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## **WORKING DOCUMENT**

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From:	Presidency
To:	MOCADDEM Roundtable

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N° prev. doc.:	WK 14538/2024 INIT
Subject:	Action file to follow up on the EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans – Implementation report

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In view of the Mocadem Roundtable of 19 June 2025, delegations will find attached the "Action file to follow up on the EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans – Implementation report".

## ACTION FILE TO FOLLOW UP ON THE EU ACTION PLAN ON THE WESTERN BALKANS

## – Implementation Report

Action	Lead actor(s)	Status	Way ahead incl. timeline	Comments incl. on results
<b>I. Strengthen border management along the routes</b>				
<b>1. Strengthen Frontex joint operations and deployments along the EU's external borders with Western Balkan partners based on the existing Frontex Status Agreements.</b>  <b>Launch and swiftly conclude the negotiations of the revised Frontex Status Agreements with Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, enabling Frontex joint operations and deployments along the borders between WB partners</b>	Frontex, Commission, MS	<p>Status agreements based on current EBCG Regulation in force in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia and provisionally applicable in Bosnia and Herzegovina (from 11 June 2025).</p> <p>Frontex Joint Operations in place (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina without executive powers, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia),</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [COM] Bosnia and Herzegovina: Signature of the Status Agreement (11 June 2025); finalisation of operational plan (Frontex-BiH Border Police) tentatively August 2025 .</li> <li>- [Frontex] Based on the mandate and subject to host countries' request, swiftly launch joint operations, especially along the borders between Western Balkan partners, in line with the new Status Agreements. Provide WB partners with technical, operational and other kinds of relevant support. Timeline: Ongoing</li> <li>- [MS] Provide necessary personnel and resources to ensure the availability of EU assets, notably in Frontex joint operations.</li> </ul>	[COM] Overall, there are approximately 500 border and coast guards deployed by Frontex in the region under status agreements and working arrangements.

Action	Lead actor(s)	Status	Way ahead incl. timeline	Comments incl. on results
			<p>Timeline: ongoing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [MS] Continue and explore new possibilities for providing bilateral support to WB partners.</li> </ul> <p>Timeline: Ongoing</p>	
<b>2. Ensure the effective implementation of the adopted IPA programme to strengthen border management capacities</b>	Commission, Frontex	<p>Currently ongoing regional programmes on border management in the Western Balkans:</p> <p>1. IPA 2021 regional support to border security funded by the EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III – EUR 7 million, implemented by Frontex: contribute to increased implementation by the Western Balkan partners of EU-compliant border security measures by capacitating partners to operationalise and implement Frontex Status Agreements (outcome 1); improving knowledge and better equipping Western Balkan partners to align their Integrated Border</p>	<p>Main activities under Frontex-led project in 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (Outcome 1): beneficiaries appointed representatives in the IBM Working Group (WG) and 12 female border police guards to establish the Network of Women in Western Balkan border police agencies. Training for IBM WG is in progress. The first IBM WG meeting, focused on EIBM components of quality control and Fundamental Rights and took place on 10-11 April 2024 in Warsaw, Poland. The second meeting, held on 26-28 November in Budva, Montenegro, included sessions on EU crisis management policies and an EIBM crisis simulation. Additionally, IBM Working Group members attended two trainings on the EIBM concept, held on 21-23</li> </ul>	<p><i>More in general, IPA 2023 Individual measure to strengthen migration management capacities in the Western Balkans for 2023 – EUR 54 million + EUR 6 million additional support to the regional anti-smuggling programme.</i></p> <p><i>Moreover, IPA 2024 support (EUR 60 million) adopted. Includes EUR 13 million for returns (one part is currently being implemented by IOM through a contribution agreement signed in December 2024 and one will be implemented by EU MS, with NL in the lead contracting ongoing) and EUR 47 million for bilateral assistance in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Montenegro.</i></p>

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		<p>Management (IBM) strategies with EU IBM standards (outcome 2); and increasing Western Balkan partners' expertise in setting up fully operational National Coordination Centres (NCCs), interoperable with the EUROSUR framework (outcome 3)</p> <p>2. IPA 2022 Individual measure under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) to strengthen border management capacities in favour of the Western Balkans for 2022 – EUR 39.2 million (notably for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo* and Serbia).</p> <p>3. IPA 2023 Individual measure to strengthen migration management capacities in the Western Balkans for 2023 – EUR 54 million.</p>	<p>May and 22-24 October 2024, in Warsaw, Poland. The first meeting of the women in border police was held on 8-9 April 2024 in Warsaw, Poland and the second meeting co-organised with CEPOL, in the form of a leadership and management training for women in law enforcement, was held on 9-12 December in Budapest, Hungary.</p> <p>- (Outcome 2): Four workshops on the Frontex-INTERPOL Electronic Library Document System (FIELDS) were conducted. The FIELDS workshops on Quick Check Cards creation and validation took place on 12-16 February 2024 in Slovenia, on 8-12 April in Poland, on 8-12 July in Hungary, and on 9-13 September in Italy, with the involvement of 8 experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. 146 border guards from Western Balkan partners were trained on border checks,</p>	

\* 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.

