UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

EVOLVING TRENDS

AFGHAN ASYLUM APPLICATIONS & RECOGNITION RATES IN THE EU+

JULY 2026

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses trends in Afghan asylum applications and recognition rates in EU+ countries between January 2021 to March 2026. For the purposes of this paper, EU+ refers to European Union Member States, plus Norway and Switzerland. The analysis examines changes in the volume and profile of Afghan applicants- including children, women and girls, and unaccompanied children – as well as trends in first-instance asylum decisions and recognition rates in EU+ countries.

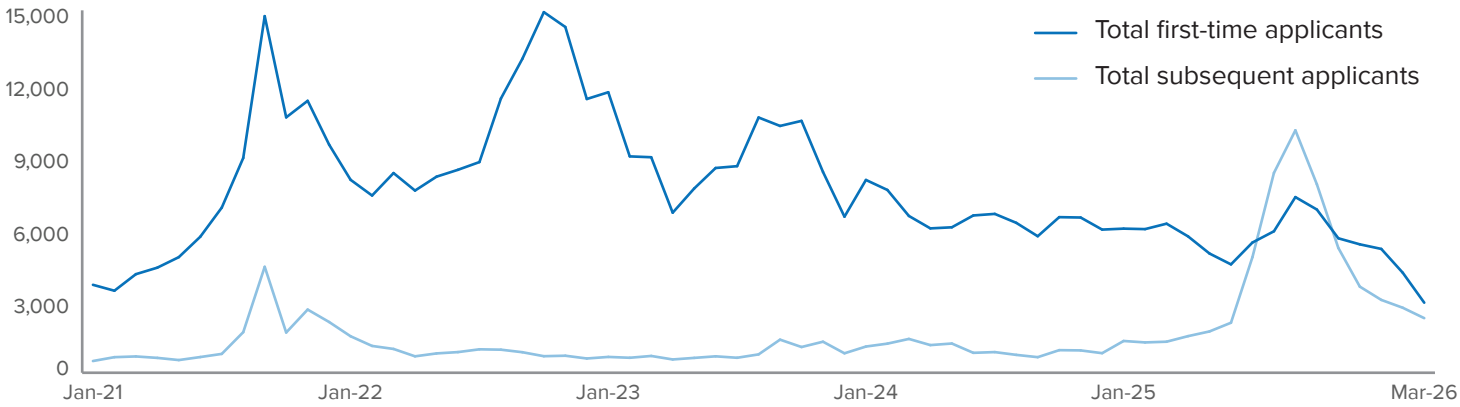
The analysis is based primarily on Eurostat data,[1] which is used to calculate Afghan application trends and recognition rates in the EU+. To contextualise and interpret these trends, the paper also draws on analysis from the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), including the Latest Asylum Trends series and related thematic products.

EUAA analyses are based on data from the Agency's Early Warning and Preparedness System (EPS). EPS data are provisional data shared by EU+ countries under agreed reporting timelines to provide near real-time estimates of asylum trends. As a result, EPS figures may differ from the final, validated data published by Eurostat. Throughout this paper, Eurostat data is used as the primary statistical source, while EUAA publications are used to provide context on the timing, drivers and composition of Afghan asylum trends.

OVERALL TRENDS IN AFGHAN APPLICATIONS

Afghan asylum applications in the EU+ followed a two-wave pattern between early 2021 – early 2026. At the beginning of 2021, monthly applications stood at around 4,000. From the first half of the year, they rose sharply, reaching a first peak of nearly 19,000 applications in September 2021. The rise occurred partly within a broader post-COVID recovery in asylum applications, as the easing of travel and administrative restrictions led to higher application levels across nationalities. However, the increase in Afghan applications in the second half of 2021 outpaced that of many other nationalities and coincided with the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 and the subsequent deterioration in the country's security, political and human-rights situation, particularly for women and girls. From August 2021 onwards, Afghans became the largest nationality applying for asylum in the EU+ on a monthly basis. Over 2021 as a whole, 102,000 Afghans applied for asylum, becoming the second-largest applicant group after Syrians. For both nationalities, application numbers reached their highest levels since Europe's 2015-2016 refugee crisis.[2]

Afghan first-time and subsequent asylum applicants in the EU+ | 2021 - Q1 2026



[1] Data extracted in April 2026.
[2] See Latest Asylum Trends - Annual Overview 2021 | European Union Agency for Asylum.

The 2021 increase in applications was followed by sustained high levels in 2022. Afghan applications did not return to the lower levels recorded at the beginning of 2021, reflecting continuing protection needs after the Taliban takeover. Conditions in Afghanistan became increasingly restrictive, particularly for women and girls, with growing limitations on access to education, employment, freedom of movement, public participation and access to rights.[3] This context contributed to displacement from Afghanistan and continued high asylum applications levels in the EU+.[4]

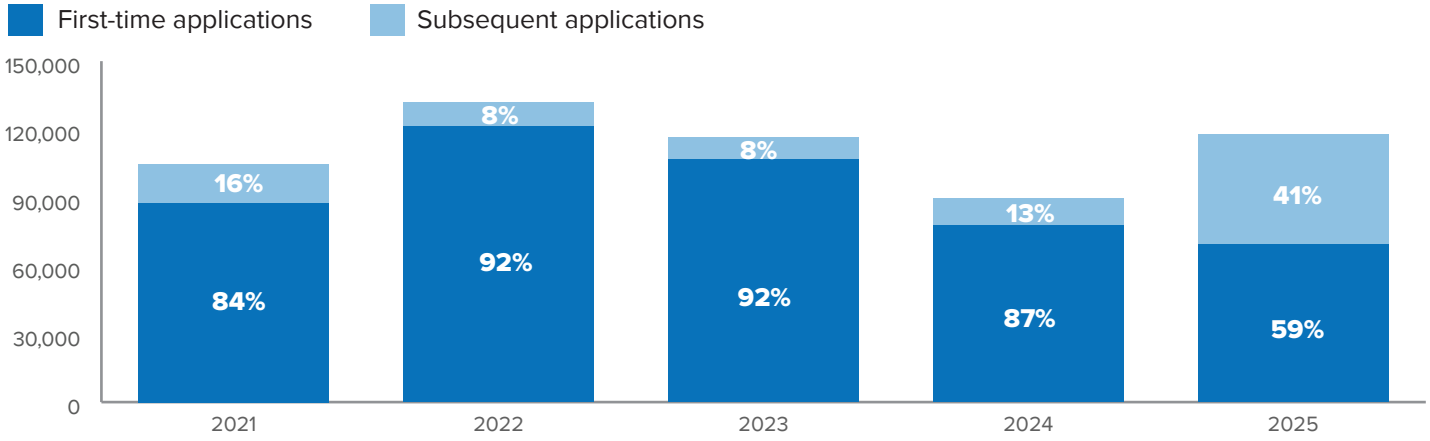
Annual Afghan applications peaked in 2022 with 133,500 applications, before declining to 117,500 in 2023 and 89,700 in 2024, although Afghans remained among the largest groups seeking asylum in the EU+. By 2024, monthly applications generally ranged between 7,000 to 8,000, well below the 2021-2022 peak, but still roughly double pre-Taliban takeover levels.[5]

A second increase emerged in 2025. Monthly applications rose during the middle of the year and exceeded 17,000 in September, before declining sharply towards the end of the year and in early 2026. This second rise was different from the 2021-2022 increase, driven largely by subsequent applications from Afghans already present in the EU+ rather than by a sustained rise in newly arriving first-time applicants (Figure 1).

The increase occurred against a backdrop of continued restrictions imposed by Afghanistan's de facto authorities. In August 2024, the so-called Law on the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice formalized and expanded restrictions on public life, including requirements relating to dress and limitations on women's presence and voices in public spaces.[6] Restrictions on women's access to education also persisted. In November 2024, medical graduation examinations were held without the participation of women for the second consecutive year, following the ban on women attending medical institutes introduced in December 2024.[7]

Irregular movement patterns provide additional context for these asylum trends. In 2023, Afghans remained among the most frequently detected nationalities on the Western Balkan, Eastern Mediterranean and Eastern Land border routes, as well as those departing irregularly towards the United Kingdom.[8] The same pattern continued during the first half of 2024, despite an overall decline in irregular border crossing detections. Together, these trends suggest that movements from and through Afghanistan towards Europe remained significant, even as annual asylum applications fell from their 2022 peak.

Afghan asylum applications in the EU+ by application type | 2021 - 2025



[3] See the timeline of 2021-2026 edicts and developments affecting Afghan women and girls on pages 9-11.
[4] See Asylum Report 2022 | European Union Agency for Asylum.
[5] See Latest Asylum Trends 2024 - Annual Analysis | European Union Agency for Asylum.
[6] See here.
[7] See Report – Afghanistan's human rights situation "continues to deteriorate dramatically" | OHCHR.
[8] See Latest Asylum Trends 2023 - Annual Analysis | European Union Agency for Asylum.

