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Tuesday 25 April 2023

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 25 April 2023

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader today is Dr Lesley Morrison.

Dr Lesley Morrison: Are we being good ancestors? Let me tell you about a very special woman who lived in Peebles until two years ago, when she died aged 93. She lived her life as a Quaker. In the words of George Fox, founder of the Quakers, she walked “cheerfully over the world,” seeing the good in everyone and everything.

She made everything she wore, she wasted nothing, her garden was loved and beautiful and her gate and door were always open. She and her late husband were Mr and Ms Community—they were engaged, connecting and encouraging. In the 1980s, they founded the Tweeddale Peace Group, and in 2021, we planted a tree on the banks of the River Tweed to commemorate that and welcome the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Our friend embodied Quakerism. She lived life to the full, with curiosity, creativity and kindness. She left a legacy of love and compassion. She also had courage. I will quote the Quaker book of advices and queries:

“Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community?”

We have come to understand what our friend always knew—that life cannot be taken for granted, and that we need to work urgently to preserve the earth that we love. She knew that peace and our ecological system are interdependent, and that we need to find ways of working with those whose actions could destroy them.

Peace, climate justice, social justice and racial justice are all interconnected. When I worked as a general practitioner, I heard stories on a daily basis about people’s lives that illustrated that. The climate crisis is a health crisis, and health professionals have a duty to use their voice to say that very loudly. The duty of us all, perhaps especially politicians, is to look at the many issues that we face in the world today through the lens of the climate crisis.

Climate change is the crucial issue of our time, but rather than be overwhelmed by the enormity of the task, let us instead adopt the attitude of Christiana Figueres, who chaired the UN Paris climate talks. She said:

“We are privileged to be alive now at this time of climate crisis when we have the opportunity to make a real difference.”

We can all work together in a spirit of hope. The one question that we all have to ask ourselves is, “Are we being good ancestors?”

Thank you.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Dr Morrison.

Before we move to the next item of business, I invite members to join me in welcoming to the gallery the honourable Craig Farrell MLC, President of the Legislative Council, Parliament of Tasmania. *[Applause.]*

Topical Question Time

14:04

Car Use Reduction (Investment)

1. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to a recent report by Friends of the Earth Scotland, which suggests that additional investment is required in public transport if the Scottish Government is to meet its target of reducing car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030. (S6T-01336)

The Minister for Transport (Kevin Stewart): The Scottish Government recognises that reaching our target of a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by 2030 will require a broad combination of interventions, including infrastructure, incentives and disincentives, and we know that, to reduce car use, public transport has to be available, affordable and accessible. As part of the fair fares review, a six-month pilot to remove ScotRail peak fares on all routes will start in October. In addition, £421.8 million has been allocated in funding for bus services and concessionary fares in 2023-24 to provide up to 2.3 million people in Scotland with access to free bus travel. That is part of a total of over £2 billion spent on supporting public transport by the Scottish Government annually.

Brian Whittle: The report makes clear the scale of the potential costs required to achieve the Scottish Government's target of around £1.7 billion per year for the next 12 years purely for capital investment in new rail services, new zero-carbon buses, new tram systems and new light rail networks. So far, the Scottish Government has not given any indication of how it intends to practically address that issue. Does the minister accept that nothing close to that level of investment will be possible without significant private sector support? How does the Scottish Government plan to obtain that?

Kevin Stewart: It would be extremely helpful if the United Kingdom Government and the Treasury began to loosen the purse strings and invest in infrastructure to allow all of us to reach our net zero targets. It really is a matter for Government to play its part. The Scottish Government is doing that; I suggest that the UK Government is not.

Mr Whittle is right that we all have a part to play, including the private sector. We will do what we can to encourage the private sector to play its part in our net zero ambitions. However, that would be much easier if the UK Government did its bit.

Brian Whittle: The Scottish Government is doing what it always does: it is deflecting away from its responsibilities.

Although there is a clear need to reduce emissions from modes of transport that are powered by internal combustion, does the minister accept that there is a serious risk of policies in that area being developed in a highly city-centric way, which could disadvantage rural areas as a poor relation when it comes to investment in new transport infrastructure and by prioritising travel for those who live inside cities ahead of those who travel into them from elsewhere?

Kevin Stewart: No, the Government will not be city centric in its policy interventions. We recognise that there are different factors at play in our rural areas. That is why we recognise that there will be more car usage in rural areas. There will also be car usage by folks with blue badges, for example. We have to tailor our policies to meet the needs of all of Scotland, and that is what we will do.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the minister agree that the Conservatives need to be a bit more realistic about where the money might come from and that, if we had a better fiscal framework with the UK, that would be a big help in the first instance?

Kevin Stewart: I agree entirely with John Mason. We need increased fiscal flexibility, including additional borrowing powers. The latest gross domestic product deflators published by the Office for Budget Responsibility show that our core capital funding from the UK Government will fall by over 16 per cent in real terms by 2024-25 compared with 2021-22. That represents a steep decline in the buying power of our investment. Coupled with the current impact of high inflation, that places significant additional pressures on our capital programme.

As members know, we also have limited capital borrowing powers, and Scotland is constrained by reliance on the UK Government for capital grant allocations, which have failed to respond to meet the need for infrastructure to support Scotland's net zero emission targets. The UK Government needs to step up to the plate and loosen those purse strings.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Friends of the Earth Scotland's report, "On the Move: Investing in public transport to meet carbon targets and create jobs" highlights how, through increased capital investment in public transport, the Scottish Government could create 22,000 jobs directly and 416,000 jobs indirectly. In the Scottish National Party leadership campaign, the now First Minister made it clear in his response to the pledge for rail campaign by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers that his Government would be committed to investment in our railway. Will the minister therefore once and for all rule out cuts to ScotRail

ticket offices, which threaten rail jobs and services?

Kevin Stewart: We will continue to invest in our national railway. It is now more than a year since ScotRail was nationalised, which I am pleased about. That is good for all—for ScotRail, for its staff and, most important, for passengers. I reiterate that it would be much easier to increase capital investment if the Treasury did what is required and invested in our net zero ambitions.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Alongside numerous UK Climate Change Committee reports, the Friends of the Earth report shows us that, without decisive action to reduce the number of cars on the roads, we will not achieve our legally binding targets, which this Parliament voted for. Does the transport minister agree that traffic demand management measures are an essential tool to reduce transport emissions and raise revenue? Will he provide an update on what correspondence ministers have had with the UK Government on the need for such measures?

Kevin Stewart: I agree with Mr Ruskell and the UK Climate Change Committee that we need to deter car use, which should be accompanied by investment in active travel and public transport. The need for all that is set out in the route map for a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by 2030.

At ministerial and official level, we have continued to seek engagement on the issues that the UK Climate Change Committee has raised, but the UK Government has yet to give the devolved nations clarity on whether it plans to reform motoring taxes and, if so, when. We know that reforms to transport taxes will be crucial to meeting net zero targets. If the UK Government does not want to act on that, it should devolve responsibility for such matters to this Parliament, so that we can do the right thing.

International Students (Homelessness)

2. Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to a recent report by the National Union of Students Scotland, which stated that more than a fifth of international students in Scotland have experienced homelessness during their studies. (S6T-01335)

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): Scotland welcomes international students from all over the world; they are an important part of our student community. The report raises significant issues that I know universities will take seriously as they seek to have robust plans in place to assist students in finding accommodation.

Foyso Choudhury: I congratulate the minister on his new position. This is international students

week, but thousands of students across Scotland are still struggling through the housing crisis without help from the Scottish Government. In my members' business debate last week, I addressed the huge number of houses that are mould infested and dangerous. Landlords and letting agents are refusing to deal with damp and mould, and it is again students who are suffering, as they cannot afford to live anywhere else. What is being done to hold landlords and letting agents to account for structural repairs and damp control in private rented accommodation?

Graeme Dey: I thank Foyso Choudhury for his kind words. The issue is really important, and I will take a moment to address it. As members know, the Scottish Government has no direct role in the provision of student residential accommodation, but we are determined to improve accessibility, affordability and standards in purpose-built student accommodation, which we can influence.

Students should not be disadvantaged in the housing market. The review that is under way has looked at key issues such as accessibility, affordability and standards, as I said. The expert group has involved the NUS, and I look forward to receiving the group's recommendations soon.

On the wider issue in the private sector that the member has highlighted, during the next few weeks and months, I will be speaking to ministerial colleagues about what we can do in that regard.

Foyso Choudhury: NUS Scotland's study also found that 29 per cent of international students have considered leaving their course because of financial difficulties, and, shockingly, that 49 per cent skipped meals due to their financial circumstances.

In January, I hosted a round-table event on student housing in the Parliament, where many international students told me that they have faced racism from private landlords when looking for affordable housing. If they cannot secure a United Kingdom-based guarantor, purpose-built student accommodation is the only option for many of them. Such accommodation often has associated difficulties, including term length, and it is far too expensive for most students to afford. Will the minister agree to meet me to discuss the housing situation of international students in Scotland?

Graeme Dey: I would be absolutely delighted to meet the member to discuss the issue further. Let me be absolutely clear: if there is a sense that there is any racism at play, that would be completely unacceptable.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): As this is my first opportunity to do so, I, too, wish the minister well in his new role.

Representatives of the Indian student community have highlighted that a shortage of accommodation is a serious issue for international students in Scotland. Some students have reported being advised to return to India for a whole semester if they were unable to secure accommodation. Others have had to sleep in their friends' hallways until they find accommodation of their own. What is the Government doing to ensure that that issue does not make Scotland a less attractive destination for international students?

Graeme Dey: I thank Pam Gosal for her kind words.

If there is an issue specific to Indian students, I am happy to discuss that with the member. In addition to my previous comments, I note that, over the next few weeks and months, I will be meeting principals—members can imagine that I am quite popular at the moment, with principals wanting to meet me. If members identify hotspots where there are issues, I would be more than happy to discuss that and to put that on the agenda of my meetings with principals in those universities. I am more than happy to discuss the matter further with Pam Gosal.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I, too, welcome the minister to his new role. The findings of the report are deeply concerning. I appreciate that the Scottish Government is carrying out a review of the provision of purpose-built student accommodation and the sector to inform a student accommodation strategy for Scotland. Will the minister provide details on the scope of the review? Does he agree with me that the responsibility lies with universities, which, as private institutions, have a duty to look after their students' wellbeing?

Graeme Dey: Yes, responsibility primarily lies with universities. However, last week, I met students from multiple universities in the Edinburgh area. I was extremely encouraged to hear about the emphasis that those universities place on the wellbeing of students. They do some good work in that area.

On the review, the scope was fairly wide ranging. I am awaiting the recommendations of the group and will consider those carefully. We want to provide a response that sets out strategic priorities for student accommodation that is informed by the challenges that the students in question are facing.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I do not think that the minister really understands the severity of the problem. We have more international students than ever before and we have got a housing crisis, particularly for students. He cannot really wash his hands of the matter. I

am sure that he will get involved directly with universities; however, the matter is a direct responsibility for Government. It must get the balance right. Our international reputation could be damaged if we do not sort out this international student housing crisis. Does he understand that?

Graeme Dey: I do not think that I indicated, in any way or in any of my answers, that I am washing my hands of the matter. I simply stated a fact: primary responsibility for the issue lies with individual universities. However, as I have laid out, we are doing work in this area.

Yes—Willie Rennie is right to talk about getting the balance right, and I am happy to have conversations with him if he has specific issues that he wants to raise with me on the matter.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (Examinations Preparation)

3. **Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has had with the SQA regarding the preparations for this year's exams. (S6T-01332)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): The SQA operates at arm's length from ministers and is responsible for its own operational decisions and planning, including preparations for exams. Notwithstanding that, Scottish ministers and officials are kept informed through regular meetings. I met the chief executive and the chair of the SQA last Wednesday, 19 April.

Exams have now started and will continue until 31 May. Across Scotland, about 130,000 school pupils and learners will be sitting national 5, higher and advanced higher exams in a variety of subjects. I wish them every success, and I thank the SQA, teachers, lecturers, parents and carers for all the support that they are providing.

Bill Kidd: I welcome the cabinet secretary to her role.

For our young people, exams represent the culmination of a lot of hard work. The disruption that was caused by the pandemic had a clear impact on previous exam diets, so what specific measures has the SQA taken to ensure that this year's exam diet runs smoothly and gives our young people the platform to demonstrate their talents and hard work?

Jenny Gilruth: It is worth putting on the record that the modifications to the 2022 national qualifications continued into this year's exam diet in recognition of the on-going impacts of the pandemic, which Bill Kidd mentioned. The modifications vary by subject and by level, but they include removing or reducing elements of exams or course work, giving more choice or time

during assessments and removing topics entirely from exams.

In addition, the SQA has confirmed that it will continue this year to use a sensitive evidence-based approach to grading. As was the case last year, that approach will be grounded in evidence and will take into consideration the significant modifications that have been made to national course assessments.

The SQA has also confirmed that there will be a free and direct appeals service, which will give all learners the right to request a review of their marked exam papers. That service will be available this year for the first time. In addition, in exceptional circumstances a service will exist for those who are unable to sit an exam or whose performance on the day is impacted by personal circumstances.

Bill Kidd: An evidence-based overhaul of our qualifications system gives us the chance to think about the ways in which we assess progress and measure achievement. I welcome the cabinet secretary's indication that those ways might look radically different. Does she agree that any new qualifications system should be designed to draw out the diverse range of talents and abilities that exist among our young people?

Jenny Gilruth: I agree with the sentiment behind Bill Kidd's question. The aim of Professor Hayward's independent review of qualifications and assessment is to ensure that all senior phase school pupils and learners have an equal and enhanced opportunity to demonstrate their learning. Back in October 2021, the review was announced by my predecessor in response to concerns about curriculum content in the senior phase being driven by high-stakes exams, rather than by the provision of a rich and rounded educational experience. That was, of course, one of the precursors to curriculum for excellence, as was the potential overreliance on exams. Those points were drawn out in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's subsequent report.

We will continue to engage with the national discussion that will come forward shortly. The output from that will be invaluable in determining where we go next in respect of exams.

Professor Hayward's independent review is still under way. The interim report was published at the start of March, and I expect to receive the final report at the end of May. I will meet Professor Hayward tomorrow to discuss her work in more detail. I commend her very much for her hard work and for the engagement that she has undertaken with young people, the profession and people across the education system. Her final report will

deserve and require detailed consideration by the Government.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I, too, welcome the cabinet secretary to her role, and I echo what has been said about pupils and students who will be sitting their exams over the next few weeks.

This year, teacher strikes across Scotland caused significant disruption for pupils and students, who missed many days of school, including during their prelims. For many pupils, this will be the first time that they have ever sat an exam, but they have been badly let down by the Scottish National Party Government. I have been contacted by parents who fear that their children might not have received the support that they needed.

Will the cabinet secretary detail what catch-up lessons and support, such as tutors, were provided for pupils who were most affected by the strikes? Is she confident that the support that has been provided will make up for the lost learning time?

Jenny Gilruth: I look forward to working with Ms Gallacher in due course. She has raised a number of concerns; I am more than happy to look at them in more detail. I am aware that support has been put in place, very much in recognition of the points that the member raises in relation to industrial action. There is the national e-learning offer, which provides thousands of live, recorded and supported online resources, including lessons. That support and study revision can be accessed independently by young people at a time that suits them.

The SQA has issued the "Your National Qualifications" and the "Your Exams" booklets, which include study and exam tips. The SQA has also confirmed that a free and direct appeals service, which will give all learners a direct right of access to an appeal, will be available this year. That is a significant change to how the SQA administers appeals. In addition, as I outlined in my response to Bill Kidd, provision will be put in place in relation to exceptional circumstances.

It goes without saying that throughout the Easter holiday period a number of teachers will have been running study classes to support their pupils in preparing for the exams.

As I said, if Ms Gallacher has more information in relation to the concerns that she has raised, I will be more than happy to look at it in more detail and raise the matter with the SQA, should that be needed.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary to her new role, and I look forward to working with her.

Yesterday, the SQA exam diet started, and I wish young people across the country the very best of luck. Of course, the SQA itself is going through a significant and necessary review. The Muir review suggested taking accreditation and regulation out of the SQA. The previous education cabinet secretary ignored that advice and said that the Scottish National Party Government intended to leave both functions in the new qualifications board, thereby directly contradicting one of the recommendations in the Muir report. Will the new cabinet secretary review that decision and reassure us that the Scottish Government is listening to experts and is fully committed to genuine education reform, rather than simply to a rebrand with the old management still in place?

Jenny Gilruth: I look forward very much to working with Ms Duncan-Glancy on education.

