Wilfried
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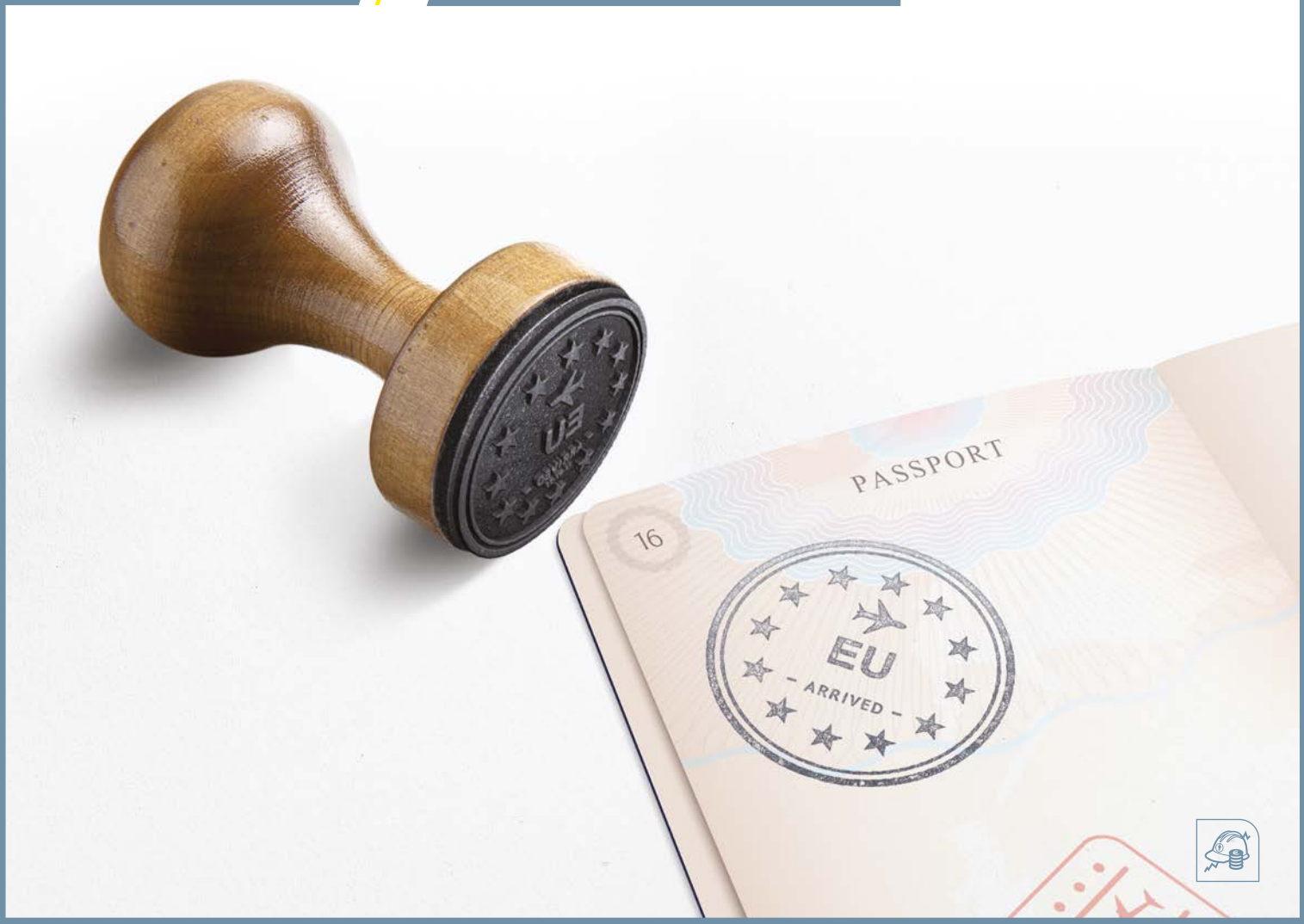
for European Studies

# Immigration to Europe:

## The Big Picture for the EU and Its Member States

Rainer Muenz and Jemal Yaryyeva



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# Table of contents

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# About the authors

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# Executive summary

For most periods of its modern history, Europe had a negative migration balance. Tens of millions of people left the continent for other parts of the world, while the number of those admitted to work or settle in Europe was comparatively small. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, North-Western Europe began attracting substantial numbers of migrants. Despite this, it is only since the mid-1980s that today's 27 EU countries have reported more immigration than emigration (when adding up their inflows and outflows). In recent times inflows have accelerated.

Based on statistical data provided by Eurostat and selected other sources, this paper develops a comprehensive picture of all international migrants entering the EU, as well as movements between EU countries, providing a number of novel data breakdowns. It demonstrates the complex and changing nature of EU-bound immigration. Some flows depend on factors such as economic booms and recessions and demographically induced shortages of labour, while others are impacted by wars and political conflicts in the wider EU neighbourhood (i.e. Eastern Europe, the Middle East), as well as those in Western Asia, the Horn of Africa and parts of Latin America. It also demonstrates how, within the EU, the volume (the absolute numbers of EU and non-EU citizens) and the composition of migrants differ from country to country.

With a particular focus on immigration from outside the EU, the paper examines the years 2013 to 2022, relying on figures such as first residence permit data, statistics on first asylum requests and information on temporary protection for people fleeing Ukraine. Overall, more than 22 million non-EU citizens were admitted to the 27 EU countries between 2013 and 2022, while about 10 million people left the EU during this period.

Between 2013 and 2022, people admitted for humanitarian reasons (i.e. asylum, subsidiary protection and temporary protection) dominated among arriving non-EU citizens (49% of all arrivals). The largest groups were asylum seekers from the Middle East, Western Africa, the Horn of Africa, South Asia and Latin America. In 2022 displaced Ukrainians, to whom EU member states collectively granted temporary protection, became the largest group ever admitted to the EU.

Among those asking for asylum in the EU, women were more likely to receive protection than men. As a consequence, despite the clear predominance of male asylum seekers, the female share among first-instance positive decisions in 2018–22 was around 40%. Women also dominated among adult Ukrainians receiving temporary protection.

Within the legal framework of regular migration, the largest number of residence permits was issued for reasons of marriage or family reunion (27% of all arrivals), also marking an absolute record in 2022. The number of those admitted for employment was much smaller (17% of all arrivals). This legal avenue for labour migrants has only recently become more significant, namely in 2018–19 and 2021–22.

Intra-EU migration has picked up since the EU enlargements of 2004, 2007 and 2013. Throughout the 2010s, the availability of mobile EU citizens from Central and South-Eastern Europe dampened demand for non-EU labour in North-Western and Southern Europe. In recent years, this effect seems to have worn off as wage levels have converged, while population decline in many parts of Central and South-Eastern Europe has reduced the pool of potential emigrants. This is one of the two main reasons why the admission of non-EU labour is growing again across the EU. The other reason is the domestic labour shortage caused by the retirement of the baby-boomer generation.

During the period analysed, Germany was the primary destination for non-EU nationals entering the EU, with 5.1 million arrivals between 2013 and 2022. France and Spain followed as the second and third most important destinations, with 2.8 million and 2.5 million arrivals, respectively. While Syrians, Afghans, Moroccans, Colombians and Venezuelans were previously predominant among newcomers, the mass influx of displaced Ukrainians in 2022 reshaped the demographic picture and made them the largest national group among non-EU immigrants admitted during the period 2013–22.

The number of new arrivals in 2022 was unprecedented. Millions of displaced Ukrainians entered the EU within a relatively short period of time while, during the same year, absolute numbers of asylum seekers were also high, and the numbers of non-EU citizens admitted for marriage, family reunion and employment reasons also reached unprecedented levels.

Since the mid-2000s many so-called co-ethnics living in non-EU countries such as Bosnia, Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine have obtained Croatian, Hungarian and Romanian citizenship, and have therefore gained access to the bloc's labour markets and social welfare provisions. Furthermore, Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain have extended citizenships to the descendants of those who have left these countries since the nineteenth century for the Americas and other continents. And, as a result of the UK leaving the EU, considerable numbers of UK citizens have been applying for Irish citizenship. The arrival and settle-

ment of people who acquired citizenship of an EU country through one of the above-mentioned schemes before entering that country is not fully visible in available migration statistics as these immigrants do not require residence permits.

Available labour market data clearly indicate the impact of origin and citizenship on employment and unemployment. On the one hand, mobile EU citizens residing outside the member state in which they were born have a slightly higher employment rate than natives. On the other hand, third-country nationals residing in the EU had much lower employment rates and a significantly higher risk of being unemployed or working below their skill level. This is particularly true for women immigrating from non-EU countries, and especially so for the many women born in Türkiye, North Africa and Western Asia.

Labour market outcomes can partly be explained by the structure of inflows. EU citizens moving to another EU country are profiting from free access to labour markets. For most of them employment opportunities are the main motivation for their mobility.

In contrast to this, the majority of non-EU citizens are admitted for humanitarian reasons (i.e. asylum or temporary protection), or as family migrants (for marriage or family reunion), but not based on their talent, skills or employability. In most EU countries only a minority of non-EU immigrants are admitted as genuine labour migrants. However, recently their numbers have been growing.

Migration will most likely shape the future of Europe in several ways during the decades ahead. Europe's adverse demographic dynamics—an ever-growing excess of deaths over births and rapidly ageing native populations—will continue to cause massive shortages of labour and skills. Migration, however, can only compensate for the decline in native workforces if the talents and skills of the newly arriving people are compatible with Europe's needs. There are two ways that this could work. The first would require admission of migrants based on skills acquired abroad and their willingness to work in EU destination countries. Employability would then be the main selection criterion. The second path forward would require a massive reskilling of migrants who do not meet these criteria. In any case, European societies will have to put more emphasis on the socio-economic, linguistic and political integration of migrants and their EU-born children.

**Keywords** European migration – Labour migration – Asylum – Humanitarian admission – Family migration – EU labour mobility – Migrant integration – Naturalisation

# Introduction

Migration matters. Massive flows of migrants, as recorded in recent years, have a significant impact on the ethno-cultural, socio-economic and religious composition of the people living in Europe's receiving countries. They also have negative implications for some sending countries due to the economic consequences of losing the working-age population in general and skilled labour in particular.[1]

These current trends are likely to continue, as Europe's adverse demographic dynamics are already causing massive shortages of labour and skills. This will almost inevitably lead to more labour migration in the decades ahead. As a consequence, the regions attracting additional foreign labour and skills will become more diverse. At the same time the additional demand for migrant labour will lead to the further depopulation of less affluent peripheries, both within the EU and in its neighbourhood.

International migration represents more than just the movements of people across borders. It stands as one of Europe's most intensely debated and divisive political issues, with conflicts often centred around irregular arrivals, the number of asylum seekers, and the ability or inability of EU countries to return migrants without valid residence permits. More recently the functioning or failure of the socio-economic and cultural integration of immigrants and their children has also become a politically relevant topic.

This paper aims to broaden the discourse by providing a comprehensive view of migrants living in the EU and analysing all relevant immigration flows over the 10-year period from 2013 to 2022. It starts by highlighting the historical shift from emigration to immigration on the continent since the 1980s. It also looks at the stock of migrants living in the 27 EU countries, including the mobile EU citizens who move between the member states.

In its main section, the paper analyses in detail the latest migration trends and patterns in Europe by looking at countries of origin, countries of destination and the types of residence permits issued during the period

[1] Part of the analysis presented in this publication builds on a policy brief published by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development: R. Münz, *How Will Migration to Europe Look in the Future? Trends, Open Questions, and Four Plausible Scenarios*, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, Prague Process (Vienna, 2020). It also builds on a public lecture at the University of Zurich; see R. Münz, 'The Future of Migration and Integration in Europe', in A. Kellerhals (ed.), *Europa als die Schweiz der Welt? Referate zu Fragen der Zukunft Europas* (Zurich: Schulthess, 2020). As a separate point, we would like to thank Vít Novotný for his guidance throughout the whole project and Allessandra De Martini for her assistance with preparing the reference apparatus as well as Vicky Nash and Marvin DuBois for their proofreading and editing support.

2013–22. It also addresses the unique dynamics of 2022, with a focus on both the mass migration flows from other parts of the world to the EU in general and the massive inflow of displaced Ukrainians in particular.

The analysis clearly distinguishes between asylum seekers (and other migrants admitted for humanitarian reasons), labour migrants, and those arriving for marriage and family reunion purposes. The latter merits particular attention as it has become the most important legal avenue of regular immigration to the EU.

Based on available data, the paper presents and analyses, for the first time,[2] migration corridors between non-EU sending and EU receiving countries for the various types of inflow (2013–22) as defined by the main gates of entry (i.e. marriage and family reunion, work/employment, education, asylum and temporary protection).

The subsequent sections of the paper examine the various indicators that measure the integration of migrants living in the EU member states, such as labour market participation, education, and social and political inclusion. The paper concludes by discussing the implications for migration of the demographic trends and labour shortages in Europe.

The appendix discusses the concepts and definitions used, and some of the limitations of measuring migration through the lens of statistics on flows as opposed to the data on residence permit statistics provided by Eurostat, the EU statistical agency. Readers with a particular interest in data and methodological approaches will find specific information as well as links to the relevant data sources in the substantial footnote apparatus.

[2] As far as we are aware.

# Migration trends: from emigration to immigration

For centuries Europe was a continent of emigration. The outflows started when European countries began to conquer overseas territories and establish colonial settlements. Emigration, however, only became a mass phenomenon after the onset of the Industrial Revolution. At this point, labour migration replaced colonial settlement as the dominant form of mobility between Europe and overseas destinations. At the same time, migration from the agrarian peripheries to the rapidly growing metropolitan areas and emerging industrial centres also started to shape the population distribution within Europe.

In total some 65–70 million Europeans left the continent—the vast majority of them between 1815 and 1960.[3] However, since the 1950s and 1960s, Europe—once the world's most important migrant-sending region—has gradually become a prime destination for immigrants from other parts of the world.[4]

Only since the 1980s has there been significantly more immigration into all of the (current) 27 EU countries combined than emigration from these countries to the rest of the world.[5] This positive migration balance has contributed to Europe's overall population growth. Since 2013 the total number of deaths has been larger than the number of children born in the EU27. As a result, the level of net migration[6] accounts for the total population growth (or decline). In 2020 and 2021, for the first time, the demographic gain from net immigration was smaller than the negative balance between births and deaths, resulting in a small population decline in the EU. However, the unprecedented mass immigration that took place in 2022 has completely reversed this situation and returned the overall population to growth.[7]

[3] B. Etemad, 'Pour une approche démographique de l'expansion coloniale de l'Europe', *Annales de démographie historique* 113 (2007); see also K. Bade, *Migration in European History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).
[4] S. Castles, M. J. Miller and H. de Haas, *The Age of Migration* (London: Red Globe Press, 2017, 6th edn.).
[5] *Eurostat*, 'Population change by component (annual crude rates), EU-27, 1960-2019 (per 1 000 persons)'.
[6] That is, immigration minus emigration.
[7] *Eurostat*, 'Population and population change statistics' (6 July 2023).

In the majority of EU member states, migration has had a visible and transformative impact on the socio-demographic composition of societies. Parts of Europe, urban areas in particular, are now characterised by ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. Consequently, migrant integration and the management of this diversity have become essential complements to the migration policy of EU member states.[8]

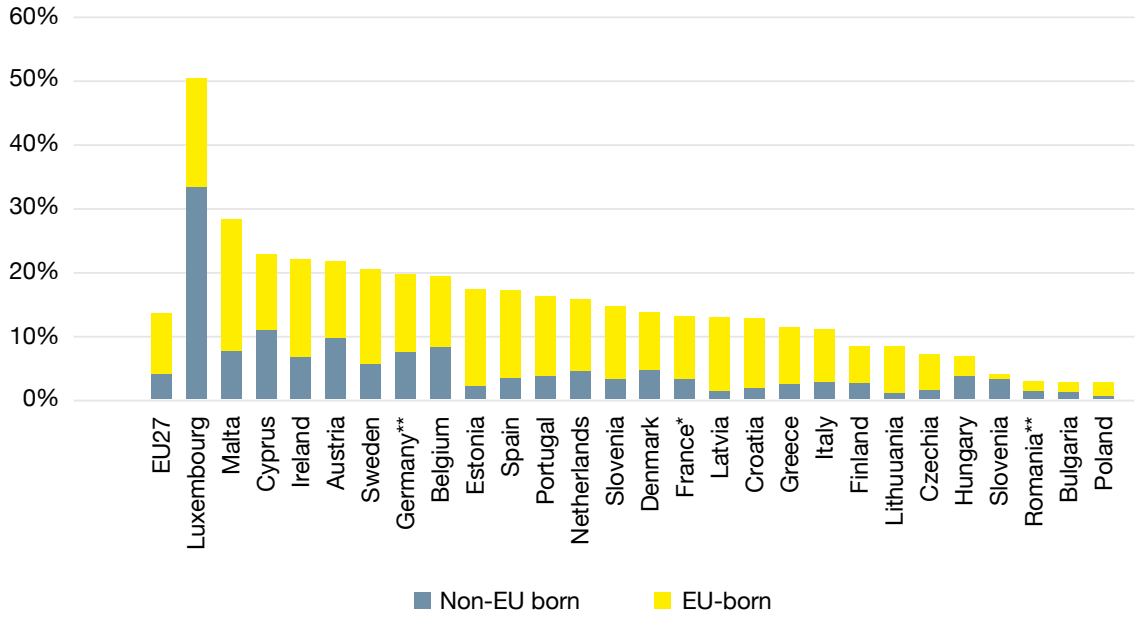
# Migrants living in the EU

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the number of immigrants and mobile EU citizens[9] living in today's 27 EU countries has almost doubled from 29 million (6.8% of the total EU population) in 2000 to 56–7 million (12.5%) in early 2023.[10] Of these immigrants, roughly one-quarter (14 million) moved from one EU member state to another, while 42 million were third-country nationals and naturalised EU citizens with a place of birth outside the EU. Thus, in early 2023 the share of non-EU-born residents in the EU was 9.4% (see Figure 1).

The EU country with by far the largest absolute number of foreign-born residents was Germany (16.5 million in early 2026), followed by France (8.6 million), Spain (8.2 million) and Italy (6.0 million). In relative terms the smallest EU countries hosted the largest share of foreign-born residents (Luxembourg, 50%; Malta, 28%; Cyprus, 23%), followed by some mid-sized countries (Ireland, 23%; Austria, 22%; Sweden, 20%; Belgium, 19%) and Germany (19%), Europe's most populous country. There are also several other small countries with high shares of foreign-born residents (Estonia, 17%; Slovenia, 15%) (see Figure 1).[11] Outside the EU, the UK (10.8 million, 14%), Switzerland (2.6 million, 30%) and Norway (0.9 million, 17%) were other European countries with sizeable foreign-born populations.

[8] European Commission, *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027,* Communication, COM (2020) 758 final (24 November 2020).
[9] Defined as persons living outside their country of birth for an extended period of time (i.e. more than 12 months).
[10] *Eurostat,* 'Population on 1 January by age group, sex and country of birth' (last update 14 February 2024). The official figure (56 million) underestimates the actual number, as Bulgaria, Finland, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Sweden did not include Ukrainians under temporary protection in their reported figures on foreign-born residents (see Figures 1 and 18). The true value for January 2023 is likely to be above 57 million.
[11] Ibid.

**Figure 1 Share of foreign-born population in EU countries, 1 January 2023**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Population on 1 January by age group, sex and country of birth', migr_pop3ctb.

*Note*: Data for Bulgaria, Finland, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Sweden do not include displaced Ukrainians with temporary protection. * indicates provisional data; ** indicates an estimate.

