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5.6.1 Data on unaccompanied minors

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5.6.1.1. Applications for international protection by unaccompanied minors

icon presenting data on unaccompanied minors

According to Eurostat Technical Guidelines, all applicants for international protection who are considered by the responsible national authority to be unaccompanied minors are counted as such. The age of an applicant refers to their age as accepted by the national authority, which may have been determined through an age assessment procedure. Applications by unaccompanied minors present additional challenges given the more extensive asylum procedures[1392] and special reception conditions[1393] that they require.

In 2022, 42,000 applications for asylum were lodged by unaccompanied minors across EU+ countries, which was the most since 2016. This represented an increase of three-fifths from the previous year, slightly exceeding the growth in total applications (+53%).

Unlike total applications for all ages, however, most of the increase was concentrated among just two citizenships *(see Figure 29)*. Almost one-half of all applications by unaccompanied minors were submitted by Afghans (20,000), which increased the most in absolute terms compared to 2021 (+6,500). They were followed at a distance by Syrians (10,000, +5,200). Together, these two nationalities accounted for over two-thirds of all applications lodged by unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries and almost three-quarters of the annual increase. Nonetheless, at far lower levels, applications by unaccompanied minors from Egypt, Türkiye, Tunisia, India, Yemen, Burundi and Ukraine (in descending order) reached unprecedented levels. [lxiv]

Since both applications by unaccompanied minors and others grew significantly in 2022, the share of unaccompanied minors remained stable at about 4%. Nevertheless, there was significant variation among citizenships. About 1 in 7 applicants from Afghanistan and 1 in 8 applicants from Somalia were considered to be unaccompanied minors, but only 1 in 14 Syrians. In contrast, applications by unaccompanied minors were almost negligible among several top citizenships for asylum applications, including Colombians, Turks and Venezuelans.

The most unaccompanied minors lodged asylum applications in EU+ countries since 2015

Figure 29. Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by main country of origin, 2015-2022

Figure 29. Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by main country of origin,
Note: Data for Iceland were missing.
Source: Eurostat [migr_asyunaa] as of 13 April 2023.

Overall in 2022, 1 in 6 of all applicants under the age of 18 was an unaccompanied minor. The proportion was higher for minors aged 14 to 17, with more than one-half being unaccompanied. [lxv] Most notably, over 80% of the Egyptian, Bangladeshi and Indian minors between 14 and 17 years of age were unaccompanied, as well as about three-quarters of Afghans and Pakistanis in this age group. In contrast, just 7% of the 14-to-17-year-old Colombians and Ukrainians were unaccompanied.

Over 93% of all unaccompanied minor applicants were 14-to-17 years old. Only 7 % of the total for EU+ countries were younger than 14 years, but over 70% of the unaccompanied minors in Poland were in this age group. Girls represented just 7% of all unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries. Their representation was higher in the youngest age cohort (below the age of 14), where they accounted for about 18%. Girls represented a minority of the unaccompanied minors of most nationalities.

Almost all unaccompanied minors applied for the first time, with subsequent applicants accounting for a negligible share of the total.

More than one-half of all applications for international protection by unaccompanied minors were lodged in Austria (13,000 or 31%), Germany (7,300, 17%) and the Netherlands (4,200, 10%). In both Austria and the Netherlands, as well as in Bulgaria (3,400), France (1,000) and Cyprus (900), figures for 2022 were the highest on record (*see Figure 30).*

In contrast, in Romania and Slovenia applications by unaccompanied minors fell significantly from peak levels in the previous year. Of all applications lodged in Austria, Bulgaria, the Netherlands and Norway in 2022, more than 10% were lodged by unaccompanied minors. This contrasts with France and Spain where the proportion was less than 1 in 100 applications.

Record-high numbers of unaccompanied minors in Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France and the Netherlands

Figure 30. Top 10 EU+ countries receiving applications by unaccompanied minors, 2022

Figure 30. Top 10 EU+ countries receiving applications by unaccompanied minors, 2022
Note: Data for Iceland were missing.
Source: Eurostat [migr_asyunaa] as of 13 April 2023.

5.6.1.2. Case closures related to unaccompanied minors

Decisions at first instance and recognition rates

In 2022, asylum authorities issued some 13,000 first instance decisions to unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries, which was one and a half times as many as in 2021. As illustrated in Figure 31, large increases were recorded in the number of first instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan and Syria, and at lower levels, Somalia and Bangladesh.

While the number of first instance decisions increased across all four main nationalities, the outcome of such decisions varied significantly. Refugee status or subsidiary protection were granted to almost all Syrian unaccompanied minors (96%) in contrast with the small minority of positive decisions being issued to minors from Bangladesh (6%).

In both cases, recognition rates for unaccompanied minors mirrored the recognition rates for adults from the same country of origin. Notable exceptions included unaccompanied minors from Somalia and Iraq who had higher recognition rates than their adult counterparts. In contrast, unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan were granted refugee or subsidiary protection less frequently than adults, on account of a higher proportion being granted national forms of protection.

First instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan doubled

Figure 31. First instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors and respective recognition rates by Top 10 nationalities, 2022

Figure 31. First instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors and respective recognition rat

Note: The recognition rate is calculated as the proportion of first instance decisions granting EU-regulated types of protection.
Source: Eurostat [migr_asyumdcfa] as of 13 April 2023.

As illustrated in Figure 32, five EU+ countries jointly issued about three-quarters of all first instance decisions on applications submitted by unaccompanied minors in 2022: Germany (23%), Greece (16%), Switzerland (12%), Italy (12%) and the Netherlands (11%).

Of the top countries, Germany issued about two and a half times more first instance decisions to unaccompanied minors than in 2021. The increase was mainly driven by many more decisions issued to the two main groups of unaccompanied child applicants in the country, namely Afghans (1,500 decisions) and Syrians (1,100 decisions) which more than tripled and doubled, respectively. Most decisions concerned older male minors aged 14-17.

In terms of the outcome, the share of rejections declined from almost one-quarter in 2021 to less than one-tenth as many more decisions granted an authorisation to stay for humanitarian reasons (1,200, up from 200 in 2021). In addition, about 53% of first instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors in Germany granted EU-regulated forms of protection, including refugee status and subsidiary protection *(see Figure 32).*

Germany issued almost one-quarter of all decisions to unaccompanied minors

Figure 32. Outcome of first instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors by Top 5 EU+ country, 2022

Figure 32. Outcome of first instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors by Top 5 EU+ cou

Source: Eurostat [migr_asyumdcfa] as of 13 April 2023.

Greece issued the second highest number of first instance decisions to unaccompanied minors in 2022, up by one-half from the previous year. The increase was driven solely by more decisions being issued to minors aged 14-17 as the number of decisions issued to those younger than 14 decreased from already low numbers. Decisions issued by Greece to unaccompanied minors from Somalia increased the most in absolute terms, making them the top nationality and exceeding decisions issued to unaccompanied minors from Pakistan, which declined by one-half from the previous year. Many more decisions were also issued to unaccompanied minors from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Egypt (in descending order).

Overall, 45% of all first instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors in Greece granted EU-regulated forms of protection in 2022. This represented a significant increase from the previous year (26%) as more decisions were issued to minors from countries with higher recognition rates.

First instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors in Switzerland surged to the third-highest across EU+ countries, driven by many more decisions issued to Afghan unaccompanied minors. In fact, about 90% of first instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors in Switzerland related to nationals of Afghanistan and almost all of them were granted temporary admission under Swiss law.

In contrast, the number of first instance decisions issued to minors by Italian asylum authorities remained stable in 2022, with unaccompanied minors from Bangladesh receiving the largest number of decisions, as was the case in the previous year. The share of positive decisions also remained largely stable in Italy, with refugee and subsidiary status being (jointly) granted in 35% of all first instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors, while about one-quarter of decisions granted humanitarian status under the national framework.

Significant increases were recorded in the Netherlands, where the number of first instance decisions issued to unaccompanied minors rose by over two-thirds from 2021. More than one-half of these decisions were issued to Syrians, while decisions issued to Eritreans, Iraqis and Somalis accounted for about one-tenth each. For these top four nationalities, most decisions

were positive (granting refugee status or subsidiary protection).

Turning to final decisions issued in appeal or review on applications by unaccompanied minors, these increased by around one-third from the previous year. This was driven by many more decisions issued by Greece (1,000), which in fact issued almost two-thirds of all second or higher instance decisions to unaccompanied minors, mostly to minors from Pakistan and Bangladesh (640 and 150 respectively, with all of them consisting of rejections).

Withdrawn applications

An asylum application can be explicitly or implicitly withdrawn for various reasons before a final decision has been issued, regardless of whether an application is pending at first or higher instances *(see Section 4.4.8)*.

In 2022, about 18,000 applications were withdrawn by unaccompanied minors in 20 EU+ countries which reported data. Similar to withdrawn applications by adult applicants, this was about twice as many as in 2021. In fact, the growth in withdrawn applications outpaced the growth in applications lodged by unaccompanied minors. In particular, a sharp increase was noted during the second half of the year, peaking at over 2,600 withdrawn applications by unaccompanied minors in October 2022. The applications were predominantly withdrawn by one particular group, with male applicants, aged 14-17, accounting for 95% of withdrawals. In fact, in 2022, the most withdrawals since at least 2008 were recorded for applicants within the 14-17-year age group.

Almost all withdrawals were implicit, suggesting that the unaccompanied minors did not notify the authority of their intention to withdraw the application. It is possible that an asylum applicant implicitly withdraws their application from one EU+ country to apply again elsewhere, thus indicating secondary movements towards other EU+ countries.

