

Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson MP
Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

22 November 2022

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter of 31 October in which you asked me to provide information in addition to a series of outstanding questions from the evidence session senior officials attended on 26 October, please find answers below.

Manston

You asked for an outline on my visit to Manston on Sunday 30 October, and the actions taken to address the concerns.

During my visit in Manston sites in Kent on Sunday 30 October I was shown the areas where migrants are currently being held and viewed facilities, including the medical area. I discussed potential solutions to ease the current pressures on our immigration system and support those on-site and thanked staff for their continued hard work.

I am incredibly proud of the skill and dedication shown to tackle this challenging situation. Following my visit, teams have undertaken a momentous effort to move over 1,000 people off site within the last five days, helping return Manston onto a more suitable footing.

Other significant improvements have been made, including bolstering the 24/7 medical facilities already on site, a significant increase in bedding, improved catering facilities and the provision of more activities to support migrant welfare, including for children.

The vital work to safeguard individuals and ensure people are treated with dignity, care and compassion while we source alternative accommodation remains our priority.

You asked if the Manston processing site is being operated as a Short-term Holding Facility (STHF) under the STHF Rules 2018.

Manston operates as a non-residential short-term holding facility. In order to operate as a short-term holding facility (STHF), a site does not need to be designated as one.

The Immigration (Places of Detention) Direction 2021 sets out the places in which people can lawfully be detained, and included within that are STHFs (both non-residential and residential STHFs) as set out in paragraph 3(1)(c) of the Direction. Only immigration removal centres are designated individually by name. [Immigration \(Places of Detention\) Direction 2021 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/immigration-places-of-detention-direction-2021.pdf)

You asked for a number of information relating to GP hours/days on site at Manston.

We have three Health & Care Professional Council (HCPC) registered paramedics, three ambulance technicians and two emergency department consultant doctors available every day at Manston. This is one on-call doctor, paramedic and technician available during the night. There is a fully-stocked ambulance on site and a well-equipped health centre is available 24/7.

The Western Jet Foil has a further two HCPC registered paramedics, three ambulance technicians, a fully stocked ambulance, and a small, well-equipped health suite is available.

We are working with partners in Kent NHS to improve access to mental health professionals, but this is a provision that is already extremely stretched across the county. All our staff are trained to identify and deal with vulnerable people and in the event of a mental health crisis we work closely with existing health providers to ensure appropriate onward referral.

You asked about the duration individuals have been held at Manston.

Any data we provide would quickly be out of date given the speed at which we have been processing people through Manston over the last three weeks.

As of 15 November, and following a further surge in arrivals over the weekend of 12 November, there were 1,212 people in Manston, none of whom had been there longer than 12 November.

Asylum Accommodation

You asked about the Home Office's criteria for its choice of hotel sites to accommodate asylum seekers.

We are committed to ensuring that destitute asylum seekers are housed in safe, secure and suitable accommodation, and that they are treated with dignity while their asylum claim is considered.

Our providers are tasked with identifying all appropriate options to ensure that suitable accommodation is secured quickly, including contingency accommodation such as hotels, as required.

The providers work with the market to offer a range of options across the UK that are safe, habitable and fit for purpose.

Regarding hotels, we and our providers source suitable accommodation to fulfil our statutory duties within the broad principles of:

- Standards – in line with contractual requirements
- Availability – generally on an exclusive use basis
- Suitability – including impacts and availability of local services, community cohesion and feedback from local partners
- Affordability and Value for Money

Once initial checks and considerations are complete, and an individual site is identified as potentially viable, providers are given approval to begin due diligence and engagement with hotel. The Home Office then begins its engagement activity with local partners including notice to the relevant local authority chief executive and Member of Parliament.

We aim to provide as much notice as possible and offer information on dedicated local partners, though notice periods will vary and are sometimes constrained by the urgency of the demand to ensure compliance with statutory obligation to provide accommodation.

Given the current, pressing need to move people from Manston, we are considering all possible options and moving to secure suitable accommodation at pace. As this takes place we remain resolute in our commitment to work with local partners to understand and address concerns during and after any implementation period.

You asked whether the Home Office plans to publish data in future releases on the number of asylum seekers placed in initial accommodation by local authority area.

Official statistics published by the Home Office are kept under review in line with the code of practice for statistics, taking into account a number of factors including user needs, as well as quality and availability of data.

Following the transition to the new ATLAS immigration platform, work is ongoing to transform the associated reporting. Once that work completes in 2023, further changes to the published data on those in the asylum system may be possible.

We recognise the current high level of interest in the asylum support system and are considering what further information could be made available ahead of that transition.

Asylum Claims via English Channel

You asked for a number of statistics relating to people who crossed the English Channel in 2022 and in comparison, to 2021, the proportion of asylum claims have been refused; what proportion were subsequently successfully appealed.

