



House of Commons  
Public Accounts Committee

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# Immigration enforcement

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**Seventeenth Report of  
Session 2019–21**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 14 September 2020*

**HC 407**

Published on 18 September 2020  
by authority of the House of Commons

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## Summary

Immigration has always been a cause of public and political debate. Despite years of discourse on the topic, we remain concerned by how little evidence the Home Office (the Department) has with which to inform that debate. It is disappointing that, despite this Committee's previous findings, the Department is still not sufficiently curious about the impact of its actions and the underlying reasons for the challenges it faces.

We are concerned that if the Department does not make decisions based on evidence, it instead risks making them on anecdote, assumption and prejudice. Worryingly, it has no idea of what impact it has achieved for the £400 million spent each year by its Immigration Enforcement directorate. There are major holes in the Department's understanding of the size and scale of illegal immigration and the extent and nature of any resulting harm. It does not understand the support people need to navigate its systems effectively and humanely, or how its actions affect them. In 2019, 62% of immigration detainees were released from detention because the Department could not return them as planned to their country of origin. The Department does not really understand why this figure is so high or what it can do ensure these returns are completed as planned.

The significant lack of diversity at senior levels of the Department means it does not access a sufficiently wide range of perspectives when establishing rules and assessing the human impact of its decisions. Professional judgement cannot be relied upon if an organisation has blind spots, and the Windrush scandal demonstrated the damage such a culture creates. We are pleased to hear the Permanent Secretary say that he is committed to achieving greater diversity and acknowledge clearly that with diversity comes better leadership, decision-making and governance. The Department must deliver on these intentions to reduce the likelihood of another Windrush-type scandal in the future.

The Immigration Enforcement directorate has some big challenges ahead. It will need to respond to the end of the transition period for leaving the EU and the new points-based immigration system, implement the recommendations of the Windrush lessons learned review, and overcome the damage done to its reputation. The Department showed a disturbing lack of urgency in some areas. It is good to hear the Department promising improvement and recognising the need for it—but actions speak louder than words and we expect to see tangible improvements when we next review progress.

## Introduction

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The Home Office (the Department) is responsible for preventing abuse of immigration rules, tracking those who abuse immigration rules and increasing compliance with immigration law. Immigration Enforcement is the directorate within the Department responsible for preventing abuse of the immigration system, dealing with the threats associated with immigration offending and encouraging and enforcing the departure of immigration offenders and foreign national offenders from the UK. The Directorate's vision is "*to reduce the size of the illegal population and the harm it causes*". It employs about 5,000 staff and received approximately £392 million in 2019–20. It has faced an 11% real-terms reduction in its resource budget since 2015–16.

## Conclusions and recommendations

1. **Despite years of public debate and interest in immigration, the Department still does not know the size of the illegal population or have a clear grasp of the harm the illegal population causes.** Immigration Enforcement has a vision “*to reduce the size of the illegal population and the harm it causes*”, but it has not estimated what that population is since 2005. The Department could not respond to our concerns that potentially exaggerated figures calculated by others could inflame hostility towards immigrants. It currently estimates that between 240,000 and 320,000 people per year come into contact with its immigration enforcement services, but also recognises that the quality of its information is not good enough to provide a baseline to measure progress against its vision. The Department identifies a range of harms caused by immigration crime, but it was unable to tell us how many people either caused, or were victims of, harm. Nor could it provide a figure for the impact on public services of providing services to people who should not be receiving them. It is only now starting work to understand the impact of enforcing the immigration laws on the economy and society.

