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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Strengthening migration management capacities in the Western Balkan region - Presidency discussion paper

On 19 February 2020, the joint HLWG/SCIFA discussions on the topic of strengthening migration management capacities with Western Balkan partners, held on the basis of the Presidency paper, led to overall agreement that the Western Balkan region is of great strategic importance for the EU in terms of the management of migration. The meeting provided an insight into substantial EU funding for the partners in the Western Balkans for asylum, migration management, and migration-related humanitarian assistance as well as the EU Agencies' operational assistance and engagement in the region, namely through FRONTEX, EASO and EUROPOL. It was concluded that cooperation with the Western Balkan partners must be comprehensive and well coordinated, with EU Agencies playing an important role. It was stressed almost unanimously that the synergies of all EU and Member States' actions in the Western Balkan region should be enhanced. More precisely, comprehensive and coordinated EU support should focus on:

- promoting efficient border management (including through the conclusion and implementation of all EBCG Status Agreements and through alignment with the EU's common visa policy),
- increasing capacity for voluntary returns and stepping up support for readmission in countries of origin,
- combating human smuggling,
- continuing efforts to strengthen asylum and reception systems, while also building up more political will and ownership of migration actions,
- efficient exchange of information on irregular movements and migration management capacities among Western Balkan partners and with the EU,
- funding support.

Divergences in the development of institutional capacity in the Western Balkan partners may arise because, in the current migration situation, they perceive themselves only as a transit region, in particular with regard to the fact that they are to a large extent affected by irregular secondary movements between EU Member States transiting through the Western Balkans. Enhancing their overall migration capacities - including the asylum system, the reception conditions and return capacities - is essential. To achieve this goal, it is essential to have a partnership based on mutual trust and willingness.

In order to establish a stepping-stone for future strategic plans to strengthen migration capacities in the region, the Croatian Presidency initiated and undertook a comprehensive mapping of Member States' non-EU-funded cooperation and activities in the area of migration management.

The mapping results show that 15 Member States provide support in the region. As regards the fields of support, the results of the mapping clearly indicate that the majority of bilateral support is provided in two areas, namely border management and combating the smuggling of migrants (over 50% of all MS activities) (see *Chart 1*). At the same time, the results indicate a very low level of general support in the field of integration (2%) and the legal migration scheme (4%), as well as a relatively low level of support in the fields of asylum (6%), reception (8%) and return (7%).

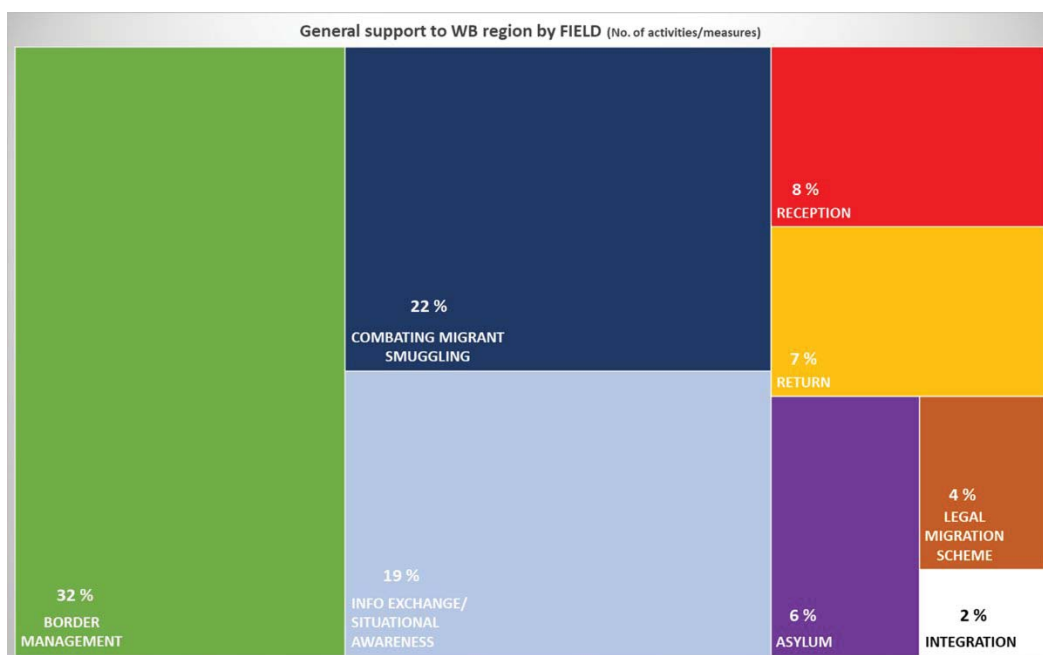


Chart 1

The mapping results also show that 15 Member States provide support in the region through either expert assistance, equipment or financial assistance. Overall, 67% of all the assistance provided takes the form of expert assistance (see Chart 2).

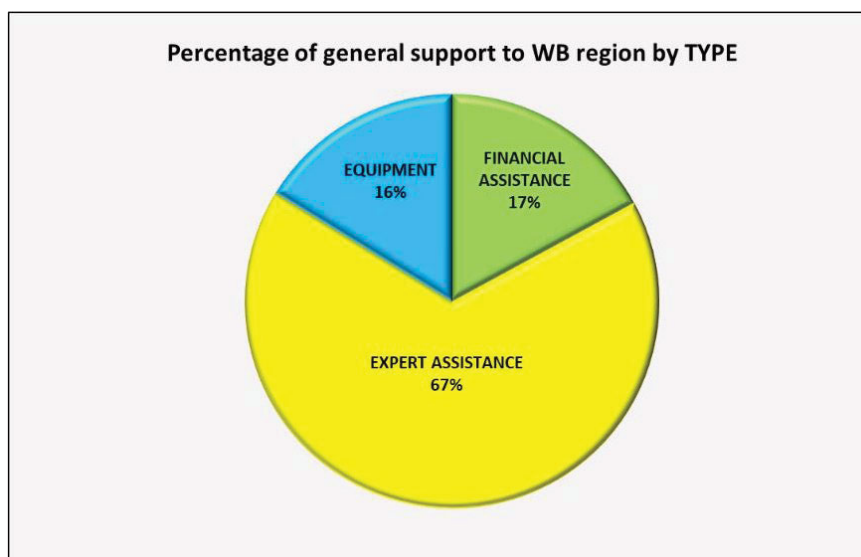


Chart 2

Support is not distributed equally among the Western Balkan partners. Member States’ assistance is focused mostly on the partners bordering the EU, i.e. North Macedonia and Serbia (almost 50% of all MS activities), while Kosovo* is the partner with the lowest percentage of Member States’ activities (9%) (see *Charts 3 and 4*).

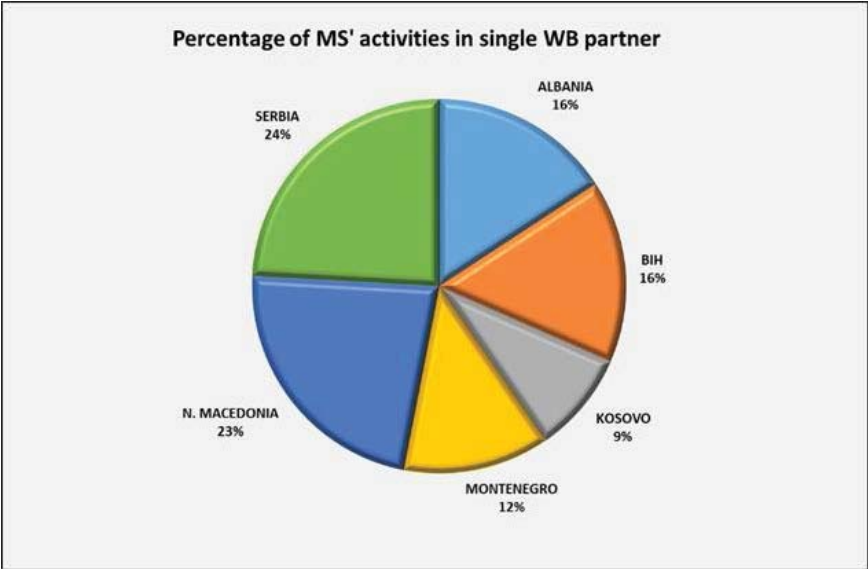


Chart 3

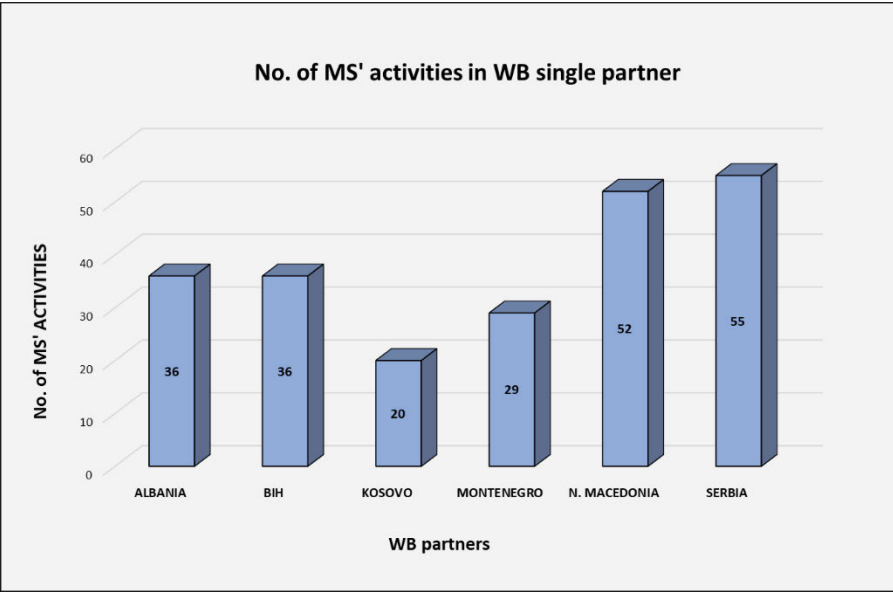


Chart 4

* 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.

It should be acknowledged that more than half of the EU Member States provide various types of support within a total of 228 activities, with the aim of helping to strengthen the partners' migration capacities.

The results of the mapping underpin the conclusions reached during the joint SCIFA/HLWG meeting: namely, that there is a need for a strategic and comprehensive approach that would result in long-term, sustainable migration management in the Western Balkan region. The support provided by Member States to date reflects their awareness of the geopolitical importance of certain Western Balkan partners, namely those bordering the EU. The majority of the support is directed towards the field of border management and combating the smuggling of migrants through expert assistance, thus indicating that Member States' focus is on the prevention of irregular migratory movements to the EU. On the other hand, integration and labour migration schemes are among the least supported areas of engagement. Bearing in mind the overall migration situation, such an approach is both expected and understandable, but may contribute to strengthening the Western Balkan partners' self-perception as a transit region, which poses a challenge for the further improvement of all aspects of their migration capacities.

According to the results of the mapping, a substantial proportion of all the Member States' activities are directed towards information exchange between MS and specific partners in the region. However, during the joint SCIFA/HLWG meeting, some delegates expressed concerns regarding the unsatisfactory level of unified information flow and the need for enhancement. Therefore the Presidency believes that there is a need to assess whether the current approach to this issue is appropriate and discuss possible new approaches.

In addition, it can be seen that the activities of Member States and EU Agencies in their respective fields of competence tend to be directed at specific fields of interest, and are thus most likely to overlap as regards the relevant Western Balkan partners as well as the scope of support provided.

All the aforementioned issues could have the effect of undermining the desired results, as the current approach does not fully enable comprehensive support for the Western Balkan partners to establish responsible and sustainable migration management, risking duplication in some areas while leaving gaps in others.

The Presidency believes that the efforts which have been undertaken by Member States on this issue constitute a worthwhile contribution and give an added value to the overall EU engagement that should be widely acknowledged. Our common approach should therefore be well coordinated between EU institutions and Member States and should encompass equal support in all fields of migration management, rather than focusing on ad hoc solutions aimed at specific fields depending on current interests.

The Presidency also firmly believes that the approach towards the comprehensive strengthening of Western Balkan migration capacities should be based on mutual trust between the EU and its partners, respecting them and acknowledging their importance for the EU, as this is an issue of shared interest and common responsibility. Western Balkan partners should be encouraged to assume a more active role in migration management.

Against this background, Member States are invited to consider the following questions:

1. As Member States have already agreed on adopting a strategic approach towards Western Balkan partners, should this approach also address support in all areas of migration management in order to ensure a system which is sustainable in the long term?
2. As Member States report less bilateral cooperation in the area of returns from the Western Balkans to the countries of origin than with regard to certain other aspects of migration management, this is an area where more could be done to support the Western Balkan partners. Can you provide some examples of best practice in this area?

3. In your opinion, is it feasible to implement a regional biometric registration/data-sharing system of asylum applicants and irregular migrants (compatible with EURODAC) in order to improve and strengthen overall border management and asylum capacities and improve the information flow and the overall migration picture in the region?
 4. How can we build trust and encourage Western Balkan partners to cooperate pro-actively as partners with the EU in the area of migration management?
 5. How can we engage with Western Balkan partners in order to improve their capacities in the event of a crisis situation such as a large-scale migration influx?
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Analysis of results obtained by the questionnaire on the bilateral cooperation between Member States and Western Balkans partners in the area of migration

Work methodology

The questionnaire examined the bilateral cooperation and the support provided to the Western Balkans partners by Member States (not financed under EU funds) for the period from 2015 to the present. In order to get a clear picture of the efforts made by Member States to strengthen migration capacities in the Western Balkans, **the questionnaire covered the following fields of support: asylum, reception, border management, return, combating migrant smuggling, integration, legal migration and information exchange/situational awareness. Three types of support were taken into consideration for the purposes of this analysis: financial assistance, expert assistance and provision of equipment.**

The questionnaire was compiled in such a way as to provide the answers to the following questions:

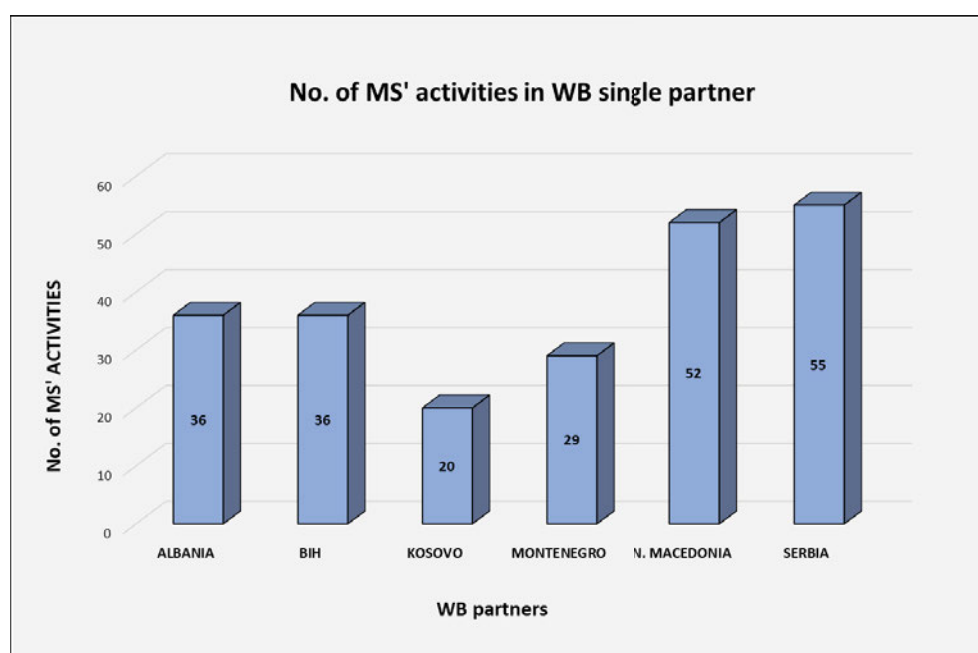
- How many Member States participate in bilateral activities?**
- Which parts of the Western Balkans region are covered by the assistance provided by Member States and which are not?**
- What kind of assistance do Member States most commonly provide/have the capacity to provide and to which fields?**
- Which Western Balkans partners are the focus of bilateral activities and which are not?**

Results of the data analysis

The analysis was based on the questionnaire replies from 23 Member States. According to the results obtained,¹ as many as 15 Member States provide some sort of assistance. It should be noted that some of these Member States carry out a number of activities in either one or several Western Balkans partners. This is why the data must be analysed according to the number of Member States providing support to the Western Balkans, but also according to the number of activities. More specifically, this means that if the same number of Member States provide support to Serbia and North Macedonia, for example, the data show that more activities are carried out in total in Serbia since some Member States carry out several activities in more than one Western Balkans partner.

The data analysis shows that 15 Member States carry out a total of 228 activities in the Western Balkans through eight different areas encompassing various types of support (see *Table 1*).

Table 1

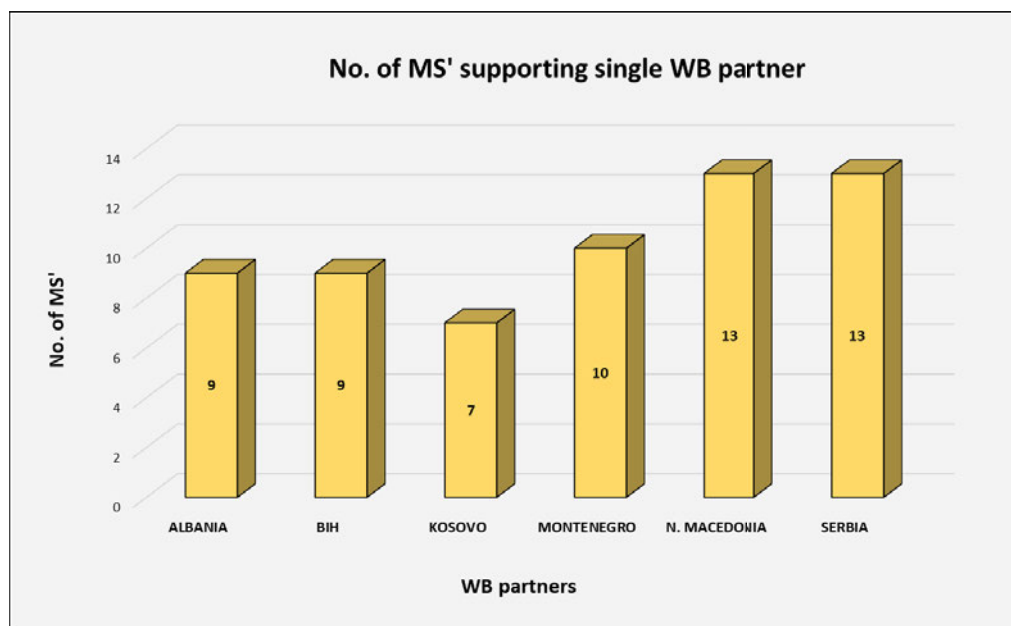


¹ The results of the questionnaire provide an overview of cooperation for each individual Western Balkans partner. When interpreting the results, it must be kept in mind that the questionnaire does not make a distinction between current activities and those which have been discontinued, given that the mapping was done for the period from 2015 to the present. Likewise, each activity is counted as one item regardless of its real value or content (e.g. the help of one expert, as an activity, is counted as equivalent to a donation of 100 thermal imaging cameras).

The results of the questionnaire indicate that Member States have a significant interest and engagement in the region. Given that, more than half of the Member States responded positively to the question about providing support to the Western Balkans partners.

The results show that Member States (as many as 13 of them) have mostly directed their support to Western Balkans partners bordering with the EU, namely North Macedonia and Serbia, Montenegro (10), Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania (9), with Kosovo receiving the least support (7) (see *Table 2*). This result reflects their understanding of the geostrategic position of the Western Balkans partners.

Table 2



However, this data should also be broken down by the number and percentage of activities (see *Tables 3 and 4*) in order to see the percentage of activities pertaining to a particular Western Balkans partner. This allows the following conclusion to be drawn: despite the fact that the same number of Member States provide support to Serbia and North Macedonia (13), more activities are carried out in Serbia (24%) than in North Macedonia (23%). More Member States participate in Montenegro (10) than in Albania (9) or Bosnia and Herzegovina (9). However, the number of activities is lower in Montenegro (12%) than in Albania (16%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (16%).

Table 3

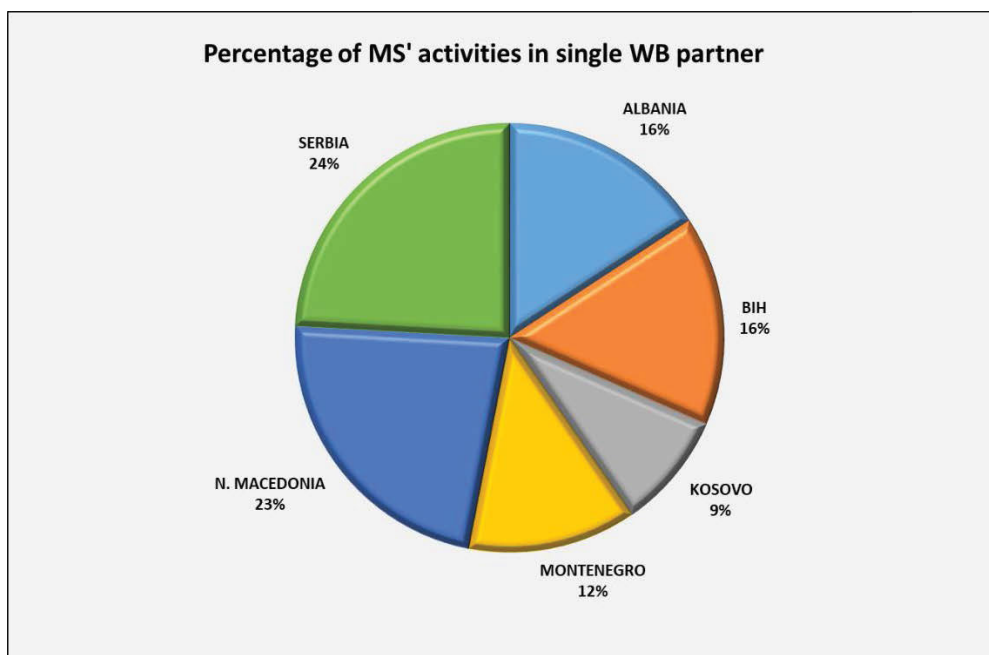
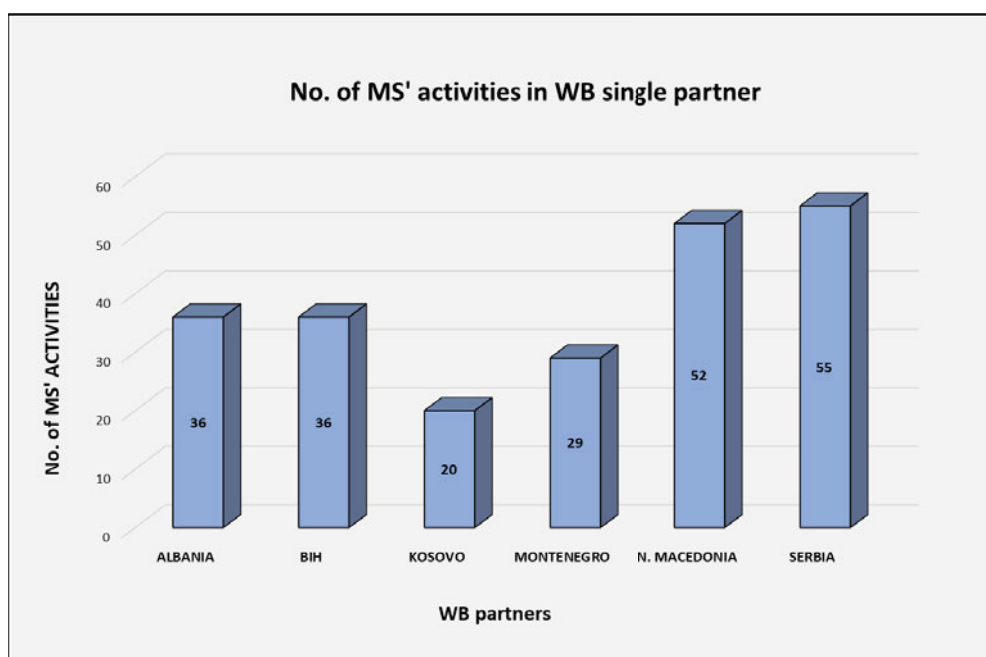
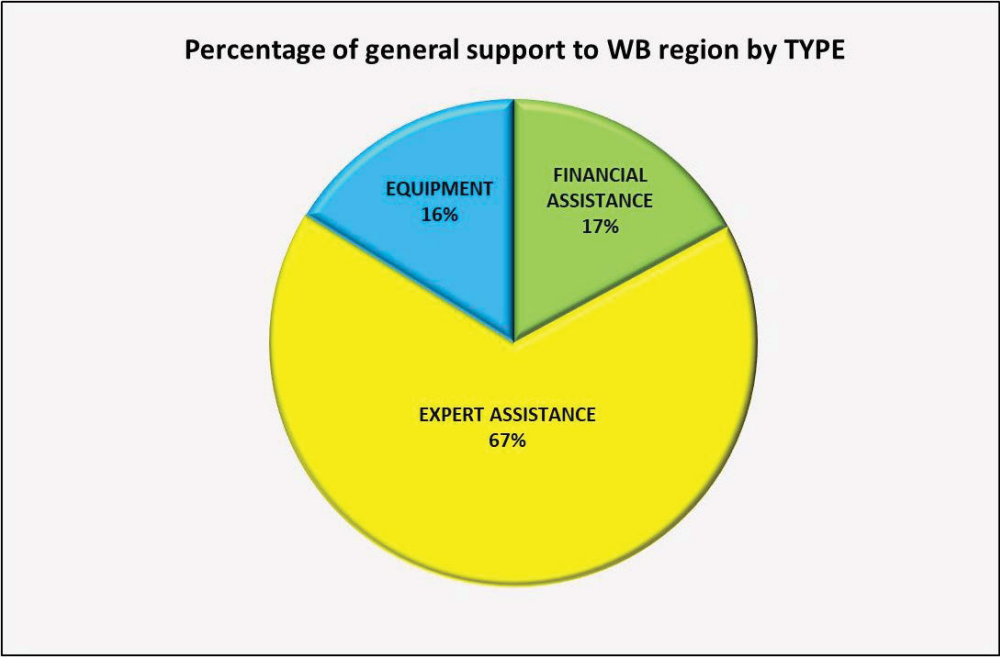


Table 4



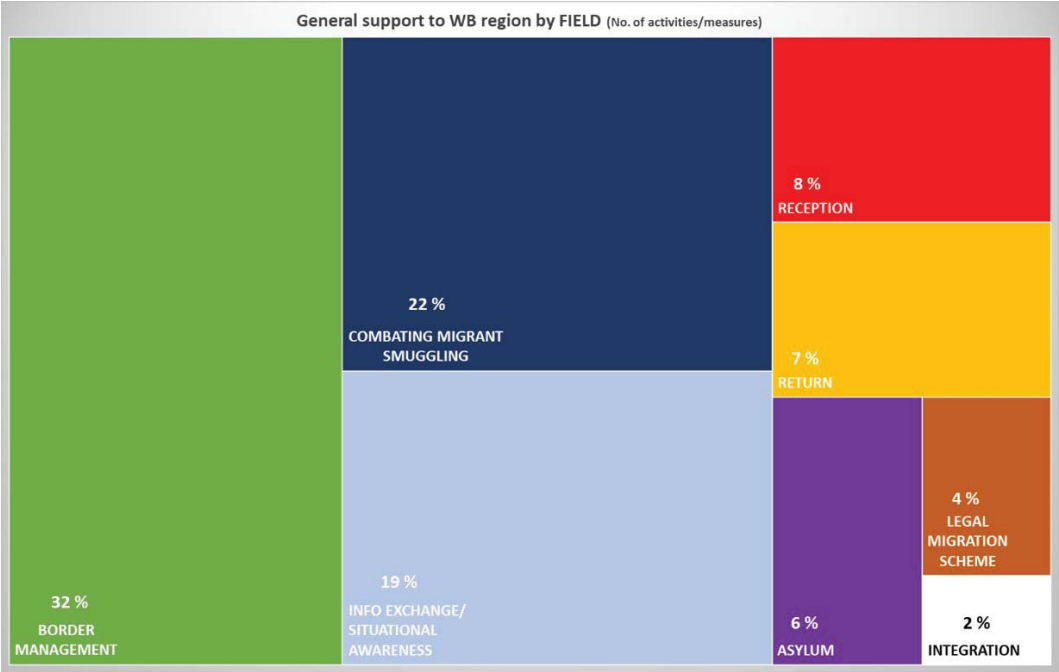
As regards **the type of assistance** provided (financial, expert and equipment), the results show that the highest percentage of assistance provided by Member States pertains to the help of experts (67%), with financial assistance (17%) and equipment (16%) trailing far behind (see *Table 5*).

