

The EU Migration Crisis in Terms of Asylum Applications Received: A Cluster Analysis over the Period 2015-2018

Nicolescu, Andreea Florentina; Drăgan, Gabriela

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Nicolescu, A. F., & Drăgan, G. (2020). The EU Migration Crisis in Terms of Asylum Applications Received: A Cluster Analysis over the Period 2015-2018. *Studia Europejskie - Studies in European Affairs*, 24(4), 109-123. <https://doi.org/10.33067/SE.4.2020.6>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-ND Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-ND Licence (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivatives). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

*Andreea Florentina Nicolescu**

*Gabriela Drăgan***

The EU Migration Crisis in Terms of Asylum Applications Received. A Cluster Analysis over the Period 2015–2018

Abstract

This research sets out the importance of studying the refugee crisis and the phenomenon of migration, the way refugees reach European territory and in which states they aim to settle. The first part of the article shows the evolution of illegal entries on the routes that refugees use to enter the European continent in the period between 2009–2018. The second part of the article aims to highlight the European States which were affected by the refugee crisis in light of the asylum requests submitted by the applicants for international protection in the EU between 2015–2018. Therefore the analysis led to the classification of the European States into four clusters: (i) states with a high number of asylum applications; (ii) states with a medium to high number of asylum applications; (iii) states with a small to medium number of asylum applications; (iv) states with a small number of asylum applications. The objective of this classification is to identify the states that were affected by the refugee crisis.

Keywords: Refugee Crisis, Mixed Flows, Access Routes, Clusters, Asylum Applications

* **Andreea Florentina Nicolescu** – The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, e-mail: andreea_nicolescu93@yahoo.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-4028-3650.

** **Gabriela Drăgan** – The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, e-mail: gabriela.dragan@yahoo.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-4713-8915.

Introduction

The refugee crisis is a humanitarian crisis characterised by the migration of a high number of people from conflict-affected areas, particularly the Middle East, with the intention of seeking asylum in a Member State of the European Union.

The refugee crisis is defined as a phenomenon based on persons seeking refuge, asylum, and safe conditions in another country than their own, following the decision to escape from violence, persecution, war or natural disasters. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) states that in recent years, migration has been experienced an increase on the background of conflicts, persecution, environmental degradation and security deficiencies.¹

The movements and migration of refugees are at the centre of global attention and in recent years, Europe has been put in a position to respond to the greatest migratory challenge since the end of World War II. The arrival of refugees and migrants in the EU reached its peak in 2015, exposing a number of weaknesses and gaps in the EU's asylum, external borders, and migration policies. Europe is an ideal place for refugees and migrants, given its geographical location and reputation, as well as an example of stability and openness in the context of growing international conflicts, climate change and global poverty.²

The need to research this issue is highlighted by the call of Europeans on decision makers to take more action in the context of migration. In 2019, the European Commission carried out the standard Eurobarometer, which was held from 7th June to 1st July, 2019 and covered 34 countries and territories. The survey shows that migration (34%) is the main focus of concern, representing more than a third of the Europeans surveyed. Migration is followed by climate change (22%), terrorism (18%), the public finances of the Member States (18%), the environment (13%), and unemployment (12%) which are among the concerns of the Europeans who participated in the survey.³

The survey carried out at the European level shows that people are concerned about issues that are important for the present and for the future of the EU, with migration being the main concern of those ques-

¹ <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/global-refugee-crisis-facts-definition-how-to-help> (access 15.03.2020).

² J. Apap, A. Radjenovic, *Briefing EU policies – Delivering for citizens, The migration issue*, “European Parliament” 2019, p. 1.

³ *Standard Eurobarometer 91 Spring 2019 – Public opinion in the European Union*, European Commission, Bruxelles, June 2019.

tioned which points to the need to study this phenomenon in order to identify the ways in which refugees arrive in Europe and in which states they aim to settle.

The Entry Routes in Europe

This research identifies the routes used by the asylum seekers in order to reach European territory, and are analysed according to the number of illegal crossings detected in the European Union between 2009 and 2018.

