

Suella Braverman revives Tory pledge to cut net migration to ‘tens of thousands’

Home secretary says her ‘ultimate aspiration’ is to reduce migration figure from current level of 239,000

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Suella Braverman has revived a previous Conservative pledge to reduce net migration to tens of thousands of people, despite the failure of successive governments to hit the same target over a nine-year period.

The home secretary said she would aspire to cut the overall migration figure from the current level of 239,000 amid a growing clamour from party activists for the government to take control of immigration levels.

She was also forced to admit that the Conservative plan to send people seeking asylum to Rwanda will not happen “for a long time”.

In an appearance at a Tory party conference fringe meeting, she said her “ultimate aspiration” is to get net migration down into the tens of thousands, but refused to set an exact target to be achieved before the next election.

“In the 90s it was in the tens of thousands under Mrs Thatcher – net migration – and David Cameron famously said tens of thousands, no ifs no buts.

“So that would be my ultimate aspiration but we’ve got to take it slowly and we’ve got to go incrementally.

“I think we have got to definitely substantially reduce the number of students, the number of work visas and in particular the number of dependants on those sorts of visas,” she said.

Cameron first pledged to keep net migration to tens of thousands in 2010. The target, which has never been met, was maintained by Theresa May’s government before being ditched in 2019 under Boris Johnson.

Net migration in the year ending June 2021 was 239,000, according to the House of Commons library.

Farmers should end their reliance on foreign workers, Braverman said, urging them to improve automation and employ more UK citizens. “I’m not persuaded that domestic workers don’t want to work as farmers,” she said.

Braverman, who replaced Priti Patel in the cabinet role last month, told the Telegraph’s assistant editor Christopher Hope that sending migrants to Rwanda before Christmas would “be my dream” but admitted it would not happen “for a long time” because of legal challenges which could go all the way to the European court of human rights. “Unfortunately we have got to let that play out,” she said.

Adopting a more conciliatory tone than her predecessor, she praised her French counterparts and said the UK will seek a new deal to double the number of French patrols covering the coastline around Calais.

Moving on to drug use, she called for police to take a “tough line” on casual use of cannabis and criticised middle class parents for “turning a blind eye” to their children’s recreational use.

“We need to take a tough line,” she said.

Braverman, a critic of so-called “woke” culture, said she was “proud of the British empire” and its legacy, and declined to rule out standing again to become leader of the Conservative party if there was a vacancy.

“Everyone should try running, it was a great experience,” she said.

Enver Solomon, the head of the Refugee Council, said none of the home secretary’s proposals on immigration would tackle the problems in the asylum system.

“It fundamentally fails to address the reasons people are forced to come here in the first place,” he said.

“We need constructive proposals, from creating safe routes for refugees to ending the backlog in asylum claims and working with international partners to properly address root causes of forced migration.”