Latest Asylum Trends

Latest asylum trends – June 2019

Some 49,700 asylum applications were lodged in the EU+ in June, the least so far in 2019.
The main countries of origin of applicants were Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Iraq and Colombia.
EU+ countries issued about 41,700 decisions in first instance, the lowest output in about four years.
34% of the decisions issued in the first half of 2019 granted EU-regulated protection.
Some 439,000 cases were pending at first instance at the end of June.

The visualisation below provides an overview of the key indicators regarding the situation of international protection in the EU+ in the past 24 months. The size of the different circles in the countries of origin is proportional to the volume of applications lodged in EU+ countries, the colour of the circle reflects the recognition rate at first-instance (blue - high, red - low). The shade of the country reflects the stock of pending cases at the end of the selected year. By clicking on a circle, the evolution of these key indicators for the citizenship selected is displayed in the lower panel.

Reference month: June 2019
Animate the map
Citizenship: TOTAL
Click to reinitialise
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.

Key findings

- Approximately 337,200 applications for asylum were lodged in the EU+ in the first six months of 2019, up by 10% compared to the same period in 2018.


- Nationals exempt from Schengen visa requirements now lodge more than a quarter of all applications in the EU+.
- Nationals of some Latin-American countries, including Venezuelans, Colombians and Salvadorians, have already lodged as many (or more) applications as in the whole of 2018.
- The output of first-instance authorities continued to be modest, with some 277 700 decision in the first semester of the year.
- Some 95 300 first-instance decisions issued so far in 2019 have granted EU-regulated forms of protection (70 % refugee status and 30 % subsidiary protection) which amounts to a EU+ recognition rate of 34 %. Citizens from Yemen and Syria had the highest rate (86 %) whereas Moldovans (0.3 %) and North Macedonians had the lowest (1 %).
- At the end of June 2019 there were some 439 000 cases awaiting a decision in first instance in the EU+, which is an increase compared to a year ago. In addition, an equal number of cases are also pending in appeal or review.

**Asylum applications up by 10 % from the first half of 2019**

Approximately 337 200 applications were lodged in the EU+ in the first six months of 2019, up by 10 % compared to the same period a year earlier, an increase that has persisted since the summer of 2018. In contrast to this trend of increased applications for asylum, in June 2019 applications fell to the lowest level of the year so far (50 000), but there were more weekends and fewer working days; moreover, the total number of applications is comparable with a year ago in June 2018.

In June, citizens of Syria, Afghanistan and Venezuela continued to lodge the most applications for asylum, albeit in lower numbers than in May. In particular, Venezuelans lodged fewer applications, down by 20 % from May, but they were still lodging far more applications than in 2018 (see box below for more information).

Similarly, citizens from Iraq, Colombia, Pakistan, Albania, Turkey, Nigeria and Iran also lodged significant numbers of applications and also down from May; this was especially true for Nigerians (-30 %) and Iranians (-25 %). However, for the most part these citizenships have been lodging more applications so far in 2019 compared to the first half of 2018, but somewhat fewer than in the second half; this was more evident for Albanians, Turks, Iranians and Palestinians. It should be noted that this is in line with the trends typically observed over the past 10 years, with asylum applications peaking over the summer and autumn months.

More strikingly, Venezuelans and Salvadorians have so far in 2019 lodged nearly as many applications as in the whole of 2018, whereas other Latin-American citizenships - such as Colombians, Nicaraguans, Hondurans and Peruvians - already outnumbered last year's total. For citizenships lodging fewer applications, it is worth highlighting that nationals of Georgia, China, India and Cameroon have been lodging more applications for a second consecutive semester, denoting a stable
upward trend. Also applicants from Congo (DR) have been seeking asylum more frequently over the past year, and lodged a record level of applications in June, about 900.

In contrast to the general upward trend, nationals of Syria, Pakistan and Iraq were the only important citizenships who lodged fewer applications in the first six months of 2019 than in either semester in 2018; nevertheless, these three citizenships still accounted for about one in five of all applications lodged so far in 2019.

Nationals of countries exempt of visa requirements when entering the Schengen area have been lodging increasing numbers of applications over the past year and a half. Applications from this group reached a new record in the first semester of 2019, accounting for about 27% of all applications lodged in the EU+; this proportion was just 18% in both semesters of 2018. Clearly, the rise was mainly driven by the high number of applicants from Latin-American countries, but also from Georgia and Albania.

Some 3% of all applications registered in the first six months of the year were lodged by self-claimed unaccompanied minors (UAMs), consistent with previous months. Among the citizenships lodging at least 300 applications overall, the largest concentration was seen among those from Vietnam (at least 10% were UAMs), followed by Sudanese, Eritreans and Afghans (almost one in 10).

Finally, repeated applicants – who previously lodged an application in the same EU+ country – continued to account for about one in 10 applicants in the EU+. Consistent with previous reporting periods, the most repeated applicants were nationals of Western Balkans countries, in particular of North Macedonia and Serbia (35% of all applications they lodged between January and June 2019), Bosnia and Herzegovina (30%) and Kosovo (28%). Besides this group, other nationalities lodging a high proportion of repeated applications were Gambians and Russians (about one in four applications each), as well as nationals of Lebanon, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan (approximately one in five).

Focus on the main countries of origin of applicants

Syria - Syrian nationals lodged approximately 4 851 applications in June; this was the lowest number so far in 2019, but this was true for many other citizenships of origin. In the first six months of 2019, Syrians lodged about 32 200 asylum applications. The number of Syrians applying for international protection in the EU+ has been lower than in both the previous semester (-16%), and in the first half of 2018 (-12%). Notwithstanding the decrease, one in ten applications in the EU+ was still lodged by a Syrian national. Slightly less than 80% of the applications so far in 2019 were lodged in just five EU+ countries; compared to 2018, applications were more unevenly distributed across the EU+.
Syrian applicants received about 38,300 first-instance decisions in the first half of 2019, more than twice as many as any other citizenships; this overall output was in line with that registered in the previous two semesters. Overall in the EU+, each month in 2019 there were more case closures (either because a decision was issued or the application was discontinued after withdrawal or otherwise closed) than applications lodged by Syrian nationals. Approximately 43,900 Syrian applications were pending at first instance at the end of June, just some 450 fewer than a month earlier. While the number of Syrians awaiting a decision at first instance has been generally decreasing in the first half of 2019, over the past three months the number of open cases remained large stable at about 44,000. At the end of June, four fifths of cases were pending in just five EU+ countries.

The EU+ recognition rate for decisions issued in the first half of 2019 was 86%, down from 89% in the previous semester.

**Afghanistan** – In June, Afghan nationals lodged 3,750 applications for international protection, and about 23,500 since the beginning of the year. The total is thus higher (by 21%) than in the first half of 2018, but lower than in the second half (-9%). This fluctuation might be linked to the rise in irregular migration of Afghans which took place over the summer and autumn months of 2018. This is not a novelty, since more applications as a result of increased arrivals in the second part of a calendar year typified Afghan asylum-related migration to the EU+ over the past few years. So far in 2019, eight in 10 Afghan applications were lodged in five EU+ countries. Afghanistan remained the country of origin of most UAMs applying for asylum in the EU+, with almost one in 10 Afghan applicants being UAMs. These were quite unevenly distributed across the EU+, in that they accounted for a considerable proportion of applications by Afghans – up to almost half – in some EU+ countries.