The entry of asylum seekers in the EU is usually illegal given the lack of documents and the use of unauthorized border crossing points. Mixed flows are made up of those who illegally cross borders and by those who represent potential asylum seekers. In this regard, mixed flows constitute a challenge for border authorities, as they must distinguish between those who cannot be refused entry to a Member State and illegal immigrants who are not allowed to enter in accordance with Schengen Borders Code.⁴

According to the European Parliament, there are seven routes of entry into Europe (as shown in Figure 1), the main nationalities of refugees and illegal immigrants that have been registered through these routes being the following:

- **Western African:** Senegal, Morocco.
- **Western Mediterranean:** Morocco, Algeria.
- **Central Mediterranean:** Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire.
- **Circular route (Albania – Greece):** Albania, Afghanistan, Turkey.
- **Eastern Mediterranean:** Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan.
- **Western Balkans:** Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq.
- **Eastern border:** Vietnam, Ukraine, Russia.

The Western African route, which is mainly crossed by people from Senegal and Morocco, is heavily used for those who come from Africa. In this context, the European Union is Africa's main partner, with the European Commission working with the African Union (AU) to face common challenges. The common priority of the EU and Africa is to save lives, fight traffickers, create legal pathways to Europe, and to achieve economic opportunities.⁵

⁴ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/infographics/migration/public/?page=intro> (access 17.03.2020).

⁵ *The EU's key partnership with Africa: The Commission's contribution to the leaders' agenda*, European Commission, Bruxelles, 26.01.2018.

Entries on the Western Mediterranean route, which stretches across the sea between Spain and Morocco, have increased significantly since the start of the crisis. In 2016, most of the detections of illegal border crossings on the Western Mediterranean route came from Africa, as was the case for the Central Mediterranean route. In this case, migrants left the Moroccan and Algerian coasts for the southern shores of Spain and most of the detections were reported around the Straits of Gibraltar. As regards 2017, the situation in the Rif region in Morocco created an opportunity for more departures from its west coast in the second half of that year. Thereby, two out of every five immigrants in 2017 were from Algeria and Morocco and the majority of the remaining people on this route came from West Africa. At the end of 2018, the number of Moroccan immigrants started to increase, so Morocco became the main starting point for them to reach Europe. On both land and sea routes, Moroccan people were the top nationality detected by Frontex in 2018.⁶

At the same time, as regards the Western Mediterranean route, ES registered about 65,000 arrivals in 2018 making it the main entry point into the EU. In this context, the EU is working to strengthen its partnership with Morocco, being ready to ramp up support for migration management to Spain.⁷

Among the main irregular access routes used to enter the EU in recent years is the Central Mediterranean route, with migrants starting from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa and passing through Libya and eventually crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. Libya has thus become a state where networks of trafficking in human beings and the smuggling of people have been developed.⁸ The main objectives of migration policy along the Central Mediterranean route are: saving lives, protecting refugees, combating traffickers, and stopping illegal migration by creating legal, organized, and safe routes.⁹

According to Frontex, the Central Mediterranean route has been used predominantly by immigrants from Tunisia, Eritrea and Libya and has been widely used since 2015. The majority of the immigrants who arrived in Europe via this route had come from Libya, where smuggling networks took advantage of those who wanted to leave their countries of

⁶ <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/western-mediterranean-route/> (access 20.03.2020).

⁷ *Migration Immediate measures needed*, European Commission, Bruxelles, 6.03.2019.

⁸ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/migratory-pressures/central-mediterranean-route/> (access 25.03.2020).

⁹ *Central mediterranean route: protecting migrants and managing irregular flows*, European Commission, Bruxelles, 14.11.2017.

origin.¹⁰ In this context, Italy is located on the first line of the Central Mediterranean route, with most migrants from Libya entering Europe via Lampedusa island in southern Italy, which has become the entry portal to Europe and one of the most popular migrant centres.¹¹

