

Latest Asylum Trends - Annual Overview 2022

Key Findings

- EU+ countries received some 966 000 asylum applications in 2022, up by around half from 2021 and the most since 2016.
- Around 4 million persons fleeing Ukraine registered for temporary protection in EU+ countries, without having to undergo an asylum procedure.
- The largest groups of asylum applicants were Syrians, Afghans, Turks, Venezuelans and Colombians. The latter three, as for many other citizenships, applied in record numbers.
- Some 43 000 applicants claimed to be unaccompanied minors, the most since 2015.
- EU+ asylum authorities issued some 632 000 first instance decisions in 2022. The gap between decisions issued and applications lodged was the widest since 2015.
- As a result, cases pending at first instance increased by 44 % to 636 000 at the end of 2022.
- The EU+ recognition rate was 40 % in 2022. Recognition rates were especially high for Syrians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Eritreans, Yemenis and Malians.

Source: EUAA EPS, December 2020 – December 2022.

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Asylum applications include all persons who have lodged or have been included in an application for international protection as a family member in the reporting country during the reporting month.

EU+ refers to the 27 European Union Member States, plus Norway and Switzerland.

First instance decisions include all persons covered by decisions issued on granting EU-regulated international protection status (refugee or subsidiary protection) following a first time or repeated application for international protection in the first instance determination process.

Stock of pending cases includes all cases for which an asylum application has been lodged and are under consideration by the national authority responsible for the first instance determination of the application for international protection (until the first instance decision has been issued) at the end of the reference period (i.e. last day of the reference month). It refers to the “stock” of applications for which decisions at first instance are still pending.

The EU+ recognition rate includes EU-regulated forms of protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and excludes national protection forms (humanitarian reasons). It is calculated by dividing the number of positive first instance decisions (granting refugee status or subsidiary protection) by the total number of decisions issued.

Nearly one million asylum applicants and around four million fleeing Ukraine

In 2022, a large refugee movement from Ukraine – of dimensions not seen in Europe since the Second World War – coincided with more asylum applicants from a wide range of countries. As a result, EU+ countries received close to 5 million persons seeking some form of international protection. **Around 4 million**[1] **persons fleeing Ukraine after the Russian invasion benefitted from temporary protection at the end of 2022, while a further 966 000 persons sought asylum during the year**.[2] The largest groups of asylum applicants were Syrians, Afghans, Turks, Venezuelans and Colombians. In the context of Ukraine, the EU Council activated the temporary protection directive, which had been devised for such situations and was rapidly implemented by national authorities.[3] It allowed those fleeing Ukraine to obtain temporary protection without having to undergo an asylum procedure.[4] **While temporary protection averted extreme pressure on asylum case processing, the reception systems of EU countries have come under high pressure and asylum authorities still needed to cope with increasing numbers of applicants.**

Even without factoring in the registrations for temporary protection, applications for international protection in the EU+ were high compared to previous years. **Asylum applications in 2022 exceeded those in 2021 by around half. Since 2008, higher levels were only recorded in 2015 and 2016**, when substantially more than one million applied in each year.[5] About 885 000 applicants in 2022 were first-time applicants, up by two thirds from 2021 when repeated applications in the same EU+ country had accounted for a relatively high share. Some 80 000 repeated applications were received in 2022, a tenth less than in 2021 but nevertheless the second most since at least 2014. **Some 43 000 applicants claimed to be unaccompanied minors, the most since 2015** but still equivalent to 4 % of all applicants, in line with recent years.

Record applications from a wide range of citizenships

Nine of the 10 main applicant groups in 2022 lodged substantially more applications than in 2021. **Syrians (some 132 000) and Afghans (129 000) remained by far the largest groups**, lodging 24 % and 29 % more applications, respectively (see country focus). Both groups applied the most since 2016, and they jointly accounted for two thirds (29 000) of all self-claimed unaccompanied minors. With numbers more than doubling, **Turkish applicants (55 000) became the third largest group**. They were followed by Venezuelans (51 000) and Colombians (43 000) who both lodged about three times as many applications as in 2021. Applications increased by between 50 % and 100 % for Pakistanis (37 000), Bangladeshis (34 000) and Georgians (29 000). In fact, **Turks, Venezuelans, Colombians, Bangladeshis and Georgians all applied the most since at least 2008**.[5] Ukrainians (28 000) were only the ninth largest group of asylum applicants because Ukrainians almost exclusively registered for temporary protection (see country focus). As tenth largest group, Iraqis (27 000) lodged slightly fewer applications than in 2021 (- 6 %), the only decline among the 30 largest applicant groups in 2022.

