
EU SEES SHARP RISE IN ASYLUM APPLICATIONS FROM VENEZUELA

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The number of applications for asylum in the EU is back up. While Syrians and Afghans formerly topped the list, the EU has seen a surge in the number of refugees from Latin America — particularly Venezuela.

After several years in decline, the number of first-time asylum applications lodged in European Union countries is growing again, according to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).

While first-time applications from Syrians — the largest nationality represented — were down 8% from 2018 to 20,392, Venezuela came in second, with 14,257 citizens seeking asylum in the European Union.

"The fact that Venezuelans lodged more applications than Afghans represents a noticeable development," EASO said. "Venezuelan nationals had never lodged such a high number of applications in a single month ever before."

Earlier this year, Venezuela saw a worsening of a political, economic and humanitarian crisis resulting from the contested re-election of President Nicolas Maduro.

The EASO recorded some 206,500 applications in EU countries for the first four months of the year — up 15% from the 179,000 lodged during the same period in 2018.

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Afghanistan was in third place, with the number of citizens lodging first applications for asylum in the EU up 36% to 14,042. The number of Colombians was up 156% to 8,097.

First-time applications from West Balkan countries such as Albania and Caucasus nations such as Georgia were up. The proportion of applications from people from countries whose citizens don't require a visa to travel in the Schengen zone reportedly increased from roughly 20% to about 25%.

Germany's Afghanistan problem

As the number of asylum applications within the European Union grows, so will the number of deportations from EU countries — especially Germany.

Dominik Bartsch, the representative for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Germany, criticized the long-running practice of sending displaced people back to Afghanistan, calling the shipping of

civilians to a war zone "unrealistic" and recommending that it be done only "as an exception."

On Monday, Pro Asyl, an organization that supports and advocates for displaced people in Germany, called for a complete halt of deportations to Afghanistan and Sudan ahead of the start of Wednesday's state interior minister meetings. Pro Asyl has also urged the German government not to deport people to Syria or Iraq.

The states of Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and Saxony are petitioning for the German government to permit deportations to Syria should conditions in the country improve, despite the eight-year civil war.

Through April, Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) denied 145 appeals from people who had sought refuge in churches to avoid deportation, the EPD news agency reported, citing a request for information presented to the agency by the Left party. Two people were allowed to lodge asylum applications within Germany. That makes for a success rate of just 1.4% — down from nearly 12% in 2018, when 77 of 647 appeals were granted.

mkg/aw (AFP, dpa, KNA, epd)

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