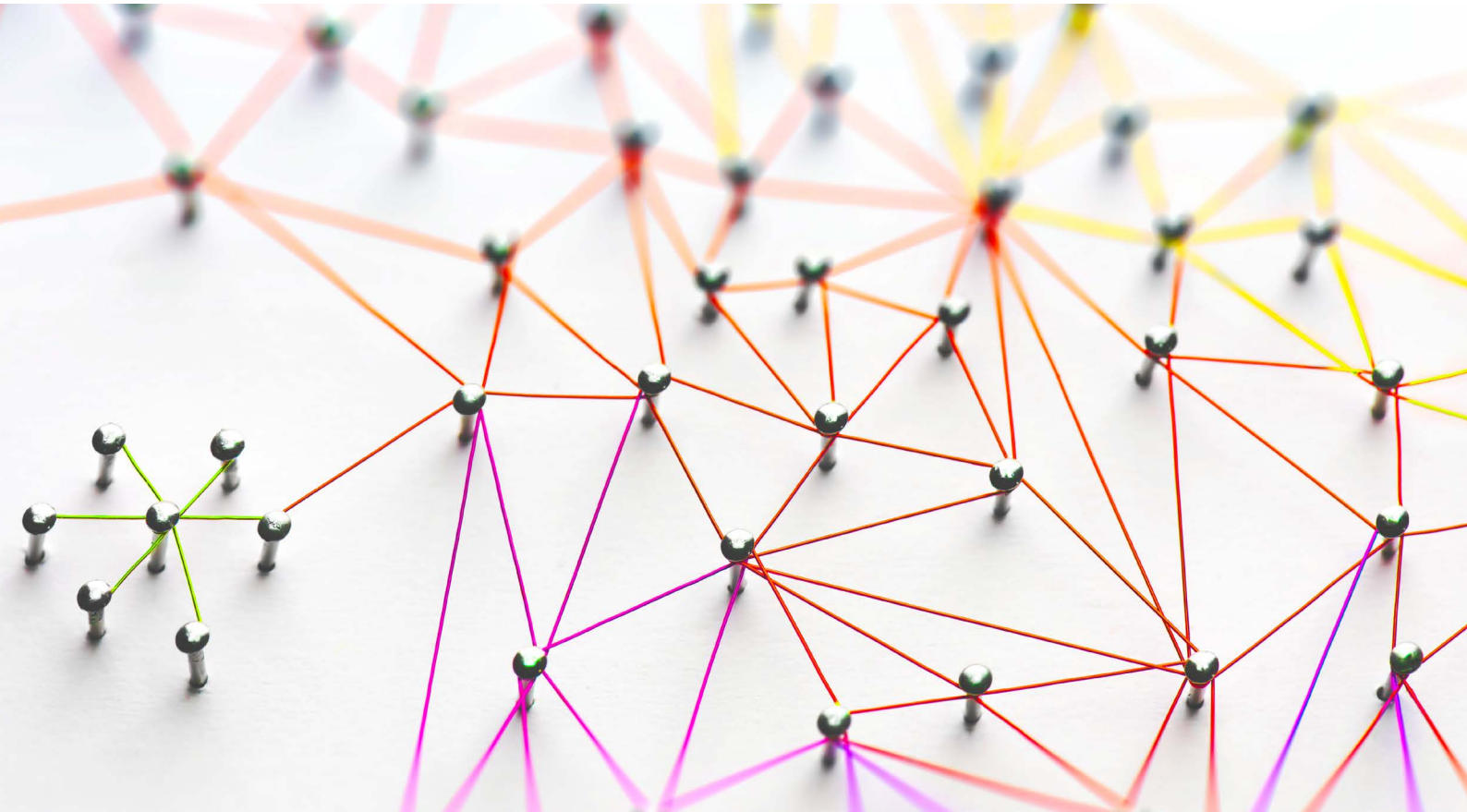




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Asylum and migration overview 2024

European Migration
Network

July 2025

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About the European Migration Network

The European Migration Network (EMN) is a network of migration and asylum experts consisting of 35 National Contact Points (NCPs) in the EMN Member (EU Member States except Denmark) and Observer Countries (Norway, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Montenegro, Armenia, Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Albania), the European Commission with the participation of EU Agencies (EUAA, FRONTEX and FRA). The EMN plays a key role in providing policymakers and the general public with up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum. The EMN was legally established under Council Decision 2008/381/EC. Each NCP is appointed by their national government, primarily from Ministries of Interior and of Justice, specialised government agencies dealing with migration, international protection, reception and/ or citizenship issues with some NCPs being represented by university, research institutes as well as country offices of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The European Commission coordinates the EMN, assisted by a dedicated Service Provider. In their own countries, the EMN NCPs form national networks with a wide range of relevant stakeholders.

Explanatory note

The European Migration Network Asylum and Migration Overview (AMO) name was updated for the 2024 edition, to clearly distinguish it from the European Annual Asylum and Migration Report (EAAMR), to be issued by the European Commission under Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 (AMMR) by 15 October 2025. The EMN AMO does not include implementation reporting related to the Pact on Migration and Asylum. It retains the structure and content of previous annual reports from the European Migration Network, covering eleven migration and asylum topics, as indicated on the contents page. The AMO provides an overview of legal and policy developments at both EU and national level under these thematic headings, complemented by Eurostat statistics and national data, for the period January to December 2024.

This EMN Asylum and Migration Overview (AMO) 2024 was prepared on the basis of annual national Asylum and Migration Overviews from the following EMN Member and Observer Country National Contact Points (NCPs) (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Serbia) according to a common template to ensure, to the extent possible, comparability. EMN Observer Country National Contact Points in Armenia, Montenegro and North Macedonia also contributed statistics for the report. More detailed information on the topics addressed in this EMN Asylum and Migration Overview 2024 may be found in the available national Asylum and Migration Overviews for 2024, and it is strongly recommended that these are consulted as well.

The national Asylum and Migration Overviews provided by EMN NCPs describe the migration and asylum situation and developments in their respective countries specifically for the calendar year 2024. National overviews are largely based on analysis of existing legislation and policy documents, reports, academic literature, internet resources and reports and information from national authorities and practitioners.

Statistics included in the EMN Asylum and Migration Overview (AMO) 2024 are sourced from Eurostat, national authorities and other (national) databases.

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1. OVERVIEW OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN MIGRATION AND ASYLUM IN EMN MEMBER AND OBSERVER COUNTRIES IN 2024



1.1. KEY POINTS

- 2024 marked a landmark change in European Union (EU) asylum and migration policy with the adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum (the Pact). The Pact is set to apply from June 2026, introducing a new, more coordinated approach to managing asylum and migration. Other EU developments included the June 2024 European Parliament elections and the re-election of Ursula von der Leyen as President of the European Commission. The new Commission took office on 1 December 2024, with a commitment to strengthening common borders while promoting a modern, balanced approach to migration management.
- 2024 was marked by ongoing geopolitical instability in both the immediate EU neighbourhood and beyond, with multiple crises such as Russia's war against Ukraine, conflicts in the Middle East, and unrest in various parts of Africa), significantly influencing migration patterns. Russia's continued war against Ukraine remained a source of displacement. The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria further contributed to regional volatility and renewed displacement.
- Irregular border crossings into the EU dropped by 38% in 2024, falling to just over 239 000 detections, the lowest since 2021. This overall decline was due to a 59% reduction in arrivals via the Central Mediterranean route (with fewer departures from Tunisia and Libya) and a 78% decrease in arrivals via the Western Balkan route.
- At national level, several European Migration Network (EMN) Member Countries introduced more restrictive migration and asylum policies. Significant emphasis was placed on controlling and regulating migration flows, with five EMN Member Countries adopting a stricter approach to migration management overall. While some developments were linked to national security agendas, others aimed to combat misuse of migration channels, ease pressure on asylum and reception systems, address housing shortages, and resolve integration challenges.
- First-time asylum applications in the EU and Norway decreased from 1 054 645 in 2023 to 917 215 in 2024 (-13%), with the highest numbers of applicants from Syria, Venezuela and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, international protection remained a key area of national and EU-level policy development, shaped by continued geopolitical pressures, fluctuating arrivals, and evolving operational needs. Many EMN Member and Observer Countries took steps to improve the efficiency and fairness of international protection systems. In response to sustained application levels, countries also expanded or reorganised reception capacities, reduced waiting times for accommodation or the duration of stay and implemented new models for more effective reception facility management.
- 2024 brought major developments in border and Schengen policy, marked by Regulation (EU) 2024/1717 (revised Schengen Borders Code) to strengthen external border management and clarify the conditions for internal border controls as measures of last resort, Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 (the Screening Regulation), and ongoing preparations for major EU border information technology (IT) systems. The new Screening Regulation reinforced control of external borders by imposing a common Schengen discipline on all Member States to carry out identity, security, health and vulnerability checks on each irregular migrant and asylum seeker upon entry. Another key milestone was the phased enlargement of the Schengen Area to include Bulgaria and Romania, with internal sea and air border checks abolished from 31 March 2024 and progress towards land border checks to be lifted by 1 January 2025.
- Following the Council of the EU's decision to extend temporary protection until March 2026, EMN Member Countries continued to adapt their responses to persons fleeing the war in Ukraine, focusing on transitioning from emergency measures to more sustainable, longer-term approaches. Although not legally bound by the Council decision, EMN Observer Countries also continued to adapt their national responses, such as updating their processes to extend residence documents, ranging from automatic extensions to issuing new identity (ID) or biometric cards. In efforts to balance

public finances and stimulate self-reliance, some EMN Member Countries limited access to social assistance and state-provided or state-funded accommodation.

- In 2024, addressing labour shortages and skills gaps remained a key driver of legal migration policy across the EU and EMN Member and Observer Countries. At EU level, the adoption of Directive (EU) 2024/1233 (the recast Single Permit Directive) supported more streamlined admission and stronger worker protections. In addition, there was significant progress in the implementation of Talent Partnerships and the negotiations by co-legislators regarding the EU Talent Pool. At national level, reforms focused on attracting and retaining third-country nationals across a wide range of occupations and sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, and information and communications technology (ICT) through simplified and digitalised work permit procedures, fast-track schemes, and improved pathways for students and graduates to join the labour market. Germany eased its rules to allow certain asylum seekers and individuals with suspended removal orders to access skilled worker permits.
- Integration measures included access to employment, education, language learning, and anti-discrimination, as well as efforts to reduce barriers for vulnerable and newly arrived migrants. Several countries revised their integration strategies, introduced civic orientation schemes, and launched digital platforms to support inclusion. Meanwhile, education-focused initiatives, such as Portugal's expanded early childhood education capacity, underscored the growing attention to inclusion from early life stages onwards. In Belgium's Walloon Region, a pilot initiative adapted the driving theory exam for non-native speakers to improve access to employment through better mobility.
- The protection of vulnerable groups remained a key priority at EU and national level. Several EMN Member and Observer Countries enhanced the identification, reception, and protection of unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups. Measures included improved age assessment procedures, stronger safeguards against abuse, and better data retention. Countries introduced child protection measures such as child-friendly accommodation, independent inspections, and updated care standards. Support for vulnerable adults, particularly women victims of violence, also increased.
- In June 2024, the EU adopted Directive (EU) 2024/1712 (the revised Anti-Trafficking Directive) to strengthen the fight against trafficking in human beings, for example by adding the exploitation of surrogacy, of forced marriage and of illegal adoption as new forms of exploitation. The Anti-Trafficking Directive needs to be transposed by Member States by mid-July 2026.
- Developments in return and readmission focused on strengthening enforcement, addressing gaps that leave individuals without a clear legal status or resolution in their migration and return process, enhancing operational cooperation, including joint return operations (JROs), and new bilateral agreements at national level. Voluntary return and reintegration were promoted through expanded counselling and financial incentives, and cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), with a growing emphasis on sustainable reintegration and preventing further migration.
- Migration and development policies continued to address root causes of irregular migration, promote circular migration, and harness diaspora contributions. Notable initiatives supported youth employment, skills development, and economic resilience in partner third countries. Developments in international cooperation on irregular migration included enhanced United Kingdom (UK)-France cooperation under the Sandhurst Treaty and new or extended agreements involving Lithuania, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine on border management and tackling irregular migration.



1.2. INTRODUCTION

2024 was characterised by continued geopolitical instability in the EU neighbourhood and beyond, with multiple overlapping crises shaping migration dynamics. Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine remained a driver of displacement. In response, in June 2024, the Council of the EU decided to extend temporary protection until 4 March 2026. In the Middle East and across various parts of Africa, several concurrent developments resulted in regional volatility and displacement, including the escalating conflict in Gaza and rising tensions between Israel and Hezbollah, the instability in north-east Syria involving Turkish and Kurdish forces, the fall of the Assad regime,¹ Sudan's escalating civil war, and military coups in West Africa.

Notwithstanding the turbulent geopolitical context, total asylum applications in the EU and Norway decreased by 13%, falling from 1 054 645 in 2023 to 917 215 in 2024, with the highest numbers of applications from nationals of Syria, Venezuela and Afghanistan.² Similarly, irregular border crossings into the EU dropped, falling by 38% to just over 239 000 detections, the lowest since 2021. This overall decline was primarily due to a 59% reduction in arrivals via the Central Mediterranean route and a 78% decrease in arrivals via the Western Balkan route, while the Eastern route saw a threefold increase in crossings, mostly along the borders with Ukraine and Belarus.³ Data on the number of legal migrants receiving a first residence permit in the EU in 2024 were not yet available at the time of writing this report. However, in line with the trend of the previous three years, the share

¹ Following the fall of the Assad regime, 12 EMN Member Countries (AT, BE, EL, DE, FI, HR, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, SE) temporarily suspended the issuing of decisions on asylum applications for Syrian nationals, while the geopolitical situation was reassessed.

² Eurostat, Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data [migr_asyappctza], https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/product/view/migr_asyappctza?category=migr:migr_asy:migr_asyapp, date of extraction 10 June 2025.

³ Frontex, 'Irregular border crossings into EU drop sharply in 2024', Press release, 14 January 2025, <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/irregular-border-crossings-into-eu-drop-sharply-in-2024-oqpwex>, accessed 17 May 2025.

of third country nationals in the total European population (EU and Norway) continued to increase, reaching over 29 million or 6.4% of the total population on 1 January 2024 (Figures 1 and 2).

2024 was also marked by major reforms of EU migration and asylum policy. On 11 June 2024, the Pact⁴ was adopted, setting out comprehensive new rules to reform and strengthen the EU's migration management and asylum system. Set to apply from June 2026, the Pact represents a commitment to balance responsibility and solidarity across EU Member States and reinforce the EU's ability to manage migration flows more fairly and effectively. It focuses on asylum processes, forced and irregular migration, crisis management and promoting safe and legal pathways to protection, as well as introducing a return border procedure.

Other notable EU developments included the European Parliament elections in June 2024, in which the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) remained the largest group, securing 188 of the 720 seats, followed by the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) with 136 seats, and Patriots for Europe (Pfe) with 84 seats.⁵ On 18 July 2024, Ursula von der Leyen was re-elected as President of the European Commission for a second term⁶ and the new Commission took office on 1 December 2024. As part of its agenda, the Commission committed to implementing the Pact and strengthening common borders while promoting a modern, balanced approach to migration management.⁷

Developments reported by EMN Member and Observer Countries in 2024 were mainly a continuation of older and more recent trends. In the area of integration, for example, nearly all countries continued to implement existing policies, focusing on employment, education, housing, and civic participation. Similarly, several countries renewed their efforts to combat trafficking in human beings and protect vulnerable groups, for example by strengthening their legal frameworks.

In some areas, new policies reflected emerging trends since the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, similar to 2022 and 2023, persistent labour shortages were identified as a key driver of migration policy reform at both EU and national level, spurring governments to undertake

initiatives to facilitate recruitment, skills recognition and retention of third-country national workers. Digitalisation likewise continued to be a cross-cutting priority across all areas of migration and asylum, aiming to increase efficiency, reduce backlogs, and improve service delivery.

Other recent developments signalled a partial shift from previous years. Following the EU-wide extension of temporary protection to March 2026, countries accelerated the process of transitioning from emergency measures to longer-term support for those fleeing the war in Ukraine, e.g. by providing pathways to alternative permits for employment or family reasons. With growing concerns about national security, misuse of migration channels, or pressure on asylum and reception systems (among others), some countries reported a shift towards more restrictive migration and asylum policies. Rules and requirements were tightened in legal migration, asylum, integration and citizenship. Several policy measures in integration and inclusion introduced a stronger element of conditionality, reflecting a shift towards greater expectations and responsibilities for migrants, particularly in areas such as language learning, civic knowledge, and meeting specific integration conditions.

Several policy areas were shaped by a high degree of policy and legislative activity at EU level. In preparing to implement the Pact, national reforms on asylum focused on faster asylum access, refined admissibility checks, and expanded procedural safeguards. Major advances were made in respect of border policy and Schengen enlargement, notably the revised Schengen Borders Code⁸ and the phased integration of Bulgaria and Romania. Efforts against irregular migration were reinforced in 2024, supported by EU-level legislative initiatives such as the anti-smuggling package and revised Screening Regulation⁹ and Regulation (EU) 2024/1358 (the Eurodac Regulation).¹⁰ The revised Anti-Trafficking Directive¹¹ mandated formalised national referral mechanisms and stronger cooperation with asylum systems. Cooperation on return and reintegration policies was reinforced by the adoption of Regulation (EU) 2024/1349 (the Return Border Procedure Regulation),¹² which will apply from 2026. Thirteen countries introduced reforms to improve identification, increase enforcement, and close legal gaps in the return process.

4 Council of the EU, 'The Council adopts the EU's pact on migration and asylum', Press release, 14 May 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/05/14/the-council-adopts-the-eu-s-pact-on-migration-and-asylum/>, accessed 17 February 2025.

5 European Parliament, '2024 European election results', 23 July 2024, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/>, accessed 17 May 2025.

6 European Parliament, 'Parliament re-elects Ursula von der Leyen as Commission President', Press release, 18 June 2024, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240710IPR22812/parliament-re-elects-ursula-von-der-leyen-as-commission-president>, accessed 17 February 2025.

7 European Commission, 'European Union priorities 2024-2029', n.d., https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities/european-union-priorities-2024-2029_en, accessed 17 May 2025.

8 Regulation (EU) 2024/1717 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1717/oj/eng>, accessed 18 April 2025.

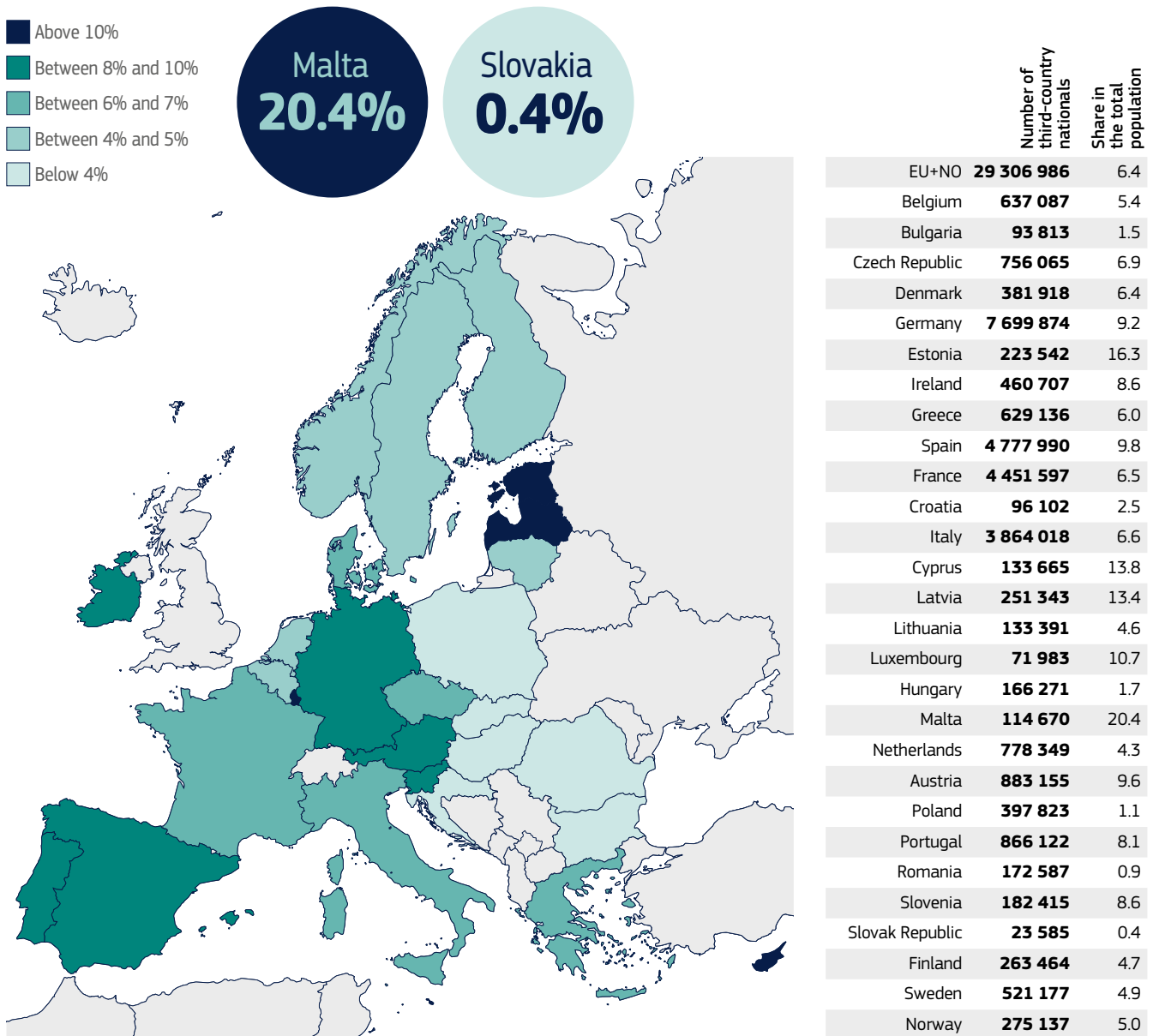
9 Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 introducing the screening of third-country nationals at the external borders and amending Regulations (EC) No 767/2008, (EU) 2017/2226, (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/817, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1356/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

10 Regulation (EU) 2024/1358 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on the establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of biometric data in order to effectively apply Regulations (EU) 2024/1351 and (EU) 2024/1350 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Directive 2001/55/EC and to identify illegally staying third-country nationals and stateless persons and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States' law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes, amending Regulations (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1358/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

11 Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1712/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

12 Regulation (EU) 2024/1349 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 establishing a return border procedure, and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1148, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1349/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

Figure 1: Share of third-country nationals in the total population, EU and Norway, 1 January 2024 (%)



Source: Eurostat (migr_pop1ctz), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

Note: In Estonia and Latvia, the number of third-country nationals includes recognised non-citizens.

Figure 2: Third-country nationals, EU and Norway, 1 January 2021–2024

Share of the total population in % (and the absolute number)



Source: Eurostat (migr_pop1ctz), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

Notes: 2022 data for Romania not included; In Estonia and Latvia, the number of third-country nationals includes recognised non-citizens.



1.3. MORE RESTRICTIVE MIGRATION POLICIES AS A RESPONSE TO NEW AND OLD CHALLENGES

In 2024, a notable trend emerged in 17 EMN Member and Observer Countries¹³ towards more restrictive or stricter migration and asylum policies, including in legal migration, asylum, integration, and acquisition of citizenship. Some developments aimed to address national security concerns, concerns about the misuse of migration channels, pressure on asylum and reception systems, housing shortages, and integration challenges.

In the area of legal migration, several countries¹⁴ tightened their admission rules for specific categories of third-country nationals, including for work-related migration,¹⁵ self-employment,¹⁶ study¹⁷ and family reunification.¹⁸ The changes mainly aimed to prevent misuse of specific migration channels. Self-employed workers and entrepreneurs, including digital platform workers, were subject to more rigorous rules in five EMN Member Countries.¹⁹ To tackle the misuse of student permits, Czech Republic, Finland and Sweden introduced more restrictive measures, including higher tuition fees (Finland). The Netherlands ended certain work visas and a scheme for Asian restaurants over labour exploitation concerns and eliminated its investor permit due to money laundering risks and low impact. Changes in Hungary and Lithuania aimed to restrict access for medium-skilled and low-skilled workers, prioritising attracting highly skilled workers to support the country's transition from a low-cost, labour-based economy to a high value-added, quality-driven economy.

In the area of asylum, reforms in eight countries²⁰ aimed to tighten national asylum systems by introducing stricter administrative criteria, admissibility procedures or legal definitions in national law. Six EMN Member Countries increased the monitoring of asylum applicants,²¹ six introduced stricter legal definitions,²² and Finland shortened the duration of residence permits. Finland, France

and Germany introduced further grounds for refusal or withdrawal of the protection status. Finland enacted the Border Security Act, laying down the conditions for restricting applications for international protection in a limited geographical area on Finland's national border and in its immediate vicinity. Measures were taken in five countries²³ to strengthen admissibility checks and reduce delays linked to low-credibility cases. Belgium, Finland and Ireland expanded the use of accelerated procedures to improve efficiency in processing cases, applying them to cases from safe countries of origin,²⁴ applicants posing security risks or submitting subsequent applications,²⁵ and high-volume nationalities.²⁶

In the area of integration and inclusion, several policy measures became stricter or conditional, reflecting a shift towards greater expectations and responsibilities for migrants, particularly in areas such as language learning, civic knowledge, and meeting specific integration conditions. Four countries²⁷ (further) linked integration to legal stay or access to services. France, for example, set conditions for the issuance of residence permits and/or their renewal based on integration criteria, including a certain level of proficiency in the French language and respect for the principles of the Republic.

The area of acquisition of citizenship also saw the introduction of some stricter policies, largely motivated by national security concerns, public safety, and the reinforcement of integration standards. Sweden and Moldova tightened eligibility based on public order and security concerns for applicants with criminal links or perceived threats. Italy and Portugal added procedural and evidentiary barriers, including stricter integration and ancestry requirements. France raised the language threshold for naturalisation to signal higher integration expectations.



1.4. CONTINUED DIGITALISATION AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN MIGRATION AND ASYLUM PROCEDURES

Digitalisation continued to be a cross-cutting trend in key areas such as legal migration, integration and asylum, aiming to improve the efficiency of migration management and reduce administrative backlogs and lengthy application processing times (see Figure 3).

Ongoing digitalisation of legal migration processes, including in processing applications and issuance of

residence permits, were reported by seven EMN Member and Observer Countries.²⁸ Seven EMN Member and Observer Countries²⁹ took initiatives to digitally connect employers with international talent and digitalise legal migration procedures. Italy made employer requests for hiring highly qualified workers available through an online portal, Austria launched the Work in Austria Talent Hub to

13 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and MD (across all areas of migration listed).

14 BE, CZ, FI, FR, HU, LT, NL, PL, SE.

15 FI, HU, LT, NL.

16 BE, FI, FR, HU, PL.

17 CZ, FI, SE.

18 BE, FI, HU, SE.

19 BE, FI, FR, HU, PL.

20 DE, FI, FR, IT, LT, SE, SK, and MD.

21 DE, FI, FR, LT, SE, SI.

22 FI, FR, IT, LT, SE, SK.

23 DE, EL, FI, FR, SK.

24 BE, IE.

25 FI.

26 IE.

27 AT, DE, FR, SE.

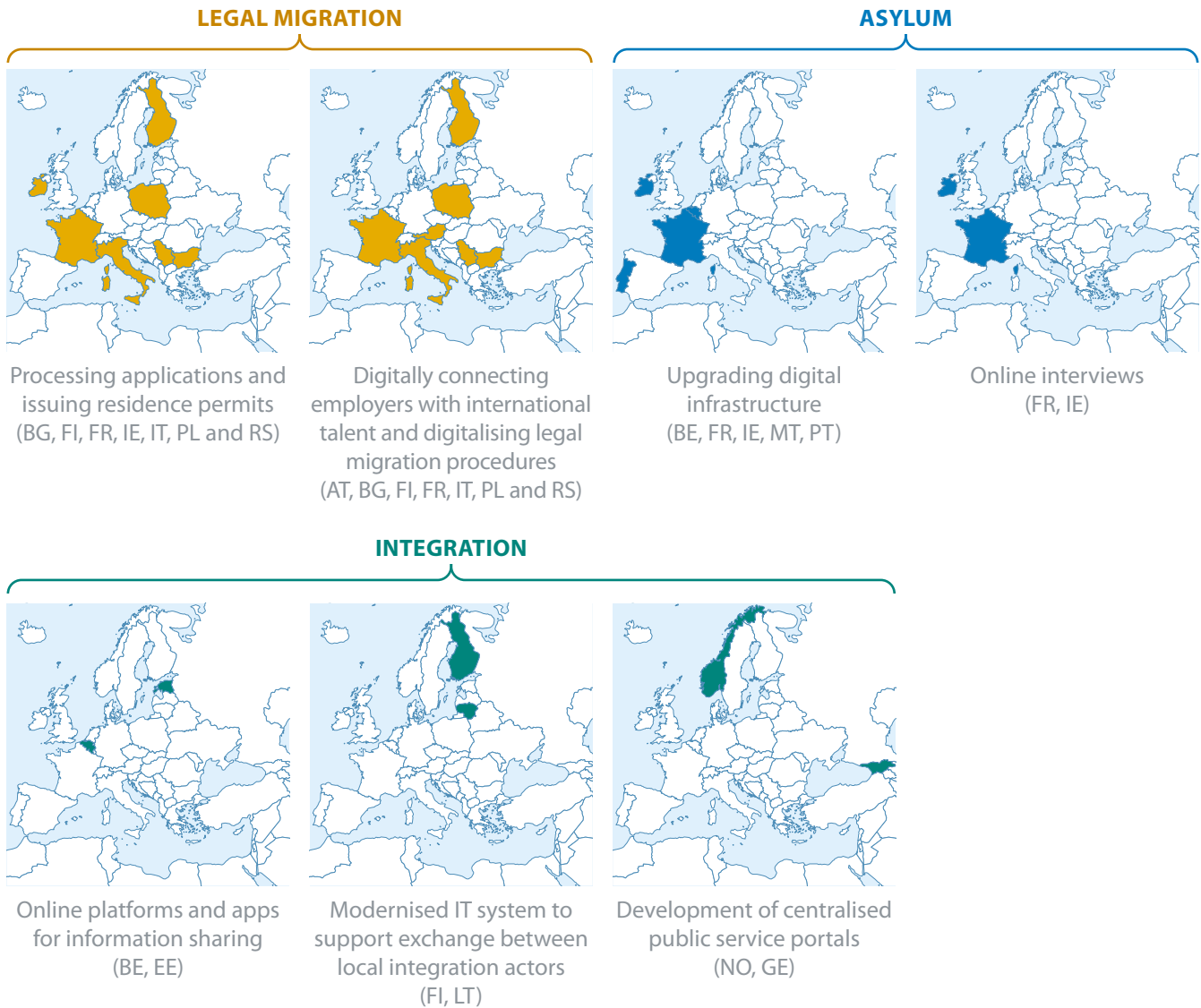
28 BG, FI, FR, IE, IT, PL, and RS.

29 AT, BG, FI, FR, IT, PL, and RS.

connect employers with international talent, and Poland simplified procedures for Ukrainian nationals by allowing employment to begin upon electronic notification from employers. France enhanced its Digital Administration for

Foreign Nationals in France (ANEF) remote service with improved user support, while Serbia enabled electronic applications for single permits from abroad.

Figure 3. Digitalisation across EMN Member and Observer Countries in 2024



The digitalisation of different aspects of asylum processes took place in seven EMN Member and Observer Countries,³⁰ such as upgrading digital infrastructure,³¹ allowing interviews to be held online,³² and improving efficiency and transparency.³³ Ireland shifted towards fully digital applications, allowing asylum seekers to apply online using iPads at designated facilities, with the exception of unaccompanied minors. Belgium expanded its cloud infrastructure for asylum processes and automated Dublin transfer requests. France focused on data security and the automation of personal data processing and remote consultation interfaces. Portugal started digitally storing all applications to ensure data integrity and remote accessibility. Bulgaria developed a digitalisation plan for

international protection procedures by 2026. Norway committed NOK 100 million (€8 627 028) to modernise the immigration administration IT system and enhance digital infrastructure.

The digitalisation of integration and inclusion processes and services was reported by seven EMN Member and Observer Countries.³⁴ These included apps or platforms for providing integration information, such as Belgium (Flanders Region)'s Welcome App and Estonia's state portal featuring 'Settling in Estonia' and an Adaptation Roadmap. Finland and Lithuania modernised their data systems to support integration in municipalities and improve information exchange between integration actors. Norway and Georgia further developed public service portals to provide

³⁰ BE, BG, FR, IE, MT, PT, and NO.

³¹ BE, FR, IE, MT, PT.

³² FR, IE (remote interviews on a trial basis).

³³ BG, FR, and NO.

³⁴ AT, BE, EE, FI, LT, and NO, GE.

centralised, user-oriented access to state services for foreign nationals.

Digitalisation efforts in border management were advanced at EU level through the preparation for the implementation of many measures related to IT systems (the Entry/Exit System (EES), European Travel Information

and Authorisation System (ETIAS), Schengen Information System (SIS),³⁵ Visa Information System (VIS)) and their interoperability as well as the two regulations on the collection and transmission of advance passenger information (API).³⁶



1.5. ADAPTING NATIONAL PROCEDURES AND CAPACITIES TO INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION NEEDS

In 2024, international protection remained a key area of national and EU-level policy development, shaped by continued geopolitical pressures, fluctuating arrivals, and evolving operational needs. As shown in Figure 4, Germany remained the country receiving the highest number of first-time applications (230 000), followed by Spain (164 000), Italy (151 000) and France (131 000). Overall, EMN Member Countries experienced considerable variations as compared to 2023. A majority of countries reported a drop in applications – the most significant ones being Romania (-77%), Estonia (-67%) and Slovakia (-64%) percentage-wise, and Germany (-100 000), Austria (-34 000) and France (-14 000) in absolute terms. The drop in first-time applicants in Romania, for example, was

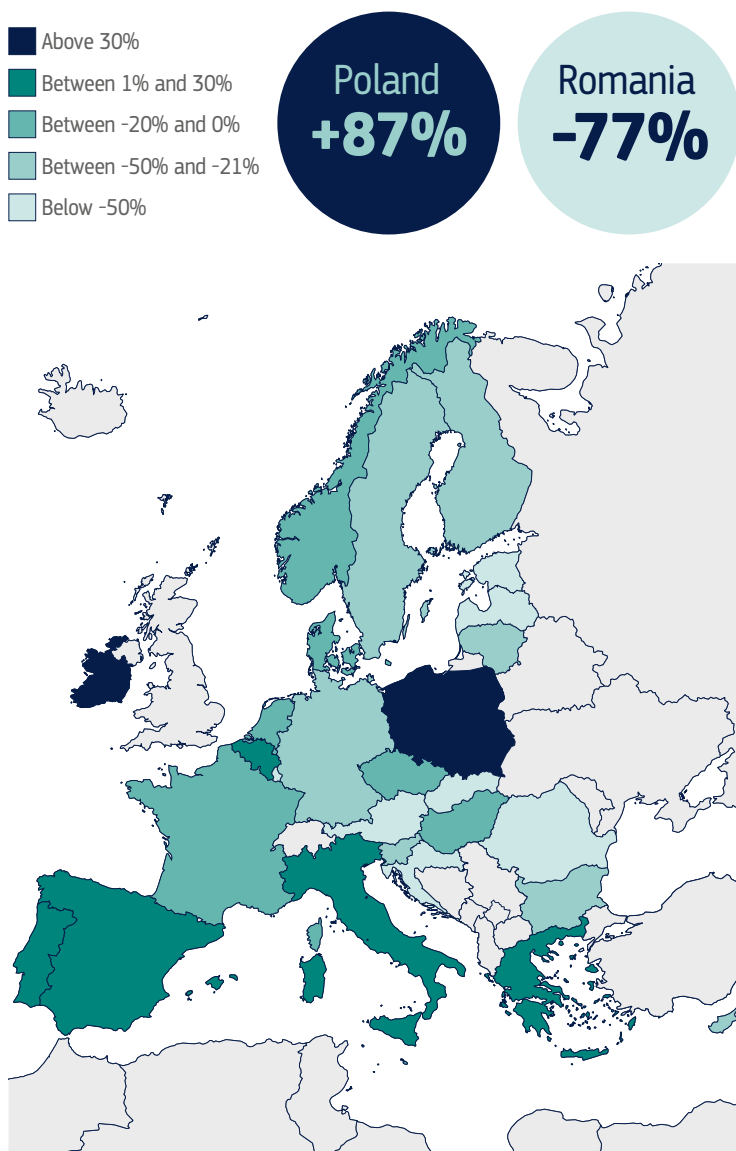
explained by a number of factors including the reduced use of the Western-Balkans route, the changing profile of applicants for asylum, strengthened border control measures in Romania and the increased promotion of voluntary returns. On the other side of the spectrum, Poland reported an increase in applications by 87%, followed by Ireland (+39%) and Greece (+19%). In absolute terms, Italy (+21 000 approximately), Greece (11 000) and Poland (7 000) experienced the sharpest uptick. The most significant factor behind the increase in Poland was the rise in applications from Ukrainian citizens, particularly men of military age concerned about return and conscription as their passports approached expiration.

³⁵ SIS is discussed here only in the context of border management.

³⁶ Regulation (EU) 2025/12 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 December 2024 on the collection and transfer of advance passenger information for enhancing and facilitating external border checks, amending Regulations (EU) 2018/1726 and (EU) 2019/817, and repealing Council Directive 2004/82/EC, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2025/12/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025; Regulation (EU) 2025/13 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 December 2024 on the collection and transfer of advance passenger information for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime, and amending Regulation (EU) 2019/818, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2025/13/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

Figure 4: Overview of first-time asylum applications from third-country nationals, EU Member States and Norway, 2021-2024

Variation of asylum applications in 2024 compared to 2023



Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza), date of extraction: 28 May 2025.

Number of asylum applications

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2023-2024 variation
EU27 (from 2020)	535 985	873 680	1 049 510	912 415	-13%
Belgium	19 545	32 100	29 260	33 050	13%
Bulgaria	10 890	20 260	22 390	12 130	-46%
Czechia	1 055	1 335	1 130	1 025	-9%
Denmark	1 995	4 475	2 355	2 180	-7%
Germany	148 175	217 735	329 035	229 695	-30%
Estonia	75	2 940	3 980	1 330	-67%
Ireland	2 615	13 645	13 220	18 435	39%
Greece	22 660	29 125	57 895	68 995	19%
Spain	62 050	116 135	160 460	164 010	2%
France	103 790	137 510	145 055	130 860	-10%
Croatia	2 480	2 660	1 635	1 000	-39%
Italy	45 200	77 200	130 565	151 120	16%
Cyprus	13 260	21 590	11 660	6 750	-42%
Latvia	580	545	1 625	800	-51%
Lithuania	3 905	905	510	295	-42%
Luxembourg	1 365	2 405	2 615	2 125	-19%
Hungary	40	45	30	25	-17%
Malta	1 200	915	490	440	-10%
Netherlands	24 730	35 500	38 320	31 925	-17%
Austria	37 800	109 775	56 135	22 220	-60%
Poland	6 240	7 700	7 720	14 445	87%
Portugal	1 350	1 975	2 600	2 675	3%
Romania	9 065	12 065	9 875	2 265	-77%
Slovenia	5 220	6 645	7 185	5 465	-24%
Slovakia	330	500	370	135	-64%
Finland	1 355	4 815	4 450	2 260	-49%
Sweden	9 015	13 180	8 945	6 755	-24%
Norway	1 595	4 650	5 135	4 800	-7%

At EU level, adoption of the Pact was a pivotal moment, laying the groundwork for a more coherent and harmonised approach to asylum across EU Member States. The Pact's legislative instruments, such as Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 (the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation),³⁷ Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 (the Asylum Procedure Regulation),³⁸ and Regulation (EU) 2024/1347 (the Qualification Regulation)³⁹ aim to streamline procedures,

enhance efficiency, and ensure more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing between Member States.

At national level, many EMN Member and Observer Countries took steps to improve the efficiency and fairness of their international protection systems. Reforms included facilitating access to asylum procedures,⁴⁰ updating

37 Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on asylum and migration management, amending Regulations (EU) 2021/1147 and (EU) 2021/1060 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 604/2013, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1351/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

38 Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 establishing a common procedure for international protection in the Union and repealing Directive 2013/32/EU, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1348/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

39 Regulation (EU) 2024/1347 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as BIP, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection and for the content of the protection granted, amending Council Directive 2003/109/EC and repealing Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1347/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

40 BE, FR.

admissibility rules,⁴¹ and adapting the Dublin procedures to increase transfers and clarify processes.⁴²

Nine countries⁴³ made changes to their procedures (standard, border, accelerated) to better manage case-loads and align with operational realities. Enhancements to procedural safeguards focused on improving access to information,⁴⁴ interpretation services,⁴⁵ legal counselling,⁴⁶ and child-sensitive justice.⁴⁷

Reception and access to services for applicants of international protection were a major focus in 2024. Countries with sustained application levels expanded or reorganised their reception capacity,⁴⁸ reduced waiting times for accommodation or the duration of stay,⁴⁹ and implemented new models for more effective reception facility management.⁵⁰ Adjustments to material support sought to better match applicants' needs with public resources, with some countries reducing or withdrawing allowances⁵¹ and others introducing new or extending existing allowances.⁵²

Meanwhile, labour market access was facilitated through shorter waiting periods and expanded work rights in some countries.⁵³ Pre-integration efforts continued through language support,⁵⁴ vocational training,⁵⁵ and digital platforms⁵⁶ designed to inform and empower applicants from the early stages of the process.

On resettlement and humanitarian admission, France reported resettlement admissions and Portugal resumed its resettlement programme after a period of suspension. Belgium suspended its programmes temporarily after elections and two countries⁵⁷ scaled back their programmes due to policy shifts. Initiatives such as France's *Avec elles* programme to provide refugee women and girls and host communities with better tools to address protection and inclusion challenges and the expansion of community sponsorship guidelines at EU level illustrated efforts to create more structured and dignified pathways to protection.



1.6. ADVANCING SCHENGEN GOVERNANCE THROUGH BORDER AND VISA MEASURES

2024 brought major developments in Schengen governance and border policy, marked by the revised Schengen Borders Code, which aimed to strengthen external border management and clarify the conditions for internal border controls as measures of last resort. The new Screening Regulation, adopted in May 2024, imposed a harmonised Schengen discipline to carry out identity, security, health and vulnerability checks on each irregular migrant and asylum applicants. All relevant EU and national databases must be consulted for that purpose and migrants will not be able to bypass checks in these databases. This is

important for Schengen, and it is important for security in Europe. A thematic evaluation on return was conducted across the Schengen Area, resulting in a proposal for a Council implementing decision on the recommendations from the evaluation.⁵⁸ Another key milestone was the phased enlargement of the Schengen Area to include Bulgaria and Romania, with internal sea and air checks abolished and full access to large-scale IT systems granted in March 2024, and progress towards internal land border checks to be lifted by 1 January 2025 (Figure 5).

41 DE, EL, FI, FR, IE, SK.

42 BE, EL, FR, HU.

43 BE, BG, CZ, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, NL.

44 BE, IT, LV, SK.

45 BE, FR, MT, and NO.

46 AT, LT.

47 BE, DE.

48 BE, CY, IE, LU, NL, PT.

49 BE, IT, FR, NL.

50 EE, ES, FI, LT, NL.

51 FI, FR, IE.

52 DE, LT.

53 DE, EL, IE, LT.

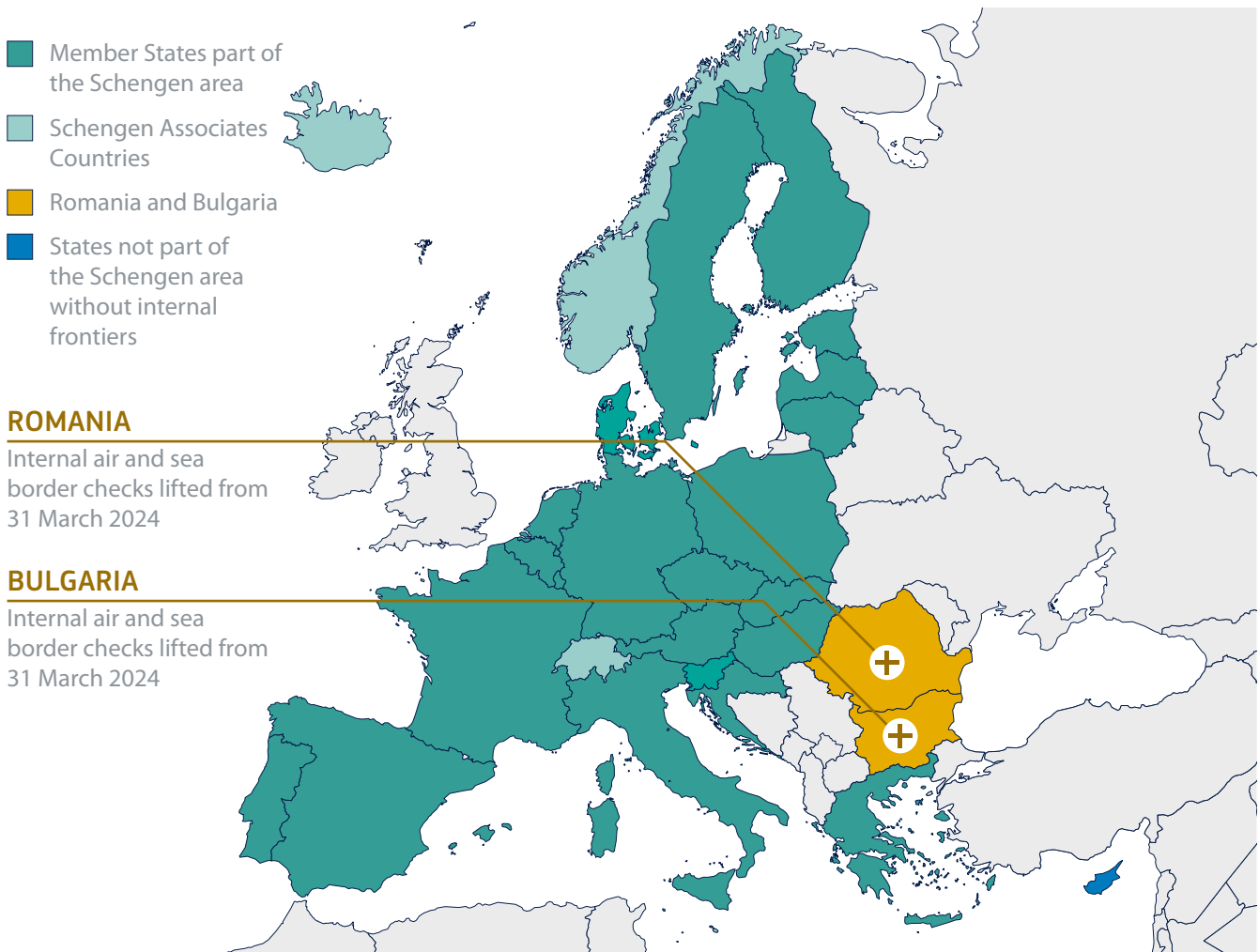
54 BG, LV.

55 AT, BE, PT.

56 PL.

57 FI, SE.

58 Proposal for a Council implementing decision setting out recommendations addressing identified common areas for improvement resulting from the 2024 thematic Schengen evaluation 'Bridging national gaps: towards an effective EU return system through common solutions and innovative practices' COM/2024/589 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52024PC0589>, accessed 2 June 2025.

Figure 5. Bulgaria and Romania join the Schengen Area

Political agreement was reached on Regulation (EU) 2025/12⁵⁹ on the collection and transmission of API, aimed at enhancing border control. The European Commission released a Communication⁶⁰ on countering hybrid threats resulting from the weaponisation of migration, allocating €170 million for enhanced surveillance and security at the external borders.

Implementation of EU large-scale IT systems continued across EMN Member Countries, including the EES and the ETIAS. National integrated border management (IBM)⁶¹ strategies were developed in 11 countries.⁶²

In visa policy, EMN Member Countries streamlined their national procedures for issuing national visas,⁶³ improved national registries,⁶⁴ and expanded opportunities for the submission of visa applications.⁶⁵ Four EMN Member and Observer Countries⁶⁶ imposed visa requirements on specific nationalities, while others⁶⁷ lifted restrictions. The Netherlands introduced airport transit visa requirements for citizens of Chad, Senegal, Mauritania and the Central African Republic transiting airports in the Netherlands, while Poland introduced visa requirements for Colombian nationals carrying out a paid activity during their stay in Poland, in light of an increase in work permit applications and cases of misuse of visa-free travel.

59 Regulation (EU) 2025/12 focuses on enhancing and facilitating external border checks by standardising the collection and transfer of API data. It amends Regulations (EU) 2018/1726 and 2019/817, and repeals Council Directive 2004/82/EC; Regulation (EU) 2025/13 pertains to the prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime through the collection and transfer of API data. It amends Regulation (EU) 2019/818.

60 Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on countering hybrid threats from the weaponisation of migration and strengthening security at the EU's external borders, COM(2024) 570 final, eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52024DC0570, accessed 24 February 2025.

61 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council establishing the multiannual strategic policy for European integrated border management, COM/2023/146 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0146>, accessed 20 March 2025.

62 BE, CZ, FR, HR, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE.

63 BG, EE, IT, LT, MT.

64 EE.

65 BG, CZ, SK.

66 IE, NL, PL, and RS.

67 IE and GE, UA.



1.7. ADDRESSING IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Efforts to prevent and tackle irregular migration continued, driven by the evolving tactics of smuggling networks and geopolitical pressures, particularly at the EU's eastern borders. At EU level, negotiations on the 'anti-smuggling package'⁶⁸ progressed, including a revised Council Directive 2002/90/EC (the Facilitation Directive)⁶⁹ and Regulation (EU) 2022/991⁷⁰ strengthening the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol)'s mandate. The Pact reinforced efforts to counter

irregular migration with the adoption of the Screening Regulation and the Eurodac Regulation, enhancing the EU's ability to detect and respond to irregular movements.

To address irregular entry and stay, EMN Member Countries established more stringent sanctions for smuggling activities,⁷¹ reinforced operational cooperation,⁷² and clarified existing legislation.⁷³

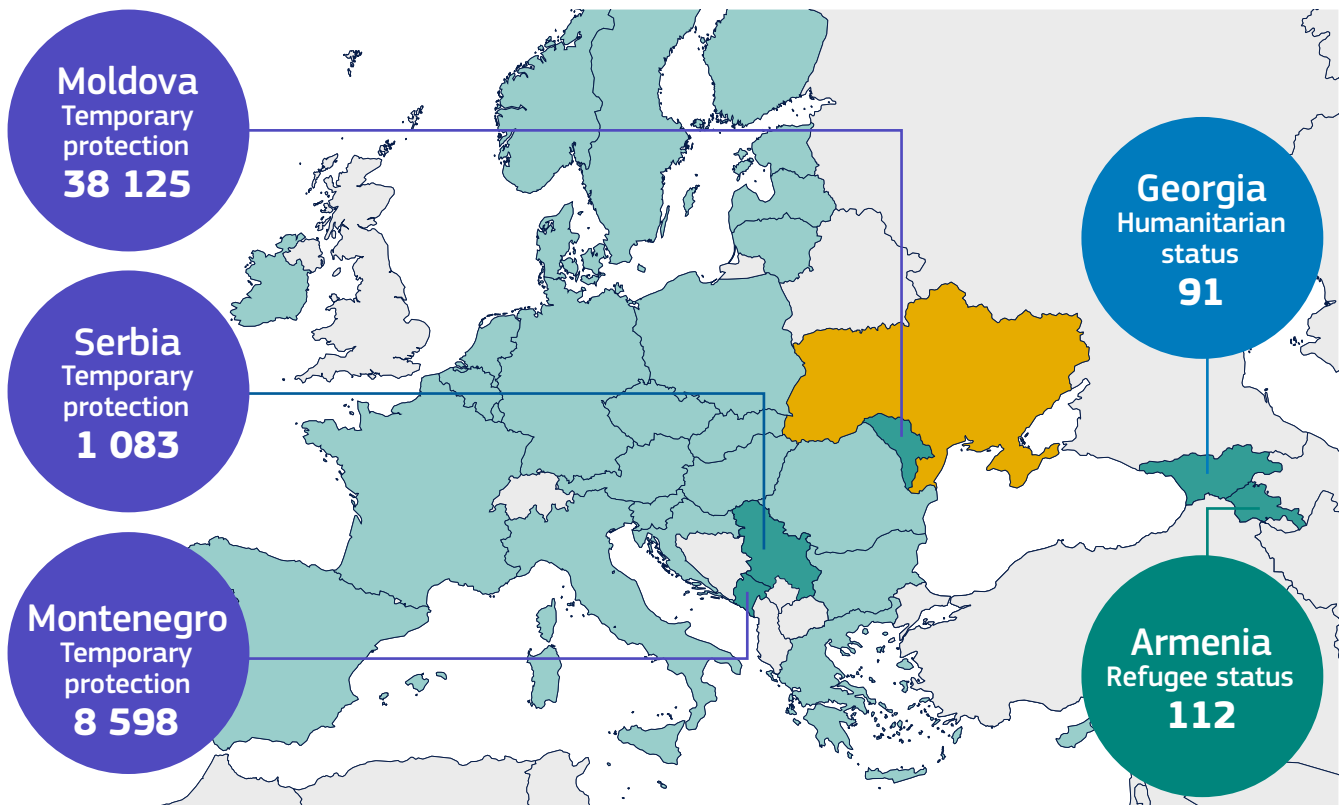


1.8. FROM EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO SUSTAINABLE INCLUSION: EVOLVING SUPPORT FOR DISPLACED PERSONS FROM UKRAINE

On 31 December 2024, over 4.2 million non-EU citizens who had fled Ukraine as a consequence of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine still had temporary **protection status** in the EU (see Chapter 5). EMN

Observer Countries likewise continued to host Ukrainians within their territory, providing different protection statuses (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Types of protection provided by EMN Observer Countries to those fleeing the war in Ukraine, 2024



Source: relevant authorities in the EMN Observer Country.