Afghans were the citizenship of origin for whom the output of first-instance authorities decreased the most, (almost) progressively declining from the maximum value in January (about 3,400) to the minimum in June (about 2,400). Analysing the cumulative number of decisions is even more informative. In the first six months of 2019, Afghan applicants received some 17,600 decisions, half as many as in the same period in 2018, and 25% fewer than in the second half of that year. A decline in decision making was particularly evident in certain EU+ countries. A decline was observed also with regard to other types of case closures, resulting into more inflow (applications lodged) than outflow (case closures) of asylum cases in each month of 2019 with the exception of February. The discrepancy was particularly marked in June, contributing to a rise in pending cases, whose increase was more or less continuous in the first half of 2019: some 34,500 applicants were awaiting a decision at the end of June, up from 30,500 a year earlier.
The first-instance EU+ recognition rate for decisions issued in the past six months was 47%, down by two percentage points from the previous semester.

**Venezuela** – Asylum trends for Venezuelan nationals dropped visibly in June: they lodged 3,200 applications, considerably fewer than in other months of 2019, with the sole exception of January. Nevertheless, applications in the first half of 2019 (21,700) already equalled those registered in the whole 2018 (22,200). Venezuelan nationals continued to seek international protection in a very limited number of EU+ countries.

In June, Venezuelan nationals received the highest number of decisions since 2014, some 1,565; the previous record was 856 decisions in April. Venezuelan nationals were issued 3,900 decisions in the first half of the year; similar to asylum applications, this total already equalled the output registered in the whole of 2018. Nevertheless, Venezuelan nationals still had the largest gap between inflow and outflow of asylum cases among all citizenships of origin: in the first half of 2019, they lodged 17,800 more applications than they received decisions. Despite this, pending cases decreased for the first time since 2014: at the end of June, there were some 35,300 applications awaiting a decision at first instance, some 1,600 fewer than in May. Yet, compared to a year ago, the stock was up by a large 65%.

The first-instance EU+ recognition rate for decisions issued in the past six months to Venezuelans was 23%, considerably lower than in the previous semester (38%). It must be noted that this recognition rate does not include permits to stay for humanitarian reasons under national law concerning international protection (i.e. humanitarian protection), which are granted automatically to Venezuelan nationals in some EU+ countries.

Thus far in 2019, the case processing of first-instance authorities remained modest

In June, approximately 41,700 decisions were issued at first instance in the EU+, the lowest output since mid-2015. In the first half of 2019, the output of first-instance authorities remained stable, at levels lower than 2018 (which was, already, characterised by a lower level of decision-making compared to previous years): some 277,700 first-instance decisions were issued, down by 12% from the same period a year earlier. Nevertheless, trends varied widely across the EU+, and three-quarters of all decisions were issued in just five EU+ countries.

Trends differed also at the citizenship level. Syrian applicants continued to receive the most decisions in June, followed by Nigerians, Iraqis, Afghans and Pakistanis; these five citizenships have been the top five countries in terms of decisions received for the past two years. With the exception of Syrians
(subject to a stable number of decisions), they all received fewer decisions at first instance compared to May. This is also true for the majority of the remaining citizenships of origin, with the notable exception of Venezuelans, who received some 1,565, more than three times as many as in May.

Looking at the cumulative number of first-instance decisions (all those issued in the first half of the year), Syrians received some 38,300 (14% of the EU+ total) decisions, twice as many as any other citizenship. Afghans, Iraqis and Nigerians received a similar number of decisions, each accounting for approximately 6% of the overall output. Despite being the citizenships receiving by far the most decisions, the output for the past semester was lower than in the previous two for each of them, with the exception of Nigerians (+7% from the second half of 2018). Beyond the top nationalities, it is worth highlighting that several Latin-American citizenships - including Honduras, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Peru, El Salvador and Colombia – were subject to sharp increases in the number of decisions.