96% of the small boats arrivals who claimed asylum in 2021 are awaiting an initial decision. 97% of those who claimed asylum in 2022 are awaiting an initial decision.

Up to 30 June 2022, 16 substantive decisions had been made on people who arrived via small boat in 2022.

There is therefore insufficient information to indicate potential refusal rates or results of appeals.

15% of those who applied in 2021, who have had a substantive consideration of their asylum claim were refused at initial outcome.

Asylum Claims and Modern Slavery Claims from small boats arrivals

You asked whether the Home Office plans to publish data on the number of people arriving in small boats apply for asylum, or the number of people who claim to be victim of modern slavery.

The Home Office publishes data on small boat arrivals in the quarterly Irregular Migration to the UK release which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-statistics>

The next release, with data up to 30 September 2022, will be published on 24 November 2022.

Albanians

You asked for information on the number of Albanian nationals who have made the crossing during 2022 have claimed on arrival to be a victim of modern slavery.

5% of Albanian arrivals between 1 January and 30 June 2022 have been referred to National Referral Mechanism (NRM) so far¹. Albanians make up over half of all modern slavery referrals from small boats arrivals during this period.

Not all arrivals will be referred immediately, for instance if they have an outstanding asylum claim or have not been referred for relocation under our Migration and Economic Development Partnership.

So, while the number of small boats arrivals that have been referred to the NRM is proportionately low, the number referred following enforcement activity is much higher

For example, 40% of all those detained for return in 2021 were referred into the NRM system and 52% of Albanian nationals detained for return were referred into the NRM.

Further information is available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/factsheet-small-boat-crossings-since-july-2022/factsheet-small-boat-crossings-since-july-2022>

You asked for information on the proportion of Albanian NRM referrals [including for small boat arrivals] reached the ‘conclusive grounds’ stage and what happens to those who don’t? [e.g., do they withdraw their claim, seek asylum instead, or make a human rights-based claim].

In the first two quarters of 2022, Albanian nationals were the most common nationality referred into the NRM, accounting for 27% (2,138) of all referrals.

Of the Reasonable Grounds decisions made by the Home Office Competent Authorities since the start of 2021 for Albanian nationals, 92% have been positive. . This data is available on the UK data service here at <https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/>

¹ Please note, these statistics have been taken from a live operational database. As such, numbers may change as information on that system is updated.

As outlined in [Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance for England and Wales](#) (under Section 49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015) an individual, or someone acting on their behalf, may request reconsideration of a negative Reasonable Grounds or negative Conclusive Grounds decision by the relevant competent authority if additional evidence becomes available that would be material to the outcome of a case, or there are specific concerns that a decision made is not in line with this guidance.

For those that receive a negative Reasonable Grounds decision, where there are no other barriers or further claims, we would take forward removal action as appropriate.

You asked for information relating to the number of Albanians who were found to be victims of modern slavery the Government supported to return voluntarily, and details of numbers of people aided and cost.

Our records show that one Albanian, who had a positive Reasonable Grounds decision, departed voluntarily from the community through the Voluntary Return Scheme (VRS) in the financial year 2021/22. Nobody returned voluntarily through the VRS following a Conclusive Grounds decision.

You asked for information relating to Albanians who have been detained, under investigation/in prison that the Government supported to return voluntarily, and details of the cost of these returns.

During the first quarter of 2022, seven Albanian nationals have undertaken an assisted voluntary return from detention. During 2021, 33 Albanian nationals undertook an assisted voluntary return from detention. These returns do not come with financial assistance.

You asked for a number of statistics relating to Albanians undertaking assisted voluntary return.

Ten Albanian nationals have undertaken an assisted voluntary return from the community during the first quarter of 2022. During 2021, 11 Albanian nationals undertook an assisted voluntary return from the community.

You asked for a number of people that have been returned to Albania since the UK/Albanian Readmission Agreement came into force in May 2022.

The UK Albania Returns Agreement was signed in July 2021 and ratified in May 2022. Since July 2021, we have returned over 1,000 Albanian nationals.

Operation Isotrope

You asked for further details on what may happen if a decision is taken to cease Operation Isotrope in January 2023.

It was always the case that Defence support to the Home Office would run until January 2023, at which point the operational and wider arrangements will be reviewed.

We are working across Government to ensure readiness for Defence to hand the task back to the Home Office following the review. This includes supporting training and capability development.

Asylum decision makers

You asked for the annual attrition rate for asylum decision makers.

The annual attrition rate for decision makers between April 2021 and March 2022 was 46%. We have implemented a recruitment and retention allowance to help us maintain experienced asylum decision makers.

We are putting in place a range of interventions, including looking at job design, reward, management capability and we have developed an Asylum Academy to reduce the time to competence.

We are building high performing teams, increasing the number of decision makers and providing improved training and career progression opportunities to aid retention of staff.

We will continue to monitor and review the recruitment and retention allowance and its impact on attrition and attraction.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Robert Jenrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration