



## Refugees in Europe

According to the 1951 UN Convention, a refugee is defined as a person who ‘owing to well-founded fear<sup>11</sup> of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.’ An asylum-seeker is someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated. Asylum applications made in industrialised countries are most often based on political and religious causes.

In their attempt to reach Europe, most people use the Central Mediterranean route (by land, from sub-Saharan Africa to Libya, then by sea, often in overcrowded boats, from the Libyan coast to the Italian islands of Lampedusa and Sicily, or Malta) or the Balkans route by sea, from Turkey to the Greek islands (Kos, Samos, Chios and Lesbos), then by land via Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia or Slovenia, to Central, Northern or Western Europe.

In 2015 and 2016, the EU experienced an exceptional influx of hundreds of thousands of migrants arriving through the Mediterranean, most of them fleeing war and insecurity. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than one million people arrived in 2015, including 17 % women and 25 % under 18 and more than 850,000 via the Greek coast. The majority come from three warring Middle Eastern countries : Syria (56 %), Afghanistan (24 %) and Iraq (10 %). The remaining 10 % come from various countries in Africa (including Nigeria, Eritrea, Somalia and Gambia), Pakistan, Iran and Egypt, as well as Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

The numbers were lower in 2016, but still much higher than they were a few years ago. An agreement concluded in March 2016 with Turkey has led to a significant drop in arrivals through the Aegean Sea. But the influx reached a record level in 2016 on the Italian coast, with more than 180,000 arrivals. Unlike migrants landed in Greece, who are eligible for refugee status, those who come to Italy, most often from sub-Saharan Africa, are mainly considered as economic migrants. Thus in 2016, according to IOM, the total number of arrivals by sea fell to more than 363,000 (not counting 24,000 arrivals by land).

In 2017, the number of application for asylum has decreased with 650,000 first-time asylum seekers application in the EU-28 (against 1,206,100 in 2016). 538,000 asylum seekers were granted protection status. Even if it fell from 335,000 in 2016 to 102,000 in 2017 (from 27.8 % to 15.8 % in share), Syria was the main country of origin as it is the case since 2013. Iraqis accounted for 7 % of the total number of first-time asylum seekers and Afghans for 7 %, compared to 6 % and 5 % for Nigerians and Pakistanis. Among the largest nationality groups represented in the EU-28 in 2017, the most significant relative increase compared to 2016 was recorded for Nigerian nationals (2.2 percentage points increase), as well as for Bangladeshis and Guineans (1.6 percentage points increase). Significant increases were also noted in relative terms in the number of applicants from Turkey, Venezuela, Côte d’Ivoire, Eritrea and Albania. In 2017, among the main countries of origin of asylum seekers (except Syria), the largest relative decline was recorded for Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran.

2018 marked a decrease of 74,000 first-time applicants across the EU-28 in comparison with 2017. The largest relative increases compared with 2017 were recorded for Venezuelans (share up 1.8 percentage points), Georgians (up 1.6 percentage points), Turks (up 1.5 percentage points), Iranians (up 1.3 percentage points) and Colombians (up 1.1 percentage points). The largest relative fall in the number of applicants (except for Syria), was recorded for Nigerians (down 2.2 percentage points) and Eritreans (down 1.2 percentage points).

With 162,000 applicants registered in 2018, Germany accounted for 28 % of all first-time applicants in the EU Member States. It was followed by France (110,000, or 19 %), Greece (65,000, or 11 %), Spain (53,000, or 9 %), Italy (49,000, or 8 %) and the United Kingdom (37,000, or 6 %).

Refugees are on average more qualified than the population of their country of origin, but many of them have left their country without having completed their studies. And depending on their nationality, their level of qualification varies : while Syrians have a rather high level of university education, more than half of Afghans have not been to school at all or have not completed primary school. 79 % of the first-time asylum seekers in the EU-28 in 2018 were less than 35 years old and more than half of the refugees are under 25 years of age with most of their working lives ahead of them. It is this category that shows the greatest interest in pursuing an education cycle.

Most of the applicants are male : among the 14–17 years old, 72 %, for the 18–34, 70 % and 59 % for the age group 35–64.

The key factor for integration into the labour market is a perfect command of the language, which remains the working language in most companies. Very few jobs are accessible without a good knowledge of the language of the host country. Refugees who have learned the language and received training have a higher than average employment rate and higher incomes. That is why governments are working to improve the availability of language training, particularly for professional purposes. The aim is to establish better coordination between these language integration courses and employment measures.

Source : [Eurostat](#) (2018)