In most EU member states, the majority of foreign-born residents came from a country outside the EU. Intra-EU migrants were the majority only in Luxembourg, Hungary and Slovakia; they also represented a sizeable minority of all immigrants in Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Ireland and Malta. Due to colonial legacies and the recruitment of labour between the 1950s and the early 1970s through guest-worker programmes, France, Portugal, the Netherlands and Belgium have large shares of foreign-born residents from the Maghreb and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands have sizeable immigrant populations born in Latin America and the Caribbean. Germany and the Nordic countries, due to humanitarian migration, have considerable shares of immigrants born in the Middle East. Because of its admission of ethnic German immigrants, Germany also has sizeable numbers of immigrants born in Russia and Central Asia. As a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Germany, Poland and Czechia are hosting large numbers of displaced

Ukrainians. In Estonia and Latvia, the majority of immigrants had moved to these countries from Russia and Ukraine prior to the 1990s. They formally became immigrants with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In 2022 the overall gender ratio of Europe's EU-born and non-EU-born residents was almost even (49% male, 51% female), but migrants were—on average—younger than the natives. Immigrants were underrepresented in the age groups 0–18 and 60+ years. The majority of non-EU immigrants were between the ages of 18 and 45; the majority of mobile EU citizens were between the ages of 25 and 50.[12] This is the result of immigration flows dominated by young adults. It also reflects the fact that many migrants do not remain in their EU destination countries, but return to their country of origin (quite often, long) before reaching retirement age.

## Intra-EU/EFTA mobility

EU enlargement to Central and South-Eastern European countries in 2004, 2007 and 2013 unleashed new opportunities for the citizens of these countries to work and live in other (usually Western) EU/European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries. Once the transitional periods[13] imposed by most Western EU countries had expired, the right to free movement provided access to labour markets and residence in Western and Southern Europe for millions of citizens from Central and South-Eastern Europe. Since the early 2000s this has led to unprecedented east–west migration, not only within the EU, but also to Norway and Switzerland.

A considerable number of citizens of non-EU countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe have also profited from free movement in cases where they have easy access to citizenship of one of the states that joined the EU in or after 2004. These include ethnic Croats, mainly from Bosnia, becoming Croatian citizens;[14] ethnic Hungarians in the Serbian Vojvodina and Ukrainian Transcarpathia acquiring Hungarian citizenship;[15] Moldovans being granted Romanian passports on a regular basis;[16] and some (North) Macedonians and Turks successfully claiming Bulgarian citizenship.[17]

[12] OECD and European Commission, *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2023: Settling In* (Paris, 2023).
[13] European Parliament, *Transitional Arrangements Restricting the Free Movement of Workers on EU Labour Markets*, P6_TA(2006)0129 (5 April 2006).
[14] *Ljubic Law Firm*, 'Dual Citizenship Between BiH and the Republic of Croatia'.
[15] *Helpers Hungary*, 'Hungarian Citizenship for Ethnic Hungarians'.
[16] M. Necsutu, 'Quarter of Moldovans Now Have Romanian Passports', *Balkan Insight*, 27 May 2021.
[17] *Posolstvo*, 'Bulgarian Citizenship by Origin for Turkish Citizens', 24 January 2023.

Furthermore, some Mediterranean countries have created fast-track naturalisation schemes for descendants of 19th and 20th century emigrants.[18] As a consequence, several million Latin Americans and smaller numbers of people living in North America, Australia, New Zealand and the Lusophone countries of Africa have applied for citizenship of Italy, Greece, Portugal or Spain. Austria, Germany, Portugal and Spain have also implemented fast-track naturalisation for descendants of their former Jewish resident populations.[19] And, as a result of Brexit, Ireland has been confronted with considerable numbers of naturalisation requests from UK citizens claiming Irish descent.[20]

As a consequence of the financial crisis of 2009–10 and the subsequent rise in unemployment levels in Southern Europe, citizens of Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece were incentivised to move to Northern Europe in search of jobs; a phenomenon not seen in Southern Europe since the 1980s.

The quantitative effects are obvious: between 2010 and early 2023, when countries such as Germany and Italy were recording strong positive net migration gains, others including Spain, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece were experiencing net migration losses, thus reducing unemployment or underemployment at home, but also leading to a loss of talent and skills (i.e. brain drain). And it can be assumed that official statistics underestimate the actual outflows from Central (i.e. Poland, Hungary and the Baltic states) and South-Eastern Europe (i.e. Bulgaria and Romania) as many mobile citizens maintain a residence in EU sending countries and do not deregister when leaving for an extended period of time.

During the period 2010–15, an estimated 6.7 million EU citizens moved to another EU country for an extended period of time (i.e. 12+ months).[21] This is an average of 1.1 million per year. Between 2016 and 2019 these flows increased to 1.3–1.5 million EU citizens per year.[22] In 2021 and 2022 the numbers reached 1.2 million and 1.4 million, respectively.[23] At the end of 2022, there were 11 million EU citizens of working age residing in another EU country.[24]

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[18] *ICA*, 'Italy: Italian Citizenship Assistance'; *Hellenic Republic*, 'Greek Citizenship' (2024); *Immigration Advice Service*, 'Portuguese Nationality for Former Colonies'; *Gobierno de España*, 'Acquiring Nationality' (last update 31 January 2024).

[19] In the cases of Austria and Germany, this relates to the descendants of Jews who left the country during the Nazi regime (1933/38–45); in the cases of Portugal and Spain it relates to descendants of the Sephardic Jews who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula during and after the Reconquista (mostly in the fifteenth, sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries).

[20] *Ireland, Department of Justice*, 'Become an Irish Citizen by Naturalisation'. It is assumed that about 6 million people (approximately 10% of all people living in Great Britain) have at least one Irish grandparent, making them (almost automatically) eligible for Irish citizenship.

[21] Only EU citizens with a minimum stay of 12 months are considered in order to distinguish between immigrants (staying for 12+ months) and short-term movers (e.g. seasonal workers, posted workers, exchange students and short-term intra-company transfers).

[22] *Eurostat*, 'Immigration to EU Countries: 4.4 Million in 2017' (21 March 2019).

[23] *Eurostat*, 'Immigration by broad group of country of previous residence' (last update on 20 February 2024).

[24] European Commission, Directorate General Employment, *Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility 2022* (Luxembourg, 2023).

The majority of migrating EU citizens were people taking up jobs in another EU country, although educational and retirement mobility also played a role. For almost 6 in 10 intra-EU labour migrants (57%) the prime destinations in 2021 were Germany, Spain and Italy. In the same year, the most significant EU sending countries were Romania (27%), Poland (12%) and Italy (10%).

The majority of intra-EU migrants are male (in 2021, 57%). On average they are younger than the receiving population. Their employment rate (74%) is very similar to that of nationals in the receiving countries and significantly higher than the employment rates of third-country nationals residing in the EU (59%).[25]

The majority of intra-EU migrants contribute to employment in job sectors that demand low to medium skills, including in positions such as cleaners and helpers (constituting 10% of total employment; 559,000 workers); labourers in mining, construction, manufacturing and transport (8%; 334,000), and building and related trades workers (7%; 445,000).[26]

An important category of intra-EU mobile workers (not included in the statistics on international migration) are cross-border workers, namely persons living in one EU country and working in another EU or EFTA country. In 2021 around 1.7 million cross-border workers were documented in the EU and EFTA countries. The most important countries of origin were France (accounting for 424,000 cross-border workers) and Poland (190,000). Germany (378,000), Switzerland (345,000) and Luxembourg (212,000) were the main destination countries, hosting nearly 60% of all cross-border workers.

Approximately 70% (1.1 million) of cross-border workers in 2021 were male. More than half (54%) had a medium level of education, and most were between 35 and 49 years old (42%). Of the cross-border workforce, 46% were engaged in manufacturing and construction, while another 30% worked in service sectors such as transportation and storage, the wholesale and retail trades, and health and care.[27] A significant proportion of female cross-border workers are health and care workers.[28]

Intra-EU labour migration and cross-border mobility allows for a more flexible and dynamic labour market and can be a valuable tool in reducing unemployment in EU sending countries, as well as address-

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] C. Schultz and B. Rijks, *Mobility of Health Professionals to, From and Within the European Union*, International Organization for Migration, Research Report no. 48 (Geneva, 2014), 13–18.

ing labour shortages at the occupational level in EU receiving countries. However, given the overall small share of EU migrants relative to nationals, this type of mobility alone is not able to significantly mitigate labour shortages in EU member states.[29]

## Immigration of non-EU citizens

In the EU, over the period 2013 to 2022, some 11.4 million people from non-EU countries were granted first residence permits[30] (with a duration of more than 12 months) or Blue Cards (for highly qualified workers).[31] That is an average of 1.1 million per year.[32]

More than half of the permits were issued for family reasons (i.e. marriage migration and family reunion: 5.9 million people, 52%). Such permits are issued to two groups. The first group consists of third-country nationals admitted as dependent family members of either immigrants already lawfully residing in an EU

[29] European Commission, Directorate-General Employment, *Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility 2022* (Luxembourg, 2023).

[30] This analysis uses data on the following first residence permits categories as provided by Eurostat: family reunion/marriage, education and work/employment. Eurostat's 'other' first residence permit category includes a vast range of statuses, including asylum and international protection, humanitarian reasons and residence-only permits (e.g. pensioners, children not yet in education, investors), as well as unknown cases (for example third-country nationals who originally came for work or family reasons but for whom the national administrations can no longer identify the reason for issuing the original permit). The subcategories under this heading differ from one member state to another. See *Eurostat*, 'Residence Permits – A Methodological and Analytical Overview' (2018). Our analysis assumes that permits issued for asylum and subsidiary protection comprise the vast majority of permits counted as 'other'. Our analysis therefore makes use of the data on first applications for international protection instead of 'other' residence permits. Relevant data can also be found in D. Bongiardo, I. Crespi and I. Sofos (eds.), *Atlas of Migration 2023*, European Commission (Luxembourg, 2023).

[31] We use the Eurostat data on first residence permits issued to third-country nationals for a period of more than 12 months as a proxy for the long-term international immigration of third-country nationals. We do so despite apparent differences in concepts and methods applied among the EU member states and the types of permit issued. In the majority of cases first residence permits issued for 12+ months indicate the admission of an international migrant. In certain cases, a residence permit is also considered as a 'first residence permit' if it is the renewal of a permit issued for the same reason but with a time gap of at least 6 months between expiry of the old and the start of the validity of the new permit, irrespective of the year of issuance. Therefore, first residence permit statistics include some cases where the person was already present in the country, had to leave and then came back in the same year. However, it is worth noting that data on migratory events refer to the year of occurrence. In the case of residence permits, the year of reference reported in the data is that of the administrative act. In most cases there is a time gap between the two events (factual immigration and issuance of the residence permit). The closer the actual migration takes place to the end of the year, the higher the probability that the two events will be reported in two different reference years. This is also the case in periods where there are high inflows which put the regular administrative system under an unusual burden, leading to a backlog of undecided cases. As we are looking at a 10-year period (2013–22), we can assume that such calendar effects have no significant impact on the analysed pattern. See *Eurostat*, 'Residence Permits – A Methodological and Analytical Overview'.

[32] *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits – statistics on first permits issued during the year' (2022). Only permits with a minimum validity of 12 months are considered in order to distinguish between immigrants (12+ months) and short-term movers (e.g. seasonal labour, exchange students, short-term intra-company transfers). It is, however, possible that persons whose initial residence permit is valid for less than 12 months should be included in the immigration flow if their consecutive residence permits are extended during the same year.

member state (classical family reunion) or new immigrants entitled to bring their family with them when entering the EU (privileged family migration). The second group consists of the foreign spouses of newlywed EU citizens and long-term residents (marriage migration).[33] The second most significant regular inflow was facilitated by work-related permits,[34] which were issued to 3.8 million people (33%). Permits for educational purposes, issued to 1.7 million people (15%), played a smaller role (see Figure 2).

One important implication is that between 2013 and 2022, when taking regular immigration, asylum requests and temporary protection (for Ukrainians) into account, only one in six non-EU citizens who immigrated to an EU country was admitted because of his or her talents and skills.[35]

In contrast to classical immigration countries (such as Australia, Canada and the US), EU countries do not issue permanent residence permits (comparable to a 'green card') to newcomers arriving from non-EU countries. These newcomers have to renew their permits after a period of one or two years and only gain access to a more stable status after five years of uninterrupted residence in a particular EU country.[36] The only exception is made in cases where migrants are naturalised upon arrival or even before leaving their home country.[37] This applies both to privileged co-ethnic and co-ancestral immigrants,[38] as well as to wealthy individuals who are granted a 'golden visa' or citizenship in return for sizeable investments.[39]

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[33] First permits issued for family reasons. *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits – statistics on first permits issued during the year'.

[34] Work permits include first residence permits for work reasons issued in the EU27 and EU Blue Cards issued in 24 of the 27 EU countries between 2013 and 2022. The EU Blue Card does not apply in Denmark or Ireland, while Cyprus has established a legal framework for admitting highly qualified labour migrants but has not so far issued EU Blue Cards. A note on the European Commission's website states that 'Volumes of admission of third-country nationals entering the territory of the Republic of Cyprus for the purposes of highly qualified employment (EU Blue Card) are set to zero'. See *European Commission*, 'EU Immigration Portal; EU Blue Card – Cyprus'.

[35] In absolute terms, this was 3.8 million out of a total of 22 million admitted people.

[36] *Your Europe*, 'Residence Formalities'.

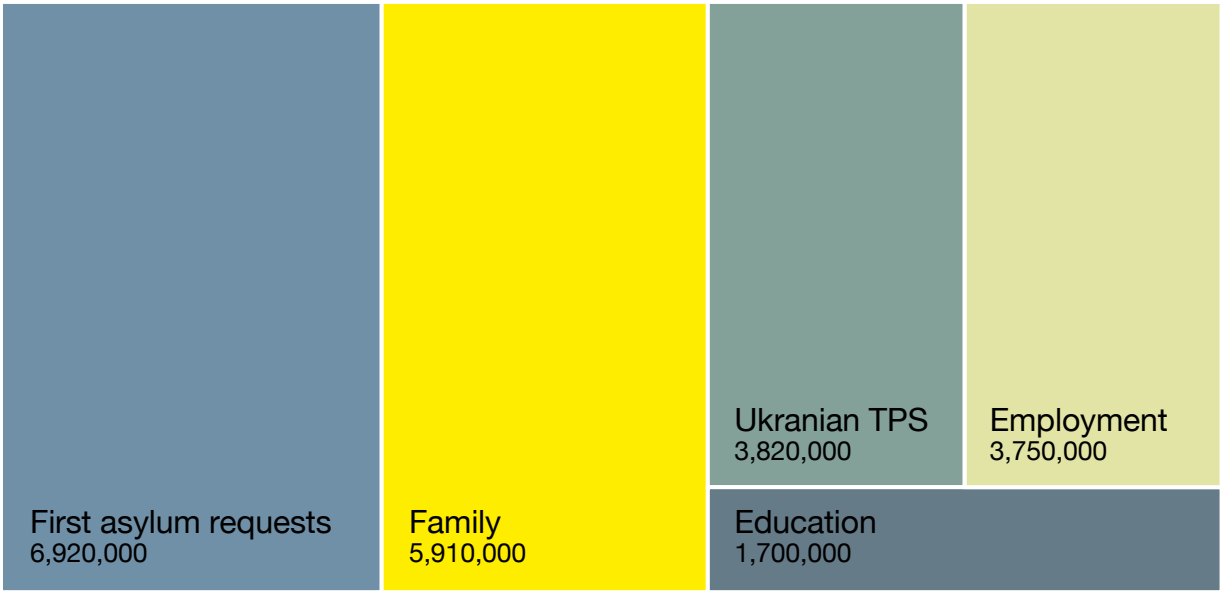
[37] These immigrants are not covered by the available statistics on people receiving first residence permits and are therefore not included in the analysis.

[38] For example, 1.3 million Moldovans (out of a total population of 2.7 million) have acquired Romanian citizenship. See N. Pinzaru, 'Moldova in Search of Experts for EU Talks After Massive Migration', *Euractiv*, 30 June 2023. For a long time, ethnic Germans and their dependent family members immigrating to Germany (so-called *Aussiedler*) made use of their immediate access to citizenship upon arrival. Since the 1950s, but particularly between 1990 and 2010 (i.e. after the fall of the Iron Curtain), more than 4.5 million ethnic Germans moved to the homeland of their ancestors. See S. Worbs et al., *(Spät-)Aussiedler in Deutschland*, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Nuremberg, 2013).

[39] Several EU countries have such programmes. The most prominent ones exist or existed in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Malta. See E. Pizzini, 'EU Citizenship for Sale', *ECA* blog, 12 February 2023.

During the analysed period (2013–22), 6.9 million first asylum applications were submitted in the 27 EU countries. In addition, as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine starting in February 2022, 3.8 million displaced Ukrainians received temporary protection status in the EU between March and December 2022 on a more permanent basis.[40] Therefore, between 2013 and 2022, the total inflow of foreign nationals from non-EU countries to the EU27 was about 22 million people. Almost a third of this inflow took place in 2022.

**Figure 2 First residence permits by reason, first asylum requests and displaced Ukrainians under temporary protection in the EU27, 2013–22**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits – statistics on first permits issued during the year' (2022), migr_res.

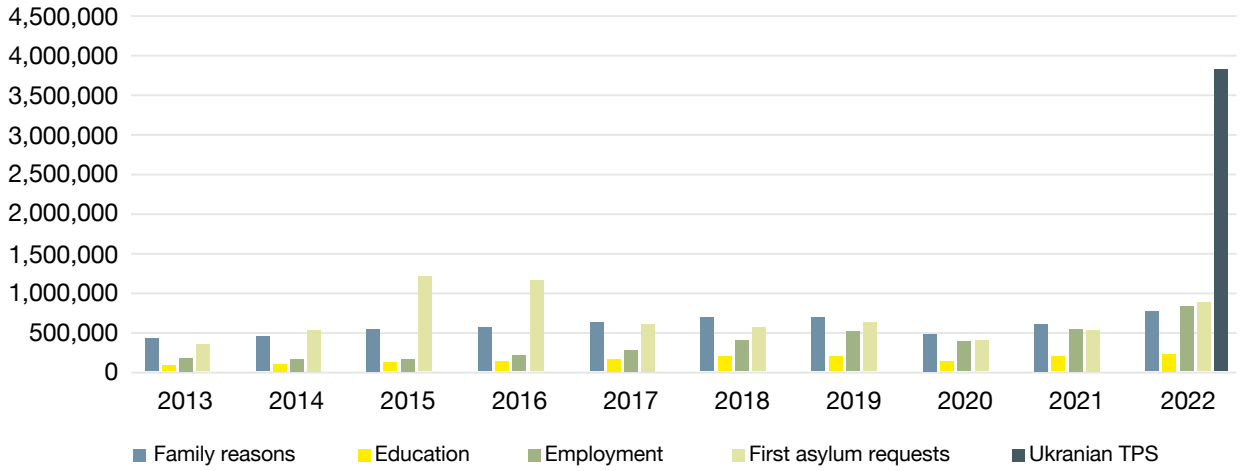
*Note*: The category of employment includes national first residence permit schemes for labour migrants and EU Blue Cards. 'TPS' = temporary protection scheme.

[40] The total inflow of Ukrainians receiving temporary protection was in the order of 5 million people, but more than one million had returned to Ukraine before the end of 2022.

At the same time some 10 million EU citizens and third-country nationals left the EU27 between 2013 and 2022 to settle in a non-EU country. As a result, the demographic net gain from migration for the EU27 during this period was in the order of 12 million people. Without this net gain the number of people living in the EU would not have grown by 7 million people, but would have shrunk. The reason for this is simple: since 2013, there have been more deaths than births recorded in the EU27. Europe's native populations are shrinking.

Until recently, Syrians, Afghans, Moroccans, Colombians and Venezuelans were the major groups among newcomers arriving in the EU. However, the mass inflow of displaced Ukrainians in 2022 led to a profound shift in the demographic landscape of migrants in the EU. In 2022 Ukrainians escaping the war in their homeland became the largest group of newcomers (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3 First residence permits issued by EU member states and first asylum requests, 2013–22, and displaced Ukrainians under temporary protection, 2022, absolute numbers**



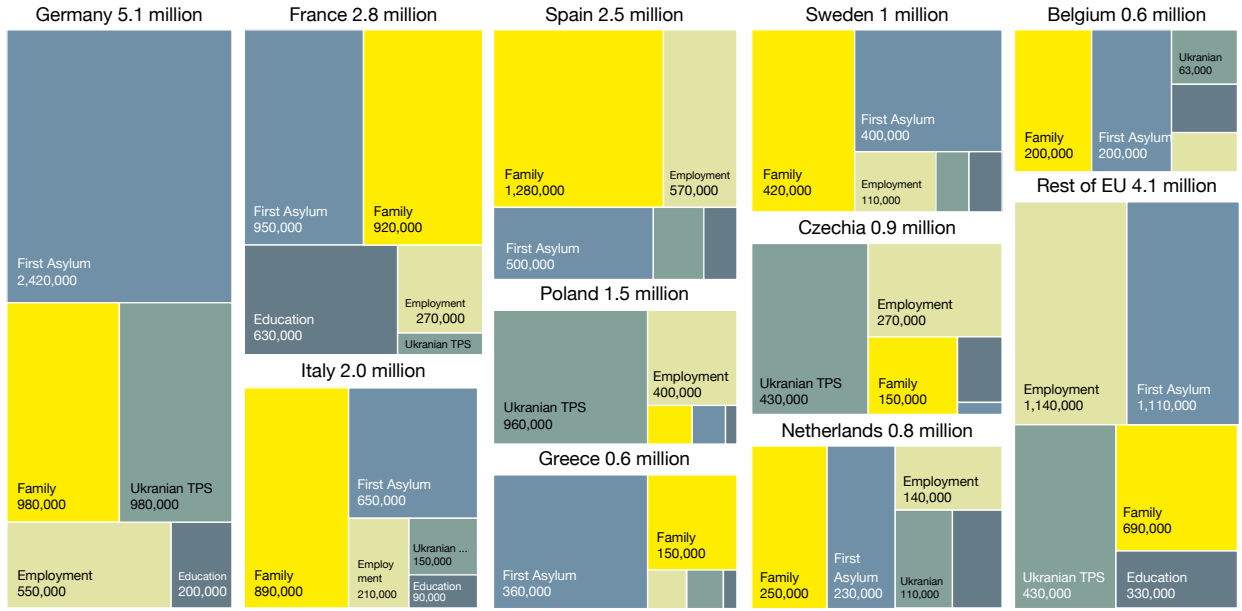

*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits – statistics on first permits issued during the year' (2022), mig_res.

*Note*: The category of employment includes national first residence permit schemes for labour migrants and EU Blue Cards. 'TPS' = temporary protection scheme.

EU countries differed widely in how many non-EU nationals they admitted or had to accept (i.e. asylum seekers and Ukrainians under temporary protection), both in absolute and relative terms. They also differed markedly when looking at the mix of immigrants.

Germany was the primary destination country for third-country nationals arriving in the EU between 2013 and 2022, with a total inflow of 5.1 million people from outside the EU. This included 1.7 million people issued with first residence permits, predominantly for marriage and family reasons (almost 1 million). Much smaller numbers of non-EU nationals were admitted for employment reasons (550,000) or educational purposes (200,000). During the same period Germany received 2.4 million first asylum applications. This inflow was predominantly linked to irregular migrants coming from Syria (900,000), Afghanistan (300,000) and Iraq (265,000). In addition, between June and December 2022, Germany granted temporary protection to about one million displaced persons from Ukraine who chose to stay in this country (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4 Combined influx of third-country nationals into the EU27, 2013–22, by top 10 countries of destination and gates of entry**



*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits – statistics on first permits issued during the year' (2022), mig_res.

*Note*: The category of employment includes national first residence permit schemes for labour migrants and EU Blue Cards. 'TPS' = temporary protection scheme.

The second most important destination was France, with a total immigration of 2.8 million people from non-EU countries (2013–22). These included 1.8 million people with first residence permits, among which marriage migration and family reunion (920,000), as well as educational migration (630,000), were the dominant reasons for issuance. The admission of labour played a smaller role (270,000). The majority of regular immigrants to France were citizens of North Africa. They arrived through established diaspora channels facilitating marriage from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, but also for work. Chinese nationals played a large role among those admitted for educational purposes. France received almost 1 million first asylum requests, with asylum seekers from Afghanistan (88,000), Albania (59,000) and Bangladesh (46,000) being the largest national groups. France also became host to a small number of displaced Ukrainians (68,000).

The third most important destination was Spain, with a total inflow of 2.5 million people.[41] The country issued some 1.9 million first residence permits, mostly for marriage migration and family reunion (1.2 million) purposes, followed by the admission of labour (574,000). Admission for educational purposes (110,000) did not play a significant role. Regular immigration was dominated by arrivals from Morocco for marriage migration and family reunion purposes, as well as labour migration. During the period analysed, Spain received 0.5 million first asylum requests, mostly from citizens of Latin America (among them 164,000 from Venezuelans; 115,000 from Colombians). It also became host to 161,000 displaced Ukrainians (Figure 4).

Fourth in line was Italy, with a total inflow from non-EU countries of 2 million people (2013–22).[42] During this period the country issued 1.2 million first residence permits, mostly for marriage migration and family reunion (895,000) purposes, with Moroccans (123,000) and Albanians (117,000) being the largest national groups. The admission of labour migrants played a smaller role (214,000). During the analysed period, Italy received 650,000 first asylum requests, representing only a fraction of the total number of people

[41] The arrival and settlement of people who acquired Spanish citizenship abroad because of Spanish (or Sephardic Jewish) ancestry is not included in this number as these people arrived as citizens and did not need a residence permit.

[42] The arrival and settlement of people who acquired Italian citizenship abroad because of Italian ancestry is not included in this number as these people arrived as citizens and did not need a residence permit.

who arrived in an irregular manner on its Mediterranean shores. These irregular arrivals were dominated by people from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East; but the largest groups of people actually asking for asylum were from Pakistan and Bangladesh. In addition, 146,000 displaced Ukrainians chose Italy as their destination country.

Fifth in line was Poland, which officially recorded an inflow of 1.5 million people. The country issued around 0.5 million first residence permits for a period of more than 12 months; mostly for employment reasons (396,000) and in a smaller number of cases for family reunion (79,000). This, however, tends to underestimate the total inflow because, over the past decade (2013–22), Poland has issued almost 5 million short-term permits for periods of less than 12 months. Many of these short-term permits were issued on a revolving basis to people who were basically living in Poland without the ability to acquire more stable residence rights—that is, they had to leave the country once a year to apply for a new permit before being readmitted (instead of being allowed to renew an expiring permit while in Poland). Most of the residence permits, both short- and long-term, were issued to Ukrainian citizens. In 2022 Poland also became the main destination for displaced Ukrainians arriving in the EU, of whom almost 1 million remained in the country (Figure 4).

## Labour migration

During the second half of the 20th century, the recruitment of labour was the most important legal gate of entry into North-Western and later also Southern European countries.[43] This held true in the early 2000s. However, as a result of the banking and public debt crises, which led to high unemployment levels in many EU countries, the number of newly issued long-term residence permits for labour migrants from third countries rapidly declined. Before 2008, 0.5–0.6 million were issued annually—then representing more than half of all newly issued regular first residence permits. This fell to just 176,000 in 2015—representing only 21% of all the residence permits (of 12+ months' duration) issued to regular migrants during that year (Figure 3).

[43] On a much smaller scale, labour migration was also the most important gate of entry to the Central and Eastern European countries until 1989. Based on bilateral contracts, Communist regimes admitted labour migrants from 'like-minded' countries such as Cuba and Vietnam. See, e.g. P. Gatrell, *The Unsettling of Europe: How Migration Reshaped a Continent* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

This shift, however, was not only related to the considerable drop in demand for additional labour during the financial crisis, which hit Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland particularly hard, but was also caused by the EU enlargement that started in 2004. After the expiry of the transitional periods of five to seven years imposed by most Western EU countries, European employers preferred to hire workers from the (then) new EU member states—in particular from Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Poland and the Baltics—rather than from third countries, as the former process is bureaucratically much easier than the latter.

After 2016 labour recruitment started to pick up again in response to employer demand. The number of first residence permits issued for employment reasons reached 525,000 in 2019 and 483,000 in 2021.[44] These figures were comparable to the levels of the early 2000s (Figure 3). In addition some 52,000 and 68,000 EU Blue Cards were issued in 2019 and 2021, respectively, to medium and highly qualified workers from outside the EU. In both years, Germany issued most (85%) of the EU Blue Cards granted by all 27 EU countries.[45]

In 2022 an unprecedented 834,000 non-EU labour migrants were admitted (752,000 permits, plus 82,000 EU Blue Cards), reflecting the increasing deficit of domestic workers mainly caused by the retirement of the baby-boomer generation (Figure 3).

In recent years non-EU labour has mainly migrated to a few specific EU destination countries. In terms of the main receiving countries for labour migrants, Spain issued the largest number of work permits during the period (574,000, see Figure 5). The largest national groups admitted for labour reasons were Moroccans (78,000) and Latin Americans (Colombians, 56,000; Hondurans, 46,000; Paraguayans, 33,000; and Peruvians, 27,000).

Germany admitted 550,000 non-EU workers (on permits of 12+ months and EU Blue Cards). The largest national groups were Indians (116,000), Chinese (37,000) and Russians (32,000). Other relevant countries of origin were the US (28,000) and Türkiye (28,000) (see Figure 5).

Poland issued the third-largest number—a total of 396,000 work permits and EU Blue Cards. In addition, the country issued almost 5 million short-term permits for periods of less than 12 months.[46] Three out of four foreign workers came from Ukraine (291,000). Belarusians (20,000) and Georgians (13,000) played a smaller role.

[44] National first residence permits (for a period of 12+ months), excluding EU Blue Cards.
[45] *Visaguide*, 'Germany Remains Top Favorite for EU Blue Card Applicants'.
[46] Issued on a revolving basis to people who had to leave the country once a year to apply for a new permit before being readmitted.

Czechia admitted 272,000 non-EU workers in 2013–22. More than half of them came from Ukraine (149,000), with smaller groups from Russia (19,000), Vietnam (12,000) and Mongolia (10,000).

France facilitated work for 271,000 non-EU workers. About a third of them were from North Africa (Moroccans, 48,000; Tunisians, 37,000; Algerians, 10,000). Indians also played a small role (15,000).

Italy issued 214,000 work permits. Citizens of Ukraine (21,000), Morocco (18,000) and South Asia (India, 17,000; Bangladesh, 15,000; Pakistan, 13,000) were the largest groups of origin (Figure 5).

The available data indicate that men were largely overrepresented among the non-EU citizens receiving work permits.[47]

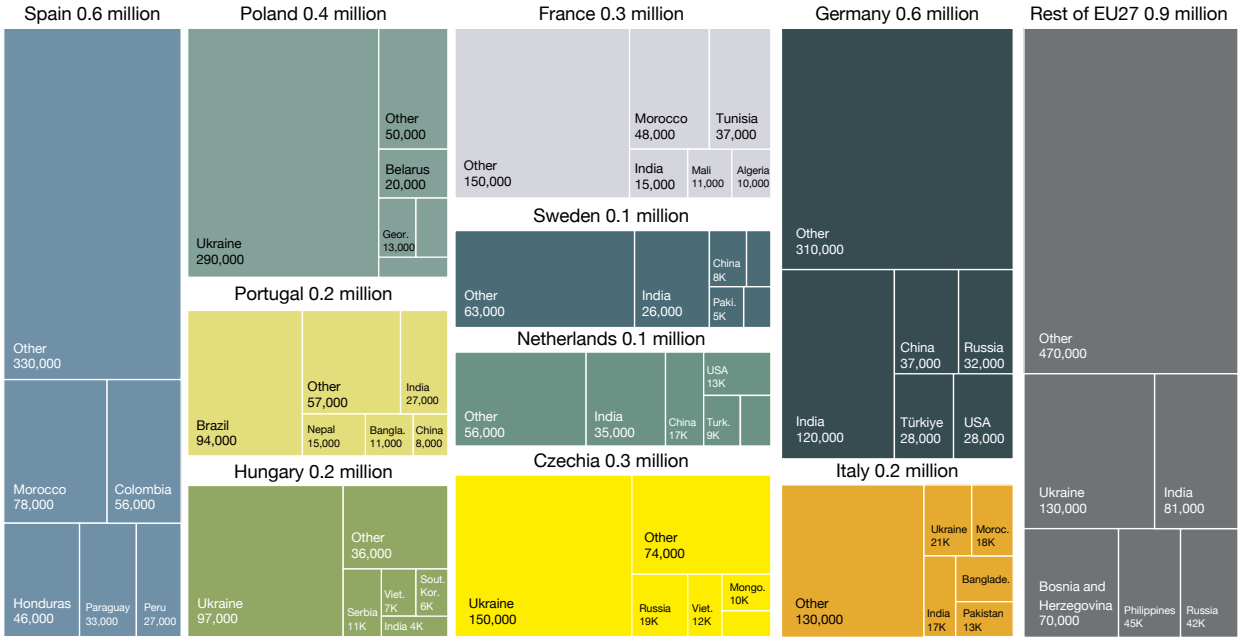
In many EU countries, labour migration from non-EU countries did not play a central role during the decade studied. This was due to EU enlargement after 2004, which led to a sharp increase in the mobility of labour from the Baltics, and Central and South-Eastern Europe towards the richer areas of North-Western and Southern Europe. People moved from regions with lower wages to those with higher wages and better infrastructure (e.g. schools, medical services). This, in turn, created a demand for migrant labour in the EU sending countries, which had growing economies and a shrinking number of natives due to emigration and very low birth rates. For this reason, Czechia, Hungary and Poland were among the top 10 countries receiving non-EU labour. Romania would also feature on this list were it not for the fact that Moldovans are easily able to access Romanian citizenship and thus provide labour without needing work or residence permits.[48] These Moldovan/Romanian dual citizens are therefore not registered despite coming from outside the EU (and thus not visible in the available statistics on newly issued residence permits, which is used as a proxy for regular non-EU immigration).

As wage levels converge and the demographic potential in Central and South-Eastern Europe shrinks, it is likely that there will be less intra-European mobility of labour in the future. As a consequence, the unprecedented number of non-EU workers admitted to the EU27 in 2022—with 752,000 work permits valid for more than 12 months issued—is likely to become the 'new normal', with even higher numbers of new labour migrants to be expected.

[47] *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits – statistics on first permits issued during the year'.

[48] By 2021 a quarter of all Moldovan citizens had acquired Romanian citizenship. See Necsutu, 'Quarter of Moldovans Now Have Romanian Passports'.

**Figure 5 First residence permits for employment issued 2013–22, by top 10 countries of destination and top 5 countries of origin**




*Source*: *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits – statistics on first permits issued during the year' (2022), mig_res.

*Note*: The category 'Employment' includes national first residence permit schemes for labour migrants and EU Blue Cards.

## Marriage migration and family reunion

Between 2013 and 2022, residence permits for family reasons were issued to 5.9 million people in the EU27. In all of the 10 years covered, this represents the most important legal gate of entry for regular migrants moving from non-EU countries to the EU. The annual number of permits issued rose from 430,000 in 2013 to 690,000 in 2019 and—after a Covid-19-related drop—to 770,000 in 2022. This was the highest number ever recorded (Figure 3).

Over the decades the nature of family-related immigration to EU countries has changed. Initially it enabled labour migrants arriving in Western Europe to sponsor their dependent family members to join them in destination countries once they had settled and gained a more permanent status (classical family reunion). Today, the majority of first residence permits issued for family reasons serve to facilitate the immigration of young brides and grooms who are marrying EU-born members of established diasporas. The latter have usually found partners from their ancestral regions or the extended family networks of their parents and grandparents.[49] In many cases this form of reunion is based on an arranged marriage.[50]

Available statistics on first permits issued for family reasons do not allow for a clear distinction between classical family reunion and marriage migration. It is however possible to compare them with other types of permits issued to immigrants from the same country. If, for example, France issued only 10,000 long-term work permits (Figure 5), but 172,000 family-related permits to Algerians (Figure 6), it becomes clear that most of these permits were for newlywed spouses joining a partner in France.

A new form of family migration relates to the spouses and children of highly qualified immigrants, who are entitled to bring their family along when initially entering the EU (privileged family migration).

Finally, there is an increasing number of dependent family members joining recognised refugees and people with subsidiary protection already living in an EU member state. In many cases this is not documented in data covering first residence permits as several countries register these family members as first asylum seekers.

The available data indicate that women are overrepresented among non-EU citizens arriving through marriage migration and family reunion.[51]

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[49] K. Charsley (ed.), *Transnational Marriage: New Perspectives from Europe and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2012); F. A. Mohn, 'Marriage Migration and the Economic Trajectories of First- and Second-Generation Immigrants in Norway', *Acta Sociologica* 63/3 (2019).

[50] S. Carol, E. Ersanilli and M. Wagner, 'Spousal Choice Among the Children of Turkish and Moroccan Immigrants in Six European Countries: Transnational Spouse or Co-Ethnic Migrant?', *International Migration Review* 48/2 (2014); J. Lievens, 'Family-Forming Migration From Turkey and Morocco to Belgium: The Demand for Marriage Partners From the Countries of Origin, *International Migration Review* 33/3 (1999); A. Shaw, 'The Arranged Transnational Cousin Marriages of British Pakistanis: Critique, Dissent and Cultural Continuity', *Contemporary South Asia* 15/2 (2006); C. Timmerman, I. Lodewyckx and J. Wets, 'Marriage at the Intersection Between Tradition and Globalization: Turkish Marriage Migration Between Emirdag and Belgium From 1989 to Present', *The History of the Family* 14/2 (2009).

[51] *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits – statistics on first permits issued during the year'.

In the near future the number of people admitted for family reasons will continue to grow. This will be for two reasons. The first is that the large number of asylum seekers who have been granted refugee status since 2015 has created a new cohort of recent immigrants eligible for classical family reunion. This is already bringing and will continue to bring more spouses and dependent children, who are currently still living in transit countries or regions of conflict, to those EU countries that have sizeable numbers of recently recognised refugees (even if this will continue to be partly reflected in asylum statistics).

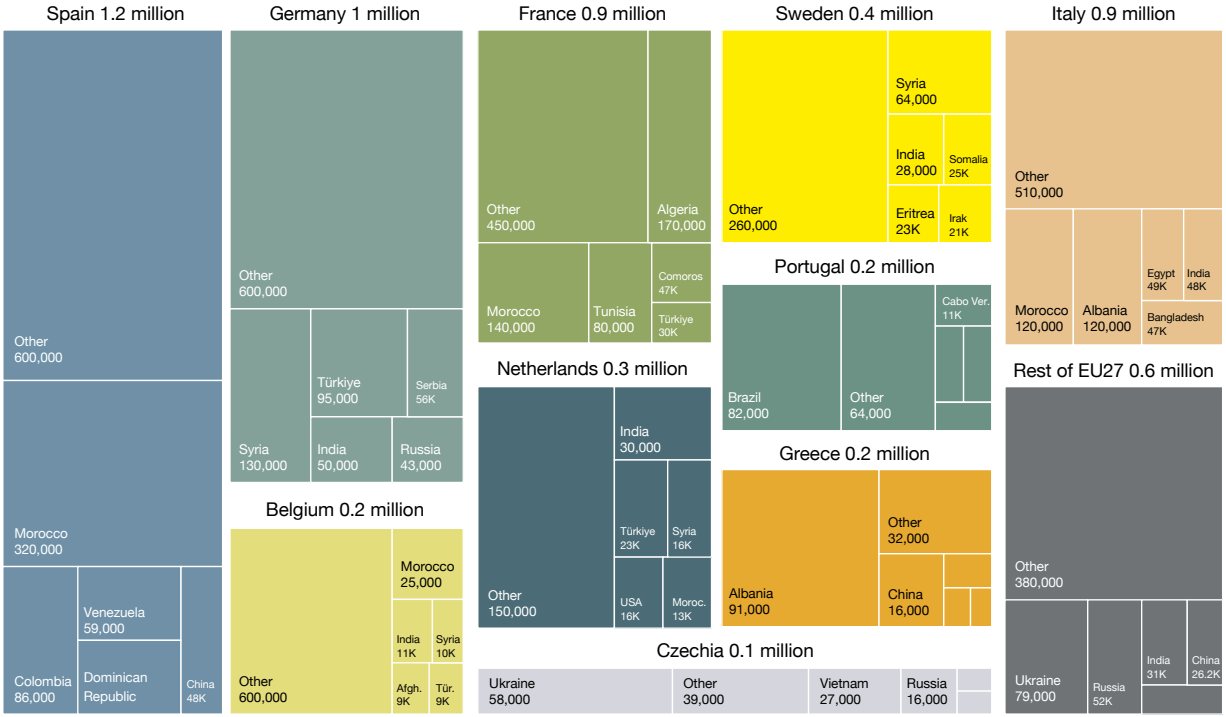
Equally, however, as classical forms of recruitment and admission of foreign labour gain ground—mainly to compensate for the shrinking domestic labour force—traditional family reunion will again become more common in the near future. As the recruitment of labour becomes more competitive, many EU countries are also offering skilled workers and investors the possibility of bringing their dependent family members with them as soon as they are granted a work permit. In this case, work- and family-related immigration will take place at the same time. This happens despite the fact that, while such permits are renewable, they are initially only valid for one or two years and subject to review before renewal.

