

ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN THE EU: BETTER DATA NEEDED

Apart from the often limited availability of data and from relevant changes in registration methods, definitions, policies, and so on, asylum seekers and refugee statistics may describe national fluctuations in the number, the composition, and the degree of recognition of asylum-seekers in the course of time. In an international context, however, much work must be done in the field of harmonization of definitions before an analogous conclusion may be drawn. In addition, agreements should be made on the choice of the variables to be included, the classifications to be used, the length of the time series, and the expected time span between collection and publication.

This rapid report deals with the main conclusions of the Eurostat-publication 'Asylum-seekers and refugees, a statistical report, volume 1: EC Member States' (1994), compiled by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI).

Migration and asylum - different concepts, different policies

Unlike in the 1950s and 1960s, economic crises and labour market developments have meant that the demand within the EU for foreign workers has been reduced significantly, the most common reasons for non-EU migrants for entering the EU are family reunification and marriage. Two further groups can be identified: asylum-seekers and refugees.

Because the admission of migrants is subject to other laws than the admission of asylum-seekers and refugees, there are arguments for distinguishing between those two groups.

From a demographic point of view, too, there are arguments against making a hard and fast distinction between migrants and asylum-seekers. The latter, like the former, represent either a temporary or a permanent increase in the population.

Everyone has the right to seek asylum from persecution

According to Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

International policy regarding persons who have fled their own countries is based on the Geneva Convention of 1951. As this convention was originally intended to benefit European refugees whose plight was caused by the Second World War (and afterwards by the Cold War), it was found necessary to extend its scope. This was done by means of the Protocol of 1967.

Convention refugees are those who have obtained refugee status under the terms of the Geneva Convention.

They may be divided into two categories:

- 'quota refugees', who are invited by governments at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);
- individual asylum-seekers who are granted refugee status.

Although these terms are often - and incorrectly - used interchangeably, the difference between a refugee and an asylum-seeker is that a refugee has been recognised as such, whereas an asylum-seeker is still awaiting a decision on his or her application for refugee status.

The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol do not provide any guidelines on interpretation, which is a matter for the individual countries. This has given rise to considerable differences in the form, substance and results of the asylum procedures adopted by the various signatories.

The main differences concern:

- nature of admission procedures, including appeal procedures;
- development of accelerated procedures for particular categories of asylum applications, notably for manifestly unfounded applications;
- interpretation of the definition of 'refugee' in accordance with Article 1A of the Geneva Convention.

Asylum-seekers who are not considered eligible for refugee status within the meaning of the Convention do not necessarily have to leave the host country. This is because various new types of status have been introduced over the years, such as 'de facto refugees', 'refugees on humanitarian grounds', 'persons with exceptional leave to remain', and 'displaced persons'.

It goes without saying that differences as described above are reflected in the statistics.

A refugee is someone with '...a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of

- *race,*
- *religion,*
- *nationality,*
- *membership of a particular social group,*
- *political opinion..'*

(Article 1, United Nations Convention of Refugees, 1951)

What should be counted?

Asylum and refugee statistics firstly serve political purposes: they support the development and evaluation (monitoring) of interrelated policies. Scientific purposes are served as well: for example, by means of statistical analyses, the interdependency between asylum/refugee and various other societal phenomena (employment, education, integration, participation, etc.) can be studied.

Asylum statistics should paint an accurate picture of the path which an asylum-seeker is likely to have to follow from the moment of submitting his or her request to the moment of receiving a final decision. Relevant characteristics include the nature of stay/residence permit, country of citizenship, country of (ethnic) origin, country of birth, gender, date of birth, and family relationship. As asylum procedures can last for one or even several years, the approach should be longitudinal. This means that cohorts (groups of persons submitting their requests in a given year) should be monitored over time.

Statistics on refugees should, in the first instance, provide a description of invited (quota) refugees and recognized asylum-seekers who are resident in a country at a given moment, distinguished by nature of stay/residence permit, country of citizenship, country of (ethnic) origin, country of birth, gender, date of birth, family relationship, date of entry into the country, and place in the country where one resides. In addition to these stock data, refugee statistics should also comprise flow data, relating to changes in the stock, such as arrivals, departures, births, deaths, naturalizations, and changes in the nature of the stay/residence permit.

Who is an asylum-seeker? Who is a refugee?

