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The EMN Quarterly provides policymakers and other practitioners with updates on recent migration and international protection policy developments at EU and national level. The 45th edition provides information from **October-December 2023**, including the (latest) relevant published statistics.

The Quarterly is organised by policy theme. You can directly access your area of interest by clicking on one of the following themes:

TEMPORARY PROTECTION DIRECTIVE

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SPECIAL NOTE

This edition contains only national level updates. In June 2024, the EMN launched an updated version of the newsletter - EMNews - covering updates from the first quarter of 2024. EMNews will provide more focused and concise information covering EU and national level developments in the field of migration and asylum.

Recent EMN publications:

- EMN study on the [Application of the Temporary Protection Directive: Challenges and practices in 2023](#)
- EMN study on the [Illegal employment of third-country nationals: 2017-2022 situation analysis](#)

- EMN inform on the [Integration of applicants for international protection in the labour market](#)
- EMN inform on the [Access to autonomous housing in the context of international protection](#)

Stay tuned for upcoming EMN publications:

- EMN inform on Monitoring the integration of third-country nationals

TEMPORARY PROTECTION DIRECTIVE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Austria: On 19 December 2023, the Minister of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection [amended](#) the Regulation on the Implementation of Health Insurance for Persons Included in Health Insurance Pursuant to Article 9 General Social Insurance Act, extending the inclusion of displaced persons from Ukraine until 4 March 2025.

On 30 December 2023, the [Act on the Compensation of Family Expenses 1967](#) and the [Childcare Allowance Act](#) were amended. Accordingly, the applicability of these laws to displaced persons from Ukraine will now end on 4 March 2025 at the latest.

Czech Republic: On 30 November 2023, the [extension of temporary protection](#) for 1 year, i.e. until March 2025, for persons displaced from Ukraine due to the Russian invasion and the related war conflict, was approved by the government. The amended law envisages the same procedural model for the extension of this status as was used previously used for the first extension of temporary protection.

Finland: On 31 December 2023, the municipal model for accommodation [ended](#). The Finnish Immigration Service had developed the municipality model as a temporary solution to compensate municipalities for the costs of accommodation and guidance services for beneficiaries of temporary protection. The original purpose of the model was to enable people fleeing the war in Ukraine to stay in the place where they had settled when they arrived in Finland.

Greece: On 20 December 2023, law [L 5078/2023 \(GG A'211\)](#) was published, in which, Article 194 provides the possibility that beneficiaries of temporary protection can apply for the granting of one of the categories of residence permits provided in the new Migration Code (L.5038/2023, GG A'81), until March 4, 2025. The provision will enter into force on 31 March 2024.

Italy: The state of emergency aimed at providing relief and assistance to the Ukrainian population on the national territory was further extended until 31 December 2024, according to the provisions of the annual financial law. Additionally, expiring residence permits under temporary protection are now valid until 31 December 2024. These permits may be revoked following any possible decision by the EU Council to cease protection, but they can be converted, upon the individual's request, into work residence permits.

In December 2023, the continuation of ongoing reception projects was authorised, including the accommodation of 2 168 refugees from Ukraine for a period of three months. A subsequent extension until the end of 2024 was planned.

Latvia: On 23 November 2023, [amendments to the Law on the Support of Civilians of Ukraine](#) were approved, which extends the period of validity of visas and residence permits issued to Ukrainian civilians until 4 March 2025. The aim of the amendments was to reduce the administrative formalities associated with the determination of temporary protection status and to reduce administrative burden.

On 19 December 2023, the Cabinet of Ministers approved [the plan of measures for providing support to Ukrainian civilians in Latvia for 2024](#). It determines the measures to be implemented by State institutions,

municipalities, non-governmental organisations and merchants, and the resources to be involved in order to ensure coordinated action by providing support measures to Ukrainian civilians – both those who are already staying in Latvia and those Ukrainian civilians who, fleeing the war, will still arrive in Latvia in 2024.

Netherlands: On 14 November 2023, the Senate [voted](#) in favour of an amendment to the Rent Benefit Act creating the right to rent benefits for Ukrainians for the duration of their temporary protection in the Netherlands. Given the uncertainty regarding the possibility of voluntarily moving back to Ukraine, it was seen as desirable to allow Ukrainians to settle outside reception locations. Ukrainian displaced persons are allowed to work in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, it is plausible that some are unable to provide for housing independently.

Portugal: The [Council of Ministers Resolution no. 120/2023 of 9 October](#) extended the validity, for a period of six months, of temporary protection titles, granted to people displaced from Ukraine.

Sweden: On 22 December 2023, the government decided on an amendment with regard to Sweden's application of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). The [government's decision to expand the scope of the TPD](#) primarily affects applicants for international protection from Ukraine who arrived in Sweden before 30 October 2021 and have not had their applications examined. People from this group now have the opportunity to receive temporary protection on the condition that they were in Sweden legally prior to 22 December 2023.

Montenegro: From 1 October until 20 December 2023, the total number of applications for temporary protection of persons from Ukraine was 473, out of whom 259 were women and 214 were men. The number of temporary protection permits granted during this time was 392. During the reporting period there were no cases of unaccompanied minors from Ukraine.

1. GENERAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Austria: The Minister of the Interior issued a number of regulations in connection with internal border controls:

- In October 2023, border controls at the internal borders with the Slovak Republic were reintroduced. In order to ensure public peace, order and security, the internal borders with the Slovak Republic may be crossed in traffic on land and at sea only at border crossing points. The regulation [entered into force](#) on 4 October 2023 and was set to terminate ten days later but was extended on [12 October 2023](#), [2 November 2023](#), [22 November 2023](#) and on [1 December 2023](#) until 2 February 2024;
- On [27 October 2023](#), [15 November 2023](#), [6 December 2023](#) and [14 December 2023](#), the previously enacted Regulation of the Federal Minister of the Interior on the Temporary Reintroduction of Border Controls at the Internal Borders with the Czech Republic was extended and remains in force until 16 February 2024;
- On 10 November 2023, border controls at the internal borders with the Republic of Slovenia and Hungary were temporarily [reintroduced](#). In order to ensure public peace, order and security, the internal borders with the Republic of Slovenia and Hungary may be crossed in land traffic only at border crossing points between 12 November 2023 and 11 May 2024.

Belgium: On 8 December 2023 the Belgian Presidency [programme](#) was released. It sets out the priorities and main directions of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, which takes place in the first half of 2024. In the area of asylum and migration, the Belgian Presidency aims to address all remaining legislative files associated with CEAS and the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. The Belgian Presidency will also take further discussions on return and reintegration, the future of the EU visa policy, legal migration, and the development of integrated border management.

Cyprus: On 12 October 2023, the discussion for the adoption of the [bill establishing the Deputy Ministry](#) of Migration and Asylum commenced before the Parliament. The new Deputy Ministry is expected to be established in the first trimester of 2024.

Finland: On 16 October 2023, the Ministry of the Interior announced it would [launch a reform of the Nationality Act](#). The plans involve changes to the legal provisions specifying requirements for the period of residence, integrity and livelihood, and the introduction of a citizenship test. The objectives set out in the Government Programme will be implemented in stages in projects set up by the Ministry of the Interior.

On 9 November 2023, it was announced that the Finnish Immigration Service would [carry out reforms](#) in order to improve its ability to meet the goals set out in the Government Programme. The Finnish Immigration Service would launch cooperation negotiations that concern the majority of the staff. The negotiations do not aim to reduce staff.

France: On 19 December 2023, the bill to control immigration and improve integration was passed into law. The law sets out four priorities to control immigration and improve integration: controlling immigration by tightening the conditions for issuing residence permits for family reunification; combatting illegal immigration by stepping up return measures for foreign nationals who pose a serious threat to public order; making the right of asylum effective by reducing processing times for asylum applications; and improving the reception of foreign nationals admitted to reside in France to ensure successful integration, while paying particular attention to knowledge of the French language and access to work.

Greece: On 21 December 2023, the Minister of Migration and Asylum met representatives of three international organisations and 29 civil society bodies, that are active in programmes in the reception, asylum and integration sectors and the protection of vulnerable persons. The aim of the meeting was the [exchange of views for the better management](#) of all joint actions.

Ireland: On 19 December 2023, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (who are responsible for migrant integration and the accommodation of international protection applicants) published their [statement of strategy 2023-2025](#).

Italy: On 5 December 2023, the conversion law of the decree dated 5 October 2023, concerning 'Urgent provisions on immigration and international protection, as well as support for security policies and the functionality of the Ministry of the Interior', [came into effect](#) in Italy. The decree comprises provisions for preventing and fighting irregular immigration, regulations on international protection, unaccompanied foreign minors, and measures related to reception.

Lithuania: On 4 October 2023, in response to increasing refugee flows due to the situation at the Nagorno Karabakh, the government [allocated](#) € 350 000 in humanitarian support to Armenia.

On 5 October 2023, the government [confirmed the state budget](#) and articulated its commitment to enhancing institutional capacity to manage migration processes. In pursuit of this objective, € 2 million were allocated for the creation of new posts and salary increases for staff in the Migration Department.

Luxembourg: On 8 October 2023, general elections were held in Luxembourg. On 9 October 2023, Luc Frieden (Christian Social People's Party (CSV)) was appointed to form a government. On 13 November a coalition agreement was announced between the CSV and the Democratic Party. Migration as a topic was addressed as part of [the Coalition Agreement for 2023 – 2028](#).

