

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT

European Committee B

EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR ASYLUM

*Tuesday 15 November 2016*

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**Saturday 19 November 2016**

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:**

*Chair:* ANDREW ROSINDELL

† Abbott, Ms Diane ( <i>Hackney North and Stoke Newington</i> ) (Lab)	† McDonald, Stuart C. ( <i>Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East</i> ) (SNP)
† Arkless, Richard ( <i>Dumfries and Galloway</i> ) (SNP)	† Pursglove, Tom ( <i>Corby</i> ) (Con)
† Brine, Steve ( <i>Winchester</i> ) (Con)	† Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob ( <i>North East Somerset</i> ) (Con)
† Costa, Alberto ( <i>South Leicestershire</i> ) (Con)	† Shah, Naz ( <i>Bradford West</i> ) (Lab)
† Fabricant, Michael ( <i>Lichfield</i> ) (Con)	† Turner, Karl ( <i>Kingston upon Hull East</i> ) (Lab)
† Ghani, Nusrat ( <i>Wealden</i> ) (Con)	Martyn Atkins, Leoni Kurt, <i>Committee Clerks</i>
† Goodwill, Mr Robert ( <i>Minister for Immigration</i> )	† <b>attended the Committee</b>
Green, Kate ( <i>Stretford and Urmston</i> ) (Lab)	

**The following also attended (Standing Order No. 119(6)):**

Double, Steve (*St Austell and Newquay*) (Con)

# European Committee B

*Tuesday 15 November 2016*

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

## European Union Agency for Asylum

8.55 am

**The Chair:** Does a member of the European Scrutiny Committee wish to make a brief explanatory statement?

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): Mr Rosindell, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship bright and early on this Tuesday morning.

The documents are at the heart of the EU's response to the migration and refugee crisis. According to the EU treaties, EU asylum policies should be governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility. In practice, the so-called Dublin rules, which allocate responsibility for examining asylum applications made within the EU, place a heavy burden on a small number of front-line member states. The inability of those states to cope has resulted in large-scale secondary movements, prompting some member states to build fences while others have brought back internal border controls to stem the flow of irregular migrants.

The reforms proposed by the Commission are intended to ensure quicker access to an asylum procedure and to discourage secondary movements. They are also intended to make the Dublin system fairer through the introduction of a new corrective allocation or fairness mechanism, which would redistribute asylum seekers from overburdened member states. Participation in the new fairness mechanism is optional, but opting out comes at a price—€250,000 for each relocated asylum seeker that a member state refuses to accept.

Other elements of the reform package are the EU's asylum database, Eurodac, and the proposed transformation of the existing European Asylum Support Office into a new EU asylum agency. Under the Commission's proposals, Eurodac would be developed into a broader migration management tool to assist with the return of irregular migrants, while the EU asylum agency would have a stronger mandate to monitor the application of EU asylum rules and provide operational and technical assistance to members whose asylum and reception systems were experiencing disproportionate pressure.

The UK participates in all the measures that the proposals would replace, but will be bound by only the latest proposals if the Government decide to opt in. The Government have the option to wait and see how negotiations progress and, if they are happy with the outcome, to seek to opt in at the end of the process, once the regulations have been formally adopted. But if the UK wants to have a direct influence on the negotiations and to vote on the outcome, it has to opt in during the initial three-month opt-in period.

The Government appear to have agonised over the opt-in decision. Today's debate was initially scheduled for 7 December and then postponed. The Government submitted their debate motion to the Public Bill Office only last Friday, giving the House minimal notice of

their intentions. The delay has meant that the opt-in deadline of 30 September for the EU asylum agency regulation has already passed, pre-empting any opportunity for Parliament to debate and inform the Government's position. The Government have taken us to the wire on the proposed Dublin and Eurodac regulations, the opt-in deadline for both of which is 18 November. The European Scrutiny Committee recommended that the proposals be debated on the Floor of the House, because they raise important questions about the functioning of the UK's asylum system.

The Government support the principles underpinning the Dublin system and consider the system to be of significant benefit to the UK. Responding to an urgent question on the Dublin system in May, the former Immigration Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), made it clear that the Government would oppose any new redistribution mechanism, but he also indicated that there was no risk that we would lose our existing powers to return people to other EU member states, as the Commission has stated explicitly that we can continue to uphold and operate the existing Dublin arrangements if we decide not to opt in to the new measures.

Can the Minister give a categorical assurance that the UK will be able to remain part of the current Dublin system if it does not opt in to the Commission's Dublin reforms? Is there not a real possibility that the UK could be thrown out of Dublin altogether and, if it were, how could the UK remain in Eurodac, given that that is an integral part of the Dublin system? The Government have decided not to opt in to the proposed new EU asylum agency, so can the Minister tell us whether the UK will continue to participate in the European Asylum Support Office and whether the office will cease to exist once the new agency is created? Do the Government intend, as the motion hints, to participate in negotiations on the new agency with a view to opting in post-adoption? Given the importance of those questions, perhaps the Minister will explain why they do not merit the exposure and scrutiny of a debate on the Floor of the House.

Finally, the Government's opt-in decisions have also to be considered in light of the referendum outcome. Do the Government want the UK to continue to participate in the Dublin system once it has left the EU? Would the UK still be able to participate in Eurodac following its withdrawal from the EU, and at what cost? Once the UK has left the EU, how will its co-operation with the new EU asylum agency differ from when it was a member?

I look forward to a lively debate and to the Minister's full response.

**The Chair:** I call the Minister to make an opening statement.

9 am

**The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):** I am pleased to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. For the record, I want to say how pleased we are on this side of the Committee that the shadow Home Secretary has graced us with her presence—it obviously underlines the importance of the measures.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): My hon. Friend is, as ever, very courteous, but does he not suspect that it might be because no one else is available to do the job?

**Mr Goodwill:** I could not be so uncharitable, I am sure.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I volunteered to do this because I think the immigration challenge that Europe faces is no laughing matter. I have more junior colleagues in my Home Office team who were available to do it. Our constituents want to see us take the issue seriously.

**Mr Goodwill:** When the hon. Lady started her career in the Home Office she was involved in this particular area, as a fast-streamer, so I am sure that her expertise will be useful as she brings it to bear during the debate.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset for his opening words. I can reassure him that I did not feel any need to agonise over the decision—it was a fairly simple one—and I apologise for any part I may have played in any delays. I am sure he is aware that a lot has been going on, both in the Government and in Europe, since 23 June.

I thank the European Scrutiny Committee for selecting these important measures for debate and apologise for the late tabling of the motion and any inconvenience caused to the Committee by the change in date. The three measures under consideration—the reform of the Dublin regulations, the reform of the Eurodac regulation, and a proposal for a new EU asylum agency—represent the first wave of a package of proposals to reform the Common European Asylum System, or CEAS.

A wide-ranging package of reforms to CEAS was proposed by the European Commission in a communication published in April of this year. The migration crisis led to the Commission identifying priorities for addressing perceived structural shortcomings in CEAS: Dublin reform; reinforcing the Eurodac fingerprint database, which supports the operation of the Dublin mechanism; providing a stronger mandate to the European Asylum Support Office, or EASO; and further harmonising asylum systems. The proposals on harmonisation are not before us today.

It is undoubtedly necessary to develop an asylum and migration framework in the European Union that works to control illegal migration, deter abuse and prevent unwarranted secondary movement. That does not mean, however, that the Government agree with all the policy options that the Commission suggests. The Government have already decided not to opt in to the proposed EU agency for asylum. I apologise that the Committee did not have the chance to debate the proposal before the opt-in deadline, but I suspect it would have supported our opt-out.

