

Croatia



General Information



Population

3 855 600 (World Bank 2022)

4 047 680 (STAT HR 2020)



Immigration

86 765 (Eurostat 2019)

33 414 (STAT HR 2020)



Emigration

1 039 526 (UN Emigration Stock 2020)

34 046 (STAT HR 2020)



Working-age population

2 450 642 (World Bank 2022)

3 512 000 (STAT HR 2020)



Unemployment rate

7 % (World Bank 2022)

7.5 % (STAT HR 2020)



GDP

71 600 049 650.2 current prices USD (World Bank 2022)

57 232 000 000 current prices HRK (STAT HR 2020)



Refugees and IDPs

Refugees

23 789 (UNHCR 2023)

Asylum Seekers

1 273 (UNHCR 2023)

3 039 (STAT HR 2021)

IDPs

0 (UNHCR 2023)

41 630 (IDMC 2020)



Citizenship

By Birth

No (GLOBALCIT 2022)

By Descent

Yes (conditional) (GLOBALCIT 2022)

Years of Residency

6-10 (GLOBALCIT 2022)



Territory

56 594 km² (CIA World Factbook)

Migration Authorities

Responsible Body

Ministry of Interior

Line Ministries

Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy

Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs

Ministry of Science and Education

Ministry of Health

Agencies

Central State Office of Demography and Youth

Central State Office for Croats outside the Republic of Croatia

Jesuit Refugee Service Croatia

The Croatian Red Cross

Civil Rights Project Sisak

Key Policy Documents

2022 Ordinance on the temporary residence of third country nationals in the Republic of Croatia

2021 Ordinance on visas

2020 Law on Foreigners

2020 Law on the posting of workers to the Republic of Croatia and the cross-border enforcement of fines

2020 Decision on temporary restriction of crossing the border crossings of the Republic of Croatia

2020 Law on Regulated Professions and Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications

2019 Law on EEA nationals and members of their families

2017 Regulation on the Croatian visa information system

2012 Ordinance on the residence and work of highly qualified third-country nationals in the Republic of Croatia

1997 Law on Health Care of Foreigners

Relevant Publications

Prague Process Handbook on Managing Labour and Circular Migration

Analytical Report. The Western Balkan Migration Route (2015-2019)

Croatia is a country of emigration with a declining and ageing population, however, immigration to the country has been on the rise. Over the past decade, the population of Croatia declined by 230.000 reaching **4.047.700** persons at the end of 2020. The average age of the Croatian population in 2020 was **43.8 years**. According to UN projections, the population of the country may further decline **to reach 3.3 million persons by 2050 and 2.2 million by 2100**.

Estimates of the number of Croats living abroad (officially defined as 'Croats outside Croatia' as per the **national Law**) vary from **0.9 million** to over **2.5 million**. Large Croatian communities are found in Bosnia and Herzegovina (over **0.5 million**) and other countries of ex-Yugoslavia. Outside the Balkan Peninsula, **Germany, Austria, Australia, the US, Canada and the UK** host a considerable number of Croatian emigrants and people of Croat origin.

In recent history, the country faced two distinct emigration waves. In the 1990s, over 500.000 people fled due to the war in parts of Croatian territory. After the war, **200.000 people, mostly Croats**, who relocated to safe parts of Croatia during the war, returned to their homes. Out of **300.000 Serbs** who mainly fled to Serbia, some **100.000 returned** to Croatia (many of them returned to exercise their property rights and pensions and relocate to Serbia again), while most decided to integrate into Serbian society. The war had therefore led to a decline in population and a change in the ethnic structure of Croatia.

Since Croatia's membership in the EU in 2013, the country faces **increasing** emigration **driven** by dissatisfaction with the situation in Croatia and opportunities in the countries of destination. Shortly before joining the EU in 2011 and 2012, emigration flow amounted to an average of **12.800 persons** yearly. Since 2013, the flow has been steadily growing. In 2017, it reached a peak of **45.367 Croatian nationals**. The increase was particularly pronounced since Germany lifted labour market restrictions for Croatian citizens in 2015. However, since 2018, the flow has declined to reach only **26.000 in 2021**. Given that many Croatian nationals **do not deregister** while leaving Croatia, the number of emigrants may be much higher. The main countries of destination of Croatian emigrants are **Germany, Austria, and Bosnia and Herzegovina**. When it comes to the age structure, emigration is getting younger: while in 2001-2013, emigrants were on average **41.5 years old**, the average age stood at **33.6 years** in 2016.

Continuous emigration and population ageing in Croatia contribute to **labour shortages, limit the growth potential of the economy** and negatively affect the **long-term stability of the social system**. Labour shortages are particularly pronounced in the **health sector**, but unskilled labour is also scarce. For that reason, Croatia used to set annual employment permit quotas for third-country nationals. The quota for foreign workers in 2019 was **65.100**, a two-fold increase compared to 2018. In 2020, the annual quota rose to **78.470**, but only about **50%** of the quota was used due to the pandemic. The new **Law on Foreigners**, adopted in 2020, abolished the annual quotas for employment permits of third-country nationals, as well as introduced temporary residence visas for "digital nomads" and remote workers.

At the same time, emigration drives up remittances received from abroad, which contribute to the financing of private consumption and improve the country's balance of payments. As a share of GDP, remittances have grown from **4.7%** in 2013 to **7.35%** in 2020.

Highly-skilled Return Migrants to the Western Balkans

Lessons Learned from the 2015-2016 Migration Situation in the Western Balkan Region

Policy Brief. Ukraine: One year of EU visa-free regime

Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2020 for Croatia

Migration Profile Croatia

Dynamics and determinants of emigration: the case of Croatia and the experience of the new EU member states

Improving Croatian employment opportunities is in everyone's interest

Migration and Brain Drain. Europe and Central Asia Economic Update

Internal rural-to-urban migration of a mostly young part of the population (over 47% are aged 20 to 39) is also significant. In 2020, 64.155 people changed their place of residence within Croatia: five counties and the city of Zagreb had a positive migration balance, while fifteen counties, mostly those located in southern and south-western Slavonia, had a negative migration balance.

Over the past decade, immigration to Croatia has been constantly growing, albeit without exceeding the emigration flow. According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, the in-flow approached 36.000 persons in 2021, including some 10.000 returning Croatian nationals. The growth has been particularly pronounced as of 2018, against a greater influx of immigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo* that continue to represent key origin countries. The number of first time and all valid resident permits issued to non-EU nationals in Croatia has equally increased. The former parameter has grown from 3.320 in 2013 to the record 50.455 in 2019 and 33.580 in 2021. Meanwhile, the latter increased from 12.259 in 2013 to the record 77.821 in 2020. Overall, nationals of Bosnia and Herzegovina received one-third of new permits in 2021 and held nearly half of all valid permits in Croatia in 2020. In terms of reasons, employment has climbed up reaching 90% among first time permits and 57% among all valid permits.

Since 2015, Croatia has also become a transit country on the Balkan migration route to the western EU member states. As soon as Hungary closed its borders to migrants in 2015, the flow of migrants reoriented to Croatia almost overnight. Access to Croatian territory became problematic as numerous international organizations documented a consistent pattern of ill-treatment of migrants trying to cross into Croatia from Bosnia and Herzegovina by Croatian law enforcement representatives (such as collective expulsions of migrants, denial of access to asylum, and the use of extreme violence by Croatian border police). As a result, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture recommended Croatia to introduce a Border Monitoring System.

Over the period 2013 to 2021, the number of non-EU nationals found to be illegally present in Croatia has seen a three-fold increase reaching 1.345 in 2021. The number of non-EU nationals refused entry at the border has also grown from 10.015 in 2013 to 14.190 in 2021, placing Croatia among the top-three EU countries on this parameter, inferior only to Hungary and Poland. When it comes to returns, Croatia has been issuing a growing number of orders to leave (4.355 in 2013 vs. 15.125 in 2021) but the effective return rate did not exceed 16% in the period 2019-2021.

In terms of international protection, the number of asylum seekers in Croatia is increasing but remains inconsiderable compared to the overall flows. In 2021, the number of asylum seekers amounted to 3.039 up from 1.932 in 2020. Yet, the number of positive decisions remains low (42 in 2020 and 68 in 2021) since most asylum seekers leave Croatia before the asylum procedure is completed. Asylum seekers are mostly from Afghanistan and Iraq. Along with Syrians, nationals of Afghanistan and Iraq comprise the majority of the 1.020 refugee status holders who resided in Croatia in 2021.

In 2022, Croatia saw an inflow of people fleeing the war in Ukraine. From 25 February to 11 April, a total of 13.597 Ukrainian nationals arrived in Croatia. The Government passed a Decision on the introduction of temporary protection in the Republic of Croatia for displaced persons from Ukraine, as well as a Decision on covering the costs of accommodation for displaced persons from Ukraine who are in private accommodation. Moreover, Ukrainian nationals are allowed to enter Croatia without a passport.

In 2020, Croatia passed amendments to the Law on Citizenship, which **facilitate the conditions** for acquiring Croatian citizenship. In 2022, the country introduced several **improvements** for the residence and work rights of third-country nationals. In recent years, Croatia has also been working on the new **Action Plan 2021-2023 for the Integration Strategy**, which should replace the previous such document. However, the plan was still under development in August 2022.

As a member of the European Union, Croatia is subject to all EU regulations on regular and irregular migration. The country is a beneficiary of specialized European funds for financing various projects (e.g. **EPIC, Establishment of a relocation mechanism, Building support to persons under international protection through the development of social services**) in the field of migration. The country is also a member of the IMO, UNHCR, the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the Budapest Process, the Prague Process and the Regional Cooperation Council. Moreover, Croatia adopted the Global Compact for **Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact for Refugees**.