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**ASYLUM CRISIS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: THE FAILURE
OF CONSERVATIVE POLICY**

UK is facing an urgent problem of illegal migration, which has recently gained new urgency. This has become especially noticeable against the background of a sharp increase in unauthorized sea crossings of the English Channel. The migration crisis was influenced by both global and domestic factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which temporarily diverted attention from migration and asylum issues. However, as the immediate problems caused by the pandemic began to subside, migration returned to the forefront of the political and public

agenda, sparking fierce debate amongst politicians, the media and society. This study analyses the British government's 'Stop the Boats' policy proposed by the Conservative Party. This strategy involved the resettlement of asylum seekers in Rwanda in order to address the problem of irregular migration. The main objectives of the policy were to strengthen border security, reduce administrative burdens and combat illegal smuggling networks.

Initially, the policy gained significant political and public support due to its perceived decisiveness and effectiveness. However, its implementation faced many challenges. High financial costs, administrative inefficiencies, legal uncertainty and ethical disputes have seriously undermined the success of the programme. Moreover, these shortcomings contributed to growing public discontent, decreased trust in state institutions and increased political instability. This was ultimately one of the reasons for the resignation of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

In addition, the policy increased polarisation in British society, creating a tense social environment. Some political analysts and commentators have even likened this sentiment to a state of civil war, pointing to the deep divisions within British society and the numerous anti-immigrant protests.

This situation emphasizes the complexity of the migration challenges facing the UK today and the need to find more balanced and long-term solutions that can take into account both national interests and humanitarian obligations.

Key words: Illegal migration, "Stop the Boats" policy, United Kingdom, Conservative Party, Rwanda, border security, asylum seekers, societal polarization, social instability, migration crisis.

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КРИЗА З НЕЛЕГАЛЬНОЮ МІГРАЦІЄЮ У ВЕЛИКОБРИТАНІЇ: ПРОВАЛ ПОЛІТИКИ КОНСЕРВАТОРІВ

Велика Британія стикається з нагальною проблемою нелегальної міграції, яка останнім часом набула нової гостроти. Це стало особливо помітним на

тлі різкого збільшення кількості несанкціонованих морських перетинів Ла-Маншу. Міграційна криза зумовлена як глобальними, так і внутрішніми факторами, уключаючи пандемію COVID-19, яка тимчасово відвернула увагу від питань міграції та надання притулку. Однак із поступовим послабленням гострих проблем, спричинених пандемією, питання міграції знову опинилися в центрі політичного й суспільного порядку денного, викликавши запеклі дискусії серед політиків, ЗМІ та громадськості.

У цьому дослідженні аналізується політика уряду Великої Британії «Зупинити човни», запропонована Консервативною партією. Ця стратегія передбачала переселення шукачів притулку до Руанди задля розв'язання проблеми нерегулярної міграції. Основними цілями політики були посилення прикордонної безпеки, зменшення адміністративного навантаження та боротьба з незаконними мережами контрабанди.

Спочатку політика отримала значну політичну та суспільну підтримку завдяки її уявній рішучості й ефективності. Однак реалізація цієї стратегії зіткнулася з численними викликами. Високі фінансові витрати, адміністративна неефективність, юридична невизначеність та етичні суперечки серйозно підірвали успіх програми. Крім того, ці недоліки призвели до зростання суспільного невдоволення, зниження довіри до державних інституцій і зростання політичної нестабільності. Зрештою, це стало однією з причин відставки прем'єр-міністра Ріші Сунака.

Крім того, така політика посилила поляризацію в британському суспільстві, створивши напружену соціальну атмосферу. Деякі політичні аналітики та коментатори навіть порівняли цей стан із громадянською війною, указуючи на глибокі розбіжності в британському суспільстві й численні антиіммігрантські протести.

Ця ситуація підкреслює складність міграційних викликів, із якими сьогодні стикається Велика Британія, і необхідність пошуку більш збалансованих та довгострокових рішень, які б ураховували як національні інтереси, так і гуманітарні зобов'язання.

