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4.6.1.1. Applications for international protection by self-claimed unaccompanied minors

icon presenting data on unaccompanied minors

According to the EPS data collection, the indicator on unaccompanied minors includes all asylum applicants who are recorded as unaccompanied minors at the moment of lodging their application for international protection. Generally, this is based on the claim of the applicant as age assessment procedures usually take place after the lodging of the application. However, in some countries, the assessment could be done simultaneously. The term ‘self-claimed unaccompanied minors’ does not indicate whether the information on age which was provided by the applicant is accurate.

In 2023, 41,000 applications for asylum were lodged by self-claimed unaccompanied minors across EU+ countries. This was similar to the level in 2022 (-5%) and the second-highest on record since 2015. The share of applications by unaccompanied minor remained stable, representing about 4% of all applications lodged in EU+ countries. However, variations were seen at the country level. For example, just 2% of applications in Italy and Spain were lodged by self-claimed minors, while they accounted for a much higher portion in Bulgaria (17%) and the Netherlands (16%).

Germany, the Netherlands and Austria (in descending order) continued to receive the highest number of applications by unaccompanied minors, but their numbers shifted to a great extent in 2023 within these Top 3 countries. With a notable increase, Germany (with 10,300 applications) hit the highest peak on record and replaced Austria as the top receiving country for this profile of applicants *(see Figure 22)*. The sharp rise was driven by Syrian, Afghan and, at lower levels, Turkish unaccompanied minors, who all applied in Germany in unprecedented numbers. With 6,100 applications, the Netherlands also surpassed Austria and witnessed an all-time high of self-claimed minors due to record numbers of unaccompanied minors from Syria, Somalia, Iraq and Sudan (in descending order).[xlix]

At lower levels, Bulgaria (3,800) and Switzerland (2,300) received the most applications by unaccompanied minors since 2015, Spain (2,600) since 2019 and Italy (2,200) since 2018. In contrast, applications by this profile fell significantly in several some countries. While Austria (5,100) remained in the top receiving countries, applications there and in Belgium (2,600)

dropped markedly from the highs recorded in the previous year as a result of a sharp decrease in applications by Afghan unaccompanied minors.

Icon for figure

Record number of unaccompanied minors in Germany, the Netherlands and Bulgaria

Figure 22. Top 10 EU+ countries receiving applications by self-claimed unaccompanied minors, 2023 compared to 2022 and share of applications lodged by the main citizenship of unaccompanied minors, 2023

Figure 22. Top 10 EU+ countries receiving applications by self-claimed unaccompanied minors, 20

Note: Data were not available for Portugal for October-December 2023.
Source: EUAA EPS data as of 1 February 2024.

4.6.1.2. Citizenship of self-claimed unaccompanied minors

A significant share of minor applicants originated from Syria and Afghanistan, jointly accounting for three in every five applications by self-claimed unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries. Unaccompanied minors from Syria applied the most on record in 2023, while applications by unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan dropped to the lowest since 2020.

At far lower levels, applications by self-claimed unaccompanied minors from Venezuela, Türkiye, Egypt, Colombia, Sudan and Palestine (in descending order) reached unprecedented levels. In addition, Eritrean unaccompanied minors lodged the most applications since 2016.[li]

Implicitly withdrawn applications by unaccompanied minors declined by more than one-third from the peak in 2022, particularly by Afghan unaccompanied minors. This suggests there was a possible reduction of secondary movements by unaccompanied minors within EU+ countries.

- [xlix]Since the start of the EPS data exchange in 2014.
- [li]Only countries with at least 240 applications by self-claimed unaccompanied minors in 2023 were considered.

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