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Over 1.1 million applications for international protection were lodged in EU+ countries in 2023, the most since the refugee crisis in 2015-2016.[vi] In fact, in the last quarter of 2023, the number of applications lodged exceeded 2016 levels (*see Figure 3*). 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.

Figure 3. Number of asylum applications by month (January-December 2023) in EU+ countries, selected years

Figure 3. Number of asylum applications by month (January-December 2023) in EU+ countries, selected
Note: Data were not available for Portugal for October-December 2023.
Source: EUAA Early Warning and Preparedness System (EPS) data as of 1 February 2024.

In addition to the rise in applications, around 1 million decisions granted temporary protection to people fleeing Ukraine.[vii] In total, over 4.3 million people were under temporary protection by the end of 2023.[3][4]

The overall increase in 2023 masked diverging developments across receiving countries. Among the 29 EU+ countries, applications increased by more than 5% in 12 countries but decreased by more than 5% in another 11. The increases recorded in the top receiving countries had the largest impact on the EU+ trend (*see Figure 4*). Once again, Germany topped the list in terms of the number of applications received (334,000, +45% from 2022) and accounted for about 30% the total. This is a substantial share, but less than in 2016, when Germany received almost three-fifths of all applications.

Figure 4. Asylum applications in 2022 and 2023 by main receiving countries in 2023

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Note: Data were not available for Portugal for October-December 2023.
Source: EUAA EPS data as of 1 February 2024.

The next three top receiving countries jointly accounted for 41% of applications, with record numbers in each:[viii] France (167,000 applications, +7% increase), Spain (162,000, +38%) and Italy (136,000, +63%). In 2016, their combined share was below one-fifth. At far lower levels,

Bulgaria, Slovenia, Estonia, Luxembourg and Latvia (in descending order) also received unprecedented numbers of applications, while the Netherlands and Switzerland received the most since 2015.

In contrast, applications in Austria declined substantially by 46% compared to 2022 (with 59,000 applications received in 2023). Decreases at lower levels were also seen in Sweden, Cyprus, Romania, Denmark, Croatia and Czechia (in descending order).[ix]These declines may be partially attributable to several developments ranging from changes to visa-free policies in neighbouring third countries,[315]the introduction of certain temporary internal border controls, changes in routes of irregular entry and onward travel, and the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive in 2022 which led to fewer Ukrainians lodging asylum applications in 2023.

Syrians, Afghans and Turks continued to apply the most for international protection, accounting for over one-third of all applications lodged in EU+ countries. The highest share of their applications was lodged in Germany. 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, who applied in lower numbers than in the previous year (a decrease by 11%). With 101,000 applications, Turks applied in record numbers[x]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 many other citizenships as well (*see Figure 5*). Venezuelans and Colombians, who ranked fourth and fifth, applied in record numbers for the second consecutive year. At lower levels, nationals of other Latin American countries also lodged record numbers of applications in 2023, including Peru, Cuba, Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina and Paraguay (in descending order).[xi]These increases were on top of a previous surge in 2022, as the region continues to face one of the largest population displacements in its history. [316] Almost 8 in every 10 applications by Latin Americans in the EU+ in 2023 were lodged in Spain.

Shifting the focus to Africa, about 273,000 applications for international protection were lodged in 2023 from 55 African countries of origin as conflict, humanitarian and economic crises persisted in several parts of the continent.[317]There was a sharp increase in applications by nationals from the top countries of origin in this region, namely Moroccans, Egyptians, Guineans and Ivorians (in descending order), which jointly accounted for more than one-third of all applications. All four applied in unprecedented numbers, as did nationals of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Cameroon.[xii]In addition, there was a six-fold increase in applicants from Burkina Faso (6,900) compared to 2022.

In contrast, the largest decline in absolute terms was in applications by nationals of India, likely a reflection of the change in the visa-free policy of Serbia at the start of 2023. At the same time, this was partially offset by a rise to unprecedented levels of applications by citizens from neighbouring Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal (in descending order).

Applications by Palestinians[xiii] rose in the summer of 2023 and they increased further following the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in October 2023. In fact, Palestinians applied for asylum in record numbers in 2023.[xiv] About three in every five applications by Palestinians

were lodged in Greece, contributing to the sharp rise in the total number of applications in the country. As a result, Greece received the third-highest number of applications per capita across EU+ countries in 2023, almost as many as Austria, which was in second place after Cyprus. A high number of applications was also recorded in Belgium, which received an additional 28% of the EU+ total.

Figure 5. Applications for international protection in EU+ countries by country of origin, 2023

Figure 5. 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 EPS data as of 1 February 2024.

- [vi]Data were not available for Portugal for October-December 2023.
- [vii]Based on data by Eurostat: Decisions granting temporary protection by citizenship, age and sex – monthly data, data at the end of December 2023 (last update on 5 February 2024). Data for December 2023 were missing for Switzerland.
- [314]Eurostat (2024, February 8). Over 4.3 million people under temporary protection.

- [viii]Since at least 2008, based on a combination of data from Eurostat (2008-2014; last update on 18 January 2024)

- [ix]Only countries with at least 1,000 applications lodged in 2023 were considered.
- [315]European Commission. (2023, May 30). *Coomunication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the monitoring of the EU's visa free regimes* [COM(2023) 297 final].

- [x]Since at least 2008, based on a combination of data from Eurostat (2008-2014; last update on 18 January 2024)
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZA__custom_4848743/default/tab

  and EPS (since 2015).
- [xi]For this analysis, Latin America includes Central America, South America and the Caribbean. Only citizenships with at least 1,000 applications in 2023 were considered.
- [316]European Commission. *European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations: South America*.

- [317]United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2024). *Global Appeal 2024*.

- [xii]Other African applicant groups applying in record numbers include nationals of Angola, Benin, Chad, Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Only citizenships with least 1,000 applications in 2023 were considered.
- [xiii]Palestine is not recognised as an independent state by all countries globally and across the EU. This leads to different approaches in the statistical recording and reporting of Palestinians, who may be reported as stateless or of undetermined nationality. As such, available EPS data on Palestinians should be considered underestimated.

- xivAt far lower levels, applications for international protection by Israelis (283) were also at a record high in 2023.

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