The country that issued the largest number of marriage and family-related first residence permits in the period 2013–22 was Spain (1.2 million) (see Figure 6). About half of these were issued to citizens of Morocco (320,000), Latin America (Colombia, 86,000; Venezuela, 59,000; Dominican Republic, 56,000) and China (48,000). Marriage was the main reason among the Moroccan family migrants, whereas the newly admitted Colombians and Venezuelans were more often dependent family members of people from these two countries who had already gained refugee status or acquired citizenship in Spain.

The second most important destination was Germany (980,000). Syrians were the largest group (128,000), clearly reflecting the large number of recognised refugees of Syrian origin admitted since 2015. These refugees are now being joined by dependent family members. Other relevant groups included Turkish citizens (95,000), partly as a result of marriage migration, as well as Serbs (56,000), Indians (50,000) and Russians (43,000) who were mainly arriving through classical family reunion, with dependent family members joining labour migrants already living in Germany or having been granted a residence permit from the outset.

France admitted 917,000 people for family reasons (2013–22). More than half of them were from North Africa (Algeria, 172,000; Morocco, 138,000; Tunisia, 80,000), the Comoros (47,000) and Turkey (30,000), with most arriving as a result of marriage migration.

**Figure 6 First residence permits issued for family reasons, 2013–22, by top 10 countries of destination and top 5 countries of origin**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits – statistics on first permits issued during the year' (2022), mig_res.

Another prime destination was Italy, which admitted 895,000 people for family reasons. Among the newly admitted Moroccans (123,000), Albanians (117,000) and Egyptians (49,000), marriage migration played a significant role. People admitted from South Asia (India, 48,000; Bangladesh, 47,000) were predominantly the dependent family members of recruited workers.

Sweden issued 424,000 first residence permits for family reasons. About a third were issued to citizens of key refugee-producing countries (Syria, 64,000; Somalia, 25,000; Eritrea, 23,000; Iraq, 21,000). Among them were both family members of recently recognised refugees and marriage migrants.

# Asylum seekers and refugees

## First asylum requests

The number of first-time asylum-seekers rose from 200,000 (annual average 2008–10) to more than 1.2 million per year in 2015–16. This increase was closely linked to the civil wars in Syria and Iraq, as well as to instability and political violence in Afghanistan. During 2015 and 2016, irregular arrivals across the Mediterranean and via the Western Balkan countries peaked. Since 2017 the numbers arriving by these routes have been in decline. The number of first-time asylum applications dropped to 630,000 in 2019 and to 417,000 in 2020. The latter was not only the result of travel restrictions linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, but also to asylum bureaucracies in the receiving countries temporarily not processing claims.[52] In 2022 first asylum requests doubled compared to 2020, reaching 884,000, which represented the highest level since the refugee crisis of 2015 and 2016 (Figure 7). In 2023 the number of first asylum requests was again over 1 million.[53]

During the analysed period the composition of asylum seekers shifted significantly. Initially the majority of them had come in an irregular manner across the Mediterranean and/or via the Western Balkans. Today only a minority of asylum seekers still reach EU territory as irregular migrants.[54] The majority arrive in an orderly manner: as tourists and travellers, students, posted workers and so on, asking for asylum after having entered the EU/Schengen area at a regular border crossing point; or as the dependent family member (spouse, child below age 18) of a recognised refugee. In many EU countries the latter are registered as asylum seekers despite the fact that they had already been granted legal access through family reunion prior to their arrival. In some EU countries even the children of refugees born on their territory are registered as asylum seekers.

Between 2013 and 2022, Germany received by far the largest number of first asylum requests (2.4 million). France (946,000) came a distant second. Next in line were Italy (652,000) and Spain (505,000). Among the smaller EU countries, Sweden (404,000) and Greece (363,000) registered considerable numbers of asylum seekers.[55]

[52] Many asylum seekers actually arriving in 2020 were only registered and processed in 2021.

[53] *Eurostat*, 'First-time asylum applications up 20% in 2023' (last update 25 March 2024).

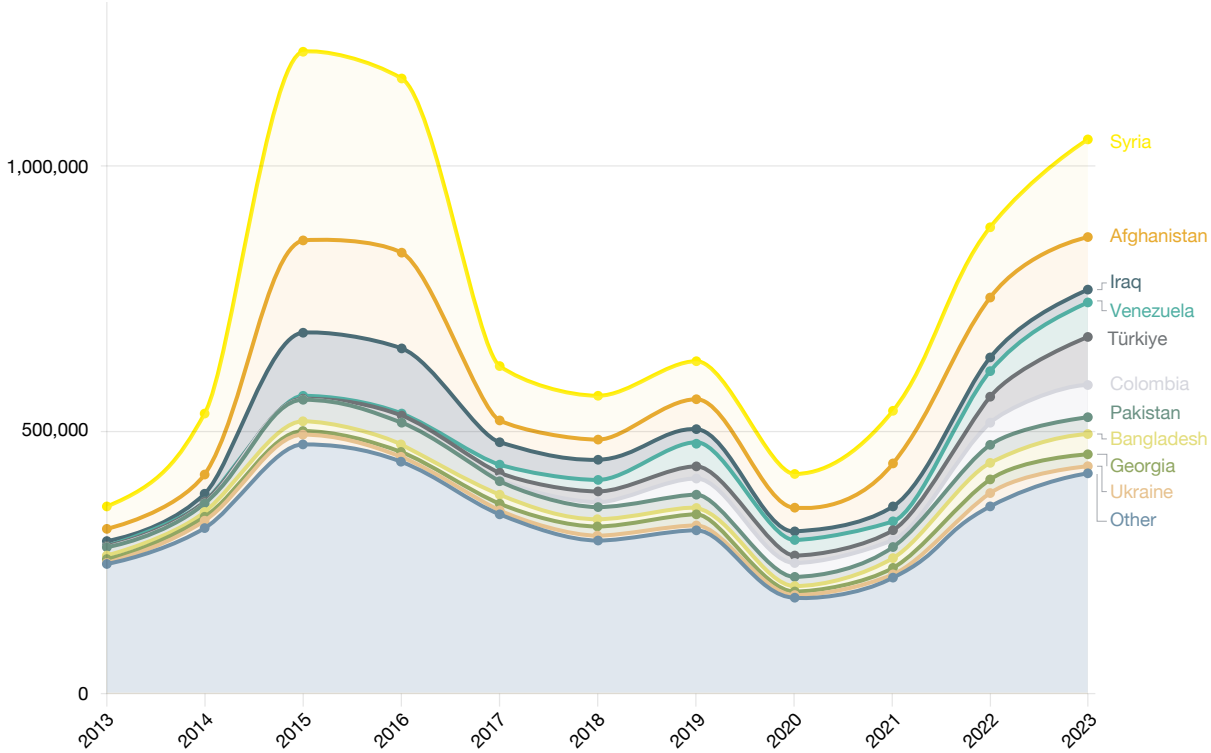
[54] 2023: 380,000 irregular border crossings into an EU member state; among them about 60,000 double counts of asylum seekers crossing first into Greece or Bulgaria and later into Croatia or Hungary. *Frontex*, 'Significant rise in irregular border crossings in 2023'.

[55] *Eurostat*, 'Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex – annual aggregated data' (last update 7 March 2024).

The geographic distribution of first asylum requests offers a few insights into the dynamics observed over the past decade. Between 2013 and 2022, the six EU countries with the largest numbers of first asylum requests (as listed above) became responsible for two-thirds of all asylum seekers arriving in the EU. Among them, Italy and Greece registered many more irregular arrivals than asylum requests, indicating substantial secondary movements of asylum seekers along the 'Balkan route' as well as across Italy's northern borders. The majority of EU countries reported comparatively small numbers of asylum seekers. This was partly due to their geographic location (e.g. the Baltic states, Czechia, Ireland and Portugal). Others managed to avoid registering asylum seekers despite considerable flows across their territories (e.g. Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia) or (more or less) successfully shielded themselves from such flows (e.g. Finland, Malta, Poland and Romania).

During the period, Syrians (1.4 million) and Afghans (0.8 million) were by far the largest national groups seeking asylum, with numbers peaking in 2015–16 and remaining quantitatively relevant throughout the whole period. Third in line were Iraqis (440,000), whose numbers also peaked in 2015–16, but have been far smaller in more recent years. Next in line were citizens of Venezuela (184,000, with arrivals beginning in 2017) and Colombia (132,000 since 2018), as well as Turks (165,000), who started to arrive in 2017 and have recently moved into the top five groups of origin (see Figure 7).

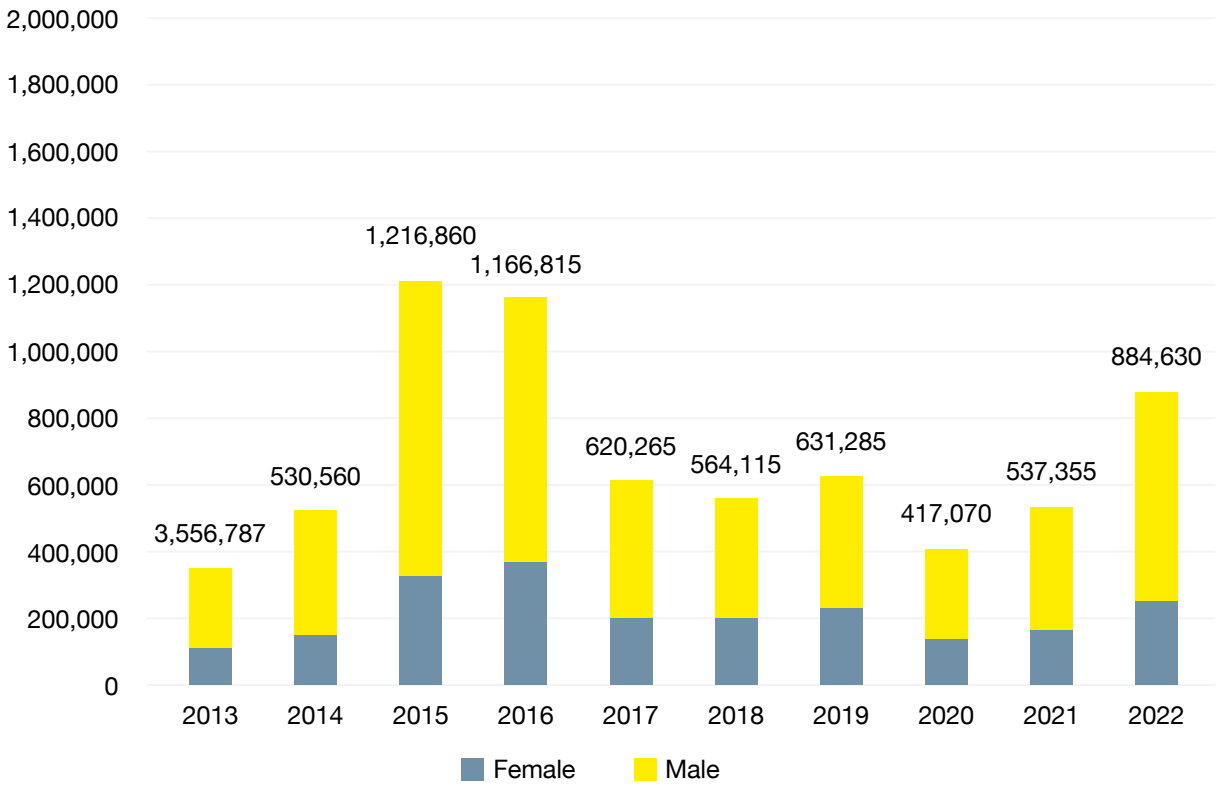
**Figure 7 First-time asylum applicants to the EU27, 2013–23, by country of origin**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex – annual aggregated data' (last update 7 March 2024), mig_asyappctza.

Between 2013 and 2022 asylum flows were dominated by (mostly young) men. Female first-time asylum seekers accounted for only about one-third of all requests (Figure 8). A non-negligible minority of asylum seekers were unaccompanied minors.

**Figure 8 First-time asylum applicants to the EU27, 2013–22, by gender**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex – annual aggregated data', (last update 7 March 2024), mig_asyappctza.

*Note*: Gender aggregations for Slovakia and Greece in 2013 are estimated.

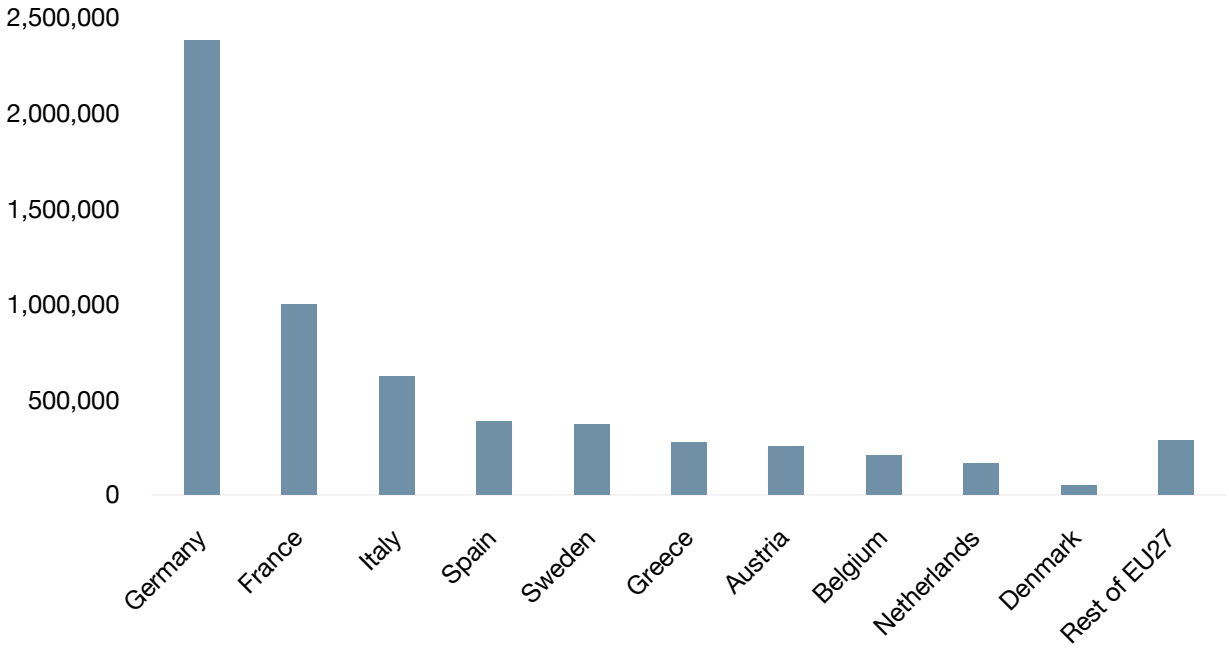
The processing of asylum seekers is distributed quite unevenly among EU countries compared to their first admission or registration, because the EU country of first arrival is not necessarily the EU country in which an asylum seeker is registered for the first time.[56] Because of further 'secondary movements', the claims of many asylum seekers are processed in an EU country other than the one in which the entry or the asylum request was registered in the first place. This is because the Dublin regulations—which determine in principle which EU country is responsible for the processing of an asylum claim—are no longer fully applied and enforced by the EU member states.[57] Asylum seekers are rarely returned to the country where they first entered the EU/Schengen area. And irregular migrants who do not immediately ask for asylum when crossing an external EU/Schengen border are not usually prevented from moving on to another EU/Schengen country.

Because of these secondary movements within the EU, the uneven administrative as well as fiscal burdens caused by asylum seekers can best be captured by looking at the number of processed claims with positive or negative decisions. Between 2013 and 2022 about six million asylum claims were decided. During this period Germany was the country which processed the largest number of asylum cases (2,371,000), followed by France (988,000), Italy (624,000) and Spain (380,000). Altogether these four countries accounted for 73% of all first-instance decisions (see Figure 9). Among the smaller EU countries, Sweden, Greece, Austria and Belgium processed comparatively high numbers of claims. However, in the majority of EU countries, the numbers of claims decided were fairly small: either because there were no arrivals, or because most asylum seekers had moved on to other EU/Schengen countries or to the UK.

[56] During the analysed period, Italy and Greece registered many more irregular arrivals than asylum requests. Hungary, in most cases, did not accept asylum applications from irregular migrants arriving on its territory. Furthermore, people travelling with valid documents can easily enter the EU/Schengen area in a particular country and ask for asylum in another country.

[57] *European Commission*, 'Country Responsible for Asylum Application (Dublin Regulation)' (2020).

**Figure 9 First-instance decisions on asylum applications (positive and negative), 2013–22, by top 10 countries of destination**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'First-instance decisions on asylum applications by type of decision, citizenship, age and sex' (2022), migr_asydcfsta.

## Positive decisions on asylum applications

Between 2013 and 2022, some 2.8 million asylum seekers were granted protection under first-instance decisions. After second-instance revisions, we can assume that more than three million (out of a total of six million asylum seekers with decided claims) received refugee status or subsidiary protection.[58] This means that more than 50% of all first- and second-instance decisions were positive. The highest numbers of positive decisions were made in 2016 and 2017, reflecting the massive inflows of Afghans, Iraqis and Syrians in 2015–16 (Figure 10).

