

**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 “EU regional support to protection-sensitive migration management systems in the Western Balkans - PHASE III”**

## 1. SYNOPSIS

### 1.1. Action Summary Table

<b>Title</b>	<b>EU regional support to protection-sensitive migration management systems in the Western Balkans - PHASE III</b> Multi-country multiannual action plan in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2022			
<b>CRIS/OPSYS number</b>	IPA III/2021/043-643/03			
<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>	Western Balkans (Republic of Albania, Bosnia 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 1 - Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy Thematic priority 4 - Migration and border management			
<b>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</b>	Main SDG(s) on the basis of section 3: <b>SDG 10:</b> Reduce inequality within and among countries.			
<b>DAC code(s)</b>	15190 - Facilitation of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility – 100%			
<b>Main Delivery Channel@</b>	IOM - 47066 UNHCR - 41121 Other multilateral institution - 47000			
<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Migration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	COVID-19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### BUDGET INFORMATION

<b>Amounts concerned</b>	Budget line: 15 02 01 01.01 Total estimated cost: EUR 19 200 000 Total amount of EU budget contribution: <b>EUR 19 200 000 – year 2021</b>
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### MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

<b>Type of financing and method(s) of implementation</b>	Project Modality  <b>Indirect management</b> with: - European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) - European Asylum Support Office (EASO) - International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
<b>Relevant priorities and flagships from Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans</b>	Not relevant
<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

Resilient, more humane and more effective migration management in the Western Balkans is a key priority given both the geographical location of the region vis-à-vis the European Union (EU), as well as its European perspective. In support of the 2021 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy<sup>1</sup> and in line with the IPA III Programming Framework, this action aims to contribute to a more effective protection-sensitive migration management in the region aligned to EU and international standards. Ultimately, the action will contribute to the effective and rights-based management of migrants and persons in need of international protection in the Western Balkans.

To respond to continued challenges faced by the region in managing mixed migratory movements, the action will support the further development and strengthening of holistic and sustainable systems and capacities across the whole migration management process including identification, registration and referral at the border, asylum systems and reception capacities, as well as both voluntary and non-voluntary returns. The action will be implemented in full respect of human rights and take into account particularly the specific situation of vulnerable groups such as women, persons with disabilities and unaccompanied and separated children. It will have a strong regional approach including at a policy level to ensure increased coherence, coordination and cooperation both between the beneficiaries and between the beneficiaries and the EU. The action will at all times align with EU and international standards on migration management.

The action has been designed to build upon the results of past phases of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) regional migration programme, taking into account lessons learned and best practices. It complements other IPA funded activities planned at the beneficiary level. The action is implemented by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (hereinafter referred to as Frontex), the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

## 2. RATIONALE

### 2.1. Context Analysis

The rule of law is a key benchmark against which the progress of IPA III beneficiaries' on their European path is assessed. Migration management, asylum and border management are all important elements of the broader rule of law area, covered by Chapter 24 of the EU *acquis*. As such, they are central to the EU's engagement with the Western Balkans. The IPA III Programming Framework Window 1 - Thematic Priority 4 - Migration and border management recognises the importance of enhancing IPA III beneficiaries' capacities in the area of migration management, asylum and border management.

The management of mixed migratory movements in line with international obligations remains one of the key challenges for the Western Balkans. The challenges are inherently shaped by the region's geographical position along key migratory routes to the EU and its European perspective. This interdependence between the EU and the Western Balkan region necessitates particularly close cooperation and coordination within the region and with the EU to ensure coherent approaches for their mutual benefit. In this context, there is a continued need to further align institutions and legislation in the Western Balkans with the EU and international standards and to strengthen systems and capacities to allow effective management of migration while ensuring international protection standards and human rights.

The action is fully in line with the European Commission New Pact on Migration and Asylum<sup>2</sup> which recognises the importance of the Western Balkans for the EU's migration and asylum policy and that the cooperation with the region is already long-standing, tailor-made and comprehensive.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2021) 644, 19.10.2021

<sup>2</sup> In September 2020, the European Commission proposed a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, covering all of the different elements needed for a comprehensive European approach to migration. It sets out improved and faster procedures throughout the asylum and migration system and it sets in balance the principles of fair sharing of responsibility and solidarity. Available here: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/migration-and-asylum-package-new-pact-migration-and-asylum-documents-adopted-23-september-2020\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/migration-and-asylum-package-new-pact-migration-and-asylum-documents-adopted-23-september-2020_en)

## 2.2. Problem analysis by areas of support

The Western Balkans have made progress in developing capacities, new or enhanced institutions, as well as in the adoption and implementation of the necessary legal frameworks on asylum, border management, and legal migration. While in most cases the migration systems and capacities are now in line with the EU *acquis*, in various areas they continue to fall short in practice, particularly against the backdrop of the current migratory movements. This is particularly relevant for the EU, as the region is flanked by EU Member States which share challenges linked to migration with the Western Balkans.

The Western Balkans region is located along one of the main migratory routes into the EU. It is affected by mixed migration movements going from the EU to the EU. Meanwhile, reinforced border controls at the external EU borders have led to the phenomenon of “stranded migrants” and reported pushbacks to prevent unauthorised crossing of external borders. In this context, refugees and migrants face manifold risks on their route which increase their vulnerability. As the region is still largely considered by asylum-seekers and migrants alike as a transit region, they are often less receptive to information on access to asylum procedures and related services which makes the identification of people with international protection needs all the more challenging.

While the region is no longer facing a similar level of migratory movement as during the crisis in 2015/16 and the number of irregular arrivals have considerably decreased, the region continues to be transited by migrants and refugees trying to reach the EU, and most recently migrant smuggling activities along the route have increased. In 2020, despite reaching record lows in April 2020 due to restrictions related to COVID-19, the overall number of irregular arrivals from the Western Balkans to the EU have been higher than in 2019, with more than 23,000 detections of irregular border crossings recorded. Migrant smuggling activities have also resumed and asylum-seekers and migrants may rely on smuggling networks to facilitate secondary movement, which leaves them exposed to a range of protection risks including physical abuse, gender-based violence (GBV), trafficking in human beings (THB) and in some cases, arbitrary detention. Intense migratory movements have continued to result in a large number of refugees and migrants present in the region.

At present, the Western Balkans do not operate together under a common policy or management framework on migration. While bilateral cooperation between Western Balkan partners at borders has been developed, true regional cooperation along the migratory routes covering other aspects of migration management, remains limited. Moreover, the Western Balkans do not have at their disposal the full set of EU policy tools designed to underpin regional migration management. Lastly, limited domestic resources, overstretched systems and a low level of absorption capacity also present particular challenges in each of the Western Balkans to a varying degree.

