EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Mid-term evaluation of the project (December 1, 2021 - November 30, 2023)

Addressing Mixed Migration Flows in the Western Balkans

Commissioned by IOM Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Executive Summary

The mid-term external evaluation of the "Addressing Mixed Migration Flows in the Western Balkans" project implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Justice of Norway (administrated by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Sarajevo) has been conducted with a multi-dimensional approach, covering relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the interventions. The project, envisioned to enhance the response to mixed migration challenges, is characterized by a strong alignment with the objectives outlined. The methodology of the evaluation followed rigorous data analysis, stakeholder interviews, and field observations, leading to an in-depth understanding of the project's achievements and areas that required attention.

The evaluation concluded that the project has been highly successful in meeting its intended goals and positively impacting the Western Balkans' response to mixed migration. It has proven effective and efficient, achieving most of its expected outcomes despite challenges posed by external factors. While the immediate project results have been favorable, emphasis on sustainability and preparation for service transition is needed to ensure that the gains made are maintained and built upon by local partners and stakeholders. The project's impact is evident and largely sustainable, although the transition to local stewardship requires careful planning and robust readiness assessment. Future projects can draw on the insights from this evaluation to further strengthen planning, implementation, and sustainability strategies to continue making a tangible difference in migration management within the region.

Relevance: The project demonstrated high relevance, as the majority of activities directly contributed to the overarching objectives. The project attained an alignment score of 9.5/10, signifying a strong link between the activities and intended outcomes. Stakeholders' satisfaction was notably high once informed about project components, ensuring that the project aptly addressed diverse needs.

Coherence: The coherence of the project with IOM's ongoing programs and strategic directions was significant. The project interventions were well integrated with IOM's thematic areas, with all outputs designed to complement and enhance the impact of other initiatives. The project demonstrated a strong commitment to aligning not only with national policies and IOM guidelines but also with IOM strategies at both sub-regional and country levels, in addition to emphasizing alignment with national strategies. This underscored the project's strategic integration.

Effectiveness: The evaluation highlights the project's exceptional management of complexities, surpassing expectations with its responsive and beneficiary-centered approach. Stakeholder satisfaction, from individuals, and institutional partners to donors, underscores the project's transformative impact and successful outcomes achieved within set timeframes. Noteworthy adaptability to economic challenges, political tensions, and dynamic migrant flows further exemplifies the project's commitment to responsiveness and impactful execution.

Efficiency: The project exhibited remarkable efficiency in resource utilization, with minimal variance between actual and projected costs. Stakeholder satisfaction with time management and project execution was rated at the highest levels, indicating effective use of time and expertize.

Impact: The project made significant strides, denoting positive changes in both institutional practices and individual beneficiaries' lives. The intervention showcased robust impact, with no significant negative or unintended effects detected. Measures taken to mitigate potential risks were effective, enhancing the overall value of the project.

Sustainability: The engagement levels from stakeholders and their involvement in the project's lifecycle were notable, with high satisfaction reported. However, the sustainability of the project outcomes raised concerns regarding the preparedness of partners to continue activities without IOM's direct involvement, especially post-2025.

Recommendations: The evaluation team has formulated key recommendations, including five priority suggestions with defined implementation approaches and expected outcomes, based on the obtained results and conclusions (while also noting additional incidental recommendations and good practices documented as separate annexes):

➢ Enhance project coordination by developing a digital interactive platform for two-way information exchange, ensuring stakeholder access to project details, alignment with national strategies, and transparent communication.

➢ Establish a sustainability roadmap, integrating continuous project monitoring, fostering ownership among stakeholders, aligning project outcomes with national strategies, and implementing risk mitigation and contingency planning.

➢ Prepare for project phase-out by developing comprehensive Phase-out plans, engaging non-governmental partners, emphasizing evidence-based decision making, and facilitating knowledge transfer to local institutions.

➢ Strengthen monitoring mechanisms for Social Cohesion outputs, focusing on assessing the impact of mini projects, gathering beneficiary feedback, and understanding the application of enhanced capacities.

➢ Clearly define the role of the Social Cohesion component in contributing to project impact and sustainability, including follow-up meetings, donor acknowledgment, collaboration with partners, and setting clear expectations for their contributions.

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List of acronyms

AVRR	–	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
BiH	–	Bosnia and Herzegovina
EU	–	European Union
EM	–	Evaluation Manager
EQ	–	Evaluation Question
FGD	–	Focus Group Discussion
IOM	–	International Organization for Migration
KIRS	–	Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of Serbia
MoI	–	Ministry of Interior
MoS	–	Ministry of Security of BiH
NGO	–	Non-Governmental Organization
PSU	–	Programme Support Unit
PMT	–	Project Management Team
RS	–	Republika Srpska
CSO	–	Civil Society Organization
SFA	–	Service for Foreigners' Affairs
SoP	–	Standard Operating Procedures
ToR	–	Terms of Reference
TRC	–	Temporary Reception Centres
UNEG	–	United Nations Evaluation Group
WB	–	Western Balkans

1. Introduction: The evaluation background and context

Established in 1951, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the UN Migration Agency, works closely with migrants and over 170 Member States, including six missions in the Western Balkans (WB). Namely, to ensuring well governed migration, the IOM is engaged in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo*[1]. The mission in BiH offers assistance for sub-regional coordination, working closely with the Regional Office in Vienna. This assistance involves tackling particular migration challenges and evolving patterns at the sub-regional level while also managing relationships with partners. In 2024, IOM implements up to 14 regional projects in the WB, with funding from the European Union (EU), Denmark, Italy, Norway, and the UK.

Since the beginning of 2015, the WB region has emerged as a major crossroads for migrants attempting to reach the EU. Migrants used to travel predominantly through North Macedonia and Serbia, but in 2019 the route shifted towards the coastal road, through Albania, BiH, Kosovo* and Montenegro. Migrant arrivals in 2022 saw a substantial uptick of nearly 60 per cent across the entire region when compared to 2021 (IOM BiH: Annual Report 2022).

Among others, IOM has been implementing the project "Addressing Mixed Migration Flows in the Western Balkans". The primary aim of the project under consideration is to ensure that vulnerable migrants in the WB are better protected and have access to safe and dignified return assistance, not only by boosting the capabilities for receiving, referring, and registering migrants, but also to facilitate assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) for migrants. Furthermore, this project seeks to expand the understanding of migration-related data and knowledge concerning risks and vulnerabilities throughout the sub-region, but also to strengthen capacities and address the needs of communities most affected by mixed migration movements.

This evaluation covers the full scope of the project, with particular focus on activities conducted in Albania, BiH, Montenegro and Kosovo*. The evaluation process covered the period from 1 December 2021 to 31 January 2024,[2] and all the project's outcomes:

- ➢ [Outcome 1] Authorities and humanitarian responders have access to accurate, up-to-date data and enhanced knowledge on migrants arriving to, and present in the WB.
- ➢ [Outcome 2] Vulnerable migrants have access to increased reception and referrals capacities in migrant facilities across the region.
- ➢ [Outcome 3] Migrants in transit in the WB have access to return and reintegration assistance.
- ➢ [Outcome 4] Local authorities have strengthened capacities to address the needs of communities most affected by mixed migration movements in Republika Srpska (RS).

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[1] All references to Kosovo* shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).
[2] The project has been extended of two years. The end date was moved from 30 November 2023 to 30 November 2025.

2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

2.1. Evaluation purpose

The overarching objective of this external evaluation is to critically examine the extent to which the project has achieved its intended results and to determine its sustainability. The evaluation seeks to provide the project team and stakeholders, including donors, with a holistic understanding of the project's effectiveness and efficiency. It will allow the internal audience within IOM to internalize lessons learned and recognized good practices for potential future initiatives. Simultaneously, it aims to deliver an extensive analysis of the project's impact (to date), enabling the donor to assess the effectiveness of their contribution.

Concrete recommendations for future initiatives, drawing from a nuanced understanding of the project's progress and incorporating good practices from diverse contexts, aim to enhance migration responses in the WB. Internally, the evaluation serves as a tool for learning, adaptation, and improvement, contributing to the organization's capacity to address mixed migration flows effectively. It also provides the donor with a comprehensive analysis of achieved impact and potential future outcomes, fostering accountability and transparency. Furthermore, the evaluation examines beneficiary satisfaction, the mitigation of negative effects, and assesses stakeholder involvement, emphasizing sustainability and continued benefit from the project's results. (Structured segments of the evaluation purpose are displayed in Annex 6.4.)

2.2. Evaluation scope

The evaluation encompasses the entire scope of project activities implemented in WB sub-region, spanning from December 1, 2021, to November 30, 2023. In line with the project's implementation scope, the evaluation primarily focused on Albania, BiH, Montenegro, and Kosovo*, while also including Serbia and North Macedonia.

Initially planned as the final evaluation, the project received additional support from the Norwegian Embassy, leading to its continuation in a similar form. Consequently, this evaluation is now considered more of a mid-term assessment.

The focus of this evaluation was on the achievement of the project's objectives and outcomes, assessed through the lens of six DAC evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the evaluation aimed to gather robust qualitative but also quantitative data from key stakeholders, including individual beneficiaries, institutional partners at both national and local levels, and the most relevant humanitarian actors. This approach enabled the evaluation team to provide comprehensive answers to all the evaluation questions specified in the Terms of Reference (ToR).

2.3. Evaluation criteria

Fourteen evaluation questions (EQ) have been guiding the evaluation team during the evaluation process (See Annex 6.2. Evaluation matrix). By answering these questions, the team successfully described status of the indicators related to six DAC evaluation criteria:

➢ Relevance: Assesses the extent to which the project aligns with the priorities and needs of the target population and stakeholders.
➢ Effectiveness: Measures the degree to which the project achieves its intended goals and objectives.
➢ Efficiency: Evaluates how well the project utilizes resources (such as time, money, and human resources) to achieve its objectives.

- Impact: Analyses the broader effects and changes resulting from the project, often considering both intended and unintended outcomes.
- Sustainability: Examines the likelihood of the project's benefits continuing after the conclusion of the project, including its ability to maintain positive outcomes.
- Coherence: Assesses the project's compatibility and harmonization with other interventions and initiatives in the same field or region.

3. Evaluation framework and methodology

3.1.   Data sources and collection

To ensure data validity and reliability of the evaluation results, this evaluation implied four data collection methods and different data sources that have the potential to reflect critical project outputs and outcomes but also adequately inform EQs, sub-questions, and related indicators.

(a) Document review (120+ documents): The initial phase, which involved a thorough examination of relevant project documents, was already accomplished for the purpose of creating this document and the attached tools. However, evaluation processes often required these documents to be additionally reviewed or considered after key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Documentation was analysed in alignment with the EQs, while critical elements within these documents were highlighted to provide substantial support for the evaluation process.

(b) KIIs (KIIs with 47 individuals, conducted in the period between 6 November 2023, and 19 January 2024): A series of semi-structured interviews with 47 individuals was conducted with key project stakeholders, including project staff, authorities, partners, donors, and beneficiaries. The interviews adhered to a predefined agenda that mirrored the evaluation objectives. An interview questionnaire guided these interactions, characterized by a mix of open and closed questions. The questionnaire structure was indicative of the interview content, allowing for flexibility to accommodate follow-up questions and discussions as needed.

(c) FGDs (five FGDs conducted in the period from 6 to 11 November 2023): Five FGD were organized to engage different stakeholders and beneficiaries. Discussions were conducted with a semi-structured approach in alignment with the field mission agenda. The discussion guide and instructions could be adjusted to delve deeper into specific themes or feedback that emerged during the conversation. The first focus group was dedicated to local authorities and project partners engaged in supporting the Service for Foreigners' Affairs (SFA) program. Their input offered valuable insights into collaborative efforts within this program. The second focus group assembled parents and NGO representatives associated with "Drugaciji Svijet," an organization assisting individuals with autism. By gathering their experiences and perspectives, this discussion shed light on the direct impact of "Drugaciji Svijet's" services. The third focus group engaged beneficiaries of the AVRR program, delving into their experiences and the effects of AVRR services on their lives. The fourth focus group encompassed a broader group of project beneficiaries, aiming to understand their feedback and the overall impact of project services. Finally, the fifth focus group involved AVRR beneficiaries in their respective countries of origin, focusing on post-return experiences and the effectiveness of reintegration services. These focus groups, each tailored to specific stakeholders, played a pivotal role in gathering diverse perspectives, feedback, and experiences that significantly contributed to the comprehensive evaluation of the project's effectiveness and impact across various segments of the target population and beneficiaries.

(d) On-site direct observation (Conducted in the period from 6 to 11 November 2023): This method was applied as unstructured/uncontrolled and non-participant observation. Evaluators observed as detached emissaries without any attempt to experience through participation what others felt (non-participant observation). Observation was applied during the field visits to project sites in BiH and Montenegro, including temporary reception centres (TRCs), outreach, AVRR and DTM activities, as well as host communities supported through rehabilitation and small-scale initiatives.

3.2. Data analysis

The evaluation's analytical process was underpinned by an in-depth desk review combined with a qualitative analysis of data gathered from KIIs and FGDs, but also on-site direct observations, KIIs and FGDs.

In alignment with the evaluation objectives, special attention was given to analyzing outcomes linked to project objectives and DAC criteria. This outcome-oriented approach ensured that the analysis remained focused on the 6 DAC criteria and the four outcomes of the project, facilitating the extraction of actionable recommendations and strategic insights into the project's delivery and success. Through this comprehensive data analysis process, the evaluation endeavored to create an intricate tapestry of qualitative insights framed within the broader quantitative context provided by project documentation. This balanced amalgamation afforded a deepened understanding and informed the subsequent conclusions and recommendations.

3.3. Sampling

In this evaluation, the evaluation team did not employ traditional sampling methods. Instead, all participants were carefully selected based on a purposeful selection strategy collaboratively developed with the Project Management Team (PMT). This approach ensured that the evaluation included a comprehensive range of stakeholders reflective of the multiple facets of the project.

