

Asylum Statistics Annual Trends

March 2021

Many of the figures in 2020 show the impact of coronavirus and the lockdown restrictions and differ significantly from previous years as a result.

APPLICATIONS:

- In 2020 the number of applications for asylum in the UK, excluding dependants, (29,456), was 18% lower than in 2019 (35,737). The 2019 figure was significantly higher than any of the previous 3 years and the 2020 figure was very close to that for 2018.

Table 1: Asylum applications in the UK (excl. Dependants)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Applications	30,747	26,547	29,504	35,737	29,456
% change from previous year	-6%	-14%	+9%	+21%	-18%

Applications by nationality:

- In 2020 there were increases in the number of applicants from Eritrea, Sudan and Syria compared with 2019. Applications from the rest of the top ten countries decreased.

Table 2: Top ten asylum applicant producing countries (excl. Dependants)

	2019	2020	% change
Iran	4,855	3,847	-21%
Albania	3,488	2,784	-20%
Eritrea	1,876	2,496	+33%
Iraq	2,985	2,304	-23%
Sudan	1,524	2,040	+34%
Syria	1,031	1,479	+43%
Afghanistan	1,573	1,336	-15%
Pakistan	1,937	1,205	-38%
Vietnam	1,561	955	-39%
India	1,580	849	-46%

- Over the past 9 years 14 different countries have appeared in the list of the top ten asylum applicant producing countries. Eritrea, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan have been in the top ten in every one of the last 9 years.

- Zimbabwe had the highest number of applicants in 2009 (5,599) and third highest in 2010 (1,446) but since then has never been in the top ten. Somalia is another country where the number of applicants has declined in recent years.
- After declining numbers from 2009 to 2013 applications from Iraq have risen in recent years until a fall in 2020. Libya featured in the top ten list in 2011, but not before or since. The number of applicants from Syria rose steadily from 2010 until 2016, fell in 2017, but rose again in 2018, 2019 and 2020. The number of applications from China rose significantly in both 2018 and 2019 but fell in 2020.

Applications by location

- The majority of applications are made in-country rather than at ports. Over recent years there have been relatively small variations in the percentage of applications made in-country, ranging from 78% to 92% of all applications. In 2020 84% of applications were made in country and there was a significant drop in the number of applications made at ports.

Table 3: Applications by location (excl. Dependants), by year

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
In-country	26,865	22,474	23,601	28,023	24,825
% change from previous year	-10%	-16%	+5%	+19%	-11%
Port	3,882	4,073	5,903	7,714	4,631
% change from previous year	+33%	+5%	+45%	+31%	-40%
Total	30,747	26,547	29,504	35,737	29,456
% change from previous year	-6%	-14%	+11%	+21%	-18%

DECISIONS:

- In 2020 54% of initial decisions were refusals, 40% were grants of asylum, 3.8% were grants of Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave, and 2% were grants of leave to remain under other categories, such as family or private life rules; a category introduced in 2011.
- The percentage of decisions to grant refugee status was higher than the average over the past 5 years.
- There has been a steady decline in the number of decisions to grant discretionary leave to remain. This is related to a change in the way decisions are made on applications from unaccompanied children, who used to be frequently granted discretionary leave when they were under 18.
- The 'other grants of leave' category includes UASC leave, the temporary leave often given to unaccompanied children whose claim is refused.
- The percentage of refusals in 2020 was lower than the average over the past 5 years.
- The table below shows the figures for decisions made, it does not include cases where an application was withdrawn of which there were 2,545 in 2020.

Table 4: Initial Decisions (excl. Dependants)

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
Decisions	24,895		21,269		21,084		20,766		14,365	
Refugee status	7,317	29%	5,957	28%	5,557	26%	9,401	45%	5,753	40%
Humanitarian Protection	187	0.8%	146	0.7%	582	3%	637	3%	510	3.5%
Discretionary Leave	114	0.5%	84	0.4%	104	0.5%	70	0.3%	38	0.3%
Other Grants of Leave	1,027	4%	592	3%	688	3%	688	3.3%	268	2%
Refused	16,430	66%	14,490	68%	14,153	67%	9,970	48%	7,796	54%

- Among the countries with large numbers of asylum applicants from which the highest percentages were given refugee status or other forms of leave to remain in 2020 were Iran, Eritrea, Sudan, Syria and Vietnam as can be seen from the table below.
- In contrast, among the countries with relatively large numbers of applicants Pakistan, Albania and India had above average refusal rates, particularly India.

