

# Latest Asylum Trends - Annual Overview 2021

## Key Findings

- Some 648 000 applications for international protection were lodged in the EU+ in 2021, a third more than in 2020 and essentially returning to pre-pandemic levels.
- The share of male applicants increased to 70 %.
- About 89 000 or 14 % of all applications were repeated applications lodged in the same EU+ country, the most since 2008.
- Some 23 600 applications were lodged by unaccompanied minors, the most since 2017.
- Germany received the most asylum applications, followed by France, Spain and Italy. In Austria, the number of applications was more than twice as high as in 2020.
- Relative to population size, Cyprus received by far the most applications in 2021, followed by Austria and Malta.
- Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis lodged the most applications for international protection overall. From August 2021 onwards, Afghans were lodging the most applications.
- EU+ asylum authorities issued about 535 000 first instance decisions in 2021, roughly in line with pre-pandemic levels.
- The EU+ recognition rate was 34 % at first instance, including refugee status and subsidiary protection. Most positive decisions at first instance granted refugee status.
- Recognition rates were especially high for Eritreans (81 %), Belarusians (80 %), Yemenis (77 %) and Syrians (71 %).
- At all instances, approximately 767 000 applications were awaiting a decision at the end of 2021, similar to a year earlier.

In the **visualisation below**, the shading indicates the recognition rate or, alternatively, pending cases (see the drop-down menu).

**Source: Eurostat, from 2014 to 2021.**

Based on Eurostat [migr\\_asyappctza](#), [migr\\_asypenctzm](#), and [migr\\_asydcfstq](#) as of 22 April 2022.

The figures presented in this visualisation may be subject to update or revision from the Member States. Data available on the Eurostat website are rounded to the nearest five. As such, aggregates calculated on the basis of rounded figures may slightly deviate from the actual total. Please be advised that a '0' may not necessarily indicate a real zero value but could also represent a value of '1' or '2'. It is important to note that Eurostat Technical Guidelines have been regularly amended. For more information on these changes which affect data comparability over time please refer to the following reference metadata [migr\\_asyapp\\_esms](#) and [migr\\_asydec\\_esms](#).

designation "Kosovo" is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence".

**Asylum applications** include all persons who have lodged or have been included in an application for international protection as a family member in the reporting country during the reporting month.

**EU+** refers to the 27 European Union Member States, plus Norway and Switzerland.

**First instance decisions** include all persons covered by decisions issued on granting EU-regulated international protection status (refugee or subsidiary protection) following a first time or repeated application for international protection in the first instance determination process.

**Stock of pending cases** includes all cases for which an asylum application has been lodged and are under consideration by the national authority responsible for the first instance determination of the application for international protection (until the first instance decision has been issued) at the end of the reference period (i.e. last day of the reference month). It refers to the "stock" of applications for which decisions at first instance are still pending.

**The EU+ recognition rate** includes EU-regulated forms of protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and excludes national protection forms (humanitarian reasons). It is calculated by dividing the number of positive first instance decisions (granting refugee status or subsidiary protection) by the total number of decisions issued.

## **Applications for international protection in the EU+**

In 2021, EU+ countries received approximately 648 000 applications for international protection, indicating that the number of people seeking refuge in Europe essentially returned to pre-pandemic levels even while some COVID-19 restrictions were still in place. The total represents an increase by a third compared to 2020, matching the level in 2018.

As in previous years, most applicants were male, but their share increased to 70 % in 2021, compared to 65 % in 2020 and 63 % in 2019. Applicants aged 18-34 years, predominantly men, accounted for one-half of all applicants in 2021, while 29 % were younger than 18. Only one-fifth of all applicants were older than 35. The shares of applicants by age were similar to previous years, with women only being the majority of applicants aged over 65.

In the first few months of 2021, the monthly level of applications remained roughly stable from the end of 2020. But about halfway through the year, applications started to increase and culminated in two monthly peaks in September and November 2021. The peaks were largely the result of more applications by Afghans and Syrians, including many repeated applications by Afghans.

In 2021, about 89 000 or 14 % of all applications were repeated applications lodged in the same EU+ country, which was the most since 2008. At the time of writing, data on repeated applications were still missing for Cyprus, Denmark and Sweden. This represents an increase by more than one-half from 2020, when there were 57 000 repeated applications.

