

2026 CEAR REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Refugees in Spain and Europe



CEA(R)

Comisión Española
de Ayuda al Refugiado

**The Spanish Commission for
Refugee Aid (CEAR) is a non-
governmental organization founded
in 1979 with the aim of working
alongside citizens to defend the
right to asylum.**

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Cover photo: Residents of a CEAR reception center take part in a community garden activity that they regularly hold together with local residents of the municipality. February 2026, Madrid. © Jaime Alekos

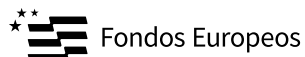
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INTRODUCTION

The 24th Annual Report of the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid (CEAR) analyzes the situation of refugees worldwide, in the European Union, and, primarily, in Spain.

The global figure for forced displacement fell for the first time in a decade, reaching 117.5 million people by mid-2025, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This 5% decrease from the figures recorded in 2024 is the first decline in a decade. However, it does not reflect reduced protection needs; rather, it indicates an increase in anti-migration policies worldwide.

Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, and Venezuela remained the main countries of origin of refugees, and Sudan joined the ranks for the first time with an 18% increase. Meanwhile, 88% of new cases of internal displacement recorded in 2025 occurred in Haiti, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, and Ukraine.

In Palestine, the genocide continued unabated in the face of inaction by an international community whose credibility has crumbled as Israel has inflicted devastation on the Palestinian people and territory.

The EU continued to promote legislative reforms aimed at further bolstering returns and shifting responsibilities to third countries. In this regard, in March 2026, the concepts of “safe country of origin” and “safe third country” were overhauled, putting the principle of non-refoulement at risk. The first establishes a general presumption of safety that jeopardizes the individualized review of asylum applications from individuals coming from countries deemed “safe”; the latter allows for the return of individuals whose applications have been denied to countries where they have no prior significant ties, with mere transit being sufficient. Furthermore, the proposed new Return Regulation aims to streamline and increase the effectiveness of returns. It includes measures that severely

restrict rights, such as prolonged detention and sanctions, and paves the way for the creation of “return centers” outside the EU.

In 2025, Spain fell from second to third place in the number of applications for international protection across the EU. Syria fell from first to third place in the number of applications registered, with Afghanistan and Venezuela taking the top two spots. The protection rate across the EU slumped significantly from 46.6% in 2024 to a historic low of 29%, and Spain once again ranked last at 11.2% (down 7.3% from 2024).

The number of sea arrivals on Spanish shores declined significantly, primarily along the Canary Islands route. This was the result of strengthened migration controls with third countries, especially Mauritania. In contrast to this overall decline, the Balearic route underwent a considerable increase, particularly in the number of people from Somalia undertaking long, arduous journeys with severe consequences for their physical and mental health, making them even more vulnerable. On the other hand, significant legislative reforms have impacted the reception of children and adolescents in the Canary Islands, resulting in the transfer of 581 minors in 2025.

Lastly, the International Protection Reception System (IPRS) reached a turning point in 2025, driven by the sustained increase in asylum applications in previous years, the consolidation of heavy migration flows in border areas, and the arrival of unaccompanied minors. It is also important to note the substantial changes in the system's internal organization and in the criteria for referral, stay, and discharge of participants. Structural difficulties in accessing housing and administrative barriers to accessing basic rights, such as health care and education, persist as challenges in the integration processes for international protection beneficiaries •



A Sudanese family carrying all their belongings moments before returning to Sudan from the village of Atham, a border town in South Sudan and one of the main destinations for displaced people. February 2025, South Sudan.
© Diego Menjívar

A young boy in a red shirt stands in front of a heavily loaded truck. The truck's bed is piled high with large, light-colored sacks, likely containing grain or other bulk goods. The boy is looking directly at the camera. The background is a clear, bright sky.

THE GLOBAL EXODUS

According to the UNHCR, there were **117.5 million forcibly displaced people in 2025**. Compared with 2024, this represents a 5% decline—the first in nearly a decade—but it does not reflect a reduction in protection needs. On the contrary, it is indicative of the shrinking of spaces of protection, and particularly of the securitization of migration policies globally, which has led to greater border externalization and forced returns in countries that had previously hosted large numbers of refugees.

There were 42.5 million refugees worldwide, including 5.9 million Palestine refugees under the UNRWA's mandate; 8.4 million were asylum seekers; and approximately 4.4 million were stateless.

Just five countries hosted more than a third of the global refugee population: Colombia (2.8 million), Germany (2.7 million), Turkey (2.7 million), Iran (2.5 million), and Uganda (1.9 million). As in previous years, most refugees sought protection in neighboring countries, the majority of which were low- or middle-income nations, such as Bangladesh, Chad, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Niger, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Yemen.

It is worth noting that, as in previous years, **people displaced within their own countries of origin or residence** constituted the largest group of forcibly displaced people, totaling 67.8 million (down from 72.1 million in 2024). With more than 10 million internally displaced people, Sudan remained the country with the most internal displacements worldwide, followed by Syria, with 6.5 million internally displaced people. On the other hand, just six countries accounted for 88% of new internal displacements in 2025: Haiti, Myanmar, Nigeria, the DRC, South Sudan, and Ukraine.