The crucial question when it comes to compiling statistics on asylum-seekers appears, at first sight, to be a simple one:

who should be regarded as an asylum-seeker or refugee?

In fact, this question is far from simple.

- Does the concept of asylum-seeker equal the concept of asylum application?
- Are requests submitted abroad included in the number of asylum-seekers?
- Are entry requests denied at the border counted as applications?
- Are second applications, in the same or in another country, considered as new applications or as the continuation of old ones?
- To what extent are asylum-seekers who were ultimately granted to stay on other grounds than the 1951 Convention seen as refugees?
- Are quota refugees regarded as asylum-seekers?
- Is a refugee who settled in the country more than ten years ago, or who was naturalized after several years, still counted as a refugee?
- Are reunified family members also counted as refugees?
- Is a child born to a refugee parent also a refugee?

The answers to these questions vary considerably from one Member State to another, and this produces corresponding differences in their respective statistical practices.

As a consequence, international comparisons of the numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees require correction mechanisms constructed according to uniform standards. To date, however, the available statistical material is insufficient as a basis for constructing most of these mechanisms.

Increase in asylum requests until 1992, decrease in 1993

The differences in definitions used by the Member States and the differences in the extent to which asylum statistics are available make it practically impossible to compile asylum statistics for the European Union as a whole. This basically means that until now asylum statistics can only be used within the different national contexts. Caution must be exercised when national data are placed in an international context.

Measured in terms of the number of requests for asylum in recent years, a broad distinction can be made between important asylum countries (with more than 10 000 asylum-seekers per year) and less important asylum countries. The latter category includes Greece, Ireland, Italy (despite the relatively high numbers recorded for 1987 and 1991), Luxembourg and Portugal.

The following concerns only the important asylum countries. Most of these, but by no means all of them, have seen sharp increases in the number of asylum-seekers since the mid-1980s (Table 1).

Germany is the undisputed favourite for asylum-seekers, but there have also been relatively sharp increases in the United Kingdom and Spain. In 1992, the number of asylum-seekers in these three countries was 5-6 times as high as in 1985. The growth in the Netherlands and Belgium (3-4 times higher than in 1985) is somewhat less pronounced. In Denmark, there was no significant increase in the 1985 figure until 1992. In France, by contrast, the number of asylum-seekers in 1992 was actually less than that in 1985.

In comparison with 1991, the number of requests for asylum in Germany, Denmark and Spain increased dramatically in 1992, although there were steep decreases in the United Kingdom and France. The reasons for these disparate developments, apart from factors such as whether or not persons from the former Yugoslavia are included in the statistics, may be the effectiveness of new or established policy measures designed to control the flow of asylum-seekers.

There are indications however that the number of asylum-seekers in 1993 has decreased significantly in many EU countries and in particular in Germany.

**Table 1:
Requests for asylum in the main asylum countries of the EU¹**



	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
*1000								
Germany	73.8	99.7	57.4	103.1	121.3	193.1	256.1	438.2
United Kingdom	6.2	5.7	5.9	5.7	16.8	30.3	57.7	32.0
France	28.9	26.3	27.7	34.4	61.4	54.8	47.4	27.0 ²
Netherlands	5.6	5.9	13.5	7.5	13.9	21.2	21.6	20.3
Belgium	5.3	7.6	6.0	4.5	8.1	12.9	15.4	17.6
Denmark	8.7	9.3	2.7	4.7	4.6	5.3	4.6	13.9
Spain	2.3	2.8	3.7	4.5	4.1	8.6	8.1	11.7
1985 = 100								
Germany	100	135	78	140	164	261	347	593
United Kingdom	100	93	95	93	272	492	937	520
France	100	91	96	119	212	190	164	93 ²
Netherlands	100	104	238	133	246	376	383	360
Belgium	100	143	113	85	152	243	290	333
Denmark	100	107	31	54	53	61	53	160
Spain	100	122	161	196	177	376	354	509

1 The countries are in the order of the number of asylum requests received in 1992. As there are wide differences in national definitions, there is little scope for making international comparisons of absolute numbers.

2 Provisional.

Source: Eurostat, 1994.

