

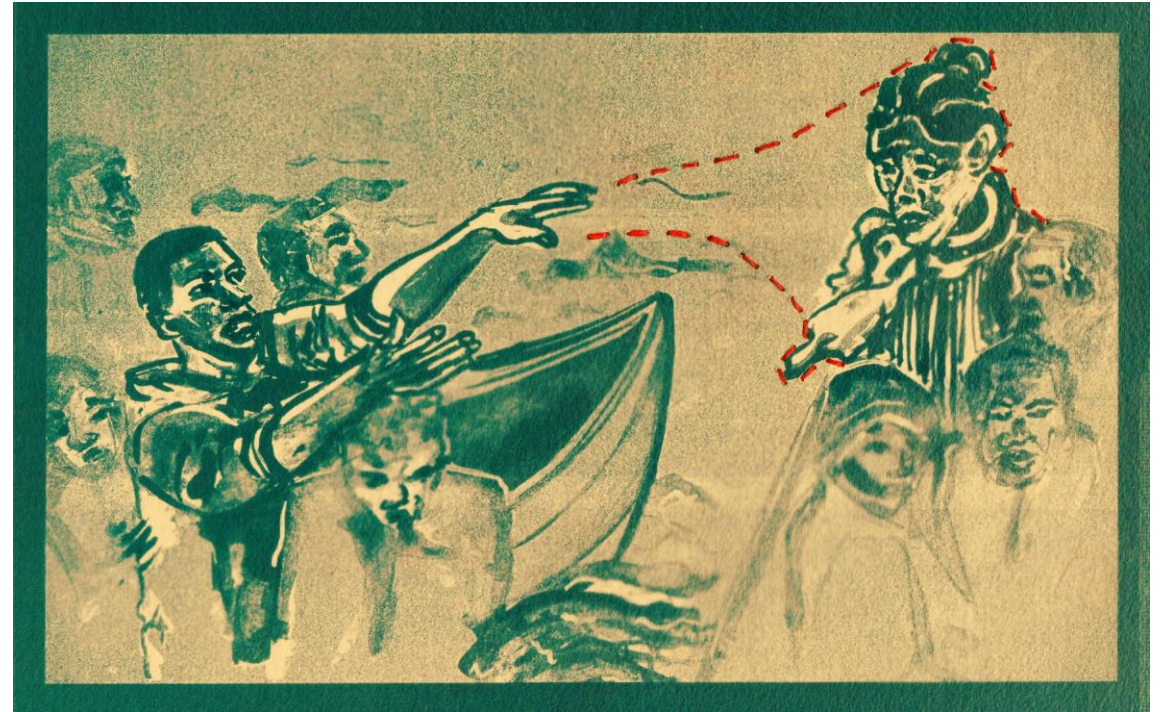
Families of Missing Migrants in the UK: Their Search for Answers and the Impacts of Loss

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Research context

- Key aim:
 - To understand the experiences of families searching for lost migrant relatives in the UK and beyond
- Method
 - Qualitative interviews with 23 multi-national participants in 3 UK cities



Key findings

1. Obstacles due to migration controls and socio-economic constraints:
2. Families searching for missing migrant relatives face diverse social, psychological and other impacts
3. The politics of [safe] migration –
 - Hyper-emphasis on illegal / unsafe migration obscures the fact most people migrate legally / safely
 - This discourse obscures increasing limits placed on safe migration options, supports harmful policies and erodes sympathy and support for vulnerable migrants and families searching for missing migrants

Findings (1) Obstacles

- The impact of immigration controls:

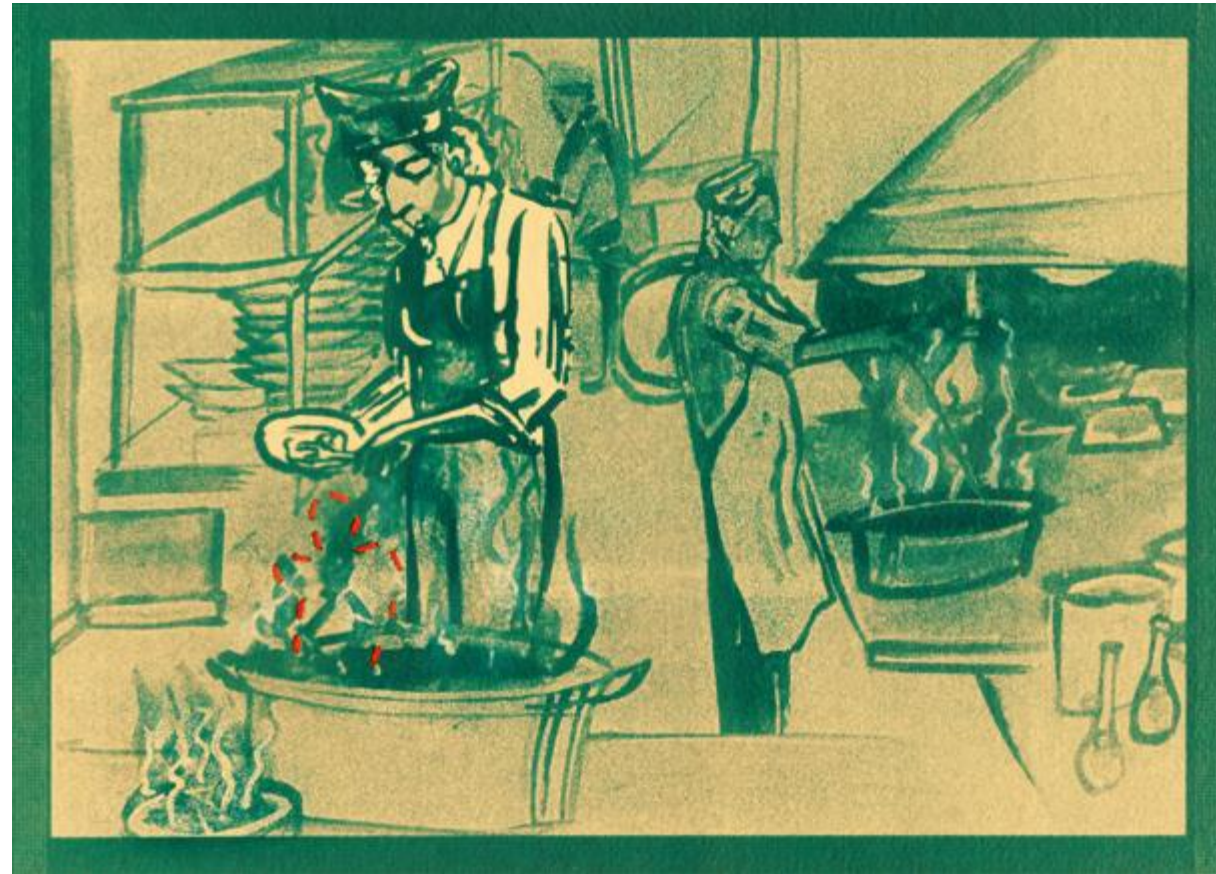
“Those days my heart would skip a beat whenever I heard the word[s] “Home Office”. You feared they were coming for you anytime you saw a police car. I was completely afraid of asking anyone else for help because I was an illegal immigrant and didn’t want just anyone at all to know. I didn’t even dream of opening up about this problem I was having until I got my papers.” (Tasha)



Findings (1) Obstacles

- Socio-economic constraints:

“The main challenges I can say is ... first, if you are struggling to survive yourself, you can't find someone. Unless you settle down, you can't look for them. Unless you have somewhere to live, you have a roof [over] your head, and then some income to live on, that's when you can really focus on finding them” (Ali)



Findings (2) Impacts

- Psychological issues:

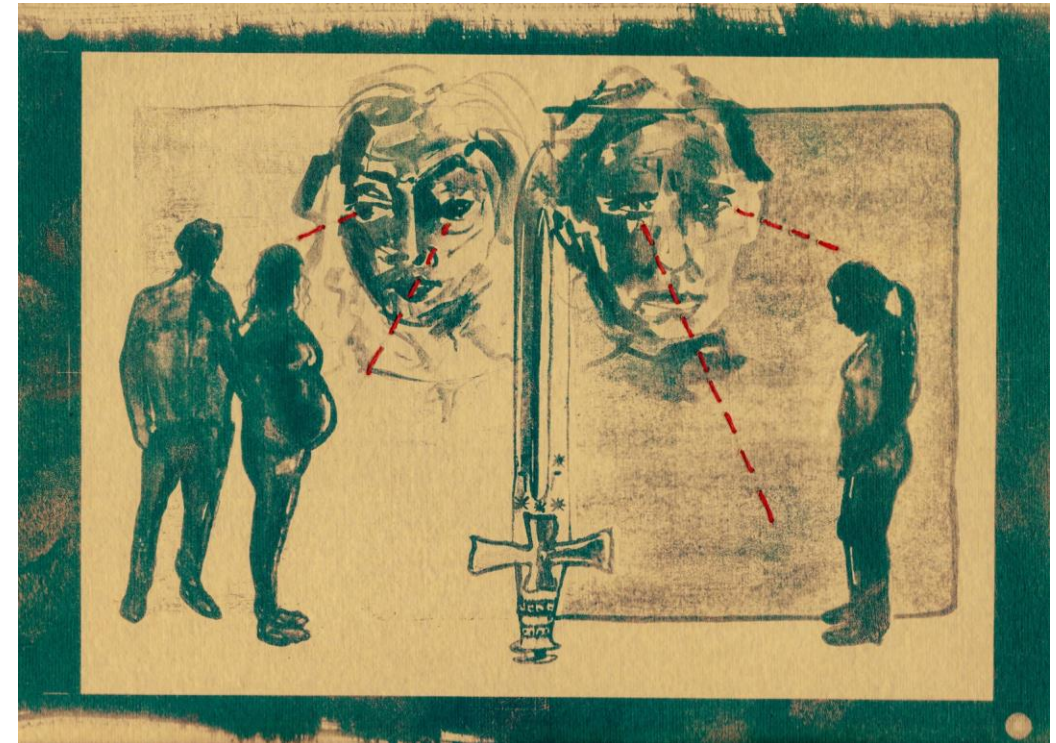
“My life is really miserable! I spend days drinking and smoking. I spend every GBP 20 or 30 that I get on cigarettes and alcohol. But when I am done smoking or drinking, I retreat to one corner to cry, to think about my life, about my dead brother, my family and all that. I feel as if I should not be doing this, but I can't get over it..” (James)



