Please cite as: EUAA, '4.2 Global overview of application for international protection' in *Asylum Report 2020*, Januar 2022.

4.2 Global overview of application for international protection



The comparison of asylum applications lodged in EU+ countries and the rest of the world is hindered by the lack of systematic global data collection with standardised indicators. Nevertheless, comparing preliminary UNHCR data with Eurostat data, it is possible to draw conclusions about the distribution of asylum applicants worldwide.[xii]

In 2019, more than 2 million people sought international protection globally.[xiii] Over one-third applied for international protection in EU+ countries. In other words, almost twice as many applications for international protection were lodged in other regions. However, in relative terms Europe has been receiving more asylum seekers. The ratio of applications per capita was approximately 1:715 in EU+ countries, while it was 1:5 360 in the rest of the world. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the global number of asylum seekers might be underestimated because of differences in categorisation. For example, applicants from Syria who seek asylum in Turkey receive temporary protection prima facie and are not included in the number of applicants outside of EU+ countries.

Figure 4.4 presents an overview of asylum applications lodged in EU+ countries and in the rest of the world for the Top 15 countries of origin of citizens seeking international protection in each of the two groupings. In the graph, Venezuela is highlighted as an outlier due to the greatest difference in the scale of applications lodged.

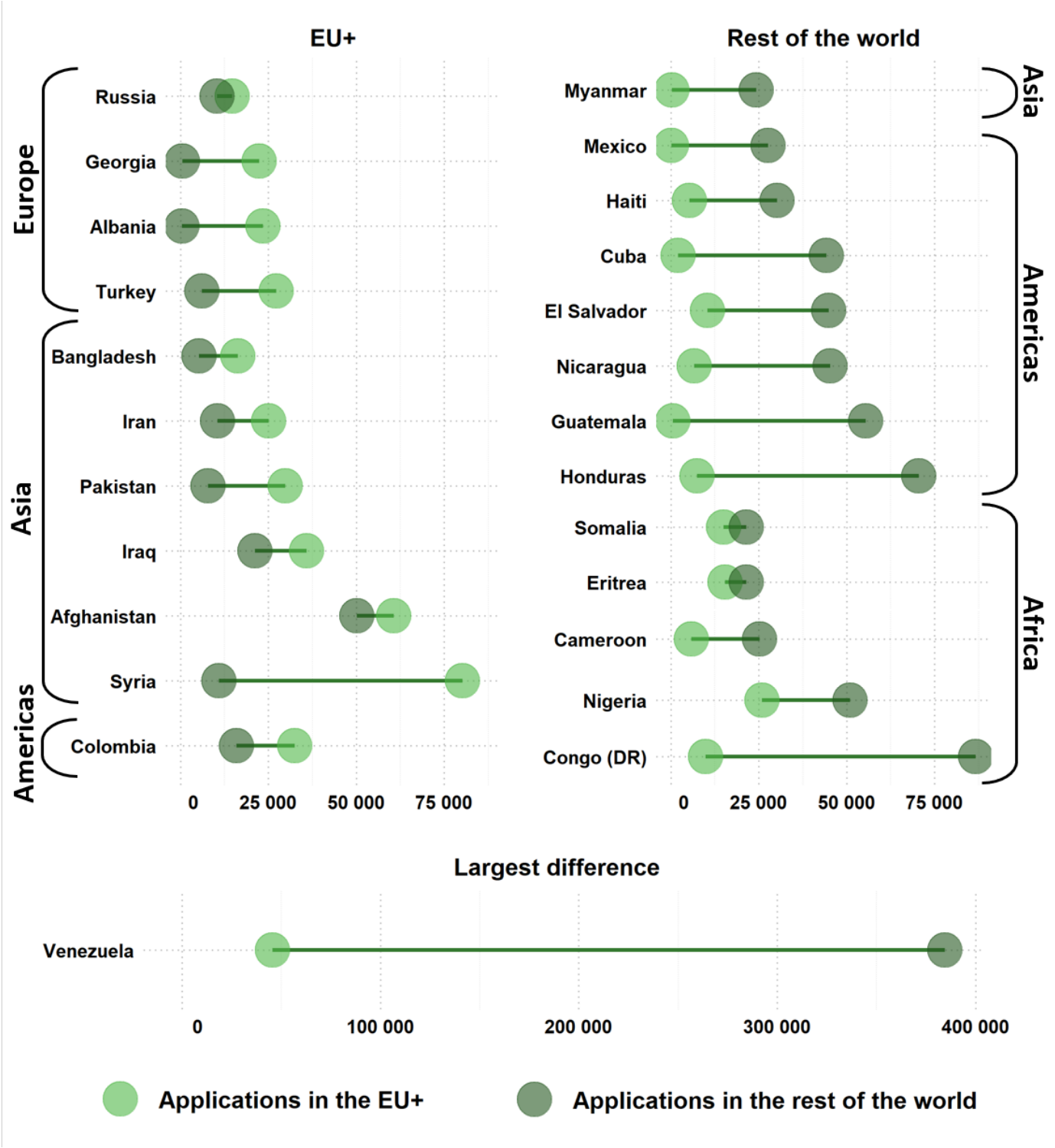
There appears to be a regional pattern of applicants from certain countries of origin lodging applications for international protection within the region where the country is located. For example, more than three-quarters of applications by citizens of Turkey were lodged in EU+ countries, with the remainder being lodged mostly in countries such as Canada, Japan and the United States.Other applicants from the European region (most notably, Albania, Georgia and Russia) also tended to lodge more applications within EU+ countries than elsewhere in the world (although the difference for citizens of Russia was less pronounced).[xiv] The number of Albanians and Georgians lodging applications for international protection outside of EU+ countries was negligible.

