

Asylum Report 2024

Executive Summary



Asylum Report 2024

Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in
the European Union

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

June 2024



© European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), 2024

Neither the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) nor any person acting on behalf of the EUAA is responsible for the use that might be made of the information contained within this publication.

Cover photo: iStock/[Halfpoint](#)

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024

PDF BZ-AH-24-001-EN-N ISBN 978-92-9403-977-4 ISSN 2600-2957 doi: 10.2847/075148

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged. For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not under the EUAA copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

Foreword

For the first time since the inception of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), Europe was called to assist such a high number of people seeking protection. In 2023, asylum applications rose to levels reminiscent of the 2015-2016 refugee crisis. But in reality, countries provided protection to far more people, as over 4.3 million beneficiaries of temporary protection were recorded since the beginning of the Russian invasion, on top of the over 1.1 million asylum seekers in 2023.

Against this background, the adoption of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum represented an important moment for the EU in advancing its unique multinational asylum system. This success was catalysed by political will, flexibility and extensive efforts at the technical level to iron out the specific details of a sophisticated framework. The pact will play a pivotal role in converging practices and enabling EU+ countries to address the high number of asylum seekers.



But let us be clear – Member States will need to continue to show perseverance in the coming years. Work remains to be done to address existing backlogs, effectively process the increased number of incoming applications and provide accommodation to applicants for protection. Simultaneously, authorities will need to restructure their asylum and reception systems to align with the common procedures which are defined in the pact. It is clear that this will require additional resources and detailed national implementation plans.

The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), already functioning with an enhanced mandate for 2 years, has continued being a major actor in the field of international protection in Europe by providing unprecedented levels of operational, technical and training support in 2023. As we usher in an era of important advancements in Europe's asylum system, a well-equipped EUAA will continue to assist in harmonising practices in Member States, increasing expertise and improving Europe's capacity to provide protection solutions.

Nina Gregori
Executive Director
European Union Agency for Asylum



Contents

Contents	5
Introduction	6
1. Global developments in the field of asylum in 2023	7
2. Major developments in asylum in the European Union in 2023	8
3. Functioning of the Common European Asylum System	9
Box 1. Temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine	9
3.1. Access to procedures	10
3.2. The Dublin procedure	12
3.3. Special procedures to assess protection needs	13
3.4. Processing asylum applications at first instance	14
3.5. Processing asylum applications at second or higher instance	15
3.6. Reception of applicants for international protection	16
3.7. Aspects of detention involving applicants and former applicants	17
3.9. Legal assistance and representation	18
3.10. Interpretation services	18
3.11. Country of origin information	19
3.12. Statelessness in the asylum context	19
3.13. Content of protection	20
3.14. Resettlement and humanitarian admissions	21
4. Children and people with special needs in the asylum procedure	22
5. EUAA support in 2023	24
Concluding remarks	26



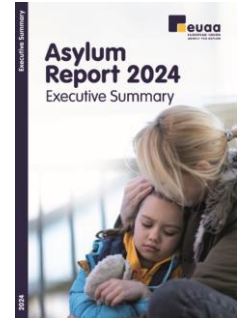
Introduction

The Executive Summary of the [Asylum Report 2024: Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union](#) summarises the key developments in international protection which are presented in detail in the main report.

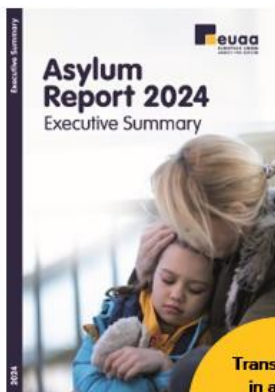
The summary is available in [30 languages](#), including all EU languages and Albanian, Arabic, Macedonian, Russian, Serbian, Turkish and Ukrainian.

The information that is presented in the main report can be filtered through various, user-friendly resources:

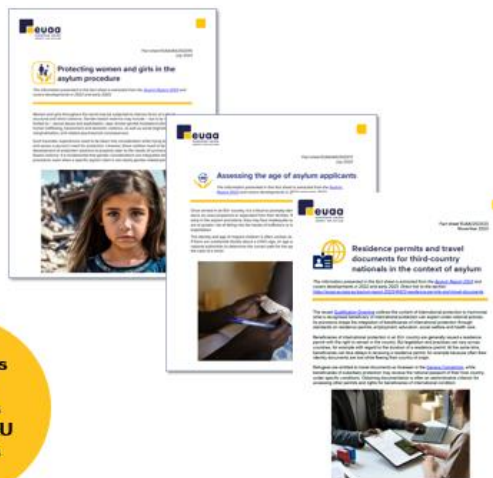
- The [National Asylum Developments Database](#) presents the legislative, institutional and policy developments which are described in the report. Updates can be searched by country, topic, year and type of development. The information is also summarised and presented in a table by country and by thematic area in a PDF document.
- The report presents a selection of jurisprudential developments based on the [EUAA Case Law Database](#). The hyperlinks within the text will bring readers to the specific case in the database.
- The sources used for the production of the Asylum Report are presented in the list of references at the end of the report. They are also available in a separate, detailed [Sources on Asylum 2024](#), grouped by type of source. Readers can easily identify whether sources are from European institutions and agencies, international organisations, national authorities, civil society organisations or think tanks and academia.



Additional resources to the Asylum Report 2024



Translations
in all EU
languages
and 7 non-EU
languages



Sources on
Asylum 2024



National
Asylum
Developments
2024



1. Global developments in the field of asylum in 2023



Protection needs continued to rise in 2023, while no single development was a catalyst in the same way that the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan or the COVID-19 pandemic defined previous years. Nonetheless, these crises continued to influence developments in 2023 amid new and ongoing conflicts, climate shocks, geopolitical unrest, violence and persecution which led millions of people to flee their homes.

The number of forcibly displaced people in 2023 reached a historical high of over 114 million, with key hotspots of displacement including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Latin American and Caribbean countries, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan and Ukraine. The escalation of the conflict in Gaza from October 2023 on and the associated humanitarian crisis drastically increased protection needs in the region.

Amid this backdrop, the international community continued efforts in developing solutions for people in need of protection, often through multistakeholder cooperation and an increasing diversity of actors involved in providing solutions. A prime example of such an initiative was the commitment at the second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023. Governments, international actors, the private sector and civil society organisations committed over USD 2.2 billion for specific policies and programmes to support displaced populations and countries hosting refugees and pledged to resettle 1 million refugees by 2030 and assist an additional 3 million people through community sponsorship.