Ключові слова: нелегальна міграція, політика «Зупинити човни», Велика Британія, Консервативна партія, Руанда, прикордонна безпека, шукачі притулку, суспільна поляризація, соціальна нестабільність, міграційна криза.

1. INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation. The ongoing migration crisis in the United Kingdom has highlighted the challenges of managing irregular migration while striking a balance between national security, economic potential and humanitar-

ian obligations. A significant increase in the number of unauthorized maritime crossings of the English Channel has increased public and political attention to this issue, exposing the shortcomings of existing migration policies.

The British government's 'Stop the Boats' policy, proposed by the Conservative Party, was aimed at combating illegal migration by resettling asylum seekers in Rwanda. Although this policy was introduced as a decisive measure to prevent illegal border crossings, reduce administrative burdens and combat smuggling networks, its implementation has faced significant obstacles. These include high financial costs, administrative inefficiencies, legal and ethical controversies, as well as wider societal consequences such as increased polarization and civil unrest.

Review of Literature. Research on the international migration system shows that undocumented migrants possess so-called "status value." Their illegal status allows various actors in the process to benefit from it. From a political perspective, the status value of undocumented migrants supports the logic of division and control, promoting nationalist ideas about who has the right to belong to society and who should be excluded and punished. The absence of citizenship and illegalization is also linked to profit generation, as it facilitates the growth of carceral economies focused on migration control, as noted by geographer Lauren Martin [1]. Although this phenomenon has existed before, Brexit has amplified the status value of undocumented migrants and migration control, bringing these issues to the forefront of political discourse.

Migration, especially illegal migration, is one of the most acute and controversial issues in contemporary global politics. Researchers pay particular attention to the role of news media in shaping and perpetuating negative stereotypes about refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants. The media played a decisive role in provoking the unrest that occurred in the UK in August 2024, by spreading negative images of migrants and stoking fear of them. The wide resonance and escalation of social tension were fueled by the media, which contributed to the growing hostility toward asylum seekers. Research by Joaquín Caviedes [2] shows that the media often portray asylum seekers as an economic or national security threat, a notion supported by Victoria Esses, Shana Medianu, and Amanda Lawson [3]. In some cases, the media distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' refugees, separating those deemed deserving of help from those deemed a potential threat, as Sarah Blinder and William Allen argue [4]. Nick Phillips and Cynthia Hardy also suggest that journalists and media organizations play a crucial role in shaping public discourse about migrants, which can either reinforce hostility or promote support for asylum seekers [5], [6]. This

was evident in August 2024 in the UK, when negative media coverage of migrant issues led to riots.

News focused on the threats associated with migration heightened tensions in society. In this context, the media served not only as a channel for transmitting information but also as a tool to reinforce fears and prejudices among the population. The result was an increase in aggression towards asylum seekers and immigrants, resulting in clashes, acts of vandalism, and confrontations with the police. Many researchers, including Majid KhosraviNik [7], believe that political elites often use this issue as a tool to gain popularity. A striking example of this is the Rwandan scheme initiated by the Conservative Party of the UK, which, despite initial expectations, failed and became one of the reasons for the party's defeat in the early elections. The issue of asylum seekers also played a key role during the Brexit referendum, when the public, by a narrow margin, voted for the UK's exit from the European Union, as Edward Stewart and Andrew Mason [8], along with Sukhwant Virdee and Brendan McGeever [9], highlight.

Purpose of the Article. The aim of this article is to critically analyze the UK's response to irregularities, with a particular focus on the Conservative Party's Stop the Boats policy and the subsequent Rwanda project. It examines the objectives, implementation and outcomes of the policy, exploring how it addressed issues such as border security, administrative efficiency and tackling illegal migration networks. The study assesses the successes and failures of the policy, including its financial, legal and ethical implications, as well as the societal and political consequences that follow.

Research Methodology. The primary materials for the study include analytical reports from governmental and non-governmental organizations, media publications, official government documents, statistical data on the implementation of the Rwandan scheme, and records of debates in the UK Parliament. Special attention is given to research findings on public reaction to the government's policy and its influence on the unrest.

