



BUDAPEST PROCESS

37th Senior Officials Meeting

Date

26-27 November 2025

Location

Istanbul, Türkiye

Summary

The Budapest Process convened its 37th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in Istanbul on 26-27 November 2025. Hosted by Türkiye as Chair of the Dialogue, the meeting gathered 110 participants from 38 Budapest Process participating and observer countries and 10 partner organisations and dialogues. These include Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan; as well as Abu Dhabi Dialogue, Bali Process Regional Support Office, EU – including European Commission, European Union Agency for Asylum and Frontex, ICMPD, ILO, IOM, MARRI, UNHCR and UNODC.

- 1. Meeting background and objectives:** As the first gathering of senior officials since the adoption of the 2024 Ministerial Declaration and its accompanying Call for Action, the 37th SOM aimed to: i) review progress made in the first year of implementing the Call for Action, with a particular focus on operational activities in the Silk Routes region; ii) take stock of ongoing and upcoming initiatives related to the three Budapest Process Thematic Working Groups on Return and Reintegration, Legal Pathways for Migration and Law Enforcement Cooperation) and; iii) discuss current migration landscape in the Silk Routes and outlook for 2026.
- 2. Opening:** The SOM opened with welcoming statements from Türkiye as Chair, Hungary as Co-Chair, the European Commission, and ICMPD as the Secretariat. Speakers highlighted the significance of the first implementation year of the Call for Action 2025–2030, underscoring the need to ensure that the dialogue remains relevant, responsive and

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practically oriented in light of evolving migration dynamics, noting that the value of the process lies in translating shared priorities into delivery. In this context, the importance of maintaining momentum, strengthening coordination across countries of origin, transit and destination, and upholding a whole-of-route approach was emphasised, as well as the essential role of Senior Officials in ensuring continuity between Ministerial commitments and operational action.


- 3. Implementation Review of the Call for Action 2025-2030:** Senior Officials took note of the progress made since November 2024, presented through an overview of ongoing implementation of the Call for Action 2025–2030 in the Silk Routes region. The update outlined advances in implementation of individual priority goals, including integrated border management, return and sustainable reintegration, the promotion of legal pathways, and the continued operation and expansion of Migrant Resource Centres and their 360° service model, reflecting increased focus on capacity development, mobility governance and coordinated service delivery. Concrete examples from Silk Routes countries demonstrated the operational activities undertaken across the Dialogue’s priority areas. The presentation also outlined ongoing areas of work and next steps in programme delivery and cooperation mechanisms, highlighting the active engagement of partner governments in taking forward the commitments of the 2024 Ministerial Declaration.
- 4. The Migration Partnership Facility (MPF) presented its work and how it supports the Implementation of the BP’s Call for Action.** The presentation outlined how ongoing MPF actions contribute to areas such as return and reintegration, legal pathways and labour mobility, institutional development and cooperation with Silk Routes partners, and highlighted the value of the MPF’s flexible financial and technical support - including grants, technical assistance, dialogue support and knowledge tools - in enabling partners to advance joint priorities. Opportunities were also presented to mobilise MPF financial support for future initiatives aligned with Budapest Process strategic directions, demonstrating how the Facility can continue to reinforce delivery of Ministerial commitments in the years ahead.
- 5. Panel Discussion on Migration Outlook in the Silk Routes Region:** Moderated by the Head of the Budapest Process Secretariat, the panel brought together ICMPD, IOM, UNODC, UNHCR and ILO to reflect on key developments shaping migration dynamics in the Silk Routes region. Discussions highlighted trends in labour mobility; the complexity of mixed drivers shaping the migration landscape in the region, including factors such as conflict, displacement, disaster, climate-related movement, labour migration and return migration; vulnerabilities linked to trafficking and exploitation; and the growing influence of technology on criminal networks operating along the route. The panel highlighted four overarching messages emerging from the exchanges: (1) the enduring importance of strong normative and legislative frameworks; (2) the need to better understand a new era of more centralised, technologically enabled criminal networks; (3) the importance of fostering legal pathways in light of future labour needs in destination countries with declining demographic growth; and (4) the continuing difficulties surrounding information-sharing and cooperation, where building trust remains essential to keeping pace with rapidly adapting smuggling structures.



6. High-Level Session on the work and outlook for the Thematic Working Groups: the High-Level Session reviewed the work and forward outlook of the three Budapest Process Thematic Working Groups. Senior representatives of the co-chairing countries presented conclusions from their 2025 meetings and outlined priority areas for 2026. Across all three Working Groups, Co-Chairs reaffirmed their commitment to advancing the delivery of the Call for Action and strengthening cooperation among Budapest Process partners.

- a. For the *Thematic Working Group on Return and Reintegration* (co-chaired by Bangladesh, Türkiye and, as of 2026, Iraq), interventions highlighted continued efforts to strengthen return and reintegration systems across the Silk Routes region, agreement to update the BP Return and Reintegration Roadmap, and the need for sustained stakeholder engagement and community-based approaches to reintegration. Co-Chairs also noted interest in capacity development and technical support, a whole-of-government approach to managing return, and the use of digital solutions to support coordinated reintegration.
- b. For the *Thematic Working Group on Legal Pathways for Migration* (co-chaired by Pakistan and Italy), discussion underscored priorities such as expanding cooperation on skills partnerships and ethical recruitment, improving alignment between labour mobility schemes and labour market needs, and continued coordination on skills certification and matching. Co-Chairs also highlighted the need for strengthened cooperation with Silk Routes partners and capacity development to advance structured, skills-based and well-governed labour mobility initiatives.
- c. For the *Thematic Working Group on Law Enforcement Cooperation* (co-chaired by Bulgaria and Iraq), priority highlights included reinforcing COLEP as the operational arm of the TWG, advancing integrated border management and coordinated security cooperation, and deepening collaboration on information exchange, practitioner training and technology-driven approaches to counter migrant smuggling. Co-Chairs also underlined the need for enhanced capacity development and deeper operational cooperation with Silk Routes partners to more effectively address smuggling networks.

7. Thematic Panel Discussion on Syria: Moderated by Türkiye as Chair, the panel brought together representatives of the Turkish Ministry of Interior's Department of Temporary Protection and experts on Syria, migration management and asylum to examine the complexities surrounding return-related considerations in the Syrian context. Drawing on Türkiye's experience as the country hosting the largest Syrian refugee population, the discussion outlined the comprehensive legislative and institutional framework of governing returns and areas where further strengthening of the framework and its implementation is possible. Panellists also explored the key factors shaping decision-making of prospective returnees – such as security conditions, availability of housing, access to basic services and prospects for livelihoods – highlighting the complex nature of voluntary return considerations. The panel concluded with broad agreement on the importance of upholding the principles of voluntary, safe and dignified returns. Particular attention was given to the situation of women and of children, including the need to ensure that their respective protection and wellbeing



considerations remain central to any assessment of return. Finally, the discussion highlighted the value of using the Budapest Process as a platform to deepen dialogue on the evolving return context and to support continued exchange on Syria.

- 8. Tour de Table:** Interventions from participating countries and organisations outlined their main priorities in migration governance, current and emerging challenges at national and regional levels, and expectations for future cooperation within the Budapest Process. Delegations reaffirmed the importance and continued relevance of the priorities set out in the Ministerial Declaration and its Call for Action, pointing to areas of focus that confirm the pertinence of the three Thematic Working Groups to their operational needs. Countries and organisations also emphasised the usefulness of the Budapest Process Dialogue in addressing their priorities and supporting practical exchanges and cooperation along the routes. Delegations expressed their readiness to continue engaging actively in the Dialogue to advance shared objectives, including through financial support and practical cooperation, and offered suggestions on how the Budapest Process can further assist implementation of the Call for Action.

9. Final Reflections and Closing

Closing remarks were delivered by Türkiye, Hungary, the European Commission and the Budapest Process Secretariat, highlighting the importance of sustaining strong engagement across all regions and Thematic Working Groups and reiterated the value of the Budapest Process as a trusted, long-standing platform. Reflections also underscored the need for shared responsibility and practical cooperation to ensure effective migration governance along the routes. Looking ahead to 2026, speakers emphasised deepening cooperation, strengthening delivery, and maintaining the political momentum generated through the Senior Officials Meeting.

10. Key Messages and Conclusions:

i. Continued relevance of the Dialogue's mandate and structure

Discussions across agenda items and tour de table interventions reaffirmed that the thematic focus of the Budapest Process, return and reintegration, legal pathways, and law enforcement cooperation, remains well aligned with the operational priorities of Budapest Process countries and partner organisations.

ii. Strong progress in translating political commitments into practical delivery in 2025

The first year of implementation saw notable progress in the Silk Routes region, where both ongoing efforts and new initiatives launched in 2025 have been supporting the translation of political commitments into concrete results. Early achievements across priority areas, coupled with active engagement from Silk Routes partners and coordinated support through the Dialogue, indicate a solid foundation for continued implementation in the years ahead.

iii. Thematic Working Groups provide essential platforms for technical exchange and the anchoring of operational implementation



The work of the three Thematic Working Groups remains an anchor of the Budapest Process' operational architecture and is widely regarded as highly valuable for reviewing evolving priorities, monitoring progress in implementing the Call for Action, and informing targeted, actionable cooperation across the Silk Routes and European partners. Continued engagement of the co-chairing countries will be vital to sustaining momentum and driving forward implementation in 2026.

iv. Deepening operational cooperation along the route

Effective migration governance increasingly relies on deepening practical collaboration among countries of origin, transit and destination. This cooperation spans coordinated action against migrant-smuggling networks, strengthened support for return and sustainable reintegration, the expansion of skills-based and well-governed labour mobility initiatives, and continued investment in border management capacities.

v. Importance of research and evidence-based analysis for informed policy and forward-looking planning

Sessions consistently underscored the importance of reliable data, robust analytical capacities and anticipatory planning across the routes. Evidence-based analysis is essential for understanding the complex drivers of mixed migration and for shaping informed, forward-looking policy decisions. As highlighted throughout the discussions, strong research functions serve as core pillars of the Dialogue, underpinning targeted operational responses and ensuring that cooperation is guided by timely and actionable insights.

vi. Value of the Budapest Process as a trusted cooperation platform

The SOM reaffirmed the Budapest Process as a long-standing and reliable framework for all its partners. Its role in enabling structured dialogue, cross-regional trust-building and informed policy development amid evolving migration dynamics remains highly valuable. In this context, the Dialogue was recognised as a useful platform for continued exchanges on complex and evolving regional situations, including those related to Syria and Afghanistan. Participants noted that the Budapest Process provides an appropriate and trusted space for sustained discussion and forward-looking cooperation.

vii. Looking Ahead: Sustaining Engagement and Consolidating Momentum

Delegations expressed their readiness to continue engaging actively in the Dialogue, including through practical cooperation and financial support. They also offered proposals to strengthen implementation of the Call for Action and reinforce operational linkages across the TWGs. Looking ahead to 2026, Senior Officials underscored the importance of maintaining political momentum, enhancing delivery across the TWGs, leveraging partnerships with regional and international actors, and ensuring coherence between political commitments and operational action.