The UK participates in the European Asylum Support Office, but there were several problematic areas in the proposal for a new agency which, in my view, would outweigh any benefits to the UK. The Government's key consideration was the significant oversight that the agency could have had of the UK asylum system if the UK had decided to participate. Although we respect that our European partners may wish to pursue greater commonality in their asylum systems, we remain firmly

of the view that the functioning of national asylum systems is a sovereign issue. The Government are, of course, committed to running a high-quality, effective asylum system. We will continue to support EASO and member states that face particular pressures, as well as to share our expertise widely within the EU.

Turning to the Commission's proposal to reform the Dublin regulation, Dublin IV maintains the traditional, recognisable "Dublin" concepts to determine responsibility for examining an asylum claim. That includes provisions on family unity and the best interests of the child. The proposal introduces some procedural changes—for example, to time limits—and increases obligations on applicants to co-operate with asylum authorities by claiming in the first member state. The Government strongly support the "first safe country" principle, but within the proposal lies a corrective fairness mechanism based on a distribution key that allows for adjustments in the allocation of responsibility in certain circumstances. Essentially, it is a mandatory relocation mechanism.

The Government remain opposed to the use of relocation to address the migration situation in the EU. We have been crystal clear in all our engagement with European partners—both before and since the publication of the Dublin IV proposal—that we see no reason why a mandatory redistribution, relocation or corrective mechanism should be part of a single proposal under the Dublin regulation.

In that context, it is worth noting that the Commission was very clear when it published the proposal that should the United Kingdom not opt into the revised Dublin IV regulation, the Dublin III regulation would continue to apply between the UK and member states—a direct result of our engagement—so I hope that reassures my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset. As such, we believe that there is no risk that we would lose our current powers to return people to other EU member states as a result of this proposal. There is a clear precedent for two Dublin regimes operating in parallel, as seen with regard to relations with Denmark between 2003 and 2006, when different rules applied between states. Finally on Dublin reform, it is obvious that the legislative proposal will require significant negotiation, given the well-known divergence of views across the EU towards mandatory burden-sharing schemes.

Turning to Eurodac—the fingerprint database that supports the application of the Dublin regulation—we agree with the Commission that member states must be provided with appropriate fingerprint evidence to facilitate the operation of the responsibility mechanism and to enhance its role into other areas to address illegal migration and facilitate returns. The Eurodac III proposal includes new provisions to store data on persons found illegally present and to store facial images in addition to fingerprints. It enhances the personal data associated with the biometrics to include, for the first time, the name, nationality, date and place of birth of the data subjects and it stores the details of any travel documents held. It also lowers the age threshold for the transmission of data from 14 years of age to six to enhance the safeguarding of children.

By increasing the capture of data on illegal migrants, Eurodac III will become more of a tool for managing illegal migration, and we welcome that. Its enriched data sets are also of significant value in terms of law enforcement access. I welcome the endorsement of the Government's position on Eurodac and Dublin.

**The Chair:** We now have until 9.55 am for questions to the Minister. I remind Members that those should be brief. It is open to a Member, subject to my discretion, to ask related supplementary questions. I call Jacob Rees-Mogg.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I have three questions. First, will the Government continue to participate in the European Asylum Support Office or will it cease to exist once the agency is created? Secondly, will the Government seek to participate in Eurodac once we have left the European Union? Thirdly, what will happen to the Dublin system once we have left, and are there existing international treaties that provide the same effect of returning asylum seekers to the first safe country of entry?

**Mr Goodwill:** I thank my hon. Friend for his questions. The first—on whether the UK will continue to participate in EASO when we exit the EU—is one I can provide an answer to. How the UK supports the EU on asylum and wider migration matters will be considered in due course. However, we remain committed to supporting member states as necessary. Member states participating in EASO who do not participate in the EU agency for asylum would remain bound by the current EASO regulations, unless ejected in line with article 4 of protocol 21 of the treaty. EASO will continue to exist when the agency is set up, so as long as we are a member of the EU, we will be able to participate in the two in parallel.

