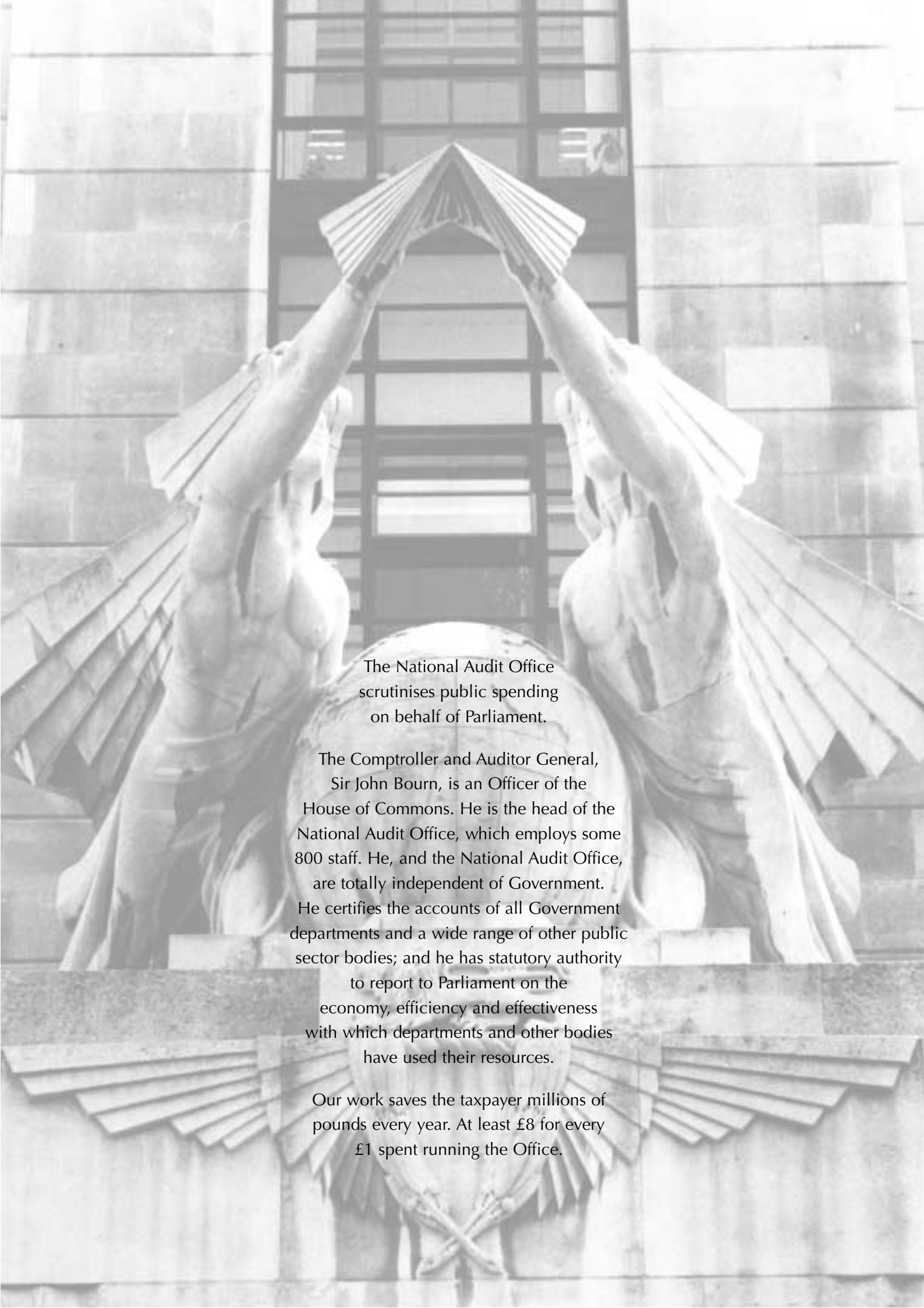


# Asylum and migration: a review of Home Office statistics

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL  
HC 625 Session 2003-2004: 25 May 2004





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# Asylum and migration: a review of Home Office statistics



**REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL  
HC 625 Session 2003-2004: 25 May 2004**

This report was prepared for the purposes of informing the Home Office about the reliability of its quarterly asylum statistics; whether those statistics are prepared in line with Office for National Statistics guidelines and standards for compiling National Statistics; and whether, on the basis of statistical evidence, recent changes in the number of asylum applications have had any significant impact on other forms of migration.

**This report has been prepared under Section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983 for presentation to the House of Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act.**

**John Bourn**  
**Comptroller and Auditor General**

**National Audit Office**  
**25 May 2004**

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# summary

- 1** The Prime Minister made a commitment that the government would halve the number of asylum applications by the end of September 2003 compared with October 2002. The Home Office has reported that it met this target, with the number of reported asylum applications falling from 8,770 in October 2002 to 4,225 in September 2003. To provide an indication of the current level of asylum activity, the Figure below shows some of the headline quarterly asylum statistics for January to March 2004, which the Home Office has published today alongside this report on its Internet website at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html).

## Headline asylum statistics for the quarter January to March 2004

Headline statistic	Numbers for the quarter
Applications	■ 8,940 principal applicants and 1,645 dependants
Initial decisions	■ 14,640 initial decisions - 535 applications granted asylum, 14,105 refused ■ 80 per cent of substantive applications <sup>1</sup> received in the previous quarter were decided within 2 months
Appeals	■ 10,100 appeals received ■ 18,255 appeals determined
Removal of failed asylum seekers	■ 3,320 principal applicants and 765 dependants removed from the country
Applications for support	■ 7,425 applications ■ 890 applicants notified as being ineligible to apply for support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) under Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002
Supported asylum seekers	■ 76,245 asylum seekers including dependants were receiving subsistence support or living in NASS accommodation
Detentions	■ 1,330 principal applicants and dependants detained

### NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> Excludes applications withdrawn or from people who could have made their asylum applications in other safe countries before arriving in the UK.

Source: National Audit Office summary of Home Office quarterly asylum statistics for the period January to March 2004



The Home Office specifically asked the National Audit Office to:

- Assess the data reliability of the quarterly asylum statistics released by the Home Office (Part 1 of this Report).
- Assess whether the process for compiling those statistics is in line with Office for National Statistics (ONS) guidelines and standards for compiling National Statistics (Part 2).
- On the basis of the statistical evidence, consider whether recent changes in the number of asylum applications have had any significant impact on other forms of migration (Part 3).
- Make recommendations for tackling any weaknesses the audit may reveal.

## National Audit Office terms of reference

- 2 In April 2004, the Home Office asked the National Audit Office to examine the reliability of its quarterly asylum statistics, consider whether recent changes in the number of applications had had any impact on other forms of migration, and report publicly alongside the release of the quarterly asylum statistics in May 2004.

## What we did

- 3 The Home Office draws on four key computer databases for the data it uses to compile its quarterly asylum statistics. It operates three of these databases itself, while the fourth is operated by the Immigration Appellate Authority<sup>1</sup> - an independent judicial body sponsored by the Department for Constitutional Affairs. The Home Office's databases are operated in a variety of locations around the country to collect detailed information on each asylum case. The Home Office's quarterly bulletins of asylum statistics report on a sub-set of the detailed information that is available.
- 4 For the purpose of our review of the reliability of the asylum statistics, we focused on 12 key sets of data contained within the quarterly bulletins (see Figure 3). We visited 21 offices around the country, including ports of entry, where we examined systems for collecting these key asylum data and entering them onto the relevant databases and where we also interviewed immigration officers and other officials. We examined the work of Home Office statisticians in reviewing quarterly asylum data and preparing asylum statistics for publication in line with a Code of Practice and Protocols issued by the Office for National Statistics. We also considered the coverage and presentation of the statistics. We commissioned from an independent expert a review of whether recent changes in the number of asylum applications have had any significant impact on other forms of migration. We consulted with the National Statistician and the Statistics Commission, and sought advice from the Royal Statistical Society on experts who might help us in our work. Details of our methods are at Appendix 1.
- 5 The National Audit Office is also currently working on two other reports relating to asylum and immigration issues, which are scheduled for publication in June 2004: *Improving the Speed and Quality of Asylum Decisions*, and *Visa Entry to the United Kingdom: the entry clearance operation*.

<sup>1</sup> The Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) consists of Immigration Adjudicators and the Immigration Appeal Tribunal (IAT). Adjudicators hear appeals against decisions made by the Home Secretary (and his officials) in asylum and immigration matters, and the IAT hears appeals against decisions taken by the Adjudicator. The Authority is part of the Department for Constitutional Affairs.



## Key conclusions

### 6 We reached the following key conclusions:

The asylum data and statistics are in most respects reliable, including the Home Office's reporting that the number of asylum applications halved between October 2002 and September 2003.

There are, however, several weaknesses in the process of compiling the statistics and in their presentation, some of which impact on other items in the published statistics.

The Home Office applies the National Statistics Code of Practice and Protocols well in some areas, but there is scope for the Home Office to consult users more, present the statistics more clearly and improve their coverage. The Home Office has appropriate practices in place to ensure the integrity of its asylum statistics, in line with established protocols.

There is no clear statistical evidence that the reduction in the number of asylum applications has had any significant impact on other forms of migration.

Reasons for migration are extremely complex and a change in numbers for any route of entry may reflect the operation of a broad range of factors. Often, these factors work independently of one another and reflect decisions taken by a myriad of people and organisations, including migrants themselves, governments and other organisations, in response to changing circumstances.

Reductions in the number of asylum applications can be explained, in part, by measures taken by the government to manage down the intake of asylum seekers, alongside other wider trends. The UK remains a very attractive destination for some people from overseas. In the time available, the statistical analyses in this Report focused on changes in the number of people entering the UK through individual routes of entry. Further research might usefully be carried out to compare asylum flows with the combined statistics for all routes of entry and by nationality. This would allow a broader picture to be obtained of any relationships that might exist between asylum and other forms of migration, rather than one based only on individual routes.

## Key findings

### On the reliability of the asylum data and statistics

7 The asylum data and statistics are in most respects reliable including the Home Office's reporting that the number of asylum applications halved between October 2002 and September 2003. There are several weaknesses in the process of compiling the statistics and in their presentation, however, some of which impact on other items in the published statistics:

- although the data and statistics reliably record the number of asylum applications received, there is a weakness in the system for referrals of illegal immigrants that brings a risk to the completeness of the data. Where illegal immigrants are arrested but then not detained in police cells or immigration removal centres, they may be referred by the police or some enforcement offices to the nearest Home Office unit where they may make their application for asylum. There is a risk that some of these illegal immigrants do not present themselves at any of the Home Office units, do not make an application and disappear once more from view. The Home Office did not have procedures to check that all people so referred subsequently made an asylum application. It recorded some 50 people a month being referred in this manner. Although this is likely to be an understatement of the number of referrals, it is less than 2 per cent of the number of applications actually recorded;

- there are some weaknesses in the data on the timeliness of initial decisions. The Home Office aims to make 75 per cent of initial decisions within two months of the asylum application. Dates on which asylum decisions are despatched to applicants are sometimes recorded before official decision letters have been sent out, overstating the Home Office's performance against its target. By contrast, in 17 per cent of the 103 decision cases we tested, despatch dates had not been recorded despite the decision letters having been sent out. At least half of these cases had been despatched within the Home Office's target period. Their omission understated the Home Office's performance although not by enough to affect significantly the Home Office's achievement of its timeliness target in 2002-03;
- removals of asylum applicants are not always evidenced satisfactorily. Many planned removals are aborted late in the removal process, so confirmation that a failed applicant has left the country is important. In 6 per cent of the cases we tested, there was no supporting evidence to confirm the removals;
- although the data on applications for NASS support are generally reliable, the Home Office's presentation of the statistics is, in our view, materially misleading. The Home Office includes in its statistics on the number of applications for NASS support, only applications from asylum seekers deemed eligible to apply for support. It shows separately those deemed ineligible. This approach could lead to users of the statistics misunderstanding the total number of people who apply for support. The latest quarterly statistics published today report 7,425 applications for NASS support and 890 cases deemed ineligible in the quarter. It is not clear to the user that these two figures need to be added together to arrive at the total number of applications of 8,315 and so the statistic for the number of applications is materially understated;
- data on asylum seekers supported by NASS do not include some people receiving support. The providers of NASS accommodation for asylum seekers estimated that, at the end of March 2004, 2,611 people who were recorded as no longer being in receipt of NASS support were in fact still in their accommodation. The Home Office told us that some providers do not evict people whose NASS support has been terminated, as this would make them destitute. It is revising its contracts to include eviction clauses and to link contractor payments to available spaces, as a means of encouraging providers to evict. We consider this weakness materially affects the statistic for the number of asylum seekers supported by NASS;
- We also found that the statistics on asylum seekers supported by NASS at the end of March 2004 included many for whom support should have been terminated but had not been. This represents a waste of public resources. Incomplete data on the Home Office's main asylum database results in cases not being identified for cessation of support on the due dates. In a sample month, we found that some 300 cases identified by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) for cessation had not been identified as such until after the due date. In our sample testing of Home Office files on asylum seekers supported by NASS as at 31 March 2004, we found several cases where support should have been terminated but had not been; and
- the Home Office recently identified that 212 people detained in prison were missing from the detentions database and therefore from the statistics and this is material to the published total. The Home Office relies on the Prison Service and individual prisons to inform it of details of non-UK nationals detained in prisons, but these arrangements do not work well. The Home Office has not always been informed of the numbers of such detainees. Home Office data include details of some detainees who have been released from prison without its knowledge, while some detainees are not included in the Home Office data at all. In our testing of cases, we found that the Home Office had no evidence on file to confirm those recorded as being detained in prison.

- 8 In the time available we were not able to select and test a large enough sample of data entered on the Home Office's asylum databases to provide with sufficient precision a view on the reliability of the statistics. During the three weeks available, the Home Office was able to make available 276 (some 80 per cent) of the 350 files we selected for audit testing. The above conclusions on the reliability of the asylum data and statistics are therefore based on the assurance we have taken from our review and testing of the operation of data entry procedures and the results of the files we audited. Our view on reliability is also affected by the 74 files that the Home Office was unable to provide in the time available for our testing.

## On the application of the National Statistics Code of Practice and Protocols

- 9 In 2002, the National Statistician, as head of both the Office for National Statistics and the Government Statistical Service (GSS) issued a Code of Practice setting out eight principles that government statisticians are expected to follow and uphold. The ONS has also issued 11 separate Protocols, providing further information on how key aspects of the Code should be implemented. The Code and the Protocols are available on the National Statistics website at [www.statistics.gov.uk/about/national\\_statistics/cop/default.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/national_statistics/cop/default.asp).

- 10 The Home Office applies the Code and Protocols well in some areas, but there is scope for further improvement:

- it has given insufficient attention to consulting formally with users other than those in government;
- the quarterly asylum statistics do not allow all users to understand how the asylum process works. The Home Office is working to improve them;
- the quarterly asylum statistics do not provide a comprehensive picture of people receiving support funded by the Home Office. They only disclose those people residing in NASS accommodation or in receipt of subsistence allowances. The statistics therefore fail to account for up to 16,000 asylum cases involving single people or families in accommodation and receiving subsistence funded by the Home Office, but whose support is administered under arrangements with local authorities. The Home Office has not included any of these cases in its asylum statistics because of difficulties in obtaining reliable data from all local authorities. The number of these cases is decreasing over time because there are no new cases being funded under these arrangements. In addition, under another set of arrangements that has now been ceased, the Home Office pays the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to support some asylum seekers; such cases are now estimated to have fallen to around 1,000. The Home Office knew that the number of cases was falling and would eventually cease and therefore decided that its resources were better devoted to data on asylum seekers supported by NASS;
- Home Office statisticians need to improve documentation of their work. They could better record the work they actually carry out in their preparation of the statistics, to aid internal review of the work and external validation of it in National Statistics reviews; and
- statistical definitions reflect UK legislation and asylum systems. The Home Office is working with European counterparts on greater harmonisation, however, on key definitions for asylum statistics provided to the European Commission for its own publications.

