



Council of the European Union  
General Secretariat

**Brussels, 09 December 2024**

**WK 15851/2024 INIT**

**LIMITE**

**VISA  
COEST  
COLAC  
COWEB  
MIGR  
FRONT  
ASIM  
COMIX**

*This is a paper intended for a specific community of recipients. Handling and further distribution are under the sole responsibility of community members.*

## **MEETING DOCUMENT**

---

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Visa Working Party
N° prev. doc.:	16326/24
Subject:	7th Commission Report under the Visa Suspension Mechanism

---

Delegations will find attached the presentation made by the Commission services at the Visa Working Party meeting on 9 December 2024 on the above-mentioned subject.



# **7<sup>th</sup> Commission Report under the Visa Suspension Mechanism**

***Silvio Grieco, DG HOME  
Visa Policy***

# Scope of the Report – continuing the new strategic and global approach

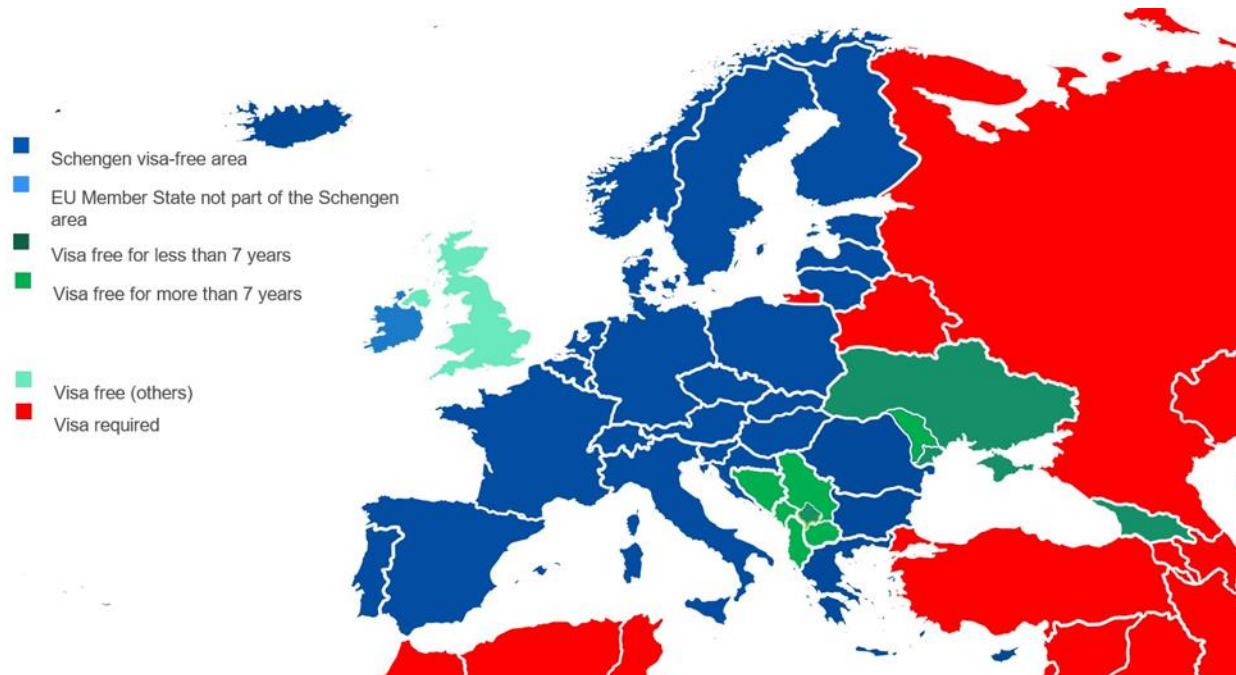
- **EU's neighborhood** ('visa liberalisation dialogue' countries)
  - Visa-free for less than 7 years (Georgia, Kosovo\*, Ukraine)
  - Visa-free for more than 7 years (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia)
- **Eastern Caribbean** (investor citizenship schemes)
- **Latin America** (increased asylum applications)

*\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.*



European  
Commission

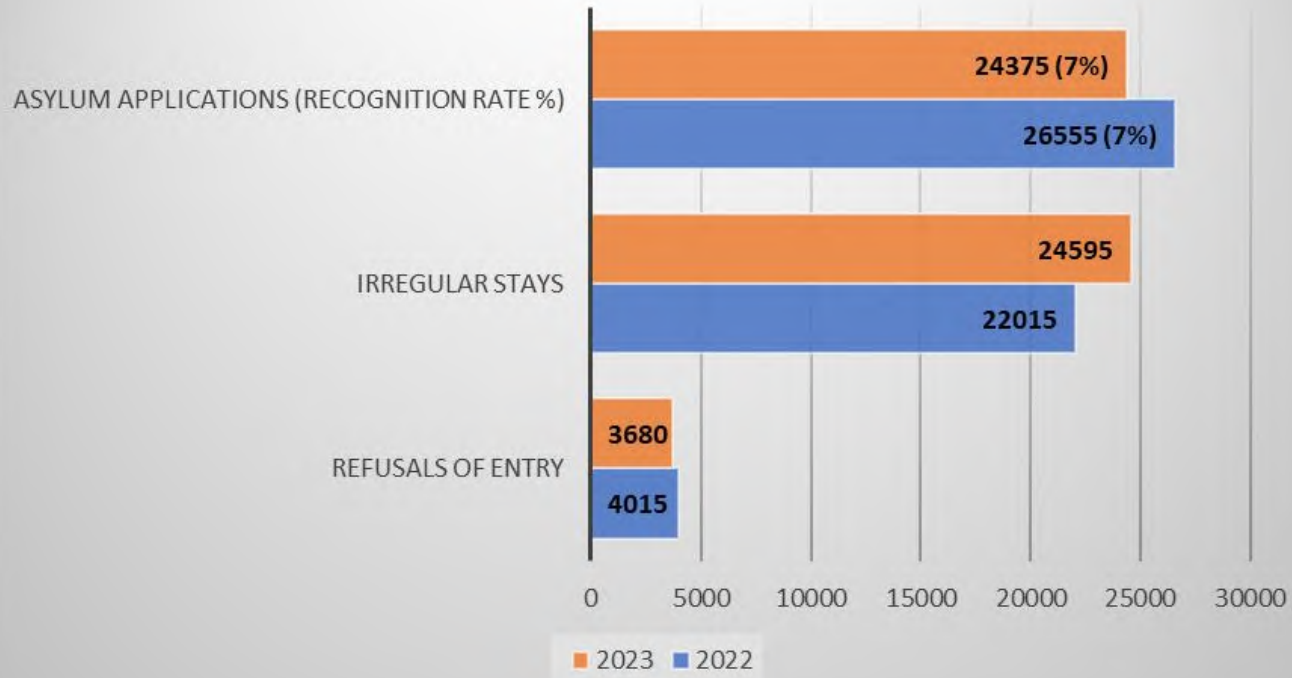
# EU's neighbourhood



# Visa-free for less than 7 years

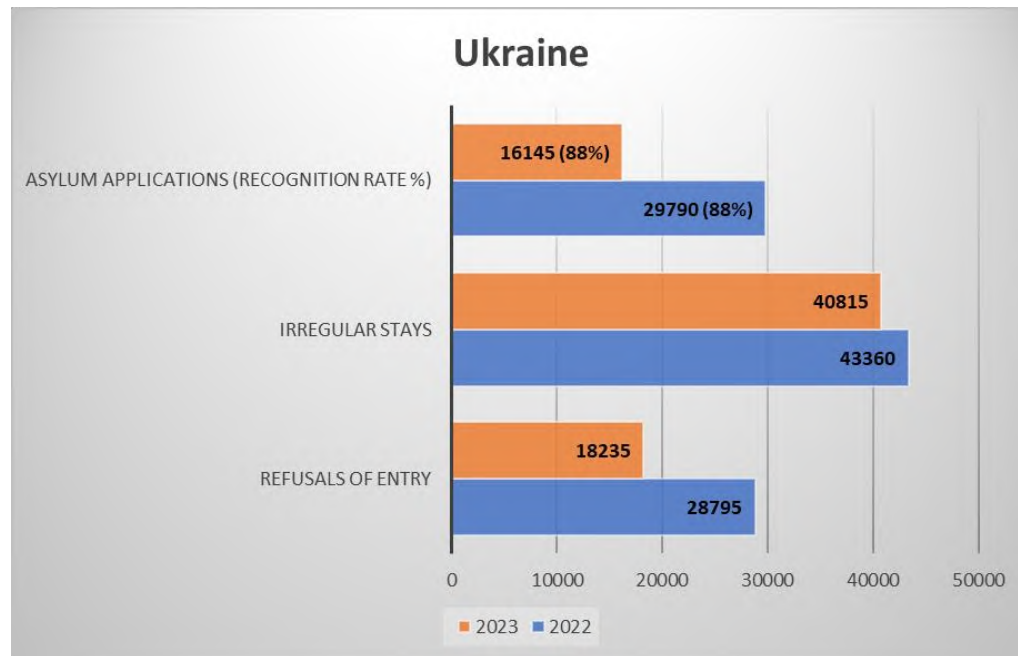
- Full reporting on continuous fulfilling of benchmarks
  - Visa policy alignment
  - Document security, including biometrics
  - Integrated border management, migration management, asylum
  - Monitoring trends in irregular migration, applications for international protection, returns and readmission
  - Public order and security
  - External relations and fundamental rights
  - Recommendations

