



# Serbia

## General Information



### Population

6 586 476 ([World Bank 2024](#))  
6 586 476 ([STAT RS 2024](#))



### Immigration

712 550 ([UN Immigration Stock 2024](#))  
41 273 ([STAT RS 2023](#))



### Emigration

963 307 ([UN Emigration Stock 2024](#))



### Working-age population

4 149 673 ([World Bank 2024](#))  
3 016 800 ([STAT RS 2024](#))



### Unemployment rate

7.2 % ([World Bank 2024](#))  
8.6 % ([STAT RS 2024](#))



### GDP

90 097 765 959.1 current prices USD ([World Bank 2024](#))  
9 748 258 700 000 current prices RSD ([STAT RS 2024](#))



### Refugees, Asylum seekers, IDPs

#### Refugees

39 403 ([UNHCR 2025](#))  
24 862 ([Commissariat for Refugees and Migration 2024](#))

#### Asylum Seekers

200 ([UNHCR 2025](#))  
219 ([MoI RS 2024](#))

#### IDPs

209 704 ([UNHCR 2025](#))  
194 171 ([Commissariat for Refugees and Migration 2024](#))  
UNHCR data refers to Serbia and Kosovo: S/RES/1244 (1999)



### Citizenship

#### By Birth

No ([GLOBALCIT 2024](#))

#### By Descent

Yes (conditional) ([GLOBALCIT 2024](#))

#### Years of Residency

3 years of residence required ([GLOBALCIT 2024](#))



### Territory

77 474 km<sup>2</sup> ([CIA World Factbook](#))



# Migration Authorities

## Responsible Body

Commissariat for Refugees and Migration

## Line Ministries

Ministry of Interior

Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Justice

## Agencies

Coordination Body for Migration Monitoring and Management

Coordination Body for Monitoring Flows in the Area of Economic Migration

Council for Reintegration of Returnees under the Readmission Agreements

Commission for Monitoring Visa Free Travel Regime with the EU

Commission for Coordination of the Permanent Integration Process of Refugees

Office for Kosovo and Metohija

Office for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region

EU Support to Migration Management in the Republic of Serbia

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, Serbia

## Key Policy Documents

1992 Law on Refugees

2004 Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Serbia

2009 Law on the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region

2011 Law on the Permanent and Temporary Residence of Citizens

2012 Law on Migration Management

2014 Law on the Employment of Foreigners

2017 Law on Higher Education (Article 97)

2018 Law on Foreigners

2018 Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection

2018 Law on Border Control

2019 Law on Health Protection (Article 3)

2009 Migration Management Strategy

2009 Strategy on the Reintegration of Returnees under the Readmission Agreement

2010 Strategy for Sustainable Survival and Return to Kosovo and Metohija

2015 National Strategy for Resolving the Issues of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons for the period 2015-2020

2017 Integrated Border Management Strategy in the Republic of Serbia 2017-2020

2018 Strategy for Combating Irregular Migration in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2018-2020

2020 Economic Migration Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the Period 2021-2027

National Program and Action Plan to Counter Trafficking in Human Beings (2024–2029)

## Relevant Publications

Changing Demographics in the Countries of the Prague Process: Implications for Migration

Webinar: From refugee crises to labour migration and back?

The Western Balkan Migration Route (2015-2019)

Lessons learned from the 2015-2016 migration situation in the Western Balkan region

The 10th Anniversary of the Prague Process

Highly-skilled Return Migrants to the Western Balkans

Serbia Feasibility study Facilitating Diaspora Investments (2017)

Serbia was long characterised by large-scale emigration and, during 2015-2019, by its role as a major [transit state](#) on routes toward the EU. While these features remain relevant, inward migration has increased, reflected in the [growing number of foreign nationals](#) residing in Serbia for extended periods. The population has contracted steadily since 1998 due to [negative natural increase](#) and sustained [emigration](#), notwithstanding recent inflows. Between 2015 and 2024, the number of inhabitants fell from 7.10 million to 6.59 million, a loss of over 7%, with a further 0.5% decrease recorded between 2023 and 2024.

National data on emigration, albeit incomplete, indicate an [outflow](#) of the population toward the EU, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. The government assumes a diaspora of [up to five million persons](#), including around 600,000 living in Europe. UNDESA reported [963,307 Serbian emigrants in 2024](#), of whom 93.3% resided in Europe, primarily in Germany (32%), Austria (15%), France (10%) and Switzerland (7%).

Economic motives dominate contemporary emigration. Youth [unemployment reached 23%](#) among those aged 15-24 in 2024, far exceeding the overall rate of 8.6%, suggesting a strong push factor for young and early-career cohorts. [Wage differentials with EU countries](#) further encourage mobility, reducing incentives for return despite [improved macroeconomic stability](#) since the early 2000s. First-time permits issued to Serbian nationals in the EU increased from [39,232 in 2020 to 53,378 in 2023](#). In 2024, out of [46,560](#) first-time permits, 52% were granted for employment and 33% for family reasons. Croatia, Germany, and Slovenia were the main issuers on employment grounds, while Germany alone provided 53% of all family-related permits. Since 2020, Germany remains the single largest issuing country overall, even where recent issuance declined there and Slovakia and expanded in Croatia, Austria, and Slovenia. In [Germany](#), the [Western Balkans Regulation](#) – expanded since 2023 to allow up to 50,000 entries annually regardless of formal qualifications – has eased access to the labour market and reinforced recruitment through private agencies. According to Serbian employment agencies, construction, hospitality, transport, and health [sectors](#) continue to show high demand for Serbian workers seeking temporary employment in the EU.

Mirroring these flows, the number [valid residence permits](#) held by Serbian citizens in the EU increased by over 23% from 427,743 in 2020 to a peak of 528,031 in 2023. Out of 524,051 valid permits in 2024, 32% were issued on family-related grounds, largely by Germany, while 29% were granted on other grounds, mainly by Austria. Permits linked to asylum and employment represented 20% and 17%, respectively, with Germany leading in both categories. Education permits remained marginal (1%), with Slovenia as the principal destination.

Family reunification has become a self-reinforcing channel, with established communities in Germany facilitating additional arrivals over time. Higher education abroad also remains relevant, driven by both education quality and subsequent labour-market access. The number of Serbian students abroad reached [17,220 in 2023](#), a modest 1.6% decrease from 2022, with Hungary, Germany, Austria, and Türkiye as the leading destinations. Protection-related mobility has weakened: [3,225 applications for international protection](#) by Serbians were lodged in 2024 in EU Member States, 30.6% fewer than in 2023. Most claims were submitted in Germany (70.2%), France (15.5%) and Italy (3.6%).

The number of Serbian nationals detected as [illegally present in the EU](#) fell by 22.5% from 16,780 in 2020 to 13,010 in 2024, with most cases recorded in Hungary, Germany, and Austria. In parallel, enforcement of return intensified: EU Member States issued [6,455 return orders](#) to Serbian citizens in 2024 (+14.7% compared with 2022), while [3,910 persons returned](#) following an order to leave (+19.2% compared with 2020).

Immigration to Serbia, though previously limited, expanded rapidly in the early 2020s, climbing from [9,312 arrivals in 2020 to 41,273 in 2023](#). The 2023 flow was dominated by Russian (55.6%), Chinese (15.4%) and Indian citizens (4.9%), reflecting geopolitical business relocation and project-based labour recruitment. In 2024, first-time temporary residence permits fell to [34,131](#) (–24% from [45,112](#) in 2023) yet remained several times higher than in 2020-2021. Russians received 49% of new permits and dominated those granted for employment, family reunification and education, suggesting household relocation to Serbia, while Chinese and Indian nationals mostly received employment permits linked to corporate and infrastructure investments. [Employment accounted for 55.1% of all first-time permits in 2024](#), reflecting domestic [labour shortages and the growing presence of foreign investors](#), above all [China](#). Chinese FDI rose sharply after 2018, reaching about €1.4 billion in 2022-2023, comparable to total EU investment (€1.46 billion), and Chinese companies now operate across strategic sectors such as steel, tyre production, energy, and renewables, a footprint closely mirrored by the increased number of Chinese residents and managerial staff. Education-driven mobility has also strengthened: [2,426](#) education-based permits were issued in 2024, up from 1,826 in 2023 and 561 in 2021 (+332% over three years), with Russians remaining the largest group of foreign students, followed by Indian and Nigerian cohorts.

[UNDESA data on the resident migrant stock](#) portray a historically rooted structure: in 2024, 712,550 migrants lived in Serbia, 96% originating from Europe, mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina (39%), Croatia (31%), Montenegro (8%), and North Macedonia (5%), while Russian (2%) and Ukrainian (1.5%) nationals represented newer but smaller shares.

Forced displacement continues to shape Serbia's migration profile. The country hosted almost [618,000](#) refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia after the conflicts of the 1990s, and by 2023 roughly [25,000](#) remained, the reduction stemming mainly from long-term integration and naturalisation rather than large-scale return or resettlement. Furthermore, in 2024, [194,171](#) persons displaced from the Autonomous Province of Kosovo\* and Metohija were living in Serbia. Recent asylum application numbers remain modest, with [196 registered in 2023](#) and [219 in 2024](#). The main countries of origin in 2024 were Syria (16%), Türkiye (14%), and Cuba (13%), compared with Russia and Burundi in 2023, while Cuba remained among the top three in both years. Only [seven protection decisions](#) were positive – four granting refugee status and three subsidiary protection – resulting in a recognition rate of 12%. As of June 2024, Serbia hosted [24,862](#) refugees. In addition, in 2024, [temporary protection](#) was granted to 355 Ukrainians and extended to 679 more. Ukrainians can remain in Serbia [visa-free for 90 days](#) and those with temporary protection status can [access public](#)

[services](#) such as health care, education and accommodation.

Border-control data suggest tightening entry management: [4,716](#) people were denied entry to Serbia in 2024, [17%](#) more than in 2023, predominantly citizens of Türkiye, with decisions issued mainly at [Belgrade Nikola Tesla Airport and the Serbia-Bosnia and Herzegovina land crossing](#), most often due to [unclear purpose of stay or suspected misuse of visa-free travel](#).

In 2023, Serbia adopted a new [National Program and Action Plan to Counter Trafficking in Human Beings \(2024-2029\)](#) and strengthened victim identification mechanisms. That year, 58 victims were identified, primarily women and children, including foreign nationals. Most cases involved labour exploitation (35), followed by sexual exploitation (13) and multiple forms of exploitation (10), with foreign victims originating from Burundi, India, Iran, Montenegro, Pakistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

In recent years, Serbia has advanced the alignment of its [migration governance](#) with the EU acquis as part of the accession process. Legislative [amendments adopted in 2023](#) extended temporary residence permits from one to three years, shortened eligibility for permanent residence from five to three years, and [allowed migrant workers](#) to change employers within 30 days of contract termination. The full implementation of the [Law on Foreigners](#) introduced a unified residence and work permit procedure aligned with the EU standard format for non-EU nationals. Serbia also began issuing [travel documents to refugees](#) in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Operational cooperation on border management intensified in 2024 with the signing of [a Frontex agreement](#) enabling joint operations and [deployment of the standing corps](#) along Serbia's borders, particularly with non-EU neighbours. This complements existing bilateral and trilateral cooperation, including joint patrols with Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, and Romania, [enhanced collaboration with Hungary](#) on combating smuggling, and the [Serbia-Austria-Hungary Trilateral Initiative](#) launched in 2023 to strengthen controls along the North Macedonia border.

Serbia is party to several migration dialogues, including the Prague Process. It has endorsed both [Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees](#), continues cooperation with the EUAA, joined the [European Migration Network as an observer](#) in 2023, and maintains an expanding network of readmission agreements with [EU Member States](#), [Western Balkan partners](#), and [non-EU countries](#).

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