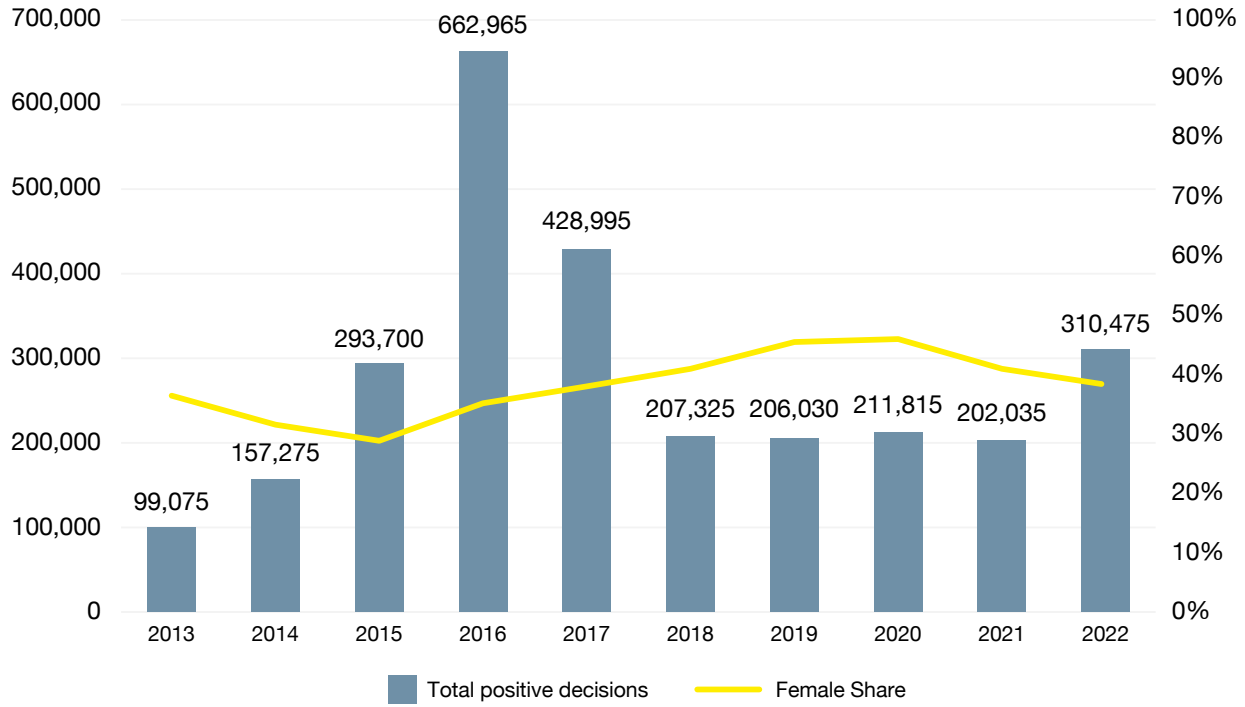
In 2022, another peak year, nearly half of all first-instance decisions made on asylum applications were positive (49%). Thus, 310,000 asylum seekers were granted protection status (up 54% compared to 2021; see Figure 10). Of them 143,000 received refugee status (46% of all positive decisions), 101,000 (33%) were given subsidiary protection and 66,000 (21%) were granted humanitarian protection.

The share of women being granted protection fluctuated between 28% and 46% (Figure 10). Given the dominance of males among asylum seekers in the EU, the fact that between 30 and 40% of all positive first-instance decisions in 2018–22 were granted to women clearly indicates that female applicants were more likely to get refugee status than male applicants.[59]

[58] Subsidiary protection is a lesser form of protection given to a third-country national or a stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but might face a real risk of suffering serious harm if returned to the country of origin or former residence. See *European Commission*, 'Migration and Home Affairs (Glossary) – Subsidiary Protection'.

[59] This can partly be explained by the composition of dependent family members joining recognised refugees already residing in the EU. Most of these dependent family members are women and children (below age 18). Several EU countries register them as first asylum seekers with automatic access to refugee status. This then creates a higher percentage of female asylum seekers being recognised as refugees.

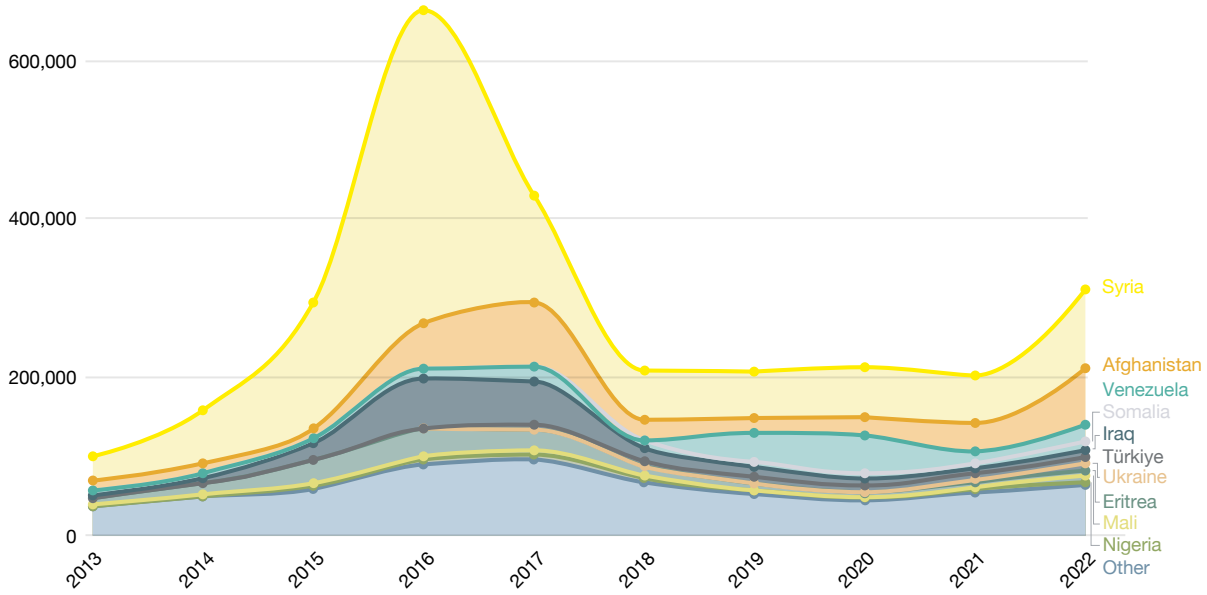
**Figure 10 First-instance positive decisions on asylum applications, 2013–22, female share in %**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'First-instance decisions on asylum applications by type of decision, citizenship, age and sex' (2022), migr_asydcfsta.

Since 2013 asylum seekers from Syria have been the largest group to be granted protection in the EU27 (Figure 11). In 2022 Syrians received 100,700 positive decisions (32% of the total), most of which were granted by Germany (67,700). In the same year, 70,600 Afghan nationals received positive decisions (23%); half of them in Germany. The third-largest group receiving positive decisions were Venezuelans (22,000; 7% of the 2022 total), almost all of them granted by Spain.

**Figure 11 First-instance positive decisions on asylum applications, 2013–22, by country of citizenship**

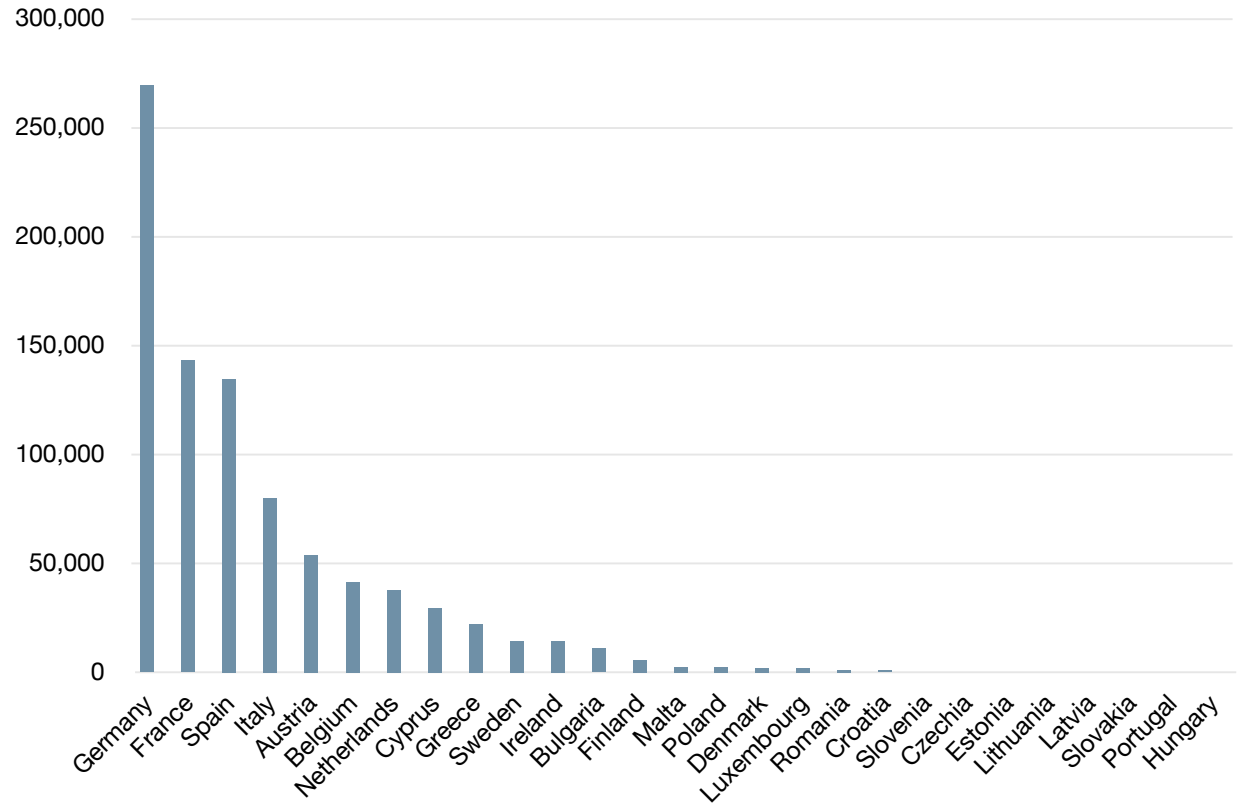



*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'First-instance decisions on asylum applications by type of decision, citizenship, age and sex' (2022), migr_asydcfsta.

With 2.8 million people granted asylum or temporary protection in 2013–22, family reunion became (and will remain) an issue for dependent family members of recognised refugees. This secondary flow of citizens originating from refugee-producing countries (or from transit countries hosting refugees, such as Jordan, Lebanon and Türkiye) is already visible and will remain significant during the coming years.

At the end of 2022, 877,785 applications for international protection in EU member states were still under consideration by national authorities. Germany had the largest share of pending applications (268,895, or 30.6% of the EU total), ahead of France (142,940, or 16.3%) and Spain (134,740, or 15.4%) (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12 Pending asylum applications from third-country nationals, by EU state, December 2022**

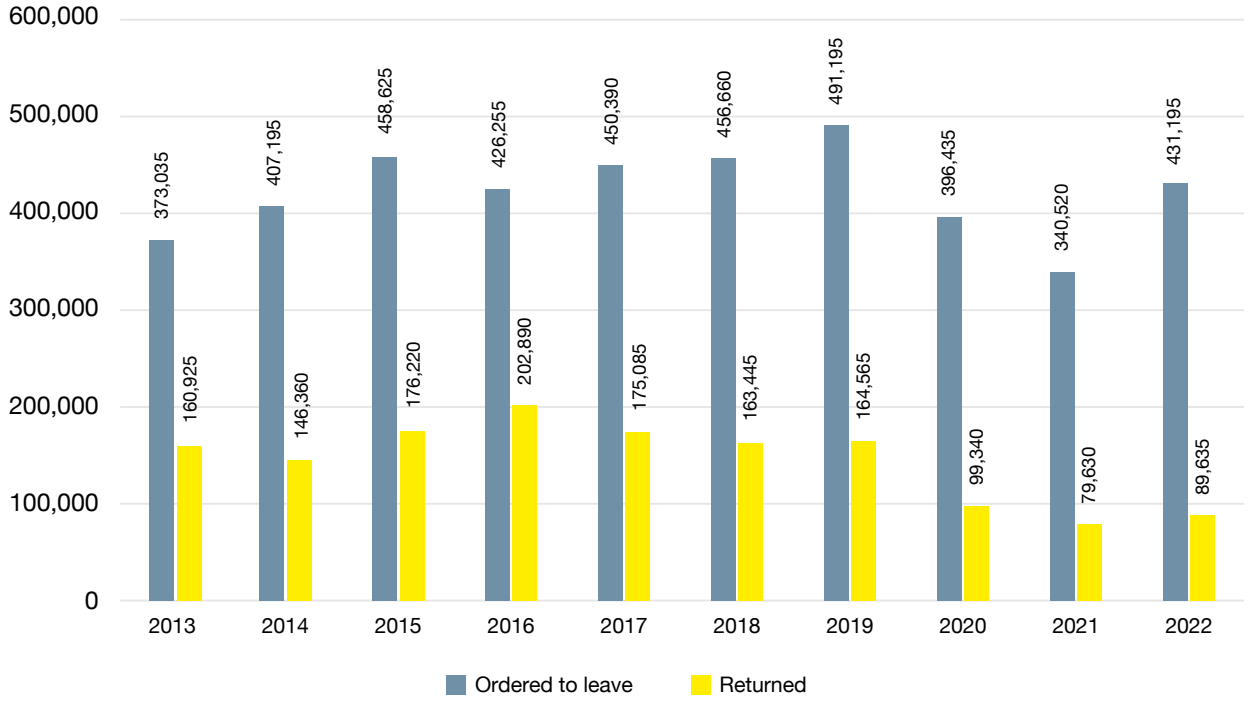



*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'First-time and subsequent asylum applicants in EU countries' (2022), migr_asyappctzm.

## Emigration and return

Between 2013 and 2022 about 10 million EU citizens and third-country nationals left the EU. These included 1.4 million people without a valid residence permit, as well as rejected asylum seekers (14% of all people leaving the EU). This was, however, only about one third of the 3.9 million people who had received an order to leave an EU country (Figure 13).[60]

**Figure 13 Third-country nationals ordered to leave an EU country versus effective returns (voluntary, assisted or enforced), 2013–22**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Third-country nationals ordered to leave – annual data (rounded)', migr_eiord1; *Eurostat*, 'Third country nationals returned following an order to leave – annual data (rounded)', migr_eirtn1.

[60] See *Eurostat*, 'Third-country nationals ordered to leave – annual data (rounded)'; and *Eurostat*, 'Third country nationals returned following an order to leave – annual data (rounded)'.

The low rates of return for migrants without a valid legal residence status have created a sizeable group of migrants in legal limbo or with an unenforceable order to leave the EU member state in which they reside. Depending on the host country, migrants with an expired residence permit or a rejected asylum claim, as well as visa over-stayers, usually only find work in the informal economy (as irregular agricultural or construction workers, in restaurants and hospitality, in private households, as prostitutes, etc.).

# 2022: a very special year

## Mass immigration to the EU

With an inflow of 7 million[61] non-EU nationals to the 27 EU countries, 2022 was the year in which Europe was confronted with the largest number of immigrants recorded since the end of the mass displacements, expulsions and ethnic cleansing that occurred at the end and in the aftermath of the Second World War.[62] When deducting the 2.7 million people who left the EU in 2022, the net gain from migration (4.3 million) also reached an all-time high.[63]

The record high numbers of 2022 mainly had to do with the arrival of over five million Ukrainians who had been displaced by Russia's military aggression against their home country. Of these, 3.8 million remained as (at least temporary) migrants in the EU.[64] The application of the EU-wide temporary protection status for Ukrainians reinforced the image of the EU as an entity that privileges humanitarian admissions.[65]

[61] This figure includes the 3.8 million Ukrainians who were still living in the EU at the end of 2022 (out of the more than 5 million who had entered the EU at some point during 2022), the 1.8 million recipients of newly issued national first residence permits and EU Blue Cards, as well as the 0.9 million who had made first asylum applications.

[62] In the period 1945–7 about 15 million Europeans were forcibly displaced. See P. Ahonen et al., *People on the Move: Forced Population Movements in Europe in the Second World War and Its Aftermath* (Oxford: Berg, 2008); Gatrell, *The Unsettling of Europe*; and N. M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth- Century Europe* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[63] *European Commission*, 'Statistics on Migration to Europe' (2024).

[64] That is, they were still present in the EU on 31 December 2022.

[65] *European Commission*, 'Migration and Home Affairs (Glossary) – Temporary Protection'. The possibility of granting EU-wide temporary protection (based on the decision of the EU Justice and Home Affairs minister) was established in 2001, but was not applied until 2022. In the past, several EU countries had applied collective temporary protection to certain groups of people seeking protection (e.g. in the years 1992–5 to Bosnians fleeing to Austria and Germany).

At the same time, an unprecedented nearly 1.8 million new residence permits (with a validity of 12+ months) were issued for education, employment[66] and family reasons by the 27 EU countries. This represented a 34% increase compared to the previous year (2021: 1.4 million) and a remarkable 78% increase compared to the numbers during the peak of the global Covid-19 pandemic (in 2020 just 1 million first residence permits were issued).

With 320,000 first residence permits issued for family, education and employment reasons (including Blue Cards), Spain was the most important destination for third-country nationals in 2022, followed by Germany (301,000), Italy (212,000), France (200,000) and Poland (127,000).

In 2020 the number of first residence permits issued for employment reasons was low (389,000) due to the Covid-19 pandemic, travel restrictions, and the sudden drop in demand for labour and skills from non-EU countries. However, this decline had already reversed in 2021 (551,000), and in 2022 the number of first residence permits issued for employment reasons (45% of all permits issued) had more than doubled compared to 2020, to 834,000. This was the highest number recorded since 2008, the first reliable year for this data.

Spain (143,000), Germany (119,000) and Poland (110,000) issued most of the first residence permits for employment reasons (including EU Blue Cards) in 2022. Workers from Ukraine (128,000), India (79,000), Morocco (45,000) and Brazil (36,000) were among the five largest national groups granted first residence permits and EU Blue Cards.

The first residence permits issued for education reasons accounted for only 13% of all permits issued in 2022. Similarly to work permits, their number had also increased by 60% (236,000) compared to the first Covid-19 pandemic year (147,600), when most teaching had taken place online, thus reducing the demand for student immigration visas. In 2022 France, Germany and Italy were among the top issuers of first residence permits for education purposes, with 61,200, 39,600 and 23,000 student permits issued respectively. The students to whom they were issued were mainly Indian (25,000), Chinese (19,000) and Moroccan (16,000).

Marriage migration and family reunion remained one of the main gates of entry for those legally migrating to and staying in the EU27: 770,000 residence permits valid for 12+ months were issued for family

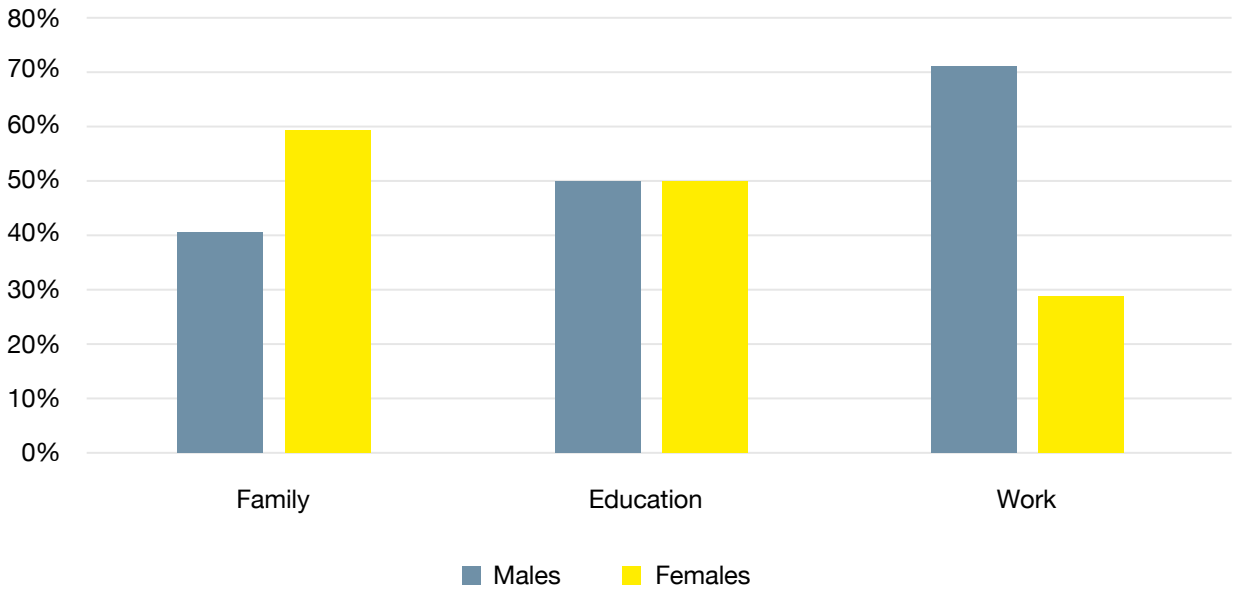


[66] Including EU Blue Cards.

reasons. Countries with a significant number of immigrants and established diaspora communities issued most of the permits for family reasons, enabling marriage migration and—to a lesser degree—classical family reunion. These were Spain (154,000), Italy (126,000) and France (90,000). The largest national groups newly admitted as marriage migrants or dependent family members were from Morocco (75,000), India (41,000) and Albania (38,000). Notably, Germany recorded a 194% increase in the issuance of family-related residence permits (143,000) when compared with 2021 (48,500).

