PRAGUE PROCESS
ПРАЖСКИЙ ПРОЦЕСС

MIGRATION OBSERVATORY:

Selected Publications

2021-22

Funded by
the European Union

Disclaimer

This publication was produced in the framework of the 'Prague Process: Dialogue, Analyses and Training in Action' initiative, a component of the Migration Partnership Facility project, funded by the European Union and implemented by ICMPD.

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ISBN: 978-3-903120-98-3 (printed version)
ISBN: 978-3-903120-99-0 (electronic version)

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PRAGUE PROCESS MIGRATION OBSERVATORY

The Prague Process is an intergovernmental migration dialogue among close to 50 countries from Europe and Central Asia. During the third Ministerial Conference in 2016, the participating states agreed to establish the Prague Process Migration Observatory in order to strengthen information sharing among the Parties and better inform policy makers and experts from the migration authorities in their decisions.

Since 2018, the Migration Observatory engages academic researchers and state experts from the region to undertake systematic and ad hoc analyses of important migration trends and policy developments at regional and national level, addressing contemporary migration challenges. Their publications identify concrete lessons learned, map possible future trends and draw relevant policy recommendations. Their findings equally inform the senior-level discussions within the Prague Process.

The Migration Observatory thus provides impartial, evidence-based analysis in line with the six thematic areas set out by the Prague Process Action Plan:

- preventing illegal migration;
- return, readmission and reintegration;
- legal and labour migration;
- integration;
- migration and development; and
- asylum and international protection.

All outputs and publications are available at **www.pragueprocess.eu** in both English and Russian.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dear Reader,

This third collection of selected publications produced within the Prague Process Migration Observatory is released amidst Russia's war against Ukraine, which has resulted in the largest human displacement witnessed in Europe since World War II. More than 14 million people were forced to flee their homes in search for safety. Nearly seven million people have fled to neighbouring countries and further afar, with women and children accounting for the vast majority of the externally displaced Ukrainian citizens. Two chapters address the migration repercussions of the war: First, special attention is given to the vulnerability among those fleeing the war to human trafficking. Secondly, the elaboration of possible post-war scenarios shall allow us to better understand the mid- and long-term migration repercussions of the war.

This book is also released shortly before the fourth Prague Process Ministerial Conference, which shall set the political mandate and content of our joint cooperation for the years to come. The first section thus entails the background papers developed on the six thematic areas of the Prague Process. Providing a concise overview of the key considerations at hand, these documents have informed the intergovernmental discussions within the process of jointly formulating the future Action Plan.

The book further contains a number of publications dedicated to other important migration aspects, corresponding to the traditional format of this series. The COVID-19 pandemic still resonates globally, the developments in Afghanistan deserve continuous attention, and economies have been facing new challenges related to food and energy supplies, which will remain in the focus of the Migration Observatory.

As usual, I would like to thank the authors for sharing their analysis, expertise and concrete recommendations. Special gratitude goes to Alexander Maleev and Irina Lysak, who did not only ensure the high quality of this book but also produced a good share of its content.

In these challenging times, our cooperation has become more vital than ever. We hope for this book to inform decision makers and thereby contribute to finding adequate policy responses.

Sincerely yours

Dr Phil. Radim Zak
Head of Prague Process Secretariat
ICMPD Head of Region, Eastern Europe and Central Asia

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Alexander Maleev & Irina Lysak

May-June 2021

Key Developments across the Prague Process region

Asylum has been one of the most broadly and emotionally debated policy areas. In the end of 2019, **79.5 million people worldwide have been seeking refuge**, including 45.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 20.4 million refugees, and 4.2 million asylum seekers. Unrest, persecution, human rights violations, armed conflicts and other serious threats erupted in various parts of the world, including also in the Prague Process region – in **Ukraine**, the **South Caucasus** and just recently in **Central Asia**. According to UNHCR, the overall number of displaced people has doubled over the past decade. Many of the concerned populations have thus far failed to find lasting solutions for rebuilding their lives. Between 2010 and 2019, only 3.9 million refugees were able to return to their countries of origin. In comparison, almost 10 million refugees managed to return home during the previous decade and over 15 million throughout the 1990's. Around half of those displaced nowadays are children. Over 50% of all IDPs are women.

Since 2014, **Syria** has been the main source country of refugees. 3.6 million of them have found shelter in **Turkey**, which swiftly became the world's leading refugee-hosting country after hosting only around 10.000 refugees back in 2010. The outbreak of the armed conflict in **Eastern Ukraine** in 2014 resulted in the displacement of 1.7 million people, most of whom remain IDPs within Ukraine. In the **European Union**, the number of asylum applications peaked at 1.28 million in 2015 and amounted to 698 000 in 2019. Since 2015, over five million asylum claims have been lodged in the EU, with **Germany** alone registering almost two million requests. Arrivals in **Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Italy and Spain** remained below 200,000 between 2017 and 2019. At the end of 2019, the EU hosted a total of 2.6 million refugees, equivalent to 0.6% of the EU population. On average, around 370,000 asylum applications are rejected on an annual basis across the EU. However, only around a third of these persons are actually returned home.

Outside the EU and Turkey, the **United Kingdom** and **Russia** registered the most asylum applications. The **Western Balkan region** continues to constitute an important transit corridor for mixed migration flows to the EU. While the number of registered asylum applications across the region increased by 19% by 2018, most applicants abandoned the related procedures before actually receiving a decision.

In terms of policy, the Prague Process states have made increased efforts to build capacities in this area, establishing new asylum systems or adjusting existing ones. The **Eastern Partnership** countries made good use of the trainings received within the Prague Process Targeted Initiative and the UNHCR-led Quality Initiative. **Moldova** improved its decision making through an internal quality-control mechanism. **Georgia's** recognition rates increased from 5.5% in 2018 to 13% in 2019, following greater use of country of origin information, among other improvements. The **Western Balkan states** also implemented various initiatives to reinforce their national asylum systems, harmonising data collection and identifying protection needs. Individual legal counselling and strategic litigation were essential tools in addressing identified shortcomings. Since the adoption of a comprehensive, EU-inspired Law on Foreigners and International

Protection in 2013, **Turkey** has maintained a consistently high standard in its emergency response. The Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) established in 2014 assumed all competencies in the area of international protection as of 2018. The country has been enhancing its registration and protection procedures continuously, introducing 40 e-learning modules to support training and deploying over 500 bilingual support personnel. Meanwhile, the **Central Asian countries** have made significant progress in reducing statelessness, which has affected many people in the region, as well as in establishing their national legal frameworks on international protection. In 2017, **Turkmenistan** amended its Law on Refugees, introducing an enhanced protection for unaccompanied children seeking asylum, as well as temporary and complementary protection. Since 2017, the **Kyrgyz Republic**'s criminal code prevents the criminalisation of asylum seekers entering the country illegally. In 2018, **Kazakhstan** simplified the procedures for refugees to acquire permanent resident status.

Within the **European Union**, a unified response to international protection has been hard to achieve since 2015, resulting in many ad-hoc solutions existing to this day. Progress was made in legislative areas, including two regulations establishing a framework for the inter-operability of relevant EU information systems as well as the common position on the recast Return Directive. Considerable work was also accomplished in the policy implementation and practical cooperation among EU+ countries. The EU's Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024 set the main priorities for the next institutional cycle, including migration and asylum, as well as the cooperation with countries of origin and transit as priority areas. All these efforts, however, did not manage to overcome the long-standing stumbling block of **solidarity and responsibility sharing**.

Despite the adoption of the **Global Compact on Refugees** in 2018 and numerous other flagship initiatives, solutions for refugees are in decline. A growing number of people in need of protection remains in precarious situations. **Resettlement** benefits only a fraction of the world's refugees, many of whom have little hope of ever returning home. At the same time, their socioeconomic integration in the host countries has become ever more challenging, with the **COVID-19 pandemic** further exacerbating the situation of vulnerable populations, which are particularly susceptible to outbreaks due to dire living conditions and limited access to healthcare. Already marginalised refugees and displaced communities have been forced further into poverty, women and girls are facing increased exposure to gender based violence and worsening gender inequality, access to education has been further reduced, and people are under increasing pressure to return to unsafe or unstable situations. Moreover, governments leveraged the pandemic to restrict access to protection due to heightening security concerns, thereby creating a precedent for the future.

The EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum

The EU's continuous goals to ensure fair access to an asylum procedure, as well as legal certainty for asylum seekers, remain valid within the New Pact, which shall build on previous compromises and progress made. It proposes various legislative measures to improve the EU's common asylum system:

- A new **solidarity mechanism** for the distribution of incoming asylum seekers among Member States;
- New legislation to establish a **screening procedure** at the EU's external borders;
- A more effective and flexible use of **border procedures** as a second stage in the process, bringing the rules on the asylum and return border procedures together into a single instrument;
- Harmonised rules and improved **reception conditions** for asylum applicants, including earlier access to the labour market and better access to education. Disincentivising unauthorised **secondary movements** and clarifying the rules on **detention**;
- A further harmonisation of the **criteria for granting international protection**, as well as clarifying the **rights and obligations of beneficiaries** and setting out when protection should end, in particular if the beneficiary has become a public security threat or committed a serious crime;
- Addressing **situations of crisis and force majeure**;
- Establishing the EU contribution to **global resettlement efforts**;
- The Regulation to set up a fully-fledged **European Union Agency for Asylum**

The European Commission is thus proposing to establish a seamless procedure at the border applicable to all non-EU citizens crossing without authorisation, comprising **pre-entry screening**, an **asylum procedure** and where applicable a swift **return procedure**. Asylum claims with low chances of being accepted should be examined rapidly without requiring legal entry to a Member State. Meanwhile, the normal asylum procedure would continue to apply to other asylum claims and become more efficient, bringing clarity for those with well-founded claims. The new procedures shall allow asylum and migration authorities to more efficiently assess well-founded claims, deliver **faster decisions** and thereby contribute to a better and more credible functioning of asylum and return policies.

For those whose claims have been rejected, an EU **return border procedure** would apply right away, thus eliminating the risks of unauthorised movements and sending a clear signal to smugglers. Every person should continue to have an individual assessment, with full respect for the principle of **non-refoulement and fundamental rights**. Those most vulnerable should be exempt from the border procedure. An effective monitoring mechanism already at the stage of the screening shall represent an additional safeguard.

Beneficiaries of international protection should have an incentive to remain in the Member State which granted international protection, with the prospect of long-term resident status after three years of legal and continuous residence in that Member State. This would also help their integration into local communities.

Another important step will be the future monitoring of national asylum systems by the new **European Union Agency for Asylum**. The new mandate should respond to Member States' growing need for operational support and guidance on the implementation of

the common rules on asylum, as well as bringing greater convergence and mutual trust. The new Agency would also be able to provide capacity building and operational support to **third countries**. After all, the well-functioning migration management on key routes is essential to protection as well as to asylum and return procedures.

The needs of children represent a key priority as they are particularly vulnerable. The **rights and interests of the child** shall be ensured in line with international law on rights of refugees and children as well as with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The new rules shall ensure that the best interests of the child are the primary consideration in all respective decisions. Representatives for **unaccompanied minors** should be appointed more quickly and given sufficient resources. Unaccompanied children and children under twelve years of age together with their families should be exempt from the border procedure unless there are security concerns. In all other relevant asylum procedures, child-specific procedural guarantees and additional support should be effectively provided at every stage, providing effective alternatives to detention, promoting swift family reunification, and ensuring that the voice of child protection authorities is heard. Children should be offered adequate accommodation and assistance, including legal assistance. Finally, they should also have prompt and non-discriminatory access to education, and early access to integration services.

Resettlement is a tested way to provide protection to the most vulnerable refugees. Recent years have already seen a major increase in resettlement to the EU, and this work should be further scaled up. The EU will also support Member States wishing to establish **community or private sponsorship schemes** through funding, capacity building and knowledge-sharing, in cooperation with civil society, with the aim of developing a European model of community sponsorship, which can lead to better integration outcomes in the longer term.

Looking into the Future

Forced migration and displacement will hardly disappear in the future. No matter whether countries pursue open or restrictive policies on international protection, they will need to address this issue as part of their overall migration management framework.

The climate for the admission, processing and treatment of asylum-seekers continues to be malevolent. Refugee issues are often heavily politicized. Many media outlets incite negative attitudes resulting in racist and xenophobic attacks against refugees. To confront these manifold challenges, there is an urgent need to revitalize the **legal principles** that underpin asylum and refugee protection. To do so, there is a need for **strengthened partnerships** between all stakeholders and a clearer understanding of their roles. It is important that states commit themselves to establish asylum systems, which responsibly identify who is a refugee, who is otherwise in need of protection, and who should be rejected and returned home in a safe and dignified manner. The countries of the Prague Process could support each other in building such systems through sharing practices and information, as well as providing targeted guidance and advice. The role of **UNHCR** in this process will be of utmost importance.

Another important protection partner is the **judiciary**. Informed judicial interventions by national courts restore the real meaning to the notion of "protection" for refugees

by ensuring that all administrative action meets the basic principles of fairness and due process and that refugees and asylum-seekers are treated in a fair, dignified and humane way. The professionalism of the judiciary relies heavily on the existence of **continuous training in asylum processes** for itself and law enforcement bodies. In the past, the Prague Process already provided a number of trainings and designed specific training guidance, which can be used to build new training activities in this area. A comprehensive needs analysis could represent a first step in creating further tailor-made training curricula. Designing online trainings on the basics of the discipline, on cross-cutting issues, but also advanced trainings featuring case studies and knowledge from non-legal disciplines may provide a useful support tool for the Prague Process states.

To support the further development of **national asylum legislation**, taking stock of the latest key decisions in refugee law across the region could be beneficial as it would allow developing concrete guidance on open interpretative questions. Institutions should strive for a smart legislative design that features both positive and negative incentives to optimise compliance. As the factors forcing people to flee may remain in place for decades, legislation targeting long-term residents enjoying international protection could consider broadening opportunities for their economic mobility under predefined criteria.

It is vital to remember that **security and refugee protection are not mutually exclusive**. An integrated response to asylum and migration flows that enables states to identify persons entering their territory, and to respond to protection needs as well as to security concerns in line with their obligations under international law requires robust and efficient systems to register and screen individuals seeking entry. From both a protection and a security perspective, it is critical to establish asylum systems that allow for the fair and efficient determination of claims for international protection. Good practice also involves cooperation between border guards, security services and immigration and asylum authorities within a given state, with other states along travel routes and with regional and international organisations.

The search for **durable solutions** is central to every refugee situation. Durable solutions are achieved when refugees can enjoy a secure legal status that provides them with lasting access to their rights. This can either be accomplished through voluntary repatriation, through settlement and integration in the country of asylum or through organised resettlement. The latter, in particular, has an important role to play in the international refugee protection regime and is one way in which states can demonstrate solidarity. At present, around half of the Prague Process states feature **resettlement programmes,** leaving ample room for advancement in this respect, particularly among the non-EU Prague Process states. Traditional resettlement programmes can also be complemented with private sponsorship mechanisms, humanitarian admission programmes and humanitarian visas, academic scholarships as well as specific labour migration schemes for refugees. Such complementary options shall be discussed jointly with partners across the region.

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Integration policies across the Prague Process region

The integration of immigrants and their children is vital for social cohesion and their ability to become self-reliant, productive citizens. It is also a prerequisite for the host population's acceptance of further immigration. Well-integrated migrants diminish the demographic pressure and help to address existing labour market needs. Opposingly, a lack of integration creates numerous challenges for hosting societies and the very migrants. While traditional countries of immigration have been paying due attention to migrants' integration for many years, states less affected by immigration have only recently started addressing this poicy area. Even though integration policies differ between countries, they mostly face similar challenges.

The **MIPEX Integration Index** provides data on 38 Prague Process states. Most of them fall into the category characterised by 'halfway favourable integration policies', resulting in as many obstacles as opportunities for immigrants to participate and settle in. On average, immigrants enjoy most basic rights and long-term security, but still lack equal opportunities for full participation in all areas of life. Generally, immigrants face greater obstacles in emerging destination countries - **the Baltics, Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe** - with relatively small numbers of immigrants and high levels of anti-immigration sentiment. Meanwhile, **Sweden, Finland and Portugal** provide the most favourable conditions for integration across the Prague Process region. **Lithuania, Latvia, Croatia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Poland as well as Russia** pursue slightly unfavourable integration policies by either denying integration or providing it only 'on paper'. Russia's foreign-born population, one of the largest in raw numbers, faces many obstacles and slightly unfavourable prospects for long-term integration. More favourable conditions exist in **Moldova, Ukraine** and throughout the **EU**.

The vast majority of Prague Process states improved their integration policies over the past five years, with the most positive shifts implemented by **Ireland and Turkey**. Ireland's Integration Strategy for 2017-2020 created a slightly favourable approach focused on equal rights and opportunities. Meanwhile, Turkey – a major country of immigration – implemented the Harmonization Strategy Document and National Action Plan (2018-2023) to promote coordination among the relevant institutions, and ensure basic rights such as education, health, and labour market, as well as non-discrimination. **Denmark**, on the contrary, has significantly relapsed on its commitments to integration in 2015-2020, following the experienced spike in mixed migration flows.

Within the **EU**, national policies are stronger and convergent in the areas covered by EU law, such as basic security, rights and protection. Meanwhile, **education and political participation** remain a weak point for many Member States. Immigrant pupils receive little tailored support to catch up if they lagg behind, or to quickly learn the local language. Teachers and other pupils remain poorly informed concerning diversity and immigrants. In terms of political participation, most immigrants have few opportunities to inform and improve the policies that shape their daily lives since the competent authorities are not accountable to them.

The **economic integration** of migrants remains equally challenging. Compared to the native-born, immigrants have higher unemployment rates virtually everywhere. Within the EU, the pay gap between migrant and national workers in **Cyprus, Slovenia, Italy, Portugal, Luxembourg and Austria** has worsened since 2015. Overall, a migrant worker earns around 20% less as compared to a national worker for doing the same job. Female migrant workers face a 'double wage penalty', both as migrants and women, partly because they represent the large majority of domestic workers. The witnessed **skills mismatch**, whereby migrants often end up in jobs that do not reflect their skill level or education, also requires stronger policy consideration. Virtually everywhere, immigrants have difficulties in getting their qualifications valued, particularly those obtained abroad. The problem of transferring skills and experience across countries undermines successful integration.

The sudden surge in migrant arrivals as of 2015 affected the integration landscape negatively. The witnessed **media reporting** created a rather unfavourable public perception of migration and migrants, thus hindering their integration. For refugees, a timely economic and social integration is particularly hard to achieve. In **Germany**, for example, many refugees live in asylum shelters largely isolated from German society for too long, awaiting a vacant place in integration courses or being unable to work due to lengthy approval procedures.

Stepping up integration efforts: Key areas and recommendations

States should consider concrete actions at all stages of the integration process, ranging from pre-departure measures to long-term integration policies. These need to be implemented at national and local level, closely engaging civil society. The related challenges concern not only newcomers but often also second- or even third-generation nationals with a migrant background. Successful integration policies are not only a cornerstone of a well-functioning asylum and migration management system but can also support the dialogue with partner countries.

Successful integration measures require early action and long-term investment. Integration can start even prior to arrival. Setting up and expanding **pre-departure measures** (e.g. training, orientation courses), and effectively linking them to post-arrival measures can significantly facilitate and speed up the integration process, including in the context of resettlement and community sponsorship. Online services can be particularly effective in the pre-departure phase to help migrants learn the language and acquire skills. Skills assessments already conducted in the pre-departure phase can equally help migrants to integrate more quickly into the labour market.

Migrant women and girls face additional obstacles to integration. They are more likely to enter the country to join a family member, bringing with them domestic responsibilities that can prevent them from fully participating in the labour market or in education. When employed, migrant women are more likely to be over-qualified for their jobs than native women. Accounting for **gender aspects** is also pivotal for the promotion of intergenerational upward mobility. The better migrant parents and especially mothers are integrated, the more positive are the outcomes for their children. Nevertheless, migrant women often are not adequately reached by mainstream integration offers.

Integration begins right from the migrants' arrival to their host communities. It happens in every village, city and region where migrants live, work and go to school. Where migrants settle can thus affect their integration prospects. This is why addressing integration policies at the **local level** is key. Establishing a network of metropolitan cities could support the exchange of best practices. Meanwhile, the proportion of migrants settling in rural areas is relatively low. Nevertheless, they tend to fare worse on most integration indicators, both due to the general shortage of basic services in many rural areas and the lack of specific support services that migrants need. Local authorities should establish shared spaces such as cultural and sports facilities in order to prevent segregation. In addition, they should engage with all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, educational institutions, employers and socio-economic partners, churches, diaspora organisations and the very migrants. Ultimately, integration requires a holistic **whole-of-society approach**.

The **recognition of skills and qualifications** acquired abroad needs to occur faster and more easily. National authorities need to ensure that procedures for recognising foreign qualifications are quick, fair, transparent and affordable. Migrants should be provided with all the relevant information on recognition practices. Increasing the comparability of qualifications is also essential. In this regard, fostering the cooperation between national centres for recognition (e.g. through the ENIC-NARIC network) and exchanging more actively on the provision of **complementary or bridging courses** for migrants could be beneficial.

Learning the **local language** is crucial in order to successfully integrate. However, this should not stop a few months after arrival but also be supported for intermediate and advanced courses and tailored to the needs of different groups. Combining language training with the development of other skills or work experience and with accompanying measures like childcare has proven to be particularly effective in improving access to and the outcome of language training. While e-learning tools for language mastery exist in many Prague Process states, new technology could be deployed much stronger in this area, without fully replacing face-to-face learning. Given the limited knowledge and room for innovation with regards to new technologies, facilitating research and knowledge exchange is particularly important. Moreover, offering bridging courses to complement the education acquired abroad can help migrants to complete their education or to pursue their studies in the host country. Finally, gaining an understanding of the laws, culture and values of the receiving society earliest possible, for example through civic orientation courses, is equally recommended. The courses shall begin upon arrival and accompany migrants along their integration journeys.

Upskilling and reskilling should be continuously supported, including through validation procedures for non-formal and informal learning. Authorities need to ensure that more migrants participate in high-quality **vocational education and training**. A strong work-based learning dimension in line with local and national labour market needs can be particularly helpful. States should actively support employers in assessing and recognising the skill level of their employees. The rollout of a **fast-track assessment** of candidates' vocational education for a specific job can be helpful in this regard. Countries such as Germany and Austria have developed computer-based skills identification tests supporting early profiling of refugees and migrants. Their experience could be valuable for other countries. If designed in a tailor-made way, online platforms also have great

potential to facilitate **labour matching** as well as immigrants' access to vocational training, where they still remain underrepresented, in spite of substantial needs. Better guidance and counselling on learning opportunities along with better outreach programmes may also constitute a prerequisite for success.

Migrants and nationals with a migrant background play a key role for the economy and the labour market. This has also been exemplified during the COVID-19 crises, which made their contribution in essential services all the more evident. A successful **labour market integration** is not only a moral duty but also an economic imperative as it could generate large economic gains, including fiscal profits, contributions to national pension schemes and national welfare in general. It requires the active collaboration of a large variety of actors, including the public and private sector. Moreover, there is a need to raise awareness of discrimination in the recruitment process and in the workplace and reinforce anti-discrimination measures.

Migrant entrepreneurs contribute to economic growth, create jobs and can support the post-pandemic recovery. However, they often lack the necessary networks and knowledge of the regulatory and financial framework or face difficulties in accessing credit. They thus require more support through easier access to financing, training and advice. Digital finance can help in making financial services more accessible. Migrant entrepreneurship can be further facilitated through tailored training and mentoring programmes and by including entrepreneurship in integration programmes.

More migrant children should participate in high quality and inclusive early childhood **education**. Teachers need to be better equipped with the necessary skills and to be given the resources and support needed to manage multicultural and multilingual classrooms. This would benefit both the migrant and native children. Teaching curricula could be improved to better value and mobilise the pupils' individual linguistic backgrounds as key skills. A stronger involvement of health and social services as well as parents can also improve education outcomes of migrant children. Ensuring the accessibility and affordability of after-school leisure activities and sports is equally important in this regard. Children generally require additional protective support, always ensuring the best interest of the child. Unaccompanied minors who arrive past the age of compulsory schooling may require tailor-made support programmes.

Promoting inclusion and providing opportunities for young people at risk through education, culture, youth and sports can further contribute to the prevention of **radicalisation**. Working closely with practitioners and local actors can be particularly effective in preventing radicalisation. States should support first line practitioners to develop best practices to address violent extremism, support resilience building and disengagement, as well as rehabilitation and reintegration in society.

National authorities should ensure equal access to regular **health care** services, including for mental health, and proactively inform migrants about their related rights, while also addressing any form of discrimination. The provided services should be adapted to the particular needs of specific migrant groups such those suffering from trauma, victims of human trafficking or gender based violence, unaccompanied minors, elderly or disabled people, and particularly pregnant women (pre- and post-natal phase). Migrants often face additional challenges such as limited access or a health insurance linked to their residence status, language barriers and limited knowledge on how to

access services, scarce financial resources, or living in disadvantaged areas with lower quality health services. National systems thus need to adapt to these challenges and migrants' specific needs. Providing training to health care workers concerning diversity management and the particular vulnerabilities described would represent a valuable first step. In this regard, the Prague Process states could make use of the different projects and training materials developed within health programmes.

States and local municipalities should facilitate migrants' and refugees' **access to adequate and affordable housing**, and actively fight discrimination and segregation on the housing market. The competent authorities need to ensure an integrated approach between housing policies and policies on access to employment, education, healthcare and social services. Adequate, affordable and autonomous housing for refugees and asylum seekers who are likely to be granted international protection should be provided as early as possible.

As public perception matters, future integration policies should feature a strong communication dimension, promoting a **balanced and fact-based media coverage** while acknowledging and addressing challenges and opportunities that migration brings. Working with media representatives, education institutions as well as civil society organisations is key to better inform about the realities of migration and integration. These efforts should involve traditional and new media outlets including social media and blogger communities, which could reach an audience of different ages and backgrounds. Inclusive policies create a 'virtuous circle' of integration that promotes openness and interaction. Migrants and natives are more likely to interact in countries where inclusive policies treat immigrants as equals. Inclusive policies increase positive attitudes and create an overall sense of belonging, well-being and trust.

Modern technologies open up new opportunities to modernise and improve access to integration and other services. **Digital public services** need to be deployed in an inclusive way and be accessible to migrants, as they could otherwise widen inequalities instead of narrowing them. The COVID-19 crisis has shown the potential of digitalising services such as education, language and integration courses. However, this shift also made clear that migrants often face obstacles in accessing digital courses and services because of lacking the needed devices or the required language and digital skills to make use of them. Establishing digital literacy courses for migrants and ensuring that digital public services are inclusive by design, easily accessible and adapted to a diverse population is essential. Engaging migrants themselves in their creation and further development can be particularly helpful.

Efficient integration policies should be built upon reliable evidence on the specific outcomes of integration policies. To **monitor and evaluate** the effectiveness of policies in the long-term, accurate and comparable data on the scale and nature of discrimination suffered by migrants is important. Developing and updating monitoring systems to identify key challenges and track progress over time is just as important as the availability of data on integration outcomes at national and local levels.

Most Prague Process countries still lack experience in the integration sphere and only now start to shape their related policies. Across the region, third-country nationals continue to fare worse than native-born in employment, education and social inclusion

outcomes. This means that all countries need to step up the development of effective integration strategies. Acknowledging that integration concerns the whole of society, their related efforts may constitute a marathon rather than a sprint.

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IRREGULAR MIGRATION

According to a survey carried out among all Prague Process states in 2020, the thematic area of *'preventing and fighting illegal migration'* represents the second most important policy priority for the Prague Process states, trailing only marginally behind the thematic area of readmission, return and reintegration. In comparison, the evaluation carried out in 2015 saw the prevention of irregular migration as most relevant by participating states. Unsurprisingly, this is also the most complex and comprehensive thematic area of the Prague Process Action Plan, covering the widest scope of policy issues, such as awareness-raising campaigns, human trafficking and smuggling, border management, data collection and information sharing, identification, document security or the exchange of analytical methods.

Key Developments across the Prague Process region

The past decade saw major population movements across the immediate neighbourhood of the Prague Process, directly affecting many participating states. The rising numbers of people arriving into Europe exposed major weaknesses in the migration policy setup at the national and regional level. **Turkey** has been the country most affected by the immense numbers of people fleeing the war in neighbouring Syria and Iraq, as well as Afghanistan. Hosting nearly four million migrants and refugees, Turkey has played a key role in considerably reducing the further migration to Europe.

The **Western Balkan countries** equally played an important role, closely cooperating with the EU on migration and security aspects. Of the almost one million refugees who found shelter in Germany in 2015, over 80% passed through the Western Balkans. This period also saw an increase in the arrival of irregular migrants from within the Western Balkan region to the EU. The 'closure' of the Western Balkan route proclaimed in 2016 intensified migrant smuggling and left many transit migrants stranded across the Western Balkan countries. Moreover, the route remains frequented until present, with the respective flows on the rise again since 2019. While the policy response of the countries along the route has predominantly been a national one, the challenges faced require a coordinated approach.

Within the **European Union**, the crisis of 2015-2016 revealed major shortcomings, as well as the complexity of managing a situation, which affects different Member States in different ways. The main challenges included the management of the external border, overpopulated reception centres or high numbers of unauthorised secondary movements. The 1.82 million illegal border crossings recorded along the EU external border in 2015 decreased to 142.000 by 2019. In legislative and normative terms, the EU amongst others put forward and adopted the European Agenda on Migration, the European Agenda on Security, the EU Action Plan against Migrant Smuggling, the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats, including the crime priority Facilitation of Illegal Immigration. Whereas irregular movements from third countries have represented a great deal of concern for the EU and its Member States, most irregular migrants in the EU originally enter legally on short-stay visas, but then remain irregularly after their visa expired.

Similarly, the visa-free regime established among the countries of the **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)**, Ukraine and Georgia (with some exceptions) allows regional migrants to enter the CIS territories legally for employment purposes. The irregular employment of labour migrants remains quite common across the Prague Process region, especially among seasonal and domestic workers. The **Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)**, established in 2015, has tried to tackle this issue through targeted agreements but remaining administrative barriers and substantial financial expenses incurred by migrants restrain these efforts. All across the region, employers have strong incentives in hiring labour migrants informally, thereby contributing to the existing problem.

Driven by greater security concerns, the technological development of **artificial intelligence**, mass surveillance and cutting-edge innovation applied for identity checks, border controls or return facilitation has also accelerated in the past decade. The spread of modern technology, however, creates new challenges. The recent trend in developing complex interoperable databases, where millions of personal data are collected, stored and processed for a variety of purposes, and especially in the context of irregular migration, is both a benefit and a point of growing concern. This is especially evident against the background of an overly politicized public discourse on irregular migration, which consolidates the negative attitudes towards migrants.

The **trafficking in human beings** in mixed migration contexts has highlighted the need to identify factors of vulnerability that may lead to exploitation, human trafficking and other types of abuses. Among the people on the move in 2015-2018 most trafficking cases went unidentified and trafficked people rarely sought help. Common challenges for the national authorities included: high numbers of people transiting within a short time, making it difficult to assess individual cases; lack of capacity among asylum and border authorities to identify potential trafficking cases; and gaps in protection systems for trafficked people.

Finally, the ongoing **COVID-19 pandemic** has provoked major disruptions to cross-border mobility, bringing down both irregular and regular migration. The longer-term implications for migration, visa policies, entry conditions and border management are yet to be assessed by policy makers across the Prague Process region and beyond.

The EU's New Pact on Migration an Asylum

The **Communication on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum**[1], issued by the European Commission in September 2020 and currently negotiated between EU Member States, provides new instruments to tackle irregular migration. The Pact aims at establishing faster, seamless migration processes and stronger governance of migration and border policies, supported by modern IT systems and efficient EU agencies. It entails robust and fair management of external borders, a new solidarity mechanism for situations of pressure and crisis, as well as a stronger foresight, crisis preparedness and response. Ultimately, the Pact shall rebuild Europeans' trust in migration management in an effective, yet humane way.

1. See: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1601287338054&uri=COM%3A2020%3A609%3AFIN

The New Pact does not anticipate the impact its provisions and follow-up actions will have on **vulnerable groups**. For that end, it is important to consider how the proposed pre-entry screening procedure, detention periods, as well as returns and relocations, will impact the most vulnerable including potential victims of trafficking. Meanwhile, the European Commission is moving closer to finalising new EU Strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in human beings.

Integrated border management is an indispensable policy instrument for the EU to protect its external borders. Another building block lies in the improved interoperability that shall connect all European systems for borders, migration, security and justice, providing national authorities with complete, reliable and accurate information. This will also bring a major boost to the fight against identity fraud. The Schengen visa procedure shall be fully digitalised by 2025, with a digital visa and the ability to submit visa applications online.

The new 2021-2025 EU Action Plan against **migrant smuggling** will boost cooperation by introducing new measures and strengthened inter-agency cooperation in the areas of document fraud, as well as new phenomena such as digital smuggling. The EU plans to improve information exchange with third countries and action on the ground, through support to common operations and joint investigative teams, as well as information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration. Europol will strengthen its cooperation with the Western Balkans with similar agreements also expected for Turkey and others in the immediate neighbourhood.

The EU will further strengthen **cooperation with countries of origin and transit** to prevent dangerous journeys and irregular crossings. Addressing the root causes of irregular migration and combatting migrant smuggling are valuable objectives in this respect. Strands of work such as creating economic opportunity or increasing stability can reduce the number of irregular arrivals to the EU. The New Pact explicitly acknowledges the important progress made at the regional level within the Prague Process, which shall be further built upon in the future.

Stepping up the cooperation

The dialogue between EU and non-EU countries has deepened in recent years. Due to their geographical location, the EU envisages a **tailor-made approach** to migration management for the Western Balkan, Eastern Partnership and – albeit to a lesser extent - Central Asian countries. By developing their capacities and border procedures, these countries should not only become closer to the EU standards but also better equipped to respond constructively to common security challenges. Closer cooperation with Russia and Turkey is also needed. The 2016 EU-Turkey Statement has already reflected a deeper engagement. The Facility for Refugees in Turkey continues to respond to the essential needs of millions of refugees and is likely to retain this role. This makes continued and sustained EU funding equally essential in the future.