The study uses content analysis of media publications and official government statements to examine the public debate around the Rwanda Scheme.

– Comparative analysis of the costs and benefits of the UK's migration policy in comparison with other European countries.

– Sociological analysis of public opinion polls on the support or criticism of this policy.

– Analysis of the political consequences based on the election results and subsequent government decisions after the scheme was cancelled.

2. RESEARCH RESULTS

On August 6, 2024, the world's richest person, tech billionaire Elon Musk, commented that the United Kingdom was on the brink of "civil war" following a week of far-right riots across the country. Musk, the owner of the platform X and known for his controversial online statements and retweets of far-right posts, reacted to a video allegedly showing clashes between rioters and British police after several days of far-right violence in various UK cities [10].

This time, the catalyst was the murder of three girls under the age of 10 at a dance workshop for younger schoolchildren. The horrific knife attack also left eight other children and two adults seriously injured. A 17-year-old was charged with the crime. Soon after, far-right, racist groups spread disinformation about the identity of the attacker, sparking riots, first in Southport 36 hours after the attack, and then in other cities such as London, Hartlepool, Manchester, Aldershot, and Sunderland. The mother of seven-year-old Elsie Dot Stencomb, one of the murdered girls, appealed through social media for an end to the violence in Southport [11].

Racist motives were clearly the driving force behind these riots. Far-right social media accounts, including supporters of the now-defunct English Defence League (EDL), circulated false claims that the suspect was an asylum seeker, calling for protests across the country. Mosques in Southport and Hartlepool were targeted. In London, rioters chanted, "We want our country back" [12].

These riots were used by some politicians with hardline anti-immigration and anti-asylum views as an argument to claim that Britain is not a successful multi-ethnic society. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Sir Keir Starmer, strongly addressed the rioters during a press conference on August 4, warning them that they would inevitably regret their actions. He stated, "This is not a protest, but organized, violent banditry, which has no place on our streets or in the online space," Starmer emphasized. He also promised to do everything possible to hold the perpetrators accountable, addressing the nation amidst the riots in the UK [13].

The Prime Minister's statements have received widespread support. For example, *The Spectator* remarked, 'Riots in Britain occur with the same frequency as sunny days: roughly once a decade.' The publication also highlighted that, regardless of the underlying reasons, the common trait in all such events is senseless destruction. Rioters burn and destroy their own communities, while opportunists take advantage of the chaos for political

gain. Equally concerning is the spread of fake news and disinformation, which only exacerbates the situation [14].

Analysts unanimously pointed out that we are living in times when a small group of racists with violent tendencies can easily incite civil unrest through social media and messaging platforms. Unlike in the past, far-right extremists no longer require complex organizational infrastructure. The recent riots in the UK were not the result of local conflicts but rather actions by individuals who traveled to create tensions, driven by disinformation about the Southport incident. Research shows that some false claims first appeared on Telegram and later spread to TikTok, X, and Facebook.

Despite assurances from senior state officials and respected publications, the risk of these racist riots escalating into something more severe for Britain remained significant. Sir Keir Starmer effectively addressed the situation, describing the events as attacks on the rule of law and announcing an initiative to coordinate intelligence and police forces nationwide. However, the August riots also highlighted one of the most pressing issues in British society: illegal migration.

Those crossing the border seeking asylum are often labeled “illegal migrants,” though under international law, particularly the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, such actions are legal. According to these documents, a person seeking asylum cannot be expelled or returned to a country where their life or freedom is at serious risk. Added to this is the Dublin III Regulation, adopted in June 2013, which governs the process of submitting asylum applications within the EU. It stipulates that the first member state where fingerprints are taken or an asylum application is submitted is responsible for processing that claim, preventing multiple asylum requests across different countries [15].