As expected, women were overrepresented among the non-EU citizens being granted first residence permits for marriage and family reasons. Men clearly outnumbered women among those who were admitted for work, while the gender balance among holders of educational permits was almost equal (Figure 14).

**Figure 14 First residence permits by reason and gender, 2022**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits – statistics on first permits issued during the year' (2022), mig_res.

*Note*: Certain data on gender distribution are not available for Poland, Croatia, the Netherlands, Greece and Lithuania.

## Asylum in 2022

Asylum seekers arrived from a wide range of regions, with Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela and Türkiye being the top countries of origin in 2022. While the Syrian civil war has basically ended and the armed conflict was mainly confined to Idlib province, citizens of this country remain the largest group of asylum seekers in the EU. In 2022, 132,550 Syrians applied for protection in the EU27, accounting for 15% of the total number of first-time asylum applications (Figure 7). Most of them came from transit countries: notably Türkiye, but also Lebanon and Egypt.

Afghan nationals were in second place, submitting 114,290 first-time asylum applications, or 13% of the total. The surge in the number of Afghan asylum seekers was a result of the Taliban takeover in mid-2021, which resulted in widespread human rights abuses and the collapse of the local economy once the military and most humanitarian and non-governmental organisations had withdrawn, and foreign financial aid had been suspended (Figure 7).

A significant number of first-time asylum applications were also made by Venezuelans (50,050) escaping the ongoing politico-economic and humanitarian crisis in their country, but asylum seekers also came from the much more stable Colombia (42,420).[67] Another 49,875 were Turkish citizens, reflecting a deterioration of economic and political conditions in Türkiye.

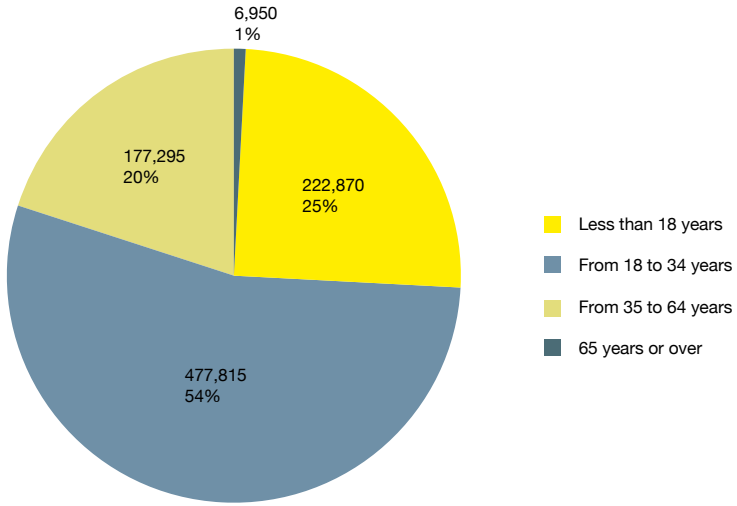
In 2022 adult asylum seekers dominated among first-time applicants, with more than half of the applicants aged between 18 and 34 (478,000; 54%) and 184,000, or 21%, 35 years or older. A quarter (25%) of applications were made by minors aged below 18 (223,000) (see Figure 13). Of these, 42,000 were unaccompanied minors,[68] who represented 5% of all first-time asylum seekers.

The total number of asylum seekers receiving a positive first-instance decision in 2022 was 310,500 (Figure 11). Germany (128,500) reported the highest number of positive first-instance decisions (constituting 41% all positive decisions), followed by France (35,600; 11%), Spain (35,100; 11%) and Italy (25,700; 8%) (see Figure 16).

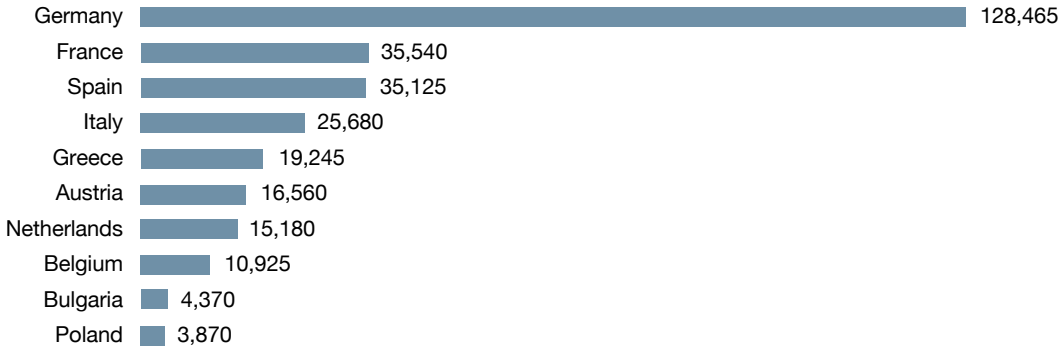
[67] As Colombians and Venezuelans (like most other citizens of Latin American and Caribbean countries) do not need a Schengen visa when travelling to the EU, asylum seekers from this region (also including Guatemalans, Hondurans and Salvadorians) usually arrive in a regular manner and are therefore not registered as irregular entrants.

[68] *Eurostat*, 'Children in migration – asylum applicants' (2023).

**Figure 15 First-time asylum applicants to the EU27 in 2022, by age**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex – annual aggregated data', migr_asyappctza




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'First-instance decisions on asylum applications by type of decision, citizenship, age and sex' (2022), mig_asydcfsta.

## Displaced Ukrainians

As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, between February 2022 and December 2023 more than six million Ukrainians were forced or decided to leave their homes and move to another European country, either for a short time or an extended period.[69] Another 1.3 million moved to Russia: some on a voluntary basis, many others—including unaccompanied children—against their will.[70]

In March 2022 the EU interior ministers activated the Temporary Protection Directive to allow EU member states to grant Ukrainian citizens (and potentially persons of other nationality leaving Ukraine) temporary residence permits in the EU quickly and unbureaucratically.[71] Temporary protection was initially granted for one year and has since been extended for subsequent periods of 12 months.[72]

By the end of December 2023, the 27 EU countries were still granting temporary protection status to around 4.3 million persons who had fled Ukraine due to the Russian aggression and had not returned or moved on to overseas destinations (Figure 17). Almost all of them were Ukrainians (99%), but other nationalities included Russians (12,000; 0.3%), Nigerians (5,000; 0.1%) and Azeris (4,000; 0.1%).[73]

[69] As of September 2023. Of them, 5 million arrived in 2022, but only 3.8 million remained until the end of 2022. By the end of 2023 the number had grown to four million. See *Statista*, 'Estimated Number of Refugees From Ukraine Recorded in Europe and Asia Since February 2022 as of March 2024' (2024).

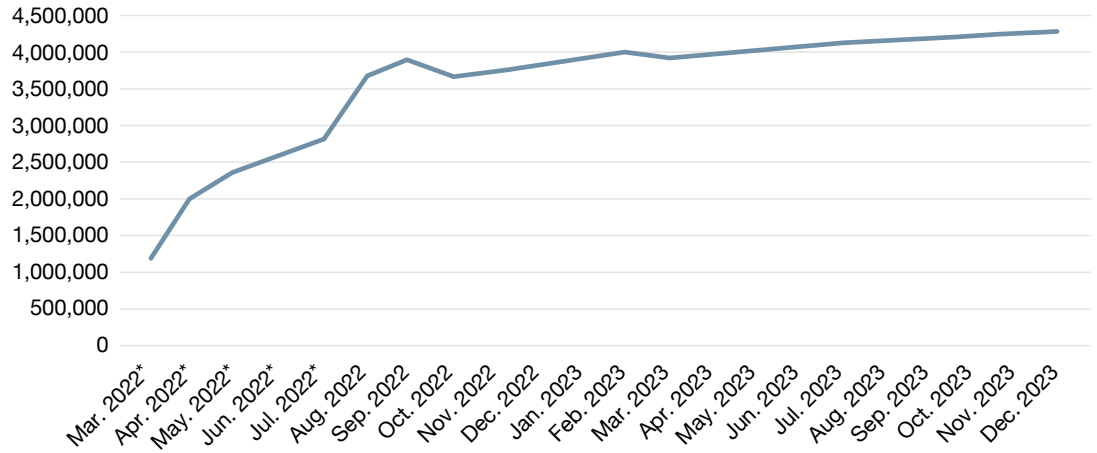
[70] *UNHCR*, 'Ukraine Refugee Situation' (2024).

[71] *European Commission*, 'Migration and Home Affairs (Glossary) – Temporary Protection'.

[72] *European Commission*, 'EU Solidarity With Ukraine: Commission Proposes to Extend Temporary Protection for People Fleeing Russian Aggression Against Ukraine Until March 2025', Press Release (19 September 2023).

[73] *Eurostat*, 'Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month by citizenship, age and sex – monthly data' (2024).

**Figure 17 Numbers of persons who fled Ukraine and were under temporary protection in the EU27, by month**



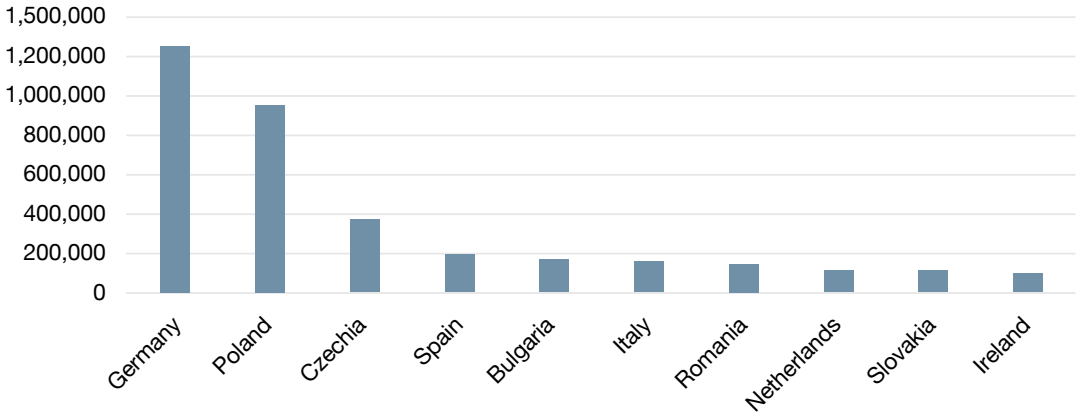

*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month by citizenship, age and sex – monthly data' (2024), migr_asytpsm.

*Note*: The figure shows the EU total, excluding Germany (data not available between March and August 2022), France (data for minors is excluded), Austria (data not available between March and June 2022), Hungary and Slovakia (March 2022 data not available).

As of December 2023, the EU countries hosting the largest numbers of people who had fled Ukraine residing in the EU under temporary protection were Germany (1.25 million people; 30% of the total), Poland (955,000; 23%), Czechia (373,000; 9%), Spain (195,000; 5%) and Bulgaria (171,000; 4%) (see Figure 18).[74] Outside the EU, the UK (175,000),[75] Moldova (110,000)[76] and Switzerland (75,000)[77] also hosted significant numbers of Ukrainians.

[74] In December 2023 the total number of Ukrainians under temporary protection in the EU was 4.2 million. See Eurostat, 'Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month by citizenship, age and sex – monthly data'.
[75] *UK Government*, 'How Many People Do We Grant Protection To?' (last update 14 November 2023).
[76] *UNHCR*, 'Ukraine Refugee Situation Republic of Moldova' (2023).
[77] *Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe*, 'Ukraine'.

**Figure 18 Top 10 EU countries hosting Ukrainians under temporary protection, December 2023**

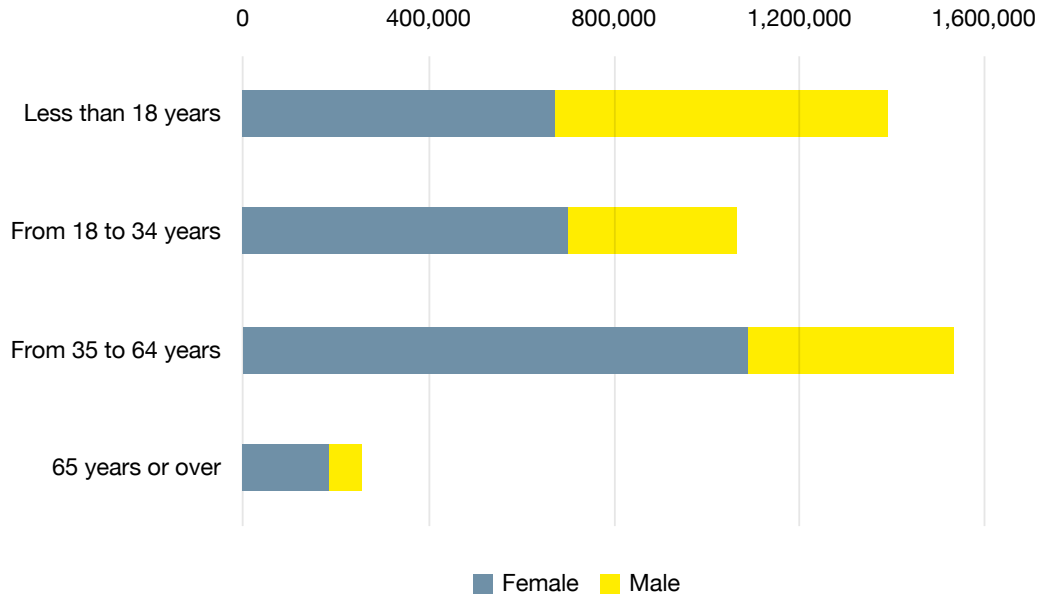



*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month by citizenship, age and sex – monthly data', migr_asytpsm.

The majority (61%) of displaced Ukrainians in the EU[78] were of working age (18 to 64 years) and predominantly women. Minors constituted a third of the group (33%). Only about 6% were retired people. The gender ratio among minors was relatively balanced (673,880 girls vs. 715,250 boys). The fact that adult men accounted for only a fifth (21%) of the temporary protection beneficiaries is largely explained by the martial law and mobilisation of men in Ukraine since February 2022. This prevented most of them from leaving the country legally. As a result, the majority of the Ukrainians benefiting from temporary protection in Europe are women and children (Figure 19).

[78] This excludes the figures for Hungary.

**Figure 19 Ukrainian temporary protection beneficiaries, by age and gender, December 2023**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month by citizenship, age and sex – monthly data', migr_asytpsm.

*Note*: The figure shows the EU total, excluding Hungary.

The situation of displaced Ukrainians under temporary protection in the EU27 differs from that of asylum seekers. On the one hand, Ukrainians under this protection can freely choose the EU country of their residence. They are exempt from individual asylum procedures and have immediate access to EU labour markets as well as social benefits.[79] On the other hand, the temporary status of Ukrainians and the expectation that many of them will go back to their home country makes speedy socio-economic integration less likely.

[79] *European Commission*, 'Migration and Home Affairs (Glossary) – Temporary Protection'.

## Returns

In theory, any credible migration policy should be complemented by a policy facilitating returns ensuring that unsuccessful asylum seekers and other foreign nationals without valid residence permits or with expired travel visas can be repatriated to their home countries.[80] In practice, the EU member states and the EU as a whole are far from effective in this field.

In 2022 some 1.1 million non-EU nationals were found to have no valid residence permit (this includes irregular arrivals, those with expired permits and visa overstayers), an increase of 59% compared with 2021. Due to lengthy administrative procedures, contested decisions and humanitarian considerations, only 431,200 irregular non-EU nationals received an order to leave the EU.[81] A mere 17% (73,600) of them actually returned to their country of origin or previous country of residence prior to entering the EU (Figure 13). Of these, 34,000 returns were enforced while about 40,000 took place on a more or less voluntary basis, including 30,000 returns of third-country nationals taking place within the framework of an assisted return programme.[82] The main countries to which returns were actually taking place were Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Serbia and Türkiye. Citizens of Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea and Syria who were ordered to leave an EU country had the smallest return rates.[83]

[80] *European Commission*, 'A Humane and Effective Return and Readmission Policy'.
[81] *European Commission*, 'Statistics on Migration to Europe'.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

# Migrant integration in the EU

Migrant integration is a multifaceted process that involves language acquisition, as well as the economic, social, cultural and, in certain circumstances, also political participation of migrants in host countries.[84] The most relevant dimensions are economic activity, educational enrolment, social inclusion and acquisition of citizenship.

## Labour market participation

Available labour market data clearly indicate the impact of origins and citizenship on employment and unemployment. In 2022, 75% of people aged 20–65 living in their EU country of citizenship were economically active. Mobile EU citizens had a slightly higher employment rate (77%), outperforming the natives. In contrast, with only 62% economically active, third-country nationals age 20–65 residing in the EU had a much lower employment rate.[85]

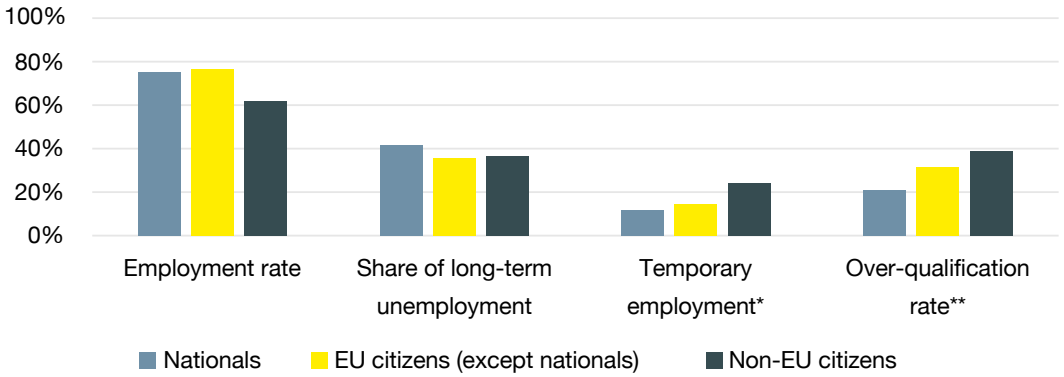
While the employment rate among non-mobile nationals of the EU member states is high, their share in long-term unemployment (42%) was also notably higher in 2022 than that of both mobile EU citizens (36%) and third-country nationals (37%) (see Figure 20).[86]

[84] In order to measure the integration of migrants in various dimensions, a set of indicators was established by a European ministerial conference on integration in 2010. See *European Commission*, 'Declaration of the European Ministerial Conference on Integration' (Zaragoza, 16 April 2010). The data presented in this section also cover displaced Ukrainians under temporary protection who started to enter EU countries in late February 2022. For practical reasons (not being represented in the household sample because of recent arrival; not being able to answer the questions because of language problems), it is likely that they are underrepresented in the analysed Labour Force Survey (LFS) data for 2022. For more details on the Labour Force Survey see: *Eurostat*, 'Microdata – EU labour force survey'. Relevant data can also be found in Bongiardo, Crespi and Sofos (eds.), *Atlas of Migration 2023.*

[85] *Eurostat*, 'Employment rates by sex, age and citizenship' (2022).

[86] *Eurostat*, 'Long-term unemployment (12 months or more) as a percentage of total unemployment, by sex, age and citizenship (%)' (2023).

**Figure 20 Labour market integration of migrants, age 20–64, in the EU27 in 2022, by citizenship (%)**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Employment rates by sex, age and citizenship' (2023), lfsa_ergan.

*Notes*: * = temporary employees as percentage of the total number of employees. ** = the over-qualification rate shows the proportion of employed persons aged 20–64 with a tertiary level of educational attainment who are employed in a low- or medium-skilled occupation.

Third-country nationals residing in the EU27 were significantly more likely to be temporarily employed (in 2022: 25%) than mobile EU citizens (15%) or non-mobile EU nationals living in their country of citizenship (12%). Only being able to engage in temporary employment potentially poses obstacles to the long-term economic stability and social integration of third-country nationals residing in the EU. At the same time immigrants holding residence permits of a limited duration will clearly have difficulty getting a stable employment contract with a longer time horizon.

Additionally, migrants from outside the EU quite often find themselves working in positions below their formal qualification levels. In 2022 almost 40% of the employed non-EU citizens aged 20–64 were working in low- or medium-skilled occupations despite having a tertiary degree. For comparison, the over-qualification rate among nationals was 21% and among mobile EU citizens was 32%.[87]

[87] *Eurostat*, 'Non-nationals more likely over-qualified than nationals' (9 March 2023).

There are two main reasons for this. The first may be the existence of a mismatch between formal qualifications and actual employment,[88] which can either be the result of obstacles in obtaining recognition for foreign qualifications and previous work experience or due to acquired skills not matching the requirements of the labour markets in EU destination countries.[89] The second reason is the possibility of discrimination in the workplace, for which there is empirical evidence.[90]

At the same time, over-qualification among migrants is also influenced by the migration and integration policies of individual EU member states. In some EU countries (such as Belgium and Austria), work permit regulations require third-country nationals to reapply for permits when switching jobs. This can thus limit migrants' flexibility in finding employment that aligns with their skills and education.[91]

Beyond that, the lower employment rates of non-EU citizens in general and of women in particular can be explained by the fact that over the past decade only a minority of newly arriving immigrants have been admitted because of their skills. The majority of adults arrived by way of marriage or family reunion, or as asylum seekers who were granted refugee status or humanitarian protection. Empirical data show that the economic integration of family migrants and refugees takes place at a much slower pace.[92]

In recent years, the vast majority of mobile EU citizens as well as non-EU citizens admitted as labour migrants integrated into the labour market quickly (with average employment rates in the first five years after arrival of 86% for men and 78% for women). Over time these employment rates tend to drop (at more than 10 years after arrival, 79% of men and 68% of women were employed) (see Figure 21). This gradual decline partly has to do with family formation as many women leave the labour market (at least temporarily) when they have children.[93]

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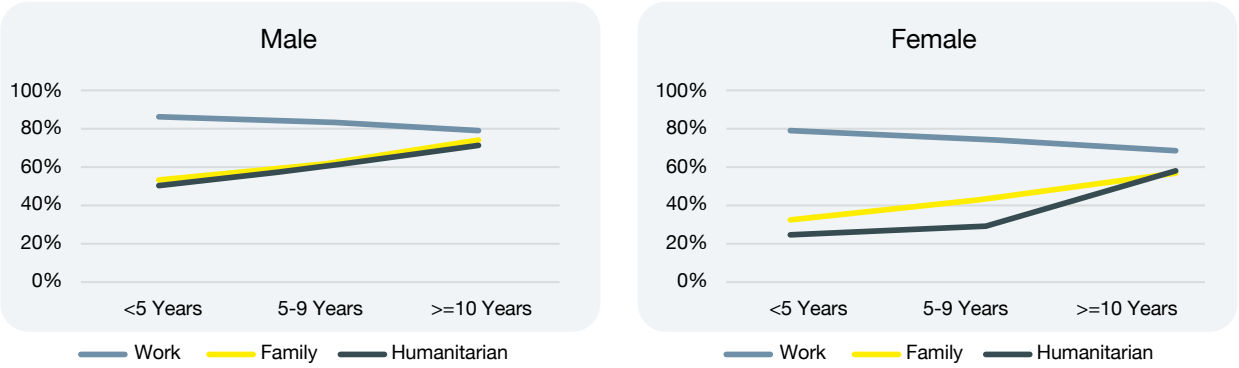
[88] T. Sparreboom and A. Tarvid, *Skills Mismatch of Natives and Immigrants in Europe*, International Labour Organization (Geneva, 2017).
[89] V. Margaras and K. Eisele, *Recognition of the Qualifications of Third-Country Nationals*, European Parliamentary Research Service, Briefing PE 754.594 (November 2023).
[90] European Parliament, Directorate-General Internal Polices, *Discrimination of Migrant Workers at the Workplace*, Note for the EMPL Committee (Strasbourg, 2014).
[91] L. Kijewski, 'EU Work Permit Rules Lead to Exploitation, Migrant Workers Say', *Politico*, 12 September 2023.
[92] OECD and European Commission, *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2023*; F. Endel, G. Kernbeiss and R. Münz, *Erwerbsverläufe von Migrantinnen und Migranten, mit Fluchthintergrund, aus Drittstaaten, aus der Europäischen Union*, Austrian Integration Fund (Vienna, 2022).
[93] European Commission, Directorate-General Employment, *Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2023. Annual ESDE Report* (Luxembourg, 6 July 2023).

In contrast, non-EU citizens admitted for family reasons (marriage or family reunion) had much lower employment rates (during the first five years after arrival only 52% of men and 31% of women were employed). The gap with those admitted for employment reasons only narrows after more than 10 years of residence, with employment rates increasing to 72% for men and to 57% for women initially admitted for family reasons.

The same is true for those admitted for humanitarian reasons (asylum or other forms of protection). Initially employment rates in this group are the lowest (during the first five years after arrival, only 50% of men and 23% of women were employed). These rates also recover over time (after more than 10 years, 71% of men and 58% of women were employed; see Figure 21).

**Figure 21 Labour market integration of migrants age 20–64 in the EU27, by gate of entry, duration of stay and gender, 2021 (%)**




*Source*: OECD and European Commission (2023), 38, based on EU-LFS 2021, https://stat.link/uev0zq

*Note*: Gate of entry defined by type of arrival (first residence permit for employment reason; first residence permit for family reason; asylum request with subsequent refugee, subsidiary or humanitarian protection status).

These initially low rates partly have to do with the fact that people arriving as newlywed spouses, dependent family members or asylum seekers are not selected for their education or skills. The low rates among female migrants can also be explained by the fact that in many places of origin (e.g. the Maghreb, Afghanistan) the majority of women do not actively participate in the formal economy.

## Education

Education is another important factor that shapes individuals' socio-economic opportunities. This is not only of particular relevance for children with a migrant background raised in a host country, but also defines the human capital of those who migrate as adults and were raised in a sending country.

Data on the educational attainment of adults living in the EU demonstrate considerable disparities depending on origin and citizenship. In 2022, 45% of all non-EU citizens living in the EU27 only had a primary or incomplete secondary education. This was twice as high as the proportion of non-mobile EU citizens with low educational attainment (22%). Among mobile EU citizens, one-third fell into this category (31%) (see Figure 22).[94]

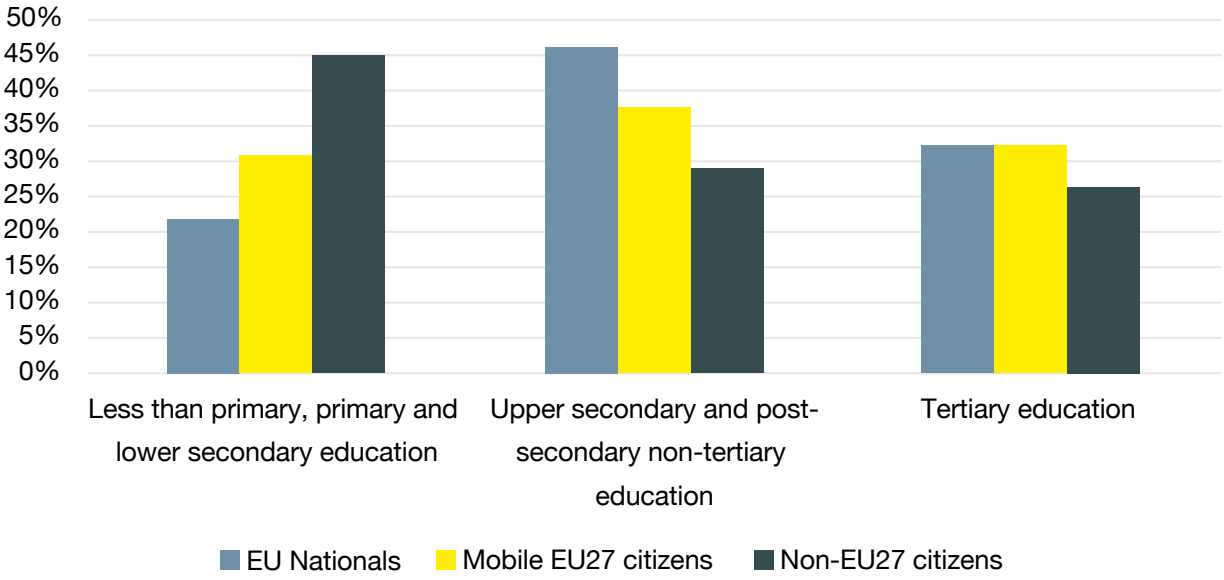
For the majority of native, non-mobile EU citizens, upper-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education are the most common educational levels (46.0%). In contrast, mobile EU citizens (38%) and non-EU citizens (29%) are less likely to have attained a medium level of education.

When it comes to higher levels of education, the gap between non-mobile EU citizens (= natives) and migrant groups was narrower. Among the natives, a third (32%) have completed tertiary education; the same percentage as among EU citizens living in another EU country. Among non-EU citizens only a quarter (26%) have a high level of educational attainment (Figure 22).

The available information suggests that many immigrants—in particular those from non-EU countries—are employed below their formal skills level.[95] This can be seen as a form of 'brain waste' as qualified immigrants are not becoming fully productive.[96]

[94] *Eurostat*, 'Population by educational attainment level, sex, age and citizenship' (2023).
[95] Sparreboom and Tarvid, *Skills Mismatch of Natives and Immigrants in Europe.*
[96] European Commission, *Skills Mismatch and Productivity in the EU* (Luxembourg, 2019).

**Figure 22 Population by educational attainment level and citizenship, 2022, in %**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Population by educational attainment level, sex, age and citizenship' (2023), lfs_9911.

## Social inclusion

According to the European Commission's *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027*, social inclusion, affordable housing and decent health for those migrating to Europe are key to the long-term well-being of migrant and local communities.[97] However, despite the efforts of the EU to promote the well-being of not just their own citizens, but all legal residents, significant disparities remain evident.

[97] European Commission, *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027*, Communication, COM (2020) 758 final (24 November 2020).

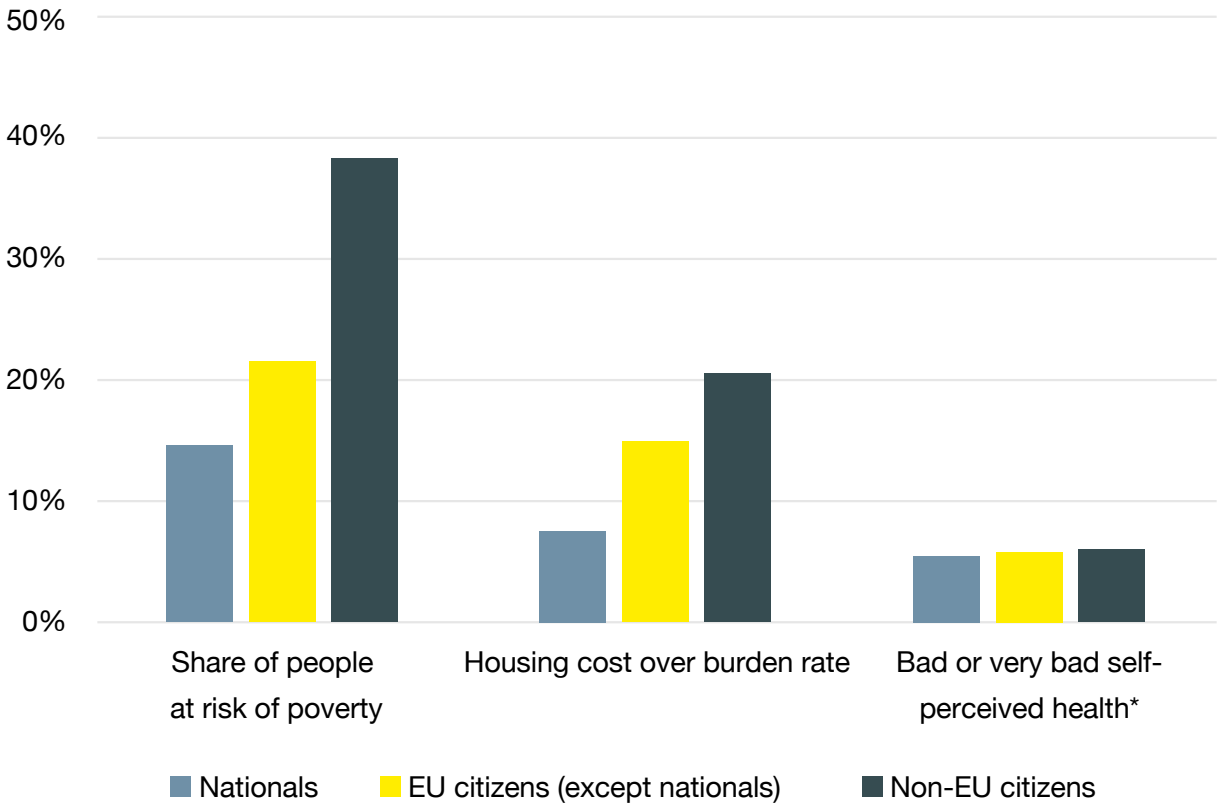
The social inclusion indicator, which includes the risk of poverty, shows that migrants are generally less socially included than EU nationals. According to the EU statistics on income and living conditions,[98] more than a third of non-EU citizens (38%) and more than one in five citizens originating from another EU country (21%) experienced social marginalisation or was close to poverty in 2021. The share among non-mobile EU citizens was lower: only one in seven (14%) faced such a risk. Non-mobile EU citizens were also the least affected by the housing cost overburden rate,[99] with only 8% facing challenges in securing adequate housing in 2021. In contrast, housing costs impacted 16% of mobile EU citizens and 21% of non-EU citizens, creating significant barriers to ensuring secure living conditions and long-term integration (Figure 23).

Lastly, the self-perceived health status of residents (aged 20–64) appears to be quite similar regardless of whether they have or do not have a migrant background. In 2021 about 6% perceived their state of health to be 'bad' or 'very bad'.

[98] *Eurostat*, 'Migrant integration statistics – at risk of poverty and social exclusion' (2023).

[99] The housing cost overburden rate refers to the proportion of the population residing in households where the total housing expenses constitute more than 40% of the available income after deducting housing subsidies. See *Eurostat*, 'Migrant integration statistics – housing' (2023).

**Figure 23 Social inclusion, housing and health indicators for people of differing migrant backgrounds aged 18–64 in the EU27 in 2021**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'At-risk-of-poverty rate by group of country of birth (population aged 18 and over)', ilc_li31 and ilc_li32; *Eurostat*, 'Housing cost overburden rate by age, sex and group of country of origin' (2022), ilc_lvho25; Eurostat, 'Self-perceived health by sex, age and groups of country of citizenship' (2023), hlth_silc_24.

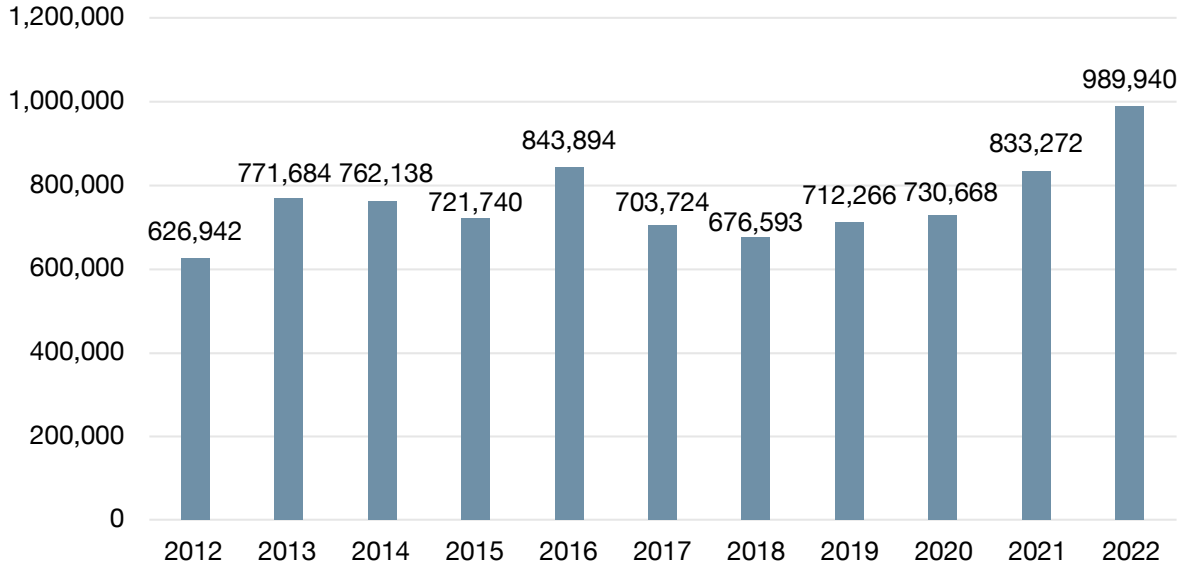
*Note*: * = age group for the self-perceived health indicator: 20–64 years.

## Political inclusion

Acquisition of citizenship is a crucial step in migrant integration as it transforms a legal foreign resident with limited rights into a fully fledged citizen in both legal and political terms.

Between 2012 and 2022, the 27 EU countries granted citizenship to 8.4 million[100] legal residents[101] and a few non-residents.[102] The annual number of naturalisations increased by 32% between 2012 and 2016 and dropped in the following years, before reaching a second peak in 2022 (see Figure 24).

**Figure 24 Citizenships granted by the 27 EU member states between 2012 and 2022**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Acquisition of citizenship by age group, sex and former citizenship' (2024), migr_acq and migr_pop1ctz.

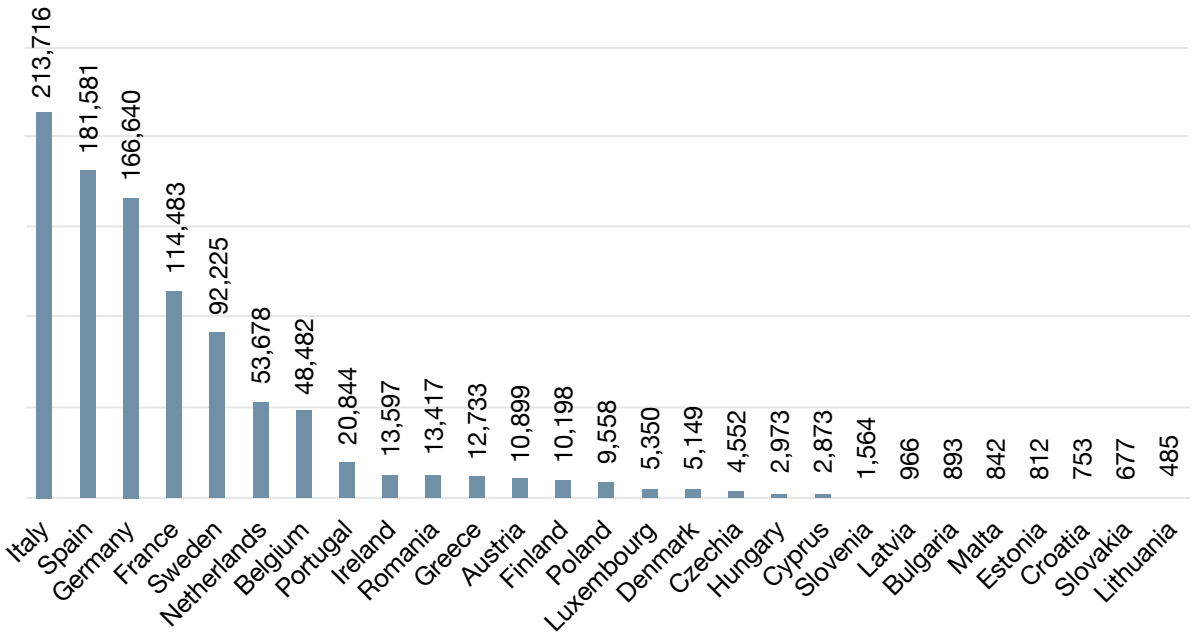
[100] This number not only includes migrants who held citizenship outside the EU, but also migrants from other EU member countries, along with individuals categorised as stateless or of unknown citizenship.