Poland: On 13 December 2023, the President of the Republic of Poland appointed a new majority coalition government formed following mid-October parliamentary elections. Marcin Kierwiński became the minister responsible for domestic affairs. On 22 December 2023 Maciej Duszczuk was appointed undersecretary of state at the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. The new deputy minister will be responsible for international issues and migration policy. Ms. Agata Furgała was appointed director of the Ministry's Department of International Affairs and Migration.

Slovenia: On 9 November 2023, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia [adopted the first strategy for the integration of foreigners who are not citizens of the European Union](#) into the cultural, economic and social life of the Republic of Slovenia. It defines integration as a two-way process and stresses the importance of

linguistic integration. Measures also cover integration in education, the local community, employment, the removal of administrative barriers and cooperation with diasporas.

Georgia: On 24-26 October 2023, Georgia [hosted the Prague Process regional workshop](#) on the ‘Potential of Digitalisation in the Migration Context’ organised by the Ministry of Justice of Georgia and the Prague Process Secretariat and International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). The workshop gathered over 70 participants from 16 countries as well as international organisations, Erasmus University Rotterdam, and independent experts. The Workshop featured four sessions focusing on existing digital tools and solutions and corresponding technological gaps in areas such as integration (reintegration), international protection, legal (labour) migration and migration & development. The discussion topics were inspired by and based on the joint EMN-OECD inform on the “[The Use of Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence in Migration Management](#)”.

In October-November 2023, [Geostat resumed work](#) on listing the population and households in Tbilisi, as part of the preparatory work for the General Population Census 2024. Field work has been broken down into three stages with data collected by 900 interviewers with the use of modern technologies.

On 16 December 2023, the State Commission on Migration Issues (SCMI) on its [32nd sitting](#) adopted [2024 Action Plan](#) of the 2021-2030 Migration Strategy. The Action Plan includes 41 objectives and 108 activities to be implemented by SCMI member and partner agencies in 2024.

On 19 December 2023, [the Agreement on Migration and Mobility](#) between Georgia and Germany was signed, aiming to strengthen cooperation in the field of labour/circular migration, sharing experience in the educational field and the fight against illegal migration.

Portugal: On 29 October 2023, following [Decree-Law 41/2023 of 2 June](#) and [Ordinance 324-A/2023 of 27 October](#), Portugal concluded the process of restructuring its borders and migration management system and the implementation of a new paradigm of public migration policies. The new Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA) results from the merge of the High Commission for Migration (ACM) and the administrative part of the Immigration and Border Service (SEF). It is a public institute integrated in the indirect administration of the State, endowed with administrative and financial autonomy, with jurisdiction and decentralised services throughout the national territory, and is subject to the oversight and supervision of the member of the Government responsible for the areas of equality and migration. Its mission is to implement national and European public policies on migration and asylum, particularly those relating to the entry and stay and the reception and integration of foreign citizens in national territory, providing the necessary information about documents, job offers, public services, and promoting the learning of the Portuguese language, among other services. AIMA is thus responsible for pursuing a global and holistic approach to migration and asylum management, making the system more efficient and more resilient to future migratory pressures and humanitarian crises. The police competences of the former SEF were transferred to the Criminal Investigation Police (criminal investigation), the Public Security Police and the National Republican Guard (border security) under the oversight of the Internal Security System (integrated border management). The Institute of Registries and Notary, I. P. (IRN, I. P.) assumed the powers of SEF to grant and issue the Portuguese electronic passport, as well as to the renewals of residence permits.

Residence permits for investment activity (ARI) were revoked by [Law no. 56/2023 of 9 October](#) on new measures on the subject of habitation, revoking the concession of residence permits for real estate investment purposes. Specifically, this Ordinance revoked the possibility of obtaining a residence permit through investment in real estate, in an attempt to curb real estate speculation.

Montenegro: During the reporting period, draft amendments to the Law on Foreigners were sent to all relevant governmental bodies for comments and suggestions. As a new government was elected on 31 October, and the new Regulation on the Organisation of State Administration had come into force shortly after, the amendments needed to undergo an additional review by all relevant bodies in November. Following the inter-institutional consultations, the draft will be sent to the European Commission for further comments and suggestions. The main reason for the amendments is further harmonisation of the Law on Foreigners with the Law on Life Partnership of Same-Sex Partners (“Official Gazette of Montenegro”, No. 67/2020). The law also needs to further elaborate on the procedure for determining the status of stateless persons.



2. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION INCLUDING ASYLUM

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Austria: On 14 December 2023, the Constitutional Court [found in its ruling](#) that the legal provisions on the implementation of legal counselling and representation of asylum seekers and foreigners by the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services were unconstitutional, as the independence of the counselling and representation was not sufficiently guaranteed by law. Therefore, the right to an effective legal remedy was violated and the Constitutional Court has repealed the corresponding legal provisions, due to enter into force on 30 June 2025.

Belgium: On 20 October 2023, the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons ([CGRS](#)) announced that the notification of decisions granting or refusing subsidiary protection status to applicants from Gaza and the West Bank was [suspended](#) until the CGRS had sufficient objective information to assess the security situation in the Palestinian territories accurately. On 19 December the CGRS announced that the assessment had been completed and that it had decided to resume the processing of all Palestinian cases.

Bulgaria: On 30 November 2023, an "Instruction on the terms and conditions for age assessment" was approved by the Chairperson of the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers. The Instruction was developed jointly with the State Agency for Child Protection. It sets out the criteria and methods for assessing and establishing the age of a foreigner with an unknown identity seeking protection in the Republic of Bulgaria, who declares being a minor or who is reasonably assumed to be a minor. It also lays down the procedures for when an age assessment expertise shall be ordered and carried out.

Cyprus: On 7 July 2023, the Deputy Director-General of DG HOME, Mrs. Beate Gminder visited Cyprus' First Reception Centre, where reconstruction and expansion works are taking place. The € 22 million large-scale upgrades of the centre, developed in cooperation with the Cypriot authorities and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are co-funded by the 2021-2027 Asylum Migration and Integration Fund.

From 1 October 2023, the minimum period within which asylum seekers may have access to the labour market after the date of submission of their application for international protection, in specific sectors and occupations, has been increased from one to nine months according to a [ministerial decree](#) for the employment of asylum seekers which was reviewed on 29 September 2023.

Finland: On 23 October 2023, the Ministry of the Interior set up two [projects aimed at tightening the rules](#) on international protection in line with the Government Programme. The planned changes will make international protection temporary in nature and introduce the option to withdraw protection if the applicant commits a serious offence. A second project aims to improve the efficiency of the asylum process.

France: On 23 October 2023, a [decree amended the provisions](#) relating to the 'wanted persons files', by including asylum seekers awaiting Dublin transfer who have absconded and extending the list of agents who can consult it.

On 13 December 2023, at the World Refugee Forum, France [reaffirmed its full commitment](#) to work alongside the UNHCR to help refugees. It announced that the French Republic has decided to triple its financial contribution over three years and has committed itself to resettling isolated and particularly vulnerable refugee women in France, particularly victims of violence, exploitation or human trafficking, via the "Women in Danger" scheme. This scheme will set up jointly with UNHCR and will initially welcome women from Afghanistan.

Greece: On 20 December 2023, [legal amendments were published](#) concerning access to the labour market for international protection applicants. They provide international protection applicants with the right to access the labour market 60 days (instead of 6 months) after lodging an international protection application in case a first instance decision is not issued, as long as they have a valid international protection applicant's card.

On 5 December 2023, [Joint Ministerial Decision no.527235](#) on the national list of countries designated as “safe countries of origin” national law was issued. It designated the same 16 countries as the previous Joint Ministerial Decision, namely on the matter: Egypt, Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Georgia, Gambia, Ghana, India, Morocco, Bangladesh, Benin, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, Togo, and Tunisia.

On 15 December 2023, the list of safe third countries was [updated](#) providing the same list, as previously, regarding Turkey as a safe third country for persons of origin of the following countries: Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Somalia and with the following specific additions: Albania, for persons entering the Greek territory illegally through the borders with Albania, North Macedonia for persons entering the Greek territory illegally through the borders with North Macedonia. Before the issuance of the above decision, (on 31st October) according to art. 91, par. 3 of L.4939/22, the Director of Asylum Service conducted a special proposal on the latest developments on asylum policy for countries designated by national list as “safe third countries”. The designation of Turkey as a safe third country was an important step in tackling illegal migration flows and the criminal activity of smuggling networks, as well as for the full and unwavering implementation of EU-Turkey Joint Declaration.

On 7 November 2023, [the Ministerial Decision on the “Provision of Legal Aid to Applicants for international protection”](#) was issued. This decision made the necessary regulatory arrangements to incorporate the provision of funding of legal aid to applicants for international protection under adequate financial resources by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (for the period 2021-2027).

On 31 December 2023, a [decision of the General Secretary for the Reception of asylum-seekers](#), revised the General Regulation on the operation of the closed-controlled access centres.

Ireland: On 28 November 2023, the Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth published a [report on Refugees and Integration](#). The report outlines recommendations as part of the Committee’s recent work relating to refugee integration, such as the timely processing of applications for international protection, accommodation, combatting misinformation and disinformation and challenges facing refugee and migrant children.

Italy: On 5 October 2023, the following legal provisions were introduced:

- Stricter criteria for the acceptance of international protection applications, modifying the regulations concerning a 'reiterated' international protection application if submitted again by the applicant during the execution phase of an expulsion measure from the national territory.
- Shorter deadlines for requesting the reopening of the examination of the international protection application from twelve to nine months after the suspension ruled by the Territorial Commission, in cases where the applicant leaves the reception facilities without justified reason.
- Extended access to the facilities of the Reception and Integration System to all women, not just those who are pregnant.
- Possible deviations from the capacity requirements for reception centres and facilities in circumstances of extraordinary urgency, no more than twice the planned capacity.