The member raises a number of issues. It is worth pointing out that, as well as the Muir report, we have the OECD recommendations and, as I mentioned, the national discussion. Furthermore, at the end of next month, we will have Professor Hayward's independent review of qualifications. More broadly, it is really important that I, as cabinet secretary, listen to the profession. Last week, I spent some time listening to former colleagues in a school in Edinburgh. I am mindful that the past wee while has been a difficult time for the profession. It is really important that changes that result from the reviews are progressed in conjunction with the profession; I cannot foist change upon the profession.

I am mindful of Ms Duncan-Glancy's point about rebranding. In Government, we need to recognise that the purpose behind the changes is to develop and deliver a more effective education system that better meets the needs of our learners and young people and prepares them for the world of work. I am absolutely committed to taking that forward, as cabinet secretary.

Illegal Migration Bill

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-08680, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the Illegal Migration Bill. I would be grateful if members who wish to speak in the debate could press their request-to-speak button now. I call Shirley-Anne Somerville to speak to and move the motion. You have up to 15 minutes, cabinet secretary.

14:28

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville):

I welcome the opportunity to open this important debate on the United Kingdom Government's Illegal Migration Bill, but I want to be clear at the outset that the Scottish Government condemns the cruel and inhumane provisions in the bill and has written to the UK Government to urge it to scrap the bill in its entirety.

The UK Government's view is that the bill is entirely reserved but, by its own admission, the impact of the proposed legislation is UK-wide, with specific effects on local authorities, for which responsibilities are devolved. The Scottish Government was given no opportunity to comment on or consider the proposals properly before their introduction. Given the subject matter and the pace at which the bill is being rushed through the House of Commons, it is important that the Scottish Parliament take this opportunity to debate the bill and its consequences.

The bill will also amend the powers and duties of the Scottish ministers to provide support and assistance to victims and potential victims of human trafficking under the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015. Clauses 23 and 27 of the bill, for instance, will clearly change the powers and duties of the Scottish Government. Clause 19 is also aimed at having an effect on devolved services to care for looked-after children.

Any regulations that would amend, repeal or revoke any Scottish legislation on any devolved matter should be subject to the consent of the Scottish ministers or, at the very least, consultation with the Scottish ministers. Therefore, I confirm to Parliament that we will shortly lodge a legislative consent memorandum on the bill and I will write to the UK Government today to inform it of our intention to do so.

The UK has international obligations that it must uphold. The 1951 United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, to which the UK was a founding signatory, requires the UK Government to ensure that the rights of refugees are respected and protected.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees—UNHCR—the UN refugee agency, has stated that the UK Government's Illegal Migration Bill

“would be a clear breach of the Refugee Convention and would undermine a longstanding, humanitarian tradition of which the British people are rightly proud.”

I agree with that statement. Countries have an obligation to offer a place of safety to desperate people fleeing conflict and persecution because it is enshrined in international law and a moral obligation to do it because it is the right and fair thing to do.

The bill not only runs counter to the refugee convention but risks breaching the UK's obligations under the European convention on human rights. As is well known, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, who was instrumental in drafting the ECHR, was a Scottish MP and an eminent lawyer. He was also Home Secretary under Winston Churchill. It was Churchill's—[*Inaudible*].

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, we seem to be experiencing some technical difficulties with your microphone. I ask you to bear with me for a moment.

Cabinet secretary, would you mind continuing and let us see how we go?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Okay. We shall try. I am happy to move seats if required, Presiding Officer, but we will give it a go for now. I have no idea how much the chamber heard, but I will carry on from where I think I left off.

As is well known, Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe, who was instrumental in drafting the ECHR, was a Scottish MP and an eminent lawyer. He was also Home Secretary under Winston Churchill. It was Churchill's Conservative Government that ensured that the United Kingdom was the first signatory to the convention in 1951. However, in 2023, the current Home Secretary is unable to provide an assurance that her proposed legislation complies with that same convention. That is, to be quite frank, an appalling state of affairs.

The rights established by the convention are written into Scotland's devolution settlement and have been fundamental to the work of this Parliament for more than two decades. The convention rights provide fundamental constitutional safeguards that ensure that executive powers cannot be abused. For example, the Scottish ministers have no power to act in a way that is incompatible with the convention rights. Legislation that is passed by this Parliament is not law if it fails the same test.

Thanks to the Human Rights Act 1998, which the current UK Government remains intent on repealing, similar constraints apply more widely to all public authorities. It is unlawful for any public authority to act incompatibly with those same convention rights. Crucially, human rights breaches can be directly challenged in the courts. However, the reality is that the Home Secretary and her colleagues are intent on depriving us all of the protections that are enshrined in the Human Rights Act 1998 and in Scotland's constitutional settlement.

It beggars belief that destitute migrants who are fleeing war and repression, together with victims of human trafficking, might be the specific target of the Illegal Migration Bill.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: The cabinet secretary is absolutely right, in that the vast majority of the people who are forced to take to the small boats to cross the Channel have a genuine claim to asylum on these shores and are fleeing unimaginable atrocity. Does she agree that the nomenclature of the bill that is being debated by the UK Parliament—the Illegal Migration Bill—suggests otherwise: that those people are looking to come to this country for reasons other than persecution and fleeing death and tyranny?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I very much agree with the point that Alex Cole-Hamilton makes. The narrative that it is giving on the entire issue around immigration, migration and refugees is deeply concerning. I think that there is a deliberate attempt by the UK Government to misuse and confuse terms and therefore to confuse the British public on our responsibilities and affect the British public's desire for all of the UK to continue to be a welcoming nation. Therefore, I very much associate myself with Alex Cole-Hamilton's remarks.

The Scottish Government has repeatedly raised concerns about the UK Government's Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and its “New Plan for Immigration”. The Illegal Migration Bill deepens the already significant damage to the UK's reputation as a place of refuge and it further diminishes our credibility with international partners. It is clear that the new legislation will not achieve the change that is desperately needed in our asylum and immigration system to make it humane and fit for purpose.

The UK Government's Illegal Migration Bill will apply to most people who claim asylum and it criminalises some of the most vulnerable people in our society. However, the inhumanity of the bill is most evident in how it mistreats children, denying them the right to feel safe and the right to live a happy and full childhood. Under the bill, the secretary of state is not required to make arrangements to remove any unaccompanied child

from the UK until they turn 18 years old, but there is the power to do so. That does not provide the safety and certainty that children require so that they can rebuild their lives in the UK.

The bill effectively reverses the ban on child detention that was implemented under the UK coalition Government in 2014 and it will potentially give the UK Government powers to imprison children in immigration centres and deport unaccompanied children to a third country where they have no connections or family. That is shocking and not something that anyone should support.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I share the cabinet secretary's concern at what the bill will do for children's rights. That issue was raised in the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee this morning. We asked witnesses how important it now is that the Scottish Government does all that it can to mitigate, wherever possible, the harms that the bill will cause. They highlighted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as one area on which we need action. Does the cabinet secretary recognise the importance of incorporation of the UNCRC in relation to the Illegal Migration Bill and other areas, and can she say when the bill on incorporation of the UNCRC will be brought back to Parliament?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I very much welcome Pam Duncan-Glancy to her new role. I hope that we will still be having discussions like this across the chamber, because there are areas of great interest and the UNCRC is one of them. I recognise its importance. Clearly, we are at a position where the Scottish Government requires to work with the UK Government to see whether we can find amendments to the bill on incorporation of the UNCRC that will cause no other concerns and issues as we move forward to a reconsideration stage. That work is on-going with the UK Government. There is no one more impatient than I am to get that bill in front of the chamber once again and get it moving, given that I have responsibility for it. I also have responsibility for the human rights bill, which I am very keen to be working on as well. I share the member's frustration on that issue, but it is important that the Governments work together to see whether we can make progress.

Amendments to the Illegal Migration Bill that were tabled by the UK Government on Friday will see age-disputed young people automatically considered to be adults if they refuse to undergo contentious scientific age assessments. We are seriously concerned about the ethical implications of subjecting children to those techniques and also about the capacity of the techniques to accurately assess age. Those methods have no place in Scotland.

Like all children, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children should have access to the full care, support and protection of children's legislation, and we continue to scrutinise what the Illegal Migration Bill will mean for vulnerable children and victims of human trafficking who flee to the UK for a place of safety. We fear that it will place those already vulnerable children at further risk of trafficking and exploitation. We are aware of acute pressures on accommodating unaccompanied asylum-seeking children across the UK, and the Scottish Government is working with the Home Office, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and operational partners on solutions to those pressures. However, we should be clear that the UK Government's bill is not part of that solution.

Scottish local authorities have consistently shown their willingness to assist vulnerable young asylum seekers who arrive in the country alone. As of the end of March, almost 290 asylum-seeking children have been transferred to Scotland through the national transfer scheme since July 2021. We are committed to providing the safety and security that young asylum seekers need to rebuild their lives, and in April, we launched the statutory independent child trafficking guardianship service to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who might have been, or who might be vulnerable to becoming, a victim of human trafficking.

This bill from the UK Government also punishes innocent families, children and victims of human trafficking. The bill will restrict access to support for many refugees and victims of human trafficking without even giving them the dignity of having their case heard. Those people are the most vulnerable people in the world and they should be welcomed, supported and protected. To remove their ability to access vital support to assist with the recovery from their horrific experiences is surely utterly inconceivable in our system.

Trafficking victims often suffer from severe trauma. They have little choice about their movements and they are frequently unaware of their location or even of how they entered the country. Removing the existing protections based on how they entered the UK is irresponsible and will make the victims much less likely to seek help, thereby tightening the grip of the perpetrators. The Scottish Government remains committed to providing support and assistance to those who are identified as potential victims of human trafficking and who are residing in Scotland. That is why we are providing the Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance and Migrant Help with funding to support their important work.

We also need wholesale reform of the UK Government's asylum system. It should be built on

principles of fairness, dignity and respect. The UK needs an asylum system that is effective and efficient, and which delivers for highly vulnerable people. It needs to ensure that asylum claims are assessed on whether people meet the criteria for recognition as a refugee as set out in the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. That is someone who is outside the country of their nationality because of a well-founded fear of persecution and is unable to avail themselves of the protection of their country or nationality. The UK Government must also urgently provide clarity on the funding that is available to local authorities and other partners who are providing vital support on the ground for asylum seekers, including children.

As part of a reformed asylum system, safe and legal routes must exist in the UK for people who are in search of safety and protection from war and persecution. That is the only realistic way of disrupting the business model that human traffickers use to exploit already vulnerable people who are seeking refuge. However, the UK bill proposes to cap the number of people who can come to the UK on any safe route, while going further to push people who are in need of protection into exploitation and destitution.

Other resettlement states from Canada to Finland to New Zealand are adding growing targets to already large per capita programmes. The strong policy and funding support by the European Union for all third country pathways has multiple projects, each generating new, mutually reinforcing networks. At the very least, the UK Government should expand UNHRC-referred resettlement routes and add additional legal pathways, focusing on education, employment, humanitarian corridors, family reunification and community sponsorship.

Today, I have had the opportunity to highlight some of the grave concerns that this Government has about the bill. Scotland is stronger for our multiculturalism, and non-UK citizens are an important part of our country's future. That is why we condemn unreservedly the UK Government's Illegal Migration Bill as cruel and unnecessary, and we will continue to urge the UK Government not to progress the bill but instead to deliver a humane and flexible asylum and immigration system. That is what the British people expect, and it is certainly what I hope the Scottish Parliament will expect a following our debate this afternoon.

I move,

That the Parliament deems the UK Government's proposed Illegal Migration Bill to be dehumanising and immoral; notes that the bill proposes that anyone who enters the UK by irregular routes would not be able to remain in the UK, and would be subject to detention and then returned to their home country or what the UK

Government deems to be a safe third country such as Rwanda; agrees that the proposals in this bill will remove access to support for some of the most vulnerable people in the world, including children, potentially forcing them into further exploitation and destitution; acknowledges that the Home Secretary has no confidence that the bill is compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights; notes the strict limitations on any formal routes for people seeking asylum; agrees that the UK has moral and international legal obligations to uphold the 1951 Refugee Convention and offer a place of safety to people, including children, fleeing conflict and persecution, and affirms that sanctuary should be available under these obligations to those fleeing war and persecution, and that Scotland remains welcoming to such vulnerable people in their time of need.

The Presiding Officer: Members will wish to be aware that time will be given back when interventions are taken this afternoon.

14:44

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): In opening the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour, I want to state our clear opposition to the UK Conservative Government's Illegal Migration Bill. It is a pernicious piece of legislation that strips vital protections from some of the most vulnerable people. It further tarnishes the international reputation of Britain and diminishes our standing in the world.

Compassion, tolerance and support for human rights: those are the values that I recognise for Britain in a global world—not what is in this bill. The bill has rightly been condemned, including in the House of Commons by my colleague Yvette Cooper, the shadow Home Secretary, who described it as

"a con which will make the chaos worse".

Labour voted against the bill in the House of Commons, and tried to pass amendments to block its passage to the next stage.

It is clear that the bill is not a solution. It is an ideologically motivated assault on the rights of people who are fleeing warfare, persecution and human trafficking. It is another example of the Conservative Government's cruel approach. It follows the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which led to the creation of the Rwanda scheme—a scheme that breaches international law and the UN refugee convention. Even by the Tories' standards, the Rwanda scheme has been shown to be unworkable and a waste of taxpayers' money. The idea that the Government can offshore asylum claims to another country that is more than 4,000 miles away is cruel and absurd in equal measure.

The impulse to travel and cross borders to seek safety and a more peaceful and prosperous life has been a facet of human behaviour since the beginning of time. Indeed, for many of us in this Parliament, it is part of our own story, including

that of my ancestors, who were fleeing hunger, and of others who came to these shores, leaving behind war, discrimination or violence.

The Tories need to recognise that we do not exist in isolation. We are part of an increasingly interconnected world, and the world is becoming smaller as we become more connected.

We live in a world that is still deeply unequal, with persecution, violence and warfare being very real threats for a significant percentage of the global population. People will seek to migrate and find asylum in safer and more prosperous nations—people such as the many who have gone before us, placing all that they have at peril on unforgiving seas and risking everything for a place of sanctuary. Therefore, we need a Government that is focused on solutions and not fixated on stoking division and playing political games with people's lives. That is why Labour has called on the UK Government to create more safe and legal routes for people seeking asylum and to provide additional resources to the Home Office to help to process the backlog of asylum applications.

Criticism of the UK Government's proposals has been widespread, with third sector organisations roundly condemning the plans as poorly conceived, unethical and impractical. The International Rescue Committee has stated that

“The Bill will not stop small boats crossing the Channel. It will only add to the trauma of the people in these boats, while further damaging Britain's global reputation for fairness and compassion”;

Amnesty International has concluded that

“There is nothing fair, humane or even practical in this plan”;

and Liberty has described the bill as

“a shocking attack on the rule of law”.

The Scottish Refugee Council has described the bill as a tool to dehumanise asylum seekers and the Institute for Public Policy Research has described the plans as “impractical and unethical”.

Suella Braverman, the Home Secretary herself, has acknowledged that there is a more than 50 per cent chance that the provisions break international human rights law. Really? Is that how low we have stooped? It is outrageous, and the Conservative Party should be utterly ashamed. It seems that crashing the economy was not enough for the Tories; they feel compelled to drag Britain's international reputation through the mud, and they seem happy to act with total disregard for the laws and treaties that govern international relations.

In the assessment of Enver Solomon of the Refugee Council, the bill is

“an unworkable, costly and nasty piece of legislation. It treats refugees like criminals”

and it would see the UK cast alongside

“Russia and Belarus as countries who show no respect for international law.”

To be blunt, the Government's approach is reckless, breaches Britain's international obligations and diminishes our status in the world.

As we have already heard, it is important to remember that the right to seek asylum is a fundamental human right, as outlined in the UN refugee convention of 1951.

The UK has always welcomed those who are fleeing persecution, regardless of whether they come through a safe and legal route. As it stands, the bill will mean shutting the door on victims who have been trafficked into slavery here in the UK because

“If they come here illegally they will not be supported to escape their slavery.”

Those are not my words; they are the words of Conservative former Prime Minister Theresa May, who is hardly renowned for being liberal on immigration but who has been critical of the Government's approach with the bill. She is right to raise the issues of human trafficking and modern slavery, because the bill will drive a coach and horses through protections for people—women in particular—who are trafficked to Britain as victims of modern slavery.

In October 2019, this nation was given a profound reminder of the enduring prevalence of human trafficking when 39 people from Vietnam were found to have died in the most horrendous of conditions, locked in the trailer of a refrigerated articulated lorry. That harrowing case reinforced the urgent need for both our Governments, in Holyrood and Westminster, to redouble their efforts to protect people who are victims of human trafficking.