All-time highs[6] were also recorded for many citizenships outside the 10 main applicant groups. They included Indians and Burundians, whose applications increased more than sixfold and fivefold, respectively. These surges were linked to visa-free entry for Indians and Burundians to Serbia until the visa regime changed in late 2022. Visa-free entry to non-EU countries in the Western Balkans likely also contributed to high levels of Turkish and Tunisian applications. In fact, **citizens of three North African countries applied the most on record**: Moroccans, Tunisians and Egyptians, jointly lodging almost 59 000 applications. Record applications were also received from citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Peru, Moldova, Yemen, Belarus and Cuba, among others. While not at record levels, there were substantially more applicants from the Western Balkans, specifically Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo. These countries as well as Georgia, India, Morocco, Tunisia and Moldova are considered safe by many EU+ countries.[7] **Substantial decreases in applications were rare** but occurred for Malians and Senegalese, among others.

Focus on selected countries of origin of applicants

- **Ukraine** – Following Russia's invasion on 24 February 2022, Ukraine has been going through the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the end of the Second World War. By 3 January 2023, UNHCR reported 13.5 million entries from Ukraine to the four EU neighbouring countries. During the same period, there had also been some 9.2 million entries into Ukraine from Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Moldova, although this number includes many back-and-forth movements.8 Within Ukraine, about 5.9 million persons were internally displaced, according to IOM estimates for December 2022.9

  On 4 March 2022, the Council of the EU activated the temporary protection directive (TPD or 2001/55/EC).10 Without requiring an asylum procedure, the directive envisages temporary protection for Ukrainian nationals, some categories of third-country nationals and stateless persons who were residing in Ukraine before the Russian invasion. Subsequently, EU+ countries rapidly adopted national legislation to implement the directive.11 By the end of 2022, around 4 million benefitted from temporary protection in the EU+, according to Eurostat.1 An overwhelming proportion of the people registering for temporary protection were Ukrainians, most of them female.

  According to an EUAA survey, two thirds of persons fleeing Ukraine registered for temporary protection and only 2 % applied for asylum.12 Ukrainians were nevertheless the ninth largest group of asylum applicants in the EU+ with over 28 000 asylum applications lodged in 2022 (the most on record), a fourfold increase from the previous year. Specifically, Ukrainian asylum applications skyrocketed in March to 13 800, a fivefold increase from February following another fivefold increase from January. In April, however, Ukrainians only lodged about 1 900 asylum applications in the EU+. Over the second half of 2022, Ukrainian applications decreased to an average of 1 100 per month. This downward trend reflected the shift from asylum applications towards registrations for temporary protection.

  In 2022, almost all Ukrainians who applied for asylum did so for the first time (93 %). The number of self-claimed unaccompanied minors increased at least fivefold compared to the previous years, but they still represented only 1 % of all Ukrainian applications. The EU+ recognition rate for Ukrainians soared to 86 % in 2022 (+ 74 percentage points from 2021), one of the highest recognition rates among the main applicant groups and the most on record for Ukrainians. Nevertheless, only few Ukrainians were granted refugee status as nearly all positive decisions at first instance granted subsidiary protection.

  The sharp increase in Ukrainian asylum applications was not equally reflected in the number of first instance decisions. EU+ countries issued around 8 900 first-instance decisions to Ukrainians in 2022, a slight increase from the previous year but still fewer than before 2020. Even though decision making accelerated after April 2022, it remained far behind applications, leading to a gap of about 19 400 cases between applications and decisions by the end of 2022. While high levels of withdrawn applications reduced the gap, cases pending at first instance still increased considerably from 2021. At the end of 2022, they had more than tripled compared to a year earlier and stood at around 13 000. Two thirds had been awaiting a decision for more than half a year.

- **Syria** – In 2022, Syrians continued to lodge the most applications in the EU+ (132 000). This represented a 24 % increase from 2021 and the most applications since the refugee crisis of 2015/2016. In the first quarter of 2022, Syrian applications were relatively stable, but from May they increased for

six consecutive months and reached the highest monthly number of the last six years in October. According to a Frontex report, Syrians were one of the top three nationalities in terms of illegal border-crossings, detected mainly along the Western Balkans, Central Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean Routes.13

In line with many new arrivals, 97 % of the Syrians seeking asylum in the EU+ in 2022 were first-time applicants, as had been the case during the refugee crisis. Syrians continued to be involved in secondary movements with more than one in 10 first-time asylum applications resulting in a Dublin procedure, slightly more than in 2021.14 Self-claimed unaccompanied minors represented 7 % of all Syrian applications (some 9 200, the most since 2015). They accounted for more than a fifth of all unaccompanied minors applying in the EU+ in 2022.

By the end of December 2022, the Syrian caseload at first instance reached 88 000 cases, up by more than a quarter from a year earlier. Syrians received 109 000 first instance decisions in 2022, up by 24 % from 2021 and the most in five years. The recognition rate was 94 % – the highest since 2017. Almost two thirds of the positive decisions granted subsidiary protection (63 %, the highest proportion since at least 2014) and just 37 % granted refugee status.

- **Afghanistan** – Amid a worsening security, humanitarian and economic situation in Afghanistan,15 Afghans remained the second largest group of asylum applicants in the EU+, as they had been since 2018. In 2022, their number rose by 29 % from 2021 to about 129 000, the most since 2016 and representing 13 % of all asylum applicants in 2022. The inflow accelerated around May and peaked at 15 400 applications in October. The vast majority of Afghans seeking asylum in the EU+ were first-time applicants (92 %). Some 19 700 Afghan applications (or 15 % of all) were lodged by self-claimed unaccompanied minors. This represented an increase by half from the previous year and the most since 2015. As in 2021, Afghans accounted for nearly half of all self-claimed unaccompanied minors applying in the EU+.

  In 2022, some 85 000 first instance decisions were issued on Afghan applications across the EU+, an increase by nearly two thirds from 2021. There was also an increase in the number of Dublin closures (13 000, + 69 %) and in cases discontinued after withdrawal (33 200, + 125 %). As a result, in 2022 more Afghan cases were closed than opened. Yet, since October, applications have exceeded the outflow, while both have been declining. Overall, the number of Afghans awaiting a decision at first instance at the end of 2022 (some 69 000) was essentially the same as a year earlier. The EU+ recognition rate for Afghans was 54 % in 2022, down from 66 % in 2021. The decline was mainly due to more decisions granting a humanitarian status under national law, while only refugee status and subsidiary protection are counted towards the EU+ recognition rate.

Decisions lagging far behind applications lodged

In 2022, **EU+ asylum authorities issued some 632 000 decisions at first instance**,16 up by a fifth from 2021. The increase was mainly due to more decisions on first-time applications for asylum, while fewer decisions were issued on repeated applications than in 2021. However, **applications increased far more than first instance decisions and came to outnumber them by about 333 000 in 2022**. This gap was the largest since 2015 and more than three times the gap in 2021 (100 000). While accounting for withdrawn applications and other case closures in addition to decisions would reduce this imbalance substantially, most of the gap translated into an increase in pending cases (see below).

In 2022, **the most decisions were issued to Syrians (about 109 000), Afghans (85 000) and Venezuelans (34 000)**. In all three cases, these were more decisions issued than in 2021, especially for Afghans (+ 64 %) and Venezuelans (+ 88 %). Among citizenships receiving at least 5 000 decisions in 2022, similar or even stronger increases otherwise only occurred for Georgians, Malians, Tunisians and Indians. In contrast, EU+ countries issued substantially fewer decisions to Nigerians, Guineans, Iranians and Russians than in 2021. The largest gaps between applications and decisions appeared for Afghans, Turks, Syrians and Colombians.

Highest EU+ recognition rate in five years

The EU+ recognition rate was 40 % in 2022, up by five percentage points from 2021 and the most in five years. For the EU+ recognition rate, only decisions that granted refugee status and subsidiary protection are considered positive, in contrast to decisions granting humanitarian protection under national law that are not considered to be part of the Common European Asylum System. While decisions granting refugee status increased by a quarter from last year to some 147 000 in 2022, the **increase in the recognition rate was primarily driven by more decisions granting subsidiary protection**, which rose by two thirds to some 106 000. Specifically, most positive decisions issued to Syrian applicants granted subsidiary protection.

Among citizenships receiving at least 1 000 decisions in 2022, recognition rates were especially high for Syrians (94 %), Belarusians (88 %), Ukrainians (86 %), Eritreans and Yemenis (84 % each) as well as Malians (70 %). **Afghans had a significantly lower recognition rate (54 %) than in 2021** (see country focus). Recognition rates were especially low for citizens of India, Moldova, North Macedonia and Vietnam (1 % each), Tunisia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2 % each) as well as Venezuela, Serbia and Nepal (3 % each). However, many Venezuelans received humanitarian protection under national law.

Mounting caseload for national systems

Based on the latest available data, **about 950 000 cases were pending at all instances in the EU+ at the end of November 2022**,[17] up by 14 % compared to the end of December 2021. Cases pending at first instance – those that are still being processed by asylum authorities, not including those that are open in appeal or review (second and higher instances) – increased substantially more: **at the end of December 2022, some 636 000 cases were pending at first instance in EU+ countries**,[18] up by 44 % (or 193 000 cases) compared to December 2021. This was the highest first instance caseload for EU+ countries since 2017. Due to the numerous applications lodged in 2022, cases pending for up to six months (some 354 000) increased far more strongly than those pending for more than six months (270 000). While most cases pending at first instance concerned Syrians and Afghans, the largest increases pertained to cases on Colombians, Venezuelans and Turks (in absolute terms) as well as Indians, Peruvians and Ukrainians (in relative terms).[19]

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