

These briefings provide an analysis of the [publicly available UK National Referral Mechanism \(NRM\) data](#) on potential victims of modern slavery and the disaggregated [NRM data which is available from the UK Data Service \(UKDS\)](#).¹ The NRM is the UK's official system through which victims of modern slavery are identified and supported (See the 'How NRM decision-making operates' box below).

This is the eighth in a series of briefings produced by IOM UK which follow each quarterly release of NRM data from the Home Office. The briefings focus on recent NRM data, but also use historical NRM data for context. They provide an analysis of key highlights, ongoing trends, and data gaps identified by IOM UK. The analysis of the disaggregated NRM data from the UKDS enables the briefings to offer additional detailed analysis to the Home Office's own statistical bulletin for each NRM data release.

This briefing focuses on the whole of 2023 and highlights four key findings from analysis of the data (see box on right).

While there were a record high 17,004 referrals in 2023, the number of people eligible for assistance fell for the first time ever.

The [Home Office's statistical bulletin](#) for NRM referrals in 2023 highlights that there were 17,004 NRM referrals in 2023; the highest since records began.

Graph 1 shows the historical trend of large annual increases in the number of NRM referrals. For example, referrals in 2022 increased by 33% compared to 2021. Whereas the increase of 17,004 referrals in 2023 compared to 16,938 referrals in 2022 was smaller than 1%.

However, 2023 saw the first ever fall in the number of people who received a positive Reasonable Grounds (RG) decision. This is of crucial importance because such a decision is required for an adult to access government funded specialist support and assistance for potential victims of modern slavery. There were nearly 6,500 fewer

HIGHLIGHTS

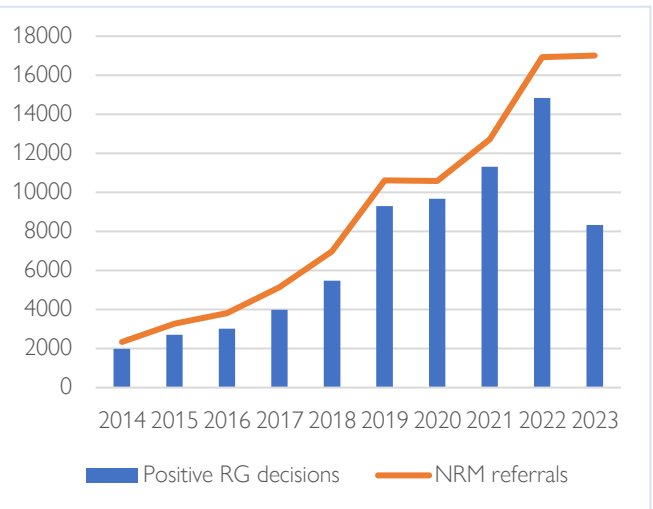
While there were a record high 17,004 referrals in 2023, the number of people eligible for assistance fell for the first time ever.

A record high 9,819 Conclusive Grounds decisions were made in 2023. This was driven by a large increase in negative decisions and decisions for Albanian cases.

There were unprecedented differences in the proportion of positive Reasonable Grounds decisions for UK and foreign national cases, particularly for children, with a UK child being almost twice as likely to receive a positive decision compared to a foreign national child.

The median waiting time for Conclusive Grounds decisions for women fell by more than 200 days in 2023, but women still waited a year longer than men for a decision.

positive RG decisions in 2023 (8,317) than in 2022 (14,823).



Graph 1: Number of Positive RG Decisions and NRM referrals per year 2014-2023

HOW NRM DECISION-MAKING OPERATES

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) has a two-stage decision-making process for identifying potential victims of modern slavery (a term that includes any form of human trafficking, slavery, servitude or forced labour). The first stage is the Reasonable Grounds (RG) decision, which should be made within 5 working days of a potential victim being referred to the NRM. The RG decision is a "decision taken by the competent authorities as to whether the decision maker agrees there are reasonable grounds to believe, based on all available general and specific evidence but falling short of conclusive proof, that a person is a victim of modern slavery."¹ A positive RG entitles a person to a reflection period of at least 30 days to receive specialist support and assistance. The second stage Conclusive Grounds (CG) decision should be made no sooner than 45 days after the RG decision, and is made on the 'balance of probabilities' threshold. Both the RG and CG determinations are made by the Single Competent Authority (SCA) and Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority (IECA) which both sit within the Home Office. Further information on the NRM is available [here](#).