68 European Parliament, 'Revision of the anti-smuggling package', 2024, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/753190/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)753190_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/753190/EPRS_BRI(2024)753190_EN.pdf), accessed 18 March 2025.

69 Proposal for a Regulation on enhancing police cooperation in relation to the prevention, detection and investigation of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and on enhancing Europol's support to preventing and combating such crimes and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/794, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023PC0754>, accessed 18 May 2025.

70 Proposal for a Directive laying down minimum rules to prevent and counter the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and stay in the Union, and replacing Council Directive 2002/90/EC and Council Framework Decision 2002/946 JHA, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023PC0755>, accessed 18 May 2025.

71 DE, FR.

72 BE, BG, EE, EL, SE, SK.

73 DE, FR, LT.

In 2024, five EMN Member Countries⁷⁴ continued to adapt their responses to persons fleeing Ukraine by transitioning from emergency measures to more sustainable, longer-term approaches. Following the EU-wide extension of temporary protection until March 2026 and similar extensions for protection of displaced people from Ukraine in EMN Observer Countries, EMN Member and Observer Countries⁷⁵ updated their processes to extend residence documents, ranging from automatic extensions⁷⁶ to issuing new ID or biometric cards.⁷⁷ France, Italy and Poland introduced measures to transition beneficiaries of temporary protection (BoTP) to alternative residence permits, aiming to ease administrative burdens and support longer-term integration through work, business, or family-related pathways. Germany and the Netherlands restricted the possibility of temporary protection

for non-Ukrainian third-country nationals, while Lithuania revoked special admission conditions for foreign nationals unable to return to Ukraine but not eligible for temporary protection.

In an effort to balance public finances and stimulate self-reliance, EMN Member Countries⁷⁸ limited access to social assistance⁷⁹ and state-provided or state-funded accommodation.⁸⁰ In Bulgaria, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Bulgarian Red Cross developed a holistic support programme to help BoTP, particularly those in vulnerable situations, to access services, exercise their rights, and achieve self-reliance. Labour market integration was encouraged in EMN Member Countries through simplified work permit rules,⁸¹ and access to employment support programmes for working BoTP.⁸²



1.9. MEETING LABOUR MARKET NEEDS THROUGH MIGRATION PATHWAYS

In 2024, addressing labour market needs and filling skills gaps were a central driver of legal migration policy at both EU and national levels, prompting a range of initiatives to attract, retain and better regulate the entry of third-country national workers.

EMN Member and Observer Countries implemented wide-ranging reforms to their legal migration policies, primarily to address persistent labour shortages across a wide range of occupations and sectors such as healthcare, ICT, agriculture, and transport. Measures were introduced to simplify admission procedures,⁸³ expand legal channels,⁸⁴ and improve the efficiency of work permit systems, often through digitalisation⁸⁵ and fast-track schemes.⁸⁶ Measures were introduced to limit the administrative barriers for highly qualified workers, including through flexible recognition of qualifications and professional experience,⁸⁷ shorter contract duration to lodge an application for a permit,⁸⁸ favourable conditions to access residence,⁸⁹ mobility between employers,⁹⁰ easing family reunification,⁹¹ changes in salary thresholds,⁹² and a more attractive tax regime for high-earning migrants.⁹³

Efforts to retain third-country students encouraged graduates' long-term integration, facilitated students' access to

the domestic labour market,⁹⁴ and fostered international cooperation⁹⁵ in occupations facing labour shortages.

In parallel, a focus was placed on safeguarding the rights of migrant workers and preventing labour exploitation, with EMN Member and Observer Countries introducing measures such as stricter oversight of employers,⁹⁶ improved complaint mechanisms,⁹⁷ and stronger victim protection.⁹⁸

Ireland reported labour shortages as a driver for allowing spouses and partners of certain permit holders admitted under family reunification to take up employment without having to apply for a separate permission.⁹⁹

Germany introduced more flexible work and residence rules to better harness the labour potential of asylum seekers and those with suspended deportation. Certain asylum seekers were allowed to switch to a skilled worker residence permit and some employment requirements were eased for individuals whose removal was suspended. For example, people with a suspended deportation order who had completed training as healthcare assistants were eligible for a temporary residence permit. Those enrolled in vocational training in Germany were also entitled to a temporary residence permit if they could support

74 DE, EL, ES, FR, IE.

75 AT, CZ, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LU, NL, PT, SK, and NO, MD, RS.

76 DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, SK.

77 AT, LU, NL, SK, and RS.

78 BG, CZ, IE, IT, LT, LV, NL, SE, SI, SK.

79 IE, NL, SE, SK.

80 CZ, IE, LT, SE, SI, SK.

81 AT, DE, LT, SK.

82 BE, SE.

83 CZ, FR, SI, SK, and MD.

84 DE, IT, PT.

85 BG, FI, FR, IE, IT, PL, and RS.

86 CZ, EL, IE, IT.

87 BE, DE, EE, IT, SK.

88 BE, EE, LU, LV.

89 BE (intra-EU mobility only), BG, DE, HR.

90 BE, BG, EE, FI, LU, LV.

91 DE, EE, LU.

92 BE, HE, LU, SK.

93 LU: Luxembourg Government, 'Adaptation du Barème de l'impôt sur le revenu', 2023, https://gouvernement.lu/fr/actualites/toutes_actualites/communiqués/2023/12-decembre/20-adaptation-barème-impôt.html, accessed 17 April 2025.

94 BG, CZ, HR, IT, PT.

95 AT, BE, CY, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LU, PT.

96 FR, LV, PL.

97 FR, LV, PL.

98 CY, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, SK.

99 Applies to the general employment permit, intra-corporate transferee employment permit, critical skills employment permit and researchers on a hosting agreement.

themselves financially. If they could not ensure their subsistence, they were generally granted a suspension of deportation for the duration of the training.

The EU advanced legal migration pathways, including through operationalisation of the EU Talent Pool and the Talent Partnerships. The proposed Talent Pool Regulation¹⁰⁰ was under negotiation throughout 2024, with the

Council of the EU agreeing a general approach in June 2024 to create an EU-wide platform matching third-country jobseekers with employers facing labour shortages.¹⁰¹ The recast Single Permit Directive¹⁰² was adopted in April 2024. It aimed to streamline application procedures and strengthen third-country national workers' rights and protections against labour exploitation.



1.10. ENHANCING INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS

Almost all EMN Member and Observer Countries reported measures to foster third-country nationals' general participation and inclusion in their host society.¹⁰³ These focused on addressing labour market needs,¹⁰⁴ 'improving language learning,¹⁰⁵ and enhancing the active participation of third-country nationals in host societies.¹⁰⁶ Ongoing challenges such as skills shortages and social cohesion led several countries to revise or adopt national and regional strategies to boost migrants' access to employment,¹⁰⁷ education,¹⁰⁸ housing,¹⁰⁹ and healthcare,¹¹⁰ while also enhancing local-level service delivery and coordination through multi-level governance approaches.¹¹¹

Education and training of migrants were central pillars, with actions on early language acquisition, civic orientation, and expanding vocational and tertiary education access. Migrant children's school inclusion and well-being also featured as key areas, with some countries introducing bilingual education,¹¹² tailored learning support,¹¹³ and new funding schemes to reduce educational barriers.¹¹⁴

Labour market integration was further promoted through measures supporting access to vocational training¹¹⁵ and

the recognition of skills.¹¹⁶ Countries introduced language training tied to employment,¹¹⁷ job placement initiatives,¹¹⁸ and mentoring schemes to improve employability of third-country nationals.¹¹⁹ Policies were also introduced to support the participation of spouses in the workforce.¹²⁰

To strengthen inclusion, 16 EMN Member and Observer Countries¹²¹ reported developments on mainstream anti-discrimination and anti-racism policies, moreover supporting migrants' participation in civic life through separate community engagement, mentoring, and cultural mediation activities.

In 2024, the EU continued to implement its 2021–2027 Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, launching a mid-term review and a progress tracker.¹²² Events such as meetings of the European Integration Network on migrant children education, EU funding on integration and migrant participation, the closing of the European Year of Skills, and the 9th Meeting of the European Migration Forum highlighted persistent challenges in language barriers and discrimination, while stressing the need for skills recognition, labour market inclusion, and stronger coordination.¹²³



1.11. RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS, UNACCOMPANIED MINORS, AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

Fourteen EMN Member and Observer Countries¹²⁴ adopted or renewed national action plans targeting

trafficking in human beings. Countries also implemented legislative changes¹²⁵ to better tackle trafficking in

100 Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an EU Talent Pool, COM/2023/716 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52023PC0716>, accessed 18 June 2025.

101 Council of the EU, 'EU to facilitate recruitment of third country jobseekers', Press release, 13 June 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/13/eu-to-facilitate-recruitment-of-third-country-jobseekers/>, accessed 18 May 2025.

102 Directive (EU) 2024/1233 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 April 2024 on a single application procedure for a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a Member State and on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a Member State (recast), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1233/oj/eng>, accessed 18 April 2025.

103 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, MT, NL, LU, LV, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK and NO, GE, MD, RS.

104 FI, FR, and NO.

105 AT, EE, FI, FR, IT, PT, SK.

106 AT, BE, FR, IE, IT, LV, PL, PT, SE, and NO.

107 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, NL, PT, SK, and NO, GE.

108 AT, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, IT, LU, MT, PT, SE, SI, SK, and NO, GE.

109 BE, DE, EE, EL, IT, LT, LU, SE, SK.

110 CZ, EL, IT, SK.

111 CY, DE, HR, IE, IT, LU, PL, PT, SK.

112 BE.

113 EE, EL, FI, IT, LU, SE, SK, and NO.

114 HR, SE.

115 BE, EL, IT, LU, PT, and GE.

116 BE, DE, EL, FI, PT, and NO, GE.

117 AT, DE, FR, NL, PT.

118 AT, NL.

119 BE, IT, SK.

120 IE, LU, SK.

121 BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, MT, PT, SE, and NO, MD.

122 European Commission, 'The EC launches survey for the mid-term review of the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027', https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/news/ec-launches-survey-mid-term-review-action-plan-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027_en, accessed 12 February 2025.

123 Ibid.

124 AT, BG, CZ, DE, FR, HR, LT, MT, NL, PT, SI, SK, and MD, RS.

125 BE, FI, FR, IE, MT, NL, PL, SE.

human beings through prevention,¹²⁶ the prosecution of traffickers,¹²⁷ and enhanced victim protection,¹²⁸ either by targeting specific forms of trafficking in human beings or through a comprehensive approach.

Detection and identification of victims of trafficking in human beings were enhanced through awareness-raising and training for key stakeholders.¹²⁹ Some of these efforts specifically focused on the detection or identification of child victims,¹³⁰ victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour¹³¹ or sexual exploitation,¹³² and victims in migration and asylum procedures.¹³³

Several EMN Member and Observer Countries made efforts to improve the identification¹³⁴ and reception¹³⁵ of unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups in 2024. Steps to improve the identification and registration of unaccompanied minors included enhancing identification and data retention procedures,¹³⁶ introducing stricter measures to address abuse and track minors involved in criminal activity,¹³⁷ and updating age assessment procedures to ensure consistency and safeguard minors' welfare.¹³⁸ Three countries¹³⁹ sought to increase their

accommodation capacity for unaccompanied minors after a growing number arrived. For vulnerable adults, several countries concentrated on supporting women victims of violence.¹⁴⁰

Six countries¹⁴¹ introduced measures to strengthen child protection for applicants for international protection, focusing on safeguarding, rights awareness, and improved care standards. Initiatives ranged from developing child-friendly accommodation and information materials¹⁴² to independent inspections¹⁴³ and updated protection policies to better safeguard minors in asylum and reception systems.¹⁴⁴

At EU level, the revised Anti-Trafficking Directive was adopted in June 2024. It introduced stronger tools for law enforcement and judicial authorities to investigate and prosecute new forms of exploitation (the exploitation of forced marriage, of illegal adoption and of surrogacy), as well as mandating national referral mechanisms, improving coordination with asylum authorities, and requiring EU Member States to criminalise the knowing use of services from trafficking victims.



1.12. ENHANCING RETURN, READMISSION AND REINTEGRATION EFFORTS

The adoption of the Return Border Procedure Regulation in 2024, under the Pact, established a return procedure at the EU's external borders for non-EU nationals and stateless persons whose asylum applications are rejected at the border. It is set to come into operation in June 2026.

Seventeen EMN Member and Observer Countries¹⁴⁵ introduced reforms to facilitate identification, enforce return decisions, and enhance cooperation across agencies. Some countries¹⁴⁶ implemented security-driven return measures, such as forced returns of criminals and people considered a potential threat. France and Portugal made changes to prevent legal uncertainty so that the nature of the stay of migrants (regular or irregular) was determined by either a residence permit granting a right to stay or a return

decision. JROs supported by Frontex played an essential role in strengthening operational cooperation.¹⁴⁷

Voluntary return was actively promoted as a preferred, humane and cost-effective alternative, with some countries expanding return counselling¹⁴⁸ and financial support schemes.¹⁴⁹ Malta and Sweden increased financial reintegration assistance, the Netherlands adjusted its assistance to European Reintegration Programme (EURP) level, and Finland reduced the amount of money if the person applies 30 days or more after being notified of a negative first instance decision/a negative first asylum decision. In Italy and Latvia, return and reintegration assistance were also opened to forcibly returned persons.

126 BE, FI.

127 FI, NL, PL, SE.

128 ES, IE, MT.

129 BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IT, LV, MT, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and GE.

130 CZ, DE, EL, MT, SE, and GE.

131 DE, EE, EL, FR, PL, SE.

132 DE, FR, SE.

133 CZ, EL, HU, SE, SI.

134 BE, FR, IT, PL.

135 AT, BE, BG, EL, ES, FI, FR, IT, LU, SI, and MD.

136 IT, PL.

137 BE, FR.

138 BE, SE.

139 BG, IE, IT.

140 AT, DE, ES, FR, SE, and MD.

141 BE, CZ, DE, IE, PL, and GE.

142 CZ.

143 IE.

144 BE, DE, PL.

145 AT, BE, CY, DE, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, and NO, MD.

146 DE, FI, FR, PL.

147 BG, CY, DE, EE, EL, MT, PL, and MD.

148 AT, BE, BG, CY, EL, ES, IT, LU, MT, PT, SE, SI.

149 MT, SE.



1.13. PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION WITH THIRD COUNTRIES ON MIGRATION

2024 saw continued or new cooperation between EMN Member and Observer Countries and other third countries, covering a range of thematic areas, including legal migration,¹⁵⁰ irregular migration,¹⁵¹ border management,¹⁵² return,¹⁵³ and supporting migration and development (Figure 7).¹⁵⁴

Seventeen EMN Member and Observer Countries¹⁵⁵ sought to facilitate legal migration through bilateral labour migration agreements aimed at opening or strengthening legal channels for the recruitment of skilled workers from different third countries.

Several countries participated in or explored their involvement in Talent Partnerships with Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Bangladesh and Pakistan. One project reported was Belgium's Care/Soins Global Skills Partnership Project, a mobility scheme in the care sector between Morocco and Belgium.

In the area of irregular migration, EMN Member and Observer Countries reinforced collaboration with third countries that play a key role in managing and preventing irregular migration¹⁵⁶ in response to a high number of irregular arrivals from those regions/countries.¹⁵⁷ As such,

cooperation efforts were primarily focused on North,¹⁵⁸ West¹⁵⁹ and East¹⁶⁰ Africa, as well as the Middle East,¹⁶¹ Serbia¹⁶² and Bangladesh.¹⁶³ Bilateral cooperation with third countries on the management of external Schengen borders was reported by 14 EMN Member and Observer Countries¹⁶⁴ and aimed to strengthen operational capacity.

Ten EMN Member and Observer Countries¹⁶⁵ reported developments in their cooperation with third countries to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings, driven by the need to reinforce the fight against trafficking in human beings as a form of organised crime.¹⁶⁶

Synergies between migration and development were fostered through a wide range of initiatives at EU and national level. The EU and its Member States continued to engage multilaterally through regional migration processes at ministerial and senior official level, including the Budapest process¹⁶⁷ and Rabat process.¹⁶⁸ At EU level, the EU and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) launched the Platform for Remittances, Investment and Migrants' Entrepreneurship (PRIME) Central Asia programme to enhance digital access to remittances and support migrant entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.¹⁶⁹

¹⁵⁰ AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, SE, SK, and GE.

¹⁵¹ AT, BG, DE, EL, ES, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, PL, PT, SE, SK.

¹⁵² AT, BE, FR, LT, and GE, MD.

¹⁵³ AT, BG, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, SK, and GE, MD, UA.

¹⁵⁴ AT, BE, EE, FR, DE, IT, LU, MT, NL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and NO, MD.

¹⁵⁵ AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, SE, SK, and GE.

¹⁵⁶ AT, HU, IE, IT, MT, PL, PT, SK.

¹⁵⁷ BE, BG, IE, IT.

¹⁵⁸ IT (Tunisia), MT (Libya)

¹⁵⁹ AT (Ghana), IT (Côte d'Ivoire), PL (Senegal), PT (Guinea-Bissau).

¹⁶⁰ AT (Kenya).

¹⁶¹ AT (Iraq and Bahrain), BG (Türkiye).

¹⁶² HU, SK.

¹⁶³ IT, PL.

¹⁶⁴ AT, BE, DE, EL, FR, LT, PL, PT, SK, and GE, MD, UA, RS, MK.

¹⁶⁵ BE, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, IT, LU, PL, SE, and GE.

¹⁶⁶ DE, FR, IT, PL, SE, and GE.

¹⁶⁷ The Budapest Process is an interregional dialogue on migration involving states along the migratory routes from Europe to the Silk Routes region. Budapest Process, 'The Budapest Process Ministerial Declaration', 2024, <https://www.budapestprocess.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Budapest-Process-Ministerial-Declaration.pdf>, accessed 17 February 2025.

¹⁶⁸ Rabat Process, 'Rabat Process Senior Officials Meeting', 2024, <https://www.rabat-process.org/en/activities/political-meetings/som-rabat-2024>, accessed 17 February 2025.

¹⁶⁹ IFAD, 'REMIT PRIME Central Asia', 2024, <https://gfrid.org/publications/platform-for-remittances-investments-and-migrants-entrepreneurship-prime-central-asia-programme/>, accessed 26 March 2025.

Figure 7: Examples of international partnerships on migration, 2024**LEGAL MIGRATION****Belgium**

Took part in the "Care/Soins" Global Skills Partnership Project, a mobility scheme in the care sector with Morocco

Portugal

Signed labour mobility agreements with India and Morocco and implemented actions in the framework of Memorandum of Understanding with Cape Verde, Mozambique and Timor.

Italy

Pursued cooperation with third countries by launching 27 new programmes of professional and civic-linguistic training, designed to bring workers trained abroad to Italy and recruit them outside the annual quotas.

Georgia

Implemented the principle of reciprocity under the Horizon Europe Association Agreement.

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**Belgium**

Continued implementation of the O-remit project on affordable remittances and diaspora investments, with 2024 milestones including workshops, a green business training and a National Remittance Summit.

Norway

In cooperation with International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICDMP), opened a Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) in Iraq that provided comprehensive information on migration-related challenges and opportunities.

COMPREHENSIVE PARTNERSHIPS**Germany**

Established six comprehensive migration partnerships, including formal agreements with India, Kenya, Uzbekistan, and Georgia, as well as strengthened bilateral working structures with Morocco and Colombia.

**IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND SMUGGLING****Austria**

Signed an agreement with Bahrain to strengthen cooperation in the areas of internal security and migration, and concluded legally non-binding Memoranda of Understanding with Ghana and Kenya to reinforce their cooperation on irregular migration, return and readmission.

Italy

Signed a protocol of understanding implementing the Memorandum of Cooperation in the management of migration flows with Tunisia.

Hungary and Serbia

Strengthened their cooperation with third countries by enhancing the exchange of information or deploying liaison officers.

RETURN AND READMISSION**Moldova**

Signed bilateral readmission agreements with Azerbaijan and the United Kingdom.

Latvia and the Slovak Republic

Signed bilateral implementation protocols with Ukraine under the EU readmission agreement (EURA).

**TRAFFICKING****Estonia**

Implemented a project in cooperation with United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Uzbekistan to prevent trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation.

France

Implemented a project in partnership with Colombia to train Colombian investigators in the field of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

2. OVERARCHING DEVELOPMENTS ACROSS MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

In May 2024, the Pact¹⁷⁰ was adopted by the Council of the EU, following the vote of the European Parliament in April. It encompasses several critical legislative instruments across asylum, border management and irregular migration. The European Commission supported these efforts with a Common Implementation Plan on the Pact¹⁷¹ and investments in infrastructure, legal reforms, and capacity-building.

At national level, some overarching developments were driven by political shifts and elections in five countries.¹⁷² Eleven EMN Member Countries¹⁷³ placed significant emphasis on controlling and regulating migration flows. Key developments included the adoption of migration strategies¹⁷⁴ and legal and policy reforms.¹⁷⁵ Four EMN Member Countries¹⁷⁶ also restructured institutional responsibilities, in part to improve coordination and streamline asylum and migration policy.



2.1. DEVELOPMENTS AT EU LEVEL

The Pact¹⁷⁷ entered into force on 11 June 2024 and will enter into application in June 2026. It encompasses several critical legislative instruments:¹⁷⁸

- Replacing the Dublin III Regulation, the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation establishes a solidarity mechanism obliging EU Member States to contribute to migration management.
- The Asylum Procedure Regulation standardises asylum application procedures across the EU, introducing mandatory border procedures.
- The Return Border Procedure Regulation includes admissibility assessments and safeguards for applicants to enhance fairness while preventing abuse of the system.
- The Screening Regulation aims to ensure that the identity of third-country nationals subject to screening is quickly established and that all third-country nationals entering the EU without fulfilling the entry conditions are swiftly referred to the correct applicable procedure.
- The Eurodac Regulation revises the Eurodac system, expanding its scope to include the registration of individual asylum seekers, facilitating the tracking of movement within the EU and aiding the identification of the EU Member State responsible for processing applications.
- Regulation (EU) 2024/1359 (Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation)¹⁷⁹ provides a framework for Member States to adjust their asylum and migration rules during crises, allowing for flexibility in procedures and the activation of solidarity measures to support affected states.
- The Qualification Regulation aims to ensure that Member States apply common criteria to qualify persons as beneficiaries of international protection (BIP). It also defines the content of international protection rights and obligations of BIP.
- Directive (EU) 2024/1346 (the revised Reception Conditions Directive)¹⁸⁰ provides for minimum standards of assistance for asylum applicants in EU Member States, ensuring adequate standards of living for those arriving to the EU and seeking international protection.
- Regulation (EU) 2024/1350 (the Resettlement Regulation)¹⁸¹ aims to enhance safe and legal pathways to the EU for people in need of protection and

170 Communication on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM(2020) 609 final, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52020DC0609>, accessed 25 March 2025.

171 Communication on a Common Implementation Plan for the Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM (2024) 251, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2024%3A251%3AFIN>, accessed 17 February 2025.

172 AT, BE, LT, NL, PT.

173 AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, HU, LT, NL, PT, SE, SK.

174 HR, PL, SI, and GE.

175 BE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, PT, SE, SK, and UA.

176 CY, HR, MT, NL.

177 European Commission, 'Pact on Migration and Asylum', 21 May 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en, accessed 11 February 2025.

178 European Commission, 'Legislative files in a nutshell', 4 June 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum/legislative-files-nutshell_en, accessed 17 February 2025.

179 Regulation (EU) 2024/1359 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 addressing situations of crisis and force majeure in the field of migration and asylum and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1147, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1359/oj/eng>, accessed 17 February 2025.

180 Directive (EU) 2024/1346 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AL_202401346, accessed 18 June 2025.

181 Regulation (EU) 2024/1350 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 establishing a Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework, and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1147, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1350/oj/eng>, accessed 7 June 2025.

contribute to strengthening comprehensive partnerships with non-EU countries hosting large refugee populations.

On 12 June 2024, the European Commission presented the Common Implementation Plan on the Pact, mapping out milestones to operationalise the Pact's provisions by June 2026.¹⁸² This includes investment in infrastructure, capacity-building, and revisions of national laws to align with the new EU framework. It was used as a basis for the preparation of EU Member States' national implementation plans, which were due in December 2024.

On 31 July 2024, the European Commission confirmed that Ireland would participate in seven¹⁸³ of the nine legislative Acts of the Pact. In opting into these seven legislative instruments, Ireland chose to align with European migration policies to enhance asylum procedures, border security, and integration efforts.¹⁸⁴

At EU level, following his nomination by the Austrian government, the former Austrian Minister of Finance, Magnus Brunner, was appointed as the European Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration. They took office on 1 December 2024, with a mandate to implement the Pact and strengthen Europe's internal security and IBM.



2.2. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

At national level, the main overarching developments in 2024 were legislative and policy reforms,¹⁸⁵ the adoption of migration or other related strategies (e.g. demographic strategies),¹⁸⁶ and organisational changes.¹⁸⁷

National elections took place in four EMN Member Countries,¹⁸⁸ with migration playing a central role and/or new policy agendas or developments following the formation of new governments (e.g. the Netherlands).

Belgium's elections resulted in new regional governments that introduced policies focused on economic migration and integration. In Lithuania, a change in political leadership led to a new government programme addressing migration policy, labour shortages, and regional development. Meanwhile, Portugal's new government approved the Action Plan for Migration, which aimed to attract migrants for demographic and economic reasons while ensuring regulated, safe and orderly migration. In the Netherlands, following the appointment of a new government on 2 July 2024, the Ministry of Asylum and Migration was established, appointing a dedicated Minister for Asylum and Migration.

Overarching high level and strategic legislative and policy reforms¹⁸⁹ were introduced to ensure legislative simplification,¹⁹⁰ better control and regulation of migration flows,¹⁹¹ and to facilitate economic migration and social integration.¹⁹² Legislative simplification in France and Spain focused on restructuring and simplifying migration laws. France introduced the Law to control immigration and improve integration. Similarly, Spain's new Immigration Regulations seek to simplify and clarify administrative processes and to facilitate access to legal residence status in specific cases, ensuring greater legal certainty for migrants. Sweden implemented broad reforms to bring

its migration policy in line with minimum EU standards. In Greece, a new Migration Code (L5038/2023) entered into force, which reformed the previous legislative framework for the entry and residence of third-country nationals and simplified procedures for issuance of residence permits.

Significant emphasis was placed on controlling and regulating migration flows, with five EMN Member Countries¹⁹³ adopting stricter overall approaches to migration management (see Section 1.4). Belgium tightened its policies on family reunification, return, and statelessness. Stateless persons can now apply for residence through a new procedure introduced in March 2024 via the immigration authorities; however, unlike the existing court-based process, this route does not grant full recognition or rights. Only those recognised as stateless by a family court are officially registered as such and receive full documentation. Finland continued to implement the government programme from 2023, which centred on managing, controlling and streamlining migration, while preventing misuse of the system. France's Law to control immigration and improve integration introduced cross-cutting measures to strengthen border controls, enhance return mechanisms, and regulate legal migration. In the Netherlands, a policy priority for the new government was to streamline the national asylum procedure and reduce the influx of asylum seekers. Sweden's government continued to implement a major policy shift to reduce irregular migration, increase the number of returns, and adapt asylum legislation to the EU minimum level.

2024 saw the adoption of migration or other related strategies in five countries,¹⁹⁴ primarily driven by demographic challenges,¹⁹⁵ labour market needs,¹⁹⁶ and efforts to strengthen migration governance and national

182 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 'Implementation Plan for the Pact on Migration and Asylum', COM/2024/251 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2024%3A251%3AFIN>, accessed 17 February 2025.

183 Reception Conditions Directive; Eurodac Regulation; Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework Regulation; Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation; Qualification Regulation; Asylum and Migration Management Regulation; Asylum Procedure Regulation.

184 European Commission, 'European Commission's decisions on Ireland's participation in seven legislative acts of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum', 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/european-commissions-decisions-irelands-participation-seven-legislative-acts-eu-pact-migration-and_en, accessed 11 February 2025.

185 BE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, PT, SE, SK, and UA.

186 HR, PL, SI.

187 CY, ES, HR, IE, MT, NL, SK.

188 AT, BE, LT, PT.

189 BE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, SE, SK, and UA.

190 ES, FR, LT.

191 BE, ES, FR, PT, SE, SK.

192 ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, SK.

193 BE, FI, FR, NL, SE.

194 HR, PL, SI, and GE.

195 HR.

196 SE, SK, and GE.

security.¹⁹⁷ Poland, Slovenia and Ukraine introduced new government strategies on migration. Poland adopted a long-term migration strategy, *Regain Control. Ensure Security. A Comprehensive and Responsible Migration Strategy for Poland for 2025–2030*, which aimed to create transparent and secure rules for immigration to Poland from the point of view of state interests. Slovenia adopted a new *Government Strategy on Migration* to update its 2019 framework. Croatia adopted the 2033 *Demographic Revitalisation Strategy* on balanced population mobility and improving migrant integration. Slovak Republic started the preparation of a new migration and asylum strategy to replace the existing one in place until 2025. Georgia adopted the 2025 *Action Plan of the 2021–2030 Migration Strategy*, outlining activities across migration priorities to enhance migration management, facilitate legal migration, combat irregular migration, and support reintegration and integration efforts.

Organisational changes took place in five countries in 2024.¹⁹⁸ The Netherlands established the Ministry of Asylum and Migration, transferring responsibilities from

the Ministry of Justice and Security in a bid to streamline asylum management and implement stricter migration policies under the new government. In Croatia, the 2033 *Demographic Revitalisation Strategy* envisaged establishing a migration office to monitor and facilitate development of migration policies. In Cyprus, the migration and asylum responsibilities of the Civil Registry and Migration Department and the Asylum Service were transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection. In Malta, ministerial responsibility for employment was transferred from the Ministry for Finance to the Ministry for Home Affairs.

In July 2024, Ireland joined the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) to enhance its role in European migration policy, gain expertise, and strengthen cooperation with EU and non-EU partners.

In 2024, following the misappropriation of €61 million, Caritas Luxembourg was dissolved, leading to the creation of *Hëllef um Terrain* (HUT) in September to continue its refugee shelter management and various social services. HUT became operational on 1 October 2024.

197 PL.

198 CY, HR, MT, NL, SK.

3. LEGAL MIGRATION



3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents developments in legal migration across several categories, including work-related migration, self-employed/business migration, and students and researchers. It also covers measures to enhance legal channels of migration, prevent labour exploitation, and guarantee the conditions for family reunification.

EU-level developments in 2024 included actions following the tabling of the proposal for an EU Regulation establishing the EU Talent Pool¹⁹⁹ and the adoption of the recast Single Permit Directive.

Policy developments across EMN countries in 2024 revealed a trend towards addressing labour shortages across a wide range of occupations and sectors. These shortages extend beyond highly skilled labour to lower-skilled, seasonal, and other remunerated workers. EMN Member and Observer Countries²⁰⁰ reported shortages affecting various sectors, notably healthcare,²⁰¹ ICT,²⁰² transport,²⁰³ agriculture,²⁰⁴ tourism,²⁰⁵ and education.²⁰⁶ Various approaches emerged to address these needs: the simplification of procedures and recruitment processes to accelerate the validation process (for particular groups),²⁰⁷ continued digitalisation,²⁰⁸ and fast-tracked recruitment for certain sectors or occupations through quotas.²⁰⁹ There were increased efforts to retain third-country national students by encouraging graduates' long-term integration, facilitating students' access to the domestic labour market²¹⁰ and fostering international cooperation²¹¹ in occupations facing labour shortages. To ensure better awareness

of migration procedures and enhance their attractiveness, eight Member Countries²¹² revamped or consolidated the information made available to potential migrants.

At the same time, there was a focus on preventing labour exploitation and the protection of migrant workers, driven by growing concerns about specific sectors of the labour market, such as construction, agriculture and the tourism industry. Fourteen EMN Member and Observer Countries²¹³ addressed risks or actual cases of labour exploitation through diverse measures, including improved oversight,²¹⁴ and enhanced staff training, improved enforcement measures, and cross-agency coordination.²¹⁵

For migrant students, developments reflected two opposing trends, with some countries²¹⁶ reporting measures to encourage long-term integration and retain graduates in the domestic labour market, while others²¹⁷ reported measures to prevent potential misuse or reduce administrative inefficiencies, notably regarding cases involving students engaging in employment, or students applying for family reunification.

2024 also saw a trend towards restricting access and admission for certain categories of migrant workers in six EMN Member Countries.²¹⁸ Measures included tightening rules for admission, restricting quotas, or discontinuing schemes with third countries, reflecting a shift towards more selective immigration policies.

199 Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an EU talent pool, SEC(2023) 716 final, SWD(2023) 716 final, SWD(2023) 717 final, SWD(2023) 718 final, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/d74d42e8-96b7-416b-b5b7-b3b7334317d8_en?filename=Regulation%20establishing%20an%20EU%20Talent%20Pool_en.pdf, accessed 11 February 2025.

200 AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, PT, SK, and MD, RS.

201 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, FR, IE, IT, PL, SE.

202 CZ, EE, HR, IE, LT, LV.

203 CZ, FR, LT, SK.

204 CZ, EL, FR, IE, IT, SK.

205 CZ, EL, FR, IT.

206 BE, EE.

207 AT, BE, BG, DE, ES, FR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, PT, SK, and RS.

208 BG, FI, FR, IE, IT, PL, and RS.

209 CZ, EL, IT, LT.

210 BG, CZ, ES, HR, IT, PT.

211 AT, BE, CY, DE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LU, PT.

212 AT, CZ, DE, EE, FI, HU, LV, PT.

213 BE, BG, CY, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, NL, SK, and NO, UA.

214 FR, LT, LV, PL.

215 CY, FI, FR, IT, HR, LT, SK.

216 CZ, ES, HR, IT, NL, PT.

217 BE, FI, SE.

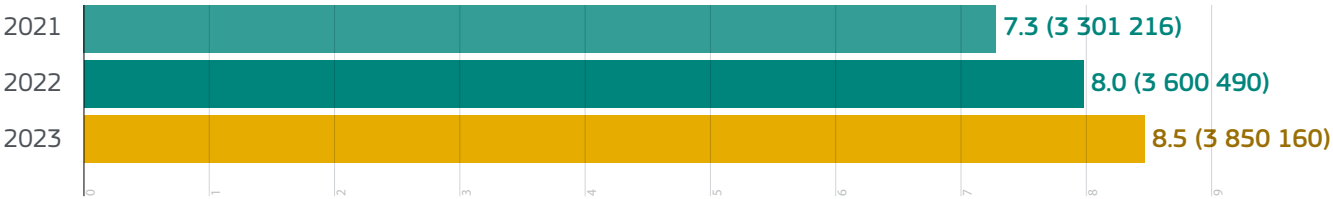
218 FI, HU, LT, NL, PL, SE.

The number of first residence permits issued to third-country nationals continued to grow from 2022 to 2023 (+6.9%), although at a slower rate than from 2021 to 2022 (9%) (see Figure 8). The same top three countries whose citizens received the most first residence permits

in 2022 also received the most in 2023, namely Ukraine, Belarus and India (see Figure 9). Table 1 shows first residence permits issued in EMN Observer Countries 2023–2024. The number rose in Armenia, Georgia and Moldova from 2023 to 2024, and fell in Montenegro and Serbia.

Figure 8: First residence permits issued to third-country nationals, EU and Norway, 2021–2023

Number per 1 000 people (and the absolute number)

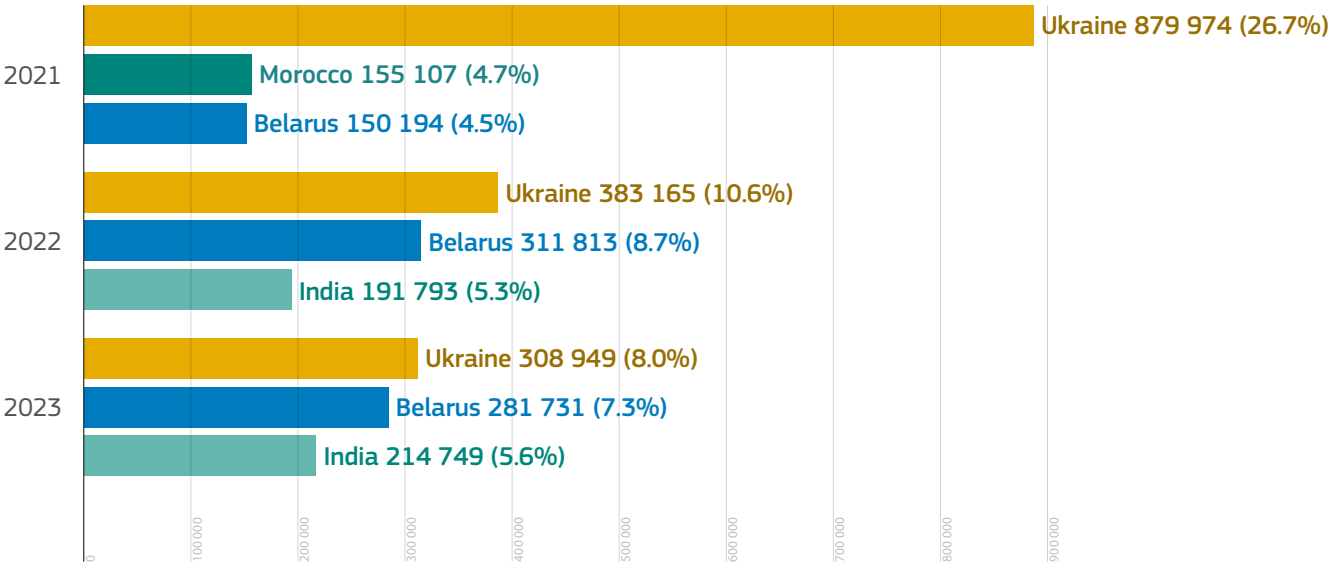


Source: Eurostat (migr_resfirst and migr_pop1ctz), date of extraction 10 June 2025.

Note: 2024 data were not available at the time of drafting this report.

Figure 9: Top three countries whose citizens received first residence permits, EU and Norway, 2021–2023

Absolute number (and the share in total number)



Source: Eurostat (migr_resfirst), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

Table 1: Total number of first residence permits in EMN Observer Countries, 2021–2024

	Year	Total first residence permits		Year	Total first residence permits
Armenia*	2021	4 191	Montenegro*	2023	43 404
	2022	16 658		2024	39 296
	2023	12 108	North Macedonia	2021	6 309
	2024	12 491		2022	n/i
Georgia	2021	11 923		2023	n/i
	2022	16 214	Serbia	2024	334
	2023	21 450		2021	17 560
	2024	25 870		2022	38 479
Moldova	2021	4 186	Ukraine	2023	45 112
	2022	11 218		2024	34 131
	2023	4 100		2021	60 632
	2024	8 153		2022	n/i
Montenegro*	2021	21 562		2023	n/i
	2022	35 323		2024	n/i

Source: relevant authorities in the EMN Observer Country.

'n/i' means no information

'n/a' means not applicable

***Armenia and Montenegro note:** these two countries do not distinguish between first and subsequent residence permits. Therefore, the data presented for these countries include all residence permits issued annually.



3.2. EU DEVELOPMENTS

In legal migration, in June 2024, under the Belgian Presidency, the Council adopted the general approach on the proposal for a Regulation establishing the EU Talent Pool.²¹⁹ The EU Talent Pool will be the first EU-wide platform facilitating international recruitment by matching employers in the EU with jobseekers in third countries. The tool will not be reserved solely for highly qualified employment but will tackle labour shortages at all skill levels. On 8 July 2024, the European Commission launched a €3 million programme under the Talent Partnership with Bangladesh, managed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), to facilitate safe, regular legal labour migration to the EU by enhancing skills development, vocational training, and language support.²²⁰ A programme to support the Talent Partnership with Pakistan was launched in November 2024 to boost international mobility and cooperation on labour migration by better matching EU countries' labour market needs with Pakistan's talent.²²¹

The Labour Migration Platform²²² organised its fourth and fifth meetings in March and October 2024. Discussions

focused on undeclared work, labour exploitation, and labour to labour market tests, digital tools, and enhancing employer involvement in shaping migration policies.²²³

The recast Single Permit Directive was adopted in April 2024. EU Member States have until 21 May 2026 to transpose changes into national law. It streamlines the procedures for obtaining a work and residence permit and shortens the duration of application procedures. It strengthens the rights of third-country national workers by introducing a right to change employer and to remain in a Member State during a period of up to three or six months of unemployment. It also aims to prevent, detect and sanction labour exploitation by requiring the monitoring and inspection of employers, sanctions as well as complaint mechanisms. These measures should contribute to boosting the EU's attractiveness to third-country nationals and helping EU countries to address labour shortages.²²⁴

219 Council of the EU, 'EU to facilitate recruitment of third country jobseekers', Press release, 13 June 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/13/eu-to-facilitate-recruitment-of-third-country-jobseekers/#:~:text=Today%2C%20the%20Council%20agreed%20its,shortage%20occupations%20of%20EU%20employers>, accessed 19 May 2025.

220 European Commission, 'Talent Partnership with Bangladesh: launch of a new programme to boost labour mobility', 8 July 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/talent-partnership-bangladesh-launch-new-programme-boost-labour-mobility-2024-07-08_en, accessed 11 February 2025.

221 European Commission, 'Commission launches a new programme to support EU-Pakistan Talent Partnership', 26 November 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-launches-new-programme-support-eu-pakistan-talent-partnership-2024-11-26_en, accessed 10 June 2025.

222 The Labour Migration Platform was launched in January 2023, bringing together the European Commission, EU Member States, and social partners and other key stakeholders to enhance legal labour migration from third countries to the EU.

223 European Commission, Labour Migration Platform, n.d., https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/labour-migration-platform_en, accessed 12 February 2025.

224 European Commission, 'A single permit for work', 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-resettlement-and-integration/work/single-permit-work_en, accessed 18 March 2025.



3.3. OVERARCHING AND CROSS-CUTTING DEVELOPMENTS

Twenty-one EMN Member and Observer Countries²²⁵ reported developments in legal migration, including Poland and Portugal, which adopted an overarching strategy with a view towards adopting new policies. Key drivers behind these changes included shifts in migration trends,²²⁶ administrative backlogs and burdens,²²⁷ efforts to strengthen legal pathways and prevent labour exploitation,²²⁸ and the need to address labour shortages.²²⁹

Most of these changes aimed to simplify and increase the efficiency of procedures to obtain work and residence permits.²³⁰ Other changes related to new conditions for admission of third-country nationals and renewal of permits.²³¹

Amendments or new legislation were issued to speed up processing times for all or certain categories of permits.²³² France, Portugal and Slovenia indicated that government action here was spurred by the need to address administrative backlogs and excessive burden.

To streamline procedures, five EMN Member and Observer Countries²³³ implemented simplification measures. France and Serbia took new steps towards digitalisation in their processes. At the request of the Minister for the Interior, France implemented new procedures in its ANEF remote service to implement the digitalisation of applications for residence permits, with enhanced support for users. Serbia

enabled electronic applications from abroad in the single permit procedure. Belgium eliminated the waiting time associated with national registration before employment. Additionally, Belgium and Latvia²³⁴ expedited processing times by reducing the legal processing period. In Belgium, for certain categories of workers, this period was shortened to 90 days instead of four months.

Several EMN Member and Observer Countries²³⁵ modified conditions for the admission, stay, and permit renewal of third-country nationals and their families. Germany cited labour shortages as a key driver for these changes, Italy²³⁶ and Finland noted the need to strengthen legal migration pathways, and Luxembourg's reforms focused on aligning national and European legislation. Germany also completed its implementation of the Act on the Further Development of Skilled Immigration, which clarifies permit issuance conditions and expands eligibility for family reunification.

Some recent developments reflect a more regulated approach to access through legal migration channels. In Austria, the annual Settlement Ordinance defines the number of residence permits subject to quotas for third-country nationals. In 2024, the number of quota places was slightly lower than in the previous year.²³⁷ The Slovak Republic amended its legislation to tighten the conditions to obtain a business residence permit.



3.4. WORK-RELATED MIGRATION

3.4.1. Cross-cutting developments affecting all migrant workers

To tackle labour shortages and continue digitalisation efforts, as well as to prevent misuse of legal migration channels, 22 EMN Member and Observer Countries²³⁸ introduced new policies and/or measures affecting all categories of migrant workers.

Poland and Portugal adopted dedicated national strategies for migrant workers, covering different areas such as attracting and retaining talent, training and skills-matching, and strengthening legal pathways and preventing their misuse.

3.4.2. Cross-cutting developments driven by labour shortages

Labour shortages were identified as a major driver for policy change in 13 EMN Member and Observer Countries.²³⁹ Measures to attract workers in sectors experiencing shortage included simplified and more flexible procedures,²⁴⁰ sometimes in very specific industries²⁴¹ (see Box 1), and increasing quotas.²⁴²

Eleven EMN Member and Observer Countries²⁴³ indicated that their policy changes aimed to simplify procedures and increase flexibility, both crucial to attracting workers. To ease procedures, Ireland approved the rollout of a single permit scheme over the next three years,²⁴⁴ while Slovenia extended its measure for the issuance and renewal of

225 AT, BE, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, PL, PT, SI, SK and UA, RS.

226 BE, ES, PL.

227 BE, EE, PT, SI.

228 BE, FI, FR, IE, IT.

229 BE, DE, ES, FR, IE, LU, SK.

230 BE, FR, IT, LV, PT, SK, and RS.

231 DE, FI, HU, IT, LT, LU, PT, SI and RS.

232 BE, FR, IT, LV, PT, SK, and RS.

233 BE, FR, IT, LV, and RS.

234 Amendments to the Immigration Laws, of 7 June 2024, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/352613-grozijumi-imigracijas-likuma> <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/352613-grozijumi-imigracijas-likuma>, accessed 18 March 2025.

235 DE, FI, HU, IT, LT, LU, PT, SI.

236 Law of 9 December 2024, no. 187.

237 Settlement Ordinance 2024, FLG. II, No. 170/2024.

238 BE, BG, CZ, DE, ES, FR, FI, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and GE, MD, RS.

239 AT, BE, CZ, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, PT, SK, and MD.

240 BE, CZ, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, SK, and MD.

241 CZ, FR, SK.

242 CZ, IE, IT, SK.

243 BE, CZ, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, SK, and MD.

244 Department of Justice, 'Ministers McEntee and Burke welcome agreement on actions to increase the competitiveness of Ireland in attracting key skills', Press release, 15 May 2024, <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/db1e2-ministers-mcentee-and-burke-welcome-agreement-on-actions-to-increase-the-competitiveness-of-ireland-in-attracting-key-skills/>, accessed 19 February 2025.

single residence and work permits for foreigners, based on positive outcomes of the initial phase. Czech Republic and Moldova also simplified their procedures, targeting third-country nationals from selected countries instead of specific categories of workers. Measures introducing greater flexibility included the possibility to work during short-time stay under certain conditions,²⁴⁵ the possibility to combine professional activities in a single permit,²⁴⁶ and increased mobility between employers.²⁴⁷

Box 1: Easing procedures in specific sectors/occupations

In cases of particularly acute labour shortages in certain sectors or occupations, EMN Member Countries sought to simplify and facilitate admissions of workers. In France, some provisions of the Law of 26 January 2024 to control immigration and improve integration (CIAI Law) targeted more flexible recruitment in the hotel and catering, transport, medical, and agriculture sectors. Similarly, Slovak Republic responded to acute labour shortages in the national and international transport sector by speeding up and streamlining access of selected third-country nationals in the occupations of bus drivers, heavy goods vehicle drivers and lorry drivers. Czech Republic sought to match workers and employers more efficiently through a legislative regulation on vacancy registration and abolishing the need for labour market test where the labour market demand in a given region significantly exceeds supply. However, occupations targeted by this waiver are defined by the regional branch of the Labour Office on a case-by-case basis.

To attract workers, Sweden commissioned authorities to review efforts and propose simplifications. The report will be available in 2025 and includes recommendations for easing procedures for companies to recruit foreign workers with in-demand skills. Similarly, Georgia undertook a large sectoral survey in the manufacturing sector to gain knowledge of the foreign workforce's needs and skills and inform future policies.

While some countries introduced measures to simplify procedures and ease access for third-country nationals, others implemented stricter safeguards to prevent misuse. In Germany and Latvia, employers who previously misused the recruitment system for third-country nationals could be denied access to hiring foreign workers. Latvia also reported amendments to the Regulations Regarding the Employment of Foreigners, requiring employers to cooperate with the State Employment Agency (SEA) when

applying for a vacancy. This includes justifying the number of vacancies, assessing the local candidates offered by the SEA, and providing reasons for rejecting candidates, ensuring greater oversight in the hiring process.

3.4.3. Digitalisation of procedures

In line with developments observed in 2023,²⁴⁸ five EMN Member and Observer Countries²⁴⁹ reported transitioning towards partial or fully digitalised procedures. Finland invested in streamlining online applications for work-based residence permits. The multi-stakeholder 'Streamlining the work and education-based immigration process' (OLEDIGI) project aimed to make the e-service more customer-friendly, speed up application processes, and simplify procedures for employers through the 'Enter Finland' service. The project made it possible to process residence permit applications of highly skilled individuals and start-up entrepreneurs, including their family members, within 14 days. It also shortened the processing times of other work-based residence permit applications to 30 days, on average.

3.4.4. Highly qualified workers and intra-corporate transferees

The growing need for skills and talent, particularly in the ICT and health sectors, and the transposition and/or implementation of the revised Directive (EU) 2021/1883 (EU Blue Card Directive)²⁵⁰ in national legislation were the two main drivers for policy change in respect of highly qualified workers or intra-corporate transferees.²⁵¹ Additional measures to improve procedures included further digitalisation.

Twelve EMN Member Countries²⁵² introduced policy changes to transpose/implement the revised EU Blue Card Directive, while introducing additional measures to adapt to the high demand for skilled workers. Measures to attract and retain highly qualified workers included flexible recognition of qualifications and professional experience,²⁵³ shorter contract duration to lodge a permit application,²⁵⁴ favourable conditions to access residence,²⁵⁵ mobility between employers,²⁵⁶ easing of conditions for family reunification,²⁵⁷ changes in salary thresholds,²⁵⁸ and a revised, more attractive tax regime for high-earning migrants.²⁵⁹ The Slovak Republic also extended the upper limit of the period for which an EU Blue Card can be issued, from four to five years.

Labour shortages particularly affected the ICT and health-care sectors, prompting EMN Member Countries to simplify their recruitment procedures. Four countries introduced

²⁴⁵ BE, LT.

²⁴⁶ BE (Flanders Region, Wallonia Region).

²⁴⁷ HR, IE.

²⁴⁸ European Migration Network (EMN), Annual report on Migration and Asylum 2023 – EMN annual report, 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/84da11ab-a2b4-48f8-9279-05249b742335_en?filename=2023_EMN_AMO.pdf, accessed 20 May 2025.

²⁴⁹ BG, IT, FI, PL, and RS.

²⁵⁰ Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of highly qualified employment, and repealing Council Directive 2009/50/EC, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32021L1883>, accessed 13 March 2025.

²⁵¹ BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, PL, SE, SK.

²⁵² BE, CY, EE, ES, FI, HR, IT, LU, LV, NL, SE, SK.

²⁵³ BE, DE, EE, IT, SK.

²⁵⁴ BE, EE, LU, LV.

²⁵⁵ BE (intra-EU mobility only), BG, DE, HR.

²⁵⁶ BE, BG, EE, FI, LU, LV.

²⁵⁷ DE, EE, LU.

²⁵⁸ BE, EL, LU, SK.

