

BUDAPEST PROCESS

Thematic Working Group Meeting on Law Enforcement Cooperation

Ingredients for Successful International Cooperation,
Capacity Development and Risk Analysis

Date

6-7 October 2025

Location

Sofia, Bulgaria

Summary (draft)

The Budapest Process convened the **Thematic Working Group Meeting on Law Enforcement Cooperation (TWG-LE) in Sofia, Bulgaria**. The meeting was **co-chaired by Bulgaria and Iraq and supported by ICMPD**, as the Budapest Process Secretariat. It gathered **62 participants from 17 countries, the European Union (EU), as well as several international organisations**. These include: Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Pakistan, Poland, Serbia, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine – as well as representatives of the EU, including Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission (DG HOME), Frontex, and EUAM Iraq; the UN, including IOM and UNHCR; Council of Europe; MARRI; the Regional Support Office for the Bali Process; as well as representatives of ICMPD, including members of the Budapest Process Secretariat.

- 1. Meeting background and objectives:** Building on the 2024 Ministerial Declaration and Call for Action, which identified law enforcement cooperation as a key priority, this meeting in Sofia continued the work started in 2023. It sought to consult Budapest Process countries and partner organisations on ways to enhance practical cooperation on law enforcement under the Community of Law Enforcement Practitioners (COLEP) as the TWG-LE's operational arm. The discussions aimed to identify key ingredients for successful international law enforcement cooperation, reflect on lessons learned since the establishment of the TWG in 2023 and progress achieved, explore good practices and models for institutionalised, sustainable capacity development, and discuss the role of strategic

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planning and risk analysis in strengthening operational readiness and cooperation. Additionally, the meeting aimed to translate shared priorities into actionable recommendations to guide the future work of the TWG and COLEP.

2. The opening and setting the scene laid the grounds for a forward-looking and collaborative discussion, stressing the importance of continued commitment among Budapest Process Partners to collaboratively address challenges of irregular migration. Opening remarks were delivered by representatives of Bulgaria and Iraq, as the Thematic Working Group Co-Chairs, Türkiye as Chair of the Dialogue, the European Commission (DG HOME), and ICMPD, as the Budapest Process Secretariat. Speakers reaffirmed the relevance of Priority Goal 1 of the 2024 Budapest Process Ministerial Declaration and its accompanying Call for Action, stressing the importance of coordinated efforts to implement a genuine whole-of-route approach. The TWG-LE was highlighted as a practical bridge between political commitments and operational delivery, supporting partners in translating shared priorities into concrete cooperation on the ground.
3. **The High-Level Panel discussion explored what makes law enforcement cooperation effective in practice.** The panel was composed of high-level speakers from Bulgaria, Iraq, Bangladesh and FRONTEX and set the tone for an honest exchange on turning intentions into shared outcomes. The discussion demonstrated that Budapest Process partners are already cooperating closely through joint operations, secure communication platforms, liaison officers, and training academies. Yet, panellists recognised that deeper and more structured collaboration could further enhance impact. The panellists highlighted that targeted investments in data systems, communication, training, and joint investigations can address existing gaps and enhance operational readiness. In particular, panellists noted the need to strengthen resources, skills, and institutional frameworks to improve cross-border coordination. The discussion concluded that effective cooperation relies on a solid analytical foundation, the smart use of technology, and skilled practitioners working together through shared understanding, joint practice, and sustained investment in training.
4. The first day concluded with a **presentation on the phenomenon of fraudulent online job advertisements and their potential links to transnational organised crime**, delivered by the ICMPD Research Unit. Drawing on research in Pakistan, the presentation highlighted how deceptive online job offers—often disseminated through social media—can expose aspiring migrants to fraud, smuggling, and trafficking. Further research into this emerging trend was deemed as valuable, with a view to focus on what happens once migrants have crossed the border into another country to analyse the phenomenon in its entirety.
5. **Technical Panel I: Sustainable Capacity Development Through Institutionalised Training** opened the second day of the TWG-LE Meeting in Sofia. The panel was composed of representatives from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Bangladesh, as well as Iraq and focussed strongly on institutionalised capacity development as a foundation for sustainability and national ownership. The discussion highlighted that capacity development in the Silk Routes countries has evolved to focus on well-structured, training systems that develop trainers,