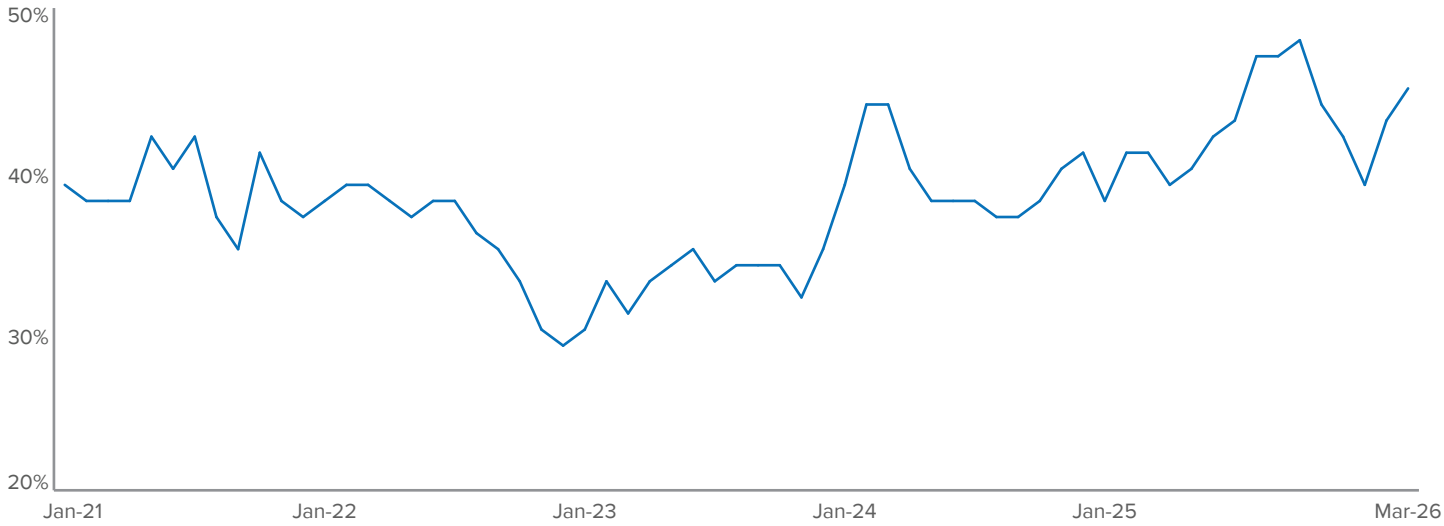
Legal and policy developments in several EU+ countries recognising Taliban-imposed restrictions on women and girls as a form of persecution were central to the 2025 increase in subsequent applications. EUAA Country Guidance on Afghanistan, adopted in 2023 and updated in 2024, concluded that Taliban-imposed restrictions on women and girls may amount to persecution. A 2024 ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union confirmed that Taliban restrictions on women can constitute persecution, meaning that Afghan women may qualify for refugee status on the basis of nationality and gender alone. Following these developments, many Afghan women and their family members who had previously been granted subsidiary or national forms of protection lodged subsequent applications seeking refugee status, which affords broader rights and protections, including family reunification. The surge was concentrated mainly in Germany, where authorities reported a sharp rise in Afghan women's asylum claims in mid-2025 and noted that nearly half were subsequent applications. On a smaller scale, there was also an increase in Austria in the first half of 2025.[9] As asylum applications by Syrian nationals fell sharply following the regime change in that country, Afghans became the nationality lodging the highest number of asylum applications in the EU+ in 2025.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN AMONG AFGHAN ASYLUM APPLICANTS

Children and female applicants represented a substantial share of the Afghan asylum-seeking population throughout the period. Figure 3 shows the proportion of children under 18 years of age among all Afghan applications in the EU+, while Figure 4 shows female applicants separately for first-time and subsequent applications. These groups are not mutually exclusive: Afghan girls are included in both groups. As a result, the percentages shown for children and female applicants should be interpreted separately and cannot be added together.