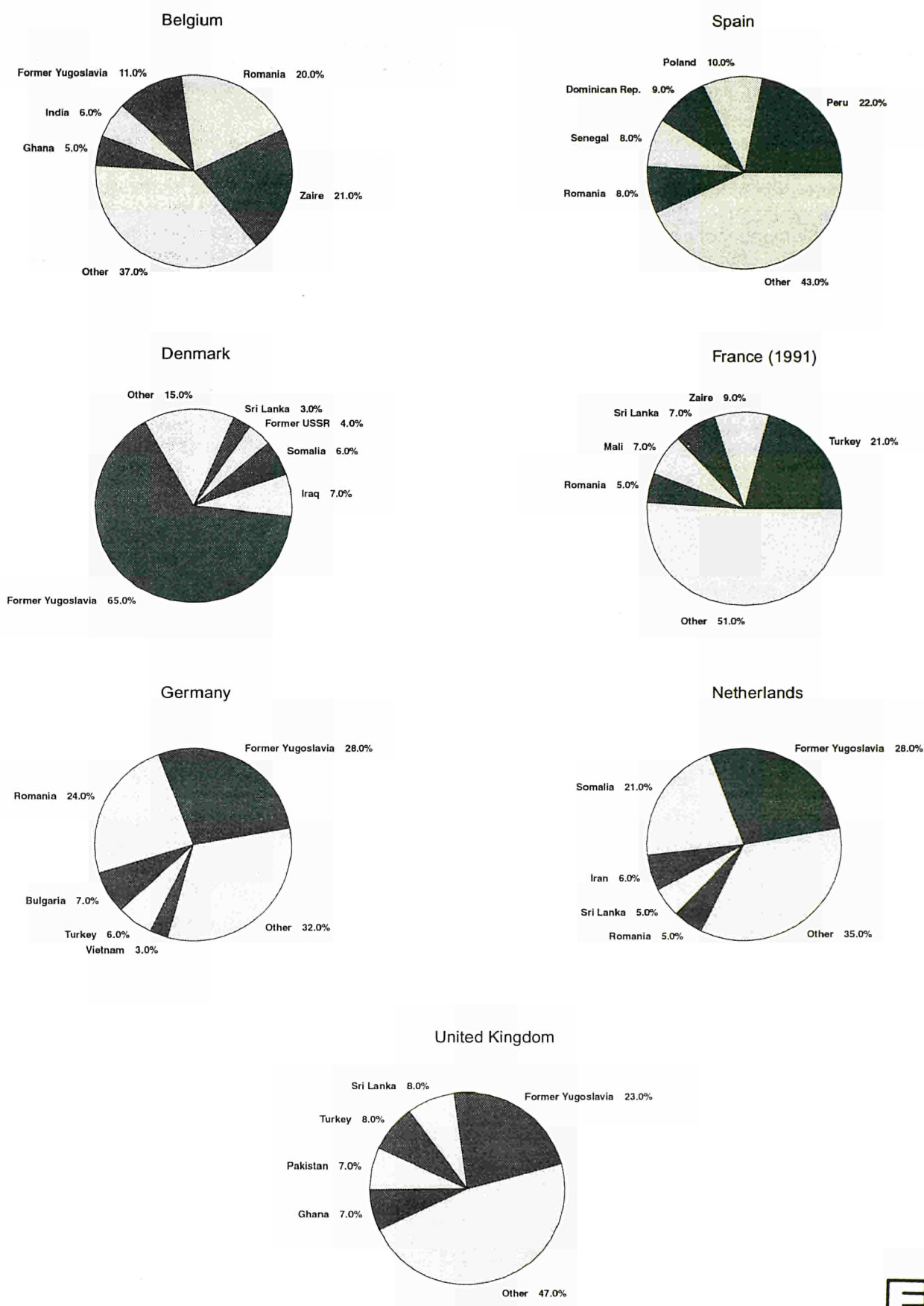
Figures 1-7 show the main citizenships of asylum-seekers in the EU. Both remarkable similarities and discrepancies are shown. Furthermore some additional remarks can be made.

- In Germany and Denmark, the number of asylum seekers from non-EU European countries is about 70% of the total, compared with less than 30% in Spain.
- In Denmark, the large share of asylum-seekers accounted for by non-EU Europeans consists almost entirely of persons from the former Yugoslavia. In Germany, the percentage of asylum-seekers from Romania is almost equal to that from the former Yugoslavia.
- As in Germany and Denmark, asylum-seekers from the former Yugoslavia comprised the largest category of asylum-seekers in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands in 1992. In the other Member States,

asylum-seekers from the former Yugoslavia are numerically much less important.

