

COUNTRY FACTSHEET | JULY 2024

Main developments
in migration and
international
protection, including
latest statistics

ESTONIA 2023



OVERARCHING AND CROSS-CUTTING CHANGES

On 20 June 2023, the government of Estonia voted to amend the Family Law Act and related legislation (including the Aliens Act, the Citizenship Act, the Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens, the Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act, etc.), introducing marriage equality. As of 2024, marriage can be contracted in Estonia between two adults, regardless of their gender. As a result, the definitions of family members in the related acts were expanded to include same-sex spouses and registered partners, as well as the child of

a registered partner. The amendments also included the establishment of the implementing acts for the Registered Partnership Act.



LEGAL MIGRATION

Several important amendments to the Aliens Act entered into force in 2023. From 1 January 2023, it is possible to apply for a new temporary residence permit for short-term employment. These residence permits will allow foreigners who have worked in Estonia on a short-term basis for at least nine months to apply for a residence



KEY POINTS

In 2023, Estonia continued to move towards the digitalisation of migration-related procedures. Its Migration Surveillance Database (MIGIS) went live in July 2023. In November 2023, the Automated Biometric Identification System database (ABIS) was completed.

In June 2023, the government of Estonia voted to amend the Family Law Act, which led to the introduction of **marriage equality**. As of 2024, marriages can be contracted in Estonia between two adults regardless of their gender.

In 2023, amendments to the Aliens Act came into force, creating a new residence permit for short-term employment and a new incentive for hiring foreign labour for so-called growth companies.

permit that is valid for up to two years (also called the 1+2 scheme).

Amendments introducing a new incentive for hiring foreign labour for growth companies entered into force on 1 January 2023. A growth company is a company registered in Estonia to develop a business model with high global growth potential that is innovative and replicable and that shall significantly contribute to the development of the Estonian business environment.

On 21 March 2023, an amendment entered into force providing Ukrainian citizens who were in Estonia before the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and to whom temporary protection may be provided, with the possibility to formalise their right to temporary stay in Estonia on the basis of a long-term visa. This will allow them to prove their legality of stay in Estonia while travelling to another Member State (or to Ukraine, if necessary).

On 18 May 2023, the government of Estonia approved an amendment/waiver to Regulation No 42, Imposition of sanctions of the Government of the Republic in connection with the aggression of the Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine. This allowed citizens of the Russian Federation and Belarus who were in Estonia as students, doctors (including dentists) or researchers before the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine to apply for a new residence permit. The waiver applies if they have passed all necessary Estonian language examinations or completed an Estonian-language curriculum and are proficient in Estonian language (at least level B2). Academic staff are exempt from the language requirement.

On 18 December 2023, a new regulation was passed regarding the Database of Registering Short-term Employment of Aliens in Estonia. It allows for the modernisation of the procedural environment, improves the efficiency of the Police and Border Guard Board (PBGB)'s work, as well as the procedural capacities of other relevant administrative bodies.



INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

The focus in 2023 was on accommodating the needs of high numbers of beneficiaries of temporary protection (BoTP). Reforms are set to take place shortly, which will entail large-scale changes in the legal system in relation to the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

In August 2023, the PBGB signed a cooperation agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR). The cooperation agreement stipulates monitoring activities, among other provisions. UNHCR focuses on the entry of refugees to Estonia, their access to asylum, and protection against return. It also supports measures to enhance PBGB staff knowledge and skills in relation to refugee law and refugee protection standards.



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

In January 2023, the Estonian and Finnish Ministries of the Interior agreed that Finland would receive up to 100 displaced people from Ukraine per week from Estonia if the refugees expressed their wish to move. In Finland, displaced people from Ukraine could request temporary protection and were guaranteed the relevant support services.

Previously, temporary protection was provided for one year and extended annually. However, as of September 2023, temporary protection was provided to both initial applicants and renewals until March 2025.



UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

No significant developments to report in 2023.



INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

The most significant development in integration was the implementation of preparatory and supportive activities for transition to Estonian-language education. In 2022, the Estonian government decided to transition to Estonian-language education, aiming to provide all children with quality education in Estonian. The transition will take place in several stages and begins in 2024. Several supporting activities were implemented in 2023, such as increasing funding for teaching Estonian, increasing the salaries of teachers in the ethnically segregated Ida-Viru County (where there is a large proportion of Russian-speaking inhabitants and a shortage of teachers proficient in Estonian), providing guidance to local governments on transitioning, etc.

To facilitate smoother integration of immigrants, the [Settling in Estonia](#) proactive government service was initiated in 2023. It serves as a central hub for all essential information on available services for newly arrived immigrants. It is structured as a roadmap, guiding users from one service to another. The service is accessible in English, Russian and Estonian.

Several studies and evaluations of integration policy measures were carried out: (1) implementation of adaptation and integration measures; (2) language learning experiences, motivation, and obstacles faced by poorly integrated permanent residents, new immigrants, and BoTP living in restricted language environments; (3) impact and sustainability of the network-based support service provision model for new immigrants and the courses and materials of the [Settle in Estonia](#) adaptation programme. [Estonian integration monitoring](#) takes place

every two to three years and analyses adaptation and integration processes in Estonian society. The monitoring took place in 2023 and the results were published in March 2024. These studies and evaluations provide important insights and input into formulating and adjusting integration policy measures in Estonia.

CITIZENSHIP AND STATELESSNESS

No significant developments to report in 2023.

BORDERS, VISA AND SCHENGEN

As of 1 January 2023, the State Border Act was amended, with border control measures on land and on transboundary water bodies performed by the PBGB while border controls at sea are performed by the Estonian Defence Forces (EDF). When performing border controls, the police participates in guarding the sea border and Estonian airspace. In parallel, the PBGB maritime patrol vessels became a part of the Estonian Navy (a structural unit of the EDF), following a merger of the two services. The EDF now has sole responsibility for maritime situational awareness (previously a shared responsibility).

In December 2023, the second part of the fully developed Estonian South-Eastern border section was completed. In total, approximately 63 km of border infrastructure was complete at the end of 2023 (the length of South-Eastern border is approximately 136 km). The infrastructure is expected to be completed by the end of 2025.

IRREGULAR MIGRATION

In 2023, the PBGB finalised MIGIS, enabling automatic and manual data-based checks against different databases, creating risk profiles, plans and report inspections,

drawing statistics and exchanging information with other state authorities. MIGIS went live on 20 July 2023.

TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

On 1 April 2023, the new Victim Support Act came into force. The Act changed the status of the presumed victims, but the services remain for the target group not identified as victims of trafficking in human beings but linked to other related crimes.

RETURN AND READMISSION

As of 8 March 2023, Estonia and other EU Member States using the Schengen Information System (SIS) can exchange information on third-country nationals' return decisions. SIS also enables monitoring whether third-country nationals with return decisions have left the territory of the EU.

On 29 September 2023, the PBGB signed a service-level agreement (SLA) on its participation in Frontex Joint Reintegration Services (JRS).

On 23 October 2023, Estonia signed a bilateral readmission agreement with Uzbekistan.

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The Digital Explorers II project began in March 2023. It addresses one of the root causes of migration – unemployment and the lack of proficient talent in developing countries. It offers training and IT-related work experience in Estonian companies to final year university students from Kenya. It also introduces Estonia's eGovernment, education system and labour market to Kenyan policymakers in immigration, labour, and education, as well as employers in the IT and/or digital field, in both the private and public sectors.

STATISTICAL ANNEX

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

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

period 2020-2022 is covered. Exceptionally, the monthly data on temporary protection covers the period until March 2024. **The data were extracted during April–May 2024. The manuscript was completed in May 2024.** The Eurostat website is constantly updated. Therefore, it is likely that more recent data will have become available since. An online data code available under each figure can be used to directly access the latest data on [Eurostat's website](#).

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

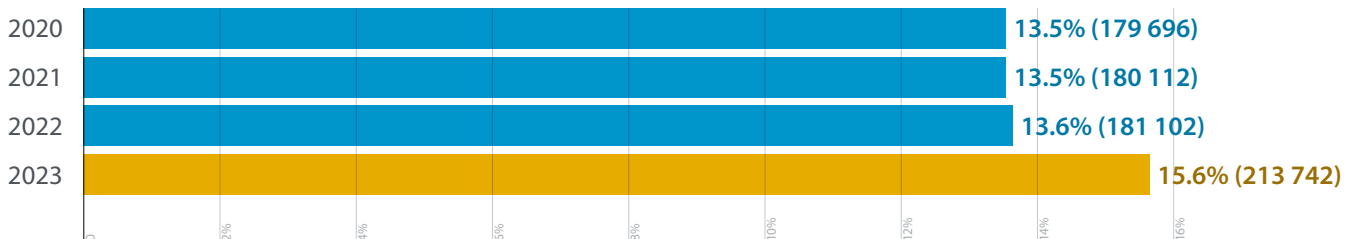
A 'How to read the statistical annex' guide, describing each individual chart and providing links to the data sources, is available [here](#).



LEGAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

Third-country nationals, 1 January 2020–2023

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

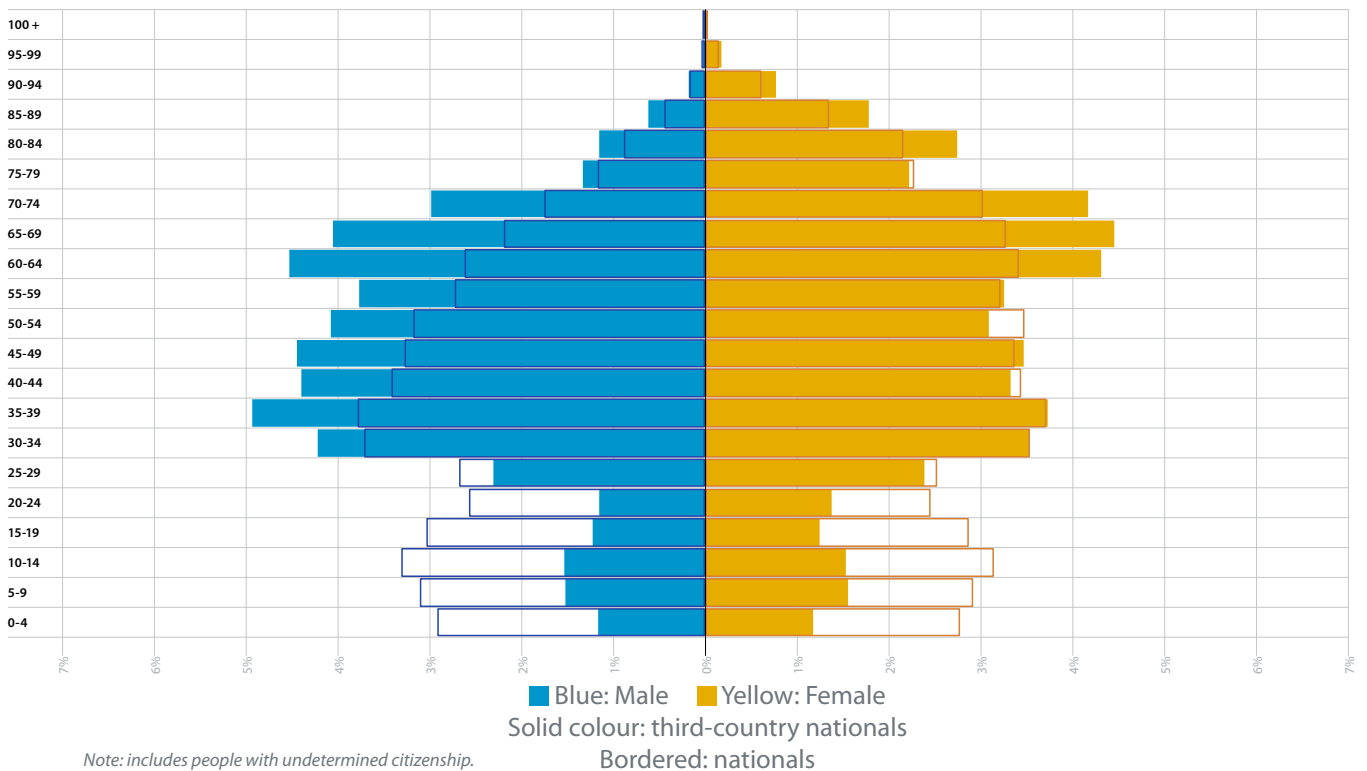


Note: includes people with undetermined citizenship.

Source: Eurostat (migr_pop1ctz)

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

%



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

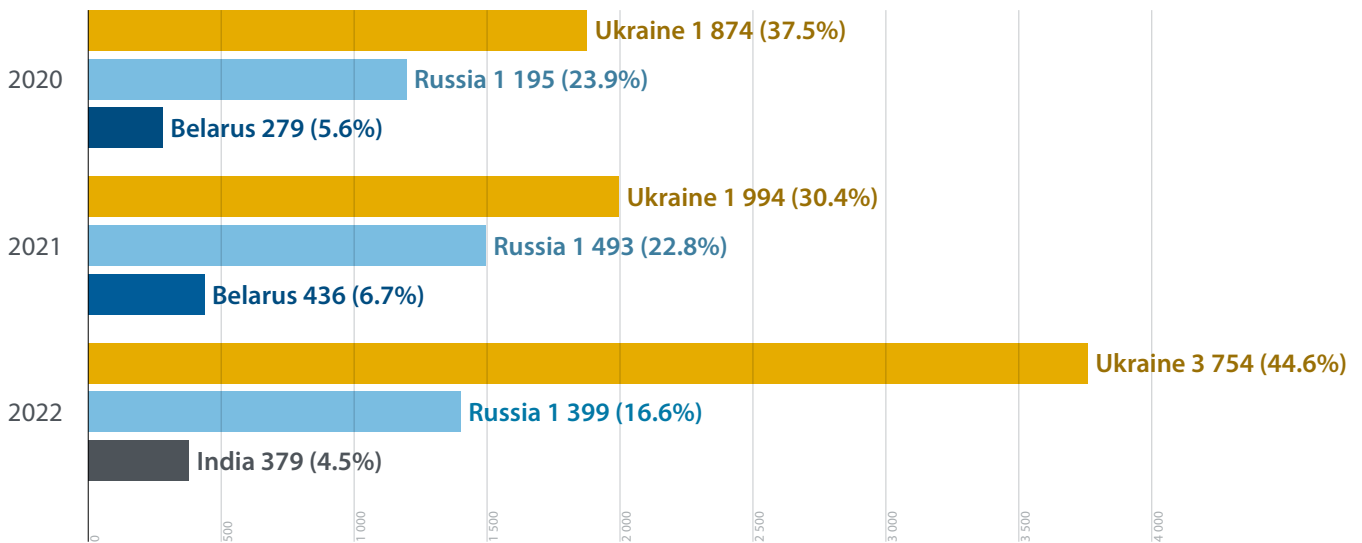
Number per 1 000 people (and the absolute number)



Source: Eurostat (migr_resfirst, migr_pop1ctz and migr_resp)

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

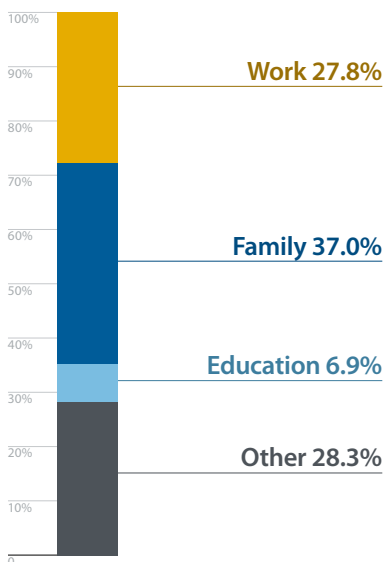
Absolute number (and the share in total number)



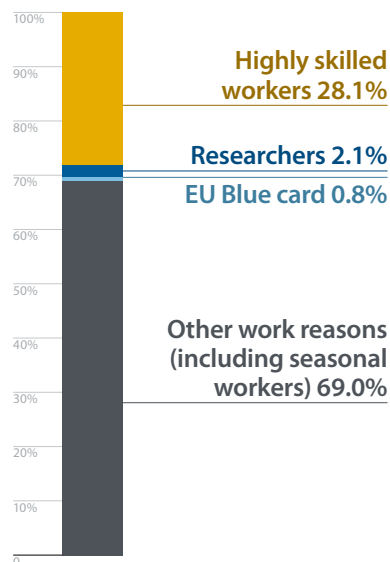
Source: Eurostat (migr_resfirst)