Since the early 2010s, reducing the number of illegal migrants in the UK to 100,000 per year has been one of the key points on the Conservative Party’s agenda. Public demand for reducing the influx of migrants was reflected in the popular slogan of the official campaign for leaving the European Union – “take back control of our borders.” Researchers have rightly noted that a segment of the electorate’s negative attitude towards the EU’s freedom of movement significantly influenced the results of the 2016 referendum [16].

After Brexit, especially in the case of a no-deal exit, it was expected that the United Kingdom would no longer be part of the Dublin III Regulation, which governed the procedures for asylum applications within the EU. This regulation provided a mechanism for determining which country was

responsible for processing an asylum claim, usually the first country the asylum seeker entered. In the event of a no-deal exit, the UK would have ceased to be part of this mechanism, and new rules were set to come into effect immediately after leaving.

According to the “UK government’s White Paper on Immigration” under Theresa May, if the Withdrawal Agreement was ratified, the UK would have remained a participant in the Dublin agreements until the end of the transition period, allowing for discussions on new mechanisms for future cooperation [17].

However, prior to leaving the EU in 2018-2019, British authorities recorded an increase in the number of undocumented foreigners, which was largely due to the uncertainty surrounding future migration rules. The legal vacuum that emerged before and after the referendum, particularly due to the suspension of the Dublin Regulation and the challenges of deporting asylum seekers to EU countries, contributed to this phenomenon. Added to this were family reunification aspirations and the cultural and linguistic appeal of the UK for people from former colonies [18].

In 2018, small boat crossings of the English Channel began increasing, with around 300 people arriving in the UK that year. By 2019, the number surged to over 1,800, prompting the UK government to tighten border controls. Despite these efforts, including a joint action plan with France and significant financial investments in surveillance, the crossings continued. In 2020, further border measures were introduced, and the government appointed a “Commander of Channel Threats.” However, the problem persisted, with tragic incidents like the deaths of seven people in October 2020 highlighting the growing dangers. The UK and France increased police presence in Calais and allocated additional funds to combat illegal migration. Yet, by the following year, 28,000 people crossed the Channel, exposing the continued ineffectiveness of these strategies [19].

The fight against illegal migration and asylum system reform after Brexit, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, moved to the periphery of public and political discussions. However, at the same time, the rise in illegal Channel crossings forced the government to focus on establishing legal mechanisms for returning illegal migrants. These efforts intensified at both national and international levels.

In 2021, Boris Johnson’s government initiated a large-scale legislative reform aimed at combating illegal migration, smuggling, and human trafficking, as well as tightening asylum regulations. In March 2021, the government published the main document outlining post-Brexit immigration policy – the

“New Plan for Immigration.” It stipulated that all “illegal” arrivals, including those via small boats, would not have the right to seek asylum in the UK. The plan also proposed life imprisonment for those facilitating illegal journeys, expanded immigration detention, and the possibility of deportation to a “safe third country.” At the same time, the UK and France announced the allocation of €62.7 million to enhance security measures along the borders in northern France and the English Channel. While border control was aimed at deterring people from crossing, the new legislation was based on the concept of a “deterrent effect” – imposing severe punishment on those who had already crossed, to discourage others [20].

In April 2022, the “Nationality and Borders Act” came into force. The law aimed, firstly, to make the asylum system fairer and more efficient, secondly, to deter illegal entry into the UK and combat smugglers’ business models, and thirdly, to allow for the deportation of migrants who had no legal grounds to remain in the country [21].

The law also introduced a two-tier system of protection based on how migrants entered the UK. Those who used “safe and legal routes” could request asylum, while those who arrived illegally were granted limited protection for up to 30 months, with restricted rights, including the denial of family reunification. Additionally, the law included provisions for the “inadmissibility of asylum claims” for EU citizens and individuals with ties to safe third countries [21].

The issue of small boat crossings in the English Channel became a key element in the Conservative Party government’s review of its post-Brexit “sovereign” immigration policy. In January 2022, Prime Minister Boris Johnson called on the military to “block the flow of migrants.” This operation, named “Operation Isotropic,” sparked not only academic debate but also intense discussions in Parliament. Members of the House of Commons Defense Committee warned of “the negative consequences of a potential military operation in the Channel for the reputation of the Royal Navy,” pointing out that “this statement was premature, and the decisions behind the policy were flawed” [22].

