

HOW THE BUDAPEST PROCESS CONTRIBUTES TO MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

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About the dialogue: The Budapest Process is an interregional dialogue on migration stretching from Europe to the Silk Routes Region - also covering Europe's Eastern neighbours, the Western Balkans and Central Asia. The dialogue provides a platform for dialogue and operational cooperation for over 50 governments and 10 international organisations and committed to promoting safe, orderly and regular migration along the migration routes. ICMPD hosts the Secretariat of the Budapest Process.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



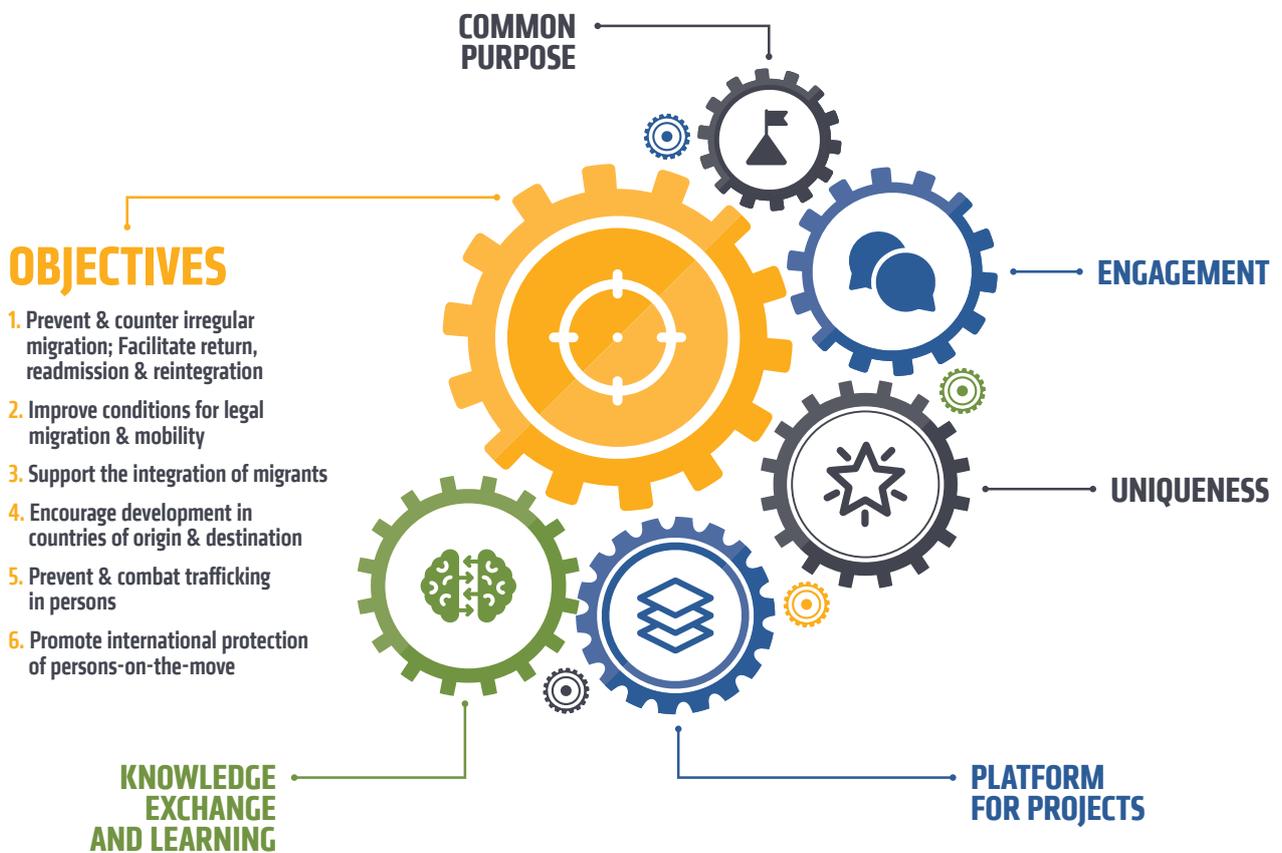
This report identifies the ways in which the Budapest Process (BP) has contributed to migration governance and the objectives of its participating countries in the Silk Routes region since its foundation in 2010. Five of its overarching characteristics and activities are identified:

1. **Uniqueness:** The BP is *unique* in terms of its participating states, organisational structure, and flexibility, resulting in (1) participation by some of the world's main countries of migration origin, transit, and destination; (2) collaboration between governments that—without the BP's flexible but formal structure—would lack the trust, incentives, or infrastructure to do so; and (3) governance beyond the possibilities of bilateralism without threatening the autonomy of participating states.
2. **Engagement:** The BP facilitates continuous, constructive, high-level as well as technical/operational level *engagement* by participant countries, resulting in (1) better understanding, trust, and respect between participant countries, (2) deeper and more specialised relationships and networks, and (3) incremental progress towards increasingly advanced joint agreements and declarations (such as the two recent Ministerial declarations of 2013 and 2019) and modes and methods of meetings, with the BP becoming a well-known “brand” among participating states for dealing with migration governance issues in the region.
3. **Common purpose:** The BP has created a sense of common *purpose* amongst participating states—in terms of a common approach, terminology and “team spirit” between the officials of the participating states and organisations—resulting in (1) an “epistemic community”; (2) a greater willingness and ability to compromise; and (3) movement from consensus to common policy goals.
4. **Platform for projects:** The BP acts as a *platform* for and jointly administers projects, on-the-ground operational activities and tools for policy advancement and institutional capacity building, including Migrant Resource Centres, Integrated Border Management, on-demand technical assistance and projects dedicated to protecting migrants' rights and enhancing cooperation on migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons. These have resulted in (1) measurable impact towards the BP's objectives, such as discouraging irregular migration and raising awareness of legal and safe options and assistance; (2) more advanced cross-border cooperation on migration governance; and (3) stimulus for innovative solutions, for which the BP acts as a testing ground;
5. **Knowledge exchange and learning:** The BP facilitates peer-to-peer *learning*, knowledge and data exchange and continuous tracking of the progress of activities and processes, resulting in (1) open and comprehensive documentation and data collection and exchange; (2) continuous improvement of the dialogue; (3) better trained front-line and decision making officers and greater migration governance expertise.