My hon. Friend also asked about the continuation of the Dublin III regulations and Eurodac when we leave. The operation of a system whereby people can be identified through their biometrics will be important post-Brexit. No doubt that will be part of those negotiations, about which I will not speculate. Countries that are not currently members of the European Union can participate in Dublin III, so a precedent may well be set there. It would not be helpful to speculate on any of our negotiating positions or on what may be the concluding position of negotiations. Be in no doubt, though, that we see these as very important issues that should be addressed during our negotiations once article 50 has been triggered, which I am told will be before the end of March.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The Minister has outlined again the Government's opposition to any form of relocation mechanism. That takes us to the crux of the matter. As the European Scrutiny Committee has asked in some of the supporting papers, if the Government do not have this model in mind, what alternative model do they have to share responsibility more equitably at times of intense migratory pressures? Is it the Government's position that, instead of solidarity, we are just to leave matters to the frontline states?

**Mr Goodwill:** We certainly stand by our record of stepping up to the mark in helping with the unprecedented wave of migration across the European Union. Home Office officials, as well as other officials, are operating in Italy and Greece. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the situation in Greece has not yet been normalised. Of course, operating through the Dublin mechanism, not only have we been able to bring children across from countries such as Italy, Greece and, in particular, France in recent days and weeks, but children whose needs are best served by being in another EU member state have

been moved to join family elsewhere. The system is voluntary: we have been offering technical and practical support, including funding for particular needs, as well as the support we have been giving in the Mediterranean, using vessels commissioned to help to rescue life and deter migration there.

**Michael Fabricant:** Although I am not a great lover of simplistic phrases, does my hon. Friend still stand by the precept adopted by our former leader, William Hague, who is now in another place, that this country should be a safe haven but not a soft touch?

**Mr Goodwill:** Of course that is a commendable concept; it is how it is practically delivered. That is why we have regulation such as Dublin III, which enables a mechanism to be put in place to help where we can. As we have seen following the dismantlement of the camp in Calais, through the Dublin III regulation and, indeed, section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016—the so-called Dubs amendment—we have been able to play our part in giving care and help to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children whom we saw in such dreadful conditions in Calais.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** Just one supplementary question, if I may. I welcome some of what the Minister said about work that has been undertaken in frontline states. To press that a little further, I remember reading a situational briefing about Home Office staff who had been sent to Greece. If I recall correctly, at that stage 75 staff were involved in implementing the deal to return people to Turkey, but only two people were involved in implementing the Dublin process. Does that suggest that we have not got our priorities right and should be increasing support for reuniting families across Europe?

**Mr Goodwill:** It is certainly a priority to make sure that the Dublin regulation operates. We offered 75 staff to help in Greece and have dedicated teams working on the Dublin system as well. However, I must underline the importance of the Turkey deal, because one of the most harrowing images that we all saw, following that dreadful number of shipwrecks and drownings, was the poor child washed up on the beach. The Turkey deal was there to deter and prevent people from making that hazardous journey, to stop us playing into the hands of the people smugglers. That deal is saving lives every single day. If only we could have a similar deal for people making the hazardous trip from north Africa, where in some cases we are still seeing dozens of drownings at a time. It is important that we support our EU partners in Greece and Italy through the practical mechanisms and the practical support we put in place, but we also need to ensure that the Dublin regulation operates. Returns to Greece are not possible currently because of some problems that I hope the Commission and the Greek Government will be able to work through.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** I have one final set of questions on Eurodac. I broadly share the Minister's views—the proposals are welcome—but these questions come from the Committee papers. Are the Government satisfied with the safeguards that will be put in place and the rationale for the significant reduction in the age when migrants will be documented? What did the Information Commissioner say when consulted about the Eurodac proposals, if they were consulted at all?

