UNODC in South Eastern Europe

NEWSLETTER | Vol. 37

This newsletter provides information about key news and events related to UNODC’s action and partnerships in the region. The UNODC Regional Programme for South Eastern Europe (2020-2023) is structured along the three main pillars: (I) Support to law enforcement, enhanced border security and related topics, (II) Strengthening the fight against organized crime and countering illicit financial flows, (III) Drug use prevention and treatment of drug use disorders; and a cross-cutting pillar (IV) on research and emerging types of crime. The Programme focuses on priority actions identified in cooperation with the Government’s in the region and through a dialogue with national, regional and international partners. For feedback, queries or comments regarding this newsletter, please contact Ms. Ekaterina Kolykhalova (e-mail: ekaterina.kolykhalova@un.org) and Ms. Lejla Karahasanovic (lejla.karahasanovic@un.org).

NEWS AND EVENTS

Bosnia and Herzegovina highlighted three priorities in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, namely women’s participation in all recovery measures, commitment to strengthening the "care economy" and a more active and effective response to violence against women and girls. Research findings on well-being and safety of women presented at the event found that 3 out of 10 women experienced some form of sexual harassment in their lifetime while only 3% of victims felt able to report to the police what they had experienced. The representative of the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina concluded that 2021 should be a turning point for the accelerated realization of gender equality in the country and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls to become a priority in adopting and implementing public policies at all levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the same token, UNODC participated in a joint campaign led by UN Women around this year’s theme "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world." For the campaign in Albania, UN agencies reached out to the women who have supported their communities during the pandemic while facing its challenges. On this occasion, UNODC reached out to an Addictologist and Clinical Toxictologist in Addictology & Clinical Toxicology Service, at the University Hospital Centre "Mother Teresa" in Tirana, and a part-time lecturer at the Faculty of Medicine of Tirana, who worked with UNODC on the organization of the Universal Treatment Curriculum (UTC) trainings aimed at reducing problems associated with substance use disorders. The trainings took place in February and September/October 2020 and were aimed to reduce the significant health, social and economic problems associated with substance use disorders by building international treatment capacity through training. The medical professional shared some of her experiences during the pandemic, including by mentioning: “During this difficult period I found myself facing many ethical dilemmas: on the one
hand, my profession as a physician, serving patients, and to be safe and to protect myself and my family.” This and other experiences have been relayed through social media to convey the message of the strong women supporting their societies and communities in Albania during the pandemic.

UNODC participates in the 5th Security Board meeting of the Integrative Internal Security Governance

2 February 2021, Sarajevo/online: UNODC participated in the 5th Security Board meeting of the Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG), which was the first meeting under the new Terms of Reference adopted in 2019 by the Ministers of Interior/Security of the six Western Balkan jurisdictions and under the umbrella of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). The meeting was chaired by European Commission’s DG NEAR and RCC. The event, attended by the Western Balkans counterparts represented at the ministerial level and by international partners, aimed to present and discuss topics that are essential to the new IISG phase, including the working methodologies, the new workplan, new members, the development of the secure database and website, the objectives and the state of play of the IISG and its Pillars and the role of the members. The UNODC representative confirmed the Office’s support to the initiative and underscored the importance of ownership by the Governments in the region as well as the coordination of efforts of the various actors in South Eastern Europe (SEE) region.

(For more info on all above: Ekaterina Kolykhkova)

PROMOTING BORDER CONTROL MEASURES/CCP/AIRCOP

UNODC continues its partnership with the EU through the initiative within the UNODC Regional Programme for South Eastern Europe (RP SEE) entitled “EU-UNODC joint action promoting rule of law and good governance through targeted border control measures at ports and airports in SEE”. The action involves the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme (CCP) and the UNODC-WCO-INTERPOL Airport Communication Project (AIRCOP). It supports the implementation of the UN Conventions on drugs and crime and the EU Acquis, notably the Chapters 23 and 24 addressing serious organized crime, rule of law, good governance and security. More information on the initiative is available in the UNODC-SEE webpage.

UNODC launches the 2021 training cycle for the officers of the AIRCOP/CCP inter-agency group and Air Cargo Control Unit at the Skopje and Belgrade International Airports

1-5 March and 8-10 2021, online: UNODC organized the online theoretical training for the customs and border police officers of the AIRCOP/CCP inter-agency group at the Skopje International Airport, which will be composed of a JAITF and an Air Cargo Control Unit (ACCU), as well as officers of the ACCU at the Belgrade International Airport. The training was delivered online to 31 officers from the Customs Administration and the Ministry of Interior/Border Police Directorate of North Macedonia and 14 officers from the relevant authorities in Serbia. During the first part of the training, CCP delivered a three-day Basic Theoretical Training (part 1) presenting topics such as risk indicators, profiling and targeting, detection of smuggling of illicit goods, air cargo safety and other relevant matters concerning air cargo shipments. This part of the training was followed by the two-day AIRCOP delivery of the module „World of Drugs – 1“, organized for the AIRCOP/CCP inter-agency group in North Macedonia, which enhanced the knowledge of the participants on cocaine trafficking, highlighting strengths and weaknesses of the current counter-measures and current detection methodologies, raising the awareness towards the adoption of a risk based approach against the threats targeting international airports. These activities represent the start of the training cycle for the

UNODC assesses the Skopje International Airport and conducts consultations with the authorities

14-17 March 2021, Skopje, North Macedonia: UNODC met with officials from the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office in charge of Fight Against Corruption, National Coordination Center for Border Management, Border Police, Customs Administration, Public Security Bureau Director, and the EU Delegation in Skopje, to discuss and promote the next steps of the establishment of a Joint Airport Investigation Task Force (JAITF) at the Skopje International Airport to form part of the inter-agency group. During the meetings, the counterparts discussed the development of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), the staff selection of the inter-agency group, as well the allocation of office space at the Skopje International Airport for this purpose. The visit also allowed for the technical assessment of the airport for the selection of the suitable premises at the passenger terminal, which would enable the settlement of the AIRCOP/CCP inter-agency group and the subsequent UNODC procurements aimed at its operationalization. The EU Delegation considered the visit and meetings as excellent progress in terms of effective action implementation, particularly during the ongoing pandemic. The government counterparts also highlighted the benefits of the action as an effective solution to address threats targeting airports and expressed their commitment to actively participate in improving border security systems.
officers of the two components of the joint AIRCOP/CCP interagency group in North Macedonia and the ACCU in Serbia, and were delivered by experienced international experts from WCO and UNODC.

**UNODC presents cooperation within the EU-UNODC Border Control Action in SEE as best practice**

11 February 2021 and 30 March 2021, online: UNODC participated in regional meetings with international stakeholders and took part in the discussions to share the experience in implementing the action and present it as best practice. In February, UNODC chaired a panel at the SMI 14th Border Security Conference 2021 on Securing Land Borders, Improving Biometric Technology, and Optimising the Airport Security Experience. The event brought together representatives from the EU Commission, law enforcement agencies from various countries, as well as international organizations. With COVID-19 spreading across the globe, the security and integrity of a nation’s borders has rarely been more important than now. The problems of migration, cross-border criminality, and smart-borders have become even more critical as rogue elements seek to exploit the situation. Addressing these issues was at the core of this conference. During the event, the panel discussion covered all the aspects related to the AIRCOP Global Programme and the key synergies with the CT Travel Programme. The UNODC AIRCOP expert made an intervention to present the ongoing EU-UNODC joint action as a best practice aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the One UN approach and action. In the same token, in March, UNODC participated in the 2nd Western Balkans Stakeholder meeting, organized by the EU Western Balkans Training Project which provides a coordination platform for the international stakeholders operating in SEE to enhance synergy of efforts and avoid duplications. Building on the outcomes of the previous meeting held in January 2020, the meeting focused on ongoing and planned activities in the area of border security as well as on the related challenges in SEE during the COVID-19 pandemic. UNODC contributed to the discussion by presenting the action as best practice and an effective way to counter illicit cross-border activities. The JAIFTF component has been indeed widely recognized as a relevant synergy with the international stakeholders engaged in the development of the Advance Passenger Information/Passenger Name Record (API/PNR) programs in the Balkan region, as well as a valid operational asset aimed at tackling threats targeting airports.

**UNODC coordinates activities with partners in North Macedonia**

8 and 16 February 2021, online: UNODC participated in the donor coordination meeting organized by the US Embassy in Skopje to share details of the planned activities for 2021 in North Macedonia and ensure coordination of efforts. Representation at the meeting included the German Development Agency (GIZ), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), OSCE, UNODC as well as the UK among others. The international stakeholders shared information on future work in the areas of anti-corruption, asset recovery, and digital evidence while UNODC presented its work on enhanced border control, asset recovery, and firearms. In the same token, UNODC met with the counterparts from the regional project ”IPA 2017 Countering Serious Crime in the Western Balkans” implemented by GIZ, Italian Ministry of Interior, and Center for International Legal Cooperation (CILC) to discuss the coordination of activities and possible synergy related to the introduction of the API/PNR in North Macedonia within the joint EU-UNODC action on enhanced border control.

**UNODC and North Macedonia seal cooperation on enhanced border control in SEE**

26 January 2021, Skopje, North Macedonia /online: The Government of North Macedonia, represented by the Ministry of Interior, and UNODC formally agreed to pursue cooperation in the area of enhanced border control in the framework of the EU-UNODC joint action by signing a joint Letter of Agreement (LoA), which stipulates that both entities agree on the implementation of the AIRCOP and the CCP in North Macedonia and in particular on the establishment of a nationally owned airport inter-agency group that will consist of an ACCU and an AIRCOP JAIFTF at the Skopje International Airport. The LoA was signed by Mr. Oliver Spasovski, the Minister of Interior of North Macedonia and Mr. John Brandolino, Director of the Division for Treaty Affairs of UNODC. The Minister of Interior expressed appreciation to UNODC for supporting the Government agencies through capacity building and stated that the LoA “reinforces the architecture of the fight against organized crime” in the country while the Director of the Division for Treaty Affairs reiterated UNODC’s readiness to support North Macedonia in addressing cross-border illicit activity.

**UNODC held meetings with the authorities in North Macedonia following the signing of the LoA**

4 February 2021, Skopje, North Macedonia: UNODC held a meeting with the new Director of Customs Administration and a meeting with the Director of Bureau for Public Security of North Macedonia. The counterparts welcomed the signing of LoA between UNODC and North Macedonia on the establishment of an airport inter-agency group composed of ACCU and a JAIFTF and concluded that an important milestone in increasing and fostering border security was achieved. Both offices also reiterated their support to the EU-UNODC joint action, and expressed willingness to be actively involved in the action’s upcoming activities in full capacity, recognizing its benefits for the country and the region.
In the same token, UNODC seized this opportunity to discuss details for the creation of the airport inter-agency group with a focus on the team composition, location of the office space, and offered support for the development of SOPs, which will serve as an inter-agency cooperation agreement between all national law enforcement agencies to form part of the airport group.

UNODC conducted a mentorship visit to the PCU at the land-border crossing Gradiška in Bosnia and Herzegovina

25-29 January 2021, Gradiška, Bosnia and Herzegovina: CCP continued the implementation of the basic training cycle for the customs and border police officers of the PCU at the land-border crossing Gradiška. As part of the staged training cycle provided by the CCP programming worldwide, the practical training component for the staff of PCU Gradiška focused on risk analyses-based profiling of containers and other shipments, identification and interdiction of high-risk cargo, illegal cross-border movement of goods and other criminal activities observed in the international trade supply chain. The training offered practical exercises on real-time cases, complemented by interactive discussions on contemporary modus operandi used by criminal groups in trafficking of drugs and chemical precursors, firearms and other illicit goods.

UNODC conducted a mentorship visit to PCU at the land-border crossing Bijača in Bosnia and Herzegovina

19-22 January 2021, Bijača, Bosnia and Herzegovina: CCP delivered the first in 2021 mentorship visit to the PCU at the land-border crossing/customs point Bijača. Mentorship visits provide PCUs worldwide with continuous support and the visit to the PCU Bijača aimed in particular to enhance the operational capacities of the PCU and address challenges specific to land-borders. During the visit, a CCP expert observed the daily routines of the Indirect Taxation Authority (ITA) and Border Police of Bosnia and Herzegovina officers assigned to the unit and provided support related to risk profiling of containerized shipments and identification of potential high risk assessments, as well as physical inspections. The visit enabled the discussions on common challenges and emerging threats related to organized crime and other criminal activities that frontline customs and border police offices encounter in their daily work. Other topics addressed during the visit were the tracking and tracing of the movements of container shipments, trends in concealments and modus operandi used by criminal groups and further development of regional and global cooperation between customs and police administrations within the CCP framework.