The relationship between the above five characteristics of the BP and its objectives is outlined in a theoretical framework, visualised below:

Figure 1. How the Budapest Process contributes to migration governance

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BUDAPEST PROCESS





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ACRONYMS

ADD	Abu Dhabi Dialogue
BP	Budapest Process
CFA	Call For Action
EU	European Union
GAMM	Global Approach to Migration and Mobility
GCM	Global Compact for Migration
GFMD	Global Forum on Migration and Development
IBM	Integrated Border Management
IMM	Improving Migration Management in the Silk Routes Region project
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
SOM	Senior Officials Meeting
SR	Silk Routes
UN	United Nations



INTRODUCTION



The Budapest Process (BP) is an inter-governmental framework for dialogue of over 50 states dedicated to the issues of migration and mobility. The BP acts as a platform for discussion between governments, while administering joint operational activities as directed by its participating and observer states and partner international organisations. In general, the BP's activities are geared towards (1) promoting safe, legal migration, (2) countering irregular migration and (3) developing the role of migration in the economic development of the Silk Routes countries. The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) acts as the Secretariat of the BP while Türkiye and Hungary act as its Chair and Co-Chair, respectively. Since 2010, the BP has focused its activities on the “Silk Routes” (SR) region, with a special focus on Afghanistan¹, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan.

As this document shows, owing to both its own characteristics and the global migratory context, the BP has become far more than simply a forum for discussion. Frameworks for dialogue² on migration have become integral parts of international migration cooperation in several parts of the world since the 1980s, as growing migration flows and the politicisation of migration have demanded that governments find novel approaches to migratory issues such as: international protection, irregular migration, return and readmission, migrant smuggling and human trafficking, and labour migration, as well as myriad developmental aspects of migration.

This report identifies how the BP specifically contributes to its participating states' migration policy objectives and its long-term impact on regional cooperation on migration governance, particularly since 2010. The ways in which the BP does so are organised according to five of its notable characteristics: *uniqueness, engagement, common purpose, projects, and learning*. These five characteristics are then combined in the conclusion to offer a theoretical framework to explain how the BP has affected change and how its work might be improved upon.

- 1 Due to fall of the government in August 2021 and ensuing take-over of the country by the Taliban, Afghanistan is currently not part of the Budapest Process and its Silk Routes Region Working Group
- 2 Sometimes known as “Regional Migration Dialogues” (RMDs) or “Regional Consultative Processes” (RCPs; Köhler, J. 2011. ‘What government networks do in the field of migration: an analysis of selected Regional Consultative Processes’ in Kunz, R., Lavenex, S. and M. Panizzon (Eds.), *Multilayered Migration Governance. The Promise of Partnership*, London/New York, Routledge, 2011)

1. UNIQUENESS

The BP is *unique* in terms of its participating states, organisational structure, and flexibility, resulting in (1) participation by some of the key migratory countries of origin, transit, and destination; (2) collaboration between governments that—without the BP’s unique, flexible structure—would lack the trust, incentives, or infrastructure to do so; and (3) trans-national/regional governance beyond the possibilities of bilateralism without threatening the autonomy of participating states.

PARTICIPATING STATES

The BP’s participating states make it unique in that it is the only dialogue dedicated to migration between Europe and West, South and Central Asia. It not only facilitates the bridging of migration realities across regions, continents, over 50 countries³, and several key migratory routes, but crucially includes many of the world’s main countries of migration origin, transit, and destination. Indeed, the key change for the BP in the last ten years has been its expansion to include the five “Silk Routes” countries (Afghanistan –until August 2021, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan) and the adoption of the Silk Routes Partnership for Migration in 2013, with a renewed commitment achieved in 2019.

Moreover, only states are considered full participants, with international organisations participating as observers⁴ alongside a few observer countries⁵. This reflects, on the one hand, the fact that migration is a state competence and typically viewed as a core—often sensitive—component of sovereignty and, on the other, the need for a forum in which state officials can discuss those matters of migration governance that are international in nature. This state-centric structure goes all the way to the leadership of the dialogue, with the BP not being led by the European Union or other supranational organisations that can take the lead of proceedings. Instead, the BP is chaired by Türkiye and co-chaired by Hungary, while Bulgaria and North Macedonia lead Regional Working Groups and major funders have in the recent past included Australia, Hungary, Finland, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Türkiye as well as the European Union.

3 Afghanistan*, Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus*, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Iraq, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation*, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uzbekistan. *currently not included

4 Council of Europe, European Union Asylum Agency EUAA, European Commission, European External Action Service EEAS, General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex, International Centre for Migration Policy Development ICMPD, International Labour Organisation INTERPOL, ILO, International Organization for Migration IOM, United Nations Development Programme UNDP, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, Bali Process, Economic Cooperation Organization ECO, Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative MARRI, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation BSEC, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe OSCE

5 Including Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, India, Iran, and the USA.

FLEXIBLE BUT FORMAL

The unique, flexible structure of the BP retains a high degree of formality in its participating structure, meeting cycles, chairmanship, and the role of its Secretariat. This structure was formalised in the 2013 Istanbul Declaration, which also acknowledged and identified the clear roles of Senior Officials, Chairs, Secretariat and Regional Working Groups. The BP's high-level meetings are within a formal setting and encourage interaction as peers on an equal basis. Moreover, several features of the BP, such as ministerial conferences and joint ministerial declarations, appear formal as some documents also use action oriented and 'reputationally binding' language. Indeed, the seniority of the officials involved—up to the ministerial level—gives the dialogue gravity and a sense of formality and reverence for the BP's ongoing conversations, agreements, and commitments.

However, the BP retains sufficient flexibility to not restrict the actions or rights of participating countries. States can frankly and robustly debate issues, eventually leading to compromise, consensus, and joint declarations and action, without the focus being on negotiating binding rules or diplomatic protocols. Such flexibility also precludes dissenting countries from blocking action that does not involve them and a rigid legal framework that could limit the actions of the participating states. Moreover, such flexibility provides a platform for rapid response to changing migration realities—often unpredictable and fast-changing, requiring quick reactions before the window of opportunity closes—in real time with the relevant national ministries responsible for migration.