Findings (2) Impacts

- Psychological issues:

“The sense of loss never leaves you. Leaving one’s country in the midst of violence and losing contact with one’s dad or losing a family member brings all sorts of negative memories, especially when you hear of people crossing or migrating to another country now. It is still difficult to express how I feel when I hear that people are crossing the Mediterranean or going to Libya. It is just traumatizing!” (Ali)



Findings (3) The politics of illegal / legal migration

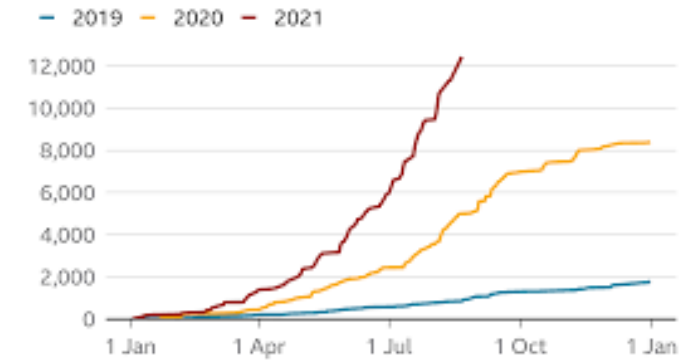
- Safe migration does not attract similar sensational headlines or public and policy attention as unsafe migration

“Nobody talks about legal migrants, only illegal migrants. This creates fear about us, and no one wants to know our problems and our lost loved ones” (Munir)

“We want safe migration but how do you get the visa for this?” (Cindy)

Boat crossings have risen fastest in 2021

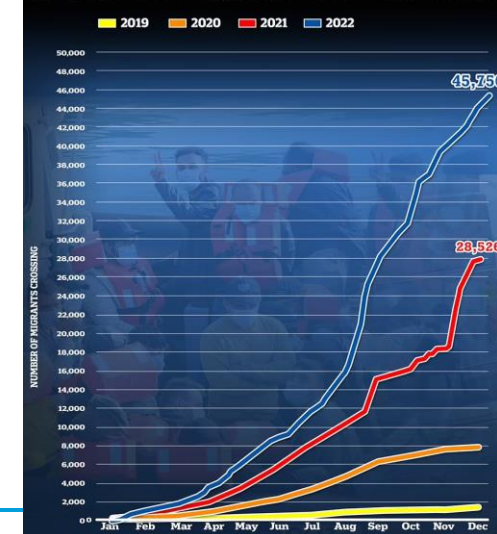
People crossing English Channel in boats, year to date



Source: Home Office

BBC

NUMBER OF MIGRANTS CROSSING THE CHANNEL ON SMALL BOATS



Conclusion and recommendations

- Centring of families in their search for their missing migrant relatives as well as in all activities and initiatives linked with lost or missing migrants
- The designation or creation of a dedicated multi-agency “one-stop shop” to assist those in the United Kingdom searching for missing migrant relatives
- Promoting discourse and opportunities on safe migration to counter hyper emphasis on unsafe migration and its attendant challenges for vulnerable migrants and families searching for loved ones
- The creation of a fund to address the socioeconomic needs of those searching for their missing migrant relatives and to facilitate efforts linked with the search for missing or lost migrants
- The provision of legal mechanisms that allow people with missing migrant family members to carry out searches regardless of their immigration status in the United Kingdom and without fear of sanctions.

