

Wars in Syria and Iraq drive highest asylum numbers in 22 years

By UNHCR | 26 March 2015 | [Français](#)

GENEVA - The wars in Syria and Iraq, as well as armed conflicts, human rights violations and deteriorating security and humanitarian conditions in other countries, pushed the number of asylum applications in industrialized countries to a 22-year high last year, according to a UNHCR report released today.

The UNHCR's Asylum Trends 2014 report puts the estimated number of new asylum applications lodged in industrialized countries throughout the year at 866,000, a 45 per cent increase from 2013, when 596,600 claims were registered. The 2014 figure is the highest since 1992, at the beginning of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres put the new figures in their historical context. "In the 1990s, the Balkan wars created hundreds of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers," Guterres said. "Many of them found refuge in industrialized countries in Europe, North America and elsewhere. Today, the surge in armed conflicts around the world presents us with similar challenges, in particular the dramatic situation in Syria. Our response has to be just as generous now as it was then - providing access to asylum, resettlement opportunities and other forms of protection for the people fleeing these terrible conflicts."

Syrians were by far the largest group among those seeking asylum in 2014, with almost 150,000 applications, one in every five asylum claims in the industrialized world. Iraqis accounted for 68,700 applications, almost double the number in 2013. Afghans were the third largest group, with almost 60,000 applications, followed by citizens of Serbia (and Kosovo) and Eritreans.

The industrialized country receiving the largest number of asylum seekers in 2014 was Germany, with over 173,000 applications. Syrians made up a quarter of all asylum applications in Germany. The United States received an estimated 121,200 asylum claims, mostly from Mexico and countries in Central America. Turkey, which by the end of 2014 hosted over 1.5 million Syrian refugees, received 87,800 new asylum applications in 2014, mainly from Iraqis. Sweden ranked fourth among the 44 industrialized countries, with 75,100 applications, mainly from Syrians and Eritreans. Italy registered 63,700 new applications in 2014, the highest on record. Asylum seekers in Italy came mainly from Mali, Nigeria and Gambia.

It is worth noting that the Russian Federation, which is not included in this report for methodological reasons, received some 265,400 applications for temporary asylum and 5,800 applications for refugee status from Ukrainians during 2014. At the same time, the number of Ukrainians seeking asylum in the 44 countries included in the report went up from 1,400 in 2013 to 15,700 in 2014.

While there has been a net overall increase in asylum applications, the number of new claims has not been spread evenly among the 44 countries covered by the report. The top five receiving countries (Germany, the

United States, Turkey, Sweden and Italy), for example, accounted for 60 percent of all new asylum claims.

The report reveals other disparities, as when a country's population size is taken into account, for example. Relative to the size of its population, Sweden is the country with the largest number of asylum seekers (24.4 asylum seekers per 1,000 inhabitants on average, during the last five years), followed by Malta, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Montenegro.

While most industrialized countries saw increases in the number of asylum applicants during last year, some countries registered a decrease, notably Australia, where numbers went down 24 per cent from 11,700 in 2013 to less than 9,000 in 2014.

UNHCR's Asylum Trends 2014 report is based on data received from 44 governments in Europe, North America and parts of the Asia-Pacific. The number of people applying for refugee status in industrialized countries is just one element in the global picture of forced displacement from conflict and persecution. Worldwide, by the end of 2013, 51.2 million individuals were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations. Of these, some 16.7 million people were refugees and 33.3 million were internally displaced in their own country. Close to 1.2 million were asylum-seekers. UNHCR's forthcoming Global Trends 2014 report, due in June 2015, will provide a complete picture of global displacement in 2014.

The Asylum Trends 2014 report and annex tables are available here:

- [Report](#)
- [Annexes](#) [Excel tables -zip file]

- Media contacts in Geneva:

- Melissa Fleming, Chief Spokesperson +41 22 739 7965
- Babar Baloch, Communications Officer +41 79 557 9106
- Karin de Gruijl, Senior Communications Officer +41 79 255 9213
- Ariane Rummery, Senior Communications Officer +41 79 200 7617
- William Spindler, Senior Communications Officer +41 79 217 3011

- Media contacts in other countries: [Field Media Officers](#)

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