

# YEA Annual Trends 2024



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## INTRODUCTION

Your Europe Advice (YEA) is an EU legal advice service available to citizens and businesses. Managed by the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) under contract with the European Commission, it consists of a team of 54 lawyers who respond to enquiries in all 24 official EU languages and have expertise in both EU and national laws across all Member States.

In 2024, YEA received 26,753 requests for legal advice, with its legal experts responding to 19,255 enquiries—an increase of 3% from the previous year. Additionally, YEA handled 164 legal advice requests from 23 SOLVIT centres, marking a 49% rise compared to 2023 and the highest number ever recorded. These enquiries offer valuable insights into the challenges EU citizens and businesses experience in exercising their rights, particularly freedom of movement.

Beyond providing information, advice and guidance, YEA plays a key role in identifying recurring or systemic issues, serving as a reality check on the implementation of EU rights. By analysing enquiry trends, YEA gathers evidence of legislative gaps or inconsistencies in how EU law is applied. This insight is further strengthened by YEA's feedback reports, which help the European Commission identify grey areas in legislation or potential infringements that may require action against Member States.

ECAS produces these reports based on noteworthy cases handled by YEA. They highlight persistent challenges in the Internal Market and contribute to shaping EU policy.

This YEA Annual Trends Report is based on 2024 data extracted from the enquiry database and feedback reports. Using a structured classification system, it provides an overview of the most pressing legal concerns affecting citizens and businesses.

The “conclusions and recommendations from ECAS” are ECAS’s personal opinions and do not necessarily correspond with the views of the European Commission.

## 1. Nature of the Enquiries

In 2024, the number of questions received by the YEA service increased slightly compared to 2023. The number of ineligible questions was high (21%), but stable compared to 2023. Some UK requests are no longer covered by EU law. Enquiries were received from third-country nationals and third-country businesses that were not related to EU law and could not be dealt with by the YEA.

Social security enquiries (28%) were a significant proportion of those received. These were followed by residence rights (21%) and entry procedures (11%). This hierarchy remains unchanged from 2023.

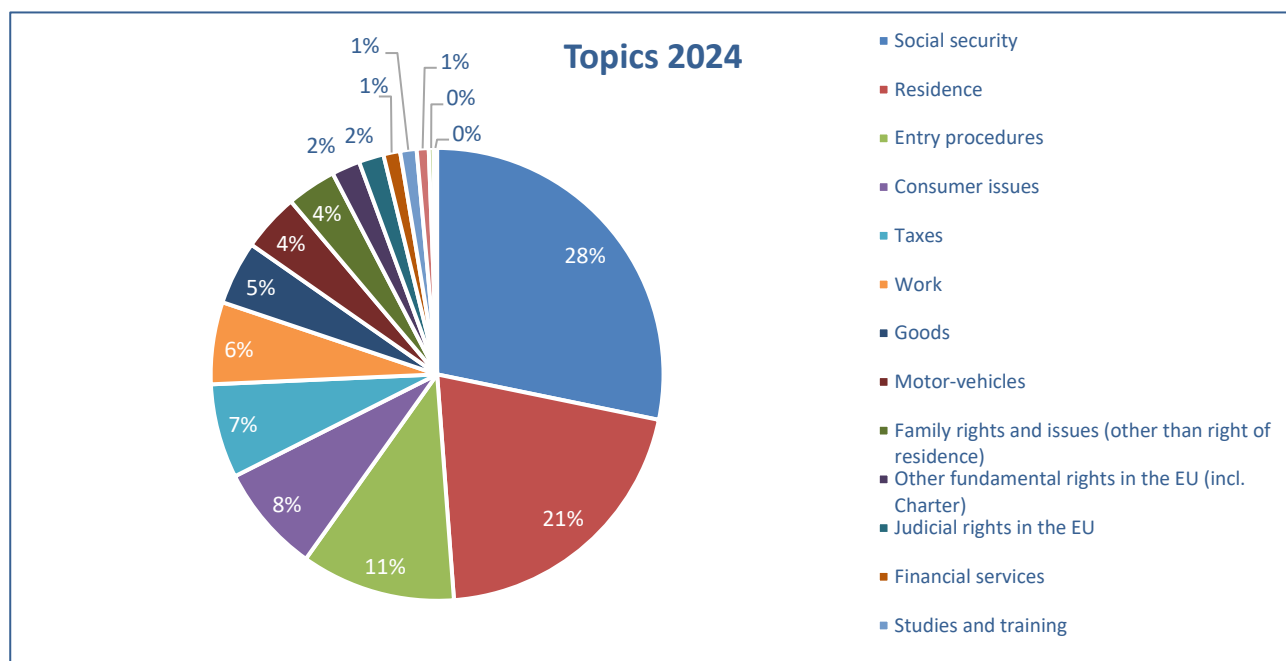


Figure 1: Source YEA Database

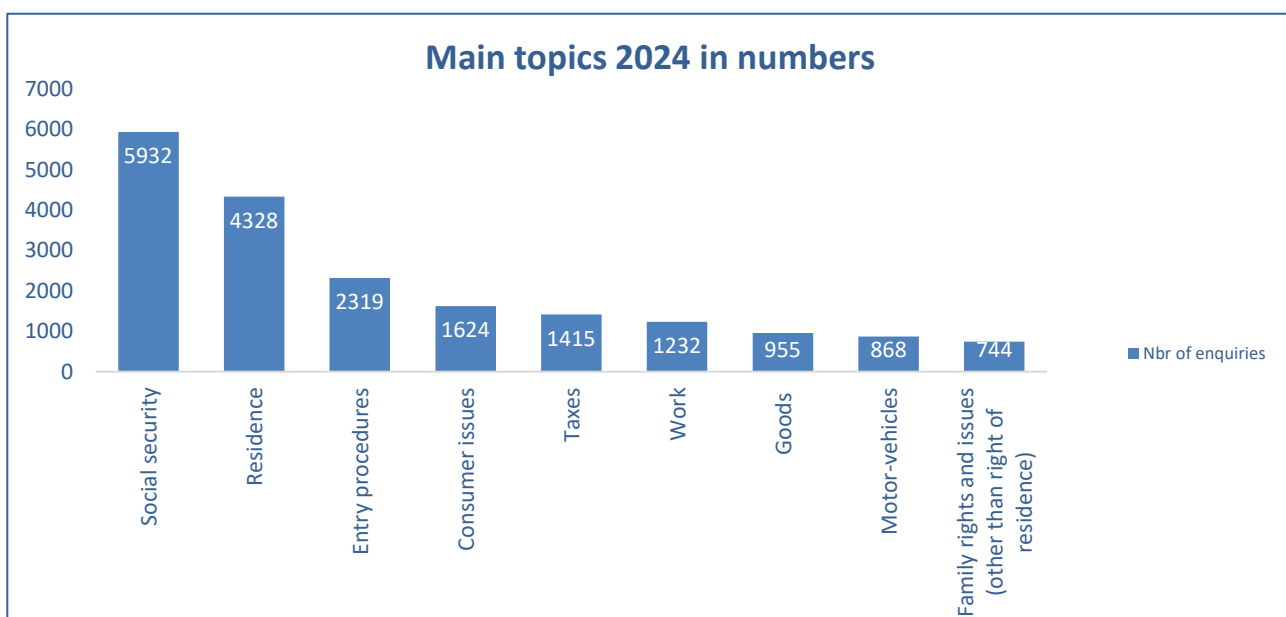


Figure 2: Source YEA Database

Compared to 2023, residence enquiries have experienced the strongest growth (+11%), reflecting increasing concerns about settling in another EU Member State. Social security inquiries have risen by 5%, reinforcing its position as the most significant topic and underscoring its continued importance. By contrast, entry procedures have declined by 11%, suggesting reduced concerns or improved processing.

Notably, other categories have seen significant growth in engagement, particularly studies and training, family rights and fundamental rights, indicating increasing interest in education, legal protection and personal rights in the EU.