The population for the evaluation was defined in conjunction with the PMT, which identified key individuals and groups that possessed in-depth knowledge or had been significantly impacted by the project. This selective process was engineered to include project staff, relevant authorities, implementing partners, donors, direct beneficiaries, and members of the communities within the project's geographical scope.

Through this tailored process, the evaluation team ensured representation from each of the project's core component areas, such as reception and registration services, AVRR, data management, and local capacity development initiatives. The selected participants provided insights critical to gaining a comprehensive understanding of the project's relevance, coherence, efficacy, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability.

The purposive selection procedure assured that the evaluation's breadth would encompass the full spectrum of the project's reach, directly supporting the evaluation objectives. By engaging with carefully selected individuals and groups with first-hand experience and association with the project, the evaluation benefits from targeted and relevant information that contributes to a nuanced and actionable final analysis.

3.4. Limitations and proposed mitigation strategies

Given that every methodological approach carries inherent limitations, the evaluators in this process emphasized the following:

(a) General limitations of FGDs and KIIs: FGDs might have been influenced by social desirability, dominant voices, group dynamics, and challenges in participant recruitment. It was particularly emphasized in the humanitarian response programs, in which beneficiaries had expectations or depended on project activities (potential for social desirability) or beneficiaries stayed shortly within the project (participant recruitment and sampling). KIIs could have suffered from bias, sampling bias, limited generalizability, power dynamics, and potential evaluators bias.

(b) Resource intensiveness: The proposed approach was resource-intensive, particularly in terms of the time and expertize required. It might have demanded a substantial additional number of days to implement field visits.

(c) Unavailable beneficiaries: The evaluation could have faced a limitation related to incomplete beneficiary data. Not all beneficiaries who benefited from the project might have been identifiable, making it challenging to include their perspectives in the assessment. This limitation arose due to various reasons, including mobility, data gaps, and privacy concerns.

Nevertheless, proactive strategies were implemented to address these limitations, including:

(a) General approach: To mitigate these limitations, careful planning, thoughtful participant/informant selection, consideration of the context, and the use of complementary data collection techniques were essential for a more comprehensive understanding of each evaluation topic.

(b) Resource planning: Ensured that the budget and resources allocated for the proposed methodology aligned with the project's financial constraints and timelines. Prioritized essential technological needs and allocated resources judiciously.

(c) Fallback to traditional methods: Had a contingency plan that allowed for the fallback to traditional data collection methods in case the proposed technology encountered insurmountable challenges. This ensured that the evaluation could continue without significant disruptions.

(d) Sample selection: Given the constraints that limited the opportunities for a robust beneficiary evaluation sample, the evaluation relied on the available sample, closely collaborating with IOM field teams and the PMT. This collaborative effort aimed to ensure that the selected participants represented diversity within the beneficiary population. Through meticulous sampling, the evaluation team sought to extract valuable insights with confidence, striving to attain a comprehensive understanding of the project's impact and effectiveness within the confines of the available data.

4. Findings

4.1.   Relevance: Is the intervention doing the right things?

Main findings: The project demonstrates a nuanced understanding of migration dynamics, effectively meeting evolving migrant needs through collaborative efforts and utilizing institutional and operational capacities throughout WB. Additionally, the project's responsiveness significantly bolstered its capacity to deliver timely and appropriate solutions that directly addressed the challenges experienced by the beneficiary population.

The project's adaptability receives praise for its flexibility, allowing swift responses to dynamic challenges, a quality uniformly acknowledged by stakeholders for its efficacy in addressing mixed migration challenges. Concrete project actions, such as the provision of sanitary materials and repairs to infrastructure, showcase immediate and proactive responses to emergent needs, resulting in notable impacts on living conditions, risk management, and logistical efficiency.

Stakeholder satisfaction is evident, with initial vagueness resolved through detailed briefings, leading to high satisfaction levels among donors and stakeholders. The diligent needs analysis, involving rigorous training, surveys, and tailored responses for individual and institutional beneficiaries, contributes to the project's relevance and success.

The evaluation reveals strong alignment between project activities and strategic objectives in addressing mixed migration flows in the WB, with a notable score of 9.5 out of 10. While most activities align with the project's overall objective, supplementary initiatives under Outcome 4 contribute more indirectly. While challenges exist in the form of limited project visibility and visibility of its impact, the evaluation identified the need for enhanced collaboration with institutional partners to align with leadership aspirations and formal strategic actions. There is also the identified need for an assessment focused on AVRR components, particularly sustainable reintegration.

EQ 1: Are the project activities and outputs consistent with the intended outcomes and objective?

The overall objective of the project - "To ensure that vulnerable migrants in the WB are better protected and have access to safe and dignified return assistance" - seems relatively broad and almost any activity related to mixed migration movements could be relevant. However, the objective has been specified through four project outcomes. Namely, the project is geared towards enhancing vital aspects of migration response, such as strengthening reception, referral, and registration capacities (Outcome 2), expanding the knowledge base concerning migration risks and vulnerabilities within the region (Outcome 1), and facilitating AVRR for migrants (Outcome 3). Additionally, the project implies the segment related to supporting the communities most affected by migrations (Outcome 4). The extensive volume of findings from diverse sources underscores the significant relevance of these outcomes. Synthesizing these findings has led to the following summative presentation:

➢ [Outcome 1] Data utilization: The relevance of integrating the DTM into the project activities is underscored by its direct impact on (a) tailoring services to migrants' needs and (b) evidence-based decision making for all stakeholders. This outcome is particularly relevant as it directly addresses the first step in any migration-related intervention: the accurate identification of beneficiary populations and their needs. The data-driven approach ensures that subsequent project interventions are evidence-based and grounded in the actual circumstances of the populations being served.

- [Outcome 2] Facilities improvement, protection and support: Making concrete improvements to the living conditions of individual beneficiaries is a testament to the project's relevance. Reception centre improvements and segregated spaces, particularly for vulnerable categories (e.g., unaccompanied minors, women, GBV survivors, potential survivors of trafficking), demonstrate the project's commitment to protecting and enhancing the welfare of people on the move.
- [Outcome 3] Informed AVRR: The provision of counselling and reintegration assistance embodies the project's relevance to the fundamental needs of migrants seeking returns and sustainable reintegration. By equipping beneficiaries with knowledge and resources, the project aligns efforts with migrants' aspirations and the operational context of returns, directly contributing to their sense of agency and long-term stability.
- [Outcome 4] Community-oriented initiatives and cohesion: Indirect benefits to migrants and communities derived from initiatives under this outcome resonate with the current global emphasis on integration and social inclusion. Improvements in social infrastructure, though not directly related to migration services, provide relevant socio-economic environments for migrants to live and integrate into host communities.

The desk review and fieldwork result strongly affirm that most project activities are directly linked to the stated objective. Results of the in-depth analysis strongly support the assumption that the project's activities are predominantly consistent with the intended outcomes outlined in the project results matrix. On the other side, two activities within the Outcome 4 component, focused on "social cohesion," indirectly contribute to the overarching project goal rather than directly supporting it.

The bulk of project activities align with other IOM programmatic components (e.g., AVRR, DTM, TRC management), directly addressing the demands posed by mixed migration flows. This strategic approach significantly bolsters the connection between activity-level initiatives and the project's outcomes and the overall objective. Methodologies and tools established by IOM (data bases, manuals, Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs), etc.) play a pivotal role here, consistently refined through best practices and lessons learned.

In evaluating Outputs 4.1 and 4.2 of the project, it has been noted that the linkage between the activities—improving local health and social infrastructures, and supporting community initiatives—and the project's core migration objective may not be immediately apparent. This is particularly true in the case of the citizens' associations "Drugaciji svijet" in Bijeljina and "Rada Vranjesevic" in Banja Luka. The project documentation does not explicitly articulate how support for these associations directly contributes to the project's end goal of managing mixed migration flows. Moreover, representatives from "Drugaciji svijet" did not provide substantial information regarding the relevance of their activities to the migration context or populations during the evaluators' field visits. Although IOM's assistance in reconstructions is acknowledged, the visibility and downstream impact on migration-related outcomes remain largely unquantified and are not actively tracked by the project staff.

Summing up these findings, the connection between Output 4.1's initiatives and the overall project goal seems "thin" and indirect. While these outputs are indeed valuable contributions to community welfare and infrastructure, their direct influence on the project's primary migration management objectives appears to be more peripheral. In contrast, all other project components have been found to be tightly integrated and demonstrably central to achieving the project's main aims.

Although four other interventions (small-scale project) within this activity relate more directly to the project outcomes and objective, the field visits revealed some discrepancies. For example, respondents from the Ambulance "Kozluk" couldn't recognize the purpose behind the reconstruction, which affected the visibility and perceived value of the project's activities. Moreover, there was an absence of monitoring regarding how many migrants received medical assistance at the Ambulance "Kozluk."

Following a thorough team discussion and data triangulation, the evaluation team evaluated the alignment score between project activities and objectives, which stands impressively high at 9.5 out of 10. Our assessment takes into account the fact that IOM, as a leading organization in migrations, consistently aims for excellence.

KPI 1 - Alignment score between project activities and the objective (on a scale 1 - 10).

The high alignment score of 9.5 indicates a robustly planned project where activities are directly contributing to its objectives, with minor exceptions where certain outputs lacked clarity in their connection to overarching goals.

The evaluation's key finding emphasizes that the project's responsiveness significantly bolstered its capacity to deliver timely and appropriate solutions that directly addressed the challenges experienced within the beneficiary population. This finding is substantiated by concrete actions taken, such as:

- ➢ Provision of sanitary materials for family containers (TRC Usivak): The delivery of sanitary materials to family containers at Usivak directly improved living conditions, illustrating the project's immediate response to emergent health and hygiene needs.
- ➢ Acquisition of a water pump to prevent the flooding of numerous residential containers at TRC Usivak: Addressing the risk of flooding at TRC Usivak represents a proactive measure to protect residents from potential natural disaster impacts, highlighting preemptive risk management.
- ➢ Repair of a drinking water supply system at the Bozaj reception centre: The repairs to the drinking water system at Bozaj reception centre signify a focus on fundamental human needs, ensuring continuous access to safe water—a critical requirement for health and well-being.
- ➢ Transportation assistance to transport a bigger group of migrants from Bijeljina to TRCs in Sarajevo: Facilitating the transport of larger groups of migrants underscores the project's logistics planning and its intent to bridge the gap between need and service provision efficiently.
- ➢ Expedited procurement of other essential items: The swift procurement of other vital items reflects a nimble supply chain operation that adapts to urgent requirements without delay.

KPI 2 - Per cent of output deliverables directly contributing to project objective

The majority (more than 80 per cent) of the project's deliverables have been directly aligned with the objective, demonstrating that the project's planning was effectively translated into action. While most outputs were on target, some activities, particularly those related to Output 4.1 and 4.2, require further alignment to ensure all efforts contribute directly to the project's aims.

Within the evaluation, the project's adaptability is acknowledged as a salient feature by key stakeholders, inclusive of IOM project staff, government officials, and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Flexibility is recognized as instrumental to realizing the main goal of managing mixed migration efficiently and upholding humanitarian ideals—the ability to adjust to dynamic needs and challenges as they arise is vital for responding effectively to crises. It is identified as one of the key factors for the finding that partners—without exception—uniformly acknowledged the project's efficacy in addressing mixed migration challenges (Notably, this acknowledgment excludes those individuals or entities who lack familiarity with the project's purpose and components, such as "Drugaciji svijet"). "One distinguishing factor of this project is its flexibility. It gives us assurance that the challenges we face daily

can be resolved swiftly, ensuring an appropriate response. Without this, our approach would be fundamentally different," expressed a representative from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) in Montenegro. Representatives from the Norwegian Embassy emphasized their regular communication with IOM regarding project implementation, highlighting that while reports are submitted annually, their confidence in IOM remains strong based on their ongoing cooperation. They stressed the importance of flexibility, particularly in response projects, which they observed firsthand during their visits to BiH.

The evaluation identified a notable practice characterized by the strategic integration of crucial program elements and activities, particularly exemplified in the provision of assistance packages. For instance, in Montenegro, this integration manifested through the distribution of backpacks to the beneficiaries, which included not only essential items but also informative leaflets about the AVRR program. This approach not only meets immediate needs but also enhances beneficiaries' awareness of available support services, contributing to their informed decision making process (See also Annex 6.6.).

EQ 2: Does the project meet the needs of the beneficiaries?

Stakeholder Perception on Project Alignment with Their Needs

An intriguing dichotomy surfaced during the project evaluation. Despite initial vague familiarity with the project amid two-thirds of stakeholders, subsequent detailed briefings catalyzed a profound recognition and articulated satisfaction with the project's outreach. This amplification of awareness underscores the importance of effective communication in enhancing stakeholder engagement and appreciation for the project's intents and achievements. However, after the project components were presented to them, each of the partners pointed out that the project fully meets their needs. This is what was also noticed by evaluators who did not have access to the project documentation. "It seems that everyone is very grateful to IOM for this support," said one of them.

