

**to the Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the multi-country multiannual action plan in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2022**

**Action Document for “EU4Youth: Participation of the Western Balkans in International Assessments”**

## 1. SYNOPSIS

### 1.1. Action Summary Table

<b>Title</b>	<b>EU4Youth: Participation of the Western Balkans in International Assessments</b> Multi-country multiannual action plan in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2022			
<b>CRIS/OPSYS number</b>	IPA III/2021/NEAR>EAC/13			
<b>Basic Act</b>	Financed under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)			
<b>Team Europe Initiative</b>	No			
<b>Zone benefiting from the action</b>	The action shall be carried out in Western Balkans (Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, and Republic of Serbia)			
<b>Programming document</b>	IPA III Programming Framework			
<b>PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION</b>				
<b>Window and thematic priority</b>	Window 4 - Competitiveness and inclusive growth Thematic priority 1 - Education, employment, social protection and inclusion policies, and health to strengthen access to and quality of education			
<b>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</b>	Main SDG: 4 - Quality Education			
<b>DAC code(s)</b>	11230 – Basic life skills for youth and adults – 50% 11321: Lower secondary education / ISCED 2 – 50%			
<b>Main Delivery Channel @</b>	Multilateral organisations - 40000 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - 47080			
<b>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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Aid to environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

	Gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Trade development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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"/>
	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>Internal markers</b>	<b>Policy objectives</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	Digitalisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Migration	<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>Amounts concerned</b>	<p>Budget line: 15 02 02 01.02</p> <p>Total estimated cost: EUR 4 800 000</p> <p>Total amount of EU budget contribution: <b>EUR 4 800 000 – year 2021</b></p>
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#### MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

<b>Type of financing and method(s) of implementation</b>	<p>Project Modality</p> <p><b>Direct management</b> through: grant</p> <p><b>Indirect management with</b> the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)</p> <p>The action will be co-delegated to the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC)</p>
<b>Relevant priorities and flagships from Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans</b>	<p>Priorities: "Human Capital Development"</p>

<b>Final date for concluding contribution / delegation agreements, procurement and grant contracts</b>	At the latest by 31 December 2022
<b>Indicative operational implementation period</b>	72 months following the adoption of the Financing Decision

## 1.2. Summary of the Action

In order to improve its education system, which will educate skilled and resilient citizens of the Western Balkans, the region needs to have a reliable baseline of the current level of skills. This will also enable convergence with the EU targets on skills and education. In the area of education and training this implies cooperation with EU Member States for convergence on policy reforms and participation in the EU's programme in the field of education, Erasmus+. In addition, the Western Balkans should follow the latest developments in EU standards and strive to meet the targets that the EU Member States have set for themselves in improving education and training. Social and economic advancement across the Western Balkans requires provision of quality compulsory education. In particular, it is important that the educational systems involved will follow ambitions of the European educational area, while strengthening regional integration and territorial cooperation.

Considering this, the Western Balkans are encouraged to participate in internationally recognised surveys and assessments that could provide such a baseline of their education systems against international benchmarks.

The objective of the Action is to contribute to the improvement of education systems in the Western Balkans by benchmarking educational provision in mathematics, science, computer and information literacy, and by giving a voice to teachers and school leaders in the education policy debate. The Action will fund international participation of the participating Western Balkan IPA beneficiaries in international testing of pupils in mathematics and science (TIMSS 2023), and in digital competences (ICILS 2023), as well as Teaching And Learning International Survey (TALIS), which aims to describe teaching and learning conditions.

## 2. RATIONALE

### 2.1. Context Analysis

The IPA III beneficiaries should follow the latest developments in EU standards and strive to meet the targets that the EU Member States have set for themselves in improving education and training. Social and economical advancement across the Western Balkans requires provision of quality compulsory education. In particular, it is important that the educational systems involved will follow ambitions of the European educational area, while strengthening regional integration and territorial cooperation.

In 2018 the Western Balkans participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) simultaneously for the first time, which led to a comparative study of the region to determine what 15-year olds in the Western Balkans know and can do. The results from PISA 2018 demonstrated that overall outcomes of the region are improving. This said, performance is generally lower than that of the countries across the European Union and the OECD. The PISA 2018 results further revealed that learning outcomes in the regions are highly inequitable, and boys perform worse than girls also when comparing to international averages. Learning gaps between linguistic student groups is at times substantial, and students enrolled in vocational programmes underperform compared to students enrolled in general upper-secondary programmes to a larger extent than across OECD countries. Mapping of teaching methods revealed a need to review the methods used in some of the economies as they seemed to be less favourable for improving the learning conditions and outcomes.

Participation in specific tests and surveys is useful in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges which could lead to knowledge-based policies with the aim of enhancing the quality of education and student learning.

The aim of the **Teaching And Learning International Survey (TALIS)** is to contribute to a debate about developing teaching as a profession. TALIS' main goal is to provide information that education systems can use to guide their policies (principles, rules, and guidelines), or that they can adopt to support their long-term goals. This goal implies a

focus on factors that are amenable and malleable to change at the system, school, and teacher levels. To do so, the three main purposes of TALIS are **to describe teaching and learning conditions; to identify the relationships among components of those conditions; and to identify and describe how teaching and learning conditions and relationships vary within and across TALIS participants and over time.** The teaching and learning conditions that TALIS focuses on are those that education stakeholders consider educationally effective because they enhance student learning.

The OECD is now preparing for the implementation of the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle of TALIS, to be administered in 2024. Starting from 24 participating education systems in 2008, more than 50 participants have now confirmed their participation in the TALIS 2024 core survey at ISCED Level 2<sup>1</sup>. In the latest TALIS cycle in 2018, the main themes covered by the survey included teachers' instructional practices, school leadership, teachers' professional practices, teacher education and initial preparation, teacher feedback and professional development, school climate, teacher human resource issues and stakeholder relations, as well as teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Two cross-cutting themes were also addressed throughout these themes: innovation, and equity and diversity. All these themes are relevant for the Western Balkans.

The European Commission has been an instrumental historical partner of the OECD for the implementation of TALIS, covering about 80% of the international costs of the EU and the EEA member countries through the Erasmus+ programme. Indeed, the collection and analysis of TALIS data fuels the regional analysis of teachers and teaching policies and can be found in recent publications like *Teachers in Europe – Careers, development and well-being* (2021) and *Education and Training Monitor* (2019 and 2020). Through the IPA III Framework Programme, the goal is to extend the reach and benefits of TALIS to neighbouring education systems in the Western Balkans with a view to help open up discussion with different stakeholders in the region giving a voice to teachers and school leaders in the policy debate, in order to contribute to improving education policies.

The international large-scale assessments, comparative studies Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) (edition 2023) implemented under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) provides multiple opportunities for understanding and improvement of regional educational systems and the contexts in which these operates. TIMSS has particular relevance for the **subjects of mathematics and science at the ISCED Level 1<sup>2</sup> (both laying foundations – attitudinal as well as cognitive, for future interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and understanding of environmental matters).** ICILS provides **insights into state of the digital competence of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at the ISCED Level 2<sup>3</sup> and offers valuable review of malleable factors for potential reforms initiatives aimed in improving digital engagement, safety and wellbeing.** The results and analysis of TIMSS and ICILS can be found in publications such as *Education and Monitor* (2020), or the *Eurydice report Digital Education at school in Europe* (2019).

In addition, these truly global endeavours serve well in enhancing capacity of the involved institutions for the monitoring project and the related analysis, and support international and regional cooperations as well as peer learning and the sharing of good practices.

## 2.2. Problem analysis by areas of support

The Western Balkans have embarked on reforms to implement modern teaching practices that align with EU practices and have been supporting learning of all students. However, data from PISA 2018 revealed that many teachers in the region continue to rely heavily on traditional pedagogies, such as lecturing to students and encouraging them to memorise information. This suggests that the modernisation of teaching in the region hinges upon transforming teachers' beliefs and practices, as well as supporting their transition towards new pedagogies and collaborative ways of working with their peers.

In this context, it is of utmost importance for education policy-makers in the Western Balkans to develop better information systems on teaching and learning environments. One effective way of achieving this is to gather information from teaching practitioners themselves on their beliefs, practices, perceived professional development needs and barriers to the adoption of more professional ways of working. Yet, little is known about the conditions of teachers' work in the region or on policy levers to help elevate the professionalism and effectiveness of the profession in the region. Developing information systems on teachers, teaching and learning is thus not only important to

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<sup>1</sup> Lower secondary education

<sup>2</sup> Primary education

<sup>3</sup> Lower secondary education

diagnose problems and suggest policy reforms, but they can also help monitor changes in these areas over time.

By collecting detailed information about the training, beliefs and practices of teachers, the school working environments of teachers and school leaders, and the school learning environments of students, TALIS aims to fill the current information gaps. TALIS 2024 survey offers a unique opportunity to delve into these areas by listening to teaching practitioners' feedback and needs, and thus help create an evidence-informed dialogue – with teachers and education authorities at the central level and beyond – about how to improve teacher policies and complement the information collected through PISA.

TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023 offer a unique opportunity to support the green agenda, STEM careers interest, and digitalisation as well as monitor important EU benchmarks also in the Western Balkans, to support them in advancing within the field and to prepare them on the requirements of the *acquis* and to level the playing fields within the region and also in comparison to EU standards. Results of participation in such tests provide the EU and the region with invaluable indicators on the developments of the region, and facilitate targeted support in the coming years to ensure that the Western Balkans, as a key priority region for the EU, is not left behind. This is particularly important in the current times considering that COVID-19 pandemic has hit the educational sector very hard. The potential negative long-term impact is a potential decrease in spending on education, which may have huge consequences for the prospects of the young generations in the region. It is therefore important that the EU continues to pay importance to this sector and to monitor developments within education ensuring that young people and their right to quality education is not further negatively affected by the pandemic in the longer term.

### 2.3. Relevance and complementarity with strategies supported by key stakeholders

The Western Balkans need to be able to rely on quality data in order to reform their education systems, especially when it comes curricular changes, to teacher and teaching policies, and to monitor the implementation of these reforms as well as their impact on teachers and teaching. At the moment, while PISA provides useful information on students' learning outcomes, little is known about teaching practices, teachers' knowledge gaps and professional development needs, as well as the working conditions impeding their implementation of effective practices and professional ways of working. The collection of data through TALIS 2024 to fill data gaps allows the Western Balkans to benchmark themselves to the EU, and also to measure progress and change over time. In doing so, it can contribute to building new high quality monitoring and reporting systems for the education sector.

Western Balkans are actively implementing external testing with the aim to promote quality, comparability and fairness in evaluating achievement. As ICILS 2023 and TIMSS 2023 are based on the content taught and linked to particular grades, they are easier to accept, understand, interpret, and follow up by educators. These tests will be complemented by more research oriented assessments that will provide more context for evaluation of the intended and implemented curricula as well as extend the comparability of the measured achievements to the international level.

### 2.4. Relevance and complementarity with EU policy and EU and other donors' assistance

In order to support the goals of the **Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)<sup>4</sup> for the Western Balkans** and to ensure the sustainability of investment in the region, the leaders of the European Union and its Member States, together with the Western Balkans leaders launched on 6 October 2021 a dedicated **Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport**. This comprehensive, long-term strategy for cooperation with the Western Balkans lays the foundations for evidence-based policy making and promote inclusive and high-quality education and training systems thus providing improved perspectives for the youth in the region. Supporting the Western Balkans regular participation in international tests like PISA, TALIS, TIMSS, PIRLS and ICILS to measure any developments and to compare results with the EU is among the priorities of the Agenda within the field of education.

The overall objective of the EU's assistance under the **IPA III Programming Framework**, specifically under Window 4 is to strengthen economic and social development, including through education. This is envisioned through *Thematic Priority 1: Education, employment, social protection and inclusion policies, and health*. The specific objective of IPA III in this area is to strengthen access to quality education and to support candidate and potential candidates to achieve high employment levels and a skilled and resilient workforce. IPA III will further focus on the training of teachers and school managers, governance and strategic policy-making.

This is in line with strategic objectives in several key EU policy documents in the field of education.

The **Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025** includes the vision for priority regions

<sup>4</sup> COM(2020) 641, 6.10.2020.

where the widening of the association of non-EU members, including the Western Balkans, is part of the vision. Therefore, to achieve this, it is important to encourage the Western Balkans to participate in international tests and surveys to support a solid knowledge basis for them to develop further, and for the EU to monitor the efforts and developments. In order to compare results, it is crucial that the Western Balkans are not only expected to achieve the same standards, but also measured by the same surveys and tests as EU Member States to allow for a reliable comparison now and in the future.

The **Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)** (2021/C 66/01) sets five priorities, two of which are directly linked to the surveys: *competences and motivation in the education profession* as well as *the green and digital transitions* are key elements in the European Union's agenda for the next decade. TALIS, ICILS and TIMSS will contribute to our knowledge on this. On this basis, the EU Member States agreed to seven EU-level targets. Two of these have strong links to TIMSS and ICILS studies:

1. **Low-achieving 15-year-olds in basic skills:** The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%, by 2030. While this target is based on OECD PISA, IEA TIMSS provides interim data and benchmarks on mathematics and science achievements that are useful for shaping early interventions for younger students at lower grades.

2. **Low-achieving eight-graders in digital skills:** The share of low-achieving eight-graders in computer and information literacy should be less than 15%, by 2030. The target is based on the Computer and Information Literacy (CIL) survey from the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) executed by the IEA. The ICILS target population comprises students in their eighth year of schooling. (*Official Journal of the European Union, 2021/C 66/01 from 26.2.*)

In addition, the Commission was given the explicit mandate to develop proposals for possible indicators or EU-level targets in the areas of inclusion and equity, of the teaching profession as well as of sustainability, including greening of education and training systems.

One of the two strategic priorities of the **Digital Education Action Plan** is to encourage more participation in ICILS, to better understand gaps and strengthen the evidence base for actions to address these gaps. This will include introducing an EU target for student digital competence to reduce the share of 13-14 year old students who underperform in computer and information literacy to under 15% by 2030. Through the Digital Education Action Plan the EU will promote global cooperation, while simultaneously addressing its strategic goals in priority regions, among them the Western Balkans in which digital transformation will play a central role in relaunching and modernising the economies in line with the **Digital agenda for the Western Balkans** and the **Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport**.

As outlined above, there is a solid basis for encouraging and supporting the Western Balkans in participating in TALIS 2024, ICILS 2023 and TIMSS 2023.

## 2.5. Lessons learned and links with previous financial assistance

The proposed Action builds upon previous interventions in obtaining data and information on skills and education, and supporting the implementation of international surveys and tests in the Western Balkans. Recent assistance included provision of international costs for participation in TIMSS 2019, PIRLS 2021 and funding of a regional report by OECD analysing the results from PISA 2018 in the Western Balkans. Therefore, the proposed action will be developed upon lessons learned and support the continuation of regular assessments.

The Action will also take into account lessons learned from COVID-19 pandemic that have demonstrated the need for flexible arrangements in terms of project implementation, including the possibilities to implement activities online if the situation does not allow for physical travels and encounters. This kind of flexibility should be taken into account when conducting the TALIS 2024, TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023 studies.

## 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

### 3.1. Planned results and intervention logic (describing causal links between impact, outcome(s) and output(s) and including assumptions)

The **Overall Objective** of this Action is to contribute to improvement of education systems in the Western Balkans by benchmarking educational provision in mathematics, science, computer and information literacy and by giving a voice to teachers and school leaders in the policy debate. The intervention shall lead to successful participation of at least four IPA beneficiaries in TALIS 2024 round, and to successful participation of IPA beneficiaries in TIMSS 2023 and

ICILS 2023. Therefore, the Action will be done through two components: TALIS 2024 survey and TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023 assessments.

### **Component 1: TALIS 2024 survey**

If knowledge and findings related to the education systems of at least four of the Western Balkans are developed based on **TALIS 2024 survey**, then there was a successful participation of at least four IPA III beneficiaries in TALIS core ISCED 2 survey. OECD will ensure effective implementation of the survey operations in the participating IPA beneficiaries by closely liaising with the IPA beneficiaries in the Western Balkans. In collaboration with the international consortium, the OECD Secretariat will prepare the participating IPA beneficiaries for the implementation of the TALIS round and for the field trial and main survey data collections.

If findings of TALIS 2024 are successfully discussed with the stakeholders from the region, highlighting promising regional practices and policies for audiences of teaching professionals, then there was a successful participation of at least four IPA III beneficiaries in TALIS core ISCED 2 survey. Robust international indicators and policy-relevant analysis on teachers and teaching will be developed, with guidance and policy recommendations to develop policies to promote conditions for effective teaching and learning, and to develop a high-quality teaching profession. Co-operation of the Western Balkan IPA III beneficiaries in modernising their education systems will be promoted.

The effective and successful implementation of the TALIS 2024 survey in the Western Balkans, will depend on the following assumptions:

- potential changes in political leadership do not impact the commitment to the Action;
- participating IPA III beneficiaries appoint a National Project Manager (NPM) and resource a National Centre to work on TALIS 2024 implementation with the OECD Secretariat and the international consortium in accordance with the TALIS timeline and technical standards, with the aim to oversee the implementation at the IPA III beneficiary level.

### **Component 2: TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023 assessments**

If capacity is developed in **DIGITAL TIMSS 2023** administration, including processes, data management and reporting, then IPA beneficiaries successfully participated in TIMSS 2023. Digital TIMSS reflects the growing use of digital devices in school and everyday life and leverages technology to assess a new generation of students. TIMSS 2023 completes TIMSS' transition to eAssessment. Among key features of TIMSS 2023 counts innovative item types that engage the Grade 4 students, problem solving and inquiry tasks (PSIs) integrated into the assessment design, group adaptive assessment to ensure alignment with student populations, enhanced international reporting that includes reporting of process data, policy-relevant information on contexts for learning mathematics and science, and multiple modes of delivery, including online, and efficient operations. TIMSS data are recognised by UNESCO as a solid evidence base for researchers, educators, and policymakers interested in monitoring progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: obtaining a quality education for all. For example, the Low International Benchmarks established by TIMSS are recognised as the most appropriate measures of the 'SDG minimum proficiency level' (indicator 4.1.1) for numeracy.

Process data captured during the assessment will enable better understanding of student approaches to mathematics problem solving and scientific inquiry, test-taking strategies, and engagement. This information will be included in the TIMSS 2023 international reporting to enhance understanding of students' mathematics and science achievement. The TIMSS 2023 Encyclopedia, authored by participating beneficiaries, will provide comprehensive information about each beneficiary, including structural aspects of education systems, curricular content and instruction, and recent or planned reforms.

If capacity is developed in **ICILS 2023** administration, including processes, data management and reporting, then IPA beneficiaries successfully participated in ICILS 2023. **ICILS** is a response to the increasing use of information and communications technologies (ICT) in modern society and the need for citizens to develop relevant capabilities to participate effectively in the digital age. It deals with modern, pervasive digital contexts for information management and communication. In particular, ICILS 2023 will include more aspects related to digital citizenship, reflecting young peoples' increasing opportunities for online citizenship participation.

The study will help participating IPA beneficiaries to understand how digital technologies are used in classrooms and their impact on teaching methods to develop CIL skills. It also provides evidence of how students' CIL relate to out-of-school contexts that support learning. It measures international differences in **Grade 8 students'** computer and information literacy (CIL): their ability to use computers to investigate, create, participate and communicate at home, at school, in the workplace and in the community.

### 3.2. Indicative type of activities

Non-exhaustive, indicative list of activities supported is the following:

#### Component 1: TALIS 2024 survey

- ensuring the effective **implementation of the survey operations** in the participating beneficiaries, will involve the following activities:
  - policy dialogue;
  - technical assistance;
  - reinforcing beneficiary systems.
- providing **robust international indicators and policy-relevant analysis on teachers and teaching**, and developing a **regional analysis of TALIS 2024 findings and policy recommendations adapted to the Western Balkans context**, will involve the following activities:
  - performance monitoring and reporting;
  - technical assistance (training, studies, etc.);
  - reinforcing beneficiary systems;
  - policy dialogue.
- **Promotion of co-operation among the Western Balkan IPA beneficiaries in modernising their education systems and discussing TALIS 2024 findings and policy implications for the region will involve the following activities:**
  - performance monitoring and reporting;
  - policy dialogue;
  - technical assistance (training, studies, etc.);
  - reinforcing beneficiary systems.

This implementation will entail the preparation of the TALIS 2024 conceptual framework by the TALIS 2024 Consortium; the preparation of a guidance manual outlining the role, responsibilities and desirable profile of NPMs and additional staff involved in the implementation of TALIS 2024 and survey operations manual(s); the preparation of the TALIS 2024 international instruments for the field trial and main survey by the TALIS 2024 Consortium. In addition, it will require the organisation by the TALIS 2024 Consortium of NPM meetings providing all information and training to TALIS 2024 participating beneficiaries and economies for the implementations of the TALIS instruments at the central level.

This will also involve production of the TALIS 2024 international report and dataset, including the data and indicators for the Western Balkans. The Executive Summary of this report will be translated into participating IPA beneficiary languages and individual notes for the TALIS 2024 participants will be generated.

#### Component 2: TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023 assessments

- reinforcing Western Balkan IPA beneficiaries' systems
  - Capacity development (workshops, trainings);
  - facilitation of peer learning and regional cooperation (meetings and publication projects);
  - technical assistance (studies);
- providing access to the internationally developed and agreed instruments, tools and procedures, including the analytical methods, performing scaling and benchmarking against the international benchmarks recognised by UNESCO (TIMSS) and EC (ICILS);
- performance monitoring and reporting;
- establishing trends from TIMSS 2019 to TIMSS 2023 taking in account change from a paper to a computer based assessment.

The implementation may entail development, revision and finalisation of testing frameworks and specifications, developing new items and scoring procedures for those items, preparing field test, revising and streamlining the questionnaires (for student, teachers and school), developing procedures for instruments translation verification, developing sampling plans for each participating beneficiary, monitoring the sampling procedures in each relevant IPA beneficiary, developing operations and data collection manuals, training beneficiaries in data collection and scoring procedures for the assessment, translations and translation verification of main data collection instruments, conducting quality assurance of field operations during data collection, and documenting the results.

### 3.3. Risks and assumptions

Risks	Risk level (H/M/L)	Mitigating measures
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Changes in political leadership in some of the Western Balkans impacting their commitment to participate in the action	<b>M</b>	Keep all stakeholders informed about the project goals and benefits with dedicated meetings aiming in a peer networking across the region.
Insufficient adherence of the Western Balkans to the survey timelines and technical standards	<b>L</b>	Provide high-quality training and support to IPA beneficiaries highlighting the process
External factors such as pandemic, natural disaster, conflicts	<b>M</b>	Factor in buffer periods to provide some margins in case of unexpected events, and default administration of the survey online in TALIS 2024, so as to limit the dependence of the survey operations to the opening of schools Relaxing timeschedules as possible, developing new procedures (globally).
Impossibility to conduct physical activities	<b>L</b>	A mitigation measure could be to conduct the seminar virtually as a second-best alternative in case the seminar cannot be postponed
Lack of budget and/or technical equipment for preparatory and/or field work and data collection at a central level	<b>M to H</b>	Collaboration among institutions across the region, NRCs engaging possible sponsors in their beneficiaries. Focusing on the key activities and providing and additional support possible to keep quality of the outcomes.
Delayed adoption of IPA III regulation	<b>L</b>	Considering that political agreement on the IPA III regulation was reached on 2 June 2021, we consider a delayed adoption to be of a low risk. A mitigating measure would be to provide formal assurance that costs would be covered even in the event of a delayed adoption, which as a last resort would involve a separate funding agreement.
<b>Assumptions (to be reflected in the Logical Framework Matrix above) – grouped by outputs and outcomes</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political stability</li> <li>• Availability of IPA beneficiary staff</li> <li>• Commitment of IPA beneficiaries to follow procedures and respect timelines</li> </ul>		

### 3.4. Mainstreaming

#### **How does this Action contribute to Gender Equality and Women’s and Girls’ Empowerment (in line with the EU gender equality strategy 2020-2025)?**

This Action will strive to promote gender equality as well to take measures to achieve equal opportunities for male and female in all aspects regarding the implementation of the Action.

Gender equality checks will also be incorporated in the activities concerning the tests, including equal inclusion of girls and boys will participate in the assessments and the same percentage of female and male teachers will participate in the TALIS survey as the gender distributions found in the schools. The results of the assessments and surveys, wherever relevant are broken down by gender as it is useful for the teachers, directors and policy makers to analyse them and develop appropriate gender-sensitive policy/practices in response to them.

Equal participation of women and men will be secured through appropriate information and publicity material, in the design of actions and accessibility to the opportunities they offer. An appropriate men/women balance will be sought on all the managing bodies and activities of the Action.

#### **How does this Action address Environment and Climate change?**

Participation of students, staff, learners and teachers in the testing and surveys will contribute to their knowledge of sciences according to international standards and comparisons with other beneficiaries. Therefore the Action has an

indirect link to issues on environment and climate change, as its objective is to improve what is taught and how in order to improve educational provision as well as attainment in these areas.

**How does this Action address the Rights Based Approach?**

This action addresses Sustainable Development Goal 4, Quality Education which is to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life long learning opportunities for all”. By measuring the current situation and thus allowing for a baseline for comparison with other partners but also to benchmark any developments in the region in the coming years, the EU will support the Western Balkans in achieving access to quality education for all of their citizens regardless of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and geographical belonging. Any exclusions and non response at a school or a classroom levels will be thoroughly documented, reviewed, and annotated according the technical standards of studies.

**How does this Action promote the systematic engagement with Civil Society?**

This Action helps to ensure an inclusive and transparent dialogue, consultation and communication with all relevant stakeholders in the respective sectors.

**3.5. Conditions for implementation**

**Component 1: TALIS 2024 survey**

The main conditions that have to be in place for an effective and timely implementation of the Action are: a strong and stable level of political commitment of the Western Balkans, and an effective mechanism to train and support NPMs in the participating IPA III beneficiaries in fulfilling their tasks in a timely manner in accordance with TALIS 2024 technical standards and the TALIS 2024 timeline. This requires engaging suitable and well established institutions to administer TALIS at national level, that possess the staff, technical and budgetary means for the due tasks. The national ministries would thus have to ensure that suitable institutions are assigned to administer TALIS, and would have to provide dedicated budget and resources for the project work.

**Component 2: TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023 assessments**

There are two particular contextual situations that hinder implementation the most: 1) overload of underresourced institutions, and 2) lack of endorsement and support of the project work at the political level. The ministries would have to act swiftly in tasking a suitable institution (preferably outside the ministry itself) and providing dedicated budget for the project work. The best progress and impact is achieved when either an independent and resourced body is responsible for the project work or a close collaboration among the experts from ministries and leadership of the tasked institutions is established.

### 3.1. Logical Framework for PROJECT MODALITY (3 levels of results / indicators / Baselines / Targets / Source of Data / Assumptions - no activities)

Results	Results chain: Main expected results (maximum 10)	Indicators (at least one indicator per expected result)	Baselines (year)	Targets (year)	Sources of data (1 per indicator)	Assumptions
<b>Impact</b>	To contribute to improvement of education systems in the Western Balkans by benchmarking educational provision in mathematics, science, computer and information literacy, and giving a voice to teachers and school leaders in the education policy debate	<p>PISA scores</p> <p>Mathematic achievement – in each of the participating education systems</p> <p>Science achievement – in each of the participating education systems</p> <p>ICILS achievement – in each of the participating education systems</p>	<p>2018</p> <p>2019</p> <p>2019</p> <p>NA</p>	<p>2023 (available in 12/2024)</p> <p>2023 (available in 12/2024)</p> <p>2023 (available in 12/2024)</p>	<p>PISA 2018 or PISA 2022</p> <p>TIMSS 2023</p> <p>TIMSS 2023</p> <p>ICILS 2023</p>	Not applicable
<b>Outcome 1</b>	At least four IPA III beneficiaries successfully participated in TALIS 2024	<p>Official letters from the four Western Balkans confirming their intention to participate in TALIS 2024.</p> <p>Data collection, analyses and inclusion of the results for the at least four Western Balkans in the TALIS 2024 international report</p>	0	4	<p>Official correspondence from the four Western Balkans confirming their participation in TALIS 2024.</p> <p>Official correspondence from participating the four participating Western Balkans confirming the nomination of a NPM in TALIS 2024.</p> <p>Publication of the TALIS 2024 international report, release of the TALIS international database by the end of 2025, publication of the relevant participant notes.</p>	<p>Beneficiaries must confirm their participation by deadline of end October 2021</p> <p>The work of the International Consortium is not delayed.</p>

<b>Outcome 2</b>	IPA III beneficiaries successfully participated in TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023	Data collection, analyses and inclusion of the results in TIMSS 2023 available  Data collection, analyses and inclusion of the results in ICILS 2023 available		2021 – Preparation for field testing  2022 – Field test of instruments and procedures  2023 – Data collection  2024 – Data processing and reporting  2025 – Database and support documentation release	Field test TIMSS 2023 (in 2022) ICILS 2023 (in 2022) Data Collection TIMSS 2023 ICILS 2023	2021 – availability of budget, technical equipment and personnel for preparatory work at central level 2022 and 2023 – availability of budget, technical equipment and personnel for the field work and data collections due at central level 2022 & 2023 – epidemiological situation allowing for the necessary field work and data collection
<b>Output 1 related to Outcome 1</b>	Developed knowledge and findings related to the education systems of at least four Western Balkans	Production of the TALIS 2024 international database including the data for at least four Western Balkans.	0 (2021)	4	Meeting materials  Datasets	Changes in political leadership at the central level do not delay the work  Dedicated staff and resources available at central level
<b>Output 2 related to Outcome 1</b>	Successfully discussed findings of TALIS 2024 with the stakeholders from the region, highlighting promising regional practices and policies for audiences of teaching professionals	Agenda of the seminar based on the TALIS 2024 results in the Balkan region.	0	1		
<b>Output 3 related to Outcome 2</b>	Capacity developed in DIGITAL TIMSS 2023 administration, including processes, data management and reporting	Number of meetings, trainings and workshops	0	14		
<b>Output 4 related to Outcome 2</b>	Capacity developed in ICILS 2023 administration, including processes, data management and reporting	Number of meetings, training and workshops	0	8		

## 4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

### 4.1. Financing agreement

In order to implement this action, it is not foreseen to conclude financing agreements with the relevant IPA III beneficiaries.

### 4.2. 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>5</sup>.

#### 4.2.1. Direct Management (Grants)

##### **Grants: (direct management)**

##### **Component 2: TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023 assessments**

##### **(a) Purpose of the grant**

Implementation of part of the Action will contribute to achieving that relevant IPA beneficiaries successfully participate in TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023 and develop their capacities in administration – including processes, data management and reporting – of these international assessments, contributing to outcome 2 and its related outputs specified under section 3.

The grant may be awarded without a call for proposals to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), an International Non Profit making Association. This beneficiary is chosen on account of its technical competence and high degree of specialisation.

##### **(b) Justification of a direct grant**

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the recourse to an award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified based on Article 195 (f) of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, i.e. "for activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its **high degree of specialisation** or its administrative powers, on condition that the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals. Activities performed by the IEA will result in the Western Balkans gaining access to the internationally developed and agreed instruments, tools and procedures, including the analytical methods, performing scaling and benchmarking against the international benchmarks recognised by UNESCO (TIMSS) and EU (ICILS). Both TIMSS and ICILS are carried out by the IEA since 1995 and 2013, respectively. Therefore the IEA knowledge of the methodology and its mandate, together with its strengths and valuable previous technical expertise on this specific type of activity constitutes an extremely valuable advantage that remains unmatched by any other organisation. This is why, given the IEA special position, it is the most suitable structure to ensure appropriate implementation of this part of the Action.

##### **(c) Exception to the non-retroactivity of costs**

The Commission authorises that the costs incurred may be recognised as eligible as of 1 January 2021 because the activities for the Western Balkans are to be aligned with the overall timing for the TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023 assessments and some preparatory work is necessary.

In line with Article 27(6) NDICI activities supported under the Instrument and the underlying costs incurred in 2021 may be considered eligible even if those activities were implemented and those costs were incurred before the grant application was submitted.

The international work on ICILS 2023 and TIMSS 2023 was respectively launched in March 2020 and February 2021

<sup>5</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.

with field trial preparations starting during 2021. Important bilateral activities were also carried out in close collaboration with the participating educational systems. The next TIMSS 2023 National Research Coordinators (NRC) meeting is scheduled online for October 11-15, 2021 to review and approve the TIMSS 2023 Field Test instruments. The upcoming work also includes the release of Survey Operations Procedures, conducting the first Data Management Seminar for the field test, providing sampling software WinW3S to countries, providing the Field Test instruments in the online translation system and providing dedicated support to regional participants in view of ICILS 2023 and TIMSS 2023 field tests scheduled during the spring 2022.

#### 4.2.2. Indirect management with an international organisation

##### **Component 1: TALIS 2024 survey**

A part of this action may be implemented in indirect management with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This implementation covers all aspects of the action, including management, coordination and provision of expertise to perform TALIS 2024 survey and assessment in the participating Western Balkan IPA beneficiaries, contributing to outcome 1 and its related outputs specified under section 3. This implementation will result in developed knowledge and findings related to the education systems providing relevant stakeholders with the robust international indicators and policy-relevant analysis on teachers and teaching to guide policy recommendations to promote conditions for effective teaching and learning, to develop a high-quality teaching profession, and to highlight promising regional practices and policies.

The envisaged entity has been selected using the following criteria: its mandate to support education policy, extensive knowledge in relevant policy assessment, planning, management, analysis, and design and access to the TALIS methodology, as well as experience in previous rounds of TALIS surveys.

##### **Exception to the non-retroactivity of costs**

The Commission authorises that the costs incurred may be recognised as eligible as of 1 June 2021 because the activities for the Western Balkans are to be aligned with the overall timing for the TALIS 2024 survey and some preparatory work is necessary.

In line with Article 27(6) NDICI activities supported under the Instrument and the underlying costs incurred in 2021 may be considered eligible even if those activities were implemented and those costs were incurred before the grant application was submitted.

The work to engage the relevant IPA beneficiaries could not be delayed without jeopardising their joining the survey. Work already started with the international contractor from 1 June 2021. From 20 to 23 September 2021, the OECD will have its first National Project Managers (NPM) meeting with all participants. After the meeting, the sampling and translation tasks will start. As the Western Balkans are new participants, it is important that they are not delayed. Individual sampling consultations will begin in October 2021 and participants will be asked to complete the first three sampling forms in September 2021.

#### 4.3 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.

#### 4.4 Indicative budget

	<b>EU contribution (amount in EUR) 2021</b>	<b>Indicative third party contribution, in currency identified 2021</b>
Direct management with IEA - <i>cf. section 4.2.1</i>	3 600 000	N/A
Indirect management with OECD – <i>cf. section 4.2.2</i>	1 200 000	N/A
<b>Grants – total envelope under section 4.2</b>	4 800 000	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4 800 000</b>	<b>N/A</b>

#### 4.5 Organisational set-up and responsibilities

The main stakeholders targeted by this action are IPA beneficiaries and their education institutions. The Action will seek to target other actors, such as civil society organisations, to ensure a wide dissemination of the final products and recommendations of the Action.

Implementing partners will ensure coordination with relevant regional and international organisations, bilateral partners and non-governmental organisations. A Steering Committee may be established in order to provide a strategic guidance and oversight during the project implementation.

