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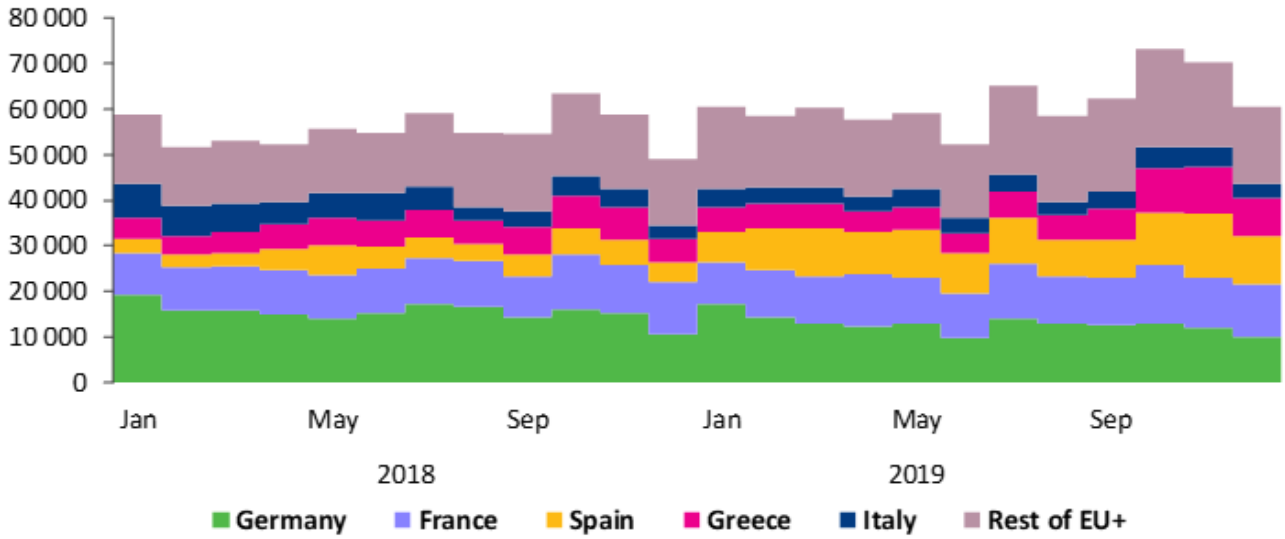
4.1 Data on applications for international protection

At the EU level

In 2019, almost 740 000 applications for international protection were lodged in EU+ countries, an increase of 11% compared to 2018. This was the first time since the migration crisis of 2015 that the number of applicants started to climb, in part due to a sharp rise in applications from Venezuelan and other Latin American nationals. In fact, top receiving countries, such as France, Greece and Spain, received more applicants in 2019 than during the migration crisis.

Broadly speaking, asylum applications already started to increase back in 2018, but this increase continued and even accelerated throughout 2019. Correspondingly, more applications were registered at the end of 2019 than at the beginning of the year *(see Figure 4.1).*

Figure 4.1 Number of applications by top-receiving countries in Europe, 2018-2019



Source:Eurostat.

Following the usual trend, there were five times as many applications for international protection than detections of illegal border crossings at the external border in 2019, approximately 740 000 compared to 140 000, respectively.[166] Nonetheless, border countries such as Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and some Western Balkans countries detected an increase in illegal border crossings compared to 2018.[167]

With regard to the characteristics of applicants, the number of female applicants increased in 2019 by 14 %, but still nearly two-thirds of all applications were lodged by males. The proportion of male applicants, however, far exceeded that of females in countries such as Slovenia (95 % of applications were lodged by males), Malta and Bulgaria (86% each). The opposite trend occurred in Hungary, Germany, Norway, Poland, Spain and Sweden, where the share of female applicants was the highest across EU+ countries, ranging between 41 % and 45 %.

The age of applicants can also be important, for example to plan adequate health care. Most applicants were young adults, aged between 18 and 34 years, accounting for nearly one-half of all applicants for international protection. For older cohorts, over one-fifth of applicants fell into the 35- to 64-year-old age group and just 1 % were older than 64 years.

From 2015 to 2019, there have been more minors younger than 14 years old who have lodged applications than applicants aged 35 to 64 years. These minors accounted for almost one-quarter of all applicants in 2019, although the gap with the older cohort is narrowing. The number of unaccompanied minors applying for international protection declined in 2019. This group accounted for just 2% of applications in 2019, a share which has declined since 2016.

At the country level

Applications continued to be concentrated in a small number of Member States. For instance, in 2019 France, Germany and Spain received more than one-half of all applications in EU+ countries, followed at a distance by Greece *(see Figure 4.1).* For the sixth consecutive year, Germany continued to receive the highest number of applications (about 166 000), albeit a smaller proportion of the total caseload (22 % of all applications in 2019, down from 28 % in 2018).

At the country level, trends varied considerably compared to 2018. For example, applications for international protection more than doubled in Spain (about 118 000) despite relatively low levels of irregular migration. This can be explained by the rise in applications from Latin American nationals. Asylum applications also increased in France (about 129 000 in total) where secondary movements remained important and in Greece (about 77 000) where arrivals from Turkey increased.

Conversely, Italy received far fewer applications (about 44 000 in total) for the second consecutive year, associated with significantly reduced irregular migration across the Central Mediterranean. As a result, for the first time since at least 2015, Italy was no longer among the Top 5 receiving countries.

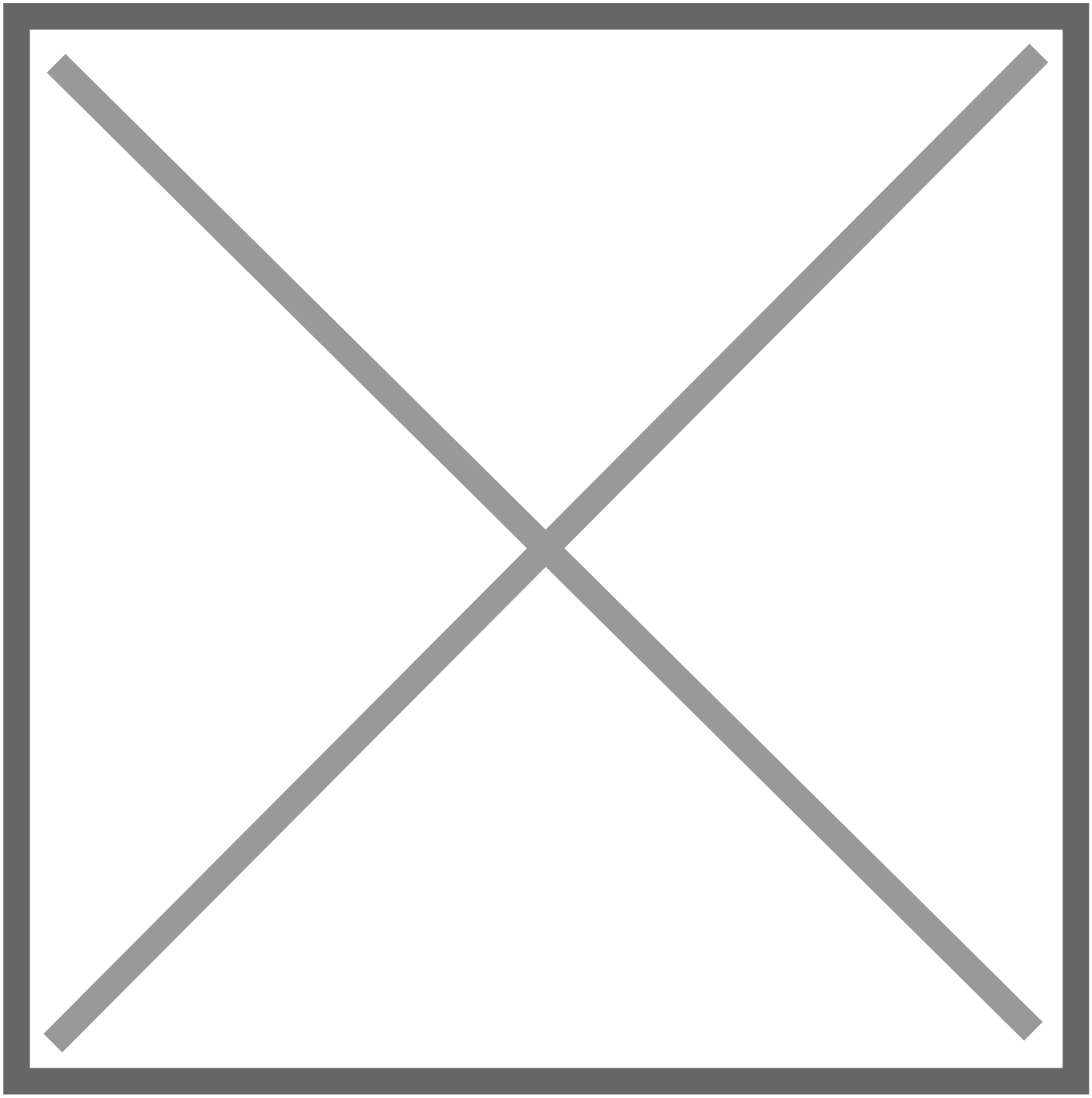
At the same time, upward asylum trends took place in other EU+ countries. Among countries which received more than 4 000 applications in 2019, the increases were most notable in Malta (+ 92 %), Cyprus (+ 76 %), Ireland (+ 30 %), Belgium (+ 22 %) and Sweden (+ 22 %).[xi] Among countries which received fewer than 4 000 applications, increases were also reported in several EU+ countries located around the Western Balkan region, such as Croatia (+ 75 %), Slovenia (+ 33 %) and Romania (+ 21 %), in addition to Lithuania (+ 59 %), Portugal (+ 42 %), Slovakia (+ 31 %) and Czechia (+ 13 %).