Concrete instances where the IOM's endeavours proved indispensable were prolific. From Serbia's deployment of DTM and outreach teams addressing irregular migration to Kosovo's* reliance on IOM-field translators, the project consistently played a pivotal role in operational effectiveness. Additionally, infrastructural enhancements, such as the installation of a waiting room at the Bozaj reception centre, augmented the logistical capabilities of border management, reinforcing the project's commitment to comprehensive assistance. The partners have emphasized that without the IOM's support, they would not be able to respond adequately to the forthcoming tasks. In addition to the fact that all interviewees pointed out that capacity building, support

> **KPI 3 - Stakeholder satisfaction score with the project's alignment with beneficiary needs (measured on a scale of 1 to 10)**
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> Stakeholders expressed a high degree of satisfaction with how the project met beneficiary needs, scoring a perfect 10. This indicates the project's success in understanding and addressing the demands of those it aimed to support, bolstering its relevance. This evaluation points to the project's robust alignment with its goals and strong synergy with existing IOM initiatives.

through data collection and analysis, and AVRR are of key importance, they put almost the same importance on many actions in which IOM enabled their needs to be met. A few examples are below:

➢ The importance of DTM and outreach teams, especially in relation to irregular migration trends (institutional partners from Serbia);
➢ Interviewed professionals from Kosovo* have highlighted the crucial role of IOM translators, stating that without their assistance, their operational capacity would be significantly diminished;

➢ Installation of a waiting room (two accommodation containers and one sanitary) where migrants who are arriving after the working hours of the MoI/Border Police (which performs registration) to the reception centre Bozaj (Montenegro);

➢ Support to the Centre for Social Work during the transport and placement of vulnerable categories, specifically unaccompanied minors (BiH).

Given that it is not realistic to expect that individual beneficiaries can recognize a specific project, they were asked about the specific services they received through the project.

➢ [Outcome 1] A group of Ukrainian refugees from Montenegro (three women) pointed out that the introduction into the process of continuous data collection and analysis through DTM surveys was of key importance for them. In addition to the fact that they managed to get additional support from IOM, which was important for many participants, this type of intervention enabled them to set their strategic priorities much better and to make decisions based on the data obtained. "For example, we now see that our compatriots are mostly concentrated in Podgorica, Bar, Budva and Herceg Novi. However, we currently advise many people to go to Nikšić because there are good opportunities there." Also, "The data we collect opens the door to many other opportunities," said one respondent. Namely, they are now empowered to define their needs much more precisely and jointly advocate for them.

➢ [Outcome 2] All respondents from the mixed group in TRC Spuz (four women and nine men; Citizens of Turkey, Russia, and Iran) without exception pointed out that all their needs (while in transit), which someone can provide in a foreign country, were met. In addition to essential needs (food, accommodation, hygiene, medical care), they highlighted counseling sessions, which include information related to AVRR, as a particularly important segment. Nevertheless, this group of respondents pointed out that they have no intention of returning to their countries of origin because of the current situation there. Some of these respondents who have been staying there for a long time have expressed their intention to stay permanently (the case from Montenegro), and believe that they have been provided with good opportunities for integration into society. 6 of them out of a total of 13 came to TRC Spuz from TRC Bozaj, and the IOM mobile team provided them with transport. This was especially important for a young woman from Iran who had a serious leg injury and could not walk independently at the time of the FGD. Also, for example, one beneficiary in TRC Bozaj pointed out that he is grateful to everyone and that he currently has everything he needs. Although he wants to continue his journey towards the EU, he is happy to have received information about the AVRR possibilities, because he did not know about it before.

➢ [Outcome 3] Group of AVRR beneficiaries in Sarajevo (10 males): All ten respondents pointed out that all their needs in the TRC are currently met. In terms of specific support for AVRR, eight respondents (all from Turkey) believe that they are waiting too long for transport home ("We are waiting more than 25 days and we still don't know when we are going"). They believe that this is a short-term solution for them to avoid the winter, and to try to collect some funds, so they will try to cross the borders again. "We will not stop trying until we get to the EU". They also pointed out that the funds they receive for reinstallation (150+350 EUR) are not enough to make their return sustainable and expressed concern that they would never receive the 350 EUR when they return home. However, IOM staff provided meaningful explanations regarding their complaints on duration of the procedures and concerns regarding financial support. Apart from them, two other beneficiaries (one from Somalia and one from Morocco) are completely satisfied with everything they heard about AVRR.

➢ [Outcome 4] Although the Beneficiaries in the citizens' association "Drugaciji svijet" are not from the category of migrants, it is important to emphasize the importance of this intervention for

project Outcome 4. "IOM brought our organization back to life, and thus gave faith and hope to all our children," said the director of the association. During the field visit, the evaluators had the opportunity to attend educational workshops for children and youth with "atypical development". The subjective impression of evaluators regarding this activity is extremely positive, especially considering the change that occurred with the initial support of the IOM. Among other things, certain grants were obtained from the local community, educated workshop leaders for children and young people agreed to work even as volunteers, etc.

The results of the observation indicate the general satisfaction of individual beneficiaries with the services offered by the IOM. Namely, in TRC Blazuj (BiH) it is noticed a special place where they can prepare their own food from their traditional kitchen because sometimes the meals provided to them do not taste like their dishes from the country of origin. It not only reflects support to cultural diversity, but also reflects how deep and sensitive the IOM support is.

Also, one can notice specially created activities for women and girls, especially for unaccompanied children (examples from TRC Usivak, BiH), in accordance with their needs and preferences. That's how some of the women discovered their talents and want to continue developing in that direction. A good example is the creative workshops within the "No Nation Fashion" initiative, which won the IOM Global Innovation Award for Gender, Diversity & Social Inclusion. In addition to these examples, one could notice many examples that confirm the gender-sensitive and age-sensitive approach. Although with significantly smaller capacities for accommodation, the TRCs in Spuz (Montenegro) strive to act according to similar practices as in BiH.

Stakeholder Recognition and Overall Satisfaction

A central aspect of the evaluation revolved around the satisfaction levels expressed by the stakeholders. Despite an initial difficulty among some to distinguish this project's specific components from IOM's broader body of work, clarifications led to recognition and satisfactory assessments. Notably, the donor representatives—who possessed an intimate understanding of the project's finer details—consistently reported high levels of satisfaction with the outcomes, often alluding to performance that not only matched but exceeded the projected plans. This sentiment underscores the project's success in meeting its objectives and delivering quality outputs. After analyzing and considering all available data sources, the evaluation team has determined that the project's alignment with beneficiary needs has resulted in a Stakeholder satisfaction score of 10 out of 10.

Diligent Needs Analysis

Already during the first year of project implementation, with the aim of disseminating important multi-layered information about the mobility, vulnerabilities, and needs of displaced and mobile populations, IOM has trained 93 data collectors in the WB (30 female, 63 male), completed 14 surveys, and produced four reports.

The field visit revealed a multitude of individual assessments tailored to specific cases, but also for the groups. From the moment individuals enter the country, Outreach teams gather data on general needs. In cases of urgent requirements for vulnerable groups, such as medical emergencies, swift solutions are arranged, such as transportation by IOM mobile teams and the provision of comprehensive care and protection by partner parties in supported communities under Outcome 4. Following this initial stage, needs assessments continue upon entry into TRCs, and persist throughout or after individual activities within these centres. Notably, the findings underscore the significance of short-term stays of migrants in TRCs, especially during the summer and notably in countries like Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, and Kosovo*, where irregular border crossing into the EU neighboring countries (e.g., BiH,

Serbia) is perceived as more accessible. According to IOM staff, this fact emphasizes the critical necessity for frequent and ongoing assessments to adapt services to the evolving needs of the migrant population.

However, considering the results related to the AVRR component (including, the above-mentioned feedback received by Turkish AVRR beneficiaries, IOM staff feedback, IOM reports[3], see also results of the AVRR Satisfaction Survey, particularly for the cases supported by this project), it seems important to carry out a separate assessment whose focus would be only on AVRR components (e.g., to explore is the financial support adequate regardless of the country or origin).

When it comes to the needs assessment of institutional partners, it is most often based on "light touch" assessments and information received during meetings by competent authorities. The evaluation reveals that the existing level of collaboration, while satisfactory for current operational requirements, warrants further enhancement to match the leadership aspirations and formal strategic planning. This refinement is crucial to fortify the project's capacity-building, equipment, and policy development efforts which are instrumental in establishing a sustainable model, even as the project encounters transitions within the broader EU-funded context. For example, it is quite obvious that there was a great need for institutions for data and reliable evidence about the migrant population, their needs, and movements. At the same time, their scope of data collection (and applied methodology) did not have the potential to offer credible data on which to base decisions. During the project, the capacities of state services to implement the DTM methodology were significantly strengthened in all countries. However, although during the interview they indicated that this methodology is excellent and that they want to integrate it into their approaches, they expressed great concern in terms of their capacity to be able to carry out such activities independently.

The distinctive aspect of this project lies in its focus on meeting the needs of its beneficiaries. While it involves two beneficiary levels—Institutional beneficiaries, also referred to as partners, and individual beneficiaries—it's evident that the primary goal is protecting the best interests of the migrant population through institutional support. Namely, the description of each outcome of the project confirms centeredness on one or both of these beneficiary categories.

The desk review showed (by using Text Summarization abstractive methods (generating new sentences that capture the essence of the text)) concentration of the text in the following three segments:

- Individual beneficiaries: In offering support to individual beneficiaries, the project's endeavors include a gender-sensitive approach that caters to the unique needs of all migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. This approach not only aims to improve access to voluntary return and reintegration pathways but also ensures that gender considerations are woven into the provision of counseling, shelter, accommodation, WASH facilities, food, and non-food items. Recognizing the disproportionate impact that migration challenges can have on women and girls, the project emphasizes gender-specific assistance and protection measures to support these vulnerable demographics effectively.
- Institutional partners: Collaboration with institutional partners is crucial for the project's success. It involves working closely with national stakeholders, migration management authorities in the WB (such as SFA, Ministry of Interior, Border Police), and coordination with EU delegations, DG ECHO, DG NEAR, the Central European Bank, and IcSP. This collaboration is aimed at improving migration management, addressing shelter and protection needs, and ensuring a coordinated response.
- Knowledge enhancement and data: The project prioritizes the collection and analysis of migration flow data using the DTM to enhance understanding, better risk profiling, and provide protection-

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[3] E.g. IOM data show that on average between 50 and 70 per cent of returnees benefit from reintegration assistance.

sensitive responses. This involves building capacities within relevant national institutions and humanitarian actors to use this data effectively for improved migration and humanitarian management responses.

Results given by analyzing conducted interviews, FGDs, and observation methods support the findings of the desk review. The following text summarizes the results for each outcome (project component) by looking from the perspective of (a) Individual beneficiary's needs and (b) Institutional beneficiary's needs:

➢ Outcome 1: (a) Helps to identify needs of beneficiaries at group and individual level, including their vulnerability, needs for protection, challenges they are facing with, other needs. (b) State institutions leverage DTM to fortify their decision making processes by employing standardized data collection methods across the WB, addressing the challenge of scant and disjointed data on migrating populations. Through direct surveys with migrants, DTM furnishes critical insights into their characteristics and requirements, empowering tailored programmatic responses and enhancing policymakers' access to a distinct evidence pool.

➢ Outcome 2: (a) The support provided to individuals within the migrant population includes expanding and refurbishing reception facilities in the WB, such as creating separate areas for families and unaccompanied children, improving isolation/quarantine capacities, and enhancing living conditions by upgrading WASH zones and accommodations. Additionally, initiatives involve procuring food, non-food items, medical assistance, psychosocial support, and specialized services for vulnerable groups like interpreters and outreach programs to migrants outside formal reception facilities. (b) State institutions benefit from this project component by bolstering their capacities to manage migrant populations, ensuring adequate accommodation, and improving reception facilities. Additionally, the provision of essential services like food, medical assistance, and specialized support aids in maintaining public health standards and alleviates the burden on state resources during humanitarian crises.

➢ Outcome 3: (a) The assistance to individuals among the migrant population is channelled through targeted counselling and informative sessions within and outside reception centres, aiming to empower informed decision making regarding voluntary return and sustainable reintegration. Moreover, tailored reintegration plans offer specific support, including housing, employment guidance, healthcare access, and psychosocial aid, addressing the diverse needs of returning migrants for a stable reintegration process. (b) These efforts strengthen collaboration between state institutions and IOM, enhancing institutional capacities for managing challenges or returns effectively. Due to the lack of contracts about readmission with the state of origin or due to the specific status of Kosovo*, authorities recognized this project component as extremely important.

➢ Outcome 4: (a) This project component indirectly supports individual beneficiaries, who may expect intercultural understanding, professional health support, etc. (b) State institutions benefit from this support by enhancing social inclusion efforts through the bolstering of health and social infrastructures, mitigating the strain on local services while fostering collaboration between state authorities and communities to address the diverse needs of both migrants and residents.

Feedback Mechanisms

Seen from the aspect of the overall project, there are many beneficiary feedback mechanisms in place. However, to ascertain both the accessibility and effectiveness of the feedback mechanisms, evaluators utilized a validated 4-level scale to evaluate their quality for beneficiaries within the context of the mixed migration response.[4] Developed and validated by the EBD International team, this scale has been tailored for assessing project evaluations associated with the mixed migration response in BIH. Illustration 1 summarizes the results for each of the project Outcomes, observing from the perspective of Individual beneficiaries and Institutional beneficiaries. The text below provides explanations.

Illustration *1. Accessibility and effectiveness of the feedback mechanism*

Project components	Individual beneficiaries	Institutional beneficiaries
Outcome 1	N/A	Good
Outcome 2	Excellent	Excellent
Outcome 3	Excellent	Excellent
Outcome 4	Fair	Fair

When it comes to Outcome 1, it was found that there are feedback mechanisms utilized during data collection by IOM field teams, and the results are analysed and used in decision making. To a certain extent, less effective and less accessible for all are the feedback mechanisms applied in strengthening institutional capacities. These mechanisms often involve one-way feedback based on individual opinions, not validated through various data sources.

For Outcome 2, practically, there's a specific form of feedback mechanisms for each activity conducted in TRCs. In addition to individual beneficiaries, regular feedback is gathered from institutional beneficiaries. These mechanisms are usually formal and well-defined, allowing analysis of demographics, social, and other components crucial for an adequate response to beneficiaries' needs.

