REGIONAL SUPPORT TO PROTECTION-SENSITIVE MIGRATION MANAGEMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans and Turkey is a European Union-funded programme implemented in seven beneficiary countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey. It aims to provide a comprehensive and holistic regional approach to migration management systems in the framework of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II) and as part of the EU accession processes of the beneficiaries. The Programme focuses on introducing and sharing EU standards and best practices on migration management while supporting the beneficiaries to develop an effective protection-sensitive response to mixed migration flows. Programme actions are implemented by Frontex, EASO, IOM and UNHCR in a spirit of joint partnership complementing national efforts in the area of migration management and providing a mixture of horizontal and regional support.

The Aim of the Programme is to support six IPA II beneficiary countries to develop capacities and strengthen their identification, registration and return mechanisms, with a view to improve their operational response to mixed migration flows.

The Objectives of the Programme focus on enhancing some of the key areas of migration management systems, such as strengthening the asylum system, mechanisms for identification and forced return, enhancing the exchange of non-personal information in the region and contributing to the establishment of assisted voluntary return mechanisms in the beneficiary countries.

* 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.
Key actions implemented by IOM during 2016 – 2019:

Strengthened migration data collection, systematization and analysis of non-personal data and supported exchange of information at inter-regional levels and with EU agencies

With the aim to ensure that accurate data on mixed movements are available and to facilitate systematic co-ordination and cooperation between countries in the region regarding information on cross-border movements along the Western Balkan migration route, IOM has developed and validated the Regional Template for Exchange of Non-Personal Migration Data, in line with Regulation 862/2007 on community statistics. This regionally harmonized and EU-compliant template serves to promote greater standardization among data collectors and facilitate direct comparison of data and trends at the regional level.

Addressing the needs for alignment with common basic EU standards in the targeted countries, IOM procured the Regional Platform for Migration Data Exchange in the Western Balkans (WB-MIDEX) hosted by the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI). WB-MIDEX, online and fully operational since 2019, incorporates migration data templates and allows for a user-friendly data entry. It is a custom-made online platform which will fully cater to the needs of the beneficiaries and enable efficient, effective and sustainable data exchange and analysis. In August 2019, it was officially handed over to MARRI Regional Centre (RC), with a two-year warranty and hosting period and data exchange is expected to commence in the course of 2020.

Established voluntary return and reintegration mechanism at the national level; operational cooperation with selected countries of origin established and ongoing

This activity envisages establishing the regional Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme for migrants wishing to voluntarily return to their countries of origin. The development and operationalization of regionally harmonized Standard Operating Procedures for AVRR within targeted countries provides a common minimum standard of assistance in accordance with international law principles and ensures operational consistency of assisted voluntary return.

Regional Platform for Migration Data Exchange in the Western Balkans (WB-MIDEX)

Migrant assisted in voluntary return at the Belgrade Airport
The Programme (in collaboration with several other IOM projects) worked to enhance AVRR operations, as well as to ensure effective counselling and information services on AVRR in asylum and reception centres, making the AVRR programme available to all interested migrants and ensuring that AVRR practitioners are capacitated to implement and oversee effective returns in line with EU standards and practices. Additionally, in order to increase mutual trust and establish effective cooperation with the AVRR programme, IOM facilitated several events with Consular and Diplomatic representations of migrants’ top countries of origin. In the period 2016-2019, 1,623 migrants made use of IOM’s AVRR programme and returned to their countries of origin, with top destinations being Iran, Iraq and Pakistan. Each migrant was assisted with a unique reinstallation grant upon return, in line with the amounts agreed upon by IOM missions within the Western Balkan region.

Established regional pool of interpreters in the Western Balkans, providing sustainable interpretation services with cultural mediation competencies.

Adequate communication with migrants is crucial, as this can ensure that the asylum procedure is conducted fairly, as well as assist authorities in identifying migrants, and determining if they are vulnerable and have additional needs. This activity focuses on the access to a pool of interpreters within the countries that are most affected by the recent flows and serves to enhance the process of ensuring the promotion and protection of migrants’ rights.

In order to fully meet the translation and interpretation needs of the migration management authorities in the Western Balkans, IOM developed a mobile application, the Migration Translation Application (MiTA). MiTA is an offline smartphone application that allows migration management officials to access a basic interpretation service with pre-determined and pre-recorded questions during first contacts with migrants. MiTA contains a list of 50 questions translated into all WB languages (Albanian, Serbian/ Bosnian/Montenegrin and Macedonian) and 8 extra-regional languages (English, French, Arabic, Pashto, Urdu, Kurdish, Somali, and Farsi). The aim of MiTA is to facilitate basic communication between the official (e.g. border police officer) and the migrant during their first contact. The questions focus on the migrant’s identity, country of origin, travel route and immediate protection needs.

Following the signature of the Protocol on the Use of Joint Interpretation Pool in the Area of Migration and Asylum by Western Balkan Ministers of Interior/Security, providing legal grounds for the set-up of a fully functioning service for effective and timely scheduling of extra-regional interpreters, IOM has operationalized the Regional Remote Interpretation Service (RRIS), an enhanced interpretation-scheduling platform with easy-to-use features such as interpreter’s availability calendar, scheduling, profiles and rating. In its current form, the MARRI RRIS is easily accessible to asylum departments, offering the possibility to schedule interpreters in advance.

Finally, interpreters/cultural mediators were engaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia to work directly with migrants ensuring effective communication between migrants and migration management authorities, in a context of increased presence of migrants and changing migration trends. Aimed at standardizing cultural mediation services across the region, the Programme supported the development of the Cultural Mediation Competencies Curriculum as a tool for building the capacities of service providers to provide culturally sensitive services.
Improved identification and vulnerability assessment of migrants and refugees, with referral systems in place and functioning within national mechanisms.

This activity aims to improve comprehensive referral mechanisms at the national level in line with EU practices. IOM has developed a Regional Migration Management Process Map, which illustrates the procedures, processes and cross-cutting aspects to be included in a well-developed and effective protection-sensitive migration management system, compliant with EU standards. The Process Map will serve as the basis for further strengthening of national migration management systems in the region and is accompanied by a visual tool and a narrative description. This product was developed jointly with all project partners, which provided substantive input from their respective thematic areas and mandates.

Regional Migration Management Process Map

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