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

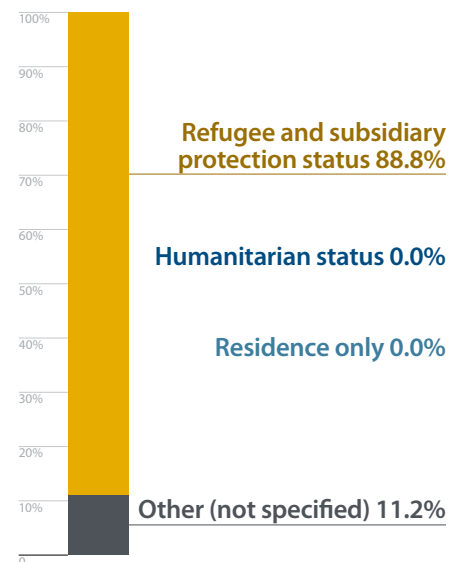
All permits, by reason, %



Work reason, by type, %



Other reason, by detailed reason, %



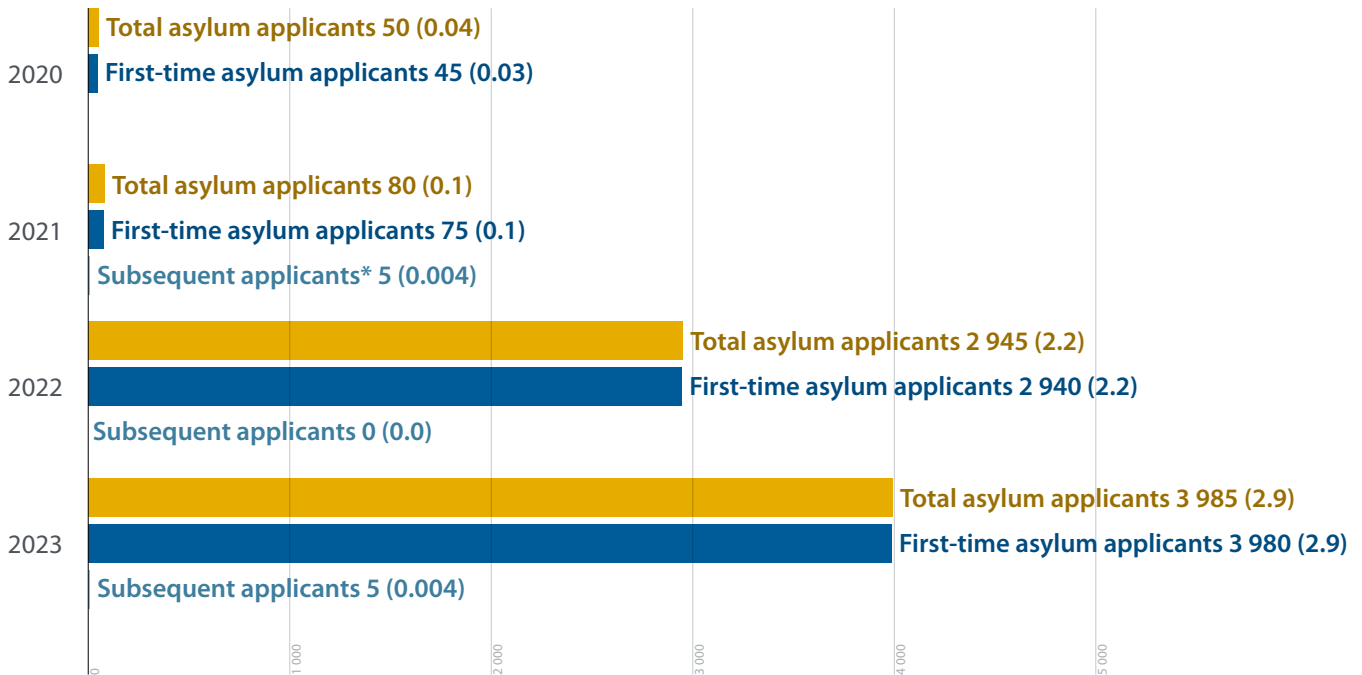
Source: Eurostat (migr_resfirst, migr_resfpc, migr_resocc and migr_resoth)



INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION INCLUDING ASYLUM

Asylum applicants by type of application, 2020–2023

Absolute number (and the number per 1 000 people)

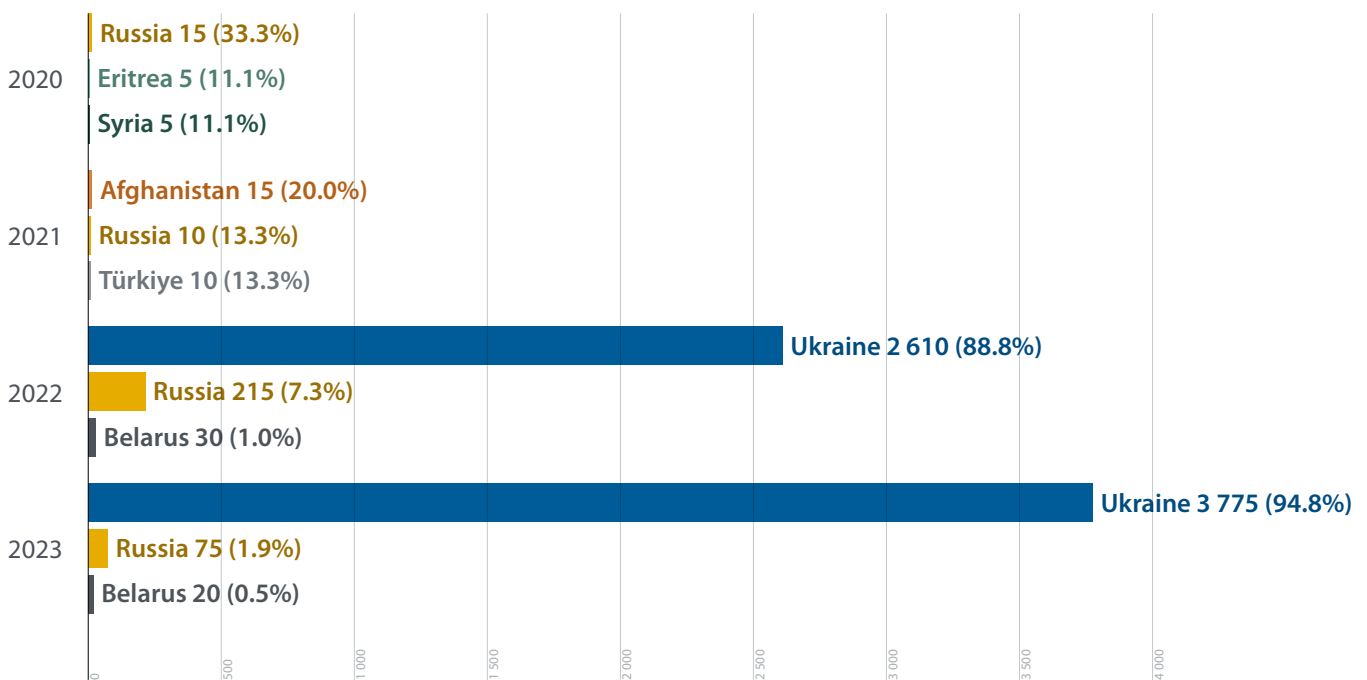


* Data collection from 2021.

Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza, migr_pop1ctz and migr_asyapp1mp)

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

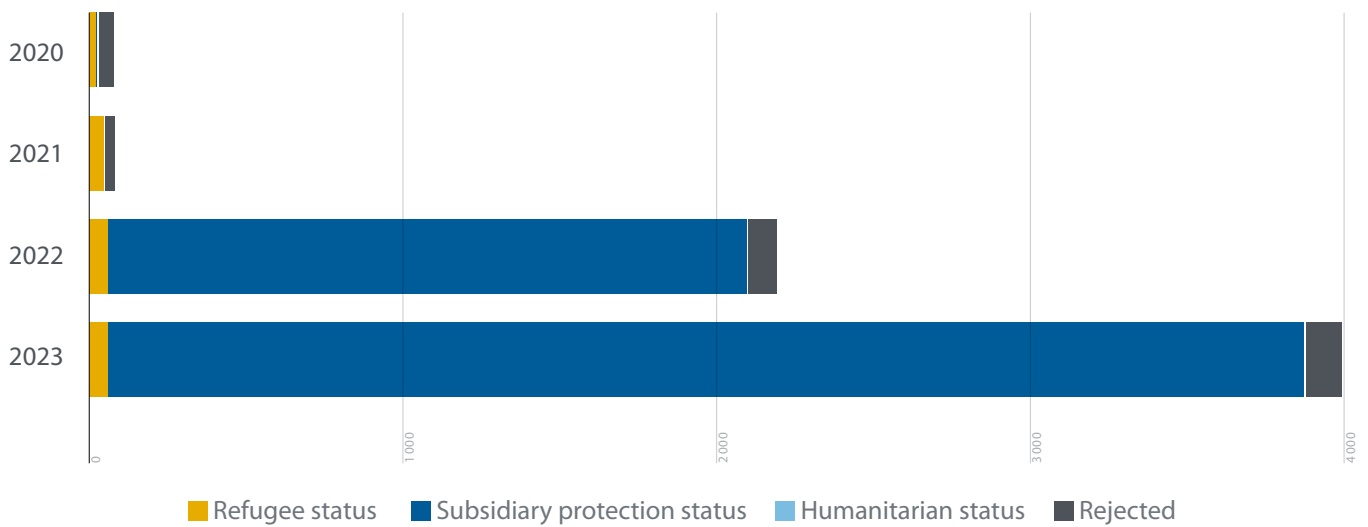
Absolute number (and the share in total number of first-time applicants)



Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza)

First instance asylum decisions by outcome, 2020–2023

Absolute number (and the share of the total)



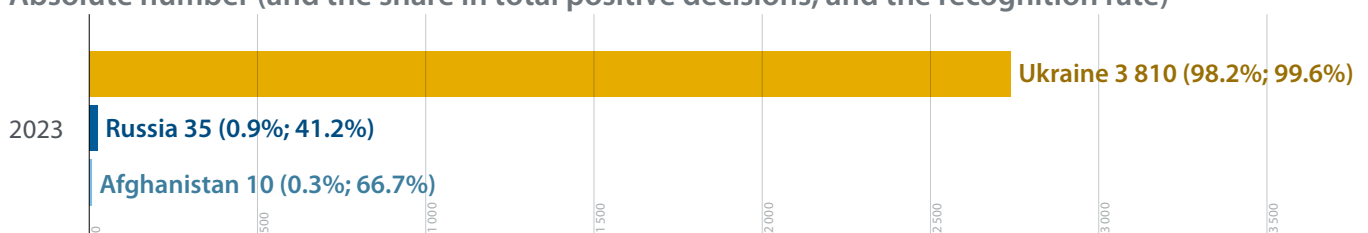
Year	Refugee status number (share of total)	Subsidiary protection status number (share of total)	Humanitarian status number (share of total)	Rejected number (share of total)
2020	20 (31.0%)	5 (5.6%)	0 (0.0%)	45 (63.4%)
2021	45 (61.0%)	0 (2.6%)	0 (0.0%)	30 (36.4%)
2022	60 (2.7%)	2 040 (93.1%)	0 (0.0%)	90 (4.1%)
2023	60 (1.5%)	3 820 (95.7%)	0 (0.0%)	115 (2.8%)

Note: The shares are calculated using unrounded figures.

