

Chair's Declaration of the Western Balkans Summit Interior Ministers Meeting,

15 October 2025

1. Ministers of Interior and Security of the UK, Western Balkans Six and representatives of the European Union and its Member States along with senior official representatives met on 14 and 15 October 2025 in Lancaster House, London, under the chairmanship of the Rt. Hon. Shabana Mahmood, Secretary of State for the Home Department. This marks the 11th Western Balkans Summit, demonstrating continuation of the important dialogue and successful cooperation regarding the Western Balkan region.
2. Discussions focussed on tackling shared drivers of instability and building resilient communities, with a particular emphasis on addressing mutual challenges to the security, safety and prosperity of our citizens from illegal migration, securing our borders, and combatting organised immigration crime. Participants remain committed to building resilience in the Western Balkans, recognising that the challenge must be addressed at a route-based, regional level. Ministerial discussions also focussed on tackling vulnerabilities to Serious and Organised Crime (SOC), particularly on illicit finance flows, and combatting Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG), its links to organised crime, and on technology facilitated gender-based violence.
3. Participants agree the side events are an important component of the Western Balkans Summit Interior Ministers Meeting. This year, Interior affairs equities were discussed at regional events including the Gender Equality Forum, the Civil Society Forum, and events on border security, illicit finance, and on anti-corruption. Outcomes from these side events informed the Interior Ministerial Meeting.
4. Agreements made under each theme include:

Strengthening Regional Border Management

5. Effective Border Security is critical to ensuring public trust in our migration systems and democratic institutions. Western Balkans Summit partners are keenly aware of the impact of illegal migration on communities, and the need to ensure that participants are working together to prevent the flow of migrants into Europe and beyond – a flow that is being facilitated by people smugglers with no regard for human life. Participants recognise the need to continue to pursue ways to ensure that we are operating safe and effective migration systems, and work together to effectively crack-down on organised immigration crime in the Western Balkans.

6. Increased cooperation between law enforcement agencies, and collaboration with external agencies, is crucial to preventing illegal migration. Participants will see improved migration management through enhanced cooperation, including via FRONTEX. The processing and sharing of travellers' biometric information at external borders will increase opportunities to prevent illegal crossings and exploitation of vulnerable migrants. In support of this, participants agree to build on existing Working Arrangements (and Status Agreements where applicable) between FRONTEX, the Western Balkans Six and the UK respectively, to strengthen border management and tackle irregular migration. Participants also agree to enhanced regional cooperation between law enforcement partners to maximise our response to crack down on people smuggling gangs.
7. To support this enhanced regional cooperation, participants agree that the Western Balkans Border Directors Forum hosted in October, should continue as a permanent side event, bringing together participants from the Western Balkan six to discuss joint solutions to prevent regional illegal migration. The Western Balkans Border Directors Forum, coordinated in collaboration with International Organisation for Migration, and with attendance from FRONTEX this year, discussed their successes and challenges to date. A range of actions were identified, focused on improving real-time intelligence sharing, addressing visa abuse, improving returns cooperation with countries of origin, and bolstering legislation to empower law enforcement officers.
8. Alongside work to enhance effective border management, participants agree the importance of being able to return illegal immigrants and support the returns of those who wish to return to their country of origin safely. Coordination between Western Balkans participants, the EU Member States and the UK on the effective implementation of returns processes, including the sharing of best practice and support with training requirements, is vital in ensuring effective returns systems. Participants also noted the crucial role of assisted voluntary returns and reintegration programming in providing safe alternatives to migrants who would otherwise face further exploitation by people smuggling gangs.
9. Participants note the discussions at the Civil Society Forum on the need to reduce the push factors driving young people to emigrate from the Western Balkans, and to ensure that there are fewer barriers to regional labour mobility in the Common Regional Market. These are important factors in ensuring economic growth for the region and preventing migration that is damaging to the long-term prospects of Western Balkans partners.
10. Economic development and prosperity are equally supported by the implementation of effective visa policies and regimes. The participants welcome the ongoing steps being taken by Western Balkans partners to harmonise their visa regimes with the EU, and agree on the need to ensure that, where visa-

free access is provided for overseas citizens, effective safeguards are in place to prevent the exploitation of this access by individuals seeking to migrate onward illegally.

11. Equally, where there are opportunities provided for access to the labour market for migrants from overseas, participants agree that there is a requirement to ensure that these routes cannot be the subject of abuse, either by migrants or by businesses who seek to exploit migrant labour. Participants agree to an ongoing dialogue on ways of preventing visa abuse within these schemes, with outcomes from this dialogue to be shared and discussed at the 2026 meeting of the Western Balkans Summit Interior Ministers.
12. Partners agree tackling cross-border trafficking and exploitation should be prevented, especially with regards to children. We recognise that strengthening regional coordination with WB6 can ensure trends in the areas of abuse and potential cross-border trafficking can be monitored to help prevention.