Table 5: Asylum decisions by nationality, 2020, top ten countries for number of decisions (excl. Dependants)

	Decisions	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	Family or Private Life / UASC Leave	Refusals
Iran	2,185	1,164	3	0	20	998
Iraq	1,507	243	73	6	49	1,136
Sudan	1,237	708	2	0	1	526
Eritrea	1,062	786	1	0	2	273
Afghanistan	729	334	10	1	10	374
Albania	645	202	4	3	22	414
Pakistan	643	203	1	5	22	412
Syria	576	422	5	0	1	148
Vietnam	465	298	8	1	12	146
India	442	4	1	2	12	423

APPEALS:

- In 2020 39% of appeals were allowed, while 50% were dismissed.
- The success rate at appeal had remained steady for a number of years, but there was a significant increase in both 2015 and 2016 as well as an increase, after several years of decline, in the number of appeals heard. The number of appeals heard has been declining since 2017 with a very large drop in 2020.

Table 6: Appeals determined

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
Determined	12,581		14,299		11,627		9,668		3,784	
Allowed	5,051	40%	5,074	35%	4,457	38%	3,994	41%	1,481	39%
Dismissed	6,914	55%	8,623	60%	6,662	57%	5,023	52%	1,882	50%
Withdrawn	616	5%	602	4%	508	5%	651	7%	421	11%

- Iraq, Pakistan and India had below average success rates at appeals in 2020 whereas Albania, Eritrea and Syria had significantly above average success rates. However the number of appeals was quite low for many countries so the percentage success rates are not as useful as in earlier years.

The figures on appeals may differ from those shown in earlier summaries due to changes in the data sources (see note at the end of this summary).

REFUGEES RESETTLED:

- Refugees have been accepted for resettlement in the UK via the Gateway Programme, the Mandate Scheme, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (started in 2014) and most recently the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (started in 2016).
- The UK commitment to the Gateway Programme was for 750 refugees per year, referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Mandate scheme covers people who have been granted refugee status by UNHCR and have ties to the UK.

Table 7: Refugees resettled (incl. Dependants)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Gateway Programme	804	813	693	704	77
Mandate Scheme	8	28	18	11	5
Syrian Vulnerable Persons	4,369	4,832	4,407	4,408	662
Vulnerable Children	31	539	688	489	79

- There was a very large drop in the number of people resettled in 2020 compared with earlier years.

ASYLUM SUPPORT:

- The total number of asylum seekers (including dependants) in receipt of Section 95 asylum support at the end of 2020 was 45,626 of whom 41,302 were in dispersal accommodation and 4,324 were receiving subsistence only.
- The numbers rose during 2018 and were then at their highest since 2007 but fell back slightly in 2019 before rising again in 2020.

- The region of the UK with the largest number in dispersal accommodation at the end of 2020 was the North West (9,592). This region has had the largest proportion since the beginning of 2008.
- 12,235 asylum seekers were in initial accommodation at the end of 2020, which represented a very large increase from earlier years.

Table 8: Asylum seekers in receipt of asylum support (incl. Dependants)

	End of 2016	End of 2017	End of 2018	End of 2019	End of 2020
Dispersed accommodation	36,626	37,716	41,316	40,702	41,302
Subsistence only	2,763	3,020	2,949	2,847	4,324
Initial accommodation	1,990	1,802	2,129	2,738	12,235

Applicants supported under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

- 4,214 decisions to grant Section 4 support were made in 2020. This is an increase from 2018 and 2019 but still lower than earlier years.
- At the end of 2020 6,180 applicants, including dependants, were receiving Section 4 support.

Table 9: Grants of Section 4 Support

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of grants	4,530	5,257	2,007	2,455	4,214

Table 10: Numbers in receipt of Section 4 Support (incl. Dependants)

	End of 2016	End of 2017	End of 2018	End of 2019	End of 2020
Number supported	3,773	4,114	4,032	3,804	6,180

- For more detail on asylum support see the separate briefing on this subject produced by the Refugee Council.

ENFORCEMENT & COMPLIANCE:

Removals (Asylum Applicants)

- Including dependants, in 2019, 3,222 asylum seekers were removed or departed voluntarily, a 20% reduction from 2018 (4,049). The full data for 2020 is not yet available.
- The total number of removals and voluntary departures went down in each year from 2009 until 2017. The number went down again in 2018 and 2019.
- 1,710 asylum seekers left under Voluntary Return schemes in 2019. The figures for voluntary returns tend to change as more information becomes available about verified voluntary returns, often being increased, so comparison of the latest figure with earlier years has to be treated with some caution.

Table 11: Removals and voluntary departures of Asylum Applicants, incl. dependants

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Enforced	3,617	2,581	3,209	2,271	1,512
Voluntary	1,816	1,536	2,107	1,778	1,710
Total	5,433	4,117	5,316	4,049	3,222

Detention

Persons leaving detention

- A total of 4,048 people were recorded as removed from the UK upon leaving detention in 2020, having been held solely under Immigration Act powers.

