

Voluntary Review Report on the Status of Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration in Albania in 2021

I. Issues

Issues of migration are quite important for the development of the country, as a key priority in the process of the country's accession in the European Union (EU).

Currently, Albania is implementing the National Strategy on Migration (NSM) and its Action Plan (AP) for 2019-2022. This is a document which defines the main principles and objectives for migration governance in Albania.

In the course of the last two years, the country has been affected by a number of migration dynamics, combined with "*brain drain*."

Taking measures to avoid permanent migration of qualified and educated individuals requires promotion of temporary migration, in particular circular migration of qualified individuals.

The Government of Albania is trying to promote volunteer return of qualified permanent or temporary migrants through short-term stays for consulting, teaching or training purposes. To this purpose, it is important to identify and tap on all intellectual assets outside the country. The importance attached to the development of public policies for the inclusion, involvement and contribution of Albanian communities outside the country in the social economic and political development of the country has been spelled out in the National Strategy for the Diaspora.

The Diaspora is an added value for the Albanian society, and to this end, the Government supports the organization of Albanian communities worldwide, in order to factor them in the cooperation for expediting the country's development.

Migration of unaccompanied minors also represents an important issue, same like the re-integration of returnees, in particular of those under vulnerable circumstances.

Another issue is related to the prevention of phenomenon of misuse of no-visa regime in the *Schengen* area by the Albanian citizens. Measures already taken have led to a significant drop in the number of asylum-seekers in the EU. According to EUROSTAT data, the number of Albanian asylum-seekers in the EU during 2019 was 20,415, while dropping significantly in 2020 to 6,935 asylum-seekers. In 2021 (January-November 2021) 8,595 Albanian citizens applied for asylum in one of the countries of the European Union.

Same like in other countries of the Western Balkans, Albania was affected by mix migration flows, not just due to social and economic circumstances, but also to different conflicts happening worldwide. The categories of foreigners arriving in the country include, *inter alia* asylum-seekers refugees, migrants, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated minors and stateless persons. To this end, responsible institutions have done a very good job, in particular regarding improvement, during 2021 of the national legislation for migration and asylum. Improvements were also introduced in the infrastructure of the hosting facilities. The National Hosting Facility has already been reconstructed and has a hosting capacity of 250 beds.

In line with the continuous recommendations of the EU for dedicated spaces for unaccompanied minors and vulnerable categories in the temporary hosting facilities in Gërhot, Kapshtica and

Kakavija, there are already premises and dedicated adjusted spaces, in accordance with the specificities of these categories.

In the Border Police stations of Kapshtica and Kakavija there are special premises/facilities dedicated to vulnerable groups. These facilities, and other accommodation premises serve for accommodation during 10 hours which coincides with the deadline for screening of irregular immigrants. The Government of Albania has demonstrated a lot of responsibility in increasing capacities for registration and temporary accommodation of migrants, and the relevant training and development and planning for emergencies. These capacities reach up to 500 beds, depending on accommodation of migrants. In addition, in this aspect in the course of 2021 there was an update of the National Contingency Plan.

In August 2021, Albania started temporarily hosting evacuees/refugees from Afghanistan. Following a Council of Ministers decision adopted on 25 August 2021 under the asylum law as of end September close to 1150 were granted protection for one year pending security screening.

They are hosted in open facilities in various locations in Albania, with the understanding that they would further be resettled in the United States under a specific visa regime. While child protection system still faces challenges to fully respond to the needs of migrant, foreign, unaccompanied and/or separated or stateless children – UNICEF is supporting to keep children safe in the facilities through education, child friendly spaces and culturally adapted child protection mechanisms.¹

Albania adopted the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) during the Intergovernmental Conference on the Global Compact for Migration in Marrakesh, December 10-11, 2018. GCM is now part of migration policies and migration management in the country. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) through its Department of Anti-trafficking and Migration, as the lead governmental institutions responsible for migration policies has been working also in the course of 2021 to inform the responsible institutions and respective actors about the context and objectives of GCM. MoI and the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE), as the main leading governmental institutions for the implementation of the National Migration Strategy (2019-2022) are consulting in regular bases with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and actors involved in the process.

There has been important progress in light of improving “the coordinating mechanism for governance migration” through improved functionality in order to reach “improved horizontal and vertical coherence through extended operational and strategic coordination”. This mechanism is an expression of the will of the Government of Albania towards adopting the *‘Whole of Government’* approach in migration governance.

The Technical Secretariat for Migration was established in 2019, as a horizontal body under the Section for Migration in the Ministry of Interior. This structure is under the Migration Sector at the Directorate against Trafficking and Migration, General Regulatory and Compliance Directorate in the MoI. One of the main tasks of this Sector is to ensure monitoring of progress covering all pillars of the Strategy and its Action Plan, to ensure that it is comprehensive and up-to-date, based on actual and standard information.

¹ Information from UNICEF Albania.

The Technical Committee for Migration (TCM) was established in 2020, while the Steering Group for Migration of the National Strategy for Migration and the Action Plan was introduced in March 2021.

The Technical Secretariat for Migration (TSM) is in charge of coordinating monitoring activities of all leading agencies, by collecting quarterly reports to ensure harmonization, identification of gaps, and analyses of the trend for National Strategy on Migration (NSM) implementation. The unit has introduced an agenda with dates on which reports should be submitted and provides technical assistance for the central points, while clarifying and methodological aspect. In addition, the Technical Secretariat for Migration is in charge of integrating inputs coming from the leading agencies into a biannual progress report regarding implementation of the National Strategy on Migration (NSM) and of the action plan, and submits it to the Technical Committee for Migration, which is chaired by the Deputy Minister of Interior and composed of General Directors of each leading agency/institution in charge with implementation of NSM and of the Action Plan. The Technical Committee on Migration puts the TSM in charge of coordinating activities, in order to prepare a comprehensive annual draft report that covers all measures defined in the National Strategy for Migration and in its action plan, as well as to ensure an evaluation of the issues and recommendation's for corrective actions. The report is then submitted to Steering Group on Migration (SGM) for review. SGM discusses achievements and challenges identified by the Technical Secretariat based on the annual reporting and in line with the circumstances issues recommendations and makes proposals at the policy level for the Council of Ministers, regarding migration issues.

One of the achievements towards improving coordination for governance of migration in Albania is the successful Mid-term Review of the Action Plan of the National Strategy for Migration. Following the first years of implementation of the National Strategy on Migration (SKM) 2019-2022, the Technical Secretariat for Migration, under the guidance of the Chair of the Technical Committee for Migration was supported by a consultancy team of IOM and conducted a mid-term review of the strategy implementation.

The review of the National Strategy on Migration (NSM) and the action plan to identify and analyse specifically the outcome and challenges in the implementation of the Strategy, starting from June 2019 until June 2021. This process was in line with the circumstances and comes up with the proposal for the review of the remaining period of implementation until the end of 2022, based on the analysis outcome.

The review is based also on a previous study, i.e. *Scoping Study* on the applicability of the measures of the Strategy, which reflects the implementation status of SKM and of its action plan, and reviews the synergy of the NSM with other sectoral strategies that include migration-related measures.

Both the Review, and the *Scoping Study* have been done with the support of the project “Improved coordination for governance migration in Albania”, which is implemented jointly by GIZ, Albania and IOM Albania, with financial assistance from GIZ, aiming at the continuous support for the Government of Albania to improve migration governance.

Important steps forward have been taken regarding review of activities of local government structures in the implementation of migration policies (process launched by the former Ministry for Diaspora), legislation and provision of assistance for migrants, with the legal changes in the Law no.38/2019 “On some additions and changes to law no.139/2015 “On local self-

governance” (the local government for this time is in charge of specific tasks and the establishment of specific structures about issues related to migration and diaspora) and DCM no.456 of 10.6.2020, “On some additions and changes to decision no.910, of 21.12.2020 of the Council of Ministers “On issues, scope of consultation, procedure, form and method of organization of local governance with the Consultative Council of local self-governance”. (Consultations between central and local self-governance).

Furthermore, in order to ensure improved vertical and horizontal coherence of NSM, the Ministry of Interior has contributed to the process of formulation of all new strategic documents which are also relevant to issues pertaining to migration governance, while making sure that the measures in these strategies are coherent and constituent with the National Strategy for Migration (NSM) and its Action Plan.

The implementing institutions of the national strategy for migration (i.e. the Ministries) have submitted six regular biannual reports (Report on the National Strategy for Diaspora, for National Strategy on Legal Education and Integrated Border Management Strategy etc.) to the Permanent Mechanism of migration governance for the formulation and implementation of new sectoral and cross-sectoral strategies covering migration aspects.

Albania has developed key activities for the establishment of institutional capacities of the Albanian system for migration governance, and launching of foreseen operational measures.

There has been considerable progress regarding legislative reforms both in terms of ensuring compliance of national legislation with advanced EU standards, as well as in terms of meeting international commitments and obligations of Albania through negotiation and signing of agreements with destination, transit and origin countries of migrants.