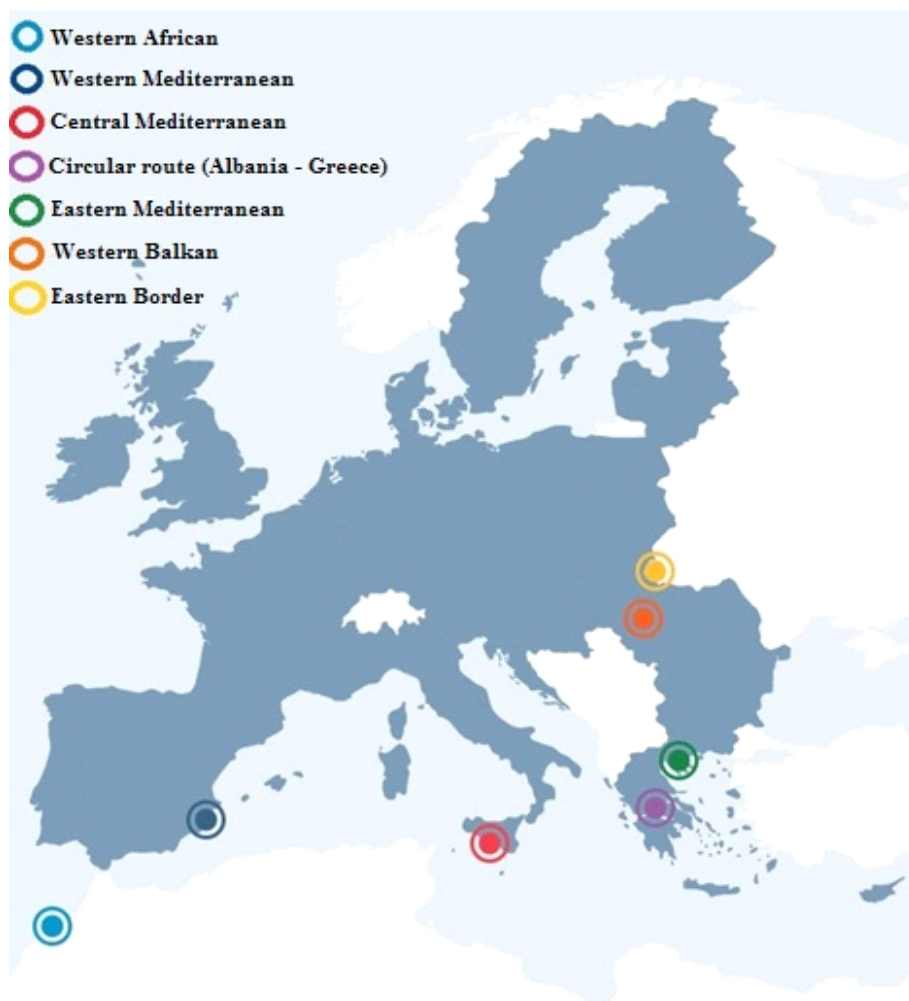


Figure 1. The main routes used by migrants to enter the European territory

Source: Made by the authors on the basis of the information provided by the European Parliament.

¹⁰ <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/central-mediterranean-route/> (access 21.03.2020).

¹¹ V. Gauriat, *Lampedusa divided over migrants*, “Euronews”, 8.07.2019.

The EU is active in Libya along the Central Mediterranean route in order to prevent refugees from starting dangerous journeys from Libya, to end smuggling, and to protect refugees in accordance with the international law. The EU supports Libya's political transition along with UN-led mediation efforts in order to create a sustainable solution to the political crisis in Libya. In addition, EU economic assistance to the Libyan people focuses on restoring governance and improving socio-economic conditions, and the EU is also providing nearly €30 million in funding to help the most vulnerable Libyans.¹²

The Eastern Mediterranean route was the main access route for migrants to Europe, seeing the European continent's largest migration since World War II. In 2015 around 885,000 people used it to reach EU territory, which is 17 times more than in 2014. The number of arrivals on this route subsequently decreased following the implementation of the EU–Turkey Agreement in March 2016. At the EU's external border with Turkey, migratory pressure in 2017 remained the same as in the previous year, with around 42,000 border crossings. As for the situation in 2018 on the Eastern Mediterranean route, the pressure was 34% higher than the previous year, due to increases in the number of border crossings from Turkey to Greece, with around 56,000 border crossings registered.¹³

Based on Frontex data, Table 1 reflects the situation of illegal detections at the European borders and in this context the access routes in Europe are highlighted according to the number of persons detected. The table shows that by 2015, when the crisis started, the number of persons detected having entered Europe illegally did not exceed 65,000 persons/year on each route analysed, except for 2014, when around 170,000 people were identified on the Central Mediterranean route alone.

