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Immigration and Asylum

UK Parliament Debates

Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill: Report Stage, House of Lords

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-04/debates/525F3E62-A481-4C81-BB49-69BE8525B763/SafetyOfRwanda\(AsylumAndImmigration\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-04/debates/525F3E62-A481-4C81-BB49-69BE8525B763/SafetyOfRwanda(AsylumAndImmigration)Bill)

and

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-06/debates/4475C1E4-2C43-44B0-B087-0DDA3ADD222F/SafetyOfRwanda\(AsylumAndImmigration\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-06/debates/4475C1E4-2C43-44B0-B087-0DDA3ADD222F/SafetyOfRwanda(AsylumAndImmigration)Bill)

UK Parliament, House of Commons Oral Answers

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

Diana Johnson (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Office if he will make a statement on the publication of 13 reports by the former independent chief inspector of borders and immigration on 29 February and how the inspectorate will now operate in the absence of a chief inspector or deputy?

Reply from the Minister for Legal Migration and the Border (Tom Pursglove):

We recognise that independent scrutiny, such as that provided by the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration, plays an important role in ensuring that we have an effective immigration system. In January, the Home Secretary made a promise to the former chief inspector to publish all overdue reports as soon as possible ... Last Thursday, we delivered on that promise by publishing all 13 reports that were outside the eight-week commitment to review and respond. We take ICIBI reports seriously and we do not wait until publication to act on its findings. Indeed, some of the reports' recommendations have now been implemented and work is ongoing across the Department to implement others. That includes action to strengthen border security and improve the system for processing asylum claims. The final two reports from the former chief inspector will be published in the established eight-week period. There is no requirement for a chief inspector to be in place for that to happen, but the process of appointing his replacement is under way, with the advert going live the day after the former chief inspector had his appointment terminated. ...

The security and effectiveness of the UK border is of paramount importance. The Government recognise that, which is why we have taken wide-ranging action to tackle illegal migration and reform our asylum system. Our efforts are paying off, but there is more to do. We will never compromise on this. We will always put the safety and interests of the British people first.

Diana Johnson: ... On Tuesday 20 February, the Home Secretary sacked David Neal. Eight days later, the Home Office published 13 of the 15 reports that the chief inspector had submitted during his tenure, none of which had been published within the agreed eight-week deadline following receipt.

The reports raise multiple serious concerns about the Home Office's handling of border security and immigration operations. Will the Minister confirm what action is being taken to address the report findings that the protection of borders at airports is "neither effective nor efficient", with border posts being left unstaffed? What steps will the Minister take to remedy the serious failures identified in attempts to discover illegal goods at airports? Does the Minister accept the conclusion that attempting to clear the legacy backlog at all costs "has led to perverse outcomes for claimants and staff", with quality assurance "sacrificed for increased productivity"? With the new chief inspector not expected to be in post for six to nine months, and with no deputy to step up and exercise statutory responsibilities, will the Minister explain exactly how the inspectorate will operate during that period? Is all inspection work now on hold, and what happens to the inspectorate's 30-plus members of staff?

Last week, David Neal told the Select Committee of his concerns regarding Wethersfield asylum accommodation centre relating to suicide, violence and the lack of expertise to manage the situation. Will the Minister now agree to the Committee's request to visit Wethersfield?

The Committee last week published the 10 changes that David Neal thinks need to be made to improve the effectiveness of the inspectorate, including the power to publish its own reports, creating a deputy position, and providing access to commercial contracts entered into by the Home Office. Does the Minister have any plans to implement any of those recommendations? Finally, will he comment on the joint letter sent by seven national

home affairs editors complaining about the decision to publish a slew of Home Office reports on the same day as the Sarah Everard report?

Reply from Tom Pursglove: ... we have made progress in publishing the reports. I assure the House that the existing reports that have not yet been responded to will be dealt with within the eight-week window. ...

On the recommendations in the various reports, we have obviously responded to those reports. A number of recommendations have been accepted, a number have been progressed, and a number have been completed. The reports speak for themselves, and give an indication of the direction of travel that we intend to take. We also want to engage with the next inspector regarding that performance, to ensure that they have an important role in overseeing the delivery of the commitments that we have made in response to the issues that were understandably raised in the reports. ...

On the asylum backlog ... I would argue that the teams have done remarkable work in delivering on the commitment to get on and process the legacy backlog. There has been much learning along the way, which we will take forward into future processing. There will be increased sampling in the way that the inspector recommended, as well as improvements to IT.

Arrangements for the ICIBI functions in this period are under consideration. The Minister for Countering Illegal Migration is the lead on that aspect of the Department's work. ...

Tim Loughton (Conservative): ... is it not the case that David Neal was dismissed by Teams call by a civil servant? Why was he not afforded the courtesy of seeing a Minister? Is it not also the case that, despite the recruitment process having started last November, no suitable candidates came forward and the post had to be readvertised at a higher salary?

Thirdly, the Minister has not mentioned anything about how the inspectorate actually operates. Is it not the case that the 30 civil servants are unable to carry on their work on the reports they are currently working on, unable to carry out any inspections, unable to pick up the schedule of reports that has been programmed, and unable to comment on any responses to the reports?

Finally, can the Minister assure me that there were no redactions and nothing was removed from the 13 reports published en masse last week, because there is no inspector or deputy inspector to challenge the contents of the reports that have been put into the public domain?

Reply from Tom Pursglove: On my hon. Friend's final point, I will go away and check, and I will write to him. This is clearly an important function. The recruitment process was restarted the day after Mr Neal left the role. We are keen to make progress in appointing a new independent chief inspector of borders and immigration, and I encourage people to put themselves forward. It is an important role, and the Government value it. ...

Yvette Cooper (Labour): We think of the family and friends of the seven-year-old who lost her life in the channel this weekend. It matters more than ever that we stop the criminal gangs and dangerous crossings that are undermining border security and putting so many lives at risk.

The Tory Home Secretary has shamefully tried to bury or hide 13 inspectorate reports and one National Audit Office report with damning revelations about Britain's borders, and now he has gone into hiding himself. He should be doing a statement on those reports, which show shocking border security failures, including border and customs posts not staffed. In one airport, the inspectorate was told, "customs is shut down for the summer". It found that equipment was "either broken, not available, or untrusted", and that there was "a lack of anti-smuggling capability". Mr Neal said that "protection of the border is neither effective nor efficient".

Will the Minister tell us how many times customs and border posts have gone unstaffed this year? Does he even know? How many high-risk private flights were not checked in person? How long will there be no inspector in post?

More findings: only two people have been removed under the inadmissibility process that the Government claimed would cover tens of thousands, and 147 unaccompanied children who went missing have still not been found. On Rwanda, £400 million of taxpayers' money will have been spent even if no one is sent. If 300 people go, it will be £580 million. That is over half a billion pounds on a scheme that will cover less than 1% of UK asylum arrivals—nearly £2 million per person. I say to the Minister: do not give us any garbage about the Tories having a plan. That is not a plan; it is a farce. Why do they not stop wasting that money and instead put it into rebuilding border security and stopping the criminal gangs? ...

Finally, there is the revelation that the Home Office has gone a shocking £5 billion over budget this year because it failed on the backlog, on returns, on hotels and on Rwanda ...

Reply from Tom Pursglove: ... I share the right hon. Lady's sentiments about the terrible incident at the weekend when that young girl lost her life. In the last few weeks, we have yet again seen lives lost in the channel, and that is a source of regret for all of us. That is why the Government are absolutely determined to put an end to these channel crossings. We are making progress—that is why the number of crossings last year was down by over a third compared with the year before, and Albanian arrivals are down by over 90%—but there is more work to do, and we will continue to see through the plan that is delivering those results. ...

