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: drop in 2018**

Having peaked in 1992 (672 thousand applications in the EU-15) when the EU Member States received many asylum applicants from former Yugoslavia and again in 2001 (424 thousand applications in the EU-27), the number of asylum applications within the EU-27 fell to just below 200 thousand by 2006.

Focusing just on applications from citizens of non-member countries (see Figure 1), there was a gradual increase in the number of asylum applications within the EU-27 and later the EU-28 through to 2012, after which the number of asylum seekers rose at a more rapid pace, with 431 thousand applications in 2013, 627 thousand in 2014 and around 1.3 million in both 2015 and 2016. As such, the number of asylum applications within the EU-28 in 2015 and 2016 was approximately double the number recorded within the EU-15 during the previous relative peak of 1992. In 2018, 638 thousand asylum seekers applied for international protection in the Member States of the European Union (EU), down by 10% compared with 2017 (712 thousand) and just over half the number recorded in 2016, when nearly 1.3 million asylum applicants were registered. This figure is comparable to the level recorded in 2014, before the peaks of 2015 and 2016.
The number of first-time applicants in the EU-28 in 2018 was 581 thousand, which was 57 thousand (9%) less than the total number of applicants. 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.

This latest figure for 2018 marked a decrease of 74 thousand first-time applicants across the EU-28 in comparison with the year before, as the number of first-time applicants fell from 655 thousand in 2017 to 581 thousand in 2018. This followed on from a considerable decrease of 551 thousand first-time applicants between 2016 and 2017. The main contributions to the decrease were lower numbers of applicants from Syria and Nigeria, (see Figure 2).

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.
Citizenship of first-time applicants: largest shares from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq

Syria was the main country of citizenship of asylum seekers in the EU Member States in 2018, a position it has held each year since 2013. In 2018, the number of Syrian first-time asylum applicants in the EU-28 fell to 81 thousand from 102 thousand in 2017, while the share of Syrians in the EU-28 total dropped from 15.6 % to 13.9 %.

Afghanis accounted for 7.1 % of the total number of first-time asylum applicants and Iraqis for 6.8 %, while Pakistanis and Iranians for 4.3 % and 4.0 % respectively.

Among the most numerous groups of citizenship of first-time asylum applicants in the EU-28 in 2018, the largest relative increases compared with 2017 were recorded for Venezuelans (share up 1.8 percentage points), Georgians (up 1.6 percentage points), Turks (up 1.5 percentage points), Iranians (up 1.3 percentage points) and Colombians (up 1.1 percentage points). The largest relative fall in the number of applicants, among the most common countries of citizenship for asylum seekers in 2018 (except for Syria), was recorded for Nigerians (down 2.2 percentage points) and Eritreans (down 1.2 percentage points)\(^2\).

\(^2\)For the purpose of this analysis only the top 30 countries of citizenship in terms of the number of applicants for asylum were considered.
Main countries of destination: Germany, France and Greece

With 162 thousand applicants registered in 2018, Germany accounted for 28 % of all first-time applicants in the EU Member States. It was followed by France (110 thousand, or 19 %), Greece (65 thousand, or 11 %), Spain (53 thousand, or 9 %), Italy (49 thousand, or 8 %) and the United Kingdom (37 thousand, or 6 %).

Among Member States with more than 5 000 first-time asylum seekers in 2018, the number of first time applicants, rose most compared with the previous year in Cyprus (+70 %, or 3 thousand more first-time asylum seekers in 2018 than in 2017) and Spain (+60 %, or 20 thousand more), ahead of Belgium (+29 %, or 4 thousand more), the Netherlands (+27 %, or 4 thousand more), France (+20 %, or 19 thousand more) and Greece (+14 %, or 8 thousand more). In contrast, the largest relative decreases were recorded in Italy (-61 %, or 77 thousand fewer), Austria (-49 %, or 11 thousand fewer), Sweden (-19 %, or 4 thousand fewer) and Germany (-18 %, or 36 thousand fewer), (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3: Number of (non-EU) asylum seekers in the EU and EFTA Member States, 2017 and 2018 (thousands of first time applicants)](image)

Table 1 provides an overview of the five largest groups of first-time asylum applicants (by citizenship) in each of the EU Member States. Syrians accounted for the largest number of applicants in 8 of the 28 EU Member States, including 44 thousand applicants in Germany (the highest number of applicants from a single country to one of the EU Member States in 2018) and 13 thousand in Greece. Some 19 thousand Venezuelans applied for protection in Spain, while 16 thousand Iraqi applicants were recorded in Germany and almost 10 thousand in Greece. Afghanis accounted for 12 thousand applicants in Greece, 10 thousand in France. Other Member States with high number of applicants of a single citizenship in 2018 were: Germany with 11 thousand applicants from Iran, 10 thousand from Nigeria and 10 thousand from Turkey, Spain with 8 thousand from Colombia and France.
with 8 thousand from Albania.