This Report of Volunteer Review makes an assessment of the status of implementation of 23 GCM objectives, with specific focus on innovative policies and promising practices regarding these objectives; institutional measures and changes; barriers and challenges; synergies with regional development; lessons learned and how they can be “translated “into recommendations. The Report is focused on the following topics:

- i) What is the impact of the GCM vision, responsibilities and common goal in the work of the interested parties in issues of migration?
- ii) How have the main principles of GCM been applied (people-focused: international cooperation; national sovereignty; rule of law and due/fair process; sustainable development; human rights; gender-responsiveness; child-sensitive; whole government approach; and society approach);
- iii) What has been the country’s response towards implementation of GCM objectives, and in terms of coordination with public institutions and partner organizations?

II. Progress of GCM Objectives Implementation in Albania

Objective 1: Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregate data as a base for evidence-based policies

Albania has continued with the process of improving data collection, analyses and division for migration, through improved institutional capacities for collection of administrative data on migration, through training, study visits, migration studies etc.

The new law no. 79/2021 “On foreigners” spells out the responsible state authorities for collecting and administering personal data on foreigners from state entities, private entities, Albanian or foreign citizens residing in the Republic of Albania, and from the foreigner person. These data get recorded in the National Electronic Registry for Foreigners.

According to Decision of Council of Ministers (DCM) no. 857 of 29.12.2021, “On the establishment and operation of National Electronic Registry for foreigners in the Republic of Albania” (NERF), and in line with Law no. 79/2021 “On foreigners”, governmental responsible authorities for handling foreigners input and update personal data for foreigners in this registry. (NERF) contains personal data on foreign nationals/citizens. This electronic registry includes 5 main modules:

- a) The Module for border crossing control, which contains data reflected and audited by the Border and Migration Department;
- b) The Visa Module, which contains data input and audited by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs;
- c) The Module of single permits and residence permits which contains data input and checked by the Border and Migration Directorate and the National Agency of Employment and Skills;
- ç) The Module for handling foreigners staying illegally in the territory, which contains data reflected and checked by the Border and Migration Directorate;
- d) The Module for ID cards and travel documents/papers for foreigners, which contains copies of these documents used by the foreign national while entering the Republic of Albania and for his/her identification.

The Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) is the responsible institution for the collection, processing and distribution of administrative data, including data on migration. The annual figures of immigrants are projected based on the integrated model on migration in Labour Force Survey since 2015. Migration Statistics are collected in line with Regulation 862/2007 of the Council of Europe, as a guide for the unification of collection and analysis of national statistics for migration and asylum and have been included for the first time in the Program of Official Statistic of 2017-2021. In addition, there is in place a new methodology for collection of data from public institutions which is expected to be operational soon.

With reference to INSTAT, as the key institution for establishing a joint system for migration data, with IOM expertise and the support of EUD-there is now in place a Gap Report about administrative data on migration. INSTAT has disseminated Guidelines for Migration Statistics in Albania to all institutions and line ministries. The new standard model for the collection of administrative data was processed further and was submitted to the Ministry of Interior and Border and Migration Directorate. The processing of a new model for data collection will be followed up by its dissemination, in order to make the new model accessible by all institutions, in order for it to be used as an official model for collection of administrative data, coordinated by the Technical Secretariat for Migration. INSTAT, in cooperation with IOM and CESS, with the support of GIZ launched the first Home Migration Survey (HMS) in 2019, with the participation

of more than 20 thousand households, and more than 70 thousand respondents, the biggest of its kind ever launched in Albania.

The Border and Migration Department is in charge of collecting and processing in real time and continuously migration data through the Foreigners Electronic Registry (FER), while the data source for asylum-seekers and citizenship remains the Ministry of Interior. Based on the collected data, the MoI drafts and publishes country's migration profiles (both annual and extended), while reflecting the Findings of the European Commission (2007) for Extending and Improving Global Approach to Migration in the South-eastern regions bordering with the EU. The Ministry of Interior has finalized the Extended Migration Profile for 2015-2018.

In the context of cooperation with the countries of the region and international partners, Albania has launched its Regional Platform for Personal Data Exchange on Migration, developed by MARRI, i.e. Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative. In addition, work is underway for the regional format of exchange of non-personal statistics for smuggling of migrants, with the support of IOM project "Improving capacities and mechanisms for identification and protection of migrants in the Western Balkans". Albania and the countries of the region exchange non-personal data, for purposes of prevention and reducing the risk of smuggling.

Objective 2: Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin

The most sustainable way for reducing emigration flows is by promoting economic development and creation of new jobs. To this end, employment and strengthening of the labour force are priorities of the Government. In 2019, the Government of Albania adopted the National Strategy on Employment and Skills, and its Action Plan for 2019-2022. At the core of this document lay employment opportunities, education and skills for all, dignified labour, social inclusion and cohesion. The Government of Albania remains committed to incentives for education, training and employment of youth and unaccompanied minors in the countries of origin/residence, in cooperation with the local authorities. According to law no. 15/2019 "On employment promotion", returned emigrants and young persons under 29 are part of special groups for whom are available and adopted employment promotion programs.

The Covid-19 pandemic imposed a rapid growth in unemployment worldwide. It led to an unexpected increase of unemployed in Albania, and among Albanian emigrants in the countries of destination, since the sectors of employment of migrant labour, such as food supply and services, tourism, textiles, and retail trade were the most severely hit by the Pandemic. Emigrants are vulnerable to loss of employment and pay due to the negative economic impact of the pandemic. Despite efforts of the Government to save jobs, INSTAT reports that the private sector lost 23, 5005 jobs from January 2019 until June 2020. The government made efforts to generate new employment in the public sector, and consequently the number of public employees in Albania grew by 1% (1,483 jobs were generated) during the same timeframe. Meanwhile there have been efforts to maintain the level and quality of public services, health and education services, as well as social services for the vulnerable marginal groups of population. About 2,500 households were added to the Social Assistance Program.

The Government came up with two packages of financial assistance, one for small businesses and ordinary citizens, and the second for employers and employees, in the form of subsidies for

employees and former employees who lost their jobs in companies with over 14 million lek turnover. Subsidies were also made available for the tourism sector; two packages of financial assistance for citizens and business, and additional budgetary funds for healthcare services. Unemployment benefits and social assistance benefits were doubled. Until September 3, 2020, 86 667 businesses and 383 627 citizens employed in businesses which were either closed or hit by COVID-19 Pandemic have benefited from reimbursement of 12,742,627,298 lek or 121 million dollars (total fund).

The Government of Albania has provided significant support in the prevention of illegal migration, and promotion of regular alternatives through dissemination of information in the whole country and launching of information and awareness raising campaigns. The Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with IOM, and other responsible institutions have launched since January 1, 2020 a Project for "Prevention of unsafe migration from Albania to some of the EU member countries – Follow up campaign", which was funded by the Netherlands.

Furthermore, on March 26, 2021 was launched a project on "Raising awareness and information about safety and empowerment for all - Albania / ARISE ALL". The Project brings about two innovative activities in 12 regions of Albania, as well as in Belgium and Netherlands about safe and regular migration awareness raising.

The Ministry of Interior and State Police have monitored the mobility situation of Albanian citizens in the Schengen area and in other EU countries, and have worked on raising their awareness regarding the implications of overstaying the visa limits, and to avoid abuse with the right for free movement. Albanian state border police and migration authorities, at the Border Crossing Points apply specific interviews for citizens who leave the country for the first time, they apply instruction for use of interview techniques to identify potential asylum-seekers and to detect persons who might have assisted or helped them procure fake papers, and keep contacts and exchange information with the police forces of neighbouring countries through Centres for Exchange of Information and International Airports, anytime they run across such Albanian citizens traveling to EU countries.

Albanian citizens who have been readmitted have been briefed about the implications and ramifications of illegal migration, and to provide them with information about public and non-public services that facilitate their re-integration. During the referral period for this Report the implementation agreement for the project Counselling for migration has continued.

This project is part of the Global Program "Migration for development" authorized by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, aimed at the fight against irregular migration, while providing information about legit ways of labour migration, and providing information regarding VET education, and the perspectives of the labour market in Germany and in Albania. The project is implemented in Albania thanks to a cooperation between GIZ, and MoFE structures.

In addition, consular services in the Albanian consular offices have been strengthened and improved, to provide information to Albanian citizens regarding regular stay in the countries of destination through Migration Windows and official websites, reflecting fully disclosed information about the right of stay of Albanian citizens in the Schengen area. Most of consular services are now available online, thus meeting the requirements and needs of citizens and saving them time and money.

Objective 3: Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration

Albania has a sustainable legal framework for the protection of Albanian emigrants in the countries of destination and immigrants in Albania. Information is provided throughout all migration stages, through and towards Albania, while informing Albanian emigrants about their rights, obligations, and penalties involved in case of violation of Schengen rules. Awareness raising activities are organized in all regions of Albania, supported by IOM and Albanian consular services in all EU member countries and countries of the Schengen area. Returning migrants are informed at the border crossing point about the existing re-integration services in the country, and are assisted with transportation, food and necessary drugs.

With regard to work permits, the online platform found in E-Albania provides information about the documentation and procedures for obtaining work permits. Return migrants may obtain information services about employment opportunities from the regional local and national employment offices.