**Mr Goodwill:** I very much support the reduction in age. We have seen younger children being trafficked into Europe. In many cases, we have been able to take younger children from France and other EU countries because of the Dublin regulation. It is important that we can identify who those children are, if at all possible.

The Commission's rationale is clear from the memorandum accompanying the proposal. The migration crisis has raised profound questions about how to safeguard and protect unaccompanied children. Child protection, and missing children from third countries in particular, is a concern ensuing from the crisis in the EU. The Commission argues, and we agree, that the apparent increase in the smuggling of minors below the age of 14 means that there is a stronger need to collect biometrics from a lower age for the purposes of Eurodac. That will help with the identification of children and may assist in establishing family links or links with travelling companions. Many member states collect biometrics from minors at a younger age than 14 for visas, passports, biometric residence permits and general immigration control. Indeed, I was in Jordan last week, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was collecting iris scans from children younger than 14 to enable identification.

When children go into the asylum system, whether in the UK, Europe or the region where the conflict is, it is important that we can be sure exactly who those people are. The taking of fingerprints for Eurodac from minors from the age of six has been proposed based on research that shows that fingerprint recognition of children can be achieved with a satisfactory level of accuracy at that age, although the fingers of younger children are not sufficiently developed to enable that to be a useful tool.

**The Chair:** If no more Members wish to ask questions, we will now proceed to the debate on the motion.

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*

That the Committee takes note of European Union Document No. 8742/16, a Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Union Agency for Asylum and repealing Regulation (EU) No 439/2010, endorses the Government's decision not to opt in under Protocol 21 on the Position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice annexed to the EU Treaties (Protocol 21), notes that the Government is able to opt in post-adoption and supports the Government's intention to continue supporting other Member States on asylum matters; further takes note of European Union Document No. 8715/16, a Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast), also known as the Dublin Regulation and endorses the Government's decision not to opt in under Protocol 21; further takes note of European Union Document No. 8765/16, a Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of Dublin Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 and endorses the Government's decision to opt in under Protocol 21.—(*Mr Goodwill.*)

9.17 am

**Ms Abbott:** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I am glad to be able to speak in this important debate. We know, because the polling tells us, that immigration is very high up our constituents' list of concerns. Whether it is the people in

contact with me daily who are frightened by the tenor of the immigration debate—a fear that has been reinforced by the election of Donald Trump in the United States—or whether it is the people who believe that immigration is the source of many of their problems, we can all agree that this subject should be taken seriously.

The Opposition argue for an immigration policy that is based on the facts, which puts the good of the economy and our GDP first, and which emphasises the kind of society we want to be—an immigration policy that speaks to the historical values of the British people. We welcome the draft regulations in principle. We believe they are long overdue. More than 1 million refugees arrived in southern Europe last year. In the first six weeks of this year, the rate increased tenfold on the same period in 2015. Sadly, the number of missing children in Europe has far exceeded 10,000.

Earlier in the year I visited Lesbos, which is the first port of call for tens of thousands of refugees who have crossed the Mediterranean. From meeting the people who run the facilities for refugees and from meeting the refugees themselves, I was struck by what a huge burden the issue is on a country such as Greece, which has many economic problems. I was struck that even in the middle of what is obviously a crisis for the people of Lesbos, they were trying to do their best to welcome the refugees: many residents of Lesbos are people who sought refuge in Greece from other parts of the Mediterranean and other parts of the middle east.

I was struck by the inadequacy of Europe's response to the refugee issue. It cannot be right that a country such as Greece, which, rightly or wrongly, has been through so much economically in recent years, is taking such a huge burden of our response to the refugee challenge. The Minister has said that the Government have sent half a dozen or a dozen Home Office officials over there. I was on Lesbos and I saw no evidence of a substantive British response or substantive British support for the challenge the Greeks are facing. I was also struck—on Lesbos and while visiting other refugee camps in Lebanon and, of course, Calais—by how ruthless the people smugglers are. I therefore welcome the regulations, the aims of which are to achieve an organised and humane response, and to tackle the people smugglers.