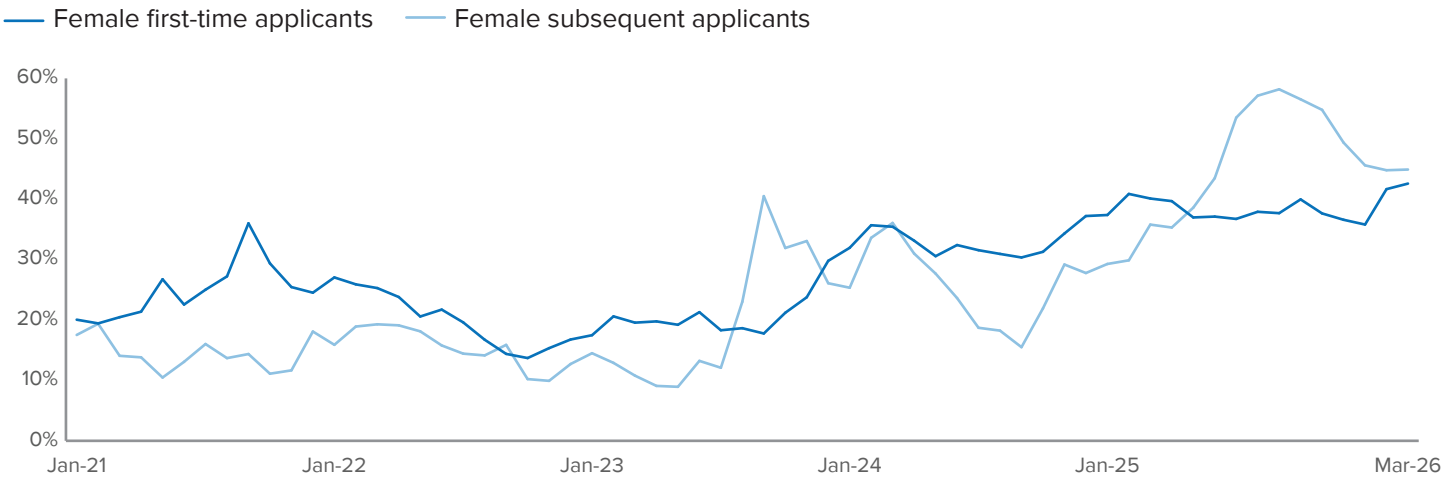
Children consistently accounted for a large share of Afghan applicants. Across 2021-2025, they represented 38 per cent of all Afghan asylum applicants in the EU+. Their numbers rose and fell broadly in line with overall application trends, indicating that family- and child-related protection needs remain a central feature of Afghan displacement to the EU+.

Composition of Afghan asylum applicants in the EU+: children under 18 | 2021 - Q1 2026

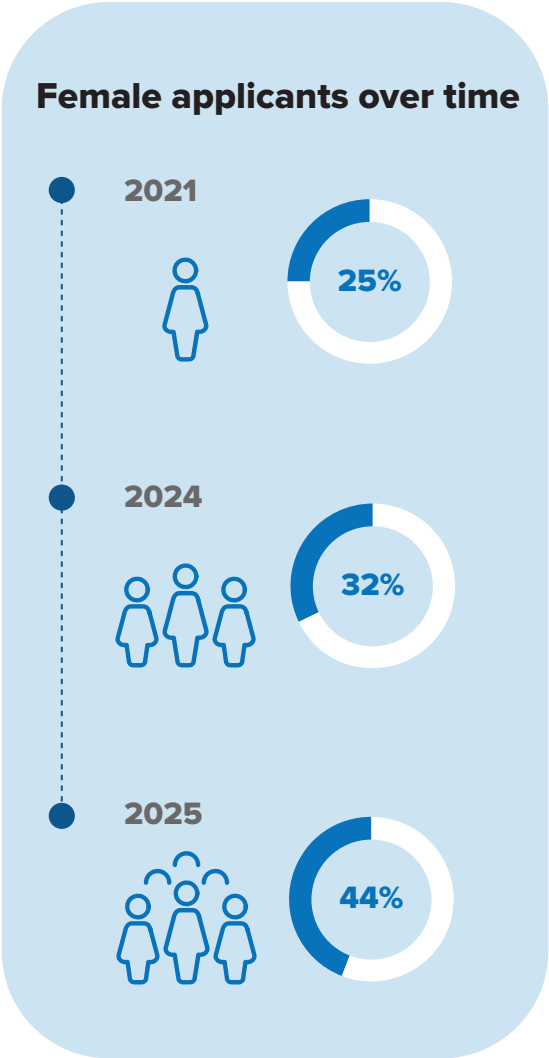


[9] See Latest Asylum Trends 2025: Annual Analysis | European Union Agency for Asylum.

Composition of Afghan female asylum applicants in the EU+: | 2021 - Q1 2026



The data show that the share of female Afghan applicants increased over time, but the breakdown by application type indicates that the rise was particularly pronounced among subsequent applications. Women and girls accounted for 25 per cent of all Afghan applicants in 2021, 32 per cent in 2024 and 44 per cent in 2025. However, the high overall share recorded in 2025 was driven largely by subsequent applications. Among subsequent applications, the female share rose from 29 per cent in January 2025 to 54 per cent in July, 57 per cent in August and a peak of 58 per cent in September, before remaining high at 56 per cent in October and 49 per cent in December. By contrast, the female share among first-time applications remained lower and more stable during the same period, mostly around 37 to 40 per cent. This suggests that the 2025 increase should not be interpreted only as a change in the profile of new arrivals or first-time applicants. It also reflects the growing role of subsequent applications by Afghan women and their family members already present in the EU+, following legal and policy developments in several countries recognising Taliban-imposed restrictions on women and girls as a form of persecution that may warrant refugee status.[10]



[10] See footnote 4.