Therefore, Table 1 shows that the most common access routes in Europe were: The Eastern Mediterranean, the Western Balkans, and the Central Mediterranean.

In 2015, more than 885,000 people were detected crossing the Eastern Mediterranean route illegally and around 764,000 people through the Western Balkans route. One year later, we can see that the number of people who entered Europe illegally using the above access routes was lower than the previous year. However, compared to the years before the crisis, 2016 is above the level recorded in the period 2009–2013.

¹² *EU action in Libya on migration: The Commission's contribution to the leaders' agenda*, European Commission, Bruxelles, 7.12.2017.

¹³ <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/eastern-mediterranean-route/> (access 26.03.2020).

Table 1. Access routes in Europe by number of illegal crossings detected between 2009 and 2018

Access routes	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Central Mediterranean	11,043	4,450	64,261	15,151	45,298	170,664	153,946	181,376	118,962	23,485
Eastern Mediterranean	39,973	55,688	57,025	37,224	24,798	50,834	885,386	182,277	42,319	56,560
Western Mediterranean	6,642	5,003	8,448	6,397	6,838	7,183	7,004	9,990	23,063	56,245
Circular route Albania – Greece	40,250	35,297	5,269	5,502	8,728	8,841	8,932	5,121	6,396	4,550
Western African	2,244	196	340	174	283	276	874	671	421	1,323
Western Balkan	2,995	2,302	4,596	6,336	19,926	43,355	764,033	130,261	12,179	5,844
Eastern Border	1,335	1,052	1,049	1,597	1,316	1,275	1,927	1,349	776	1,029

Source: Made by the authors on the basis of the data provided by Frontex.

The Western Balkans route was the second migration route used to enter Europe. However, after the record number of illegal entries in 2015, entries using that path have been steadily decreasing. In 2015, migrants arriving in Greece had a direct effect on the Western Balkans route, as people who entered the EU via Greece tried to cross their way through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia and then to Western Europe. In 2015, the region recorded more than 764,000 border crossings, an increase of 16 times higher compared to 2014. In 2016, following restrictions implemented throughout the region, in the countries of destination and the Aegean Sea, the flow of people transiting the Western Balkans decreased considerably month on month from around 128,000 illegal crossings in January 2016, to about 3,000 entries in December of the same year. In 2017, migrants tried to enter the Western Balkans through the southern borders shared with Greece and Bulgaria, before moving to north and trying to leave the region largely via the northern common borders of Hungary and Croatia or Romania with Serbia. In 2018, the number of illegal migrants detected along the Western Balkans route halved compared to the previous year, with around 5,800 entries.¹⁴

¹⁴ <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/western-balkan-route/> (access 27.03.2020).

Despite the European Union's efforts to reduce migratory pressure in Greece, many of the Greek islands remain accessible to asylum seekers and more people are moving from Turkey to the islands in the eastern part of the Aegean Sea, which leads to the creation of a growing population in the reception centres that the Greek authorities provide. Greece's crowded asylum centres are in Lesbos, Samos and Chios, and there is the possibility of expanding asylum centres that are overburdened.¹⁵

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), about 60,000 refugees lived in Greece's refugee camps in 2019, with non-governmental organizations criticizing poor conditions in shelters on Greek islands near the Turkish coast. Since 2016, the number of refugees arriving in Greece through the Eastern Mediterranean Sea has been significantly lower since the EU–Turkey Agreement on the better monitoring of the maritime border.¹⁶

