



INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE (IPA II) 2014-2020

MULTI-COUNTRY

EU4Youth: Enhancing skills and education for young people in the Western Balkans

Action summary

The overall objective of the action is to contribute to increasing skills and knowledge of young people in the Western Balkans by enhancing education systems, and promoting cooperation in the region.

The action will contribute to regional cooperation, trust and reconciliation among young people in the Western Balkans through supporting the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) in strengthening its capacities and in establishing the Western Balkans School Partnership Scheme.

The action will also contribute to diagnosis of the education systems in the Western Balkans with the aim to provide the relevant institutions, ministries and other relevant stakeholders with the necessary evidence for developing their strategies and reforms.

Action Identification	
Action Programme Title	IPA Multi-country Action Programme 2020 – part 1
Action Title	EU4Youth: Enhancing skills and education for young people in the Western Balkans
Action ID	IPA 2020/041-818.02/MC/EU4Youth- Enhancing Skills and Education
Sector Information	
IPA II Sector	9. Regional and territorial cooperation
DAC Sector	11230 – Basic life skills for youth and adults
Budget	
Total cost	EUR 6.5 million
EU contribution	EUR 5.5 million
Budget line(s)	22.020401- Multi-country programmes, regional integration and territorial cooperation
Management and Implementation	
Method of implementation	Indirect management
<i>Indirect management:</i> Entrusted entity	Component 1 – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH Component 2 – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation’s International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO-IIEP)
Implementation responsibilities	Component 1: Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations– Unit D.5 Regional Cooperation and Programmes Component 2: Unit A 3 Thematic support, Economic Development & IFIs, Public Administration Reform
Location	
Zone benefiting from the action	Western Balkans (Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, and Republic of Serbia)

Specific implementation area(s)	N/A
Timeline	
Final date for contracting including the conclusion of contribution/delegation agreements	At the latest by 31 December 2021
Final date for operational	72 months from the adoption of the Financing Decision

* 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.

implementation			
Policy objectives / Markers (DAC form)			
General policy objective	Not targeted	Significant objective	Main objective
Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aid to environment	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender equality (including Women In Development)	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trade Development	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reproductive, Maternal, New born and child health	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RIO Convention markers	Not targeted	Significant objective	Main objective
Biological diversity	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Combat desertification	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change mitigation	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change adaptation	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. RATIONALE

PROBLEM AND STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

The Western Balkans have a common heritage and common challenges. Despite conflicts that have created lingering prejudice and intolerance, experience has shown that joint actions in promoting tolerance, solidarity, and cooperation stimulate progress. A new generation of leaders will be the ones to demonstrate that this cooperation is not only necessary, but also crucial for social, economic, and cultural development, as well as for the reconciliation and European perspective of the entire region. To do this and to make these changes possible, young people must have the support and resources of established institutions.

Prejudice, denial, revisionism and nationalism distort social and political narratives that influence young women and men in the Western Balkans. Inherited, negative narratives form the basis for young people's future life choices about career, residence, friendships and even the possibility of dialogue with other people; therefore, compounding negative narratives about "the others". In this volatile context, there is a notable lack of opportunity for young people to move within the region for volunteering, formal and non-formal education, or simply to meet and share experiences.

It is important to foster and develop a culture of mobility and exchanges. Insufficient opportunities for participation, limited awareness of the importance to participate, mistrust in institutions, low interest in politics, insufficient youth-targeted information, inadequate tools to reach out to young people are among the main causes of the significant decline in participation of young women and men in their societies and democratic life. Over the years, considerable efforts were deployed in the region to support youth exchanges. Youth organizations from the Western Balkans have been cooperating enabling mobility and intercultural learning in the region. Several regional platforms and initiative related to youth and education exist in the Western Balkans¹. However, there is still a need to improve and initiate functional cooperation platforms, developed or funded by the Western Balkan IPA beneficiaries themselves. Existing regional structures established for the benefit of young people lack a cross-cultural network and a true governmental commitment needed for sustainable regional exchange programmes and common projects that will empower youth.