This chapter analyzes the major displacement crises across the globe: Afghanistan, Syria, Venezuela, Ukraine, Sudan, the Sahel, the DRC, and Somalia. In Afghanistan, deteriorated human rights, socioeconomic fragility, and the climate crisis continued to exacerbate the



humanitarian crisis and forced displacement in the country. Of particular concern is the lived reality of women and girls in a system that human rights organizations and experts describe as a true gender apartheid that institutionalizes gender-based discrimination, oppression, and domination.

Syria continued to face multiple humanitarian and security challenges, despite the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime and the start of a fragile transition process, thus raising questions about the feasibility of large-scale returns. In 2025, more than 1.3 million Syrian refugees returned to the country, mainly from Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, and nearly 2 million internally displaced persons returned to their places of origin or other destinations of their choice. However, in the context of instability, intercommunal tensions fueled by external actors intensified, with serious episodes of sectarian and communal violence leading to forced displacement.

In **Venezuela**, although there were some macroeconomic improvements, the social, political, human rights, and humanitarian crises persisted, specifically affecting the most vulnerable collectives. According to UNHCR data, by the end of 2025, 7.9 million people from Venezuela had

been displaced outside the country, making it the leading country of origin for refugees worldwide.

In **Ukraine**, patterns of systematic violations of international humanitarian law intensified, notably the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas, short-range drones, kamikaze drones, as well as coordinated attacks on energy infrastructure that disrupted electricity, water, and heating supplies across the country during a winter with temperatures as low as -15°C . In this context, the refugee population from Ukraine continued to grow, reaching nearly 5.9 million. Of these, more than 90% were hosted in European countries—primarily in the European Union—with the main host countries being Poland (979,980), the Czech Republic (396,820), Romania (199,640), Slovakia (151,240), and Moldova (139,160). The EU Temporary Protection Directive, which has already enabled more than 4.3 million people displaced by this conflict to access protection quickly and effectively, was extended through March 2027.

In **Sudan**, the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) entered its third



A child looks out at the sea from the ruins of a destroyed home, surrounded by makeshift tents due to displacement. The devastation in Gaza has forced thousands of families to abandon their homes and seek shelter along the coast. January 2026, Palestine. © Abed al hakeem Abu Reyash

In 2025, 117.5 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide.

The **Democratic Republic of the Congo** continued to experience an escalation of insecurity, which, combined with the deterioration of human rights and vulnerability to the climate crisis, has led to more than 4.9 million internally displaced persons, while the country was hosting more than 600,000 refugees from other countries, mainly from the Central African Republic, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Burundi. At the same time, 1.3 million people from the DRC were living in other countries as refugees and asylum seekers, mainly in Uganda (629,961), Burundi (104,885), Rwanda (78,875), Tanzania (73,368), Zambia (70,167), Kenya (65,249), and other African countries.

In **Somalia**, amid prolonged armed conflict, restrictions on rights, and high vulnerability to the impacts of the climate crisis, 3.8 million people were internally displaced. Meanwhile, more than 903,000 Somalis were refugees or asylum seekers outside the country, hosted mostly in neighboring countries such as Kenya (484,530), Ethiopia (360,734), Uganda (50,617), and Yemen (38,372).

Lastly, **Israel's genocidal campaign against the Palestinian** population continued into 2025, particularly in the Gaza Strip. After a brief lull at the beginning of the year, the Israeli offensive intensified in March 2025, while the flow of humanitarian aid into the Strip was further restricted. In May, a militarized and privatized distribution system created by Israel and the U.S., the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), was launched. More than 2,500 people were killed while waiting in lines to receive food from the GHF. This situation led to the official declaration of famine in the Strip.

In early October, a new ceasefire agreement was reached based on the U.S. president's so-called "Peace Plan," or "20-Point Plan," which was subsequently endorsed by the UN Security Council through Resolution 2803 on November 17, 2025. This resolution has been described by independent UN experts and Palestinian civil society organizations as contrary to peremptory norms of international law, as it undermines the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination •

year in April 2025, with devastating consequences in terms of forced displacement, the humanitarian situation, and protection and human rights. In April, more than 1,000 internally displaced persons were killed during the RSF attack on the Zamzam camp, leading to the renewed forced displacement of over 400,000 residents of the camp. By late October, after an 18-month siege, the RSF captured the capital of North Darfur, El Fasher, committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts constituting genocide against non-Arab communities—primarily the Zaghawa and Fur. In total, 13.4 million Sudanese people remained forcibly displaced by mid-2025, and 10.1 million were internally displaced. Refugees from Sudan were mainly hosted in neighboring countries, including Chad (1.3 million), Egypt (737,400), South Sudan (551,300), Libya (386,200), and Ethiopia (96,600).

In the **central Sahel —Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger—** political instability, conflicts, and climate-related disasters continued to cause forced displacement, both within each country and across the region as a whole. According to UNHCR projections, by the end of 2026, up to 5.7 million people will be forcibly displaced in the Sahel, Mauritania, and the coastal countries of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo.

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND REFUGEES

In 2025, many of the conflicts that had marked the previous year persisted and intensified, including those in Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Venezuela, while instability in the Sahel and West Asia increased. Nevertheless, the EU continues to prioritize a security-based approach to migration policy at the expense of establishing safe, legal migration routes and providing protection.

