

# Strengthening Migration Management, Asylum And Return Processes In The Western Balkans

Highlighted Project Activities

Implementation period: 1 July 2023 - 31 May 2026



 Federal Ministry  
Republic of Austria  
Interior

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**The project: Strengthening Migration Management, Asylum and Return Processes in the Western Balkans**

This project is co-financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)  
and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior

# Introduction

From 1 July 2023 to 31 May 2026, Hilfswerk International, in partnership with the Joint Coordination Platform (JCP), implemented the project “Strengthening Migration Management, Asylum and Return Processes in the Western Balkans” with the aim of strengthening reception and protection capacities in Western Balkan countries, while respecting human rights and the EU acquis.

Through more than 90 events and activities - trainings, workshops, conferences, bilateral meetings and study visits - regional cooperation was strengthened with the participation of more than 550 government representatives and experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia.

The project contributed to the development of a more efficient and humane migration management system, while controlling irregular flows and establishing practices aligned with EU standards.

The project was funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Federal Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Austria.

# Conference on Strengthening Migration Management, Return and Asylum Procedures in the Western Balkans

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina | 14–16 May 2024

As the starting point for more intensive regional cooperation, the Sarajevo conference laid the foundations for the further development of a shared approach to migration.

On this occasion, Sarajevo brought together representatives of institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia, as well as international partners - the Joint Coordination Platform, EUAA, FRONTEX, IOM and MARRI - with the aim of strengthening a joint response to migration challenges.

The exchange of experiences covered return, asylum and migration management, with a focus on harmonising legislation with EU standards, strengthening capacities and cooperation with countries of origin.



As the organiser and initiator of the dialogue, Hilfswerk International once again confirmed its role as a reliable partner through this conference.

# Connected Workshops for Strengthening the Regional Response to Migration

Ohrid, North Macedonia | 10-14 June 2024

The workshops in Ohrid directly built on the conclusions from Sarajevo, focusing on their practical application.

The connected workshops once again brought together representatives of institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia, with the support of the Joint Coordination Platform, Hilfswerk International and international organisations.



On this occasion, the conclusions from Sarajevo were further developed into concrete proposals related to legislation, monitoring, standard operating procedures and the training of security officers.

The need for further strengthening inter-institutional cooperation was also emphasised, as well as the importance of better linking the strategic and operational levels.

# Media Narratives and Public Perception of Migrants in the Western Balkans

Tarcin, Bosnia and Herzegovina | 18-20 November 2024



In parallel with strengthening institutional capacities, the project also opened the question of how migration is represented in the public sphere.

One of several events focused on communicating migration-related topics brought together participants from different communication-related fields, opening a dialogue on the important role of the media in shaping public perceptions of migration.

During these activities, participants discussed media responsibility, the importance of accurate information and the need to avoid stereotypes and sensationalism in reporting. This work also resulted in the preparation of strategic documents and guidelines for communicating migration-related content in the public sphere.

Through this approach, migration was considered within an institutional, social and ethical framework, with attention to the proper way of communicating this important topic through the most relevant and widely used communication channels today.

# Operational Meetings on Return and Asylum

Budva, Montenegro | 4-7 December 2024

Following the strategic and communication-related topics, the focus shifted to the operational level of cooperation among institutions.

The meeting in Budva brought together representatives of institutions responsible for migration, return, asylum and border security, together with partners from Hilfswerk International and the Joint Coordination Platform.

The focus of the meeting was on operational challenges, including the coordination of police and security structures, as well as the improvement of reception and return procedures.



The meetings resulted in an emphasised need for joint procedures, more frequent exchange of information and further strengthening of regional cooperation.

# Review of Achievements in the Escort Training Programme

Budva, Montenegro | 3-5 February 2025



As part of the continued strengthening of operational capacities, special attention was given to professional development through training programmes.

This event brought together participants and partners involved in the development of the escort training programme within return procedures.

In addition to improving the knowledge and skills of participants, this exchange of experiences enabled an analysis of results achieved to date and the planning of further activities, with an emphasis on continuing the organisation of regular trainings aimed at improving coordination and developing professional standards in the field of escort.

# Operational Meetings on Return and Asylum

Skopje, North Macedonia | 3-7 March 2025



Strengthening the migration management system also requires a particular focus on the protection of human rights and the prevention of gender-based violence.