The **root causes of irregular migration** and the immediate migration drivers are complex. Trade and investment policies may contribute to addressing the root causes by creating jobs and opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic has already caused massive disruptions, once again underlining the need to build strengthened, resilient economies

delivering growth and jobs for local people, thereby reducing the pressure for irregular migration. Economic opportunities, particularly for young people, are essential in this context.

Supporting the development of **effective migration governance systems** is another key element. Partner countries can support mutual efforts and learn from each other in managing irregular migration and combatting migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks. Targeted campaigns providing information on legal migration opportunities and explaining the risks of irregular migration, while countering disinformation, remain valuable instruments for the future.

Visa policy can also be used to curb unfounded asylum applications from visa-free countries. The EU Visa Suspension Mechanism provides for the systematic assessment of visa-free countries against criteria including irregular migration risks and abusive asylum applications. This can ultimately result in the removal of third countries from the visa-free list. At the same time, developing legal pathways and multilayer assistance tools on the ground should contribute to the reduction of irregular migration, undeclared work and labour exploitation.

Further advancement in **border technology** is inevitable. The current coronavirus crisis might fuel the move from the traditional paper passport to a digital one, which would allow integrating sensitive medical records, such as the vaccination history. Given the growing numbers of smartphone users and the broad mobile coverage, this could be feasible. Furthermore, the need for digitalisation and automatisation in border control processes and in view of border security, allowing to simplify border guards' workload and to reduce administrative burdens, has been present for several years. This is also reflected in the substantial research and various innovative projects carried out, aiming at achieving new instruments in the light of automated and digitalized border control. The targeted use of artificial intelligence in border management could further help avoid physical contacts, tackle repetitive tasks and quickly process high volumes of information. Increased use of contactless equipment such as fingerprint scanners or facial recognition cameras could enhance the health security of both border guards and travellers and might reduce the risks of abuse (e.g. stolen fingerprints). Automated border controls have already proved valuable at some air borders, being widely accepted by travellers with access to certain types of identity documents due to their intuitive and user-friendly setup. Additional infrastructure development, capacity building, equipment supply and progress with the issuance of new generation identity documents is a joint interest. Furthermore, by opening the door to cutting-edge technology more measures on data protection and protection of human rights shall see the light in legislation and practice.

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LABOUR MIGRATION

In response to the survey carried out among all Prague Process states in 2020, nearly half of the responding states named the thematic area of *'Addressing legal migration and mobility with a special emphasis on labour migration'* as their top policy priority. Already within the evaluation carried out in 2015, the vast majority of respondents saw this thematic area as overly relevant to their migration policy development. Its respective provisions foresee the elaboration and exchange of good practices in managing labour migration, social portability, skills recognition (including upon return) and the mobility of students and researchers.

Key Developments across the Prague Process region

Europe has an ageing and shrinking population and faces various skills shortages. The decrease in fertility rates and ageing of population has further accelerated over the past decade, with Europe's population projected to reach its peak at 748 million people in 2021. Meanwhile, **the countries of Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Turkey** all feature natural replenishment and a much younger population. These demographic characterstics and trends have a direct impact on labour migration policies and flows.

The contribution of legally staying migrants to reducing skills gaps and rejuvenating the population has been widely recognised. Migrant workers have filled existing labour market gaps, including in occupations that were key to the COVID-19 response. Depending on labour migrants of all skill levels, many high-income countries have introduced targeted mobility schemes and facilitated visa arrangement for specific work categories. In low-income countries, labour mobility has often represented a viable option to sustain families or even national economies.

The past decade saw a significant increase of labour migration across the Prague Process region, with the **EU and Russia** remaining the two main destinations. Most labour migrants still originate from within the region. **Germany** is the number one destination for both EU and non-EU labour migrants. Its lead actually increased following Brexit.

Some 33 million labour migrants are currently working in the **EU**, accounting for 17% of the entire EU labour force. Moreover, nearly 17 million EU citizens are living or working in another Member State - twice as many as 10 years ago. The intra-EU mobility continues to grow, albeit at a slower pace, with ever shorter periods of stay abroad and more circularity observed in recent years. Migration from rural to urban areas, as well as from Eastern to Western EU Member States, has further aggravated the disbalance between 'centres' and 'peripheries', with the latter experiencing a persistent exodus and brain drain. Most non-EU migrants equally tend to opt for capital cities.

In the past decade, four of the six **Western Balkan (WB) countries** became candidates for EU accession and five reached visa liberalisation with the EU. As a whole, the WB region still features considerable labour emigration foremost directed to the EU but also **Montenegro**, which is equally attracting and sending labour migrants. **Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina** lost nearly half of their population to emigration, with

the latter particularly affected by brain drain. Young but less skilled nationals of **North Macedonia and Kosovo**[1] continue emigrating in search of jobs and better opportunities. As compared to the past, the recent outflows from the WB region tend to be less intensive, more temporary and circular in nature. While the propensity to migration remains high, labour migration is no longer viewed as a life-long decision. In policy terms, all WB countries acknowledged the prominence of labour migration and initiated the design of corresponding institutional structures and national strategies, albeit with a varying degree of success. Some have actively promoted regular channels of migration by renewing existing labour migration agreements and signing new ones with EU Member States as well as within the WB region.

Labour migration from the **Easter Partnership (EaP) countries** has been gradually shifting towards the EU. In 2019, roughly half of all EaP migrants targeted the EU for employment purposes. This is especially true for Ukrainian nationals who accounted for more than half of all residence permits issued in the EU for work reasons. **Poland** has been pursuing a fairly flexible labour immigration policy, attracting many (temporary) labour migrants from neighbouring **Ukraine and Belarus** and turning into the prime EU destination for EaP labour migrants. The character of labour migration remains mostly temporary and circular, with labour migrants often working below their qualifications.

Russia represents the main destination for labour migration in the post-Soviet region and especially from **Central Asian countries and Armenia**, which all largely depend on remittances sent home. The share of labour migrants from **Ukraine and Moldova** has been declining in favour of the EU. With the establishment of the **Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)** in 2015, labour migrants from the EAEU member states – **Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan** - can work in Russia without a work permit and enjoy other benefits, including the retention of pension rights. In recent years, **Russia and individual countries of Central Asia** have developed the organised recruitment of labour migrants, although the share of workers mobilised through such schemes remains low overall. Some experts voice concerns that the potential for migration to Russia from many post-Soviet states is close to exhaustion and the country may soon need to explore other potential donors.

In Central Asia, **Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan** heavily rely on labour migration with the resulting remittances representing a lifeline for many families and the economy. All three countries, work on improving pre-departure information systems, diversifying external labour markets and working towards enhancing the skills and employability of their nationals abroad. Over the recent past, **Uzbekistan** has turned into a frontrunner in this context.

The impact of COVID-19 on labour mobility has been considerable, simultaneously reducing its volume, while also highlighting the need for migrant workers in key economic sectors of destination countries. It also became apparent that apart from high skilled workers those with low and medium qualifications are also in high demand.

1. This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

The EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum

The EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum issued in September 2020 is still under negotiation between EU Member States. Once approved, it will constitute the EU's overall framework for migration, including its external dimension. Recognising that most migrants enter the EU legally, the Pact raises the need to better match existing labour market needs.

Several EU-funded legal migration Pilot projects have already demonstrated the possibility to implement schemes that meet the needs of migrants, states and employers. The forthcoming **Talent Partnerships** shall scale up these efforts and support mutually-beneficial legal migration and mobility from key partner countries, while maintaining national states' responsibilities in this area. The strong engagement of the private sector and social partners will be essential in this regard. The Talent Partnerships shall combine direct support for mobility schemes for work or training with capacity building measures. The reinforced cooperation with partner countries shall be pursued bilaterally and through regional migration dialogues such as the Prague Process.

The New Pact further foresees several legislative measures to enhance labour mobility to the EU:

- The recently revised **Visa Code** and further visa facilitation measures should enhance short-term mobility of *bona fide* travellers, including students;
- The ongoing reform of the **Blue Card Directive** shall allow Member States to attract more highly skilled migrants. The reform envisages more inclusive admission conditions, improved rights, swift and flexible procedures and enhanced intra-EU mobility of migrant workers.
- A new EU-wide scheme shall enable the **recognition of skills** and relevant experience.
- The review of the **Single Permit Directive** shall explore the possibility of introducing common rules for the admission and residence conditions for low and medium skilled workers and further simplfy and facilitate the existing single permit procedure..
- The recently revised **Directive on Students and Researchers** adopted in 2018 facilitates their access to the EU and intra-EU mobility.
- The **EU Talent Pool** shall provide an EU-wide platform for international recruitment, allowing EU migration authorities and employers to identify skilled third-country nationals who have expressed their interest in migrating to the EU.

Looking into the Future[2]

While the **COVID-19 pandemic** is still present and more health-related interventions are still needed, the Prague Process countries should start looking into the future and

2. The forecasting is based on the Secretariat's research and expertise.

build preparedness for the years to come. Although the impacts of the pandemic on the socio-economy situation are to be further elaborated, the pre-COVID trends give us a basic idea of further developments in the area of legal migration.

Demography will impact global patterns of migration. Based on the demographic curve, the labour force of European states and Russia is projected to decline substantially over the coming years and decades. The resulting challenges will require sensitive policy interventions in the area of migration and beyond. Several of today's sending countries could be put in a position, in which they will have to start admitting or even actively recruiting foreign labour. Eventually, labour migrants might come from other parts of the world. In this context, countries of the Prague Process region will inevitably be **competing for talent and skills** with classical immigration countries, but also against each other. It would be important that the PP countries with (so far) little or no experience in recruiting and admitting foreign labour migrants prepare for this policy option. Others, which have been predominantly welcoming migrant workers from neighbouring countries, should prepare for migrant workforces with larger diversity, possibly creating the necessity for additional integration efforts.

Whereas labour migration across the Prague Process region is unlikely to slow down in the foreseeable future, attracting the skills needed may become more difficult. This calls for the **development of more favourable and flexible migration policies and programmes**, in line with responsibilities of respective state authorities. Policy options such as job-search visas, new pathways for entrepreneurs, subsidies to employers recruiting foreign labour, and easier status change can make a positive impact. Improving the **portability of social rights and benefits** accumulated by migrant workers could be achieved relatively easily through the signing of bilaterial or regional agreements. To improve the retention of labour migrants outside of metropolitan areas, some governments may support a whole-of-family approach for settlement, including spousal welcome services.

Ensuring **sufficient outreach means** will also matter. An online presence that previously only explained and presented the legislation should go into personalised marketing and promotion, offer rapid response to specific questions or service hotlines. The opening of **Migrant Resource Centers** may also represent a viable option to better inform potential migrants on the possibilities of legal migration and equally inform about the risks of irregular migration. Some Prague Process countries already undertake these efforts and could share their experience with others. A stronger **engagement and dialogue of national employment services**, the regular exchange of good practices and closer cooperation between them may also prove overly beneficial.

Already existing efforts concerning **skills recognition and licensing, skills development and matching mechanisms** should be reinforced, making use, albeit carefully, of new technologies. This may also require additional investments in national education systems, as well as a certain degree of harmonisation and coordination amongst them. While countries of destination may be inclined to facilitate the labour market access of foreign **students, graduates and researchers**, they could also consider compensating countries of origin for the prior educational investment.

Due to the substantial difference in wages and working conditions for highly qualified workers, these have a higher incentive to leave. The resulting **'brain drain'** is difficult to curb by sending countries alone. Receiving countries shall support them in their efforts to prevent significant shortages in key areas such as the health and care sectors. Recruiting countries also have the possibility to establish skills equivalence schemes in advance, which rate educational outcomes in sending countries according to the standards of receiving countries. Bilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries can be helpful in avoiding **brain waste**. Moreover, joint efforts to facilitate return and circularity, as well as suitable employment at home, can result in **'brain circulation'**, considered most beneficial for developing countries who can profit from the generated knowledge transfer.

Automation and artificial intelligence may help mitigate future labor market shortages. Maintaining high standards in terms of personal data protection will play an important role in this regard. The states may also need to factor in different forms of **non-standard employment** such as remote and virtual work, which require adjusted policies not only for attracting labour migrants but also in a range of related policies such as taxation. Ensuring proper rights and decent working conditions for this new type of (migrant) employees will also be of growing importance.

All Prague Process countries also need to start **assessing future economic performance** and particular sectors driving future GDP growth, thereby defining specific demand for labour and skills. In a world where the use of fossil fuels and air travel will come under increasing pressure due to global warming, **innovation** is inevitable. For example, tourism, the lifeline for many marginal economies, may look very differently in the future. Moreover, **automation** will lead to stronger demand for high-skilled labour. Making migration systems fit for the future, regarding changing supply, demand, unknown skill needs and new policy priorities means investing in their adaptability. It is very unlikely that any single country can fully address these challenges alone.

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Key Developments across the Prague Process region

At the time of adopting the Prague Process Action Plan in 2011, all Prague Process states acknowledged the significance of the **Migration and Development (M&D) nexus**. Since then, most states of the region scaled up their respective efforts substantially by designing and promoting 'Migration for Development' programs. The adoption of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** for the period 2015–2030 genuinely anchored international migration into the global development agenda. At the same time, developmental indicators such as life expectancy, education level, the environmental dimension, human and sustainable development, or the aim to reduce inequalities have found stronger consideration in migration policies.

Addressing **diaspora issues** more comprehensively and an increased institutionalisation of diaspora engagement on behalf of migrant sending countries has represented one important policy development in the M&D area. The elaboration of specific diaspora strategies aimed at facilitating the contribution of expatriates to their countries of origin without necessarily returning there has featured prominently across the **Western Balkan (WB)** states with **North Macedonia and Montenegro** setting up dedicated Diaspora ministries and agencies. **Georgia and Azerbaijan** established financial tools and grant programmes supporting their Diasporas, the rights of own nationals in destination countries as well as development projects or scientific cooperation. **Moldova** factored diaspora relations into its policy in 2015. Its Government Activity Program of 2019 has aimed to assist Moldovans abroad. Meanwhile, **Kazakhstan and Russia** have focused on repatriation and resettlement programmes. Since the mid-2010s **Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan** have equally started designing initiatives supporting their Diasporas, although mainly focusing on external labour migration and resulting remittances with the ultimate goal to foster investment as well as professional and educational contributions. Especially **Uzbekistan** has been strongly advocating for the rights, freedoms and interest of Uzbek nationals living abroad. Over the recent past, the country has proactively pursued an open and forward-looking agenda, successfully attracting highly qualified professionals of Uzbek origin to take up various positions in government bodies.

The development potential of **remittances**, which many countries of the region heavily rely upon, remains underutilised. The share of remittances invested in business or profit-generating activities remains very low, ranging from 2.9% in **Serbia** to 3.6% in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and 4-8% in **Kosovo***. Due to the persistent lack of affordable, trustworthy transfer systems, most remittances continue to occur through informal channels. The costs of remitting remain higher than the 7% level envisaged by the SDGs. Nevertheless, the key importance of remittances at the individual household level, as well as to reducing overall poverty, needs to be emphasised. In this context, **Tajikistan,** the second most remittance-dependent country worldwide, has represented an illustrative example of the striking impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following a 50% decline in the overall volume of remittances received (mostly from Russia), the country was forced to request financial support from the International Monetary Fund.

The past decade also saw a moderate number of attempts to implement **circular labour migration** across the Prague Process region. **Georgia** made significant steps towards setting up circular migration schemes with **France** and **Germany**, as well as establishing bilateral agreements on circular migration with some dozen EU Member States. Within the EU, **Germany** was particularly supportive of circular migration schemes, allowing migrant workers from the **WB countries** to access its labour market temporarily. Similarly, **Russia** concluded bilateral agreements supporting circularity with **Tajikistan** and **Uzbekistan**. Due to structural reasons and the overarching trust in traditional kinship networks, a large share of **Central Asian labour migrants in Russia** nevertheless continue working and receiving their salaries informally. Naturally, this phenomenon somewhat undermines the fiscal benefit for the country of destination. For the time being, circular migration largely remains an unregulated process established and maintained by the migrants themselves.

The interrelated issues of **brain drain and brain waste** remain largely unaddressed across the Prague Process region. Southern EU Member States are losing talent to the Northern partners. **Spain and Italy**, for example, are estimated to have lost 80.000 and 130.000 highly qualified nationals respectively between 2007 and 2017. Migrants frequently work below their qualification, unable to certify their diplomas or due to discrimination. Concerns over the brain drain of qualified individuals moving from the EU periphery to its centre and from rural to metropolitan areas received more attention in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the past decade, the EU made several M&D related commitments. The so-called **Agenda for Change** of 2011 pledged to enhance circular migration schemes, to support employment services in their labour matching efforts, and to facilitate the portability of social rights and entitlements of migrants. Notable initiatives included the setting up of the **EU Immigration Portal** and the EU-UN **Joint Initiative for Migration and Development**. Meanwhile, **Germany and Turkey** made significant efforts and investments to actively support the socioeconomic integration of refugees, trying to make best use of their individual skills. The unprecedented **mixed migration flows** experienced as of 2015 resulted in largely security-centred policy approaches, considerably reducing M&D related efforts across Europe. More recently, however, the focus on M&D re-emerged again as part of the policy debate on addressing the so-called **'root causes'** of (irregular) migration.

The EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum

The EU is the world's largest provider of development assistance. The engagement with partner countries shall be stepped up across all **areas of cooperation**, including on migration issues. Work to build stable and cohesive societies, to reduce poverty and inequality and promote human development, jobs and economic opportunity, to promote democracy, good governance, peace and security, and to address the challenges of climate change can all help people feel that their future lies at home.

Migration is systematically factored in as a priority in the **financial programming**. The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument recognises the importance of M&D. The EU is determined to maintain its strong commitment to fostering sustainable development-oriented solutions. Assistance will be targeted as needed to those countries with a significant migration dimension.

The **root causes** of irregular migration and forced displacement, as well as the immediate factors leading people to migrate, remain overly complex. Addressing these root causes, helping refugees residing in third countries and supporting well-managed legal migration are valuable objectives to be pursued through comprehensive, balanced and tailor-made partnerships. The future approach shall deploy a wide range of **policy tools**, and have the flexibility to be both tailor-made and able to adjust over time. The include development cooperation, security, visa, trade, agriculture, investment and employment, energy, environment and climate change, and education shall be addressed in a joint manner.

Many other policies can be harnessed to help build **stability and prosperity** in partner countries. Trade and investment policies already contribute to addressing root causes by creating jobs and perspectives for millions of people worldwide. Boosting investment through vehicles such as the External Investment Plan can make a significant contribution to economic development, growth and employment. Better exploiting the potential of remittances can also help economic development. Cooperation in education, skills and research, as well as in policies such as digital, energy or transport, also helps to deepen economic development. The EU will use these policies wherever relevant in the engagement with partner countries.

Looking into the Future

The mere complexity of M&D leaves ample room for improvement. Over time, more attention has been directed to certain migration aspects and sub-groups, such as forced labour, mobile care workers, the challenges faced within migrant families, new notions of 'home' or the impact of ageing societies. Migration dialogues can contribute to reaching a **common understanding of the M&D nexus**. The Prague Process states could possibly widen or refine the set objectives and working methods in the M&D area, trying to better mainstream development-related issues into their migration policies (and vice versa). A closer alignment of development policies and migration policies could enhance their effectiveness and prevent potential contradictions and disagreement at inter-ministerial and international level.

With the global race for talent expected to intensify over time, the need to prevent **brain drain** and **brain waste**, while facilitating **brain circulation** and **brain gain** will become ever more important, requiring not only administrative and operational solutions, but also clear political vision and guidance. Skills partnerships between countries of origins and destination offer mutual benefits. Open systems characterised by right-based approaches, which safeguard the dignity of migrants and respect the interests of all parties, have better chances to succeed. The declining and ageing populations across most of the Prague Process countries calls for intensified cross-border cooperation and a stronger consideration of M&D related aspects.

Circular migration needs to be tailored to each specific setting, especially when it comes to smaller countries featuring higher rates of skilled emigration and fewer possibilities to replace skilled workers. The respective policies and schemes need to remain realistic but also open to innovative design features, offering incentives to migrant workers and employers alike. Receiving countries could develop solutions

allowing migrants to return in subsequent years to work for the same employer or in the same industry. This could ensure relative consistency and predictability of circular migration. Strong bilateral partnerships allow for greater mutual benefits, both in terms of the development impact in countries of origin and addressing security concerns in countries of destination. Considering the importance of labour migrants' **remittances and savings**, countries attracting temporary labour could propose cheaper and more convenient transfer channels, as well as programmes that support migrants' financial inclusion and financial literacy. The increasing importance of digitalisation and online solutions such as 'block chain' has manifested itself throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and may offer innovative solutions in the years to come.

Good practice suggests that **M&D strategies** should be multi-sectoral, participatory, location-specific and embedded in multilateralism. A holistic design shall allow adapting to increased complexities and the ever-new challenges encountered. They should involve a broad range of actors, drawing on a variety of knowledge and viewpoints. National M&D strategies need to differentiate between rural and urban settings and various other regional particularities. The exchange of national experiences in multilateral settings such as the Prague Process could facilitate intergovernmental cooperation, knowledge sharing and the protection of global public goods. Mutual learning remains a key component for development, particularly as countries experiment with new strategies.

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READMISSION, RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

According to a survey carried out among all Prague Process states in 2020, the thematic area of readmission, return and reintegration represents the **top policy priority** for approximately half of the Prague Process states, thereby scoring highest overall among the six thematic areas. Among the four specific actions listed under this thematic area (see 'Background document'), the first one - referring to **readmission (agreements)** – attracted the greatest interest. In comparison, the evaluation carried out in 2015 had identified the prevention of irregular migration as the thematic area most requested by participating states. Overall, both the survey of 2020 and the evaluation of 2015 confirmed that the thematic areas and their specific provisions corresponded to the policy priorities and actual policy developments across the participating states.

An area of functioning readmission agreements?

Since the formulation of the Prague Process Action Plan in 2011, **Armenia (2014), Azerbaijan (2014), Georgia (2011), Turkey (2014)** and most recently **Belarus (2020)**[1] concluded readmission agreements with the EU. Moreover, **Ukraine, Moldova, Russia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia** all concluded such readmission agreements already before. For countries enjoying a visa-free regime with the EU, the return rates of their nationals from the EU constitute an important indicator of their compliance with the respective obligations. While the overall **return rates** from the EU have been decreasing, the return rates to all **Eastern Partnership** countries and Russia have, on the contrary, increased in recent years, most notably to Georgia, followed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine. While in the case of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine the return rate decreased in 2019, EU Member States continue expressing satisfaction with the overall cooperation on readmission with those countries and the decrease is to be seen as a consequence of Member States' internal administrative obstacles rather than worsening of cooperation, with secondary movements also playing a part. The return rates to the **Western Balkans** peaked in 2016 but then declined. However, the number of Western Balkan nationals ordered to leave in 2017-2019, with the exception of Albania, also declined.

Within the framework of the **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)**, a number of agreements concerning the return of migrants have been adopted. One example is the *Agreement on Cooperation of the CIS Member States on the Return of Minors to their States of Permanent Residence* of 2002. In 2010, the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan and Belarus concluded an agreement on cooperation in combating illegal labour migration from third countries. Currently, it provides the means to protect the internal market of the **Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)** and ensure the continued freedom of movement of migrant workers. **Russia** has concluded readmission agreements with the CIS countries, the EU, associated members of the Schengen area (Iceland, Norway,

1 The Belarus authorities retaliated by announcing the suspension of their participation in the Eastern Partnership and by announcing the suspension of the Readmission Agreement with the EU on 28 June 2021. A bill on the suspension of the Readmission Agreement with the EU was submitted to the Belarus Parliament on 8 September 2021. Read more here: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_21_4908

Switzerland and Liechtenstein), as well as Turkey, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. **Kazakhstan and Belarus** ratified their bilateral readmission agreement in 2015.

Even though return migration is an important phenomenon for the **Central Asian count-ries**, their national legislation, multilateral and bilateral agreements or strategic plans rarely single out return and readmission as a separate, stand-alone policy area. Nevertheless, various laws, concepts and decrees entail provisions on return. Whereas the issues of **voluntary return and reintegration** are covered in the national legislation only in general terms, this legislation is expected to develop substantially across Central Asia in the near future. Return migration to the countries of the region is characterised by ethnic repatriation on the one hand, and the forced return of irregular migrants on the other. The worsening of the economic situation in Russia in 2014, as well as the tightening of its migration legislation largely increased return migration to the Central Asian states. Many return migrants who were banned from re-entering Russia were left in difficult and uncertain situations. This has unleashed the relevance of reintegration support programmes. In response to the Russian entry bans, **Tajikistan** adopted an or-der supporting the employment of the concerned Tajik labour migrants. Its recent *State Strategy for the Development of the Labour Market* sets out the rules and procedures for regulating return migration. In terms of ethnic repatriation, **Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan** have developed special laws regulating the return of ethnic Kazakh and Kyrgyz to their historical homeland. The intensification of voluntary return programs is important for the Central Asian countries. Return migrants help to address regional imbalances in terms of development, population settlement or labour supply.

The **Russian Federation** also features a so-called 'program on compatriots', scaling up its efforts to attract compatriots to Russia, thereby addressing the country's demographic decline. These efforts have also entailed simplified pathways to naturalisation for certain national groups as stipulated by the recent legislative amendments in the citizenship law. The latest State Migration Policy until 2025 also provides some key messages in this regard.

The EU's New Pact on Migration an Asylum

The **Communication on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum**[2], issued by the European Commission in September 2020 and currently negotiated between EU Member States, aims to improve the link between asylum and return. On average, every year around 370,000 applications for international protection are rejected but only around one third of these persons are returned home.

The new compulsory **pre-entry screening** shall include identification, health checks, se-curity checks, fingerprinting and registration in the Eurodac database. Where applicable, the new, faster **asylum border procedure** shall be followed by a swift return procedure. This shall ultimately speed up decision-making and make asylum procedures more efficient. Meanwhile, an integrated and **modern migration and border management system** with the improved Eurodac database shall help to deter unauthorised second-ary movements, facilitate the monitoring of returnees and track support for voluntary

2 See: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1601287338054&uri=COM%3A2020%3A609%3AFIN

departure and reintegration. The Pact also foresees the introduction of new intra-EU solidarity mechanisms such as **'Return sponsorships'**, whereby an EU Member State takes over responsibility for returning a person with no right to stay on behalf of another Member State. **Legal guarantees** and a monitoring system shall ensure full respect of rights from beginning to end of the process. The set of new tools on returns further include more **support from Frontex**, the appointment of an **EU Returns Coordinator** and a **High Level Network** coordinating national action, as well as a **sustainable return and reintegration strategy** to help countries of origin.

In parallel, the New Pact aims at deepening the cooperation on migration through **comprehensive, balanced and tailor-made partnerships** with key countries of origin and transit. These partnerships shall bring together a wide range of policies, such as education, development, visas, trade, agriculture, job creation, research, energy, environment or climate change. They shall also entail strategic, coordinated and flexible use of EU financing tools, with the EU and its Member States working hand in hand. The new partnerships shall result in a coherent migration approach on all levels: bilateral, regional and global. The five migration policy areas listed include the ambition to **improve return and readmission, step up voluntary returns and help reintegration**. Naturally, the Prague Process shall play its role in this endeavour in the years to come.

Taking the next step on return and reintegration

Return and reintegration programs[3] are an important part of overall migration management. There are various operational and political reasons for implementing return and reintegration assistance. Some people simply need assistance to return home. In line with its provisions, the Prague Process shall mainly address **voluntary return**. Nevertheless, there is rich evidence supporting the setting up of a harmonious returns program featuring the availability of both voluntary and forced return.

A recent examination of return and reintegration programmes across the 50 Prague Process states has shown that **36 out of 50 Prague Process states (72%) do have a visible return and reintegration programme**. Whereas 33 states (66%) work with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to administer their programme, three states manage it on their own. Among 14 non-EU Prague Process members, several only have a return programme for their own nationals but no outward programmes for returning foreign nationals. This could be for a variety of reasons, including small caseload or a preference for forced return.

In general, there is potential to identify common interests and explore joint solutions, especially for non-EU Prague Process states. One suggestion is to identify some **common functions** for further development among willing participating states. These could provide for economies of scale, particularly for low-volume caseloads, providing governments and donors with an opportunity to save time and money.

While some Prague Process states may want to improve an existing programme, others may build new programmes from scratch. Whatever the challenge, some **major focus areas** shape the performance of return and reintegration programmes: policy and programme control; specific features and objectives of a national programme;

operational alliances between countries, information sharing and capacity building; choice of service partners; visibility of forced returns to boost voluntary returns. Addressing some of these areas may form part of the future Prague Process cooperation.

The following activities can be considered for the next phase of the Prague Process cooperation:

- Complete **mapping** and analysis of the return and reintegration programs for non-EU Prague Process states. The result shall form a blueprint, identifying opportunities for training and coaching on policy development and programme design, as well as opportunities for further programme development with willing states. This activity also produces a large amount of information for potential future joint actions between states with similar challenges and program requirements.
- Linking EU Member States with non-EU states' programme development objectives. Some EU members are already providing funding and knowledge to their non-EU partners, helping them to support returning nationals. The Prague Process could promote **return and reintegration partnerships**, supporting dialogue on the willingness to develop joint return and reintegration initiatives, including capacity building and funding opportunities. This may also encourage a more direct focus on specific topics, such as a particular geographic region, migrant nationality, or migration challenge.
- Establishing return and reintegration **activity hubs** in geographic hotspots for greater investment and development. These hubs shall allow for targeted return and reintegration initiatives in a particular region.

The Prague Process provides an appropriate forum for its participating states to identify joint solutions and other initiatives for return and reintegration programmes.

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RETURN AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS IN THE NON-EU PRAGUE PROCESS STATES

Glen Swan

September 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Return and reintegration programs provide travel and post-arrival assistance for migrants returning from a country of temporary residence to a country of origin. These programs are not always commonplace in migration management, with some countries preferring to manage departures and any associated departure assistance under general border security functions. In the last eighteen months, the number of return and reintegration programs has doubled in Prague Process non-EU participating states. High-level responses to migration flows are encouraging neighbouring or like-minded countries to find common ground for cooperation and networking for these programs. Some of these programs have the potential to function as part of a broader regional network. Mapping the existence and functionality of these programs provides a starting point for more specific dialogue and action within the Prague Process and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the existence and function of return and reintegration programs in Prague Process non-EU member states. Whereas the existence of return and reintegration programs in EU member states is, as a general statement, more common and established, locating information on these programs across the non-EU Prague Process states varies in difficulty, mainly because some countries have official return and reintegration programs, while others absorb return and reintegration functions into existing enforcement or compliance programs.

There are three clear geographic regions of interest for non-EU return and reintegration programs: Western Balkans, South Caucasus, and Central Asia.

Survey responses from 16 Prague Process states form the basis for the findings and recommendations in this paper. The following analysis demonstrates the different styles of return and reintegration programs, why these programs exist, how these programs implement different policy settings and respond to different immigration challenges. The collected information provides evidence for a possible future collaboration amongst willing member states, including policy development, program enhancements, sharing best practices and, potentially, joint operational activities. Even without the latter, there are efficiencies and advantages for sharing policy settings and program design within a network of like-minded member states. For example, identifying return and reintegration development opportunities in the Western Balkans may produce a series of ideas for co-investment, either by national programs or with the assistance of an external donor. The Prague Process also provides an opportunity for targeted discussion amongst its member states on opportunities for broader collaboration, such as shared ownership for specific program functions.

The traditional way of establishing a return and reintegration program is to create a policy and/or legal framework that interacts with program delivery, which has a country form a bilateral agreement with a chosen service partner for program delivery. This is usually performed by individual bilateral agreements, most times employing the services of one or two major service partners. This approach provides individual resources and standalone program capabilities but is an expensive way of establishing services that could be shared across like-minded countries in the same geographic region.

There are three clear geographic regions of interest for non-EU return and reintegration programs: Western Balkans, South Caucasus, and Central Asia. Not all countries in all three regions have an immediate need for program development, but there is an opportunity to assist the formation of cohesive policy settings which may inform any future program development or enhance existing programs. There is potential to establish return migration hubs in each geographic region. These hubs could provide a regional focus on best practices and needs-based policy development.

SURVEY RESPONSES

As part of the preliminary work for this paper, Prague Process states were invited to complete a short survey on the status of return and reintegration assistance programs[1]. A separate exa-mination of programs in the Western Balkan region revealed some notable developments by the International Organisation for Migration. Meanwhile, Central Asian countries tend to focus on sending their nationals abroad, rather than on return migration.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- 16 responses received, including 6 EU and 10 non-EU participating states;
- Three non-EU countries advised of current programs (Belarus, Georgia, and Norway), two other countries (Azerbaijan and Armenia) advised of a likely future program supported by IOM;
- All responding EU member states have an established, functioning return and reintegration program;
- Montenegro was the only respondent who self-manages its returns without a formal program;
- Turkey implemented its self-managed national return and reintegration program this year, which may represent an interesting example for other non-EU states;
- Uzbekistan was the only Central Asian country to respond.

Building and implementing a self-managed program provides Turkey with greater control over the capability of its returns program and serves as an example for other member states who may be jostling with the reality of having state-managed return migration programs co-exist with adjacent functions managed by UN partners.

Turkey's return migration program is an interesting combination of traditional and progressive elements. Prior to the implementation of the self-managed program, almost all returns (forced or voluntary) were performed via a program managed by national immigration authorities, with a small number of voluntary returns supported via an IOM-managed Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) program.

1 Member states were asked about the existence of such programs or similar programs, any associated websites and support materials, and applicable guiding policy or legislation. In the absence of a current program, member states were asked to comment on the likelihood of a future program. Results and findings were prepared based on the results received. With 10 out of 17 non-EU participating states responding to the survey, a logical next step may consist in engaging directly with specific member states to complete the information gathering.