Table 1: Five main citizenships of (non-EU) asylum applicants, 2018 (number of first time applicants, rounded figures) Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza)

Age and gender of first-time applicants

Almost four in five (79%) of the first-time asylum seekers in the EU-28 in 2018 were less than 35 years old (see Figure 4); those in the age range 18–34 years accounted for slightly less than half (48%) of the total number of applicants, while nearly one third (31%) 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 Member States, with the
largest share of applicants being those aged 18–34. However, there were a few exceptions to this pattern: Hungary, Austria, Germany and Poland reported a higher proportion of asylum applicants less than 18 years old (at least 44 %).

![Distribution by age of (non-EU) first-time asylum applicants in the EU and EFTA Member States, 2018](image)

**Note:** due to the use of rounded figures in these calculations the sum of all age groups does not always equal 100 %.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: migr_asyappctza)

**Figure 4: Distribution by age of (non-EU) first time asylum applicants in the EU and EFTA Member States, 2018 (%)**

Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza)

The distribution of first-time asylum applicants by sex shows that more men than women were seeking asylum. Among the youngest age group (0–13 years), males accounted for 51 % of the total number of applicants in 2018. There was a greater degree of gender inequality for asylum applicants who were 14–17 or 18–34 years old, where 72 % and 70 %, respectively, of first-time applicants were male, with this share dropping back to 59 % for the age group 35–64. Across the EU-28, female applicants outnumbered male applicants in 2018 for asylum applicants aged 65 and over, although this group was relatively small, accounting for just 0.7 % (0.4 % 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 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 2018 there were 19 700 applications in the EU-28 from unaccompanied minors; this represents 10 % all asylum applicants aged less than 18 (see Figure 6). Among EU Member States, the largest shares of unaccompanied minors among all minor asylum applicants in 2018 were recorded in Slovenia (70%) and Bulgaria (57%). Conversely, Czechia and Estonia did not register any unaccompanied minors in 2018.
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 2018, almost 582 thousand first instance decisions on asylum applications were made in the EU Member States and a further 309 thousand final decisions following an appeal. Decisions made at the first instance resulted in 217 thousand persons being granted protection status, while a further 116 thousand received protection status on appeal.

By far the largest number of decisions (both first and final) was issued in Germany (see Figure 7), constituting nearly one third (31 %) of the total first instance decisions and almost half (47 %) of the total final decisions in the EU-28 in 2018.
Figure 7: Number of first instance and final decisions on (non-EU) asylum applications, 2018 (thousands)

Source: Eurostat (migr_asydcfsta) and (migr_asydfina)

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 2018, 37% of EU-28 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 (see Figure 8). For first instance decisions, some 56% of all positive decisions in the EU-28 in 2018 resulted in grants of refugee status.
In absolute numbers, 122 thousand persons were granted refugee status in the EU-28 in 2018 at first instance, 62 thousand were given subsidiary protection status, and 33 thousand were given authorisation to stay for humanitarian reasons.

Among EU Member States, the highest shares of positive first instance decisions out of the total number of first instance decisions in 2018 were recorded in Ireland (85 %) and Luxembourg (72 %). Conversely, France, Estonia, Spain, Latvia, Poland and Czechia each recorded first instance rejection rates between 72 % (France) and 89 % (Czechia).

**Final decisions taken in appeal**

In 2018, 38 % of EU-28 final decisions based on appeal or review resulted in positive outcomes.

Around 116 thousand people in the EU-28 received positive final decisions, of which 42 thousand were granted refugee status, 38 thousand were granted subsidiary protection, and a further 36 thousand were granted humanitarian status.
Only in five EU Member States more than half of final asylum decisions in 2018 were positive: Finland (69 %), the Netherlands (60 %), the United Kingdom (58 %), Bulgaria (57 %) and Austria (54 %).

The highest shares of final rejections were recorded in Portugal and Estonia, where 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 and 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 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

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