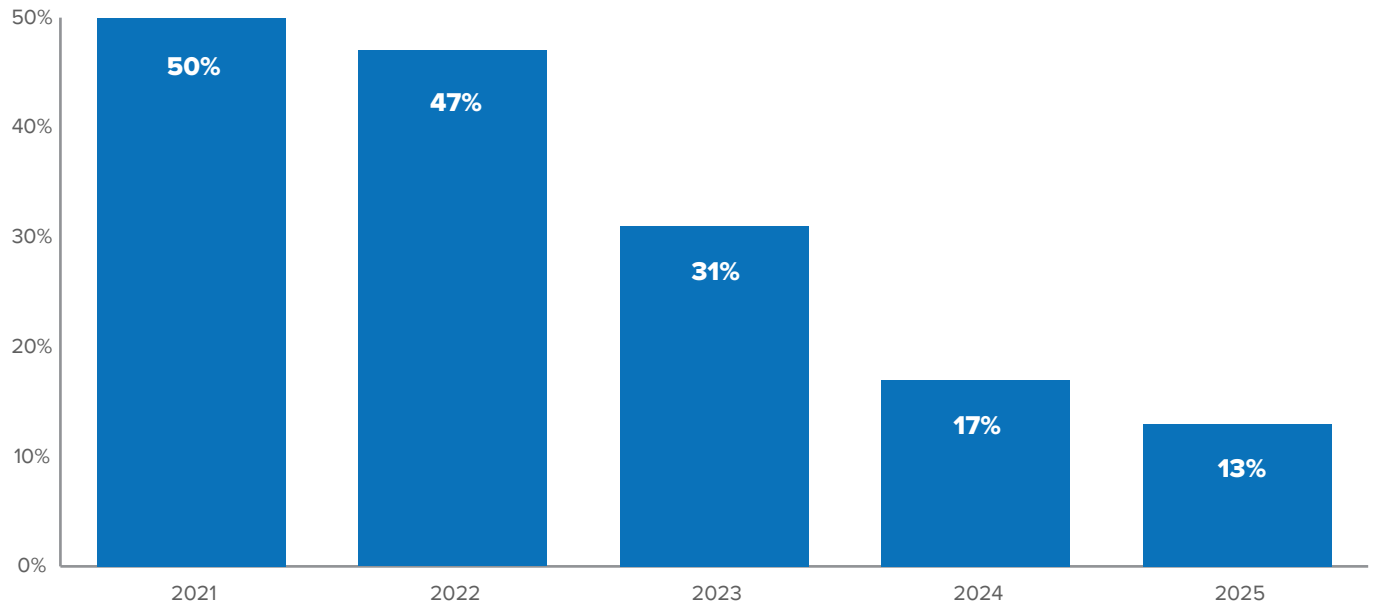
UNACCOMPAINED AFGHAN CHILDREN

Afghan unaccompanied children have been a prominent group within the EU+ unaccompanied children population, although their relative share has declined over time. In 2021 and 2022, Afghans accounted for around half of all unaccompanied children applications in the EU+, reflecting both the scale of Afghan displacement and the high number of unaccompanied children among Afghan applicants. Their share fell to around a third in 2023, and declined further in 2024 and 2025. By 2025, Afghans represented approximately one eighth of all unaccompanied children applications in the EU+.

The unaccompanied children population in the EU+ remained overwhelmingly male. Based on EUAA analysis, nine in ten unaccompanied children applicants in the EU+ were boys in 2024, continuing a longstanding trend.[11] The same pattern was also evident among Afghans, with boys accounting for 95-99 per cent of Afghan unaccompanied children applications annually between 2021 and 2025.

Despite the decline in absolute numbers and share, Afghan unaccompanied children remain a significant protection concern. Withdrawals among unaccompanied children may reflect onward movement after an initial asylum claim is lodged, including cases where the authorities lose contact with the child and subsequently close the case as withdrawn. This dynamic is particularly relevant for Afghan unaccompanied children who are predominantly older adolescent boys and may move onward to reunite with family members or relatives elsewhere in the EU+. These patterns continue to place pressure on asylum, reception and child-protection systems, particularly for children travelling without a parent or legal guardian.

