Asylum statistics

Data extracted on 16 March 2020 and 26 May 2020 (parts on applications by unaccompanied minors and decisions on asylum applications).

Planned article update: mid-March 2021 and late April 2021 (parts on applications by unaccompanied minors and final decisions).

This article describes recent developments in relation to numbers of asylum applicants and decisions on asylum applications in the European Union (EU). Asylum is a form of international protection given by a state on its territory. It is granted to a person who is unable to seek protection in his/her country of citizenship and/or residence, in particular for fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

Number of asylum applicants: increase in 2019

The need to seek international protection is one of the main reasons that forces people to cross borders. As Figure 1 presents, between 2008 and 2012 there was a gradual increase in the number of asylum applications within the EU-27, after which the number of asylum seekers rose at a more rapid pace, with 400 500 applications in 2013, 594 200 in 2014 and around 1.3 million in 2015. In 2016 the number levelled off at around 1.2 million. In 2017, the number of asylum applications marked a significant decrease of 44.5 % in comparison with 2016, and continued a downward path also in 2018.

In 2019, 676 300 asylum seekers applied for international protection in the 27 current Member States of the European Union (EU-27), up by 11.2 % compared with 2018. This was the first time the number of asylum applications increased year-to-year since 2015.
First-time applicants: 612 700 in 2019

The number of first-time asylum applicants in the EU-27 in 2019 was 612 700. A first-time applicant for international protection is a person who lodged an application for asylum for the first time in a given EU Member State and therefore excludes repeat applicants (in that Member State) and so more accurately reflects the number of newly arrived persons applying for international protection in the reporting Member State. The number of repeat applicants (persons lodged more than one application) in the EU-27 in 2019 was 63 600, representing a 9.4 % of the total number of applicants.

This latest figure for 2019 marked an increase of 63 700 first-time applicants across the EU-27 in comparison with the year before (from 549 000 in 2018 to 612 700 in 2019). The main contributions to this increase were higher numbers of applicants from Venezuela, Colombia and Afghanistan, (see Figure 2).

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1 The EU total is calculated as an aggregation of Member States data. Member State data refer to the number of persons applying for asylum for the first time in that Member State. Persons may however apply for international protection in more than one Member State in a given reference year. Consequently, the EU total may include such multiple applications.
Citizenships of first-time asylum applicants (non-EU-27 citizens), EU-27, 2018 and 2019 (thousands)

Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza)

Citizenship of first-time applicants: largest numbers from Syria, Afghanistan and Venezuela

Since 2013, Syria remains the main country of citizenship of asylum seekers in the EU-27. In 2019, the number of Syrian first-time asylum applicants in the EU-27 fell to 74,400 from 80,000 in 2018, while the share of Syrians in the EU-27 total dropped from 14.6% to 12.1%.

Afghans accounted for 8.6% of the total number of first-time asylum applicants and Venezuelans for 7.3%, while Colombians and Iraqis for 5.2% and 4.4%, respectively.

Among the most numerous groups of citizenship of first-time asylum applicants in the EU-27 in 2019, the most substantial increase in the number of applications in comparison with 2018 was recorded for nationals of Venezuela (22,600 applications more, or +101.9%), followed by nationals of Colombia (21,800 more, or +216.7%) and Afghanistan (13,600 more, or +34.8%). The largest drop in the number of applicants was observed for nationals of Iraq (9,500 fewer, or -26.2%) and of Syria (5,700 fewer, or -7.1%).

Main countries of destination: Germany, France and Spain

With 142,400 applicants registered in 2019, Germany accounted for 23.3% of all first-time applicants in the EU-27. It was followed by France (119,900, or 19.6%), Spain (115,200, or 18.8%), ahead of Greece (74,900, or 12.2%) and Italy (35,000, or 5.7%).

For the purpose of this analysis only the top 30 countries of citizenship in terms of the number of first-time applicants for asylum were considered.
Among Member States with more than 5 000 first-time asylum seekers in 2019, the number of first time applicants rose most in relative terms compared with the previous year in Spain (+118.4 %, or 62 400 more first-time asylum seekers in 2019 than in 2018), Cyprus (+66.8 %, or 5 100 more), ahead of Sweden (+27.9 %, or 5 000 more), Belgium (+27.4 %, or 5 000 more), Greece (+15.3 %, or 9 900 more), the Netherlands (+9.9 %, or 2 000 more) and France (+7.6 %, or 8 500 more). In contrast, the largest relative decreases were recorded in Italy (-34.5 %, or 18 400 fewer), Germany (-12.0 %, or 19 400 fewer) and Austria (-7.0 %, or 800 fewer), see Figure 3.