The majority of EU+ countries recorded more withdrawals in 2022 compared to 2021. However, notable exceptions were Romania and Slovenia, where withdrawals declined to just one-quarter and one-third of 2021 levels, respectively.

As with withdrawals by adults, the sharpest increases took place in Austria and Bulgaria, where the number of withdrawals by unaccompanied minors more than tripled and doubled *(see Figure 33).* In fact, Austria accounted for almost two-thirds of the total in 2022. Bulgaria followed at a distance, accounting for one-fifth of the total. At lower levels, Greece recorded an increase of one-fifth from 2021, where the third-most withdrawals by minors took place.

Sharp increase in withdrawals of asylum applications in Austria by unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan

Figure 33. EU+ countries with the most withdrawals by citizenship of the unaccompanied minor applicant, 2022 compared to 2021

Figure 33. EU+ countries with the most withdrawals by citizenship of the unaccompanied minor ap

Source: Eurostat [migr_asyumwita] as of 13 April 2023.

Afghan unaccompanied children accounted for almost three-quarters of all withdrawals by unaccompanied minors. They withdrew over 13,000 applications in 2022 compared to 6,100 in 2021, largely in Austria (68% of all applications withdrawn by Afghan unaccompanied minors) and Bulgaria (22%).

At far lower levels, the second-highest number of withdrawals by unaccompanied minors corresponded to Syrian nationals (about 1 in 10 of all withdrawals by unaccompanied minors), increasing more than two-fold from the previous year. Once again, most withdrawals occurred in Austria and Bulgaria, followed at a distance in Greece and Romania.

Withdrawals by unaccompanied minors from Pakistan and Egypt also increased significantly from 2021 and were the third and fourth highest out of all citizenships. They accounted for 5% and 3% of all withdrawals by unaccompanied minors, respectively.

Pending cases

The increase in the number of asylum applications lodged by unaccompanied minors outweighed the significant increases in both decisions (at all instances) and withdrawals *(see Figure 34)*. As a result, the number of unaccompanied minors with an asylum application pending at the end of 2022 increased by more than two-fifths in comparison to 2021.

More applications than case closures resulted in a large caseload of applications by unaccompanied minors

Figure 34. Applications by unaccompanied minors: lodged, withdrawn at any instance and closed with a decision at first and second or higher instance, 2022 compared to 2021

Figure 34. Applications by unaccompanied minors: lodged, withdrawn at any instance and closed
Source: Eurostat [migr_asyumwita, migr_asyumdcfa, migr_asyunaa, migr_asyumpctm
] as of 13 April 2023.

Increases occurred in most countries, albeit to a different extent. In the countries with the most pending cases related to unaccompanied minors, namely Germany and the Netherlands, such cases increased at least two-fold *(see Figure 35)*, whereas numbers increased more moderately, albeit still markedly, in Belgium and Austria (up by 37% and 57%, respectively). Together, these top four countries accounted for three-fifths of all pending cases for unaccompanied minors, with Germany alone accounting for one-fifth.

Conversely, pending cases decreased by one-quarter in Greece, mostly due to more decisions being issued.

Almost two-thirds of all pending cases for unaccompanied minors at the end of 2022 related to children from Afghanistan and Syria. The latter increased far more significantly with respect to the previous year (7,600, +144% from 2021) but remained the second-largest group after

Afghans (9,200, +17%). Caseloads for unaccompanied minors were also relatively high for Eritreans (+70%) and Somalis (+47%), with around 1,400 pending cases each.

One-fifth of applications by unaccompanied minors were awaiting a final decision at the end of 2022 in Germany

Figure 35. Unaccompanied minors with an asylum application pending at the end of December 2022 by EU+ country

Figure 35. Unaccompanied minors with an asylum application pending at the end of December 20
Note: Data on pending cases for unaccompanied minors were not available for countries marked in grey.
Source: Eurostat [migr_asyumpctm] as of 13 April 2023.

- 1392Immigration and Naturalisation Service, Ministry of Justice and Security | Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedients, Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. (2022, July 14). More and more extensive asylum procedures for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. https://ind.nl/en/news/more-and-more-extensive-asylum-procedures-for-unaccompanied-minor-asylum-seekers
- 1393Federal agency for the reception of asylum seekers | L'Agence fédérale pour l'accueil des demandeurs d'asile | Federaal agentschap voor de opvang van asielzoekers. (2022, December 10). Manque de places pour les Mena [Lack of places for Mena]. https://www.fedasil.be/fr/actualites/accueil-des-demandeurs-dasile/manque-de-places-pour-les-mena
- lxivThe highest since at least 2008. This only includes citizenships with at least 100 applications by unaccompanied minors.
- lxv This is calculated as the number of unaccompanied minor applicants (Eurostat migr_asyunaa) divided by the number of applicants for international protection younger than 18 years (Eurostat migr_asyappctza).

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