Encouraging incentives and initiatives for regional cooperation and mobility of young people started emerging recently, in particular with the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). This Western Balkan initiative was initiated at the 2014 Western Balkans Summit in Berlin and it has been officially set up in 2016 by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. RYCO started its operations in 2017 with the aim to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation among young people in the region through youth exchanges and initiatives. It is the first of its kind with tangible commitments of relevant IPA beneficiaries and may be the key driver for youth development and leadership throughout the region. Having in mind that RYCO is a young organization, it still needs support for further strengthening of its capacities.

According to RYCO, schools in the Western Balkans do not have sufficient capacity to participate in various projects and youth exchange initiatives, mainly due to lack of financial capacity, conceptual knowledge and experience of applying for ad-hoc opportunities, implementing and reporting on projects, as well as the lack

¹ e.g. Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training, Regional Cooperation Council/SEE 2020 Strategy, Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue, IPA Funds for Cross-Border Cooperation and regional civil society organisations thematic networking, EU - Council of Europe Youth Partnership, Erasmus+, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, Creative Europe, Europe for Citizens, or European Fund for the Balkans

of motivation to participate in such initiatives. In addition, there is no sufficient governmental support, in particular by ministries dealing with youth and education, to promote and encourage school cooperation and exchange on a regional level.

PISA, OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. For the first time in 2018, all Western Balkan IPA beneficiaries participated in the same round of PISA. PISA 2018 results were released in December 2019. The Western Balkans performed below the OECD average (reading: 489, mathematics: 489, and science: 487). The biggest improvement in the region (and in the whole OECD) is for North Macedonia, which managed to improve the scores in mathematics by 23 points, in science by 29 points, and in reading by 41 points. Flat evolution, after a big increase seen in PISA 2015, has been recorded for Albania and Montenegro. The latter is the only IPA beneficiary, which has managed to improve the average results, while improving the equity of the education system at the same time. The first set of results for Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks it in position 63 out of 78, with better results in mathematics rather than science and reading. Serbia slightly reduced its scores in all three domains, but remained the best performer in the region. Kosovo is ranked the 3rd from the bottom, leaving only the Dominican Republic and Philippines behind. There is a slight improvement in points though, since this year in reading the students got 353 points (compared to 347 in 2015) and in math 366 points, compared to 362 points in 2015. The students did worse in science with 365 compared to 378 in 2015. On average, girls slightly outperformed boys in all three domains.

Moreover, governance remains an important hindering factor for efficient and effective policy-making and policy implementation in the Western Balkans. Policy decision making is traditionally characterised by highly centralised systems, paralleled with fragmentation of responsibilities, unclear roles and lack of coordination mechanisms. This seriously hampers cooperation among different governmental bodies (with dispersion of resources and overlaps) and between governmental and non-governmental actors. Efforts have been made 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 the Western Balkans region to be able to achieve full speed and operational reforms implementation. Indeed, education systems in the Western Balkans are facing important challenges related to inter alia governance, financing, quality, curricula, training of teachers. To be addressed these challenges need deep and thorough analysis and reforms. This is why, methodologies for diagnosis of governance and financing need to be developed and tested with ministries of education in all IPA beneficiaries in the region.

The diagnosis of the education system is an indispensable process and tool for any ministry. It implies reviewing the features of the sector including its context, access and equity, internal and external effectiveness, funding, quality, and management, as well as prognosis. A detailed diagnosis of a beneficiary's education system, helps decision-makers identifying system strengths and weaknesses, monitoring progress achieved and defining the best education policy options. Carrying diagnosis regionally in all Western Balkan IPA beneficiaries will provide decision-makers with a comparative perspective and guide key education policy choices.

OUTLINE OF IPA II ASSISTANCE

In line with the above, the action will boost education and skills, and promote creation of sustainable opportunities for young women and men in the region.

Component 1 - Reconciliation of Youth through School Partnerships

The action will strengthen capacities of RYCO and create opportunities for young women and men to engage in activities that build mutual understanding and reconciliation. By supporting RYCO, the action will support development of a political and social environment that empowers and facilitates youth exchanges, enables youth-led processes of intercultural dialogue and reconciliation, and furthers advancement of social capital among young women and men by strengthening their competences and competences of other partners.

