



EASO Asylum Report 2020

Annual Report on the
Situation of Asylum in the
European Union

The background of the cover is a photograph of a severely damaged stone wall. A large, jagged hole is visible in the upper left portion of the wall. In the foreground, several jackets and coats of various colors (tan, blue, grey, yellow) are hanging on the remaining wall. A bicycle is partially visible at the bottom right, and some debris and more clothing are scattered on the ground in the lower left.

Key Findings



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KEY FINDINGS

1. About the report

The [EASO Asylum Report 2020](#) provides a comprehensive overview of developments in the field of international protection at the European and national levels. Based on a wide range of sources, the report presents a brief overview of the global context of asylum, highlights developments in the European Union (EU) Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland (EU+ countries), and examines the main trends and changes in legislation, policies, practices and case law. The report focuses on key areas of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), within the broader context of migration and fundamental rights.

The trends outlined in the *EASO Asylum Report 2020* set the background for the current year. The novel COVID-19 global outbreak will have a direct impact on asylum-related developments in 2020, highlighting the need for innovative approaches to ensure full respect for the right to asylum. With the New Pact on Migration and Asylum currently being drafted, lessons drawn from the COVID-19 pandemic may be valuable in modernising and improving asylum procedures across EU+ countries.

2. Main developments in asylum in 2019 in EU+ countries

In October 2019, the Progress Report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration took stock of major achievements under the European Agenda on Migration since 2015. A key dimension of the EU approach to address the Eastern Mediterranean route is the partnership with Turkey through the EU-Turkey Statement. After four years of its implementation, irregular arrivals from Turkey to the EU remained 94 % lower than prior to the agreement, and a cumulative total of about 27 000 Syrian refugees have been resettled from Turkey to an EU+ country. No major legislative progress took place in 2019 on the adoption of the CEAS reform package. The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) issued 12 judgments in 2019 related to preliminary rulings on interpreting the CEAS.

In 2019, the number of applications for international protection increased in Europe for the first time since 2015. Against this background, EU+ countries continued their efforts to further calibrate their asylum systems and enhance solutions for international protection, building on initiatives introduced in previous years.

EU+ countries continued to place an emphasis on swift registration and collection of detailed information from applicants in the early stages of the asylum procedure to distinguish more efficiently between persons in need of protection and those who will be directed to return. This has been coupled with measures to enhance border procedures.

Efforts increased across EU+ countries to support the needs of vulnerable applicants, from early identification and provision of procedural safeguards to improving specialised reception facilities and developing tailor-made information materials for unaccompanied minor applicants in particular.

Despite continued efforts by EU+ countries to identify solutions for the effective return of persons without a right to stay in the EU, including former applicants for international protection, the number of actual returns remained much lower than return decisions.

With a considerable number of cases pending at second instance, courts and tribunals continued to play an important role in shaping the practical application of the provisions of the European asylum acquis.

3. Key indicators for 2019

Arrivals: Despite an overall decrease in the number of arrivals at the EU external borders in 2019, different trends emerged across migration routes into Europe. The Western and Central Mediterranean routes had fewer arrivals compared to 2018, while the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes experienced increased arrivals.

Applications: There was an 11 % increase in the number of applications for international protection in EU+ countries in 2019 (almost 740 000 applications). For the first time since the migration crisis of 2015, the number of applicants began to rise again, in part due to a sharp rise in applications from nationals of Venezuela and other Latin American countries. Some countries, such as CY, FR, EL, MT and ES, received more asylum applicants in 2019 than during the migration crisis.

Receiving countries: Asylum applications continued to be concentrated in a small number of countries. In 2019, FR, DE, ES received more than one-half of all applications in EU+ countries, followed at a distance by EL.

Countries of origin: At the global level, nationals from Syria accounted for one-third of the global refugee population, with 6.6 million who have fled their country, according to data from the UNHCR. At the EU level, in absolute numbers, applicants from Syria lodged about 80 000 applications, followed by Afghanistan (about 61 000) and Venezuela (about 46 000).

