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NEWSLETTER

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October- December 2022



BOMCA 10 IN FOCUS

Dear BOMCA-newsletter readers,

On behalf of the European Union, it is my pleasure to share with you the third issue of the BOMCA Newsletter. It will provide you with an update on the Programme's activities and progress across all five Central Asian states for the third quarter 2022 in the field of integrated border management.

Over the last two decades, BOMCA has been the European Union's flagship initiative in the area of border management. It solidified the EU-Central Asia partnership and contributed to ensuring stability, peace, and security in the region.

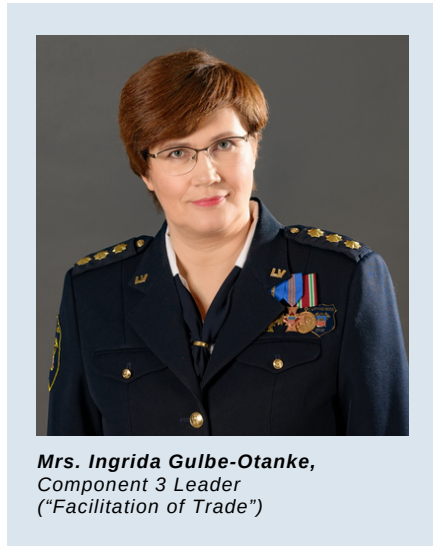
This success would not be possible without the vital role civil society is playing in deepening cross-border relations. This is why we will continue to systematically reach out to and involve civil society in relevant BOMCA activities.

A strong and prosperous Central Asia is a crucial precondition of peace and security in Asia, Europe, and the whole world. This is why, celebrating the 20th BOMCA anniversary next year, we can and should be proud of our common achievements so far.

And, please be assured that the European Union will remain your trustworthy partner, committed to further promoting and supporting regional cooperation and good-neighboring, cross-border relations in Central Asia.



H.E. Kestutis Jankauskas,
Ambassador of the European Union to Kazakhstan



Mrs. Ingrida Gulbe-Otanke,
Component 3 Leader ("Facilitation of Trade")

Dear BOMCA partners,

I'm very glad to present to you the next issue of BOMCA Newsletter, which highlights programmatic progress in the past three months. The content of this Newsletter will provide more information about the progress of programmatic activities across all of its thematic components. One of them is Component 3, that was implemented by the State Revenue Service of the Republic of Latvia and aims to further support the regional economic integration process.

During the last quarter of 2022 Component 3 intensified its focus on strengthening the institutional capacities of the Central Asian agencies in sanitary, phytosanitary and veterinary areas, as Phase 10 of BOMCA programme has a specific objective to increase bilateral, multilateral and regional cooperation between Central Asia and European Union in this field.

Three regional workshops were organised to assist in the assessment of trade facilitation measures and supporting the capacity building activities in the areas covered by the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and sanitary measures, including international standards - in Astana for representatives of veterinary services; in Almaty for officials of food safety control services; and in Tashkent for representatives of plant health services. Overall, all three workshops introduced participants to the global organisations that work in the field of sanitary and phytosanitary measures as part of the FAO, WTO and its SPS agreement, the "three sisters": Codex Alimentarius, World Organisation for Animal

(OIE) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). Understanding global issues makes it easier to understand how SPS issues are regulated, which are essential for national protection against pests, plant and animal diseases, food security, while promoting safe and reliable trade without unnecessary barriers.

So let me please invite you to learn about the key activities and progress achieved in the 4th issue of BOMCA Newsletter!

