

Migrant Voice stands with the RNLI

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This weekend, RNLI volunteers did what they have always done. They went out and brought frightened people safely to shore. What happened next should shame this country. Their boats, carrying more than 100 people rescued from a single dinghy, were turned away from both Southampton and Portsmouth ports. Threats of legal action followed. Volunteers who had spent hours saving lives were left waiting at sea while ports that should have received them instead shut their doors.

We want to say plainly what we feel, gratitude, respect, and solidarity with every RNLI crew member who launches a boat with no interest in anyone's paperwork, only in whether they are safe. These are people who give their time, unpaid, to pull strangers from the water, including, this year alone, thousands of people who had nothing to do with the Channel at all, and the small number who did, pulled from dinghies taking on water, children among them. They do not ask who someone is or where they are from before they help. That is exactly as it should be.

It is a disgrace that the people who did this, who saved lives without hesitation, were met with denial, delay and legal threats instead of support, and that the same weekend saw volunteers branded traitors by far right cowards, who hid behind masks to spread hate and intimidation while they were out saving people, and abused online for the "crime" of doing their job. We utterly condemn whoever made the decision to deny these boats access to harbour, and everyone who created a climate in which lifesaving crews had to worry about their own safety and reputation for bringing rescued people ashore. Leaving a lifeboat crew exposed at sea, or exposed to a hostile crowd on land, because of who happened to be on board, is indefensible.

The RNLI has never asked who deserves rescue. It has simply rescued. On behalf of migrants and everyone who believes in a country that still helps people in danger, we say: thank you, we stand with you, and we will not let this be normalised.