BEYOND THE POSSIBILITIES OF BILATERALISM

As such, countries are free to—and often do—take advantage of the formal platform to expand joint efforts far beyond bilateral relations. For some participating countries, the BP is the only venue where representatives of different ministries of one state can meet and be able to discuss their views on migration openly. Moreover, the executive-level, technical and often confidential nature of the BP has allowed participating officials to focus on practical solutions rather than political 'point scoring'. The BP's unique structure enables it to overcome the 'fundamental power asymmetry' in international migration governance between countries of origin and those of destination, with the former typically preferring multilateralism⁶ and the latter unilateralism. A key result of this is: an increased level of trust and credibility between governments—which, regarding migration, are highly interdependent; an increased willingness to participate and; ultimately, more ambitious policy collaboration.

6 Betts, A., 'The global governance of migration and the role of trans-regionalism' in Kunz, R., Lavenex, S. and M. Panizzon (Eds.), *Multilayered Migration Governance. The Promise of Partnership*, London/New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 23-46, p.24.



2. ENGAGEMENT



The Budapest Process facilitates continuous, constructive, high-level and technical *engagement* by participant countries, resulting in (1) greater understanding, trust, and respect between participant countries, (2) deeper and more specialised relationships and networks, and (3) incremental long-term progress towards increasingly advanced joint agreements, meetings, and declarations, with the BP increasingly a well-known ‘brand’ among participating states for addressing migration governance issues in the region.

BETTER UNDERSTANDING, TRUST, AND RESPECT

The Budapest Process is notable for its high level of participant country engagement. This is perhaps best evidenced both by the typically 30-35 countries present in every meeting and the numerous and increasingly advanced and complex agreements, meetings, and declarations developed and endorsed under the umbrella of the Budapest Process over the last ten years. Such levels of participant state engagement are firstly, a result of the Budapest Process offering an opportunity for open dialogue on equal terms—including dissent and disagreement—that over time has led to mutual understanding and trust. This trust not only emerges from the unique participant base, structure, and flexibility of the dialogue, but also the eagerness of participants to continually engage. Such a comfortable atmosphere of like-mindedness encourages engagement in developing ideas and exploring new ways of thinking, while facilitating the bridging of differing views and positions.

Such long-term, continuous engagement is especially vital on the topic of migration. Through continuous engagement, both countries of origin and destination have come to understand each other’s perspectives, building trust and better cooperate to achieve the common goal of ‘well managed migration’ – i.e., reducing irregular migration and improving legal migration channels.

DEEPER AND MORE SPECIALISED RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKS

Moreover, the BP acts as a time- and cost-efficient way for states and other stakeholders to strengthen their networks. This is especially important for smaller participating states, or those that have less other multilateral fora for engagement with European states.

Engagement resulting from the BP is not limited to multilateral dialogue and cooperation between countries. The BP also results in considerably more enhanced bilateral relations, with thematic, working group, ad-hoc as well as the annual Senior Officials Meetings (SOM) seeing scores of bilateral/side-line meetings organised beforehand by the BP Secretariat between national officials, thus ultimately

resulting in a far-reaching network on all levels. Improved networks facilitate everyday cooperation between states and answer the question of ‘whom to call?’ in another country or ‘whom to meet?’. They can also facilitate formal bilateral and regional cooperation and the development of common regional positions and cooperation on any issue of relevance. Furthermore, appointing of national focal points for the Budapest Process in each participating country means that, despite high levels of turnover amongst governments and national officials, the BP Secretariat is quickly informed about changes and arriving officials are briefed and quickly integrated into an international migration governance network.

The BP also engages with other migration dialogues and multilateral migration governance agreements, such as the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM), the Bali Process, the Rabat Process, the Khartoum Process, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) and the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) and appears as well on the United Nations Network on Migration.

INCREMENTAL LONG-TERM PROGRESS

The BP’s structure and networks provide the capacity and institutional memory to facilitate incremental, long-term progress. The BP has progressively brought together more countries from Europe and Asia to bring about positive change in migration governance. Prior to 2010, the BP focused more on wider Europe with particular attention given to the Western Balkans and Caucasus as well as certain Central Asian countries. However, after 2010, countries such as Afghanistan*, Bangladesh, China⁷, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria⁸ became active members, not just of the larger BP dialogue but also within the newly formed Silk Routes Working Group. The BP was able to use this enhanced engagement (or ‘enlargement’) to conceive of and implement projects on-the-ground.

Ongoing engagement by states and organisations with the BP Secretariat has made the BP a well-known brand and reference point amongst national officials, particularly within ministries of foreign affairs and interior. This institutional role and the seniority of participating public officials means that what is decided in the BP’s meetings is more easily accepted *within* national administrations. As such, engagement within the BP often prepares the ground for mobilising international support to aid in the development of national policies, in particular those that have a regional impact / whole of routes impact.

7 China was an active member of the Budapest Process and its Silks Routes Working Group up until December 2012, after which it stopped participating in meetings. It must be noted that in April 2015, the EU and China decided to engage in bilateral dialogue under the EU-China Mobility and Migration Dialogue programme.

8 Syria attended the 1st meeting of the Working Group on the Silk Routes Region in November 2010, which was the first and last meeting Syria attended in the Budapest Process, as soon after (in March 2011) a civil war broke out and the country stopped participating.



3. COMMON PURPOSE



The Budapest Process has created a sense of common *purpose* amongst participating states—in terms of a common approach, terminology and ‘team spirit’ between the officials of the participating states and organisations—resulting in (1) an “epistemic community”⁹; (2) a greater willingness and ability to compromise; and (3) movement from consensus to common policy goals.

CREATION OF AN “EPISTEMIC COMMUNITY”

The BP’s unique character and ongoing engagement by its participating states has led to the formation of an “epistemic community” in which participants form and share a common understanding of migration realities, causes and effects, narratives, concepts, practices, phrases, and more fundamentally normative values and beliefs. This aids the creation of a community and the sense of a common purpose, making it possible to reach a compromise, formulate policies and establish the common terminology needed for ministerial declarations. Furthermore, such commonalities mean that participating officials then return to their respective national institutions with a common framework for understanding migration. The sense of common purpose is reinforced by the tendency of participating countries, organisations, and people to focus on areas of cooperation and finding common ground rather than fixating on issues that polarise, leading to advanced forms of cooperation in highly specific areas throughout the dialogue.