**Recommendation:** *The Department should undertake work to improve its understanding of the illegal population in the UK. This should include analysis by age, length of time in the UK, and whether they originally entered the UK legally or illegally. It should also produce clear definitions of harm, and a means to record the level of harm caused by the illegal population. The Department should write to us within three months of this report to set out us what steps it is taking to increase its understanding, including how it is working with other government departments, academics and other interested groups to establish what might be possible.*

2. **The Department relies upon a disturbingly weak evidence base to assess the impact of its immigration enforcement activity.** The lack of reliable evidence on what works prevents it from planning and prioritising its activities effectively. The Department accepts that it cannot easily use data to measure the impact of the £400 million it spends each year in Immigration Enforcement and has a “dearth of information” in some aspects of its activities. It allocates resources between its different immigration responsibilities based on “judgements”, but if those judgements are not based on evidence, it is unclear what factors the Department is considering. Worryingly, the Department could not always provide evidence or data to support its decisions, for example on its strategy to tackle organised immigration crime, or to demonstrate understanding of the problems it faces, for example the impact of accessible and good quality legal advice on its success in returns. Although it is working to increase its analytical capabilities to learn from the challenges it faces, this work is only at an early stage.

**Recommendation:** *Within six months of this report, the Department should put in place a detailed improvement plan for its collection, use, and analysis of data. It should write to the Committee and set out:*

- *The skills gaps it has identified in its analytical capability and how it intends to fill them;*

- *A plan for transforming Immigration Enforcement into a data-led organisation, including timescales and priorities for improvements; and*
  - *How it intends to use this in the future to help plan and prioritise its activities.*
3. **The culture and make-up of the Department have left it poorly placed to appreciate the impact of its policies on the people affected.** The Department has done little to dispel accusations that its decisions are based on a lack of curiosity, preconceptions and even prejudice. The Department acknowledges how close it came to being declared institutionally racist in the Windrush lessons learned review and that it has to change its culture. It recognises the value of greater diversity for enabling better decision-making, leadership and governance, though only one member of the Department’s current executive committee comes from a BAME background. Similarly, the Department recognises that it could improve the successful management of cases through the immigration system by adopting a more people-centred approach. Yet there is little existing evidence that the Department actively seeks to identify or evaluate the impact of its actions on the individuals it encounters. This creates a risk of harm and distress to innocent people who are here perfectly legally, and we are not satisfied that the Department attaches sufficient importance to this risk.

**Recommendation:** *Building on its response to the Windrush lessons learned review, the Department should mobilise its evidence base and evaluations to challenge its own assumptions and beliefs about the user experience within the immigration system. The Department should write to us by 31st December 2020, setting out the insights it has developed about the experience of its users, and what improvements it is making as a result.*

4. **The Department’s failure to develop an end-to-end understanding of the immigration system leads to problems which it could avoid.** At present, there are gaps in its digital and paper trail, and it is likely these have an impact on Immigration Enforcement’s ability to remove individuals from the UK. The Department says that there is now an “active conversation” with Ministers around improving its ability to move cases through the system. In 2019, the Department released 62% of immigration detainees it intended to remove from the UK, an increase from 56% in 2018. The Department believes this rise reflects abuse of asylum claims and other protection routes, but it did not provide any systematic analysis to support this. Given the strong passions seen on all sides of the immigration debate, a Government Department making unsupported claims of this kind risks inflaming prejudices against legitimate immigrants and bona fide asylum seekers. It did, however, accept our suggestion that direct engagement and better quality legal advice at an earlier stage may influence its ability to ensure returns are successful.

**Recommendation:** *The Department needs to develop a joined-up approach across the full end-to-end immigration system to ensure that people get the right support at the right time. It should record and assess how people move through the immigration system to understand where and how problems arise. This should include evaluating whether earlier access to good quality, affordable legal advice*

*might help to reduce the number of late claims. The Department should write to the Committee within six months of this report, setting out progress in this regard.*

5. **The Department is unprepared for the challenges the UK's exit from the EU presents to its immigration enforcement operations.** The Department relies on cooperation with EU partners to support its international operations, including the return of foreign national offenders and individuals who arrive in the UK illegally via EU transport hubs. It would like this cooperation to continue after the end of the transition period for the UK's departure from the EU but showed a worrying lack of urgency about securing the necessary agreements. When we took evidence in mid-July, the Department provided no evidence that it had begun discussions with EU partners or internally to prepare for the possible impact these changes may have on its operations. Without putting new arrangements in place successfully, there is a real risk that EU exit will actually make it more difficult to remove foreign national offenders and those who try to enter the country illegally.