Climate change and its role in generating displacement, as well as the impact of climate change on refugees and host communities, continued to be among the key themes in discourse related to international protection. Discussions also continued around statelessness in the context of asylum and the interplay between statelessness and protection needs.

As the international community continues to address complex aspects of constantly-changing patterns of displacement, a growing realisation seems to inform the discourse and praxis of international protection over the past years: forced displacement is not only a humanitarian concern but also a development challenge. The majority of refugees around the world not only originate from fragile environments, but also flee to fragile environments, with more than three-quarters of globally displaced people being hosted in low- and middle-income countries. The humanitarian-development-peace approach, prominent in the efforts of the international community over the past years, advocates for comprehensive responses from various stakeholders, including businesses, financial institutions and civil society organisations, to use their respective expertise in achieving development solutions.



[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)



2. Major developments in asylum in the European Union in 2023



The European Parliament and the Council reached political agreement in December 2023 on key legislative instruments of the Pact on Migration and Asylum. This represented a major breakthrough in the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), paving the way for the finalisation of instruments to equip Europe with a functional and modern migration and asylum architecture.

In 2023, the EU continued to take action in addressing the devastating consequences of Russia's aggression on Ukraine, including steps to catalyse closer cooperation among international actors and putting forth instruments to support Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction and modernisation. The extension of temporary protection until March 2025 offered stability and predictability to millions of beneficiaries. Reaffirming the European long-term commitment to peace, security and prosperity in the region, in December 2023, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine, following a recommendation by the European Commission.

Pressure persisted at the external borders of the EU, with the highest number of irregular border crossings since 2016. According to data collected by Frontex, 385,000 irregular border crossings were detected at the EU's external borders, representing an increase of 18% compared to 2022. To address this, the EU introduced initiatives for the effective management of its external borders by calibrating a European Integrated Border Management, upgrading existing information systems and their interoperability, and working with key partner countries across migration routes.

To complement the two 2022 action plans related to the Central Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes, the European Commission presented two additional action plans in 2023 to address the Western Mediterranean, Atlantic and Eastern Mediterranean routes. Acknowledging that an estimated 90% of people who cross the EU's external borders irregularly do so with the assistance of migrant smugglers, in November 2023 the European Commission presented new legislative proposals to prevent and fight migrant smuggling.

To promote protection-oriented solutions across the world, the EU continued its comprehensive and mutually-beneficial cooperation with third countries. Activities under the external dimension of the EU's migration and asylum policy included efforts to address root causes of irregular migration; develop legal pathways to protection in Europe; provide support for protection solutions in other parts of the world; combat smuggling networks; and work with partner countries on migration and border management.

In its role to ensure a harmonised interpretation and application of EU law, in 2023, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) issued more than [20 judgments and orders](#) interpreting various provisions of CEAS, for example covering topics related to access to the asylum procedure, the Dublin procedure, effective remedy in accelerated procedures and family reunification.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)



3. Functioning of the Common European Asylum System



As result of sharply increasing numbers of people in need of protection in Europe and saturated national reception systems, EU+ countries implemented legislative, policy and practical initiatives in 2023 to manage the fluctuating situation. At the same time, concerns about some practices within national asylum and reception administrations were voiced by civil society organisations, UNHCR and other international organisations.

Box 1. Temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine



As the military aggression against Ukraine persisted into its second year, over 4.3 million non-EU citizens who left Ukraine continued to be hosted with a temporary protection status in EU+ countries, which also extended the validity of protection until March 2025. In 2023, EU+ countries issued over 1 million decisions that granted temporary protection, with Ukrainian nationals receiving 99% of them. Since the high levels at the outset of the war, decisions granting temporary protection have been declining and remained relatively stable at a lower level as of the summer of 2023.

A number of EU+ countries allowed the temporary protection status to be converted into residence permits for employment or family reunification. And some countries extended the scope of temporary protection to Ukrainian nationals who were already outside of Ukraine when the military aggression began. In contrast, other countries began to introduce measures to delimit eligibility for temporary protection.

The courts also defined eligibility criteria. In *Applicant v State Secretariat for Migration*, the Swiss Federal Administrative Court (FAC) ruled that temporary protection was not to be granted to Ukrainians who also had a EU/EFTA+ citizenship. The Constitutional Court in Austria confirmed that temporary protection applies to Ukrainian nationals who left the country shortly before 24 February 2022 but in principle were residing there. The Administrative Court of Munich in Germany decided in *Applicant v Immigration Office* (M 4 S 23.2442) that unmarried partners of persons from Ukraine were not eligible to receive temporary protection. The court came to the same conclusion in the case M 4 K 23.2440. The latter decision was reversed by the Bavarian Higher Administrative Court on 31 October 2023, with the decision in case 10 C 23.1793.

Special measures, including scholarships and free language lessons, were introduced to support the social and economic integration of beneficiaries of temporary protection into host societies. Suitable accommodation and housing continued to be a pressing topic, while integration into the labour market was generally facilitated. Nevertheless, roughly three-fifths of the decisions granting temporary protection in the EU+ in 2023 were issued to women and girls, over one-quarter were issued to children, creating a burden for many Ukrainian women to take up employment in their host country. In addition, Ukrainians were often employed in lower-skilled positions, partly due to the lengthy procedures for the recognition of diplomas or qualifications.

In order to better understand the needs of displaced persons from Ukraine, the EUAA, together with the OECD, continued to implement the Surveys of Arriving Migrants from Ukraine. Based on the results, two fact sheets were published in June and October 2023. In addition, the report



'Voices in Europe: Experiences, hopes and aspirations of forcibly displaced persons from Ukraine' analyses the first-hand testimonies gathered through the on-going survey and presents the prevailing themes raised by this population.

3.1. Access to procedures



In 2023, EU+ countries received over 1.1 million applications for international protection, which was the most since the refugee crisis in 2015-2016. In the last quarter of 2023, the number of applications lodged exceeded 2016 levels. The number of applications lodged each month in 2023 was almost always higher than in 2022 and over 90% were first-time applicants as in 2022.

Germany topped the list in terms of the number of applications received (334,000, +45% from 2022) and accounted for about 30% of the total. The next three top receiving countries jointly accounted for 40% of applications, with record numbers in each: France (167,000 applications, +7% increase), Spain (162,000, +38%) and Italy (136,000, +63%).

When considering asylum applications in relation to population size, Cyprus topped the list with around 13,000 applications lodged per 1 million inhabitants. Other countries that experienced significant levels of pressure from the inflow of asylum applications included Austria (6,500 per 1 million inhabitants), Greece (6,200), Germany (4,000), Luxembourg (3,800), Bulgaria (3,500), Slovenia and Switzerland (3,400 each).