In 2025, the number of irregular arrivals in Europe dropped 24% compared to 2024, continuing the downward trend (158,003 versus 208,909) and breaking the upward cycle observed from 2020 to 2023. However, **deaths and disappearances remained high, with 2,504 recorded in 2025** compared to 3,812 in 2024, reflecting just how perilous the routes are and how insufficient search-and-rescue capacity is.

The profile of arrivals in Europe changed substantially in 2025 compared to 2024. After the fall of the al-Assad regime, **Syria no longer leads the list of main countries of origin, and Bangladesh has moved into first place with a 58% increase in arrivals**, followed by Egypt. Afghanistan continues in third place. **Sudan and Somalia reappeared for the first time since 2020**, while Mali and Senegal saw a significant drop in their numbers compared to the previous year (-61% and -58%, respectively).

Once again, **the majority of arrivals came by sea (143,715)**, while only 9% (14,288) arrived by land. As for the routes, **the Central Mediterranean route to Malta and Italy remained stable** (66,562 compared to 66,855 in 2024), while arrivals via the Eastern Mediterranean to Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus fell by 30% from 2024. **The Atlantic route to the Canary Islands experienced the sharpest decline**, shifting from a 17% increase in 2024 (46,843 arrivals) to a 62% decrease in 2025 (17,788).

In 2025, 158,003 people arrived in the EU, 24% fewer than in 2024.

Despite these fluctuations, Italy (66,316), Greece (48,916), and Spain (36,775) remained the main countries of arrival in the EU.

Regarding land arrivals (14,288), Bulgaria recorded a sharp decline (3,306; -64%), while Greece became the main country of entry (7,132, compared to 7,574 in 2024). Spain ranked third, with a significant increase in land arrivals (3,850; +45%).

In 2025, the EU, along with Norway and Switzerland, recorded **822,000 asylum applications, a 19% decrease from 2024**, continuing the downward trend that began in 2023. **Germany remained the country with the most applications (162,664), followed by France (152,291), Spain (143,170), which dropped to third place, and Italy (133,520; -16%).** Greece remained in fifth place (61,631). The main countries of origin varied by destination, with Syria, Afghanistan, and Turkey standing out in Germany; Afghanistan, Haiti, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in France; Venezuela, Mali, and Colombia in Spain; and Bangladesh, Peru, and Egypt in Italy.

As for the nationalities of asylum applicants in the EU, there were significant changes compared to 2024. **Syria no longer tops the list, as the number of asylum applications fell by 72%; Afghanistan (117,119) now holds that position, with applications increasing by 33%.** Venezuela ranks second, followed by Syria (42,421), Bangladesh (36,900), and Turkey (33,203).

Regarding unaccompanied minors, **21,125 applied for asylum in 2025, 42% fewer than in 2024.** The majority were from Afghanistan (13%), Eritrea, Syria, Egypt, and Somalia. Germany received the most applications of this type (23%), followed by the Netherlands (17%), Spain (15%), Greece (14%), and Belgium (8%).

By the end of 2025, approximately **4.35 million people** who fled **Ukraine** following the Russian invasion in February 2022 were receiving **temporary protection in the EU.** The figures have remained relatively stable since

early 2023; as was the case last year, most received temporary protection in Germany (1.2 million) and Poland (1 million), although the Czech Republic hosts the highest number per capita (1 per every 28 residents). Spain granted temporary protection to 248,687 Ukrainians in 2025, a figure similar to that of 2024. The EU issued 683,395 new temporary protection decisions, 14% fewer than in 2024, thus confirming the downward trend of recent years. Most Member States saw a decrease in the number of decisions made, notably so in Germany (–24%), Poland (–7.9%) and Romania (–26.1%). Only a few countries saw increases, such as Denmark (+42.4%), Lithuania (+12.8%), and Latvia (+15.6%). Since the start of the war, the EU has granted temporary protection to nearly 6.9 million Ukrainians.

The recognition rate for international protection fell to 29%, the lowest on record, and a decline of more than 15% from 2024. This can be explained by various factors, including fewer decisions issued on applications submitted by Syrian nationals following processing suspensions imposed by several countries after the fall of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024. The recognition rate for Syrian nationals thus declined sharply, from 90% over the previous two years to 28% in 2025. Recognition rates for other nationalities, such as Turkish, have also declined significantly, dropping from 54% in 2019 to 13% in 2025, and for Iraq, which fell to 19% in 2025.

In contrast, nationals of Haiti, Mali, and Afghanistan show a common upward trend: Haiti reached nearly 90% (up from less than 20% in 2021), ranking first on the list; followed by Mali, which exceeded 80% in 2024 and 2025 (below 20% in 2019); and Afghanistan reached 68% in 2025 (below 20% in 2017).

The EU countries that granted the most protection in 2025 were Finland (95%) and Estonia (93%), followed by Hungary (65%), Portugal (59%), Greece (58%) and Austria (58%). Spain once again ranks at the bottom, with a rate of 11.2%, which is 7.3% lower than in 2024.