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			<p>border surveillance, screening and debriefing, and fundamental rights. These training sessions started in March and continued until November, with around 25 participants attending each month. A tender for English language training for border guards in the Western Balkans was published by end 2024 for participation in 2025.</p> <p>- (Outcome 3): 6/6 Fact Finding Missions successfully completed. 2 study visits to NCC Romania and Slovakia done. 24 border guards participated in these study visits. Preparatory work for the implementation of the EUROSUR framework in the Western Balkans has started. Technical and legal consultations with the beneficiaries regarding equipment have been completed to date.</p> <p>Focus on enhancing situational awareness, especially at the airport BCPs in Sarajevo and Belgrade. Strengthening of border control and screening at the airports, especially Belgrade and Sarajevo.</p>	

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3. Review and potentially increase Frontex support to Member States at the EU external borders			Actions in the European Union	
4. Support financially Member States who bilaterally support Member States and Western Balkan partners in their border management activities			Actions in the European Union	
<b>II. Ensure swift asylum procedures and support reception capacity</b>				
5. Continue supporting Western Balkans partners in further strengthening and accelerating their asylum and registration procedures	EUAA, Commission, EUDEL, MS	Joint Roadmaps between EUAA and Western Balkans partners being updated and implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [COM] Montenegro: Second Roadmap 2025-2027 signed in March 2025.</li> <li>- Serbia: The second Roadmap has been extended until the next one is finalised. Technical discussions have been finalised on the third- Roadmap [REDACTED]</li> <li>- Albania: The second Roadmap (2024- 2027) was endorsed by the Albanian Interior Minister in October 2024.</li> </ul>	<p><i>EUAA supported the drafting of Montenegro's response and contingency plan in the context of mass inflow of persons fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Support for a revised contingency is foreseen under the new roadmap.</i></p> <p><i>Implementation of the IPA III Regional Programme "EU Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management Systems in the Western Balkans – Phase III" is ongoing.</i></p>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bosnia and Herzegovina: Second Roadmap for 2025-28 endorsed in January 2025.</li> <li>- North Macedonia: Third Roadmap 2025-2028 endorsed in January 2025.</li> <li>- Kosovo: Second Roadmap not yet finalised. The First Roadmap 2022-2024 has been extended to 2025. .</li> <li>- [COM] Regularly assess progress in the area of asylum procedures, with clear indicators, in the context of enlargement negotiations. Timeline: ongoing</li> <li>- [EUAA] Ensure implementation of the six EUAA Joint Roadmaps for cooperation, strengthening the asylum and reception systems in line with the Common European Asylum System and EU standards. Timeline: Ongoing</li> <li>- [MS] Based on available capacities, provide the EUAA with national experts and practitioners or help EUAA</li> </ul>	<p><i>Operational capacities have been strengthened by Western Balkan partners.</i></p> <p><i>Messaging from COM, EUDEL, MS continues towards addressing the still limited access to asylum procedure and increasing the quantity and quality of decisions for international protection, though progress has been made.</i></p>

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			organise exchange visits for Western Balkan partners to Member States. Cooperate with Western Balkan partners at a bilateral level on development of reception capacities. Timeline: Ongoing	
<b>6. Support the better management of reception capacity through targeted IPA actions</b>	Commission, EUAA	As part of the EU-funded regional programme "Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management Systems in the Western Balkans, Phase III", Frontex and EUAA have developed a common contingency planning methodology for non-EU countries, by adapting the relevant tools used for EU MS. The support to Western Balkan partners to develop or update the national contingency plans had been initiated, following the methodology. The contingency plan has been updated for Kosovo. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Western Balkan partners are getting support from Frontex/EUAA for their Contingency Plans.</li> <li>- [COM] Carry out targeted IPA actions to support accommodation for and basic needs of migrants and refugees. Timeline: Ongoing</li> <li>- [EUAA] Continue work on strengthening reception capacity in the Western Balkans, notably by delivering technical support both through the EUAA's in-house expertise, as well as with EU Member State experts and practitioners. Timeline: Ongoing</li> </ul>	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]



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		<p>██████ █ ███ ██████████</p> <p>Included in EUAA Joint Roadmaps with Western Balkan partners.</p> <p>Most reception centres in the region have been established thanks to IPA funds:</p> <p>Montenegro: two reception centres with a total capacity of 164 beds. A centre for unaccompanied children has 25 additional beds.</p> <p>Bosnia and Herzegovina: around 3000 places in four EU-funded temporary reception centres in the Una-Sana and Sarajevo cantons.</p> <p>Serbia: 11 reception /transit centres with a total capacity of 2800 places and additional 1500 places for short stay could be made available. This adds to 2 500 beds in asylum centres.</p>		<p><i>EU should further insist on Western Balkan partners establishing multi-purpose centres, reception and if needed detention facilities, especially at entry points, which is in line with UNHCR recommendations.</i></p> <p><i>Focus should also be put on strengthening of security in and around reception centres, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to prevent possible secondary movements or migrant smuggling activities.</i></p>