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

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

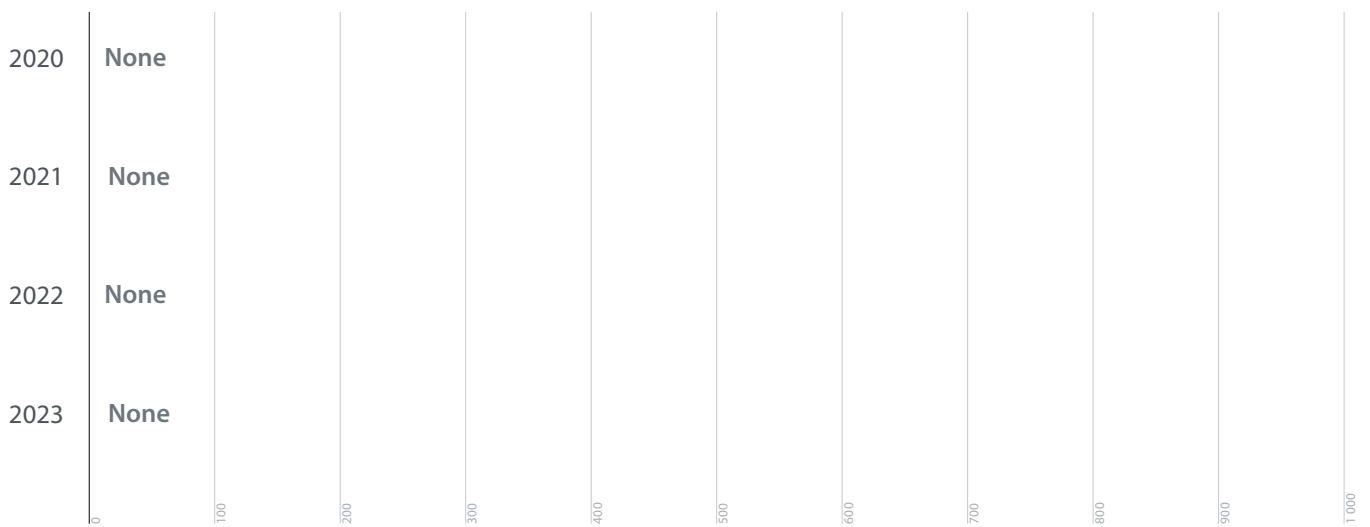
Absolute number (and the share in total positive decisions; and the recognition rate)



Source: Eurostat (*migr_asydcfsta*)

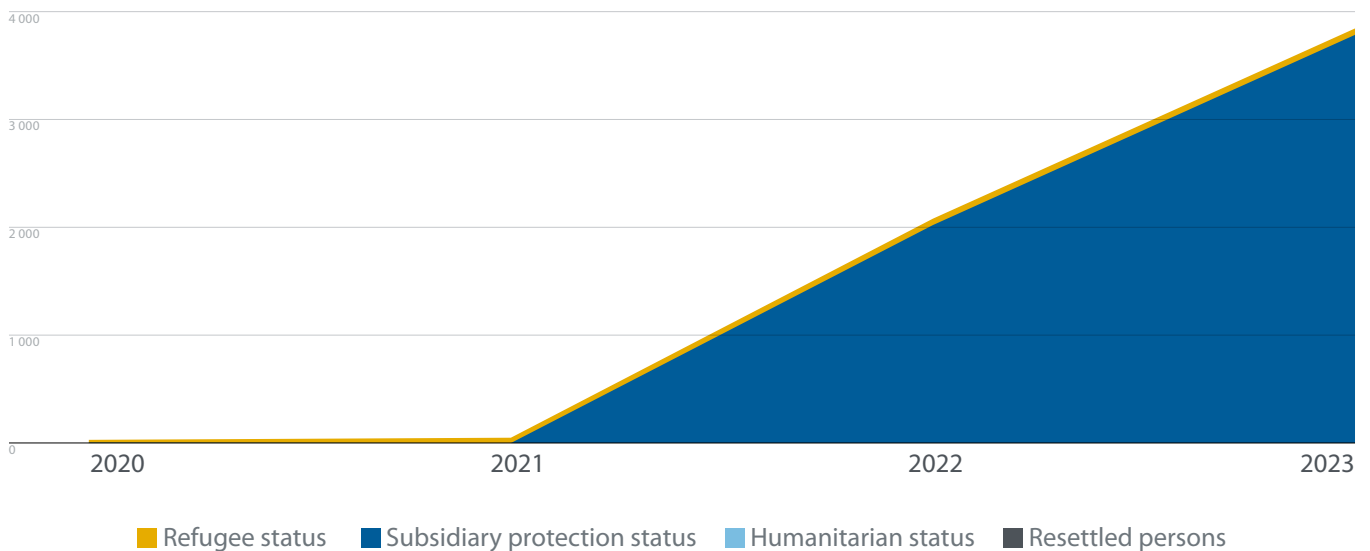
Resettled third-country nationals by sex, 2020–2023

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



Source: Eurostat (migr_asyresa)

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



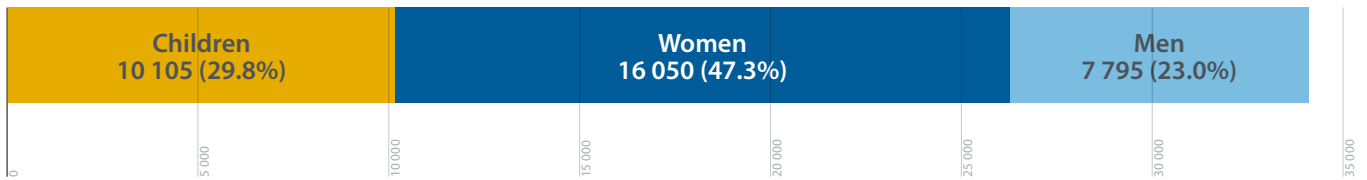
Year	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection status	Humanitarian status	Resettled persons
2020	25	5	0	0
2021	50	0	0	0
2022	60	2 040	0	0
2023	60	3 820	0	0

Source: Eurostat (migr_asydcfsta, migr_asydcfina and migr_asyresa)

TEMPORARY PROTECTION

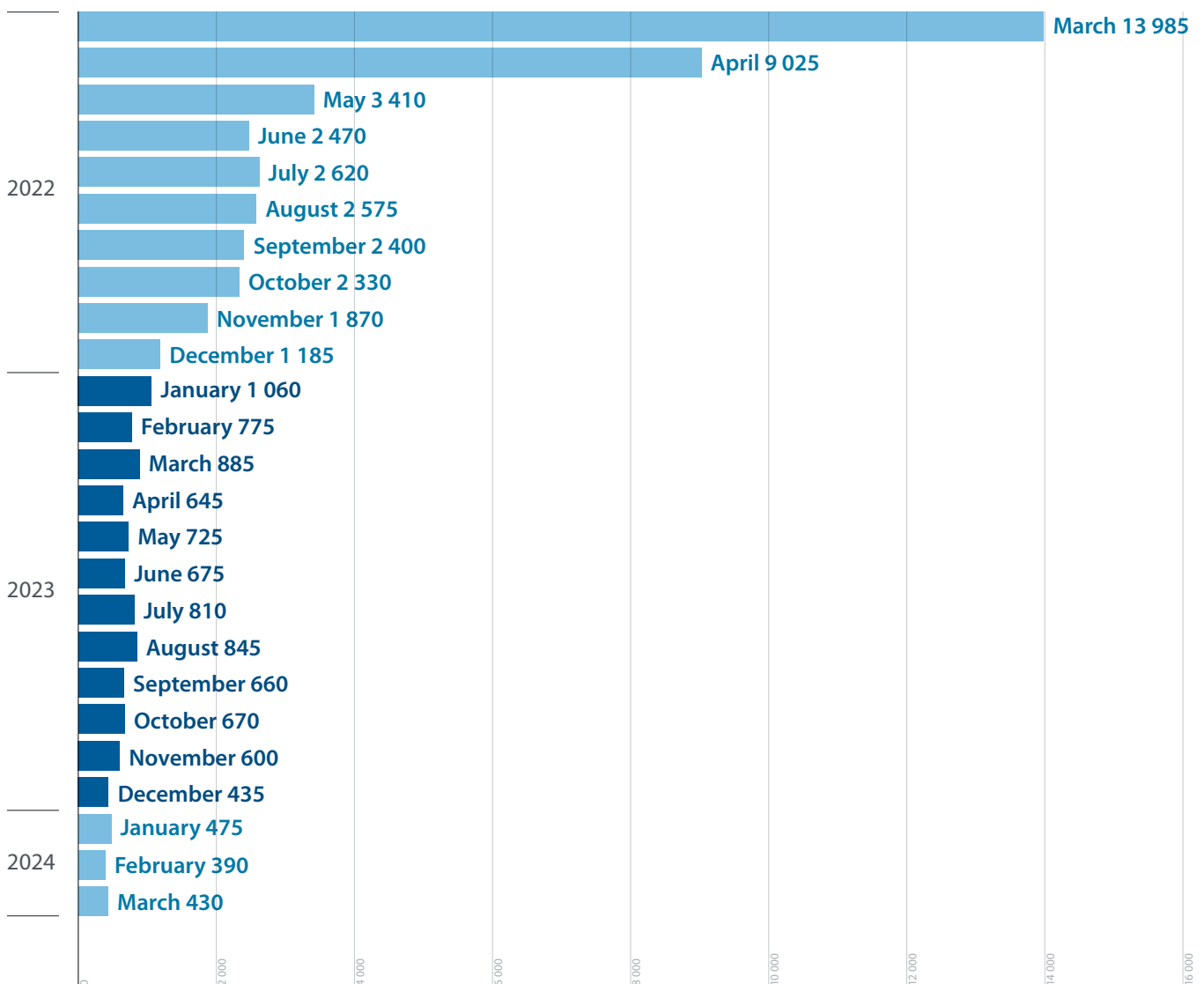
Beneficiaries of temporary protection by age and sex at the end of March 2024

Absolute number (and the share of the total)



