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4.1.4. Managing caseloads and assessing applications for international protection

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ar2025 414 caseload first instance icn

In 2024, EU+ asylum authorities issued 795,000 first instance decisions on asylum applications. This is the most since 2017. For the fourth year in a row, the most decisions were issued by Germany and France, together accounting for almost one-half of the EU+ total in 2024. Germany issued 251,000 decisions, which was the most since 2017. This increase mostly comprised negative decisions. France, with 138,000 decisions, issued the most on record. The output was driven by a surge in positive decisions issued to Haitians (7,300) and Ukrainians (6,800).

Italy (85,000) had the largest absolute increase among EU+ countries, almost doubling the number of decisions from the previous year. The increase was driven by positive decisions issued to applicants from Burkina Faso and Mali, and negative decisions issued to applicants from Bangladesh, Egypt, Pakistan, Morocco and Tunisia (in descending order). Greece (55,000) issued the most decisions at first instance in 4 years. Belgium, Switzerland, Ireland and Poland reached record highs.

Figure 5. Disparity between asylum applications and case closures (first instance decisions, discontinuations after withdrawals and otherwise closed cases) in EU+ countries with the largest gaps, 2024

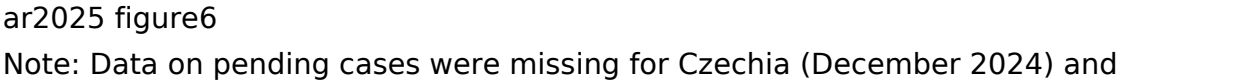
ar2025 figure5
Note: Data on withdrawn applications were missing for Spain (January 2024). Data on otherwise closed cases were missing for Belgium (since October 2022), Italy (September 2024) and Spain.
Source: EUAA EPS data as of 3 February 2025.

Despite the increased number of decisions taken in many countries, there were 981,000 pending cases at the end of December 2024 – among the highest on record. As seen in Figure 6,

the share of cases which were pending for more than 6 months also increased in 2024.

Three countries jointly accounted for over two-thirds of all pending cases at the end of 2024: Spain (with 252,000 open cases), Italy (227,000) and Germany (213,000). Pending cases at first instance reached unprecedented levels in the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, Poland, Luxembourg, Croatia and Portugal (in descending order). However, Croatia and Poland managed to reverse the trend and ended 2024 at a lower level than in the previous year. Indeed, 16 EU+ countries decreased their numbers of pending cases compared to the end of 2023, with the largest absolute decrease reported in Germany.

Figure 6. Pending cases for less than 6 months, for more than 6 months and unknown across EU+ countries, January 2015–December 2024



Note: Data on pending cases were missing for Czechia (December 2024) and Slovakia.
Source: EUAA EPS data as of 3 February 2025.

Against this background, many authorities focused on making the asylum procedure even quicker and more efficient. Authorities aimed to clear out their backlogs as much as possible before the mandatory application of the pact in June 2026 in order to avoid having to apply old and new rules in parallel (depending on the date of the application) for an extensive amount of time. In addition to staff recruitment and digitalisation, authorities applied different case load management methods to increase their efficiency. For example, a new template was piloted in Czechia to support case officers with drafting decisions, while new standard operating procedures were developed in Sweden for case officers for the identification of special needs and the application of exclusion grounds. The Belgian CGRS implemented a specific action plan to process applications from Palestinians more quickly.[175] Several countries used prioritisation policies (*see Figure 7*).

These policies often formed part of a more comprehensive plan to increase efficiency and decrease backlogs, and yielded promising results. The Belgian Tabula Rasa project, which tested new practices such as a preliminary questionnaire before the personal interview and the shortened reasoning of decisions, was finalised at the beginning of 2024[176] and found to be very efficient without compromising the quality of decisions. As a result, the procedures have continued in 2025 under the Prisma project. The Dutch IND managed to process 18,000 additional applications within the prioritisation project between May 2023 and mid-July 2024.[177]

Despite these measures, asylum procedures remained lengthy in some cases. For example, the possibility to extend the asylum procedure to 21 months remained in place in the Netherlands.[178] Ombudspersons and courts decided on complaints in individual cases of long processing times.[179]

Figure 7. Examples of prioritisation policies in 2024

Belgium	Fast-track procedure for applicants from Georgia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Western Balkan countries and for applicants who already have a protection status in another EU Member State
Ireland	Prioritising applicants from countries with the highest number of applications in the past 3 months (Nigeria, Jordan)
Luxembourg	Prioritising older cases by date of lodging
Netherlands	Prioritising applicants with high chances of receiving protection (by a specialised project team), applications by nationalities with little chances of obtaining international protection and applicants who cause a nuisance or disturbance

Sources: Ireland[180] and Netherlands.[181]

Specific policies for applicants from certain countries of origin helped with case load management and assessments. EU-wide responses were triggered by developments in Syria in December 2024, when most EU+ countries suspended decisions on the protection needs of Syrian applicants until there was more clarity on the situation in the country (*see Table 2*). Typically authorities still continued with decisions on admissibility or Dublin transfers of Syrian applicants, but the caseload is anticipated to grow.

