

Budapest Process

2nd Meeting of the Community of Law Enforcement Practitioners

Date: 18 May 2022

Location: Hybrid - Ohrid, North Macedonia and online

Summary

The second meeting of the Community of Law Enforcement Practitioners (COLEP) was held in a hybrid format in Ohrid, North Macedonia with an option to join virtually. The purpose of the meeting was for countries to present their Country Profiles based on guidelines shared by the Budapest Process Secretariat as well as to discuss needs and opportunities for law enforcement collaboration. Finally, the participants would decide on the rotational chairmanship of the COLEP platform.

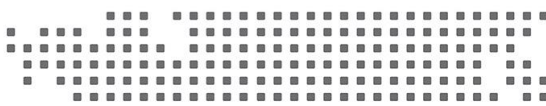
Officers from the following countries and institutions attended this meeting of the COLEP:

Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Serbia; European Commission, UNODC and Frontex.

The meeting was opened by the Head of the Budapest Process Secretariat and a short summary of the outcomes of the first meeting were presented.

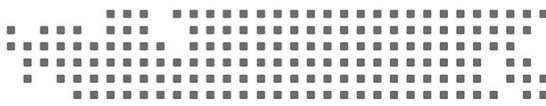
Main Summary of Country Profile presentations

- **Azerbaijan** presented an overview of the dedicated Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) and Smuggling of Migrants (SOM) laws and the National Action Plan (NAP) 2020-2024 and the robust prosecution efforts undertaken under the “Protocol on Cooperation in the Fight against Organized Crime in the Caspian Sea”.
- **Bulgaria** primarily focused their country profile on migrant smuggling and the issue of lack of deterrents and consequences for migrant smugglers, i.e., the cost being lower than the gains. Trends of increased digitalisation were mentioned as key aspects of change in the recent years. While de-briefing and gathering intelligence from identified migrants, they made reference to migrant deterrent factor of having a ‘bad experience’. The country also underlined the Hawala banking system as a challenge for investigators.
- **Austria** shared the importance of partnership between police officers and investigators with non-governmental organisations working on the ground and providing intelligence and knowledge which helps in combating SOM. Austrian law enforcement is actively engaged in international and regional cooperation and would like to expand these efforts and linkages.
- **North Macedonia** shared their recent collaborative work at border crossing points with deployment of ‘mobile teams’ on the ground to provide up-to-date knowledge on identified vulnerable communities such as the Roma and Sinti. Provided a short case study on an investigation involving Taiwan. They shared the recent trend of nationals from India and Cuba exploiting the visa free regime with Serbia and then gaining access to North Macedonia.
- **Pakistan** highlighted the challenges it faced in the prosecution of traffickers and smugglers as well as the good practice of intra- and inter-governmental cooperation. They highlighted



through case studies, that international cooperation is increased through liaison offices set up abroad such as the Federal Investigation Agency's 'Link Offices'. Finally, national migration awareness campaigns targeting districts with vulnerable communities are being undertaken.

- **France** shared their most recent trend of smugglers using small boats to facilitate irregular entry into the UK and the implications this had on countering irregular migration. Significant information was provided of relevance to COLEP, in that, the top five nationalities of smugglers identified, includes Iran and Iraq, and the same nationalities were in the top three of nationalities of migrants identified - therefore, France identified willingness to share data with Iran and Iraq.
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)** presented their law enforcement structure highlighting that they are a country of origin, transit and destination. Thousands of migrants from the Silk Routes countries are stranded in BiH and exposed to exploitation and abuse, in particular the vulnerable groups among them. Cooperation with civil society and cross-border investigations with Serbia, Croatia, Europol, and Interpol were highlighted as well as an active involvement in *Task Force Western Balkans*.
- **Germany** stressed the importance of maintaining an accurate picture of ever-changing SOM and THB environments. An Integrated Border Management (IBM) strategy is being used by Germany for improved tackling of SOM and THB through BCPs, as well as deployment of liaison officers in Countries of Origin (CoO) and Countries of Transit (CoT). Intra-agency coordination and information analysis needs improvement within the country. Sophisticated digital technologies for communication and financial matters, secondary movements, and usage of third countries by crime groups remain major challenges.
- **Bangladesh** shared that seven courts were operating as specialised smuggling and trafficking courts with trained prosecutors and judges. There are district monitoring cells, a nation-wide hotline and an online app operated by the Police. Furthermore, victim support centres and awareness raising programmes are functional all over the country. Provision of data to the US Trafficking in Persons (TiP) Report is an important task for law enforcement agencies in the country. Memoranda of Understanding between Bangladesh and countries of destination on cooperation regarding SoM and THB were important in bearing results.
- **Iran** is dealing with over one million additional Afghan refugees since August 2021. The government approach is to issue visas to as many migrants as possible on humanitarian grounds in order to allow them to seek employment opportunities. In parallel, they aim to discourage irregular migration to Iran but many Afghan migrants have no official documents as the Taliban were not issuing passports anymore. Iran is actively engaging its neighbouring countries for operational cooperation on migration related issues and border control as well as countering irregular movement.



Main Points of Discussion

- Participants agreed to remain focused on the objectives of COLEP and to be proactive in their role within the platform. In short, COLEP remains a platform to discuss what is not yet known and what is new in terms of preventing and countering irregular migration, SOM and THB;
- Transnational cooperation is proven to work and can work better if communication barriers and 'red tape' is reduced. Very often, *time is of the essence*, therefore – alternative and faster channels are needed in urgent situations;
- Bulgaria and Pakistan were endorsed as Chairs of the COLEP platform within a the tri-partite chairs system; one more tri-partite chair is needed and would ideally be a destination country.

Next steps

- The BP Secretariat will share contact information of all COLEP focal persons via a list of participants;
- Countries participating in COLEP that seek closer cooperation with each other may request the BP Secretariat to facilitate bilateral interactions (such as requests for information and knowledge exchange, capacity building, operational partnerships, and other assistance/support). To this end, the Secretariat will design a communique regarding a mechanism that can be used by COLEP participants;
- In order to strengthen how COLEP countries share information and to make exchanges concrete, the next COLEP meeting will include a workshop on real-life case studies to illustrate good practices, shortcomings, lessons learned in international cooperation against SoM and THB, as well as a table-top exercise based on a hypothetical situation involving transnational investigation and prosecution;
- The next COLEP meeting will most likely take place in September/October either in person or online. The next meeting will focus on:
 - Presentation of concrete case studies, where presenters must illustrate and document at least one (ideally 2-3) real-life example where a best practice was utilised and/or key learnings were derived;
 - Creating links with Interpol's National Central Bureau (NCB) officers, Europol and CEPOL representatives;
 - Discussing the most pressing issues for each country/region by allowing the tripartite chairs to identify the challenges within their respective regions to enable peer-to-peer learning;
 - Discussing how to develop and standardise a 'trafficking victim identification procedure' vis-à-vis 'international uniform guidelines' or other means, including training workshops on the topic.