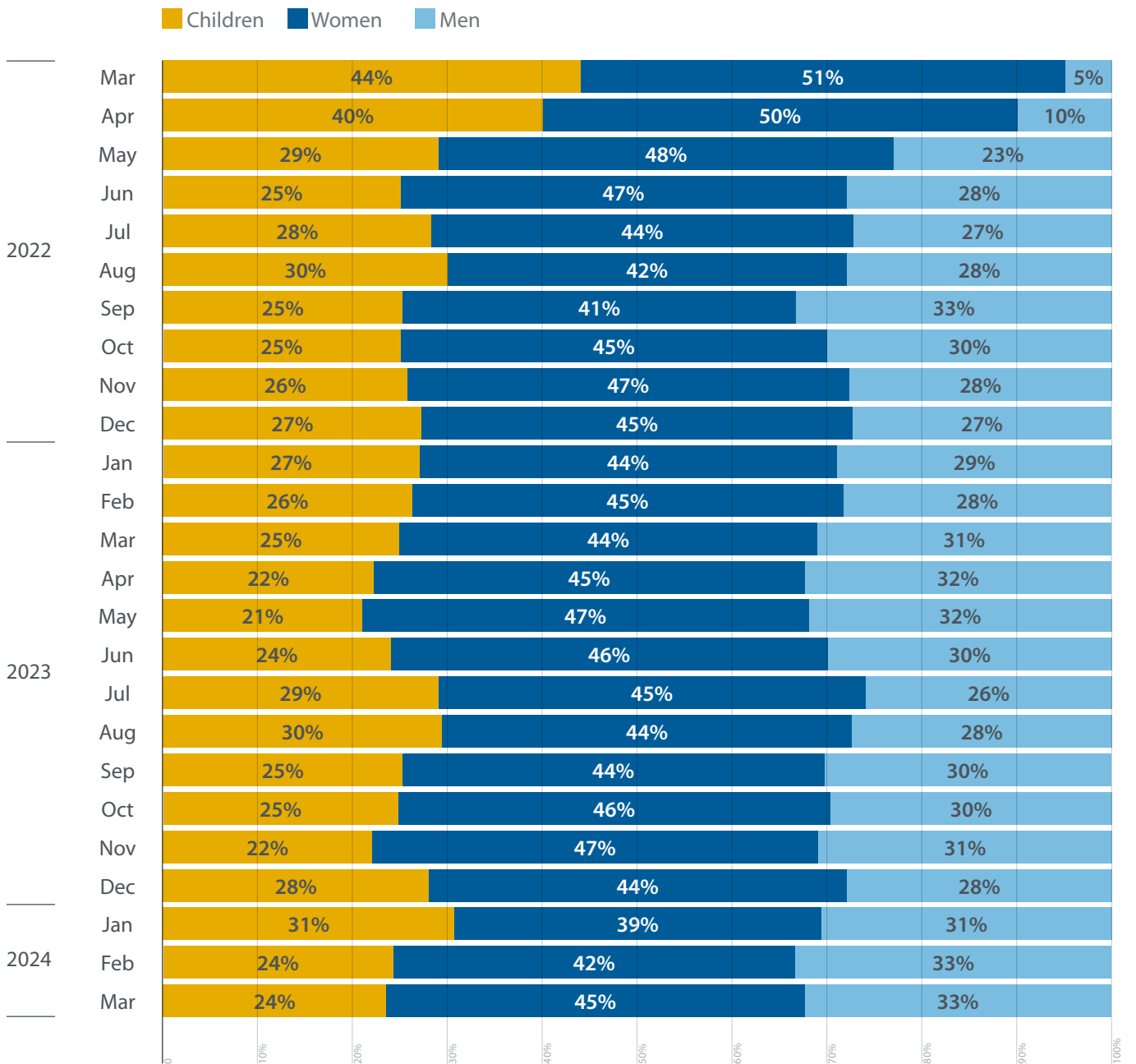
Source: Eurostat (migr_asytspm)

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



Source: Eurostat (migr_asytprm)

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



Source: Eurostat (migr_asytprm)



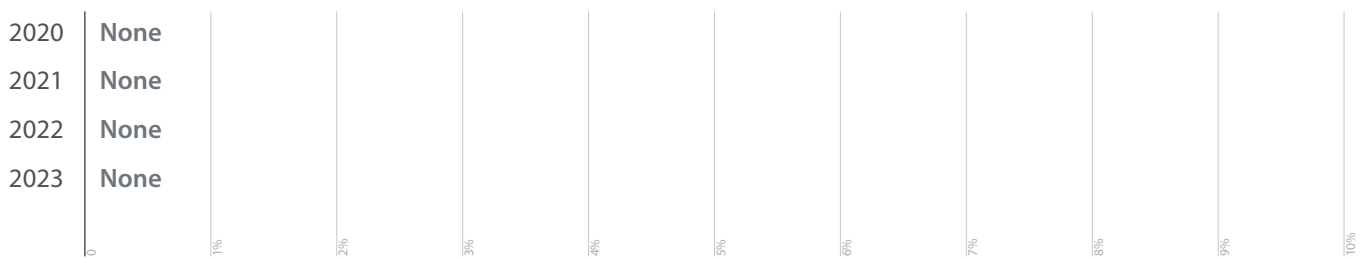
UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Unaccompanied minors applying for asylum, 2020–2023

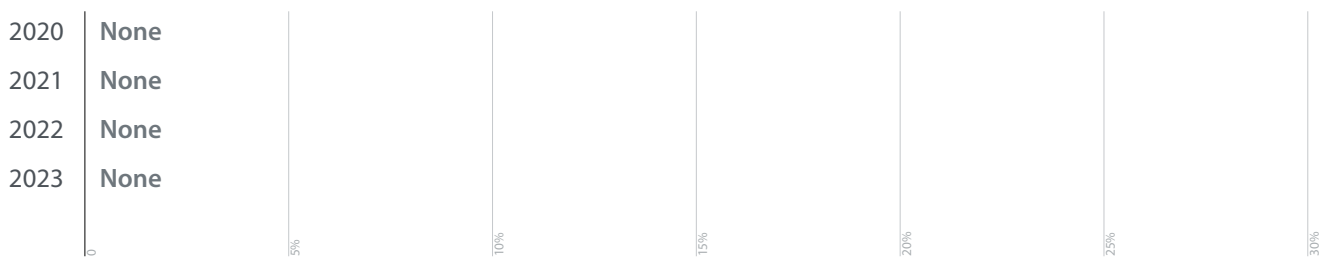
Number (and the share in total number of unaccompanied minors in the EU)



Share of all first-time asylum applicants



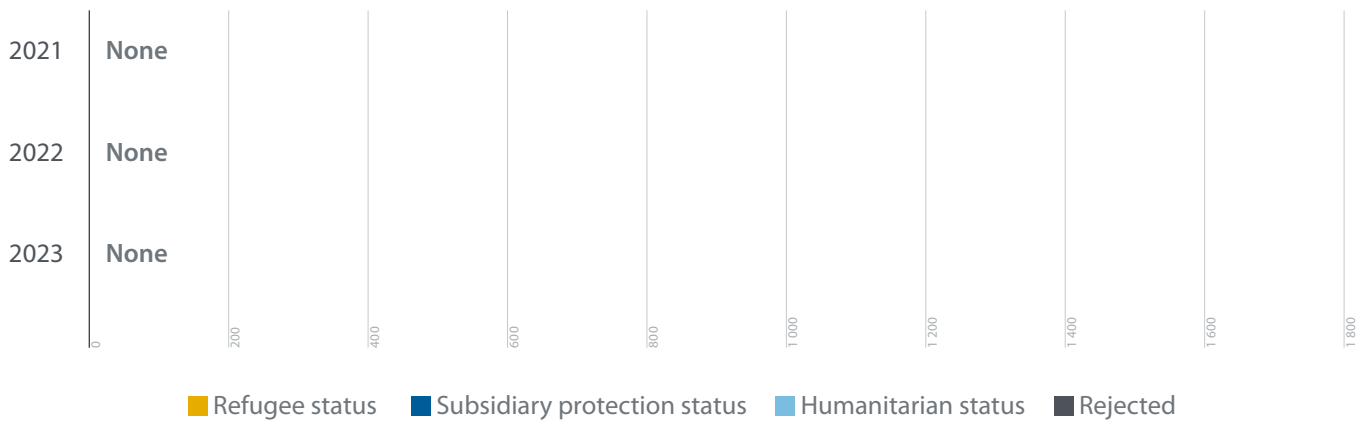
Share of all first-time asylum applicants aged less than 18 years



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

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

Absolute number (and the share of the total)



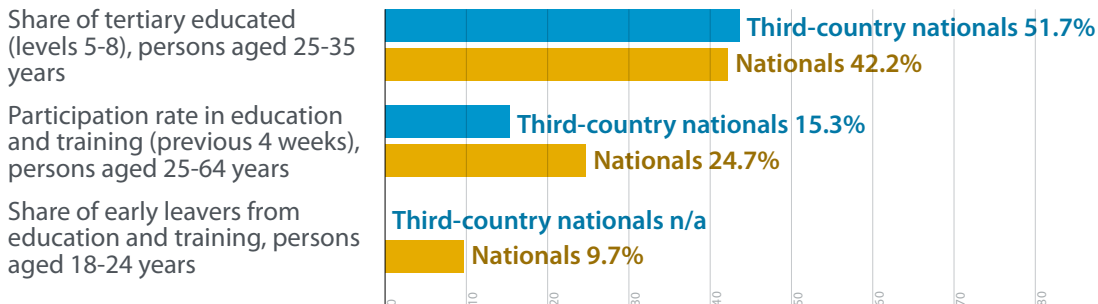
Year	Refugee status number (share of total)	Subsidiary protection status number (share of total)	Humanitarian status number (share of total)	Rejected number (share of total)
2021	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2022	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2023	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Source: Eurostat (migr_asyumdca)