**Recommendation:** *The Department urgently needs to develop a forward plan and put in place actions to mitigate the risks to its work with EU partners. This should include consideration of reciprocal arrangements for:*

- *immigration staff working in other countries;*
- *the return of offenders, from the UK to EU member states and vice versa, following the end of transition period; and*
- *the return of individuals who attempt to enter the UK with false documents or by clandestine means from an EU country, or indeed those who enter EU countries from the UK.*

6. **We are not convinced that the Department is sufficiently prepared to safeguard the status of individuals while also implementing a new immigration system and managing its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.** The Department faces several challenges in the immediate future. The extension of visas during the COVID-19 pandemic raises concerns that mistakes in case and data management could affect an individual's future immigration status. The Immigration Enforcement directorate also needs to adapt to the updated vision and values the Department sets out for the UK's future immigration system from January 2021. The Department committed again to implementing the recommendations of the Windrush lessons learned review and contacting all those who were affected, not only those from the Caribbean. Whilst we are pleased that this is the Home Office's policy now, we note that the Department initially rejected the recommendation made by our predecessor Committee in March 2019 that the Department should extend its historical reviews beyond Caribbean Commonwealth nationals to include nationals from other Commonwealth countries. Tackling these challenges will require significant change. The Department pins its hopes on its ongoing programme of digitisation and automation to support its response to these challenges, including its implementation of Atlas, but its history of delivering such projects is patchy at best.

**Recommendation:** *Within six weeks of this report, the Department should write to this committee to explain its priorities while implementing these significant changes. Specifically, it should set out:*

- *How it will balance risks to delivery against the risk that these changes will unfairly affect the lives and rights of individuals;*
- *What practical steps the Department has taken and will take to achieve this balance; and*
- *What testing it has conducted to ensure that its information systems can fully support these steps.*

# 1 Understanding the scale of the problem

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1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the Home Office (the Department) about immigration enforcement activities in the UK.<sup>1</sup>

2. The Department is responsible for preventing abuse of immigration rules, tracking those who abuse immigration rules and increasing compliance with immigration law. Immigration Enforcement is the directorate within the Department responsible for preventing abuse of the immigration system, dealing with the threats associated with immigration offending and encouraging and enforcing the departure of immigration offenders and foreign national offenders from the UK. Its vision is “*to reduce the size of the illegal population and the harm it causes*”. It employs about 5,000 staff and received approximately £392 million in 2019–20. It has faced an 11% real-terms reduction in its resource budget since 2015–16.<sup>2</sup>

3. Immigration Enforcement conducts a wide range of activities. It aims to increase compliance with immigration laws by working with international partners to prevent illegal entry and with other government departments to limit unlawful access to government-funded services. It tackles the threats associated with immigration offending by disrupting criminal gangs and performing enforcement visits to businesses and homes around the UK. It also returns those with no permission to be in the UK or foreign nationals who have committed serious crimes in the UK to their country of origin.<sup>3</sup>

## Recognising the scale of immigration offending and the harm it causes

4. We heard that the Department does not know how many people are living or working in the UK without permission, and the Department admitted its frustration at not knowing this figure. The NAO reported that the Department has not updated its 2005 estimate of 430,000 people, and the Department claimed this situation reflected the extreme difficulty of producing such an estimate. However, it recognised the importance of having a baseline against which to assess progress, and is developing an approach to define the level of demand on its Immigration Enforcement services.<sup>4</sup> It estimates this demand at between 240,000 and 320,000 people per year, but explained that this estimate does not demonstrate how many people may be in the country illegally. Instead, it reflects the number of people Immigration Enforcement has some contact with. The Department also explained that it was in discussion with the Office for National Statistics about creating a clearer baseline to measure future progress against its vision.<sup>5</sup>