Some 23 600 applications for international protection were lodged by unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries. Data were missing for France, Lithuania and Portugal. the most since 2017. However, the share of unaccompanied minors within all applicants for international protection remained relatively stable at around 4 %. About two-thirds of all unaccompanied minor applicants were 16- to 17-year-olds. Only 9 % of the total were younger than 14 years, and girls represented just 6 % of all unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries.

## The receiving countries

In line with the overall increase in the total number of asylum applications, the vast majority of EU+ countries received considerably more applications in 2021. Germany received the most asylum applications (191 000), followed by France (121 000), Spain (65 000) and Italy (53 000). In Austria (39 000), the number of applications was more than twice as high as in the previous year. This increase, as in many other EU+ countries, was linked to rising applications by Afghans and Syrians. However, Spain was one of the few EU+ countries that received fewer applications, alongside Greece, Sweden, Finland and Malta. The notable decrease in Spain was due to fewer applications by Latin Americans.

In terms of applications relative to population size, Cyprus received by far the most applications in 2021, more than 1 500 per 100 000 inhabitants, followed by Austria, where 432 applications were lodged for every 100 000 inhabitants, and Malta (294 per 100 000 inhabitants). In several other countries, applications were still relatively high, between 216 and 266 applications for every 100 000 inhabitants, including in Greece, Slovenia, Liechtenstein, Iceland, Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium (in descending order).

Most repeated applications were lodged in just two EU+ countries, which means they were more geographically concentrated than first-time asylum applications. Close to half of all repeated applications were lodged in Germany alone (48 %) and another fifth was received in France (19 %). Most unaccompanied minors lodged applications in Austria (5 600), Germany (3 300) and Bulgaria (3 200), followed at some distance by Greece, Belgium, Romania, Italy, Switzerland and Slovenia (in descending order).

## Applicants' countries of origin

The peak of applications in September partly resulted from the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the evacuations that followed. From August 2021 onwards, Afghans were lodging the most applications for asylum in EU+ countries. However, in terms of the annual total, Syrians represented the largest applicant group in 2021, lodging about 117 000 applications in EU+ countries. In comparison, Afghans lodged 102 000 applications and were the second-largest group. Importantly, for both of these citizenships, applications in 2021 were the highest since the refugee crisis in 2015/2016. Their applications alone accounted for much of the overall increase in applications in 2021.

These two citizenships were followed at a distance by nationals of Iraq (30 000 applications), Pakistan and Turkey (25 000 each) as well as Bangladesh (20 000). All of them lodged considerably more applications than in 2020. In contrast, Venezuelans (18 000) and Colombians (14 000) lodged far fewer applications than in the previous two years.

Following a ruling of the Court of Justice of the EU in November 2020 on the refusal of military service in the Syrian army as possible grounds for well-founded fear of persecution, EUAA Case Law Database, EZ v Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 19 November 2020. Syrians lodged an exceptionally high number of repeated applications in Germany in 2021 (about 15 000). Likewise, mainly around the time of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, Afghans lodged 58 % of their repeated applications in Germany (about 8 400).

More than half of all applications by unaccompanied minors were lodged by Afghans (53 %), followed at some distance by Syrians (16 %), Bangladeshis (6 %) and Somalis (5 %), all with increasing trends compared to recent years.

## Decisions at first instance

In 2021, EU+ asylum authorities issued approximately 535 000 first instance decisions, marginally more than in 2020 but roughly in line with pre-pandemic levels. Conversely, following a sharp drop in 2020, many more applications were lodged in 2021 (up by one-third), particularly since August 2021. As a result of the steady climb in applications, by the end of 2021, applications lodged in EU+ countries outnumbered first instance decisions by over 113 000.

Three EU+ countries jointly issued just under two-thirds of all first instance decisions: France (26 %), Germany (25 %) and Spain (13 %). Italy and Greece followed at a distance, issuing 8 % and 7 % of all decisions, respectively, in addition to Austria and Belgium (4 % each).

Most first instance decisions in EU+ countries were issued to nationals of Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Colombia (in descending order), receiving one in every three decisions in 2021. Except for Colombians, for whom decisions halved, all these nationalities received more decisions in 2021 than in 2020. The most notable increase in relative terms was for Pakistani applicants, who received nearly a third more decisions in 2021 than in the previous year. Nationals of Bangladesh and Nigeria also received considerably more decisions.

