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The Western Balkan countries are located on a mixed migration route, the so called Balkan Route, leading from Turkey, Greece over Western Balkans, onwards to other European Union countries. The importance of the Balkan Route in regard to mixed migration of third country nationals rose in the course of 2010 and continues being the major transit migration route towards the EU MSs, especially for migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan and North African countries. Among irregular migrants transiting the Western Balkan countries there is also a significant share of Separated Children and Unaccompanied Minors (UAMs). Furthermore, after the visa liberalisation agreements were signed between the EU and Western Balkan countries, there was a steep increase in the asylum applications of Western Balkan nationals lodged in the EU member states. There is a need for strengthened knowledge on the flows of irregular migrants in, from and through the Western Balkan countries, including flows of UAMs, in order to formulate corresponding policies and to ensure that sufficient resources and staffing to Border Services are allocated. Furthermore, as irregular migration is a regional and cross-regional phenomenon, there is a need to ensure proper coordination and information exchange between countries of origin, transit and destination.

The overall objective of this programme is to strengthen the knowledge base on irregular migration flows in, from and through the Western Balkans and to ensure cross-regional cooperation and coordination on the issue, including countries of origin, transit and destination.

The proposed activities will be grouped in two blocks leading to the following results:

1. Regional Research on Irregular Migration Flows in, from and through the Western Balkans

Analytical research on irregular migration flows in, from and through the Western Balkans will be conducted, including also a chapter on UAMs and other vulnerable groups. It will ensure that an up-to-date and comprehensive analytical report is available, which can help to guide governments in the development of regional and national policies in the area of tackling irregular migration.

2. Conference establishing a Dialogue with Countries of Origin, Transit and Destination of Irregular Migrants transiting through the Western Balkans

This conference will facilitate the dialogue between the migration and criminal justice authorities of the countries along the Western Balkan route, (including countries of origin, transit and destination), with the aim to discuss the possibilities of enhanced cooperation in regard to stemming irregular migration flows. The conference will build up a cooperative network of migration and criminal justice actors along the Western Balkan route and focus on coming up with a set of recommendations for immigration and criminal justice actors, for more effective responses to challenges posed by transnational crime in the context of irregular migration.

**For the purpose of this project the Western Balkan countries refer to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo UNSCR 1244, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia*

KEY PROGRAMME DATA

Project type: Immigration and Border Management (TC)

Secondary project type: Trafficking (CT)

Geographical coverage: Western Balkan countries*

Executing agency: International Organization for Migration (IOM);

Management site: IOM Tirana and IOM Belgrade (under the guidance of Sub-Regional Coordinator for the Western Balkans)

Beneficiaries: The Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo UNSCR 1244, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia), civil society, vulnerable migrants in Western Balkans

Partner(s): Ministries of Interior/Labour of Western Balkan countries, Border/Migration Police of the Western Balkan countries, OSCE,