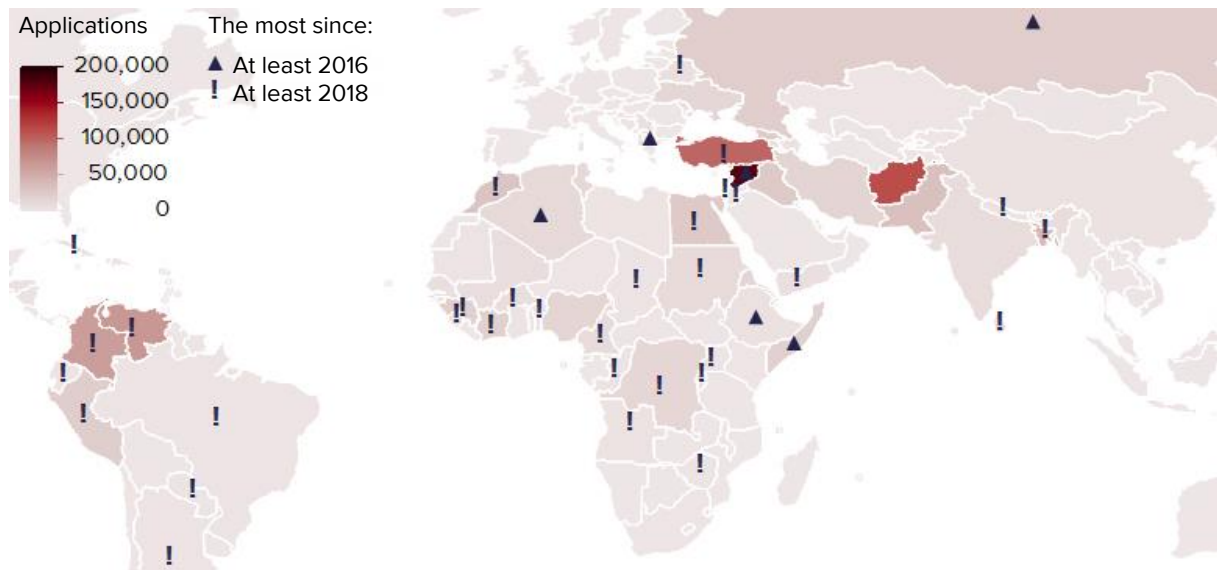
Syrians, Afghans and Turks continued to apply the most for international protection, accounting for over one-third of all applications lodged in EU+ countries (see *Figure 1*). Nationals of Syria, who accounted for about one-sixth of all applicants, lodged 181,000 applications, which was a 38% increase compared to 2022 and the highest level since 2016. They were followed at a distance by Afghans, with 114,000 applications, representing an 11% decrease compared to the previous year. With 101,000 applications, Turks applied in record numbers and maintained their position as the third-largest applicant group. This was an 82% increase compared to 2022, nearly surpassing the number of applications by Afghans.

Record high numbers of applications were lodged by other citizenships as well, including Venezuelans and Colombians, who ranked fourth and fifth. Following the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in October 2023, Palestinians applied for asylum in record numbers.

In 2023, EU+ countries continued to experience pressure at the borders and faced challenges related to the high number of arrivals. The impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine kept pressure on the EU's external eastern borders, while countries in the Mediterranean region struggled with the continued arrival of migrants by sea. Countries experiencing movements along the Balkan route ramped up their efforts to control the borders. Pressure was also felt in central European countries, which received increasing numbers of applications.



Figure 1. Applications for international protection in EU+ countries by country of origin, 2023



Notes: Data were not available for Portugal for October-December 2023. The boundaries in the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the European Union.

Source: EUAA Early Warning and Preparedness System (EPS) data as of 1 February 2024.

Against this backdrop, EU+ countries focused on reducing and preventing irregular migration into the EU, which at times risked impacting effective access to the territory. Throughout 2023, EU institutions and agencies, UNHCR, and international and civil society organisations scrutinised policies and practices related to providing effective access to the territory and the asylum procedure. They expressed concern about possible violations of fundamental rights at the external borders and called on both national governments and the European Commission to ensure the respect for fundamental rights and adherence to the principle of *non-refoulement*.

Some countries maintained a state of emergency, applying rules which allowed for derogations from the regular procedure. They also started investing in the use of technology to maintain border security. The increased workload arising from the higher number of applications led many countries to make adjustments to registration and lodging processes, in addition to reshuffling human resources to tackle the backlog of applications.

Link to the section in the main report: [add URL]



3.2. The Dublin procedure



In 2023, the European Commission and EU+ countries focused on enhancing the effectiveness of the Dublin III Regulation. Member States started applying the practical solutions defined in the Roadmap on Improving the Implementation of Transfers under the Dublin III Regulation (the Dublin roadmap), which was endorsed by EU+ countries at the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA) meeting on 29 November 2022.

Such practical solutions included, for example, recruiting and training staff, revising workflows and standard operating procedures, and embarking on or continuing with digitalisation initiatives. The EUAA published updated recommendations on [the implementation of Dublin transfers](#) and on [family reunification within the Dublin procedure](#), and fact sheets were released with up-to-date information on Dublin transfers.

The different measures yielded promising results, improving communication among Dublin units, overcoming obstacles in the implementation of Dublin transfers, increasing resources to allow for improved Dublin procedures and strengthening compliance with EU law and court rulings. The European Commission presented a number of good practices from EU+ countries in a [working document](#) published at the end of 2023.

Many Dublin units remained under pressure in 2023 due to the increasing number of applicants. Under its operational plans, the EUAA provided support to Dublin units in several Member States. The impact of the invasion of Ukraine on Dublin units decreased compared to 2022 but continued to affect the tasks and workload in many units.

The CJEU delivered several preliminary rulings on the interpretation of the Dublin III Regulation, similarly to previous years. Many EU+ countries noted that the implementation of some of these judgments – for example [Joined Cases C-323/21, C-324/21 and C-325/21](#) – raised additional practical questions, and discussions within the European Commission's Contact Committee or the EUAA's networks provided useful platforms to find solutions to these challenges.

According to provisional data which are regularly exchanged between the EUAA and 29 EU+ countries, 176,000 decisions were issued in 2023 in response to outgoing Dublin requests. This represented an 8% increase compared to 2022, resulting in the highest annual total since at least 2016. The number of monthly Dublin decisions was persistently above the 14,000 mark between July and November 2023 as a consequence of the rise in asylum applications in EU+ countries during the same period.

Overall, the annual ratio of decisions received on Dublin requests to asylum applications lodged was 15%, similar to 2022. Although some decisions on Dublin requests concerned family reunion cases, the stable ratio of decisions to applications suggests that in 2023 an increased number of asylum seekers moved from the first country of arrival to another to lodge a new application (referred to as secondary movements), impacting asylum caseloads overall.



At the country level, Germany and France continued to receive the most decisions in response to their requests, jointly accounting for around three-fifths of the EU+ total. As in previous years, Italy issued the most decisions overall on Dublin requests. However, for the first time on record, Croatia emerged as the second country, as the decisions it issued almost tripled compared to the previous year.

In 2023, there was a 72% acceptance rate for decisions in response to Dublin requests, meaning the share of positive decisions (explicitly or implicitly) for an application out of all decisions issued. This was 12 percentage points higher than in 2022, increasing to the most since 2017.

The number of Dublin transfers which were implemented (15,000) remained stable compared to 2022, but still well below pre-COVID-19 levels (over two-fifths fewer than in 2019). The implementation of Dublin transfers was partially hampered by the increased strain on asylum and reception authorities caused by the sharp rise in irregular arrivals throughout the year.

Article 17(1) of the Dublin III Regulation was invoked about 7,500 times in 2023, increasing by three-fifths from 2022 to the most in 5 years. Article 17(1) is a discretionary clause, which allows a Member State to examine an application for international protection lodged by a third-country national or a stateless person, even if such an examination is not its responsibility under the criteria laid down in the regulation.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)

3.3. Special procedures to assess protection needs



During the examination of applications for international protection at first instance, Member States under certain conditions can use special procedures – such as accelerated procedures, border procedures or prioritised procedures – while adhering to the basic principles and guarantees set out in EU law.

Legislative developments related to border procedures in 2023 ranged from proposals to introduce the procedure for the first time to changes to the conditions for applying the procedure and to the competent court for examining appeals. Several EU+ countries amended their lists of [safe countries of origin](#) and designations as safe third countries, while others started working on the adoption of such lists. The referral made by the Greek Council of State about the designation of Türkiye as a safe third country remained undecided by the CJEU in 2023, while the ECtHR provided interim measures to applicants for whom Türkiye was deemed as a safe third country.

Applications lodged after secondary movements continued to trigger inadmissibility decisions, and the CJEU was expected to rule in 2024 on the processing of applications lodged by people who have received international protection in another Member State but cannot be transferred back due to a risk of inhuman or degrading treatment.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)



3.4. Processing asylum applications at first instance



EU+ countries took a number of actions to respond to the increased number of applications for international protection. Some proposed legislative changes to further accelerate the asylum procedure, while new working methods, prioritisation policies and recruitment of additional staff were introduced to maximise the number of decisions taken. Member States also trialled changes to the procedure to reduce the length of the personal interview. Some EU+ countries introduced new information systems or began projects to digitalise their systems. Determining authorities followed up on lessons learned from past quality assessment initiatives, provided more training to staff and started new quality review processes for first instance procedures and decisions.

NGOs continued to raise concerns related to delays in scheduling personal interviews, the lack of training of officers carrying out interviews and the length of asylum procedures. UNHCR also expressed its position on the externalisation of asylum procedures, as in 2023 some Member States considered the transfer of asylum applicants to third countries for the processing of their asylum claims. The use of AI in migration was also identified as a topic of concern.

Decisions and case closures at first instance

In 2023, EU+ countries issued about 677,000 first instance decisions, the most since 2017. For the second successive year, Germany continued to issue the most decisions among EU+ countries (around 219,000, accounting for one-third of the EU+ total). It was followed at a distance by France (133,000) and Spain (90,000). These three countries jointly issued two-thirds of all first instance decisions. But trends differed: while Germany recorded the largest absolute increase in decision-making among EU+ countries compared to 2022 (+21,000), the opposite occurred in Spain (-13,000). In the meantime, decision-making remained stable in France.

For the third successive year, most decisions were issued on applications submitted by Syrians (132,000 decisions) and Afghans (89,000), jointly accounting for one-third of all decisions in the EU+. Notable absolute increases in decisions issued were also seen for nationals of: Türkiye (38,000 first instance decisions), Venezuela (45,000), Morocco (16,000), Georgia (23,000), Russia (10,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (11,000), Eritrea (12,000) and Ukraine (10,000).

Decisions on asylum applications are just one way to close an asylum case. Discontinuations and other case closures also contribute towards the overall outflow at first instance. Thus, in 2023, the overall number of cases exiting the asylum system at first instance (combining first instance decisions, discontinuations after withdrawals and other closures) also reached the highest level in 6 years (at about 863,000).

To accurately depict the level of pressure on national asylum systems, the number of applications lodged (inflow) should be juxtaposed with all case closures (outflow). This reveals that the gap between the inflow of applications for international protection and the outflow of cases exiting the asylum system at first instance continued to widen to be the largest in 5 years. In other words, in 2023, the asylum system at first instance absorbed approximately 280,000 cases more than it managed to process. This marked a caseload accumulation



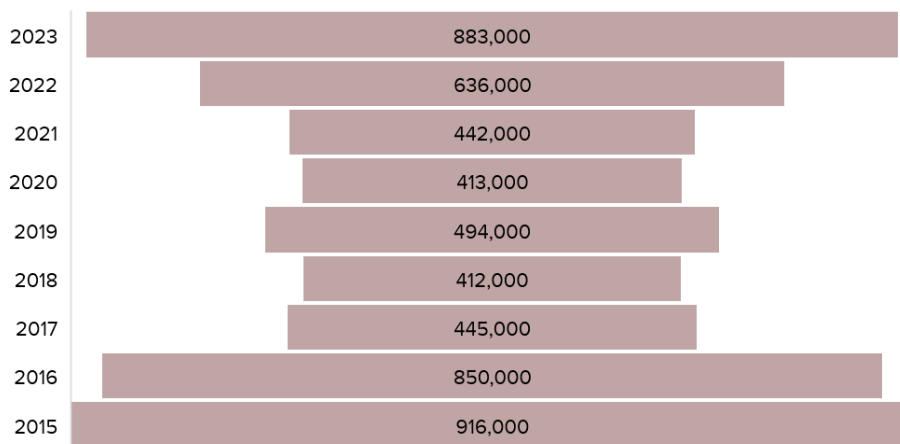
increase by 66% from 2022, which contributed to the continuation of the trend visible since mid-2021 whereby the inflow consistently exceeded the outflow.