Albania is supported in air cargo control during COVID-19

16-19 March 2021, Tirana, Albania: CCP organized a mentorship mission for the officers of the ACCU at the Tirana International Airport (TIA) to encourage mentoring habits for the ACCU officers, especially in view of the current global pandemic situation. The participants joined the review of various topics and actual case scenarios, including with regard to easing customs control on imports and exports to leverage the COVID-19 crisis when dealing with consignments of medical supplies. The mentors provided a list of measures that ACCU and Customs Administration officers should implement to support the economy and sustain supply chain continuity, such as: designate an officer to serve as a focal point to resolve issues faced by importers/exporters; advocate for sustaining an end-to-end supply chain continuity, including the smooth and unhampered movement of goods inland; or apply risk management to keep physical inspections to the minimum necessary and to speed up customs clearance. It was also rec-ommented to review the proposed measures within the Customs Administration, Police and TIA to enable their use as tools to support operational work of the relevant law enforcement agencies. This activity is funded by Government of France.

UNODC supports partnership with the private business operators in border control in Albania

17 February 2021, Tirana, Albania/online: CCP in Albania organized a workshop on the enhancement of cooperation and partnership between the ACCU operating at Tirana International Airport and the private business operators. The workshop, which was held in a hybrid manner brought together the officers of the ACCU, representatives from the Customs Administration and State Police, experts from UNODC and WCO and representatives from the operators of fast parcels and postal correspondence couriers. The Director General of the Albanian Customs Administration acknowledged the importance of Customs-ACCU-Business partnership as an integral part of a broader undertaking for good governance and effective border controls. The event allowed for fostering the networking among ACCU officers and business operators and the sharing of knowledge on the ACCU role in the context of improved controls, accountability and facilitation of legitimate trade. The UNODC and WCO experts demonstrated the different scenarios which would assist the ACCU officers and the business operators in elaborating a continued consultative process and a robust partnership. Following active discussions, the participants agreed on producing an action plan for the cooperation and exchange of information and agreed to organize follow-up meetings to build a solid partnership aimed at facilitating border control procedures and securing borders. This activity is funded by Government of France.
**UNODC supports SEE in countering organized crime**

15-17 February 2021, online: UNODC organized a multi-stakeholder virtual event aimed at discussing strategic priorities to prevent and combat organized crime in line with the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). The event was organized under the umbrella of UNODC Programme on “Implementing the Organized Crime Convention: from Theory to Practice”, which envisages the provision of assistance to States for the development and implementation of relevant strategies to address transnational organized crime. The Programme also supports States in adopting or amending legislative instruments to implement the UNTOC and/or follow up to the UNTOC Review Mechanism observations. Within this framework, UNODC is finalizing a strategy toolkit intended to support States in the development of comprehensive strategies to fight against the full range of organized crime threats. Against this backdrop, the virtual event focused on peer-to-peer exchanges around good practices for the development of strategies against organized crime to ensure that lessons learned from different parts of the world are reflected in the toolkit and shared across borders. The event brought together over 120 participants, primarily national experts from over 45 countries as well as experts from international, regional and civil society organizations and the private sector. National experts from SEE also participated in the event and time was dedicated to the discussions around the 2017-2020 Strategy for the fight against organized crime of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the ongoing efforts to develop a new strategic document. On the basis of discussions held in the course of this event, UNODC will proceed to finalize the strategy development toolkit and provide concrete technical assistance and capacity building to States in the development of national strategies to prevent and combat organized crime, as requested by the 10th session of the Conference of the Parties to UNTOC in resolution 10/4.

**FIREARMS CONTROL**

Currently, UNODC through its Global Firearms Programme (GFP) is implementing the following projects in South Eastern Europe: (i) A regional project on Criminal Justice Response against Arms Trafficking, aimed at supporting the six Western Balkan jurisdictions in strengthening their criminal justice response to firearms related criminality, particularly illicit arms trafficking and their links to transnational organized crime; (ii) the joint UNODC – UNDP project on Halting arms and lawbreaking trade (HALT) aimed at enhancing the capacities of the ITA, as well as Border Police, Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations and three postal agencies of Bosnia and Herzegovina to better combat illicit arms trafficking through development of standard operating procedures, provision of training, and procurement of specialized equipment for the detection of smuggled firearms. The financial support for these projects is provided under the Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024 (Roadmap) Multi-Partner Trust Fund by Germany, UK, Netherlands, France, Sweden and Norway.

