4.4. Managing caseloads and assessing applications for international protection

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ar2025 414 caseload first instance icn

Several countries updated policies based on changes in the countries of origin in order to support good quality and rapid decision-making.222 Nonetheless, the volatile situation in several countries of origin impacted case processing, with several authorities suspending the processing of cases by nationals from certain countries of origin. These decisions often had a significant impact on caseloads, pending cases and recognition rates.

An example was the responses triggered by developments in Syria in December 2024, when most EU+ countries suspended decision-making on the protection needs of Syrian applicants until there was more clarity on the situation in the country.223 Asylum authorities re-started processing of these cases at different times throughout 2025 *(see Table 2)*. At the end of 2025, Syrians were the main nationality in the caseload of 12 EU+ countries. This nationality accounted for one-half or more of all pending cases in Austria, Cyprus, Germany and Norway.

Table 2. Resumption of assessments of applications submitted by nationals of Syria, 2025

Month in 2025	Country re-starting decisions on protection needs of Syrian applicants
April	Poland
May	Cyprus (partial resumption, full resumption confirmed for February 2026), Greece
June	Netherlands224
July	Austria, Denmark, France
August	Malta
September	Czechia, Finland,225 Germany,226 Sweden,227 Switzerland (partial resumption for specific profiles)228
October	Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg
November	Belgium229

Month in 2025	Country re-starting decisions on protection needs of Syrian applicants
December	Norway[230]
Countries that did not suspend the decision-making on protection needs of Syrian applicants	Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Portugal, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain
Countries where the suspension remained in place at the end of 2025	Croatia, Ireland (recommenced assessing cases in February 2026), Italy

Table 3. Examples of the temporary suspension of decision-making on protection needs of applicants with certain profiles, 2025

Profile of applicant	Time period	Country applying the policy
Nationals of Lebanon	31 October 2024–1 May 2025	Norway[231]
Nationals of Lebanon	14 November 2024–17 June 2025	Netherlands[232]
Applicants from the West Bank not registered with UNRWA	12 March 2025–16 March 2026	Belgium[233]

In these circumstances, the need for up-to-date, objective and balanced information on countries of origin was even more accentuated, putting at the forefront the work of COI units *(see Table 4)*. Asylos warned that changes in the form and content of the US State Department annual reports risk undermining fair and evidence-based asylum decisions in EU countries.[234] In Belgium, the coalition agreement stated that the CGRS' COI unit (CEDOCA) will be given an additional mandate to investigate the rule of law and detention conditions in other countries in order to assess the feasibility of building or leasing prisons where convicted detainees in irregular stay can serve their sentences. These agreements could only be implemented if the detention is carried out in a proper and humane manner, respecting international legal obligations and would require judicial approval by the Council of State and advice from CEDOCA.[235] In 2025, CEDOCA prepared nine papers for the Minister for Asylum and Migration related to this matter.

Digitalisation and the establishment of integrated case management systems remained a crucial objective for asylum authorities in strengthening capacity and preparing for compliance with some of the stricter timelines under the Pact *(see Table 5)*. Academia warned about the risk for marginalisation of other perspectives in the process of increased technological use.[236]

Table 4. Fact-finding missions for country of origin information, 2025

National authority	Mission
Czech Ministry of the Interior	Damascus and Lebanon on the topic of return migration and the security situation in Syria
French OFPRA and CNDA	Joint mission to Angola, followed by the publication of a joint mission report[237]
Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) Landinfo	Afghanistan (together with the SMA), Syria (together with the SMA)
Swedish SMA, Lifos	Afghanistan (together with the Norwegian UDI Landinfo), Iraq/KRI (together with the Danish Immigration Service COI unit), Syria (together with the Norwegian UDI Landinfo)