A GREATER WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO COMPROMISE

The BP’s uniqueness, engagement, and creation of a sense of community have all facilitated a greater willingness and ability to compromise. Such compromises have been explicitly highlighted as the key to the BP’s incremental steps forward. When, in 2010, the expansive third phase of the BP was announced, it was acknowledged by participants that the BP had led to compromises on longstanding themes like irregular migration, return and readmission, and asylum. As such, the Chair and the Secretariat were able and encouraged additional reflection on new topics such as return of unaccompanied minors, identification of vulnerable groups, labour and legal migration, and migration and development. Moreover, both the new Silk Routes countries and longstanding participants agreed on the importance to understand, acknowledge, and address the root causes of irregular migration and promote new migration management tools, such as migration profiles, and assisted voluntary returns. Furthermore, the BP agreed to report activities and the outcomes of Senior Official Meetings online, leading to greater transparency. The BP preparatory meetings at Senior Official level over the next two years involved intensive consultations and discussions between participant countries and the eventual adoption of the Istanbul Ministerial Declaration.

9 Ruggie, J. G. 1975. ‘International responses to technology: concepts and trends’, *International Organization*, 29(3): 557-583.

MOVEMENT FROM CONSENSUS TO COMMON POLICY GOALS

The Istanbul Ministerial Declaration on a Silk Routes Partnership for Migration, adopted in 2013¹⁰, committed its signatories to work towards six overarching policy goals:

1. **Irregular migration:** Prevent and counteract irregular migration, facilitate return and readmission of irregular migrants, and combat criminal networks involved in smuggling of migrants.
2. **Labour Migration:** Better organise and improve conditions for legal migration and mobility.
3. **Integration:** Support the integration of migrants and counteract phenomena of discrimination, racism, and xenophobia.
4. **Migration & Development:** Strengthen the positive impact of migration on development, both in countries of origin and of destination.
5. **Trafficking in persons:** Prevent and combat trafficking in persons, address its root causes and provide adequate protection and support to trafficked persons.
6. **Protection:** Promote international protection and the respect of the rights of refugees in line with international standards.

The Istanbul Declaration was praised by the participants as one of the most far-reaching and balanced declarations ever adopted by such a diverse group of 47 countries and international organisations¹¹ to address the most salient issues of migration. It reflected the evolution of migration management discourse throughout the then 20 years of the BP, shifting the emphasis from control of irregular migration to a more nuanced approach including issues such as labour migration, mobility and development, the impacts of discrimination, racism and xenophobia, and the effects of environmental transformations on migration. Moreover, the agreement emphasised an unambiguous commitment to the respect of human rights in migration management processes, with a particular pledge to ensure the rights of children and recognise gender-specific aspects of migration. All countries committed to concerted action and to invest in the dialogue and its projects.

After 2013, the BP held regular meetings on the priority areas defined by the Istanbul Declaration, as well as Regional Working Group meetings, which led to the emergence of joint projects under the BP banner between participating countries of origin, transit, and destination, discussed in the following sections. After 2016– due to the changed migration situation in the Silk Routes Region and along several migration

10 Marking the 20th anniversary of the Budapest Process, Turkey, as the Chair, hosted the 5th Ministerial Conference in Istanbul on 19 April 2013. Over 250 representatives gathered at the conference hosted by the Turkish Ministry of Interior and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

11 47 participating countries and International Organisations: Afghanistan*, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus*, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, India, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, the Russian Federation*, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States of America, Council of the European Union, European Commission, EUAA, Frontex, ICMPD, IOM, MARRI, OSCE, UNHCR, UNODC. *currently not attending the BP.

routes, the need to take a results-oriented approach, and the contribution of the BP to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and other Regional Consultative Processes—discussions on a Call for Action for the Silk Routes Countries were initiated in order to agree on how to turn the six priority goals into reality. After two years of consultation, the Istanbul Commitments on the Silk Routes Partnership for Migration and its Call for Action (CFA) – a five-year plan – was adopted by 38 countries at the BP’s 6th Ministerial Conference held in Istanbul in February 2019¹². The CFA reiterates the Budapest Process’s six priority goals, listed above, and translates them into a 41 action points. The CFA led in turn to a developed ‘Implementation Plan of the Call for Action’, structured around three pillars—dialogue, operational cooperation and knowledge creation and sharing. This plan—put together by BP officials—incorporated participating countries’ varying ability to take part in actions, highlights how the process remains an arena for political manoeuvring and gives adequate space to participating states to continuously re-assess their own priorities and level of participation.

Notably, despite disparate interests, countries have increasingly been able to agree on common principles and areas for common endeavour—such as fighting irregular migration—as well as areas for compromise—such as the scale and types of regular migration and how these can be supported in pre-departure, transit and post-arrival phases. Such a holistic and common approach has required and thus led to greater information sharing, ongoing engagement, and deeper cooperation on longstanding issues of migration governance and border management, all of which the BP facilitates, including through its flanking projects, as discussed in the next section.

12 More information here: <https://www.budapestprocess.org/about-us/mission-and-vision-statement/6th-ministerial-conference>



4. PLATFORM FOR PROJECTS IN THE SILK ROUTES REGION



The Budapest Process acts as a *platform* for and jointly administers projects, on-the-ground operational activities and tools for policy advancement and institutional capacity building, including Migrant Resource Centres, Integrated Border Management, the Silk Routes Facility and projects dedicated to protecting migrants' rights and enhancing cooperation on smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons. These have resulted in (1) innovation for which the BP acts as a testing ground; (2) measurable impact towards the BP's objectives, such as discouraging irregular migration and raising awareness of legal and safe options and assistance; and (3) more advanced cross-border governance.