To be able to provide information to potential migrants in Germany, the Government of Albania signed an agreement with the German Government (through GIZ) for the implementation of “Counselling for migration in Albania” project. Since October 2016, next to the Regional Employment Office in Tirana, and since December 2019 in Shkodra, “DIMAK” Albania, the German centre for Information about Migration, VET training and career counselling is operational and provides information about regular migration and risks related to irregular migration. These programs have provided IT infrastructure support to AKPA. The migration staff of AKPA have participated interactively in workshops and trainings organized by IOM and GIZ, in cooperation with Albanian institutions that have focused on the formulation and collection of statistics of labour migration, and the implementation of National migration Strategy for 2019 – 2020.

In support of the training needs of the labour offices staff activities were organized under the project for “Strengthening institutional capacities for migration governance in Albania” funded by IOM development fund.

In addition, it is important to take the necessary steps for the formalization and capacity building of Migration Windows in the regional and local employment offices. Information about regular/legal migration for employment purposes for Albanian citizens who wish to work in Germany has continued under the project for “Migration counselling in Albania”.

The Government’s focus on the cooperation with partner institutions of countries of destination has continued. Cooperation with GIZ continued with extending in the beginning of 2021 of the new agreement on migratory issues, while pursuing cooperation to this end in the context of the project “Migration counselling in Albania”.

IOM, as an intergovernmental organization is implementing projects in partnership with responsible government institutions. IOM has provided continuous support to Migration Windows in all labour offices, with activities for capacity building, and information packages, including online information. However, it is important to take the necessary steps for the formalization and capacity building of Migration Windows in the regional and local employment offices.

Objective 4: Ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity and accurate information

Introduction of online services and simplification of procedures have facilitated the process for obtaining single permits and employment permits. The Ministry of Interior is working towards the distribution of biometric IDs for all foreign citizens legally residing in Albania. Foreign citizens with valid residence permits in the Republic of Albania may apply to be equipped with a biometric ID card. This ID card has the same features as any ID card issued to Albanian citizens. The card identification number (NID) enables 20,000 foreigners with residence permits in Albania to register with e-Albania, while giving them access to online services provided by the Albanian government.

The new law no 79 of 24.06.2021, “On foreigners” cancelled law no 108/2013 “On foreigners”. The changes and amendments to this law have allowed for its fine-tuning and harmonization with Directives, Rulings and Regulations of the Council of Europe. The law is based on the principle of a child’s best interest, the principle of the right to family life, principle of non-return, principle of due process, and non-discrimination principle. Despite the broad guarantees that law provides it is still concerning other procedural rights of children in these processes, especially clearer guidance and standards for interviewing children, that should be developed.²

Law no. 79/2021 has suffered changes with regard to the work permit which is now being referred to with a new term, which is the single permit, and which provides for all types of single permits, the procedures for acquiring a single permit, and the appeal procedures. Furthermore, the single permit is also provided to special categories, with regard to new terms related to foreigners, such as “*Au pair*”, foreigners as key personnel, grounds for the permit, issuing of permits with 5 years deadline for United States citizens, EU citizens and citizens of the Republic of Kosovo when they apply for the first time and meet the generic criteria of this Law.

Some of the single permit types added include those issued to digital employees, retired permit for pensioners, residence permit when in possession of immovable properties, vessel crews, investors, etc. A novelty of this law includes definition of the status and issuance of documents for stateless persons. The procedure for application, evaluation, approval and refusal of the request for stateless status gets approved by an order of the minister responsible for rule of law and public security.

As mentioned above, by the end of 2021. DCM no. 857, of 29.12.2021 provided for the “establishment and operation of the national electronic registry for foreigners in the Republic of Albania”. NERF is a national database for foreigners who enter or aim to enter in the Republic of Albania, for purposes of residence, transit, on grounds of employment, studying, and exit of the Republic of Albania.

Objective 5: Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for legal migration

Albania is part of the processes for strengthened regional cooperation and free movement in the region. We can mention, inter alia:

- **Open Balkans agreement**

1. Agreement about terms of free access in the labour market in the Western Balkans:

² Recommended by UNICEF Albania.

The agreement for free access in the labour market in the Western Balkans is aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and mutual understanding, with the view of contributing to the economic development and growth, increased investments and employment in the Western Balkans, for purposes of progress and prosperity. With the adoption of this agreement, citizens of the contractual parties will enjoy the right to moving, staying and working freely within the territory of each contractual party, in line with the definitions of this agreement.

2. Agreement for interconnection of schemes for electronic identification of citizens in the Western Balkans:

This agreement is about ensuring that contractual parties are able to provide access to their e-governance services for citizens of other contractual parties, by making use of the verification schemes for electronic identification of the contractual party to whom the citizen using e-governance services belongs to.

▪ **Agreements with Kosovo**

1. Agreement for facilitation of procedures and terms for obtaining temporary resident visa is meant for the facilitation of terms and procedures for issuing temporary resident visa to the citizens of both signatory parties. This agreement also aims at promoting contacts and mobility, as important elements for the cooperation between both countries, while ensuring more favourable elements of cooperation between both countries, while guaranteeing more favourable terms for having access in the labour market, family reunification, which is indispensable for ensuring family life; to facilitate integration of citizens of party countries, in order to promote economic development and social cohesion; to foster scientific research and innovation etc.

2. Cooperation Agreement between the Ministry of Finance and Economy of the Republic of Albania and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the Republic of Kosovo about labour mobility: This agreement, *inter alia*, aims at strengthening relations between policy enforcement agencies and VET agencies, and exchange of best practice in the area of employment, VET and migration, and ensuring that workers of one country may be employed in the territory of the other country.

With the view of strengthening regular migration, the Government has improved legislation about private employment agencies, based on ILO standards. Actually, there are in place three DCMs that regulate operation of private employment agencies (no. 101/2018), and specific rules about temporary staff employed by the private employment agencies (no. 286/2018 and no. 555/2019).

Progress has been made regarding strengthening cooperation with homologue institutions in the countries of destination regarding transfer of best practices for provision of information to migrants (study visits, distribution of material etc.).

Objective 6: Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work

Employment of foreign citizens in Albania is done in line with the Labour Code, and the new law “On foreigners”. The latter provides for several principles of employment of foreign citizens, and rules for different types of singles permits that foreign citizens are eligible to. Secondary legislation for Private Employment Agencies spells out certain provisions that aim at improving

fair and ethical employment of migrant labour force. There is space for strengthening enforcement of secondary legislation.

Inspectors of Labour and Social Services Inspectorate are in charge of inspecting and monitoring the working conditions of foreign labour force in the country, and their opportunities for dignified labour. In the course of 2019, the Inspectorate has performed inspection checks about working conditions and employment contracts of 1,106 foreign workers, and has detected 8 workers with no working permit, and 2 workers with work-related injuries. During 2020, the Inspectorate has met with 217 immigrant workers, and has detected 10 workers with no work visa, and 2 workers with work-related injuries. The state Labour and Social Services Inspectorate has established a Central Unit in the Labour Inspectorate to detect and investigate violations against foreign workers.

The Government of Albania is pursuing its work for the formulation of Guidelines for ethical recruitment for private employment agencies, based on the legislation in effect, their publication in the website of MoFE, NAES, Labour Inspectorate, National Business Centre, and their distribution in the labour offices.

Ethical practice for recruitment of migrant workers will be promoted in cooperation with the private sector. The ethical framework for recruitment in Albania will be further fine-tuned to include requirements for protection from COVID-19 implications, in consultation with recruitment agencies and the private sector.

Furthermore, IOM will support consultations with recruitment agencies for processing, display and dissemination of information and materials for promotion of ethical recruitment, and opportunities for safe and organized migration, and benefits related to the status of regular migration. With the support of IOM there is now available a study on the effectiveness of provisions of law no. 9668/2006 “On emigration of Albanian citizens on employment grounds”, while the implementation of this law has proved to be problematic. However, if we are to refer to the legislation adopted after 2011, there are favourable provisions for treatment of Albanian immigrants, such as: the suffrage right, with the changes introduced in the Electoral Code, online consular services etc.

According to its Internal Operational and Organizational Regulation, the mission of the National Employment and Skills Agency is to ensure accomplishment/delivery of rights of Albanian citizens, immigrants, stateless persons who are entitled to the refugee status, and asylum-seekers in the territory of the Republic of Albania, to receive services and have access to public employment and self-employment services and programs, as well as to VET qualifications, in order to find a suitable job.

Objective 7: Address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration

During the decision-making process regarding foreign citizens, the responsible authorities apply legal provisions in line with the main freedoms and rights stipulated in the Constitution, conventions and internationally ratified agreements. Law no.79/2021“On foreigners” has led to continuous fine-tuning of the legislative framework for migration, while further harmonizing the legislation on migration with relevant EU Directives identified during *screening* process for Chapter 24 “Justice, freedom and security”. The law is expected to facilitate management of regular migration and assist in the fight against irregular migration. The fight against

irregular/illegal migration is one of the pre-requisites in the context of the process for EU accession. The law “On foreigners” aims at improving the scope rights of foreigners, in terms of offering protection to migrants and their family members, refugees, asylum-seekers, while ensuring access to integration programs and services for foreign citizens. Steps forward have been taken with regard to formulation and adoption of bylaws in line with the Law “On foreigners. A foreign citizen who has been issued a residence permit in the Republic of Albania may apply with the responsible local authority on border and migration issues for family reunification, should he meet the criteria provided for in the law. A foreign citizen equipped with a residence permit for family reunification may conduct an economic activity, except for the cases when there is a legislation that prohibits it explicitly, and without prior approval from NAES. This right is also marked in the residence permit for family reunification.