During the reporting period, 19 Afghan people were resettled from Iran to Italy under the National Resettlement Programme, where they were granted refugee status.

During the reporting period, through two different agreements in force between the Italian Ministry of the Interior (Moi) and CSOs, 132 Afghan nationals, 126 from Pakistan and six from Turkey arrived safely in Italy through humanitarian corridors. Another 122 people, mainly Syrians, were transferred from Lebanon.

On 20 December 2023, a new Memorandum of Understanding was signed as a result of the cooperation between the Italian Moi, MFA, UNHCR and experienced Italian CSOs. This three-year agreement aims at ensuring a safe pathway for 1 500 vulnerable people in need of international protection, who will be identified by UNHCR staff on the ground, and transferred to Italy by the end of 2026. These people will be hosted partly by the national reception system (600 people), and partly by the three signatory CSOs (900 people).

Luxembourg: Since 23 October 2023, [men travelling alone who have submitted an application for international protection are no longer automatically admitted to the first-time reception centre](#). They are seen

individually by the social services of the National Reception Office, which assesses people's vulnerability and needs on a daily basis and establishes a waiting list for people wishing to be accommodated by the state. Absolute priority is given to women, children and families as well as the most vulnerable.

Sweden: On 1 December 2023, [amendments to the Aliens Act with regard to family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection](#) entered into force. These were previously exempt from the maintenance requirement for family reunification when the application from a family member was submitted within three months from when they received their own residence permit. Following the recent amendments beneficiaries of subsidiary protection no longer benefit from this exception.

On 1 December 2023, [amendments to the Aliens Act pertaining to family reunification for resettled refugees](#) entered into force. Refugees admitted as part of Sweden's resettlement programme continue to benefit from an exemption from the maintenance requirement when the application from a family member was submitted within three months. However, the three-month grace period now starts when the residence permit was issued for the refugee. Previously, the three-month period started when they entered Sweden.

On 1 December 2023, [amendments to the Aliens Act introduced restricted possibilities to grant a residence permit on humanitarian grounds](#). The provision for allowing a residence permit to be granted on the grounds of particularly distressing circumstances was removed. Children can instead be granted a residence permit on the grounds of *exceptionally distressing* circumstances, even if the circumstances do not have the same seriousness and weight as for adults. The provision of particularly distressing circumstances was introduced in 2014, but was not applied in 2016-2021 when a temporary act was in force.

Georgia: On 28-29 November 2023, representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (MIA) [participated in a study visit](#) at the Swedish Migration Agency (SMA) in Malmö, with a specific focus on the assessment of indiscriminate violence and identification of the persons with specific needs. The study visit was supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Office in Georgia.

Montenegro: During the reporting period, there were 28 requests for international protection and one subsidiary protection was granted.



3. UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Bulgaria: A third safe zone for unaccompanied minors is under establishment in the Harmanli Registration and Reception Centre within the project "Enhancing support and integration, care and protection systems of refugee and migrant children in EU countries". The creation of the third safe zone is expected to be completed by February 2024. The project is funded by UNICEF.

During the reporting period, an expert of the Child Protection Directorate at the Agency for Social Assistance participated in interinstitutional working group meetings for the elaboration of a draft Law amending and supplementing the Law on Asylum and Refugees. The working group is led by the State Agency for Refugees.

France: On 12 December 2023, a new five-year plan, known as the "[National Strategic plan 2023-2027](#)" was announced. The plan sets out three priorities to improve the assessment and care of unaccompanied minors: the management and coordination of child protection, in both penal and civil cases; professional practices and adaptation to provide for the needs of each young person, including the most vulnerable; and the attractiveness of related professions and quality care assessments.

On 22 December 2023, a decree [modified the procedures](#) for the sheltering, age assessment and isolation of persons declaring themselves to be minors and deprived of their family's protection, as well as those relating to the State's flat-rate contribution to the expenses incurred by departments for the sheltering and assessment of these persons. In particular, this decree provides for an identification of the health needs of the person taken into care, with a view to referral to appropriate care, and the introduction of a respite period prior to the interview to assess minority status.

Greece: On 31 October 2023, the Decision on the Inclusion of the Grant Act for the implementation of the project "National Guardianship System of Unaccompanied Minors" and inclusion in the programme "Greece

Programme: Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund 2021-2027" was published. The provision of guardianship services was entrusted to two NGOs: "METAdrasi" and "PRAKSIS", who have years of proven experience in the protection of unaccompanied minors. The Guardianship Scheme is coordinated and supervised by the General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection (GSVPIP) of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. Also, from the 6-8 December 2023, a training of trainers (ToT) on guardianship issues for unaccompanied minors took place.

From 18-22 December 2023, the GSVPIP implemented the first five-day ToT on best interest procedures and on conducting best interest assessments, in the framework of the project "Harmonization, Establishment and Certification of Best Interest Procedures", which was implemented in cooperation with UNHCR and EUAA.

The Joint Ministerial Decision Nr. 539638/23 on "Establishing Procedures for the Submission, Examination and Resolution of Complaints" was issued, which provides a Complaints Mechanism in the framework of the implementation of the new National Guardianship System.

The National Emergency Response Mechanism of GSVPIP of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, was awarded second place at the European Crime Prevention Award (ECPA) contest and Best Practice Conference, held by the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN). The conference took place on 13-14 December 2023, in Valencia under the theme "Preventing Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Labour Exploitation and Other Kinds of Exploitation".

Ireland: On 19 October 2023, the Ombudsman for the Children's Office (OCO) published a [Special Report](#) on the Safety and Welfare of Children in Direct Provision. It is the first report of its kind since the OCO was established in 2004.

On 14 November 2023, the Council of Europe (COE) Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) published its [baseline report on Ireland](#). This first report of its kind represents an evidence baseline on Ireland's implementation of the Istanbul Convention and includes several findings in relation to migration and international protection.

Italy: The decree of 5 October 2023 introduced changes to the reception of unaccompanied foreign minors:

- In the event of a short-term absence of temporary facilities, minors above the age of sixteen can be temporarily placed in a specific section designated within adult centres for a duration not exceeding ninety days.
- In case of numerous and close arrivals, public security authorities can order health examinations, including radiographic ones, for age determination.

On 15 November 2023, the [Fifth Report on the Quantitative Monitoring System for Voluntary Protection for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors](#) was published. In 2022, voluntary guardians for unaccompanied foreign minors amounted to 3 783, almost 10% more than in 2021.

On 11 December 2023, a deadline extension made 750 unused endowments from the PERCORSI 4 project available, for implementing [socio-occupational integration paths for unaccompanied foreign minors and young migrants up to 24 years](#). The paths, promoted by public and private labour market operators, are based on the "individual endowment" tool, ensuring the provision of support services. Those paths comprise extracurricular internships lasting six months, which can be extended.

On 19 December 2023, the Council of Ministers approved the [Regulation](#) concerning the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies' tasks regarding unaccompanied foreign minors.

The AMIF Managing Authority approved the project proposal "Strengthening the capacity for reception, inclusion, and support for the autonomy of minors in the Reception and Integration System," authorising a continuation from 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2025, of 69 projects for a total amount of 1 078 places."

Latvia: On 24 October 2023, Cabinet Regulation [No. 608 "Procedure in which the inter-institutional cooperation programme "Barnahus" is implemented"](#) was approved, determining the procedure in which the implementation of the "Barnahus" inter-institutional cooperation programme is organised, provides services and carries out inter-institutional cooperation procedures, as well as the scope and procedure of personal data processing.

Luxembourg: On 20 November 2023, the Ombudsman for Children and Youth (OKaJu) presented a thematic report [“Towards an Autonomous Administrative Status for Unaccompanied Children in Luxembourg. Getting unaccompanied children out of the administrative and legal dark.”](#) While the report notes that unaccompanied children have the right to be represented by a guardian and an ad hoc administrator, it also highlights the discrepancies that exist between theory and practice.

Netherlands: On 1 October 2023, [the new Statelessness Determination Procedure Act came into effect](#). This act introduces a new procedure for determining statelessness, enabling persons residing in the Netherlands but who are not sufficiently documented to have their statelessness established.

On the same day, an amendment of the Netherlands Nationality Act (*Rijkswet op het Nederlanderschap*, RWN) and Passport Act (*Paspoortwet*) was implemented. Among other things, this amendment allows irregularly staying minors, born stateless in the Netherlands to obtain Dutch citizenship via the so-called ‘*Optie*’ procedure after 5 years of stable residence with the understanding that no other nationality can reasonably be obtained. The amendment applies to minors under 21 years old, who are born stateless in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and who do not have lawful residence.

Slovenia: On 28 October 2023, a Decree on providing appropriate [accommodation, care and treatment of unaccompanied minors](#) came into force and is expected to become applicable by February 2024. The decree aims at providing a systemic solution for ensuring appropriate accommodation, care and treatment of unaccompanied minors based on the International Protection Act, the Foreigners Act, and the Temporary protection for Displaced Persons Act.

Georgia: On 1 November 2023, the Parliament of Georgia [adopted amendments](#) to the Law on Georgian Citizenship. Upon the amendment, the term of residence for naturalisation of a stateless person in Georgia decreased from 10 years to five years.

Montenegro: During the reporting period, the section for the reception of foreigners seeking international protection of the Ministry of Interior of Montenegro had six unaccompanied minors in its reception centres. For other vulnerable categories there were three LGBTQ persons, two persons with disabilities and three persons with mental health disorders. All of them were provided with appropriate support.