## On whether there is a statistical relationship between the reduction in the number of asylum applications and other forms of migration

- 11** The trend of asylum applications was upward in the months leading up to the autumn of 2002, when there was a sharp fall followed by an even sharper fall at the start of 2003. The number of applications then rose gently from June to September 2003, before falling once more. The Home Office has attributed the sharp fall in reported asylum applications since October 2002 to a range of statutory and non-statutory measures to reduce the number of applications, and to wider trends in asylum flows.
- 12** Since before October 2002, the Home Office has modelled the combined effects of the various measures on the number of asylum applications and re-forecast on a six-monthly basis, taking account of actual monthly asylum applications. The number of asylum applications has declined by more than the Home Office's most optimistic forecast of October 2002, although that forecast did not take account of all intake reduction measures that were subsequently introduced.
- 13** Professor John Salt and James Clarke at the Migration Research Unit of University College London (UCL) undertook, on our behalf, a review of whether, on the basis of the statistical evidence available, recent changes in the number of asylum applications have had any significant impact on other forms of migration. They examined whether the reduction in the number of asylum applications since 2002 was due to:
- fewer asylum seekers wanting to come to the UK, reflected in increased asylum applications in other European countries commensurate with the reduction in this country; and/or
  - some people who might previously have claimed asylum entering the country through other legal migration routes; and/or
  - some people not choosing to claim asylum upon coming to this country, having entered or stayed illegally.

*There is no statistical evidence that asylum seekers who might otherwise have come to the UK switched to other Western European destinations*

- 14** The UCL team analysed data on the number of asylum applications received by 17 Western European countries<sup>2</sup> in 2002 and 2003, and found that, like the UK, most other Western European countries also experienced a decline in the number of asylum applications over the period 2002 to 2003. No other country in this group experienced as large a reduction as that of the UK, however, and only Portugal had a percentage reduction greater than that of the UK. The reduction in the number of asylum applications elsewhere in Europe, including in most of the UK's neighbouring countries, suggests there was a common trend across the region and that a diversion of asylum seekers away from the UK in order to claim asylum elsewhere in Western Europe was unlikely to have occurred.

<sup>2</sup> Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

*There is no statistical evidence that some people who might previously have claimed asylum entered the country through other legal migration routes*

- 15 The UCL team examined 10 different data sets over the four years 1999-00 to 2002-03 to determine whether people who might previously have come to the UK claiming asylum entered the country instead as another form of legal migrant.

#### **The 10 different data sets examined by the UCL team**

- Applications for work permits<sup>1</sup>
- People entering the UK with work permits
- Workers joining the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS)<sup>2</sup>
- Workers joining the Sectors Based Scheme (SBS)<sup>2</sup>
- People entering the UK as domestic workers
- People entering the UK as au pairs
- People entering the UK under European Community Association Agreements (ECAA)<sup>2</sup>
- People entering the UK as students
- International Passenger Survey (IPS) data on immigrants and emigrants<sup>3</sup>
- International Passenger Survey (IPS) data on visitors

#### **NOTES**

- 1 This data set consisted of applications for work permits from employers for people outside the country, and first permissions for work permits for people already in the country. It excluded extensions to existing work permits and changes of employer.
- 2 See glossary.
- 3 Immigrants are people who have been out of the UK for more than a year and enter the country with the intention of remaining for more than a year. Emigrants are people who have been in the UK for more than a year and leave with the intention of living abroad for more than a year.

*Source: National Audit Office summary of data sets examined by the UCL team*

- 16 Between 2002 and 2003, there was a net reduction of 34,763 in the number of asylum applications in the UK. The Figure below shows the 11 nationalities where there were the largest reductions. Together, these nationalities accounted for some 80 per cent (29,446) of the total gross fall of 36, 819 in the number of applications.

- 17 These 11 key countries have a wide geographical spread and represent a broad spectrum of experience in the generation of asylum seekers, including the incidence of major wars, local conflicts and their aftermath, repressive regimes and the involvement of particular persecuted groups in the population. They form a reasonable group against which to measure the possible diversion of flows into other routes of entry. It can reasonably be expected that, if there had been any diversion of asylum seekers into other routes of entry into the UK, it would show up in the data for these 11 key countries. The focus was therefore upon these 11 key countries throughout the statistical analysis.

### **Reduction in the number of asylum applications from nationals from 11 key countries, 2002 to 2003**

*Nationals from 11 key countries together accounted for 29,446, or 80 per cent, of the total (gross) fall in asylum applications over the period 2002 to 2003.*

<b>Total net<sup>1</sup> reduction in the number of applications, 2002-03</b>	<b>34,763</b>
<b>Total gross<sup>1</sup> reduction in the number of applications, 2002-03</b>	<b>36,819</b>
<b>Country of nationality</b>	<b>Gross Reduction</b>
Iraq	10,524
Afghanistan	4,912
Zimbabwe	4,373
Sri Lanka	2,427
Serbia and Montenegro	1,462
Somalia	1,442
Czech Republic	1,292
Poland	894
Sierra Leone	769
Democratic Republic of Congo	688
Romania	663
<b>Total reduction across these 11 countries</b>	<b>29,446</b>

#### **NOTE**

- 1 There were reductions in asylum applications from some nationalities, and increases from others. The total gross reduction is the sum of the former, while the total net reduction is the former minus the latter.

*Source: The UCL team's analysis of Home Office data*

- 18 There was no significant statistical relationship between the number of work permit applications and asylum applications over the period. Nor did the pattern and trend for workers under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme provide conclusive evidence that people, who might previously have come to the UK claiming asylum, entered the country instead under that Scheme. If any diversion did occur, it would appear to relate mainly to Polish nationals, whose participation in the Scheme increased the most. There might, however, be many reasons for this increase and further examination would be required to explore these.

- 19** As the Sectors Based Scheme only started as recently as May 2003, it was not possible to conduct any trend analysis within the Scheme or to compare the trend with that of asylum applications. The number of people of different nationalities on the Scheme does not appear to be related to the fall in the number of asylum applications over the period. It is therefore unlikely that the Scheme represents an alternative route of entry into the UK for people who might previously have entered the country as asylum seekers.
- 20** The number of people coming to the UK as domestic servants was too small to have had any impact on the number of asylum applications. The number of people coming to the UK as au pairs increased in 2002 and 2003, due to 2003 being the first year that nationals from six Eastern European countries were eligible to enter the country as au pairs. Overall, the entry of such nationals precludes any meaningful comparison between changes in the number of au pairs and of asylum applications over the period.
- 21** There is also little likelihood of a link between the increase in entrants under European Community Association Agreements (ECAA) and the fall in the number of asylum applications over the period. It is likely that the buoyant state of the UK labour market and the opportunities offered by the ECAA system would have persuaded nationals of some of the countries covered by these arrangements to come to the UK to work.
- 22** The number of overseas students entering the UK fell by 13 per cent between 2002 and 2003, while the total number of students from the 11 key countries fell by some 5 per cent. The evidence therefore does not support the view that potential asylum seekers have been diverted into entering the UK as students.

*Limitations or inadequacies in other sources of data precluded further statistical analysis for the purposes of this review*

- 23** The Home Office relies on the ONS to provide information on the number of migrants and visitors arriving in and departing from this country, from its International Passenger Survey. The Survey is intended only to provide a broad indication of the numbers of migrants and visitors and does not sample enough migrants to allow for any meaningful analysis of the nationalities of people arriving in the UK as migrants. Although there are major limitations in interpreting visitor data for the purposes of this review, given the wide range of people and types of journey they cover, there does not appear to be a clear or consistent link between the fall in the number of asylum applications and the change in the number of visitors to the UK in 2002 and 2003.



**24** The UCL team would also, ideally, have liked to include in their statistical analysis the annual National Statistics about migrant workers, published by the DWP as complementary data alongside the other 10 data sets analysed. The most recent set of published statistics was for 2001-02, however, and therefore did not cover 2002 or 2003. DWP was due to publish the 2002-03 statistics in April 2004 but has announced today that publication has been delayed because of concerns about the quality of statistics produced from data taken from the National Insurance Recording System. Previous years' statistics have always undercounted, to some degree, the total number of migrants applying to work in the UK each year. Further details are set out in DWP's Press Notice issued today, which can be found at [www.dwp.gov.uk/mediacentre/press\\_release\\_archive\\_index.asp](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/mediacentre/press_release_archive_index.asp). The Department expects to receive new data from the System in July 2004, which will allow it to revise prior years' statistics and provide a more complete picture of migrants applying for National Insurance numbers. It will then use these to publish relevant National Statistics, although DWP will not be able to announce a date for their publication until it has received the new data. As the DWP data were intended to complement the other data sets used by the UCL team, their absence did not impair the statistical analysis or its results.

*In the absence of data on illegal migrants it was not possible to assess whether some people have decided not to claim asylum but have entered, or stayed in the UK, illegally*

- 25** There are neither data sources nor estimates of the number of people living illegally in the UK. It was therefore not possible to assess whether some people have decided not to claim asylum but have entered, or stayed in the country, illegally.
- 26** A study completed in 2002 for the Home Office reviewed methodologies used by researchers and government agencies in other countries to estimate the size of illegal populations. The Home Office told us that it is evaluating whether any of the methods described in the 2002 study could be applied in the UK.

### Further analysis of how individual routes of entry work for individual countries would be helpful

**27** The UCL team focused their statistical analyses on changes in the number of people entering the UK through individual routes of entry. The analyses pointed up variation between countries, which makes generalisation difficult. Any diversion away from applying for asylum might, for example, be spread differentially between various alternative routes of entry and might therefore have to be assessed collectively, rather than analysed by individual routes. It is also possible that any diversion might have slowed a decrease already taking place in other routes. To assess how far this might be the case, however, further research would be required. Such research might usefully assess the way in which each of the routes of entry has operated with respect to individual sending countries. Research might also be carried out to compare asylum flows with the combined statistics for all routes of entry and by nationality. This would allow the Home Office to obtain a broader picture of any relationships between asylum and other forms of migration, rather than one based only on individual routes.

## Recommendations

**28** We make the following recommendations:

- i The Home Office should improve its documentation to evidence the removal of failed asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, in order to be able to demonstrate that it has actually removed these people from the country.
- ii Given that most files are passed between different offices and worked on by a variety of officials at various stages in the asylum process, the Home Office needs to improve its control over the management of asylum case files. Better controls over the movement and location of files would reduce the staff cost involved in tracing and retrieving files, reduce delays in handling applicants' cases, and improve accountability.
- iii The Home Office needs to establish and follow common arrangements at the local level for the referral of illegal immigrants by the police to local enforcement offices. It needs to stop the practice whereby some of its enforcement offices refer potential asylum applicants to its Asylum Screening Units to make their asylum applications, rather than register the applications themselves.
- iv While the Home Office is trying to solve the problem of contractors not evicting people whose right to receive support has ceased, it should in the meantime include in its quarterly asylum statistics the number of such people who continue to receive support by occupying NASS-funded accommodation.
- v As part of its quality assurance work, the Home Office should give particular attention to keeping the CID database up-to-date as cases progress so that cases are identified for cessation of NASS support on the due dates.
- vi The Home Office should establish regular meetings with key user groups, such as academics, Members of Parliament and interest groups, to discuss the content and presentation of its asylum statistics, and ways of making its asylum statistics more understandable to the general user, including the media. It should consider users' needs and make its deliberations of any changes widely available on its website.
- vii The Home Office should include in its asylum statistics its best estimates of the number of asylum seekers living in accommodation run by local authorities but funded by the Home Office. It should also set out its plans to confirm the number of such people.
- viii The Home Office should improve the way it records the work carried out by its statisticians in preparing the asylum statistics, to aid internal review and external validation during National Statistics reviews.
- ix The Home Office should work with the Office for National Statistics to put in place better means of identifying migrants entering the UK, to be used for statistically reliable analyses of migration trends including by nationality. Measures might include, for example, recording all migrants and other visitors as they enter or leave the country.
- x The Home Office should complete, as a priority, its review of methods that could be applied in this country to estimate the number of illegal immigrants in the UK, and take action to put in place any methods found to be suitable.
- xi The Home Office should carry out further analysis of asylum and migration statistics, comparing asylum flows against the combined statistics for all routes of entry and by nationality in order to obtain a broader picture of any relationships between asylum and other forms of migration rather than one based on a route-by-route approach.
- xii The Home Office should carry out a data matching exercise between its asylum databases and data on other routes of entry, as a means of identifying whether any refused asylum seekers have subsequently entered the country by other means.



# Part 1

## Reliability of the quarterly asylum statistics

1.1 The Home Office draws on four key databases for most of the data it uses to compile its quarterly asylum statistics (**Figure 1**). It operates three of these databases, while the fourth is operated by the Immigration Appellate Authority.<sup>3</sup>

### 1 The four key databases that collect asylum data, and the type of data collected

*The Home Office draws on four key computer systems, together with a small number of manual systems, for the data it uses to compile its quarterly asylum statistics.*

Database	Data collected
Case Information Database (CID), with some additional data collected on manual records	Asylum applications Asylum decisions Asylum appeals received Asylum appeal outcomes by nationality <sup>1</sup> Asylum removals Voluntary assisted removals
ASYS - the database containing details about asylum seekers applying for, or receiving, support from NASS; with some additional data collected on manual records	Applications to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) <sup>2</sup> for subsistence payments and/or accommodation  Decisions on eligibility <sup>3</sup> for support under Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002
Detainee Location and Management Information System (DELMIS)	Asylum seekers and other immigration offenders detained  Asylum seekers and other immigration offenders released from detention
Immigration Records Information System (IRIS) <sup>1</sup>	Outcome and timeliness of asylum appeal hearings <sup>1</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 The Home Office receives data on appeal hearings and decisions from the Immigration Appellate Authority, which operates its own appeals database (IRIS), and enters the outcomes onto CID.
- 2 Asylum seekers may apply to the National Asylum Support Service, part of the Home Office, for subsistence payments and accommodation while their applications are being considered.
- 3 Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 introduced a requirement that asylum seekers apply for NASS support "as soon as reasonably practicable", which is interpreted as within three days of entering the country, otherwise they are not eligible for support.

*Source: National Audit Office*

<sup>3</sup> The Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) consists of Immigration Adjudicators and the Immigration Appeal Tribunal (IAT). Adjudicators hear appeals against decisions made by the Home Secretary (and his officials) in asylum and immigration matters, and the IAT hears appeals against decisions taken by the Adjudicator. The Authority is part of the Tribunals Group of the Court Service, an executive agency of the Department for Constitutional Affairs.

1.2 **Figure 2** shows that the four key databases are operated in a variety of locations around the country:

- **asylum applications**, made as verbal requests in person, may be made at ports of entry and Asylum Screening Units in Birmingham, Croydon and Liverpool and other locations around the country. Immigration officers and other officials enter applicants' details onto CID;
- **applicants are subsequently interviewed and their cases assessed** in Croydon and Liverpool, or in fast-track facilities at Harmondsworth Detention Centre or Oakington Reception Centre. Decisions are entered onto CID;
- **applicants may appeal against the Secretary of State's asylum decision**, appeals are lodged with the Home Office, and heard by an Adjudicator at Hearing Centres around the country. Applicants and the Secretary of State may seek leave to appeal against the Adjudicator's decision to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal. Appeal outcomes are entered onto CID;
- **on applying for asylum, applicants who are destitute, or likely to become so shortly, may apply for subsistence support and accommodation** and, following a decision on their eligibility, details of those to be supported and the arrangements for their support are entered onto the asylum support database (ASYS); and
- **applicants refused asylum are expected to return to their country of origin, or arrangements are made for their removal by enforcement offices around the country**. Failed asylum seekers may be detained pending their removal, and those in detention are recorded on DELMIS. Removal is recorded on CID following confirmation from the ports that removal has occurred.

1.3 The data collected on the four databases are detailed and voluminous. For example, the data include biographical details about main applicants together with those of any dependants, and their nationalities. The three Home Office databases are operated by staff within the Home Office's Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND). They operate independently - with separate data entry. The main database CID records details of asylum applicants whose support is managed by and recorded on ASYS and records appeals which are being managed and recorded on IRIS and when applicants have been detained, as recorded on DELMIS. The one automated link between the databases is from ASYS to CID which updates CID for an asylum applicant's application for support and cessation of support.

1.4 Statisticians in the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics (RDS) Directorate obtain data extracts from IND and data from the Immigration Appellate Authority to produce the quarterly bulletins of asylum statistics. The quarterly bulletins report on a sub-set of the available data, grouped under eight main headings and supported by more detailed analysis in 17 additional statistical tables. The bulletins are available on the Home Office Internet website at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk). For the purpose of our review of the reliability of the asylum statistics, we focused on 12 key sets of data contained within the quarterly bulletins (**Figure 3**).

1.5 We examined:

- the controls over the completeness and accuracy of the asylum data entered onto the Home Office's asylum databases for these key data sets<sup>4</sup> during the three month period August to October 2003 and January to March 2004; and
- the work of Home Office officials, including its statisticians, to assure the reliability of these key elements of the asylum data before they are produced as National Statistics in the asylum quarterly bulletins.

