Asylum and migration in the EU: facts and figures

The peaks in migration flows witnessed in the EU in 2015 and 2016 have subsided. Check out the latest migration and asylum numbers in our infographic.

The arrival of more than one million asylum seekers and migrants to Europe in 2015 exposed serious flaws in the EU's asylum system. To respond to the migrant crisis, Parliament has been working on proposals to create a fairer, more effective European asylum policy.

Below you will find all the relevant data about migration in Europe, who migrants are, what the EU is doing to get to grips with the situation, and what financial implications there have been.

Definitions: what is a refugee? What is an asylum seeker?
Asylum seekers are people who make a formal request for asylum in another country because they fear their life is at risk in their home country.

Refugees are people with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, politics or membership of a particular social group who have been accepted and recognised as such in their host country. In the EU, the qualification directive sets guidelines for assigning international protection to those who need it.

Currently people from outside the EU must apply for protection in the first EU country they enter. Filing a claim means that they become asylum applicants (or asylum seekers). They receive refugee status or a different form of international protection only once a positive decision has been made by national authorities.

Asylum decisions in the EU

In 2019, there were 714,200 applications for international protection in the EU plus Norway and Switzerland, which is 13% more than the 634,700 applications received in 2018. During the previous years, there were 728,470 applications in 2017 and almost 1.3 million in 2016.

Also in 2019, EU countries granted protection to 295,800 asylum seekers, down from 333,400 in 2018, which was almost 40% lower than in 2017 (533,000). Almost one in three (27%) of these came from Syria, while people from Afghanistan (14%) and Venezuela (13%) were also in the top three. The number of Venezuelans rose by nearly 40 times in 2019 compared to 2018. Of the 78,600 Syrians granted international protection in the EU, nearly 71% received it in Germany.

Situation in the Mediterranean

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency collects data on illegal crossings of the EU's external borders registered by national authorities. In 2015 and 2016, more than 2.3 million illegal crossings were detected. In 2019, the total number of illegal border-crossings into the EU dropped to 141,846, its lowest level since 2013 and a decrease of 5% compared to 2018.

One person can go through a border more than once, so the number of people coming to Europe is lower. However, EU countries have been under significant pressure.

In 2019, 735,835 people were denied entry at the EU’s external borders, according to provisional figures. In the first half of 2020, 23,288 people risked their lives reaching Europe by sea, with around 248 feared to have drowned. More than 120,000 people reached Europe by
sea in 2019, compared to more than one million in 2015. The Mediterranean crossing remained
deadly however, with 1,319 dead or missing in 2019, compared to 2,2771 in 2018 and 3,139 in
2017.

Migrants illegally present in the EU

In 2015, 2.2 million people were found to be illegally present in the EU. By 2019, the number
had dropped to just over 650,000. “Being illegally present” can mean a person failed to register
properly or left the member state responsible for processing their asylum claim. This is not, on
its own, grounds for sending them away from the EU.

What Europeans are thinking

Migration has been an EU priority for years. Several measures have been taken to manage the
crisis as well as to improve the asylum system. According to the results of a Eurobarometer poll
released in May 2018, 72% of Europeans want the EU to do more when it comes to migration.

Even though the Eurobarometer survey from June 2019 shows that migration was the fifth
biggest issue that influenced Europeans’ voting decisions for that year’s EU elections, a

Parlemeter 2019 survey conducted after that registered a drop in importance. It showed 34% of
Europeans voted with migration in mind. The top issues were the economy, climate change,
human rights and democracy, as well as the future of the EU.

The EU significantly increased its funding for migration, asylum and integration policies in the
wake of the increased inflow of asylum seekers in 2015. In the forthcoming negotiations on the
EU’s post-2020 budget, Parliament will call for additional funding in these areas.

Learn more about how the EU manages migration

Refugees in the world

Around the world, the number of people fleeing persecution, conflict and violence has reached
79.5 million for the first time ever. That is equivalent to almost every man, woman and child in
Germany being forced from their homes. Children account for about 40% of the world’s refugee
population.

The countries hosting the largest number of refugees are Turkey, Colombia, Pakistan, Uganda
and Germany. Only 15% of the world’s refugees are hosted by developed countries.

Check out our infographic above for the latest Eurostat figures on asylum applications in the EU
as well as UNHCR figures on the number of refugees in EU countries.