



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

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**Iraqis, Afghans and Somalis top list of asylum seekers in industrialized world**

GENEVA --Asylum applications in industrialized nations rose by 10 percent in the first half of 2009 compared to the same period last year, according to the UN refugee agency's provisional statistics released Wednesday. A total of 185,000 asylum claims were filed in the six months of this year across 38 European countries, the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and The Republic of Korea.

Iraq remains the top country of origin of the asylum applicants (13,200 claims) for the fourth consecutive year. Afghans (12,000 claims) and Somalis (11,000 claims) are the second and third largest groups as security conditions continue to deteriorate in large parts of their home countries. The other main countries of origin are China, Serbia (including Kosovo), the Russian Federation, Nigeria, Mexico, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

"These statistics show that ongoing violence and instability in some parts of the world force increasing numbers of people to flee and seek protection in safe countries," High Commissioner António Guterres said. "There is an acute need for countries to keep their asylum doors wide open to those who are in genuine need of international protection."

As a region, Europe received 75 percent of all asylum applications although the United States remained the single largest recipient country with an estimated 13 percent of all applications filed in industrialized nations (23,700). France ranks as the second recipient nation with 10 percent of all claims (19,400), followed by Canada (18,700), the United Kingdom (17,700) and Germany, ranked fifth (12,000).

Analyzing the trends, the UNHCR statistical report shows an uneven distribution of asylum claims. The majority of claims by Iraqis, for example, were submitted in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, as well as in neighbouring Turkey. Afghan claims were mostly filed in the United Kingdom or Norway, while Somalis mainly applied for asylum in the Netherlands, Sweden and Italy.

Policy changes may also affect asylum trends, according to the report. It cites the example of a sharp decline in Iraqi asylum claims in Sweden after a migration court ruled in 2007 that the situation in Iraq was not one of "armed conflict". The decision, the report says, may have shifted Iraqi applications to other countries such as Germany, Finland and Norway.

While the report focused on asylum trends during the first half of this year, the authors say the second semester might see a further increase in the number of claims, based on seasonal patterns over the past 10 years. The report also cautions that the number of applications does not necessarily equal the number of individuals because some people may have applied in more than one country in a given year or more than once in the same country.

The full report, "Asylum levels and trends in industrialized countries, first half 2009" can be found on UNHCR's website: <http://www.unhcr.org/4adebca49.html>

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