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

The BP Secretariat ensures the sustainability and continuity of numerous projects that focus on all areas of migration but particularly irregular migration (including smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons), labour migration and legal pathways, as well as migration and development. The projects are designed in order to respond to unique needs of stakeholders in the Silk Routes region in regards to policy advancement and capacity-building, as well as establishment of transnational initiatives for sharing best practices and enhancing operational cooperation. Moreover, most projects under the BP umbrella are typically conceived during BP meetings or in bilateral or multilateral talks on the side-lines of such meetings (which the BP proactively facilitates) and then developed with the input and endorsement of participating countries of origin, transit, and destination. As such, the transnational nature of many of these projects makes them particularly suitable for addressing migration issues with a whole-of-route approach while utilising innovative methods tailored to local needs.

Several projects have been implemented in the Silk Routes Region since 2010 and have continuously led to improved forms of migration governance. Following the Silk Routes admission to the BP in 2011, the 'Fostering cooperation in the Area of Migration with and in the Silk Routes' (2011 – 2013) project signalled the inauguration of operational cooperation with countries of the Silk Routes. The project was funded by the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Türkiye and contributed significantly to improving the cooperation framework between the Silk Routes and other Budapest Process countries. This was achieved by conducting a series of assessment visits and informal consultation meetings with a view to identify the priorities and needs of stakeholder countries – thus a set of concrete project proposals were developed to serve as a basis for the operational follow up package following the upcoming Istanbul Ministerial Declaration in 2013.

With the momentum in place, the United Kingdom initiated a project, entitled 'Bridging Measures for Migration Management in the Silk Routes Region'. This project focused on capacity building in migration management and carried out initial assessments and pilot trainings for officials of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan. It also laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive and regional migration management project. The 'Support to the Silk Routes Partnership for Migration under the Budapest Process' project was launched in February 2014 as the first multilateral contribution to the implementation of the Istanbul Declaration and lasted until July 2017, strengthening the migration management capacities of authorities in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan at the national and regional levels, as well as in Bangladesh and Iran. Co-funded by the European Union as well as Bulgaria, Hungary, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye and the United Kingdom, it also initiated the development of sustainable training systems, enhanced data management and expertise, and supported migration policy development frameworks. These initial initiatives were an early indicator of the opportunities for innovative approaches to build bridges between differing priorities and approaches to migration governance. With the continued development of initiatives and their opportunity to be far-reaching, the dialogue has more tightly aligned its work on the ground with its objectives and started tracking its impact.

IMPACT TOWARDS THE BP'S OBJECTIVES

Lasting from August 2017 to April 2022, the €12.5 million EU-funded project 'Improving Migration Management in the Silk Routes Countries' (IMM) was built on past projects and activities in the Silk Routes as well as a desire to achieve the BP's common policy goals. The broad IMM project aimed at maximising the development potential of migration and mobility within the Silk Routes region and major labour receiving countries while establishing comprehensive regional responses to migration and mobility, full respect of human rights, and protection of migrants. Aside from further strengthening of the regional migration dialogue under the BP, the IMM established several more Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs), the Protection of Migrants' Rights (MIGRAP) initiative, the Silk Routes Facility for demand driven technical assistance for migration management, and facilitated the establishment of the Regional Law Enforcement Cooperation (RELEC) initiative. The details of each of these can be found on the Budapest Process website. The main outcomes, some of which are measured in impact assessments in international scientific journals¹³, can be seen in Figure 2, 3 and 4.

13 Dennison, J. (forthcoming). 'How Migrant Resource Centres affect migration intentions and awareness of risks: evidence from a quasi-experimental field study in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, and Pakistan' in *International Migration*

Figure 2. Policy work across the Silk Routes region

Policy work across the Silk Routes (SR) Region



OUTPUTS:



3 major policies in 3 countries
covering all migration thematic areas



18 research & policy papers
on climate-induced migration, female migration, country information needs assessment and reintegration



3 guides/SOPs
on labour migration

RESULTS:



Policies serve as basis for government programming



A meaningful vision for migration management
grown from national expertise and context



Ownership by government counterparts

WAY FORWARD:



Implementation and monitoring
of specific policy responses based on government needs

Figure 3. Awareness-raising – Migrant Resource Centres

Awareness-raising: the Migrant Resource Centres (MRC) network in the region



OUTPUTS:



7 fully operational Migrant Resource Centres (MRC)
in 5 countries integrated within Ministries



More than 150 Leaflets
(covering topics such as safe migration processes, country-specific laws and regulations, recruitment costs and occupational safety and health)



Outreach to 92 million migrants
potential, current and returning (295,000 received personalised counselling)

RESULTS:



13 % reduction
on the likelihood of emigrating irregularly (from 21 to 8 %)



Bridged institutional and service gap
between migrants and governments



6.7 % increase
on the likelihood of migrating regularly (from 73.2 to 79.9%) after MRC interventions



MRCs are “ears on the ground”
on migration trends

WAY FORWARD:



Expansion of MRC
work, staff, location



Addressing information needs
of displaced and people on the move



Engagement with MRC
related facilities in destination countries

Figure 4. Institutional and capacity building work

Institutional and Capacity-building work: highlights from the Facility, MIGRAP and RELEC



OUTPUTS:



More than 7,000 individuals
capacitated in more than
90 organisations/institutions



**23 training modules/
activities**



20 CSOs engaged
and capacitated with
more than 24,000 outreach

RESULTS:



**Change in the knowledge,
attitude and practice**
on the part of government officials



**Development of guidelines,
operations manuals,
research and policy papers**

WAY FORWARD:



**Institutionalisation
of the modules**
in regular government programming
and budgeting



**Enhanced capacity
building**



Support focusing on **long-term
interventions/cooperation
and strategic dialogue**

In 2020, following the 2019 Ministerial Conference, the Budapest Process established a Reference Group, comprised of selected countries, to provide a common thread between meetings and the overall goals of the dialogue as well as to develop and endorse concrete on-ground activities in the Silk Routes region. In 2021, the Reference Group endorsed three project proposals developed by the BP Secretariat. These proposals, to be implemented directly under the umbrella of the Budapest Process, reinforce the dialogue's central role in enhancing operational cooperation in light of partners' needs shared in thematic meetings on the topics of law enforcement cooperation, skills partnerships and vocational training, and return and reintegration. Initial implementation has begun on the first two projects and further funding will enable these projects to develop and to respond to the BP's objectives. Like the Migrant Resource Centres, these projects will each be subject to respective robust impact assessments.