5. When asked about the possible scale of illegal migration, the Department was unable to tell us how many people came to the UK legally and did not renew their visa, and how many deliberately came illegally. We heard that it largely knew how many people come into

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1 C&AG’s Report, *Immigration Enforcement*, Session 2019–21, HC 110, 17 June 2020

2 C&AG’s Report, para 2

3 C&AG’s Report, paras 2.4, 2/13, 2.20

4 Qq 37, 42, 64; C&AG’s Report para 1.14

5 Qq 37, 39, 42

the country and, to a degree, how many leave, but it was not yet able to assess the status of everybody that enters the country. The Department recognised that there are significant gaps in its data, though it believes its modernisation programmes will provide digital evidence of an individual's immigration status at the border, in country and on departure. The Department told us it is also working to clean its data and remove duplicate records to provide a “*single understanding*” of the people that Immigration Enforcement engages with. It was unwilling to estimate when its data would be of sufficient quality to support its activities effectively but suspected it was on a “*continual journey*” to improve that data.<sup>6</sup>

6. The Department recognised that the question of migration is politically sensitive and divisive.<sup>7</sup> The Department could not explain why it had not previously attempted to understand the impact that enforcing the immigration laws has on the economy and society.<sup>8</sup> It asserted that other organisations who create estimates for the level of illegal immigration are doing so with the “*best will in the world*”, but it did not respond to our concerns that potentially exaggerated figures could inflame hostility to immigrants. We also heard that, although other organisations estimate the scale of illegal immigration, the Department does not believe that these estimates are fully reliable. It told us it is willing to work with these organisations and listen to how they calculated their estimates.<sup>9</sup>

7. The Department described the different forms of harm that occur from immigration crime. These include criminal harm by foreign national offenders against their victims and society, and the harm organised crime groups commit against society and vulnerable people. It also includes the financial harm to legitimate UK employers of competitors employing people illegally and harm caused to taxpayer-funded public services by people attempting to use them illegally.<sup>10</sup> The Department acknowledged that the vast majority of illegal immigrants do not cause direct harm to the public, but can cause harm to the wider economy.<sup>11</sup> In response to a recommendation in the NAO's report, the Department told us it was reviewing whether its use of the concepts of risk, threat and harm was consistent.<sup>12</sup>

8. We asked the Department about the financial impact of providing public services to people who should not be receiving them. It could not provide a figure for this.<sup>13</sup> We heard that the Department had no data on the harm suffered by people who were victims of organised immigration crime or the distinction between those victims and other immigration offenders.<sup>14</sup> We asked when the Department would have meaningful and reliable indicators of the scale of harm in its four categories. The Department claimed it can measure the amount of harm that it prevents, for example by removing a foreign national offender, but acknowledged that it would be a long time before it could measure the total harm that arises from immigration crime.<sup>15</sup>

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6 Qq 38–39, 42–43, 64

7 Q 46

8 Q 35

9 Qq 45, 46

10 Q 33

11 Q 40

12 Qq 33, 40; C&AG's Report, para 19

13 Q 34

14 Q 36

15 Q 43

## 2 Understanding the business and setting priorities

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### Using information to manage the business effectively

9. The NAO reported that Immigration Enforcement uses management information to assess the performance of individual teams rather than the system's overall health, and the Department accepted this finding.<sup>16</sup> We asked whether the Department could deliver an effective immigration enforcement service without basic management information. The Department rejected the suggestion that it had no management information, and stated it had “*too much [management information], but not of the right sort*”. It recognised the need to improve its management information and its ability to measure the overall outcomes of its activities rather than inputs and outputs.<sup>17</sup> For example, the NAO reported that the Department and its partners identified 11,300 clandestine attempts to enter the country at UK ports and 35,600 attempts from overseas in the twelve months to the end of October 2019. In the twelve months to the end of October 2018 these figures were 7,200 and 33,600, respectively, although the Department cannot determine whether this apparent rise is because it had a greater overall impact or whether there had been more attempts made.<sup>18</sup> The Department stated that it is developing methods to identify the impact of its interventions and that these should move away from performance assessments which rely heavily on the overall number of returns it makes.<sup>19</sup>

