

EDITORIAL

Financial media often refer to specific periods that typically provide rough conditions. The historical realities of the stock market in particular talk of the 'September Effect' when the leading indexes perform the poorest. For the global community, not only September but the entire third quarter of 2021 was marked by the shock arising from the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan. Most Prague Process states voiced their concern over the anticipated migrant exodus. The decision of Albania to accept 4,000 Afghan asylum seekers on its territory stands out in this context.

Not all events of the third quarter were bleak. The European Commission presented two long-awaited documents, providing better conditions for regu-

lar and especially high-skilled labour migrants, as well as concrete steps to counter migrant smuggling. Meanwhile, the Prague Process organised a Study visit of Kyrgyzstan to Austria, a webinar on demography and the launch of its E-learning Platform that shall support capacity development in the region. The Migration Observatory also released some new interesting publications featured in this Quarter Review.

Beyond the mentioned developments, this issue of the Review addresses the area of climate-induced migration within the Prague Process region and proposes additional reading on the matter.

Enjoy the read and stay safe!

Looking ahead: upcoming Prague Process activities in 2021

22 November	●	<i>Prague Process Senior Officials' Meeting</i>
23-24 November	●	<i>4th International Border Management Conference</i>
December	●	<i>Webinar 'The EU Strategy for Voluntary Return and Reintegration' (tbc)</i>

September saw three Prague Process events

After a short summer break, the Prague Process started the new season with three distinct activities.

In early September, Austria hosted a Prague Process Study visit of representatives of the Council for Migration, Compatriots and Diasporas abroad under the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic. The visit included meetings with ICMPD, the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Joint Cooperation Platform under the Ministry. It provided

an insight into the work of the Austrian Interior Ministry in the areas of migration, asylum and borders, and allowed studying the experience of the Austrian authorities in addressing the migration crisis of 2015. This information may help Kyrgyzstan to prepare for a possible influx of migrants and asylum-seekers amid the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan.

September also saw the official launch of the Prague Process E-Learning Plat-

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The Platform provides educational material for independent, self-paced remote learning in English and Russian, thus representing a flexible and user-friendly tool to enhance vocational training among the staff of the migration authorities of the Prague Process states. The courses correspond to the six thematic areas of the Prague Process

Action Plan. To date, the Platform hosts courses on Labour migration, Identification and Profiling at the Border and on Integrated Border Management (IBM). The work on the course on Return and Reintegration, as well as an updated video version of the IBM course is ongoing.



Finally, on 30 September Prof. Ronald Skeldon, Universities of Sussex and Maastricht, shed some light on the ongoing decline of human populations in

the webinar '[Demography and migration in the Prague Process region](#)', drawing attention to some of the inherent tensions created by demographic decline and specifically its linkages to migration, both internal and international. The webinar flagged the overall demographic trends across the Prague Process countries, identifying differences amongst them, and highlighting policy issues that will need to be addressed, particularly in terms of migration policies.

Over the past 1,5 years, the Prague Process Webinar series, launched in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, has turned into a good practice welcomed by participating states and a wider audience.

The renewed EU action plan against migrant smuggling (2021-2025) and Employers Sanctions Directive

In late September 2021, the European Commission adopted its [Renewed EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling \(2021-2025\)](#) and [Communication on the application of the Employers Sanctions Directive](#). Both initiatives contribute to implementing the EU's comprehensive and sustainable approach to migration, as outlined in the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#).

With a view of promoting sustainable and comprehensive migration management, the renewed EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2021-2025) addresses new challenges in the area of irregular migration, including state-sponsored migrant smuggling. The Plan sets out several concrete actions to prevent and counter migrant smuggling, such as:

- 1) Developing Anti-Smuggling Operational Partnerships with concrete tools;
- 2) Responding to the instrumentalization of irregular migration by State actors through operational, legal, diplomatic and financial measures, e.g. partial suspension of the [Visa Facilitation Agreement with Belarus](#);

- 3) Improving the implementation of the legal framework for sanctioning smugglers and for protection from exploitation, including through existing UN Conventions and Protocols;

- 4) Enhancing cooperation and information exchange between countries and EU agencies, which will allow addressing the constantly evolving criminal landscape (e.g. digital smuggling);

- 5) Increasing research and data collection of migration trends to better understand the nature and operation of criminal networks.