- **Community of Law Enforcement Practitioners (COLEP)** – a forum designed to improve law enforcement responses to irregular migration and related crimes like smuggling and trafficking by serving as a platform for informal but structured interactions between law enforcement officers of countries of origin, transit, and destination, with an aim to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and exchange.
- **Joint Vocational Training for Labour Migration** – the project involves a study, which first means a mapping of vocational training structures of ICT, long-term care, and hospitality sectors in select European and Silk Routes countries, with the aim of developing and harmonising joint training standards to facilitate targeted and sustainable labour migration in these sectors.
- **Reinforcing Return Migration, Reintegration and Development Initiatives** – the project is designed to ensure the inclusive, long-term, rights-based, and sustainable reintegration of returnee migrants to Silk Routes countries through support for specific and concrete policy development, programmes, and services at the national and local levels.

INTEGRATED BORDER MANAGEMENT

The BP has led to projects that directly encourage and facilitate cross-border cooperation. The €12 million EU-funded project ‘Integrated Border Management in the Silk Routes Countries’ (IBM) operates under the umbrella of the dialogue and builds on the Budapest Process’ historic engagement with partners in the Silk Routes region and the foundation laid by the aforementioned ‘Improving Migration Management in Silk Routes Countries’ (IMM) project. The IBM Silk Routes project seeks to support the countries in the region to enhance their border management systems, using as a blueprint the Integrated Border Management (IBM) concept, reflecting its principles and main components, and translating them to the specific circumstances and dynamics of the Silk Routes countries. Aiming to conclude in 2023, the projects’ foreseen main outcomes and outputs are showcased in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Current outputs of the Integrated Border Management project



5. KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND LEARNING

The Budapest Process facilitates peer-to-peer *learning*, knowledge and data exchange and continuous tracking of the progress of activities and processes, resulting in (1) open and comprehensive documentation, data collection and exchange; (2) continuous improvement of the dialogue; (3) more well-trained staff and greater migration governance expertise.

OPEN AND COMMON DOCUMENTATION, DATA COLLECTION AND EXCHANGE

The BP offers an improved knowledge base to governmental and non-governmental stakeholders: up-to-date, reliable, and neutral information on migration issues and migration realities in relevant countries is crucial for evidence-based policy making. The BP supports this information need through collecting and sharing comparable data using jointly accessible internet platforms, reports and databases. Finally, documentation produced is shared between participating countries (through the focal points), readily available online¹⁴. The BP produces a whole range of knowledge products to suit the particular needs of the participants in its formats of its meetings, thus the documents could take the shape of thematic / policy briefs, case studies, background papers, political / strategic papers, project proposals, concept notes and fiches, visibility documents (see [annex](#) for research products produced between 2019-2021). These include briefing papers on topics varying from labour migration regimes, the gig economy and skills partnerships to topics relating to climate change and migration in South Asia, migration narratives and the propensity to emigrate, a typology of migrant smuggling and what works and what does not in the area of reintegration to name a few. Many thematic briefing papers are the basis for discussions in meetings for participating countries. Additional documents include more strategic knowledge on how the Budapest Process has changed its strategic direction whether structurally, geographically or thematically: the 2013 Istanbul Ministerial Declaration included many of these changes. In addition, more structural documents to support the establishment of new flexible structures provide knowledge on the inner functioning of a migration dialogue: the terms of reference for the Reference Group are the fruit of these more structurally strategic discussions. Finally, due to the dialogue's longstanding presence in migration governance, some knowledge products focus on commemorating its past work and its evolution and development overtime. In this vein, the Budapest Process infographics, factsheets as well as its catalogue of all meetings held since 1993 are a great reminder of this evolution and how the BP has put a mark in migration governance in the past 30 years¹⁵.

¹⁴ Reports, Analyses, and Guidance documents. Find [here](#) and [here](#)

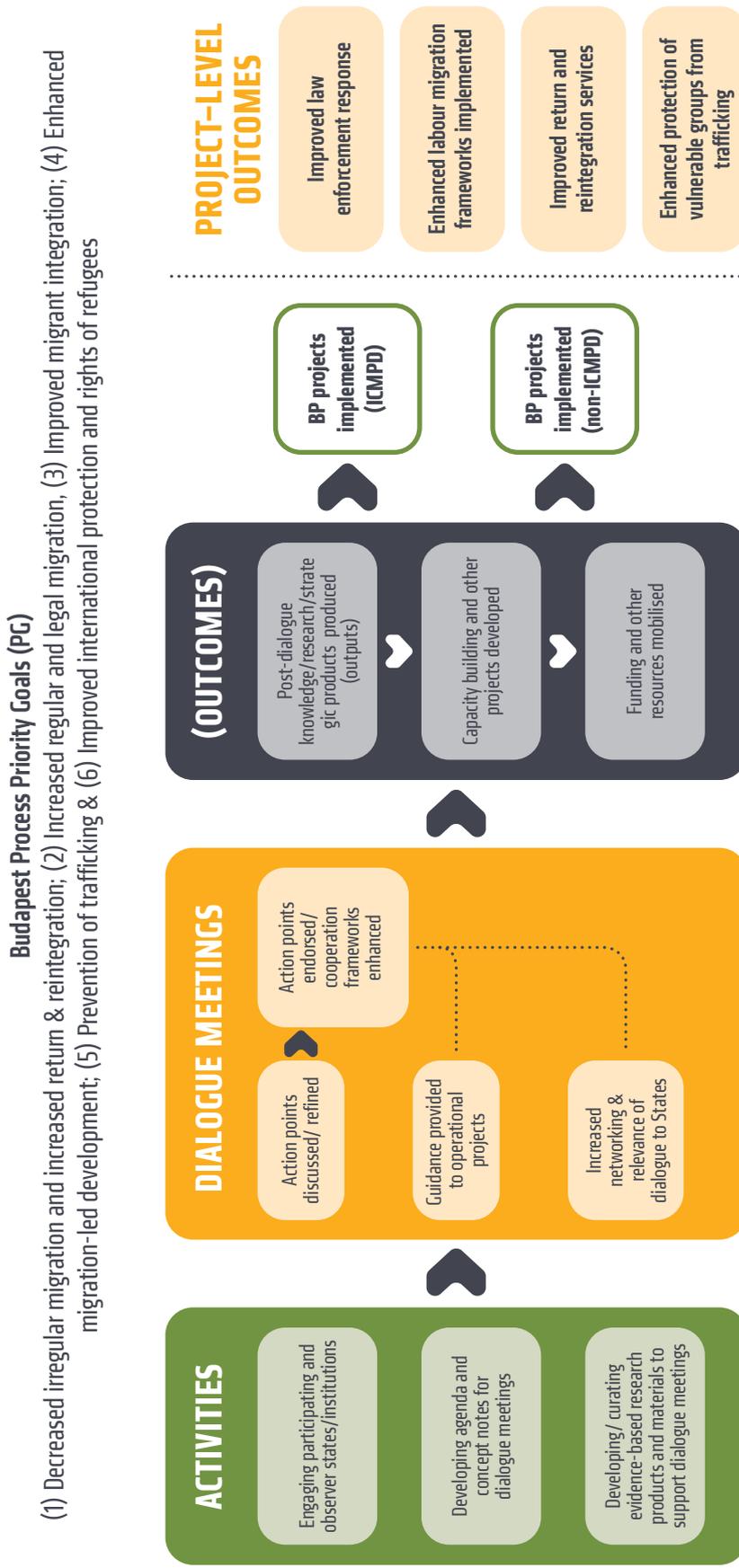
¹⁵ [Catalogue of BP Meetings \(1993-2019\)](#)