We have a fundamental point of difference in that the Government believe that the Rwanda policy is an important part of the answer in putting those evil criminal gangs out of business. It is not acceptable to spend £8 million a day in the asylum system. ... We think that advancing that policy and putting those criminal gangs out of action is the right thing to do, recognising that the policy is novel and has been challenging. ...

Ultimately, Border Force facilitates 132 million passenger arrivals last year, processing over 96% of passengers within service standards. Significant progress has been made since the report was commissioned to increase the number of officers trained in vulnerability and behavioural detection, and that is set to continue.

We treat the inspector's recommendations with the utmost seriousness; we get on and deliver on those recommendations and, as I have consistently set out to the House, we now have a commitment to respond to those reports within eight weeks.

James Daly (Conservative): Following on from that point, there is clearly an issue with publication within eight weeks. Bearing in mind that the public purse is funding 30 civil servants and a chief inspector of immigration, has my hon. Friend considered a statutory basis for the eight-week requirement—or whatever requirement is necessary or proportionate—for the publication of such reports, to ensure efficiency in the system?

Reply from Tom Pursglove; ... I am happy to put that suggestion to the Minister who leads on these matters in the Department. I can absolutely assure my hon. Friend that there is a commitment to engage with the reports within that eight-week window ...

Aliston Thewliss (SNP): I thank David Neal for his work. Nobody can doubt that he was an independent chief inspector of borders and immigration, and his reports bear testament to that work. He called out the Home Office for being particularly poor at communication, and for its data being “inexcusably awful.” In relation to Border Force, he highlighted “basic stuff not being done”.

He shone a bright light on the shoddy treatment of unaccompanied children in hotels, some of whom are still missing to this day and have not been found by the Home Office. He highlighted the “lack of grip and poor leadership” that resulted in those children becoming lost. He also highlighted the chaos and the secret policies being operated as part of the

Afghan citizens resettlement scheme—utterly unacceptable.

What happens now to the planned inspections that are stuck in limbo? Those inspections include adults at risk, which is crucial as people have committed suicide in asylum accommodation. Small boats are all the more critical given the tragic loss of a seven-year-old wee girl just this week. On high-performance visas, on Rwanda, on Georgia and on age assessment, what will happen to the work plan that the chief inspector set out, and to the staff—expert inspectors—who are in place to deliver it? Will David Neal's recommendations be taken on by whoever follows him in that post? What will the Department do for future reports? ...

Reply from Tom Pursglove: ... I too, actually, want to place on record my thanks to Mr Neal for the work that he did ...

There are recommendations that the Government have accepted and are taking forward. We treat the outcomes of those reports with the seriousness that they warrant. We will continue to work through those recommendations; even in the absence of an ICIBI, we will continue to make progress against our commitments. Obviously, we want to get on and appoint a replacement for Mr Neal, and that process is under way. We want to do that as quickly as possible, while also making sure that we properly engage the Home Affairs Committee in that process, and we will do so in the way that that Committee would rightly expect.

It is welcome that we no longer have any unaccompanied asylum-seeking children hotels under the auspices of the Home Office, but the recommendations that were made within the report still stand and, again, we treat them seriously. As I said at an earlier Home Affairs Committee appearance, I treat tracing missing asylum-seeking children with the utmost seriousness, and with better relationships with the police, improved guidance and other steps, we have managed to track down more of those children since we met at the Home Affairs Committee.

We continue to see Afghans arriving under the ACRS. That is welcome, and we will continue to evolve that scheme and make improvements where we can. We have made commitments around the scheme, and it is of real importance to me: fulfilling our promises to those who worked with the British Government and to others is a responsibility that I take incredibly seriously.

I want to make sure that we go about this recruitment process in the proper way, involving the Home Affairs Committee. The second permanent secretary is leading engagement with the secretariat at the ICIBI, and we will get on and appoint a successor. ...

To read this very long question and answer session in full see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-04/debates/97CB98BE-699C-408F-8B53-1CA4500848D6/IndependentChiefInspectorOfBordersAndImmigration>

The inspection reports referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/inspection-reports-by-the-independent-chief-inspector-of-borders-and-immigration#2024>

The Government responses referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/responses-to-reports-by-the-independent-chief-inspector-of-borders-and-immigration#2024>

UK Parliament, House of Commons Written Answers: Rwanda Refugee Policy

The following two questions both received the same answer

Asylum: Rwanda

Rupa Huq (Labour) [13025] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department,

whether he plans to publish guidelines that protect LGBT+ refugees in relation to her proposals to offshore refugees to Rwanda.

Rupa Huq (Labour) [13026] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has made an assessment of whether Rwanda is a safe country to which to send LGBT+ refugees.

Reply from Michael Tomlinson: Protection from discrimination is enshrined within the Rwandan constitution. Rwanda does not criminalise or discriminate against sexual orientation in either law or policy.

The published country information notes (CIN) for Rwanda have been updated and can be found at the following link: [Safety of Rwanda \(Asylum and Immigration\) Bill: supporting evidence](#), along with other supporting evidence relating to the safety of Rwanda.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-05/13025>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-05/13026>

UK Parliament, House of Commons Written Answers: Other Immigration and Asylum

British Nationality

Ben Lake (Plaid Cymru) [16407] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for what reason it is his policy that a person born between 2 October 2000 and 29 April 2006 is only considered to have British citizenship at birth if their British citizen father was married at the time of their birth to their EU citizen mother.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: Between 1 January 1983 and 30 June 2006, a child could only obtain British citizenship through their father if the parents were married. The law changed on 1 July 2006 to allow a person to acquire citizenship through their father, irrespective of whether the parents were married, subject to proof of paternity.

The 2006 change only affects children born after 1 July 2006: the earlier law continues to apply in relation to people born before that date. The change was not made retrospective, to avoid altering a person's status after their birth without allowing them to make an informed choice about acquiring British citizenship.

A person born before 1 July 2006 can register as a British citizen if they would have become a British citizen automatically had their parents been married. Those applying under this route do not have to pay a registration fee.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16407>

Windrush Compensation Scheme

Lisa Nandy (Labour) [16799] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department are taking to improve the speed of delivery of full compensation under the Windrush Compensation Scheme.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: The Windrush Compensation Scheme is determined to ensure everyone who was affected receives every penny of the compensation to which they are entitled at the earliest point possible. The scheme is making significant progress towards achieving this aim. As of the end of January 2024, the scheme had paid over £80 million in compensation and over 82% of claims received had been given a final decision.

The time to allocate a claim for a substantive casework consideration has been reduced significantly, from 18 months to under 4 months. The 4-month period includes all essential eligibility checks, together with a Preliminary Assessment to make an initial payment of £10,000 wherever possible.

However, each person's claim is deeply personal and deserves to be processed with the utmost care and sensitivity so that the maximum payment can be made to them.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16799>

Information about the Windrush Compensation Scheme, referred to above, can be read at <https://www.gov.uk/apply-windrush-compensation-scheme>

Visas: Skilled Workers

Tim Farron (Liberal Democrat) [15429] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to this Oral Statement of 4 December 2023 on Legal Migration, Official Report, column 41, whether family members of individuals that met the previous skilled worker salary threshold will remain eligible for the route to settlement.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: Dependants of Skilled Workers can apply for settlement irrespective of the salary of the lead migrant, provided the lead migrant qualifies for settlement or has settled.