Component 2 - Diagnosis of the Education System

A diagnosis, including prognosis, of the education system will be performed in each Western Balkans IPA beneficiary with the aim to provide the relevant institutions, ministries of education and all relevant stakeholders with the necessary evidence for their strategies and reforms. A particular attention will be placed on governance, including monitoring and evaluation of the public policy implementation, and financing of the education systems, as these are key for the planning and reforms in the education sector, as well as for calibrating financial assistance. The diagnosis will analyse the equity and access of the education including issues of inclusiveness of the education, social factors, drop-outs rates, participation of disadvantage groups including minorities. It will also assess *inter alia* 1) the state of play and what reforms are needed; 2) the state of infrastructure and infrastructure needs; and 3) reconciliatory and inclusionary aspects of education. The action will build on the existing data and analysis and thus, synergy with existing studies and assessments will be ensured.

RELEVANCE WITH THE IPA II MULTI-COUNTRY INDICATIVE STRATEGY PAPER AND OTHER KEY REFERENCES

Supporting cooperation and potential of young people in the Western Balkans is crucial for the region's further development and a prerequisite for peaceful coexistence and reconciliation. This has been particularly highlighted through the Flagship Initiatives 3 and 6 of the February 2018 Commission Communication on “*A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*”². Expanding the scope and reach of RYCO and introducing an intra-regional mobility scheme is one of the concrete measures under Flagship 6.

Supporting socio-economic development and putting a special focus on creating opportunities for youth in the Western Balkans is also one of the EU priorities identified in the Sofia Priority Agenda of 17 May 2018³.

The revised IPA II Multi-country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020⁴ also highlights the need for further progress towards reconciliation and good neighbourly relations, including support to youth. Lastly, financial assistance will be in line with, and in support of, the Enlargement Strategy for the Western Balkans and Turkey. The support will be consistent with other EU policies in the same area, in particular the South East Europe 2020, as well as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in particular SDG 17 – Partnerships for the goals.

LESSONS LEARNED AND LINK TO PREVIOUS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The action takes into account lessons learned from the ongoing action with RYCO. It builds on past dialogues, while recognising strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. In particular, RYCO's need to further build its planning, organizational and operational capacities has been taken into account, while planning Component 1 of the action. GIZ's overarching involvement will bring value to RYCO and the entire action; it will encourage further development of RYCO's competences to independently manage large-scale donor-funded projects in a learning-by-doing manner.

The action also takes into account lessons learned from a pilot diagnostic assessment of vocational education and training (VET), performed by the European Training Foundation (ETF) for Montenegro in 2018.

² COM (2018) 65 final.

³ Sofia Declaration, 17 May 2018, available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/34776/sofia-declaration_en.pdf

⁴ C(2018) 3442, 31.05.2018.

2. INTERVENTION LOGIC

LOGICAL FRAMEWORK MATRIX

OVERALL OBJECTIVE(S) / (IMPACT(S))	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS			SOURCES & MEANS OF VERIFICATION		
	INDICATOR'S NAME	BASELINES (INCL. VALUE & REFERENCE YEAR 2017)	MILESTONES (INCL. VALUE & REFERENCE YEAR)			TARGETS (INCL. VALUE & REFERENCE YEAR)
To increase skills and knowledge of young people in the Western Balkans by enhancing education systems, and promoting cooperation in the region.	PISA results	<p>Reading Albania, 405 Bosnia and Herzegovina, 403 Kosovo,353 Montenegro, 421 North Macedonia, 393 Serbia, 439</p> <p>Mathematics Albania, 437 Bosnia and Herzegovina, 406 Kosovo,366 Montenegro, 430 North Macedonia, 394 Serbia, 448</p> <p>Science Albania, 417 Bosnia and Herzegovina, 398 Kosovo,365 Montenegro, 415 North Macedonia, 413 Serbia, 440</p>	Improved overall results by 1.5% (2021)	Improved overall results by 4% (2024)	-PISA Results	
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE(S) / OUTCOME(S)	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)				SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS

Component 1 Specific Objective 1: To strengthen RYCO's capacity and to establish a regional School Partnership Scheme	Structured regional cooperation of institutions responsible for education is established	No		Yes	- Action Report - RYCO's reports - Western Balkan summits - Reports on flagship initiative 6 - Regular exchange of information and dialogue with the ministries of education	- Political stability in the region - Continuous political support of RYCO
	Structured School Partnership Scheme is established, and sustainability ensured	No		Yes		
Component 2 Specific Objective 2: To improve identification of system strengths and weaknesses, monitor progress achieved and define the best education policy options.	Diagnosis is carried out .The diagnosis includes an analysis at education system 's level of issues of governance and financing, equity, inclusiveness and access to education, quality and relevance.	No		Yes		
OUTPUTS	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)				SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
Output 1 (influencing Specific Objective 1): RYCO's institutional/operational capacity to manage international cooperation projects is improved	Number of Open Calls successfully implemented	1 (2017)	3 (2021) 4 (2022)	5 (2023)	- Finding from the pre-post survey commissioned by the action - Feedback from potential grantees - Projects Evaluation Report	- Schools and teachers motivated to participate in the action's activities - Sufficient number of quality applications submitted for call of proposals - Selected grantees willing to participate at the capacity building trainings
Output 2 (influencing Specific Objective 1): The capacity of schools and other formal education structures to actively participate and develop quality projects on youth exchanges is improved	Number of project proposals received per each open call	42 (2017)	70 (2021) 85 (2022)	100 (2023)	- RYCO's reports - Evaluation reports	
	Number of teachers/representatives that participated in capacity building measures, disaggregated by sex	0 (2017)	50 (2022)	100 (2023)		
Output 3 (influencing Specific Objective 1): Regional youth and school cooperation, mobility and exchange is increased	Number of students that participated in activities organized by the school partnership projects, disaggregated by sex	150 (2017)		2000	- RYCO's reports - Monitoring reports - Reports of beneficiaries - Signed MoUs	
	Number of long-term established school partnerships/ signed MoUs	0	5	10		
Output 4 (influencing Specific Objective 2): Capacity of education stakeholders to build strategies and reforms based on evidence is developed	Number of meetings carried out during the diagnosis, between the ministries and the contractor.	To be defined upon action commencement				
	Quality of the information made accessible during diagnosis.	To be defined upon action commencement				

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

It is proposed to implement the action through two complementary work streams: 1) one contributing to regional cooperation, trust and reconciliation (Reconciliation of Youth through School Partnerships), and 2) the other feeding the policy dialogue and the programmes of reforms in education systems across the Western Balkans (Diagnosis of the Education System).

The following indicative main activities have been identified:

Component 1 - Reconciliation of Youth through School Partnerships

The action will contribute to regional cooperation, trust and reconciliation in the Western Balkans through strengthening capacities of RYCO and setting up and implementing a regional School Partnership Scheme. The envisaged outputs will be achieved through three groups of activities as follows:

- 1) The first group will specifically target strengthening of RYCO's capacity in order to achieve Output 1.
- 2) The second, relating to Output 2, will focus on strengthening the capacity of schools to participate in youth exchange programs, and for this purpose will engage regional cooperation among the ministries in charge of education on matters of relevance for ensuring an enabling environment for structured cooperation. Regional cooperation among the ministries will build on existing regional platforms, such as Western Balkan Platform for Education and Training (WB PET), Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE), and Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).
- 3) The third group, related to Output 3, will focus on establishing and implementing the School Partnership Scheme concept and supporting long-term school partnerships.

Sub-Component 1: Strengthening institutional/operational capacity of RYCO to manage international cooperation projects

At the start of the action, during the inception phase, a **comprehensive needs assessment** will be conducted. It will assess RYCO's organisational structure, as well as the capacity of its staff to consolidate and implement projects related to structured school exchanges. This will identify which **organizational changes** need to be implemented and what kind of **capacity building** is needed for RYCO staff. Capacity building may include, but is not limited to trainings on project cycle management (PCM), teambuilding workshops, gender analysis, etc.

The action will further support RYCO in **development of IT tools** that will improve the efficiency of RYCO in terms of institutional memory, application processing, monitoring and reporting. For end users, the services will become more user-friendly (e.g., online application, online database of schools' partnerships, access to a variety of e-materials, disaggregation by gender, vulnerable groups etc.). Ultimately, development of IT tools will contribute to the overall digitalisation of RYCO's processes and its positioning as a modern institution able to respond to the needs and interests of young women and men in the region.

Activities related to **raising visibility of RYCO** will also be a significant part of the action. These activities will promote and better position RYCO among the relevant institutions throughout the region. Promotional activities will include, but will not be limited to, development of success stories, utilisation of social media, development of promotional materials and videos, organization of promotional activities for schools and students, etc.

Sub-Component 2: Increasing the capacity of schools and other formal education structures to engage in regional cooperation projects

This subcomponent is focused on enhancing the direct capacity of schools to engage in school exchanges. It will also support the creation of an enabling environment for schools to participate in RYCO's activities, through ensuring commitment and support of all relevant ministries in the Western Balkans IPA beneficiaries. Therefore, the action will engage **ministries in charge of education** on issues of relevance, and will also support regional cooperation with the aim to ensure enabling environment for successful, structured regional school partnerships. In addition, ministry representatives will be involved in the main activities (e.g. kick-off and closing conferences) of the action. Existing regional platforms, including WB PET, ERI SEE and RCC, will be associated into this process.

Promotional activities on the importance of regional youth and school exchanges will take place. These will increase motivation and quality of participation of students, teachers, principals, representatives of youth organisations, as well as ministries. They will also contribute to parents' understanding and support.

The **capacity of schools** will be developed through e.g. promotional info sessions, specific trainings, regional conferences, etc. The aim of these activities will be to increase the number and improve the quality of projects (established through Sub-Component 3), as well as to enable the exchange of experiences and regional networking. A participatory approach will be promoted from the start of the action.

An inclusive approach will be promoted from the start of the action, to ensure that stakeholders referred to in the text above also include persons (notably students) who belong to minority and vulnerable groups. Gender balance will be ensured.

Sub-Component 3: Establishment and implementation of the Western Balkans School Partnership Scheme

The action will support **development of the Schools Partnership Scheme**, which will have two segments: cross-border school projects, and long-term school partnerships. School Partnership Scheme will be developed based on the proven models and experiences of regional school exchanges from the Academy of Central European Schools (ACES) by providing grants for a variety of cross-border school projects, and Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO) by supporting long-term school partnerships and focusing on reciprocal student exchanges. To ensure the ownership and build RYCO's capacities, the implementation of this sub-component will be sub- granted to RYCO.

The **cross-border school projects** module of the School Partnership Scheme will be implemented through open calls for proposals for a number of cross-border school projects. Tailor-made **mentoring activities** will support schools and students before and during the implementation of grants. RYCO will be assisted in promoting gender sensitive sub-projects.

Long-term school partnerships (e.g., through Memoranda of Understanding) and reciprocal student exchanges will be encouraged and supported. Long-term school partnerships will lead to the creation of an excellence pool among teachers in the region, as well as a multiplying effect on teachers' cooperation in the region and further encouragement of cooperation in the Western Balkans.

Component 2 - Diagnosis of the Education System

The diagnosis of the education systems in the Western Balkans will feed the policy dialogue and the programmes of reforms. The diagnosis will particularly focus on governance, including monitoring and evaluation of the public policy implementation, and financing of education in the region. Based on the diagnosis, the relevant IPA beneficiaries will have more evidence to plan reforms, request targeted support and address better the challenges they face. The carrying out of the diagnosis as a process will rhythm the dialogue between education stakeholders and donors.