Within Outcome 3, the AVRR program demonstrates a comprehensive approach, prioritizing 'active listening' to truly understand the specific and sometimes unexpressed needs of individual beneficiaries. An illustrative outcome of this attentive approach is the development of specialized housing containers in TRC Blazuj. These facilities serve not only to better prepare the beneficiaries for their upcoming reintegration into their home countries but also to offer a safeguarded environment, shielding them from potentially harmful external influences. The project has effectively instituted robust feedback mechanisms that reinforce this outcome's focus on individual care. These mechanisms are operationalized through a variety of surveys, including AVRR program monitoring surveys, reintegration assistance satisfaction surveys, and reintegration sustainability surveys. Collectively, these tools gather comprehensive feedback that informs the continual refinement of the reintegration process, ensuring that beneficiaries' re-entry into their home environments is supported, sustainable, and responsive to their evolving circumstances.

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[4] Poor: The feedback mechanism is either non-existent or ineffective. Beneficiaries do not have access to channels to provide feedback, or if available, the system is unreliable, unresponsive, and lacks transparency. There is no evidence of feedback being utilized to improve services.
Fair: A basic feedback mechanism is in place, but it has limitations. Beneficiaries have some channels to voice their opinions, but these channels may not reach all groups or may not be easily accessible. Feedback is occasionally considered in program adjustments but lacks consistency in implementation.
Good: The feedback mechanism is well-established and accessible to most beneficiaries. There are multiple channels available, and efforts are made to ensure inclusivity and diversity in gathering feedback. Feedback is regularly collected, analysed, and incorporated into decision making processes, resulting in visible improvements in services.
Excellent: The feedback mechanism is robust and comprehensive. Beneficiaries have various accessible and responsive channels to provide feedback. Mechanisms are tailored to different groups' needs, ensuring inclusivity. Feedback is systematically collected, analysed, and promptly acted upon, leading to continuous improvements in services and strong evidence of beneficiary-driven changes in humanitarian response.

Regarding social cohesion activities (Outcome 4), a basic feedback mechanism is in place, but it has limitations. Typically, this feedback mechanism relies on irregular contacts and unstructured conversations with beneficiaries, often without adequately developed tools.

4.2. Coherence: How well does the intervention fit?

Main findings: The evaluation team has ascertained that the project excels in forging synergies and establishing coherent linkages with other initiatives within IOM's operational sphere. Also, the findings indicate that IOM closely collaborates with all key multilateral and bilateral stakeholders (donors) who have initiatives related to migration issues, considering their initiatives. This is particularly emphasized in BiH, where IOM is recognized as a key player for all migration-related matters. It seamlessly integrates lessons from historical programming, embodying a strategic evolution within the organization's thematic and operational priorities. This systemic assimilation underpins the project's design, enabling it to resonate with IOM's established imperatives and guidelines while also aligning with national policies where applicable.

EQ 3: To what extent does the project create synergies and linkages with other interventions implemented in the same thematic area, or previous projects implemented by IOM? How IOM adapts its programming in relation to other existing projects/activities?

Project's alignment with IOM's strategic documents

This project almost perfectly aligns with IOM's overall thematic focus areas and strategies. The desk review showed a clear link between project components and IOM sub-regional strategy as well as IOM country strategies for BiH, Albania, and North Macedonia. The interviewed IOM staff also clearly underlined how this project supports priorities of the sub-regional strategy and strategies of the specific countries. They showed ability to link each project component (or outcome) with a particular strategic priority (Humanitarian assistance and protection, Resilience and Empowerment, Human Mobility, Migration governance).

KPI 4 - Alignment with IOM's strategic documents or thematic priorities (measured as a binary "Yes" or "No")

The project is strongly aligned with IOM's strategic priorities. It means a successful integration within the broader objectives of the organization, ensuring coherence across IOM's various programs and interventions aimed at managing migration challenges.

Internalization of lessons learned from past projects

The project exhibits profound integration with both prior and ongoing programs, drawing upon a reservoir of IOM's institutional experiences to optimize its current initiatives. Proven best practices and reflections from past efforts underpin the execution of project activities, fostering a culture of continual enhancement and situational responsiveness. In particular, staff with longer tenures display a high degree of internalization of past lessons, indicating the critical value of experience in reinforcing the project's effectiveness. The project's alignment with IOM's strategic documents and thematic focus areas is plainly evident, with literal and functional links to strategic priorities such as humanitarian assistance, resilience, and empowerment. The capacity to align detailed project components with broader strategic ambitions signifies maturity in strategic planning and the delineation of operational priorities.

The project's remarkable coherence can be attributed predominantly to the seamless integration of well-established IOM program activities into each component of this project. This synergy stands as a

pivotal factor contributing to the project's overall success. Information gathered from IOM staff underscores their commitment to applying valuable lessons gleaned from prior projects in their day-to-day operations, strategically aligning efforts with the activities of this project. This commitment is consistently evident across all project outcomes. For example:

- ➢ [Outcome 1] Adhering to the comprehensive IOM guidelines for all phases of the DTM tool, including presentations and collaboration with partners, is critically important to prevent unintended consequences and maximize potential. Any innovations and adjustments must be strictly coordinated, as was the case during this project.
- ➢ [Outcome 2] In TRCs, very often there are urgent requests that cannot be planned (e.g., maintenance, breakdowns, lack of working materials, specific needs of individual beneficiaries). Emergency cases are always a special challenge for institutional partners. Nevertheless, key operations must continue, and long-term experience of working in TRCs and trust-based cooperation with institutional partners offers solutions.
- ➢ [Outcome 3] The AVRR program follows a "migrant-centered" approach rooted in human rights principles, accomplished through meticulous case management and pertinent expertize. Lessons from past projects have illuminated that, despite beneficiaries' good intentions, their assumptions, mental state, influence from the travel group, or a single call from home can adversely affect the process. In response to this, competent IOM staff proactively gathers pertinent information and ensures effective case management to prevent potential challenges.
- ➢ [Outcome 4] Social cohesion cannot be guaranteed without a profound appreciation of the local government as well as a deep understanding of their priorities and the challenges they face. This lesson has been learned through collaboration with local communities throughout BiH, and it is integrated into the implementation of this project.

However, an important finding of this evaluation is the variability in applying lessons learned from prior projects, contingent upon individual staff members' tenure within IOM and their experience with similar initiatives. Namely, the results show that the number and level of applied lessons learned from previous projects directly depends on years of work experience in IOM, but also in other similar organizations (this is especially symptomatic for work in TRCs). Observed from the level of staff from the TRC, which is primarily related to Outcome 2, the following quote best describes this finding: "Internalization of lessons learned is possible if you were part of the IOM when that lesson was learned. However, if you are a new member of the organization, especially if you have no experience in related fields, the organization will not specifically point out the lessons learned." Finally, based on desk review analysis and interviews, these findings indicate decentralized and asymmetric institutional memory. Consequently, while long-serving team members often display a profound internalization of past insights, newer staff, or those with less experience in analogous contexts, may not inherit these insights due to the lack of explicit mechanisms for knowledge transfer within the organization.

In conclusion, the evaluation identifies an opportunity for IOM to enhance project internal coherence through systematic knowledge preservation and dissemination, fostering a learning organization ethos that transcends individual staff experiences and fortifies the project's foundation on collective institutional knowledge. Enhancing the mechanism of internalizing lessons learned as an unwavering element in project management will not only ignite a feedback loop for current projects but also serve as a preventive measure for potential future project hurdles.

Partnership and coordination in project activities

Examining the coordination[5] of project activities reveals an emphasis on partnership especially with government institutions integral to the operational landscape of the project. MoIs (Ministry of Security (MoS) in case of BiH), SFA, and local social welfare centres are pivotal stakeholders, engaging actively in coordinating specific elements of the project. These stakeholders play a fundamental role in not just executing, but also coordinating essential project activities. Their participation underlines the project's alignment with national strategic frameworks and operational procedures. Nevertheless, the evaluative findings suggest that there is an underrepresentation of local NGOs and Civil Society Organization (CSOs, e.g., Church or Riyaset/Islamic Community), academy, and private sector, within the coordination framework. The involvement of these entities could enrich perspectives and broaden the outreach, benefiting the project. The evaluation findings across different outcomes reveal a mixed picture, with clear (a) good practices and (b) a significant "room for improvements":

➢ [Outcome 1] Data-driven decision making: (a) Coordination efforts to roll out the DTM were effective, with adequate training provided to both IOM staff and institutional stakeholders in the data collection process. A good practice is also that representatives of Ukrainian Centre (NGO) have been trained for data collection and data utilization, which significantly contributed to evidence-based decision making. Also, in Montenegro, a collaboration regarding data collection (primarily qualitative data) has established with Islamic Community. (b) However, challenges were reported regarding data sharing and the immediate operational use of data by governmental partners, indicating a need for clearer guidelines and expectations. Additionally, except number of people trained and materials shared with institutional partners throughout the subregion, there is no identified factors that guarantee ownership and sustainability of DTM.

➢ [Outcome 2] TRCs Enhancements: (a) In the context of TRCs, the evaluation identified that the activities were directly responsive to the requests from partners, ensuring that needs were met efficiently. There are standard operative procedures in place, and seems everyone is strictly following them. (b) On the flip side, an absence of specialized assessments indicating the genuine needs of institutional partners is obvious. Consequently, requests are made on an ad hoc basis, lacking systematic and strategically arranged formulations. Despite extensive discussions about transitioning activities to institutions, specific plans are absent, adding pressure to partners and fostering unclear expectations. While investing in capacity-building for institutional partners is possible, their valid question arises: Is the assumption that state services can replicate the services provided by international NGOs realistic? At the same time, the evaluation did not identify best practices in terms of capacity-building for local NGOs or the potential establishment of ownership over specific segments. Furthermore, no findings were documented regarding collaboration practices with the private sector.

➢ [Outcome 3] AVRR implementation: (a) The evaluation team received very positive feedback from all institutional partners engaged in the AVRR process. These practices stem from the IOM's coordination of activities, while institutions primarily respond to requests. (b) Nevertheless, institutional partners view this activity as solely within the purview of the IOM, and thus, no discernible efforts have been identified to actively engage them more substantially in voluntary return matters.

➢ [Outcome 4] Social Cohesion: (a) This approach has successfully facilitated the establishment of cooperation with institutions in the RS for the first time, marking this project segment as a significant "game changer." Partnership relations have not only been forged at the RS entity level

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[5] Coordination of project activities by partners refers to the collaborative effort among multiple parties involved in a project to ensure smooth functioning, alignment of tasks, and achievement of common objectives. It involves the synchronized execution of various tasks, communication, resource allocation, and sharing of responsibilities among the different partners or stakeholders involved in the project.

but have also been activated directly with local authorities and institutions, including centres for social welfare, health institutions, police, and local NGOs (See Annex 6.6. for selected good practices). (b) Despite these achievements, there is ample room for the identification and advancement of these partnerships, especially considering the unstable political environment in BiH. Setting clear expectations from institutions in the RS for the upcoming period remains a crucial aspect of further progress. Also, the potential of local NGOs/SCOs remained unused.

Enhancing the impact throught the project outputs

The evaluation findings suggest that each of the nine project outputs is inherently crafted not only to align with but also to enhance the effectiveness of current IOM interventions. This alignment is not merely about adhering to strategic requirements for project approval; it operationalizes a framework where each output is an interlocking piece that, when combined with ongoing initiatives, creates a more formidable response to migration challenges. To explain this point concretely:

> **KPI 5 - Per cent of project outputs designed to complement or enhance the impact of other interventions.**
>
> All project outputs (n=9 or 100 per cent) were found to be complementary to other IOM interventions, showcasing a holistic, interconnected approach to tackling migration issues, and leveraging synergy across activities to augment overall program impact.

1. Reinforcement of data-driven interventions: One output involving the strengthening of the DTM serves to bolster another intervention related to evidence-based policy advice to local governments. The enhanced data collection capabilities result in more precise and actionable information, heightening the efficacy of policy recommendations and enabling governments to respond more adeptly to the contextual migration realities.
2. Enhancement of protection services: The deliverables facilitating legal and safeguarding services for vulnerable migrating populations are closely interrelated with IOM's broader protection programs. These project components directly contribute to the strength and reach of IOM's protection services, thereby amplifying the protection available to at-risk groups.
3. Social cohesion measures: The components that involve educational support and social integration harmonize with IOM's strategy to mitigate conflicts and foster positive social dynamics between migrant and host communities. The project's outputs provide additional resources and platforms for interaction that accentuate these strategic aims.
4. Capacity building and empowerment: Lastly, certain outputs pertaining to training and livelihood programs are crafted to dovetail with the pre-existing economic empowerment programs of IOM. This integration leverages and scales up the impact, providing a double-barreled approach to both immediate assistance and the creation of longer-term economic sustainability for migrants.

EQ 4: Do the project activities and outputs consider relevant national policies and IOM guidelines?

According to all interviewees, there is an extremely high adherence to national policies and IOM guidelines while implementing this project. During the field visit, the Evaluation team observed that IOM closely collaborates with the state institutions, and they are fully aware of the national laws and procedures, including standard operative procedures for specific processes (e.g., SOPs for TRCs functioning). Also, IOM field staff are well informed on IOM guidelines and principles. However, it is interesting to note that only one respondent (excluding IOM staff) knows the priorities of the IOM strategy, neither at the sub-regional nor at the national level.

> **KPI 6 - Degree of adherence to national policies and IOM Guidelines**
>
> The project has highly adhered to both national policies and IOM guidelines, emphasizing the program's compliance with statutory requirements and organizational best practices. This ensures the project's operations are both legitimate and aligned with established protocols.