Table 5



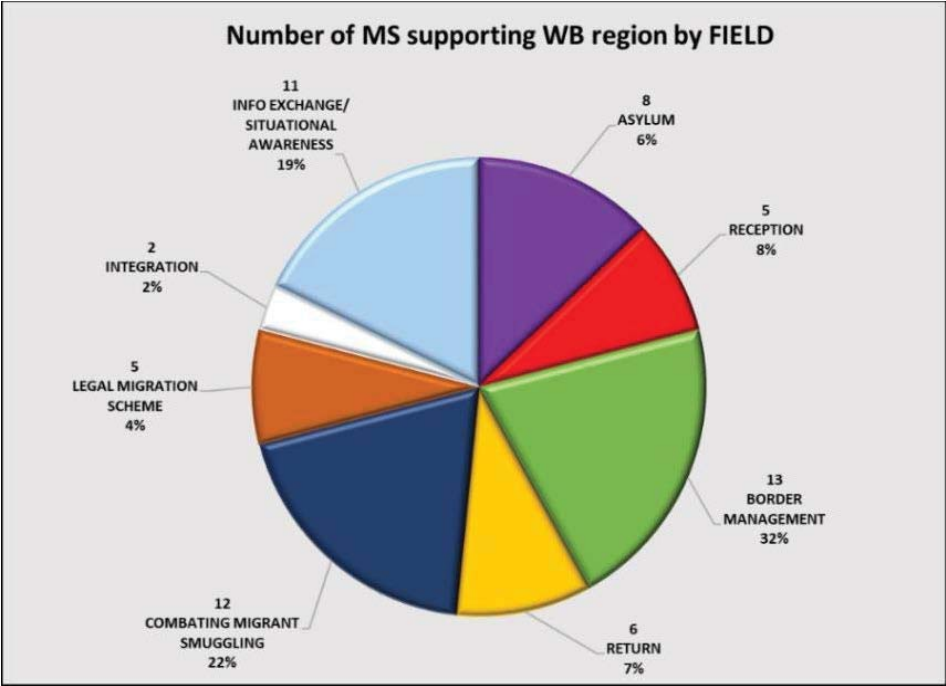
As regards **the areas of assistance**, Member States are mostly interested in border management (32%), combating migrant smuggling (22%), and exchange of information and situational awareness (19%). The lowest number of activities relate to integration (2%), legal migration (4%), asylum (6%), reception (8%) and return (7%) (see *Table 6*).

Table 6

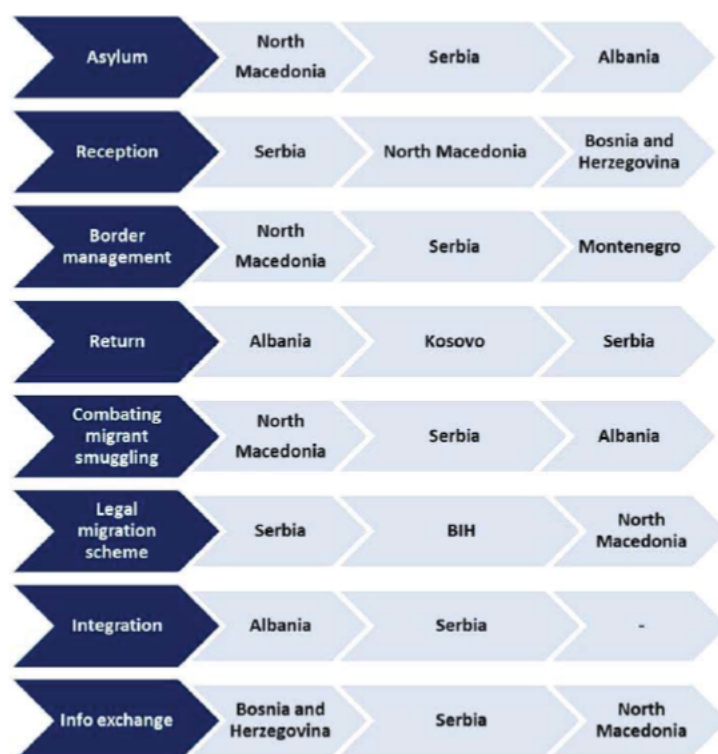


However, when we look at these results from the perspective of a number of Member States engaged in particular areas and compare them with the percentage of engagement in particular areas, we obtain the following results: the highest number of Member States (13) are engaged in border management (a total of 32% of activities). This is followed by combating migrant smuggling (12), which represents a total of 22% of all activities in the area of combating migrant smuggling (see *Table 7*).

Table 7



With regard to migration areas and the top 3 Western Balkans partners in each of these areas, the results are as follows:

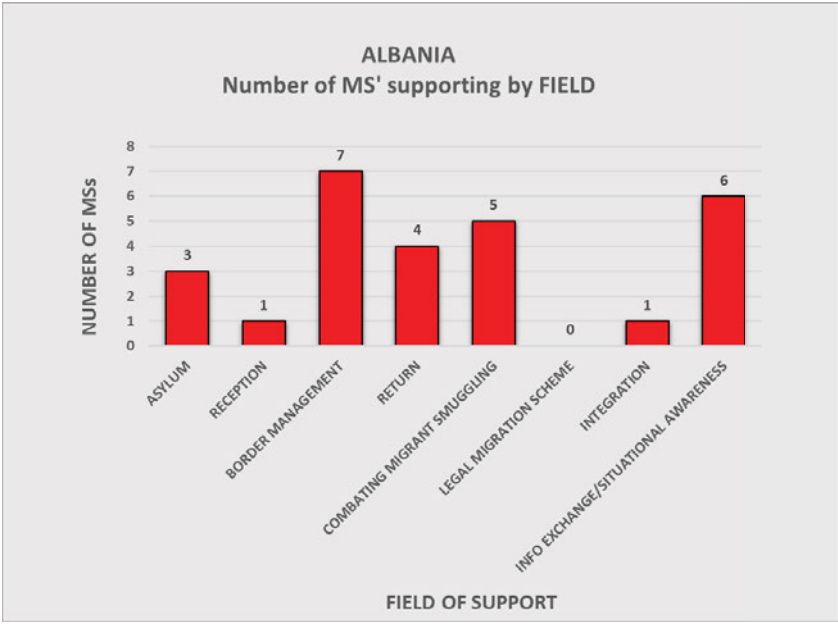


Furthermore, below we have summarised the type of assistance available to Western Balkans partners by area for each particular partner.