²⁵⁹ LU: Luxembourg Government, 'Adaptation du Barème de l'impôt sur le revenu', 2023, https://gouvernement.lu/fr/actualites/toutes_actualites/communiqués/2023/12-decembre/20-adaptation-bareme-impot.html, accessed 17 April 2025.

simplified procedures for ICT workers,²⁶⁰ while France, Italy and Poland did so for healthcare professionals. In France, strict administrative and regulatory requirements have hindered the recruitment of professionals in understaffed medical and paramedical fields (e.g. nursing assistants, nurses, midwives), prompting a procedural simplification and the inclusion of these occupations in the talent permit. Sweden eased procedures by lowering the salary threshold from 1.5 to 1.25 times the average annual salary for high-skilled workers and simplifying transitions between the EU Blue Card and other residence permits.²⁶¹

Digitalisation played a role in simplifying procedures for high-skilled workers. In Finland, the Immigration Office introduced automated post-decision monitoring for specialist residence permits. In Italy, the form that employers can use to request the hiring of highly qualified foreign workers was made available on the services portal of the Ministry of the Interior's one-stop shop for immigration.

3.4.5. Low-skilled and medium-skilled workers (other than seasonal workers)

Thirteen EMN Member Countries²⁶² reported policy changes or measures targeting low-skilled and/or medium-skilled workers. In some countries,²⁶³ changes in procedures aimed to expand and/or facilitate admission to occupations facing shortages, while in others²⁶⁴ they marked a more restrictive approach. Four countries²⁶⁵ developed schemes with countries of origin to ease legal migration, targeting low-skilled and medium-skilled workers.

Eight countries targeted specific sectors and/or occupations facing labour shortages.²⁶⁶ Among those seeking to facilitate and/or expand admissions of low-skilled and medium-skilled workers, Austria, Italy and Germany adopted measures to address the high demand in the health and care sectors resulting from an ageing population.

Measures to remedy labour shortages varied in scope and type, ranging from a database to accelerate recognition of qualifications for health, care and specialist nursing staff from third countries,²⁶⁷ to the simplification and increased efficiency of procedures.²⁶⁸ Other measures included the suspension of labour market tests for bottleneck professions,²⁶⁹ the creation of new quotas, increased quotas, or in some case extra quotas for identified occupations.²⁷⁰

Box 2: Promotion of legal entry channels in Italy

Following the adoption of the revised Consolidated Immigration Act²⁷¹ to meet businesses' need for workers, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies

approved 27 new programmes for professional and civic-linguistic training. The programmes aimed to bring workers trained abroad to Italy and recruit them outside the quotas.

The measure arose from the need to offer Italian businesses effective instruments to deal with the growing shortage of both qualified and unqualified labour in strategic sectors, while ensuring the legal, regulated entry of workers. The approach aimed to boost the competitiveness of the Italian production system, reducing the use of irregular forms of work and promoting pathways to sustainable social and employment integration for foreign workers.

Policy changes aimed to enhance conditions for the residence and stay of low-skilled and medium-skilled workers. In Bulgaria, foreigners holding a single residence and work permit were covered for health insurance under the Law on Health Insurance. Finland raised its income limit in line with the actual cost of living and ensured subsistence.

In contrast, Hungary, Finland, Lithuania and the Netherlands tightened their rules on the admission of medium-skilled and low-skilled workers. To support the country's transition from a low-cost, labour-based economy to a high value-added, quality-driven economy, Lithuania introduced stricter quotas for foreign nationals, except for employers with investment agreements or major project contracts. Finland and the Netherlands discontinued work visas for certain specific schemes, due to risk of labour exploitation. Following news reports by Dutch media about labour exploitation in the Asian restaurant sector, the Netherlands abolished a special arrangement that allowed restaurants to recruit specialised personnel from outside the EU without a labour market test.

3.4.6. Seasonal workers

Labour shortages, the growing demand for low-skilled and medium-skilled workers, and the strengthening of seasonal workers' labour rights led 13 EMN Member Countries²⁷² to initiate processes to adapt or change their policies.

A set of measures to address labour shortages focused on facilitating the recruitment of seasonal and casual workers by reducing bureaucratic barriers for recruitment, mobility, and permit extension/renewal.²⁷³ Bulgaria adopted amendments to the legal regime of residence and work of seasonal workers, as set out in the Law amending and supplementing the Law on Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria (LFRB), to enable more flexibility for the mobility of seasonal workers and to offer a path towards residence rights. Other measures taken by EMN Member Countries were linked to mobility between employers, the extension

260 CZ, HR, LI, SK.

261 Swedish Government, 'Decision: Implementation of the new Blue Card Directive', 28 November 2024, available at: https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/beslut/beslut-genomforande-av-det-nya-blakortsdirektivet_hcc320241128sfu6/, accessed 14 April 2025.

262 AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, ES, FI, HU, IE, IT, LT, NL, SK.

263 BE, BG, DE, ES, IE, IT, SK.

264 FI, HU, LT, NL.

265 CZ, FI, HU, NL.

266 AT, BE, CZ, DE, IE, IT, LT, SK.

267 AT.

268 AT, BE, BG, ES, IE, SK.

269 BE (Brussels-Capital Region).

270 DE, IE, IT, LT, SK.

271 Testo Unico sull'Immigrazione [TUI] of 1998, revised by Decree 124/2023, <https://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/98286dl.htm>, accessed 15 March 2025.

272 BE, BG, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LU, LV, PL, SK.

273 BE, BG, EL, FI, HR, IE, IT, SK.

of stay for seasonal workers,²⁷⁴ and expanded annual quotas and lists of countries of origin of seasonal workers in agriculture and tourism.²⁷⁵

Ensuring compliance with Directive (EU) 2014/36 (Seasonal Workers Directive)²⁷⁶ was an important driver of certain changes reported. Three EMN Member Countries²⁷⁷ were subjected to an infringement procedure initiated by the European Commission for incorrect transposition, leading to policy changes in 2024. Four EMN Member Countries²⁷⁸ took measures to correct inconsistencies or clarify implementation, mostly to increase the protection of seasonal workers. For instance, France and Latvia introduced measures requiring employers to show proof of decent living conditions for their workers.

3.4.7. Self-employment and start-ups

Policy changes for self-employed individuals and start-ups in 2024 sought to foster innovation, while addressing concerns about the platform economy. While EMN Member Countries generally recognised the need to attract entrepreneurs and boost economic growth through innovation, they expressed concerns about the increasing numbers of self-employed workers who may primarily engage in platform-based work and thus require specific forms of protection.

Ten EMN Member Countries²⁷⁹ enacted new policies related to self-employed workers and start-ups. Germany and Italy facilitated the admission of entrepreneurs. In Germany, individuals wanting to start a business received a temporary residence permit if their subsistence in the first months was assured through a grant offered by a German scientific organisation or a public body. Italy published a list of entrepreneurs who could access the quotas for 2024,²⁸⁰ reflecting a growing interest in the creative industry.

However, the high proportion of third-country nationals self-employed in the platform economy led Belgium and France to increase checks on self-employed activity and the residence status of workers.²⁸¹ Belgium's Brussels-Capital Region clarified the initial application conditions, renewal conditions and new revocation or refusal grounds for self-employed individuals, improving transparency. France linked the work permit to the residence permit, as a significant proportion of people working under a self-employment scheme, particularly in connection with so-called collaborative platforms, were without residence permits.

Finland, Hungary and Poland issued stricter rules for entrepreneurs, including post-decision monitoring and a narrower catalogue of foreigners authorised to conduct unregistered business (Poland).

3.4.8. Other remunerated workers

Five EMN Member Countries²⁸² reported policy changes in respect of other categories of remunerated workers, including those providing religious services, teachers, and those of Italian descent. Belgium's Flanders and Wallonia Regions, for example, eased rules for teachers, enabling teachers to renew a single permit despite summer holiday interruptions, or to apply for the new labour authorisation scheme for teachers coming to Belgium to teach a foreign language or culture in the context of a cooperation agreement or programme.²⁸³ Italy allowed extra quotas for the entry of Venezuelan workers of Italian descent.

3.4.9. Tackling labour exploitation and safeguarding equal treatment

Fourteen EMN Member and Observer Countries²⁸⁴ introduced measures to address labour exploitation in 2024. Measures included enhancing workers' legal protection, expanding employer accountability, ensuring support for victims, strengthening enforcement and inspections, and improving cross-agency coordination.

Six countries²⁸⁵ reinforced the legal protection of workers. In France, the 2024 CIAI Law allocated an equal share of responsibility across interested parties, but also required a thorough check of the employer's history. In Ireland, new legislation granted the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment discretionary power to stipulate additional requirements for the granting of permits (e.g. accommodation, training, expenses) intended to protect migrant workers' rights.²⁸⁶ The accompanying regulations also enabled permits to be conditional on employers providing certain supports to employees.

In relation to the protection of victims of exploitation, France provided for the issuance of a temporary residence permit marked as 'Family private life',²⁸⁷ while Italy adopted a 'special cases' permit to protect victims of labour exploitation while their cases were processed.

Stronger enforcement and inspections were reported in Croatia, where the Amendments to the Aliens Act included a test run by the employment authority to check whether salary levels were equal for equivalent occupations. In Lithuania, the use of the QR-based Transparent Worker

274 HR, SK.

275 AT, EL, IT.

276 Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32014L0036>, accessed 13 March 2025.

277 BG, LU, SK.

278 ES, FR, LV, PL.

279 BE, DE, ES, FR, FI, HU, IT, LU, PL, SK.

280 The list includes: entrepreneurs who intend to implement an investment plan of interest to the Italian economy of no less than €500 000, and the creation of at least three new jobs; freelance professionals who exercise regulated or supervised professions, or represented at the national level; holders of corporate administration and control positions; famous artists or those with elevated and well-known professional qualifications, recruited by public or private entities; and third-country nationals who intend to form innovative start-up businesses.

281 BE, FR.

282 BE, DE, IE, IT, LT.

283 Walloon Government Decree of 6 June 2024 concerning the admission to work of foreign workers, Articles 20 and 64, <https://wallex.wallonie.be/eli/ar-rete/2024/06/06/2024007847/2024/09/01>, accessed 20 May 2025.

284 BE, BG, CY, EE, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, NL, SK, and NO, UA.

285 BE, FR, IE, IT, and NO, UA.

286 Employment Permits Act 2024 and accompanying Employment Permits Regulations, <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/employment-permits-act-2024-information-note.html>, accessed 24 April 2025.

287 In the event of complaints being lodged for acts constituting the offences of subjecting a vulnerable or dependent person to unfit accommodation (as per Provisions of Article 225-14 of the Criminal Code (slumlord)), the 2024 CIAI Law provides for this new permit.

Identification Code was expanded in 2024 to become mandatory for all individuals performing construction work. Finland and Slovak Republic focused their efforts on staff training for earlier detection of labour exploitation.

Efforts were made to improve cross-agency coordination.²⁸⁸ In Cyprus, the Labour Inspectorate signed a memorandum with the Office of Combatting Exploitation in Human Beings of the Cyprus Police.

3.4.10. Bilateral labour migration agreements

Ten EMN Member Countries²⁸⁹ sought to facilitate legal migration through bilateral labour migration agreements that opened or strengthened legal channels for the recruitment of skilled workers. Four countries²⁹⁰ participated or considered potential involvement²⁹¹ in the Talent Partnerships with Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Bangladesh and Pakistan.²⁹² For instance, to cope with an ageing population and labour shortages in the care and medical sector, Belgium took part in the Care/Soins Global Skills Partnership Project, a mobility scheme in the care sector between Morocco and Belgium.

Other forms of cooperation were reported by some EMN Member Countries, such as legally non-binding Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs),²⁹³ formal and informal migration agreements,²⁹⁴ labour mobility agreements,²⁹⁵ partnerships,²⁹⁶ or work and holiday visa programmes.²⁹⁷ Austria signed a non-legally binding MoU with Indonesia on the recruitment of skilled labour and non-legally binding MoUs with Ghana and Kenya, which focused on return cooperation, with certain aspects of legal mobility. Portugal reported the development of different actions under the framework of several types of cooperation schemes, such as labour mobility agreements previously signed with India and Morocco, and MoUs previously concluded with certain countries of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP). Additionally, Portugal placed labour attachés at some embassies. Spain signed MoUs with Gambia, Mauritania and Senegal to strengthen secure and regular migration pathways and to protect worker rights. Germany has entered into six migration partnerships in recent years (with more to follow), including formal agreements with India, Kenya, Uzbekistan and Georgia, and strengthening bilateral working structures with Morocco and Colombia. All six partnerships focus on both skilled labour migration and a reduction of irregular migration.



3.5. STUDENTS AND RESEARCHERS

3.5.1. Students

Twelve EMN Member Countries²⁹⁸ made changes to their policies targeting students. Seven²⁹⁹ aimed to encourage students and researchers to integrate and remain after their studies, grants or projects, while others sought to address the possible misuse of this migration channel.³⁰⁰

Measures to retain students and researchers included promoting language acquisition in Czech Republic and Portugal and facilitating access to permanent residence in Croatia through proposed amendments to the Aliens Act. Similarly, in Bulgaria, a draft law amending and supplementing the LFRB provided the conditions and procedures for granting residence to the category 'post-graduates'. In Italy, a decree enabled the conversion of residence permits for reasons of study to reasons of work during the actual studies, or within one year of the end of those studies. France recruited 'attractiveness advisers' throughout the prefectural network to support students and researchers in their job searches and transition from study to work. Ireland sought to attract more students and

researchers by launching its first International Talent and Innovation Strategy 2030, a six-year strategy³⁰¹ with several pillars. It includes an education quality mark meant to ensure quality assurance of infrastructures in higher education, with a view to attracting international students, both within and outside Europe.³⁰² While Austria did not report any legal changes for students, it highlighted the issue of 'asymmetric mobility', whereby a disproportionate number of foreign students stay in a host country for the full duration of their studies but then leave instead of taking up employment in Austria.

Finland, Czech Republic and Sweden, by contrast, tightened their rules. In Sweden, where there were strong indications of misuse due to frequent changes from student to work permits after one semester of study, an inquiry was requested by the government to assess the need for stricter rules. In Finland, the Amendment of the scope of the Student and Researcher Act came into force to prevent circumvention of immigration rules. For example, asylum applicants cannot apply for a student category permit. In addition, a proposal was tabled to increase tuition fees for third-country nationals by 2026.

288 CY, FR, IT.

289 BE, CY, DE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, PT.

290 BE, DE, ES, PT.

291 CY, DE.

292 European Commission, 'Talent Partnerships: Commission launches new initiative to address EU skills shortages and improve migration cooperation with partner countries', Press release, 11 June 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_2921, accessed 13 March 2025.

293 AT, ES, PT.

294 DE.

295 PT.

296 FI.

297 LV.

298 BE, BG, CZ, ES, FI, HR, IE, IT, NL, PT, SE, SK.

299 CZ, ES, HR, IT, NL, PT, SK.

300 BE, CZ, FI, SE.

301 Irish Government, 'Global Citizens 2030 - Ireland's Talent and Innovation Strategy', 15 January 2024, <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-further-and-higher-education-research-innovation-and-science/publications/global-citizens-2030-irelands-talent-and-innovation-strategy/#six-pillars-of-global-citizens-2030>, accessed 20 May 2025.

302 Irish Government, 'Minister O'Donovan announces TrustEd Ireland, a new international education mark, will open for applications in September 2024', 21 August 2024, <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-further-and-higher-education-research-innovation-and-science/press-releases/minister-odonovan-announces-trusted-ireland-a-new-international-education-mark-will-open-for-applications-in-september-2024/>, accessed 20 May 2025.

3.5.2. Researchers

Five EMN Member and Observer Countries reported developments related to researchers to align with Directive (EU) 2016/801 (Students and Researchers Directive)³⁰³ and the revised EU Blue Card Directive,³⁰⁴ as well as to retain foreign talent.³⁰⁵ In Belgium, the Brussels-Capital and Walloon Regions introduced work permit exemptions for short-term research projects. Sweden solicited an inquiry to attract and retain foreign talent, assessing possible measures such as shortened length of stay and new grounds to be granted residence for researchers. Georgia implemented the principle of reciprocity of the Horizon Europe Association Agreement: if programmes equivalent to the Horizon Europe scheme exist in Georgia, they should also be made available to EU institutions.

3.5.3. Trainees, au pairs and volunteers

In response to labour shortages in the care sector, Belgium's Walloon Region changed the age limit for au pairs from 30 to 31 years old and began to index salary thresholds yearly. Finland increased the minimum income in this category to reflect the current cost of living. Norway reported discontinuing its au pair scheme for third-country nationals and instead limiting it to European Economic Area (EEA) applicants. This change reflected a policy priority to reserve unskilled labour opportunities for individuals from the EEA region.



3.6. FAMILY REUNIFICATION

The need for clarification and simplification led six EMN Member Countries³⁰⁶ to adapt or plan to adapt their family reunification policies and related legislation. Amendments included clarification of the legal basis for launching investigations into suspected sham marriages in the Netherlands, and the recognition of registered partners as spouses, including same-sex partners, in Estonia.

Ireland reported labour shortages as a driver to allow partners of certain permit holders admitted under family reunification to take up employment without having to apply for a separate permit.³⁰⁷ Italy introduced some changes to the conditions of admission, in line with Directive (EU) 2003/86 (Family Reunification Directive),³⁰⁸ allowing sponsors to be reunited with their family members, provided they legally reside in Italy for a minimum of two years and are able to provide housing. It also revised the

legislation regulating minimum housing standards when assessing applications for family reunification. Under this new legislation, the municipality is the responsible authority for verifying the number of occupants and compliance with the minimum decent housing requirements.

Four EMN Member Countries³⁰⁹ introduced more restrictive measures on family reunification. In response to identified abuses, Belgium's federal parliament adopted a new law expanding the grounds for restrictions to family reunification. The new law also introduced additional conditions, including actual authority and custody of the minor, for third-country national parents of minor EU citizens seeking residence. In Hungary, the review of migration legislation established that family members of third-country nationals living in Hungary for less than two years no longer qualified for family reunification.



3.7. INFORMATION PROVISION

Eight EMN Member Countries³¹⁰ revamped or consolidated their information provision to ensure the clarity and quality of information available to prospective migrants. These efforts aimed to attract foreign talent and ensure better awareness of migration procedures.

Finland continued to develop the Work in Finland website, complemented by marketing campaigns to increase its visibility. The Discover Finland project³¹¹ was launched to support the recruitment of third-country nationals already familiar with Finnish culture. Similarly, Latvia produced several information videos covering topics such as obtaining an EU Blue Card, entry of seasonal workers, start-up visas, and validation of invitations and sponsorships.

Estonia introduced the 'Coming from Abroad to Work in Estonia' guide. Austria leveraged digitalisation to improve access to migration-related information and connect Austrian companies with international workers through the Work in Austria Talent Hub, a new online platform launched by the Austrian Business Agency (ABA).

303 Directive (EU) 2016/801 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing (recast), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2016/801/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

304 BE, ES.

305 FI, SE, and GE.

306 BE, EE, ES, IE, NL, PT.

307 This applies to the following permits: general employment permit, intra-corporate transferee employment permit, critical skills employment permit and researchers on a hosting agreement.

308 Council Directive 2003/86/EC of 22 September 2003 on the right to family reunification, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32003L0086>, accessed 13 March 2025.

309 BE, FI, HU, SE.

310 AT, CZ, DE, EE, FI, HU, LV, PT.

311 Discover Finland is funded by the Asylum and Migration Integration Fund (AMIF), <https://eusa-rahastot2021.fi/-/discover-finland>, accessed 13 March 2025.



3.8. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Concerns about money laundering and misuse of migration channels saw the Netherlands eliminate its residence permit scheme for wealthy investors. The scheme's impact on attracting business contributions had been minimal, which was attributed to some of its restrictive requirements (e.g. a check by the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) in the Netherlands and the country of origin of the applicant investor).

Serbia fully implemented the Law on Foreigners, establishing a unified procedure for residence and work permits that was fully aligned with Regulation (EU) 2017/1954 on a unified format for residence permits for third-country nationals.³¹²

Several developments were linked to Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine. In line with 2023 developments, Ukraine consolidated its legislation and granted temporary permits to foreigners and stateless individuals serving under contract in its armed forces, the state special transport service, and the national guard. Ukrainians in the rest of

Europe were also targeted by some of these changes: The Czech Republic reopened its consular services in Ukraine and interest from Czech employers led to the reopening of migration programmes for specific categories of Ukrainian nationals. Poland introduced a simplified, digitalised procedure for Ukrainian nationals, with an electronic notification from an employer sufficient to begin employment. Additionally, Polish-speaking Ukrainian qualified nurses and midwives were granted conditional rights to practice in Poland. The ongoing war also affected Belarusian and Russian nationals. In Lithuania, amendments to the Resolution on declaring a state-level emergency and appointing a state-level emergency operations manager, along with changes to the Law on restrictive measures due to military aggression against Ukraine, led to additional entry restrictions for Belarusian and Russian citizens. Latvia extended the restriction of entry to Russian nationals wishing to cross the EU's external borders for tourism and leisure purposes.³¹³

312 Regulation (EU) 2017/1954 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2017 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1030/2002 laying down a uniform format for residence permits for third-country nationals, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2017/1954/oj/eng>, accessed 19 March 2025.

313 On 27 February 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers decided to extend the validity of Order No. 599 of 9 September 2022 'On the Entry of Citizens of the Russian Federation into the Republic of Latvia' until 4 March 2025, https://www.emn.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/EMN_zinojums_210x297mm_eng.pdf, accessed 14 April 2025.

4. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION



4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter details new policy and legislative developments in relation to procedures for international protection, procedural safeguards (e.g. access to information and legal counselling), reception of applicants for international protection, international protection status and its withdrawal, as well as relocation, resettlement, humanitarian admission, and other pathways to protection.

Adoption of the Pact was the main legislative development in international protection at EU level. It aimed to streamline asylum procedures, enhance solidarity between EU Member States, and strengthen the efficiency and fairness of the EU's asylum system. Many of the national developments were motivated by the need to ensure national security and increase administrative efficiency, while continuing to meet humanitarian obligations. More specifically, some of these changes intended to tighten national asylum systems³¹⁴ and optimise administrative structures and the operation of asylum services.³¹⁵

In relation to access to asylum procedures, EMN Member and Observer Countries introduced a wide range of reforms in 2024. Seven EMN Member Countries³¹⁶ introduced changes to their asylum application procedures, either to simplify access to the procedure³¹⁷ or to respond to migration pressures and security concerns.³¹⁸ On their admissibility procedures, EMN Member Countries³¹⁹ took measures to align with EU case law and to expand the grounds for inadmissibility or withdrawal of applications³²⁰ to improve efficiency and prevent system misuse. To boost the implementation of Regulation (EU) 604/2013 (the

Dublin III Regulation),³²¹ four EMN Member Countries³²² introduced measures to increase the numbers of Dublin transfers, enhance overall efficiency, and clarify processes. Nine EMN Member Countries³²³ made changes to the type of procedure used to examine asylum claims (standard, border, accelerated) to improve efficiency,³²⁴ align with EU legal standards,³²⁵ or respond to operational challenges.³²⁶

In 2024, 14 EMN Member Countries³²⁷ implemented measures to expand or adapt their reception capacities and services to meet the evolving needs of applicants for international protection. Nine countries³²⁸ adjusted their material reception conditions and allowances to better balance available public resources with applicants' needs, while five³²⁹ reported changes to healthcare access and seven³³⁰ introduced or revised measures related to labour market access.

Another area of focus was detention and alternatives to detention, where the changes to detention conditions reported by seven EMN Member and Observer Countries³³¹ were mostly driven by the need to improve return and asylum procedures,³³² manage migration pressures,³³³ align with EU standards,³³⁴ and protect vulnerable groups, such as families with children.³³⁵

Seven EMN Member Countries adjusted their family reunification rules for BIP, with some³³⁶ tightening regulations to prevent misuse and enhance immigration control and others³³⁷ focusing on improving legal clarity and promoting family unity. Driven by public security concerns,

314 DE, FI, FR, IT, LT, SE, SK, and MD.

315 BE, CY, EL, ES, FI, IT.

316 BE, EE, EL, FI, FR, IT, PL.

317 BE, EL, FR.

318 BE, FI, IT, PL.

319 DE, EL, SK.

320 FR, IT, SK.

321 Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/604/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

322 BE, EL, FR, HU.

323 BE, BG, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, NL.

324 BE, FI, FR, IE, IT.

325 BG, EL, NL.

326 BE, FR, IT, NL.

327 BE, CY, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PT, SK.

328 CY, DE, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, MT, PT.

329 CY, FI, IE, IT, MT.

330 CY, DE, EL, FI, LT, LU (right to apply for EU Blue Card), MT.

331 BE, CZ, EL, FR, IT, LT, NL.

332 BE, CY, FR, IT, LT, LU.

333 CY, CZ, FI, FR, IT.

334 BE, EL, LT, and MD.

335 BE, CZ, EL, LT.

336 AT, BE, FI, NL.

337 BE, EE, FI, HR, LT.

three EMN Member Countries³³⁸ implemented measures to withdraw international protection for individuals posing security threats.

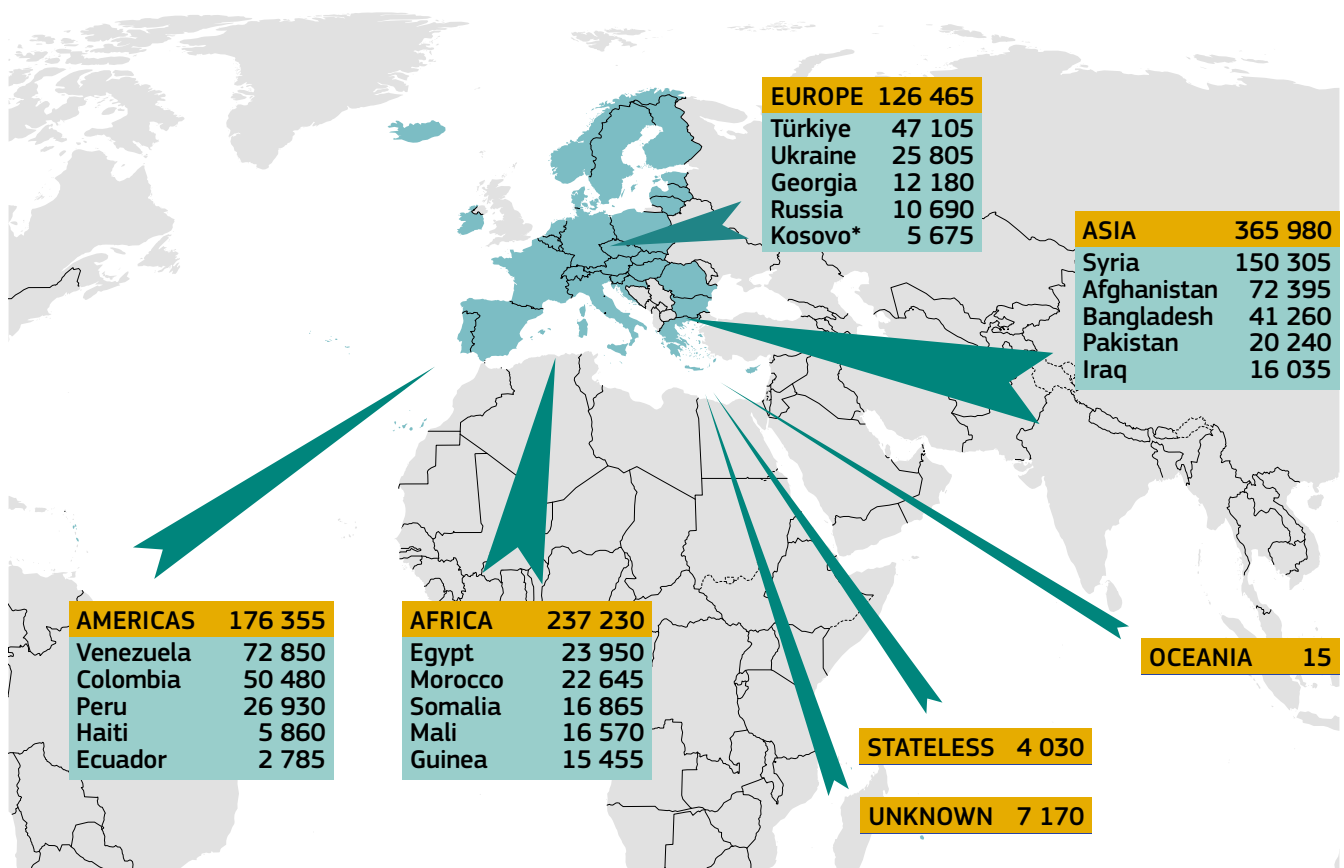
Resettlement and humanitarian admission efforts continued³³⁹ or resumed after a suspension³⁴⁰ in some countries, while others suspended³⁴¹ or scaled back³⁴² their programmes due to policy shifts.

The number of first-time asylum applications in the EU and Norway decreased by 13%, falling from 1 054 645 in 2023 to 917 215 in 2024. The highest number of applicants came from Syria, followed by Venezuela and Afghanistan (see Figure 10). Over 750 000 first-instance

asylum decisions were taken in 2024, up from over 680 500 in 2023, an increase of 11% (Figure 12). Compared to 2023, the share of first-time decisions to award refugee status and humanitarian status went down by 0.6% and 2.3% respectively in 2024, and the share of decisions granting subsidiary protection status went up by 1.5%, meaning an overall reduction in positive decisions of 1.4%. The share of rejected applications at first instance went up by 1.6%.

From EMN Observer Countries, Moldova and Georgia received the highest number of total asylum applications in 2024 at 8 153 and 1 641 respectively (Table 2).

Figure 10: Number of first-time asylum applicants, main citizenships by continent, EU and Norway, 2024

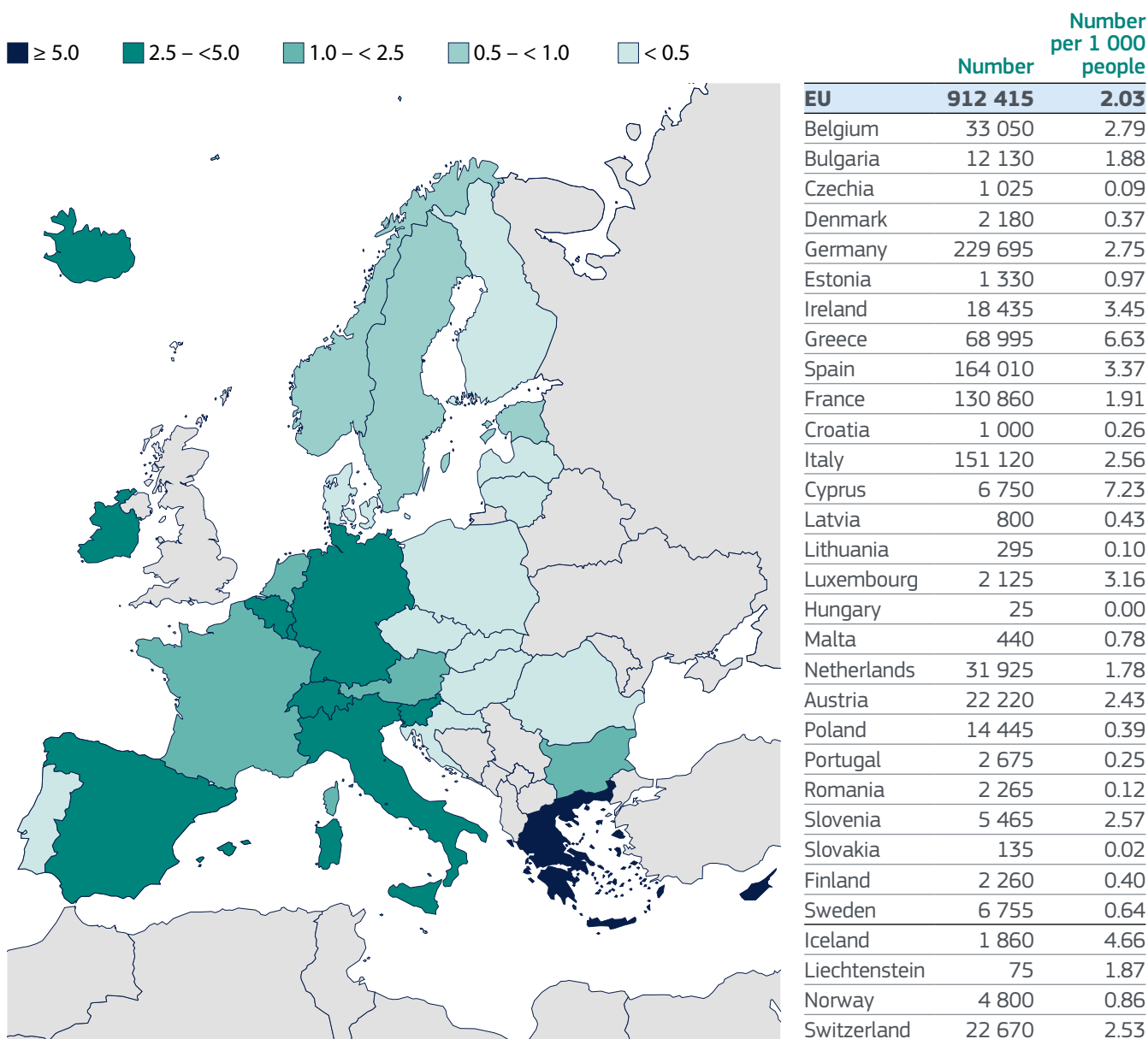


* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence
Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

338 FI, FR, IT.
339 FR.
340 PT.
341 BE.
342 FI, SE.

Figure 11: First-time asylum applicants, EU and Norway, 2024

Number per 1 000 people



Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza, demo_gind and migr_asyapp1mp, date of extraction: 10 June 2025).

Table 2. First-time/total asylum applications in EMN Observer Countries, 2024

	Year	First-time applications	Total applications		Year	First-time applications	Total applications
Armenia	2024	637	660	North Macedonia	2024	334	334
Georgia	2024	n/a	1 641	Serbia	2024	216	219
Moldova	2024	8 153	8 153	Ukraine	2024	n/i	106
Montenegro	2024	132	132				

Source: relevant authorities in the EMN Observer Country.

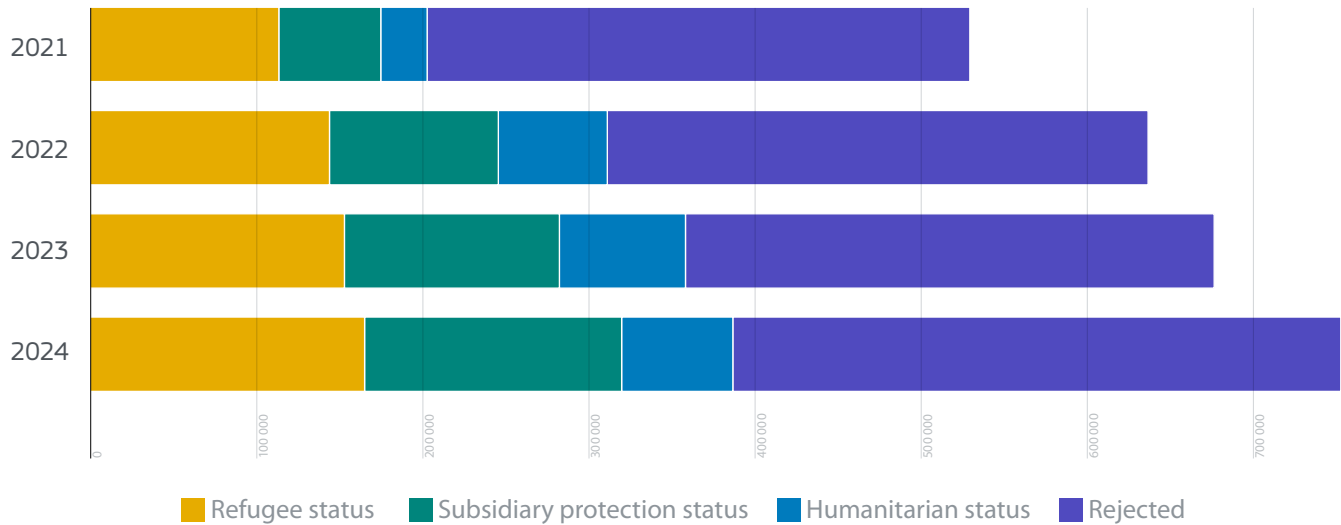
'n/i' means no information

'n/a' means not applicable

Georgia note: Asylum applicant: A foreigner or a stateless person who has applied for international protection to the State authority and in respect of whom the Ministry has not made a decision or in respect of whom the court decision has not entered into legal force. In the event of cases when an asylum-seeker withdraws a claim/appeal, appeals the court's decision concerning the withdrawal of a claim/appeal and/or re-applies to the court for international protection, s/he is not considered as an asylum applicant. In case of submitting subsequent application for international protection, a foreigner or stateless person is considered to be an asylum seeker only upon issuance of an individual administrative-legal act on admissibility.

Figure 12: First instance asylum decisions by outcome, EU and Norway, 2021–2024

Absolute number (and the share of the total)



Year	Refugee status number (share of total)	Subsidiary protection status number (share of total)	Humanitarian status number (share of total)	Rejected number (share of total)
2021	114 300 (21.5%)	61 715 (11.6%)	28 065 (5.3%)	328 545 (61.7%)
2022	144 965 (22.6%)	102 220 (16.0%)	65 970 (10.3%)	327 365 (51.1%)
2023	154 010 (22.6%)	130 140 (19.1%)	76 325 (11.2%)	320 050 (47.0%)
2024	166 220 (22.0%)	155 610 (20.6%)	67 320 (8.9%)	368 030 (48.6%)

Source: Eurostat (migr_asydcfst), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.



4.2. EU DEVELOPMENTS

The Pact introduced a set of rules to streamline asylum processes and ensure faster, fairer, and more efficient procedures for assessing asylum applications. It aims to reduce discrepancies between national asylum systems and enhance legal certainty, establishing common standards across the EU.

Several instruments of the Pact introduce measures to facilitate access to asylum and improve the functioning of the asylum system.³⁴³

- The Asylum and Migration Management Regulation replaces the Dublin III Regulation and introduces a reformed framework for the allocation of responsibility between EU Member States for examining asylum applications. Central to this reform is the establishment of a mandatory solidarity mechanism focused specifically on asylum seekers. Under this mechanism, EU Member States are required to contribute to the overall management of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), either by relocating asylum applicants from EU Member States under pressure or by providing alternative forms of support, such as financial contributions or capacity-building measures. This shift aims to ensure more equitable distribution of responsibilities

and reduce the strain on the Member States at the EU's external borders.

- The Asylum Procedure Regulation standardises the rules and procedures for lodging and examining asylum applications across the EU. It introduced mandatory border procedures for specific categories of applicants, enabling rapid processing of claims at or near external borders.
- The Qualification Regulation aims to ensure that EU Member States apply common criteria to qualify persons as BIP. It defines the content of international protection rights and obligations of BIP.
- The revised Reception Conditions Directive adjusts the provision of minimum standards of assistance for asylum applicants by Member States, ensuring adequate standards of living for those arriving in the EU and seeking international protection.
- The Eurodac Regulation revises the Eurodac system, expanding its scope to include the registration of individual asylum seekers, facilitating the tracking of movements within the EU and aiding the identification

³⁴³ European Commission, 'Legislative files in a nutshell', 4 June 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum/legislative-files-nutshell_en, accessed 17 February 2025.

of the EU Member State responsible for processing applications.

- The Resettlement Regulation aims to enhance safe and legal pathways to the EU for people in need of protection and to contribute to strengthening comprehensive partnerships with non-EU countries hosting large refugee populations.

On 7 November 2024, the High-Level Committee on Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission (the Committee) held its first meeting, chaired by the European Commission.³⁴⁴ The Committee will support the European Commission to implement the Resettlement Regulation. The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) issued new guidance on an EU approach to community sponsorship schemes,³⁴⁵ establishing guidelines that set minimum quality standards.³⁴⁶



4.3. OVERARCHING AND CROSS-CUTTING DEVELOPMENTS

In 13 EMN Member and Observer Countries,³⁴⁷ overarching developments in international protection were driven by national security agendas and efforts to increase administrative efficiency, while continuing to meet humanitarian obligations. These changes sought to tighten national asylum systems in eight EMN Member and Observer Countries³⁴⁸ and to optimise administrative structures and asylum service operations in five countries.³⁴⁹

Eight EMN Member and Observer Countries³⁵⁰ took measures to tighten their asylum frameworks by shortening residence permit durations,³⁵¹ introducing further grounds for refusal or withdrawal of the protection status,³⁵² and introducing stricter legal definitions.³⁵³ Finland shortened the residence permit duration from four to three years and made international protection temporary. It also increased assessments of protection needs and introduced further conditions for refusing or withdrawing the protection status. Sweden conducted a legal inquiry to align its national asylum legislation with the minimum standards and definitions required by EU law, focusing on tightening regulations around legal assistance, asylum application rejections and permanent residence permits as part of a broader government shift toward a more restrictive

asylum and migration policy. Germany introduced the Act on the Improvement of Internal Security and the Asylum System to accelerate asylum procedures and enable refusal or withdrawal of the protection status on security grounds.

To optimise asylum service operations, six EMN Member Countries carried out organisational reforms.³⁵⁴ Belgium established a dedicated Chain Monitoring unit to collect monitoring data and forecast needs in the asylum chain, ensuring that policy and operations align amid a reception crisis and rising applications. Cyprus transferred asylum responsibilities from the Ministry of the Interior to the newly created Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection.

Twelve EMN Member Countries³⁵⁵ temporarily suspended or paused the issuing of decisions on asylum applications for Syrian nationals following the fall of the Assad regime to reassess the geopolitical situation. Belgium also temporarily suspended the examination of Sudanese, Russian and Lebanese cases, while the Netherlands suspended examination of Lebanese cases and resumed processing of applications from Palestinian Territories.



4.4. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION PROCEDURE

4.4.1. Access to the procedure

Seven EMN Member Countries³⁵⁶ made changes to access to the application procedure, motivated by a need to simplify access³⁵⁷ or to address migration challenges and security concerns.³⁵⁸

To facilitate access to the asylum procedures, Belgium relocated its asylum registration centre in Brussels, addressing practical limitations at the previous site. France established France Asylum regional centres, integrating

registration, material reception, and application in a single location to improve accessibility.

To address growing migration challenges and security concerns, Poland adopted a draft law in December 2024 introducing temporary, proportional asylum restrictions in response to high numbers of arrivals at the Belarusian border, which came into force in March 2025. Estonia and Finland restricted border crossings with Russia: in Estonia, due to reciprocal closures, and in Finland, in reaction to hybrid threats. Italy introduced a legal obligation for asylum applicants to cooperate on verifying their identity,

344 European Commission, 'Launch of the High-Level Committee on Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission', Press release, 7 November 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/launch-high-level-committee-resettlement-and-humanitarian-admission-2024-11-07_en, accessed 7 June 2025.

345 EMN Glossary, 'Definition of community sponsorship', n.d., https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/community-sponsorship_en, accessed 25 March 2025.

346 EUAA, 'Guidelines on the EU approach to community sponsorship', 2024, https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2024-12/2024_12_Guidelines_on_the_EU_approach_to_community_sponsorship_EN.pdf, accessed 17 February 2025.

347 BE, BG, CY, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, SE, SK, and MD.

348 DE, FI, FR, IT, LT, SE, SK, and MD.

349 BE, CY, EL, ES, FI.

350 DE, FI, FR, IT, LT, SE, SK, and MD.

351 FI.

352 DE, FI, FR.

353 FI, FR, IT, LT, SE, SK.

354 BE, CY, EL, ES, FI, FR.

355 AT, BE, DE, EL, FI, HR, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, SE.

356 BE, EE, EL, FI, FR, IT, PL.

357 BE, EL, FR.

358 BE, FI, IT, PL.

with forced data acquisition from electronic devices in cases of non-cooperation.

4.4.2. Admissibility of applications

Six countries³⁵⁹ took measures to strengthen their admissibility checks. Germany and Slovak Republic considered inadmissible any new elements or findings that existed at the time of the previous asylum proceeding but were not submitted by the applicant during that proceeding without relevant justification. This aligned with Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) decision C-18/20³⁶⁰ and prevented delays in low-credibility cases.

In Finland, since the asylum border procedure entered into force on 1 September 2024, applications with indications of inadmissibility were examined in the border procedure where applicable. France amended its asylum procedure to allow the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) to issue inadmissibility decisions without assessing asylum claims for applicants already granted protection in another country and expanded the use of audiovisual communication for personal interviews in cases of potential inadmissibility. An amendment to Ireland's International Protection Act 2015 provided for the risk of serious harm to be reviewed when considering a transfer to a safe third country.

France and Italy introduced measures extending the reasons for withdrawal of asylum applications. Aligning with broader efforts to reduce processing times and ensure compliance with reception obligations, France expanded the grounds for terminating an asylum application so that a case can be closed when an applicant abandons the designated accommodation without justification. Similarly, Italy defined specific circumstances under which an application can be considered withdrawn, such as leaving reception facilities or missing interviews, while introducing a structured process for reopening or rejecting claims.

4.4.3. Dublin procedures

Four EMN Member Countries³⁶¹ introduced changes to boost the implementation of the Dublin Regulation by increasing the number of Dublin transfers, enhancing efficiency and clarifying processes. France reduced the appeal period for Dublin transfers from 15 to 7 days, with a 15-day ruling deadline, to streamline asylum processing and align appeal time limits while maintaining legal protections.

4.4.4. Type of procedure to examine claims

Nine EMN Member Countries³⁶² made changes to the type of procedure used to examine asylum claims (standard, border, accelerated) to improve efficiency,³⁶³

align with EU legal standards,³⁶⁴ and respond to operational challenges.³⁶⁵

Standard procedure

The Netherlands changed its asylum assessment framework from specific risk groups to individualised risk profiles, emphasising personal circumstances. In addition, the asylum assessment framework was refined to align with recent CJEU rulings on political opinion, membership of a particular social group, and how to properly evaluate a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict. A new framework for assessing asylum claims from so-called Westernised women who identify with equality between men and women³⁶⁶ established a three-step process to determine whether women applicants with gender equality values face persecution in their country of origin, aligning with the CJEU ruling in Case C-646/21.³⁶⁷

Border procedure

Changes to the border procedure were reported by France and Italy, while Finland included a border procedure in the Finnish Aliens Act. To improve the efficiency of its procedure at the border, France extended the judicial court's decision period for detaining foreign nationals in waiting zones from 24 to 48 hours. This was prompted by the arrival of the Ocean Viking in Toulon on 11 November 2022, carrying 234 third-country nationals, which highlighted the inadequacy of the previous 24-hour deadline. Italy amended its border procedure to introduce stricter expulsion rules, expand detention provisions, apply border procedures more broadly, and reduce the appeal period for negative asylum decisions to seven days.

Accelerated procedure

Belgium, Finland and Ireland expanded the use of their accelerated procedure. To expedite case processing, Belgium implemented a fast-track procedure for asylum applications from safe countries of origin and other low protection rate countries, with a 15-day and 50-day deadline, respectively. Finland expanded the use of the accelerated procedure, particularly for applicants posing a national security threat or submitting subsequent applications after the first asylum application was rejected. Ireland expanded its accelerated procedure to prioritise applicants from the most common country of origin (Nigeria) in April, then the top two countries from July onwards (Jordan and Nigeria) to improve efficiency.

Six EMN Member Countries³⁶⁸ revised their lists of safe countries of origin in response to changing geopolitical developments. Belgium added Moldova to the list of safe countries. Ireland added Algeria and Botswana in January to its safe country list, followed by Brazil, Egypt,

359 DE, EL, FI, FR, IE, SK.

360 CJEU, Case C-18/20, Judgment of the Court (Third Chamber) of 9 September 2021, *Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl (Demande ultérieure de protection internationale)*, 11 June 2024.

361 BE, EL, FR, HU.

362 BE, BG, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, NL.

363 BE, FI, FR, IE, IT.

364 BG, EL, NL.

365 BE, FR, IT, NL.

366 Westernised women in this context refers to foreign women who have adopted a 'western' lifestyle or ideas of gender equality since their arrival in the Netherlands that are not accepted in their country of origin. This includes exercising rights and freedoms for women in the Netherlands that deviate from traditional gender roles in their country of origin.

367 CJEU Case C-646/21, Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 11 June 2024, *K and L v Staatssecretaris van Justitie en Veiligheid*.

368 BE, BG, EL (new list: Egypt, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Georgia, Gambia, Ghana, India, Morocco, Moldova, Bangladesh, Benin, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal and Togo, with Angola and Moldova added in 2024), IE, IT.

India, Malawi and Morocco in July 2024. Italy removed Cameroon, Colombia, and Nigeria due to safety concerns in parts of their territories, in line with a CJEU ruling (Case C-406/22)³⁶⁹ but included Bangladesh, Egypt, Peru and Sri Lanka on its list. Greece added Moldova and Angola to its list.

First-instance appeals

To reduce backlogs and enhance regional access to justice, Germany, France and Italy made changes to their asylum appeal systems. France reformed the National Court of Asylum (CNDA) by establishing five regional chambers to improve access and ease caseload congestion in the court in Paris. The single-judge system became standard for appeals to speed up processing claims. Germany allocated first-instance appeals related to specific countries of origin to a single administrative court in several federal states. Italy transferred jurisdiction for detention validations to the Court of Appeal, reducing the appeal deadline to seven days for applicants processed under Italy's accelerated asylum border procedures.

4.4.5. Operational aspects of the international protection procedure (including appeals)

Procedural safeguards

Nine EMN Member and Observer Countries³⁷⁰ reported measures to improve procedural safeguards, notably to ensure access to information,³⁷¹ enhance interpretation and translation in asylum procedures,³⁷² strengthen the independence and transparency of legal counselling for asylum seekers,³⁷³ and enhance procedural fairness.³⁷⁴

Belgium, Italy, Latvia and Slovak Republic took steps to improve access to information, focusing on clarity, accessibility, and multilingual support. Belgium introduced a new brochure and website, offering information in multiple formats and languages. Italy, Latvia and the Slovak Republic simplified the language in their information materials. The Slovak Republic incorporated graphics and icons to make key asylum-related content more understandable. Latvia changed its approach to presenting decisions refusing status to applicants by providing a separate, concise explanation in simple language, along with pre-prepared translations of appeal and legal aid conditions. As it had previously translated each individual decision, the change enhanced effectiveness and resource efficiency.

Belgium, France and Malta took steps to enhance interpretation and translation services in their asylum procedures to improve accessibility and fairness for applicants. Belgium established a legal framework for interpreters and translators, ensuring clear appointment and remuneration criteria, as well as a code of ethics. France required asylum seekers to select their preferred language at France Asylum regional centres, allowing OFPRA to schedule

interviews accordingly. In Norway, the government allocated NOK 5 million (around €430 000) to strengthen legal aid for asylum seekers.

To strengthen the independence and transparency of legal counselling for asylum seekers, Austria introduced greater protection against dismissal for legal counsellors and established clear responsibilities within the legal advice sector. Lithuania initiated the transfer of responsibility for state-guaranteed legal aid from the Minister of the Interior to the Minister of Social Security and Labour, ensuring greater impartiality.

To enhance procedural fairness for minors in asylum processes, the Council for Alien Law Litigation in Belgium ran a pilot project on child-friendly justice. Within this project, the Council introduced adapted convocation letters explaining hearings in child-friendly language and launched a pilot project for minor-friendly hearing rooms. Germany addressed legal representation for accompanied minors by recognising youth authority-verified custody powers, streamlining processes for youth welfare offices and family courts.

Timeframes and case management

Ten EMN Member and Observer Countries³⁷⁵ introduced reforms to improve time management of caseloads and reduce backlogs,³⁷⁶ improve the efficiency of their asylum systems,³⁷⁷ and increase transparency in processing applications.³⁷⁸

To improve time management, Ireland and Italy increased resources for processing asylum claims. Portugal prioritised clearing pending asylum cases from 2023, dedicating a caseworker exclusively to vulnerable cases. Norway restructured its asylum case management, shifting from country-specific teams to flexible, expertise-based temporary teams, allowing for data-driven prioritisation based on arrivals, backlog, and priority groups.

Motivated by capacity constraints and a need for greater efficiency, Belgium's Tabula Rasa pilot project aimed to improve efficiency, decision quality, and employee well-being. Following an evaluation of the pilot, the programme will be implemented in 2025 under the name 'Prisma'. Ireland's International Protection Office (IPO) launched a pilot programme for remote asylum interviews to reduce travel requirements and increase processing capacity. The Netherlands extended the examination period for asylum applications by nine months, allowing the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) up to 15 months to process cases to ensure thorough assessments amid rising asylum applications and capacity constraints. The IND started publishing processing times for family reunification applications on its asylum dashboard to increase transparency and help applicants to manage their expectations. France significantly reduced its processing time in early 2024 through procedural reforms, resource expansion, and case management improvements.

