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A first instance asylum application is considered to be closed once a decision has been issued by a national authority. According to Regulation (EC) 862/2007,542there are five outcomes that should be reported by EU+ countries:

icon for decisions at first instance

i) Refugee status (as per the 1951 Geneva Convention);
ii) Subsidiary protection status;
iii) Authorisation to stay based on humanitarian reasons under national law (humanitarian protection), if this exists under national law;[xvii]
iv) Temporary protection status (under EU legislation);[xviii] and
v) A negative decision resulting in the rejection of the application.

During the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, 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) *(see Figure 4.16),* 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.

In 2021, 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 each issuing 4% of all decisions.

Of the top countries, France issued almost three-fifths more decisions than in 2020, exceeding pre-pandemic numbers by one-fifth. The increase applied almost equally to all age groups and both sexes, but most notably to minors under the age of 14. France issued more decisions to most of the top nationalities applying for asylum compared to the previous year, particularly, in relative terms, for nationals of Comoros, Turkey, Nigeria, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (in descending order).[xxix]

First instance decision-making by Germany remained stable compared to 2020, but there were significant variations across citizenships receiving a decision. For example, Germany issued many more decisions (+50%) to Syrian nationals compared to 2020, particularly in the first 6 months of 2021. The decisions by Germany on Syrian applicants accounted for over one-tenth of all decisions taken on international protection in Europe in 2021. At lower levels, decisions for Moldovans more than doubled from the previous year, rising to the most on record.[xxx] In contrast, fewer decisions were issued to nationals of Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria and Turkey.[xxxi]

Conversely, Spain and Greece, which had bolstered their decision-making in 2020, each took approximately two-fifths fewer decisions in 2021. In Spain, fewer decisions were issued to Colombian and Venezuelan cases (-51% and -66%), as well as, at lower levels, to nationals of El Salvador and Nicaragua.[xxxii] Many of the decisions issued by Spanish authorities continued to grant national protection to Venezuelans, which entails a faster and less labour-intensive procedure in terms of case processing. Greece issued fewer decisions to Afghan and Syrian nationals (-37% and -73%, respectively).

Decisions in Italy increased slightly. While Italy continued to issue most decisions to citizens of Bangladesh, Nigeria and Pakistan, an unprecedented number of decisions were issued to Afghans (four times as many as in 2020) and Tunisians (more than doubled from 2020). First instance decisions in Belgium increased by 29% compared to 2020, primarly driven by a sharp increase in decisions for nationals of Palestine and Eritrea (each almost doubling from the previous year), as well as for Afghans.

After a momentary reversal in 2020, the number of applications exceeded decisions again in 2021

Figure 4.16. Number of first instance decisions issued and asylum applications lodged in EU+ countries, 2008-2021

Figure 4.16. Number of first instance decisions issued and asylum applications lodged in EU+ cou

Source: Eurostat, [migr_asyappctza] and [migr_asydcfstq] as of 22 April 2022.

Following an increased inflow of asylum applications, Austria issued four-fifths more decisions in 2021 than in 2020, recording an annual peak in the last quarter of 2021, following an upward trend since the second quarter of 2020. The increase was across all age groups (except those aged 65 or older) but most notable among 18- to 34-year-olds, where the share increased by over 140% in 2021. Austria issued two and a half times more first instance decisions to Syrians and almost three times more to Moroccans.[xxxiii]

Cyprus also ramped up decision-making in 2021, with two and a half times more decisions taken than in 2020. Of the top four nationalities, the largest increase in absolute terms was for nationals of India and Bangladesh, recording almost 9 and 12 as many decisions, respectively, as in the previous year, followed by Pakistanis and Syrians.

Despite stable decision-making between 2020 and 2021, Germany had the largest excess of inflow (applications lodged) over first instance decisions, followed at a distance by Austria and the Netherlands. In fact, in the overwhelming majority of EU+ countries, the number of applications lodged outnumbered decisions issued in 2021. Only France, Greece, Spain and Hungary (in descending order) closed more cases than they opened *(see Figure 4.17).* This suggests that pressure on national asylum systems in most EU+ countries remained high or increased.

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 one-third more decisions in 2021 than in the previous year.

Nationals of Bangladesh and Nigeria also received considerably more decisions in 2021. The rise in decisions for Bangladeshis was mostly due to a significant increase in decisions by France, recording the largest increase in absolute terms. This was followed by Cyprus and at a lower level by Austria, Italy and Romania.

Similarly for Nigerians, the increase was explained by a rise in decisions issued by France (+4,000 from 2020) and at lower levels by Cyprus and the Netherlands, each taking the most decisions on Nigerian nationals on record. At lower levels, there were marked increases in decision-making for nationals of Belarus, Comoros, India, Moldova (each rising to the most on record) and North Macedonia.[xxxiv]

In contrast, the biggest decline in both relative and absolute terms was for decisions issued to Venezuelan nationals, which dropped by almost two-thirds from the 2020 peak, mainly driven by Spain as the top decision-issuing country for this group. At the same time, fewer decisions were issued to Colombians (primarily in Spain), Iranians (mostly due to a drop in decisions by Germany and Sweden) and Iraqis (largely on account of fewer decisions by Germany, Greece and Sweden).

Around one-half of all decisions at first instance were issued to adults in the 18- to 34-year-old age group. Over one-quarter of all decisions in 2021 were issued to minors, with Syrian and Afghan children jointly representing over one-third of those younger than 18. Decisions issued to Syrian minors declined by 15% in 2021, but there was a comparable rise in decisions issued to Afghan minors. Other main nationality groups for minors in 2021 included Iraqis, Nigerians and Eritreans (in descending order).

Germany and Austria received considerably more applications than the number of first instance decisions they issued

Figure 4.17. Disparity between the number of asylum applications and first instance decisions issued in selected EU+ countries, 2021

Figure 4.17. Disparity between the number of asylum applications and first instance decisions issu

Source: Eurostat, [migr_asyappctza] and [migr_asydcfstq] as of 22 April 2022.

In contrast, while children from Venezuela and Colombia were among the top nationality groups in 2020, decisions for these groups dropped by two-thirds and one-half respectively, in line with a similar decline in decisions for Venezuelan and Colombian adults.

Men received over two-thirds of all first instance decisions in 2021, representing a slightly higher share than in 2020. In a few countries, however, women received a higher portion of decisions than the EU+ average. In Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Spain and Switzerland, between 41% and 46% of all decisions were delivered to female applicants.[xxxv]

Infographic: Profile of applicants

Footnotes

[xvii] Granting humanitarian protection is not harmonised at the EU level and is only reported to Eurostat by 23 of the 31 EU+ countries (Austria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland). In addition, various forms of humanitarian protection can be granted, separate from the asylum procedure, and thus the positive decisions may not be reported to Eurostat under this indicator.

[xviii] This is based on the Temporary Protection Directive, Regulation 2001/55/EC, which was used for the first time in 2022 in EU countries.

[xxix] Only citizenship groups above 4,000 in 2021 were considered.

[xxx] Since at least 2008.

[xxxi] Only citizenship groups above 3,000 in 2021 were considered.

[xxxii] Only citizenship groups above 2,500 in 2021 were considered.

[xxxiii] Only citizenship groups above 1,000 in 2021 were considered.

[xxxiv] Only citizenship groups above 2,000 in 2021 were considered.

[xxxv] Only countries issuing more than 1,000 decisions in 2021 were considered.

- 542Regulation (EC) No 862/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 July 2007 on Community statistics on migration and international protection and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) No 311/76 on the compilation of statistics on foreign workers (Text with EEA relevance). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2007/862/oj

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