##### **Component 1: TALIS 2024 survey**

- The TALIS Governing Board (TGB) determines the policy priorities for TALIS and makes sure that these are respected during the implementation of each TALIS survey. The TGB is composed of representatives of all participants in TALIS. Representatives are appointed by their education ministries. The TGB usually meets twice a year.
- The OECD Secretariat is a team comprised of a senior analyst, policy analysts and a logistics and administrative coordinator who are responsible for overseeing the development of the TALIS survey within the OECD.
- The international consortium is responsible for the design of the TALIS survey. This contractor was chosen through a Call for Tenders and the selection of the contractor was endorsed by the TGB.
- The TALIS 2024 Questionnaire Expert Group (QEG) provides leadership and guidance in the construction of the TALIS teacher and school leader/principal questionnaires. The members of the QEG are nominated by the international consortium.
- The TALIS 2024 Technical Advisory Group (TAG) provides guidance on technical and methodological aspects of the study. The members of the TAG are nominated by the OECD Secretariat.
- TALIS 2024 NPMs are appointed by their governments to lead the national centre staff, and work with the OECD Secretariat, the TGB and the TALIS Consortium to oversee the implementation of TALIS in each participating economy in accordance with the TALIS technical standards and schedule.

##### **Component 2: TIMSS 2023 and ICILS 2023 assessments**

- The International Study Centre (ISC: TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Centre at the Boston College) and/or IEA offices (Amsterdam and Hamburg) are responsible for preparing the study frameworks, study instruments including the test items and questionnaires and related scoring guides, preparing survey operations manuals, providing technical solutions and support, checking for consistency and comparability, leading quality assurance activities, checking data and other materials received from participating educational systems and creating international databases, processing data, establishing scales, and publishing international results and reports.
- Participating education systems are in charge of translating and adapting the provided sources into their language(s) and context. They are entitled to review and contribute to the source versions of any document used (frameworks, instruments, manuals, guidelines). They are communicating with schools and other stakeholders involved, they are collecting and processing data as well as reviewing their datasets and results prior release of the international reports and databases to the public. In addition, they are responsible to analyse the central results in more details and convey the findings to other stakeholders concerned with education at their central level.

Dedicated institutions established for assessment, testing, and/or certification are usually acting on behalf of the systems above. In the (rare) cases where such body is not available, Ministry of Education needs to dedicate its personnel or find a suitable institution capable to work on the due tasks.

## 5. PERFORMANCE/RESULTS MONITORING AND REPORTING

### 5.1. Internal monitoring

The day-to-day technical and financial monitoring of the implementation of this Action will be a continuous process and part of the implementing partners' responsibilities. In addition, the Action might be subject to external monitoring in line with the European Commission rules and procedures.

A Steering Committee may be established under the project offering an internal monitoring process.

### 5.2. Roles & responsibilities for data collection, analysis & reporting

The implementing partners will continuously collect, record and track key data on the implementation of activities. Particular emphasis will be placed on systematic monitoring of progress and assessment against the qualitative and quantitative indicators identified in the logical framework.

### 5.3. Evaluation

Having regard to the nature of the action, a final evaluation will be carried out for this Action or its components via independent consultants contracted by the implementing partner.

It will be carried out for accountability and learning purposes at various levels (including for policy revision), taking into account in particular the fact the complex nature of the action.

The Commission may, during implementation, decide to undertake such an evaluation for duly justified reasons either on its own decision or on the initiative of the partner.

The evaluation reports shall be shared with the partners and other key stakeholders. The implementing partner and the Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, where appropriate, in agreement with the relevant IPA III beneficiaries, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the Action.

The financing of the evaluation shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing Decision.

## 6. AUDIT

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 audits or expenditure verification assignments for one or several contracts or agreements.

The financing of the audit shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing Decision.

## 7. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

Visibility of EU funding and communication about objectives and impact of Actions are a legal obligation for all Actions funded by the EU, as set out in the EU communication and visibility requirements in force.

In particular, the recipients of EU funding shall acknowledge the origin of the EU funding and ensure its proper visibility by:

- providing a statement highlighting the support received from the EU in a visible manner on all documents and communication material relating to the implementation of the funds, including on an official website and social media accounts, where these exist; and
- promoting the actions and their results by providing coherent, effective and proportionate targeted information to multiple audiences, including the media.

Visibility and communication measures shall be implemented, as relevant, by the public administrations (for instance, concerning the reforms linked to EU budget support), entrusted entities, contractors and grant beneficiaries. Appropriate contractual obligations shall be included, respectively, in financing agreements, delegation agreements, and procurement and grant contracts.

The measures shall be based on a specific Communication and Visibility Plan, established and implemented in line



with the EU communication and visibility requirements in force. The plan shall include, inter alia, a communication narrative and master messages for the Action, customised for the various target audiences (stakeholders, civil society, general public, etc.)

Visibility and communication measures specific to this Action shall be complementary to the broader communication activities implemented directly by the European Commission services and/or the EU Delegations and Offices. The European Commission and the EU Delegations and Offices should be fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities, notably with respect to the communication narrative and master messages. It is the responsibility of the implementing partner(s) to keep the EU Delegations/Office and the European Commission fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities.

Communication on this Action should also take into consideration the risks from misinformation and disinformation, and the ways of countering these in order to avoid undermining the Union's efforts and image in the Western Balkans.

## 8. SUSTAINABILITY

International tests and surveys are carried out in a regular, multi-annual cycles. In order to benefit from them, the Western Balkans should participate regularly to receive analysis and monitor their developments and trends.

For the EU it is important to be able to compare progress by each relevant IPA III beneficiary over time and to compare results within the region.

Regular and continuous participation of the participating Western Balkans IPA beneficiaries in international assessments and surveys should be promoted and encouraged through the policy dialogue between the European Commission and the governments of the region.