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF THE DIALOGUE

Cognisant of the need to learn lessons and improve its methods to achieve better results, the Budapest Process has developed a theory of change to showcase its impact within its dialogue meetings and beyond to better align its programmes with its objectives. The Theory of Change highlights the long-term outcomes of the dialogue, most notably through its projects, whether led by the Secretariat, ICMPD, or other organisations. The request for a better tracking of the dialogue's short, medium and long-term impact was brought up by Senior Officials in 2019 and was taken forward to be sustainably conceptualised and integrated into the dialogue.

A specific monitoring and evaluation tool has been developed to measure the impact of the dialogue in the medium to long-term with clear indicators of success for impact. As already mentioned, robust measurement and evaluation procedures and impact assessments are and will continue to be administered where possible on specific initiatives.

Figure 6. The Budapest Process's theory of change



WELL-TRAINED STAFF AND GREATER MIGRATION GOVERNANCE EXPERTISE

The BP provides cost-efficient knowledge (see appendix below). The BP gives officials at all levels access to the international community which will provide them with a wide range of policy approaches. This includes NGOs, CSOs and academic centres and researchers from the Silk Routes countries as part of an active effort to move away from only 'Western' viewpoints. It also includes 'lessons learned' meetings and training sessions as well as validation workshops during and after projects to ensure the improvement of future policy or operational interventions, thus ensuring sustainability of projects.

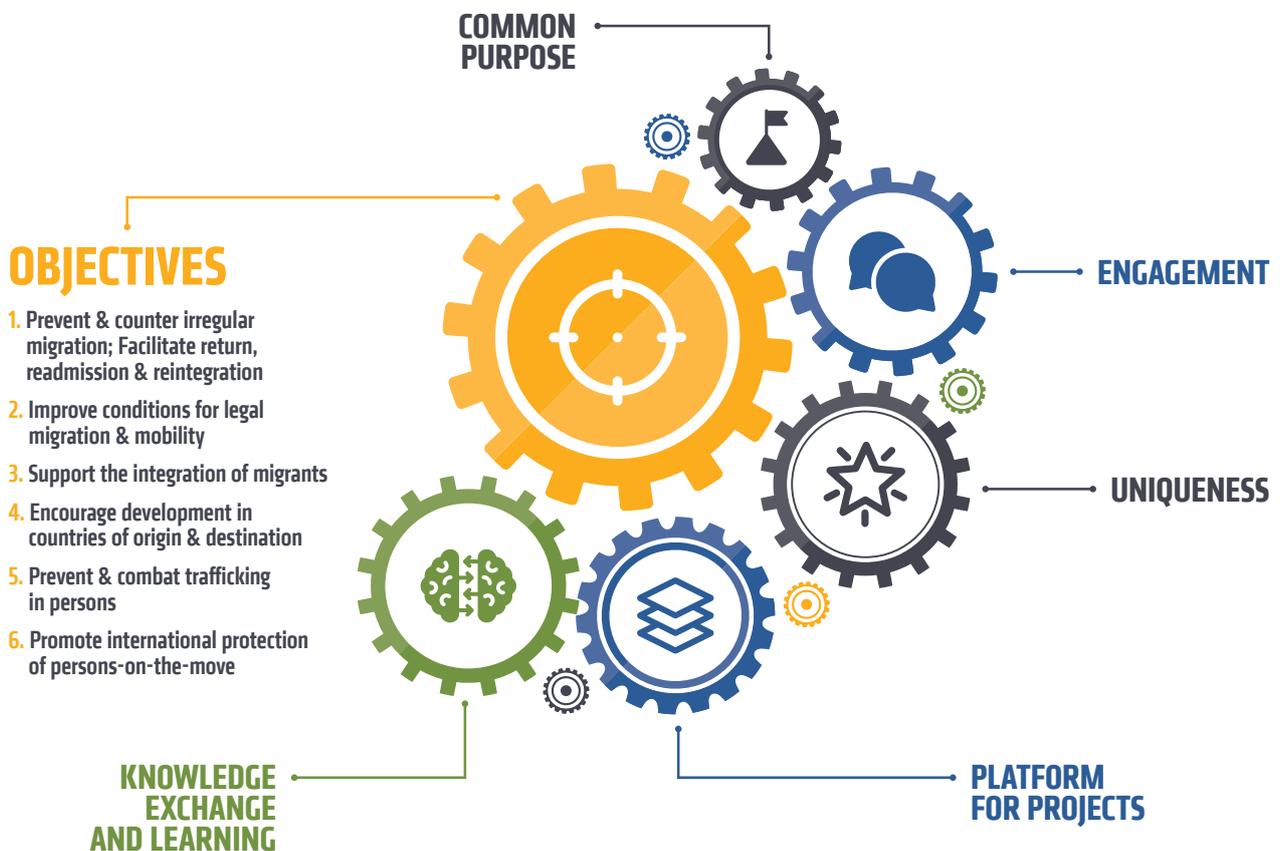
National and regional workshops and training sessions are organised via numerous projects. These workshops have also produced training manuals, for example, for the Federal Investigation Agency of Pakistan, which was also adopted by Afghanistan and Iraq. Finally, the Silk Routes Regional Office within ICMPD Headquarters also now has a dedicated [online training portal](#) designed to allow easy access digital and distance learning courses and related training material on migration topics that are tailor-made for migration, law enforcement, social and labour authorities and border management agencies across the countries of the Silk Routes Region as part of the IMM project which ended in April 2022.