10. We asked how the Department allocated resources across the immigration system and heard that this relies upon the judgements of senior staff rather than direct evidence. The Department explained that a “*dearth of information*” on some immigration enforcement activities meant it is not possible to assess the outcomes of deploying resources from one part of the system to another.<sup>20</sup> The Department accepted that it had not always focussed on gathering data that would allow Immigration Enforcement to prioritise effectively. The Department also stated that it is attempting to better understand the illegal population so it can make “*the right interventions with the right people at the right time*”. We heard that Immigration Enforcement now focusses on improving prioritisation by putting harm at the top of its prioritisation framework. We asked whether someone who is not doing any harm would be a lower priority, and heard that people who are in the UK illegally would always be of interest to Immigration Enforcement.<sup>21</sup>

11. During the evidence session, the Department failed to provide a specific answer to questions about the characteristics of the illegal population or the evidence it used to make decisions.<sup>22</sup> We asked the Department to provide us with facts to support its claims rather than possibilities or speculation.<sup>23</sup> For example, the NAO reported that the Department could not support its assertion that a larger number of minor disruptions could have a more lasting effect on organised crime groups than major disruptions. The Department

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16 Q 78; C&AG's Report, para 3.15

17 Qq 34, 42

18 C&AG's Report, para 2.6

19 Q 77

20 Qq 47, 49

21 Qq 41, 42

22 Qq 34, 36, 80, 95, 97, 105

23 Q 40, 98

had agreed the NAO report and so it was somewhat surprising to hear the Department respond that it “*did not express itself [to the NAO] as well as it could have done*” on this point.<sup>24</sup> The NAO also reported other cases where the Department could not provide solid evidence for its actions.<sup>25</sup> We asked whether acting without adequate evidence left the Department open to the charge that it acted on prejudice. The Department responded that it was determined to act on evidence and data. It admitted its frustration at not being able to have a clearer assessment of its value for money and prioritisation decisions and expressed its wish to improve.<sup>26</sup>

## Challenging assumptions within Immigration Enforcement

12. The Committee of Public Accounts has found previously that the Department did not use its own data to fully explore the impact of its work on individuals.<sup>27</sup> During the evidence session, we asked whether the Department considered the implications of immigration enforcement actions for young people whose immigration status had not been formalised.<sup>28</sup> The Department did not think these people would be a “*particular priority*” and said it would take into account any barriers that had prevented their earlier engagement with the UK Visas and Immigration or Immigration Enforcement. We heard that the Department “*would hope*” that these cases would be identified earlier to allow discussions about their status and that checkpoints in the system would prevent them being unnecessarily caught up in the enforcement system.<sup>29</sup>

13. We asked the Department to account for the plummeting number of people it returns to their countries of origin. The Department claimed that the fall in returns was because of greater compliance with immigration rules, changes to the legal framework and higher numbers of claims made on human rights, modern slavery, asylum or medical grounds.<sup>30</sup> The Department asserted that most asylum claims in detention are designed to thwart the system, but it accepted it was struggling to see what it could do to prevent this.<sup>31</sup> However, the NAO reported that the Department did not explore possible failings within Immigration Enforcement in its internal analysis on unsuccessful returns.<sup>32</sup> We did not hear evidence of any analysis the Department had conducted on the impact of decreasing the financial package available for voluntary returns, its claimed success in returning foreign national offenders on charter flights during the COVID-19 pandemic or the percentage of people granted asylum after making a claim in detention.<sup>33</sup>

