

Asylum Seekers in Europe

May 2021

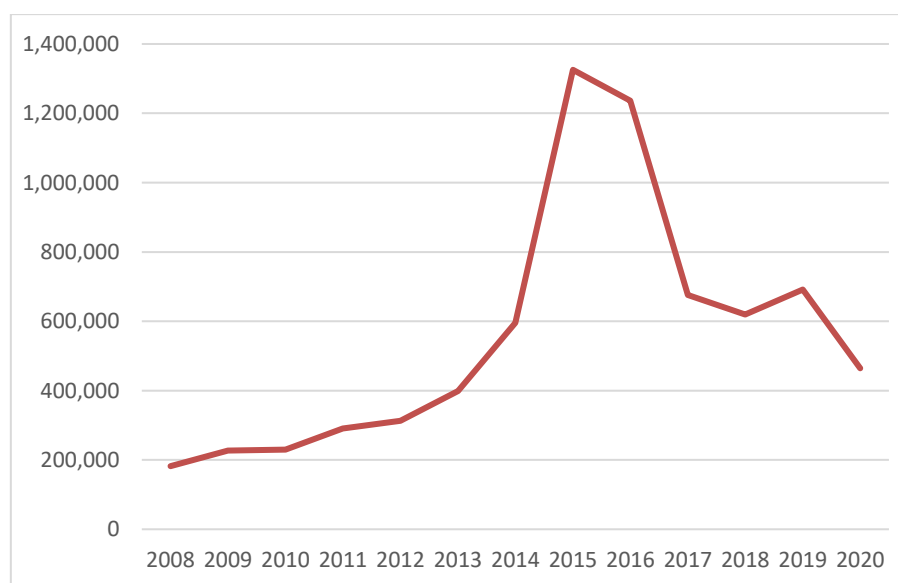
The main source of data covering Europe as a whole is the Eurostat database. Eurostat depends on statistics supplied by the equivalent of the Home Office in each country. The Eurostat statistics cover all the EU countries, plus Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. Until this year that included the UK among the EU countries but that is no longer the case and the most recent Eurostat data does not at present have figures for the UK.

The total number of asylum seekers in Europe showed a particularly large increase in 2015 but numbers fell quite sharply in 2017 and by a smaller amount in 2018 and then rose in 2019 before falling again in 2020. The table and chart below show the total number of first time applications in each year since 2012 as reported by Eurostat. The 2020 figure has been estimated by adding the Home Office published statistic for new claims to the Eurostat figures to make it comparable with earlier years. Eurostat also publishes figures described as the total number of applications, which includes fresh claims as well as first time applications, and may also have some double counting as a result of applicants who have made an application in one country being removed to another country under the Dublin Regulation, and then making a claim in that country. The trends for these two sets of figures are similar.

The total number of first time applications for 2020 was 65% lower than the 2015 figure.

First Time Applications

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
313,270	398,575	595,530	1,325,475	1,236,385	675,795	619,390	691,090	464,690

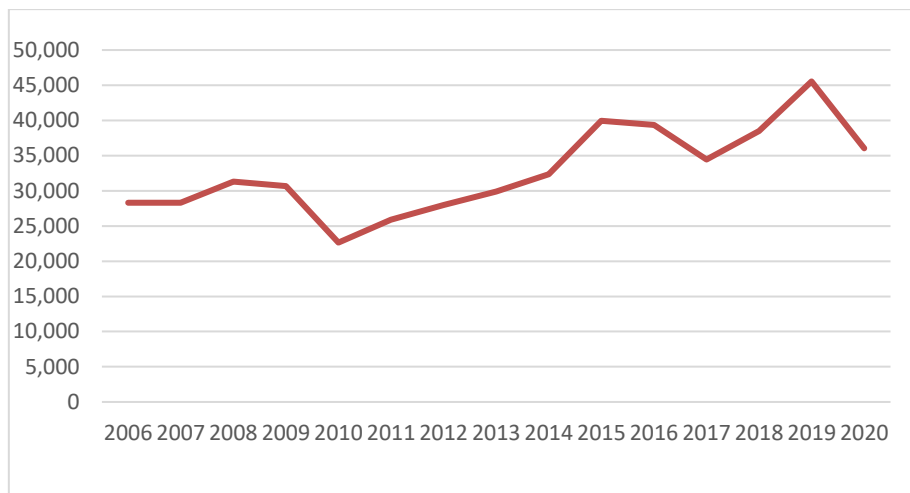


The Home Office has also published statistics for the number of asylum applications in Europe. For some countries these were sourced from the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees, and for others from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. They differed from the Eurostat figures by a few percentage points. Generally the Home Office figures have been higher than the figure for first time applications quoted by Eurostat, but lower than the total number of applications quoted by Eurostat, although in 2015 and 2016 the Home Office figure was lower than both Eurostat figures. The differences are probably due to differences in the methodology of collection of data. The trends are similar to those shown in the Eurostat data.

UK Figures

The numbers of asylum applications decreased in the UK in 2020, as happened across Europe as a whole. The table and chart below use Home Office statistics. These figures include dependants.