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		<p>Albania: around 600 beds in the total reception capacities (open centres), no separate facilities for unaccompanied minors.</p> <p>Kosovo: two reception centres with current capacities to host 350 persons. In collaboration with Frontex, EUAA completed the support to Kosovo in revising their Contingency Plan.</p>		
7. Ensure accurate registration in Eurodac			Actions in the European Union	
8. Set up pilot projects in interested Member States for fast asylum procedures in line with the existing acquis			Actions in the European Union	
9. Swiftly implement the roadmap on better implementation of Dublin transfers			Actions in the European Union	
10. Step up the comprehensive			Actions in the European Union	

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migration management team in Greece, consider other MS				
<b>III. Fighting migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings</b>				<i>This heading covers actions to tackle both migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.</i>
<b>11. Make full use of the newly established Europol Operational Task Force. Also enhance participation of all Western Balkan partners in the EMPACT cycle 2022-2025 and its Operational Action Plan (OAP) to fight against criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.</b>  <b>Enhance participation of all Western Balkan partners in the EMPACT cycle 2022-2025 and its</b>	Europol, Commission, MS	<p>Implementation is ongoing.</p> <p>All Western Balkan partners have posted a Liaison Officer at Europol Headquarters. Albania deployed a second one, while Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina deployed their first one in 2023.</p> <p>All Western Balkan partners have nominated a National EMPACT Coordinator (NEC) – to facilitate participation in EMPACT actions. All have stepped-up their participation in EMPACT activities, including for some of them as leaders or co-leaders of operational actions for several of them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [Europol] Together with Western Balkan partners, ensure the effective implementation of operational agreements and working arrangements. Timeline: Ongoing</li> <li>- [Europol] Continue the participation of liaison officers from Western Balkan partners deployed at Europol in the Joint Liaison Task Force on Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking of Human Beings. Timeline: Ongoing</li> <li>- [Europol] Provide support through the Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC) in the cases of joint migrant smuggling and financial investigations in order to trace, seize and recover criminal assets.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Need for continuous enhanced engagement with Europol Taskforces, EMPACT, Joint Investigation Teams and exchange of SIENA messages.</i></p> <p><i>[COM] The 12th INTERPOL Global Conference on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling for Expert Groups took place between 28-30 October 2024, in Belgrade, Serbia, with support from EU4FAST.</i></p> <p><i>The last technical meeting of Task Force Western Balkan under the leadership of Austria as action leader for the dedicated EMPACT action was held in Sarajevo, 15-18 October 2024. Agenda includes discussions on the Rapid Response Mechanism, the launch of a new OTF focusing on Afghan criminal networks, Intelligence Interviews in cooperation AT/BG in the framework of the Schengen Regional Cooperation Initiative, Social Media</i></p>

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<b>Operational Action Plan</b>		<p>Increased exchanges of information via SIENA and participation in an increased number of Joint Investigation Teams.</p> <p>Active participation of Western Balkan partners, including deployment of police officers, in Operational Task forces”, both dedicated to tackling migrant smugglers and in Joint Action Days.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [MS] Cooperate with relevant bodies in the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human being, notably through the exchange of staff and field missions, as well as by implementing related EU funded projects. Timeline: Ongoing</li> <li>- Encourage migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings investigations to systematically include financial investigations to trace, seize and recover criminal assets.</li> <li>- Further support to Western Balkan partners will be provided through the new Common Operational Partnership call for projects launched by the Commission in 2024 under the Internal Security Fund, with an envelope of EUR 12 million. New projects are currently being prepared.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Monitoring, ID Fraud and Visa Abuse as well as tackling illicit financial flows.</i></p> <p><i>The Prague Process Workshop on Border Surveillance (Belgrade, 8–9 April 2025) brought together representatives of the border management authorities to discuss best practices, challenges, and recent policy developments in border management and surveillance. The event served as a platform for sharing experiences and fostering cooperation on preventing irregular migration and combating migrant smuggling.</i></p> <p><i>Examples of successful counter-smuggling operations in the region:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Under the umbrella of EMPACT – the Joint Action Days Southeast Europe (JAD SEE) coordinated from Sarajevo – BiH (December 2024). 796 individuals were arrested, 316 investigations initiated, and 442 weapons seized as a result of the massive operation, which involved 31 109 officers.</i></li> <li>- <i>Under the auspices of an Europol Operational Task Force (Nov.</i></li> </ul>

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				2024), an EU-wide operation, led by Germany, resulted in the takedown of a large criminal network involved in migrant smuggling, weapons trafficking and document fraud. The investigation was conducted within the framework of a Europol Operational Taskforce, made up of authorities from Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, the United Kingdom and other European countries. Over 450 officers were deployed on the ground during the action day. It led to 25 arrests in total, 3 high-value targets arrested, 31 locations searched across 7 countries, and seizures of vehicles, electronic equipment and cash.
<b>12. Ensure the quick and effective implementation of the recently adopted IPA regional anti-smuggling programme</b>	Commission	Implementation is ongoing, including outreach to beneficiaries.  Regional Anti-Smuggling Operational Partnership with Western Balkan partners launched at the EU-Western Balkans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [COM] 18 October 2023 - 18 October 2024 - anti-trafficking media campaign in the form of a TV spot raising awareness against Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) in Kosovo.</li> <li>- Further support to EMPACT activities with a focus on</li> </ul>	[COM] Regional IPA project on anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking (EU4FAST) signed in June 2023, and being rolled-out in all Western Balkan partners. An addendum to EU4FAST worth EUR 6 million was signed in December 2024.