## Completeness and accuracy of asylum data entered on the Home Office's asylum databases

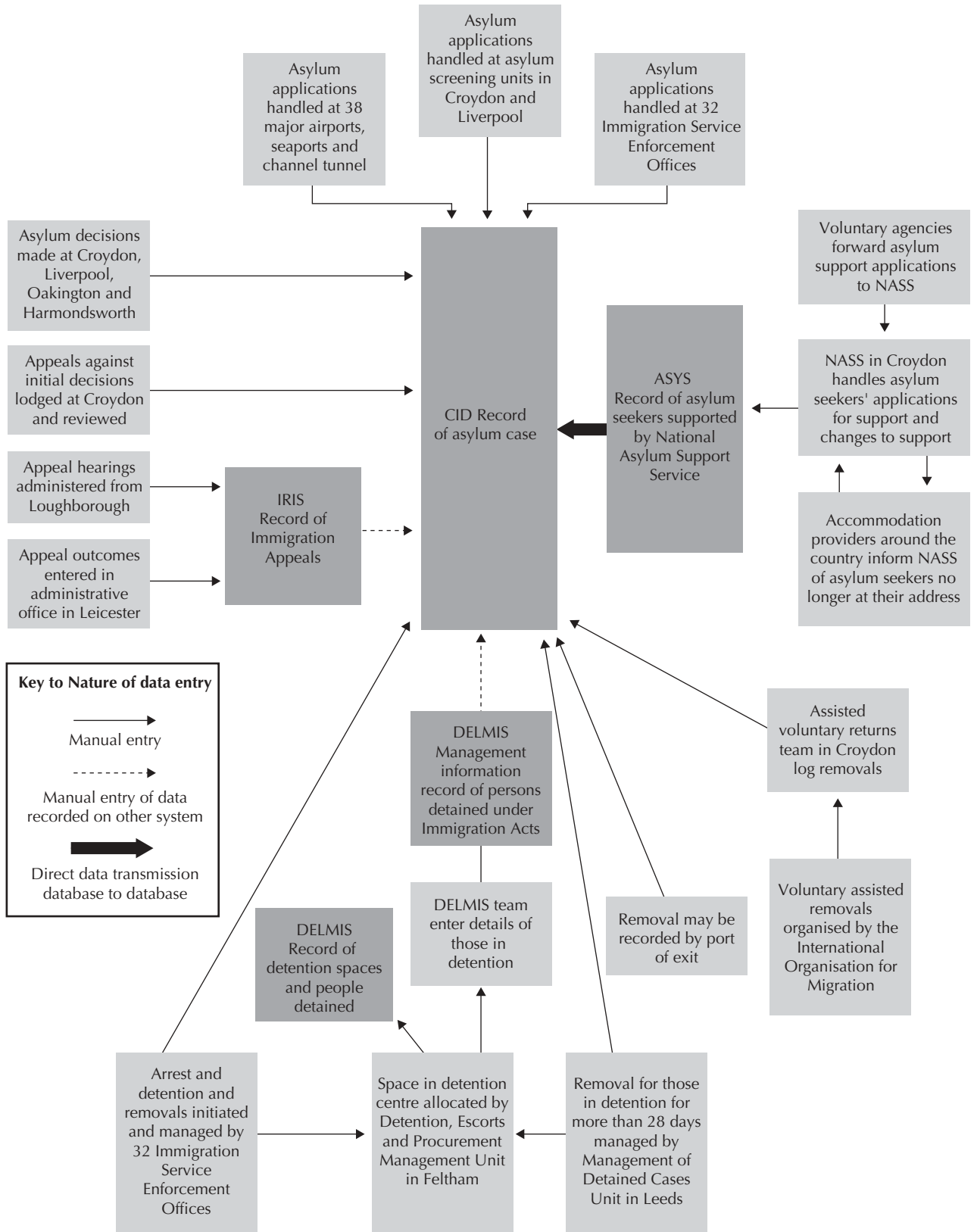
1.6 Ensuring the completeness and accuracy of the data on the asylum databases is difficult, reflecting the complexity of the asylum process and the involvement of two different government departments. It also reflects, however, the Home Office's reliance on three separate asylum databases that are not fully integrated and that are also supplemented by manual systems (Figure 1).

1.7 The Case Information Database (CID) is the main asylum database. It started as a database containing basic details about asylum seekers and was initially expected to be an interim solution. After the Home Office abandoned a previous project known as the Casework Programme, however, CID was developed to such an extent that it has become IND's main caseworking system (Appendix 2). The Home Office had launched the Casework Programme in 1996, with the aim of developing a bespoke, paperless casework system. In his March 1999 report, *The Immigration and Nationality Directorate's Casework Programme* (HC 277, 1998-99), the Comptroller and Auditor General commented on the Home Office's delay in securing delivery of that system. In February 2001, however, the Home Office stopped further development of the system, which was being developed by Siemens Business Services Ltd under a private finance deal. The Home Office had concluded it was too complex and out of touch with the Home Office's working practices.

<sup>4</sup> We did not examine the controls over data concerning the number and timeliness of appeal decisions recorded on the Immigration Appellate Authority's computer systems, which are outside the Home Office's control.

## 2 Where asylum data are collected and entered onto databases

Asylum data are collected at a variety of locations around the country.



Source: National Audit Office

### 3 Groupings within the quarterly asylum statistical bulletins and the 12 key data sets examined by the National Audit Office

To assess the reliability of the asylum statistics, the National Audit Office examined 12 key data sets reported in the Home Office's quarterly asylum statistics.

Grouping in quarterly asylum statistics	Key data sets examined by the National Audit Office
Applications	■ Number of principal applicants
Initial decisions	■ Number of initial decisions ■ Applications accepted or refused ■ Timeliness of initial decisions
Appeals <sup>1</sup>	■ Number of appeals received
Removal of failed asylum seekers	■ Number of principal applicants and dependants removed from the country
Applications for support	■ Number of principal applicants and dependants ■ Number notified ineligible to apply for NASS support under Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002
Supported asylum seekers	■ Number of principal applicants and dependants receiving subsistence support or living in NASS accommodation
Detention	■ Number of principal applicants and dependants detained
Oakington Reception Centre <sup>2</sup>	■ Number of applications received at Oakington Reception Centre ■ Number of decisions at Oakington Reception Centre

#### NOTES

- 1 The Home Office receives data on the number and timeliness of appeal determinations from the Immigration Appellate Authority.
- 2 The Oakington Reception Centre is a fast track facility where principal applicants and dependants are detained in asylum cases that, upon initial screening, appear to be straightforward and suitable for speedy decision-making in 7 to 10 days.

Source: National Audit Office

1.8 The Home Office revised its contract with Siemens to develop and operate CID. The database has been steadily extended over time to capture increasing amounts of data on most aspects of an asylum case. It is currently used by around 12,000 staff. The Home Office is planning to make further enhancements to CID, but will continue to run the ASYS and DELMIS databases alongside CID for the foreseeable future.

1.9 From an application for asylum through to decision and removal, a case goes through many stages and administrative processes, which are recorded on the Home Office's databases. Complications to this process may arise at any stage (Figure 4).

### 4 Some of the complications of the asylum process that bring risks to the integrity of asylum data and statistics

There are several complexities in the asylum process that put at risk the completeness and accuracy of the underlying asylum data and the asylum statistics.

- Asylum applicants making multiple applications under different names
- An applicant's personal circumstances may change - such as through marriage, ill-health, arrival or birth of new dependants
- Circumstances in applicants' country of origin may change
- Applicants may apply for judicial review of actions taken by the Home Office
- Asylum legislation, policy and processes may change
- Case law may change
- Applicants may become eligible for entry to the UK under other immigration routes

Source: National Audit Office



1.10 The process by which asylum data are collected needs to be managed in order to reduce the inherent risks to the quality and reliability of the data that may come, for example, from:

- incorrect or incomplete data entry by insufficiently trained staff;
- staff entering data in different locations misunderstanding or interpreting in different ways the complex definitions that govern how case details should be recorded; and
- double entry of asylum cases, where details may be entered at many stages in the process and there is risk of misspelling similar names and creating duplicate cases.

### The Home Office is taking steps to improve the quality of data entered into CID

1.11 In recent years, the Home Office has recognised as a priority the need to improve the quality of the data entered into CID, particularly the minimum data required on asylum cases such as applicants' biographical data, as well as information about appeals and removals. It found that CID recorded for April to June 2003:

- 87 per cent of the information it should have contained about new asylum applicants' biographical details;
- less than half of the necessary information about applications processing through key stages to appeal; and
- less than a third of the information it should have recorded about new removals.

1.12 In response, the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) put in place a Data Quality Strategy in July 2003 intended to prompt and support staff to improve the quality of data entered onto its asylum databases and established a target, that in March 2004, 90 per cent of the data entered would be accurate and timely. Subsequently, however, IND clarified the definition of the target as meaning completeness of data entry onto CID. It aims to achieve a target, that in March 2005, 95 per cent of all data entered onto CID would be complete, logical, timely and accurate. IND is considering when it will be in a position to extend the Strategy to cover data entry onto the ASYS and DELMIS databases. It aims to sustain these improvements. To help achieve these improvements, the Directorate has appointed local data quality managers, responsible for providing advice to local staff on data entry and for checking data quality and ensuring any errors or omissions are rectified.

1.13 The Home Office applies a range of quality assurance measures on its asylum data:

- quality reviews of the underlying data undertaken by the data providers, before the data are passed on to statisticians; and
- quality assurance reviews by Home Office statisticians to prepare the data for publication as National Statistics.

*Quality reviews are undertaken by the providers of the data entered onto CID*

1.14 Staff within the Home Office's Immigration and Nationality Directorate who operate the three Home Office asylum databases carry out monthly reviews of the data entered onto CID. These typically involve manual checking of at least 10 per cent of cases against the key information that they should contain. Where they identify any errors, omissions or inconsistencies, data on CID are amended. Data on CID are also used to check data on ASYS. Daily checks are also carried out on data entered into DELMIS. Quality reviews are used by IND to highlight the need for any additional training or guidance to be provided to staff responsible for inputting the original data.

*Home Office statisticians also quality assure some of the key data*

1.15 Home Office statisticians transfer into their own systems data from the four main asylum databases and manual records (Figure 1). These transfers bring a degree of risk as they involve the extraction of data from databases, and the manual transfer of a small amount of data from source records, into computerised spreadsheets. We found, however, that the statisticians check the completeness and accuracy of the extracted data in accordance with well defined instructions, targeting their data quality work on the headline totals. We carried out our own checks on the transfer and reconciliation of data from CID into the statisticians' spreadsheets and found that the data had been accurately extracted to form a reliable basis for the quarterly statistics.

1.16 Home Office statisticians also undertake a series of monthly reviews of the data, to identify any logical errors, omissions or inconsistencies. For example, they look for any cases where the recorded date of a decision on an asylum application is before the recorded date of the actual application, or where a decision has been recorded but without a decision date. The statisticians feed back the results of their reviews to the operators of the databases, for their investigation and correction. These on-going reviews help to provide assurance of the completeness and accuracy of the data to be used to prepare the quarterly asylum National Statistics.

*The Home Office has identified improvement in the data entered onto CID and has proposals for extending its quality assurance work*

1.17 The Home Office has reported that 93 per cent of the data entered into CID during March 2004 were complete, up from 72 per cent during August 2003. It has also found that, in March 2004, CID recorded:

- 95 per cent of the information it should have contained about new asylum applicants' biographical details;
- 95 per cent of the necessary information about applications processing through key stages to appeal; and
- 90 per cent of the information it should have recorded about new removals.

This constitutes a marked improvement in the completeness of data being entered onto CID, compared with June 2003 (paragraph 1.11).

1.18 The quality review checks undertaken by the Home Office statisticians are year-on-year resulting in smaller differences between the confirmed statistics in the quarterly bulletins and the original underlying data. There is, however, a continuing need to make small changes to previously published statistics.

1.19 In June 2004, the Home Office plans to extend the measures it uses to assess data quality by incorporating logic checks and, for some types of data, checks on the timeliness of data entry. It also plans to carry out manual checks of the accuracy of a sample of data entered onto CID by tracing data items back to source documentation. It is also proposing to work with business units to identify and spread good practices in data quality management. The Home Office aspires to introduce enhancements to its computer systems that would facilitate more accurate data entry.

The asylum data and statistics are in most respects reliable, although there are several weaknesses in the process of compiling the statistics and in their presentation, some of which materially affect the published statistics

1.20 The Home Office's June 2003 review of data quality, and the quality assurance work that staff in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate have carried out each month, covered key data items that should be recorded on CID. Within the timescale available, our review was not designed to cover the same ground. For the purposes of our review, we focused on those data items underpinning the 12 sets of data contained within the quarterly bulletins (Figure 3).

1.21 We reviewed data entry procedures operating at all stages of the asylum process. In the time available we were not able to select and test a large enough sample of cases from CID, ASYS and DELMIS to supporting documentation on the Home Office's files to provide with sufficient precision a view on the reliability of the statistics. We identified a non-statistical sample of 350 cases (Appendix 1). During the three weeks available for the sample testing, the Home Office was able to make available 276 (some 80 per cent) of the 350 files we selected for audit testing. The Home Office told us that it could not locate 15 files, while the other 59 files were not found or available in time for the audit. For the purposes of this audit, we have therefore drawn our conclusions set out below on the basis of the assurance we have taken from our review and testing of the operation of data entry procedures and the results of the files audited, as well as considering the lack of 74 files for testing.

*Data on the number of asylum applications received are reliable, but there is a weakness in the system for referrals of illegal immigrants that brings a risk to the completeness of the data*

1.22 About one third of asylum seekers claim asylum when they arrive at a UK port or airport. Others who have entered the country with a visa or clandestinely may claim asylum at one of the Home Office's three asylum screening units in Croydon, Birmingham and Liverpool. Illegal immigrants identified during the course of police or immigration operations may also claim asylum.

1.23 We found processes in place that helped to reduce the risks of seriously misstating the number of asylum applications, arising out of the complexities of the asylum process. The Home Office has clear procedures:

- to decide whether an application from someone who had previously applied for asylum could be treated as a new one;
- for encouraging adult dependants to apply for asylum in their own right at the outset of an application; and
- for linking newly arrived dependants to existing cases.

From our testing of 117 files, we confirmed that applications on CID had been reliably recorded. We were unable to check 16 per cent of our selected sample, however, as the files were not available.

1.24 We also confirmed that appropriate checks were carried out to identify whether a record already exists for an applicant. Immigration officials in the ports and asylum screening units we visited checked asylum applicants' fingerprints, name, date of birth and nationality to the CID database and the EURODAC database of asylum applicants' fingerprints maintained by European countries.

1.25 The key risk associated with the data on the number of asylum applications, however, concerns their completeness. People must orally ask for asylum or to be considered for refugee status. Understanding, and therefore recording, an application on a timely basis might be a challenge, given the potential language barriers that immigration officials face. Immigration officials whom we interviewed at the ports and asylum screening units we visited told us, however, that from their experience they accepted all but the most indistinct applications for asylum. We also found that, having received an application, immigration officials entered it onto CID immediately. At the locations we visited, we found no evidence of applicants' case files not having been recorded on the database.

1.26 We found that local enforcement officers were targeting their work at identifying failed asylum seekers, in response to the Home Office's priority of removing these people from the country. In the course of their work, however, they continued to carry out other key activities, such as working with police on street crime initiatives and operations to identify illegal working. As well as identifying failed asylum seekers, these activities would be likely to identify illegal immigrants who might then claim asylum. There were no data available on the number of operations carried out in previous years by enforcement offices or on how they were targeted between failed asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. Since 1 April, however, the Home Office has introduced a new management information system that records details of large and medium scale operations planned and carried out.

1.27 There is also a weakness in the way that the police and some enforcement offices refer illegal immigrants to other offices to make their asylum claims. When illegal immigrants are arrested, immigration officers may process and record their applications for asylum while the applicants are detained in police cells or immigration detention, sometimes using a hand held computer to access CID. However, where they are not detained, they may be referred by the police or some enforcement offices to the nearest Asylum Screening Unit to make their asylum applications and have them recorded on CID. There is a risk that some of these illegal immigrants do not present themselves at any of the Units in Croydon, Birmingham or Liverpool, to make an asylum application, are not recorded on CID and disappear once more from view. We found that the Home Office had records of some 50 people a month being referred. It did not have procedures in place, however, to record all those potential applicants

referred to Screening Units to check against the number that did subsequently apply for asylum. Although 50 a month is likely to be an underestimate of the numbers of people referred in this way, it remains low compared with the number of applications that are recorded.

**On the basis that the latest statistics report 10,585 asylum applications received in the quarter, we do not consider that these weaknesses materially affect the reliability of the statistics or the Home Office's reporting that the number of asylum applications halved between October 2002 and September 2003.**

*Data on asylum decisions are generally reliable, but weaknesses in the processing of decisions undermine the accuracy of the data about the timeliness of decisions*

1.28 We found that decision outcomes are reliably entered onto CID. Caseworkers enter the decision outcome onto the database and a 10 per cent sample of decisions is checked to confirm that decisions are supported by documentary evidence. Data quality checks are also undertaken to ensure that all of the details about decisions have been completed.

1.29 The key date for determining the Home Office's performance against its targets is the date that an asylum decision is despatched to an applicant. For 2003-04, the Home Office aimed to make 75 per cent of initial decisions within two months of the asylum application.

1.30 Staff at the Asylum Despatch Service Unit in Croydon told us that there had been occasions when they had entered decision despatch dates onto CID in advance of the official letters and forms being signed and sent to the applicants. Such practice has the potential to overstate the Home Office's performance against its timeliness target, although not significantly. By contrast, we found that for 17 per cent of the 103 cases tested in our audit which had reached the decision stage, decision despatch dates had not been entered on CID. At least half of these cases were despatched within the Home Office's timeliness target. Their omission from CID meant that the statistics understated the Home Office's performance against its target. We were, however, unable to audit 23 files, as they were not available, of which some 20 might have been expected to have reached the decision stage.

**On the basis that the latest quarterly statistics report 14,640 asylum decisions in the quarter, we do not consider that these weaknesses materially affect the reliability of the statistics.**

*Data on the number of appeals received are broadly reliable*

1.31 Applicants are required to send any appeals against their asylum decisions to a PO Box address in Croydon. Appeals are then entered onto CID. Sample checks are carried out on the accuracy of data input, involving checks from the data entered on CID back to the originating documentation. There are also weekly exception reports of cases recorded on CID where some fields remain incomplete, triggering corrective action. Our audit testing, however, showed that for some 18 per cent of the 40 cases within our sample of recent cases which had got to the appeal stage, CID had not been updated for appeals received. In one case where no appeal was recorded, the Home Office file showed the applicant had been granted asylum following appeal. We were, however, unable to audit 23 files, as they were not available, of which some 8 might have been expected to have reached the appeal stage.

**On the basis that the latest quarterly statistics report 10,100 appeals received in the quarter, we do not consider that these weaknesses materially affect the reliability of the statistics.**

*Data quality checks provide assurance on the reliability of the data on the number of asylum applicants removed from the country, but removals are not always evidenced satisfactorily*

1.32 Enforced removals are recorded on CID once Home Office staff at the departure airport or port have confirmed- often orally - that the removal has been completed. Confirmation of an applicant's departure from the country is important. Many planned removals are aborted late in the removal process because of further legal representation, problems with the arrangements for the removal such as lack of transport or escort, or disruption by the person being removed that cannot be contained.

1.33 We found that local staff, including local managers and data quality managers, at ports and local enforcement offices, carry out weekly checks of the accuracy of CID records, comparing them to their local records, where these are kept. These checks are mainly intended to ensure that all removals are being recorded on CID and that other items of removals data are being completed on CID. These checks provide assurance that the removals data recorded on CID are reliable.

1.34 We found, however, that in 6 per cent of the 48 cases we tested, neither CID nor the file provided evidence to confirm the recorded removals. At some of the ports, airports and enforcement offices we visited, we found some confusion between immigration officers and enforcement officers over who was responsible for recording a removal once it has taken place. There were

also differing practices in place for documenting confirmation that a removal had occurred. The Home Office is aware of this and is seeking to identify and spread best practice. We were, however, unable to audit 12 (20 per cent) of the sampled removals files, as they were not available.

**On the basis that the latest quarterly statistics report 4,085 asylum applicants removed from the country during the quarter, we do not consider that these weaknesses materially affect the reliability of the statistics.**

*Although the data on applications for NASS support are generally reliable in our view, the Home Office's presentation of the statistics is materially misleading*

1.35 Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 requires that asylum seekers in need of support during the processing of their asylum applications apply for NASS support "as soon as reasonably practicable", which is interpreted as within three days of entering the country, otherwise they are not eligible for support. In interpreting this requirement, the Home Office interviews asylum seekers and determines whether they applied within three days of arrival in the UK before deciding on whether they are eligible and may apply for support. It does not expect asylum seekers to make an application for NASS support until the Home Office has decided on their eligibility to apply for such support. Some asylum seekers nonetheless apply regardless. The Home Office records on ASYS, and includes in its statistics, the number of applications for NASS support received. This excludes those people who have waited to apply until the eligibility decision has been made. There are therefore some people who seek support but who do not feature in the statistics. The Home Office reports separately, in its quarterly statistics, the number of cases ineligible for NASS support.

1.36 Users of the quarterly statistics may reasonably interpret the number of applications for NASS support as being all those people who sought support in the quarter, whereas they are instead only the people deemed eligible to apply for support. Users have to add the number of applications to the number of ineligible applications to arrive at the actual total number of people who sought support in any quarter. But it is not clear from the statistics that they have to do so. Depending on the number of ineligible cases each quarter, it may also distort the Home Office's commentary on whether applications are higher or lower than the previous quarter, and by how much. The Home Office should show in its quarterly asylum bulletins the total number of applications for NASS support irrespective of their eligibility, alongside those applications deemed ineligible.



1.37 Decisions on people found not to be eligible to apply for support are recorded on a spreadsheet system maintained for the purpose and the number refused is reported in the asylum statistics. From a small sample test, we found that data on the number of people deemed ineligible to apply for support are incomplete.

1.38 All of the 40 applications for support that we checked from ASYS to the supporting documentation had been reliably recorded. Our tests confirmed that the applications had been made by asylum applicants. The Home Office could not, however, provide files to support the other 10 of the 50 cases we selected for audit testing.

1.39 Applicants apply for support on forms provided by NASS or via voluntary organisations that provide asylum seekers with emergency accommodation while their applications are being processed. With the Home Office relying on six voluntary organisations to provide emergency accommodation, we would expect it to carry out periodic reconciliations between its own records and those of its providers. The Home Office does not carry out such reconciliations, however, which would provide assurance that its data are complete and to act as a control against fraudulent or duplicate claims for support.

**On the basis that the latest quarterly statistics report 7,425 applications for NASS support in the quarter, we consider that these weaknesses result in a materially misleading presentation of the statistics.**

*Data on asylum seekers supported by NASS omit some people receiving support, while they include others that should not be receiving support, materially affecting the statistics*

1.40 We found that changes in asylum seekers' circumstances and cessations of NASS support are generally recorded on a timely basis, and that ASYS presents a broadly accurate record of those people receiving support at any point in time. However, NASS staff told us that it can take between 3 and 14 days before an application for NASS support is registered on ASYS, generally because of the time taken to determine an applicant's eligibility to apply for support. During this time applicants are usually supported in emergency accommodation. Some of these people are not included in the statistics on asylum seekers supported by NASS until their application for support is registered on ASYS. The Home Office is aware of this gap in its statistics. Its current best estimate is that the statistics at the end of March 2004 might exclude up to 2,000 people, although it is investigating further to clarify the numbers that might be involved.

1.41 We also found that the providers of NASS accommodation estimated that, at the end of March 2004, 2,611 people who were recorded on ASYS as no longer being in receipt of support were in fact still in

their accommodation. The Home Office produces lists from the CID database of people whose right to support has ceased - either because they have been granted asylum or leave to remain in the UK and are therefore eligible to take up employment or social security support, or because they have exhausted their rights to appeal against refusal of their asylum application. The Home Office records the cessation on ASYS, prompting its contractor to stop paying asylum seekers their subsistence allowances. At the same time, it informs the local authorities and private firms that provide accommodation that they should stop doing so.

1.42 The Home Office funds many providers of accommodation for spaces regardless of occupancy, although it pays others according to occupancy. There is therefore some direct cost to the taxpayer of people who stay in accommodation beyond the due cessation date. All people who stay in accommodation beyond the due cessation date are improperly benefiting from the support arrangements and occupying spaces that others might use. The Home Office told us that some providers do not evict people whose asylum seeker support has been terminated because this would make them destitute. There are, however, arrangements in place under which the Home Office may provide support to failed asylum seekers who are no longer eligible for NASS support but who cannot immediately return to their country of origin.

1.43 The Home Office is aware of the problem of some people staying in accommodation beyond the due cessation date. Where possible, it encourages providers to evict. Not all of the Home Office's contracts with providers, however, contain clauses requiring eviction. The Home Office is revising its contracts to include such clauses and to link contractor payments to available spaces, as a means of encouraging providers to evict.

1.44 We also found that the statistics on asylum seekers supported by NASS at the end of March 2004 included many for whom support should have been terminated but had not been. For example, people granted asylum or leave to remain in the UK are eligible for NASS support for up to 28 days after conclusion of their case, while single people are eligible for support up to 21 days after they have no more rights to appeal against the refusal of their asylum application. We found that incomplete data on CID results in cases such as these not being identified for cessation of support on the due dates. In a sample month, we found that some 300 cases identified by IND for cessation had not been identified as such until after the due date. In our sample testing of 36 Home Office files for asylum seekers supported by NASS as at 31 March 2004, we found several cases where support should have been terminated. For example, a single person who had been determined as being the responsibility of a third country in November 2002 and an individual recorded as having absconded in May 2003.

**On the basis that the latest quarterly statistics report 76,245 asylum seekers supported by NASS during the period, 48,610 of whom were receiving accommodation support, we consider that these weaknesses materially affect the reliability of the statistics.**

*Data on detentions are materially in error as 212 people detained in prison were missing from the DELMIS database*

1.45 People may be detained for immigration reasons at a variety of Home Office centres, in prisons, or in police cells. Private sector firms and the Prison Service running Home Office reception and removal centres such as those at Oakington and Harmondsworth provide the Home Office with copies of their own records of detainees, which Home Office staff then use to cleanse the DEMS records before updating DELMIS. We found that the DELMIS database contains details of all of the people detained at Home Office detention centres.

1.46 The Home Office relies on the Prison Service and individual prisons to inform it of details of non-nationals detained in prisons, to be entered into its DELMIS database. We found that this arrangement has not always worked satisfactorily because the Prison Service or individual prisons have not always informed IND of how many people they were holding in prison with Court deportation orders. Nor have the arrangements for agreeing with IND whether to continue with the detention for immigration reasons at the end of the criminal sentence always worked well. DELMIS therefore does not contain wholly reliable data on detainees: some detainees are not recorded on DELMIS, while DELMIS records details of some detainees who have been released from prison without the Home Office's knowledge. In our testing of cases on DELMIS to Home Office files we found that for people recorded as being detained in prison the Home Office had no evidence on file to confirm this.

1.47 In May 2004, the Home Office also identified 212 people thought to be detained in prison in England and Wales at the end of March 2004 solely for immigration reasons but who were not recorded on DELMIS. These cases, including both asylum and non-asylum cases, were the responsibility of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's Criminal Casework Team. They were recorded on the Team's database but not on DELMIS. The Criminal Casework Review Team and the Prison Service have undertaken a casework audit, which by May 2004 had covered all but one prison, to ensure that IND has a complete record of all foreign nationals detained in prisons. IND has now agreed new processes and instructions with the Prison Service for notifying it of all non-nationals received into prisons, which it expects to implement in June 2004.

**On the basis that the latest quarterly statistics report 1,330 asylum seekers detained during the quarter, we consider that these weaknesses materially affect the reliability of the statistics.**

# Part 2

## Working in line with National Statistics guidelines and standards

2.1 In 2002, the National Statistician as Head of both the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Government Statistical Service (GSS) issued a Code of Practice setting out eight key principles that government statisticians are expected to follow and uphold (**Figure 5**). The ONS has also issued 11 supporting Protocols, providing further

information on how key aspects of the Code should be implemented. The Code and the Protocols are available on the National Statistics website at [www.statistics.gov.uk/about/national\\_statistics/cop/default.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/national_statistics/cop/default.asp).

### 5 The eight principles set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice

*The ONS Code of Practice sets out eight key principles that government statisticians are expected to follow and uphold in preparing National Statistics.*

#### **Relevance**

National Statistics will **meet the needs of users** - the government, business and the community - within the available resources, based on effective consultation with stakeholders, providing a balanced, comprehensive picture relevant to the mix of needs.

#### **Integrity**

National Statistics will **gain public trust** by being produced using objective and transparent methods based on scientific principle and best international practice, and free of political involvement.

#### **Quality**

National Statistics will be **fit for purpose and of high quality**, based on fully documented processes and methods, professional competence, peer group appraisal and other quality assurance and improvement measures.

#### **Accessibility**

There will be **fair and open access** to National Statistics. Data will be presented in such a way that clearly and accurately expresses the contents to the widest possible audience.

#### **Protecting confidentiality**

**Confidentiality will be protected** over data collected for Statistics. No Statistics will be produced that are likely to identify an individual, unless specifically agreed with that individual.

#### **Balancing the needs of users against the burden on providers**

Data will be **collected only when the benefits exceed the costs** to providers.

#### **Enhancing Statistics**

Common statistical definitions and classifications will be promoted and used in all statistical sources and surveys to **maximise the value** of the statistics.

#### **Efficient provision of Statistics**

**Price should not be a barrier** to access to National Statistics publications.

*Source: National Audit Office summary of the National Statistics Code of Practice Statement of Principles*



## 2.2 The Code sets out the roles and responsibilities for National Statistics:

- As the Head of both the ONS and the GSS, the National Statistician has overall responsibility for the professional statistical quality of all National Statistics outputs and for ensuring that all outputs are produced in accordance with the standards set out in the Code and supporting Protocols. The National Statistician is responsible, in particular, for establishing a programme of thorough reviews of key outputs at least every five years;
- the Heads of Profession for statistics in each government department and the Chief Statisticians in the devolved administrations are responsible to the National Statistician for the professional quality of their work. They are expected to prepare the statistical work programmes of their departments and administrations, observe and promote the use of the Code of Practice and advise on and promote best practice and implement quality assurance measures;
- Ministers decide the scope of National Statistics and departmental statistical programmes and resources; and
- the Statistics Commission<sup>5</sup> comments on the application of the Code of Practice and the quality assurance processes of government bodies, and advises Ministers on any areas for improvement.

2.3 Two of the Protocols - the Protocol on Release Practices and the Protocol on Consultation Arrangements between the National Statistician and UK Government Ministers - were officially launched in 2002. Another nine other remaining Protocols were launched in April 2004. However, Heads of Profession and Chief Statisticians within the GSS were consulted and involved in the development of all of the Protocols, as were stakeholders and members of the public, and were therefore familiar with their content before they were formally released. The Home Office intends to commission later this year an independent review of the control of immigration National Statistics publications, including asylum statistics, in accordance with the National Statistics Quality Review Programme. This programme has been designed to meet the requirements of the Code for thorough reviews of key outputs at least every five years.

## The Home Office is drawing up a plan of the changes it needs to make to bring its statistical work fully in line with the Code and Protocols

2.4 The Home Office recognises that its statistical work is not yet fully in line with all aspects of the Code and the Protocols, not least because the ONS has only recently formally issued 9 of the 11 Protocols. Heads of Profession within the Government Statistical Service were consulted and involved in the development of the Protocols and were familiar with the Protocols' content before they were formally released. The content of the Protocols changed during their consultation stages and, now that the Protocols have been formally issued, Departmental Heads of Profession are expected to put in place a plan deliver compliance with them. The Home Office expects to have a fully costed plan on necessary changes by September 2004.

2.5 Against this background, we examined the progress that Home Office statisticians were making towards working fully in line with the Code and the Protocols in compiling its quarterly asylum statistics.

## The Home Office applies the Code and the Protocols well in some areas, but there is scope for further improvement

2.6 Over recent years, the Home Office has substantially increased the amount of asylum statistics it publishes to meet better the needs of users of its statistics. In 2001, when it introduced Quarterly Bulletins to replace the monthly statistical updates, it extended their scope to include information on asylum applicants in receipt of support, numbers held in detention, numbers removed and cases received and decided at Oakington. Since then it has added further information, such as on the timeliness of decisions and appeals. And, in the next annual asylum statistics, the Home Office will include for the first time information on the quality of initial decisions, the turnaround time on clearly unfounded cases and on the percentage of people who have become failed asylum seekers compared with numbers who have been removed.

<sup>5</sup> The Statistics Commission is an independent non-departmental public body set up in June 2000 to help ensure that official statistics are trustworthy and responsive to public needs. The Commission is sponsored by HM Treasury and operates independently both of Ministers and the producers of statistics, including the ONS.

