

EASO

EU+ asylum trends

2018 overview



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Source: EASO EPS, December 2016 - December 2018.

Asylum applications include all persons who have lodged or have been included in an application for international protection as a family member in the reporting country during the reporting month.

First-instance decisions include all persons covered by decisions issued on granting EU-regulated international protection status (refugee or subsidiary protection) following a first time or repeated application for international protection in the first instance determination process.

Stock of pending cases includes all cases for which an asylum application has been lodged and are under consideration by the national authority responsible for the first instance determination of the application for international protection (until the first instance decision has been issued) at the end of the reference period (i.e. last day of the reference month). It refers to the “stock” of applications for which decisions in first instance are still pending.

The EU+ recognition rate includes EU-regulated forms of protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and excludes national protection forms (humanitarian reasons). It is calculated by dividing the number of positive first-instance decisions (granting refugee status or subsidiary protection) by the total number of decisions issued.

This document is produced by EASO on the basis of monthly data exchanged under the Early Warning and Preparedness System (EPS). The data shared with EASO by the EU+ countries are provisional and unvalidated, and therefore may differ from validated data submitted to Eurostat (according to Regulation (EC) No 862/2007). In line with the dissemination guide on EPS data, EASO cannot publish data disaggregated per EU+ country.

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Latest asylum trends – 2018 overview

Applications overall decreased, but variation among citizenships of origin

In 2018, EU+ countries recorded some 634 700 applications for international protection.¹ This is a decrease by 10 % compared to 2017, and the third consecutive year with fewer applications after the unprecedented influx following the migration crisis of 2015. Overall asylum figures returned to approximately pre-crisis levels of 2014, when EU+ countries processed some 641 000 applications for international protection.²

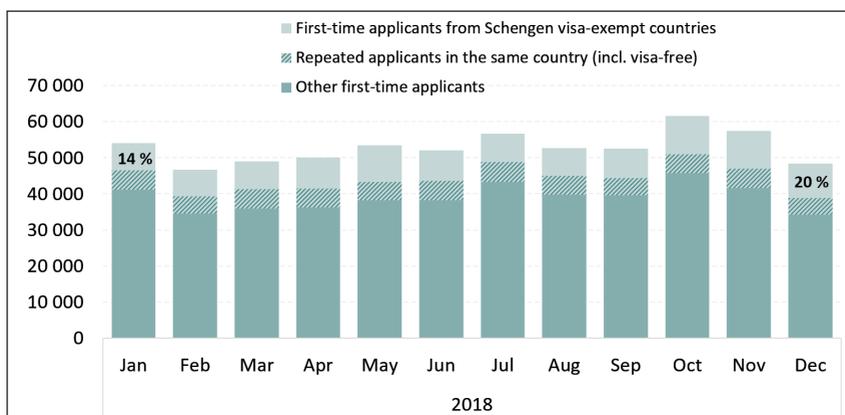


Figure 1. Monthly applications for international protection in the EU+, per type of applicant. Source: EASO EPS data.

Despite the year-on-year decrease compared to 2017, there was a slight upward trend throughout 2018; fewer applications were lodged at the beginning of the year, with fewer than 50 000 applications in both February and March. In February the fewest applications were lodged, approximately 46 700. Progressively more applications were lodged each month across the second and the third quarters of the year, eventually peaking during the final months; in October the most applications were lodged (61 700). About 4 % of all applications in 2018 concerned self-claimed **unaccompanied minors** (UAMs).³ Some citizenships of origin had a high concentration of UAMs, such as Gambian and Vietnamese (among each of whom one in five applicants claimed to be unaccompanied minors).

For the sixth consecutive year Syrians lodged more applications for asylum than any other citizenship: some 74 800 applications (- 24 % from 2017) lodged in the EU+, such that one in 10 applicants in the EU+ was a Syrian national. Afghan (45 300) and Iraqi (42 100) nationals also lodged high numbers of applications. Despite lodging fewer applications compared to 2017, these top three countries of origin still accounted for 26 % of all applications in 2018. The top ten countries of origin also included **Pakistan** (5 %), **Iran**, **Nigeria**, **Turkey**, **Venezuela** (4 % each), **Albania** and **Georgia** (3 % each).