In general, the evaluators found that the project activities were well aligned with relevant policies and guidelines, but that the links were not clearly made in project documents. More explicit linkages could contribute to making the relevance of the project activities more obvious to partners and stakeholders who are not familiar with the project. Although the IOM country strategy for BiH refers to the "future Migration and Asylum Strategy 2021-2025" (future at that moment), the project's documentation, including the project interim report, does not make a connection with how this particular project contributes to the implementation of the national strategy. This strategy is "elaborated in consultation with IOM" during 2021 and 2022 (See, for example, IOM BiH Annual report for 2022, p. 17), and there are logical connections with this project, but they are not visible to external partners. Simultaneously, project documentation frequently refers to IOM guidelines and principles (e.g., those related to "do not harm approach", gender equality, child protection, vulnerable categories), while national laws, strategies, action plans, etc., are not pointed out.

4.3.   Effectiveness: Is the intervention achieving its objectives?

> **Main findings:** The evaluation underscores the project's adept handling of strategic, operational, and contextual complexities. Aligned with strategic targets, the project's responsive and beneficiary-centered approach surpassed expectations, maintaining success amid dynamic migrant flows, economic challenges, and regional political volatility.
>
> Stakeholder feedback, ranging from individual beneficiaries to high-level donors, consistently expresses satisfaction, affirming the transformative impact of the project. The achievement of project outputs within set timeframes reflects effective management and adherence to operational plans, while agile responses to migrant dynamics, inflationary pressures, and political tensions showcase the project's adaptability.
>
> Facing global economic fluctuations, the project navigated inflationary pressures through resource optimization, preserving service quality within budgetary constraints. Maintaining neutrality amidst political tensions, the project secured cooperation through strategic communication and agreements with local authorities, safeguarding interventions from disruption.
>
> Demonstrating remarkable flexibility, the project deployed mobile teams, tailored services in TRCs, and adjusted to beneficiary requirements in response to contextual shifts. Beneficiary satisfaction consistently increased, particularly within TRCs and the AVRR program, affirming IOM's effective and beneficiary-focused execution.

Effective coordination and monitoring mechanisms were established across project outcomes, contributing to successful implementation throughout the majority of the project's lifecycle. In summary, the project's accomplishments reflect a commendable commitment to responsiveness, adaptability, and impactful outcomes.

EQ 5: Have the project outputs and outcomes been achieved in accordance with the stated plans?

Despite a notable challenge – the difficulty stakeholders had in distinguishing between this project's specific components and other IOM activities – feedback from various sources speaks volumes about the high satisfaction levels with the IOM's results. Considering that most stakeholders cannot differentiate between the components of this project and other components of IOM work, it cannot be expected that they can thoroughly understand the project outputs. All respondents have consistently emphasized the highest level of satisfaction with the achieved results of the IOM. Additionally, the donor representatives, who have a clear view of the expected project outputs, expressed exceptional satisfaction, with the project indeed meeting and sometimes exceeding their expectations. This backdrop provides a resounding endorsement of satisfaction, indicating that the project merits the maximum score within the evaluative satisfaction scale. In this regard, there are no findings that would diminish the maximum score on a scale of 1 to 10 that measures a stakeholder satisfaction.

> **KPI 7 - Stakeholder satisfaction with accomplished outputs and their quality against the started plans (on a scale of 1 to 10)**
>
> Stakeholders have reported significant satisfaction with the project's outputs (score 10) relative to the plans, highlighting the project's effectiveness in delivering anticipated results with a high degree of quality.

Timeliness of output completion

Project monitoring and reporting have reflected a consistent theme – that of timeliness. IOM project implementation teams, PMT, monitoring professionals, as well as donor representatives have corroborated that the completion of project outputs adhered closely to the established schedule. This is supported by the fact that the Interim Report does not highlight any delays. Based on monitoring data, the IOM staff concludes that nearly all set targets have been met in accordance with the established plans, and a significant number of targets have even been exceeded. However, a small number of those outputs did not meet the targets, and the reasons remained beyond the scope of the IOM to address (e.g., the number of migrants assisted through the AVRR program). This shortfall, however, can be attributed to a complex convergence of factors which merit a detailed examination. While it was anticipated that the program would assist a higher number of migrants, the nature of assistance required evolved during the project's life cycle. For one, the geographic breadth of the beneficiaries' destinations expanded, encompassing countries which necessitated more extensive and costly travel arrangements. These countries, often further afield, significantly inflated the costs of return compared to previous benchmarks, stretching the budgetary provisions of the AVRR program. Moreover, the demographic profile of assistees underwent a shift, marked by an increased incidence of medical and complex cases that inherently demanded higher investment due to their specialized nature. For instance, healthcare needs, the presence of vulnerable groups requiring escorts, and various logistical intricacies presented themselves as obstacles that were both unforeseen and beyond IOM's standard arrangements. It is the dynamic response to these challenges that highlights the adaptability and dedication of IOM's teams. Nevertheless, it remains unclear why this was not addressed as a challenge in the Interim Report.

Contextual Influence Project Effectiveness

In the context of IOM's intervention, several dynamic external factors influenced the achievement of project outcomes, impacting operational planning and execution. This section elaborates on the resultant impact of these externalities and the measures IOM adopted to mitigate and adapt to these challenges.

Evaluation findings highlight three dimensions that stakeholders underlined as the most prominent:

> **KPI 8 - Stakeholder satisfaction with the alignment of project content with beneficiary needs and expectations**
>
> Stakeholder feedback suggests that the content of the project aligns well with beneficiary expectations and needs, garnering a high satisfaction rating which demonstrates the project's efficacy in being responsive and beneficiary-focused.

(a)   Unpredictability of migrant flows: The unpredictable nature of migrant flows has presented a substantial challenge to migration management and service provision. A notable observation is the significant fluctuation in the average duration of migrant stays in TRCs, plummeting from 58 days in December 2021 to a mere 8 days in December 2022. This dramatic change underscores a rapid turnover of migrant populations, demanding a dynamic operational approach to both logistical and resource planning aspects of TRCs, as outlined in Outcome 2. Concurrently, outreach teams must adapt to these contextual changes, leading to variations not only in the number of team members but also in their field positions, impacting both Outcome 1 and Outcome 2.

Both IOM staff members and all stakeholder respondents acknowledge the PMT's adeptness in implementing adaptive measures to tackle challenges stemming from changing contexts. IOM swiftly tailoring capacities and services in TRCs to align with individual beneficiary needs, responded to the challenges posed by the reduced average stay of migrants. Recognizing the need for agility, IOM increased the flexibility of service offerings within TRCs to align with the shortened duration of visits. The organization streamlined processing procedures for expedited turnovers, ensuring swift and efficient service provision. Furthermore, IOM introduced agile logistics and resource management systems to adeptly respond to the dynamically changing population dynamics, addressing the evolving needs of migrants in a more responsive and flexible manner. There are numerous examples across various project segments support this observation, such as deploying mobile teams across territories for enhanced outreach and DTM activities, and customizing project activities to cater to the requirements of institutional beneficiaries.

(b)   Inflationary pressures: The project period experienced considerable inflationary pressures due to increased global commodity prices, supply chain disruptions, and currency fluctuations. This inflation led to rising costs for essential goods and services, straining project budgeting and compromising the purchasing power of households, including those of beneficiaries and local stakeholders. The inflationary climate had several consequences for the project:
- ➢ Escalation in the cost of supplies and services contracted for the project impinged on the budgetary allocations.
- ➢ Increased financial strain on beneficiaries exacerbated their vulnerability and necessitated additional support services.
- ➢ Heightened financial pressures influenced stakeholder capacities and willingness to contribute to project goals.

IOM adapted through revision and optimization of budget allocations without compromising the project's service quality; Engagement in negotiations for cost-effective contracts and resource procurement solutions; Enhancement of financial support programs to mitigate the impact of inflation on the vulnerable populations served by the project. The regular communication between donors and the PMT tracked all changes and adaptations within the project intervention. Moreover, the PMT leveraged the advantage of concurrent implementation with other projects supporting similar components, such as

those funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (addressing migrants' presence) and the Czech Ministry of Interior (flow monitoring in the WB), as well as the European Union Instrument for Contributing to Security and Peace (EU-IcSP) under the regional project "Addressing COVID-19 challenges within the Migrant and Refugee Response in the Western Balkans."

(c)   Political tensions: The regional political environment, marked by ethnic tensions and divergent visions for the future, introduced additional layers of complexity to program implementation. Political tensions impacted the project in the following aspects:

➢ Potential delays and disruptions in receiving authorizations and support from local authorities due to political disagreements.
➢ Challenges in maintaining a neutral stance while engaging with various political entities to secure cooperation for project activities.
➢ Difficulties in achieving consensus among diverse stakeholders for collaborative initiatives due to differing political agendas.

IOM negotiated these political challenges by strengthening communication channels with political stakeholders to advocate for the imperative of humanitarian priorities over political divisions; Building trust with local communities to ensure continued access and support for project interventions; Leveraging Memorandums of Understanding and formal agreements, like that signed with KRIS in Serbia (Outcome 1), to cement commitment from local authorities, thereby insulating project activities from political disruption.

There is an impression that IOM maintained impartiality regarding any political tensions in the region, evidenced by outcomes such as the signing of a memorandum of understanding with KRIS in Serbia, despite it being initially described as a challenge in the first interim report. A notable example is the highly positive impact of the project, introducing certain activities in the migrant response for the first time in the territory of RS. The Norwegian Embassy played a significant role in these efforts, expressing readiness to get involved and contribute directly to specific project activities. "The migration issue is a strategic question for the Norwegian government," noted one of our respondents. On the other hand, several instances were highlighted by respondents where the embassy could help. It primarily involving political decisions, such as Serbia in terms of data sharing, Kosovo regarding its status and cooperation with other countries, etc.

EQ 6: What are the major factors influencing the achievement of the project's expected outcomes?

A significant number of mechanisms put in place by the management team to ensure effective implementation have been identified and applied within this project. The number of these mechanisms varies for each outcome, depending on the complexity of each. The results confirmed that the number of applied mechanisms to ensure effective implementation was sufficient for the first three outcomes, while there is insufficient data that claims the same for the Outcome 4. All the applied mechanism were implemented successfully.

➢ [Outcome 1] DTM standards, Methodological framework, DTM & Partners Toolkit, DTM training methodology, but also mechanism related to Flow Monitoring Surveys (FMS) and the Migrants' Presence (MP) exercises are part of IOM's DTM, activities in the Mediterranean region. Implementation of these mechanisms are effectively monitored.
➢ [Outcome 2] SoPs for coordination with all partners in TRCs (in which IOM has dedicated staff who has clear roles and responsibilities - Centre managers, Centre administrators, registration staff, protection and MHPSS staff, centre assistants, cultural mediators, and others) and outside the centres (where IOM has its mobile and outreach teams, who are working with precise guidelines).

Additionally, monitoring mechanisms are well established and functional. Feedback and complaints boxes in all TRCs in BiH but AAP mechanisms not standards across the region, especially when centres not managed by IOM.

➢ [Outcome 3] AVRR programme imply well-established components of administrative, logistical and financial support, including reintegration assistance (See, for example AVRR Framework). Each component has its procedures, implementing mechanisms, but also robust monitoring mechanisms.

➢ [Outcome 4] Although IOM has a global component regarding 'Migrant integration and Social Cohesion,' besides regular field visits and direct communication with local institutions/organizations for support, this evaluation did not identify any other established mechanisms (e.g., monitoring).

Besides the earlier explained negative contextual factors (Unpredictability of migrant flows Inflationary pressures Political tensions), there are two identified game-changing internal factors that dominantly and positively influenced the effectiveness of the project intervention: (1) Strong and well-established IOM programmatic mechanism and tools – e.g., guidelines, procedure, databases, monitoring tools (2) committed and dedicated staff at the field.

EQ 7: Are the target beneficiaries satisfied with the services provided?

Crucial to effectiveness is the perception of those receiving the intervention's services. This project's evaluation dissected satisfaction on both quantifiable and anecdotal fronts.[6] The evaluation, in this respect, gauged stakeholders' contentment not only with the tangible outputs but also with the perceived quality and value added by these outputs to the overarching goals of the IOM.

Stakeholder satisfaction was quantitatively measured using a scale from 1 to 10. Across the board, all stakeholders (n=16) have consistently rated their satisfaction at the higher end of the scale, offering a strong affirmation of the project's perceived effectiveness. Also, stakeholders acknowledged that the outputs not only addressed the immediate needs of the beneficiaries but were also instrumental in contributing to the broader strategic objectives related to managing mixed migration flows within countries in WB.

When stakeholders shared their perceptions about the project staff, all feedback was positive and could be categorized as follows: responsible and available (n=7), empathetic (n=5), humanitarian-oriented (n=5), committed to the organization (n=4), and other positive attributes (n=8). However, in several instances, concerns were noted regarding the staff working in the field due to the high number of working hours (e.g., members of mobile teams were in situations working between 16-20 hours to provide support to vulnerable groups in terms of transportation).

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[6] Quantitative satisfaction metrics: The evaluations measured satisfaction rates using scales and percentages to depict a more scientific perspective. Donors and PMT satisfaction regarding budget adherence exhibited impressive scores, weathering significant economic tumult.
Anecdotal depictions of efficacy: The rich repository of anecdotes (from weekly Situation Reports and interview with beneficiaries) and field verbatims offer testament to the beneficiary-end impact of the project. While large-scale surveys weren't always feasible, these smaller, individual narratives strung together a compelling tapestry of change.

Due to the fact that this project complemented the majority of existing activities, which are part of established and well-developed IOM programs, this evaluation couldn't determine the extent to which this specific project contributed to changes in stakeholder satisfaction. However, it's important to highlight that stakeholders in BiH (primarily SFA representatives) expressed particular satisfaction and change brought about by the project component implemented in RS, or Outcome 2 and Outcome 4, of this project. This component, in fact, provided a distinct recognition of the change achieved by this project in BiH. Specifically, for the first time, it ensured the presence of intervention in the territory of RS.

