



# **ICMPD Migration Outlook**

## **Western Balkans and Türkiye 2023**

**Nine migration issues to look out for in 2023**  
Origins, key events and priorities for Europe



# Nine Migration Issues to Look out for in 2023

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## 1. Protracted Crises in Syria and Afghanistan

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There are several protracted and critical migration and displacement situations across the world, however, the Syria and Afghanistan situations remain the ones that affect migration movements in the Western Balkan region and Türkiye the most. Therefore, countries in the region require additional, targeted and aligned support including cross-regional initiatives. Despite commendable efforts of the migration institutions in the region together with other relevant stakeholders and actors in improving migration management, there are many indicators already alerting that 2023 may be another difficult year in terms of migration movements due to conflicts and insecurity, economic crises and fundamental and human rights violations in the countries of origin, especially Syria and Afghanistan.

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## 2. The prominence of migration as an important heading in politics

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Migration-related issues will most likely continue to play a dominant role in Türkiye in 2023. Migration is expected to be among the most prominent topics on the agenda not only in the run-up to the Turkish general elections that are expected to be held in May 2023 but also afterwards. Since the migration situation in the country has been discussed widely, the policies and measures are expected to revolve around migration control, securitisation return of irregular migrants border protection integration and the return of Syrians to their home country.

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## 3. The expected increase in migration flows from and through Türkiye

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FRONTEX reported a total of 10.959<sup>1</sup> detections in 2022, originating from Türkiye to the EU. According to the FRONTEX Risk Analysis Report 2022/2023, 2023 will likely see a further significant increase in irregular migration at sea borders due to aggravating political and socioeconomic push factors in a wide range of key countries of origin and transit, as well as higher-level push factors such as persisting global inflation<sup>2</sup> All factors combined indicate that migration pressures in the direction of Türkiye will persist, continue to the Western Balkans and finally aim to reach the EU in the period ahead.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-map/>

<sup>2</sup> FRONTEX Risk Analysis Report 2022/2023, Source: <https://prd.frontex.europa.eu/document/risk-analysis-for-2022-2023/>



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## 4. Protracted displacement and economic crises in the Middle East

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Rights and policies applied for migrants and overall economic conditions in the WB Region do not create favourable environments for all migrants to stay and therefore countries in the region are considered as transit stages by irregular migrants. Due to said conditions; migrants generally do not prefer to stay in the region, thus they do not apply for asylum or just apply and then leave. This leads WB Countries to take action through the prism of considering migration mainly as a transit matter. Irregular migration through the WB region has increased in 2022 due to multiple reasons, one of which is visa-free access granted to some of the origin countries such as Burundi, India, Morocco or Tunisia. Following political pressure from the EU side, Serbia has committed to tightening its visa regulations which are expected to result in curbing some share of the irregular migration flows in Western Balkan Route towards Europe in 2023.

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## 5. The debates on Voluntary Return to Countries of Origin

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As WB countries do not have strong return capabilities, the mere apprehension of irregular migrants does not result in the desired curbing of irregular migration. Such a situation does cause secondary movements from Region to the EU. However, lately, important steps were taken in this regard and return became a key subject and major objective of the migration debate in the region. Türkiye on the other hand increased its capacity and prioritizes the return operations of irregular migrants among its migration management strategies. These developments are a sign that both voluntary and forced return operations in the region will increase in the next year. In order to carry out these operations in a functioning manner, both the WB countries and Türkiye are expected to enhance the dialogue with important countries of origin in 2023 while at the same time investing in the strengthening of their national return mechanisms.

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## 6. Ongoing political and socio-economic challenges and their implications on the social harmonization<sup>3</sup>

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Numerous studies and surveys show that there is a significant decrease in social acceptance and solidarity with the Syrians residing in Türkiye and an increase in concerns that in the future migration flows will even rise and have negative effects on the already dire economy, unemployment and costs of living. Policy interventions need to address these issues and communicate successfully with Türkiye's host communities and migrants, otherwise, 2023 may be a challenging year in terms of social cohesion and rising tensions between local and migrant communities.

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<sup>3</sup> Please check the following website to have information on "harmonization" terminology used by the Presidency of Migration Management of Türkiye: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/about-harmonisation>



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## 7. Accession Talks Underway for Western Balkan Countries

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A shared strategic objective that principally unites the whole WB region and the EU is the EU integration of the WB countries, however, the accession process is more or less stuck for a long time. Ukraine and Moldova were granted candidate status in June 2022. Understandably, much attention has been paid to the accession perspective of these two countries, however, it also re-triggered the discussion of Western Balkan countries' EU membership. Accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania were opened in July 2022 and also Kosovo\*<sup>4</sup> submitted its application for membership in December 2022. Finally, on 15 December 2022, the European Council granted a candidate status for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Montenegro and Serbia are negotiating candidates for almost 10 years now, making them the most advanced candidates, and therefore raising expectations to join the Union earlier than the others. To meet EU criteria, WB Countries are expected to deliver more key reforms at both political and operational levels and this will have also a direct effect on work on migration policies and frameworks in 2023 and beyond.

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## 8. Impact of the EU Pact on Western Balkan Countries

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Based on new Commission proposals, the European Union is undertaking a major overhaul of its procedures designed to protect its external borders, accelerate the screening of irregular arrivals and maximize returns of third-country nationals with no right to stay. The Western Balkan countries will need to follow this process closely, assess the overall effects of the implementation of the Pact and decide how to identify, protect and advance their own interests without diverging from the logic of accession, especially in light of pre-existing agreements with EU countries on readmission and visa liberalization arrangements. Conversely, if migration governance, border management and return capacities in the WB can not be strengthened in 2023 and 2024 in parallel to the EU's measures and based on similar policies and measures, the implementation success of the PACT will most likely be limited and migration management in the WB region may face similar or even additional challenges.

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<sup>4</sup> \*All references to Kosovo\* in this content should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).



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## 9. Implication of the earthquakes on migration management in Türkiye

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On February 6th two catastrophic earthquakes hit Türkiye and Syria marking one of the most devastating natural disasters of the century. The impact of the disaster has been nothing short of catastrophic, with tens of thousands of people losing their lives and millions more being displaced from their homes. The World Health Organisation put the number of people affected by the disaster reached an alarming 23 million. Among the affected population are approximately 1.7 million Syrians who are under temporary protection in Türkiye, who make up almost half of the registered Syrian population currently residing in Türkiye. This unfortunate developments and subsequent decision taken would have implications over migration situation in Türkiye and may have implications around the close by region. Even though initial analyses have been made internally the consequences that the earthquakes may have on migration patterns throughout the year in Türkiye and Syria, in the region and beyond, are difficult to assess from today. But they are also of secondary importance in view of the untold human suffering.

Much of the work on this Migration Outlook for 2023 had already been completed by the time of the disaster, thus this outlook do not reflect specific inputs as per implications of the earthquake. In light of the catastrophe, some of the analyses and scenarios provided by the report will develop differently than expected some weeks ago based on the projection gathered from the developments that occurred in 2022. Others, however, will not be affected and continue to provide a good basis for Outlook's main purpose, which is to invite a discussion of what has defined the world of migration in recent months and is likely to define it in the year ahead.

Deeply saddened by the loss of life and destruction of livelihoods caused by the earthquakes, ICMPD has been doing everything in its power to support our partners in their efforts to rescue, relief, and reconstruction as well as preparation for further crises that could arise in aftermath of the earthquake. The staff members at the ICMPD Ankara and Istanbul offices, who are also the main authors of this report, are working tirelessly to coordinate immediate actions, the procurement of essential items and a constant exchange with donors and national institutions and other international organizations to redirect activities towards relief efforts as well as exploring new opportunities to be able to mobilize more assistance, both for the short to long term needs.

## Introduction

This Regional Migration Outlook for Western Balkans and Türkiye region aims to present a data-based brief overview of the main migration and migration policy trends in 2022 in Türkiye and Western Balkans, including the main drivers for expected migratory developments and events to watch out for in 2023. The Outlook's regional scope will provide the opportunity for in-depth analysis, aiming at achieving a better understanding of migration trends and patterns, based on its focus on localized areas and events.

