

COUNTRY FACTSHEET | JULY 2024

Main developments
in migration and
international
protection, including
latest statistics

BELGIUM 2023



OVERARCHING AND CROSSCUTTING CHANGES

In 2023, the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration continued the work on the drafting of a new Code for Controlled Migration (*Wetboek gecontroleerde migratie* (NL); *Code de la migration contrôlée* (FR)) to replace the existing legislative framework on migration and asylum in Belgium. The proposal for a new migration code aims to adapt the legislation for today's challenges, to make procedures simpler and clearer, and to prevent abuse to the maximum extent possible. The code proposal was officially presented on 10 January 2024 and is

currently being discussed in government. Additionally, in March 2023, the Council of Ministers approved a package of reform measures as part of the changes foreseen in the new migration code put forward by the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration. The initiatives cover reforms on family reunification, Dublin transfers, reception policy, legal residence for stateless people and return policy.

The saturation of the reception network – ongoing since the summer of 2021 – continued throughout 2023. As in 2022, several measures were taken to increase reception capacity and improve overall management of the crisis. Despite the efforts made, the reception shortage

KEY POINTS

To mitigate the ongoing reception crisis, measures were implemented at various levels to enhance the outflow from the reception network.

Since 1 February 2023, workers eligible for a single permit of indefinite duration have been able to submit their application via the Working in Belgium digital platform.

In September 2023, the Flemish government approved the TurboPlan for Better Civic Integration and Faster Employment.

persisted and had significant legal and humanitarian consequences.

In October 2023, the federal government reached an agreement on additional budget funds for the reception of asylum seekers and migration management.

LEGAL MIGRATION

The Flemish government launched several initiatives to facilitate the welcoming of migrants, including the launch of an information website and the allocation of financial support for “expat centres”.

At the same time, it developed measures to counter economic exploitation, including higher administrative fines for the illegal employment of foreign employees, a new notification obligation for employers, and modification of the rules on chain liability. The latter rules expand the violations for which a contractor is directly liable and introduces an obligation of due diligence to all contractors in the ‘chain’ of contractors.

Since 1 February 2023, workers eligible for a single permit of indefinite duration have been able to submit their application via the Working in Belgium digital platform.

The Flemish and Walloon Regions updated their bottleneck professions list, which exempts certain third-country nationals from a labour market test in the context of an application for a single permit.

In April 2023, the European Commission opened infringement proceedings against Belgium for failing to transpose all provisions of the Seasonal Workers Directive (Directive 2014/36/EU) in a fully conforming manner.

In May 2023, the Belgian Development Agency, Enabel, officially launched the PEM N’Zassa project in Abidjan. In September 2023, the Entrepreneurial Mobility Link (EMLINK) project Strengthening the Partnership between Belgium and Georgia through Temporary Mobility of Entrepreneurs was launched. Additionally, the International Organization for Migration’s DT4E 2.0 project was accepted, to start in 2024 and follow up on the DT4E project, along with another project on circular migration with Suriname.

In 2023, Belgium continued its implementation of Directive 2016/801 on researchers.

In the context of family reunification, residence permits (F cards) are no longer issued ex officio if no decision is taken within six months.

In July 2023, an Interministerial Conference on Labour Migration and Integration reached an agreement on future reforms.

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

In July 2023, the European Court for Human Rights unanimously held that Belgium had violated Article 6

(right to a fair hearing) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). On 29 June 2023, the Brussels Court of First Instance argued that the right to asylum had also been violated and that the Belgian state was endangering the rule of law by failing to respect court rulings.

To address the reception crisis, several measures were taken. The Commissariat General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) explored innovative methods to tackle the backlog of cases and increase the outflow from the reception network. Simultaneously, the Cabinet established a working group specifically focused on long-term stayers, aiming to facilitate their exit from the network. Additionally, the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) implemented several measures to increase reception capacity, including: the expansion of the shelter agreement with the Brussels-Capital Region; the creation of temporary emergency reception places; the introduction of financial incentives for local reception initiatives; the extension of operational support from the European Union Agency for Asylum, and the establishment, by the federal government, of a taskforce on asylum and reception to search for additional reception capacity and address the logistical, administrative and budgetary needs involved.

Responding to the high number of applicants residing outside of the official reception network as a result of the shortage of reception capacity, Fedasil introduced a new multistakeholder approach to enhance support for them. A first integrated information point or onestop desk was created, serving as central hub for providing guidance and information, and facilitating referrals to essential services. The Belgian Red Cross also established a fully fledged medical centre to ensure access to primary healthcare for people outside of the reception network.

From 20 October 2023 to December 2023, the CGRS temporarily suspended the notification of decisions providing or refusing subsidiary protection status for Gaza and West Bank applicants, in order to gather accurate security information about the situation in the Palestinian territories.

In 2023, Belgium pledged to relocate 100 individuals under the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism. Additionally, the reception provision for resettled refugees was enhanced by opening a dedicated reception centre, introducing a new financial model and allocating funding to community sponsorship groups.

TEMPORARY PROTECTION AND OTHER MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO RUSSIA’S WAR OF AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE

To better integrate beneficiaries of temporary protection into the Belgian labour market, a decree came into effect in the Flemish Region in May 2023 imposing an obligation

on any person of working age, who benefits from temporary protection and is registered in a municipality in the Flemish Region, to register with the Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB).

In the autumn of 2023, Flanders shifted its strategy from focusing on public accommodation centres to facilitating a transition towards the regular housing market. This strategy aims to lever integration and inclusion in the labour market and will intertwine multiple policy areas such as labour, housing and integration.



UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

Contrary to previous years, there was a decrease in the number of arrivals of unaccompanied minors in 2023. However, Fedasil continued to face a shortage of reception places, particularly for the most vulnerable profiles. To counter the ongoing lack of reception places, the reception capacity for unaccompanied minors was increased in 2023.

Furthermore, measures were taken to improve the identification and age assessment of unaccompanied minors where their age is disputed, including ensuring that the Guardianship Service is present during the registration of unaccompanied minors by the Immigration Office. The shortage of guardians was addressed through new recruitment measures and improvements to working conditions.

A roadmap on disappearances of unaccompanied minors was developed by the Working Group on Disappearances of Unaccompanied Minors, composed of Fedasil, the Immigration Office, the Guardianship Service, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Police and Child Focus. It sets out guidelines to prevent and address disappearances, the division of roles among the stakeholders involved, and a stepbystep plan outlining actions to be taken before, during and after a disappearance.

In 2023, Fedasil initiated the implementation of its policy for young adults aged 18 to 21. Pilot projects were launched with its partners, aimed at strengthening the transition to adulthood by ensuring continuity in individual support; offering opportunities for training and professional activation; offering support from intercultural mediators; and reducing the risk of incidents, restorative practices and activities for this target group. These projects are set to be further developed in 2024.



INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

Two further amendments to the Flemish civic integration programme came into force in 2023. On 1 January 2023, the participation pillar was implemented. In addition to the first three pillars (Dutch lessons, social orientation

and the pathway to employment), this new fourth pillar creates a tailor-made programme to strengthen participants' social network to enable them to participate in society. As of September 2023, the Flemish civic integration programme is no longer free of charge.

In September 2023, the Flemish government approved the TurboPlan for Better Civic Integration and Faster Employment. The plan contains 10 actions to further strengthen civic integration policy, requiring more efforts from newcomers in terms of labour market participation, and offering improved guidance towards sustainable employment.

In July 2023, the adoption of a new ordinance introduces a bilingual civic integration programme in the Brussels-Capital Region from 2024 onwards. As a result, a person integrating in the Brussels-Capital Region will be able to apply for the Dutch-language programme offered by the Flemish Community or the bilingual programme offered by the Common Community Commission. Both trajectories will be equivalent.

On 15 March 2023, the Flemish Human Rights Institute (VMRI) was established to protect all human rights within the sphere of Flanders' competencies.

Following the adoption, in 2023, of antiracism plans by the Brussels-Capital Region, the French Community and the Walloon Region, all that remains is for the Flemish and German-speaking Community to contribute to the long-awaited Interfederal Action Plan against Racism.



CITIZENSHIP AND STATELESSNESS

On 23 March 2023, the Constitutional Court ruled that language requirements to acquire citizenship (level A2 for both oral and written components) are discriminatory towards illiterate persons insofar as no exception is provided for the fulfilment of the written component. The Court argued that failure by these persons to achieve the written component cannot necessarily be attributed to an unwillingness to integrate or to a lack of effort, but to a lack of certain basic linguistic competences. To address this discrimination, a draft law was put forward on 4 December 2023 to amend the Belgian Nationality Code by specifying that illiterate individuals can satisfy the language requirement by fulfilling the oral component only.

In the context of the rights of stateless people in Belgium, the Immigration Office instructed municipalities to withdraw Belgian citizenship from children born in Belgium to Palestinian parents. However, at the end of January 2024, the Federal Ombudsman issued a [recommendation](#) urging the Immigration Office to stop this practice immediately, as it did not consider the Immigration Office competent in the matter.

On 29 September 2023, the federal government submitted a draft law to introduce a residence procedure on the grounds of statelessness. The draft law's proposed

objective is to fill the gap in current legislation, identified by the Constitutional Court in two rulings in 2009 and 2012, according to which the difference between the treatment of recognised refugees and recognised stateless people is discriminatory.

BORDERS, VISA AND SCHENGEN

The Federal Public Service (FPS) Foreign Affairs began the digitisation of visa application files in 2023. The files are digitised by external service providers and transferred to the FPS' Visa on Web platform. In 2023, pilots started in Iran, Russia and China. Visa applications submitted at these diplomatic posts were processed in Brussels based on scanned documents. The project, which aims to expedite application processing, is set to expand in 2024.

In the first quarter of 2023, the Belgian consular posts in Turkey and Morocco suspended the issuance of economic migration visas for 770 and 100 files, respectively, due to suspicions of fraudulent visa applications. This led to policy changes in the Brussels-Capital and Flemish Regions.

IRREGULAR MIGRATION

In 2023, the Individual Case Management (ICAM) regional offices, operated by the Immigration Office's Alternatives to Detention Department, became operational across all Belgian provinces. Their objective is to assist irregularly staying migrants in finding long-term solutions, such as legal residency in Belgium or return.

TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

In June 2023, the Special Parliamentary Commission, assigned to evaluate Belgian legislation and policy concerning trafficking in human beings and smuggling, submitted a report concluding its work and including 100 recommendations. These recommendations, directed towards all parties engaged in combatting trafficking in human beings and smuggling, were approved by the Chamber of Representatives.

