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icon for the functioning of the common European asylum system

Similar to the recast Asylum Procedures Directive (APD), the Asylum Procedure Regulation (APR) outlines access to the procedure as a three-step process, including the making, registering and lodging of an application. Effective access to the asylum procedure means that people seeking international protection can reach the authorities and are afforded a fair and efficient process. This is inexorably linked with effective access to the territory to make an application. In addition to the APR, specific EU legal instruments govern access to the asylum procedure in Europe:

- The Screening Regulation sets up uniform rules for EU Member States to ensure that people having crossed the external border in an unauthorised manner without fulfilling entry conditions undergo identity, security, health and vulnerability checks and are channelled towards the appropriate procedure (border, accelerated or regular asylum procedure or return procedure);
- The Eurodac Regulation establishes an interoperable asylum and migration database to support the asylum system and help manage irregular migration; and
- The Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation establishes measures for situations of crisis and instrumentalisation of migrants.

  The principle of *non-refoulement* is a core principle of international and EU laws to ensure that an applicant is not returned to a country where they will face persecution (recast Qualification Directive (QD), Recital 3). It constitutes an essential and crucial safeguard throughout the asylum procedure, including for the access to the procedure, as obstructing access to territory and access to the procedure may, in certain circumstances, result in a person being returned to a country where their life or freedom may be threatened, breaching the international principle of *non-refoulement*.

With over 1 million applications for international protection in 2024, EU+ countries continued experiencing pressure on asylum systems. At the same time, there was a significant 38% drop in

the number of irregular border-crossings at the EU's external borders,66 due to sharp decreases in arrivals through the Central Mediterranean and the Western Balkan routes. This was a result of regional efforts which focused on actively reducing irregular migration and fighting smuggling networks. Nonetheless, the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the situation along the borders with Belarus kept exerting pressure on the EU's eastern borders, where a threefold increase in crossings was reported. Increases, to a lesser degree, were also recorded in the Eastern Mediterranean and Western African routes.67

With the continued high inflow of applicants for international protection, EU-level and national discourses revolved around effectively protecting the EU's borders while ensuring access to the procedure for those in need of protection. EU+ countries used a combination of proactive and reactive measures to prevent and manage irregular migration, which at times risked impacting effective access to territory. Naturally, additional resources were allocated to put in place the necessary legislative provisions by their entry into application in 2026 and build the organisational, administrative and technical infrastructure for the implementation of screening and border procedures foreseen by the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

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Relative pressure from asylum-related migration

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  European Border and Coast Guard Agency. (2025, January 14). Irregular border crossings into EU drop sharply in 2024.

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  European Border and Coast Guard Agency. (2025, January 14). Irregular border crossings into EU drop sharply in 2024.

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