During 2020, 7658 foreigners were issued residence visas in Albania. Of these, 1588 individuals were issued residence visa on grounds of family reunification. According to the visa expiry, foreigners with visas on grounds of family reunification are classified as follows: visa issued up to 12 months for 815 foreigners; visa issued up to 24 months for 654 foreigners with visa expiry for 5 years, 35 foreigners, and permanent residence, 84 foreigners. In the course of 2021, 8769 persons were equipped with residence visa. Of them, 1542 persons were issued visas on grounds of family reunification. 4383 foreign nationals were issued 12 month visas; 1516 foreigners were issued 24 months visas; 152 foreigners were issued 5 year visa, and 269 foreigners were issued residence visas.

The Law no. 10/2021 “On asylum in the Republic of Albania” was adopted in 2021. *Inter alia*, the purpose of this Law is to ensure rights and obligations of refugees, of applicants for international protection and persons with temporary and complementary protection. In addition to this law, there are also several bylaws.

As reiterated in the joint statement about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on migrants’ situation, this pandemic caused an unprecedented human crisis, leading to devastating ramifications on human health, life and welfare of people worldwide. Migrant workers were often faced with specific challenges during COVID-19 pandemic due to a series of factors, including inappropriate living and working conditions, limited local knowledge and networks, discrimination, lack of access to healthcare services, and exclusion in the host countries. However, Albania has enhanced legal guarantees against discrimination for all persons residing in its territory.

The Contingency Plan was developed in April 2020, with the goal of managing mixed flows, considering the vulnerability of populations in mobility (such as unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking, asylum-seekers, persons with disabilities etc.). The Plan reflects the contribution and suggestions/comments of the responsible Ministries and international organizations (IOM, UNHCR) and has been updated in 2021 with the contribution of IOM. The Government of Albania is trying to mitigate migration weaknesses in the context of management of regular and irregular migration flows towards Albania.

Objective 8: Save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants

The Government of Albania does not as yet have in place a set of rules and specific procedures on missing migrants. However, it is cooperating on regular terms with international organizations

and services of other countries to search for and identify all cases of missing migrants. Albania is signatory to the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR).

Objective 9: Strengthening the transnational response to smuggling of migrants

So far as the Objective per se is concerned, all GCM objectives, except for Objective no. 9 correspond with at least one objective to the National Strategy on Migration (NSM) and another strategic document of the Government of Albania. Objective 9 for strengthening transnational response to smuggling of migrants bears no direct reference to SKM, but is linked to the National Action Plan against Trafficking of Human Beings adopted by DCM no. 670, of 10.11.2021.

- ***Regional and international cooperation:***

Regional and international cooperation has taken on a new dimension, with meetings organized with partners from Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Great Britain, Germany etc., in order to intensify efforts in the fight against trafficking of human beings, since this is not an Albanian only or a regional phenomenon alone. It is a global phenomenon and as such requires coordinated efforts among the countries in the fight against crime. A series of measures have already been taken for further intensifying this cooperation, which have been translated into Agreements and Protocols signed with Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Greece, United Kingdom, for the identification, referral, protection and re-integration of victims/potential victims of trafficking. Work is underway for the review of the implementation of the Agreement with Greece, in order to develop Unified Action Procedures for the identification, referral and assistance of victims/potential victims of trafficking, in particular of children.

- ***Strengthening partnership and initiatives with international organizations and the civil society***

Cooperation with international partners and civil society organizations plays a key role in addressing trafficking of human beings, in the effective coordination and involvement of the civil society in the anti-trafficking structures and mechanisms, as equal partners. Some of the key aspects of the cooperation include implementation of joint/common projects, as follows:

- the Project “Transforming the national response to trafficking of human beings within and from Albania” funded by the United Kingdom, is being implemented by UNICEF Albania, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, for the prevention of trafficking by increasing capacities and opportunities for at risk population, economic and social re-integration of victims of trafficking/ potential victims of trafficking and people at high risk, local and nationwide information and awareness raising based on evidence-generation, and strengthening of capacities of professionals and first line responders of responsible institutions. While the project works closely in 4 regions in Albania, namely: Tirana, Kukës, Dibra and Shkodra, it has established a vivid network of experienced civil society organizations and international organizations to address and provide services in view of THB in Albania.

- Regional project for “Prevention and fight against trafficking of human beings in the countries of the Western Balkans”, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, is being implemented by the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), in cooperation with GIZ and 6 countries of the Western Balkans. The Project’s goal is to improve the situation and circumstance of potential victims of human beings trafficking in the Western Balkans, among mix migratory flows, with particular attention being paid to local populations, unaccompanied women and children, and other vulnerable groups at risk of trafficking.

Objective 10: Prevent, combat and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration

Prevention, fight against trafficking in persons, and protection of victims and potential victims of trafficking continues to be one of the main priorities of the Government of Albania, and of the relevant structures responsible assigned to these tasks.

The Government of Albania has launched and coordinated a series of activities, among which we can refer to improved legal framework on anti-trafficking and ensuring its correct implementation.

Adoption of the National Action Plan for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons, 2021-2023 (DCM no. 670 of 10.11.2021) is testimony to the dedication of the Government of Albania, and its public and non-public institutions, anti-trafficking stakeholders that operate in the public and non-public structures, to minimize the phenomenon of trafficking in persons. UNICEF Albania provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Interior for the preparation and subsequent adoption of the National Action Plan for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons, 2021-2023 (DCM no. 670 of 10.11.2021).³ The goal of this strategic document is to convey the vision that trafficking in persons may be successfully prevented, only through social and economic empowerment of vulnerable groups and persons, through efficient implementation of the law, and punishment of perpetrators, strengthening of services and capacities to the assistance of persons who are victims or potential victims of trafficking. Activities foreseen under the National Action Plan aim at improving the operability of a comprehensive system, by strengthening the mechanism for the identification, criminal prosecution, protection, and re-integration of victims of trafficking.

Decision of Council of Ministers no 499, of 29.08.2018 “On adoption of standard procedures of action for protection of victims and potential victims of trafficking” is currently being implemented. This DCM is the main document for the identification, referral, protection and provision of assistance to victims and potential victims of trafficking. The main focus of these procedure are the victims, and their protection, while making sure it is done on a case by case bases, and by building certain accepted standards about the methodology for the whole process of identification and referral to be construed, and then for the protection of victims of trafficking. These procedures shall apply to all categories of victims and potential victims of trafficking (i.e. minors and adults, women and men, Albanian and foreign citizens alike) subject of trafficking of

³ Information from UNICEF Albania.

all forms of exploitation. For purposes of clarification and facilitation in the implementation of Standard Action Procedures for the protection of victims and potential victims of trafficking were organized training sessions with staff of responsible structures assigned for the identification and protection of victims and potential victims of trafficking.

In addition, law no. 79/2021 “On foreigners” provides that the responsible local authority on border and migration gives priority to the execution of volunteer return of victims of trafficking of human beings who wish to return voluntarily in their countries of origin.

The establishment of 4 Mobile Units (Tirana, Shkodra, Kukës and Dibra) has played an important role in the identification of victims and potential victims of trafficking. All 4 Mobile Units were supported by the Human Trafficking project led by UNICEF Albania that increased local capacities for the identification of PV/VoTs at community level and managed to identify 95 PV/VoTs during 2021. The achieved results reiterate the need to establish and maintain similar identification mechanisms for PV/VoTs in 12 regions in Albania.

Victims and potential victims of trafficking are provided assistance in the shelters for victims of trafficking, and in the community. Currently in Albania there are four such host and re-integration centres. All of these centres provide services to victims and/or potential victims of trafficking, be them local or foreign, to children and adults, male and female. The host and re-integration centres provide full range package of services for re-integration of victims and/or potential victims of trafficking, such as: accommodation, safety, re-integration plan, medical assistance, psychological help, psycho-social assistance, tending to education needs and school enrolment; legal aid, vocational education training assistance, employment counselling, social activities, services for economic empowerment, including micro-finance grants; assistance for the children of victims of trafficking, financial support and long-term accommodation, information about available services in the community, and relevant contact information; continuous monitoring and supervision of program beneficiaries.

It is important to mention the impact of COVID-19 on the reintegration cycle for PV/VoTs that were assisted by the shelters during this period. Three shelters that partnered with UNICEF Albania in framework of the HT project funded by the UK government, reported a slowdown of reintegration processes for PV/VoTs during the pandemic, which involved risks of re-trafficking if not properly addressed. Hence, immediate efforts were undertaken to ensure the provision of basic living standards and means of support for PV/VoTs and their dependents throughout the pandemic, through tailor-made case management plans.

The economic reintegration component of “Transforming the national response to trafficking of human beings within and from Albania” project implemented by UNICEF Albania, has successfully applied employment schemes for PV/VoTs and people at risk of trafficking, by means of partnering with local businesses and National Employment Offices, as well as self-employment through start-up funding. Similar interventions should be strengthened as vital contributions to the economic reintegration and subsequent independence of PV/VoTs and people at risk of trafficking in Albania.

However, successful reintegration remains difficult because core protection, care and social services from the state are insufficient. Specialized and reintegration services for victims should be provided and the work on case management should be further strengthened.⁴

Foreign victims and potential victims of trafficking are provided with the same services, of same quality as Albanian victims and potential victims of trafficking within the same centres (shelters). Other services for foreign victims and potential victims of trafficking include: helping them apply and equip them with temporary resident visa; equipping them with papers ensuring their return to their country of origin; registration of children in the civil status registration offices when children are born in Albania, etc.

For purposes of community awareness raising, the Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with partner organizations and state institutions during October organizes the "The Month against Trafficking in Persons" campaign. Awareness raising activities for the prevention of trafficking in persons are organized in 12 regions of the country.

"Transforming the national response to trafficking of human beings within and from Albania" project implemented by UNICEF Albania, enhanced the role of Regional Anti-trafficking Committees (KRAT) in 4 regions of Albania, and engaged with them directly and frequently on how to meet the specific needs of every region with regard to prevention of trafficking, or identification and provision of support to PV/VoTs. The cooperation will be extended in 2022 with provision of capacity building for technical professionals of KRAT member institutions.

Albanian authorities repatriated six adult women and 18 minors from the camps in Syria in October 2020 and August 2021. Their return, reintegration and rehabilitation have been prepared and accompanied by an inter-institutional working group, with leading roles for the CVE Coordination Centre and the ASP's Counter-Terrorism Directorate. UNICEF has supported children and their families to re-integrate and access all basic needs through social and legal support.⁵

Objective 11: Manage borders in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner

Adoption of the Integrated Border Management Strategy is not just only a pre-requisite for full EU accession, but the implementation of this concept is concomitantly a clear indication that the Republic of Albania is willing and ready to contribute to security in the region, as a credible partner of the European Union in its border control. The Republic of Albania, through adoption of this strategic document, and other investments in this aspect, aims at reaching EU standards in the area of Integrated Border Management. Reaching these standards provides safety and security to Albanian and foreign citizens, and leads and ensures development of barrier-free economic cross-border activities.

Major achievements in this area are the result of continuous improvements of border infrastructure, enhanced border police capacities for the detection, apprehension and control of emigrants at the border and in the territory, and for their referral to the relevant appropriate

⁴ Information provided by UNICEF Albania.

⁵ Information from UNICEF Albania.

services. The system for border management information, so-called Total Information Management System” (TIMS), and the Foreigner Electronic registry^{FER37}, enables monitoring of entry and departure from the country, and over-staying visas. The Law on Foreigners and the Law on Asylum and their relevant bylaws that regulate the procedure for screening of immigrants, such as asylum-seekers, unaccompanied minors, potential victims of trafficking, and paperless migrants, in order to provide them with the necessary assistance.

However UNICEF Albania brings to attention that unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and repatriated Albanians from conflict zones face multiple deprivation and challenges with the fulfilment of their basic rights. In many instances these challenges are directly related to systemic gaps and overall lack of quality services for vulnerable population. There is a statelessness determination procedure in place but the instruction to stipulate how this mechanism will work is not yet in force. Medical examination for determining the age of the unaccompanied child and the procedure for placing a child into custody is still challenging.⁶

Albania is a transit country for migratory flows from the Middle East. During 2021, the Border and Migration Department has handled, in line with standard operational procedures for 18,496 first-time foreign illegal citizens and 8,434 repeat illegal/irregular foreigners. In terms of classification according to citizenship, the majority of migrants are Syrians (10275), Afghan national (2369), Bangladeshi (1,198) and Moroccan (871).

For purposes of addressing issues related to illegal migrants, with the support of IOM there are in place two Transit Centres, respectively in the Border Crossing Stations of Kapshtica (Korça) and Gërhot (Gjirokastra), with hosting capacity approximately 60 persons in each of them. The screening process at the border is run in these two facilities. In case there are migrants with health problems, immediate health care services are provided in the temporary accommodation centre, as well as in the healthcare centres or hospitals.

In addressing these specific issues, the border and migration police has had the continuous support of CARITAS Albania. The police officers in charge of handling illegal migrants, in line with ANTI-COVID-19 safety protocols have taken the necessary precautionary measures, and have been equipped with masks, gloves, disinfectants for preventing being infected from Covid or other contagious diseases.

In cooperation with FRONTEX, the Government of Albania has taken the necessary measures to enhance cooperation and exchange of information, in particular with countries affected by abusive Albanian asylum-seekers, and to intensify return operations for Albanian citizens.

Special attention has been paid to strengthening regional cooperation, by giving priority to exchange of information with Migration Services and Diplomatic Offices in Tirana, of the neighbouring countries affected by the migration flows, as well as with foreign liaison officers accredited in Albania, in particular with those of potential destination countries. We have joint border patrols, in particular along the green border, with Northern Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro. Currently the Joint Centre for exchange of information with North Macedonia and

⁶ Information from UNICEF Albania.

Kosovo is operational. The Ministry of Interior is cooperating with the Emergency Operational Office at the Prime Minister's office (ZOS), in charge of drafting reports any time refugees/migrants are detected at the border and in the territory.

We have had very good cooperation with international organizations, such as IOM, UNHCR, CARITAS, etc., in particular regarding emigration aspects, and immigration flows. At the same time, in cooperation with IOM training was provided to the border police personnel. On October 5, Albania and the European Union signed a Cooperation Agreement for Border Management between Albania and FRONTEX. Activities included in the memorandum are meant for addressing illegal migration, in particular unexpected migration flow patterns and cross border crime, and may include technical and operational assistance at the border. The Government of Albania, with the support of FRONTEX is working for drafting a new Strategy for Integrated Border Management, which will be a follow-up of the existing Strategy (2014-2020). Albania is part of an ongoing process of cooperation with countries of the EU and of the region regarding emigration related exchange of information. We have a National Contact Point for the migration flows, which is in close cooperation with FRONTEX through daily briefings.

There is the joint border patrol along the green border with Northern Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro. In addition, there is the Joint Centre for Exchange of Information with Northern Macedonia and Kosovo.

Albania is in the process of updating its equipment and infrastructure for border surveillance, including green and blue borders.

Objective 12: Strengthen certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral

The Government of Albania is regularly updating its Contingency Plan to provide for mix massive migratory flows, while paying special attention to vulnerable individuals, such as: unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking, asylum-seekers and persons with disabilities. The emergency plan aims to guarantee the rights of asylum-seekers and emigrants and provide for their safety, through screening and processing of data, delivery of services and assistance during displacement, evacuation, accommodation in emergency situation, food, healthcare and psycho-social services.

In line with the National Strategy on Migration and the Action Plan for 2019-2022, as well as Order no. 592 of 06.12.2019 "On the establishment of the working group for "Adoption of the Contingency Plan", the Contingency Plan was drafted, under the lead of the Ministry of Interior and the General State Police Department. The plan reflects the contribution, input and suggestions/comments of the relevant ministries and international organizations that operate in the country. For the formulation of this plan we exchanged information and were extended the cooperation of competent authorities of other countries. In addition, the Plan of Measures identifies the host centres, the role of each responsible institution, and the modalities for

operation and command. Currently, Albania's Contingency Plan is up-to-date and operational, pending approval by the Council of Ministers.

Following the dynamic of mix migratory flows that affect both the region, and our country, and based on EU recommendations, for purposes of prevention and management of illegal migration, the managing border and migration authorities have compiled draft re-admission agreements with some countries of origin, such as: Afghanistan, Irak, Pakistan, India, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Bangladesh, Tunis. The draft re-admission protocol with the Greek counterparts has been under review/negotiation since July 2020.

Since 2020, 200 new police personnel have been added to the Border and Migration Police, bringing the number to a total of 1,838 police officers. In the course of 2021, 75 new staff were added to the Border and Migration police ranks. Training sessions and joint trainings were organized with the managing officials of border police and frontline police officers.

The structures of border and migration police (both at the border and in the territory) strictly follow provisions in line with law no. 79/2021 "On foreigners", and the standardized operating procedures related to the identification process (reference to Order of DPPSH no. 172, of 08.02.2018). During this process, following their classification as: either asylum-seekers, potential victims of trafficking, illegal migrant, or unaccompanied minor there is the process of identification and registration of foreign citizens and administrative measures stipulated under the above-mentioned legislation. In line with DCM no 111, of 06.03.2019, "On procedures and rules for child repatriation" cases of foreign unaccompanied minors are referred to, at the Child Protection Unit of the relevant municipality.

During processing of visa applications for foreign citizens, the consular officers in the diplomatic missions base themselves in the legislation for foreigners in the Republic of Albania. Following receipt of online applications, the consular offices conduct the necessary appropriate verifications for each application singularly. The consular offices make assessment of the documents put online for each case.

The data filed by visa applicants for the territory of the Republic of Albania are processed and saved under TIMS, which is accessible by all competent authorities in charge with handling visa applications, in line with the legislation on foreigners in the Republic of Albania.

In addition, in line with the legislation, the consular offices of the Republic of Albania that handle visa applications of foreign citizens, on a case by case bases may ask for additional documentation. If during administering visa applications of foreign citizens, the consular services observe that the visa applicant has submitted forged documentation, they enjoy the right to refuse the visa, without any further procedures with competent structures. Currently, visa applications are processed by the E-Visa system which is accessible by all structures involved in the process of visa issuance.

Regarding enforcement of rights to public services for foreign residents in Albania there are now available information packages regarding different services, from different institutions, classified according to the most important life events. The information package for foreigners in Albania

provides detailed information for foreigners who wish to stay, or who want to use the country for transit purposes, or on employment grounds, to study or to depart from the Republic of Albania, be them EU citizens or non-EU citizens. In all Windows of integrated ADISA centres it is now possible to apply for services in NAES migration dedicated Window. These applications can now all be run through e-Albania portal.

According to Instruction no. 293/2015 “On handling of foreign citizens legal residents in the country”, all Border Crossing Points and Border Police stations now have one trained staff for inspection, assessment and referral of illegal immigrants, following best practice of IOM, UNHCR, CARITAS, etc.

Also, during January 2021-december 2022 there is the ongoing IOM Project for “Raising awareness and securing information about safety and empowerment for all” - "ARISE ALL" funded by EU AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) (2014-2020), co-funded and in partnership with the Belgian Service Public Federal (SPF Belgium) and the Ministry of Justice of Netherlands. The project has brought about innovative activities in 12 regions of Albania, Belgium and Netherlands about raising awareness for safe and dignified migration. IOM has provided continuous support to the Government of Albania regarding enhanced capacities and training of Border and Migration Police through local and regional projects, and enhanced hosting capacities at the border with Greece for the registration and temporary accommodation of illegal migrants. Currently in Gërhot (Gjirokastra) and Kapshtica (Korça) there are two fully equipped centres with 60 staff.

Objective 13: Use immigration detention only as a measure of the last resort and work towards alternatives

Albanian legislation defines detention as a measure of last resort for illegal migrants that enter the Albanian territory. To restrict/limit the flow of illegal migrants, they are sent in the pre-Detention Centre for Foreigners in Karec, near Tirana, where they stay until their departure to their country of origin or transit. In the course of 2021, the closed facility/centre of Karrec accommodated 69 illegal migrants.

Foreigners in the Republic of Albania enjoy the rights stipulated in the Constitution, and international ratified conventions.⁷

Provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Migrants and their family members are reflected in the content of the new law “On foreigners” no. 79/2021. The law guarantees compliance of its provisions with the rights and freedoms stipulated in the Constitution and in the international ratified instruments, in particular to ensure that its provisions are compliant with the principle of a child’s best interest, the principle of the right to family life, non- refoulement principle,

⁷ Constitution, article 16 paragraph 1. Provides that the fundamental freedoms and the obligations provided in the Constitution for Albanian citizens apply equally to foreign nationals and stateless persons in the territory of the Republic of Albania, except when the Constitution specifically ties the Albanian nationality to the exercise of certain rights and freedoms.

principle of due process; with the view of continuous improvement of the migration legislation, aiming at further approximation of migration legislation with relevant EU directives identified during the Screening process of Chapter 24 on “Justice, Freedom and Security”.⁸

Objective 14: Enhance consular protection, assistance and cooperation throughout the migration cycle

Albania currently has 72 consular officers in all diplomatic and consular missions. To ensure a gender-sensitive approach, 38 or 53 percent of consular posts are held by women. Consular officers are trained on migration aspects/issues before the start of their work with Albanian consular services. Consular officers handling sensitive data and information are equipped with the Security Certificate issued by the Government. Diplomats appointed in the diplomatic missions of the Republic of Albania, prior to taking over their assignment are trained about consular services and systems that are used in this context. In addition, diplomats handling consular services of certain sensitive aspects are preliminary issued the security certificate by the competent structures.

Data of visa applicants are processed and maintained in the TIMS system, which is accessible by the relevant governmental institutors. When the consular officer comes in possession of forged documents, he/she rejects the visa to the applicant without consulting with other competent structures.

Albanian Consular services in the Schengen countries inform their citizens in their countries about the above-mentioned regulations, and guide them to contact border and migration services of the respective countries. In the official website there is fully disclosed information about the right to stay of Albanian citizens in the Schengen area countries. Also, the website provides information about calculation of residence period, in line with the legislation in effect. With regard to the above, the consuls are already briefed and should such request come from interested citizens, they convey this information and the necessary instructions to the relevant parties. On a case by case bases, the Consuls may instruct the applicants to contact the responsible border structures or those of the countries where the citizens wish to travel. The Online consular

⁸ Article 99 of the law on foreigners, Order for departure and execution deadline defines that:

7. a foreigner who has been approved for prolongation of the period for execution of the voluntary departure has the right to:

- a) stay together with his/her family members that are in the territory;
- b) to have access to primary healthcare, to be entitled to treatments for specific disease, and public health services;
- c) when the foreign citizen is a child he should have access to the education system, depending on the stay period;
- ç) for specific services for persons with disabilities.

8. At the moment of the execution of the order for the departure of the foreign citizen from the territory, it is taken into account the child's best interest, situation of vulnerable persons, family family, and health status of the foreigner subject to the order for departure from the territory.

9. Information is provided in written form, to the foreigner, according to the Administrative Procedure Code, in a language understandable from him, or at least in English, about the order of departure, while informing him/her about appeals procedure, in line with article 100 of this Law. The format and the content of the departure order is established with instruction of the Minister for public order and security.

services platform provides digitalized procedures for all consular services. Some of these services include: Application for assistance, procedures for gaining, re-gaining and giving up Albanian citizenship, laissez-passer, civil status documents, notarial acts, and different types of applications and verifications.

During processing of visa applications for foreign citizens, the Consuls in the diplomatic missions and/or consular officers of the Republic of Albania refer to the Law on foreigners in the Republic of Albania. Following receipt of online applications, consular officers run the necessary verifications for each application. In concrete terms, the consular officers assess the documentation posted online for each specific case. In addition, for each application, should the consular officer deem it reasonable, he/she may ask for additional documentation.

Objective 15: Provide access to basic services for migrants

Provision of services for immigrants is stipulated in the law on Foreigners no. 79/2021 which aims at improving the area of immigrants' rights, regarding protection of migrants and their family members, refugees, asylum-seekers, while ensuring access to programs and integration services for foreigners. The new legal framework facilitates management of legal migration and the fight against illegal migration. It is now possible to apply for services in all integrated centres of ADISA and those dedicated to migration. NAES provides public employment and self-employment services and programs and VET training courses for Albanian nationals, as well as foreign citizens and stateless persons, and for immigrants who enjoy the status of refugees and asylum-seekers in the Republic of Albania.

Information about visa application for work permit, temporary and permanent permits and Albanian citizenship is public and it is translated into five different languages (English, French, Italian, German and Turkish) for EU and Non-EU citizens based on the statistics about the biggest number of foreign citizens in the Republic of Albania. Applications are filed online through e-Albania.

Potential Albanian emigrants and immigrants in Albania are provided services about information, approval of employment, certificate registration at the workplace, employment verification, and other employment services, VET services etc.

In addition, Albanian potential emigrants are provided with basic services, on regular bases, such as: information about opportunities and conditions for migration in countries of destination (before and after their return), providing with the necessary documentation, monitoring registration and border control system, exchange of information about the number, place and duration of legal stay in each country. For returnees, the Ministry of Interior and the Border Police provide information about possibilities for their re-integration, transportation, translation/interpretation, food supply, clothing, and accommodation for vulnerable returnees, emergency health aid, etc.

Every child returnee enjoys the right for school enrolment. Local education offices and schools assist the children of returnees to get enrolled in school during the year, and they report

periodically to the regional education offices, in January and in June. Children returnees are admitted in schools, even when they are in possession of incomplete documentation. In the course of 2019-2020 academic year, 220 children returnees were admitted in school. Schools provide social and psychosocial counselling services for children returnees in need of these services. Those schools which also serve the purpose of community centres provide extra-curricular courses in Albanian language or in other subjects, and other programs or alternative after school courses. One such initiatives is the project “Let’s do our homework”. Education offices and schools cooperate closely with local government authorities and IOM, to facilitate their re-integration and to prevent re-emigration.

Law no. 111/2017 “On state legal aid” provides for state legal aid to foreign citizens or stateless persons who stay in the territory of the Republic of Albania and have been equipped with residence visa, in the territory of the Republic of Albania based on international ratified agreements by the Republic of Albania, or based on the principle of reciprocity. The same applies for asylum-seekers, persons that enjoy the status of refugees, persons in a process of appeal against administrative decisions and/or court rulings for refusal of application for asylum or revoking the decision for the refugee status, according to the legislation in effect about asylum in the Republic of Albania. In addition, in line with the National Strategy on Migration, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice are working to ensure free legal aid for illegal immigrants.

Free legal aid is afforded to citizens through primary legal aid service, Legal Clinics at the public/private universities, and NGOs authorized by the Minister of Justice. Other measures provide for the review of the anti-discrimination legislation, with particular focus on women migrants, and implementation of specific measures for assisting migrants and women in the labour market.

The Foreigner Identification Number (FIN) generated by the FER system is yet to compatible with the online system (e-Albania) to access various services in Albania⁹.