**UNODC meets with judges to discuss harmonization of the court practice in Serbia**

5 March 2021, Belgrade, Serbia: The UNODC GFP organized a coordination meeting with the judges of the Supreme Court, Court of Appeals and Higher and Basic Courts in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Nis, to initiate the work on the case law document, containing specific adjudicated cases and highest courts’ instances opinions and aimed to harmonize the court practice in firearms-related cases. The meeting enabled the data collection for the further development of the case law document as well as to assess the needs of the judiciary in adjudicating firearms-related cases. The next steps of the process were defined with the further formulation of the case law document with the participation of the judges and inclusion of the criminal cases from specific territorial competences to highlight the challenges related to illicit firearms trafficking.

**UNODC supports North Macedonia in the collection of data on firearms**

4 March, Skopje, North Macedonia: UNODC GFP met with representatives of the analytical Sector of the Ministry of Interior of North Macedonia and members of the National Commission on SALW to discuss the UNODC activities on firearms trafficking. UNODC GFP summarized its activities in the country and underlined the importance of criminal justice data. The participants emphasized that the lack of an international system for standardized reporting on the scale, technologies, routes and methods of illicit trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition is a major barrier to more effective international cooperation and the identification of global and regional firearms trafficking trends and patterns. Against this backdrop, the participants agreed that the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (IAFQ) developed by UNODC and distributed annually to the Member States is critical to collecting firearms related data in a uniform and standardized manner.
The representatives from the Ministry of Interior emphasized their readiness to further improve the quality and quantity of firearms related data and reiterated their commitment to work closely with UNODC towards this goal, also by means of involving additional organizational units within the Ministry to streamline the process of data collection.

**UNODC supports North Macedonia in countering firearms trafficking in postal and fast courier shipments**

**18 February 2021, online:** UNODC GFP organized a meeting with the Customs Administration of North Macedonia to discuss the upcoming Gap and Needs Assessment (GNA) intended to increase the capacity of the Customs of North Macedonia to detect firearms, their parts, components and ammunition in postal and fast courier shipments. The GNA, together with the training needs analysis and the equipment needs analysis, will provide a baseline for establishing priorities, reflecting the needs, and identifying the technical assistance required by national counterparts. UNODC GFP has shared with Senior Customs representatives a draft Joint Action Plan related to the implementation of the GNA and presented the scope of the assessment. One of the main outcomes of the meeting was the formation of a Working Group to facilitate the implementation of the GNA, which will be composed of officials from the Customs Administration and the National Postal Operator.

**UNODC supports Bosnia and Herzegovina in the criminal justice response against firearms trafficking**

**17 February 2021, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina:** UNODC GFP met with the Deputy Minister of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina to discuss the legislative analysis of the criminal law and criminal procedure law and its harmonization with the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol) and UNTOC. The UNODC GFP presented its work on the gap analysis of criminal legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and highlighted its links to the ongoing Review Mechanism for the Implementation of UNTOC and the UN Firearms Protocol. The scope of the discussions included also the activities of the GFP for supporting the efforts of Bosnia and Herzegovina in implementing the regional Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition in the Western Balkans, including training on collection of electronic evidence and the importance of the Mutual Legal Assistance procedure in this process.

**UNODC helps strengthen Bosnia and Herzegovina’s customs control for arms trafficking in international parcels**

**9 February 2021, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina:** The UNODC GFP organized a workshop for ITA of Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed at reviewing the SOPs for detection of firearms, their parts and ammunition in international postal and courier parcels. The SOPs were developed by the GFP based on the GNA conducted in 2020. During the workshop, the UNODC GFP underlined the importance of developing and adopting common set of rules for processing mail trafficking and highlighted specific aspects of the draft SOPs, which contribute to increasing the capacity of ITA, including the good practices addressed in the SOPs linked to evaluation of risks, treating evidence, health and security. The ITA representatives underscored the added value of UNODC’s draft SOPs to their workflows and specifically emphasized the usefulness of the sections on health and security as well as the commercial sector. These sections will be included in all SOPs of ITA.

(For more info on all of the above: Dimitirje Ristic, Dubravka Piotrovski, Kiro Cvetkov)

---

**ANTI-CORRUPTION/ASSET RECOVERY**

**UNODC initiates the implementation of the Asset Recovery initiative in SEE**

**23-26 March 2021, Skopje, North Macedonia:** UNODC held a series of meeting with the national authorities of North Macedonia to introduce the new Asset Recovery initiative, a regional project in the six Western Balkans jurisdictions, including North Macedonia, aimed to enhance the capacity of the addressed jurisdictions to recover the proceeds and instrumentalities of crime. The project is implemented by UNODC and focuses on: developing practitioners guides on different aspects of mutual legal assistance (MLA) for the purposes of asset recovery; developing asset recovery roadmaps at the national and regional levels; developing action plans to improve the collection of data system in respect to the asset recovery statistics; and research on the state of play of asset recovery efforts in the Western Balkans. During the meeting with the State Public Prosecutor and Head of the Asset Recovery Office, the
counterparts agreed upon the proposed priority areas for the creation of the national Asset-Recovery Roadmap. As part of the next steps, UNODC presented the upcoming activities under the Asset Recovery initiative that will be implemented in North Macedonia in 2021: Development of the MLA-asset recovery guide; Drafting of the Modus Operandi Manual for international cooperation; and Development of the methodology for the collection of data relevant to the asset recovery process. The Asset Recovery activities in SEE are conducted in the framework of the RP SEE and funded by the Government of the UK.

**UNODC conducts consultations on the Regional Anti-Corruption and Illicit Finance Roadmap in North Macedonia**

**23-25 March 2021, Skopje, North Macedonia:** UNODC held a series of meetings with the authorities in North Macedonia to discuss the next steps in the implementation of the Regional Anti-Corruption and Illicit Finance Roadmap (Regional Roadmap) in North Macedonia and identify a list of priorities for this purpose. During the meeting with the Vice Prime Minister in charge of the Fight Against Corruption, UNODC put forward the proposal for North Macedonia to host the regional forum for the development and adoption of the Regional Roadmap by the six jurisdictions of the region in June 2021. Consequently, the Vice Prime Minister presented the newly adopted Anti-Corruption Plan of the Government of North Macedonia and expressed readiness to work with UNODC on identifying potential synergies with the UNODC Roadmap. UNODC was also convened to a meeting with the Vice Prime Minister along with the Customs Office to raise awareness on the importance of the Customs office and their role in the fight against corruption and illegal financial flows. During the event, flyers with information of how to report corruption on the border crossings, were distributed to the passengers crossing the border. On this occasion UNODC presented best practices in mitigating corruption in Customs. Furthermore, during the meeting with the Public Procurement Office at the Ministry of Finance, UNODC discussed the priorities related to the fight against corruption in public procurement. The counterparts agreed to work with UNODC on the recommendations related to public procurement in the context of the development of the Regional Roadmap. During the meeting with the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, UNODC presented the Riyadh Initiative, the primary goal of which is to build a network of anti-corruption law enforcement experts. The meeting with the Ministry of Interior allowed for coordination of the planned UNODC activities with the counterparts. Finally, UNODC attended an advocacy event organized by the Kochani municipality, where the Anti-Corruption Plan of the Government of North Macedonia was presented.

**UNODC attends the signing ceremony of the International Treaty on Exchange of Data for the Verification of Asset Declarations by Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia**

**19 March 2021, Belgrade, Serbia:** UNODC attended the signing ceremony of the International Treaty on Exchange of Data for the Verification of Asset Declarations that took place in the Serbia Palace (Palata Srbija) in Belgrade. The Treaty was developed and negotiated under the Southeast Europe Regional Programme on Strengthening the Capacity of Anti-corruption Authorities and Civil Society to Combat Corruption and Contribute to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) Review Process, implemented by the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI) in partnership with UNODC. The basis of the Treaty is UN-CAC and States Parties Resolution 6/4, which encourages Member States to consider the possibility of concluding multilateral agreements on civil and administrative matters relating to corruption. The purpose of the International Treaty on Exchange of Data for the Verification of Asset Declarations is to prevent and to combat corruption by providing for direct administrative exchange of information concerning asset declarations between the Parties of the Treaty. The Treaty will enable anti-corruption bodies to communicate formally with each other regarding data on foreign assets and interests, and thus significantly enhance verification of declarations.
UNODC participates in a discussion on COVID-19 and Organized Crime in the Western Balkans organized by International Institute for Strategic Studies

3 March 2021, online: UNODC was part of an expert panel discussion on COVID-19 and Organized Crime in the Western Balkans with presenters from the Southeast European Law Enforcement Center, the Syracuse Institute, and the International Institute for Strategic Studies. UNODC presented some salient aspects of crime and corruption in the region and outlined possible policy responses and priorities for governments in terms of asset recovery and illicit financial flows. The jurisdictions in the region have come a long way to adhere to international standards and the EU Acquis. Yet, it remains difficult to ascertain the effectiveness of new policies and measures due to the lack of available data. Revisiting the methodologies to gather asset recovery-related data would allow to have better knowledge of the state of the play and adapt public policies accordingly. Additionally, it would be useful if illicit enrichment is criminalized in those instances where it has not been considered and that non conviction-based (NCB) confiscation laws are adopted. While the UNCAC does not categorize both measures as mandatory, its adoption would increase the legal tools available to practitioners to fight organized crime and corruption. Nevertheless, the UNCAC requires as a minimum that all States parties should be in a position to support mutual legal assistance requests from countries that have adopted NCB systems.