Pending cases at first instance

The continuously widening gap between applications and case closures led to the highest number of pending cases in the last 8 years, second only to the levels recorded in 2015 (see *Figure 2*).

At the end of 2023, approximately 883,000 cases were awaiting a decision at first instance (a rise by two-fifths from the end of 2022). The caseload concerned a range of citizenships, but the largest number pertained to Syrians and Turks. One-half of all cases in the EU+ were pending for more than 6 months.

Figure 2: Number of pending cases at first instance in EU+ countries at the end of the year, 2015–2023



Note: Data were not available for Portugal for October-December 2023.

Source: EUAA EPS data as of 1 February 2024.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)

3.5. Processing asylum applications at second or higher instance



In 2023, developments at second instance focused on the right to access the appeal procedure and the competent bodies which should examine an appeal depending on the circumstances. The scope of appeals in international protection cases (including the requirement to provide an *ex nunc* examination of both facts and points of law) and the suspensive effect of an appeal were the subject of legislative changes and judicial review. Some countries strengthened their laws on the right to a hearing before an appeal body, and several judgments highlighted the importance of this procedural safeguard on appeal. In addition, courts stressed the need to ensure that a same-sex interpreter, interviewer or judge could be provided on appeal.



As every year, appeal bodies suspended the examination of cases on appeal for specific profiles of applicants (for example for applicants from the Gaza Strip and Sudan) due to ongoing situations. Countries also updated guidelines based on developments in countries of origin.

The length of asylum appeals was an aspect of concern for national authorities, with civil society organisations urging several EU+ countries to render a decision within reasonable time limits. The digitalisation of appeals in international protection cases continued throughout 2023 through remote hearings.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)

3.6. Reception of applicants for international protection



Challenges from previous years continued in 2023 with the reception of applicants for international protection. Reception authorities in the majority of EU+ countries were still concerned with providing suitable accommodation for each applicant, as reports of homelessness, destitute or sub-standard living conditions, and the lack of support services were frequent by international organisations, national human rights institutions, ombudspersons and civil society organisations. The situation continued to negatively impact applicants with special needs and vulnerabilities, such as children, women, LGBTIQ applicants or applicants with physical and mental disabilities (see *Section 4*). Courts were frequently called upon to ensure access to material reception conditions and dignified conditions for all applicants.

Next to addressing urgent needs, national authorities in several countries continued their quest for structural solutions to ensure flexible and sustainable reception systems. This entailed changes, for example, to the institutional set-up, funding structure and cooperation agreements with other stakeholders. The environmental sustainability of facilities gained more importance as reception systems had to cope with increased demand and higher energy costs, as detailed in a dedicated EUAA [situational update](#).

The pressure on the reception system was a catalyst in the revision and stricter application of the rules on the entitlement to reception conditions. Changes to legislation generally clarified the end of reception. As in previous years, the outflow from reception centres often stagnated or even slowed down, as recognised beneficiaries of international protection faced challenges in finding their own accommodation in the private market. Policy proposals aimed to facilitate this transition and to allow faster access to the labour market.

While challenges will likely remain, national authorities need to continue to look for flexible and sustainable solutions in reception to efficiently adapt to the changing numbers and profiles of applicants and reception residents.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)



3.7. Aspects of detention involving applicants and former applicants



In 2023, practices and conditions in detention continued to be closely scrutinised by international, European and national monitoring and judicial institutions. Public discussions intensified about detention at the border of people who arrive in an irregular manner and their possibility to access the asylum procedure or obtain counselling and legal advice. The conditions in detention at the border were often described as alarming by international and civil society organisations. The ECtHR issued decisions on cases from previous years condemning these conditions and practices at the border. The ECtHR and national courts also ruled against the detention of applicants with special needs, especially children.

EU+ countries typically extended the grounds for detaining foreigners, including applicants for international protection, and increased the possible length of immigration detention. Legislative changes in some countries included the possibility to detain an applicant who is at risk of absconding while awaiting a transfer to another EU+ country under the Dublin III Regulation.

Key themes in policy discussions included the detention of foreigners pending a return, the application of the principle of *non-refoulement* in such cases and the actual possibility to implement return decisions. These areas were also abundantly reflected in jurisprudential developments in 2023.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)

3.8. Access to information



National authorities and other stakeholders continued to strive for information to be available more readily and in various formats and languages. Some countries produced tailored information for specific audiences, such as minor applicants and displaced persons from Ukraine.

Some countries launched information campaigns focused on deterring nationals from countries with low recognition rates from undertaking perilous journeys to the EU, only to have their application rejected. Others focused on raising awareness among rejected applicants about the possibility of a voluntary return to the country of origin.

After several years of work, the EUAA launched a comprehensive new portal, [Let's Speak Asylum](#), where recommended methodology and practical tools are available to stakeholders working on information provision in the asylum system.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)



3.9. Legal assistance and representation



In 2023, EU+ countries continued to strive to improve access to and the quality of legal assistance in all stages of the asylum procedure. Developments included institutional changes, specialised training for providers and amending the eligibility criteria to work as a legal assistance provider in the field of international protection.

Nonetheless, challenges were reported on accessing legal aid, particularly at the borders or in detention. For example, the lack of communication with a lawyer and an effective right to legal assistance for asylum seekers in detention were raised within different fora. Some countries amended national provisions to reinforce the right of detained asylum seekers to be in contact with family members, legal counsellors and relevant organisations.

With displaced persons continuing to arrive from Ukraine, some EU+ countries continued to provide legal information on and assistance with the temporary protection procedure.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)

3.10. Interpretation services



In 2023, national authorities, courts and tribunals, civil society organisations and service providers made efforts to enhance access to and increase the quality of interpretation in asylum procedures and the reception system. Across EU+ countries, increasing applications led to growing interpretation needs. In some countries, where the profiles of applicants remained similar to previous years, no significant new needs emerged. In countries, however, which received applicants with diverse profiles, additional challenges were noted with regard to securing effective interpretation services. On the whole, shortages in certain languages, the unavailability of interpretation for certain services and heterogenous standards continued to impact applicants' procedural rights and access to services, such as healthcare.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)



3.11. Country of origin information



Key developments in the production of COI in 2023 centred around improving methodologies, including through standardising reporting; enhancing cooperation through bilateral, international and European frameworks, as well as with civil society organisations; increasing accessibility to COI by making reports and resources publicly available; and widening the scope of information by addressing specific areas in greater detail.