The total number of applications processed in the EU grew by 15% in 2025, with 874,416 decisions, in line with recent trends. Germany (273,983) remains the EU country with the highest number of resolved international protection applications, followed this year by France (151,041), Spain (141,674), and Italy (115,899). Moreover, the total number of pending applications fell from 1,247,100 to 1,219,390, although this figure remains among the highest on record.

Germany, Spain, Italy, and France accounted for up to 77.3% of all pending applications at the end of 2025. The vast majority of pending applications continued to be from nationals of Venezuela (120,079 or 30% higher than in 2024). Syria remained in second place, despite



Two parents bid farewell to their daughter, who is boarding an evacuation train in the city of Pokrovsk. Due to the rapid advance of Russian troops, hundreds of civilians are leaving the city and its surroundings in Pokrovsk. August 2024, Ukraine. © Diego Herrera

a decrease in the number of applications filed, followed by Colombia (70,352), Afghanistan (43,476), and Peru (42,968).

Discussions continued in 2025 on measures related to the **European Pact on Migration and Asylum (EPMA)**, which is set to enter into force on June 12, 2026. The debate focused specifically on its **external dimension**, one of its strategic pillars, which is integrated across most of its regulatory instruments.

One of the most controversial aspects has been the expansion and relaxation of the use of the **concepts of “safe country of origin” and “safe third country,”** which allow **Member States to declare international protection applications inadmissible based on generalized assumptions**, thereby failing to ensure an individualized examination of each case.

The Pact introduces the **possibility of drawing up a common European list of countries of origin presumed to be safe** on the understanding that there is no general risk of persecution. It also allows for the creation of additional national lists that need not coincide with the European ones. In December 2025, the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Parliament

Cooperation with third countries in the field of migration control is a strategic pillar of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum, which enters into force on June 12, 2026.

agreed on the first list, which will take effect in June 2026 and includes **Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, India, Kosovo, Morocco, and Tunisia.**

The concept of a **“safe third country”** implies that a country through which the applicant has transited and with which they have a reasonable connection (usually a prior stay) can offer them effective protection. However, negotiations throughout 2025 have further eroded safeguards on the use of this concept: the country of return does not need to appear on an official list and, following the February 2026 adoption of Regulation 2026/463 amending the Procedures Regulation, **it is no longer necessary to demonstrate a prior reasonable connection; mere transit is sufficient.**

To facilitate returns, the European Commission proposed a **new Return Regulation** in November 2025 that establishes faster procedures, extends the maximum



People forcibly displaced from various sub-Saharan African nationalities wait for assistance on a wooden boat overcrowded with 107 people, as workers from the Spanish NGO Open Arms approach them in the Mediterranean Sea, in international waters, 60 miles off the Libyan coast. February 2021, Central Mediterranean. © Bruno Thevenin

detention period to 24 months, and introduces penalties for non-cooperation with the authorities. Furthermore, the proposal allows for **readmission to third countries with return agreements, even in the absence of any prior connection** to the person concerned, and paves the way for the creation of “return centers” outside the EU.

In late December 2025, the Council of the European Union reached a political agreement to launch the **annual solidarity mechanism** for 2026. This instrument was designed under the EPMA to provide support to Member States with the highest numbers of irregular migrant and refugee arrivals. The agreement stipulates that **in 2026, the main countries to benefit from this support will be Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Spain**. However, this mechanism introduces a flexible system that allows Member States to choose how they contribute to migration management at the European level; they can select among relocation measures, financial contributions, or assuming responsibility for returning a person to a third country with which they have an existing readmission agreement. This puts potential solidarity at risk of becoming a mechanism for financial compensation and the externalization of responsibilities •

ACCESS TO THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM IN SPAIN

In 2025, access to the international protection procedure in Spain remained contingent on entry into the country or crossing the state’s borders. Article 38 of the Asylum Law provides for the possibility of requesting transfer from a third country to Spain to subsequently initiate the procedure. Although no official data is published on individuals transferred through this channel, CEAR teams observed that they were primarily Afghan and Palestinian nationals, with other cases involving highly exceptional circumstances. This provision continues to be applied inconsistently across embassies, leading to various rulings and judgments by the National Court and the Supreme Court ordering the immediate transfer of applicants.

The applications that the Ministry of the Interior counts as having been submitted at embassies are actually family extensions. In 2025, 2,513 applications of this type were recorded, representing 1.7% of the total and a 38.8% increase over 2024. Processing these applications continues to present challenges, particularly in verifying family ties, dependency, and prior cohabitation in the case of extended families, as well as significant processing delays.

A total of 134,895 international protection applications were filed in Spain, accounting for 93.4% of the total. Throughout 2025, applications declined gradually, ending the year 14.25% lower than 2024. The decline was particularly concentrated in the second half of the year. Thanks to this reduction, some provinces were able to begin scheduling appointments to formalize applications, though they did not meet the 3- to 6-day deadlines outlined in the Procedures Directive. Over the year, the pilot project to formalize applications at the Reception, Care, and Referral Centers (CREADE) continued for vulnerable individuals who arrived via the Canary Islands





and were transferred to the mainland. Likewise, in the summer of 2025, the Ministry of the Interior launched an emergency plan in the Canary Islands to process applications from minors who had expressed the desire to seek asylum, in compliance with the Supreme Court Order of March 25, 2025, which mandated their access to the state's International Protection Reception System.

In March 2025, a Joint Directive issued by the Secretary of State for Security and the Undersecretary of the Interior was approved, establishing that access to the procedure cannot be made contingent upon possession of specific documentation, registration in the municipal census, administrative status, or a prior assessment of the application's viability. The Directive also set forth guidelines regarding the formalization interview, the confidentiality of interview spaces, legal assistance and interpreting, and the special treatment of individuals with specific needs.

At border checkpoints (airports, ports, and land borders in Ceuta and Melilla), 6,135 applications were submitted, down from 7,382 in 2024 but stable in percentage terms (4.2% versus 4.4%). Since the closure of the border crossings in Ceuta and Melilla in 2020 to individuals without a Schengen visa or residence permit, applications at this land border have dropped dramatically. Just a single application was filed in 2025 by a Moroccan man at the Ceuta border crossing, which was denied, although the National Court upheld the interim measures.

99% of border applications were filed at airports. Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas Airport was the main point of registration, with 5,523 applications. In 2025, CEAR provided legal assistance to 3,692 people in this border procedure, or approximately 70% of the applications filed at this airport. The main nationalities served were Venezuela, Palestine, Colombia, Ecuador, Morocco, Russia, Cameroon, Iran, Bolivia, and Sudan.

In July 2025, a transit visa requirement was imposed on Russian nationals even though they accounted for only 3% of the applications filed under this procedure.

During October and November, in response to the increase in arrivals at Madrid's airport, facilities were set up in Terminal 2 that did not meet the minimum requirements of the Reception Directive, prompting CEAR to file complaints with the Ombudsman. These issues were resolved within a few days, and individuals in vulnerable situations or with manifestly well-founded claims were authorized to enter the country. 82% of the people assisted by CEAR were admitted for processing. In 33 cases, urgent interim measures had to be requested from the National Court to suspend return to the country of origin following a final denial; these were granted in only five instances. In the other 28 cases, despite the UNHCR's recommendation for admission, the individuals were returned to their country of origin. The lack of suspensive effect in appeals within the border asylum procedure violates Article 46.7 of the EU Asylum Procedures Directive and Article 13 of the ECHR, as established by the European Court of Human Rights in *AC v. Spain* (2014). Eleven years later, the State has not adopted the necessary measures, which is why CEAR is calling for legislative reform to prevent returns that entail a risk of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment.

CEAR identified signs of potential human trafficking in 71 assisted border cases, primarily for sexual and labor exploitation, with 56 being women. Only two women were formally identified by the Madrid Provincial Immigration and Border Brigade. However, in 57 cases confirmed by the specialized agency present during the interview, the applications were accepted, and appropriate refuge was provided.

A total of 853 international protection applications were filed at Foreigner Detention Centers (FDCs), accounting for 0.5% of the total, the same as in 2024 and significantly lower than the numbers recorded in 2019 (2,164) and 2018 (1,776). In 2025, the FDCs in Algeciras, Barcelona, Las Palmas, Murcia, Valencia, and Madrid were active, while the one in Tenerife remained inactive for the fourth consecutive year. The new Algeciras-Botafuegos FDC, with 500 beds, began operating in a trial phase in November 2025. This macro-center is the largest in Spain, and the fact that it was created and continues to operate reinfor-

The entry into force of the new Immigration Regulation had a direct impact on people applying for international protection.



A CEAR staff member assists people on a daily basis who seek information about access to International Protection in Spain. February 2026, Madrid. © Jaime Alekos

ces the criminalizing view of migration, as denounced by the Coordinadora contra los CIE and the members of the Migregroup network in Spain—including CEAR—which oppose the opening of new centers.

Difficulties in accessing the procedure and obtaining interpreting services continued. Proof of this is the detention of 21 young Bangladeshis at the FDC in Valencia, whose applications were denied despite their claims of political persecution. They were released after being detained for 60 days.

In 2025, no official data were published on individuals who arrived as stowaways at Spanish ports and sought international protection, as the Asylum and Refugee Office does not record or disaggregate these applications. According to the UNHCR, at least 24 people sought asylum at the ports of Arrecife, Las Palmas, Cartagena, Algeciras, Tarifa, and Vigo, most of whom were Moroccan nationals. CEAR provided legal assistance in several cases in Gran Canaria and Las Palmas, with mixed results, including returns and admissions for processing on Spanish territory.

There were also humanitarian disembarkations, such as that of 49 Senegalese nationals in Arrecife, as well as asylum requests from crew members detained in Algeciras. These situations highlight ongoing gaps in safeguards and underscore the need to reform the stowaway protocol to ensure immediate legal assistance.

In 2025, 144,396 international protection applications were filed in Spain, 13.7% fewer than in 2024, making Spain the third-largest recipient country in the EU. **Vene-**

zuela was the leading country of origin for applicants, with 85,413 applications (59.1%), up 29.1% from 2024. Mali came in second place with 16,004 applications, or nearly 50% more than in 2024. Colombia dropped to 14,524 applications, 64% fewer than in 2024, followed by Peru with 3,511, Senegal with 3,333, and Morocco with 3,303, reflecting a sharp decline from 2024 (22.2%). Palestine recorded 1,868 applications, a 105% increase; Nicaragua, 1,605; Somalia, 1,275; and Guinea, 1,112.

In 2025, 160,663 cases were resolved, a 67% increase from 2024. The number of pending applications decreased by 9.6% to 218,731. **The recognition rate fell from 18.5% to 11.2%.** There were 7,838 decisions granting refugee status (4.9%), 6.3% for subsidiary protection, 57,333 decisions on humanitarian grounds (35.6%), and 68,329 negative decisions (42.5%). The number of cases archived totaled 16,991, representing 10.5% of the total.

The entry into force of the **new Immigration Regulations** in May 2025 had a direct impact on applicants for international protection, as it excluded the time spent as an applicant from the calculation of length of residence and established that the two systems were incompatible. This had a clear **deterrent effect between May and December 2025**, coinciding with a high volume of pending cases at the Asylum and Refugee Office (218,733) and a decrease in asylum applications from nationals of countries such as Colombia, Peru, and Senegal. In 2025, 16,991 applications were finalized, a significant increase

linked to applicants withdrawing their claims to qualify for residency.

Among the positive aspects of the Regulation are the loosening of requirements for obtaining residency permits, the reduction of the required length of stay from three to two years, and the introduction of new categories, such as the social and educational residency permit. As of September 30, 2025, 11% of foreign nationals held residency permits based on ties to the community, with 4,597 permits granted for socio-occupational ties, 1,293 for socio-educational ties, and 192 for second-chance permits.

At the beginning of 2025, 837,978 people were in an irregular administrative situation, representing 17.2% of the foreign population from third countries, with Colombians (290,000), Peruvians (110,000), and Hondurans (90,000) accounting for the largest numbers. As the data above show, these nationalities largely coincide with those for which there has been a decline in applications for international protection, revealing a notable parallel between the two indicators. Behind the numbers are people in vulnerable situations. Irregular immigration status has relegated them to a state of legal and social invisibility, exposing them to conditions of exploitation and social exclusion and severely affecting their access to housing, healthcare, social services, and financial stability, with a particularly severe impact on migrant women.

In light of these consequences, CEAR filed an administrative appeal with the Supreme Court against the most harmful provisions of the Regulation. The extraordinary regularization process launched in April 2026, driven by a Popular Legislative Initiative and backed by more than 700,000 signatures, may address these situations. However, CEAR emphasizes the need for structural measures to prevent applicants for international protection from becoming trapped in prolonged situations of vulnerability •

Arrivals by sea declined overall, especially along the Atlantic route, while arrivals to the Balearic Islands increased, where the Somali route is becoming established.

SITUATION AT THE SOUTHERN BORDER

2025 was marked by a sharp decline (46%) in the number of migrant arrivals on the coast. Notably, there has been a drastic decrease in arrivals via the Canary Islands route, down by as much as 62% compared to 2024. This was primarily due to strengthened migration controls with third countries such as Senegal and Mauritania. Despite the overall decline in total arrivals, there was a significant increase along the Balearic Islands route, of up to 24.5% compared to 2024, thus consolidating the trend observed in previous years.

Similarly, while the main nationalities of arrival recorded in 2024 remained largely unchanged, there were some



Flowers placed on the graves of migrants who were traveling on a boat that sank as it approached the port of La Restinga, on the island of El Hierro, Spain. May 2025, El Hierro. © Borja Suárez

variations. In 2025, those arriving on shore were primarily from **Algeria (27%), Mali (17%), Morocco (15%), and Senegal (15%)**. Women accounted for 8% of all arrivals, with variations by route (10% in the Canary Islands and 10.5% in the Balearic Islands), while unaccompanied minors accounted for up to 15% of all arrivals.

In addition, there have been arrivals of unaccompanied migrants and families in **highly vulnerable situations**, including serious medical cases linked to conditions that developed both in their countries of origin and during transit. Some cases that stand out include kidney conditions, comas caused by travel in small boats and canoes, severe health consequences from ingesting saltwater

and exposure to the cold, and illnesses specific to the migration process such as “patera foot.”

Also noteworthy were cases of **mental health disorders** such as dual diagnosis (particularly among men), post-traumatic stress, and severe feelings of hopelessness. A high number of cases involving **survivors of gender-based violence** were also identified, including sexual, physical, and psychological violence, both in countries of origin and during transit.

Regarding the **increase in arrivals via the Balearic route**, there was a rise in the share of people from Somalia, Mali, Guinea-Conakry, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso making **extremely complex, lengthy, and dangerous journeys lasting up to two years**. The 5% increase in Somali arrivals, particularly via the Balearic route, stands out. These individuals report human rights violations during transit, including sexual violence, forced labor, imprisonment, torture, and extortion, especially in Libya, as well as arrests and forced returns in the Algerian desert.

As for the situation in the **Canary Islands**, 2025 was a year of restructuring, marked by a sharp decline in migrant arrivals —as pronounced as the increase seen in

A greater level of vulnerability was observed among those who arrived, due to increasingly longer and more dangerous routes.



2023—and changes to the system for protecting unaccompanied migrant children.

The **62% decline in arrivals compared to 2024** (17,788 people) was also accompanied by a shift in routes: while in 2024 most of the boats heading for the islands departed from Mauritania, **in 2025 they departed mainly from Gambia, Senegal, southern Morocco, and Guinea-Conakry**. On the other hand, the decline in arrivals has not led to a proportional reduction in risk, with an extremely high number of shipwrecks, disappearances, and boats missing. According to the IOM, **at least 421 people died or went missing on this route in 2025**, and the organization Caminando Fronteras puts the figure at 1,906 deaths and disappearances between January and December.

The **chronic overwhelm of the Canary Islands' child protection system** persisted despite the lower number of sea arrivals, the gradual transfers to other autonomous communities and the referral of asylum seekers to the Spanish international protection system, resulting from legislative reforms and Supreme Court rulings made throughout 2025.

The March 2025 approval of **the amendment to Article 35 of the Immigration Act** introduced a binding mechanism for the territorial distribution of migrant minors, designed to relieve regions facing migration crises, such as the Canary Islands, the Balearic Islands, Ceuta, and Melilla. Likewise, in August 2025, **Royal Decree 743/2025**, establishing the capacity of each autonomous community to accommodate migrant minors, was approved, thus defining the structure of the reception system for unaccompanied migrant minors throughout Spain. Furthermore, on August 29, 2025, a **migration emergency was formally declared**, and transfers of minors from the Canary Islands to other regions were initiated.

Almost simultaneously, in light of the chronic overwhelm of the Canary Islands' protection system, **the Supreme Court issued several rulings** in March and June, establishing as a precautionary measure that the national system for the reception of international protection applicants—administered by the central government—must also participate in the reception of minors under state guardianship who are, in turn, asylum seekers. With this measure, the State was required to assume responsibility, using its own resources, for the care of approximately 1,000 minors seeking asylum who are being cared for in the Canary Islands.

Despite resistance, the transfer of unaccompanied minors from the Canary Islands to the mainland continued in 2025. CEAR took on part of the responsibility for transferring and housing these minors on the mainland as part of the national response and at the request of the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration (MISSM).

According to information released by the Government of the Canary Islands, 581 migrant minors were transferred from the archipelago in 2025. Of these, 410 transfers were made through the asylum process (in compliance with the Supreme Court's ruling) and 171 through the new mechanism.

As for the situation in Ceuta and Melilla, **the total number of migrants arriving in Ceuta by land increased by 39.2% compared to 2024** (3,523 people). Most of those who entered Ceuta in 2025 were Moroccan nationals, including minors, and they did so by swimming across the strait. According to CEAR's observations, the trend of entering by swimming has also been adopted by nationals of other countries, including Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. The route chosen from the neighboring country, as in 2024, remains via the Castillejos (Morocco) area to El Tarajal (Spain) and the Beliones (Morocco) area to Benzú (Spain).

Meanwhile, **the number of migrants arriving in Melilla rose compared to 2024**, with a 19% increase in sea arrivals and more than an 181.9% increase in land arrivals (including those who swam ashore). The people who swam to the Spanish coast at Melilla were Moroccan men aged 17 to 21. After undertaking journeys lasting anywhere from 2 to 10 hours, many of them presented various stages of hypothermia, skin lacerations from their wetsuits, dehydration, and semi-consciousness.

As for asylum applications, 2,229 were submitted in Ceuta in 2025, while 1,132 applications for international protection were filed in Melilla. All of these were processed through the on-territory procedure. It is also worth noting that in mid-March, the Ministry of the Interior issued a directive generally restricting access to the procedure for foreign nationals who have entered Ceuta and Melilla directly and irregularly, following a period of openness that began in September 2023 with the arrival of applicants from the mainland •



RECEPTION AND INCLUSION

2025 marked a turning point for the International Protection Reception System (IPRS) in Spain, characterized by a sustained increase in asylum applications as in previous years, the consolidation of heavy migration flows in border regions, and the arrival of unaccompanied minors. These factors were compounded by substantial changes in the system's internal organization and in the criteria for referral, stay, and discharge of participants.

In 2025, the International Protection Reception System assisted 69,563 people, a 6.5% increase over 2024, primarily from Venezuela, Ukraine, Mali, Senegal, Colombia, and Peru, in that order.

Of particular importance are the legislative changes and judicial rulings that have affected the reception provided to unaccompanied minors. On the one hand, the Supreme Court's ruling of March 25, 2025, established the obligation for the MISSM to provide shelter to unaccompanied minors seeking international protection who had been at reception centers within the child protection system in the Canary Islands. To comply with this ruling, the MISSM requested support from IPRS partner organizations, providing emergency funding specifically for the management of these places. In this context, CEAR initially took on the provision of 8 places in Navarre and 20 in Seville,

which was later expanded to 30, for a total of 38 places, maintained until the end of 2025.

The reception of minors seeking international protection requires ongoing assessment of the best interests of the child. In this regard, and given the lack of formal, standardized procedures for determining these best interests—or for assessing specific protection needs—it continues to fall to the organizations supporting these minors to identify these needs, which are often overlooked, unidentified, and unaddressed by the asylum system.