With a lower and relatively stable number of applications lodged in 2018, the situation of asylum in the EU+ seems to have stabilised. Nonetheless, the past 12 months highlighted several important developments compared to 2017. Some of these trends intensified over the second half of the year, and will be monitored in the forthcoming months:

- increased applications lodged by some citizenships, –including citizens who are exempt from visa requirements when entering the Schengen Area;
- more repeated applications (i.e. by persons who previously lodged another application in the same EU+ country) which became a larger subset of asylum applications in the EU+;
- the recognition rates of some citizenships were subject to considerable changes – either upward or downward;
- the backlog, i.e. the number of cases pending at first-instance, has not been reduced.

Some citizenships applied for international protection in higher numbers than in 2017. For instance, **Colombians** (+ 210 %), **Venezuelans** (+ 88 %), **Georgians** (+ 72 %), **Palestinians** (+ 61 %), **Turkish** (+ 48 %) and **Iranians** (+ 37 %) lodged far more applications for asylum than in the previous year. Specifically, Georgian, Turkish and Venezuelan nationals, have been applying for asylum in steadily higher numbers for the last two years (see the box at the bottom of the page for a focus on the most relevant countries of origin).

Some of these citizenships (Colombia, Georgia and Venezuela) are exempt of visa requirements when entering the Schengen Area, and accounted for most of the increase in the number of asylum applicants from visa-liberalised countries (VLCs).⁴ Overall in 2018, some 115 000 applications were lodged by nationals of VLCs, up by 30 % compared to 2017. **This means that almost**

20 % of all applications for asylum in the EU+ were lodged by third-country nationals who were able to enter the Schengen area visa free, by far the highest concentration in recent years. The majority of visa-exempt applicants were citizens of countries located in Latin America or the Western Balkans.

Finally, applicants from **Western Africa** continued to lodge fewer applications for asylum. These included citizens of The Gambia (- 62 %), Senegal (- 46 %), Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire (- 41 % each), Mali (- 38 %) and Guinea (- 26 %). This is almost certainly related to much reduced irregular migration across the Central Mediterranean, the route typically travelled by nationals of Western Africa countries.



Figure 2. Top 10 citizenships of origin in 2018 and degree of change from 2017 (arrows). Source: EASO EPS data.

While fewer applications were lodged in 2018 compared to the year before, this was only the case for first-time applicants; in contrast, in 2018 there were about 62 200 repeated applications, up by 11 % from 2017. Thus, in 2018 about **1 in 10 applications in the EU+ were repeated**. Such a high proportion implies that the population of applicants for international protection comprised of fewer new arrivals to the EU+. Importantly, some citizenships tended to lodge repeated applications in extremely high numbers. This was the case, for instance, for nationals of the Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia and Serbia, for whom one in three applicants were repeats; generally, the concentration of repeated applicants was higher among nationals of Western Balkan countries.

Focus on relevant countries of origin of applicants



Syria – In 2018, Syrian nationals continued to lodge more applications for asylum (~74 800) than any other citizenship. Despite a decrease of 24 % from 2017, Syrians still lodged around 10 % of all applications in the EU+. More than three-quarters of all Syrian applications were lodged in just five EU Member States. Syrian nationals also received the most first-instance decisions (~78 800) or more than one in ten decisions issued in the EU+. At the end of 2018, some 47 600 Syrian applicants were still awaiting a first-instance decision, up by 17 % from 2017.

Of all first-instance decisions issued for Syrian applicants, 87 % were positive i.e. they resulted in some form of international protection, the highest across all citizenships (together with Yemenis). Nevertheless, this recognition rate was six percentage points lower than in 2017.