and embed learning within institutions. Participants shared examples of police academies and training centres adopting “train-the-trainer” models and hybrid learning methods. The session underlined the need to link training with operational performance, adapt international expertise to local realities, and the smart and responsible use of digital technologies. It also generated ideas for collaboration within the Budapest Process, including joint training modules, study visits, and cross-academy partnerships to build on and expand good practices.

6. **Technical Panel II: The Potentials of Effective Risk Analysis** examined how national risk analysis (RA) frameworks can strengthen border operations and planning. The panel was composed of representatives from Georgia, Türkiye, Pakistan, Iraq, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic, and facilitated a practical exchange of models and lessons learned. Discussions highlighted that RA has evolved into a dynamic process guiding resource allocation, prevention, and coordination. Countries shared experiences with their own approaches to RA, emphasising the importance of integrating digital, analytical, and coordination infrastructures; conducting joint assessments; and ensuring continuous training. In this context, the panellists in particular noted the importance of advance passenger information (API) systems and data integration to improve data quality and analytical value, enhancing the detection of high-risk passengers and supporting effective decision-making. The session underlined that that intelligence-led border management and real-time data exchange are key to strengthening preparedness across the region, reaffirming that closer cooperation and information exchange among countries of origin, transit, and destination are vital for timely responses to shifting routes and emerging risks.
7. The meeting concluded with the **Roundtable Discussion on the Future of the Community of Law Enforcement Practitioners (COLEP)**, focussing on the next steps for the operational arm of the TWG on Law Enforcement Cooperation. Building on these discussions, participants highlighted the importance of translating these components into tangible outputs. In particular, the idea of developing a shared “toolbox” of training resources was welcomed as a means to consolidate and better align the capacity-building efforts across the region. Furthermore, the participants also stressed the value of ensuring strong alignment with national priorities and enhancing synergies with other initiatives, to maximise impact and avoid duplication. Both Co-Chairs, Bulgaria and Iraq, reaffirmed their commitment to lead COLEP’s next phase in close cooperation with participating countries and the Budapest Process Secretariat, ensuring that COLEP continues to evolve as an effective operational mechanism supporting law enforcement cooperation.

8. **Key messages and main conclusions**

The conclusions below capture the main messages and priorities emerging from the meeting:

General

- a. A unified understanding of risks and threats was seen as the foundation for effective cooperation. Exchanges pointed to the need to develop a Roadmap on Law Enforcement

Cooperation to guide concrete actions, track progress, and foster collaboration among countries of origin, transit, and destination.

- b. Effective law enforcement cooperation depends on the engagement of a broad range of actors, including national law enforcement and judicial bodies, international organisations, and civil society partners. The involvement of private sector actors – such as technology companies, financial institutions, transport providers, and online platforms – can be instrumental in driving innovation and strengthening cooperation along the migration route.
- c. Digital tools, data systems, and AI were also recognised as essential enablers of effective border management, provided they complement rather than replace human expertise. Investment in technology must go hand in hand with improving data quality, interoperability, and standardisation to enhance detection, surveillance, and analytical capacities.
- d. Trust was seen as best built through effective cooperation, joint investigations, and peer exchanges, rather than formal agreements alone. Making use of existing frameworks such as the Budapest Process and its operational arm COLEP, as well as other platforms like EMPACT and Frontex, can further strengthen operational links between Silk Routes and European partners.

Institutionalised Capacity Development

- e. Sustainable capacity development requires institutionalised training and long-term ownership by national institutions. Efforts should build on existing police academies and service colleges, aligning training strategies with operational needs, migration priorities, and regional frameworks.
- f. Law enforcement institutions should continue evolving into learning organisations that retain institutional memory, adapt to new generations of officers, and make use of digital, flexible, and individualised learning paths.

Risk Analysis

- g. Risk analysis was highlighted as a key tool for preparedness. It should guide resource allocation, border planning, and cooperation among countries of origin, transit, and destination to ensure proactive rather than reactive border management. The use of advance passenger information (API) systems and integrated data was noted as essential for stronger analysis and risk profiling. Shared analytical methodologies, such as CIRAM, can support this effort.
- h. Discussions also underlined the importance of ensuring that operational cooperation remains people-centred and protection-oriented, integrating mechanisms for identifying, referring, and protecting victims of trafficking and other vulnerable groups.

COLEP

- i. The meeting reaffirmed COLEP's strong potential as the operational arm of the Budapest Process TWG on Law Enforcement Cooperation, fostering concrete cooperation between Silk Routes and European partners, and underlining the importance of continuing this collaboration. Looking ahead, participants agreed that COLEP should in particular prioritise three interlinked areas: identifying knowledge gaps on trafficking in human beings (THB) and smuggling of migrants (SoM) along the route – including in countries of origin, transit, and destination; strengthening capacities of law enforcement authorities through advanced and joint training, using national master trainers where applicable and integrating victim identification and referral mechanisms; and promoting international cooperation through operational exchanges, study visits, and transnational training courses.
- j. The Budapest Process continues to serve as a catalyst for harmonising approaches, promoting shared standards, and linking national, regional, and route-wide initiatives under a coherent framework.

9. Recommendations and the way forward

Drawing on the discussions, the meeting highlighted practical directions to advance law enforcement cooperation under the Budapest Process, in line with Priority Goal 1 of the 2024 Ministerial Declaration and Call for Action on preventing irregular migration:

- a. **Develop a Roadmap on Law Enforcement Cooperation**, similar to the Roadmap on Return and Reintegration, outlining concrete actions, milestones, and mechanisms for follow-up. The Roadmap should translate policy commitments into operational cooperation through peer learning, pilot projects, and common standards, while fostering a whole-of-route approach and cooperation among countries of origin, transit, and destination.
- b. **Strengthen COLEP as the operational arm of the TWG on Law Enforcement Cooperation** by developing a project proposal which focuses on international cooperation and capacity development, using regional expertise on identified gaps for sustainable cooperation.
- c. **Promote inclusive cooperation** by engaging key stakeholders beyond law enforcement, including the private sector and training institutions, particularly in the areas of digitalisation, innovation, and modern training delivery.
- d. **Enhance analytical and operational capacities** through interoperable risk analysis systems and improved data quality. Strengthening system integration, data standardisation, and joint risk assessments across origin, transit, and destination countries will improve preparedness and resource allocation.
- e. **Combine technology with human insight** by ensuring that innovative tools complement, rather than replace, professional judgement. Strengthen cross-agency cooperation between border, migration, and social service authorities to enhance

operational effectiveness, enable the identification and referral of victims of trafficking and other vulnerable persons, and help reduce the demand that fosters exploitation.

- f. **Advance institutional learning and sustainability** by transforming law enforcement institutions into learning organisations with national training strategies, digital learning tools, and mechanisms for knowledge retention. Officers at all levels should be trained to interpret and apply analytical outputs effectively.
- g. **Ensure coherence between national and regional initiatives** by using the Budapest Process and its operational arm COLEP as a catalyst to harmonise training visions, promote shared standards, and link existing networks such as EMPACT, FRONTEX, and regional police academies.
- h. **Seek dedicated funding for a new COLEP phase** to consolidate research, training, and operational cooperation under a unified framework guided by the new Roadmap.
- i. **The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to turn political priorities into coordinated, sustainable action.**

10. The Government of Bulgaria, as the host country and the Co-Chair of the TWG on Law Enforcement Cooperation, thanked participants for their active contributions to the Thematic Working Group meeting and reiterated its commitment to continue serving as the European political lead of COLEP. The Government of Iraq likewise reaffirmed its strong commitment to their role as Co-Chair of the TWG on Law Enforcement Cooperation.