³⁶⁹ CJEU Case C-406/22, Judgment of the Court on 4 October 2024, *Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, Odbor azylové a migrační politiky*.

³⁷⁰ AT, BE, DE, FR, IT, LT, LV, SK, and NO.

³⁷¹ BE, IT, LV, SK.

³⁷² BE, FR, MT, and NO.

³⁷³ AT, LT.

³⁷⁴ BE, DE, and NO.

³⁷⁵ BE, FI, FR, IE, IT, MT, NL, PT, SE, and NO.

³⁷⁶ IE, IT.

³⁷⁷ BE, FR, IE.

³⁷⁸ NL.

Digitalisation of the procedure/ data management elements

Seven EMN Member and Observer Countries³⁷⁹ reported digitalisation efforts in their asylum processes. These included upgrading existing digital infrastructure,³⁸⁰ allowing at least some interviews to be held online,³⁸¹ and improving efficiency and transparency.³⁸²

Upgrades of digital case management systems were reported in five EMN Member Countries.³⁸³ Belgium expanded its cloud infrastructure for asylum processes and automated Dublin transfer requests. France improved data security and compliance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR) through the automation of personal data processing and remote

consultation interfaces, ensuring seamless data-sharing between asylum institutions. Ireland shifted towards fully digital applications, allowing asylum seekers to apply online by using iPads at designated facilities, while also trialling remote interviews. Portugal started digitally storing all applications to ensure data integrity and remote accessibility.

In terms of future planning, Bulgaria developed a digitalisation plan for international protection procedures, set to be fully implemented by 2026. Norway committed NOK 100 million to modernising its immigration administration IT system to streamline operations and enhance digital infrastructure.



4.5. RECEPTION OF APPLICANTS FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

In response to changing reception needs, 14 EMN Member Countries³⁸⁴ took measures to expand or adjust the reception capacities and services provided to applicants for international protection. Nine EMN Member Countries³⁸⁵ reported adjusting material reception conditions and allowances to balance public resources and the needs of applicants for international protections. Five countries³⁸⁶ reported measures concerning healthcare access, while seven countries³⁸⁷ reported access to labour market measures. In Finland, access to the labour market was curtailed so that the right to work expired after a fixed 30 days from serving the decision to the applicant. Previously, it expired only once the decision was enforceable, i.e. when the applicant could be removed from the country by law.

4.5.1. Reception of applicants for international protection, including access to basic services

Accommodation

In response to pressure on reception systems due to sustained high application numbers, some EMN Member Countries³⁸⁸ introduced measures to expand reception capacity,³⁸⁹ reduce waiting times for access to accommodation and duration of stay,³⁹⁰ and improve reception facility management.³⁹¹

Six EMN Member Countries³⁹² undertook measures to increase reception capacity in response to a rising number of applications. Belgium approved a new public tender framework to involve private operators in reception services, with up to 3 500 places planned. Cyprus began upgrading its reception centres, aiming to increase the

capacity of Kofinou centre to 750 beds and create a new centre in Limnes with 1 000 beds. Luxembourg opened new accommodation structures and called on municipalities to identify available properties or land to expand reception capacity. As in previous years, a temporary winter emergency facility was made available during the coldest months to homeless adults, including applicants for international protection who were not accommodated in reception structures. The Netherlands introduced new measures to create 12 000 additional reception places, including temporary emergency accommodations through municipalities. Portugal expanded its asylum reception facilities through a partnership with a network of host organisations. In contrast, a lack of national funding saw Bulgaria reduce its reception facility capacity to 3 225 places.

Box 3: France's National Plan for the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Refugees 2024-2027: Optimising asylum reception and accommodation management

France adopted a new National Plan for the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Refugees 2024-2027, setting regional targets to manage accommodation more efficiently. As of 31 December 2024, the national reception system had 119 437 places. To speed up processing times for asylum seekers, it aims to regulate the management of the accommodation stock and optimise the availability of accommodation. Previously, 21% of the stock was occupied by people who should not have been there, either because they had been refused asylum for more than a month (7.2%), or because they had been granted international

379 BE, BG, FR, IE, MT, PT, and NO.

380 BE, FR, IE, MT, PT.

381 FR, IE.

382 BG, FR, and NO.

383 BE, FR, IE, MT, PT.

384 BE, CY, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PT, SK.

385 CY, DE, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, MT, PT.

386 CY, FI, IE, IT, MT.

387 CY, DE, EL, FI, LT, LU (right to apply for EU Blue Card), MT.

388 BE, CY, ES, FI, IE, IT, LT, LU, NL, PT.

389 BE, CY, IE, LU, NL, PT.

390 BE, IT, FR, NL.

391 EE, ES, FI, LT, NL.

392 BE, CY, IE, LU, NL, PT.

protection and were staying beyond the authorised six-month period (11.7%). The National Plan forecast that the number of accommodation places would be 113 258 in 2025, taking into account the closure of 6 500 accommodation places by 2025 and the introduction of 5 000 new places in other areas, meaning an actual decrease of 1 500 in 2025 (around 1.3%).

Belgium and Finland took measures requiring applicants for international protection to contribute financially towards their reception costs. Belgium introduced a new system obliging employed applicants for international protection to make financial contributions based on their income. Finland increased the maximum reception fee from €9 to €12 per day to align costs with reception expenses.

Four EMN Member Countries³⁹³ introduced measures to reduce waiting times for accommodation. To simplify the system and reduce unnecessary relocations, the Netherlands removed the link between asylum processing and reception locations, allowing asylum seekers to complete their process regardless of location. The Netherlands also allowed an extension of temporary stays in hotels and other accommodations by an additional six months in exceptional cases where relocation to permanent housing was not available.

Five EMN Member Countries³⁹⁴ undertook structural and regulatory reforms in reception facility management. Estonia amended the internal procedural rules for accommodation centres, introducing updates on substance use, absences, complaint mechanisms, and personal file management to address practical challenges and align with EUAA reception standards. Finland replaced its outdated guidelines with new instructions for reception centres to enhance operations, align with contractual obligations, and improve monitoring. To strengthen budget management and clarify administrative processes, Spain enhanced the management of the international protection reception system, for example by improving the planning and allocation of services as well as their evaluation, monitoring and compliance. Lithuania reorganised the Refugee Reception Centre into the Reception and Integration Agency, consolidating all reception functions under a single institution that will provide accommodation, social support, and other essential services to third-country nationals. This created a unified and more effective reception system, with consistent standards and improved access to assistance. The Netherlands' Dispersal Act mandated a fairer and more balanced allocation of asylum reception responsibilities across municipalities and provinces, replacing the previous voluntary system with a structured distribution key. Municipalities had until 1 November 2024 to finalise reception place allocations. However, the new government stated its intention to repeal the Dispersal Act, making its future uncertain.

Box 4: Ireland's Comprehensive Accommodation Strategy for International Protection Applicants: Building a sustainable asylum reception system by 2028

Ireland's Comprehensive Accommodation Strategy for International Protection Applicants was announced on 27 March 2024. It addressed accommodation shortages and outlined a long-term system change by 2028. Immediate measures for 2024-2025 included converting commercial properties and acquiring state lands for these purposes, while the revised accommodation model moves away from reliance on private providers, expanding state-owned and commercial accommodation. It envisions a structured process where applicants spend six months in reception centres before moving to accommodation centres if they are still awaiting a decision on their claim, with a total planned capacity of 35 000 beds.

Other material reception conditions, including allowances

Changes to other material reception conditions were motivated by balancing public finances with ensuring fair distribution of support,³⁹⁵ as well as having to take better account of the specific support needs of certain categories of applicants for international protection.³⁹⁶ These measures included reducing or withdrawing allowances³⁹⁷ and introducing new or extending existing allowances.³⁹⁸

Four EMN Member Countries³⁹⁹ reduced or withdrew allowances. Finland reduced the basic and operating allowances for asylum seekers. France introduced mandatory rules for refusing or withdrawing material reception conditions in certain situations, including when asylum seekers reject assigned accommodation, leave the designated region, or submit false information. Ireland introduced an income assessment for the allowance paid to international protection applicants, which will no longer be provided where an individual has an income of more than €125 per week for a combined total of 12 weeks or more. Germany extended basic benefits from 18 to 36 months, lengthening the time until applicants get access to higher benefits at the level of regular income support schemes. It also excluded from benefits those asylum seekers notified of a decision to transfer them to the EU Member State responsible under the Dublin III Regulation, except temporary benefits and hardship assistance (e.g. benefits to cover the special needs of children).

Ireland and Lithuania introduced or extended certain allowances. Ireland announced its plan for an International Protection Child Payment for children in state-provided reception accommodation to increase the weekly allowance for children (currently €29.80). Lithuania allowed asylum seekers living independently (in addition to those residing in temporary accommodation facilities) to receive an allowance for food if no meal service is provided and a monthly monetary allowance.

³⁹³ BE, FR, IT, NL.

³⁹⁴ EE, ES, FI, LT, NL.

³⁹⁵ DE, FI, FR, IE.

³⁹⁶ IE, LT.

³⁹⁷ FI, FR, IE.

³⁹⁸ DE, LT.

³⁹⁹ DE, FI, FR, IE.

Austria and Germany introduced benefit card systems for asylum seekers. Austria piloted a benefits card to replace cash with in-kind support, while Cyprus planned to implement a pre-paid bank card to streamline payments and address difficulties in opening bank accounts.

Access to the labour market

To facilitate access to employment, Germany, Greece and Lithuania reduced the waiting period for asylum seekers' access to the labour market: Greece from six months to 60 days after lodging their application, and Germany for asylum applicants in reception centres from nine to six months, with limited discretion of the foreigners' authority. Germany eased work rules to better tap into labour potential, allowing certain asylum seekers to switch to skilled worker permits and reducing work requirements for removal suspensions. Rules also meant that persons whose removal was suspended and who had completed training as a healthcare assistant were eligible for a temporary residence permit. If people whose deportation was suspended were in vocational training in Germany, they were entitled to a temporary residence permit if they were able to ensure their subsistence. If they were not able to ensure their subsistence, they were usually entitled to the temporary suspension of deportation for the purpose of training. Lithuania expanded asylum seekers' work rights by removing work permit requirements in special situations and allowing self-employment in delayed cases.

In Finland, recent amendments to the Aliens Act⁴⁰⁰ restrict the ability of applicants for international protection to transition to certain other residence permit categories, including those based on employment, entrepreneurship, or study (see access to education below). Finland also reduced the period of the right to work for applicants for international protection, i.e. in most cases where the person receives a negative asylum decision, their right to work ends earlier than before. Ireland moved the labour market access application process for international protection applicants to the IPO, with a new online system to streamline applications, reduce processing times, and support the IPO's transition to a paperless system.

Access to healthcare, including mental health

Six countries⁴⁰¹ reported measures to improve access to healthcare. In Cyprus, the Asylum Service initiated an agreement with the State Health Services Organisation (OKYPY) to formalise the provision of free health care to asylum seekers within the public health system. Finland and Malta took steps to enhance mental health support, through four projects in reception centres in Finland, and through collaboration with Mental Health services in Malta. Ireland allocated €50 million to a health model for refugees, ensuring continued flexible local healthcare services for the growing number of asylum seekers, health assessments, immunisations, general practitioner (GP) sessions, and medical cards. Portugal established a

national contact point for healthcare to enhance access to medical services.

Access to education

Latvia and Georgia expanded access to education for minor asylum seekers. Latvia introduced a new education model programme with enhanced Latvian language support, expanded teacher training, and increased school readiness to educate asylum-seeking minors. It included the creation of individual learning plans and the inclusion of special education schools for those identified as needing such supports. As noted above, recent amendments to Finland's Aliens Act restrict the ability of applicants for international protection to transition to certain other residence permit categories, including to study. Georgia expanded its State Integration Programme to fund sports, creative, and educational courses, providing up to GEL 1 500 (€494) per beneficiary for one year to support skill development and socioeconomic integration.

Child protection/safeguarding measures

Seven countries⁴⁰² reported measures to improve child protection, focusing on safeguarding, rights awareness, and compliance with national standards. Measures on child protection and safeguarding were motivated by a need to strengthen legal compliance,⁴⁰³ prevent abuse,⁴⁰⁴ improve care standards,⁴⁰⁵ and support the integration and well-being of minors in asylum and reception systems.⁴⁰⁶ Belgium supported a project on creating more child- and family-friendly accommodation within the reception network. The Czech Republic distributed information materials for children in reception centres. Germany supported the Save the Children's 'Listen Up!' project to strengthen the rights and protection of children in accommodation centres, including the development of complaint mechanisms to safeguard minors from violence. With a focus on safeguarding, Ireland's Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) began inspecting certain accommodation centres for compliance with national standards, as part of the government's commitment to independent oversight. Poland updated its Policy for the Protection of Children from Abuse in Centres for Foreigners for enhanced child protection measures in response to legislative changes in the Family and Guardianship Code.

Early integration measures

Six EMN Member Countries⁴⁰⁷ introduced new measures to support the integration of asylum seekers, including promoting social participation and community engagement, and improving access to services. Austria extended the possibilities for asylum seekers to engage in charitable work for state entities and non-profit public sector organisations, offering €1.60 per hour as an incentive, while reducing their monthly pocket money from €40 to €20 if they opted out. Bulgaria and Cyprus launched programmes and projects co-financed under the AMIF programme. IOM Bulgaria launched a five-year holistic support programme for asylum seekers and BIP. In Belgium, various projects sought to integrate high-skilled

400 Amendment to the Aliens Act (472/2024) Sections 35 and 36, which came into effect on 1 September 2024.

401 CY, FI, IE, IT, PT, MT.

402 BE, CZ, DE, IE, IT, PL, and GE.

403 IE, PL.

404 DE, PL.

405 BE, CZ.

406 BE, DE.

407 AT, BE, BG, CY, EL, PL.

applicants for international protection into the labour market, tackle exploitation, and facilitate collaboration with tax authorities and temporary work agencies (TWAs). Poland launched the mobile app Refugeebook, offering information on social assistance, asylum procedures, and life in Poland. The app provides real-time updates and notifications relevant to applicants. The app is accessible to applicants for international protection via a QR code included in documents and on information posters in foreigners' centres and at the Foreigners' Service Point in Warsaw.

Assessment and response to special reception needs in relation to vulnerabilities

Five EMN Member Countries⁴⁰⁸ carried out changes to improve vulnerability detection and assessment in their asylum systems. Four countries⁴⁰⁹ enhanced their existing structures: Belgium, through a project on vulnerability detection and referral; Cyprus via new standard operating procedures (SOPs) for vulnerability assessments and training; Czech Republic by expanding EUAA training to all frontline staff; and Germany through a model project to develop specialist tools and monitoring. Ireland faced capacity constraints, temporarily suspending its vulnerability assessment programme but later resumed assessments for families via an external contractor.



4.6. DETENTION OF APPLICANTS FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

Nine EMN Member and Observer Countries⁴¹⁰ introduced measures on detention conditions. These changes to detention and alternatives to detention targeted improvements in return and asylum procedures,⁴¹¹ managing migration pressures,⁴¹² aligning with EU standards,⁴¹³ and protecting vulnerable groups, such as families with children.⁴¹⁴

To improve its return and asylum procedures, France adopted a decree in July 2024 extending the grounds for placing asylum seekers under house arrest or in detention. This aimed to increase the effectiveness of removal measures for those posing a threat to public order or at risk of absconding. To manage migration pressures, Cyprus increased its engagement in Frontex activities and supported the development of best practices on alternatives to detention. To protect vulnerable groups, Belgium formalised its ban on detaining families with minor children, providing more appropriate accommodation in designated family units. Finally, to align with EU standards, Moldova amended its legal framework in 2024 by partially transposing Directive 2008/115/EC (Return Directive)⁴¹⁵ on the return of illegally staying third-country nationals.

Measures to minimise the detention of families with children were adopted by four EMN Member Countries,⁴¹⁶ aligning with EU and international obligations. Belgium

legally formalised the prohibition of detaining families with minor children, allowing them to be housed in family units with the same legal framework as detention centres, including shortened appeal periods and faster asylum processing. Greece amended its legislation to correctly transpose Article 11(6) of Directive (EU) 2013/33 (the recast Reception Conditions Directive),⁴¹⁷ specifying that exceptions to separate accommodation for detained families can only occur at borders and transit zones of the country's ports or airports, ensuring compliance with EU regulations. The Czech Republic established an informal working group to improve the implementation of alternatives to detention for families.

France, Italy and Lithuania adjusted their rules for detention and alternatives to detention. France extended house arrest and detention possibilities for asylum seekers, while Italy changed the calculation method of the amount of financial guarantee required as an alternative to detention in border procedures. Lithuania established a maximum detention period of six months for those deemed a flight risk, security risk or security threat. The Netherlands no longer allowed phone searches of detained third-country nationals without consent, following a Council of State ruling that the current law was insufficiently clear.



4.7. FAMILY REUNIFICATION FOR BIP

Seven EMN Member Countries introduced changes to family reunification rules, with some⁴¹⁸ tightening regulations to prevent misuse and enhance immigration

control and others⁴¹⁹ focusing on improving legal clarity and promoting family unity.

408 BE, CY, CZ, DE, LT.

409 BE, CY, CZ, DE.

410 BE, CZ, EL, FR, IT, LT, LU, NL, and MD.

411 BE, CY, FR, IT, LT, LU.

412 CY, CZ, FI, FR, IT.

413 BE, EL, LT and MD.

414 BE, CZ, EL, LT.

415 Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2008/115/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

416 BE, CZ, EL, LU.

417 Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2013/33/oj/eng>, accessed 18 March 2025.

418 AT, BE, FI, NL.

419 BE, EE, FI, HR, LT.

Four EMN Member Countries⁴²⁰ introduced stricter regulations on family reunification for BIP. Austria introduced stricter document verification and increased DNA testing, alongside proposals for additional measures to further restrict family reunification, e.g. raising the minimum age for spouses from 18 to 21. Belgium established conditions under which parents of accompanied foreign minors with international protection can obtain the right to reunite with their child, provided the family existed in the country of origin and the child is still a minor at the time of the application.

Finland introduced conditions for granting or refusing residence permits based on family ties, including cases where there are concerns about fraudulent family ties,

misrepresentation, or the use of minors as sponsors to facilitate entry. The Netherlands tightened the criteria for family reunification, specifically for adult children of BIP, by clarifying that they must have remained under the care of the sponsor, cohabited continuously, and not formed their own family.

Croatia, Estonia and Lithuania introduced changes to enhance legal clarity and promote family unity. Croatia allowed BIP to submit temporary residence applications for their family members at local police administrations or stations to eliminate logistical challenges. Estonia introduced marriage equality, granting same-sex couples the right to marry and aligning the definition of family members in legislation on family reunification.



4.8. WITHDRAWAL OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION STATUS

Driven by public security concerns, three EMN Member Countries⁴²¹ implemented measures to withdraw international protection for individuals posing security threats. France expanded the grounds for withdrawing residence permits for BIP, allowing revocation if the individual posed a serious threat to public order. Italy introduced withdrawal if a third-country national was deemed a threat to state security.

Austria began procedures to revoke the asylum status of Syrian refugees, particularly those who had been in Austria for less than five years, with decisions to be made after further hearings. This is in line with the Austrian Asylum Act 2005, which mandates reassessment in cases of political changes in the country of origin relevant to the fear of persecution.



4.9. RELOCATION, RESETTLEMENT, HUMANITARIAN ADMISSION AND OTHER PATHWAYS TO PROTECTION

In 2024, France reported resettlement admissions in response to evolving political and humanitarian contexts. Portugal resumed its resettlement programme after a period of suspension while other countries suspended⁴²² or scaled back⁴²³ their programmes due to national policy shifts.

As announced at the World Refugee Forum in December 2023, France implemented the initiative *Avec elles*, welcoming a majority of women refugees (53% of resettled refugees), including Afghan refugees from Türkiye and their families (300 people). France welcomed 18 refugee students as part of the Univ'R university corridor pilot programme, 25% of whom were women.

Belgium, Finland and Sweden suspended⁴²⁴ or scaled back⁴²⁵ their programmes due to national policy shifts. Following federal elections, Belgium suspended resettlement and relocation until a new government was formed.

Finland and Sweden scaled back their admissions, particularly of unaccompanied minors. Finland reduced its resettlement quota to 500 refugees from refugee camps in Türkiye, Iran, Rwanda, Libya and Peru, while excluding unaccompanied minors. Sweden focused on Congolese refugees in Uganda and Tanzania, while limiting the resettlement of unaccompanied minors to those with family ties, prioritising women and girls, in line with the government's policy to reduce immigration levels.

⁴²⁰ AT, BE, FI, NL.

⁴²¹ FI, FR, IT.

⁴²² BE.

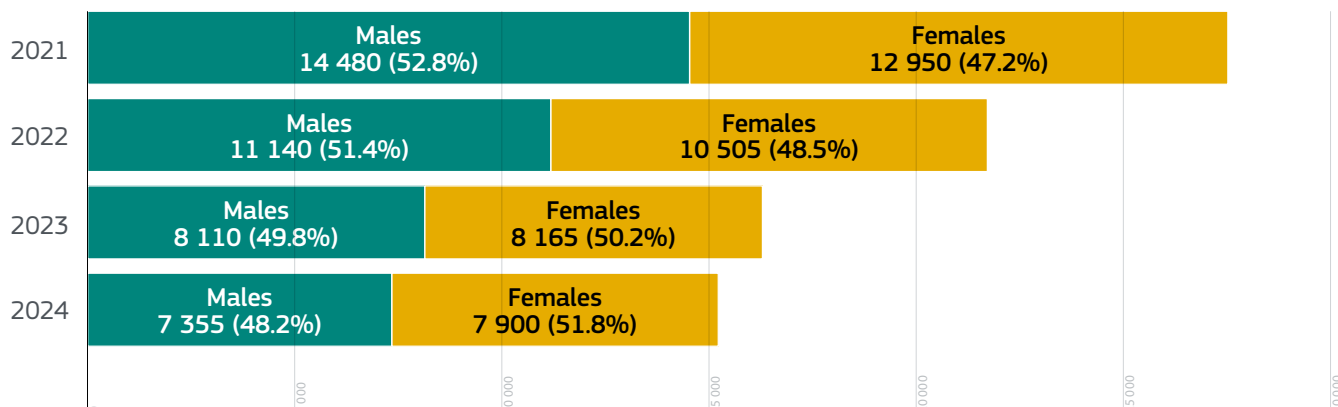
⁴²³ FI, SE.

⁴²⁴ BE.

⁴²⁵ FI, SE.

Figure 13: Resettled third-country nationals, by sex, EU and Norway, 2021-2024

Absolute number (and the share of total resettled third-country nationals)



Source: Eurostat (migr_asyresa), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.



4.10. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

EMN Member Countries reported other developments in international protection, covering a diverse range of measures, including legislative amendments, policy changes, and emergency measures related to migration and asylum management.

Estonia removed fee exemptions for residence permit card for applicants for international protection, except for the first issuance, to align fees with actual costs and encourage self-service use. One of the justifications was that the person extending the residence permit is eligible to work in Estonia. The changes took effect from 1 January 2025. Latvia adopted amendments to the Personal Identification Documents Law to establish a unified emergency travel document in line with EU Directive (EU) 2019/997,⁴²⁶ and introduced a state fee for processing residence permits for refugees and beneficiaries of alternative status to simplify the fee collection process for migration services. Greece issued a circular providing guidance on the process for BIP to obtain long-term resident status, requiring them

to surrender their refugee residence permit, which is then invalidated and forwarded to the Asylum Service.

Serbia began implementing a legal act adopted in 2023 enabling the issuance of travel documents to refugees, thereby advancing the full implementation of the United Nations (UN) 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees.

Norway pledged to accept up to 20 medically evacuated patients from Gaza under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) medical evacuation scheme, along with accompanying persons (totalling up to 100 individuals). These cases will count towards Norway's total refugee resettlement quota. Ireland pledged to evacuate up to 30 sick children from Gaza for treatment and care. Luxembourg pledged to receive two patients from Gaza. Italy extended the state of emergency for interventions abroad to support refugee aid from Gaza and continue civil protection efforts amid ongoing crises. Belgium also made pledges in 2024 for medical evacuations from Gaza through the MEDEVAC project.

⁴²⁶ Council Directive (EU) 2019/997 of 18 June 2019 establishing an EU Emergency Travel Document and repealing Decision 96/409/CFSP, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/997/oj/eng>, accessed 18 June 2025.

5. TEMPORARY PROTECTION AND OTHER MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO PERSONS FLEEING THE WAR IN UKRAINE



5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of developments across EMN Member and Observer Countries in response to persons fleeing the war in Ukraine, particularly for BoTP. It examines developments with regard to the implementation and extension of temporary protection; legal and procedural adaptations; and access to or means to access rights, suitable accommodation, healthcare, social assistance, education and the labour market.

On 31 December 2024, over 4.2 million non-EU citizens who fled Ukraine as a consequence of Russia's war had temporary [protection status](#) in the EU. This represented a slight decrease compared to 1 January 2024, when this figure was 4 241 505.⁴²⁷ The highest ratio of BoTP per thousand people was observed in the Czech Republic (35.65), Poland (27.1), Estonia (25.8) and Latvia (25.7) whereas the corresponding figure across the EU was 9.48 per thousand people.⁴²⁸ In 2024, 737 170 decisions were taken providing temporary protection to people displaced from Ukraine – a 27% decrease compared to 2023 (see Figure 14).

While the EU-wide extension of temporary protection until March 2026 ensured continued access to basic rights, countries varied significantly in how they adapted legal status procedures, restructured welfare support and promoted long-term integration. A common trend at national level was the gradual transition from emergency responses to more sustainable, system-integrated approaches – emphasising self-reliance, labour market access and equal treatment with other residents.

Changes concerning the legal status of BoTP were primarily driven by the Council Decision to extend temporary

protection,⁴²⁹ as well as efforts to facilitate long-term integration⁴³⁰ and to improve administrative efficiency, data accuracy and legal certainty.⁴³¹

In 2024, 20 EMN Member and Observer Countries⁴³² updated their policies on the legal status of BoTP, reflecting both the evolving situation on the ground and for EU Member States – the Council's decision to extend temporary protection. A key focus was placed on extending the validity of residence documents to ensure that BoTP could legally remain in the territory,⁴³³ while also offering pathways to alternative residence permits beyond temporary protection.⁴³⁴ Germany and the Netherlands tightened rules for non-Ukrainian third-country nationals.

EMN Member and Observer Countries⁴³⁵ introduced a wide range of changes to the rights of BoTP, driven by the need to facilitate long-term integration,⁴³⁶ promote selfreliance and balance support with budgetary sustainability.⁴³⁷

Access or the means to access accommodation was changed in a greater number of countries than any other area of rights. Sixteen EMN Member and Observer Countries⁴³⁸ made changes to accommodation and housing for BoTP. Seven EMN Member Countries⁴³⁹ limited the provision of accommodation due to budgetary constraints and efforts to encourage long-term integration, and five countries⁴⁴⁰ expanded or prolonged accommodation capacity or housing support.

Eight countries⁴⁴¹ reported on new measures on access to medical care, to integrate BoTP into national healthcare systems,⁴⁴² ensure the longer-term sustainability of healthcare provisions⁴⁴³ and address a growing demand

427 Eurostat, Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month by citizenship, age and sex - monthly data migr_asytpsm, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYTPSM_custom_17124989/default/table?lang=en, accessed 13 June 2025.

428 Eurostat, Beneficiaries of temporary protection by citizenship - per thousand persons, migr_asytpspop, date of extraction 26 June 2025.

429 AT, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, HR, FI, FR, IT, LT, LV, LU, NL, PL, PT, SK, and NO, RS, MD.

430 AT, CZ, EE, FR, IT, PL, SK.

431 FI, LV, NL, SK, and NO, GE.

432 AT, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, HR, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LV, LU, NL, PL, PT, SK, and NO, RS, MD.

433 AT, DE, EE, EL, IE, IT, LU, NL, PT, SK.

434 AT, CZ, FR, IT, PL, SK.

435 AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK, and NO, GE.

436 AT, BE, PL, SE, SK, and NO.

437 IE, NL, SE, SK.

438 BE, BG, CZ, EE, EL, FR, IE, IT, LT, LU, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK, and NO, GE.

439 CZ, IE, IT, LT, SE, SI, SK.

440 CZ, IT, LV, LU, and GE.

441 CZ, EE, EL, IE, LT, LV, SE, SK, and GE.

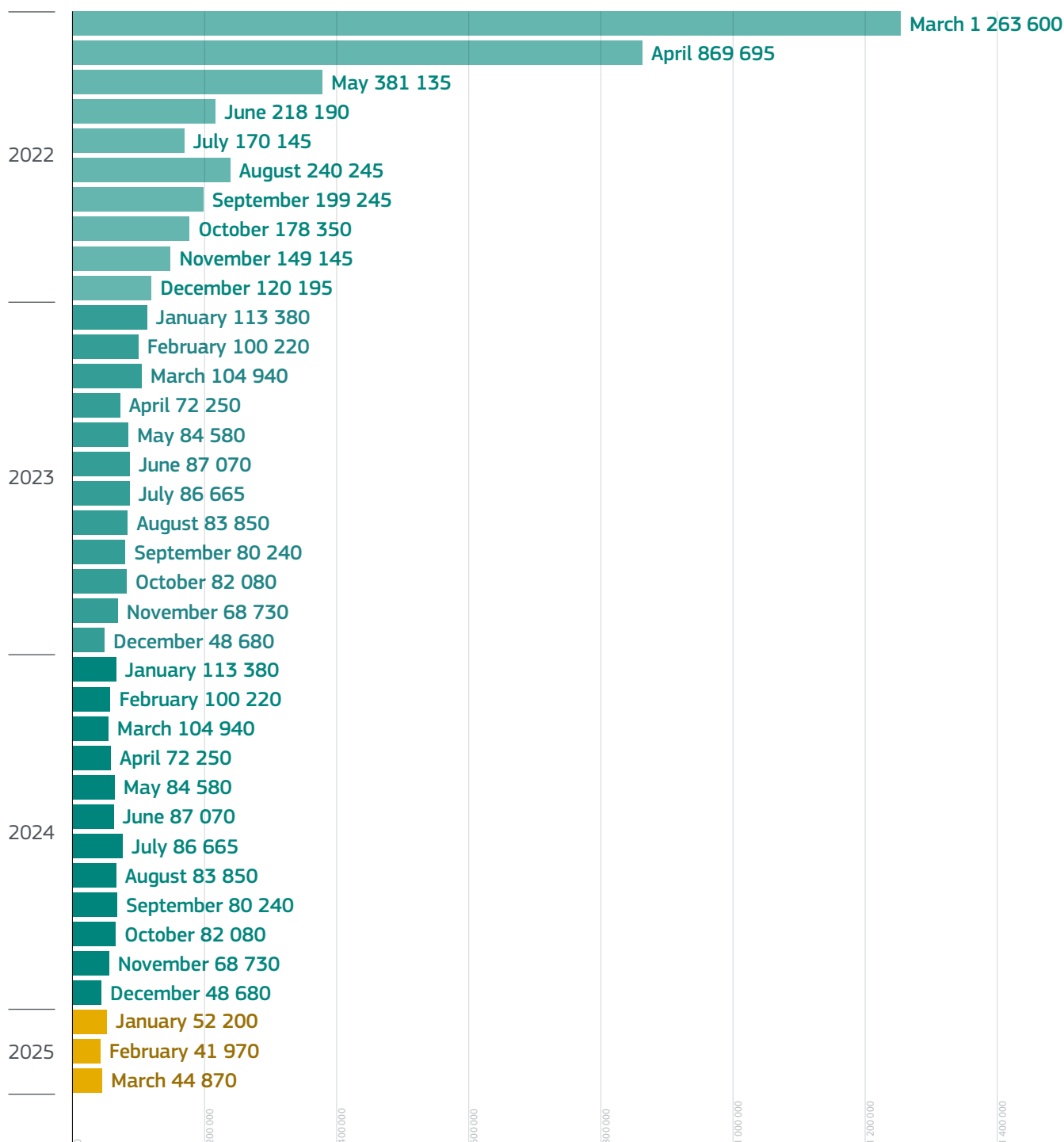
442 EE, PL, SE, and GE.

443 EE, IE, PL, SE, and GE.

for medical services.⁴⁴⁴ Ten EMN Member Countries⁴⁴⁵ adjusted social assistance for BoTP to stimulate self-sufficiency and limit access to social assistance,⁴⁴⁶ and to provide targeted support, particularly to vulnerable people.⁴⁴⁷ Access to education also saw changes in 10 EMN Member

and Observer Countries, which introduced compulsory school attendance,⁴⁴⁸ abolished certain exemptions (such as those for exams and language knowledge),⁴⁴⁹ and took measures to provide financial support or resources for displaced school children and students from Ukraine.⁴⁵⁰

Figure 14: Number of decisions providing temporary protection to people displaced from Ukraine due to Russia's invasion, EU and Norway, March 2022–March 2025



Note: March to July 2022 excludes Germany, as data not available. Source: Eurostat (migr_asytpfm), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

444 CZ, LT, SK.

445 BG, CZ, IE, IT, LV, LT, NL, SE, SI, SK.

446 IE, NL, SE, SI, SK.

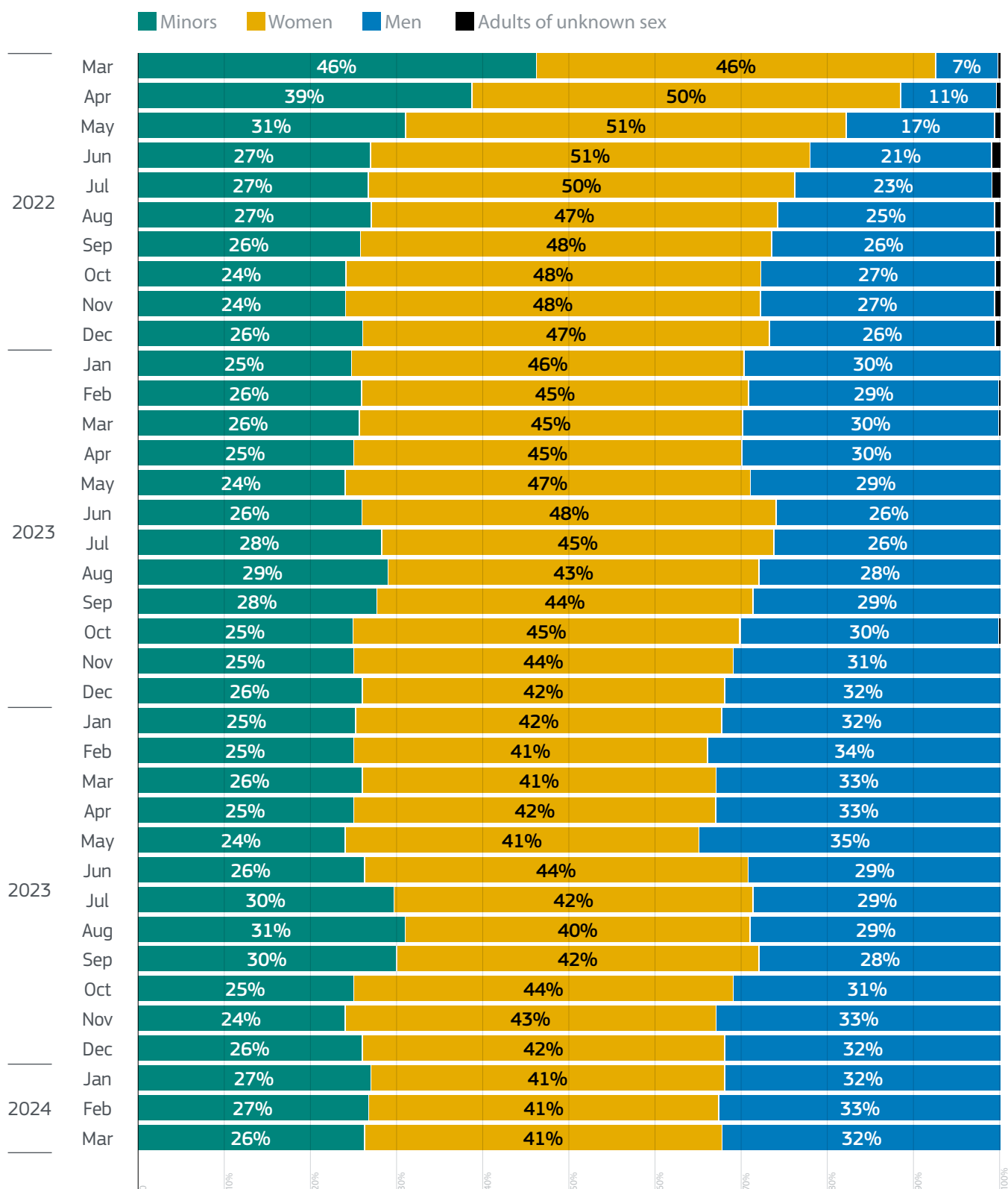
447 BG, CZ, IT, LV, LT.

448 AT, PL, SE, SK.

449 CZ, LT.

450 HR and NO, MD.

Figure 15: Decisions providing temporary protection to people displaced from Ukraine due to Russia's invasion by main population groups, EU and Norway, March 2022–March 2025



Note: March 2022 to December 2024 excludes Hungary, as data by sex and age are not available. March to July 2022 also excludes Germany, as data not available.

Source: Eurostat (migr_asypfm), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.



5.2. EU DEVELOPMENTS

On 25 June 2024, the European Council extended temporary protection status for Ukrainian refugees by an additional year, prolonging it from 4 March 2025 to 4 March 2026.⁴⁵¹ This extension ensures continued legal

residence and access to employment, housing, education, healthcare and social assistance for Ukrainian nationals who fled the Russian invasion.



5.3. OVERARCHING AND CROSSCUTTING DEVELOPMENTS

Overarching developments include those in EMN Observer Countries that are not covered by the EU Temporary Protection Directive but provide their own equivalent or other types of protection to those fleeing the war in Ukraine. In 2024, EMN Observer Countries Moldova and Serbia extended protection for displaced persons from Ukraine for another year. In Norway, however, people fleeing from areas of Ukraine that the Norwegian Immigration authorities consider to be safe are no longer covered by the Norwegian collective protection scheme, with certain exceptions. Georgia extended visa-free stay for Ukrainian citizens from two to three years to ensure a sufficient legal stay period for those fleeing the war.

Other overarching developments⁴⁵² related to BoTP in 2024 were reported by three EMN Member Countries and were diverse, ranging from planning support measures⁴⁵³

to registering BoTP in population registers⁴⁵⁴ and launching a multiannual support programme.⁴⁵⁵

Latvia approved the 2025 Plan of Measures for Supporting Ukrainian Civilians, outlining actions to be implemented by various institutions and the resources committed for supporting BoTP in 2025. Sweden had allowed BoTP who had been provided with temporary protection for two years to register in the Swedish Population Register and be given a personal identity number. In 2024, this was reduced to one year, which expanded the rights and benefits of BoTP and aimed to improve their living conditions.

In Bulgaria, IOM Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Red Cross launched a holistic, EU-funded four-year programme to support BoTP, focusing on socio-economic inclusion through access to essential services, skills development and local authority capacity-building, starting in January 2025.



5.4. LEGAL STATUS

Twenty EMN Member and Observer Countries⁴⁵⁶ made changes concerning the legal status of BoTP in 2024. These changes aimed to update or extend the validity of documents, following the Council Decision, to: extend temporary protection allowing BoTP to remain in the territory;⁴⁵⁷ offer BoTP alternative residence permits on grounds other than temporary protection;⁴⁵⁸ restrict temporary protection for non-Ukrainian third-country nationals;⁴⁵⁹ and streamline the procedure for providing temporary protection, as well as improve data accuracy and the monitoring of legal status.⁴⁶⁰ The procedure to extend residence documents in line with the Council Decision differed across countries, ranging from automatic extensions to requiring some form of registration.

In five EMN Member Countries⁴⁶¹ the validity of the residence permits for temporary protection was automatically extended with no further action needed from BoTP. Austria updated ID cards with a new validity date and sent the new cards to BoTP.

Four EMN Member Countries⁴⁶² updated their processes for issuing ID/biometric cards to BoTP. In Estonia, the

process for renewing residence permit cards was streamlined through an automated online system, allowing applicants to receive a new card without visiting a service point or undergoing additional checks. Luxembourg and the Slovak Republic replaced paper certificates with biometric cards.

Six EMN Member Countries⁴⁶³ took measures to offer BoTP alternative residence permits on grounds other than temporary protection. In Austria, legislative changes enabled displaced persons already employed in the country to switch to the regular settlement scheme if certain requirements are met (as specified in Section 5.5.5 below). In the Czech Republic, BoTP who meet the specified conditions – including economic independence and temporary protection for at least two years – can obtain a special long-term residence permit for five years. In France, as of December 2024, prefectures must automatically examine whether BoTP can be granted a permanent residence permit under other laws, to reduce the administrative burden on prefectures in charge of renewing residence authorisations for temporary protection every six months. This will also make the right of residence for

⁴⁵¹ Council of the EU, 'Ukrainian refugees: Council extends temporary protection until March 2026', Press Release, 25 June 2024,

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/25/ukrainian-refugees-council-extends-temporary-protection-until-march-2026/>, accessed 17 February 2025.

⁴⁵² BG, LV, SE.

⁴⁵³ LV.

⁴⁵⁴ SE.

⁴⁵⁵ BG.

⁴⁵⁶ AT, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, HR, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LV, LU, NL, PL, PT, SK, and NO, RS, MD.

⁴⁵⁷ AT, DE, EE, EL, FR, IE, IT, LU, NL, PT, SK.

⁴⁵⁸ AT, CZ, FR, IT, PL.

⁴⁵⁹ DE, NL.

⁴⁶⁰ FI, LV, NL, SK, and NO, GE.

⁴⁶¹ AT, DE, EL, ES, SK.

⁴⁶² EE, LU, NL, SK.

⁴⁶³ AT, CZ, FR, IT, PL, SK.

BoTP more permanent and improve their integration. Italy allowed temporary protection permits to be converted to work permits, while, in Poland, Ukrainian citizens with a national identification number marked 'UKR' could apply for temporary residence permits linked to work, business or family reunification. The Slovak Republic facilitated the process of obtaining a residence permit for the purpose of employment for BoTP under certain conditions.

Germany and the Netherlands restricted temporary protection for non-Ukrainian thirdcountry nationals. In Germany, any permits issued to non-Ukrainian thirdcountry nationals with a temporary Ukrainian right of residence expired on 4 March 2025. In the Netherlands, temporary protection for third-country nationals who had held temporary residence permits in Ukraine before the war officially ended on 4 March 2024. While return decisions were issued with a 28-day departure period and a financial return incentive, legal challenges led to a provisional extension of rights until a CJEU ruling⁴⁶⁴ that EU Member States could lawfully terminate protection for this group. Lithuania revoked special admission conditions for foreign nationals unable to return to Ukraine but not eligible for temporary protection, including the right to work during examination of their residence permit applications.

Four EMN Member and Observer Countries⁴⁶⁵ extended temporary protection or other protection/statuses provided to persons displaced from Ukraine. In Latvia, legal amendments adopted in 2024 provided for Ukrainians to be granted temporary residence permits for three years instead of two. The Slovak Republic streamlined the procedure for providing temporary protection, including simplifying administrative processes in cases involving the birth of a child to a temporary protection holder, and introducing the option for BoTP to apply for a five-year residence permit. Effective from 1 January 2025, Norway extended the maximum duration of temporary collective protection for foreigners from three to five years, to alleviate practical challenges for immigration authorities and allow more time to assess the future situation in Ukraine.

Latvia amended the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians, requiring all Ukrainian civilians to hold a valid residence permit to improve data accuracy and aid planning, as the number of BoTP remained uncertain. Lithuania introduced an obligation for BoTP to inform the Migration Department if they move abroad. In this case, the Migration Department could revoke the temporary residence permit or terminate the examination of the application.



5.5. RIGHTS

5.5.1. Access to suitable accommodation and/or means to obtain housing

EMN Member and Observer Countries⁴⁶⁶ made changes to accommodation and housing for BoTP, with seven EMN Member Countries⁴⁶⁷ limiting the provision of accommodation as a result of overall housing shortages and other practical constraints,⁴⁶⁸ and others limiting efforts to encourage long-term integration.⁴⁶⁹ Five countries⁴⁷⁰ expanded or prolonged accommodation capacity or housing support, driven by the need to scale up capacity and enhance or prolong housing support.

Seven EMN Member Countries⁴⁷¹ reported taking measures to limit state-provided or state-funded accommodation. The Czech Republic reduced the duration of state accommodation for newly arrived BoTP from 150 to 90 days. In the Slovak Republic, the period was set at 120 days in 2024, with plans to reduce it further to 60 days in 2025. Ireland and Lithuania introduced time limits for newly arrived BoTP of a maximum of 90 days in Ireland and six months in Lithuania.

In Estonia, as of September 2024, BoTP are eligible for one-time compensation of housing costs only if they receive a residence permit for the first time and submit the rent compensation application within six months of receiving that initial residence permit. In Lithuania, another amendment removed the exemption allowing

BoTP to apply for housing rent compensation without declaring assets or income, ensuring equal treatment with other applicants for housing support. Lithuania eliminated financial assistance for private accommodation, while Slovenia reduced it. In Sweden, BoTP were removed from the Swedish Migration Agency's reception system upon registering in the Swedish population register, rendering them ineligible for housing or financial support from the agency. Instead, they gained access to support and financial compensation through the Swedish Social Insurance Agency or their local municipality.

Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway reinforced the role of municipalities in housing BoTP. The Netherlands reconfirmed municipal responsibilities for BoTP in law, while Norway introduced a White Paper that suggested simplifying and accelerating the process of finding suitable municipal housing for this group. Belgium's Flemish Region extended subsidies for local authorities providing reception services for BoTP until March 2026, supporting their transition to the private rental market.

Five EMN Member and Observer Countries⁴⁷² reported on measures to increase/prolong accommodation capacity or housing support. The Czech Republic adjusted housing allowances for BoTP by increasing deductible costs, unifying rates and maintaining higher support for vulnerable individuals, while providing emergency aid to better target assistance and encourage labour market participation. Meanwhile, a first round of projects funded under AMIF

⁴⁶⁴ Case-law of the CJEU, 19 December 2024, [Joined Cases C-244/24, C-290/24](#). Case-law of the CJEU, 19 December 2024, [Joined Cases C-244/24, C-290/24](#). Case-law of the CJEU, 19 December 2024, [Joined Cases C-244/24, C-290/24](#).

⁴⁶⁵ IE, LV, SK, and NO.

⁴⁶⁶ BE, BG, CZ, EE, EL, IE, IT, LT, LU, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK, and NO, GE.

⁴⁶⁷ CZ, IE, IT, LT, SE, SI, SK.

⁴⁶⁸ CZ, IE, LT, SE, SI, SK.

⁴⁶⁹ BE, NL, SK, and NO.

⁴⁷⁰ CZ, IT, LV, LU, and GE.

⁴⁷¹ CZ, EE, IE, IT, LT, SE, SI, SK.

⁴⁷² CZ, IT, LV, LU, and GE.

to help BoTP find affordable housing were launched in 8 out of 14 regions, with a second open call for proposals in December ensuring nationwide coverage by the end of 2025. Italy extended previous support measures and allocated funding for 359 additional living spaces across 22 projects from 1 May to 31 December 2024, extending previous support measures. Latvia extended the deadline for accommodation and catering support for vulnerable groups to align with the EU Council's extension. Luxembourg opened a new accommodation facility for BoTP with a capacity of 118 beds, while several existing facilities were upgraded to expand capacity. Georgia extended its housing support programme until 1 April 2025, allowing Ukrainian citizens to receive a monthly housing allowance of GEL 300 per family (around €96) and a monthly subsistence allowance of GEL 45 per person (around €14).

5.5.2. Access to medical care, including in relation to mental health

Eight EMN Member and Observer Countries⁴⁷³ reported new measures related to access to medical care, primarily driven by the need to integrate BoTP into national healthcare systems,⁴⁷⁴ to ensure the longer-term sustainability of healthcare provisions⁴⁷⁵ and address a growing demand for medical services.⁴⁷⁶

Four EMN Member and Observer Countries⁴⁷⁷ stopped specialised healthcare arrangements for BoTP, granting them access to the general national healthcare system under the same conditions as other residents. For example, Estonia announced that, as of 1 January 2025, the Health Insurance Fund would no longer receive additional state funding to cover BoTP medical care through specialised agreements, and that BoTP would receive family medical care under the same conditions as Estonian residents. This requires them to register with a family doctor, as the Health Insurance Fund will no longer receive additional state funding to cover their medical care through specialised agreements.

Other countries⁴⁷⁸ adjusted or extended their medical support. Ireland, for instance, allocated €50 million to the Health Service Executive's Refugees and Applicants Seeking Protection health model, which also supports BoTP. This ensures continued service delivery and expansion to meet the high demand from nearly 132 000 new arrivals from Ukraine and other countries, through flexible local healthcare provisions.

5.5.3. Access to social welfare and subsistence assistance

Ten EMN Member Countries⁴⁷⁹ adjusted social assistance for BoTP to stimulate selfsufficiency, limit access

to social assistance⁴⁸⁰ and provide targeted support, particularly to vulnerable people.⁴⁸¹

Four EMN Member Countries⁴⁸² took measures to reduce or limit access to social assistance for BoTP, to ensure the sustainability of welfare systems, promote selfsufficiency and align support for BoTP with that of other migrant groups or residents. The Netherlands, for example, introduced amendments to promote selfreliance for BoTP, including introducing a personal contribution for displaced persons, the mandatory withdrawal of living allowances for those employed, and stricter enforcement of the 28-day absence from the country rule.

Five EMN Member Countries⁴⁸³ adjusted targeted support for specific BoTP. The Czech Republic and Latvia prolonged financial aid for vulnerable groups, particularly BoTP with disabilities. Bulgaria increased one-time assistance based on the increased poverty line, while the Czech Republic increased humanitarian benefits for disabled children and adults. Latvia increased both the one-time employment-related benefit for BoTP – linked to the national minimum wage – and the separate crisis allowance provided by local social services in emergency situations. Meanwhile, Lithuania and Italy expanded social services to better support BoTP. Lithuania offered state-funded care services for vulnerable BoTP, based on vulnerability assessments of visible or documented disability, prior institutional care in Ukraine, or other clearly identified needs, as determined by municipal social workers or registration centre staff.

5.5.4. Access to education for minors (including educational support)

Ten EMN Member Countries took measures to strengthen the educational integration of school-aged children from Ukraine into their national education systems by introducing compulsory school attendance,⁴⁸⁴ abolishing certain exemptions,⁴⁸⁵ and providing financial support or resources for displaced school children and students from Ukraine.⁴⁸⁶

Four EMN Member Countries⁴⁸⁷ adjusted the minimum age for compulsory school attendance requirements. In Austria, as of July 2024, the obligation to attend compulsory education until the age of 18 also applied to young people from Ukraine displaced by the war. The Slovak Republic approved legislation to introduce full compulsory education in the next school year, starting from 1 September 2025. Similarly, Poland required children aged 7–18 displaced from Ukraine to attend Polish schools from 1 September 2024, except for final-year Ukrainian students who could continue distance learning. Poland also extended free Polish language tuition, introducing intercultural assistants and implementing European Social

473 CZ, EE, IE, LT, LV, SE, SK, and GE.

474 EE, PL, SE, and GE.

475 EE, PL, SE, and GE.

476 CZ, LT, SK.

477 EE, PL, SE, and GE.

478 CZ, IE, LT, LV, SK.

479 BG, CZ, IE, IT, LV, LT, NL, SE, SI, SK.

480 IE, NL, SE, SI, SK.

481 BG, CZ, IT, LV, LT.

482 IE, NL, SE, SK.

483 CZ, IT, LV, LT.

484 AT, PL, SE, SK.

485 CZ, LT.

486 HR, and NO, MD.

487 AT, PL, SE, SK.

Fund+ projects to support migrant student integration. In contrast, Cyprus renewed its decision allowing students displaced by the war in Ukraine to be exempt from mandatory attendance at public schools, so that they can continue distance learning under the Ukrainian education system but requiring them to submit progress reports twice a year until the end of the school year.

The Czech Republic, Estonia and Lithuania abolished certain exemptions for Ukrainian pupils and students. The Czech Republic abolished segregated classes, restricted curriculum modifications to those with temporary protection for less than 12 months, maintained standard admission rules for secondary schools, and required all teachers to meet Czech language requirements. Estonia began its transition to a fully Estonian language education system, starting with kindergarten and grades 1 and 4, including minors under temporary protection, as part of a phased plan set to continue until 2030. Lithuania abolished exam exemptions for students from Ukraine for the 2024/2025 academic year, ensuring equal treatment with other national groups.