14. The NAO reported that Immigration Enforcement could make better use of its analytical functions and evaluations to improve as an organisation.<sup>34</sup> The Department recognises the need to refresh its research and evidence base across the borders and immigration system and told us about its increasing use of analysis and evaluation to

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24 Qq 97–98; C&AG’s Report, para 2.16

25 C&AG’s Report, paras 2.9 & 2.30

26 Qq 105–106

27 HC Committee of Public Accounts, *Windrush generation and the Home Office*, Eighty-second report of session 2017–19, HC 1518, 6 March 2019, pp.6–7

28 Q 67

29 Qq 68–69

30 Q 80; C&AG’s Report para 2.30

31 Q 93

32 C&AG’s Report, para 2.30

33 Qq 81, 90, 93

34 C&AG’s Report para 3.23

demonstrate the impact of its immigration enforcement activities.<sup>35</sup> The Department also told us that it needs to open up and “*get much more used to working with and listening to the communities*” working with it, particularly those who have not had a positive view of it.<sup>36</sup> It expressed the need for a more people-centred immigration process, which it defined as supporting the people within it.<sup>37</sup>

15. The Department accepted that the Windrush lessons learned review had come exceptionally close to declaring it as institutionally racist. We were pleased to hear the Department commit to implementing each of the recommendations of that report and acknowledge the need to change the whole culture of the Department.<sup>38</sup> We asked what proportion of senior staff within the Department came from minority backgrounds; only one member of its Executive Committee came from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background.<sup>39</sup> The Department described the benefits of greater diversity at senior levels for its decision-making, leadership and governance but acknowledged diversity as being its biggest issue.<sup>40</sup>

### Organising an end-to-end immigration enforcement system

16. We asked whether Immigration Enforcement should focus on in-country immigration enforcement rather than having to provide support at the border. The Department responded that it sees managing immigration into the country and in-country as a single system.<sup>41</sup> However, the NAO reported that the Department “*does not yet manage*” immigration enforcement as an end-to-end system.<sup>42</sup> The Department accepted the need for an end-to-end perspective which supports a smoother route for people through its immigration enforcement processes.<sup>43</sup> The Department said it is working with Ministers to address issues affecting its ability to move people’s cases forward. It also believes that its modernisation programmes will better support that end-to-end perspective.<sup>44</sup> The Department claimed, though, that there were examples where it worked together as a “*seamless whole*”. We suggested that these examples were thin on the ground in the NAO’s report and requested more specific details.<sup>45</sup>

17. The Department told us that it works with different parts of the public sector and Government, such as the Ministry of Justice, to deliver its immigration enforcement services, and that this cooperation may not appear in its performance data.<sup>46</sup> We heard that Immigration Enforcement is providing more opportunities for face-to-face interactions and maintaining contact with people even when they are engaged with other agencies.<sup>47</sup> It claimed that this allowed it to make the “*right intervention*” with those people at a later point.<sup>48</sup>

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35 Qq 35, 63, 102

36 Q 65

37 Qq 8, 103

38 Q 71

39 Q 74

40 Q 76

41 Qq 48, 49

42 C&AG’s Report, para 18

43 Qq 38, 78, 94, 103, 104

44 Qq 38, 102

45 Qq 78, 79

46 Qq 36, 41, 67

47 Qq 41, 68, 81

48 Q 41

18. We asked what the Department could learn from its analysis of late asylum claims to reduce the number of these. The NAO reported that the Department failed to complete 62% of the returns it planned from immigration detention in 2019, compared to 56% in 2018.<sup>49</sup> We heard how decisions and trends elsewhere in the system, for example changes in the legal framework and greater compliance on immigration rules, affect the Department's success in completing returns. The Department explained that a large number of asylum claims in detention slowed down some elements of the immigration system, but it did not specify which elements. We questioned whether other factors such as the Department's decision to reduce the financial package for voluntary returns or earlier access to good quality legal advice could influence the successful resolution of cases.<sup>50</sup> The Department told us it had not directly assessed the possible impact of legal advice, but it believed legal advice could allow cases to flow more smoothly through the system. The Department was not aware of any analysis it had conducted on whether the cost of providing that advice would save money later in the process, but it offered to confirm that point.<sup>51</sup>