Türkiye and the Western Balkan (WB) countries are among the global regions most affected by mixed migration flows, composed of refugees and other migrant categories, either as destination, transit or host countries. The countries of the region are faced with mounting pressures linked to the large numbers of refugees and displaced they already host and the increasing numbers of refugees and migrants crossing their territories to reach Europe. In 2023, it can be expected that the region will be affected by even increasing migration and mobility along the Eastern Mediterranean Migration and Western Balkans Route. Notably, the overall cancellation of the mobility restrictions in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic in most countries, the increasing irregular migration following the blockage in migration routes due to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, visa liberalization and other mobility facilitation, economic downturns and political instabilities are the most prominent developments that affect the migration situation in Western Balkans as well as in Türkiye.

In 2022, Türkiye marked its eighth consecutive year as the host to the largest number of refugees in the world. According to the latest statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) of the Ministry of Interior of Türkiye, there are around 3.5 million Syrians<sup>5</sup> registered under temporary protection (SuTP) in Türkiye as of December 2022. Additionally, Türkiye hosts approximately 330,000 international protection applicants and status holders mostly from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran and other countries. Last year, the issues mostly dominating the migration debate in Türkiye included voluntary and forced returns, preventing irregular migration, as well as social harmonization for the registered migrants in the country.

Through the lifting of Covid-19, travel restrictions, the number of apprehended irregular migrants on land and at sea started to record an increase again from 162,996 apprehensions in 2021 to 285,027 apprehensions in 2022<sup>6</sup>. The majority of apprehended individuals included Afghan, Syrian and Pakistan nationals. Also due to a shift in government policy priorities, 124,441 irregular migrants were returned to their home country<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The Temporary Protection Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December 2022) Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>

<sup>6</sup> The Irregular Migration Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on December 31 2022) Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration>

<sup>7</sup> Twitter Account of Presidency of Migration Management, Post published on 2 January 2023, [https://twitter.com/Gocidaresi/status/1609957713756446749?s=20&t=a\\_Sm97DhFYCCG88y3Y09vw](https://twitter.com/Gocidaresi/status/1609957713756446749?s=20&t=a_Sm97DhFYCCG88y3Y09vw)

In this realm, the number of irregular migrants who have returned on an assisted voluntary basis under the National Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (NAVRR) project implemented by ICMPD, which became operational on 27 April 2022, is recorded as 609 as of December 2022. Among the total returnees, 98% of them have returned to the priority countries of origin (Pakistan, Bangladesh and Uzbekistan) under the mechanism, whereas, 2% of them were noted to be vulnerable groups (mostly victims of trafficking in human beings) who voluntarily returned to other countries of origin (such as Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Taiwan, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco). Additionally, considering the voluntary return of the Syrians in Türkiye, it is reported by the Presidency of Migration Management of Türkiye (PMM) that in 2022, 58,758 (reached in total of 539,332) Syrians have returned to the safe zones voluntarily.

Türkiye is well supported by the EU through the EU Facility for Refugees in Türkiye, namely FRIT Programme which focuses on humanitarian assistance, education, migration management, health, municipal infrastructure, and socio-economic support.<sup>8</sup> As of November 2022, the full operational budget of €6 billion has been committed and contracted, with more than €4.9 billion reported to be disbursed<sup>9</sup>. According to the Facility Results Framework Monitoring Report published in June 2022, the total number of Actions in the Facility Portfolio including both currently active and completed ones is 129, as of December 2021<sup>10</sup>.

In the WB region and according to UNHCR Data, between Jan-Oct 2022, authorities in Serbia reported 99,031 new arrivals to governmental centres (compared to 49,402 in the same period in 2021). Bosnia and Herzegovina on the other hand recorded 22,717 irregular arrivals during the same period<sup>11</sup>. Most of the WB countries, on the other hand, do not officially publish all migration-related data, therefore the updated legal or irregular migration numbers in each country are not always possible to access or compare. However, irregular migration trends in the WB region can be observed via FRONTEX reports that show the irregular entries to the Schengen area over the WB Route. Based on the latest information from these reports the total cumulative number of irregular entries to the EU from WB in 2022 was 168% higher (128,400) compared to the trends observed in 2021 (around 40,372) for the same period<sup>12</sup>. The WB route is now considered one of the most active ones, having observed the highest number of apprehensions since the migration crisis in 2015.<sup>13</sup> This is even more remarkable,

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<sup>8</sup> [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/turkiye/eu-facility-refugees-turkey\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/turkiye/eu-facility-refugees-turkey_en)

<sup>9</sup> [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/frit\\_factsheet\\_November%202022.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/frit_factsheet_November%202022.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/facility-results-framework-monitoring-report-december-2021\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/facility-results-framework-monitoring-report-december-2021_en)

<sup>11</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents>

<sup>12</sup> EU external borders in October: Number of irregular entries on the rise, FRONTEX (accessed on November 30, 2022) Source:<https://FRONTEX.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/eu-external-borders-in-october-number-of-irregular-entries-on-the-rise-7CiZBL>

<sup>13</sup> EU external borders in October: Number of irregular entries on the rise, FRONTEX (accessed on November 30, 2022) Source:<https://FRONTEX.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/eu-external-borders-in-october-number-of-irregular-entries-on-the-rise-7CiZBL>

considering that people fleeing Ukraine and entering the EU through border crossing points are not part of the statistics on illegal entries detected.

Within the framework of various programmes, EU funding for the further development of migration management capacities for the Western Balkans countries is reported as increasing in the upcoming years by 60% to more than 350 Million EUR by 2024.<sup>14</sup> Given the increased migration pressures in the region, the beneficiary countries are expected to improve their asylum and reception systems, strengthen border protection, combat smuggling networks and organized crime groups, and speed up returns from the Western Balkans to the CoOs using the support of the EU through targeted programs.

### Focus regions/ Countries

In 2022, the three factors that affected migration movements in the region the most - namely Türkiye, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo\*, Montenegro and North Macedonia - were the large refugee populations displaced due to the protracted and critical situations such as the ongoing wars in Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Russia's invasion in Ukraine; factors related to economic opportunities, political instability, climate change in the CoOs etc.; and the migration policy responses developed in these contexts.

At the same time, a continued reduction in the level of impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was observed throughout the year, which eased the need to provide related services for public migration agencies, NGOs and the relevant International Organizations in the region. On the other hand, a worsening of the overall economic conditions in both Türkiye and WB Countries due to conflict and the global supply and cost-of-living crisis inevitably affected the migration situation as well as the overall conditions of refugees and migrants. In Türkiye high inflation, economic volatility and depreciation in the Turkish Lira have deteriorated the purchasing capacity of low-income households, including migrants, and the state of uncertainty arising from the elections expected in 2023 has affected their decisions on moving towards Europe or staying and participating in the harmonization policies.

### Türkiye

plays a key role in responding to the many migration challenges encountered in the wider region for many years now. Given the country's current migration situation, migration will remain a vital and sensitive topic during 2023 and beyond, following up on the elections planned to take place in May 2023. The country still hosts the highest number of refugees in the world, including around 3.5 million Syrians under temporary protection, along with about 330,000 other nationalities under international protection.<sup>15</sup> In 2021 alone, Türkiye received approximately additional 30,000 applications for international protection (excluding Syrians).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/varhelyi/announcements/commissioner-oliver-varhelyi-bosnia-and-herzegovina-migration-signature-ceremony\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/varhelyi/announcements/commissioner-oliver-varhelyi-bosnia-and-herzegovina-migration-signature-ceremony_en)

<sup>15</sup> <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>

<sup>16</sup> The International Protection Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on December 31 2022) <https://en.goc.gov.tr/international-protection17>



## Syria

remained the country of origin with the largest number of internally displaced persons and refugees worldwide. The number of internally displaced persons in Syria reached 6.9 million<sup>17</sup>. In addition, 5.6 million Syrians are currently registered mostly in neighbouring countries<sup>18</sup>. As of December 2022, out of around 6 million Syrian refugees, 3,535,898 were registered in Türkiye<sup>19</sup>. The security situation in the country has not stabilized yet the Turkish military operations at the Syrian border as well as the Turkish military presence in Northern Syria are still ongoing. The protracted political and socio-economic crisis results in a further and severe deterioration of living conditions, which might prompt further displacement across borders.

## Afghanistan,

on the other hand, continued to be a major source of migration towards Türkiye, WB and neighbouring regions as well, with the majority of Afghans ultimately aiming to reach Europe. In 2022, Afghans continued to top among the irregular migrants intercepted in Türkiye (115,775) with a 64.79% increase in comparison to 2021 (70,252)<sup>20</sup>. Even though the official numbers of inflows from Afghanistan have not been published on the specific occasion by PMM, there were 19,400 applications from Afghans for international protection in Türkiye, as of the end of 2022<sup>21</sup> according to the latest data published. It currently stands as the second largest country of origin of refugees in the world, with 2.6 million refugees in 2021, and Afghans constitute the largest group of asylum seekers in Türkiye since 2019.

## The Western Balkan Countries

remained a region with significant, and even increasing migrant arrivals, in 2022 as well. During the last 12 months, the Western Balkans region has been experiencing a continuous increase of migrants passing through the region. 145,600 irregular border crossings were registered in 2022, with an increase of 152% compared to the same period in 2021. The main countries of origin were Syria, Afghanistan, Türkiye and Tunisia<sup>22</sup>. Countries which recorded the most irregular arrivals of migrants in

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<sup>17</sup> UNHCR Operational Update, September 2022

<sup>18</sup> UNHCR, Syrian Regional Refugee Response, Operational Data Portal, Total Syrian Persons of Concern by Country of Asylum, Source: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

<sup>19</sup> The Temporary Protection Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December 2022) Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>

<sup>20</sup> The Irregular Migration Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on December 31 2022) Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration>

<sup>21</sup> The Irregular Migration Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on December 31, 2022) Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration>

<sup>22</sup> <https://FRONTEX.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-map/>

2022 were Serbia (around 117,499<sup>23</sup>), Bosnia and Herzegovina (around 25,000<sup>24</sup>) and North Macedonia (around 18,502<sup>25</sup>)

Due to liberal visa regimes towards important countries of origin, functioning prevention measures along other migration routes and generally increasing migration pressures due to the global poly-crisis, the number of registered migrants has almost doubled in **Serbia**. An increase in Burundi nationals has been noted in the second and third quarters of 2022 in the whole WB region, specifically in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Another specific trend has been an increase in the number of Moroccan citizens in Serbia, who are now the second most important nationality of origin. However, visa-free access has been cancelled in the autumn of 2022, and the trend of arrivals has been decreasing ever since.

As mentioned above, until mid-December 2022 the number of registered arrivals of migrants in **Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)** reached approximately 25,000 representing an increase of 66% compared to 2021 when 15,740 arrivals were registered<sup>26</sup>. The number of registered new arrivals in 2022 is close to the number of migrants in 2019 (29,169) which was a year with the highest migratory pressure in BiH. However, compared with the period of 2017 – 2019, the current situation in BiH can be better handled due to the fact that reception capacities were built in the meantime, and generally enhanced resources ensure better migration management.

#### In **North Macedonia**,

in 2022 there was an increase in arrivals of 7% compared to last year, and 22,806 attempts of illegal migration were registered<sup>27</sup>. On the other hand, **Montenegro's** authorities did not observe a significant increase in arrivals compared with previous years, except for the arrivals of Ukrainian refugees or other Ukrainian citizens who did not declare themselves as asylum seekers/subsidiary protection seekers. **Albania** on the other hand registered 11,890 illegal migrants between 2019-2021<sup>28</sup>. 57.4% come from Iraq and Syria and the rest come from Morocco, Afghanistan, Palestine, Pakistan and Algeria. In Kosovo\* there is no recent data published however in 2020, there were 2,600 illegal migrants in

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<sup>23</sup> Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia, December 2022

<sup>24</sup> Based on monthly arrivals recorder by Ministry of Security presented through the Situation report prepared by IOM,  
[https://bih.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1076/files/2022/Sitrep/001\\_IOM%20BiH%20External%20Sitrep\\_28%20NOV\\_11%20DEC%20%283%29.pdf](https://bih.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1076/files/2022/Sitrep/001_IOM%20BiH%20External%20Sitrep_28%20NOV_11%20DEC%20%283%29.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.mkd.mk/makedonija/politika/makedonija-e-neatraktivna-za-migrantite-a-obidite-za-ileglalenvlez-vo-zemjava>

<sup>26</sup> Based on monthly arrivals recorder by Ministry of Security presented through the Situation report prepared by IOM,  
[https://bih.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1076/files/2022/Sitrep/001\\_IOM%20BiH%20External%20Sitrep\\_28%20NOV\\_11%20DEC%20%283%29.pdf](https://bih.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1076/files/2022/Sitrep/001_IOM%20BiH%20External%20Sitrep_28%20NOV_11%20DEC%20%283%29.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.argumentum.al/en/open-balkans-and-berlin-process-are-complementary-processes-for-progress-of-cooperation-among-wb-countries/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://ina.media/?p=5053&lang=en>

Kosovo\* and 50% of them were from Syria. 2020 was also the year that Kosovo\* had the highest number of illegal immigrants<sup>29</sup>.

After the Russian invasion in February 2022, **Ukraine** has faced severe destruction and levels of displacement that are unique in Europe's post-WW-II history. Even though the region in the scope of this report is not neighbouring the country and not confronted with bigger numbers of Ukrainian and Russian refugees seeking protection and assistance compared to host countries like Poland, Germany or Romania. However, it is worth mentioning that with the situation deteriorating in Ukraine, the region also experienced an influx of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war due to existing cultural ties, economic reasons or because of existing family networks. The majority of Ukrainian refugees are in private accommodation, while the national authorities have provided sufficient accommodation capacities. Ukrainian refugees received temporary protection or similar national protection schemes such as medical and social protection, and access to education and work. According to UNCHR, Türkiye accommodated 86,545, Montenegro 28,639, North Macedonia 6,386, Albania 2,505 and Bosnia and Herzegovina 132 Ukrainian refugees while Serbia and Kosovo\* registered 22,716 Ukrainian refugees in total by the end of 2022<sup>30</sup>. 5,116 refugees from Ukraine have applied for international protection in Türkiye according to the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM)<sup>31</sup>.

### Migration trends in the region

In Türkiye, the migration debate during 2022 was dominated by operations that focused on border management and security, the prevention of irregular migration, returns of irregular migrants, possible voluntary returns of migrants mostly for SuTPs, as well as harmonization policies and legal migration.

#### Irregular migration

Along with the official numbers revealed by the public authorities in the focus region and international organizations alike, also considering that the final destinations of migrants travelling along this route are further north, official EU figures and analyses must be taken into account to draw a complete picture on irregular migration dynamics affecting Türkiye and the WB. The significant increase in arrivals and detections in 2022 has to be largely attributed to factors outside the region itself. Several factors influenced the size and direction of movements along this route, including economic pressures, rising inflation, the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, insecurity along the Syrian border, but also an increase in the number of people arriving by air in Serbia as a result of visa-free policies<sup>32</sup>.

Türkiye is both a destination and a transit country for refugees and irregular migrants aiming to cross into Europe, due to increasing instability and conflict in the region, rising unemployment and a generally worsening economic situation. Irregular migration figures started to go up again in 2022 as reflected in the increased number of apprehensions compared to 2021. The number of irregular

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.korrektpress.net/me-shume-se-2600-emigrante-ne-kosove-mbi-50-vetem-nga-siria/>

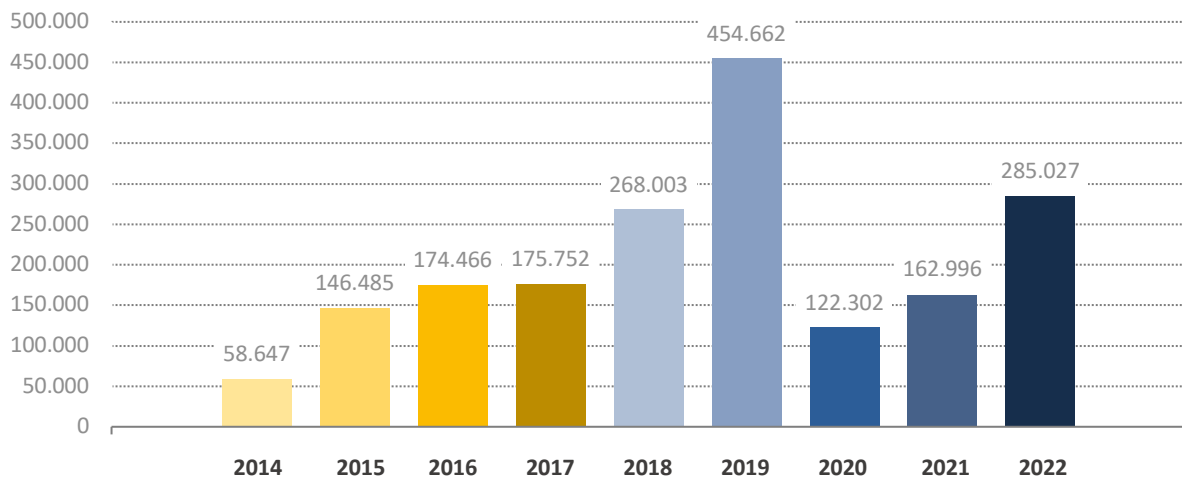
<sup>30</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

<sup>31</sup> <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/3438>

<sup>32</sup> Germany, EU pressure Serbia to curb illegal migration:  
<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/44026/germany-eu-pressure-serbia-to-curb-illegal-migration>

migrants apprehended by Turkish authorities stood at 285,027 as of 31 December 2022 indicating a significant increase in comparison to 2021 (162,996)<sup>33</sup>.

**Figure 1: Türkiye: Apprehension of Irregular Migrants**



Source: Irregular Migration Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management

At this point, the increase in apprehensions at the sea borders of Türkiye can be considered significant as well: The number of irregular migrants apprehended by the Turkish Coast Guard Command in 2022 was 49,518 and 109% higher than the figures in 2021<sup>34</sup>. Turkish authorities reported the arrest of 9,147 migrant smugglers in 2022, the highest number in 12 years. Arrivals to Greece leaving from Türkiye were reported at 18,778 (Sea: 12,756, Land: 6,022) in 2022<sup>35</sup>.

According to PMM figures Turkish law enforcement agencies apprehended 9,149 migrant smugglers in 2022 (as of 31 December 2022), while the apprehensions were 4,282 in 2020 and 7,942 in 2021<sup>36</sup>.

Afghans, Syrians and Pakistanis continued to top the list of irregular migrants intercepted in Türkiye followed by Palestinians and Iraqis<sup>37</sup>. Out of the 285,027 irregular migrants apprehended in 2022, 115,775 were Afghan nationals<sup>38</sup>. Since the August 2021 Taliban takeover and subsequent economic collapse, smuggling services experienced a spike in demand from Afghans trying to flee the volatile

<sup>33</sup> The Irregular Migration Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December 2022), Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration>

<sup>34</sup> Irregular Migration Statistics (sg.gov.tr)

<sup>35</sup> January – October 2022, Western Balkan Route: 7.989, Eastern Mediterranean Route: 2, Central Mediterranean Route: 144

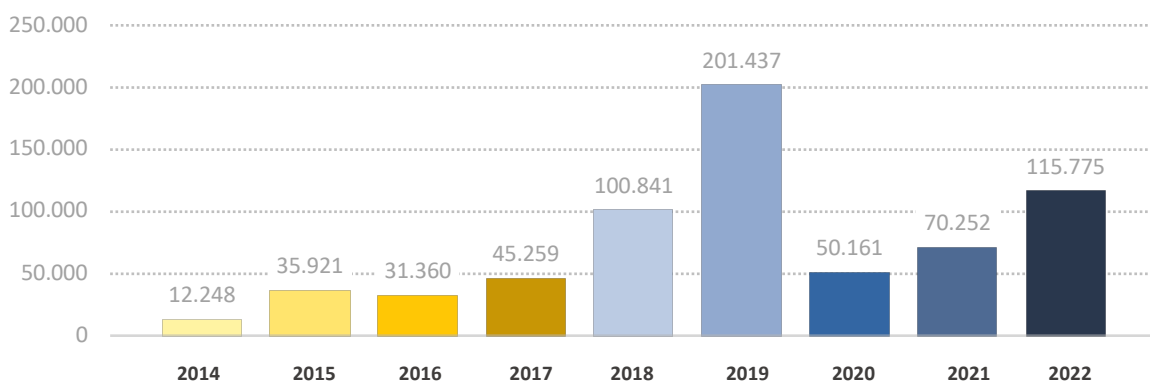
<sup>36</sup> The Irregular Migration Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December 2022), Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration>

<sup>37</sup> The Irregular Migration Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December 2022), Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration>

<sup>38</sup> The Irregular Migration Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December, 2022), Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration>

situation in their home country.<sup>39</sup> Continued deterioration in the economy and employment opportunities and the uncertain security situation in Afghanistan as well as the relatively less favourable conditions in the neighbouring countries of Türkiye, will likely continue to represent push factors for an additional number of Afghan nationals trying to move towards Türkiye, through Iran<sup>40</sup> and Pakistan. Moreover, the increasing inflation rate and the decreasing job opportunities in Türkiye may lead to an increase in the number of migrants who perceive Türkiye rather as a transit country and increase the demand for migrant smugglers organising an onward journey towards the EU.

**Figure 2: Türkiye: Apprehension of Afghan nationals in recent years**



Source: Irregular Migration Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management

The FRONTEX Risk Analysis for 2022/2023 indicates that Türkiye's enhanced control measures are likely to shift irregular migration flows from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Western Balkan route. Significant political risks are likely to persist in the WB because of this anticipated increase in land migration. These risks include economic dislocation and additional unplanned government expense, potential economic and cultural conflicts with local populations, and increased political pressure from local populations to better manage and control potentially disruptive flows of migrants through the area. Additionally, the perception that the WB could be used as an infiltration route for criminals and terrorists has the potential to cause strains between the governments of the WB and the EU<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> MMC Asia 4Mi Snapshot – October 2022, 'The role of smugglers in Afghans' irregular journeys to Türkiye', p.1 accessed from <https://mixedmigration.org/resource/smugglers-afghans-irregular-journeys-turkiye/>

<sup>40</sup> According to MMC field research, the majority of respondents who used smugglers (92%) reported that they started their journey in Afghanistan. A large majority transited Iran (89%); 41% transited Pakistan (41%). Most survey respondents made stops in Iran (89%) on their way to Türkiye: to look for smugglers to organize the next stretch of their journey (24%), working to earn money for the next stretch of their journey (21%), to stay with friends/relatives (20%), or waiting for transport (19%). The rest of Afghans interviewed (8%) cited Iran as their first country of departure; this accounts for Afghans who have been living in Iran as refugees or undocumented migrants and, due to a variety of factors including lack of access to education, employment, and legal status, embark on onward journeys to Türkiye and beyond. F MMC Asia 4Mi Snapshot – October 2022, 'The role of smugglers in Afghans' irregular journeys to Türkiye', p.3 accessed from <https://mixedmigration.org/resource/smugglers-afghans-irregular-journeys-turkiye/>

<sup>41</sup> FRONTEX Risk Analysis for 2022/2023, <https://FRONTEX.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/FRONTEX-releases-its-risk-analysis-for-2022-2023>

The number of irregular border crossings at the EU's external borders in the first six months of is registered as around 330,000 in 2022<sup>42</sup>. There were around 145,600 illegal crossings from the WB route and this accounted for half of all the detections, there is a significant increase compared to the previous years<sup>43</sup>. Compared to last year, the number of detections increased nearly 136% compared to 2021 in WB Route. There were many repetitive crossing attempts from the migrants that are already on WB and this increase can be related to this situation. Syrians, Afghans and Turkish are the main nationalities on the Western Balkan Route<sup>44</sup>. It was also suggested that since the security controls are strict on Mediterranean Route, migrants use the Western Balkan route more frequently<sup>45</sup>

For Bosnia and Herzegovina, in comparison to the situation in 2021, the number of registered irregular migrants has been increasing by almost 10% in 2022. During the entire of 2021, 15,812 irregular migrants were registered, while as of 3 October 2022 17,316 migrants were registered. The main characteristics of migration trends in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022 in comparison to 2021 were a decrease in the numbers of migrants from Pakistan (from 4,434 in 2021 to 1,880 in 2022) and Bangladesh (from 2,341 in 2021 to 2,067); a slight increase of migrants from Afghanistan (from 5,382 in 2021 to 5,438 in 2022) and Iran (from 692 in 2021 to 1,004 in 2022); a significant increase in numbers of migrants from Burundi (from 0 in 2021 to 2,234 in 2022), India (from 226 in 2021 to 625 in 2022) and Cuba (from 0 in 2021 to 770 in 2022), and the Congo Democratic Republic (from 0 in 2021 to 327 in 2022).

There has been also an increase in the number of irregular migrants passing through Serbia. For example, in 2021, 60,075 migrants were registered for the period January-December 2021, while in 2022, 82,584 migrants were registered for the period January-October 2022. Predominant nationalities were: Afghanistan (just below half of the total population of migrants), Syria, Pakistan, Burundi and Morocco. It was reported that the increase in Burundi nationals occurred mainly after the end of the summer of 2022. Specifically, the months of August, September, and October 2022 have seen an increase, compared to the same months from the previous year. (As a comparison: September 2022: 9,414 migrants; September 2022: 19,490 migrants).<sup>46</sup>

## **Return**

The large size of the migrant population in the country, as well as the increased migration flows in 2022, together with the instability in Afghanistan, climate disasters in Pakistan, protests in Iran and the

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<sup>42</sup> <https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/eu-s-external-borders-in-2022-number-of-irregular-border-crossings-highest-since-2016-YsAZ29>

<sup>43</sup> EU external borders in June: Western Balkan route most active, FRONTEX, Source: <https://FRONTEX.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/eu-external-borders-in-june-western-balkan-route-most-active-oPV0mM>

<sup>44</sup> EU external borders in June: Western Balkan route most active, FRONTEX, Source: <https://FRONTEX.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/eu-external-borders-in-june-western-balkan-route-most-active-oPV0mM>

<sup>45</sup> InfoMigrants, Source: <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/43691/why-has-the-balkan-migrant-route-become-more-active-again>

<sup>46</sup> Commissariat for the Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia, October 2022.

war in Ukraine stretched Türkiye's reception and integration capacities even further and led to prioritizing the work on return among its migration management strategies. Notably, the ongoing efforts for facilitating voluntary return operations lead to a further increase in the number of returns. By October 2022, UNHCR announced that 346,387 thousand Syrians have returned home.<sup>47</sup> Among them, 157,758 Syrians have returned to Syria from Türkiye.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, it is reported by the PMM that in 2022, 58,758 (reached in total of 539,332) Syrians have returned to the safe zones voluntarily.

According to "The Syrians Barometer 2021" research carried out by MÜGAM (Ankara University Migration Research Centre) with the support of UNHCR, 64.2% of Syrians in Türkiye want to go to another country. When asked about the prospect of returning to back to Syria, 60.8% of SuTP in Türkiye responded "I don't plan to return to Syria under any circumstances" whereas 33.1% responded, "I would return if the war in Syria ends and if an administration we want is formed". At the same time, respondents were more hesitant with regard to a return to a "safe zone" in Syria (1.7%). Responses given to the question "would you want to move to a country other than Türkiye and Syria" show that the intentions of Syrians to move to a third country have strengthened. The response "I would go if I had an opportunity" has emerged as the top answer with 55%.<sup>49</sup>

The PMM published the number of non-voluntary returns in 2022 as 124.441 which is 161% higher than the previous year's figures, and more importantly, it is the highest number of deportations in the migration management history<sup>50</sup> of Türkiye. Under the scope of a pilot programme, voluntary return operations started for Afghanistan under the National Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (NAVRR) mechanism last year, which was established through a cooperation protocol between PMM, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and the Turkish Red Crescent. As of 27 April 2022, the voluntary return operations under the National AVRR Mechanism have started officially. By the end of December 2022, 609 irregular migrants were assisted with voluntary returns to their CoOs, the majority to Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Bangladesh. The unstable conditions in countries of origin have been one of the major factors affecting the return operations in Türkiye, causing delays in returns and reintegration programmes. ICMPD continues to support bilateral dialogues with countries of origin and expand the number of collaborated countries of origin to maintain the return operations of Türkiye.

Significant increases in returns in Bosnia and Herzegovina started to be observed in 2022, with higher numbers than other WB countries that reported lower quotas or no returns at all. The main reason for these differing trends lies in Albania, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia and Montenegro typically transit countries, while BiH together with Serbia are the last countries at the border to the EU. Consequently,

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<sup>47</sup> Registered Refugees from Syria, UNHCR, Source:  
[https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria\\_durable\\_solutions](https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions)

<sup>48</sup> Registered Refugees from Syria, UNHCR, Source:  
[https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria\\_durable\\_solutions](https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions)

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2022/12/SB-2021-English-01122022.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> The Presidency of Migration Management Twitter Post, 02.01.2023  
[https://twitter.com/Gocidaresi/status/1609957713756446749?cxt=HHwWuoDT\\_deA3NcsAAAA](https://twitter.com/Gocidaresi/status/1609957713756446749?cxt=HHwWuoDT_deA3NcsAAAA)

they accommodate larger irregular migrant populations and are the final stages before migrants attempt to cross EU borders in an undocumented manner. The trend of voluntary returns increased in 2022, due to the expected lifting of COVID-19 measures, increased possibilities for travel and the increase in the endeavours initiating the NAVRR Operations. During 2021 the AVRR programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina was supported by IOM while the Service for Foreigners' Affairs as a responsible domestic authority also directly conducted a voluntary return programme. In that light, 206 foreigners were returned to their country of origin in 2021 through the assistance provided by IOM while 459 cases were successfully realized directly by the Service for Foreigner Affairs<sup>51</sup>. Data on assisted and/or forced returns for 2022 were not available at the time of writing but will be presented in the forthcoming Ministry of Security 2022 Migration Profile.

It is important to add that both the EU institutions and member states strongly support the development and actual carrying out of voluntary return processes including through the several project initiatives that were launched or agreed upon during 2022. One of those initiatives is EVOLVE project initiated by the ICMPD WB&TR Regional Office and funded by the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, aiming to provide support to the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the areas of migration, reception and border management. In that light, the EVOLVE project will provide support within the scope of the further development of the national return system by facilitating the establishment of the mechanism for return between all responsible partners at the national level, supporting the negotiation processes, strengthening the capacities of national authorities, improving cooperation programmes with countries of origin, monitoring the implementation of national AVR programmes and finally strengthening required infrastructure and equipment.

### **Border Management and Security**

While more open borders and closer cross-border relations are a corollary of growing economic interdependence, it is also a fact that increased cross-border flows have become a growing security concern across the region. Balancing the twin policy objectives of efficient mobility and enhanced security has always been one of the core challenges in border management, requiring complex but harmonious systems and procedures.

Türkiye has more than 30 border crossing points with its neighbours Bulgaria, Greece, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Iraq, Iran and Syria, with a land border of 2,949 km and a coastline of 8,484 km. Due to its unique geographical position, located at the crossroads of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East, Türkiye has traditionally been regarded mainly as a transit country of (irregular) migrants. Yet over the last decade, Türkiye has increasingly become a destination country for immigrants; presenting a paradigm shift which called for further strengthening of border protection measures and overall border management capacities along the green and blue borders of the country as well as at border crossings.

In this respect, border management is one of Türkiye's main priorities. Due to continuous migration pressure on Türkiye as a result of the ongoing conflicts and deteriorations in the political and economic

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<sup>51</sup> Migration profile of BiH, page 44, <http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/120920225.pdf>



situations of the neighbouring countries, increasing the border surveillance capacity at Türkiye's borders has become a major priority, both for the Turkish authorities as well as the governments of European destination countries. Given the security considerations and the need to curb irregular movements, Türkiye is constructing physical barriers (including concrete modular walls) and installing high-tech surveillance systems along its eastern and south-eastern land borders as preventive measures.

To this end, a significant amount of modern border security equipment has been procured through the use of European Union funds and national resources, particularly in the last decade, to enhance border surveillance capacity at all borders and to combat irregular migration and cross-border crime effectively.

Among the projects supported by the European Union, electro-optical surveillance systems (electro-optical surveillance masts with radar systems, command and control shelters, ground sensors and components) and armoured mobile surveillance vehicles were procured to Türkiye's eastern and western borders. In addition, 284 thermal cameras for the enhancement of surveillance capabilities on the southeastern borders were supplied and hardware and software components for the National Coordination and Joint Risk Analysis Center (NACORAC) were procured, allowing instant data exchange between border-related institutions, and a common database in the field of border management was established, allowing for the joint risk analysis of responsible authorities.

As for the projects funded by national resources, the border physical security systems (modular concrete walls, wire fences, patrol roads, and surveillance systems) were fully installed on the Syrian border, whereas the instalment is ongoing on the Iranian border. In addition, border lighting systems are being set up, given the occurring needs, in different border regions.

Yet because of the long mountainous areas with difficult climatic and geographical conditions and the volatile situation in the neighbouring countries, the existing systems are considered not sufficient and further investments will be needed in 2023 both for the development and implementation of effective border management strategies and for enhancing operational capacities of all institutions involved.

In addition to the technical interventions aiming to strengthen border surveillance, Türkiye also seeks to strengthen its joint border management risk analysis capacity. To this end, the EU-funded NACORAC Project<sup>52</sup> is implemented since May 2022 for increasing the joint risk analysis capabilities of NACORAC and for facilitating border management data sharing with relevant stakeholders. Under this scope, a "Needs and Gaps Assessment" was conducted in 2022 for identifying the legal, institutional and technical gaps and needs to operationalize NACORAC. In this context, EU good practices on risk analysis centres were shared with NACORAC. In addition, NACORAC staff received basic trainings on irregular migration and risk analysis under the scope of the Project and they conducted field visits in Antalya

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<sup>52</sup> Supporting the Institutional Capacity of the National Coordination and Joint Risk Analysis Centre (NACORAC) Project

and Balıkesir to observe practices with regard to border management data collection by relevant local authorities.

### **Legal Migration and Harmonization**

In recent years, Türkiye developed into an attractive destination for legal and notable labour migration. Thus, it continues to appeal to increasing numbers of legal migrants as well, even in economically challenging times.

With gaining momentum, Türkiye has undertaken significant efforts to improve and strengthen its policy and operational framework in the area of legal migration to promote sustainable ways for legal entry and stay in Türkiye. The end objective is to develop and establish a new and comprehensive Legal Migration Strategy Framework regulating all aspects including residence permits, visa, foreigners of Turkish lineage, border gates and data management.

In 2022, the number of foreigners residing in Türkiye with a valid residence permit reached 1,354,094, a slight increase compared to 2021<sup>53</sup>. This included 941,290 migrants under the short-term residence permit, 143,346 migrants under the student residence permit, 100,938 migrants under the family residence permit, and 164,085 migrants under other types of residence permits.<sup>54</sup> A breakdown by nationality reveals that in 2022, Russian citizens constituted the largest group of legal migrants with residence permits in Türkiye, closely followed by Iraqis, Turkmens, Syrians, and Iranians. Istanbul remained Türkiye's main hotspot for legal and notable labour migrants, with a slight increase in the number of legal migrants residing in the province with 703,115 in 2022 compared to 692,007 in 2021.

Per the latest published statistics, the number of foreigners who had entered Türkiye almost doubled to 43,761,189 in 2022 while it was 24,630,685 in 2021, from 12,678,664 in 2020, referring to all foreigners including migrants looking for protection as well as travelling for other reasons such as education, business and etc. This is an indicator of the crucial need to reinforce and strengthen Türkiye's policy in the area of legal migration and to enhance sustainable legal and operational capacity in the above-mentioned areas with regards to legal migration.<sup>55</sup> The growing number of entries inherently resulted in increasing the number of liaison offices of PMM at the airports of different cities. Thus, the top three countries of origin of foreigners who entered Türkiye are as follows; the Russian Federation, Germany and England. These countries are followed by Bulgaria, Iran, Georgia, the Netherlands, Iraq, Poland and France.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, the number of foreigners who exited from Türkiye increased to 44,324,195 while it was 24,150,633 in 2021 and 13,036,926 in 2020. The top three countries of origin of foreigners who exited from Türkiye are Germany, the Russian Federation and

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<sup>53</sup> Residence Permit Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December 2022) <https://en.goc.gov.tr/residence-permits>

<sup>54</sup> Residence Permit Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 4 January 2023) Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/residence-permits>

<sup>55</sup> Entry-Exit Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December 2022) Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/entry---exit>

<sup>56</sup> Entry-Exit Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December 2022) Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/entry---exit>

England. These are followed by Bulgaria, Iran, Georgia, the Netherlands, Iraq, Poland and France.<sup>57</sup> The mentioned countries e.g. Iran and Iraq, are also among the countries of origin of persons who entered Türkiye through irregular migration<sup>58</sup>, therefore, enhancing the capacities to manage entries and exits of foreigners and at the same time further developing the existing operational policies and procedures for legal migration would also contribute to the prevention of irregular migration, through promoting sustainable ways for legal entry and stay in Türkiye.

Considering the fact that after it is determined the passengers do not meet the conditions to enter Türkiye, they are considered Inadmissible (INAD) Passengers, makes this area one of the integral parts of the entry and exit procedures. Enhancing targeted and sustainable procedures compatible with human rights is also relevant in this area of legal migration. Based on the statistics for 2022<sup>59</sup> shared by the Presidency of Migration Management, the total amount of INAD passengers was 4,298 individuals in 2022 while it was 16,052 individuals in 2021. The main reasons for being listed as INAD were an entry ban (2,061 individuals) and travel without a visa (686 individuals). These grounds were followed by invalid documentation (677 individuals), foreigners who were considered undesirable for reasons of public order or public security<sup>60</sup> (344 individuals), foreigners who did not possess any kind of documentation (178 individuals), visa violation (108 individuals), forgery (104 individuals), illegal exit (79 individuals), other reasons e.g. foreigners who failed to supply proof of the reason for their purpose of entry into transit from or stay in Türkiye (40 individuals), hostile passenger (14 individuals), illegal entry (4 individuals) and foreigners who did not possess sufficient and sustainable resources for the duration of their stay (3 individuals). the top three countries of origin of INAD passengers in 2022<sup>61</sup> were Uzbekistan (489 individuals), Iraq (438 individuals) and Iran (355 individuals), followed by 1,550 individuals listed from unspecified countries of origin. PMM has recently taken over the responsibilities related to the detection of inadmissible passengers, imposition and removal of entry bans, airport transit and deportation transit from the General Directorate of Security. Therefore, ensuring uniformity in the legislation and applications at the air border gates and capacity development of the relevant staff were also conducted by PMM in the scope of its responsibility for managing legal migration. Thuswise, through assisting PMM's legal and operational capacities, ICMPD's role embraces a wider range of legal migration policies such as addressing the improvement of legal and operational capacity primarily in the areas of residence permits, border gates, visas, and data management with the overall aim in the long run of reducing the irregular migration flow through preventing attempts to irregular entry into Türkiye.

The provision of asylum and protection services to SuTPs continued to put a significant strain on Türkiye, with more than 3.5 million SuTPs. The number of SuTPs has decreased by approximately 5.0%

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<sup>57</sup> Entry-Exit Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December 2022) Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/entry---exit>

<sup>58</sup> Please see the relevant statistics of irregular migration from <https://www.goc.gov.tr/duzensiz-goc-istatistikler>

<sup>59</sup> The statistics cover the period until June 2022.

<sup>60</sup> Per the Article 15/1(c) of Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP)

<sup>61</sup> The statistics cover the period until June 2022.

compared to the figures in 2021<sup>62</sup>. Nevertheless, the actual figure is estimated to be even higher, due to a backlog in registration. According to the statistics shared by Prof. Murat Erdoğan from MÜGAM on the occasion of the promotion of the Syrians Barometer Report 2021, app. 100,000 children of Syrian origin are born every year in Türkiye. <sup>63</sup> By the end of 2022, only 47,763 Syrian refugees lived in camps (as compared to 51,551 in late 2021), whereas the vast majority lived in urban areas, in their majority well integrated with the local populations. Istanbul, Gaziantep, Hatay and Şanlıurfa continued to host the largest SuTPs with above 1 million Syrians<sup>64</sup>.

European Union assistance aims to support the majority of migrants who live in urban areas in vulnerable situations, as well as the host communities to provide access to quality education, health protection and livelihoods as well as other services. Since 2011, the European Union was the leading donor in the international response to the Syrian crisis and a total of 6 Billion Euros were allocated for the actions mentioned above under the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye (FRIT Programme). <sup>65</sup>

As of 2022, the total number of Actions implemented under FRIT is 129, including both completed and ongoing projects. 84 of these Actions are managed through the humanitarian strand and 45 through the development strand<sup>66</sup>. Until now, 2.3 million individuals benefited from Facility-funded protection activities and over 704,000 children were enrolled in schools. 131 new schools were built to respond to the education needs that emerged from the crisis. Over 22.8 million primary health care consultations were delivered and 181 Facility-supported Migrant Health Centers are established and still operational.<sup>67</sup>

Under the livelihoods Actions of the Facility, the number of refugee and local host community members that receive vocational trainings is 33,000. 550 people received entrepreneurship trainings and more than 1,000 companies were provided consultancy services. Over the second half of the year, 677 new or improved jobs were created through employability support. 489 enterprises have also been established with Facility support and almost 2,000 jobs were already obtained with a total aim of 27,000 jobs. <sup>68</sup> The implementations via the Facility is expected to continue in 2023 as well.

The countries in the Western Balkans region are highly dependent on remittances from their respective diasporas. Therefore, the priority of the region is to attract the diaspora to invest in their countries of origin, through the establishment of relations with second and third generations of diaspora abroad,

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<sup>62</sup> Temporary Protection Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December 2022) Source: [en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27](https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27)

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2022/12/SB-2021-English-01122022.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Temporary Protection Statistics of the Presidency of Migration Management (accessed on 31 December 2022) Source: [en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27](https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27)

<sup>65</sup> FRIT Factsheet, November 2022 (accessed on 20 December 2022) Source: [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/frit\\_factsheet\\_November%202022.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/frit_factsheet_November%202022.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> The Facility Results Framework Monitoring Report No:9. Source: <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-07/220608%209th%20Facility%20Monitoring%20Report.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> FRIT Factsheet, November 2022 (accessed on 20 December 2022) Source: [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/frit\\_factsheet\\_November%202022.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/frit_factsheet_November%202022.pdf)

as well as through simplification of the procedures for investors and those who want to establish businesses. On the other hand, due to continued brain drain and a permanent general trend of locals leaving their countries to work abroad, predominantly in the EU, the region faces a structural lack of workforce for both manual and skilled labour, as well as in the IT sector. This can be seen as the predominant reason for promoting visa liberalization for nationals from Asian countries who are intended to fill crucial gaps in the local and regional labour force. In a similar vein, the discussion on enhancing possibilities to take up legal work for asylum seekers during the procedure or after a positive decision remains a politically sensitive topic, as it would require a shorter period for the authorities to decide on asylum or subsidiary protection but could also create an incentive for even larger numbers of asylum seekers to enter the countries of the region. Against the backdrop of increasing labour shortages, this discussion will continue throughout 2023 as well.

### **Migration Policy Developments**

The March 2016 EU-Türkiye Statement remained the key framework governing cooperation on migration between Türkiye and the EU also in 2022. Türkiye continued to play an essential role in ensuring the effective management of migratory flows along the eastern Mediterranean route with significantly lower irregular border crossings between Türkiye and Greece compared to the period prior to the adoption of the Statement.

Sustainable migration management in Türkiye calls for upgrading the border management system. A study for a new Integrated Border Management (IBM) model started in 2022 and is due in 2023. It aims to develop coordination and cooperation mechanisms at all levels of border management. Türkiye confirmed its dedication to further developing its institutional structure according to a model that it will determine according to its own needs. In the framework of a project implemented with EU financial support, Türkiye is currently reviewing the current IBM system, including overall strategic priorities, legal and institutional frameworks, policies and practices, developing an improved model of national Integrated Border Management by implementing the updated National Action Plan tailored to specific needs and priorities. Additionally, Türkiye aims to produce its first annual joint risk analysis report by the end of 2023 under the NACORAC Project. To this end, Türkiye currently seeks to strengthen its institutional capacities for adopting a coordinated approach at the national level for data sharing among relevant national stakeholders, and for advancing the risk analysis skills of the NACORAC and other relevant stakeholders involved in IBM.

Türkiye has adopted and has been applying the second Strategy Document and National Action Plan for Irregular Migration (2021-2025) in the previous years which shaped the country's policies to curb and prevent irregular migration. The priorities set in the action plan are: enhancing national and international mechanisms and cooperation for preventing irregular migration in the source countries, reinforcing effective border security and measures to combat irregular migration, management of labour migration through effective and comprehensive policies, ensuring a human rights-focused implementation of procedures for irregular migrants in the country, improving the monitoring on the protection of irregular migrants in vulnerable situations, and the further development of evidence-

based policies to combat against irregular migration and enhancing the System for Return of irregular migrants in line with human rights standards and ensuring their reintegration.

Return has become an inevitable policy priority. Established cooperation with countries of origin has proven successful. Türkiye, hosting almost 4 million migrants together with a major increase in irregular migration in recent years, puts forth voluntary return as the primary goal<sup>69</sup> in migration management and continues the efforts to further voluntary returns of migrants. In this regard, PMM started to give weight in 2022 to assist voluntary return operations, which is also considered essential for a sustainable return policy. Currently, through four externally funded projects conducted by ICMPD, there are ongoing efforts to strengthen the mechanism and expand the number of the collaborated countries of origin. The works on Voluntary Return Regulation are finalized in 2022 and envisaged to be published in 2023. Within this scope, the standard operating procedures for the regulation have also been developed in 2022. Besides, ICMPD supported PMM to develop the 2023-2025 National Assisted Voluntary Return Strategy Plan in line with the strategic priorities of Türkiye.

In 2022, the focus of voluntary return was Pakistan as a priority country due to developments in Afghanistan and the second half of 2022, the scope of the priority countries of origin was broadened, including Somalia, Uzbekistan and Bangladesh. The bilateral relations with the countries of origin and Türkiye were supported and strengthened, ICMPD already supported a visit to Pakistan in 2021, and in 2022, regional workshops to gather countries of origin, as well as, a visit to Bangladesh was organized to strengthen further the migration dialogues and operational capacities especially on return and reintegration axis.

On the other hand, concerning the high number of SuTPs in Türkiye, PMM announced the cumulative number of Syrian voluntary returnees as 539,332 by the end of 2022<sup>70</sup>. The issue of providing citizenship to Syrians also remained on the public agenda. In May 2022, the Directorate General of Civil Registration and Citizenship Affairs announced that the cumulative number of Syrians who were granted Turkish citizenship reached 221,671<sup>71</sup>.

Western Balkan countries have continued developing migration-related policies reflecting the situation of migrants mainly transiting the region via the 'Balkans Route', in addition to harmonizing the policy and legislation in line with the requirements of the EU integration process. Recognising the valuable role of EU membership in both political and practical terms, Ukraine and Moldova were granted candidate status in June, four months into the conflict in Ukraine. While much attention has understandably been paid to the accession of these countries, it is important not to neglect the prospects of Western Balkan countries, who have been involved in the EU accession process for a long

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<sup>69</sup> Anatolian Agency, Minister of Interior Soylu: 529 thousand Syrian brothers have returned so far, 20/10/2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/icisleri-bakani-soylu-su-ana-kadar-529-bin-suriyeli-kardesimiz-geri-dondu/2716293#>

<sup>70</sup> Twitter Account of Presidency of Migration Management, Post published on 2 January 2023, [https://twitter.com/Gocidaresi/status/1609957713756446749?s=20&t=a\\_Sm97DhFYCCG88y3Y09vw](https://twitter.com/Gocidaresi/status/1609957713756446749?s=20&t=a_Sm97DhFYCCG88y3Y09vw)

<sup>71</sup> News by Haberturk, Nüfus Müdürlüğü: 221 bin 671 Suriyeli, Türk vatandaşlığı aldı (accessed by 08/12/2022) Source: <https://www.haberturk.com/nufus-mudurlugu-221-bin-671-suriyeli-turk-vatandasligi-aldi-3544181>

time. On 15 December 2022, the European Council granted a candidate status for Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>72</sup>, however, intensified work on border management and migration management, as well as ensuring the functioning of the asylum system, is expected to be high on BiH's priority list to advance the process further.

The Western Balkans countries are not yet members of the EU and their migration policies are still shaped by their domestic politics and economic situation. However, the EU and Western Balkans agreed to further strengthen strategic partnerships in 2022. In September 2020, the European Commission (EC) announced the European Pact on Migration and Asylum (hereafter referred to as the 'PACT') which is a legislative document, framing the main principles and planned steps for revising the EU migration, asylum, and border management systems by the means of accelerating the screening of irregular arrivals and ensuring the effective return of third-country nationals with no right to stay. One aim of the PACT, as stated by the Commission, is the better management of mixed migration flows by establishing a seamless link between all stages of the migration process, from arrival to processing of requests for international protection until, where applicable, return<sup>73</sup>.

Since the PACT is designed to improve the overall migration management system, and due to the mechanisms envisaged for the management of external borders of the EU, it can be expected that the implementation will have significant effects not only within the scope of the EU but also in the countries of transit and the origin. Given the strong focus on accelerated screening at the border, maximizing and speeding up returns, and a full redesign of the EU's migration diplomacy, including in the area of visa policy, the Western Balkan Countries started to intensely discuss the PACT's implications on the cooperation neighbouring countries, in particular for the countries in the WB.

Next year will provide the final opportunity to complete the work and to agree on the PACT or at least some of its legislative proposals before the next European elections in 2024. The effects of the PACT could expose the WB countries to more migratory pressure based on an increase in returns of irregular arrivals after screening. If migration and border management in WB would not strengthened in parallel, based on similar policies and measures, the implementation success level of the PACT could be affected and migration management in WB may face additional challenges. Thus, migration management systems in the WB require a tailor-made approach to adjustments and improvements to explore more sustainable approaches.

In this regard, the Tirana Declaration that was agreed upon at the EU-Western Balkan Summit that took place in Tirana on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2022, will play an important role in 2023. The declaration is focused on reconfirming the importance of a strategic partnership between the EU and WB. It also reaffirms the EU's strong support for the EU perspective of the WB countries. One of the key topics discussed at the Summit was addressing the challenges posed by migration including the following financial EU support to enhance the asylum and reception system, strengthen border protection, support fighting smuggling networks and organized crime groups, and step up returns from WB to the

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<sup>72</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/60872/2022-12-15-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> European Commission Regulation Of The European Parliament And Of The Council, COM(2020) 612

countries of origin. Furthermore, the European Union and North Macedonia signed an agreement on operational cooperation in border management with the FRONTEX that can be expected to show the first results in 2023.

In previous years, Serbia had granted visa-free entry to countries like Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Burundi, India, and Türkiye, all of which do not recognise Kosovo\* as an independent country. This is widely reported as also affecting irregular migration dynamics on the Western Balkan route and to the EU. In 2022 and after arriving legally in Serbia, a certain share of migrants from the aforementioned countries used the services of people smugglers operating in the region to attempt undocumented entry into the EU. This development must be seen against the fact that along other main irregular migration routes and in the EU, entry policies and visa granting were handled more restrictively. Different opportunity structures along the routes prompt migrants to move towards states which allow them to come without a visa and that are located close to an EU external border. Both were the case for Serbia and migrants who did not intend to stay in Serbia, continued their journey to the north of the country and tried to cross the border several times before they finally managed to enter Hungary. Meanwhile, Serbia has committed to tightening its visa regulations, the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), to be launched in the second half of the year, should also help to identify irregular migration risks linked to specific origin countries, and the newly concluded migration and mobility partnerships between EU member states and important countries of origin will facilitate legal migration but also enhance the cooperation on preventing irregular migration. Thus, it can be expected that Serbia's policy change will contribute to a reduction of irregular movements across the Western Balkan routes in 2023. Whether it will be sufficient to outweigh the impact of the other major drivers of irregular migration. Indeed, upon introducing some revisions to visa regimes, trends of irregular migration also changing.

Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have agreed on passport-free travel with Türkiye in 2022, which has not entered yet into force. Some observers have expressed concerns that the mentioned agreement will cause an increase in irregular migrants crossing the WB region in 2023. According to the agreement, citizens of Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina will be able to enter Türkiye (and vice versa) with their national IDs only. Consequently, the agreement has created some concerns among the EU member states, regarding the possible fraud that could be committed by migrants smugglers and irregular migrants to enter Serbia, but have not become a highly contested political issue so far.

The readmission agreements signed between Pakistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina represent an important positive step in the overall return policy development in the region. Even though there are certain setbacks, the positive effects of the implementation of the subject agreement are already visible, particularly in terms of a reduced number of migrants from Pakistan in the territory of BiH. In addition, the agreement presents a strong foundation for the return programmes which will be conducted in the future, especially if additional financial support can be ensured. A lack of sufficient financial resources is considered one of the reasons for the still limited cases of enforced returns that were started during the summer of 2022.



## Conclusions for 2023

The migration year 2022 in the Western Balkans and Türkiye Region was shaped by several crucial drivers and events. 2022 marked Türkiye's eighth consecutive year as the host to the largest refugee population in the world. In recent history, Türkiye has become a country that faces all aspects of migration as a transit, destination and source country, which has to deal with exceptionally high volumes of persons falling under all the different migrant categories. While challenges were increasing day by day also in 2022, not only due to the number of migrants and asylum seekers but also due to increasingly critical perceptions of the society on migration and economic limitations to shoulder the burden deriving from the situation, the responsible authorities in Türkiye strongly engaged in the development and implementation of solutions both in Türkiye and along the migration routes linked to the country.

The Western Balkan route together with the Central and the Eastern Mediterranean routes constituted the most active irregular migratory route throughout last year. Individually, the Western Balkan route was the most significant in terms of absolute numbers (a total of 145,600 cases in 2022) and relative increase in detections (up 136% compared to 2021). Syrian, Afghan, Turkish and Tunisian nationals accounted for most of the attempted irregular crossings along this route. Thus, the detections included secondary movements of migrants who had already stayed in the Western Balkans, newcomers arriving from Greece or Bulgaria, as well as those having made use of visa-free travel (e.g. Indian nationals), moved onwards to the EU's borders, arriving in Hungary and to a lesser extent in Croatia and Romania.

Considering the increasing number of irregular migrants, both Türkiye and Western Balkans have adjusted their priorities and migration policies even more towards preventing irregular migration and better promoting return policies. In this regard, Türkiye also has emphasised the necessity to work on especially these areas during its ICMPD Steering Group Chairmanship in 2023, in close cooperation with the other ICMPD Member States.

Having no or limited representation of countries of origin in the region, as well as having limited structural cooperation with these countries, which hampers the issuance of identity and travel documents for prospective returnees, have since long kept the numbers of returns limited in the case of the WB Countries. With an increase in financial resources and targeted projects, it can be expected that these obstacles can be – at least partly – successfully addressed in 2023 and beyond. It can be expected that successful operations on irregular migration and return will increase in the coming years but will require continued commitment and endurance from the WB countries and their EU partners.

Border management was one of the main priorities for Türkiye and the Western Balkans in 2022 and it seems to keep that position in 2023 as well. Endeavours to improve the border management structures in Türkiye will also have a direct impact on the EU's migration and border management systems. Türkiye is committed to a reform process in this area since 2022 to improve the risk management capacity of the border agencies, strengthen the technical and institutional capacity of blue and green border surveillance and control, foster modernization of border crossing points and

also develop a National IBM Strategy. Western Balkans countries on the other hand need to operationally and politically prepare for the potential effects of the implementation of the EU Pact on Asylum and Migration on their respective situation. This will imply major adjustments to their border management and return systems in 2023 and the following years.

Finally, creating pathways for legal migration and the management of entries and exits has crucial importance for both Türkiye and Western Balkans countries. Both will make migration and mobility more manageable for the authorities and enhance their capacity to take proactive and preventive actions in utilising migration-related opportunities and in avoiding migration-related risks. Since most of the irregular migrants passing through WB countries heading towards Europe do not want to apply for asylum on WB soils, the WB countries face big challenges in dealing with undocumented and unregistered migrants using the Western Balkans mainly as stages along the route to the EU. Their capability to address these issues successfully will ultimately also depend on the establishment of a joint strategy with the EU and the provision of the necessary support to put it into practice.