It is true that immigration is a reserved issue, but this Parliament should use its powers to help those who are fleeing persecution and face a heightened risk of human trafficking. In that respect, the Scottish Refugee Council has called on the Scottish Government to use the powers that it has under section 9 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 to create an end-to-end anti-trafficking protection process, bypassing the UK national referral mechanism to stay compliant with the European convention on human rights. I urge the cabinet secretary to explore how the Government can most effectively use those powers to ensure that the national referral mechanism, which is operated by the UK Home Office, is not the only process for identifying trafficked people.

I also ask the minister, in her concluding speech, to update Parliament on the work that is

being done to help communities meet the challenge of welcoming refugees, particularly those who have come from Syria and Afghanistan to live in communities across Scotland and who need more support. Our local authorities clearly need more support to be able to offer the services that are required. I hope that the minister will also update Parliament on the planning and support for refugees who have recently come from Ukraine.

I am clear in affirming my belief that the bill is a shameful, immoral and unworkable piece of legislation. I believe that it is motivated by political calculation that plays to people's worst instincts by stoking fear and division. Labour's amendment adds to the Government motion by highlighting the recent assessment by the Equality and Human Rights Commission that the bill threatens to undermine the universality of human rights and the protections for victims of trafficking and modern slavery, as well as breaching the UK's obligations under the refugee convention and the European convention on human rights.

Let us be in no doubt: the Tories' Illegal Migration Bill, in its current form, will do real harm. It will remove the protections for victims of modern slavery, will seek to abandon Britain's international obligations and will reduce our standing in the world. It is not the way that we should choose. There is another way by which we can offer safe and legal routes to those fleeing persecution, violence and war. Let us in this chamber say with one voice that refugees are welcome here, that there is a place for them, that they will be safe, and that this bill is pernicious, unworkable and wrong.

I move amendment S6M-08680.1, to insert at end:

“, and agrees with the assessment of the Equality and Human Rights Commission that the bill risks undermining the universality of human rights and protections for victims of trafficking and modern slavery, as well as breaching the UK's obligations under both the 1951 Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights.”

14:53

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome Emma Roddick to her post as Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees. It is always good to see a member from the Highlands and Islands assume ministerial office, and I offer my party's congratulations in that regard.

The issue that we are debating today is undoubtedly a serious one and I will address some of the themes raised by the cabinet secretary later in my remarks. However, we have, this week, seen the Scottish National Party Government accuse others of disrespecting devolution, which takes some brass neck when we are today

debating an issue that is entirely reserved to the UK Parliament.

We could instead be debating why, under this Government, accident and emergency waiting times hit their worst level on record, or why cancer waiting times are the longest on record. We could instead be debating why the education attainment gap has widened and not narrowed or why, after 16 years of SNP rule, there are now fewer teachers in our schools compared with the number in 2007-08.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I wonder whether the member thinks that the line that he is taking is in any way appropriate when we are dealing with such a serious issue.

Donald Cameron: I think that it is entirely appropriate. The issues that I am outlining, which fall within devolved competence, are also deeply serious.

We could instead be debating why, after eight years, and nearly £500 million later, ferries remain in dockyards on the Clyde rather than serving island communities. There are so many pressing and serious issues that we could be debating, yet—

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member take an intervention?

Donald Cameron: I would like to carry on for the moment.

In the early weeks of this Government, we are debating a UK Government bill about a matter that is entirely reserved to the UK Parliament. That is a matter for the processes of this Parliament. I am glad that you are still in the chair, Presiding Officer, because this debate time was set down for Scottish Government business. The UK Parliament has debated and continues to debate the bill. MPs from all parties have debated it. There are plainly very differing views across this chamber on migration—

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Donald Cameron: I want to make some progress.

Until today, however, we have had no indication of the Scottish Government's views on the bill, because no legislative consent memorandum has been published or made available to the public. We have had no formal documentation regarding the Scottish Government's views on the competence of the bill. The cabinet secretary only gave an outline in her speech just now. In those circumstances, to be frank, and with all due respect, it is not acceptable to turn up to the chamber for a substantive debate and expect

MSPs to answer on the issues. If that is not disrespecting Parliament, Presiding Officer, I do not know what is.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I wonder what Donald Cameron thinks of the fact that the Scottish Government was not aware and was not given any previous warning of what was in the bill before it was published. We are talking about the showing of contempt for the Scottish Government and—more important, I think—the Scottish Parliament, which has the right to debate any subject that it so chooses in the interests of the people of Scotland. I think that the people of Scotland care about how we care about the most vulnerable in our society.

Donald Cameron: If the cabinet secretary was serious about that point, she would know that Angus Robertson, her Cabinet colleague, wrote to the UK Government in March this year, yet it is only today that she has turned up and given the Scottish Government's response, in outline, on these issues.

We still do not know whether the Scottish Government thinks that devolved competence is engaged or whether it believes that legislative consent is necessary. If it believes that consent is necessary, we do not know why or in what way.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Donald Cameron: No, thank you.

We do not know which areas of devolved competence the Scottish Government argues are affected. We know none of that, and the brief comments that the cabinet secretary made in her speech do not make up for the lack of formal process. That makes a mockery of this Parliament and its processes.

I am not naive about the politics of this. No doubt we will hear more in this debate about not just illegal migration but migration in general. That is important, and in that respect, I turn to the substance of the bill. The UK Government has made it abundantly clear that the bill seeks to address the growing instances of people smuggling and to reduce unsafe migrant crossings. It is about illegal migration. It is about an issue that, as we all know, affects the south of England in particular.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Will the member give way?

Donald Cameron: I am sorry. I am going to keep going.

It aims to break the people-smuggling networks, stop the criminal gangs who exploit the most vulnerable and, ultimately, ensure that lives can be saved. Too many lives have already been lost as a

result of those practices, and it is right that the UK Government does everything in its power to tackle the issue head on.

Maggie Chapman: Would Donald Cameron like to outline to the Parliament the legal routes by which an asylum seeker can come to the UK?

Donald Cameron: There are already safe and legal routes for entering the UK. There are schemes for Afghan citizens and Ukrainian refugees as well as routes for Hong Kong overseas nationals to enter the UK. That is on top of more general routes such as the UK resettlement scheme for refugees who are encamped in neighbouring countries due to hostilities in their home country.

However, surely we can all acknowledge and agree that illegal entry to the UK should be discouraged and, instead, access to safe and legal routes should be improved.

Since 2015, the UK has offered safety to nearly 480,000 people from all over the world, including from Syria, Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine. That is positive, and we want to continue to ensure that those who are in need and require refuge and sanctuary are welcomed—however, that must be done in accordance with the law.

We must also recognise that the arrival of people to the UK by illegal means ultimately puts a strain on our infrastructure and resources. In 2022, more than 45,000 people arrived in the UK after crossing the English Channel by boat. That significant number, if repeated without any action, could pose serious issues for the individuals who make such dangerous trips and could benefit the criminals who seek to exploit them.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I have listened to Donald Cameron's speech, which has been largely about process and, secondarily, about delineating the problem. I have listened to his contributions many times and am aware of his values and his moral compass. Would he, personally, support the bill if he were an MP in the House of Commons?

Donald Cameron: Yes, and I would debate the issues. The bill provides new rights of legal challenge, which include the ability for an individual who may be within the scope of the bill to challenge a removal. That includes an ability to make what is called a "serious harm suspensive claim", whereby a person will have a period of time in which to make a claim that their removal to a safe third country would result in a real risk of serious and irreversible harm.

To answer Alex Cole-Hamilton's question, there are, entirely justifiably, protections in the bill. Those include an ability to make what is called a "factual suspensive claim", if a person believes that there has been a factual mistake in

determining that they were an illegal entrant who is subject to the duty to remove.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Donald Cameron: I have taken many interventions and will carry on. I regret not being able to take Stephanie Callaghan's intervention.

Those provisions are fully in keeping with the UK Government's international obligations and provide opportunities to ensure that all decisions that are taken are correct.

To answer the point about the law, the Government is confident that the legislation will allow it to detain and swiftly remove those who enter the UK illegally. That will create a deterrent for those small boat crossings while being consistent with our treaty obligations.

To conclude, there are so many issues that this Parliament could debate to improve people's lives, but we find ourselves debating a UK Parliament bill. Today's motion will pass, no doubt, but, all the while, the pressing issues that we can endeavour to resolve, given that they fall within the competence of the Parliament, will remain untouched. For those reasons, I ask members to reject the Government's motion.

15:03

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I, too, welcome Emma Roddick to her post. I am grateful to speak for the Scottish Liberal Democrats in this important debate. It is timely in that it connects directly to the anguish that is being played out on our television sets among those who are seeking passage out of Sudan as, potentially, Khartoum falls. That offers an understanding of what is being fled by those who risk the open sea in craft that are sometimes not even watertight. We know that the majority of those who take to the boats have a legitimate claim to be here. They are fleeing unimaginable atrocity in places such as Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. They have a right to find safe harbour here, but they are deprived of safe and legal routes so to do.

Gary Lineker spoke for many of us when he stood up to the inhumane approach of the Conservative Home Secretary. Suella Braverman sought to stoke public animosity towards those vulnerable people when she claimed that

"100 million people"

worldwide

"could qualify for protection under current laws"

and, in her words,

"they are coming here".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 7 March 2023; Vol 729, c 152.]

Such replacement rhetoric was used in Germany in the 1930s. Gary Lineker was not wrong.

The British people have a long and proud history of providing sanctuary to those who need it most. In the 1600s, it was to Catholics and Protestants alike who were fleeing religious persecution in Europe. Indeed, the word "refugee" was coined for the Huguenots, who were sheltered in a building called "the refuge", in London.

In the 1800s, it was political thinkers being hounded out for revolutionary ideas. We heard in the cabinet secretary's remarks that it was Churchill's second Government that first brought that into line and saw the UK become one of the first signatories to the convention, because of the reality of displacement of people by the second world war. It was nearly a century ago—it is hard to imagine—that 50,000 Jewish refugees sought shelter in this country after being subjected to one of the worst atrocities in the history of humankind.

We saw that tradition evidenced in the Kindertransport, Biafra and the homes for Ukrainians scheme. That is the Britain that I recognise: one that is tolerant, internationalist in outlook and compassionate and that recognises the needs of the persecuted and the dispossessed.

That British tradition has provided some of our greatest politicians, businesspeople and writers, to name but a few. Our much-beloved meal of fish and chips is thought to have originated from Jewish refugees in the 1500s.

The Conservative Government is seeking to squander that tradition and sully that reputation. Experts are resounding that the bill will have a detrimental effect on those who are seeking asylum, including by giving the Government the power to detain adults and children indefinitely; by preventing victims of modern slavery from accessing vital support; and by making it almost impossible for families that have been torn apart to be reunited, leaving children and young people alone and vulnerable. In short, all that the bill will do is harm those vulnerable people.

Not only does the bill display a startling lack of compassion and humanity, but there are sinister undertones in it with regard to our democracy. If passed, the bill would severely restrict the justice process. Courts would no longer be allowed to review whether, or intervene if, a detention period or removal was inappropriate or unlawful. In other words, the bill takes away powers from our justice system and places them, unfettered, into the hands of UK Government ministers. It should give all of us grave cause for concern.

Our democracy is only as safe as the mechanisms that hold it together and that hold those in power to account. Our courts play a crucial part in that, providing a check on the power of the executive branch. As the proposals in the bill illustrate, our Conservative Government seems intent on chipping away at those safeguards. It is no wonder, then, that the bill has been decried by so many, including the United Nations, which has stated that the bill would breach the 1951 convention, risking a contravention of international law. The Home Secretary cannot even confirm whether the bill is compatible with the European convention on human rights. There are clear standards that those in Government must adhere to, and introducing legislation that is not in keeping with international law surely falls well beneath those standards.

Despite the bill being a catastrophe in waiting, the Conservatives are right about one thing: our asylum system is broken and woefully inefficient. I will go one step further and say that the Home Office is not fit for purpose. It is the Conservatives who bear the responsibility for both of those things, and we should not forget that the Scottish Conservatives continue to defend the legislation, despite the hugely damaging consequences that it will have for human rights and Britain's international reputation. Even Douglas Ross, who sits in this chamber, voted for it at Westminster, alongside every other Scottish Conservative MP, showing once again that the nasty insular streak is still alive and well in the Scottish Conservatives. I pity those who sit on the Tory benches, many of whom are here today, because it is once again a party that I do not believe is speaking for them. It is punching down on the marginalised and demonising the desperate.

Instead of penalising those in need of safety, we must help them. That is why the poorly named Illegal Migration Bill needs to be scrapped immediately. The Government must provide safe and legal routes for refugees, and it should do that by expanding and properly funding a refugee resettlement scheme. The Liberal Democrats are also proposing the establishment of a new, dedicated unit for asylum that can make decisions fairly and quickly, unlike the Home Office.

We ought to remember that it is a lottery that decides whether one is born into a country with peace and safety or into one with war, destruction and persecution. We live in a world that is volatile and, at times, fragile. As events in Ukraine over the past year have taught us, it could very suddenly be us fleeing from danger. If we or our children ever had to leave Britain in boats to venture into troubled waters and travel to lands unknown, we would pray for kindness and a welcome with open arms when we got there. It is

therefore our moral duty to extend that same courtesy from one human to another.

The poet Warsan Shire wrote:

“no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark”.

We must do everything in our power to ensure that Scotland and the UK remain open to those who seek sanctuary within our shores.

15:10

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I proudly represent one of the most diverse constituencies in the country. Many of those who live in Glasgow Kelvin are first-generation migrants—as am I, having moved to this country from Pakistan. Our diversity is far from a weakness. It is our strength—it is part of Scotland's rich tapestry. Scotland, like the UK in general, is an ancient migrant nation. The contribution of those who pay Scotland the ultimate compliment by choosing to call our country their home is our past, our present and our future.

However, who gets to do so is currently at the mercy of a remarkably cruel UK Government. The name of its game is keeping people out. I, for one, cannot see any reason for the UK Government's blind resentment towards displaced, disadvantaged and desperate people. Everything that it does seeks to hammer the vulnerable, and the Illegal Migration Bill is no different. It is, in part, disguised as an attempt to thwart organised criminals who are looking to make quick and easy money from those who are desperately seeking safe sanctuary. In reality, though, it makes criminals out of those who are escaping war-torn nations. Underpinning the whole thing is an outright ban on claiming asylum in the UK. That is how serious the bill is.

Unless someone is lucky enough to be from a nation with a specific refugee scheme set up by the UK Home Office, there is no route for them to make a claim for asylum within these islands. Under the Tories' proposals, if someone comes to the UK seeking asylum, they face being detained indefinitely and left in a permanent state of uncertainty, with the threat of being deported. In fact, included in the bill is the removal of court oversight, which gives the Home Secretary free rein to lock up people who are seeking asylum in the UK, including children. It would leave the most vulnerable people in the world detained, destitute and dying.

I remind the chamber that the provisions in the bill will empower a Home Secretary who dreams of deporting refugees to nations with a questionable record on human rights. Just last year, Rwandan police arrested, detained and charged a woman at

a concert in Kigali for what they labelled as a shameful dress. The police and Government in Rwanda frequently persecute journalists who speak out. We should not be outsourcing our human rights obligations. We live under an uncaring, unfeeling and—in my opinion—increasingly extreme Government that we, in Scotland, did not vote for.

During recess, I met the Women's Integration Network in my constituency and heard from a number of refugee women and asylum seekers who faced the many challenges of the UK's current immigration system. The asylum process is taking far too long. Those who are appealing decisions are served eviction notices. Where do they go? Some of the people who have been served notices leave prior to that deadline. Where do they go? In my opinion, that is enforced destitution. In addition, unlike in the USA, Canada, Germany, Australia and many other nations, those who are seeking asylum in the UK are not permitted to work at any point. They have to live on £6 a day. How many of us in the chamber spent that shortly after leaving the house? It is all part of the Tory Government's hostile environment approach to dealing with people who arrive here from elsewhere.

This morning, I convened my first meeting of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, where we heard compelling and grim evidence from the Scottish Refugee Council, JustRight Scotland, the Simon Community Scotland and refugee support at the British Red Cross, all of which deal with the grass-roots effects of such terrible bills. Their message was clear: the bill undermines the power of the Scottish Government, including our obligations towards children.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The member is making a powerful speech. She mentions the absurdity of the prohibition on working. Does she recognise that 1,200 asylum-seeking doctors are registered with the British Medical Association? That would be a sure-fire way to immediately improve capacity in our national health service. It costs only £25,000 to train an asylum-seeking doctor to practise in the UK, as opposed to £200,000 to train a medical student from scratch.