In contrast, nationals of countries in the Americas, in particular Latin America, sought international protection mostly outside of EU+ countries. But following the pattern, most applications were lodged within the region. The largest group of applicants globally were Venezuelans, who went primarily to Peru, followed at some distance by other countries in the

Americas, such as Brazil, the United States, Ecuador and Colombia (in decreasing order). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the number of applications from Venezuelans in Spain was similar to that in Brazil.

Other applicants from Latin America, such as Guatemalans, Hondurans and Salvadorans, went primarily to Mexico and the United States, and Nicaraguans mainly to Costa Rica. Applicants from Cuba had a more diverse set of destinations, including Uruguay, the United States, Mexico and Brazil (in decreasing order). An exception was applicants from Colombia, where about twice as many Colombians applied for asylum in Europe – in Spain, in particular – as in the rest of the world (almost exclusively in the Americas).

Figure 4.4 Applications for international protection in EU+ countries compared to the rest of the world for selected countries of origin of applicants, 2019



Note: The figure contains a selection of the Top 15 countries of origin of applicants lodging an applications in EU+ countries and the Top 15 countries of origin for the rest of the world. There is an overlap for five of these countries (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia and Venezuela). The left side of the graph portrays the top countries of origin which lodged more applications for international protection in EU+ countries than elsewhere. The right side of the graph portrays the top countries of origin which lodged more applications in the rest of the world. Venezuela is shown separately because of large differences in the scale.
Source: Eurostat and UNHCR.

A similar pattern is found in Africa, with most applications for international protection being lodged within the region. Applicants from this region most commonly originated from the Democratic Republic of Congo, with almost all of their applications being lodged in Africa, particularly in Uganda [xv] and other neighbouring countries, such as Burundi, the Republic of

Congo and Zambia. Similarly, nationals of Nigeria sought refuge mostly in Niger, and nationals of Cameroon in Nigeria. Eritreans and Somalis seeking international protection also stayed predominantly within the African region, but large numbers also applied in EU+ countries.

Breaking from the regional pattern, applicants from the top countries of origin in Asia mainly lodged applications in EU+ countries in 2019. The only exception were citizens of Myanmar who sought asylum primarily within Asia, particularly in Malaysia. Nationals from Syria accounted for the largest number of applicants from Asia, mainly lodging their applications in Germany and Greece. Citizens from Iraq also applied more often in EU+ countries than elsewhere, but their number of applications lodged was similar in Germany and Turkey. Germany was the top global destination for Iranians and France for Bangladeshis.

Geographical location seems to influence the choice of the destination country where an application for international protection is lodged, as seen in the trends with applicants from Africa, Europe and Latin America. However, this is not always the case, as exemplified by applicants from Asia.

[xii] Eurostat data are used for estimating the number of applications at the EU+ level (as throughout this report) and preliminary UNHCR data are used for the rest of the world. It should be noted that the discrepancies between Eurostat statistics and UNHCR estimates for the number of new or repeated asylum applications lodged by nationals of a given country of origin in EU+ countries are quite low.

[xiii] UNHCR, Global Trends 2019, forthcoming.

[xiv] Outside of EU+ countries, Russians applied mostly in Israel, the Republic of Korea and the United States of America.

[xv] For nationals of the Democratic Republic of Congo in Uganda, in addition to applications lodged (about 1 500), the figure includes persons granted protection prima facie (about 46 600), which represents the majority of cases.

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu