

## MIGRATION PATHWAYS

# Western Balkan Regulation

### Overview

In a bid to reduce the number of asylum seekers, Germany enacted a new regulation in 2015 opening its labor market to nationals from the Western Balkan countries.

### Why was it started?

In 2015, large numbers of Syrian nationals used the Balkan route to apply for asylum in Northern Europe, especially Germany. Many people from the countries along the route used these flows to apply for asylum in Germany, despite having almost no chance of receiving it. Such flows put pressure on the German asylum system and undermined the ability of the German labor market to attract Western Balkan nationals through legal migration.

### How does it work?

The Western Balkan Regulation is part of broader package of asylum reforms passed by the German Parliament in November 2015. It allows people from the Western Balkans to receive temporary work visas as long as they have a job offer from a German employer. The legal pathway was opened on the understanding that it would reroute people who would otherwise seek asylum in Germany. The regulation was initially meant to last five years (through December 2020).

*Countries all around the world utilize migration pathways to train and bring over workers with needed skills. The CGD Migration Pathways database documents these pathways to promote innovation in this space. To explore the database, visit [GSP.cgdev.org](https://GSP.cgdev.org).*



Country of Destination  
**GERMANY**

Country of Origin  
**ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND  
HERZEGOVINA, KOSOVO,  
MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO,  
AND SERBIA**

Skill  
**NOT SPECIFIED (MAINLY  
CONSTRUCTION AND  
HOSPITALITY)**

Skill Level  
**LOW AND MODERATE**

Timeline  
**2015–23**

Beneficiaries  
**25,000 A YEAR**

In September 2020, Germany extended the regulation through 2023. A new quota of 25,000 people a year was established, based on the number of people who applied under the scheme in 2019. Employers still need to prove that they cannot find local workers for the positions and that employment conditions are at a certain minimum standard.

### What impact has it had?

Between 2015 and 2017, more than 117,000 work contracts were submitted and approved under the new regulation. Based on these contracts, 44,093 applicants received work visas. Over the same period, asylum applications from the region dropped 90 percent, from 120,882 to 10,915. The work visas were about evenly split between unskilled/low-skilled workers (51 percent) and skilled workers (46 percent). Most were in the construction sector; some were in the hospitality and health care sectors. The regulation also reduced workloads for asylum-processing staff and border police, reduced illegal employment, and improved cooperation between Germany and the Western Balkan countries.

### Further readings

Bither, J., and A. Ziebarth. 2018. *Creating legal pathways to reduce irregular migration? What we can learn from Germany's "Western Balkan regulation"?* German Marshall Fund of the United States. <https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/vor-ort/zav/westbalkanregelung>

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German Federal Employment Agency. 2021. "Living and working in Germany: Western Balkans regulation." <https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/vor-ort/zav/westbalkanregelung>

Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, P. 2019. "Developments in Germany in the context of visa liberalisation." Working Paper 83, German National Contact Point for the European Migration Network (EMN). [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/11a\\_germany\\_visa\\_liberalisation\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/11a_germany_visa_liberalisation_en.pdf)



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