- Albania:**

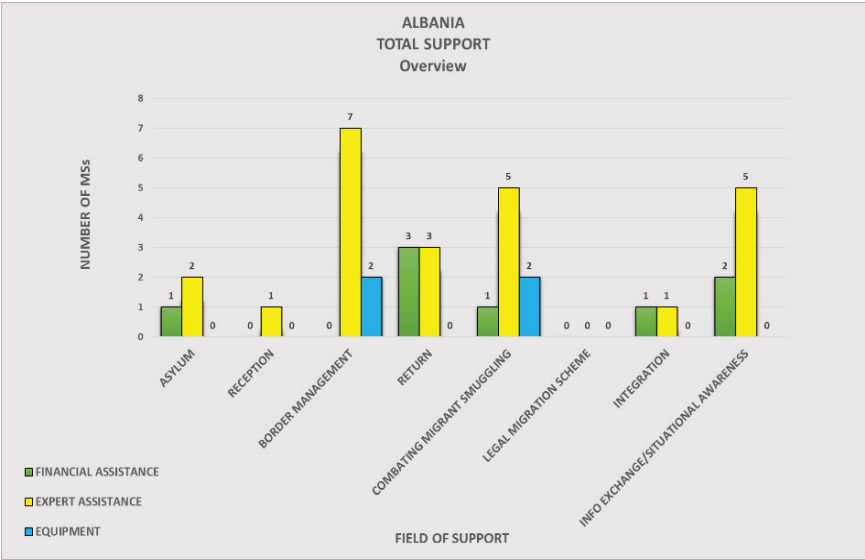
A total of nine Member States provide assistance to Albania, most of them in the area of border management (7), information exchange/situational awareness (6), and combating migrant smuggling (5). Four Member States participate in the area of return, whereas no Member States are involved in the area of legal migration. Only three Member States provide assistance in the area of asylum, whereas one Member State provides assistance in the area of reception and one Member State in the area of integration (see *Table 8*).

Table 8



As regards **the type of assistance** (see *Table 9*²), Albania receives most assistance in the form of experts, followed by financial assistance and then equipment.

Table 9

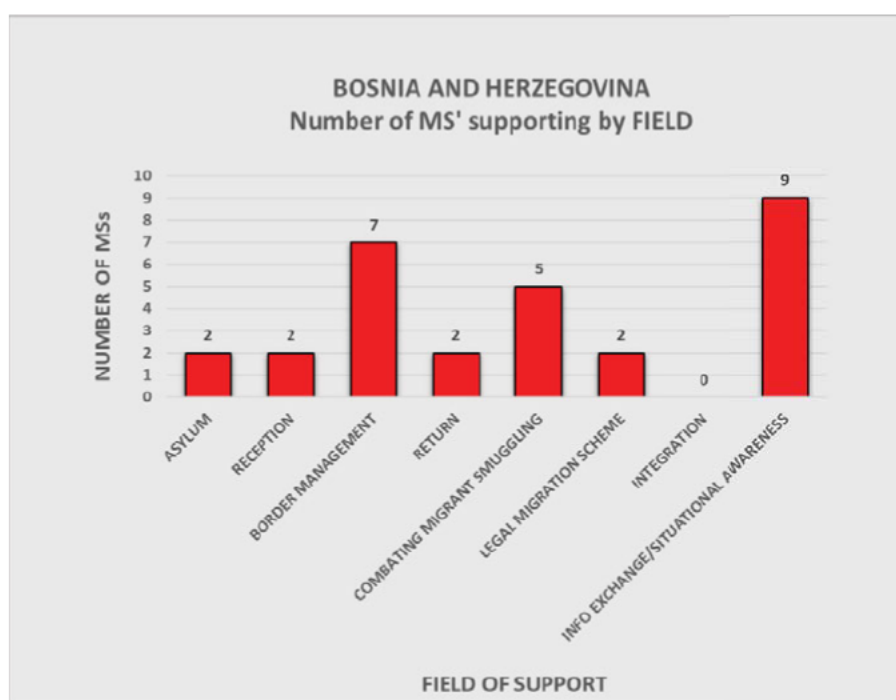


² Table 9 shows the number of Member States activities in a particular Western Balkans partner. More specifically, some Member States provide various types of assistance in numerous areas, and therefore the figures relating to the number of Member States in this table should not be added up when interpreting this table (in the area of migration management, for example, six Member States are active, of which all six provide assistance in the form of experts, whereas two of them provide additional assistance in this area in the form of equipment).

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

As many as nine Member States provide assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina, most of them in the area of information exchange (9) and border management (7). Interestingly, no assistance is provided in the area of integration, whereas in the areas of asylum, reception, return and legal migration assistance is provided by two Member States each (see *Table 10*).

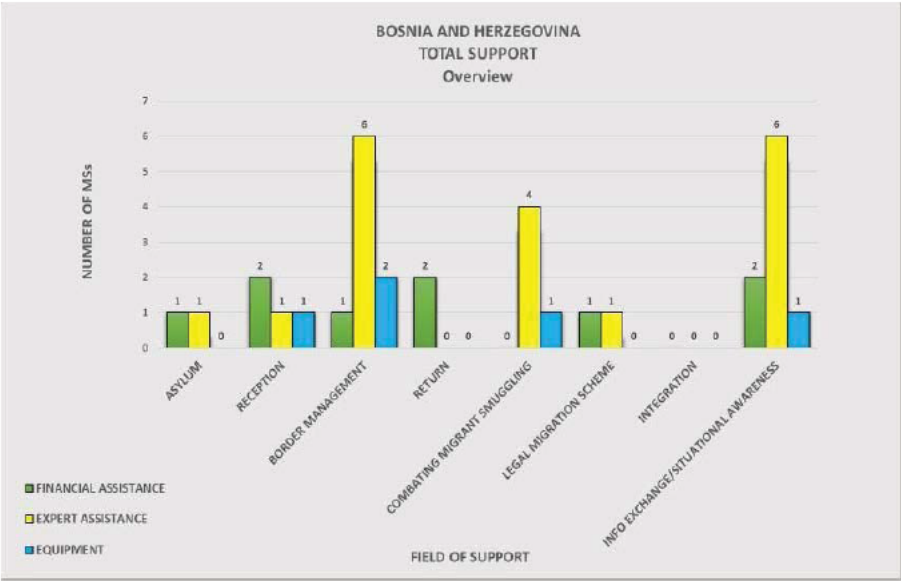
Table 10



As regards **the type of assistance**, Bosnia and Herzegovina receives most of its assistance in the form of experts, and the least in the form of equipment (see *Table 11*³).

³ See the explanation in footnote 2.

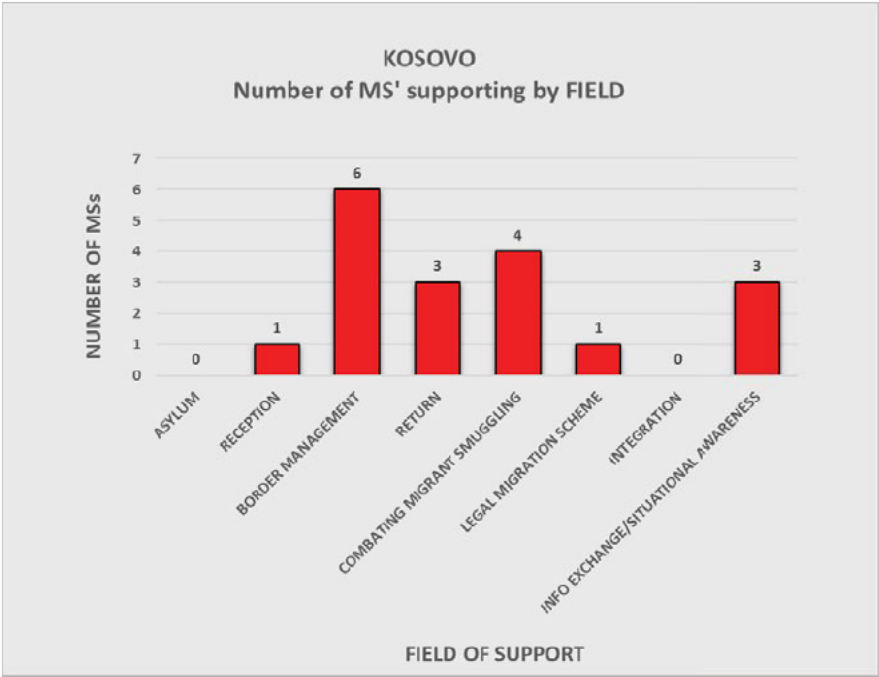
Table 11



• Kosovo

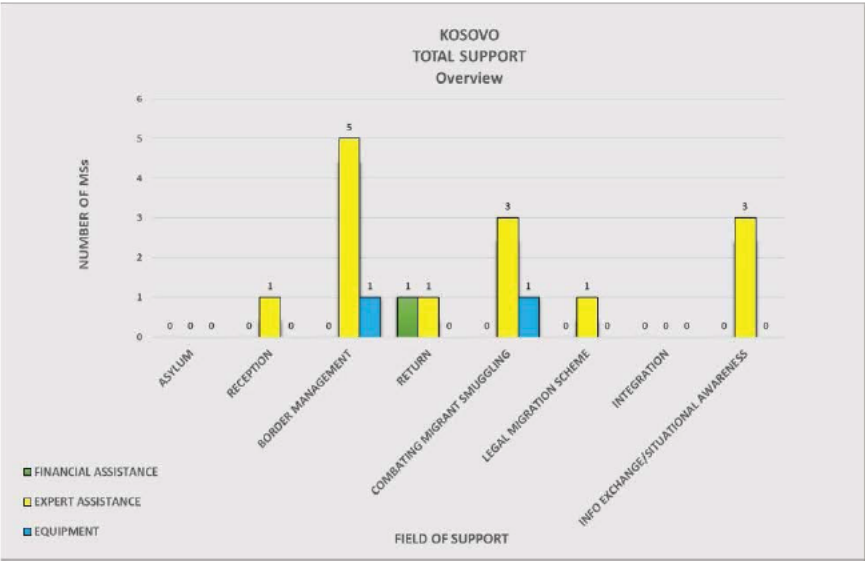
Seven Member States provide assistance to Kosovo, most of them in the area of border management (6) and combating migrant smuggling (4). No assistance is provided in the areas of asylum and integration (see Table 12).

Table 12



As regards **the type of assistance**, Kosovo receives most of its assistance in the form of experts (see *Table 13*⁴).

Table 13

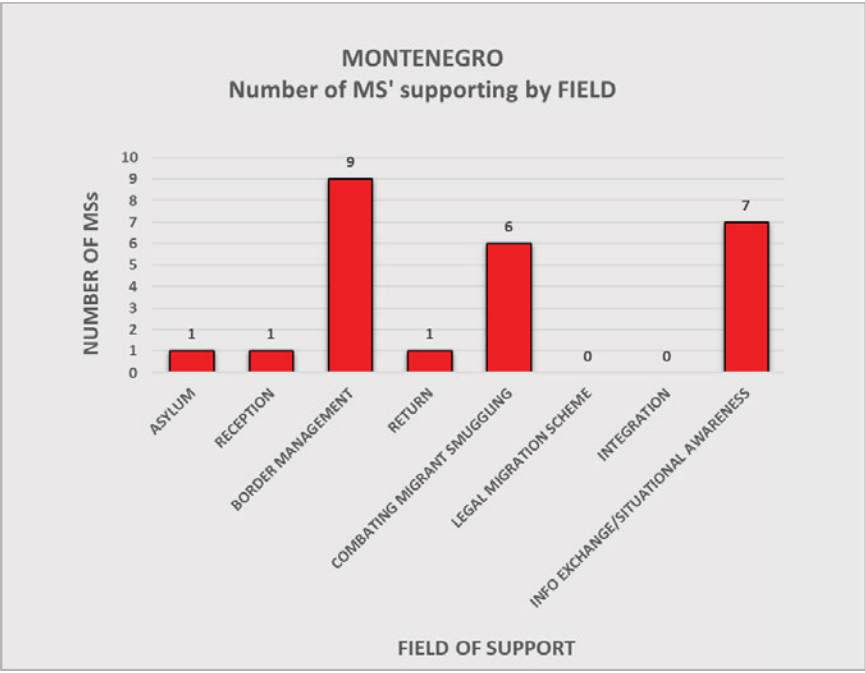


• **Montenegro**

10 Member States provide assistance to Montenegro, most of them in the area of border management (9), information exchange (7) and combating migrant smuggling (6). No assistance is provided in the areas of legal migration and integration, whereas in the areas of asylum, reception and return assistance is provided by one Member State each (see *Table 13*).

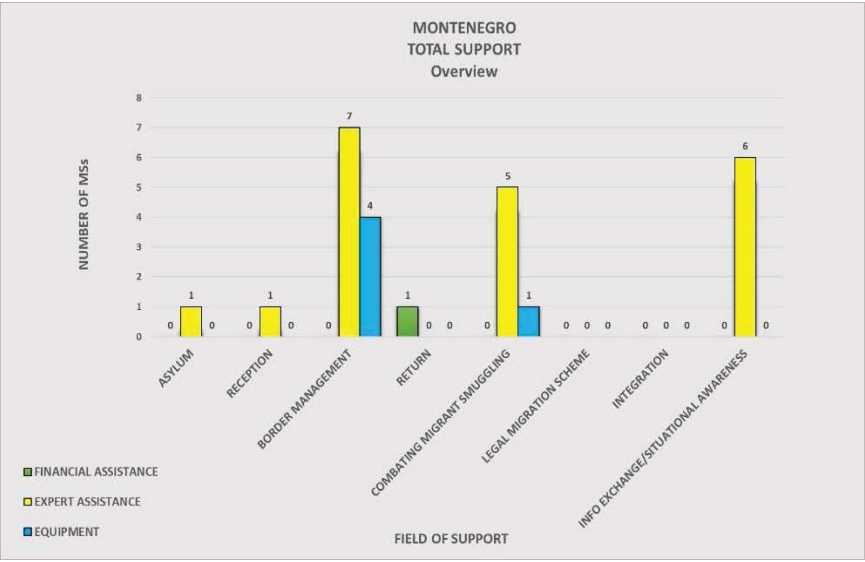
⁴ See the explanation in footnote 2.

Table 13



As regards the type of assistance, Montenegro receives most of its assistance in the form of experts and to a lesser extent in the form of financial assistance and equipment (see *Table 14*⁵).

