



WESTERN BALKANS JOINT ACTIONS AGAINST SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS AND TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

Background

Since the beginning of 2015, the Western Balkans (WB) region has emerged as a major transit hub for migrants attempting to reach the European Union (EU). Mixed migration movements which previously impacted mostly North Macedonia and Serbia, have now shifted to the WB coastal road, through Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo* and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Comprehensive data on migrant arrivals in the region remain scarce but IOM data shows that a total of 1.4 million migrants were registered by authorities in the region between January 2015 and June 2021. Although authorities have improved border and immigration processes, structures and capacities, the management of migration continues to pose challenges in the WB. Increased and more complex mixed migration movements have placed additional pressure on the already strained capacities of WB authorities to effectively manage borders, and address the needs of migrants in transit, especially the most vulnerable.

In 2020, Europol noted a growth of migrant smuggling activities in the WB, with criminal networks employing increasingly exploitative measures to defeat controls. Officials at Points of Entry (PoE) are often insufficiently trained and ill-equipped to detect identity and travel document fraud. Cultural and linguistic barriers are further exacerbating issues of identification and referrals, due to the low number of available cultural mediators and access to sustainable interpretation. Moreover, operative work of the law enforcement agencies is often suboptimal due to challenges in information flow and lack of coordination, both on national and especially at regional level. Systems for direct assistance to and empowerment of victims of trafficking (VOTs) and migrants in a vulnerable situation are present in the region, but there is both room for improvement of the level of services available, and a notable lack of exchange of best practices and lessons learned between the actors in territories and across the region.

The proposed Western Balkans Joint Actions Against Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Human Beings project is envisaged as a 36-month intervention, that aims to address these systemic gaps and concerns while taking into account country specific priorities and needs. **The overall objective of the project is to contribute to better migration management of mixed migration flows in the Western Balkans through strengthening effective counter-smuggling and counter-human trafficking practices, in line with protection sensitive approaches to assisting VOTs.**

BUDGET:

DKK 15,026,751.00

DONOR:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

IMPLEMENTED BY:

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

DURATION:

36 months

GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE:

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo*

BENEFICIARIES:

Ministries of Interior/Security, Prosecutor's Offices, National Task Forces for countering smuggling of migrants (SOM) and trafficking in human beings (THB) in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo

For any additional information or questions about the project, please send us a message on wbjast@iom.int.



Outcome 1

Enhanced regional strategic and operational cooperation, coordination, and technical capacities to identify, investigate and prosecute SOM and THB, in line with EU and international practices and standards.

The project will build on previous efforts to continue to support and enhance regional cooperation and capacities in criminal justice response to SOM and THB through stakeholders coordination meetings on strategic cross border cooperation and exchange of operational information facilitating cross border joint operations; capacity building at the regional level through design and delivery of victim-centred and trauma informed approach in proactive identification, investigation and prosecution trainings (training of trainers (ToT), simulations/desktop exercises); and mechanisms for enhanced cooperation in investigations through, inter alia, sustainable interpretation solutions.

Outcome 2

Strengthened prevention, protection and prosecution efforts to counter SOM and THB in all WB jurisdictions.

The project will build on joint experiences working bilaterally with the WB6 to strengthen counter SOM and THB mechanisms at the national level, by working with relevant state agencies to further strengthen their technical capacities. Through a consultative process, each state partner will be able to determine, in line with the project's priorities, the areas of programming, training, technical equipment most needed to improve their prevention, protection and prosecution efforts. In addition to creating new opportunities for state and non-state actors to cooperate through trainings and implementation of existing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), the project will also support standardized SOM and THB administrative data collection protocols, further building on current efforts in BiH.

Outcome 3

Enhanced protection and empowerment of vulnerable migrant categories following a rights-based and victim-sensitive approach.

The project will provide direct assistance to particularly vulnerable categories (e.g. VOTs, unaccompanied migrant children (UAMCs)) whose needs are not met through regular assistance programs, and support public authorities in the WB as well as other stakeholders such as international organizations and NGOs working with the target population to do so. To promote a victim-centred, rights-based and gender-sensitive approach to vulnerable categories, IOM will map key services available, and work with front-line delivery partners in bridging direct assistance gaps.

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.