

Organised Immigration Crime Summit: Starmer government leads global anti-migrant offensive

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7 April 2025

Britain's Labour government has cemented its position as one of the most right-wing governments in Europe since taking office last July. Central has been the anti-immigration platform rolled out by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and his Home Secretary Yvette Cooper.

Last week Starmer and Cooper hosted a two-day conference attended by representatives of 40 countries and corporations, the Organised Immigration Crime (OIC) Summit.

Under the guise of tackling people smuggling, the event outlined a common right-wing anti-immigrant, austerity agenda to justify military spending and strengthen borders.

Since coming to power, Labour has sought to prove itself more hostile to migrants than its Conservative predecessors and the far-right Reform UK.

Starmer restated Labour's pitch in introductory remarks to the summit and a filthy op-ed in a right-wing rag, the *Daily Mail*.

His first words were not about migration, but to note that the summit was being held where earlier European leaders had met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Saying "Ukraine's security is our security," Starmer insisted this could only be delivered by "the biggest increase in defence spending since the Cold War."

Starmer insisted that all other concerns are subordinate to this goal, and require international cooperation, which was also "clearly true for the security of our borders."

The summit brought together representatives not just from Europe, but from the United States, Vietnam and Iraq, as well as tech conglomerates Meta, X and TikTok.

Starmer made his usual law-and-order appeals, calling people-smuggling a "security threat similar... to terrorism."

For all the rhetoric employed about ending the criminal exploitation of vulnerable people, Starmer has always been clear that his concern is solely for the strictest regulation of migration. Describing "Illegal migration" as a "massive driver of global insecurity," he complained, "It undermines

our ability to control who comes here"—by which he means the skilled workers demanded by industry and services such as the NHS.

He reinforced this populist pitch in the xenophobic *Daily Mail*, leading off his op-ed with the message to the newspaper's readership: "I know many of you are angry about illegal migration. You're right to be," he wrote.

Describing the tightening of borders as "a basic question of fairness", he added that British people were "compassionate and fair-minded. But [!] we all pay the price for insecure borders—from the cost of accommodating migrants to the strain on our public services."

The gall is staggering, from a man whose government has just announced cuts that will throw 250,000 disabled people into poverty and is pledged to impose brutal austerity to fund military expenditure.

At the summit, Starmer detailed the intensification of police measures against migrants seeking to cross the English Channel, including "new border patrols and specialist units on the French coast using state-of-the-art surveillance technology."

His announcement that it will now "be an offence to endanger lives at sea to prevent more tragic deaths in the Channel" was cynical in the extreme, given that the maritime agencies of Europe have been complicit in abandoning migrants in small boats.

Eight migrants have already died crossing the Channel this year. Internationally nearly 9,000 people are known to have died last year trying to cross borders, while 2024 was the deadliest year on record for migrants trying to reach Europe.

The United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM) notes that the actual global figure is likely even higher, as many deaths go unreported. The global death toll has risen for five successive years, more than doubling since 2020.

Following two deaths over two days in the Channel shortly before the summit, Amnesty International UK's refugee and

migrant rights director Steve Valdez-Symonds told press the policy of “simply trying to ‘smash gangs’ and ‘stop boats’ without taking some real share of responsibility for people who currently have no safer options is doing no good whatsoever.”

Starmer told the summit that he had opposed the Tories’ scheme to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda. Borrowing Tory rhetoric (describing Britain as “a soft touch”), he told the *Mail* that opposing the scheme was “not just because it was a gimmick designed to sound tough... But because it was a hollow pledge to working people which had no prospect of ever being fulfilled.”

Starmer boasted that since coming to office, Labour has deported more than 24,000 people. He bragged of “the highest returns rate for eight years,” which it “would have taken the Rwanda scheme 80 years to achieve.”

Starmer’s pledge to the British ruling class is that he can implement such authoritarian policies more efficiently. Once in office, he signed a similar deal to the Rwanda scheme that allows deporting any migrants arriving in the Chagos Islands in the British Indian Ocean territories (BIOT) to St Helena, an island in the South Atlantic 5,000 miles from the UK.

Similar models are being adopted by ruling elites across Europe. Draft European Union (EU) legislation last month proposes new return rules that would allow “return hubs”—dedicated deportation centres outside the EU. These are at high risk of infringing the Geneva Convention’s principle of non-refoulement, which forbids returning refugees to countries where they might face persecution or serious harm.

Approving the idea, the conservative European People’s Party (EPP)—comprising 82 right-wing parties and partners in the European Parliament—pointed to Albania’s deal with the government of Italian fascist Giorgia Meloni. The EPP called for revision of the Geneva Convention to bring it in line with the “current world.”

Albania sent representatives to the OIC summit and Starmer has been assiduous in courting Meloni, whose government he said had made “remarkable progress” in combatting immigration.

One of Starmer’s main policies is strengthening the police and intelligence apparatus through the establishment of the Border Security Command (BSC). BSC head Martin Hewitt, a former head of the National Police Chiefs’ Council, accompanied Starmer on his trip to Rome last September to meet Meloni. Her regime is not only criminalising the act of seeking asylum but also hindering civilian sea rescue operations.

Albania has built two detention centres, funded and managed by Italy, that hold up to 36,000 migrants per year. From the camps, but not on Italian soil, they are able to

apply for asylum in Italy. If refused, as most are, they are deported.

Starmer pledged an investment of £150 million over the next two years into “an elite Border Force.” He promised “new powers and new criminal offences to get the job done.” European governments have adopted this policy more widely, with recent calls for Frontex to become a “fully operational European border agency.”

The proposed new powers make clear that combatting “people-smugglers” are a pretext for a wider war on the working class. The police will be empowered to seize the phones and devices of all *migrants*. While allegedly enabling intelligence gathering on smugglers, it targets their victims and opens the way to broader repression.

Starmer’s Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill will be amended to include greater right-to-work checks on gig economy workers. Home Secretary Cooper has indicated she will restrict the number of those arriving on a student or work visa and subsequently claiming asylum. As noted by the WSWS, the government is also examining how Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights—the right to family life—applies to migration cases, after pledging to close a “legal loophole” through which a Palestinian family from Gaza were granted the right join a family member in Britain.

Starmer told the summit there is “nothing progressive about allowing working age people to come here illegally instead of supporting them to build their own economies, secure a better future for their own countries, and build a safer, more prosperous world.” That comes from a man boasting of accelerating military expenditure and threatening nuclear-armed Russia that is moving the world ever closer to war.



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