Iran – A prominent citizenship of origin since at least 2015, Iranian nationals lodged some 25 400 applications, and ranking 5th among all citizenships of origin. More than 80 % of all Iranian applications in 2018 were lodged in just five EU+ countries. The level of asylum applications remained largely stable in the first half of 2018, but abruptly increased in the second half of the year peaking in October and November. Rising levels of asylum-related migration from Iran are partially explained by a visa-free agreement for Iranian nationals in Serbia, which entered into force in September 2017 but was subsequently abrogated in October 2018.

Despite increased applications, Iranian applicants received half as many first-instance decisions in 2018 (about 19 700) than in 2017. As a result, the number of Iranian applicants awaiting a decision at first instance increased substantially in the second half of 2018: at the end of December 2018, ~15 800 Iranian nationals were still awaiting for a decision at first instance.

The first-instance EU+ recognition rate for Iranian applicants in 2018 was 38 %, considerably lower than in 2017 (53 %). Almost all positive decisions granted refugee status, and only a small proportion (6 %) subsidiary protection.



Turkey – For the second consecutive year Turkish nationals continued to lodge more applications for asylum (~24 500), up by 48 % from 2017. The majority of applications were registered in the second half of the year peaking in July and October (2 884 in both months). Almost two-thirds of all Turkish applications were lodged in just two EU+ countries.

Approximately 15 300 first instance decisions were issued to Turkish applicants in 2018, similar to last year which led to a sharp increase in the number of applications pending at first instance. At the end of December 2018, some 17 800 Turkish applicants were still awaiting a decision, an increase by 67 % from 2017.

Of all first instance decisions issued to Turkish applicants 46 % were positive, mostly granting refugee status. In 2017, the EU+ recognition rate was much lower at 33 %.



Venezuela – In 2018, Venezuelan nationals – who can enter the Schengen Area visa free holding a biometric passport - lodged twice as many applications for asylum (~22 200) than in 2017. Asylum applications fluctuated considerably throughout the year, rising sharply in the second quarter (>3 000 applications lodged in May), decreasing over the summer months, and then rising again during the last three months of the year. Almost all applications were lodged in just five EU+ countries.

Venezuelan applicants were subject to just 3 300 decisions in 2018 – a fraction of the number of applications lodged. As a result, the number of Venezuelan applicants awaiting a decision at first instance rose vastly. In fact, some 30 900 Venezuelan applicants were awaiting a decision at first-instance in the EU+ at the end of 2018, more than double of last year. The first-instance EU+ recognition rate for Venezuelan applicants was 23 %, up from 10 % in 2017.



Georgia – As was the case for Turkey and Venezuela, asylum applications from Georgia rose for the second consecutive year. In 2018, Georgian nationals lodged almost 20 000 asylum applications in the EU+, three-quarters of which were in just five countries. Georgians can also enter the Schengen Area visa free, provided that they hold biometric passports, since March 2017. Asylum trends for Georgian nationals varied throughout the year, with most applications being lodged towards the

beginning and the end of the year. About 7 % of such applications were repeated, meaning that almost one in 10 applicants lodged more than one application in the same country.

Georgian applicants received just under 14 800 first-instance decisions in 2018, remarkably an increase compared to 2017 (+ 63 %). Nevertheless, at the end of 2018, some 8 800 Georgian applicants were still awaiting a decision at first-instance in the EU+, up by 58 % from December 2017. Three-quarters of such applications were pending in just five EU+ countries.

The EU+ first-instance recognition rate for Georgian applicants was 3 %, one of the lowest among the top ten countries of origin, and similar to 2017. Positive decisions granted similar numbers of subsidiary protection and refugees status.

First-instance decisions decreased vastly

In 2018, EU+ countries issued about 593 500 decisions at first instance, a large 40 % decrease compared to 2017.⁵ In 2017, several EU+ countries increased the output of first-instance authorities to reduce the backlog accumulated during the refugee crisis. Still, the number of decisions issued in 2018 remained considerably higher than the pre-crisis level of 2014, when some 369 300 decisions were issued at first instance. In fact, some EU+ countries issued more decisions in 2018 than a year earlier.

