

Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the EU

URBÁN Ferenc¹

The study aims at describing the global asylum related tendencies laying focus first on the international trends and after this it introduces the reader into the asylum related trends in the EU and in Hungary.

Keywords: *asylum seekers, European Union, statistical data*

In terms of global trends of asylum seekers and refugees, 2016 could be called the year of records. Although the number of asylum seekers reached its peak in the European Union, this number still remains much higher in other parts of the world.

Global Trends

According to the latest available data of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) there were 65.6 million² people at the end of 2016 who sought for asylum in the world because of persecution, armed conflict, and generalized violence or human rights violations. This number incorporates the recognized refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons beyond the scope of UNHCR, too. If this, a little bit more than 65 million people, were citizen of one single country then this country would be the twenty-first most populous country of the world and its population number would be almost equal with the population of France or the United Kingdom.

The number of recognized refugees and persons in a refugee like situation under the scope of UNHCR³ has increased significantly in the last six years; it was 10.4 million at the end of 2011 and it was more than 22.5 million⁴ by the end of 2016 which was the highest registered number in the last twenty years.

By the end of 2016 the biggest countries of origins refugees were still the countries with generalized violence: The Syrian Arab Republic (5.5 million persons)⁵ and Afghanistan (2.9 million persons).

There have been fights between different armed groups in Syria for six years, under which especially the civilian population suffered. According to the latest data

¹ URBÁN Ferenc, statistician for social statistics, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, Unit for migration statistics. ORCID: 0000-0001-7165-5643. ferenc.urban1980@gmail.com

² Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2016, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, latest global available data: www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5943e8a34/global-trends-forced-displacement-2016.html (Downloaded: 04.07.2017.)

³ List of countries signed the Geneva Protocol of 1951 and 1967 is available under the following link: www.unhcr.org/3b73b0d63.html (Downloaded: 04.07.2017.)

⁴ Including 5.3 million Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's mandate.

⁵ From whom 4.9 million are under the mandate of UNHCR.

the number of internally displaced persons reached 6.3 million people in December 2016,⁶ the number of people in need reached 13.5 million. The number of persons fled from Syria who are either recognized refugees or registered asylum seekers and await registration is estimated to reach about 4.9 million people reported by ECHO.⁷

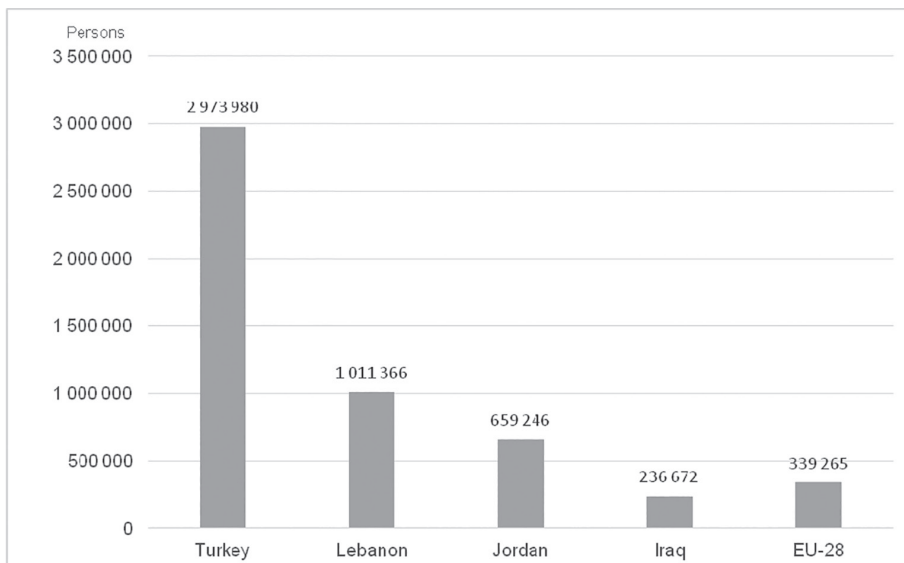


Diagram 1. Number of persons fled from Syria seeking for asylum in the neighbouring countries and in the EU-28 countries, December 2016 (Source: Data of European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, 2017 and Eurostat. Available: www.ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf and www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat [Downloaded: 04.07.2017.]

Hosting more than three million Syrian fled from their home country, Turkey received the biggest number of Syrian asylum seekers – although comparing to its total population the ratio of Syrian asylum seekers is bigger in Lebanon, where about one-sixth of the total population (5.8 million persons) is from Syria (1.0 million). Furthermore, numerous asylum seekers claiming themselves as Syrian citizens do not apply for asylum in the neighbouring countries but they do in Europe.

Worldwide on the imaginary list of countries of origin (following Syria and Afghanistan) is Somalia with 1.1 million people seeking for asylum. People originating from Somalia sought for asylum in huge numbers in Kenya (324,400 persons), in Yemen (255,000 persons) and in Ethiopia (242,000 persons).

⁶ Syria Crisis Bi-Weekly Situation Report No. 19. 12 December 2016.

⁷ European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection. Available: www.ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east-north-africa/syria_en (Downloaded: 04.07.2017.)

The number of persons who left their home because of the armed conflict in South-Sudan increased in 2016 to 778,000, most of them found shelter in Uganda (639,000 persons), in Ethiopia (338,800 persons) and in Sudan (297,200 persons). Other big countries of origin were Sudan (650,600), the Democratic Republic of Congo (537,000 persons), the Central African Republic (490,900 asylum seekers), Myanmar (490,900 persons) and Eritrea (459,400 asylum seekers) in 2016.

Half of the ten biggest receiving countries can be found in Africa, in the Sub-Sahara region.⁸ On the second diagram those countries are represented where the number of refugees and persons in a refugee-like situation was one of the highest according to UNHCR's definition.

Most of the countries which ensure refugee status or status similar to refugee status⁹ located either in Asia or in Africa and belong to the developing or less developed countries while the number of refugees in the developed countries is much less.

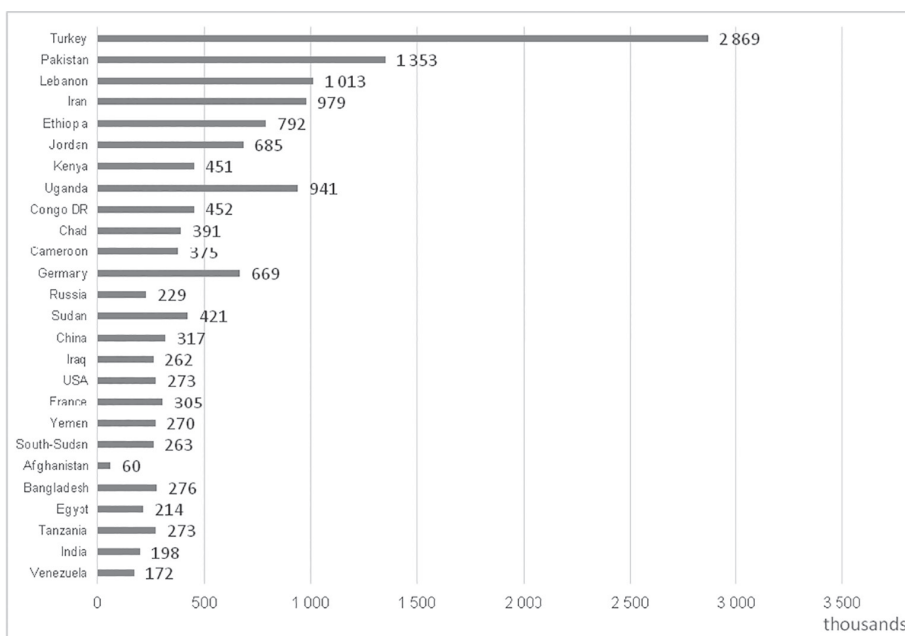


Diagram 2. Recognized refugees and persons in a refugee-like situation in selected receiving countries 2016 (Source: Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2016, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Available: www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5943e8a34/global-trends-forced-displacement-2016.html [Downloaded: 04.07.2017.]

⁸ According to data published by UNHCR in June 2016.

⁹ According to UNHCR this category is descriptive in nature and includes groups of persons who are outside their country or territory of origin and who face protection risks similar to those of refugees, but for whom refugee status has, for practical or other reasons, not been ascertained.

Countries of Origin of Asylum Seekers Arriving in the EU

In 2016 the number of registered asylum seekers reached a high peak in the European Union. The number of first and repeated asylum applications was over 1.2 million in 2016. 28% of persons applied for asylum in the European Union are still Syrian citizen. Lot of asylum seekers applied for asylum from Afghanistan (15% of the total applications) and Iraq (11% of the total applications)¹⁰ and a lot of asylum seekers were registered from Pakistan and Nigeria (from both countries 4%) as well.

At the beginning of 2015 a huge number of asylum seekers were registered from Kosovo in the European Union (mostly in Hungary and in Germany). Following this tendency, the lodged asylum applications from Kosovo decreased by the second quarter of 2015 but since the first half of 2015 the phenomenon of so called mixed migration flows became more significant in the European Union. Later the biggest relative fall in the number of applicants, among the most common countries of citizenship for asylum seekers in 2016, was recorded for Albania and Kosovo. One of the main characteristics of the mixed migration flows is that among groups of persons fled from wars there can be found persons as irregular migrants and asylum seekers who do not flee from persecution and war but because of their depriving financial situation.

More than three-fourth of persons applied for asylum in the European Union – according to their citizenship – arrived from only 12 countries in 2016.

Table 1. Number of asylum applications in the EU-28 countries according to their country of citizenship 2010–2016 (The number of first and repeated asylum applications together, for the year 2016. Source of data: Eurostat.)

Country of citizenship	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total	259 400	309 040	335 290	431 090	626 960	1 321 600	1 259 955
Syria	5 010	8 145	24 115	49 980	122 065	368 400	339 265
Afghanistan	20 600	28 160	28 020	26 215	41 405	181 360	186 595
Iraq	15 830	15 230	13 190	10 740	21 365	124 905	130 015
Pakistan	9 220	16 265	19 785	20 850	22 220	47 840	49 840
Nigeria	6 805	13 075	7 520	11 670	20 065	31 165	47 710
Iran	10 340	11 890	13 600	12 680	10 905	26 550	41 340
Eritrea	4 540	5 725	6 400	14 485	36 945	34 105	34 480
Albania	1 925	3 080	7 500	11 065	16 950	67 740	32 385
Somalia	14 360	12 370	14 280	16 510	16 490	21 005	20 050
Serbia	17 740	14 105	19 055	22 360	30 840	30 050	13 185

¹⁰ According to the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs these countries are still not recommended for Hungarian citizens as a travel destination. Available: www.konzuliszolgalat.kormany.hu/utazasra-nem-javasolt-tersegek (Downloaded: 04.07.2017.)

Country of citizenship	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Ukraine	830	940	1 095	1 055	14 060	22 050	12 475
Kosovo	14 310	9 880	10 210	20 225	37 890	72 465	11 680
Other	137 890	170 175	170 520	213 255	235 760	293 965	340 935

In the table above there can be found citizens of countries where there is not an ongoing war, though these countries belong to the relevant countries of sources. (For instance: Nigeria, Iran and Pakistan).¹¹

Countries of Destinations of Asylum Seekers in the EU

In 2016 the highest number of asylum applications were submitted in Germany among the MSs of the EU, the second country on the list of asylum applications was Italy and the third was France – in 2015 this situation was quite different while Hungary was ranked as the second on this list and Sweden was ranked as the third country.

According to the statistical table it can be concluded that the total number of asylum seekers in the European Union remains still high and the change in the ranking is mostly due to the changes in the border regimes which were introduced in 2015 by some of the MSs of the Schengen Area.¹²

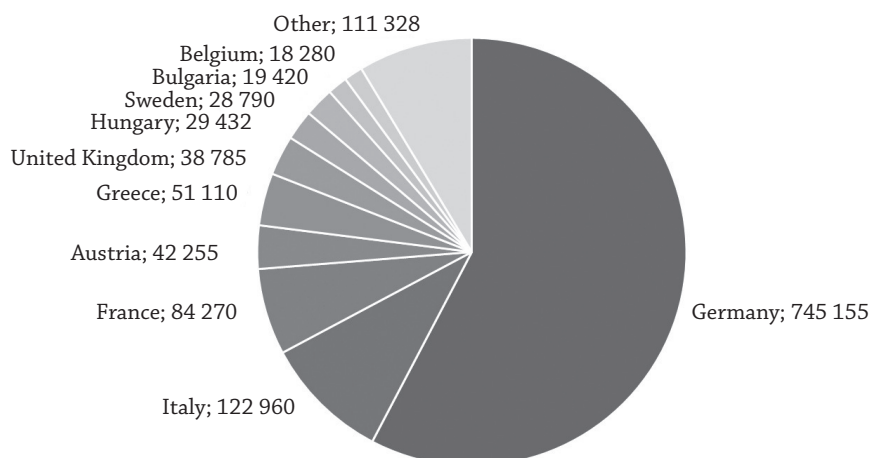


Diagram 3. Number of asylum applications in the EU-28 MSs by main receiving countries in 2016 (Source: Eurostat database. Available: www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database [Downloaded: 04.07.2017.]

¹¹ According to the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

¹² See Border fence at the Hungarian–Serbian border implemented in 2015 or temporary border control at the Schengen Borders in some of the MSs.

The biggest receiving countries of asylum seekers have been continuously for decades the same group of countries, most probably because of the vital diaspora, the higher standard of living and the better reception system. 95% of all asylum applications registered in the EU were lodged in 10 main MSs. The number of asylum applications have increased continuously between 2010 and 2016 almost five times.

According to the latest available data 1,291,785 asylum applications were lodged in the 28 MSs of the European Union. While examining the data, it has to be taken into consideration that in the single countries of the European Union the statistical observation of the first time asylum applications and the repeated applications according to Article 4 of regulation 862/2007 EC is distinct but this diversification is not possible for the whole European Union.

An asylum seeker can apply for asylum in Hungary and not waiting for the outcome of the procedure he or she can leave the country for instance and lodge an asylum application in Austria and afterwards in Germany or in Sweden. The asylum application is counted as first time asylum application in each of the MSs, and his or her applications lodged in the different countries are added together because in the European Union there is not any common system for registration of asylum applications.

The reason of establishing this system can be found in the idea that the stakeholders involved in the development of the European asylum regulations thought that the asylum seekers will stay in the country where they applied for asylum. The number of the repeated asylum applications in the same country is quite low, it is about 10% of the total asylum applications. Generally, it is hard to estimate the quantity of this phenomenon for the whole European Union but according to experts it can be more frequent than repeating the application in the same country.

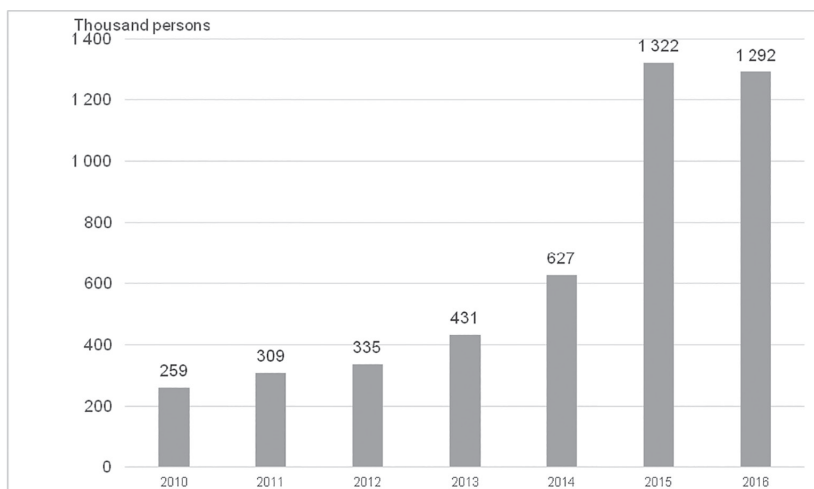


Diagram 4. Asylum applications in the EU-28 MSs 2010–2016 (Source: Eurostat database. Available: www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database [Downloaded: 04.07.2017.])

Unaccompanied Minor Asylum Applicants

One of the most relevant phenomena of the latest asylum flow is the significant increase in number of unaccompanied minor asylum applicants. They constitute one of the most vulnerable groups of asylum seekers, and that is why a special focus has to be laid on them. In 2016 63,290 unaccompanied minor asylum applicants were registered in the EU, it is six times higher than the registered 11–13 thousand applications by unaccompanied minors between 2008 and 2013.

A significant majority of the unaccompanied minors was male (90%) and half of them was citizen of Afghanistan. Most of them, 57% (35,935 persons) were registered in Germany, it follows Italy with a ratio of 10% (6,020 persons) of the asylum applications lodged by unaccompanied minors in the European Union. The Hungarian authorities registered 1,220 unaccompanied minor asylum applications (less than 2% of the asylum applications lodged by unaccompanied minors in the European Union). In Hungary the majority of the unaccompanied asylum applicants left the country before the end of the asylum procedure.

Number of Asylum Applications Registered in Hungary

Because of its geographical situation on the continent, Hungary is mainly a transit country for the irregular migrants; due to this, the number of asylum applications in Hungary is in strong correlation with the number of irregular migrants and potentially asylum seekers in the main, “classic” receiving countries.

After the peak in number of asylum applications lodged in Hungary in 2015 due to the implementation of the border fence at the southern border of Hungary which became functional on the 15th of September 2015 at the Hungarian–Serbian border and at the Hungarian–Croatian border it is functional from the 16th of October 2015, the number of asylum applications have declined in 2016. The declining tendency in number of asylum applications can originate in the EU–Turkey deal too. Due to these changes in the Hungarian migration policy, the number of asylum applications began to increase slightly in the second quarter of 2016, possibly because of the better weather conditions but after introducing new, stricter regime in the so called “transit zones” at the Hungarian–Serbian border, from the third quarter the numbers began to fall.

The lower numbers of asylum applications can be originated on the one hand in changes in the migration routes and on the other hand in changes in the migration policy.

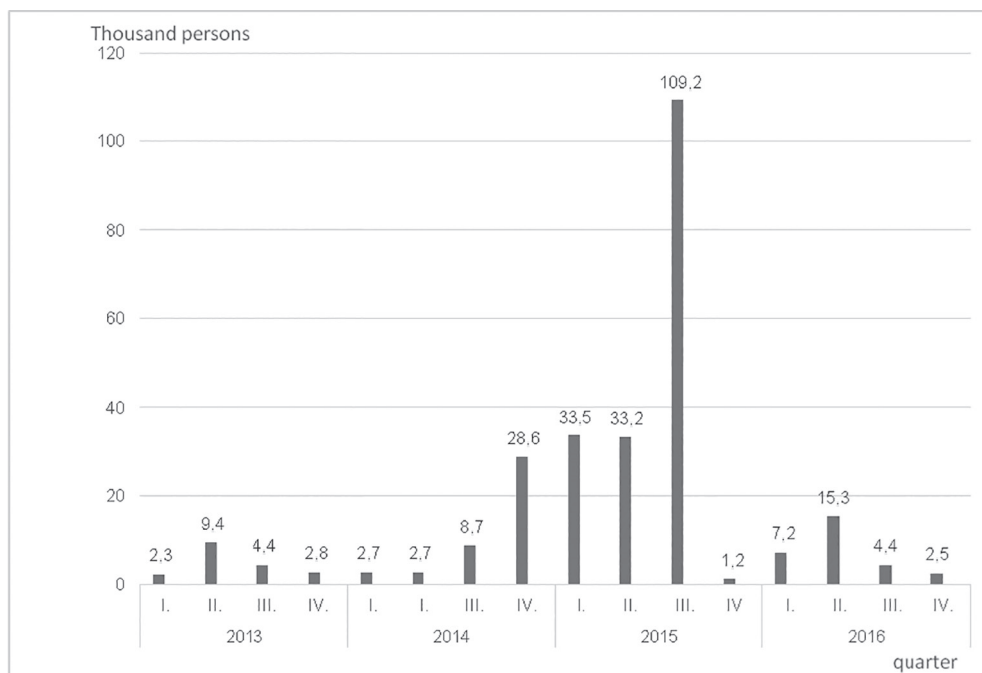


Diagram 5. Number of asylum applications registered in Hungary
(Source of data: Immigration and Asylum Office.)

The majority of the asylum seekers arrived in Hungary were citizens of Afghanistan in 2016 which means a change in the tendency comparing with the previous year where the number one country of origin was Syria.

Hungary’s Role Affecting the Asylum Situation in the European Union

Table 2. Number of asylum applications registered in Hungary disaggregated by main countries of origin (Source of data: Immigration and Asylum Office.)

Country of origin	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total	2 104	1 693	2 157	18 900	4 277	177 135	29 432
Syria	23	91	145	977	6 857	64 587	4 979
Afghanistan	702	649	880	2 328	8 796	46 227	11 052

Country of origin	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Kosovo	379	211	226	6 212	21 453	24 454	135
Pakistan	41	121	327	3 081	401	15 157	3 873
Iraq	48	54	28	63	497	9 279	3 452
Bangladesh	4	3	15	679	252	4 059	279
Iran	62	33	45	61	268	1 792	1 286

In 2016 like in previous years the majority of persons who applied for asylum in Hungary has absconded before the end of the asylum procedure and applied for asylum in another EU country. This phenomenon is illustrated sensibly by the ratio of asylum applications and decisions taken. The ratio of asylum cases where a decision could be taken is in Hungary the lowest comparing the other EU MSs, this means that the applicant was not present for the asylum authority in the later phases of the procedure. It can be outlined that a vast majority of asylum applicants sees Hungary as a transit country.

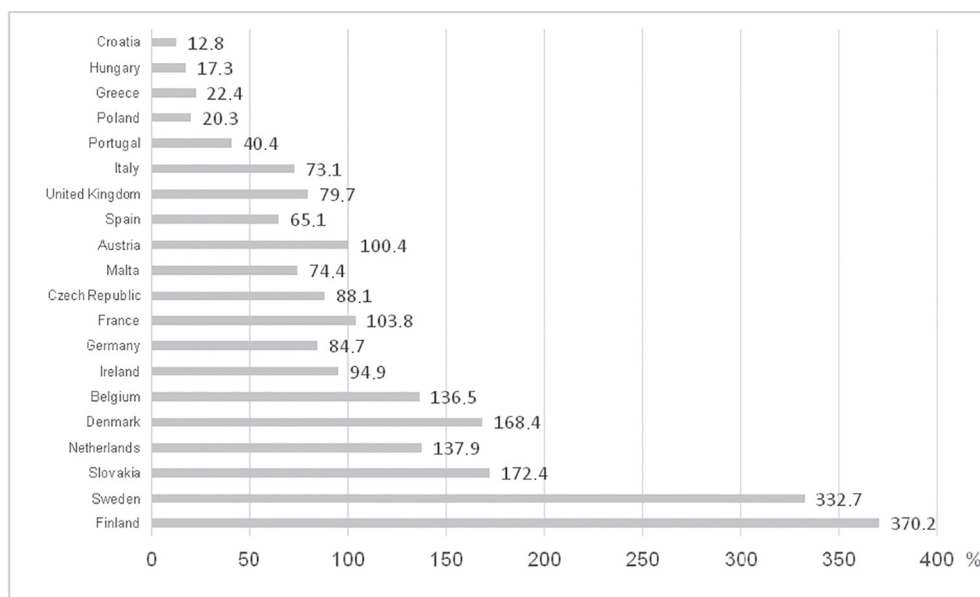


Diagram 7. Ratio of the registered asylum applications and decisions taken in selected countries of the European Union 2016 (Source of data: Eurostat.)

* Values above 100% are possible if the application was lodged before the reference year but the decision was taken in 2016¹³

¹³ Source of data: Eurostat.

In some MSs (e.g. in Finland and in Sweden) the ratio of applications and the decisions taken is almost 400% which is because of the practice that these MSs experienced in the previous years and especially in 2015, a high increase in number of asylum applications and in the last year these countries speeded up their procedures and introduced prioritised procedure.

The number of persons recognized as refugee or taken under subsidiary protection by the asylum authority did not increase although the number of applications was significantly higher than it was typical in the previous years. Between 2012 and 2016 – except the year 2013 – the number of asylum applications was about 500 persons and regarding their nationalities, the recognized persons had Syrian, Afghan or Somalian citizenship.

Table 4. Number of persons taken under refugee status and subsidiary protection (Source of data: Immigration and Asylum Office.)

Type of protection¹⁴	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Recognized refugee	83	52	87	198	240	146	154
Subsidiary protection	132	139	328	217	236	356	271
Humanitarian reasons	58	14	47	4	7	6	7
Total	273	188	462	419	483	508	432

The stock number of recognized refugees and persons taken under subsidiary protection who are entitled to leave the country was 4,400 persons on the 1st of January 2016, which means 0.04% of the total population; at the same time the number of persons taken under international protection in the European Union was 408 persons, which means 0.08% of its population.

Although Europe can experience a huge increase in the numbers related to asylum statistics but these figures in comparison to the figures registered on the other continents are just a snatch of those data.

It must be added that the recently seen changes in figures of procedures related to asylum are mostly influenced by the implemented border controls on the Schengen external borders and by the temporarily reintroduced border controls between some of the Schengen States.

¹⁴ By the asylum authority.

REFERENCES

- United High Commissionaire for Refugees, *Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2016*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Available: www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5943e8a34/global-trends-forced-displacement-2016.html (Downloaded: 04.07.2017)
- European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection. Available: www.ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east-north-africa/syria_en (Downloaded: 04.07.2017)
- Eurostat, Eurostat database. Available: www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database (Downloaded: 04.07.2017)
- Immigration and Asylum Office. Available: www.bmbah.hu/index.php?lang=en (Downloaded: 04.07.2017.)