In June 2023, a national operational coordinator against trafficking in human beings and smuggling was appointed within the Federal Public Service Justice. The primary role of the operational coordinator is to develop

a crisis plan for scenarios where a significant number of exploitation/trafficking victims are identified in Belgium and the capacity to accommodate these victims is surpassed.

In December 2023, the Federal Judicial Police released a European strategic analysis on minors' exploitation in trafficking in human beings. The document, which aims to increase the attention of the political, judicial and police authorities and to foster action at national and European levels, was distributed to all Member States via Europol.

Throughout 2023, the Belgian Immigration Office, together with its partners, also took action in third countries to inform specific target groups about the risks of engaging in irregular migration, including the risk of human trafficking and exploitation and about legal and safe alternatives. Information campaigns, including an anti-trafficking component, were implemented in Vietnam and in Nigeria.

RETURN AND READMISSION

Following a decrease during the years 2020 and 2021, which were impacted by COVID 19, the return figures increased again. In 2023, the Belgian Immigration Office organised 2 997 forced returns.¹ Fedasil, the agency overseeing the national assisted voluntary return programme, intensified its efforts in facilitating voluntary returns, including through the Frontex Application for Return (FAR). This led to a total of 3 107 individuals voluntarily returning to their country of origin.

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

In 2023, several measures were taken to monitor the nexus between migration and development. In this context, a 'migration marker' was introduced in the Belgian Official Development Assistance database. It allows the Belgian Development Cooperation to optimise and better track spending on projects and plans with a migration and development nexus.

In 2023, Belgium amended its bilateral programme in Burkina Faso to ensure the adoption of durable solutions in cases of protracted displacement in the Centre East and Centre North regions of the country.

Finally, there were several new developments regarding labour mobility projects, as well as the launch of a project on remittances (O-REMIT by IOM).

¹ Forced returns totaled 3 383 (2 011 to country of origin, 1 075 under Dublin, 297 bilateral) according to the Immigration Office's 2023 report. Voluntary returns were 2 997 (2 952 from Fedasil, 45 from the Immigration Office). These figures include all returnees supported by the Immigration Office or Fedasil and may differ from Eurostat statistics, which only cover returns with an official order to leave the territory.



STATISTICAL ANNEX

The statistical annex available on the next pages complements the Country Factsheet and provides an overview of the latest available statistics for Belgium on aspects of migration and international protection. It was prepared by Eurostat and it is organised in ten thematic sections, including legal residence, temporary protection, asylum, unaccompanied minors, integration, irregular migration, return and visas. The dashboard-like layout of the annex allows comparability across countries as well as simultaneous visualisation of different indicators.

The data presented in the annex regard third-country nationals, which means persons who are not EU citizens, including stateless persons. The data cover the period 2020-2023. Since 2023 data were not available at the time of publication for certain datasets, in these cases the

period 2020-2022 is covered. Exceptionally, the monthly data on temporary protection covers the period until March 2024. **The data were extracted during April–May 2024. The manuscript was completed in May 2024.**

The Eurostat website is constantly updated. Therefore, it is likely that more recent data will have become available since. An online data code available under each figure can be used to directly access the latest data on [Eurostat's website](#).

For some indicators, data are rounded at the source. Due to this, in some cases, the sum of percentages or of individual values might not add up to 100 or to the total value.

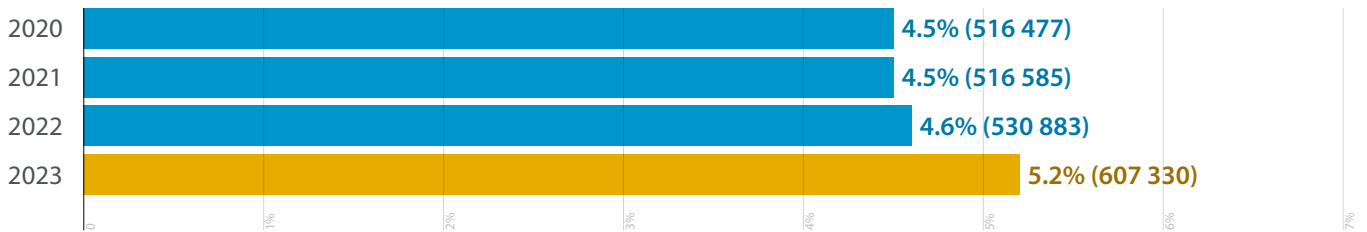
A 'How to read the statistical annex' guide, describing each individual chart and providing links to the data sources, is available [here](#).



LEGAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

Third-country nationals, 1 January 2020–2023

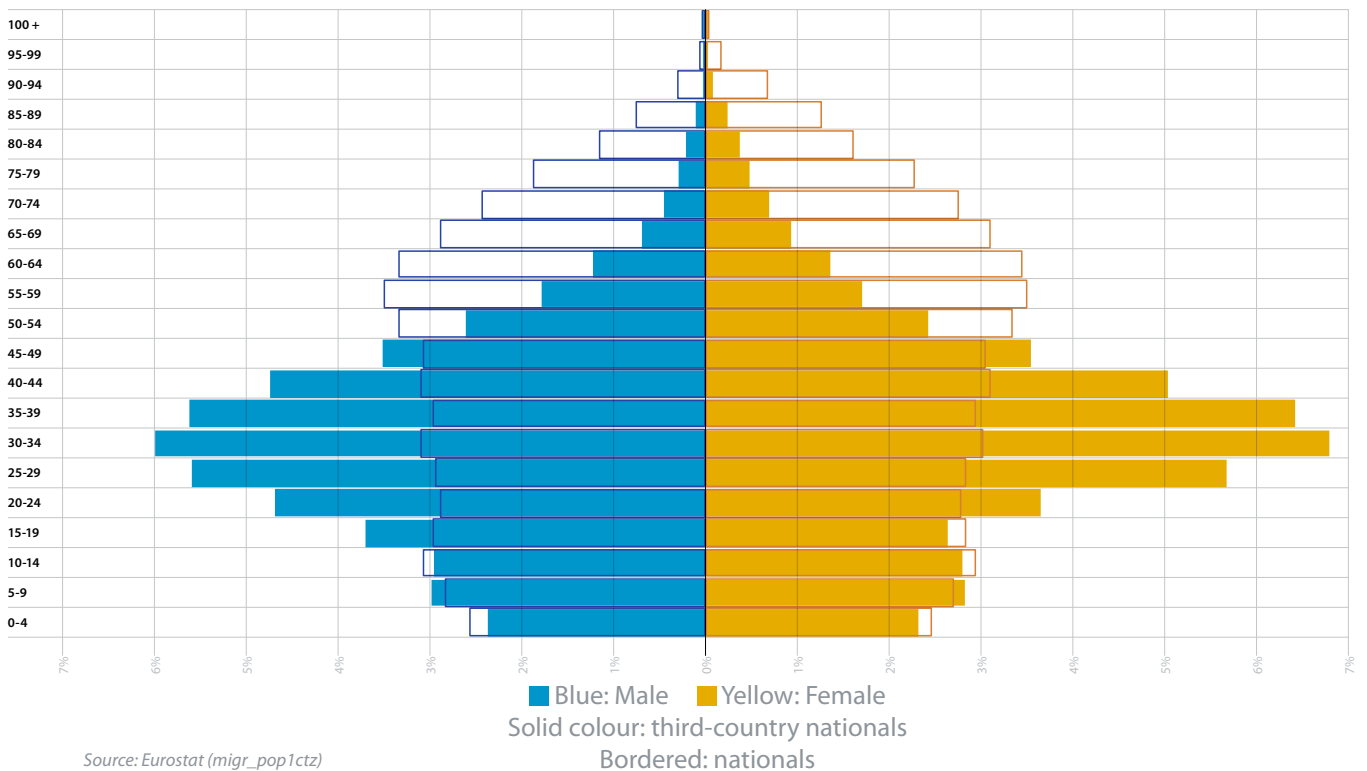
Share of the total population in % (and the absolute number)



Source: Eurostat (migr_pop1ctz)

Age structure of nationals and third-country nationals, 1 January 2023

%



Source: Eurostat (migr_pop1ctz)

First residence permits issued to third-country nationals, 2020–2022

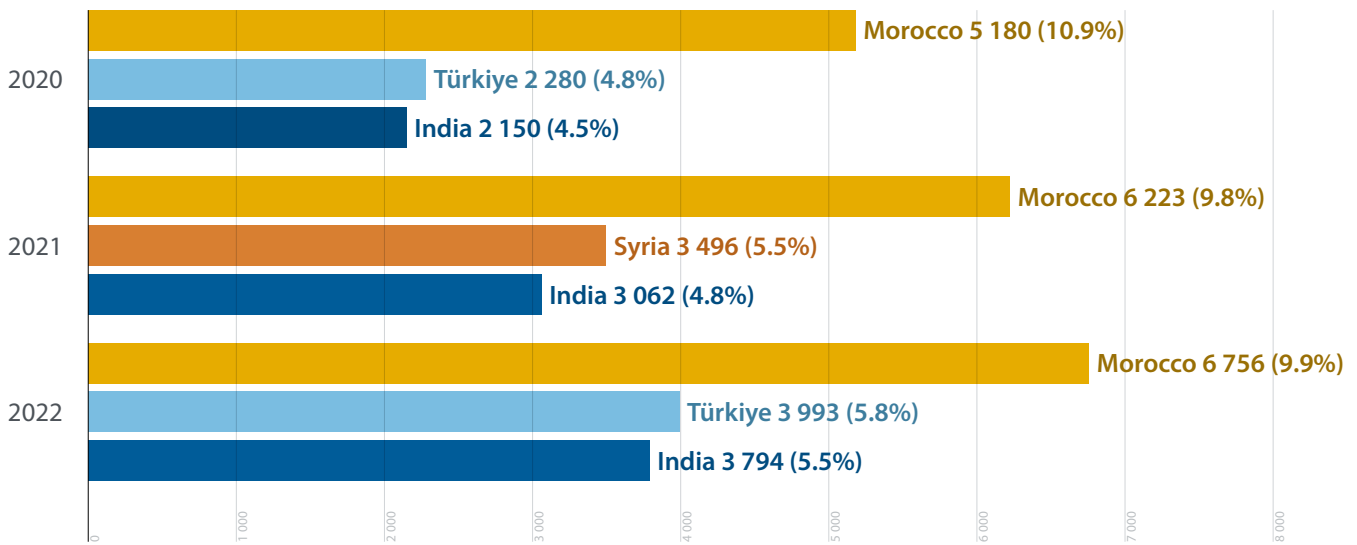
Number per 1 000 people (and the absolute number)



