



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

### **MULTI-COUNTRY**

### **EU support to youth in the Western Balkans**

#### **Action summary**

The overall objective of the action is to contribute to reconciliation in the Western Balkans by increasing regional cooperation opportunities of young people. The action will aim to boost people-to-people exchanges and provide opportunities for youth to be involved in decision making. The action will also improve the knowledge of young civil servants of the EU enlargement process. Taken together, the coordinated approach proposed supports an enabling environment for an improved future for young people in the Western Balkan region.

The target group and final beneficiaries of the action will be national and local authorities, schools, civil society organizations and young people.

<b>Action Identification</b>			
<b>Action Programme Title</b>	IPA II Multi-country Action Programme 2019		
<b>Action Title</b>	EU support to youth in the Western Balkans		
<b>Action ID</b>	IPA 2019/040-826.07/MC/Support to youth		
<b>Sector Information</b>			
<b>IPA II Sector</b>	9. Regional and territorial cooperation		
<b>DAC Sector</b>	11420 – Higher education (Youth)		
<b>Budget</b>			
<b>Total cost</b>	EUR 4.7 million		
<b>EU contribution</b>	EUR 4.7 million		
<b>Budget line(s)</b>	22.020401- Multi-country programmes, regional integration and territorial cooperation		
<b>Management and Implementation</b>			
<b>Management mode</b>	Direct and indirect management		
<i>Direct management:</i> <b>European Commission</b>	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations– Unit D.5 Regional Cooperation and Programmes		
<i>Indirect management:</i> <b>Entrusted entity</b>	Component 1 - Member State Agencies		
<b>Implementation responsibilities</b>	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations– Unit D.5 Regional Cooperation and Programmes		
<b>Location</b>			
<b>Zone benefiting from the action</b>	Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, , Kosovo* , Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia)		
<b>Specific implementation area(s)</b>	N/A		
<b>Timeline</b>			
<b>Final date for contracting including the conclusion of delegation agreements</b>	At the latest by 31 December 2020		
<b>Indicative operational implementation period</b>	72 months from the adoption of the Financing Decision		
<b>Policy objectives / Markers (DAC form)</b>			
<b>General policy objective</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Main objective</b>
Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X

\* 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.

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"/>
<b>RIO Convention markers</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Main objective</b>
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

Young people (aged 15 to 30) are an important resource for the future of the Western Balkans. According to the Balkan Barometer 2018<sup>1</sup>, young people in the region are more likely to favour EU membership and see its benefits in terms of the freedom to travel, study and work. The EU is often perceived as a source of higher employment opportunities and a better future.

This perception is reinforced as young people are confronted with various challenges in the Western Balkans, including a difficult economic context, high levels of youth unemployment and outdated education systems that do not respond to the needs of the present-day labour markets and promote gender stereotyping. Young people, including girls, not in education, employment or training are particularly vulnerable to marginalisation. The contribution of young people to the economic growth of the region remains under-exploited, while “brain drain” becomes a real issue. At the same time, young generations overall seem less interested in news and information from the Western Balkans; interest for the region correlates positively with the level of education.

Regional cooperation and people-to-people contacts, in particular cooperation among the young generations, are important for the promotion of mutual understanding as well as social, cultural and economic development. Regional cooperation remains a catalyst for the enlargement process and a key enabling factor for comprehensive reforms and the return to sustainable economic growth in the Western Balkans. In the past two decades, intra-regional youth cooperation in the Western Balkans has been encouraged by the EU. The EU has also been supporting dialogue on the future of youth in the region through a number of projects and initiatives, including the Erasmus+ Programme. In recent years, focus on youth gained impetus in the Berlin Process. The establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) in 2016 was a tangible positive step towards promoting dialogue, involving young people in joint activities and changing the regional narrative. However, further work is needed to ensure sustainable youth involvement across the region, in particular through strengthening national youth councils.