UNODC and Partners launch new Programme: Southeast Europe Together Against Corruption (SEE-TAC)

29 January 2021, Vienna/online: The UNODC report on Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans has shown that corruption and organized crime are mutually reinforcing, leading to systemic weaknesses in the rule of law. To assist Member States in the region, UNODC together with RAI designed a new programme: Southeast Europe – Together Against Corruption, funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). The meeting introducing the new initiative gathered over 80 participants, to mark the launch of three years of activities aimed at strengthening the resilience of Southeast Europe and combating corruption. This will be achieved by enhancing the capacity of governments, civil society organizations, the private sector and the media; to prevent and fight corruption while effectively implementing the UNCAC. During the event, UNODC Regional Asset Recovery and Anti-Corruption Advisor for the Western Balkans, underlined the importance of the experiences and the technical expertise of non-governmental stakeholders in the prevention and fight against corruption. She further observed that the two UNOC country reviews undertaken in the region thus far – namely in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia – involved committed non-governmental actors. This result she proudly attributed to the success of UNODC’s multi-stakeholder workshops. Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce in Albania, mentioned that thanks to UNODC and RAI’s efforts, the private sector has joined forces with civil society organizations and built collective action initiatives in the country, which led to a notable improvement of national anti-corruption strategies and an alignment with the best international practices. Under the auspices of the SEE-TAC Programme, 25 public institutions, 40 business representatives and 175 civil society representatives will be working together alongside the UNCC Coalition and the WB6 Chamber Investment Forum, on the implementation of a wide range of activities throughout the upcoming years.

For more info on all of the above: Virginia De Abajo Marques)

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

UNODC develops toolkit on the investigation and prosecution of trafficking in persons for organ removal

3-4 March 2021, Vienna, Austria: The number of persons reported to be trafficked for the purpose of organ removal is steadily growing. According to UNODC’s 2020 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, North Africa, followed by the Middle East, has the highest share of detections of victims trafficked for the purpose of organ removal. Keen to provide criminal justice practitioners with guidance and practical tools, a comprehensive toolkit on the investigation and prosecution of trafficking in persons for organ removal was developed under the framework of the EU-funded Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants (GLO.ACT). To obtain feedback on the first draft of the toolkit from stakeholders, partners and independent experts, GLO.ACT facilitated two online expert group meetings (EGMs) targeting different regions of the world, including SEE with the participation of Albania. Addressing the over 100 participants of the EGMs, the GLO.ACT Project Coordinator pointed out that the participation of surgeons, law enforcement and prosecu
HUMAN TRAFFICKING

3-4 March 2021, online: UNODC in collaboration with the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal migration of North Macedonia organized the Regional Expert Group Meeting (REGM) on "Access to Effective Remedies for Victims of Trafficking in Persons in South Eastern Europe". The event enabled the examination of the right to effective remedies for victims of TIP, with a specific focus on SEE, scope of its application, and the practical challenges that arise in providing remedies to victims. The main aim of REGM was to provide practical recommendations for solutions to improve access to remedies for victims of TIP. Over 98 participants from SEE, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Romania, as well as France, Greece and Slovenia attended the event. Among the discussed topics were regional and international initiatives enhancing access to effective remedies for victims of TIP; national practices on procedural rights to access justice for victims of TIP presented through practical cases; civil society practices on provision of procedural rights for victims of human trafficking; as well as national mechanisms for remedies of victims of TIP; TIP for labour exploitation; addressing the demand side of TIP; TIP in children in particular for the purpose of forced criminality; and addressing TIP in prostitution through international cooperation. This initiative is funded by the Governments of France and Sweden.

