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icon for withdrawn applications at first instance

An asylum application can be withdrawn for various reasons before a final decision has been issued, regardless of whether an application is pending at first or at higher instances. For reporting purposes, withdrawn applications can be measured based on two indicators:

- 'explicit' withdrawals refer to cases where the applicant no longer needs international protection and notifies the authorities to withdraw the application; and
- 'implicit' withdrawals concern cases where the authorities fail to locate the applicant and therefore it is considered that the applicant has abandoned the procedure. Data on implicit withdrawals may cover cases prior to the reference year since an applicant may have absconded long before the withdrawal was noted and reported.

In 2022, about 140,000 applications were withdrawn in EU+ countries, which was twice as many as in 2021 and the most since 2016. At the same time, the number of asylum applications lodged in EU+ countries increased steadily (one-half more than in 2021) but at a slower rate than the rise in withdrawals. The ratio of withdrawn applications to applications lodged thus rose from about 1 in 10 in the previous 4 years to 1 in 7 in 2022. Over two-fifths of the withdrawals occurred in the last 4 months of 2022, with peak occurrences in October and November 2022.

Around four in every five withdrawals were by male applicants and almost three-fifths by applicants between 18 and 34 years of age. In 2022, the most withdrawals since at least 2008 were recorded for younger applicants (14-17 years old), which was twice as many as in 2021. Furthermore, the number of withdrawn applications by older applicants (65 years or older) tripled from 2021, reaching 960 applications, which was the most since 2016.

At least four-fifths of all withdrawn applications in 2022 were implicit.[xli] In most EU+ countries with available data,[xlii] the majority of withdrawals were implicit. The most notable exceptions included Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland and Norway, where explicitly withdrawn applications ranged between 66% and 94% of all withdrawn applications.[xliii] It is possible that an asylum applicant implicitly withdraws their application from one EU+ country in order to apply again in another one, thus indicating secondary movements towards other EU+ countries. In this regard, there was a pattern of many implicit withdrawals, and thus secondary movements, from the countries along the Balkan route and countries at the EU's external borders.

Almost all EU+ countries recorded more withdrawals in 2022 compared to 2021. Exceptions included Greece, Latvia and Malta, where withdrawals decreased, and France, where they remained stable. The sharpest rise took place in Austria and Bulgaria, where five times as many withdrawals were recorded compared to the previous year *(see Figure 16).* For the first time on record, in 2022, Austria became the top EU+ country for withdrawn applications, accounting for almost one-third of the total. Bulgaria followed at a distance, accounting for one-tenth of the total.

At lower levels, important relative increases took place in Denmark (five times as many as in 2021), Poland (almost four times as many) and Cyprus (over twice as many). In addition, several countries recorded the most withdrawals since 2008, including Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, whereas Cyprus recorded the most since 2010 and Croatia since 2013.[xliv] While recording a decline of one-tenth from 2021, Greece continued to receive the third-most withdrawals.

The number of withdrawn applications in 2022 increased in most countries, notably in Austria and Bulgaria

Figure 16. EU+ countries with the most withdrawals, 2022 compared to 2021

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Source: Eurostat [migr_asywitha] as of 13 April 2023.

In terms of nationality, one-quarter of all withdrawals were by Afghan nationals. Afghans withdrew over 35,000 applications in 2022 compared to 18,000 in 2021, largely in Austria and Bulgaria *(see Figure 17)*. Furthermore, in 2022, Afghans accounted for almost one-half of all withdrawn applications by minors and represented two-thirds of all withdrawals in the 14-17 age group.

In 2022, Indians emerged as the second nationality to withdraw the most applications in EU+ countries. The surge in withdrawals by applicants from India was staggering, with over nine times as many withdrawn applications as in the previous year. The vast majority were withdrawn by this citizenship in Austria, followed at a distance in Cyprus and Slovenia.

All withdrawals in Austria[xlv] and Slovenia were implicit, suggesting strong secondary movement flows across the Balkan route towards other destination countries. The flow of Indian applicants through the Balkan route was enabled by Serbia’s visa-free policy.[471]

Syrians, Ukrainians, Turks, Pakistanis and Tunisians (in descending order) also withdrew a high number of applications. All recorded large-scale increases compared to 2021, with the most notable rises for Ukrainians (15 times as many withdrawals as in 2021) and Tunisians (over 3 times as many). The high level of withdrawn applications by Ukrainians is likely related to the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive, after which many Ukrainians withdrew their asylum application and instead registered for temporary protection.

Austria was the top country for withdrawals by Syrians, Turks, Pakistanis and Tunisians, whereas Romania accounted for over two-fifths of the withdrawals by Ukrainians. Other notable instances of withdrawals by Syrians were in Bulgaria and Greece, while a large number of Ukrainian applications were also withdrawn in Bulgaria, as well as in Denmark and Sweden.

On a smaller scale, withdrawals rose significantly for Egyptians (mainly in Italy and Austria), Russians (mainly in Poland), Colombians (largely in Spain) and Moroccans (mainly in Austria and Bulgaria), in descending order.[xlvi]

The number of withdrawn applications in 2022 increased in most countries, notably in Austria and Bulgaria

Figure 17. Citizenships with the most withdrawn applications by EU+ countries recording the most withdrawals, 2022 (bubbles) compared to 2021 (legend)

Figure 17. Citizenships with the most withdrawn applications by EU+ countries recording the most

Source: Eurostat [migr_asywitha] as of 13 April 2023.

Applicants of most nationalities largely withdrew their applications implicitly. The main exceptions – with more explicit withdrawals – included nationals of Western Balkan countries, such as Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia, as well as Vietnamese.[xlvii]

- [xli] In 7% of cases, the type of withdrawal was not reported. Most of these cases concerned Romania.
- [xlii] Romania did not report data on the type of withdrawal.
- [xliii] Analysis was restricted to EU+ countries with at least 300 reported withdrawals in 2022.
- [xliv] Analysis was restricted to EU+ countries with at least 300 reported withdrawals in 2022.
- [xlv] According to Article 25(2) of the Austrian Asylum Act of 2005, in Austria it is not possible to withdraw an asylum application explicitly.
- [471] Schengenvisa, Serbia Introduces Visas for Nationals of India & Guinea-Bissau From January 1, 2023, 23 December 2022.
- [xlvi] Analysis was restricted to citizenships with at least 1,000 reported withdrawals in 2022.
- [xlvii] Analysis was restricted to citizenships with at least 300 reported withdrawals in 2022.

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