In addition, public administration reform (PAR) remains among the focal areas of EU's assistance for the Western Balkans beneficiaries that face common challenges. European Commission Progress Reports and the EU/OECD SIGMA assessment reports show that PAR challenges in the Western Balkans include but are not limited to: enhancement of policy and legislative development, coordination capacities including European Integration planning and implementation, accountability, professionalization and de-politicisation of the civil service, and human resource development and management. The common PAR problems faced by the Western Balkan IPA II beneficiaries could be more efficiently addressed through peer reviews and sharing of good practices across the region as regional cooperation in this field also contributes to the development of effective and efficient state administrations in the region

Overall, regional cooperation and youth mobility effectively improve the future of youth, and promote overall social equity by providing opportunities for youth. The proposed action, *EU support to Youth in the Western Balkans* will create new and strengthen existing opportunities for young people in the region by:

- strengthening exchanges among youth and administrations in the region and with the EU
- provide opportunities for youth to participate in decision making and improve knowledge of EU enlargement process

### OUTLINE OF IPA II ASSISTANCE

In line with the above, the *EU support to Youth in the Western Balkans* will foster existing and facilitate creation of sustainable opportunities for young people in the Western Balkans.

#### *Scheme for Young Civil Servants*

The action is based on the current EU Scheme for Young Professionals in the Western Balkans, a regional exchange and executive programme for young civil servants. Main results of the action will be stronger

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.rcc.int/seeds/files/RCC\\_BalkanBarometer\\_PublicOpinion\\_2018.pdf](https://www.rcc.int/seeds/files/RCC_BalkanBarometer_PublicOpinion_2018.pdf)

professional network in place between young civil servants and between administration, and improved knowledge and experience of young civil servants of the European perspective of the Western Balkans.

#### *Western Balkans Youth Lab*

Secondly, the action will put in place a Western Balkans Youth Lab. The Lab will consist of a series of interactive workshops, webinars, conferences, field visits, etc. based on participatory leadership methods that stimulate open conversations and active engagement between young people and policy-makers in the region. Youth policy labs will offer safe space for youth to participate on an equal basis with policy makers and engage in meaningful manner in a policy development based on the principles of co-management and co-production. The main results will be co-creation, testing and prototyping of ideas that address complex social issues such as writing a strategy or a policy, conducting research, evaluating a public service, or running a project.

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

Supporting the education, 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 highlighted through the *Flagship 3: Supporting socio-economic development*, and the *Flagship 6: Supporting reconciliation and good neighbourly relations* of the February 2018 Commission Communication on “*A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*”.<sup>2</sup> 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 2018. The Sofia Priority Agenda also proposes the establishment of a “Western Balkans Youth Lab”, providing space for innovative policy-making addressing the needs of young people, and tackling brain drain.

The revised IPA II Multi-country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020<sup>3</sup> also highlights the need for further progress towards reconciliation and good neighbourly relations, including support to youth. Financial assistance will also 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.

### **LESSONS LEARNED AND LINK TO PREVIOUS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

The action takes into account lessons learned in previous actions.

The Scheme for Young Civil Servants builds on previous interventions targeting young civil servants, namely the *EU Scheme for Young Professionals*, which was a regional action implemented with British Council in the Western Balkans in the period between 2016 and 2019. The EU Scheme for Young Professionals gathered young civil servants from the Western Balkan IPA II beneficiaries for an executive training and an intra-regional exchange programme. This pilot (IPA II Multi-Country Programme 2016) and a subsequent action (IPA II Multi-Country Programme 2017) has positively contributed to the PAR and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. In general, feedback from civil servants has been very positive, with the regional exchange part of the action having been identified as one of the main highlights of the programme. Nevertheless, some key challenges appeared in recent year, such as:

- effectiveness of dissemination of the call for expression of interest for participants in different Western Balkan IPA II beneficiaries, and
- low number of applications followed by low success rates.

Therefore, based on lessons learned, the Scheme for Young Civil Servants has been developed to better respond to current needs of the administrations including through a stronger link with targeted IPA II beneficiaries.

The *Western Balkans Youth Lab* builds on past dialogues with young people. It recognises that to be fruitful, dialogues should lead to co-creation of relevant policies, and thus to turn recommendations into actions.

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<sup>2</sup> COM (2018) 65, 6.2.2018 - [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> C(2018) 3442, 31.05.2018.

## 2. INTERVENTION LOGIC

### LOGICAL FRAMEWORK MATRIX

<b>OVERALL OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)</b>	<b>SOURCES OF VERIFICATION</b>	
To contribute to reconciliation through improved regional cooperation of young people in the Western Balkans and with the EU	Number of young people (sex disaggregated) from the region engaged in regional cooperation programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Project reports and statistics;</li> <li>-European Commission Progress Reports;</li> <li>-Media;</li> <li>-External monitoring surveys, polls, reports and studies.</li> </ul>	
<b>SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)</b>	<b>SOURCES OF VERIFICATION</b>	<b>ASSUMPTIONS</b>
<p>SO 1 To strengthen exchanges among youth and administrations in the region and with the EU</p> <p>SO 2 To provide opportunities for youth to participate in decision making and improve knowledge of EU enlargement process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of exchanges among youth (sex disaggregated) (study visit, training, etc.) supported</li> <li>- Existence of Western Balkans youth lab</li> <li>- Number of young people (male/female) and policy makers respectively participating in youth lab</li> <li>-Number of policies co-created or consulted with young people (male/female)</li> <li>- % of young civil servants (male/female) participating in the programme who report an increase in knowledge of EU enlargement process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Project reports and statistics;</li> <li>- European Commission Progress Reports;</li> <li>-Media;</li> <li>-External monitoring</li> <li>- Survey of young civil servants participating in programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Young people motivated to improve regional cooperation.</li> <li>- Political situation allows for regional cooperation.</li> <li>-Interest, engagement and active participation of all relevant stakeholders including authorities at local and targeted IPA II beneficiary level, schools, and civil society organisations.</li> <li>- Participation of EU Member States administrations secured.</li> </ul>

RESULTS	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)	SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
<p><b>Result 1:</b> Stronger professional network in place between young civil servants and between administrations</p> <p><b>Result 2:</b> Improved knowledge and experience of young civil servants of the European perspective of the Western Balkans</p> <p><b>Result 3:</b> Increased mobilisation of youth in policy making</p> <p><b>Result 4:</b> Increased co-creation of relevant policies with youth</p>	<p>-% of participants (male/female) in who acknowledge that the project has strengthened their network</p> <p>- Number of policy papers developed</p> <p>-Number of young people (male/female) who participated in the Western Balkans Youth Policy Lab</p> <p>- Number of policies co-created</p>	<p>- Project reports and statistics</p> <p>- External monitoring</p> <p>- Surveys, polls, reports and studies.</p>	<p>- Interest of young people to engage</p> <p>-Availability of relevant institutions and civil society organisations</p>

## **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES**

The action is proposed to be implemented through two complementary work streams: one targeting young people in public administrations (component Scheme for Young Civil Servants) and the other targeting youth and organisations involving youth (component Western Balkans Youth Lab).

The following indicative main activities have been identified:

### ***Component 1 - Scheme for Young Civil Servants***

The proposed component builds upon previous interventions targeting young civil servants, and it has been adapted based on lessons learned. The component targets civil servants involved in the European perspective of the Western Balkans from various institutions from IPA II beneficiaries in the Western Balkans who are younger than 35 years of age. It will contribute to the development of effective and efficient public administrations in the region by offering a tailor-made fellowship and training programme for a selected number of highly qualified young civil servants. The selected civil servants will be involved in a sequence of activities: targeted executive training, study visit in at least one EU Member State public administration, and an intraregional exchange.

The administrations of Western Balkans will be involved in selecting the participants to ensure that the programme meets specific knowledge and networking needs. As women's participation in the civil service is vital for their economic empowerment, as well as for mirroring the fabric of society in a beneficiary's public institutions, participation of women in the scheme will be encouraged. The scheme will also be designed so as to support participants in their current career path. It will stimulate intraregional cooperation and cooperation with the EU. The programme will ensure continuous mentoring of participants throughout their participation. Each participant will be expected to participate in the creation of knowledge products that contribute to the work of their administrations. A virtual exchange platform will be created to allow for exchanges including for programme alumni.

It is foreseen to support three cohorts of young civil servants over the course of three years.

