

ASYLUM BACKLOGS

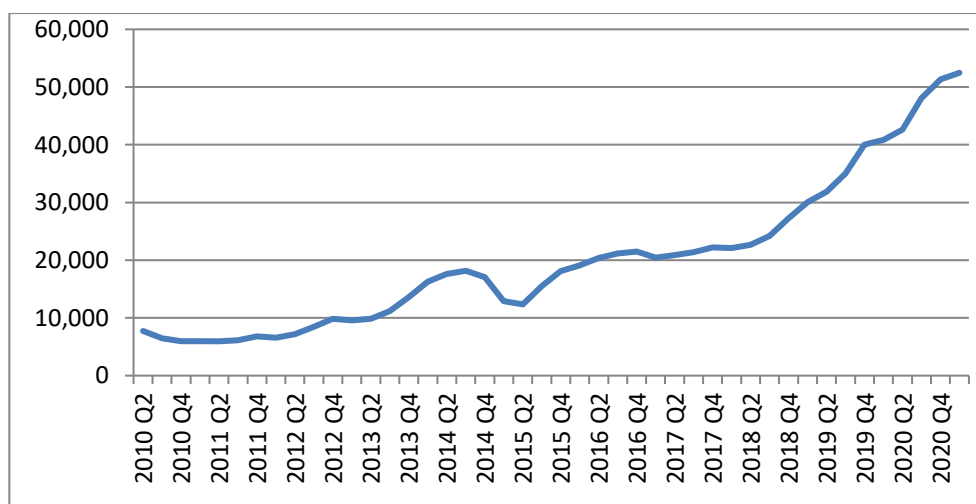
May 2021

Although asylum decision making has clearly been badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic the backlog of asylum application awaiting a decision is not a new phenomenon. At the end of March 2021 39,252 applications had been pending for more than six months. This is the highest figure recorded

At the end of March 2021 54,973 of the applications for asylum received since April 2006 from main applicants were pending a decision (either an initial decision or further review). After decreasing during 2016 this figure rose during 2017 and 2018. The Home Office had previously explained that the rise was due to a drop in staffing levels and that they had taken steps to rectify this; the dip in early 2015 appears to substantiate this. However the number of cases outstanding for more than 6 months increased in each quarter of 2016, before decreasing slightly in the first quarter of 2017. It rose again during the remaining quarters of 2017 and reached the highest figure ever recorded since this data was published (2010) in the first quarter of 2021. There had been a reduction in the number of cases pending further review over recent years but the number increased in quarter 1 of 2019 before falling in quarter 2 and then increasing again during 2020. There was a decrease in the first quarter of 2021.

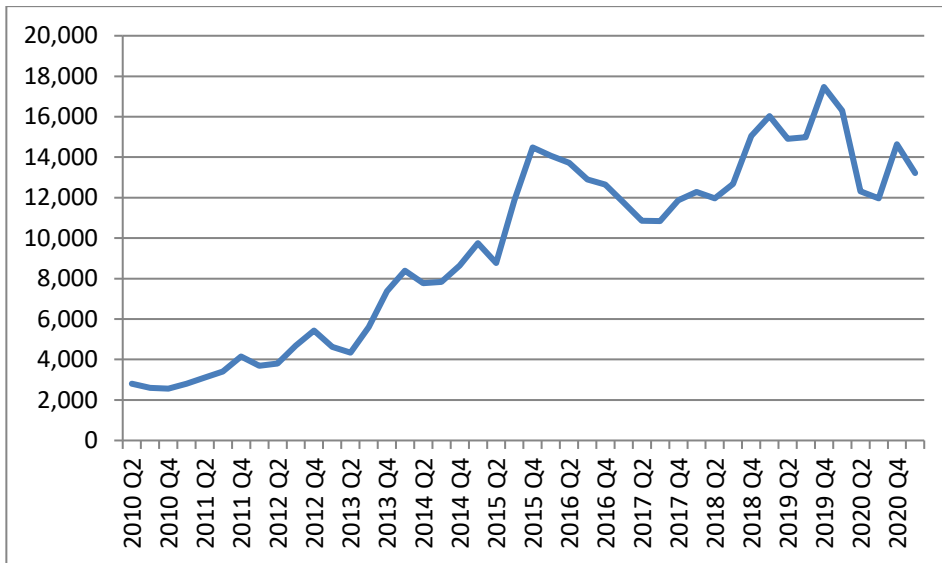
During 2010 the number of asylum initial decisions taken in each quarter was larger than the number of new applications. However in every quarter since then the opposite has been true, except for the last quarter of 2014 and the first two quarters of 2015. (The initial decisions taken in a quarter are not necessarily on applications made in that same quarter, but the cumulative effect of a continued gap over a number of years between applications made and decisions made is inevitably an increase in the number of cases with decisions pending). The statistics on pending cases have been published since quarter 2, 2010.