Further details on the changes and how they may affect migrants can be found through the following link:

www.gov.uk/government/news/fact-sheet-on-net-migration-measures-further-detail

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-23/15429>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-12-04/debates/921A08A2-F615-48F2-8C56-423A29556F9F/LegalMigration>

Migrants: Health Services

Stephen Timms (Labour) [16062] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 26 February 2024 to Question 13206 on Migrants: Health Services, whether applicants who applied for entry clearance under paragraph 319X of the Immigration Rules before 12 April 2023 pay the Immigration Health Surcharge if their application is processed after that date.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: Appendix Child Joining a Non-Parent Relative, also known as Appendix CNP, allows for extended family with protection status in the UK to sponsor children to join them where there are serious and compelling circumstances. This can be in situations where a child has no parents or relatives to care for them, or where the parents or relatives in their own country cannot safely care for the child.

Simplification of the Immigration Rules, by inserting Appendix CNP on 12 April 2023, did not impose different Immigration Health Surcharge requirements, but replicated the existing provisions contained under paragraph 319X.

There were no policy changes made to the requirements of this route and it was solely formatting changes in line with the wider simplification format. Decision makers have been instructed to consider all applications made before and after 12 April 2023 under Appendix CNP. This means that all applications submitted prior to, and after, 12 April 2023 must pay the Immigration Health Surcharge. The requirement to do so may be waived where the sponsor is determined to be destitute, but it is in the best interests of the child to come to the UK.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16062>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-06/13206>

The following three questions all received the same answer

Visas: Palestinians

Stephen Farry (Alliance) [16279] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many visas for Palestinian nationals (a) are being processed, (b) have been approved and (c) have been rejected since 1 October 2023.

Stephen Farry (Alliance) [16538] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people in Gaza are awaiting the results of their applications for a visa as a dependant of someone in the UK on a (a) work and (b) student visa, who applied (i) on and (ii) before 7 October 2023.

Stephen Farry (Alliance) [16539] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications for visas for Palestinian nationals were (a) rejected and (b) approved in (i) October 2023, (ii) November 2023, (iii) December 2023, (iv) January 2024 and (v) February 2024.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: The Home Office does not publish data at the level of detail requested, however, we do publish data on entry clearance visas, by nationality, in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on work and sponsored study visas granted are published in table Vis_D02 of the [Entry clearance detailed dataset](#). Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbook. The latest data relate to 2023 Q4.

Every attempt is made to meet the service level agreement standard, but in certain cases additional checks are required which can mean visa requests take longer to process.

The latest data on performance against service standards is published through migration transparency data and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/migration-transparency-data#uk-visas-and-immigration>

The Home Office also publishes information on visa processing times for applications inside and outside the UK at: [Visa processing times](#).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16279>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16538>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16539>

Entry Clearances: Gaza

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour) [16180] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what provision his Department has made for collecting biometric data from relatives of British nationals fleeing Gaza in the absence of functioning visa applications centres in Gaza.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: The Visa Application Centre in Gaza has been closed since 7 October 2023 due to the conflict in the region and to ensure the safety of staff and customers. UKVI will continue to monitor the situation and work closely with the commercial partner, TLS, to re-open the centre when it becomes safe to do so.

Those who wish to make a UK visa application will need to enrol their biometrics at an alternative Visa Application Centre in OPT (Ramallah or Jerusalem) or a nearby country. Customers can visit <https://pos.tlscontact.com/> for an up to date list of Visa Application Centres in the region.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16180>

Refugees: Gaza

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [16266] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will take steps to enable children in Gaza with parents living in the UK

to come to the UK.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: The UK Government is monitoring the situation in Israel and Gaza closely to ensure that it is able to respond appropriately. UKVI is working closely with the FCDO in supporting family members of British nationals evacuated from Gaza who require a visa, signposting the necessary steps and expediting appointments at the Visa Application Centre.

British citizens and those with settled status in the UK, together with their foreign national dependants, (spouse, unmarried/civil partner, child under 18), may come to the UK, provided that they have valid travel documents and existing permission to enter or remain in the UK; or are non-visa nationals. They must also pass appropriate security checks.

The Government allows individuals with protection status in the UK to sponsor their partner or children to stay with, or join, them here through our refugee family reunion policy, provided they formed part of the family unit before the sponsor fled their country of origin to seek protection.

There are additional safe and legal routes for people to come to the UK should they wish to join family members here, work, or study. They would need to meet the requirements of the relevant Immigration Rule under which they were applying to qualify for a visa.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-28/16266>

Palestinians: Refugees

Caroline Lucas (Green) [15866] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department is taking to provide safe and legal entry routes for people in Gaza seeking to join family members in the UK.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: The UK Government is monitoring the situation in Israel and Gaza closely to ensure that it is able to respond appropriately.

British citizens and those with settled status in the UK, together with their foreign national dependants, may come to the UK provided that they have valid travel documents and existing permission to enter or remain in the UK; or are non-visa nationals. They must also pass appropriate security checks.

The Government allows individuals with protection status in the UK to sponsor their partner or children to stay with, or join, them here through our refugee family reunion policy, provided they formed part of the family unit before the sponsor fled their country of origin to seek protection.

There are additional safe and legal routes for people to come to the UK should they wish to join family members here, work, or study. They would need to meet the requirements of the relevant Immigration Rule under which they were applying to qualify for a visa.

The Home Office has not considered establishing a separate resettlement route for Palestinians to come to the UK. Since 2015, over half a million people have been offered safe and legal routes into the UK. Our approach is considered in the round, rather than on a crisis-by-crisis basis.

UK Visas and Immigration is working closely with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in supporting family members of British nationals evacuated from Gaza who require a visa, signposting the necessary steps and expediting appointments at the Visa Application Centre.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/15866>

Visas: Gaza

Caroline Lucas (Green) [15865] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of the barriers to people in Gaza who are seeking to join their family members in the UK reaching their closest visa application centre in Egypt.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: Immediate family members of British citizens, individuals with protection status, and those settled in the UK, who wish to come and live in the UK and do not have a current UK visa, can apply under one of the existing Family visa routes.

The Home Office is working closely with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in supporting family members of British nationals evacuated from Gaza who require a visa, signposting the necessary steps and expediting appointments at the Visa Application Centre (VAC). VACs in the region, such as Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, are open and offering a full service.

In the vast majority of circumstances, the UK requires biometrics to be taken as part of an application; this is vital so we can conduct checks on the person's identity and suitability to come to the UK. Biometrics, in the form of fingerprints and facial images, underpin the current UK immigration system to support identity assurance and suitability checks on foreign nationals who are subject to immigration control. Applicants who are at risk of embarking on an unsafe journey must provide evidence they need to make an urgent journey to a VAC that would be particularly unsafe for them, and they cannot delay their journey until later or use alternative routes.

When considering a pre-determination or an excusal of the requirement for an applicant to enrol their biometrics request under the Unsafe Journey's policy, decision-makers must refer to the Biometric Enrolment and the Unsafe Journey's guidance.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/15865>

The guidance referred to above can be read at

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65cc97af130549000c8679af/Biometric+enrolment+guidance+-+unsafe+journeys.pdf>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Visas: Gaza

Nadia Whittome (Labour) [16438] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people from Gaza have arrived in the UK following a successful application for a family visa as a (a) spouse, (b) partner, (c) fiancé, (d) child, (e) parent, (f) relative providing care of a British citizen, (g) settled resident and (h) person with protection status since 7 October 2023.

Nadia Whittome (Labour) [16439] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people in Gaza are awaiting results of applications for family visas as a (a) spouse, (b) partner, (c) fiancé, (d) child, (e) parent, (f) relative providing care of a British citizen, (g) settled resident and (h) person with protection status who applied (i) on or (ii) before 7 October 2023.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: The number of people in Gaza who are awaiting results of applications for family visas does not form part of any current transparency data or migration statistics and is not published.

Transparency data is however published quarterly on Gov.uk and includes data on the outcomes of visas issued on family routes, although this does not necessarily equate to entering the UK once granted leave.