With the above analysis in mind, the Action will cover **four main areas of support (corresponding to four specific objectives)**:

### **Area of support #1: Improved standardised and regionally-operable statistics and mechanisms for identification, registration and referral of mixed migration movements**

#### **- Short problem analysis**

In the area of managing mixed migration movements and sharing of information, there remains a lack of regional cooperation, in particular when it comes to the exchange of non-personal data, as well as operational-level data. There are continued capacity needs in the area of regionally-operable mechanisms for identification, registration and referral of mixed migration flows and information exchange on a regional level and with the EU. In particular, further work is needed on the standardisation of migration statistics and in parallel on the development of comprehensive plans for the upgrading of IT systems for border and migration management to be compatible regionally and with EU systems. Moreover, interpretation capacities at the borders are still limited and hamper the operation of first contact, undermining the application of international rights. The capacity of border guards to communicate with migrants is largely impaired by the language barrier and a lack of physical interpreters available at the borders. There is therefore need to develop sustainable interpretation tools which can be used to ensure the effective identification and registration of persons in line with international rights.

- Description of main stakeholders

The action will mainly target local and central authorities entering into first and second contact with migrants and refugees, relevant policy and decision-makers, border guards, key experts and potential data-contributing institutions and bodies, including non-governmental organisations and other civil society representatives (as relevant). The ultimate beneficiaries of the action are migrants and refugees and asylum seekers in need of international protection.

- Complementarity with beneficiaries' strategies

The action will support beneficiary implementation of strategies underpinning their European path.

### **Area of support #2: Improved implementation of international protection measures, including for vulnerable persons**

- Short problem analysis

Particular challenges remain when it comes to the institutional capacities of asylum systems in the region, which remain uneven. The asylum systems in the Western Balkans are in various stages of development and the overall quality of procedures in terms of fairness and efficiency is neither fully tested nor established due to the low number of asylum cases being processed and the relatively low recognition rate. Even though appropriate legal frameworks are mostly in place, their implementation remains inconsistent due to varying levels of human resources, equipment, and knowledge. A significant number of asylum decisions are reached only on procedural grounds and not on the merits as applicants abandon the procedure following onward movement. In some beneficiaries, judicial review is ensured at the 3rd instance only, and courts generally limit their interventions to procedural aspects, without considering the merits of the case.

The development of reception capacities also remains a challenge in several Western Balkan partners. Although reception centres for asylum-seekers, as well as other types of reception centres, including temporary centres, have been established in all Western Balkan beneficiaries, the ability of administrations to effectively manage the centres is low. The development of reception management systems in line with EU standards requires attention, including as regards protection-sensitive standard operating procedures (SOPs) and mechanisms for identification of persons with special needs. Finally, there is a lack of capacity to identify, assess and address the needs of vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied and separated children. While the legal framework for protection of vulnerable groups is in place, the establishment of adequate and/or fully operational mechanisms for the identification and assessment of vulnerable persons seeking asylum and their referral to appropriate protection mechanisms requires attention.

- Description of main stakeholders

The action will mainly target local and central authorities managing asylum and reception systems, relevant policy and decision-makers, asylum case officers, reception centre staff, non-governmental organisations and civil society representatives (as relevant). The ultimate beneficiaries of the action are migrants and refugees and asylum seekers in need of international protection.

- Complementarity with beneficiary strategies

The action will support beneficiary implementation of strategies underpinning their European path.

### **Area of support #3: Improved management of returns and alternatives to detention**

- Short problem analysis

Another major challenge remains ensuring that those not in need of international or temporary protection or who do not have a right to stay in the region can be effectively returned to their countries of origin (CoOs). So far return of third country nationals to their CoO remains a difficult task for the Western Balkans given the lack of readmission agreements or alternative arrangements with key countries of origin, while their capacities also remain insufficient to perform returns. Some of the key readmission-related challenges in the region include a lack of readmission agreements and cooperation with relevant CoOs, as well as the inadequate and slow identification and redocumentation processes by the CoO. Such lack of cooperation has left authorities in the region without legal mechanisms to apply non-voluntary return options to migrants in an irregular situation, thus prompting further irregular movements within the region or towards the EU. The priority CoOs, as identified by Western Balkan

authorities based on the number of irregular migrants present in the region and their presumed nationality are Algeria, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Morocco and Pakistan. Moreover, capacity is lacking for authorities to effectively carry out both Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRRs) and Non-Voluntary Returns (NVRs) in line with EU and international standards. Alternatives to detention (ATD) is relatively underdeveloped in the Western Balkan region. Underpinned by the assumption that detention should only be used as a last resort measure, in particular for vulnerable migrants, the action will support the region to develop and implement ATD as a customary means of addressing irregular detention.

- Description of main stakeholders

The action will mainly target relevant migration authorities in the Western Balkans, primarily personnel handling returns operations. Central authorities will be engaged in developing cooperation frameworks with key CoOs. The ultimate beneficiaries of the action are migrants, those who do not have specific needs requiring temporary protection or the right to stay in the region and those wishing to return to their CoO.

- Complementarity with beneficiary strategies:

The action will support beneficiary implementation of strategies underpinning their European path.

#### **Area of support #4: Improved EU-aligned contingency planning and crisis response capacities, including at regional level**

- Short problem analysis

The migration and border management challenges that affect one Western Balkan beneficiary often affect the neighbours, and as such necessary contingency plans and emergency response mechanisms should be in place at both beneficiary and regional level, where appropriate, to be able to manage future crisis situations. The existing beneficiary-level contingency plans and emergency-response mechanisms require further alignment with EU best practice including in the areas of border management, asylum and reception capacity. Moreover, regional dialogue needs to be initiated to ensure cooperation and coordinated approaches to managing increased migration movements.

- Description of main stakeholders

The action will mainly target central authorities in the Western Balkans. The ultimate beneficiaries of the action are migrants and refugees and asylum seekers in need of international protection as well as the general public.

- Complementarity with beneficiary strategies:

The action will support beneficiary implementation of strategies underpinning their European path.

Continuing to address all these gaps in protection-sensitive migration management in the Western Balkans remains a key priority for the EU, as also underlined by the New European Pact on Migration and Asylum. Moreover, the Western Balkans has also been identified as a key priority area for the implementation of the external dimension of the New Pact at a political level by the Project Group of Commissioners working on external aspects of the EU's migration policy. For all these reasons, and in order to continue to align the migration and asylum management systems of Western Balkan partners with EU and international standards that safeguard basic human rights, the activities foreseen under this action need to be granted priority.

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

The action will adopt a strategically-oriented approach to migration management that fully encompasses the different dimensions required to build sustainable and comprehensive migration management systems. Through an increased focus on activities implemented by EU Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) agencies Frontex and EASO in view of the European perspective of the region and with key support from IOM and UNHCR, the action shall embody an holistic whole system approach and support the strengthening of systems aligned to EU and international standards.

