Please cite as: EUAA, '1. Global developments in the field of asylum' in *Executive Summary of the Asylum Report 2022*, Maggio 2022.

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Events in 2021 and early 2022 triggered the displacement of millions of people, intensifying existing needs for protection solutions worldwide. The Taliban surge to power in Afghanistan gave thrust to new cycles of displacement within the country and across borders, in a region where displacement had already been a common occurrence. The Russian invasion of Ukraine forced millions of people to leave their homes and seek refuge in neighbouring countries. And people continued to flee existing hotspots of displacement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Myanmar, South Sudan, Syria, the Sahel region, Venezuela and Yemen.

According to estimations by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were more than 84 million forcibly displaced people worldwide as of June 2021. The figure includes 26.6 million refugees under UNHCR’s mandate, 4.4 million asylum seekers, 48 million internally displaced persons and 3.9 million Venezuelans displaced abroad.

In a year that marked the 70th anniversary of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees as a fundamental component of human rights law, the international community continued its global and regional efforts in developing solutions for people in need of protection worldwide. A key initiative based on multi-stakeholder cooperation is the Global Compact on Refugees, which aims to bring sustainable solutions to the situation of refugees. Under the umbrella of this framework, in 2021 work continued towards: i) easing the pressure on host countries; ii) enhancing refugee self-reliance; iii) expanding solutions in third countries; and iv) supporting conditions in countries of origin for safe and dignified returns of applicants who are denied protection.

The discourse and work on international protection continued to evolve to accommodate emerging needs and pressing topics of relevance. Key issues that remained at the centre of attention in the field of asylum in 2021 included:

- Shifting from measures introduced as a reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic to sustainable working methods that incorporate new practices and digital transformations;

- Scaling up efforts for sustainable solutions for people in need of protection;
- Acknowledging climate-induced displacement in its full dimensions and developing effective responses to the growing climate emergency;
- Further mainstreaming gender dimensions in understanding protection needs and providing protection solutions; and
- Taking into account issues of statelessness in the context of asylum and the interplay between statelessness and protection needs.

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