Table 2. Reactions from asylum authorities of EU+ countries on the situation in Syria

Country	Reactions
Austria	According to media sources, Chancellor Karl Nehammer instructed the Minister of the Interior Gerhard Karner to suspend all current Syrian asylum applications and to review all cases in which asylum was granted. Reuters. (9 December 2024). Austria stops processing Syrians' asylum applications after Assad falls.
Belgium	The CGRS suspended the examination of applications and personal interviews that were already scheduled. The CGRS maintained personal interviews and decisions for those who already have protection in another Member State. CGRS. (9 December 2024), Suspension temporaire du traitement des dossiers des demandeurs Syrie.
Bulgaria	SAR continued with the processing of applications based on its updated policy. SAR. (3 February 2025). Отчетен доклад за проведената процедура за международна закрила за 2024 г.
Croatia	The Ministry of the Interior instructed the relevant services to temporarily suspend the processing of applications from Syrian nationals. The ministry still receives applications for international protection by Syrian nationals, and they are accommodated within the reception centres, provided with material reception conditions, and given the necessary medical and psychosocial care. Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova Republike Hrvatske. (9 December 2024). Ministar Božinović: Hrvatska privremeno obustavlja zahtjeve za azil Sirijcima.

Country	Reactions
	The Ministry of the Interior announced that the examination of cases by Syrian applicants was suspended already in April 2024, as a result of increased arrivals.182
Cyprus	
	Κυβερνητική Πύλη. (13 April 2024). Ανακοίνωση για την εφαρμογή νέας πολιτικής σε σχέση με τη διαχείριση των Σύρων αιτητών ασύλου.
Czechia	The Ministry of the Interior suspended the procedure for applications for international protection and the procedure for the extension of subsidiary protection for Syrian nationals. Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky. (9 December 2024). Ministerstvo vnitra pozastavilo rozhodování o žádostech Syřanů o azyl.
Denmark	The Danish Immigration Service suspended the processing of cases by individuals form Syria. The appeals body also suspended cases on appeal, with the Coordination Committee of the Refugee Appeals Board set to review the suspension at its next meeting on 16 January 2025. Danish Immigration Service. (10 December 2024) Suspension of asylum cases regarding individuals from Syria. Refugee Appeals Board. (9 December 2024). Flygtningenævnet berostiller behandlingen af sager vedrørende personer fra Syrien (for cases on appeal and returns)
Finland	The Finnish Immigration Service suspended the examination of applications by Syrians (approximately 350 pending applications) and is reviewing its COI on the area to allow decision-making to restart. Finnish Immigration Service. (9 December 2024). Decision-making on asylum applications from Syrians paused by Finnish Immigration Service.
France	OFPRA is closely monitoring the situation in Syria. As always, in the event of a changing situation in an asylum seeker's country of origin, this may lead to the temporary suspension of decisions on certain cases lodged by Syrian nationals, depending on the reasons of the application. OFPRA. (9 December 2024). Communiqué de presse – Syrie.
Germany	The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) postponed decisions for Syrian applicants, noting that it is not yet possible to predict whether the current developments will lead to refugee movements in or out of the region. It is also not possible to predict what impact the changing situation will have on the opportunities for Syrian refugees to return to their homeland. BAMF. (9 December 2024). Rückstellung von Entscheidungen Syrien.
Greece	The Greek government suspended decisions on the merits of asylum applications by Syrians. UNHCR. (14 January 2025). For Syrians in Greece.
Italy	According to media sources, the government decided to suspend proceedings on asylum applications from Syria. Reuters. (9 December 2024). Italy pauses asylum applications from Syria.

Country	Reactions
Latvia	According to media sources, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs suspended decisions on granting international protection to Syrian citizens. Latvijas Sabiedriskais medijs. (10 December 2024). Arī Latvijā aptur lēmumu pieņemšanu par starptautiskās aizsardzības statusa piešķiršanu Sīrijas pilsoņiem.
Lithuania	According to media sources, the Head of Migration Department noted that only one Syrian asylum request was pending and was not a reason to suspend decisions. Lithuanian National Radio and Television. (11 December 2024). Syrian asylum issue not currently relevant in Lithuania – migration chief.
Luxembourg	The Ministry of Home Affairs announced the suspension of the examination of applications from Syrian nationals. The Ministry highlighted that the suspension is temporary, allowing time and consultation with other EU Member States on the situation, and that this does not impact the Dublin procedure. Ministère des Affaires intérieures, Direction générale de l'immigration. (10 December 2024). Suspension de l'examen des demandes de protection internationale des ressortissants syriens.
Malta	The International Protection Agency (IPA) temporarily suspended the examination of pending and new asylum applications for international protection by Syrian nationals. IPA. (10 December 2024). Press release by the Ministry for Homa Affairs, Security and Employment.
Netherlands	The IND suspended the examination of applications and return decisions. However, the IND will take decisions on applications submitted more than 21 months ago that due to individual circumstances, regardless of the security situation, lead to a positive decision on residence in the Netherlands. Syrians who were previously registered in another EU country (Dublin claimants), Syrians who already have international protection in another EU Member State, and public order and 1F cases are exempted from both the decision and the departure moratorium. IND. (9 December 2024). Voorlopig geen beslissing op asielaanvragen Syrië.
Norway	The UDI announced the suspension of the processing of asylum applications lodged by Syrians, while noting that scheduled interviews will still take place. UDI. (9 December 2024). Information regarding the situation in the Middle East and applications for residence in Norway.
Poland	According to media sources, the Polish Office for Foreigners will not issue decisions on Syrian citizens' applications for international protection until the situation in Syria is clarified. Reuters. (11 December 2024). European countries halt Syrian asylum applications after Assad's fall.
Portugal	According to media sources, the government had no intention to suspend the processing of pending cases. Rádio e Televisão de Portugal. (11 December 2024). Síria. Portugal mantém 1.243 refugiados no país, mas sem decisão sobre futuro.
Slovakia	The Ministry of the Interior was monitoring the situation. Ministerstvo vnútra SR (10 December 2024). Vývoj situácie v Sýrii ministerstvo vnútra monitoruje.

