



Home Office

Victoria Atkins MP
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Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM
Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner
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Dear Dame Sara

Thank you for your letter of 22 July 2021 about asylum claim decision times for potential victims of modern slavery. I am grateful for the important work you continue to do as the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and hope that this reply will be helpful in aiding that work. I am also sorry for the delay in responding.

The Government is committed to tackling the heinous crime of modern slavery; ensuring victims are provided with the support they need to begin rebuilding their lives and that those responsible are prosecuted.

The number of referrals into the NRM has increased substantially in recent years. 2019 saw a 52% increase on 2018. In 2020, 10,613 potential victims were referred to the NRM, a 0.1% decrease on 2019. This is the first year that referrals have not increased, which is thought to result from the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. Official statistics show an increasing trend of victims being referred so far in 2021 - with a 7% increase in April to June 2021 compared to January to March 2021 and a 42% increase from April to June 2020.

www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-2-2021-april-to-june/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-2-2021-april-to-june.

Furthermore, the number of referrals received in the quarter April to June 2021 is the second highest since the NRM began in 2009 (the highest number was October to December 2019). Referrals for those claiming exploitation overseas have notably increased in April to June 2021. These referrals often require increased time to prepare and serve decisions through additional enquiries via multiple overseas agencies.

The SCA is currently recruiting a large number of new decision makers across the UK to increase NRM capacity for decision-making and reduce timescales. This brings additional resource pressures initially (for training and upskilling) but will have substantial long-term benefit for decision making timescales.

Concerning asylum claim decision making, the Home Office has teams dedicated to undertaking regular case progression reviews to ensure the swift resolution of barriers present on cases and schedule asylum interviews as quickly as possible. It is actively working to reduce the number of older cases in the system and has plans in place to improve the speed at which outstanding asylum claims are decided.

The Home Office is working to significantly increase the number of asylum decision makers to reduce the number of claimants awaiting a decision and the timeframes for decisions. To support the increase in decision makers, it has introduced the Asylum Development Academy.

The Home Office is also continuing to develop existing and new technology to help build on recent improvements, such as digital interviewing, to move away from a paper-based system and create a streamlined digital business to enable more effective workflow, appointment booking and decision-making.



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