Table 5. Examples of digitalisation initiatives in EU+ countries, 2025

Country	Initiatives
Austria	Ongoing initiatives for a speech-to-text and translation tool for asylum interviews.
	Adjusting the CGRS database to implement parallel procedures after the entry into application of the Pact.
Belgium	Setting up a proof of concept at CALL to test an AI-powered search system making it easier and faster for staff to find information for decisions on appeals.
	Use of AI in COI: Training on prompting, automation of footnotes and bibliography, support for research and summaries.
Bulgaria	Development of a modular IT case management system, with funding through TSI and from Switzerland.238
	Development of an internal COI platform.
Cyprus	Ongoing digitalisation of physical files with EUAA support. Upgrade of the IT system of the Asylum Service is planned for 2026.
Czechia	Amendments to the Act on Asylum allow the Ministry of the Interior to use a technical interpretation device during proceedings in real time. Interpretation can also be done by videoconference, and if a document is not accompanied by an official translation, the Ministry of the Interior can use machine translation.
France	AMIF-funded project on piloting the use of AI tools, for example for document searches (but never for drafting decisions) and the digitisation of the asylum application processing system. 239
Ireland	The IPO launched the International Protection Application Portal, allowing registered applicants to check the status of their application, download their application form and upload documentation and submissions.240
Luxembourg	On-going work on updating the digital case management system.
Malta	On-going work on a new case management system and a document management and case tracker tool.
Netherlands	On-going work on a new IT system.
Norway	Digitalisation of the entire migration sector continued in 2025 and legislative amendments were adopted to allow for the implementation of digital processes.241
Portugal	Development of a translation and interpretation software to be used in the asylum procedure.
Spain	Progress in the development of a new case management system (LARES) which focuses on the interconnection of the Asylum Database with other national and international databases relevant to the processing of international protection cases.
Sweden	Development of a digital tool allowing case officers to monitor cases within a time-bound process and with automated statistics.

In 2025, EU+ countries issued almost 874,000 first instance decisions, which is the most since 2017. The increase was driven by a sharp climb in the number of rejections, mainly for citizens of countries with a low recognitions rate (20% or lower). The most decisions were issued in Germany, followed by France and Spain. France, Ireland and Italy issued the most decisions on record. Several countries issued less decisions, mainly due to fewer decisions issued to Syrians. The largest declines in decision-making were seen in Austria, Greece and the Netherlands.

Pending cases at first instance decreased to 863,000 in 2025, from 986,000 in 2024 (approximately 13% decrease) *(see Figure 5)*. While some EU+ countries ramped up first

instance decision-making, the decline in pending cases was rather the result of fewer applications being lodged. The caseload shrank in 15 countries. In Germany, pending cases at first instance halved by the end of 2025 from a year earlier (102,000). Bulgaria recorded the largest relative decline. The number of pending cases declined to an unprecedented low in Sweden.

However in Italy, despite the record level of decision-making, the number of pending cases increased, becoming the country with the most pending cases across the EU+. The caseload remained high in Spain as well. Most pending cases in the EU+ pertained to Venezuelans (120,000, almost all in Spain), Syrians (100,000, nearly one-half in Germany) and Colombians (70,000, mostly in Spain). At the end of 2025, the caseload related to applicants from countries with a low recognition rate reached 63% of the total pending caseload.

Despite the drop in pending cases at first instance, more appeals overall implied a stable and high caseload at all instances.

Figure 5. Annual asylum applications, first instance case closures and year-end pending caseloads at first instance and all instances in EU+ countries, 2020-2025

ar2026_figure5.png
Note: Eurostat data for December 2025 were missing for: Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland. For these countries, November 2025 data were used as estimates, except for Denmark (for which October 2025 data were used). Data for Portugal for 2025 were fully missing and therefore excluded.
Source: EUAA EPS data as of 3 February 2026 and Eurostat migr_asypenctzm as of 2 February 2026.

Figure 6. Disparity between asylum applications and case closures (first instance decisions, discontinuations after withdrawals and otherwise closed cases) in EU+ countries with the largest gaps, 2025

ar2026_figure6.png
Note: Data on otherwise closed cases were missing for Belgium and Spain.
Source: EUAA EPS data as of 3 February 2026.

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