## Home Office statisticians have, however, given insufficient attention to consulting formally with users other than those in government

- 2.7 The Home Office has expanded the detail and scope of its quarterly, and annual, asylum statistical bulletins after drawing on the views of its own officials and those of the European Union and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. It has consulted informally with the research community and has contributed to a public seminar on migration statistics at the Royal Statistical Society. It has consulted with some Members of Parliament and external stakeholder groups on some specific issues. It has not, however, held regular user group meetings to discuss the statistics presented. The independent review that it intends to commission later this year of the control of immigration National Statistics publications will include consultation with users.
- 2.8 Asylum seeker removal is a good example of the type of information that users have been asking to be included in the Home Office's statistics. The statistics have not included the total number of applicants who have exhausted their rights to appeal against refusal of their asylum applications and who have not yet been removed. The Home Office has not, until recently, had sufficiently reliable data on such applicants to be published as National Statistics. It is working to improve the data and later this year will consider whether and, if so, how to publish them.

## The quarterly asylum statistics do not allow all users to understand how the asylum process works, although the Home Office is working to improve them

- 2.9 The quarterly asylum statistics provide a picture of key aspects of asylum work during, or at the end of, the quarter, with some prior quarter or prior year data provided to allow comparison over time. This form of presentation does not allow all users of the statistics to understand how the various stages of the asylum process and the various statistics fit together or to form a view on the Department's performance in processing asylum cases from start to finish. Information on the progress and perhaps the outcome of asylum applications in a particular quarter would give users a better understanding of how initiatives to speed or otherwise improve processes are affecting asylum applicants. The Home Office provides this type of information in its annual asylum statistics, although the statistics do not cover the whole asylum process through to removal. Home Office statisticians could provide more commentary but are concerned - particularly in the

current environment - that further explanatory commentary could easily be misunderstood as the making of political points, which have no place in a statistical bulletin. They recognise, however, that there is scope for improving the extent to which the statistics are easily understandable to the general user.

## The quarterly asylum statistics do not provide a comprehensive picture of people receiving support funded by the Home Office

- 2.10 We found that the quarterly asylum statistics only disclose those people residing in NASS-funded accommodation or in receipt of subsistence support. The statistics therefore fail to account for cases supported under arrangements that pre-date the establishment of NASS in April 2000. The statistics omit up to 16,000 such asylum cases, involving single people or families in accommodation and receiving subsistence funded by the Home Office, but whose support is administered under arrangements with local authorities. The Home Office has not included these cases in its asylum statistics because of difficulties in obtaining reliable data from all local authorities. The number of these cases is decreasing over time. In addition, the Home Office pays the Department for Work and Pensions to support some asylum seekers; such cases are now estimated to have fallen to around 1,000. The Home Office also knew that the number of cases was falling and would eventually cease as the support arrangements were being replaced by the new NASS arrangements, and therefore decided that its resources were better devoted to data on the latter.
- 2.11 Local authorities also accept new cases of unaccompanied children seeking asylum, funded by the Home Office. At the time of our audit, NASS estimated there were around 7,000 unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the care of local authorities. Again, the Home Office has not included any of these cases in its asylum statistics because of difficulties in obtaining reliable data from all local authorities.
- 2.12 The latest quarterly statistics show that 76,245 asylum seekers were in receipt of NASS support at the end of March 2004. The statistics point out that this refers to people who reside in NASS accommodation. In our view, however, this presentation is misleading, because it leaves out a materially significant number of supported asylum seekers from the statistics. If the people supported under arrangements involving DWP and local authorities were included in the statistics, there would be a significant increase in the statistics.

2.13 The Comptroller and Auditor General drew attention to the existence of asylum seekers administered under these arrangements in his report on the 2001-02 Home Office Resource Accounts. He qualified his opinion on those Accounts due to the lack of sufficient evidence to support the regularity of the payments that the Home Office makes to local authorities<sup>6</sup>. For 2002-03 the Comptroller and Auditor General received further evidence from local authority auditors regarding local authority accounts and did not qualify his opinion on the 2002-03 accounts<sup>7</sup>.

### The statistical methods and definitions used by the statisticians are appropriate, and there have been no breaches of the Protocol governing the release of statistics

2.14 Home Office statisticians are part of the Research, Statistics and Development Directorate, which is separate from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate that is responsible for managing the asylum process and recording asylum data. The statistical methods and definitions used by the statisticians are appropriate, and the definitions used for key statistics are explained in the asylum statistics. We found that the statisticians had appropriate practices in place to ensure the integrity of the asylum statistics each quarter and from quarter to quarter, explaining the need for any revisions to the statistics in accordance with the relevant Protocol. Although the Home Office has made information available on request, it has not reported its methodology for preparing the statistics, nor is its methodology otherwise made widely available to help external users understand how the statistics were generated and how they may be used.

2.15 The statisticians are alert to the need to avoid political interventions in the process. They have developed the quarterly reporting cycles for the asylum statistics and their policy on the release of statistics and consult with Ministers over the scope of the statistics, as allowed for by the Code.

2.16 The Protocol on the release of National Statistics suggests that the statistics should be released separately from, and before, statements by ministers. We found that had been the case. The Protocol also points out that privileged early access to the statistics should only be given for the purpose of enabling Ministers and their officials to respond to questions on the statistics when they are released. We found that the Home Office makes a submission to Ministers and senior policy officials and provides them with a pre-release copy of the statistics, as allowed under the Code. The Home Office has a policy of allowing the disclosure of

management information for periods covered by the last statistical bulletin. And, it allows broad statements of more recent trends. There has been one instance where the Home Office's Director of Research, Development and Statistics reviewed whether there had been a breach of the release Protocol. As required under the Protocol, he wrote to the National Statistician to explain that the data quoted in the media were based on previously disclosed management information. He also provided an explanation to the Statistics Commission.

### Home Office statisticians bring professional competence to their quality reviews, but need to improve documentation of their work

2.17 Home Office statisticians, and the providers of the underlying data within the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, work separately and together to assure the quality of the data and the resultant statistics. We found that the statisticians were appropriately trained and qualified. They told us that, when they extract data from the underlying databases and manual records into their own computerised spreadsheets to form the basis of the quarterly statistics, they subject their work to peer review. We found that the Home Office statisticians had documented their procedures and held detailed desk instructions, as required by the Protocol. However, we considered that they could improve their documentation, providing more explanation of the procedures in use, to ensure that new staff fully understood what was required of them particularly in relation to the objectives and significance of the work. In addition, we found that the Home Office could better record the work actually carried out in their preparation of the statistics, to aid internal review of the work and external validation of it in National Statistics reviews.

### The quarterly asylum statistics are presented in a straightforward way and made available to as wide an audience as possible, although better presentation and explanation would aid the general user

2.18 Home Office statisticians have made the asylum statistics widely accessible by placing them on the Home Office's website at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk). We were able to locate the asylum statistics for October to December 2003 within two minutes of reaching the website. They also provide the statistics in hard copy, where users request it. The statistics are also presented in a straightforward way, with sections containing narrative supported by charts and tables, although some of the presentation and lack of explanation diminish their clarity, particularly for the general reader.

<sup>6</sup> Home Office Resource Account 2001/02 CM 5444.

<sup>7</sup> Home Office Resource Account 2002/03 HC 193.

Statisticians have taken care to ensure that there have been no breaches of confidentiality in the presentation of asylum statistics

2.19 We found that the statisticians were alert to the need to protect the confidentiality of the people represented in the asylum statistics. The asylum statistics typically address large numbers of applicants, but where they deal with small numbers (for example, in breakdowns of figures by nationality) the statisticians take care to ensure that individuals cannot be identified. We found that there had been no breaches of confidentiality.

The Home Office considers costs and potential benefits before deciding on whether data should be gathered to produce statistics

2.20 The Research, Statistics and Development Directorate estimates that it costs £365,000 to prepare and produce both the quarterly and annual asylum statistical bulletins. The Home Office considers the costs associated with any proposals to increase the scope of its published statistics against the expected benefits to users.

Statistical definitions reflect UK legislation and asylum systems, but the Home Office is working with European counterparts on greater harmonisation

2.21 The definitions used in preparing the asylum statistics reflect the legislation and the administrative systems involved in the asylum process. We found that, as legislation and the asylum process change, the statisticians consider whether any changes are required to the definitions. The Home Office's definitions are not fully comparable with those used in other European countries, because of different legislation and different administrative systems. There are differences, for example, in the stages of appeal available to an asylum seeker. There are also significant differences in national support and removal arrangements. The Home Office, and its counterparts in other European countries, are aware of the differences. They are working with the European Commission on harmonising some of the key definitions for asylum statistics provided to the Commission for its own publications.

The statistics are provided in an efficient manner through the Home Office website, and no fee is charged for any hard copies requested by users

2.22 The costs of producing the statistics are not borne by the users, as the statistics are freely available on the Home Office website and the Home Office does not charge a fee for hard copies.

## Strengthening the impact of the Code of Practice and Protocols

2.23 In May 2004, the Statistics Commission published a report which had been commissioned by the Government in the June 2000 Framework for National Statistics recommending that the National Statistics Code of Practice and Protocols be strengthened by putting them on a statutory footing, and that the Commission also be replaced by a statutory body to oversee the adoption of the Code and the Protocols by government statisticians. The Commission considers that a new, more robust, statutory Code should be developed by the National Statistician for approval by the Statistics Commission. The aim would be to enhance public confidence and trust in the arrangements governing the preparation and release of all official statistics. The government has welcomed the report and will be discussing its recommendations with the Statistics Commission and the National Statistician. It will also reflect on the wide-ranging public debate that the Commission's proposals are likely to engender.



# Part 3

## Whether changes in the number of asylum applications have had any impact on other forms of migration

3.1 The trend of asylum applications was upward in the months leading up to the autumn of 2002, when there was a sharp fall followed by an even sharper fall at the start of 2003 (**Figure 6**). The number of applications then rose gently from June to September 2003, before falling once more.

### Measures to reduce the number of asylum applications

3.2 The Home Office has attributed the sharp fall in reported asylum applications since October 2002 to active management of the situation, involving a range of statutory and non-statutory measures to reduce the number of applications, and measures not aimed primarily at reducing intake, but which might have had

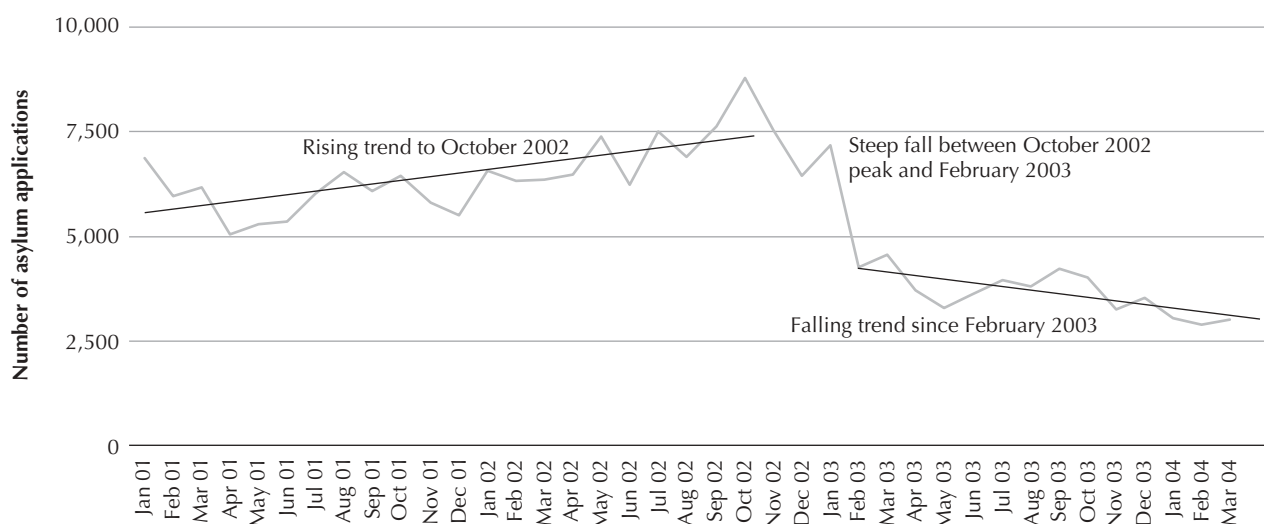
that effect, for example faster processing of applications (**Figure 7**). The Home Office has also noted, however, that there has been a general trend of reduced asylum flows elsewhere in Europe.

The Home Office has modelled the effects of the measures on a monthly basis

3.3 Since before October 2002, the Home Office has modelled the combined effects of the various measures on the number of asylum applications and re-forecast on a six-monthly basis, taking account of actual monthly asylum applications (**Figure 8**). The model is used for internal management purposes, and is not intended for official publication.

#### 6 The trend in the number of asylum applications, 2001 to 2003

*There have been two distinct trends in the number of asylum applications since January 2001: a rising trend until October 2002, followed by a falling trend since then.*



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office statistics



## 7 Key changes to reduce the number of asylum applications

*There have been eight key changes to reduce the number of asylum applications.*

### Non-suspensive appeals

- Since November 2002: under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, the Secretary of State has designated 24 countries as generally safe. Asylum applications from nationals of these countries may be certified as "clearly unfounded". Such applicants have no right of appeal before being removed from the UK. Introduced in three waves<sup>1</sup>, for different countries, in November 2002, April 2003 and July 2003.

### New visa requirements

- In November 2002 and January 2003 respectively: introduced the requirement that people travelling to this country from Zimbabwe and Jamaica obtain appropriate visas before entering the UK.

### Closure of Sangatte reception centre

- In December 2002: in consultation with UK and French authorities, the Red Cross closed its reception centre at Sangatte in France. The Home Office accepted into the UK 1,200 Iraqis and Afghans from the centre, not as asylum seekers but as temporary economic migrants with work permits and visas for four years.

### Deployment of New Detection Technology (NDT) for searches of freight entering from Calais and Coquelles and Vlissingen, Ostend and Zeebrugge

- In January 2003, June 2003 and December 2003 respectively: introduced new technology for port operators to search freight containers and lorries entering the country from Calais and Coquelles and Vlissingen, Ostend and Zeebrugge.

### Restricted access to support

- In January 2003: introduced a requirement, under Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, that asylum seekers apply for NASS support "as soon as reasonably practicable", which the Home Office interprets as within three days of entering the country, otherwise they are ineligible for support.

### Fast track processing and detention

- In April 2003: introduced fast track facilities for processing asylum applications at secure centre at Harmondsworth, where asylum seekers are detained pending decisions on their applications and any appeal determinations.

### Extension of requirement for Direct Airside Transit Visas

- In June 2003 and October 2003: introduced a requirement that people of a further 16 nationalities and 6 nationalities respectively<sup>2</sup> had Direct Airside Transit Visas for the period of time spent waiting in the departures area of UK international airports for an onward connecting flight.

### Extension of juxtaposed border controls

- In February 2004: introduced a second phase of juxtaposed border controls to enable immigration officers to decide the admissibility of passengers prior to embarkation for the UK from the key ports of Calais, Dunkirk and Boulogne. The first phase had been introduced in August 2002.

## NOTES

- 1 Wave one covered: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia; wave two covered: Albania, Bulgaria, Jamaica, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania and Serbia/Montenegro; and wave three covered: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Ukraine.
- 2 The requirement for Direct Airside Transit Visas already existed for some nationalities. In June 2003 a further 16 nationalities were added to the list: Albania, Belarus, Burma, Burundi, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Moldova, Nepal, Palestinian Territories, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Vietnam. In October 2003 an additional 6 nationalities were added to the list: Angola, Bangladesh, Cameroon, India, Lebanon and Pakistan.

