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## **MEETING DOCUMENT**

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Visa Working Party
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Subject:	8th Commission Report under the Visa Suspension Mechanism

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Delegations will find attached the presentation made by the Commission services at the Visa Working Party meeting on 23 January 2026 on the above-mentioned subject.

PUBLIC

# 8th Commission Report under the Visa Suspension Mechanism

# Scope of the report – geographical coverage

- **EU's neighborhood** (Western Balkans + Eastern Partnership countries)
  - Visa-free for less than 7 years (Kosovo\*)
  - Visa-free for more than 7 years (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine)
- **Eastern Caribbean**
- **Latin America**

*\* 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*



# Scope of the report – key themes

- **Visa policy alignment**

- **Migration, border management and readmission**

- **Unfounded asylum applications**

- **Public order and security issues** (incl. the fight against corruption and document security)

- **Citizenship questions** (incl. investor citizenship schemes)

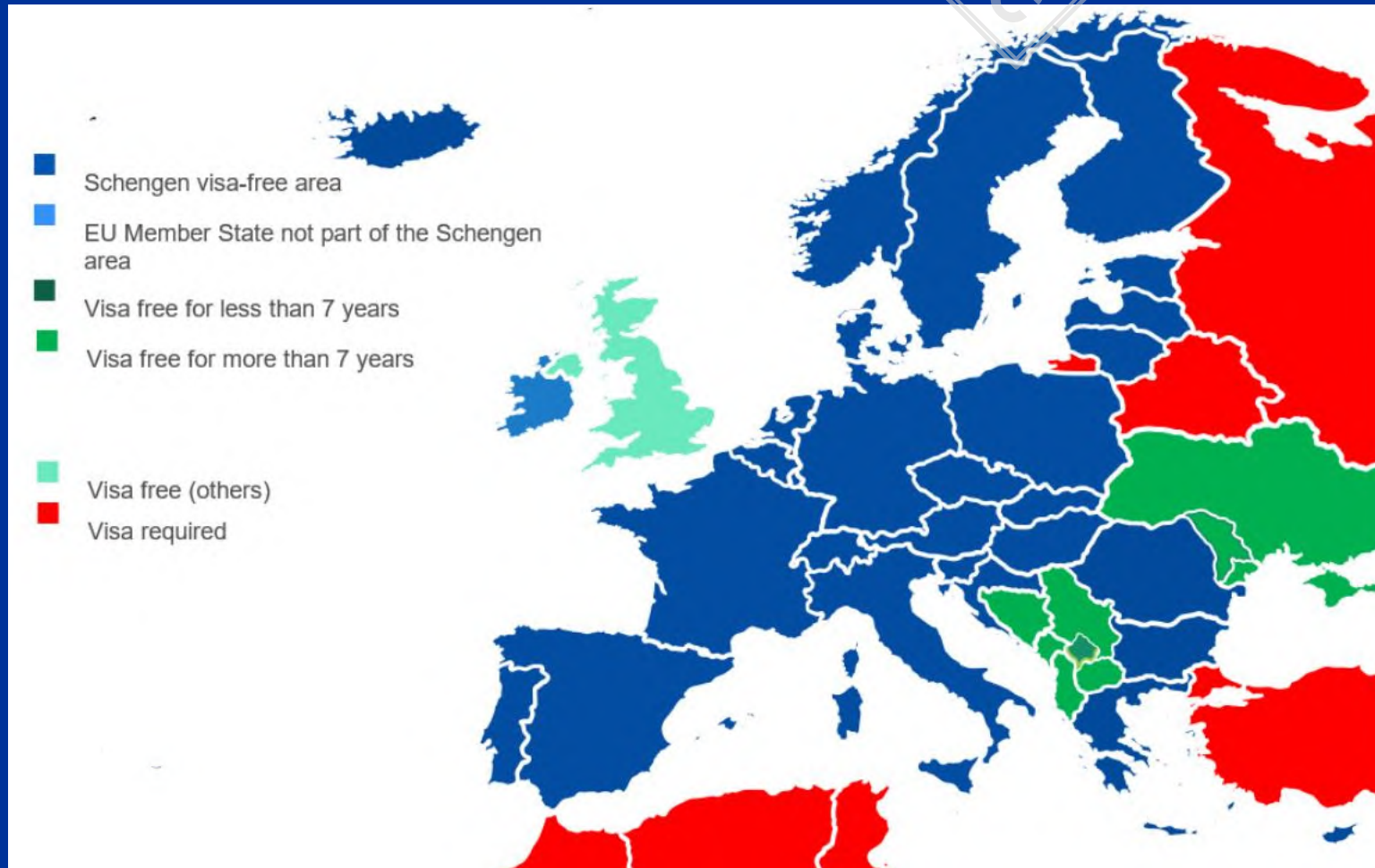


# Revised visa suspension mechanism

- **The revised visa suspension mechanism (in force since 31 December 2025), introduces several modifications, in particular several new grounds for suspension:**
  - **lack of alignment of a country's visa-free regime with the EU's visa policy**, in cases where this may lead to increased illegal migration risks;
  - **the operation of an investor citizenship scheme**, whereby citizenship is granted in exchange for pre-determined payments or investments, without the person concerned having any genuine link to that third country;
  - **systemic deficiencies in document security, law and procedures;**
  - **a deterioration in the EU's relations with a third country**, for a number of reasons including hybrid threats, serious breaches of the UN Charter and international law, and human rights and humanitarian law violations.



# EU's neighbourhood



# 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



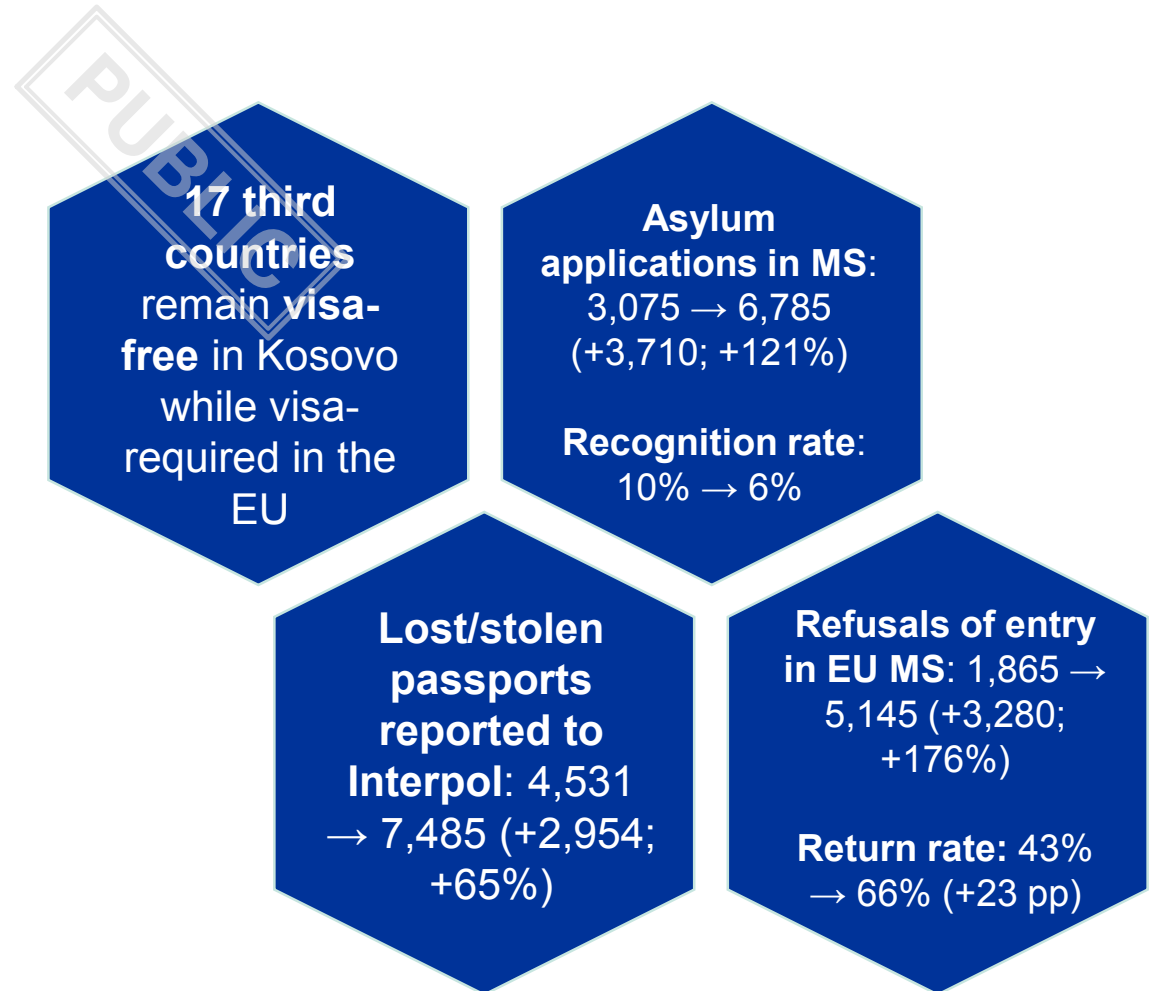
## Visa-free for more than 7 years

**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



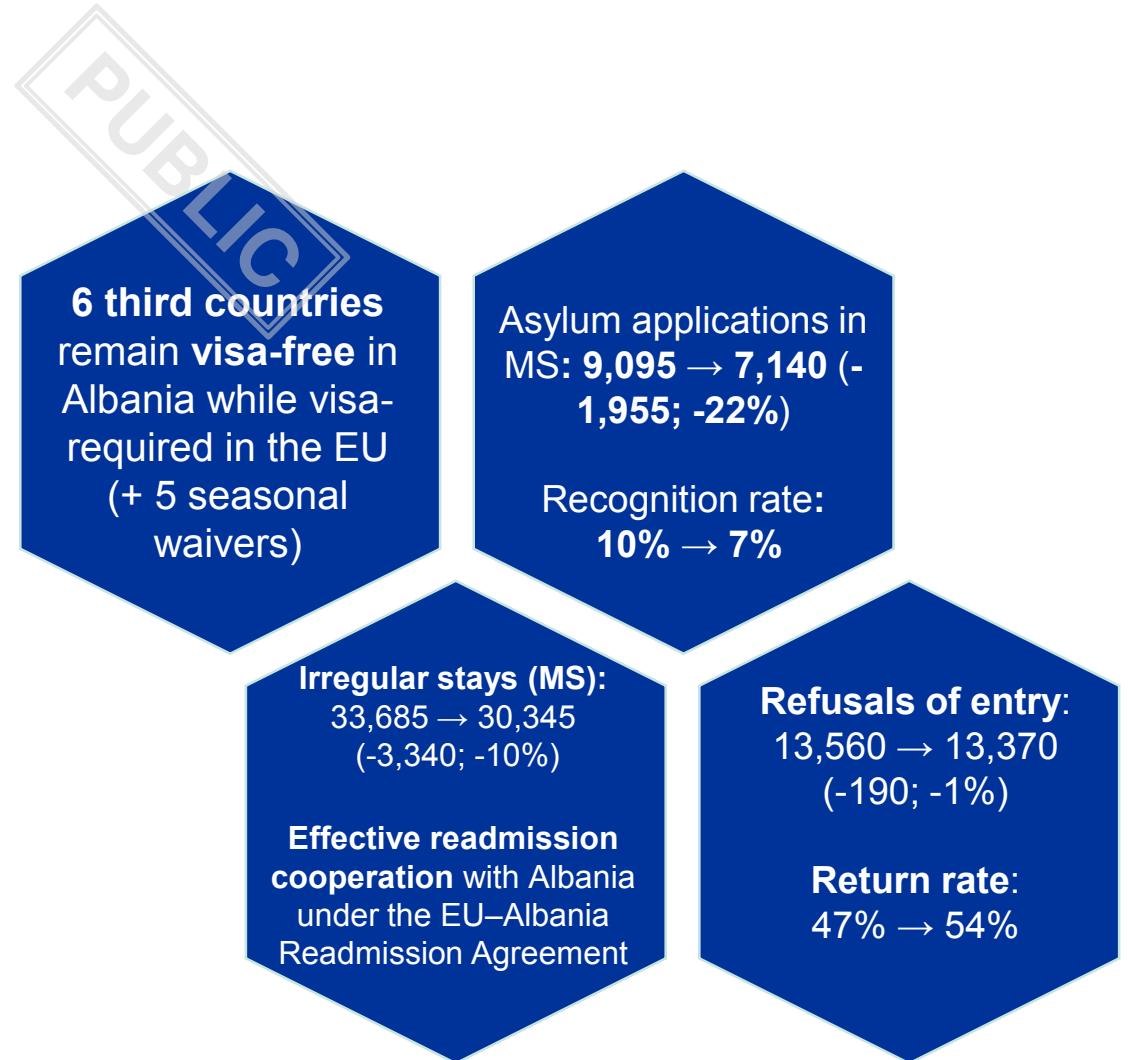
- **Visa policy alignment:** align Kosovo's visa-required list with the EU list; pending full alignment, **strengthen screening** of visa-exempt travellers posing migration/security risks; align visa procedures with **Schengen standards**, notably **biometric collection** (digital photo + fingerprints).
- **Unfounded asylum applications:** strengthen initiatives with Member States to monitor and curb unfounded claims; maintain and adapt the communication campaign on citizens' rights/obligations under visa-free travel.
- **Document security:** prevent issuance of identity/travel documents under false identities; improve detection of forged documents; cooperate with Member States on **SIS alerts/name changes**; maintain Interpol cooperation; fully implement the new **Law/Administrative Instruction on Identity Cards**..
- **Protection of non-majority communities:** Kosovo should continue to make tangible improvements in protecting the rights of non-majority communities.





# Albania

- **Visa policy alignment:** further align with the EU visa-required list, focusing on higher-risk nationalities; align visa procedures with Schengen standards, notably biometric collection Pending full alignment, intensify screening of visa-exempt arrivals from higher-risk countries.
- **Unfounded asylum applications:** continue and reinforce measures to reduce unfounded claims, with particular attention to applications by unaccompanied minors. Prevention of illegal stays/overstays: maintain and tighten measures to prevent overstays by Albanian nationals in Schengen.
- **Visa issuance + hiring oversight:** strengthen screening for visas requested by higher-risk third-country nationals; tighten issuance conditions; improve monitoring of hiring practices and strengthen labour inspectorates (in response to cases of migrants entering Albania legally on visas/work permits and later arriving irregularly in EU/Schengen).
- **Fraudulent identity documents:** intensify detection and prevention of counterfeit Albanian identity documents.
- **Investor citizenship scheme follow-up:** refrain from establishing/implementing an investor citizenship scheme and repeal the legal basis (current status noted as suspension rather than repeal)





# Bosnia and Herzegovina

- **Visa policy alignment (urgent):** further align its visa policy with the EU list of visa-required third countries, with particular focus on those countries whose nationals pose illegal migration and/or security risks to the EU. Seasonal visa waivers (not compatible with the EU acquis) should be avoided/discontinued.
- **Visa issuance controls:** enhance the screening of visa applications submitted by third-country nationals from high-risk countries; tighten the conditions under which visas are issued to nationals of such countries, including stronger risk assessment and verification of supporting documentation.
- **Border management:** intensify efforts to improve border management, (particularly increasing the capacity of border guards), addressing illegal border crossings, and advancing implementation of the Frontex Status Agreement by launching more joint operations at high-risk sections of the land border.
- **Border screening pending full alignment:** pending full alignment of visa policy, continue and strengthen screening at the border of arrivals of visa-exempt third-country nationals, with particular attention to verification of passport authenticity. Proactively engage third countries and airlines, and to progress on establishing passenger data exchange systems (API/PNR).

**7 third countries** remain **visa-free** in BiH while visa-required in the EU (+ 3 seasonal waivers)

**Asylum applications in MS:** 1,620 → 1,445 (-175; -11%)  
**Recognition rate:** 6% → 5%

**Frontex Status Agreement** was signed on 11 June 2025 and deployment of Standing Corps officially started on 29 Oct 2025

**Refusals of entry:** 4,010 → 5,070 (+1,060; +26%)  
**Return rate:** 50% → 51%





# Georgia

Georgia is the most serious case in the 8th VSM cycle: the Commission finds significant regression on some visa liberalization benchmarks, no meaningful corrective action in response to prior (7<sup>th</sup> VSM Report) recommendations, and a deterioration that undermines the mutual trust underpinning visa-free travel.

## Background / Commission assessment (2024–2025):

- On 14 July 2025, the Commission formally recalled Georgia's obligation of continued compliance with visa liberalisation benchmarks and requested detailed information on implementation of the 7th VSM recommendations; Georgia's reply reported no meaningful progress.
- The Commission highlights continued application (and public defence) of legislative measures restricting fundamental rights and freedoms, including: Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, Law on Family Values and Protection of Minors, FARA, and amendments affecting grants, political associations, administrative offences, broadcasting and criminal law.
- The Commission concludes Georgia has regressed significantly on key governance/rule-of-law benchmarks; regression is also noted on visa alignment and the fight against corruption. Following European Council conclusions (2024), most forms of EU cooperation with Georgia's Ministry of Interior and security agencies were suspended.

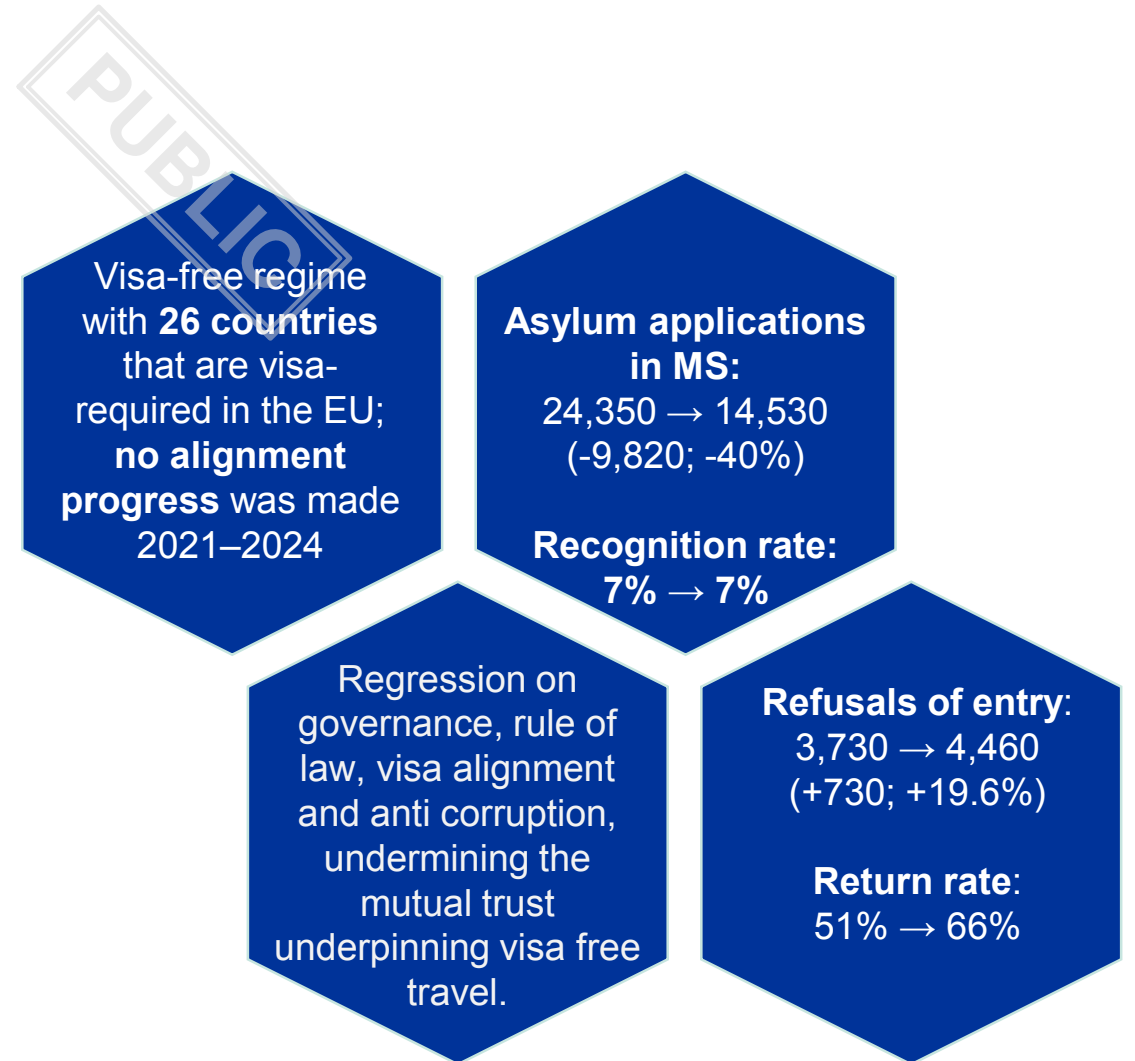
## Implications under the revised Visa Suspension Mechanism:

- The Commission signals that appropriate measures should be considered under the revised VSM, given the systemic/deliberate nature of backsliding.
- First phase could target holders of diplomatic/service/official passports; if issues persist, suspension could be extended; ultimately, Georgia could be transferred to Annex I (visa-required list).

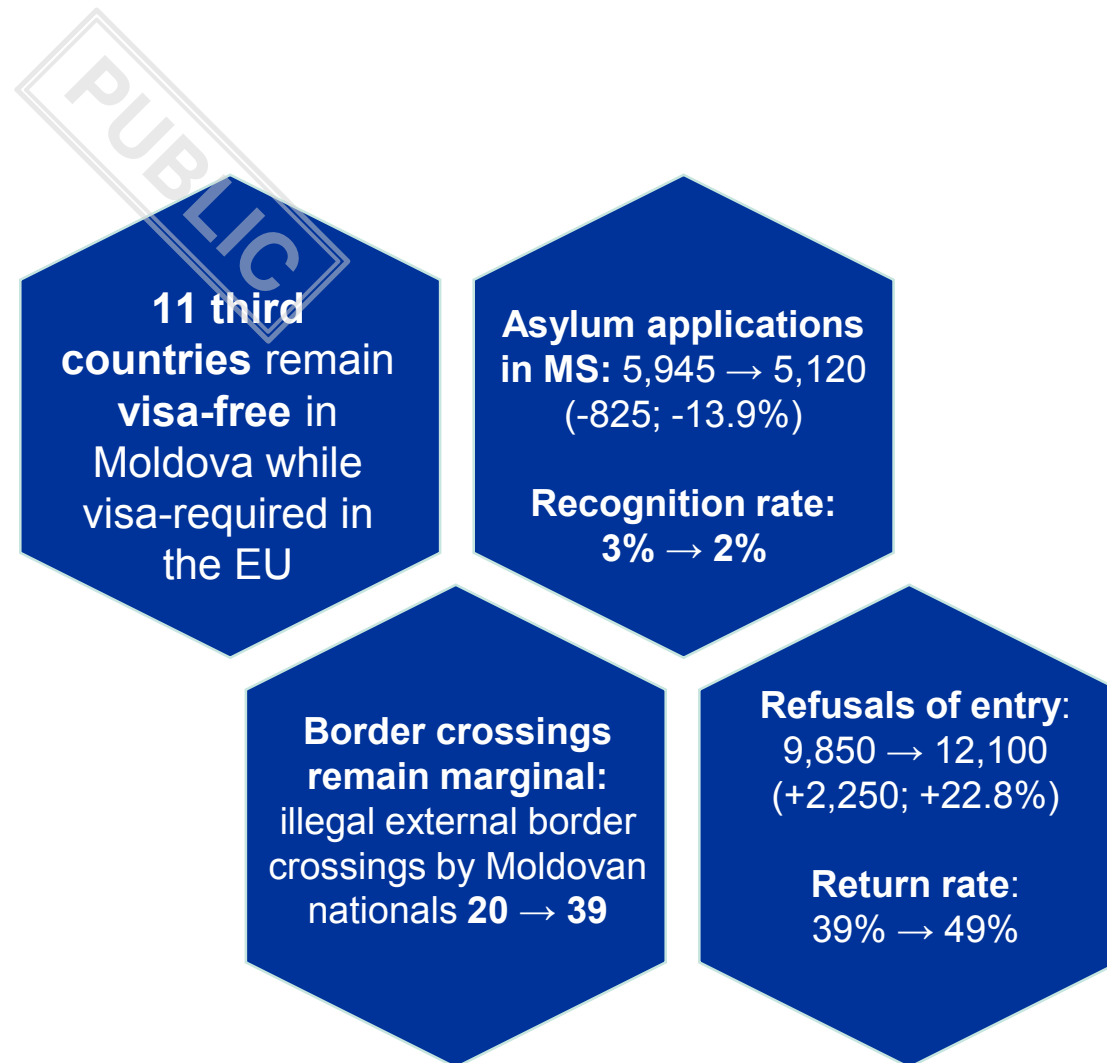


# Georgia

- **Fundamental rights / rule of law:** Re-align with the visa-liberalisation benchmarks by reversing backsliding and addressing legislation and practices that restrict fundamental rights and freedoms, in line with the Commission's prior recommendations; demonstrate concrete corrective measures rather than continued defence of restrictive laws.
- **Visa policy alignment:** Deliver tangible progress towards alignment with the EU visa acquis (lists and practice), including addressing the large misalignment created by visa-free regimes with EU visa-required countries and the widening gap (incl. the China waiver).
- **Immediate termination of the GCC-entry workaround:** Terminate immediately the practice of allowing visa-free entry for nationals of 17 high-risk countries (visa-required in both the EU and Georgia) based on GCC visas/residence permits; partial restrictions are insufficient.
- **Anti-corruption benchmarks:** Implement outstanding anti-corruption recommendations (institutional capacity for asset recovery/management; credible strategy/action plan; effective independence and neutrality safeguards) and ensure reforms do not further weaken the integrity framework.



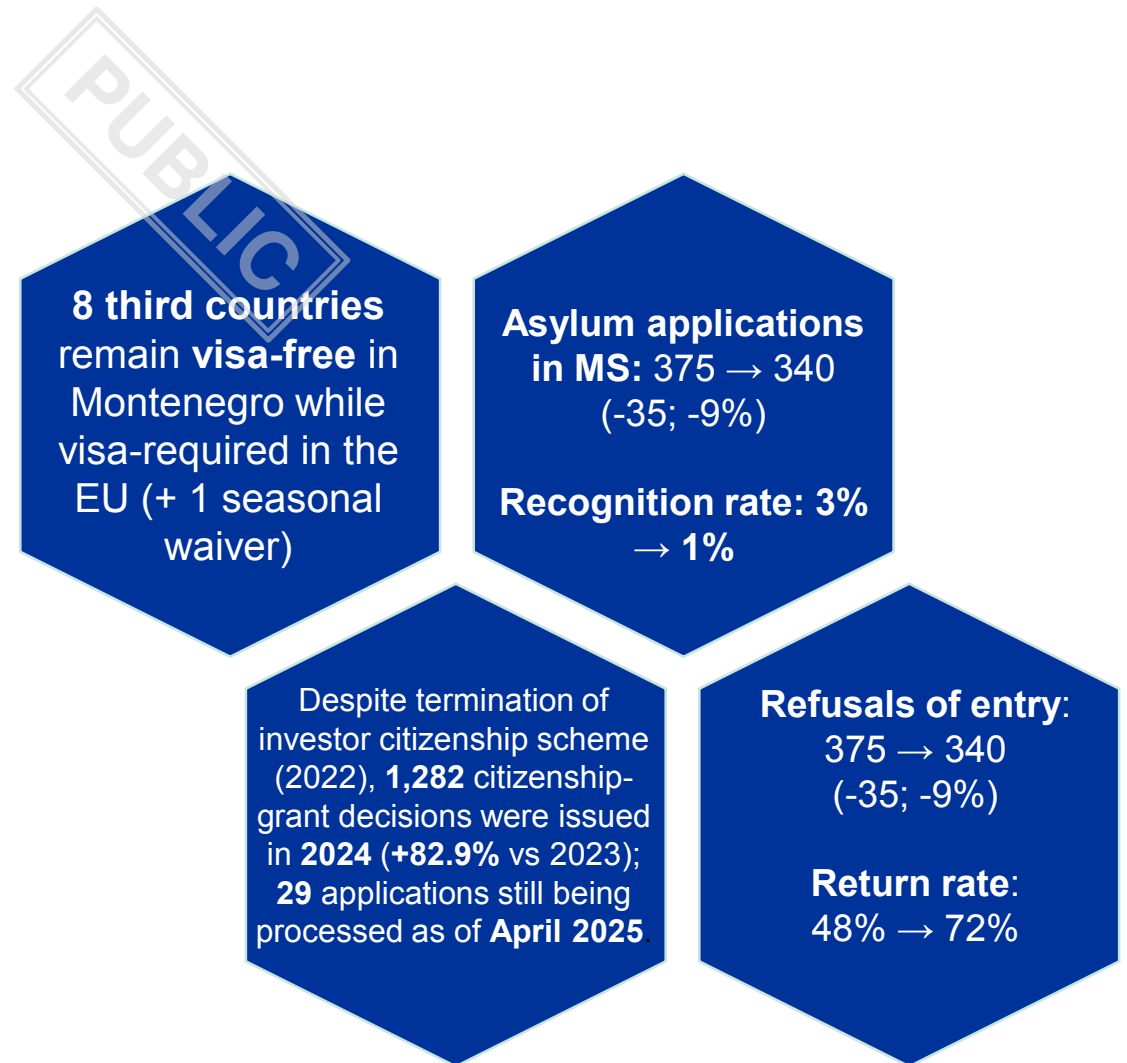
- **Visa policy alignment:** Moldova must align its visa policy with the EU list of visa-required countries, in particular regarding countries presenting illegal migration and/or security risks to the EU. Pending full alignment, Moldova should continue and strengthen rigorous screening of visa-exempt third-country nationals, especially those originating from high-risk countries.
- **Unfounded asylum applications:** Moldova must intensify efforts to address the continued occurrence of unfounded asylum applications by Moldovan nationals in EU Member States. This could include targeted information campaigns tailored to relevant migrant profiles and the introduction of border exit checks to improve tracking and deterrence.





# Montenegro

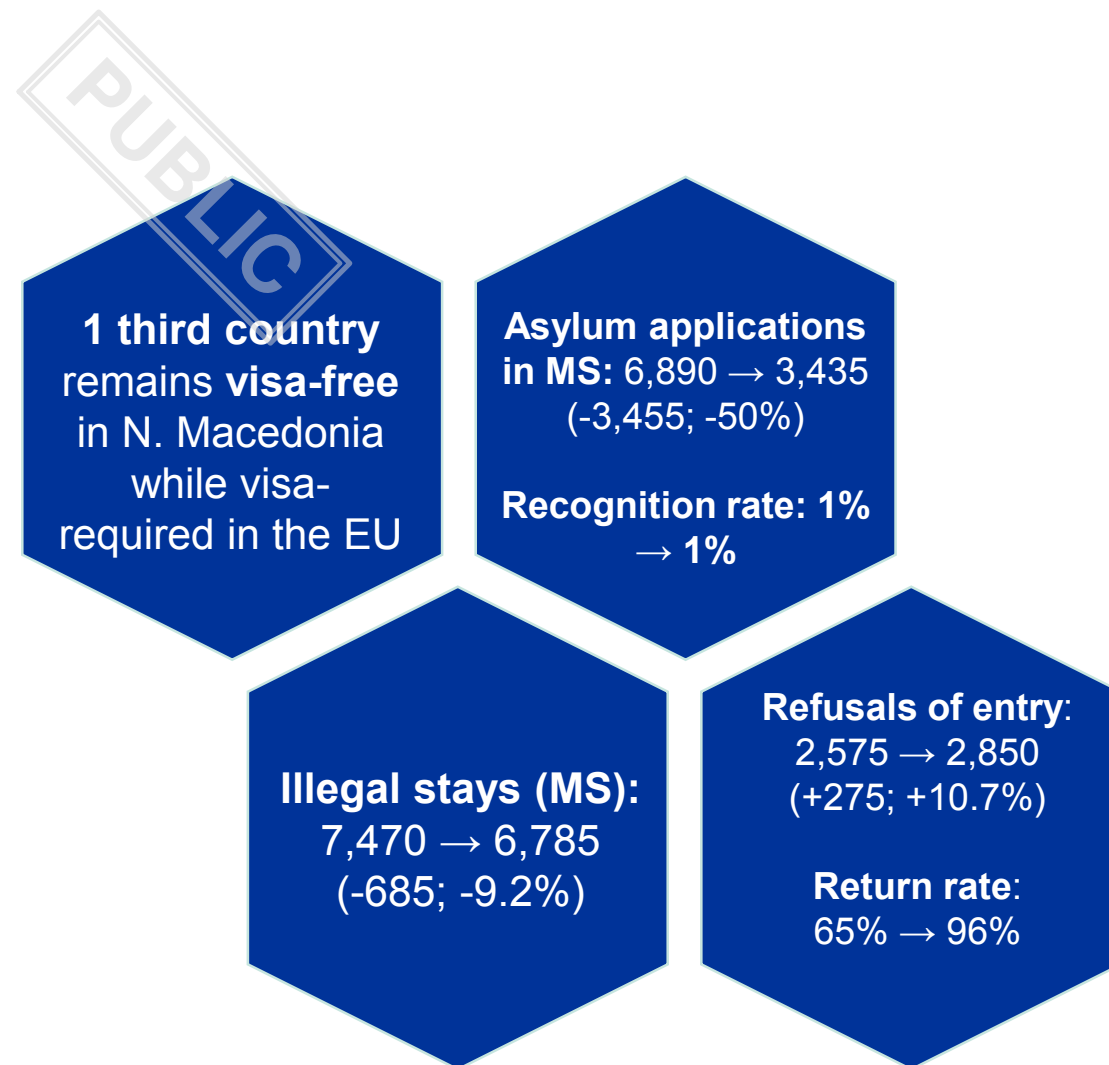
- **Alignment with the EU visa list:** Montenegro must align its visa policy with the EU list of visa-required third countries. Montenegro must not grant any more seasonal visa waivers, including to those countries, that were removed from the permanent visa free list. Montenegro should also align its visa procedures with Schengen standards, in particular by introduction of collection of biometric as part of the examination of visa demands. In the interim, Montenegro must implement targeted security measures, such as enhanced screening of visa-exempt arrivals, and document their effectiveness in reducing illegal migration and security risks.
- **Visa application infrastructure:** In preparation for the transition to a revised visa policy, Montenegro should expand its visa issuance capabilities through digitising elements of the visa issuance process to allow nationals of currently visa-exempt countries to apply for a visa once the exemption is lifted. This will facilitate administrative processing and support policy alignment
- **Investor citizenship scheme follow-up:** Montenegro must ensure that the legal basis of the scheme is repealed and all pending applications under the now-terminated scheme are processed in accordance with the highest security standards. **In addition, possible cases of citizenships previously granted through this scheme to individuals subject to international restrictive measures must be reviewed and revoked where appropriate**





# North Macedonia

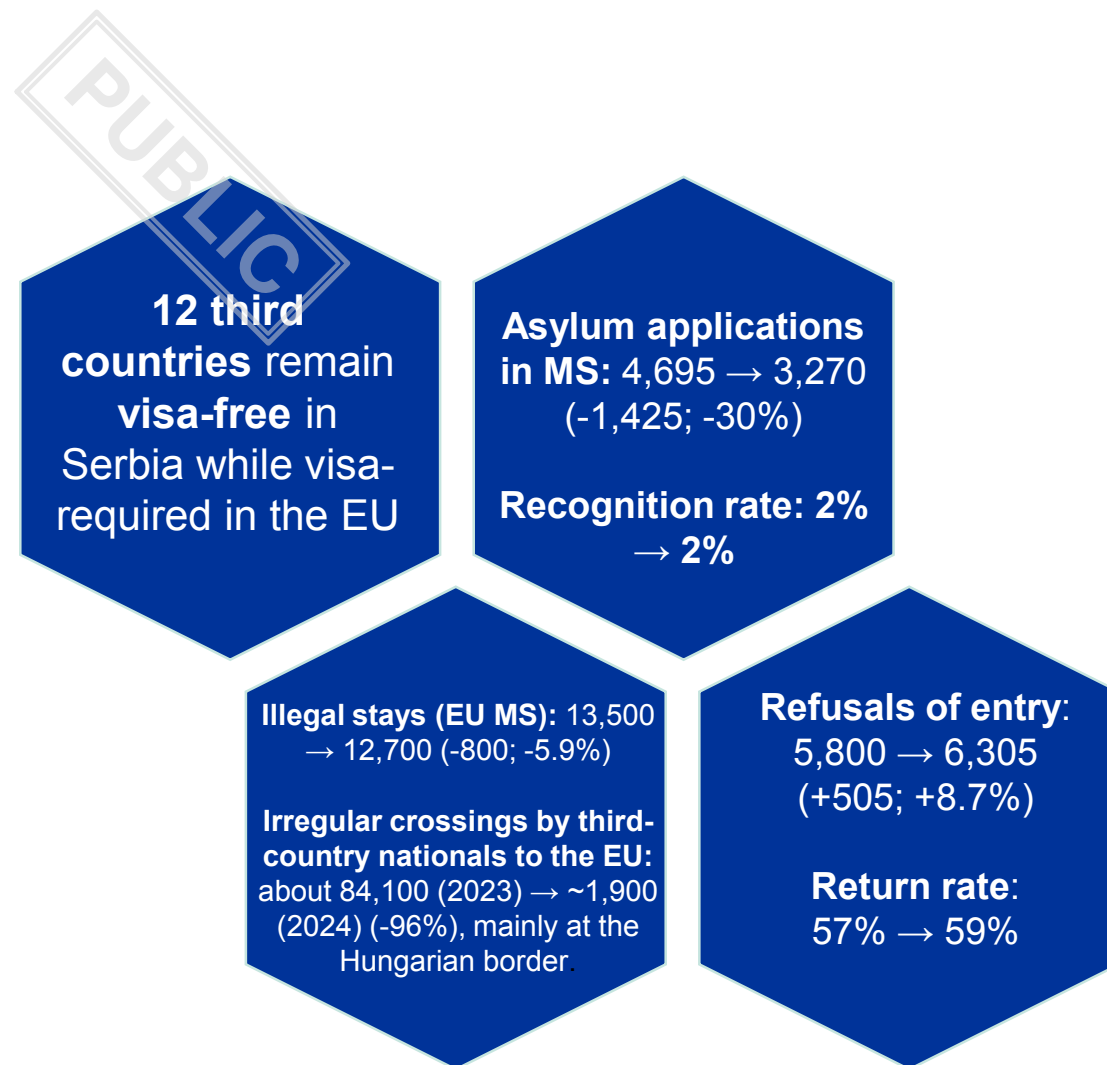
- **Visa policy alignment:** North Macedonia must complete the alignment of its visa policy with the EU list of visa-required third countries. It should also align visa procedures with Schengen standards, notably by introducing biometric data collection (digital photo and fingerprints) as part of the examination of visa applications.
- **Screening of Turkish arrivals:** North Macedonia should report on the implementation and effectiveness of additional screening measures applied to Turkish nationals arriving in the country, particularly regarding illegal migration and security risks.
- **Overstays:** To mitigate the persistent phenomenon of nationals overstaying in the Schengen area, authorities must implement targeted initiatives, including information campaigns on visa-free travel conditions and enhanced cooperation with Member States.
- **Investor citizenship scheme (“special economic interest”):** North Macedonia must abolish the scheme and repeal its legal basis, provide information on applications already submitted under the provision, and ensure that all such applications undergo rigorous background checks.





# Serbia

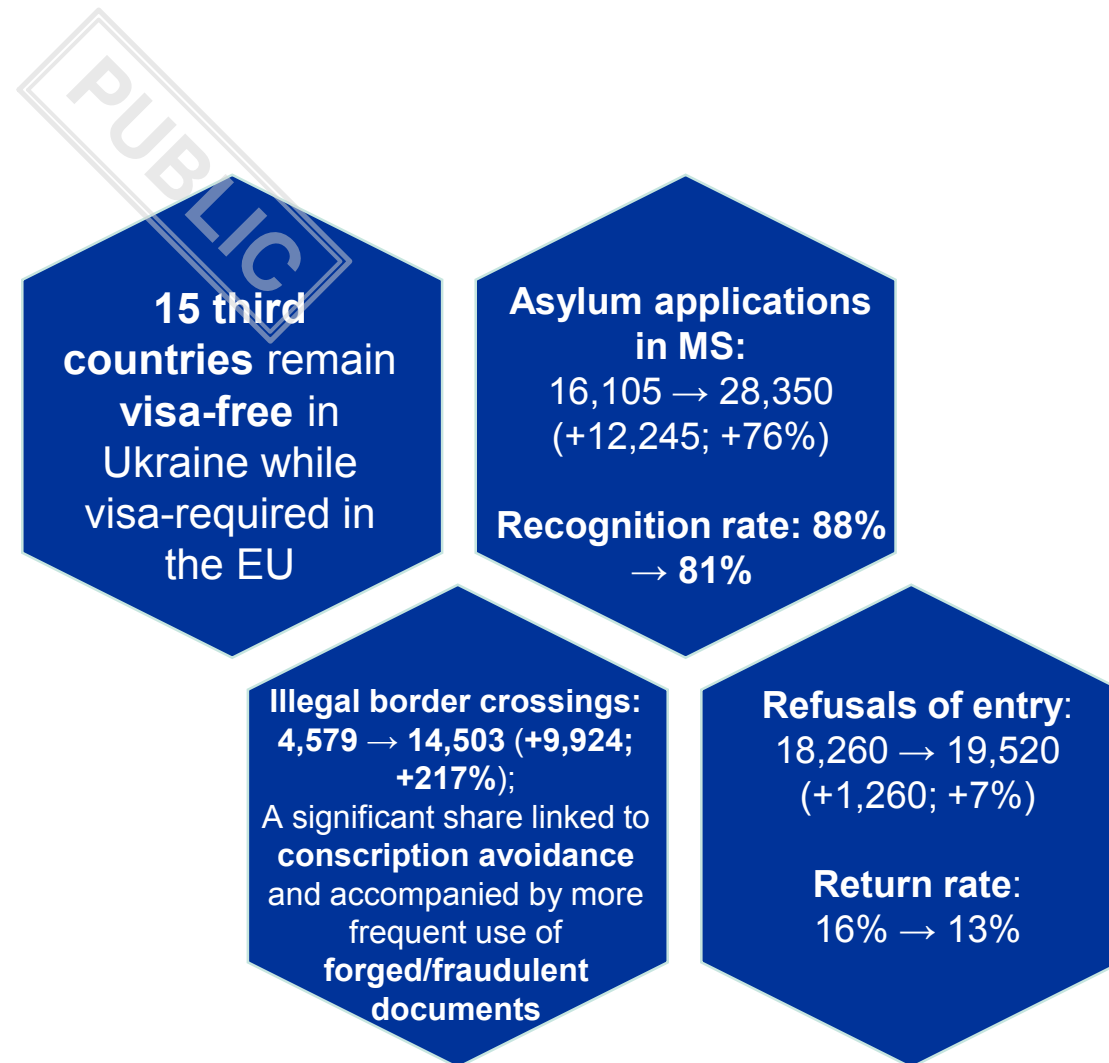
- **Visa policy alignment:** Further align Serbia's visa policy with the EU list of visa-required third countries, prioritising high-risk nationalities. Align visa procedures with Schengen standards, notably biometric collection (digital photo and fingerprints). Pending full alignment, strengthen screening of visa-exempt third-country nationals from high-risk countries
- **Visa issuance procedures:** Enhance screening of visa applications lodged by nationals from countries presenting illegal migration and/or security risks, and tighten issuance rules to ensure stronger control and EU-consistent risk assessment.
- **Implementation of readmission obligations:** Fully implement the third-country nationals' clause of the EU–Serbia Readmission Agreement, particularly when transit through Serbia is demonstrably documented.
- **Citizenship practices:** Refrain from granting citizenship under accelerated/simplified procedures to nationals of countries posing illegal migration or security risks to the EU; ensure adequate, thorough security screening for all applicants, including under ordinary naturalisation.
  - Since 2022, **200+ Russian nationals** obtained Serbian citizenship under an “interest of Serbia” provision without mandatory residence, raising concerns about Schengen circumvention





# Ukraine

- **Visa policy alignment:** Ukraine must align its visa policy with the EU list of visa-required third countries, with a particular focus on countries whose nationals present illegal migration or security risks to the EU.
- **Document security:** Ukraine is encouraged to make greater efforts to address the issue of use of fraudulent documents, including but not limited to passports.
  - Reports flag some Ukrainian nationals holding **multiple valid biometric passports** and instances of **manually altered passport expiry dates**; last non-biometric passports were issued in **2016** and are expected to be phased out by **2026**
- **Anti-corruption efforts:** Ukraine is encouraged to continue strengthening its anti-corruption framework by further developing a credible and consistent track record of investigations, prosecutions, and convictions in corruption-related cases.



# Eastern Caribbean



# Eastern Caribbean – state of play

- The Commission has engaged with the five visa-free Eastern Caribbean countries operating investor citizenship schemes (**Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Lucia**) to obtain detailed information and data on how these schemes operate.
- All five countries operate distinct schemes that typically grant citizenship in exchange for direct budget contributions or investment (infrastructure/utility/real estate). Due diligence and security screening processes are described as broadly similar across the five.
- In 2024, among the four Eastern Caribbean countries that reported data on the main nationalities of successful applicants (excl. Grenada) the majority of applicants continued to originate from countries that are subject to visa requirements for entry into the EU. (e.g. 531 nationals of **Syria**, 365 of **Iraq**, and 333 of **China**). In Grenada, which also reported partial data, the leading applicant nationalities in 2024 were **China** (96 applicants) and **Nigeria** (82 applicants)

	Antigua and Barbuda	Dominica	Grenada	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Saint Lucia
<b>Total applications received</b>	4,332 (2015–2023) 1,733 (2024) 78 (2025 until 30/4)	13,161 (2015–2022) 4,068 (2023) 3,893 (2024)	5,847 (2015–2023) 420 (2024) 123 (2025 until 31/03)	19,655 (2015–2023) 223 (2024) 171 (2025 until 30/4)	7,437 (2015–2023) 4,304 (2024) 120 (2025 until 30/4)
<b>Rejections</b>	169 (2015–2023) 30 (2024) 5 (2025 until 30/4)	420 (2019–2022) 210 (2023) 255 (2024)	256 (2015–2023) 93 (2024) 25 (2025 until 31/03)	739 (2015–2023) 98 (2024) 86 (2025 until 30/4)	97 (2015–2023) 227 (2024) 151 (2025 until 30/4)
<b>Rejection rate (2024)</b>	1.7%	6.5%	22.1%	43.9%	5.3%
<b>Total passports issued</b>	<b>7,995</b> (2015–2023) <b>1,276</b> (2024) <b>540</b> (2025 until 30/4)	<b>29,590</b> (2018–2021) <b>9,539</b> (2023) <b>9,586</b> (2024)	<b>16,086</b> (2015–2023) <b>5,180</b> (2024) <b>1,518</b> (2025 until 31/03)	<b>48,844</b> (2015–2023) <b>6,437</b> (2024) <b>734</b> (2025 until 30/4)	N/A



# Eastern Caribbean – state of play

All five countries apply a restricted countries policy, under which individuals holding certain nationalities are **excluded** from applying to their investor citizenship schemes:

Grenada	Antigua and Barbuda	Saint Lucia	St. Kitts and Nevis	Dominica
Afghanistan Belarus Iran North Korea Russia Sudan Yemen	Afghanistan Belarus Iran North Korea Russia Somalia Sudan Yemen	Belarus Cuba Iran North Korea Russia Venezuela	Afghanistan Belarus Iran Iraq North Korea Russia	Belarus (Northern) Iraq Yemen  <b>Unless certain criteria met:</b>  North Korea Sudan



# Eastern Caribbean – follow-up and recommendations

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**Regional reform package (2023–2025):** the five Eastern Caribbean countries agreed and began implementing a set of reforms to tighten governance and integrity safeguards in investor citizenship schemes, notably through more structured due diligence/security screening, improved information-sharing/transparency, and the creation of a regional regulatory framework (including steps towards biometrics and enforcement capacity).

Nevertheless, the number of applications remains substantial (13,113 (2023) → 10,573 (2024) and the rejection rates remain low (e.g. *Antigua and Barbuda* 1.7%, *Saint Lucia* 5.3%, *Dominica* 6.5%) across five concerned countries.

- The operation of investor citizenship schemes by countries that are visa-free in the EU constitutes a serious security concern.
- The operation of a scheme, whereby citizenship is granted in exchange for pre-determined payments or investments, without the person concerned having any genuine link to that third country, constitutes a potential ground for the suspension of visa-free travel under the revised Visa Suspension Mechanism.
- Concerned Eastern Caribbean countries should take all measures necessary for adequate security vetting of applicants, pending the discontinuation of those schemes.



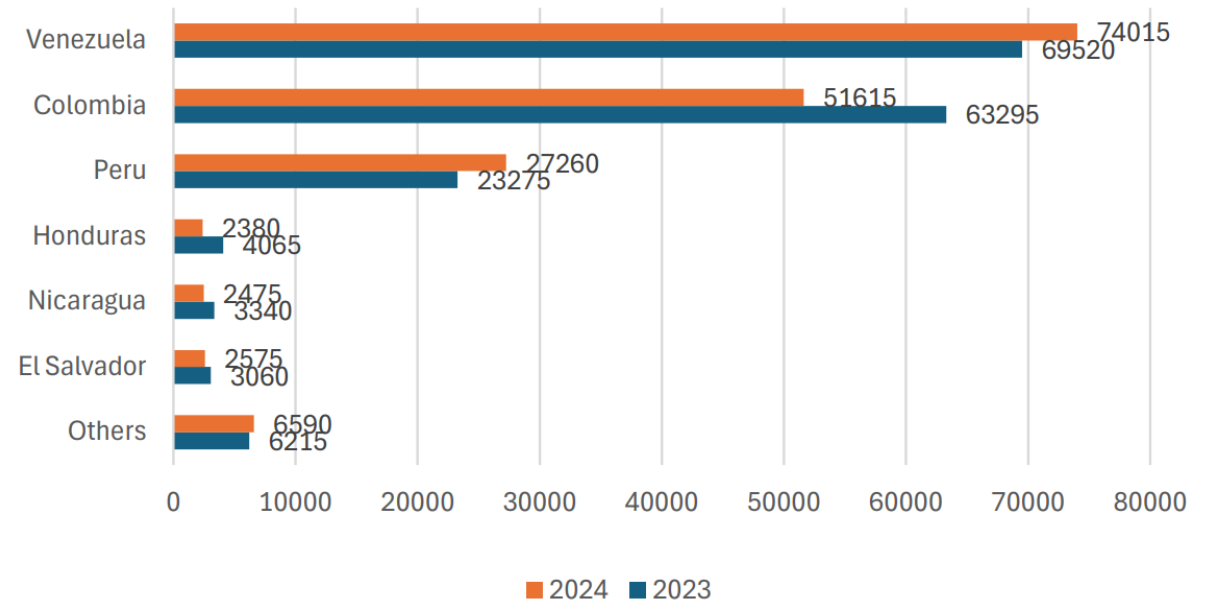
# Latin America



# Latin America – state of play

- Unfounded asylum applications lodged by visa-exempt nationals continue to place a disproportionate burden on Member States' asylum systems, given their typically very low recognition rates.
- Scale (2015–Q1 2025): 18% of all asylum applications received in the EU were lodged by nationals of countries benefiting from visa-free access.
- Latin America is the dominant source: Between 2015 and Q1 2025, nationals of Latin American visa-free countries lodged over 50% of all asylum claims submitted by visa-exempt third-country nationals.
- 2024 overall (15 visa-free Latin American countries): 166,910 applications in 2024 vs 172,770 in 2023 ( $\approx -3\%$  year-over-year). Highest volumes: **Venezuela, Colombia, Peru**, followed (at lower levels) by **Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador**.

Asylum applications 2023 compared to 2024



# Latin America – follow-up and recommendations

- **Venezuela:** 74,015 vs 69,520 (continued upward trend; annual figures exceeding 50,000 over the past three years). The Commission links the increase to Venezuela's political/economic crisis; nevertheless, sustained growth combined with low recognition rates remains a concern. Relations remain strained; no accredited ambassadors and no structured dialogue in place.
- **Colombia:** 51,615 vs 63,295 (-19%). The Commission/EEAS engaged Colombia through the EU–Colombia Roundtable on Migration and Mobility (12 Nov 2024) and EU–Colombia Political Dialogue (26 Jun 2025); Colombia launched an awareness campaign (April 2025) and a ~50% decrease has been observed in 2025.
- **Peru:** 27,260 vs 23,275 (+17%); discussed in late 2025 at high-level, with Peru expressing readiness to address.
- **Honduras:** 2,380 vs 4,065 (-42%); **Nicaragua:** 2,475 vs 3,340 (-26%); **El Salvador:** 2,575 vs 3,060 (-16%).
- **Recommendation:** while recognising increased efforts by concerned Latin American countries, they should take further measures to curb the number of overstays and unfounded asylum applications submitted by their citizens in the EU. Such measures, already being taken by some countries, should include, when possible, departure checks/verifications, communication campaign to inform citizens of their rights and obligations under the visa-free regime with the EU, as well as other measures that might be agreed either with EU or bilaterally with EU Member States.