As hon. Members might imagine from a former Home Office civil servant, I believe in the Dublin III regulation. I believe that refugees should be processed at their first point of contact with Europe. However, it is grossly unfair to expect Greece and Italy to struggle on as they have been doing. The Dublin III regulation has been very difficult to enforce, yet if we do not enforce it, it will be not the countries of Europe but the people smugglers who decide where refugees and economic migrants go. That is why we must have a level of European co-operation and a framework that will work in a way it has not up to now. I hope that we all agree that the Dublin regulation is in need of update and reform to fit our current reality.

The UK has long benefited from the arrangements, as one of the few member states that transports more asylum seekers across its borders than are received under the Dublin regulation. I believe, and I think that Opposition Members strongly believe, that whether or not we are in Schengen and whether or not we are formally in the EU, we are part of the European family

[Ms Abbott]

of nations. We must take our fair share of the responsibility. We should be opting in to a regulation that makes sharing the burden as equal as possible. On Eurodac, it is clearly important that we have a robust system of processing asylum seekers and determining their entitlement to be refugees. The regulation to improve and expand Eurodac goes some way towards meeting that need.

**Michael Fabricant:** I am following the hon. Lady's speech with great interest and I agree with much of it, but she began by saying, quite rightly, that she is aware that immigration is a major issue in the minds of many of our constituents. She also said—and I have some sympathy with this—that the United Kingdom must take its fair share and should remain a part of the scheme after leaving the European Union. How does she reconcile those two concepts when, as she will know, of the 52% of the population who voted for Brexit, many are believed to have done so because of overall net immigration to the UK?

**Ms Abbott:** I am well aware of what the hon. Gentleman is saying. I can only repeat what I said at the outset. Our immigration policy should be based on the facts, not on urban myth. It should be based on what is good for the economy and good for society, and it should be based on our values as a country. If that means that we have to go out and argue and campaign for that position, I for one am willing to do so. Anything else leads to a downward spiral of anti-immigration rhetoric, and we can see the consequence of that downward spiral in the result of the recent presidential election in the United States. The US electoral college has spoken, and of course the American people are entitled to elect the President of their choice, but we should never legitimise Donald Trump's anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and anti-women rhetoric, and we should be aware that one of his first appointments was of Steve Bannon, who runs the website Breitbart, which is largely regarded as anti-Semitic. We must work with our oldest ally as we have always done, but we cannot legitimise a political narrative of that kind.

**Mr Goodwill:** Would the hon. Lady clarify something? From what she said earlier, she appears to support a mandatory relocation measure in the EU. Is that indeed the position of the Labour party?

**Ms Abbott:** Broadly, we support these regulations in principle, and specifically we believe in much more genuine European co-operation. That is the position of the Labour party.

**Michael Fabricant:** The hon. Lady said just now that she would wish that after we leave the European Union we continue within this scheme—or is she now saying that she does not wish that to be the case?

**Ms Abbott:** If I knew what the Government's plan on these matters was, I could respond to what the hon. Gentleman said. [Interruption.]

**The Chair:** Order.

**Ms Abbott:** If I knew what the Government's plan was in relation to Brexit, I could respond to what the hon. Gentleman said. I can only say that the first principle, which is an important principle, is the maximum amount of European co-operation, whether that takes place formally within the EU or just on the basis that we are part of the European family of nations. Anything else, anything other than the maximum European co-operation, leaves literally hundreds of thousands of people across Europe and in the middle east in appalling conditions, hopeless and helpless.

To return to the question of Eurodac, in extending its capabilities we must note that in recent years member states have developed a habit of putting “anti-terror” in front of legislation and sometimes using that as a licence to implement unnecessarily draconian measures or surveillance practices. We must protect our security. Our constituents expect us to do that; it is probably the first responsibility of any Member of Parliament. However, we can do it while respecting our commitment to all human rights and civil liberties. We must also take into account the sensitivity of minors when considering fingerprinting from the age of six.

On the European Union agency for asylum, Labour Members agree with the European Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs, who said in May:

“The time has come for a reformed and more equitable system, based on common rules and a fairer sharing of responsibility.”

It is not clear to me who would argue with that. There are no walls, there is no barbed wire and there is no militarisation of the police that can in the end halt the weight of migration that we are seeing in the current era. Only fair regulations, properly implemented, and European co-operation can bring some order to the situation, which has hitherto been characterised by a high degree of disorder, which feeds public fears but also leads to the very tragic plight of the refugees whom we see, and I have seen, in refugee camps all over Europe.

I note that there is much debate about the manner in which we should make these arrangements, given our imminent departure from the European Union. As I said, the plan is not clear. Recent papers that have been leaked from Government emphasise even more a lack of clarity about the plan. However, even if we leave the EU—that was the democratic vote of the British people—the British Government must work with the European family of nations on a sustainable migration policy that remains in place, as other arrangements in relation to security will have to remain in place. We need mechanisms by which legitimate asylum applicants can ask for protection without having to pay with their lives or their life savings. Those routes need to be not only safe and legal, but efficient and effective.

Europe's refugee crisis will not end overnight, and our moral obligation does not end when we leave the European Union. With the lack of transparency in the Government's Brexit plans, it is difficult, in closing, to be more specific than I have been. However, I can set out the broad principles with which I will approach the immigration debate: to take it seriously, not to use it as a weapon for short-term party political advantage, to always have the interests of the country and society at heart, and also to always, whatever the pressures and whatever the international context, speak for an immigration policy that speaks for the values of British people.

9.30 am

**Stuart C. McDonald:** I will be mercifully brief. The humanitarian crisis that has reached Europe would at any other time have been quite upsetting enough, but the debates going on here in the United Kingdom have meant—with no disrespect—that the issue has unfortunately been sent off to a European Committee when a debate on the Floor was what was recommended. I share the concerns outlined at the start of the debate about one of the opt-out deadlines already having passed.

**Ms Abbott:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. This is a subject of great importance, and this is why I have spoken on it this morning. It should have been debated on the Floor of the House.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** I absolutely agree. My party also supports the broad thrust of the proposals outlined in the documents, although not entirely and without qualification. A supranational crisis like this requires a supranational response, and solidarity with the front-line states is essential. That is why my party supported the Commission's proposals for relocation, and we voted for them back in December when we did have a debate on the Floor of the House. We regret how ineffective member states have been in implementing them.

This is another attempt at fairly sharing responsibility in times of emergency. I return to the question that I posed during our question session: if not this model, then what alternative do the Government have in mind to share responsibility more equitably at times of intense migratory pressures? I am not convinced that the Government have offered a realistic alternative. The most recent situational briefings from the likes of the International Rescue Committee and others remind of us how grim the situation is in Greece and around there. The simple fact is that the situation is far more readily dealt with if we share responsibility rather than leaving a handful of frontline states to face responsibility themselves.

9.32 am

**Mr Goodwill:** There can be no doubt that migration and immigration are very contentious issues, not only in this country but worldwide. It is important that we have a grown-up debate on the issue, one in which xenophobia or racism should play no part whatsoever. The Government's position is well known, which is that we should control net immigration to sustainable levels—that is, the tens of thousands rather than the hundreds of thousands. At the same time I must make it clear that the UK has a proud history of providing help for those in genuine need. The objectives of reducing net migration should not be confused with our international obligations towards those claiming asylum and the mechanisms within the Dublin regulation for family reunification, which are supported by Eurodac. Indeed, in 2015, 130 children came to the UK under the Dublin regulation.

We have also unilaterally implemented measures such as the Syrian vulnerable persons relocation mechanism, through which we are on track to bring 20,000 vulnerable people to the UK before the end of this Parliament. The latest figures on that will be published on 1 December. I am optimistic that they will show that we are on track to deliver it. In addition, we have the scheme to bring

3,000 vulnerable children and their families from the wider region to the UK. This process is just starting to get into gear.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** All these schemes are very welcome—for the children, the relocation of Syrians and so on—but what strikes me as the Minister is speaking is whether these people coming into the UK will be counted towards the net migration target. Is that not a perfect example of why refugees and asylum seekers should be removed from any net migration target?

**Mr Goodwill:** They will be part of the figures. That is how the net migration figures are gleaned. They are based on a survey. As I said, we should not hear any suggestion that we are not stepping up to the mark as regards our international obligations on asylum. That should not be affected by the target to reduce net migration. Indeed, we have unilaterally put the schemes I have just described into place to bring people across from the region and reduce one of those big pull factors. One of the big problems with people drowning on that perilous journey across to Greece or Italy is that the people smugglers see their customers—if you can call them that—being able to get to Europe and be looked after there. We need to make sure we help people in the region, removing that pull factor.

This is over and above our long-standing obligations through the gateway and mandate systems. In terms of our wider help, from the financial point of view, the UK remains one of the largest member state contributors to Greece's efforts to implement the EU-Turkey agreement, offering 75 personnel, of whom 58 are on station. The UK has deployed a Border Force search and rescue cutter in the Aegean, as well as contributing assets to the NATO mission. HMS Mersey, our offshore patrol vessel, is on station too.

Funding of £2 million was made available for the assisted voluntary returns project through the International Organisation for Migration in Greece from January 2014 to May 2016. The UK has also allocated up to £34 million to the humanitarian response in Greece, including £8 million to the UNHCR.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Are these figures part of our overall net contribution to the EU budget or are they supplementary to it?

**Mr Goodwill:** These figures have come from the UK as part of our overseas development budget. I can give my hon. Friend some clarification on whether any of that money has been channelled via the EU, but as far as I am aware, this is money from the UK Exchequer, not European money.

Start Network non-governmental organisations were given £11.5 million, £1 million was given to the IOM and more than £1.8 million of essential supplies were provided. They included 3,100 tents for over 15,600 people, 60,000 blankets, 8,000 sleeping bags and other basic items, including direct support for the German Government with returns and donating 40 ex-Ministry of Defence Land Rovers to the Bulgarian border police to help them patrol the green border with Turkey.

[Mr Goodwill]

The key message on Dublin is that the Government maintain their position: we support the existing principles of the Dublin regulations, but do not agree to a mandatory redistribution mechanism as part of a revised Dublin regulation. I am still slightly confused about the Labour party's position on that. Indeed, Dublin is important, as it prevents asylum shopping and reinforces the first safe country principle; redistribution does not.

**Ms Abbott:** The Minister may be confused about some things, but he is not half as confused as I am about what this Government's response is to Brexit.

**Mr Goodwill:** As I have shown, our response to this crisis has been to step up to our obligations as part of Dublin, to go over and above our obligations by incorporating the Dubs amendment into the Immigration Act 2016, and to give the humanitarian and practical help that I have just listed. Given all the ways we are

helping people in the region—I was in Jordan last week to see how that money was being spent, putting clean water into some of the refugee camps, helping with the registration of refugees and helping with the education of children in those camps—I think the Government can be proud of our record in that regard.

I have followed the debate with great interest and I thank those who have contributed. It is the Government's position that it is necessary to develop an asylum and migration framework in Europe that works to control illegal migration, deters abuse and prevents secondary movement. That does not mean, however, that the Government agree with all the policy options suggested by the Commission or that they are right for the UK. These opt-in decisions will be fully in line with the national interest.

*Question put and agreed to.*

9.39 am

*Committee rose.*