The latest transparency data can be found at: [Migration transparency data](#) and [Immigration system statistics data tables](#).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16438>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-29/16439>

The following three questions all received the same answer

Asylum: Housing

John Hayes (Conservative) [15556] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, in which local authorities his Department (a) owns and (b) rents housing for people seeking asylum.

John Hayes (Conservative) [15557] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the cost to the public purse is of housing (a) owned and (b) rented by his Department for people seeking asylum.

John Hayes (Conservative) [15558] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much his Department has paid (a) Serco, (b) Clearsprings, (c) Mears and (d) other contractors to provide accommodation to asylum seekers since 2019.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: Data on the number of supported asylum seekers accommodated in each local authority area and the number of supported asylum seekers in accommodation (including in contingency hotels and other contingency accommodation) is published in table Asy_D11 here: [Asylum and resettlement datasets](#).

Costs are subject to change depending on numbers being accommodated within the asylum system. Accommodation costs are considered to be commercially confidential. Therefore, the Home Office does not publish this information. However, total expenditure on asylum is published in the Home Office Annual Report and Accounts, available at [HO annual reports and accounts](#).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-26/15556>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-26/15557>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-26/15558>

Asylum: Housing

Alex Sobel (Labour Co-op) [16021] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for what reason his Department has reduced the amount of support given to people living in asylum accommodation which provides all their meals to £8.86 per week.

Reply from Tom Pursglove: The level of the allowance given to those supported under section 95 and section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 is reviewed each year to ensure it covers an asylum seeker's essential living needs.

In setting the rates, we have utilised an alternative methodology to determine the costs of essential needs, which uses a 'disaggregated CPI' (Consumer Prices Index). The methodology has been designed to offer a more accurate measure of changes in the price of items to cover essential living needs. As previous rate increases have been made using CPI rates, this has led to an overestimate of the cost of essential needs for an individual in catered accommodation, therefore, using the methodology set out above, the catered rates have been slightly reduced.

Individuals accommodated in hotels and other catered sites are also provided 3 meals a day, snacks, water, toiletries, and some other services, in addition to their weekly allowance. Additional support is also available to pregnant women, young children, and individuals who provide evidence of exceptional needs.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/16021>

UK Parliament, House of Lords Oral Answers

Former Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration: Reports

Lord Browne of Ladyton (Labour): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the release on 29 February of 13 reports produced by the former

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, and their findings in particular with regard to the conduct of staff responsible for unaccompanied refugee children in Kent.

Reply from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom): My Lords, last Thursday we published 13 reports that were outside the normal eight-week commitment to review and respond. We also published the Government's responses. We take the ICIBI reports seriously and do not wait until their publication to act on their recommendations. We have already implemented several of those recommendations. As regards the incident at the hotel, there was an immediate investigation and the support worker in question was removed.

Lord Browne of Ladyton: My Lords, the reports are damning, documenting the disappearance of 467 asylum-seeking children and Home Office employees asking lonely unaccompanied children to play a cruel guessing game as to which of them will receive foster care; and revealing systemic failures at the border and in the asylum decision-making process. It beggars belief that David Neal was not sacked for revealing these truths, or that his 13 reports were not released en bloc to minimise security. Who ultimately is responsible for the culture of defensiveness in the Home Office, which Neal suggested had allowed these failures over time to go unchecked? If the Minister disputes this characterisation, can he inform your Lordships' House in what respect the comprehensive evidence provided in the reports that support his assertion is mistaken?

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I am afraid I do dispute that characterisation. David Neal had his appointment terminated after he broke the terms of his contract and lost the confidence of the Home Secretary, because he released sensitive and misleading information from unpublished reports, well within the time commitment for publication. The Home Office had therefore not had time to fact-check and redact inappropriate material. I will give an example of the fact-checking required in some cases: the asylum casework report contained 67 factual inaccuracies, the vast majority of which were indeed accepted by the ICIBI. It is important to mention that a new inspector will be appointed following a full and proper process.

As regards the situation in the hotel, as I said, on both occasions of the inspection, the ICIBI found that children accommodated temporarily at the hotels reported that they felt happy and safe and spoke well of the staff caring for them. But, once we learned about the incident from the chief inspector, there was an immediate investigation and the support worker in question was removed and did not return.

Baroness Berridge (Conservative): My Lords, your Lordships' House spent many hours considering the Illegal Migration Bill, which considered the law to enable the Home Office to accommodate vulnerable children. Major concerns were raised at that time. Indeed, the Children's Commissioner has said that it is "not appropriate" for the Home Office to accommodate vulnerable children—it is not its expertise. Will my noble friend the Minister accept her offer, in these circumstances, to conduct an inquiry and find out exactly what has been going on with what is obviously a most vulnerable group of children, many of whom are primary school age?

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: My Lords, since the two ICIBI inspections, in 2022 and 2023, we have closed all seven hotels used to accommodate unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. It goes without saying that the safety and welfare of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is a priority. The multidisciplinary wraparound care provided in the hotels, including access to nurses and social workers, ensured that children were supported around the clock.

On whether they were of primary school age, I am afraid I do not recognise those numbers. I can update the House: as of 5 March, 118 children are still missing; 104 of those are Albanian, all of them are male, and the vast majority were aged 16 and 17 when they went missing. Only about 18 are still under the age of 18. It is not quite the picture that my noble friend painted.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Labour): My Lords, the chief inspector was due to start an inspection on the age assessment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children shortly. What will happen to this now that he has been sacked? If an interim inspector is appointed, as was suggested by the Minister in the Commons, could he be encouraged to look at this, given all the accumulating evidence of the wrongful age assessment of children?

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: This is obviously a subject to which we will return a bit later, but as I said, a new chief inspector will be appointed following a full and proper process in accordance with the Governance Code on Public Appointments. The Home Secretary is considering appointing an interim chief inspector to cover the period of recruitment. What his remit will be I do not know, but of course we will come back in due course.

Baroness Brinton (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, since autumn 2022, we have had a number of Questions and Statements on the status of the Home Office as corporate parent when there is a gap before the appointment of a council. Indeed, on 23 January last year, my noble friend Lord Scriven asked when the Home Office was going to become a corporate parent, and the Minister at the time said that he would take it back and discuss it. The recently published ICIBI report covering an inspection in September and October last year says that “the Home Secretary’s use of hotels to accommodate unaccompanied asylum-seeking children was unlawful. The Home Office has been running unregistered children’s homes for two years now, when these children should be in the ... care of Kent County Council”.

Can the Minister confirm that the Home Office no longer has an invisible corporate parent responsibility without actually doing it lawfully?

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: My Lords, as I said, we have closed the seven hotels that were used to accommodate unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, as identified in the two ICIBI inspections. As the noble Baroness will be aware, the Home Office will return to the High Court on 14 March as part of the ongoing High Court oversight of the Kent County Council case, so I will say no more on that at the moment. ...

Lord Coaker (Labour): My Lords, the Minister gave us an updated figure—that 118 children are still missing. That is truly shocking: the state has lost 118 children. What was lacking in the Minister’s answer was any description of what the Government are doing to try to find those children. What effort is being made to locate them? What liaison is taking place with police, social services and children’s services across the country? I say again to the Government: they have lost 118 children. If the state were a parent, it would be prosecuted.

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: ... Of course, we are unable to detain anybody, so when he characterises them as being lost, they have left as much as anything else. When they go missing from hotels, a multiagency missing persons protocol is mobilised, alongside the police and local authorities, to establish their whereabouts and ensure they are safe. Many of those who go missing are subsequently traced and located. The Home Office continues to review and improve practices around preventing children going missing, including work with the National Police Chiefs’ Council, which is publishing, and has published, guidance on missing migrant children. I say again: the vast majority of these were aged 16 and 17. Only 18 are still aged under 18.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat): The Government’s Rwanda Bill will now contain measures that will allow unaccompanied children to be relocated to Rwanda, and the Government have published a country note for Rwanda stating that it is a safe country. Normally, country notes are reviewed by the independent commissioner, but David Neal’s office confirmed to me on 17 January that the Government had not yet asked for an independent review of their country note statement that Rwanda is a safe country. Now that there is no independent reviewer, how will Parliament know that that statement has

been reviewed by an independent commissioner?