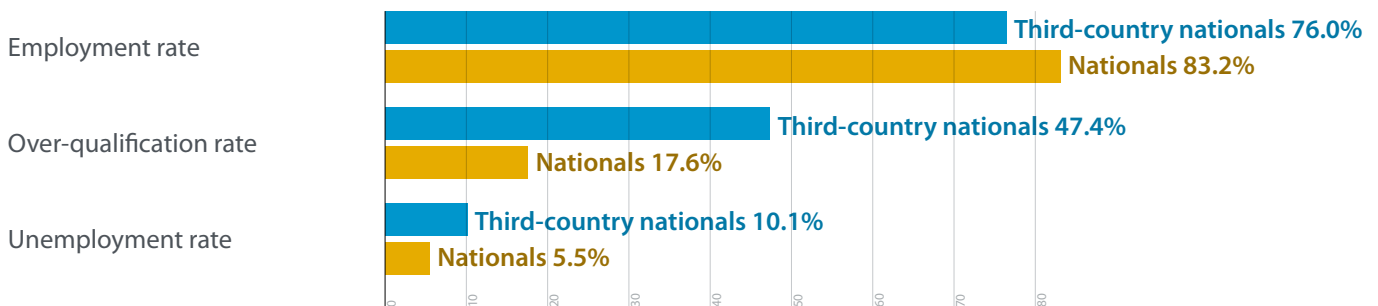
INTEGRATION

Integration indicators, 2022 or 2023

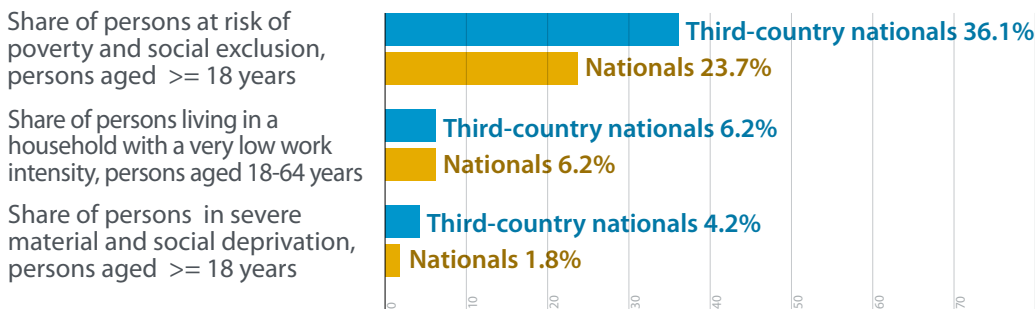
Education, 2023



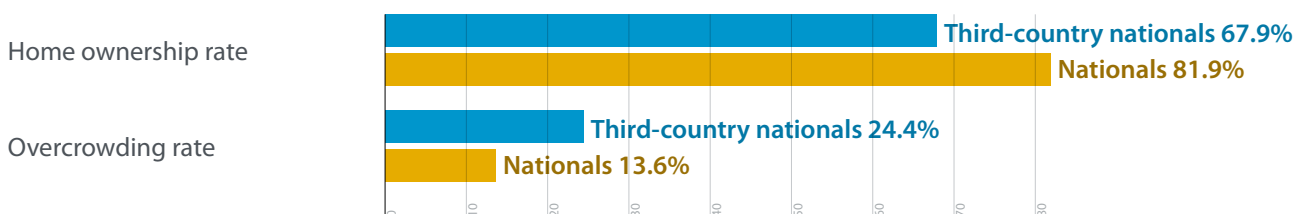
Labour market, persons aged 20-64 years, 2023



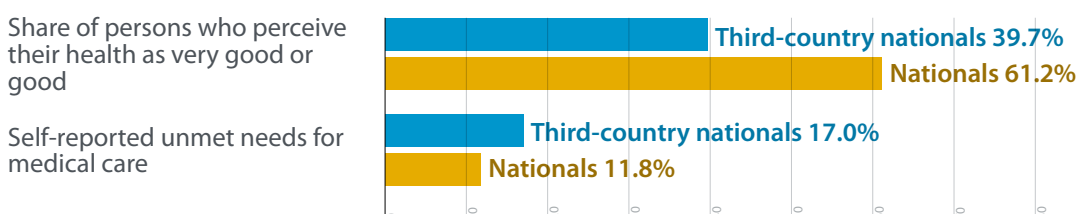
Social inclusion, 2023



Housing, persons aged >= 18 years, 2023



Health, persons aged >= 16 years, 2022

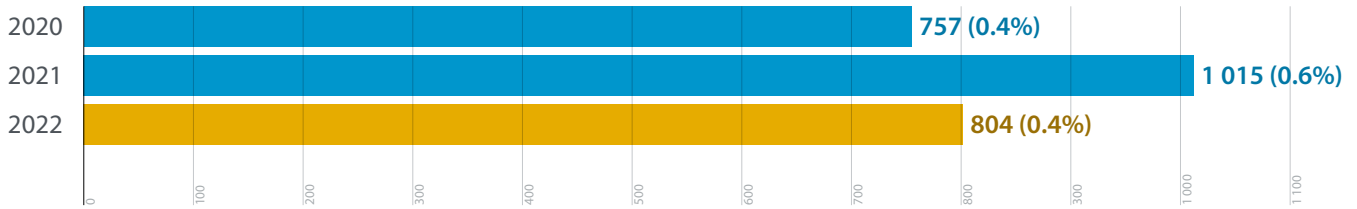




CITIZENSHIP AND STATELESSNESS

Third-country nationals who acquired citizenship, 2020–2022

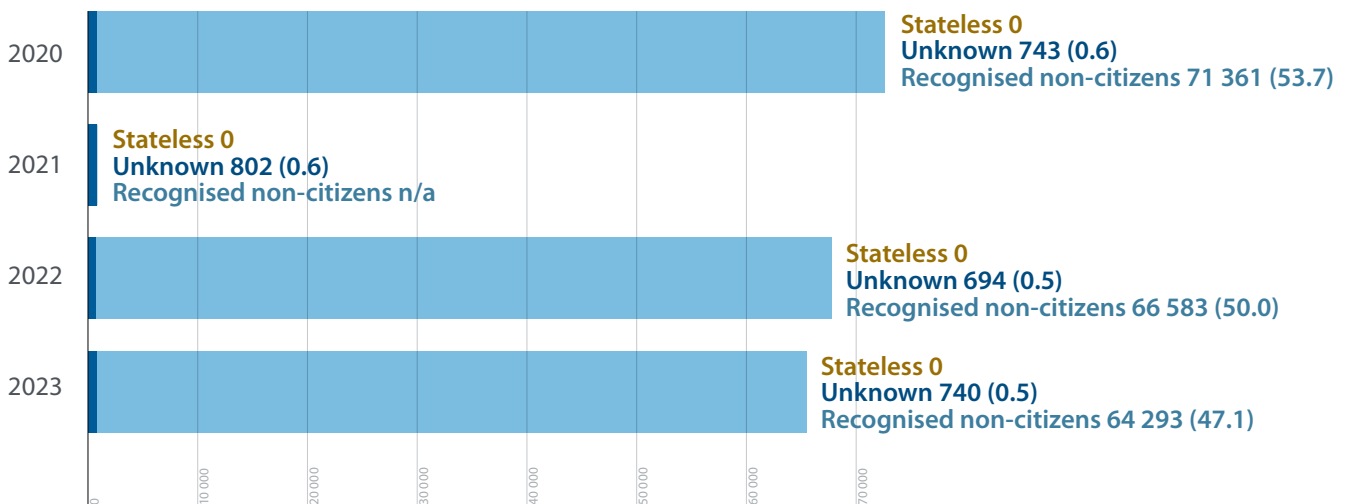
Absolute number (and share of total third-country nationals in the country)



Source: Eurostat (migr_acq and migr_pop1ctz)

Stateless persons, persons with unknown citizenship and recognised non-citizens, 2020–2023

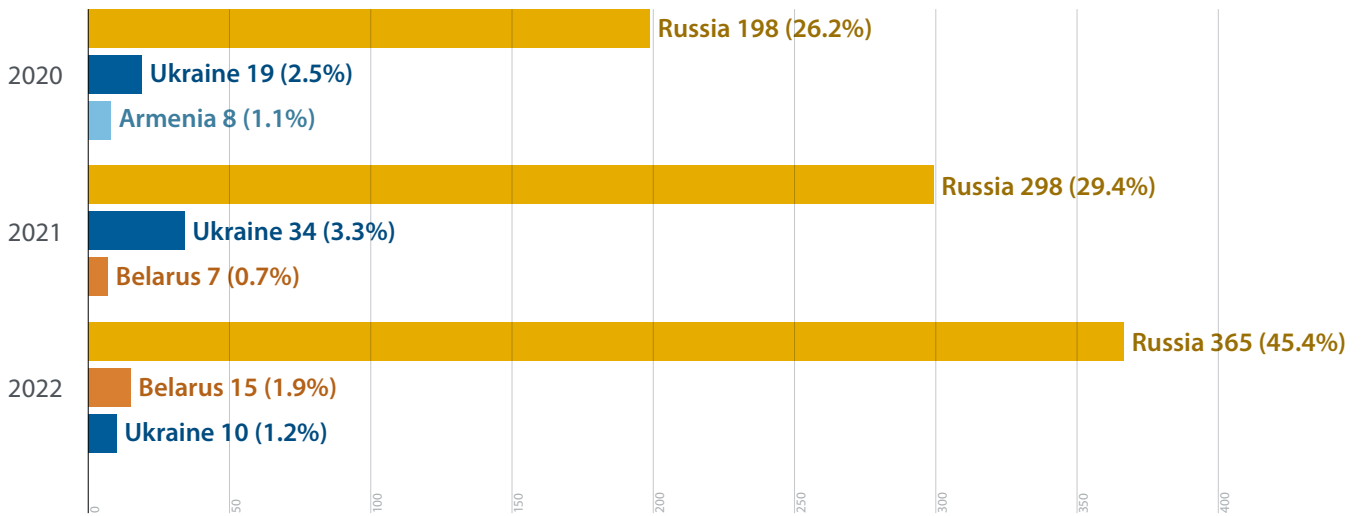
Absolute number (and the number per 1 000 people)