Kaukab Stewart: I absolutely accept that every human being has skills to offer. We could make full use of them, as any country in the world could.

This illegal Illegal Migration Bill does not speak for Scotland, our values or our needs as a nation, as Paul Sweeney mentioned. I join colleagues today and any other day in calling for immigration to be devolved, but we all know very well the UK Government's attitude towards devolution and devolved powers.

It is clear to me, as it should be to everyone, that the only way that Scotland can exercise its values in the world and make our nation a welcoming home to those who need it is through taking full control of our finances so that we can invest in a fast and fair system of processing applications rather than the current profit-from-people-in-peril model that is perpetuated by the UK Government.

The bill is happening now and must be stopped now. I was glad to hear from the cabinet secretary that the Scottish Government will do everything that it can to challenge the bill. It breaks many of the UK's obligations under the ECHR and the UNHCR refugee convention. It would be more suitable if it was actually called, as I said, the illegal Illegal Migration Bill.

I make a plea directly to Scottish Conservative members to make their voice heard. They know that the bill is wrong—it is morally, legally and ethically wrong—so they should not sit there meekly and nod along to what their London bosses are doing. They should stand up to them. My challenge to Douglas Ross is to whip his MPs to vote against the bill when it comes to the House of Commons for its third and final reading. All other Tory MSPs should speak out and encourage their colleagues south of the border to put a stop to what is proposed in the bill. To do nothing is to support the bill, and Conservative members' silence gives consent. They should send a message that the Scottish Parliament does not consent to the Illegal Migration Bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Pauline McNeill joins us remotely and will be followed by Bob Doris. You have a generous six minutes, Ms McNeill.

15:18

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I begin by expressing my concern for the people of Sudan and the UK nationals who are trapped there. About 70 doctors are trying to get back to the UK; they are part of our diverse work force. If any of them had tried, under the bill, to get to the UK to seek asylum from war-torn Sudan and its regime, they would have failed.

The Illegal Migration Bill is morally unacceptable; I join with the others who have said that. It is also practically unworkable and, as with immigration deterrence policy, it is very likely to fail on its own terms and not to achieve its stated objectives.

As we have heard in the chamber, the bill intends, in effect, to abolish the asylum system for almost everyone who currently uses and needs it. Instead, the UK Government will detain people

and remove them to either Rwanda or another so-called safe third country.

The bill will grant unwarranted and unaccountable powers to the Home Secretary and will enable huge public moneys to be lost to private profit in detention and institutional accommodation. The bill, in effect, entirely abolishes the right to seek asylum or to have support or protection from trafficking for all those who arrive irregularly.

Such unofficial arrivals are necessarily and solely due to the UK Government's having refused to create safe travel arrangements—especially from the countries that we have a legal obligation to help due to British involvement in war and conflict—thereby abandoning people to acute risk. Tragically, as other members have said, we know that people have lost their lives at sea, in the backs of lorries and in other unsafe conditions. Hundreds have already lost their lives.

Even the most hard-line Conservative Governments in the past would never have attempted to set an immigration policy in such a draconian way. The policy is the centrepiece of a party in government that is completely out of ideas and is trying to stir up hostility against the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our society. Suella Braverman has been allowed to continue with a hostile immigration policy from Boris Johnson's Government to Rishi Sunak's Government, even though there have been significant attacks on immigration centres across England. That further highlights how cruel the bill is.

Suella Braverman appeared at a select committee meeting in which she attempted to answer a simple question from her Tory MP colleague Tim Loughton, about how a 16-year-old African who is facing persecution could make an application to come to the UK legally. She and her official stumbled over the answer, and they eventually had to concede that it was not possible to do that from some countries. That is acutely embarrassing and is a complete failure of the policy.

The bill will also give the Home Secretary the power to take charge of the care of unaccompanied children, rather than that sitting—rightly—with child protection experts in local authorities. That is despite 222 lone children—that we know of—having recently gone missing from Home Office hotels. Many of them have most likely been trafficked for exploitation. Many members have pointed that out. How Britain proposes, under the bill, to treat children who come to this country is one of the most devastating things about the bill.

There is no doubt that the human consequences of the bill will be utterly devastating. The bill means that a family who are fleeing from the Taliban in Afghanistan, a woman who is fleeing from violence under the Iranian regime or a child who is escaping from forced labour in Sudan would not have their claims for asylum considered.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has said that the bill is

“a clear breach of the Refugee Convention”,

and that the bill would

“amount to an asylum ban—extinguishing the right to seek refugee protection in the United Kingdom for those who arrive irregularly, no matter how genuine and compelling their claim may be, and with no consideration of their individual circumstances.”

Most shocking, perhaps, is the fact that the Home Secretary has confirmed that she cannot declare the compatibility of the bill with human rights obligations. That is the incredible reality.

The bill is derisive of both constitutional international law—not merely the European convention on human rights—and domestic legal principle. At its worst, it appears to purposely seek conflict with the European Court of Human Rights and our independent judicial system. The Home Secretary has repeatedly suggested that legal rights, due process and the decisions of independent courts are in some sense an illegitimate impediment to Government attempts to respond to irregular migration. I say to the Tories: how can Britain possibly set an example in the democratic world when it will not accept the rule of law itself? Even the most hard-line Tories must reflect on how that diminishes Britain's standing on the international stage.

Let me be clear: we do not need new laws to prevent people from taking dangerous journeys. We simply need to provide safe, dignified and legal routes from all countries in the world for survivors of oppressive regimes and organised crime. We desperately need a compassionate alternative at the UK level. In Scotland, we cannot merely stand by and watch the UK Government strip vulnerable people of their human rights and dignity. I certainly will not do that.

UK Labour has voted against the bill at various stages, and we will join others in voting against it. We will also join the cross-party efforts to campaign against this inhumanity. I call on the new First Minister to live up to the promises that the Scottish Government made to refugees and asylum seekers who are already in Scotland, to make their lives better and give them hope of a better life, by living up to much better standards.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I call Bob Doris, who has a generous six minutes.

15:24

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): If people really want to know what the UK's cruel and immoral Illegal Migration Bill is about, they would do well to look at a Refugee Council briefing from January 2023, which I urge everyone to read. The briefing's very first page offers a breakdown of the men, women and children who crossed the Channel to seek asylum in 2022.

We should remember that the people whom we are referring to would pretty much automatically be considered for deportation in short order to Rwanda or elsewhere, virtually irrespective of their circumstances. Such people would be deported without any meaningful judicial oversight and in contradiction of a number of international human rights obligations, which the UK Government seems to be happy to flout, almost as a badge of honour. What price the 1951 refugee convention? It has been left in ashes at the hands of the UK Government. There is nothing honourable about the UK Government's Illegal Migration Bill, which shames the UK.

In 2022, 45,746 men, women and children crossed the Channel in small boats to reach the UK. As the Refugee Council said,

"Each of those people ... had their own experiences before, during and after making that crossing. Many will have been very traumatic."

At least six out of 10 of those who made that crossing in 2022 would be recognised as refugees if the UK Government got round to processing their applications. Nearly 20 per cent—8,700—of all the people who made the crossing in small boats were children. Four in 10 who crossed the Channel came from just five countries—Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Eritrea and Sudan. People from three of those countries have an asylum grant rate—if the decisions are ever made—of 98 per cent, and the rates for the two other countries are 86 per cent and 82 per cent.

It is clear from those statistics that the real agenda of the bill is not to tackle illegal immigration or human trafficking, or to protect exploited individuals: rather, the bill's purpose is to wrongfully, wilfully and immorally reclassify such vulnerable men, women and children not as vulnerable refugees but as illegal immigrants, and to deny them their most basic human rights.

The UK Government puts great stock in stressing that it will accept asylum seekers only from safe and legal routes, but it has repeatedly failed to explain what those routes are and it has

not demonstrated that, where such routes exist, asylum seekers can access them in meaningful numbers. Figures from last year clearly substantiate that position. In the first nine months of 2022, almost 25,000 men, women and children crossed the Channel to claim asylum from seven countries—Albania, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Eritrea and Sudan. Only 867 people from those countries were resettled through a so-called safe route. I will explain that stark statistic.

Members will recall that the Refugee Council estimated that at least 60 per cent of those who put their lives at risk to cross the Channel would have their asylum claim approved if the UK Government ever got round to making a decision. That would mean granting asylum to almost 15,000 asylum seekers from the seven countries that I mentioned. Given that, why do such people risk their lives to cross the Channel in boats? It is because they know that to say that there are safe and legal routes is a big lie and is completely disingenuous—it is sleight of hand and a con trick.

As the MSP for Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn, I see well integrated and valued citizens whose families originally hail from countries around the globe, including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan and many more, and were often refugees who sought places of safety. They made their homes in Maryhill and Springburn and across Scotland. I see wonderful organisations, such as the Maryhill Integration Network and Glasgow Afghan United, supporting many members of that diaspora.

I am also aware of the deep worry of many of those whom I have mentioned that the Illegal Migration Bill will not only have a devastating effect on those who are in profound need and are seeking asylum who still have to make it to our shores; it will also have a corrosive and demonising impact on people who have made their lives here already. That is a result not just of the reality of the bill but of the rhetoric that surrounds it. It will undermine people's lives here in Scotland, so I say to the Conservatives that the bill is absolutely relevant to the people of Scotland.

Existing asylum seekers are still stuck in the system after many years. My constituents are often forced into destitution, as Kaukab Stewart pointed out, and are denied the right to work. As Paul Sweeney mentioned, some of those people could help our national health service, almost at a stroke, but are denied being able to do so by the UK Government.

If the Illegal Migration Bill is passed, other people who have still to find their way to our shores will be in significant peril. Those people will still arrive, but they will not be able to step forward and make an asylum claim. They will be vulnerable, exploited and exposed to sinister

forces and to people who would seek to abuse them.

The bill will not end modern slavery; it will institutionalise it. It is a deeply sinister bill that will have the most vulnerable people on our shores lurking in the shadows, scared to step forward. Shame on the UK Government; shame on the UK Government; shame on the UK Government.

15:31

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Today's debate is an opportunity for this Parliament to say, without apology, that Scotland welcomes refugees. As others have indicated, it is also a chance to make clear that we reject the notion that the legal obligations that this country has to offer shelter to people fleeing war and persecution should be abandoned.

The UK Government's Illegal Migration Bill is the latest move in a long line of actions that have damaged the UK's international reputation as a place of refuge. It is worth reminding ourselves why refugees come to the UK. According to the British Red Cross, about half of the refugees coming into the country are doing so to be reunited with their families. It is, of course, common for families to become separated as they flee from their homes or during what can be arduous journeys in search of safety. Language and culture are certainly also factors. At one point, nearly a quarter of the world's population lived under the British empire. That fact created, along with some other less creditable things, cultural ties with countries round the globe. It is only natural that people will seek shelter in countries with which they have some familiarity.

Despite what certain publications would have us believe, refugees do not come here for a generous benefits system. A single asylum seeker gets £45 a week, which is less than in many other countries, such as Germany. Asylum seekers cannot work or claim other benefits; they do not get the choice over where they get to live; and too many refugees in the UK end up exposed to poverty, homelessness and abuse.

The UK takes in fewer people than comparable European countries. Germany takes into two and a half times more refugees than the UK; France takes one and a half times more; and Spain and Austria take in more. The UK takes fewer refugees proportionately than most European Union countries, with the application per capita rate being almost half the EU average.

Against that background, it is difficult to explain the UK Government's focus on such an unworkable and inhumane policy as the one that it presently proposes. We heard the Home Secretary stoke up tensions with talk of invasions

and claims that arrivals are only here to game the system. Language like that makes it hard to escape the conclusion that the policy is being pursued as part of some fairly ugly political calculations.

However, let me put that to one side and keep our minds on the real lives affected by the bill. OpenDemocracy cites the story of a former police major in Iran. That police officer fled the country in 2019, after refusing to act against fuel demonstrations. He later fled Turkey after being found and harassed by Iranian intelligence agents, eventually arriving in Britain after crossing the Channel on a small boat last year. He was held in an immigration detention centre, privately run for the UK Home Office, living in constant fear of deportation. Now, he is in a hotel that is run by Home Office contractors.

The point is that the man was one of 3,594 Iranians to arrive by small boat between January and September last year, according to figures from the Refugee Council. There has been continuous widespread unrest in Iran following the death of 22-year-old Jina Mahsa Amini. She was arrested by Iran's morality police for allegedly wearing her headscarf incorrectly. UN human rights experts have condemned the killings and the state crackdown on protesters, which has been alleged to include arbitrary arrests and detentions, sexual violence, excessive use of force, torture and enforced disappearances.

Had refugees fleeing the Iranian regime arrived in the UK with the proposed bill enacted, they would have faced deportation to Rwanda and would have been told that their method of entry was illegal and that they should have come via the official route. For context, I note that, over that time, the official route was able to resettle a grand total of nine people from Iran.

That gets to the heart of the problem, as Mr Doris and several others have described. More than 4,000 people arrive from Iran every year, and we all agree that that country is run by a repressive and dangerous regime. The vast majority of asylum claims—82 per cent—are therefore granted at the initial stage, and even more are granted on appeal, but the official route managed to resettle a grand total of nine people over nine months. There is, in effect, no official route.

The figures for channel crossings by people from other countries show a similar situation. Tiny numbers of Afghans, Iraqis, Sudanese and Eritreans come to the UK via official routes.

The total failure to provide safe routes allows the criminal people smugglers to prosper, and it is forcing refugees into dangerous journeys and exploitation. Instead of improving safe routes, the

UK bill will arbitrarily detain and remove victims of modern slavery and trafficking. Victims of modern slavery will, in effect, be punished, while traffickers will often be able to continue to operate with impunity.

Scotland's Parliament will take no lectures about what it can and cannot discuss. Today, it is saying very clearly that Scotland wants no part at all in this awful and dehumanising piece of Westminster legislation.

15:37

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I and my Scottish Green colleagues welcome the motion and the debate. However, we do so with deep sadness, visceral anger and profound horror at what is being done in the name of the United Kingdom—a kingdom from which we have never longed more to disassociate ourselves.

In reality, the bill is not about illegal migration; it is, in itself, illegal, not only in the “specific and limited way” with which we already know the UK Government is cheerfully comfortable but in its fundamental and far-reaching intentions. The bill openly fails to comply with the European convention on human rights, specifically excludes the proper jurisdiction of the courts and breaches the 1951 refugee convention, not in minor details but as its core objectives. In terms of human rights, its solemn obligations under international law and the deep moral imperatives of compassion and justice, which prompted the refugee convention, the UK is now—let us be blunt—a rogue state.

Over the past months, we have become accustomed to using the word “unprecedented”, but what is being done is breathtaking in its utter annihilation of so much good that has gone before. As Human Rights Consortium Scotland and JustRight Scotland have so accurately said, the bill constitutes a human rights emergency. The right to seek refugee protection, the right to liberty and security, the right to access justice and the right to freedom from torture and slavery are all fundamentally violated by this shameful piece of propaganda posing as legislation.

The situation for people who are currently seeking asylum in the UK is, as we know, bad enough already. They face huge delays in processing applications, inappropriate and often dangerous accommodation, contemptibly meagre allowances and, for most, denial of the opportunity to contribute to much-needed work.

Just this morning, the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee heard that many people who have fled traumatic and dangerous situations are stuck in institutional hotel

accommodation, with just £1.32 a day to spend, for years. I wonder how many members on the Tory benches think that that is actually okay.

The system urgently needs reform to make it fairer and more humane, trauma-informed and person-centred, and more efficient in terms of time, skills and cost. However, the bill is diametrically opposed to that direction of reform. As the Scottish Refugee Council points out, it is “morally repugnant” and “practically unworkable”, and will enable a vast further transfer of funds from the public sector to private profit. Of the £3 billion a year that is currently in the sector, most is funnelled not to communities, asylum seekers or support organisations, but to private companies. The bill only exacerbates that.

As the Human Rights Consortium Scotland and JustRight have testified, the bill

“abolishes the asylum system”

for almost all people who currently use it and need it. Perhaps we should take a moment to let that sink in—it “abolishes the asylum system”. There is no way for most to apply for asylum before arriving here, and no way to arrive that is safe or designated as legal.

Under this extraordinary testament of cruelty, the Home Secretary has not only the power but the duty to treat people who are seeking refuge as persons “subject to removal”. They can be imprisoned indefinitely, with no court normally able to review that incarceration. They can be deported to the country that they are fleeing from, to Rwanda—a nation torn by colonial-created conflict and with a recent history of serious human rights abuses—or to what has been described, with bitter irony, as “another safe third country”. Most can never return to live here, and their unborn children can never live here. The bill enables “hereditary civic purgatory”, as JustRight Scotland said this morning.