# Georgia



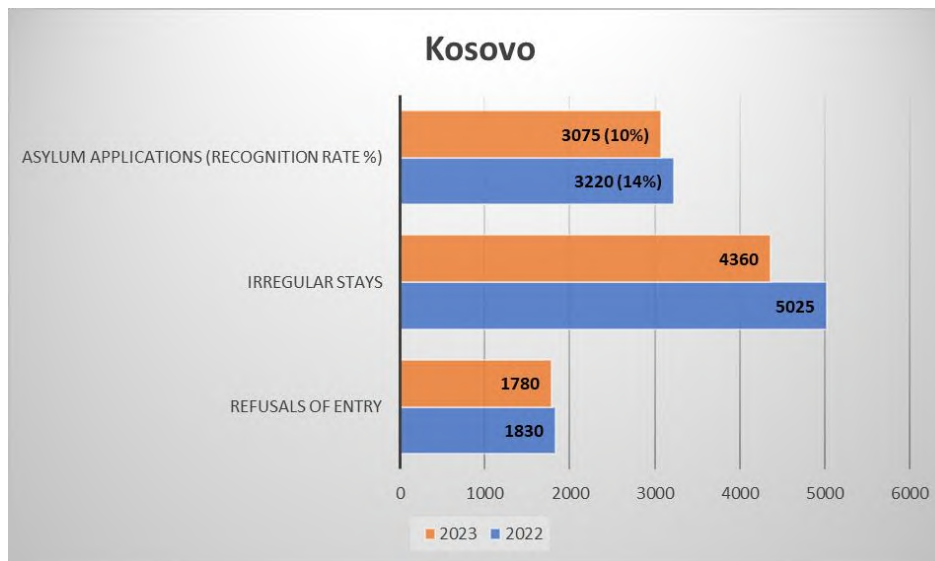
# Georgia

- a) **Ensure and uphold the protection of fundamental rights of all Georgian citizens**, including the freedoms of association, assembly and expression, the right to privacy, the right to participate in public affairs, as well as the prohibition of discrimination.
- b) **Avoid and repeal any legislation that may restrict fundamental rights and freedoms**, go against the principle of non-discrimination and contradict relevant European and international standards. In particular, repeal the Law on ‘transparency of foreign influence’ and the legislative package on ‘family values and protection of minors’, and amend the national strategy and action plan on human rights to ensure that the rights of LGBTIQ persons are fully upheld.
- c) **Align Georgia’s visa policy** with the EU list of visa-required third countries, in particular with regard to countries presenting irregular migration or security risks to the EU.
- d) Step up action to address the issue of **unfounded asylum applications and irregular stays** in Member States, such as information campaigns on the visa-free regime to relevant migrant profiles and stricter border checks.
- e) Set up an **Asset Recovery Office and Asset Management Office**, and continue efforts in asset tracing, freezing, management, confiscation and disposal.
- f) Adopt a new **anti-corruption strategy** and action plan, ensuring adequate resources for their implementation and pay special attention to investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of high-level corruption cases.
- g) **Amend the Law on Anti-Corruption Bureau** to address key Venice Commission recommendations, particularly those pertaining to the Anti-Corruption Bureau’s effective independence, political neutrality and functions.
- h) Align the **Law on Personal Data Protection** with the EU acquis.



- a) **Align Ukraine's visa policy** with the EU list of visa-required third countries, in particular with regard to countries presenting irregular migration or security risks to the EU.
- b) Continue strengthening efforts in the **fight against organised crime**, with a special focus on countering the smuggling of firearms and drugs, combatting trafficking in human beings and the financial dimension of organised crime, despite the war-related challenges.
- c) Continue strengthening the **anti-corruption framework**, ensuring that anti-corruption institutions are fully independent and able to deliver a real and significant output, also in view of long-term reconstruction efforts.



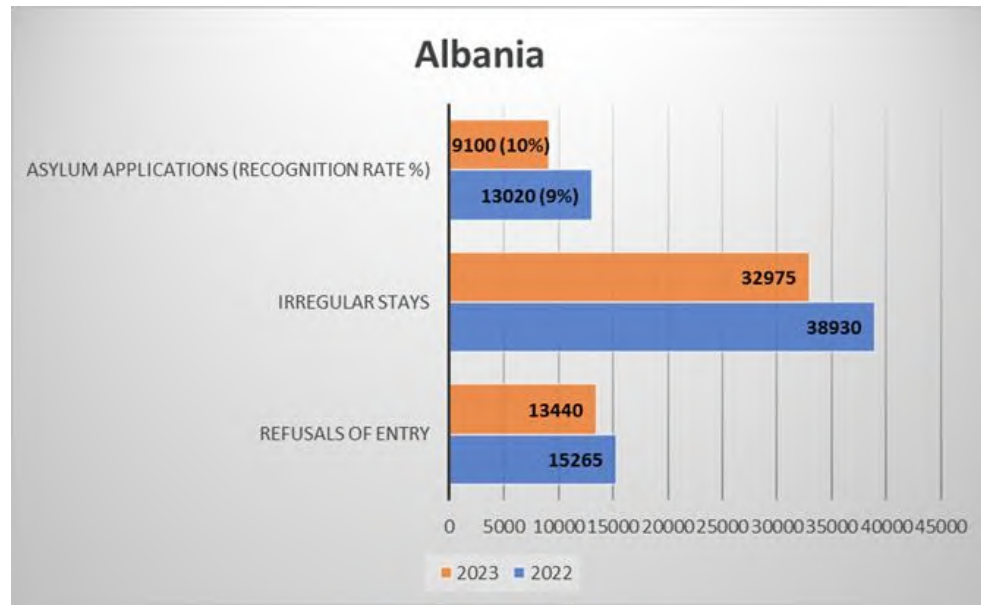


*First seven months of 2024: 3 905 asylum applications (+108% compared to the same period in 2023).*