Source: Eurostat (migr_resfirst, migr_pop1ctz and migr_resp)

Top 3 countries whose citizens received first residence permits, 2020–2022

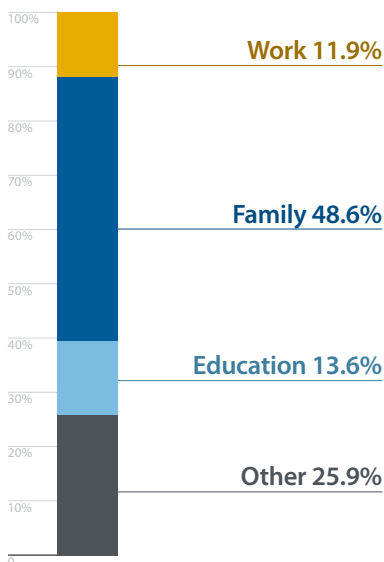
Absolute number (and the share in total number)



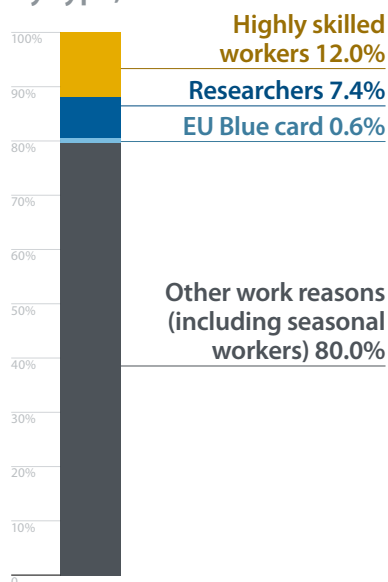
Source: Eurostat (*migr_resfirst*)

First residence permits issued, distribution by reason or type, 2022

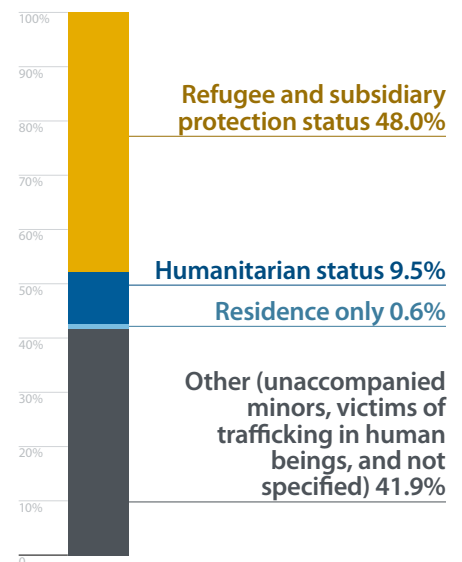
All permits,
by reason, %



Work reason,
by type, %



Other reason,
by detailed reason, %



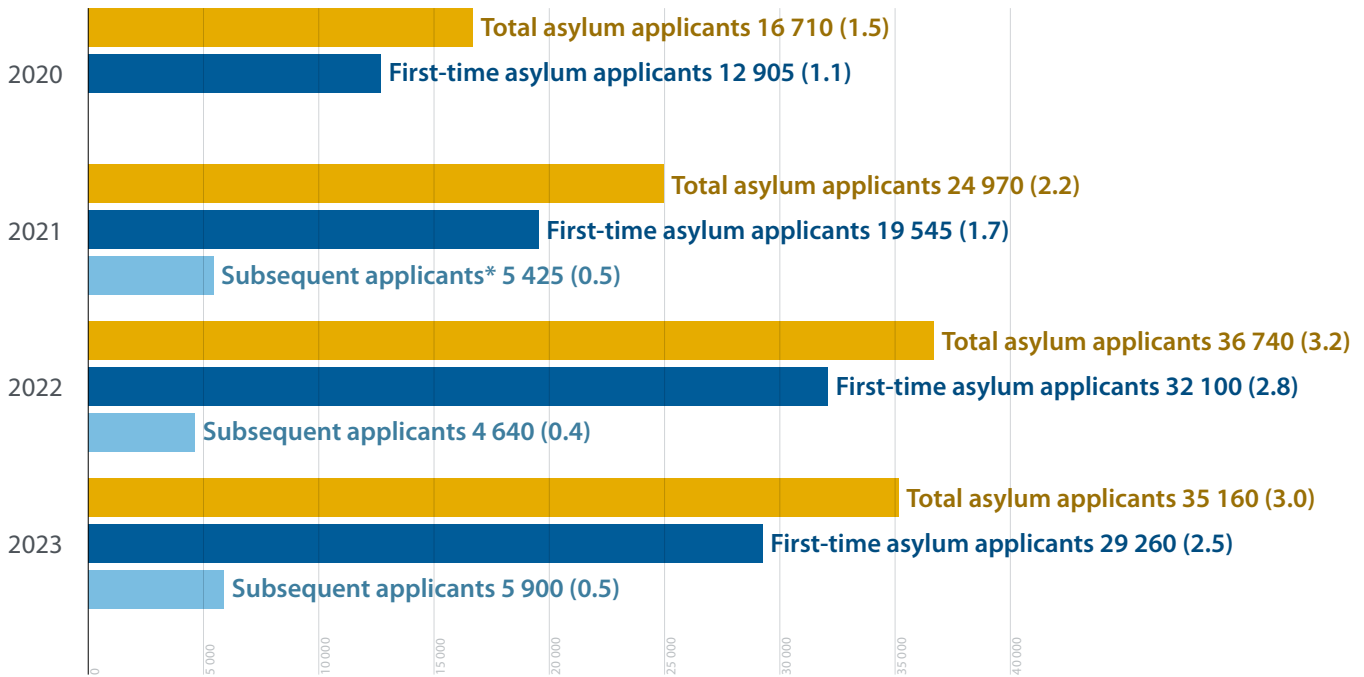
Source: Eurostat (*migr_resfirst*, *migr_resfpc*, *migr_resocc* and *migr_resoth*)



INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION INCLUDING ASYLUM

Asylum applicants by type of application, 2020–2023

Absolute number (and the number per 1 000 people)

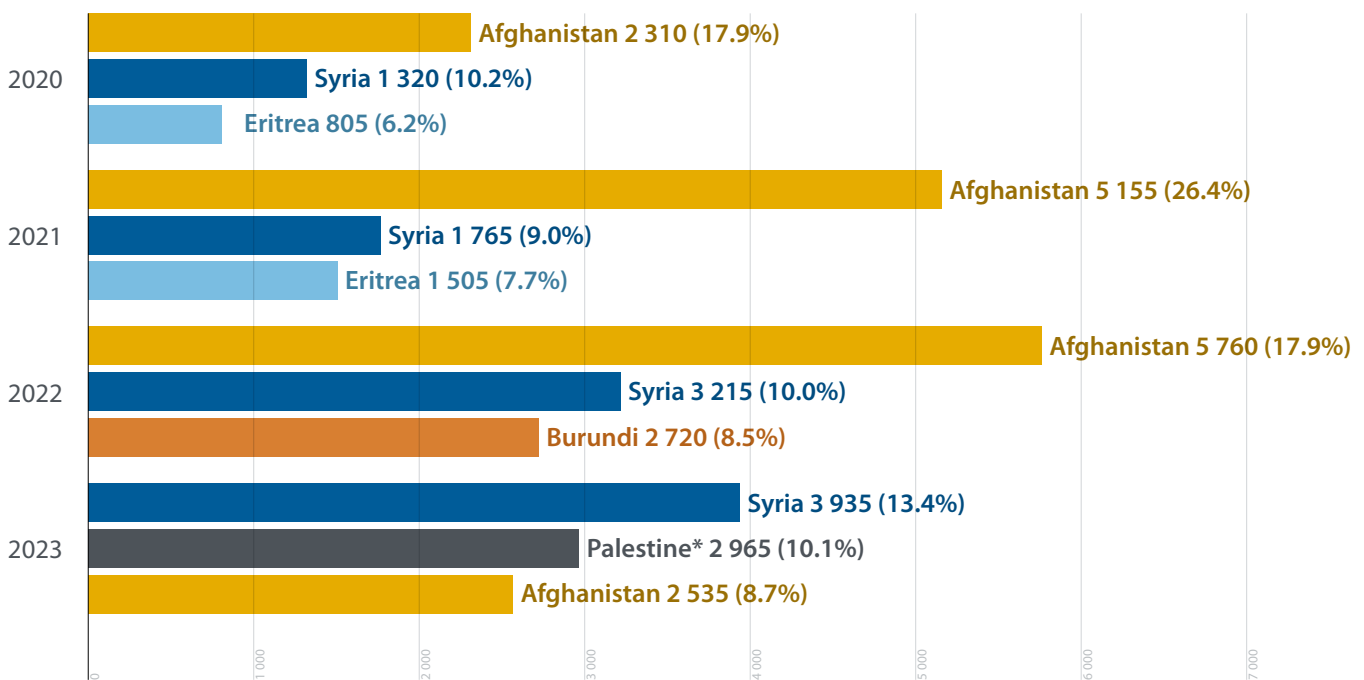


* Data collection from 2021.

Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza, migr_pop1ctz and migr_asyapp1mp)

Top 3 countries of citizenship – first-time asylum applicants, 2020–2023

Absolute number (and the share in total number of first-time applicants)

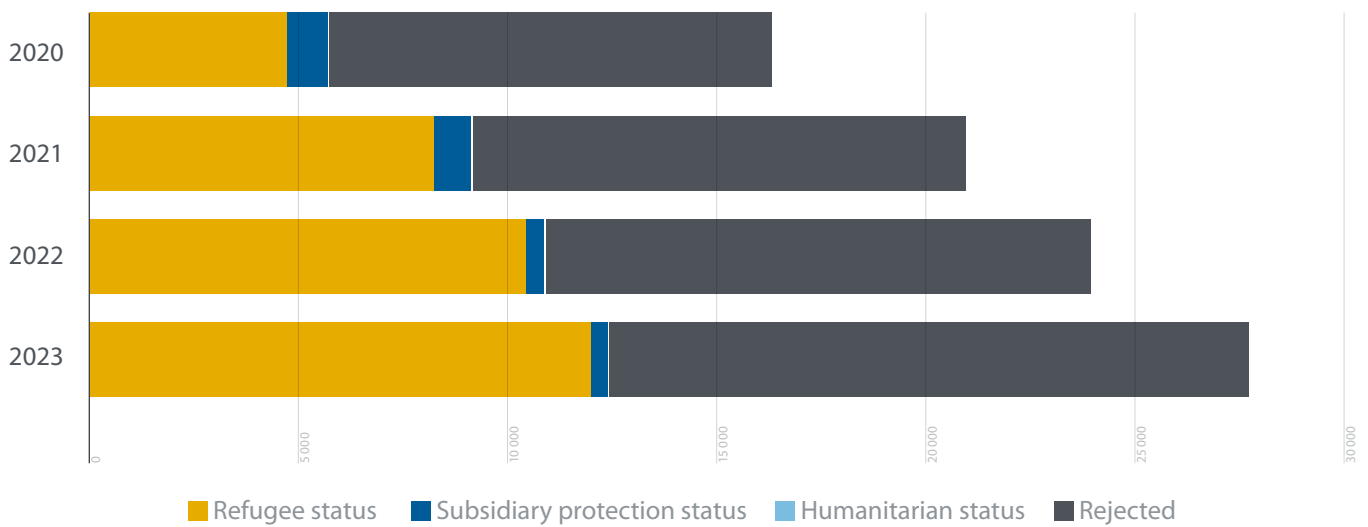


* This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual position of the reporting country on this issue.

Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza)

First instance asylum decisions by outcome, 2020–2023

Absolute number (and the share of the total)

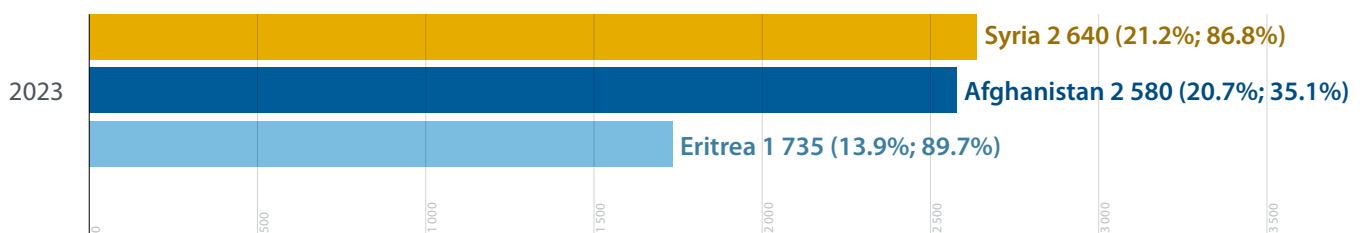


Year	Refugee status number (share of total)	Subsidiary protection status number (share of total)	Humanitarian status number (share of total)	Rejected number (share of total)
2020	4 735 (28.9%)	975 (6.0%)	-	10 650 (65.1%)
2021	8 280 (39.4%)	885 (4.2%)	-	11 865 (56.4%)
2022	10 495 (43.7%)	430 (1.8%)	-	13 105 (54.5%)
2023	12 040 (43.2%)	415 (1.5%)	-	15 400 (55.3%)

Source: Eurostat (*migr_asydcfst* and *migr_asydec1pc*)

Top 3 countries of citizenship granted positive asylum decisions at first instance, 2023

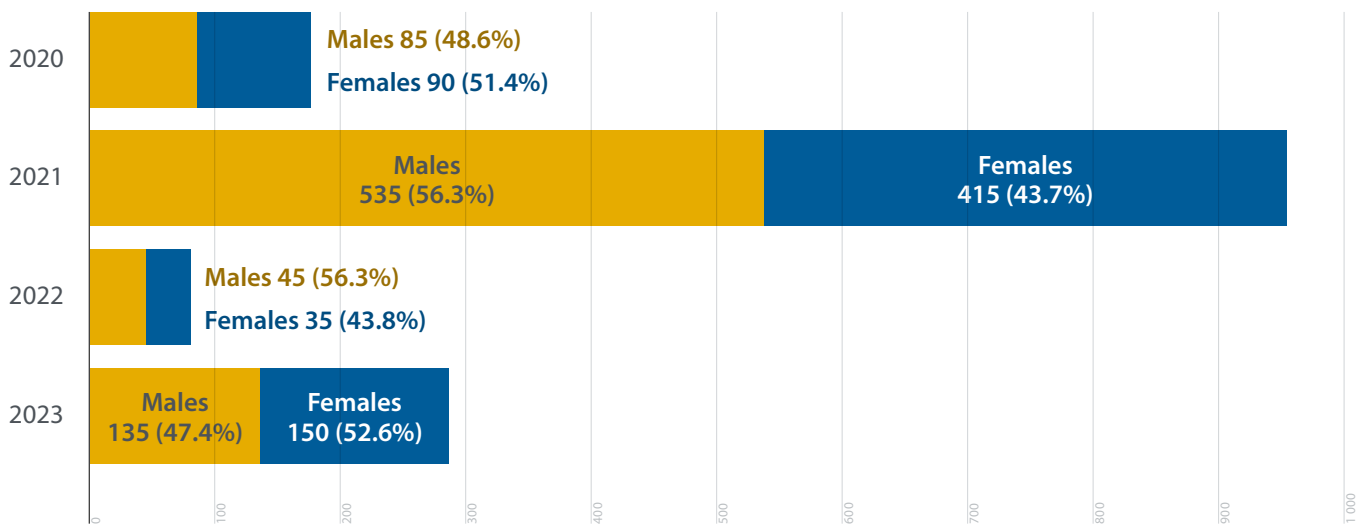
Absolute number (and the share in total positive decisions; and the recognition rate)



Source: Eurostat (*migr_asydcfst*)

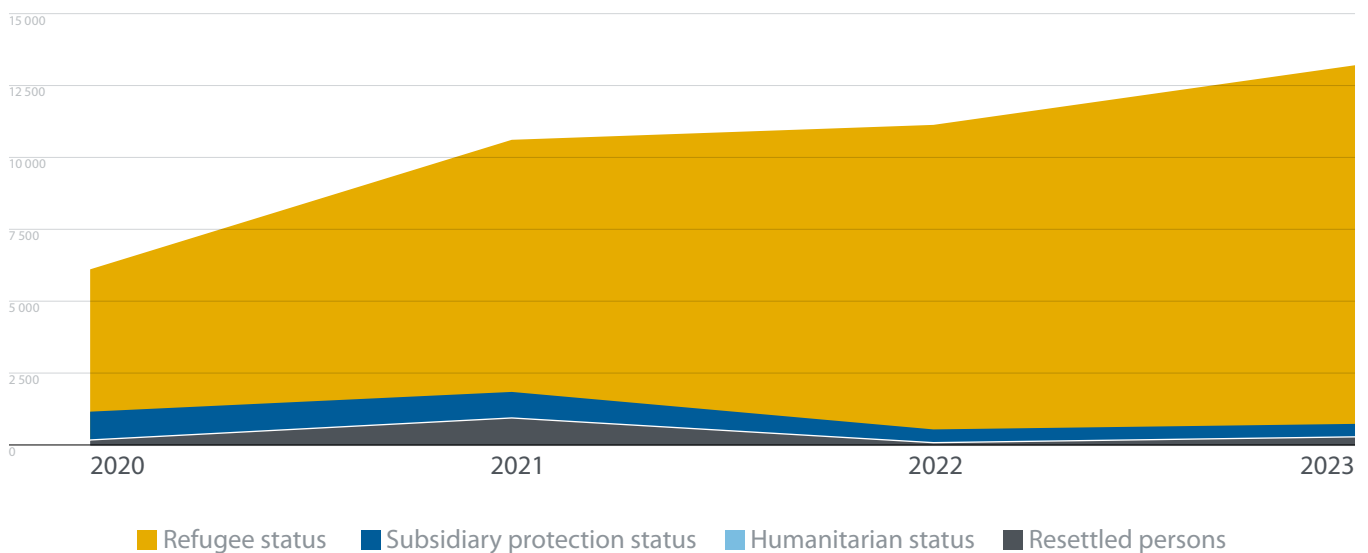
Resettled third-country nationals by sex, 2020–2023

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



Source: Eurostat (migr_asyresa)

Number of positive decisions for third-country nationals, by outcome, 2020–2023



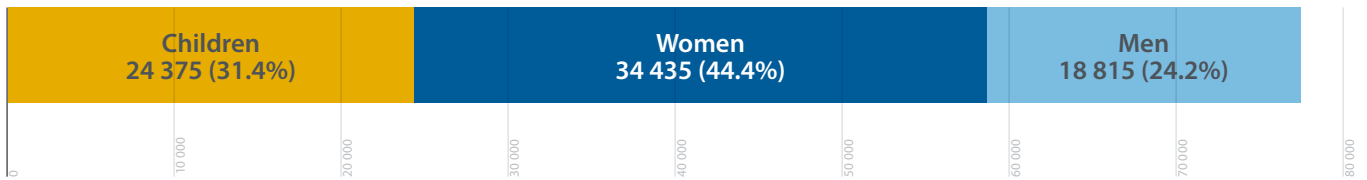
Year	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection status	Humanitarian status	Resettled persons
2020	5 010	1 020	-	175
2021	8 875	940	-	950
2022	10 720	490	-	80
2023	12 625	480	-	285

Source: Eurostat (migr_asydcfsta, migr_asydcfina and migr_asyresa)