Source: Eurostat (migr_pop1ctz)

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

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



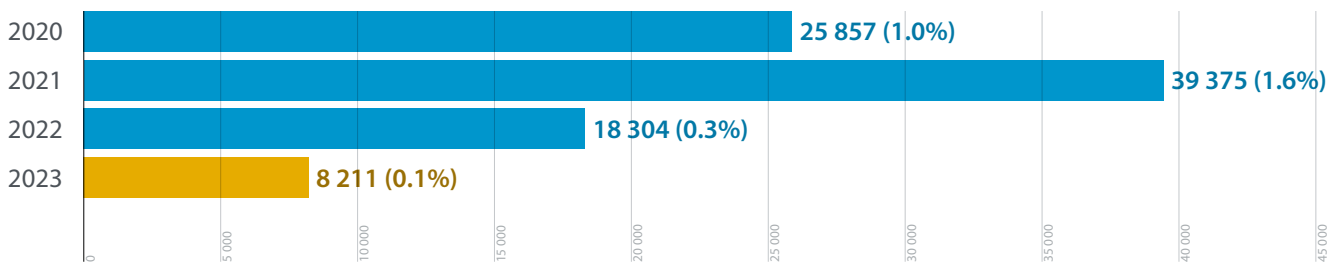
Note: People of undetermined citizenship are a large number of those acquiring citizenship in Estonia.

Source: Eurostat ([migr_acq](#))

BORDERS, SCHENGEN AND VISAS

Schengen uniform short-stay visas issued, 2020–2023

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

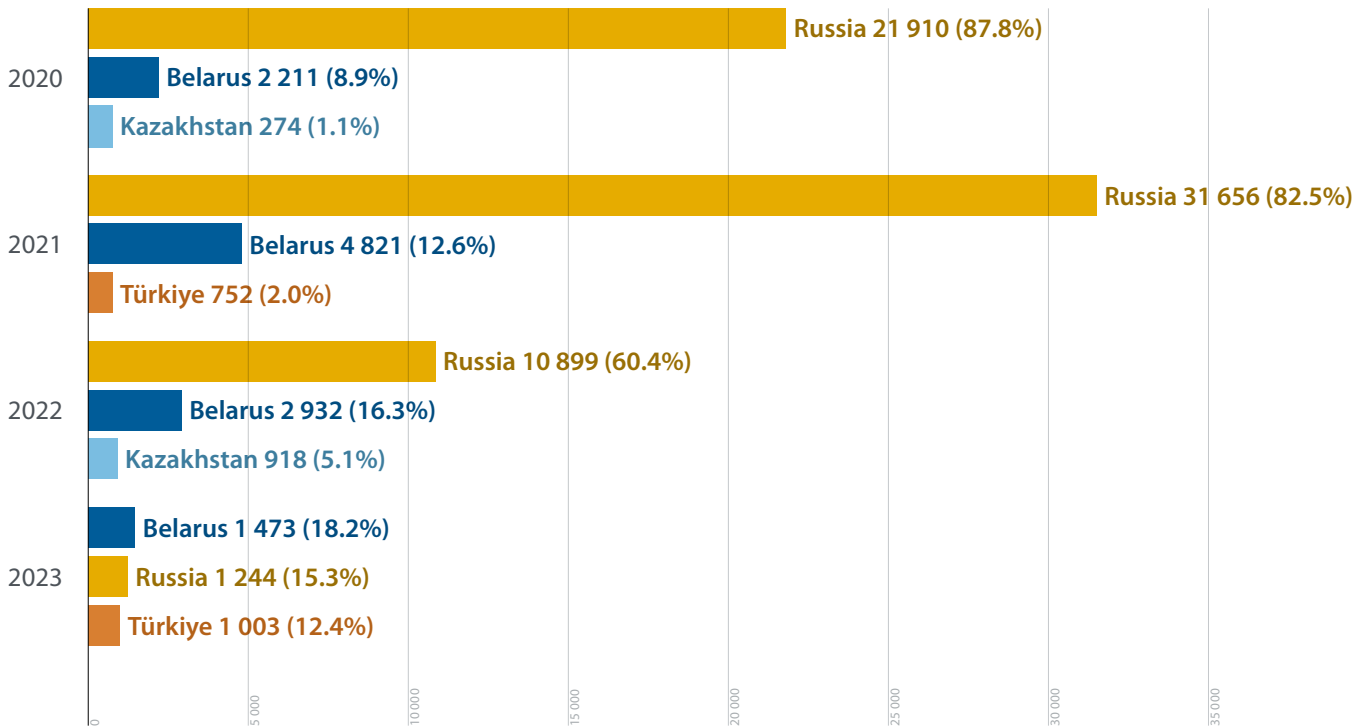


Note: Uniform short-stay visas (C visas) entitle the holder to stay in the territories of all Schengen States for up to 90 days within a 180-day period. Such visas may be issued for the purpose of a single entry or multiple entries.

Source: Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs

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

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



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

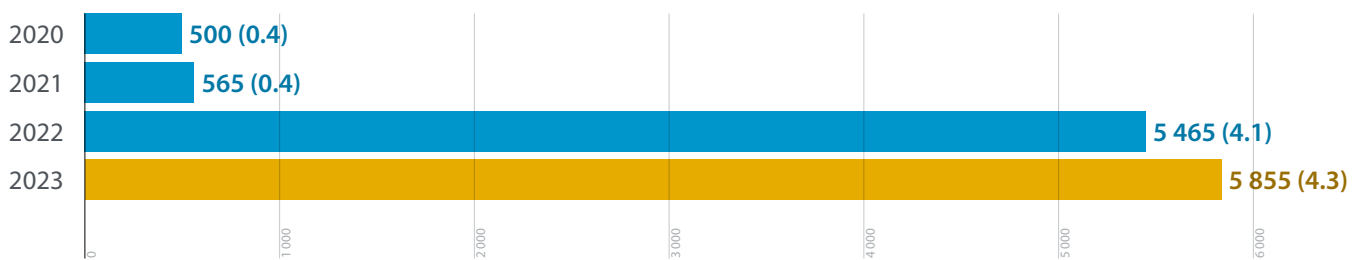
Source: Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs

IRREGULAR MIGRATION

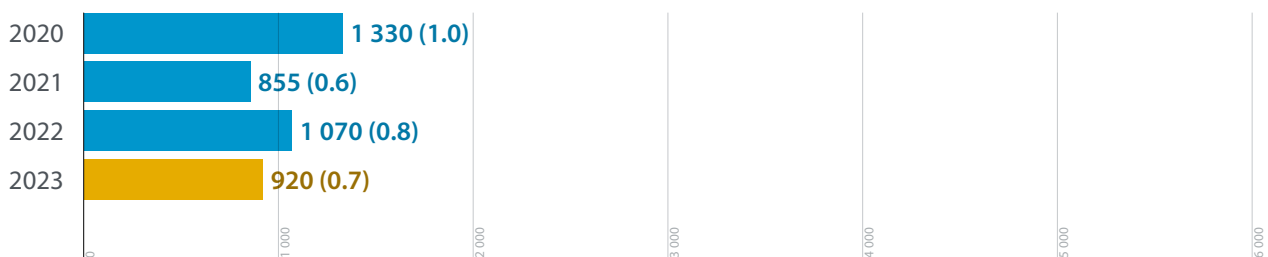
Third-country nationals subject to immigration law enforcement, 2020–2023

Absolute number (and the number per 1 000 people)