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49 C&AG's Report, para 2.29, Figure 12

50 Qq 79, 80, 82

51 Qq 100, 101

## 3 Planning for the future

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### The impact of EU exit on the immigration enforcement system

19. We asked about the impact of the UK's departure from the EU on the Department's immigration enforcement activities.<sup>52</sup> The Department has teams in EU countries which support its work to prevent unlawful entry to the UK and to tackle organised immigration crime. The Department told us the Dublin II agreement allows it to pass responsibility for some asylum cases to EU member states, for example where non-EU nationals enter the UK by clandestine or illegal means from EU countries.<sup>53</sup> The Department also explained it has a series of prison transfer arrangements linked to the EU which support the return of foreign national offenders. But the Department believed that many of the arrangements for returns with individual EU member states are done bilaterally, rather than through the EU and Commission.<sup>54</sup>

20. The Department acknowledged that these arrangements would be part of the ongoing negotiations with the EU.<sup>55</sup> We asked whether Immigration Enforcement proposed to keep teams in EU airports after the transition period ended. The Department appeared unconcerned about any possible barriers to this, and said that it did not see any reason why the arrangements would change.<sup>56</sup> It also told us it was not aware of any legal barriers to this work and that this issue had not been raised, but it suggested that no discussions had taken place within the Department to prepare for any change in these arrangements. It acknowledged that it would require individual agreements with member states to maintain the presence of UK Immigration Enforcement teams in EU states following the end of the transition period. It highlighted France and Belgium as particular priorities, but it was not aware of any discussions it had had with EU member states. The Department told us its discussions to date had focused on its ambition to replace the Dublin II Regulation and EURODAC system.<sup>57</sup>

### Planning for changes to the immigration enforcement system

21. The Department reiterated its commitment to implementing the 30 recommendations of the Windrush lessons learned review. We heard that it was making progress with the Windrush compensation scheme but was unwilling to set itself targets on the number of cases or amount of money it would deal with.<sup>58</sup> It underlined its commitment to include people from non-Caribbean Commonwealth countries in the scope of its Windrush response and offered to write to us with further details of those efforts.<sup>59</sup> The Department acknowledged that the review had been a difficult read and stated it had no intention of turning its response into a box-ticking exercise. It stressed the need to understand the scale of transformation that would be involved in delivering on these commitments, which would include setting a vision and values for the whole Department as it implements the

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52 Q 84  
 53 Qq 50–52  
 54 Qq 84, 85  
 55 Qq 58, 84  
 56 Q 53  
 57 Qq 55–60  
 58 Qq 9, 11  
 59 Qq 65–66

new immigration system. However, when we took evidence in mid-July, the Department did not describe specific steps it would take in responding to the review.<sup>60</sup>

22. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department extended the visas of all individuals for whom it was difficult to seek visa extensions or return home. The Department told us it was unlikely to apply another blanket extension beyond the end of July 2020 and would instead look on a case-by-case basis.<sup>61</sup> The Committee of Public Accounts has previously reported concerns that the Department did not take seriously the risks of making “*life-changing decisions*” on people’s futures based on “*incorrect data from systems that are not fit for purpose*”.<sup>62</sup> We asked the Department how it could ensure it avoids similar mistakes that would affect someone’s future immigration status. The Department recognised that its data systems in the past would not have been capable of keeping track of such cases, but it assured us that it would take a careful approach and make itself available to anyone who felt they were not being given adequate support.<sup>63</sup>