As in previous years, COI units continued to focus on some of the most common countries of origin of asylum applicants in Europe, namely Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. EU+ countries also monitored developments in Latin America, as interest on the region increased. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, COI needs on the security situation in Russia and Ukraine increased significantly. This trend persisted in 2023, and national COI units produced outputs on the two countries, also following fact-finding missions, when possible.

Reported challenges in the area of COI production included staff shortages; a lack of accessibility to information on latest developments due to conflict, security concerns and limited access to countries with authoritarian governments; and an increase in urgent requests which place strain on available resources.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)

3.12. Statelessness in the asylum context



In the context of asylum, statelessness may affect the determination process for an application for international protection and the procedural safeguards of the applicant. In 2023, statelessness, remained a topic of importance on the EU agenda. This was particularly the case as statelessness-related considerations were relevant to two major areas of conflict in 2023, namely Palestine and Ukraine.

In 2023, about 2,300 asylum applications were lodged in EU+ countries by stateless persons, which is in line with 2022. Throughout the year, just over 1,200 decisions were issued at first instance to stateless applicants in EU+ countries. The recognition rate of stateless applicants was 53% in 2023, relatively similar to the past few years but much lower than during the refugee crisis of 2015-2016 (when nearly 9 in 10 decisions were positive). At the end of 2023, 1,900 cases of stateless applicants were pending at first instance.

A number of legislative developments aimed to increase recognition and ensure that the rights of stateless people are protected, including stateless asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, as well as their children. Amidst positive developments, civil society organisations emphasised that more work needs to be done to identify and fully protect the rights of stateless people.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)



3.13. Content of protection



Content of protection refers to the rights to which beneficiaries of a form of protection are entitled in the country of asylum, as well as the associated obligations. Protection is granted when applicants receive a positive decision granting refugee or subsidiary protection status (also referred to as EU-harmonised statuses). The recognition rate refers to the number of positive outcomes as a percentage of the total number of decisions on applications for international protection. While national forms of protection do grant a protection status to third country nationals, those statuses – which are not harmonised across EU+ countries – are typically not included in the calculation of recognition rate.

In 2023, the recognition rate at first instance for EU-regulated forms of protection climbed to 43%, increasing for the third year in a row. This was the highest rate since 2016 (when 57% of decisions granted refugee status or subsidiary protection). The rise was mostly driven by increased recognition rates for Afghans, Iraqis, Palestinians and Ukrainians and by more decisions issued to Syrians. In total, 54% of all positive decisions granted refugee status, while 46% granted subsidiary protection.

Beyond EU-regulated statuses, it is worth noting that over one-quarter of negative decisions for EU-regulated statuses granted a national form of protection, which offered authorisations to stay for humanitarian reasons.

Nationalities with the highest recognition rates in 2023 included Syrians (94%), Ukrainians (92%), Palestinians (87%), Yemenites (84%), Eritreans (83%) and Belarusians (81%).

The extent and quality of rights and services that beneficiaries of protection receive shape the prospects of their effective integration into the host society. In 2023, legislative and policy changes focused on family reunification and national forms of protection, while some EU+ countries continued developing integration policies and strategies tailored to the common profiles of beneficiaries of protection in the respective countries, with the support of civil society organisations. A number of initiatives focused on facilitating administrative procedures that beneficiaries of protection use to access associated rights.

The occasion of the 20-year anniversary since the Family Reunification Directive entered into force prompted publications and recommendations to improve its implementation. The CJEU and national courts continued to deliver guidance on its practical application, clarifying related rules on its scope and criteria.

Several initiatives focused on establishing or adjusting rules and criteria for national forms of protection. In order to avoid a legal limbo, some EU+ countries granted residence permits based on humanitarian or medical considerations in an effort to safeguard the best interests of the child or the principle of *non-refoulement*.

Naturally, many integration initiatives in 2023 targeted beneficiaries of temporary protection, including support in accessing education and language training. Civil society organisations played a key role in providing relevant services and complementing efforts by authorities at the community level.



Among reported challenges, it was noted that limited or a lack of social housing alternatives and a shortage of low-cost housing in local markets created impediments for beneficiaries of international protection to find accommodation.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)

3.14. Resettlement and humanitarian admissions



EU+ countries strived to fulfil their resettlement commitments in 2023, while facing particular challenges at the national level. Priorities needed to be reshuffled amid a shortage of accommodation places to host resettled refugees. At the same time, emergency situations struck third countries in which refugees at risk were waiting to be transferred, such as the earthquake in Türkiye.

In total, about 15,000 people arrived in 2023 to the EU+ from third countries in the context of resettlement or humanitarian admissions. This was the lowest number since 2016, with the exception of 2020, when transfers were severely hindered due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The role of civil society organisations continued to be important in the implementation of resettlement and complementary pathways, including humanitarian admission programmes. Civil society organisations participated in the referral of refugees, contributed to the success of evacuations of refugees at risk and supported in the safe transfer of selected refugees, depending on the agreements signed with EU+ countries. Their role in the provision of reception services, particularly housing, was key to ease pressure on reception systems in some countries.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)



4. Children and people with special needs in the asylum procedure



In 2023, several EU+ countries reported a continued high number of applicants with special needs, ranging from applicants with physical or mental disabilities to victims of gender-based violence and children arriving to the EU alone. Against the general background of frequent delays in the asylum procedure and saturated reception systems, governments continued to look for solutions to ensure dignified conditions and security for the most vulnerable. At times, legislative and policy changes allowed for a derogation from higher standards, while international and civil society organisations highlighted the risks of this for the longer term.

Authorities in countries with high numbers of simultaneous arrivals faced difficulties in appropriately identifying and assessing special needs. ECtHR judgments pronounced in 2023 -referring to situations in 2018-2020- served as a reminder that gaps in identification and support to applicants with special needs may have a dramatic impact on their lives. In addition, [EUAA research](#) revealed substantial data gaps as EU+ countries do not generally collect or register data on vulnerabilities, in large part due to data protection concerns, so it is difficult to identify the most common types of disabilities or vulnerabilities detected among applicants for international protection.