The event in North Macedonia brought together institutional representatives and experts working on the protection of members of vulnerable groups in the migration context, with a focus on strengthening the response to gender-based violence, exploitation and other risks that members of these categories often face.

A coordinated and sensitive approach within migration procedures, aligned with respect for human rights, was once again highlighted as crucial for further progress in this important area.

# Strengthening Return Capacities in the Western Balkan Countries – First Operational Meeting

Ljubljana, Slovenia | 18–20 March 2025



Continuing the work on operational issues, the project also placed special attention on improving return capacities.

The meeting in Ljubljana brought together representatives of institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovenia and Montenegro. With the support of Hilfswerk International and the Joint Coordination Platform, participants discussed important operational issues, including procedures for the identification of persons, cooperation with countries of origin and effective coordination models.

Events of this character sought to encourage and highlight the importance of linking operational work with strategic planning.

# Evaluation Conference of the Escort Training Programme

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina | 24-26 March 2026

The final conference of the escort training programme brought together participants, partners and institutional representatives involved in the development and implementation of this important segment of capacity strengthening in the field of return. Through a review of the previous period, exchange of experiences and joint assessment of results, it was confirmed that investment in professional knowledge and shared standards contributes to the long-term value of institutions and the system as a whole.

The presence of various relevant stakeholders in Sarajevo further emphasised that meaningful change occurs when field experience is connected with strategic planning and regional cooperation, which was also advanced through the implementation of this project activity.



# Practical Training in Video Production and Advertising - Workshop 1

Igman, Bosnia and Herzegovina | 15-17 April 2025

Alongside the strengthening of institutional processes, the project also developed capacities for quality public communication in the field of migration.

One of several practical trainings held for this purpose brought together participants with the aim of acquiring and improving skills in video production and content editing - activities that form part of the everyday work of communication and public relations sectors within relevant security institutions, agencies and services.

Through several days of practical work, the trainings developed skills needed for responsible and precise communication on migration, covering aspects of everyday communication as well as the equally important field of crisis communication.



# Impact of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum on Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina | 20-22 May 2025



In the context of European integration, special focus was placed on understanding the new policies and obligations facing institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The event on the impact of the EU Pact on Migration brought together representatives of the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Service for Foreigners' Affairs, the Border Police of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Directorate for European Integration, with the aim of jointly examining the legal and institutional implications of the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

During the event, the need for coordination and timely system adjustments was emphasised, with the aim of better understanding the necessary policies and essential practices expected in the period ahead.

## Study Visit to Austria by Representatives of the BiH Asylum Sector

Vienna, Austria | 13-16 October 2025

As a continuation of the learning and adaptation process, an exchange of experiences with European partners was also organised.

The study visit to Austria, organised within the project, provided institutional representatives with direct insight into European best practices and institutional solutions in the field of asylum, contributing to the strengthening and development of professional networks and learning through international cooperation.



## Training of Human Rights Monitors in Return Operations and Strengthening Oversight in Migration Procedures

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina | 1-5 December 2025



Strengthening oversight systems is a key step in ensuring responsible migration management.

The event held in Sarajevo brought together institutional representatives and experts involved in the development and oversight of return procedures, with a focus on strengthening the role of human rights monitors and transparency in the processes of institutional action.

# Meeting and Workshop on Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Migration Management

Becici, Montenegro | 15-18 December 2025

As the project activities came together as a whole, the focus returned to regional cooperation and long-term results.

The regional event in Montenegro brought together representatives of institutions and partner organisations with the aim of strengthening regional cooperation through the identification of shared challenges and the improvement of coordination between the strategic and operational levels.

This event once again emphasised the importance of continuous regional dialogue and mutual support, with the aim of improving the management of migration, asylum and return processes.



# Media Campaign “Steps of Change – On the Paths That Shape Safety”

As the final segment of the project, communication activities were brought together through a regional campaign.

Implemented within the project, this campaign highlighted the importance of a controlled, safe and human rights-oriented process of managing migration, asylum and return in the Western Balkans.



The aim of the campaign was to bring the real and secure aspects of migration closer to the public as a result of quality cooperation among regional security institutions responsible for migration and asylum issues.

By highlighting positive examples from practice, the campaign presented real stories of people in migration, contributing to the reduction of stereotypes, prejudice and generalisations about people on the move.



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