Decisions on applications for international protection: In 2019, EU+ countries issued approximately 585 000 decisions on first instance applications, a continued declining trend in the number of decisions rendered since 2016. Two-fifths of all first instance decisions were positive: more than one-half of all positive decisions granted refugee status and the remainder, in equal shares, granted subsidiary protection or humanitarian protection.

Pending cases: The backlog of applications for international protection still awaiting a decision (close to 912 000 applications, almost 1 % more than in 2018) remained much higher compared to the pre-2015 level. DE continued to have by far the most open cases, but in contrast to many other EU+ countries, there was a reduction in the overall number between the end of 2018 and 2019. The stock of pending cases was considerable and growing in BE, EL, FR, ES and UK.

Transfer of asylum applicants based on the Dublin system: There was a 3 % increase in the number of decisions on outgoing Dublin requests in 2019 compared to 2018. EU+ countries implemented about 27 200 transfers, a 3 % decrease compared to 2018, which is in line with the small decrease in accepted requests.

Unaccompanied minors: In 2019, approximately 17 700 applications for international protection were lodged by unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries, a 13 % decrease compared to 2018. Applications by unaccompanied minors accounted for 2 % of the total number of applications. Countries focused on expediting the appointment of guardians and improving the overall quality of the guardianship system.

Access to procedure: EU's external borders remained at the forefront of public debate - search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea and the safe disembarkation and relocation of rescued migrants. Overall countries placed emphasis on border procedures and swift registration

and early collection of detailed information from applicants to distinguish more efficiently between persons in need of protection and those who will be directed to return).

Legal assistance and representation: EU+ countries introduced legislative changes to provide and expand free legal counselling and advice.

Special procedures: A number of EU+ countries made changes to their national lists of safe countries of origin, while others – such as CY and IT – introduced these lists for the first time. EU+ countries also focused on defining criteria for subsequent applications for international protection to prevent misuse of the asylum system by filing repetitive applications with no merit.

Procedures at first instance: EU+ countries implemented legislative amendments, institutional changes, practical measures and new working methods. Challenges raised by civil society organisations still included exceedingly long first instance procedures, frequently extending past legal limits.

Reception: Several countries fine-tuned their institutional frameworks, established guidelines, implemented monitoring and increased funding. Some countries expanded accommodation for the increased number of applicants. A few countries descaled reception capacity. However, UNHCR and civil society organisations identified deficiencies in access to housing, health care and education for children.

Detention: New or amended legislation was introduced by EU+ countries to further define or elaborate the grounds for detention and alternatives to detention in both asylum and return procedures.

Procedures at second instance: Developments focused on the suspensive effect of appeals against first instance decisions and time limits for appeals. The backlog of cases on appeal and the length of proceedings remained notable; several EU+ countries took measures to reduce the number of pending appeals.

Content of protection: Developments were diverse. Several legislative initiatives addressed family reunification, while some countries developed comprehensive measures to increase the participation of third country nationals in the labor market.

Return of former applicants: EU+ countries continued to identify solutions for the effective return of former applicants for international protection, but the number of actual returns remained much lower than return decisions.

Resettlement: Resettlement remained high on the policy agenda. The European Resettlement Scheme was launched in July 2015 and, as of December 2019, two successful resettlement programmes had assisted more than 65 000 people. EU+ countries made progress toward reaching the goal of resettling 50 000 migrants, under the second EU Resettlement Scheme. In 2019, approximately 30 700 persons arrived in Europe through resettlement, 8 % more than in 2018. As has been the case for three years, Syrians accounted for nearly two-thirds of all resettled persons.

4. EASO's operational support to EU+ countries

The rise in migration flows along the Eastern Mediterranean route amplified the pre-existing pressure on asylum systems of Member States in the region. To assist frontline Member States

along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes, EASO improved and, when needed, expanded its operational support to Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Malta.

In 2019, EASO's operational assistance reached unprecedented levels coordinating the deployment of over 900 persons (including EASO staff, experts from EU+ countries, temporary agency workers, interpreters, cultural mediators and security personnel) in four Member States (Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Malta). Close to 40 % of the agency's annual budget was spent on operational support in 2019.