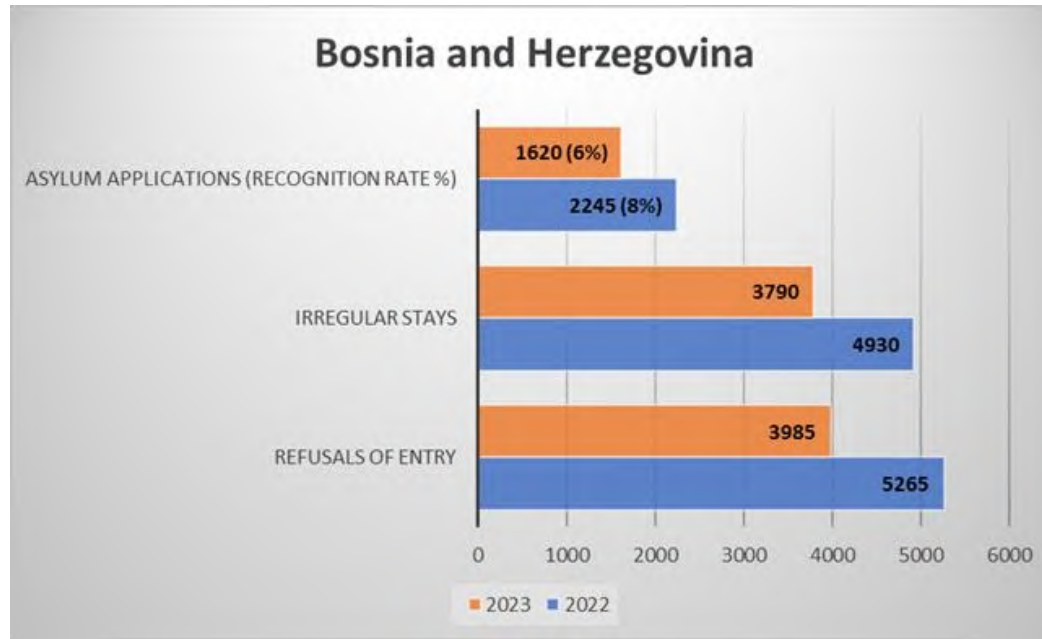
- a) **Align Kosovo's visa policy** with the EU list of visa-required third countries. Pending full alignment, a more rigorous screening of visa-free arrivals of third-country nationals, in particular those from countries presenting security or irregular migration risks, should be introduced either via operational and/or administrative initiatives (e.g., at border crossing points) or by national legislation as a minimal temporary measure expected from Kosovo.
- b) Continue and strengthen the initiatives recently launched in cooperation with Member States to monitor the issue of **unfounded asylum applications** by Kosovo citizens in Member States, including by reinforcing awareness campaigns to inform about the rules applying to travel to the Schengen area and by applying stricter screening upon departures.
- c) Continue implementing bilateral **readmission agreements** to keep the current good level of cooperation, and work towards concluding new readmission agreements.
- d) Continue implementing the legal and policy framework on **judicial and criminal matters**.
- e) Further strengthen the **protection of the rights of non-majority communities** and improve their implementation.

# Visa-free for more than 7 years

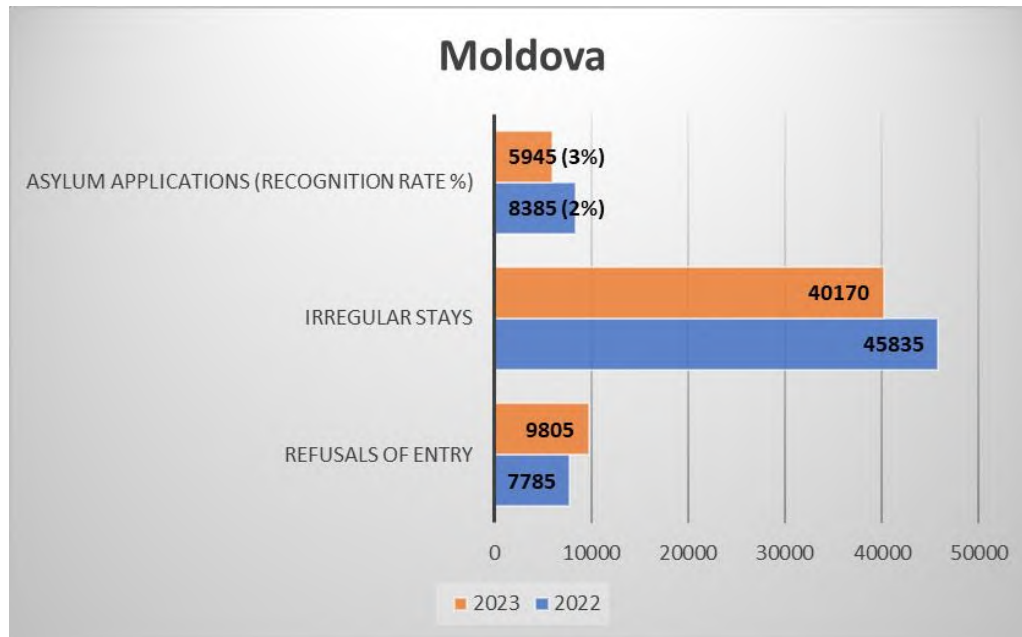
- Report on specific challenges deriving from visa-free travel and on cooperation with EU:
  - Visa policy alignment
  - Monitoring trends in irregular migration, applications for international protection, returns and readmission
  - Cooperation on migration, border management and readmission
  - Cooperation on security