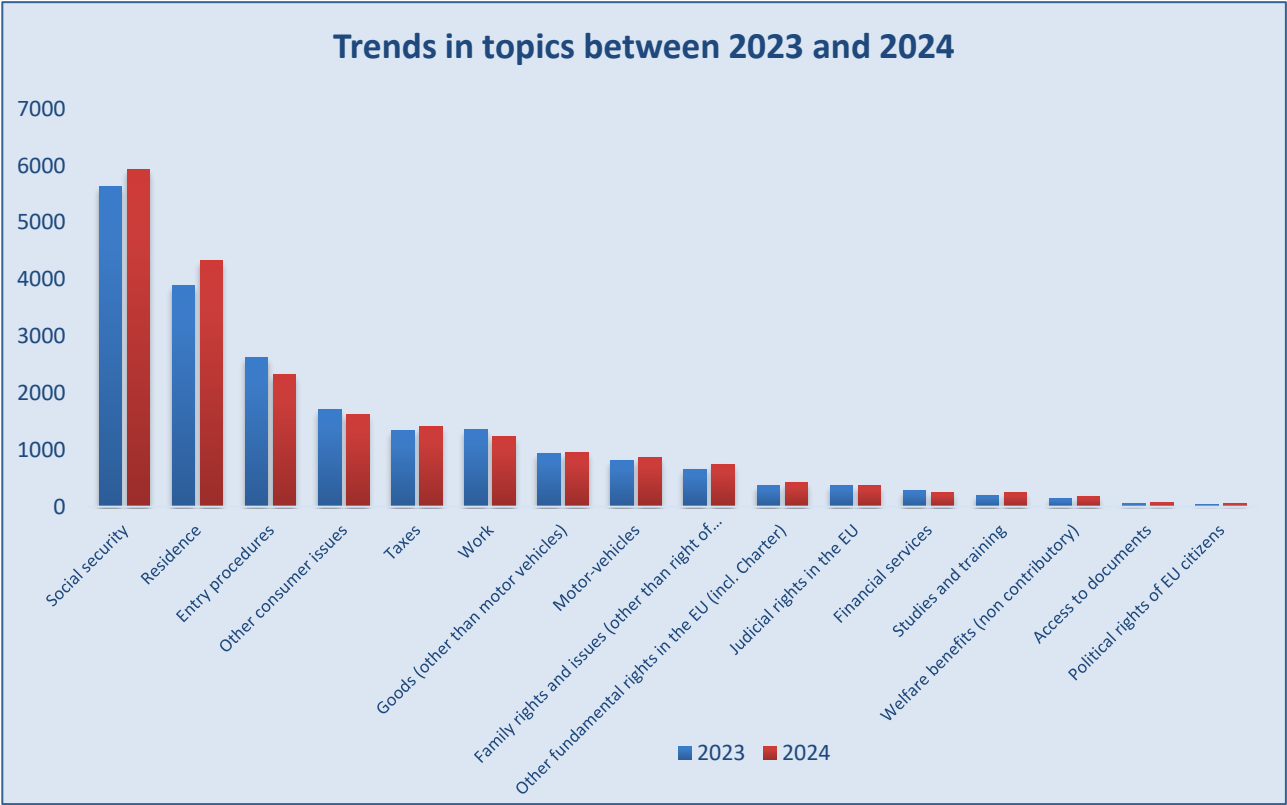


Figure 3: Source YEA Database

YEA received enquiries from citizens from all 27 EU countries and from Norwegian, Icelandic and third-country nationals who are family members of EU citizens. While 14% of the enquiries were from third-country nationals, YEA received fewer questions from British citizens than in previous years. The top ten nationalities that contact YEA remain unchanged compared to 2023.

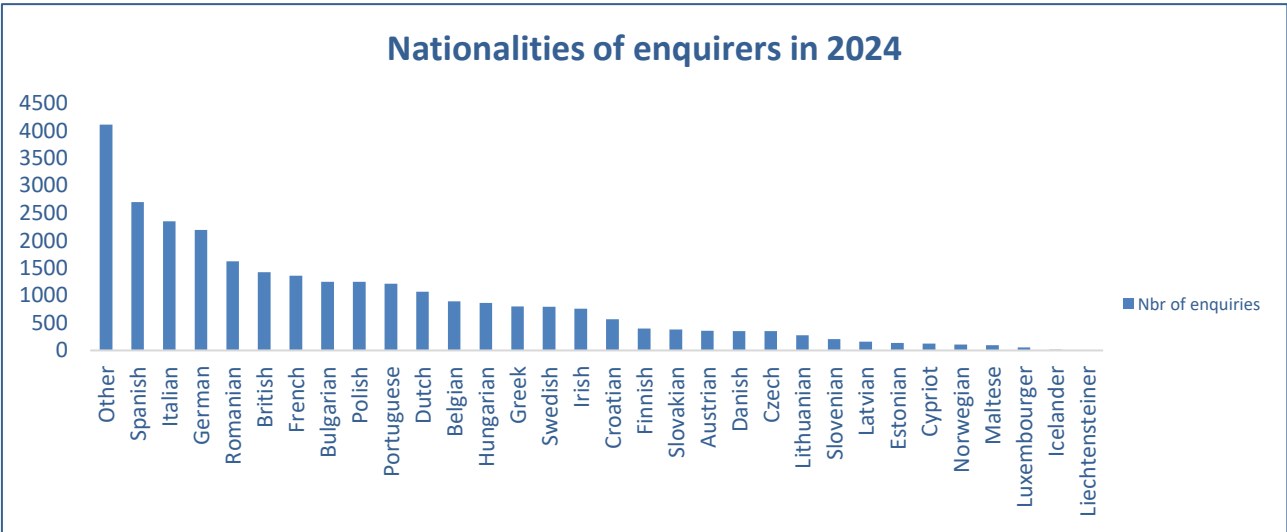


Figure 4: Source YEA Database

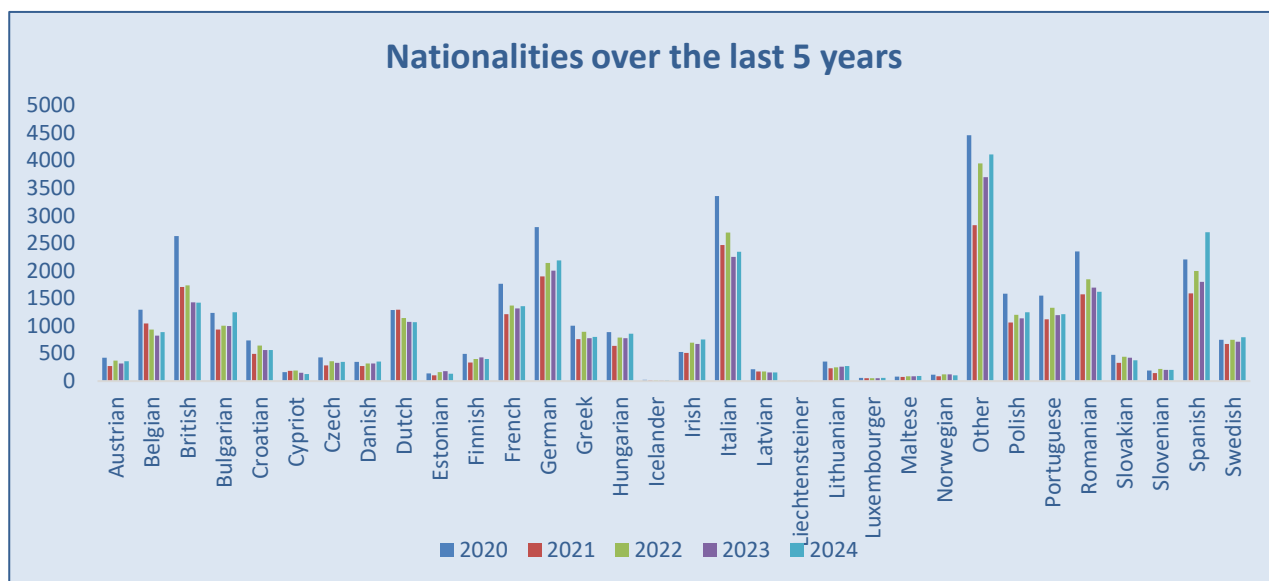


Figure 5: Source YEA Database

The enquiries received concerned all 27 Member States, as well as Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein. YEA received most questions concerning Germany, Spain, France, Italy and Portugal.