4. LEGAL MIGRATION

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Austria: In December 2023 two regulations entered into effect implementing the annual [list of shortage occupations](#) and specifying the [quotas for the temporary employment of foreigners in tourism and agriculture and forestry](#).

Croatia: On 23 November 2023, the Croatian Law Centre held an international conference on “New Legal Pathways for Access to Protection and Integration of Refugees in Europe - Opportunities and Challenges” The conference was organised as a final event within the transnational two-year project [“Complementary Pathways for Southeast Europe – COMP4SEE”](#) which is co-financed by the AMIF Fund of the EU and the Office for Cooperation with NGOs of the Government of the Republic of Croatia. The main goal of the conference was to ensure the promotion of complementary pathways as a means of legal arrival, admission and integration for refugees. The conference gathered experts and relevant stakeholders from three partnering countries (Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovenia), but also from across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Southeastern Europe (SEE), EU Member States and states in the accession process to the EU.

Cyprus: On 20 October 2023, [the relevant legislation](#) was amended so that EU citizens residing and/or working in the Republic of Cyprus could also be registered at Citizen Service Centres, which operate in different parts of the island with extended working hours.

Estonia: In November 2023, the [Automated Biometric Identification System \(ABIS\)](#) database was completed. ABIS is a central national database where biometric data gathered in state proceedings is stored, it allows the comparison of biometric data using artificial intelligence, thereby increasing the reliability of verifying

personal identification and the verification of identity. This gives even better assurance that a person can only have one identity in Estonia.

Finland: On 21 November 2023, the ministerial working group on employment and entrepreneurship approved the [revised Talent Boost programme](#) on work-based and education-based immigration for 2023–2027. The programme aims to provide Finland with skills that meet its needs and to strengthen economic growth, employment and innovation activities.

France: On 20 November 2023, a decree [published the agreement](#) between the government of the French Republic and the government of the Republic of Congo extending the effect of a clause regarding the short-stay exemption for Congolese and French nationals holding secure diplomatic passports under the 25 October 2007 agreement on the concerted management of migratory flows and co-development.

As of 3 October 2023, first and renewal [applications for “private and family life” residence permits](#) will be processed exclusively online. These permits concern foreign nationals who are victims of human trafficking offenses, beneficiaries of a protection order and unaccompanied foreign minors entrusted to the child welfare service or a trustworthy third party before their sixteenth birthday.

Greece: On 20 December 2023, legislation was published, which includes [several provisions on legal migration](#). These included modified provisions regarding the obligations of employers and of third-country nationals who are invited to Greece for employment reasons as well as relevant sanctions. New provisions also established a new type of residence permit for work for third-country nationals who, among others, have a declaration of a job offer from an employer in Greece and have completed at least three continuous years of residence in the country”.

On 22 December 2023, it was announced that the [new Migration Code](#) would enter into force on 31 March 2024 (instead of the previously established date of 1 January 2024).

On 18 October 2023, the Minister of Migration and Asylum extended the deadline to 30 November 2023 to submit [applications for residence permits to nationals of Bangladesh](#) in accordance with provisions within the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Greece and Bangladesh for migration and mobility.

Ireland: On 23 October 2023, the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform announced the expansion of civil service [eligibility criteria](#) to include non-EEA individuals holding Stamp 4 residence permissions. People with Stamp 4 permissions are free to take up employment in Ireland, however previously the eligibility criteria for civil service roles included citizenship from within the European Economic Area (EEA).

From 30 November 2023, applicants for a Stamp 4 immigration permission will no longer be required to [obtain a letter of support](#) from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE). Stamp 4 applications and checks will be handled entirely by the Department of Justice.

Italy: On 3 October 2023, the Decree of 27 September 2023, concerning the 'programming of legal entry flows into Italy for foreign workers for the period 2023–2025' was published in the Official Gazette. A total of 452 000 entries were granted. Entries for the three-year period are planned as follows:

- 136 000 for the year 2023;
- 151 000 for the year 2024;
- 165 000 for the year 2025.

On 20 October 2023, a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\) between Italy and Tunisia](#) was signed. The memorandum authorises the annual entry of 4 000 non-seasonal Tunisian subordinate workers. The MoU comprises simplified procedures for visa and residence permit issuance. Workers covered by the memorandum will be able to stay in Italy even after the contract ends, for the validity period of the residence permit, and access further employment and regular residence opportunities.

On 2 November 2023, a [bilateral agreement was signed between Italy and India](#) on migration and mobility. The agreement includes an extensive programme to facilitate the mobility of students, workers, professionals, researchers, and academics between Italy and India. Collaboration also focuses on preventing and countering irregular migration, exploitation, and trafficking in human beings.

On 2, 4, and 12 December 2023, [three designated 'click days' specified in the Decree Flows took place](#), respectively, for non-seasonal subordinate work, family and socio-health assistance, and seasonal subordinate work. Applications were processed through the designated online platform.

Slovenia: On 16 November 2023, an [amendment to the Foreigners Act entered into force](#), which replaces the requirement of knowledge of the Slovenian language at entry level A1 for the extension of a temporary residence permit for family members of third-country nationals with subsistence level knowledge. The new effective date for this condition is 1 November 2024. The amendment also allows third-country nationals with a valid temporary residence permit who have been residing in Slovenia for one year the right to family reunification with family members who are third-country nationals (previously the condition was two years).

On 21 and 29 December 2023, amendments to the executive acts of the Foreigners Act entered into force, providing the remaining basis for the new option of providing extended or further residence permits or EU registration certificate cards by post. The option to serve the issued residence card by post will come into effect on 8 January 2024.

Sweden: On 1 November 2023, [tougher maintenance requirements to receive a work permit](#) in Sweden were introduced. Previously, applicants for a work permit in Sweden needed a monthly salary of SEK 13 000. The new requirement corresponds to a salary of at least 80 per cent of the median salary in Sweden. Currently, this means a monthly salary of at least SEK 27 360 (before tax).

Georgia: On 19 December 2023, the annual information meeting on residence permit regulations was held for the representatives of 25 authorised educational institutions of Georgia with the highest number of foreign student enrolments. During the meeting, representatives of the Public Service Development Agency delivered up-to-date information on procedures and guidelines that should be considered by the educational institutions while providing support to their students on obtaining study residence permit.

On 20 October 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in partnership with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) created an [informative video clip](#) on visa-free travel to EU/Schengen area, to remind Georgian citizens of the importance of visa-free travel with the EU, the achievements and efforts made to gain it, as well as measures to preserve it. The video aired on main televisions.

Montenegro: On 20 December 2023 there were 94 271 foreigners residing legally in Montenegro, out of whom 29 842 have a permanent residence permit and 64 429 temporary residence.



5. INTEGRATION

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Austria: On 8 November 2023, the Council of Ministers [adopted a draft legislation](#) reforming the National Socialism Prohibition Act 1947 – the criminal law instrument in the fight against anti-Semitism, right-wing extremism and National Socialist reactivation.

Finland: On 1 November 2023, a report on the employment, use of employment services and future plans of Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection was [published](#). The report is based on surveys of Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection, employers, employment services and organisations. As a whole, Ukrainians responding to the survey were satisfied with the services they used in Finland. The most significant obstacles to employment were deficiencies in language skills and education and the fact that their qualifications were incompatible with Finnish requirements.

On 14 November 2023, Finland's Startup Refugees [won](#) the Responsible and Inclusive Entrepreneurship category in the European Enterprise Promotion Awards. The inclusive activities of Startup Refugees support asylum seekers, refugees and other immigrants in finding employment, starting a business and developing skills.

Greece: On 1 December 2023, through the amendment of the relevant Programmatic Agreement between the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA), the [HELIOS integration programme](#) (providing beneficiaries of international and temporary protection with integration courses, accommodation support, employability support and integration monitoring) continues

being implemented through a non-cost extension until 31 December 2023 (with plans for the programme to continue being implemented through funding from ESF+).

In December 2023, the action "[MOMENTUM](#)" "Breaking silos, promoting young third-country national women's access to targeted vocational training and labour market opportunities through social economy" was completed. "MOMENTUM" has been a seven-month pilot programme that brought together civil society organisations, public employment services, VET providers and employers at local level (in Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Hungary) with a view to reduce the structural and cultural barriers faced by third-country national women (primarily refugee women aged 18-35) in accessing vocational training and employment opportunities (especially in the sector of the social economy).

In October 2023, the Social Integration Directorate of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, in collaboration with UNHCR, published a "[Guide for Beneficiaries of International Protection](#)", providing useful, valid, and reliable information about basic sectors of everyday life in Greece, such as employment, education, healthcare and welfare. The Guide is available in Greek, English, French, Lingala, Farsi, Arabic, Somali, Sorani, and Urdu.

On 20 October 2023, the application for funding of the Project "INtegration: Through School into Community" from EEA Grants 2014–2021 was approved. The *General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection* along with the NGO *Solidarity Now (SN)* and the *National and Kapodistrian University of Athens* will collaborate on the project. The aim of the project is to promote refugee/migrant integration by providing education and access to labour market services for refugee/migrant children and youth, including unaccompanied minors. The partnership will create knowledge-enhancing tools for inclusive education and employability counselling for this vulnerable group and train frontline professionals (educators and staff working with unaccompanied minors), while the project will conduct targeted research on school dropout and relevant prevention methodologies.

Ireland: On 16 November 2023 the Department of Justice [announced](#) that people are now able to apply for citizenship online. The digitalisation of the citizenship application process is a key milestone in the Department's modernisation programme.

On 2 October 2023, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) [announced](#) that approximately € 750 000 per year will be made available under the National Integration Fund to national and regional projects supporting the integration of migrants.