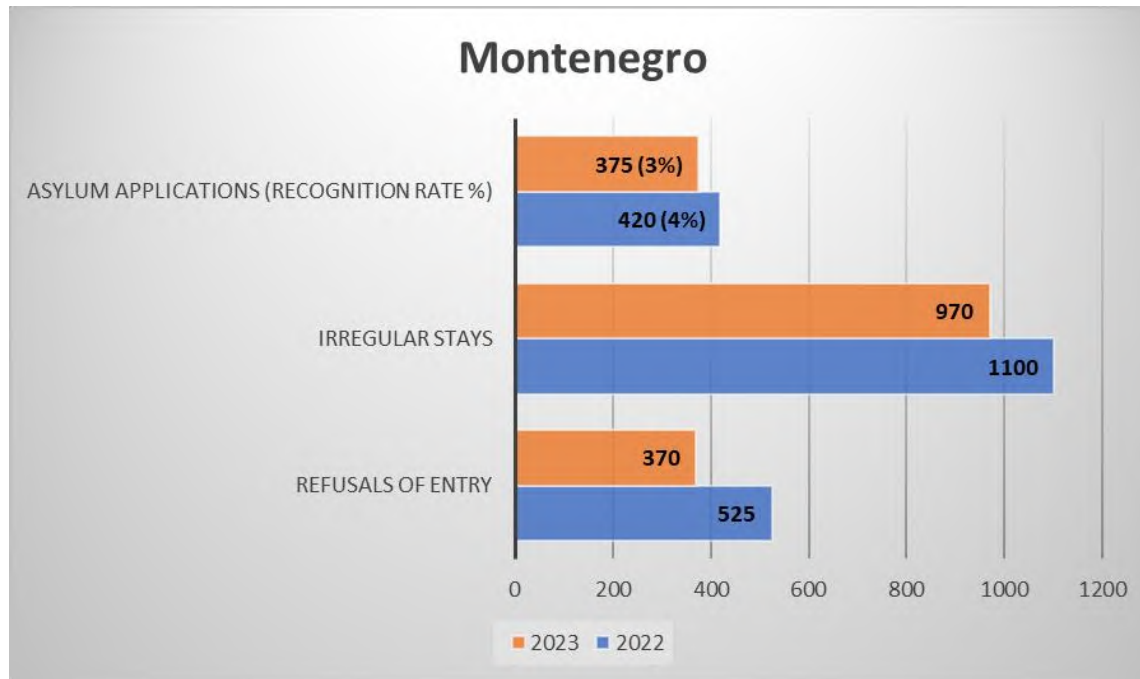
- a) **Align Albania's visa policy** with the EU list of visa-required countries. Pending full alignment, a more rigorous screening of visa-free arrivals of third-country nationals, in particular those from countries presenting security or irregular migration risks, should be introduced either via operational and/or administrative initiatives (e.g., at border crossing points) or by national legislation as a minimal temporary measure expected from Albania.
  
- b) Continue and strengthen initiatives to address the issue of **unfounded asylum applications** in the EU, in particular concerning unaccompanied minors.



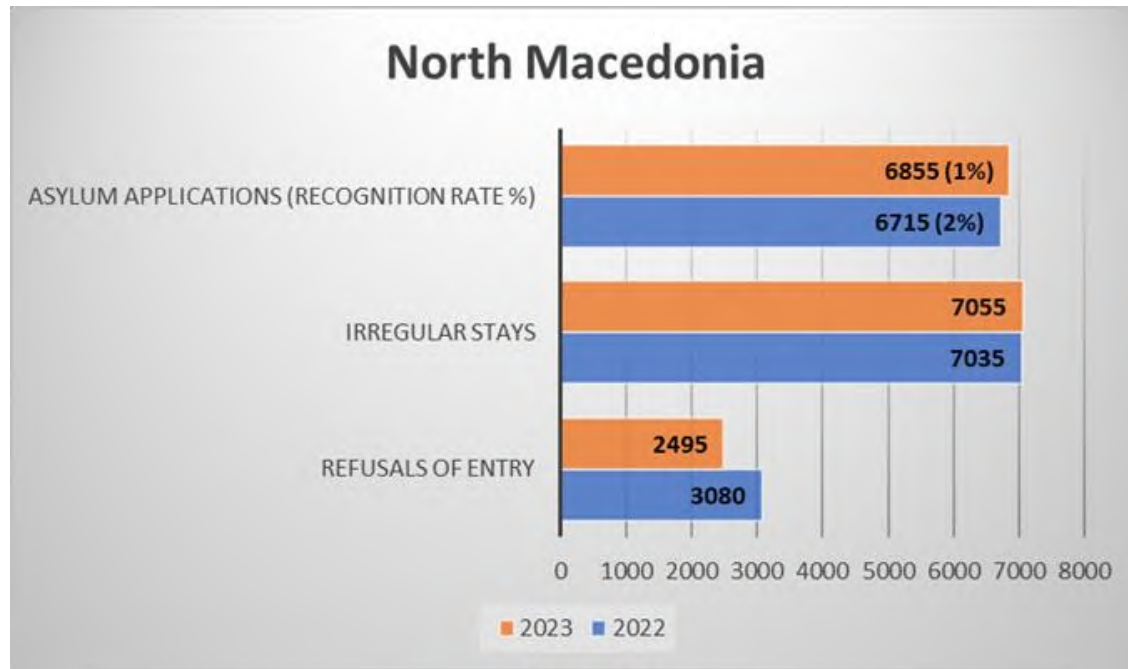
- a) **Align Bosnia and Herzegovina's visa policy** with the EU list of visa-required countries. Pending full alignment, additional security measures including a more rigorous screening of visa-free arrivals of third-country nationals, in particular those from countries presenting security or irregular migration risks, should be introduced either via operational and/or administrative initiatives (e.g., at border crossing points) or by national legislation as a minimal temporary measure expected from Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- b) Swiftly sign and ratify the **Frontex status agreement** with the EU.
- c) Improve coordination of border management, urgently addressing the issue of **irregular border crossings on the sub-route passing through Bosnia and Herzegovina**.



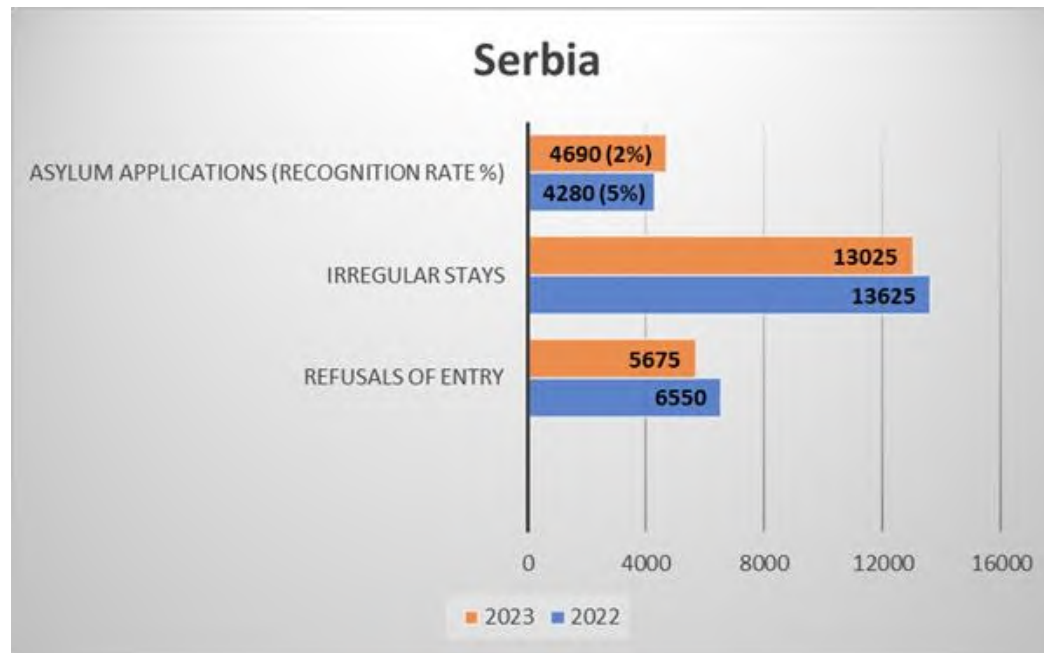
- a) **Align Moldova's visa policy** with the EU list of visa-required countries, in particular with regard to countries presenting irregular migration or security risks to the EU.
  
- b) Continue efforts to **combat organised crime**, with particular attention to tackling smuggling of firearms and drugs, combatting trafficking in human beings and the financial aspects of organised crime.



- a) **Align Montenegro's visa policy** with the EU list of visa-required countries. Pending full alignment, security measures including a more rigorous screening of visa-free arrivals of third-country nationals, in particular those from countries presenting security or irregular migration risks should be introduced either via operational and/or administrative initiatives (e.g., at border crossing points) or by national legislation as a minimal temporary measure expected from Montenegro.
  
- b) Ensure that **pending applications under the recently terminated investor citizenship scheme** are screened and processed in accordance with the highest possible security standards and that the citizenship granted via that scheme to persons subject to international restrictive measures are revoked.



- a) Complete the full **alignment of visa policy of North Macedonia** with the EU list of visa-required countries. Pending full alignment, a more rigorous screening of visa-free arrivals of third-country nationals should be introduced either via operational and/or administrative initiatives (e.g., at border crossing points) or by national legislation as a minimal temporary measure expected from North Macedonia.
  
- b) Ensure that **applications for citizenship under the ‘special economic interest’ law** are handled with thorough background vetting on applicants and refrain from enabling systematic acquisition of citizenship for special economic interest.



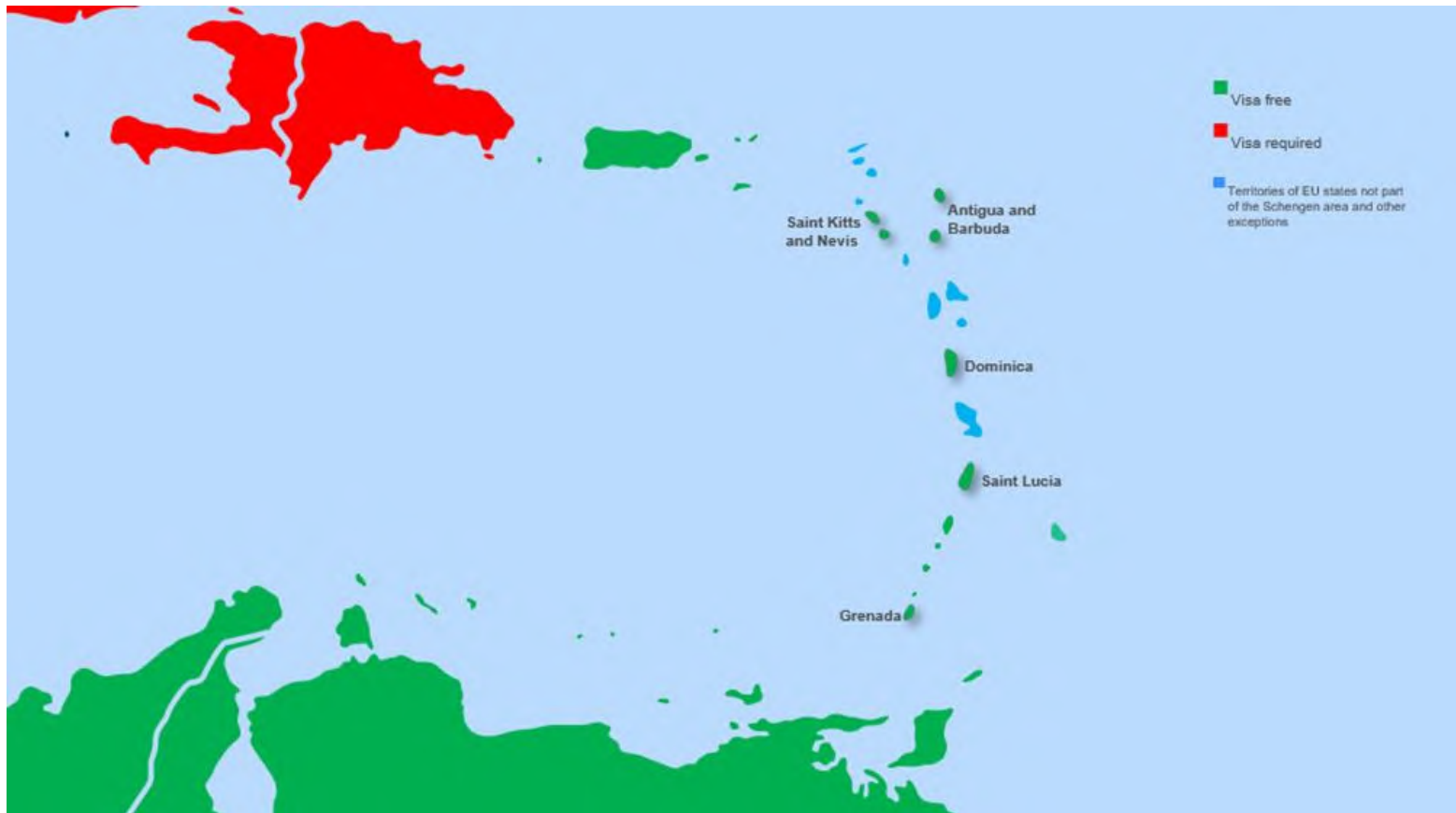
- a) **Align Serbia's visa policy** with the EU list of visa-required countries. Pending full alignment, a more rigorous screening of visa-free arrivals of third-country nationals, in particular those from countries presenting security or irregular migration risks, should be introduced via operational and/or administrative initiatives (e.g., at border crossing points) as a minimal temporary measure expected from Serbia.
- b) Fully implement the **third-country national's clause of the EU-Serbia readmission agreement**.





European  
Commission

# Eastern Caribbean



# State of play of monitoring

- Engagement and exchange of information since 2020
- First assessment in the 6<sup>th</sup> VSM Report: several elements suggesting that the five countries' screening and vetting procedures may not be sufficiently thorough to ensure the rejection of applications from individuals who could be a potential security risk for the EU once acquiring the citizenship of those countries and consequently visa-free access to the EU.

	Antigua and Barbuda	Dominica	Grenada	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Saint Lucia
<b>Total applications received</b>	3 719 (2014-2022)  685 (2023)  739 (2024 until 30/6)	13 161 (2015-2022)  4 068 in 2023  2 981 in 2024 (until 30/6)	3 151 (2014-2022)  1 251 (2022)  2 297 (2023)  138 (2024 until 31/07)	17 668 (2015-2022)  1 987 (2023)  98 (2024 until 30/6)	2 013 (2015-2022)  4 076 (2023)  1 226 (2024 until 30/4)
<b>Rejections</b>	157 (2014-2022)  24 (2023)  23 (2024)	420 (2019-2022)  210 (2023)  180 (2023)	204 (2015-2022)  59 (2023)  34 (2024)	532 (2015-2022)  207 (2023)  4 (2024)	70 (2015-2022)  28 (2023)  81 (2024)
<b>Total passports issued</b>	7 205 (2014-2022)  1 191 (2023)  198 (2024 until 30/6)	34 596 (2018-2022, 2022 data being verified)  9 539 (2023)  5 484 (2024 until 30/6)	6 479 (2014-2022)  2023-2024: N/A	35 577 (2015-2022)  2023-2024: N/A	N/A

# Follow up

- High-level and technical engagement continued in 2024
- **Main concerns persist**
- **Economic and political importance** of CBI schemes for the five countries
- Increased awareness of the need to strengthen security screening systems, and openness to substantial improvements
- **Memorandum of understanding** providing a framework for cooperation to strengthen the security of their schemes (minimum investment fee increased to 200 000 USD).
- The Commission will continue to work in close cooperation with the five Eastern Caribbean countries and assess the implementation of their reforms.
- Once the **revised visa suspension mechanism** will be adopted, the Commission will adapt its assessment on the basis of the new rules.



European  
Commission

# Latin America

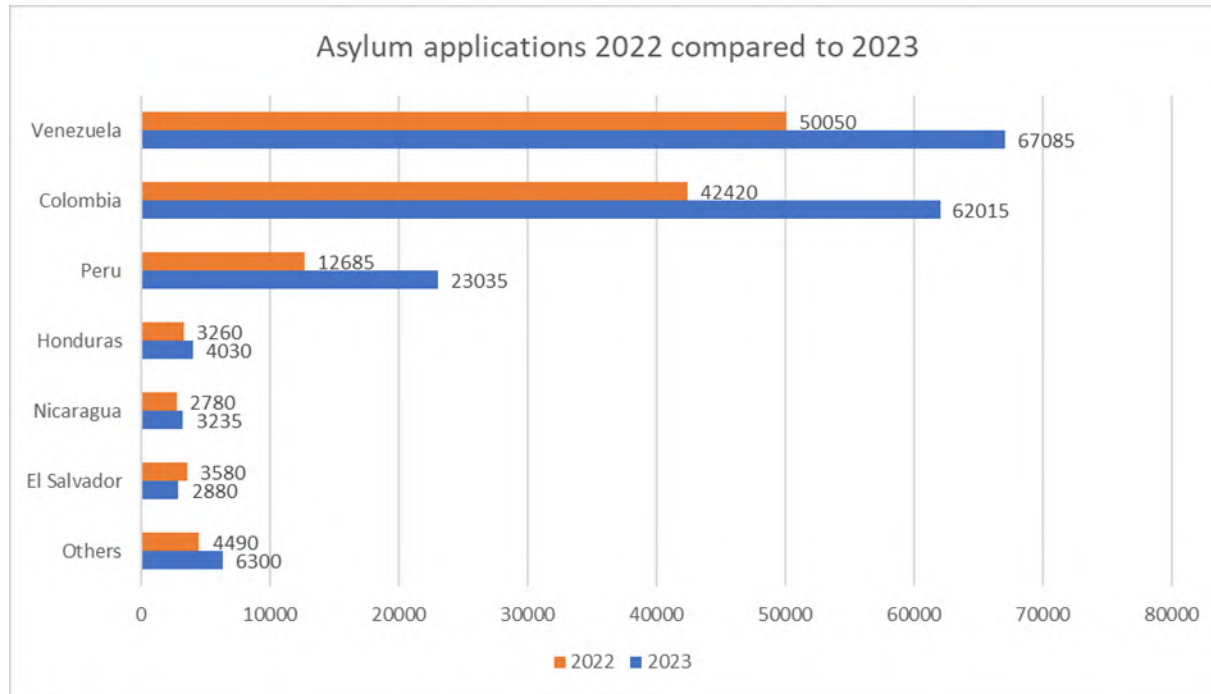


# Asylum applications

- Between 2015 and the first quarter of 2024, asylum applications lodged by nationals of the visa-free countries of Latin America have **increased significantly** (half of the total asylum applications from third-country nationals travelling visa free - 600 000 out of 1.2 million).
- Asylum applications by nationals of visa-free countries often have a **low recognition rate** and thus create a significant **burden for the Member States asylum systems**

Country	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Jan-Jul 2024
Costa Rica	10	5	15	20	60	40	20	80	115	120
El Salvador	555	1765	2965	5040	9070	4230	1830	3580	2880	1540
Guatemala	20	40	85	230	620	500	265	440	545	260
Honduras	220	475	1325	2770	7245	5670	2360	3260	4030	1580
Mexico	75	50	80	125	200	160	135	260	335	195
Nicaragua	45	65	165	1890	6530	3900	1365	2780	3235	1545
Panama	5	5	10	15	55	50	60	125	170	85
Argentina	15	20	35	100	340	450	325	810	1475	985
Brazil	90	205	290	670	1605	1650	795	1555	1775	1245
Chile	35	50	50	105	225	300	195	370	600	385
Colombia	270	1050	3935	10045	31850	29055	13140	42420	62015	31845
Paraguay	15	15	30	80	375	370	250	740	1085	735
Peru	145	150	550	1515	6810	6140	3055	12685	23035	16135
Uruguay	0	10	20	30	110	170	140	110	200	110
Venezuela	775	4690	12985	22195	44770	30325	17380	50050	67085	41740
<b>TOTAL</b>	2275	8595	22540	44830	109865	83010	41315	119265	168580	98505

# Asylum applications – follow up



- The Commission will engage in **dialogue with the most concerned countries** to exchange information and best practices, support the efforts of authorities in the implementation of appropriate border controls on departure, awareness raising campaigns, and other appropriate actions.
- The Commission will **monitor the implementation of these measures** and the impact on the numbers of irregular stays and asylum applications, under the current legal framework.