



# Safer borders, stronger ties

At Europe's busiest border, Bulgarian and Turkish partners unite to strengthen security and protect vulnerable people with the project 'Joining for Safer Borders'

Joint training for improving the professional capacity and skills of the staff of the law enforcement departments", Kırklareli, 30-31 January 2025

By Selin Güllüoğlu

At Kapikule-Kapitan Andreevo, where Bulgaria meets Türkiye, the border never sleeps. Trucks, tourists, and travelers flow through what is officially Europe's busiest land crossing and largest customs gate: the main gateway between the European Union and its southeastern neighbors.

The figures speak for themselves: around 87% of all pressure on Bulgaria's borders is concentrated here. It's also the point that records the highest number of irregular crossings, making it particularly exposed to smuggling and trafficking risks.

Because this border marks the external frontier of the European Union, the way it operates reflects the EU's own values. Border officers must balance vigilance with humanity, ensuring that safety measures go hand in hand with respect for human rights especially as rising

irregular migration raises concerns for women and children at risk of exploitation.

## Shared challenges, shared solutions

To address these pressures, five neighboring regions (Edirne and Kırklareli in Türkiye, and Haskovo, Burgas, and Yambol in Bulgaria) have come together under the Interreg IPA Bulgaria-Türkiye programme to launch 'Joining for Safer Borders'.

Their mission: to strengthen border management through better equipment, joint training, and long-term collaboration. This project creates a shared reaction capacity that improves both security and humanitarian response. Because sharing a border means sharing the problems... and the solutions.

## Training for trust and humanity

Thanks to 'Joining for Safer Borders', more than 100 border officers from Bulgaria and Türkiye have trained side by side, not only in legal and tactical procedures, but in humanitarian awareness. Workshops cover EU migration law, national policies, and human rights principles. Officers also participate in joint simulations and demonstrations to test their skills in real-life scenarios.

On the other hand, let's not forget that communication is often a real challenge in the border. In this sense, language courses in Bulgarian and English help them communicate more easily, paving the way for long-term cooperation beyond the project's lifespan.

The border forces are also becoming better equipped and faster to respond. New document readers, license plate recognition systems, and patrol vehicles ensure precise and efficient checks. How? By reducing bottlenecks and increasing safety for locals, travelers, and businesses alike.

3-Day joint training and demonstrations , Burgas, 2-4 June 2025

But equipment alone isn't enough. What really changes the game is the cross-border bond between the teams. Together, they are developing a coordinated reaction capacity that protects vulnerable people while keeping the border secure.

## A safer, fairer frontier

The Bulgarian-Turkish border is one of Europe's most visible frontiers. It's where EU external policies meet real lives. Through this project, partners are proving that security and humanity can go hand in hand.

By investing in people, trust, and shared responsibility, 'Joining for Safer Borders' turns a line on the map into a bridge of cooperation, one that keeps both Europe and its neighbors safer.

**“ Sharing a border means sharing the problems... and the solutions”**



## TESTIMONIAL

**Şefik ODUNCU. Customs Officer, Kırklareli / Dereköy Border Crossing Point (Türkiye)**

### How will this project contribute to regional security and cross-border cooperation in the long term?

In the long term, the information-sharing opportunity we received from the project during the trainings will bring significant benefits. Both the Bulgarian and Turkish sides perform the same type of work, and exchanging knowledge about our respective activities is very useful. Learning about the new and evolving smuggling methods observed by the Bulgarian side, and understanding how they handle certain challenges, while also sharing our own experiences, will make border protection much more coordinated and effective in the long run.

### What concrete improvements have you observed thanks to the equipment provided?

The new document and passport readers installed within the project have significantly improved the efficiency of our work at the border. Previously, we used older devices that often produced reading errors, failed to recognize documents, or took a long time to process them. This caused long queues at the checkpoint. The new devices are much faster and far more reliable. We are clearly seeing their benefits in our daily operations.

### How did the trainings contribute to your work?

My duty mainly involves passport control. The trainings were mostly about irregular crossings, which are not directly related to my unit's daily tasks. However, we learned about which countries irregular migrants come from, which routes they use for transit, and what methods they apply. We gained insight into the difficult choices migrants are often forced to make. In another training, we gained a broader, more academic perspective, covering topics

**“ Working together makes our borders safer and our work more humane” Şefik Oduncu**

such as the historical roots and evolution of migration. Learning about the issue from different perspectives helps us be more aware of the importance and sensitivity of our duty.

### How was cooperation with your Bulgarian colleagues?

We usually don't face communication problems with our Bulgarian colleagues. During the trainings, simultaneous interpretation was provided. In one-on-one exchanges, some speak Turkish and some of us speak English. Our interactions are sincere and friendly, and we share professional experiences and knowledge with each other.

### Did you attend the language training?

I didn't attend because I already speak English. From what I heard, the courses went very well, but the participation rate was low since the class hours often overlapped with working hours.

### What did the project teach you regarding vulnerable groups?

Migrants are not only young men; they include women, children, and the elderly, all moving together in search of safety and a better life, often as their last resort. Their living conditions are extremely harsh. The trainings focused on empathy and addressing their problems with constructive, solution-oriented approaches. We already receive institutional trainings that emphasize humanitarian conduct, but this project added valuable new perspectives and refreshed what we had previously learned. Overall, it was a very positive and useful experience.

### What should officers pay most attention to in terms of humanitarian principles?

In our duties, we act based on national and international legal frameworks. Beyond these, we must put ourselves in the place of the vulnerable and recognize that their attempts to cross borders are often acts of last resort. This awareness already exists among us, but the project's training helped reinforce and deepen it.



Training on effective team work in situation of crisis and migrant communication strategies”, Edirne, 25-26 April

## Main impact of the project

- Enhanced security through modern technology and faster response times
- Over 100 trained officers in EU law, migration policy, and humanitarian standards
- Improved cooperation between Bulgarian and Turkish border institutions
- Protection of vulnerable groups, especially women and children at risk of trafficking
- Shared language and trust, enabling smoother collaboration in the long term

### More information



### Project focus

- Cross-border cooperation between Türkiye & Bulgaria
- Border safety & migration management
- Training on humanitarian principles
- Exchange of operational best practices
- Improvement of border-control equipment & procedures



Selin Güllüoğlu

Age: 24

Nationality: Turkish

Region where you are deployed: Ankara, Türkiye

Write three words that define ‘European cooperation’ for you:  
opportunity, connectivity, solidarity.