*Source: National Audit Office*

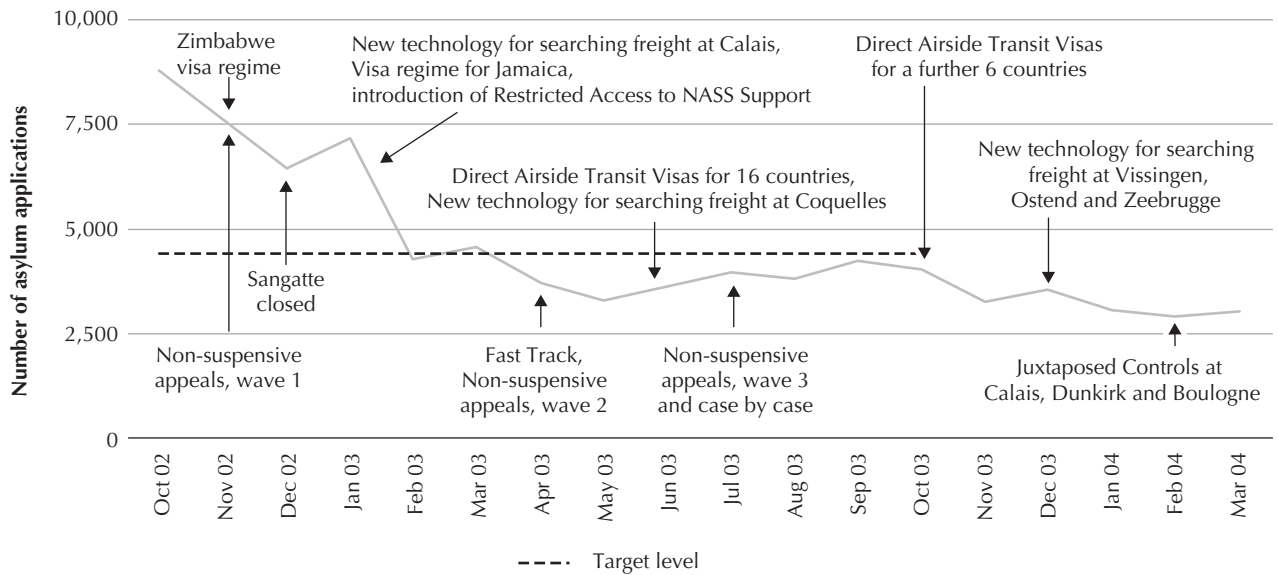
3.4 In its model, the Home Office forecast optimistic, realistic and pessimistic trends in the number of asylum applications. The number of asylum applications has declined by more than the Home Office's optimistic

forecast in its model as at October 2002, although that forecast excluded some intake reduction measures that were at the time not planned but that were subsequently introduced (**Figure 9**).



## 8 Modelling the effects of intake reduction measures on the number of asylum applications, October 2002 to March 2004

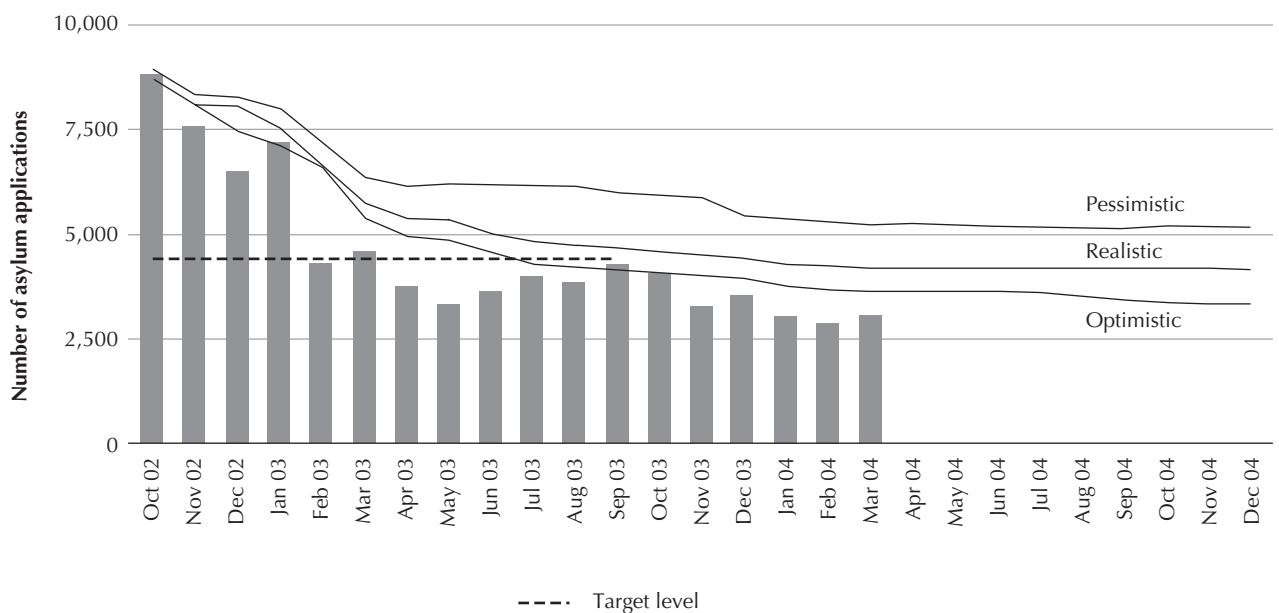
The Home Office has modelled the combined effects of various measures on the number of asylum applications.



Source: National Audit Office analysis of asylum intake reduction model

## 9 October 2002 pessimistic, realistic and optimistic forecasts of the number of asylum applications compared with the actual number of applications, to March 2004

The number of asylum applications declined significantly over the period October 2002 to March 2004, in several months exceeding the Home Office's optimistic forecasts.



Source: National Audit Office summary of Home Office model

## Evidence of any relationship between asylum statistics and general migration trends

3.5 Professor John Salt and James Clarke at the Migration Research Unit of University College London (UCL) undertook, on our behalf, a review of whether, on the basis of the statistical evidence available, recent changes in the number of asylum applications have had any significant impact on other forms of migration. They examined whether the reduction in the number of asylum applications since 2002 was due to:

- fewer asylum seekers wanting to come to the UK, reflected in increased asylum applications in other European countries commensurate with the reduction in this country; and/or
- some people who might previously have claimed asylum entering the country through legal routes of entry; and/or
- some people not choosing to claim asylum upon coming to this country, having entered or stayed illegally.

More detailed explanation of the UCL team's approach and of the data used in their statistical analysis is at Appendix 1.

### Overall conclusion

#### On the basis of their statistical analysis, the UCL team have concluded that:

- Reasons for migration are extremely complex and a change in numbers for any route of entry may reflect the operation of a broad range of factors. Often, these factors work independently of one another and reflect decisions taken by a myriad of people and organisations, including migrants themselves, governments and other organisations, in response to changing circumstances.
- There is no clear statistical evidence of any direct impact of the decline in the number of asylum applications between 2002 and 2003 on the statistics for other routes of entry into the UK.

Whether the reduction in the number of asylum applications since 2002 was due to fewer asylum seekers wanting to come to the UK

3.6 The aim of this part of the analysis was to determine the extent to which the pattern and trend in asylum applications in the UK since 2002 were replicated in other European countries. An increase in the number of asylum applications in other European countries that matched declines in the UK might indicate that people had switched from the UK to other countries. If there were no evidence of increased numbers of applications elsewhere, or the numbers of applications declined, the statistical evidence might suggest that the patterns and trends experienced in the UK were repeated elsewhere.

3.7 Even a close statistical association, however, would not by itself indicate any causal relationship. Nor would it indicate the nature of any relationship. Changes in numbers of asylum applications in other European countries, as in the UK, may occur for many reasons, such as changes in policy towards migrants or in the state of labour markets or other conditions in destination countries, changes in countries of origin due to political, military and other events, or changes in countries chosen for asylum seekers by human traffickers.

#### On the basis of their statistical analysis, the UCL team have concluded that:

- There is no statistical evidence that asylum seekers who might otherwise have come to the UK switched to other Western European destinations.
- Like the UK, most other Western European countries have also experienced a decline in the number of asylum applications over the period 2002 to 2003, although by a smaller amount than in the UK.
- For most other Western European countries, the nationality trends of asylum applications were similar to those in the UK.

*Nationals from 11 key countries accounted for 80 per cent of the gross fall in the number of asylum applications over the period*

3.8 Between 2002 and 2003, there was a net reduction of 34,763 in the number of asylum applications in the UK. **Figure 10** shows the 11 nationalities where there were the largest reductions. Together, these nationalities accounted for some 80 per cent (29,446) of the total gross fall of 36,819 in the number of applications.

**10 Reduction in the number of asylum applications from nationals from 11 key countries, 2002 to 2003**

Nationals from 11 key countries together accounted for 29,446, or 80 per cent, of the total (gross) fall in asylum applications over the period 2002 to 2003.

**Total net<sup>1</sup> reduction in the number of applications, 2002-03** **34,763**

**Total gross<sup>1</sup> reduction in the number of applications, 2002-03** **36,819**

Country of nationality	Gross Reduction
Iraq	10,524
Afghanistan	4,912
Zimbabwe	4,373
Sri Lanka	2,427
Serbia and Montenegro	1,462
Somalia	1,442
Czech Republic	1,292
Poland	894
Sierra Leone	769
Democratic Republic of Congo	688
Romania	663
<b>Total reduction across these 11 countries</b>	<b>29,446</b>

**NOTE**

- 1 There were reductions in asylum applications from some nationalities, and increases from others. The total gross reduction is the sum of the former, while the total net reduction is the former minus the latter.

*Source: The UCL team's analysis of Home Office data*

- 3.9 These 11 key countries have a wide geographical spread and represent a broad spectrum of experience in the generation of asylum seekers, including the incidence of major wars, local conflicts and their aftermath, repressive regimes and the involvement of particular persecuted groups in the population. They form a reasonable group against which to measure the possible diversion of flows into other routes of entry. It can reasonably be expected that, if there had been any diversion of asylum seekers into other routes of entry into the UK, it would show up in the data for these 11 key countries.

*The greater the number of asylum applications by nationality in 2002, the larger the fall in applications in 2003*

- 3.10 Using regression analysis<sup>8</sup>, the UCL team found that, for the 11 key countries and for all countries with significant numbers of asylum seekers, the change in the number of asylum applications in 2003 was significantly correlated<sup>9</sup> with the number of asylum applications in 2002: the larger the number of asylum applications in 2002, the larger the reduction in applications in 2003. The key countries determining the correlation were Iraq, Afghanistan, Serbia and Montenegro, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe. Eastern European countries did not feature significantly in determining the correlation. The results of this exercise support the decision to focus on the key countries throughout the following statistical analyses.

*Alongside the UK, most other Western European countries also experienced a decline in the number of asylum applications between 2002 and 2003*

- 3.11 The UCL team analysed data on the number of asylum applications received by 17 Western European countries<sup>10</sup> in 2002 and 2003, and found that 13 of these countries experienced a reduction in the number of applications. Four experienced an increase, although in three of these cases the increase was small (totalling just 3,310 applications). Together, the 17 countries experienced a total reduction of 49,410. No other country in this group experienced as large a reduction as that of the UK, however, and only Portugal had a percentage reduction greater than that of the UK. The reduction in the number of asylum applications elsewhere in Europe, including in most of the UK's neighbouring countries, suggests there was a common trend across the region and that a diversion of asylum seekers away from the UK in order to claim asylum elsewhere in Western Europe was unlikely to have occurred. The Home Office pointed out that the number of asylum applications in the UK fell by a disproportionately greater amount than elsewhere in Europe. It considered that this was consistent with a diversion of asylum seekers away from the UK.

<sup>8</sup> Regression analysis is a statistical technique used to determine whether there is an association or relationship between two or more sets of data. See glossary of terms.

<sup>9</sup> Correlation analysis is a statistical technique used to measure the strength of any association or relationship present between two or more sets of data. See glossary of terms.

<sup>10</sup> Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

*Falls in the number of asylum applications elsewhere in Europe were mainly attributable to nationals from the same key countries that accounted for the fall in applications in the UK*

3.12 For most countries where statistics on the nationality of asylum seekers are available, nationality trends were similar to those in the UK. For those countries that experienced large falls - Austria, Denmark, Germany and Sweden - a substantial part of the reductions in the number of asylum applications was attributable to nationals from the 11 key countries (see paragraph 3.8). For those countries that experienced smaller falls - Belgium, Ireland and Switzerland - a smaller part of their reductions was due to nationals from the 11 key countries. In Norway and, particularly in The Netherlands, the number of applications from nationals from the key countries increased, in the case of The Netherlands mainly because of an increase of 2,450 in Iraqi applications.

Whether the reduction in the numbers of asylum seekers since 2002 was due to some people entering the country through legal routes of entry

3.13 The aim of this part of the analysis was to determine whether people who might previously have come to the UK claiming asylum entered the country instead as another form of legal migrant. People might also have entered legally as visitors, but not claimed asylum and not returned to their host country. The UCL team examined 10 different data sets over the four years 1999-2000 to 2002-03 (**Figure 11**).

## **11** The 10 different data sets examined by the UCL team

*The UCL team examined statistics for 10 different legal routes of entry into the UK.*

- International Passenger Survey (IPS) data on immigrants and emigrants<sup>1</sup>
- International Passenger Survey (IPS) data on visitors
- Applications for work permits<sup>2</sup>
- People entering the UK with work permits
- Workers joining the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS)<sup>3</sup>
- Workers joining the Sectors Based Scheme (SBS)<sup>3</sup>
- People entering the UK as domestic workers
- People entering the UK as au pairs
- People entering the UK under European Community Association Agreements (ECAA)<sup>3</sup>
- People entering the UK as full-time students

### NOTES

- 1 Immigrants are people who have been out of the UK for more than a year and enter the country with the intention of remaining for more than a year. Emigrants are people who have been in the UK for more than a year and leave with the intention of living abroad for more than a year.
- 2 This data set consisted of applications for work permits from employers for people outside the country, and first permissions for work permits for people already in the country. It excluded extensions to existing work permits and changes of employer.
- 3 See glossary.

*Source: National Audit Office summary of data sets examined by the UCL team*

**On the basis of their statistical analysis, the UCL team have concluded that:**

- The International Passenger Survey, which is intended only to provide a broad indication of the number of migrants and visitors arriving in and departing from this country, does not sample enough migrants to allow for any meaningful analysis of the number arriving in the UK as nationals of the 11 key countries primarily responsible for the fall in the number of asylum applications in 2002-03.
- Although there are major limitations in interpreting visitor data for the purposes of this review, given the wide range of people and types of journey they cover, there does not appear to be a clear or consistent link between the fall in the number of asylum applications and the change in the number of visitors to the UK in 2002 and 2003.
- There was no significant statistical relationship between the number of work permit applications and asylum applications over the period. The statistical analysis did not therefore support the view that people who might previously have entered the UK as asylum seekers have entered the country instead on work permits.
- The pattern and trend for SAWS workers do not provide conclusive evidence that people who might previously have come to the UK claiming asylum entered the country instead under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme. If any diversion did occur, it would appear to relate mainly to Polish nationals whose participation in the Scheme increased the most. There might, however, be many reasons for this increase. Further examination would be required of the process of recruitment of these Polish nationals as SAWS workers, including information about their characteristics, to explore these other possibilities.
- As the Sectors Based Scheme only started as recently as May 2003, it was not possible to conduct any trend analysis within the Scheme or to compare the trend with that of asylum applications.
- The number of people of different nationalities on the Sectors Based Scheme does not appear to be related to the fall in the number of asylum applications over the period. It is therefore unlikely that the Scheme represents an alternative route of entry into the UK for people who might previously have entered the country as asylum seekers.
- The number of people coming to the UK as domestic workers was too small to have had any impact on the number of asylum applications.
- The number of people coming to the UK as au pairs increased in 2002, and further in 2003, due to 2003 being the first year that nationals from 6 Eastern European countries were eligible to enter the country as au pairs. Overall, the entry of such nationals precludes any meaningful comparison between changes in the number of au pairs and of asylum applications over the period.
- There is little likelihood of a link between the increase in entrants under ECAA arrangements and the fall in the number of asylum applications over the period. It is likely that the buoyant state of the UK labour market and the opportunities offered by the ECAA system would have persuaded nationals of some of the countries covered by these arrangements to come to the UK to work.
- The number of overseas students entering the UK fell by 13 per cent between 2002 and 2003, while the total number of students from the 11 key countries fell by some 5 per cent. The evidence therefore does not support the view that potential asylum seekers have been diverted into entering the UK as students.

*IPS data are based on too small a sample of migrants and other visitors to allow any meaningful analysis of migration flows from the 11 key countries*

3.14 The Office for National Statistics carries out the International Passenger Survey. The Survey consists of a continuous sample of passengers arriving at, and departing from, the UK's main ports and airports and the Channel Tunnel. It does not include people travelling between the Irish Republic and the UK and the Channel Islands. The sample is drawn on a multi-stage basis. The first stage samples particular time "shifts" or sea crossings. Travellers are then systematically selected at fixed intervals. The annual sample is equivalent to about 0.2 per cent of migrants and visitors to this country. The sample consisted of 2,477 migrants entering the country in 2002. From these data the ONS then produced an estimate of 385,900 immigrants entering the UK in 2002.