Croatia, Norway and Moldova implemented targeted measures to provide financial support or resources for displaced school children and students from Ukraine. Croatia's Ministry of Science, Education and Youth adopted measures to co-finance various educational expenses for displaced Ukrainian students, including outofclassroom activities, accommodation, meals and additional support programmes, with the aim of easing financial burdens on families facing high living costs. Norway introduced temporary legal changes to expand kindergarten capacity for displaced children from Ukraine and extended the time limit for municipalities to provide primary and lower secondary education from one to three months, allowing separate language adaptation classes in response to the high influx of refugees from Ukraine. Moldova's Ministry of Education and Research continues to support the education of children displaced from Ukraine through an online resource.

5.5.5. Access to the labour market

Measures were taken by seven EMN Member Countries⁴⁸⁸ to enhance the labour market integration of BoTP.

To facilitate the transition to alternative residence permits, Austria enabled BoTP already employed in Austria to apply for a Red-White-Red Card Plus. This provides unlimited labour market access if: they have been employed for a total of at least 12 months within the last 24 months prior to submitting the application; and they were subject to full insurance or insured as a self-employed person for at least 12 months within the last 24 months. Italy allowed BoTP to convert their permits into residence permits for

work purposes. Similarly, Germany issued recommendations for authorities to facilitate the transition of BoTP to training or employment permits under the Residence Act, providing legal certainty for both individuals and employers amid labour market needs (see also Section 5.4 above).

Putting in place additional support and training in Belgium, Flanders strengthened labour market integration for BoTP by deploying 47 additional mediators at the Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB) and offering 2 000 Dutch training courses to reduce language barriers and improve employment opportunities. In Sweden, BoTP who register on the Swedish Population Register and obtain a personal number gain access to the Introduction Programme through the Public Employment Service, which provides tailored support, job opportunities and financial compensation to facilitate their integration into the labour market.

Exemptions to labour market tests were adopted in Lithuania and the Slovak Republic. Lithuania extended the exemption from state language proficiency requirements by one year, allowing BoTP to work without language restrictions for up to three years, while amendments also granted them the right to engage in selfemployment. The Slovak Republic waived the labour market test for those employed for at least six months and applying for temporary residence for the purpose of employment at the same job. It also granted BoTP the right to engage in business activities in the territory of the Slovak Republic to promote their economic independence and longterm integration.

5.5.6. Access to education for adults, including vocational training

Ten EMN Member and Observer Countries⁴⁸⁹ focused on education and skills development for BoTP.⁴⁹⁰

A key trend was the expansion of language and vocational training, with four EMN Member Countries⁴⁹¹ introducing new or improved programmes. Tailored to labour market needs, Croatia linked language training to employment sectors such as construction and tourism, while Luxembourg launched job-specific language courses to support Ukrainian jobseekers. Improved access to higher and adult education for BoTP was reported by six EMN Member and Observer Countries.⁴⁹² Austria extended tuition fee exemptions for Ukrainian students, and Bulgaria simplified admission for BoTP while offering state-subsidised language training. Norway expanded access to vocational and secondary education, ensuring that displaced adults can retrain and pursue new qualifications. Moldova signed a collaboration agreement between the State University of Moldova and Ukraine's V N Karazin National University, enabling joint study programmes in various academic fields.



5.6. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

The Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Norway took measures to support those who wished to go back

home to Ukraine voluntarily by facilitating their re-entry and reintegration.

488 AT, BE, DE, EE, IT, LT, SE, SK.

489 AT, BE, EE, FI, HR, LU, PT, SE, and NO, MD.

490 Some of the developments in relation to Ukrainian school children and students mentioned in 5.5.4 may also deal with young adults.

491 BE (the German-speaking Community), EE, HR, LU.

492 AT, BE, FI, PT, SE, and NO.

The Czech Republic implemented a pilot Assisted Return Programme to support Ukrainian nationals wishing to go back home voluntarily, facilitating 21 returns and addressing complex cases requiring additional assistance.

Belgium and Estonia introduced legislative changes to enhance family reunification for BoTP. Belgium expanded the categories of family members eligible for reunification under temporary protection to include the non-registered partners and parents of unmarried minors. Estonia aligned its family reunification rules with newly established marriage equality laws, including for BoTP.

Following a Council of State ruling on 17 January 2024, confirming that temporary protection for third-country nationals who previously had temporary residence in Ukraine would end on 4 March 2024 (see also Section 5.1), the Netherlands extended its return policy for this group to offer financial and logistical support for voluntary return to their countries of origin before that date.

6. UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS



6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines developments relevant for unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups.⁴⁹³ The majority of EMN Member and Observer Countries (22 out of 30)⁴⁹⁴ reported developments and measures concerning these groups. New EU legislation adopted under the Pact focused on improving the situation of unaccompanied minors and strengthening procedural safeguards, as well as access to reception and assistance.

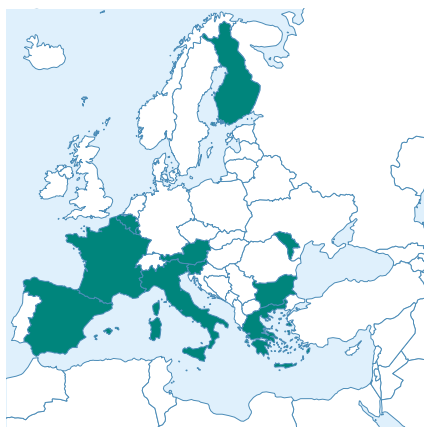
An important driver of measures reported by EMN Member and Observer Countries was the need to ensure that reception and other services offered were adequate and sufficient, considering the number of vulnerable persons and unaccompanied minors.⁴⁹⁵ In some cases, this meant increasing resources to meet a greater demand for services⁴⁹⁶ or maintain current capacities,⁴⁹⁷ while in a few countries this involved a reduction or recalibration of services, due to a lower influx or targeted efficiencies.⁴⁹⁸

Figure 16. Addressing needs of UAMs and other vulnerable groups

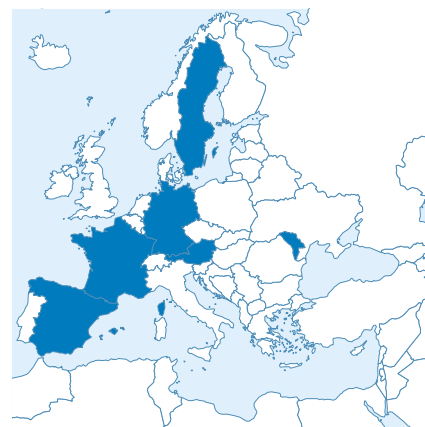
ADDRESSING NEEDS OF UAMS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS



Improving the identification and registration of UAMs (BE, FR, IT, PL)



Improving the reception of UAMs and other vulnerable groups (AT, BE, BG, EL, ES, FI, FR, IT, LU, SI, and MD)



Providing support to women victims of violence (AT, DE, ES, FR, SE, and MD)

The need to improve reception processes and enhance safeguards also inspired several legislative measures, training programmes and quality standards in several EMN Member Countries.⁴⁹⁹ When it comes to vulnerable adults, several countries concentrated on enhancing support to women who are victims of violence.⁵⁰⁰

In 2024, the number of unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in the EU and Norway fell to its lowest level since 2021. Boys represented 86.6% of unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in 2024, although the share of girls had steadily increased from 7.3% in 2021 to 13.3% in 2024. In 2024, nearly 18 000 first-instance asylum

⁴⁹³ Other vulnerable groups include disabled people, elderly people, LGBTQI people, pregnant women, persons with serious illnesses or mental disorders and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence.

⁴⁹⁴ AT, BE, BG, CY, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and MD.

⁴⁹⁵ BE, BG, CY, EL, FI, IE, IT.

⁴⁹⁶ AT, IE.

⁴⁹⁷ AT, BG, CY, EL, IT.

⁴⁹⁸ BE, FI.

⁴⁹⁹ BE, BG, CY, EL, FR, IE, IT, LU, NL, SE, SI.

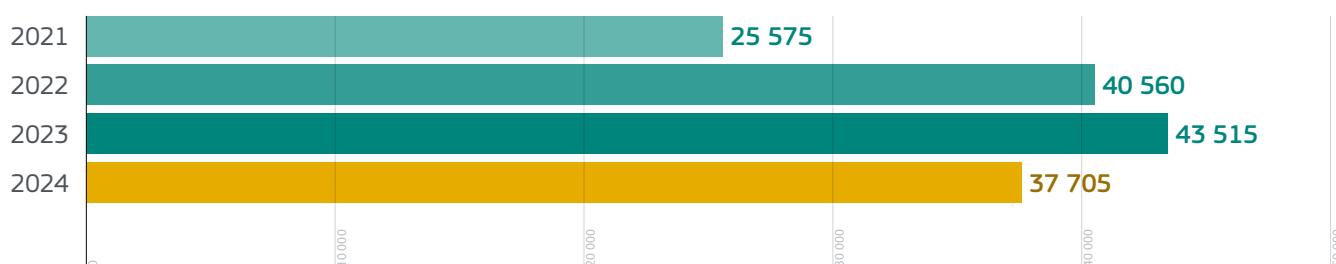
⁵⁰⁰ AT, BE, ES, FR, SE, and MD.

decisions were made for unaccompanied minors – up 10% from 2023 and 53% from 2022 (see Figure 19). About 47% of applications resulted in the provision of subsidiary protection status, 23% refugee status and 14% humanitarian status. A further 16% were rejected, which

is a significantly lower share than the rejection rate (49%) for all asylum applications at first instance (see Chapter 3). The share of decisions granting subsidiary protection status rose from 40.6% in 2023 to 46.4% in 2024, while the share of other decision types dropped.

Figure 17: Unaccompanied minors applying for asylum, EU and Norway, 2021-2024

Number of first-time asylum applicants



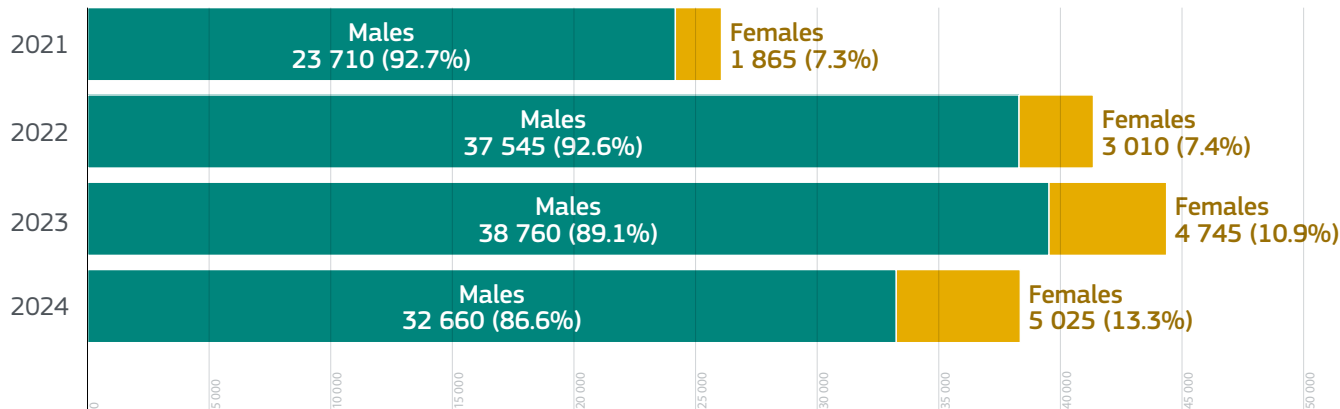
Note: Due to temporary derogations, data on unaccompanied minors first-time asylum applicants not available for France (2021 and 2022), and for Cyprus and Poland (2021 to 2023).

Data for 2024, estimation due to missing data for Poland.

Source: Eurostat (migr_asyumacta), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

Figure 18: Unaccompanied minors by sex, EU and Norway, 2021-2024

First-time asylum applicants, absolute number (and shares of males and females of the total)



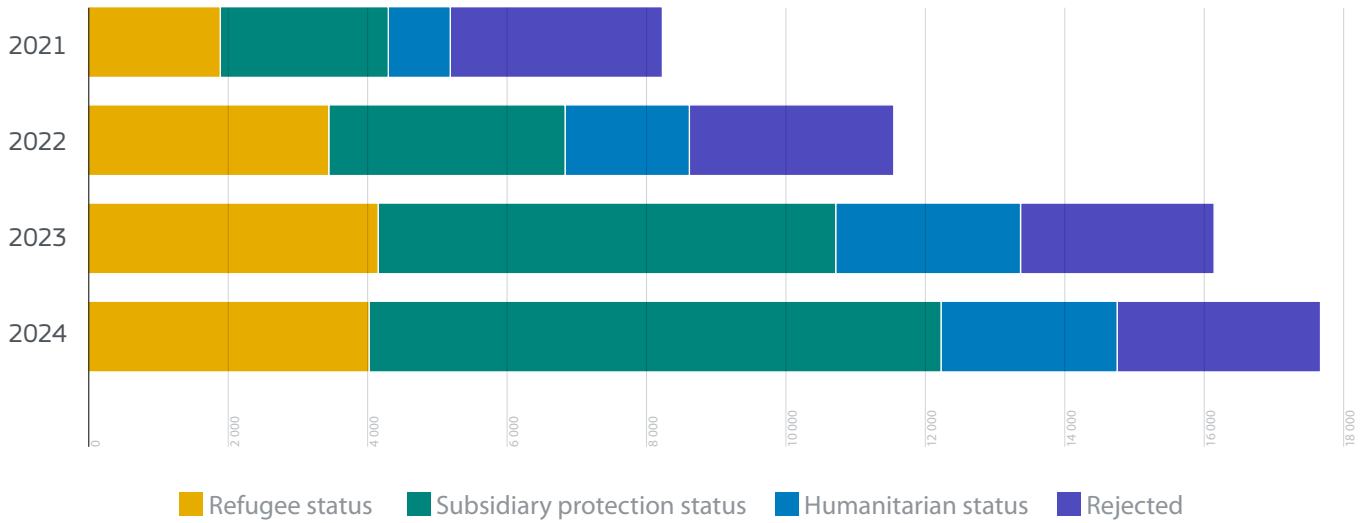
Note: Due to temporary derogations, data not available for France (2021 and 2022), and for Cyprus and Poland (2021 to 2023).

Data for 2024, estimation due to missing data for Poland.

Source: Eurostat (migr_asyumacta), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

Figure 19: Firstinstance asylum decisions on applications lodged by unaccompanied minors (third-country nationals) by outcome, EU and Norway, 2022 and 2023

Absolute number (and the share of the total)



Year	Refugee status number (share of total)	Subsidiary protection status number (share of total)	Humanitarian status number (share of total)	Rejected number (share of total)
2021	1 890 (23.0%)	2 400 (29.2%)	885 (10.8%)	3 030 (36.9%)
2022	3 440 (29.9%)	3 375 (29.3%)	1 775 (15.4%)	2 920 (25.4%)
2023	4 145 (25.8%)	6 535 (40.6%)	2 640 (16.4%)	2 765 (17.2%)
2024	4 015 (22.8%)	8 170 (46.4%)	2 515 (14.3%)	2 905 (16.5%)

Note: Excluding Poland, as data not available.

Source: Eurostat (migr_asyumdcfa), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

6.2. EU DEVELOPMENTS

In 2024, the Pact committed to protecting the fundamental rights of migrants, and the rights and best interests of children, stating that unaccompanied minors should receive ‘immediate assistance’ in the EU.⁵⁰¹ While there is no single definition of vulnerability or vulnerable persons or groups in the Pact, several categories appear across all instruments, and there is a common objective of acknowledging special needs when vulnerability is assessed.

Several instruments of the Pact expand or redefine procedural guarantees for unaccompanied minors and vulnerable groups:

- Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 (the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation) introduces time limits for appointing a representative or guardian and clarifies the procedure for designating the Member State

responsible for processing a request for asylum made by an unaccompanied minor, prioritising reunification with relatives where in the minor’s best interests. Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 (the Asylum Procedure Regulation) further regulates age assessment and generally exempts unaccompanied minors from border and accelerated examination procedures. Where screening takes place at an external border, this should follow a preliminary vulnerability check and the appointment of a representative for the minor.⁵⁰²

- Regulation (EU) 2024/1358 (the Eurodac Regulation)⁵⁰³ lowers to six the minimum age above which an unaccompanied minor’s biometric data may collected and stipulates that it be done by a trained official in the presence of a designated representative, with a focus on respecting the minor’s best interests.

501 European Commission, ‘Managing migration responsibly’, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/story-von-der-leyen-commission/managing-migration-responsibly_en, accessed 20 February 2025.

502 Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 introducing the screening of third-country nationals at the external borders and amending Regulations (EC) No 767/2008, (EU) 2017/2226, (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/817, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202401356, accessed 20 February 2025.

503 Regulation (EU) 2024/1358 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on the establishment of ‘Eurodac’ for the comparison of biometric data in order to effectively apply Regulations (EU) 2024/1351 and (EU) 2024/1350 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Directive 2001/55/EC and to identify illegally staying third-country nationals and stateless persons and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States’ law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes, amending Regulations (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/818 of the European Parliament, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1358/oj/eng>, accessed 17 February 2025.

- Regulation (EU) 2024/1350 (the Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework) lists unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable individuals as eligible

for admission under a resettlement programme or for humanitarian admission.



6.3. IDENTIFICATION AND REGISTRATION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

6.3.1. Identification and registration

Four EMN Member Countries⁵⁰⁴ reported key developments with regard to the identification and registration of unaccompanied minors, driven by a need to improve identification, detection and follow-up actions,⁵⁰⁵ and to tackle misuse of the asylum system.⁵⁰⁶ In Poland, for example, to enhance follow-up actions, the retention period for unaccompanied minors' records in national data systems was extended from 12 to 36 months, to enable better assessment of their eligibility to receive education benefits upon reaching majority.

To tackle possible misuse, Belgium implemented a 'fast-lane' system to expedite the process for international protection applicants when there are manifest doubts over their alleged status as minors. To better identify juvenile offenders and improve the tracing of minors who have committed multiple offences, France adopted a repository of unaccompanied minors suspected of having committed a criminal offence, making it possible to collect identity data and fingerprints without the minor's consent. France also legislated to allow the removal of extended benefits and child welfare services for former unaccompanied

minors who are given an order to leave French territory, notably if found to pose a serious threat to public order.

6.3.2. Missing unaccompanied minors

Only Sweden reported key developments on this aspect, with new legislation allowing the police to maintain a registry of unaccompanied minors reported as missing and to process data from other government agencies to support investigations.

6.3.3. Age assessment

To enhance efficiency and act in the best interests of the child, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Sweden reported updating guidance or procedures in relation to age assessment. Guidance issued by the Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees sought to avoid unnecessary medical examinations to determine an unaccompanied minor's age. Cyprus drafted Standard Operating Procedures (with the support of the EUAA) and Sweden updated standardised processes to ensure accuracy and consistency in line with identified best practices.



6.4. RECEPTION AND CARE OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Eleven EMN Member Countries⁵⁰⁷ reported key developments affecting the reception and care of unaccompanied minors, such as increasing resources⁵⁰⁸ or expanding accommodation capacities.⁵⁰⁹ In the case of four EMN Member Countries, changes were driven by a growing number of unaccompanied minors arriving,⁵¹⁰ while in Belgium changes in reception capacity reflected lower influx and occupancy rates. Seven EMN Member Countries reported revising their standards,⁵¹¹ procedures⁵¹² or quality assurance processes⁵¹³ with the objectives of enhancing reception conditions for unaccompanied minors⁵¹⁴ or easing the administrative burden for authorities.⁵¹⁵

Austria, Finland and Italy reported changes to the allocation of funding. In Italy and Austria, additional resources or funding were made available to enhance or maintain capacities for the reception and care of unaccompanied minors. However, Finland reduced the reception allowance paid to unaccompanied minors in line with new government objectives to achieve budgetary savings.

Three EMN Member Countries⁵¹⁶ sought to increase their capacity to provide accommodation in response to a growing number of arriving unaccompanied minors. Italy reported launching several EU-funded projects to create additional reception places, as well as taking measures to incentivise foster care as a preferred reception measure for unaccompanied minors arriving in the country.

France, Greece and Slovenia sought to clarify the conditions for accommodating unaccompanied minors. To combat the issue of unaccompanied minors living in precarious conditions or homelessness, Greece adopted SOPs for emergency accommodation facilities. Similarly, Slovenia issued a decree defining adequate accommodation, 24-hour care and treatment for unaccompanied minors in the country, while Bulgaria introduced a 'safe zone' for unaccompanied minors in one of its asylum reception centres. In Luxembourg, the National Office for Children took over responsibility for accommodating, supervising and providing acute additional assistance to

⁵⁰⁴ BE, FR, IT, PL.

⁵⁰⁵ IT, PL.

⁵⁰⁶ BE, FR.

⁵⁰⁷ AT, BE, BG, CY, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, SI.

⁵⁰⁸ AT, FI.

⁵⁰⁹ BG, CY, IE, IT.

⁵¹⁰ BG, CY, IE, IT.

⁵¹¹ FR, EL, SI.

⁵¹² BE, EL.

⁵¹³ IE, IT, LU.

⁵¹⁴ EL, FR, SI.

⁵¹⁵ BE, EL.

⁵¹⁶ BG, IE, IT.

unaccompanied minors. After reports of local authorities making extensive use of unauthorised facilities (e.g. hotels) to house unaccompanied minors, France further specified that such alternative accommodation should be resorted to in limited circumstances, by derogation and only temporarily.

Belgium and Greece introduced simplified procedures for unaccompanied minors to renew their international protection applicant card and register for health insurance, respectively. Both measures sought to tackle the administrative burden. In Belgium, this was done by allowing minors to register for health insurance while waiting to be

appointed a guardian, because of the long waiting times involved.

Ireland, Italy and Luxembourg reported actions to enhance reception processes. Training programmes provided for professionals dealing with unaccompanied minors in Luxembourg focused on targeted, highquality support. Italy adopted a decree further defining how interviews with unaccompanied minors entering reception facilities must be conducted to identify the minor's best interests and potential protection needs. Following inspections, Ireland's Child and Family Agency committed to introducing a new model of care and quality management system for reception and the provision of services.



6.5. GUARDIANSHIP

Belgium and Greece reported significant developments on guardianship in 2024 with the aim of ensuring that all unaccompanied minors have a guardian. Greece established its national guardianship system and a Guardianship Council for unaccompanied minors to ensure uniform implementation and accessibility. The country also set up an electronic platform to help implement and monitor guardianships, as well as SOPs and training. In addition, Greece made it compulsory for a guardian to be appointed for all asylum proceedings, except for the lodging of an application for international protection by a minor over 15 years of age.

Box 5: Belgian measures to increase the number of guardians

In Belgium, measures were taken to increase the number of guardians, including recruiting more of them and providing financial incentives for setting up guardianships. This resulted in Belgium cutting down its waiting list and meeting its objective of assigning guardians to unaccompanied minors within eight weeks.



6.6. FAMILY REUNIFICATION FOR UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Measures on family reunification were reported by Belgium and Italy. In Italy, legislation was adopted to facilitate the tracing of an unaccompanied minor's family, and their emotional and family relationships, and to enable family reunification when in the minor's best interests.

To combat misuse and bring its legislation in line with EU jurisprudence, Belgium shortened, from 12 to 3 months, the period during which an unaccompanied minor's parents can apply for family reunification in cases where the minor has received protection and reached majority during the asylum procedure.



6.7. STATUS DETERMINATION PROCEDURES AND PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS FOR UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Three EMN Member Countries reported key developments on safeguards, all with different drivers, including: to implement more child-friendly judicial procedures;⁵¹⁷ to ensure that detention is only used as a last resort and for as short a time as possible;⁵¹⁸ and to comply with upcoming national legislation⁵¹⁹ or national jurisprudence.⁵²⁰

Belgium launched two pilot projects involving unaccompanied minors to develop more sensitive hearings and tailored convocation letters (see Chapter 3). The Netherlands clarified its rules on detaining unaccompanied

minors during asylum or return procedures, ensuring that detention is only used as a last resort and for the shortest time possible.

Finland's highest administrative court ruled that a minor applying for international protection should be treated as such, even if they reach majority during the application process.

517 BE.
518 NL.
519 NL.
520 FI.



6.8. TRANSITION TO ADULthood FOR UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Cyprus, Greece and Latvia reported measures to extend support to all minors without parents or guardians (not just those in migration) who reach adulthood. All measures included provisions on vocational education, with Cyprus and Greece also reporting the inclusion of language courses.

Aiming for budgetary savings instead, Finland lowered the age limit for former unaccompanied minors to receive follow-up care from 25 to 23.

Box 6: Greece's support for unaccompanied minors' transition to adulthood (the HELIOS junior programme)

Greece introduced provisions on vocational education and language courses for unaccompanied minors transitioning to adulthood in 2024. Aside from educational aspects, Greece reported additional support services such as individual guidance, accommodation in supervised settings for up to 18 months, support to acquire certifications and official documents, and a financial allowance. The country also launched an EU-funded project to expand the provision of specialised services across its territory, with a focus on mental health, legal aid, support to prevent school dropout, and transition to adulthood.



6.9. OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

Eleven EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵²¹ reported developments affecting other vulnerable groups, driven by a need to enhance authorities' capacities and processes, or to strengthen safeguards and support for LGBTQI applicants for international protection⁵²² and victims of gender-based violence.⁵²³

Six EMN Observer and Member Countries⁵²⁴ reported adopting measures to combat gender-based violence. The Austrian Integration Department dedicated funds to combating sexual violence such as forced marriage, abduction or female genital mutilation. This included funding for a coordination office providing advice and support on issues related to female genital mutilation, and for the National Competence Centre for the Prevention of Abduction and Family Violence. The country also ran multilingual information campaigns for victims of violence, with women and girls in migration found to be generally less aware of the services available. Improving information accessibility was at the core of the new gender-based violence policy adopted by the Swedish Migration Agency, which prioritised vulnerability and vulnerability assessment in the revision of its reception policy. Spain introduced a new residence permit for victims of sexual violence, including women and their children.

New developments regarding sexual orientation and identity were reported by Germany and Malta, with the

latter introducing legal recognition of non-binary genders in all official documents. Cooperation between civil society and national authorities in Germany sought to address the reception and protection needs of vulnerable groups in asylum procedures, such as LGBTQI applicants, who are particularly affected by intersectional discrimination and at greater risk of violence, assaults and hostility in shared accommodation and reception centres.

In Belgium, Greece and Ireland, there were further changes to the authorities' capacity and processes for dealing with vulnerable groups. Guidelines issued by the Belgian Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) sought to better address the specific procedural needs of applicants and support the CGRS in assessing applications equally. Greece's largest cities, Athens and Thessalonica, established units dedicated specifically to reviewing applications for international protection made by individuals from vulnerable groups as defined in law. In Ireland, standardised procedures were adopted to streamline the provision of accommodation for pregnant asylum seekers. In addition, to free up internal resources and address an increase in arrivals and pressure on available accommodation, the Irish International Protection Accommodation Services temporarily suspended and later outsourced its vulnerability assessment programme. The programme was partly resumed for certain groups in November 2024.

521 AT, BE, DE, EL, ES, FR, IE, IT, MT, SE, and MD.

522 BE, DE, MT.

523 AT, BE, ES, FR, SE, and MD.

524 AT, BE, ES, FR, SE, and MD.

7. INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

7.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines developments in the integration and inclusion of migrants. Language acquisition is an overarching theme in national strategies, education, labour market integration and basic services. The developments were largely driven by the need to ensure the participation of third-country nationals in their host country's labour market and wider society, as well as to improve anti-discrimination and anti-racism actions.

During 2024, the EU continued to implement its 2021–2027 Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, while the European Year of Skills came to an end.⁵²⁵

Thirteen EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵²⁶ reported measures to increase the integration and inclusion of migrants in 2024, including amending national strategies to boost labour market integration,⁵²⁷ promote local language proficiency,⁵²⁸ enhance digitalisation,⁵²⁹ and strengthen societal integration.⁵³⁰

Eight EMN Member Countries also revised measures to strengthen or expand stakeholder collaboration and efforts to establish integration policies at regional and local levels.⁵³¹

Twelve EMN Member Countries reported changes with regard to education and training.⁵³² Five EMN Member and Observer Countries recorded developments in language acquisition and inclusion in early childhood education.⁵³³

Language instruction and integration in primary and secondary education were advanced in seven EMN Member and Observer Countries.⁵³⁴ In tertiary education, seven EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵³⁵ also reported the importance of language acquisition. Similarly, knowledge of the national language was highlighted as a crucial aspect of measures for labour market integration⁵³⁶ and basic services.⁵³⁷

Figure 20 below compares EU integration indicators in education, the labour market, social inclusion, health and housing for 2024 for third-country nationals and nationals of the respective reporting countries. While fewer third-country nationals than nationals had been educated at tertiary level in 2024, roughly the same number of third-country nationals and nationals had been in training or education in the last four weeks. Third-country nationals, however, tended to leave education or training early, aged 18.24. In the labour market, a higher proportion of third-country nationals were unemployed or over-qualified for their work than nationals. Third-country nationals were also more likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion, as they were more often living in a household with very low work intensity, or in severe material or social deprivation. For health indicators, on the other hand, third-country nationals were more likely to consider themselves as having good or very good health.

⁵²⁵ European Commission, 'Results of the Year of Skills', 2025, https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/about/results-european-year-skills_en, accessed 6 June 2025.

⁵²⁶ AT, BE, EE, FI, FR, IE, IT, LV, PL, PT, SE, SK, and NO.

⁵²⁷ FI, FR, and NO.

⁵²⁸ AT, EE, FI, FR, IT, PT, SK.

⁵²⁹ AT, BE, EE.

⁵³⁰ AT, BE, FR, IE, IT, LV, PL, PT, SE, and NO.

⁵³¹ CY, DE, HR, IT, LU, PL, PT, SK.

⁵³² AT, DE, EL, FI, HR, IT, LU, MT, PT, SE, SI, SK.

⁵³³ DE, EE, PT, SE, and NO.

⁵³⁴ EE, EL, FI, IT, LU, SE, SK, and NO.

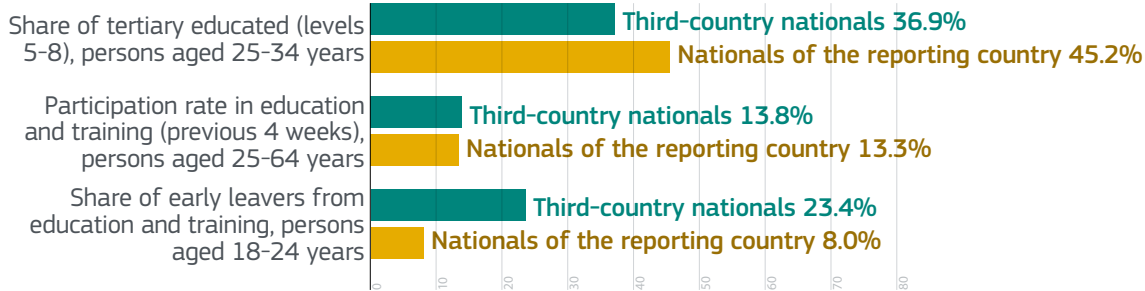
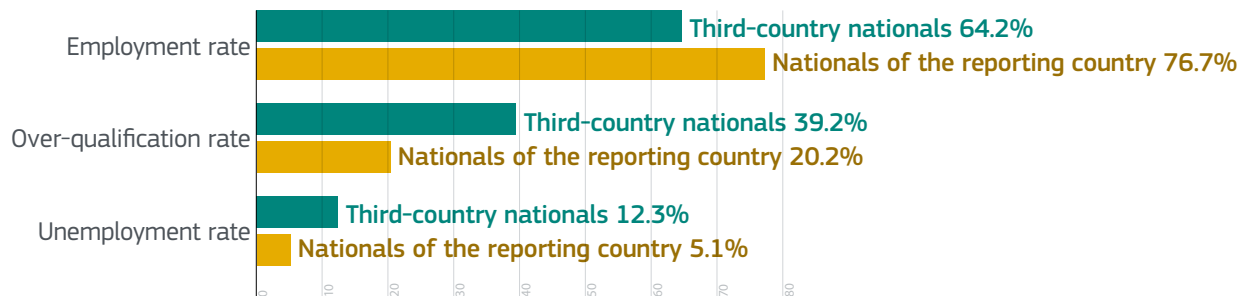
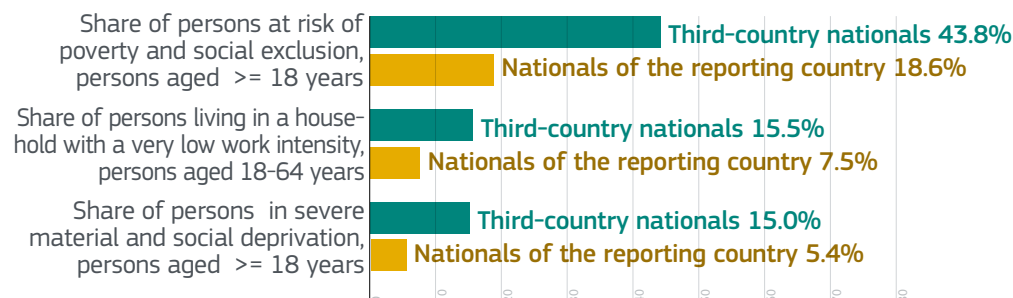
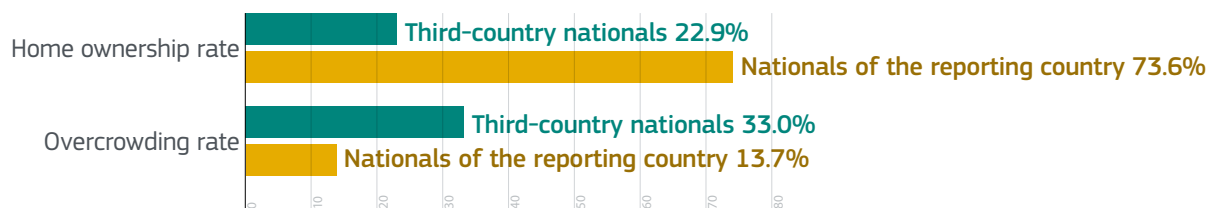
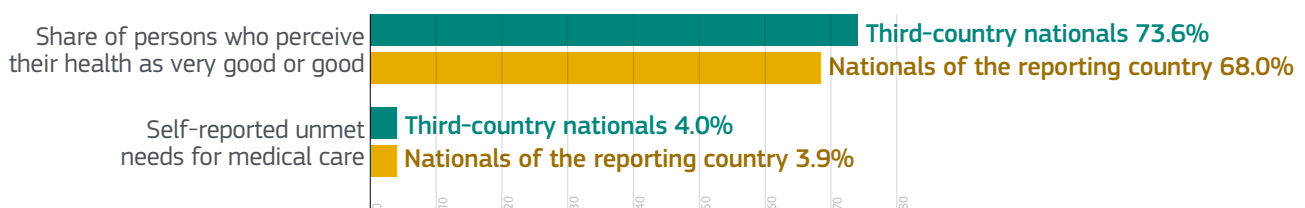
⁵³⁵ EE, IT, LU, SE, SK, and NO, GE.

⁵³⁶ AT, BE, CZ, EE, EL, FI, FR, IT, NL, PT, and GE.

⁵³⁷ BE, BG, CZ, DE, FR, EL, IT, LU, PT, SE, SK.

Figure 20: Integration indicators, EU 2024

%

Education**Labour market, persons aged 20-64 years****Social inclusion****Housing, persons aged ≥ 18 years****Health, persons aged ≥ 16 years**

Source: Eurostat (edat_lfs_9911, trng_lfs_12, edat_lfse_01, lfsa_ergan, lfsa_eoagan, lfsa_urgan, ilc_peps05n, ilc_lvhl15n, ilc_mdsl15, ilc_lvho15, ilc_lvps15, hlth_silc_24 and hlth_silc_30), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.



7.2. EU DEVELOPMENTS

Implementation of the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion continued during 2024. The plan includes targeted initiatives in key sectors such as education, employment, health and housing, and provides a framework for Member States to develop their migrant integration policies. In May 2024, the European Commission launched a survey for the mid-term review of the Action Plan. An Action Plan Progress Tracker, containing interactive sections that monitor changes in integration and inclusion, was launched on the European Website on Integration – now called the ‘migrant integration hub’⁵³⁸ – and is updated every four months.

Several key events took place throughout the year. The European Commission organised two European Integration Network meetings. The first took place in May 2024 with the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU on education of migrant children. There were discussions on data and indicators on education for monitoring the integration of migrant children, as well as key aspects for inclusive education, the specific needs of migrant children, and how to promote well-being at school and psychosocial support.⁵³⁹ The second meeting, in December 2024, focused on EU funds to support integration, and migrant participation in the design and implementation of integration policies.⁵⁴⁰

In February 2024, the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU hosted a High-Level Policy Forum and Ministerial Conference on the Integration of Newcomers. Discussions highlighted key challenges that migrants face, including language barriers, administrative hurdles and discrimination. Participants also stressed the importance of labour market inclusion, skills recognition and social cohesion.⁵⁴¹

The closing event of the European Year of Skills, on 30 April 2024, emphasised the need to improve skills matching for third-country nationals. Key priorities included promoting digital and entrepreneurial skills, enhancing recognition of foreign qualifications, and supporting employers to provide language and cultural training. Participants also emphasised effective coordination through initiatives like the Talent Pool and Talent Partnerships.⁵⁴²

Finally, at the ninth meeting of the European Migration Forum, in November 2024, participants stressed the need for long-term EU and national support for migrant integration, including direct access to AMIF funding for local and regional authorities. They called for closer collaboration with businesses to address labour market needs, simplified qualification recognition, and enhanced migrant support through mentoring and intercultural mediation. Engaging local communities in integration efforts was seen as key to combating racism and changing migration narratives.⁵⁴³

In December 2024, the Urban Agenda Partnership on the inclusion of migrants and refugees held its first plenary after entering a new phase. It welcomed ten new members, mainly from local and regional authorities, and presented its new workplan which includes four actions to be implemented by 2027: inclusive integration into quality jobs; inclusive education from early childhood to higher education; combating migration disinformation, hate speech and discrimination and increasing coherence between EU funds on integration to better align funding support with the reality on the ground.



7.3. NATIONAL INTEGRATION STRATEGY

7.3.1. National/regional integration strategy

The majority of EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵⁴⁴ reported updates to their national or regional integration strategies in 2024. These revisions were driven by political developments such as national or regional elections,⁵⁴⁵ the need to boost labour market integration,⁵⁴⁶ promote local language proficiency⁵⁴⁷ and enhance digitalisation,⁵⁴⁸ and changes to integration strategies to strengthen civic integration.⁵⁴⁹

The Walloon government in Belgium reformed its integration frameworks to provide equitable access to services, professionalise support systems and secure sustainable financing. The Czech Republic introduced a comprehensive 2024 action plan to secure the necessary financial resources and respond swiftly to emerging integration challenges. France included the integration of newly arrived third-country nationals legally residing in the country in its Government Priority Policies (PPG).⁵⁵⁰ Moreover, through its new CIAI law, France conditions the issuance and/or renewal of residence permits on integration criteria,

538 European Commission. Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021–2027. Progress tracker, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/migrant-integration/migrant-integration-hub/progress-tracker-action-plan-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027_en, accessed 25 June 2025.

539 European Commission, 16th meeting of the European Integration Network (in person), organised in cooperation with the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU. <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/meetings/consult?lang=en&meetingId=54607&fromExpertGroups=602>, accessed 12 February 2025.

540 European Commission, 17th meeting of the European Integration Network (in person) <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/meetings/consult?lang=en&meetingId=58343&fromExpertGroups=602>.

541 European Commission, The integration of newcomers – Ministerial Conference organised by Flanders, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/integration-newcomers-ministerial-conference-organised-flanders-2024-02-15_en, accessed 12 February 2025.

542 European Commission, European Year of Skills – what comes next? event report, https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/publications/european-year-skills-what-comes-next-event-report-0_en, accessed 12 February 2025.

543 European Commission, 9th edition of the European Migration Forum Enhancing the Role of Civil Society in Implementing the Pact on Migration and Asylum 28–29 November 2024, Brussels, https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025-01/european_migration_forum_-_9th_meeting_-_report.pdf, accessed 12 February 2025.

544 BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, PT, SE, SK, and NO, MD, RS.

545 BE.

546 FI, FR, IT, and NO.

547 EE, FI, FR, IT.

548 BE, EE.

549 BE, FR, IT, LU, LV, PL, PT, SE, and NO.

550 Instruction NOR IOMV2403137J on the 2024 priorities of the integration policy for newly arrived foreign nationals, including refugees, 26 March 2024 (<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/download/pdf/circ?id=45543>)

including a certain level of proficiency in the French language and respect for the principles of the Republic.

To enhance labour market integration, Germany launched the JobTurbo initiative, which is designed to accelerate labour market entry for refugees by combining work experience in Germany with on-the-job language and vocational training. The initiative was driven by the urgent demand for skilled workers. France prioritised the integration of newly arrived foreign nationals by enhancing language and civic training to facilitate smoother access to employment.

Seven EMN Member and Observer Countries pursued societal integration through language and civic training – a crucial component in changes to their integration strategies.⁵⁵¹ Estonia is transitioning to a fully Estonian language education system in a process that began in September 2024 and should be completed by 2030. In Moldova, the changes focused on improving the integration of third-country national children (predominantly from Ukraine) into the Moldovan educational system via online courses. In Finland, the new National Integration Programme (2024–27) has a focus on language learning (Finnish/Swedish).

In 2024, Sweden presented the new objective of the country's integration policy, which centres more on demands and responsibilities for third-country nationals, as well as Swedish language skills. In March 2024, the Norwegian government presented a White Paper on Integration, emphasising improved living conditions and societal participation for newly arrived migrants, drawing on lessons from the influx of Ukrainian displaced persons. In Luxembourg, a new Law on Intercultural Living Together came into force on 1 January 2024, replacing previous approaches with a more inclusive framework that is applicable to all residents and people working in the country.

7.3.2. Distribution of responsibility for integration policy

Seven EMN Member Countries⁵⁵² redistributed responsibilities between national, regional and local levels. These developments were driven by growing integration challenges,⁵⁵³ the need for improved stakeholder coordination,⁵⁵⁴ and a focus on delivering more effective, inclusive and locally tailored integration services.⁵⁵⁵

To address integration challenges more effectively, Croatia launched the SINERGY project (Ensuring a Synergistic Approach to the Integration of Third-Country Nationals) to strengthen multilevel cooperation in integration, with a focus on BIP. In the Czech Republic, a governmental group focused on improving support for BoTP. Cyprus redefined its institutional responsibilities through a newly established Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection that should develop a comprehensive Integration Strategy.

To improve stakeholder coordination, France enhanced the coordination of both local and national efforts for newly arrived migrants, and Ireland rolled out local integration teams to better support forced migrants. In Estonia, new municipal integration coordinators have been established to improve local service delivery. In the Slovak Republic, two cities have introduced integration strategies, as highlighted in the box below:

Box 7: Integration strategies in the cities of Nitra and Košice, in the Slovak Republic

The cities Nitra⁵⁵⁶ and Košice adopted comprehensive integration strategies to ensure the effective and sustainable integration of third-country nationals at local level. This was driven mainly by the rising number of third-country nationals in the Slovak Republic and the need for a systematic local response to promote integration.

7.3.3. Digitalisation of integration processes and services

The digitalisation of integration processes and services was reported by seven EMN Member and Observer Countries.⁵⁵⁷ These included apps or platforms for providing integration information. Digital information services were introduced in Belgium's Flemish Region through the Welcome App, and in Estonia through a state portal featuring 'Settling in Estonia' and an Adaptation Roadmap, driven by local initiatives and national development plans with European funding. After legislative changes, Finland and Lithuania modernised their data systems to support integration in municipalities and improve the exchange of information between integration actors. Norway and Georgia further developed public service portals to provide centralised, user-focused access to state services for foreign nationals.

7.3.4. Monitoring and evaluation of integration programmes and strategies

Eight EMN Member Countries⁵⁵⁸ reported advancing the monitoring and evaluation of their integration strategies in response to legislative reforms,⁵⁵⁹ administrative needs,⁵⁶⁰ and the need for coordinated, data-driven evaluations of integration policies.⁵⁶¹

Driven by legislative reforms, the Walloon Region established a new regional Observatory for Foreigner Integration, and the Brussels-Capital Region accredited the Brussels Centre for Intercultural Action (CBAI) as monitoring actor for the integration programme. Lithuania began modernising the refugee Administration Information System (PAIS) to streamline registration and monitoring processes, and Portugal finalised projects to standardise

⁵⁵¹ EE, FI, LU, PT, SE, and NO, MD.

⁵⁵² CZ, EE, HR, IE, FI, FR, SK.

⁵⁵³ SK.

⁵⁵⁴ HR.

⁵⁵⁵ EE, IE.

⁵⁵⁶ Available at <https://comin.sk/kontakty/strategia-integracie-cudzincov-v-meste-nitra>, accessed 10 February 2025.

⁵⁵⁷ AT, BE, EE, FI, LT, and NO, GE.

⁵⁵⁸ BE, EE, FI, IT, LT, LU, PT, SE.

⁵⁵⁹ BE, LU, LT.

⁵⁶⁰ FI, PT.

⁵⁶¹ IT, EE, SE.

procedures and enhance support capacity in integration services.

Estonia, Finland and Italy reported on integration monitoring, with Estonia publishing the results of its 'Integration Monitoring 2023' survey in 2024. The survey is conducted

every two to three years and used as a primary source for formulating integration policies.

Due to administrative needs, Finland issued its national Overview of Integration 2023 to track changes over the government term, and Italy published reports on key integration indicators.



7.4. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

Ten EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵⁶² involved different stakeholders to foster integration processes. These included strengthening or expanding stakeholder collaboration and networks,⁵⁶³ improving stakeholder coordination,⁵⁶⁴ and addressing migration challenges through collaboration.⁵⁶⁵ Three EMN Member Countries⁵⁶⁶ introduced centres and hubs to streamline

access to services and foster coordinated regional service implementation. The aim of involving stakeholders was to assist vulnerable groups in navigating complex institutional frameworks, including facilitating access to services,⁵⁶⁷ fostering sustainable integration⁵⁶⁸ and promoting active stakeholder active participation.⁵⁶⁹



7.5. PRE-DEPARTURE INTEGRATION PROGRAMMES

Seven EMN Member Countries reported on pre-departure integration programmes.⁵⁷⁰ Portugal implemented a pilot project, which targeted Moroccan citizens by providing Portuguese language training before migration to improve social and professional inclusion. In 2024, Austria successfully applied for a European Commission funded project (EAGLE) to provide upskilling and language training for metalworkers in Egypt to address skilled labour shortages. Germany included pre-departure measures in its Residence Act, and has implemented projects to promote integration from day one and reduce the burden on domestic services.

Countries also focused on information campaigns, with the Czech Republic publishing an updated information package, 'Next Stop Czech Republic', to enhance predeparture awareness of mandatory adaptation courses.

Malta concluded a Technical Support Instrument project to strengthen stakeholder coordination for sustainable pre-departure measures. The Flemish Region in Belgium introduced a pilot project enabling future newcomers from Arab countries to commence civic integration online in their country of origin, to ensure realistic expectations and a smoother transition upon arrival.



7.6. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The majority of EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵⁷¹ introduced or amended integration measures in education and training to facilitate the integration of migrants through basic skills and language education, increasingly with digital educational tools. Language education was a major focus in early childhood and school-related education in general, along with skills development for third-country nationals and integration specialists.

7.6.1. Basic skills and language

Fifteen EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵⁷² introduced changes to policy frameworks or new measures concerning basic skills and language education. These mostly concerned digitalisation efforts⁵⁷³ and targeted support for migrants⁵⁷⁴ (e.g. to overcome language

barriers,⁵⁷⁵ and improve integration into the labour market and society in general⁵⁷⁶). Austria provides the Austrian Integration Fund Language Portal, offering individuals the opportunity to learn German in a flexible way, independent of time and location, with all services available free of charge. This platform encompasses a comprehensive range of teaching and learning materials, online German courses and preparatory resources for language examinations. Funded by AMIF, several projects were implemented in Italy to develop regional plans for language and civic orientation training, and to implement personalised language courses, to supplement the provision of literacy courses for adult third-country nationals. Luxembourg launched a collaboration with the subscription-based language learning software Babbel to provide free online language courses. Targeted efforts include customised

⁵⁶² CY, DE, HR, IE, IT, LU, PL, PT, SK, and NO.

⁵⁶³ DE, IE, IT, and NO.

⁵⁶⁴ HR, IE, IT, PL, SK.

⁵⁶⁵ DE, IE, IT, and NO.

⁵⁶⁶ HR, PL, SK.

⁵⁶⁷ CY, HR, PL.

⁵⁶⁸ DE, FI, SK, and NO.

⁵⁶⁹ IT, LU.

⁵⁷⁰ AT, BE, CZ, DE, IT, MT, PT.

⁵⁷¹ AT, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, IT, LU, MT, PT, SE, SI, SK, and NO, GE.

⁵⁷² AT, DE, EE, EL, FI, HR, IT, LU, MT, PT, SE, SI, SK, and NO, GE.

⁵⁷³ AT, LU, PT, and NO, GE.

⁵⁷⁴ DE, EL, FI, HR, IT, SE, SI, SK, and NO, GE.

⁵⁷⁵ AT, EL, HR, IT, LU, PT, SI, SK.

⁵⁷⁶ AT, DE, IT, LU, PT, SE.

courses for applicants for international protection in Croatia and Luxembourg (a test phase for linguistic integration courses began with the start of the 2024/2025 school year), as well as on-the-job language training in Germany.

7.6.2. Civic integration programmes

Eight EMN Member Countries⁵⁷⁷ amended their civic integration programmes aiming to deepen language proficiency, enhance civic knowledge, and create more inclusive and accessible integration pathways.

From July 2024, Austria piloted the expansion of its mandatory orientation and values courses from three to five days, to enable a more intensive study of the basic values of community life and central issues of integration. It also organised compulsory civic orientation courses for asylum seekers on the Austrian cultural and legal framework. The Czech Republic introduced integration seminars via the AMIF project New Home in the Czech Republic 2024-2026. Belgium launched a harmonised bilingual civic integration programme in Brussels to ensure an inclusive and flexible approach to civic integration. In the Walloon Region, the integration programme has been amended to include a longer integration period of three years (previously 18 months) to ensure that everyone can participate in the programme.

In Germany, new questions were included in the obligatory test on German law, culture and history at the end of the integration language course. These questions were driven by a rising number of antisemitic incidents in public after the Hamas-led terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, and were on the topics of antisemitism, Jewish life in Germany and Israel's right to exist.

7.6.3. Early childhood education and care

In five EMN Member and Observer Countries,⁵⁷⁸ developments in early childhood education and care centred on language acquisition and inclusion. Estonia reported on beginning the transition to a fully Estonian language education system from 2024 onwards. The new Preschool Education Act will also improve the accessibility and quality of early education. In Germany, developments included a new vocational language course at B2 level, aimed at migrants who are interested in working in early childhood education to fill the need for skilled educators. Portugal expanded the role of Multidisciplinary Support Teams for Inclusive Education – a specific organisational resource with a recognised role in supporting learning and inclusion – and increased vacancies in public kindergartens to boost academic inclusion among migrant students.

7.6.4. Primary and secondary education

Primary and secondary education to enhance language instruction and support the integration of migrant

children was a focus in eight EMN Member and Observer Countries.⁵⁷⁹ To ensure access to learning support for all students, Finland mainstreamed such support in upper secondary and vocational education, and in Greece the 'All Children in Education' programme was completed to improve school readiness for migrant children. The Slovak Republic enhanced integration support in primary and secondary education through language clubs, tailored courses and extracurricular support, while Sweden launched an initiative to increase reading among children to improve language proficiency, and Norway developed continuing education and digital resources to better integrate newly arrived students. Responding to the needs of its diverse population, Luxembourg is continuing to diversify its public school system by starting the planning process to add three new public European and international schools, and by preparing the nationwide rollout of the pilot project Growing Together (*zesumme wuessen* – ALPHA). A first evaluation of this project was presented in 2024 and multiple professional development courses for teachers are underway. ALPHA started in 2022 and allows parents to choose whether their children learn to read and write in German or French (until 2022, German was the only option in Luxembourg).

7.6.5. Tertiary education

Language acquisition was a major driver for developments related to tertiary and adult education in seven EMN Member and Observer Countries.⁵⁸⁰ Via an AMIF funded project on capacity building for universities, Italy expanded access to university courses for third-country nationals, addressing limited opportunities for these students to access tertiary education. Luxembourg expanded the available languages for several vocational training offers. Norway launched the NORSTIP scholarship scheme for students from selected partner countries to boost postgraduate education for international students and facilitate knowledge transfer. The scheme was introduced in response to newly introduced tuition fees for students from outside the EU and European Free Trade Association area. A key prerequisite of the scheme is that the students return to their home countries after completing their education in Norway. Georgia approved new regulations permitting vocational training components to be delivered fully online, enhancing flexibility and accessibility for foreign trainees.

