



Refugees in Europe

A refugee is a person who has fled to another country through genuine fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Until they are granted refugee status by the country of destination, the person is known as an asylum seeker. There are now 25 million official refugees in the world.

Mass flights of refugees have most often been stimulated by wars of independence, international conflicts, civil unrest and ethnic conflicts. World War I and II were responsible for the largest refugee movements in Europe. More recently, the dissolution of the Iron Curtain has resulted in huge inflows of refugees from East Germany to West Germany and "ethnic cleansing" massacres have led to huge exoduses from the former Yugoslavia.

Refugees are, therefore, involuntary migrants. Most refugees move to neighbouring countries. However, over the last decade an increasing number have applied for asylum in European countries.

countries are not easy because some countries have introduced different levels of recognition. For example, in Denmark, Finland, The Netherlands, Portugal, Norway, Sweden and the UK, significant numbers of asylum applications are granted temporary leave to remain but are denied full refugee status. Several countries, including the UK, granted new forms of temporary asylum status to people fleeing the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and both Germany and Hungary have made special provision which falls short of granting full refugee status to certain applicants.

However, such difficulties fail to hide the huge disparities in recognition rates across Europe. Recognition rates in the European states over the period 1990 to 1995 are summarised in Table 1.

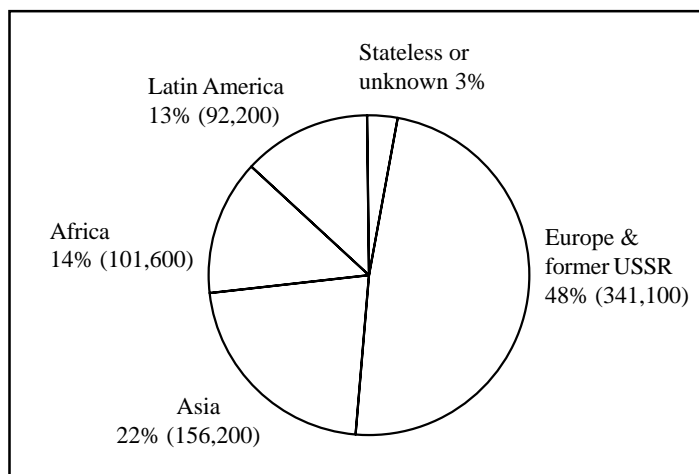
Refugees or Migrants?

The effects of wars, civil unrest and persecution are made much worse (exacerbated) by poverty and environmental disasters. In the Sahel, for example, drought and desertification has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. This has led some observers to suggest that many refugees are actually economic or environmental migrants, moving away to better their standard of living.

Asylum applications in Europe

Half of the asylum seekers who entered Europe in 1995 originated in Europe (Fig 1) the majority from Yugoslavia and Romania, the remaining 52% being derived from Asia (especially China, India and Sri Lanka), Africa (especially Algeria and Somalia) and Latin America (Guatemala and Haiti).

Fig 1. Sources of European asylum seekers



Of all the European Union states, Germany has received the greatest number of asylum applications over the last five years and Portugal has received the least. West Germany took a sympathetic stance to refugees from East Germany, perhaps because the majority of these were young, educated and at least partly skilled. Acceptance, or **recognition** rates also vary considerably. Straightforward comparisons between different European

Table 1. Recognition rates

Country	1990-95		
	Applications	Recognition	% Recognised
Austria	812,000	8,500	1.0
Denmark	50,000	3,500	7.0
Finland	12,000	5,000	41.6
France	199,000	60,000	30.1
Germany	1,500,000	93,000	6.2
Greece	13,000	600	4.6
Italy	35,000	3,000	8.6
Portugal	4,000	250	6.3
Spain	6,500	3,600	55.4
Sweden	206,000	115,000	55.8
UK	195,000	41,000	21.0

In most European countries, the recognition rates vary dramatically between asylum seekers from different parts of the world. For example, in 1993 85% of asylum seekers from South-East Asia (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam) were accepted but only 12% of African applications were successful. Similarly, in Germany in 1992, 44% of asylum seekers from Iran gained acceptance whilst the corresponding figure for Bulgarians was only 1%.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Sweden has had the highest recognition rate. Over 25% of all applications originated from the Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey and Syria and from Palestinians). Between 1980 and 1994 460,000 individuals were granted residence permits and half of these were recognised as refugees.

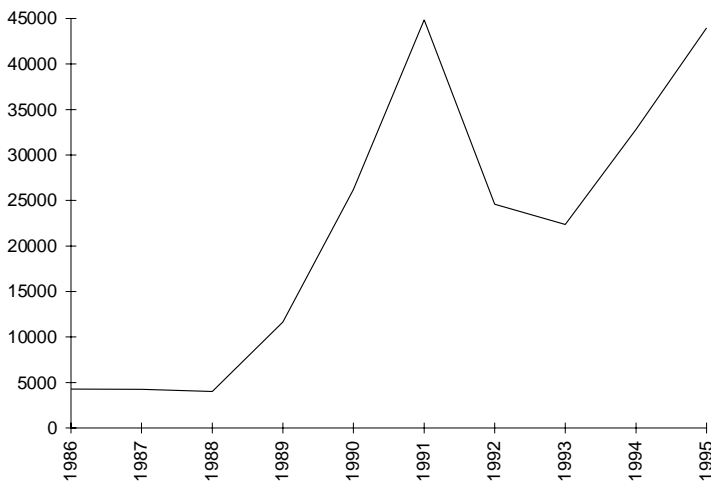
Political changes in several European countries over the last two years suggest that acceptance rates are likely to fall. In France, Germany and The Netherlands, right wing political parties, often strongly campaigning on anti-immigration policies, have grown in popularity.

In all three countries, the main criticism of “soft” immigration policies is that immigrants take jobs which would otherwise be available to nationals and money spent on refugee housing and social security payments, for example, would be better spent on strengthening corresponding provision for that country’s nationals.

The UK

Asylum applicants to the UK have dramatically increased over the last ten years (see Fig 2). In part, this has been a result of the civil wars and human rights abuses in Nigeria, Somalia, Algeria, the former Yugoslavia, Iran and Iraq.

Fig 2. Asylum applications to the UK



The major countries of origin are shown in Table 2.

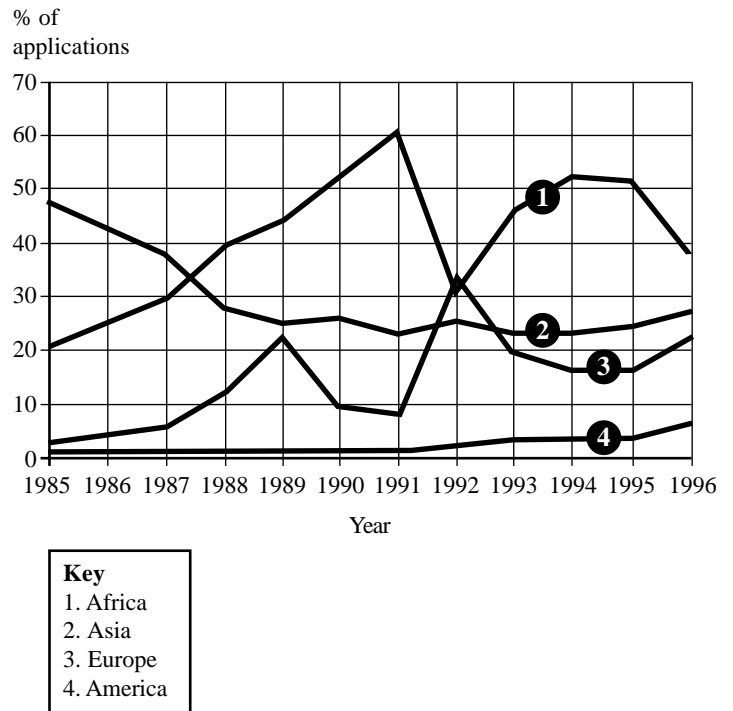
Table 2. Country of origin of UK asylum-seekers

	Country of Origin			
	1993	1994	1995	1996
1	Sri Lanka	Nigeria	Nigeria	Nigeria
2	Fmr Yugoslavia	Sri Lanka	Somalia	India
3	Ghana	Turkey	India	Pakistan
4	Nigeria	Ghana	Pakistan	Somalia
5	Turkey	India	Sri Lanka	Turkey
6	Somalia	Somalia	Ghana	Fmr USSR
7	India	Sierra Leone	Algeria	Sri Lanka
8	Pakistan	Pakistan	Turkey	Kenya
9	Sierra Leone	Fmr Yugoslavia	Fmr Yugoslavia	Fmr Yugoslavia
10	Zaire	Kenya	Tanzania	Columbia

Between 1993 and 1996, Nigeria produced the greatest number of applications, largely as a result of the annulment of Presidential elections in 1993. Since 1986, 15000 Nigerian nationals have applied for asylum in the UK.

Over the last decade, there has been a significant change in the continent of application of asylum seekers to the UK (Fig 3).

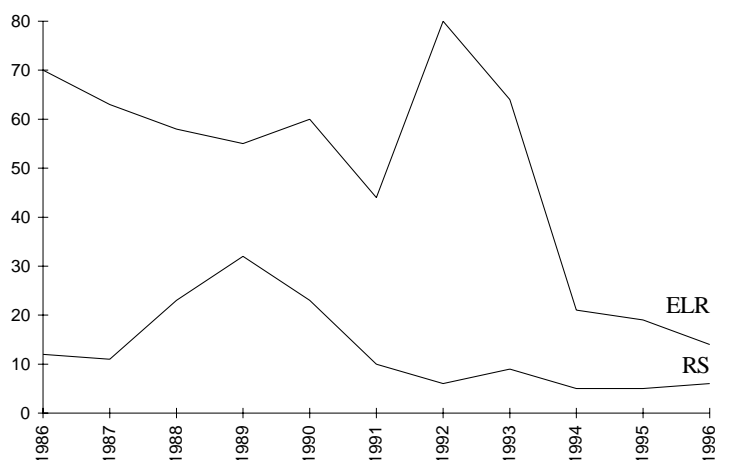
Fig 3. Asylum applications in the UK by continent, 1985-96



In 1985, the greatest number of applications came from Asia, but by 1996, the majority of applicants came from Africa. Applications from Europe have increased since 1996, largely as a result of increased applications from eastern Europe.

As asylum applications to the UK have increased over the last decade, the percentage of applicants who have been granted asylum or refugee status has decreased. In 1986, 70% of applicants were given exceptional leave to remain (ELR) in the UK, by 1996, this had fallen to only 15% (see Fig 4).

Fig 4. UK applicants gaining ELR or refugee status



In 1996 a total of 39,000 decisions were made on asylum applications - the highest number of decisions on record. 6% of applicants were granted refugee status and just over 14% were not recognised as refugees but were granted exceptional leave to remain (ELR). 80% were therefore rejected completely.

Exam Hint - It is important that candidates appreciate the essential difference between refugees and migrants i.e. persecution. However, many of the problems which refugees and migrants face in their destination country are similar, as are their effects (see Factsheet 27 'International Migration').

As in the rest of Europe, the number and proportion of applicants who receive refugee status of ELR varies dramatically according to their country of origin. The proportion of Iranians and Iraqis who receive refugee or ELR status is consistently higher than the proportion from Zaire of Algeria, for example. Nationals of Iraq, Iran, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia are much more likely to receive refugee status than other nationals.

The dramatic fall in the proportion of applicants who are granted ELR is mainly a result of the introduction in 1993 of the **Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act** which strictly limited ELR to cases where there was conclusive proof of humanitarian concern. This legislation - which introduced fingerprinting of asylum seekers and reduced their access to free legal advice - has clearly been successful in deterring multiple applications. Almost 50% of the 2200 grants of asylum in 1996 went to nationals of the former Yugoslavia. Just as Nigeria, India and Pakistan produced most applications in 1996, so these three countries had the highest refusal rates - 16%, 11% and 8% respectively. The UK has traditionally accepted refugees from its former colonies, eg. Uganda and Hong Kong and recognition rates are significantly higher.

People who arrive in the UK seeking asylum are held in detention centres whilst their application is considered. Many asylum seekers have to wait in detention for years before a decision is made. For example, by July 1997, there were 11,000+ applications which dated back to, or before, August 1993. In 1995, The government introduced an accelerated decision-making process, known as the '**short procedure**'. This aimed to reduce the period between application and interview and interview and decision and, it is claimed, this procedure has now almost become the norm. However, following vocal criticism by refugee support groups, the government also initiated a '**Spend to Save**' initiative which aimed to reduce the backlog of asylum applications and appeals.

Nearly 70% of Britain's refugees live in Greater London, largely because this is where most arrive and are detained, but also because the refugee support agencies are concentrated in the capital and employment opportunities are relatively good. However, nearly 50% of all refugees in Britain remain unemployed one year after gaining such status and a large percentage of asylum seekers never gain full time employment. Faced with a very different culture, and often unable to speak English, refugees often fail to take advantage of the limited support and services which are available.

As can be seen in Fig 2, asylum applications fluctuate, for it has usually been the case that, in the year following large increases in the number of applicants, the government has introduced new legislation in order to limit future applications. In 1992, for example, new measures were introduced to deter multiple and other fraudulent applications and applications fell over the next two years. Refugee agencies now believe that there is a **climate of disbelief** in considering asylum applicants and argue that it is far too difficult for asylum seekers to prove that their fear of persecution is justified. Refugee agencies have argued that as a result of the relaxation of travel restrictions within EU countries, these countries have tightened their entry procedures to non-EU citizens.

Table 3 summarises the main measures used to restrict the number of refugees who enter Britain and other European countries.

Table 3. European control of refugees

Visa	Visas must be stamped in the applicant's passport. Often, these must be obtained from the citizen's embassy or from the embassy of the country which they wish to visit. For many asylum seekers, both home and foreign embassies are dangerous places to visit.
Single Application Rule	Refugee agencies have claimed that asylum seekers are now unofficially only allowed to apply to one European country. If that application is rejected, then it is believed that other EU countries will automatically reject the application. This, it is claimed, has led to a group of asylum seekers called ' refugees in orbit '.
The Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987	Airlines are fined £2,500 for every person they bring into Britain without the correct travel documentation. Since 1987, the British government has fined airlines £17 million.
1951 UN Convention	Asylum seekers must be able to provide documentary evidence proving their fear of persecution.
Transit through "safe" countries	Applicants who arrive in the UK, having travelled through another country deemed to be "safe" may now be returned to that country for a decision on their asylum application.

Acknowledgements;

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