Countries of origin

Three countries accounted for one-quarter of all applications for international protection in EU+ countries in 2019. In absolute numbers, applicants from Syria lodged about 80 000 applications, followed by Afghanistan (about 61 000) and Venezuela (about 46 000) *(see Figure 4.2).*

Indeed, for the last six years Syrians have lodged the most applications in EU+ countries. While the number of applications from Syrian nationals declined slight from 2018, the number of applications from Afghan and Venezuelan nationals increased sharply over the year, with 28 % and 103 % increases, respectively. Afghanistan and Venezuela – together with Colombia, El Salvador and Peru – accounted for most of the increase in applications for international protection in EU+ countries in 2019. Other countries of origin with increased applications in Europe compared to the previous year included Moldova (+ 49 %), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (+ 30 %), China (+ 26 %) and Turkey (+ 10 %).

Figure 4.2 Top countries of origin of applicants for international protection in EU+ countries, 2018-2019



Source: Eurostat.

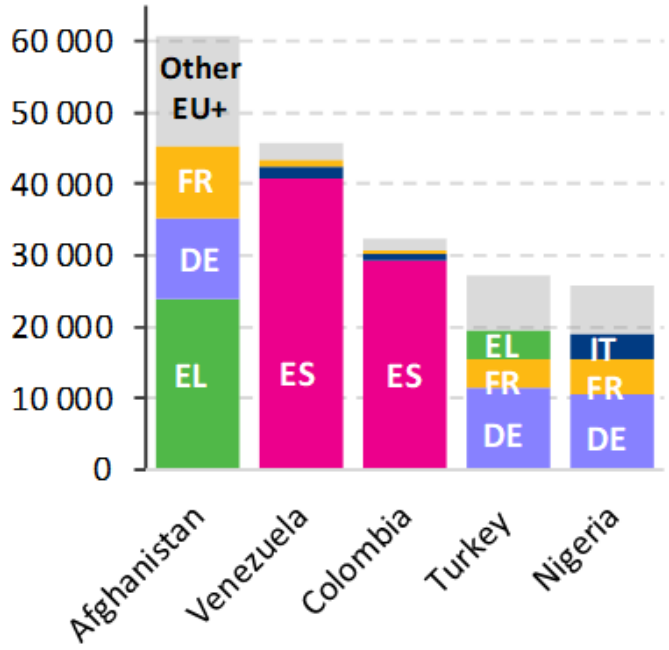
It is important to note that many Latin-American nationals have visa-free entry into the Schengen Area and so their arrivals and (increased) applications are not expected to be linked to irregular migration. But this is not the case for all countries in Latin America. For example, nationals of Haiti do not have visa exemptions to travel to Europe, but they lodged twice as many applications (about 5 000) than in 2018, almost exclusively in France, due to its overseas territories where applicants from Haiti travel to lodge their applications.

Following a decrease in arrivals through the Central Mediterranean route, citizens of several African countries lodged fewer applications in EU+ countries than in the previous year, namely Côte d’Ivoire, Eritrea, Libya, Sudan and The Gambia (among countries with more than 3 000 applications in 2019).

Receiving countries

Often language, cultural connections or geographical proximity can influence where an application is lodged. Indeed, trends emerge with some nationals applying for international protection in a limited number of countries (see Figure 4.3). This was typically the case for Latin Americans (Venezuelans and Colombians, but also nationals of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) who lodged applications primarily in Spain. Similarly, applications by Afghans were mostly lodged in Greece, in line with increased arrivals along the Eastern Mediterranean route.

Figure 4.3 Applications for international protection lodged in EU+ countries, by selected countries of origin, 2019



Source: Eurostat.

[xi] Increases ranged between + 5 885 and + 1 110 applications.

166 Frontex. (n.d.). *Detections of illegal border-crossings statistics*. Retrieved 20 May 2020, from https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Migratory_routes/2020/Detections_of_IBC_2020_04_06.xlsx

167 Frontex. (2020). *Risk Analysis for 2020*. https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2020.pdf

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