## Recognition rates

The overall EU+ recognition rate for first instance decisions on asylum applications was 34 % in 2021. This means that out of 535 000 decisions issued, 182 000 were positive, granting the applicant either refugee status or subsidiary protection. Hence, two-thirds of all first instance decisions were negative.

Most positive decisions at first instance granted refugee status (118 000 or 65 % of all positive decisions) and subsidiary protection was granted in the remaining 64 000 cases (35 % of all positive decisions). While the recognition rate for EU-regulated types of protection has remained stable since 2018, the share of positive decisions granting refugee status dropped in 2021.

Asylum applicants who were not eligible for international protection as defined in the Qualification Directive may be granted an authorisation to stay for humanitarian reasons under national law. The EU+ recognition rate of 34 % excludes authorisations to stay for humanitarian reasons. If such authorisations were included, the recognition rate for 2021 would be 40 %. This considerable difference is largely due to humanitarian status granted to Venezuelans in Spain, which represented more than two-fifths of all humanitarian permissions to stay in EU+ countries. Moreover, Afghans received one-seventh of all humanitarian permissions, most of which were issued by Germany and Switzerland.

Among the 20 nationalities receiving the most first instance decisions in 2021, Eritreans had the highest recognition rate at 81 %. The high rates of acceptance have been the case for this group of applicants since 2015, ranging from 79 % to 89 %. This was followed by Syrians (71 %), Afghans (64 %) and Somalis (55 %). For the remainder of the top nationalities, recognition rates continued to be relatively low. For example, nationals of Albania, Bangladesh, Colombia, Georgia, Morocco and Venezuela had recognition rates ranging from only 3 % to 8 %. Outside the top 20 nationalities, recognition rates were notably high for nationals of Belarus (80 %), Yemen (77 %), Burundi (65 %), Palestine (64 %), China (51 %), South Africa (50 %) as well as stateless persons (55 %).

## Pending cases awaiting a final decision

At first and higher instances combined, over 767 000 applications were awaiting a decision in EU+ countries at the end of 2021. At the time of writing, data were missing for Lithuania, similar to a year earlier with a slight 1 % decrease. In the first months of 2021, the stock of pending cases gradually declined, but the number started to quickly increase in August 2021 to return on par with the level at the end of 2020 in just a

few months.

When combining Eurostat data with EUAA EPS data, EUAA EPS data cover first instance cases. They are provisional and not validated, but they provide information on overall trends at the EU+ level. They do not include information on Iceland and Liechtenstein. According to Eurostat data, the total number of pending cases in these two countries was low. The number of cases pending at first instance and at second or higher instances can be disaggregated. The results indicate that the overall stock of pending cases increased at first instance, whereas there was a decrease at higher instances. At the end of 2021, some 442 000 cases were pending at first instance, accounting for 58 % of the total – a higher share than a year earlier.

About a third (34 %) of all pending cases at all instances continued to be awaiting a decision in Germany, with a total of 264 000 open files. This was driven particularly by more cases by Syrian and, to a lesser extent, Afghan applicants. Other EU+ countries with a considerable number of pending cases included France (145 000), Spain (104 000), Italy (52 000) and Greece (38 000). Compared to the end of 2020, Greece managed to decrease its backlog substantially (- 40 %), whereas decreases in France and Italy were more modest (- 4 % each).

In some countries, there were sharp increases in the number of pending cases: Austria (+ 6 700), the Netherlands (+ 6 400), Cyprus (+ 6 300) and Bulgaria (+ 5 400). In each of these countries, the number of pending cases started to rise in the second half of 2021. While in Cyprus the increase affected multiple nationalities, in Austria and the Netherlands it affected primarily Syrian applicants, and in Bulgaria Afghans and Syrians.

Afghans (103 000) and Syrians (96 000) not only continued to have the most pending cases in EU+ countries at the end of 2021, but their numbers rose, by 10 % and 38 %, respectively, compared to 2020. For Afghans, the total represented the most pending cases since July 2020. The increases for both nationalities were driven by the fact that more applications were lodged in 2021, thus by the end of the year, over two-thirds of cases awaiting a decision for Afghan and Syrian applicants were pending at first instance.

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