In April 2022, the UK and Rwanda signed their first agreement to establish the Migration and Economic Development Partnership. Both sides saw it as a potential solution to illegal migration. Under the Memorandum of Understanding, a five-year program was launched to resettle asylum seekers for further claim processing. This initiative was designed to compensate for the loss of mechanisms to return illegal migrants to EU countries. London allocated £120 million for the creation of Rwanda’s Economic Transformation

and Integration Fund, also covering the costs of resettling and temporarily housing each migrant (ranging between £20,000 and £30,000). This agreement, however, faced sharp criticism from human rights organizations and opposition groups, with some comparing it to the colonial-era slave trade. On the other hand, the right-wing think tank Policy Exchange supported the plan [23].

At the same time, in July 2023, the UK introduced the Illegal Migration Act, which mandated the deportation of all individuals who entered the country illegally, stripping them of the right to seek asylum. The law specifies that deportation would occur to the individual's country of citizenship (if deemed safe) or a designated "safe third country." A total of 57 countries are identified as safe, with eight designated specifically for male migrants.

Despite these measures, the UK faced unprecedented levels of emigration in 2023, according to the Home Office. The migration balance from June 2022 to June 2023 reached 672,000 people, significantly surpassing pre-pandemic figures. By the end of 2023, the UK government set a new target to reduce the migration balance to 300,000 people annually [24].

This led to the introduction of the "Rwanda Security Bill" by Home Secretary James Cleverly on December 6, 2023. The bill officially recognized Rwanda as a "safe country" for the resettlement of illegal migrants. It also repealed provisions of the Human Rights Act of 1998, which had allowed British courts to block the deportation of asylum seekers to Rwanda. A new bilateral agreement between London and Kigali replaced the previous memorandum. This treaty included new guarantees that asylum seekers deported to Rwanda would not be transferred to other countries unless requested by the UK. The agreement also established an independent monitoring committee, a joint committee for experience sharing, and a new appeals body. According to Article 19 of the treaty, the most vulnerable refugees from Rwanda would be resettled in the UK [25].

The new government initiatives sparked mixed reactions. Some critics within the establishment viewed the measures as half-hearted and insufficiently strict, as they still allowed migrants legal avenues to challenge deportation. This led to renewed debates on the effectiveness of the UK's approach to managing migration.

The new government initiatives sparked mixed reactions. Some within the establishment viewed the measures as half-hearted and insufficiently strict, as they still allowed migrants legal avenues to challenge deportation. This led to the resignation of Deputy Home Secretary Robert Jenrick. The influential "European Research Group" of Conservatives called for a revi-

sion of the bill, proposing a “redrafted version.” Meanwhile, the centrist Conservative group “One Nation” supported the government plan, while another faction criticized the government’s willingness to back away from international legal norms [26].

Despite the divide within the Conservative ranks, on December 12, 2023, the bill passed its second reading in the House of Commons (313 in favor, 269 against). A significant portion of the right-wing faction (37 MPs) abstained from the vote, hoping for amendments during later stages of debate [25].

This bill became law on April 25, 2024, coming into effect as the “Rwanda Security (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024.” Under the law, individuals could no longer appeal their relocation on the grounds that Rwanda was not a safe country in general or due to the possibility of their return or Rwanda’s failure to meet its obligations under the agreement. Instead, individuals had to prove in national courts that Rwanda was unsafe for them specifically (for example, if they were known critics of the Rwandan government). The legislation, which recognized Rwanda as a safe country under all circumstances, was described by a former Supreme Court judge as “constitutionally controversial” [27].

