



Migration Profile

CROATIA

Executive Summary

Croatia is a parliamentary republic. Geographically, it borders Slovenia to the north, Hungary to the northeast, Serbia to the east, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro to the south, and the Adriatic Sea to the west. The territorial land area is 56,590 km², while the territorial water area is 31,067 km². The country is divided into three zones with different climatic, geographical and cultural characteristics: the coastal strip, the mountain ranges and the extended plains. Croatia has 1,185 islands (Pakleni archipelago), of which only 50 are inhabited. The climate is moderate continental.

Croatia is a member state of the Council of Europe and has been a member state of the European Union since 1 July 2013. The country has a population of 4,089,400 inhabitants (2018). Croatia was part of Yugoslavia until 1991, and became independent at the beginning of the Balkan wars. Although the country signed the Schengen Treaty in 1995, it remains outside the Schengen Area due to the limited technical adjustments made and, accordingly, maintains border controls. Initially, Croatia was not involved in the migration crisis. Once in Serbia, refugees and migrants tried to reach the Schengen Area through Hungary. Overnight, Croatia was faced with overwhelming arrivals of thousands of people, a situation which continues to this day.

In Croatia, a quarter of the total number of irregular migrants are from Afghanistan, where, due to the political, social and economic situation after the war, Afghans have a multitude of reasons for migration: violence, insecurity, unemployment, poverty and natural disasters. It is estimated that about 80% of asylum seekers leave Croatia before the end of the asylum status process; further, about 20% of asylum seekers in Croatia do not remain within the territories of the European Union, and 1% of asylum seekers return to their country of origin instead of continuing to live within the established asylum and reception system. According to UNHCR data, there are significant numbers of unaccompanied minors crossing the Balkan route who are exposed to elevated risks to their safety, health and personal security. The causes of internal displacement within Croatia are essentially climatic factors. The largest flows of forced migration also occur due to economic or family issues.

Croatia's entry into the European Union has made it a gateway for migration. The flow has doubled since 2015, when Croatian workers started to enjoy full freedom of movement in most EU

countries, including Germany. According to statistics, the most popular destination countries of Croatian emigrants are Germany, Ireland and Austria. Their numbers have gradually increased, from under ten thousand in 2012 to 66,201 in 2017. It is estimated that adding in emigrants to other countries would increase these numbers by 25%.

B. Country profile

I. Basic Information

Croatia is a parliamentary republic. Geographically, it borders Slovenia to the north, Hungary to the northeast, Serbia to the east, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro to the south, and the Adriatic Sea to the west. The territorial land area is 56,590 km², while the territorial water area is 31,067 km². The country is divided into three zones with different climatic, geographical and cultural characteristics: the coastal strip, the mountain ranges and the vast flat area. Croatia has 1,185 islands (Pakleni archipelago), of which only 50 are inhabited. The climate is moderate continental.

The country is inhabited mainly by Croats (89.63%), and there are also a number of other ethnic groups: Serbs (4.4%), Bosnians (0.5%), Italians (0.45%), Hungarians (0.37%), Albanians (0.34%), Slovenes (0.30%) and others including Czechs, Roma, Montenegrins, Slovaks and Macedonians (2.5%). Croats belong to the family of Slavic peoples. Some indigenous Croatian communities live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Slovenia, Serbia, and Montenegro and there are historical Croatian settlements in Austria and Italy (Molise Region). The Croatian diaspora in the world numbers more than 2.5 million people. About 700,000 Croats live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, making them one of the three main ethnic-religious and constituent communities of that country.

The predominant religion is Christian-Catholic (87.8%), followed by Christian Orthodox (4.4%) and Sunni Islam (1.3%). The patron saints of Croatia are St. Joseph and St. Jerome. The official language is Croatian, while the other languages present (Serbian, Hungarian and Italian) are spoken as a first language by less than 5% of the population. Most of the Region of Istria is bilingual (Croatian and Italian). Although Italian is spoken by a large part of the population of this region, the level of protection of the Italian minority varies greatly at the municipal level.

