Migration trends across the OSCE

2015-2025

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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Foreword

In an era of unprecedented human mobility, the OSCE's unique mandate and inclusive structure position us to address migration challenges and opportunities with a comprehensive approach that spans economic, social, environmental, and security dimensions. At a time when migration patterns are increasingly complex and multifaceted, this comprehensive report provides essential data-driven insights that are vital for informed policymaking and effective regional cooperation.

The evidence presented in this analysis reveals a region experiencing simultaneous convergence and divergence with global migration patterns. This report demonstrates the critical importance of drawing from multiple authoritative sources to paint a comprehensive picture of regional trends. However, gaps in data availability and methodological differences across national statistical systems continue to limit our collective understanding of migration phenomena.

There is an urgent need to ground responses in robust, harmonized data across OSCE participating States. Data-based evidence is the cornerstone for designing migration policies that are both effective and respectful of human dignity. By deepening our collective understanding through consistent statistics and analytical rigor, we enable more effective policy coordination, foster transparency, anticipate demographic trends, and enhance the capacity to manage migration in a way that benefits migrants, sending and receiving communities alike.

The growth in remittance flows reported here highlights migration's enduring socioeconomic importance, reinforcing the link between migration and sustainable development that the OSCE has championed for decades. Of particular significance are the shifting dynamics in labour migration that this report documents. The intensifying global competition for workers and talent has positioned labour migration as essential for sustaining economic growth across many participating States. As labour migration continues to evolve, the OSCE is called upon to support policies facilitating legal migration pathways while tackling irregular migration with targeted, human rights-compliant measures.

Faced with demographic shifts, geopolitical crises, and climate change impacts, this analysis validates the prescience of the OSCE's migration-related framework, from the 1975 Helsinki Final Act's recognition of migration's economic and social dimensions to recent Ministerial Council decisions addressing large-scale movements and migration management. Our organization's strength lies not only in its broad membership but also in its ability to convene dialogue, share best practices, and coordinate regional efforts. As we move forward, the evidence presented here must inform our collective efforts to transform migration into an opportunity for enhanced cooperation, shared prosperity, and regional stability.

Bakyt Dzhusupov

Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic
and Environmental Activities
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Key Takeaways

The OSCE region's migration patterns both reflect and diverge from global trends for the period 2015-2025. The most striking differences include the region's simultaneous role as both a major destination and source of migration, the unprecedented scale of intra-regional displacement due to the war in Ukraine, and the significant regional variations within the OSCE area itself.

- **Migration growth at the global level outpaces migration growth in the OSCE region**

In the last decade, the global estimated stock of international immigrants increased by 22 percent (from 250 million to 304 million). The OSCE area experienced a slightly lower growth of 19 percent in immigrant stock (from 140 million to 167 million). As a share of the global population, immigrant stock has increased from 3.3 percent to 3.7 percent, marking a 12 percent increment. In the OSCE region, the share grew from 12 percent to 12.8 percent, marking a 6.7 percent increase. Globally and in the OSCE region alike, diversification of migration flows is increasing both in terms of origin and destination.

- **The OSCE region shows stark regional divergence in migration and demographic dynamics**

Within the OSCE, regional patterns vary dramatically. In the OSCE Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, and Central Asia immigration stagnated or even contracted, contrasting with the broader OSCE trend of increasing immigration. OSCE Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe recorded a marked increase in emigration. OSCE South-Eastern Europe and Eastern Europe face accelerating rates of depopulation, while OSCE Central Asia's population grew 16 percent (69 million to 80 million).

- **Migration patterns show regional variations in gender dynamics**

While OSCE-wide patterns show balanced gender distribution, OSCE regions exhibit distinct profiles. Labour migration corridors drive the geographic distribution of migrant workers as well as their composition by gender, depending on the nature of the demand for migrant labour by specific sectors. Displaced Ukrainians are predominantly women and children due to conscription policies. OSCE Central Asia maintains marked female majorities in both emigrant (52%) and immigrant (57%) populations.

- **Remittance flow intensifies and remains a vital lifeline to many OSCE regions and participating States' economies**

The OSCE region demonstrates a more intense remittance relationship than global averages. Remittance outflows from the OSCE grew by 51 percent (reaching $327 billion), while inflows increased by 43 percent (to $235 billion). The regional impact varies, with some OSCE regions showing extreme remittance dependency. OSCE Eastern Europe relies heavily on inflows (9 percent of GDP) while paying minimal outflows. Areas such as Tajikistan (38 percent of GDP), Kyrgyzstan (19 percent of GDP), and Kosovo[1] (17.5 percent of GDP) rank among the highest beneficiaries of remitted inflows as percentage of GDP globally.

- **Labour migration plays a key role in offsetting workforce shortages and in driving economic growth, in a context of intensifying global competition for workers and talent**

The size of the OSCE's working-age population (15-64 years) stagnated between 2015 and 2024 (slightly shrinking from 846 million to 844 million). The broader OSCE region faces workforce shortages. In most participating States, attracting foreign workers is becoming essential to offsetting workforce shortages and sustaining economic growth. In contrast with the broader OSCE trend, OSCE Central Asia's working-age population grew 24 percent.

- **The war in Ukraine has been a transformative force of migration dynamics**

The war in Ukraine fundamentally reshaped migration patterns across multiple OSCE regions. Ukraine became the world's second-largest refugee source. Refugees hosted by OSCE participating States nearly tripled from 4.8 million in 2015 to 13.9 million in 2024. Unlike in previous decades, nearly half of all refugees hosted in the OSCE area are now nationals of OSCE participating States themselves (primarily Ukrainians). The war disrupted some historic labour mobility patterns, with migrant workers from OSCE Eastern Europe and Central Asia rapidly diversifying their destination, often in the context of bilateral labour migration agreements.

- **Irregular migration fluctuates across regions and time**

Despite representing a small fraction of total migration, irregular migration remains a priority concern for many participating States, in context of dangerous routes, high numbers of deaths, with inconclusive policy responses. Irregular flows show distinct regional concentrations and fluctuations across time. These variations highlight how irregular routes are shaped not only by geopolitical crises and root causes in the countries of origin, but also by the legal and policy responses of the receiving countries.

These findings reveal that, while the OSCE participates in global migration trends, it exhibits unique characteristics driven by economic disparities, demographic dynamics, and intra-regional conflicts. As a comprehensive security organization with participating States spanning major origin, transit, and destination countries, the OSCE is uniquely positioned to leverage its inclusive structure and diverse membership to facilitate the dialogue and cooperation that multifaceted challenges of migration require.

1 All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, should be understood in compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

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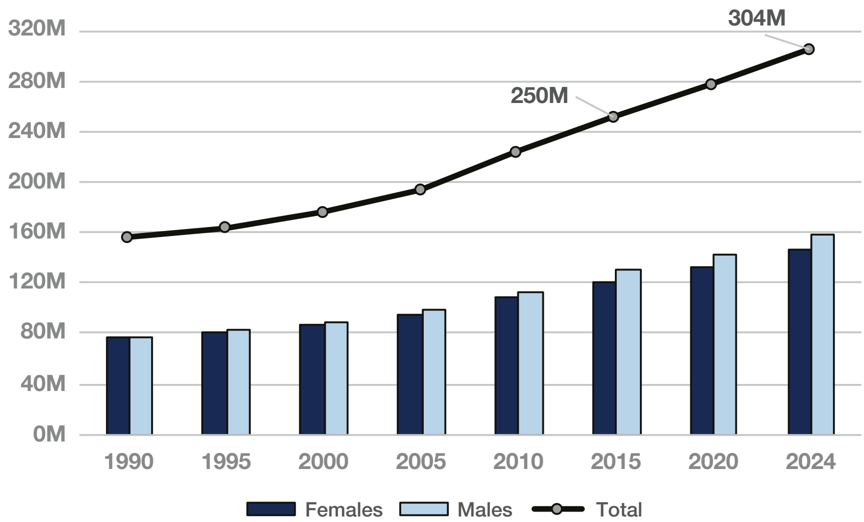
1. Introduction – Global Outlook

1. Introduction – Global Outlook

International migration[2] has continued to rise in absolute figures over the past decade, reaching an estimated stock of about 304 million worldwide in 2024, a 22 percent increase from 250 million in 2015 (Figure 1.1). This growth in absolute numbers is largely driven by global population increases. Most international migrants move within their continent of origin. For instance, more than 69 million Asians resided in other Asian countries in 2020, and 21 million Africans lived elsewhere in the continent. At the same time, long-distance migration corridors, such as Asia-to-Europe and Latin America-to-North America, continue to expand, contributing to ever-greater diversity in destination societies. Permanent-type migration to OECD countries set a new record in 2023, reaching 6.5 million. This number was 10 percent higher compared to 2022 and 28 percent above 2019 levels (OECD, 2024).

***Figure 1.1** Estimated stock of international migrants worldwide, 1990-2024*



Source: UN DESA (2025)

Migrant workers, across all skill levels, represent the majority of migrants. Worldwide, workers account for 62 per cent of the international migrant population (ILO, 2021). There is also evidence that temporary migration for work is overtaking permanent migration, for example in Canada and Poland, often as a result of the adoption of specific policies or migration partnerships (World Bank, 2023a). The number of internationally mobile students has also significantly increased over the last decade.

The share of female migrants stayed relatively consistent at about 48 percent (Figure 1.1).

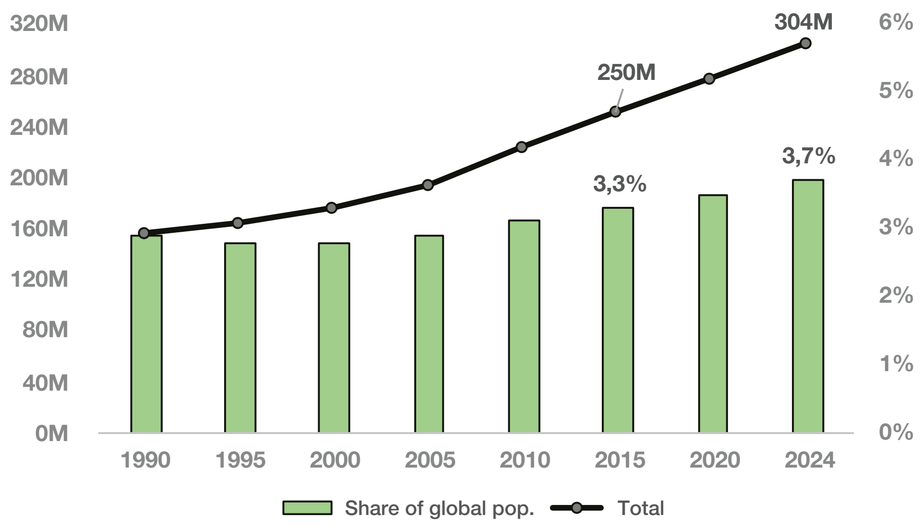
2 There is no internationally agreed upon legal definition of international migration. However, the 1998 United Nations Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration has developed a statistical definition to ensure a common baseline: an international migrant is defined as "any person who changes his or her country of usual residence and established a new residence in another country within a given year" (UN, 1998). In addition, a threshold, usually of 12 months, is used to specify the amount of time a person must have lived continuously in another country to qualify as a migrant. The international migrant stock is a measure of the number of persons who are considered international migrants at a given point in time. (UN DESA, 2025). UN DESA's estimates rely on population censuses and define international migrants based on their country of birth except for 46 countries where this information is not available, and citizenship is used instead. The statistical definition of an international migrant makes no reference to the reason for migration or to the legal immigration status of persons changing their country of residence.

1. Introduction – Global Outlook

Nonetheless, the share of females in the migrant population varies significantly by region of destination, with the lowest in Asia (42%), and the highest in Europe (52%), Northern America (51%), and Oceania (51%). Labour migration corridors drive the geographic distribution of migrant workers as well as their composition by gender, depending on the nature of the demand for migrant labour by specific sectors.

Despite a robust growth in the absolute number of international migrants over recent decades, their share of the world's population remains small: in 2024, about 3.7 percent of people globally were international migrants (Figure 1.2). The share of migrants in the global population has remained relatively stable around 3 percent between 1990 and 2010. In the last decade, this share has increased from 3.3 percent (2015) to 3.7 percent (2024), marking a 12 percent increment. When looking at specific regions, since demographic growth has been uneven across the world, the share of immigrants in high-income countries increased more than three times faster than population, and only half as fast as population growth in low-income countries (World Bank, 2023a).

Figure 1.2 *International migrants as share of the global population, 1990-2024*



Source: *UN DESA (2025)*

Rising populations in low-income countries, alongside the aging demographics of high- and middle-income countries, are becoming key forces influencing contemporary international migration. High-income countries are aging rapidly, while many middle-income countries have also started to face slowing population growth and declining birth rates, marking a transition from countries of emigration to future destinations for migrants (World Bank, 2023a). In regions such as Europe, North America, Australia, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, the population is projected to decline by 14 per cent over the next thirty years (with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lithuania, and the Republic of Moldova recording the largest relative reductions) (UN DESA, 2024). In stark contrast, low-income countries — especially across Africa — continue to experience substantial population growth.

In most countries, the impact of international migration on population change is generally limited, with notable exceptions. Demographic changes are creating large mismatches between labour supply and demand across the world, and spark an **intensifying global competition for workers and talent.** In regions such as Europe, North America, and Australia, attracting foreign workers is now viewed as essential to offsetting workforce shortages and sustaining economic growth. Immigration is projected to become the main driver of population growth in 52 countries by 2054, including Australia, Canada, and the United States of America (UN DESA, 2024). In lower-income regions, migration remains both a channel for development and a response to youth unemployment. Regional migration patterns are thus being fundamentally shaped by these economic and demographic factors, in an era of shrinking workforces and shifting global population centres (IOM, 2024).

Labour migration and remittances remain vital to economic development and demographic sustainability in many countries, even in the face of disruptions such as conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, international remittances rose to US$831 billion – the highest number on record so far, with remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries totalling a record US$647 billion, outpacing both foreign direct investment and official development assistance in many regions. Major economies such as India (US$111 billion received in 2022), Mexico (US$61 billion), and China (US$51 billion) have stood out as the largest recipients globally, but smaller and lower-income countries are often the most remittance-dependent, with inflows comprising over 20 percent of GDP in places like Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, and Tajikistan (World Bank, 2023a). Remittances are often more stable than other capital flows, and have shown exceptional resilience, rebounding quickly after COVID-19 and providing essential support to households and national economies in regions with high rates of international migration, such as South and Southeast Asia, West and Central Africa, parts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (World Bank, 2023b). On the outflow side, major sending countries include the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Switzerland.

As of mid-2024, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide reached an unprecedented high of nearly 123 million — almost double the 65 million recorded in 2015 — driven by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and severe disruptions (UNHCR, 2025). This figure encompasses 45 million refugees and asylum-seekers. The number of refugees alone (36.8 million) has more than tripled compared to a decade ago. This global increase in forced displacement has been driven primarily by major and protracted crises in Afghanistan, the Sahel, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Venezuela, with just six countries accounting for more than three-quarters of those requiring international protection. Most refugees (69%) continue to be hosted in neighbouring countries, and low- and middle-income countries host 71 percent of the world's population in need of international protection, enduring significant pressure on regional resources and infrastructure. Iran is the world's largest refugee-hosting country, with nearly 3.8 million refugees in 2024, followed by Türkiye (3.1), Colombia, Germany, and Uganda, underscoring the combined influence of proximity and national asylum policies. Asylum pressures reached new highs: in 2023, 3.6 million new individual asylum applications were registered globally, with the United States (1.2 million) and Germany (329,100) as leading receiving countries. At year-end, there were 6.9 million pending asylum claims worldwide, the highest ever (UNHCR, 2024). These mounting pressures have deepened both humanitarian and policy challenges, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated international responses to support both displaced populations and the communities that host them.

Irregular migration remains one of the most significant concerns, in context of dangerous routes and high numbers of deaths, with inconclusive policy responses. Detected irregular border crossings fell during the initial COVID-19 pandemic period. They surged again in 2022 and 2023 in response to protracted crises and the reopening of routes. The Central Mediterranean remains the world's deadliest migration route on record, with more than 20,000 deaths and disappearances reported between 2014 and 2022 (inclusive of nearly 2,800 deaths across Mediterranean routes in 2022 alone) – numbers that are likely underestimated (IOM, 2024). Risks extend far beyond the Mediterranean: the West African Atlantic route is highly lethal, the Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama remains treacherous, and at least 950 deaths were documented crossing the Sahara Desert between 2021 and 2023. These movements are increasingly facilitated by transnational smuggling networks. An estimated

1. Introduction – Global Outlook

60 to 80 percent of irregular migrants to Europe rely on smugglers, paying up to US$10,000 per journey (IOM, 2024). Migrant smuggling is extremely lucrative. A multi-billion-euro worldwide trade annually that, in many areas, is more profitable than drugs.[3]

In terms of policy responses, a number of countries have opted for restrictive immigration and asylum laws, drawing criticism for exacerbating risks and violating rights, with NGOs reporting increased incidents of pushbacks, family separation, and detention (UNHCR, 2024). Others have expanded regular migration channels. Germany's *Skilled Worker Immigration Act* attracted 650,000 non-EU workers in 2023, while Gulf states issued 2.1 million new work permits and Australia increased its permanent skilled visa intake by 15 percent (IOM, 2024). However, **there is not a direct zero-sum relationship between regular and irregular migration channels:** decreases in one do not necessarily and automatically lead to increases in another (Belmonte et al., 2019). A clearly growing trend is the **intensification of bilateral and multilateral agreements with partners in the neighbourhood and along the main migration routes, where the management of cross-border population movements is tied to other policy areas,** such as trade, visa facilitation, economic or development aid. While this policy approach has led to effective results in decreasing irregular crossings, its efficacy in addressing organised immigration crime is yet unclear, and has raised public concern regarding the respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and migrants' dignity (EMN, 2024; Adamson and Tsourapas, 2019).

Climate change and environmental shocks are accelerating displacement, through both sudden- and slow-onset impacts. The effects of environmental and climate-related factors on both internal and international mobility, as well as in reshaping migration patterns globally, remain insufficiently understood. Extreme weather events and slow-onset environmental degradation displaced about 33 million people internally in 2022, with sudden-onset disasters accounting for 98 percent of these displacements (IDMC, 2023). By 2050, the World Bank's projections estimate that climate-related internal migration in developing countries could range from 44 million to 216 million people (World Bank, 2023a). These challenges are compounded by the intersection of climate change with conflict, and economic and institutional fragility: three-quarters of the world's forcibly displaced population reside in countries highly vulnerable to climate hazards (UNHCR, 2024). Quantitative evidence on exposure to climate-related hazards (heat waves, floods, droughts, wildfires, crop failure, sea level rise) and projections of future vulnerabilities at the global scale are increasingly scientifically robust. However, while experts agree that climate change may compound the economic, political, and social drivers of human mobility, the evidence-based understanding of the climate-mobility nexus is still not robust enough to inform policy measures (GDI IOM, 2023).

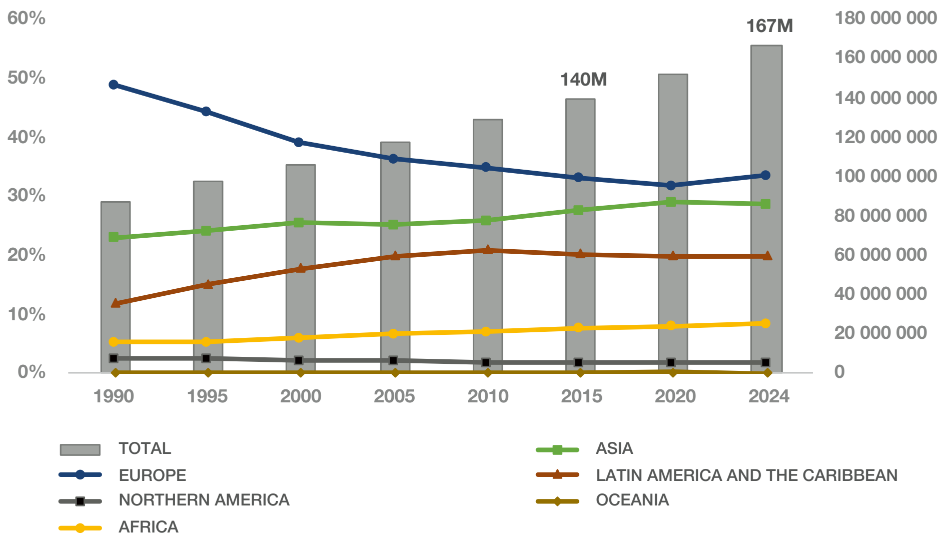
3 See: UNODC (2024), 5 facts you need to know about migrant smuggling.

2. Key trends in the OSCE area

2. Key trends in the OSCE area

Between 2015 and 2024, the OSCE area experienced significant growth in its immigrant stock, increasing from nearly 140 million to almost 167 million people — a rise of roughly 19 percent (Figure 2.1). This trend reinforces the overall increase recorded since 1990, when the immigrants' stock in the OSCE area amounted to 87.5 million. Europe remains the predominant continent of origin, with migrant stocks climbing from about 47.9 million to 55.3 million, though its share of the total slightly decreased from 34 percent to 33 percent. While the long-term trend reveals steady expansion, the acceleration after 2015 highlights the growing role of migration in shaping demographic and social landscapes across the OSCE region.

***Figure 2.1** OSCE Region - Immigrants' stock (total) and by continent of origin (%), 1990-2024*

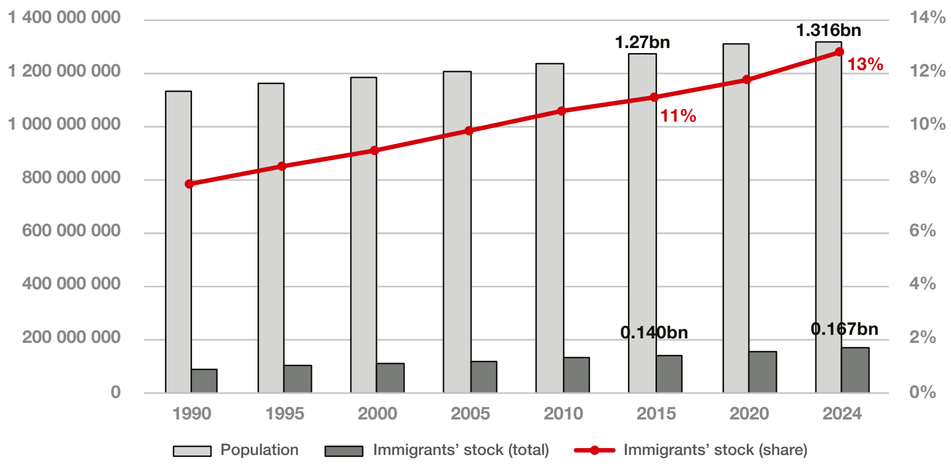


Source: UN DESA (2025)

Over the past decade, the diversification of migration flows into the OSCE area has increased. Data show increased diversity both in terms of origin and destination. Immigration from Africa, starting from a smaller base, records the fastest proportional increase — by about one-third — rising from 10.1 million (2015) to 13.5 million (2024), and growing from 7 percent to 8 percent of total stocks (Figure 2.1). Asian immigration also grew substantially, with the estimated stock rising from 38.4 million to 47.1 million, and its relative share from 27 percent to 28 percent. Latin America and the Caribbean contributed consistently, with estimates of stocks growing from 30.5 million to 33.5 million, maintaining around 20 percent of the total. Meanwhile, migration from Northern America and Oceania remained relatively stable, accounting for just over 2 percent and 0.2 percent of the total, respectively.

Demographic trends in the OSCE area highlight the increasing relative importance of migration in driving population changes across the OSCE region. The immigrant stock as a share of the total OSCE population increased from 11 percent in 2015 to 13 percent in 2024 (Figure 2.2). This two-percentage-point rise reflects a growth of the total immigrants' stock by 19 percent in the last decade, from roughly 140 million to 167 million. The demographic contribution of migration is notable, considering that the overall population in the OSCE area in the same period grew by approximately 3.5 percent, from an estimated 1.27 billion in 2015 to around 1.316 billion in 2023.

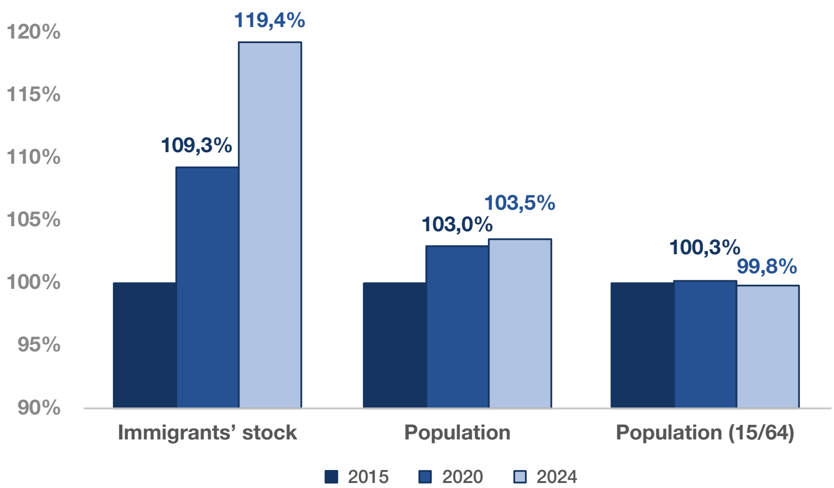
Figure 2.2 *OSCE Region - Immigrants' stock and resident population, 1990-2024*



Source: UN DESA (2025; 2024)

If managed effectively, labour migration could play a key role in offsetting workforce shortages and driving economic growth. The size of the OSCE area's working-age population (15-64 years) stagnated between 2015 and 2024 (slightly shrinking from 846 million to 844 million). Working-age individuals compose the large majority of the immigrant population, which grew more than 19 percent over the same period. The contrasting trends between the growth in the immigrants' stock, the modest expansion of total population, and the stagnation of the working age population underscore migration's potential role in sustaining demographic vitality and labour force dynamics across the OSCE region (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 *OSCE Region - Demographic changes (2015=100)*

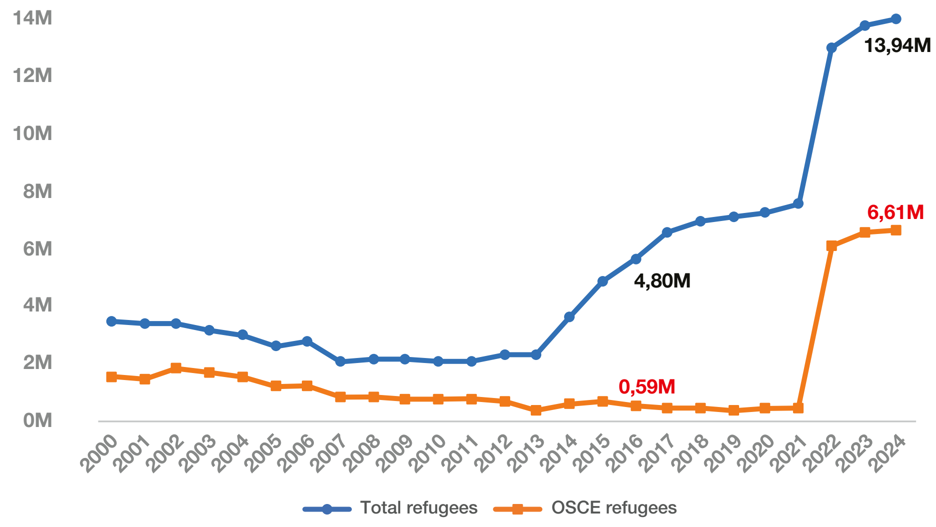


Source: UN DESA (2024; 2025) and World Bank (2025).

2. Key trends in the OSCE area

The refugee landscape within the OSCE region has changed dramatically in the last decade. The total number of refugees hosted by OSCE countries increased from 4.8 million in 2015 to more than 13.9 million in 2024 - a growth of almost 190% (Figure 2.4). Particularly notable is the surge since 2022 in refugees originating from OSCE participating States and hosted within the OSCE itself. This shift is largely due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has resulted in more than 6 million people seeking refuge in neighbouring OSCE countries, most notably Germany (1.14 million), Poland (0.96 million) and the Russian Federation (1.22 million) (UNHCR, 2025). As a result, the composition of the refugee population in the OSCE area has changed dramatically —today, nearly half of all refugees hosted in the OSCE area are themselves nationals of OSCE countries, illustrating the region's dual role as both a destination and a source of large-scale forced displacement.

Figure 2.4 *OSCE Region - Stock of hosted refugees, 2000-2024*

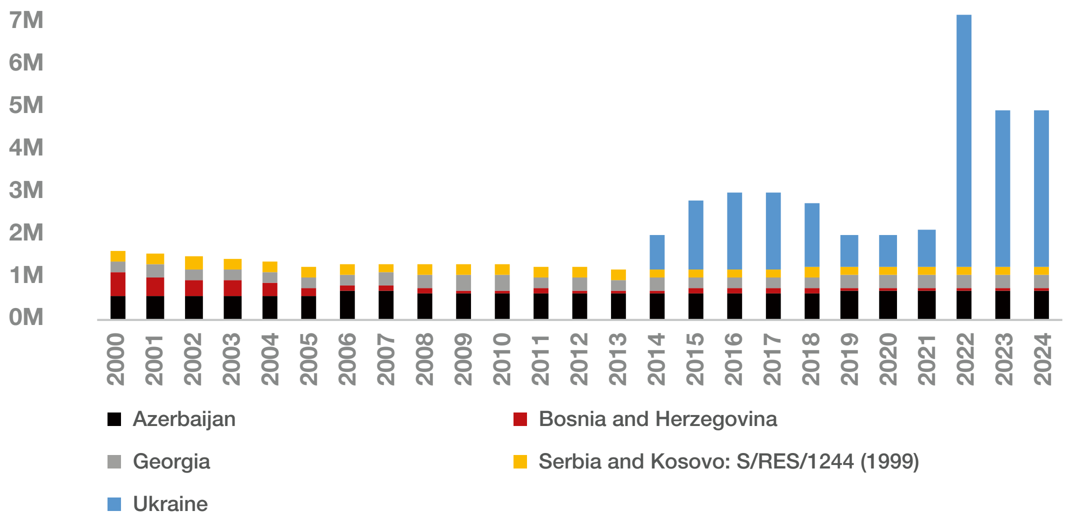


Source: UNHCR (2025). Notes: Data for the year 2024 are available up until the mid-year.

Internal displacement in the OSCE area grew over the past decade, reflecting the impact of the war in Ukraine (Figure 2.5). According to UNHCR's data, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the OSCE area remained relatively stable and below 1.5 million until 2013, with most IDPs concentrated in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Serbia and Kosovo.[4] This changed from 2014 onwards. While Ukraine had virtually no IDPs prior to 2014, its displaced population jumped to 823,000 in 2014, climbed to 1.6 million in 2015, and then surged to nearly 6 million in 2022. By 2024, Ukraine accounted for the overwhelming majority of the OSCE region's nearly 5 million IDPs.

4 Please, note that UNHCR collects data for both Serbia and Kosovo S/RES/1244 (1999) together as part of its regional data collection and operations in the SEE situation data. All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, should be understood in compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

Figure 2.5 OSCE Region - Stock of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), 2000-2024

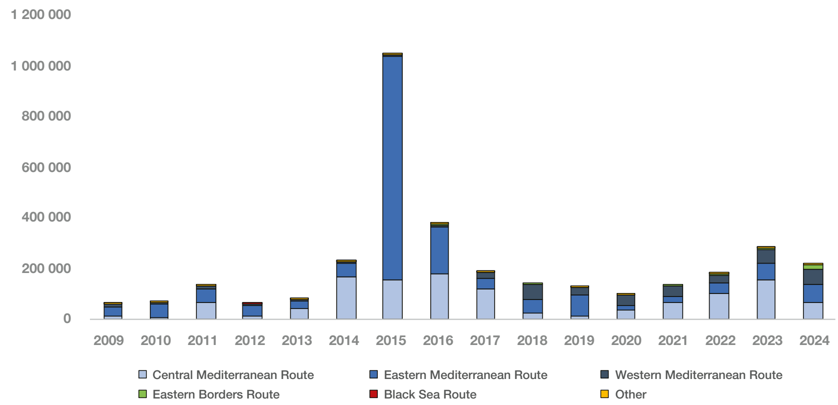


Source: UNHCR (2025)

Irregular migration is notoriously challenging to track as, by definition, there are not much official data. Across the OSCE, estimates or data concerning border crossing detections are available for the EU, US, and the UK. **Irregular arrivals to the European Union reached an historic peak in 2015** (Frontex 2025). Authorities recorded more than 1 million detections across all major routes — particularly along the Eastern and Central Mediterranean corridors (Figure 2.6). This surge was primarily driven by the Syrian conflict, resulting in more than 885,000 detections on the Eastern Mediterranean Route and around 154,000 on the Central Mediterranean Route in that year alone. Following 2016, irregular flows declined sharply, thanks largely to a combination of border enforcement measures and international agreements, such as the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016. This downward trend continued through the COVID-19 pandemic, during which recorded numbers fell below 100,000 in 2020. Irregular arrivals have rebounded modestly since 2021. As the EU adopted the decision in 2022 to assign those fleeing war in Ukraine the right to temporary protection, detections along the Eastern Border Route showed a relatively moderate increase. This highlights how irregular migration to the EU is shaped not only by geopolitical crises and root causes in the countries of origin, but also by the legal and policy responses. As of 2024, irregular arrivals reached 217,948 detections, with the Mediterranean routes still accounting for nearly all irregular border crossings into the EU.

2. Key trends in the OSCE area

Figure 2.6 *OSCE Region - Detections of irregular border crossings into the European Union, 2009-2024*

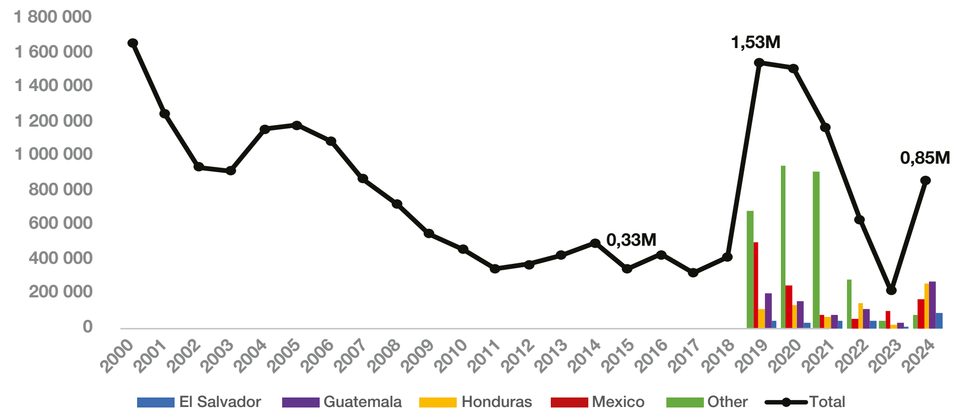


Source: Frontex (2025)

During the past decade, detected irregular entries along the United States' South-Western border show a fluctuating trend with a peak of more than 1.5 million in 2019 (Figure 2.7). After steady declines since the year 2000, annual apprehensions along the south-west US border reached a low of about 304,000 in 2017. This trend reversed in 2019, when apprehensions surged to more than 1.53 million, driven primarily by more than half a million Mexican nationals and large numbers from Guatemala (195,294) and Honduras (111,155).

Detected irregular entries then progressively slowed down, until reaching an all-time low of about 200,000 in 2023. Preliminary data for 2024 suggest another spike, with more than 851,000 detections reported. The recent surge is characterized by a diversification of origins with Guatemala (31%), Honduras (30%), Mexico (20%), and El Salvador (11%) being the main countries of origin. This evolving profile highlights the south-west US border as a persistent focal point of migration pressures, shaped by both regional instability and shifting US migration and border policies.

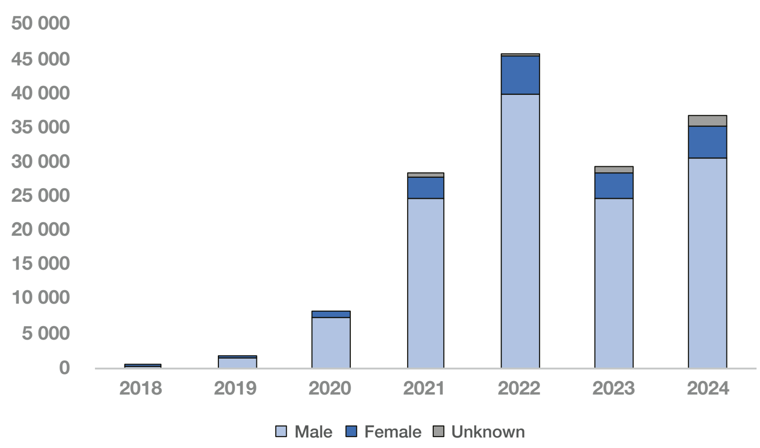
Figure 2.7 *OSCE region - Detections of irregular border crossings at the South-West US border, 2000-2024*



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (2025)

Irregular migration to the United Kingdom has become increasingly visible since 2018, particularly through the rise in small boat crossings across the English Channel (Figure 2.8). While comprehensive data on irregular migration remains elusive, official statistics on detected small boat arrivals provide a window into recent trends (UK Home Office 2025). Between 2018 and 2024, annual detections rose from 299 in 2018 to more than 36,000 in 2024, with a peak of 45,774 in 2022. The overwhelming majority of detected arrivals are male individuals (over 84% in most years), with young adults (ages 18–39) making up the largest share. As of 2024, the main nationality groups were Afghanistan, Syria, and Iran.[5] Nearly all (99%) those who arrived via small boats submitted an asylum claim upon arrival, with about 10 percent of them also holding a National Referral Mechanism referral.[6]

***Figure 2.8** OSCE region - Detected small boats arrivals to the UK, 2018-2024*



Source: UK – Home Office (2025)

Small boat arrivals have remained a consistent feature of the UK's migration landscape in recent years. This has occurred against a backdrop of increased efforts to manage and reduce irregular migration over the past decade, particularly through measures aimed at enhancing border security, deterring illegal entry, and addressing the root causes of migration. Despite implementing more restrictive migration policies and practices, particularly following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, net (regular) migration rose between 2015 and 2023, and non-EU immigration reached a record high in 2022. In 2024, net migration declined sharply to its lowest level since 2021, a change largely attributable to reductions in work and study-related immigration, following the introduction of more restrictive visa policies, but levels remain higher than pre-Brexit figures (House of Commons, 2025).[7]

5 Home Office, How many people come to the UK irregularly? https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2025/how-many-people-come-to-the-uk-irregularly?

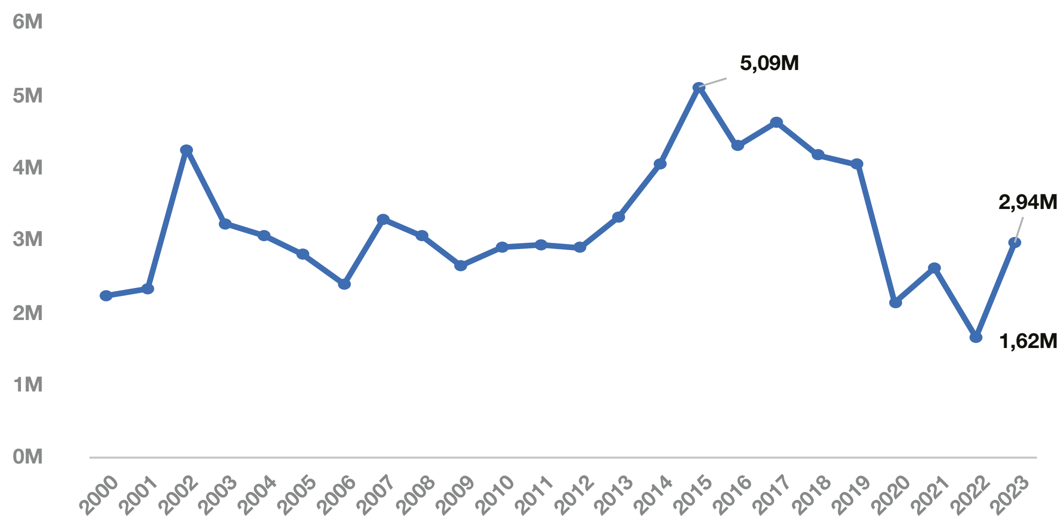
6 The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the UK's framework for identifying and supporting potential victims of modern slavery or human trafficking. An NRM referral means that, in addition to seeking asylum, the individual is recognized as potentially requiring protection and support as a victim of exploitation.

7 Office for National Statistics, What's driving the fall in net migration? May 22, 2025. Retrieved from https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2025/05/22/taking-a-look-at-what-is-driving-the-fall-in-net-migration/#:~:text=Our%20provisional%20estimates%20show%20net,related%20visas%20%E2%80%93%20especially%20student%20dependants.

2. Key trends in the OSCE area

Although the OSCE area as a whole has recorded positive net migration, the region has shown marked variability over the past two decades and across participating States. Net migration flows in the OSCE region have fluctuated considerably from year to year. A sustained positive trend emerged after 2010, culminating in a peak of over 5 million net immigrants in 2015, representing 0.4 percent of the OSCE population (Figure 2.9). The region then maintained high positive net migration through 2019, consistently above 4 million per year. However, this trend reversed sharply in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as positive net migration dropped to about 2.1 million (0.16%), and remained lower through 2022 (1.6 million; 0.12%). By 2023, positive net migration moderately rebounded, returning to nearly 2.9 million (0.23%). These fluctuations underscore the sensitivity of migration flows to political, economic, and health shocks.

***Figure 2.9** OSCE Region - Net migration flows, 2000 - 2023*

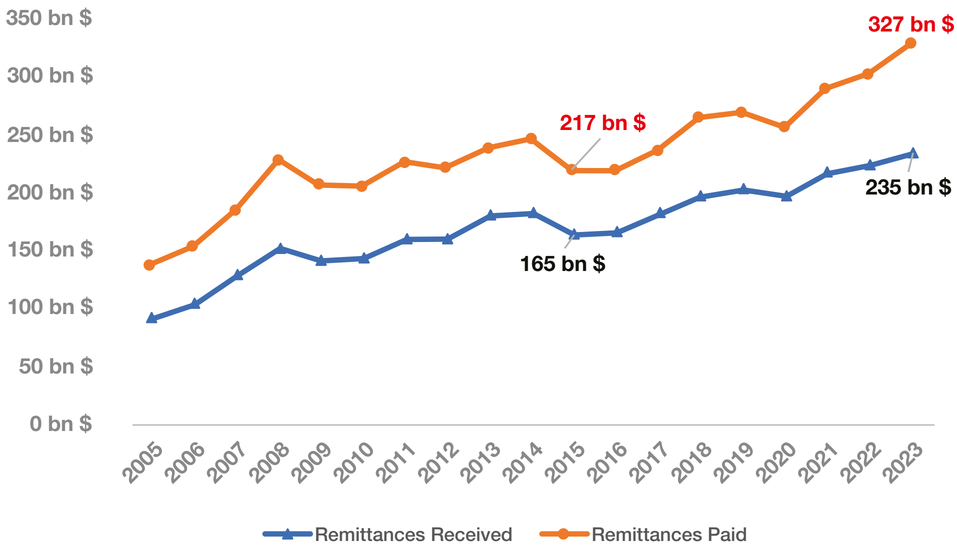


Source: UK – Home Office (2025)

Data confirm the ongoing importance of the OSCE region as a major hub of migration - serving as both a destination and an origin of migrants. As of 2024, reflecting persistent regional demographic and economic disparities within the broader OSCE area, participating States recording the highest positive net migration are the United States (+1.3 million), Germany (+0.6 million), and the United Kingdom (+0.45 million); whereas participating States with the highest negative net migration are Türkiye (-0.32 million), Ukraine (-0.30 million), and Greece (-0.16 million).

Remittance flows to and from the OSCE area recorded robust and sustained growth over the past decade. The OSCE area plays an important role both as a significant source and recipient of remittances. In 2015, personal remittances received by households in OSCE participating States amounted to about US$165 billion, and those paid out by immigrants to countries of origin reached US$217 billion (Figure 2.10). These figures correspond to, respectively, about 0.41 and 0.54 percent of the OSCE area's aggregated Gross Domestic Product (in current US$). Since 2015, the inflow of remittances has grown steadily, rising by 43 percent to US$235 billion in 2023 (stable at roughly 0.41% of the aggregated GDP). Outflows have increased even more sharply, surging by 51 percent to US$327 billion over the same period (about 0.57% of the aggregated GDP). This upward trend reflects both rising global mobility and the increasing importance of migrants' financial contributions for families, communities, and economies in origin countries. The resilience of remittance flows was particularly evident during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when both inflows and outflows in the OSCE region quickly rebounded and set new records. As of 2023, the top net exporters were the United States (-85.3 billion US$) and Switzerland (-33.6 billion US$). The main beneficiaries of remitted inflows as percentage of GDP were Tajikistan (38% of GDP), Kyrgyzstan (19%), Kosovo (17.5%), Uzbekistan (13.8%), Georgia (13.7%), the Republic of Moldova (12%), Montenegro (10.7%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (10.2%). Overall, these trends underscore the critical role remittances play as an economic lifeline for millions.

Figure 2.10 *OSCE Region - Estimated value (in current US$) of personal remittances to (received) and from (paid) OSCE countries*[8]



Source: World Bank (2025). Note: Remittances paid and received are not perfectly comparable because data availability is not complete for every participating State between 2005 and 2023. For instance, data on remittances paid are missing for Turkmenistan and San Marino in 2023 but are available for remittances received.

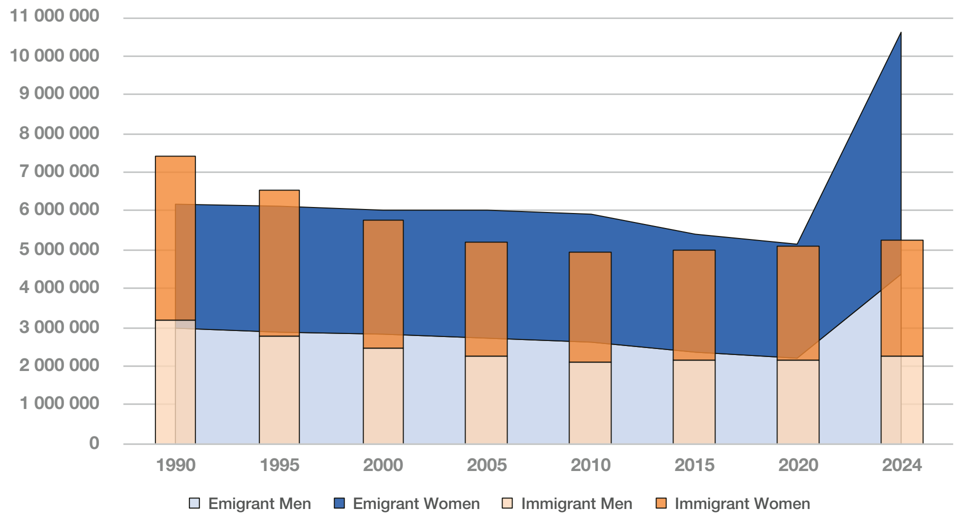
8 Personal remittances comprise personal transfers and compensation of employees. Personal transfers consist of all current transfers in cash or in kind made or received by resident households to or from non-resident households. Personal transfers thus include all current transfers between resident and non-resident individuals. Compensation of employees refers to the income of border, seasonal, and other short-term workers who are employed in an economy where they are not resident and of residents employed by non-resident entities. Data are in current U.S. dollars.

3. Regional insights: OSCE Eastern Europe (EE)

3. Regional insights: OSCE Eastern Europe (EE)

Migration trends in OSCE Eastern Europe (Ukraine and Moldova) over the past decade are defined by a marked increase in emigration and relative stagnation in immigration. Trends in the region must be considered in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine. From 2015 to 2024, the number of emigrants nearly doubled from just over 5.4 million to more than 10.6 million (Figure 3.1), a 97 percent increase. The stock of female emigrants increased relatively more (204%) than men (187%). At the same time, the immigrant stock remained largely unchanged, rising modestly from 5 million to 5.25 million. Unlike the broader OSCE area, OSCE EE's demographic profile is now shaped by mass outward flows and limited new arrivals, underscoring its significance as a region of emigration.

Figure 3.1 *OSCE Eastern Europe (EE) – Stocks of emigrants and immigrants, 1990-2024*

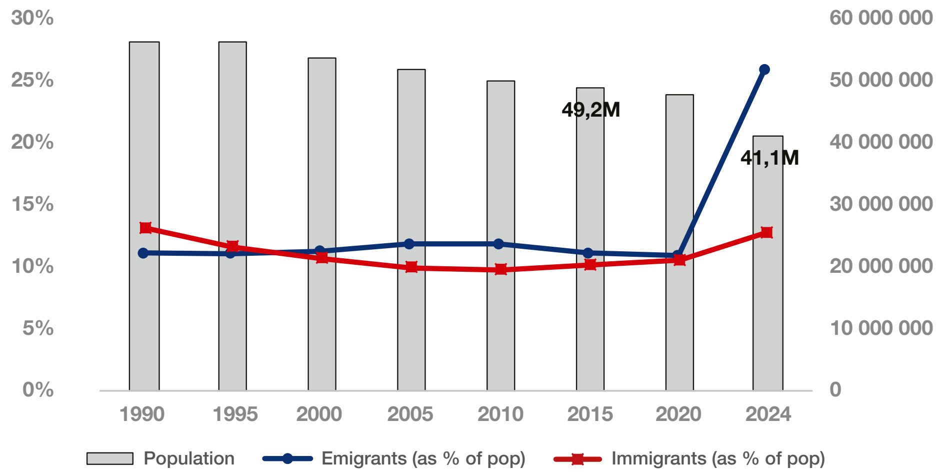


Source: UN DESA (2025)

Compared to the OSCE as a whole, OSCE EE's soaring emigration rates and stable immigration underscore accelerating depopulation and potential labour shortages. By 2024, emigrants from OSCE EE accounted for more than a quarter (26%) of the region's population, up from around 11 percent in 2015 (Figure 3.2). Similarly, more than a quarter of the Republic of Moldova's economically active population are estimated to be working abroad (IOM, 2024). At the same time, immigrants account for about 13 percent of the OSCE EE's resident population, reflecting a 3-percentage-point growth over the past decade – in part, due also to the inflow of refugees to the Republic of Moldova from Ukraine. The region's overall population continues falling from 56.4 million in 1990 to 41.1 million in 2024.

3. Regional insights: OSCE Eastern Europe (EE)

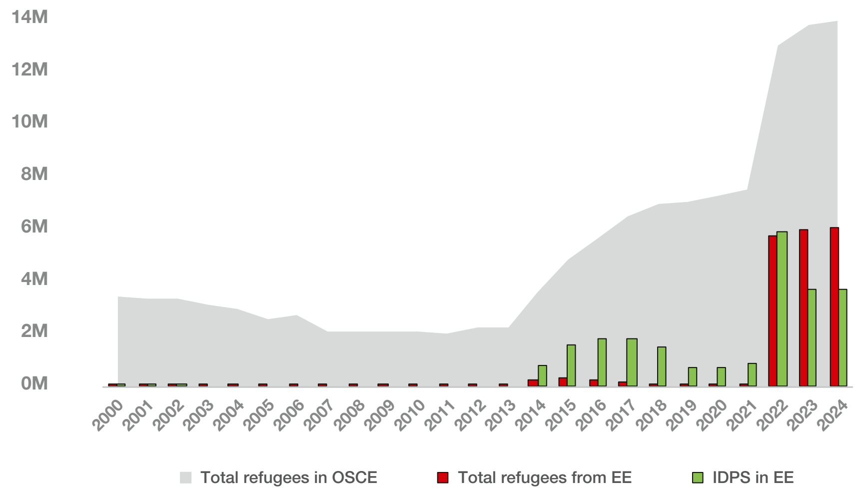
***Figure 3.2** OSCE Eastern Europe (EE) - Stock of emigrants and immigrants as share of resident population, 1990-2024*



Source: UN DESA (2025; 2024). Note: population data only covers until 2023.

The war in Ukraine of 2022 has dramatically accelerated population movements in OSCE EE and forced displacement. By the end of 2023, Ukraine was the world's second-largest source of refugees, with more than 5.6 million registered abroad and about 3.6 million internally displaced (Figure 3.3). The vast majority of Ukrainian refugees are women and children, due to conscription requirements that primarily affect men. Similarly, women and girls accounted for 58 percent of IDPs in 2023. Children made up 24 percent of Ukraine's IDP population, significantly higher than their share (18%) of the overall population (UNHCR, 2024).

***Figure 3.3** OSCE Eastern Europe (EE) - Stocks of refugees and IDPs, 2000-2024*

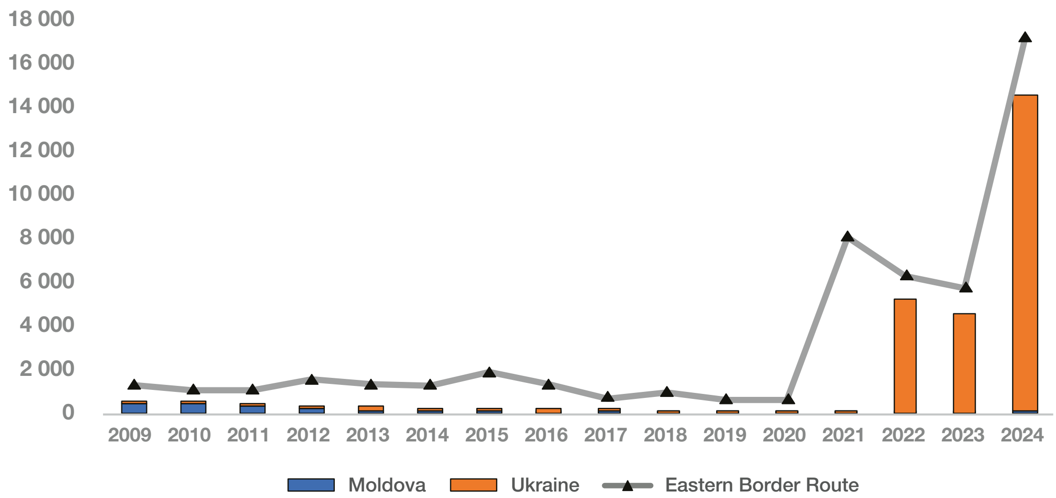


Source: UNHCR (2025). Note: 2024 data only cover up to mid-year.

The war in Ukraine has had an impact on irregular migration patterns into the EU, with a measurable increase in detections of Ukrainian nationals attempting illegal border crossings since 2022 (Frontex 2025). Until 2021, the number of detected illegal border crossings by nationals of Moldova and Ukraine remained relatively stable and negligible (Figure 3.4). The numbers surged dramatically in 2022, when detections of Ukrainian nationals rose from 112 in 2021 to 5,148 in 2022, and reached 14,503 in 2024. Looking more broadly at the detected irregular crossings by all nationalities along the Eastern Borders Route, the numbers increased from 615 in 2021 to 17,260 in 2024.

While the vast majority of Ukrainian displacement has been managed through legal channels – particularly the EU's Temporary Protection Directive – these figures suggest that a subset of displaced Ukrainians and migrants of other nationalities have resorted to irregular routes, potentially due to documentation challenges, family separation, or attempts to reach specific destinations outside formal protection frameworks. In contrast, detections of Moldovan nationals have continued to decline, indicating that Moldova's migration pressures have not translated into significant increases in irregular border crossings during this period.

***Figure 3.4** OSCE Eastern Europe (EE) - Irregular arrivals from Ukraine and Moldova and on the Eastern Borders Route, 2009-2024*

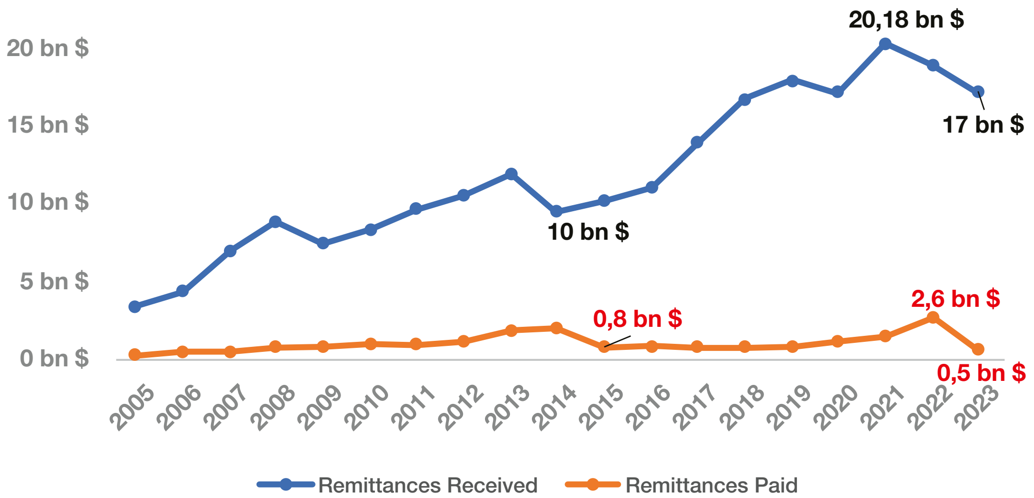


Source: Frontex (2025)

OSCE EE stands out as a net beneficiary of remittance flows. As of 2023, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova received about US$17 billion in remittances (at current prices), while total personal remittances paid from the region amounted to about US$0.5 billion (Figure 3.5). Moreover, while inflows grew by nearly 70 percent between 2015 and 2023, outflows were about 30 percent lower. It should also be noted that both inflows and outflows declined in 2023 compared to the previous years. Outflows, after peaking at US$2.56 billion in 2022 – more than three times their 2015 level – declined significantly as the war in Ukraine disrupted both labour mobility and economic conditions. In terms of economic weight, remittance inflows represented about 9 percent of the region’s GDP in 2023 (slightly declining from 10.1% in 2015). These trends highlight the region’s strong reliance on international remittances to support local economies, making them especially crucial during periods of crisis and displacement.

3. Regional insights: OSCE Eastern Europe (EE)

***Figure 3.5** OSCE Eastern Europe (EE) - Estimated value (in current US$) of remittances paid and received, 2005-2023*



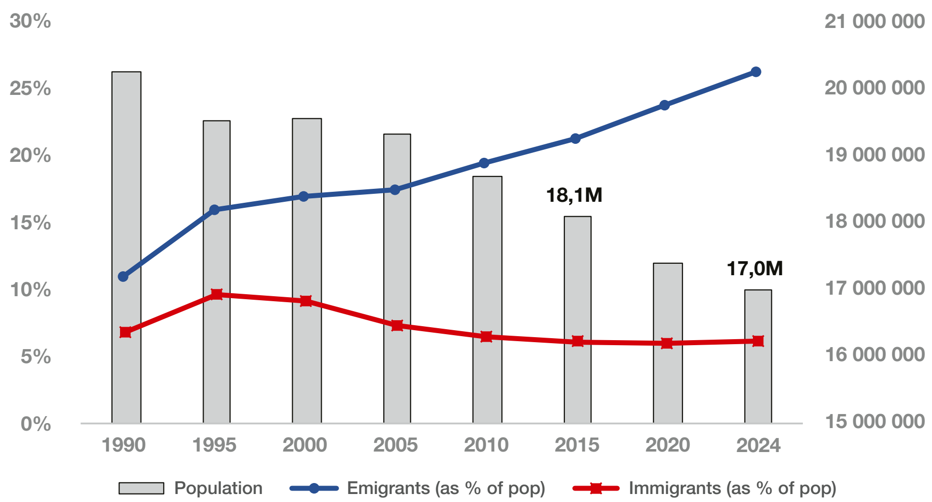
Source: World Bank (2025)

4. Regional insights: OSCE South-Eastern Europe (SEE)

4. Regional insights: OSCE South-Eastern Europe (SEE)

The OSCE South-Eastern European region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo,[9] Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) continues to be characterized by increasing emigration and declining population. High rates of poverty, wage gaps compared to other countries in Europe, and lack of trust in institutions reportedly contribute to decisions to leave (IOM, 2024). Young people and skilled workers often seek better-paying jobs in Western and Northern Europe. Depopulation across the region is significant due to a combination of low birth rates and high emigration. Between 2015 and 2024, the resident population declined from 18.1 to 17.0 million (Figure 4.1). During the same period, the share of emigrants increased from 21 to 26 percent, while the share of immigrants remained stable at 6 percent. Among emigrants the share of women decreased from 51 percent in 2015 to 50 percent in 2024 (UN DESA, 2025). Between 2018 and 2024, the number of work permits issued to foreign workers across the region more than doubled, from 40,000 to more than 100,000, as the regional economy experienced significant labour shortages, especially in the sectors of hospitality, construction, agriculture and transport (IOM, 2024).

Figure 4.1 *OSCE South-Eastern Europe (SEE) - Estimated population and Stock of emigrants and immigrants as share of resident population, 1990-2024*

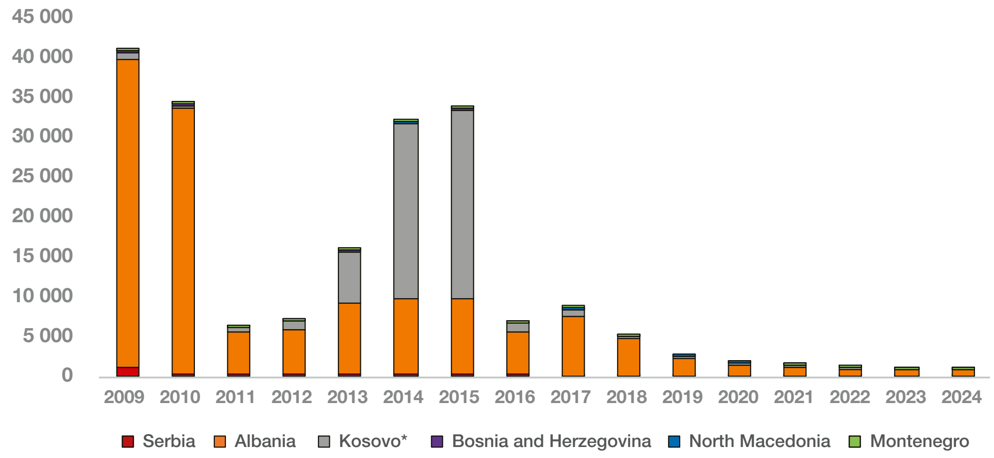


Source: UN DESA (2024; 2025). Note: population data only covers until 2023.

After peaking in 2015, irregular migration from OSCE SEE to the EU has declined consistently (Figure 4.2). From more than 33,000 detections in 2015, irregular arrivals from OSCE SEE decreased to less than 1,000 in 2023 and 2024. According to Frontex data (2025), Albania has been the main source of irregular migrants to the EU within the OSCE SEE region. However, detections of Albanians irregularly crossing the EU border declined from 39,000 in 2009 to about 600 in 2024. At the same time, thousands of young Albanians have taken difficult journeys crossing the English Channel in small boats to try and reach the United Kingdom (IOM, 2024; see also Chapter 1). Kosovo experienced a brief surge between 2013 (about 6,350 detections) and 2015 (almost 23,800 detections), quickly returning to historically low levels (less than 40 detections in 2024) (Frontex 2025).

9 All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, should be understood in compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

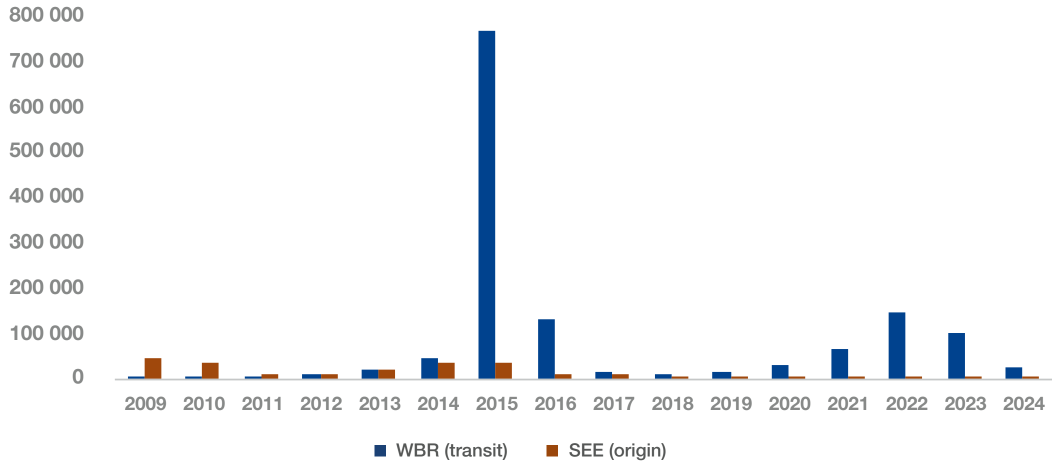
Figure 4.2 *OSCE South-Eastern Europe (SEE) - Detections of irregular border crossings to the EU, 2009 - 2024*



Source: Frontex (2025)

The region has been characterized for being a transit corridor (the 'Western Balkans Route') for people coming outside of the OSCE SEE, and moving towards Northern and Western Europe. The main route used by migrants arriving in the region often pass through North Macedonia and Serbia, and then involve attempts to cross into the European Union across the Hungarian border (Frontex 2025). However, after the peak in 2015 the number of migrants transiting via the Western Balkan Route has remained low compared to other routes, such as the Mediterranean (Figure 4.3). The three largest nationalities travelling this route between 2015 and 2024 were Syrians, Afghans and Pakistanis.

Figure 4.3 *OSCE South-Eastern Europe (SEE) - Irregular migration to the EU, 2009 - 2024*

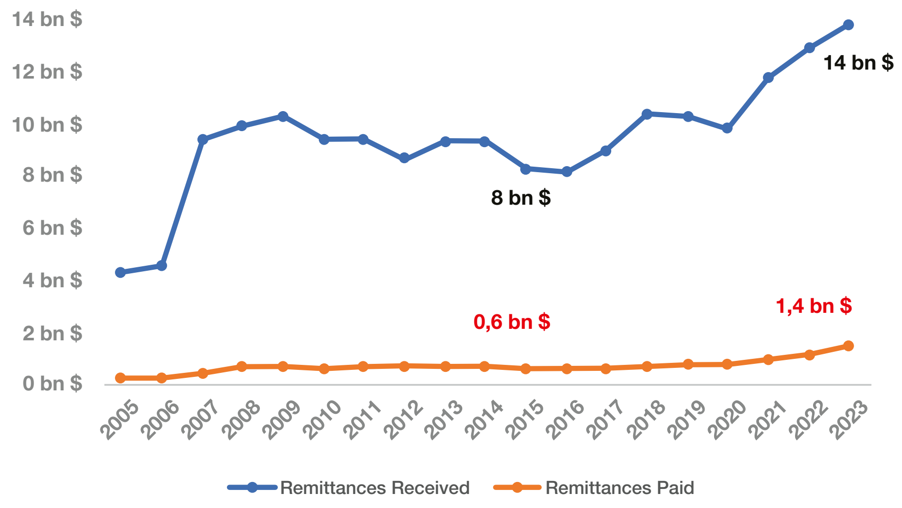


Source: Frontex (2025)

4. Regional insights: OSCE South-Eastern Europe (SEE)

Remittances remain a defining feature of OSCE SEE's economies. During the last decade, remittances received in the six OSCE SEE jurisdictions increased from about US$8 billion in 2015 to almost US$14 billion in 2023 (Figure 4.4), marking a 67 percent increase and accounting for about 8 percent of the region GDP. As of 2024, the main beneficiaries of remittances inflows were Kosovo (17.5% of GDP), Montenegro (10.7% of GDP), and Bosnia-Herzegovina (10.2% of GDP). At the same time, remittances paid by immigrants in OSCE SEE to their countries of origin increased from about US$0.6 billion to US$1.4 billion, equivalent to about 1 percent of the region's GDP. Despite the difference in volume, remittances paid off the OSCE SEE region grew by 133 percent between 2015 and 2023.

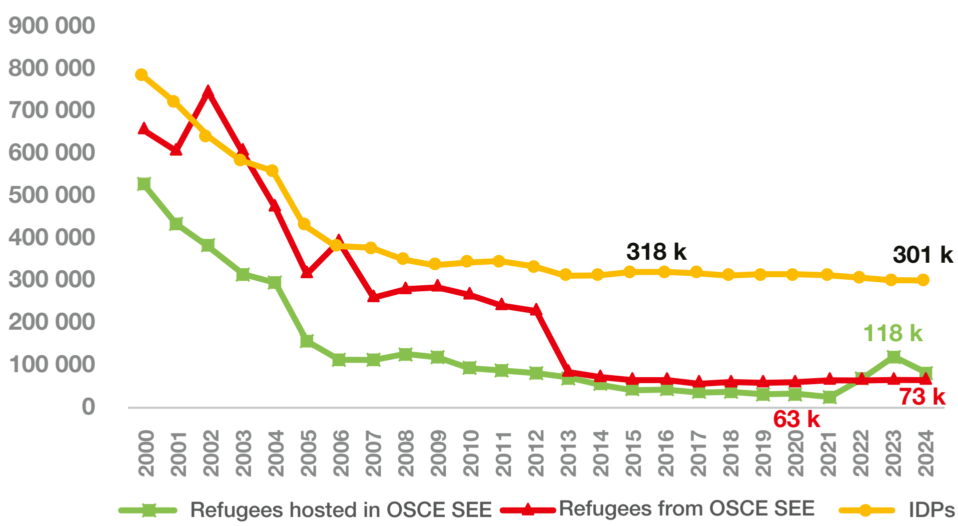
***Figure 4.4** OSCE South-Eastern Europe (SEE) - Estimated value (in current US$) of remittances paid and received, 2005-2023*



Source: World Bank (2025)

The war in Ukraine has shaped displacement trends in the OSCE SEE region (Figure 4.5). The number of refugees hosted in the region remained relatively stable and low from 2015 to 2021, fluctuating between approximately 44,000 and 26,000. In 2022, there was a sharp increase, with the number of hosted refugees rising to nearly 69,000 and peaking at more than 118,000 in 2023. As of 2024, Ukrainians accounted for almost 70 percent of refugees in OSCE SEE. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) remained stable over the last decade, consistently hovering around 300,000.

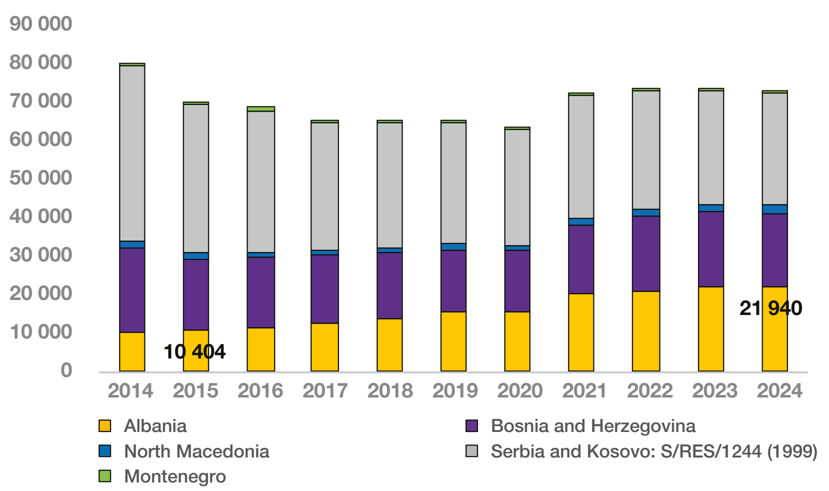
Figure 4.5 OSCE South-Eastern Europe (SEE) - Displacement trends, 2000 - 2024



Source: UNHCR (2025). Note: 2024 data only cover up to mid-year.

There was a slight increase in the number of people from OSCE SEE seeking refuge abroad, reversing a 20-year long decline. In 2021, the number of people from OSCE SEE seeking protection abroad rose from 62,000 to 73,000 (Figure 4.6). Notably, the number of Albanians enjoying international protection more than doubled between 2015 (ca. 10,400) and 2024 (ca. 22,000).

Figure 4.6 OSCE South-Eastern Europe (SEE) - Number of refugees by origin, 2014 - 2024



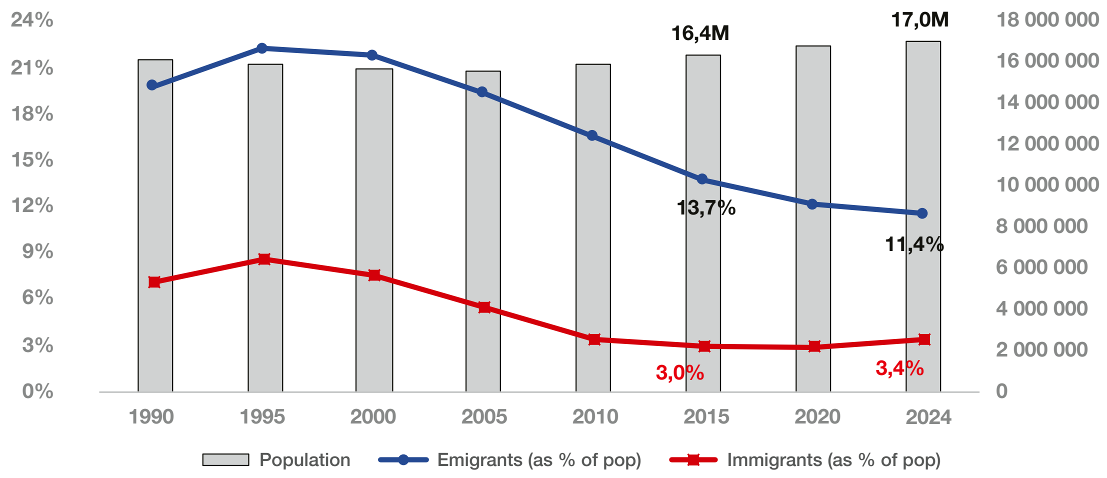
Source: UNHCR (2025). Note: 2024 data only cover up to mid-year. UNHCR collects data for both Serbia and Kosovo S/RES/1244 (1999) together as part of its regional data collection and operations in the SEE situation data.

5. Regional insights: OSCE South Caucasus (SC)

5. Regional insights: OSCE South Caucasus (SC)

The OSCE South Caucasus region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) displays a persistent pattern of emigrant stocks consistently exceeding immigrant stocks, but the gap has gradually decreased in recent years. As of 2024, the total number of emigrants reached about 1.9 million, in decline from 2.2 million in 2015 (Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2). About two thirds of those who emigrated were residing in Europe in 2024, with a predominance of Eastern European destinations (UN DESA, 2025). At the same time, immigrants were less than 575,000, but increasing from 492,000 in 2015. In relative terms, emigration decreased from about 14 percent of the resident population in 2015 to 11 percent in 2024. The immigrants' stock increased slightly from about 3 percent to 3.4 percent of the resident population.

Figure 5.1 *OSCE South Caucasus (SC) - Estimated population and Stock of emigrants and immigrants as share of resident population, 1990-2024*

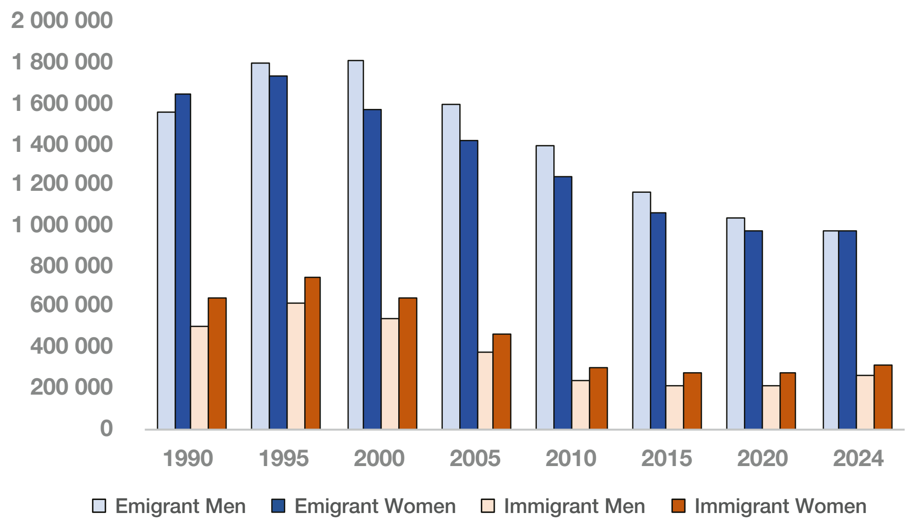


Source: UN DESA (2024; 2025). Note: population data only covers until 2023.

The percentage of women among emigrants increased to 50 percent in 2024. The proportion of male emigrants declined from 52 percent in 2015 to 50 percent in 2024 (Figure 5.2). Women continue to represent the majority of immigrants. The prevalence of women among immigrants has remained relatively stable between 2015 and 2024, at about 55 percent of the immigrant stock. This persistent predominance of women immigrants reflects broader demographic and social trends in the region, including the feminization of migration and the significant role of women in cross-border family reunification and labour mobility.

5. Regional insights: OSCE South Caucasus (SC)

Figure 5.2 *OSCE South Caucasus (SC) - Emigrant and immigrant stocks by gender, 1990 - 2024*

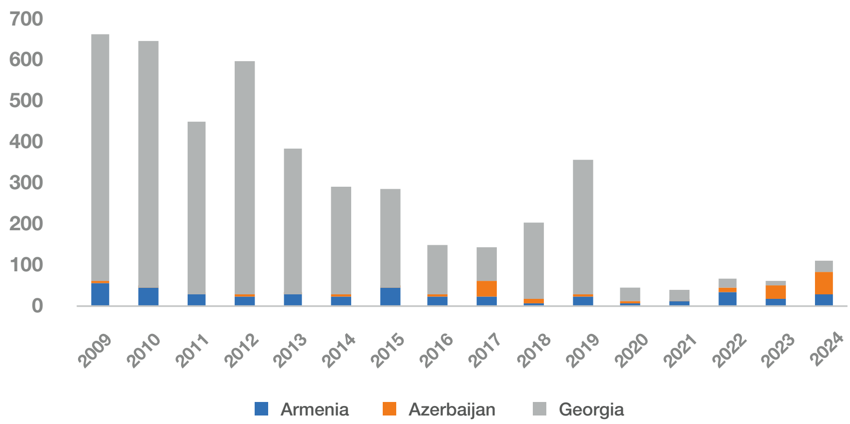


Source: UN DESA (2025)

Available estimates suggest irregular migration from OSCE SC countries remains negligible compared to regular emigration. According to Frontex (2025), the number of individuals from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia who have been detected attempting irregular crossings into the EU remained below 500 annually throughout 2015–2024, with a notable decline since 2020 (Figure 5.3). Complementing these figures, return order statistics between 2015 and 2024 demonstrate the limited irregular presence of OSCE SC citizens in the EU (Eurostat, 2025).[10] The number of orders to leave issued yearly to citizens from OSCE SC by EU Member States fluctuated between 6,090 and 20,250 in the case of Georgia, with a peak in 2023. Orders to leave issued to Armenian nationals remained between 2,500 and 5,000 annually, with a peak in 2017; and, in the case of Azerbaijani nationals, between 900 and 2,000, with a peak occurring in 2017. These figures underscore that irregular migration into the EU from the OSCE SC is minor in scale and continues to decrease.

10 Specifically, data series: Third country nationals ordered to leave - annual data (migr_eiord).

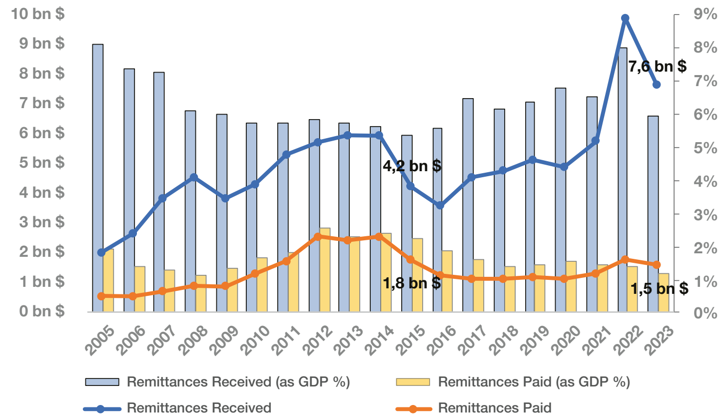
Figure 5.3 *OSCE South Caucasus (SC) - Detected irregular border crossings into the EU, 2009 - 2024*



Source: Frontex (2025)

Despite a declining stock of emigrants, remittances paid into OSCE SC countries have grown in nominal value. The value of remittances received in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia grew from about US$ 4.2 billion (at current prices) in 2015 to almost US$10 billion in 2022 (Figure 5.4). While remittances declined in 2023 to US$7.6 billion, they still marked an 80 percent increase compared to 2015. As of 2023, remittances received in the OSCE SC correspond to nearly 6 percent of the region's GDP. On the other hand, remittances paid out by immigrants residing in the region remained relatively stable between US$1.1 and US$1.8 billion, declining from 2.2 percent of GDP in 2015 to 1.2 percent in 2023. As of 2024, remitted inflows as a percentage of GDP amounted to 4.6% in the case of Armenia, and 1.8% in the case of Azerbaijan - both cases marked a decrease from 2015, when the figures were 14.1% for Armenia and 2.4% for Azerbaijan. In 2024, Georgia recorded about 11.8 percent GDP-worth of remittances received, marking a 22.9 percent increase from 2015 (9.6%) (World Bank, 2025).

Figure 5.4 *South Caucasus (SC) - Estimated value (in current US$) of remittances paid and received, 2005-2023*



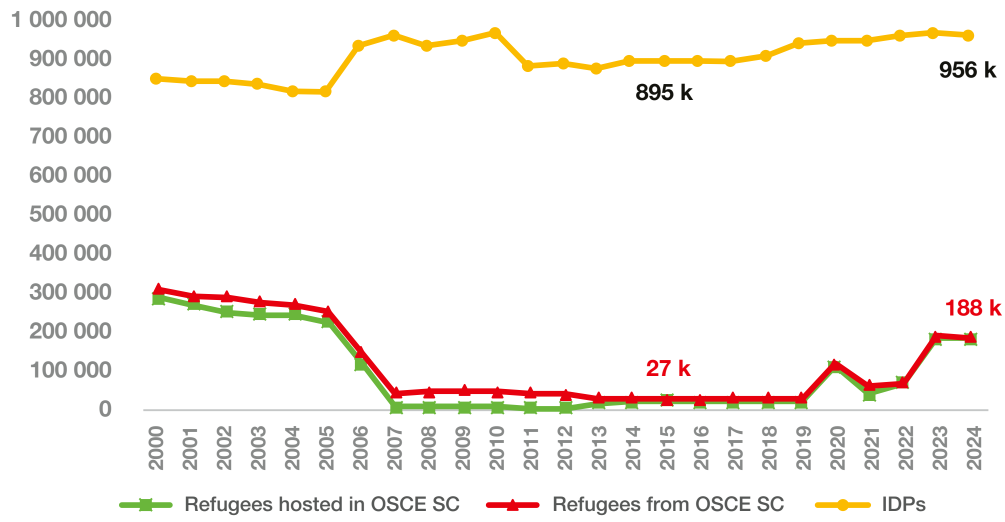
Source: World Bank (2025)

5. Regional insights: OSCE South Caucasus (SC)

Between 2015 and 2024, the OSCE SC experienced a notable rise in both internal and cross-border displacement (Figure 5.5). The number of IDPs increased from more than 895,000 in 2015 to almost 956,000 in 2024 — a 6.8 percent rise over the period. By the end of 2023, Azerbaijan accounted for 68 percent of all IDPs in the region (657,749), Georgia for 31 percent (295,831), and Armenia for 1 percent (7,600) (UNHCR, 2025; IDMC, 2023).

During the same period, the number of refugees originating from the OSCE SC surged from 27,000 to 188,000, a seven-fold increase in less than a decade (Figure 5.5). This sharp rise was especially pronounced between 2020 and 2023, largely due to conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. As of 2024, Armenia provided temporary protection to more than 148,000 people. Azerbaijan became a major country of origin for new asylum applications and temporary protection abroad, with more than 156,500 individuals receiving international protection in 2024 (UNHCR, 2025).

Figure 5.5 *OSCE South Caucasus (SC) - Displacement trends, 2000 - 2024*



Source: UNHCR (2025). Note: 2024 data only cover up to mid-year.

6. Regional insights: OSCE Central Asia (CA)

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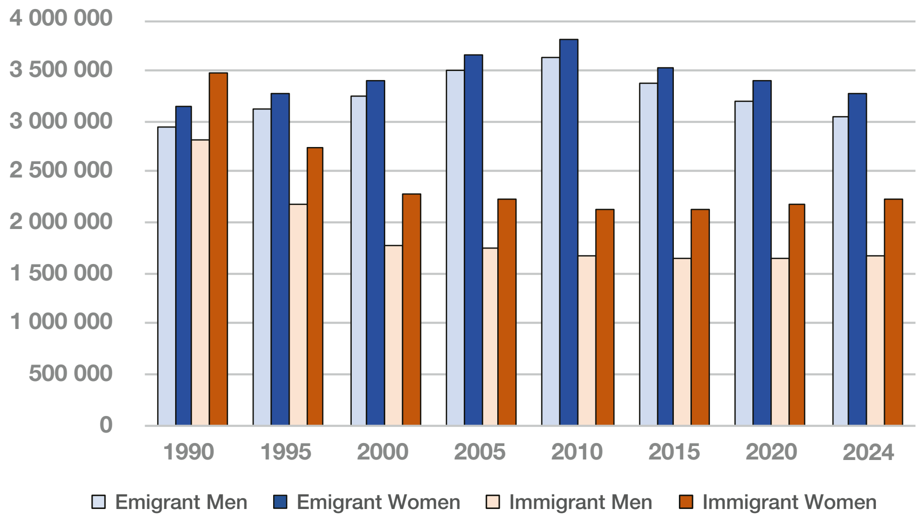
OSCE Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) remains predominantly a region of emigration, although in the last decade the emigrants' stock decreased while the immigrants' stock slightly increased. The stock of emigrants from OSCE CA declined from about 6.9 million in 2015 to 6.3 million in 2024 (Figure 6.1), an 8.7 percent decrease. Meanwhile, the number of immigrants residing in the region saw a slight increase, from approximately 3.8 million to 3.9 million over the same period. As of 2024, women made up a majority of both emigrant (52%) and immigrant (57%) populations. The prevalence of women among international migrants has persisted over time (UN DESA, 2025).

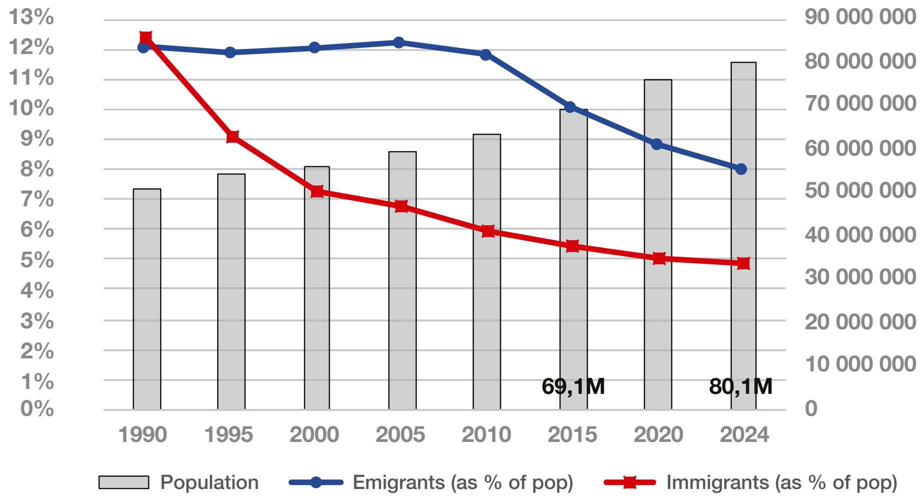
Figure 6.1 *OSCE Central Asia (CA) - Estimated stocks of emigrants and immigrants, by gender (1990 - 2024)*



Source: UN DESA (2025)

Unlike the broader OSCE area, OSCE CA's population growth has outpaced migration patterns. Between 2015 and 2024, the resident population grew from 69.1 million to 80.1 million, marking a 16 percent increase (Figure 6.2). At the same time, the working age population (16 to 64) grew by 24 percent, from 40.8 to 50.6 million (World Bank, 2025). Relative to the size of the resident population, both emigration and immigration have shrunk between 2015 and 2024 (Figure 6.2). Emigrants as share of the resident population dropped from 10 to 7.9 percent, while immigrants reduced from 5.5 to 4.9 percent. These trends underscore that while emigration remains an important feature of OSCE CA, rapid population growth and shifting age structures are increasingly important factors shaping the region's demographic and economic landscape. The war in Ukraine disrupted the historic mobility patterns from OSCE CA to the Russian Federation, a primary destination for migrant workers from the region. Migrant workers from OSCE CA have rapidly diversified their destinations, shifting to the European Union, the UK, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and other parts of Asia such as the Republic of Korea, often in the context of bilateral labour migration agreements (ICMPD 2025).

Figure 6.2 *OSCE Central Asia (CA) - Stock of emigrants and immigrants as share of resident population, 1990 - 2024*



Source: UN DESA (2024; 2025). Note: population data only covers until 2023.

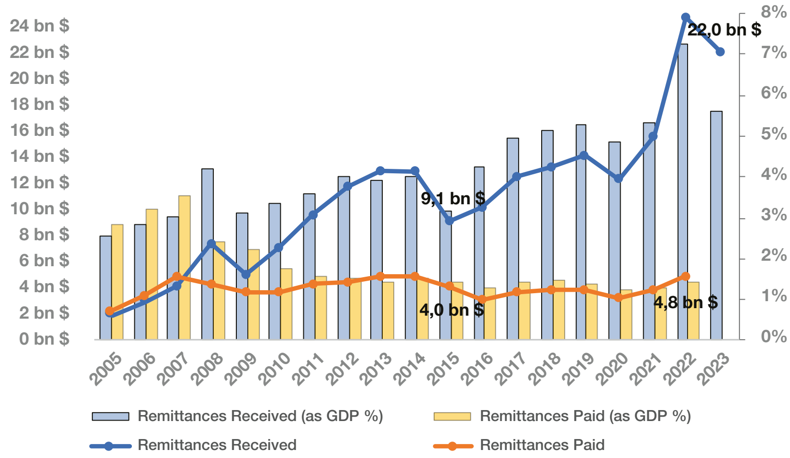
Despite a decline in (long-term) emigration, remittances received in OSCE CA have continued to grow at a remarkable pace.[11] Remittances received by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan increased from about US$9 billion (at current prices) in 2015 to more than US$22 billion in 2023, marking a 144 percent increase (Figure 6.3). As of 2023, the total amount of remittances received accounted for about 5.6 percent of the region's GDP, up from 3.2 percent in 2015.[12] The importance of remittances is especially pronounced in Tajikistan, where inflows represented almost 38 percent of GDP in 2023, followed by Kyrgyzstan (18.8 percent) and Uzbekistan (13.7 percent). These ratios are among the highest globally and underscore the relevance of labour migration for OSCE CA's economies. During the same period, remittances paid by immigrants in the area grew by 19 percent, from US$4.0 billion in 2015 to US$4.8 billion in 2022. Relative to the region's GDP, estimated remittances paid out of OSCE CA have remained stable around 1.4 percent.

11 Data on remittances received and paid in Turkmenistan are not available.

12 Excluding Turkmenistan.

6. Regional insights: OSCE Central Asia (CA)

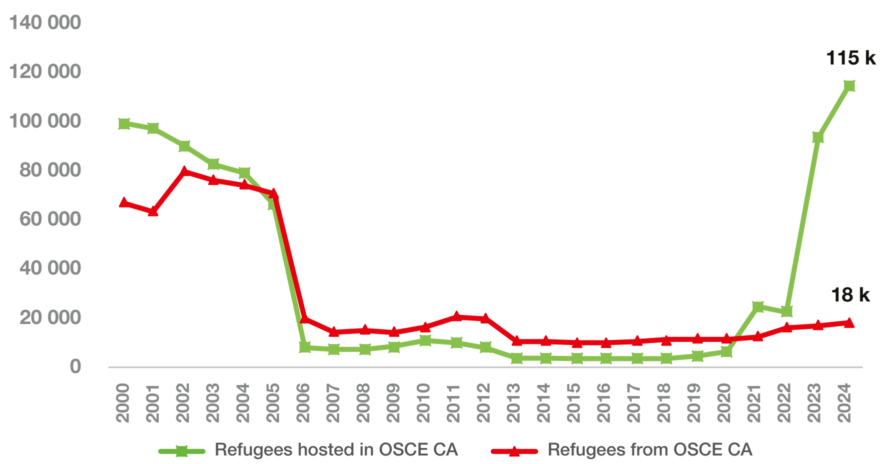
***Figure 6.3** OSCE Central Asia (CA) - Estimated remittances received and paid, 2005 - 2023*



Source: World Bank (2025)

In the last decade, the number of refugees and refugee-like individuals hosted in OSCE CA surged (Figure 6.4). The stock of persons receiving international protection in the region was as low as 3,144 in 2015. This figure started increasing in 2020 and continued to grow in 2021, reaching 24,000. This first increase was due to an influx, particularly in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, of Afghan nationals, in the context of the seizure of power by the Taliban. The number of people receiving international protection rose again in 2023 and 2024 peaking at 115,076. As of 2024, Kazakhstan (57%) and Kyrgyzstan (22%) host the majority, with their country of origin reported as “unknown” (UNHCR, 2025).

***Figure 6.4** OSCE Central Asia (CA) - Estimated stock of refugees, 2000 - 2024*



Source: UNHCR (2025). Note: 2024 data only cover up to mid-year.

During the same period there was a slight increase in the number of OSCE CA's citizens receiving international protection abroad. The number of refugees registered with UNHCR grew from 10,194 in 2015 to 18,841 in 2024, almost an 85 percent increase. In relative terms, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have recorded the greatest increases between 2015 and 2024. The main countries of asylum are Germany, France, and the United States (UNHCR, 2025). Overall, OSCE CA's countries are a negligible source (less than 0.1%) of global displacement as well as within the OSCE area.

7. Conclusion

7. Conclusion

The migration trends documented in this report reflect both the prescience of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to migration and the ongoing relevance of its foundational commitments.

From the 1975 *Helsinki Final Act's* recognition of migration's economic and social dimensions, to *Ministerial Council Decision 3/16 on the OSCE's role in the governance of large movements of migrants and refugees* with its focus on large-scale movements, the OSCE migration-related framework continues to provide essential guidance for addressing contemporary challenges.

The resilience and growth of remittance flows, reaching record levels despite global disruptions, demonstrate migration's continued contribution to sustainable development and co-development, validating the OSCE's focus on these connections since the *Ministerial Council Decision 2/05 on Migration*.

The multifaceted nature of migration dynamics evidenced in this report, shaped by a constantly evolving set of global and regional factors, underscores how the OSCE's mandate remains relevant. The organization's comprehensive, cross-dimensional approach offers a framework for transforming migration into an opportunity for enhanced cooperation, shared prosperity, and regional stability.

At the same time, the described scale and complexity of current migration dynamics; their linkages with economic, social and environmental factors; the stark regional variations in migration patterns across the OSCE; and persistent challenges connected to irregular migration, climate displacement, and record forced displacement levels require enhanced focus and operational capacity, especially within the remit set forth by the *Ministerial Council Decision 5/09 on Migration management*.

Decision 5/09 tasks the Permanent Council and the OSCE executive structures to "Provide a broad regional platform for dialogue on migration and security issues […]; Continue working on gender aspects of migration; Assist participating States, upon their request, to improve migration legislation […]; Contribute to international efforts to assess the possible impact of environmental degradation on migratory pressures, which climate change may magnify, in order to ensure better preparedness in this area; Continue to assist the participating States, upon their request, to promote effective migration management, including exchange of best practices, and to facilitate legal migration and fight illegal migration, while paying particular attention to bilateral and multilateral co-operation in this field".

As a comprehensive security organization with participating States spanning major origin, transit, and destination countries, the OSCE is uniquely positioned to leverage its consensus-based, inclusive structure and diverse membership to facilitate the dialogue and cooperation that multifaceted challenges of migration require.

Glossary[13]

Asylum seekers - are individuals seeking international protection, typically through an asylum application. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been fully processed and decided upon. Not all asylum seekers will ultimately be recognized as refugees, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker.

Emigration - refers to the act of leaving one's country of nationality, birth or usual residence and relocating to another country with the intention of making it the new country of usual residence. This is viewed from the perspective of the country of departure.

Immigration - refers to the act of moving into a country other than one's country of nationality, birth, or usual residence with the intention of making the destination country one's new usual residence. This is viewed from the perspective of the country of arrival.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) - are persons forced to flee from their home or place of usual residence as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, generalized violence, human rights violations, natural or human-made disasters and who, differently from refugees and asylum seekers, do not cross international borders.

Internal migration - refers to the act of relocating one's permanent residence within the same country without crossing international borders.

International migration - refers to the act of relocating one's place of usual residence across an international border to another country. Depending on the country and institution, the definition of international migration may or may not include a temporary threshold (e.g. for at least 12 months). International migrants are commonly defined based on their nationality or country of birth. These distinctions are relevant for both statistical and legal purposes.

Irregular migration - refers to movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from a State of origin, transit or destination. Although a universally accepted definition of irregular migration does not exist, the term is generally used to identify persons moving outside regular migration channels. The fact that they use irregular migration pathways does not imply that States are not, in some circumstances, obliged to provide them with some forms of protection under international law, including access to international protection for asylum seekers fleeing persecution, conflicts or generalized violence. Refugees are protected under international law against being penalized for unauthorized entry or stay if they have travelled from a place where they were at risk.

Labour migration - refers to movement of persons from one State to another, or within their own country of residence, for the purpose of employment.

Migrant flow (international) - refers to the number of international migrants arriving in (inflow) or departing from (outflow) a country over a specific period, usually a year.

Migrant stock (international) - refers to the total number of international migrants present in a given country at a particular point in time who fall under the definition of "international migrant" applied by that state (for legal purposes) or institution (for statistical purposes).

Mixed migration - refers to the movements of people across borders, generally in an irregular manner, involving individuals and groups who travel alongside each other, using similar routes and means of transport or facilitators, but for different reasons. People travelling as part of mixed movements have different needs and profiles and may include asylum-seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied or separated children, stateless persons, and migrants (including migrants in irregular situations or migrants in vulnerable situations).

Net Migration - is the net total of the number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants, including both citizens and noncitizens, during the period.

Permit - in the migration context, documentation, such as a residence or work permit, typically issued by a government authority, which provides evidence that a person has permission to reside or carry out certain activities (such as working or studying).

Refugees - Refugees are persons who flee their country of origin and are unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. Refugee status is usually recognized as the positive outcome of an asylum application and related process. However, under international refugee law, recognition as a refugee is declaratory and not constitutive. For example, a person is a refugee within the meaning of the 1951 Convention as soon as they fulfil the criteria contained in the definition. They do not become refugees because of recognition, but they are recognized because they are refugees.

Regular migration - movements that occur in compliance with the laws of the country of origin, transit, and destination.

Remittances - in the migration context, private international monetary transfers made by migrants individually or collectively. Remittances are primarily sent to individuals in countries of origin with whom migrants maintain close ties, although they may also be sent to relatives in other countries of destination. The terms "social remittances" or "social capital transfer" are also increasingly used in reference to non-monetary transfers resulting from migration such as transfers of knowledge, know-how, networking, and skills.

13 This glossary is based on the following sources: https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms; https://www.unhcr.org/glossary; https://population.un.org/wpp/glossary-demographic-terms.

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Notes

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