



2022 ANNUAL REPORT: Refugees in Spain and Europe EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CEA(R)

Comisión Española
de Ayuda al Refugiado



A displaced Syrian woman holds her children after visiting an aid delivery point at Abu Makki camp, in the Sarmada district outside Idlib, Syria. There are 12 camps and 14 orphanages in the Idlib region. According to the United Nations, 13.4 million people in Syria need some form of humanitarian assistance, including 6 million who require urgent assistance. More than 12 million people struggle to meet their basic food needs each day and 500,000 children suffer from chronic malnutrition. November 2021. © EFE/EPA/ SEDAT SUNA | CEAR

Cover photo: An Afghan refugee waits to be treated at a health unit in a camp on the outskirts of Islamabad in January 2022. After the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, millions of people have been forced to flee the country and the vast majority have taken refuge in neighboring countries. © Sohail Shahzad/EFE/EPA

Executive Summary

2022 Report

Refugees in Spain
and Europe





Migrants line up to register at the San Vicente migration reception center on 23 December 2021 in Darién, Panama. More than 130,000 migrants in transit to North America crossed Panama in 2021, without precedent for the Central American country, which is preparing to face a potential new wave of migration driven by the crisis created by the pandemic. © Bienvenido Velasco/EFE

1. Introduction

The 20th Annual Report of the Spanish Commission for Refugees (CEAR) analyzes the situation of refugees in the world, the European Union and, chiefly, Spain. For yet another year, the total number of forced displacements reached a new high, with 85.8 million displaced persons in June 2021. Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, and Palestine are the main countries of origin for refugees, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Afghanistan had the highest rates of new internal displacements during the first semester of 2021. And to all this, the situation of forced displacement from Ukraine starting in early 2022 due to the war the country is currently experiencing must be added. According to recent UNHCR data, the staggering figure of more than 100 million forcibly displaced people worldwide was reached by mid-2022.

Within the European Union, the Pact on Migration and Asylum did not progress as expected in 2021. There are still major disagreements on issues related to solidarity and shared responsibility, and the conflicting stances of the countries of the South and the Visegrád group remain evident.

Spain once again ranked third among EU countries to receive asylum seekers in terms of volume, with Venezuela and Colombia being the main countries of origin. However, international protection was only granted to 10.5% of the 71,830 people whose file was ruled on. Although this represents an increase compared to the previous year, it is markedly lower than the EU average of 35%. Moreover, 18.5% obtained a residence permit for humanitarian reasons.

The episode of arrivals to the autonomous city of Ceuta on 17 and 18 May was especially disconcerting; pushbacks were identified, and agglomerations formed in public spaces (parks, streets, etc.) due to difficulties in accessing the Center for Temporary Protection of Immigrants (CETI).

Finally, it is worth noting the response of the Spanish government in Operation Antigone, by which the arrival of refugees evacuated from Afghanistan was coordinated in an organized manner. This orchestrated and professionalized response to the forced displacements from Afghanistan is an example of the capacity of the state system to respond quickly and effectively in sudden emergencies.

For yet another year, the CEAR Annual Report offers authorities its main proposals to improve the protection of refugees based on a firm commitment to the right to asylum •





A woman fetches drinking water from one of the few places where one can find it in the drought-stricken region of Kwangite in Kilifi county, Ganze, Kenya. It is estimated that more than 2 million Kenyans are facing famine due to the ongoing drought. Thousands of animals died in the north, northeast and coastal regions, the latter of which were some of the hardest hit. Residents of Kilifi in Ganze, one of the regions most affected by the drought, have no choice but to walk over six hours to fetch water. Kilifi County (Kenya). October 2021. © Daniel Irungu / EFE / EPA

2. The global exodus

In June 2021, there were 85.8 million forcibly displaced people in the world due to violence, human rights violations, wars, and persecution. It is the highest figure known to date. Of these, 26.6 million were refugees, of whom 20.8 million were under the mandate of UNHCR and 5.7 million were Palestinian refugees under the protection of UNRWA; 4.4 million were international protection applicants and 3.9 million were displaced abroad from Venezuela. On

the other hand, there were 59.1 million internally displaced people at the end of 2021.

In addition to these data are the millions of people forcibly displaced as a result of the war in Ukraine in 2022, in total more than 6 million refugees and more than 7 million internally displaced people. According to recent UNHCR data, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide surpassed 100 million by mid-2022.



