

London lawyer criticises UK–France migrant deal

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A leading British human rights solicitor has sharply criticised the Government’s newly introduced immigration detention policy, describing it as “utterly absurd” and little more than a cosmetic change to existing arrangements.

David Haigh, speaking to GB News, questioned the effectiveness of the UK–France migrant exchange deal, which has been promoted by ministers as a significant step in tackling

illegal immigration across the Channel. While he acknowledged that it was positive the Government was taking action, he argued that the changes amounted to little more than rebranding existing processes.

“The positive thing is they’re doing something, but I really don’t see how this is going to work or that there’s any real changes,” he said.

Haigh’s main criticism is that the policy does not alter the legal framework underpinning asylum claims. The deal involves relocating migrants from hotels to detention facilities, but in his view, this is a superficial modification that leaves the core asylum process untouched.

He explained that under current UK law, migrants arriving in the country can initiate an asylum application by presenting themselves to a border official and stating their intention to claim asylum. According to Haigh, people-smuggling networks often coach migrants on this procedure before they reach British shores, ensuring they know the correct steps to take once in the UK.

“What we know is that some of the people who have come across since the new policy was in place have been detained,” he noted. However, he stressed that without legislative amendments, the Government cannot make meaningful changes to the asylum process itself.

The migrant exchange deal, announced earlier this year, was designed to strengthen cooperation between Britain and France in handling cross-Channel migration. Supporters argue that it will help reduce hotel accommodation costs, increase the deterrent effect for illegal entrants, and streamline processing. Critics, however, believe that without fundamental legal reform, such measures are unlikely to deter determined migrants or disrupt the criminal networks facilitating crossings.

The Home Office has defended the agreement, insisting that moving migrants into detention facilities is a necessary step to speed up removals and ensure that those with no legal right to remain in the UK are dealt with swiftly. Ministers have also highlighted ongoing discussions with France to improve joint patrols and intelligence-sharing along the northern French coastline.

Haigh’s comments add to the growing debate over the effectiveness of Britain’s immigration policies, particularly regarding Channel crossings. The Government has faced repeated

legal challenges to its plans, with campaigners arguing that any changes must still comply with domestic and international human rights obligations.

For now, the UK–France arrangement remains in place, but the criticism from figures like Haigh underscores the continuing tension between government strategy and legal limitations