



Modern slavery Referrals by small boat migrants (2018-2022)

Illegal Immigration: MW 512

13 January 2022

Key points

In the first half of 2022, over half of all small boat modern slavery (SBMS) referrals came from Albania. This is five times more than the second largest group (Eritreans).

In the first half of 2022, already 59 per cent of the total amount of the previous year's total SBMS referrals had been made.

The previous record for the most SBMS referrals for a single nationality was the 74 per cent of referrals relating to Iranians in 2019. However, the number of Albanian SBMS referrals in 2022 is five times the Iranian total from 2019.

It is estimated, based upon data published as part of a Freedom of Information release, that less than half (22-45 per cent) of SBMS referrals ultimately receive a positive decision.

Introduction

Since 2018, England's southern coast has experienced frequent, often daily, crossing of immigrants arriving in the United Kingdom illegally via small boats holding anything from five to fifty or more people. This year, it has emerged that a significant number of these individuals have been making claims of modern slavery. In 2021, there were 8,388 referrals for foreign nationals, of which 23 per cent came via small boat. According to former immigration minister Chris Philp MP, this is done because a low burden of proof makes it difficult for caseworkers to dismiss false claims.¹

In previous work by Migration Watch UK, it was shown that a certain group, Albanians, coming from a safe country had become the single largest nationality being referred for modern slavery under the National Referral Mechanism.² This paper follows on from that to show the link between those claims and illegal small boat crossings using Freedom of Information data.

¹ Philp, Chris., End the scourge of bogus modern slavery claims, 16 August 2022, The Daily Telegraph, available at: [telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/08/16/end-scourge-bogus-modern-slavery-claims/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/08/16/end-scourge-bogus-modern-slavery-claims/) (last accessed 13 December 2022).

² Migration Watch UK., The Abuse Of Modern Slavery Laws By Asylum Seekers, 22 September 2022, available at: migrationwatchuk.org/news/2022/09/20/the-abuse-of-modern-slavery-laws-by-asylum-seekers (last accessed 13 December 2022).

Analysis

Table 1: Number of SBMS referrals, 2018-End of June 2022 (Source: Freedom of Information release, December 2022)

Year of arrival	Total	Of total crossings (%)
2018	12	4
2019	159	8.6
2020	1,176	13.9
2021	1,946	6.8
2022 to June	1,156	9.1
Total 2018 to 2022	4,449	8.6

Table 1 above shows the number of individuals for each year since Channel crossings began in their current form that are identified as potential victims of modern slavery, whether immediately or at a later date (including, for example, if their presence in the UK is not detected upon making landfall).

As Table 1 above shows, the number of small boat arrivals to be referred as a potential modern slavery has grown significantly since 2018, although peaking as a proportion of the total in 2020 at 14 per cent of the total crossings that year.

By June 2022, the number of SBMS claimants had already reached near-parity with 2020, and is likely to have surpassed the 1,946 of 2021 by the end of the year.

Table 2: Top nationalities among SBMS referrals 2019-End of June 2022 (%)

Country	2019	Country	2020	Country	2021	Country	2022 to June
Iran	74.2	Sudan	31.7	Vietnam	24.6	Albania	51.1
Iraq	15.1	Iran	17.2	Eritrea	14.7	Eritrea	10
Afghanistan	3.8	Eritrea	10	Iran	11.4	Sudan	7.7
All other nationalities	6.9	Iraq	8.3	Sudan	11.3	Iran	6.1
		Yemen	5.6	Albania	11.2	Vietnam	6

Above, Table 2 shows the national groups being referred the most in each year by percentage (the full list is available in Annex A). 2019 shows only three nationalities due to a low number of SBMS referrals that year.

In the first half of 2022 (which had around seven times more crossings than 2019), over half of the SBMS referrals concerned Albanians, a NATO member and aspiring European Union member state. This amounted to 591 referrals for Albanians in the first half of 2022.

Over the three and a half years covered by Table 2, Iranian is the only nationality to have been consistently represented in the top five. There were about 613 referrals by Iranians over the period, with the highest number in 2021 when there were 222 referrals.

Overall, the 74.2 per cent of referrals by Iranians in 2019, when there were 118 such referrals, is the largest proportion recorded for a single nationality. Although, this occurred in a year when illegal Channel crossings remained relatively low.

Table 3: Number of SBMS referrals to have received Positive Conclusive Grounds

Outcome	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 to June
Positive Conclusive Grounds	5	51	123	73	38
Balanced % of the total	45	45	22.5	30	-

Table 3 above shows the number of SBMS referrals arriving in each year to have subsequently received Positive Conclusive Grounds for their claims. That is to say, those who have been acknowledged as victims of modern slavery, including those who may have appealed an initial rejection.