The action shall build upon results achieved in the first two phases of the IPA funded regional protection-sensitive migration management programme. While continuing and boosting support to strengthen regional cooperation including at policy level, the action will also comprise of strategic and targeted bilateral activities in order to make

progress in priority areas for each beneficiary. This more individualised approach shall ensure each beneficiary receives the targeted support necessary to register progress on protection-sensitive migration management and ultimately, rule of law.

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

Within the **IPA III Programming Framework**, migration is recognised as a strategic priority for the EU given the challenges faced by the region as a predominantly transit route and the knock-on effects these challenges constitute for EU Member States. In particular, the Programming Framework Window 1 of Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy has a thematic priority related to migration and border management with a commitment to support Western Balkans in further developing capacities to grant protection to people fleeing persecution or serious harm. Specifically, the framework underlines the EU commitment to “Ensuring access to international protection and access to basic services for the most vulnerable people” which “remains a priority in this area, together with supporting asylum authorities and efficient asylum procedures with special focus on unaccompanied children and on vulnerable categories of asylum seekers”.

While the revised accession methodology (**Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans**<sup>3</sup>) underlined the need for the Western Balkans leaders to deliver more credibly on their commitment to implement the fundamental reforms required, the **2020 Communication on EU enlargement policy**<sup>4</sup> highlighted that the rule of law remains a key condition for EU accession and that addressing reforms in the area of rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy and ensuring proper management of migration are thus key priorities in the enlargement process, as reflected in chapters 23 and 24. This action is designed to contribute to the implementation of these key strategies. In addition, the **Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans**<sup>5</sup> adopted in October 2020 aims to spur the long-term economic recovery of the region and underlines the EU priority of fostering closer regional integration and convergence with the EU. Implementation of reforms, in particular in the area of rule of law and fundamental freedoms, will be crucial for the success of the economic plan and the sustainable economic development in the region.

The recent **New European Pact on Migration and Asylum** re-emphasised the importance of the Western Balkans for the EU's migration and asylum system by stating that “the Western Balkans require a tailor-made approach, both due to their geographical location and to their future as an integral part of the EU”, and underlined that “coordination can help to ensure they are well equipped as future Member States to respond constructively to shared challenges, developing their capacities and border procedures to bring them closer to the EU given their enlargement perspective.” The New Pact specifically stressed the important role EU JHA Agencies should continue to play as part of the EU's migration relationships with beneficiaries. It also stressed that “the EU should use all the tools at its disposal to bring operational support to the new partnerships, including through a much deeper involvement of EU agencies” and underlined that “Frontex's enhanced scope of action should now be used to make cooperation with partners operational.”

In line with the rationale of the Pact, the action shall have a stronger focus on **strengthening regional policy dialogue** between the beneficiaries to facilitate a coordinated approach to managing migration in the Western Balkans at the political level, in addition to the technical activities to be undertaken. This is key as regional cooperation to tackle migration challenges is crucial for effective implementation of migration management systems. The action shall aim to complement and seek synergies with other donor assistance.

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

The EU has through previous and on-going support provided financial and technical assistance to the Western Balkans to help address the challenges faced in the area of migration both at a bilateral and regional level. Since 2016, the IPA-

<sup>3</sup> COM(2020) 57, 5.02.2020.

<sup>4</sup> COM(2020) 660, 6.10.2020.

<sup>5</sup> COM(2020) 641, 6.10.2020.

funded regional migration programme implemented by Frontex, EASO, IOM and UNHCR has worked to enhance capacities in a number of key areas such as registration and referral systems, asylum and reception systems, regional sharing of migration statistics, Assisted Voluntary Returns (AVRs) and social cohesion and integration of migrants. The first and second phases of the programme benefited from both external and internal evaluation mechanisms.

The design of this action (third phase of programme) shall be reflective of the challenges faced in the previous implementation. In this respect, the action will **continue to implement activities with a regional focus**, but it will also increasingly **reinforce beneficiary capacity through targeted bilateral activities**. This approach is designed to ensure that the region and each beneficiary collectively can make substantive progress in strengthening protection-sensitive migration management capacity. Moreover, in line with the New European Pact on Migration, the action envisages a **stronger role for EU JHA agencies** as being best placed to support the Western Balkans to **align their migration systems with EU standards** and to prepare the beneficiaries for future accession. Support provided through the previous phase of the migration programme was largely based on short-term expertise focused on developing frameworks. Moving forward, a **more action-oriented** approach to capacity development will be adopted with a **longer-term** focus on building sustainable protection-sensitive migration management systems. The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted certain needs of the beneficiaries in the area of **contingency planning and crisis-management** mechanisms. In this respect, the action will include specific activities to increase the capacity of the beneficiaries to better prepare for and manage crisis situations in order for their migration systems to continue functioning under extraordinary circumstances. This will be taken forward at both the bilateral and regional levels. Furthermore, the action shall support engagement and cooperation between the beneficiaries at a **political as well as technical level** given their interdependence in managing migration. The regional policy dialogue shall reinforce the needed regional approach to addressing migration.

### 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 (Impact)** of the action is to contribute to a more effective and rights-based management of migrants and persons in need of international protection in the Western Balkans.

The **Specific(s) Objective(s) (Outcomes)** of this action are:

- 1) Improved standardised and regionally-operable statistics and mechanisms for identification, registration and referral of mixed migration movements
- 2) Improved implementation of international protection measures, including for vulnerable persons
- 3) Improved management of returns and alternatives to detention
- 4) Improved EU-aligned contingency planning and crisis response capacities, including at regional level

The specific objectives are interlinked and mutually reinforcing in that they together strengthen protection-sensitive migration management in the Western Balkans in line with EU and international standards.

The **main expected outputs** (list is not exhaustive) are:

- 1) The Western Balkans are further acquainted with EU best practice in managing migratory movements and capacitated to identify, register and refer migrants to the relevant services in a standardised and regionally harmonised manner

Building on previous support, the action will continue to further strengthen beneficiary capacity to manage mixed migration movements in line with EU best practices and international standards through the deployment of training, capacity building and exchange of best practice facilitated primarily by Frontex. It foresees to develop for the remaining four beneficiaries regionally harmonised Masterplans for the upgrading of IT systems for the identification, registration and referral of migrants. The Masterplans will ensure compatibility of the IT systems with EURODAC as a first step towards supporting concrete information-sharing within the region and with the EU as relevant. The action will also further support the beneficiaries to implement sustainable interpretation tools.



2) The Western Balkans are better equipped to align with EU migration data standards and further prepared to share and exchange harmonised migration data and statistics both with the EU and at the regional level

The action will support the collection and exchange within the region and with the EU as relevant of regionally harmonised and operable migration data and statistics aligned with EU migration standards. It will build on previous work to develop migration statistics roadmaps in some beneficiaries by extending the work to all beneficiaries and piloting their implementation. The work will be closely coordinated with Eurostat.

