

PRESS KIT

ASYLUM-SEEKING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Background note on interpretation of the figures

1. Total numbers

Asylum statistics are based on the records of administrative procedures. Up-to-date figures are often provisional and will often consist only of total numbers of asylum applications for each Member State. Subsequent corrections to the totals are usually, but not always, insignificant. It is difficult to obtain a recent total for the EU because some larger Member States can be the last to supply figures.

2. Analysing trends

The totals for the EU hide differing trends for different Member States or groups of 'receiving countries'. A comparison of the different experiences of the EU15 and the 'EU10' groups of countries is illustrative. The Annual Report for the EU : http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/doc_centre/asylum/statistics/doc_annual_report_2002_en.htm shows that, between 1998 and 1999, total numbers for the EU15 rose from around 300,000 in 1998 to 360,000, then stayed around that level for the following three years, falling again in 2003 to the 1998 level. UNHCR figures <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/statistics> indicate that the decline then continued through to 2005. Figures for the 'EU10' between 1998 and 2003 show that total numbers more than doubled over the same period, although from only 16,000 to 37,000. UNHCR data indicate that this rise continued in 2004 but may have started to fall in 2005.

It is important not to misrepresent trends. The numbers of asylum applications in Greece increased nearly three-fold (an additional 177%) between 1998 and 2003 – a difference of around 5,000. In Germany, the annual total was halved – this made a much bigger impact on the EU totals - around 48,000 fewer applications in that year. The rise and fall in the EU15 had more impact on the overall numbers, but the trend in the 'EU10' indicated a significant change for those countries. These numbers can only be understood in the context of the process of accession to EU membership.

3. Which citizenships are important ?

Data which are disaggregated by citizenship give a clear indication of the countries from which asylum seekers are fleeing. It is important to note that the suite of citizenships for a particular receiving country can be highly differentiated, (for example the top ten citizenships of asylum applicants in Finland in 2003 amounting to 63% of the total, the remaining 37% of the total applications was comprised of fewer than 80 from each individual country). The suites of citizenships may be different from that of a neighbouring Member State and can alter greatly from one year to the next.

4. What is not known about the numbers of asylum seekers ?

There are no comprehensive data on cohorts of asylum seekers in the decision-making process, so it is not possible to track and interpret the workings of the system. Stock data are not available for most countries, so it is difficult to know how many applicants are waiting for decisions, going through the system, or have had their cases finally decided.