On the one hand, the Action Plan further reinforces the effective and sustainable return and reintegration, which shall reduce incentives for irregular migration by providing opportunities in origin countries. On the other hand, it emphasizes the importance of the [Employers Sanctions Directive](#) in preventing organized exploitation and protecting the rights of migrant workers. The Directive provides a legal framework to prevent and respond to irregular employment of third-country nationals and irregular migrants who are most vulnerable.

Adopted on 29 September 2021, the Communication on the new Directive describes the steps for its application, including evaluation and assessment of further actions in three main areas: sanctions against employers, measures to protect the rights of irregular migrants, and inspections. To strengthen the effectiveness of the existing rules outlined in the Directive and address their inefficient use by Member States, the European Commission aims to **enhance the dialogue** with Member States' authorities, sharing of **good practices** and continuous **monitoring of the Directive's implementation**. The Directive shall be implemented by the end of 2022.



EU Blue Card: new rules to attract highly-skilled

The [2009 Blue Card directive](#) has been widely known as the main EU legislative act that defines the entry and residence conditions for skilled third-country nationals who wish to work in an EU Member State. The EU Blue Card gives them the right to live and work in an EU country, provided they have higher professional qualifications, such as a university degree, and an employment contract or a binding job offer with a salary higher than the average in the targeted EU country. All EU MS except Denmark and Ireland apply the directive.

Over the past decade, the Blue Card initiative has not attracted enough workers in [certain occupations or industry sectors](#), such as healthcare, ICT, engineering, etc. Given the EU's declining population and evolving labour market challenges, the time has long come to revisit the Blue Card's existing rules.

On 7 October 2021, the Council of the EU adopted the [Blue Card](#) reform on the new entry and residence conditions for third-country nationals, representing the only legislative change in the field of legal labour migration at

EU level in recent years. This reform is aimed at attracting and retaining qualified workers, in particular in shortage sectors, through simplifying and further harmonizing the conditions of entry and residence, thereby increasing the attractiveness of the EU Blue Card for highly qualified workers. The new rules envisage:

- More flexible criteria for admission (a six-month work contract or job offer replaces a 12-month one);
- Simplified procedures for recognised employers;
- Lower threshold for the minimum salary that applicants must earn to qualify for the Blue Card (100-160 % of the average gross annual salary vs. the current 150 %);
- Simplified Intra-EU mobility;
- Simplified and facilitated family reunification for EU Blue Card holders;
- Eligibility for highly skilled beneficiaries of international protection to apply for the EU Blue Card.

The revised Directive provides increased flexibility and mobility opportunities while ensuring equal treatment for Blue Card holders and national permit holders on the labour market. The national schemes of Member States aimed at highly qualified workers may exist in parallel with the EU Blue Card scheme.

The adopted rules will enter into force 20 days following their publication in the Official Journal. Member States will have two years to transpose the rules to the national legislation.

Check the [infographics](#) to learn more.



Image credit: Council of the EU

Interview with Albania: a big step for a small country



While many countries across and outside Europe expressed reservations or even strong opposition to receiving Afghan asylum seekers and refugees fleeing the country amidst the deteriorating situation, Albania has offered shelter to 4,000 Afghans. To learn more about this sensitive matter, the Prague Process Secretariat talked to **Ms Albana Gjoka**,

Specialist, Directorate of Asylum and Foreigners, as well as Citizenship, **Mr Alban Haxhi** and **Ms Keti Suli**, both Experts in the Migration Sector, Directorate of Anti-Trafficking and Migration, at the Albanian Ministry of Interior.

Dear colleagues, Albania recently agreed to take in up to 4,000 asylum seekers from Afghanistan. Is there a plan to grant them refugee status, provide assistance and integrate them into society?

The Albanian Government took the decision to shelter Afghans in our country for one year. For the best management of this situation, a task force has been set up, based on the provisions of the decision of the Council of Ministers no.

501, dated 25.08.2021 "On granting Temporary Protection to Afghan citizens and stateless persons with temporary or permanent residence in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan". This Task Force consists of seven main ministries, including the Ministry of Interior. It is headed by the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

The main assignments of this Task Force refer to:

- negotiating with international partners on the basic issue;
- drafting an action plan for managing the flow of international protection seekers;
- coordinating the reception situation

and accommodation of Afghan citizens and stateless persons with temporary or permanent residence in Afghanistan;

- identifying emergency needs to anticipate work with possible changes in the legal, sub-legal and regulatory framework, to improve the situation;

- analysing additional budget requests for the operation, expenditures and necessary material base, as well as coordinating donor funds for this purpose.

All Afghan citizens who have entered the Republic of Albania, have received a one-year Temporary Protection status, based on the above mentioned Council decision.

The law 10/2021 "On Asylum in the Republic of Albania" clearly defines that a foreigner, who enjoys temporary protection, can apply for international protection at any time. In accordance with the Asylum Law, the review of this application begins only after the expiration of the term of temporary protection. This is also in line with Art. 17 of EU Directive 2001/55 of 20 July 2001 "*On minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof*".

Appropriate measures have been taken and the Ministry of Interior has prepared brochures in order to provide all Afghan citizens in Albania with information on their rights and obligations. This information has been translated into Dari and Pashtu.

What is the current capacity of Albania's asylum system? How many asylum seekers and refugees does Albania host?

The Republic of Albania has a reception capacity for approximately 390 asylum seekers. The main Reception Center for Asylum Seekers is the one in Babrru. This open centre is currently expanding its reception capacity to 250 people through construction of a new building. Asylum seekers at the Center receive accommodation, food, health care and various other services. There is a doctor,

a social worker, a psychologist and an enabling environment. Convenient facilities for children, libraries and sports facilities are currently underway.

The country also has two transit centers. The establishment of the one in Kapshtica, Korça was supported by IOM, the other one in Gërhot, Gjirokastra has been created with the support of the Council of Europe Development Bank Fund. Both centres can accommodate up to 60 people each. They also feature the IT equipment required to ensure a proper control procedure.

In the south of the country, the municipality of Gjirokastra hosts a Social Center for Irregular Migrants and Asylum Seekers of vulnerable categories, which can accommodate up to 20 people with a focus on women and children during the pre-screening process. They have the right to stay for up to 72 hours, with the possibility to extend this term if needed.

In 2019, Albania registered 6.604 requests for international protection. In 2020, there were only 2.232 such requests. This decrease is partly explained by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Albania's capacity will increase in the event of higher entry rates. While the country has witnessed an increase in the number of asylum applications in recent years, there has been a trend for so-called 'rest and go' asylum seekers to abuse the Albanian asylum system on their journey to Western Europe. In fact, 90% of asylum seekers have left the country without submitting any application for international protection or during the respective procedures.

Early 2021 saw the adoption of the new Law on Asylum. Could you tell us more about it in the context of the Afghan situation?

The strengthening of the national asylum system requires ever more work. The main aim is to approach the European standards in terms of refugee status determination. In this vein, the Law no. 10/2021 "On Asylum in the Republic of Albania" adopted in February 2021 has brought the legislation closer to the EU acquis.

The law aims to further strengthen and improve the system in line with international legal standards and to ensure the functioning of all components of the asylum system. It shall comply with the principle of non-refoulement and other rights of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as to ensure the equal treatment of third country nationals legally residing in Albania. The law introduces an expedited procedure for relevant cases and provides additional protection for vulnerable groups. Albania has the institutions needed to handle requests for international protection - complaints can be filed with the National Commission for Refugees and Asylum, and appeals filed in administrative courts.

The Article 86 of the Law on Asylum provides for the rights and obligations of persons under temporary protection, as follows:

- to stay in the Republic of Albania for the duration of temporary protection;
- to be granted basic living conditions and housing, in accordance with the economic possibilities of the Republic of Albania;
- receive health care;
- receive pre-university education under the same conditions as Albanian citizens;
- exercise the freedom of thought and religion according to their convictions, in accordance with the applicable legislation;
- work and receive professional training;
- receive legal aid guaranteed by the state.

Foreigners under temporary protection may only request for family reunification if this right cannot be exercised in any other country.

Many countries refuse to bring in Afghan asylum seekers for security reasons. Is this also a concern for Albania? How does the country plan to address it?

The established Task Force coordinates the reception and accommodation of

Afghan citizens and stateless persons with temporary or permanent residence in Afghanistan.

Persons under temporary protection are obliged to comply to the Law on Asylum and must respect the national laws. Naturally, they are not entitled to establish, join or support political groups or other organizations that violate the public order or national security, nor do they have right to vote. Meanwhile, the competent institutions shall focus on preventing the stigmatization and discrimination of migrants. In the context of COVID-19, our ministry has worked closely with the responsible institutions

to provide refugees and migrants, regardless of their legal status, with access to health care, other services and culturally and linguistically sensitive information on how to prevent infection.

What is your message to all Prague Process states in relation to the Afghan situation?

All persons have the right to seek freedom and peace. Our countries must always be ready to welcome asylum seekers and refugees. To this end, we must cooperate among ourselves in the spirit of solidarity.

In line with the policies of the European Union that we aspire to accede, we must offer the right status to every third-country national seeking international protection, and ensure that they are respected. We must keep in mind in our policy the principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child and the facilitation of family reunification, as well as the principle of Non-refoulement.

No one is safe until we all are safe.

Thank you very much for the interview!

Climate-induced migration: will it affect the Prague Process states?

Climate change is said to become a prominent push factor of migration in the near future. The newest World Bank projections indicate that as many as 216 million people could move within their own countries due to slow-onset climate change impacts by 2050. They will migrate from areas with low availability of water and reduced crop productivity as well as from areas affected by sea-level rise and storm surges. Hotspots of internal climate migration could emerge as early as 2030 and continue to spread and intensify by 2050.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 5.1 million people could become "internal climate migrants", representing up to 2.3 percent of the region's total population. While the projected numbers are lower than in other regions, climate migration in Eastern Europe and Central Asia can have substantial development implications.

In fact, Central Asia is already vulnerable to climate change. Climate trends for Central Asia consistently show that temperatures are rising, particularly during the winter months, and the average annual temperature will continue to increase in the future. Moreover, Central Asia is likely to experience an increased incidence of drought and longer dry



spells that could worsen land degradation and desertification. Warmer temperatures can also cause increased glacial melt with implications for reduced flows in the regions' major rivers and for key economic sectors. Stark elevation differences, coupled with constant seismic activity, also mean that Central Asia experiences many natural hazards, namely floods, landslides, and earthquakes.

Environmental factors are already driving mobility in Central Asia, particularly as water stress and land degradation affect rural livelihoods. Salinization, for example, already affects over 60 percent of irrigated lands in Central Asia. Environmental migration and displace-

ment have also occurred after disasters or as part of resettlement programs. Research suggests that climate change may contribute to an intensification of both internal migration and outmigration to Russia. At the same time, in some situations, migration might be desired, but not accessible; involuntary immobility can lead to compromised livelihoods along with new strategies to maintain them. On the other hand, deep ties to places, family, and community may keep people in certain areas despite deteriorating conditions.

The Fergana Valley that hosts nearly a quarter of the population of Central Asia, the area around Tashkent and lower-elevation areas of southern Tajikistan

(including Dushanbe) are projected to be climate in-migration hotspots, along with denser settlements in northern Kazakhstan (Karagandy, Nur-Sultan, and Kostanay). This will amplify projected population growth trends in these areas, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas, as well as in the Fergana Valley.

Reflecting projected decreases in water availability and crop productivity, the areas along the southern border of Kazakhstan, pockets surrounding the

Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and the area around Bishkek, may become climate out-migration hotspots. Smaller pockets of eastern Turkmenistan and southern Uzbekistan along the Amu Darya River are also projected to be climate out-migration hotspots for the same reasons.

Many of the climate in-migration hotspots are major urban areas. These cities will need to provide advanced public service provision, affordable

housing programs, and employment opportunities for increasing numbers of people. Meanwhile, national and city planning systems will need to account for important changes to existing settlement patterns. These will need to go hand in hand with climate-resilient infrastructure investments and improved connectivity networks, especially as cities continue to grow and draw migrants from rural areas.

Read more [here](#) and [here](#)

Debates over Afghanistan: no exodus or an exodus to be?

The newsfeed of the third quarter was loaded with warnings about a possible spike in outflows of Afghan asylum seekers due to the pullout of international forces from the country. Concerned by these prospects many countries voiced the need to reinforce international support and aid to the Afghan population while preventing its exodus.

Reports on the numbers of Afghans actually leaving the country varied considerably with estimates of [irregular border crossings into Iran](#), Pakistan and from Iran into Turkey outnumbering the regular ones. July and August media reports were referring to some [few hundred to two thousand Afghans](#) coming to Turkey daily. July data of the [IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix](#) (DTM) estimated some 20,000 – 30,000 Afghan nationals migrating every week. However, most Afghans in fact became internally displaced. Just within the month of September, there were [nearly 3 million IDP movements](#) across the various Afghan provinces. The official number of IDPs as per the UNHCR surpassed [3.5 million](#) this year. Meanwhile, the number of Afghans who left the country since 1 January 2021 is estimated at only [58,000](#).

The fear of a mass exodus, however, has had an impact. The Central Asian states have sealed their borders in a collective security effort. Pakistan and Iran, already hosting the largest Afghan communities, have equally closed the borders allowing for limited entry of visa

holders. Turkey officially announced that it cannot shoulder the burden of a new migration wave and stated bolstering security on its eastern border with Iran. In particular, to prevent irregular crossings, Turkey initiated the construction of [a 295-kilometre long wall along its border with Iran](#). The leaders of EU Member states announced their readiness to resettle a fraction of the Afghan refugee population, fearing a repetition of the 2015-2016 situation.

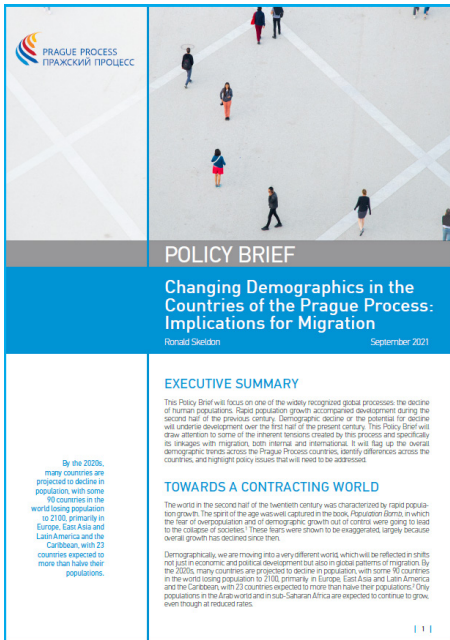
Most recently, the discourse on Afghanistan has increasingly revolved around the worsening humanitarian situation. Even before the Taliban entered Kabul on 15 August, the situation in the country was among the worst in the world. Nearly half of the country's [40 million people](#) already needed humanitarian

assistance. This year, the country is also facing the second drought in four years and the worst of its kind in 27 years. [An estimated 22.8 million people](#), or 55 per cent of the population, are expected to be in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity between November 2021 and March 2022. The [full implications](#) of the recent political transition on the country's basic services, financial systems and markets will take time to manifest. However, initial indications already reveal a severe deterioration of the situation for vulnerable people. In his opening statement at the 72nd session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, [U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said](#) that such deterioration will almost inevitably cause large internal and possibly external displacement.



Image credit: Google Maps

Prague Process Migration Observatory: Newly released publications



Policy Brief 'Changing Demographics in the Countries of the Prague Process: Implications for Migration' by Professor Ronald Skeldon

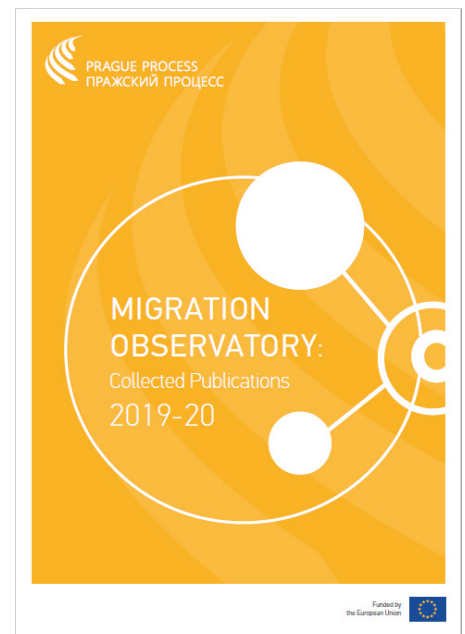
This Policy Brief addresses one of the widely recognized global processes: the decline of human populations. Rapid population growth accompanied development during the second half of the previous century. Demographic decline or the potential for decline will underlie development over the first half of the present century. This Policy Brief draws attention to some of the inherent tensions created by this process and specifically its linkages to migration, both internal and international. It flags the overall demographic trends across the Prague Process countries, identifying differences across the countries, and highlighting policy issues that will need to be addressed.

Read [here](#)

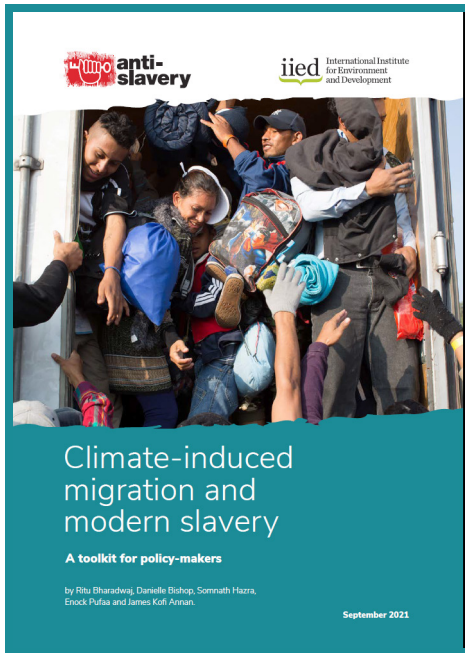
The Book 'Migration Observatory: Collected Publications 2019-20'

This second collection of publications produced within the Prague Process Migration Observatory covers the period 2019-2020. It aims to inform migration decision-makers, specialists, scientists, academics and the interested public about ongoing migration trends and policy developments across the Prague Process region. The featured authors are state representatives, academic experts or other specialists. Their contributions aim at raising awareness concerning a wide range of migration phenomena that affect people's lives or even societies as a whole. The collected publications shall inform the interested reader and possibly inspire new ideas and initiatives for the future.

Read [here](#)



Interesting reads



Study by EMN Germany for the European Migration Network 'Data management in the asylum procedure in Germany'

This study is the German contribution to the EMN study 'Accurate, timely, interoperable? Data management in the asylum procedure'. Data on asylum seekers and asylum applicants is collected for the purposes of establishing and documenting identity, verifying the need for protection, as well as for administrative, integration and security purposes in the asylum process. Consistent data management across all authorities is of particular importance for a reliable asylum procedure. The early collection and interagency exchange of personal data enables asylum seekers to be clearly identified, prevents multiple registrations and allows individual process steps in the asylum procedure and beyond to be more closely linked.

Access [here](#)

Climate-induced migration and modern slavery: a toolkit for policymakers

According to the Global Estimate of Modern Slavery, 40.3 million people are living in slavery worldwide, which disproportionately affects the most marginalised, such as women, children and minorities. Climate change and climate-induced migration heightens existing vulnerabilities of slavery. Drivers of vulnerability to modern slavery are complex and impacted by many layers of risk. While several socio-economic, political, cultural and institutional risks shape vulnerability, climate change impacts and environmental degradation are further worsening it. As climate shocks are set to intensify, many more millions will be displaced by climate change in the coming decades.

Access [here](#)



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