Share of unaccompanied Afghan child asylum applicants in the EU+ | 2021 - 2025



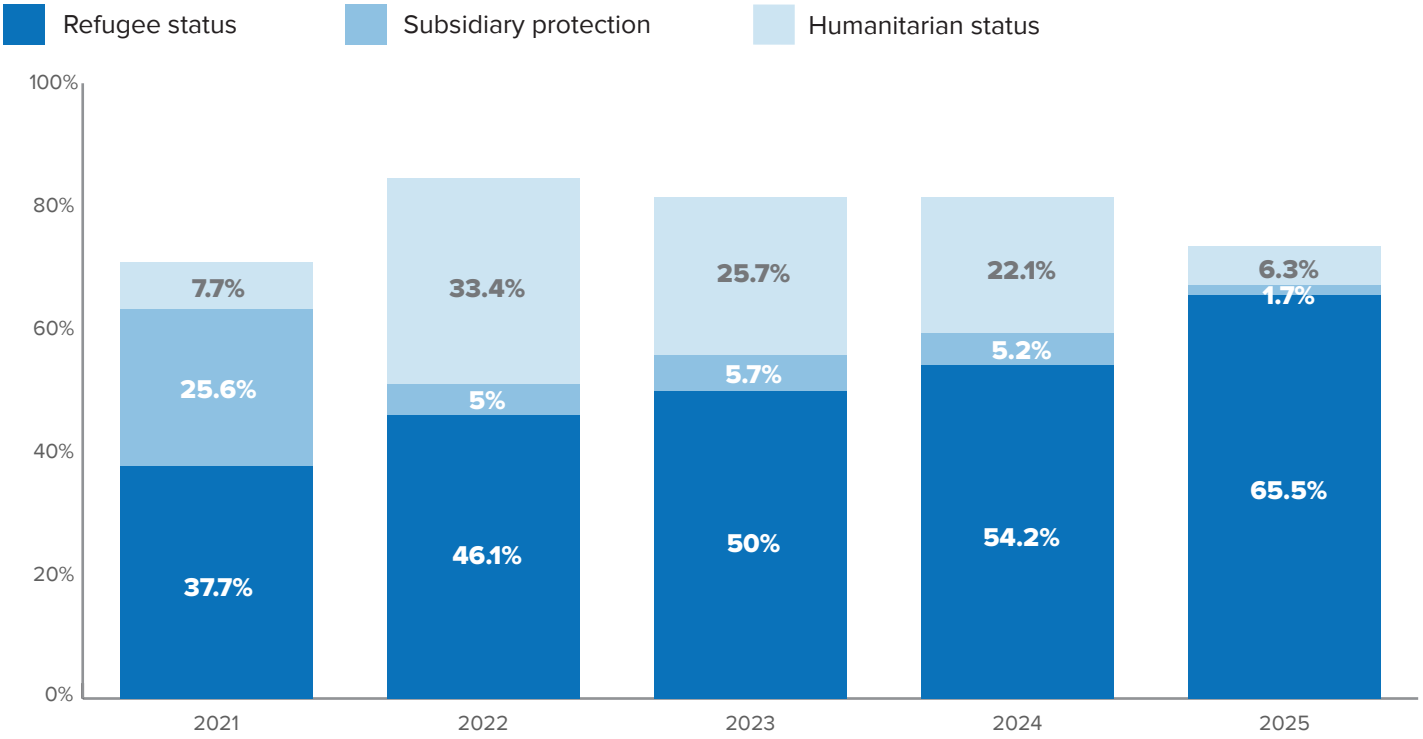
[11] See Data Analysis of Unaccompanied Minors in 2024 | European Union Agency for Asylum.

AFGHAN RECOGNITION IN THE EU+

Afghan applicants continued to receive relatively high levels of protection at first instance in the EU+ between 2021 and 2025. For the purposes of this paper, the EU+ recognition rate includes only refugee status and subsidiary protection and excludes national humanitarian forms of protection.[12] It is calculated as the share of first-instance decisions granting refugee status or subsidiary protection out of all first-instance decisions issued.[13] On this basis, the recognition rate remained above 50 per cent throughout the period, standing at 63 per cent in 2021, 51 per cent in 2022, 56 per cent in 2023, 59 per cent in 2024 and 67 per cent in 2025. Humanitarian status, shown in Figure 5, is excluded because it is a nationally regulated form of protection rather than one harmonized at the EU level.

The composition of EU-regulated protection changed markedly over time. In 2021, refugee status and subsidiary protection were more evenly distributed: 38 per cent of all first-instance decisions granted refugee status and 26 per cent granted subsidiary protection. From 2022 onwards, refugee status became the dominant form of EU-regulated protection granted to Afghans. In 2022, 46 per cent of all first-instance decisions granted refugee status, compared with only 5 per cent granting subsidiary protection. This pattern continued in subsequent years, with refugee status accounting for 50 per cent of decisions in 2023, 54 per cent in 2024 and 66 per cent in 2025, while subsidiary protection remained much lower. This shift shows not only that Afghans continued to receive EU-regulated protection at relatively high rates, but also that the type of protection increasingly moved towards refugee status.