#### Sub-component 1: Targeted executive training

The project will partner with at least one or two training institutions in the EU to offer a tailor-made short executive training to participants. The training will introduce them to the skills and perspectives, including on the EU, that are needed throughout the programme, enable sharing of approaches to common issues, and initiate relationships among the participants.

#### Sub-component 2: Study visit in the EU

Young civil servants will be exposed to the administration of at least one Member State of the EU. This component is envisaged as a study visit to an institution related to the field of work of the participant. It is organised in view of exposing participants to the structures, policies and work of an EU Member State administration with a view to strengthening thematic policy knowledge but also of enlargement requirements. The study visit should include exposure to civil society and private sector actors when relevant.

#### Sub-component 3: Intraregional element

A core element of the programme is an intraregional exchange. Participants will reconvene in six regional capitals to expand their perspectives on their work and on the region. They also examine ways in which they can collaborate and build on their experiences.

#### Sub-component 4: Cross-cutting: mentoring, support, networking

To support knowledge transfer and networking, the action will provide for mentoring and support to its participants including through the virtual exchange platform.

Work on joint regional knowledge products will be encouraged. Relevant administrations will be associated to review the work. Adequate dissemination of the products will be ensured.



## ***Component 2 - Western Balkans Youth Lab***

The proposed component will enable the organisation of a series of youth policy labs across the Western Balkans. The youth policy labs will bring together youth and policy makers from the region in regular policy dialogue on issues important to the youth in the Western Balkans.

### Sub-component 1: Mapping

The action will initially conduct a mapping exercise to identify how best to involve youth in the planned youth labs. The exercise will outline youth actors and organisations/stakeholders working with youth in a broad sense (sports, culture, environment, youth not in education, employment or training etc.). It will also map existing youth policies, programmes and initiatives as an input to the Youth Labs and evidence based policymaking. The mapping should identify possibilities to embed the Youth Labs in other youth related processes in view of linking policy inputs to actionable solutions.

### Sub-component 2: Youth Policy Labs in the Western Balkans

The aim of the policy labs is to facilitate youth participation in policymaking. Based on the mapping exercise, the specific design of the youth labs will be determined. A first step will be to create a reference group of youth to guide the process of establishing the labs using formats that speak to youth. Thematically, the focus of the youth policy labs will build on the policy issues identified in previous youth conferences and engagement as important to youth in the region. This can include issues covered under the Multi-Annual Plan on Regional Economic Area such as Trade, Investment, Mobility and Digital Agenda. The mapping exercise will also provide input in identifying gaps, including gender gaps, in youth policies, programmes and initiatives.

The youth labs will be designed to be flexible and responsive to upcoming youth needs in the course of the labs. Specific attention will be paid to activate youth across the region including young people not in education, employment or training. The targeted participants will also include key youth organisations from the region with particular importance given to include the organisations representing and working closely with vulnerable and marginalised groups, as well as a right balance of large organisations based in the capitals and urban areas, and those located and working in rural areas. With regards to policy makers, line Ministries and relevant national agencies and bodies depending on the thematic focus will be targeted for participation.

At least four youth policy labs will be organised annually over the course of three years. The labs will take the form of interactive meetings/workshops/study visits. Interaction among participants will be facilitated in a continuous process between and beyond the meetings to create a dynamic of trust and active networks. A technical assistance instrument will be designed to support the implementation of the recommendations of the youth policy labs by either the youth organisations or the policy makers. The instrument can be mobilised to take forward specific policy work/studies that have been identified as necessary to advance on collaborative proposals emanating from the from the policy labs.

In view of supporting structures for more effective youth participation in policy making more broadly, the action will aim to complement the work on youth policy labs with support to the development and strengthening of the national youth councils in the Western Balkans. Specific training, capacity building and networking support is expected to be offered at regional and European levels, when relevant. Capacity building and technical assistance for policy makers to ensure the development of necessary legal frameworks to ensure independence and sustainability of the national youth councils could also be delivered.