Figure 3: Number of first-time asylum applicants (non-EU-27 citizens), 2018 and 2019 (thousands)

Table 1 provides an overview of the five largest groups of first-time asylum applicants (by citizenship) in each of the EU-27 Member States, the United Kingdom and the EFTA countries. Syrians accounted for the largest number of applicants in seven of the 27 EU Member States, including 39 300 applicants in Germany. Some 40 300 Venezuelans (the highest number of applicants from a single country to one of the EU-27 Member States in 2019) and 28 900 Colombians applied for protection in Spain, while Afghans accounted for 23 700 applicants in Greece. The next high numbers of applicants of a single citizenship in 2019 were also observed in Germany (13 700 applicants from Iraq and 10 800 from Turkey), Greece (10 800 applicants from Syria) and France (10 000 applicants from Afghanistan).
Table 1: Five main citizenships of first-time asylum applicants (non-EU-27 citizens), 2019 (number, rounded figures) Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza)

Age and gender of first-time applicants

More than three quarters (77.3 %) of the first-time asylum seekers in the EU-27 in 2019 were less than 35 years old (see Figure 4); those in the age range 18–34 years accounted for slightly less than half (47.0 %) of the total number of first-time applicants, while almost one third (30.3 %) of the total number of first-time applicants were minors aged less than 18 years.

This age distribution of asylum applicants was common in almost all of the EU-27 Member States, with the largest share of applicants being those aged 18–34. However, there were a few exceptions to this pattern: Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria and Poland reported a higher proportion of asylum applicants less than 18 years old.
The distribution of first-time asylum applicants by sex shows that more men (61.9 %) than women (38.1 %) were seeking asylum. Among the youngest age group (0–13 years), males accounted for 51.2 % of the total number of applicants in 2019. Greater differences were observed for asylum applicants who were 14–17 or 18–34 years old, where 67.9 % and 69.0 %, respectively, of first-time applicants were male, with this share dropping back to 58.0 % for the age group 35–64. Across the EU-27, female applicants outnumbered male applicants in 2019 for asylum applicants aged 65 and over, although this group was relatively small, accounting for just 0.8 % (0.5 % females and 0.3 % males) of the total number of first-time applicants.
Applications by unaccompanied minors

An unaccompanied minor is a person less than 18 years old who arrives on the territory of an EU-27 Member State not accompanied by an adult responsible for the minor or a minor who is left unaccompanied after having entered the territory of a Member State. In 2019 there were 14 100 applications in the EU-27 from unaccompanied minors; 7.1 % of all minors were unaccompanied (see Figure 6).

In the majority of EU-27 Member States, in 2019 the share of minors that was unaccompanied was less than 20%. Only five Member States recorded higher rates: Romania (34.5 %), Cyprus (46.9 %), Slovakia (69.8 %), Bulgaria (71.8 %) and Slovenia (80.2 %).

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3 The EU-27 aggregate includes 2018 data for Spain.
Decisions on asylum applications

Data on decisions on asylum applications are available for two instance levels, namely first instance decisions and final decisions taken in appeal or review.

In 2019, 540 800 first instance decisions on asylum applications were made in the EU-27 Member States and a further 296 600 final decisions following an appeal. Decisions made at the first instance resulted in 206 000 persons being granted protection status, while a further 91 000 received protection status on appeal.

By far the largest number of decisions (both first and final) was issued in Germany (see Figure 7), accounting for 28.5 % of the total first instance decisions and 44.2 % of the total final decisions in the EU-27 in 2019.
First instance decisions on asylum applications

Figure 8 provides an analysis of the outcome of first instance decisions. Though refugee and subsidiary protection status are defined by EU law, humanitarian reasons are specific to national legislation and are not applicable in some of the EU Member States.

In 2019, 38.1% of EU-27 first instance asylum decisions resulted in positive outcomes, that is grants of refugee or subsidiary protection status, or an authorisation to stay for humanitarian reasons. For first instance decisions, some 52.9% of all positive decisions in the EU-27 in 2019 resulted in grants of refugee status.
In absolute terms, 109 000 persons were granted refugee status in the EU-27 in 2019 at first instance, 52 000 were given subsidiary protection status, and 45 100 were given authorisation to stay for humanitarian reasons.

Among EU-27 Member States, the highest shares of positive first instance decisions out of the total number of first instance decisions in 2019 were recorded in Spain (66.2 %), followed by Luxembourg (56.7 %), Austria (53.5 %), Greece (53.1 %), Ireland (52.1 %) and Denmark (52.0 %). Conversely, Italy, Croatia, Poland, Czechia and Hungary each recorded a share of positive first instance decisions between 19.7 % (Italy) and 8.5 % (Hungary).

**Final decisions taken in appeal**

The share of positive final decisions based on appeal or review (30.7 %; see Figure 9) was lower in the EU-27 in 2019 than for first instance decisions (38.1 %; see Figure 8). Around 91 000 people in the EU-27 received positive final decisions based on appeal or review in 2019, of which 33 200 were granted refugee status, 30 000 were granted subsidiary protection, and a further 27 900 were granted humanitarian status.
Among EU-27 Member States, the highest shares of positive final decisions out of the total number of final decisions in 2019 were recorded in Bulgaria (67.7 %), followed by Austria (55.7 %), Ireland (48.9 %), the Netherlands (48.0 %) and Finland (44.9 %). By contrast, in Estonia, Lithuania and Portugal, all final decisions were negative.

Source data for tables and graphs
- Asylum statistics: tables and figures

Data sources
Eurostat produces statistics on a range of issues relating to international migration. Between 1986 and 2007, data on asylum was collected on the basis of a gentlemen’s agreement. Since 2008 data have been provided to Eurostat under the provisions of Article 4 of Regulation (EC) 862/2007; most of the statistics presented in this article were collected within this regulatory framework.

Data are provided to Eurostat with a monthly frequency (for asylum application statistics), quarterly frequency (for first instance decisions) or annual frequency (for final decisions based on appeal or review, resettlement and unaccompanied minors). The statistics are based on administrative sources and are supplied to Eurostat by statistical authorities, home office ministries/ministries of the interior or related immigration agencies in the EU Member States.

Two different categories of persons should be taken into account when analysing asylum statistics. The first includes asylum seekers who have lodged a claim (asylum application) and whose claim is under consideration by a relevant authority. The second is composed of persons who have been recognised, after consideration, as refugees, or have been granted another kind of international protection (subsidiary protection), or were granted protection on the basis of the national law related to international protection (authorisations to stay).
for humanitarian reasons), or were rejected from having any form of protection.

Since the entry into force of Regulation (EC) 862/2007, statistics on asylum decisions have become available for different stages of the asylum procedure. First instance decisions are decisions granted by the respective authority acting as a first instance of the administrative/judicial asylum procedure in the receiving country. In contrast, final decisions in appeal or review relate to decisions granted at the final instance of administrative/judicial asylum procedure which result from an appeal lodged by an asylum seeker rejected in the preceding stage. Since asylum procedures and the number/levels of decision making bodies differ among the EU Member States, the true final instance may be, according to the national legislation and administrative procedures, a decision of the highest national court. However, the applied methodology defines that final decisions should refer to what is effectively a final decision in the vast majority of cases: in other words, once all normal routes of appeal have been exhausted and there is no possibility to appeal on the substance of the decision but only on procedural grounds.

Context

The 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees (as amended by the 1967 New York Protocol) has, for around 70 years, defined who is a refugee, and laid down a common approach towards refugees that has been one of the cornerstones for the development of a common asylum system within the EU. Since 1999, the EU has worked towards creating a common European asylum regime in accordance with the Geneva Convention and other applicable international instruments.

The Hague programme was adopted by heads of state and government on 5 November 2004. It puts forward the idea of a common European asylum system (CEAS), in particular, it raises the challenge to establish common procedures and uniform status for those granted asylum or subsidiary protection. The European Commission’s policy plan on asylum (COM(2008) 360 final) was presented in June 2008 which included three pillars to underpin the development of the CEAS:

- bringing more harmonisation to standards of protection by further aligning the EU Member States’ asylum legislation;
- effective and well-supported practical cooperation;
- increased solidarity and sense of responsibility among EU Member States, and between the EU and non-member countries.

With this in mind, in 2009 the European Commission made a proposal to establish a European Asylum Support Office (EASO). The EASO supports EU Member States in their efforts to implement a more consistent and fair asylum policy. It also provides technical and operational support to Member States facing particular pressures (in other words, those Member States receiving large numbers of asylum applicants). The EASO became fully operational in June 2011 and has worked to increase its capacity, activity and influence, working with the European Commission and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In May 2010, the European Commission presented an action plan for unaccompanied minors (COM(2010) 213 final), who are regarded as the most exposed and vulnerable victims of migration. This plan aims to set-up a coordinated approach and commits all EU Member States to grant high standards of reception, protection and integration for unaccompanied minors. As a complement to this action plan, the European Migration Network has produced a comprehensive EU study on reception policies, as well as return and integration arrangements for unaccompanied minors.

A number of directives in this area have been developed. The four main legal instruments on asylum — all of which are currently subject to proposals for replacement or recasting — are:

- the Qualification Directive 2011/95/EU on standards for the qualification of non-EU nationals and stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection;
- the Procedures Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection;
- the Conditions Directive 2013/33/EU laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection;
the Dublin Regulation (EU) 604/2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the EU Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national (national of a non-member country) or stateless person.

EU operational and financial support has been instrumental in helping Member States to address the migration challenge. In particular, the European Commission offers Member States continued financial support under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). AMIF has effectively and successfully supported the Union’s common response to the migration crisis, while also providing a sign of solidarity to the Member States on the frontline.

In April 2016, the European Commission adopted a Communication (COM(2016) 197 final) launching the process for a reform of the CEAS. This included options for a fair and sustainable system for allocating asylum applicants among EU Member States, a further harmonisation of asylum procedures and standards to create a level playing field across the EU and thereby reduce pull factors inducing irregular secondary movements, and a strengthening of the mandate of the EASO.

In May 2016, the European Commission presented a first package of reforms, including proposals for establishing a sustainable and fair Dublin system (COM(2016) 270 final), reinforcing the Eurodac system (COM(2016) 272 final) and establishing a European Agency for Asylum (COM(2016) 271 final).

In July 2016, the European Commission put forward a second set of proposals related to the reform of the CEAS, for example to establish a resettlement framework for the EU (COM(2016) 468 final) and a common procedure for international protection (COM(2016) 467 final) as well as a recast of the legislation on the standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (COM(2016) 465 final).

In March 2019, the European Commission reported on the progress made over the past 4 years and set out the measures still required to address immediate and future migration challenges (COM/2019/126 final).

Other articles
- Asylum quarterly report
- Dublin statistics on countries responsible for asylum application
- Enforcement of immigration legislation statistics
- Residence permits - statistics on first permits issued during the year
- Migration and migrant population statistics
- Migrant integration statistics
- Population and population change statistics
- Population statistics at regional level

Data visualisations
- Asylum statistics

Publications
- All publications on asylum and managed migration
- All publications on migrant integration
Main tables

- Asylum and managed migration (t_migr), see:
  - Asylum and first time asylum applicants - monthly data (rounded) (tps00189)
  - Persons subject of asylum applications pending at the end of the month - monthly data (tps00190)
  - Asylum and first time asylum applicants - annual aggregated data (rounded) (tps00191)
  - First instance decisions on asylum applications by type of decision - annual aggregated data (tps00192)
  - Final decisions on asylum applications - annual data (tps00193)
  - Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors - annual data (tps00194)

Database

- Asylum and managed migration (migr), see:
  - Asylum and Dublin statistics (migr_asy)
    - Applications (migr_asyapp)
    - Decisions on applications and resettlement (migr_asydec)
    - 'Dublin' statistics (migr_dub)

Dedicated section

- Asylum and managed migration

Methodology

- Applications (ESMS metadata file — migr_asyapp_esms)
- Decisions on applications and resettlement (ESMS metadata file — migr_asydec_esms)
- 'Dublin' statistics (ESMS metadata file — migr_dub_esms)

External links

- European Commission — DG Migration and Home Affairs — Common European asylum system
- European Asylum Support Office — EASO
- European Migration Network — EMN
- UNHCR — Statistics and operational data