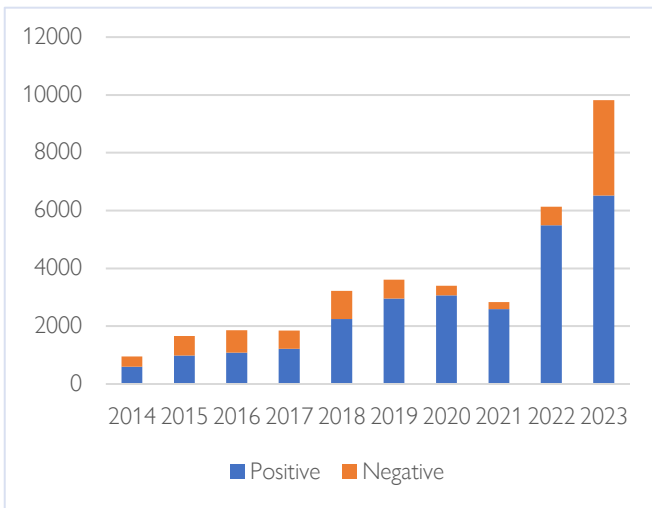
¹ Home Office, *Modern Slavery Research & Analysis*. (2024). *National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics, 2014-2023*. [data collection]. 11th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 8910, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8910-11>

A record high 9,819 Conclusive Grounds decisions were made in 2023. This was driven by a large increase in negative decisions and decisions for Albanian cases.

There were a record high 9,819 Conclusive Grounds (CG) decisions made in 2023. This was more than the total number of decisions in 2021 and 2022, combined. Two things stand out when examining this increase. Firstly, the number of negative decisions and secondly, the increase in decisions for Albanian nationals.

Graph 2 shows that the 3,297 negative CG decisions in 2023 was more than the total of all negative decisions made between 2017-2022. The percentage of these decisions made in 2023 which were positive fell to 66%, from 89% in 2022.

Whereas the Home Office's statistical bulletin for 2023 acknowledges and interprets the large fall in the percentage of positive RG decisions (see *highlight 3*) it does not offer any insight into why the proportion of positive CG decisions fell by a third.

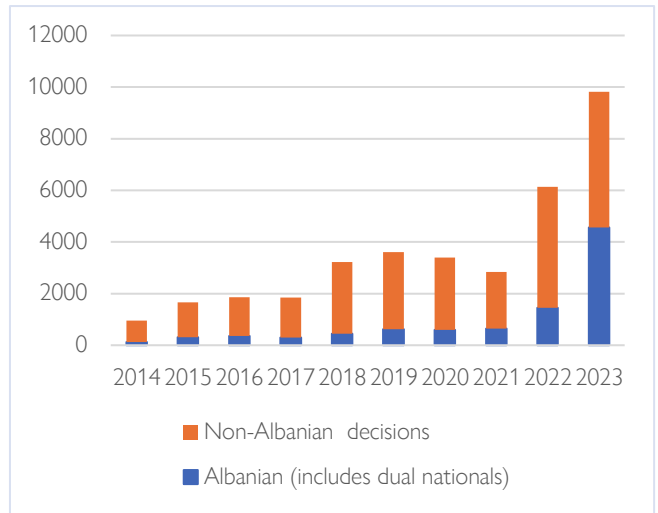


Graph 2: Negative and positive CG decisions per year 2014-2023

The second factor contributing to the increase in the number of CG decisions in 2023 was the dramatic increase in the number of decisions made for Albanian nationals; 4,567 in total which was more than triple the total for 2022. Indeed, as shown by Graph 3, the 2023 total was only slightly less than the cumulative total number of CG decisions made for Albanian nationals between 2014-2022 (4,847). Graph 3 also shows that Albanians accounted for nearly half of all CG decisions made in 2023 (47%) while representing only one-in-four referrals (24%). For adult cases, Albanians represented more than two-thirds of all CG decisions in 2023 (68%).

The unprecedented number of decisions for Albanians is unsurprising given an update to the Modern Slavery Act Statutory Guidance in February 2024 added a new section titled the 'Prioritisation of Conclusive Grounds cases.'

The guidance explains "Whilst progressing and considering all Conclusive Grounds cases, the Competent Authorities have to allocate cases on a regular basis and they are provided with the flexibility to respond to the operational needs of the day, including ordering within priority groups in order to meet the objectives of His Majesty's Government." The only nationality included as a priority group is Albanian.



Graph 3: CG decisions for Albanians and all others per year 2014-2023

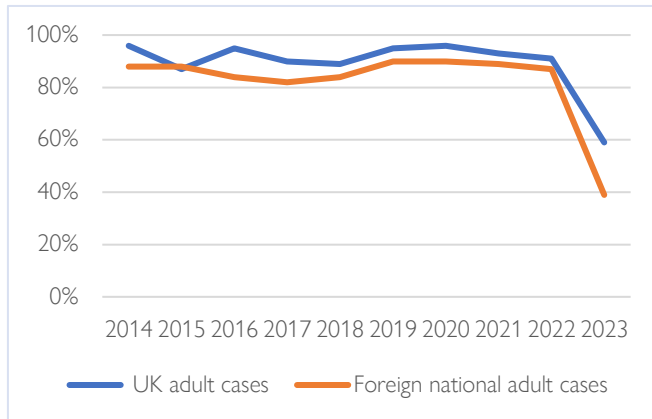
It is unclear what impact this scale of prioritisation on decision making for Albanian nationals will have on the overall waiting times for decisions for non-Albanian referrals (making up 76% of referrals in 2023). IOM will continue to monitor the numbers of decisions for Albanian cases throughout 2024.

There were unprecedented differences in the proportion of positive Reasonable Grounds decisions for UK and foreign national cases, particularly for children, with a UK child being almost twice as likely to receive a positive decision compared to a foreign national child.

