

Rt Hon Meg Hillier MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

21 June 2022

Dear Chair,

At my appearance on 23 May I committed to follow up with answers to questions asked during the session. Please find these below.

Inadmissibility and relocation to Rwanda

You asked for a quarterly update on how many people claiming asylum have been declared as inadmissible and will be relocated to Rwanda as part of our Migration and Economic Development partnership.

To recap, from 1 January 2021, following the UK's departure from the European Union, new inadmissibility rules came into effect. The inadmissibility rules provide the grounds for treating an asylum claim as inadmissible to the UK asylum system, if a person has earlier presence in, or connection to, a safe third country. It also provides for the person to be removed to that or another safe third country, with that country's permission. Rwanda is such a safe third country.

The Home Office already publishes detail on how many asylum claims are considered for inadmissibility action, considered inadmissible, removed to safe third countries and top countries to which returns are made as part of quarterly immigration statistics. The most recent statistics were published on 26 May 2022 and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-march-2022/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to#inadmissibility>

But for ease I am setting out the detail below:

Between 1 January 2021 and 31 March 2022:

- 13,473 asylum claimants were identified for consideration on inadmissibility grounds
- 12,277 'notices of intent' were issued to individuals to inform them that their case was being reviewed in order to determine whether removal action on inadmissibility grounds was appropriate and possible
- 6,573 individuals were subsequently admitted into the UK asylum process for substantive consideration of their asylum claim

As you will be aware, a judicial review of the Migration and Economic Development Partnership is currently before the High Court, with a hearing due next month. Therefore, we are currently not in a position to set out how we will provide specific updates on the progress of the partnership.

Student Visas

You asked whether the wait time for student visas is three weeks.

At the session I confirmed we are regularly updating pages on gov.uk relating to wait times and that the Home Office has been prioritising Ukraine Visa Schemes applications in response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Student applications submitted outside of the UK are currently taking on average 5 weeks to process. We are working hard to process applications to get back to the 3-week service standard.

We are communicating directly with customers that applications for study are taking longer to process at this time. Staff are being redeployed to these visa routes and we continue to onboard and train more staff, as we approach the expected summer surge in visa applications including to study in the UK.

We continue to process applications under the student route submitted within the UK inside our 8-week service standard.

Passports

You asked what the current passport backlog figure is and when the lead time for receiving a passport will go back to 6 weeks.

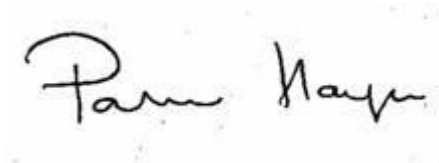
As I noted at the session, we are dealing with record levels of intake so that work in progress will naturally be high, but we also have higher numbers of caseworkers and have record levels of output. The number of passport applications in progress is not the best measure of how the system is operating, as HM Passport Office carries work in progress across the year as part of normal operational planning.

By way of illustration, approximately 250,000 passport applications are being processed each week, and the latest figures show more than 90% were processed within 6 weeks. It has always been the case that a British passport will not be issued until all checks have been satisfactorily completed, and where further information is required, applications will take longer. In the week ending 8 May, 1.4% of applications from the UK had completed processing outside of 10 weeks.

We put the 10-week service standard in place as early as April 2021 because we knew of the latent demand following the pandemic. Over 5 million people delayed their passport applications in 2020 and 2021, and as passport demand has returned applications will take longer.

There are no plans currently to change this advice until the demand for passports returns closer to normal levels. In the meantime, we urge customers to make their applications in good time, allowing 10 weeks for processing, and not to book travel without a passport that meets their travel needs.

With my very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Patricia Hayes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Patricia" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and the last name "Hayes" follows in a similar but slightly smaller script. The ink is dark and the background is white.

Patricia Hayes
Second Permanent Secretary, Home Office