TEMPORARY PROTECTION

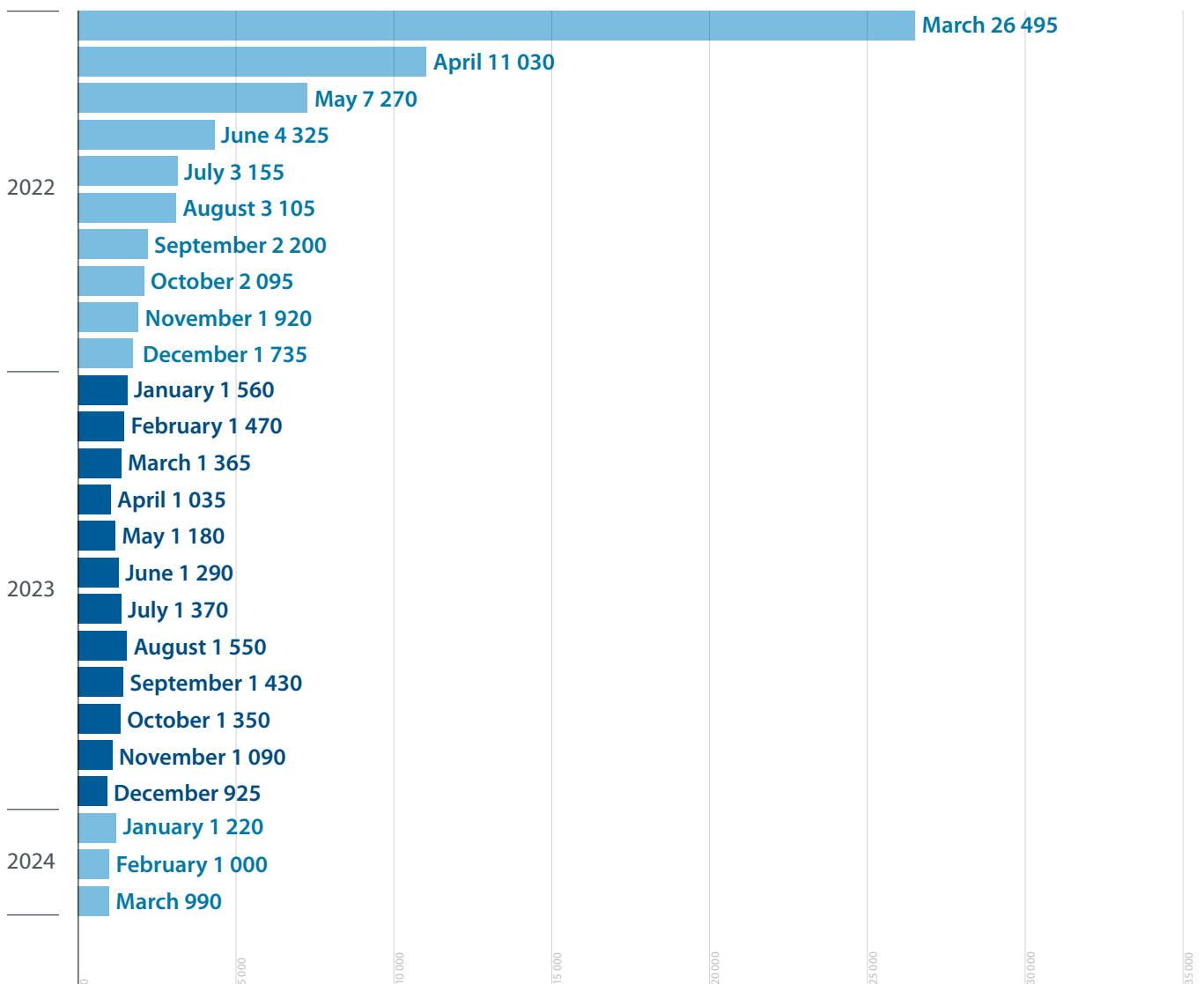
Beneficiaries of temporary protection by age and sex at the end of March 2024

Absolute number (and the share of the total)



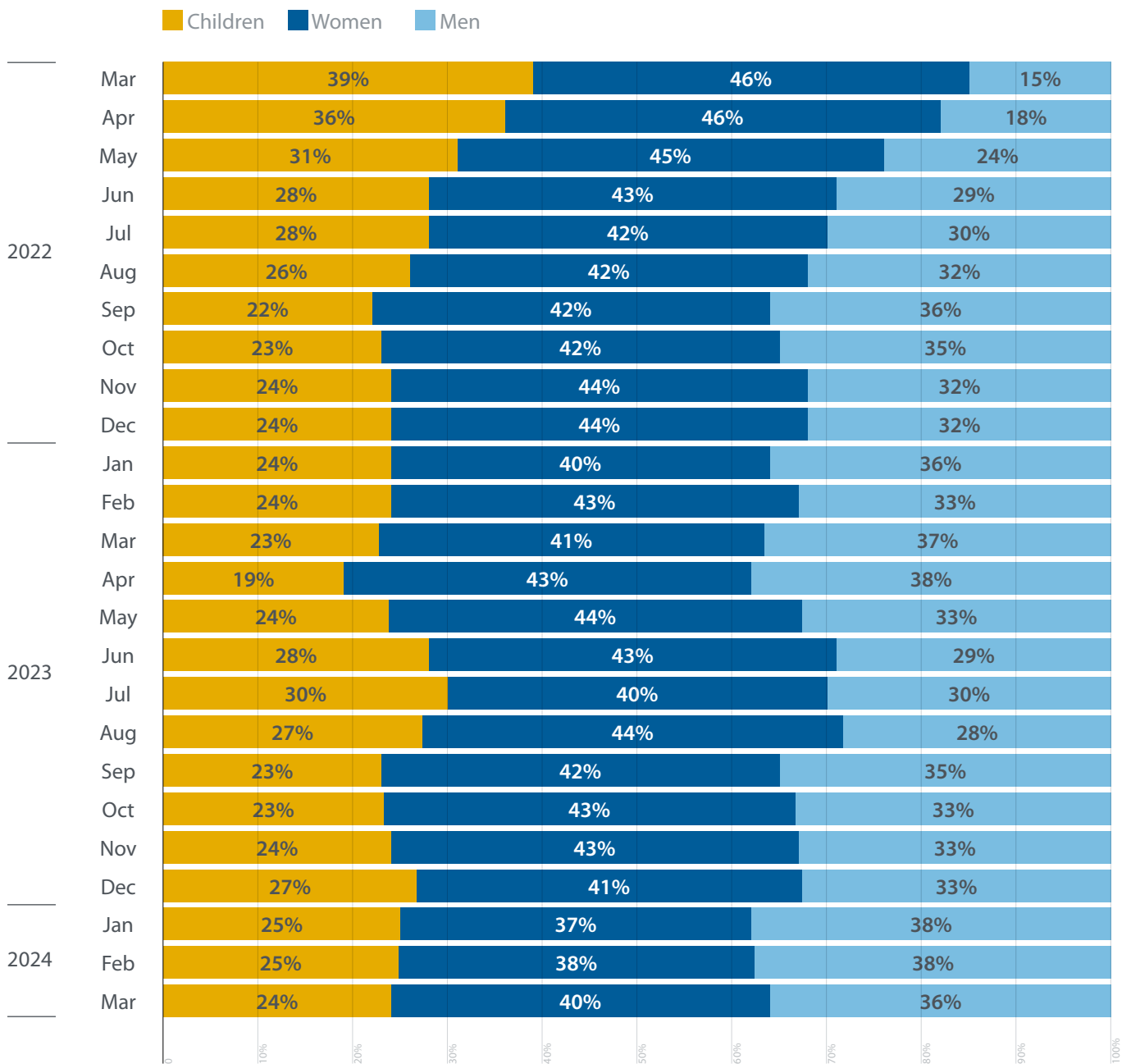
Note: In addition, 25 adults reported with unknown sex.
Source: Eurostat (migr_asytpsm)

Number of decisions providing temporary protection to people displaced from Ukraine due to Russia's invasion, March 2022–March 2024



Source: Eurostat (migr_asytpfm)

Distribution by age and sex of decisions providing temporary protection to people displaced from Ukraine due to Russia's invasion, March 2022–March 2024



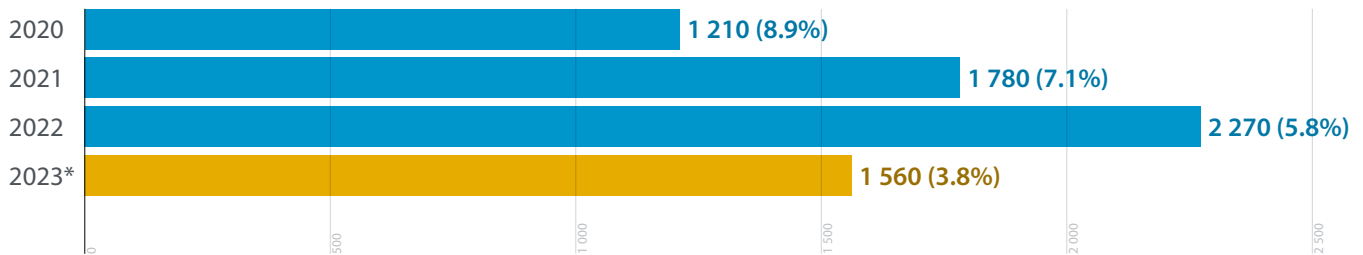
Source: Eurostat (migr_asytpfm)



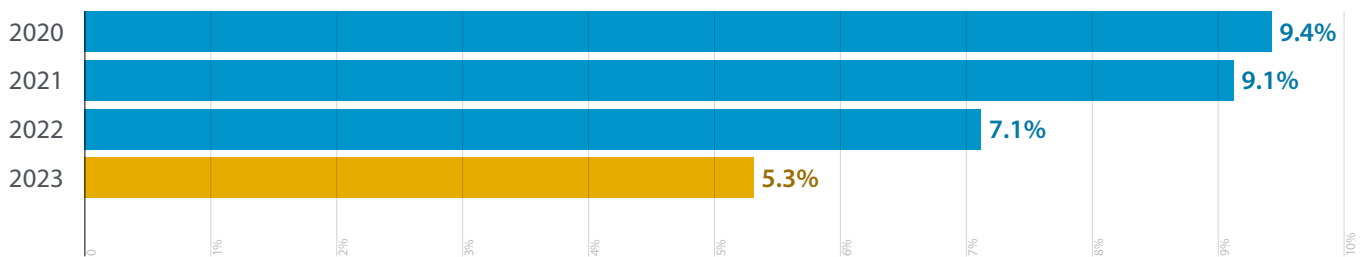
UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Unaccompanied minors applying for asylum, 2020–2023

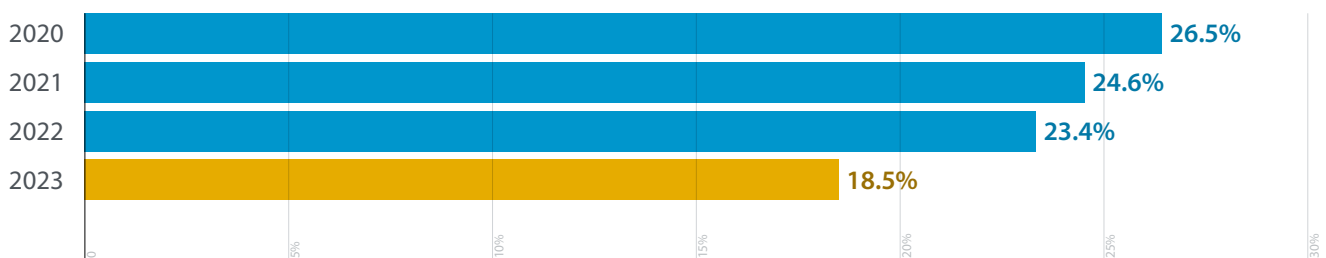
Number (and the share in total number of unaccompanied minors in the EU)