In mid-2021, 68% of people forced to cross their country's borders came from five countries: Syria (6.8 million), Venezuela (4.1 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million), South Sudan (2.3 million) and Myanmar (1.1 million). The countries to host the most displaced persons were Turkey (3.7 million), Colombia (1.7 million), Uganda (1.5 million) and Pakistan (1.4 million). As a whole, 86% of forcibly displaced people are received by some of the most impoverished countries.

Situations such as that of Syria are especially worrying: a decade after the start of the war, it is still not a safe country for millions of refugees to return to. Some 6.8 million Syrian refugees have been hosted in 129 countries, mainly neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. The situation in Afghanistan is also alarming, where more than half the population continues to be in dire need of humanitarian aid and displacements continue.

Regarding Venezuela, the upward trend in the number of displacements throughout 2018 and 2019 came to a halt in 2020 due to the pandemic restrictions, and there was a significant drop in protection applications. However, in the first half of 2021, it once again ranked

second in the origin of forcibly displaced people around the world, with around 6 million people forced abroad by the end of the year.

Lastly, it should be noted that the number of people displaced because of climate change and environmental degradation across the world is on the rise, with most coming from the countries of the Global South. Displacements due to such causes may reach 250 million people by 2050. Although the international agenda is paying increasingly greater attention to this issue, there are troubling regulatory vacuums when it comes to the protection of this displaced population. In this regard, one initial obstacle is the absence of an internationally agreed term. There is also a lack of legal recognition. However, progress could be made towards broader and more inclusive interpretations of existing instruments to guarantee the protection of all these people. At the EU level, the Temporary Protection Directive would be an appropriate instrument to guarantee their protection. The proposal for a New European Pact on Asylum and Migration is another opportunity to move forward in this regard by including specific protection mechanisms for this population •



Landing operations of the Geo Barents in Palermo, Italy. The Médecins Sans Frontières ship arrived at the port with 367 migrants on board, including 172 minors, following a rescue mission in the central Mediterranean in October 2021. © Igor Petyx/EFE/EPA

3. The European Union and refugees

In 2021, a total of 630,630 people applied for international protection in the EU, representing a notable increase from the 472,395 applicants the previous year. Germany (190,545), France (120,685) and Spain (65,404) hosted the largest number of applicants, 43% of the total. Syria (115,470), Afghanistan (98,685) and Iraq (29,850) were the main countries of origin, accounting for almost one third

of all the applications filed in the EU. The average recognition rate was 35% and the number of pending resolutions reached 758,645 by the end of the year.

Regarding the New European Pact on Migration and Asylum, there has been little progress in the negotiations throughout 2021. Except for the agreements reached in Directive 2009/50/EC on

highly qualified employment and the creation of the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA), the rest of the legislative proposals are still under negotiation.

Major disagreements persist on issues related to solidarity and shared responsibility and the different stances of the countries of the South and the Visegrád group remain evident. The proposal is especially focused on the externalization of borders and the reinforcement of returns. It includes an à la carte solidarity mechanism by which countries may choose to contribute through (non-mandatory) relocation commitments, return sponsorship, or other technical/

economic support. There is still room for negotiations to correct this drift and work to achieve a pact that is a full guarantee for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, negotiations were interrupted by the largest exodus of refugees in Europe since World War II. The European Union responded immediately, approving the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive, proving that with political will a common response is feasible. All this can serve as a precedent to develop instruments for the Pact that lay the foundations of a common and structured migration and asylum policy •



A woman feeds her baby at the camp on the border of Belarus and Poland. Hundreds of people seeking asylum in the EU were trapped at the border for three days in frigid temperatures. Grodno Region, Belarus. November 2021. © Stringer/EFE/EPA

4. Access to the right of asylum in Spain

In 2021, there were 65,404 international protection applicants in Spain, or 26% less than in 2020, partially due to restrictions on movement resulting from the pandemic. Other obstacles in the way of accessing the procedure that already existed in 2020 persisted in 2021: a shortage of online appointments to formalize international protection applications, delays in appointments, and restrictive practices and disparate criteria. In addition, cases of potential trafficking victims were still detected; these cases merit differential treatment in procedures for access to international protection since they represent particularly vulnerable situations.

Although Colombia and Venezuela remain the top countries for the third consecutive year, there was a noteworthy change in trend in the profile of the applicants, whose origin went from being mainly large family groups from Latin America to mostly young men on solo migration journeys from Africa. The other main nationalities of asylum seekers were: Morocco, Mali, Senegal, Peru, Honduras, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nicaragua. Overall, 64% of applicants were men and 36% were women.

Madrid, Catalonia, Andalusia, the Canary Islands and the Valencian Community were the five autonomous communities where the most applications were formalized in 2021, in that order. Despite the continued closure of the border with Morocco, Ceuta

and Melilla saw an increase in the number of asylum applications received.

Since the progressive lifting of travel restrictions on third-country nationals, there was an increase in international protection applicants received through air borders, with a total of 1,589 people by the end of 2021. The Spanish visa policy continued to be used, which prevented people from Haiti from accessing international protection, for example.

Following the downward trend of recent years, 639 applications were formalized at immigration detention facilities (CIE). These centers were closed for a few months due to the pandemic and later reopened unnecessarily despite the opposition of organizations such as CEAR, which defend the use of alternative legal measures.

Regarding the resolutions, 71,830 files were resolved in 2021, with Colombia and Venezuela being the main nationalities of applicants. However, at the end of the year, there were still 104,010 files pending resolution. The rise in the rate of protection recognition is noteworthy, exceeding 10%, although it is still far below the European average of 35%. It is also worth noting the decrease in the rate of accepted protection resolutions for humanitarian reasons for applicants from Venezuela, falling from 97% in 2020 to 82% in 2021 •





Young migrants scale the fence in the northern city of Fnideq in an attempt to cross the Spanish border into the enclave of Ceuta on 18 May 2021. In just over 24 hours, some 8,000 people entered the Spanish city of Ceuta on the North African coast. The border between Fnideq, Morocco and Ceuta, Spain. May 2021. © Jalal Morchidi/EFE/EPA

5. Situation on the Southern Border

As in 2020, the main points of arrival along the Spanish coasts during 2021 were the Canary Islands and the Andalusian coasts (mainly Almería). There was also a significant number of arrivals to Ceuta and Melilla. The response to the arrival of migrants on the Spanish coasts continued to present remarkable challenges in 2021.

The Government's response to the hike in arrivals to the Canary Islands led to the implementation of macro camps under the so-called "Canary Islands Plan" [Plan Canarias]. This is Spain's own response model for large-scale emergencies, and it must not be allowed to become chronic since it does not include the usual reception standards. Likewise, there were no humanitarian coordination spaces for all the actors involved to exchange information on the number of places available in the Canary Islands and the peninsula, their locations, specialized resources and the protocols to follow for certain

profiles in vulnerable situations. Another important issue was the operational difficulties in the care and referral of children traveling solo who arrived in the Canary Islands.

As for the arrivals in Ceuta, pushbacks were practiced on 17 and 18 May 2021 and agglomerations were formed in public spaces (parks, streets, etc.) due to difficulties in accessing the CETI and the failure to identify situations of vulnerability. In Melilla, there was a noteworthy increase in protection applications by Moroccans, which were dealt with through the territorial procedure while the border post was closed. While in Ceuta, asylum seekers were able to exercise their right to free movement and travel to the peninsula, in Melilla the right to free movement was not always respected and the requirements for travel to the peninsula were not uniform, ignoring the different criteria applied between the two autonomous cities •

6. Reception and integration

The reception and integration of refugees in 2021 continued to be shaped by the pandemic, ongoing since March 2020. Due to the decrease in the number of asylum applications submitted, there was a corresponding reduction in the number of people who accessed the national reception and integration system.

The Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration announced the modification of the current reception and integration system for international protection applicants and refugees to make it more robust and sustainable. It also considered increasing the number of reception spots in the system, focusing on state-owned spots, and establishing a new form of collaboration with organizations through joint action. CEAR deems this essential to maintaining the basic

pillars of the system: its inclusive and protective nature, comprehensive and specialized care, and multidisciplinary conformation. It is also essential to guarantee regional alignment and orchestration in phases and levels and to maintain the current model of social cooperation with specialized non-governmental organizations.

Finally, it is worth mentioning Operation Antigone, by which the arrival of refugees evacuated from Afghanistan was coordinated in an organized manner. The orchestrated and professionalized response to the forced displacements from Afghanistan is an example of the capacity of the state system to respond quickly and effectively in sudden emergencies when there is a political will to do so •



A Colombian family seeking asylum at a CEAR reception center in Alicante. © Winston Van Hughes/ CEAR

Proposals for improving the protection of refugees

CEAR has prepared a set of proposals for the Spanish authorities to guarantee the rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, regardless of their origin and with full respect for current legislation. Below is a list of the proposals that CEAR considers essential for this purpose.

1. Guarantee coherence between migration policy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Global Climate Action Agenda, the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025, the Spanish Urban Agenda, and the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees, ensuring an intercultural approach based on human rights and gender equality in their implementation.
2. Move towards broad and inclusive interpretations of the definition of “refugee” contained in the Geneva Convention to guarantee the protection of people fleeing from situations prompted by climate change or environmental degradation.
3. Defend and promote solidarity and co-responsibility among EU Member States in the reception and protection of asylum seekers and refugees. For this, work must be done to achieve a Common European Asylum System that improves alignment in the evaluation of international protection applications and the rate of recognition between the different States.
4. In the negotiations for a New European Pact on Asylum and Migration, promote the adoption of an agreement for safe disembarkation that includes mandatory relocation quotas. The new pact must also guarantee access to the procedure, the personalized review of each application without applying criteria of nationality, and compliance with the due guarantees and the principle of non-refoulement.
5. Make headway with the effective transposition of the European Directives on international protection to Spanish Law 12/2009 of 30 October regulating the right to asylum and subsidiary protection.
6. Take on a greater commitment to adopting safe and legal vias for obtaining protection. This implies more ambitious resettlement quotas, increasing the number of people ultimately resettled, and expanding the number of eligible nationalities. It also means a more extensive application of Article 38 of the Spanish Asylum Law and greater flexibility of family reunification requirements.

7. Eliminate the transit visa requirement for people from countries in conflict such as Haiti, Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Gambia and Cameroon, whose populations suffer from serious human rights violations and are eligible for international protection.

8. Comply with the recommendations of the Ombudsman in its 2021 annual report, including guaranteeing the rights of asylum seekers until a final resolution is issued, providing detainees at the CETIs with information on the right to asylum, and allowing verification rounds to be conducted in the rooms for people denied entry and asylum seekers at the Madrid-Barajas airport to check the status of all persons while they are held in said units.

9. Guarantee access to the procedure under the provisions of Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection. To do so, it is necessary to improve and eradicate the deficiencies of the appointment system for formalizing international protection applications and increase the number of appointments available

for those who wish to submit said applications in Spain.

10. Provide immediate access to the ordinary procedure for applicants with specific needs that cannot be addressed in expedited border procedures and foreigner detention centers under Article 24 of Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for granting or withdrawing international protection.

11. Modify the Joint instructions of the General Directorate of Police and the Civil Guard, the Department of Interior Policy, and the Directorate of Immigration on the treatment of foreign stowaways of 28 November 2007 to guarantee access to the international protection procedure for stowaways, legal assistance and an interpreter.

12. Guarantee that the interviews to formalize international protection applications meet the minimum requirements established in art. 17 of the Spanish Asylum Law, providing sufficient human resources and continuous training for the officials in charge of conducting them.

13. Guarantee quality interpreting in a language that the applicant understands and in which they can express the reasons for their request in detail. This must be guaranteed throughout the entire procedure, including notifications of the resolutions of acceptance, non-acceptance or denial of international protection.

14. Guarantee discerning treatment during the international protection procedure at the border and foreign detention centers, applying a perspective of gender, sexual diversity, age and vulnerability in cases in which the vulnerability factors of art. 46 of the Spanish Asylum Law apply.

15. Settle the 104,000 files pending resolution and promote the registration, processing and resolution of family extension files effectively to guarantee the right to family reunification of the beneficiaries of international protection.

16. Move forward in the recognition of the right to asylum in cases of persecution by non-state agents when applicants lack effective protection by the country's authorities.

17. Agree to the closure of the foreigner detention centers and contemplate alternative measures set forth in the Spanish Immigration Law.

18. Put an end to the pushback of people who arrive in Ceuta and Melilla and the isles and guarantee that the Tenth Additional Provision of the Immigration Law is applied in full accordance with international regulations on the protection of human rights signed by Spain.

19. Improve the humanitarian response and protection of rights in emergencies (foreseen or unforeseen) resulting from the increase in arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers through the design of expeditious action protocols to expand the system's capacity in emergencies and humanitarian crises when necessary and ensure the financial and institutional sustainability of the system at all times.

20. Streamline the first emergency response to cover minimum but basic reception conditions, through contingency plans that respond to the increase in arrivals, such as those in the Canary Islands or Ceuta.

21. Avoid prolonged stays in large reception camps and expedite the transfer to the peninsula of migrants arriving in the Canary Islands or Ceuta/Melilla. In the case of the Canary Islands, the transfer and relocation of children who arrive alone must be urgently expedited, and shared responsibility and solidarity between all the autonomous communities for their reception must be promoted.

22. Improve action protocols for the arrival of adults with children, prioritizing the best interest of the child over other considerations.

23. Make the model of the reception and integration system for international protection applicants and refugees more solid and sustainable, by safeguarding rights, including a regulatory framework that guarantees the protection of the economic, social and cultural rights of international protection applicants and beneficiaries.

24. Maintain the characteristics of the Spanish reception and integration system based on the methodological design of intervention by phases and levels through personalized integrated itineraries of inclusion that cover the inclusive, individualized and specialized attention of the system.

25. Maintain the current model of social cooperation with social organizations and specialized NGOs, which are key actors in the management of resources for interdisciplinary reception teams, both in professionalized units and in their community contexts.

26. Design equitable territorial distribution mechanisms that ensure compliance with the responsibility resulting from international obligations regardless of the territorial context and that guarantee a balance in the service provided to people in the international protection system and response to humanitarian emergencies. These mechanisms must incorporate equitable and fair criteria for the allocation of places, the response to situations of social and economic vulnerability, and the treatment of certain reception needs.

27. Maintain the Reception, Care and Referral Centers (CREADE) set up in response to the emergency in Ukraine as spaces for registration, documentation, and access to the procedure for all asylum seekers regardless of their place of origin.

28. Build narratives that help create a positive political and institutional line of communication

regarding migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. The joint message and the agreed response to the displacement caused by the war in Ukraine were key to generating an inclusive story and a feeling of solidarity across all strata of society.

29. Promote and support the participation of associations, volunteers and citizens as an element of social cohesion, including through the implementation and funding of community action, care and local solidarity programs and projects linked to international protection in the local reception contexts, as well as projects and initiatives to raise awareness and eradicate hate speech, racism and xenophobia.

30. Approve the Comprehensive Law on Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination. In addition to criminal law, comprehensive regulations are needed to protect victims from discriminatory behavior that currently does not constitute a crime but does constitute an administrative offence.

31. Approve the Comprehensive Law for the Protection and Assistance of Human Trafficking Victims, addressing all types of trafficking, whether or not they are related to organized crime, and regardless of the sex, age, administrative status or nationality of the victims.







We hereby present our 20th Annual Report. And we do so still appalled by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has led to the largest exodus in Europe since World War II. The global forced displacement figures continue to shatter records year after year. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by mid-2021, 85.8 million people had left their homes due to persecution, human rights violations and wars.

We continued to observe obstacles to solidarity and shared responsibility in the European Union. They were clear during the negotiations of the New European Pact on Asylum and Migration which, more than two years after its presentation, is still under negotiation.

The effects of the pandemic continued to impact the number of arrivals of undocumented migrants on European coasts and other points along the external EU borders, including Spain. Moreover, several specific events took place, such as the more than 8,000 people who arrived in Ceuta in May, the forced departure of

thousands of Afghan nationals, and the scaling of the Melilla fence in early March 2022—the largest to ever happen in the autonomous city. Despite the decrease in the number of applicants—down to 65,404 in Spain—and the number of resolutions, the recognition rate doubled in 2021 compared to 2020, surpassing 10%. However, it is still far below the European average of 35%.

The report reflects on some of the major aspects of the current reality at the main points of arrival along Spain's southern border: the Canary Islands, Ceuta, Melilla and the coasts. It also details some of the latest developments in the asylum system in the context of the progressive recovery from the pandemic and the evolution of humanitarian care, shelter and reception programs for migrants and international protection applicants. Special attention is paid to the shelter and reception process for people from Afghanistan, always with a focus on profiles of special vulnerability and the firm intention of promoting their full social inclusion and autonomy.

From the prologue by Carlos Berzosa, CEAR president

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