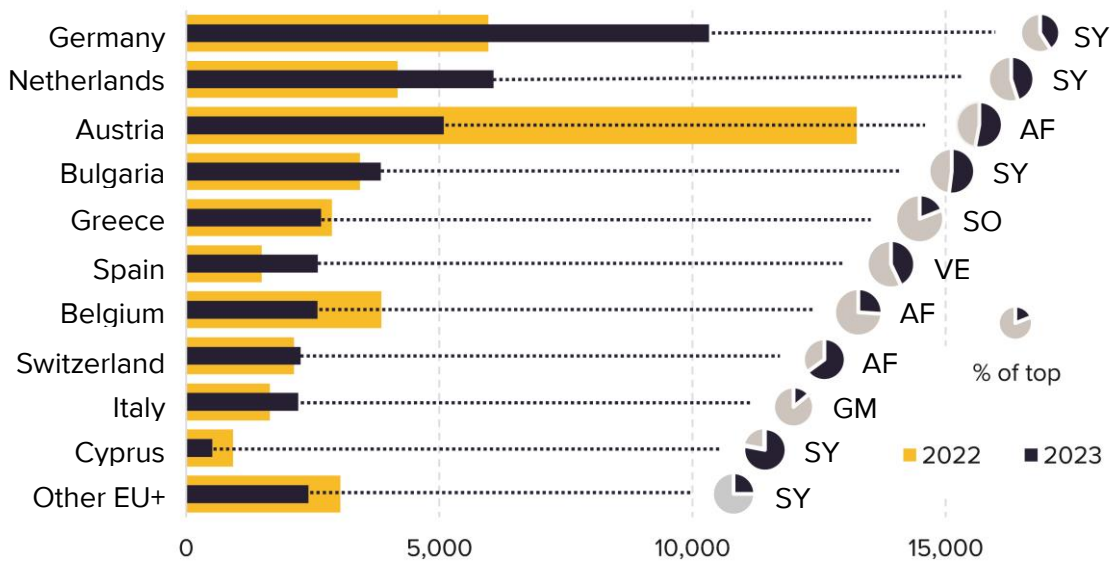
In October 2023, the Istanbul Convention entered into force in respect of the EU, including the provisions relating to asylum and *non-refoulement*. At the country level, efforts focused on the prevention of violence against women and girls and support for female victims of violence. Comprehensive mappings still revealed many gaps in asylum and reception systems, risking the safety of women and girls. These gaps and their detrimental impact were also captured and adjudicated by courts.

National authorities made efforts to improve the responsiveness of asylum and reception systems to the needs of applicants with diverse SOGIESC. Accurate and timely country of origin information focused on the situation of LGBTIQ persons to properly assess their situation. To this end, in 2023, the EUAA updated its [COI Research Guide on LGBTIQ](#) to assist practitioners. At second instance, courts often stepped in and overturned negative first instance decisions to ensure protection for this profile of applicants.

As the majority of persons seeking temporary protection in Europe comprised women and children, considerations related to trafficking in human beings continued to be prominent among EU+ countries, triggering further prevention and protection measures in 2023. Following the European Commission's proposal from December 2022 to revise the Anti-Trafficking Directive, the European Parliament adopted its mandate for negotiations with Member States which started in November 2023 with the European Council. Subsequently, the European Parliament and Council reached an informal agreement in January 2024 on expanding the scope of the current directive. At the national level, EU+ countries introduced changes to better identify, refer and protect victims of trafficking. Some countries also focused on monitoring the situation by commissioning studies to analyse current trends.

In 2023, 41,000 applications for asylum were lodged by self-claimed unaccompanied minors across EU+ countries. This was similar to the level in 2022 (-5%) and the second-highest on record since 2015. The share of applications by unaccompanied minor remained stable, representing about 4% of all applications lodged in EU+ countries. A significant share of minor applicants originated from Syria and Afghanistan, jointly accounting for three in every five applications by self-claimed unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries.

Figure 3: Top 10 EU+ countries receiving applications by self-claimed unaccompanied minors, 2023 compared to 2022 and share of applications lodged by the main citizenship of unaccompanied minors, 2023



Note: Data were not available for Portugal for October-December 2023.

Source: EUAA EPS data as of 1 February 2024.

Implicitly withdrawn applications by unaccompanied minors declined by more than one-third from the peak in 2022, particularly by Afghan unaccompanied minors. This suggests there was a possible reduction of secondary movements by unaccompanied minors within EU+ countries.

The continued high number of applications from unaccompanied children across several EU+ countries prompted several changes in their reception. Many issues persisted and reception conditions for children were often sub-optimal. Legislative and policy changes aimed to speed up processes and ensure suitable support, with NGOs highlighting risks that these derogations may mean in practice.

In addition, a lack of guardians for unaccompanied minor applicants was reported in some EU+ countries. To provide guidance and assist in increasing the quality of services, the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) developed a [manual for trainers](#) of guardians, which is complemented by an e-learning platform. In addition, together with the EUAA, two practical guides were developed for guardians as an [introduction to international protection](#) and to the [asylum procedure](#). FRA and the Council of Europe also published [guidance](#) for border officials and other authorities on protecting children at Europe's borders.

[Link to the section in the main report: \[add URL\]](#)

5. EUAA support in 2023



With migratory pressures and complex protection needs persisting in Europe, the Agency expanded its operational and technical support to address evolving patterns. As an integral actor in the collective EU response in addressing the needs of millions of displaced persons, the EUAA effectively contributed to the implementation of protection solutions across Europe, including by offering assistance to countries receiving large numbers of displaced persons from Ukraine.

To provide evidence-based information to a range of audiences, including policymakers, the EUAA continued to collect, process, synthesise and analyse information on specific themes, latest developments, emerging topics and forecasting in the field of asylum. Following the [roadmap for convergence](#) of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU, the EUAA conducted a [pilot study](#) to analyse decision-making practices on asylum claims and the origin of differences in protection rates between Member States, in particular with regard to countries of origin for which [guidance notes](#) have been developed by the Agency. The study found that the variations in recognition rates resulted from the complex interplay of multiple factors, such as differences in national systems and decision-making practices which are influenced by national policies, guidance and jurisprudence. The study also highlighted that the EUAA's products and activities help to reach convergence in practices.

The Agency also carried out an in-depth [evaluation](#) of the use and impact of its country information and guidance products, which found that both the EUAA's country of origin information and country guidance products were widely used, the former primarily by case officers and the latter mostly by policymakers. The added value of the EUAA's products compared to national sources is their authoritativeness, the consistent use of a rigorous methodology and the level of harmonisation.

Training developed and delivered by the Agency supported the practical implementation of CEAS by assisting asylum and reception officials enhance their knowledge, skills and autonomy to implement efficient and fair procedures, in line with EU standards. In total, more than 13,000 participations in EUAA training activities were recorded in 2023, and more than 7,500 learners were trained.