The EU's 6,000 kilometre land border between Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the Eastern States (EE, FI, HU, LV, LT, NO, PL, SK, BG, RO) presents significant challenges regarding border control. In 2016, fewer than 1,500 entries were reported and about a quarter of them involved nationals from neighbouring countries, mostly Ukrainians, Russians and, to a lesser extent, from Belarus and Moldova, most of whom cross the Polish and Romanian land border with Ukraine. Between October and December 2015, a temporary, illegal migration route was opened in the form of the so-called Arctic route through Russia across the land borders with Norway and Finland. Around 6,000 asylum seekers were identified in the previous period and most were from Afghanistan and Syria. The main crossing point was Storskog, the only legal land border crossing between Norway and Russia, which recorded about 5,200 asylum applications in 2015, with the flow also expanding to Finland.¹⁷

Regardless of the route taken by refugees to reach Europe, the routes are dangerous and often put people's lives at risk. This is why it is necessary to create safe and legal routes which are essential both to ensure that those wishing to apply for asylum in the EU arrive safely within the European territory and also to prevent smuggling initiatives.

¹⁵ I. Antypas, G. Grün, *Beyond capacity, Greek island refugee camps get more packed*, "Deutsche Welle", 18.12.2018.

¹⁶ D. Pundy, *Refugees face violence, abuse on Europe's new Balkan route*, "Deutsche Welle", 15.04.2019.

¹⁷ <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/eastern-borders-route/> (access 28.03.2020).

Cluster Analysis Regarding the EU Member States According to Asylum Applications

This analysis is intended to divide Member States into four clusters in order to classify them in terms of the number of applications received during the period of 2015–2018. A cluster analysis of the EU states in relation to the asylum applications received on their territory is important in the context of identifying the countries affected by the refugee crisis in terms of the number of asylum applications received. The clustering was realised by using a statistical indicator provided by Eurostat which shows the number of asylum applications lodged by asylum seekers among the EU28. The data used was annual and the reference period was 2015–2018, taking into account that 2015 was the year in which the refugee crisis started and the available data at the time of conducting the research was until the end of 2018.

The main objective of this analysis is to classify the EU Member States into four categories, with the aim of identifying the loading level of the EU28 regarding the asylum applications registered on their territories. In order to do this clustering, the Quartile function in Excel was used.

Calculating the quartile has resulted in the following clusters which can be visually identified in the Figure 2:

- States with a high number of asylum applications: 1,628.405–156,513.75 (marked on the map with red).
- States with a medium to high number of asylum applications: 156,513.75–33,777.5 (marked on the map with blue).
- States with a small to medium number of asylum applications: 33,777.5–6,077.5 (marked on the map with orange).
- States with a small number of asylum applications: 6,077.5–690 (marked on the map with green).

Within the first group, the group with a high number of asylum applications, the following states are found: DE, IT, FR, SE, HU, GR, AT. In the period 2015–2018, a 81.5% share of all asylum applications was submitted within the group of states with a high number of asylum applications lodged at the EU28 level.

The state with the highest number of asylum applications received during 2005–2018 is Germany (1,628.405 applications) the majority of the applications were registered in 2016 (745,155 applications) and 2015 (476,510 applications). Of all asylum applications submitted in the EU28 in the period 2005–2018, around 41.3% of those applications were submitted in Germany.

