



IN DIALOGUE WITH ACADEMIA: UNIVERSITY DISCUSSION PAPERS

# Migration in the Western Balkans: Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue for an Inclusive Region

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European  
Policy  
**DIALOGUE  
FORUM**

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**UNIVERSITY DISCUSSION PAPERS – 001**

In Dialogue with Academia: University Discussion Papers aim to bridge the gap between academic research, policymaking, and implementation of good practices by leveraging the critical contributions of religious and faith leaders. By engaging university professors and students in key themes related to social cohesion, the initiative explores how interreligious and intercultural approaches can help identify common ground, fostering an inclusive social pact that aligns religious values with secular policies. This effort seeks to cultivate European societies where everyone feels a sense of belonging. The series of Discussion Papers will inform KAICIID's future actions.

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## Executive summary

The Western Balkans, a region marked by historical divisions and ongoing demographic challenges, faces critical migration and integration issues that demand effective and inclusive responses.

The region's significant emigration and labour shortages, coupled with the influx of migrants and refugees, create a pressing need for effective integration strategies. The presence of refugees and migrants could be harnessed to address skill gaps, revitalise economies, and counteract declining populations. However, effective integration responses are hindered by long-standing fractures, insufficient services, and negative public perceptions shaped by media narratives and politicisation of migration issues.

Religious leaders and actors are critical in countering xenophobia and fostering mutual understanding between newcomers and host communities. Their close ties to communities enable them to support positive attitudes towards newcomers, offer spiritual support and inclusive spaces, promote evidence-based policymaking, and strengthen social bonds through interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

By leveraging enhanced cooperation between religious leaders and local authorities, the Western Balkans region has the opportunity to embrace its potential as a long-term destination, rebuilding fractured communities, fostering economic resilience, and ensuring inclusive development and shared prosperity.