An annual Ministerial Meeting on Youth Policy can be envisaged – where relevant – with the Ministers responsible for youth policy where the outcomes of the youth policy labs will feed into the meeting and form the basis for discussion on how to support youth, youth policies and development and strengthening of the national youth councils in the Western Balkans. The youth policy labs can also be embedded in relevant regional high-level events, where such engagement adds value and visibility to the overall approach.

### Sub-component 3: Participation of Western Balkan Youth in International Conferences

The programme will further aim to promote people-to-people contacts between the EU and the Western Balkans. Opening opportunities for young people to participate in events (meetings, seminars, workshops,

conferences) is of particular importance to the youth of the Western Balkans. Therefore, this component will support the participation of the Western Balkan youth in selected international conferences by covering costs of travel and accommodation for the young people from all Western Balkans.

RYCO and the European Youth Forum will be sought to be associated to the Youth Labs action to ensure complementarity to their work. The European Commission Joint Research Centre, European Training Foundation (ETF), and UNICEF will be associated, as relevant, on the youth policy lab methodology.

## RISKS

The following main risks have been identified:

Risks	Risk level (H/M/L)	Mitigating measures
Public administrations in the Western Balkans are reluctant to motivate their young civil servants to participate in the Scheme for Young Civil Servants	L	Public administrations will apply to the programme which will directly feed into their work.
Public administrations in the EU Member States or in the Western Balkans are not committed	L	A robust communication strategy will be designed
Youth are not motivated to participate in policy processes	L	The action will be designed to link the policy labs to processes which can deliver concrete outcomes to youth
To identify issues that can be tackled regionally by the youth labs	L	The action will synergise with the ongoing regional cooperation agenda and seek input from young people
<b>Assumptions</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people motivated to improve regional cooperation.</li> <li>• Political situation allows for regional cooperation.</li> <li>• Interest, engagement and active participation of all relevant stakeholders including authorities at local and IPA II beneficiary level, schools, and civil society organisations.</li> <li>• Participation of EU Member States administrations secured.</li> <li>• Availability of relevant institutions and civil society organisations</li> </ul>		

## CONDITIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

No particular conditions are required to start implementation of this action.

## 3. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

#### *Component 1 - Scheme for Young Civil Servants*

This implementation entails managing and implementing all aspects of the Scheme for Young Civil Servants, including providing technical assistance, managing the selection of participants/training institutions and visited institutions, implementing the exchange, visibility actions, audits and evaluations. A call for proposals may be implemented as integral part of the action. This activity will be implemented in indirect

management with pillar-assessed EU Member States' agencies or a consortium thereof as the scope of the component requires the involvement of a body, which can develop exchanges with public administrations in the EU and in the Western Balkans.

#### *Component 2 - Western Balkans Youth Lab*

This implementation entails mapping of youth actors, policies and programmes and identification of existing support; planning and implementation of Youth Policy Labs; and participation of the youth from the Western Balkans in international conferences. Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Secretariat will be entrusted to implement the Western Balkans Youth Lab by ensuring a meaningful policy dialogue between young people and policy makers from relevant line Ministries, as well as full integration of youth policy labs into ongoing regional policy development processes. In implementing the action, the RCC will cooperate with other relevant youth initiatives and stakeholders including RYCO, ETF, the European Commission Joint Research Centre and UNICEF.

### **IMPLEMENTATION METHOD(S) AND TYPE(S) OF FINANCING**

This action will be implemented in the modality of a direct management, as well as indirect management, with Unit D.5 being responsible for the contracts' implementation and monitoring.

#### *Component 1 - Scheme for Young Civil Servants*

This part of the action, for the amount of EUR 3.2 million, may be implemented in indirect management with a Member State agency. The indicative duration of the contribution agreement will be 36 months.

#### *Component 2 - Western Balkans Youth Lab*

This part of the action, for an amount of EUR 1.5 million, will be implemented in direct management through a direct grant with the Regional Cooperation Council. The indicative duration of the grant contract will be 36 months.

## **4. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT**

### **METHODOLOGY FOR MONITORING (AND EVALUATION)**

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. The evaluations will be carried out as prescribed by the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations Guidelines on linking planning/programming, monitoring and evaluation. In addition, the action might be subject to external monitoring in line with the European Commission rules and procedures.

