

Lord Brian Paddick
Liberal Democrats Lords Spokesperson for Home Affairs
(via email)

23 March 2023

Dear Lord Paddick,

Thank you for your letter regarding the use of migration statistics by the Minister for Immigration, Robert Jenrick. You raised three concerns, which we address below.

First, you were concerned about the Minister's statement in the House of Commons that "the global migration crisis is placing unprecedented strain on our asylum system"¹. You noted that the annual number of asylum applications was higher in 2002, which you suggest contradicts the claim that there is 'unprecedented strain' on the asylum system. It is unclear what supporting evidence was used to make this claim, but there will be different ways to understand and debate the strain on the asylum system. This will not depend solely on the rate of applications, but also on the capacity and capability of the system to deal with them.

Second, you said that the Minister overstated the significance of Albanian migrants in an interview on 2 November, compared to the greater number of arrivals from India and Poland. However, the Minister was talking then specifically about migrants crossing the English Channel on small boats. He stated that one in four such migrants arriving in the past year were Albanian. Official statistics published on 24 November showed that from January to September 2022, Albanians did account for 27% of all Channel crossings², but these data were not then in the public domain. At the time of the interview, there were several published data sources relating to this statement, including:

- the previous regular bulletin from 25 August³, which said that from January to June 2022, 17% of all migrants crossing the channel were Albanian; and
- an ad hoc factsheet publication published on 2 November⁴, which said that from May to September 2022, 43% of all migrants crossing the channel were Albanian.

It is right that Ministers receive up to date management information about fast moving situations, and understandable that from time to time they may inadvertently use unpublished data in their public statements. But when this happens, the information should be published as soon as possible. This is especially important when, as in this case, there are a variety of sources. Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, wrote to the Home Office Permanent Secretary on 21 November making this point⁵.

¹ [Asylum Seekers Accommodation and Safeguarding](#), Hansard, 7 November 2022

² [Irregular migration to the UK, year ending September 2022](#), Home Office, 24 November 2022

³ [Irregular migration to the UK, year ending June 2022](#), Home Office, 25 August 2022

⁴ [Factsheet: Small boat crossings since July 2022](#), Home Office, 2 November 2022

⁵ [Ed Humpherson to Matthew Rycroft: Transparency of Home Office statistics](#), Office for Statistics Regulation, 21 November 2022

Third, you were concerned by the Minister's claim that a large proportion of small boat arrivals from Albania are economic migrants (as opposed to successful asylum applicants). The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) last year investigated claims about the number of economic migrants arriving on small boats and concluded that, based on the available public evidence, it was impossible to know how many people crossing the channel on small boats were 'economic migrants'⁶. The Home Office does now publish some information about the outcomes of asylum claims by people crossing on small boats, but 83% of main applications since 2018 are still awaiting a decision². The 2 November factsheet discusses the existing data on the success of asylum applications by nationality, and its limited relevance to recent small boat arrivals:

“Although very few of the recent small boat arrivals will have had their asylum application considered at this point, we know that Albanians more generally had been less likely to be granted asylum than other nationalities with the current grant rate 53% compared to 76% for all nationalities.

“However, the published grant rates do not relate to the Albanians arriving on small boats this year, as almost all of these individuals will still be awaiting a decision on their claim and their resulting grant rate could be substantially different.”⁴

In line with our guidance on intelligent transparency⁷, public statements should be clear on whether they are sourced using official statistics or other forms of evidence. Greater transparency about and access to the underlying data and evidence supports public debate on prominent issues, improves public trust in government and reduces the risk of misunderstandings or misleading information being shared on key statistics. OSR is engaging with colleagues in the Home Office to improve the transparent use and release of data relating to immigration.

Officials from the UK Statistics Authority engaged with the office of the Minister for Immigration to seek clarification on the sources underpinning the Minister's statements, however at the time of writing this clarification has not been received. I have therefore responded on the basis of the published official statistics available.

Yours sincerely,



Sir Robert Chote
Chair

⁶ [OSR statement on claims related to economic migrants](#), Office for Statistics Regulation, 28 April 2022

⁷ [Intelligent transparency](#), Office for Statistics Regulation