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COVID-19: Asylum applications down by 43% in March



Applications for asylum in the EU+ dropped by almost half in March as COVID-19 containment measures took effect, following persistently high levels of applications in the first two months of the year.

Figures released by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) show that in March, just 34 737 applications were lodged in the EU+, dropping by 43% from February. Asylum authorities were affected to different extents across the EU+ by the COVID-19 outbreak, both with regard to the activities of asylum systems themselves, as well as due to border restrictions.

Just before the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe, applications had increased compared to the same period in 2019 (+16% over January-February 2019), with 65 300 applications lodged in January and 61 100 in February. Thus, March figures are not truly indicative of asylum-related migration trends towards the EU+, but are rather the result of COVID-19 containment measures.

On 16 April, the European Commission, with input from EASO, presented Guidance on implementing EU rules on asylum and return procedures. The Guidance provides advice to Member States on ways to ensure the continuity of asylum procedures within the context of the challenging COVID-19 situation.

Over the past months, asylum applications have become increasingly concentrated to a limited number of EU+ Member States, with the top four countries receiving more than three quarters of all applications lodged. As is usually the case, one in every ten applications lodged in February (and one in every eleven in March) was repeated, meaning lodged by applicants who already received a negative decision on a previous application, while approximately 3% of all applications were lodged by self-claimed unaccompanied minors.

Fewer decisions granting EU-regulated forms of protection

The output of first-instance authorities in March did not drop to the same extent as applications, such that the recent upward trend in pending cases at first instance was halted. More first-instance decisions were issued in the first quarter of 2020 (144 114) compared to 2019 (136 302).

The overall recognition rate for EU-regulated types of protection has been decreasing over the past year. The recognition rate for decisions issued in Q1 2020 was 28%, down from 31% in the previous quarter. A year ago, in Q1 2019, the share of positive decisions stood at 35%.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe in March, Syrians (14 441) and Afghans (13 245) continued to lodge the most applications for asylum, as well as Colombians (10 155) and Venezuelans (10 098). These four citizenships accounted for 38% of all applications lodged in the EU+ overall in the first two months of the year.

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

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