It is also informative to examine the number of first-instance decisions vis-à-vis asylum applications lodged by specific citizenships. Venezuelans had by far the largest discrepancy, with far fewer decisions than applications lodged, together with Colombians – with as little as 1,740 first-instance decisions compared to 13,356 asylum applications lodged between January and June – and other Latin-American citizenships. This could be linked to the fact that these nationalities tend to apply in a limited number of EU+ countries, thus exercising a considerable pressure on the national asylum systems. However, other nationalities for whom the caseload was more evenly spread across the EU+, such as Afghans, Georgians and Turkish were also applying for asylum more than they received decisions, but discrepancies were much more modest. Still, this had clear implications for the assessment of the specific stocks of pending cases.4

**EU+ recognition rates slightly declining**

The EU+ recognition rate for decisions issued at first instance in the first half of the year was 34%, two percentage points lower than in the previous semester (July-December 2018).5 The majority of positive decisions issued in the past six months granted refugee status (70%), and the remainder subsidiary protection; over the past few months, the share of positive decisions granting refugee status has been expanding.

Among the citizenships with at least 1,000 decisions issued in the past six months, applicants from Yemen, Syria (86% each) and Eritrea (80%) had the highest recognition rate, followed at a distance by Stateless applicants (67%). On the other hand, applicants from Moldova (0.3%), North Macedonia (1%), Georgia and India (3% each) had the lowest. With regard to recognition rate variation, a large drop was observed for applicants from Palestine (by 22 percentage points to 54%), Libya (58%, -7 p.p.), Colombia (9%, -6 p.p.) and Stateless applicants (67%, -4 p.p.). In contrast, the recognition rate increased for Sudanese (65%, +7 p.p. Turkish (54%, +8 p.p.) and Cameroonian (28%, +4 p.p.).
More pending cases at first instance compared to a year ago

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 June 2019 there were some 439,039 applications awaiting a decision in first instance in the EU+, stable with May (when there were approximately 3200 more cases pending). Almost three quarters of the backlog at first instance continued to be registered in just five EU+ countries. Over the past year, the stock of pending cases remained largely stable, and actually slightly more cases are pending than a year ago in June 2018, by about 13,800 cases. Moreover, there were also twice as many applications awaiting a decision in appeal or review at the end of April 2019, implying that a considerable part of the backlog has been transferred from asylum authorities to judicial bodies.

With regard to the main citizenships of origin, one in four applications pending at first instance at the end of June 2019 involved applicants from Syria, Venezuela and Afghanistan. One noticeable development is that, for the first time since 2014, the number of Venezuelans awaiting a decision at first instance decreased (by about 1,600 cases); it is nonetheless too early to imply a reversion of the trend. The number of pending cases continued to increase for the remaining Latin-American citizenships. Broadly, the evolution of the citizenship-specific pending cases has been stable over the first part of 2019, in that those increasing did so (almost) each month, such as the afore mentioned Latin-American citizenships, Afghanistan, Congo (DR), Turkey and China. Similarly, the citizenships for whom the number of applicants awaiting a decision has been decreasing were subject to a constant decrease; these included nationals of several African countries who have been seeking asylum less frequently over the past two years, such as Nigeria, Eritrea, Senegal, Mali and The Gambia.

Slightly more than half of all applications were pending for longer than six months (55%). The proportion of cases pending for longer periods has been increasing over the first semester of the year, and for some citizenships, it was even higher than the average. Namely, this was the case for applicants from Venezuela (70%), Honduras (68%), Ukraine (67%), Colombia (65%), Ghana (63%) and El Salvador (61%). While the share of cases awaiting for longer periods of time has decreased among Latin Americans and Ghanaians, it has been sharply increasing for Ukrainians.

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Notes

[1] The EU+ is composed of 28 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland. Monthly data for June were available for 28 EU+ countries; monthly data for May were available for 29 EU+ countries.

[2] 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. Some 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.

[3] 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 28 EU+ countries.

[4] It must be noted that cases closures, beside first-instance decisions, also include withdrawals and discontinuations (for instance, when another EU+ country accepted responsibility for examining an asylum application following a Dublin procedure).

[5] 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.

[6] Data for June were missing for three countries. Calculations on the variations of the stock of pending cases were made only for the 27 countries reporting in all months.

[7] 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).