> **KPI 9 - Existence of documented case studies or testimonials from beneficiaries regarding their improved satisfaction**
>
> The presence of numerous case studies and beneficiary testimonials evidence the positive changes brought about by the project and confirm the project's tangible impact on the targeted population.

Furthermore, in line with the previously mentioned results on feedback mechanisms, the evaluation has documented numerous processes that enable the identification of needs and expectations. Looking at the information gathered from stakeholders and monitoring data, there is strong evidence that beneficiaries are highly satisfied with how the project objectives are impacting them. It is also confirmed by the individual stories contained in each weekly Situation Report released by IOM. More than 30 of these, conducted during the duration of this project, have been analysed, consistently highlighting a positive impact for beneficiaries, often accompanied by their quotes. (See, for example, Situation Report, Nov 2023, p4).

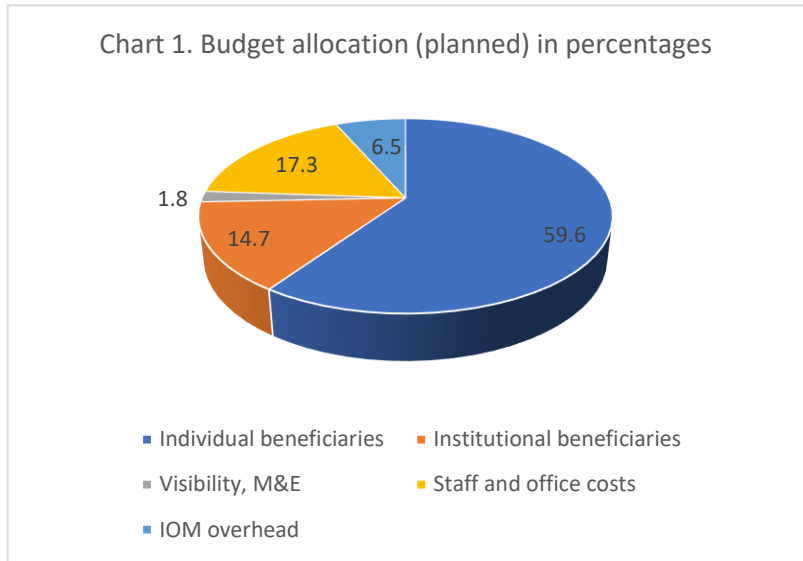## 4.4. Efficiency: How well are resources being used?

> **Main findings:** The comprehensive efficiency analysis underscores the project's adept utilization of financial, human, and time resources, translating them into tangible results aligned with IOM and donor strategic goals. The project exhibits a high level of efficiency, managing financial challenges effectively, maximizing resource utilization, and adapting to cost changes with proactive decisions.
>
> The project demonstrates effective financial stewardship, maintaining minimal variance between actual and budgeted costs to ensure goal achievement without compromising integrity. Resource utilization is optimized, with funds, expertize, and time efficiently directed towards project targets, even in the face of global economic shifts and unexpected extensions. The project showcases adaptability to cost changes, particularly within the AVRR program, where proactive decisions ensure funds are allocated where most needed without sacrificing support quality.
>
> Efficiency extends to time management, as stakeholders universally acknowledge the project's exceptional timeliness and adaptive response to evolving needs, exemplified by rapid implementation adjustments in TRCs. Despite strategic delays, the project successfully delivered between 80 to 100 per cent of activities and outputs on schedule, with identified delays attributed to strategic flexibility rather than poor planning or execution. The absence of significant adverse effects on the project timeline or outcomes highlights the project's punctuality and dependable implementation practices.

EQ 8: How well are the resources (funds, expertize, and time) being converted into results?

Analyzing budget items at the output level in terms of the planned budget and the purpose of the outputs, the following results were obtained: Nearly three-quarters of the project budget (or 75 per cent of the total 37.5 million NOK) are allocated to beneficiaries. Specifically, almost 60 per cent of the budget is designated for individual beneficiaries, while 15 per cent is allocated to institutional beneficiaries. The remainder of the budget is utilized for IOM staff and office costs (17.3 per cent), IOM overhead (6.5 per cent), and project visibility and Monitoring & Evaluation (1.8 per cent).

Chart 1. Budget allocation (planned) in percentages

- Individual beneficiaries
- Institutional beneficiaries
- Visibility, M&E
- Staff and office costs
- IOM overhead

Additionally, representatives from IOM and Donors have highlighted that the largest portion of the budget is directed towards providing direct support in protecting individuals on the move and strengthening institutional capacities. They also expressed high satisfaction with achieved results against the project budget.

The donors and PMT have expressed a remarkably high level of satisfaction with the accomplished results within the project's budget. This satisfaction is particularly notable considering the period of significant global inflationary pressures, especially within the Balkan region. There is clear evidence that the budget has been maximally utilized to achieve the set project goals and targets. Additionally, the desk review hasn't revealed any information suggesting otherwise. As per the financial interim report, the difference between the planned and executed budget is minimal, with the remaining balance reasonably allocated for the remainder of the project duration. There is unequivocal evidence indicating full satisfaction among the PTM and donors, with the satisfaction rate reaching a score 10 (on a scale of 1 to 10). Even when set targets are not achieved, which is an exception in this project, it is noticeable.

KPI 10 - Variance between actual project costs and budgeted costs (Cost efficiency)

Minimal variance between actual and projected costs indicates efficient financial management of the project despite external economic challenges. This fiscal prudence has allowed the project to achieve desired outcomes without compromising on efficiency or quality.

Namely, through an analysis of budget implementation and achieved results, it was found that the set target for Outcome 3 was not met, which anticipated assisting 150 migrants in voluntary return to their country of origin. While 113 migrants have been successfully returned (or 75 per cent of the target), the planned budget line amount has been exceeded by at least 40 per cent. Namely, some of the costs related to AVRR activities (such as flight tickets and accompanying vulnerable groups, especially with medical assistance) increased to an extent that the target couldn't be met. Due to the global rise in service costs, the PMT had to make the decision to spend the available funds regardless of the clear indication that the target couldn't be achieved. Such instances have been reported to the donor.

The high satisfaction scores across stakeholder groups indicate an acknowledgement of the efficient practices that have been institutionalized within the project management framework. This is

KPI 11 - Stakeholder satisfaction with project time management and efficiency

The maximum satisfaction score emphasizes that stakeholders are appreciative of the project's timeliness and efficiency in managing and implementing activities, which is a testament to the PMT's expertize.

evident in moments when rapid operational adjustments were needed, such as quickly addressing urgent needs at TRCs, congruent with the findings for EQ 8 and EQ 9. According to all stakeholders, time management for all components of this project is at the highest possible level. Institutional partners consistently praised and appreciated the speed of adaptation in project activities, while individual beneficiaries highlighted the timeliness of the assistance they received. It's worth noting the subjective impression of evaluators who noticed the exceptional efficiency of IOM staff in the field, setting them apart from other organizations. The efficient coordination mechanisms in place, as seen in the responsive measures taken at TRC Bozaj (Montenegro) to efficiently resolve issues with power generators and water supply systems, attest to the PMT's practical expertize in crisis management. These actions demonstrate the project's high level of efficiency as perceived by all parties involved.

EQ 9: Were the project activities undertaken, and were the outputs delivered on time?

The data indicates that an impressive percentage of the project's activities and outputs were delivered on schedule. The findings from the desk review and fieldwork indicate that between 80 and 100 per cent of project activities and outputs were delivered according to the predetermined schedule, marking the highest score. The exceptions that are identified were not a consequence of poor planning or implementation, but rather of flexibility and commitment to maximize the available budget, bearing in mind best interests of beneficiaries. This

KPI 12 - Per cent and number of project outputs delivered on predetermined schedule

Delivering between 80 to 100 per cent of project activities and outputs as scheduled showcases the project's commitment to timeliness and a rigorous adherence to planned timelines, enhancing the project's reliability and reputation for punctuality.

adherence to the set timeline not only contributed to the project's reliability but also affirmed the PMT's capacity for strategic prioritization and flexibility—the capacity to maximize available budgets and address beneficiary needs without delay. This punctual delivery, however, did not occur in isolation. It was achieved despite facing significant external pressures that required the PMT to demonstrate adaptability, a fact that contributes positively to the achievability of targets. Ensuring continued progress towards project goals, even in a challenging context, speaks to the core efficiency values upheld by the project team.

In assessing the efficiency of the project's execution, particularly concerning adherence to timelines, the evaluation team found no evidence of significant delays in project activities or outputs that substantially affected the overall project timeline or compromised the achievement of desired outcomes. This indicates effective project management and a well-structured implementation strategy that anticipated and mitigated potential disruptions. The PMT's successful maneuvering around obstacles ensured that essential services were continuously delivered to beneficiaries and that strategic project milestones were attained on time, underscoring the project's commitment to efficiency and punctuality. Even in situations where minor delays occurred, the team's agility in execution and flexibility in responding to emergent challenges safeguarded the project's integrity and efficacy.

4.5.   Impact: What difference does the intervention make?

Main findings: The project has brought about significant and positive changes both in (a) institutional practices and the (b) lives of individual beneficiaries. Notably, the implementation of the DTM across state institutions has significantly enhanced the effectiveness of migration management, aligning with the strategic imperative for robust migratory data. The creation of strategically positioned Mobile Teams has strengthened institutional capacities to protect and support migrants, showcasing the project's direct influence on improving migrant assistance. The AVRR program has had a broad impact on facilitating migrant returns, contributing significantly to the success of sustainable reintegration efforts. Additionally, improvements to health infrastructure highlight the project's broader impact on community welfare, emphasizing its commitment to supporting both migrants and local populations.

Additionally, the project has demonstrated proactive measures to identify and mitigate negative impacts, such as human trafficking within TRCs and the misuse of financial assistance through AVRR, showcasing a comprehensive approach to risk management.

While there are no explicit unintended effects documented, responses suggest a potential risk of dependence on IOM expertize, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach to building local capacity and reducing the possibility of learned helplessness among state institutions. The project has also displayed vigilance in identifying and preempting risks associated with financial incentives and trafficking within its programs, implementing awareness and reporting strategies to minimize such issues.

EQ 10: Does the impact come from the project activities, from external factors, or both?

When evaluating the origin of impact emanating from the project, it's evident that both project activities and external factors have played roles in shaping outcomes, warranting a classification of changes into two distinct categories: (1) Institutional work improvements and (2) Individual beneficiary life enhancement. There are at least ten significant changes identified among which the examples below best represent the changes per each project outcome in different country.

[Outcome 1] The introduction and integration of the DTM has led to significant improvements in the management of irregular migration. Institutional bodies in all countries have benefited from enhanced data-driven strategies resulting in more precise and effective decision making processes. These changes directly stem from project activities, showcasing how the DTM has become a cornerstone within national migration management frameworks, providing real-time data critical for policy and operational responses. [Example of evidence of a significant change:] As per a representative of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of Serbia (KIRS), the management of irregular migration in Serbia sees significant reinforcement through the integration of the DTM mechanism into the operations of state bodies. This integration ensures better-informed decision making.

[Outcome 2] In RS (BiH), the installation of Mobile Teams at tactical points has reinforced the operational capacity to identify and safeguard vulnerable migrants in transit. This represents an active and concerted initiative by the project, ideally situated to adapt with agility to such external factors as shifts in migration patterns and pressures—thereby exemplifying how the IOM project activities have played an integral role in yielding positive change. [Example of evidence of a significant change:] The establishment of Mobile Teams at strategic locations in the RS (BiH) forms a crucial aspect of SFA's efforts to actively engage in identifying and safeguarding vulnerable groups of individuals in transit. This is underlined by all (n=3) SFA representatives.

[Outcome 3] The impact on the lives of individual beneficiaries was observed through substantive enhancements in services provided by the AVRR program, which facilitated voluntary returns and sustainable reintegration for a significant number of individuals (See, for example, Annex 6.7). By looking from the institutional level, for Kosovo, due to its unique status, the program's influence was underscored by professionals from the area as a critical solution for those returned to their countries of origin. [Example of evidence of a significant change:] Specifically, through this project, the AVRR program has facilitated voluntary returns and sustainable reintegration for 113 individuals, thereby laying the groundwork for additional opportunities. AVRR satisfaction survey (N=27), conducted between January and August 2023 shows a maximum score. Additional examples pointed by professionals from Kosovo* stressed the particular significance of this component. Due to Kosovo's status regarding international recognition, the AVRR program often stands as the sole means for individuals to return to their country of origin.

[Outcome 4] Furthermore, the strengthening of health institutions within affected municipalities has directly resulted in the increased capacity of these centres to provide adequate support to both local and migrant populations. This is indicative of the project's deliberate push to improve health infrastructure, while also acknowledging that external factors, such as the evolving healthcare needs brought on by migration, undeniably shape the project's impact on such institutions. [Example of evidence of a significant change:] Health institutions in municipalities grappling with migration have markedly enhanced their

> **KPI 13 - Number of documented case studies or reports showcasing how project activities have achieved impact regarding specific needs and challenges**
>
> The documented cases reflect the project's substantial real-world impact on both institutional practices and the welfare of individuals, demonstrating the project's ability to effectuate change and address established needs effectively.

infrastructure, significantly boosting their capacity to offer adequate support to both the local population and those in transit. This is not only confirmed by the local professionals but also observed during field visits.

The project's evolution and its ability to reach predetermined goals have been inherently influenced by various external determinants. These include shifting patterns of migration, regional economic stability, political trends, and societal attitudes toward migration. The project's design and adaptability have enabled it to navigate these elements, using project-specific activities to mitigate challenges and amplify impacts.

The reported outcomes demonstrate a clear interplay between the project's activities and the external context in which they were undertaken. The IOM project's initiative and responsiveness to external factors have amplified the robustness and effectiveness of its interventions, ensuring that the project remains pragmatic and relevant to the needs it seeks to address.

EQ 11: Which negative or unintended effects are being produced by the project, and did the project team take timely measures to mitigate any unplanned negative impacts?