The Home Office's statistical bulletin for the 2023 NRM statistics highlights that "the proportion of positive reasonable grounds decisions made was 55%, the lowest for a year since the NRM began." The Home Office further explains that in recent years, around 9 out of 10 RG decisions were positive and highlights that changes to how these decisions were made on 30 January 2023 led to a fall in positive decisions in 2023.

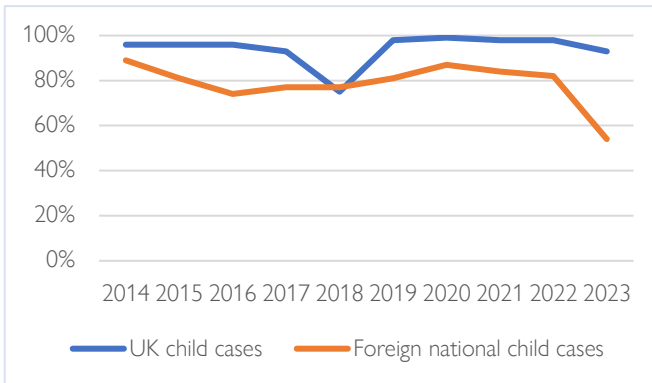
The Home Office bulletin also highlights the overall proportion of positive decisions for adults was 41% and 74% for children. However, the proportion of positive decisions for UK adults and children were much higher than the overall proportion while foreign national adults and children had lower percentages of positive decisions.

Graph 4 shows large falls in positive decisions for both UK and foreign national adults but the drop for foreign nationals to just 39% of positive RG decisions was much lower than the 59% of positive decisions for UK adults.



Graph 4: Percentage of positive RG decisions for UK and foreign national adult cases

Graph 5 shows an even greater difference in the proportion of positive decisions for child cases for UK and foreign nationals. Whereas only 54% of foreign national child cases received a positive RG decision, 93% of UK child cases did. The decision making for UK child cases in 2023 did not fall from the recent trend of 9 out of 10 positive cases.



Graph 5: Percentage of positive RG decisions for UK and foreign national child cases per year 2014-2023

2023 was a record-breaking year in terms of the difference in the proportion of positive RG decisions for UK nationals and foreign nationals for both child and adult cases. The Home Office's statistical bulletins do not provide any disaggregation of the outcomes of decisions beyond age

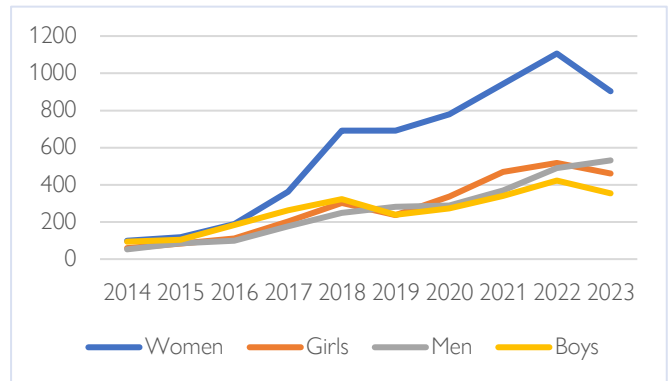
group and competent authority. Further disaggregation for outcomes of decisions in the Home Office's statistical bulletins would improve understanding of such important differences. IOM will continue to monitor and analyse decision making for these groups in 2024.

The median waiting time for Conclusive Grounds decisions for women fell by more than 200 days in 2023, but women still waited a year longer than men for a decision.

The Home Office's analysis of the 2023 data notes that the median 526 days waiting time for all CG decisions in 2023 was slightly shorter than the 544 days median in 2022. However, when this is disaggregated for men, women, boys, and girls, the findings show significant differences in how long these groups wait for a decision. Graph 6 shows that the long-term trend of women waiting far longer for a decision than any other group continued in 2023. Despite the 904 days median waiting time for women in 2023 falling more than 200 days compared to 2022, and a record high 532 days median for men, women still waited a year longer than men for a decision.

For the fourth year in a row, boys waited the shortest time for a decision. The median for boys was just under a year (354 days). The quicker decision making for boys and girls may be related to more than half of those cases being UK nationals. [IOM's previous analysis](#) has highlighted the shorter waiting times for CG decisions for UK nationals.

IOM will continue to monitor the waiting times for men, women, boys and girls throughout 2024 and will look at whether the waiting time for women falls further and if there is a continued narrowing of the still significant gap in their waiting times compared to these other groups.



Graph 6: Median waiting times (in days) for CG decisions for women, girls, men and boys.

ABOUT IOM

Founded 73 years ago in 1951, IOM is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration. With 175 member states and presence in over 100 countries, IOM as the UN Migration Agency is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. The organization works with its partners in the international community to assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration, advance understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration and to uphold the well-being and human rights of all migrants. The IOM Country Office in the UK (IOM UK) is one of over 150 country offices, promoting cooperation and dialogue on migration issues. (See www.unitedkingdom.iom.int for more information). To contact IOM UK about this briefing, please email pburland@iom.int