3.15 International migration estimates are compiled using the IPS and Home Office administrative sources. They are designed to provide a broad indication of the number of migrants and other travellers arriving in, and departing from, this country. They provide a high-level indication of trends in migration, but are not intended to be used to identify statistically reliable trends in migrant nationalities. The sample sizes used in the International Passenger Survey are too small to allow for any meaningful analysis of the number of migrants and other travellers from the 11 key countries. The sample in 2002-03, for example, did not pick up any nationals from several of these key countries, while some of the other key countries had only one national in the samples. IPS data for the three preceding years 1999-2000 to 2001-02 showed a similar pattern.

*There does not appear to be a clear or consistent link between the fall in the number of asylum applications and the change in the number of visitors to the UK in 2002 and 2003*

3.16 The vast majority of visitors to the UK come on brief visits of a few nights or weeks. People who might previously have come to the UK claiming asylum might have entered the country instead, however, as visitors and then not claimed asylum and not returned to their host country. The UCL team examined IPS data on arrivals, departures and the net balance over the period 1999 to 2003 to determine whether the nationals of the 11 key countries showed an inclination to enter the UK as visitors and then stay. The resulting analysis can provide only a crude indicator, however, partly because there are many reasons why people might enter with the intention of staying briefly but then stay for a longer term visit, but also because the analysis is based on sample data where there is inevitably some imprecision.

3.17 The IPS data might contain people who entered as visitors but then claimed asylum in-country. The UCL team therefore broke the data into three sets: all visitors; excluding all in-country asylum applicants; and excluding half of the in-country asylum applicants. For the latter two sets, the ONS's rounding of visitor numbers to the nearest thousand may more than off-set the exclusion of in-country asylum applicants, although this was a problem that could not be avoided for the purposes of this analysis. For each of these three data sets the UCL team then calculated annual changes in the net balance between arrivals and departures of nationals of the 11 key countries and carried out a regression analysis on the changes in visitor numbers and on the number of asylum applications between 2002 and 2003.

3.18 There was a very varied pattern between countries with no consistent trend over time or between individual countries. For example, the results for both the data set containing all visitors and for the data set without any in-country asylum applicants showed that there were respectively net reductions of 84,000 and 26,000 in the number of nationals of Poland and Romania that visited the UK between 2002 and 2003. The number of Iraqi nationals visiting the UK also fell during the period. Although there were net increases in the number of nationals of other key countries, the increases represented only a small percentage of the almost one million nationals of the 11 key countries who visited the country during the period. There was no correlation between the change in the number of asylum applications and the change in visitor numbers.

*There was no significant statistical relationship between the number of work permit applications and asylum applications over the period*

3.19 Although the total number of work permit applications grew each year from 1999-2000 to 2002-03, the rate of growth decelerated over the period. The number of applications for work permits grew by 23,489 and 24,289 respectively in 1999-2000 and 2000-01, before growth fell away sharply in the following two years. The number of work permit applications grew by 13,376 in 2001-02, and by only 1,597 in 2002-03. Thus, over the period 2002-03 when the number of asylum applications fell by 34,763 (paragraph 3.8), the number of applications for work permits rose by just 1,597 - less than 5 per cent of the decline in asylum applications. Using regression analysis, the UCL team found that there was no statistically significant correlation between the number of work permit applications and asylum applications over the period.



*The pattern and trend of increases in the number of applications for work permits do not support the view that potential asylum seekers have been diverted to this route of entry*

3.20 Across the 11 key countries (paragraph 3.8), the number of applications for work permits increased by only 997 in 2002-03, equivalent to less than 3 per cent of the 34,763 fall in the number of asylum applications over that period. The situation was similar for most of the key countries on an individual basis. For example, there was no increase in work permit applications for Iraqis alongside the large fall in Iraqi asylum applications, while work permit applications from Zimbabweans fell as the number of asylum applications from Zimbabweans decreased (Figure 10).

3.21 Among the 11 key countries, the situation of nationals from Poland and Romania was more complicated:

- in the case of Polish nationals, the number of work permit applications increased by 624 in 2002-03 while the number of asylum applications fell by 894. The increase in the number of work permit applications was, however, less than the increase of 931 in the previous year; and
- the number of work permit applications from Romanian nationals increased by 487 in 2002-03 while the number of asylum applications fell by 663. The increase in work permit applications was, however, part of a trend over previous years.

3.22 Thus, although for nationals of these two key countries the numbers of applications for work permits went up at the same time that there was a decrease in asylum applications, there was still a shortfall in the increase in work permit applications compared with the fall in asylum applications.

*The statistics do not provide conclusive evidence that people who might previously have come to the UK claiming asylum entered the country instead as SAWS workers*

3.23 The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) started after the Second World War to allow young people from across Europe to work in agriculture, particularly to provide an additional source of labour in peak seasons. Workers are mainly students aged between 18 and 25. The government sets annual quotas to manage the number of people working under the Scheme. It set a quota of 10,000 in the 1990s, but increased it to 15,200 in 2001 and to 25,000 in 2003. The increase was agreed after consultation between the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the agriculture industry in order to overcome difficulties in recruiting seasonal labour.

3.24 The number of SAWS work cards increased from 10,464 in 1999 to 23,329 in 2003, rising by 3,957 (20 per cent) between 2002 and 2003. Each year since 2000, however, the rate of increase has been slowing down. Most of the cards were taken up by nationals of Eastern European countries. Among the 11 key countries, nationals of Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania increased their combined take-up by 1,668 (28 per cent) from 5,886 to 7,554 between 2002 and 2003. Their increased take up accounted for 42 per cent of the total net increase of 3,957 across all countries between 2002 and 2003.

3.25 The trend varies, however, between these three key countries. Nationals of Poland were the largest group among the three and its trend had a significant impact on the total number of work cards issued. The number of Polish nationals in the Scheme increased by 1,614 - accounting for 41 per cent of the total net increase of 3,957 across all countries - between 2002 and 2003. The 33 per cent increase in their numbers, however, was not greatly out of line with the increase of 28 per cent in 2002 or 19 per cent in 2001. At the same time, the number of Czech nationals on the Scheme fell, while the absolute increase in take up by Romanian nationals was relatively small at 223.

3.26 There were relatively large increases in take up by nationals from several non-key countries where the decrease in the number of asylum applications was small. There were, for example, substantial increases in take up by nationals of Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Russia and the catch-all group of "other" countries, where the percentage rates of growth between 2002 and 2003 were higher than that of Polish nationals.

3.27 The pattern and trend for SAWS workers do not provide conclusive evidence that people who might previously have come to the UK claiming asylum entered the country instead under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme. If any diversion did occur, it would appear to relate mainly to Polish nationals whose participation in the Scheme increased the most. There might, however, be many reasons for this increase. Further analysis is required of the process of recruitment of these Polish nationals as SAWS workers, including information about their characteristics.



*It is unlikely that the Sectors Based Scheme represents an alternative route of entry into the UK for people who might previously have entered the country as asylum seekers*

- 3.28 The government introduced the Sectors Based Scheme (SBS) in May 2003 to address shortages in lower skilled occupations, initially in food processing and hospitality. The SBS evolved from the government's commitment to developing quota based seasonal schemes to relieve recruitment difficulties in specific sectors, and was introduced following consultation with employers.
- 3.29 To manage the number of people working under the Scheme, the government has set an annual quota of 10,000 work cards for people in each of these sectors. To be eligible, employees must be between 18 and 30 years of age, and are entitled to work in the UK for up to 12 months.
- 3.30 As the Scheme only started in May 2003, it was not possible for the UCL team to conduct any trend analysis within the Scheme or compare the trend with that of asylum applications. The data do show, however, that the Scheme has so far attracted a wide range of nationalities. Nationals from eight of the 11 key countries have joined the Scheme, although together they number just 2,170 (21 per cent) of the total of 10,170 people recruited onto the Scheme during 2003. Among these, nationals from Poland accounted for the largest number of work cards - 1,206 (12 per cent) of the workers on the Scheme. Outside the group of key countries, most other countries had fewer than 100 nationals on the Scheme. The exception was Bangladesh, whose nationals accounted for the largest number of work cards among all nationalities - 2,379 or some 23 per cent of the total. The number of asylum applications from Bangladeshi nationals, however, increased over the period 2002 to 2003 by 11. The number of people of different nationalities on the Scheme therefore does not appear to be related to the fall in the number of asylum applications over the period. It is unlikely that the Scheme represents an alternative route of entry into the UK for people who might previously have entered the country as asylum seekers.

*The number of people coming to the UK as domestic workers was too small to have had any impact on the number of asylum applications during the period*

- 3.31 Domestic workers are people who travel to the UK with their employer, intending to work full time under the same roof as their employer or in a household that the employer uses regularly. Domestic workers must have been working in their employer's household for more than a year before coming to the UK and may enter the country for up to 12 months.

- 3.32 In 2003, the Home Office gave 10,602 domestic workers leave to enter the country, an increase of 5 per cent (490) compared with 2002, marginally reversing a declining trend since 1999. The biggest source country was the Philippines; Filipinos accounted for 34 per cent of the 2003 total. The 11 key countries accounted for only 4.9 per cent of the 2003 total, and the number of nationals from these countries has been declining. Overall, the number of people coming to the UK as domestic workers was too small to have had much impact on the number of asylum applications.

*The entry of newly eligible nationalities precludes any meaningful comparison between changes in the number of au pairs and of asylum applications over the period*

- 3.33 Au pairs come to the UK to learn English, live with an English-speaking family and help in the home in return for a reasonable allowance. They should be between 17 and 27 years of age, unmarried and without dependants, should not intend to stay in the UK for more than two years and come from a European country that is not a member of the European Economic Area<sup>11</sup>. Nationals from Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became eligible for entry to the UK as au pairs only from December 2002. It was therefore not possible to carry out a trend analysis on them.
- 3.34 Data were available for 14 countries, including the key countries of the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Serbia and Montenegro. The number of entrants declined from 14,653 to 11,985 in 2001, before recovering to 12,760 in 2002 and 15,314 in 2003. The increase from 2002 to 2003 was due to the first year of inclusion of the newly eligible countries, particularly Poland, 3,494 of whose nationals entered in 2003. The trend was not consistent across the four key countries, however, with the number of nationals from the Czech Republic and Serbia and Montenegro declining between 2002 and 2003. Overall, however, the entry of newly eligible nationalities precludes any meaningful comparison between changes in the number of au pairs and of asylum applications over the period.

*There is little likelihood of a link between the increase in applicants under ECAA arrangements and the fall in the number of asylum applications over the period*

- 3.35 The European Union established European Community Association Agreements (ECAA) as transitional measures to allow certain nationals of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia or Slovenia to enter European Union member states in order to establish themselves in business, while their countries prepared for accession to the Union. Home Office data for the two years April to

March 2002-03 and 2003-04 show that the number of nationals making new applications from the acceding countries more than doubled over the period, from 13,056 to 27,397 - an increase of 14,341.

3.36 The trend varied, however, between countries. Among the 11 key countries, there was an increase of 3,850 in the number of Polish nationals and an increase of 1,592 in the number of Romanians (far exceeding the falls of 894 and 663 respectively in the number of asylum applications from Polish and Romanian nationals - see Figure 10), but there were only 49 more Czechs. The combined increase of 5,491 across these three key countries - constituting 38 per cent of the total increase - was, however, exceeded by an increase of 6,040 Bulgarians (constituting 42 per cent of the total increase). Bulgaria was not one of the key countries, with only a small number of its nationals coming to the UK as asylum seekers during the period.

3.37 Linking the rise in the number of people entering the UK under ECAA arrangements with the fall in the number of asylum applications over the period is problematic. There was no consistent trend across the individual ECAA countries, some having substantial increases while others' were more modest. There are also difficulties in interpreting the ECAA data. No study has been carried out to ascertain the characteristics of the people that have come to the UK under the ECAA arrangements, which might vary from country to country. It is likely, however, that the buoyant state of the UK labour market and the opportunities offered by the ECAA system would have persuaded citizens of some of these countries to come to the UK to work. These factors, together with the increase in nationals from countries with small numbers of asylum applications, suggest that there is little likelihood of a link between the increase in entrants under ECAA arrangements and the fall in the number of asylum applications over the period.

*The statistical evidence does not support the view that potential asylum seekers have been diverted into the academic route of entering the UK*

3.38 Numbers of international students have been rising globally over recent years. International students constitute a very diverse group, covering young people attending both short (a few weeks) and long (3 to 4 year undergraduate and postgraduate) courses. The group also includes a wide range of different types of students, studying language, vocational and various other further and higher education courses. In the UK, many educational institutions have been encouraged to increase their foreign student intake and actively to recruit people from abroad.

3.39 The number of students given leave to enter the UK increased annually between 1999 and 2002, the largest increase of 40,173 occurring in 1999-2000. In 2002-03, however, the number of students entering the country fell by 48,465 (13 per cent) to 318,628. The trend for the 11 key countries broadly followed that for total foreign students. Over the period 1999 to 2003, the annual changes in the number of students from the key countries were small compared with the total changes. The total number of overseas students from the group of 11 key countries fell by 1,393 (some 5 per cent) in 2003 from a total of 29,454 in 2002. On this evidence, it is difficult to support the view that potential asylum seekers have been diverted into entering the UK as students.

**The absence of data on illegal migrants entering the UK means that it is not possible to assess whether some people have decided not to claim asylum but have entered, or stayed in the country, illegally**

3.40 Perhaps the major statistical challenge that every country faces relating to international migration is how to estimate the number of illegal migrants working in, or entering, the country. There are neither data sources nor estimates of the number of people living illegally in the UK. It was therefore not possible to assess whether some people have decided not to claim asylum but have entered, or stayed in the country, illegally.

3.41 The production of estimates of illegal populations is now a priority for many countries. In July 2003, in response to the Home Affairs Select Committee's April 2003 report on Asylum Removals (HC 654-1), the government pointed out that it was working towards the development of methods to estimate numbers of illegal residents in the UK. A study completed in 2002 for the Home Office reviewed methodologies used by researchers and government agencies in other countries to estimate the size of illegal populations. It assessed the viability of using these methods in the UK. In its response to the select committee, the government stated that it would assess the merits of these approaches to ensure that any commitments to put them into practice were appropriate. The Home Office told us that it is evaluating whether any of the methods described in the 2002 study could be applied in the UK.

## Further analysis of how individual routes of entry work for individual countries would be helpful

3.42 The UCL team focused their statistical analyses on changes in the number of people entering the UK through individual routes of entry. The analyses pointed up variation between countries, which makes generalisation difficult. Any diversion away from applying for asylum might, for example, be spread differentially between various alternative routes of entry. It is also possible that any diversion might have slowed a decrease already taking place in other routes. To assess how far this might be the case, however, further research would be required. Such research might usefully assess the way in which each of the routes of entry operates with respect to individual sending countries. Research might also be carried out to compare asylum flows with the combined statistics for all routes of entry and by nationality. This would allow the Home Office to obtain a broader picture of any relationships between asylum and other forms of migration, rather than one based only on individual routes.

## Evidence of any asylum applicants being encouraged to enter by other routes

- 3.43 During our interviews with immigration officers at the ports of entry, enforcement offices and asylum screening units, we enquired into the possibilities to divert potential asylum seekers to legal routes of entry. As we noted in paragraph 1.25, we found that immigration officers gave potential applicants every opportunity to claim asylum. We found no evidence of deflection to legal routes of entry. No officials approached us during our visits to disclose any concerns about diversion of people away from the asylum route of entry.
- 3.44 In response to media and public concern around the asylum process, the Accounting Officer for the Home Office sent a message to all staff in IND on 25 March 2004 reminding them of the established procedures for reporting their concerns about the propriety of the management of the asylum process. As at 19 May 2004, no such concerns had been raised since the Accounting Officer's message.

# Appendix 1

## Methods

In preparation for this work, we consulted with the National Statistician, the Statistics Commission and the Royal Statistical Society:

### **Consultation with the National Statistician, the Statistics Commission and the Royal Statistical Society**

We met with Len Cook, the National Statistician, to discuss the terms of reference for the audit, the National Statistics Code of Practice and Protocols and the National Statistician's expectations of Heads of Profession for statistics in government departments.

We also consulted with the Statistics Commission and the Royal Statistical Society over who might help us with our audit; and with the Statistics Commission on their May 2004 report "Legislation to build trust in the statistics" Statistics Commission Report No 18.

