# MIGRATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

## IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE, EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

## THEMATIC BRIEF

The SEEECA region's population growth declined in the last decade:

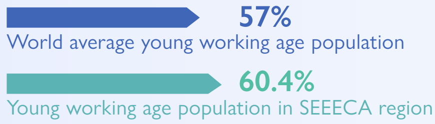
(only increasing by 6%).

The population in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (SEEECA) has observed a decline in its growth in the last decade compared to previous decades (only increased by 6% compared to 24% in the last forty years) - mainly due to the negative net migration, the low total fertility rates and the decreased life expectancy at birth in the Central and Eastern Europe region (UNFPA, 2018). The conflicts in the region might also increase the mortality rates like displacement might lead to lower birth rates due to displacement. More than six million Ukrainian refugees have been recorded abroad, the majority of which are women and children (UNHCR, 2023).

The share of women in the SEEECA region will continue to be slightly higher than the population of men in the next seventy year:

50.2% in line with global trends

The share of women in the SEEECA region will continue to be slightly higher than the population of men in the next seventy years (50.2% in 2100). This might mean higher number of female migrants within and from the region, and potentially higher participation of women in the labour force (DESA, 2021).




The SEEECA region tends to have a younger working age population (60.4%) than the world average (57%). However, there are large differences within the SEEECA region, with Western Balkans[1] (WBs) and South Caucasus[2] facing rapidly ageing populations while Central Asian working age population is growing. In the last ten years an increase of 5.4 percentage points was recorded in the age dependency ratio, meaning that in the SEEECA region people in need of social support, especially of older ages such as health care, and pension schemes, are growing. It should still be noted that the overall age dependency ratio is lower in the SEEECA region (52.9 years) than the world (55.3 years) and European Union (EU) average (56.3) (World Bank, 2023a).


The bilateral migration corridors between the Russian Federation and Ukraine ranked as the fourth and fifth largest corridors in the world in 2020 (DESA, 2021). However, the bilateral migration corridors have been impacted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Since 24 February 2022, more than six million Ukrainian citizens have been displaced out of their country in Europe as of June 2023 (UNHCR, 2023a). The share of women among adult refugees is around 70% in most host countries and many have arrived with children, with the share of minors around 30% (OECD, 2023). This

[1] Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

[2] Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

gender composition is unusual compared to other refugee populations hosted in the region such as the Syrians and Afghans displaced populations. The impact of this on birth rates, education and integration is to be seen.

**> 1.8 million**
Russian citizens, foreign citizens and stateless persons have left the Russian Federation in 2022.

While the Russian Federation has been the number one destination country in the region for international migrants, in particular for migrants from Central Asia, it is increasingly becoming a country of origin (DESA, 2021). It has been estimated that in 2022 more than 1.8 million Russian citizens, foreign citizens and stateless persons have left the Russian Federation (Rosstat, 2023). Lower income countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia such as Moldova, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan increasingly became host countries for Russian nationals.


Türkiye has been hosting the largest population of Syrian refugees since the breakout of civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2011. However, since 2021, a decline has been observed in the number of Syrian refugees in Türkiye (3.7 million in 2021 versus 3.2 million in 2023) potentially due to (1) more than 150,000 cancelled registrations under the PMM led verification process since 2021, (2) return of over 500,000 Syrian nationals to the Syrian Arab Republic and (3) more than 200,000 Syrian nationals who became Turkish citizens as of 2022 (PMM, 2023).

From 1990 to 2020 international migrant stock in Türkiye had increased by
**420%**

From 1990 to 2020 the international migrant stock in Türkiye increased by 420 per cent (DESA, 2022). This shifted the migration trends of the country from a sending country to a receiving one in the previous decades. Almost half of the current 3.35 million Syrian refugees in Türkiye are children (PMM, 2023) including those born in displacement in Türkiye, which increases the overall young population in the country. However, 400,000 school age Syrian children do not attend school (UNICEF, 2022) and a significant group of refugees are engaged in informal work in the country (World Bank, 2023d). In response, early and coordinated integration programmes are recommended to remove language barriers and minimize negative impacts of informal labour through education and social protection policies (World Bank, 2023).

**≈ 3 Million**
people forced to flee their homes in Türkiye due to the earthquakes.

In addition, devastating earthquakes that hit Türkiye and Northwest Syria in February 2023 had a significant impact on mortality and mobility, resulting only in Türkiye of 45,089 casualties (AFAD, 2023) and almost three million people forced to flee their homes, including Syrian refugees who experienced secondary displacement (IOM, 2023b).

**The traditional labour migration corridors were impacted by COVID-19.**

Remittance inflows in SEEECA region:

6% in 2020

17% in 2021

The traditional labour migration corridors which greatly contribute to the intraregional mobility (68 % of the total mobility from the region) were impacted by COVID-19, as demonstrated by the six per cent decrease in remittance inflows in the region in 2020 and the successive increase of 17 per cent in 2021 (World Bank, 2023b). The increase could be partially attributed to migrant workers stranded in countries of destination who could not use informal channels to transfer money and had to transfer via official banks. This might have enabled better tracking of the volume of remittances.

**Since the beginning of 2023, the Russian Ruble has depreciated, which is bound to impact remittances to Central Asia.**

In 2022, the initial projections were that Central Asian migrant workers would seek other destinations due to the anticipated economic developments. The remittances from the Russian Federation reached record highs in 2022, due in part to increased demand for labor and to the Russian Ruble's appreciation against the US Dollar (World Bank, 2023c). However, since the beginning of 2023, the Russian Ruble has depreciated which is bound to impact remittances to Central Asia. This might result in search for alternative destination countries for migrant workers as per the initial projections in 2022. One of the emerging destination countries has been the United Kingdom which established seasonal work schemes to make up for the post-BREXIT labour shortages (BBC,2022).

**Western Balkans are experiencing a brain drain due the ongoing emigration of health personnel towards the EU.**

Brain drain is affecting the SEEECA region as a result of the shrinking active age population in the EU that implements schemes to attract qualified workers. Most notably, the Western Balkans are experiencing this due to the ongoing emigration of health personnel, mainly doctors and nurses towards the EU (OECD, 2022). The gap in active age labour force which EU is experimenting might also mean that existing diasporas from the SEEECA region will expand, as for instance the Georgian and Armenian communities.

In return, the Western Balkans are experiencing a higher number of Turkish and Chinese migrant workers and businesses that partially compensate the decrease in working age population in this region (Imami et al., 2021).

**In 13 SEEECA countries, the percentage of urban population is higher than world average(56.2%)**

In line with global migration trends, there is a rural-to-urban mobility trend in the SEEECA region: the average proportion of the SEEECA population moving from the rural to urban areas has increased by 28.1 per cent, from 31.6 per cent in 1950 to 59.6 per cent in 2020. Similarly, the world population moving to urban areas has increased by 26.6 per cent, rising from 29.6 per cent in 1950 to 56.2 per cent in 2020. This can be most observed in thirteen SEEECA countries which present higher incidence of urban population than the world average (56.2%), while mostly Central Asia countries are below the world average (DESA, 2021).

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Climate change and environmental degradation is an increasingly relevant factor for this internal mobility, particularly affecting the Western Balkans in the SEEECA region (IOM, 2022 and IPCC, 2023). In some countries, migration may respond to the population gaps in rural areas caused by the internal mobility to urban settlements. For example, Afghan migrants in Türkiye work in the agriculture and animal husbandry sectors while the local populations are moving to more urban areas (Foschini, 2022ab).

## CONCLUSIONS

*“ Migration is not only a factor but also part of the solution for the demographic changes. ”*

Migration is not only a factor but also driving and crucial part of the solution for the demographic changes. Therefore, it needs to be mainstreamed across different thematic policy areas. In terms of labour market integration, it becomes crucial to assess, attract and retain workers in all skills categories, while also reducing the cost of recruitment, enhancing private-public partnership as well as promoting student mobility. This should be complemented by enhancing the potential of temporary and circular migration, while ensuring the protection of rights, anticipation, development, and recognition of skills at both ends. This needs to be coupled with guaranteeing more flexible residence permits, entry provisions, and procedures to change visa/residency categories to promote regular migration flows to destination countries. In addition, it is important to implement social inclusion policies not only for migrants but also for their next generations (Haller et al., 2011) who can greatly contribute to economic and social development of the host countries.

The higher share of women compared to that of men in the region might translate into more women migrants for the SEEECA region. As a result, countries of origin and destination would need to take measures to address protection needs, especially in sectors such as domestic work. The financial inclusion of women would also need to be taken into account since their remittance sending habits might differ in comparison to men in terms of using technological tools and sending higher percentages of their income home.

**The higher share of women compared to that of men in the overall population of the region might translate into more women migrants for the SEEECA region.**

**There are some data gaps in the analysis on migration and demographic trends.**

There are some data gaps in the analysis on migration and demographic trends due to lack of some indicators (sex and age disaggregation) in the SEEECA public data sources including censuses. There are also differences in definitions that can lead to further problems in counting, such as double counting or variations in counting methods. Nevertheless, data is fundamental in building an evidence base for mainstreaming migration in public discourse.

Countries confronted with aging and shrinking populations would need to consider taking additional measures, including the need to adapt workplaces, welfare, and public health systems to accommodate the increased demand for accessible and affordable quality health care and long-term care (EC, 2023; Peri, 2020).

**Aging populations require more welfare support.**

**Migration can be a solution to make up for the ageing of populations:**

**Growing labour surplus in many developing countries**

**Slow down the ageing of populations**

**Mitigate the decline in working age population**

Migration can be part of the solution to make up for the ageing of populations in the developed regions: migrants can increase the working age population and reduce the old-age dependency ratios in the developed regions (World Bank, 2023b; EC, 2023; DESA, 2017). This can be applicable to flows from the SEEECA region to the EU countries particularly from the Western Balkans and the Eastern Europe. On the other hand, the impact of this on the developing countries needs to be considered as they might face declining working age population (due to emigration and low natality rates) in return. This might also require to seek solutions in opening their labour markets to migrants and also designing or expanding skills mobility partnerships which benefit both country of origin and country of destination.