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		<p>Justice and Home Affairs ministerial 3-4 Nov 2022.</p> <p>Immigration Liaison Officers' Network Regional meeting in Tirana on 28-29 March 2023 further operationalised the Partnership by strengthening links among practitioners from MS and Western Balkan partners.</p> <p>Regional IPA project (EUR 36 M) on anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking signed in June 2023, and being rolled-out in all Western Balkan partners.</p> <p>Participation at the High-Level International Conference on a Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling held on 28 November 2023. All joined the Call for a Global Alliance.</p>	<p>migrant smuggling and THB priorities, but also high-risk criminal networks;</p> <p>- Montenegro: the first International Operations Room in the region was opened on 3 April 2025, to be followed by the other partners in the region. An updated needs assessment on interoperability will be planned in May 2025 after the start of activities of the International Operational Room.</p>	<p><i>Participation at Ministerial level from all Western Balkan partners</i></p> <p><i>[REDACTED] at the High-Level International Conference on a Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling held on 28 November 2023. All joined the Call for a Global Alliance.</i></p> <p><i>29 September - 4 October 2024 EU4FAST supported INTERPOL's largest ever operation against trafficking in human beings and smuggling "Liberterra II", which took place simultaneously in 116 countries and territories. Several criminal groups were tackled: a total of 2,517 arrests were made during the action week – 850 of which were specifically on human trafficking or migrant smuggling charges; 3,222 potential victims of human trafficking were rescued; 17,793 irregular migrants were identified.</i></p> <p><i>On 9-10 December 2024, the 1st Regional Conference of Criminal Forensic Institutes of the Western Balkans was held in Tirana. The Conference aimed to provide an opportunity for 25 participants from forensic institutions including their</i></p>

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				<p><i>heads to come together and exchange knowledge. The primary objective was to foster regional cooperation, sharing best practices, and discuss challenges in the field of forensics, facial recognition systems and identity recognition considering the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.</i></p> <p><i>During 2024, EU4FAST supported the finalisation of the Rule of Law Assessment Report for the Western Balkan partners</i></p> <p><i>Support of Western Balkan participation (EU4FAST):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>March 2025: Debriefing Joint Action Day Southeast Europe (JAD SEE) 2024 at Europol HQ and preparatory meeting JAD Global Chain 2025 at Europol HQ</i></li> <li>- <i>April 2025: Preparatory meeting JAD Danube 10 2025 at Frontex HQ.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Bilateral cooperation AT/BG in the framework of the Schengen Regional Cooperation Initiative on combatting human smuggling; Joint intelligence interviews in close cooperation with FRONTEX and Europol; The goal is to leverage each</i></p>

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				<p><i>other's experience and insights to create a robust and targeted operational framework; start in the second quarter of 2025.</i></p> <p><i>Implementation (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2025) of the AMIF-funded information and awareness campaign 'Pathways EMR-WBR - A dynamic platform for changing irregular migration behaviour along the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans routes' with a budget of EUR 1.4 million, implemented by Seefar (BE, NGO) with META (IT, NGO), and the Austrian and German authorities. The project supported social media campaigns, an online platform and providing counselling to frontline workers. Geographically, the project focused on Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Türkiye, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.</i></p>
<b>13. Implementation of the Toolbox addressing the use of commercial means of transport to facilitate irregular migration to the EU</b>			<p>Actions in the European Union and with Western Balkan partners, as well as in other third countries.</p> <p>Targeted use of measures from the Toolbox on Transport Operators</p> <p>Timeline: Ongoing</p>	





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		<p>return operations to third -countries (including Türkiye, Pakistan, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] BiH has concluded readmission agreements / arrangements with Türkiye and Pakistan and is currently negotiating Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) with Bangladesh. BiH has also an agreement with Türkiye for facilitated and accelerated transit procedures regarding readmission operations.</p> <p>The EU-funded pilot project for forced returns with Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUR 500 000) has been extended to Serbia with a similar budget (contracted by Serbia).</p> <p>As part of the regional protection-sensitive migration management programme project, Frontex has increased its support, with training of</p>	<p>own bilateral readmission agreements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Frontex to continue to support the Western Balkan partners in boosting their integrated return management systems, inter alia with aligning national return case management systems with EU RECAMAS model for non-EU countries, return-related profiles training, sharing knowledge and good practices on cooperation with countries of origin, developing SOPs in the area of forced returns.</li> <li>- New regional IPA programme to cover both voluntary and non-voluntary returns for a total of EUR 13 million under process of finalisation (adopted by IPA Committee 22 March 2024). One part is implemented by IOM and one will be implemented by a consortium of EU MS led by NL.</li> <li>- Commission, Frontex and MS to continue coordinating efforts and messaging to Western Balkan partners on returns.</li> </ul>	

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		<p>return escort officers, gap assessment of return case management systems, workshops with MS experts dedicated to engaging with specific countries of origin. For example, on January 24-25 2024 Frontex organised a workshop for all Western Balkan partners regarding cooperation with countries of origin with a focus on Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco, and Algeria. A follow-up workshop on India, Egypt and Iraq is planned for January 2025.</p> <p>A NL Seconded National Expert has been deployed at EU Delegation to Serbia as of April 2024 to provide support to Serbian authorities on returns.</p> <p>New regional IPA programme to cover both voluntary and non-voluntary returns. for a total of EUR 13 million was adopted in March 2024 by IPA Committee. A</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ongoing: Western Balkan Return Mechanism (NLD with, ICMPD as implementing partner): Provide capacity building to return of third-country nationals from WB to their countries of origin</li> </ul>	

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		<p>contract was signed with IOM (EUR 8 million) and a second one is being contracted with EU MS (EUR 5 million, NL in the lead)</p> <p>Follow up Workshop for Western Balkan partner countries to be organised in January 2025 addressing cooperation with IRQ, IND and EGY, under the IPA III Protection-sensitive Migration Management project.</p> <p>Technical assistance mission to Serbia to strengthen the 'integrated return management system' by developing or updating the national 'standard operating procedures' (SOPs) with primary focus on forced return operations took place between 12-15 November 2024. It resulted in a mission report that was shared with the MoI on 20 December 2024. The</p>		

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		report included an extensive section of proposed follow-up actions. Further actions in relation to the mission and the report will be carried out in 2025.		
<b>15. Strengthen the operational capacities of the Western Balkan partners to carry out returns</b>  <b>(See actions under point 14)</b>	Commission, Frontex, MS	<p>Implementation is ongoing.</p> <p>As noted under previous point, a new regional programme on returns, worth EUR 13 million, was adopted by IPA Committee in March 2024. Two components: i) EUR 8 million allocated to IOM. Implementation started in January 2025; ii) MS component of EUR 5 million, for which contracting is ongoing (NL to lead implementation).</p> <p>March 2023: Commission organised an in-depth session on return acquis with Serbia, as offered during Senior Officials Mission to Belgrade in December 2022.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [Frontex] Provide support, together with IOM, to WB partners for conducting returns and developing return management systems under the IPA III regional protection-sensitive migration management programme, with short term deployments of experts. Timeline: Ongoing</li> <li>- [COM, EEAS] Continue financial support to the different components of return and readmission, including voluntary and non-voluntary returns.</li> <li>- [COM, Frontex, MS] Support partners in making full use of the Joint Coordination Platform (hosted by AT) to inter alia foster exchanges of best practices and strengthen</li> </ul>	

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			<p>cooperation on return at operational level. Timeline: Ongoing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthening Migration Management, Asylum and Return Processes in the Western Balkans: AMIF-funded project, implemented by Hilfswerk International; supported by the JCP - objective: practical support for WB institutions in the area of return, border management and asylum (legislation, information exchange, best practices, workshops, study visits).</li> </ul>	
<b>16. Convene Joint Readmission Committees with Western Balkan partners bilaterally for effective implementation of the EU Readmission Agreements</b>	Commission, MS	<p>Yearly Joint Readmission Committees take place with the Western Balkan partners (except Kosovo), as per the Readmission agreements signed with the Western Balkan partners.</p> <p>EU-Albania Joint Readmission Committee on 5 October 2023.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [COM] Hold Joint Readmission Committees with Western Balkan partners upon request of either party.</li> <li>- Bosnia and Herzegovina: 10<sup>th</sup> JRC took place on 28 April 2025 North Macedonia and Albania: Next Joint Readmission Committee being planned for Q3 /2025 (no date yet).</li> </ul>	

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		EU-Serbia Joint Readmission Committee on 15 March 2024. Issue with the implementation of the third country national clause still present but at smaller scale than in late 2022.  EU - Montenegro Joint Readmission Committee took place on 19 April 2024, with no major issues detected.		
<b>V. Achieving the alignment of visa policy</b>				
<b>17. Swiftly align visa policy with the EU</b>	[Western Balkan partners]	Steps taken by Western Balkan partners since October 2022:  <b>Albania:</b> did not renew the seasonal visa exemptions [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] The list still contains 11 cases of non-alignment [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	Political outreach from Commissioners and Commission senior officials to Western Balkan Ministers to continue in 2025.  Western Balkan partners should be encouraged to take further steps in all contacts and at all levels. This was done last at political level by Commissioner Johansson at the EU-WB Ministerial Forum on JHA matters held in Budva on 28-29 October 2024 and followed up at the EU-Western Balkans JHA Senior Officials Meeting on 8 April 2025 in Brussels.	<i>Western Balkan partners have taken steps since October 2022 to align their visa policy with third countries that were causing most issues in terms of irregular arrivals to the EU. However, most Western Balkan partners still have a visa free regime with third countries causing migratory or security risks such as [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] Visa-free schemes with Türkiye have the most significant impact on irregular movements to the EU.</i>

Action	Lead actor(s)	Status	Way ahead incl. timeline	Comments incl. on results
		<p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p><b>Bosnia and Herzegovina:</b> ended visa free regime for [REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p><b>Montenegro:</b> reinstated visa requirements for [REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED] In February 2025, Montenegro put [REDACTED] back on its seasonal exemption list. The list therefore contains 13 cases of non-alignment</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	<p>Concrete commitments have been made by all Western Balkans to further align with the EU list of visa-required third countries and to introduce additional security measures to better screen visa-free arrivals as part of their Reform Agendas under the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans [REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	



