

Policy Brief

The Bargaining for Working Conditions and Social Rights of Migrant Workers in Central East European Countries (BARMIG) project assesses the role of established industrial relations institutions in addressing the effects of migration on changing labour markets. It also examines how trade unions and employer organizations in Czechia, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland respond to these changes.

In recent years Croatia became highly dependent on migrant workers. The economy was faced with huge outflow of the labor force after joining the EU particularly in the public healthcare sector. Construction sector is facing growing labor shortages and predictions are that in ten years most workers will be foreigners in the sector. In 2021 Croatia changed its legislation for regulating work of third country nationals. The old quota system was replaced by the new market test system which is more flexible. Nevertheless, the employers tend to criticize it for being too complex and bureaucratic. Croatia does not have effective policies that would support labor market integration of third country nationals, especially of workers who do not speak Croatian.

The employment of third country nationals is typically temporary. In the tourism and hospitality sector work related migration has a strong seasonal character. In other sectors employment contracts are concluded for a longer time period, usually for a year. Most migrant workers work as physical laborers in construction, tourism and in the metal industry. The role of intermediaries is strong in construction, metal industry and the digital platforms, while in other sectors it is marginal. Circular migration is present in all sectors. This means that migrant workers work in Croatia for a year or two, after which they leave for their home countries. Most migrant workers originate from countries of the region, although in recent years workers from non-European countries are increasing in number.

The social partners are aware of the growing relevance of migrant work, but currently they miss staff that would deal specifically with migrant workers. They lack strategies for addressing this issue due to low financial and human capacities and insufficient regulatory support. Employment and integration of migrant workers is not a subject of collective bargaining.

Recommendations

- Croatia needs urgently to develop a migration strategy that would perceive migration as opportunity for the overall economic and social development.
- The state has to become more active in supporting integration of migrant workers. This primarily concerns free of charge language courses but also better access to various social security benefits.
- The social partners have to start discussing migrant work in all social dialogue forums in order to prevent discrimination of migrants and secure their better integration at the workplace and society at large.

The project is supported by the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission.