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**THIS ACTION IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**ANNEX V**

to the Commission Implementing Decision on the on the financing of the multiannual action plan in favour of the NDICI Neighbourhood East Region for 2023-2024

**Action Document for Supporting Education Reform & Skills in the Eastern Partnership region**

**ANNUAL ACTION PLAN**

This document constitutes the annual work programme in the sense of Article 110(2) of the Financial Regulation, and action plan/measure in the sense of Article 23(2) of NDICI-Global Europe Regulation.

**1. SYNOPSIS**

**1.1 Action Summary Table**

<b>1. Title OPSYS Basic Act</b>	Supporting Education Reforms & Skills in the Eastern Partnership region (SER) Multiannual Indicative Programme for the Eastern Neighbourhood 2021-2027(MIP 2021-2027) <sup>1</sup> OPSYS business reference: ACT-61849 ABAC Commitment level 1 number: JAD 1164447 (2023) Financed under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe).
<b>2. Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)</b>	Yes
<b>EIP Flagship</b>	No
<b>3. Team Europe Initiative</b>	No
<b>4. Beneficiaries of the action</b>	The action shall be carried out for the benefit of the Eastern Partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus <sup>2</sup> , Georgia, Republic of Moldova <sup>3</sup> , Ukraine).
<b>5. Programming document</b>	Multiannual indicative programme for the Eastern neighbourhood 2021-2027 and NDICI-GE Regulation (adopted on 9 June 2021, came into force on 14 June 2021 and applies retroactively since 1 January 2021), complemented by the Commission

<sup>1</sup> C(2021)9370 adopted on 15/12/2021.

<sup>2</sup>In line with the Council Conclusions of 12 October 2020 and in light of Belarus's involvement in the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, recognised in the European Council Conclusions of February 2022, the EU has stopped engaging with representatives of Belarus public bodies and state-owned enterprises. Should there be a change of the context this may be reconsidered. In the meantime, the EU continues to engage with and, where possible, has stepped up support to non-state, local and regional actors, including within the framework of this regional programme, as appropriate.

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter referred to as Moldova.

	Delegated Regulation to set out specific objectives and thematic priorities for NDICI-GE assistance.			
<b>6. Link with relevant MIP(s) objectives/expected results</b>	<p>Priority area 1: Resilient, sustainable and integrated economies</p> <p>Specific objective: 3. Invest in human capital and knowledge societies.</p> <p>Expected results :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhanced quality, relevance, innovativeness and inclusiveness of education systems</li> <li>- Better skills matching the labour market needs</li> </ul>			
<b>PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION</b>				
<b>7. Priority Area(s), sectors</b>	110 Education, 111 Education, Level Unspecified, 112 Basic Education, 113 Secondary Education, 114 Post-secondary Education			
<b>8. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</b>	<p>Main SDG : SDG 4 (Quality Education)</p> <p>Actions under this priority area align primarily with SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth) and &amp; SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)</p>			
<b>9. DAC code(s)</b>	11110 - Education policy and administrative management 100%			
<b>10. Main Delivery Channel</b>	<p>Multilateral organisations – 40000</p> <p>International NGO - 21000</p>			
<b>11. Targets</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Migration <input type="checkbox"/> Climate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social inclusion and Human Development <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity <input type="checkbox"/> Human Rights, Democracy and Governance			
<b>12. Markers (from DAC form)</b>	<b>General policy objective</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Aid to environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Disaster Risk Reduction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Inclusion of persons with Disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Nutrition	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>RIO Convention markers</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	Biological diversity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**13. Internal markers and Tags**

Combat desertification	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change mitigation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change adaptation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Policy objectives</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
EIP	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
EIP Flagship	<b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/>		<b>NO</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Tags	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>
transport	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
energy	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
environment, climate resilience	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
digital	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
economic development (incl. private sector, trade...)	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
human development (incl. human capital and youth)	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
health resilience	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
migration and mobility	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
agriculture, food security and rural development	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
rule of law, governance and public administration reform	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
other	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Digitalisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tags	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>
digital connectivity	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
digital governance	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
digital entrepreneurship	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
digital skills/literacy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
digital services	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Connectivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tags	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>
digital connectivity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
energy	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
transport	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
health	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

education and research	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Migration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduction of Inequalities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COVID-19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### **BUDGET INFORMATION**

<b>14. Amounts concerned</b>	Budget line(s) (article, item): BGUE-B2023-14.020111-C1 NEAR – Eastern neighbourhood Total estimated cost: EUR 2 500 000. Total amount of EU budget contribution EUR 2 500 000.
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### **MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION**

<b>15. Implementation modalities (management mode and delivery methods)</b>	<b>Indirect management</b> with the pillar-assessed entity(ies) to be selected in accordance with the criteria set out in section 4.3.1.
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## **1.2 Summary of the Action**

Partner countries in the Eastern Partnership region are facing the challenge of having to undertake reforms to ensure that their education and training systems prepare citizens for current and up-coming technological, social and economic changes. The six countries have achieved high levels of education participation at all levels and full literacy, in general educational attainments are high and the vast majority of the labour force in Eastern Partnership countries has a medium or high level of education, however with pronounced differences between them. Despite these positive performances in terms of participation, all countries face challenges in terms of quality, across all sub-sectors. This includes the quality of teaching and learning and students' mastery of subject knowledge and transversal skills.

The objective of this action is to support the strengthening of education systems in the Eastern Partnership countries, with a particular focus on the governance and management of the systems, to contribute to improved equity, gender equality, quality and relevance of education systems, also in the context of alignment with standards and recommendations of relevant bodies, such as the Council of Europe's Venice Commission.

This action has three main components (pillars): Education sector Diagnostics, Capacity Development for Policy Implementation and Training.

The first component/pillar will offer to partner countries the possibility to undertake diagnostics of their education sectors including where relevant legislation, human and financial resources providing a detailed analysis of the education system and sector performance, including an analysis of thematic areas such as equitable access (taking gender, disability and other relevant factors into consideration), to a quality and relevant education system, financing, governance. These diagnostics will support and inform the Education Ministries in their sector policy and planning work and contribute to reinforcing the relevance of EU engagement in the education sector in the Eastern Partnership countries, providing an analysis to reinforce the policy dialogue and the further prioritization of EU interventions in the sector. It will notably aim to improve evidence-based policy-making and implementation of education reforms.

The second component/pillar will be tackling the main challenges identified by the diagnostics. It will also serve as a basis for follow-up work within the action, which will offer capacity development opportunities in areas related to the governance and management of the sector both at partner country level, tailor made to context needs, and through trainings and peer learning opportunities at regional level. The capacity development activities that will take place at partner country level will be on-demand and developed in complementarity with possible EU bilateral interventions in the education sector, and in coordination with other development partners' interventions.

The third component/pillar is focusing on regional training seminars for policy makers in the field of education. This component is intended to complement the specific country level diagnostic work, by offering peer learning opportunities at the regional level, gathering representatives from the five ministries of Education and other relevant stakeholders.

This action will contribute towards achieving higher levels of employment, build up the region's human capital, and provide them with valuable skills which are adapted to the needs of the labour market. This would result in a boost of competitiveness, growth and jobs.

All three components will also contribute to supporting Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in fulfilling the priorities outlined in the Commission's opinion on their application for EU membership.

### **1.3 Beneficiaries of the action**

The final beneficiaries of the action are the citizens of the Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine).

The main institutional beneficiaries for this action will therefore include:

**Ministries of Education**, ministries of Finance and possibly other relevant line ministries with responsibility related to education as well as public agencies under the Ministries of Education authority, assisting in the implementation of education policies. Sub-national levels with responsibility in the implementation of education policies and reforms as part of the ongoing devolution process (particularly deconcentrated services and schools). They should be involved in the elaboration of the diagnosis and, particularly the central level, but also, probably to varying degree in each of the country the sub-national level, will be the main stakeholders and beneficiaries of the subsequent actions.

The central level institutional setting is similar across all five countries. One ministry is responsible for the entire sector, from pre-schooling to higher education and Vocational Education Training (VET). It is in charge of designing the overall strategy and policies, developing the curricula, determining school standards, approving textbooks and allocating financial resources. Public semi-autonomous agencies, under the ministry's authority, assist in the implementation of education policies, especially in matters pertaining to the management of exams, quality insurance, national qualification framework and teachers' training. A process of devolution of responsibilities to lower administrative levels (local governments, deconcentrated services/territorial administration and schools) is under way in the five countries but with varying degrees of advancement and different institutional choices.

*Other stakeholders and beneficiaries will include:*

As this action aims to contribute to improving the education systems in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, ultimately the education institutions and schools, including those of persons belonging to national minorities, as well as students and staff will be stakeholders and the final beneficiaries from the results of this action.

**EU Delegations** are also very important stakeholders of this action, notably as the main interlocutors of national authorities in their dialogue with the European Commission. The EU Delegations will therefore be key in the elaboration of the diagnostics, in supporting their effective use, but also in contributing to ensuring complementarities of subsequent actions with ongoing or forthcoming programming in the sector.

## **2. RATIONALE**

### **2.1 Context**

#### **The regional context**

Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine has fundamentally changed the geopolitical landscape in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region.

The decision to grant Ukraine and Moldova candidate status and provide an EU membership perspective to Georgia, has transformed the nature of the EU's engagement with the Associated Trio.

The EU is also actively facilitating and supporting the normalisation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Belarus has seen an unprecedented mobilisation of grassroots movements following the falsified elections in August 2020. Taking into account the EU Restrictive measures in view of the situation in Belarus<sup>4</sup> and the involvement of Belarus in the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU's support focuses on medium to long term assistance, in order to sustain and strengthen the remaining civil society in Belarus and in exile, and to preserve and develop Belarus's human capital potential – thus laying the foundations for a prosperous future democratic Belarus, in the event of a political transition.

The EU continues to support the resilience of Belarusian people and organisations affected by the political crisis by providing support to the civil society, independent media and other non-governmental actors.

The European Union has also significantly increased its support to the mobility of people and in the field of education. This is strategically important for addressing immediate challenges but also for the long-term development of a democratic Belarus.

Against this background, Member States and partner countries were united in their calls for the continuation of the EaP, albeit in a more flexible, streamlined format, which focuses on the areas in which regional cooperation offers the most added value.

#### **The need to modernise education systems in the EaP region and to invest in Education**

In general, educational attainments are high in the EaP region and the vast majority of the labour force has a medium or high level of education. However, differences are pronounced between the five countries: in 2020, in Ukraine and Georgia, above 90% of the population group aged 20-24 had achieved at least an upper secondary educational level; in Moldova and Armenia, despite an increase over the period, the proportion

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<sup>4</sup> In line with the Council Conclusions of 12 October 2020 and in light of Belarus's involvement in the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, recognised in the European Council Conclusions of February 2022, the EU has stopped engaging with representatives of Belarus public bodies and state-owned enterprises. Should there be a change of the context this may be reconsidered. In the meantime, the EU continues to engage with and, where possible, has stepped up support to non-state, local and regional actors, including within the framework of this regional programme, as appropriate.

remained much lower.<sup>5</sup> Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has significantly destabilised the education system in Ukraine and neighbouring countries such as Moldova and is challenging the continuity of access to quality education. In Ukraine, as a result of shelling and bombing, 3,151 educational institutions were damaged, of which 440 were destroyed since February 2022, which intensified online education services already implemented during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Of the children and teachers who need education services, 35 per cent are those who are displaced inside the country.

The six countries have achieved high levels of education participation at all levels and full literacy. In 2020-2021, net enrolment rates are close to or above 90% for all basic education cycles. In terms of pre-primary education, the five countries can be divided in two groups: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have an extensive coverage, with high gross enrolment rates (85-95%) while the sub-sector remained relatively undeveloped in Armenia and Azerbaijan (gross enrolment ratio around 45%). Gross enrolment rates in higher education vary from 38% in Azerbaijan to about 80% in Ukraine (against an EU average of 40%). Participation in vocational education and training also varies across the five countries: from higher level participation in Azerbaijan 43.2% and Moldova to 45.3% to medium level in Armenia 25.9% and Ukraine 27% down to 7.6% in Georgia in 2020. Participation in lifelong learning of population aged 25-64 remains very low in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine between 0.5-1% while in Armenia and Azerbaijan, it varies between 7-9% but remains below the EU average of 11% in 2021.<sup>6</sup>

The partner countries consistently perform below the EU and OECD averages in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys, in reading, mathematics and science with some countries however registering some improvements in the most recent surveys. There is also inadequacy between skills provision in Vocational education and training (VET) institutions and skills demand on the labour market, including to support the ecological transition. Data on inequalities are not systematically available for the six countries. Nevertheless, significant discrepancies exist between students in rural and urban areas, both in terms of access and learning achievements, and the education systems in the five countries insufficiently address the educational needs of vulnerable groups such as children from ethnic minority groups, refugees and displaced children and children with special needs.

In the area of **higher education**, most of the EU funding is provided through **Erasmus+**. Erasmus+ includes a strong international dimension in mobility and cooperation activities. It supports European organisations in an intensification of international mobility and cooperation with third countries not associated to the programme, including EaP. Erasmus+ is a well-known and highly appreciated programme amongst the academic community, the student population, and amongst youth organisations in the region. In the current programme 2021-2027, Erasmus+ supports the EaP countries with the total budget of EUR 215 million in mobility of students, staff and youth, as well as in building capacity of higher education institutions, vocational education and training or virtual exchanges projects. In general, activities implemented by Erasmus+ are addressing the key challenges in the EaP region, contributing to human and institutional development, digital transition, peace and security.

All EaP countries are members of the **Bologna process** (except for Belarus). The Bologna Process seeks to bring more coherence to higher education systems across Europe. It established the **European Higher Education Area** to facilitate student and staff mobility, to make higher education more inclusive and accessible, and to make higher education in Europe more attractive and competitive worldwide.

Moreover, for the past 10 years EaP countries have been involved in the **eTwinning programme** for schools, allowing them to cooperate directly with thousands of schools throughout Europe.

Some strategic priorities and ongoing areas of reforms cut across the partner countries. In general, educational infrastructure is in poor state and not adapted to students with special needs, across all sub-sectors of

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<sup>5</sup> Moldova: 71% for men and 73% for women. Armenia: 57.6% for men and 44% for women. No recent data for Azerbaijan. Source: EU – Eurostat (2022) European Neighbourhood Policy - East - education statistics - Statistics Explained (europa.eu)

<sup>6</sup> Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

education. The school network has not been adjusted to structural demographic trends and calls for a rationalization of material and human resources. A second reform axis deals with quality improvement through the revision and delivery of curricula and learning content, towards a competence-based approach, and a focus on the teaching profession.

**Strategic planning** efforts have recently been deployed in several Eastern Partnership countries, which have adopted sector-wide strategic frameworks for the period up to 2030. These strategies are accompanied by medium-term operational plans. All countries, however, face challenges of institutional coordination, at both inter-sectoral and institutional level and between the central and local levels. Efforts to further strengthen planning, monitoring and evaluation capacities should be deployed in order to effectively implement strategic frameworks. In general, the Eastern Partnership region is characterized by a limited availability of comprehensive sector analyses allowing to have a holistic outlook on education performance and organizational features, institutional and governance challenges, as well as financial and human resources, to inform sector strategy and policy development and planning.

However, in 2018-2019, development partners (UNICEF, World Bank) have published sector analyses for Moldova and Ukraine. In Georgia and Armenia, the recent government design of a new strategy has built on sector diagnoses but they are not widely/publicly available and it does not seem that these analyses have been envisioned as tools to support the strengthening of planning and monitoring -capacities within ministries of education.