It is also worth noting the care provided to **Gazan minors** with special healthcare needs who were evacuated by the Spanish government starting in July 2024 and who accessed the IPRS through the initial assessment and referral phase. CEAR Euskadi provided support to all 21 families who arrived during the various evacuations (81 people in total), offering housing, legal guidance, psychological support, language classes, assistance with accessing healthcare, education, training, and employment services, and translation services.

These families, who already faced a difficult health situation and a heavy emotional burden stemming from the genocide, encountered a series of additional obstacles from the time of arrival, such as changes in housing due to being switched into different programs, school transfers, difficulties in balancing family life, and administrative delays, all of which hinder the integration process.

Of particular note is the **need to reunite with the family members they left behind in Gaza**, a right afforded to those who have been granted international protection. Once approved, the procedure requires family members to go to the nearest Spanish embassy to apply for a visa, but due to the circumstances of the genocide, Gazans are unable to leave the Strip. Thus, those who have already been approved for family reunification cannot access the Spanish Embassy in Cairo to process their visa. The CEAR teams assisting these families have observed with concern the daily suffering these individuals endure due to separation from their loved ones, and the uncertainty surrounding their health, safety, and well-being in the face of constant violence.

Regarding the **integration process** for international protection beneficiaries, once they have left the IPRS and been granted protection, the continuity of integration efforts depends on effective **access to economic, social,**

The reception of children and adolescents became one of the main challenges of the reception system.

and cultural rights (ESCR) in their place of residence. Access to these rights varies across autonomous communities due to the lack of uniformity in administrative requirements and effective coordination between systems. This is the case with the transition from state aid to the **Minimum Living Income (IMV)** or regional income support, which does not always occur automatically or in a coordinated manner, due in part to requirements such as continuous registration in the municipal registry and processing times that can last for several months.

On the other hand, access to housing remains central to the process of inclusion: access to employment, education, social benefits, and public services is seriously compromised **without stable housing**. In a national context where access to housing has become a structural problem and a genuine social emergency, refugees are disproportionately affected. They face discriminatory practices in the housing market that exacerbate their housing precarity. This, in turn, has a direct impact on the continuity of education for minors, on maintaining employment, on balancing work and family life, on accessing social services, and on processes of social and labor market inclusion.

Lastly, **registration in the municipal census remains a structural barrier** to the effective exercise of rights by applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. Although registration is a right in itself, it is also a basic requirement for accessing social, health, and educational benefits. In practice, difficulties in becoming registered persist, resulting in administrative exclusion that blocks access to key rights, such as the IMV, regional income support, health insurance cards, and equal access to schooling •

The inclusion processes of beneficiaries of international protection continue to be shaped by obstacles in access to economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR).



Demonstration in support of the self-determination of the Sahrawi people in Madrid, a people that has endured 50 years of exile, resistance, and struggle. November 2025, Madrid. © CEAR

We present our *24th Annual Report* in a global context marked by the proliferation and intensification of conflicts and human rights violations which, together with the climate emergency, have forced 117.5 million people to flee their homes in 2025.

Impunity continues to undermine the already crumbling edifice of international order. Violence is exported and multiplied, fuelled by the expansion of a technological and arms industry that amasses its profits on the bodies subjected to violence and massacred in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or at our own borders—necessary collateral damage for the development of a laboratory of global repression. Colonialism is being reinvented in Palestine and Western Sahara, and international organizations are relegated to mere instruments of formal validation of power relations between states.

Countries in the Global South and with fewer resources continue to host nearly one third of all forcibly displaced people, while wealthier countries still fail to commit to legal and safe pathways and durable solutions. The European Union continues its anti-immigration drift: the security-focused approach of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum is reinforced by new legislative reforms such as the Return Regulation. Cooperation with third countries is also intensifying, without the establishment of mechanisms to oversee and monitor compliance with human rights.

In 2025, for the first time, the rising trend in the number of applications for international protection in Spain is interrupted: 144,396 applications, 13.7% fewer than the previous year. This slowdown is due, on the one hand, to the impact of the entry into force of the Immigration Regulation in May 2025, and, on the other, to the progressive tightening of migration policies and to border control and externalization agreements with third countries such as Mauritania. Latin America and Africa are the main regions of origin for 9 out of the 10 nationalities with the highest number of applications, with Somalia and Guinea as notable new entries, alongside Palestine. The level of protection provided by the Spanish state continues to decline sharply and is among the lowest in the EU: in 2025 it stands at 11.2%, far below the European average, which exceeds 35%.

The number of arrivals to Spanish coasts also fell in 2025, particularly in the case of arrivals to the Canary Islands, linked to strengthened migration control from Mauritania. By contrast, sea arrivals to the Balearic Islands and the mainland have continued to increase, consolidating the use of longer and more dangerous routes, such as the one linking Somalia with the Balearic Islands.

In terms of progress, the reform of Article 35 of the Immigration Law was adopted, establishing a binding mechanism for the equitable distribution of children and adolescents among the different autonomous communities, although its practical implementation is not without obstacles. Finally, we address the persistent challenges in the process toward the full inclusion of migrants and refugees, highlighting barriers to access to housing as a central issue.

From the foreword by Carlos Berzosa,
President of CEAR.

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