The three citizenships receiving most decisions were also the same citizenships lodging the most applications: Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, jointly receiving a third of all the first instance decisions issued in the EU+. Syrians received the most (78 800), despite the overall number of decisions halved compared to last year. The decrease was much larger for Afghans, who received most decisions in 2017, but three times fewer in 2018 (~59 700 decisions). The decrease was noticeable also for Iraqis, for whom the volume of decisions halved to about 42 200.

Most citizenships were issued much fewer decisions than in 2017. Notable exceptions concerned Bangladeshis (about 18 100, up by 15 %) and Georgians (some 14 800, increasing by 63 %), who received more decisions than in 2017.

One in three first-instance decisions were positive

The EU+ recognition rate fell six percentage points to 34 % of all first instance decisions, granting either refugee status or subsidiary protection. In particular, nearly two thirds of the positive decisions granted refugee status.⁶

Among the 30 citizenships with most decisions issued, Syrians still had the highest recognition rate (87 %), despite a decrease by six percentage points. Also, Yemen (87 %) and Eritrea (82 %) had high recognition rates. In contrast, Georgia (3 %), The Gambia (4 %), Bangladesh, Senegal and Algeria (5 % each) had the lowest.

Compared to 2017, the recognition rate changed for several citizenships of origin. Several received a higher share of positive decisions compared to 2017: this was the case for China (41 %, +14 percentage points), Libya (64 %, + 13 p.p.), Venezuela (23 %, + 13 p.p.), Afghanistan (43 %, + 11 p.p.). On the other hand, for other nationalities the recognition rates dropped sharply: Iraq (38 %, - 16 p.p.), Iran (38 %, - 15 p.p.) and Somalia (49 %, - 12 p.p.). For some

citizenships, nearly all positive decisions granted refugee status; this was the case for Turkey, Iran and China.

For some citizenships, recognition rates varied considerably across EU+ countries. The largest variations⁷ were observed for Afghanistan (between 6 % and 98 %) and Iraq (between 8 % and 98 %). Generally, the variation was more limited for citizenships having a lower than average recognition rate. At lower EU+ recognition rates, in fact, the variation was more modest for Albanians (between 1 % and 10 %) and Bangladeshis (between 5 % and 18 %). At higher recognition rates, instead, the variation increased compared to last year, ranging between 27 % and 100 % for Syrians and between 56 % and 97 % for Eritreans. However, also with regard to the latter citizenships, the vast majority of EU+ countries – in particular, those issuing most decisions - had a similar decision-making practice, with only a couple of countries granting a substantially lower number of EU-regulated forms of protection.

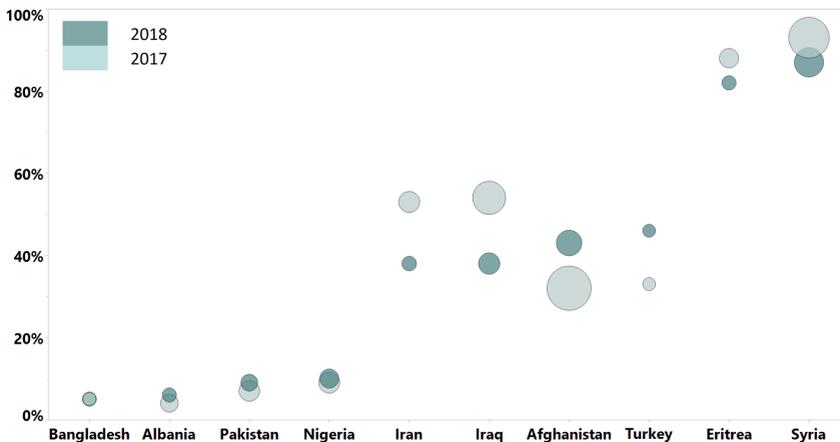


Figure 3. Top 10 citizenships with most first-instance decisions issued in 2018, with their EU+ recognition rates in 2018 and 2017. The size of the bubble indicates the number of decisions issued. Source: EASO EPS data.