**Financial data** is in general only available at aggregated level and very little is known on funding mechanisms and financial flows to education institutions. In-depth institutional analyses, including of devolution processes, are not available either. Progress towards the full operationalization of an **Education Management Information System** varies across the partner countries, and ministries' limited capacity to systematically process and analyze data, significantly reduces the use of evidence for policy planning and monitoring.

Despite these positive performances in terms of participation, all countries face challenges in terms of **quality**, across all sub-sectors. This includes the quality of teaching and learning and students' mastery of subject knowledge and transversal skills. Inequalities in access and in learning achievements are also noted, such as between students in rural and urban areas, for specific vulnerable groups. While gender parity is generally achieved in terms of access at primary and secondary level, women's enrolment in higher education is higher than that of men.

With the exception of Armenia, between 2010 and 2021, levels of public expenditure on education have converged towards the EU average (4.8% of GDP in 2021),<sup>7</sup> following both upward and downward trends. Moldova and Ukraine, which started from very high levels, recorded a decrease (from 7.7% to 5.8% of GDP over 2010-2021 for Moldova and from 6.6% to 5.5% for Ukraine) but remain today above the EU average. However, due to the Russian war of aggression, in Ukraine, the 2022 education budget sustained dramatic cuts, which has had a serious impact on teachers' salaries. On the other hand, between 2010 and 2020, Georgia and Azerbaijan have increased their financial effort towards education, a positive trend which recently stalled. In both countries, public expenditure on education grew from 2.8% to 3.8% of GDP over 2010-2020 before dropping in 2021 to 3.3% in Azerbaijan and to 3.6% in Georgia. Armenia lags behind: of the five countries, it has the lowest education spending, which has also declined from 2.8% of GDP in 2010 to 2.3% in 2020 before an increase to 2.7%, close to its 2010 level. For these last three countries, education spending remains low compared to international benchmarks and considering the significant infrastructural improvements required across their education systems.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Source: Eurostat.

<sup>8</sup> Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

In all countries, citizens' right to education is recognized by the constitution and the Education Law. Primary and lower secondary education is free and compulsory. The **central level institutional setting** is similar across all five countries. One single ministry is responsible for the entire sector, from pre-schooling to higher education and VET. It is in charge of designing the overall strategy and policies, developing the curricula, determining school standards, approving textbooks and allocating financial resources. Public semi-autonomous agencies, under the ministry's authority, assist in the implementation of education policies, especially in matters pertaining to the management of exams, quality insurance, national qualification framework and teachers' training.

A process of **devolution of responsibilities** to lower administrative levels (local governments, deconcentrated services/territorial administration and schools) is under way in the five countries but with varying degrees of advancement and different institutional choices. In Georgia, schools enjoy a large autonomy, with support of local state services and only pre-primary education falls under local authorities' responsibility. In Armenia, with the exception of high schools and some pilot general, the state territorial administration (provinces) is in charge of the management of schools. In Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine, management competences for pre-primary, primary and secondary schools have been formally decentralised to local authorities whereas the current status of implementation remains unclear. In Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, formula-based mechanisms for financial transfers to schools have been introduced.

In **Belarus**, general problems in the education system include state monopolisation, excessive regulation and bureaucratisation, limited autonomy and freedom of educational institutions and teachers, and insufficient adaptation to the modern context (including poor educational materials, ill-adapted curricula, and weak development of innovative and modern forms of education, especially for distance education). Humanities, civic education, as well as history and culture are more and more replaced by ideological concepts.

Belarusian students and the academic and teaching community were one of the most visible groups in the protests after the 2020 election. Repressions against students and the academic community resulted in arrests, dismissal, expulsion and pressure. Since the end of 2021 there has been a second wave of mass dismissals and bans on the profession in education, which has affected secondary school teachers, university professors, researchers and academia.

Because of the high level of state and ideological control over higher and secondary education, it is extremely difficult to count on the transformation of education through cooperation with state-controlled institutions. However, the liquidation of CSOs and the closure of EU-supported education programmes has resulted in a dramatic decrease in alternative education sources. In this context, it is necessary to support opportunities for Belarusians to benefit from high quality education abroad, and to foster the development of alternative educational opportunities and institutions. In addition, further strengthening of the European Humanities University (EHU) through scholarship-based contribution is essential to consolidate the university's institutional development and to strengthen its reputation for providing a high-quality learning and teaching experience. The EHU could feasibly constitute a model higher education institution for the future democratic Belarus, allowing for the transfer of established practices and European standards to the educational system of Belarus in the event of a political transition. Moreover, there is a need to support strategic thinking in the sphere of education reform. All these efforts should be seen as a basis for a transformed educational system in Belarus, to be replicated following a democratic transition. Building synergy between numerous projects and initiatives is therefore essential. There is also a need to support the training and retraining of Belarusian professionals from across all spheres of Belarusian society. This includes not only civil society activists, journalists but also other professionals who were forced to leave Belarus or stay without a job in the country as a result of the ongoing repressions, and who require assistance to find employment and continue their professional development.

## **Linkages of the Action with the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) and the European Green Deal (EGD)**

The **Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership** supports the investment pillar presented in the joint staff working document (“Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities” from July 2021). One of its pillar is to invest in people and knowledge societies, the plan is focusing on education reforms, including in higher education, primary education, vocational education and training and life-long learning.

One of the **flagships of the EIP in Moldova**, aims to provide concrete assistance to the Ministry of Education and Research in its efforts to implement the national education strategy. Modernising the education system, improving school infrastructure, matching skills development to labour market demand – with a focus on green and digital jobs- and ensuring the attractiveness of teaching profession are key. The aim is to improve access, relevance and quality of education via technical assistance, the supply of equipment and the refurbishment of schools infrastructure. Additional measures to improve access to childcare and other basic social services, among other things, are mobilised to boost women’s employment. The overall cost of the programme is estimated to amount up to €25 million. The EU use mainly grants to support the implementation of this flagship.

Activating education and training is also a key feature of the EGD, which recognizes the importance of **schools, training institutions and universities to engage with pupils, parents, and the wider community on the changes needed for a successful transition.**

### **Complementarity with funding of other donors**

In the partner countries, for the last 15-20 years, the World Bank has consistently been engaged in supporting structural changes in education, in all sub-sectors, promoting a set of systemic and institutional changes. Its main areas of intervention in basic education have been curriculum reform, teacher training and professional development, the strengthening of monitoring capacities through the establishment of Education Management Information System (EMIS) and student learning assessment mechanisms.

The Asian Development Bank supports education sector reforms in Southern Caucasus including Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Projects vary from supporting VET and secondary general education with substantial funding particularly in Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Global Partnership for Education is operating in Moldova and Ukraine, where UNICEF is the implementing agency. Information on EU member states’ interventions in the region is limited, except for Germany’s support to the TVET sector. Recently, the French Development Agency has teamed up with the World Bank to implement Georgia Human Capital project.

As a result of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, humanitarian agencies have deployed emergency education interventions in Ukraine but also in neighbouring countries to address refugee children’s education needs. In Ukraine specific, the European Commission allocated a EUR 100 million support package for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of schooling facilities damaged in Russia’s full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine. Support is implemented through EU’s humanitarian partners (EUR 34 million) and partly as budget support to the Government of Ukraine directly (EUR 66 million). The Commission has also launched an EU-wide solidarity campaign to donate school buses for Ukraine, channelled through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

Other donors made relevant contributions to the education sector but they never addressed the lack of evidence and the need for diagnostics of education systems in the Eastern Partnership region.

## 2.2 Problem Analysis

**A well performing education system is essential for the future prosperity and stability of EaP countries.** While the value of an education is multifaceted and has a major impact on strengthening relations between partner countries and the European Union, a strong education system is vital for innovation, competitiveness and job creation, reduces poverty and boosts economic growth, has a positive impact on health and life expectancy, gender equality, is essential for social inclusion (including gender equality) and finally it is key for the fight against climate change and environmental degradation.

The main challenge in the Eastern Partnership region is the need to invest in education and training systems that prepare citizens for current and up-coming technological, social, environmental and economic changes. This should be addressed by Governments through the implementation of education reforms.

Throughout the EaP region, skills needs from enterprises are not met. Improving the quality of education systems could result in an enhanced capacity to respond to this gap, by focusing on necessary and relevant skills needs, qualifications and training programmes.

Real change in the education and training provision and system change is slow. There is still a big gap between policy intentions and change on the ground due to weak implementation capacity of institutions and Ministries of Education. Political instability and weak systems of governance have led to substantial discontinuity in policy development and implementation of reforms.

Despite a lack of national diagnostics on the education sector, some strategic challenges have been identified by the EaP countries, such as governance, the state of the infrastructure, the level of spending in the education sector and strategic planning.

Challenges faced by education systems in EaP countries include the following issues:

### 2.2.1 Weaknesses in governance and institutional capacities

All EaP countries face challenges of institutional coordination, both at inter-sectoral and institutional level and between the central and sub-national levels. Insufficient capacities in planning, monitoring and evaluation also undermine the implementation of strategic frameworks.

Strategic planning efforts have recently been deployed in Armenia, Georgia and Moldova, which have adopted a sector-wide strategic framework for the period up to 2030. These strategies are accompanied by medium-term operational plans. In Azerbaijan and Ukraine, while a previous education development plan covered the period 2013-2020/2021, the current status of strategic planning in the sector are unclear. In 2017, Ukraine adopted a new Law on Education and launched a reform of school education under the New Ukrainian School initiative, the implementation of which has become challenging in the current context. In 2022 the new “Socio-economic development strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2022-2026” was adopted.. The objective is to increase access to and the quality of pre-school education, increasing the share of one-to-five-year-olds enrolled in pre-school education to 50%, to apply a competency-based curriculum in general education, with resources allocated to improve PISA performance, increase access to and the quality of vocational education, focusing on the requirements of the labour market, integration of employers into the vocational education system, etc. In August 2022, the government of Georgia adopted the new Unified National Strategy of Education and Science 2022-2030 and Action Plan 2022-2024. A new national strategy ‘Education 2030’ has been also approved by the government of Moldova in March 2023. Armenia’s comprehensive Education Strategy covering the whole education spectrum (pre-school education, primary and

secondary schools, vocational education, life-long learning and higher education) and the accompanying Action Plan were respectively adopted in December 2022 and March 2023.

In general, the EaP region is characterised by a **limited availability of comprehensive sector analyses** including education performance and organisational features, institutional and governance challenges, as well as financial and human resources, to inform sector strategy development and planning.

Progress towards the full operationalisation of an Education Management Information System varies across the five countries. **The limited capacity to systematically process and analyse data significantly reduces the use of evidence. This lack of systematic education policy monitoring and evaluation hinders countries capacity to steer the education system performance** and adjust education policies accordingly.

Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems is fundamental to ensure continuous improvement of policies and actions. This includes the development of results-oriented systems of assessment, with relevant data and indicators to monitor and evaluate progress and achievements.

Proper and timely **evidence on skills demand and supply** is also an essential ingredient for making education and training relevant to socio-economic needs and to support progress towards gender equality and the green transition.

**Governance** remains an important hindering factor for efficient and effective policymaking and policy implementation in most countries in the field of education. Ministries of Education have limited staff with weak capacities in the EaP, with weaknesses in governance leading to discontinuities in policy development and implementation.

Policy decision-making is traditionally characterised by highly centralised systems, paralleled with fragmentation of responsibilities, unclear roles and lack of coordination mechanisms hampering cooperation among different governmental bodies (with dispersion of resources and overlaps). Efforts have been put in place to overcome the existing fragmentation through testing mechanisms to improve coordination. However, there is a long way to go to change the traditional governance settings and arrangements for countries to be able to achieve full speed and operational reforms implementation. **The governance of the education systems needs improvement** to ensure permanent and coordinated interaction among actors at different levels (including sectoral and subnational levels). Moreover, there is a **need for a reinforcement of the monitoring capacities** of the countries, to cover policy implementation, education system outcomes, and the changes in skills demand.

For some of the EaP countries, education spending remains low compared to international benchmarks and considering the significant infrastructural improvements required across their education systems. In most countries, the extensive network of small schools is not conducive to efficient allocation of financial, material and human resources. However, some countries achieve higher learning outcomes than countries with similar levels of spending.

### **2.2.2 Challenges related to the quality of education**

All EaP countries face challenges in terms of quality, across all sub-sectors of education. This includes the quality of teaching and learning and students' mastery of subject knowledge and transversal skills. The five countries consistently perform below the EU and OECD averages in PISA surveys, in reading, mathematics and science, even though Armenia and Moldova have registered some improvements in the most recent surveys. There is also mismatch between skills supply in VET institutions and skills demand on the labour market.

Ongoing reforms related to quality improvement include reforms related to the revision and delivery of curricula, towards a competence-based approach, and a focus on the teaching profession. In all EaP countries, the teaching force is ageing and the profession is unattractive due to a relatively low pay. The shortage of teachers is particularly acute for Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Ongoing reforms focus is on teachers' pre-service training and recruitment, career advancement and professional development. At least in Armenia and Georgia, pay rises have also been granted to teachers and school administrators to enhance the attractiveness of the profession.

(STEM) programmes, should also build national and local knowledge and capacity on climate change and environment management that are relevant to local circumstances and can be applied across all sectors of the economy.

### **2.2.3 Inequalities and challenges related to inclusiveness**

Data informing on **inequalities** are not systematically available. Nevertheless, significant disparities exist between students in rural and urban areas, both in terms of access and learning achievements. The war in Ukraine has substantially impacted education quality of all children in the country, specifically in rural areas where access is greatly impeded by the recurrent shelling. In PISA studies, students from urban areas outperform students from rural areas at rates much greater than in similar OECD countries. Moreover, the education systems in the five countries insufficiently address the educational needs of **vulnerable groups** such as ethnic minority groups, refugees and displaced children and children with special needs. In particular, refugees in Moldova consistently identify education and learning as a top priority while in displacement. The Government of Moldova should be assisted in expanding access to all forms of education and improve quality and inclusiveness of education and learning for refugees. This should include the provision of language support, skill development, teacher training and the provision of dedicated material, technology and devices ensuring inclusion of refugee children with disabilities and Roma children. Finally, the inclusion and remuneration of Ukrainian teachers in Moldova should be supported.

While gender parity is generally achieved in terms of access at primary and secondary level, women's enrolment in higher education is higher than that of men. Boys also perform worse than girls in PISA studies, at rates exceeding international averages and, except for Armenia, youth educational attainment is also significantly higher for women than for men.

Nevertheless, gender stereotypes continue to influence teaching practices and materials and traditional gender norms keep influencing the choice of specialisations both in VET and higher education, where women hardly opt for STEM disciplines.

## 2.3 Lessons learned

The recent expansion in education is impressive by historical standards. In many partner countries (including the Eastern Partnership) over the last few decades, net enrolment in education has greatly outpaced the historic performance of today's industrial countries. The payoff to these efforts is education that delivers for growth, economic and social development. But schooling (and access to education) is not the same as learning. Schooling without learning is a wasted opportunity. More than that, it is a great injustice: the children whom society is failing most are the ones who most need a good education to succeed in life. Children learn very little in many education systems: even after several years in school, thousands of students lack basic literacy and numeracy skills.

There is nothing inevitable; adaptation of existing strategies and instruments can make the **difference if policies are evidence based and monitored through a relevant system based on indicators and benchmarking**. Partner countries in the EaP region should better design **evidence-based education policies**. The first step to improving education policies and reforms is **to put in place good metrics** for monitoring whether programmes and policies are delivering quality and inclusiveness in the education systems. Credible, reliable information and evidence can shape the incentives facing politicians. Most notably, information on student learning and school performance fosters healthier political engagement and better service delivery. Information also helps education ministries and policy makers manage a complex system. **Measuring learning** can improve equity by revealing hidden exclusions. As emphasized at the outset of this overview, the learning crisis is not just a problem for the society and economy overall; it is also a fundamental source of inequalities and widening gaps in opportunity.

### Lessons learned from relevant ongoing actions funded by the EU

So far, the EU support in the region has primarily focused on higher education (through Erasmus+) and VET (through bilateral programmes and the support provided by the European Training Foundation). Support to basic education has traditionally been limited. Nevertheless, most recently, in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova the EU has broadened its programmatic scope to encompass issues pertaining to quality improvements and systemic reforms in basic education (EU4INNOVATION project 2019-2023, and the recently approved EU Support to Education programme in Armenia; support to Azerbaijan's agency for quality insurance in education).

The EU is currently implementing (with IIEP) education sector diagnostics in the Republic of North Macedonia and Albania. This action does not offer follow up actions such as the capacity development activities proposed under this action. Limited lessons learned are available at this stage as several diagnostics are still underway.

In parallel, **ETF (European Training Foundation) conducted a diagnostic** in Kosovo. Lessons learned from this diagnostic, as well as from another diagnostic conducted in the NEAR region, in Lebanon, have permitted to identify the following success factors:

- Strong interconnectivity: Teamwork based on regular exchange (team meetings) to develop collective intelligence, common understanding and flexibility
- Strong commitment and constant involvement of national technical team members is needed to help mobilise institutions, ensure access to data and interlocutors, provide feedback and protect neutrality
- Continuous ownership and co-management/leadership of the implementation process by the designated national partners.
- Partnership/involvement of other development cooperation partners operating in the education sector

The diagnostics conducted by the European Training Foundation (ETF) allowed to **provide a holistic overview and panorama on shortcomings and priorities needed in the design and adjustment of**

**education strategies and policy priorities** and provide hands-on recommendations and roadmaps for both quick fixes as well as medium and long-term targets. They also informed the EU services on the focus and scope of new EU financed interventions in education sector. Besides the core dimensions of the methodology on assessing financing, governance and inequality in education system new dimensions such as digitalisation of education and the impact of green transition on education system and learning outcomes can be considered in future diagnostics. A rapid availability of the diagnostics results through thorough assessments engaging all stakeholders in the education sector were appreciated by the partner country stakeholders. The experience proved that the diagnostics methodology worked well in compact and relatively small size countries. If replicated in a larger country such as Ukraine it may need to review more in-depth also a couple of pilot regions, for instance those with education in national minority languages, besides assessing the governance and performance of the education system at the national level. Moreover, access to available data and a participatory approach engaging key stakeholders at all levels of education including civil society is critical for holistic diagnostics of the entire education system and a consensus of policy priorities and actions.

**A diagnostic of education systems in the EaP region will allow partner countries to act on evidence: assess weaknesses (regarding governance and financing and priorities at national level), to make reforms a serious goal and have impact.**

### **3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION**

#### **3.1 Objectives and Expected Outputs**

The objective of this action is to support the strengthening of EaP partner countries education systems, with a particular focus on the governance of the systems, to contribute to improved equity, quality and relevance of education in EaP partner countries. The action will be offering the possibility to undertake diagnostics of the education sectors for the five EaP countries, providing a detailed analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the education sector. Findings and recommendations emerging from the analysis will serve as the basis for follow-up work, within the action. This follow up will include the possibility to undertake more detailed analysis of specific areas, and capacity development at partner country level, while, at regional level, it will focus on providing training opportunities. The diagnostics are intended to support both the Ministries of Education (MoEs) in their sector policy and planning work, and the EU in its engagement with EaP countries in the education sector, inform and reinforce the policy dialogue and the further prioritisation of future interventions. For Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia this diagnostic should also support further alignment with the European Education Area.

#### **Overview of the action and the three pillars:**

The implementation of the action will be organised in three pillars, focusing on the following areas:

- First Pillar: Education sector diagnostics
- Second Pillar: Capacity development for policy implementation
- Third Pillar: Training

#### **Pillar 1. Education sector diagnostics**

This first component should offer the five EaP countries the possibility to undertake education sector diagnostics, *i.e.* an education sector analysis providing information on the sector context and performance (including where relevant legislation, human and financial resources). These diagnostics are an important tool for sector planning, including for the work on strategies, and priority programmes. These diagnostics provide

information on sector challenges and are also a good basis for sector dialogue and the identification of potential areas to focus external technical and financial support.

Depending on the country context, it can be decided that one or several areas of the analysis deserve more attention in the diagnostic, for instance education for national minorities in Ukraine.

This component may be implemented in a phased approach (i.e. not all countries will be covered in Year 1 of the action) responding to the needs and ensuring a suitable timeline for partner countries.

The process of conducting the diagnostic will be carried out in close cooperation between external/international specialists, national experts and staff from the Ministry of Education/other concerned ministries and the EU Delegations as well as other relevant stakeholders. The process itself constitutes an exercise to support strengthening of capacities in gathering and analysing available information and data on the sector. In addition, the sector analysis typically includes an assessment of institutional/organisational capacity.

## **Pillar 2. Targeted capacity development - Partner country (national) level**

Activities under this component will follow up the results of the diagnostics and should aim to support the ministries of education to initiate activities related to the implementation of specific recommendations/actions emerging from the diagnostic work.

This component should offer the possibility to provide targeted technical support at central and possibly sub-national level on system challenges and bottlenecks identified through the diagnostic work, including:

- To deepen the analysis in one (or more) specific area such as sector planning, financing and governance in which capacity development could be offered (e.g. in planning, or monitoring of sector performance in the implementation of its plans). More in depth analysis of challenges encountered in sector financing/PFM could also be considered.
- Targeted technical capacity development in specific planning/governance functions of the Ministry of Education/sub-national education authorities.

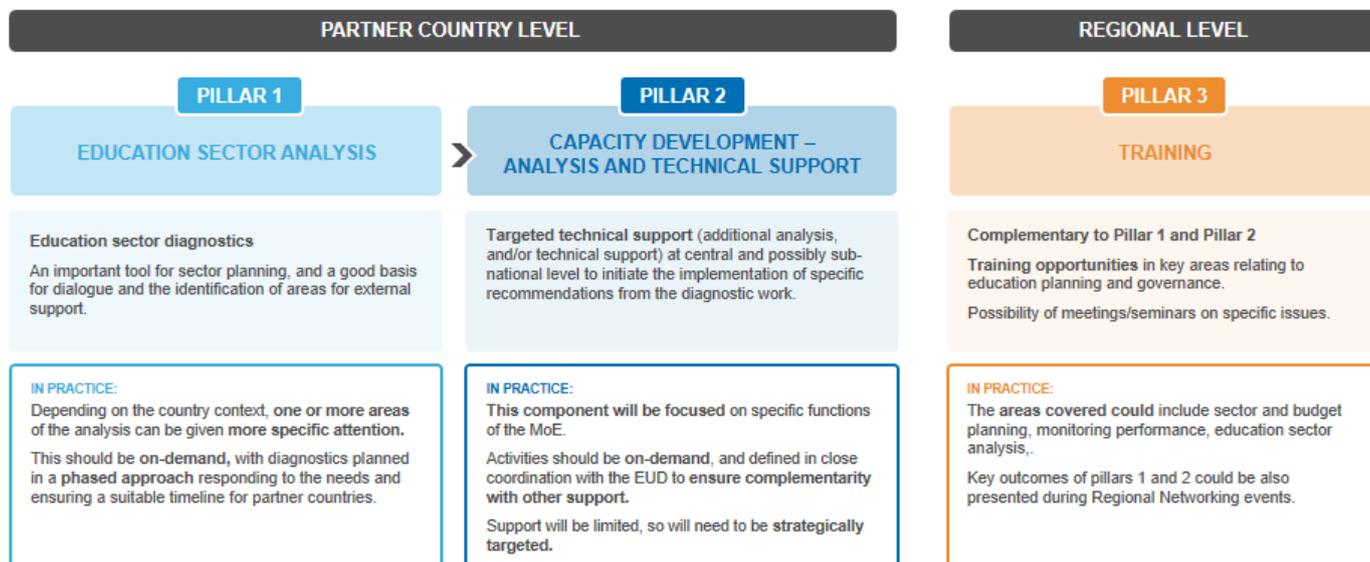
While it would be ideally linked to the results of the sector diagnostic, flexibility should be given to respond to requests even in the case where a full sector diagnostic is not undertaken, as long as such request has a clear link to the objective of this action and is embedded within a strategic education reform agenda in the country in line with this action. This component will need to be focused on some specific areas/functions of the MoE. These activities will need to be defined in close coordination with the EU Delegations to ensure complementarity with other EU financed bilateral support. This support will be limited/timebound, to be strategically targeted. It could be extended by future bilateral actions.

## **Pillar 3. Training - Regional level**

This component is intended to complement the specific country level diagnostic work, by offering learning opportunities at the regional level, gathering MoEs representatives and possibly other stakeholders, centred around a series of short training courses in key areas relating e.g. to education planning and governance. The regional courses will bring together staff from MoE or public agencies under the Ministries of Education authority from several of the partner countries involved in the action, and could be delivered through a blended learning approach, with online and face-to-face courses, and including a strong focus on practical exercises, drawing on country / regional contexts. The specific areas covered can be determined based on dialogue and an assessment of needs, but indicatively could include areas such as sector and budget planning, monitoring sector performance, education sector analysis/diagnostic,

This component could also offer the possibility of meetings/seminars around specific thematic areas. Focusing on the workforce of the Ministries of Education and Public agencies under the Ministries of Education authority, assisting in the implementation of education policies by providing relevant trainings, should ultimately contribute to an increase of the overall quality of the education system. Involving them in

the diagnostic process, and related capacity development and trainings should contribute to an increased ownership of the reforms. The areas covered by these trainings could include sector and budget planning, governance, monitoring performance, education in minority languages. Some training workshops from Pillar 3 will be opened to the Belarusian civil society (Belarus will be excluded for pillars 1 and 2).



The first two pillars will be implemented at partner country level and tailor made to the country contexts, the third pillar will be the regional pillar, offering opportunities for trainings, peer to peer learning, and exchange of experience. It is expected that the action and its different pillars will together contribute to an enhanced sector policy dialogue on education in the partner countries.

**The Overall Objective (Impact)** of this action is to contribute to improved equity, quality and relevance of education in the partner countries.

**The Specific Objectives** of this action are to

- SO1: Improve governance of the education systems in the Eastern Partnership countries
- SO2: Strengthen capacities in evidence based planning and monitoring of performance in the education sector

The **Outputs** to be delivered by this action contributing to the corresponding Specific Objectives are the following.

**Output 1 (SO 1):** Diagnostics of the national education sectors completed (maximum 5) (*First Pillar*)

**Output 2 (SO 2):** Strengthened capacities of the national administrations/institutions in governance, financing and planning of education (*Second Pillar and Third Pillar*)

**Output 3 (SO 2):** Increased training and peer learning opportunities (*Third Pillar*)

### 3.2 Indicative Activities

Activities proposed by the action, particularly under Pillar 1 and 2, will be provided on-demand and tailor made to the context and needs of the partner countries. The scope and focus of the diagnostics can indeed be adapted, as well the timing for their implementation, to ensure that they are responding to the sector context. The capacity development activities and possibly additional more in-depth reviews that will take place at country level will be on demand, and based on the analysis and recommendations of the diagnostics and on the recommendations from relevant bodies, such as the Council of Europe's Venice Commission. The scope and focus of these might therefore differ from country to country. The Third Pillar should provide a training offer, and peer to peer learning opportunities. Regional training seminars could indicatively be linked to sector governance and management, including planning and monitoring.

#### **Output 1 (SO 1): Diagnostics of the national education sectors completed**

Indicative activities under this output include:

- Implementation of sector diagnostics for maximum 5 countries
- Preparation of cross-country policy papers on common challenges for equitable and quality education systems in the countries of the Eastern partnership region (or on a more specific topic)

#### **Output 2 (SO 2): Strengthened capacities of the national administrations/institutions in terms of governance, financing and planning**

This concerns demand driven capacity development support. Indicative activities under this output depend on requests from partner countries and may include:

- Functional reviews/Institutional assessments on specific MoE functions such as planning or monitoring conducted, actions plans prepared to reinforce the capacities of the system from central to sub-national levels
- Analysis on financing/Public Financial Management (PFM) - Public Expenditure Reviews (PERs)
- Drafting of a roadmap after the identification of specific priority areas from the diagnostics.
- Carrying out actions to reinforce capacities in planning, data use for the development and the monitoring of the implementation of policies/reforms/strategies
- Supporting the development of policy frameworks and capacities for monitoring the implementation of reforms.

#### **Output 3 (SO 2): Increased training and peer learning opportunities, resources and experience shared**

To foster exchanges of experiences, good and innovative practices, tools and instruments in education among the participating countries, through training workshops, peer learning events and visits. These activities under the third pillar should offer networking opportunities (possibly leading to the creation of frameworks) among peer institutions playing a key role in the education sector, and education sector agencies responsible for key functions in the education system.

The action will create a community of practitioners at regional level and also of national minority languages. It is important to develop knowledge and exchanges by bringing together **implementation practitioners at regional level**.

Indicative activities under this output include, inter alia:

- Peer learning activities of different forms, including thematic workshops, peer visits, internships, others
- Modular regional training and capacity development programme for Ministries of Education, Ministries of Finance, relevant public institutions and agencies under the MoE authority, and academia
- Training seminars
- Facilitating the participation in existing international networks and specialised platforms of exchange.

### **3.3 Mainstreaming**

#### **Environmental Protection, Climate Change and Biodiversity**

**Outcomes of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening** concluded that key environmental and climate-related aspects need to be addressed during design.

**Outcomes of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening** classified the action as Category B (not requiring an EIA, but for which environment aspects will be addressed during design).

**Outcome of the Climate Risk Assessment (CRA) screening** concluded that this action is no or low risk (no need for further assessment).

#### **Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls**

As per OECD Gender DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as G1. This implies that special attention should be given to secure equal treatment to all genders in training, preparation of training materials and guidelines.

#### **Human Rights**

The main human right supported by this project is the right to education secured by Protocol 1, Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). In addition, this action also considers Prohibition of discrimination and equal treatment of genders secured by article 14 and protocol 12, Article 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Also, this action considers the Articles 12-14 concerning the education rights of persons belonging to national minorities of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities as well as related recommendations of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.

#### **Disability**

As per OECD Disability DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as D1. This implies that special attention will be given to inclusiveness and accessibility of educational process, especially for children and teachers with disabilities.

#### **Democracy**

The action does not directly target democratic development. Democratic principles will be taken into consideration, particularly in the guidelines and educational modules elaborated within the action.

#### **Conflict sensitivity, peace and resilience**

The action does not directly target conflict prevention and peace, however the 'do no harm' principle and conflict-sensitivity will be embedded in the activities.

