

Stephen Kinnock MP
Shadow Minister for Immigration
(via email)

2 August 2023

Dear Mr Kinnock,

Thank you for your letter of 15 June. You raised concerns about the use of asylum backlog statistics by Ministers and the definition of the asylum backlog.

You gave two examples of statements made recently by Ministers:

- On 8 March, the Prime Minister said the asylum backlog had reduced by 6,000.
- On 12 June, the Home Secretary said the asylum backlog had reduced by 17,000.

The Home Secretary's statement of 12 June was initially unclear, but she clarified later in the debate that she was referring to the 'legacy' backlog of asylum applications. She had previously explained the distinction that the Home Office draws between 'legacy' and 'flow' backlogs – namely comprising applications submitted up to, and then on or after, 28 June 2022 – in a letter to the Home Affairs Committee of 29 January¹.

The Home Office publishes statistics on asylum applications awaiting a decision² as part of its asylum and resettlement datasets³ and it has provided an additional breakdown on this basis since February 2023⁴, following the letter to the Home Affairs Committee. As this is an additional breakdown, not a material change to the statistics, there is no requirement for this to be formally pre-announced by the department.

The figure cited by the Prime Minister was the legacy backlog as of the end of February. It had not been published at the time the Prime Minister used it and it was only included in an ad-hoc statistical release on 24 April⁵. Statistics should be available publicly at the same time or as soon as possible after their use by Ministers or departments, and we welcome improvements that the Home Office has made since then to release publications to support Ministerial statements in a timely manner.

¹ [Letter from the Home Secretary, 29 January 2023](#)

² [Asylum applications awaiting a decision, year ending March 2023](#)

³ [Asylum and resettlement datasets - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ [Asylum and resettlement summary tables, year ending December 2022](#)

⁵ [Statistics relating to the Illegal Migration Bill - GOV.UK](#)

Incidentally, the Prime Minister said in his statement that the decline in the backlog was 6,000 *people*. This is likely an understatement as that was the decline in the number of outstanding applications, and some asylum applications involve more than one person.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sir Robert Chote", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Sir Robert Chote
Chair