A key area of work for the EUAA is to provide operational and technical assistance, especially to Member States experiencing disproportionate pressure on their asylum and reception systems. In 2023, the EUAA provided [operational support](#) to 13 EU Member States across a number of areas which, depending on the specific needs of each country, may include support to increase capacity and quality in registration and processing of applications at first and second instances; in national reception systems; in the Dublin procedure; in vulnerability assessments and in enhancing protection for unaccompanied minors; in improving information provision and information management; and in the areas of relocation and resettlement. Evaluations of the Agency's operational support conducted in 2023 showed that support was provided efficiently and led to improved workflows and increasing capacity. In addition, throughout 2023 the EUAA continued to support the external dimension of CEAS through its cooperation with third countries on the basis of bilateral roadmaps and EU-funded regional programmes.



In May 2023, the Agency's first Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO) was appointed, who started to develop the Agency's Fundamental Rights Strategy and establish a complaints mechanism to respond to claims of breaches of fundamental rights in the context of the Agency's operations. Steps were also taken to develop a methodology for the new monitoring unit of the Agency. The focus would be to work closely with Member States to monitor how the legal obligations of the EU asylum *acquis* are applied in practice; assess Member States' capacity to manage pressure; prevent shortcomings; identify existing limitations; and assist Member States to address them.

In 2023, the EUAA held the rotating presidency of the [Justice and Home Affairs Agencies Network \(JHAAN\)](#), and worked together with other agencies across five main priority areas:

- Digitalisation, covering issues related to the use of artificial intelligence, biometrics and interoperability;
- Implementation of the EU Green Deal in JHA Agencies;
- Information provision in mixed migration situations;
- Cybersecurity; and
- Internal and external communication to increase awareness and promote the network's activities and functioning.

Link to the section in the main report: [add URL]



Concluding remarks

In 2023, European countries continued to host a record number of persons in need of protection, as asylum applications climbed for the second year in a row. Conflict, persecution, human rights violations, natural disasters and degrading ecosystems kept forcing millions of people to leave their homes, with some seeking protection in Europe.

Over 1.1 million applications lodged in EU+ countries in 2023 is reminiscent of the numbers in 2015 and 2016, the years of the migration crisis in Europe. At the same time, EU+ countries issued over 1.1 million decisions granting temporary protection to displaced persons from Ukraine, with the conflict continuing and the country still experiencing the devastating results of the Russian invasion. A notable difference between the years 2015-2016 and 2022-2023 is that during the migration crisis the increased number of applications came from a few select countries, while currently applicants originate from a larger number of countries, thus necessitating higher diversity in guidance to effectively assess protection needs.

Understandably, the combined total of people seeking protection placed asylum and reception systems in Europe under extreme pressure. Protection solutions were identified due to political will in allocating additional resources and the combination of efforts and expertise by multiple stakeholders at EU, national and local levels. In contrast to the period 2015-2016, the past year has not been presented as a 'crisis' in public discourse, while catering to more people in need of international and temporary protection. This indicates that, despite limitations to varying degrees in the functioning of national asylum and reception systems, European countries have made progress in increasing their preparedness and are better equipped to manage a high inflow of people seeking protection.

Nevertheless, gaps and deficiencies were widespread in reception systems with frequent reports by international organisations, national human rights institutions, ombudspersons and civil society organisations on substandard living conditions, limited support services and homelessness. Asylum authorities have also reported that arriving applicants are of growingly poorer health, likely a result of the more dangerous journeys they take to reach Europe. Responding methodically and systematically to such health needs means that more resources are required. As it is evident that pressure will persist in the years to come, EU+ countries need to programme and invest accordingly to enhance processing capacity and strengthen reception systems in order to provide dignified reception conditions to people in need.

Amidst the efforts made by EU+ countries to provide effective protection and the reported limitations in the functioning of asylum and reception systems, the role of judicial institutions in interpreting the EU asylum *acquis* and guiding the practical implementation of CEAS has been decisive. Both the CJEU and national judicial institutions continued scrutinising national legislation, policies and practices in a number of CEAS-related areas, with a particular emphasis on effective access to the territory and the asylum procedure and the application of the principle of *non-refoulement*, the Dublin procedure, the assessment of applications, reception conditions (including safeguards for applicants with special needs) and detention. In response to rising applications, it is expected that attempts to externalise the processing of applications for international protection will remain on the political agenda. In this context, it will be essential that national courts carry out judicial reviews to ensure that fair and efficient asylum proceedings are provided to applicants.



With a significant share of pending cases awaiting a decision at second instance, it is expected that court decisions will increasingly define lawful practices and influence asylum policies in EU+ countries. To this end, it is essential to allocate resources to advance professional development and expertise on asylum among national judges. It is also of paramount importance that authorities follow court decisions to bolster confidence in and safeguard the integrity of CEAS.

An area that generated much discussion in 2023, similar to previous years, was the dual challenge of border management and effective access to protection for those in need. In 2023, significant steps were taken toward calibrating an integrated European border management system to effectively control external land and sea borders and safeguard the functioning of the Schengen area. This was done through interconnection and the interoperability of information systems on borders and security, closer coordination between European agencies and national authorities, and cooperation with third countries. In addition, a key component of the European integrated border management, as sketched out by the European Commission in 2023, is full respect for fundamental rights. Nevertheless, on a number of occasions reports emerged of practices inhibiting effective access to territory for people who may have been in need of protection. It is of essence for EU+ countries to put in place and sufficiently equip independent mechanisms to monitor human rights compliance at the borders, as also foreseen in the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Undoubtedly, the political agreement on and the subsequent practical steps taken toward the adoption of the pact have been a major breakthrough in the evolution of CEAS. In its historical evolution, CEAS has always driven EU+ countries to improve their asylum and reception systems and increase protection standards. The pact intends to offer a modern asylum system that is, indeed, multifaceted and provides a variety of instruments. It aims to help countries address a complex reality within a migratory landscape defined by multiple, diverse and often unpredictable parameters. As not all possible scenarios can be accounted for, the pact aims to strengthen solutions and expand the range of possibilities addressed by its different instruments.

Drafting common legislation, albeit important, is only one step toward a unified asylum policy and harmonised protection standards. Equally critical is the application of the rules in a converging and harmonised way. The months following the adoption of the pact will be a busy but constructive period, when countries, with guidance from the European Commission and support from EU agencies, will put in place the necessary arrangements for the practical functioning of the pact. In this process and beyond, the EUAA will continue being a vital component of the European asylum architecture, providing technical, operational and training support to EU+ countries. With its reinforced mandate, the Agency will work closely with countries to monitor how the legal obligations of the EU asylum *acquis* are applied in practice, prevent shortcomings, identify existing limitations and assist countries in addressing them.