ABOUT BOMCA 10

Since its launch in 2003, the various phases of the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) funded by the European Union with the contribution of Latvia and Lithuania have focused on capacity building and institutional development, developing trade corridors and the facilitation of trade, improving border management systems and eliminating drug trafficking across the Central Asia region.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

Enhancing security, stability, and sustainable growth in the region, as well as supporting cross-border cooperation and improving living conditions for people living in border areas of Central Asia

BUDGET



21 650 050

DURATION



April 2021 - September 2025



COMPONENT 1
INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF BORDER CONTROL AGENCIES

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

Adopting international security standards, integration of best practices and/or compliance with integrated border management models where applicable



COMPONENT 2
IMPROVEMENT OF DETECTION CAPACITIES

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

Enhancing detection, coordination and investigation effectiveness within and between Central Asian countries



COMPONENT 3
FACILITATION OF TRADE

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

Harmonizing institutional, technical and normative practices related to the facilitation of legitimate flows of people and cargo across borders



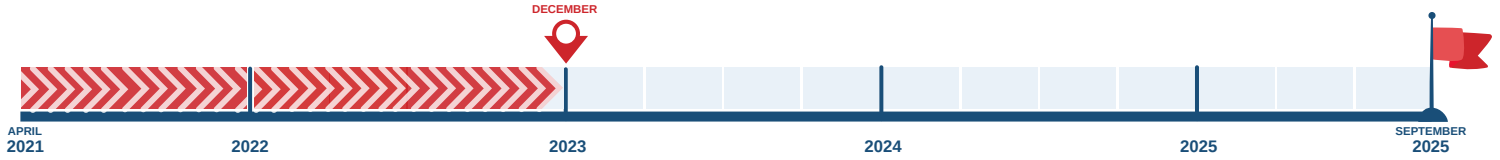
COMPONENT 4
IMPROVEMENT OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

Improving living conditions in border areas through local economic development, with a focus on human rights, gender equality and vulnerable groups (such as women, children and victims of human trafficking)

BOMCA 10 PROGRESS IN A NUTSHELL

Project implementation timeline



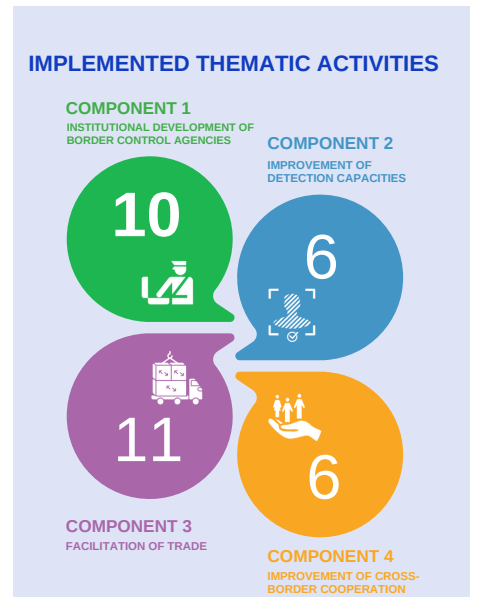
From October 3 to November, 23 BOMCA 10 held National Project Steering Group meetings in Bishkek, Dushanbe and Ashgabat and Regional Project Steering Group meeting online. These events aimed at reviewing the Programme's progress for the year and to define plans for the upcoming period.

For this purpose, the Programme's leadership, representatives of the European Union and implementing partners met with the key partners, such as Central Asian state agencies, international organizations and projects. The two-day event was dedicated to the joint session, followed by bilateral thematic consultations with each of the key national stakeholders. Furthermore, the BOMCA component leaders presented some brief information on the project results for 2022 and an overview of the planned activities.

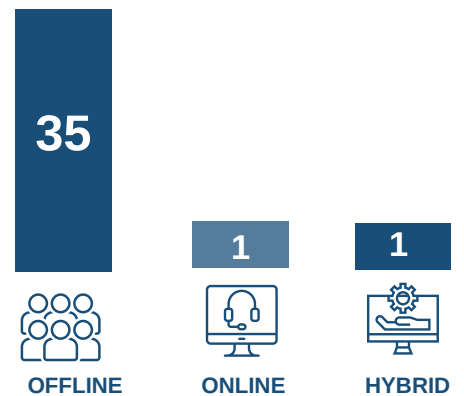
The RSG meeting defined and monitored the strategic direction of the programme implementation, reviewed the Programme's overall progress since December 2021, achievements and challenges to date, as well as having discussed the regional work plan for the next year.

It is worth noting that since October 2021, the start of the active implementation phase, BOMCA 10 has implemented 131 capacity-building activities in the region across four thematic areas – institutional development of border control agencies, improvement of detection capacities, facilitation of trade, and improvement of cross-border cooperation.