7.6.6. Other forms of education/training

Eight EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵⁸¹ reported on developments in non-formal education that affected third-country nationals and nationals working in the area of integration.

For third-country nationals, the Walloon Region in Belgium implemented a pilot project adapting theoretical driving licence exams for nonnative speakers, as explained in the box below.

⁵⁷⁷ AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FR, NL.

⁵⁷⁸ DE, EE, PT, SE, and NO.

⁵⁷⁹ EE, EL, FI, IT, LU, SE, SK, and NO.

⁵⁸⁰ EE, IT, LU, SE, SK, and NO, GE.

⁵⁸¹ AT, BE, EL, LU, NL, PL, SE, and MD.

Box 8: Improving access to the theoretical driving licence exam for nonnative speakers in Belgium

On 16 May 2024, the Walloon government adopted a decree to pilot a specially adapted session for the theoretical driving licence exam, tailored for candidates whose language or literacy skills are insufficient. This initiative aims to provide better mobility for labour market entry, especially in rural settings.

The decree was adopted following a parliamentary inquiry on 12 December 2023, which highlighted repeated failures of the theoretical test by candidates who had previously held driving licences in their home countries – a concern raised by the advocacy group *Lire et Ecrire* in support of universal literacy rights.

Measures for professionals included the *Mocowiec* programme in Poland, which trains specialists in migration and integration to enhance the qualifications of staff in Foreigner Integration Centres. Sweden allocated increased funding for language training among welfare workers in the care sector, addressing gaps in Swedish language proficiency that affect integration. The City of Zagreb in Croatia launched a financial support programme in 2024 for highschool and university students under international or temporary protection, offering 75 one-time grants of €2 000 to help alleviate educational costs amid rising inflation and high living expenses.



7.7. LABOUR MARKET AND SKILLS

Most EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵⁸² noted changes in policies regarding labour market integration and skills to improve labour market access, as well as language acquisition for employment.

France and Ireland reported overarching changes. *France Travail*, which replaced *Pôle Emploi* from 1 January 2024, aims to improve access to (full) employment by offering tailored professional integration pathways and personalised support, especially for vulnerable jobseekers, including legally entitled third-country nationals. In May 2024, Ireland announced that eligible spouses and partners of most employment permit holders (General Employment Permit, Critical Skills Employment Permit, Intra Corporate Transferee Employment Permit and Researchers on a Hosting Agreement) will now be registered on a Stamp 1G instead of a Stamp 3 permission. This gives spouses and partners who have been granted family reunification the automatic right to take up employment in Ireland, without having to apply for a separate employment permission.

7.7.1. Access to vocational training/other types of training

Six EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵⁸³ introduced vocational or other training to enhance the economic participation of migrants, overcome language and skills deficits, and address labour market shortages. Objectives focused on strengthening vocational pathways, enhancing employability and promoting sustainable integration into society.

In Belgium, implementing its wider regional integration policy, the Flemish government introduced ‘warm welcome houses’ for migrants coming for the purpose of employment. These centres offer newcomers and their families support in their integration, including guidance on suitable training courses and information about the labour market. Following the revision of the Walloon Code of Social Action and Health (Decree of 14 March 2024), vocational training offers have been expanded as part of the ‘Training Integration Plan’ to better suit the needs of newly arrived jobseekers.

In Greece, under the HELIOS+ umbrella, comprehensive language courses and programmes such as ‘Bridging the Skills Gap’ and ‘Helios Junior’ were deployed to develop language proficiency and vocational skills among BIP, particularly targeting vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors. Similarly, the Netherlands introduced pilot projects offering paid work placements and onthejob language training to support professional integration, while Portugal introduced the INTEGRAR Programme, which combines extensive language courses with comprehensive integration training to foster technical and soft skills. In Georgia, the expansion of vocational education providers across multiple municipalities has been prioritised to improve local access to vocational education.

7.7.2. Recognition of skills and formal qualifications

Seven EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵⁸⁴ reported on policy changes regarding the recognition of formal qualifications and skills to address labour market integration challenges and skills shortages.

In Belgium, the Flemish government expanded its policy on the Recognition of Acquired Competencies (EVC) to provide official validation of skills gained through work or volunteering as required – driven by a new integration strategy after the new Flemish government was elected in May 2024. Similarly, a working group in Finland, set up by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, put forward proposals for validation processes for healthcare professionals from third countries to alleviate labour shortages.

Germany introduced a multi-pronged approach that certifies non-formal expertise via the Vocational Training Validation and Digitalisation Act and streamlines formal recognition for skilled migrants through digital applications and advisory services. Portugal enhanced the criteria for qualification recognition and inter-agency collaboration to expedite the professional and social integration of migrants and, in Norway, a new regulation on general recognition of higher education from abroad came into force on 1 August. Georgia expanded its capacity to recognise

582 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, NL, PT, SK, and NO, GE.

583 BE, EL, IT, LU, PT, and GE.

584 BE, DE, EL, FI, PT, and NO, GE.

non-formal education, with aim of promoting lifelong learning.

7.7.3. Other measures to facilitate labour market integration of third-country nationals

Other measures were implemented by 12 EMN Member Countries,⁵⁸⁵ including language and training initiatives for specific sectors,⁵⁸⁶ as well as services to support employment.⁵⁸⁷

Austria organised career platforms to connect jobseekers with limited German to vacancies in sectors such as logistics, tourism and care, while also funding language courses and recognition measures in the health and care sector. France amended its Labour Code to integrate language training into working hours for non-French speakers, and the Netherlands introduced a subsidy scheme to support employers to guide BIP through language and cultural

adaptation. Luxembourg simplified entry conditions for highly qualified workers.

With regard to services, Estonia reformed its Labour Market Measures Act to offer improved career services for short-term workers. In addition, a support measure for the employment of BIP was incorporated into the Employment Programme as a permanent service. The Slovak Republic supported activities to facilitate interpreter services and support for the recognition of foreign qualification. In addition, new contact and service centres were established to facilitate local integration and the settlement of highly skilled migrants, addressing demographic challenges and labour market shortages. Cyprus provided support for public employment services by recruiting temporary officers to assist both asylum seekers and employers. Finland established a working group to develop an action plan to tap into unused labour potential, driven by the need to respond to persistent labour shortages and facilitate a more inclusive integration process.



7.8. BASIC SERVICES

Twelve EMN Member Countries⁵⁸⁸ reported developments in access to basic services for third-country nationals, including access to housing, healthcare, social security and support for highly skilled workers, tackling practical barriers to enhance integration.

7.8.1. Access to housing

Nine EMN Member Countries⁵⁸⁹ reported on housing initiatives to provide decent living conditions and foster social inclusion. Belgium launched the IOM PATH (Providing Assistance for Transitioning Housing Solutions) project to prevent homelessness among BIP and BoTP. The new Flemish government introduced increased language proficiency requirements for social housing tenants to facilitate integration into Flemish society. Estonia issued guidelines for rent compensation for Ukrainians to ensure equal rights and clarify compensation conditions. Similarly, the Slovak Republic enhanced communication between self-governing regions regarding housing support and entitlements. By reducing the required minimum residence period from 12 to 3 months, Luxembourg made the conditions for accessing cost-of-living benefits and energy allowances more flexible. This change is particularly relevant for recently arrived migrants, including third-country nationals. Lithuania allowed BIP to reside in accommodation facilities temporarily, either at their own expense or for free in specific crisis situations, to prevent social exclusion and homelessness. Italy adopted national guidelines to define minimum housing standards for agricultural workers to combat precarious living conditions and launched the LGNET 3 project to address urban degradation and marginalisation among third-country nationals. Sweden extended a temporary additional housing allowance to support financially vulnerable families during economic hardship.

7.8.2. Access to healthcare, including mental healthcare

The Czech Republic expanded public health insurance to cover children with long-term residence permits, addressing challenges with expensive private insurance systems. Within the HELIOS+ programme, Greece included targeted psychosocial counselling for BIP and BoTP and, as part of AMIF 2021-2027, Italy funded regional plans to standardise health assistance for vulnerable protection applicants. The Slovak Republic reported on amending legislation and launched projects to improve comprehensive healthcare access for asylum seekers and those under temporary protection.

7.8.3. Access to social security

Seven EMN Member Countries⁵⁹⁰ reported on social security and welfare initiatives, with France implementing agreements between the Family Benefits Funds and the General and Individual Support for Refugees (AGIR) programme to streamline refugee support and benefit access. Italy signed a bilateral social security agreement with Albania to regulate pension services and unemployment, sickness and maternity benefits for those who are or have been employed or self-employed in the two countries. Portugal developed existing and established new bilateral social security relations to safeguard migrant workers' rights, and Sweden launched an inquiry into stricter welfare qualification criteria to deter pull factors and promote self-sufficiency among new arrivals. In Latvia, a series of amendments to social, disability and employment support laws aimed to extend rights to social services and to ensure broader social inclusion. Regarding mental health, Poland launched the 'Peer Support for Youth's Psychological Health' project, enrolling 200 high

⁵⁸⁵ AT, CY, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LU, NL, PT, SK.

⁵⁸⁶ AT, DE, FR, NL, PT.

⁵⁸⁷ CY, CZ, EE, SK.

⁵⁸⁸ BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FR, IT, LU, PT, SE, SK.

⁵⁸⁹ BE, DE, EE, EL, IT, LT, LU, SE, SK.

⁵⁹⁰ EL, FR, IT, LV, PL, PT, SE.

schools and 400 educators to develop structured methods

for supporting students in psychological crises, including those with a migration background.



7.9. FOSTERING PARTICIPATION AND ENCOUNTERS WITH THE HOST SOCIETY

Eight EMN Member Countries⁵⁹¹ introduced initiatives to foster the active participation of migrants, strengthen social cohesion and enhance access to essential services, driven by targeted legislative reforms and socio-economic developments in their respective countries.

In the Walloon Region in Belgium, new mentorship projects were introduced to foster direct contact between migrants and the host society, while Croatia established an Advisory Group to train third-country nationals in human rights advocacy to encourage active involvement in integration processes. Germany allocated €790 million in federal funding for urban development to create inclusive social infrastructure that supports newcomers. Similarly, Ireland introduced the 'Community Connection Project', alongside a further €50 million for the Community Recognition Fund to build community resilience in communities hosting BoTP and asylum seekers.

With regard to integration services, Lithuania began centralising translation services to streamline access to essential services; Luxembourg organised two Orientation Days to familiarise participants with administrative procedures and promote civic engagement; and Slovenia launched the 'My Way' project to encourage intercultural dialogue and mutual adaptation between migrants and host communities, to facilitate integration, promote social cohesion, and address prevailing labour market and community challenges. Additional developments were reported by four EMN Member Countries.⁵⁹² These include language training implemented by IOM, as well as the financing of migrant information centres to boost the social, economic and cultural integration of third-country nationals in Bulgaria and the Slovak Republic. Greece expanded its Migrant Integration Centres and intercultural mediation services to offer comprehensive support for third-country nationals.



7.10. FIGHTING RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

The majority of EMN Member Countries and two Observer Countries⁵⁹³ reported developments in the promotion of inclusion through mainstream anti-discrimination frameworks aimed at protecting all individuals (including migrant communities), and separate policies specifically targeting migrants.

Mainstream measures included new or updated national action plans and legal reforms to tackle various forms of racism and hate crime (e.g. anti-Muslim racism, antisemitism and xenophobia), aimed at fostering mutual respect, equal opportunities and social cohesion.⁵⁹⁴ Box 9 outlines a measure against anti-Muslim racism and antisemitism in Norway.

Box 9: Action plan against anti-Muslim racism and antisemitism in Norway

The government launched new action plans for 2025–2030 to combat anti-Muslim racism and antisemitism, targeting all Muslims and Jews (including those merely perceived as such). The plans, built around three priority areas – dialogue and a functioning democracy, knowledge and competence, and safety and security – aim to intensify and renew efforts to eradicate racism, harassment and discrimination based on ethnicity and religion, thereby ensuring mutual respect and equal opportunities for all. These measures are driven by the persistent challenges of anti-Muslim racism and antisemitism, which have worsened recently due to the war in the Middle East.

In Germany, the Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism hosted an international conference in Berlin in May 2024 in cooperation with the European Union Anti-Racism Coordinator. The conference focused on conditions for success for national action plans against racism. The Commissioner for Anti-Racism hosted the second Forum against Racism in October 2024 in Berlin on the topic of 'Racism and School', and funded professional, easy-to-access community-based counselling in migrant organisations and other community facilities. Since 2023, 32 new points of contact with over 50 counsellors have been established nationwide to close gaps in the counselling landscape.

Bulgaria and the Slovak Republic reported on policies specifically targeting migrants. The Slovak Republic established dedicated Foreigners' Service Centres to facilitate the settlement of highly skilled migrants, labour migrants in shortage professions, and returnees, as well as municipal contact centres to support the integration of all migrants. The objective was to streamline administrative procedures and strengthen local support networks, driven by labour market demands and the growing number of migrants in the country. The box below outlines the support provided in Bulgaria.

⁵⁹¹ BE, DE, EL, HR, IE, LT, LU, SI.

⁵⁹² BG, EL, FR, SK.

⁵⁹³ BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, MT, SE, and NO, MD.

⁵⁹⁴ BE, DE, ES, FI, IE, MT, SE, and NO, MD.

Box 10: Policies targeting migrants in Bulgaria

In 2024, IOM Bulgaria launched a five-year EU-co-financed programme designed to address the need for greater social solidarity and tolerance towards third-country nationals within Bulgarian society. The programme aims to build multicultural competences by exposing the public to the personal stories and specific challenges faced by vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, victims of trafficking in human beings, and persons with disabilities. At the same time, it provides targeted support to help overcome intercultural differences; foster real participation in the integration process among civil society, social partners and authorities; and raise awareness of the positive contributions that migrants make to national development – all while promoting respect for their human rights and cultural identities, ultimately facilitating their socio-economic integration.

8. CITIZENSHIP AND STATELESSNESS

8.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the acquisition of citizenship and statelessness. Fourteen EMN Member and Observer Countries reported legal and policy developments in this area in 2024.⁵⁹⁵ Key trends included national measures to strengthen the requirements for the acquisition of citizenship,⁵⁹⁶ justified by governments as ways to enhance the protection of national security and public safety, or to reinforce integration standards. Conversely, other EMN Member and Observer Countries adopted reforms that strengthened procedural safeguards⁵⁹⁷ or eased requirements for the acquisition of citizenship,⁵⁹⁸ to improve accessibility and streamline procedures.

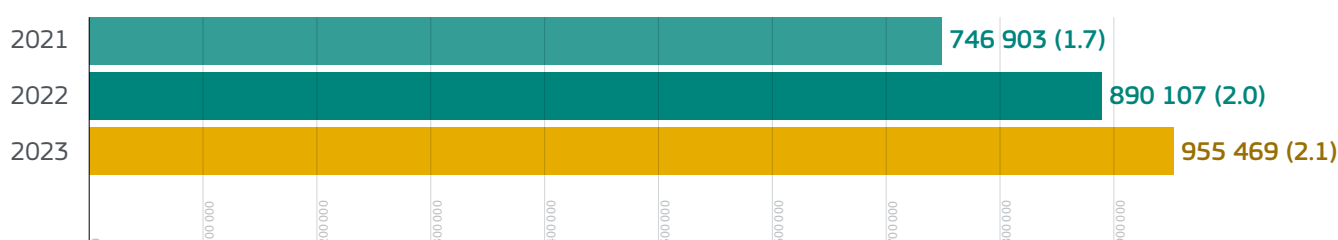
On statelessness, national policy changes in four countries were aimed at enhancing the administrative procedures to identify and recognise stateless persons.⁵⁹⁹ Key drivers for these changes included governmental programmes⁶⁰⁰ and international commitments.⁶⁰¹

In 2024, the European Commission reaffirmed the EU's support to governments in addressing statelessness in the Joint Statement on World Refugee Day.⁶⁰² The Pact also introduced relevant provisions for the rights of stateless persons in the EU, including a legal requirement to identify and record indications of statelessness, pending a determination.⁶⁰³

A growing number of third-country nationals acquired EU or Norwegian citizenship from 2021 to 2023 (see Figure 21). Among them, Morocco was the most common country of origin for third-country nationals acquiring EU or Norwegian citizenship in 2021 and 2022, followed by Syria and Albania. In 2023, Syria became the most common country of origin for third-country nationals acquiring EU or Norwegian citizenship (see Figure 22). In EMN Observer Countries, Armenia recorded the highest number of citizenship acquisitions in 2024 (20 776), followed by Serbia (15 559) and Moldova (8 178) (see Table 3).

Figure 21: Third-country nationals who acquired citizenship, EU and Norway, 2021–2023

Absolute number (and the number per 1 000 people)



Source: Eurostat (migr_acq and migr_pop1ctz), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

595 AT, BE, CY, FI, FR, DE, IE, IT, LU, PT, SE, and GE, MD, UA.

596 FI, FR, IT, PT, SE, and MD.

597 IE.

598 BE, CY, DE, and GE, UA.

599 FI, PT, and UA, MD.

600 FI.

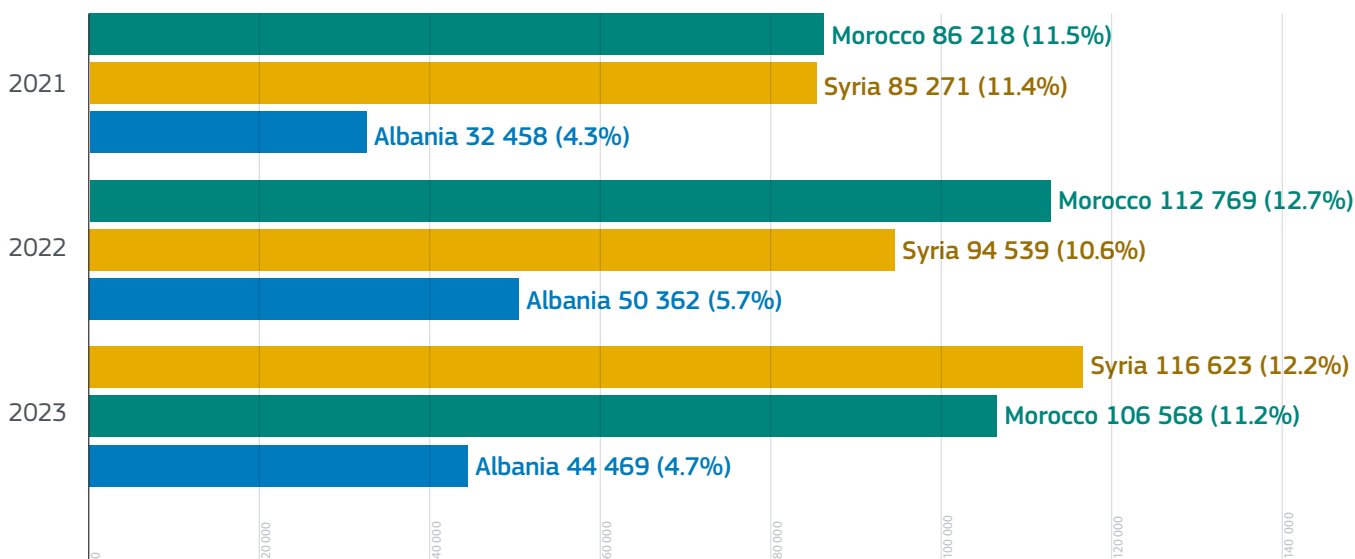
601 MD.

602 European Commission, 'Joint Statement by the European Commission and the High Representative on the occasion of World Refugee Day', 2024, [Joint Statement by the European Commission and the High Representative on the occasion of World Refugee Day - European Commission](#), accessed 10 June 2025.

603 Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 introducing the screening of third-country nationals at the external borders and amending Regulations (EC) No 767/2008, (EU) 2017/2226, (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/817, OJ L, 2024/1356, 22.5.2024, [Regulation - EU - 2024/1352 - EN - EUR-Lex](#), accessed 21 May 2025.

Figure 22: Top three countries of non-EU citizens acquiring citizenship, EU and Norway, 2021-2023

Absolute number (and the share of all acquisitions by third-country nationals)



Source: Eurostat (migr_acq), date of extraction: date 10 June 2025.

Table 3. Number of foreign nationals who acquired citizenship and stateless persons in EMN Observer Countries (2021-2024)

EMN Observer Country		2021	2022	2023	2024
Armenia	Total number of foreigners who acquired citizenship	7 379	25 515	20 884	20 776
	Number of stateless persons	786	672	612	308
Georgia	Total number of foreigners who acquired citizenship	2 847	3 995	4 029	3 442
	Number of stateless persons	530	525	530	488
Moldova	Total number of foreigners who acquired citizenship	5 490	6 855	5 564	8 178
	Number of stateless persons	1 903	1 908	1 878	n/i
Montenegro	Total number of foreigners who acquired citizenship	734	965	2 830	2651
	Number of stateless persons	n/i	n/i	n/i	11
North Macedonia	Total number of foreigners who acquired citizenship	n/i	n/i	n/i	397
	Number of stateless persons	n/i	n/i	n/i	36
Serbia	Total number of foreigners who acquired citizenship	22 502	29 251	22 981	15 559
	Number of stateless persons	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Ukraine	Total number of foreigners who acquired citizenship	4 768	2 512	2 511	1 985
	Number of stateless persons	6 091	5 976	5 824	6 544

"Source: relevant authorities in the EMN Observer Country.

'n/i' means no information

'n/a' means not applicable

Georgia note: Data is cumulative statistical data on all six types of acquisition of Georgian citizenship (by naturalisation) derived from the Organic Law of Georgia on Georgian Citizenship and data on exercising the temporary right for restoration of Georgian citizenship. Georgian citizenship is mainly granted to either former Georgian citizens or persons originating from Georgia; persons who have acquired Georgian citizenship might not always be a resident of Georgia.

Armenia note: the number of foreign citizens who acquired citizenship includes a large number not residing in Armenia (mostly representatives of Armenian Diaspora).



8.2. EU DEVELOPMENTS

Although the EU does not have the competence to adopt binding measures on the recognition of statelessness, EU institutions can issue non-binding action plans or

strategic frameworks to guide and support Member States in addressing this issue. Since the introduction of EU citizenship, individuals who are citizens of an EU Member

State automatically hold EU citizenship. This status grants them additional rights and privileges. However, Member States maintain full competence to establish the conditions for acquiring national citizenship.⁶⁰⁴

In June 2024, the European Commission reaffirmed the EU's commitment made at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum to improve the situation of refugees and forcibly displaced persons caught up in conflicts and humanitarian crises across the world. The EU also continued to support governments in addressing statelessness and

strengthening their asylum systems.⁶⁰⁵ The Pact also introduced relevant provisions for the rights of stateless persons in the EU. For instance, the Screening Regulation introduced a legal requirement to identify and record indications of statelessness, pending a determination. In addition, the Asylum Procedures Regulation stipulates the consequence of identification of statelessness, stating that when an individual claims not to have a nationality, the fact must be clearly registered pending the determination of whether the individual is stateless.



8.3. ACQUISITION OF CITIZENSHIP

The protection of national security and public safety was a notable driver of more stringent requirements for the acquisition of citizenship in Portugal, Sweden and Moldova. For instance, Moldova's reforms aimed to prevent individuals who pose a threat to public order from acquiring citizenship. Sweden introduced stricter eligibility conditions for the acquisition of citizenship by notification. Individuals aged over 15 who are suspected or convicted of certain offences, pose a threat to national security or public safety, or have ties to certain groups and organisations are ineligible for citizenship by notification. Portugal, meanwhile, strengthened its criteria for assessing an applicant's connection to the national community. The demonstration of such ties now requires not only positive indicators of integration, but also the absence of involvement in violent crime, particularly violent or highly organised criminal activities. These criteria now serve both as grounds for opposing the acquisition of nationality by declaration of will, and as a requirement for naturalisation.

Other developments in France, Italy and Portugal aimed to reinforce integration standards, by strengthening eligibility criteria or introducing additional conditions for specific categories of citizenship applicants. France raised its language proficiency requirement for naturalisation from B1 to B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages scale, placing greater emphasis on language skills as a key indicator of social and cultural integration. In Italy, a new circular was issued concerning the most recent case law guidance from the Court of Cassation on the recognition of Italian citizenship by descent. To obtain recognition of citizenship by descent, applicants must now provide evidence that none of their ancestors voluntarily renounced Italian citizenship. Portugal introduced new cumulative requirements for naturalisation by descendants of Portuguese Sephardic Jews, who must

now prove both a tradition of belonging to a Sephardic community and a minimum of three years' legal residence in Portugal.

Conversely, other EMN Member and Observer Countries moved to ease citizenship acquisition requirements,⁶⁰⁶ aiming to improve accessibility and streamline procedures; for example, through the introduction of electronic solutions. Georgia simplified the process for applicants seeking citizenship by naturalisation. Changes allow candidates to take part in the required exams before formally submitting their citizenship application. The examination process is now conducted electronically through a dedicated portal. Cyprus reported that recent legislative changes allowed citizenship to be granted to individuals who do not have full (mental) capacity. Similarly, Belgium eased the requirements for illiterate individuals. In Germany, one key change included the allowance of multiple citizenships, removing the previous requirement for naturalised German citizens to renounce their prior nationality. The residency requirement for naturalisation was also reduced from eight years to five.

Box 11: Ukraine – Simplifying citizenship acquisition for those contributing to the country's defence

To support those defending the country, Ukraine introduced legal reforms to simplify citizenship acquisition for individuals contributing to its defence. Law No. 3897-IX, effective from November 2024, streamlined the process for foreigners and stateless persons involved in protecting Ukraine's territorial integrity, as well as their family members. It also regulated the requirement to renounce foreign citizenship for Russian and Belarusian nationals.



8.4. STATELESSNESS

Five EMN Member and Observer countries reported changes or initiatives on statelessness in 2024.⁶⁰⁷ A notable trend was the enhancement of administrative

procedures to identify and recognise stateless persons. Legislative reforms focused on harmonising national frameworks with international conventions and

604 European Parliament, 'Acquisition and loss of citizenship in EU Member States', 2018, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625116/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)625116_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625116/EPRS_BRI(2018)625116_EN.pdf), accessed 3 March 2025.

605 European Commission, 'Joint Statement by the European Commission and the High Representative on the occasion of World Refugee Day', 2024, [Joint Statement by the European Commission and the High Representative on the occasion of World Refugee Day - European Commission](#), accessed 12 February 2025.

606 BE, CY, DE, and GE, UA.

607 BE, FI, PT, and UA, MD.

initiatives,⁶⁰⁸ equating stateless persons with BIP with regard to family reunification benefits,⁶⁰⁹ and expediting citizenship processes for stateless persons.⁶¹⁰ Key drivers for these changes included the need to bring legislation in line with EU jurisprudence,⁶¹¹ national policy priorities such as the governmental programme in Finland, and international commitments.⁶¹²

As regards legal regulation of statelessness, Finland's reforms centred on facilitating access to citizenship for stateless persons. Since 1 October 2024, citizenship applications by stateless persons have been processed urgently, with decisions required within one year. Finland also amended its Citizenship Act to align its definition of a stateless person with the 1954 UN Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. Similarly, Moldova demonstrated its commitment to addressing statelessness by joining the Global Alliance on the Eradication of Statelessness in October 2024.⁶¹³ Ukraine updated its legal framework on 10 October 2024, aligning the procedure for recognising stateless persons with the Law of Ukraine on Administrative Procedure. The changes promoted consistency in administrative practices for migration-related cases, improving procedural clarity for stateless applicants.

Developments also included plans for improvements to procedures for identifying and determining statelessness through dedicated statelessness determination procedures. Portugal introduced a legislative proposal on 18 December 2024 that regulates the status of stateless persons, introducing new procedures for determining statelessness and a special procedure for stateless people to obtain Portuguese nationality.

Changes also occurred with regard to the issuance of residence permits and rights granted to stateless persons. Belgium introduced a new administrative procedure to grant residence permits based on statelessness.⁶¹⁴ This reform addressed legislative gaps identified by the Constitutional Court in 2009 and 2012.⁶¹⁵

Box 12: Belgium – a new set of family reunification rules for stateless persons

In March 2024, Belgium also revised its family reunification laws, aligning the rights of stateless persons with those of BIP.⁶¹⁶ The new provisions enable family members of a person with a one-year residence permit based on statelessness to be exempt from the otherwise mandatory proof of material conditions (e.g. adequate housing and health insurance) for family reunification, if certain other conditions are met. To benefit from this exemption, three cumulative conditions must be met: the application for family reunification must be submitted within the first year of residence in Belgium based on statelessness; the family ties must have existed before the stateless person entered Belgium; and family reunification must not be possible in another country with which the stateless person or their family members have a special connection. Additionally, the law clarifies that excusable late filing (beyond one year) is now permitted for family members of stateless persons, mirroring the rules for BIP. It also defines how a child's minority status is determined in family reunification cases to ensure procedural consistency.

608 FI and MD.

609 BE.

610 FI, and UA.

611 BE.

612 MD.

613 This step followed Moldova's pledge at the Global Refugee Forum and reflects its dedication to international cooperation in combating statelessness. *Republica Moldova și-a asumat nouă angajamente axate pe incluziunea refugiaților, drepturile copiilor, egalitatea de gen, educație și eradicarea apatridiei, în cadrul Forumului Global pentru Refugiați 2023*, Ministerul Muncii și Protecției Sociale, <https://social.gov.md/comunicare/republica-moldova-si-a-asumat-noua-angajamente-axate-pe-incluziunea-refugia-tilor-drepturile-copiilor-egalitatea-de-gen-eduatie-si-eradicarea-apatridiei-in-cadrul-forumului-global-pentru-refugiatii/>, accessed 13 March 2025.

614 Loi modifiant la loi du 15 décembre 1980 sur l'accès au territoire, le séjour, l'établissement et l'éloignement des étrangers en matière de droit au regroupement familial.

615 The law created a new stateless determination procedure alongside the existing one (recognition of statelessness status by family courts). Under the new system, the Immigration Office assesses applications for residence permits based on statelessness. Although individuals granted residence through this procedure may receive a five-year permit and benefit from family reunification rights similar to those for refugees, they do not gain the official 'stateless person' status unless formally recognised by a family court. Only family court recognition adjusts the applicant's nationality to 'stateless person' in the National Register and grants additional rights, such as travel documents.

616 *Loi modifiant la loi du 15 décembre 1980 sur l'accès au territoire, le séjour, l'établissement et l'éloignement des étrangers en matière de droit au regroupement familial.*

9. SCHENGEN GOVERNANCE AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN BORDER MANAGEMENT AND VISA POLICY



9.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights key developments related to Schengen, as well as other advancements in border management and visa policy in 2024. These developments primarily aimed to enhance the effectiveness of border management. Key EU milestones included the adoption of a revised Schengen Borders Code, the adoption of the new Screening Regulation, and the lifting of controls at the internal land borders with Bulgaria and Romania by 1 January 2025.

Citing reasons such as irregular migration, smuggling, terrorism and security threats, seven EMN Member Countries reported reintroducing border controls at Schengen internal borders.⁶¹⁷ However, multiple examples of enhanced cross-border cooperation, both among Schengen States⁶¹⁸ and with third countries (including EMN Observer Countries), were also reported.⁶¹⁹ Some developments related to Schengen visas were driven by the 2023 Schengen evaluation in the area of external border and visa policy, changes to the Visa Code and the new 'Visa Code Handbook'.⁶²⁰

Eleven EMN Member Countries⁶²¹ reported working towards or adopting national multiannual IBM strategies, in

response to the European Commission's communication.⁶²² EMN Member Countries also implemented numerous measures related to IT systems (EES, ETIAS, SIS, VIS) and their interoperability. Other measures or preparatory actions to harmonise and strengthen external border management were reported by 11 EMN Member Countries,⁶²³ some of them prompted by hybrid threats,⁶²⁴ the outcomes of the Schengen evaluation⁶²⁵ or the revision of the Schengen Borders Code.⁶²⁶ In five EMN Member Countries, these measures focused on increasing the use of technology for border control and surveillance.⁶²⁷

Figure 23 below provides the number of Schengen uniform short-stay visas issued in the EU and Norway between 2021 and 2024. In 2024, the number increased by around 1.2 million – an increase of approximately 15% compared to around 41% in 2023. The lower numbers in 2021 and 2022 are due to COVID-19 and the associated travel restrictions. Figure 24 gives the total annual number of illegal border crossings detected at the external borders of the Member States of the EU and Schengen Associated Countries between 2022 and 2024. In 2024, the number dropped by around 38% from 2023, reaching approximately 239 000 – the lowest level since 2021.

617 AT, DE, FR, NL, SE, SI, SK.

618 AT, DE, EE, HU, LT, LV, PL.

619 GE, MD, UA, RS, MK.

620 EE, FI, LT, SK.

621 BE, CZ, FR, HR, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE.

622 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council establishing the multiannual strategic policy for European integrated border management COM/2023/146 final, 14.03.2023. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0146>, accessed 20 March 2025.

623 BE, CY, EE, EL, FR, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SI.

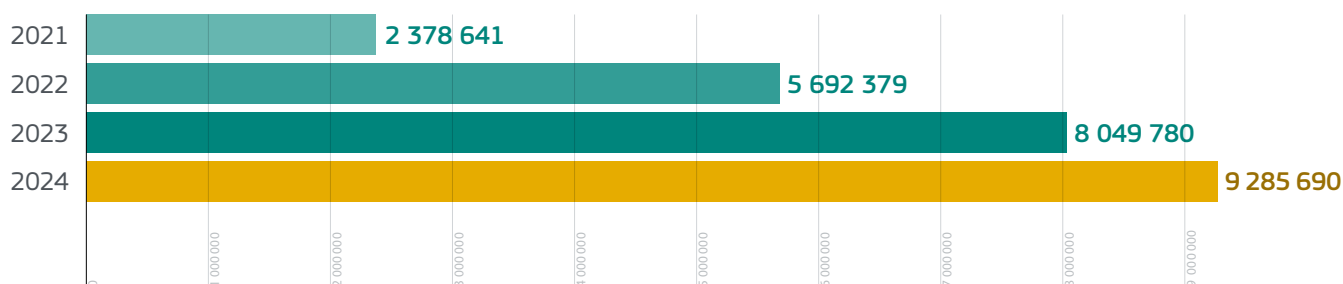
624 EE, FI, LT, LV, PL, and NO.

625 FR.

626 SI.

627 CY, EE, EL, FR, NL.

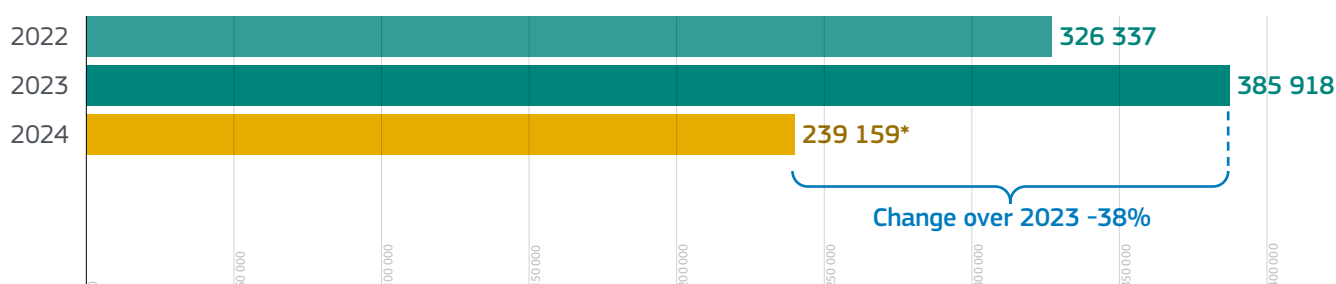
Figure 23: Number of Schengen uniform short-stay visas issued, EU and Norway, 2021–2024



Note: Uniform short-stay visas (C visas) entitle the holder to stay in the territories of all Schengen States for up to 90 days within a 180-day period. Such visas may be issued for the purpose of a single entry or multiple entries.

Source: Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs.

Figure 24: Total annual number of illegal border crossings detected at the external borders of the Member States of the EU and Schengen Associated Countries, 2022–2024



Source: Frontex Annual Brief 2024, date 24 January 2025.

**includes estimates*



9.2. EU DEVELOPMENTS

Several important developments occurred at EU level in 2024. The revised Regulation 206/399 (Schengen Borders Code) came into force on 10 July 2024. It aims to strengthen external borders with measures addressing the instrumentalisation of migrants, and a reinforced framework for cross-border police cooperation in border regions as an alternative to internal border controls. The revised Schengen Borders Code also sets out a revised framework for the possible reintroduction of internal border controls as a lastresort measure, with defined time limits and increased safeguards meaning border controls can only be introduced if there is a serious threat, with notification and consultation requirements.⁶²⁸

Among the legislative files of the Pact,⁶²⁹ Regulation 2024/1356 (the Screening Regulation), which will apply from June 2026, establishes a mandatory screening to be applied to irregular migrants and asylum seekers

entering the EU. This includes a preliminary health and vulnerability check, identification, registration of biometric data, security check and referral to asylum or return procedure. The new Screening Regulation is an inclusive part of European integrated border management (EIBM). Even though it will enter into application only in two years (from June 2026), its implementation should be already being prepared and will be reflected in EIBM strategies at EU and national level.

On 1 March 2024, political agreement⁶³⁰ was reached between the European Parliament and the Council on the two Regulations on the collection and transmission of API, one of which repealed the Directive from 2004.⁶³¹ The new rules will make data available more efficiently for border and law enforcement authorities, while respecting EU data protection standards. They are intended to facilitate external border checks and strengthen the prevention,

⁶²⁸ European Commission, 'The Commission welcomes the political agreement on new rules for a more resilient Schengen area', 6 February 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_667, accessed 21 February 2025.

⁶²⁹ European Commission, Communication from the Commission on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM (2020) 609 final, 23.9.2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52020DC0609>, accessed 24 April 2025.

⁶³⁰ European Commission, 'Commission welcomes political agreement on Advance Passenger Information to facilitate border management and strengthen security', 1 March 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1262, accessed 21 February 2025.

⁶³¹ Regulation (EU) 2025/12: This regulation focuses on enhancing and facilitating external border checks by standardising the collection and transfer of API data. It amends Regulations (EU) 2018/1726 and 2019/817, and repeals Council Directive 2004/82/EC. Regulation (EU) 2025/13: This regulation pertains to the prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime through the collection and transfer of API data. It amends Regulation (EU) 2019/818.

detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime.

The European Commission adapted rules for issuing multiple-entry visas to Indian nationals, making it easier for these nationals to travel within the Schengen area and reducing the number of applications.⁶³²



9.3. SCHENGEN

In 2024, Schengen remained the world's most visited destination, attracting more than half a billion visitors. Accounting for 40% of global international travel, Schengen acts as a fundamental enabler of the single market promoting free movement and security through a common visa policy and external border management. The removal of the last remaining internal border controls with Bulgaria and Romania in 2025 marked a further historic step in European integration.

Box 13: Enlargement to 29 countries of the Schengen area without internal frontiers

Controls at the internal borders with Bulgaria and Romania were gradually lifted: internal air and sea border controls were abolished on 31 March 2024, and checks on persons at the internal land borders were lifted on 1 January 2025.⁶³⁴

Cyprus, a Schengen State, progressed another step further towards fully joining the Schengen area by working to implement the relevant Schengen recommendations⁶³⁵ and finalising its first Schengen evaluation. The country implemented many measures to improve alignment with the Schengen acquis, including: increasing consular personnel; improving returns procedures; harmonising various practices with the Schengen Borders Code; developing interoperable databases and control systems; improving relevant infrastructure; and initiating representation agreements.

9.3.1. Schengen governance

Five EMN Member Countries underwent periodic Schengen evaluations in 2024.⁶³⁶ Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania reported having adopted action plans to implement the 2023 Schengen evaluation recommendations.

The European Commission also provided Schengen States with their individual Schengen Scoreboard, highlighting priority areas in which implementation of the Schengen acquis needed to be improved to maintain and ensure an

In December 2024, the European Commission adopted a Communication to support EU Member States to counter hybrid threats from the weaponisation of migration by Russia and Belarus. The aim was to strengthen security at the EU's external borders, preventing Russia and Belarus from using European principles and values – including the right to asylum – against the EU⁶³⁷ (see Chapter 10).

effective area of freedom, justice and security without internal frontiers.⁶³⁷

Similarly, the European Commission issued the 7th and 8th editions of the Schengen Barometer+, which it presented to the March and October Schengen Councils as a key tool in the annual cycle. It provides a comprehensive situational picture of the drivers that impact the stability of the Schengen area, by presenting an overview of recent developments and emerging threats using the most up-to-date data.

Effective Schengen governance remained crucial in ensuring that the freedoms that Schengen provides to citizens are maximised, through the highest levels of security across the Schengen area. This is vital in the continuous effort to build a stronger, more versatile Schengen capable of adapting to future threats.

9.3.2. External dimension of Schengen

A number of developments that EMN Member countries reported in relation to Schengen visas were driven by the 2023 Schengen evaluation in the area of external border and visa policy,⁶³⁸ and changes to the Visa Code and the corresponding new 'Visa Code Handbook'.⁶³⁹

The 2023 Schengen evaluation in the area of external border and visa policy was the driver for developments regarding Schengen visas in Estonia and Finland. To implement the recommendations from the Schengen evaluation, Estonia streamlined the process of issuing visas at the border with regard to the requirement of prior consultation about individuals. Finland introduced a sponsorship agreement to foster work-related mobility and processing of visa applications. It allows a Finnish citizen or a person with a residence permit to finance the travel of the visa applicant, and that can be taken into account in the visa consideration.

Changes to the Visa Code and publishing a new 'Visa Code Handbook' at EU level led to changes at national level in Estonia, Lithuania and the Slovak Republic. These included

632 Commission Implementing Decision of 18.4.2024 establishing adapted rules on the issuing of multiple-entry visas to Indian nationals residing in India and applying in India for short-stay visas, C(2024) 2434 final, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/93d78385-3bd5-441f-bbf5-a233dceac4ae_enhttps://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/93d78385-3bd5-441f-bbf5-a233dceac4ae_en, accessed 21 February 2025.

633 Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on countering hybrid threats from the weaponisation of migration and strengthening security at the EU's external borders, COM(2024) 570 final, eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52024DC0570, accessed 24 February 2025.

634 European Commission, 'Statement by the European Commission on the occasion of Bulgaria and Romania becoming fully part of Schengen', 12 December 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/pl/statement_24_6401https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/pl/statement_24_6401, accessed 21 February 2025.

635 Council documents: 5535/21, 10403/22, 12636/21, 12638/21, 12639/21, 11237/24.

636 CZ, HR, PL, SE, SK.

637 European Commission, Annex to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Annex 1, 2025 State of Schengen Report, COM (2025) 185 final, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52025DC0185#:~:text=of%20Schengen%20Report-ANNEX%201,-implementation%20of%20the>, accessed 17 June 2025.

638 EE, FI.

639 EE, LT, SK.

increasing visa fees,⁶⁴⁰ modifying the visa application form⁶⁴¹ and developing a new consular methodology.⁶⁴²

Having joined the Schengen area from 31 March 2024, Bulgaria began the process of issuing uniform (Schengen) visas valid for the entire Schengen territory. The country implemented a project funded under the Internal Security Fund for upgrading and developing software and hardware of the National Visa Information System, and ensuring a continuous connection of that system with the VIS.

Other developments related to Schengen visas included introducing an appeal procedure before an administrative court against a visa decision or the decision on the period of stay,⁶⁴³ providing a new visa register,⁶⁴⁴ and contracting new service providers to process visa applications.⁶⁴⁵ Latvia started visa application processing at its embassy in Ireland for the first time.

9.3.3. External border management

Harmonisation of external border controls of the Schengen area brought multiple developments across EMN Member Countries. The year 2024 saw EMN Member Countries implement many measures related to IT systems (EES, ETIAS, SIS, VIS) and their interoperability. Responding to the European Commission communication on the multiannual strategic policy for EIBM for 2023–2027,⁶⁴⁶ 11 EMN Member Countries worked towards or adopted national multiannual IBM strategies.⁶⁴⁷ Eleven EMN Member Countries strengthened or harmonised external border management through further measures or preparations (including enhanced use of technology for border control or surveillance, and training for frontline border guards to improve border checks).⁶⁴⁸ There were no reported developments on local border traffic regimes.

EMN Member Countries also reported on developments related to specific EU external border instruments, as analysed below.

Entry/Exit System

The EES is an IT system designed to register the entry, exit and refusal of entry data of third-country nationals crossing the Schengen area's external borders and travelling for short stays. The system will also replace the

stamping of passports.⁶⁴⁹ The system was not launched in 2024, as the European Commission has not received all notifications of readiness from EU Member States, which is a legal requirement for the system to start operations. In preparation for the launch of the system, EMN Member Countries using the EES undertook various measures, such as: issuing domestic legislative acts and legal preparations;⁶⁵⁰ training police and visa officers;⁶⁵¹ developing software and IT systems;⁶⁵² installing equipment at border crossing points and preparing infrastructure;⁶⁵³ and procurement.⁶⁵⁴ The Slovak Republic launched a pilot project for its national part of the EES at a border crossing point with Ukraine. On 4 December 2024, the European Commission proposed to introduce a phased start for the EES,⁶⁵⁵ allowing EU Member States to deploy the EES progressively at their external borders over a six-month period. The legislative proposal aimed to facilitate the operationalisation of the system as soon as possible.

European Travel Information and Authorisation System

Ten EMN Member Countries⁶⁵⁶ using ETIAS reported on their preparations for its launch.⁶⁵⁷ Planned to come into operation after the EES entry into operation, ETIAS will be an IT system for travel authorisation and an entry requirement for visa-exempt nationals travelling to 30 European countries for a short stay prior to their arrival. While awaiting the launch of the system, Malta and Sweden carried out ongoing preparations, and eight other EMN Member Countries reported on more specific measures, such as developing and adopting laws and normative acts,⁶⁵⁸ training,⁶⁵⁹ signing an interinstitutional funding agreement⁶⁶⁰ and preparing IT systems.⁶⁶¹

Schengen Information System

Responding largely to the evolution of relevant EU legislation, seven EMN Member Countries reported developments in relation to the SIS.⁶⁶² In Luxembourg, a new piece of legislation entered into force, establishing operational rules on the use of the SIS and conditions for issuing a return alert. Lithuania amended its immigration law to provide for recognition of a return decision issued by another EU Member State and entered as a return

640 EE, LT.

641 EE.

642 SK.

643 EE.

644 EE.

645 CZ, EE.

646 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council establishing the multiannual strategic policy for European integrated border management COM/2023/146 final, 14.03.2023. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0146> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0146>, accessed 20 March 2025.

647 BE, CZ, FR, HR, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE.

648 BE, CY, EE, EL, FR, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SI.

649 Regulation (EU) 2017/2226 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2017 establishing an Entry/Exit System (EES) to register entry and exit data and refusal of entry data of third-country nationals crossing the external borders of the Member States and determining the conditions for access to the EES for law enforcement purposes, and amending the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement and Regulations (EC) No 767/2008 and (EU) No 1077/2011, OJ L 327, 9.12.2017.

650 BE, HU, MT, PL, PT.

651 BG, CZ, DE, EE, HR, LV, MT.

652 EL, HU, SE.

653 EL, LV, MT.

654 MT.

655 Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a temporary derogation from certain provisions of Regulation (EU) 2017/2226 and Regulation (EU) 2016/399 as regards a progressive start of operations of the Entry/Exit System COM/2024/567 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52024PC0567>, last accessed 03 June 2025.

656 BE, BG, CZ, CY, DE, HU, LU, MT, PL, SE.

657 Regulation (EU) 2018/1240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 September 2018 establishing a European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) and amending Regulations (EU) No 1077/2011, (EU) No 515/2014, (EU) 2016/399, (EU) 2016/1624 and (EU) 2017/2226 OJ L 236, 19.9.2018.

658 BE, CZ, HU, LU, PL.

659 BG, CZ DE

660 CY.

661 HU.

662 BE, BG, EE, LT, LU, LV, RO.

alert in the SIS. Latvia adopted amendments to legislative acts on use of the SIS in the field of police cooperation and judicial cooperation in criminal matters to include an alert on vulnerable persons who should be prevented from travelling. In Belgium and Estonia, developments were aimed at implementing the provisions of the SIS legal acts. Specifically, Belgium adopted a legislative act with additional national rules on the list of authorities with a right of access to the SIS, and the cases in which a return alert in the SIS is only optional.⁶⁶³ Estonia began to use fingerprint searches at border controls, which had previously not been possible.

Visa Information System

Bulgaria and Romania were granted read-only access to the VIS⁶⁶⁴ in 2021, and both countries gained full access on 31 March 2024. Lithuania provided access to the VIS for law enforcement purposes based on Council Decision 2008/633/JHA.⁶⁶⁵

Interoperability between EU information systems on migration

Within the framework for interoperability between EU information systems in the field of borders, visas, asylum and migration, national developments included: the adoption of a national law in Germany; the adoption of an operational document clarifying measures for determining identity and conditions for checking personal data stored in Lithuania; progress towards a policy document in Poland; and research in Cyprus.

European Integrated Border Management

EIBM is understood as national and international coordination and cooperation, among all relevant authorities and agencies involved in border security and trade facilitation, to establish effective, efficient and coordinated border management at the external EU borders to achieve the objective of open but wellcontrolled and secure borders.⁶⁶⁶ Responding to the European Commission 2023 communication on establishing the 2023-2027 multiannual strategic policy for EIBM,⁶⁶⁷ 11 EMN Member Countries worked towards or adopted national multiannual IBM strategies.⁶⁶⁸ For instance, in Belgium, the new IBM strategy was developed jointly by the Belgian Federal Police, the Belgian Immigration Office and the Belgian Customs and Excise Service, and it focuses on the 15 components identified by the European Commission's communication. France developed a national strategy for integrated European border management (for the period 2024-2027) to ensure strategic governance and regional steering of

border management, as well as effective coordination and uniform application of border control procedures.

Other developments

Other measures or preparation to harmonise and strengthen external border management were reported by 11 EMN Member Countries,⁶⁶⁹ some of which were driven by hybrid threats,⁶⁷⁰ the outcomes of the Schengen evaluation⁶⁷¹ and the revision of the Schengen Borders Code.⁶⁷² In five EMN Member Countries, such measures aimed specifically to increase the use of technology for border control and surveillance.⁶⁷³

Six EMN Member and Observer Countries⁶⁷⁴ received funds for upgrading border surveillance systems from the €170 million package that the European Commission made available under the Border Management and Visa Policy Instrument to counter hybrid threats on the EU's eastern border.⁶⁷⁵

Box 14: Digital solutions

Initiatives from France and the Netherlands aimed to increase the use of automated border control systems and biometric technologies to improve the effectiveness of border controls. Legislative amendments in France and the Netherlands, respectively, extended the use of the automated processing of personal data and provided a legal basis for the use of biometrics in automated border controls. To assess the use of digital travel credentials (DTC) in the border process, as requested by the European Commission, the Netherlands implemented a pilot project to test the effectiveness of DTC-1 (a copy of the digital information on the passport chip) when used in combination with facial recognition technology at border control points to speed up airport procedures.

EMN Member Countries⁶⁷⁶ also reported using EU co-financing for projects using digital technologies – for instance, a joint project by Greece and Cyprus using AI for border surveillance, and a €4.4 million grant for Estonia for using innovative technological solutions at the EU external border.

Responding to the Schengen evaluation, France, in coordination with Frontex, developed a 10-week initial training programme for frontline border guards to improve border checks. To ensure that administrative penalties can be applied for noncompliance, France also incorporated into legislation a definition of failure to comply with the obligation to transmit advance passenger information.

663 In line with Article 3 (2)(3) of Regulation (EU) 2018/1860 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 November 2018 on the use of the Schengen Information System for the return of illegally staying third-country nationals, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TEXT/?uri=CELEX:32018R1860>, accessed 12 June 2025.

664 Regulation (EC) No 767/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 concerning the Visa Information System (VIS) and the exchange of information between Member States on short-stay visas, long-stay visas and residence permits (VIS Regulation), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2008/767/oj/eng>, accessed 20 March 2025.

665 Council Decision 2008/633/JHA of 23 June 2008 concerning access for consultation of the Visa Information System (VIS) by designated authorities of Member States and by Europol for the purposes of the prevention, detection and investigation of terrorist offences and of other serious criminal offences, OJ L 218, 13.8.2008.

666 EMN Glossary v.10.

667 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council establishing the multiannual strategic policy for European integrated border management COM(2023)/146 final, 14.03.2023. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0146>, accessed 20 March 2025.

668 BE, CZ, FR, HR, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE.

669 BE, CY, EE, EL, FR, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SI.

670 EE, FI, LT, LV, PL, and NO.

671 FR.

672 SI.

673 CY, EE, EL, FR, NL.

674 EE, FI, LT, LV, PL, and NO.

675 European Commission, Commission steps up support for Member States to strengthen EU security and counter the weaponisation of migration, Press Release, 11 December 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_6251, accessed 12 June 2025.