Share of all first-time asylum applicants



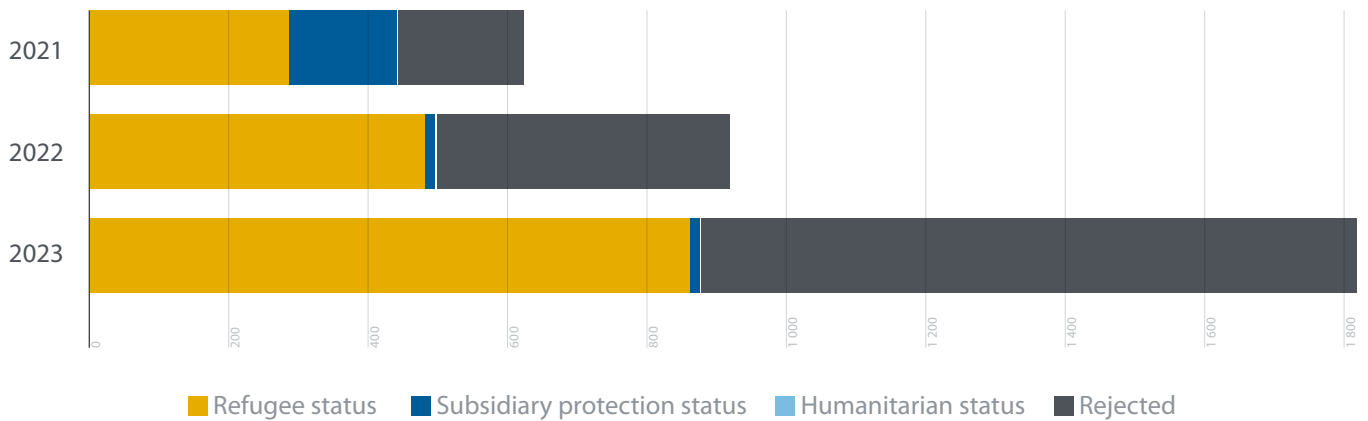
Share of all first-time asylum applicants aged less than 18 years



* The total number of unaccompanied minors in the EU used to calculate the share includes 2022 data for Cyprus.
Source: Eurostat (migr_asyunaa and migr_asyappctza)

First instance asylum decisions on applications lodged by unaccompanied minors by outcome, 2021-2023

Absolute number (and the share of the total)



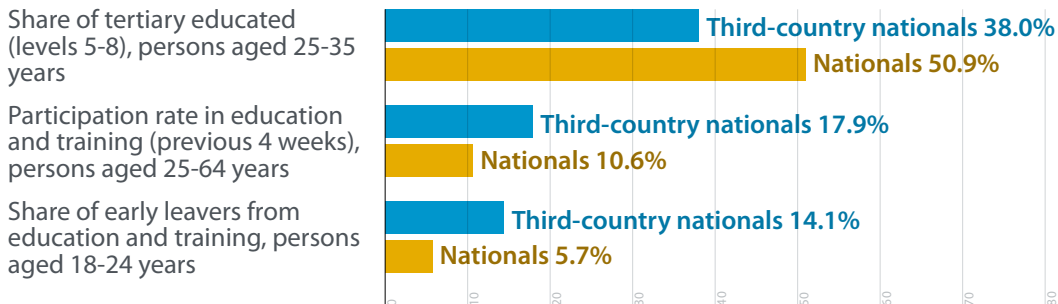
Year	Refugee status number (share of total)	Subsidiary protection status number (share of total)	Humanitarian status number (share of total)	Rejected number (share of total)
2021	285 (46.0%)	155 (25.0%)	-	180 (29.0%)
2022	480 (52.5%)	15 (1.6%)	-	420 (45.9%)
2023	860 (47.4%)	15 (0.8%)	-	940 (51.8%)

Source: Eurostat (migr_asyumdca)

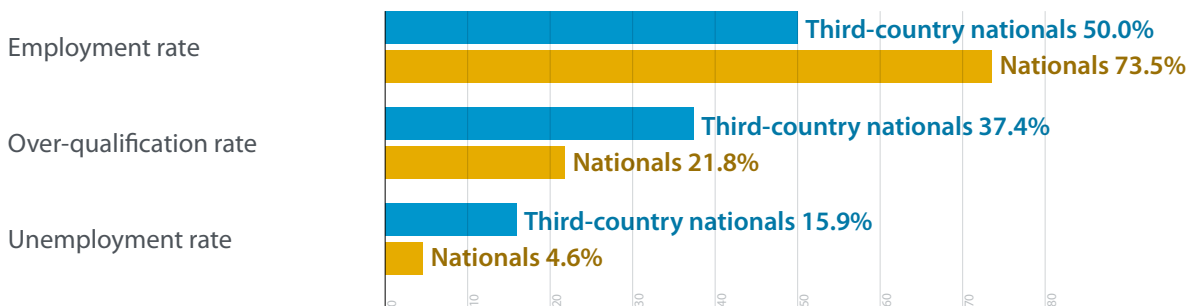
INTEGRATION

Integration indicators, 2022 or 2023

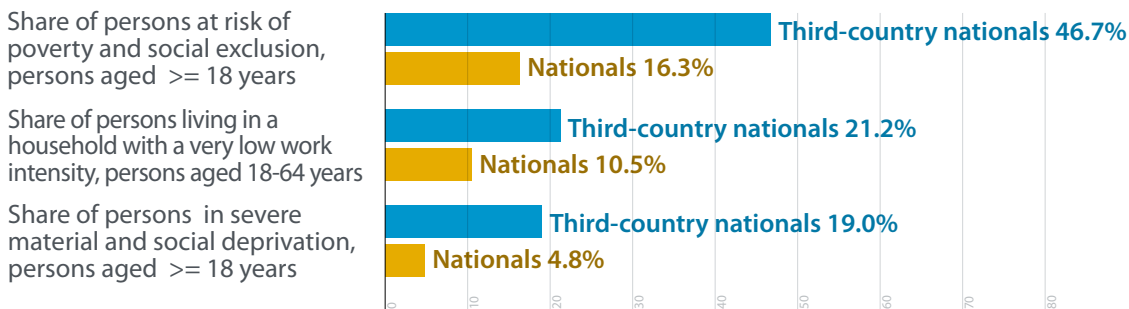
Education, 2023



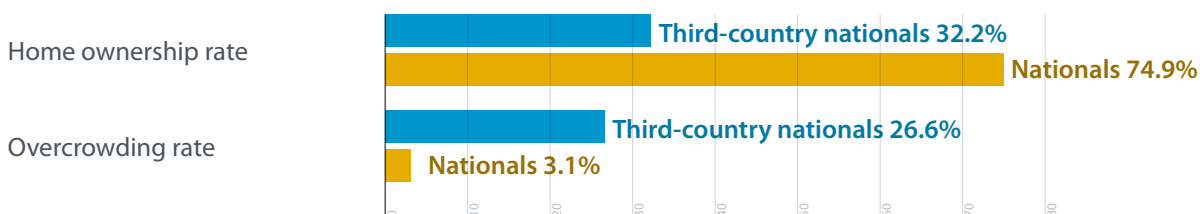
Labour market, persons aged 20-64 years, 2023



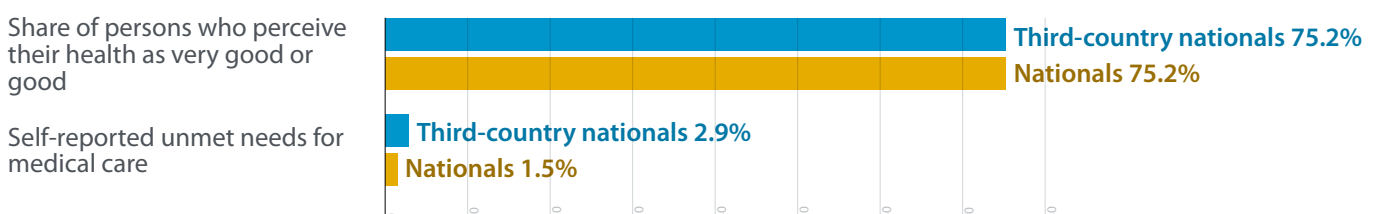
Social inclusion, 2023



Housing, persons aged ≥ 18 years, 2023



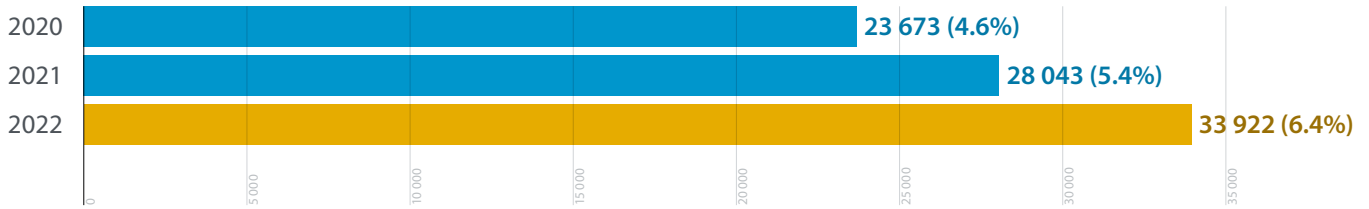
Health, persons aged ≥ 16 years, 2022



CITIZENSHIP AND STATELESSNESS

Third-country nationals who acquired citizenship, 2020–2022

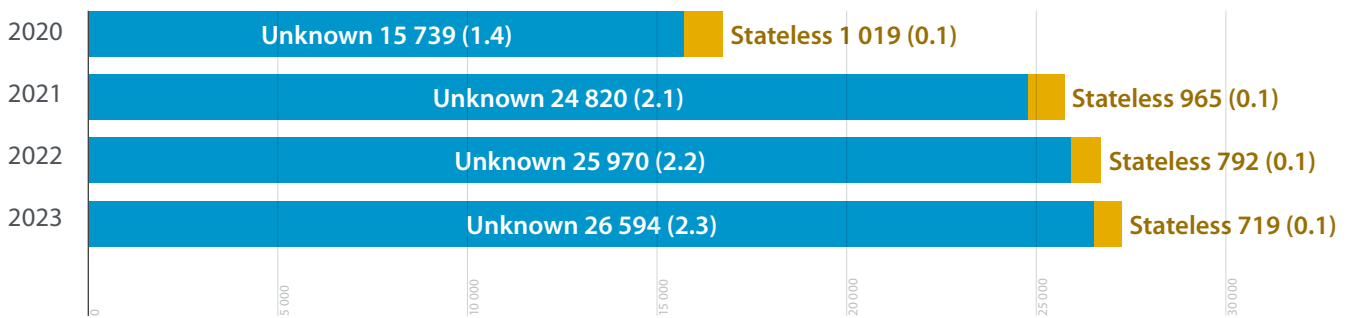
Absolute number (and share of total third-country nationals in the country)



Source: Eurostat (migr_acq and migr_pop1ctz)

Stateless persons and persons with unknown citizenship, 2020–2023

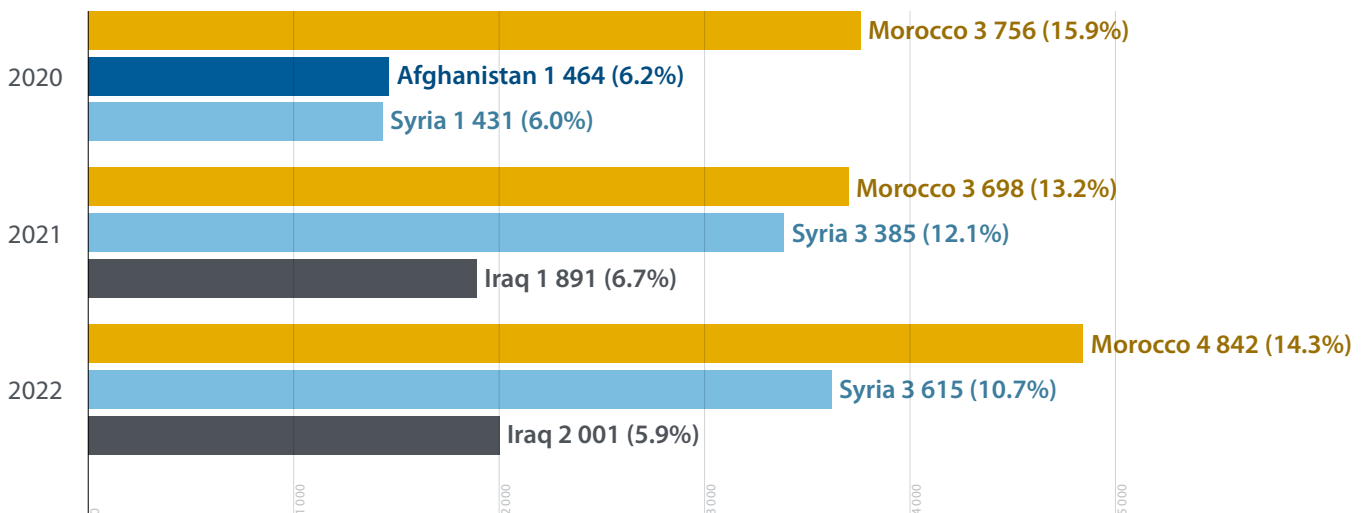
Absolute number (and the number per 1 000 people)



Source: Eurostat (migr_pop1ctz)

Top 3 countries of previous non-EU citizenships of persons acquiring citizenship, 2020–2022

Absolute number (and the share of all acquisitions by third-country nationals)

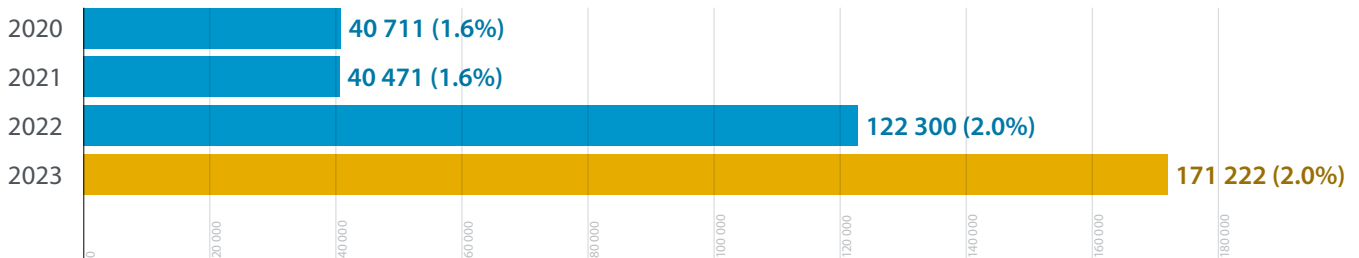


Source: Eurostat (migr_acq)

BORDERS, SCHENGEN AND VISAS

Schengen uniform short-stay visas issued, 2020–2023

Absolute number (and the share of all uniform short-stay visas issued within the Schengen Area)

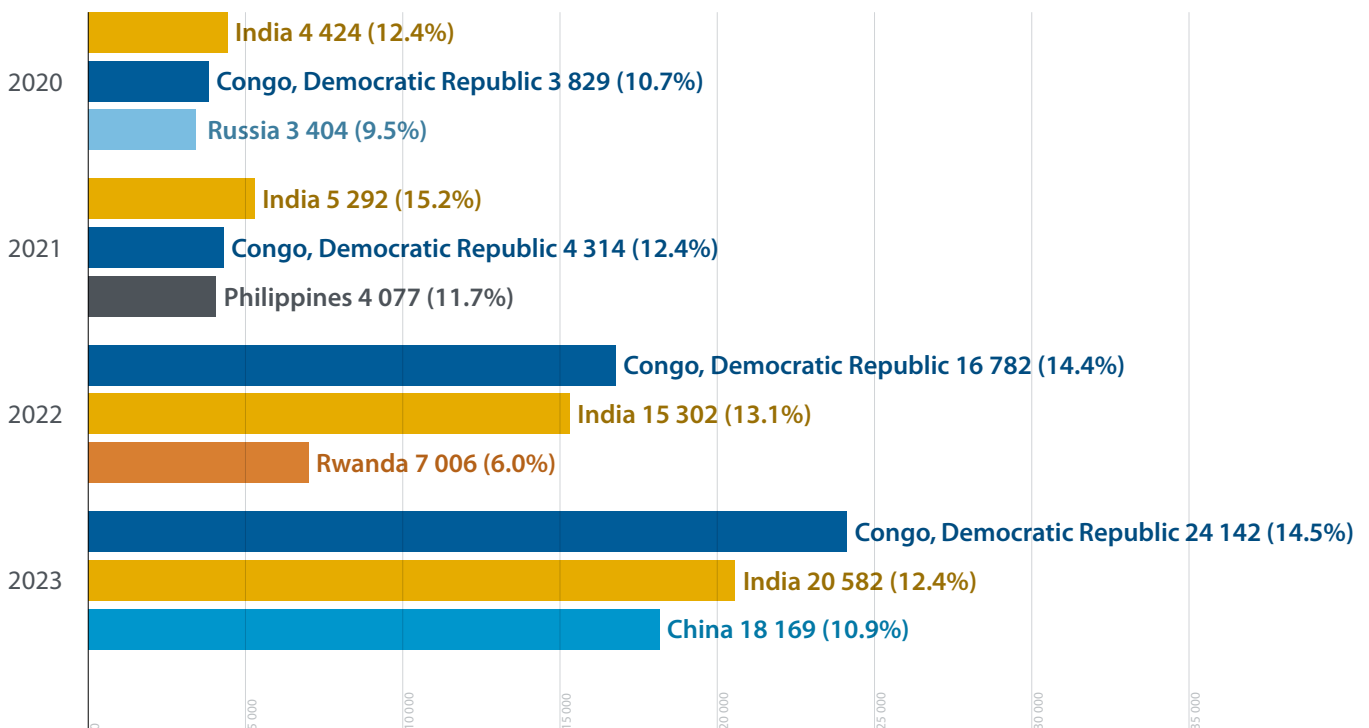


Note: Uniform short-stay visas (C visas) entitle the holder to stay in the territories of all Schengen States for up to 90 days within a 180-day period. Such visas may be issued for the purpose of a single entry or multiple entries.

Source: Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs

Three consulate countries in which the most Schengen uniform short-stay visas were issued, 2020–2023

Number of uniform short-stay visas issued (and the share of all uniform short-stay visas issued in consulate countries)



Note: the consulate country might not be the same as the country of citizenship of the visa applicant.

Source: Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs

IRREGULAR MIGRATION

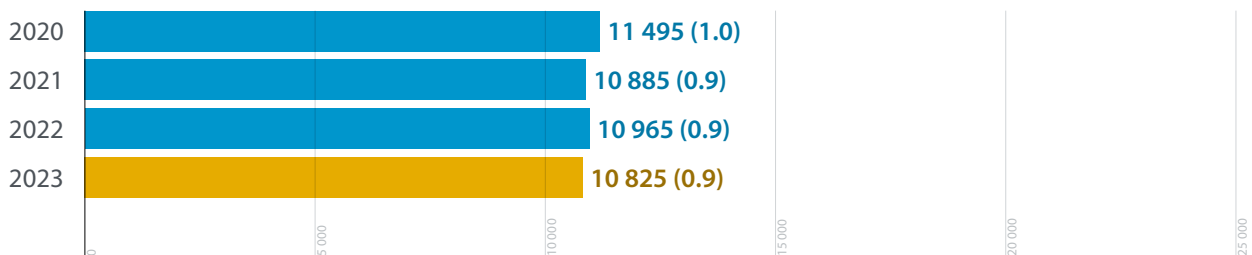
Third-country nationals subject to immigration law enforcement, 2020–2023

Absolute number (and the number per 1 000 people)

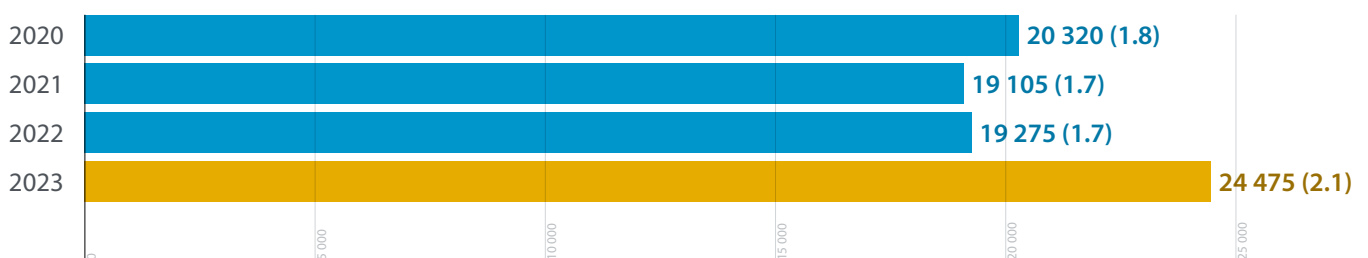
Persons refused entry



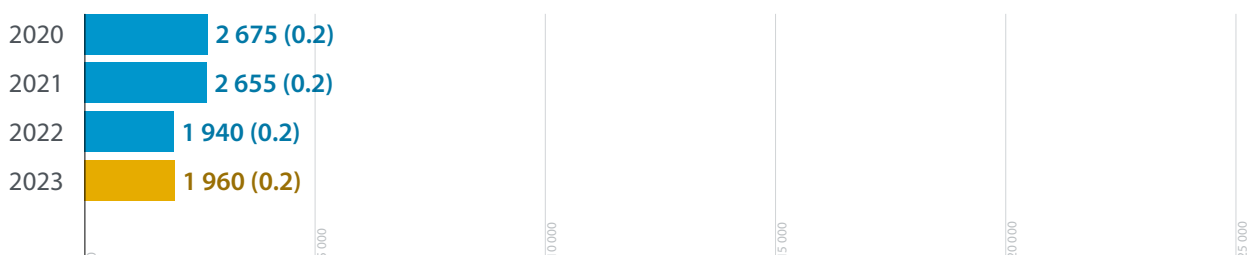
Persons found to be illegally present



Persons ordered to leave



Persons returned to a third country



Source: Eurostat (migr_eirfs, migr_eipre, migr_eiord, migr_eirtn, demo_gind and migr_eilpop)

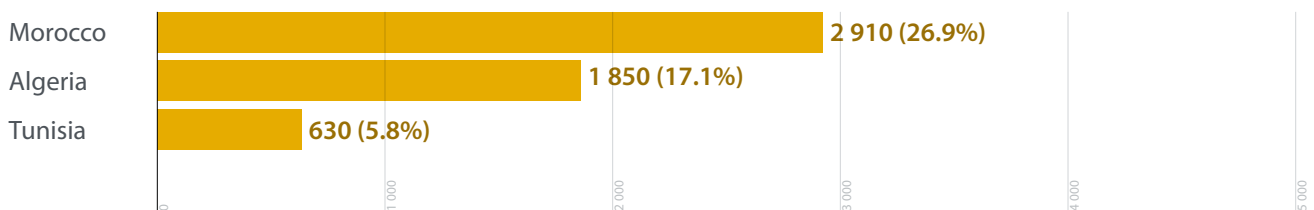
Top 3 countries of citizenship of third-country nationals subject to immigration law enforcement, 2023

Absolute numbers (and the shares in the respective totals)

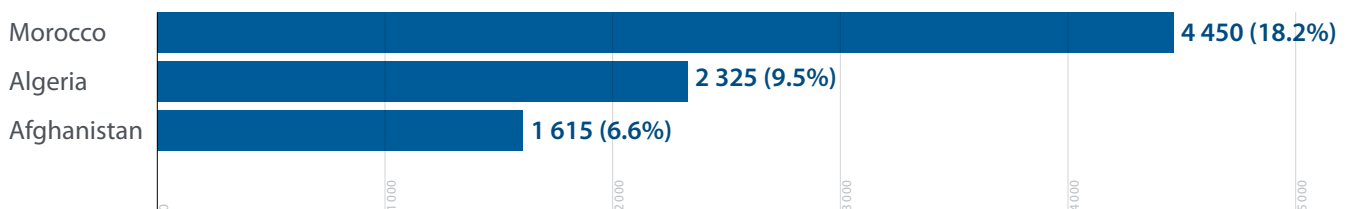
Persons refused entry



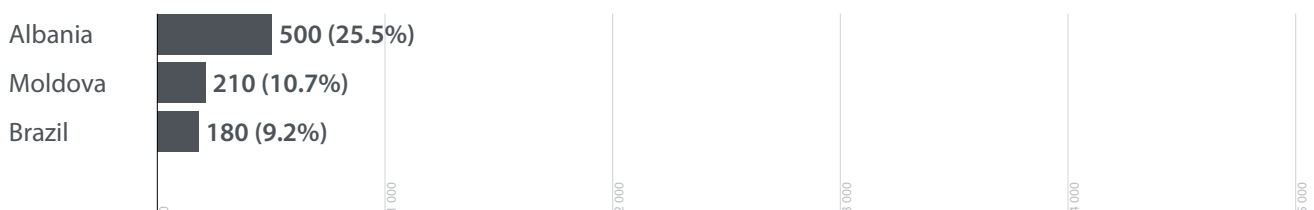
Persons found to be illegally present



Persons ordered to leave



Persons returned to a third country

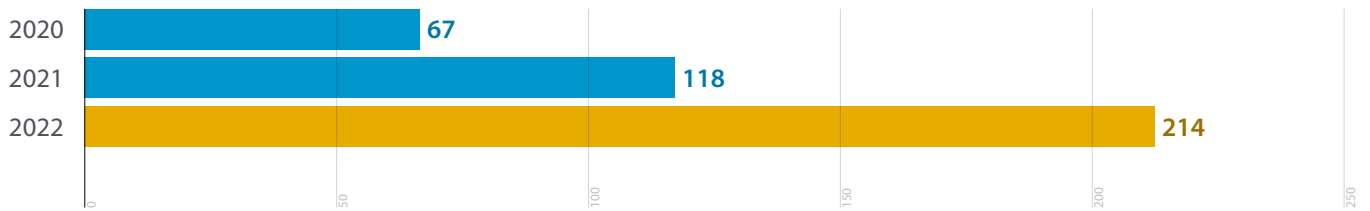


Source: Eurostat (*migr_eirfs*, *migr_eipre*, *migr_eiord* and *migr_eirtn*)



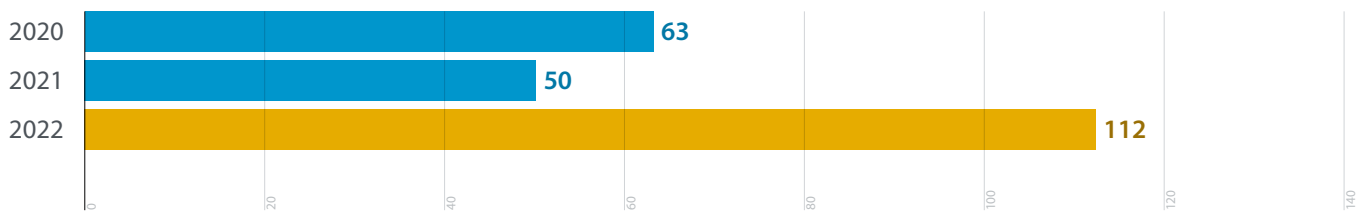
TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

Number of third-country nationals victims of trafficking in human beings, 2020-2022



Source: Eurostat (crim_thb_vctz)

Number of first residence permits issued to victims of trafficking in human beings, 2020-2022

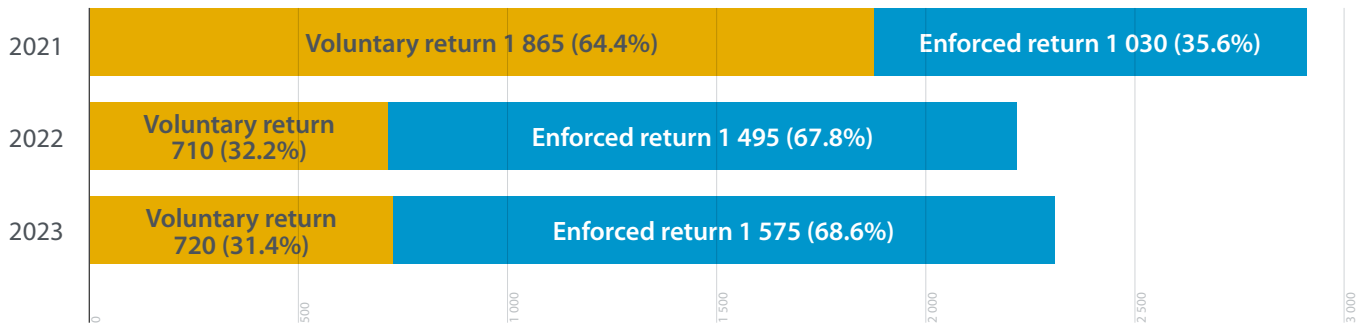


Source: Eurostat (migr_resoth)

RETURN AND READMISSION

Third-country nationals who left the territory, by type of return, 2021–2023

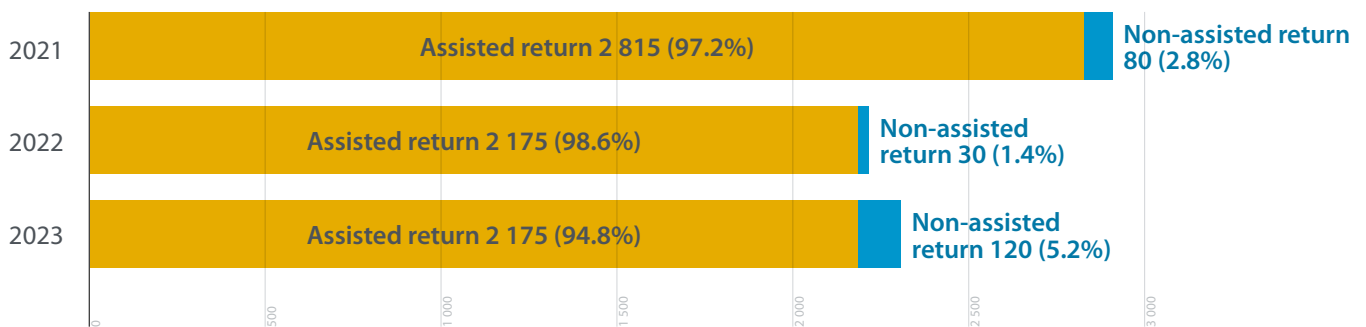
Absolute number (and the share of the total)



Source: Eurostat (migr_eirtn1)

Third-country nationals who left the territory, by type of assistance received, 2021–2023

Absolute number (and the share of the total)



Source: Eurostat (migr_eirtn1)