Persons detained

- At the end of 2020 a total of 910 persons were detained, there were no children who were in detention at this point in time.
- 438 persons who had sought asylum at some stage were being detained solely under Immigration Act powers (48% of all immigration detainees)
- During 2020 a total of 9,620 entries into detention by asylum seekers were recorded, and 10,320 cases of asylum seekers leaving detention. These figures do not necessarily correspond to the numbers of people detained as some will have entered and left detention more than once.
- 95% of all detainees were male.

Table 12: People in detention

	End of 2016	End of 2017	End of 2018	End of 2019	End of 2020
Total	2,738	2,545	1,784	1,637	910
Asylum detainees	1,626	1,508	1,085	994	438

Children in Detention

- In 2020 23 children entered detention. 4 of these children were detained at the Gatwick pre-departure accommodation, 1 at Tinsley House, and 18 at Yarls Wood IRC.
- *For more detail on children in detention see the separate briefing on this subject produced by the Refugee Council. There are also briefings on detention in the asylum system and the detained fast track process.*

CHILDREN:

Applications by Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum

- The number of applications from Unaccompanied Children, excluding dependants, was 2,291 in 2020, a 39% decrease compared with 2019.

Table 13: Asylum applications by Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum (excl. Dependants)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Applications	3,290	2,399	3,063	3,775	2,291
% change to previous year	+1%	-33%	+28%	+23%	-39%

- Sudan was the country of origin for the largest number of unaccompanied children in 2020.
- 85% of all applications in 2020 were from the 8 countries listed below. There were fewer than 60 applications from every other country.

Table 14: Top child asylum applicant producing countries (excl. Dependants)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Sudan	255	356	496	457	406
Afghanistan	754	277	223	437	376
Eritrea	413	355	684	597	303
Iran	388	233	269	545	269
Vietnam	194	306	324	459	258
Iraq	324	271	332	459	158
Syria	140	39	39	53	90
Albania	420	265	293	238	86

- In 2020 91% of applicants were male, a similar percentage to earlier years.

Age Disputed Cases

- The number of age disputed cases decreased in 2020. As a percentage of the number of applications during the year it was higher than 2019.

Table 15: Age Disputed Asylum applications (excl. Dependants)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Applications	929	718	875	798	732
% change to previous year	+18%	-23%	+22%	-9%	-8%

N.B. The Home Office statistics on age disputed cases do not include the category of those applicants who claim to be children but who are treated as adult according to Home Office policy. This used to state that in the opinion of an Immigration Officer “their physical appearance and/or general demeanour **very strongly** indicates that they are **significantly** over 18 years and no other credible evidence exists to the contrary” but the wording has changed since June 2019 to “very strongly suggests that they are 25 years or over”.

Decisions

- The rate of grants of protection (refugee status and humanitarian protection) has risen quite starkly in recent years, both numerically and as a percentage of decisions.
- For unaccompanied children who have reached the age of 18 when they receive their decision, refusal rates have tended to be much higher; there was a refusal rate of 82% in 2015. However the refusal rate fell to 57% in 2016, fell again to 45% in 2017, rose to 60% in 2018, and fell to 39% in 2019 and to 35% in 2020.

- For unaccompanied children a new category since 2013, UASC leave, is used in cases where the only reason for giving leave is that the applicant is a child who cannot be returned, and this means there are far fewer grants of discretionary leave.
- The majority of decisions on asylum applications by unaccompanied children under the age of 18 used to be grants of discretionary leave. In 2013 over 70% of all grants of discretionary leave were to children aged 17 and under, although they accounted for only 3% of total decisions.

Table 16: Initial asylum decisions on unaccompanied children aged 17 and under

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
2020	585	486	14	2	41	1	41
2019	1,830	1,382	79	0	172	42	155
2018	1,325	773	44	2	316	1	189
2017	1,454	817	36	2	386	2	211
2016	1,656	502	50	14	828	2	260

Table 17: Initial asylum decisions on unaccompanied children who have reached the age of 18

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
2020	598	368	20	0	0	1	209
2019	1,289	638	63	5	0	81	502
2018	824	299	29	2	0	3	491
2017	586	307	12	1	0	1	265
2016	295	118	6	1	1	2	167

ASYLUM APPLICATIONS (DEPENDANTS):

- In 2020 there were 6,585 applications from dependants. The detailed under 18 breakdown from earlier years is no longer available. In 2020 there were 4,783 dependants who were under 18 and 1,802 who were over 18.

The tables below show the age and gender of dependants .