- The share of asylum requests from nationals of African countries is relatively high in Belgium (40%), France (35%, 1991) and the Netherlands (32%).
- Zaire and Somalia each accounted for more than half of all asylum requests from Africans in Belgium and the Netherlands respectively.
- Asylum-seekers from Asian countries are relatively numerous in the United Kingdom (Sri Lanka and Pakistan) and in France (Sri Lanka).
- Asylum-seekers from South America are numerically significant only in Spain. The biggest groups are from Peru and the Dominican Republic. There is also a significant number of Polish asylum-seekers in Spain.

Figures 1-7:
Asylum requests by country of citizenship in the main EU asylum countries, 1992



Source: Eurostat, 1994.



Only few asylum-seekers become refugees

The recognition rate is a generally accepted measure which places the number of requests which are granted in relation to the total number of requests. Unfortunately, recognition rates are not calculated in a uniform manner throughout the EU.

As is common practice with other demographic measurements, it is necessary to relate a rate to a 'risk population'. The denominator of the recognition rate should therefore be the number of asylum-seekers. Furthermore, given that procedures are not necessarily completed within the same year, correct calculation requires a longitudinal approach, meaning that a cohort of asylum-seekers has to be monitored over time.

Only one Member State - Belgium - calculates the recognition rate in this way. The United Kingdom will be able to do so within a few years. The other countries divide the number of recognitions in a calendar year by the number of asylum-related decisions. This other method

is referred to hereafter as 'recognition percentage', so as to distinguish it from the recognition rate.

Theoretically, a recognition rate is preferable to a recognition percentage. Apart from the aim of describing the asylum process in longitudinal terms as far as possible, a recognition percentage can be misleading if substantial numbers of procedures have not yet been completed.

In addition to making a distinction between the recognition rate and recognition percentage, it is important to use a precise definition of the numerator and denominator. In order to define the numerator, it is necessary to establish which types of status are 'recognized', whether or not recognized status granted on appeal is included, and whether or not quota refugees are included. In order to define the denominator, it is necessary to establish whether or not the number of asylum-seekers whose requests are rejected during the preliminary admission procedure is included, and whether or not an adjustment is made for asylum requests which are withdrawn or which are invalid.

Table 2 shows recognition percentages/rates according to national practices.

Table 2:
Recognition percentage/rate as calculated in accordance with national practices in the main asylum countries of the EU¹

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Germany ²	11	6	5	8	5
United Kingdom ³	23	32	22	9	3
France	35	28	15	20	:
Netherlands ⁴	7	9	7	4	15
Belgium	21	14	6	2	:
Spain	:	:	:	4	4

1 Only the data from Belgium are classified by year of request (rate); the other data are calculated on a calendar-year basis (percentage).

No time series are available for Denmark.

2 Excluding status granted on appeal.

3 Excluding persons granted exceptional leave to remain.

4 Excluding status granted on humanitarian grounds.

Source: Eurostat, 1994.

The different definitions of the numerator probably account for the fact that in 1992 the recognition percentages in Denmark and the Netherlands were 50% and 37% respectively (the highest among the EU countries), whereas those in Italy and the United Kingdom were below 5%. If, however, the numerators in the Danish and Dutch figures included only Convention refugees, the recognition percentage in these two countries would fall to below 15%. By contrast, if the UK concept of 'exceptional leave to remain' is included in the UK numerator, the UK's recognition percentage comes out at no less than 47%!

The recognition percentage for Germany in 1992 was about 5%. This is on the low side, however, since it does not include refugee status granted on appeal and is unadjusted for requests which were withdrawn. A more realistic percentage would be 15.

In view of the above, it has to be concluded that international comparison of recognition rates or recognition percentages is a very tricky business. It will not be possible to draw watertight conclusions regarding 'genuine' differences between the Member States until such time as they agree on a more or less standard method of calculation.

Are asylum-seekers counted as migrants?