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: To start with, the noble Lord is incorrect in saying that unaccompanied children will be sent to Rwanda; as he is well aware, that is prohibited under Article 3 of the treaty. On the review, the ICIBI started on the country-of-origin information but that has not yet been sent to the Home Secretary. That is one of the ongoing pieces of ICIBI work that cannot be finalised until a new or interim ICIBI has been appointed, and I cannot comment on that process yet.

Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe (Labour): Do we not have thousands of people in this country who should not be here, but of whose whereabouts we have no knowledge? ...

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (Green): ... how can the Government be sure that the number of primary school-age children is accurate, according to their judgment?

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: As the noble Baroness will be aware, there are a number of different views on this. Age assessments go both ways. I was reading of a case earlier where a number of children requested that one of their number who had been imposed on them be looked into because the said person was significantly older than he appeared to be, and that was found to be the case. It works both ways.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-06/debates/FC14FF99-1D37-472A-AD14-30BD5D693249/FormerIndependentChiefInspectorOfBordersAndImmigrationReports>

The inspection reports referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/inspection-reports-by-the-independent-chief-inspector-of-borders-and-immigration#2024>

The recent Government responses referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/responses-to-reports-by-the-independent-chief-inspector-of-borders-and-immigration#2024>

Ukrainians: Visas and Further Support

Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to extend visas for Ukrainians which are due to expire after 3 years, and what further support they intend to provide to Ukrainians in the United Kingdom.

Reply from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom): My Lords, to provide future certainty, on 18 February the Government announced that existing Ukraine scheme visa holders will be able to apply for permission to remain in the UK for an additional 18 months under a new Ukraine permission extension scheme, which is set to open in early 2025 before the first Ukraine scheme visas start to expire in March 2025.

Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate: ... [I] commend the Government on their actions to offer sanctuary to so many Ukrainians. I also pay tribute to the many families and organisations under the Homes for Ukraine scheme who have hosted and helped those displaced people, including colleagues in this House and Members of the other place. However, the visas granted envisaged a shorter conflict than the one we unfortunately have, so will my noble friend assure the House that everything will be done to make necessary renewals as straightforward and stress-free as possible for those currently in receipt of our hospitality?

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I thank my noble friend for those remarks and join him in praising the generosity of the British public over the three bespoke Ukraine schemes. The UK has welcomed or offered sanctuary to more than 280,000 Ukrainians and their families fleeing the war in Ukraine. Together with our partners and allies, the Government stand in solidarity with Ukraine and will show that those who need our help are still warmly welcomed. It is right that we continue to adapt and develop the visa routes to ensure that they keep pace with the rapidly

shifting situation in Ukraine, remaining as efficient and sustainable as possible while providing stability for those welcomed to the UK who need our sanctuary. We will ensure that this is done as efficiently as possible.

Lord Addington (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, will the Minister assure us that all those being helped by this scheme will be assisted until it is safe to go home and that, whatever the rollout may be, a further scheme will be found? That is probably the assurance they need, and this country should give it.

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: The noble Lord raises a very good point. Of course, it is not for this Government to judge the certainty of conflict situations, which are very difficult to manage. However, I have no doubt that the Government will do whatever is necessary to maintain the current sanctuary that this country proudly offers.

Lord Ponsonby of Shubrede (Labour): My Lords, I too pay tribute to all the families who have taken Ukrainians into their homes. Under the new changes to the Ukraine family scheme, unaccompanied children will no longer be able to join their parents in Britain automatically. Does the Minister think that restricting family rights at a time when Ukrainian troops are under heavy fire in Donetsk sends the right message to the people of Ukraine about our willingness to stand by them?

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: ... Ultimately, of course we would like to see families reunited in a safe Ukraine. The UK's Ukraine schemes are not family reunification pathways. They are designed to provide temporary sanctuary in the UK for Ukrainians fleeing war. Ukrainian nationals who would have qualified under the Ukraine family scheme will still be able to apply under Homes for Ukraine. The Home Secretary will obviously consider any compelling and compassionate grounds that are presented on a case-by-case basis; for example, where families will be separated from young children. Plenty of routes still exist for family reunification in the UK, even though, as I said earlier, they are not reunification pathways.

Lord Stirrup (Crossbench): My Lords, I am aware of a Ukrainian lady who is harboured here in the United Kingdom, whose husband remains in Ukraine, and who has sadly had a return of a cancer from which she was previously in remission. She is not just grateful for but indeed overwhelmed by the help and treatment that she has received here in the UK. Does the Minister agree that while there is absolutely no room for complacency, we should be very proud of what this country has done in supporting the Ukrainians?

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I completely agree with the noble and gallant Lord. Although I obviously cannot comment on individual cases, I wish the lady in question the very best, and I hope that she is reunified with her husband in due course.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-04/debates/4A639C2D-DF2D-4039-ACA8-350777E1440C/UkrainiansVisasAndFurtherSupport>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-extends-stay-for-ukrainians-in-the-uk>

UK Parliament, House of Lords Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Immigration Controls: Health Services

Lord Weir of Ballyholme (DUP) [HL2613] To ask His Majesty's Government how many people currently working in healthcare provision who fall under Standard Occupational Code (SOC) 6145, or senior carers who fall under SOC 6146, are migrant workers who would fall under the ambit of new restrictions preventing their dependents moving to the UK.

Lord Weir of Ballyholme (DUP) [HL2615] To ask His Majesty's Government what consultations they had with devolved administrations before they proposed new immigration rules preventing carers and senior carers from bringing their dependents to the UK.

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: As the Home Secretary outlined on 4 December 2023, a care worker or senior care worker issued with a visa prior to the net migration measures coming into force on 11 March would not be restricted from bringing dependents to the UK.

Details of the net migration measures announced in December, are available here: <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/01/reducing-net-migration-factsheet-december-2023/>

As outlined by the Home Secretary on 4th December, visas issued prior to the changes are not impacted.

Immigration is a reserved matter. In general, the Government engages regularly with the devolved administrations through advisory groups when developing all its policies.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-20/hl2613>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-20/hl2615>

Asylum: Housing

Lord Roberts of Llandudno (Liberal Democrat) [HL2571] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they provide WiFi access within asylum seekers' lodgings to enable them to communicate with family members.

Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom: The provision of Wi-Fi is not a contractual requirement across the asylum accommodation estate.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/hl2571>

Press Release

New measures to tackle small boats agreed by Calais Group

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-measures-to-tackle-small-boats-agreed-by-calais-group>

New Publications

Funding for Ukraine resettlement: Scottish Government letter to UK Government

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/funding-ukraine-resettlement-letter-uk-government/>

Visas for culture and creative sectors: Scottish Government letter to the Home Secretary

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/visas-culture-creative-sectors-letter-home-secretary/>

Updated: Migrants detected crossing the English Channel in small boats – last 7 days

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats-last-7-days>

Updated: Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme: Visa data by country, upper and lower tier local authority

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-visa-data-by-country-upper-and-lower-tier-local-authority>

News: Rwanda Refugee Policy

Rwanda flights bill begins tricky House of Lords stage

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68466383>

Rwanda bill: Government suffers five defeats in House of Lords

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68473525>

Lords vote to exempt heroes who supported UK troops from flights to Rwanda

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/rwanda-bill-house-of-lords-small-boats-sunak-b2508224.html>

Rwanda safe for asylum seekers? It's a legal fiction

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rwanda-not-safe-asylum-seekers-joanna-cherry-98nqmnpc7>

Rwanda scheme is a source of great shame for Britain

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rwanda-scheme-is-a-source-of-great-shame-for-britain-35qdpq5f8>

Peers are right to challenge the Rwanda bill – and to join our call to support Afghans who served this country

<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/editorials/rwanda-bill-lords-asylum-immigration-afghan-b2506702.html>

News: Channel Migrants

Number of migrants crossing Channel since Sunak became PM tops 40,000

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/number-of-migrants-crossing-channel-since-sunak-became-pm-tops-40000-wtdflmv8w>

'No foot-dragging', warns chair of inquiry into 27 Channel deaths

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/06/no-foot-dragging-warns-chair-of-inquiry-into-27-channel-deaths>

English Channel: Girl, 7, dies after boat capsizes near Dunkirk in France

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-68461794>

News: Other Immigration and Asylum

Information Commissioner's Office finds the Home Office's pilot of GPS electronic monitoring of migrants breached UK data protection law

<https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/media-centre/news-and-blogs/2024/03/ico-finds-the-home-office-s-pilot-of-gps-electronic-monitoring-of-migrants-breached-uk-data-protection-law/>

Tory MP calls for integration policy to encourage migrants to 'embrace British values'

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/conservative-andrew-rosindell-british-mps-home-office-b2508688.html>

Calls for inquiry after refugee children made to guess who got foster care in ‘game’
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/mar/04/calls-inquiry-refugee-children-made-to-guess-foster-care-game>

TOP

Community Relations

News

No wonder Britain is so divided — we’re too diverse

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/no-wonder-britain-is-so-divided-were-too-diverse-f9q6d7wpd>

TOP

Equality

UK Parliament, House of Commons Written Answers

The following three questions all received the same answer

Health Services: Ethnic Groups

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [15689] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which ethnicity codes are collected by NHS services.

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [15690] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether ethnicity codes used in the NHS are in line with the (a) 2001 and (b) 2011 Census codes.

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [15691] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she plans to take to help ensure NHS services record ethnicity data in line with the 2021 Census categories.

Reply from Andrew Stephenson: The current Information Standard for collection of ‘Ethnic Category’ uses the seventeen classifications set out in the 2001 census, which are available at the following link:

https://www.datadictionary.nhs.uk/attributes/ethnic_category_code_2001.html

The information standard also allows for the collection of a wider range of ethnic classifications. However, as stated in the 2001 Information Standard, ‘these more detailed categories are purely optional and for local use in any way or not at all, provided that any such use does not cut across the national standard.’

The issue of equality monitoring, by reference to ethnicity and the other eight protected characteristics, is being considered at national level under the programme called the Unified Information Standard for Protected Characteristics (UISPC).

Evaluating the use of the 2021 ethnicity census categories is part of this programme. The UISPC Publication Steering Group is reporting to NHS England and the Department this year which will inform a view on the next steps, including any plans for publication and any consultation and implementation timetable.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-26/15689>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-26/15690>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-26/15691>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Travellers

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour) [16514] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will bring forward a Race Action Plan to tackle (a) systemic inequalities affecting and (b) discrimination faced by (i) Romani, (ii) Roma and (iii) Irish Travellers in the (A) education, (B) economic, (C) criminal justice and (D) health sectors.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour) [16515] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps he is taking to ensure that the lived experiences of Romani, Roma and Irish Travellers are taken fully into account in consideration of policy affecting them.

Reply from Lee Rowley: The Government takes its responsibilities and statutory obligations to all our communities seriously. Simultaneously we emphasise the importance of governing on behalf of everyone, irrespective of background, race, ethnicity or any other characteristics.

Constant attempts to atomise public policy making will neither be successful nor help the communities they erroneously purport to assist.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16514>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-01/16515>

New Publication

Visualise: Race & Inclusion in Secondary School Art Education

https://assets.website-files.com/61488e50132da098d2dd729b/65e6182ba9a49e6d304e16a8_Visualise-Race%20and%20Inclusion%20in%20Secondary%20School%20Art%20Education_Master_Digital.pdf

TOP

Racism, Religious Hatred, and Discrimination

Scottish Parliament Motion

Foysoil Choudhury (Labour) [S6M-12428] **United Nations International Day to Combat Islamophobia on 15 March 2024** – That the Parliament welcomes the United Nations International Day to Combat Islamophobia on 15 March 2024; understands that there has been a recent significant rise in reported Islamophobic attacks across the country, and appreciates the hard work that Police Scotland, local authorities and community organisations are undertaking to tackle this form of hate in society; recognises what it considers to be the immensely challenging circumstances facing Scotland's Muslim community, as, it believes, men and women come under attack from extremist ideologies and experience frequent abuse, as well as discrimination and marginalisation in the media, at school, at work and online; acknowledges all of those who have supported Islamophobia awareness and continue to stand with those affected by any form of hate, and hopes for Scotland to continue to be a place where people are free to practice their faith without fear.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-12428>

Islamophobia

Peter Grant (SNP) [901765] What steps [the Minister] is taking to tackle Islamophobia.

Reply from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan): We have been clear that anti-Muslim hatred has absolutely no place in our communities. I feel that strongly, as I represent one of the most diverse constituencies in the country. We have provided over £6 million to the anti-Muslim hatred monitoring and support service Tell MAMA, and just shy of £13 million to schemes protecting mosques and faith schools. Funding for both measures had been uplifted in response to increased reporting since October.

Peter Grant: An extreme right-wing Conservative MP was allowed to go on an extreme right-wing Conservative-funding TV station and make a series of vile Islamophobic remarks. The MP was not suspended for Islamophobia; he was suspended for refusing to obey an order from his party leader. Does the Minister understand why it is that, not only among Muslim communities but across a much wider range of believers and non-believers, people are becoming increasingly concerned that, in the eyes of this Government, Islamophobia is seen as somehow less abhorrent than other forms of racism?

Reply from Felicity Buchan: The Government were absolutely clear that those were not appropriate comments. That is completely clear. Any form of religious hatred is not acceptable in our society.

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): The recent rise in anti-Muslim hate incidents and crimes is really worrying. Will the Government do everything they can to improve education so as to improve multi-faith understanding and tackle this scourge?

Reply from Felicity Buchan: My right hon. Friend makes a good point. Education is critical, and we need to bring our communities together. Last weekend, I was delighted to attend an inter-faith event in my constituency that included Holland Park synagogue, where it was hosted, and al-Manaar mosque. That inter-faith work and communities working together is critical. ...

Liz Twist (Labour): For almost two years this Tory Government have failed to appoint an independent adviser on Islamophobia. The former adviser has criticised the Government for their failure to engage, and revealed that he could not even get them to provide terms of reference for his role. Does the Minister agree that this Government lack the political will to tackle this pernicious hatred, or even to call it out?

Reply from Felicity Buchan: I strongly disagree. We plan to appoint a new independent adviser on anti-Muslim hatred, and we will update the House shortly. ...

Anum Qaisar (SNP): Like so many, I am fearful of the inability to call out Islamophobia becoming a scaremongering tactic to stoke fear and division and garner support for the extreme far right. It makes life difficult or even dangerous for Muslims. Across all four nations, more can and should be done on a cross-party basis to tackle that hatred. That starts with being able to call out Islamophobia when it occurs. Could the Minister clarify the line between being wrong and being Islamophobic?

Reply from Felicity Buchan: There is no question but that those comments were wrong. I face the Mayor of London in opposition all the time, and I could criticise him for many things—housing, policing, fire or transport—but I would never accuse him of being in any way under the influence of Islamists.