The Home Secretary is given the power to take charge of unaccompanied children. More than 200 such children have already gone missing from hotels to which they were sent by the Home Office, and that same Home Office has no idea where they are now.

The bill removes support for many survivors of human trafficking and exploitation, including the support and protection that the Scottish Government and local authorities are duty bound to provide. We already struggle to prosecute traffickers, and the bill punishes the victims—it is a charter for those who deal in human misery, and a life sentence for their victims.

There is no need for the bill. Contrary to the toxic discourse of the Tory Government and Tory press, the UK does not take more than its fair

share of refugees. In fact, by any measure, it takes much less. If the UK's historical responsibility for division, for oppression, including of LGBTQIA+ people, and for conflict-exacerbating climate impacts are taken into account, its contribution falls even further from a bare moral minimum.

There is more. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has said that the UK's new approach

“undermines established international refugee protection law and practices”

and

“risks dramatically weakening a system that has for decades provided protection and the chance of a new life to so many desperate people.”

In closing, I want to use the words of Graham O'Neill of the Scottish Refugee Council, who this morning told the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee:

“This bill is a betrayal of the refugee convention, which rose from the ashes of the community response to the Holocaust. That is what we are turning away from.”

Where the UK leads, however dark that path, I fear that others will follow. It is therefore our human responsibility to stand for the rule of law, for the protective duties of our Administrations, and, most of all, for those whom the bill would crush and break. They are not “removable persons”; they are our neighbours and our friends, and they are welcome here—home.

15:44

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Yet again, we have come to the chamber to discuss and object to another abhorrent policy decision made by the Tory-run UK Government. The aptly named Illegal Migration Bill will, as others have pointed out, place the UK firmly outside international law, put us in direct breach of the 1950 European convention on human rights and completely erode confidence that the UK is a good-faith actor in upholding the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

This brazen policy does not even try to hide its contempt for international law. The Prime Minister has openly hinted at removing the UK from the ECHR. The UK would, therefore, be in the esteemed company of the Greek junta of 1967 to 1974 and the current Russian regime as the only countries that have left the convention. Maybe those of us who are in the chamber—but mostly those on the Tory benches, who perhaps have most influence with their colleagues at Westminster—should let that sink in for a moment.

Freedom from Torture, Amnesty International, Doctors Without Borders, the British Red Cross,

the Simon Community, JustRight Scotland, the Scottish Refugee Council, the UN and countless legal bodies are just some of the organisations that have grave reservations about the planned legislation. Indeed, as already mentioned, the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee heard some powerful evidence this morning from representatives of some of those organisations, who spelled out in no uncertain terms the hugely immoral nature of the bill and the devastating impact that it will have—ultimately, potentially leading to the loss of life. Seven members of the committee were at the meeting, but I encourage all members to watch the rerun of that session, because it was very powerful.

With each new proposal that the current UK Government makes, we isolate ourselves from the international community and slip further, seemingly to appease the far right. As Alex Cole-Hamilton pointed out, Gary Lineker received unwarranted backlash for correctly pointing out that the language used in this debate is similar to the language used in 1930s Germany. That is because, in October 2022, the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, described the small boats crossing the Channel as an

“invasion on our southern coast”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 31 October 2022; Vol 721, c 641.]

That language is so dangerous because it portrays migrants as if they were an enemy force that must be repelled with violence. The UK Government has also previously referred to “swarms” of “marauding migrants”, in dehumanising language that fully vindicates Mr Lineker's viewpoint.

I will outline the current proposals. The bill will make all individuals who enter the UK illegally permanently inadmissible to the asylum system. This ill-thought-out policy means that the UK will arbitrarily detain and remove victims of modern slavery, exploitation and trafficking without mercy. People who are trafficked here will, paradoxically, be denied protections that are offered by the UK's Modern Slavery Act 2015.

The bill will introduce a legal requirement on the Home Secretary to detain and deport people without regard for the consequences. The checks and balances against those new powers will be severely constrained because the bill will inhibit judicial oversight and reduce and restrict the appeals process.

People who are fleeing persecution, prejudice or war or for a host of other valid reasons and who fall foul of these draconian laws will be returned to the country that they were fleeing from in the first place or sent to Rwanda, a country that has been accepting unwanted migrants from other countries since 2014 but is certainly not known as a beacon for upholding human rights.

In her time reporting from Rwanda, Irish journalist and writer Sally Hayden documented the reality that Rwanda has little freedom of speech. Sally was granted accreditation for reporting on the migrant situation there because the authorities mistakenly believed that she would report only positive things about the system. Despite that, she was not granted access to refugee camps to speak to migrants who were detained there. Instead, she relied on sources outside of camps, who spoke of an atmosphere of distress, abuse, exploitation and fear of reprisals if they were outed as informers on the human rights violations that took place. Mental, physical and sexual abuse was commonplace for migrants, and victims received no justice.

How can the UK be morally comfortable with sending people to a country that has such blanket censorship on what happens to refugees who are sent to its care? In her multi-award-winning book, "My Fourth Time, We Drowned: Seeking refuge on the world's deadliest migration route", Sally Hayden outlined the plight, tragedy and, indeed, resilience of the ordinary people who are forced by circumstances that are beyond their control to flee their homes and search for better, safer lives.

That is the point that we must remember. We must remember the people whose lives will be made just that bit more difficult by the bill. It unapologetically and cruelly slams the door in the face of the gay men fleeing the death penalty in Iran and the Somalian families, in a country where well over 1,000 children are confirmed to have been drafted as child soldiers, wanting a better life for their children. Those are just two examples. Other members have given many more, and let us not forget that, as we speak in the chamber today, the prospect of further violence and humanitarian tragedy in Sudan looms large.

The bill must not be allowed to continue, and I will assert that Scotland stands shoulder to shoulder with those seeking safety in this country. We must do all that we can to show them dignity and respect.

Last week, I was proud to host a welcome afternoon and constituency information session for the many Ukrainian refugees who now call Coatbridge and Chryston their home. Although the circumstances of their arrival have been tragic, it has been inspiring to see the many local community groups and people come together to support our newest neighbours. If the current UK Government had even a fraction of the kindness, understanding and welcoming nature that my constituents have shown, we would not need to be discussing this repulsive proposal in the chamber today.

On that note, I will conclude.

15:51

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Presiding Officer,

"I am unable to make a statement that, in my view, the provisions of the Illegal Migration Bill are compatible with Convention rights, but the Government nevertheless wishes the House to proceed with the Bill."

That is a quote from the bill's explanatory notes by Suella Braverman, the lead architect of the Illegal Migration Bill. Ms Braverman followed up in a letter to MPs in March, in which she said:

"This does not mean that the provisions in the bill are incompatible with the Convention rights, only that there is a more [than] 50% chance that they may not be."

Again, as we saw with the Northern Ireland protocol, the Government is playing fast and loose with international treaties that it has signed. As many members have indicated, rarely has a bill been more aptly named. The Illegal Migration Bill is morally repugnant and legally inept.

The Home Secretary has been heralding Rwanda as a deportees' utopia on our news screens, smiling all the while, while insisting that Rwanda's very name should serve as a deterrent to people wanting to cross the Channel. However, should the Tories' utopian deterrent policy fail, they hope that the new measure to codify anti-refugee prejudice might satiate their support base in the UK.

The prejudice and the lies have persisted, and we must combat that with compassion and truth. I have heard people who have been taken in by the othering of refugees ask the question: why do so many refugees come to the UK? As Dr Allan and many others have indicated, in relative terms it is not so many and, of the people who do come, the vast majority have good reason for doing so.

Zehrah Hasan, advocacy director of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, outlined that in her evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights last year. More than 80 per cent of the refugees in the world live in the global south. In other words, asylum seekers overwhelmingly seek refuge in neighbouring countries. In Europe, most seek refuge in France, Germany and Greece. The Eurostat 2021 figures, which, of course, do not include the UK now, showed that 53.6 per cent of the European migrants were citizens of Asian countries including Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. Does our recent policy in the middle east, including military intervention, put no responsibility on the UK to honour its international obligations?

In any case, as has already been said, the minority who seek refuge in the UK often have family or community ties. A 2018 study of more than 400 people in northern France found that more than half of those who wanted to travel to the

UK had a family member here. The other reason was that their second language may well be English. Proponents of the bill casually overlook the influence of British imperialism, which has made English the most widely spoken second language in the world, and people are often fleeing conflicts that the UK has had more than a minor role in, either historically or presently.

Ms Hasan's testimony at the Westminster committee was not rhetoric or ideological. It was statistics and fact. That is why the impetus behind the UK Government's Illegal Migration Bill is so manifestly unjust. It is based on a false narrative. It is a concerted attempt to weaponise asylum seekers and frame them as a homogenised mass that is responsible for the UK's inexorable decline under Conservative rule. We are told not to look at Brexit, Truss and Kwarteng's disastrous budget, personal protective equipment scandals, and the back-scratching of Tory donors but to look at the poor soul who needs sanctuary or, as Braverman would put it, look to the invader.

Lord Dubs, who arrived in the UK from Czechoslovakia as a child fleeing the Nazis, described Suella Braverman's likening of refugees to invaders as "deeply and personally upsetting" and a low point in his half-century career in politics. The Dubs amendment to the Immigration Act 2016 served as an example of creating a safe route for unaccompanied child refugees. They are bairns, and they should be our bairns as soon as they seek to claim asylum in the UK.

The bill is the most insidious form of populist-driven irrational policy, and it is yet another example of the Westminster system working against Scotland's markedly different needs. We have an ageing population and population decline. We need to encourage more people to come here, and our refugees should be allowed to work when they come here.

We have increasing recruitment pressures across the public and private sector and they have been compounded by Brexit. Meanwhile, the UK saddles us with a hostile immigration system that is unfit for our different population needs. It bemoans the cost of housing asylum seekers but steadfastly refuses to allow asylum seekers to make an economic impact and work in our country. How can that be justified?

I will stand with every member of this Parliament who is against the bill and is fighting for the rights of refugees.

15:57

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I rise to support the amendment in the name of my friend, the member for West Scotland, Mr O'Kane, and I

thank the Government for lodging the motion for debate this afternoon.

The Illegal Migration Bill is, arguably, one of the most grotesque pieces of legislation that has ever been introduced in this country. It has received widespread, almost universal, condemnation from those who operate in the field. It will criminalise human beings for having the audacity to try to reach these shores while looking for safety and sanctuary. Amnesty International says that it is a

"huge step towards the UK completely abandoning its responsibilities under international law to respect and protect the universality of human rights."

The Human Rights Consortium and JustRight Scotland call its introduction an "urgent human rights emergency", and the Scottish Refugee Council condemns the legislation as "morally repugnant, practically unworkable", and states its belief that it will have

"severe impacts on women, men and children seeking safety".

All of that begs the simple question why. Why would the UK Government seek to introduce legislation that is so callous, so devoid of compassion and so clearly designed to sow division and incite hatred? The answer is quite simple: the UK Government does not have one single positive thing to offer this country—not one. This is the last desperate vestige of a Government that is flailing towards a massive defeat at the next election, and all that it has to offer this country is inflammatory rhetoric that is designed to fan the flames of culture wars, which it hopes might save it some seats by appealing to people's worst instincts.

There is no clearer example of the fanning of those flames than the Rwanda policy. Let us think about for a second about a refugee who is fleeing persecution while genuinely fearing for their life and who is so desperate that they are willing to put their children into a rubber dinghy and make the horrific journey across the channel. They have legitimate reasons—they have family and are desperate to reunite with relatives, or they might speak English rather than French or German. When they get here, rather than being treated with compassion and dignity, they are detained without limit of time or charge, processed, and then shipped off to Rwanda, despite warnings about that country's human rights record, which is subject to case before the Court of Appeal as we speak.

That is cruelty that I cannot even begin to comprehend. I am not entirely sure why the Tory party thinks that we will stand by and allow it to do this to some of the most marginalised and vulnerable human beings on the planet. Even the costs are absurd: the £120 million down payment

works out at something like £600,000 to send just one asylum seeker to Rwanda. That would cover the cost of making bus travel free for a year for every asylum seeker in Scotland. It would also pay for universal credit for one asylum seeker for 149 years. It is absolutely ridiculous in its own terms, too.

The Tories have ravaged our asylum and immigration systems. Thirteen years of austerity have hollowed out our public sector to the extent that we are now unable to do something as simple as process asylum claims. It is an atrocious waste of human life; it is also an atrocious waste of public money.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am grateful to Paul Sweeney for taking my intervention; I am loth to interrupt him during what is a typically excellent speech. Does he agree that a solution to part of the cost issue, the delay issue and all the other problems that he has identified in the existing asylum process would be to allow asylum seekers to work? Many of them want to pay their way while they are waiting for their claim to be assessed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back.

Paul Sweeney: I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for making such a typically astute intervention. Every case involving immigration that I dealt with as a member of the UK Parliament broke my heart: the waste of life, the desperation, the feeling that they were in an open prison and the psychological torment of not knowing what their destiny would be. It absolutely appalled me at every turn. There were young children who were not able to progress their life and deeply angry young people who had spent 18 years in a form of purgatory, yet the system costs us £1.5 billion a year.

It is a waste of life and a waste of money, particularly when we consider that 75 per cent of the initial asylum decisions that were made last year resulted in a grant of asylum. When we add in the result of half of the appeals that were made on the balance of those decisions, we see that applications had an overall success rate of 87.5 per cent.

It is not a problem that we need to fix; it is a problem of the system failing those people. They are not the problem; we are arbitrarily punching down on some of the weakest people in our society, and I have nothing but contempt for what the British Government has done in this matter. However, as is always the case with the Tories, it is never their fault. Their modus operandi, like the MOs of populists that have gone before them, is to point the finger of blame at minorities rather than to accept their own shortcomings.

It is important to remember the context in which this is occurring. There are no legal safe routes to

asylum in this country other than one or two country-specific schemes such as the Afghan scheme, which has already cruelly failed people, including those who have helped our armed forces in Afghanistan and who are now suffering the threat of death or torture as a result. Of those limited schemes, every one has failed. Is it any wonder that people try to reach these shores via unofficial routes?

The bill is full of disgusting provisions. Those that I think are the worst are the criminalisation of victims of human trafficking and modern slavery, the criminalisation of survivors of torture and the criminalisation of survivors of domestic violence and domestic slavery. It is the thin end of the wedge.

I had to deal with the case of Duc Nguyen in north Glasgow. He was arrested when the police raided a cannabis factory and discovered him; he was imprisoned in Dungavel and then moved out of Scotland to deny him access to justice. He was almost deported, but his local church intervened to get him legal representation. That happened before the bill was introduced, when there were already provisions in place to protect victims of human trafficking and modern slavery. He was a victim of human trafficking and modern slavery, yet he was detained and punched into the Home Office's labyrinthine system of detention.

Bob Doris: Will Paul Sweeney take an intervention?

Paul Sweeney: I am in my final minute—is that possible, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can get the time back, Mr Sweeney.

Paul Sweeney: I am happy to give way.

Bob Doris: I am aware of the powerful case that Mr Sweeney has mentioned. Does he share my concern that vulnerable men, women and children—asylum seekers and refugees—will still come to our shores, because they absolutely have to, but that many of them will not seek to present for asylum? They will disappear into the darkness to be exploited by the very slave trade people from whom we are trying to protect them, which will institutionalise slavery for an underclass of vulnerable people fleeing destitution elsewhere in the world and being let down by the UK Government.

Paul Sweeney: Bob Doris makes an important point: if we cannot provide a basic interface for people, they will disappear into the black economy, making them even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

We have a legal responsibility and obligation to those victims and survivors who we have just referenced. For example, the Scottish Parliament

passed legislation that obliges Scottish ministers to provide support and assistance to the survivors of trafficking. The heinous and grotesque Illegal Migration Bill modifies the very legislation passed here that places those obligations on Scottish ministers and so, as legislators elected to this Parliament, we should unreservedly reject the bill, regardless of our political affiliation.

There are countless reasons for rejecting this rotten bill. I could stand here all day picking apart its potential illegalities and the dog-whistle politics that it represents, but I am conscious of time. We have the opportunity today to stand as one and to send a resounding message to the UK Government that this Parliament whole-heartedly rejects the bill. I urge colleagues from across the chamber to join us in that call.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I take the opportunity to remind members that those who speak in the debate must remain in the chamber to hear at least two more speakers after making their own contribution, as well as be here for the opening and closing speeches.

16:05

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads:

“Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.”

The United Kingdom helped to draft that declaration and voted for it at the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, in the wake of the deadliest conflict the world had ever seen. Three years later, the 1951 refugee convention, which the United Kingdom once again helped to draft and voted for, clarified the status of refugees and set out the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum. Article 31 of the 1951 refugee convention is clear:

“The Contracting States shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees”.

