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Sir Robert Chote
Chair, UK Statistics Authority

Sent via email

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Dear Sir Robert

I am writing to you in relation to the government's publication this week of ad-hoc statistics on the Home Office's handling of asylum cases, and statements to the media by members of the government about these statistics.

As you will be aware, both the Prime Minister and Home Secretary have made claims about the government's progress toward clearing the backlog of unresolved asylum claims, including but not limited to cases which predate the introduction of new rules in June 2022. I am by no means alone in finding these claims implausible, misleading and at odds with the government's own published statistics.

Media reports this week have indicated that the UKSA plans to look into these claims and – if necessary – take such actions as you see fit to correct the record on any erroneous claims. I am writing to set out my own concerns, which I hope you will take into consideration in the course of carrying out this work. I would also appreciate an update from your team on any outcomes of your enquiries.

As you know, in December 2022 the Prime Minister announced his intention to clear the backlog of asylum claims by the end of 2023. As discussed in our previous correspondence, the government later revised this target to resolving only those claims made prior to 28 June 2022.

Once again, however, there has been a striking disconnect between what the official statistics clearly show, on the one hand, and Ministers' statements about what the statistics show, on the other. Perhaps the most egregious example this week was the Prime Minister's [statement](#) on X/Twitter:

"I said that this government would clear the backlog of asylum decisions by the end of 2023. That's exactly what we've done."

Yet the figures published by the Home Office the same day show unambiguously that the "total asylum backlog" stood 98,599 cases on 28 December 2023.

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Even if we accept at face value the distinction drawn by the government between the so-called “legacy backlog” and the total backlog of all unresolved claims, the Home Secretary’s claim – widely [reported](#) by the BBC and others – that the “legacy backlog” has now been cleared also appears to be at odds with the fact that some 4,500 “complex” cases, which predate the 28 June 2022 cut-off point, remain unresolved. The Home Secretary himself does not dispute that fact, judging by his statements this week.

I am concerned that these statements by Ministers – if left uncorrected – risk creating a highly misleading picture of the actual state of affairs with respect to the asylum backlog, an issue of significant interest to the public.

I would therefore be grateful if you would look into these issues as soon as you are able to, with a view to establishing whether there is any evidentiary basis to support claims by Ministers that either the asylum backlog as a whole, or the so-called “legacy backlog”, had in fact been fully cleared by the end of December 2023. It should go without saying that the record should be corrected if, as appears likely, any demonstrably false claims have been made by Ministers. I trust that you and your team will work with Ministers and officials to ensure that any necessary corrections are made expeditiously.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Kind regards

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Shadow Minister for Immigration

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