It seems that Portugal is the only country that includes all asylum-seekers in the immigration statistics (Table 3). It should be noted, however, that Portugal does not count as asylum-seekers persons who are rejected in the admission procedure. The other EU countries include asylum-seekers only partially in the immigration statistics. For some countries (Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands), inclusion depends on registration in the population registers.

For other countries (Greece, Spain, France, and Italy), inclusion is limited to asylum-seekers who were officially granted to stay. In Denmark, only persons who immigrate on other grounds and who subsequently apply for asylum are included, while in the United Kingdom persons who apply after entry are likely to be excluded. Finally, Ireland limits the inclusion of asylum-seekers or refugees to those who were found in the Labour Force Survey (or in the event of a census).

Table 3:
Migration statistics and asylum-seekers¹

	B	DK	D	GR	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	P	UK
Immigration statistics												
Asylum-seekers included	p	p	p	p	p	p	p	p	p	p	+	p
Identifiable	-	-	-	+	p	-	-	+	-	-	+	-
Time between arrival and registration	c	?	c	b	c	c	d	c	c	c	a	a
Invited refugees included	+	+	+	:	+	+	p	+	+	+	+	+
Identifiable	-	-	-	:	p	-	-	+	-	-	+	-
Time between arrival and registration	c	a	c	:	c	c	d	c	c	a	a	a
Emigration statistics												
Asylum-seekers/refugees included	p	p	p	p	p	:	p	p	p	p	:	p
Identifiable	-	-	-	-	-	:	-	-	-	-	:	-
Time between departure and registration	?	?	a	?	?	:	?	?	?	c	:	a

¹ + = yes; - = no; p = partly; ? = unknown; : = not applicable; a = shorter than one month;

b = shorter than three months; c = shorter than one year; d = longer than one year.

Source: Eurostat, 1994.

Except for Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain (partially), asylum-seekers cannot be identified as such in the immigration statistics. For France it may be possible to estimate the total number of (granted) asylum-seekers that is included in the immigration statistics. However, for the remaining EU countries it is unknown which asylum-seekers are included in the immigration statistics and, consequently, which asylum-seekers are excluded.

Accounting for a possible time lag between arrival and the (possible) entry into the migration statistics, which may be more than one year (Ireland), the answer to the previous question may only be estimated by comparing additional variables, if available, like country of nationality or origin.

The immigration statistics of almost all EU countries encompass invited or resettled refugees. However, again except for Portugal, Italy, and Spain (partially), they cannot be identified as such.

The relation between migration statistics and asylum statistics on the immigration side is generally repeated on the emigration side. So, if inclusion in the immigration statistics depends on registration in population registers, inclusion in the emigration statistics depends on deregistration from these registers. Other countries that only include granted asylum-seekers in their immigration statistics do the same as regards the emigration statistics. However, it should be noted that there are some differences:

- for France no emigration statistics are available;
- in Portugal and Spain emigration statistics only refer to nationals;
- in the Netherlands (rejected) asylum-seekers who leave (or should have left) the country without notification of their departure, are removed from the local population registers afterwards, as so-called administrative corrections.

In none of the EU countries can asylum-seekers or refugees be identified as such in the emigration statistics. Again, by means of one or more additional vari-

ables, some rough estimates may be made on the number of asylum-seekers or refugees in the emigration statistics, although the often unknown period between departure and registration may impede estimates like these.

Recapitulating Table 3: statistics on international migration are not strongly linked to the statistics on asylum, particularly as both sources do not really match. Certainly from the point of view of an adequate system of population accounting, improvements in the relation between those statistics should be pursued.

A first step towards improvement might be to include the analysis of asylum statistics in the work programs of the national agencies (national statistical institutes) dealing with the presentation and analysis of migration statistics. Specific studies on the relation between both statistics might result in recommendations to intensify this relation. National experiences in this field could be internationally exchanged during regular (Eurostat and United Nations) meetings of migration experts.

Further Reading

Eurostat

Asylum-seekers and refugees, a statistical report, volume 1: EC Member States, 1994

Rapid Reports "Population and Social Conditions":

1993-6: "Population by citizenship in the EC- 1.1.1991"

1993-12: "International Migration Flows in selected EC countries - 1991"

Other

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1993, *The State of the World's Refugees. The Challenge of Protection*. Penguin Books. New York.

INFORMATION:

Thana CHRISSANTHAKI

Tel. : 4301-32087

Fax : 4301-34415