EU received over 1.1 million asylum applications in 2023

In 2023, EU+ countries received 1.14 million applications for international protection, reaching a 7-year high. Syrians continued to lodge the most applications, with Afghans remaining the second largest applicant group, albeit with significantly fewer applications than the previous year. An increase in Palestinian applications was also noted towards the end of the year.

Analysis released by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) reveals notable shifts in the asylum landscape within the EU+. In 2023, EU+ countries lodged over 1 140 000 applications for asylum, an increase of 18% compared to 2022[1]. Germany (334 000) continued to receive the most applications
by far, in absolute terms; though Cyprus (12 000) was under the most pressure, relative to its population size.

Changing trends for some countries of origin

In 2023, Syrians (181 000) submitted significantly more applications; in fact, recording an increase of 38 % compared to 2022. This represents just under half of the number of applications lodged in 2015. Afghans (114 000), while remaining the second-largest applicant group, lodged significantly fewer applications compared to 2022 (down by 11 %); making them one of the only key nationalities to decrease last year.

In a trend that began in the fourth quarter, Turkish nationals (101 000) lodged over four fifths (82 %) more applications; compared to the year before. Around one fifth of all applications were lodged by nationals with visa-free access to the Schengen Area, including Venezuelans (68 000) and Colombians (63 000).

Despite some inconsistent data, it has become clear that more Palestinians are lodging asylum applications in the EU+. In 2023, the number of applications reached nearly 11 600, two thirds higher than in 2022.

A natural consequence of higher applications is the increasing number of cases pending a decision at first instance (883 000), which rose by 39 % in 2023. This does not paint a complete picture however, as EU+ countries are also working to provide temporary protection to over 4.4 million Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion. These parallel strands continued to pose significant challenges for EU+ asylum and reception authorities; so much so, that by the end of 2023, the EUAA was providing operational assistance in 13 Member States.

High application levels and strains on reception capacity in some Member States

In 2023, Germany (334 000) remained the leading destination of asylum seekers in the EU+, receiving nearly a third of all applications. In fact, Germany received more applications than France (167 000) and Spain (162 000) combined. Italy (136 000) also featured prominently in the asylum landscape.
Collectively, these four countries received over two thirds of all applications last year.

Some citizenships lodge most of their applications in a single EU+ country. In 2023, these included Venezuelans and Colombians, lodging over 80% of their applications in Spain; Egyptians lodging nearly 70% of their applications in Italy, as well as Afghans, Syrians, and Turks lodging most of their applications in Germany. Significantly, of the Moroccans (31,000) applying in EU+ countries, most did so in Austria. In addition, Guineans (21,000) and Ivorians (20,000) largely applied in France.

While evaluating which EU+ countries receive the most asylum applications is important, it is not the best measure of pressure on national administrations. Indeed, asylum and reception systems vary widely in terms of their capacity. Cyprus (12,000), with its small population, received 1 application per 78 inhabitants. In contrast, Germany received 1 application per 252 inhabitants. While receiving very different numbers, Belgium (35,000) and Estonia (4,000) were under similar pressure per capita. Taken together, EU+ countries received approximately one asylum application for every 400 inhabitants in 2023.

**Highest recognition rate in years**

In 2023, the EU+ recognition rate rose to 43% which is the highest level seen in 7 years. While the rate remained stable for most nationalities; for some, it fluctuated – both in terms of the number of positive decisions (at first instance), but also in terms of the type of protection decision.

Although remaining high, in the case of Syrians (over 80% recognition rate) only a quarter of decisions (26%) granted refugee status. For Afghans however (61% recognition rate), around half of the decisions granted refugee status. In addition, since 2019, the recognition rate for Turkish nationals has decreased significantly to 25%.

For more information and a series of interactive data visualisations, please visit the Latest Asylum Trends page.
Any further information may be obtained from the European Union Agency for Asylum’s Press Office at the following email addresses:

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[1] EUAA EPS data are preliminary and might differ from the validated statistics submitted to Eurostat under Regulation (EU) 2020/851 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2020/851), at a later stage. Total EPS numbers include an approximation for one EU+ country and may change after updates.