Project implementation in the period of October - December 2022



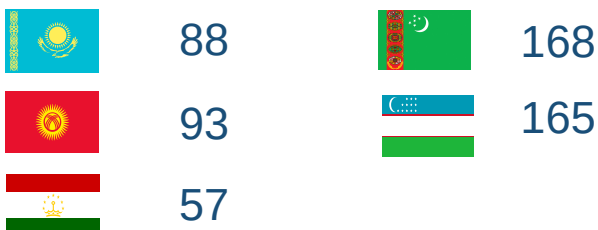
FORMAT OF THE IMPLEMENTED EVENTS



GENDER



NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN PROJECT ACTIVITIES ACROSS CENTRAL ASIAN STATES



THEMATIC ACTIVITIES IN FOCUS



COMPONENT 1 INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF BORDER CONTROL AGENCIES

In the 4th quarter of 2022 the main efforts of Component 1 were focused on several thematic priorities.

BOMCA held a regional workshop on the development of a manual for border control for the representatives of Border Agencies of the Central Asian countries and the State Migration Service of Turkmenistan. The Manual is a set of guiding principles for the 1st line officers working at Border crossing points. It includes an introduction to modern methodology of document checks and recommendations on the organization of effective control procedures, taking into account good practices collected in EU MSs and CA countries.

To summarize knowledge and practical recommendations for successful profiling and interviewing at Border crossing points to be carried out by Border Guards, Customs Units, and Police officers, BOMCA 10 organised a regional workshop on the elaboration of a handbook on profiling and identification at the 1st line border checks. Having in mind the potential risk of mixed migration flows, there is a need to have skills on profiling vulnerable groups of refugees, unaccompanied minors etc. The Handbook is translated into the national languages of CA countries and will be shared with the beneficiaries.



To continue cooperation among CA countries in the area of training, an exchange of trainers was implemented from Kazakhstan to Turkmenistan to conduct a workshop on profiling techniques.

In the past quarter Component 1 finalized the series of the national workshops on risk analysis for representatives of the border guard, customs, law enforcement agencies and other state agencies engaged in the border management of CA countries. This activity introduced participants to the basic principles, applicable practices and regulations and joint border security risk analysis procedures, based on the European experience, and provided an overview of the national system, legal framework and approved activities necessary to develop the relevant risk analysis systems.

It is worth noting that Component 1 continuously ensures synergies with other stakeholders working on the topics of IBM and whenever relevant conducts joint events (e.g. with LEICA, UNODC, UNHCR and OSCE).



COMPONENT 2 IMPROVEMENT OF DETECTION CAPACITIES



Following these activities, EU experts took additional steps to assess the problematic aspects of information and evidence exchange in the investigation of cross-border crimes, as well as the possibilities of faster exchange of information and evidence while investigating such crimes. Two bilateral workshops were conducted, one with a focus on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as well as another focusing on Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Not only did the Component successfully finalise two training of trainers (ToT) courses for dog handling instructors specialising in the search for drugs and explosives, ammunition, and weapons in Latvia and Lithuania, but it also completed the final activities of a series of national workshops for dog handlers in all five Central Asian countries. These training sessions helped participants to understand better the organisation, role, capability, and requirements of canine units in detecting various types of smuggled goods, such as arms, explosives, ammunition, drugs, and precursors.

In the past three months, Component 2 continued working on improving detection capacities with a focus on enhancing cooperation at the bilateral, regional, and international levels for information exchange on cross-border crime, including the use of Interpol databases in border control.

After two regional workshops, which were dedicated to the development of a common understanding and approach to Joint Investigation Teams (JIT) in cases of cross-border crime investigation, proposals were elaborated for the development of a JIT model, taking into account the existing practices and standards of international legal cooperation in the participating CA countries.



THEMATIC ACTIVITIES IN FOCUS



COMPONENT 3 FACILITATION OF TRADE

From October-December BOMCA has intensified the focus on strengthening the institutional capacities of the Central Asian agencies in sanitary, phyto - sanitary and veterinary areas, as Phase 10 of BOMCA programme has a specific objective to increase bilateral, multilateral and regional Central Asia and European Union cooperation in this field.