This project, while achieving significant success in various outcomes, also encounters the challenges of potential negative or unintended consequences. Such effects, often unforeseen, are an inherent risk in complex humanitarian initiatives and may emerge as the project evolves.

Based on the findings of the desk review, no negative or unintended effects of the project intervention were specifically identified. Nevertheless, some respondents highlighted several aspects that should be considered as potential unintended consequences:

➢ Involvement in illicit activities within TRCs: It was posited that there might be instances where beneficiaries within the TRCs could be covertly involved in human trafficking or smuggling chains. Such involvement could potentially exploit the TRC's environment to perpetuate illicit actions. Various activities conducted within TRCs and a lack of oversight may facilitate such individuals remaining unidentified and leveraging their position for illicit actions.

➢ Misuse/abuse of financial assistance: Providing financial assistance through the AVRR program might incentivize individuals or groups to attempt to exploit the opportunity for non-repayable funds. Concerns were raised during interviews that the financial support provided through the AVRR program may inadvertently create incentives for misuse. Specifically, respondents have identified young men who utilized the AVRR program and returned to TRCs within a short period.

➢ Creation of dependency on IOM services: Feedback from project stakeholders indicated a growing reliance on IOM's capabilities, leading local institutions to develop 'learned helplessness'— a dependence on IOM for the execution of services related to the migrant crisis. This situation might impede the development of local capacities to manage such issues independently. IOM has demonstrated excellence in its work through highly prepared staff and well-established programs. However, there has been minimal involvement of local non-governmental partners, while state institutions, which have profound challenges (e.g., lack of staff for the essential duties), could hardly keep up with such activities. The following quotes accurately reflect the finding that state services are significantly discouraged regarding the transition of services and activities from IOM to them: "Simply put, for us, IOM handles everything related to the migrant crisis."(Border Police of BiH representative), "Whenever there's a need, IOM is there" (MoI representative 1). "We, as a service, and even citizens, are used to IOM solving all problems related to migrants. There's even an instance where citizens called IOM when a drowned migrant was found." (Border police representative) "As a state service primarily concerned with national security, we can never approach addressing migration issues in as humanitarian a manner as IOM and other NGOs can." (MoI representative 2)

Measures for Mitigation Negative Effects

In response to the above-mentioned potential unwanted impacts, IOM has implemented strategies to identify and mitigate such effects diligently:

➢ Comprehensive oversight within TRCs: The IOM Protection Team's persistent presence and the introduction of meticulous monitoring mechanisms have been fundamental in preempting human trafficking and exploitation within TRCs. Regular audits and reviews are conducted to ensure that activities and environments within TRCs do not inadvertently enable illicit actions.

➢ Awareness and training: Common in IOM protocols, operatives within TRCs are trained to identify signs of trafficking and are encouraged to report suspicious behaviors. This has become part of the organizations' regular activities, reinforcing the culture of vigilance amongst the staff and beneficiaries in TRCs.

➢ Strengthened process control in AVRR Assistance: To alleviate the potential exploitation of the AVRR program, the PMT has refined beneficiary screening processes and established stricter control measures. They have focused efforts on ensuring that financial aid supports return and sustainable

reintegration, in addition to temporary relief is delivered to vulnerable and particularly vulnerable beneficiaries. Proactive exploration of opportunities to prevent potential abuse of programs like the AVRR is an integral part of the PMT's commitment. These include beneficiary education on the objectives and proper use of financial support.

4.6.   Sustainability: Will the benefits last?

Main Findings: The evaluation reveals a high level of satisfaction among stakeholders regarding their involvement in the project implementation processes. Both institutional and individual beneficiaries actively engage with the project, with institutional stakeholders emphasizing their active role in activities. While there are challenges, such as turnover and short stays for individual beneficiaries, the existing mechanisms overseen by the PMT and IOM field staff are acknowledged for their effectiveness. Notably, collaboration with stakeholders in TRCs is recognized as excellent, demonstrating the success of involving stakeholders in designing project activities. However, the findings underscore room for improvement in stakeholder engagement in the planning phase.

The evaluation identifies critical insights into the project's sustainability, emphasizing the need for clear phase-out plans and responsibilities for service continuation. While resources like documents and tools are conducive to transition, skepticism exists regarding institutional partner readiness. Despite capacity-building achievements, they show limited readiness to fully assume services beyond IOM's exit. In that sense, findings indicate limitations in the strategic coordination of the processes.

Stakeholders express optimism for IOM's commitments up to 2025, but uncertainties arise beyond that period. Noteworthy is the variation in sustainability ratings for different project components. While TRCs receive high trust, social cohesion activities face challenges.

To address challenges, stakeholders suggest strategic utilization of the next two years to develop a Phase-out strategy, optimize resources, and maximize project impact. The evaluation highlights the importance of crucial strategic documents existing in each WB country, providing a foundation for sustainability. However, concerns about political instability in certain regions may pose challenges to sustaining favorable conditions for the project's long-term success.

EQ 12: To what extent have target groups and possibly other relevant interest groups/stakeholders been involved in the planning/implementation process?

Looking at all the results, it can be concluded that all stakeholders have highlighted their maximum satisfaction with their ability to engage and be consulted during the project implementation. This is further supported by the findings listed below, in addition to the previously described findings regarding feedback mechanisms in place (under the sub-section "Relevance"). The existing mechanisms of involving institutional stakeholders in the project planning and implementation, while not formally established (except SoPs in TRCs), have been deliberated upon and overseen by the PMT and IOM field staff throughout the project's duration. While no identified negative observations by stakeholders regarding these mechanisms, the findings underscore that IOM values and acknowledges all requests and recommendations from institutions in its decision making process.

Viewed from the perspective of individual beneficiaries, a positive finding is the fact that a certain number of them are consistently involved in different activities in TRCs - such as translation, facilitating workshops, designing and leading sessions, and more. However, it's important to highlight a finding that presents one of the biggest challenges: the high turnover and short stays in TRCs. "We've become a fast track on the road to Europe," expressed one of the respondents. Consequently, individual beneficiaries might lack the willingness to offer specific suggestions or get deeply involved. Nevertheless, based on respondents' statements and direct observations, it can be concluded

KPI 16 - Stakeholder assessment of the degree of involvement and consultation on a scale of 1 to 10).

Stakeholder consultations and involvement in project implementation have reached their peak. However, the highest score for the section concerning Stakeholders' involvement in project design is hindered by the perception that certain stakeholders were not consulted about their priorities. In summary, the overall score for this indicator stands at 9 out of 10.

that individual beneficiaries from the category of people on the move have no trouble expressing their needs and making requests for assistance. "They know exactly what we can provide even before they arrive. Some even know our names, as the people they can turn to for something," mentioned the TRC staff in Montenegro.

Regarding institutional beneficiaries, their representatives emphasized their active role in all project activities. "We always communicate everything and implement it together as agreed," said the head of the department for asylum. However, institutional stakeholders underline the possibility of better coordination in the phase of designing projects by IOM, primarily to jointly identify priorities. "It happens that we have some needs, which we know about before certain projects, but the IOM is not able to help us because they have to move within the framework of their planned project activities and defined budget," the respondent pointed out.

A good example of how the absence of stakeholder involvement in the planning phase can cause challenges can be recognized in the framework of Outcome 1. Namely, the exclusion of partners in Serbia when planning the implementation of activities related to this outcome, led to later difficult implementation, which was manifested (among other things) in the non-sharing of data. However, when the implementation started, after the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding, cooperation and implementation went much better. Although the same approach was applied in other countries, there were no negative implications, primarily due to the lower level of development of the partners in terms of data collection, processing, and availability.

On the other hand, within the framework of Outcome 2, i.e. cooperation with stakeholders in TRCs in all countries, which takes place on a daily basis, cooperation is also excellent in terms of stakeholder involvement in designing project. In BiH, this goes to the extent that SFA representatives even know which IOM projects are in progress (by the project name or donor), while this is not the case in Montenegro. One got the impression that the continuity of cooperation and coordination of activities enables the IOM within the framework of TRCs to obtain information about most of the key needs of stakeholders. Also, there are indicators that management of TRC by IOM, brings advantages in this context.

Another good practice within Outcome 4 highlighted the benefits of collaborative design of project activities. Initially, there was greater flexibility at the project's outset regarding how to approach and directly support individuals through the Social Cohesion model. Following alignment of priorities with RS government and local authorities, full support was obtained from local institutions, as evidenced by the results of interviews with local partners.

EQ 13: Are there plans and strategies in place for IOM, partners and beneficiaries to be able to continue to build on and benefit from the results of the project?

While the IOM's Country Strategy for BiH mentions "the transition plan to a more state-owned migration response", there is no such a plan available yet. On the other side, although the Migration and Asylum Strategery of BiH, which is also developed in consultation with IOM, outlines some steps regarding transition, it lacks clear and specific indicators regarding this. Consequently, there is ambiguity about which entities will assume which responsibilities, in what capacity, in coordination/collaboration with whom, etc. The evaluation did not identify any form of an internal plan by IOM to ensure the sustainability of the project ("sustainability roadmap"), nor was any document identified that could be considered a "Phase-out Plan" (such a plan should be developed in collaboration with key stakeholders, primarily institutional partners).

> *KPI 15 - Existence of formalized, functioning mechanisms for partners to continue to support the objectives of the project*
>
> *While there are strategies in place, with a potential to enable a transition to local ownership of the project's services, ongoing concerns regarding the readiness of partners suggest the need for additional actions.*

In that context, the evaluation team recognized the need for clarifying transition pathways and firmly establishing the parties responsible for service continuation. The resources available to partners—in terms of documents, guidelines, SoPs, and monitoring tools—are conducive to the transition, but there is skepticism about the level of partner readiness to fully assume services beyond IOM's exit. Stakeholder assessment ratings vary by country and project component, with respondents expressing optimism for the continuation of IOM's strategic commitments up to 2025 but uncertainty thereafter.

The resources in terms of developed documents, guidelines, SoPs, and monitoring tools are exceptionally good and conducive to the transition. However, even though institutional partners have strengthened their capacities through various trainings with IOM, the results haven't shown a sufficient level of readiness on their part. It appears unreasonable to assume that these institutions face no other capacity-related challenges beyond limited capacities in responding to the migration situation.

Respondents from institutions are currently quite skeptical regarding sustainability measures. Specifically, there is willingness among the leaders of relevant institutions but the key source of skepticism lies in questions about (a) the institutional capacities and (b) the divergence in approaches to migration flows compared to humanitarian and other international organizations.

However, "it's promising that IOM will continue implementing its programs that encompass all components of this project", said the respondent. "It will be an extra time to set priorities and test our abilities". This quote reflects impressions by key stakeholders throughout the countries. Namely, they believe that the scope of sustainability measures will depend on the available resources. In that sense, they trust in some opportunities for additional financial resources through EU funds for countries/institutions. For example, in BiH representatives from both institutions and IOM see a strong potential in the fact that the country is encouraged to fully take over the management of TRCs by the end of 2025. Among others, the rationale for this relies on the Stabilization and Association Agreement between EU communities and BiH.

Based on all the findings, it is evident that the stakeholders' assessment of the effectiveness of sustainability measures varies from country to country and depends on the project component. Additionally, stakeholders have different perspectives on the sustainability of project components up to 2025 and beyond. Mostly informed about IOM's strategic commitments, they tend to evaluate sustainability measures more positively for the period until the end of 2025. However, concerning the period beyond that, they frequently emphasize their uncertainty about what will happen.

> **KPI 17 - Stakeholder assessment of the effectiveness of sustainability measures**
>
> Stakeholders' varied assessments indicate mixed confidence in the project's ongoing sustainability measures. While there is optimism for continued effectiveness up to 2025, uncertainty persists about the long-term continuation of project efforts post-IOM exit.

Taking into account all the results, it is possible to provide an approximation of stakeholder's assessment of sustainability measures at the level of project components/outcomes:

➢ [Outcome 1] Rating SIX: Stakeholders argue that there are very good resources in terms of methodology and guidelines for DTM, along with provided training for state employees. However, they negatively assess the issue of capacities for implementing DTM and the time available for such activities. Additionally, there is significant skepticism about whether the results will indeed be used for decision making. There is distrust regarding the level of awareness among state services regarding evidence-based decision making.

➢ [Outcome 2] Rating EIGHT: Results indicate significant trust in sustainability measures concerning the continuation of TRCs' operations. There are already examples of best practices where state services have taken over certain services, and the long-term work with international agencies has served as on-the-job mentoring for many. Governmental services already have experience dealing with increased migrant population and examples of good practices.

➢ [Outcome 3] Rating SIX: In the context of AVRR, respondents mostly indicated their readiness to support this program and make themselves available to IOM. However, they lack a clear vision of what their role would be in ensuring the sustainability of this program.

➢ [Outcome 4] Rating THREE: The evaluation didn't identify specific mechanisms ensuring the sustainability of social cohesion or the potential transition of associated activities to institutions. Representatives from institutions generally lack clarity on the purpose of these activities and how they align with project objectives. Nevertheless, smaller reconstruction projects will remain visible for a certain period and will to some extent be used to meet the needs of the migrant population.

The Migration and Asylum Strategy 2021-2025 in BiH and the Strategy on Migration and Reintegration of Returnees in Montenegro 2021-2025 represent extremely crucial documents that provide a robust foundation for the sustainability of project components, confirmed key stakeholders. Both documents, alongside their action plans, envisage the need for continuous data collection and decision making based on it, commitment to implementing voluntary and involuntary programs, and bolstering the capacities of relevant state authorities. Additionally, both documents anticipate the continuation of intensive collaboration with IOM. Strategic documents of other WB countries in this area are similar, and it is reasonable to assume they have similarly high potential for sustainability of the project outcomes.