3) The Western Balkans have improved coordination/exchange mechanisms within and between asylum and reception authorities, including with the EU

The action will facilitate the development of coordination and/or exchange mechanisms within and between asylum and reception authorities, including with the EU, in view of supporting the emergence of joint approaches and information sharing. The support will include the facilitation of regional dialogues and other mechanisms for best practice sharing.

4) The Western Balkans are further equipped to implement international protection measures, including for vulnerable persons

The action will provide for tailor-made technical expertise and support to enable the region to strengthen its implementation of international protection measures, including for vulnerable persons. It will in particular focus on developing and implementing sustainable tools such as a pool of trainers for capacity strengthening of asylum and reception staff. It will also provide technical expertise to develop procedures and guidelines in the areas of asylum and reception. By using the same expertise available to EU Member States in this area of work, the approaches and cooperation will be increasingly aligned with the EU.

5) The Western Balkans have strengthened capacity to provide quality assurance in asylum examination processes and appeals

The action will seek to improve the quality of asylum examination processes and appeals by developing approaches and tools, and building the capacity of relevant stakeholders to apply quality assurance tools, processes and procedures.

6) New arrivals, asylum-seekers, as well as refugees, have access to legal counselling and assistance

The action will work with legal assistance and counselling providers to strengthen the knowledge of asylum seekers and refugees and the exercise of their rights. The action will also support relevant stakeholders to develop and provide information on access to asylum for new arrivals. These activities fill a critical service gap in the provision of international protection in the Western Balkans. In parallel to the service provision, the action will engage in capacity building of legal aid providers.

7) The Western Balkans are better equipped to undertake AVRRs and NVRs

The action will further develop the capacity of the beneficiaries to undertake both AVRRs and NVRs including through the provision of technical support, expertise and training. In particular, the action will support the development of electronic case management systems in 2 beneficiaries. It will develop readmission cooperation mechanisms with key CoOs and facilitate return procedures. Support to migrants will be provided through reintegration support upon arrival in their CoO, as well as pre-departure support services including counselling. The action will fund AVRRs from the region to CoOs under the understanding that sustainable returns are underpinned by fair and functioning asylum systems.

8) The Western Balkans have increased capacity to implement alternatives to immigration detention (ATD) and procedural safeguards in line with international standards

The action will provide technical support and expertise to further develop new approaches on effective regularisation

and ATD programmes in the region. It will base its work on beneficiary specific assessments of ATD/regularisation and develop and pilot approaches. The action will promote the results of the pilot to feed broader discussion on ATD.

9) The Western Balkans have better knowledge of EU-aligned contingency planning and have improved capacity for crisis response including at regional level

The action will support capacities in contingency planning and crisis response at beneficiary and regional level. Through the provision of technical support and expertise, the action will support the development of contingency planning in the areas of border guarding, asylum and reception. It will facilitate regional dialogue through the setting up of a dedicated Working Group and by supporting the conclusion of a framework agreement on regional cooperation. It will use the same expertise available to EU Member States in this area of work, therefore increasing alignment of approaches and cooperation with the EU.

All specific objectives and outputs of the action will be implemented in such a manner so as to ensure alignment and integration of each beneficiary into EU tools, practices and mechanisms in the area of migration. In this respect, regional cooperation is crucial. **Given the high policy relevance of the foreseen outcomes and outputs, the action will at all stages dovetail and support the overall policy engagement of the EU with the IPA III Western Balkans. The EU JHA agencies Frontex and EASO will be at the heart of this action, taking forward regional and bilateral activities under their respective mandates. IOM and UNHCR will complement, support and strengthen the work of the EU agencies, bringing forward activities in line with their respective mandates.**

### 3.2. Indicative type of activities

The action will indicatively include the following main activities:

#### *Indicative type of activities:*

**Output 1: The Western Balkans are further acquainted with EU best practice in managing migratory movements and capacitated to identify, register and refer migrants to the relevant services in a standardised and regionally harmonised manner**

- *Providing technical assistance, advice and expertise;*
- *Capacity building, exchange of best practice and training;*
- *Providing support to systems/mechanisms/procedures/processes;*
- *Extension of interpretation tools;*
- *Developing Masterplans for upgrading IT systems;*
- *Supporting regional cooperation/networking.*

**Output 2: The Western Balkans are better equipped to align with EU migration data standards and further prepared to share and exchange harmonised migration data and statistics**

- *Providing technical assistance, advice and expertise in the development and implementation of statistics roadmaps;*
- *Capacity building, exchange of best practice and training;*
- *Supporting regional cooperation/networking.*

**Output 3: The Western Balkans have improved coordination/exchange mechanisms within and between asylum and reception authorities, including with the EU**

- *Providing technical assistance, advice and expertise;*
- *Capacity building, exchange of best practice and training (incl train-the trainers);*
- *Providing support for attendance to EU network meetings in agreement with network members;*
- *Providing support to strengthen systems/mechanisms/procedures/processes;*
- *Supporting regional cooperation/networking.*

**Output 4: The Western Balkans are further equipped to implement international protection measures including for vulnerable persons**

- *Conducting assessments and analysis;*
- *Providing support to strengthen systems/mechanisms/procedures/processes;*
- *Capacity building, exchange of best practice and training (incl train-the trainers);*
- *Supporting regional cooperation/networking.*

**Output 5: The Western Balkans have strengthened capacity to provide quality assurance in asylum examination processes and appeals**

- *Conducting assessments and analysis;*
- *Providing support to strengthen systems/mechanisms/procedures/processes;*
- *Supporting regional cooperation/networking.*

**Output 6: New arrivals, asylum-seekers, as well as refugees, have access to legal counselling and assistance**

- *Providing support to strengthen systems/mechanisms/procedures/processes;*
- *Supporting regional cooperation/networking;*
- *Provision of legal assistance counselling and information.*

**Output 7: The Western Balkans are better equipped to undertake AVRRs and NVRs**

- *Capacity building, exchange of best practice and training;*
- *Providing technical assistance, advice and expertise;*
- *Developing and piloting case management systems;*
- *Conducting assessments and analysis;*
- *Supporting regional cooperation/networking and cooperation with CoO on NVR and AVRR;*
- *Provision of pre-departure services on NVR and AVRR;*
- *Conducting AVRR;*
- *Provision of reintegration support in CoO.*

**Output 8: The Western Balkans have increased capacity to implement alternatives to immigration detention (ATD) and procedural safeguards in line with international standards**

- *Conducting assessments and analysis;*
- *Piloting of ATD/regularisation approaches.*

**Output 9: The Western Balkans have better knowledge of EU-aligned contingency planning and have improved capacity for crisis response including at regional level**

- *Providing technical assistance, advice and expertise;*
- *Capacity building, exchange of best practice and training;*
- *Developing regional platform and cooperation.*

All outputs foresee the organisation of events/workshops for policy dialogue, capacity strengthening and/or networking. The action will not directly fund activities in the area of service provision in reception centres or the procurement of IT systems for the identification, registration and referral of mixed migration movements.

### 3.3. Risks and assumptions

<b>Risks</b>	<b>Risk level (H/M/L)</b>	<b>Mitigating measures</b>
Risk 1  Low level of cooperation by beneficiary institutions	<b>L</b>	This risk can be mitigated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- grounding the action in the accession context &amp; ensuring policy level dialogue;</li> <li>- applying a participatory methodology in the majority of activities to increase accountability, participation, ownership and ensure sustainability of results.</li> </ul>

<p>Risk 2</p> <p>Lack of efficient coordination and communication between beneficiaries and implementing partners could impede success of the project</p>	<p><b>L</b></p>	<p>This risk can be mitigated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensuring accessibility of a range of communication channels to maintain close cooperation and information sharing;</li> <li>- Regular meetings between beneficiaries and implementing partners to update on progress of implementation;</li> <li>- Potential challenges for implementation should be pre-empted as early as possible with effective mitigation measures in place.</li> </ul>
<p>Risk 3</p> <p>Limited absorption capacity in Western Balkans namely due to other (inter)nationally supported activities and/or limited availability of counterparts/experts.</p>	<p><b>M</b></p>	<p>This risk can be mitigated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementing partners ensuring coordination with EU Delegations/EU Office as well as with other donors in the region with a view to better streamline the various activities.</li> </ul>

**Assumptions (to be reflected in the Logical Framework Matrix below) – grouped by outputs and outcomes**

**Outcome level:**

All outcomes: No further deterioration of the migration situation in the Western Balkans. Ownership of beneficiaries is respected in implementation.

Outcome 1: Beneficiaries are committed to increase capacity for identification, registration and referral of mixed migration movements.

Outcome 2: Beneficiaries remain committed to building sustainable and protection-sensitive asylum and reception systems that are fully aligned with international human rights standards.

Outcome 3: Beneficiaries are committed to increase capacity in management of returns and alternatives to detention. Fair and functioning asylum systems underpin return capacities.

Outcome 4: Beneficiaries are committed to increase capacity on contingency planning. Necessary political will in the EU to extend crisis response planning measures to Western Balkans region.

**Output level:**

Output 1: Beneficiaries are committed to strengthen cooperation within the region and with the EU. Beneficiaries commit to procuring the necessary EURODAC compliant IT equipment upon completion of the Masterplans. Beneficiaries use the interpretation tools made available. Necessary staff and other resources are in place.

Output 2: Beneficiaries are committed to strengthen cooperation within the region and with the EU. Beneficiaries use the migration statistics in planning their management response. Authorities remain committed to implement regional mechanisms for coordination/data exchange and development of new mechanisms.

Output 3: Beneficiaries are committed to strengthen cooperation with the EU. Authorities remain committed to implement regional mechanisms for coordination/data exchange and development of new mechanisms.

Output 4: Key stakeholders are committed to improving standards in the asylum and reception system. Beneficiaries adopt and apply specialised procedures for vulnerable groups. Staff are open to use knowledge gained in everyday functions. Authorities remain committed to improving reception facilities in line with EU and international standards. Necessary staff and other resources are in place.

Output 5: Beneficiaries commit to ensuring high quality of asylum procedures. Necessary staff and other resources are in place.

Output 6: Necessary political will to complement UNHCR, partners and NGOs free legal aid to refugees and asylum seekers with the provision of state provided free legal assistance. Necessary political will to seek long-term sustainable solutions to legal assistance. Authorities continue to cooperate in provision of information on access to asylum to new arrivals.

Output 7: Commitment by authorities to maintaining case management systems beyond implementation of the action. Cooperation initiated with CoOs maintained by authorities. Necessary ownership and commitment by authorities to adopt and apply international standardised procedures for AVRRs and non-voluntary returns. Necessary staff and other resources are in place.

Output 8: Necessary political will to adopt new approaches. The pilot initiatives boost broader engagement on ATD/regularisation.

Output 9: Necessary political will by authorities to adopt revised contingency plans. Necessary staff and other resources are in place. Necessary political will to engage in discussions that would eventually lead to the operationalisation of a regional contingency response.

### 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)?**

Women and children are particularly vulnerable in a migration context, and this will be fully considered throughout all the support provided through this action which puts migrants and people in need of international protection at its heart. Many activities specifically target capacity development in the context of providing sufficient responses to vulnerable persons and those with specific needs, including unaccompanied and separated children. Female migrants, especially those considered at risk of sexual exploitation, will receive special attention. In addition, the action shall respect the principles of equal opportunity and ensure equal participation of women and men in all activities. Each activity will include gender measures and indicators will be sex- and age-aggregated.

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

There is no direct link to environment and climate change, as the action is centered on migration management within the Western Balkans. However, caution will be taken to reduce any associated environmental impact where possible. The impact of methods of transportation used by action staff will be taken into consideration when travelling to the region.

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

The action aims to develop long-term asylum and protection mechanisms that align to EU and international standards which guarantee international protection. As such, the action is specifically designed so as to strengthen systems that guarantee human rights. It will specifically work on strengthening asylum systems to ensure that individuals fleeing violence, including gender-based persecution, can exercise their right to protection and family unity across the region and that refugees are not discriminated against on the basis of nationality when being processed in transit.

The action shall have a cross-cutting approach to ensuring fundamental rights standards are respected in all aspects of protection-sensitive migration systems.

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

Linkages and synergies will be sought and developed with upcoming and ongoing IPA-funded civil society programmes in the area of migration. Participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in relevant meetings at regional and IPA III beneficiary level will be facilitated where possible. CSOs/NGOs will be consulted in the implementation of specific activities within the action and participate in workshops and meetings where relevant. Part of the action may also be implemented through small sub-granting schemes to local CSOs and/or NGOs, which will foster partnerships and help build capacities of local actors thus contributing to the sustainability of the action.

#### **Others (such as Resilience and Conflict Sensitivity, Roma, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups)**

All support of the action requiring a direct engagement with migrants is steered towards ensuring a protection-sensitive approach, giving specific consideration to the individual needs of different groups of people in need in the migration process. Particular attention will be paid to unaccompanied and separated children, families, persons with

disabilities, as well as refugees who may be suffering from considerable trauma. Roma inclusion will be mainstreamed throughout the action where possible. Vulnerable persons will be identified so as to benefit from specialised procedures.

### 3.5. Conditions for implementation

No conditions apply to this action. However, effective capacity strengthening requires high-level support by the beneficiaries and a concrete commitment to allocate relevant staff and resources to beneficiary institutions. Access to information and counterparts by implementing partners is also required. The Commission reserves the right to take appropriate measures, including by re-directing activities in consultation with implementing partners, if it assesses that such necessary accompanying measures by beneficiaries are not in place. The assessment of the Commission will rely on reporting by implementing partners, monitoring of the action and dialogue with beneficiaries.

3.6. 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 a more effective and rights-based management of migrants and persons in need of international protection in the Western Balkans	<p>A) Extent to which Western Balkans have migration policies to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people (1 = requires further progress; 2 = partially meets; 3 = meets; 4 = fully meets)</p> <p>B) Extent to which Western Balkans' asylum frameworks and systems enable access of asylum-seekers and refugees to meaningful protection</p>	<p>A) 2.75 (2019)</p> <p>B) Partially</p>	<p>A) 3 (2027)</p> <p>B) Improved</p>	<p>International Organisation for Migration and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs as custodian agencies; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development as partner agency</p> <p>European Commission</p>	<i>Not applicable</i>
<b>Outcome 1</b>	Improved standardised and regionally-operable statistics and mechanisms for identification, registration and referral of mixed migration movements	Extent to which standardised and functional techniques on identification of migrants and vulnerable persons are operational in each beneficiary (Y/N)	No (2022)	Yes (2025)	<p>Commission reports/assessments</p> <p>Beneficiary reports</p> <p>Implementing partner reporting</p>	<p>No further deterioration of the migration situation in the Western Balkans</p> <p>Beneficiaries are committed to increase capacity for identification, registration and referral of mixed migration movements</p> <p>Ownership of beneficiaries is respected in implementation</p>

<p><b>Outcome 2</b></p>	<p>Improved implementation of international protection measures, including for vulnerable persons</p>	<p>A) Level of implementation of EASO Roadmaps B) Extent to which status determination procedures meet minimum international and EU standards</p>	<p>A) Low implementation in 4 beneficiaries (2022) B) Partially</p>	<p>A) Medium implementation in 6 beneficiaries (2025) B) Improved</p>	<p>Commission reports/assessments Beneficiary reports UNHCR, EASO reports Implementing partner reporting</p>	<p>No further deterioration of the migration situation in the Western Balkans Beneficiaries remain committed to building sustainable and protection-sensitive asylum and reception systems that are fully aligned with international human rights standards Ownership of beneficiaries is respected in implementation.</p>
<p><b>Outcome 3</b></p>	<p>Improved management of returns and alternatives to detention</p>	<p>A) Number of beneficiaries with improved return systems in place and in use B) Extent to which approaches to ATD are adopted in the region (Y/N)</p>	<p>A) 0 (2022) B) No (2022)</p>	<p>A) 6 (2025) B) Yes (2025)</p>	<p>Commission reports/assessments Implementing partner reporting</p>	<p>No further deterioration of the migration situation in the Western Balkans Beneficiaries are committed to increase capacity in management of returns and alternatives to detention Ownership of beneficiaries is respected in implementation.</p>



						Fair and functioning asylum systems underpin return capacities
<b>Outcome 4</b>	Improved EU-aligned contingency planning and crisis response capacities, including at regional level	Level of preparedness to effectively manage migration related crisis situations	Low preparedness (2022)	Medium preparedness (2025)	Commission reports/assessments Beneficiary reports Frontex reports	No further deterioration of the migration situation in the Western Balkans  Beneficiaries are committed to increase capacity on contingency planning  Necessary political will in the EU to extend crisis response planning measures to Western Balkans region  Ownership of beneficiaries is respected in implementation.
<b>Output 1 related to outcome 1</b>	The Western Balkans are further acquainted with EU best practice in managing migratory movements and capacitated to identify, register and refer migrants to the relevant services in a standardised and regionally harmonised manner	A) Number of IT Masterplans for identifying and registering mixed migration flows developed in the region  B) Level of accessibility by users of sustainable interpretation tools	A) 2 (2022)  B) Limited access (2022)	A) 6 (2025)  B) Increased access (2025)	Implementing partner reporting (Frontex, IOM)	Beneficiaries are committed to strengthen cooperation within the region and with the EU  Beneficiaries commit to procuring the necessary EURODAC compliant IT equipment upon

						<p>completion of the IT Masterplans</p> <p>Beneficiaries use the interpretation tools made available</p> <p>Necessary staff and other resources are in place</p>
<b>Output 2 related to outcome 1</b>	<p>The Western Balkans are better equipped to align with EU migration data standards and further prepared to share and exchange harmonised migration data and statistics</p>	<p>A) Number of statistics roadmaps supported in the region</p>	<p>0 (2022)</p>	<p>3 (2025)</p>	<p>Implementing partner (IOM)</p>	<p>Beneficiaries are committed to strengthen cooperation within the region and with the EU</p> <p>Beneficiaries use the migration statistics in planning their management response</p> <p>Authorities remain committed to implement regional mechanisms for coordination/data exchange and development of new mechanisms</p>
<b>Output 3 related to outcome 2</b>	<p>The Western Balkans have improved coordination/exchange mechanisms within and between asylum and reception authorities, including with the EU</p>	<p>A) Number of regional dialogues of asylum and reception authorities organised</p> <p>B) Level of information exchange and knowledge sharing between EU Member States and Western Balkans</p>	<p>A) 0 (2022)</p> <p>B) Low level of information exchange and knowledge sharing (2022)</p>	<p>A) To be determined at inception phase (2025)</p> <p>B) Increased level of information exchange and knowledge-sharing (2025)</p>	<p>Implementing partner reporting (EASO)</p>	<p>Beneficiaries are committed to strengthen cooperation with the EU</p> <p>Authorities remain committed to implement regional</p>

						mechanisms for coordination/data exchange and development of new mechanisms
<b>Output 4 related to outcome 2</b>	The Western Balkans are further equipped to implement international protection measures including for persons with special needs	<p>A) Extent to which a pool of trainers in EASO relevant advanced modules is established and stands ready to train asylum and reception staff</p> <p>B) Number of procedures for effective identification, assessment, and referral of persons with special needs developed at beneficiary level</p> <p>C) Extent to which standardised and harmonised guidelines/manuals/SOPs for the management of reception centres with a specific focus on vulnerable groups exist</p>	<p>A) Pool of trainers in core modules exists (2022)</p> <p>B) 4 (2022)</p> <p>C) Standardised and harmonised guidelines/manuals/SOPs do not exist (2022)</p>	<p>A) Pool of trainers in advance modules exists (2025)</p> <p>B) 10 (2025)</p> <p>C) Standardised and harmonised guidelines/manuals/SOPs exist (2025)</p>	Implementing partner reporting (EASO)	<p>Key stakeholders are committed to improving standards in the asylum and reception system</p> <p>Beneficiaries adopt and apply specialised procedures for vulnerable groups</p> <p>Staff are open to use knowledge gained in everyday functions</p> <p>Authorities remain committed to improving reception facilities in line with EU and international standards</p> <p>Necessary staff and other resources are in place</p>
<b>Output 5 related to outcome 2</b>	The Western Balkans have strengthened capacity to provide quality assurance in asylum examination processes and appeals	Application by beneficiaries of information provision and quality assurance tools, processes and procedures	Low application (2022)	Increased application (2025)	Implementing partner reporting (EASO, UNHCR)	<p>Authorities commit to ensuring high quality of asylum procedures</p> <p>Necessary staff and other resources are in place</p>