Table 18: Applications by Dependants by age

	2014	2015	2016	2017
Under 5	2,687	2,681	3,052	2,711
5 – 9 yo	1,312	1,337	1,640	1,589
10 – 13 yo	746	670	809	790
14 – 15 yo	307	282	336	319
16 – 17 yo	253	232	264	246
18+ yo	1,969	2,033	2,481	2,205

Table 19: Applications by dependants aged 18 and over

	Total Applications	Male dependants	Female dependants	% Female
2020	1,802	391	1,410	78%
2019	2,589	654	1,933	75%
2018	2,280	622	1,658`	73%
2017	2,205	666	1,539	70%
2016	2,481	845	1,636	66%

N.B. There are a few cases where the age or gender of dependants is recorded as unknown.

WOMEN AND GIRLS:

Applications

- In 2020 22% of asylum applications were made by women. This was slightly below the average for recent years.

Table 20: Applications by women (Excl. Dependants)

	Total Applications	Applications by women	% by women
2020	29,456	6,599	22%
2019	35,737	9,120	26%
2018	29,504	8,025	27%
2017	26,547	7,364	28%
2016	30,747	7,680	25%

- The proportion of women applicants varies considerably from country to country. For a few countries there are more women applicants than men, or a roughly equal number, whereas in others the proportion of women applicants is low.

Table 21: Women asylum applicants from the top ten applicant producing countries 2020

	Total Applications	Applications by women	% by women
Iran	3,847	459	12%
Albania	2,784	717	26%
Eritrea	2,496	581	23%
Iraq	2,304	406	18%
Sudan	2,040	94	5%
Syria	1,479	151	10%
Afghanistan	1,336	89	7%
Pakistan	1,205	296	25%
Vietnam	955	297	31%
India	849	143	17%

Table 22: Top ten countries for women asylum applicants 2020

	Applications by women	% of total by women	Change in no. from 2019
Albania	717	26%	-239
Eritrea	581	23%	+129
Iran	459	12%	-347
Iraq	406	18%	-142
China	389	55%	-193
Nigeria	338	53%	-132
Vietnam	297	31%	-257
Pakistan	296	25%	-141
Stateless	181	24%	-19
El Salvador	180	34%	-20

- In 2020 only 9% of asylum applications by unaccompanied children were by girls. The percentage of applications by girls has remained steady in recent years.

Table 23: Applications by unaccompanied children seeking asylum

	Total Applications	Applications by girls	% Female
2020	2,291	210	9%
2019	3,775	413	11%
2018	3,063	334	11%
2017	2,401	261	11%
2016	3,290	333	10%

- The main countries of origin for unaccompanied girls seeking asylum in 2020 were those shown in the table below. There was a significant increase in applications from Vietnam in 2017 and from Eritrea in 2018. There were fewer than 10 girls applying from every other country in 2020.

Table 24: Applications by unaccompanied children seeking asylum (girls only)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Eritrea	110	29	99	120	86
Vietnam	71	121	131	164	65
Somalia	10	10	9	13	10

Decisions

- Until 2014 women asylum seekers were generally slightly more likely than men to be granted asylum, and slightly more likely to be granted humanitarian protection or discretionary leave.
- Until 2014 the refusal rates for women tended to be lower than for men, however in 2015 the percentage of women granted asylum was significantly lower than for men and the refusal rate was higher. In 2018, 2019 and 2020 the refusal rate for women was lower than for men.

Table 25 Decisions by gender

	Granted Asylum		Granted HP or DL or other leave		Refused	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
2020	37%	50%	5%	7%	58%	43%
2019	45%	47%	4%	9%	49%	44%
2018	24%	31%	6%	8%	70%	61%
2017	26%	31%	4%	4%	68%	65%
2016	29%	29%	6%	4%	66%	67%

Appeals

- The differences in success rates between men and women are relatively small.

Table 26 Appeal decisions by gender

	Appeal Allowed		Appeal Dismissed		Appeal Withdrawn	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
2020	38%	43%	52%	42%	10%	15%
2019	40%	44%	54%	47%	6%	9%
2018	40%	43%	55%	49%	6%	8%
2017	35%	37%	61%	59%	4%	5%
2016	41%	41%	55%	54%	5%	5%

Note

Figures given in this summary may differ from those in earlier summaries. In some cases this is because of rounding which was done in Home Office Statistical Bulletins which is no longer done, and in other cases, particularly for more recent statistics, because of adjustments made as a result of more complete and accurate information becoming available.

The full detailed statistics covering the most recent period can be found on the Gov.UK website via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets>

For older statistics follow this link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office/series/migration-statistics>

The user guide to the Immigration statistics can be found via this link

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/232217/user-guide-immig-statistics.pdf

About the Refugee Council

The Refugee Council is one of the leading organisations in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees. We give help and support to asylum seekers and refugees, and also work with them to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed by decision-makers.