



# SERBIA

## COUNTRY PROFILE

### DRIM

Danube Region  
Information  
Platform for  
Economic  
Integration of  
Migrants

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## SHORT INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Serbia has faced a great number of challenges in resolving migratory movements and integration policies in the last decades. Due to this history, the migrant and refugee issue in Serbia can be divided into two periods: a) 'Refugee crisis' as a result of the 1990's conflicts in the former Yugoslavia: Analysis of data from 2001 shows that 451,980 persons that fled during the war in Croatia and BiH were registered in Serbia, of whom 377,731 had a valid refugee status, while 74,249 of them were persons endangered by war who did not meet international law standards for attaining the status of a refugee. By the end of the 2004, more than 100,000 people accepted Serbian citizenship, whereas a smaller number returned to their country of origin. However, the problem is still present, as evident in the UNHCR's report from 2010 which showed that Serbia, with 86,000 refugees and 21,000 internally displaced persons, was at that time number one in Europe in terms of the number of forced migrants, and was still among the leading 5 countries in the world with an extended refugee crisis (Government of Republic of Serbia, 2016). b) The denomination 'refugee crisis' is related to a series of events regarding the mass influxes of refugees and irregular immigrants from Asia, Africa and parts of Southeast Europe (Kosovo\* and Albania) into EU countries, which has been recorded since 2010, escalating in 2015. At the end of 2016, in Serbia, 5,500 migrants were housed in permanent and transit centres, and from the very beginning of the migrant crisis, over 900,000 migrants passed through Serbia according to data by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migrations. As the Balkan route was closed, and a large number of migrants remained stuck in Serbia, the idea of integration became more important, but a clear plan for its realization is still lacking. Beside the dominant forced migrations in Serbia, voluntary migration is also present as a consequence of job searching, and in this group the Chinese stand out as the most numerous population (Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, 2016).

## TABLE WITH BASIC INFORMATION

Capital: <b>Belgrade</b>
Official language(s): <b>Serbian</b>
Population (end of year 2016): <b>7,076,372</b> <sup>1</sup>
Foreigners as percentage of total population (end of year): <b>0.47% of the total population (temporary residence – 28,139 and permanent residence – 5,721)</b> <sup>2</sup>
Percentage of foreigners in the labour force (end of year 2016): <b>0.167% (11,862)</b> <sup>3</sup>
Unemployment rate (end of year 2016): <b>14%</b> <sup>4</sup>
Degree of urbanisation, number of cities over 100,000 inhabitants: <b>15 cities over 100,000 inhabitants (beginning of year)</b> <sup>5</sup>
Country's accession to the EU and the Schengen Area: <b>Not a member of EU, not a member of Schengen. Serbian nationals have visas – free access to the Schengen Area (limited to 90 days within any 180-day period).</b>

## THE MIGRANT POPULATION

According to the 2011 census, the total number of foreign-born people is 770,528 individuals, the greatest number of whom originated from one of the former republics of Yugoslavia, totalling at 687,948, whereas the number of persons from other countries was smaller, amounting to 82,580 citizens (SORS, 2011: 25). Article 24 of the Law on Foreign Nationals prescribes that foreign citizens can be granted stay for up to 90 days, temporary residence or permanent residence. Temporary residence can be granted to foreign citizens that intend to stay in Serbia longer than 90 days. The total number of foreigners at the end of 2015 in Serbia that have been granted temporary or permanent residence is 33,860, which represents 0.47% of the general population (CRM, 2016: 10-16).

<sup>1</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> CRM, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> CRM, 2016, pp. 14-15.

<sup>4</sup> SORS, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> SORS, 2011, pp. 23-27.

Table 1: Foreign nationals with permanent residence in RS in 2015 by citizenship nationality

Citizenship	Romania	PR China	Russian Federation	F.Y.R.O.M.	Ukraine	Germany	Bulgaria	Poland	Croatia	Albania
Number of persons	1,146	647	554	501	317	302	234	176	137	131
%	20.0	11.3	9.7	8.8	5.5	5.3	4.1	3.1	2.4	2.3

Source: Migration profile for Republic of Serbia for 2015

Table 2: Temporary residence grants at the end of 2015 by nationality

Citizenship	PR China	Russian Federation	Libya	F.Y.R.O.M.	Ukraine	Romania	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Number of persons	6,160	3,430	2,287	1,573	1,241	1,140	972
%	21.1	12.2	8.7	5.5	4.5	4.4	3.4

Citizenship	Croatia	Italy	Greece	Montenegro	USA	Albania	Turkey	Bulgaria
Number of persons	936	867	743	688	471	464	436	400
%	3.5	3.0	2.6	2.4	1.6	1.6	1.9	1.7

Source: Migration profile for Republic of Serbia for 2015

Male foreign citizens in Serbia mostly gained residence on the basis of labour (84.2%) and education (58.4%), while most of the women gained residence on the basis of family reunification (62.1%) (CRM, 2016: 12). Beside the dominant forced migrations in Serbia,

voluntary migration is also present as a consequence of job searching, and in this group the Chinese (4.006) stand out as the most numerous population.

In 2016, a total of 12,821 persons expressed their intent to seek asylum in Serbia. The Office for Asylum, as a body of the Government of Republic of Serbia operating within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, accepted 42 requests for asylum, and granted 19 refugee statuses and 23 subsidiary protections in 2016. Refugee status in Serbia was granted to five asylum seekers from Libya, four asylum seekers from Cuba and Sudan respectively, two from Cameroon, and one from Iran, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Syria; whereas subsidiary protection was granted to eight asylum seekers from Libya, five from Ukraine and Afghanistan respectively, two from Somalia and Syria, and to an asylum seeker from Iraq.

Even though 2016 saw the largest ever number of accepted asylum requests (42), since the Law on Asylum's entry into force, the position of asylum seekers and persons who are given refugee status or subsidiary protection has not improved much. Of the 42 accepted requests in 2016, 19 people were given refugee status, while 23 cases were concluded with the granting of subsidiary protection (Petrović, 2016: 38). From the Law on Asylum's entry into force in 2008 up to the end of 2016, the Office for Asylum granted 41 persons refugee status and 49 subsidiary protections. Before 2008, the state of Serbia was not in charge of deciding on granting asylum or subsidiary protection, but rather the UNHCR was, and for this reason there is no statistical data on granted asylum or subsidiary protection before the enactment of the Law on Asylum.

Table 3: Number of stated intents since the start of Law on Asylum implementation per annum

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
77	275	522	3,132	2,723	5,066	16,490	579,518	12,821

Source: Authors, consulted publications (Migration profiles for Republic of Serbia from 2008-2015)

In 2015, there were 579,518 stated intents for asylum in Serbia, of whom 313,335 were male and 92,188 female. The largest number of people were from Syria (52.1%) and Afghanistan (27.82%), followed by Iraq (13.13%), Iran (1.99%) and Pakistan (1.57%), all due to the increased number of migrants originating from the Middle East and Africa (CRM, 2016: 41). In 2015, entry into Serbia was denied to a total of 7,718 foreign nationals, which represents a decrease compared to 2014 - 8,238, 8,069 - 2013, 8,101 - 2012, 9,561 - 2011, and 14,586 - 2010 (CRM, 2010-2016). When looking at the age structure of foreigners and persons without nationality who have received a ban on entering the country in 2015, the dominant age group is 21 to 40 years of age (77.29%). Of the total number of persons who received a ban on entering the country in 2015, 95.04% were male (1,436) (CRM, 2016: 41).

## LABOUR MIGRANT POPULATION

At the end of 2015, 11,862 foreigners were allowed temporary residence on a labour basis. The number of issued work permits to foreigners with temporary residence in Serbia between 2009 and 2014 was almost equal, i.e. was between 2,490 in 2009 and 2,892 in 2014. The number of permits issued in 2010 was 2,576 (CRM, 2011: 22), in 2011 it was 2,573 (CRM, 2012: 18), in 2012 2,958 (CRM, 2013: 19), while in 2013 2,798 permits were issued (CRM, 2014: 20). The number increased greatly in 2015, specifically to 6,203 (CRM, 2016: 14). Of the aforementioned number for 2015, 1,670 of the permits (27%) were issued to women. From the total number of permits issued to foreigners that were granted permanent residence (170), women were issued 85 permits. Work permits in 2015 were most commonly issued to foreigners with temporary residence that attained a higher level of education, specifically education level VII certificates (2,087, i.e. 33.6%), level IV (1,717, i.e. 27.7%), level VI (1,140), level III (655), level I (311), level II (132), level VIII (88) and finally level V (50). The percentage of foreigners employed in the total active labour population of Serbia was 0.7% during 2015. The largest proportion of employed foreigners are in Belgrade (19%) and Novi Sad (3.1%) (CRM, 2016: 18).

## **POLICIES AND APPROACHES TO (LABOUR) MIGRANTS**

Asylum issues in the Republic of Serbia are regulated by a number of strategic and normative acts, including as its basis the [Law on Asylum](#). Serbia adopted the [National Strategy for Resolving the Issue of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons for 2015-2020](#), which defines the main aims and measures for the permanent resolution of the refugee problem in Serbia. The [Strategy for Managing Migration of the Republic of Serbia](#) from 2009 prescribed that Serbia will manage migrations in a comprehensive way, with adherence to European standards in the area of migrations and with respect to specific circumstances. The Strategy, among other things, is based on values that aim to ensure the respect of human rights of all categories of migrants, ease integration into society, ban discrimination, facilitate the reunification of families and respect the needs of all interested parties (Tošković et al, 2016: 19).

In terms of integration, Serbia is obliged not only by provisions from ratified international conventions that guarantee refugee rights, but also by national legislation, specifically the [Constitution of the Republic of Serbia](#), [Law on Asylum](#) and [Law on Managing Migrations](#). Article 17 of the Constitution states that foreign nationals, in line with international agreements, are entitled to all rights in Serbia guaranteed by the Constitution and law, except for the rights that are reserved only for nationals of the Republic of Serbia by the Constitution or law. The Strategy for Managing Migrations, in the section that describes the state of affairs in the migrations sector, deals with the position of asylum seekers and points to the fact that in Serbia there is not a specifically designated institution that would deal with the integration of persons who received refugee status in accordance with the Law on Asylum. It should be noted that in the process of EU integration, Serbia adopted the Action Plan for Chapter 24, which envisions a series of changes regarding the asylum and migratory practices in the state, primarily by amending the existing Law on Asylum, but also via other necessary changes.

Regarding the field of work, foreigners are employed on the basis of a new Law on Employment of Foreigners, which provides more efficiency and has resulted in an increasing number of foreign people working in Serbia.



## OVERVIEW OF INFORMATION SERVICES FOR MIGRANTS

The main ministries, institutions and organizations in charge of potential migrants, from their entry into the country and request for asylum up to ensuring housing, food and possible integration, are: the [Ministry of Labour](#) is responsible for supporting migrants and job search assistance, as in receiving social assistance. The Ministry's website (Serbian and English language) provides information about special social programmes for migrant support. The [Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development](#) is preparing special programmes for children, while the [Ministry of Health](#) is trying to provide health care for all vulnerable migrant individuals. The [Commissariat for Refugees and Migration](#) is a very important government institution, which offers all information about the accommodation of migrants and potential government integration programmes. The [National Employment Service](#) is a public organization that is responsible for organizing and obtaining work permits, and helps people who are not Serbian citizens to find a job. Among the most crucial non-state actors that deal with migrant issues are: the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) is a United Nations programme mandated to protect and support refugees at the request of a government or the UN itself, and assists in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country. One of the most involved CSOs in providing assistance in obtaining asylum is the [Belgrade Center for Human Rights](#). Other local organisations, such as [Group 484](#), [Asylum Protection Center](#) (provides legal, psychosocial and other support and protection to asylum seekers, refugees, displaced persons and any other persons who are in danger of migrating; in the English, French, and Arabic language), [Praxis](#), [Atina](#) (helps victims of human trafficking; in the English language), [ASTRA](#), [OHCHR](#), [Medecins sans frontieres - MSF](#), [UNICEF](#), [International Aid Network - IAN](#) (provide psychological support services; in the English, Serbian, and French language), [UN WOMEN](#), [Humanitarian Center for Integration and Tolerance](#), [Snaga prijateljstva - Amity](#), [Group for Children and Youth "Indigo"](#), [Center for Crisis Policy and Reaction](#), [Psychosocial Innovation Network - PIN](#). [The Center for Crisis Policy and Reaction](#) is an institution where refugees and asylum seekers can receive information that are of significance for their stay in Serbia, and which should provide refugees from the Middle East with translators and offer basic service information, as well as legal and psychosocial support. The [online platform](#) Azil.rs monitors the status of refugees both in their country of origin and Serbia.



## **KEY STAKEHOLDERS (STATE/INTERNATIONAL/NGO SECTOR)**

### **Public institutions:**

- The Commissariat for Refugees is a special government agency established to conduct expert and other activities regarding the housing, return and/or integration of refugees.
- The Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman) is an institution in charge of representing public interest by examining and responding to complaints of abuse or denial of rights. Special attention is given to: rights of national minority members, children's rights, disabled persons' rights, detained persons' rights, and gender equality.
- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was founded in 1950 in Geneva by the UN General Assembly with the aim of ensuring international protection and aid for refugees.
- The Belgrade Center for Human Rights is an NGO that deals with: offering legal and psychological aid to asylum seekers, strategic litigation, status analysis and reporting, public representation and raising awareness among state bodies and citizens.

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