CONCLUSION

This report demonstrated how the BP specifically contributes to its participating states' migration policy objectives and its long-term impact on regional cooperation and migration governance, particularly since 2010. Five notable, interrelated characteristics and activities are identified; namely, *uniqueness*, *engagement*, *common purpose*, *platform for projects*, and *knowledge exchange and learning*. Examples and effects of each of these are shown respectively while the connection between them is highlighted, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. How the Budapest Process contributes to migration governance

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BUDAPEST PROCESS



HOW THE BUDAPEST PROCESS CONTRIBUTES TO MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

However, this report and the figure above also point to a long-term historical movement of the Budapest Process's function and capability, from the 2010 expansion to the Silk Routes, the 2013 Istanbul Declaration that outlined the BP's policy objectives, and the more recent 2019 Call for Action and its Implementation Plan, as well as the projects that stemmed from these landmarks. In a sense, the BP is currently at the beginning of a new cycle, having moved from being a unique body of high-level engagement, through to the attainment of common policy goals, to innovative projects, and finally to a more robust form of impact assessment.

Looking forward, then, the Budapest Process has the potential to be in a far stronger position than ten years ago, with many of the institutional characteristics in place now making it far more capable of effecting positive change. However, migration dialogues, such as the BP, have received various types of criticism. Notably, these include the argument that they are 'talking shops' that produce minimal on-the-ground effect and reinforce power imbalances towards richer states or multinational organisations such as the EU and UN (and their affiliated agencies and institutions). As such, the future of the Budapest Process will be reliant on the extent to which its impact –both towards the goals of countries of destination and origin– can be robustly demonstrated, with the impact assessments of the innovative Migrant Resource Centres and other projects acting as starting point. With further demonstrable impact, the Budapest Process and its participating countries will be able to retain and expand the resources and organisation that make the BP already today far more than 'simply a dialogue' and instead a unique, 'flexible but formal' platform for bilateral and multilateral migration governance – a platform that caters to participating countries' respective needs while aligning with common policy goals and continuing to have an adaptive and robust Implementation Plan reinforced with relevant on-the-ground projects.

APPENDIX

PUBLICATIONS

Research outputs	Linked to (meeting/other)	Theme	Format	Purpose
1 Return and Reintegration: what works, what doesn't	Return and Reintegration thematic meeting in March 2020	Return and Reintegration (PG 1)	Background paper	Providing evidence-based information to participants ahead of the meeting
2 Migrants pushed to the brink Bangladesh Action Aid	Silk Routes Facility	Climate induced migration (PG 1)	Policy Brief	Informing policy makers
3 Policy Brief on Pakistan National Emigration Policy	Silk Routes Facility	Labour migration (PG 2 & 4)	Policy Brief	Informing policy makers
4 Briefing Paper - Attitudes to migration: Budapest Process post-webinar debrief	Webinar on 'Understanding how migration narratives shape public perceptions and Attitudes towards migration' – on 30 September 2020	Integration; counteract discrimination, racism and xenophobia (PG 3)	Background paper	Providing evidence-based information to participants ahead of the meeting
5 Briefing Paper - On the way to skills partnerships	Thematic Meeting on Labour Migration – on 3-4 November 2020	Labour Migration (PG 2 & 4)	Background paper	Providing evidence-based information to participants ahead of the meeting
6 Briefing Paper - A snapshot of some trends and aspects of the Gig economy in Budapest Process countries	Thematic Meeting on Labour Migration – on 3-4 November 2020	Labour Migration (PG 2 & 4)	Background paper	Providing evidence-based information to participants ahead of the meeting

7	Labour Migration Visa Regimes: A case study approach. Policy options and ways forward in the current COVID-19 pandemic	Thematic Meeting on Labour Migration – on 3-4 November 2020	Labour Migration (PG 2 & 4)	Report	Follow up of the Thematic Meeting held on 3-4 November 2020 on Labour Migration. This paper provides further evidence-based information to the BP stakeholders
8	Understanding and Explaining Attitudes to Migration in the Silk Routes and South Asian countries - The state of the art and recommendations for next steps	Webinar on Understanding & Explaining Attitudes to Migration in the Silk Routes (SR) – on 24 March 2021	Integration; counteract discrimination, racism and xenophobia (PG 3)	Report	Providing evidence-based information to the BP stakeholders (follow up to the webinar in 2020 on the topic of migration narratives)
9	Typology of Migrant Smuggling: A holistic understanding	Virtual Thematic Meeting on dismantling of smuggling networks: international cooperation and investigations – on 1-2 June 2021	Prevent and combat smuggling of migrants (PG 1)	Report	Providing evidence-based information to participants ahead of the meeting
10	Addressing climate change induced displacement and migration in Bangladesh	Silk Routes Facility	Climate induced migration (PG 1)	Report	Informing policy makers
11	Invisible women: A gender analysis of climate-induced migration in South Asia	Silk Routes Facility	Climate induced migration with gender aspect (PG 1)	Report	Informing policy makers
12	Climate change drives migration in conflict-ridden Afghanistan	Silk Routes Facility	Climate induced migration (PG 1)	Report	Informing policy makers

