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CONFERENCE

Migratory Challenges on the Western Balkans Route

06 June 2023, 09.30-16.00 (CEST)

Podgorica, Montenegro

Draft Agenda

1. RATIONALE AND AIMS

The Western Balkans are at the heart of the European continent, surrounded by EU Member States, which makes this region a key corridor for migrants trying to reach the EU from the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Authorities in the region have registered more than 1 million migrants since 2015. Even though the numbers have decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the strategies used to enter the EU have largely diversified, this route remains very active.

The number of detections more than doubled in 2022 compared to 2021,¹ which further confirms that this route remains one of the main migratory paths into the EU. In 2022, Frontex recorded a 134% increase in irregular border crossings on entry to EU Member States on the Western Balkans route, compared to 2021. The Western Balkans route is considered the most active, with 281 000 irregular entries detected since January 2022.² When it comes to Montenegro, 8 519 irregular migrants were registered in 2022, compared to 3 405 in the previous year.³

The migration situation in the region remains complex and challenges the institutional capacities of the Western Balkans, particularly in relation to migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

Migratory challenges on the Western Balkans route were discussed at the October Justice and Home Affairs Council and the Berlin Process Ministerial. At the EU-Western Balkans Justice and Home Affairs Ministerial of 3-4 November 2022 in Tirana, Western Balkan partners committed to a unified, comprehensive approach which, coupled with determined action by

¹ Number of illegal border crossings on entry to EU MS in 2022: **144 118**. Number of illegal border crossings on entry to EU MS in 2021: **61 618**. Source: Frontex.

² [EU external borders in October: Number of irregular entries on the rise \(europa.eu\)](#)

³ Border Police report.

the EU in coordination with EU Member States, has already started to yield results that now need to be strengthened further.

On 5 December 2022, the European Commission proposed a new Action Plan for the Western Balkans,⁴ which identified 20 specific measures aiming to build on the progress achieved, strengthening the partnership with the Western Balkans in light of their unique status from the perspective of EU accession and their continued efforts to align with the EU acquis, as well as identifying key actions to take inside the EU.

In this context, this conference, organised in partnership between European Migration Network and Podgorica Chairmanship in Office of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) seeks to discuss how to tackle common challenges on the Western Balkans migratory route and future actions both on regional and national level.

2. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The conference will take place in **hybrid format in Podgorica, Montenegro on 06 June, 2023.**

It will be a one-day event consisting of three panel discussions. The event is designed for EMN Member and Observer Countries⁵ and SEECP Participants, but other partners will be invited too: representatives of DG HOME, EUAA, FRONTEX, EUROPOL, EEAS, the new European coordination platform for migratory policy from Vienna and local offices of IOM, UNHCR and the Delegation of the EU to Montenegro.

The number of participants attending the event in person will be limited to 100, while there will be no limit when it comes to online participation.

To attend in person, we kindly ask you to register [here](#) by 20 April 2023. As the capacity of in-person attendance is limited, we kindly ask you to appoint up to two representatives per country/organisation with direct competencies in the area. After the deadline has passed, available seats will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Practical instructions regarding online participation will be shared with you in due time.

⁴ EU Action Plan for the Western Balkans, 5 December 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_7447, last accessed on 28 February 2023.

⁵ EMN Member (EU Member States except Denmark) and Observer Countries (NO, GE, MD, UA, ME, AM, RS).

DRAFT AGENDA

6 June 2023	
09:30 – 09:45	Welcoming remarks Event moderator: EMN ME <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Filip Adžić - Minister of the Interior of Montenegro (TBC)▪ Sergej Mučalica, Acting Director General of Directorate for International Cooperation, European Integration and Projects▪ Radovan Popović, Acting Director General of Directorate for Administrative Affairs, Citizenship and Foreigners
09:45 – 10:00	Keynote Speech <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Ylva Johansson - European Commissioner for Home Affairs (TBC)
10:00 – 11:15	Panel 1: Strengthening cross-border cooperation to address smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings – <i>The panel discusses main trends and challenges in trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans and explore solutions, bringing examples from across Europe. It will respond to questions such as: How are trafficking and smuggling networks detected and what are the main good practices and challenges in bringing perpetrators to justice? How are victims identified, and referred to protection, support and assistance services, especially in cross-border cases? What preventive steps need to be taken to ensure better cross-border cooperation for the early identification and referral of trafficking victims?</i> Moderator: Tijana Šuković , Head of Anti-trafficking Department, Ministry of Interior <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Group for the Suppression of Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration, Police Directorate, Ministry of Interior of Montenegro▪ Diane Schmitt, Anti-trafficking Coordinator Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs▪ Javier Vázquez, European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) EUROPOL▪ Davor Raus, UNODC Questions and Answers/ Moderated discussion
11:15 – 12:45	Panel 2: Challenges in readmission and return policy to the countries of origin along the Western Balkans route – <i>The panel reflects on trends, challenges and solutions concerning the implementation of readmission and returns to countries of origin and ways to counter irregular migration routes. Questions addressed include: What is the possible joint approach of the Western Balkans regarding communication with third countries /countries of origin? How are readmission agreements useful? How can the EU and its Member States support the Western Balkans in the return of third-country nationals to their country of origin?</i> Moderator: Return coordinator or C1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Frontex (TBC)▪ Migration Asylum Refugees Regional Initiative - MARRI▪ MoI BiH (TBC)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>IOM, Podgorica Office</i> ▪ <i>Directorate for Administrative Affairs, Citizenship and Foreigners, Police Directorate, Ministry of Interior of Montenegro</i> ▪ <i>Joint Coordination Platform (TBC)</i>
12:45-14:00	Lunch
14:00-14:15	Family photo
14:15 – 15:30	<p>Panel 3: Challenges arising from the increased number of people fleeing the war in Ukraine: temporary protection and best practices – <i>The panel discusses repercussions on migration policy of people fleeing from the war in Ukraine. It addresses questions such as: What actions have been taken to host people from Ukraine (temporary protection, reception, accommodation)? What challenges have been faced so far and what are the main issues, which need to be solved in order to respond to the refugee crisis more successfully?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderator: Amer Kapetanović, <i>Head of the Regional Cooperation Center (RCC) Political Department</i> ▪ <i>Directorate for Administrative Affairs, Citizenship and Foreigners, Ministry of Interior of Montenegro</i> ▪ <i>DG HOME C3, (TBC)</i> ▪ <i>Pavla Pánová, Unit for Policy and Analyses of the Department for Asylum and Migration Policy, Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic</i> ▪ <i>Jean Yves Bouchardy/Slobodan Raščanin, UNHCR Podgorica</i> <p>Questions and Answers/ Moderated discussion</p>
15:30 – 15:45	<p>Concluding remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>EMN ME/ ME institution</i> ▪ <i>EMN Chair</i>