Croatia is a member state of the Council of Europe and has been a member state of the European Union since 1 July 2013. The country has a population of 4,089,400 inhabitants (2018) with a growth rate of -0.03%. Its GDP is US\$14,869,090 per capita. The country's accession process to the euro is currently under negotiation. Croatia produces natural gas by extracting deposits in the Adriatic Sea, on the border with Italian waters. Tourism has taken on a growing importance over the years, accounting for almost 20% of GDP.

II. Internal and International Migration

Croatia was part of Yugoslavia until 1991 and became independent at the beginning of the Balkan wars. The country signed the Schengen Treaty in 1995, but remains outside the Schengen Area due to the limited technical adjustments made and, accordingly, maintains border controls.

Initially, Croatia was not involved in the migration crisis. Refugees and migrants went through Serbia in their attempt to reach the Schengen Area through Hungary. In 2015, the Hungarian

government decided to close the border and adopted very strict measures (installation of barbed-wire fences, positioning of the army along the border, arresting those who entered the country illegally). This diverted the migratory flow to Croatia where, overnight, the country was faced with the arrival of an overwhelming number of people, a situation which continues to this day.

In 2015, for the first time in its short history, Croatia experienced a substantial flow of refugees from other continents. Each day, several thousand people began to cross the border between Croatia and Serbia. In the winter of 2015 and early into 2016, this situation gradually changed from when the number of non-Syrian refugees from Croatia to neighbouring Serbia began to increase.

The Balkan route was officially closed in March 2016. According to the UNHCR, in 2018 between 90,000 and 100,000 people tried to reach the European Union via the Balkans. A large number of families make their way to the border with Croatia in their attempt to reach the European Union. They are fleeing war and violence in their home countries, including Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria. In the course of a few months in 2017, some 658,068 refugees crossed into Croatia, but their flow was set to increase. Traffickers promptly offered their services to those who had become stuck on the Croatian peninsula after the closure of the borders. Traffickers also targeted, albeit in smaller numbers, those who still continued to arrive. Thousands of people from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan travelled the length of the Balkan route across the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and then entered the European Union.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

For several years now the issues of emigration abroad and the depopulation of large areas of the country have been addressed in Croatian magazines and newspapers, often speaking in such terms as "exodus" and "demographic catastrophe". These reports also include recurring testimonies from mostly young people who have left their native land for northern Europe.

According to Croatia's National Statistical Office, after the country entered the European Union, the annual number of emigrants increased from 15,262 in 2013 to 39,515 in 2018 (with a peak of 47,532 people in 2017). In 2013 and 2014, Croatia was hit by a serious economic crisis that resulted in unemployment reaching more than 17%.

The country's entry into the European Union has made it a gateway for migration flows; the numbers have doubled since 2015, when Croatian workers began to enjoy full freedom of movement to most EU countries, including Germany. According to statistics, the destination countries for most Croatian emigrants are Germany, Ireland and Austria. Their numbers have gradually increased:

- 9,007 in 2012
- 16,895 in 2013
- 45,517 in 2014
- 61,626 in 2015
- 64,654 in 2016
- 66,201 in 2017.

Adding emigrants to other countries would increase these numbers another 25%.

The latest waves of migrants are much younger than in previous waves. In the early 2000s the average age of migrants was 41.5 years, and by 2016 this had decreased to 33.6 years and included a higher portion of minors. Within these numbers there should be further differentiation, however, between Croatians from Croatia and those who have a Croatian passport but are from other countries (especially Bosnia and Herzegovina). Most of the migrants come from regions with higher levels of unemployment, such as Eastern, Central, Lika and Gorski Kotar. Nevertheless, migration also affects north-western Croatia and will likely increase in the near future. It can also be said that migration provides an outlet for the unemployed. The rate of unemployment in 2019 was just over 7%, less than half what it was 5 years earlier.

Migration flows in recent years have revealed shortcomings in the local labour market. There is a chronic lack of qualified personnel in some economic sectors; this is especially alarming in the health sector. At the same time, there is also a shortage of unskilled workers. Despite what is often thought, the Croatian labour force that emigrates has a generally lower level of education when compared with those who remain. In recent years, Croatia has set increasing quotas for foreign workers. This quota was increased in 2019 to 65,000 15,600 in the hotel sector, 17,800 in construction). In the hotel sector, foreign workers come from East Asia, specifically the Philippines. Additionally, Croatia faces a major surge of Catholics leaving the country. "There are 400,000 Croatians abroad," explains Mgr Marin Barisic, Archbishop of Split-Macarska, "among them doctors, teachers and engineers. In short, we are losing important professionals needed to ensure the development of the nation".

IV. Forced Migration (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees)

In 2018, according to data from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 140 people were registered as internally displaced persons due to the flooding of the Lika River in the Kosinjstati Valley. In 2017, 230 people were recorded as internally displaced persons due to forest fires along the Adriatic coast. These causes of internal displacement in Croatia are mainly due to climatic factors, though the largest flows of forced migration occur due to economic or family issues.

In Croatia, a quarter of the total number of irregular migrants comprises people from Afghanistan, where due to the political, social and economic situation after the war, people have a multitude of reasons for migration: violence, insecurity, unemployment, poverty and natural disasters. It is estimated that about 80% of asylum seekers leave Croatia before the end of the asylum process; further, about 20% of asylum seekers in Croatia do not stay in the territory of the European Union and 1% of asylum seekers return to their country of origin instead of continuing to live within the established asylum and reception system. According to UNHCR data, there are significant numbers of unaccompanied minors crossing the Balkan route who are exposed to elevated risks to their safety, health and personal security.

The migration crisis in Croatia is of a considerable scale, with more than 460,000 people on average passing through the country each year in recent times.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Trafficking in Persons Report of 2020, Croatia is increasing its efforts in the fight against trafficking in persons but does not fully meet the minimum requirements for the elimination of human trafficking. Among its efforts, more action has been taken to investigate, prosecute and convict more traffickers and to identify more victims,

particularly victims of organised crime. Croatia has conducted operations proactively by increasing the funding of Croatian NGOs, adopting the National Action Plan 2018-2021 and increasing law enforcement efforts. In 2019, the government conducted awareness campaigns, distributing information materials to students and teachers. Article 106 of the Croatian Criminal Code criminalizes trafficking in prostitution and forced labour with sentences between 1-15 years in prison, similar to the punishment for serious crimes such as rape. Criminal prosecutions, however, are still lengthy. The country has adopted a number of operational and strategic documents in the fight against human trafficking:

- Protocol on the identification, assistance and protection of trafficked persons in 2008, 2010, 2017
- Protocol on procedures during the voluntary return of trafficked persons in 2009 and 2017
- Protocol on Human Trafficking, Integration and Reintegration of Victims in 2011.

Croatia has introduced the major international documents into its national legislation, such as the National Referral System to fight human trafficking globally and protect victims. Despite this, in recent years Croatia has become a destination country and also a country of origin for trafficking. Most of the trafficking victims are Croatian males who are exploited within Croatia for labour purposes. Over the years, Croatia has identified foreign nationals from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Nigeria, Hungary, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines. As reported in the 2017 European Commission Report, Croatia identified a total of 29 victims of trafficking (16 male and 13 female). Nineteen of these victims were Croatian citizens and 10 were foreigners (citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania and Nigeria). Among these victims of trafficking were 14 children.

In the past five years, traffickers have exploited victims from within the country as well as from outside Croatia. Women and girls from the Balkans and Central Europe are subject to prostitution in Croatia. Traffickers exploit them in prostitution within the country and elsewhere in Europe. Although no official data on traffickers exploiting Roma children in forced begging in Croatia were reported for 2019, this had been reported previously. Those vulnerable to traffickers in Croatia are women; those vulnerable to forced labour in the agricultural sector are Croatian, Bosnian and Romanian men. Migrants and refugees, especially women and unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and neighbouring countries who travel or are trafficked into Croatia are vulnerable to trafficking. For example, Taiwanese women and men were victims of organised crime and forced labour in an illegal call centre in 2018.

In October 2019, an international investigation conducted by Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Italy led to the dismantling of a network of smugglers targeting migrants trying to reach Europe. The Slovenian public broadcaster RTV SLO covered this story and revealed that the investigation had started after the Italian authorities stopped a Slovenian citizen in Trieste while he was attempting to transport three Iraqis in a rented car. The network had been in operation since April 2016 and had smuggled approximately 150 refugees to the European Union across the Slovenian border. The crossings were mainly to Croatia, near Dragonja, Jelšane and Babno Polje, near Slovenia's southwest border. It is believed that the migrants came from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea and Afghanistan. The presence of international networks of smugglers is increasing. The reckless and unscrupulous actions of smugglers, sometimes driving drunk or with overloaded vehicles, put migrants' lives at risk.

VI. National Legal Framework

The Republic of Croatia's Constitution of 1990 guarantees the members of all national minorities the freedom of expression of their nationality, freedom to speak and write their language, and cultural autonomy. Croatia has signed and ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 New York Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. As the number of asylum seekers increased after its entry into the European Union, Croatia adopted the Act on International and Temporary Protection No. 1328 in June 2015, which repealed the Asylum Act 2003 (Official Gazette No. 79/07, 88/10, 143/13).

As far as Croatian citizenship is concerned, the Law on Citizenship (Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, No. 130/11, 74/3, 69/13) establishes the criteria for acquisition by descent, by birth on the territory, and through naturalisation. The conditions for naturalisation as a Croatian citizen are to be at least 18 years of age; residence in the country for 8 consecutive years as a foreigner with permanent residency; and knowledge of the Croatian language and Latin alphabet, and Croatian culture and social order.

The conditions for granting residency permits in Croatia are stipulated in the Law on Foreigners (Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, No. 130/11, 74/13, 69/17 and 46/18). Residence permits vary according to the category of foreigner who applies for residency. These permits are divided into short-term, temporary and permanent residency. Short-term residency is a stay of up to 90 days in any 180-day period. Temporary residency is a stay of up to one year, which may be granted for the purposes of family reunification, education, scientific research, or employment. Finally, a permanent residency permit in Croatia is unlimited and may be granted after five consecutive years of temporary residency, temporary asylum or subsidiary legal protection. When the final decision on the permanent residency permit is made, the foreigner must have already obtained temporary residency. For permanent residency, the foreigner must also fulfil the following conditions: have sufficient funds for his/her maintenance, have health insurance, know the Croatian language and Latin alphabet and Croatian culture and social order.

A third-country national with a residence and work permit or a work registration certificate can work in Croatia. The annual quota for residence and work permits which is sometimes exceeded. According to the Croatian Penal Code, anyone who helps illegal immigrants to enter or transit through the country illegally is criminally punishable.

The visa regime in Croatia is regulated by the following regulations: EC Directive no. 539/2001, Law on Foreign Nationals no. 130/11, 74/13, Directive on the Visa System no. 54/12, 38/13, Regulation on Visas no. 7/13, 5/18. In 2014, the Government of the Republic of Croatia established the application of the EU Regulation No 565/2014, which applies the simplified regime for the control of persons at the country's borders. All foreigners in possession of valid documents for the Schengen Area (residence permit and visa for two or more entries), as well as a visa and a residence permit issued by Bulgaria, Cyprus and Romania, do not need an additional Croatian visa, provided that the document relating to the Schengen Area is valid when entering and leaving the Republic of Croatia.

VII. Main Actors

The State

In the town of Slavonski Brod on the border with Slovenia, a large transit camp was set up for up to 10,000 people in a disused refinery. Here, migrants are registered, receive assistance and can then leave for Slovenia on special trains; between 2,000-3,000 people pass through the Slavonski Brod Camp each day. In the two towns of Bihac and Velika Kladusa, four camps have been set up, three in Bihac and one in Velika Kladusa. The Velika Kladusa Camp on the Croatian border closed in autumn 2018 and migrants have since been accommodated in the disused "Miral" Factory.

The Catholic Church

According to data from the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), there are approximately 350 asylum seekers in Croatia, mainly in refugee reception centres run by government departments and various institutions. The Jesuit Refugee Service is active throughout Croatia, providing education, psychosocial and legal support to forced migrants in reception centres. With the support of UNICEF, the Service runs child-friendly spaces in reception centres for asylum seekers in Zagreb.

Caritas has a presence throughout the Balkan route and works with hundreds of volunteers, coordinated by experienced staff who manage the refugee emergency through the distribution of food and basic necessities (winter clothing and hygiene kits especially) in reception camps located along the borders of transit countries. Caritas Croatia, in cooperation with the local diocesan Caritas of Djakovo-Osijek, has a presence inside the transit camp of Slavonski Brod on the border with Slovenia, where it offers support and assistance. Caritas Croatia also provides appropriate clothing, woolly hats, gloves and scarves for migrants who are not properly dressed for the winter season. Thanks to Caritas, 500 beds have also been set up inside the camp, should people need to rest or break their onward journey. Caritas Croatia is supported in its work by various organisations, both Croatian and from other European countries, including Sweden, Germany, Austria and Italy. Many local and foreign volunteers are involved in Caritas Croatia's services for migrants in the Slavonski Brod Camp. To enter Croatia, migrants are transported in special trains that leave from Sid, Serbia's border town, taking about 1,000 migrants at a time to the transit camp set up by the Croatian government in Slavonski Brod. This camp is divided into six sectors and has a total capacity of 10,000 beds.

ICMC (International Catholic Migration Commission) signed an agreement in 2019 with the Croatian Ministry of the Interior by which ICMC contributes its expertise and services for the resettlement of refugees living in Turkey. Croatia plans to resettle 100 refugees with the possibility of increasing this number.

In August 2020, a Centre for Roma opened in Petrijanec. One third of Croatia's roughly 35,000 Roma live in the Diocese of Varazdin. The structure was built by the Sovereign Order of Malta in order to promote educational, training, spiritual and recreational activities and to promote integration of the country's largest ethnic minority into society. The Order had already built similar structures in Romania, Hungary and Ukraine.

International organisations and other organisations

On the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Red Cross, UNHCR and IOM are active, especially in support of asylum applicants. IOM manages food aid and clothing distribution through a free shop that provides services to about 150 people.

Much of the aid to refugees in Croatia comes from volunteers or fundraising networks. For years now, NGOs including Sos Kladusa, No Name Kitchen, Are You Syrious, Zagreb Peace Studies Centre, Welcome Initiative have been involved in monitoring borders and supporting migrants who become stranded along the Balkan route. Most of these services are provided by Sos Kladusa and No Name Kitchen and include dining and shower facilities. Along the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina in the centres in Velika Kladusa and Bihac, volunteers from Christian churches in Switzerland provide refugees with warm blankets and clothing.

February 2020

References

Institutional & NGO Websites

European Commission

https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/member-states/croatia_en

World Bank

<https://data.worldbank.org/country/croatia?view=chart>

US Department of State

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>

Croatian Bureau of Statistics

https://www.dzs.hr/default_e.htm

Internal Displacement Monitoring Center

<http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/croatia>

International Organization for Migration

<https://publications.iom.int>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

<https://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b73b0d63/states-parties-1951-convention-its-1967-protocol.html>

Migration Portal

<https://migrationdataportal.org>

IDOS - Centro Studi e Ricerche sull'immigrazione (Centre for Immigration Studies and Research)

<https://www.dossierimmigrazione.it/no-mans-land-aggiornamento-a-luglio-2019/>

Caritas Ambrosiana

<https://www.caritasambrosiana.it/emergenze-caritas/emergenze-in-corso/emergenza-profughi-balcani>

Jesuit Refugee Service

<https://jrs.net/en/country/croatia/>

International Catholic Migration Commission

<https://www.icmc.net/2019/03/13/icmc-assists-croatias-efforts-to-resettle-refugees/>

Online Newspapers and Periodicals

<https://www.avvenire.it/chiesa/pagine/dai-balcani-lesodo-dei-cattolici>

<https://lemondediplomatique.hr/predzide-tyrdave-europe/>

<https://vaic.hr/it/novita/immigrazione-in-croazia/>

<https://migracije.hr/soggiorno-e-lavoro-degli-stranieri-nella-repubblica-di-croazia-cittadini-di-stati-terzi/?lang=it>

https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2015_06_70_1328.html

<https://sicurezzainternazionale.luiss.it/2019/10/22/migranti-balcani-smantellata-rete-clandestina-trafficienti/>

<https://www.vaticannews.va/it/chiesa/news/2020-09/croazia-nomadi-rom-centro-formazione-lavoro-integrazione-covid.html>