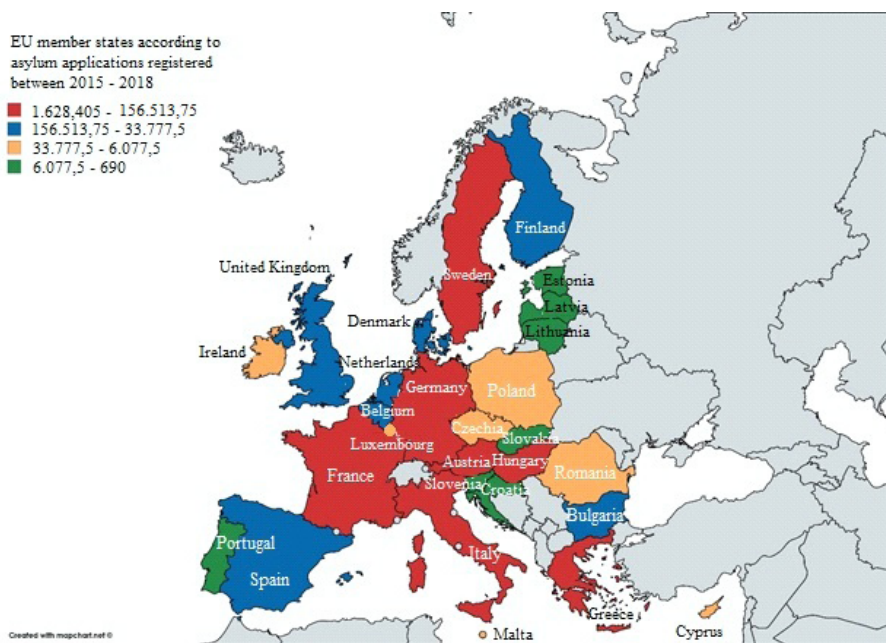


Figure 2. Clustering of EU Member States in terms of asylum applications from 2015 to 2018

Source: Made by the authors using Mapchart, based on data provided by Eurostat.

Italy is the second state among the countries with the highest number of asylum applications (395,300 applications) in the European Union, representing 10% of the total applications submitted at the EU28 level during the period under review. One factor that has led to the reception of a high number of asylum applications by Italy is its geographical location and its openness to the Mediterranean Sea. With a similar level of applications in the analysed period, France (380,190 applications) is the third state in this group, registering in 2018 the highest number of requests (120,425 requests) from the analysed period. Of all the applications submitted in the EU Member States, 9.6% of them were registered in France.

Sweden is also in the same group of countries, which received 6.1% of asylum seekers in the EU28 (239,125 applications) during the period under review. In this case, the number of asylum applications gradually decreased between 2015 and 2018. Also, in 2015, Sweden was the third country after Germany and Hungary in the context of countries with a high number of asylum applications in the EU. In this regard, Hungary has a particular feature; in 2015 it was the second country among those who received a high number of asylum requests in Europe (177,135 ap-

plications), after Germany. After what happened in 2015, the number of the applications in Hungary dropped dramatically (to 670 applications in 2018) following the installation of iron gates that rendered asylum seekers unable to cross borders. Following this decision, in 2016 Hungary dropped to 7th place among the countries that received the most asylum applications, dropping again to 16th in 2017 and yet again to 24th in 2018.

Greece has also been affected by the refugee crisis partly due to its geographical location which makes it possible to land a high number of asylum seekers on its territory. With its opening in the Mediterranean Sea, Greece faced a large wave of refugees in the period 2015–2018 during which time the number of applications submitted there (189,930 applications) represents 4.8% of all applications made by refugees in the EU28. It is also important to note that Greece differs from most EU Member States if we take into account the fact that the number of asylum applications within it has increased every year, starting from 13,205 asylum applications in 2015 and reaching 66,965 asylum applications in 2018, contrary to developments in most Member States. This feature can also be identified in the following states: FR, ES, CY, SI.

Austria is the seventh Member State to be part of the group of countries with a high number of asylum applications, with around 4.3% of asylum applications lodged at the EU level in the four reference years (168,840 applications). The evolution of asylum applications in Austria has decreased, taking into account the fact that in 2016 the number of applications was half that of the previous year, this situation being repeated in the following years.

The second group of states includes countries with a medium to high number of asylum applications received, including the following: UK, ES, NL, BE, FI, BG, DK. In this group, 15.5% of all asylum applications were registered at the EU level.

The United Kingdom is the first state in the category of those with a medium to high number of asylum applications. The UK is included as one of the analysed states, considering the fact that in the analysed period 2015 – 2018 it was still part of the EU. Over the years analysed, the UK was one of the countries targeted by asylum seekers, accounting for 3.9% of the total applications submitted at the EU28 level (152,405 applications).

It is worth noting that one of the main reasons behind the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU bloc was the uncontrolled migration it was subjected to. On 31st January 2020, UK legally revoked its EU membership, following numerous discussions on the consequences of globalization.¹⁸

¹⁸ R. Hutton, *The Roots of Brexit*, “Bloomberg”, 31.01.2020.