In recent years, Turkey sought to diversify its returns program, and started investing in self-managed program and policy development. Building and implementing a self-managed program provides Turkey with greater control over the capability of its returns program and serves as an example for other Prague Process states who may be jostling with the reality of having state-managed return migration programs co-exist with adjacent functions managed by UN partners.

It is also important to acknowledge the six EU member states who provided responses to this survey. These responses included very good examples of established return and reintegration programs in Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Finland. A welcome surprise was high-quality information providing good insight into the return and reintegration program in Portugal and the substantial policy framework supporting the program in Slovakia. Further engagement with Slovakia is recommended for insight into the modern pressures of forming and implementing a return and reintegration program, its integration into a full-scale migration management system, and the relative success of the individual components.

Previous work on this topic in the second half of 2020 examined the presence or non-presence of return and reintegration programs in all 50 Prague Process member states. One of the clearest observations from the 2020 data was the number of non-EU member states who had no evidence of a national return and reintegration program (14 in total). This could be for a variety of reasons, including small demand for these programs or a preference for unassisted return or forced return. At the time, this was identified as a significant statistic for further analysis and a probable focal point for further dialogue.

Western Balkans countries now share a common IOM return and reintegration network, where migrants can contact centralised phone numbers or approach IOM offices in the host country.

However, much has changed in eighteen months. Of these 14 countries, now only six Central Asia countries remain without a return and reintegration program. The most visible difference is the establishment of IOM return and reintegration programs in countries where there were no such programs in 2020.[2] Western Balkans countries now share a common IOM return and reintegration network, where migrants can contact centralised phone numbers or approach IOM offices in the host country. This trend has also extended to South Caucasus countries, with Armenia and Azerbaijan advising of the likely future establishment of IOM programs. This is a significant development in a short space of time. This territorial presence is important for migration flows in the next five to ten years, continuing to assist perennial onward migration from Turkey and eventual return journeys to Ukraine.

2 https://avrr-wb.com/

Table 1: Data comparison for non-EU member states with 'no program', November 2020-July 2022

Country	November 2020	July 2022	Notes
Albania	No evidence of national program	IOM Western Balkans cluster	https://avrr-wb.com
Armenia	No evidence of national program	Potential future program with IOM	https://publications.iom.int/books/setting-system-assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration-armenia
Azerbaijan	No evidence of national program	Likely future program with IOM	https://migration.gov.az/en/useful_detail/372
Kazakhstan	No evidence of national program	No evidence of national program	
Kosovo	No evidence of national program	IOM Western Balkans cluster	https://avrr-wb.com
Kyrgyzstan	No evidence of national program	No evidence of national program	
Liechtenstein	No evidence of national program	No evidence of national program	
North Macedonia	NNo evidence of national program	IOM Western Balkans cluster	https://avrr-wb.com
Montenegro	No evidence of national program	IOM Western Balkans cluster	https://avrr-wb.com
Moldova*	No evidence of national program	No evidence of national program	Experiencing significant impact from the war in Ukraine
Tajikistan	No evidence of national program	No evidence of national program	https://www.budapestprocess.org/silkroutesfacility/projects-in-central-asia/181-reintegration-of-returning
Turkmenistan	No evidence of national program	No evidence of national program	
Ukraine*	No evidence of national program	No evidence of national program	Experiencing significant impact from internal displacement
Uzbekistan	No evidence of national program	No evidence of national program	

**Denotes separate classification for these countries due to current environmental forces*

INSIGHTS

Return migration is a perennial challenge for government-to-government cooperation, usually with some dispute between sending and receiving countries over the strengths and weaknesses of asylum policy or international protection commitments. Additionally, the reasons for establishing a return and reintegration program are sometimes bundled with a general political commitment to migration management, at a distance from the practicalities of voluntary return programs and efficacious reintegration outcomes. General political commitments are the starting point for policy development and the objectives for operational activities.

In the past, EU member states have pursued an elusive topic of harmonised return migration initiatives, such as policy settings and some operational practices. What emerged is the administrative and mechanical differences between member state programs, demanding a broader definition of harmonisation, focusing on the potential for joint initiatives and shared activities. The change in focus acknowledged the sovereign principles of asylum policy and border management but encouraged shared responsibility for migration events that clearly expanded across multiple member states. The idea of joint initiatives is not a new phenomenon, and recent developments provide the imperative for these conversations to progress beyond traditional migration dialogues and include operational planning.

The *Joint Coordination Platform (JCP)* is a notable development on the topic of migration management, especially for activities outside the Schengen zone. Its tasks include monitoring and controlling the EU external borders as well as migration management initiatives in third countries such as border protection, return migration, people smuggling and asylum procedures. JCP, with the support of ICMPD, proposes the establishment of a regional return mechanism for the Western Balkans, assisting returns to third countries and completing general capacity building activities for return migration. The mechanism is akin to an activity hub for return migration and is a firm step forward for the pursuit of joint efforts and cooperation in this region. It's also a suitable forum for commencing informal collaboration on best practices and shared strategic interest in specific migrant groups or hotspots.

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Establishing a return and reintegration network is something available to non-EU states to broaden dialogue and identify opportunities for economies of scale. A recent past example is the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN)[3]. Originally formed in 2011, ERRIN was a joint initiative of 16 EU member states and Schengen associated countries providing reintegration assistance in approximately 40 countries of origin. ERRIN called its services *Joint Reintegration Services* (JRS). JRS is a multi-faceted product providing willing member states with a network to share current practices for return migration,

3 https://returnnetwork.eu/

develop meaningful dialogue on common topics, establish quality-of-service principles, and identify potential for common operational partnerships. In practice, JRS provides a centralised reintegration assistance interface for national returns programs, as an alternative to each member state forming its own bilateral agreements for service delivery in the same countries. Each member state still decides how and when a foreign national leaves its borders, then the returnee is introduced to JRS for all post-arrival assistance. In mid-2022, Frontex took responsibility for ERRIN JRS services[4], arguably in a bid from the European Commission to take a step towards a high-level platform for return and reintegration programs. A connected but separate relationship exists between JCP and JRS. Frontex is a key JCP stakeholder, but its mandate prevents activities in third countries, which suggests implementing JRS via the regional return mechanism with support from ICMPD.

JRS is an important element in EU templates for return and reintegration activities and presents a convenient turn-key solution for JCP and Western Balkans countries. Other inspiration, including other ERRIN initiatives, is contained in the *EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration* (the Strategy), such as the links between common quality standards and durable reintegration outcomes, capacity building to increase third country ownership of programs, and transition plans for establishment of reintegration centres in third countries. Of note for non-EU Prague Process states is the commitment to more coordination and integration of voluntary return and reintegration programs, both in Europe and transit countries. In pragmatic terms, this means greater EU investment in return and reintegration programs along known migrant pathways in non-EU countries, an effort to short-circuit migration journeys to EU member states. Additionally, return and reintegration investment in countries of origin now link with development initiatives, which for so long were two disparate modes of activity.

Of note for non-EU Prague Process states is the commitment to more coordination and integration of voluntary return and reintegration programs, both in Europe and transit countries. In pragmatic terms, this means greater EU investment in return and reintegration programs along known migrant pathways in non-EU countries, an effort to short-circuit migration journeys to EU member states.

The Strategy provides comprehensive guidance and important principles for establishing and maintaining return and reintegration programs, and this material is also important in dialogue with non-EU member states. Although non-EU migration challenges may not be an exact match to those experienced by EU member states, the program principles remain the same. For example, JRS established a Return and Reintegration Centre in Armenia, in cooperation with Armenian national authorities. The major objective was establishing services owned by national authorities, as opposed to the traditional model of sharing ownership with an external service partner. The centre provided all essential services for Armenian migrants returning from EU countries, including referral to essential local services,

4 ICMPD continues heritage ERRIN projects under the newly formed ICMPD Return and Reintegration Facility https://returnnetwork.eu/2022/06/07/errin-closing-conference/

5 https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/countries/central-asia.html/content/dezaprojects/SDC/en/2020/7F10669/phase1?oldPagePath=/content/deza/en/home/laender/asie-centrale.html

counselling, and reintegration planning. Over time, JRS increased the capacity of Armenian authorities to a point where ownership of the centre was transferred. This example is available for implementation in most countries of return, such as establishing similar services in Pakistan and Bangladesh for those nationals returning from the Western Balkans.

Central Asian countries represent a different challenge for migration programs when compared to other non-EU regions, marked by lower or deferred demand for return migration programs. In this region, maximising legitimate forward migration pathways is of higher demand. This means creating programs supporting two groups of migrants: firstly, those migrants seeking legitimate and durable employment in foreign countries and, secondly, exploited labour migrants who are stranded in foreign countries and need assistance returning home. A current project addressing these challenges is a collaboration between Switzerland and IOM, facilitating safe and skilled migration to Russia and Kazakhstan for labour migrants from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan[5]. The project acknowledges underdevelopment for labour migration regulations and proposes developing a series of coordinated mechanisms between government and non-government stakeholders. For individual migrants, there is an increased focus on pre-departure information, systems for improved employability and employment safeguards and access to livelihood assistance upon return home. A project of this scale and scope is necessary to unpack and rewire migration challenges in this region. Government-organised foreign recruitment programs offered to Uzbek nationals, for example, are not popular due to unreliable employment placement and high registration costs. Additionally, there are international programs currently focused broadly on *safe migration in Central Asia*[6], but mostly focus on informed migration journeys by avoiding migration trafficking. The major need for Uzbek labour migrants is a streamlined and cost-friendly registration process, independently verified employment placements, and the necessary assistance and support mechanisms while working abroad. The absence of these requirements in government-organised programs means Uzbek nationals self-manage requirements for working abroad or seek assistance from private recruitment agencies.

Insight for program enhancements or future Prague Process dialogue can benefit from an initiative implemented by BRAC as part of its safe migration programs.

Insight for program enhancements or future Prague Process dialogue can benefit from an initiative implemented by BRAC as part of its safe migration programs[7]. BRAC is the number one non-governmental organisation in the world, providing innovative solutions for a broad range of beneficiaries, largely those experiencing poverty and varying forms of disadvantage. BRAC saw the need to establish an end-to-end program to source and place Bangladeshi nationals in verified employment abroad[8]. Additionally, the program provides return migration assistance for those migrants stranded abroad.

6 https://www.usaid.gov/central-asia-regional/fact-sheets/safe-migration-central-asia

7 http://bpl.brac.net/

8 BRAC established a national recruitment agency with the primary purpose of disrupting unethical markets, reducing migration costs for workers, reducing fraud and administration burdens for both workers and recruiters, and streamline forward migration pathways. BRAC provides integrated support in all the steps of the process from sourcing, recruiting, assistance with registration for both the job seekers and overseas employers.

This is a compelling example of a regional-specific migration program, showcasing primary elements other than return and reintegration assistance. It is an unlikely silver bullet for challenges faced by labour migrants in Central Asia but is recommended for expanded functions of the current ICMPD Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs)[9]. MRCs provide an information supporting safe migration journeys, including referral to trusted stakeholders for further support with services such as job placement or visa services. Non-EU Prague Process states are likely senders and receivers of labour migrants in need of broader access to services at the start and end of their journeys. This is a primary argument for broadening the service offerings of MRCs in Western Balkans, South Caucasus, and Central Asia. Providing access to necessary work permits, verified employment contracts and livelihood assistance are examples of high-demand services for MRCs to consider for future service offerings.

CONCLUSION

Mapping the existence and capacity of return and reintegration programs in Prague Process non-EU member states is the first step to understanding the utility of these programs. A logical next step is to complete the mapping process, with direct engagement with Prague Process states absent from the survey responses. Once complete, the responses provide a launch pad for more targeted dialogue on the potential appetite for shared initiatives.

Mapping the existence and capacity of return and reintegration programs in Prague Process non-EU member states is the first step to understanding the utility of these programs.

A key focal point of continuing analysis is the intersection between relevant policy and program functions in willing member states, particularly asylum policy and return migration policy. Other focal points include the relationship between forced and voluntary return programs, and the involvement of external organisations to assist with operational function. An emerging hypothesis in non-EU member states says some of the programs exist without clear links with overall migration management or a regional response to migration. Without this relationship, the programs become isolated from broader migration objectives and produce less departures. Additionally, the newness of the programs is usually coupled with an uninformed perspective of its eventual capacity and utility, and this is usually the most contentious time for return migration programs. One suggestion is to encourage broader collaboration on key topics such as policy initiatives and operational procedures, primarily through forums such as JCP. Member states with current or emerging return and reintegration programs should prioritise activities of economies-of-scale and collaboration with like-minded neighbours. Standalone initiatives on this topic are expensive and potentially distanced from the benefits of collaboration. Likewise, non-EU member states can benefit from the lessons and experiences on network building within EU member states.

9 https://www.migrantresources.org/

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Annex 1: Survey responses for return and reintegration programs in Prague Process member states

Country	EU	Program	Notes
Albania	No	No	Albania advised it has no current return and reintegration program but works with IOM Albania to provide return and reintegration assistance for returning nationals. Future migration flows may change the need for such a program.
Armenia	No	No	Armenia advised it does not have a current return and reintegration program but anticipates a future program with the support of IOM.
Austria	Yes	Yes	www.returnfromaustria.at
Azerbaijan	No	No	www.migration.gov.az/ru/useful_detail/376 Azerbaijan advised it does not have a current return and reintegration program but anticipated a future program with the support of IOM. Additionally, Azerbaijan conducted a pilot project for voluntary return (2017-2020), identifying migrant demand and building operational experience.
Belarus	No	Yes	www.iom.by/en/activities/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration Belarus advised its AVRR program has been operational since 2018 with the cooperation of IOM, providing return and reintegration assistance for foreign nationals returning before an expulsion decision.
Belgium	Yes	Yes	retourvolontaire.be
Finland	Yes	Yes	voluntaryreturn.fi
Georgia	No	Yes	www.georgia.iom.int/return-georgia Georgia advised its AVRR program has been operational since 2013 with the cooperation of IOM, providing return and reintegration assistance for foreign national residing in Georgia who do not have the resources to return home.
Germany	Yes	Yes	www.returningfromgermany.de www.startfinder.de
Moldova	No	No	www.particip.gov.md Moldova advised of a program for returning Moldovan citizens.
Montenegro	No	No	Montenegro advised it does not have a current return and reintegration program, and rather chooses to self-manage the voluntary return of foreign nationals. Foreign nationals who apply for voluntary return are managed by the police and provided with a travel document and one-way travel ticket.
Norway	No	Yes	www.udi.no/en/return/
Portugal	Yes	Yes	www.retornovoluntario.pt www.reintegracobrasil.com
Slovakia	Yes	Yes	www.minv.sk/?dokumentyprepriimatela Continuing national program with IOM
Turkey	No	Yes	www.gonullugeridonus.org.tr Turkey advised it has a current return and reintegration program, a self-managed national program. The program co-exists with an IOM assisted AVRR program.
Uzbekistan	No	No	Uzbekistan advised it does not currently have a return and reintegration program, citing reasons related to a decreasing caseload of foreign nationals.

WHAT GOVERNMENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VULNERABILITY TO TRAFFICKING AMONG THE PEOPLE FLEEING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

ICMPD Anti-trafficking Programme

August 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The war in Ukraine has been raging for six months. The number of people who have fled the war in Ukraine only to Europe has passed 6.3 million while more than 6.6 million were displaced internally within Ukraine. A considerable number of countries, first and foremost Ukraine's neighbouring countries, but also other countries, including EU members that have been most affected by the influx of people fleeing the war, have made significant efforts to respond to their arrival.

6.3 million refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe.

So far, the incidence of human trafficking cases among those fleeing the war in Ukraine has remained insignificant. Still, people who fled the conflict are seeing their personal resources (be of financial or emotional nature) depleted with grimmer perspectives; As their displacement protracts, their vulnerability to exploitation, including trafficking, increases. These vulnerabilities need to be addressed now to avert the descent of a secondary crisis among displaced populations in their host communities later on. The persisting nature of the risks is well illustrated e.g. by 'huge spikes' in online searches across multiple languages and countries for explicit content and sexual services from Ukrainian women and girls.[1]

The existing research by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) has demonstrated how people fleeing the conflict become vulnerable to human trafficking. In this Policy Brief, we examine the nature of these vulnerabilities and provide guidance as to where the countries hosting the people displaced by the war need to invest their attention and efforts to tackle the increased dangers of human trafficking.

TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND PEOPLE FLEEING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

What shapes a person's vulnerability

International mechanisms and organisations fighting trafficking in human beings from the very outset of the crisis sounded the alarm of the nature and magnitude of vulnerabilities of the people fleeing the war in Ukraine to exploitation and abuse, including to trafficking. In order to understand the challenges in the current situation, we need to understand the depths of the phenomenon of **vulnerability** and its parameters. According to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000) to the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, the abuse of an individual's position of vulnerability is one of the means that the criminals can use when committing the crime of human trafficking. The UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), which ICMPD is co-

Humanitarian crisis at risk of becoming a trafficking crisis.

1. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Recommendations on enhancing efforts to identify and mitigate risks of trafficking in human beings online as a result of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

chairing with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2022, defines vulnerability as a notion that includes three factors – personal, situational, and contextual.

Personal vulnerability factors include aspects that are an integral part of an individual (e.g. age, sex, gender, ability, disability, ethnicity or sexual orientation). Such personal characteristics do not make a person vulnerable on human trafficking on a standalone basis, yet they may intersect with other vulnerability factors and exacerbate the overall vulnerability of a person to human trafficking in particular situations and in different contexts. **Situational vulnerability** factors relate to temporary challenges that negatively affect the person in course of a certain period of time, such as irregular migration status. **Contextual vulnerability** factors refer to the effect of the external context surrounding the person and exerting its negative effect on that person (such as certain policy frameworks, social norms or humanitarian crises, including those resulting from armed conflicts).

Contextual vulnerability factors, albeit in combination with the other two, considerably exacerbate the vulnerability of people fleeing the war in Ukraine while increasing the risks posed by traffickers who see the situation as an opportunity. The data below (as of 17 August 2022) illustrates well the scale at which these factors can operate:

- 6.3 million refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe,
- Only 3.8 million refugees registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes, and
- Over 6.6 million internally displaced persons (IDP) within Ukraine. (data as of 12 August).

Vulnerabilities to trafficking in human beings of people fleeing the war in Ukraine

The authorities managing the **humanitarian response** in situations like these need to understand the vulnerabilities faced by those fleeing the conflict, in order to calibrate their identification and protection responses appropriately. These include, for instance:

- The interplay between severe **impoverishment** of displaced people and **shortfalls in the provision of humanitarian aid**, both financial and in-kind, triggers desperate situations among populations concerned;
- The **lack of information** on what opportunities for travel and residence are available, adds to the insecurity and impossibility to take informed and safe decisions. In such circumstances, they may engage in risky coping strategies – accepting offers for shelter, transportation or fast money, without assessing the risks and ending up in an exploitative situation;
- Lack of **centralised coordination** of registration and referral services (at both national and European level) can lead to many vulnerable persons falling through the cracks of the registration and referral systems with private drivers involved in the transportation, or ambiguous response to potential risks of mistreatment or abuse of the arrivals;

- Low or no awareness among the first responders on the **potential risks for abuse, exploitation and human trafficking**;
- Vulnerability to exploitation affects also people who live in the area of actual military conflict or are **internally displaced** and must adapt their lives to the prevailing insecurity. Especially vulnerable and in need of assistance are those prevented from leaving the country because of their **special (medical or age-related) needs** - elderly and sick people, residents of care institutions, hospitalised persons, children from orphanages and other institutions together with their family members and care-givers.

A recent rapid assessment by La Strada International and The Freedom Fund confirmed the first two from the above list as factors that increase the vulnerability to human trafficking of the people fleeing the war in Ukraine, and also identified the following additional factors:

- **Exposure to risks** online as traffickers are already using social media to target potential victims;
- **Criminal networks already operating in the region** that might be 'enjoying' more freedom due to the challenges of law enforcement in the areas affected by conflict or experiencing a large influx of refugees;
- **Pre-existing risk factors**, particularly the high prevalence in Ukraine of **domestic violence** (generally a push factor for human trafficking) prior to the war, and vulnerabilities from **secondary displacement** or having lived in the conflict-affected territories in Ukraine since 2014.

In July, ICMPD conducted a rapid assessment among the selected Prague Process participants hosting considerable numbers of Ukrainians that fled the war. Only one of the respondent countries informed of two underage females identified as victims among those displaced from Ukraine. Of the **current challenges**, the authorities mostly highlighted the language barrier, which some are addressing by providing all information campaigns on the dangers of human trafficking in multiple languages, including Ukrainian and English. Importantly, they highlighted the problem of not all those who fled the war being centrally **registered** (nor all those persons or families who have taken in the displaced Ukrainians). Paying adequate attention to underage persons, particularly unaccompanied minors was reported as a particular challenge. The authorities are aware that the longer the displacement continues the more vulnerable people will become. The expectation is that in addition to those with financial resources to support themselves fleeing the conflict in the early days, also those with fewer financial resources would be leaving Ukraine as the war protracts, making them vulnerable to exploitation and traffickers.

Assessing possible **future challenges** with the displaced Ukrainian community, the respondents see issues related to accommodation as well as financial resources. Some fear that having more private housing arrangements might make it more difficult for the authorities to mitigate the human trafficking risks. The displaced persons from Ukraine are expected to possibly face financial or other kind of obligations vis-à-vis persons that have helped them or provided services or accommodation, which may lead to exploitative offers/situations.

In terms of **training needs,** while the respondents noted that key frontline professionals appear to possess a solid knowledge base, certain sectors require better level of knowledge and awareness of the phenomenon – particularly health professionals, transport and hospitality sector workers. Additionally, there is possibly an increasing need for additional specialisation of professionals providing psycho-social support to be able to address the traumas generated by the war.

The respondents also reported of **proactive preventive steps** taken to ensure better inter-agency coordination to allow for adequate and swift identification of trafficking victims among the refugees from Ukraine. Authorities of one of the respondent countries reported of cooperation with accommodation booking platforms (e.g. Airbnb, Bookio) to enable direct contact with the anti-trafficking authorities in case of suspected human trafficking cases. Moreover, information on human trafficking was published on the website of these platforms. In another country, steps were taken to facilitate the access to labour market by giving the Ukrainian citizens access to the labour market across all specialisation categories and entitling the employers to receive state subsidy for housing and travel expenses. The authorities also commissioned a recruitment agency to give assistance for the refugees in terms of legal and secure employment through designated assistance points.

Adequate policies for accessing legal status and significant reduction of vulnerability to human trafficking

In order to respond to the situation of displacement of millions of people, the European Commission on 4 March 2022 activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). It is an important step as it provides legal **pathways towards safety**. From the viewpoint of one's legal status, TPD foresees the obligation of Member States to provide the persons enjoying temporary protection with **residence permits** for the entire duration of the protection, guarantees for access to the **asylum procedure**, the right to **move to another EU country** before the issuance of a residence permit, and to **move freely in EU countries** (other than the Member State of residence) for 90 days within a 180-day period after a residence permit in the host EU country is issued. TPD's application has led towards swifter issuing of status confirmations and granting effective access to rights, as opposed to facing protracted waiting time for processing one's asylum application.

The TPD's mandatory protection applies to:

- Ukrainian nationals residing in Ukraine and their family members who have been displaced on or after 24 February; and
- stateless persons, and nationals of third countries who benefitted from international protection or equivalent national protection in Ukraine as well as their family members who had been residing in Ukraine before 24 February.

Since many third country nationals who were lawfully residing in Ukraine for other reasons than international protection (such as students) are not included in the scope of application of the TPD, EU Member States shall apply temporary protection or adequate protection under their national law to permanent residents of Ukraine who were in Ukraine prior to 24 February and are unable to return in safe and durable conditions to their countries of origin.

Indeed, the legality of the stay is of paramount importance and an essential factor that contributes to improve the resilience of the people to exploitation, human trafficking and abuse.

Those people who fled the war in Ukraine but remain **outside the temporary protection regime**, fall among the most vulnerable in addition to: women and girls, children (especially separated and unaccompanied children, and children in institutional care), non-Ukrainian nationals (including undocumented and stateless people who were living in Ukraine prior to the war), and groups who were marginalised and discriminated against prior to the war (such as disabled and elderly people, Roma, and LGBTQI+).

As of 17 August 2022, UNHCR reported 6.3 million refugees from Ukraine registered across Europe, while only 3.8 million were registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes. In many EU Member States, the difference remained within a 10 per cent margin. However, for example, in case of Romania, the number of registered refugees was 84,662 and the number of those registered for Temporary Protection (or similar national protection scheme) was 52,952. In Estonia these figures were 50,491 and 32,077, respectively; In Germany, 940,000 and 670,000, respectively.

The reasons for such a discrepancy are not entirely clear. According to the Police and Border Guard Board of Estonia, such difference can be due to several reasons. For one, impossibility of tracking the complete movement. Namely, following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Estonia restored entry checks on the border with Latvia and therefore has registered those leaving Ukraine that arrived either through Russia or Latvia. However, exit controls with Latvia, Finland and Sweden have not been introduced and hence it is possible that many of those that arrived in Estonia and declaring their intent to remain in Estonia, have nevertheless left Estonia. Second, the Police and Border Guard Board estimates that many do not register as they wish to return to Ukraine as soon as possible, while some may also think they do not need any services from the state. Third, a portion of Ukrainian citizens that had arrived to Estonia, had also other grounds to regulate their stay, mainly relocating to live with their family member already residing in Estonia.

In addition, lessons learnt from previous crises underpin also the following risks:

- TPD and the national provisions deriving from it are of a **temporary nature**, which means that they do not allow people to plan for or invest in their future in the long-term. Insecurity about the present and future poses a threat to the people, making them hopeless and vulnerable to various abuse;
- **Non-Ukrainians** who were legally residing in Ukraine with temporary permit have greater difficulties in acceding a legal status. While non-Ukrainian nationals who legally resided in Ukraine do fall under the TPD, recent data from the field suggests that in practice those without Ukrainian nationality seem less entitled to temporary protection. At the outset of the fleeing, other nationals got held up at the border or in other locations facing unclear procedures. These people could easily face irregular status in host countries;

- **Undocumented and stateless people and the Roma** are particularly vulnerable. Those without a proof of legal residence in Ukraine may need to apply for international protection, while there have already been concerns raised about hindrances in the access to protection for the Roma.

A number of countries have **expanded the TPD's protective scope** to other persons in need of international protection due to the war in Ukraine. For instance, according to the data collected by UNHCR, **Germany** extended the temporary protection to Ukrainian nationals who resided in Germany prior to the war and are unable to renew their residency permits because they no longer meet the relevant criteria. **Slovenia, Luxembourg, and Portugal** extended protection also to third-country nationals with short-term residence permits in Ukraine who are unable to return to their countries of origin. Ireland included Ukrainian nationals who were in Ireland before 24 February on short-stay visas, as well as those residing on the basis of other types of migratory permits, who can opt to either extend them or to avail of temporary protection when/if expired. Finland extended the protection to Ukrainian citizens unable to return to Ukraine due to the ongoing conflict as well as their family members, including also those previously residing in Finland, and third-country nationals and stateless persons who resided in Ukraine legally (whose safe and permanent return to the relevant country of origin is not possible). **Spain** expanded the protection to Ukrainian citizens who were residing in Spain and their family members, as well as to those irregularly in the country before 24 February, as well as third-country nationals who legally resided in Ukraine (who cannot return to their home countries). A number of countries are already showing a **great degree of flexibility** regarding standards for personal documentation for those fleeing the war. For instance, in **Ireland** persons fleeing Ukraine may present any identification documentation available. **Portugal** accepts any means of proof of identity while expired or unofficial documents do not lead to an automatic rejection of the request. In **Bulgaria**, if traditional identification documents are not available, any other official document that indicates identity are considered.

Access to labour market and vulnerabilities to human trafficking of people fleeing the war

The TPD granted the people fleeing the war in Ukraine the right of access to the labour market. However, as discussed above, in some hosting countries there appears to be a rather large discrepancy among those who have fled Ukraine for European countries and those registered for temporary protection.

Not being able to work legally in a host country often means that in order to secure means of subsistence, people seek opportunities in the informal market where any type of unregulated work may be accepted, further exposing already vulnerable displaced persons to exploitative recruiters who may also be traffickers.

The following factors need to be taken into consideration:

- A major obstacle for employment is the **knowledge of the language** of the receiving country, which limits the options of the labour market available to the displaced people, placing them mainly into low-skilled labour sector;

- Practice suggests that the **low-skilled migrant labour** is the segment that experiences the highest numbers of cases of exploitation and abuse. The states should be mindful about it and ensure recognition of professional skills, job matching procedures and access to decent work;
- Some receiving countries and particularly **hosting communities** experience economic challenges. A large group of displaced people can deepen the economic strain and influence negatively the community dynamics.

In addition to the above challenges, the host country also needs to consider the **role of Ukrainian diaspora**. It functions as a bridge between the displaced people and the host country, providing contextual knowledge to the newcomers. Diaspora becomes a source of support during the orientation and job-finding process, a mediator for the first contact with employers. The diaspora could provide the host country with additional insight about the labour engagement of the Ukrainian citizens and about potential problems related to exploitation and abuse.

On 2 June 2022, the **Network of Anti-Trafficking Coordinators of South East Europe** (NATC SEE) in organization by ICMPD in its role as the Network's Secretariat, gathered to discuss the impact of the Ukrainian crisis on human trafficking in the NATC SEE members (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia) and mitigating the trafficking risks amidst the mass displacement from Ukraine in the neighbouring countries. The discussions highlighted two key issues of relevance for this Policy Brief:

- Firstly, no potential or identified victims of trafficking among people fleeing the war in Ukraine were reported in the SEE region;
- Secondly, all the anti-trafficking coordinators did raise concern that **an increased vulnerability** to trafficking is expected to advance in the upcoming period due to **lack of access to the labour market** in the hosting countries.

Displaced children's vulnerability to human trafficking

In the context of crises, children are considered particularly vulnerable because of their age and development. The humanitarian situation, the legal residence and employment status of children's parents or other family members, together with the challenges faced by authorities in relation to, *inter alia*, safe accommodation, child protection and education also influences displaced children's vulnerability. The chaos of displacement poses risks for all children.

The international community has warned about the cases of **missing children**, fleeing the country on their own, sent by their parents to the border or being lost in the groups of people crowding the border-crossing points. Timely registration and identification of vulnerable children, particularly those unaccompanied or separated, is crucial to prevent situations of abuse.

A month after the start of the war, UNICEF alerted that some two million children had fled the Ukraine with (more than) another two million displaced internally. Reliable statistic on the number of **unaccompanied children** are not available yet due to methodological

inconsistencies between data collection mechanisms and the initial rapid development of the events that saw large numbers of people flee the war in Ukraine. Numerous reports continue to raise concern, including stories of unaccompanied children being picked up by strangers or a 'friend of a friend'; an absence of procedures to deal with these children when crossing the border of Ukraine, etc. Registering these children, obtaining information about adult family members in Ukraine or in other countries and the involvement of local child protection authorities to make referral to secure child-friendly and age appropriate facilities is a challenge for the first responders. Failing to identify and support these children exposes them to the severe danger of being groomed and abused by traffickers and other criminals. Specific focus is reported given to children from institutions in Ukraine (e.g. orphanages), and children at risk of trafficking and abduction. The European Commission is preparing dedicated Standard Operating Procedures for transfers of unaccompanied minors.

So has nothing been done to address the dangers of human trafficking?

Quite the opposite. The current crisis has triggered a few unprecedented actions, such as the application of TPD, and also a fast response from the international community and EU specifically regarding the risks of human trafficking.

On 28 March the **European Commission** presented a *10-Point Plan* for stronger European coordination on welcoming people fleeing the war against Ukraine, which among others, tasked the EU's Anti-Trafficking Coordinator to develop a shared anti-trafficking plan to address the risks of trafficking and support potential victims. On 11 May, the **EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator** introduced *A Common Anti-Trafficking Plan to address the risks of trafficking in human beings and support potential victims among those fleeing the war in Ukraine*. The Plan is articulated along five main objectives: strengthening awareness raising, reinforcing prevention, enhancing the law enforcement and judicial response, improving the early identification, support and protection of victims, and addressing the risks of trafficking in human beings in non-EU countries, especially Ukraine and Moldova. Importantly, besides giving recommendations for EU Member States, the Plan sets forth concrete actions with timelines for EC, its structures and agencies.

Europol's agents in frontline countries are supporting law enforcement authorities and border guards in collecting and assessing information to enhance the detection of the human trafficking crime. Europol has set up a Temporary Trafficking in Human Beings Task Management Group with frontline Member States, Ukraine and Moldova, to discuss the most recent information and issues in relation to the war in Ukraine. Europol runs monthly online meetings within the Working Group for Ukraine, which includes representatives of Europol, UNODC, Frontex, and Austria, Germany, Hungary, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Slovakia to address the human trafficking issues in connection with the war in Ukraine. **Eurojust** has disseminated an Information Note to all MS to raise awareness of their judicial authorities about human trafficking risks in the context of the war in Ukraine, encourage the authorities to open trafficking investigations when there are suspicions of exploitation of Ukrainian refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors, and to offer its assistance in these trafficking investigations to speed up judicial cooperation. On 14 June 2022, the

first informal meeting of the **focus group of specialised prosecutors** against trafficking in human beings gathered prosecutors and judges from the EU MS. Together with the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, the participants discussed how to enhance the judicial response to cases of human trafficking in relation to the war in Ukraine.

Similarly, the European Parliament's different structures have taken active steps, for instance, within the **Intergroup on Children's Rights**, the **Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality**, and the **Legal Affairs and Employment Committees**. The **Coordinator on Children's Rights** repeatedly stressed the risks faced by children escaping the conflict and launched common actions with the **European Network of Ombudspersons for Children**. Moreover, MEPs adopted a resolution, expressing their concerns about the increasing number of reports of human trafficking, sexual violence, exploitation, rape, and abuse of women and children fleeing the war in Ukraine.

UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict conducted an on-site visit to Lyiv and Kyiv in May and also visited Poland and Moldova, in light of concerns about the cross-border trafficking of Ukrainian women and children, including for the purposes of sexual exploitation and prostitution. This resulted in the signing of a F**ramework of Cooperation on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence** with the Government of Ukraine on 3 May. Among the Framework's five objectives is also addressing concerns related to conflict-driven trafficking in persons for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

The **OSCE** Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings on 9 March 2022 issued *Recommendations on the need to enhance anti-trafficking prevention amid mass migration flows*. On 4 May, the **Council of Europe** Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings issued a *Guidance Note on addressing the risks of trafficking in human beings related to the war in Ukraine and the ensuing humanitarian crisis*. As mentioned above, the **Network of Anti-Trafficking Coordinators of South East Europe** (NATC SEE) met on 2 June to discuss the impact of the Ukrainian crisis on human trafficking specifically in its members. That initiative is particularly relevant as NATC SEE involves countries that both are and aspire for EU membership, as well as countries that are on the frontlines of humanitarian response to the Ukraine crisis and those who are left out of the spotlight but do still deal with that war's aftermath.

The **Protection Cluster** in Ukraine established in May an Anti-Trafficking Task Force by which it created a platform to, among others, provide technical guidance, identify trends, gaps and priorities, formulate priorities and recommendations for Protection Cluster members, complement the Protection Cluster service mapping to integrate the existing services suitable for survivors to access in this crisis, establish referral and standard operating procedures. The Task Force meets fortnightly.

Finally, as co-chairs of **Interagency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons** (ICAT), ICMPD and UNODC have established an ICAT Policy Support Group on trafficking in persons in the context of the Ukraine crisis. Leveraging on the comparative advantages of its members, ICAT will use the Policy Support Group to collect, analyse and exchange relevant information that will be used to inform the development of policy guidance on human trafficking. The Group is meeting monthly, in the week after the Protection Cluster's Task Force meeting.

The brief overview above is merely a glimpse of main actions undertaken by the EU and key international organisations. Meanwhile, there are numbers of non-governmental organisations working daily on addressing the humanitarian crisis. Let us also be mindful that the above initiatives are happening against the background of already elaborate institutional anti-trafficking frameworks on national level of the EU Member States.

THE GENERAL BEARING FOR POLICY OPTIONS

To address the vulnerabilities, the strategies the authorities will develop, would need to:

Reduce the vulnerability of *individuals* as each individual situation is different with its own specific circumstances that create risks to trafficking. Here a survivor-inclusive and survivor-informed approach is important, as are gender- and child-sensitive approaches, supporting vulnerable individuals and groups, and establishing tools and mechanisms to ensure safe online-environment for children;

Work with the relevant *communities* to increase public awareness about the modalities used by the perpetrators and to ensure the community does not unknowingly contribute to the vulnerabilities to human trafficking. It will be valuable to assess, which communities are particularly at risk, also to work with the community-based and civil society organisations to understand the underlying cultural contexts and practices, and to ensure that all the services required for successful reintegration of trafficked persons are available;

Policy approach needs to include approaches on individual, community and systemic/ structural levels.

Change a number of *structural elements* to create an environment that does not favour human trafficking, including policies and legal frameworks to address the lack of opportunities for all members of the society, to address the challenges in sectors where human trafficking is particularly present, reinforce and build the capacity of stakeholders to identify trafficked persons, investigate and prosecute the offenders (including ensuring the link between national anti-trafficking and asylum systems), and strengthen data collection and analysis on human trafficking phenomenon.

What we know from the recent conflicts

The governments can draw on the valuable lessons gathered and analysed in course of a number of ICMPD research initiatives identifying the vulnerability patterns of people on the move (since the start of the war in Syria). Below we offer some of the key lessons learned from the empirical research to guide the governments on their way to tackle vulnerability and understand what drives the resilience of those on the move.

Personal factors are not in themselves sources of resilience or vulnerability to human trafficking. Rather, these personal factors (e.g. as age and gender) interact with contextual factors (in this particular case, for instance, the armed conflict) of resilience or vulnerability in specific ways to increase resilience or exacerbate vulnerability. Personal vulnerabilities and factors of resilience are relevant throughout the journey, from the pre-departure phase in the country of origin or former residence to settling in the intended final destination.

Children are vulnerable to trafficking and other abuses per se, because of their lack of life experience. Age interacts with gender, making girls, boys, women or men particularly resilient or particularly vulnerable, depending on the context and situation.

Women and girls are at a higher risk of sex trafficking in particular, as well as related abuses such as 'survival sex' (the exchange of sex for a good or service that the person needs) and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Men and boys are generally considered more resilient, yet they are also exposed to specific vulnerabilities and gendered expectations. Importantly, in some cases the presumption of their resilience may in fact exacerbate their vulnerabilities.

Travelling in the company of one or both parents, is a key source of resilience for a child. Nevertheless, three crucial issues can be detrimental to the resilience of children travelling with parents. Firstly, children may appear to be travelling with their parents or family members, but in fact this is not the case. Secondly, a child's parent or parents may be the ones who are abusing and/or exploiting them. Finally, children may become separated from their parents along the journey. In the context of war in Ukraine, it can be presumed that the majority of unaccompanied children are not orphans, but rather have become separated from their parents or guardians at some stage, either on departure from their country of origin or during the journey.

Children may be sent by their parents to travel alone. While this may cause the child to be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, because of the risks of the journey, if the children's family subsequently travel and reunite with them, this boosts their resilience as they can once again enjoy parental care.

Women and children are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, due to gender- and child-specific risks. Women travelling with their children but without an adult male companion – which due to military mobilisation in force in Ukraine most often is the case - are particularly vulnerable. While the majority of those fleeing the war in Ukraine are women and children, it is still important to keep in mind the following lesson learned in case the structure of those fleeing was to change. Women and children may also be at risk from some of the men they are travelling with, and therefore seek protection from other men, including family members. If the men whom they seek protection from protect them, then this is a source of resilience. On the other hand, some women and girls are abused or exploited by men whom they sought out for protection.

Access to education for children and vocational training for adults. Access to education is one of the most important resilience factors to human trafficking for children. For adults, vocational training is a specific factor of resilience, both during the course of the training itself, as a meaningful activity, and as a way of subsequently integrating people into the labour market. Because economic vulnerabilities are one of the key factors making people more prone to trafficking and related abuses, accessing decent employment in a destination country is a crucial factor of resilience.

Lack of options created by restrictions to access to the labour market, and, to a lesser extent, limited opportunities in the labour market for those who do have access, is detrimental to financial and psychological resilience. In some cases, it may lead people to accept exploitative work due to the lack of alternatives.

Effective access to information about their situation and about their options when people arrive in a destination context, in a format they understand, is a crucial aspect of resilience to trafficking and other abuses. People need to know what stage their application for protection is at, how long they will stay at an accommodation centre and what their legal options are, otherwise, due to frustration and uncertainty people may to look for alternative, irregular options. An important aspect of access to information is the availability of translation services and cultural mediators to ensure effective communication and build trust between national authorities and people on the move.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE VULNERABILITY TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING OF THOSE FLEEING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Taking into account the vast knowledge base that has formed over the past two decades regarding what constitutes a successful anti-trafficking response, specifically informed by the lessons learned from previous conflicts and guided by the information of the incidence of human trafficking in the context of this ongoing war in Ukraine, the governments of the countries faced with the influx of people that fled the war, need to consider the following set of recommendations as the essential minimum to avoid that human trafficking will become a crisis within a crisis.

- **Ensure continuous dissemination of information** about potential safety risks, exploitation and human trafficking among the authorities responsible for the first contact - the personnel of the reception centres, border and local police structures, officers, NGOs, volunteer's networks and among the arriving persons. Make information available (including in Ukrainian and Russian) about registration, helplines and support services available to refugees.

Lessons learned from previous conflict situations provide solid guidance for actions needed now

- **Ensure that national legislation and regulations are coordinated and prepared to timely register and grant temporary protection to people fleeing the war in Ukraine.** Prepare instructions and road maps/standard operating procedures to facilitate the work of different institutions involved in the process and monitor the capacity of the state administration to process the applications. In cases of excessive workload, ensure additional human, technical and/or financial support. Consider expanding the scope of the temporary protection status to all people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Provide specialist support across the full range of needs of the refugees, including psychosocial and trauma care.
- **Prepare the national anti-trafficking mechanisms** (National Referral Mechanisms or equivalent systems) for identification of trafficking cases among displaced population. Establish early identification mechanisms at borders and/or reception centres (depending on the specific situation in the particular host country). Provide training and capacity development to key first line responders to enable them to identify possible human trafficking cases and support the presumed trafficked persons. Vetting of volunteers and service providers (e.g. drivers) is strongly advised as a good practice.

- **Support the organisations** that provide for the immediate and long-term needs of trafficked people. When opening investigations, provide assistance to the identified victims to ensure their adequate access to justice through legal aid and adequate information in the language they can understand.
- **Ensure access to language and vocational courses** that could be attended in parallel with the employment. Promote women's access to the labour market, particularly in a situation where women are heads of households by introducing training programmes.
- **Engage with the public and the hosting communities to disseminate information** about possible situations of abuse, exploitation and trafficking. Provide hotline numbers and appoint authorities who could be signalled.
- **Work closely with the Ukrainian diaspora** in the receiving country in order to obtain access to vulnerable groups. Monitor situations and signals for potential exploitation and abuse.
- **Assess the situation in the host communities** (especially those with larger displaced population and/or with seriously challenged economies) and include those that are vulnerable in the humanitarian assistance and initiatives directed towards displaced people. Such process will also contribute to improving relations between displaced people and the local residents of the receiving community.
- **Actively identify violations of workers' rights.** The perpetrators should be held responsible by law enforcement agencies, requiring the development and use of indicators, and training programmes for labour inspectors and law enforcement agencies on trafficking for labour exploitation. Labour inspectors should have sufficient resources to carry out inspections of workplaces, particularly in sectors where there are indications of labour exploitation and trafficking.
- **Establish a system for registration of unaccompanied and separated children.** Provide age-appropriate protection and support services: safe child-friendly accommodation facilities (family environment if possible), accurate and fair age-assessment of unaccompanied and separated children, immediate appointment of a legal guardian to represent child's best interest, emotional support adequate to their age, immediate access to education. Implement ongoing monitoring of the cases.
- **Establish and implement cooperation procedures between countries** to identify, trace and reunite unaccompanied, separated or missing children with their family members.
- **Facilitate the children's access to regular schooling** and other child protection measures in order to grant them their basic right to education and render them less likely to become involved in child labour or begging. Children's parents should also be supported in order to have methods or income generation that do not involve their children.
- **Monitor the developments in the human trafficking field in the country.** Particular attention to be placed on monitoring the situation concerning Ukrainian refugees – the incidence of human trafficking identified among them, labour engagements,

housing, health care, etc. (for those with special protection status and those without) and the education and care of Ukrainian children, including those residing without parental supervision, also to understand to which extent the Ukrainian diaspora is engaged with the newly arrived people (link-up between the central/provincial/local governments and the Ukrainian diaspora to engage better and monitor the situation).

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THE WAR IN UKRAINE: POST-WAR SCENARIOS AND MIGRATION REPERCUSSIONS

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June 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February has resulted in the displacement of more than 14 million people, representing one quarter to one third of the entire population. Up to two thirds have been displaced internally with another 6 million people fleeing to neighbouring countries, mostly to the EU, but also Russia and Turkey. As of late March, following the withdrawal of Russia's forces from the north and northeast, people also began returning. This Policy Brief first develops six scenarios of the outcome of the war. Second, it identifies key drivers of forced migration as well as the opportunity/constraints structure including pre-war migration networks and migration aspirations that influence migration decisions among displaced persons from Ukraine. Third, it suggests six post-war migration scenarios investigating the propensity for people to remain in their current host countries or return to Ukraine. The resulting scenarios suggest that fewer than 1.65 million to 21 million people will stay in host countries. The most probable scenario suggests that around 2.9 million will remain in destination countries, and could be joined by 580,000 family members. Any scenario, however, would be affected and can be manipulated by respective policy measures.

The latest data cited in the document stems from May 2022.

CURRENT SITUATION

On 24 February, Russia invaded Ukraine. The Russian army targets the more densely populated east of Ukraine: four of the five largest cities (Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, and Odesa), the industrial and economic heartlands of Ukraine, the entire coast with the two key ports (Mariupol, Odesa) and most international airports. The invasion and subsequent prolonged fighting resulted in widespread destruction of residential areas, various types of infrastructure, including the critical ones, as well as the closure of businesses with the subsequent loss of income of the population[1]. According to UNDP, from 53.8% and up to 90.5% "could be facing poverty and vulnerability to poverty". Moreover, "Ukraine's economic ruin is one of the war's important, if less visible, outcomes". Significant parts of Ukraine could be destroyed, large parts of the economy devastated, large parts of society will be torn apart, and many people will almost certainly be traumatised and possibly demoralised.

By 15 May, 14.2 million Ukrainians have been displaced: 8 million internally as IOM claims, though only 1 million were registered, and 6.2 million internationally.

By 15 May, 14.2 million Ukrainians have been displaced: 8 million internally as IOM claims, though only 1 million were registered, and 6.2 million internationally. The EU received 5.3 million (primarily Poland, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia), Moldova – 396.000, Russia - 850.000 (however, many were rather deported, plus another 105.000 who were evacuated, partly involuntarily from occupied Donetsk and Luhansk in the week before the invasion), Turkey – over 70.000 and Belarus – 27.000[2]. Hence, 85% of the internationally displaced fled to the EU and 13.7% to Russia (half as many as in 2014).

From the end of week two, displaced Ukrainians also began arriving in countries not bordering Ukraine. By 11 April, the EU member states located further from the border with Ukraine registered or reported some 1.35 million persons (see Table 1). Hence, at least 32.4% of all arrivals in the EU's peripheral member states travelled onward. By mid-May this share had already increased to 45%. Germany, the Czech Republic and Spain reported the largest numbers. 65% of the Ukrainians arriving in Germany first arrived in Poland. Several sources reported that some host countries would have much higher capacities; for example, France accepted 30.000 but could host 100.000. The numbers are expected to increase in accordance with the existing migration networks in many countries and due to previous migration experiences of Ukrainians. To date, destinations are chosen based on self-selection and the move is self-organised; no compulsory dispersal took place.

In contrast, in six weeks, 67.6% of displaced persons still stayed in the countries bordering Ukraine, which may also signal return aspirations. Indeed, there are increasing reports of return migration, notably since the withdrawal of the Russian troops from the northeast at the end of March 2022, whilst an attack on Odesa was no longer imminent. By 13 April, up to 870.000 are reported to have returned, 1.26 million by mid-May, though this number may well include pre-war migrants, for instance, men joining the defence efforts as well as temporary visits back home.

By mid-May, the different data sources conflate stocks and flows, i.e. arrival and residence, and net migration is obscured. In most EU member states and Moldova, there are only statistics on arrivals of Ukrainians in the EU but not on stays, while net migration figures are not available. For example, Poland registered 2.8 million arrivals whilst only 846.000 million ID numbers were issued by 13 April. Only around 90.000 out of 466.000 arrivals in Hungary applied for some kind of permit. Most arriving persons move on to other countries, and authorities are criticised for inflating numbers. Since 2.4 million have meanwhile registered in other EU and EFTA countries and Turkey, accordingly there will be fewer Ukrainians in the EU member states bordering Ukraine and Moldova, reaching approximately 1.9 million. Due to the visa-free travel, Ukrainians have not always registered in their (temporary) host countries. Moreover, because of frequent onward migration, many Ukrainians could have been double-counted, in particular at the beginning of the crisis upon arrival in the EU or another transit or destination country. Finally, returns as well as repeated journeys need to be deducted from the total number of arrivals.

POST-WAR SCENARIOS

There are signs that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is part of a broader long-term plan. The invasion has been prepared for at least one year, since March 2021, when Russia held first large-scale military exercises to the east of Ukraine; at that occasion, Russia already set up the infrastructure for an invasion. The invasion follows from the previous 2014 Russian occupation of Crimea and the intervention in eastern Ukraine and the subsequent occupation of roughly one third of the Donetsk and Luhansk provinces. By 2020, Russia had finally completed the modernisation of its armed forced, though rearmament continues; this so-called New Look reform began after the 2008 war against Georgia. In retrospect, the annexation of Crimea turns out to be a strategic precondition for the current invasion of Ukraine because it facilitates a two-pronged attack from north and south to cut the country in half and encircle the Ukrainian army in the Donbas.

Simultaneously, Ukraine, too, modernised its army, expanded its personnel to 255.000 active-duty soldiers and 900.000 reservists and was supplied by the west with strategic know-how, arms and training. However, Ukraine did not anticipate the invasion and thus did not mobilise its reserves or prepare adequate defences in the north, northeast and south of the country.

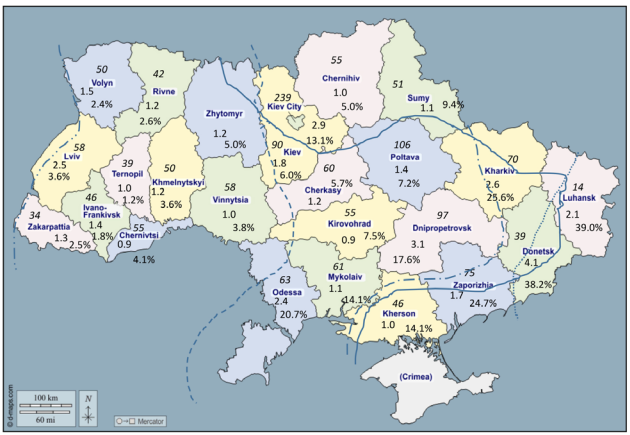
Given the far-reaching Russian policy goals and the present-day limited military success, the tension in the region will likely continue for several years or even decades.

At several occasions, Russia demonstrated some key strategic aims, notably, pushing back NATO in Eastern Europe, and installing a pro-Russian regime in Ukraine. Publications that are more recent suggest a more radical plan with the complete eradication of Ukraine, its culture and people. It is not clear what economic plans Russia has for Ukraine and whether this has changed over the past weeks against the unexpected Ukrainian resistance. With the plan for quick victory fading and Russian losses becoming significant, Russia seems to aim at destroying the economy and infrastructure as well as the social structure and depopulate the territories it is targeting. Given the far-reaching Russian policy goals and the present-day limited military success, the tension in the region will likely continue for several years or even decades.

Six possible post-war scenarios

The scenarios developed below and the assessment of their probability is based on the assumption that Russia will not give up its plan easily. Various sources (RUSI, ISPK, ISW, IM, FPRI, Foreign Affairs, McKinsey, The Guardian, BBC) offer various scenarios; from these, six main types of possible outcomes of the war become apparent (also see Map 1). Four main dimensions are considered: duration of the fighting, the proportion of Ukraine that would be occupied or controlled (in a repressive and authoritarian fashion) by Russia or respectively remain sovereign, the level of destruction and security situation in the various territories and the reconstruction efforts including economic recovery.

Map 1: Map of Ukraine with oblasts and population in million, rounded (mio.); lines indicating scenarios of outcome of war; oblasts GRP per capita rounded in 100.000 UAH (2017), and percentage of ethnic Russians (2001)



Legend: battle zone, scenario 2; scenario 3; scenario 4; scenarios 5 and 6

Source: Free Map from D-Maps.com and additional features added by the author. The lines indicate the various scenarios depending on the outcome of the war. Numbers above the name of Oblast indicate GRP (Ukraine's average GRP is 70.000.000 UAH/2.221.390,51 Euro), numbers below the name of Oblast indicate the population in million, and percentage refers to the proportion of people identifying themselves as Russian in the last 2001 census.

1. The war will continue until autumn/winter ending with a defeat of Russia (e.g. FPIR). Russia withdraws its troops and also gives up the territory occupied or annexed in 2014 (status quo before 2014). Ukraine remains a sovereign country. However, large proportions of territory within 100 kilometres of the Russian border will be ravaged by war, military and civilian casualties will be limited whilst the rest of the country is largely intact. The security situation in all parts of Ukraine will be stable. A large amount of western aid will be made available to rebuild the country; economic recovery is fast.

This scenario is unlikely to be achieved without western intervention in the foreseeable future.

2. The war will continue until autumn/winter 2022. The Russian army will be pushed back and/or largely withdraws its troops. No or only small parts of Ukraine, in addition to Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk will be occupied, ruled or determined by Russia (status quo after 2014). Most parts of Ukraine remain sovereign. However, large proportions of territory within 100 kilometres of the Russian border will be ravaged by war, military and civilian casualties will be limited whilst the rest of the country is largely intact. In the Russian occupied parts, the security situation will be precarious. All high gross regional product (GRP) provinces will remain sovereign. A large amount of western aid will be made available to rebuild the country; economic recovery in the government-controlled territory is fast.

This scenario is a possibility (e.g. ISW), though unlikely as it would mean that Russia fails to achieve any of its aims.

3. The war will continue until autumn/winter 2022. Russia will occupy a stretch of Ukraine within 100 kilometres of the Russian border including the entire oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk, possibly parts of Kharkiv oblasts and a land bridge between Russia and Crimea including the oblasts of Zaporizhia and Kherson. Nevertheless, the majority of the country remains sovereign. However, large proportions of territory within 100 kilometres of the Russian border will be ravaged by war, military and civilian casualties will still be limited whilst the rest of the country is largely intact. This results in yet another frozen conflict. In the Russian occupied parts, the security situation will be precarious. Two high GRP provinces will be lost to Russia diminishing the country's absorption capacity of IDPs. Significant western aid will be made available to rebuild the sovereign parts of the country; economic recovery is fast. Also, in the occupied parts, some limited reconstruction will take place.

This scenario (e.g. RUSI, IM, Globsec, FPIR) reflects Russia's minimum aims of gaining full control of Donetsk and Luhansk and overcoming the isolation of Crimea, which might be achievable given the limits of Russian resources and is thus a realistic possibility.

4. The war will continue until winter 2022 or summer 2023, Russia occupies large parts of Ukraine east of the line Kyiv-Mykolaiv. A sub-scenario (4.1) would be the occupation of the entire southern coast including the ports of Odesa cutting sovereign Ukraine from the Black Sea and thus almost all international trade. Hence, most large cities, most industries, infrastructures and economic hubs and most natural resources come under Russian control. The country will be divided with only a small part of it remaining sovereign. Whilst some guerrilla activities and civil disobedience continues in the occupied territory, Russia enforces a repressive

regime and persecutes Ukrainian government officials and pro-Ukrainian actors. In the Russian occupied parts, the security situation will be precarious. Only the smaller western parts of Ukraine remain sovereign. Large proportions of territory including most major cities will be ravaged by war, military and civilian casualties will be high whilst only the west of the country is largely intact. Only below average GRP provinces with limited IDP absorption capacity remain sovereign severely diminishing the country's absorption capacity of IDPs. Western aid only benefits unoccupied western Ukraine; however, it remains structurally and economically weak. Meanwhile, reconstruction in the occupied parts will be limited to some strategic and highly visible locations.

This scenario is a possibility (e.g. IM) but looks increasingly less likely as Russia lacks resources for sustaining the war and a sustained occupation of such a vast territory with a largely hostile population.

5. The war will continue until winter 2022 or summer 2023. Russia takes the capital, the Ukrainian army will be defeated affecting 0.5 to 1 million soldiers and volunteers, the government capitulates, most fighting ceases and Russia installs a pro-Russian administration and de-facto controls the whole of Ukraine. Some guerrilla activities and civil disobedience continue, Russia enforces a repressive regime and persecutes Ukrainian government officials and pro-Ukrainian actors. For a long period, the security situation will be precarious in the entire country. Most major cities will be ravaged by war, military and civilian casualties will be very high whilst only the west of the country is largely intact. Only some Western aid is delivered but is limited to humanitarian aid. Reconstructions begin but are slow. Significant parts of the economy will not recover in the near future.

This scenario is a possibility (e.g. IM) but less realistic, notably because Russian resources are limited whereas Ukrainian resistance continues to receive western military aid and is stiff and people will not give in to Russian ruling, least so in the west.

6. The war will become protracted similar to the situation in Syria; Russia continues attacking, bombing and shelling at the current intensity the parts of Ukraine that are still under government control, fighting continues along the frontline and there will be guerrilla fighting in the occupied territories. In the Russian occupied territories, repression is widespread and violent. Most major cities will be ravaged by war, military and civilian casualties will be very high. Reconstruction is stalled, the economy remains weak and the security situation remains precarious in most parts of the country.

This scenario (e.g. IM, Foreign Affairs, FPIR, BBC) is unrealistic as neither the Russian side nor the Ukrainian side has the resources for affording a protracted war.

A couple of key features can be identified: Notably, the economically structurally weak provinces in the west host the most IDPs, whereas the structurally strong provinces in the south-east except for Donetsk and Luhansk are hardest hit by the invasion. Moreover, in the regions and cities affected by the fighting, the level of destruction will be widespread. Russia seems to lack resources for sustaining a long war, full control and occupation. Whereas Ukrainian resistance will continue so that the stability and security situation in the occupied territories will remain precarious. Economic support for all

parts not under Russian control will be substantial. However, "Putin will remain dangerous in the long run" and the geopolitical situation will remain unstable though "the days of Putin's regime are numbered" (Institut Montaigne).

MIGRATION SCENARIOS

To develop migration scenarios, this Policy Brief considers, first, the pre-war situation, notably the existing migration networks and the migration aspirations of Ukrainians. Second, key drivers or causes of forced migration are identified and the scope for individual and collective decision-making, in other words, the human agency discussed. Third, the resilience of the current host countries for Ukrainian displaced persons is considered. On that basis, six migration scenarios are developed corresponding to the six scenarios on the outcome of the war.

Conditions and drivers

Before the outbreak of the war and thus the outset of forced migration from Ukraine there were a little over 2 million registered Ukrainians in the EU, EFTA and Turkey (Table 1). To this, one needs to add some level of irregular immigrants. This represents a vast migration network, within which Ukrainian displaced persons migrate and which determines the choice of destination.

Table 1: Ukrainian-born residents and refugees in the EU, EFTA and Turkey (rounded), 2020, 2021, resp. 2022 (11/4/2022)

Country	Pre-war immigrants	Registered refugees	Country	Pre-war immigrants	Registered refugees
Poland	>1,100,000 (2018)*	846,000******* 1.5+ mio. realistic	Denmark	12,000	24,000
Germany	>159,000	360,000******	Bulgaria	12,000	73,000
Czechia	137,000	272,000+	Slovakia	12,000	
Spain	102,000 (2019)	110,000	Switzerland	11,000	26,000
Hungary	72,000	90,000 (31/3)	Sweden	11,000	29,000
Romania	48,000	n/a	Norway	6,000	11,000
Italy	41,000	89,000	Belgium	3,600	31,000
France	32,000	30,000	Netherlands	3,200	27,000
Turkey	30,000	68,000+	Finland	3,200	9,000+
Portugal	29,000 (2020)**	24,000	Ireland	3,000 (2016) *****	21,000
Lithuania	26,000	41,900	Slovenia	2,800	8,000
Estonia	25,000	29,000	Luxemburg	1,600	4,000
United Kingdom	18,000 (2021)***	12,000	Iceland	400	600
Austria	15,000	51,000	Cyprus	n.a.	15,000
Greece	15,000****	18,000	Croatia	n.a.	12,600

Source: Eurostat; * Review of World Economics (only labour migrants) ; ** Portuguese American Journal; *** Statistika; **** ELIAMEP 2015; *****Ireland Examiner; ****** Bundesministerium des Inneren, (19/4/22, 313,000 on 11/4); ******* 13/4/22

Before the war, migration aspirations among Ukrainians were high though decreasing. According to the findings of the FP7 project Eumagine, in 2012 around 49% of all Ukrainians of working age in four different areas in the East, West, Centre and the capital aspired to migrate. In the meantime, the Delmi report suggests that some 26% held migration aspirations in the period 2006-2021. The most attractive countries or regions included the EU (47%), the US (15%), Russia (13%) and Canada (6%). Within the EU, the most stated aspired destinations are Germany (35.6%), Poland (15.4%), Italy (10.9%), France (7.3%), the Czech Republic (7%) and Spain (5.3%). However, migration aspirations need to be treated with caution; notably, the first Gallup survey suggests that only 3% of those who have migration aspirations finally prepare for migration.

The key drivers and decision-making processes of forced migration are distinctly different from drivers of voluntary migration. The latter group leaves by choice, in an orderly fashion and prepares in advance to seek education, employment, business and love abroad, either short or long-term. Meanwhile, displaced persons and refugees, compelled by force, violence, persecution or war, flee unprepared and in a disorderly manner, thereby leaving most of their possessions and oftentimes necessary documents behind. For this reason, it can be assumed that their return aspirations are high. However, in the situation of protracted displacement, displaced persons also consider drivers typical for voluntary migration, and relocate to other countries as denoted by the concept of secondary migration.

The case of persons displaced from Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014 can help to develop migration scenarios. At the time, only some 18%-20% IDPs returned to the occupied territories, while almost all remaining IDPs resettled within Ukraine and half of them in the government-controlled part of the occupied provinces near the place from where they were displaced.

In the current situation, there are only few surveys that provide insights on return aspirations. A Ukrainian survey suggests that 93% of internally displaced Ukrainians wish to return. An IOM survey found that 80% of Ukrainian refugees in Poland aspire to return, 5% - aspire to stay and 4% - aspire moving to another country. Meanwhile, the majority of Ukrainian refugees in Germany (42%) wish to stay, with only 32% willing to return. Moreover, in the case of Germany, the desire to stay is highest among single men (50%), whereas the desire to return is more widespread among the elderly (age 60+) and women with children (44% and 33% respectively). This implies that the further Ukrainians fled from the war zone the less likely is their aspiration to return. It has been observed, that the equivalent of 13.4% of all Ukrainian nationals in the EU or 19.3% of Ukrainian refugees have returned within seven weeks since the beginning of the war and as soon as fighting ceased in some parts of the country. Furthermore, Ukrainians with the aspiration to stay in the current host country are likely to develop aspirations for family reunification. In Germany, women with children represent around half of the people who fled the war; of these, 41% aspires to stay. This group is most likely to have left husbands behind and is thus most likely to aspire family reunification.

However, the final behaviour in the current conflict will be determined by a range of macro-level and micro-level drivers:

(a) the duration of the war (the longer the war lasts, the less likely people are to return);

(b) the scope of the destruction; notably the loss of the home in Ukraine (the higher the level of destruction is, the lower are the chances for people to return);

(c) the political situation in Ukraine (which parts will be occupied, ruled by Russia and which parts will be free) (people are less likely to return to an occupied territory);

(d) the Gross Regional Product (GRP) of the free provinces (this contributes to the absorption capacity of IDPs);

(e) the economic outlook of Ukraine including the reconstruction efforts and speed thereof (people are less likely to return to poverty and more likely to return if there is a reconstruction boom maybe even similar to a Marshall plan for Ukraine);

(f) the family status and whereabouts of other family members, notably forced separation from family members, loss of close family members in the war, such as husbands, wives, children, parents etc. (people are less like to return if they have lost core family members, notably husbands, wives and parents);

(g) ethnicity (ethnic Ukrainians are less likely to return to Russian occupied or controlled territory, not the least due to fear of persecution);

(h) the duration of stay in the EU (the longer people stay in the EU the less likely return is a realistic option);

(i) their legal status in the EU and the related political situation (the less stable their status is the more likely they are to return);

(j) the integration in the host community, city and country, notably with regards to the labour market, housing market, education system and language acquisition (the better people and their children are integrated, the less likely they are to return);

(k) the need to generate remittances for family members still in Ukraine (the greater the need to generate remittances for those left behind in Ukraine is, the less likely they are to return);

(l) the perceptions of migration and perceptions of Ukraine before the war (the more critical their perceptions of Ukraine and the more positive their perceptions of the host country are, the less likely they are to return);

(m) the perception of Ukraine after the war (the more critical their perception of Ukraine after the war is, the less likely they are to return); and

(n) the perception of life in the EU (the more positive they are about life in the host country the more likely they are to stay).

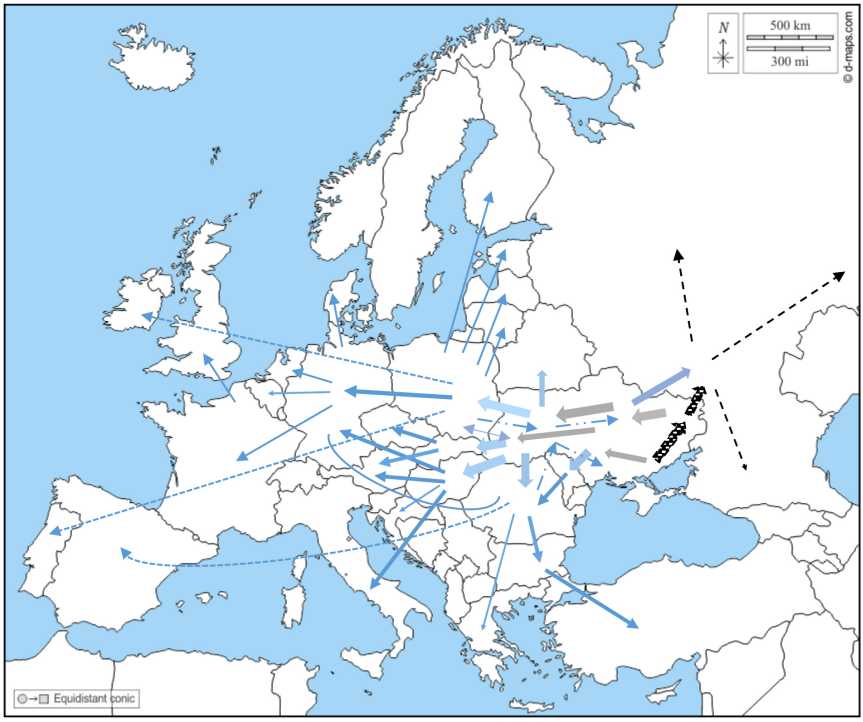
In social terms, there are three options possible: 1) remaining in the current host country; this includes possible reunification with family members still in Ukraine; 2) returning and reintegrating to the country of origin, either to the place of origin or elsewhere; 3) or resettlement to a third country within the EU or beyond. To some extent, this is congruent with the politically defined durable solutions, notably return, local integration or resettlement to a third country.

The legal situation represents an important driver of migration. It will be decisive whether the EU's temporary protection directive is implemented in a restrictive or generous fashion; for instance, whether the recognition of skills and certificates will be simplified to actually enter the labour market. Another factor is whether temporary protection will expire, whether Ukrainians are expected to return and to what extent and by what means return will be enforced. In the case of protracted displacement, durable solutions, notably local integration, become inevitable. Ultimately, the outcome of the individual's decision will be determined by the balance between human agency, the aspirations of the displaced Ukrainians and structure i.e. the solution(s) offered by the host countries.

In the case of protracted displacement, durable solutions, notably local integration, become inevitable.

Finally, there are only a few signs that suggest that resilience among the countries hosting Ukrainian displaced persons is fading. All EU host countries experience population ageing and potentially shrinking populations. Furthermore, key host countries such as Poland lost significant proportions of their populations due to emigration. All host countries currently enjoy economic growth and all report a significant number of job vacancies. In addition, to date, no country reported unrest or conflict due to the inflow of Ukrainians.

Map 2. The observed dynamics of migration from and to Ukraine in 2022



Legend: Internal migration: ; primary flight: ; major secondary onward migration/overland:
Minor secondary onward migration: ; onward migration/air: ;
major deportations: ; onward deportation: ; return migration: ; transnational movements:

POST-WAR MIGRATION SCENARIOS

According to the scenarios of the outcome of the invasion and taking into account the drivers of forced migration, six scenarios of post-war migration are possible:

1. No part of Ukraine is occupied by Russia, some Eastern parts are destroyed. The overwhelming majority, up to 93% of IDPs as the Rating Group survey suggests will return. Only a small proportion may opt not to return, notably because their homes are destroyed. Of the international refugees, 20% to 50% - depending on whether they are in a country bordering Ukraine or another EU member state - may take the opportunity to realise their pre-existing or newly developed migration aspirations. This means that 550.000 may remain in the peripheral EU countries and 824.000 - in other EU member states. However, migration aspirations will be diminishing with Ukraine's economic recovery and growth and potentially even with the EU membership. Of those aspiring to stay in the EU, 20% or more will pursue family reunification attracting at least another 275.000 persons. As a result, less than 1.65 million Ukrainians would settle in the EU, a trend decreasing.

2. No or small additional parts of Ukraine are occupied apart from already occupied Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea. However, some parts of eastern Ukraine are devastated. As above, the majority of currently displaced persons would return though 1.65 million or more Ukrainians would settle in the EU.

3. Russia occupies some parts of Kharkiv province, the remainder of Donetsk and Luhansk and the provinces forming a land bridge between Russia and Crimea. This would affect 7.9 million people of whom 4.5 million, but possibly more, would be displaced. Of these, 1.44 million would flee to the EU. As of April 2022, an additional 7.2 million were displaced who would no longer be affected by the occupation. Of these, around 2.2 million are in the EU, of which 1.4 million are in the peripheral and 720.000 in other EU MS, of which 484.000 and 497.000 aspire staying in the peripheral and other EU MS respectively. Under this scenario, around 2.9 million could stay in the EU, 20% would aspire family reunification and thus could be joined by 580.000 family members. Therefore, a total of 3.48 million Ukrainians could settle in the EU longer term.

4. This scenario largely reflects the situation as of 31 March before Russia withdrew from Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumi provinces. In this case, 21.3 to 24.8 million Ukrainians (the latter including Mykolaiv and Odesa) would be or would have been affected. Of these, 12 to 14 million would be displaced, 4.84 million would become international refugees, and 4.5 million would be in the EU. Of the latter, only 563.000 could return to occupied territory. Of the remainder, 20% would aspire for family reunification bringing in at least another 900.000 Ukrainians. Thus, the total number of Ukrainian refugees in the EU increases to 4.8 million.

5. The entire territory of Ukraine comes under Russian control; most parts are directly occupied, whilst the west is ruled by a pro-Russian puppet regime. This affects the entire population of Ukraine, 37 million people. It can be expected that 20.9 million will aspire to flee the country. The figure can also be higher because the western part of Ukraine is distinctly less Russian than the Donbas region, which saw 56.5%

of its population flee in 2014. This also includes the army and territorial defence personnel amounting to 0.5-1 million men and women. However, up to 10% or 2.2 million people, the most resilient and those more tolerant towards the Russian ruling, will also return. Hence, more than 18.8 million Ukrainians could seek a new home abroad. Due to continuous guerrilla warfare and occasional fighting, persecution and precarious economic situation, annually several ten thousand Ukrainians will seek refuge in the EU.

6. The last scenario is similar to scenario 5 but very few Ukrainians will have the aspiration to return.

Table 2: Overview migration scenarios, Ukrainians remaining in the EU.

Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4	Scenario 5	Scenario 6
<1.65 mio.	>1.65 mio.	3.48 mio.	4.8 mio.	18.8 mio.	>21 mio.

The above scenarios can be compared with two other cases: Yugoslavia in the 1990s and Syria in the 2010s. During the wars in the former Yugoslavia (1992-1995 and 1998-1999), 3.4 million out of 24 million population were displaced: 1.3 million represented Bosnian IDPs, 500.000 were refugees in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, 700.000 refugees in the EU, and 690.000 from Kosovo. Since then, the hostilities have ceased, the state building was completed and the countries and economies largely recovered. Ten years later, there were only 296.000 refugees and IDPs. Germany hosted 700,000 refugees (500,000 from the former Yugoslavia and 200.000 from Kosovo). Initially, refugees were granted the right to work and the free choice of residence, although family reunification was restricted and thus insignificant. As of 1997, return policies were developed and enforced resulting in the return of up to 80% within 2-3 years.

In **Syria**, violence continues since the outbreak of the war in 2011 until the present day. Large parts of many cities are destroyed (Aleppo 33%, Damascus 24%, Homs 13%, Raqqa 12%, Hama 10%; data for 2017), the repressive Assad regime remains in power and the reconstruction is stalled. Over 12.6 million continue to be displaced (5.7 million refugees and 6.9 million IDPs), 58.4% of the total population of 21.4 million (2010). Of these, 70% hope to return but very few did. This demonstrates that under adverse conditions (persecution, violence, economic hardship) and even despite political pressure (as in Lebanon and partly also Turkey) return rates are very low. Germany hosts 660.000 Syrian refugees, who attracted another 140.000 persons via family reunification, hence roughly another 21%, which is similar to the estimate of the family reunification potential of Ukrainians. Only about 1.000 have returned.

In the case of **Ukraine**, the proportion of people aspiring to flee may increase depending on the duration of the war, the size of occupied territories, the level of destruction, the loss of human lives, the degree of repressions by the occupation regime, the number of IDPs in government-controlled territories, the difficulty in terms of provisioning and economic situation of occupied territories. The greater the listed factors are the higher will be the proportion of Ukrainians seeking shelter abroad and the lower the proportion of those aspiring to return. The above calculations take into account the war of 2014 and

its patterns of displacement, where 56.6% were displaced permanently and only 12.5% of all displaced returned to occupied territory. In the current situation, some 32% of all displaced persons have already fled abroad, but this figure could increase significantly. Accordingly, the figures in the scenarios 4, 5 and 6 could also increase significantly. By the time of writing, a combination of scenarios 2 and 3 seemed most likely.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Under any scenario, a significant number of Ukrainian displaced persons, from 1.65 million to over 21 million, will be settling in the EU more or less permanently. A figure of around 2.5 to 3.5 million Ukrainians including 400,000 to 600,000 joining family members seems rather realistic. However, the lack of language proficiency, protracted improvised housing arrangements and practical problems in entering the labour market as well as sentiments will also drive significant return migration. Meanwhile, current mobility patterns facilitated by available transportation and easy border crossing suggest that migration between Ukraine and the EU increasingly features transnational patterns meaning that people are not "either here or there" but engage in circular migration. Most drivers of forced migration, as listed above, can be addressed by political measures such as active labour market integration, reconstruction of Ukraine or return incentives. Notably, transnationality requires specific policy interventions, for example, concerning remittances, development or children. Under any scenario, the EU's temporary protection directive will only serve those who are returning within three years of arrival; it will be the majority under scenarios 1, 2 and 3, whereas under scenarios 4, 5 and 6 the majority will aspire to stay in the EU. This implies, that in any case, the temporary protection directive will require an exit option, converting temporary into long-term protection.

MAXIMIZING LABOUR MIGRATION OUTCOMES FOR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN AND DESTINATION

Andrea Salvini & Georg Bolits

March 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The policy brief reflects on the criteria countries of origin can use to orient out-migration in a manner that maximises outcomes for their migrants, society and strategic governance goals. These criteria consider the labour shortages in countries of destination (CoDs) and their immigration regimes and, consequently, economic and social payoffs for migrant workers. Furthermore, authorities in CoOs are interested in minimising risks linked to the recruitment process and favour corridors that help them reduce labour surpluses in their internal labour market, and in tandem limit the incidence of brain drain and maximise that of brain gain. The choice of migration corridors to incentivise regular migration, often through bilateral agreements, is also influenced by capability considerations. Which countries can value the skills and competences of their nationals best? Finally, evidence shows that corridors are also built between countries with linguistic, geographic and cultural proximity.

How these parameters characterize corridors is illustrated through case studies to distil lessons on how to choose better partners for cooperation agreements, and select tools to set up joint governance of migration across the two ends of a corridor. A labour demand approach first identifies potential CoDs with attractive vacancies and visa regimes that allow in-migration of migrant workers from a certain skills tier. In a final step, the paper addresses "filters" applied by employers and policy makers in CoDs, before concluding with a discussion on suitable recruitment channels.

Analytical framework: Anticipating migration outcomes for CoOs and CoDs

The authors propose three distinct criteria to assess labour migration prospects for potential CoDs from the perspective of CoOs: feasibility, quality and desirability.

1. **Feasibility, i.e. is it feasible for potential migrant workers to out-migrate to the CoD?** Under this criterion, CoDs are reviewed based on skills shortages (what types of workers are required?) and labour shortages (how many workers are required?) that cannot be met by domestic labour supply. In other words, it quantifies pull factors arising from employers' need for migrants in the CoDs.

2. **Quality, i.e. what are the pay-offs for potential migrant workers who out-migrate to the CoD?** This criterion reflects the expectable returns of out-migration in terms of working and living conditions in the CoD; wages and remittance-sending prospects; as well as integration prospects, which include options for labour market mobility, family reunion, and long-term residence, as well as protection from discrimination and the presence of existing diaspora communities in the CoD. Finally, this criterion also takes stock of the possible risks faced by migrants in each CoD, including deception, contract substitution, debt bondage and labour exploitation.

3. **Desirability, i.e. is it desirable for the country of origin to promote out-migration to the CoD?** This criterion turns the attention to the CoDs seen from the point of view of the priorities and national interests of the government of the sending country (CoO). This includes i) macro-objectives of the government to identify sectors and occupational families of strategic interest; ii) opportunities for matching CoO labour surpluses with labour demand in the CoD; iii) brain drain considerations to discard

certain occupational families and incentivize recruitment in others; and ultimately iv) national development priorities to incentivize circular migration schemes that support educational and industrial policies.

From labour to skills shortages

Incidence of labour shortages that cannot be met with the supply of workers available in the domestic labour market of a CoD is the first parameter used by CoOs to screen suitable migration partners. However, on the European continent as well as on the Western shore of Asia, CoO authorities only recently started to reflect on the different opportunity costs of promoting migration towards some countries vis a vis others. The reasons are mainly related to path dependency, and hence to the historical mobility of people.

At the dawn of the reconstruction period after the Second World War, labour shortages in the West were primarily met by flows of forced migration.[1] Since the 1950s, the reservoir of persons displaced by armed conflict was complemented by labour agreements, mainly from South to North, but again the impetus for these agreements originated from labour shortages in the CoDs. Since the 1980s, free market forces favoured by increased mobility of individual migrants gradually replaced agreements between governments as a major driving force of migration. This process culminated in the large flows from the East to the West brought about by the fall of the Iron Curtain. Yet the governments of CoOs had little to no influence on the destination countries favoured by their out-migrants.

Driven by technological advances in production processes, employers in CoDs progressively required more specific sets of skills, not only for the placements occurring in local markets, but also with regard to shortages to be met by foreigners. Findings of Industry 4.0 research show that nationals in CoDs are often oriented to vacancies in the occupational tier of professionals[2], leaving many high- and semi-skilled occupations in net shortages, and creating a case for meeting skills needs with labour from abroad.[3]

At least in Europe and with the exception of professional workers, these skills needs have been mainly met through training processes that took place on the job or through the vocational education and training (VET) system in the CoD. However, in other regions, especially in Asia, large numbers of high- and semi-skilled workers are internationally recruited with vocational skills acquired and tested already in the CoO.[4]

The distance between the employer in the CoD and the CoOs where workers were trained requires authorities to set up skills recognition schemes that would be difficult to implement, or beyond the financial capacity of an individual or a group of employers. Efforts aimed at harmonizing skills needs of occupational families within the EU went in this direction. The skills requirements largely characterising the vacancies are more specific than the granularity of families described in the European Standard Classification of Occupations (ESCO).[5]

Dozens of millions of migrants were integrated into the EU over the past two decades mainly through training conducted in the CoDs, whereas regular skilled migration pathways have always played a marginal role (i.e. migrant workers fully trained in their country of origin) with the exception of foreign workers who benefitted from national

programmes such as shortage lists. For instance, Germany deploys efforts in the so-called Triple Win system, aimed to recruit nurses from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Philippines and Tunisia. In this way, the German healthcare system recruited 4,000 nurses over the past eight years.[6]

If the past decade has witnessed regular pathways mainly in the care economy sector and for programmes limited in numbers and scope, the German Skilled Workers Immigration Law opens regular labour migration pathways across the manufacturing and IT sectors.[7]

Moving from migration corridors based on generic labour needs to corridors in which workers are recruited already equipped with vocational skills requires labour migration agreements that operationalise skills recognition solutions and enable governments or private recruiters to test workers prior to the departure and facilitate their placement in the enterprises at the other end of the corridor.

An effective model of cooperation is represented by the Moldova-Israel corridor, in which authorities of the two countries agreed to a ceiling of approximately 1,000 construction workers per year. In Moldova, the National Employment Agency provided this stock of workers from its list of jobseekers, while Israeli counterparts established a testing system in Chisinau. Additional workers required on top of the 1,000 stock were recruited through a network of accredited Moldovan private recruitment agencies, which leveraged on the same system of recognition used by the public employment agencies.[8]

The idea behind this section is to qualify labour needs - defined as a measure to express the quantity of labour demanded - in such a way that they are categorized by occupational families, linked to specific competences that an applicant needs to have in order to directly perform at the workplace in the country of destination.

Large-scale recruitment operations usually exceed the capacity of individual employers or recruiters.

Visa regimes and agreements enabling international recruitment

A feasible regular migration pathway requires a labour migration visa regime that administers entries for labour purposes. In the EU, the Schengen agreement established a practice that greatly increased the feasibility of labour migration. Candidates have usually been entering a Member State without a specific employment visa, and following the signature of an employment contract, a work permit was issued. Over the past thirty years, this practice has made it less pressing for authorities in the Prague Process states to negotiate bilateral agreements, at least with EU countries of destination. For non-EU citizens, candidates also had the possibility of undergoing a job interview on a tourist visa. In general, employment visas have been less common governance instruments than work permits, for both EU and non-EU nationals.

This scheme certainly favoured free movement of labour within and to the EU and allowed the mushrooming of private entities facilitating international recruitment. However, for CoOs this model is not necessarily the one that always maximises outcomes. First, it hinders the coordinated placement of larger flows of workers,

creating sectoral bottlenecks when enterprises face sudden seasonal or temporary shortages. Large-scale recruitment operations usually exceed the capacity of individual employers or recruiters. An interesting case study to address sudden labour shortages comes from Russia. Since recently, multinational enterprises in Russia have had the possibility to directly recruit foreign workers from selected post-Soviet states with an algorithm-based system that offers a fast lane to cope with labour shortages.

While visa regimes can constitute barriers to labour migration, migration payoffs often correlate with the level of sophistication of CoDs' employment visa systems. Pioneers in this regard have been historical countries of destination such as Canada, Australia and the UK. Recently, also Central European countries such as Germany and Austria are diversifying their entry channels to allow employers to recognize skills - and recruit - directly in the countries of origin. The immigration act for skilled personnel in Germany (*Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz*) entered into force in March 2020 and created accelerated admission procedures for non-EU skilled workers. A precondition for access to the labour market is either a German qualification or a successful fast-track examination of equivalence of foreign qualifications. A skilled worker, referred to as *Fachkraft*, in this sense is a worker who has successfully completed industrial, commercial or technical vocational training. A unique feature of the new law is that even unemployed non-EU citizens with recognised qualifications are allowed to enter the country. Therefore, not only workers with a signed employment contract are allowed to enter Germany for employment purposes, but also those who wish to look for a job are granted a residence permit for up to six months if they have a recognized qualification.

In addition, the new German government coalition plans to change the hitherto temporary application of the Western Balkan Regulation into a permanent mobility framework that would allow nationals from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia access to the labour market in Germany for any type of job.[9] The new government furthermore plans to extend the EU Blue Card's application in national law also to non-academic professions, which would allow immigration also of those migrant workers who do not have a university degree but solely have a "specific job offer at normal market conditions". Finally, the government is also planning the introduction of a new residence permit for foreign skilled workers, the so-called opportunity card (*"Chancenkarte"*). This permit would enable entry for those who do not yet have a specific job offer but want to look for a job in Germany. The opportunity card would be granted based on a point system, which makes a successful application conditional on meeting certain criteria, such as level of education, work experience and knowledge of German.[10]

Employment visa systems are also complemented and intertwined with specific bilateral programmes that favour in-migrants from a certain country. Bilateral labour agreements have characterized the establishment of migration corridors since the 1960s, with the notable example of the corridor Pakistan - Kuwait and others such as the Gastarbeiter agreements between Germany and Italy.

Many sources describe in detail the scope and coverage of the hundreds of bilateral labour agreements developed in the past decades. We refer readers to the seminal work of Wickramasekara (2015)[11], which describes a new global trend, also witnessed in the Prague Process countries - the agreements for education-for-employment visas.

With labour shortages moving from farms and construction sites to factories and the service sector, practitioners observe the growing importance of language proficiency of the workplace in order to access not only semi-skilled but also high-skilled jobs. Initially, this limits international recruitment, as it is more likely that skilled workers are recruited among migrants who move up the occupational mobility ladder. Rather than recruiting skilled workers from outside, employers in the Czech Republic reported that it is easier to internally promote workers who had the chance to learn the language while working in the Czech labour market.[12]

The implication is that, especially for languages that are not easy to learn, proficiency is acquired easier if the migrant can spend some years in the country of destination before applying for a job that requires a TVET certificate. For this reason, some CoDs, for instance in the EU region, offer a favourable scheme to enter as a student and convert the student visa into an employment one. This has also been the case in the United Kingdom, where any university student can stay in the country for up to two years after graduation to look for work related to their degree or course.

Germany has also started to pave the trail of education-for-employment visas. The Sri Lanka German Training Institute (SLGTI) offers vocational training for young Sri Lankan adults. Training curricula are co-designed by German and Sri Lankan employers and benchmarked against the German National Vocational Qualification framework.[13] Graduates have excellent prospects to be matched with skilled vacancies in Germany, but can also choose to find relevant employment in Sri Lanka. Two notable features of the SLGTI are that potential employers are involved in the definition of curricula as well as the assessment of the quality of training services. Second, a dedicated Language Lab was established to teach trainees occupation-specific language courses.[14]

Beyond feasibility of migration: quality of migration outcomes

The first two sections looked in detail at aspects of a migration corridor that enable migration to a certain CoD, both in terms of legal premises for the entry of migrants for labour purposes, and in terms of vacancies available. Once migration is deemed feasible, countries of origin should incentivize corridors where migration is likely to be safer, and more profitable with respect to the quality of employment. The latter includes considerations of wages, working and living conditions.

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Remittance-sending prospects are also important, and this parameter does not always mirror nominal or real wages received by the migrant. Working in a CoD with higher average salaries often correlates with high living costs that reduce the amount a migrant can remit back home. Similarly, many vacancies are advertised with a gross wage that often hides income tax, social security contributions, and other compulsory deductions related to accommodation, food and subsistence, as well as compulsory insurance schemes. Some of these deductions are intrinsically linked to a protected job, but in general it is important to take these factors into account when deciding whether or not a migration corridor should be incentivized.

Quality of employment is a notion that also encompasses working conditions and rights at work. The former can be benchmarked by looking at indicators such as hours of work, compliance with occupational health and safety standards, payments and conditions for overtime work as well as paid annual and sick leave. The latter instead can be measured by the possibility of unionization and access to justice criteria. A migrant worker not only has to be protected by law, but also requires pragmatic access to effective grievance redress mechanisms that provide remedies and compensations.

It is important to note that working conditions do not only differ between countries of destination but can also differ greatly by sector and occupation within a CoD. Many migrant workers take up jobs in atypical occupations and may dwell in premises located near the workplace. The latter especially applies to temporary migration schemes involving those at the bottom of the occupational ladder. For this reason, living conditions should be appraised together with working conditions, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, construction, domestic work and more recently also manufacturing.

The quality of the migration experience depends not only on the workplace, but also on living conditions. Integration prospects, which include options for labour market mobility, family reunification, and long-term residence, as well as protection from discrimination and the presence of existing diaspora communities in the CoD need to be considered as yardsticks to evaluate the opportunity of favouring a certain potential destination country. Finally, this criterion also takes stock of the possible risks faced by migrants in each CoD, including deception, contract substitution, debt bondage and labour exploitation. For a more in-depth review of integration prospects in different destination countries, we refer the reader to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) funded by the European Union.[15]

Aligning migration incentives with national development objectives

The decision to migrate to a particular country is generally taken at the level of individuals and households. Nonetheless, governments can shape incentives to promote out-migration in corridors that favour recruitment in certain skills profiles over others, or favour circular versus permanent out-migration.

For several decades, Eastern European nationals have tried to settle in countries such as the UK, where many migrants seek to obtain permanent residence. Indeed, circularity is more likely with countries of destination characterized by less restrictive labour migration visa regimes.[16]

A feature of a migration corridor can be advantageous for one CoO but disadvantageous for others. Governments of countries such as India and Egypt, which are characterized by a disproportionate youth bulge, tend to focus less on brain drain concerns. The key priority for these countries is to place as many out-migrants abroad as possible to release domestic labour market pressures. Other CoOs, such as Morocco, are very sensitive to avoiding the risk of linking too closely their TVET curricula with the needs of foreign employers. Education authorities of CoOs, especially those with high-quality public education systems, should strategically consider mechanisms to offset the long-term costs of graduate migration incurred by taxpayers. How to account for the social

and financial impact of Indian engineers who have been trained by the Indian federal budget, if these engineers immediately out-migrate to advanced economies following graduation? The debate has serious distributional implications if one considers that all budget allocated to tertiary education competes with targets and funds aimed to increase the quality of primary and secondary education for the more economically disadvantaged.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced many governments, particularly those of countries of origin, to reflect on the strategic risk of labour shortages in the health sector, where freshly graduated doctors and nurses are tempted to migrate to countries of destination offering better-paid and protected jobs.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced many governments, particularly those of CoOs, to reflect on the strategic risk of labour shortages in the health sector, where freshly graduated doctors and nurses are tempted to migrate to CoDs offering better-paid and protected jobs. These reflections shed a light on the need to introduce strategic macro objectives in setting up migration corridors for health workers.

On the one hand, it is not uncommon to witness countries of origin that favour the out-migration of the low skilled versus that of semi- and high-skilled workers in critical sectors, primarily the health sector. These incentives can take different forms: strengthening ties with CoDs or industrial partners in need of low skilled workers, as in the case of Nepal; deploying bans for nurses, as implemented by the Philippines at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.[17] Historically, occupational bans were first established in 2006 for domestic workers migrating out of the Philippines. Other governments, such as Hungary, require medical school graduates who received a scholarship, to work in the country for twice as long as the duration of the medical degree, otherwise they need to pay back the scholarship amount received.[18]

On the other hand, promoting migration for care economy jobs can be a way to capitalize on these skills if circular schemes are embedded in the design of the corridor. The CoDs offer training in health professions and in the short to medium term benefits from the services of migrants; after a span of five to ten years, the health care professional can return home equipped with skills that may be critical for the health sector of the CoO. Such dynamics are present in the out-migration of young Irish nurses migrating to the UK to gain work experience and return to Ireland once they are in a later stage in their career. Similar patterns are observable between Scandinavian countries, where Finnish nurses migrated to Sweden and Norway but returned to Finland following a long period abroad.[19] It is important to acknowledge that such dynamics of circularity are far more difficult to establish in corridors with greater wage differentials between the CoO and the CoD.

The case of Nepal is particularly interesting. Its government with the ILO assistance has com-missioned studies specifically aimed to maximise migration of low- and semi-skilled workers. The overriding goal is to find a job for unemployed and underemployed Nepalese, especially in rural areas, that are still trapped in the informal economy and are difficult to place in a formal job at home.

The point of view of countries of destination and how to find synergies across both ends of the corridor

International labour migration always requires counterparts on the recipient side of the corridor, and CoD governments continue to be the key actors shaping the characteristics, magnitude and geographic scope of in-migration. This final section looks at the point of view of countries of destination, examining the parameters that constitute amenities for governments and industrial partners in the labour market where migrants will be placed.

- **Path dependency and risk avoidance**: A CoD that has made a positive experience with the recruitment and integration of migrant workers from certain CoOs is likely to promote additional recruitment efforts across these already established corridors. The institutional memory of the recruitment ecosystem (ministry of interior, ministry of labour, private recruitment agencies, employers' associations, employers and trade unions) favours existing pathways. This is further reinforced by CoD governments often being risk-averse to open new regular channels with 'untested' CoOs.
- **Geographic proximity**: Geographic proximity lowers direct migration costs and tends to reduce the vulnerability of migrant workers. In addition, regular and informal recruitment costs between proximate countries tend to be lower, reducing incentives for migrants to overstay a visa or engage in secondary movements to recuperate payments made upfront. The 'shorter' a given corridor, the more likely the emergence of diversified admission pathways, including short-term, seasonal, circular (multi-entry) and - in the case of neighbouring countries - cross-border visa schemes.
- **Temporality of labour needs**: Seasonal migration generally favours geographically proximate CoOs in which short periods of salaried employment are sufficient to offset the direct migration costs (especially travel). On the other hand, shortages in high-skilled occupations incentivise governments to cast a much wider net with a view to attracting talents from across the globe.
- **Alignment of skills development pathways**: The degree to which formal - and to a lesser extent informal and non-formal - skills development pathways in the CoO match the needs of final employers in the CoD is a key determinant for the feasibility of a new corridor. 'Alignment' in this context can be promoted by activities ranging from a formal alignment of national qualifications frameworks and establishment of mutual recognition arrangements to leveraging on historically conditioned similarities in education systems (e.g. the vocational training systems of Morocco and France) up to sector-specific bilateral transnational education initiatives (Sri Lanka German Training Institute) and adjustments of a CoO's training curriculum to needs of a set of CoDs. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) systems, particularly if co-owned by institutions in CoOs and CoDs, can further strengthen skills recognition for short-term, long-term and circular migration.
- **Linguistic similarity**: CoDs tend to prioritise corridors with CoOs exhibiting language similarities, principally for two reasons: i) onboarding and on-the-job

training is greatly facilitated for final employers and ii) migrants are less vulnerable and more likely to seamlessly integrate in the CoD's society, which often represents a key priority of governments. Corridors buttressed by linguistic similarities are observable across the globe, with examples including Ukraine-Poland, Moldova-Romania and Cape Verde-Portugal.

- **Cultural proximity** can favour the openness of a host population to accommodate migrant workers from a certain CoO whose society shares religious, cultural and customary similarities.
- **Vulnerability factors**: Aspects of vulnerability are cross-cutting, often shaped by geographic, cultural and linguistic factors. When exploring new corridors with CoOs, CoD governments tend to closely scrutinise the vulnerability of the initial newcomers in terms of adherence to their visa and work permit obligations, propensity for seamless integration as well as resilience to forms of labour exploitation and trafficking.

CONCLUSION

This Policy brief aimed to illustrate the leading policy imperatives and economic priorities arising at both ends of contemporary migration corridors of the Prague Process, with the aim of distilling strategic considerations that make an "optimal match" between CoOs and CoDs.

From a CoO's viewpoint, the brief provided insights on how to detect out-migration opportunities for prospective migrant workers from a holistic point of view, taking into account not only labour shortages, but also in-migration regimes and expectable economic and social payoffs for migrant workers.

To complement the perspective of CoOs, the authors explored strategic considerations guiding CoD governments when scoping new corridors or expanding existing ones. Key factors touched upon the alignment of vocational training and formal education pathways, linguistic congruence, geographic and cultural proximity, as well as other political economy factors.

Our hope is that this brief helps to fuel dialogue among the Prague Process members during an eventual global post-Covid economic recovery, which sees new skills needs emerging and provides opportunities for innovative solutions on skills-sensitive migration governance that can benefit CoOs and CoDs alike.

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IMPACT OF THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR MIGRATION

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October 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 2021, the radical Taliban movement took control of almost the entire territory of Afghanistan. Fearing for their lives, many Afghan citizens want to flee the country. The prospect of a migrant influx from Afghanistan greatly concerns the Central Asian countries, since radical Islamists may also cross the border along with the displaced population. To effectively counter and be prepared for different scenarios, the Central Asian countries have been strengthening their borders and enlisting the support of fellow member states of regional associations, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). This publication describes the situation in Afghanistan and the related policies of the Central Asian countries in terms of possible forced displacements.

CURRENT CONTEXT

Afghanistan has been at war for the past forty years. The Western model of democracy, Soviet socialism, and the ideas of colonization have never taken root in the country. All attempts to bring peace to this land ended in protracted bloodshed and withdrawal of the external reformers' troops. This always provoked high numbers of internally displaced persons and significant migration flows to the neighbouring states and EU countries, which have been the final destination for many young Afghan men.

Following the withdrawal of the US and NATO troops from Afghanistan in August 2021, the radical Taliban movement took control of almost the entire territory of the country, except the Panjshir province. According to the UN, 18 million people – more than half of Afghanistan's population – are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Poverty is growing, the agencies providing basic social services are close to collapse, and people are left homeless with winter coming. UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that Afghanistan could soon face a humanitarian disaster.

Since the beginning of 2021, 630,000 Afghans have been displaced from their homes.[1] Based on past experience, the destinations targeted by migrants within the country and abroad strongly depend on tribal, linguistic and religious ties. Today's Afghanistan is comprised of over 20 nationalities and 5 ethnic groups. Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, account for 40% of the country's population. Tajiks make up about 25%, Hazaras 15%, and Uzbeks about 10%. Typically, about 95% of Afghan asylum seekers head for Pakistan and Iran. Pashtuns cross the border to Pakistan, and Hazaras try seeking refuge in Iran. A relatively small share of ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks choose Central Asia for temporary resettlement.

While many Afghan citizens want to flee the country, most of them have neither passports nor visas, which makes it impossible to leave in a regular way or even travel within Afghanistan. Despite Taliban assurances not to stop those who want to leave, the new Afghan authorities have set up checkpoints on the roads leading to the borders to screen out people without identity documents. As a result, thousands of Afghans might

1. According to UNHCR estimates, the total number of IDPs in Afghanistan is 3.5 million. More information is available at: https://www.unhcr.org/cy/2021/09/15/un-high-commissioner-for-refugees-completes-three-day-visit-to-afghanistan/

try to reach the neighbouring countries by alternative routes. They will have to walk bypass mountain trails for several days, pay smugglers for transportation, water and food, and bribe the Taliban when encountering them. For those who previously lived in or were deported from the EU, an encounter with the Taliban in an attempt to cross the border may be fraught with punishment up to the death penalty. In addition, Afghans trying to escape to the neighbouring countries irregularly are in danger of tripping a land mine and unexploded ordnance, which are rampant in almost all of Afghanistan's border regions. Speaking of migration flows from Afghanistan, it is also important to highlight that women, children and minor girls make up the majority of internally displaced persons. The hostilities in Afghanistan and the new rules of conduct in society established by the Taliban may affect them adversely.

AFGHAN REFUGEES IN CENTRAL ASIA

Given the current situation, the Central Asian countries consider to what extent refugee flows from Afghanistan are to be expected. Despite the well-founded fears, no mass movements of Afghan migrants to the borders of the Central Asian states have occurred thus far. In early September, Ylva Johansson, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs and Migration, also stated that there has been no large-scale exodus of Afghans from the country yet. This is due to several factors.

The Taliban control the borders

Currently, all the land borders are controlled by Taliban forces, who are in constant exchange with Tajik and Uzbek warlords who have flipped to their side. Such agreements with local warlords will allow the Taliban to control the movement of the local population.

The Central Asian countries are not attractive to Afghans

The Central Asian countries are not particularly attractive for resettlement or transit due to the implemented policy of deterring and countering the penetration of "undesirable persons" to the Central Asian countries, as well as of preventing mass entry of asylum seekers.

UNHCR statistics clearly reflect a significant decline in the flow of Afghan refugees to all five Central Asian countries over the past twenty years. In Uzbekistan, the number of Afghan refugees decreased from 8,348 in 2000 to 13 persons in 2020. Similarly, a 100-fold decrease in the number of refugees from Afghanistan occurred in Turkmenistan over the same period. In addition, both countries have not had a single Afghan asylum seeker registered in over a decade. A six-, four- and three-fold decrease in the number of Afghan refugees also occurred in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, respectively.

Table 1. Number of refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan in the Central Asian countries, 2000-2020

	Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan		Turkmenistan		Uzbekistan	
	R	AS	R	AS	R	AS	R	AS	R	AS
2000	2460	0	804	87	15354	233	1450	128	8348	1235
2001	2353	10	922	98	15336	376	1515	89	9569	1316
2002	2250	0	871	104	3427	355	1263	0	5716	1060
2003	657	0	648	109	3304	433	1224	0	5470	928
2004	670	0	258	128	1816	0	1030	0	5238	426
2005	760	0	251	117	1006	22	749	0	4740	534
2006	588	21	256	201	917	238	710	0	1415	0
2007	404	5	277	344	1126	142	85	0	1047	0
2008	493	56	267	425	1790	41	46	0	809	0
2009	429	20	323	318	2673	1510	29	0	546	0
2010	593	22	415	232	3126	1607	30	0	304	0
2011	556	36	418	130	3270	2011	31	0	211	0
2012	525	35	377	150	2196	2122	19	0	173	0
2013	537	32	405	147	2004	2253	19	0	138	0
2014	578	24	386	133	1975	123	19	0	123	0
2015	644	49	258	118	1950	286	18	0	106	0
2016	599	87	242	72	2711	431	19	0	26	0
2017	561	164	236	46	2516	440	14	0	20	0
2018	538	164	223	34	2649	315	14	0	13	0
2019	491	181	227	104	3783	1413	14	0	13	0
2020	408	198	219	41	5573	408	14	0	13	0

Source: UNHCR. R – refugees, AS – asylum seekers

Afghan asylum seekers who managed to make it to the Central Asian countries may live without refugee status for years. At the end of August 2021, during rallies outside the US Embassy in Bishkek, Afghan asylum seekers, who had been living in Kyrgyzstan for several years, noted that they had been stuck in the country without benefits nor any prospects for obtaining citizenship or the possibility to leave for Europe or America. According to them, about 150 Afghan citizens, whom Kyrgyzstan refused to grant refugee status, have documents confirming the status under the UN refugee mandate, while over 200 Afghans do not have even this. Due to their undefined status and lack of documents, they cannot leave the country.

The policies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in relation to refugees from Afghanistan greatly resemble the rather reserved position of Kyrgyzstan. According to the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, some 600 Afghans found refuge in Kazakhstan as of the end of August 2021. While Bishkek and Nur-Sultan declared their readiness to accept only ethnic Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, these are just a few hundred families. At the 76th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2021 the President of Kyrgyzstan proposed Bishkek to host the UN agencies evacuated from Afghanistan and announced his readiness to accept 500 students from Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan, the only country in the region that did not adopt the 1951 Refugee Convention, allowed Western countries to use its territory for transit evacuation of their citizens from Afghanistan following the recent Taliban takeover. While Uzbekistan

has been hosting hundreds of Afghan pilots and their families who secretly fled Afghanistan, it also returned 150 Afghans following an agreement with the Taliban.

Turkmenistan adheres to an even more restrictive refugee policy. Since the witnessed escalation of the conflict, the Turkmen government has returned all asylum seekers back to Afghanistan, including ethnic Turkmen, with some Turkmen families offered to move to Tajikistan. According to Alexander Knyazev, a Russian expert on Central Asia and the Middle East, Turkmenistan is unwilling to accept ethnic Turkmen refugees from Afghanistan as they could claim their rights to lands that their ancestors left in Soviet times. These territories contain the largest gas fields, such as Galkynysh in the Mary velayat.

Of the five countries in the region, only the Republic of Tajikistan continued receiving a significant number of refugees from Afghanistan in recent years. Furthermore, their number increased considerably in 2020 exceeding 5,500 people. However, Afghan refugees in Tajikistan face those challenges that are common to Tajiks themselves, including unemployment and the inability to receive an education. Moreover, according to the Government Decree 325 of 2000, refugees and asylum seekers are neither allowed to live in large cities nor in the border regions of the country, while finding work in rural areas is even difficult for the local population.

The Central Asian borders are closed

As of end of September 2021, all the Central Asian countries have closed their borders to refugees from Afghanistan. Tajikistan, despite its recent announcement to accept refugees, was no exception and closed its borders based on the principle of collective security in the region. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, unable to secure their borders entirely on their own, rely on the Russian military contingent located in both countries. Russia actively helps its allies and continuously provides military and technical assistance that has multiplied over the past few years due to the threats coming from Afghanistan. In the event of a humanitarian crisis, Russia commits to make every effort to prevent refugees from Afghanistan from entering Central Asia and then Russia. This position was reaffirmed on 15 September 2021 in Dushanbe at a meeting of the Foreign and Defence Ministers, as well as security secretaries of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) countries[2].

Although Uzbekistan is not a CSTO member, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry has repeatedly denied information about its alleged readiness to open its borders to people fleeing the Taliban regime. Official Tashkent, having stopped accepting transit flights with asylum seekers from Afghanistan, made it clear that it does not intend to become a long-time transit country for the NATO states. Moreover, on the eve of the presidential elections, Uzbekistan warned that any attempts to cross the border, regardless of their reasons, would be suppressed in accordance with the law.

Turkmenistan also refused to accept Afghan refugees, but unlike its neighbours, the leader of Turkmenistan referred to the difficult epidemiological situation associated with

2. The Collective Security Treaty Organization includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan. See here: https://odkb-csto.org/

the spread of COVID-19. Although Turkmenistan has always been neutral and had no issues with the Taliban, the Ministry of Defence purchased modern weapons to guard its border to Afghanistan, pulling heavy weaponry and military aircraft to the border. In recent years, Ashgabat has significantly increased the number of troops at the Afghan border and is launching fortification projects to erect concrete fences.

In general, the Central Asian countries, being members of regional organizations such as Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, CSTO, and Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as a buffer zone for Russia, on which they strongly depend both economically and politically, most likely will not change their policies regarding the reception of Afghan refugees.

WHY ARE THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES UNWILLING TO ACCEPT REFUGEES FROM AFGHANISTAN?

The Central Asian countries name security as one of the main reasons for sealing off their borders to refugees from Afghanistan. There is a threat that members of radical Islamist militias may try to enter the neighbouring countries disguised as refugees. This scenario is quite realistic given the growth of a whole generation of supporters of non-traditional Islam foreign to the region and inclined to radical measures aimed at overthrowing the secular system, which happened under the influence of Pakistani, Afghan and Middle Eastern curators in Central Asia and the North Caucasus over the past decades. Suffice it to recall Takhir Yuldashev, the leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the civil war in Tajikistan, the terrorist attacks in southern Kazakhstan and the Batken events in Kyrgyzstan when thousands of armed Islamists were to enter the Fergana Valley. The main goal, as seen by Islamic activists earlier and today, is the building of a Sharia state throughout Central Asia.

The second important reason to deny Afghan refugees is the lack of necessary resources. For example, the leadership of Tajikistan, having the longest border with Afghanistan in Central Asia, has repeatedly asked for assistance from donor organizations and the UN to build the necessary infrastructure in the border areas. However, over the past 20 years, no international structure has provided practical assistance in creating an infrastructure for receiving refugees and asylum seekers.

Finally, the third reason relates to the risks of an increased illegal turnover of weapons, ammunition, explosives, psychotropic substances and narcotic drugs that can travel with the flows of refugees from Afghanistan to the Central Asian countries. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 6.7 tons of opium were produced in Afghanistan in 2019, an increase of 21% over 2018. Drug traffic is growing every year. All of Afghanistan's neighbours in South and Central Asia are sounding the alarm.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The situation assessment shows that no refugee crisis has yet occurred in the border regions of Central Asia since the recent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the countries of the Central Asian region need to collectively prepare for any possible scenario.

Like 40 and 20 years ago, the situation in Afghanistan is unpredictable and not a local problem. Further developments will depend on the nature of the actions of the new political elite of Afghanistan and of the countries that have already established contacts with them or are in a process of doing so. Primarily, this concerns global players such as the United States, China and Russia, as well as regional stakeholders – Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, India, Saudi Arabia, and the Central Asian countries. It is important for states to have a dialogue with all stakeholders in the region, despite their principle positions favouring a political resolution of the armed conflict in Afghanistan.

If the Central Asian countries open their doors to asylum seekers from Afghanistan, it will be important to create the appropriate infrastructure for receiving refugees in the border areas. In this regard, the support of developed countries of the West and Asia, which have the experience and means to implement such initiatives, will be essential. The EU could consider channelling financial and diplomatic assistance proactively through humanitarian non-governmental organizations, regional structures, international organizations, and global units such as the UN. In addition, the EU MS and other Western countries should consider the possibility of accepting and resettling Afghan refugees.

Referring to existing security concerns, the Central Asian countries shall adequately apply international legal regulations, which provide for the identification of refugees as opposed to persons posing a threat to national security. Together with the UN agencies, other international organizations, and with the participation of the mentioned stakeholders' governments, the Central Asian countries could develop a unified methodology to identify radical terrorist elements at their borders.

The development of such methodology primarily foresees an analysis of the Central Asian countries' legal frameworks for unification and compliance with international human rights law, which is just as important for the areas of security and antiterrorism as for refugee protection. For example, the national regulations and constitutions of the Central Asian countries may implement the non-refoulement principle in relation to refugees or asylum seekers in different ways. The interpretation of laws may also take different forms and approaches. Some acts explicitly mention refugees and asylum seekers. Others, with reference to certain reasons, prescribe expulsion that endangers the expelled person. Here it is important to use global best practices in the development of regional legislation on refugees and common standards for their protection.

In fairness, it should be noted that in 2012 Turkmenistan hosted a ministerial conference of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, where its member-states adopted the Ashgabat Declaration, which recognizes that "over 14 centuries ago, Islam laid down the bases for granting refuge, which is now deeply ingrained in the Islamic faith, heritage and tradition". However, everything remained on paper, and the provisions of this declaration have not achieved the same significance and legal value as instruments in other regions, such as the Latin American Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. Although this declaration is not legally binding, since 2016 some fourteen Latin American states have incorporated its expanded 'refugee' definition into their national legislation. The courts of these countries have accordingly ruled that the regional definition is part of the national regulations and that it should be incorporated into the national legal framework. Thus, there occurred synchronous, unanimous unification of legal concepts for the avoidance

of disagreements. This experience is undoubtedly useful for the countries of the Central Asian region.

Finally, it is important for countries not only to be guided by Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution", but also to place special emphasis on the protection of women, children and minors among asylum seekers. All the Central Asian countries are obliged to abide by the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Central Asian governments should also follow the UNHCR guidelines for the protection of refugee women, prevention and response to sexual violence against refugees. It is also essential to take the necessary preventive measures to protect and provide care for minor refugees and to keep humanitarian corridors open at least for this category of refugees, who do not pose a threat from a security standpoint.

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CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE PRAGUE PROCESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR MIGRATION

Ronald Skeldon

September 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Policy Brief will focus on 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 will draw attention to some of the inherent tensions created by this process and specifically its linkages with migration, both internal and international. It will flag up the overall demographic trends across the Prague Process countries, identify differences across the countries, and highlight policy issues that will need to be addressed.

TOWARDS A CONTRACTING WORLD

The world in the second half of the twentieth century was characterized by rapid population growth. The spirit of the age was well captured in the book, *Population Bomb*, in which the fear of overpopulation and of demographic growth out of control were going to lead to the collapse of societies.[1] These fears were shown to be exaggerated, largely because overall growth has declined since then.

By the 2020s, many countries are projected to decline in population, with some 90 countries in the world losing population to 2100, primarily in Europe, East Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, with 23 countries expected to more than halve their populations.

Demographically, we are moving into a very different world, which will be reflected in shifts not just in economic and political development but also in global patterns of migration. By the 2020s, many countries are projected to decline in population, with some 90 countries in the world losing population to 2100, primarily in Europe, East Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, with 23 countries expected to more than halve their populations.[2] Only populations in the Arab world and in sub-Saharan Africa are expected to continue to grow, even though at reduced rates.

The countries of the Prague Process (hereafter PP) will not be immune from this process and many are, in fact, well down the road to population decline (Table 1). Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine have already entered either into a phase of very slow or negative population growth. Yet, not all follow precisely the same pathway, with some commencing the transition earlier than others. Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries are not expected to embark upon any demographic decline until mid-century or beyond.

Table 1. Non-EU countries of Prague Process: Total Population, 1990-2100 (in thousands)

	1990	2000	2020	2030	2050	2100
Armenia	3,538	3,070	2,963	2,967	2,816	2,039
Azerbaijan	7,243	8,123	10,139	10,740	11,065	9,162
Georgia	5,410	4,362	3,989	3,853	3,517	2,514
Albania	3,286	3,129	2,878	2,787	2,424	1,088

Bosnia and Herzegovina	4,463	3,751	3,281	3,127	2,685	1,641
Montenegro	615	614	628	624	589	454
North Macedonia	1,996	2,035	2,083	2,051	1,857	1,249
Serbia	9,518	9,488	8,737	8,250	7,084	4,217
[Kosovo			1,884	1.932	1,859	
Kazakhstan	16,384	14,923	18,777	20,639	24,024	27,918
Kyrgyzstan	4,373	4,921	6,524	7,446	9,126	10,985
Tajikistan	5,284	6,216	9,538	11,557	16,308	25,328
Turkmenistan	3,684	4,516	6,031	6,782	7,949	8,421
Uzbekistan	20,398	24,770	33,469	37,418	42,942	42,271
Belarus	10,151	9,872	9,449	9,265	8,634	7,430
Republic of Moldova	4,366	4,203	4,034	3,886	3,360	2,012
Russia	147,532	146,405	145,934	143,348	135,824	126,143
Ukraine	51,463	48,838	43,734	40,882	35,219	24,413
Turkey	53,922	63,240	84,339	89,158	97,140	86,170

Source: United Nations World Populations Prospects, Volume II, New York, Kosovo Census 2011

FERTILITY DECLINE

Once fertility decline has become sustained and on pathways towards below replacement-level, no significant reversal is generally observed, even with policy interventions that are designed to reverse the trend.

Population decline is driven primarily by a reduction in fertility, the onset of which has been variable across the PP countries. A key indicator is the time a country reaches a total fertility rate (TFR) of around 2.2, when the population is just replacing itself (Table 2). However, populations do not suddenly go into decline. It takes several decades for lower fertility to lead directly to total population decline, which occurs when the number of women in the reproductive cohorts, 15 to 45 years old, begins to decrease. Fluctuations may indeed occur, and the rate of decline can vary depending upon a number of factors often revolving around economic or political crises. It is worth emphasizing, however, that once fertility decline has become sustained and on pathways towards below replacement-level, no significant reversal is generally observed, even with policy interventions that are designed to reverse the trend.

Table 2. Non-EU countries of Prague Process: Total Fertility Rates, 1985/1990-2095/2100 (children per woman)

	1985-1990	1995-2000	2015-2020	2025-2030	2045-2050	2095-2100
Armenia	2.60	1.75	1.76	1.76	1.77	1.78
Azerbaijan	3.20	2,25	2.08	1.92	1.77	1.74
Georgia	2.26	1.72	2.06	1.98	1/88	1.80

Albania	3.15	2.38	1.62	1.49	1.51	1.69
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.86	1.68	1.27	1.21	1.42	1.68
Montenegro	2.11	1.91	1.75	1.74	1.73	1.75
North Macedonia	2.27	1.83	1.50	1.47	1.56	1.70
Serbia	2.23	1.83	1.46	1.42	1.54	1.71
[Kosovo						
Kazakhstan	3.03	2.00	2.76	2.50	2.16	1.84
Kyrgyzstan	4.06	2.96	3.00	2,70	2.32	1.88
Tajikistan	5.50	4.29	3.61	3.22	2.68	1.95
Turkmenistan	4.55	3.03	2.79	2.49	2.12	1.80
Uzbekistan	4.40	3.10	2.43	2.21	1.94	1.77
Belarus	2.08	1.31	1.71	1.75	1.79	1.81
Republic of Moldova	2.64	1.70	1.26	1.36	1.50	1.64
Russia	2.12	1.25	1.82	1.83	1.83	1.84
Ukraine	1.95	1.24	1.44	1.47	1.60	1.70
Turkey	3.39	2.65	2.08	1.92	1.76	1.73

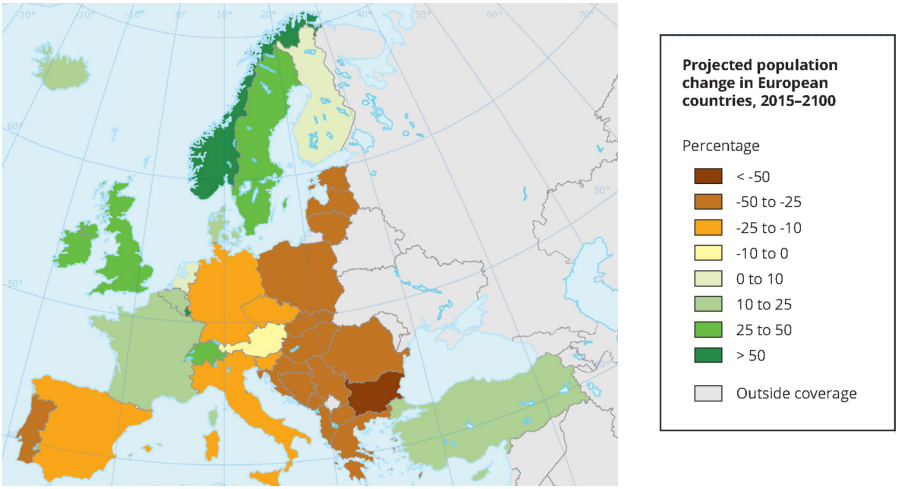
Source: United Nations World Populations Prospects, Volume II, New York

Countries have embarked upon the process of fertility decline at different times and experience that decline at different rates. In some countries, such as France, which pioneered the decline in Europe from the end of the eighteenth century, the decline fluctuated considerably with periods of increase, whilst in others, such as Germany, the decline was much sharper and definitive from the beginning of the twentieth century. Generally, the countries of Europe had reached low levels of fertility (but above replacement level) at 2.67 children per woman by 1950, although that aggregate number hides a considerable variation in levels. The total fertility rate of the United Kingdom in 1950, for example, was 2.18 compared with 3.63 in Poland and 3.43 in neighbouring Ireland.[3]

By 1980 all the countries of the present EU showed fertility levels well below replacement level.

Despite a rise in fertility in Europe during the late 1950s, and into the 1960s, by 1980 all the countries of the present EU showed fertility levels well below replacement level with an aggregate figure of 1.87. The decline continued to reach a low of 1.43 in the early years of the twenty-first century, after which a small increase took place to reach 1.5-1.6 by the 2010s. No increase to levels even approaching that of replacement are anticipated for the rest of this century with countries in the east, south and centre of the EU experiencing marked population decline to 2010 (see Map 1). Only countries in the west and northwest are projected to experience population growth, mainly driven through migration, although post-Brexit, the situation for the UK may change.

Map 1. Projected population change in European countries, 2015 to 2100



Within the non-EU countries of the Prague Process, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus fertility had either declined to reach replacement-level or were very close to that level by 1970; Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, as well as Georgia, reached this level by 1990, with Albania, Armenia and the Republic of Moldova following some ten years later. Azerbaijan did not reach replacement level fertility until after 2000, with Turkey reaching this level in 2010. Kazakhstan did reach below replacement-levels of fertility around the turn of the century but then exceptionally saw an increase in fertility after 2005 and is not expected to see a further dip to lower fertility until the 2030s. Uzbekistan should reach replacement-level by 2030, with Turkmenistan expected to follow some 20 years later, although Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are not estimated to reach this level until after mid-century (Table 2).

POPULATION DECLINE AND MIGRATION

Over the medium to longer term, populations are set to decline **and migration becomes an increasingly significant component of population change.** Nevertheless, as modelling under various scenarios has shown, immigration cannot replace cohorts lost to fertility decline.[4] The numbers required to maintain a national population at current levels of total population, labour force or balances between current labour force to total population, would be far in excess of what would be politically acceptable, quite excluding the issue that sourcing, managing and integration of such numbers over a long period would simply not be viable.

Over the medium to longer term, populations are set to decline and migration becomes an increasingly significant component of population change.

Migration can exacerbate or mitigate population growth or decline depending upon circumstances. Excluding those countries that still maintain relatively high levels of fertility, only those countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States, which operate large and comprehensive immigration programmes, will see their populations continue to increase at a steady if low rate throughout the current century.

POPULATION DECLINE AND MIGRATION IN THE EU AND THE UK

In the EU, although more deaths than births have been registered since 2012, a small increase in total population between 1999 and 2020 occurred due to an annual net immigration of 0.9 million.[5] The EU-wide figure hides considerable variation among its constituent countries. Population decline is to be found along its southern and eastern fringes while north-western and central regions show increases. These differences reflect relative differences in fertility, with the lowest rates observed in Italy, Spain, Greece, Finland and Portugal, but also net centripetal movements of populations towards the economic heartlands.

Germany, which has been a major country of immigration since the 1960s and accommodated some 1 million asylum seekers and refugees in 2015, will still see a slight decline in its total population of half a million from 2020 to 2030 from 83.7 to 83.2 million. However, a much sharper decline of 8 per cent in its labour force (25 to 64 years) will occur over the same period.[6] Despite the importance of immigration over several decades, from a policy point of view Germany only recently accepted that it had become a country of immigration, even though it had opened its borders wider than most to cater for the ethnic Germans after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While it also accepted waves of refugees from the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the Middle East in the 2010s, the immigration has only slowed its overall trend to population decline.

The **United Kingdom** had been a country of immigration during the post-WWII period and consistently showed one of the fastest population growth rates in northern and western Europe over recent decades. Given that much of that growth originated in migration from the EU when the UK was a member, it seems unlikely that the growth will continue beyond the termination of free movement from EU countries from the end of 2020.

Migration becomes significant for the reproduction of the very population itself in countries where fertility has already declined.

The admission of large numbers of immigrants each year, often in the face of considerable public resistance to such programmes, is but part of the reason that overall growth of population continues. The fertility of immigrant populations is higher than that of the native-born, even if that fertility trends towards the norm over time, and intermarriage among immigrants and between migrants and native-born increases. Over one quarter of the number of births in the United Kingdom, one of the principal destinations in Europe, is to a foreign-born mother, for example. Hence, migration becomes significant not just for supporting a market for goods and services and for the supply of essential skills, but also for the reproduction of the very population itself in countries where fertility has already declined.

POPULATION DECLINE AND MIGRATION IN PRAGUE PROCESS COUNTRIES BEYOND THE EU

The countries in the PP outside the EU are themselves at different stages of the demographic transition, although they will face similar challenges. While the majority will see their populations and labour forces decline well before mid-century, with the exception of Russia, few are major destinations for migration. Certainly, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus experienced significant interchanges of population after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, a process that had repercussions across most of the countries of the PP, although, in the three countries named, the foreign-born as a proportion of the total resident population range from 8 through 11 per cent. Nevertheless, these flows are female dominant, with median ages in the late 40s and early 50s.

This gender and age composition of the foreign-born is typical of the immigrant populations of the PP countries as a whole brought about through the creation of new states in the 1980s and 1990s. These flows in terms of age and gender profiles are quite different from those skilled, labour and immigrant flows to the EU noted above or to those immigrant flows to other major global non-PP countries. The flows of migrants to most PP countries have slowed in the twenty-first century or remained stable. The one exception is to mineral-rich Kazakhstan where migrant workers continue to be attracted to a booming, oil-rich economy but also to Turkey, with its recent influx of refugees from Syria.

Table 3. Non-EU Countries of the Prague Process: Net-migration Rate per thousand, 1985/1980-2095/2100

	1985-1990	1995-2000	2015-2020	2025-2030	2045-2050	2095-2100
	-3.9	-14.2	-1.7	-1.7	-1.8	-2.4
Azerbaijan	-4.7	-2.8	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Georgia	-1.6	-28.0	-2.5	-2.6	-2.8	-3.9
Albania	0.0	-11.5	-4.9	-3.9	-3.2	-6.9
Bosnia and Herzegovina	-6.1	-8.4	-6.4	-0.2	-0.2	-0.3
Montenegro	-9.8	-7.0	-0.8	-0.8	-0.8	-1.0
North Macedonia	-9.9	-0.5	-0.5	-0.5	-0.5	-0.8
Serbia	-10.2	-5.9	0.5	-1.2	-1.4	-2.3
[Kosovo						
Kazakhstan	-8.4	-16.4	-1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Kyrgyzstan	-6.1	-1.2	-0.6	-1.4	-1.1	-0.9
Tajikistan	-1.3	-7.9	-2.2	-1.8	-1.3	-0.8
Turkmenistan	-2.3	-3.0	-0.9	-0.6	-0.5	-0.5
Uzbekistan	-3.7	-2.0	-0.3	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2
Belarus	-0.5	1.1	0.9	0.3	0.3	0.4
Republic of Moldova	-3.9	-7.7	-0.3	-0.4	-0.4	-0.7
Russia	1.2	3.2	1.3	0.7	0.7	0.8
Ukraine	0.0	-1.9	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0
Turkey	-0.4	-0.3	3.5	-2.4	-0.6	-0.7

Source: United Nations World Populations Prospects, Volume II, New York

Across the PP region, however, emigration rather than immigration has come to dominate in most countries. Only for **Russia** do United Nations projections to the end of the century envisage a net positive flow, drawing migrants in from other PP countries, particularly from Central Asia but also other parts of the former Soviet Union. Ukraine and Belarus are seen to have an overall balance between emigration and immigration but all the other countries, including Turkey after its refugee influx, are projected to have net negative flows (Table 3). **Hence, the majority of PP countries are being hit by a demographic "double whammy": sustained declining fertility and a continuing emigration.**

INTERNAL MIGRATION: THE IMPACT OF URBANIZATION WITHIN THE PP COUNTRIES

The impact of international outflows of population has to be considered against the movements of population within the countries of the PP themselves. All countries will see an increasing concentration of populations in urban areas within their own borders (Table 5). By 2050, only one country, Tajikistan, is projected to have less than half its population living in urban areas. The majority will have more than two thirds of their populations living in towns and cities, with Russia, Belarus and Turkey having four out of every five residents in urban areas. With the exception of the Central Asian countries, all the rest of the PP will see declines in the absolute size of their rural populations, not just a shift in the relative balance between urban and rural. The sustained exodus of these members has a profound impact not so much at the national level but at the local level, particularly in the villages of origin of the migration to towns and cities. The population structures of villages become skewed to older people as they lose their productive and reproductive capabilities that ultimately give rise to rural depopulation. The migration to towns and cities is unlikely to reverse and rural depopulation will become an increasing challenge. The provision of basic services to isolated and ageing rural populations is not only expensive but presents difficulties to source staff to provide health and other support services for rural outposts.

With the exception of the Central Asian countries, all the rest of the PP will see declines in the absolute size of their rural populations.

Table 5. Non-EU countries of Prague Process: Proportion of Population in Urban Areas, 2020-2050 (per cent) and Growth in Urban and Rural Populations in 2020

	Proportion urban in 2020	Proportion urban in 2050	Growth in urban population in 2020 (per annum)	Growth in rural population in 2020 (per annum)
Armenia	63.3	74.3	0.23	-1.44
Azerbaijan	56.4	71.0	1.38	-1.03
Georgia	59.5	73.2	0.35	-1.81
Albania	62.1	78.2	1.29	-2.12
Bosnia and Herzegovina	49.0	64.6	0.61	-1.58

Montenegro	67.5	77.3	0.45	-1.37
North Macedonia	58.5	72.8	0.04	-1.72
Serbia	56.4	68.8	0.61	-1.54
[Kosovo	54.7			
Kazakhstan	57.7	69.1	1.19	0.42
Kyrgyzstan	36.9	53.6	2.05	0.60
Tajikistan	27.5	43.0	2.73	1.42
Turkmenistan	52.5	68.9	2.23	0.18
Uzbekistan	50.4	61.5	1.25	0.98
Belarus	79.5	88.30	0.28	-2.29
Republic of Moldova	42.8	56.9	0.09	-1.51
Russia	74.8	83.3	0.11	-1.75
Ukraine	69.6	78.6	-0,27	-1.73
Turkey	76.1	86.0	1.11	-1.22

Source: United Nations World Urbanization Prospects, the 2018 Revision, New York, at: World Urbanization Prospects - Population Division - United Nations

Relatively few generalizations can be made about migration although two appear to have stood the test of time. First, the majority of people move relatively short distances and, second, that the majority of those who move are young adults. This does not mean to say that some do not move long distances. They do, as the extension of PP diaspora populations to North America over recent years demonstrates, although these remain a minority. Neither can we say that older people do not move: they do, as the movement of grandparents to look after children in destinations that allow both parents to work, for example, shows. However, again these are the minority of those who move while the majority of migrants fall into both the productive and the reproductive ages of any population.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF LABOUR FORCE GROWTH

The flows of migration from PP countries can be grouped into three general categories: first, intra-cluster exchanges of population, often within the complex mosaic of ethnic groups within each cluster that involve short-distance transfers across borders of families and women for marriage; second, movements to Russia, applies particularly to the Central Asian countries; and third, more recent movements to the European Union, most specifically from the Balkans to Germany, Italy and Bulgaria, Ukraine to Poland, parts of Moldova to Romania and Georgia to Greece. The countries of the PP have emerged as a source of labour to EU countries that are themselves in a more advanced phase of demographic decline. The labour

The countries of the PP have emerged as a source of labour to EU countries that are themselves in a more advanced phase of demographic decline.

force of Germany as defined by the population 25 to 64 years old, is projected to decline by some 3.5 million between 2020 and 2030 and by another four million to 2050. That of Italy will decline by some 2.5 million between 2020 and 2030 and by almost a further six million to 2050, while the labour force of Greece will decline by 1.5 million to 2050. With the labour force of Russia projected to decline by 10 million just between 2020 and 2030 and more than a further 5 million to 2050, emigration from the PP countries can but continue.

Table 4. Non-EU countries of Prague Process: Labour Force, Population 25-64 years, 1990-2100 (in thousands)

	1990	2000	2020	2030	2050	2100
Armenia	1,714	1,443	1,649	1,525	1,461	911
Azerbaijan	3,172	3,667	5,715	5,761	5,989	4,389
Georgia	2,735	2,207	2,123	1,900	1,720	1,133
Albania	1,403	1,430	1,531	1,454	1,286	384
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2,332	2,007	1,835	1,665	1,331	710
Montenegro	306	316	335	323	295	203
North Macedonia	988	1,038	1,190	1,141	955	557
Serbia	4,933	4,896	4,687	4,436	3,590	1,830
[Kosovo						
Kazakhstan	7,534	7,110	9,604	9,586	11,877	13,541
Kyrgyzstan	1,724	1,942	3,071	3,402	4,538	5,433
Tajikistan	1,775	2,101	4,035	4,846	7,371	12,666
Turkmenistan	1,333	1,779	2,940	3,269	4,104	4,295
Uzbekistan	7,381	9,458	16,909	18,943	22,918	21,078
Belarus	5,342	5,208	5,479	4,765	4,303	3,461
Republic of Moldova	2,152	2,064	2,446	2,242	1,846	938
Russia	78,947	78,456	82,808	72,712	66,915	59,623
Ukraine	27,391	26,354	25,202	22,175	17,871	11,509
Turkey	21,596	27,642	42,980	46,520	48,944	37,615

Source: United Nations World Populations Prospects, Volume II, New York, Kosovo Census 2011

The combination of fertility decline and net migration make their more combined immediate impact on the labour force rather than total population growth. Excluding EU member states, the majority of countries in the PP will see their labour forces contract from 2020 (Table 4). Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Russia all fall into this category. The labour forces of a few countries, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Uzbekistan, will not decline until after 2050. Those of a few others, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, are not envisaged to decline this century. Some others, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Ukraine have already seen their labour forces declining since at least 1990. **The contraction of the most productive and reproductive element in the populations in the PP countries is**

already a policy issue, either from the demand or the supply side of the equation. Before policy options are considered, it is important to realize that viewing the populations of PP countries as a whole is deceptive and that significant redistribution of those populations has also been occurring over recent years.

POLICY RESPONSES

The challenges posed by declining populations will be as great as those associated with expanding populations in the previous century and will require sensitive policy intervention.

The decline of population across most of the PP countries in the first half of this century seems to be part of a universal trend and perhaps a "good" thing given the critical issue of global climate change. The impact of the current population on the environment has been considered to be unsustainable and any decline might be viewed positively. However, environmental impact cannot be measured simply in terms of numbers: patterns of consumption are more indicative. Nevertheless, numbers cannot go on increasing forever but the challenges posed by declining populations will be as great as those associated with expanding populations in the previous century and will require sensitive policy intervention. Four main areas of policy intervention can be identified for discussion:

- Policies to increase fertility.
- Policies to redefine the labour force.
- Policies to substitute physical capital for human capital: automation.
- Policies to import labour and people.

Can fertility be increased?

It is unlikely that the overall direction of fertility decline can be reversed through the introduction of baby bonuses or the provision of subsidized childcare, for example. The significance of policies to influence fertility, either downwards or upwards, is highly contested. Policy can influence the desired direction over the short term, but the number of births per woman over the longer term is more a result of economic and social development. Education of women and their participation in the economy beyond the household are perhaps the fundamental drivers of fertility decline and attempts to restrict those activities are seen to be contrary to the basic tenets of development as well as being unethical. As a result, the improved status of women through education, a recognized fundamental pillar of development, will ensure that the number of births per woman continues to decline.

Can bureaucratic solutions mitigate demographic decline?

Given that people are living longer because of mortality decline and that increased education delays the entry into the labour force, it makes sense to extend the accepted age of retirement upwards. That is, instead of retiring at age 60 or 65, workers will be expected to work until they are 70 years of age or older. However, such solutions might apply more to countries at advanced stages of development where services rather than manufacturing or agriculture dominate. Even in these cases, heavy-duty activities such

as heavy goods vehicle (HGV) driving, or repetitive activities in manufacturing, it would be unrealistic to expect workers to extend their time in employment compared to those in desk jobs where working from home may be more of an option. Governments are likely to meet considerable resistance from trade unions should any erosion of hard-fought worker rights be involved. A second option is to increase the proportion of women in the labour force. While all attempts to move towards gender equality are to be welcomed, any such increase in women's employment is likely yet further to depress fertility, as discussed above.

Can automation provide the silver bullet?

The substitution of capital for labour through automation and artificial intelligence (AI) can mitigate labour shortages, although the impact will vary depending upon the nature of the economy. Wealthier economies, and those with greater numbers of skilled workers, will benefit more than poorer economies where labour forces are dominated by the less skilled. Technology is both expensive and the product of established institutions of advanced training. Nor can technologies from external sources necessarily be easily adopted or adapted to local circumstance: they will require continuous support and maintenance. Automation is not a simple substitute for labour, but creates labour demands of its own. Moreover, not all activities are easily substitutable by automation: As populations age, for example, the provision of appropriate care and health services, although supported by new technologies, cannot simply be replaced by them.

Will the importation of labour and people provide the solution?

Perhaps the simplest solution is to extend the labour market to countries where the labour force is still expanding, which, as seen above, will still be the case for some PP countries well into the present century. Given that, as countries develop, domestic labour increasingly becomes oriented towards higher-skilled, better-paid jobs, the future demand for labour will be in less-skilled sectors of the economy, which could logically be met through the importation of workers on labour contract within the PP region. However, the migration of labour will imply long-term programmes that can be politically extremely sensitive. The nativist reactions towards immigration and the movement of labour have been driving forces for political change in the EU and in other countries of immigration. Will PP countries experiencing labour deficits be able to avoid such issues? For this reason, the importation of labour as a general strategy may become more limited in practice than in theory.

The migration of labour will imply long-term programmes that can be politically extremely sensitive.

CONCLUSION

From a policy perspective, it seems likely that a mix of all four strategies outlined above will need to be tried: no "one-size-fits-all" policy exists. That said, it is also unlikely that any single country can address satisfactorily these challenges alone and the key migration and development policies will have to be developed among countries in each of the PP clusters. Regional development strategies will need to be fashioned among complementary PP countries.

It is the specific development challenges and how these are addressed among PP countries that will determine the future directions of population growth and its increasingly important and variable component, migration. The dependence upon oil in countries such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, and the geographical position of most PP countries on the edge of major geopolitical powers, bring very specific issues in a world where the use of fossil fuels and air travel will come under increasing pressure as international policies to combat global climate change begin to bite. Hence, tourism, the lifeline for so many marginal economies, may not have a guaranteed future as a development model for PP countries. The immigration of requisite skills to the PP countries may slow in the near future but emigration will continue or increase to metropolitan powers in the EU and beyond, accelerating the demographic decline of some PP states with long-term political implications. Nevertheless, development models followed by countries in the West are under challenge from those being variously followed by countries in the East, specifically by China, and even by Afghanistan's Islamic model. Although these models employ policies that are often considered anathema to rights-based western approaches, they provide alternative visions of development that have global implications and varying consequences for migration. Migration and population redistribution in their various forms will continue to characterize PP countries as integral parts of their changing future economic, social and political development.

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SOCIAL CAPITAL AND TRANSNATIONAL HUMAN SMUGGLING: WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF COUNTER-SMUGGLING POLICIES?

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May 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The defining characteristic of the transnational market for human smuggling is the agentive choice by migrants to purchase services in order to facilitate their transportation across state borders. This broad definition includes a large variety of transactions between migrants and actors performing distinct roles, based on the nuances of diverse local dynamics. This analytical report applies a critical lens to the impact of counter-smuggling policies, in order to enable governments to set better-informed policy priorities. It is important that policymakers do not approach regulating human smuggling exclusively through the lenses of criminality, security, and law enforcement. Although human smuggling services are purchased through informal markets that infringe on national laws, these informal markets share many characteristics with other legal economic activities. A narrow focus on the criminal nature of the human smuggling industry would problematically draw policymakers' attention away from understanding how the laws and regulations that they enact influence the lived experiences of migrants. By expanding this focus, this analytical report aims to provide government actors with a tool for understanding the nuances of the human smuggling market and the full effects of potential counter-smuggling policies.

A growing body of scholarship offers deeper insight into the disorganized and highly human interactions and transactions involved in irregular migration journeys. Rather than overemphasizing the role of transnational organized crime in human smuggling, this emerging field of research examines the role of interpersonal relationships and community knowledge in facilitating migration journeys and ameliorating potential risks. Broadly referred to as 'social capital,' information shared through diaspora communities about the reputation of smuggling service providers acts a regulatory mechanism in the absence of official government oversight. Individuals' access to social capital is changeable and can fluctuate as the result of counter-smuggling policies, among other factors. Understanding the role of social capital in the market for human smuggling will allow government actors to design migration management policies that more effectively safeguard migrants' wellbeing.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE MARKET FOR HUMAN SMUGGLING SERVICES

The Structure and Organisation of Actors in the Market for Human Smuggling

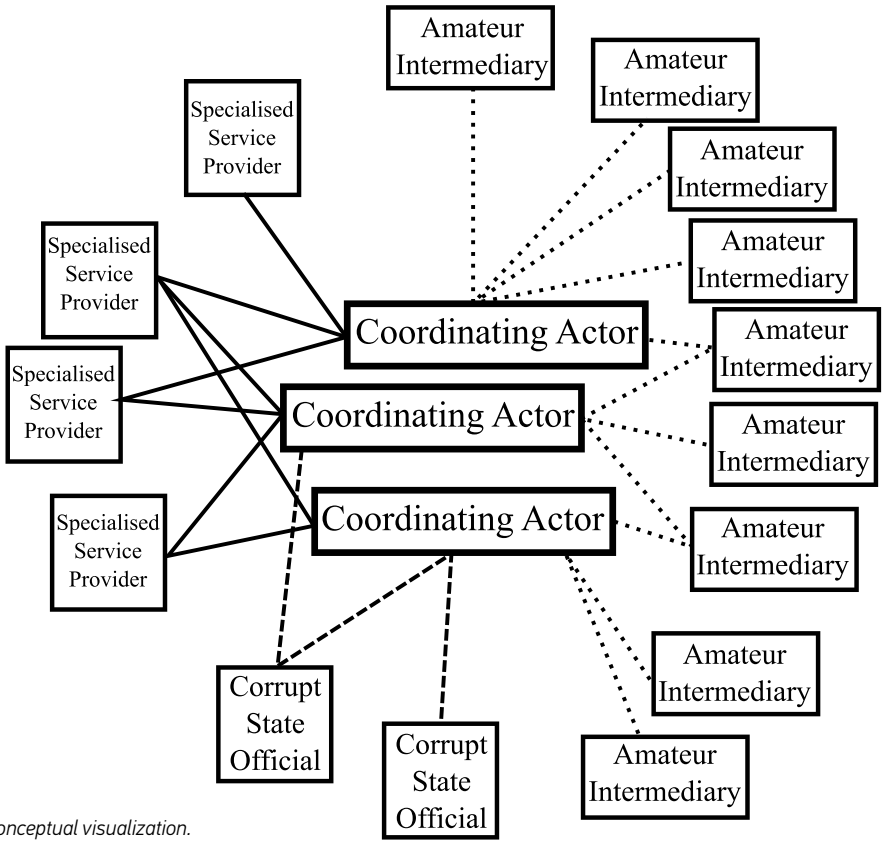
The market for human smuggling arises from a disparity between the volume of legal and easily accessible routes of migration and the demand to migrate, thereby creating an informal market. There is no single type of service provider in this market, with wide variation in the type of actors present, but evidence indicates a division of labour in the roles carried out by different actors facilitating smuggling services.[1] Much like customers in legal economic markets, migrants purchase a commodity: expertise in crossing national borders undetected. Different actors in the informal market for human smuggling offer different types of services at different prices, resulting in a matching

process between the customer and the service provider.[2] Individuals select to utilise smuggling services for multiple reasons. Among others, purchasing smuggling services can expedite migrants' departure from precarious situations, and can additionally include ancillary services such as food, accommodations, forged documents, and support finding employment upon arrival.[3] When purchasing services on the informal market for human smuggling, migrants exercise agency in determining which of the available service providers best meets their needs.

The market for human smuggling predominantly exhibits social organisation. This implies a lack of implicit linkage between actors in the market and large-scale criminal organisations. Furthermore, the social atmosphere of the market contrasts with depictions of smugglers as either apathetic or predatory actors. Instead, some smugglers have non-monetary incentives to provide their services, such as a desire to help family members and members of their community.[4] Migrants in need of smuggling services often take an active role in seeking out service providers and can rely on the recommendations of their families, friends, and communities.[5] This reliance on social communities to gain access to the smuggling market creates an environment in which service providers often divide according to kinship, community, ethnic, religious, and geographic lines.[6] **Yet, above all these distinctions, social relations are the primary organising factor.**[7] The socially organised character of the smuggling industry contrasts with political and media depictions of smugglers as explicitly amoral. Smuggling service providers respond to a need from their communities and are often locally perceived to be providers of necessary services, rather than criminal actors.[8] Moreover, the social organisation of human smuggling creates location-specific groups of service providers whose modus operandi, structure, and sophistication corresponds to the local political economy and level of border enforcement in the region in which they operate.[9] The high level of local stratification is supported by data from distinct regions across the globe, and directly contradicts narratives of hierarchically organised transnational crime syndicates dominating the human smuggling market.[10] Instead, **the market for human smuggling is composed of ad hoc relationships between actors in specific localities responding to the needs of their community members.**

Due to the localised nature of service providers and their geographic stratification, the market for human smuggling should be understood as horizontally organised, opposed to hierarchically. **The market is composed of numerous small groups of actors, sometimes collaborating and sometimes competing, seeking to earn a profit by moving people across borders undetected.**[11] These groups of actors range in size and level of sophistication, but most should be understood as *networks* of loosely connected independent actors carrying out individual roles in the larger smuggling operation, rather than as organised crime syndicates with a strict pyramid structure.[12] Evidence from across the Balkan region, Western Asia, North Africa, and Eastern Mediterranean indicates that **the networks** facilitating irregular migration **typically lack central structure,** and are organised based on a division of labour between actors involved.[13] Actors' linkages are not limited to one network facilitating human smuggling, as illustrated by **Figure 1**.

Figure 1 – The Horizontal Network Organisation of the Market for Human Smuggling



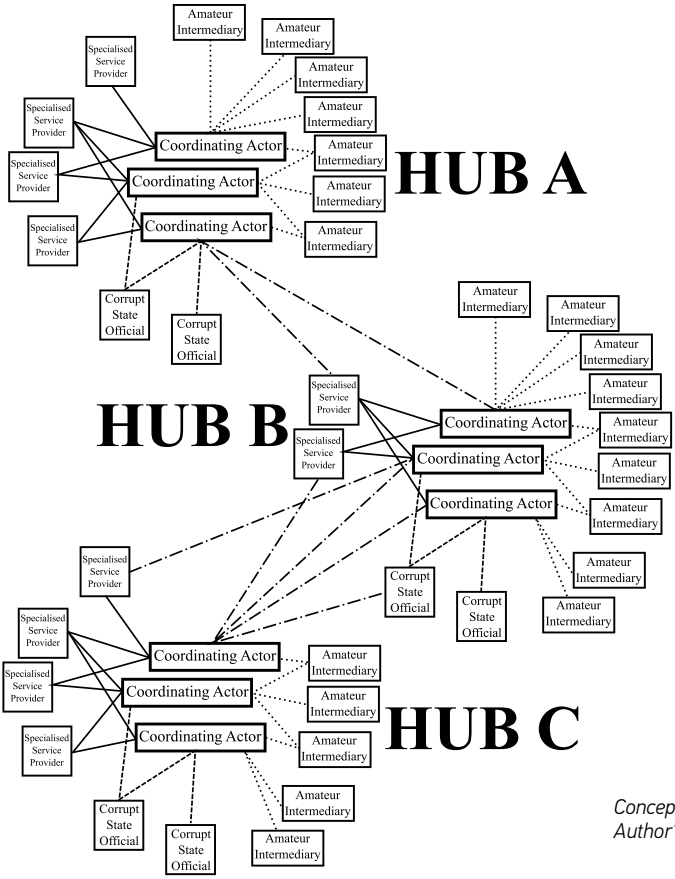
Conceptual visualization.
Author's own elaboration.

This division of labour occurs based on function and convenience rather than explicit subordination, with different actors within networks coordinating distinct necessary elements. Networks' horizontal structure results from their reliance on social connections between different actors involved, with many actors connected to multiple networks, but rarely connected to all of those involved in a specific network. Actors connected to a greater number of fellow service providers across a larger geographic area can operate in a coordinating role and leverage their high level of connection to reap a higher profit, yet this represents a distinct minority of all actors in the market.[14] Some migrants will work with smuggling networks as intermediaries to connect them with customers seeking services from their own ethnic or kinship communities in order to finance their voyages, blurring the line between migrant and smuggler.[15] Actors' level of involvement can vary, with some networks utilising specialised service providers only as needed,

such as document forgers.[16] Many of those providing specific services limit their operations to a certain geographic region, but may be connected to multiple smuggling networks simultaneously.[17] Corrupt state officials can also serve as service providers in different localities, playing a key role in enabling some smuggling networks operation.[18] The linkages between actors in a network are not uniform, with differing strengths and frequencies of contact based on individuals' unique interpersonal relationships.

The ad hoc nature of the connections between actors in smuggling networks enables actors to rapidly react to changes in the enforcement landscape and to continue operating even if some of their connections are cut off.[19] This ability is present in both low-level actors, due to their potential to connect with multiple networks, and high-level actors, due to their large number of connections to service providers. **There is no cohesive and singular market for human smuggling**, with overlapping linkages between different geographic regions, and various distinct actors operating in each location, as illustrated by **Figure 2**.

Figure 2 – The Lack of Hierarchy in the Transnational Organisation of Human Smuggling



Conceptual visualization. Author's own elaboration.

Access to migration-specific physical (e.g. vehicles) and social capital (e.g. knowledge) shapes migrants' selection of route and mode of transit, service providers' participation in the market for human smuggling, and the modus operandi of actors in the market. Access to liquidity and financial capital enables migrants to be more selective about which smuggling service providers they employ, and greater financial resources often correlates with more successful migration journeys.[20] Yet, migration-specific physical capital, such as physical fitness and access to means of transportation, can also modify migrants' need for smuggling service providers. Furthermore, previous migration experience or access to information about migration routes and service providers constitutes a form of migration-specific social capital influencing their decisions when planning journeys and purchasing smuggling services.[21] The basic forms of physical capital such as vehicles and basic forms of social capital such as local geographic familiarity are in abundance, lowering the barriers to entry in the market for human smuggling. The market is often perceived by local populations to be profitable, and legitimate economic actors with relevant skills or vehicles may enter the market for a short period of time in order to earn a profit, due to changes in either their primary economic sector or changes in the demand for smuggling services.[22] The horizontal nature of the smuggling market is well prepared to adapt to actors' entry and exit into the market and to react quickly to changes in nations' border enforcement tactics.[23] **Border enforcement strategies often result from the incorrect belief that effective counter-smuggling policies can entirely prevent irregular migration.**[24] In actuality, the **horizontal structure and ad hoc nature of linkages in the smuggling industry enables it to open new routes and adapt more rapidly than policymakers,** as illustrated by examples from Turkey, the Western Balkans, and Niger.[25]

The idea of concrete and predefined migration routes is a myth. Instead, general trends in migration routes emerge when analysed across a broader geographic area, but great variation exists in the exact paths used within that area. For example, despite frequent references to the monolithic 'Balkan route' of migration in media reporting and political statements, the 'route' is actually the sum of numerous crisscrossing paths spanning the region. Myriad paths extend from Greece and Turkey through Albania, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria, stretching northwards across Romania, Serbia, Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/1999), Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, before reaching Hungary and Croatia.[26] Migrants and smuggling service providers leverage this diversity in paths to circumvent changing border enforcement policies by diverting to a feasible alternative. This diversion of paths can occur on different scales, spanning local, national, and continental levels. Illustrating shifts within localities, numerous crossing points between Greece and Macedonia emerged in 2014.[27] Within nations, paths shifted rapidly between Edirne and Çanakkale in Turkey and between those towards Hungary and Croatia in Serbia.[28] On a continental scale, paths shifted to avoid new obstacles in the Balkan Peninsula in 2015 to stretch across Russia towards Norway.[29]

The changing location of migration paths stems from the flexible operating model of smuggling service providers, which **fluidly react to changes in the demand for their services and the obstacles that they seek to overcome** at national boundaries. Neither migration routes nor smuggling service providers are perfectly interchangeable. Thus, as the factors shaping the market change, the low barriers to entry enable new actors to offer distinct services or routes that they think will yield a profit, creating an environ-

ment in which each individual service provider controls a very small portion of the entire smuggling market.[30] The heterogeneous nature of smuggling services and routes further allows migrants to arbitrage prices in a matching process to find a provider that meets their needs.[31] Furthermore, the differentiation of services provided and the high demand in the market often dissuades service providers from operating in antagonistic competition with one another, and, in some cases, even promotes collaboration.[32] In a market free of political influence, this cooperation is not limited to low-level actors, with research indicating that even high-level actors will cooperate in order to accommodate high demand and coordinate longer journeys.[33] The forms of competition and cooperation in the market for human smuggling reflect context-specific dynamics and cannot be generalised.

The Role of Reputation and Social Capital in the Market for Human Smuggling

The complex webs of distinct migration paths intersect at key points known as hub cities, which serve as the glue that binds together larger trends in migration. These cities are typically located in close proximity to political borders or geographic obstacles, serving as a collection point for both smuggling service providers and migrants seeking to purchase services. 'Hub city' has no precise definition beyond an area where migrants and those offering migration-related service gather. The term can refer to disparate localities, including but not limited to: urban metropolises such as Athens, Belgrade, Istanbul, and Milan; cities in close proximity to important crossings such as Bodrum, Edirne, and Izmir; and intermediary points of arrival such as Chios, Kos, Lesbos, Samos, and Van.[34] In the European context, hub cities also feature in internal migration between EU Member States.[35]

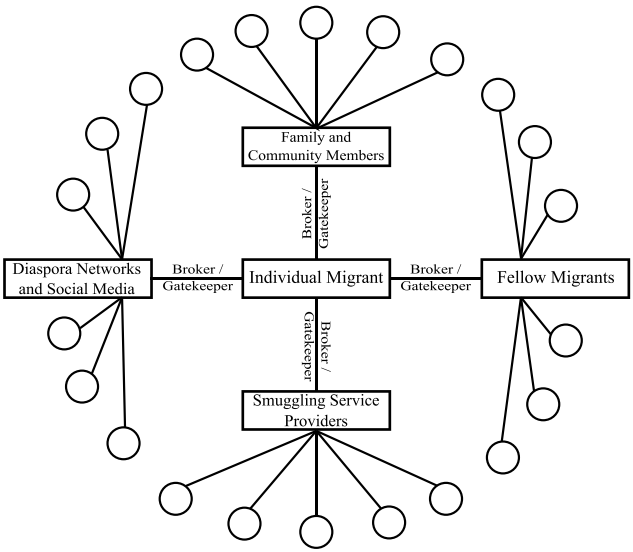
The horizontal organisation of the smuggling industry is enabled by a higher concentration of different varieties of service providers in hub cities, and the ability of these serves providers to adapt and outlast changes in migration routes confers hub cities with greater staying power.[36] The concentration of actors in hub cities also confers a boon to the local economy and allows migrants to pause and work in order to fund further segments of their journeys.[37] Importantly, hub cities serve as a key location for migrants to accrue social capital and gather information about the path ahead and the reputation of potential smuggling service providers, thereby helping to ameliorate the risks intrinsic to irregular migration.[38] **Social capital constitutes all of the knowledge, information resources and relationships available to a certain group.**[39] Social capital disseminates through relatives, acquaintances, and communities, implying network organisation, with the potential for individuals to act as both brokers and gatekeepers for social capital networks.[40] **Hub cities serve as crucial spaces of knowledge where members of existing social capital networks act as information brokers for new arrivals.**

The social capital that migrants gather counteracts the distinct information asymmetry that characterises the market for human smuggling. This information asymmetry places smuggling service providers in positions of power, as many migrants consider them one of the most reliable sources of information concerning potential migration routes.[41] Yet, due to the plurality of service providers in the market, individual actors in markets characterised by information asymmetry will endeavour to provide their customers

with confidence that they are not lying about their promised services.[42] Although service providers will provide guarantees in some instances, this confidence primarily stems from social capital about the reputation of smuggling service providers.[43] The ability of migrants to access information about actors' reputations is contingent upon their social proximity to the smuggling service providers.[44]

Migrants' social capital originates from a constellation of sources. If an individual comes from a community with a history of migration experience, family members and kinship networks often provide a foundation of social capital.[45] Information from a single trustworthy source can influence migrants' decisions more significantly than numerous less-trusted sources.[46] The recent expansion of social media enabled migrants to access social capital generated by entire diaspora communities at the touch of a fingertip, helping migrants to avoid potentially dangerous situations.[47] The proliferation of low-cost smartphones and replaceable SIM cards further enables migrants to amass social capital from digital platforms such as Facebook, Skype, Telegram, Viber, and WhatsApp.[48] While these sources do not replace the pre-existing sources of social capital such as personal relationships, social media radically enhances the scale of transnational diaspora networks and the ability for information to disseminate through them. Yet, **the role of social capital to entirely eliminate information asymmetry and insecurity should not be overplayed; information gathered through social capital is often incomplete, and in some cases even inaccurate.** This ranges from incorrect directions and descriptions of labour opportunities to cases in which acquaintances charge migrants high prices for questionably beneficial legal assistance filing asylum claims.[49] Furthermore, migrants' access to social capital is variable, with the access of migrants from rural peripheries, less populated areas, or areas with less migration experience seriously diminished.[50] Thus, while the extent of migrants' social capital derives from their access to multiple networks of information, the role played by brokers and gatekeepers to each distinct network modifies the information available to them, as illustrated by **Figure 3.**

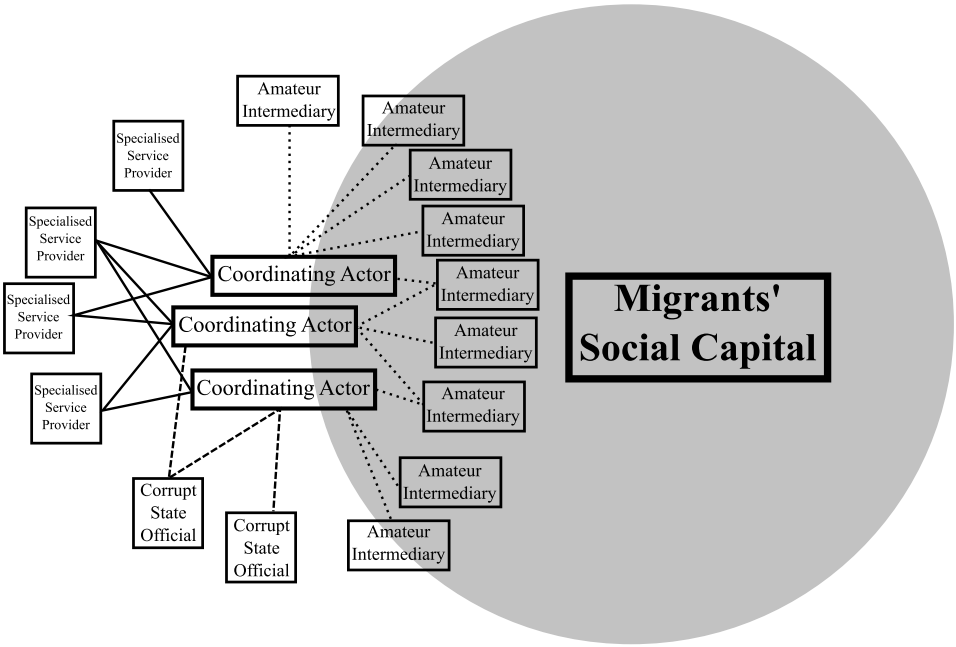
Figure 3 – The Landscape of Social Capital Sources



Conceptual visualization. Author's own elaboration.

Due to the way in which social capital influences migrants' selection of service providers, maintaining a positive reputation often shapes the profit-making strategies of smuggling service providers. **A smuggling service provider's reputation is one of the most important criteria influencing migrants' selection, with some even prioritizing a provider with a positive reputation over alternative lower-cost options.**[51] Smuggling service providers recognise that maintaining a good reputation is integral to maintaining their profitability and often prioritise protecting their reputation.[52] The power of reputation can even extend beyond individual actors, with a reputation of abuse by certain actors potentially negatively impacting other service providers in the same market.[53] In order to avoid generating a negative reputation that will spread through diaspora social networks, smuggling service providers can offer migrants reduced prices if they fail to deliver the expected services.[54] In an effort to protect social relationships and capitalise on the demand from certain communities, smuggling service providers can also provide some migrants with higher quality services and expedited departures to generate a positive reputation.[55] This reliance on reputation also functions to discourage actions that may attempt to exploit the information asymmetry in the market to yield a higher profit.[56] **Figure 4** illustrates the way in which migrants' social capital grants access to the human smuggling market and informs their selection between available service providers. **Crucially, the role of social capital in the market for human smuggling is not static, with counter-smuggling policies influencing its relevance and applicability.**

Figure 4 – Social Capital and the Market for Human Smuggling



Conceptual visualization.
Author's own elaboration.

THE IMPACT OF COUNTER-SMUGGLING POLICIES ON THE MARKET FOR HUMAN SMUGGLING

Taking Stock of Contemporary Counter-Smuggling Policies

The counter-smuggling policy options currently implemented primarily rely on the misguided belief that there is a direct causal relationship between increased border enforcement and a reduced volume of human smuggling. Such narratives often assume that national security services exert a level of coherence and efficacy that they consistently fail to demonstrate.[57] Securitizing counter-smuggling policies do not exist in a vacuum; instead, such policies catalyse coevolution in the market for human smuggling. Thus, when making policy decisions based on budgetary constraints, it is important to understand the full implications of securitised counter-smuggling strategies.

In 2015, nations in the broader European region prioritised physical barriers to prevent human smuggling and irregular migration, resulting in the simultaneous construction of the largest number of European border walls in recent history. In sum, walls were erected on the borders of Hungary and Croatia, Hungary and Serbia, North Macedonia and Greece, Austria and Slovenia, Slovenia and Croatia, the United Kingdom and France in Calais, and Latvia and Russia.[58] In the years since, further walls were built in Norway, Estonia, Lithuania, and Bulgaria, and the construction of a new barrier along Greece's Evros River continued in early 2021.[59] These policies do not eliminate the market for human smuggling, but do influence its local dynamics and can cause smuggling activities to expand.[60] The mandate of the European Border and Coastguard Agency (Frontex, hereafter) was expanded in 2016 to create a permanent reserve of border guards and vehicles, which will reach 10,000 border guards by 2027.[61]

At sea, policy priorities shifted away from Search and Rescue (SAR) operations with Frontex Operation Triton in 2014 due to the belief that such activities served as a pull factor for migration, despite evidence that a lack of SAR does not deter migration and instead only increases migration mortality rates.[62] Counter-smuggling strategies in Operation Triton's successor, Operation Sophia, prioritised seizing and destroying smugglers' vessels, using the previous counter-piracy Operation Atlanta in Somalia as a template.[63]

Implementing securitizing counter-smuggling strategies mistakenly assumes that what is effective against human trafficking, terrorism, and drug smuggling will prove equally effective against the decentralised and socially organised market for human smuggling. The incorporation of EUROPOL's European Migrant Smuggling Centre into the European Serious Organised Crime Centre (ESOCC) and its collaboration with the European Counter-Terrorism Centre demonstrates this misunderstanding.[64] Further illustrating this point, the United Kingdom created the 'Organised Immigration Crime Taskforce' in 2016 as a counter-smuggling strategy.[65] Frontex's Operation Themis, implemented to replace Operation Triton in 2018, continues to conflate irregular migration with transnational organised crime and terrorism.[66]

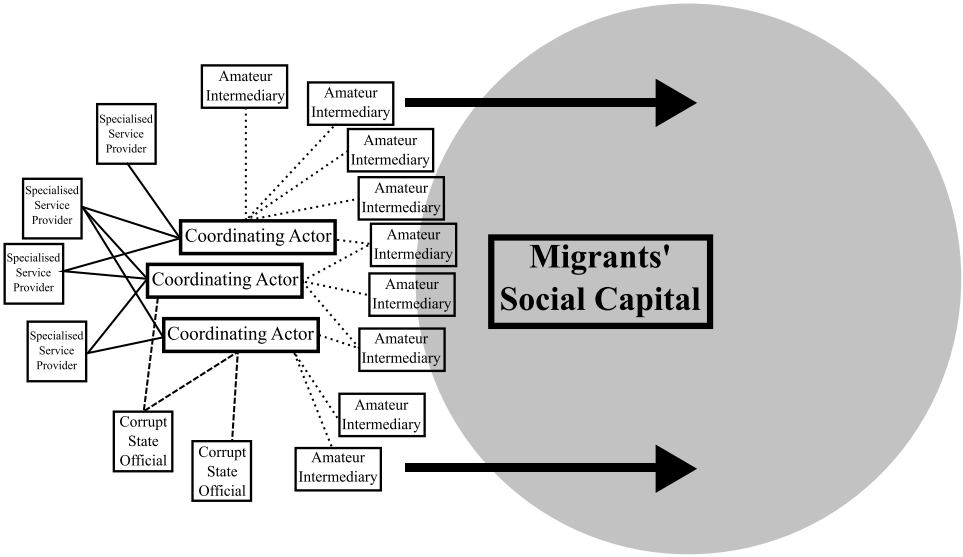
These counter-smuggling tactics result from the misperception that the convergence of different sectors of the transnational 'illicit' informal economy is inevitable and that their organisation and operation is analogous.[67] **Such policies fail to recognise the role played by the state in catalysing change in the market for human smuggling and in supporting actors' consolidation of market control.**[68] The analytical and rhetorical **linkage constructed between terrorism and human smuggling can deprioritise the development of effective legal protection mechanisms for migrants within the EU** and can set a malign example for third nations to follow.[69] The distinctions constructed between 'legal' and 'illegal' asylum seekers in both the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement and the proposed UK asylum reforms demonstrate the far-reaching impact of counter-smuggling policies based on such analytical errors.[70] Finally, initiatives that conflate removing terrorist and human smuggling content from social media can impede migrants' ability to access the protective benefits of social capital.[71] These counter-smuggling tactics misunderstand the role of social media as a driver of migration, rather than a tool to inform preordained migration journeys.[72]

Diversion and Social Capital

Akin to the inaccurate belief that greater enforcement directly correlates to lower smuggling rates, contemporary policy options often rely on the assumption that contributing to higher smuggling service prices will force the market to shrink. In many instances, higher levels of border enforcement and greater risk of apprehension will contribute to higher operating costs for smuggling service providers, but these higher costs pass directly onto migrants in the form of higher prices charged.[73]

The horizontal organisation of the market for human smuggling and flexible market entry and exit enables the industry to react to enforcement and continue to operate, indicating that policies intending to fully eliminate the market will achieve little success; still, it is important to analyse the incidental effects of such policies on the market. When facing heightened enforcement, evidence across the Western Balkan region, Niger, and Libya consistently illustrates that the prices charged to migrants increased in tandem.[74] Data from labour market matching models indicates that migrant selection reacts to changes to the price of smuggling services, meaning that **greater enforcement will also compel migrants to divert to alternative routes.**[75] This diversion can occur on both the macro and micro scale, either due to a diversification of paths within the same geographic area or to new regions entirely. A wealth of evidence from across the Sahel, Northern Africa, Eastern Mediterranean, and Western Balkan regions supports that migrants often divert onto more remote and unfamiliar paths.[76] Indeed, by diverting migration routes and smuggling activities away from previous hub cities, securitised border enforcement policies can diminish migrants' access to the protective benefits of social capital and impede humanitarian monitors from detecting potential abuse.[77] **Figure 5** illustrates the way in which diversion decreases migrants' social proximity to smuggling service providers, reducing migrants' applicable social capital.

Figure 5 – The Influence of Migrants' Diversion onto Unfamiliar Routes on Social Proximity

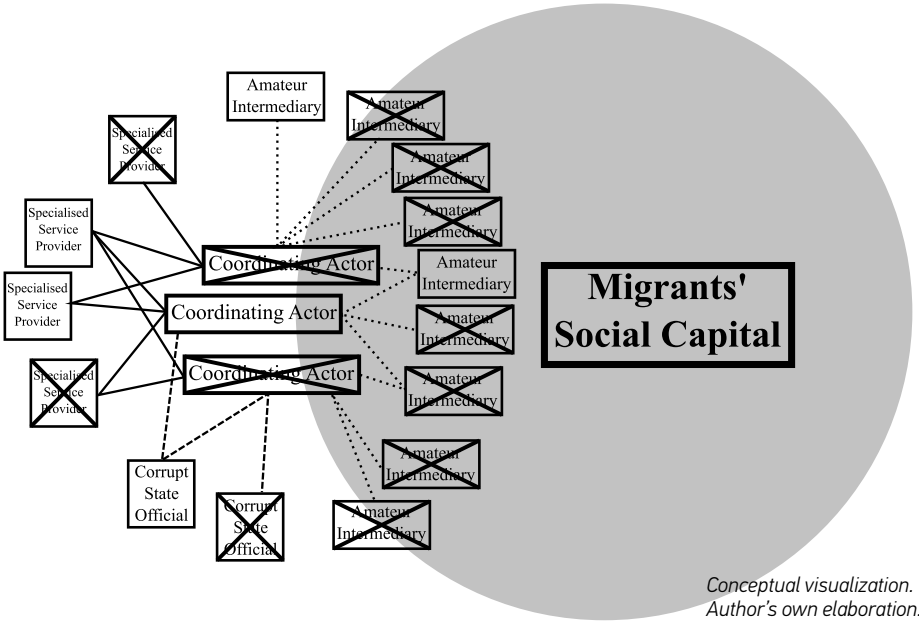


Conceptual visualization. Author's own elaboration.

Market Control and Social Capital

While the exact effects of higher enforcement on human smuggling are context-specific and vary based on multiple dynamics shaping the market, several examples support that greater enforcement activity can contribute to the consolidation of market control into the hands of a small number of actors. The disruption of the smuggling market and diversion of routes due to greater security activities also negatively impacts the business of ancillary service providers in the local economy.[78] Higher operating costs also more significantly affect amateur actors in the market for human smuggling, such as part-time service providers and intermediaries, due to their lower profit margins, and may cause them to exit the market.[79] Counter-smuggling policies often affect these small-scale actors disproportionately due to the higher visibility of their work, yet such activity will neither impact highly connected actors as severely nor prevent aggregate smuggling activities.[80] In some contexts, greater enforcement activity can also catalyse a professionalization of the market, with examples of violent competition arising between actors that further upending contributes to a consolidation of market control.[81] In areas where the market for human smuggling traditionally operated as a cottage industry with close social proximity between service providers and migrants, **a consolidation of market control can reduce the need for service providers to rely on their reputation to maintain profitability.[82] This strips away the protective benefits of migrants' social capital,** as illustrated by **Figure 6**. Thus, the securitization of migration can crowd out small-scale actors and reduce service providers' reliance on maintaining a positive reputation.

Figure 6 – The Influence of Actors' Market Exit on Social Capital



Conceptual visualization. Author's own elaboration.

Changes to the market composition and the role of reputation can further alter the modus operandi of actors in the market for human smuggling. While abuse and exploitation are not inherent to the system, actors can leverage information asymmetry to reap a greater profit when facing reduced competition or relying less on their reputation.[83] Exploitation is not limited to organised crime syndicates, and can occur even within the same ethnic or kinship group when securitised counter-smuggling policies place additional strain on service providers.[84] Diversion onto more distant routes and increasing smuggling service prices can elevate the precarity of liquidity-constrained migrants by leading to higher rates of debt-financed migration.[85] The greater reliance on smuggling service providers involved in such arrangements, in addition to the greater market control of large-scale actors, can further contribute to an increased risk of human trafficking or becoming stranded en route.[86] Dangerously, escalating securitization and actors' reduced reliance on social capital can shift their operating strategies to use kidnapping and extortion to extract profits from migrants.[87]

Securitization, Corruption, and State-Sponsored Protection Rackets

The heightened involvement of security actors opens greater potential for corrupt officials and border guards to operate state-sponsored protection rackets. Such situations arise when actors use the power of their position to selectively enforce laws for their own financial benefits.[88] Migrants often are the ones who pay the bribes that state-sponsored protection rackets rely upon, rather than smuggling service providers,

and this contributes to a steep increase in the cost of migration journeys.[89] Smuggling service providers can use connections established with corrupt state security personal to further consolidate their market control by compelling security personal to use their authority to prosecute competing smuggling service providers.[90] While one promising policy to combat exploitative human smuggling actors is community-led interventions, the integration of corrupt security service members into the smuggling industry impedes the potential of such policies.[91]

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

When implementing counter-smuggling policies, national governments naturally face budgetary constraints. The following criteria create clear guidelines of ways in which national governments can set effective priorities to ensure that the budgetary resources that they devote to counter-smuggling policies accurately reflect the nature of the market for human smuggling services. These guidelines promote policies that simultaneously prioritise the safety of migrants while avoiding enacting negative change on the structure and modus operandi of actors in the market.

1. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy to counter the market for human smuggling services, and no direct causality between greater securitization and reduced human smuggling activity. Any strategy implemented must be context-specific and reflect the unique dynamics of the local political economy. ***This is only possible if evidence from in-depth ethnographic data collection informs policy decisions***.

2. There is no single 'business model' of the market for human smuggling due to actors' demonstrated ability to fluidly adapt, implying that it is impossible for counter-smuggling policies to 'break the business model' of human smuggling without recognizing the underlying reasons for the market's existence. This involves ***opening accessible and affordable paths of legal migration.***

3. Counter-smuggling policies must ***avoid relying on the assumption that strategies that proved effective against drug smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism will be equally effective against human smuggling service providers.***

4. ***Resources devoted to countering human smuggling activities must avoid targeting low-level actors,*** for these actors' lack of significant connection to the market will render such strategies ineffectual. The social organisation of human smuggling and multiple motivations of service providers furthers indicates that criminalizing low-level actors will be counterproductive. Instead, national governments can effectively deter low-level actors from entering the market for human smuggling by expanding legal migration pathways and by expediting migrants' labour market integration.

5. ***Destroying migration-specific capital, such as vehicles, will not succeed in closing the market***. Not only can the operating practices of service providers react to circumvent such policies, but also the costs associated with such counter-smuggling policies can influence the consolidation of market control, placing migrants at elevated risk.

6. Counter-smuggling policies should not impede migrants' access to social capital. The sharing of social capital can protect migrants from exploitation and even force abusive actors to exit the market. Instead, national governments in the Prague Process region

should explore ways in which they can ***support the dissemination of social capital so that migrants can access a larger base of knowledge when making decisions***, reducing the power utilised by some smuggling service providers to profit off migrants' information asymmetry.

7. Counter-smuggling strategies are most effective when ***focusing on the actors in the market who abuse migrants.*** The agentive role taken by migrants in organising their journeys indicates that blanket policies targeting all actors, irrespective of their role and conduct, waste valuable state resources.

8. The Prague Process can support the development of mechanisms that enable irregular migrants to ***report abusive smuggling service providers to enforcement authorities without fear of negative repercussions for their status***, such as deportation. Such mechanisms would provide an important source of data to inform the effective use of counter-smuggling budgetary resources.

9. Given the ways in which securitised counter-smuggling policies can result in the proliferation of state-sponsored protection rackets, the Prague Process can further support the development of transnational mechanisms to enable migrants to ***report abuse by members of the state security services*** without fear of negative repercussions.

10. National ***asylum policies must not use migrants' illicit mode of entry or irregular status as grounds to deny their access to humanitarian protection systems*** in an effort counteract smuggling activities. Irregular migration does not exist within the scope of international refugee law, and placing additional barriers to humanitarian protection does not address the underlying causes of the market for human smuggling.

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EMBRACING A DYNAMIC FUTURE: MONUMENTAL SHIFTS IN UZBEK LABOUR MIGRATION POLICY

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February 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent past has seen Uzbekistan's great efforts toward regulating organised labour migration. The country concluded a number of far-reaching agreements with countries hosting large numbers of Uzbek migrant workers, thereby supporting the employment of own citizens abroad. It also prioritized efforts on creating jobs and promoting employment within the country, especially among the youth, with 2021 proclaimed "The Year of Youth Support and Health Promotion" by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Meanwhile, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the domestic workforce, including returning migrants, negatively and forced the Uzbek Government to take additional measures to provide legal and social protection to labour migrants in order to mitigate these negative consequences.

This paper summarises the latest developments in this field and actions taken by the Government, ranging from the introduction of a system of economic, financial, organisational and legal assistance for migrants to the provision of training for in-demand professions, skills and languages.

THE UZBEK MANDATE FOR EXPANSIVE LABOUR MIGRATION

The new Government has recognised migration issues and the various difficulties encountered by Uzbek migrant workers.

Uzbekistan is experiencing a steady increase in population and boasts a significant labour force. As of 31 December 2020, the country's population has increased to 34.5 million, with an urban-rural ratio of 50.6 percent to 49.4 percent respectively.[1] In 2018, the population living below the national poverty line stood at 11.4 percent, climbing to 12-15 percent, or 4-5 million people in 2020.[2] Meanwhile, the unemployment rate had risen to over 9 percent, continuing upward (to 11.1 percent) by the end of 2020.[3] In sum, Uzbekistan's labour force constitutes 19.1 million people, with, strikingly, around 2.5 million Uzbeks – 20 percent of the country's economically active population – working abroad.[4] Each year, some 600,000-700,000 people enter the domestic labour market and the country is taking active measures to develop targeted sectors and regions, with the aim of creating up to 500,000 new jobs annually. However, reaching this ambitious target would also require providing work abroad for almost 200,000 Uzbeks each year.[5]

Labour migration of the Uzbek population is not a new phenomenon. The previous Government attempted, albeit inactively, to regulate labour migration aiming to facilitate the socio-economic development of the country. However, the insufficient legal framework, existing bureaucratic hurdles, and the lack of bilateral and multilateral agreements on labour migration with other countries, had hampered all efforts to combat irregular labour migration. In contrast, the new Government has recognised migration issues and the various difficulties encountered by Uzbek migrant workers, increasingly playing an active role in supporting labour migrants.

Widely cited as an important factor in economic development, the past years have seen labour migration top the national agenda, with the current Government making great strides toward legalising organised labour migration and steering what has been iden-

tified as a national asset toward activities that promote socio-economic development within the country. This endeavour is based on the proven premise that labour migration, when properly organised, leads to an increase in employment and family income, an increase in skilled labour, and a decrease in labour market pressures and social tensions. During this period, many game-changing legal documents have been adopted, which are expected to help regulate and ease difficulties faced by Uzbek migrants working, or planning to work, abroad. The new measures also focus on covering travel expenses and facilitating the obtaining of permits, insurance, pensions or loans by migrants, as well as ensuring the protection of the migrants' labour rights once they depart.

LAYING THE BEDROCK FOR EFFECTIVE LABOUR MIGRATION POLICY

The starting point for the comprehensive reforms in Uzbekistan was the adoption of the Strategy for Action on five priority areas identified for the development of Uzbekistan during the period 2017-2021[6], namely: (i) improving the system of state and public construction; (ii) ensuring the rule of law and further reforming the judicial system; (iii) developing and liberalizing the economy; (iv) developing the social sphere; (v) ensuring security, inter-ethnic harmony and religious tolerance, implementing balanced, mutually beneficial and constructive foreign policy. Importantly, the fourth area of this Strategy stipulates the implementation of specific measures to increase employment, strengthen the system of social protection for citizens, and improve public health.

In order to implement the Strategy's social protection tasks, the Ministry of Labour was transformed into the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations,[7] and tasked with implementing new policy approaches on employment and development of the national labour market infrastructure. Under this Ministry, the Agency for External Labour Migration was established, which is entrusted with assisting Uzbek citizens in exercising their right to work abroad. It does this by effectively managing and monitoring the processes for organised recruitment, alongside preparation and implementation of adaptation measures and employment abroad. The Agency is further tasked with interacting with the competent authorities of foreign states on regulation of employment processes for Uzbek citizens abroad and protecting their labour rights.

Supporting Uzbeks abroad

The Agency for External Labour Migration has also been given responsibility for opening representative offices in destination countries and accreditation of foreign companies for the purposes of recruiting Uzbek migrant workers. During the course of 2021, foreign representative offices are due to be opened in Istanbul, Dubai, and four Russian cities – Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Volgograd and Pyatigorsk. These regional representative offices are authorised to directly conclude contracts with foreign employers and subsequently send citizens abroad, cooperate with diaspora organisations abroad, and attract technical assistance funds and grants from international financial institutions and organisations for the development of organised labour migration.

A special fund to "support and protect the rights and interests of citizens engaged in labour activities abroad"[8] is also envisaged. It shall provide comprehensive legal, social, and

financial assistance to those Uzbek citizens abroad subjected to violence, forced servitude or discrimination; labour or other rights violation; or those who have fallen into financial difficulty and are without documentation or means of subsistence. Funding should cover medical services for citizens who, while undertaking labour migration, require medical assistance due to injury or accident – or face insurmountable medical costs.

Organising recruitment within Uzbekistan

In order to increase guarantees of employment for citizens looking for work abroad, it is envisaged to conclude cooperation contracts between private employment agencies and foreign employers.

The next step by the Government has been to allow private employment agencies to organise recruitment of Uzbeks for work abroad. Regulation of private employment agencies is now enshrined in the Law on Private Employment Agencies,[9] which provides for the increase and expansion of employment opportunities for citizens, both within domestic enterprises and abroad. The Law sets clear regulation on the mechanisms of interaction between public services and the private employment sector, determining the procedure and conditions for the provision of employment services, including the rights and obligations of private employment agencies, enterprises and individuals, and jobseekers.

The further Law on Amendments and Additions to the Law on Private Employment Agencies[10] prohibits private employment agencies from collecting money from citizens seeking to work abroad, stipulating that such fees should be collected from the employer. In accordance with the Law, contracts for provision of services should be registered in real time in the Labour Migration database of the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations. In order to increase guarantees of employment for citizens looking for work abroad, it is envisaged to conclude cooperation contracts between private employment agencies and foreign employers or partners, whereby such guarantees would be defined as a necessary precondition for engagement.

Further legislative support for labour migration

The latest legislation also includes various measures aimed at spurring the growth and ease of Uzbek out-migration, facilitating short-term necessities with a view to stimulating long-term growth. Concrete measures include reimbursement of transport and other costs incurred by labour migrants, financial assistance during the preparation of required documents, and provision of loans, microloans and subsidies to cover migrant life and health insurance. Further provisions relate to the organisation of short trainings on migration and labour legislation, assistance to returning labour migrants in other matters, and housing for migrant families in need.[11] Within a year, it is planned to allocate 3,462 apartments in dwelling houses for labour migrants who need to improve their living conditions on the basis of issuing preferential mortgage loans.[12]

During a speech at the Meeting of the Council of CIS Heads of State on 18 December 2020,[13] the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, proposed the creation, within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), of a single interstate mechanism for (reciprocal) recognition of migrants' professional competences and qualifications, and medical examinations undergone. The President's

proposal to develop and adopt the Cooperation Programme on Labour Migration is yet another important initiative, designed to ensure sustainable socio-economic development in the CIS member states.

Signing agreements

Uzbekistan is actively signing bilateral and intergovernmental agreements with countries hosting large numbers of migrant workers, embedding organised forms of co-operation and allowing support for Uzbek citizens. One such agreement was signed between the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Russian Federation[14] to ensure protection of the rights and legitimate interests of Uzbek migrant workers engaged in temporary labour activities on the territory of the Russian Federation. According to the statistics, of more than 2.5 million Uzbek citizens working abroad, over 1,5 million work in Russia.[15]

On 30 November 2020, the official opening of a representative office of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN)[16] took place in the Uzbek capital Tashkent, facilitated by the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the basis of the "Ishga Markhamat" ("Welcome to work") Monocentre, a multifunctional centre for employment services. The RUDN University in Uzbekistan is entrusted with implementing joint projects with the Uzbek Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations in: teaching the Russian language and conducting refresher courses for Russian language teachers; conducting pre-departure training for Uzbek citizens wishing to work in the Russian Federation; preparing and conducting examinations on the Russian language, the history of Russia, and the basic legislation of the Russian Federation as required by Russia's legal framework on employment of foreign labour.

These developments are due to be further bolstered by the opening of a representative office of the Russian passport and visa service in Uzbekistan, with this office expected to provide services for preparation, registration and issuance of permits for temporary labour activities. According to the Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs, there are currently 600,000 undocumented Uzbeks residing in that country, whom are seeking to avoid deportation and a subsequent entry ban. Within a relatively short period, 421,000 citizens have been deported to Uzbekistan and are thus not entitled to return to Russia.[17]

In April 2019, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan paid a state visit to Uzbekistan for the signing of a bilateral agreement on protection of the labour rights of Kazakh citizens working in Uzbekistan, with full reciprocity for citizens of Uzbekistan working in Kazakhstan.[18]

On 25 February 2020, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed among the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Republic of Korea, and the Financial Corporation "Probest" to create favourable conditions and ensure the safety and health of Uzbek citizens engaged in temporary labour activities in Korea, and students studying in the country.[19]

Boosting labour market information and skills

As mentioned, the Government has launched the online database LaborMigration.uz[20] – which provides information on the rules of stay, working conditions, and social and housing provisions in the prospective country of employment. The legal aspects of con-

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cluding employment contracts with foreign employers and the financial support measures provided for in the legislation are also covered. Registered labour migrants who find themselves in a difficult situation abroad can also use the LaborMigration.uz portal to apply for assistance from the Agency for Labour Migration. At the time of writing, over 230,000 people are registered in the database, with services rendered covering a total of 182,857 cases.

Creating jobs and promoting employment, especially among the youth, has been identified by the Government as a way of ensuring adequate employment within Uzbekistan, as the profile of the typical migrant is under 30, from a rural area, married, and educated to at least (completion of) secondary education. It is therefore important for Uzbekistan to boost job creation at home, in line with the current supply of skills, as well as supporting the development of skills to match prevailing demand. To this end, a complex of measures has been developed, and is now being implemented, to create new jobs, train (and retrain) professional personnel, foster entrepreneurship, provide suitable infrastructure, and allocate additional plots of land for low-income groups. The Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction is a key actor in this expansion, having been created specifically to regulate the processes aimed at poverty reduction.[21]

Leveraging the youth population

With a view to reducing the outflow of human capital experienced during the past decades, enabling young people to boost their competencies, allowing them to contribute and benefit from an economically viable and legally supportive environment, and ensuring their full participation as active citizens, represent key aims of Uzbek policy on labour migration. A recent development has been the signing of the Presidential Resolution "On Additional Measures Aimed at Attracting Entrepreneurship",[22] wherein the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations was duly instructed to organise "Ishga Markhamat" Monocentres, vocational training centres, and short-term vocational training courses by 1 January 2021. The Ministry thus organises, on an ongoing basis, training for citizens in various professions, while imparting the basics of entrepreneurship and foreign languages in high demand. These activities are carried out with the involvement of various (non-state) vocational education institutions. The Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations is also charged with issuing skills passports recognised in Uzbekistan and other countries to graduates who have successfully passed examinations, creating a Unified Register of Graduates containing only individuals with confirmed qualifications.

As noted, the Government has placed youth employment at the top of the agenda, seeking to improve the pool of professional skills in accordance with labour market demand, and provide decent work based on the wishes and needs of the country's rapidly growing youth population. This is done on the understanding that investing in skills development can improve the employability of graduates, enhance the quality of available jobs, help improve the competitiveness of specific sectors, and reduce socio-economic inequality.

President Mirziyoyev, during an address to the Oliy Majlis (Parliament),[23] stated that "it is necessary to educate personnel of a new formation, who will be initiators of reforms, who will have a strategic vision, deep knowledge and high qualifications". With this aim to the fore, the Agency for Youth Affairs and the Interdepartmental Council for Youth Issues have been established. Youth parliaments have also been created in the Oliy Majlis and the Youth Academy under the Ministry of Innovative Development. Moreover, 2019 saw 5,722 public, private and family kindergartens established, increasing, over the course of just one year, preschool coverage from 38 percent to 52 percent nationwide. In 2020, the coverage of young children with preschool education reached 60 percent, the number of kindergartens increased and exceeded 14,000. Nineteen new higher educational institutions have also been opened, including nine branches of well-known foreign universities. The year 2019 also saw 146,500 students admitted to Uzbek universities – accounting for over 20 percent of secondary school graduates, compared to 9.1 percent for 2018. The proportion of school graduates in higher education reached 25 percent in 2020[24] – with levels of between 50 percent and 60 percent on the horizon.

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Uzbekistan has also become the 83rd member of World Skills International (WSI)[25] – an international non-profit movement aimed at increasing the prestige of professions, and the status and standards of vocational training around the world. Participation in WSI activities is opening up new opportunities and prospects for Uzbekistan, particularly in regard to youth employment.

Measures to spur economic growth

Spurring the country's advance, the Asian Development Bank provided a loan of $93 million to help enhance competitiveness in Uzbekistan and boost inclusive growth, through improving market-relevant skills development among young people and jobseekers.[26] The Skills Development for a Modern Economy Project seeks to develop a skilled workforce in: construction; textiles and garments; information and communication technology; agribusiness and food processing; and machinery repair and maintenance. At least 60,000 people, including 48,000 jobseekers and 500 people with disabilities, will benefit from the project. The project will also benefit industries seeking skilled workers and returning migrants who pursue reskilling or recognition of prior learning in the target sectors.

Various measures to restore economic growth in 2020-2021 and continue the systemic structural reform of the economy are being implemented to bolster key sectors, further upgrade the banking system, increase investment, and improve competition and industrial policy. This is being undertaken alongside the stimulation of domestic demand and reduction of poverty through employment and increasing income, while expanding the measures in place to provide financial support for start-ups.[27] Due to the challenge posed by rising poverty levels, and aiming to ultimately reduce labour migration, specific ministries and agencies have been tasked with developing the Poverty Reduction Strat-

egy for the Republic of Uzbekistan covering the period to 2030. It is planned to develop indicators for monitoring the implementation of national sustainable development goals, the potential of the national economy and the tasks carried out on the basis of the poverty reduction program and international experience; to determine the driving forces of the economy; and to forecast economic growth and job creation.

Placing labour migration at the centre of government strategy

One of the most significant steps taken by the Government has been the embedding of a system of safe, orderly and legal labour migration,[28] entailing:

- Approval of action plans (in effect from 1 January 2021) establishing compulsory professional education and foreign language instruction for citizens migrating for labour purposes; issuing migrants with internationally recognised certificates confirming their professional qualifications; and providing financial and social support for labour migrants in a difficult situation abroad. The plans also expand the practice on attaining life and health insurance for migrants, and reintegration of persons returning from labour migration – ensuring employment, professional development and stimulating entrepreneurial initiative, among other features.
- In order to ensure prompt dissemination of information in the field of external labour migration, official information channels of the Agency for External Labour Migration have been launched online via social networks (Telegram, Facebook).
- As of 1 January 2021, the implementation of temporary labour activity abroad through organised labour migration corresponds to the types of activities (work, services) which self-employed persons can engage in. A further initiative, based on Article 369 of the Tax Code,[29] sees self-employed persons exempt from personal income tax, and able to (voluntarily) pay social tax into the national pension fund.
- Plans have been initiated to launch a call centre, via an online platform and operating on the territory of Russia, to provide legal assistance to migrants.
- Migrants who return from abroad and register in the unified database outlined above have the right to UZS 2.2 million (approx. EUR 175) in subsidies, intended to pay the first three months' rent on commercial premises (from the date of registration as a self-employed entrepreneur).

As regards implementing the focus on compulsory professional education, the 13 "Ishga Markhamat" Monocentres, 30 vocational training centres, 11 short-term vocational training courses and 136 vocational training courses for the citizens in mahallas (local communities) have been tasked to this end. Expectations for 2021 are running high, with targets set out to:

- *Train* 70,000 Uzbek citizens in professions and foreign languages.
- *Send* 144,000 citizens abroad for temporary work in an organised manner.
- *Provide* employment for 148,000 returning labour migrants.
- *Deliver* targeted assistance to family members of 120,000 returned labour migrants.

In order to regulate relations in the field of employment, the Law on Employment of the Population[30] has been adopted, with a separate chapter covering issues related to self-employed persons. Therein are set out important criteria for gaining self-employed status and the specific tax regime applied (i.e. income received through labour activity is not included in total income, and only social tax is paid to the off-budget pension fund).

COVID-19 MEASURES

The global Coronavirus pandemic has affected all areas of the world economy, not least labour migration, forcing millions of migrants to adapt to the prevailing conditions. More jobs are therefore needed to absorb those who return to their home country, with returnees likely re-entering the local labour pool and raising the overall unemployment rate. The challenge that has now been set by events unforeseen is to rapidly accommodate these returnees into the domestic workforce, benefiting from the resources, human and otherwise, garnered abroad – while avoiding repeated out-migration. If navigated skilfully, what in the short term has manifested in a challenging shift in the Uzbek labour market may ultimately represent a significant boon for the country at large. COVID-19 has brought with it an opportunity for returnees to not only use skills acquired, but also knowledge and savings – to start businesses or invest in domestic entrepreneurial activities.

In navigating the short-term challenges, large-scale anti-crisis measures have been taken by the Government to stimulate employment, preserve jobs and income, ensure safety and health in the workplace, and prevent discrimination and social exclusion. On the initiative of the President, the Anti-Crisis Fund was created with a pool of UZS 10 trillion (EUR 780 million), alongside the Charity and Support Fund for Poor Families.[31]

During the pandemic, Uzbek labour migrants have been provided with consulting and legal services, social assistance, and financial support. Repatriation assistance was extended to those who fell into a difficult situation abroad, as well as practical assistance on collecting wages and compensation from employers. In order to promptly respond to appeals from unemployed labour migrants, two websites – Birgamiz.com and Anketa.migration.uz – were created, as well as a dedicated hotline and Telegram channel for those seeking support. Based on official statistics, about 498,000 labour migrants returned to Uzbekistan, finding themselves with no fixed income.[32]

Over the first half of 2020, the responsible labour authorities provided employment promotion services to 826,000 unemployed citizens:

- Over 33,000 families were helped via a mechanism that subsidises low-income families, developing household plots and creating agricultural cooperatives.
- A total 3,000 unemployed people were employed through subsidies for the development of entrepreneurship.
- Some 37,000 unemployed received unemployment benefits.
- Nearly 43,000 returning labour migrants were provided with employment assistance, legal services or financial assistance.[33]

Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on the labour market

Quarantine measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 have had a significant impact on the labour market. In June 2020, the Republican Research Centre for Employment and Labour Protection under the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations conducted a sociological survey across 101 Uzbek cities and districts, using a methodology developed on the basis of recommendations from the International Labour Organization (ILO). The survey covered 490 self-governing bodies of citizens, 4,900 households, and 25,900 individuals. The results of the study showed that the unemployment rate among the economically active population had reached 13.2 percent (by comparison, this figure for the same period in 2019 was 9.1 percent). The total number of unemployed thus amounted to 1.94 million and, strikingly, the unemployment rate for those aged 16 to 30 years stood at 20.1 percent.[34]

Having become a member of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in November 2018, autumn 2020 saw the launch of the regional project "Mitigation of the Socio-Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Migrants and Communities", funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.[35] The goal of the project is to help reduce the negative socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and communities, including through assisting the return and reintegration of vulnerable migrants and helping the Central Asia states and the Russian Federation to solve the operational tasks of managing labour migration during a global pandemic.

In this vein, the Government of Uzbekistan and the leaders of the Uzbek diaspora in Russia will work together to solve the problems of labour migrants. Held in online format, a recent conference gathered representatives from the Uzbek Cabinet of Ministers, government departments and diplomatic missions with leaders from over 70 diaspora Uzbek associations in Russia. The aim of the meeting was to discuss ways of resolving concerns from Uzbeks on working and residing in Russia, with a particular emphasis on navigating the restrictions then in place due to COVID-19.[36]

SHORT AND MID-TERM GOALS

On 7 August 2020, the Minister of Employment and Labour Relations, Nozim Khusanov, reported to the Senate on the work carried out since the beginning of 2019.[37] In his speech, the Minister placed an emphasis on taking the following steps:

- Lessons learned during the COVID-19 crisis would serve as the basis for future work by the Ministry on developing the National Employment Strategy of Uzbekistan, which should consolidate into one key document the various efforts that have been, and which continue to be, made throughout the country. The Strategy will be a significant policy document covering the period to 2030.
- Strengthening of the capacity of the employment services should continue, bolstered by the introduction of additional instruments for stimulating demand for labour resources.
- Systematic work should be ensured to help the employment of youth, including in rural areas, and among graduates of higher and secondary specialised educational institutions.

- Information on available vacancies should be widely disseminated in accordance with current labour legislation requirements.
- The quality of training courses in the ministry system should be improved in order to meet prevailing requirements.

The Minister further stated that the entrusted tasks on regulating labour migration and organising recruitment for work abroad have been fulfilled at a level that is *not* satisfactory. The Minister drew particular attention to the fact that the share of organised labour migration in general labour migration stood at an average of only 9 percent during the period covered.

During the 3rd meeting of the EU-Uzbekistan Subcommittee on Development Issues, the Minister put forward areas for potential bilateral cooperation between Uzbekistan and the European Union, within the framework of the new programme cycle of the European Commission for 2021-2027[38]:

- Further development of the vocational training system with the possibility of implementing the experience of the dual vocational training system for high-demand specialisations.
- Improvement of the activities of the State Labour Inspectorate, ensuring effective implementation of international norms and standards in the field of labour.
- Increased digitalisation of the services provided by employment promotion centres, ensuring effective remote support to citizens.
- Implementation of mechanisms for the organised contracting of Uzbek citizens for temporary work abroad through appropriate agreements on labour migration with EU countries.
- Development and implementation of joint programmes to support and expand employment opportunities, including training in entrepreneurial skills, developing collective forms of employment, and improving employment services.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recently adopted legislative acts and documents outlined in this paper provide a powerful impetus to implementation of the Strategy for Action on supporting employment of citizens outside of Uzbek borders, as well as reintegration upon return. These developments should help to implement comprehensive measures aimed at increasing the incomes and living standards of Uzbek labour migrant families, by promoting solutions to issues they may be facing – improving housing conditions and ensuring employment of able workforce.

As stated by the Minister of Employment and Labour Relations, a great deal has been done to improve the country's legislative base. However, the practical implementation leaves much to be desired. **If the new legal tools are to produce the intended impact, some important issues need to be foreseen**, while making efforts to reduce the number of labour migrants and ensure that their rights are observed while abroad:

- The newly established **Ministry for the Mahalla and Family Support**[39] has been entrusted with closely cooperating with citizen self-governance agencies to improve the social and spiritual atmosphere within families and mahallas; ensuring employment of women, improving working conditions, strengthening the role and importance of citizen self-governmental bodies in society, and increasing their status in regard to handling the day-to-day issues of the local population. Therefore, **it is vital to involve the Ministry and Mahalla Committees in working with the population** to explain what has been achieved on labour migration thus far and the government plans in this area. Such outreach should highlight: the benefits provided, and the support received, by migrants and their families; the advantages of legal migration – and the disadvantages of illegal migration; and which documents are required for legal employment. It should be widely communicated that the Government provides professional education and language training courses, and support and assistance in registration through the LaborMigration.uz database.

- **The Agency for External Labour Migration should have a communication channel with migrant workers**, for receiving feedback (and complaints) on the employment undertaken – or this issue could be included into the existing database. Moreover, **wide communication by private employment agencies should be carried out** online, through social networks and Telegram channels, and provide information on potential foreign employers and labour demands.

- **A broad selection of opportunities should be provided for young people** to obtain foundational technical, digital, innovation and entrepreneurial skills in order to successfully enter the labour market. Enhanced computer skills education should be extended and use and scope of the internet explained. Such initiatives should be extended widely to those residing in remote rural areas, youth from low-income families, and young people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

- **Various sociological surveys should be initiated** to monitor the dynamics of economic, political and social indicators related to migration. The surveys could study the factors and causes of labour migration by regions; help determining destinations and forms of migration; assess working conditions of labour migrants; identify channels how labour migrants find work proposals. They could feed into a national information database on labour migration; identify the main factors that determine the exact jobs most frequently carried out by migrants abroad, especially women and youth; identify the main problems and shortcomings faced especially by young people; prepare recommendations on the regulation of labour migration. The surveys could be further used to investigate the causes and consequences of migrants' movements, as well as to describe recent flows and to estimate certain types of movement, thereby helping to improve labour migration statistics, reflecting, the demographic characteristics of migrants as well as their working and living conditions. It is impossible to determine the positive or negative consequences of labour migration without having reliable information about the number and composition of the migrants and the relevant economic indicators. Such surveys should also involve the civil society and international organizations in order to get richer and more detailed data.

- **Private employment agencies and the Agency for External Labour Migration need to organise, control and ensure the protection of migrants' rights** upon arrival to the country of destination. There have been many complaints about employers not fulfilling contractual conditions. The communication with the labour migrants employed abroad through private employment agencies would be overly helpful. The launch of a dedicated section for filing complaints against abusive employers within the online database LaborMigration.uz could be complemented through the possibility of consulting lawyers on possible remedies. Moreover, a rating system of existing employers could ensure improvements for the future. Finally the active use of social media such as Facebook and Telegram could support the monitoring of related issues.

- **Both the demand-side and supply-side labour market challenges should be assessed** in order to help support private sector growth and productivity, enhance worker employability, and address the skills gap. Measures addressing the demand-side could be mobilised to spur economic growth and livelihood development. On the supply-side, similar tools should be used in educational development programming.

- **Data collection** from private employment agencies, job seekers and training providers could help in assessing the existing labour market needs abroad. The collected data could contribute to improving the supply of the skills needed and overall recruitment process (e.g. through targeted job advertisements in relevant online platforms). The data could also enhance the assistance provided for signing of employment contracts and in explaining the obligations of the parties. Meanwhile, a continuous analysis of existing vacancies could improve the assessment of present and future labour market demands and of the respective skills needed. Whereas encouraging job seekers to register at LaborMigration.uz could further enrich the available evidence, partnerships with employers could help accelerating the information flow and actual placement of migrant workers.

- According to Central Bank statistics, cross-border remittances to Uzbekistan amounted to USD $5.44 billion during the period January-November 2020. The share of all international money transfers shows that 72% are made in the Russian Federation.[40] In Uzbekistan, most returned migrants spend their savings mainly on holding social events, weddings, buying, building and renovating housing, and purchasing other commodities. In order to diversify the range of this expenditure and encourage returning migrants to remain in the country, **the Agency for External Labour Migration should undertake more active organisation of trainings in the regions/rural areas**; on how to start a business and develop business ideas and plans, spurring returnee involvement in private business and entrepreneurship.

- Labour migration brings many positive aspects; the attainment of qualifications, business experience and experience in a given profession, etc. Workers return to their country more prepared for future undertakings, either as an employee or an entrepreneur, and this presents good opportunities to develop the economy. However, for this development to ultimately materialise, it is necessary to create conducive conditions within Uzbekistan. Otherwise, returned migrants will again leave

the country to work abroad. Thus, informing citizens about employment opportunities within their own country/community is crucial, reaching the worker before they decide to (re)migrate. **Information on the demand for labour in domestic factories, and farming and non-farming enterprises should be provided**, as citizens are not always aware of the opportunities available. Such information should be better communicated and vocational training organised for those considering migration, especially women with children.

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ICMPD's Anti-Trafficking Programme assists state and non-state stakeholders at the national and regional level by supporting the development of comprehensive anti-trafficking responses in accordance with international and European standards. The Programme has a team of resourceful, dedicated, and specialised anti-trafficking experts who have been instrumental over the years in deploying various types of technical assistance expertise in different parts of the world based on needs expressed by countries, regional communities, and the donor community. The Anti-Trafficking Programme also collects and analyses facts in order to enrich its thematic expertise and to ensure the release of relevant and adequate products.

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