IPA II monitoring process is organised and led by Unit D.5 in the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. The monitoring process is aimed to improve programming, implementation and sustainability as well as timely identification, remedying and alleviation of potential issues in the process of programming and implementation of the interventions.

## INDICATOR MEASUREMENT

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Baseline (2010)</b>	<b>Target 2020</b>	<b>Final Target (2023)</b>	<b>Source of information</b>
-Number of exchanges (study visit, training, etc.) supported by the Scheme for Young Civil Servants	0	30	90	
-% of young civil servants (male/female) who report an increase in knowledge of EU enlargement process	0	80%	80%	
-% of participants in the programme who acknowledge that the project has strengthened their network	0	80%	80%	
-Existence of Western Balkans youth lab	0	3	6	
-Number of young people (male/female) and policy makers respectively participating in youth lab	0	180	360	
-Number of policies co-created or consulted with young people (specify male/female participants in each policy)	0	5	10	
-Number of policy papers developed	0	5	10	
-Number of young people (sex disaggregated) who participated in the Western Balkans Youth Policy Lab	0	180	360	
-Number of policies co-created	0	5	10	

## **5. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES**

### **GENDER MAINSTREAMING**

This action recognises that gender is an important horizontal issue. It will promote equal opportunities for young men and women in all aspects of the implementation of the action's components. The action will ensure the participation of both women and men in all activities, and measures to enhance women's participation will be taken if needed, as well as in the selection of the implementation staff. Indicators will be disaggregated by gender when possible. Progress reports will include a specific section on the progress and results of gender mainstreaming.

### **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

The action will not discriminate in any activity it may involve with and in contract it may conclude with any person regardless of gender, race, colour, religion, national 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 of the action's components.

### **MINORITIES AND VULNERABLE GROUPS**

The action will not discriminate in any activity it may involve with any person for the reasons of originating from minorities and/or vulnerable groups. The action will put in the best use the knowledge, skills and competences accumulated through the implementation of previous actions to ensure inclusion of youth 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 – through the Youth Lab component - includes a particular focus on involvement of non-governmental stakeholders and specifically civil society organisations. The results of the Youth Labs will be shared broadly with civil society actors so as to ensure wide dissemination and use of the reflection. The Regional Youth Cooperation Office, which aims to strengthen youth cooperation in the Western Balkans, will play an important role in the Youth Labs. The Labs will contribute to more an inclusive approach in policy and legislative development. They will promote appropriate involvement of young people in developing, monitoring and implementing public policies and legislation.

### **ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE (AND IF RELEVANT DISASTER RESILIENCE)**

By their nature, activities envisaged under this action do not imply direct and major impact to environmental issues. The action will be implemented in a manner which is environmentally friendly.

Climate action relevant budget allocation: EUR 0
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## **6. SUSTAINABILITY**

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

- The proposed actions are firmly anchored in the priorities and measures defined in the February 2018 Commission Communication on “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans”. The Youth Lab concept has jointly been agreed by the EU and the Western Balkans in the Sofia Priority Agenda (May 2018);
- Public administrations will apply to the Scheme for Young Civil Servants and the work conducted by the participants will feed into their regular tasks, thus ensuring the commitment and added value that the exchange programme will have to the targeted administrations;
- By enabling youth to participate in policy-making thorough the Youth Labs, the action creates sustainable capacities among the participants for the benefit of the region;

- The action does not envisage the establishment or financing of new organisational units or their running costs, thus contributing to the sustainability of the action.

## **7. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY**

Communication and visibility will be given high importance during the implementation of the action. The implementation of communication activities will be the joint responsibility of the beneficiaries, and 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 and the accession process, 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. The European Commission and the EU Delegations should be fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities.

Visibility and communication aspects shall be complementary to the activities implemented by the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations and the EU Delegations and the EU Delegations in the field. The European Commission and the EU Delegations should be fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities. The entrusted entities and the European Commission will, if relevant, develop a joint consolidated communication and visibility plan for the action based on an agreed communication narrative and master messages customised for the different target audiences (stakeholders, civil society, general public, etc.).