Objective 16: Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion

The National Strategy on Migration stipulates measures and actions to guarantee integration of migrants, such as: a comprehensive inclusive non-discriminatory framework that provides effective protection for the rights of migrants; identification of migrants as vulnerable group with the right to social assistance; improving social cultural and economic integration; clear guidance towards sustainable policies such as: citizenship and guaranteeing the legal status for members of the family etc. The “Law on foreigners” aims at improving the scope of rights of immigrants, in terms of protection of migrants and their family members. The law ensures access to integration programs and services for immigrants, better opportunities for information, and facilitated procedures for issuing residential visa, and institutional strengthening of services delivery for migrants. The law ensures compliance of its provisions with the rights and freedoms stipulated in

⁹ Recommended by UNHCR Albania

the Constitution, and with international ratified instruments, in particular to ensure that its provisions are in compliance with the principle of the best interest of the child, principle of the right to family life, non-refoulement principle, and principle of due process.

Based on the normative acts of the Council of Ministers on Pandemic, applications for renewal of residence permits for foreigners outside the territory of the republic of Albania, and the new applications for being equipped with residence visa are accepted and processed through E-Albania. There is now less required documentation/paperwork, since the applicants could not obtain some documents that were initially part of the required whole set of documents.

The project for “Generating employment opportunities for asylum-seekers in Albania” was implemented during March 1 – December 31, 2021. The project was implemented by UNHCR and ILO, in cooperation with the beneficiary structures of MoFE. The Project’s objective is to review the existing legislation in view of the integration of asylum-seekers and refugees in the labour market, and to come up with proposals for their fine-tuning. As part of this project it was provided for training of the staff of labour offices, social partners, and distribution of information leaflets about the rights and obligations of migrant workers.

Objective 17: Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration

The Law On foreigners ensures the right of foreigners legally residing in the Republic of Albania to family life. This law establishes the rules for the exercise of this right, and the rights of members of the family accepted according to these rules. Responsible authorities for the implementation of the law are under the obligation to create conditions conducive to integration in the economic, cultural and social life of immigrants/foreigners with the right to residence in the Republic of Albania, according to the stipulations in the legislation in effect for the integration of foreign citizens in the Republic of Albania. In line with their competencies, public institutions shall cooperate with social partners, NGOs, and international organizations to promote and implement programs for integration of foreigners in society.

The law provides for public institutions and not-for-profit organizations in the scope of their activity to provide foreigners protection against any form of discrimination. Direct or indirect discrimination by legal public and private entities is forbidden at all times during the process of labour immigration.

In line with the guidelines of the EU and international law, during this period, the structures of the Ministry of Interior and those of the border and migration in the State Police have focused on the implementation of legislation in effect, and handling of migrants, with particular focus on prevention of stigma and discrimination of migrants, due to measures applied during COVID-19 response operations.

The Government of Albania through its responsible institutions has ensured to refugees and migrants, irrelevant from their legal status access to healthcare, other services and sensitive

information from the cultural and language perspective about how to prevent being infected and infecting others;

Public health institutions have already been briefed to take into account health risks related to displacement, and mobility, physical weakness, due to lack of food and health status, physical and mental stress, privations due to lack of shelter, food and clean water among refugees and migrants. Special attention has been paid to the change in public perception, due to Covid-19 Pandemic, and prevention of stigma and discrimination of emigrants during enforcement of restrictions of Covid-19 pandemic, offering them access to healthcare services and information about preventive measures against COVID. Regional offices of the Border and Migration Department have been cooperating with the health care services, to review and face particular risks of infection among emigrants, due to their movements in the country, difficulties in procuring the right food, clean water, accommodation, physical fatigue and mental stress. The Border and Migration Department monitors the situation of female migrants and foreign workers in Albania, and takes the necessary measures for their protection from exploitation and violence. Emigrants are part of the Contingency Plan.

Albania has participated proactively in the process of formulation of the Action Plan of the Council of Europe “On protection of vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum in Europe (2021-2025)”. This Plan was developed by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, (CoE), based on internal coordination and cooperation, dialogue and reactions/contribution of the CoE member countries. The plan adopted by the Council of Ministers of CoE has been shared with the responsible structures of the Ministry of Interior, and will serve as an instrument for addressing issues and aspects related to migration and asylum.

Objective 18: Invest in skills development, and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competencies

Assessment of needs for different skills in the Albanian labour market was done through a study on “Skills needs assessment, 2017”. In addition, NAES (former National Employment Service) manages a data registry for qualified registered Albanian job-seekers. The National Strategy for Employment and Skills and its Action Plan for 2019-2022 places development of skills as a priority for the development of the labour force and of the labour market. Furthermore, Albania recognizes the skills, qualifications and competencies acquired in foreign countries, starting from Level 2 (training course qualifications) up to Level 5 (qualifications obtained during 2 year study programs) of the Albanian Qualifications Framework; diplomas and grades from pre-university education in other foreign countries; BA and Master, PhD Diplomas from international universities.

The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth is in charge of developing and implementing policies that aim to attract the youth, be them Albanian citizens, from the Albanian diaspora, and foreigners with skills and qualifications. Some of the mechanisms in this context include:

The Excellence Fund which is a program for support for the outstanding Albanian students, with scholarships, for the studies of the secondary or tertiary education outside the country, in the world's finest universities, and for civil servants, provided they return to Albania;

For the institutions that operate in line with the Labour Code, recruitment in the relevant posts of the beneficiaries from the Excellence Fund takes priority. Beneficiaries of the excellence Fund are employed by ten Department of Public Administration, in line with the respective DCM for temporary employment of students of the excellence Fund in public administration institutions for the whole duration of the contractual obligation". (Excellence Fund has been cancelled in 2022)

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MoESY) is part of the Working Group that has worked on the formulation of the draft agreement for the recognition of academic qualifications in 6 countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia Hercegovina).

In the first quarter of 2021, the Working Group for the Agreement of the countries of Western Balkans about Recognition of Academic Qualifications has organized several online meetings, to discuss the Agreement of the countries of Western Balkans about Acknowledgment of Academic Qualifications. The meetings were chaired by RCC. Meanwhile, on May 11, 2021 in Montenegro was organized the meeting of the Working Group for the Agreement of the countries of Western Balkans about Recognition of Academic Qualifications.

The National Program of Work Practice in the public administration aims to involve the participants in an integrated work experience, in cooperation with career professionals in the public administration, in order for them to benefit from the expertise which will impact their development of professional skills and acquaint them with how the public administration works. This program is being run by the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth, with the support of public administration institutions, and other public and non-public institutions, willing to have the interns.

On October 2, 2020 an agreement was signed between the representatives of MoFE of Albania and the respective Ministry in Kosovo "Cooperation Agreement between the Ministry of Finance and Economy of the Republic of Albania, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the Republic of Kosovo, about labour mobility". Inter alia, this agreement aims at strengthening the relations among agencies that implement employment and VET skills policies, and at the exchange of best practices in the areas of employment, VET and migration, and employment of workers from each country in the territory of the other country.

Objective 19: Create conditions for migrants and Diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries.

The Council of Ministers adopted the National Strategy on the Albanian Diaspora and the Action Plan for 2021 – 2025. This document is aimed at fostering development of public policies for

involvement and inclusion, and contribution of Albanian communities outside the country, and for strengthening relations of Albania with the Albanian diaspora.

This is the second strategy that the government of Albania adopts to this end. In 2018, the GoA adopted the National Strategy for Diaspora, 2018 – 2024 which was the first document of its kind. Dynamic developments led to an expedited application, which brought about the need for review and update of this important document in the relations of the Albanian government with its Diaspora. The National Strategy for the Albanian Diaspora, 2021 – 2025 is a follow-up of the previous strategy, and served as the bases for the adoption of a new legislation and establishment of new specialized public institutions.

In the context of involving the Diaspora to contribute in the sustainable economic and social development there is now in place a Cooperation Memorandum between the Minister of State for Diaspora, the government of Albania, and the International Office for Migration (IOM) “For consultation on issues of common interest”. Also, IOM is implementing a project for “Involvement of Albanian diaspora in the social and economic development of Albania” funded by the Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development (AICS). The project’s objective is to contribute to strengthening commitment and enhancing contribution of Albanian communities outside the country in the development of the Albanian state through transfer of knowledge and economic skills. An important part of this project was also the program “Connect Albania”, for increasing investments with the lobbying of the diaspora. In the context of this cooperation there is in place a mapping and profile exercise for the Diaspora in Italy (5 regions), France and Belgium, while there is in place the scheme for the support of institutions with qualified members from the Diaspora in the EU approximation process. This cooperation was instrumental as well during the process of the formulation of the new National Strategy for Diaspora and its Action Plan (2021-2025) which were effective starting January 2021.

In support of the re-integration of returned migrants, more work has been done to connect the returnees with the development of their local communities. Adoption of law no 38/2019 “On some additions and amendments to law no.139/2015 “On local self-governance” has led to improvements of the role and functions of the municipalities, in the area of the Diaspora and migration. The law provides for establishment of a special structure for diaspora and migration in the administration of services at the local level as part of the local self-governance administrative units. In addition, the responsible institutions have worked towards formulation and adoption of the Memorandum “For coordination of labour for the establishment of the administrative structure for diaspora and migration at the local government”, among Ministry of Interior, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, State Minister for Diaspora (SMD) , Association of Albanian Municipalities and Association for local autonomy”. These structures will assist in the delivery of information and qualitative services for migrants and the diaspora, in all Local Government units. In addition, assessment of specific needs of returnees with the view of their integration in the internal labour market is part of functional duties of the regional and local employment offices. Any Albanian citizen returning from migration appearing voluntarily at the Migration Windows in the labour office, will go through an assessment of re-integration needs, and following that he/she will be advised and/or referred to the respective structures. The

Government of Albania, as part of its support measures for investments planned in 2021 has provided as assessment criteria the migrant status” as well, as a favourable criteria for support of investments for machineries/equipment for processing/packaging/standardization/labelling of olives, olive oil, medicinal plants and herbs, dairy products, establishment or reconstruction of facilities for purposes of rural tourism, investments in agro tourism in line with a business plan etc.

The law no. 15/2019, On employment promotion, together with the bylaws for new employment programs facilitates exchange of employment services for returnees in economic difficulties. The National Agency for Diaspora has built a database for professionals’ associations in the diaspora which inter alia are considered as partners for policy consultation for re-integration of returnees in Albania.

The Albanian Development Fund for the Diaspora has established a professionals’ network project. The Professionals network in the Diaspora Platform is a by-product of the project “Diaspora for Development”, adopted by DCM no.611, of 17.10.2018. the Albanian Development Fund for the Diaspora, in light of providing assistance and support to the businesses from the Albanian community in the diaspora is implementing the project for the “Business Chamber of the Diaspora– Establishing and promoting diaspora investments in Albania” adopted by DCM no514, of 19.07.2019.¹⁰

IOM has implemented the program for the “Involvement/engaging the Albanian diaspora in the social and economic development of Albania” funded by the Italian government. The Program includes 3 components. The first component is focused on the support for the government of Albania in introducing initiatives for engaging/involving the diaspora. The second component is focused on facilitating the diaspora involvement in the development of the country through qualifications and skills. And the third component is focused on facilitation of diaspora engagement through investments.

Objective 20: Promote faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances, and foster financial inclusion of migrants

With regard to legal and regulatory interventions in the remittances market, from the perspective of the Bank of Albania in the role of the market supervisory, and regulatory authority of the financial entities involved in the money transfer services, the main activities are focused on the modernization of remittances market, including money transfer services. Adoption of law no. 55/2020 "On payment services" will contribute to improving introduction of new innovative services in the market that will promote use of internet payments and e-commerce, and introduction of new actors in the market. With the view of promoting activities of new actors in the market, the Law aims to create a balanced fair playing field among these actors and the banks. The law will also assist in enhancing market competitiveness. Enhanced transparency and

regulation of consumer protection in the field of payments will help improve market efficiency and security, and consequently will support efficiency and safety of remittances placed in the Albanian market. The Bank of Albania, as of December 2019 has introduced the appropriate regulatory framework for opening current accounts online which will help migrants open accounts and manage their funds through internet payment services.

The Bank of Albania (BoA) is pursuing its work for diversifying legal channels for the transfer of remittances, which facilitates financial involvement of the population, increases savings and promotes productive investments that contribute to the sustainable development. Promoting e-payments, to increase financial involvement of the population, including migrants and their families has been part of the focus of the work of the Bank of Albania, based on the projections of the National Strategy for the market for small transactions, 2018-2023. One of the objectives of this Strategy is the introduction of a modern national market, at the same safe and efficient based on a safe and efficient infrastructure which will contribute to the fast, cheaper and safer transfer of remittances;

The Bank of Albania has published "Pandemic and the Remittances" (February 2021). In this publication one may find articles, such as: (i) Accumulation of assets and debt of households in the host countries of the remittances: Evidence from the Survey on assets possession by Albanian households; (ii) the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on remittances in Albania; (iii) a statistical and empirical overview on remittances flow. The goal of the study of the Bank of Albania (2020) "Remittances and their impact on poverty in Albania" was to make an assessment of the impact of remittances in overcoming poverty in Albania, based on data and evidence from the Income and Living conditions in Albania Survey developed by the Bank of Albania in the course of 2019. The survey demonstrated that 23% of the Albanian households benefit from remittances, which is different for different household groups, and for different regions;

The survey on Income and living conditions is published every two years, with important contribution in understanding behaviour of households individually, but also of the household economy as a whole. Respondents include 2,500 Albanian households and are asked about their financial income and investments, and household income and expenses;

Objective 21: Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration

Readmission from third countries is challenged by the need for rapid and effective identification and referral in the asylum system or closed centers, and return to the transit country.

The competent structure in charge of return/readmission is the Unit in the Border and Migration Department. At the same time, this Unit/sector is in charge of identification and securing documentation for the conduct of the process for return/readmission. In this process, the Department for Border and Migration cooperates with a number of institutions such as: Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the State Agency

for Child Rights Protection. The adoption in September 2020 of the National Action Plan on De-Institutionalization of children from residential care supported by UNICEF is a positive step.¹¹

Re-admission agreement with the EU is being implemented at a satisfactory level. We have bilateral readmission protocols with almost all EU member countries, in line with article 19 of the above-mentioned Agreement. In this context, it is worth mentioning the cooperation with countries such as: Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, Spain, Norway, etc. During the annual meetings of the Readmissions Committee of the EU- Albania ranked very highly about the serious commitment of the Albanian authorities in handling readmission requests or identification with readmission purposes.

Despite the ramification caused by COVID-19 pandemic, the border and migration authorities are continuing their close cooperation with European partners, and not only, to carry out the obligations deriving from readmission agreements or their protocols. Since several years now, the Albanian border police is accompanying the repatriation operations from air, organized by France, in coordination with FRONTEX. There is an increase in the exchange of information and readmission operations between the Albanian authorities and FRONTEX, in particular with regard to countries with growing flows of Albanian asylum-seekers.

IOM has provided continuous support to the government of Albania for the assisted volunteer return and reintegration of Albanian migrants, and for growing capacities for the assisted volunteer return and reintegration of foreign illegal migrants from Albania to their country of origin.

Priority has been given to obtaining the necessary information for potential Albanian migrants, monitoring the system of border control and registration, and provision of information about the rules and procedures of stay in different foreign countries. In order to contribute to the sustainable integration of Albanian returnees, the following measures apply: improving the legal framework, improving the institutional framework and enhancing institutional capacities. Free information, transportation and food supplies are available for vulnerable returnees.

Objective 22: Establish mechanisms for the portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits

The Government of Albania has introduced mechanisms for the portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits by signing of bilateral agreements with many countries of destination, based on article 48 of the Stabilization-Association Agreement. Provisions of law no. 7703/1993 “On social insurance in the Republic of Albania” provide that social insurance covers: Albanian citizens and stateless persons, former Albanian citizens who live abroad, in line with conventions and bilateral agreements and the Regulation of the Institute of Social Insurance; and to foreign citizens and stateless persons who are working in Albania. A person who has been part of the mandatory social insurance scheme, who for reasonable cause and time

¹¹ Information from UNICEF Albania.

can no longer be part of the scheme, may opt for insurance according to volunteer insurance/pensions schemes.

Volunteer insurance in Albania is also possible for the duration of university studies, provided that the person is paying contributions during this time, prior to the date of beginning of the right to acquire income.

The Social Insurance Institute is the institution in charge for collecting volunteer insurance contributions, and organizing awareness raising campaigns. To this end, posters and leaflets have been disseminated among all migrants wishing to purchase volunteer insurance policies in Albania.

The Labour Inspectorate provides information about the lesser informed foreigners about the opportunities and benefits from the national social insurance scheme.

Objective 23: Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration

The Government of Albania has been intensively cooperating with the Prague Process Secretariat, for the coordination of work and ensuring participation of Albanian officials in regional and international activities of this process, in line with annual agenda/calendar of activities.

In addition, there is ongoing cooperation with Budapest Process Secretariat- Partnership for Migration in the Silk Road, for the coordination of work and ensuring participation of Albanian officials in regional and international activities of this initiative.

Albania is an active participant of MARRI Initiative introduced in Tirana in 2004, and during June 2017 - June 2018 had its Presidency. The Government of Albania is working for the adoption of a common regional approach with the countries of the Western Balkans in its activities. In the course of 2021 Albania has participated in MARRI activities, such as MARRI Forum, meetings of the Working Group for the Legal Framework Reform, MARRI. In addition, there is an ongoing excellent cooperation with international organizations such as: IOM, UNHCR and GIZ, in the area of migration management and governance, and with Europol and its representative in Tirana.

Albania has its contact person in the Network of Contact persons for Migration, of the Council of Europe, whose role is to facilitate exchange of information and best practice in handling migration issues.

The Government of Albania has taken the necessary measure to enhance cooperation and exchange of information, in particular with countries affected by abusive Albanian asylum-seekers, and has intensified operations for the readmission of Albanian citizens, in cooperation with FRONTEX, with Albanian escort. Contact officers in the foreign embassies and the Albanian police officers in the embassies in of reign countries keep in regular contact for purposes of information exchange.

Special attention has been paid to strengthening regional cooperation, with special emphases to exchange of information with migration services and diplomatic missions in Tirana of neighbouring countries affected by migration flows, and with foreign liaison officers accredited in our country, in particular with those of potential countries of destination.