The regional workshop in Kazakhstan aimed to assist Central Asian countries in the assessment of their trade facilitation measures and support of the capacity building activities in the areas covered by World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement, namely sanitary, phyto - sanitary measures and international standards.

The workshop participants were introduced with Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) standard – a prevention-based food safety system to ensure safe food (in which food safety is addressed through the analysis and control of biological, chemical, and physical hazards from raw material production, procurement and handling, to manufacturing, distribution and consumption of the finished product), pre-export program and certification principles, the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed - a notification system managed by the European Commission for the exchange of information on identified hazards, as well as the EU requirements for food product certificates.

Group work was devoted to discussing the work of inspectors during the import procedure from the point of view of HACCP principles and the development of draft guidelines for the implementation HACCP standard in each agency.

Participants' presentations and discussions showed that approaches and degrees of implementation of WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission guidelines for food import/export controls vary from country to country.

For example, the Republic of Kazakhstan is very active in the working groups of the Codex Alimentarius commissions, focusing on participation in the development of standards, rather than on the implementation of standards in national acts. Turkmenistan, on the other hand, plans to start the implementation of Codex Alimentarius standards at the national level. The Republic of Uzbekistan, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic have started and are implementing the standards.

Working in groups draft Guidelines were drafted for the implementation of HACCP standards, FAO/WHO's Codex Alimentarius/ Food Code based on the existing and specific level of implementation in each country.

During the regional seminar in Kazakhstan, veterinary agencies of CA countries were supported in achieving standards set by the World Organisation of Animal Health (WOAH, founded as OIE), introduced with the application of OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code, requirements of the Aquatic Animal Health Code and practical implementation measures for risk-based import controls and veterinary certification.

EU experts presented challenges in animal health control, based on the basic principles of the OIE, and during the discussions, participants engaged on the status of the CA countries regarding animal health monitoring and traceability requirements included in the international and national legislation and their practical application in the border control process.

An exchange of experiences through a question-and-answer session allowed participants to gain a general understanding and create a country-specific action plan for a practical approach to private luggage control, risks, and challenges. A special focus was placed on plant protection issues in cross-border movements during the regional workshop in Uzbekistan, to support the alignment of national plant legislation in all five project countries of CA with the provisions of the International Plant Protection Convention requirements.

The participants were introduced to International standards for phyto - sanitary measures: principles of plant quarantine as related to international trade, guidelines for a phyto - sanitary import regulatory system, regulation of wood packaging material in international trade and its implementation in the EU legislation, guidelines for surveillance, requirements for the establishment of pest free areas, places of production and pest free production sites and other issues regarding pest reporting and pest risks.



COMPONENT 4 IMPROVEMENT OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION



Supporting the State Customs Service of Turkmenistan in raising public awareness on national customs procedures in the border areas, BOMCA has been developing a dedicated mobile application to enhance cross-border mobility and local economic development in border areas. A two-day Workshop and Working Group Meeting that took place in the last quarter of 2022 enabled conceptualisation of the technical specifications for the mobile application, based on the best EU practices and accumulated experience.

In Kyrgyzstan, pursuing the activities foreseen within the Action Plan on raising awareness on legal and labour migration in the border regions, Component 4 stakeholders held a seminar to discuss and endorse the methodological approach to conducting a study of migration trends in the Fergana Valley, in close cooperation with the state authorities.

In the past quarter, Component 4 focused on supporting state and local authorities of Central Asian countries in building their capacities in several thematic areas.

Acknowledging the significance of credible data for informed policy making in the area of migration, the employees of the Uzbek state agencies have developed their skills in evidence based migration research with the focus on data gathering and analysis. Furthermore, contributing to the overall efforts of the Uzbek Government in pursuing gender equality and following up on the pilot training held earlier this year, the Component supported female employees of the state agencies and local authorities in integrating a gender agenda into the activities at the national level and in every-day professional operations. Targeting all employees of regional branches of beneficiary agencies across all regions of Uzbekistan, this activity contributed to the empowerment of women in a gender-sensitive manner.