Italy: On 6 November 2023, the call for proposal for the financing of Regional Intervention Plans for the integration of third-country nationals was [published](#), amounting to 60 million euros. Financed projects should include measures and interventions to support the improvement of multilevel governance for the socio-occupational integration of migrants, individual fulfilment, socialisation, and active participation of migrant citizens in economic, social, and cultural life.

On 24 November 2024, reports on [Migrant Citizens in Metropolitan Cities](#) were published. Nine monographs, one for each Metropolitan City where the presence of non-EU citizens is more relevant, are available online, along with a summary outlining their presence in all 14 Metropolitan Areas. The reports provide insights into the territorial dimension of the migratory situation, distribution of migrant citizens in different metropolitan areas, signals of stabilisation, participation in the labour market, and entrepreneurial dynamism. The analyses include a comparison with different metropolitan contexts and national data, as well as attention to the gender dimension.

On 29 November 2023, the [results of the PUOI project](#) (United Protection with Integration Objective) were presented. Over five years, 4 776 third-country nationals undertook a socio-occupational integration path, and 2 046 completed an internship. Moreover, 1 363 third-country nationals, legally residing in Italy, signed at least one employment contract between 2020 and 30 June 2023, thanks to the socio-occupational integration paths of the project.

Luxembourg: The Integration Department of the Ministry of Family, Integration and the Greater Region launched a call for projects entitled "Promoting intercultural living together", aiming to finance projects

promoting intercultural living together in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg for the year 2024. The 2024 call for projects is structured around two areas of intervention:

1: Promoting the participation of cross-border workers

2: The Citizens' Pact and Intercultural Living Together Programme – Development of model modules

29 November 2023, the Minister of National Education, Children and Youth presented [the Government Programme for Education](#). One of the points of the programme is a linguistic offer which takes into account the diversity of the school population, in particular, through the continuation and evaluation of the French literacy pilot project in basic education, the development of new public international schools and new linguistic offerings at the level of vocational training.

Netherlands: On 29 November 2023, the Administrative Jurisdiction Division of the Council of State (*Afdeling Bestuursrechtspraak van de Raad van State*, ABrVS) [ruled](#) that the 24-week limit to international protection applicants' labour market access is legally non-binding. This means the Employees Insurance Agency (*Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen*, UWV) can no longer limit applicants' access to the Dutch labour market to 24 weeks in a period of 52 weeks. According to the Council of State, the 24-week limit impedes applicants' access to the Dutch labour market, which is in conflict with the EU Reception Conditions Directive.

On 3 October 2023, the Dutch Senate [approved](#) the Emergency Act on Temporary Education Facilities for recently arrived third-country minors (*Wet tijdelijke nieuwkomersvoorzieningen in het onderwijs*). In essence, the Act provides school and municipality boards, as well as teachers, more flexibility in finding solutions to provide education for all third-country national minors in the Netherlands. The Act enables the swift provision of education to the group of new pupils who do not have access to education. In early October 2023, it was estimated that 2 000 recently arrived minors who are of school age do not receive education because of a lack of capacity.

Portugal: On 12 October 2023, [new Local Support Centres for Migrant Integration \(CLAIM\) were inaugurated](#), at the Polytechnic Institute in the city of Guarda and in the city of Viseu, respectively. These events marked the continued expansion of the National Support Network for the Integration of Migrants (RNAIM), which since then included four AIMA Shops – one-stop shops – that offer a wide range of integration services. This migrant integration net also counts on 155 henceforth named AIMA Spots, set up in partnership with municipalities, civil society organisations and institutions of higher education, with the aim of delivering decentralised information and support to migrants.

Slovenia: On 25 October 2023, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted a new Decree [regulating integration measures](#) under the Foreigners Act in more detail. The main novelty of the Decree is that all eligible foreign nationals, regardless of their status, are entitled to 180 hours of a unified learning programme of Slovenian language and familiarisation with Slovenian society, which may be increased by 60 hours if the participant does not achieve the learning outcomes.

Georgia: On 14 November 2023, the enrolment process at Vocational Educational (VET) programmes was finalised. As a result, 14 foreign citizens with compatriot living abroad, asylum seeker, refugee or humanitarian status have been enrolled in different VET programs and received state funding.

Within the reporting period, three groups of 32 foreigners were enrolled in the Georgian alphabet (initial A1 and Basic A2) courses of the state language teaching and integration programme. Moreover, as of December 2023, 474 Ukrainian beneficiaries (who live in Georgia due to the situation in Ukraine) have been enrolled in the state language teaching and integration programme.

Between 10-11 October 2023, the representatives of various state institutions of Georgia [participated in a study visit](#) to the Czech Republic on the topic of integration support provided to refugees within the State Integration Programme. The study visit was supported by UNHCR Georgia.

Montenegro: During the reporting period, 18 foreigners with approved international protection exercised the right to assistance in integration, as well as other rights defined in Article 75 paragraph 1 of the current Law on the International and Temporary Protection of Foreigners. During the reporting period two travel

documents were issued for foreigners under subsidiary protection and one personal document for an asylum seeker.

Assistance with integration into society includes the preparation of an integration plan with regard to individual needs, knowledge, abilities and skills, providing assistance for the implementation of the prepared integration plan and monitoring the implementation of the integration plan.

6. MANAGEMENT OF THE EU EXTERNAL BORDERS

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Croatia: On 14 December 2023, the Ordinance on the treatment of third-country nationals entered into force (Official Gazette No. 145/23 of December 6, 2023). The appendix includes the forms of decisions and requests for access to the National Facilitation Programme as well as for decisions on the refusal and cancellation of travel authorisation in the ETIAS system.

Estonia: In October and November 2023, the Police and Border Guard Board sent the police unit [ESTPOL8](#) to Latvia to support Latvian colleagues in preventing irregular migration on the Latvian-Belarusian border.

In November and December 2023, Schengen evaluations were carried out in Estonia.

In December 2023, the second part of the [fully developed border section](#) on the eastern border was completed. Together with the first border section completed last summer, almost half of our 135-kilometer land border with Russia has been built.

Finland: On 30 November 2023, the Government [decided to close the border](#) crossing point of Raja-Jooseppi, which meant that all border crossing points on the land border between Finland and Russia were closed until 13 December 2023.

On 15 December 2023, [border crossing points](#) were closed again. The land border between Finland and Russia was closed until 14 January 2024.

Latvia: On 12 October 2023, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the order [No 674 "On Suspension of Operation of Border Crossing Points on the State Border of the Republic of Latvia – Russian Federation"](#), which provides for the suspension of operation of the *Vientuļi* and *Pededze* border crossing points as of 16 October 2023. The order was adopted in response to Russia's decision to allow holders of Ukrainian passports to enter Russia from third countries only through two border-crossing points – the Sheremetyevo International Airport in Moscow (Russia) and the *Vientuļi* border crossing point on the Latvia -Russia border as of 16 October 2023.

On 23 November 2023 the Law "[Amendments to the State Border Law of the Republic of Latvia](#)" was adopted, which establishes the right of officials, upon reasonable suspicion, to search vehicles, capture a person who has irregularly crossed the state border, or a person who has irregularly moved a person across the state border, or a person, which provided an opportunity for a person to stay irregularly in Latvia.

Lithuania: On 25 October 2023, the European Commission [approved a project](#) submitted by the Ministry of the Interior and allocated € 9.3 million to update previously installed electronic surveillance systems on the 84.4 kilometer strip at the Lithuania-Belarus border.

Poland: On 13 October 2023, a surveillance centre was opened at the headquarters of the Warmian-Masurian Border Guard Branch in Kętrzyn and an [electronic barrier](#) was launched on the Polish-Russian border. The perimetry system operates along the entire length of the border with Russia (nearly 200 kilometres).

Portugal: [Ordinance 321/2023 of 27 October](#), first amendment to ordinance 287/2007, of 16 March and ordinance 415/2008 of 11 June, with a view to their adaptation within the scope of the restructuring of the Portuguese border control system.

[Ordinance 322/2023 of 27 October](#) with the approval of qualified border posts for entry into and exit from national territory.

[Ordinance 323/2023 of 27 October](#) defined a new template for the entry declaration in Portuguese borders.

Slovenia: Slovenia initially reintroduced temporary controls on the internal Schengen [border with Croatia and Hungary](#) on 21 October 2023 as a short-term measure. Temporary control was then [extended until 19 November 2023](#) and later [extended again until 9 December 2023](#). On 22 December, six-month internal border controls, as provided for in Article 25 of the Schengen Borders Code, were introduced.

Georgia: From 1 October 2023, a special face-recognising electronic programme was introduced at the border check points of Georgia to enhance the efficiency of the border control. The e-system will enable border-controllers to accurately identify any person who is wanted or expelled. The programme will greatly assist the implementation of and adherence to Georgia's international obligations, including the visa free regime with EU/Schengen countries.

During the reporting period, 444 Georgian citizens intending travel to the EU/Schengen area were refused permission to depart from the country based on the [Entry/Exit Law](#) requirements.

On 7-9 November 2023, with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and an EU funded project, a study visit of MIA representatives was conducted at the Italian-French border. The study visit focused on cross-border cooperation and information exchange.

On 21 November 2023, the Director of the Patrol Police Department and the Head of the Border Police [took part in the high level meeting](#) of EU pre-accession partners and the Frontex management board. It was the first time Georgia had been invited as one of the closest operational partners in an extended context. In this framework, a bilateral meeting with the Frontex Executive Director was also held.

On 20 December 2023, Order #1/514 of the Minister of Internal Affairs "On the Approval of the 2024 Action Plan for the Implementation of the Integrated Model of Risk Analysis of the State Border of Georgia" was adopted, with the aim to fully integrate a Climate Impacts Risk Assessment Methodology (CIRAM)-based risk analysis approach.

In the framework of MIA-Frontex cooperation, employees of the Patrol Police Department (immigration-border controllers) were placed in airports in EU/Schengen and associated countries. Within the reporting period (1 October - 20 December), seven Georgian officers participated in Joint Operations held in Latvia, Poland and the Czech Republic.



7. IRREGULAR MIGRATION

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Cyprus: During the reporting period, contracts have been concluded for the building of a new Reception Centre for Applicants of International Protection and a new Pre-departure Detention Centre in the area of Limnes, Larnaca. The two centres, costing around € 85 million, are expected to be finished within 24 months and improve Cyprus' infrastructure, leading to faster processing of asylum procedures and the acceleration of returns.

Finland: On 1 December 2023, it was announced that [Finland and Italy will put forward joint initiatives](#) to promote a consistent approach on the external dimension of migration policies and countering migration-related malign influence in all fora. These include fighting against people smuggling and countering the instrumentalisation of migration.

On 23 October 2023, the Ministry of the Interior set up a project to [introduce](#) a new border procedure. The border procedure will be applied in situations where an asylum application has been lodged at or in the immediate vicinity of the EU external border and is expected to be unfounded. The project will also prepare the necessary legislative amendments to enable the application of the accelerated asylum procedure in all cases that fall within the scope of the Asylum Procedures Directive.

France: On 6 November 2023, a law authorised the [approval of the protocol](#) between the Government of the French Republic and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia implementing the agreement of 18 September 2007 on the readmission of persons in an irregular situation, signed in Skopje on 5 July 2021.

Italy: Starting from 18 October 2023, bilateral cooperation began with the Ivory Coast. For a trial period of three months, four officials from the Ivorian Ministry of the Interior are transferred to Italy to collaborate on activities related to the identification of presumed irregular Ivorian migrants.

Latvia: On 5 October 2023, the Law "[Amendments to the Criminal Law](#)" was adopted. Amendments to the law provide that the punishment for irregular movement of a person across the state border will be deprivation of liberty for a period of up to three years or probation supervision, or a fine.

Poland: The Minister of the Interior and Administration decided to extend the [temporary border control](#) of persons at the Polish-Slovak border. The control has been extended several times, currently until 1 February 2024.

Montenegro: During the reporting period, the IT Department of the Ministry of Interior developed several IT tools/software which will significantly contribute to the monitoring of migrants and migratory flows in Montenegro:

- Software for the registration of expressed intentions for international protection
- Software for the registration of foreigners seeking international protection
- Software for the registration of persons seeking temporary international protection
- Adjusted the software for taking biometric data at biometric data acquisition stations in accordance with the regulations for the international protection of foreigners
- Software for issuing ID documents to persons who were granted international protection

8. RETURN

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Finland: On 2 October 2023, the Ministry of the Interior [set up a project](#) to examine the provisions on detention and entry bans in the Aliens Act. The aim was to tighten the Aliens Act in accordance with a set of measures related to voluntary return and departure laid down in the Government Programme. The project consists of two parts, one of which will tighten the provisions on detention in the Aliens Act and the other aims to reform the provisions on entry bans.

On 21 December 2023, the Ministry of the Interior issued a [new Decree on Assistance for Voluntary Return](#), which entered into force on 1 January 2024. The new decree implements the Government Programme objective of staggering the assistance for voluntary return to encourage people to leave the country as quickly as possible and refrain from requesting a review of their asylum decision. The decree also harmonises the level of assistance with Finland's reference countries.

France: On 9 October 2023, a decree [reformed the system of awarding assisted voluntary return](#), a scheme granted to third-country nationals in an irregular situation who can prove six months of continuous residence on French territory. This decree introduces a degressive system for the amount of aid granted, while increasing the initial amount of aid granted. It also reduces to three months the length of time a person has to be present on French territory and stipulates that from now on, only illegal foreign nationals who have been notified of an obligation to leave French territory will be eligible for assisted return. The decree also specifies that foreign nationals from visa-exempt third countries will only be eligible for assisted return if the obligation to leave French territory is accompanied by a ban on return.

Germany: On 25 October 2023, the Federal Cabinet [adopted a draft law](#) to improve procedures for removing foreign nationals who have no right to remain in Germany and are required to leave the country, providing the following measures, amongst others:

- The maximum length of custody to secure departure would be increased to 28 days from the current limit of 10 days.
- Members of criminal organisations could be expelled more easily even without a criminal conviction if there is enough evidence indicating that they belong to a criminal organisation,

- To be able to enter other areas in collective accommodation facilities to ensure that the relevant persons are in fact present when they are to be deported.
- To keep people from filing fraudulent follow-up applications for asylum with the intent of hindering their removal.

The draft law has been submitted for the parliamentary procedure.

Greece: On 31 October 2023, a joint Return Operation took place, in which the Asylum Service and the Directorate of Returns and Withdrawals of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum participated, resulting in 29 third-country nationals from Pakistan and 20 from Georgia departing for their countries of origin via charter flight. Another joint operation in November resulted in five third-country nationals from Pakistan departing. An operation organised by Frontex, together with the Asylum Service and the Directorate of Returns and Withdrawals, in December resulted in 40 third-country nationals from Pakistan and ten from Georgia departing for their countries of origin via charter flights.

Counselling was provided for administratively detained third-country nationals against whom a return decision had been issued, in order to motivate them to depart voluntarily through the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme provided by IOM Greece. (From a total of 159 beneficiaries, two expressed their will to return to their country of origin). In addition, according to IOM Greece, in the period from 1 October to 31 December 2023, 836 other third-country nationals also departed voluntary for their country of origin. Furthermore, according to data provided by the Hellenic Police, 676 forced returns were carried out from October to December. Finally, 207 third-country nationals also departed voluntary for their country of origin.

An agreement on the Implementation Plan between Frontex and the Greek Asylum Service on the Deployment of the Return Specialist to Greece was signed, covering the period from 4 October 2023 to 23 January 2024. It is expected that the deployment of a full-time Return Specialist on the island of Lesbos will provide a significant number of asylum seekers who are denied international protection with a pathway to a safe and dignified return to their country of origin.

On 20 December 2023, [legal amendments](#) came into force that introduced the position of National Coordinator for Returns. They are responsible for the planning, cooperation, coordination and implementation of the national and EU returns policy in cooperation with all the co-competent national services, authorities and institutions, including the Ombudsman, the services of European Commission and of other European and international organisations and institutions.

Italy: Regarding Voluntary Assisted Returns, the Evaluation Commission selected an IOM proposal for funding. A grant agreement was signed on 6 November 2023. The project would begin as soon as the necessary documentation is collected.

On 16 November 2023, the decree extending the maximum duration of detention in Repatriation Centres to 18 months was converted into law.

Latvia: On 28 November 2023, the implementation protocol of the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine for the Agreement between the European Community and Ukraine on the readmission of persons was signed.

Netherlands: On 15 November 2023, the Administrative Jurisdiction Division of the Council of State (*Afdeling Bestuursrechtspraak van de Raad van State*, ABrVS) [ruled](#) that the current procedures for informing foreign nationals in detention (*vreemdelingenbewaring*) are insufficient. The Minister for Migration has a so-called 'information obligation' towards detained foreign nationals: They have the right to know why they are detained, how they may challenge the detention and how they can obtain legal assistance. To meet the information obligation, the Minister must inform the foreign national in writing in a language he or she understands. However, a full translation of the detention measure will not be necessary in future.

Slovenia: On 15 November 2023, the RECAMAS-CT application was installed and was ready for use. The application was funded under a grant agreement between Frontex and the Slovenian Police, as technical

support for an effective policy to tackle illegal migration and an efficient return system. The aim was to replace outdated software used in the Centre for Foreigners and to develop a functional IT system to facilitate case management, identification and detention procedures.

Georgia: During the reporting period, the Migration Department of the MIA participated in seven Collecting Return Operations coordinated by Frontex. As a result, 384 Georgian citizens were safely returned from EU Member States to Georgia.

During the reporting period, expulsion decisions of 48 foreigners were issued and 32 foreigners left the country based on those decisions.

Montenegro: During the reporting period, two migrants were returned to their countries of origin with the assistance of the police who obtained travel documents and tickets. Six migrants were returned with the assistance of International Organization for Migration (IOM) AVRR programme.

9. ACTIONS ADDRESSING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Cyprus: On 18 October 2023, the Deputy Minister of Social Welfare announced the [operation of the Human Trafficking Victims Management Unit](#), which aims to offer personalised protection measures as well as support for victims of trafficking and exploitation.

Finland: On 13 November 2023, the [Work Help Finland mobile application was released](#). The mobile application was produced for foreign workers coming to Finland and residing in Finland and aims to help prevent labour exploitation and human trafficking. It provides information about employee rights and responsibilities and the key parties that provide help in Finland. The application includes an information package and key contact details in a total of 26 languages.

Greece: On 24 October 2023, the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA), of the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family, under the auspices of the Office of the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking (ONR), the competent bodies for the operation and supervision of the National Referral Mechanism for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking (NRM), respectively, organised a conference in Athens on the "*Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking in Greece: Legal Framework, Systemic Pathogenies and Prospects*", on the occasion of the 2023 EU Anti-Trafficking Day.

On 4-6 December 2023, a working visit to Athens by the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, Diane Schmitt, took place. A round table was held on Tuesday 5 December at the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, chaired by the Deputy Minister, Ms. Voultepsi, and the Secretary General for Vulnerable Citizens and Institutional Protection, Mr. Moskoff, with the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, Ms. Schmitt, and the participation of relevant officials of the Public Administration. During the meeting, there was a detailed briefing for Ms. Schmitt. Mr Brachos presented the activities of the Office of the National Rapporteur and highlighted the initiatives being undertaken in the context of preventing and combating trafficking in human beings.

On 14 and 15 December 2023, EUAA conducted two training activities on trafficking in human beings and 29 staff members of the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum participated.

On 3 October 2023, the RIS Department of Procedures and Training drafted and circulated a presentation regarding trafficking in human beings to the Reception and Accommodation facilities, in view of EU anti-trafficking Day on 18 October. The presentation was used to inform and alert residents on the phenomenon and associated risks and a document with available helplines was distributed, translated into more than 15 languages.

On 14-15 and 16-17 November 2023, IOM conducted two 'Train the Trainer' training activities on trafficking in human beings and 27 RIS staff members participated. Moreover, the RIS Department of Procedures and Training, in cooperation with IOM, distributed awareness-raising materials (posters) on trafficking in human

beings and gender-based violence in eight languages to reception and accommodation facilities on the mainland.

Ireland: On 6 November 2023, the Department of Justice [launched](#) the third National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking 2023-2027. Key actions foreseen include revising the national referral mechanism to include other competent authorities for identifying victims of human trafficking and developing a new training framework for people who encounter potential victims.

Italy: During the reporting period, the Italian Ministry of Defence was active in both national (bilateral) and multilateral (mainly European Union) operations, primarily focused on capacity building for local forces to fight trafficking in human beings. Capacity-building actions to support local forces were carried out in Libya and Niger.

In the context of countering recent migratory flows from Tunisia, the Italian Defence is assisting the Italian Ministry of the Interior in close collaboration with Tunisian authorities, respecting local ownership, to implement a project aimed at controlling land borders on the Algerian side. The Ministry of Defence has maintained a high focus on the strait between Lampedusa and Tunisia.

Between 20 October and 23 December 2023, four Tunisian officers (three from the National Guard and one from National Security) were deployed at the National Coordination Centre (NCC) of the Anti-Crime Directorate. The experimental mission aimed to facilitate effective information exchange on fishing vessels and boats involved in human trafficking, as well as to support ongoing investigations into transnational criminal networks engaged in migrant trafficking.

An open competition for the implementation of 'Running the National Intervention and Consultation Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in 2024' was held. The Ministry of the Interior and Administration Minister entrusted the implementation of the above-mentioned task to two non-governmental organisations: La Strada – Foundation Against Trafficking in Human Beings and Maria Immaculate Association "Po MOC" for Women and Children.

Greece: On 20 December 2023, [legal amendments](#) came into force that introduced the position of National Coordinator against Smuggling at the Ministry of Migration and asylum.

Poland: In October and November 2023, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration conducted an information and educational campaign – 30 second spot, on the Internet aimed at raising public awareness of the phenomenon of human trafficking, in particular in the area of forced labour exploitation. The campaign was a part of the implementation of the National Action Plan on trafficking in human beings for the years 2022-24.

Slovenia: On 7 December 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in cooperation with the Council of Europe, the Ministry of the Interior and the non-governmental organisation Society Ključ organised an [international conference](#) 'Preventing, Combating and Responding to Trafficking in Human Beings in the Context of Asylum and Migration in the Republic of Slovenia.' The conference was aimed at reviewing the situation in this area and presenting good practices, as well as identifying current challenges and finding possible solutions for them.

On October 18, 2023, an [awareness raising campaign](#) funded by the Slovenian Government and carried out by the DrogArt Association was carried out on the occasion of the EU Anti-Trafficking Day. The project was focused on raising awareness among the general public and vulnerable groups, especially migrant workers, on labour exploitation. In order to raise employers' awareness of human trafficking, the project has also produced a [digital advertising catalogue](#) with different profiles of the most frequently exploited workers, which was distributed to more than 200 companies in Slovenia.

Georgia: On 20-24 November 2023, a second [simulation-based training](#) - "The fight against human trafficking: sustainability of inter-agency cooperation through the implementation of national simulation training" was conducted in Georgia under the leadership of the Ministry of Justice and with the financial support of Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Embassy of Switzerland in

Georgia. The national simulation training was aimed at increasing the practical skills of up to 40 professionals, including investigators, prosecutors, labour inspectors, psychologists, social workers and staff working with victims of trafficking through inter-agency cooperation and a victim-oriented approach. The training will contribute to the timely detection of crimes related to trafficking in human beings, the punishment of criminals and effective integration of victims into society.

On 13-15 December 2023, the Giorgi Margiani [moot court competition](#) on trafficking in human beings was conducted in Tbilisi. The project has been running since 2014 and aims to prevent trafficking, raise students' awareness and deepen their knowledge on crimes related to trafficking in human beings, the state's policy to combat it, the services available to victims/statutory victims of trafficking, and the specifics of crime investigation and criminal prosecution in this field.

On 27 December 2023, the “Inter-Agency Coordination Council Implementing Measures Against Human Trafficking” (Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) Council) [met](#) and the member agencies (MA) of the Council presented an oral report on the implementation of the “2023-2024 Action Plan for the Fight Against Trafficking”. Moreover, changes to be made to the statute of Council were discussed and supported by members. It was decided that awareness-raising activities with different target audiences would be held intensively in 2024. Their coordination and performance monitoring would be carried out by the Council's working group.

Montenegro: During the reporting period, a new regional project entitled ‘EU Support to Strengthen the Fight against Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings in the Western Balkans’ officially commenced. It was expected that the EU funded action would significantly contribute to strengthening the capacities of all relevant Montenegrin authorities in addressing trafficking in human beings.

10. EXTERNAL DIMENSION

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Czech Republic: On 25 October 2023, the Czech Government approved support for three [projects to be implemented in Ukraine](#) in cooperation with local NGOs. The support in total amounted to € 600 000 and focuses on assistance to internally displaced persons, land mines and unexploded ordnance safety awareness and provision of health care.

On 1 November 2023, the Czech Government approved a [financial donation to UNHCR](#) to support refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia. The support amounts to € 500 000.

Italy: On 6 December 2023, the [Italian Coordination of Diasporas for Development Cooperation](#) was established, comprising over 100 associations in nine regional networks. Its mandate involves activities related to development cooperation and global citizenship education. This achievement is part of the “DRAFT the Future! Towards a Diaspora Forum in Italy” project.

On 13 December 2023, a [memorandum was signed between Italy and Ethiopia](#) to further strengthen collaboration between the two countries' educational systems. The memorandum includes cooperating in the education field to promote cultural exchanges, facilitating the study of the Italian language, strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Ethiopia, developing partnerships between technical institutes and ITS Academies with innovative programs, and encouraging cooperation among secondary education institutions in projects such as the Ministry of Education's “Growing Together” project.

From December 11 to 15, 2023, a course on border police checks and document forgery was conducted in Abidjan by two experts from the Border Police as part of the CIVIT project (Renforcement des capacités opérationnelles des autorités Ivoiriennes en charge de la gestion des frontières et des migrations).

Latvia: On 24 October 2023, in solidarity with the international community and other EU Member States, the Cabinet of Ministers made a decision to allocate [financial resources](#) of € 100 000 to Armenia to provide support as Armenia faces a humanitarian crisis following the mass arrival of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to the country.

Sweden: On 14-15 November 2023, Sweden hosted a [Khartoum Process Thematic Meeting](#) in Stockholm, initiated by Sweden and Somalia. Khartoum Process member States as well as international partners discussed tools and frameworks establishing whole-of-government approaches on migration through the example of return, readmission, and reintegration.

UPDATES ON EU LEGISLATION TRANSPOSITION

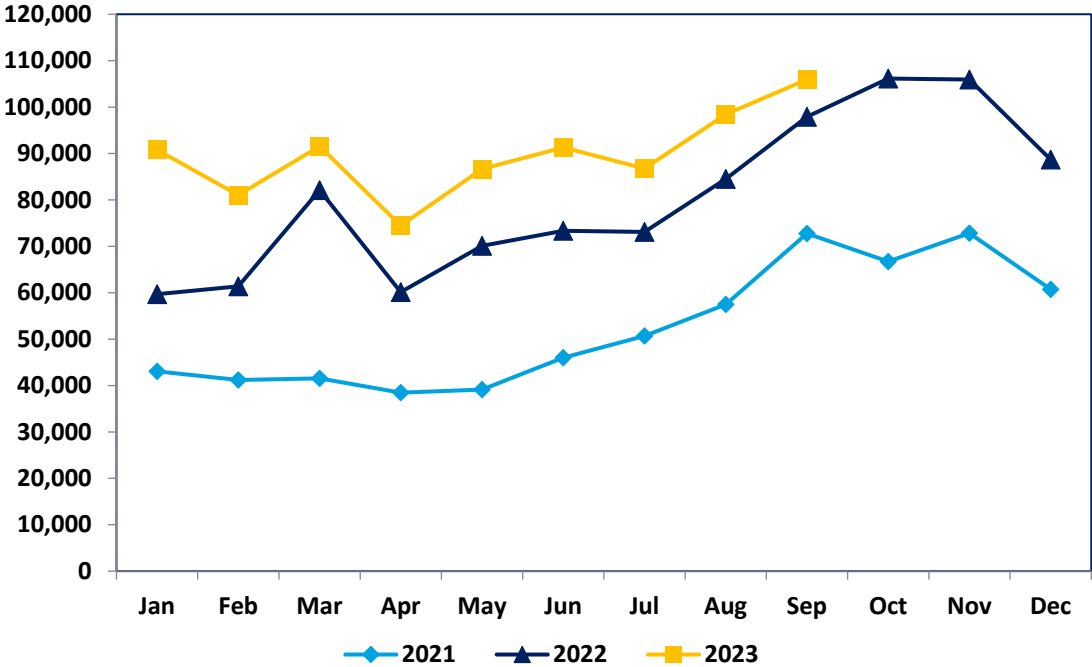
Italy: On 2 November 2023, a decree regarding [Directive \(EU\) 2021/1883](#) (the Blue Card Directive) was published, introducing new rules for the reception of more qualified foreign workers. The decree, effective from 17 November 2023, expands the pool of workers who can come to Italy through this channel. It also includes less strict requirements regarding the duration of the employment contract and salary, some procedural simplifications, and additional facilitations for family reunification, as well as for the work mobility of blue card holders issued by other EU Member States.

On 16 November 2023, the European Commission [sent a reasoned opinion to Italy](#) for not complying with EU rules on social security coordination (Regulation EC 2004/883) and the free movement of workers (EU Regulation No. 492/2011 and Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). The reasoned opinion followed a letter of formal notice sent to Italy in February 2023. Italy responded to this letter in June 2023, but the Commission believes that the response does not address its concerns. Italy has been granted two months to respond and take the necessary measures, after which the Commission may decide to refer the case to the Court of Justice of the EU.

Sweden: On 1 December 2023, [new rules with regard to family reunification](#) entered into force. With the objective to prevent forced marriages, a sponsor and his/her spouse are now normally required to be 21 years old, before the spouse is able to join him/her. The previous age threshold was 18 (Articles 4, 5 and 17 of Council Directive 2003/86/EC of 22 September 2003 on the right to family reunification).

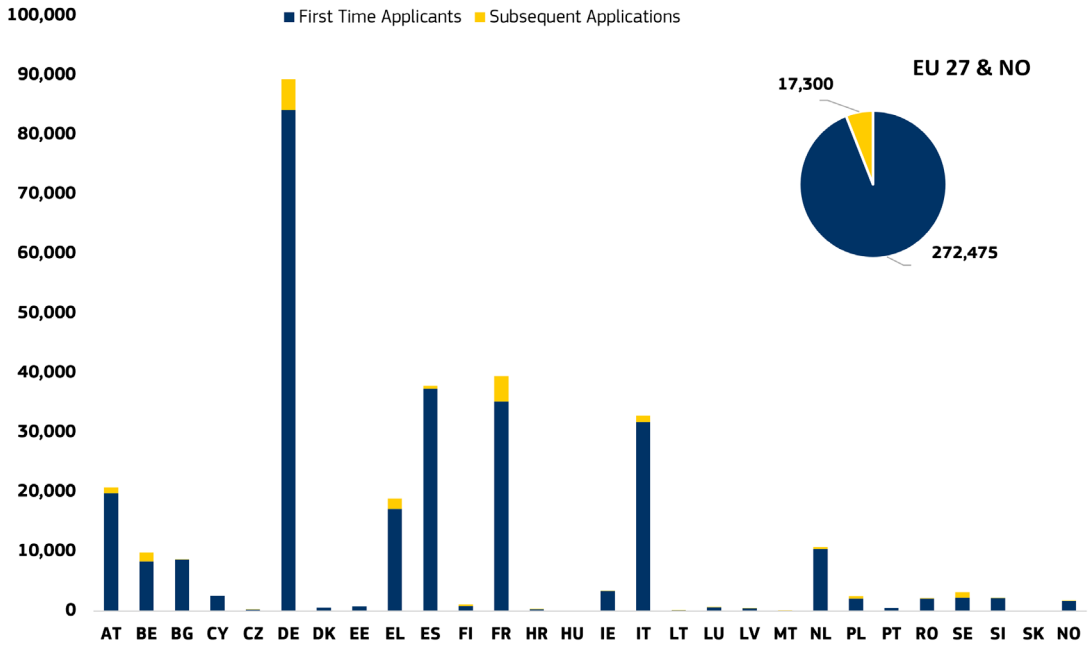
11. ANNEX: EU & COMPLEMENTARY STATISTICS, ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, OTHER EMN OUTPUTS AND RECENT EVENTS

Figure 1: Asylum applications in the EU-27, January – September 2023



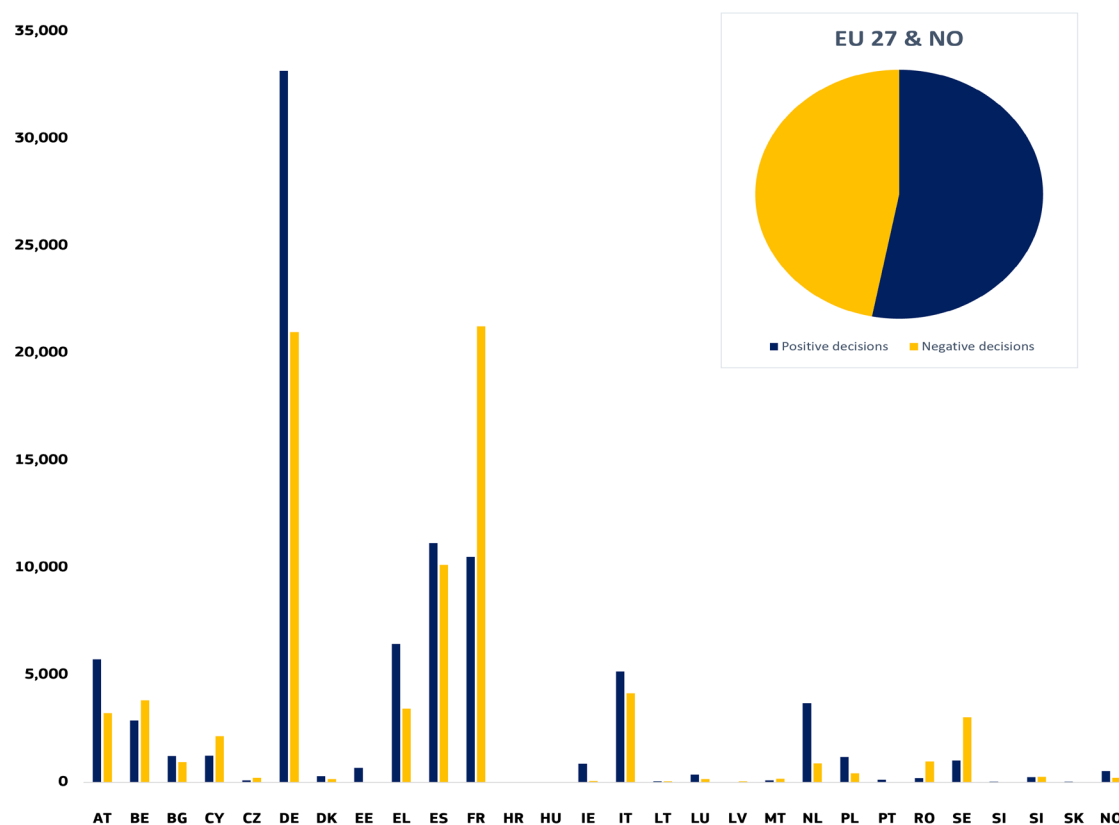
Source: Eurostat [migr_asyappctzm], total asylum applicants, extracted on 18 January 2024.

Figure 2: First time asylum applicants and subsequent applicants (together, total asylum applicants) in the EU-27 and Norway, Q3 2023 (quarterly data)



Source: Eurostat [migr_asyappctzm], accessed on 18 January 2024.

Figure 3: First instance asylum decisions in EU-27 and Norway for non-EU citizens, Q3 2023



Source: Eurostat [[miqr_asydcfstq](#)], accessed on 18 January 2024.

EMN National Contact Points: National Events and Publications

Recent National EMN conferences:

- **EMN Belgium:** On 5 and 6 December the EMN Return Expert Group (REG) conducted a successful and well-attended [workshop](#) dedicated to advancing multistakeholder governance towards case resolution of undocumented migrants. Facilitated by EMN Belgium and [Fedasil](#), this event focused on fostering connections between national authorities, local administrations and civil society organisations. The [key takeaways](#) of the workshop can be found in the workshop report.
- **EMN France:** On 8 November 2023, EMN France held a conference in Paris. This conference was structured around three panels dealing with resettlement programmes, complementary access routes and the integration of resettled persons. More than a dozen speakers, including representatives of French authorities and other member states, international organisations and civil society, presented French and European programmes and mechanisms, and shared challenges and best practices in the field.
- **EMN Ireland:** On 5 December 2023, EMN Ireland [launched](#) its 'Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2022: Ireland'. The recordings from the launch are [here](#).
- **EMN Italy:** On 12 December 2023, a capacity-building meeting was held at the Italian Ministry of the Interior, bringing together all ministerial offices involved in the national EMN network. The purpose was to educate and inform offices about the products of the migration network.

- **EMN Spain:** On 17-18 November 2023, the EMN Spanish Presidency High-Level Conference took place entitled 'Shaping the future of EU legal migration: Where are we and where do we want to go?' The agenda, recordings and conference report are available [online](#).
- **EMN Serbia:** On 8 December 2023, EMN Serbia held its first National Conference in Belgrade as a one-day hybrid event. The event discussed '[Circular Migration schemes and initiatives for diaspora moving back home: Supporting economic development in countries of origin](#)'. The conference brought together experts from EMN Member and Observer Countries, policy makers, practitioners, academia members, representatives of international and civil society organisations and facilitated discussions about the various practices and initiatives concerning circular migrations programmes and efforts to encourage members of the diaspora to return in countries of origin.