

## The European Refugee Convention?

### Basic facts about international protection in today's world

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The Geneva Refugee Convention (GRC) will turn 70 years on 28 July 2021. It is not going to be a happy birthday party.

When the GRC was negotiated at a special UN conference in Geneva in July 1951, it was still focused on the past. Its concern was refugees “who had to flee as a result of events that occurred before January 1, 1951” and who had “a well-founded fear of persecution”. States that ratified it could choose whether for them this referred only to events “in Europe” or “in Europe and elsewhere”. Furthermore, according to its statutes, the UNHCR, which was founded in 1950, was also able to develop procedures for determining refugee status elsewhere, *even in states that had not ratified the GRC*. It was not until 1967 that the scope of the GRC was extended in terms of time and geography to the future and the whole world through the “Protocol on the Legal Status of Refugees.”

To date, 149 states have acceded to the Convention or the Protocol (the United Nations has 193 members). But the appearance of a global consensus is deceptive. In fact, only a small number of states support the GRC. Most of them are in Europe. Large Asian states such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Thailand have neither ratified the convention nor the protocol. The same is true for most of the Middle East, from Saudi Arabia to Jordan and Lebanon. When it comes to the resettlement of those given protection by the UNHCR around the world, entire continents are white spots, as the annual reports of the UNHCR show. Japan ratified the Refugee Convention in 1981, but in the last seven years (2013–2019) only approved 657 asylum applications. China ratified the Refugee Convention in 1982 and has not yet adopted an asylum law or created an asylum authority.

Of the five countries with the highest number of asylum applications in the past seven years, four were in Europe: Germany (followed by the US), then Turkey, France and Italy. The top ten countries also include two small European ones: Greece and Sweden. The future of the impact of this convention thus still depends strongly on decisions taken by governments in Europe.

## Facts about asylum and refugees in the world

The tables in this paper, based on the annual Global Trends reports issued by UNHCR, show the state of asylum in our world before the pandemic struck in 2020. Between 2013 and 2019:

- *14 million asylum applications* were submitted worldwide.
- *4.2 million people received international protection following an asylum procedure* worldwide.
- Germany, Sweden and Austria gave international protection following an asylum procedure to 1.4 million people, one third of the global total.
- Between 2013 and 2019 more than half of all positive asylum decisions made worldwide were made in European democracies: EU member states, UK, Switzerland and Norway.
- Japan gave protection to 657 people in this period. China to zero. Sweden gave protection to more people, 223,000, than ten high- and middle-income countries with a combined population of 3.8 billion did.

*Sweden, international protection given, compared to 10 other states 2013-2019*

<b>Sweden</b>	<b>223,361</b>
Egypt	58,672
South Africa	25,427
Mexico	25,424
India	24,150
Indonesia	14,663
Pakistan	8,256
Thailand	8,117
South Korea	2,521
Japan	657
China	0

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Already, the number of people who receive protection worldwide following a refugee status determination process fell from 900,000 to 530,000 between 2016 and 2019. This reflects a simple reality: fewer potential refugees reach countries ready and capable to recognize their status.

### Increase in number of refugees hosted 2013-2019

Host country	2013	2019	Increase
Turkey	609,938	3,579,531	2,969,593
Uganda	220,555	1,359,464	1,138,909
Germany	187,567	1,146,685	959,118
Sudan	124,328	1,055,489	931,161
Bangladesh	31,145	854,782	823,637
Dem. Rep. of the Congo	113,362	523,734	410,372
Ethiopia	433,936	733,125	299,189
Cameroon	107,346	406,260	298,914
France	232,487	407,923	175,436
Tanzania	102,099	242,171	140,072
Sweden	114,175	253,794	139,619
Italy	78,061	207,619	129,558
Niger	57,661	180,006	122,345
Iran	857,354	979,435	122,081
Austria	55,598	135,955	80,357
United States	263,662	341,711	78,049
Rwanda	73,349	145,057	71,708
South Sudan	229,587	298,313	68,726
Lebanon	856,546	916,156	59,610
Jordan	641,915	693,684	51,769
Russia	3,458	42,433	38,975
Malaysia	96,868	127,940	31,072
Egypt	230,086	258,401	28,315
Iraq	246,298	273,992	27,694
Yemen	241,288	268,511	27,223
South Africa	65,881	89,285	23,404
Netherlands	74,707	94,430	19,723
Chad	434,479	442,672	8,193
India	188,395	195,105	6,710
China	301,047	303,381	2,334
Canada	160,349	101,760	-58,589
Kenya	534,938	438,901	-96,037
Syria	149,292	16,213	-133,079
Pakistan	1,616,507	1,419,606	-196,901
<b>Others</b>	<b>1,269,598</b>	<b>1,687,657</b>	<b>418,059</b>
<b>WORLD</b>	<b>11,003,862</b>	<b>20,221,181</b>	<b>9,217,319</b>

Colours indicate income levels 2019 (<https://www.gapminder.org/tools> for 2019):

Level 1: 0-2 USD per day:
Level 2: 2-8 USD per day:
Level 3: 8-32 USD per day:
Level 4: above 32 USD per day:

### Asylum applications 2013-2019

Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Germany	109,600	173,100	441,900	722,400	198,300	161,931	137,318	1,944,549
USA	84,400	121,300	172,700	262,000	331,700	254,272	248,822	1,475,194
Turkey	44,800	87,800	133,300	78,600	126,100	83,818	54,132	608,550
France	60,200	59,000	74,200	78,400	93,000	114,519	122,578	601,897
Italy	25,700	63,700	83,200	123,000	126,500	48,451	33,484	504,035
Peru	440	392	432	4,366	34,167	192,501	259,696	491,994
Russia	4,700	274,744	152,489	26,409	14,086	7,875	7,398	487,701
Sweden	54,300	75,100	156,400	22,400	21,500	17,983	16,866	364,549
Greece	8,200	9,400	11,400	49,800	57,000	64,985	73,478	274,263
South Africa	70,000	71,900	62,200	35,400	24,200	8,397	0	272,097
UK	29,900	32,300	38,900	38,500	33,500	37,453	42,220	252,773
Spain	4,513	5,947	14,881	16,544	31,731	55,667	116,906	246,189
Canada	10,400	13,700	16,600	43,639	47,800	55,385	46,978	234,502
Brazil	4,724	8,950	14,770	10,288	33,770	79,997	80,901	233,400
Uganda	18,800	32,400	35,900	30,300	57,300	19,667	33,290	227,657
Austria	17,500	25,700	85,800	39,900	22,500	13,746	11,403	216,549
Malaysia	54,300	25,700	22,100	20,100	23,700	23,782	26,757	196,439
Australia	16,000	15,200	16,100	33,500	36,200	28,839	25,468	171,307
Netherlands	14,399	21,811	43,071	27,772	14,899	20,501	20,136	162,589
Switzerland	19,440	22,113	39,523	32,703	16,665	17,983	11,988	160,415
Egypt	10,752	9,996	21,121	28,539	27,810	22,963	22,986	144,167
Kenya	19,238	21,519	15,766	36,738	19,025	19,397	12,340	122,504
Belgium	12,500	13,900	39,100	14,700	14,000	18,145	8,964	121,309
Mexico	1,296	1,524	3,423	1,350	14,596	29,623	69,432	121,244
Jordan	6,667	29,059	19,375	24,851	10,555	10,438	1,127	102,072
Japan	3,260	5,000	7,586	7,358	19,650	10,493	9,601	62,948
Israel	1,400	226	0	11,677	15,368	16,263	8,879	53,813
Tanzania	400	1,000	1,700	6,700	36,500	1,783	0	48,083
Zambia	2,618	1,262	2,965	3,949	18,194	11,306	7,733	48,027
<b>Others</b>	340,942	433,064	1,367,374	344,183	428,831	697,427	540,181	4,152,002
<b>WORLD*</b>	1,051,389	1,635,288	3,094,276	2,176,066	1,949,147	2,145,590	2,051,062	<b>14,102,818</b>

\* World totals include repeat applications, country totals are only new applications.

### Where international protection is given

Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	TOTAL
Germany	20,128	40,563	143,548	443,210	256,284	72,435	89,059	1,065,227
Russia	1,688	250,307	149,662	22,034	10,433	6,043	5,762	445,929
Sweden	26,817	32,347	55,647	68,090	24,662	9,258	6,540	223,361
France	11,383	21,093	26,828	36,624	34,999	38,235	35,553	204,715
Uganda	11,112	17,363	31,982	18,754	58,811	19,877	46,112	204,011
USA	21,171	23,448	23,960	20,437	23,095	30,559	41,472	184,142
Italy	14,392	20,582	29,614	35,404	31,798	30,660	17,734	180,184
Austria	5,952	11,351	16,891	26,006	28,848	18,887	11,221	119,156
Malaysia	14,495	12,378	8,505	19,906	18,629	21,049	16,016	110,978
Turkey	14,160	22,454	15,165	18,423	15,351	4,905	5,270	95,728
Canada	7,817	9,943	9,171	10,226	12,798	16,355	24,663	90,973
UK	10,629	11,874	17,143	15,088	8,555	10,085	17,224	90,598
Switzerland	7,173	14,123	13,486	12,835	14,199	14,926	10,069	86,811
Netherlands	10,618	13,250	16,000	19,597	6,121	3,213	4,283	73,082
Greece	1,413	3,852	5,872	8,539	10,364	15,189	17,119	62,348
Belgium	6,676	8,479	11,062	15,514	12,575	4,590	3,061	61,957
Egypt	4,142	4,289	7,539	6,882	10,631	8,583	16,606	58,672
Spain	532	1,583	1,020	6,869	4,818	3,173	38,000	55,995
Burundi	7,342	6,781	3,226	5,139	5,482	10,570	8,882	47,422
Kenya	6,089	4,909	5,817	5,699	38	16,579	6,212	45,343
Zambia	763	801	2,047	2,128	15,581	12,385	5,698	39,403
Australia	5,035	2,540	3,106	6,567	7,323	9,552	3,507	37,630
Norway	6,823	5,076	6,390	12,147	3,915	1,338	1,553	37,242
Jordan	3,258	13,752	13,322	1,367	2,226	1,612	650	36,187
Denmark	3,291	5,670	10,203	7,359	2,322	1,284	1,622	31,751
Sudan	7,611	4,258	4,570	4,862	4,509	3,754	1,844	31,408
South Africa	7,392	9,298	2,617	3,222	2,267	631	0	25,427
Mexico	301	0	1,081	3,282	2,825	5,921	12,014	25,424
India	4,835	4,346	2,663	3,230	4,312	1,680	3,084	24,150
Finland	1,827	1,346	1,502	6,375	3,199	2,093	2,170	18,512
Cameroon	104	4,021	6,005	2,907	1,203	2,402	1,522	18,164
Indonesia	2,420	2,457	2,416	3,216	2,580	1,455	119	14,663
Pakistan	2,186	2,111	2,496	1,274	150	18	21	8,256
Thailand,	1,438	1,613	1,127	3,037	674	10	218	8,117
Venezuela	725	724	1,211	1,308	15	615	248	4,846
Hungary	356	476	502	425	1,216	349	5	3,329
South Korea	63	633	234	305	439	632	215	2,521
Japan	158	122	106	125	64	65	17	657
<b>Others</b>	35,723	24,864	25,598	21,136	89,153	99,140	74,588	<b>370,202</b>
<b>WORLD</b>	288,038	615,077	679,334	899,548	732,464	500,107	529,953	<b>4,244,521</b>

### States hosting most refugees in 2019

Country	Number	Percent
Turkey	3,579,531	17.7
Pakistan	1,419,606	7.0
Uganda	1,359,464	6.7
Germany	1,146,685	5.7
Sudan	1,055,489	5.2
Iran	979,435	4.9
Lebanon	916,156	4.5
Bangladesh	854,782	4.2
Ethiopia	733,125	3.6
Jordan	693,684	3.4
Dem. Rep. of the Congo	523,734	2.6
Chad	442,672	2.2
Kenya	438,901	2.2
France	407,923	2.0
Cameroon	406,260	2.0
United States	341,711	1.7
China	303,381	1.5
South Sudan	298,313	1.5
Iraq	273,992	1.4
Yemen	268,511	1.3
Egypt	258,401	1.3
Sweden	253,794	1.3
Tanzania	242,171	1.2
Italy	207,619	1.0
India	195,105	1.0
Niger	180,006	0.9
Rwanda	145,057	0.7
Austria	135,955	0.7
Malaysia	127,940	0.6
Canada	101,760	0.5
Netherlands	94,430	0.7
South Africa	89,285	0.4
Russia	42,433	0.2
Syria	16,213	0.1
<b>Others</b>	1,687,657	8.3
<b>WORLD</b>	20,221,181	100.0

All numbers in these tables are taken from [UNHCR's annual Global Trends Reports](#).