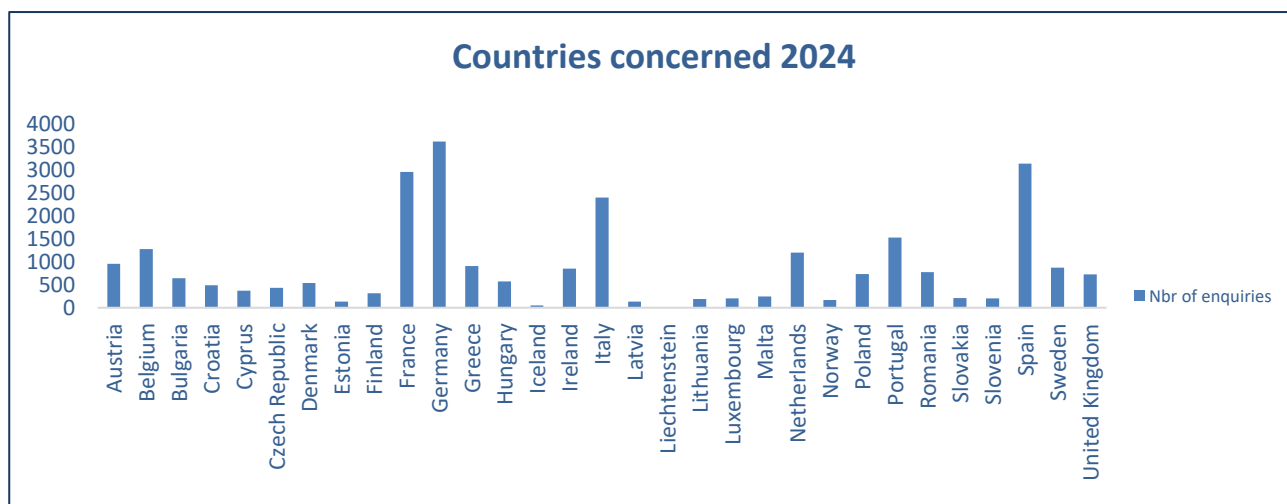


Figure 6: Source YEA Database

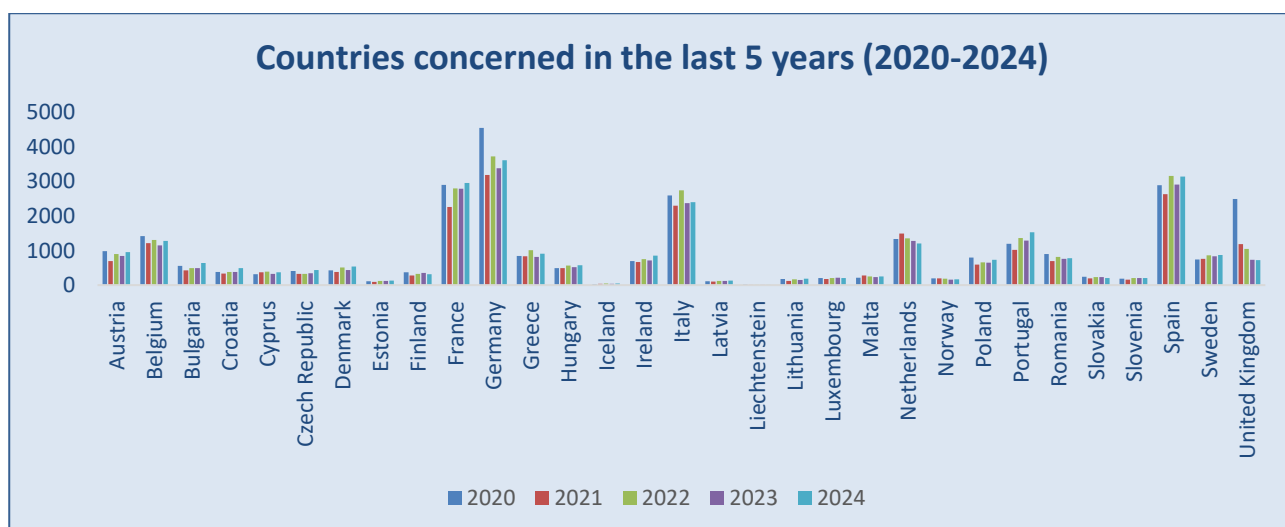


Figure 7: Source YEA Database

In 2023, YEA received enquiries from diverse socio-economic categories of citizens. Mobile workers represented 35 % of those using the service, compared to 39% in 2023 and 50% in 2022. However, enquiries from pensioners and jobseekers have increased compared to previous years.

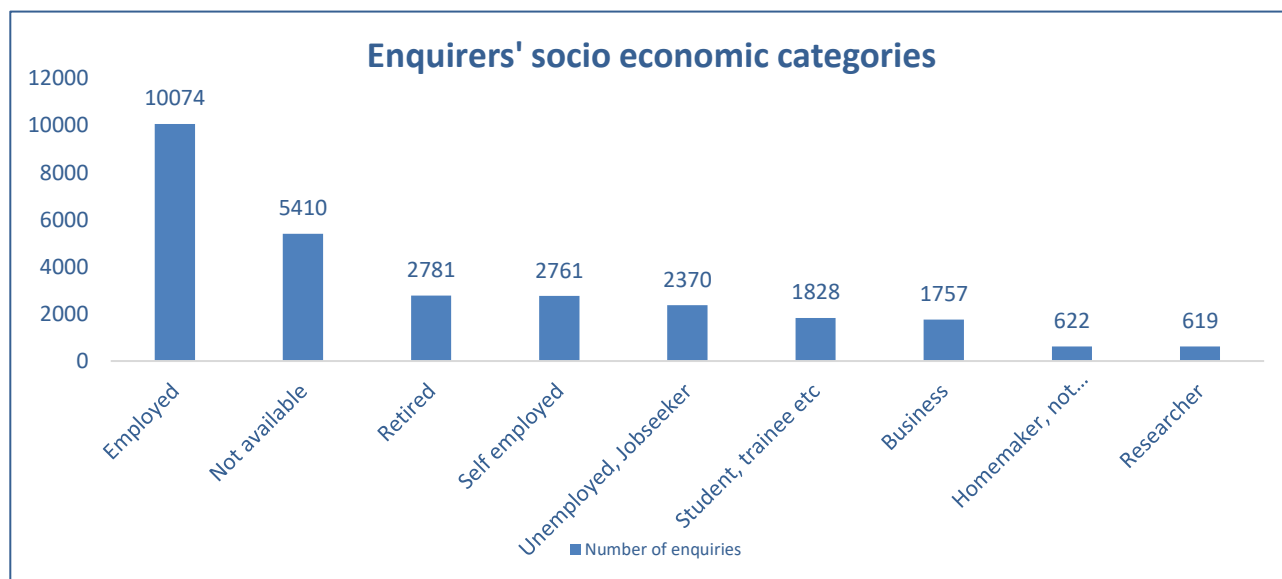


Figure 8: Source YEA Database

## 2. The Five Main Issues In 2024

Each topic is divided into sub-topics. In 2024, three of the five most important sub-topics related to social security. The year 2024 marks the first time in several years that YEA has not had 'Entry' as a sub-topic in the top five concerns:

1. Residence - family rights: 2,016 enquiries
2. Social security - country of insurance and general management: 1,875 enquiries
3. Social security - healthcare, sickness, or maternity (here comprising medical treatment): 1,689 enquiries.
4. Social security: old-age benefits: 1,431 enquiries
5. Residence – permanent residence: 955 enquiries

### 2.1 Social Security: 5,932 enquiries

A significant proportion of questions concerning social security related to general management and difficulties determining which country was competent. The number of enquiries related to access to healthcare and benefits such as old-age pensions or unemployment benefits increased in 2024. Citizens frequently struggle to navigate the complex process of identifying the responsible country. Once identified, accessing social security benefits remains challenging due to bureaucratic hurdles. Poor communication and insufficient cooperation between national authorities exacerbate these difficulties, leading to significant delays and frustration for citizens.

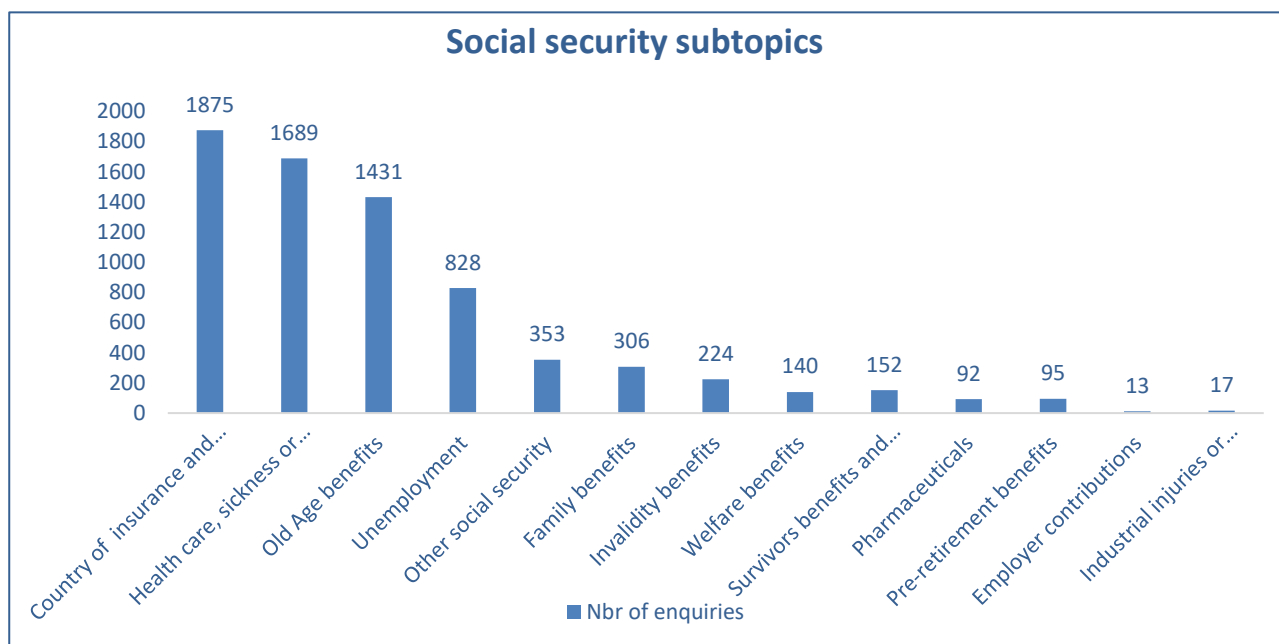


Figure 9: Source YEA Database

### 2.1.1 Country of insurance and general management (1,875 enquiries)

Articles 11 and 13 of Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 stipulate that EU citizens are covered by the legislation of only one country. The Member State where the citizen pursues economic activity is responsible for social security coverage. There are special rules for certain categories of workers, such as civil servants, who can be insured in the Member State of the employing administration, and workers who are employed or self-employed in several EU countries. However, the complexity of the rules, the lack of information and training for national authorities and the lack of coordination between Member States often make it difficult to determine which Member State is responsible. Citizens do not know where to pay social security contributions when they work in two countries, live in one country and work in another, or retire in another country. Some Member States refuse to accept responsibility and declare they are not competent even when they are. Others declare themselves competent when they are not. This takes place across most EU countries. The Court of Justice of the EU has consistently ruled that the purpose of the rules on the coordination of social security is to prevent citizens from losing their social protection when they exercise their right to free movement within the EU. However, citizens continue to experience problems maintaining social security coverage when moving from one country to another. All too frequently, they encounter a persistent and widespread lack of cooperation between national authorities.

During 2024, YEA received fewer enquiries related to Brexit and social security. However, the enquiries received indicate that the situation regarding applicable law in social security coordination after 31 December 2020 remains unclear for many EU and British citizens.

#### Examples:

A Danish citizen who previously worked in Germany and now resides in Denmark was unable to determine which social security system he belonged to. While working in Germany, he developed cancer and was subsequently dismissed by his employer. He received no financial support during his illness, as neither the Danish, nor German social security authorities were willing to take responsibility.

The Irish wife of a Polish national gave birth in Poland. The father was employed in Ireland and wanted to take paternity leave and claim paternity pay. However, he was unable to do so because Ireland refused to



issue a social security number for the baby, as the child was not yet a resident. Despite both parents having Irish social security numbers, this prevented the father from claiming paternity benefits.

A Czech/Slovak dual national experienced difficulties obtaining health insurance. She had permanent residence in the Czech Republic and temporary residence in Slovakia, where she was on parental leave. The Slovak health insurance company cancelled her cover, stating that she should be insured in the Czech Republic, where she had permanent residence. However, the Czech authorities refused to insure her, arguing that she received a parental allowance and resided in Slovakia. As a result, she was left without health insurance.

An Irish academic researcher on a two-year contract in Sweden struggled to access healthcare. He was no longer affiliated with Ireland, and his previous employment in France had ended. Although Sweden appeared to be responsible for his healthcare, the Swedish authorities refused to recognise his entitlement, classifying him as a student due to his small research grant there.

A Swedish citizen living in Spain since 2021 struggled to obtain Form S1 to register for Spanish social security. Having previously worked in Sweden, the UK and France, none of these countries accepted responsibility. France believed Sweden should issue the form, while Sweden claimed it was the UK's responsibility. Without the S1 form, the citizen was required to purchase private health insurance and was unable to obtain an EHIC card for travel.

A dual Irish/Latvian citizen residing in Ireland was caught in a dispute between the Latvian and Irish authorities over which country was responsible for reimbursing her medical expenses. She received social welfare in Ireland but also had a small pension from Latvia, leading to uncertainty about her healthcare coverage.

British citizens residing in Portugal as beneficiaries of the Withdrawal Agreement (WA) attempted to obtain EHICs in Portugal. However, the Portuguese social security authorities refused to issue the card and advised them to request it from the United Kingdom. Since these citizens no longer resided in the UK, they were not eligible to receive it there, leaving them without access to an EHIC.

#### **Conclusions and Recommendations from ECAS:**

Despite the establishment of the Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI), administrative cooperation between national authorities requires further enhancement. Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems mandates such cooperation. To ensure its effectiveness, national authorities must receive comprehensive training on the applicable social security rules governing the movement of citizens within the EU.

Requests for information should be processed promptly and, in any case, within three months. In exceptional circumstances, where meeting this deadline is not feasible, the competent authority should communicate the reasons for the delay, provide a revised timeline and offer regular updates.

#### **2.1.2 Health care, sickness or maternity (1,689 enquiries)**

The provisions of Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 are based on the notion that insured citizens and their family members are entitled to sickness, maternity and paternity benefits, irrespective of their circumstances and place of residence. EU citizens have the right to access healthcare in any EU country and to be reimbursed by their home country where they are insured, for healthcare received abroad. Decision 2003/751/EC introduced the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), which gives EU citizens effective access to healthcare in other Member States.

As in previous years, many of the enquiries received by YEA reported obstacles to accessing healthcare and receiving sickness or maternity benefits. Citizens experienced problems with recognition and coverage of the EHIC, a lack of knowledge of the applicable legal framework and difficulties in obtaining a Form S1 when moving to another Member State. These obstacles and delays can negatively impact citizens' mobility and health and place them in difficult financial situations.

#### **Examples:**

A Greek citizen experienced severe knee pain while on holiday in France and urgently needed to see an orthopaedist at a public hospital. Despite presenting his EHIC, the hospital refused to accept it and charged him the full cost of the consultation and medical exam, disregarding the urgency of his condition.

A Bulgarian citizen worked in Greece for 15 years before retiring in Bulgaria. Greece should have provided her contribution records to their Bulgarian counterparts for the purpose of processing her pension. However, the Greek authorities (EFKA) have not responded for more than two years, leaving the citizen without the pension to which she was entitled. Despite multiple requests by the Bulgarian authorities, she remained in financial hardship due to Greece's inaction.

A Romanian student enrolled in a full-time Master's program in Spain struggled to obtain an EHIC. Following the advice of her Spanish university's administrative staff, she attempted to obtain the card in Romania, but her request was refused because she was neither studying nor employed there. In Spain, she was again redirected to Romania. As a result, she remained without health insurance cover in Spain.

A Swedish citizen moving to Austria requested a Form S1 from Sweden. However, the Swedish Försäkringskassan (National Agency for Social Insurance) informed her that it could take up to 18 months to issue the form, despite the requirement that it should be provided immediately.

The Irish authorities asked a Polish citizen who had lived in Ireland for nine years to provide a Form S1 to confirm their entitlement to benefits. However, the Polish authorities refused to issue the form, stating that it should be requested and obtained directly by the Irish authorities.

#### **Recommendation:**

Raise awareness among citizens and national authorities about using an EHIC to obtain healthcare coverage.

Raise awareness of patients' rights to reimbursement (independently of possession of an EHIC) for cross-border healthcare to ensure that everyone who needs care knows their rights and can make informed choices.

### **2.1.3 Social Security – old-age benefits (1,431 enquiries)**

Most of the problems reported regarding access to social benefits concerned old-age pensions. Article 6 of Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 sets out the principle of aggregation. It requires competent authorities to take into account periods of insurance, employment, self-employment and residence in other Member States when assessing benefit claims. However, despite clear rules, periods of social contributions abroad are not always taken into account, and errors in calculations are common. Many citizens find it difficult to obtain clear and accurate information about this process.

Article 7 of the Regulation ensures that pension payments are not affected by a beneficiary's residence in another Member State and prohibits reductions, suspensions or withdrawals. Despite the Regulation's mandate for cooperation between national authorities, persistent inefficiencies often lead to delays and difficulties in claiming pension rights, sometimes leaving individuals without income. This problem is widespread across the EU.

In addition, many citizens continue to share concerns about the impact of Brexit on their pensions and acquired rights.

#### Examples:

A retired Romanian citizen living in France had been receiving a pension from Romania. The Romanian authorities then changed their procedure, requiring proof that he was still alive and eligible for the pension. He submitted the required documents but never received a response. His pension payments ceased.

A Bulgarian citizen who had worked in Cyprus for more than a decade, applied for his pension upon reaching retirement age. Since his pension entitlement depended on contributions made in Bulgaria and Cyprus, the Cypriot authorities transferred his social security records to Bulgaria. However, there was a five year delay in provision of the necessary information.

A Dutch citizen residing in Spain applied for his French pension through the Dutch pension authority (SVB). Despite sending all required documents, the French pension authority (CARSAT) claimed they never received them and refused to pay. Multiple resubmissions went unacknowledged, but no solution was found, leaving the citizen without a pension.

A French citizen resident in Spain applied for a pension thereupon turning 65, having already received a full-rate pension from France after contributing the required number of years. Despite having worked and contributed to Spanish social security for several years, the application was refused. The Spanish authorities stated that he had not met the minimum contribution period and would need to wait until age 66 years and 10 months. The citizen had 42 years of contributions across France and Spain. However, the Spanish authorities failed to aggregate the cross-border contributions.

A German citizen living in Germany was entitled to a basic pension from Romania. The social security authority in Romania refused to pay the pension into a German bank account, insisting that the pensioner should have a bank account in Romania to receive the pension.

#### Recommendations:

Pensioners require clear and reliable information since the rules differ from country to country. Information should be provided both from the country sending before departure and the receiving country upon and after arrival.

The European Institutions should reinforce the obligation of communication and cooperation between Member States, as stated in Article 76 of Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004.

### 2.1.4 Country-specific systemic issues linked to social security

**France—unemployment benefits:** Numerous complaints have been received concerning France Travail, the French unemployment benefits administration, for failing to respond to requests for Form U1 from other EU Member States. Form U1 is essential for calculating unemployment benefits when a worker moves between EU countries. Delays or non-responses from France Travail can leave individuals without benefits for months, causing financial hardship.

#### Example:

A French citizen moved to Spain and applied for unemployment benefits. He required a Form U1 from *France Travail* to transfer his work history. Despite multiple requests from Spain, *France Travail* failed to provide the form for more than six months. This delay prevented the citizen from accessing unemployment benefits and caused financial hardship.

**Hungary—EHIC for third-country nationals:** The Hungarian authorities systematically refuse to issue an EHIC to third-country nationals who have legal residence in Hungary and are covered by the state-financed social security scheme. Regulation (EU) No 1231/2010 has extended EU social coordination rules to third-country nationals residing lawfully in the EU and in a cross-border situation.

**Example:**

A third-country citizen who had lived in Hungary for a year as an EU Blue Card holder applied for an EHIC. The Hungarian authorities refused the request, stating that only individuals posted by their employer to another EU country were eligible. As a result, he was unable to obtain an EHIC for private travel within the EU.

**Italy – survivor pensions:** Italy is making impossible for family members of European citizens who have worked in Italy, but whose family members live in another country, to receive survivors' pensions. Delays are getting longer and there is no communication.

**Example:**

A Slovak citizen lost her husband, who had worked in Italy for more than 30 years. As his widow, she was entitled to a survivor's pension, but because she lived in Slovakia, her application faced endless delays. Despite submitting all the necessary documents, she received no updates or clear answers from the Italian authorities. More than a year later, she was still waiting and struggling financially. This case reflects a wider problem - Italy's increasing delays and lack of communication make it almost impossible for family members abroad to access survivors' pensions.

**Romania – EHIC for students:** As a matter of principle, students staying temporarily in the country where they pursue their studies are regarded as still residing in their home country and insured there. This means they are entitled to health care in the country where they are studying on presentation of their European Health Insurance Card issued by their home social insurance institution.

Romania refuses to issue EHICs to Romanian students studying in another Member State. Consequently, students are obliged to obtain private health insurance coverage in the host Member State where they are studying.

**Example:**

A Romanian citizen studying for a Master's degree in the Netherlands experienced difficulties in obtaining medical coverage. The University of Maastricht required a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), as the student was still officially residing in Romania during his studies. Assuming the process would be straightforward, the student attempted to obtain an EHIC. However, the Romanian authorities refused to issue the card, arguing that the student was not studying in Romania.

In some cases, access to healthcare or social benefits is conditional on a residence requirement that is not needed and in line with the EU Regulations. This issue concerned an increasing number of countries.

**Examples:**

A Spanish family living and working in France with a dependent disabled child has been deprived of all social benefits due to an unusually long residence certificate renewal process, lasting seven months. During this

period, both parents' residence documents were under review, suspending their entitlements to child benefits, including the *Allocation d'Éducation de l'Enfant Handicapé* (AEEH) for their child.

Since February 2024, a Portuguese citizen residing and working in Gothenburg, Sweden, was unable to obtain an EHIC. His application was rejected due to the absence of a personnummer (Swedish personal identification number). As a result, he had to personally cover emergency medical expenses while travelling within the EU despite being an EU citizen in an EU country.

The Italian Social Security Authority (INPS) asked a Romanian citizen to provide an EC long-term residence permit to process their old-age pension application. EU nationals, including Romanians, are not required to hold residence permits within the EU. Additionally, EU citizens must be treated the same as Italian nationals, who do not need a residence permit to receive an old-age pension.

An Austrian citizen lost his Austrian health insurance when his employment ended. He quickly found a job in Italy but had not yet established residency. The local health authority (ASL in Siena) refused to register him with the Italian health system (SSN) without proof of residence, leaving him and his family without cover. Since he was employed in Italy, the health system was responsible for covering him and his family, regardless of residence status.

### Recommendations:

The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) should be accepted in all EU Member States as proof of comprehensive healthcare coverage, regardless of where a citizen studies, works or resides. No additional requirements should limit access to healthcare or social benefits.

Private health insurance should also be recognised as valid proof of cover, especially when authorities refuse to issue an EHIC. Unnecessary administrative barriers must be removed to ensure equal treatment and compliance with EU rules.

Decision-makers at national and EU levels must take swift action to resolve the systemic problems.

## 2.2 Residence rights: 4,328 enquiries

The total number of residence-related inquiries increased significantly between 2023 and 2024. Family Rights were the most significant contributors to this increase, followed by Permanent Residence and Formalities.

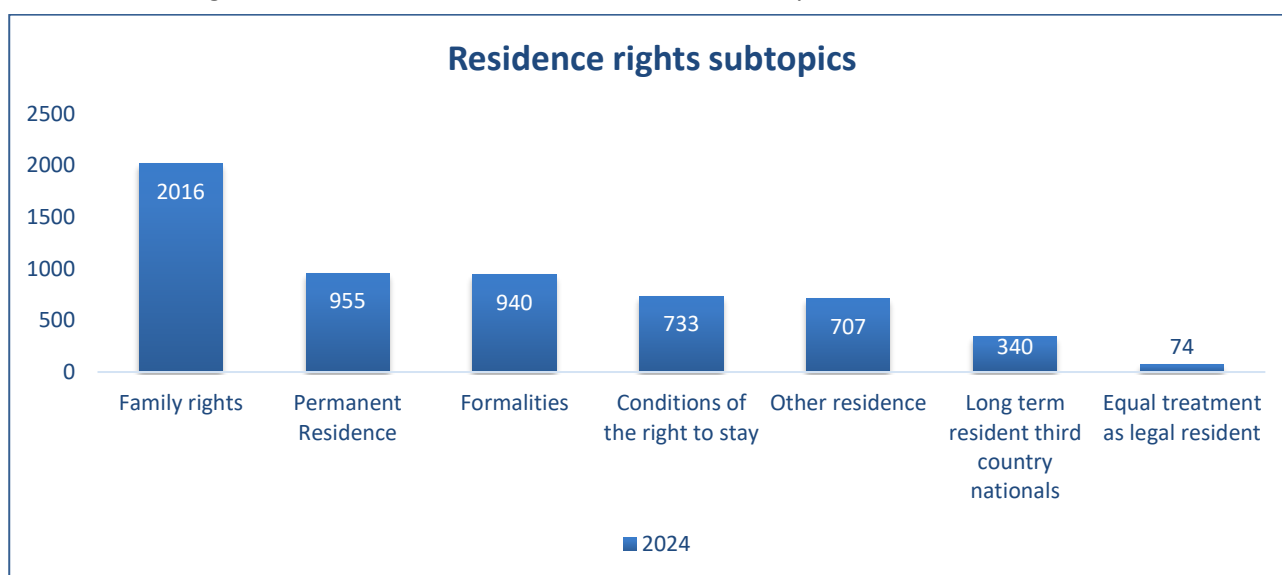


Figure 10: Source YEA Database

### 2.2.1 Family rights (2,016 enquiries)

Directive 2004/38/EC, known as the Free Movement Directive, grants EU citizens and their family members the right to move and reside freely within the EU. Family members include spouses, registered partners, children under 21, dependent children over 21 and dependent parents. The Directive merely provides for facilitation of the entry and residence of extended family members such as dependent siblings or unmarried partners in a durable relationship.

Many EU citizens who contact YEA know their free movement rights but are worried about a family member (economically dependent EU citizen or non-EU citizen). In some Member States, there is a general lack of information on family members' rights of residence. Citizens experience numerous bureaucratic impediments to having their rights recognised. These include having to prove a durable relationship or 'legalise' marriage certificates to obtain a residence card. Applicants for residence cards may also have to prove they have sufficient resources or may be subjected to language requirements. They may have their passport retained by the national authorities until a residence card is issued. Member States have also restricted their nationals who have exercised free movement rights, returning home with family members. These are common issues encountered in most EU countries.

The most striking issue in 2024 was the severe difficulty in contacting relevant authorities, obtaining appointments and processing documents. Delays far exceeded reasonable timeframes, causing significant hardship for affected families.

A residence card serves as proof of the right of residence for non-EU family members and must be issued within six months of submission of the application. This maximum period is justified only in cases requiring a public policy assessment; yet many applicants faced excessive and unjustified delays.

In 2024, Brexit also influenced the questions received, but less than in previous years. Citizens queried the implications and impact of Brexit on the residence rights of their family members. National authorities remained unfamiliar with rights deriving from the Withdrawal Agreement.

#### Examples:

A Dutch citizen moved to Germany where he attempted to obtain an appointment to apply for a residence card for his non-EU stepson in the municipality of Alsdorf (Aachen). He found it impossible to obtain an appointment to submit the application. His stepson's visa expired and his passport was also due to expire imminently.

A US national married to an Italian citizen in Ireland applied for a residence card there. After two months without acknowledgement, she was concerned about her right to remain as her leave was expiring. She also struggled to find work without proof of her right to employment.

The Cypriot Migration Department demanded excessive documents to issue a residence card to the British spouse of an Estonian citizen. These included title deeds or a rental agreement, an affidavit of financial support and health insurance—even though the EU citizen was employed.

The Maltese authorities refused to facilitate residence for the unmarried partner of an Irish citizen, citing insufficient proof of a durable relationship. Despite submitting extensive evidence, including witness statements and photographs, the authorities dismissed the application, stating that *"the department does not accept long-distance relationships."*

An Indian citizen and his Latvian wife remained in Finland after their divorce. They had a child who held Latvian citizenship. However, the Indian citizen's application for a residence card was refused without justification.

A Norwegian citizen resided in France with his non-EU spouse since October 2023. His spouse could not obtain a residence card because the EU citizen had no social security number. This number is not issued to EEA citizens without presentation of an employment contract. To obtain a contract, the prospective employer required a social security number.

A Hungarian and a Costa Rican citizen formalised their legal partnership in Austria but this was not recognised in Spain. While registered partnerships concluded in an EU Member State should be recognised for residence purposes, the non-EU partner was refused the right of residence.

After living and working in Denmark, a Portuguese citizen returned to Portugal with his Brazilian spouse. When applying for her residence card, the Portuguese authorities required them to first register their marriage with the national civil registry, delaying the process. Under EU law, returning EU citizens and their family members should enjoy rights of residence under Directive 2004/38/EC. Since the couple's marriage was legally recognised in Denmark, Portugal should not have imposed additional registration requirements before issuing a residence card.

A British national experienced delays in family reunification because Belgian municipal administrative staff were unaware of or unfamiliar with the specific process that applies to British nationals and their family members who are beneficiaries of the Withdrawal Agreement

### Conclusions and Recommendations from ECAS:

Member States should ensure that national legislation is clear and sufficiently detailed to guarantee attainment of the objectives of Directive 2004/38/EC. The [new Guidance on the right to free movement](#), published by the European Commission on December 6, 2023, aims to assist Member State authorities and national courts to correctly apply EU free movement rules regarding the existence of a duly attested de facto durable relationship. It clarifies that *"where the entry visa expires while waiting for the issuance of the residence card, non-EU family members do not have to return to their country of origin and obtain a new entry visa"*.

Member States' authorities and national administrations should be informed and trained to apply the rules appropriately.

## 2.2.2 Permanent residence, 955 enquiries

Under Article 16(1) of Directive 2004/38/EC, EU citizens who have legally resided in a host Member State for five continuous years automatically acquire the right to permanent residence, provided no expulsion decision has been enforced against them. This right is not subject to additional conditions.

Article 16(2) extends this right to non-EU family members who have also lived in the host country for five continuous years. When these conditions are met, permanent residence is automatically acquired, and the residence document simply confirms this status. It does not create new rights and is not dependent on an administrative decision.

Directive 2004/38/EC states that, when processing an application for a permanent residence card, Member States can only verify the duration of residence. Authorities must issue a document certifying permanent residence as soon as possible.

This topic is becoming increasingly important for EU citizens and their non-EU family members. In 2024, YEA received enquiries indicating that national authorities incorrectly interpret or complicate the continuous residence period calculation. Some Member States also require unnecessary documents, adding further barriers.



The most significant issue is processing delays: According to Article 19(2), Member States must issue a permanent residence certificate "*as soon as possible*", yet many applicants experience protracted delays. These challenges undermine the right to free movement and create uncertainty for EU citizens and their non-EU family members.

#### Examples:

An Italian municipality incorrectly advised a Romanian citizen that ten years of residence were required for permanent residence when EU law sets the requirement at five years. This misinformation unnecessarily delayed the citizen's application.

A Czech citizen who had lived in Italy for ten years - first as a student, then as the wife of an Italian citizen - applied for permanent residence. The municipality incorrectly required her to prove that she had been married or employed for at least five years, disregarding her entire period of residence.

A Spanish citizen with permanent residence status in France was mistakenly treated as a newcomer by the health insurance authority after changing her address within the country. This misinterpretation led to unnecessary administrative hurdles and disruption of access to healthcare.

The elderly mother of a Swedish citizen, who had lived with him in Sweden for five years after previously living together in Italy, was refused a permanent residence card. The authorities did not recognise her established right to stay, even though she met the legal requirements.

The non-EU spouse of a deceased EU citizen was refused a residence card because her late husband was not registered as a resident in Poland. However, EU law prohibits making the possession of a residence document a precondition for exercising a right under Directive 2004/38/EC.

A Finnish citizen who had lived in Poland for 20 years with her Polish family was requested to restart the residence procedure. The authorities demanded proof that her mother had renounced her Polish citizenship in 1974, even though the relevant evidence had been authenticated by a Polish Embassy previously.

A Cypriot citizen applying for permanent residence in Malta was asked to provide proof of purchases made in 2020 despite pandemic-related closures that made such transactions impossible. The excessive documentation requirement created an unnecessary obstacle to obtaining permanent residence.

The Chinese spouse of a Slovenian citizen living in Croatia did not receive a permanent residence card for almost two years. The delay jeopardized his employment.

Five years after the UK's withdrawal from the EU, a number of UK citizens who are beneficiaries of the Withdrawal Agreement have queried their right to upgrade their permanent residence in their host State.

### 2.2.3 Country-specific systemic issues linked to residence rights

**France:** Non-EU family members of EU citizens have the right to a residence card, which must be issued within six months of application. However, excessive delays were frequently reported in 2024, particularly in France. These delays cause significant hardship, preventing individuals from proving their right to reside, work, or travel. National authorities fail to provide clear timelines, making life uncertain for affected families. Then due to a technical bug, it was impossible to apply online for a residence card as a family member of an EU citizen. The problem lasted several months. Despite the administration's acknowledgement that a problem exists, there were no alternative means to attest to family members' rights of residence and work pending resolution of the problem.

There is also a worrying trend in France whereby non-EU family members who apply for residence cards there, are advised that they are not permitted to work and often that they are not permitted to leave the country pending issue of the card.



**Example:**

The Indian spouse of a Greek citizen applied for a residence card in France. Despite meeting all requirements, the application remained unprocessed for over a year. During this time, his tourist visa expired, leaving him unable to work or travel. Living near the Swiss border, he experienced difficulties visiting a doctor in Switzerland due to travel restrictions. The delay left him in legal uncertainty, with no access to employment or essential services.

The Senegalese spouse of a Romanian citizen who acquired a permanent right of residence has applied for a permanent residence card. Six months later, there were still no news. She was not permitted to work pending the issue of her permanent residence card despite having previously held two consecutive 5-year residence cards.

**Portugal:** The Agência para a Integração, Migrações e Asilo (AIMA) in Portugal is responsible for managing immigration processes, including those for EU citizens and their family members. However, since its establishment in October 2023, AIMA has faced several challenges that have significantly impacted its services.

In 2024, YEA received a significant number of complaints related to AIMA, reflecting a growing number of concerns regarding residence rights. Reports highlight major issues such as difficulties securing appointments, which lead to prolonged waiting periods for residence card renewals, permanent residence certificates, permanent residence cards, family reunification applications, and a persistent lack of responsiveness from the agency. These delays often have profound consequences for EU citizens and their family members who require residence documents to, inter alia, claim tax concessions, obtain employment, exchange or renew driving licences, or return to Portugal.

**Examples:**

A French citizen whose permanent residence certificate expired in July 2023 was unable to renew it due to the backlog, leaving him without valid documentation.

A Polish citizen who unsuccessfully attempted to apply for a permanent residence certificate experienced severe consequences when his employer at Lisbon Airport refused to renew his airport access card, as they required a valid residence document. Without it, he was unable to work.

An Italian citizen applied for a permanent residence certificate in October 2023. By the end of May 2024, he had not received any response. He was concerned that his non-EU family members would be adversely affected in their activities, such as schooling and employment while awaiting the outcome of his application.

A Belgian citizen residing in Portugal could not apply for a permanent residence certificate due to AIMA's unresponsiveness. Following her husband's recent passing, the Belgian Embassy requested proof of residence, which she could not provide, leaving her in an uncertain legal situation.

**Sweden:** EU citizens have experienced ongoing obstacles in taking up residence in Sweden where they are required to have a national identification number to be permitted to work there. This number enables access to the internet, bank accounts, healthcare, car registration, etc. The number also facilitates access to lessons and Swedish educational courses, required to register with an employment agency. EU citizens cannot get the number unless they can present a residence certificate or an employment contract.

**Examples:**

A French freelancer moved to Malmö to work remotely for her clients in France. When she applied for a personnummer, Skatteverket asked for proof that she could support herself financially. Although she had

savings and a stable income, they found her documents insufficient. She was told to register as self-employed in Sweden, a long and complex process that left her without access to public healthcare in the meantime.

A Portuguese citizen living in Gothenburg, Sweden, since February 2024, was denied the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) because he doesn't have a personnummer—only a samordningsnummer (coordination number), which is an identification for people who are not or have not been registered in Sweden.

An Italian citizen got a six-month contract at a tech company in Gothenburg. Although his employer wanted him to stay longer, the temporary contract wasn't enough to qualify for a *personnummer*. Without it, he couldn't open a bank account, making salary payments difficult. His employer had to make special arrangements to pay him.

### 3. Cooperation with other services in 2024

YEA is part of a cascade system that provides easily accessible information on EU rights to citizens and businesses.

#### 3.1 Cooperation with SOLVIT

Your Europe Advice (YEA) and SOLVIT are distinct but complementary services. While YEA focuses on providing information, responding to enquiries and providing personalised advice, SOLVIT can intervene when national authorities incorrectly apply EU law.

In 2024, YEA referred 670 enquiries to SOLVIT, usually providing legal clarification before transferring cases for resolution. 52 % of the enquiries transferred to SOLVIT related to social security.

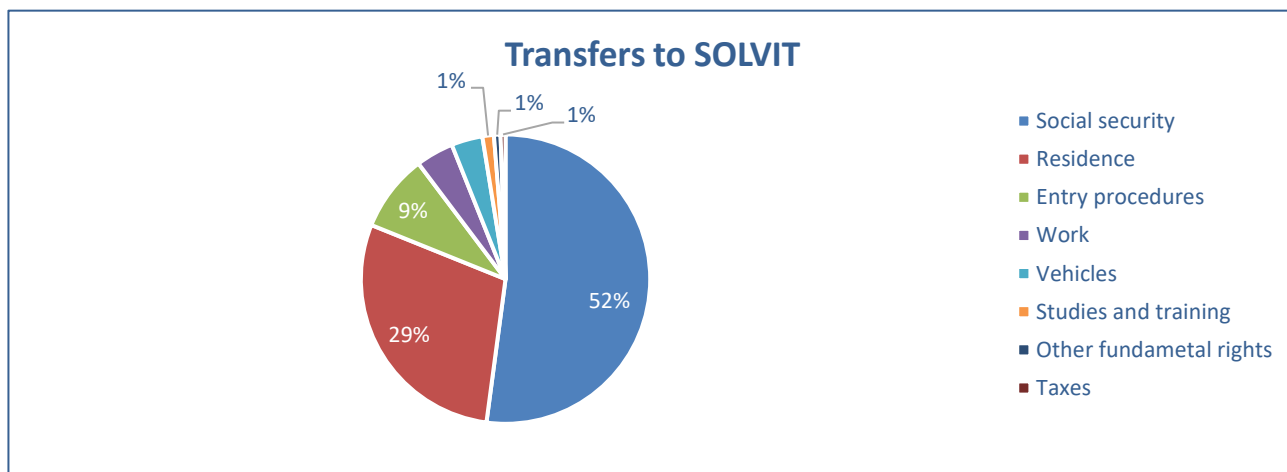


Figure 11: source YEA database

In addition, YEA responded to 164 requests for legal advice from 23 SOLVIT centres, a 49% increase, compared to 2023 and the highest number of such requests to date. The expert advice provided to SOLVIT centres enhances their understanding of the legal context of specific cases, focusing on assessing the correct application or interpretation of EU law and providing relevant legal references.

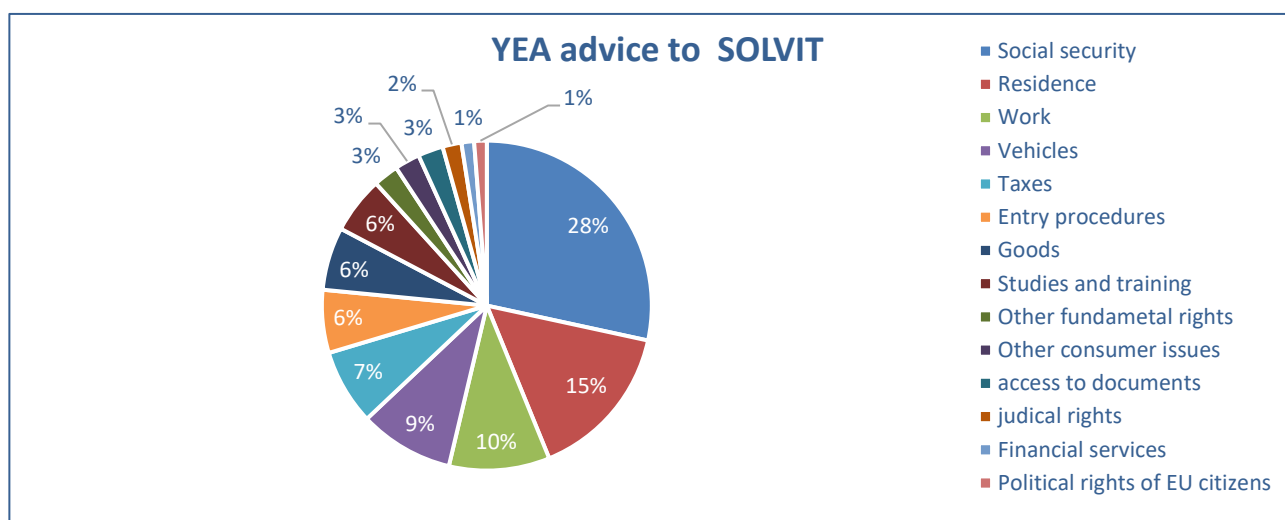


Figure 12: source YEA database

### 3.2 Cooperation with the Europe Direct Contact Centre (EDCC)

YEA also received 577 enquiries from EDCC. When EDCC is not in a position to reply to specific questions on EU law, such enquiries are transferred to YEA. YEA transferred 277 enquiries to EDCC, as these were simple requests for information.

## CONCLUSION

In 2024, the Your Europe Advice (YEA) service saw a continued rise in enquiries, with social security, residence rights and entry procedures remaining the top concerns. Social security enquiries, particularly regarding healthcare access and pension rights, highlighted ongoing administrative complexities and cross-border coordination issues. Residence rights enquiries increased significantly, reflecting increasing difficulties in obtaining and renewing residence documents, especially for family members of EU citizens. Systemic issues, such as delays, lack of cooperation between national authorities and legal uncertainties post-Brexit, persisted as significant challenges.

YEA serves as a direct contact point, bringing the EU closer to citizens—especially those exercising or planning to exercise their EU rights. This is reinforced by the overwhelmingly positive feedback from citizens and businesses who contacted YEA in 2024, with 98% expressing satisfaction after receiving a response to their enquiry.

Respondents specifically praised the service for its usefulness, completeness and clarity. Many were pleasantly surprised that an EU institution provides such a direct and accessible service. It also raises public awareness of what the EU does, clarifying common misunderstandings about its area of competence. Below is a selection of feedback from satisfied citizens and businesses:

- *“This is wonderful information- thank you very much! I am impressed!”* Joy (Germany)
- *“Hello, Thank you very much for the most informative reply. Outstanding work. Well done. Kind regards.”* Iain (Sweden)
- *“Thank you so much for answering my question so quickly. I wasn’t even sure if I’d get a response. It’s hard to get answers from the Portuguese immigration services. It’s a mess over here. You’ve really put my mind at ease. Keep up the great work you are doing informing people of their rights. You are making a different in people’s lives.”* Fiona (Portugal)

- *"Thank you 🙌 so much for the update and supplementary texts, which are most appreciated. With my very best regards". Corinne (Ireland)*
- *"Hello, Thank you so much for getting back to me so quick. The information you've provided was more helpful than any institute ever provided in Portugal. Kind Regards" Alp (Portugal)*
- *"Dear Your Europe Advice, I am not sure if you are able to receive this email, but if you can please thank the person who wrote the below email for their kindness and very helpful information. Thanks again!" Ben (France)*
- *"Good morning, Thank you so much for the prompt reply, very much appreciated. Fyi, I spoke to the seller after your email, and we clarified the situation. They finally agreed to reimburse the amount on my credit card and the shipping cost to return the item. Wishing you a great day and keep up the good work 😊 Best" Luigi (Italy)*
- *"Thank you - this is incredible. I did not expect such a valuable answer. If I can fill out any type of feedback form to give you a million stars, I will do so! This is really very helpful for confirming what documents we need, where we can pass, etc. Thank you!" Ashley (Lithuania)*
- *"Hello, Thank you very much for your advice. This is so massively appreciated. We were so confused, and this clears it up and gives us a very useful reference point. Thanks again," Richard (Cyprus)*
- *"Dear, what can I say? Your answer is very professional and has plenty of useful information, and I am very happy there are people like you in the EU community who can help the population with advice. Thanks!" Marco (Italy)*
- *"Je vous remercie de votre réponse très rapide et complète. C'est absolument parfait! Avec mes salutations européennes " Elspeth (France)*
- *"Dear Sir / Madam, I just wanted to thank you for the quality and timeliness of your reply to my queries, which I found very helpful. Yours sincerely," Richard (Cyprus)*
- *"Thank you for your comprehensive reply! The EU is wonderful, and I'm sorry my government left. Best wishes," Nathan (United Kingdom)*



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