The chart below show the total number of cases awaiting an initial decision.

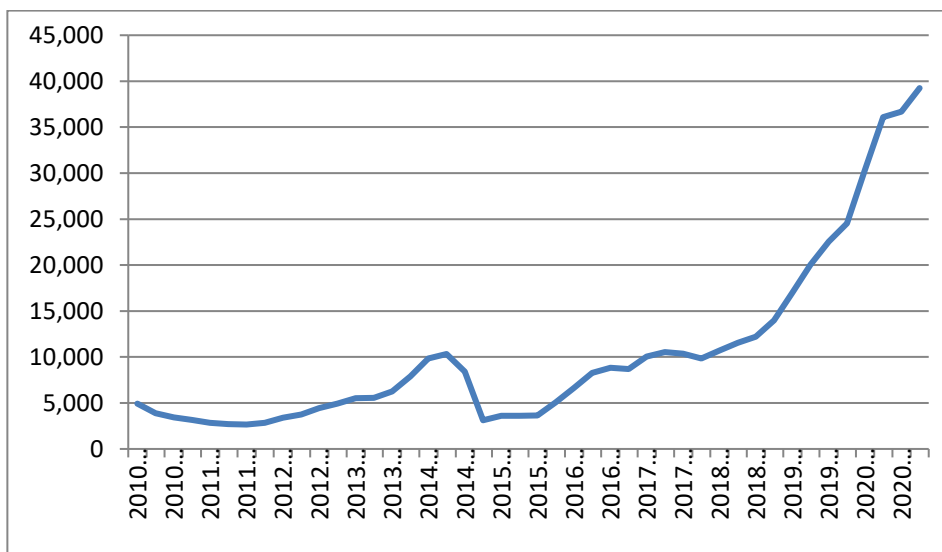


The published statistics also break down the cases into those where an initial decision has been pending for less than 6 months and more than 6 months. The charts below show this data.

Decision pending 6 months or less:



Decision pending for more than 6 months:



It is clear that the number of cases waiting over 6 months increased very significantly from 2011 until 2014, but then reduced quite rapidly until 2016 when it rose again. The first quarter of 2017 showed a small decrease but this was followed by an increase each quarter until the end of 2017 and a further increase in every quarter since then.

Decisions pending further review

Since the beginning of 2012 until recently there was relatively little change in the number of cases pending further review, ranging from a high of 4,904 in the first quarter of 2012, to a low of 3,412 in the first quarter of 2014. However in the last quarter of 2014 the figure rose to 5,907, and rose again in 2015 up to 9,236 at the end of June 2015, the highest since 2010 when these statistics were first reported. Since then the numbers have reduced and at the end of June 2017 the figure had fallen to 2,527. It rose slightly in the next quarter to 2,794 at the end of September but fell to 2,323 at the end of 2017 before rising to 2,493 at the end of March 2018 and falling again to 2,091 at the end of September 2018 and 1,760 at the end of the year. In the first quarter of 2019 it rose to 2,282, then fell to 2,164 in the second quarter and rose to 2,407 in the third quarter and to 3,614 in the fourth quarter. The figure fell to 1,381 in the first quarter of 2020 and then rose to 1,798 in the second quarter, to 2,125 in the third quarter and to 3,812 in the final quarter before falling again in the first quarter of 2021.

The Home Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons looks at the work of the Immigration Directorates within the Home Office on a regular basis. In the most recent published report on this issue in 2016 the Committee commented on the increased number of outstanding asylum applications. They said:

- The available data do not allow us to judge whether UKVI is meeting its service standards of processing straightforward asylum cases within six months and non-straightforward cases within 12 months as no such breakdown is provided. There is little point in having service standards if the information is published in such a way that does not allow UKVI's performance to be judged against them. The data must be published in a way that allows such scrutiny.
- The number of outstanding asylum applications is at an all-time high. Despite repeated warnings from this Committee the Home Office has done nothing to address this situation and it must set out what steps it is taking to tackle this concern.

The Committee's report can be found at:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/151/15102.htm>

The most recent asylum statistics can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets#asylum-applications-decisions-and-resettlement>

About the Refugee Council

The Refugee Council is one of the leading organisations in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees. We give help and support to asylum seekers and refugees, and also work with them to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed by decision-makers.