Country	Reactions
Sweden	The Swedish Migration Agency (SMA) suspended the examination of asylum applications for Syrians. The suspension was prolonged on 10 March 2025 for a period of maximum 3 months. SMA. (9 December 2024, updated on 12 March 2025). Migrationsverket beslutar om besluts- och verkställighets¬stopp till Syrien.
Switzerland	In December 2024, the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) decided that decisions on asylum application by Syrians would not be taken until further notice. The volatile situation in Syria following the overthrow of the Assad regime does not allow for a thorough examination of the reasons to seek asylum. Nonetheless, Syrians could still apply for asylum. Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM). (9 December 2024). Information regarding Syria.

At the end of 2024, the highest numbers of pending cases at first instance were recorded for Syrians (109,000 cases), Colombians (97,000) and Venezuelans (93,000). Together they represented close to one-third of the total. More than one-half of all pending cases pertained to 37 nationalities with low recognition rates, i.e. those which had recognition rates of 20% or below in 2024.iii

Court decisions increasingly shaped national authorities' assessment policies throughout 2024, for example related to Gaza, Syria, military conscription in Russia and westernised lifestyle versus the mere fact of living in Europe.183 The CJEU delivered several significant rulings, for example on women as a whole and women who identify with the value of equality between women and men as a particular social group, UNRWA's protection and assistance, and the assessment of cases lodged by Afghan women.184

COI units updated their products based on the changing situation in countries of origin, linked with the most common profiles in their national context.185 In line with the new mandate of the Belgian CGRS on the statelessness determination procedure, the country of origin information research unit (CEDOCA) updated its COI on statelessness for Palestinians and Kurds. It also undertook a number of fact-finding missions (Armenia, Burundi, Cameroon, El Salvador, Morocco, Rwanda and Türkiye), while the Austrian BFA went to Syria, the German BAMF organised a mission to Türkiye about Syrian applicants, and the French OFPRA organised a mission to Colombia.

Figure 8. Examples of policies on the assessment of asylum applications in the national context in 2024

Belgium	New policy on applicants from Somalia Resuming the processing of cases by Russian nationals Resuming the processing of certain cases by Sudanese applicants Suspension of the notification of decisions granting or refusing subsidiary protection for applicants from Lebanon
Cyprus	Suspension of the examination of cases by Syrian applicants due to mass arrivals in April 2024

Luxembourg	Guidance on the assessment of applications by Turkish nationals affiliated with the Gülen movement Guidance on the assessment of applications by Syrian applicants at risk of being conscripted into compulsory military service Adjusted policy on applications from Yemen
Netherlands	Resumption of decisions on applications from Palestinians, following the Council of State's ruling that the moratorium was not lawful Decision and departure moratorium on applications from Lebanese nationals New policy on applications by nationals of Sudan
Norway	Updated guidelines on processing asylum cases by Ukrainian nationals who are not covered by collective protection
Sweden	Update of legal position on the assessment of cases by Afghans Update of the legal position related to the assessment of certain Yemeni homeland passports

Sources: Belgium,186 Cyprus,187 Netherlands188 and Norway.189

To provide more targeted support to case officers, training initiatives were expanded both in Belgium and Germany. A new project (Consultancy@PO) was launched in Belgium to allow case officers to ask questions and hold consultations with researchers. In Germany, a BAMFGPT was piloted to allow case officers to make inquires via chat. The Irish IPO aimed to increase the efficiency and quality of its decision-making by ensuring a uniform approach to COI research and establishing a separate COI unit.

- 175

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- iii

  Nearly 200 citizenships were issued asylum decisions in 2024, but many in very small numbers which can lead to unstable or misleading recognition rates. Of the 200, 65 citizenships were issued at least 1,000 decisions and among them 37 had recognition rates of ≤20%.

- 183

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