These findings, coupled with the ongoing implementation of the project over the next two years with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Ministry of Justice, provide ample time to ensure the sustainability of key project components. To optimize resources, enhance efficiency, and facilitate a seamless transition, it is advisable to strategically utilize the upcoming

two years to develop an exit strategy that maximizes the project's impact. By pinpointing areas where the state possesses or can acquire the mandate and capacities to lead, IOM can progressively narrow its involvement to specific domains where a noticeable gap persists. These are areas that are challenging to promptly fill by either the state or NGOs. However, according to respondents, these seemingly favorable conditions could easily be compromised due to a lack of political will caused by political instability in certain countries and the region.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1.   Conclusions

Relevance

The evaluation of the project reveals a strong alignment between most activities and the project's intended objective of addressing mixed migration challenges. While the majority of project activities directly contribute to the objective, exceptions exist within certain outputs, particularly in Output 4.1 and 4.2, where the link to the overarching goal is not always evident. This discrepancy highlights the need for clearer alignment between specific activities and the intended outcomes. However, the project's overall alignment score remains impressively high at 9.5 out of 10, showcasing a robust connection between activities and objectives. The project demonstrates adaptability by flexibly adjusting activities based on contextual needs, exemplified by various instances like provision of materials, transportation, and tailored support, highlighting its responsiveness to challenges in addressing migration flows.

Regarding meeting beneficiary needs, stakeholders uniformly express gratitude and acknowledgment once informed about the project components, affirming that the project comprehensively meets their needs. Taken as a whole, it can be said that the project applied high-quality feedback mechanisms for various beneficiary groups, especially around activities in TRCs (Outcome 2) and AVRR (Outcome 3). Multiple feedback mechanisms exist, though effectiveness and accessibility vary across different project outcomes, signaling room for enhancement in soliciting and utilizing beneficiary feedback for further project refinement. While the project emphasizes addressing diverse needs of both individual migrants and institutional partners, there are identified room for improvement in certain activities within Output 4. The project allocates a substantial portion of its budget (75 per cent) directly to beneficiary-focused components, signifying a commitment to meeting the needs of those affected by mixed migration flows.

Coherence

The project appears to be deeply interwoven with IOM's ongoing and past initiatives, showcasing a high level of synergy and adaptation across thematic areas. The alignment with IOM's strategic documents and thematic priorities is notably strong, directly linking each project component with specific strategic priorities outlined by IOM, fostering a cohesive approach in addressing migration challenges. Additionally, all project outputs are designed to complement or enhance the impact of other IOM interventions, highlighting a concerted effort to reinforce existing initiatives.

The degree of adherence to national policies and IOM guidelines is reportedly high, with close collaboration between IOM and state institutions while adhering strictly to national laws and procedures. However, there are areas where the project documentation lacks explicit connections with national strategies despite referencing IOM guidelines extensively. This suggests an opportunity for clearer articulation of the project's contribution to national strategies.

Adaptability in response to the changing project context is evident through various adaptive measures, such as deploying mobile teams, tailoring services to meet beneficiary needs, and leveraging concurrent projects to maximize impact. The project seems impartial regarding political tensions, maintaining a focus on humanitarian efforts despite external challenges.

Mechanisms for effective implementation vary across project outcomes, with most of the project components having robust monitoring mechanisms (particularly across Outcome 2 and Outcome 3) while others lack the same level of detail, indicating room for improvement (particularly across Outcome 4). The

project's effectiveness seems to be positively influenced by well-established IOM tools and committed staff, while external factors like unpredictable migrant flows and inflationary pressures pose challenges.

Stakeholder satisfaction with project outputs and team performance is generally high, though the attribution of changes in beneficiary satisfaction specifically to this project is challenging due to its integration within broader IOM programs. However, stakeholders in BiH expressed particular satisfaction with the project's component implemented in RS, marking a distinct recognition of the project's impact in that territory. Additionally, various feedback mechanisms and individual stories consistently highlight a positive impact on beneficiaries.

Effectiveness

The project's outputs and outcomes have aligned closely with the stated plans, garnering consistently high satisfaction from stakeholders and donor representatives. Stakeholders, albeit unable to discern project components from broader IOM initiatives, have uniformly expressed commendation and satisfaction with the achieved results. Additionally, donors and the PMT have exhibited a notably high level of contentment, scoring a perfect 10, with the outcomes accomplished within the project's budget despite global inflationary pressures.

Multiple contextual factors, both internal and external, have influenced the project's outcomes. External factors such as unpredictable migrant flows, inflationary pressures affecting purchasing power, and political tensions across the region have posed substantial challenges. Internally, the project's adaptability to these changes through agile measures, like deploying mobile teams for outreach, tailoring services in TRCs, and customizing activities to meet beneficiary needs, has positively impacted outcomes.

Mechanisms to ensure effective implementation varied across project outcomes, with robust mechanisms present for the first three outcomes but a lack of identified mechanisms for Outcome 4 (Migrant Integration and Social Cohesion). However, all mechanisms were successfully implemented, contributing to the overall effectiveness of the project.

The project's effectiveness was influenced by a blend of internal strengths like well-established programmatic mechanisms within IOM and dedicated field staff, along with above mentioned external challenges. Stakeholder satisfaction, gauged through surveys and feedback, consistently highlighted contentment with the project's outputs. Beneficiary satisfaction was strongly evident from monitoring data and stakeholder feedback, indicating a significant positive impact on their lives attributed to the project's objectives and activities.

Efficiency

The conversion of resources—funds, expertize, and time—into results has been remarkably efficient within the project. Actual project costs were closely aligned with the budgeted costs, showcasing optimal utilization of allocated funds despite challenges like global inflation and cost increases in specific project activities. While certain elements within the AVRR program experienced cost escalations impacting target achievement, the management efficiently allocated remaining balances. Stakeholders expressed high satisfaction with time management and efficiency across all project components, acknowledging IOM's exceptional speed in adapting activities.

Outputs were delivered within specified time frames, with a high percentage (between 80 and 100 per cent) completed according to the predetermined schedule. Despite some deviations, these were primarily due to flexibility in maximizing the budget and ensuring beneficiaries' best interests.

The overall project timeline and desired outcomes remained minimally affected by any delays in project activities or outputs. No significant delays were identified that could potentially impact the

achievement of project outcomes. This efficiency and adaptability have contributed to maintaining the project's pace and its overall success in delivering outputs within the established timelines.

Impact

The project has brought about significant changes, both at the institutional and individual beneficiary levels. These changes are best categorized into outcomes for each project objective. Simply put, the project has ensured a significant change in the accessibility of crucial information regarding migrant movements, influencing the awareness of institutional partners to make fact-based decisions. Within the TRC, a well-established program continued to be implemented, directly fulfilling the basic needs of a large number of individual beneficiaries. One hundred thirteen individuals gained new life opportunities through the AVRR program. For the first time, entry into migrant response-related activities within the territory of RS was made possible.

External factors, while not directly hindering progress, have introduced potential unintended consequences. These include the possibility of trafficking within TRCs due to insufficient oversight and the potential exploitation of non-repayable funds offered through the AVRR program. Additionally, the project's effectiveness might have inadvertently contributed to a "learned helplessness" among governmental bodies, discouraging their proactive involvement in addressing migration issues.

The project team has taken proactive measures to mitigate these negative effects. Strategies include collaboration with governmental bodies to identify traffickers, enhancing awareness among TRC staff and beneficiaries, and ongoing efforts to prevent abuse through the AVRR program. However, there is significant room to improve approach in terms of strategic encouragement of institutional partners to lead some services.

Sustainability

The engagement of target groups and stakeholders in the planning and implementation process showcases high satisfaction among stakeholders for their degree of involvement and consultation. Institutional beneficiaries actively participated in capacity-building activities and task implementation, while individual beneficiaries expressed their needs and made requests for assistance.

Throughout the project, mechanisms to foster participation were overseen by the PMT and IOM field staff. Stakeholders acknowledged the effectiveness of their engagement and highlighted IOM's responsiveness to requests and recommendations from institutions in decision making processes.

It could be said that some plans for sustainability exist within the IOM Country Strategy for BiH, but the specifics regarding transitioning services to governmental bodies lack clarity. Although resources like documents, guidelines, and tools are conducive to transition, there's skepticism about institutional readiness and capacities among stakeholders. While IOM will continue its programs, uncertainty looms over the willingness and capacity of local institutions to fully take over management.

Stakeholder assessment of sustainability measures varies depending on the project component and time frame. Ratings ranged from THREE to EIGHT, with Outcome 2 (TRCs operations continuation) receiving the highest rating and Outcome 4 (long-term social cohesion) receiving the lowest.

Formalized mechanisms outlined in the Migration and Asylum Strategy 2021-2025 in BiH and the Strategy on Migration and Reintegration of Returnees in Montenegro 2021-2025 provide a foundation for sustainability. These plans emphasize continuous data collection, collaboration with IOM, and capacity-building for relevant state authorities. However, political instability in certain countries poses a threat to these plans. Overall, while strategies exist, their success relies heavily on political will and stability in the region.

5.2.   Recommendations

Considering all the obtained results and drawn conclusions, appreciating the strategic priorities of IOM and efforts through the specific project, the evaluation team has formulated key recommendations. Additionally, the evaluation process has allowed for the creation of a significant number of incidental recommendations and tips to be discussed further (available as Annex 6.5), as well as some recorded good practices (available as Annex 6.6).

The following five key recommendations are considered priorities, and they are defined in a way that indicates their implementation approach and expected outcomes. There is a mutual connection between them, so it is possible to notice certain overlaps both in necessary actions and expected outcomes.

1. Improve the effectiveness of the coordination of project activities with key stakeholders at the strategic level. Develop a platform (a digital interactive platform appears to be a potentially optimal solution) that will facilitate an easy way to coordinate project activities with all key stakeholders at the level of each IOM mission in the WB. The platform should have the potential to ensure a two-way exchange of information between stakeholders and IOM, primarily at the strategic level. Establish mechanisms for stakeholders to consistently access information on IOM projects, aligning them with national migration strategies across WB and IOM's specific country strategies. Enable stakeholders to provide feedback, comments, and recommendations on ongoing projects, fostering transparent communication and standardizing expectations. Utilize a platform for institutional stakeholders to communicate needs, contribute to project planning, and ensure their priorities are considered, promoting ownership. Enhance information exchange speed, accountability, and lesson utilization by implementing efficient communication channels. (For suggestions and tips for key actions see Annex 6.8.)

2. Develop a comprehensive sustainability roadmap that delineates a clear strategy for each project outcome beyond the project's duration. This roadmap should outline how institutional partners and beneficiaries will progressively assume control and maintain project achievements, emphasizing resource allocation and technical support. It is an internal (IOM's) tool that will guide the PMT in maximising project sustainability (and it might include advocacy initiatives, negotiation techniques and targets, external communication plans, risks of stakeholders' lack of cooperation, etc.). One of the key goals in this roadmap should be the development and adoption of the Phase-out plan (See recommendation 3). The plan involves utilizing project continuation and synergy with other projects, maintaining ongoing monitoring, and defining the donor's role. It emphasizes fostering ownership by government institutions through increased project visibility, involvement in project creation, and regular accessibility of project details for key decision makers. Clear connections to national migration strategies, the development of an external communication plan aligning with existing policies, and addressing "learned helplessness" by empowering institutional partners are proposed strategies. Additionally, risk mitigation and contingency planning, particularly for potential disruptions due to political instability, are recommended to safeguard project sustainability. (For suggestions and tips for key actions see Annex 6.8.)

3. Prepare institutional partners for exit strategies, by developing comprehensive Phase out plans in coordination with local institutions for each project component, outlining clear responsibilities and timelines for assuming services. Define, jointly with institutional partners, clear outcomes on how to capacitate partners and make an effective communication agenda, considering the developed sustainability roadmap (Recommendation 2), and coordination mechanisms (Recommendation 1). Ensure these plans are aligned with broader national strategies to create a

seamless handover. The proposed plans involves determining a phased-out process for organized activities, utilizing the SMART methodology, modern technology, and digitalization, while expanding engagement with various local partners to ensure an inclusive approach to handling migration challenges. The strategy emphasizes evidence-based decision making, proactive communication with partners (particularly for post-2025 actions), and structured knowledge transfer sessions, including comprehensive documentation, to facilitate a smooth handover of responsibilities from IOM to local institutions. (For suggestions and tips for key actions see Annex 6.8.)

4. Strengthen monitoring mechanisms to measure Social Cohesion outputs/outcomes and project activities related to enhancing the capacities of state institutions. Data collected in this segment could be pivotal for evidence-based decision making, aligning with the project's objective in component number 2. Establish robust monitoring for mini-projects (Outputs 4.1 and 4.2) to track beneficiary numbers and implement a feedback mechanism, ensuring a long-term assessment of project effects, and devise mechanisms to understand the application and impact of enhanced capacities gained through capacity-building training beyond participant feedback. (For suggestions and tips for key actions see Annex 6.8.)

5. Clearly define ways in which the Social Cohesion project component can more strongly align with the overall project objective and specify clear expectations for how this component contributes to project impact and sustainability. Among othres, it is needed to conduct follow-up meetings with supported institutions, ensure the installation of acknowledgment plaques in partner facilities, collaborate with partners to define their role in achieving impacts related to migrants, and set clear expectations for their contribution to project impact and sustainability based on positive practices. (For suggestions and tips for key actions see Annex 6.8.)

6. List of annexes

Annex 6.1. Evaluation terms of reference (ToR)

Annex 6.2. Evaluation Matrix

Annex 6.3. List of persons interviewed or consulted through FGDs

Annex 6.4. Detailed description of the evaluation purpose and potential

Annex 6.5. Incidental recommendations and tips to discuss additionally

Annex 6.6. Identified good practices

Annex 6.7. Key findings from interviews with AVRR beneficiaries

Annex 6.8. Suggestions and tips for key action