The decline in the number of cases pending at first instance was modest

Pending cases are an important measure of the workload that national asylum authorities face, as well as of the pressure on the national reception systems. **At the end of 2018, there were some 448 300 applications awaiting a decision in first instance in the EU+**, a reduction of just 6 % compared to the year before.⁸ This picture strikingly contrasts with that observed in 2017, when the high volume of decisions issued led to a sharp reduction in the number of applicants awaiting a decision at first instance, which was in fact halved from the previous year.

In 2018, the number of pending cases remained remarkably stable throughout the year. Notably, the downward trend observed for almost two years was reversed in July, when the backlog began to increase – slightly but constantly – until October, when it returned to drop. As a result, at the end of 2018 the EU+ stock of pending cases remained considerable; however, almost three-quarters were pending in just five EU+ countries.

With regard to the citizenships of origin, one in 10 applications pending at first instance involved a Syrian national, followed by Afghans and Venezuelans, each accounting for 7 % of the total. The stock of Venezuelan applicants awaiting a first-instance decision more than doubled compared to 2017, whereas the upsurge was more modest for Syrians (+ 17 %). Several other citizenships of origin were subject to sharp increases, including Colombians (+ 227 %), Turkish (+ 67 %), Georgians (+ 58 %), Albanians (+ 44 %) and Iranians (+ 20 %). Other citizenships, such as Nigerians (- 46 %), Eritreans (- 39 %) and Afghans (- 34 %) were subject to large declines.

Importantly, the decrease in the number of pending cases only concerned applicants awaiting a decision for longer than six months, whereas the number pending for less than half a year remained stable. Thus, at the end of 2018, approximately half of the applicants were awaiting a decision for longer than six months, a smaller proportion than in 2017. A comparison with Eurostat data showed that a considerable proportion of the backlog had moved to second and higher instances; in September, in the EU+ there were roughly as many applications pending at first instance as in appeal or review.⁹



Figure 4. Evolution of pending cases by duration in 2017-2018. Source: EASO EPS data.

Endnotes

- 1 The EU+ is composed of 28 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland. Monthly data on applications for international protection were available for all 30 EU+ countries.
- 2 Based on EPS data. For the 2017 overview based on Eurostat data, please consult this webpage.
- 3 Claimed UAM represent the asylum applicants claiming to be below the age of 18 years rather than those assessed to be such after an age assessment has been carried out. Several EU+ countries have difficulties reporting on claimed UAM in the framework of the EPS data exchange. These figures should therefore be considered as underestimations of the actual proportion of claimed UAM.
- 4 The full list of visa-liberalised countries is available on the European Commission website.
- 5 First-instance decisions include all persons covered by decisions issued on granting EU-regulated international protection status (refugee or subsidiary protection) following a first time or repeated application for international protection in the first instance determination process. Data on first-instance decisions were available for all 30 EU+ countries.
- 6 The EU+ recognition rate includes EU-regulated forms of protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and excludes national protection forms (humanitarian reasons). It is calculated by dividing the number of positive first-instance decisions (granting refugee status or subsidiary protection) by the total number of decisions issued.
- 7 Across the 10 citizenships of origin with most decisions issued. To avoid sensitivity to low numbers, only EU+ countries issuing in 2018 at least 100 decisions to the specific citizenships were taken into account.
- 8 Data on pending cases for December 2017 were available for 29 EU+ countries. .
- 9 An indication of the cases pending at second and higher instances (i.e. in appeal or review) may be drawn by comparing the number of cases awaiting a decision at first instance (EPS data), with those pending at all instances of the administrative and/or judicial procedure (Eurostat data)..The latest data fully available refers to September 2018.



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