By April 30, BBC News reported on the first asylum seeker who was denied protection and voluntarily left for Rwanda under the deportation scheme. According to the program, rejected migrants were offered up to £3,000 to relocate to the East African country. This scheme was separate from the government’s forced return program, announced two years earlier, and was set to begin by mid-July. “The Sun,” which first reported on this story, noted that an unidentified man flew out of the UK on a commercial flight on Monday. Officials did not provide any details except that the asylum seeker had exhausted all legal rights to remain in the UK [28]. It should be noted that this policy has proven to be costly. As of February 2024, £2 million had been spent on direct personnel costs, with these expenses likely increasing. Additionally, by that time, £2,3 million had been allocated for legal costs, and this amount had also grown. Approximately £23,5 million had been spent on accompanying measures by April 2024, i.e., by the end of the 2023-2024 financial year, according to estimates from the Home Office in the March report of the National Audit Office (Migration Observatory, 2024).

The total costs reached approximately £318 million. This amount did not cover all expenses, so the true financial cost of implementing the scheme for Rwanda was likely even higher. The mentioned figures did not account

for the costs of arresting and detaining individuals before their deportation to Rwanda. Additionally, some of these costs only covered the period up to February 2024 and likely increased by July 2024, as was the case with direct personnel expenses and government legal fees [29].

After the general election was announced in July 2024, Sunak stated that no deportation flights would occur before the election, but they would resume if the Conservative Party was re-elected. Keir Starmer, leader of the Labour Party, pledged to end the scheme if elected. Following Labour's victory in the election, Starmer confirmed the cancellation of the Rwanda scheme, stating that it was "dead and buried before it even started," and planned to replace it with a Border Security Command. It is known that the plan cost £700 million, and under this scheme, only four asylum seekers were sent to Rwanda, all of whom did so voluntarily [30].

3. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The Rwandan resettlement policy, aimed at relocating illegal migrants arriving in the United Kingdom, was a bold initiative by the Conservative Party, first under Boris Johnson and later Rishi Sunak. Designed to curb illegal border crossings and ease domestic pressures, the policy faced numerous obstacles that ultimately led to its abandonment and broader political consequences.

The implementation challenges began with high financial costs that far exceeded initial projections, drawing public and political criticism. Legal and constitutional controversies further undermined the policy's legitimacy, with human rights organizations and international bodies questioning its adherence to international norms and Rwanda's suitability as a host country. These concerns spurred protests and legal actions, intensifying opposition.

The broader implications of this policy included heightened societal tensions, with the migration crisis contributing to social unrest in early August 2024. Economic strain, perceptions of injustice, and unresolved migration issues fueled protests, signaling the policy's inability to address underlying problems and exacerbating instability. The defeat of the Conservative Party in the elections and the resignation of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak underscored the policy's failure and the government's loss of public trust.

Despite its ultimate collapse, the policy offers valuable lessons. It underscores the risks of focusing migration strategies solely on deterrence, neglecting sustainability and adherence to human rights. The Rwandan policy

highlights the need for comprehensive solutions that address migration's root causes while aligning with international obligations.

Future research should analyze similar policies in other nations, particularly those adopting containment-focused approaches, to evaluate their effectiveness and societal impact. A comparative study could provide critical insights into best practices and potential pitfalls in migration management, contributing to the development of more equitable and sustainable strategies globally.

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ПОЛІТИЧНЕ ТА ВІЙСЬКОВО-ТЕХНІЧНЕ СПІВРОБІТНИЦТВО МІЖ КОРОЛІВСТВОМ НОРВЕГІЯ Й УКРАЇНОЮ В УМОВАХ РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ

Досліджено політичну та військово-технічну співпрацю України й Королівства Норвегії в період із 2014 по 2024 рр. Методологічною основою стали принципи емпіричного й раціонального підходів, що разом з аналізом тематичних документів дали змогу визначити динаміку та формати політичної й військово-технічної співпраці між двома країнами.

Норвегія послідовно підтримує територіальну цілісність України в усіх міжнародних організаціях та інституціях. Політичне співробітництво між країнами, яке паралельно сприяло й військово-технічній допомозі з боку Норвегії, активізувалося після 2014 р. Норвезька сторона протягом 2014–