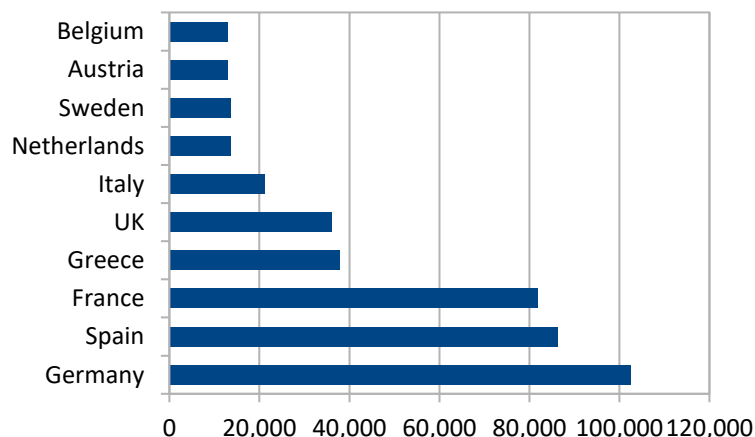
2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
27,978	29,875	32,344	39,968	39,357	34,435	38,483	45,537	36,041



In 2020 the UK was 5th in Europe in terms of the number of first time asylum applications. This was the same as in the previous 4 years.

Germany had the highest figure. Some countries, such as Sweden, with a smaller population than the UK, had proportionally more applications

The chart below compares the data for the top ten countries for first time applications in 2020.



In terms of the number of asylum seekers per 1000 population in 2020 the UK is below the average for Europe.

If the number of applications is looked at in relation to each country's GDP, again the UK is well below the average across Europe. Of the 10 countries in the table above only Germany has a higher nominal GDP than the UK.

Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum

Eurostat data shows that there was a significant increase in applications from unaccompanied children in 2015 compared with earlier years but the numbers have fallen more recently.

From 2008 to 2013 the annual total for Europe as a whole varied between 11,466 and 14,425. However in 2014 it was 23,150, and in 2015 the total was 95,205 In 2016 the numbers fell to 65,525, and there was a further fall in 2017 to 32,355, in 2018 to 20,430, in 2019 to 18,505 and in 2020 to 16,520, still significantly higher than for any year before 2014.

Sweden alone reported 34,295 applications in 2015, more than a third of the total. Germany reported 22,255 applications. In 2016 Germany reported 35,935 applications, more than half the total but reported 9,085 in 2017. For the UK the figure increased from 1,945 in 2014 to 3,255 in 2015 but then fell to 3,175 in 2016 and to 2,205 in 2017 before rising again to 2,870 in 2018, 3,650 in 2019 and then falling to 2,291 in 2020. The country reporting the highest figure in 2020 was Greece with the UK the second highest.

Countries of Origin of Asylum Seekers

In 2015 there were large increases in applications from several countries of origin compared with 2014, but the numbers stabilised in 2016 for the main countries of origin and decreased significantly in 2017. The figures for first time applications for the EU27 for the five countries of origin with the largest number of first time applications in 2019 and 2020 are shown in the table below. The large increase for Venezuela and Colombia contributed to a large increase in applications made in Spain in 2019 and 2020.

Country	2019	2020
Syria	77,245	63,505
Afghanistan	56,165	44,220
Venezuela	45,030	30,325
Colombia	32,010	29,855
Iraq	31,325	16,240

The corresponding figures for the UK were:

Country	2019	2020
Syria	1,038	1,479
Afghanistan	1,570	1,336
Venezuela	29	13
Colombia	19	9
Iraq	2,971	2,304

Iran was the country of origin for the largest number of asylum applicants in the UK in 2020.

Decisions

Decisions made during 2020 do not necessarily relate to applications made during that year. Across Europe a total of 548,825 initial decisions were made in 2020, compared with 464,690 first time applications.

The table below shows the decisions for the top 10 countries in terms of initial decisions made. A positive decision means a decision to grant refugee status, humanitarian protection, or a subsidiary protection status.

Country	Decisions	% Refugee	% Positive	% Rejected
Germany	128,590	29.4	48.6	51.4
Spain	124,795	3.5	40.9	59.1
France	86,330	13.8	22.2	77.8
Greece	62,190	42.4	55.3	44.7
Italy	40,795	11.2	28.4	71.6
Sweden	17,215	16.4	25.7	74.3
Belgium	16,360	28.9	34.9	65.1
UK	14,365	40.0	45.7	54.3
Netherlands	13,580	36.6	63.5	36.5
Switzerland	11,275	46.1	90.3	9.7

It is clear that some countries are much more likely than others to grant humanitarian or subsidiary protection than others. Spain, for example, stands out as very low in terms of grants of refugee status but then has a large increase when all positive decisions are counted.

In 2020 across Europe as a whole 22% of decisions were to grant refugee status and 42% were positive.

Notes

Detailed figures for the UK can be found in Refugee Council briefings on asylum statistics, dealing with quarterly figures and annual trends.

The Eurostat data is as published in May 2021 and may be subject to later revision.

The most recent Home Office statistics can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-march-2021/list-of-tables#asylum-and-resettlement>

Eurostat data can be found at:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data/database>

More information about asylum systems in Europe can be found in the Asylum Information Database:

<http://www.asylumineurope.org/>

About the Refugee Council

The Refugee Council is one of the leading organisations in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees. We give help and support to asylum seekers and refugees, and also work with them to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed by decision-makers.