Recognition outcomes for Afghan first-instance asylum decisions in the EU+ (%) | 2021–2025



[12] See EASO Practical Guide: Qualification for international protection | European Union Agency for Asylum.
[13] The recognition rate presented in this figure differs from the protection rates published by UNHCR. First, humanitarian status is excluded because it is a national form of protection outside the EU legal framework, whereas UNHCR generally reports it as a complementary form of protection and includes it in the overall protection rate. Second, UNHCR calculates protection rates using only substantive first-instance decisions, whereas Eurostat's negative decisions also include procedural outcomes, such as inadmissibility decisions and decisions issued under the Dublin procedure.

National humanitarian protection also played an important role, particularly between 2022 and 2024. In those years, humanitarian status accounted for a significant share of first-instance decisions, especially in 2022, when it represented roughly one third of all decisions. This pattern was largely driven by Germany, which issued the highest number of decisions on Afghan cases and granted national forms of protection in a large proportion of cases. In 2024, Germany again issued the largest number of Afghan decisions and granted national protection to 46 per cent of Afghans receiving decisions. As a result, the EU-regulated recognition rate alone understates the broader level of protection afforded to Afghans during this period. When humanitarian protection is included, positive outcomes accounted for approximately 80 per cent of all first-instance decisions between 2022 and 2024.

In 2025, the recognition rate increased to around two thirds of all first-instance decisions, while the share of humanitarian protection fell sharply. This shift is consistent with the broader legal and policy developments, including updated country guidance and the 2024 decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union recognizing Taliban-imposed restrictions on women and girls as a form of persecution.

These decision trends should be considered alongside the application patterns discussed above. The increase in Afghan applications in 2025 was driven largely by subsequent applications - particularly in Germany and, to a smaller extent Austria -while decision outcomes simultaneously shifted towards refugee status. Taken together, these developments suggest an Afghan asylum-seeking group increasingly shaped by gender-related protection claims and by the legal implications of Taliban restrictions on women and girls.

CONCLUSION

Afghan asylum trends in the EU+ between 2021 and 2025 were characterised by two distinct periods of increased applications. The first followed the Taliban takeover in August 2021 and was associated with a sharp rise in first-time applications. The second, in 2025, differed in nature: it was driven largely by subsequent applications from Afghans already present in the EU+, particularly women and family members seeking refugee status following legal and policy developments within the EU+.

The profile of Afghan applicants also evolved over the period. Children consistently represented a substantial share of Afghan applicants, accounting for 38 per cent of Afghan applications across the 2021–2025 period. The share of female applicants also increased steadily, reaching almost 50 per cent of monthly Afghan applicants at its peak in September 2025. This 2025 increase was linked largely to subsequent applications by Afghan women already present in the EU+, following legal and policy developments recognising Taliban restrictions on women and girls as persecution. Although the number and share of Afghan unaccompanied children declined over time, they remained an important group within the EU+ asylum system, particularly given protection concerns linked to children travelling without a parent or legal guardian.

First-instance decision outcomes also changed over the period. The EU+ recognition rate, based on refugee status and subsidiary protection, remained above 50 per cent throughout 2021–2025. However, the composition of positive outcomes shifted: national humanitarian protection accounted for a substantial share of decisions in 2022–2024, while refugee status became increasingly prominent, especially in 2025. Taken together, these trends show how developments in Afghanistan and changes in the legal and policy landscape within the EU+ shaped both Afghan asylum applications and first-instance protection outcomes during the period examined.

DEVELOPMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN AFFECTING WOMEN AND GIRLS: 2021-2026

The following timeline highlights edicts and developments affecting women and girls in Afghanistan from 2021 to date. It traces key restrictions introduced or enforced during this period, including measures affecting education, employment, freedom of movement, access to services, public participation and women's presence in public life. The timeline is not exhaustive but provides an overview of some of the main events illustrating the progressive narrowing of rights and opportunities for women and girls.

24 August 2021 A measure titled "Ban on Women Civil Servants" was recorded in legal analysis of measures introduced by the de facto authorities. The measure marked an early restriction on women's participation in public administration and formal employment.

CEDAW: Legal Review of Measures Introduced by Afghanistan's De Facto Authorities | OHCHR

17 September 2021 Girls were excluded from returning to secondary school when classes reopened. Reporting at the time raised concern that many girls would not be allowed back, signalling the beginning of sustained restrictions on girls' access to secondary education.

UNICEF welcomes reopening of secondary schools in Afghanistan, stresses that girls must not be left out and Taliban ban girls from secondary education in Afghanistan | Afghanistan | The Guardian

31 December 2021 Women were prohibited from travelling beyond 45 miles, or approximately 78 kilometres, without a mahram. The restriction was later reinforced through instructions to drivers not to transport women travelling beyond that distance without a male guardian.

CEDAW: Legal Review of Measures Introduced by Afghanistan's De Facto Authorities | OHCHR

23 March 2022 Girls' schools above sixth grade remained closed following an announcement by the de facto authorities. The measure formalized the continued exclusion of adolescent girls from secondary education and further limited girls' learning pathways.

Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan: April – June 2025 | UNAMA

7 May 2022 A directive on "proper hijab" was issued, requiring women to cover their faces except the eyes in front of non-mahram men. The directive also set out escalating penalties against male guardians for non-compliance, increasing pressure on women's dress and public conduct.

CEDAW: Legal Review of Measures Introduced by Afghanistan's De Facto Authorities | OHCHR

10 November 2022 Women were prohibited from using parks, gyms and public baths. The measure further restricted women's access to public and recreational spaces and contributed to the narrowing of women's public presence.

CEDAW: Legal Review of Measures Introduced by Afghanistan's De Facto Authorities | OHCHR

24 December 2022 Women were banned from working for national and international non-governmental organizations. The restriction affected women's employment and disrupted the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including services that depend on women staff to reach women and girls.

Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan: April – June 2025 | UNAMA

4–5 April 2023 Afghan women were barred from working with the United Nations. Women working for the UN in Jalalabad were first prevented from going to work, followed by a countrywide ban on Afghan women working with the UN in Afghanistan with immediate effect.

Afghanistan: Taliban must stop targeting Afghan women | OHCHR

25 June 2023 A ban on women's beauty salons was announced, with owners given until 25 July 2023 to cease operations. The measure further reduced women-led livelihood opportunities and restricted women's participation in economic activity.

Human rights situation in Afghanistan: July – September 2023 Update | UNAMA

21 August 2024 The so-called "Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice" was published. The law codified and consolidated many earlier discriminatory measures and included provisions affecting women's dress, movement, voices and public presence.

Afghanistan: Repressive law must be immediately repealed | OHCHR

2 December 2024 Women and girls were blocked from attending medical institutes, with the measure reported as effective from 3 December 2024. The instruction further restricted women's access to professional training and reduced future pathways into the health sector.

Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan: October – December 2024 | UNAMA

17 January – 3 February 2025 During this period, reports pointed to a broader coercive enforcement environment affecting women and girls across several regions. Human rights monitoring indicated that the tightening of gender-based restrictions was accompanied by increased pressure from authorities, including reports of forced compliance measures and heightened surveillance of women's behaviour and activities.

Report on the Implementation, Enforcement and Impact of PVPV Law in Afghanistan | UNAMA

22 February 2025 The Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) reportedly instructed market inspectors to deny entry to women who were not accompanied by a mahram (male guardian). Inspectors were also directed to identify and report women who did not comply with the requirement, further restricting women's access to public spaces and services.

Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan: January – March 2025 | UNAMA

3 March 2025 Inspectors reportedly carried out unannounced visits to hospitals and health facilities, directing staff to ensure compliance with mahram requirements. Reports indicated that female employees were expected to have a mahram and that treatment could be denied to female patients who attended health facilities unaccompanied.

Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan: January – March 2025 | UNAMA

January – March 2025 Throughout the first quarter of 2025, UNAMA documented systematic enforcement of restrictions affecting women and girls. Women faced growing barriers to employment and access to services, particularly where a mahram was required. The reporting period also recorded the closure of women-run media outlets and home-based businesses, alongside continued reports of corporal punishment.

Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan: January – March 2025 | UNAMA

May – June 2025 UNAMA human rights monitoring documented continued enforcement of mobility restrictions on women. Reports indicated that women were denied access to public offices, healthcare facilities and transportation services without a mahram, while businesses and clinics were instructed to refuse services to unaccompanied women.

Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan: April – June 2025 | UNAMA

17 June 2025 UN reporting highlighted the near-total exclusion of women from public decision-making processes, describing women's participation in governance structures as effectively non-existent. The reporting also confirmed the continuation of restrictions on girls' education and broader limitations on women's freedom of movement.

Gender Index 2024: Afghanistan | UN Women

September 2025 A significant escalation occurred in September when women were reportedly prevented from entering United Nations premises across the country. The restriction was subsequently confirmed and expanded nationwide, limiting women's access to UN compounds and restricting travel for work-related purposes. Humanitarian actors reported direct operational impacts on programme delivery and engagement with affected communities.

Afghanistan: New restrictions on women nationals working for UN, put aid efforts at risk | UN News

November 2025 Restrictions continued to affect women's access to education and professional development. Medical graduation examinations were reportedly conducted without the participation of women for a second consecutive year, further limiting pathways for women to enter professional sectors.

Report – Afghanistan's human rights situation "continues to deteriorate dramatically" | OHCHR

January 2026 An administrative measure affecting women in the civil service came into effect. Women who had previously remained on reduced salaries despite being excluded from work were reportedly formally dismissed or ceased receiving remuneration, further reducing women's access to formal employment and income-generating opportunities.

Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan: January – March 2026 | UNAMA

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