23. The Department told us that it has high hopes for its modernisation and transformation projects. However, the NAO reported that the Department agrees funding for its transformation projects on an annual basis, and their longer-term development is therefore uncertain.<sup>64</sup> We heard that e-visas and the introduction of its Atlas programme would provide a better grip on an individual’s immigration data. The Department claimed that Atlas would ensure that it held correct and up-to-date data on immigration cases and make these more accessible for any necessary checks.<sup>65</sup> It told us its Business Rules programme would ensure that caseworkers were taking the right actions and improve efficiency.<sup>66</sup> However, there have been longstanding concerns about the Department’s systems and data and numerous projects where the importance of good quality data in ensuring the effectiveness of systems was overlooked.<sup>67</sup> We also heard that the Department hoped more automated services would allow its immigration enforcement activities to focus more on the most complex cases.<sup>68</sup>

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60 Qq 71–73, 107–108

61 Qq 5–7

62 HC Committee of Public Accounts, *Windrush generation and the Home Office*, Eighty-second report of session 2017–19, HC 1518, 6 March 2019, p.5

63 Qq 7–8

64 C&AG’s Report, para 1.18

65 Qq 7, 8

66 Q 78

67 Q 64; HC Committee of Public Accounts, *Challenges in using data across government*, One hundred and eighteenth report of session 2017–19, HC 2492, 25 September 2019, p.12; HC Committee of Public Accounts, *Fourth annual report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts*, Third special report of session 2017–19, HC2370, 27 June 2019, p.13

68 Q 104

# Formal minutes

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**Monday 14 September 2020**

Virtual meeting

Members present:

Meg Hillier, in the Chair

Olivia Blake

Mr Gagan Mohindra

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Sarah Olney

Peter Grant

James Wild

Draft Report (*Immigration enforcement*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 23 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Seventeenth of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Thursday 17 September at 9:15am

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Monday 13 July 2020

**Matthew Rycroft CBE**, Permanent Secretary, Home Office; **Shona Dunn**, Second Permanent Secretary, Home Office; **Tyson Hepple**, Director General, Immigration Enforcement, Home Office

[Q1-108](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

IET numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Focus on Labour Exploitation ([IET0001](#))
- 2 Immigration Law Practitioners' Association ([IET0008](#))
- 3 Institute for Community Research and Development, University of Wolverhampton ([IET0005](#))
- 4 Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants ([IET0009](#))
- 5 Medical Justice ([IET0006](#))
- 6 Migrants' Rights Network ([IET0004](#))
- 7 NRPF Network, Islington Council ([IET0007](#))
- 8 Social Market Foundation ([IET0002](#))
- 9 University of Southampton (Dr Martin Hinsch, Research Fellow) ([IET0003](#))
- 10 University of Southampton (Dr Sarah Nurse, Research Fellow) ([IET0003](#))
- 11 University of Southampton (Dr Toby Prike, Research Fellow) ([IET0003](#))
- 12 University of Southampton (Prof. Jakub Bijak, Professor of Statistical Demography) ([IET0003](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2019–21

First Report	Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities	HC 85
Second Report	Defence Nuclear Infrastructure	HC 86
Third Report	High Speed 2: Spring 2020 Update	HC 84
Fourth Report	EU Exit: Get ready for Brexit Campaign	HC 131
Fifth Report	University Technical Colleges	HC 87
Sixth Report	Excess votes 2018–19	HC 243
Seventh Report	Gambling regulation: problem gambling and protecting vulnerable people	HC 134
Eighth Report	NHS expenditure and financial management	HC 344
Ninth Report	Water supply and demand	HC 378
Tenth Report	Defence Capability and the Equipment Plan	HC 247
Eleventh Report	Local authority investment in commercial property	HC 312
Twelfth Report	Management of tax reliefs	HC 379
Thirteenth Report	Whole of Government Response to Covid-19	HC 404
Fourteenth Report	Readying the NHS and social care for the COVID-19 peak	HC 405
Fifteenth Report	Improving the prison estate	HC 244
Sixteenth Report	Progress in remediating dangerous cladding	HC 506