<p><b>Output 6 related to outcome 2</b></p>	<p>New arrivals, asylum-seekers, as well as refugees, have access to legal counselling and assistance</p>	<p>A) Number of individuals on the move wishing to seek asylum receiving legal counselling</p> <p>B) Number of persons of concern (PoC) asylum-seekers and refugees receiving legal assistance</p>	<p>A) 15,000 (2022)</p> <p>B) 4,000 (2022)</p>	<p>A) 20,000 (2025)</p> <p>B) 4,500 (2025)</p>	<p>Implementing partner reporting (UNHCR)</p>	<p>Necessary political will by authorities to complement UNHCR, partners and NGOs free legal aid to refugees and asylum seekers with the provision of state provided free legal assistance</p> <p>Necessary political will by authorities to seek long-term sustainable solutions to legal assistance</p> <p>Authorities continue to cooperate in provision of information on access to asylum to new arrivals</p>
<p><b>Output 7 related to outcome 3</b></p>	<p>The Western Balkans are better equipped to undertake AVRRs and NVRs</p>	<p>A) Number of electronic case management systems with EU set-up supported</p> <p>B) Number of readmission cooperation mechanisms with selected CoO developed</p> <p>C) Number of return operations organised by Frontex or EU Member States where Beneficiaries' return escorts participate as observers</p>	<p>A) 2 (2023)</p> <p>B) 2 (2023)</p> <p>C) 0 (2022)</p> <p>D) 2,500 (2022)</p> <p>E) 0 (2022)</p>	<p>A) 4 (2025)</p> <p>B) 4 (2025)</p> <p>C) 48 (2025)</p> <p>D) 3,000 (2025)</p> <p>E) 200 (2025)</p>	<p>Implementing partner reporting (IOM, Frontex)</p>	<p>Commitment by authorities to maintaining case management systems beyond implementation of the action</p> <p>Cooperation initiated with CoO maintained by authorities</p> <p>Necessary ownership and</p>

		<p>D) Number of migrants supported in voluntary return</p> <p>E) Number of returned migrants receiving reintegration support</p>				<p>commitment by authorities to adopt and apply international standardised procedures for AVRRs and non-voluntary returns</p> <p>Necessary staff and other resources are in place</p>
<b>Output 8 related to outcome 3</b>	<p>The Western Balkans have increased capacity to implement alternatives to immigration detention (ATD) and procedural safeguards in line with international standards</p>	<p>A) Number of feasibility assessments on ATD/regularisation</p> <p>B) Number of small-scale ATD/regularisation solutions/programmes piloted</p>	<p>A) 0 (2022)</p> <p>B) 0 (2022)</p>	<p>A) 6 (2025)</p> <p>B) 2 (2025)</p>	<p>Implementing partner reporting (IOM)</p>	<p>Necessary political will by authorities to adopt new approaches to ATD</p> <p>The pilot initiatives boost broader engagement by stakeholders on ATD/regularisation</p>
<b>Output 9 related to outcome 4</b>	<p>The Western Balkans have better knowledge of EU-aligned contingency planning and have improved capacity for crisis response including at regional levels</p>	<p>A) Number of contingency plans revised</p> <p>B) Extent to which Working Group for the harmonisation of Contingency Response capacities at the regional level is established</p> <p>C) Framework agreement for regional cooperation concluded (Y/N)</p>	<p>A) 0 (2022)</p> <p>B) Working Group does not exist (2022)</p> <p>C) No (2022)</p>	<p>A) 6 (2025)</p> <p>B) The Working Group is established (2025)</p> <p>C) Yes (2025)</p>	<p>Implementing partner reporting (Frontex and EASO)</p>	<p>Necessary political will by authorities to adopt revised contingency plans</p> <p>Necessary staff and other resources are in place</p> <p>Necessary political will to engage in discussions that would eventually lead to the operationalisation of a regional contingency response</p>

## 4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

### 4.1. Financing agreement

In order to implement this action, it is not foreseen to conclude financing agreements with the targeted 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>6</sup>.

#### 4.2.1. Indirect management with EU specialised (traditional/regulatory) agencies and international organisations)

The action will be implemented through **three contribution agreements** awarded to Frontex, EASO and IOM/UNHCR respectively.

##### 4.2.1.1. Frontex

A part of this action may be implemented in indirect management with **Frontex (Contract 1)**. The implementation by this entity entails undertaking all necessary actions, including through direct implementation of activities and conducting budget implementation tasks (procurement and grants award procedures as relevant), to achieve the expected outcomes 1, 3 and 4 and the respective outputs 1, 7 and 9. Tasks may include inter alia: technical assistance, capacity building, carrying out analysis and assessments, workshops/training/events and development of tools. The envisaged entity has been selected using the following criteria: core mandate, operational and financial capacity, and experience in the region. As an EU decentralised agency, Frontex has the specific mandate to provide the EU Member States and Schengen Associated countries with support in management of their external borders. The agency facilitates cooperation between border authorities in each EU country, providing technical support and expertise. It is thus best placed to provide technical expertise and capacity building to the IPA III beneficiaries to ensure alignment with EU standards in the context of their future accession. Frontex has valuable prior expertise in working in the Western Balkan region, most notably under the previous two phases of the IPA regional migration programmes. Frontex possesses a high degree of competence and degree of specialisation necessary to implement and add value to the proposed action and has the necessary operational capacity to undertake this action.

##### 4.2.1.2. EASO

A part of this action may be implemented in indirect management with **EASO<sup>7</sup> (Contract 2)**. This implementation entails undertaking all necessary actions, including through direct implementation of activities and conducting budget implementation tasks (procurement and grants award procedures as relevant), to achieve the expected outcomes 1, 2 and 4 and the respective outputs 2, 3, 4, 5 and 9. The envisaged entity has been selected using the following criteria: core mandate, operational and financial capacity, and experience in the region. As an EU agency, EASO has the specific mandate to provide EU Member States and third partners with technical assistance and expertise to enhance internal asylum systems through a range of supportive mechanisms. The agency has expert knowledge of the challenges faced by the Western Balkans in the area of asylum, and is best placed to facilitate cooperation between the region and EU Member States in order to align standards and prepare the region for future accession. The agency has been active in the region, notably under the first two phases of the IPA regional migration programme. EASO has previous expertise in the Western Balkans region in terms of the provision of assessment, advice and training and engaging with competent authorities on asylum and reception matters. EASO possesses a high degree of competence and degree of specialisation necessary to implement and add value to the proposed action and has the necessary operational capacity to undertake this action.

