

UK-France Migrant Pact Raises Legal Concerns

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The UK's newly launched migrant returns agreement with France is facing scrutiny over whether it may allow legal loopholes to block deportations.

The agreement, which began on Wednesday, enables the UK to return migrants who are deemed ineligible to remain, in exchange for accepting the same number of individuals from

France who already have established links to Britain. The “one-in, one-out” arrangement is the first bilateral deal of its kind between the two countries.

However, concerns have been raised about a clause requiring the UK to confirm that each returnee has no “outstanding human rights claim.” Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp warned the provision could be exploited by legal representatives to delay or prevent removals. He also criticised the lack of data-sharing from French authorities, questioning how thorough background checks could be conducted without full cooperation.

Former minister Dame Angela Eagle dismissed the concerns, arguing the clause was inserted specifically to prevent unfounded legal claims from hindering deportations. She maintained that comprehensive security checks would be applied to all applicants and that anyone found to pose a risk would be rejected.

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper acknowledged that the deal alone would not end illegal Channel crossings, but called it a “significant breakthrough” as it permits direct returns to France for the first time. Speaking to the BBC, Cooper refused to predict exact numbers of removals, citing fears of aiding smuggling gangs. She did, however, commit to regular public updates on detentions and returns to ensure transparency.

Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch offered a more critical view, suggesting the agreement would have little effect. “It’s not going to make any difference whatsoever,” she said, estimating only a small number of returns. When asked if the Conservative government bore any responsibility for current immigration challenges, Badenoch rejected the suggestion. “Labour is simply rubber-stamping all of the applications and calling it processing,” she said.

Reports indicate that approximately 50 people per week may be returned to France under the arrangement, a modest number compared to the more than 800 individuals reportedly arriving in the UK each week via small boats in 2025.

French Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau described the agreement as an “experimental mechanism” aimed at weakening smuggling networks that continue to exploit vulnerable migrants across the Channel.