There should be no ambiguity on that matter.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has said that if passed, the UK Government’s proposed Illegal Migration Bill

“would amount to an asylum ban—extinguishing the right to seek refugee protection in the United Kingdom for those who arrive irregularly”.

At this morning’s meeting of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, on which I sit, we heard powerful and compelling evidence from a number of third sector organisations that support refugees in Scotland. They called the proposed legislation an “anti-human being bill” and called on members of all parties to oppose it.

I echo that call on their behalf here in the chamber, but I cannot say that I am holding my breath. Only a few months ago, the Conservative Home Secretary referred to migrants who risk their lives to cross the ice-cold waters of the Channel in dinghies as an “invasion”. That should come as no surprise. After all, the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, often touted as a moderate Tory, referred to desperate asylum seekers at Calais as a “swarm”, and the former Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Fallon, said that towns and communities were being “swamped” by huge numbers of migrant workers. Only a few months ago, Lee Anderson MP called refugees “illegal immigrants” and said that giving sanctuary to asylum seekers left a “bitter taste” in his mouth. That is the true and ugly face of the hostile environment foisted on us by a Conservative Government that Scotland did not vote for.

I was deeply saddened last year to hear the Labour shadow chancellor calling for more deportations, but I am glad to see Scottish Labour’s rejection of the bill, and I align myself with the words of Pam Duncan-Glancy at this morning’s Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee meeting.

Paul O’Kane: I am sure that the member will want to recognise, as I did in my opening remarks, the opposition that the Labour Party has shown to this bill in the House of Commons, which has included sharing the lobby with SNP members in order to table an amendment to block stages of the bill and then to vote against it. I am sure that the member will want to recognise the UK Labour Party’s position.

Karen Adam: I do, and I am hopeful that our UK colleagues can still exert some pressure. This morning’s words by the member’s colleague, Pam Duncan-Glancy, were very powerful. She expressed her anger and disgust at the bill, and I align myself with her words.

The only response to the dehumanisation tactics that we have come to expect from the Conservatives is fierce opposition. I ask colleagues across the parties to ensure that pressure is put on them on the UK side of things and that we all reject the rhetoric that they spew.

Scotland has a long and proud history of welcoming people of all nationalities and faiths and we will always stand shoulder to shoulder with those who are seeking refuge from war and persecution. We want nothing to do with this vile bill, which seeks to punish some of the most vulnerable people in the world.

As the UK Government dehumanises and punishes vulnerable asylum seekers, I want members to hear at first hand from a young LGBT+ Afghan who, despite the odds, made it to

these shores after Kabul fell. When he spoke to my office this morning, he said:

“It has been a year since I left my loved ones behind and have been living far away from the home where I was born and where I belonged. I did not leave Afghanistan willingly. I was forced to take the difficult decision to face the hardships—of financial difficulty, of separation from my family, of uncertain legal status, and of the many cultural differences here—ultimately for my own survival.

We found an impossible, but legal route. It took a great deal of time, favours, money—and months of terror, hiding and hard work. We did not expect it to work, and can't make it work for anyone else. I have other friends who are stuck in Afghanistan. I don't expect them to survive.”

That is very hard hitting and it takes a while for the reality of it to sink in.

There are people around the world whose lives are in peril, many of whom have social, cultural or linguistic ties to the United Kingdom, but who are unable to seek asylum here. Why? It is because there is no system for applying for asylum from abroad. To make an application for asylum, a person has to be on British soil. A person will be refused entry on to a plane or a ship without the appropriate visa. Safe and legal routes are limited at best.

I conclude by echoing again the poignant words of the LGBT Afghan who spoke to my office this morning:

“I have other friends who are stuck in Afghanistan. I don't expect them to survive.”

We must heed the call of the charities that gave evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee this morning, which work on the front line with refugees in Scotland. I call on members to please put pressure on colleagues UK-wide and reject this anti-human bill.

16:12

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I have never claimed to be a biblical scholar, and of late my Bible studies have been somewhat infrequent and my knowledge rusty. However, to find something that underlies the theme of this debate, I think that we can look no further than the gospel according to St Luke, which narrates the parable of the Good Samaritan. The spirit of providing help, alms, sanctuary and refuge to a stranger is the essential message of that particular parable, as I understand it, and it has been the underlying theme of many excellent and interesting speeches in this debate, starting with the cabinet secretary's speech and including those of other members.

I will not have time to rehearse them all, but I was particularly struck by Alex Cole-Hamilton's speech, which was replete with historical allusion,

among which was his reference to the Kindertransport programme. That led me to refresh my memory of that programme and to draw a comparison between how it was conducted back in the late 1930s and what is happening now.

The Kindertransport programme began with the deputation of Jewish people in Britain—Jewish leaders—and Quakers who went to Neville Chamberlain five days after the Kristallnacht pogrom. Chamberlain saw them, and the next day his Cabinet discussed the issue—not three months later after a policy paper, but the next day. Six days later, the Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, came to the House of Commons, brought forward the programme called the movement for care of children from Germany, and set about turning that great idea of being a good Samaritan into practice. They did so with extreme rapidity.

There were complexities and ins and outs, but they reached out on the radio for people to take those children into their homes. Immediately, 500 people volunteered. The programme was carried out swiftly and efficiently.

It seems to me that the spirit and effort in that project and its delivery are entirely in keeping with what I perceive to be the finest qualities of the people in England—I have always been an Anglophile. Those qualities include patience, tolerance, politeness and consideration.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Fergus Ewing will share my view that the good will that was shown in the rapidity of the Kindertransport project was again reflected in the Dubs scheme, which was set up to bring children over from the war in Syria. However, he will also recognise that process, bureaucracy and a lack of fundamental political will by the Government meant that that scheme failed to bring over as many children as had been anticipated.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back.

Fergus Ewing: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Yes, I am aware of the Dubs scheme, and I very much regret that, as I understand it—although I am no expert—the UK Government is moving away from that scheme. I hope that it will reconsider that. I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for raising that point.

My essential point is that the approach that was taken to the Kindertransport was in keeping with the English character. I will add a humorous note. I have been reading what the American author Bill Bryson has written about the English character. He said that it is unfortunate that the experiment of communism was undertaken in Soviet Russia, because the people in England would have been far more capable of implementing it properly: they

are prepared to queue endlessly; they accept rationing with fortitude; they are prepared to wait for months for items not to be delivered; although they mutter under their breath about the ills of their Government, they very rarely do anything about it; and they were prepared to accept the diktats of Mrs Thatcher without apparent demur.

The serious point that I will make is that the conduct of the Illegal Migration Bill does not match the spirit and character of the people in England and certainly does not represent the people in Scotland.

I hope that I am not offending colleagues—perhaps I have managed to do that from time to time—but, personally, I do not think that the Conservative members care any less than anybody else about people who are true refugees. That should be said. I also think that the Conservatives could play a big role in toning down at least some of the extremities of the bill, particularly in relation to children. According to the briefings that I have read, the bill will mean that children who are accepted before they are 18 will have to be deported when they get to that age. How can that be right?

Bob Doris: Will the member take an intervention?

Fergus Ewing: I am sorry. I would love to do so, but I do not have time. I must come to a close quite soon.

I just make that general point. It is important to say that all of us care about these issues. No one and no party has a monopoly on care or virtue. I certainly do not claim any particular strong credentials in that regard.

In conclusion, we should bear in mind the spirit of the Good Samaritan. At the end of the day, I very much hope that the UK Government will listen to those voices here in Scotland—I think that we are speaking for Scotland—and to those in England that represent the true, considerate and caring character of the people in England.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches. I call Foyso Choudhury to speak for around seven minutes.

16:18

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): In closing this afternoon's debate on behalf of Scottish Labour, I reaffirm our opposition to what is an abhorrent bill. The UK Government's Illegal Migration Bill paints a picture of irresponsible refugees who seem to delight in travelling to the UK in dangerous small boats. That is simply not the case. Actually, the bill could achieve the opposite of ensuring the safe passage of asylum seekers across the Channel, by forcing many

vulnerable asylum seekers into the hands of human traffickers and criminal gangs.

Many of my colleagues have already addressed today the dehumanising and immoral proposals in the bill. As the cabinet secretary's motion addresses, there are deep concerns that the bill is not consistent with the European convention on human rights. The Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, cannot even guarantee that the bill does not break international human rights law. As my colleague Paul O'Kane addressed, the UK Government should be focusing on creating more safe and legal routes for people seeking asylum, instead of vilifying those who arrive via alternative means.

As many members mentioned, the right to seek asylum is a universal human right that is enshrined in the refugee convention. It is a right that all those who enter and live in the UK should have access to. The bill takes that right away from some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland.

The UK Government's bill has received widespread criticism from numerous third sector and international organisations. All condemn the immoral and unreasonable proposals in the bill. Amnesty International UK has predicted that the bill is expected to reach into various devolved areas of competence—most worryingly, those involving child protection and anti-trafficking legislation. The anti-trafficking provisions in the bill are incompatible with the anti-trafficking obligations under article 4 of the European convention on human rights and article 12 of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

The scope of the duties requires the involvement of Scottish ministers, Police Scotland and the Lord Advocate. The bill will not only directly impact those people and their commitments in Scotland, but specifically undermine the protections contained in the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015. The Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland has advised that the bill gives the Home Secretary the power to disapply existing statutory duties in Scotland owed to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

As my colleague Kaukab Stewart mentioned, local authorities in Scotland have a responsibility to provide children in need with support and accommodation, regardless of their current immigration status. The Scottish Refugee Council has advised that the bill removes the right of survivors of trafficking or modern slavery to seek asylum in this country when entering by what the UK Government has termed "illegal means". It also removes their right to safety, assistance and

recovery and the prospect of temporary leave to remain.

My colleague Donald Cameron said that we should not be debating this issue, as it is a matter that is reserved to the UK Government. However, as I have addressed, the bill will have ramifications in Scotland that are likely to overwhelm many of Scotland's sectors. The number of asylum seekers who will need pro bono assistance is expected to be very high, which has the potential to overwhelm Scotland's legal aid services. That is not to mention the impact that the bill could have on Dungavel immigration removal centre, which is the only immigration detention centre in Scotland and currently has the capacity to detain 130 men and 12 women. Although legal professionals are monitoring the situation, they suspect that the consequences of the bill will very likely overwhelm the centre and the neighbouring community.

If provisions are not put in place to support the centre, it is likely that we will see asylum seekers being shipped elsewhere in the UK, with little regard to personal or family ties.

The bill not only contains immoral and inhuman plans that will endanger thousands of vulnerable people trying to seek asylum here in the UK; it seeks to shut the door on those who have entered the country as victims of human trafficking, who will receive no compassion or protection from the UK as a result. It will also directly impact a number of devolved areas of competence. It is likely to contradict commitments made by the Scottish Parliament and have a serious impact on sectors here in Scotland. We should remain committed to the international agreements by which the UK is bound. I hope that Scotland will remain committed, and welcoming to those entering this country, seeking asylum.

16:25

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I rise to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

The debate has been characterised by more than a little disagreement and no small amount of moralising. In reply to Fergus Ewing, I will take a moment to make this party's position absolutely clear. I and the Scottish Conservatives believe that neither Scotland nor the United Kingdom can survive without people from other nations choosing to live, work and raise their families here. We whole-heartedly back efforts to offer refugees fleeing war, famine and persecution a safe home, and we are in no doubt that the UK, as a major developed nation, has a serious and important role to play in protecting people around the world.

I would have hoped that Parliament might acknowledge that the UK Government also has a

responsibility to take forward the points that I have just set out in a way that effectively deters and hinders those who try to exploit that system. I would have hoped that the Scottish Government and others in the chamber might acknowledge that, in the face of people trafficking putting desperate people into overloaded boats and launching them across one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, we must do more to prevent lives being lost.

Alasdair Allan *rose*—

Shirley-Anne Somerville *rose*—

Maggie Chapman *rose*—

Brian Whittle: Alasdair Allan was first up.

Alasdair Allan: I think that we can all agree on the point that the member has just made about the evils of the people traffickers and the people who run the small boats. However, the Conservatives have not yet given us a real opportunity in this debate to assess their reaction to the complaint that there are virtually no legal routes to take. What are the legal routes that these people are supposed to take?

Brian Whittle: I refer the member to the answer that my colleague gave to that question earlier. Perhaps Dr Allan was not in the chamber when my colleague replied.

Alasdair Allan: I was.

Brian Whittle: Well, he gave the answer to that question.

The whole debate really is an exercise in posturing in the absence of policy. I have listened intently to the contributions of members from across the chamber, I have seen the fury that they have displayed at the legislation, and I have listened as they have sought ever taller peaks on the moral high ground, but, throughout it all, not once have I heard any member put forward a better solution to the problem.

Bob Doris *rose*—

Brian Whittle: If I could just finish this point.

Not once have I heard an explanation of how it can be possible to reduce illegal migration while doing nothing legally to ensure that it is less attractive to those who seek to come to the United Kingdom.

Paul Sweeney *rose*—

Alex Cole-Hamilton *rose*—

Brian Whittle: I think that Bob Doris was up first.

Bob Doris: The Refugee Council has made it clear that, last year, more than 60 per cent of those in small boats, from the 40,000 or so who

sought to get to our shores, were asylum seekers whose claim would have been upheld and who would have been given refugee status. If we want to stop people having to come to the UK in small boats, would the member, like me, be delighted if the UK Home Office went to France, processed people's claims there and put them directly into quality accommodation here, in the UK?

Brian Whittle: The member makes a very interesting observation. If I were among the politicians considering the bill, there are a lot of things that I would try to negotiate to amend the bill. However, that is not in my gift.

Paul Sweeney: Will the member give way?

Brian Whittle: Can I make a bit of progress, please?

There are many reasons for migration. We have talked about people in search of work and economic opportunities, people who want to join family members and people who want to come here to study. I am focusing on asylum seekers and refugees who are moving to escape conflict, persecution, terrorism or human rights violations.

There are also environmental refugees who are moving in response to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters or other environmental factors. They are all different and therefore must be assessed individually. I note that 54,000 asylum seekers in the UK are in temporary accommodation.

Paul Sweeney: Will the member give way on that point?

Brian Whittle: Just a second. The UK had net inward migration of 500,000 people last year, which is the most on record. We should also note that the number of people who chose to make their home in Scotland was disproportionately low. The Scottish Government has never addressed that problem.

Paul Sweeney: The member makes a point about the cost of accommodating asylum seekers. Surely, giving asylum seekers the right to work would allow them to pay for their accommodation and pay their way using their skills, which would give them dignity. That would dramatically reduce the cost of the immigration system from the current £1.5 billion a year that it costs us all.

Brian Whittle: Again, the member makes a very good point, but all those people have to be assessed individually—we cannot get away from that fact.

On the impacts of the Scottish Government's failures, two weeks ago, a Ukrainian family who were staying in Fife were told that they would have to relocate more than 130 miles away from their new home, where they had lived for the past two

years, due to a shortage of suitable housing in Fife. The family feared that such a move would separate them from their elderly grandparents, who are settled with a different sponsor. The family also worried that the lack of stability for the children would impact their schooling negatively.

Earlier this year, Miles Briggs led a debate on Scotland's housing crisis. Scotland has been 100,000 houses short over the past 14 years. The problem with this Government debate is that the reality is that the Scottish Government cannot meet the housing needs of the current Scottish population. Our schools, hospitals and dentists are under extreme pressure, but the Government has brought forward this manufactured debate without resolving all the issues that require to be resolved to enable inward migration.

Kaukab Stewart: Will the member take an intervention?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member take an intervention?

Brian Whittle: I have taken plenty of interventions.

That is a major factor. Few people who migrate to the UK choose to stay in Scotland. We have to deliver on that.

The challenge for me in saying all of that is that other parties in the Parliament have made up their mind. They have no interest in or desire for having a genuine debate on these issues. This is a point-scoring exercise and nothing more. That is why we are spending an afternoon debating legislation that has been introduced elsewhere in the UK when we could be debating any number of issues that are, right now, proving to be utterly unsolvable by this tired mess of a Government, as my colleague Donald Cameron highlighted.

From island ferries to education to health to transport, the Scottish Government has no answers, so it is left with no choice but to cloak its ineptitude in a veil of indignation about things over which it need not consider policy and hope that nobody notices. We could have had a constructive debate this afternoon, but we have instead had an exercise in performative anger. Although the Scottish Government may be content to use its time in office to shout at the UK Government, the public is increasingly asking whether that is all that the SNP-Green coalition is capable of. Sadly, the answer is becoming obvious.