2020 was the year in which the most, so far, have received positive conclusions when a high number of Sudanese made the crossings.

These figures may not be representative of the final SBMS grant rate because the data do not show the number of cases yet to receive a conclusive grounds decision. However, by balancing out the claims against the overall number of asylum claimants to have had their claims settled, we are able to create an approximate estimate of the total SBMS claimants to have their claims approved in each year as shown in the final row of Table 3 (see the methodology section below for a full explanation of how this estimate has been reached).

This indicates that over half of SBMS referrals are rejected or withdrawn, growing to over 75 per cent from the 2020 cohort.

Methodology

All the data within this briefing, unless otherwise referenced, comes from a Freedom of Information request submitted on the 17th of August 2022, and fulfilled on the 8th of December 2022. The full data from that request as provided is available in Annex A.

The estimate of final Positive Conclusive Ground referrals accompanying Table 3 is reached according to the following. As the asylum application backlog has passed 100,000 and includes applications going back several years,³ the data provided is an insufficient hallmark of final approved claims unless it is re-balanced to account for this. As such, the proportion of asylum claims from each year still outstanding as of June 2022 is identified. That proportion is then deducted from the total number of SBMS referrals made that year. This leaves those known to have received a positive conclusion, and those that will have been rejected or withdrawn while excluding completely those which may still be awaiting a final conclusion.

Below are the percentages of total asylum claims from each year still awaiting a final grounds decision and the equivalent number of claims to be deducted from the annual totals in line with the above explanation.

³ Home Office., How many people do we grant protection to?, 24 November 2022, available at: [gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-september-2022/how-many-people-do-we-grant-protection-to#outcomes-of-asylum-applications](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-september-2022/how-many-people-do-we-grant-protection-to#outcomes-of-asylum-applications) (last accessed 13 December 2022).

Annex A

Freedom of Information Request reference: 71409

1. Amongst migrants arriving in the UK via small boat crossings, what number claimed⁵ to be victims of modern slavery?

Year of arrival	Total
2018	12
2019	159
2020	1176
2021	1946
2022 up to 30th June	1156

⁴ Ibid

⁵ In a subsequent clarification it was made clear that claims/claimants are synonymous with referrals to the National Referral Mechanism.

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
Applications awaiting a decision (%) ⁴	11.74	28.84	53.49	93.55
Claims deducted from estimate calculation	1	46	629	1,820

2. Please break down the number of migrants coming to the UK via small boat crossings by birth country who have claimed to be victims of modern slavery.

Nationality	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Afghanistan		6	34	64	46
Albania	<5	<5	17	218	591
Algeria				<5	<5
Benin				<5	<5
Cameroon					<5
Central African Republic			<5	<5	
Chad			33	8	8
Ivory Coast			7	<5	<5
Egypt		<5	5	40	26
Eritrea			118	286	116
Ethiopia			25	59	22
Gambia		<5	7	<5	<5
Guinea		<5	7	<5	<5
Guinea-Bissau			<5		
India			17	<5	14
Iran	<5	118	202	222	71
Iraq		24	98	123	19
Kuwait			<5	<5	<5
Kuwait Bidoun			20	7	<5
Lebanon		<5			
Liberia			<5	<5	
Libya			<5	<5	5
Mali			13	<5	<5
Mauritania			<5		
Niger			<5	<5	
Nigeria		<5	<5	<5	<5
Pakistan			<5	11	<5
Palestinian Authority			<5	<5	
Philippines					<5
Refugee			12	<5	
Senegal			<5	<5	
Sierra Leone			<5		
Somalia			<5	66	<5
South Sudan			11	18	8
Sri Lanka			<5	10	<5
Stateless Person			<5	<5	
Sudan			373	220	89
Syria		<5	39	62	36
Tunisia				<5	<5
Unspecified			<5	<5	
Vietnam	<5	<5	35	478	69
Yemen			66	5	<5

3. Of those migrants arriving in the UK via small boat crossings from 2017 onwards claiming to be victims of modern slavery, how many were judged to be genuine victims of modern slavery.

Outcome	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Positive Conclusive Grounds	5	51	123	73	38

The figures in table 3 only show cases which have received a Positive Conclusive Grounds decision as of 30th June 2022. It does not show the number of cases yet to receive a Conclusive Grounds decision.

Notes

1. These statistics have been taken from a live operational database. As such, numbers may change as information on that system is updated.
2. Data extracted on 20/10/2022.
3. Data relates to people arriving by small boat crossing who were identified as potential victims of modern slavery.
4. Modern Slavery can happen or be reported at any time, so likely that numbers will increase over time.
5. Small Boat data extracted from the latest publication period as of 30th June 2022.
6. Small Boats data only started being recorded on 1st January 2018.