676 CY, EE, EL.

The revision of the Schengen Borders Code triggered domestic amendments in Slovenia in relation to the designation of border areas.

Belgium and Luxembourg, respectively, passed or introduced a bill to allow the deployment of Frontex standing corps at their external borders to carry out border controls.

9.3.4. Situation at the internal borders

To address irregular migration and security concerns, seven EMN Member Countries⁶⁷⁷ introduced or maintained border controls or checks at internal borders on a temporary basis in 2024. Countries cited reasons such as irregular migration and smuggling,⁶⁷⁸ security threats⁶⁷⁹ and terrorism.⁶⁸⁰

Austria extended border controls at its internal land borders with the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, and reintroduced or prolonged controls at the internal land borders with Hungary and Slovenia. Slovenia introduced and extended border controls with Croatia and Hungary. France, Germany (land-site borders), the Netherlands and Sweden extended or introduced border controls or checks at all their borders. Conversely, Poland lifted border controls with the Slovak Republic.

In response to the reintroduction and prolongation of internal border controls in several of its neighbouring countries, and the importance of the Schengen Agreement as an achievement of European integration, on 14 November 2024 the national Parliament in Luxembourg approved a motion against such temporary controls.⁶⁸¹ The motion highlighted, among other things, that checks at internal Schengen borders may only be reintroduced as a last resort, and only for a limited period of time; and that the controls reintroduced and extended by Germany and France were causing disruption to the daily lives of people living and working in the Greater Region, especially in Germany and France.

Box 15: Cross-border cooperation across the EU

The year 2024 saw multiple examples of cross-border cooperation. Between Austria and Hungary, cooperation involved joint cross-border measures and controls on the rail network. To implement the Baltic Council of Ministers' action plan focused on border protection, several meetings took place between Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In another regional development, joint patrols were carried out by Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.



9.4. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN BORDER MANAGEMENT AND VISA POLICY

9.4.1. Border management

Twelve EMN Member and Observer Countries reported developments aimed at strengthening border management beyond the Schengen acquis or responding to risks at the border.⁶⁸² In Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, these developments were specifically driven by the situation at their external borders with Russia or Belarus.

Estonia experienced an increase in traffic at its south-eastern border crossings, following the Russian Federation's closure of one of the main land corridors with the EU for road transport – the Narva border point in eastern Estonia. To increase the protection of Estonia's and the EU's external borders, it advanced with strengthening its south-eastern border, adding fences, technical surveillance and monitoring positions. Of the total land border (135.6 km), 80% of the planned volume of delay fences had been installed by end of 2024. Due to migratory pressure on the Polish-Belarusian border, caused by the instrumentalisation of migration, Poland signed an agreement for the construction of an electronic barrier on the Bug, Świsłocz and Istoczanka rivers. The works were financed by the EU, with co-financing from the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. Lithuania closed a further two international border crossing points with Belarus. For its part, Latvia introduced a reinforced border security regime in the areas close to the border with Belarus,

decided to keep the only road border crossing point with Belarus closed, and extended the imposition of entry restrictions on Russian nationals.

The need to respond to an (expected) increase in irregular migration also triggered the adoption of policy and operational changes in four EMN Member Countries.⁶⁸³ Estonia, for instance, started preparatory activities for the establishment of a Police and Border Guard Crisis Reserve, which will assist the police in securing external borders in cases of increased migratory pressure, and trained its reservists (the Police and Border Guard Board and the Defence Forces) on how to respond to situations of mass migration influx. Hungary upgraded its border surveillance system by modernising the visual surveillance equipment used.

Finland and Poland introduced legislative measures to respond to an existing risk of instrumentalisation of migration from Russia and Belarus at the eastern borders. Finland enacted the Border Security Act, which lays down the conditions under which applications for international protection can be restricted to a limited geographical area on Finland's national border and in its immediate vicinity. Poland signed a regulation introducing a temporary ban on staying in a specific area of the border with Belarus.

677 AT, DE, FR, NL, SE, SI, SK.

678 AT, DE, FR, NL, SI, SK.

679 DE, FR, NL, SE.

680 AT, FR, SE, SI.

681 Luxembourgish Parliament, Motion 4408: Contrôles temporaires aux frontières intérieures de l'espace Schengen, 14 November 2024, <https://wdocs-pub.chd.lu/docs/exped/0150/022/300224.pdf>, accessed 12 June 2025.

682 CY, EE, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LV, PL, SE, SK, and GE, UA.

683 CY, EE, HU, SK.

New legislation in France empowered border police to carry out checks on different means of transport to verify whether individuals have valid travel or residence documents. Likewise, to increase border security, Sweden's police implemented training for increased control in border areas, Georgia adopted a border risk analysis action plan and digitalised its data systems, and Ukraine set up a coordination centre for Integrated State Border Management.

In Ireland, temporary measures allowing Ukrainian nationals to arrive without a valid biometric passport ceased. To align Ireland's policies with the EU's, the country also increased penalties for carriers who fail to ensure that passengers have appropriate travel documentation.

9.4.2. Agreements or other forms of bilateral cooperation with third countries linked to strengthening operational capacity in border management

Various forms of cooperation to boost border management were implemented by 14 EMN Member and Observer Countries⁶⁸⁴ in 2024. Austrian police officers were deployed in Serbia, North Macedonia and other Western Balkan countries to combat irregular migration and cross-border crime, through targeted search and control measures. France and the UK agreed to enhance their cooperation under the Sandhurst Treaty. Lithuania signed bilateral cooperation plans with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Furthermore, Georgia signed an agreement on law enforcement cooperation with Belgium, participated in Frontex activities, and deployed its officers to airports in France (under an EU-funded project), Germany and Greece. Moldova and Romania signed a new agreement and extended another one on coordinated control at

specific border crossing points. To optimise border control procedures, Ukraine signed an agreement with Moldova on a joint railway checkpoint, and an agreement with Poland on a joint automobile checkpoint.

9.4.3. Visa policy under national competence

Developments related to national visas, including to align visa regimes with the Schengen area in response to an increase in applications for international protection and work permits, were reported by 15 EMN Member and Observer countries.⁶⁸⁵ Developments consisted of streamlining national procedures for issuing visas;⁶⁸⁶ improving national registries;⁶⁸⁷ widening opportunities for the submission of visa applications;⁶⁸⁸ imposing visa requirements on specific nationalities;⁶⁸⁹ and lifting visa requirements (sometimes for specific profiles).⁶⁹⁰

To align their visa regimes with that of the Schengen area (and the UK, in the case of Ireland), Ireland imposed visa requirements on nationals of Dominica, Honduras, Vanuatu, South Africa and Botswana, and Serbia imposed visa requirements on citizens of Qatar, Kuwait and Oman. EMN Member Countries also exercised national competence granted under EU visa policy. Following an increase in applications for international protection in transit, the Netherlands imposed airport transit visa requirements on citizens of Chad, Senegal, Mauritania and the Central African Republic. In turn, Poland introduced an exemption to a general, EU-wide short-stay visa waiver for Colombian nationals, and imposed visa requirements on Colombian nationals entering its territory for the purpose of work or other gainful activities – regardless of the duration of their stay (both short and long stays). This exception falls under national competence, and was motivated by an increase in applications for work permits and cases of misuse of visa-free travel by Colombian nationals.

684 AT, BE, DE, EL, FR, LT, PL, PT, SK, and GE, MD, UA, RS, MK.

685 BG, CY, CZ, IE, IT, EE, LT, MT, NL, PL, SK, and GE, MD, UA, RS.

686 BG, EE, IT, LT, MT.

687 EE.

688 BG, CZ, SK.

689 IE, NL, PL, and RS.

690 IE and GE, UA.

10. IRREGULAR MIGRATION



10.1. INTRODUCTION

At EU level, adoption of the Pact confirmed the prevention and countering of migrant smuggling as a central pillar in the EU's approach to irregular migration.

Eurostat data below (see Figure 25) show that, in 2024, 123 965 people were refused entry to the EU and Norway – around the same number as in 2023. Most of those refused entry came from Ukraine (15.8%), Albania (11.5%) and Moldova (9.8%) (see Figure 26). Additionally, 922 440 people were found to be illegally present in the EU and Norway in 2024 (see Figure 25) – the lowest number since 2021 – and of these the main thirdcountry nationalities were Syrian (15.2%), Afghan (6.5%) and Algerian (6.3%).

At national level, key developments in preventing and countering irregular migration and stay in 2024 were commonly driven by the need to step up the fight against

migrant smuggling networks⁶⁹¹ or respond to changes in the modus operandi of smugglers,⁶⁹² and the need to enhance existing capacities to detect the use of fraudulent documents.⁶⁹³ Finland and Poland also adopted specific measures to respond to the risk of instrumentalisation of migration from Russia and Belarus at the eastern borders (see also chapter 9). The need to better prevent and counter irregular migration also led a large number of EMN Member Countries⁶⁹⁴ to reinforce cooperation with third countries .

To prevent irregular stay, new measures were adopted to tackle the fraudulent use of specific types of visas (e.g. work and study visas).⁶⁹⁵ EMN Member Countries also sought to better tackle the employment of irregularly staying migrants by enhancing interinstitutional cooperation⁶⁹⁶ or reinforcing existing sanctions against employers.⁶⁹⁷

691 CY, EL, FR, LT, SE, and MD.

692 BE, DE.

693 BE, CY, CZ, FI, HU, IE, IT, LT, PT, SE.

694 AT, BE, BG, DE (migration partnerships with six countries on labour migration and irregular migration), EL, ES, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, PL, PT, SE, SK.

695 FI, IT, LT, PL, SK.

696 CY, LT.

697 CY, CZ, FR, IT.

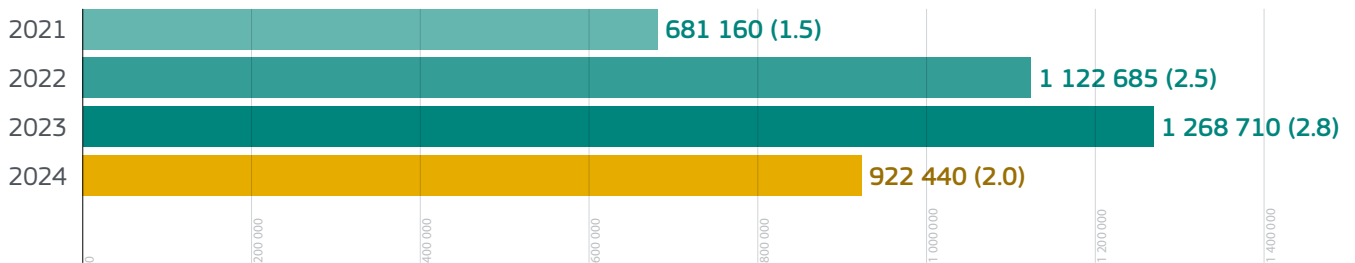
Figure 25: Third-country nationals subject to immigration law enforcement, EU and Norway, 2021-2024

Absolute number (and the number per 1 000 people)

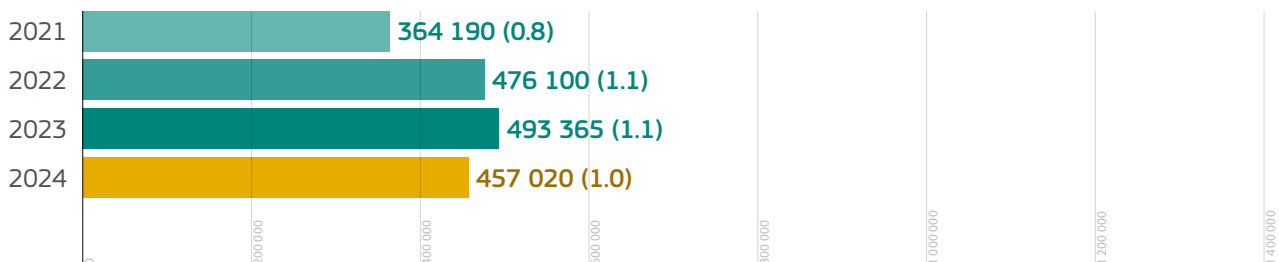
Persons refused entry



Persons found to be illegally present



Persons ordered to leave



Persons returned to a third country



Note: Data for 2024, estimation due to missing data for Portugal.

Source: Eurostat (migr_eirfs, migr_eipre, migr_eiord, migr_eiord1, migr_eirtn and demo_gind), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

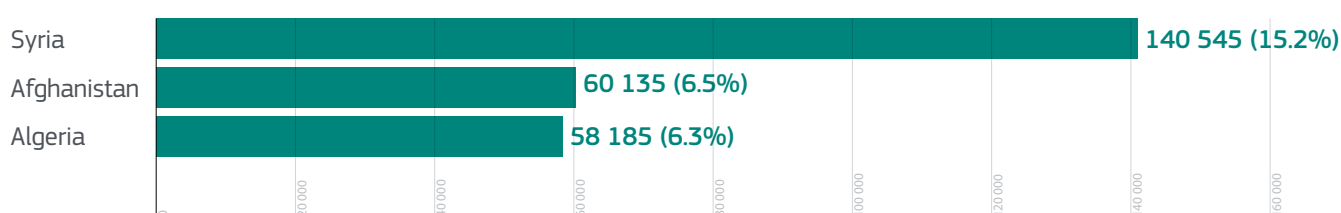
Figure 26: Top three countries of citizenship of third-country nationals subject to immigration law enforcement, EU and Norway, 2024

Absolute number (and the share in the respective total)

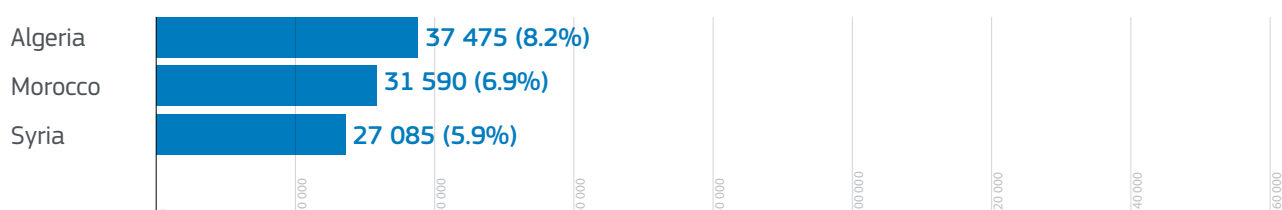
Persons refused entry



Persons found to be illegally present



Persons ordered to leave



Persons returned to a third country



Note: Data for 2024, estimation due to missing data for Portugal.

Source: Eurostat (migr_eirfs, migr_eipre, migr_eiord, migr_eiord1, migr_eirtn and demo_gind), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.



10.2. EU DEVELOPMENTS

Negotiations on the legislative proposals to counter migrant smuggling⁶⁹⁸ continued in 2024. As part of this package, in 2023, the European Commission presented a proposal for a 'revised Facilitation Directive' that

would replace the current EU legal framework to prevent and fight migrant smuggling.⁶⁹⁹ The proposed Directive foresees, among other things, the better harmonisation of existing legislation and the establishment of more

⁶⁹⁸ European Commission, 'Commission launches a Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling and proposes a strengthened EU legal framework, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_6081, last accessed on 17 April 2025.

⁶⁹⁹ European Commission, Proposal for a DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL laying down minimum rules to prevent and counter the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and stay in the Union, and replacing Council Directive 2002/90/EC and Council Framework Decision 2002/946 JHA, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52023PC0755>, accessed 17 February 2025.

stringent sanctions for migrant smuggling, as well as the expansion of EU Member States' jurisdiction over smuggling cases (e.g. to international waters). It also requires EU Member States to collect annual statistical data on migrant smuggling offences, and to reinforce their law enforcement and judicial capacities to ensure the effective prevention, investigation and prosecution of smugglers. The package also included a proposal for a Regulation to reinforce the role of Europol⁷⁰⁰ in fighting migrant smuggling, including through the establishment of a European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling, and more financial and human resources. In December 2024, the Council of the European Union agreed its position on the proposal for a revised Facilitation Directive, which will form the basis for negotiation with the Parliament (still defining its position).⁷⁰¹ In June 2024, the Council also adopted its negotiating position on the proposal to strengthen Europol's role,⁷⁰² with negotiations expected to start in late 2025, when the Parliament has adopted its own position.⁷⁰³

The adoption of the Pact puts the prevention and countering of migrant smuggling at the centre of the EU's approach to migration. The adoption of the Pact included – among other legislative instruments – the adoption of the updated Eurodac Regulation which, once implemented, is expected to allow EU Member States to better tackle irregular migration and monitor potential irregular movements throughout the EU. The Screening Regulation was also adopted as part of the Pact. The Regulation supports the efficient management of (irregular) migration, as it will make it easier for EU Member States to identify third-country nationals and direct them to the right procedure (i.e. asylum or return), as well as identify any potential health and security risks.

In response to changes in the modus operandi of migrant smuggling groups, in particular the increased complexity of migrant smuggling networks and their use of new digital technologies, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (with the European

Commission, Europol and Frontex) – in the context of the Calais Group – agreed on a five-point priority plan to better tackle irregular migration and migrant smuggling.

In December 2024, the European Commission adopted a Communication to support EU Member States to counter hybrid threats from the weaponisation of migration by Russia and Belarus, and to strengthen security at the EU external borders. The Communication set up a framework to support EU Member States in preventing Russia and Belarus from using European principles and values – including the right to asylum – against the EU. It identifies existing challenges in this context, and provides some guidance on how and when EU Member States may adopt exceptional measures to defend themselves against these types of hybrid attacks to preserve national security and protect EU external borders (e.g. taking into consideration fundamental rights implications, proportionality and necessity principles, and the duration of the measure). In this context, the European Commission invited EU Member States to cooperate closely with the EU and other Member States in fighting these threats. It also made additional funding available (a total of €170 million) to reinforce surveillance at the borders with Russia and Belarus (e.g. by upgrading equipment, improving telecommunication networks, strengthening real-time situational awareness and deploying mobile patrols).

In May 2024, €12 million⁷⁰⁴ were made available by the European Commission through a call for proposals to fund common operational partnership projects to prevent and fight migrant smuggling.⁷⁰⁵ These partnerships enable a more coordinated approach for operational cooperation between law enforcement and judicial authorities in EU Member States and partner third countries, for the prevention and fight of migrant smuggling. In a joint letter dated 15 May 2024, 15 EU Member States called on the EU to enable new solutions in the external dimension to reduce irregular migration, and to support third countries along migratory routes.⁷⁰⁶



10.3. OVERARCHING AND CROSSCUTTING DEVELOPMENTS

Overarching and cross-cutting developments in this area in 2024⁷⁰⁷ typically aimed to better control irregular migration flows and disincentivise irregular stay (including through more effective return policies).

Four EMN Member and Observer Countries adopted overarching legislation that aimed, among other things, to improve migration management and tackle irregular migration and stay.⁷⁰⁸ France passed a law that sought to counter irregular migration and increase the effectiveness of the return procedure, by enhancing inspections to

700 Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on enhancing police cooperation in relation to the prevention, detection and investigation of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and on enhancing Europol's support to preventing and combating such crimes and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/794, COM/2023/754 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023PC0754>, accessed 17 February 2025.

701 Council of the European Union, 'Migrant smuggling: member states reach agreement on criminal law', <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/12/13/migrant-smuggling-member-states-reach-agreement-on-criminal-law/>, accessed 17 February 2025. Council of the European Union, 'Migrant smuggling: member states reach agreement on criminal law', <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/12/13/migrant-smuggling-member-states-reach-agreement-on-criminal-law/>, accessed 17 February 2025.

702 Council of the European Union, 'Migrant smuggling: Enhanced role of Europol in fighting migrant smuggling', <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/19/migrant-smuggling-enhanced-role-of-europol-in-fighting-migrant-smuggling/>, accessed 17 February 2025.

703 European Parliament, 'Proposal for a regulation on enhancing police cooperation and Europol's support in preventing and combating migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings', legislative train schedule, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-promoting-our-european-way-of-life/file-commission-plans-to-step-up-the-eu-fight-against-migrant-smuggling>, accessed 21 May.

704 Under the Internal Security Fund.

705 Commission provides EUR 12 million to fight against migrant smuggling, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-provides-eur-12-million-fight-against-migrant-smuggling-2024-06-14_en, accessed 17 February 2025.

706 Countries included: Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland and Romania. See European Migration Network (EMN), '15 EU countries ask the European Commission to propose new solutions to prevent irregular immigration to Europe', <https://emn-belgium.be/news/15-eu-countries-ask-european-commission-propose-new-solutions-prevent-irregular-immigration>, accessed 26 May 2025.

707 AT, BE, FR, IE, IT, PT, SI.

708 BE, FR, IT, and MD

detect migrants in an irregular situation in departments that are subject to high migratory pressure (e.g. more frequent summary inspections of cars on public roads). Italy also passed a law that introduced a number of changes to the national migration legislation, including provisions requiring migrants who entered the territory irregularly

to cooperate with competent authorities for identity-verification purposes. Moldova introduced a legislative amendment to regulate the collection of fingerprint data from foreigners taken into public custody, removed under escort, detained for crossing the state border illegally, or who are staying in the country irregularly.



10.4. PREVENTING THE ARRIVAL OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS

10.4.1. Tackling facilitation of unauthorised entry (migrant smuggling)

In 2024, 11 EMN Member and Observer Countries reported developments to tackle the facilitation of unauthorised entry and migrant smuggling.⁷⁰⁹ Most of these developments were driven by the need to step up the fight against migrant smuggling networks⁷¹⁰ or to respond to changes in the modus operandi of smugglers.⁷¹¹ The adopted measures primarily aimed to clarify existing legislation on combating migrant smuggling,⁷¹² establish more stringent sanctions for smuggling activities,⁷¹³ and/or reinforce operational cooperation.⁷¹⁴

On fighting migrant smuggling networks, Germany, France and Lithuania introduced legislative changes to prosecute and increase criminal penalties for migrant smugglers.⁷¹⁵ France introduced a legal amendment to increase penalties for aiding the illegal entry, movement and residence of migrants when committed by criminal networks or under other aggravating circumstances (e.g. immediate risk of death or serious injury to the foreign national, undignified transport conditions, etc.). Similarly, Lithuania adopted a legal amendment that merged two aggravating circumstances (i.e. illegally transporting a person for financial gain or endangering a person's life), and established a higher penalty for the smuggling of migrants in those cases. In response to an increase in the use of violence by smugglers, Germany introduced legal changes to classify all migrant smuggling activities as serious or very serious crimes and subject them to more stringent sanctions.

Six EMN Member and Observer Countries adopted measures to reinforce operational cooperation to counter migrant smuggling and irregular migration.⁷¹⁶ Greece introduced a legal amendment to expand the list of offences that can be subject to Joint Investigation Teams to include the facilitation for profit of the entry and exit of third-country nationals from its territory by two or more perpetrators. Bulgaria signed a joint action with Romania for the coordination of police cooperation in preventing and countering irregular migration and cross-border crime. Cyprus established a specialised Unit for Combating Illegal Smuggling of migrants (see box below).

Box 16: Cyprus Unit for Combating Illegal Smuggling of migrants

In February 2024, the Aliens and Immigration Headquarters of the Cyprus Police established the Unit for Combating Illegal Smuggling of migrants. The unit's primary mission is to dismantle criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling and address the underlying conditions that facilitate their expansion. The unit's objective is to develop and maintain a comprehensive understanding of the migration landscape within Cyprus, with a particular focus on migrant smuggling and the operations of smuggling networks.

The establishment of this unit will enable continuous monitoring of the risks and threats arising from irregular immigration, while ensuring the implementation of appropriate measures to mitigate these challenges. To ensure the effective and efficient execution of its duties, the unit is structured into two offices: the Intelligence Collection Office and the Intelligence Evaluation, Processing and Analysis Office. The unit is staffed by a team of seven police officers.

Prevention, identification and investigation of fraudulent acquisition and use of false travel documents

To prevent, identify and investigate the fraudulent acquisition and/or use of false travel documents, 10 EMN Member Countries enhanced their efforts in 2024.⁷¹⁷ In most cases, efforts responded to a need to reinforce the capacity of law enforcement and border authorities to detect counterfeit and fraudulent documents.⁷¹⁸

With regard to reinforcing capacity, Cyprus, Finland and Sweden provided training to competent authorities to enhance their ability to detect false documents. In Cyprus, for example, members of the police participated in training on the analysis of facial features, impostor detection and falsified travel documents. Other countries implemented structural changes to improve their capacity to detect and investigate the use of counterfeit documents. Finland established an identification centre with the aim of ensuring the integrity, accuracy and usability of the identities managed by the Immigration Service and the

709 BE, CY, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, PL, SE, SK, and MD.

710 CY, EL, FR, LT, SE, and MD.

711 BE, DE.

712 DE, FR, LT.

713 DE, FR.

714 BE, BG, EE, EL, SE, SK.

715 DE, FR, LT.

716 BE, BG, DE, EE, EL, FR, NL, SE, SK.

717 BE, CY, CZ, FI, HU, IE, IT, LT, PT, SE.

718 BE, CY, FI, LT, PT, SE.

reliability of identity verification. The Finnish Immigration Service also started providing remote document examination support. Lithuania undertook operational changes to upgrade facial recognition systems, document verification tools and databases to improve their capacity to identify fraudulent documents.

The need to strengthen the prevention and identification of the use of forged travel documents also triggered operational and legislative changes in some EMN Member Countries.⁷¹⁹ Hungary and Sweden, for example, deployed experts to other countries to reinforce the prevention and detection of document fraud.⁷²⁰ Finland amended its legislation to clarify the consequences of presenting false travel/identity documents. The Czech Republic started preparatory works to enhance the security features of travel documents, while Sweden took further steps to introduce authentication of documents' digital chips.

10.4.2. Preventing irregular migration through information provision

Austria, Belgium and Finland sought to prevent irregular migration through new information campaigns for aspiring migrants, to raise their awareness of the risks associated with irregular migration.

Examples include Finland, which, in response to a risk of instrumentalisation of migration by Russia, launched a communication campaign in cooperation with the Finnish Border Guard, the Immigration Service and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The campaign targeted countries of origin and transit for potential migrants who may consider entering Finland through the eastern border (i.e. Iraq, Somalia, Belarus and Lebanon), and aimed to provide accurate information on irregular migration and inform migrants of the closure of the border. Austria undertook information campaigns in relevant countries of origin and transit to raise awareness of the risks of irregular migration, while Belgium launched several online information campaigns to raise awareness of the risks and consequences of irregular stay.

10.4.3. Cooperation with third countries to prevent irregular migration

Fifteen EMN Member Countries⁷²¹ enhanced their cooperation with third countries. Cooperation often aimed to reinforce collaboration with countries that play a key role in managing and preventing irregular migration,⁷²² and, in some cases, was developed to respond to a high number of irregular arrivals from certain regions/countries.⁷²³ Other cooperation efforts in this context sought to curb irregular migration,⁷²⁴ reinforce border

management⁷²⁵ and/or strengthen internal security.⁷²⁶ Most of the third countries with whom cooperation was reinforced in 2024 were in North,⁷²⁷ West⁷²⁸ and East Africa,⁷²⁹ or in the Middle East.⁷³⁰ Cooperation with Serbia⁷³¹ and Bangladesh⁷³² was also reinforced by four countries.

Five EMN Member Countries reinforced their cooperation with third countries through establishing or renewing cooperation agreements.⁷³³ Austria, for instance, signed an agreement with Bahrain to strengthen cooperation in the areas of internal security and migration, as well as legally non-binding MoUs with Ghana and Kenya to reinforce their cooperation on irregular migration, return and readmission. Italy signed a protocol of understanding to implement the Memorandum of Cooperation in the management of migration flows with Tunisia, including to counter irregular migration. Italy also hosted border guards from several countries, such as Libya and Tunisia, for training sessions related to border management and fighting migrant smuggling. Malta renewed its MoU with Libya irregular migration, and the Slovak Republic revised its MoU with Serbia to strengthen their technical and operational capacities, including establishing joint patrols in Serbian territory as part of joint operations.

Strengthening border management in third countries was reported by Italy, Poland and Portugal, which reinforced cooperation with third countries, including by enhancing their capacity to detect false documents. In cooperation with IOM, Italy organised training for border guards in Côte d'Ivoire.⁷³⁴ Portugal organised training sessions on border checks and document fraud for border guards in Guinea-Bissau, and Poland provided training on document security to the immigration police of Bangladesh and the civil registry of Senegal.

Hungary and Serbia strengthened their cooperation with third countries by enhancing the exchange of information or deploying liaison officers. Hungary started sharing statistical data with Serbia on document forgery detected on the Hungarian-Serbian border, and deployed police officers to the Serbian-North Macedonian border. Austria posted a police attaché to the Austrian embassy in Baghdad (Iraq).

Some of the measures adopted to reinforce cooperation with third countries specifically responded to an increase (or constant) number of irregular entries from certain countries.⁷³⁵ In view of the high migratory flows across the Eastern Mediterranean route, Bulgaria, for example, established an interinstitutional working group with Turkey to reinforce their cooperation on reducing irregular migration.

Luxembourg approved two EU Framework Agreements with Thailand and Malaysia at national level, which sought, among other things, to reinforce cooperation in combating irregular migration.

719 CZ, HU, IE, LT, SE.

720 Hungary deployed experts to Istanbul, Cairo and New Delhi and Sweden deployed an Immigration Liaison Officer to Athens.

721 AT, BE, BG, DE (migration partnerships with six countries on labour migration and irregular migration), EL, ES, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, PL, PT, SE, SK.

722 AT, BE, HU, IT, MT, PL, PT, SK.

723 BE, BG, IE, IT.

724 AT, BG, HU, IT, LU, PL.

725 HU, IT, PT, SK.

726 AT.

727 IT (Tunisia), MT (Libya)

728 AT (Ghana), IT (Côte d'Ivoire), PL (Senegal), PT (Guinea-Bissau).

729 AT (Kenya).

730 AT (Iraq and Bahrain), BG (Turkey).

731 HU, SK.

732 IT, PL.

733 AT, ES, IT, MT, SK.

734 In the context of the CIVIT project.

735 BG, IE, IT.

In January 2024, Italy converted its 2023 law decree on urgent measures regarding Italy's collaboration with states of the African continent into law. The law implemented measures regarding Italy's collaboration with

African countries, as part of the wider Mattei Plan on cooperation with African states, which aims – among other things – to prevent and combat irregular migration through cooperation.



10.5. PREVENTING IRREGULAR STAY

10.5.1. Monitoring of or sanctions against misuse of legal migration pathways for work, study or family reunification

Five EMN Member Countries adopted new measures to monitor or sanction the misuse of legal migration pathways,⁷³⁶ primarily in response to an increase in the number of attempts to fraudulently use specific types of visas and permits (e.g. for business, work or study).⁷³⁷ Finland reinforced cooperation between the police, the Finnish Immigration Service, the National Bureau of Investigation and the Finnish Border Guard to prevent the misuse of residence permits for study.

To further tackle undeclared work and restrict the misuse of legal migration channels, Italy passed a new law that introduced new conditions to employ third-country nationals. For example, employers must confirm an interest in hiring a third-country national before the visa is issued, and they cannot submit more than three applications to hire a foreign worker (see also Chapter 3)

10.5.2. Other developments aimed at preventing irregular stay and combating facilitation of irregular stay

Cyprus and Sweden implemented reforms that aimed to prevent and combat irregular stay, combined with making returns more effective (see also chapter 11). To respond more effectively to irregular stay, Cyprus enhanced its operational efforts to identify irregularly staying migrants and enforce return decisions. In Sweden, a State Commission of Inquiry presented measures to increase the information exchange between public authorities and municipalities to identify third-country nationals without a legal right to reside in the country, and to reinforce return operations. The measures presented included the possibility to conduct checks on foreigners within the country where there are reasons to assume that a third-country national has no legal right to reside in Sweden, and to search electronic communication equipment (e.g. mobile phones) in the residence permit return processes.

10.5.3. Prevention of employment of irregular migrants, including sanctions against employers

Six EMN Member Countries adopted new measures to prevent the employment of irregularly staying migrants.⁷³⁸ Most of these measures responded to a need to better tackle the employment of irregularly staying migrants⁷³⁹ and enhance the protection of third-country nationals from labour exploitation.⁷⁴⁰ With this aim, five EMN Member Countries⁷⁴¹ adopted legislative amendments to reinforce existing sanctions against employers,⁷⁴² and to clarify the definition of illegal employment⁷⁴³ or introduce additional obligations for employers.⁷⁴⁴ In Cyprus, an amendment to the Aliens and Immigration Law entered into force in 2024, granting the Labour Inspectorate the ability to impose administrative fines on employers in cases of illegal employment and the employment of irregularly staying persons. The Czech Republic amended the Employment Act to increase existing fines for employers, revise the definition of illegal work, and extend liability and sanctions to new cases (i.e. enabling the performance of illegal work, disguised employment intermediation, and the facilitation of disguised employment intermediation). France also adopted a new law that strengthened administrative sanctions against employers of irregularly staying migrants, and Lithuania amended its legislation to introduce stricter conditions for the employment of third-country nationals (e.g. employers must have no record of prior employment-related sanctions and migrant workers must not have been employed by more than four employers).

Lithuania and Cyprus also implemented structural changes to enhance interinstitutional cooperation to tackle the employment of irregularly staying migrants. In Cyprus, the Labour Inspectorate was given access to the Asylum Service data to better identify illegally residing and working migrants. In Lithuania, the State Labor Inspectorate in collaboration with the State Tax Inspectorate, the State Social Insurance Fund Board, the Financial Crime Investigation Service, the Police Department and the State Border Guard Service established the Interinstitutional Cooperation Centre. The centre was tasked, among other things, with the detection and prevention of illegal employment, undeclared work, forced labour and violations of foreign employment regulations.

In the context of the implementation of the government programme, Finland adopted legislative amendments that specify the situations under which residence permits can

736 FI, IT, LT, PL, SK.

737 FI, PL, SK.

738 CY, CZ, FI, FR, IT, LT.

739 CY, CZ, FR, IT, LT.

740 CZ, FR, IT.

741 CY, CZ, FR, IT, LT.

742 CY, CZ, FR, IT.

743 CZ.

744 IT.

be refused, including in cases where third-country nationals were working irregularly in Finland.



10.6. ACCESS TO SERVICES AND LEGAL SOLUTIONS FOR IRREGULARLY STAYING MIGRANTS

Ten EMN Member Countries reported new developments on access to services⁷⁴⁵ and/or legal solutions for irregularly staying third-country nationals in 2024.⁷⁴⁶

While Latvia adopted measures to enhance access to services by irregularly staying migrants, Germany and Finland introduced legislative and policy changes that restricted such access. The RUM Project (Reaching Undocumented Migrants), led by ICMPD's Return and Reintegration Facility (RRF), in partnership with the Belgian Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil), the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), and the Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI-Europe), aimed to improve outreach to undocumented migrants through the development of evidence-based tools and approaches. Countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, Serbia, and Switzerland contributed by sharing experiences and best

practices. In response to a recommendation of the Schengen Evaluation Commission, Latvia amended its Immigration Law to grant access to state legal aid to third-country nationals appealing detention decisions.

Italy and Portugal implemented changes that granted access to legal solutions for irregularly staying migrants. Italy introduced a new type of residence permit for third-country nationals who are victims of illegal recruitment and labour exploitation (see Chapter 11). Portugal approved a transitional regime that made it possible to apply for a residence permit under the revoked Expression of Interest procedure.⁷⁴⁷ France also sought to reduce legal uncertainty, so that the nature of the stay of migrants (regular or irregular) was determined by either a residence permit granting a right to stay or a return decision.

⁷⁴⁵ BE, DE, FI, LU, LV, and RS.

⁷⁴⁶ BE, ES, FR, IT, LV, PT.

⁷⁴⁷ The expression of interest was introduced by the 2007 Law on Foreign Nationals and allowed migrant workers to regularise their situation in Portugal by applying for a residence permit, even if they had entered the country on a tourist visa, as long as they had a proven employment relationship and their Social Security situation was regularised. Subsequently, Law 40/2024, of 7 November 2024, established a transitional regime that allows migrants who have contributed to Social Security in Portugal to be regularised. This regime replaces the expression of interest, which was revoked on 3 June 2024.

11. TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

11.1. INTRODUCTION

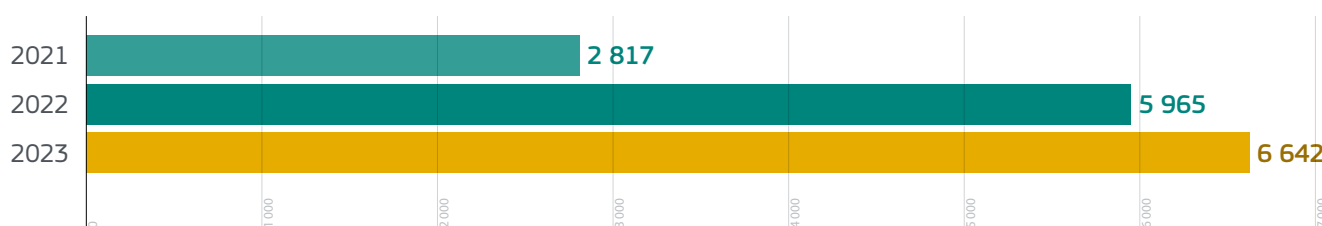
In 2024, developments to tackle trafficking in human beings were largely driven by a need to further enhance prevention, detection and identification, as well as the protection of victims, including through awareness raising, capacity building, and enhanced national and cross-border cooperation. A number of countries also worked on reinforcing or adopting national action plans and developed (or reinforced) national referral mechanisms.

At EU level, the main developments were legislative, with the adoption of the revised Anti-Trafficking Directive, which provides for new rules to reinforce the fight against trafficking in human beings. The adoption of the Pact also introduced specific safeguards and support for victims of trafficking in human beings.

Combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour⁷⁴⁸ and sexual exploitation⁷⁴⁹ was at the centre of several of the measures adopted nationally, with three countries also addressing the prevention of child trafficking and protecting child victims.⁷⁵⁰

The number of third-country national victims of trafficking in human beings registered in the EU and Norway rose in 2023⁷⁵¹ to 6 642 compared to 5 965 in 2022 – an increase of around 11% (see Figure 27). Meanwhile, the number of first residence permits issued to third-country victims of trafficking in human beings increased significantly in 2023 to 1 087 compared to 760 the previous year – a rise of over 43% (see Figure 28).

Figure 27: Number of third-country national victims of trafficking in human beings registered in the EU and in Norway, 2021-2023



Note: Excluding Sweden (2021 and 2022) and Norway (2021-2023) for which data are not available. Increase of reported number of victims is impacted by the increasing attention of the authorities and agencies that fight against trafficking in human beings.

Source: Eurostat (crim_thb_vctz), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

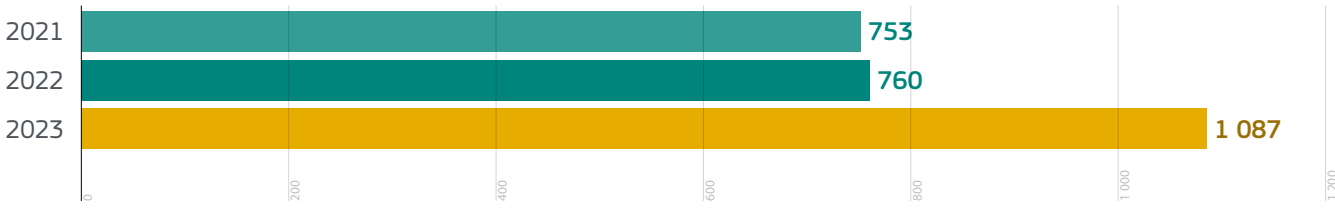
748 FI, FR, MT, SE.

749 BE, FR, IE, SE.

750 FR, MT, and GE.

751 At time of writing, data for the year 2024 on trafficking in human beings was not yet available.

Figure 28: Number of first residence permits issued to victims of trafficking in human beings, EU and Norway, 2021-2023



Source: Eurostat (migr_resoth), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.



11.2. EU DEVELOPMENTS

In June 2024, the European Parliament and the Council adopted Directive (EU) 2024/1712 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims ('revised Anti-Trafficking Directive'), which provides for new rules to reinforce the fight against trafficking in human beings.⁷⁵² The new Directive requires EU Member States, for example, to formally establish national referral mechanisms and improve coordination between those and asylum authorities. It also adds the exploitation of surrogacy, of forced marriage and of illegal adoption as new forms of exploitation under the trafficking definition (including when those take place online). To reduce the demand fostering trafficking in human beings, the revised Anti-Trafficking Directive requires EU Member States to criminalise the knowing use of services obtained from victims of trafficking. The Directive also seeks to strengthen existing tools for law enforcement and judicial authorities to investigate and prosecute this type of crime and formalises an annual Eurostat EU-wide data collection exercise on trafficking in human beings.⁷⁵³

The adoption of the Pact also introduced specific safeguards and support for victims of trafficking in human beings. Under Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 (the Screening Regulation), for example, EU Member States are required to involve national authorities responsible for detecting and identifying victims of trafficking in human beings in screening.⁷⁵⁴ Under Directive (EU) 2024/1346 (the recast Reception Conditions Directive),⁷⁵⁵ victims of trafficking in human beings are listed as applicants with special reception needs. In the same vein, Regulation (EU) 2024/1347 (the Qualification Regulation)⁷⁵⁶ requires EU Member States to consider the special needs of vulnerable categories of applicants for international protection, including victims of trafficking in human beings.

In June 2024, the Council adopted its negotiating position on the proposal to strengthen Europol's role to support EU Member States in fighting migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings (see Chapter 10).



11.3. NATIONAL STRATEGIC POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

In 2024, most EMN Member and Observer Countries implemented strategic policy measures, driven by the need to enhance the prevention and combating of trafficking in human beings.⁷⁵⁷ In most cases, these developments addressed all forms of trafficking,⁷⁵⁸ while in a few countries the strategic measures adopted focused on trafficking in human beings for the purpose of specific

types of exploitation, such as sexual exploitation,⁷⁵⁹ labour exploitation⁷⁶⁰ and the exploitation of children.⁷⁶¹

To continue enhancing their efforts to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings and support victims effectively, 14 EMN Member and Observer Countries adopted (or renewed) comprehensive national action plans broadly targeting all forms of trafficking.⁷⁶² Finland and Greece were in the process of updating theirs. Some of the main

752 Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (revised Anti-Trafficking Directive) (EU) 2024/1712), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024L1712>, accessed 17 February 2025.

753 European Commission, 'Stronger EU rules to fight trafficking in human beings enter into force', https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/stronger-eu-rules-fight-trafficking-human-beings-enter-force-2024-07-12_en, accessed 18 February 2025.

754 Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 introducing the screening of third-country nationals at the external borders and amending Regulations (EC) No 767/2008, (EU) 2017/2226, (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/817, (Screening Regulation (EU) 2024/1356) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401356, accessed 22 August 2024.

755 Directive (EU) 2024/1346 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast) (Reception Conditions Directive) (EU) 2024/1346), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401346, accessed 28 August 2024.

756 Regulation (EU) 2024/1347 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection and for the content of the protection granted, amending Council Directive 2003/109/EC and repealing Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, (Qualification Regulation (EU) 2024/1347) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401347, accessed 14 August 2024.

757 AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and GE, MD, UA.

758 AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI, SK, and GE, MD.

759 BE, FR, SE.

760 FI, FR, MT, SE.

761 FR, MT, and GE.

762 AT, BG, CZ, DE, FR, HR, LT, MT, NL, PT, SI, SK, and MD, RS.

aspects reinforced (or introduced) in the newly adopted action plans included: enhanced national⁷⁶³ and international⁷⁶⁴ cooperation to tackle trafficking in human beings; better protection of victims⁷⁶⁵ and prosecution of offenders;⁷⁶⁶ and enhanced prevention efforts targeting vulnerable groups (e.g. children, migrants and asylum seekers).⁷⁶⁷ There were also improvements in the (early) identification of victims,⁷⁶⁸ cooperation with the private sector⁷⁶⁹ and the adoption of child-sensitive approaches.⁷⁷⁰

Driven by government priorities, four EMN Member and Observer Countries adopted action plans to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings for specific types of exploitation.⁷⁷¹ Finland adopted an 'Action Plan against Labour Exploitation', while France adopted the 'Plan for the Repression of Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation' and launched its national strategy to combat the prostitution system and sexual exploitation. Georgia developed a 'Strategy on the Protection of Children Living and/or Working on the Street from Violence', which includes measures to protect these groups from trafficking in human beings.

Eight EMN Member Countries implemented legislative changes⁷⁷² to better tackle trafficking in human beings through prevention,⁷⁷³ strengthen the prosecution of traffickers⁷⁷⁴ and enhance victim protection,⁷⁷⁵ either by targeting specific forms of trafficking in human beings or through a comprehensive approach. With regard to strengthening prevention, Finland amended the Aliens Act to make it possible to refuse a residence permit if there are reasons to suspect that the applicant will be subjected to labour exploitation. Belgium adopted a law that allows the employment of sex workers under labour contracts, subject to prior authorisation under strict conditions aimed at preventing trafficking in human beings and exploitation. Ireland passed new legislation to enhance the protection of victims of sexual offences (including victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation), and to create a revised national referral mechanism for all victims of trafficking in human beings. Finland amended its criminal code to include forced marriage as a form of trafficking in human beings and Poland increased the penalties for traffickers. Among countries that adopted more comprehensive policies, Finland and Poland also introduced changes to their criminal laws to enhance their fight against trafficking in human beings.

Box 17: Initial efforts to adapt national legislation and practices to changes introduced by the revised Anti-Trafficking Directive (Directive (EU) 2024/1712)

In 2024, six EMN Member Countries⁷⁷⁶ reported adopting or discussing specific measures to adapt the national context to the new requirements introduced by the revised Anti-Trafficking Directive (Directive (EU) 2024/1712). Germany adopted, at federal level, its first comprehensive National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Human Trafficking and Support for Victims, which incorporates forms of exploitation included in the revised Directive – namely exploitation of surrogacy, of illegal adoption and of forced marriage. Greece and Poland established working groups to discuss or develop draft (amendments to) national legislation and policies to bring them in line with the revised Directive, and there were discussions in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Sweden on how the Directive would affect the national context.

In response to a need to enhance the prevention of trafficking in human beings and better protect and support (presumed) victims, four EMN Member Countries implemented organisational changes.⁷⁷⁷ In Cyprus, the role of the National Coordinator for Trafficking in Human Beings was transferred to the Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection, and Greece established a specialised team within the General Secretariat for the Protection of Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection (see box below).

Box 18: Creation of a specialised team within the Greek General Secretariat for the Protection of Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection

Recognising existing links between trafficking in human beings and migration flows, and the higher risks that vulnerable groups (e.g. unaccompanied minors, asylum seekers and stateless persons) are exposed to, in 2024, Greece established a specialised team for the protection of victims of violence and trafficking in human beings within the General Secretariat for the Protection of Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection. The team's work is structured around three pillars: prevention (including though training, awareness raising and proposing legislative reforms); protection (including measures to avoid revictimisation and empower victims); and coordination/cooperation, both at national level (with civil society organisations and among national authorities) and internationally.

763 AT, DE, FR, LT, NL, and MD.

764 AT, LT.

765 AT, FR, HR, LT, MT, NL, PT, and MD.

766 AT, MT, NL and MD.

767 DE, FR, LT, MT, PT.

768 FR, MT, NL.

769 HR, LT, and MD.

770 MT, NL.

771 FI, FR, SE, and GE.

772 BE, FI, FR, IE, MT, NL, PL, SE.

773 BE, FI.

774 FI, PL, NL, SE.

775 IE, MT.

776 CZ, DE, EE, EL, PL, SE.

777 CY, EL, LT, SE.



11.4. MAIN DETECTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS

11.4.1. Detection and identification of third-country national victims (including applicants for international protection)

Training and awareness raising

Twenty EMN Member and Observer Countries adopted measures to enhance the detection and identification of third-country national victims of trafficking in human beings, through awareness raising and the provision of training to key stakeholders.⁷⁷⁸ Some of these efforts focused specifically on the detection or identification of child victims,⁷⁷⁹ victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour⁷⁸⁰ or sexual exploitation,⁷⁸¹ and victims in migration and asylum procedures.⁷⁸²

Responding to a need to enhance awareness of indicators that could signal a situation of trafficking in human beings among people who may encounter (presumed) victims of it, 11 EMN Member and Observer Countries organised awareness raising campaigns⁷⁸³ and provided training to different actors.⁷⁸⁴ The main objective of these efforts was to enhance existing capacity to detect and identify victims of trafficking in human beings early.

In most cases, awareness raising and training efforts targeted multiple stakeholders, while also seeking to provide opportunities for cooperation and networking. Personnel at social services (including child protection authorities)⁷⁸⁵ were among the main target groups for these efforts. In Georgia, the Ministry of Justice in cooperation with the ICMPD organised training for staff at the State Care Agency on the identification of minor victims of trafficking in human beings. Poland launched a new social campaign titled 'Employed in Slavery' to raise public awareness of the forced labour phenomenon, including distributing online and print promotional materials to provincial teams working to combat trafficking in human beings across the country.

Labour authorities⁷⁸⁶ were another of the main target groups for information and capacity building campaigns organised by EMN Member Countries in 2024. Estonia, for example, organised a special training day for labour inspectors and other officials (e.g. heads of labour dispute committees and supervision inspectors) to inform them on current trends in trafficking in human beings, and enhance their capacity to detect potential victims.

In seven EMN Member Countries, awareness raising and training efforts also targeted migration and asylum authorities.⁷⁸⁷ The Swedish Migration Agency, for example, updated the handbook on trafficking in human beings for personnel at detention centres, and provided training to the units working with refugees admitted to Sweden under the quota system. As part of their resettlement

programmes, Greece and Slovenia developed new SOPs for the identification of victims of trafficking in human beings in international protection procedures (see box below).

Box 19: New SOPs for the identification of victims of trafficking in human beings among applicants for international protection

In cooperation with the Legal Centre for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment and UNHCR, Slovenia's Inter-Ministerial Working Group for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings started preparing new guidelines and procedures for the identification and referral of victims of trafficking in human beings among applicants for international protection. The SOPs will be included as part of the updated Manual on the Identification, Assistance and Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in 2025.

In Greece, the Reception and Identification Service issued an SOP on the identification of, and response to, potential or actual victims of trafficking in human beings within reception and accommodation facilities.

Considering the key role of the private sector (e.g. hospitality and transport sectors) in detecting victims of trafficking, three EMN Member Countries⁷⁸⁸ organised awareness raising campaigns and training targeting these stakeholders (see box below).

Box 20: Training and awareness raising efforts targeting the private sector

Belgium launched an awareness action targeting the hotel sector in the BrusselsCapital Region and its surroundings. As part of the campaign, they provided hotel staff with brochures explaining what constitutes trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation, how to recognise potential signs of exploitation, and providing practical advice and useful contacts.

Estonia organised a seminar for road transport companies to enhance their capacity to identify victims of trafficking in human beings. The seminar was organised under the leadership of the European Labour Authority in cooperation with the Labour Inspectorate, the Police and Border Guard Board, and the Ministry of Climate.

Greece organised the online event 'Trafficking in Human Beings: Break the Chain', which focused on increasing awareness of trafficking in human beings among the airport community, hotel industry, teachers and education staff, and others.

⁷⁷⁸ BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LV, MT, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and GE.

⁷⁷⁹ CZ, DE, EL, MT, SE, and GE.

⁷⁸⁰ DE, EL, FR, PL, SE.

⁷⁸¹ BE, DE, FR, SE.

⁷⁸² CZ, EL, HU, SE, SI.

⁷⁸³ BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, MT, PL, SK, and GE.

⁷⁸⁴ DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, MT, PL, PT, SE and GE.

⁷⁸⁵ CY, CZ, DE, EL, LV.

⁷⁸⁶ DE, EE, EL, FI.

⁷⁸⁷ CZ, EE, EL, FI, HU, SE, SI.

⁷⁸⁸ BE, EE, EL.

Through the provision of training, 10 EMN Member and Observer Countries specifically sought to enhance the capacity of law enforcement and judicial authorities to identify victims of trafficking in human beings early and ensure their protection.⁷⁸⁹ Cyprus, for instance, organised training for police officers and other officials, to improve their detection capacities and promote the sharing of investigative best practices. The Czech Republic introduced a new specialisation within the court system on sexual crimes, including trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation. France developed a specific course for investigators on interviewing (presumed) victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Awareness raising and information campaigns were also organised to increase awareness among the general public and enhance their capacity to recognise potential cases of trafficking in human beings.⁷⁹⁰ These efforts often included public events, brochures, posters and information stands in public places, as well as social media campaigns. Some of these were organised in the context of the UN Blue Heart Campaign⁷⁹¹ or the EU Anti-Trafficking Day.⁷⁹² In Poland, for example, various institutions ran promotional activities for EU AntiTrafficking Day, including conferences, workshops and informational meetings aimed primarily at youth and people seeking work abroad. These celebrations included special projects such as the 'Escapetruck' mobile escape room, which aims to raise public awareness about trafficking in human beings through experiencing dilemmas inspired by real stories.

Measures on cooperation between national authorities

In 2024, eight EMN Member Countries reported on developments in cooperation between national authorities, commonly driven by the need to improve inter-agency coordination and enhance the exchange of information to better identify victims of trafficking in human beings.⁷⁹³ In view of the increasing number of identified victims of forced labour, the Polish Ministry of Interior strengthened collaboration with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, including through training and joint awareness raising activities. France implemented multidisciplinary training courses on trafficking in human beings to optimise cooperation between those involved in law enforcement and the judicial system and enhance victims' rights.

Measures on cooperation between (Member) States

Thirteen EMN Member Countries reported enhanced efforts to reinforce cooperation with other (Member) States to tackle trafficking in human beings in 2024.⁷⁹⁴

Eight EMN Member Countries took part in joint operational actions to identify potential victims of trafficking in human

beings,⁷⁹⁵ including in the framework of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).⁷⁹⁶ EMN Member Countries also reinforced their collaboration to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings in the context of regional cooperation structures, such as the EU Network of National Coordinators and Rapporteurs on trafficking in human beings;⁷⁹⁷ the Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings (TF-THB) of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (the CBSS)(see box below);⁷⁹⁸ and the Nordic Council of Ministers.⁷⁹⁹

Box 21: Cooperation in the context of the TF-THB of the CBSS⁸⁰⁰

In 2024, Estonia and Finland held the presidency of the CBSS. During the Estonian presidency, cooperation among members of the TF-THB focused on prevention, investigation, and the provision of assistance to victims, with a special focus on migrant workers and persons engaged in prostitution. During the Finnish presidency, cooperation focused on improving the know-how and collaboration of countries in the Baltic Sea Region in preventing child trafficking and assisting victims. In 2024, the TFTHB adopted a new strategy that addresses critical issues such as labour exploitation, trafficking in human beings in the context of migration, and the genderspecific aspects of trafficking in human beings.

In view of the high number of child victims of forced begging from Balkan countries detected in northern Greece, the Greek National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) partnered with the Social Organisation for Youth Support, and with Bulgarian and Romanian organisations, to implement the Special Action 'Coordination Services for Victims of Human Trafficking in the South-Eastern Balkans'.

Other developments in relation to detection and identification

In 2024, France and Belgium adopted measures to reinforce cooperation with social media platforms and digital applications to enhance the detection and identification of victims of trafficking in human beings. In France, the Central Office for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings (OCRTEH) developed partnerships with several companies (Booking.com, Uber) whose products (applications, social networks, websites, etc.) are used by traffickers to exploit victims. A seminar was organised in April 2024 to launch this cooperation. OCRTEH also reinforced its partnership with Airbnb in 2024. In December 2024, Belgium organised the 'Benelux Day on Human Trafficking and New Technologies' to foster discussion and collaboration between Benelux government representatives and technology companies on the exploitation of digital platforms by traffickers, and strategies to combat this challenge.

789 CY, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, LV, MT, PT, SE, and GE.

790 BE, IT, MT, PL, SI, SK, and GE.

791 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'Blue Heart Campaign', <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/blueheart/>, accessed 10 March 2025.

792 BE, EL, SK, and GE.

793 DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, MT, PL, SE.

794 AT, BE, CY, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, IT, MT, LV, PL, SE.

795 AT, BE, CY, DE, FR, IE, LT, SE.

796 BE, CY, DE, FR, IE, LT, SE.

797 BE. In 2024, Belgium organised a meeting of this network, composed of all EU Member States, in the context of its Presidency of the Council of the EU.

798 DE, EE, EL, FI, LV, PL, SE.

799 SE.

800 Members of the TF-THB include Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland and Sweden.

11.4.2. National referral mechanisms (or equivalent systems) for victims of trafficking in human beings

Updates on national referral mechanisms or guidelines for their implementation were reported by eight EMN Member Countries⁸⁰¹ in 2024, to improve their effectiveness and better protect victims.

A few EMN Member Countries adopted⁸⁰² or were working to establish (or update)⁸⁰³ their national referral mechanisms. Poland adopted a new national referral mechanism, and France reinforced its one by allowing thirdparty detectors (primarily specialised associations) to provide evidence of exploitation.

New guidelines or SOPs for the implementation of national referral mechanisms were adopted by three EMN Member Countries⁸⁰⁴ in response to the need to improve the identification and protection of victims,⁸⁰⁵ and strengthen the effectiveness of the mechanism.⁸⁰⁶ Greece updated a specialised edition of SOPs focusing on the identification and support of victims in the asylum procedure to reflect organisational and legislative changes implemented in the country. Finland developed the 'National Referral Mechanism Handbook' for identifying victims of trafficking in human beings and ensuring their protection, while Germany drafted guidelines for cooperation between stakeholders within individual federal states for the identification and protection of child victims of trafficking in human beings and exploitation.



11.5. PROTECTION OF VICTIMS

11.5.1. Provision of a reflection period and/or legal residence for (presumed) third-country national victims of trafficking in human beings

In 2024, there were no developments reported concerning the provision of a reflection period for (presumed) victims of trafficking in human beings. Italy introduced a new type of residence permit for third-country national victims of illegal recruitment and labour exploitation and their family members, when individuals provide useful assistance in the investigation (e.g. identifying the perpetrators). The permit allows a stay in Italy for six months that can be extended for up to a year, and can later be converted to a work or study permit. This permit grants access to social services, study and work.

11.5.2. Provision of information, assistance and support to (presumed) third-country national victims of trafficking in human beings

Developments in the provision of information, assistance and support to (presumed) third-country national victims were detailed by 10 EMN Member and Observer Countries for 2024.⁸⁰⁷ The developments were related to either awareness raising activities⁸⁰⁸ or provision of additional support.⁸⁰⁹

Six EMN Member Countries⁸¹⁰ reported measures related to the provision of information to victims to raise their awareness of indicators of trafficking in human beings,⁸¹¹ or to inform them of existing procedures for requesting

assistance and the support services available to them.⁸¹² Cyprus published a guidebook for victims of exploitation and trafficking in human beings, and Sweden developed a brochure on the national referral mechanism to facilitate the dissemination of information on available support. Both resources were translated into 12 languages. Bulgaria launched a project in cooperation with IOM to raise awareness of the risks of trafficking in human beings.

Five EMN Member and Observer Countries sought to enhance the provision of support to victims⁸¹³ through the implementation of organisational changes,⁸¹⁴ improvement of the direct support provided,⁸¹⁵ or provision of capacity building to relevant actors.⁸¹⁶ Croatia established new Victim and Witness Support Departments at the courts and Luxembourg increased the staff at InfoTraite to ensure 24/7 availability of the assistance service, which covers the reception and psychosocial care of victims. Georgia created the Division of Services for the Victims of Human Trafficking and Violence within the State Care Agency to better coordinate the provision of assistance to victims.

In the context of a project implemented in cooperation with IOM, Greece adopted specific actions to train frontline professionals and provide in-kind support to thirdcountry national victims (e.g. vocational training, language and cultural orientation, healthcare and support for establishing small businesses), to promote their social integration.

801 DE, EE, FI, LV, MT, PL

802 PL

803 EE, FI, IE, MT

804 DE, EL, FI

805 DE, FI

806 EL

807 BG, CY, EE, EL, FR, HR, LV, MT, SE, and GE

808 BG, CY, EE, EL, FR, LV, SE

809 EL, HR, LU, MT, and GE

810 BG, CY, EE, EL, FR, LV, SE

811 BG, CY, EE, FR, LV

812 CY, EE, EL, SE

813 EL, HR, LU, MT, and GE

814 EL, HR, LU

815 EL, SI

816 EL, MT



11.6. COOPERATION WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

Ten EMN Member and Observer Countries⁸¹⁷ reported developments in their cooperation with third countries to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings.

The need to reinforce the fight against trafficking in human beings as a form of organised crime was one of the main motivations for strengthening cooperation with third countries⁸¹⁸ France and Italy, for instance, sought to enhance the capacity of third-country law enforcement authorities to combat trafficking in human beings. Italy worked on reinforcing the capacity of Libyan and Nigerian local forces, and France implemented a project in partnership with Colombia, which included providing training to Colombian investigators to strengthen Franco-Colombian police, judicial and voluntary sector cooperation in the field of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Germany signed MoUs with Brazil, Peru and Colombia to enhance cooperation in the fight against serious and organised crime, including trafficking in human beings.

Similarly, Estonia and Belgium reinforced their cooperation with third countries to respond to the high risk of trafficking in human beings among specific third-country nationalities. To respond to the high risk of labour exploitation and trafficking among refugees and internally displaced persons, Belgium supported a project in Ukraine implemented by the ILO to prevent trafficking in human beings among those groups. Estonia implemented a project in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Uzbekistan to prevent trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation. A pocket 'Guide to Safe Labour Migration between Uzbekistan and Estonia' was developed as a result of the project.

Luxembourg ratified, at national level, the Framework Agreements between the EU and Thailand, and between the EU and Malaysia, which seek to reinforce cooperation in preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting victims, among other aspects.



11.7. BENEFICIARIES OF TEMPORARY PROTECTION

In 2024 there were no legal or policy developments in relation to the fight against trafficking in human beings among BoTP.



11.8. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

Eight EMN Member Countries⁸¹⁹ reported on receiving visits and recommendations from the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), as part of the periodic monitoring of the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. These often triggered national discussions and, in some cases, led to the implementation of reforms to comply with the recommendations.

Malta, for example, amended its criminal code following a GRETA recommendation to ensure that all child victims of trafficking in human beings are afforded special protection measures. The amendment included, among other things, the possibility for judges not to impose punishment on minors convicted of: instigating or inducing persons underage to engage in prostitution or participate in a pornographic performance; or the display and possession

of pornographic material, indecent photographs, films or other material of persons underage in public places, if they were victims of sexual abuse and were compelled to commit the offence. The legislative amendment also allows the recording of minor victims' statements to the police, and establishes an obligation to examine and cross-examine children in one sitting and record their statements.

In Sweden, the Swedish Migration Agency's internal network against trafficking in human beings started collaborating more closely with the unit that handles Dublin cases, following GRETA's recommendations. Lithuania initiated the transfer of monitoring trafficking in human beings from the Ministry of Interior to the Ombudsmen's Office to enhance independence in the overseeing of trafficking efforts, as recommended by GRETA. This came into force on 1 January 2025.

⁸¹⁷ BE, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, IT, LU, PL, SE, and GE.

⁸¹⁸ DE, FR, IT, PL, SE, and GE.

⁸¹⁹ BE, CZ, DE, FI, LT, LU, MT, SE, SK.

12. RETURN AND READMISSION



12.1. INTRODUCTION

Key EU policy measures and national actions in the area of return and readmission in 2024 primarily aimed to enhance the effectiveness of return procedures and increase the numbers of third-country nationals returned. Central developments at EU level included the adoption of the Return Border Procedure Regulation and the thematic Schengen evaluation of return.

National measures on forced return were driven by security concerns⁸²⁰ and challenges posed by a lack of collaboration,⁸²¹ and sought to improve identification processes to increase the effectiveness of return.⁸²² Several EMN Member and Observer Countries cooperated on Frontex JROs.

In total, 23 EMN Member Countries reported developments in assisted voluntary return.⁸²³ Eleven countries⁸²⁴ aimed to increase the number or capacity for voluntary returns. Return counselling was most frequently cited as a measure to increase the uptake of voluntary return options.⁸²⁵ Fifteen EMN Member and Observer Countries⁸²⁶ reported on their cooperation with Frontex via the EURP, including four⁸²⁷ that began such cooperation.

Fifteen EMN Member Countries⁸²⁸ reported developments related to detention. Six⁸²⁹ reported developments that expanded the legal basis for detention, except for children. Three⁸³⁰ moved towards non-detention of children in

return procedures. Eight⁸³¹ reported other developments in respect of places and conditions of detention.

Sixteen EMN Member and Observer Countries⁸³² reported bilateral readmission cooperation, including readmission agreements, EU readmission agreement implementation protocols, using the electronic readmission case management system (RCMS), and non-binding cooperation (see Table 5 in Section 12.7).

The total number of returns in EMN Member Countries and Norway increased by 16%, from 107 540 in 2023 to 124 480 in 2024 (see Figure 29). This is a more considerable increase than in previous years, compared to 10% in 2023 and 1% in 2022. However, the low numbers in 2021 and 2022 could be explained by COVID-19 and the associated travel restrictions. The share of voluntary returns also increased, from 44.6% in 2023 to 52.4% in 2024. Assisted returns⁸³³ continued to represent the majority of all returns (see Figure 30). The share of this form of return increased from 72.5% in 2023 to 74.5% in 2024. In EMN Observer Countries, overall returns decreased by 5% in 2024 as compared to 2023, from 5 816 to 5 545 (see Table 4). In Armenia, Georgia, Moldova (for 2023 only), Montenegro and North Macedonia, the vast majority of returns were voluntary, while enforced returns took the largest share in Moldova (for 2024 only), Serbia and Ukraine.

820 DE, FI, FR, PL.

821 BE, LT.

822 BE, FI, IT, SE.

823 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and RS.

824 BG, CY, ES, IT, HU, LT, LU, MT, PT, SE, SK.

825 BG, EL, LU, MT, PT, SE, SI.

826 BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, HU, IT, LV, PL, SI, SK, and NO.

827 HU, IT, LV, SK.

828 BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, HU, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK.

829 BE, DE, FR, HU, LT, SI.

830 BE, DE, FR.

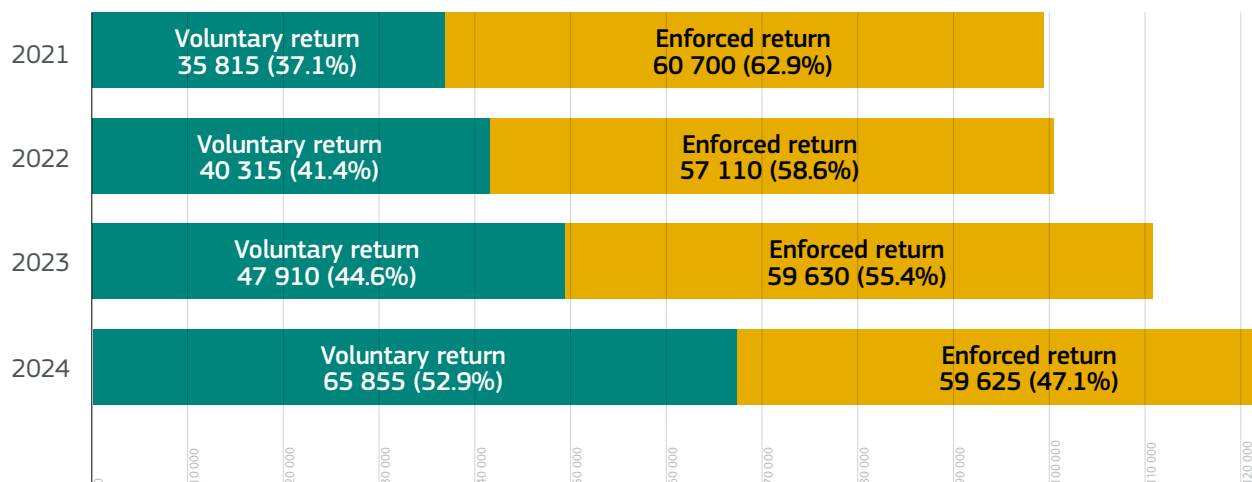
831 EE, HU, LU, LV, NL, PT, SE, SK.

832 AT, BG, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, SK, and GE, MD, UA.

833 Eurostat defines assisted returns as the situation in which the third-country national was assisted to return, by being the beneficiary of a national or EU Member State cooperative programme to encourage return and to provide reintegration assistance. Beneficiaries of assisted return programmes are mostly persons who voluntarily return but some may also have been returned by force (enforced return). In turn, non-assisted return refers to the situation in which the third-country national is recorded with departure and they do not receive a support and assistance from the national authorities (Eurostat, Enforcement of Immigration Legislation, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/fr/migr_eil_esms.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com, accessed 8 June 2025).

Figure 29: Third-country nationals who left the territory by type of return, EU, and Norway, 2021-2024

Absolute number (and the share within the total)

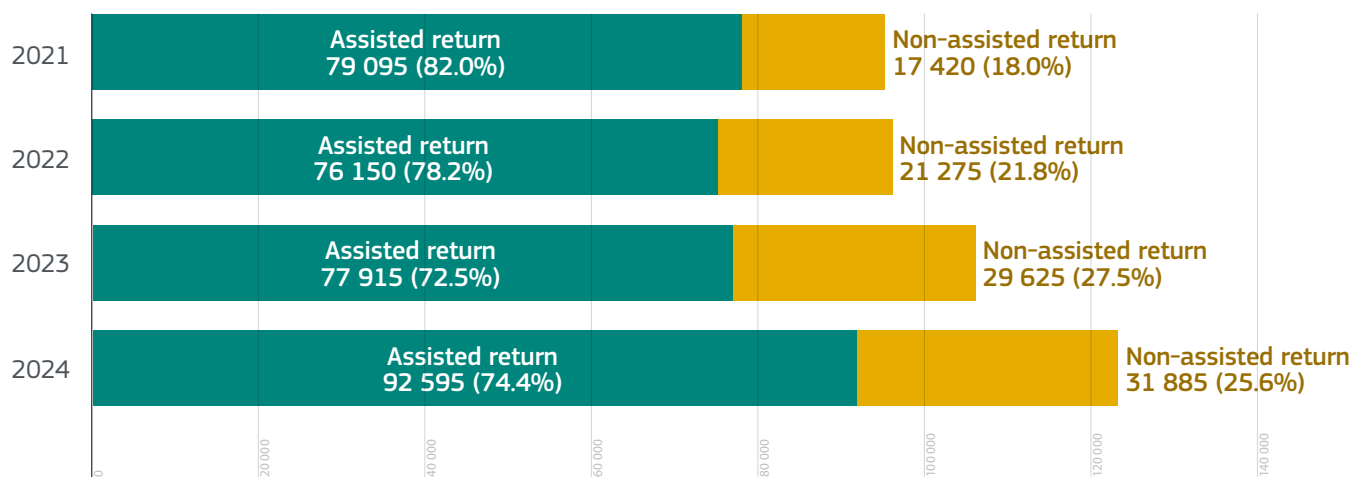


Source: Eurostat (migr_eirtn1), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

Notes: 2021 data not available for Lithuania; 2021-2023 data not available for Cyprus; Q4 2024 data not available for Portugal and Norway (estimated using Q3 2024 data).

Figure 30: Third-country nationals who left the territory by type of assistance received, EU and Norway, 2021-2024

Absolute number (and the share within the total)



Source: Eurostat (migr_eirtn1), date of extraction: 10 June 2025.

Notes: 2021 data not available for Lithuania; 2021-2023 data not available for Cyprus; Q4 2024 data not available for Portugal and Norway (estimated using Q3 2024 data).

Table 4: Number of foreign nationals who left the territory of EMN Observer Countries by type of return, 2023-2024

EMN Observer Country	Year	Number of voluntary returns	Voluntary returns as a % of the total number of returns	Number of enforced returns	Enforced returns as a % of the total number of returns	Number of total returns
Armenia	2023	2	100%	0	0%	2
	2024	20	100%	0	0%	20

EMN Observer Country	Year	Number of voluntary returns	Voluntary returns as a % of the total number of returns	Number of enforced returns	Enforced returns as a % of the total number of returns	Number of total returns
Georgia	2023	181	95%	9	5%	190
	2024	312	86%	51	14%	363
Moldova	2023	1603	96%	71	4%	1674
	2024	3	13%	20	87%	23
Montenegro	2023	1007	92%	82	8%	1089
	2024	1554	96%	73	4%	1627
North Macedonia	2023	9	100%	0	0%	9
	2024	10	100%	0	0%	10
Serbia	2023	89	31%	198	69%	287
	2024	103	33%	212	67%	315
Ukraine	2023	89	3%	2476	97%	2565
	2024	77	2%	3110	98%	3187

Source: relevant authorities in the EMN Observer Country.

'n/i' means no information

'n/a' means not applicable

Armenia note: the number of Voluntary Returns only includes cases of assisted voluntary return. There are administrative statistics on unassisted voluntary return.

Serbia note: (1) voluntary returns means returns through a programme of assisted voluntary return and reintegration. (2) forced return means return through readmission agreements and escorted by the police to the border crossing. (3) the total number of returns includes the sum (1) and (2).



12.2. EU DEVELOPMENTS

The adoption of the Return Border Procedure Regulation, as part of the Pact, was a key milestone in 2024. It establishes a new return procedure to be applied to persons whose application for international protection has been rejected in the asylum border procedure. The return border procedure will be applied, in principle, at the external border or transit zones. The procedure will last up to 12 weeks (18 weeks in a situation of crisis). If the person is not returned during this period, the return procedure under the Return Directive will apply.

Three further pieces of legislation that form part of the Pact are relevant for return. The Screening Regulation establishes rules for checks and registration of irregular migrants and asylum seekers entering the EU and a link to ensuing return or asylum procedures. The Asylum Procedure Regulation provides closer links between asylum and return procedures, providing that a return decision can be issued as part of the decision rejecting the asylum application, or in a separate act issued together with the negative decision at the same time or shortly thereafter. Where a return decision is issued as part of the decision rejecting international protection, both decisions are appealed jointly before the same court or tribunal, within the same judicial proceedings, and within the same time-limits. If the return decision is issued separately, it may be appealed in separate judicial proceedings. The Eurodac Regulation allows Eurodac to store data on third-country nationals found staying irregularly.

The revised Schengen Border Code was adopted on 13 June 2024 (see Chapter 9) and widens the possibility of transferring persons between EU Member States, rather than returning them under the Return Directive. Article 23a of the Schengen Borders Code allows EU Member States to transfer back, within a maximum of 24 hours, persons apprehended without a right to stay at internal borders areas, to a neighbouring Member State if there is a bilateral cooperation framework allowing for such transfers.

On 16 December 2024, the European Commission presented the 2024 thematic Schengen evaluation report 'Bridging national gaps: towards an effective EU return system through common solutions and innovative practices'.⁸³⁴ Its recommendations broadly fall into three areas: 1) a well-functioning Schengen system requires effective returns, 2) ensuring effectiveness at key stages of the return process between national authorities, and 3) maximising national efficiency through stronger European cooperation.

On the external dimension of return policy, the European Commission signed new partnerships including provisions on return and readmission with Mauritania on 7 March 2024⁸³⁵ and Egypt on 17 March 2024⁸³⁶ (see Section 13.2).

⁸³⁴ European Commission, 'Schengen thematic evaluation report - Bridging national gaps: towards an effective EU return system, 18 December 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/schengen-thematic-evaluation-report-bridging-national-gaps-towards-effective-eu-return-system_en, accessed 21 February 2025.

⁸³⁵ European Commission, 'The European Commission launches new migration partnership with Mauritania', Press release, 7 March 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1335, accessed 21 February 2025.

⁸³⁶ European Commission, 'EU-Egypt: Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership', Factsheet, 17 March 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_24_1512 https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/joint-declaration-strategic-and-comprehensive-partnership-between-arab-republic-egypt-and-european-2024-03-17_en, accessed 21 February 2025.



12.3. OVERARCHING AND CROSS-CUTTING DEVELOPMENTS

In 2024, all EU Member States fully applying the Schengen acquis underwent a thematic Schengen evaluation in the area of return.

At national level, there were overarching developments in return and readmission. In France⁸³⁷ and Hungary,⁸³⁸ new cross-cutting legal instruments addressing return and detention (among other areas of migration) entered into force in 2024. Greece established a National Return Coordinator to provide support to competent national authorities and work closely with the EU High-Level Network

for Return, EU Return Coordinator, Frontex and EUAA. Slovak Republic started preparations for the creation of a separate Return Department within the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police. In view of the high number of irregularly staying migrants, Belgium amended its Immigration and Reception Acts to introduce a proactive return policy and the implementation of individual case management (ICAM) coaching for irregularly staying third-country nationals.



12.4. FORCED RETURN

12.4.1. Forced return

Seventeen EMN Member and Observer Countries⁸³⁹ adopted various measures to increase the numbers of persons returned through forced return. More specifically, measures aimed to improve identification processes to increase the effectiveness of return⁸⁴⁰ or were driven by security considerations,⁸⁴¹ challenges posed by lack of collaboration with return,⁸⁴² and rulings of national courts.⁸⁴³

Developments in four EMN Member Countries⁸⁴⁴ focused on the identification process to help increase the effectiveness of return. Sweden sought to facilitate the identification of foreigners through information exchange between public authorities and municipalities, easier conditions for internal checks, the possibility to search communication devices, and increased use of biometric information. Belgium's newly adopted law will allow specific immigration officers to search electronic devices belonging to persons staying irregularly and suspected of criminal activity, based on prior authorisation from the public prosecutor or an investigating judge. Finland set up an operational cooperation group to improve the exchange of information between the immigration service and the police. Amendments in Italy focused on the acquisition of information relevant for the purpose of identifying foreigners entering/staying irregularly. Persons apprehended during irregular border crossing, rescued at sea and placed in immigration detention are required to cooperate with the authorities for identity verification purposes and have the duty to provide any elements in their possession related to their age, identity, and nationality, as well as the countries where they have stayed or transited.

Four EMN Member Countries⁸⁴⁵ reported developments driven at least in part by security considerations. In Germany, the new Act to improve returns allows more effective forced returns of criminals and people considered a potential threat by tackling problems with identification

and seeking to prevent absconding. To help return people involved in certain crimes with weapons or other dangerous objects, the new Act to improve domestic security and the asylum system provides additional grounds for return. New provisions in the Criminal Code penalising resistance or attacks on people equivalent to law enforcement officers were included in the law governing expulsions.

In Belgium and Lithuania, immigration legislation was amended because of challenges posed by a lack of cooperation with return procedures. Belgium adopted an amendment to its legislation that introduced the obligation to cooperate in return procedures and specified the consequences of failure to cooperate. Driven by increased misuse of the asylum procedure, the amendment to Lithuania's legislation will limit the rights of asylum applicants to remain while their applications are being processed and will facilitate swift removals of rejected applicants.

France tackled legal uncertainties through a legal act, meaning that foreign nationals either have a right to residence and are issued a residence permit (see Section 10.6), or do not and are notified of a return decision. Implementing its Action Plan for Migration, Portugal aimed to resolve pending cases by granting residence permits to those who meet the conditions for legalisation and notifying those who do not meet the same conditions to leave the country (after appeal deadlines have been exhausted) (see Section 10.6).

Norway lowered the threshold for tribunal hearings in deportation cases involving children, increasing access to judicial review. In the Netherlands, as per a national court ruling, return decisions will always name the country of return. Moldova partially transposed the Return Directive.

Five EMN Member Countries⁸⁴⁶ reported developments in respect of countries of return. In Austria, the Constitutional Court ruled that return decisions for an Afghan and a Syrian national were in accordance with the Austrian Constitution. In the Netherlands, the moratorium on returns to

837 CIAI Law.

838 Act XC of 2023 on the General Rules for the Entry and Residence of Third-Country Nationals.

839 AT, BE, CY, DE, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI and NO, MD.

840 BE, FI, IT, SE.

841 DE, FI, FR, PL.

842 BE, LT.

843 AT, NL.

844 BE, FI, IT, SE.

845 DE, FI, FR, PL.

846 AT, EL, FI, IE, NL.

Sudan expired. An amendment to Ireland's International Protection Act 2015 provided for the risk of serious harm to be reviewed when considering a transfer to a safe third country. Finland joined the joint Nordic initiative (NO-RAQ)⁸⁴⁷ with a focus on returns to Iraq.

Finland and Sweden implemented amendments to migration legislation concerning entry bans. In Finland, the amendments provided for withdrawing a residence permit from a foreigner staying outside Finland and imposing an entry ban for security reasons. In Sweden, the amendments will change the start date of an entry ban and their maximum duration.

Legislative amendments in Belgium expanded the range of competent forced return escorts, including Frontex personnel, to address existing shortages. Cyprus' Aliens and Immigration Unit of the police participated in national training on forced return escorts, organised by Frontex.

Based on a public procurement process, Slovenia selected an institution to monitor returns throughout the three phases of the procedure, namely the preparation for

return, the return itself, and the handover. Ireland selected a company to deliver charter flights to increase its capacity to organise removals.

12.4.2. Participation in JROs

Several EMN Member and Observer Countries cooperated on Frontex JROs in 2024. Cyprus participated in 16 JROs, Finland participated in three, and Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, and Malta participated in one JRO each. Greece organised eight JROs (seven to Georgia and Pakistan, and one to Pakistan and Bangladesh). Moldova cooperated with Germany to carry out six JROs from Germany and Poland, transferring 177 and five Moldovan citizens from these countries, respectively, where Moldova provided escorts.

More broadly, Nordic countries⁸⁴⁸ and Germany established cooperation to share operational needs, best practices and common planning to improve the use of the Frontex budget and increase the number of JROs and returns.



12.5. (ASSISTED) VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

12.5.1. Assisted voluntary return, including return counselling

Twenty-three EMN Member Countries⁸⁴⁹ reported developments concerning assisted voluntary return. Eleven⁸⁵⁰ aimed to increase the number or capacity for voluntary returns.

Twelve EMN Member Countries focused on return counselling, often with Frontex or IOM support.⁸⁵¹ Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia and the Netherlands renewed cooperation or started projects with the IOM, while Germany's federal authorities took over responsibility from the IOM for processing applications and organising voluntary returns. The IOM still remains an important partner for Germany's voluntary return and reintegration programmes.

To promote voluntary return and facilitate procedures, some countries⁸⁵² enacted new legislative amendments, while others adopted policy documents⁸⁵³ or developed operational guidance.⁸⁵⁴ Austria introduced special measures to support returns to Syria.

Box 22: New Strategy for Global Development Cooperation on Migration, Returns and Voluntary Repatriation in Sweden

Sweden presented a new Strategy for Global Development Cooperation on Migration, Returns and Voluntary Repatriation as a part of its new reform agenda for development assistance. It seeks to strengthen synergies between development assistance policy and migration policy. It will also help to counteract irregular migration and stimulate well-functioning returns that can contribute to sustainable growth and development in receiving countries (see Chapter 13).

12.5.2. Reintegration measures

Fifteen EMN Member and Observer Countries⁸⁵⁵ reported on their cooperation with Frontex via the EURP. The cooperation continued in nine countries,⁸⁵⁶ started in four⁸⁵⁷ and was enhanced in two others.⁸⁵⁸ In Germany, the number of returnees supported by the EURP increased by half.

Malta and Sweden increased their financial reintegration assistance, the Netherlands adjusted its assistance to the EURP level, and Finland provided for reducing the amount of money if the person applies for it after 30 days from notification of the first negative asylum decision. In Italy and Latvia, return and reintegration assistance were also opened to persons forcibly returned.

847 ICMPD, 'Inauguration of Nordic Cooperation on Return and Reintegration in Iraq (NORAQ) Framework', 11 June 2024, <https://www.icmpd.org/news/inauguration-of-nordic-cooperation-on-return-and-reintegration-in-iraq-noraq-framework>, accessed 18 March 2025.

848 DK, FI, IS, NO, SE.

849 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and RS.

850 BG, CY, ES, IT, HU, LT, LU, MT, PT, SE, SK.

851 AT, BE, BG, CY, EL, ES, IT, LU, MT, PT, SE, SI.

852 FI, IT, LT.

853 ES.

854 RS.

855 BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, HU, IT, LV, PL, SI, SK, and NO.

856 BG, CY, CZ, EE, EL, FI, PL, SI, and NO.

857 HU, IT, LV, SK.

858 BE, DE.

Box 23: Comprehensive sustainable reintegration projects in Belgium

The Belgian Development Agency (Enabel) launched two sustainable reintegration projects in Côte d'Ivoire (MIGRET)⁸⁵⁹ and Guinea (AMIS).⁸⁶⁰ The projects involve the cooperation of various stakeholders in Belgium

and the countries of return to embed reintegration services within existing governance and service structures. They aim to strengthen institutional capacity to ensure that national and local stakeholders are equipped to address the needs of returning migrants.



12.6. DETENTION

12.6.1. Detention

Fifteen EMN Member Countries⁸⁶¹ reported developments related to detention. In the Netherlands and Slovenia, the developments were driven by rulings of national courts. Six EMN Member Countries⁸⁶² expanded the legal basis for detention, except for children. Eight⁸⁶³ reported developments in respect of places and conditions of detention.

Seven EMN Member Countries⁸⁶⁴ modified the legal provisions on justification of detention or procedural safeguards. In France, the threat to public order may be invoked to support a request for detention or its extension. To fully use the period of detention laid down in the Return Directive, amendments to Lithuania's legislation ensured that the period of detention during the examination of the application for international protection was not included in the total detention period.

On procedural safeguards, in response to rulings of their domestic courts, the Netherlands' new policy clarified that upon receiving a detention decision, the person must be fully informed of their rights in a language they understand or can reasonably be expected to understand. Accordingly, the Netherlands introduced a written leaflet containing information in various languages. The Council of State in the Netherlands also concluded that decision on returns to Algeria were once again permitted and Algerian nationals could thus be detained to effect return, as there was a realistic prospect that the return could be carried out. Other developments included an amendment to the provisions on the review of the extension of detention in Slovenia, an extension of the time limit for judicial review of detention in emergency situations in Hungary, and the mandatory appointment of a legal representative for pre-return detainees in Germany.

Box 24: Prohibition of immigration detention of children

Belgium, Germany and France moved towards non-detention of children in return procedures. Legislative amendments formalised the existing practice in Belgium and Germany by prohibiting the detention of

families with minor children (Belgium) and the detention of children and families with children in general (Germany). In France (except Mayotte), children accompanying adults will not be placed in detention.

Several EMN Member Countries⁸⁶⁵ reported developments in respect of places and conditions of detention. Amendments to Latvia's Immigration Law allow for the detention of those foreigners who should return and who receive an additional penalty, such as a specific expulsion procedure or entry ban and their accommodation in the premises of state police. Hungary's new law provides for detention in facilities other than dedicated detention centres in emergency situations. New centres are planned in Luxembourg and Portugal. Luxembourg continued the planning process for a closed structure for people with specific needs. Portugal reported its intention to build two centres to carry out the border procedures as required in the Pact. The Slovak Republic reported that it is seeking to increase capacity and improve material conditions in its detention centres, while Sweden reported working to improve the security in its detention centres. Finally, in Estonia, healthcare provision in detention centres changed from an AMIF-supported arrangement to the state's Health Insurance Fund.

12.6.2. Alternatives to detention

Six EMN Member Countries⁸⁶⁶ reported developments aimed at expanding the use of alternatives to detention. They aimed to ensure cost-efficiency,⁸⁶⁷ relieve pressure on detention centres,⁸⁶⁸ reduce restrictions on freedom of movement while ensuring compliance with international human rights standards,⁸⁶⁹ or support supervision by the competent authorities when there is a potential threat to public order.⁸⁷⁰

Belgium's legislative amendments strengthened the alternatives to detention, particularly through ICAM, which has been in use since 2021. Preventive measures to reduce the risk of absconding were introduced, such as the obligation to submit or surrender travel or identity documents, regular reporting to authorities, and the possibility of house arrest. These less coercive measures offered a flexible approach that aimed to encourage

859 Enabel, 'Sustainable reintegration of returnees in the Côte d'Ivoire and the fight against trafficking in human beings', 20 March 2025, <https://www.enabel.be/the-eu-and-enabel-a-strategic-partnership-for-sustainable-growth-in-cote-divoire/>, accessed 19 June 2025.

860 Enabel, 'Support, Mobility, Integration and Awareness', n.d., <https://open.enabel.be/fr/GIN/2682/p/accompagnement-mobilite-insertion-et-sensibilisation.html>, accessed 20 March 2025.

861 BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, HU, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK.

862 BE, DE, FR, HU, LT, SI.

863 EE, HU, LU, LV, NL, PT, SE, SK.

864 BE, DE, FR, HU, LT, NL, SI.

865 EE, HU, LU, LV, NL, PT, SE, SK.

866 BE, FR, HU, IT, LT, LU.

867 HU.

868 HU, IT.

869 BE, LT.

870 FR.

compliance while reducing the use of detention. Hungary introduced bail as an alternative to detention and Italy made the provision of financial guarantees more flexible. Some countries also introduced or modified arrangements related to 'accommodation in a specific place', such as a temporary accommodation facility⁸⁷¹ or house arrest.⁸⁷²

Luxembourg established a so-called return house (*maison de retour*) as a semi-open facility for individuals facing removal decisions, promoting voluntary return options and social support, rather than detention, including for families and vulnerable groups.



12.7. COOPERATION WITH COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN AND TRANSIT

Table 5: Cooperation on readmission enacted or planned by EMN Member and Observer Countries, 2024

	Bilateral readmission agreement	Non-binding bilateral cooperation	Comprehensive partnership including return	Implementation protocols to EURA	Implementation of EURA via RCMS	Readmission clause in EU agreements
With EMN Observer Countries						
Georgia				ES	HU	
Ukraine				LV SK RO		
Armenia				AT		
Azerbaijan	MD					
With other third countries						
Albania		IT				
Bangladesh		BG				
Colombia			DE			
Ecuador		AT				
Iraq		BG FI				
Kazakhstan	FR	AT				
Kenya		AT	DE			
Kosovo	LT					
Kuwait		AT				
Ghana		AT				
Malaysia						LU
Morocco		BE BG	DE			
Nepal		BG				
Pakistan					HU	
Thailand						LU
United Kingdom	MD					
Uzbekistan	EE		DE			

Source: EMN national contact points (EMN NCPs).

871 LT.
872 FR.

To enhance returns, bilateral cooperation with third countries continued, with a specific focus on certain countries. Sixteen EMN Member and Observer Countries⁸⁷³ reported bilateral readmission cooperation.

Bulgaria and Finland established return-related cooperation with Iraq's embassies, which led to the issuance of travel documents.⁸⁷⁴ Latvia and the Slovak Republic signed bilateral implementation protocols with Ukraine under the EU Readmission Agreement (EURA), and Ukraine approved the implementation protocol with Romania. The Georgia-Spain bilateral implementation protocol to the EURA entered into force, and Hungary began using the RCMS when applying the implementation protocol of the EU-Georgia Readmission Agreement. A bilateral readmission agreement between Estonia and Uzbekistan entered into force, and Germany and Uzbekistan also signed a comprehensive migration and mobility partnership agreement. Germany started a migration partnership with Morocco, while Bulgaria focused on cooperation with Morocco's embassies.

Additional bilateral arrangements by EMN Member and Observer Countries focused on individual countries. France

and Lithuania signed readmission agreements with Kazakhstan and Kosovo, respectively. Moldova signed bilateral readmission agreements with Azerbaijan and the UK. Germany signed a comprehensive migration and mobility partnership agreement with Kenya, in addition to the existing agreements with India and Georgia and started a migration partnership with Colombia. The bilateral implementation protocol to the EURA entered into force between Austria and Armenia. Austria signed legal non-binding MoUs with Ghana and Kenya, including on return cooperation and non-legally binding agreements with Ecuador and Kuwait on return cooperation. Luxembourg applied the framework agreements between the EU and Thailand and Malaysia at national level. The framework agreements stipulate that the signatory countries shall readmit their own nationals. Hungary started using the RCMS to implement the readmission agreement and implementing protocol with Pakistan. Italy signed a protocol with Albania to carry out border procedures and returns from two facilities on Albanian territory. Finally, Bulgaria focused on cooperation with the embassies of Bangladesh and Nepal to facilitate the identification and issuance of travel documents for nationals of these countries.

873 AT, BG, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, SK, and GE, MD, UA.

874 BG, FI.

13. MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

13.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines new developments in synergies between international migration and development. In 2024, the EU made efforts to improve migration cooperation with third countries, enhance migration policy coherence between EU Member States, and support third countries' socioeconomic development. Fifteen EMN Member and Observer Countries⁸⁷⁵ adopted new or renewed measures and initiatives linking migration and development in third countries. Overall, these developments were driven by the need to address the root causes of irregular and forced migration. This included initiatives

seeking to improve conditions in countries of origin,⁸⁷⁶ enhance migrant reception and reintegration systems in third countries,⁸⁷⁷ and foster international cooperation.⁸⁷⁸ Some countries also sought to leverage diaspora contributions,⁸⁷⁹ while others supported the reconstruction of Ukraine's labour market through building Ukrainian workers' skills.⁸⁸⁰ Some countries⁸⁸¹ promoted circular migration by creating synergies between filling their own workforce shortages and strengthening competencies in third countries.

13.2. EU DEVELOPMENTS

In 2024, both the Pact and the Common Implementation Plan for the Pact emphasised the need for mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries to address the root causes of irregular and forced migration while promoting sustainable development.

The EU continued its diplomatic efforts to improve migration cooperation. The European Commission participated in the seventh Ministerial Conference of the Budapest Process, where officials from 50 countries and 13 international organisations endorsed a joint declaration and accompanying Call for Action 2025–2030. The declaration outlined six key priorities for 2025–2030, including maximising the positive impact of migration on development.⁸⁸²

As part of the 2024 Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) of the Rabat Process to enhance dialogue with countries along the migration routes linking Central, West, and Northern Africa with Europe, the European Commission, along with

EU Member States, supported and took part in the special event 'Circular Migration: Cycle of Opportunities and Skills Development'.⁸⁸³ The European Commission also engaged bilaterally with third countries, signing joint declarations with Mauritania⁸⁸⁴ and Egypt⁸⁸⁵ (see also Section 12.2). The joint declaration with Mauritania is a comprehensive migration agreement designed to enhance regular dialogue on migration and forced displacement, promote reciprocity, and establish a framework for joint objectives, actions, and recommendations, including on legal migration and mobility. The joint declaration with Egypt formalised a strategic and comprehensive partnership between the EU and Egypt, including legal migration and mobility for economic opportunities.

The Council of the EU approved the conclusions of the mid-term review of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI – Global Europe) programmes, reaffirming its cooperation objectives and identifying areas for improvement. The

875 AT, BE, DE, EE, FR, IT, LU, MT, NL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and NO, MD.

876 AT, IT, LU, NL, PT, SK.

877 BE, EE, MT, PT, SE, SI, and NO.

878 PT, SI.

879 BE, DE, IT.

880 DE, EE, PL.

881 BE, DE, EE, ES, IT.

882 Budapest Process, 'The Budapest Process Ministerial Declaration', 2024, <https://www.budapestprocess.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Budapest-Process-Ministerial-Declaration.pdf> <https://www.budapestprocess.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Budapest-Process-Ministerial-Declaration.pdf>, accessed 17 February 2025.

883 Rabat Process, 'Special Event - Circular migration: a cycle of opportunities and skills development', 2024, <https://www.rabat-process.org/en/document-repository/64-meeting-reports-conclusions/517-circular-mig-outcome/preview?ml=1> <https://www.rabat-process.org/en/document-repository/64-meeting-reports-conclusions/517-circular-mig-outcome/preview?ml=1>, accessed 17 February 2025.

884 European Commission, 'Joint declaration establishing a migration partnership between the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and the European Union', 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/24425c1c-dd34-4c71-8f9e-77ecbac22305_en?filename=De%CC%81claration-conjointe-Mauritanie-EU_en.pdf https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/24425c1c-dd34-4c71-8f9e-77ecbac22305_en?filename=De%CC%81claration-conjointe-Mauritanie-EU_en.pdf, accessed 17 February 2025.

885 European Commission, 'Joint Declaration on the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership between The Arab Republic Of Egypt and the European Union', 2024, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/joint-declaration-strategic-and-comprehensive-partnership-between-arab-republic-egypt-and-european-2024-03-17_en https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/joint-declaration-strategic-and-comprehensive-partnership-between-arab-republic-egypt-and-european-2024-03-17_en, accessed 17 February 2025.

review concluded that the instrument was fit for purpose and reaffirmed its objectives, which included addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. It also identified an overall need for stronger policy coherence, including migration policy, to achieve more effective development cooperation.⁸⁸⁶

At the Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC 2024), the EU announced its commitment to funding the German government's Skills4Recovery programme, which aims to rebuild Ukraine's workforce by improving workers' skills in critical sectors.⁸⁸⁷ Along with Poland and Estonia, the EU will join Germany in training 4 700 skilled workers.

The EU took steps to promote remittances as factors for socioeconomic development in third countries. In March 2024, the EU and IFAD launched the PRIME Central Asia Initiative in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Building on the success of the now closed PRIME Africa, it seeks to increase access to remittances through digital methods.⁸⁸⁸

The EU, through the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), continued to fund the EU Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF) to consolidate knowledge and build capacity to address the fragmentation of diaspora engagement for development. The second phase of the project started in June 2024.⁸⁸⁹



13.3. SYNERGIES BETWEEN MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THIRD COUNTRIES

Fifteen EMN Member and Observer Countries⁸⁹⁰ reported policy developments to facilitate synergies between migration and development in third countries. In most cases, these developments responded to a need to address the root causes of irregular migration⁸⁹¹ or to enhance migrant reception systems in host communities and reintegration processes in countries of origin.⁸⁹² Some were driven by the potential of diaspora communities to contribute to the socioeconomic development in their respective countries of origin.⁸⁹³ Others were initiated in anticipation of Ukraine's EU accession,⁸⁹⁴ or as a way to align with EU and international frameworks.⁸⁹⁵

Five countries⁸⁹⁶ reported initiatives addressing the root causes of irregular migration by improving conditions in countries of origin. The Netherlands launched a new phase of the Cooperation on Migration and Partnership to Achieve Sustainable Solutions (COMPASS) programme focused on cooperation with 14 African countries to establish sustainable solutions to irregular migration.⁸⁹⁷

Six EMN Member and Observer Countries⁸⁹⁸ funded initiatives to enhance migrant reception systems in host communities and reintegration processes in countries of origin. Five⁸⁹⁹ did so by funding development efforts. Belgium launched a one-year project, implemented by IOM, to strengthen data collection and analysis on displacement

and climate change in the Sahel and Mali to support policy and decision-making.⁹⁰⁰ Malta funded projects in Official Development Assistance (ODA)-eligible countries, such as an initiative in Türkiye to assist Syrian women refugees with essential resources and opportunities for empowerment. Portugal and Slovenia⁹⁰¹ focused their efforts on improving cooperation with third countries. For example, Portugal continued reinforcing bilateral cooperation with Cape Verde through the Coop4Int project to strengthen mechanisms for the inclusion of migrants in Cape Verdean society.⁹⁰² It also maintained immigration liaison officers in key countries of origin with the same aim.

In cooperation with ICMPD, Norway opened a migrant resource centre (MRC)⁹⁰³ in Iraq that helps build capacity for local and national government and provides comprehensive information on migration-related challenges and opportunities, raising awareness of migration processes, protecting migrant's rights, and preventing irregular migration.

The role that diaspora members can play in boosting socioeconomic conditions in third countries drove initiatives by Belgium, Germany, and Italy. The O-remit project, for example, launched by the Belgian Minister for Development Cooperation and managed by IOM Belgium, held workshops and an event promoting remittances among

886 Council of the EU, 'Mid-term evaluation of the NDICI-Global Europe external financing instrument - Council conclusions', 2024, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/docu-ment/ST-11343-2024-INI/en/pdf>, accessed 4 March 2025.

887 Delegation of the EU to Ukraine, 'Joint Action Skills4Recovery Launched: EU, Poland, Estonia join Germany to Train 4,700 Skilled Workers for Ukraine's Economy', 24 September 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/joint-action-skills4recovery-launched-eu-poland-estonia-join-germany-train-4700-skilled-workers_en?s=232, accessed 26 March 2025.

888 IFAD, 'REMIT PRIME Central Asia', 2024, <https://gfrid.org/publications/platform-for-remittances-investments-and-migrants-entrepreneurship-prime-central-asia-programme/>, accessed 26 March 2025.

889 European Union Global Diaspora Facility, 'Who we are', n.d., <https://diasporaforddevelopment.eu/who-we-are/>, accessed 26 March 2025.

890 AT, BE, EE, DE, FR, IT, LU, MT, NL, PT, SE, SI, SK, and NO, MD.

891 AT, IT, LU, NL, PT, SK.

892 BE, EE, MT, PT, SE, SI, and NO.

893 BE, DE, IT.

894 DE, EE, PL.

895 FR.

896 AT, IT, LU, NL, PT, SK.

897 IOM, 'IOM and the Netherlands announce new phase in guiding safe migration (2024 – 2027)', 2024, <https://iom-nederland.nl/en/news/iom-and-the-netherlands-announce-new-phase-in-guiding-safe-migration-2024-2027#:~:text=Building%20on%20its%20achievements%20since,projects%20into%20a%20unified%20framework>, accessed 13 March 2025.

898 BE, EE, MT, PT, SE, SI, and NO.

899 BE, EE, MT, SE, and NO.

900 IOM, 'Joint Pilot Initiative Aims to Strengthen Resilience to Climate Change in Six Sahelian States', 2024, <https://www.iom.int/news/joint-pilot-initiative-aims-strengthen-resilience-climate-change-six-sahelian-states>, accessed 13 March 2025.

901 PT, SI.

902 Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA), Coop4Int Project, n.d., <https://aima.gov.pt/pt/a-aima/projeto-coop4int>, accessed 16 May 2025.

903 ICMPD, 'Migrant Resource Centres', n.d., <https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/projects/migrant-resource-centres-mrcs>, accessed 19 March 2025.

diaspora members and recipients as an investment tool (see Box 25).⁹⁰⁴ Italy's Joint Committee for Cooperation in Development approved an initiative to mobilise remittances and investments for the economic development and resilience of rural families in Senegal and Mali.⁹⁰⁵

Box 25: IOM's O-remit project held workshops and an event promoting remittances for sustainable development

IOM's O-remit project was launched in December 2022 by the Belgian Minister for Development Cooperation to offer cost-effective remittance alternatives and promote investment opportunities in migrants' countries of origin. In 2024, the O-remit project achieved significant milestones. It held five workshops to help diaspora members and remittance recipients from Senegal, Morocco, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to explore financial inclusion and investment opportunities, while ongoing training connected them with green business opportunities. It also organised the first National Remittance Summit in June 2024.

In anticipation of Ukraine's EU accession, Estonia invested in a project sharing good practices with the Ukrainian National Employment Service⁹⁰⁶ and joined the Skills4Recovery programme, along with Poland and Germany, to support Ukraine's labour market.

Finally, to incorporate migration considerations into development strategies, in 2024, France and Sweden adopted new national strategies on migration. France set out a new Migration and Development (2024-2030) Strategy, in alignment with European and international frameworks, including the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It establishes an interministerial and global approach, aiming to cover all dimensions of human mobility and promoting Team France projects.⁹⁰⁷ Sweden's new Strategy for Global Development Cooperation on Migration, Returns and Voluntary Repatriation seeks to strengthen synergies between development assistance policy and migration policy through capacity-building and migration management in partner countries (see Section 12.5 and Box 22).⁹⁰⁸



13.4. CIRCULAR MIGRATION

Five EMN Member Countries⁹⁰⁹ reported policy developments on circular migration, largely driven by the need to address labour shortages in their respective national territories and tackle unemployment in third countries. These developments mostly focused on strengthening partnerships with third countries, mainly in Africa. For example, under the EU's Digital Explorers II project, Estonia hosted 20 young people from Kenya to gain IT-related work experience in Estonian companies and receive training at Tallinn University.⁹¹⁰

Belgium and Italy⁹¹¹ sought to create synergies between filling their own workforce gaps and supporting employment and professional development in third countries. Belgium participated in the IOM's Learning Mobility Scheme (LMS), connecting Tunisian graduates with Belgian employers and launched a Skills Mobility Partnership (SMP) in Suriname to develop a skilled Dutch-speaking Surinamese health workforce for Belgium and support capacity-building in Suriname's healthcare system.⁹¹²

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For more information

EMN website: <http://ec.europa.eu/emn>

EMN LinkedIn page: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/european-migration-network>

EMN X account: <https://x.com/emnmigration>

EMN YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@EMNMigration>

EMN National Contact Points

Austria www.emn.at/en/

Belgium www.emnbelgium.be/

Bulgaria www.emn-bg.com/

Croatia emn.gov.hr/

Cyprus www.moi.gov.cy/moi/crmd/emnncpc.nsf/home/home?opendocument

Czech Republic www.emncz.eu/

Estonia www.emn.ee/

Finland emn.fi/en/

France www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Europe-et-International/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM3/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM2

Germany www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/EMN/emn-node.html

Greece <https://migration.gov.gr/emn/>

Hungary www.emnhungary.hu/en

Ireland www.emn.ie/

Italy www.emnitalyncp.it/

Latvia www.emn.lv

Lithuania www.emn.lt/

Luxembourg emnluxembourg.uni.lu/

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The Netherlands www.emnnetherlands.nl/

Poland www.gov.pl/web/european-migration-network

Portugal rem.sef.pt/en/

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