16:34

The Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees (Emma Roddick): I thank all the members who took the time to welcome me into post. I have been lucky over the past couple of years to have built strong working relationships

with people in other parties and, although I expect very strong scrutiny from them, I hope that we can move forward, continue those discussions and build towards consensus.

I welcome the many contributions that have been made during this important debate, and I thank members for their engagement in a wide-ranging discussion on the UK Government's Illegal Migration Bill—particularly those who share our condemnation of it. I highlight comments from MSPs such as Kaukab Stewart, who talked about “Scotland's rich tapestry” and the strength in our diversity, and Maggie Chapman, who recognised that we are talking about our neighbours and friends. I challenge anyone not to be moved by Clare Adamson's contribution, in which she rightly recognised child refugees as “our bairns”.

Unfortunately, we heard comments in stark contrast to those of hope, compassion and positivity. I have been quite taken aback by the readiness of some members to pin their colours to the UK Government's mast on the issue, and particularly by suggestions that the Scottish Government should not be focusing on issues such as human rights. Human rights are everyone's business. They are a devolved matter, and they are certainly a matter for the Scottish Parliament to consider. I was glad to hear Foysol Choudhury recognising our responsibilities to refugees, including unaccompanied minors and human trafficking victims, under devolved powers. We are not willing to desert those responsibilities. It is a matter for the UK Government's conscience that it would rather opt out of its international obligations and duty to uphold the rights of other human beings.

The UK Government has relentlessly pursued a hostile environment policy towards migrants in the UK, with no regard to the consequences. That led to British citizens being caught up in the Windrush scandal. Many were refused jobs, denied access to vital public services, detained by the Home Office and even removed from the UK, which was the only country that they had ever known as home.

The Scottish Government repeatedly raised concerns about the UK Government's new plan for immigration and the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which was passed in April 2022. That led to significant differentiation on how those who arrived in the UK by small boat and sought asylum would be dealt with, and it risks criminalising people who should be protected. At that time, the Scottish Parliament withheld consent on two clauses, on human trafficking and age assessment, which did not, of course, lead to any changes in the UK Government's policies or attitude, despite the clear views of the Scottish Parliament.

The UK Government's plan to offshore asylum processing to Rwanda is a total abdication of the UK's moral and international responsibilities to refugees and people seeking asylum. That plan will make it even more challenging and prolonged for people to seek safety from war and persecution. We reiterate our fundamental opposition to the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and the plan for offshoring people seeking asylum.

It is clear that the measures that the UK Government has set out previously will not achieve the change that is desperately needed in our asylum and immigration systems to make them humane and fit for purpose. The addition of the Illegal Migration Bill to the UK Government's perverse collection of inhumane migration policies is likely to increase people's risk of exploitation and destitution. The bill extends the abhorrent treatment of refugees and victims of human trafficking by restricting their access to vital support without even having the dignity of having their case heard. Victims of human trafficking and exploitation are among the most vulnerable people in society, and removing their access to support that they deserve following horrific experiences is utterly inconceivable.

Let us be clear: the bill will exclude from help victims who are currently being controlled and exploited in our cities, towns and villages—victims who are entitled, under articles 12 and 13 of the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, to a period of recovery and assistance in their moment of crisis. Victims need reassurance that this country will support them to exit the dreadful situations that they find themselves in, not threats of removal.

Maggie Chapman: The minister has talked about what the bill will do to victims of trafficking and others. Does she agree that that is in stark contrast to what Brian Whittle said earlier about the bill improving things for victims of trafficking and our ability to tackle organised crime?

Emma Roddick: Maggie Chapman and many others have talked about victims of human trafficking and how the bill may impact them. I will come on to that. That was very much backed up by evidence and support from third parties in their statements. I am not sure what Brian Whittle bases his claim on, but we will leave it there for now.

Paul O'Kane referred to the reaction of the Scottish Refugee Council. I want to share a little more of what it has said. It said:

“The human consequences of this Bill are devastating. It means a family fleeing the Taliban in Afghanistan, or a woman fleeing violence from the Iranian regime and sexually exploited as she fled, or a man escaping forced labour in Eritrea—none of them would be able to claim asylum or seek protection as a survivor of trafficking. This

proposed law slams the door on vulnerable people, including survivors of oppressive regimes and organised crime.”

The Scottish Government has seen no evidence to support the UK Government’s claim that the national referral mechanism is being abused on a significant scale. That unhelpful rhetoric ignores the key fact that potential victims of human trafficking cannot self-refer—a referral can be made only by a first responder organisation on the basis of the information that is before it.

In 2022, more than 87 per cent of adults who received a conclusive decision were confirmed as victims of human trafficking; the figure for children was 92 per cent. That does not support the accusation that the system is being abused.

Having had a wee look at what it discussed this morning, I am not surprised by the strong showing from the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee in the debate. Anyone who heard Karen Adam’s contribution must surely recognise how abhorrent and damaging the bill would be if it were implemented.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I agree absolutely with what Emma Roddick has said. She talked about children who seek asylum. Does she recognise that the hostile environment policy, which she referred to, extends to the UK Border Force’s working practices? It operates in an atmosphere of disbelief when assessing the age of asylum seekers who are children; those children sometimes have to go through degrading treatment to have their age ascertained.

Emma Roddick: Absolutely—the cabinet secretary touched on that in her opening speech. I know from his contribution that Alex Cole-Hamilton understands the impact of people using terminology that is aimed at othering asylum seekers and refugees and making them seem less than. I completely agree with him; we must not underestimate the impact that attitude change at the top can have on the rest of society.

Alasdair Allan and Paul Sweeney made the point that safe and legal routes are extremely limited, and Maggie Chapman referred to the abolition of the asylum system altogether. The removal duty in the bill will apply to those who are thought to be in the UK illegally, regardless of whether they have made a protection claim or a human rights claim, whether they claim to be a victim of slavery or human trafficking or whether they have applied for judicial review. There are very limited means for challenging removal and they fall way short of the protections that the bill will openly remove.

On whether the matter is relevant to Scotland, to the Parliament and to people in this country, I say to Donald Cameron that there was a record

number of human trafficking victims—621—in Scotland in 2022. They are real people. I certainly care and feel a duty, as a Scottish minister, to do what we can to support those victims of crime and speak out against a bill that would deny them access to much-needed support.

Paul O’Kane: I welcome the minister to her role—I forgot to do that in my speech. Like me, does she feel that the debate has been not just political but across civic society, where there has been huge opposition to the bill? Our churches and faith groups have also spoken out. The debate is not solely political; it is happening in wider society, too.

Emma Roddick: Absolutely—I go back to the point that the mark of a society is in how it treats the most vulnerable. We must do better by asylum seekers in the UK.

In 2022, more than 45,000 migrants crossed the Channel in small boats to the UK, and it has been reported in the media that nearly 5,000 migrants may have made the same journey in 2023 so far. The number of asylum seekers who are waiting for a decision on their case in the UK has soared to record levels—about 166,000 people are in the backlog. Almost 110,000 have been waiting for six months or more, according to Home Office data that was published in February.

The crisis is growing exponentially, despite the UK Government having promised to address it. The UK asylum system is broken, and the proposals that the bill outlines will not solve the crisis or protect those who seek refuge.

The Scottish Government was given no prior notice of the bill, as the UK Government wants to rush the legislation on to the statute book. The bill will already move to the House of Lords tomorrow, just 23 sitting days after its introduction. The only opportunity for the House of Commons to consider the provisions was two days in a Committee of the Whole House, which makes it clear that UK Government is deliberately hustling through the bill to limit the scope for meaningful scrutiny.

The lack of opportunity to comment and consider the proposals properly before their introduction once again fails to recognise Scotland’s distinct social, economic and demographic needs.

However, let us make no mistake: the UK Government’s wider agenda is to roll back and to remove the rights of every member of UK society. Measures that restrict access to the courts and try to prevent victims from challenging unjust decisions and the actions of Government ministers are unjust and unacceptable. They undermine the rule of law. They are the thin end of the wedge and place us all at risk. It is therefore essential that we take a stand.

Scotland is an open and welcoming country, in total contrast to the hostile environment that characterises the UK Government's approach through its immigration and asylum systems. I am proud that Scotland has become home to people from all over the world seeking safety. I want to make clear to anyone who has sought refuge in Scotland that, regardless of where they are from or how they got here, they are welcome here.

Safe and legal routes must exist in the UK for people in search of safety and protection from war and persecution. That is the only realistic way to disrupt the business model that human traffickers use to exploit already vulnerable people seeking refuge. The bill does nothing to achieve that and merely criminalises the victims.

The introduction of the Illegal Migration Bill has resulted in widespread condemnation from the UNHCR, human rights experts and organisations across the country that provide support and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. Today, we ask the Parliament to endorse the motion and to support our rejection of the UK Government's Illegal Migration Bill.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): That concludes the debate.

Bob Doris: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Earlier in this afternoon's debate, Conservative MSP Brian Whittle said that there had not been a "genuine debate" on the Illegal Migration Bill. What provisions exist under standing orders to ensure that the Conservatives get fair debating time, given that the Conservatives had only an opening speaker, then a closing speaker, who was Mr Whittle? Were the Conservatives uninterested in the debate, were they denied speakers in the debate or were they unable to defend the indefensible?

The Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Doris for that. However, it was not a point of order. It is a matter for each party to decide how it will respond with its allocation of time in a debate.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:47

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-08699, on committee membership, and S6M-08700, on committee substitutes.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Mercedes Villalba be appointed to replace Carol Mochan as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Paul O'Kane be appointed to replace Pam Duncan-Glancy as a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Michael Marra be appointed to replace Daniel Johnson as a member of the Finance and Public Administration Committee;

Carol Mochan be appointed to replace Paul O'Kane as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee;

Foysoyl Choudhury be appointed to replace Carol Mochan as a member of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee;

Pam Duncan-Glancy be appointed to replace Michael Marra as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Mercedes Villalba as a member of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee;

Neil Bibby be appointed to replace Sarah Boyack as a member of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee;

Paul O'Kane be appointed to replace Pam Duncan-Glancy as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee; and

Katy Clark be appointed to replace Foysoyl Choudhury as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Daniel Johnson be appointed to replace Colin Smyth as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Finance and Public Administration Committee;

Alex Rowley be appointed to replace Sarah Boyack as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee;

Sarah Boyack be appointed to replace Mercedes Villalba as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee;

Sarah Boyack be appointed to replace Paul O'Kane as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Paul Sweeney be appointed to replace Rhoda Grant as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee;

Daniel Johnson be appointed to replace Paul Sweeney as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Economy and Fair Work Committee;

Mercedes Villalba be appointed to replace Colin Smyth as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee;

Foysol Choudhury be appointed to replace Claire Baker as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs and Culture Committee;

Colin Smyth be appointed to replace Katy Clark as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Audit Committee;

Colin Smyth be appointed to replace Rhoda Grant as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee; and

Neil Bibby be appointed to replace Daniel Johnson as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Criminal Justice Committee.—[*George Adam*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Motion without Notice

16:48

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I am minded to accept a motion without notice under rule 11.2.4 of standing orders that decision time be brought forward to now. I invite the Minister for Parliamentary Business to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 11.2.4, Decision Time shall be at 16:48.—[*George Adam*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

16:48

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-08680.1, in the name of Paul O'Kane, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08680, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the Illegal Migration Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

16:48

Meeting suspended.

16:51

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on amendment S6M-08680.1, in the name of Paul O'Kane.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Doney, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)

McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-08680.1, in the name of Paul O’Kane, is: For 83, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-08680, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the Illegal Migration Bill, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to vote. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
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 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
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 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
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 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
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McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-08680, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, as amended, is: For 82, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament deems the UK Government's proposed Illegal Migration Bill to be dehumanising and immoral; notes that the bill proposes that anyone who enters the UK by irregular routes would not be able to remain in the UK, and would be subject to detention and then returned to their home country or what the UK Government deems to be a safe third country such as Rwanda; agrees that the proposals in this bill will remove access to support for some of the most vulnerable people in the world, including children, potentially forcing them into further exploitation and destitution; acknowledges that the Home Secretary has no confidence that the bill is compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights; notes the strict limitations on any formal routes for people seeking asylum; agrees that the UK has moral and international legal obligations to uphold the 1951 Refugee Convention and offer a place of safety to people, including children, fleeing conflict and persecution, and affirms that sanctuary should be available under these obligations to those fleeing war and persecution, and that Scotland remains welcoming to such vulnerable people in their time of need, and agrees with the assessment of the Equality and Human Rights Commission that the bill risks undermining the universality of human rights and protections for victims of trafficking and modern slavery, as well as breaching the UK's obligations under both the 1951 Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on the two Parliamentary Bureau motions. As no member objects, the final question is, that motion S6M-08699, on committee membership, and motion S6M-08700, on committee substitutes, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Mercedes Villalba be appointed to replace Carol Mochan as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Paul O'Kane be appointed to replace Pam Duncan-Glancy as a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Michael Marra be appointed to replace Daniel Johnson as a member of the Finance and Public Administration Committee;

Carol Mochan be appointed to replace Paul O'Kane as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee;

Foysoyl Choudhury be appointed to replace Carol Mochan as a member of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee;

Pam Duncan-Glancy be appointed to replace Michael Marra as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Mercedes Villalba as a member of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee;

Neil Bibby be appointed to replace Sarah Boyack as a member of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee;

Paul O'Kane be appointed to replace Pam Duncan-Glancy as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee; and

Katy Clark be appointed to replace Foysoyl Choudhury as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Daniel Johnson be appointed to replace Colin Smyth as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Finance and Public Administration Committee;

Alex Rowley be appointed to replace Sarah Boyack as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee;

Sarah Boyack be appointed to replace Mercedes Villalba as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee;

Sarah Boyack be appointed to replace Paul O'Kane as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Paul Sweeney be appointed to replace Rhoda Grant as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee;

Daniel Johnson be appointed to replace Paul Sweeney as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Economy and Fair Work Committee;

Mercedes Villalba be appointed to replace Colin Smyth as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee;

Foysoyl Choudhury be appointed to replace Claire Baker as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs and Culture Committee;

Colin Smyth be appointed to replace Katy Clark as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Audit Committee;

Colin Smyth be appointed to replace Rhoda Grant as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee; and

Neil Bibby be appointed to replace Daniel Johnson as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Criminal Justice Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time, and we will now move to members' business.

Global Intergenerational Week 2023

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S6M-08189, in the name of Christine Grahame, on global intergenerational week 2023. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I encourage members who are not participating and who are leaving the chamber to leave as quickly and quietly as possible.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament marks Global Intergenerational Week 2023, which runs from 24 to 30 April in conjunction with Generations Working Together; considers that Scotland is a nation that values fairness, equality and community, as well as the importance of building a society where people of all ages can live happy, healthy and connected lives; recognises the view that there is an urgent need for Scotland to become an intergenerational nation, where people of all ages can work together, learn from each other and support each other in building stronger, healthier communities; acknowledges what it considers the importance of intergenerational work in tackling social isolation and loneliness, reducing ageism and improving the physical and mental health and wellbeing of people of all ages; believes that intergenerational work can reinforce Scottish social values, by promoting understanding, empathy and respect between people of different ages, and notes the calls on the Scottish Government, local authorities and all other relevant bodies to prioritise intergenerational work and develop policies and initiatives that promote intergenerational collaboration and understanding, across a vast range of policy areas, including health and social care, early years and education, and community planning.

16:58

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I thank all those who signed my motion, which has allowed it to be debated in this global intergenerational week.

Global intergenerational week is in its fourth year, and it now involves 15 countries, including Australia, Sweden, Mexico and the countries of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, of course. The campaign is aimed at inspiring individuals, groups, organisations and local and national Governments to connect people of all ages—especially younger and older generations—to share good practice and take opportunities to come together, to enjoy one another's company, and to make friendships that cross the age divides. That can be done in the simplest of ways, such as through physical activities, chatting, gardening, baking and the arts. In Scotland, the lead organisation is Generations Working Together.

Some of those activities already happen quite naturally, of course, through grandparenting and interactions with elderly relatives and neighbours. It can be about cuddling into granny or grandad telling a story from a book or simply sharing memories from the past—embellished, of course, at least in my case, for dramatic or romantic effect. That is special, and it gives parents a break. Walking hand in hand in the sunshine, with the young one chattering away and the elder out and about rather than sofa bound, is the stuff of abiding memories.

That can happen in more established settings, such as a care setting, when young ones come in to share simple play and perhaps perform a song or two. In schools, it can involve a lesson in social history—on what it was like to grow up post-war with the remnants of rationing, or in the swinging 60s, when miniskirts were all the fashion and the young rebelled against the older generation. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. It can involve a young person showing someone older how to use Facebook or the mysteries—for some—of the internet. It can be about using emojis in the right place at the right time for the right reason. Remember how David Cameron got caught out with the misuse of “LOL”?