The action aims to support policy-makers with a comprehensive assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the sector and progress achieved so that they can choose the best education policy options, prioritise reforms and strategies to implement. Based on the education sector diagnosis, ministries of education will be fully equipped to undertake reforms programmes, address their respective priorities and challenges, exchange in a more accurate manner on their best practices and experiences, while making the best use of technical and financial assistance. Diagnosis are also necessary to assess the cost of reforms and are therefore very important for those beneficiaries were future reforms and strategies will be designed as well as to better plan financial assistance.

The diagnosis will analyse the equity and access of the education in a system-wide approach including issues of inclusiveness of the education, social factors, drop-outs rates, participation of disadvantage groups including minorities. It will also include *inter alia* 1) the state of play of education policies and the need for reforms; 2) the state of infrastructure and infrastructure needs; and 3) reconciliatory and inclusionary aspects of education (the latter including both gender and other aspects). The diagnosis will build on existing data and analysis ensuring complementarity, and aim to develop a common methodology for the region, while taking into account priorities of each Western Balkan IPA beneficiary. The ambition of this component is to:

- Provide evidence regarding the weaknesses of the relevant IPA beneficiaries in the education sector. This is the key element to draft new strategies and identify reforms. This should also contribute to informing the EU Delegations (and the European Commission) and other donors regarding future priorities in the sector and also facilitate the division of labour between donors.
- Contribute to informing the programming of EU’s financial assistance, in the education sector, or related sectors overlapping with it (e.g., VET, youth, skills, including the EU regional action for Roma education). This would be done in combination with the “classic” elements of an eligibility assessment, and would focus on the credibility of the IPA beneficiary sector strategy.
- Provide evidence-based arguments for the policy dialogue between the EU and the relevant IPA beneficiaries related to education reforms.

RISKS

The following main risks have been identified:

Risk	Likelihood of Occurrence	Impact of Risk	Mitigation
Political developments in the region may influence RYCO’s governing structures	Medium	High	Steering Committee is informed in a timely manner on major political developments in the region
Political influence of RYCO Contracting Parties may compromise the action’s activities	Low	High	RYCO will organize regular meetings of the Governing Board
Lack of support for the establishment of the School Partnership Scheme from the relevant ministries in IPA beneficiaries	Medium	Medium	The action has envisioned numerous activities related to improving the visibility and positioning of RYCO in the region. The action will also support regional cooperation relevant ministries to ensure their support and active involvement in the implementation.
Low interest and motivation of beneficiaries to participate in activities as well insufficient	Low	High	The action will distribute information material and organize big kick-off meetings to secure a participatory approach from the beginning of

access to information concerning calls for proposals			implementation. The action will provide continuous support to beneficiaries in preparation, submission and implementation of proposals.
Overlapping with other donor-funded reconciliation initiatives or partners supporting RYCO.	Low	High	Continuous coordination with other donors active in the peace building/reconciliation in the Western Balkans, and continuous coordination with other actors supporting RYCO and its target groups will provide greater visibility and increase collective impact.
Lack of institutional cooperation in regards to the diagnosis (ministries of education)	Low	High	Consultation and explanatory meetings will be organised prior to launching the diagnosis as well as a continuous dialogue and cooperation to guarantee the best conditions for the performance of the diagnosis. A coordinator (or contact point) will be identified.

CONDITIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the action will depend on several key factors, including political commitments, strengthening the necessary structures for implementation and developing the capacity of involved stakeholders at central and regional levels.

3. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The action will require a strong involvement of the beneficiaries. The main stakeholders are young people and students, RYCO and its local branch offices, schools, teachers and ministries responsible for education in the Western Balkans. They will play a key role – from identification of issues to the implementation of action.

METHOD(S) OF IMPLEMENTATION AND TYPE(S) OF FINANCING (SEE ANNEX IMPLEMENTATION – BUDGET)

Component 1 – Part of this action will be implemented in indirect management with GIZ. To ensure the ownership and to build RYCO's capacities, the implementation of the sub-component 3 – Establishment and Implementation of School Partnership Scheme will be sub-granted to RYCO. Call for Proposals for schools, which is integral part of the action, will be managed by RYCO. The indicative duration of the contract will be 36 months.

Component 2 – Part of this action will be implemented in indirect management with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation's International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO-IIEP). The indicative duration of the contract will be 36 months.

4. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

METHODOLOGY FOR MONITORING (AND EVALUATION)

Monitoring is a management tool at the disposal of the action. It is expected to give regular and systemic information on where the action stands at any given time (and over time) relative to the different targets. Monitoring activities will aim to identify successes, problems and/or potential risks so that corrective measures are adopted in a timely fashion. Although it is expected to focus on the actions' inputs, activities and outputs, it is also expected to look at how the outputs can effectively prompt the outcomes.

Internal monitoring

The day-to-day technical and financial monitoring of the implementation of this action will be a continuous process and part of both primarily the implementing partner's responsibilities and that of the EU operational manager. Both types of internal monitoring will be undertaken in an inclusive way, involving key stakeholders.

In this regard,

- Implementing partners' monitoring will aim at collecting and analysing data to inform on progress towards planned results' achievement to feed decision-making processes at the action's management level and to report on the use of resources. To this aim, the implementing partner shall establish a permanent internal, technical and financial monitoring system for the action and elaborate regular progress reports and final reports. Every report shall provide an accurate account of implementation of the action, difficulties encountered, changes jointly introduced, as well as the degree of achievement of its results (outputs and outcomes) as measured by the corresponding agreed indicators (and related targets) included in the log-frame matrix. The report shall be laid out in such a way as to allow monitoring of the means envisaged and employed and of the budget details for the action. Reporting focusing on activities and inputs' use will not be considered. The final report, narrative and financial, will cover the entire period of the action implementation.

In addition, regular meetings with the EU delegations in IPA beneficiaries will take place to update on action activities. As a result of such meetings, the implementing partner should provide minutes to the participants to the meeting and the project coordinator in Brussels. The implementing partner will carry out self-evaluation reports that will determine level of achievement of the action objective and its results through the set of indicators elaborated in the log-frame, as well as the overall sustainability. These self-evaluation reports will contain recommendations and lessons learned for design of follow-up activities. Together, they will form the basis for an action-wide self-evaluation, to be led by the action coordinator.

- EU operational manager monitoring will aim at complementing implementing partners' monitoring, especially in key moments of the action cycle. It will aim to ensure a sound follow-up on external monitoring recommendations and to inform management. This monitoring could take different forms (meetings with implementing partners, action steering committees, on the spot checks), to be decided based on specific needs and resources at hand. Reporting will be done on the basis of checklists and synthesized in a monitoring note/report.

Both types of internal monitoring are meant to inform and provide support to external monitoring.

External monitoring (ROM)

The European Commission may undertake additional project monitoring in line with the European Commission rules and procedures through independent consultants recruited directly by the European Commission for independent monitoring reviews (or recruited by the responsible agent contracted by the European Commission for implementing such reviews).

Results reporting

Beside the ROM review, the European Commission may undertake action results reporting through independent consultants recruited directly by the European Commission (or recruited by the responsible agent contracted by the European Commission for implementing such reviews). Their aim would be to identify and check the most relevant results on the action.

Evaluation

Evaluation will give evidence of why intended changes are or are not being achieved.

The European Commission may carry out a mid-term, a final or an ex-post evaluation for this action or its components via independent consultants, through a joint mission or via an implementing partner. In case a mid-term or final evaluation is not foreseen, the European 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.

In case a mid-term evaluation is foreseen: it will be carried out for problem solving and/or learning purposes.

In case a final or ex-post evaluation is foreseen: it will be carried out for accountability and learning purposes at various levels (including for policy revision).

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

The evaluations should be carried out following the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations guidelines on linking planning/programming, monitoring and evaluation.⁵

Where an evaluation is foreseen and is to be contracted by the European Commission: the European Commission shall inform the implementing partner in advance of the dates foreseen for the evaluation missions. The European Commission shall form a Reference Group (RG) composed by representatives from the main stakeholders at both EU and beneficiary (representatives from the government, from civil society organisations, etc.) levels. If deemed necessary, other donors will be invited to join. The RG will steer the evaluation exercise in all key phases to comply with quality standards, and ensure a proper follow-up after completion of the evaluation.

5. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

As indicated under the specific activities, the action will strive to promote gender equality, as well as to take measures to achieve equal opportunities for men and women. Gender sensitive approaches will be promoted throughout. Participation of both women and men will be promoted in meetings, conferences and platforms, as well as through the selection of staff to the implementing body. Progress and results of mainstreaming gender in the identified areas of the proposed action will be monitored and reported on. The EU principles of the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019 will be followed, along

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/near_guidelines.zip

with the Union's objective to render gender equality, a policy priority for the EU's external relations through Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The action will not discriminate in any activity it may involve with, and in any contract it may conclude with any person regardless of gender, race, colour, religion, place of origin, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, or age. It will promote equal opportunities for young men and women in all aspects of the implementation.

MINORITIES AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

The action will promote participation of vulnerable/marginalised groups. It will put in place implementing mechanisms to ensure inclusion of young women and men from minorities, youth not in education, employment or training (NEETs) and other vulnerable groups.

ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY (AND IF RELEVANT OTHER NON-STATE STAKEHOLDERS)

The action will aim to stimulate young people and their organisations, including organisations acting as advocates for young people, to reflect on the youth exchanges and encourage them to play an active role in their communities. The implementing body will involve civil society organisations (CSOs) in relevant parts of the implementation and will continue to reach out and build lasting partnerships.

CSOs and associations will not be primary beneficiaries of the action, however they will be able to apply for School Partnership Scheme grants' on behalf of schools that face legal and administrative barriers to applying.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE (AND IF RELEVANT DISASTER RESILIENCE)

Environment and climate change issues are not directly applicable to this action. However, since the activity will cover youth and schools' exchanges, it can be considered that environment and climate change may be addressed through proposals of the grant schemes. In addition, the action will try to promote utilization of IT tools, thus providing contribution to environment protection also in this manner.

Climate action relevant budget allocation: EUR 0
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6. SUSTAINABILITY

The following three elements will contribute to the sustainability of the action:

1. The activities' proposed aim to empower young women and men to take active participation in intercultural dialogue and regional cooperation. Experience and skills that students and teachers will acquire through their participation in regional school cooperation projects will have a positive impact on their personal, but also the institutional and overall societal development on a regional level.
2. Long-term school partnerships will be established; they will ensure continuation and sustainability of regional cooperation among the schools in the region.
3. In addition, the sustainable perspective and benefit of the action is also reflected through strengthened capacities of RYCO, and expertise and skills of its staff. The action further aims that School Partnership Scheme becomes a RYCO-led process upon the completion of action.

7. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

Communication and visibility will be given high importance during the implementation of the action. The implementation of the communication activities shall be funded from the amounts allocated to the action.

All necessary measures will be taken to publicise the fact that the action has received funding from the EU in line with the EU communication and visibility requirements in force. All stakeholders and implementing partners shall ensure the visibility of EU financial assistance provided through IPA II throughout all phases of the programme cycle.

Visibility and communication actions shall demonstrate how the intervention contributes to the agreed programme objectives, as well as the benefits of the action for the general public. Actions shall be aimed at strengthening general public awareness and support of interventions financed and the objectives pursued. The actions shall aim at highlighting to the relevant target audiences the added value and impact of the EU's interventions and will promote transparency and accountability on the use of funds.

Visibility and communication aspects shall be complementary to the activities implemented by the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations and the EU Delegations in the field. 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.

The entrusted entities and the European Commission's actions should ensure enhanced donor visibility, including for EU contributions, and give more visibility to the objectives and results achieved. Furthermore, actions should ensure that all relevant stakeholders, and where possible also final beneficiaries, are informed about donors' involvement, joint actions and their results.

Actions should aim to show the link between the funds invested and the policy priorities behind them. When relevant for a specific intervention envisaged under the action, the communication and visibility plan will be based on an agreed communication narrative and master messages customised for the different target audiences. Effectiveness of communication actions will be measured inter alia through public surveys in the IPA II beneficiaries on awareness about the programme and its objectives, as well as EU funding of it.