Please cite as: EUAA, '5.6.1 Data on unaccompanied minors' in *Asylum Report 2022*, Μάιος 2022.

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According to the Eurostat Technical Guide, applications for international protection by unaccompanied minors are counted as such when the age of the applicant has been accepted by the national authority. The age of an applicant may be determined through an age assessment procedure.

In 2021, some 23,600 applications for international protection were lodged by unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries,[xlviii] the most since 2017. However, the share of unaccompanied minors within all applicants for international protection remained relatively stable at around 4%, so the increase in their absolute number is a reflection of more asylum applications being lodged in general, rather than a disproportional influx of unaccompanied minors.

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). With the exception of Greece, these countries received more applications by unaccompanied children than in the previous 2 years (or longer). Austria, Belgium and Switzerland received the most unaccompanied minor applicants since the refugee crisis of 2015-2016, while in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia the numbers were possibly the highest ever.[xlvix]

While the overall share of unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries was relatively small, there were significant variations in patterns at the country level. In particular, in Bulgaria 29% of asylum applications in 2021 were lodged by unaccompanied minors. Their share was also relatively high in Romania (18%), Austria and Slovenia (15% each). These proportions suggest that a large number of unaccompanied minors arrived in EU+ countries with the flows of asylum-related migration through the Balkan routes.

Nationality of minor applicants

icon presenting nationality of minor applicants

The absolute number of applications by unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan (12 600) and Syria (3 900) was the highest since the migration crisis in 2016 and considerably higher than in each of the previous 4 years *(see Figure 5.1).* In relative terms, more than one-half of all applications by unaccompanied children 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. Unaccompanied minors also represented 5% of applications lodged by nationals of Pakistan, but their number remained relatively stable compared to 2020 and lower than in earlier periods. On a smaller scale, there were more unaccompanied minors from Egypt (455) than at any other point since records began in 2008.

While unaccompanied minors accounted for 4% of all applications in EU+ countries, variations can be seen in the nationalities which make up this group. In total, 12% of all Afghans who sought international protection were unaccompanied minors. This has been the case already for several years and this trend shows no sign of depletion since the Taliban takeover of the country.

Unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan mostly and increasingly applied for asylum in Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Germany and Belgium (in descending order). Unaccompanied minors from Syria tended to lodge applications in Austria and Germany, and children from Bangladesh and Pakistan applied mostly in Italy and Greece. Unaccompanied Somali minors applied in multiple countries, including Greece, Germany, Austria and Italy (in descending order).

Asylum applications by unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan and Syria increased considerably compared to the past 4 years

Figure 5.1. Number of applications by unaccompanied minors by top countries of origin, 2016-2021

figure presenting number of applications by unaccompanied minors by top countries of origin, 201

Source: Eurostat [migr_asyunaa] as of 22 April 2021.

Overall, 12% of all minor applicants were unaccompanied, but the share increased to nearly one-half of all 14- to 17-year-old applicants. Notably, 86% of Bangladeshi minors between 14 and 17 years of age were unaccompanied, as well as 75% of Egyptians, 66% of Pakistanis and 65% of Afghans in this age group. In contrast, just 12% of 14- to 17-year-old Eritreans were unaccompanied and 14% of Iraqi minors.

About two-thirds of all unaccompanied minor applicants were 16- to 17-year-olds. Only 9% of the total were younger than 14 years at the EU level, but all unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in the Netherlands were in this age group.

Girls represented just 6% of all unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries *(see Figure 5.2).* Their share was higher in the youngest age cohort, those younger than 14 years, accounting for about one-fifth.

Girls were a minority among unaccompanied minors for all nationalities of applicants. However, they were slightly more prominent among children from Somalia and Eritrea, representing 25%

and 21% of the total, respectively.[l] In contrast, there were no girls among unaccompanied minor applicants from Algeria, Bangladesh and Egypt.

Very few girls among unaccompanied minor applicants in EU+ countries

Figure 5.2. Sex and age groups of unaccompanied minors applying for international protection in EU+ countries, 2021

figure presenting sex and age groups of unaccompanied minors applying for international protecti

Source: Eurostat [migr_asyunaa] as of 22 April 2022.

Footnotes

[xlviii] Data were missing for France, Lithuania and Portugal

[xlvix] At least since 2008 when Eurostat's harmonised data collection began.

[l] Only nationalities with at least 100 applications by unaccompanied minors in 2021 are considered.

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