Action	Lead actor(s)	Status	Way ahead incl. timeline	Comments incl. on results
		<p> ██████████  ██████████  ██████ ██████████  ██████████  ██████████  ██████████  ██████████ Montenegro has committed to removing more countries that are on the EU list of visa-required countries by end 2025, following an evaluation to be conducted after the summer season, and to adopt a Visa Policy Alignment Plan. </p> <p> <b>North Macedonia:</b>  reinstated visa requirements for ██████████  The decision to temporarily allow nationals from ██████████ to enter without a visa expired and was not extended. ██████████  ██████████ </p> <p> <b>Serbia:</b> reinstated visa requirements for ██████████  ██████████ ██████████  ██████████ ██████████  ██████████ ██████████  ██████ ██████████ adopted a </p>		

LIMITE

Action	Lead actor(s)	Status	Way ahead incl. timeline	Comments incl. on results
		<p>visa harmonisation plan in November 2023 committing to further align only 6 months or 1 year prior to Serbia's EU accession. Discussed with [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to strengthen controls before departure. The list still contains 12 cases of non-[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]</p> <p><b>Kosovo:</b> benefits from visa-free to the EU since 1 January 2024. In August 2024, Kosovo removed [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from its visa free list. Kosovo still has 18 countries on its visa free list which are visa-required in the EU [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]</p>		
<b>18. Continue outreach and closely monitor operational developments on the ground as well</b>	Commission, EEAS, MS	<p>Outreach and monitoring are ongoing.</p> <p>Overall commitment to visa alignment expressed by all Western Balkan</p>	- [COM, MS] Intensify high level contacts and raise visa alignment in all relevant contacts with Western Balkan partners, with a view to full	<i>Continue monitoring legislative and operational developments on visa alignment, including via Eighth Visa Suspension Mechanism Report, to be adopted in 2025.</i>

Action	Lead actor(s)	Status	Way ahead incl. timeline	Comments incl. on results
as legislative actions by Western Balkans partners, including actions towards visa alignment		<p>partners through the joint statements endorsed at the yearly EU-Western Balkans Justice and Home Affairs ministerial forum held since 2022. Visa policy alignment included among the Reform Agenda steps under the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans.</p> <p>The Brussels Declaration endorsed at the EU-Western Balkans Summit of 18 December 2024 welcomed the progress made on alignment with EU visa policy by several Western Balkan partners and called for further alignment.</p> <p>Frequent outreach since Summer 2022 to all Western Balkan partners both at Commissioner's as well as at Senior Officials' level.</p>	<p>alignment, encouraging concrete timeframes in particular on prioritized third countries. <u>Timeline: Ongoing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to encourage Serbia to adopt further decisions in visa policy alignment in the coming months, in addition to the countries it has already removed from its visa-free list.</li> <li>- Western Balkan partners should be requested to strengthen cooperation with relevant airlines to increase vigilance in the application of the requirements for travelling to this region to help to prevent the abuse of visa free regimes, in particular for [REDACTED]</li> <li>- [COM, MS] Support and coordinate with WB partners and MS outreach towards relevant airlines regarding requirements for travel to the Western Balkans. Timeline: Ongoing</li> </ul>	<i>Political outreach by Home Affairs Commissioner to Western Balkan Ministers to continue in 2025,</i>
<b>19. In the context of the visa suspension mechanism and in</b>	Commission	Ongoing The Commission has proposed a general	The proposal to review the visa suspension mechanism should be adopted by the co-legislators in the	

Action	Lead actor(s)	Status	Way ahead incl. timeline	Comments incl. on results
accordance with Article 8 of the Visa Regulation, ensure continuous monitoring and assessment of the action of the partners in the region towards visa alignment		<p>revision of the visa suspension mechanism to ensure that it is fully applicable inter alia in severe situations of non-alignment of visa policy.</p> <p>Visa alignment was one of the three main recommendations of the Seventh Visa Suspension Mechanism Report published in December 2024 for all Western Balkan partners.</p>	<p>coming months. Encourage Western Balkan partners to strengthen measures to counter irregular migration including through the Toolbox on transport operators and control at airports, in particular until the revised visa suspension mechanism is in force.</p> <p>Monitoring and assessment of the action of the partners on visa alignment in the Eighth Visa Suspension Mechanism Report, to be adopted by the end of 2025.</p>	
<b>20. Issue joint demarches and coordinate messages by the EU delegations and Member State embassies in all Western Balkans partners as well as key countries of origin and transit</b>	EEAS, Commission, MS	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Continue monitoring and assessment of the action of the partners towards visa alignment in the Eighth Visa Suspension Mechanism Report, to be adopted in 2025.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [EEAS/EUDEL/COM] Contacts and coordination to be initiated by concerned EUDEL. Timeline: Ongoing</li> <li>- EEAS] Address the visa policy alignment issue regularly in HoMs' meetings with relevant partners' authorities. Timeline: Ongoing</li> <li>- [MS] Intensify high-level contacts, coordinate messages and participate in joint demarches. Timeline: Ongoing</li> </ul>	<i>Operational measures are discussed with all Western Balkan partners aiming at better screening visa free arrivals to the region, until full alignment. Pending this, it is important that Western Balkan authorities conduct reinforced checks on visa free travellers.</i>

Action	Lead actor(s)	Status	Way ahead incl. timeline	Comments incl. on results
			- [MS] Regularly participate in HoMs' meetings with relevant partners' authorities. Timeline: Ongoing	

## ANNEX I - Member States actions

- *Description of the action with the following details (content of the action – indication of the link to the Action file objectives, overall budget, timeframe, key implementors)*

Action	Objective	Budget	Timeframe
<i>Title of the action</i>	<i>Link to the Action file objectives</i>	<i>Indicative budget</i>	<i>Foreseen timetable</i>
DK  Support to all six Western Balkans partners in enhancing border management through a regional capacity building facility on integrated border management (WBIBM).	Action 1  Strengthen Frontex joint operations and deployments along the EU's external borders with Western Balkan partners based on the existing Frontex Status Agreements.  Launch and swiftly conclude the negotiations of the revised Frontex Status Agreements with Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, enabling Frontex joint operations and deployments along the borders between WB partners	EUR 5 million  Implemented by IOM.	2021-2024 (completed)
DK  Support to all six partners in the Western Balkans on enhancing regional cooperation and coordination in countering smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings.	Action 11  Make full use of the newly established Europol Operational Task Force. Also enhance participation of all Western Balkan partners in the EMPACT cycle 2022-2025 and its Operational Action Plan (OAP) to fight against criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.	EUR 2 million  Implemented by IOM.	2021 until 30 June 2025

Action	Objective	Budget	Timeframe
	Enhance participation of all Western Balkan partners in the EMPACT cycle 2022-2025 and its Operational Action Plan		
<p>DK</p> <p>Support to all six partners in the Western Balkans on enhancing national migration management and readmission systems through a regional capacity building facility on readmission (WBCAP).</p> <p>The project also supports all six partners in the Western Balkans on return and sustainable reintegration of migrants from third countries.</p>	<p>Action 14</p> <p>Increase EU action to step up returns from Western Balkan partners</p>	<p>EUR 5 million for WBCAP and EUR 2 million for return and sustainable reintegration</p> <p>Implemented by IOM</p>	2021-2024 and 2022-2024
<p>NL</p> <p>Western Balkan Return Mechanism:</p>	<p>Action 14</p> <p>Increase EU action to step up returns from Western Balkan partners</p>	<p>EUR 1 million</p> <p>Implemented with ICMPD with practical</p>	2024-2025

Action	Objective	Budget	Timeframe
Support to all six WB countries to build return systems embedded in their national migration management legal and operational framework. In particular, the programme focuses on the partner countries' engagement with third-country authorities with the view of identification and obtaining Emergency Travel Documents necessary for carrying out returns (including forced returns).	Action 15 Strengthen the operational capacities of the Western Balkan partners to carry out returns	support from other Member States.	
SE:  MPF project: 'Strengthening the regional cooperation on migration management between Western Balkans and neighbouring EU Member States in accordance with EU	Action 5  Continue supporting Western Balkans partners in further strengthening and accelerating their asylum and registration procedures	EUR 2 million	2024-2026



Action	Objective	Budget	Timeframe
Acquis and international standards – MIRCO'			
SE:  Support to Visa Capacity Building in Bosnia and Herzegovina (VCBB), MPF project to harmonize visa legislation and visa-related policies in accordance with EU Visa-code and Schengen (MEUR 1,2, 2024-26).	Action 18  Continue outreach and closely monitor operational developments on the ground as well as legislative actions by Western Balkans partners, including actions towards visa alignment	EUR 1,2 million	2024-2026

## **ANNEX II – Common messages to the Western Balkan partners**

### **[General support]**

- Welcome the dynamic and recall the long-standing and close partnership between the EU and Western Balkan partners and express the EU's desire to continue and deepen this mutually beneficial cooperation, built around shared priorities.
- Express the commitment to maintain and further strengthen the EU-Western Balkan relations in line with the EU's enlargement policy.
- Emphasise the EU's political commitment to strengthening its relationship with the entire Western Balkan region, including in the Home Affairs area, and particularly with regard to border management, asylum and reception, return and readmission, the fight against smuggling and visa policy alignment, in line with the EU Action Plan on migration for the Western Balkans.

### **[Socio-economic support]**

- Highlight the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. The European Commission has unveiled a substantial EUR 3.2 billion investment package to support transport, digital, climate and energy connectivity projects in the Western Balkans. The projects are designed to bring tangible benefits to all six partners in the region.
- Point out that the Economic and Investment Plan is set to mobilise up to EUR 30 billion of investments. The Plan will help close the development gap between the European Union and the region and support the post-pandemic economic recovery.
- Underline that the EU is providing humanitarian and development assistance to many of the key countries of origin from which migrants usually flow to the Western Balkans as well as to persons displaced from Syria and Afghanistan to neighbouring countries.
- Underline EU support to ensure that guarantees and protection will be provided to vulnerable groups of people in transit countries.

