

Section 1. Introduction

Introduction

Icon for global developments in asylum

In 2025, Europe witnessed a year of transition, a period of restructuring, and a time of strategising and investing in the modernisation of the European asylum and migration architecture, amid a notable decrease in the number of applications for international protection. National authorities, European Union (EU) institutions, international and civil society organisations worked intensely to prepare sufficiently for the practical application of the Pact on Migration and Asylum as of June 2026. European countries continued placing a growing emphasis on the effective management of borders and working with partner countries to address irregular movements along migration routes.i

The number of forcibly displaced people worldwide stood at 117.3 million, as reported by UNHCR in June 2025. This decline after several years of continuous increase was to a certain extent attributed to the return of refugees and internally displaced people in some of the world's largest displacement situations, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1.9 million returnees), Syria (1.5 million), Sudan (1.2 million), Afghanistan (874,900), Ethiopia (438,100), Myanmar (261,500) and Ukraine (306,300).1 However, a large share of these returns plausibly occurred not due to drastic improvements in the conditions in the region of origin, but due to the absence of viable protection solutions elsewhere.2

The number of refugees also fell slightly to 42.5 million people worldwide, with two-thirds coming for just five countries: Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Venezuela.3 As in the past, most of them were hosted in low- and middle-income countries. Systematic efforts to develop protection solutions through multi-stakeholder cooperation continued, such as the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Nonetheless, in a global environment characterised by significant shifts in the foreign policy of key actors, in 2025 humanitarian efforts and development aid underwent remarkable cuts.4 These resources were largely channelled to improve the conditions that caused forced displacement in the first place. In terms of immediate impact, the absence of these resources resulted in important downsizing in catering to the needs of displaced populations.5 In the long run, it will likely result in new displacement.6 With 2025 having been described as the most conflict-heavy year on record,7 sources of mass displacement and the protracted crises they

generate will persist, as will the need to provide integrated protection responses to complex emergencies.

In this environment, EU asylum policies and practices represented a fine amalgamation of strategic directions, comprising efforts to address pressures of irregular migration outside or at the external borders of the EU, while providing refuge to people who need it. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that against a global context where protection spaces seem to be shrinking, in 2025 EU+ countries and European institutions continued allocating resources for the provision of protection solutions in Europe and worldwide. This included multilevel support for persons displaced from Ukraine, relief and assistance in displacement hotspots such as Afghanistan and Syria, and development aid in areas such as sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Americas and the Caribbean.

The 2026 EUAA Asylum Report cites diverse sources, including observations from civil society, academia and research institutions. It offers an overview of the coordinated efforts made in 2025 by European institutions and EU+ countries to prepare for the operationalisation of the Pact, which brings a new era for asylum and migration management in Europe. The report synthesises qualitative information on legislative, policy and practical developments; statistics on key indicators; and case law from European and national courts, covering major thematic areas of CEAS. This comprehensive and balanced insight into asylum-related trends at European and national levels makes it the go-to-source of information on asylum in Europe.

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  EU+ countries include EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

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  United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (4 November 2025). Mid-Year Trends 2025.

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  Migration Policy Institute (MPI). (17 December 2025). Top 10 Migration Issues of 2025; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (4 November 2025). Mid-Year Trends 2025.

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  United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (4 November 2025). Mid-Year Trends 2025.

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  United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2025). 2025 Impact Report: Response to new emergencies and protracted crises; United Nations, Regional Information Centre for Western Europe. (1 September 2025). Humanitarian aid: The most vulnerable already severely impacted by budget cuts.

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  United Nations, Regional Information Centre for Western Europe. (1 September 2025). Humanitarian aid: The most vulnerable already severely impacted by budget cuts.

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  Migration Policy Institute (MPI). (17 December 2025). Top 10 Migration Issues of 2025.

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  Migration Policy Institute (MPI). (17 December 2025). Top 10 Migration Issues of 2025.

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