News Published: 25 June 2020

EU receives one-third of global asylum applications in 2019



In 2019, applications for asylum in EU+ countries[1] rose by 11% to 738 425, followed by a 16% increase recorded in the first two months of 2020.[2] While the COVID-19 emergency has led to a recent 87% drop in applications, EASO expects the overall increasing trend to resume.

On 25 June 2020, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published its annual flagship ***EASO Asylum Report***. It presents a comprehensive overview of the latest key developments in asylum data, policy, practice and legislation. Member State-specific data can be found here.

The Report finds that 2019 was the first time since 2015 that applications increased on an annual basis, in part due to a sharp rise in applicants from Venezuela (+103% over 2018) and Colombia (+214% over 2018). Some EU+ countries – such as Cyprus, France, Greece, Malta and Spain – received more asylum applications in 2019 than during the so-called migration crisis in 2015 and 2016.

In response, EU+ countries receiving high shares of asylum applicants ramped up efforts to address the influx of migrants, disembarkations and rising backlogs of pending cases. In particular, policies and practices targeted protecting unaccompanied minors, accelerating registrations, fast-tracking the return of rejected applicants and expanding accommodation places. Nonetheless, first instance procedures were lengthy in most countries, frequently extending past the six-month legal time limit.

In 2019, the majority of **asylum applications** were lodged in Germany (165 615; 22%), France (128 940; 17%) and Spain (117 795; 16%), while the fewest were lodged in Liechtenstein (50), Estonia (105) and Latvia (195). Most asylum applicants were Syrians (80 205; 11%), Afghans (60 700; 8.2%) and Venezuelans (45 645; 6.2%).

EU+ countries made progress toward reaching the goal of resettling 50 000 migrants from non-EU countries under the second **EU Resettlement Scheme**. In 2019, approximately 30 700 persons arrived in Europe through resettlement, 8% more than in 2018. Syrians accounted for nearly two-thirds of all resettled persons for the third year in a row.

The number of **decisions** taken at first instance (excluding appeals) in 2019 decreased slightly (-3%) to 584 770, compared to 601 430 in 2018. Germany recorded the most decisions (154 175; 26%), followed by France (113 890; 19%) and Italy (93 485; 16%). Spain issued almost five times as many first instance decisions in 2019 (58 035) compared to 2018 (11 875), particularly due to the rapid assessment of Latin American applicants. Syrians (12%) accounted for the majority of decisions in the EU+, followed by Venezuelans (6.7%) and Afghans (6.4%).

The number of **pending cases** still awaiting a decision at the end of 2019 (almost 912 000 applications) remained much higher compared to the pre-2015 level, illustrating the pressure under which asylum and reception systems are still operating. However, backlogs were reduced in early 2020 as a result of temporary office closures due to COVID-19 safety measures. At the end of March, there were about 836 000 pending cases, an 8% decrease compared to the end of December 2019.

The first instance EU+ wide **recognition rate**[3] in 2019 remained on par with that of 2018, with 40% of decisions being positive. Recognition rates in EU+ countries ranged ranged from 10% in the Czech Republic to 88% in Switzerland.

A notable development in 2019 was the number and share of positive decisions granted to applicants from Venezuela. The recognition rate for Venezuelans was 96% in 2019, compared to just 29% in 2018. This was largely composed of national protection status. Other nationalities to receive a high number of positive decisions included: Syrians (86%), Eritreans (85%) and Yemenis (82%).

Asylum applications plummet in 2020, but expected to begin increasing again

Improvements made to national asylum systems, and deficiencies which persisted, were amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries which had invested in modernising and automating asylum procedures in 2019 were able to restart operations quickly by processing applications online and conducting interviews through videoconferencing.

Nonetheless, as reported by EASO in recent months, national emergency measures due to COVID-19 led to a dramatic 87% reduction in asylum applications. Only about 8 700 applications for international protection were registered in EU+ countries in April, the lowest since at least 2008.

As national and travel restrictions begin to ease, EASO expects that asylum applications will begin increasing and return to pre-COVID-19 trends. In May, asylum applications were already rising again, albeit slowly. EASO reiterates that there is no indication of less demand for international protection, and as highlighted by EASO in May, EU+ countries should be prepared for increases in asylum applications in the medium term, including due to the repercussions of COVID-19 on low-income countries.

Any further information may be obtained from the European Asylum Support Office on the following email address: press@easo.europa.eu.

Links

- EASO Asylum Report 2020
- EU+ country data fiches
- Key Findings
- Executive Summary (EN) - BG, CS, DA, DE, EN, EL, ES, ET, FI, FR, GA, HR, HU, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, SL, SV, AR, MK, SQ, SR, TR
- Bibliography for the EASO Asylum Report 2020

- Summary of legislative, institutional and policy developments in asylum in EU+ countries in 2019
- Online database for EU+ developments
- Situation of asylum in the European Union: 2019 overview (with interactive map)

Photo: © UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

---

[1]Includes 27 European Union Member States, the United Kingdom (an EU Member State in 2019), Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
[2]Compared to the same period in 2019.
[3]The share of positive decisions (granting a form of protection) in all decisions.

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