### **[Priorities in the field of migration management]**

- The EU remains committed to provide capacity building, with the aim of Western Balkan partners taking full ownership of their asylum and reception systems, ensuring adequate hosting capacity of migrants and asylum seekers. In the meantime, the EU is committed to continue providing material, technical, financial and operational assistance to ensure that the asylum and reception systems of Western Balkan partners are able to manage increased migration flows, while ensuring democratic values, respect for human rights and the rule of law.
- Emphasise the great importance to align visa policies in the region with the EU visa policy and ensure the implementation of commitments by Western Balkan partners in this regard. The EU is pleased that several Western Balkan partners made further concrete commitments to

align with the EU list of visa-required countries as part of their Reform Agenda under the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. We are also pleased that some of them already delivered on these commitments.

- Full alignment with the EU list of visa-required third countries should remain the ultimate objective. It would be a strong positive signal in the Western Balkan partners accession process. It is also important that – until full alignment – Western Balkan partner authorities conduct reinforced checks on visa-free travellers. Outreach on this matter will continue. [REDACTED] will continue to raise it during his follow-up visits to the region on the implementation of the EU Action Plan (next visits: combined visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia on 8-10 July 2025).
- Stress the importance of accurate migration situational awareness and timely exchange of information.
- Underline the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to migration governance, which entails tackling the root causes of irregular migration, combating migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons, ensuring dignified and sustainable return and reintegration, and other aspects of migration and mobility.
- Highlight the importance of awareness-raising and information campaigns which draw migrants' attention to the opportunities, risks and measures undertaken.
- Promote the increased joint operational efforts and coordination between EU Member States, Western Balkan partners and countries of origin to disrupt smuggling networks.
- Emphasise the regional EU-funded 'Anti-Smuggling Operational Partnership' that was launched to strengthen cooperation through joint investigations, stronger exchange of information, joint training for law enforcement and the judiciary and capacity building. The Operational Partnership will build on several ongoing initiatives, and the operational activities under EMPACT.
- Thank the Western Balkan partners for their support on the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling and encourage them to pursue their efforts.
- Highlight that the implementation of the regional anti-smuggling and trafficking action for the Western Balkans worth EUR 36 million is ongoing (since June 2023), with the objective of strengthening cooperation on police operations, investigations and prosecutions.

#### **[Border management]**

- Emphasise the increased EU support for border management in the Western Balkans.
- Recall the commitment to enhance operational cooperation in areas relating to security and counterterrorism, including the capacity to prevent and fight trans-national organised crime such as migrant smuggling, and human trafficking including child trafficking.

- Highlight the need to improve the coordination and implementation of planned measures based on the European Integrated Border Management (EIBM).
- Highlight that the Commission provides substantial support to Western Balkan partners on border management, including through an assistance package worth EUR 39 million under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III), which focuses on the provision of specialised equipment and the operationalisation of migration facilities. A EUR 7 million project implemented by Frontex is also under implementation to support the alignment and integration of Western Balkan partners into EU tools, practices and mechanisms in the area of border management
- Further insist that Western Balkan partners improve management of arrivals at airports, to mitigate consequences of visa free regimes.
- The increased support of Frontex - with currently nearly 500 standing corps officers deployed throughout the Western Balkans– has been essential to improve border management and deter irregular migration through the Western Balkan route over the past years.

#### **[Return and readmission]**

- The EU and EU Member States are committed to create a holistic approach to return management and cooperation on readmissions, including sustainable support for reintegration in countries of origin.
- Underline that EU and Western Balkan partners agreed on the importance of returns and implementation of readmission agreements including the use, when relevant, of third- country nationals' clause. The Commission is pleased with the level of cooperation to implement the EU Readmission Agreements that are in place in the Western Balkans.
- Effective returns of persons to their countries of origin remain a difficult area, also for EU Member States. The Commission, Frontex and Member States have all substantially increased their engagement to help the Western Balkan partners achieve results.
- Highlight the importance of efficient implementation of readmission agreements with Western Balkan neighbouring countries, notably in the area of shortened/accelerated procedures (as per successful efforts made between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- It is important that we all pursue our efforts to ensure that all partners in the region develop functioning and sustainable return management mechanisms for both voluntary and non-voluntary return as part of their migration management systems. These efforts should continue as effective returns also act as an effective deterrent on irregular migration.
- Highlight that the EU and its Member States are supporting cooperation on return, readmission and sustainable reintegration between Western Balkan partners and the main countries of origin of irregular migrants.

- Underline that the EU is supporting the Western Balkan partners with assisted voluntary and non-voluntary returns to countries of origin, through the regional programme of EUR 13 million approved by the IPA Committee. It will be implemented by IOM and EU Member States.
- Highlight the importance of efforts under the Joint Coordination Platform (JCP), which aim to support and coordinate operational measures implemented in the Western Balkans region, in particular in the field of returns and readmissions.
- Underline the EU's readiness to assist in building capacities with knowledge and skills on different aspects of return, readmission and reintegration.
- The first results have been seen, in particular from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.