UNODC holds a regional meeting of the Network of Anti-Trafficking Coordinators of SEE

26-28 January 2021, Bucharest, Romania/online: UNODC in cooperation with the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) in its role as the Network's Secretariat organized a regional meeting of the Network of Anti-Trafficking Coordinators of South-East Europe (NATC SEE) hosted by the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (ANITP) of Romania. This regional meeting was entitled “The Way Ahead: After the 10th Anniversary of the NATC SEE and the 20th Anniversary of the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol” and aimed to celebrate the two important anniversaries in order to take stock of the achievements of the previous two decades and set the way ahead for the next years. The event brought together 79 participants from SEE and other countries. In addition, representatives of regional and international organizations, civil society organizations, academia as well as European Commission and other stakeholders were present. The meetings enabled fruitful discussions among the participants, who shared their experience, challenges, good practices and lessons learnt in the implementation of the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol.

UNODC supports access to effective remedies for the victims of trafficking in persons in SEE

UNODC scales up efforts in addressing trafficking in persons in SEE

February 2021, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia: In line with the workplan of the RP SEE, the UNODC Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section (HTMSS) is leading the Regional Initiative on Trafficking in Persons in SEE, as part of the overall implementation of these areas of work in this region. The initiative was developed as a contingency plan to cover the period February-July 2021, using a combination of online meetings and increased physical presence in the region as an alternative delivery modality during the COVID-19 pandemic. The workplan includes five online regional workshops and the engagement of local experts in the four countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia). This will support the countries of SEE in addressing TIP in line with UNTOC and its supplementing Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish TIP, Especially Women and Children. The five multi-disciplinary workshops on TIP will be focused on: access to effective remedies to vic-

(For more info on all of the above: Davor Raus)
UNODC supports the implementation of its Strong Families Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina

28 January 2021, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina/online: The Community Service Organization Narko-Ne, with the support of the Government of Norway and UNDP organized the online conference to address the challenges faced in the work with families at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference was enhanced with the UNODC expertise, in collaboration with the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The event enabled the discussion of the structure and evidenced value of the Strong Families Programme, as well as the results achieved during the pilot phase (November 2020), when the Programme was introduced in the country through the online training delivered to the relevant professionals who then tested its effectiveness via the application of the Programme on 18 chosen families. The results of the pilot phase reaffirmed the commitment of the institutions and local community in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the application of evidence-based prevention strategies and further strengthening of the country’s capacities to sustain and expand prevention efforts.

During the event, some of the beneficiaries’ experiences were relayed through quotes, for example from a child beneficiary saying: “All people in my group were very positive and dear. I liked so much that we have worked and learned through games. The most useful were the stress-releasing games showed by our facilitators, and we have started immediately to use them at home. They are very helpful, we get along better, and we are controlling the stress situation better now”. The conference is part of a larger project “Enable Beneficial Civil Society Environment—EMBRACE” supported by Norway and implemented by UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina.

UNODC holds a conference on drug use prevention strategies for Slovenian health professionals

18 January 2021, online: UNODC in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Slovenia organized an online conference for the national professionals on the drug use prevention strategies. Over 30 participants attended the event, representing various national institutions and civil society organizations. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss in details the value of the UNODC-WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention as well as to present two evidence-based prevention strategies such as the family skills UNODC Strong Families programme and the social emotional learning tool aimed at preventing drug use among adolescents, which has proved to be an effective strategy in reducing substance use and risky behaviors of the target groups as well as rightly influencing their normative beliefs on substance use. While the programme has been active in SEE since years, in Croatia UNODC has launched it in December 2019 with the envisaged implementation period of two academic years until June 2021. Within this monitoring cycle and despite the COVID-19 outbreak, the programme remained active in 35 out of 41 elementary schools across Croatia, reaching students in 64 classes in total. The follow-up sessions have not only provided an opportunity to collect data and make assessments, but also to discuss different modalities on how the programme can be implemented using online platforms and sharing the best practices. The next follow-up sessions are planned for May 2021. The programme implementation in Croatia is using the good results achieved in the region so far through the UNODC’s partnership with LCIF and in the framework of the UNODC RP SEE.

UNODC advances the Lions Quest Skills for Adolescence programme in Croatia

11 January, Osijek; 12 January, Zagreb; 14 January, Split and Zadar; 15 January 2021, Rijeka, Croatia: In the framework of the LQSFA programme UNODC in partnership with the Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF), the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education and the Agency for Training and Education conducted the second round of five (online) follow-up LQSFA sessions. The LQSFA programme is an evidence-based social and emotional learning