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3.4.8.6. Pending cases at first instance

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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 15*).xxxi

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 wide array 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 15. Number of pending cases at first instance in EU+ countries at the end of the year, 2015–2023

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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 countries with the largest gaps between applications lodged and case closures (Italy, Spain and Germany, in descending order) also had the highest caseloads at first instance. Germany (240,000) accounted for 27% of the total and had the largest absolute increase in pending cases compared to the end of 2022 (up by three-quarters). The caseload also rose in Spain (183,000, up by one-third) and Italy (162,000, almost doubled). Jointly, these three countries accounted for two-thirds of all cases pending at the end of 2023.

Other large absolute increases took place in the Netherlands (44,000, up by two-fifths) and Greece (30,000, up by almost three-quarters). At much lower levels, the pending caseload more than doubled in Latvia (600, +116%) and Slovenia (1,100, +129%).

In contrast, only 10 EU+ countries managed to reduce their caseload in 2023. Among them were Austria (23,000, down by over two-fifths), Cyprus (27,000, down by one-tenth) and Sweden (5,200, down by two-fifths).

- xxxiData were missing for Slovakia. Due to missing data, data were imputed for: Cyprus, January 2016 data were used for December 2015; Lithuania, January 2022 data were used for December 2021; Portugal, September 2023 data were used for December 2023.

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