Table 14

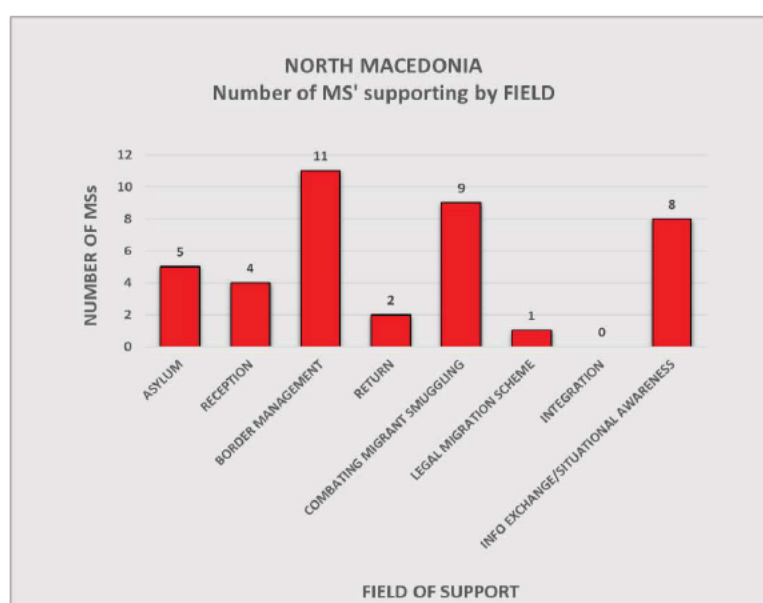


⁵ See the explanation in footnote 2.

- **North Macedonia**

A total of 13 Member States provide assistance to North Macedonia, which makes it one of the most interesting Western Balkans partners from a geostrategic point of view. As regards the areas of assistance, most assistance is provided in the area of border management (11), followed by combating migrant smuggling (9) and information exchange/situational awareness (8), and then asylum (5), reception (4), return (2) and legal migration (1). No assistance is provided in the area of integration (see *Table 15*).

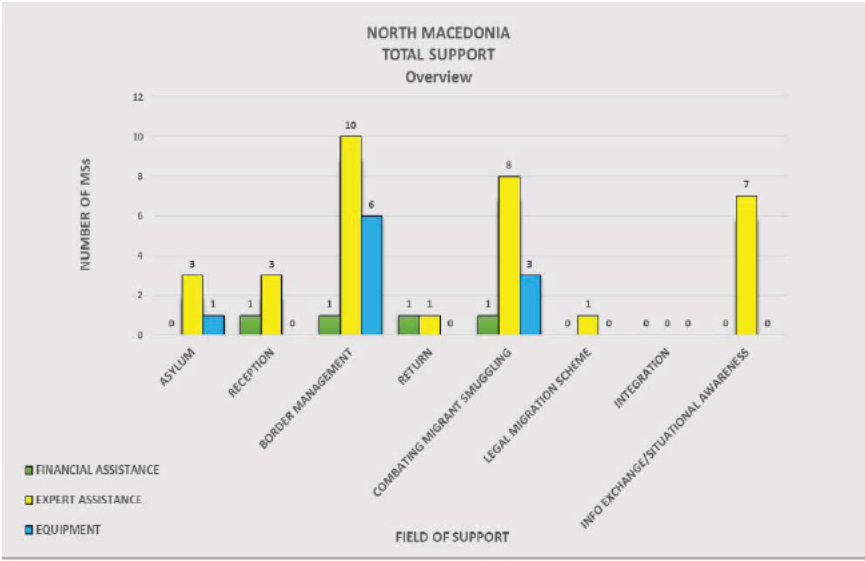
Table 15



As regards the type of assistance provided by Member States, most assistance is provided in the form of experts, and to a lesser extent in the forms of equipment and financial assistance (see *Table 16⁶*).

⁶ See the explanation in footnote 2.

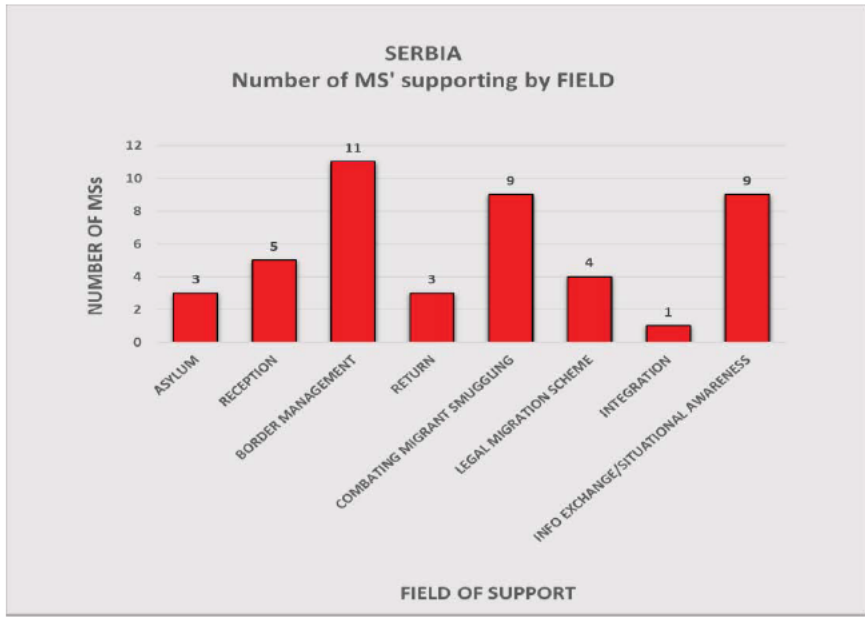
Table 16



• **Serbia**

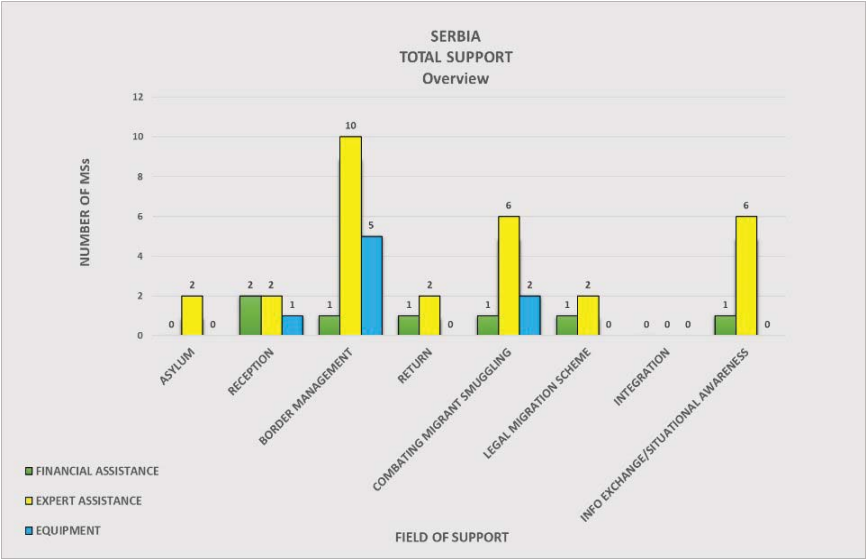
A total of 13 Member States provide assistance to Serbia. The highest number of Member States provide assistance in the areas of border management (11), combating migrant smuggling and information exchange/situational awareness (9). The lowest number relates to integration (1) (see Table 17).

Table 17



As regards the type of assistance, most assistance is provided in the form of experts, some in the form of financial assistance and to a lesser extent in the form of equipment. (see *Table 18*⁷).

Table 18



⁷ See the explanation in footnote 2.