[101] Most were non-EU citizens, but it also includes EU citizens who had moved to another EU country and got naturalised.

[102] Austria and Germany, for example, are 'restituting' citizenship to Holocaust survivors and their descendants by way of naturalisation, even if they live in another country. Croatia, Hungary and Romania have generously extended citizenship to co-ethnics living in neighbouring countries.

In 2022 the EU member states granted citizenships to 989,900 persons of EU and non-EU origin. These new citizens represented 1.8% of all foreign residents. Italy was the top country for naturalisations, granting citizenship to 214,000 people in 2022, closely followed by Spain (182,000), Germany (167,000) and France (114,000). Sweden was also in the top five countries, granting citizenship to 92,000 individuals. The country with the smallest number of naturalisations in the EU was Lithuania (fewer than 500 in 2022) (see Figure 25).[103]

**Figure 25 Citizenships granted by the EU27 member states, absolute numbers, 2022**



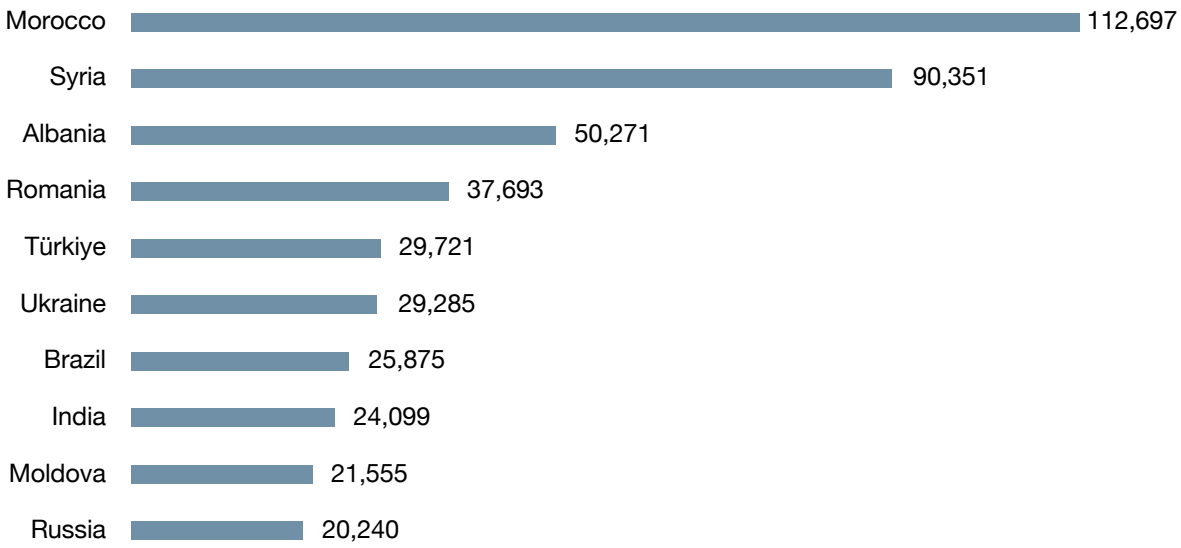

*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Acquisition of citizenship by age group, sex and former citizenship', migr_acq and migr_pop1ctz.

In 85% of all the cases, the people who were granted citizenships in 2022 were third-country nationals. Just 15% were EU citizens who wanted to change their nationality. Moroccans (112,700) and Syrians (90,400) constituted a significant portion of the recipients of citizenship, with each group accounting for

[103] *Eurostat*, 'Acquisition of citizenship by age group, sex and former citizenship'.

around 9%–11% of the total number granted by one of the 27 EU member states. Former citizens of Albania (50,300), Romania (37,700) and Türkiye (29,700) were also among the major groups of people naturalised by EU countries in 2022, followed by Ukrainians (29,300) and Brazilians (25,900) (see Figure 26).[104]

**Figure 26 Acquisition of citizenship of an EU member state in 2022, top 10 countries of former citizenship**



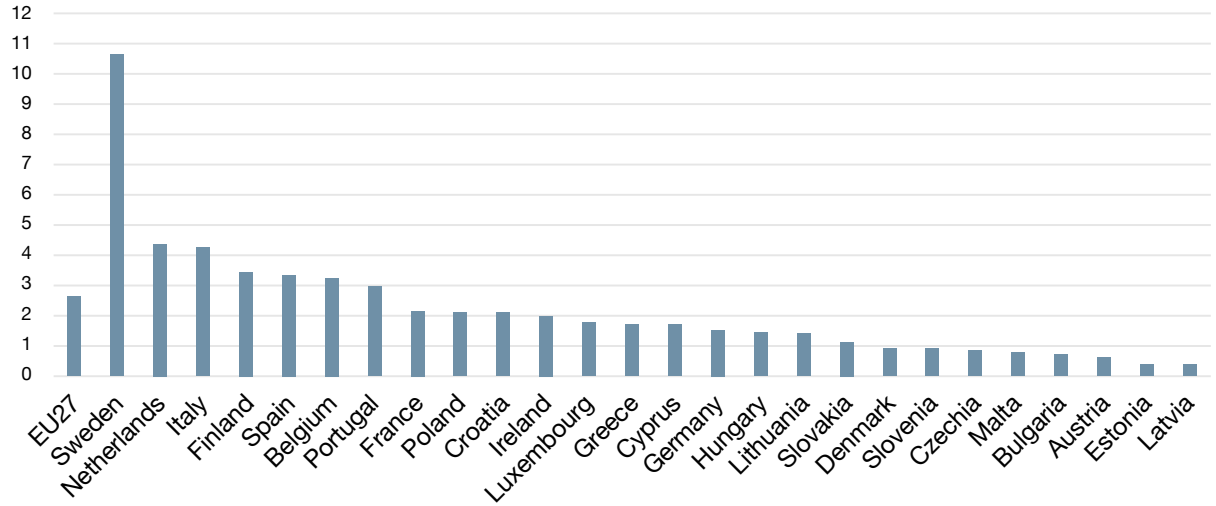

Relative to the size of its foreign resident population, Sweden had by far the highest naturalisation rate in 2022: 10.6 naturalisations per 100 non-national residents. Rates in the Netherlands (4.4%), Italy (4.2%), Finland (3.5%), Spain (3.6%) and Belgium (3.2%) were also well above the EU average (2.6%) (see Figure 27). In contrast, EU countries in the Baltics, Central and South-Eastern Europe naturalised only a very small proportion of their foreign residents (between 0.1% and 0.7%). Among the EU countries with a sizeable foreign resident population, Austria had the lowest naturalisation rate (0.6%) (see Figure 27).

[104] Ibid.

Data for the recent past show that most EU countries with a high share of foreign residents have higher naturalisation rates. The main exceptions are Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Greece and Latvia, which all have naturalisation rates below 1% per year. These countries have fairly restrictive citizenship laws while hosting relatively large numbers of foreign residents. Similarly, countries with a small share of foreign residents (Bulgaria, Czechia, Slovakia, Slovenia) also have very low naturalisation rates (below 1% per some year).

Empirical studies indicate that people with a migrant background who become naturalised in an EU country tend to be economically better integrated and have a higher income.[105]

**Figure 27 Naturalisation rates in the EU27, citizenships granted per 100 foreign residents, 2022 (%)**




*Source*: Data from *Eurostat*, 'Acquisition of citizenship by age group, sex and former citizenship', migr_acq and migr_pop1ctz.

*Note*: Aggregated data for the EU27 do not include data for Romania.

[105] F. Peters, H. Schmeets and M. Vink, 'Naturalisation and Immigrant Earnings: Why and to Whom Citizenship Matters', *European Journal of Population* 36/3 (2019).

# Conclusions and outlook

Having been the main migrant sending region of the world for quite a long period of time, since the 1950s and 1960s Europe has gradually become a destination for international migrants. At first, recruited labour as well as colonial returnees and post-colonial migrants arriving from former colonies dominated the flows. Later family reunion and subsequently also marriage migration became major legal gates of entry. On several occasions over the past decades, EU countries have also been confronted with large-scale inflows of people seeking protection—initially from the (then) Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, later from the Western Balkans and the Caucasus, and more recently from the Middle East, Eastern and Western Africa, South Asia and Latin America.

Our analysis demonstrates that the predominant gates of entry for people arriving in the EU are (a) humanitarian admission (asylum, subsidiary protection and temporary protection); (b) marriage migration; and (c) classical family reunion. In contrast to this, between 2013 and 2022, only one in six non-EU citizens who immigrated to an EU country was admitted because of his or her talents and skills. Labour migration from non-EU countries only gained momentum in 2019 and then again in 2021–22. At the same time, however, intra-EU mobility was mainly driven by people moving for employment reasons.

The composition of recent immigration has had a visible impact on socio-economic outcomes. On the one hand, mobile EU citizens and third-country nationals admitted for work have high employment rates. On the other, those arriving through marriage and family reunion, as well as those being granted refugee status or other forms of protection, take much longer to integrate into EU labour markets. This is particularly true for women from non-EU countries (and from the Middle East, Western Asia and Türkiye in particular).

In the years and decades to come, Europe's adverse demographic dynamics—an ever-growing excess of deaths over births, rapidly ageing native populations and large cohorts of baby boomers transitioning into retirement—will cause massive shortages of labour and skills in a growing number of regions and industries. As a result, labour migration will play an increasing role.

Without future immigration, the total number of EU residents in the 20–65 age group would shrink from 264 million (in 2023) to 209 million (by 2050).[106] This would be a loss of 55 million people, or about 40 million economically active EU residents and citizens. Leaving this unaddressed would lead to considerable losses in economic output, fiscal revenue and welfare.

Migration, however, can only compensate for the decline in native labour if the majority of the newly arriving people are actually entering the workforce of the admitting EU countries. Employability should therefore be the main criterion when selecting future immigrants. It is therefore important to admit a much larger share of immigrants based on their talents and skills as well as their willingness to work. At the same time European societies should put more emphasis on the socio-economic and political integration of migrants and their EU-born children. Additional integration efforts should include language and vocational training programmes, speedier recognition of qualifications and programmes that specifically address immigrant women. It should also be made clear that the socio-economic and political integration of migrants ultimately cannot be completed without naturalisation. The integrated immigrants of today and tomorrow should not become residents with fewer rights on a permanent basis, but part of our future citizenry.

# Appendix: Eurostat statistics explained

Eurostat collects and aggregates data on immigration, residence permits and asylum claims, naturalisation, the socio-economic status of people living in the EU (including migrants), as well as the returns of people ordered to leave. This appendix presents definitions and discusses the coverage as well as the limitations of the data collected and published by Eurostat.

Migrant stock statistics are typically derived from national or local population registers (or similar data sets) displaying country of birth and citizenship. Migrant stocks by country of origin can also be identified through the EU Labour Force Survey, a quarterly survey of a sample of residents carried out in all EU

[106] *Eurostat*, 'Population projections in the EU' (2023); Eurostat, 'Population projections in the EU' (2022).

countries. Migration flow statistics on immigration and (to a lesser extent) emigration are normally derived from new entries in national or local population registers or deregistration from such registers.[107] Originally such data are produced by local authorities where people register when taking residence in a particular community or deregister when leaving. Deficiencies are linked to an underreporting of emigration due to the missing deregistration of some people leaving without notice. Missing residents can be administratively deregistered (which usually happens with quite a time-lag after the targeted person has actually left). A few highly developed EU and non-EU countries do not have nation-wide or local population registers (Ireland, UK). Some flows are also derived from first asylum statistics. Data on the main reason for immigration are based on categories of residence permits usually issued by 'national interior ministries or related immigration agencies'.[108] The issuing of residence permits and the granting of asylum are recorded administrative acts. They allow us to distinguish between the main reasons for admission. Data on migrants and residence permits are collected for both migration flows and migrant stocks.

Socio-economic data analysed in this publication are taken from the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS). This is a large household sample survey providing quarterly results on labour force participation of people aged 15 and over as well as on people outside the labour force. It includes socio-demographic information. As the EU-LFS provides information on country of birth and citizenship, socio-economic data collected in this survey can be compared between natives, mobile EU citizens and migrants coming from non-EU countries. The survey covers persons aged 15 years and over who live in private households. Those doing military or community service and those living in institutional or collective households (e.g. boarding schools, monasteries, old-age care homes, student dormitories) are not included.[109]

## Definitions

- *Residence permit*. Any authorisation valid for at least three months issued by the authorities of an EU member state allowing a third-country national to stay legally on its territory. A first permit is the first instance of a residence permit being issued to a person. Unlike immigration statistics, the flow

[107] *Eurostat*, 'Glossary: Migration' (2023); *Eurostat*, 'Migration and migrant population statistics'.
[108] *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits – a methodological and analytical overview'.
[109] *Eurostat*, 'Microdata – EU labour force survey'

data on residence permits report only on third-country nationals and do not represent the movements of EU citizens within the EU. For the purposes of this publication, mobile people holding permits with validity durations of less than one year have been excluded. This limitation is necessary to fulfil the definitional requirement of being an 'international migrant'; the minimum change to the individual's usual residence has to last (or be planned) for at least 12 months.

- *Asylum applicant*. A person who has submitted an application for international protection or has been included in such an application as a family member during the reference period.

- *First-time asylum applicant*. A person who has submitted an application for international protection for the first time. Note: Several EU countries register newborn children whose parents have refugee or subsidiary protection as asylum seekers. Many EU countries also register dependent family members joining a person with refugee or subsidiary protection status as asylum seekers despite the fact that they are admitted as de facto family migrants. This blurs the line between asylum and family migration in available statistics.

- *Immigration.* According to Eurostat, the action by which a person establishes his or her usual residence in the territory of a member state for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months' duration, having previously been usually resident in another member state or a third country. Flow data on immigration[110] therefore refer to the entire inflow of people taking up usual residence in the reporting country during the calendar year of reference. The data are for all immigrants, both from EU member states and from third countries, including stateless immigrants and immigrants of unknown citizenship. It is assumed that those who are of 'unknown' origin do not hold EU citizenship.

## The limitations of Eurostat statistics

The first limitation is that residence permit statistics only count third-country nationals and do not capture the movements of EU citizens within the EU.

Second, there may be under-coverage of migration related to the duration of stay and length of validity. Although the standard definition of 'immigration' recommends that for persons to be considered migrants the



[110] *Eurostat*, 'Immigration by age group, sex and citizenship' (2023).

duration of their stay in the reporting country should be at least 12 months, some EU countries make use of an alternative definition of population (such as 'legal' or 'registered' population) or do not apply the threshold of 12 months. In the data this may lead to greater immigration flows than would be produced by the same immigration statistics using a strict application of the 'usual residence' concept. According to Eurostat,[111] in the EU this could be the case for Denmark, Germany, Spain, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland and Sweden, as well for most EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland). In fact, for all of these countries except Spain, the UN statistics on migrant stocks suggest larger migrant populations than the corresponding residence permit statistics, a difference which could be due to taking into consideration stays of less than 12 months.

When it comes to residence permit statistics, under-coverage of migration is mainly due to the lack of longitudinal information on residence permit holders, which results in figures lower than those derived from other sources, such as immigration statistics. For instance, a person who obtains a renewal for 6–11 months after a previous 6–11 month permit will not be captured as a 'new immigrant'. As a result, because of the consecutive issuance of short-term permits, there is underreporting of some persons whose de facto length of stay is at least one year.

In the dataset used for this publication these people are not represented (because we use a 12-month+ filter to correspond with the standard definition of 'immigrant'), but they would be present in available immigration statistics. At the same time, those people who extended their residence permits after a gap of six or more months might be double counted. According to the Eurostat definition, 'a residence permit is considered as a first permit also if the time gap between the expiry of the old permit and the start of validity of the new permit issued for the same reason is at least 6 months, irrespective of the year of issuance of the permit'.[112]

On the long-term side, residence permits of long validity may also miss the migratory movements that occur in between. For instance, a third-country national who holds a residence permit with a validity of five or more years and who emigrates from the country issuing the permit and later returns to this country within that period of validity would possibly not be captured by the statistics on immigration and emigration.

The third limitation relates to issues with the date of issuance and date of registration. A valid residence permit may be requested before immigration takes place (e.g. a residence permit for the reasons of work,

[111] G. Lanzieri, *Comparability of Migration and Residence Permits Data in the EU Statistics*, UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics, Item 3.10 (Geneva, 2018).
[112] *Eurostat*, 'Residence permits (migr_res). Reference metadata in Euro SDMX metadata structure (ESMS; 2024)'.

marriage or family reunion), but may also be issued after arrival (e.g. for asylum seekers/refugees). Asylum seekers can be registered by an EU member state (provisionally) on the day of entry, or they can be referred to a registration centre which would result in the asylum seeker being admitted with a certain time lag. At the beginning and the end of a particular year, both the issuance of regular first residence permits, and the registration of asylum seekers can have calendar effects, with the actual immigration taking place in one year and the registration being recorded in another.

The fourth limitation is that neither the data on residence permits nor immigration statistics capture the inflows of people arriving as irregular migrants who are not asking for asylum. They also do not capture the de facto immigration of people arriving as tourists/travellers and remaining in an EU member state beyond the 90 days granted to Schengen visa holders and third-country nationals entitled to visa-free admission (= overstayers).

Finally, the fifth limitation is that residence permits can be issued without migration actually taking place. This mainly concerns the following categories of persons:

- People who are granted a residence permit for marriage or family reunion reasons but do not actually immigrate to join their partners/kin residing in the EU.
- The newborn children of third-country nationals. The national authorities of an EU country may issue a first residence permit for a newborn child of non-EU citizens if the child does not acquire the citizenship of its EU country of birth. In these cases, no immigration has taken place despite the case being reported in the residence permit statistics of the respective country.
- Newborns born to asylum seekers. If the parents of a newborn have refugee status, some EU member states register the newborn as a first asylum seeker, thus leading to asylum requests not linked to an actual immigration event.
- Golden visa holders or persons profiting from ‘citizenship for sale’ programmes—usually wealthy third-country nationals who, due to their investments or acquisition of property, are granted a residence permit by a particular EU country and are included in the data in residence permits as soon as the permit is granted. However, many of them do not necessarily move on a permanent basis to the EU country issuing their visa or selling them citizenship.

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Who are the migrants living in the EU? Who has arrived here over the past 10 years? And to what extent have these migrants integrated? This paper provides answers based on the data on foreign-born residents, first residence permit data, statistics on first asylum requests and information on temporary protection for Ukrainians. It includes a number of novel data breakdowns.

The main finding is that over the past 10 years, about 50% of all people immigrating to the EU have been admitted for humanitarian reasons. Some 27% arrived as marriage migrants or for family reunion purposes. The number of those admitted for employment was just 17%. Notably, a third of all immigrants coming to the EU during the past 10 years arrived in 2022.

The paper shows that labour market outcomes depend to some extent on the structure of migration flows. Mobile EU citizens usually move for reasons of employment. Third-country nationals residing in the EU have much lower employment rates and a significantly higher risk of working below their skill level. Those third-country nationals admitted as refugees, for family reunion reasons or as marriage migrants are less likely to integrate into EU labour markets. This is particularly true for female migrants.

Throughout the EU, native workforces are shrinking. Migrants can only compensate for the emerging gaps if their talents and skills are compatible with Europe's needs. This necessitates the admission of non-EU migrants based on their skills acquired abroad and a rapid recognition of these skills, or the massive retraining of migrants who do not meet the necessary criteria. In any case, European societies will have to put more emphasis on the integration of migrants and their EU-born children.

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