Tackling vulnerabilities to Serious and Organised Crime

13. During the Western Balkans Summit Interior Ministers' meeting, participants established a shared understanding of the most pressing Serious and Organised Crime threats affecting the Western Balkans and allied partners. We recognise the need to promote an end-to-end approach to strategically tackle transnational organised crime. We place emphasis on disrupting illicit financial flows and the cocaine supply chains which damages our communities, threatens our security, and harms those along the supply route.
14. In partnership with the National Crime Agency's established International Liaison Officer network, we will strengthen our collaborative strategic and operational approaches including on the cocaine threat, share best practice, and identify tactical opportunities for disruption across the entire supply chain in collaboration with partners. This includes developing joint intelligence and data driven operational activity, enabling a prioritised response that actively disrupts the operations of cocaine trafficking networks and shared high-value targets, applying pressure to the entire supply chain.
15. Drugs trafficking remains closely linked with illicit firearms; the drugs trade is often a key driver of firearms-enabled serious violence. The Western Balkans Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Control Roadmap, originally adopted at the Western Balkans Summit Interior Ministers Meeting in July 2018, and a new Roadmap for 2025 – 2030 endorsed in October 2024, is a robust and regionally endorsed mechanism which participants recognise to be of significant value in controlling firearms trafficking. Partners value the importance of the role of the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) under the joint

initiative with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in ensuring a sustained effort in the implementation of the roadmap to achieve its goals for 2030.

16. We agreed upon the need to build institutional resilience and enforcement against the enablers of organised criminality such as illicit finance and corruption. Through the Western Balkans Summit Interior Ministers track, we will develop the digital economies of the WB6, reduce cash-based transactions and develop faster and more inclusive payment systems to reduce the prevalence of illicit finance across the Western Balkans.
17. Participants commit to strengthening the political and legal environment to prevent and combat corruption and organised crime as essential foundations for regional integration, security, and stronger integrity systems. This includes advancing the full adoption and effective implementation of the International Treaty on Exchange of Data for the Verification of Asset Declarations initiated by the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI).
18. Through the Western Balkans Summit Interior Ministers Meeting, we commit to deepen diplomatic and operational collaboration between Western Balkan Six, EU, UK and international partners, as well as harnessing the expertise of industry and civil society to deliver a unified and impactful response to SOC.

Combatting Violence against Women and Girls

19. Gender-based violence undermines economic growth, democracy, security, and peace. Participants face the shared challenge of combatting violence against women and girls, building on and reaffirming the commitments from 2024. Gender-based violence undermines the foundations of our societies and social cohesion. Regional civil society organisations indicate that the rates of femicide in the Western Balkans remain persistently high¹. Tragically, this is a fact that Western Balkan Summit partners share.
20. Globally, we are seeing an exponential rise in the online and technology-facilitated harassment and abuse of women and girls, including technology-facilitated violence. Participants reached consensus on the need for a coordinated response to this growing public safety threat and human rights issue that affects all societies.
21. Digital tools are increasingly being weaponised to target women and girls, both online and offline. We discussed a shared understanding of the essential role of prevention initiatives for tackling technology-facilitated gender-based violence and the role of technology companies and internet intermediaries in

¹ [The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-Womens-Rights-in-Western-Balkans-2023](#)

preventing and responding to technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. We support the WB6 commitment to join the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse to facilitate peer-learning.

22. The Gender Equality Forum included a strong focus on tackling violence against women and girls. Violence has a devastating impact on victim-survivors and hampers growth, stability and security. The Forum recommended the renewal of the Joint Statement on Gender Equality Mechanisms and Protection against Discrimination which will support shared benchmarks and reinforce accountability among Western Balkan institutions to tackle violence against women and girls.
23. Moreover, the perpetration of gender-based violence by criminal networks including sex trafficking, often facilitated online – is a horrendous form of VAWG, that causes prolonged suffering; heightens feelings of fear and undermines public trust in institutions. The rule of law plays a crucial role in addressing VAWG, by establishing legal frameworks, ensuring accountability, and promoting gender equality. Participants agree to fully implement the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Participants welcomed a support of UK legal expertise to tackle VAWG online and offline across the region.

Summary

24. Across all priority areas, Western Balkans Summit Interior Ministerial partners are demonstrating collective leadership and cooperation. We are committed to practical and shared actions to address the mutual challenges and to strengthen our collective security. Together, we will continue to uphold the safety and prosperity of our citizens.