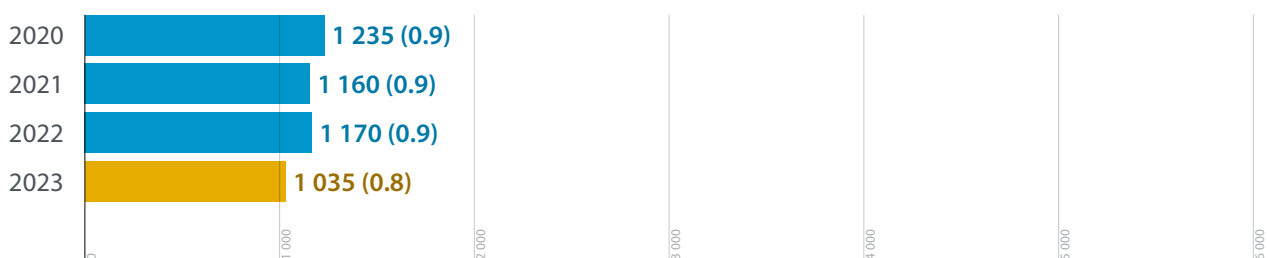
Persons refused entry



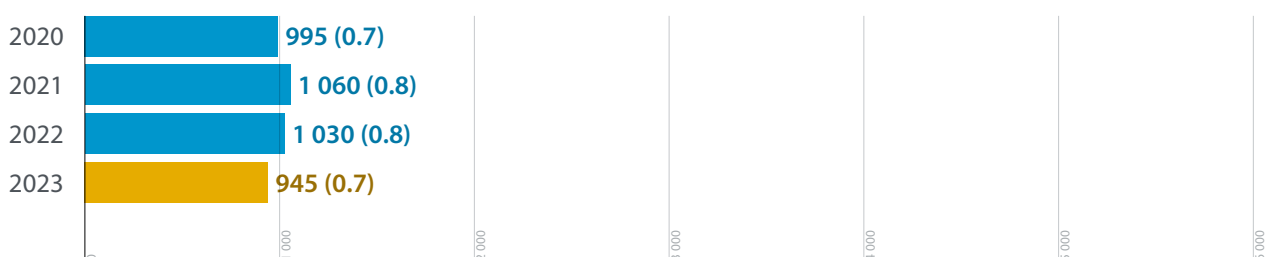
Persons found to be illegally present



Persons ordered to leave



Persons returned to a third country

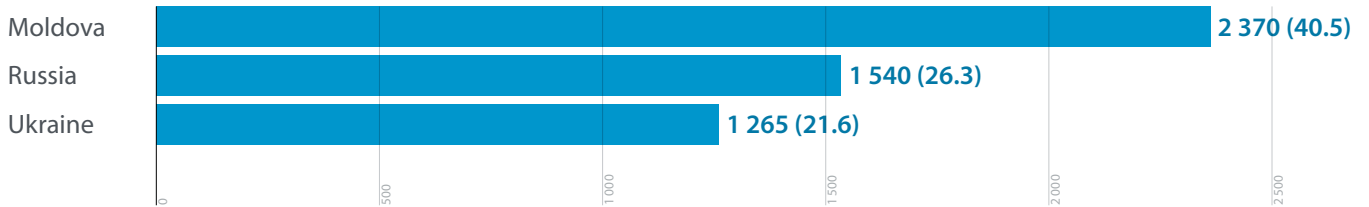


Source: Eurostat (*migr_eirfs, migr_eipre, migr_eiord, migr_eirtn, demo_gind and migr_eilpop*)

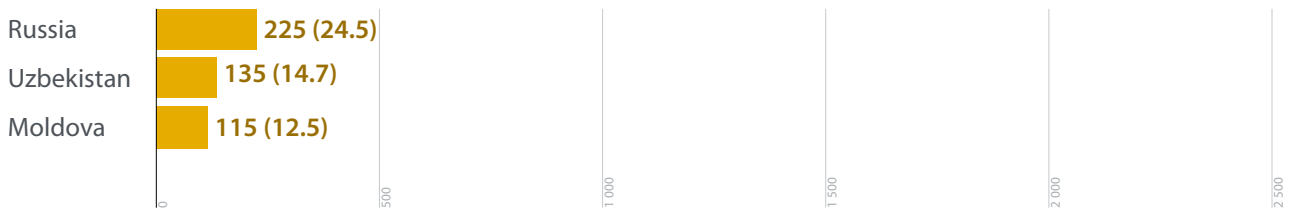
Top 3 countries of citizenship of third-country nationals subject to immigration law enforcement, 2023

Absolute numbers (and the shares in the respective totals)

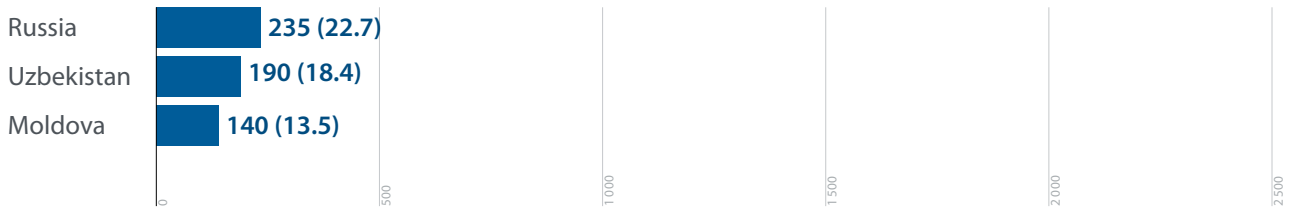
Persons refused entry



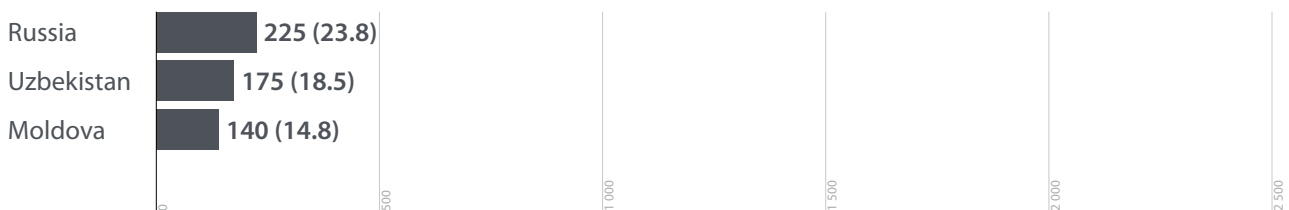
Persons found to be illegally present



Persons ordered to leave



Persons returned to a third country



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



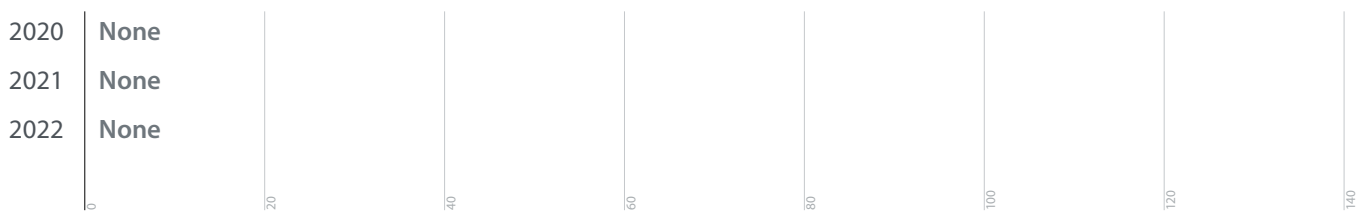
TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

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



Source: Eurostat (crim_thb_vctz)

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

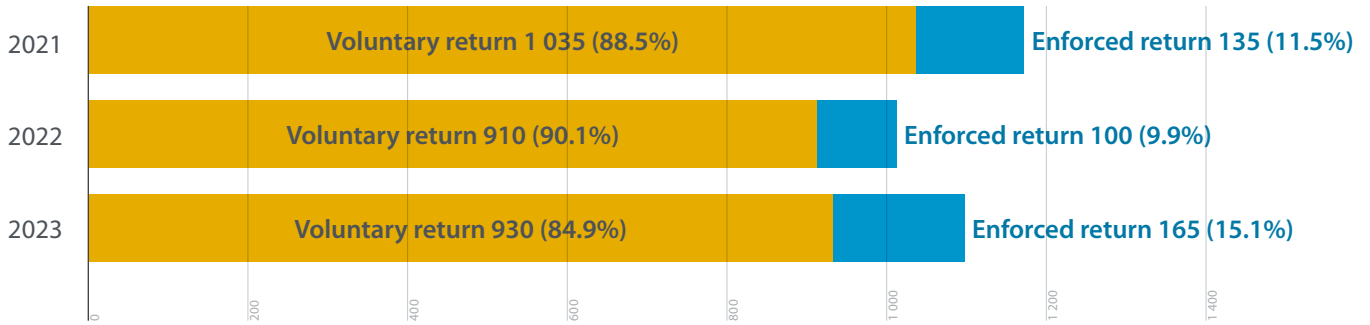


Source: Eurostat (migr_resoth)

RETURN AND READMISSION

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

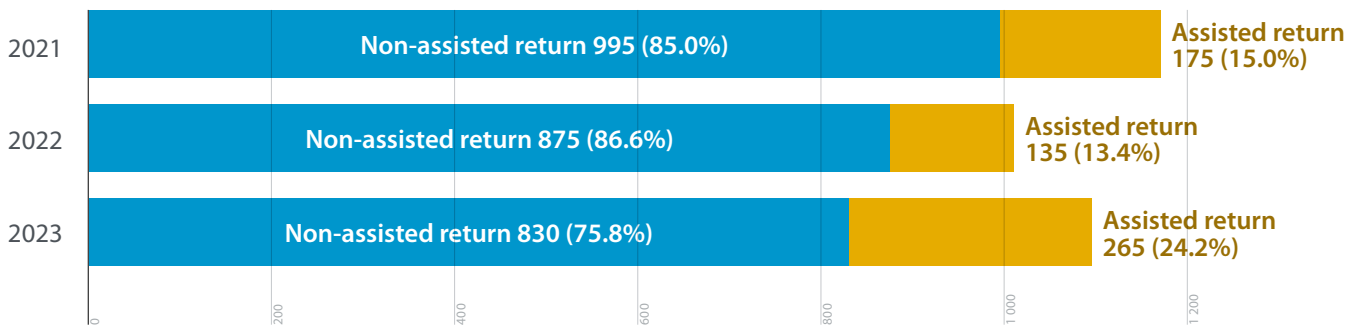
Absolute number (and the share of the total)



Source: Eurostat (migr_eirtn1)

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

Absolute number (and the share of the total)



Source: Eurostat (migr_eirtn1)