Anum Qaisar: That response will give people little comfort. Let me paint a picture for the Minister of what life is like for many Muslims growing up and living across these four nations. A month after the 9/11 attacks in 2001, my local mosque in Carfin was petrol bombed. The two men were sentenced to one year and nine months respectively. If asked, most Muslims will have their own stories. Muslims are not asking for special treatment.

They work, pay taxes, send their kids to the same schools and support the same football teams. The Government have had ample opportunity over the past few weeks to commit to tackling this stain on society, but there has been no substantial change in policy. Next Friday 15 March marks the UN's International Day to Combat Islamophobia. Will the Government use that opportunity to commit to adopting the definition of the all-party parliamentary group?

Reply from Felicity Buchan: I want to make it clear that this Government will not tolerate religious hatred towards Muslims or any other faith group. That is a red line. This Government are aware, very sadly, of incidents of anti-Muslim hatred, which is why we put in place an extra £4.9 million of protective security funding for Muslim mosques, faith schools and communities. We are 100% behind our Muslim communities.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-04/debates/25338D67-1AE6-4DDA-99CE-1D08B53EF20D/Islamophobia>

UK Parliament, House of Commons Written Answer

Protest: Greater London

John Hayes (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether his Department has provided guidance to the Metropolitan Police on tackling anti-Semitic (a) chants and (b) slogans during protests.

Reply from Chris Philp: This Government is clear that antisemitism is completely unacceptable, and we have a robust legislative framework to respond to hate crimes which target race and religion. The Government expects police to enforce the law where appropriate to protect communities and maintain public order and public safety.

Whilst the police are operationally independent and work in line with the College of Policing's operational guidance to respond to hate crime, we expect the police to fully investigate all hate crimes and work with the Crown Prosecution Service to ensure perpetrators are brought to justice. Whether specific chants or slogans constitute an offence depends on the specific context surrounding the incident and decisions on arrests are a matter for the police.

The College of Policing is responsible for providing guidance to police and are operationally independent from Government. The College of Policing have provided guidance and communications with frontline officers to ensure all officers have the latest information, advice and support they should be providing to communities.

On 28 February 2024, the Government published the Defending Democracy Policing Protocol after consulting with senior policing leaders. The protocol includes seven commitments aimed at addressing the growing trend of intimidatory behaviour and attempts to manipulate the democratic process. The full protocol can be accessed here: [Defending democracy policing protocol](#).

I also recently made a statement to the House of Commons on antisemitism in the UK. A copy of this on Hansard is available here: [Antisemitism in the UK](#).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-23/15408>

UK Parliament, House of Lords Written Answer

NHS: Discrimination

Baroness Manzoor (Conservative) [HL2804] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the extent of racism and discrimination within the NHS; what steps NHS England are taking to collate data on this issue; and how they disseminate

best practice to improve working culture within the NHS.

Reply from Lord Markham: The National Health Service is one of the most diverse organisations in this country. As of September 2023, 27.3% of hospital and community health service staff reported an ethnic minority background. However, data shows that disabled staff, staff from ethnic minority background, and staff with other protected characteristics face a worse experience of working in the NHS when it comes to abuse, bullying and harassment, and career progression.

Since 2016, NHS England has published an annual *Workforce Race Equality Standard* (WRES) report. Implementation of the WRES is a requirement for NHS commissioners and NHS healthcare providers, including independent organisations through the NHS standard contract. The WRES enables NHS organisations to better understand how they are performing against nine indicators covering issues such as board representation, career progression, and bullying and harassment. They are required to develop action plans to progress and improve against the indicators.

In June 2023, NHS England published the *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Improvement Plan* that sets out targeted actions to address prejudice and discrimination in the NHS workforce. NHS England has also provided guidance to assist trusts and integrated care boards in adopting an improvement approach to the implementation of this plan. It is supported by a repository of good practice and a dashboard, to enable organisations to measure progress.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-27/hl2804>

Information about the Workplace Race Equality Standard, referred to above, can be read at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/workforce-equality-data-standards/equality-standard/>

The Improvement Plan referred to above can be read at

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/nhs-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-improvement-plan/>

Press Release

‘Everyone Must Unite to Combat Intolerance, Stereotypes’, Secretary-General Says, in Message for Day to Combat Islamophobia

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sqsm22148.doc.htm>

News

Gove to appoint adviser to tackle Islamophobia

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/03/08/gove-to-appoint-adviser-to-tackle-islamophobia-as-he-prepar/>

The stark – sometimes racist – reality of being a Black woman in finance

<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/black-women-racism-workplace-finance-international-womens-day-b2508046.html>

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Other Scottish Parliament and Government

Press Releases

Scotland's place in the world

<https://www.gov.scot/news/scotlands-place-in-the-world/>

First Minister's Ramadan Message

<https://twitter.com/ScotGovFM/status/1766909442208018588>

New Publication

Building a New Scotland: an independent Scotland's Place in the World

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/building-new-scotland-independent-scotlands-place-world/>

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Other UK Parliament and Government

UK Parliament, House of Commons Written Answer

Honour Based Violence

Jim Shannon (DUP) [15281] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many instances of honour based violence due to forced marriage there were in the (a) UK and (b) devolved Administration in each of the last three years.

Reply from Laura Ferris: The Home Office holds data on the number of police recorded forced marriage offences in England and Wales. The data are given in the table. Police recorded offences in Northern Ireland and Scotland are the responsibility of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Scottish Government respectively.

As with all police recorded crime figures, these data only cover offences that were reported to and recorded by the police. It is recognised that force marriage is a hidden crime and victims can be reluctant to bring them to the attention of police or other authorities. These data, therefore, are likely to only represent a proportion of the actual forced marriage offences committed.

The joint Home Office and Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) provides support and advice for victims, those at risk, and professionals, through its public helpline and inbox.

We are working to increase reporting of this crime which is why the FMU has an extensive outreach programme to provide dedicated training and awareness raising sessions for professionals and communities across the country, including the police and social workers. In 2023, the FMU delivered training and awareness-raising activity to 3,656 police officers, social workers and other professionals. Victims and organisations are encouraged to report potential signs of forced marriage to professionals with safeguarding responsibilities.

[Police recorded forced marriage offences](#)

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-22/15281>

New Publication

Understanding and Responding to Blasphemy Extremism in the UK

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65e9ba875b65240011f21b9a/Understanding+and+Responding+to+Blasphemy+Extremism+in+the+UK.pdf>

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Cost of Living

Scottish Government Website

Help during the cost of living crisis

Most households are concerned about the cost of living, with worries about issues such as rent and mortgages, food and utility bills, energy costs, and debt.

In response, the Scottish Government has launched a new website that provides information to help people access support with

- Energy and Bills
- Benefits and Income
- Children and Families
- Debt and Money
- Health and Wellbeing

Your local council might be able to help if you need urgent help with money, food or fuel – contact the council for information.

<https://costofliving.campaign.gov.scot/>

News

The UK economic outlook is bleak, think tanks warn, with tough choices for the next government

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/conservative-party-ap-labour-party-rishi-sunak-jeremy-hunt-b2508785.html>

'It's all fallen flat': households earning more than £60,000 on how they are struggling financially

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/mar/04/middle-class-workers-mortgages-bills-tax>

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Other News

Regulators urge safe giving to charities this Ramadan

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regulators-urge-safe-giving-to-charities-this-ramadan>

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Bills in Progress

** new or updated this week

Scottish Parliament

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>

Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/police-ethics-conduct-and-scrutiny-scotland-bill>

UK Parliament

Asylum Application (Entry to the United Kingdom) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3530>

Asylum Seekers (Permission to Work) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3627>

The Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023 [Draft]

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2023/9780348253191/contents>

Family Visas (Minimum Income) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3684>

Housing Standards (Refugees and Asylum Seekers) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3618/stages>

Illegal Immigration (Offences) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3649>

Immigration and Nationality Fees (Exemption for NHS Clinical Staff) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3660>

**** Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3540>

Report Stage, House of Lords

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-04/debates/525F3E62-A481-4C81-BB49-69BE8525B763/SafetyOfRwanda\(AsylumAndImmigration\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-04/debates/525F3E62-A481-4C81-BB49-69BE8525B763/SafetyOfRwanda(AsylumAndImmigration)Bill)

and

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-06/debates/4475C1E4-2C43-44B0-B087-0DDA3ADD222F/SafetyOfRwanda\(AsylumAndImmigration\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-03-06/debates/4475C1E4-2C43-44B0-B087-0DDA3ADD222F/SafetyOfRwanda(AsylumAndImmigration)Bill)

Amendment Paper

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54513/documents/4526>

Bill as amended on Report

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54559/documents/4541>

Scottish Law Officers (Devolution) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3665>

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/terrorism-protection-of-premises-draft-bill-overarching-documents>

Workforce Information (Ethnicity) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3522>

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Consultations

** new or updated this week

Your Police 2023-2024 (closing date 31 March 2024)

<https://consult.scotland.police.uk/strategy-insight-and-innovation/your-police-2023-2024/>

Ending conversion practices in Scotland (closing date 2 April 2024)

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-conversion-practices-scotland-scottish-government-consultation/>

**** Disclosure Scotland fees: discounting, waivers and accredited bodies**

(closing date 28 May 2024)

<https://consult.gov.scot/disclosure-scotland/fees-discounting-waivers-and-accredited-bodies/>

ITV/Tell MAMA survey on mosque safety in the UK (closing date not stated)

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/V7V5B6L>

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Job Opportunities

[Click here](#) to find out about job opportunities.

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Funding Opportunities

** new or updated this week

**** closes this week!**

Alwaleed Community Grant Scheme

Closing date: 11 March 2024

Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World funding of up to £5,000 for projects which engage with the following themes: Interfaith and intra-faith relations, Islam and the environment, Education and skills development, and Digital Islam. For information see <http://tinyurl.com/4atszf5m>

Ethnic Minority Development Fund

Closing date: 15 April 2024

National Lottery Community Fund grants from £500 to £15,000 for projects run by ethnic minority-led third-sector organisations in Scotland that bring ethnic minority people together and build strong relationships across communities, help more ethnic minority people to be the best they can be, by supporting them as soon as possible, or improve

places and spaces that matter to ethnic minority communities. For information see <https://cemvoscotland.org.uk/emdf/>

**** Faithful Welcome**

Application deadline not stated

Faith in Community Scotland, and Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees funding of up to £500 to support Scotland's faith communities to welcome refugees and asylum seekers and enable them to be an integral part of community life, wherever they are coming from and whatever the reason. For information see <https://tinyurl.com/bdd5kr6n>

Cost-of-Living Support Scotland

Application deadline not stated

National Lottery funding from £10,001 to £75,000 for projects to help support individuals, families and communities currently experiencing hardship as a result of the cost-of-living increases. The programme aims to fund activity that reduces the impact of, or prevents financial insecurity so that people have more resilience and are more able to identify ways to deal with the impact of increased cost of living in their lives, are able to shape activity in their community to address the increased cost-of-living, and have more access to support and services that will help them to deal with the increased cost of living. For information and to apply see

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/cost-of-living-support-fund>

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Events, Conferences, and Training

** new or updated this week

**** this week!**

The Basics: A Human Rights and Equalities First Approach

13 March 2024 (online, 10.00–12.00)

14 March 2024 (online, 10.00–12.00)

THRE course to find out what human rights and equalities are and why they matter, what a human rights and equalities first approach is and why it is relevant to you and your organisation, and how we can start a conversation and talk constructively about human rights and equalities. For information see <https://tinyurl.com/yajruabu>

Governance - A Human Rights and Equalities First Approach

20 March 2024 (online, 10.00–12.30)

THRE introduction to what a human rights and equalities approach means for third sector boards and committees. For information see <https://tinyurl.com/3npb6d7f>

PANEL Workshop: A Human Rights and Equalities First Approach in Practice

25 March 2024 (online, 1.00–4.00)

THRE course about to find out about the PANEL principles, and how they can help you apply a human rights and equalities first approach. For information see <https://tinyurl.com/2srdmx62>

Rights of Refugees and Asylum Seekers

13 May 2024 (Glasgow, 10.00–12.30)

PAIH course explore how the asylum system works from the perspective of a claimant and the process involved in making a claim for asylum. The course also explores the journeys and barriers faced by both refugees and asylum seekers reaching and building a new life

in Scotland and their respective entitlement to services. For information see <https://www.paih.org/what-we-do/migrants-rights-courses>

Rights and Entitlements of EEA Nationals

15 May 2024 (Glasgow, 10.00–12.30)

PAIH course to find out about fundamental issues of housing, homelessness and welfare entitlements of EEA nationals and look at how service users might prepare themselves for an economy in recession and cost of living spiralling. For information see <https://www.paih.org/what-we-do/migrants-rights-courses>

No Recourse To Public Funds

22 May 2024 (Glasgow (10.00–12.30)

PAIH course to help frontline workers identify a tenant's current status, clarify what this means in terms of access to public funds and plan effective support where difficulties arise. For information see <https://www.paih.org/what-we-do/migrants-rights-courses>

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Useful Links

Scottish Parliament <http://www.parliament.scot/>

Scottish Government <https://www.gov.scot/>

UK Parliament <http://www.parliament.uk/>

GovUK (links to UK Government Departments) <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations>

One Scotland <http://onescotland.org/>

Scottish Refugee Council <http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk>

New Scots <https://newscots.scot/>

Refugee Survival Trust <https://www.rst.org.uk/>

Freedom from Torture <https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/>

Interfaith Scotland <https://interfaithscotland.org/>

Equality and Human Rights Commission <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en>

Equality Advisory Support Service <http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/>

Scottish Human Rights Commission <http://www.scottishhumanrights.com/>

ACAS <http://www.acas.org.uk/>

SCVO <https://scvo.org.uk/>

Volunteer Scotland <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/>

Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) <https://www.oscr.org.uk/>

Scottish Fundraising Standards Panel <https://www.goodfundraising.scot/>

Disclosure Scotland <https://www.mygov.scot/disclosure-types>

Volunteer Scotland Disclosure Services

<https://www.volunteerscotland.net/for-organisations/disclosure-services/>

BBC News <https://www.bbc.com/news>

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SCoJeC
Scottish Council of
Jewish Communities

Representing, connecting, and supporting Jewish people in Scotland



*The **Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC)** is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland. It advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community, and also works in partnership with other organisations to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality. (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438) <https://www.scojec.org/>*

BEMIS
Empowering Scotland's Ethnic and
Cultural Minority Communities

***BEMIS** is the Scottish national Ethnic Minorities led umbrella body, supporting, empowering, and building the capacity of minority third sector community organisations. As a strategic partner with Government, it is proactive in influencing the development of race equality policy in Scotland, and helps develop and progress multicultural Scotland, active citizenship, democracy, and Human Rights Education at the Scottish, UK, and European levels. (Scottish Charity, no. SC027692) <http://www.bemis.org.uk/>*



*The **Scottish Government** is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and social justice for all those who live in Scotland. **One Scotland** is the Scottish Government campaign designed to tackle racism. It aims to raise awareness of racist attitudes, highlight its negative impact and recognise the valuable contributions that other cultures have made to our society – and make Scotland no place for racism. <http://www.gov.scot/>*

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