Spain is the second country in the category of those with a medium to high number of asylum applications, accounting for 3.1% of the total EU28 applications during the reference period (121,190 applications). A unique aspect in the case of Spain is that the number of applications submitted in its territory increased every year, registering in 2015 a total of 14,780 asylum applications and reaching, in 2018, 54,050 applications.

In the case of the Netherlands, the submitted asylum applications had a downward trend until 2018 compared to 2015. In the last year analysed, the number of asylum applications was about half the number registered in 2015. Also, in the analysed period, the number of asylum applications (108,150 applications) received by the Netherlands represent 2.7% of the total applications submitted in the EU28. We can notice a similar situation in the case of Belgium, the similarity being found in the evolution of asylum applications over the years and also in the number of asylum applications; in this case BE recorded 103,810 applications during the reference period.

In Finland's case, the number of applications submitted during the period of reference represented 1.2% (47,440 applications) of the total applications submitted in the EU28. An interesting aspect in this case is that in 2015, the country registered a percentage of 68.2% of the total applications received by this state in the analysed period and in the following years the number of asylum applications decreased. Also, Bulgaria found itself at a similar level of asylum applications (46,040 applications) received as in Finland. In the first two years after the crisis, the level of applications submitted in BG was almost constant, with a small decrease in 2016 compared to the previous year, followed by dramatic decreases in 2017 and 2018. Regarding Denmark, it received a relatively small number of asylum applications (33,905 applications) compared to the other countries in this group of states. The number of asylum applications in Denmark fell from 20,935 asylum applications in 2015 to 3,570 applications in 2018.

The third group of states in the analysis is the one with a small to medium number of asylum applications registered during the analysed period and is composed of the following Member States: PL, CY, IE, RO, LU, MT, CZ. Within this group of states, 2.5% of all asylum applications submitted at EU level were registered during the reference period.

Poland is the first state to fall into the group of countries with a small to medium number of asylum applications registered between 2015 and 2018. The evolution of asylum applications in PL is highlighted by an approximately equal number of asylum applications registered in the first two years, with a small increase in 2016, compared to the previous year. In 2017 the number of asylum applications decreased to more than half of

the number of applications received in previous years and this situation continued in the last year analysed.

Bearing in mind the geographical position of Cyprus (located in the Mediterranean Sea, in the southern vicinity of Turkey, west of Syria and Lebanon) it received a substantial number (17,570 applications) of asylum applications which is significant given the small size of this country. In the case of Cyprus, the number of asylum applications registered an upward trend during the period under review. As far as Ireland is concerned, the evolution of asylum applications submitted on its territory has been fluctuating. The number of applications decreased in 2016, yet gradually increased until 2018 when, eventually, the number of applications submitted in 2015 was exceeded. In the four years analysed, Ireland received a total of 12,120 asylum applications.

Romania is also part of the group of countries with a small to medium number of asylum applications, ranking 18th among the EU28 Member States in terms of the number of asylum applications received between 2015 and 2018. During the reference years, 10,090 asylum applications were submitted in Romania, most of them (47.7%) having been registered in 2017.

Luxembourg, one of the smallest countries in the EU, received 9,430 asylum applications during the period under review. Over the years, the evolution of asylum applications lodged in Luxembourg shows that the number of applications per year in LU was approximately $\pm 2,000$. Also, Malta, given its geographical location (located at the south of Italy, east of Tunisia and north of Libya) received 7,745 asylum applications during the period under review. In the same context, the Czech Republic registered a total of 6,125 asylum applications during the analysed period. However, the number of asylum applications lodged in CZ has always been below the threshold of 2,000 applications per year.

The fourth group of states includes those that have registered a small number of asylum applications, these being: SI, PT, HR, LT, LV, SK, EE. This group of states registered a percentage of 0.05% of the total applications submitted at the EU level in the analysed period.

Slovenia is the first state to be part of the group of countries that registered a small number of asylum applications between 2015–2018. Thus, Slovenia is among the states that have registered less than 6,000 asylum applications in its territory in the four years analysed. Portugal is in the same situation as Slovenia regarding the number of asylum applications received in its territory during the reference period (5,390 applications).

Croatia, also part of the group of states with a small number of asylum applications, is where 4,210 asylum applications were lodged during the

2015–2018 period. As regards the evolution of asylum applications over the reference years, most applications were submitted in 2016 (2,225 applications) after which the number dropped below the threshold of 1,000 applications. Lithuania also received a small number of asylum applications (1,695) and the number of asylum applications in LT increased insignificantly between 2015–2017, recording in the last year analysed a slightly decreased in the number of applications. A similar situation happened in Latvia where, in each year analysed, the number of applications was less than 400.

Slovakia also recorded a small number of asylum applications and is note worthy for the fact that during the period under review, less than 1,000 asylum applications were registered in its territory. The last state to fall within the group of states with a small number of asylum applications is Estonia, which received 690 asylum applications during the reference period.

Conclusions

The refugee crisis is a phenomenon that has attracted the attention of the European population as a result of the high flows of refugees that have reached Europe and put huge pressure on certain European States that have found themselves the recipients of a high number of asylum seekers.

The analysis of the entry routes into the EU has shown that out of the seven routes frequently used by those entering Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean route is the main entry point, followed by the Western Balkans route and the Central Mediterranean route. At the same time, the number of illegal entries in the period between 2015 and 2018 accounted for 74.29% of all illegal entries registered in the period 2009–2018. This shows that the refugee crisis has had a direct effect on the illegal entry into the EU.

The cluster analysis classified EU Member States into four clusters as follows: (i) states with a high number of asylum applications; (ii) states with a medium to high number of asylum applications; (iii) states with a small to medium number of asylum applications; (iv) states with a small number of asylum applications. The EU Member States that were strongly affected by the refugee crisis are those in the first cluster: DE, IT, FR, SE, HU, GR and AT with the applications submitted within them representing a percentage of 81.5% of the total asylum applications received at the EU28 level between 2015 and 2018. It should be noted that 41.3% of the total applications submitted during the reference period were received by Germany. Also, geographical location was an important factor

that directly contributed to the submission of asylum applications in certain countries, such as Greece and Italy.

This research highlights the need to create legal pathways for accessing the European territory and to regulate the lodging of asylum applications among EU Member States. Otherwise, flows of illegal entries on the routes identified in this article will persist in putting high pressure on the asylum systems in the EU Member States targeted by refugees.

References

- Antypas I., Grün G., *Beyond capacity, Greek island refugee camps get more packed*, “Deutsche Welle”, 2018.
- Apap J., Radjenovic A., *Briefing EU policies – Delivering for citizens, The migration issue*, “European Parliament”, 2019.
- Central mediterranean route: protecting migrants and managing irregular flows*, European Commission, Bruxelles, 14.11.2017.
- EU action in Libya on migration: The Commission’s contribution to the leaders’ agenda*, European Commission, Bruxelles, 7.12.2017.
- Gauriat V., *Lampedusa divided over migrants*, “Euronews”, 8.07.2019.
- Hutton R., *The Roots of Brexit*, “Bloomberg”, 31.01.2020.
- Migration Immediate measures needed*, European Commission, Bruxelles, 6.03.2019.
- Pundy D., *Refugees face violence, abuse on Europe’s new Balkan route*, “Deutsche Welle”, 15.04.2019.
- Standard Eurobarometer 91 Spring 2019 – Public opinion in the European Union*, European Commission, Bruxelles, June 2019.
- The EU’s key partnership with Africa: The Commission’s contribution to the leaders’ agenda*, European Commission, Bruxelles, 26.01.2018.
- <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/global-refugee-crisis-facts-definition-how-to-help> (access 15.03.2020).
- <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/migratory-pressures/central-mediterranean-route/> (access 25.03.2020).
- <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat> (access 15.03.2019).
- <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/infographics/migration/public/?page=intro> (access 17.03.2020).
- <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/central-mediterranean-route/> (21.03.2020).
- <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/eastern-borders-route/> (access 28.03.2020).
- <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/eastern-mediterranean-route/> (access 26.03.2020).

<https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/western-balkan-route/> (access 27.03.2020).

<https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/western-mediterranean-route/> (access 20.03.2020).

<https://mapchart.net/> (access 20.04.2019).