



Ministerial Conference

**SUSTAINABLE
MIGRATION
GOVERNANCE**
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Skopje, 15-16 November 2022

Skopje Declaration on Sustainable Migration Governance in the Western Balkans

We, the representatives of Western Balkans, gathered in Skopje on 15-16 of November 2022 at the Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Migration Governance in the Western Balkans co-hosted by North Macedonia and the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, in the context of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU:

- WELCOMING the objective of the Ministerial Conference to identify comprehensive, sustainable and solutions-oriented approaches to effectively manage migration in the Western Balkans;
- BUILDING on the expertise gained since 2015 responding to mixed migration flows in the Western Balkans, following the unprecedented mixed movements observed along the Eastern Mediterranean Route;
- ACKNOWLEDGING the progress achieved by the Western Balkans and EMPHASIZING the further needs in improving capacities to manage migration flows in accordance with EU and international standards, and in improving cooperation within the sub-region, with EU Member States, Western Balkan partners and countries of origin, to effectively tackle common challenges in relation to irregular migration;
- RECOGNIZING that mixed migration movements in the Western Balkans are a reality to be reckoned with for the foreseeable future, and that sustainable migration governance in the Western Balkans is inextricably linked to long-term development;
- RECALLING the conclusions of the EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Forums and other relevant Ministerial statements;
- TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION the European path of Western Balkans partners, the EU Enlargement Policy and the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum;
- WELCOMING the Ministerial Conference as a conducive cadre to take stock of the advancements and ways forward to further align with the EU acquis, especially Chapter 23 on Judiciary and fundamental rights, and Chapter 24 on Justice, freedom and security;
- REAFFIRMING the leadership of Western Balkans partners in addressing irregular migratory flows in a safe, humane and orderly manner;
- ACKNOWLEDGING the importance to collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies;

As regards the comprehensive, sustainable and solutions-oriented approaches discussed to effectively manage migration in the Western Balkans:



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COMMIT to further strengthen cooperation to address smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings, and:

- Take measures to adopt rights-based and victim-centered approach, in compliance with international and EU standards, notably to identify, protect and reintegrate victims of trafficking.
- Improve cooperation and coordination through threats assessments, route-based analysis and enhanced digital and community-based prevention strategies.
- Strengthen judicial cooperation to improve the effectiveness of prosecution and convictions of smuggling and trafficking in persons across the sub-region, as applicable.
- Enhance the efforts to align visa policy in line with the Western Balkans efforts on European path.

COMMIT to increase access to legal pathways for migrants in protracted transit situation in line with relevant competences, and:

- Increasingly adopt a comprehensive approach, as critical for cooperation to promote pathways to harness the benefits of migration for the development of the sub-region.
- Optimize the use of existing regulations to increase access to temporary or permanent legal pathways. Pathways include asylum, temporary residence for humanitarian reasons, return and readmission and legal migration schemes
- Foster social inclusion and individual integration pathways to protect the most vulnerable groups, in particular children, and uphold migrants' rights to education, work, housing and a dignified life.

COMMIT to work towards a holistic return management approach, and:

- Promote the understanding that return is an integral part of sustainable migration management;
- Improve return, readmission and reintegration practices through rights-based and process-driven systems and procedures.
- Maintain dialogue with countries of origin with the aim to have approaches and mechanisms to effectively implement return, readmission and reintegration programming.
- Advance readmission cooperation with countries of origin through more flexible arrangements, aligned with the context and needs of main countries of return and Western Balkan partners.
- Incorporate readmission cooperation into wider dialogue processes with countries of origin, to leverage the benefits of reintegration, increase circular labour migration and accelerate other areas of cooperation.

Adopted in Skopje, North Macedonia
November 16, 2022