## The reliability of the quarterly asylum statistics

To provide assurance on the reliability of the quarterly asylum statistics we reviewed data entry to the Home Office's three databases - CID, ASYS and DELMIS; undertook testing of a sample of entries on the databases back to source documents on the Home Office's files; and reviewed the quality assurance work undertaken by operating units and the Home Office's statisticians:

### **Visits to immigration offices responsible for data entry onto CID**

We visited 21 immigration units around the country to examine controls over the entry of data onto the Case Information Database (CID), the Home Office's main database:

- four of the 38 major ports of entry - Dover, Stansted, Heathrow (Terminals 1 and 2) and Gatwick - which in March 2004 accounted for 47 per cent of asylum applications at ports. During these visits we:
  - interviewed 23 senior managers and Chief Immigration Officers and 13 Immigration Officers and other officers about the recording of asylum applications on CID;

- reviewed trends in the number of applications recorded; and
- reviewed management information on the quality of data input.
- Coquelles in France, where the immigration service operate border controls on the French side of the Channel (juxtaposed border controls). In this visit we:
  - interviewed 2 Immigration Officers and the data quality manager about the operation of the processes for turning back those who wanted to travel to the UK without entry clearance and for recording asylum cases denied entry to the UK.
- the asylum screening units in Croydon, Birmingham and Liverpool, where people who have recently arrived in the UK or are already in the UK and have travelled to those centres make their application for asylum. In these visits we:
  - interviewed 7 senior managers and Chief Immigration Officers and 5 other officers about how they record asylum applications on CID;
  - reviewed trends in the number of applications recorded; and
  - reviewed management information on the quality of data input.
- six of the 32 local enforcement offices, Bedford, Birmingham, Croydon, Dover, Eaton House in London, and Liverpool, which undertake operations to arrest failed asylum seekers and other illegal immigrants and organise enforced removals. In these visits we:
  - interviewed 19 senior managers and Chief Immigration Officers and 29 Immigration Officers and other officers about the operations planned and carried out and the recording of removals on CID;
  - reviewed local decisions to pursue operations to arrest, detain and remove immigration offenders, including failed asylum seekers; and
  - reviewed local practices for handling new asylum applications arising from these operations or from local police arrests of people without legal status to stay in the UK; and reviewed management information on the quality of data input.

- the Oakington Reception Centre, where applicants' cases are decided in the fast-track and non-suspensive appeals processes. During this visit we:
  - interviewed 4 Chief Immigration Officers and 7 Immigration Officers and other officers about the handling of applications, decisions and removals and the recording of key data on CID; and
  - reviewed local management information on the accuracy of data on CID in respect of asylum seekers handled in Oakington.
- the two main caseworking units, in Liverpool and in Croydon, which make decisions on asylum cases and the associated support teams responsible for the despatch of asylum decisions. In these visits we:
  - interviewed 6 senior and middle managers and 10 other staff about the recording of decisions and decision despatch dates;
  - reviewed trends in the number of decisions recorded; and
  - reviewed management information on the quality of data input.
- the asylum appeals processing centre in Croydon, which receives applications to appeal against an initial decision and organises the work of the Home Office's teams who represent the Home Office case at appeal. In this visit we:
  - interviewed 4 senior and middle managers and 3 other staff about the recording of appeals lodged and the reconsideration of asylum decisions;
  - reviewed trends in the recording of appeals lodged; and
  - reviewed management information on the quality of data input.

#### **Visits to immigration offices responsible for data entry onto ASYS**

For the audit of data entry onto ASYS, the database recording applications and changes in subsistence and accommodation support for asylum seekers, we visited the National Asylum Support Service offices in Croydon, where we:

- interviewed 20 staff and reviewed the procedures for recording applications for support, decisions on eligibility, changes to an applicant's support and cessations;
- undertook walk-through tests and compliance tests of the procedures; and
- tested that applications for support recorded by voluntary agencies are recorded on ASYS and that terminations of support were recorded.

#### **Visits to immigration offices responsible for data entry onto DELMIS**

For the audit of data entry onto DELMIS, the database of those held in detention maintained by the Detention Estate Procurement and Management Unit, we made visits to their offices in Feltham and Croydon, where we:

- interviewed 3 staff about the risks to the completeness and accuracy of the recording of detention and release or removal from the detention estate; and
- checked DELMIS records to contractors' records.



### Review of samples of Home Office files

We selected a total sample of 350 cases from the three Home Office databases to check the accuracy of the data recorded back to individual case files. In the three weeks available for the audit following the selection of the sample (3 May 2004 to 21 May 2004) the Immigration and Nationality Directorate was able to make 276 of the 350 case files available for review. The Home Office told us that 15 files could not be located, while the other 59 files were not found or available in time for the audit.

System	Element to be tested	Aug 03- Nov 03 Sample	Aug 03- Nov 03 Reviewed	Jan 04- Mar 04 Sample	Jan 04- Mar 04 Reviewed	Total sample size selected	Total sample size reviewed
CID	Applications received, initial decisions, appeals received (includes sub-sample of 40 from Oakington Reception Centre)	70	62	70	55	140	117 <sup>1</sup>
	Removals	30	26	30	22	60	48
ASYS	Applications for support In receipt of support	25	20	25 50 <sup>2</sup>	16 46	50 50	36 <sup>4</sup> 46
DELMIS	Asylum detainees	25 <sup>2</sup>	16	25 <sup>3</sup>	13	50	29
	<b>Total</b>	150	124	200	152	350	276

#### NOTES

- 1 In the sample of 117 applications, initial decisions had been reached on 103, and appeals had been lodged on 40
- 2 In receipt of support as at 31 March 2004, as reported in Quarterly Asylum Statistics, Q1 2004
- 3 In detention as at 27 December 2003 and 31 March 2004, as reported in Quarterly Asylum Statistics, Q4 2003 and Q1 2004
- 4 As well as testing entries on ASYS back to Home Office files to check that applications for NASS support were from asylum applicants, we checked the same cases to NASS files to confirm that they had been correctly recorded from NASS applications. NASS found 40 of the 50 files for our audit review.

## Working in line with the National Statistics guidelines and standards

To review the extent to which Home Office statisticians were working in line with National Statistics guidelines and standards, we reviewed the work of its statisticians:

### Review of the work of Home Office statisticians

We reviewed the work of the Home Office statisticians in producing the asylum statistics from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's operational databases against the National Statistics Codes of Practice and Protocols. In particular we:

- interviewed key staff involved with the production of the published figures at all stages of the process;

- assessed the accuracy and reliability of the process for importing data from CID, ASYS, IRIS and DELMIS into the statistical databases, including through re-performance;
- reviewed the processes for extracting the data to be used in the asylum statistics;
- for Quarter 3 and 4 2003 and Quarter 1 2004 re-performed key calculations, analyses and extractions using our own audit software; and
- reviewed the documentation held by the statisticians to provide an audit trail for their work.

Professor Tim Holt, of the Department of Social Statistics at Southampton University, provided assurance, as expert reference partner, on our audit approach and findings on the work of the Home Office statisticians and the extent to which the statisticians work in line with the National Statistics Code of Practice for Government Statistics and the associated Protocols.

## Whether changes in the number of asylum applications have had any impact on other forms of migration

To review whether changes in the number of asylum applications have had any impact on other forms of migration we reviewed the Home Office's evidence of the impact of its statutory and non-statutory measures to reduce the number of applications and commissioned analysis of data on migrants entering the UK:

### **Review of the impact of statutory and non-statutory initiatives on the level of asylum applications**

We interviewed staff within the Home Office's Immigration and Nationality Directorate about the statutory and non-statutory initiatives that had been introduced since November 2002 to reduce the intake of asylum seekers into the UK and their impact on the number of asylum applications made, and on other asylum statistics.

We reviewed their model of the impact of initiatives on asylum applications, including their October 2002 forecasts against actual numbers of applications made each month from October 2002 to March 2004, and reviewed trends for specific nationalities.

### **Review of whether changes in the number of asylum applications have had a statistical impact on other forms of migration**

We commissioned Professor John Salt, of the Migration Research Unit at the Department of Geography, University College London (UCL), to undertake a statistical review of whether changes in the number of asylum applications have had any significant impact on other forms of migration. The UCL team, consisting of Professor Salt and James Clarke, assisted by Dr Paul Densham in UCL's Department of Geography, reviewed changes in asylum applications in the UK against:

- asylum applications in selected other European countries
- people given leave to enter the UK, as students, au pairs and domestic workers
- people given leave to enter under European Community Association Agreements
- applications for work permits and first permissions
- people entering the country with work permits
- applications for the Sectors Based Scheme
- applications for the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme
- international migration inflows data from the International Passenger Survey
- visitor flows data from the International Passenger Survey

The UCL team would have liked to include in their statistical analysis the annual National Statistics about migrant workers, published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The most recent set of published Statistics was for 2001-02, however, and therefore did not cover 2002 or 2003. DWP was due to publish the 2002-03 Statistics in April 2004 but has announced today that publication has been delayed because of concerns about the quality of statistics produced from data taken from the National Insurance Recording System. Previous years' statistics have always undercounted, to some degree, the total number of migrants applying to work in the UK each year. The Department expects to receive new data from the System in July 2004, which will allow it to revise prior years' statistics and provide a more complete picture of migrants applying for National Insurance numbers. It will then use these to publish relevant National Statistics. The DWP data were intended to complement the other data sets used by the UCL team. Their absence therefore did not impair the statistical analysis or its results.

**The work of the UCL team is reflected in Part 3 of this Report.**



# Appendix 2

## History of the Home Office's Case Information Database

### The origins of CID: The Casework Programme

- In 1996, the Home Office awarded a private finance contract to Siemens Business Services (Siemens) to develop a bespoke database system for immigration casework known as the Casework Programme. The Programme was intended to provide a paperless system of case records, supplemented by on-line access to legislation, guidance and precedent, automatic generation of letters and prompts for action to be taken by caseworkers.
- The contract was expected to generate efficiency savings in the handling of immigration cases of some £150 million over seven years for the Home Office from which it was to pay some £77 million to Siemens.
- Siemens and the Home Office expected to introduce new working and associated software by November 1998. The Home Office and Siemens stopped the further development of the Casework Programme in February 2001, however, because it was considered to be over complex and out of touch with the Home Office's working practices. The Home Office decided that the CID database offered a more cost effective solution.

- From 1996 to March 2004 the Home Office has paid £203 million to Siemens under the contract, and it expects to pay a further £34 million to October 2004. The increase in cost of the contract resulted from a range of factors including the increased user base from 2,500 to 12,000 increased asylum functionality, incorporation of Work Permits, enhanced capacity for Management Information and the one year contract extension.

### Plans to enhance CID

- In 2003 the Home Office started a competitive tendering exercise for the award of a new contract to manage and enhance its computer network and support and maintain CID. It aims to award the new contract in July 2004 and transfer responsibility to its new contractor on 1 November 2004. Final bids from the three short-listed contractors - Siemens Business Services, Fujitsu Services Ltd and SchlumbergerSema - are due by the end of May.
- Meanwhile, the Home Office is developing its IT strategy to build on CID, but it has no formal plans yet in place.

### The development of CID

- In March 2002, the Home Office and Siemens agreed a revised contract to develop and operate CID until the end of the original contract date of October 2003. The Home Office has extended the contract until October 2004, when a new contract will commence after competition.
- CID started as a database containing basic details about asylum applicants, and was initially operating as an interim solution. It has, however, been extended over time to capture increasing amounts of data on most aspects of an asylum case. It is currently used by around 12,000 staff.

# Glossary

Asylum Screening Units	Asylum applications from people already in the country, who have entered either with a visa or clandestinely, are made at one of the three Asylum Screening Units, which are in Croydon, Birmingham and Liverpool.
ASYS	The Home Office's main asylum database, containing details about asylum seekers applying for support from the National Asylum Support Service.
Case Information Database (CID)	The Home Office database containing details about most aspects of asylum cases, including applications, decisions, appeals and removals.
Casework Programme	A Home Office project to develop a bespoke, paperless immigration casework system. Work on this programme ceased in 2001.
Correlation analysis	A statistical technique used to measure the strength of any association or relationship between two or more sets of data.
Detainee Location and Management Information System (DELMIS)	The Home Office database containing details about asylum seekers and immigration offenders who have been detained.
EURODAC	The system for the comparison of fingerprints of asylum applicants across European Union Member States.
European Community Association Agreements	These agreements were established by the European Union as a transitional measure to allow nationals of countries acceding to the Union in 2004, plus Bulgaria and Romania, to establish themselves in business in European Union countries. Requirements include having sufficient capital to establish the business and not supplementing business activities by taking or seeking other employment in the UK.
European Economic Area	The European Economic Area includes the 15 old and ten new member states of the European Union, and three of the four states of the European Free Trade Association (Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein ).

Government Statistical Service	The Government Statistical Service comprises civil servants involved in the production of government statistics in England, Scotland and Wales. It sets professional standards for its members, and runs a centralised recruitment service for statisticians across government departments and agencies.
Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND)	The Home Office Directorate responsible for considering applications to stay, citizenship and asylum in the UK, and for immigration control at air and sea ports and the Channel Tunnel.
Immigration Appellate Authority	The Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) is a tribunal which hears appeals against the Home Secretary's decisions in asylum and immigration matters. The Immigration Appellate Authority is part of the Tribunals Group of the Court Service, an executive agency of the Department for Constitutional Affairs.
Immigration Record Information System (IRIS)	The Immigration Appellate Authority database containing details about appeal hearings and their outcome.
International Passenger Survey (IPS)	The IPS is a continuous voluntary sample survey of passengers arriving at and departing from the main UK sea and airports and the Channel Tunnel. Moves between the Irish Republic and the UK and the Channel Islands and the mainland are excluded. It currently samples about 0.2 per cent of passengers.
International Students	This group includes young people attending both short (a few weeks) and long (3-4 year undergraduate and postgraduate) courses, including language, vocational and various further and higher education courses.
Migrants	These are people who have been outside the country for more than a year and are coming in with the intention of remaining for more than a year (immigrants) or have been in the country for more than a year and are leaving with the intention of being away for more than a year (emigrants).
National Asylum Support Service (NASS)	The National Asylum Support Service provides subsistence support and accommodation for asylum seekers whilst their claim is being considered by IND.

National Statistician	The National Statistician is the Head of both the Office for National Statistics and the Government Statistical Service.
Office of National Statistics (ONS)	The Office for National Statistics is the government department responsible for producing a wide range of key economic and social statistics. The Director of ONS is accountable to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.
National Statistics Code of Practice	The National Statistics Code of Practice sets out the key principles and standards which government statisticians are expected to follow and uphold. It is supported by 11 separate Protocols (see below).
National Statistics Protocols	<p>The National Statistics Protocols, available at <a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about_ns/cop/default.asp">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about_ns/cop/default.asp</a>, describe how the principles and standards of the ONS Code of Practice are to be implemented in practice. The eleven Protocols issued cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Release Practices</li> <li>■ Consultation Arrangements Between the National Statistician and UK Government Ministers</li> <li>■ Professional Competence</li> <li>■ Customer Service and User Consultation</li> <li>■ Data Presentation, Dissemination and Pricing</li> <li>■ Statistical Integration</li> <li>■ Data Management, Documentation and Preservation</li> <li>■ Managing Respondent Load</li> <li>■ Quality Management</li> <li>■ Revisions</li> <li>■ Data Access and Confidentiality</li> </ul>
Oakington Reception Centre	The Oakington Reception Centre is a fast track facility where principal applicants and dependants are detained while their asylum claim is decoded. It is used for asylum cases that, upon initial screening, appear to be straightforward and suitable for speedy decision-making.
Quarterly Bulletins	National Statistics on asylum published quarterly by the Home Office.
Regression analysis	A statistical technique used to determine whether there is an association or relationship between two or more sets of data.

Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS)	The Home Office Directorate responsible for Home Office statistical services and publications.
Royal Statistical Society	The Royal Statistical Society aims to develop, foster and disseminate statistical knowledge, methodology and good practice for the benefit of all society. It has some 7,200 members based in the United Kingdom and overseas.
Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS)	SAWS aims to facilitate the movement of young people from across Europe to work in agriculture, particularly in peak seasons. Participants are mainly students aged between 18 and 25.
Sectors Based Scheme (SBS)	SBS was introduced in May 2003 to address shortages in lower skilled occupations, initially in two sectors of the economy: food processing and hospitality. Employers are invited to apply on a first come first served basis for work cards, which can be issued for overseas employees aged 18 to 30 to work for up to 12 months.
Statistics Commission	The Statistics Commission is an independent non-departmental public body set up in June 2000 to help ensure that official statistics are trustworthy and responsive to public needs. It is sponsored by HM Treasury and operates independently of both Ministers and the producers of statistics, including the ONS.
Work Permits	The employment of people who are subject to immigration control is regulated by the granting of work permits by Work Permits (UK), part of the Home Office since 2001. Under the 1971 Immigration Act, a work permit is granted to a specific employer for a named person for a specific job. For a permit to be issued an overseas worker has to have both a specific job to come to and a skill or qualification that is needed.