

Asylum Seekers in Europe

June 2022

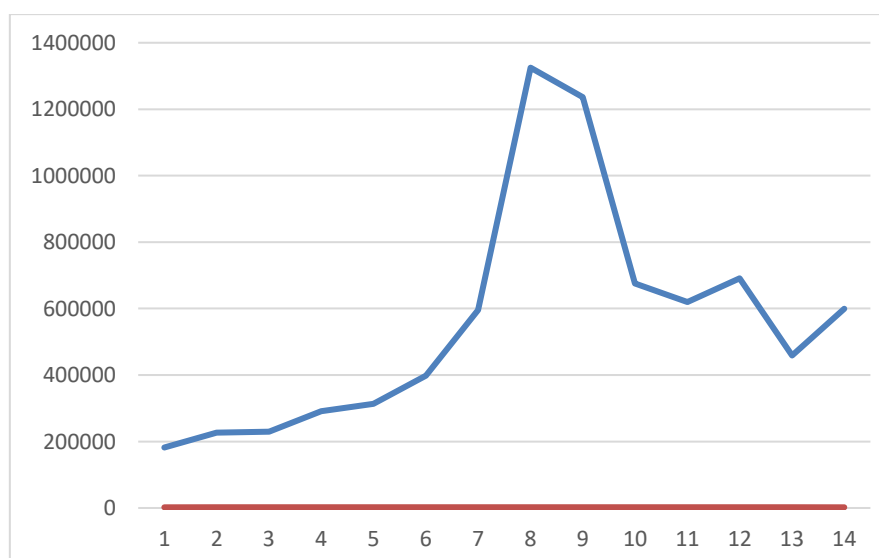
The main source of data covering Europe as a whole is the Eurostat database. Eurostat depends on statistics supplied by the equivalent of the Home Office in each country. The Eurostat statistics cover all the EU countries, plus Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. Until this year that included the UK among the EU countries but that is no longer the case and the most recent two years of Eurostat data do not have figures for the UK. Where relevant the total 2020 and 2021 figures in this briefing have been estimated by adding the Home Office published statistics to the Eurostat figures to make them comparable with earlier years.

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 2014 as reported by Eurostat. 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 2021 was 65% lower than the 2015 figure.

First Time Applications

| 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 595,530 | 1,325,025 | 1,236,300 | 675,795 | 619,385 | 691,090 | 458,585 | 599,295 |

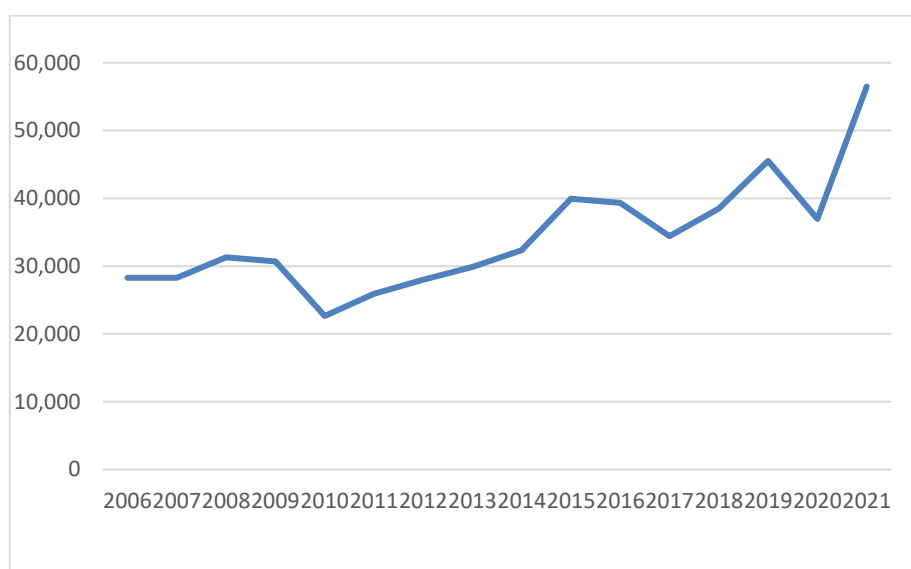


The Home Office has also in the past published statistics for the number of asylum applications in Europe. For some countries these were sourced from the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees, and for others from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. They differed 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

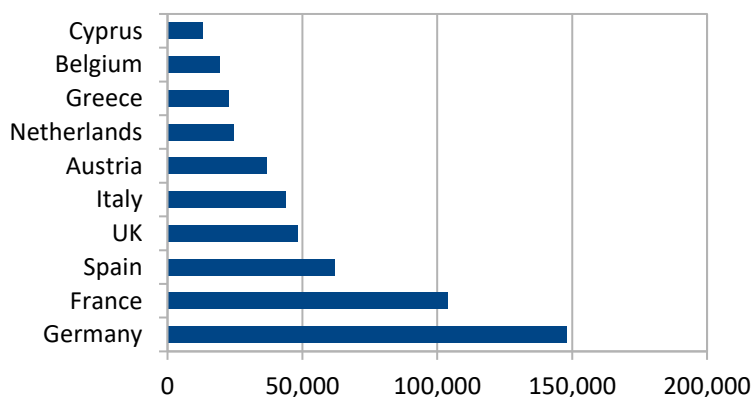
The numbers of applications decreased in the UK in 2020 then rose in 2021, as happened across Europe as a whole. The table and chart below use Home Office statistics. These figures include dependants.

| 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 32,344 | 39,968 | 39,357 | 34,435 | 38,483 | 45,537 | 36,986 | 56,495 |



In 2021 the UK was 4th in Europe in terms of the number of first-time asylum applications.

Germany had the highest figure. Some countries, such as Cyprus, 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 2021.



In terms of the number of asylum seekers per 1000 population in 2021 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.

From 2008 to 2013 the annual total for Europe as a whole varied between 11,466 and 14,425. However, in 2014 it was 24,850, and in 2015 the total was 102,680. In 2016 the numbers fell to 65,525, and there was a further fall in 2017 to 32,350, in 2018 to 20,420, in 2019 to 18,510 and in 2020 to 17,000. There was a significant rise in 2021 to 28,190.

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, falling to 2,773 in 2020 and then rising again to 3,762 in 2021. The country reporting the highest figure in 2020 was Greece and in 2021 it was Austria with a large increase to 5,605, with the UK the second highest in both these years.

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. Large increases for Venezuela and Colombia contributed to a large rise in the number of applications made in Spain in 2019 and 2020.

In 2021 the countries of origin giving rise to the largest number of applications in the EU were Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq which together accounted for almost 40% of applications.

Iran was the country of origin for the largest number of asylum applicants in the UK in 2021, followed by Iraq and Eritrea.

Decisions

Decisions made during 2021 do not necessarily relate to applications made during that year. Across Europe a total of 548,045 initial decisions were made in 2021, compared with 599,295 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 |
|---------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
|---------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|

| | | | | |
|-------------|---------|------|------|------|
| France | 137,015 | 15.6 | 24.7 | 75.3 |
| Germany | 132,680 | 24.2 | 45.1 | 54.9 |
| Spain | 70,985 | 7.5 | 28.8 | 71.3 |
| Italy | 44,230 | 15.5 | 48.3 | 51.6 |
| Greece | 37,825 | 35.0 | 44.4 | 55.6 |
| Belgium | 21,030 | 39.4 | 43.6 | 56.4 |
| Austria | 18,760 | 50.6 | 64.5 | 35.5 |
| Netherlands | 16,505 | 47.4 | 73.1 | 26.9 |
| UK | 14,575 | 66.7 | 72.0 | 28.0 |
| Cyprus | 12,270 | 2.5 | 18.7 | 81.3 |

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 an increase when all positive decisions are counted. In 2021 across Europe as a whole 23% of decisions were to grant refugee status and 41% 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 2022 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-2022/list-of-tables>

Eurostat data can be found at:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/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.