## Disaster Risk Reduction

N/A

### 3.4 Risks and Assumptions

Categories	Risks	Likelihood (High/ Medium/ Low)	Impact (High/ Medium/ Low)	Mitigating measures
External environment	Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and geopolitical tensions in the Eastern Partnership region might impede the implementation of the action in certain countries.	M/H	H	Implementer (jointly with EU Delegations) maintaining policy dialogue with parties at technical level.  The EU will continue to provide support to the partner countries over the implementation of this project but will ensure that operations are adapted and adjusted if necessary to the evolving situation, the Steering Committee of the action will have an important role in this regard. Contingency measures will be provided.
External environment	Political and macro-economic instability preventing a regional focus on the support provided.	M	M	With the exception of Belarus (not fully covered by this action) and Ukraine (where efforts will focus stimulating the resilience of the education sector), political and macroeconomic instability could affect the implementation of the action in specific countries. The flexibility of the action will allow to refocus the activities if needed.
External environment	Global crises, such as COVID-19 pandemic waves, hamper the implementation of activities.	M	M	Digitalisation of activities and online remote capacity development; collaborating with governmental entities and service providers to explore all implementation alternatives.
People and the organisation	Lack of full political support to the action, for instance if the action objectives are not considered	L	H	Policy dialogue and close communication with line Government entities (except with Belarus); consultations; transparent procedures; involvement of relevant social actors.

	a political priority anymore.			
People and the organisation	Lack of coordination among involved institutions.	<b>M</b>	<b>M</b>	Coordination supported by the action. A participatory approach will facilitate a full coordination between concerned parties.

### 3.5 Intervention Logic

The underlying intervention logic for this action is that the action will enable the conduct of comprehensive diagnosis in the partner countries, which should contribute to evidence based policies and reforms, and support the reinforcement of sector strategies and plans, as well as to their implementations. This action is designed to provide on-demand diagnosis, responding to the country contexts, and request of the national authorities which should be the ultimate beneficiaries of these. The diagnostics will also benefit EU Delegations in their engagement in the sector and related policy dialogue. Working in collaboration with national authorities will ensure the relevance of the diagnosis and ownership will contribute to their use to inform sector planning, the implementation of reforms and recommended actions deriving from these analysis.

Capacity development needs and activities will be identified on the basis of the diagnosis, as well as possibly more in depth reviews to inform follow up activities. Initial capacity development activities and technical support will be provided tailor made to each partner country context.

Finally regional trainings (seminars, peer to peer activities) completing the tailor made technical support at partner country level, and peer learning opportunities will be offered on sector thematic areas of common interest.

Ultimately this action should contribute to an improved governance and management of the education sector in EaP countries, contributing to an improved equity, quality and relevance of education in the partner countries.

### **3.6 Indicative Logical Framework Matrix**

PROJECT MODALITY (3 levels of results / indicators / Source of Data / Assumptions - no activities).

<b>Results</b>	<b>Results chain: Main expected results</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Baselines (values and years)</b>	<b>Targets (values and years)</b>	<b>Sources of data</b>	<b>Assumptions</b>
<b>Impact</b>	To contribute to improved equity, quality and relevance of education in the partner countries.	Improvement in basic skills achievement aiming at reaching EU wide target of less than 15% of 15 year-olds underachieving in reading, mathematics and science (Pisa indicators)	Baseline: PISA 2018 results for AZ, GE, MD, UA	1. less than 15% of 15 year-olds	1. OECD Pisa 2025 results report EaP National statistic	
<b>Outcome 1</b>	1. Improved governance of the education systems in the Eastern Partnership countries	1.1 Number of consultations with stakeholders incl. civil society at macro, meso and micro levels during sector diagnostics  1.2 Number of planned measures to reinforce central and sub-national levels capacities in the planning, implementation, monitoring and financing of education policies	1.1 Zero  1.2 Zero	1.1 Five consultations per country  1.2 Two to three measures per country	1.1 Ministries of Education and Annual Reports from the implementers  1.2 Ministries of Education and Annual Reports from the implementers	NA
<b>Outcome 2</b>	2. Strengthened capacities in evidence-based planning and monitoring of performance in education sector	2.1 Status of planning and monitoring mechanisms of performance in education and training	2.1 to be defined in the beginning of the project	2.1 to be defined in the beginning of the project	2.1 stakeholders survey at the beginning and end of project (as part of the diagnostics)	NA
<b>Output 1 related to Outcome 1</b>	1.1 Diagnostics of the national education sectors completed	1.1.1 Number of diagnostic assessments carried out and disseminated to stakeholders	1.1.1 Zero	1.1.1 Five diagnostic reports	1.1.1 Annual Reports from the implementers	NA

<p><b>Output 1 related to Outcome 2</b></p>	<p>2.1 Strengthened capacities of the national administrations/institutions in terms of governance, financing and planning</p>	<p>2.1.1 Findings and recommendations of diagnostic assessments feeding into policy design and implementation of the EaP countries.</p> <p>2.1.2 Number of education officials having increased their knowledge on planning, financing or monitoring, with support of the action</p>	<p>2.1.1 to be determined at the beginning of the project</p> <p>2.1.2 to be determined at the beginning of the project</p>	<p>2.1.1 to be determined at the beginning of the project</p> <p>2.1.2 to be determined at the beginning of the project</p>	<p>2.1.1 revised policy documents and action plans</p> <p>2.1.2 stakeholders survey at beginning and end of project (as part of the diagnostics)</p>	<p>NA</p>
<p><b>Output 2 related to Outcome 2</b></p>	<p>2.2 Increased training and Peer learning opportunities, resources and experience shared</p>	<p>2.2.1 Number of regional training sessions and workshops in presence &amp; online</p> <p>2.2.2 Progress in stakeholders' capacity in education policy making and performance monitoring</p> <p>2.2.3 Satisfaction rate of participants</p> <p>2.2.4 Education policy tools and documents available for all countries</p>	<p>2.2.1 to be determined in the beginning of the project</p> <p>2.2.2 to be determined in the beginning of the project</p>	<p>2.2.1 to be determined in the beginning of the project</p> <p>2.2.2 to be determined in the beginning of the project</p>	<p>2.2.1 Training plans</p> <p>2.2.2 Rapid Assessment of Capacity Development</p> <p>2.2.3 repository of good practice</p>	<p>NA</p>

## **4 IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS**

### **4.1 Financing Agreement**

In order to implement this action, it is not envisaged to conclude a financing agreement with the partner countries.

### **4.2 Indicative Implementation Period**

The indicative operational implementation period of this action, during which the activities described in section 3 will be carried out and the corresponding contracts and agreements implemented, is 72 months from the date of adoption by the Commission of this financing Decision.

Extensions of the implementation period may be agreed by the Commission's responsible authorising officer in duly justified cases.

### **4.3 Implementation Modalities**

The Commission will ensure that the EU appropriate rules and procedures for providing financing to third parties are respected, including review procedures, where appropriate, and compliance of the action with EU restrictive measures<sup>9</sup>.

#### **4.3.1 Indirect Management with a pillar-assessed entity <sup>10</sup>**

This action may be implemented in indirect management with a pillar-assessed entity, which will be selected by the Commission's services using the following criteria:

- The entity has internationally recognised role and experience in education diagnostics and it has the technical and managerial capacity to develop and implement programmes, platforms and actions with partners in the area of education and skills in the EaP countries.
- The entity has a clear mandate for the implementation of cooperation activities in the area of education and is guided by international standards and recognised normative instruments on education and skills.
- The entity has demonstrated transparency, impartiality, and the absence of conflict of interest, in other cooperation programmes with the EU.
- The entity has technical and managerial capacity in the field of education and skills.

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<sup>9</sup> [www.sanctionsmap.eu](http://www.sanctionsmap.eu) Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website it is the OJ version that prevails.

<sup>10</sup> The signature of a contribution agreement with the chosen entity is subject to the completion of the necessary pillar assessment.

The implementation by this entity entails meeting the two specific objectives of this Action:

1. Improve governance of the education systems in the Eastern Partnership countries
2. Strengthen capacities in evidence based planning and monitoring of performance in the education sector.

#### **4.3.2 Changes from indirect to direct management (and vice versa) mode due to exceptional circumstances**

If the implementation modality under indirect management as defined in section ‘4.3.1’ cannot be implemented due to circumstances beyond the control of the Commission or in case no compliant pillar assessed entity can be identified, the modality of implementation by grants under direct management would be used according to the following:

(a) Subject matter of the grant (s):

The objective of the grant is to achieve the two specific objectives (SO1 and SO2) of the Action.

(b) Type of applicants targeted:

The selection criteria will be the ones defined in section 4.3.1 and aligned with article 195 (f) FR. Applicants may equally be economic operators that fulfil those criteria and can demonstrate experience in the work areas mentioned in ‘Article 4.3.1’.

#### **4.4 Scope of geographical eligibility for procurement and grants**

The geographical eligibility in terms of place of establishment for participating in procurement and grant award procedures and in terms of origin of supplies purchased as established in the basic act and set out in the relevant contractual documents shall apply, subject to the following provisions.

The Commission’s authorising officer responsible may extend the geographical eligibility on the basis of urgency or of unavailability of services in the markets of the countries or territories concerned, or in other duly substantiated cases where application of the eligibility rules would make the realisation of this action impossible or exceedingly difficult (Article 28(10) NDICI-Global Europe Regulation).

#### 4.5 Indicative Budget

<b>Indicative Budget components</b>	<b>EU contribution (amount in EUR) 2023</b>	<b>Total (amount in EUR)</b>
Indirect management with a pillar assessed entity - cf. section 4.3	2 500 000	2 500 000
Evaluation – cf. section 5.2 Audit – cf. section 5.3	N/A Covered by another decision	
Strategic communication and Public diplomacy – cf. section 6	N/A	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 500 000</b>	<b>2 500 000</b>

#### 4.6 Organisational Set-up and Responsibilities

An oversight mechanism shall be established to ensure coordination and complementarity of the different activity streams within the Action. It will comprise representatives of the European Commissions to ensure strategic guidance of the actions, with DG NEAR as contracting authority, the EU Delegations concerned and other line DGs, when necessary, for thematic guidance, as well as implementing partners and other stakeholders as appropriate. The steering committee will meet at least twice a year and additionally on a case-by-case basis if such a necessity arises. Performance monitoring and reporting, including in terms of visibility obligations, of the Action will be undertaken in accordance with the signed agreement.

Overall, the implementing partners will also manage the Action in close cooperation with the main stakeholders, counterpart institutions, national institutions and administrations. They shall closely coordinate with the relevant EU Delegations in consultation with DG NEAR.

As part of its prerogative of budget implementation and to safeguard the financial interests of the Union, the Commission may participate in the above governance structures set up for governing the implementation of the action.

### 5. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

#### 5.1 Monitoring and Reporting

The day-to-day technical and financial monitoring of the implementation of this action will be a continuous process, and part of the implementing partner's responsibilities. To this aim, the implementing partner shall establish a permanent internal, technical and financial monitoring system for the action and elaborate regular progress reports (not less than annual) and final reports. Every report shall provide an accurate account of implementation of the action, difficulties encountered, changes introduced, as well as the degree of achievement of its Outputs and contribution to the achievement of its Outcomes, and if possible at the time of reporting,

contribution to the achievement of its Impacts, as measured by corresponding indicators, using as reference the logframe matrix.

The Commission may undertake additional project monitoring visits both through its own staff and through independent consultants recruited directly by the Commission for independent monitoring reviews (or recruited by the responsible agent contracted by the Commission for implementing such reviews).

Arrangements for monitoring and reporting, including roles and responsibilities for data collection, analysis and monitoring:

Each of the project activities is related to specific outcomes/outputs and equipped with quantified indicators and deliverables. Throughout the implementation, the achieved results will be checked against original activity plans and project deliverables set as milestones. Indicator-based reporting will be performed based on the logframe. Relevant indicators will have to be disaggregated by country, geographic unit, age group, and gender. Where feasible, data specific for most vulnerable groups should be included.

The implementing partners will be responsible for the day-to-day execution and monitoring of the activities. In case of discrepancies, the project team will propose and introduce corrective measures. The normal procedure for eliminating discrepancies will be (a) recognition of discrepancy, (b) estimation of the level of discrepancy and potential impact (time, quantity and quality wise), (c) definition of reasons (internal and external), (d) preparation of a contingency plan (responsibilities, activities), (e) implementation of a contingency plan and (f) review.

DG NEAR will be regularly updated on progress made and any issues encountered. EU Delegations in beneficiary countries will be systematically consulted and informed of annual project work plans and on the progress of any bilateral activity within the project.

EU Delegations in beneficiary countries will be regularly consulted on thematic issues. They will be invited to participate in steering committee meetings, if necessary.

Regular internal reporting will be established at the onset of the project with all project stakeholders and will contribute to the overall project evaluation reporting. While the monitoring will be a constant process, at the key milestones of the project, internal evaluation will be implemented.

The project will be subject to the internal monitoring procedures of the implementing partners. The project might be object of result-oriented monitoring (ROM) by the European Commission.

## **5.2 Evaluation**

Having regard to the nature of the action, a final evaluation(s) will be carried out for this action or its components via independent consultants contracted by the Commission.

It will be carried out for accountability and learning purposes at various levels (including for policy revision), taking into account in particular the fact that sustainability and continuation of this action at the beneficiary sites should be ensured.

The Commission shall form a Reference Group (RG) composed by representatives from the main stakeholders at both EU and national (representatives from the government, from civil

society organisations (private sector, NGOs, etc.) levels. If deemed necessary, other donors will be invited to join. The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least 3 months in advance of the dates envisaged for the evaluation exercise and missions. The implementing partner shall collaborate efficiently and effectively with the evaluation experts, and inter alia provide them with all necessary information and documentation, as well as access to the project premises and activities.

The evaluation reports shall be shared with the partner country and other key stakeholders following the best practice of evaluation dissemination<sup>11</sup>. The implementing partner and the Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, where appropriate, in agreement with the partner country, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the project. The financing of the evaluation shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing Decision.

### **5.3 Audit and Verifications**

Without prejudice to the obligations applicable to contracts concluded for the implementation of this action, the Commission may, on the basis of a risk assessment, contract independent audit or verification assignments for one or several contracts or agreements.

## **6. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

All entities implementing EU-funded external actions have the contractual obligation to inform the relevant audiences of the Union's support for their work by displaying the EU emblem and a short funding statement as appropriate on all communication materials related to the actions concerned. To that end they must comply with the instructions given in the 2022 guidance document Communicating and raising EU visibility: Guidance for external actions (or any successor document).

This obligation will apply equally, regardless of whether the actions concerned are implemented by the Commission, the partner country, service providers, grant beneficiaries or entrusted or delegated entities such as UN agencies, international financial institutions and agencies of EU Member States. In each case, a reference to the relevant contractual obligations must be included in the respective financing agreement, procurement and grant contracts, and delegation agreements.

For the purpose of enhancing the visibility of the EU and its contribution to this action, the Commission may sign or enter into joint declarations or statements, as part of its prerogative of budget implementation and to safeguard the financial interests of the Union. Visibility and communication measures should also promote transparency and accountability on the use of funds. Effectiveness of communication activities on awareness about the action and its objectives as well as on EU funding of the action should be measured.

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<sup>11</sup> See best [practice of evaluation dissemination](#)

Implementing partners shall keep the Commission and the EU Delegation/Office fully informed of the planning and implementation of specific visibility and communication activities before the implementation. Implementing partners will ensure adequate visibility of EU financing and will report on visibility and communication actions as well as the results of the overall action to the relevant monitoring committees.