In formal settings, we sometimes miss out by failing to consult and collaborate across the generations. Consider, for example, housing developments that are adaptable to changes as someone moves from single occupancy to family requirements to being elderly and perhaps the sole occupant again, and needing ground-floor living yet being able to remain in the same development. In social housing in the 1950s, there were what used to be known as pensioners houses in mixed developments, so pensioners were part of a mixed community. Developers have also contributed by building schools with integrated community spaces for use by both young and older generations in the evenings and weekends. That happens, but not often enough. It would be a good idea if new-build schools had allotments to be shared by young and old. Perhaps the older generation could share their expertise and the very young could learn that peas taste best stolen from the living pod.

That sharing breaks down barriers—real or perceived—of age divides or stereotypes. The words that we use of the elderly—the “challenge” or “burden” of demographics, people being “privileged to have pensions” and elderly people being “boring” or “selfish”—set the tone. The words that we use of the young—“a challenge”, “privileged”, “selfish” and “boring”—make the point about parallel perceptions.

Youthful exuberance in public places can be interpreted by the elderly as intimidating. I have

been there, too. Coming home from a youth fellowship meeting one Sunday evening in winter, a dozen of us were gossiping at a street corner. The next thing, a policeman approached and told us to move along. Being the person I was, even then, I questioned his authority, as we were “not breaking the law, this is a democracy”—and so on. I added that we were the youth fellowship, for goodness’ sake. It transpired that nearby households had reported us because of the noise that we were making. Needless to say, my challenge did not go down well, as the officer escorted me home. Yes: plus ça change.

Age discrimination against the older generation is alive and well, but so is age discrimination against the young. The untrammelled energy of youth can be annoying, but so, too, can the slower pace of the elderly irritate those who are young, when life is in a hurry. Tolerance and understanding is a good prescription.

It is generalising generational behaviour that is at fault. Individual-to-individual interaction can be quite a different matter. That is why one-to-one encounters—personal encounters between the younger and the older generations—can shatter such perceptions and, more than that, enhance respect and understanding.

The minister for older people, Ms Roddick, sat with me on the back benches until recently. She is 25, going on 26, and I am 78, going on 79. More than 50 years separate us and—dreaded thought of thoughts, for her and me—I am old enough to be her grandmother. She helped me when my Surface played up, and she still does so, and I hope that I was of use to her with my experience back here. More important, we also had fun on the back benches, where a degree of naughtiness can go unnoticed, Deputy Presiding Officer. A penchant for mischief can, after all, be delightfully intergenerational.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Grahame, but do not take the lack of comment to mean that that has gone unnoticed.

17:04

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Deputy Presiding Officer, I apologise to you, the minister and members for not being able to stay for the whole debate, as I have another event to attend this evening on behalf of the Parliament.

I congratulate Christine Grahame on securing this members’ business debate. As my party’s shadow minister for older people, I am delighted to have the opportunity to participate in it.

As we know, global intergenerational week runs for the whole week until Sunday. From its humble

beginnings, the event has grown to international level in only four years, such is the importance of the campaign’s aims to inspire individuals, as well as groups, organisations and local and national Government. The aims will help us to fully embrace intergenerational practice, and they are aims that I very much commend.

The goal is to connect people of different generations in mutually beneficial activities, many of which have already been mentioned by Christine Grahame. The campaign is also an opportunity to celebrate good practice, ideas, moments and opportunities that are local to us, in which different age groups come together in friendship and fellowship.

I am encouraged that the organiser, Generations Working Together, is asking everybody to host an intergenerational mix-and-mingle event during global intergenerational week 2023. With a flexible format, the charity is keen to bring people of different generations together in exciting, creative and beneficial ways. Events can be registered and uploaded on the website.

Generations Working Together’s annual conference this year was held on the same day as international women’s day. For that event, it published a booklet to celebrate and show the invaluable work and efforts of women in advancing the intergenerational movement, for which they should be commended. With a large number of stories and features, Generations Working Together’s excellent work showcased the endeavours of women in that regard.

The conference opened with a speech from the then Minister for Equalities and Older People. She announced a £3.8 million fund to support community groups to bring people and communities together to tackle loneliness and social isolation. Although, at the time, Generations Working Together described the announcement as a

“strong indication to the value which the Scottish Government places in building communities through intergenerational activities”,

which was to be commended, it is disappointing that, only days later, in the reshuffle, that highly competent minister took up a new role. The portfolio has been handed to another member, but it has been merged into a multiple-faceted ministerial role. As I have said, I acknowledge that someone is still looking after the portfolio, but it has been included in a new, extended ministerial role, which is not to its benefit. That instantly diluted the focus on older people, with their concerns being put on the back burner. If nothing else, it certainly calls into question where the Scottish Government’s focus lies when it comes to the ageing population.

Christine Grahame's motion

"recognises the view that there is an urgent need for Scotland to become an intergenerational nation".

However, the latest reshuffle exposes that there are issues when it comes to loneliness and isolation. We know from studies that the impact of loneliness on the mortality of individuals is similar to that from having around 15 cigarettes a day.

I very much hope that the will set out in the motion will continue to be maintained in the ranks of the Scottish Government, because it is important. Older people matter—our communities and our constituencies are dependent on them. I hope that the success of intergenerational working continues to be a priority for the Scottish Government.

17:09

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Christine Grahame for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I welcome the new ministers to the front bench. On behalf of Scottish Labour, I also welcome global intergenerational week and all the work in Scotland that looks to bring people of all ages together to ensure that generations have the best chance of a healthy and happy life together.

The work of Scotland-based Generations Working Together is exciting, and the development of policy from the manifesto of 2021 gives us much to aim for. The vision of Generations Working Together is for a Scotland where different generations are more connected and where everyone can build relationships that help to create a fairer society. In order to have a fairer society, we must prioritise the health of our population, which must surely be a priority for any Parliament and any Government. That has become even more important over the past few years, as it has been difficult for people to be connected as much as we would all like to see, and as we talk about in the chamber.

We have heard in this debate—and many other times in the chamber—that being healthy means being not only physically healthy but mentally, socially and economically healthy. Each of those crucial aspects of life play a role in determining the health and outcomes of an individual, a family or a population. The intergenerational work that we are talking about is essential, and there is now really good evidence to support just how important it is. We all know of the benefits of learning from our parents, grandparents and neighbours, and we have heard many good examples of how we as a society can encourage that and build on it for those who, in a more modern society, do not always benefit from that naturally. Christine Grahame gave us some lovely examples of how people can be intergenerational together. I hope to

watch her Twitter account and check that those emojis are all in the right place.

Christine Grahame: I regret to say that I have been forbidden to use Twitter by the world at large.

Carol Mochan: That must be addressed in an intergenerational way. I hope that all your "LOLs" are in the right place.

Evidence suggests that we can sometimes live in silos in Scotland today, but the development of intergenerational space gives us a chance to grow together and to feel safe to share experiences and events. That is known to help with learning, loneliness and physical and mental health, which are all really important. We know that health inequalities exist from birth and that they continue to negatively impact people throughout their lives and can determine outcomes in later life. If we believe that intergenerational policies will benefit people and communities of all ages, we must acknowledge that and build intergenerational space and activity with health inequalities at the core of that policy development.

We must be honest about policy development. The motion

"notes the calls on the Scottish Government, local authorities and all other relevant bodies to prioritise intergenerational work and develop policies and initiatives that promote intergenerational collaboration and understanding, across a vast range of policy areas, including health and social care, early years and education, and community planning."

That describes work across the portfolios, but the reality is that we need to fund local government to allow those things to happen. Local government is key to the development of all those policies and if we truly believe in that work we will fight to retain local government funding.

I am short of time, so I conclude by thanking everybody for contributing to the debate. There is a lot to be done. We need to challenge some of the decisions that are made and some of the inaction, but I believe that we can make it happen if we look at the issue with some urgency.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Ms Mochan. I think that you can expect a strongly worded letter from the Government whip's office for encouraging Christine Grahame on to Twitter. [*Laughter.*]

17:13

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I am pleased to be speaking in this debate for global intergenerational week and thank my colleague Christine Grahame for bringing it to the chamber. I, too, welcome the new ministers to the front bench.

There has never been more need for intergenerational working. During the pandemic, we saw in practice just how effective generations working together can be, with young people at the forefront of helping older people in their community.

Intergenerational week first took place in 2020 as a local campaign by St Monica Trust. Following its success, it grew into a national campaign in 2021, before it went on to become the global campaign that it is now. The campaign is led by Generations Working Together, which is an intergenerational charity that is based—I am happy to say—in Scotland. Eight countries—including America, Spain, Australia and Sweden—take part alongside partners from every nation in the United Kingdom.

More than 150 organisations have registered their support for global intergenerational week and that number continues to grow. It is through intergenerational practice that younger and older generations are able to come together and learn from each other. I was very close to my gran and I carry her influence and wisdom with me every day. One of the highlights for my late father-in-law, who died at the age of 99, was when local schoolchildren came to visit his care home. That and the regular therapy dog cheered everyone up.

I attended the first intergenerational meeting in my constituency of Strathkelvin and Bearsden in 2020, and was impressed by the passion and commitment of everyone, young and old.

One example of intergenerational practice could be the older generation and local communities helping to teach younger generations how to cook. We adults sometimes take that skill for granted as cooking is often learned from older generations in families and passed down as the foundation for a better quality of life.

As we heard from Christine Grahame and Carol Mochan, sharing skills can help both generations, the young and the not so young. Today, passing on information technology skills is a great way of bringing generations together. I know that I have enlisted the help of my son and grandchildren on many occasions.

Crucially, intergenerational practice is one way in which we can help to fight the growing epidemic of loneliness in our communities. It is estimated that around 500,000 older people can go five or even six days without speaking to or seeing anyone at all, and the number of people over the age of 50 who are experiencing loneliness is set to reach 2 million by 2025-26. That is a 49 per cent increase on the 2016-17 figures. I am sure that we all agree that that needs to change.

East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action, which is a fantastic organisation that is based in

Kirkintilloch, runs a highly successful befriending service, which has proved to be a lifeline to young and old. One older resident loved to watch horror movies but had no one to share her interest, so she was matched up with a young volunteer who shared her love of the genre and once a week they watched a movie of their choice—a perfect example of intergenerational success.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government is committed to tackling loneliness and isolation across all generations in Scotland. Generations Working Together is a national charity and the centre of excellence in intergenerational training that delivers training to communities. It is crucial that no one in any community in Scotland feels isolated or lonely. That is not the society that we want for our wonderful nation.

I strongly encourage all members to encourage intergenerational practice across their constituencies and regions, and to raise further awareness of global intergenerational work in the areas of Scotland they represent. It is important that we have a Scotland where individuals and communities are more connected, and that everyone has the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships regardless of age, status, circumstances or identity.

17:17

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I thank Christine Grahame for her motion, for securing the debate, and for her mischief. I should have done this earlier, but I now welcome Emma Roddick to her ministerial role.

Global intergenerational week and the endeavours of Generations Working Together are probably more important now than ever before. Without the core values of fairness, equality and community that are celebrated in Christine Grahame's motion, we cannot survive the intersecting crises of climate and cost, nature and neglect, and loneliness and loss that assail us all.

There are challenges of capacity, time and resources facing this work, as well as the challenges created by those whose interests are best served by keeping us divided by age and other aspects of identity. We know that some of the barriers between generations are structural, having been constructed by decades of deliberate policy and shameful inaction. The 20th century assumption of material progress—that each generation of children would have better life experiences than their parents in terms of housing, health, work and finances—is no longer the case. Young people, and even those in early middle age, are burdened by student and other debt, exploitative and precarious work with few opportunities for career progression, expensive

and unhealthy accommodation, and insufficient healthcare, especially for those in need of mental support.

We also know that the fractures of inequality cut across as well as between generations. Although many older people enjoy the benefits of having grown up under the post-war social democratic consensus, with home ownership and generous pensions, others have not been so fortunate. Poorly built and insulated housing, inadequate public transport and pressures on the health service can particularly impact on older people, especially those surviving on low incomes.

I am proud of what the Scottish Greens have done to address some of those issues, recognising that safer, greener and fairer communities and environments are of benefit to everyone, whatever our age. I am also proud of our on-going work to challenge the toxic narrative that LGBTQI+ rights—particularly trans rights—are issues of concern only for young people. If it is true that we need less sleep as we grow older, we are looking forward to plenty of time to be, as the Tory press likes to say, more and more woke.

Anyone who saw images of the giant Extinction Rebellion gathering in London last weekend will know that addressing climate change, and the need for urgent action and justice, are other imperatives that unite both young and old. Our younger generations, including the tiniest children, will bear the greatest burdens of the climate and biodiversity crises, which will affect every aspect of their lives. Older people are increasingly aware of what that means—that Governments, corporations and elites have let us all down and that it is our responsibility, whatever our age, to make our voices heard in love and rage.

It is never too late to make climate justice, environmental justice, justice for refugees and justice for all those pushed to the margins of our communities our business. At the end of a life of privilege and power, Shakespeare's King Lear finds himself, along with his fool, exiled to a stormy and barren heath. Brutally marginalised himself, he appreciates for the very first time the suffering of the poor—those whose

“houseless heads and unfed sides”

have no choice but to

“bide the pelting of this pitiless storm”.

In sorrow and shame, he says:

“I have taken too little care of this”.

We now stand amid the pitiless storms of the climate emergency, the agonies of the cost crisis and the relentless attacks of the Westminster Government, as we heard this afternoon, on the dispossessed and exiled of the world. Our only

hope, whether we are closer in age to Lear or to Cordelia, is to take care—care of our earth, care of our communities and care of one another across the generations.

17:22

The Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees (Emma Roddick): I am delighted to be closing this debate on global intergenerational week 2023, which runs until 30 April. I thank my colleague Christine Grahame for lodging the motion and for complimenting my IT skills. To be honest, her youthful exuberance on the back benches is getting a bit much for me at my age, but I like to think that we have built a nice intergenerational friendship at work.

I offer my warm thanks to fellow MSPs for attending and taking part in this important debate and for their helpful and informative contributions. It is important that Parliament comes together to support and celebrate this global event, which is supported by Generations Working Together, the nationally recognised centre of excellence that supports the development and integration of intergenerational work across Scotland. Through the equality and human rights fund, the Scottish Government has provided £600,000 to Generations Working Together to support its valuable work up to 2024.

For older people in particular, intergenerational practice can alleviate loneliness, encourage participation and increase mobility and happiness. Rona Mackay was right to focus on the “epidemic of loneliness”, as she put it. Tackling loneliness and social isolation is a key priority for the Government, and she will know that I have an eye on it, given that I have constituents in rural and island areas. That is why we have published a new delivery plan to tackle social isolation and loneliness, and we also launched a new social isolation and loneliness fund on 8 March.

In the first 100 days of this parliamentary session, we invested £1 million to fund immediate work by organisations that tackle social isolation and loneliness—I wish that that term had not been put in my speech five times—including helplines, befriending services and practical support. In January, as part of our emergency response to the cost crisis, we provided a further £971,000 to organisations working to tackle isolation and loneliness over the winter period.

Men's sheds are consistent with the values that are set out in the national performance framework, as they help to create a society that treats all our people with kindness, dignity and compassion. They help to tackle social isolation and achieve positive mental and physical health outcomes—especially for older people—and they can play a

role in intergenerational learning by enabling a space for younger and older people to work and learn new skills together. That is why the Scottish Government supports the Scottish Men's Sheds Association, which has been the national support organisation for men's sheds since 2016. Led by Jason Schroeder, the SMSA has played an important role in growing the movement to more than 200 men's sheds today.

We also value the massive contribution that volunteers make to people's lives and we appreciate all who give their time to volunteer and make things better for others. Scotland's volunteering action plan aims to create a Scotland where everyone can volunteer more often and throughout their lives.

Before I conclude, I would like to make it clear to colleagues who somehow missed Christine Grahame's introduction of me that I am the minister for older people. My brief is a large brief—I appreciate that—but if we consider the intersectional inequalities that exist for older people who are LGBTQ, from a minority ethnic background or are disabled, that makes sense, as it is important to consider equality as a whole. I promise that the Scottish Government has not deprioritised older people and that I will stick up for Scotland's older people as their minister.

Global intergenerational week provides an opportunity to reinforce the connections that we know are needed to build a stronger, fairer society. We have come a long way towards a more inclusive and equal Scotland where everyone can play their part in shaping their communities, but there is more to do. I look forward to Christine Grahame being a loud voice in my ear and making sure that we get it right.

Meeting closed at 17:26.

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