BOMCA LEADERSHIP PARTICIPATED AT THE FRONTEX 25TH INTERNATIONAL BORDER POLICE CONFERENCE IN POLAND

From October 26 to 28, in Warsaw (Poland) the Border Management Programme in Central Asia participated at the 25th International Border Police Conference – “Contingency planning for emergencies at the borders”.

Along with representatives of over seventy countries and twenty organisations, the Central Asian delegates benefited from open discussions and constructive proposals on contingency planning for emergencies, in order to enable a swift and efficient response to crises, and to learn lessons and from the experiences of other countries confronted with similar challenges.

Furthermore, the conference explored ways to ensure the operational continuation of combatting cross-border crime, also in crisis situations.

The Central Asian countries to the conference were represented by the managerial level representatives of Border Troops of the State Committee of National Security of Tajikistan, State Migration Service and State Border Service of Turkmenistan. They contributed as panel speakers. The experiences of both countries provided a valuable contribution to the discussions on challenges faced by the region following major political and security situation developments in Afghanistan.

On the margins of the Conference, BOMCA held a trilateral meeting with the Turkmen and Tajik delegations, wherein the parties exchanged views on BOMCA project implementation and other cooperation.



EU-FUNDED PROGRAMME ENHANCES INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE EXCHANGE IN CROSS-BORDER CRIME INVESTIGATIONS IN CA



To enhance the cooperation enabling bilateral, regional and international information exchange on cross-border crime, including the use of Interpol databases in border control, BOMCA 10 held two bilateral workshops for representatives of investigation units of the law enforcement agencies and prosecutor's offices from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. This activity aimed to analyze the current practices of information and evidence exchange in cross-border crime investigations in Central Asian countries with a major focus on above-mentioned countries, and to evaluate problematic aspects of information and evidence exchange in the investigation of cross-border crimes.

During each of the workshops, the participants and Lithuanian experts discussed the possibility of a faster exchange of information and evidence in cross-border crime investigation, as well as evaluating the legal and practical prerequisites for evidence using digital (electronic) data transmission methods.

Following the completion of the workshops and building upon the information received from the national counterparts, the expert team prepared protocols on cooperation related to the exchange of regional information about cross-border crimes and on the exchange of evidence between law enforcement (prosecution) agencies of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

FEATURED STORIES



EU EXPERTS DEMONSTRATED EXAMPLES OF X-RAY IMAGES OF VARIOUS TYPES OF CARGO, ROAD TRANSPORT AND RAILWAY WAGONS

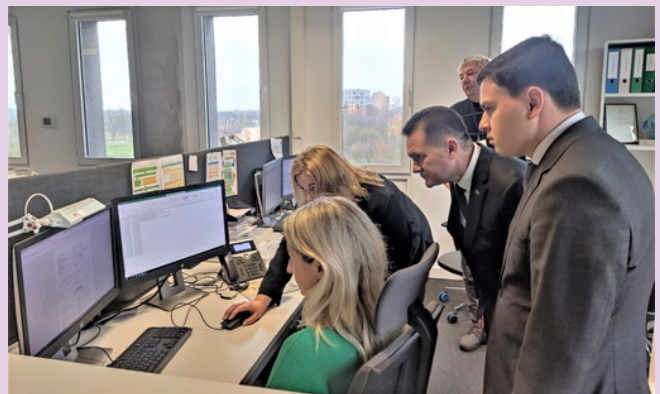
The EU countries have extensive practical experience in securing external borders, especially when checking vehicles crossing the border to identify illegally transported goods, weapons, drugs and other high-risk items. Modern hiding storage is increasingly being used, and special equipment and knowledge are needed to identify these places.

To support the customs administrations of all Central Asian states in building skills and capacities in analysing X-ray images and the application of X-ray scanning systems, a regional workshop on the recognition of anomalies in X-ray images for freight transport on land borders for customs unit officials was organised in the last week of September 2022 in Riga, Latvia.

During the workshop, EU experts demonstrated examples of X-ray images of various types of cargo, road transport and railway wagons, as well as the principles of their creation and image analysis using Baltic X-Ray Images Exchange software.

The main advantage of the training session was the venue, where a classroom was provided with high-level and professional technical equipment. An individual computer with special X-ray program and two monitors was made available for each participant, as well as a comprehensive library of X-ray images and other relevant information.

The training session consisted of a theoretical part, a case simulation linked to the theoretical part, and a practical part simulating real work environment with real X-ray image analysis. The participants were introduced to a set of interesting seizures based on the X-ray image analysis in the Baltic states and other EU countries.





BOMCA STANDS STRONGLY IN SUPPORT OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN TAJIKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

In the framework of its activities, BOMCA has been strongly committed to the support of women and gender equality in the border regions of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In fall 2022, Component 4 has carried out several events targeting national and local authorities working with the border areas' population directly and implementing regional policies in the areas of migration, economic development and gender.

Both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have adopted solid legislation and have been implementing a series of measures to enhance the role of women in the society. To build on these achievements and further strengthen the capacities of the Programme's beneficiaries for the empowerment of women, a training session on gender that took place in Tashkent and Bukhara for the female representatives of all regions of Uzbekistan familiarized participants with the international gender perspective to enhance their understanding of gender mainstreaming and equip them with the necessary tools for integrating the gender agenda into their activities at the personal and organisational levels. The workshops were the follow-up activities to the pilot training session organised earlier this year and served as a platform to present practical examples, good practices and lessons learnt from the European Union, as well as instruments to support empowerment of women in a gender-sensitive manner.



In Dushanbe, Tajikistan, the Component has supported representatives of state agencies working in border regions and districts as well as local authorities in facilitating the potential of women living in the border areas for the development of these regions through the lens of women contribution to peace and stability and local economic development. The four-day training course offered practical knowledge and tools based on the best practices within the European Union and beyond on women's role and their positive capacity in addressing conflicts and pursuing peacebuilding initiatives. Acknowledging the critical role that entrepreneurship plays in the acceleration of the local development, especially in border regions, the training course further presented key aspects and strategies for engaging women, taking into account the Tajik national context. Following up on this and based on the discussions and shared experience during the activity, the beneficiaries will be later presented with a tailored document, reflecting the practical guidelines aiming to increase the efficiency of the services and consultations provided to female inhabitants of the border regions by national and local authorities.



Throughout their operations and implemented activities, Component 4 is strongly committed to building networks and facilitate interagency partnerships that ultimately contributes to the improvement of cross-border cooperation for better living conditions in border areas. Therefore, activities in both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan gathered representatives from different state agencies and authorities from different border localities, to present the opportunity to exchange and build common approaches to women's empowerment and their increased social inclusion.



THEMATIC AND METHODOLOGICAL FOCUS IN THE NEXT QUARTER (JANUARY - MARCH 2023)



Regional workshops



Thematic meetings



Distance learning



National workshops



Exchange of trainers



Grants to NGOs



Training of trainers



Technical assistance



Other targeted capacity building activities



COMPONENT 1

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF BORDER CONTROL AGENCIES

- Facilitation of rapid and effective return of irregular migrants
- Study visits to the EU Member States
- Facilitation of the distance learning
- Strengthening training capacity in the field of document security



COMPONENT 2

IMPROVEMENT OF DETECTION CAPACITIES

- Enhancing awareness on investigation of cross-border crimes
- Enhancing cooperation with Interpol



COMPONENT 3

FACILITATION OF TRADE

- Inter-agency cooperation between Customs and Phytosanitary and Veterinary services
- Facilitation of the application of innovative principles and methods of risk management and green management
- Development of training capacities in car and truck searches



COMPONENT 4

IMPROVEMENT OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

- Research and analysis in the area of migration, cross-border and related areas
- Awareness raising on irregular migration, as well as on issues of concern for populations affected by migration
- Assistance to vulnerable population groups affected by migration and border proximity (in particular to children and women left behind by migrants)
- Support to entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship initiatives, for all population groups and among women, as a special category

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