<sup>6</sup> [www.sanctionsmap.eu](http://www.sanctionsmap.eu) Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website it is the OJ version that prevails.

<sup>7</sup> EASO is not yet pillar assessed, but an exemption decision in line with Article 154(6) of the Financial Regulation is being prepared. The grant fall-back option will be considered in case of an unlikely unsuccessful light pillar assessment or if the light pillar assessment has not been completed in time for contract signature.

#### 4.2.1.3. IOM and UNHCR

A part of this action may be implemented in indirect management with **IOM** and **UNHCR (Contract 3)**. This implementation entails undertaking all necessary actions, including through direct implementation of activities and conducting budget implementation tasks (procurement and grants award procedures as relevant), to achieve the expected outcomes 1, 2 and 3 and the respective outputs 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8. The envisaged entities have been selected using the following criteria: core mandate, operational and financial capacity, and experience in the region. As pillar-assessed organisations, IOM and UNHCR have extensive expertise and experience in the respective areas of their mandates. IOM is specialised in developing the resilience of all people on the move, and particularly those in situations of vulnerability, as well as building capacity within governments to manage all forms and impacts of mobility. UNHCR is entrusted by the UN General Assembly with the mandate to provide international protection to refugees and, together with Governments, seek permanent solutions to the problems of refugees. IOM and UNHCR have the necessary financial and management capacity to successfully manage and implement the programme. In addition, the entities have previous expertise in the Western Balkans region in terms of the provision of assessment, advice and training and engaging with authorities. IOM has also physical presence in the region on a continuous basis. Both entities possess a high degree of competence and degree of specialisation necessary to implement and add value to the proposed action and have the necessary operational capacity to undertake this action.

The Commission authorises that the costs incurred may be recognised as eligible as of 1 January 2022. This clause is necessary due to the high political importance of the programme and to ensure continuous support to the Western Balkans in improving migration management. It is important to ensure continuity between the end date of Phase II of the IPA II programme, which will cease implementation on 31 December 2021 per the current agreements with the implementing partners.

Moreover, this is of particular importance given the regulatory framework governing the financial management of the EU Justice and Home Affairs agencies. As decentralised agencies of the Union, EASO and Frontex operate under the frame of common financial rules of the European Commission (specifically the General Financial Regulation and the agency's respective Financial Regulation).

Frontex and EASO, in line with budgetary principles of specifications, unity and budgetary accuracy, are not in the position to pre-finance project activities from their own annual subsidy/budget other than in pre-agreed circumstances for a limited period of time and to the extent that it does not compromise the availability of resources for implementing all other activities planned under the respective annual work programmes and budgets.

#### 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>
<b>Outcomes 1, 3 and 4 – outputs 1, 7 and 9</b>		
Indirect management with Frontex	5 500 000	N/A
<b>Outcomes 1, 2 and 4 – outputs 2, 3, 4, 5 and 9</b>		
Indirect management with EASO	6 000 000	N/A
<b>Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 – outputs 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8</b>		
Indirect management with IOM (outputs 1, 2, 7 and 8)	7 700 000	N/A
Indirect management with UNHCR (outputs 5 and 6)		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>19 200 000</b>	<b>N/A</b>

#### 4.5. Organisational set-up and responsibilities

The action shall be implemented under 3 separate contracts by Frontex, EASO, IOM/UNHCR respectively. These organisations have been selected to ensure an holistic approach to developing sustainable migration management systems in full respect of human rights and taking into account specific vulnerabilities of different groups.

The action shall be steered through beneficiary Steering Committees, meeting at least once a year. There will be an annual Regional Steering Committee which will be chaired by the European Commission.

## 5. PERFORMANCE/RESULTS MONITORING AND REPORTING

### 5.1. Internal monitoring

The action will be implemented through 3 contracts steered through common mechanisms set up at the regional and the beneficiary level.

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

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

The implementing partners will continuously capture, record and track key statistical information on the implementation of activities. Particular emphasis will be placed on systematic collection of data required to track progress on indicators identified in the logical framework. The monitoring methods and sources will include the following as relevant: action records showing details about events held and actions taken; website and social media analysis showing viewership, reach, and engagement of target audiences; visibility and impact of social media campaigns; number of mainstream media stories published using material provided through the action; and feedback from participants through questionnaires designed for the action.

### 5.3 Evaluation

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

It will be carried out for accountability and learning purposes, at various levels (including for policy revision), taking into account the need to align the programme to the evolving policy priorities and migration context.

The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least 1 month in advance of the dates foreseen for the evaluation missions. The implementing partner shall collaborate efficiently and effectively with the evaluation experts, and inter alia provide them with all necessary information and documentation, as well as access to the project premises



and activities.

The evaluation reports shall be shared with the partner beneficiaries 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 partner beneficiary, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the project.

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

## 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 beneficiary 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

The action has been designed to ensure the long term sustainability of its results. An important aspect of the action includes capacity building activities, that build upon and continue progress made under phases I and II of the regional programme. The sustainability of capacity transfer through trainings will be ensured through careful selection of participants, application of a train-the-trainer approach, as well as with targeted follow-up actions and regular dialogue with relevant authorities/stakeholders. The transfer of knowledge from the implementing partners to the beneficiaries shall be ensured during and beyond the project implementation period.

Concerning the output of Masterplans, the relevant procurement and maintenance of EURODAC-compliant IT equipment by the beneficiaries will be required to ensure the operation of the result.

Furthermore, where possible, the action will seek to streamline best practices in line with EU and international standards into the everyday technical operation of the different areas of the beneficiaries' migration management systems. For returns, framework agreements established with countries of origin will be central to creating sustainable mechanism for returning irregular migrants and failed asylum-seekers. Regarding identification and registration at external borders, continuous transfer of knowledge will be guaranteed.

Overall, the action should be contextualised as part of the EU's overall commitment to engage more closely with the Western Balkans region including by ensuring cooperation through its JHA agencies Frontex and EASO. This long-term perspective of engagement underpins the sustainability of the capacity transfer taken forward by this action. Ultimately, the long-term sustainability of the action requires that the Western Balkans commit to strengthen their migration management capacities. This includes a commitment to increasingly allocate specific budget to ensure that the cooperation initiated under this action continues beyond its duration.