



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

MULTI-COUNTRY

EU4Democracy: Support to electoral reform in the Western Balkans

Action summary

The objective of this action is to contribute to strengthening democratic institutions and processes in the Western Balkans through support to electoral reform. Through the provision of in-depth, targeted technical assistance, and capacity building on the implementation of electoral recommendations and raised awareness on electoral reforms, the action will aim to bring the conduct of elections closer in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections.

This action builds on the positive results of previous OSCE/ODIHR implemented elections reform support. It is fully in line with the Western Balkans Strategy that stresses the importance of free and fair elections and the proper implementation of recommendations of electoral observation missions.

Action Identification			
Action Programme Title	IPA II Multi-country Programme 2020 – part 1		
Action Title	EU4Democracy: Support to electoral reform in the Western Balkans		
Action ID	IPA 2020/041-818.08/MC/EU4Democracy-electoral reform		
Sector Information			
IPA II Sector	9. Regional and territorial cooperation		
DAC Sector	15151- Elections		
Budget			
Total cost	EUR 1.5 million		
EU contribution	EUR 1.5 million		
Budget line(s)	22.020401- Multi-country programmes, regional integration and territorial cooperation		
Management and Implementation			
Method of implementation	Indirect management		
<i>Indirect management:</i> Entrusted entity	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)/OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)		
Implementation responsibilities	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations– Unit D.5 Regional Cooperation and Programmes		
Location			
Zone benefiting from the action	Western Balkans (Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, and Republic of Serbia)		
Specific implementation area(s)	N/A		
Timeline			
Final date for contracting including the conclusion of contribution/delegation agreements	At the latest by 31 December 2021		
Final date for operational implementation	72 months from the adoption of the Financing Decision		
Policy objectives / Markers (DAC form)			
General policy objective	Not targeted	Significant objective	Main objective
Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
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"/>

* 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.

Reproductive, Maternal, New born and child health	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RIO Convention markers	Not targeted	Significant objective	Main objective
Biological diversity	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Combat desertification	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change mitigation	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change adaptation	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. RATIONALE

PROBLEM AND STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Free and fair elections are at the heart of democracy. The European Commission Western Balkans Strategy of 6 February 2018 highlights the need to strengthen the functioning of democratic institutions in the region and to ensure that recommendations of election observation missions are properly implemented¹.

The 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy notes that weaknesses throughout the electoral cycle in the Western Balkans persist². The degree of implementation of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections varies across the region, having a detrimental impact on the perceived credibility of electoral processes and undermining the right to vote of citizens.

The challenges faced by each IPA II beneficiary in the implementation of electoral reforms differs. The European Commission includes in its enlargement package specific information on the implementation of recommendations pertaining to electoral reform³.

Taking a regional outlook, the following key shortcomings affect all IPA II beneficiaries to different degrees:

- **Low confidence in the impartiality and independence of electoral management bodies (EMBs) and the electoral process**, including concerns about undue influence from beneficiary institutions. In several cases, the effectiveness of EMBs has been undermined by a lack of adequate legal frameworks and limited capacity while the transparency of the electoral process has been weakened by restricted access for election observers and media;
- Concerns about **the accuracy of voter lists and voter registration processes** as well as a lack of sustainable mechanisms to ensure effective coordination and consistency with existing population registers. In some cases, electoral stakeholders have not been provided with meaningful opportunities to check and verify the accuracy of voter lists;
- **Inequitable access to media** as well as insufficient **legal safeguards to guarantee the freedom of expression and the criminalization of defamation**, limiting the opportunity for candidates to convey their message to the electorate on an equal basis and impacting as such voters' capacity to make informed choices. Media regulatory bodies often lack the mandate, resources and professional capacities to provide effective oversight of electoral campaigns in the media;
- Violence and/or intimidation during **electoral campaigns**. In addition, **campaign finance rules do not always apply equally** to all candidates and political parties, and disclosure mechanisms in place do not fully promote and ensure transparency and accountability; and
- **Limited capacity and independence of electoral dispute resolution bodies**, including the election administration and courts, to effectively adjudicate election disputes.

Building on the positive results of previous EU funded action on follow-up to electoral recommendations, this action will continue to support electoral reform in each of the IPA II beneficiaries in the Western Balkans. The action will address specifically the shortcomings identified in the beneficiaries and support implementation of follow up recommendations of OSCE/ODIHR and EU Electoral Observation missions. Expanding the scope of the previous support, which focused on election administration, voter registration

¹ 2018 Western Balkans Strategy https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/enhancing-eu-engagement-western-balkans_en

² 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-communication-on-eu-enlargement-policy_en.pdf

³ Cf. Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, COM(2019) 260 final – Albania 2019 Report <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf> Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the European Union COM(2019) 261 final – Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019 Report <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-bosnia-and-herzegovina-analytical-report.pdf> Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, COM(2019) 260 final – Kosovo 2019 Report, <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-kosovo-report.pdf> Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, COM(2019) 260 final – Montenegro <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-montenegro-report.pdf> Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, COM(2019) 260 final – North Macedonia 2019 Report <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf> Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, COM(2019) 260 final – Serbia 2019 Report <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-serbia-report.pdf>

and the conduct of media, this action will also address election campaign rules and electoral dispute resolution. The action will be implemented by OSCE/ODIHR which can leverage its expertise as the lead agency in Europe in the field of election observation.

The primary target group of this action are the institutions responsible for implementing OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. These include electoral management bodies, media regulatory bodies, and electoral dispute resolution bodies.

In addition, this action will target other relevant authorities and civil society groups including citizen election observer groups as well as politically under-represented groups, including women, Roma, Sinti and other national minorities, and persons with disabilities. On participation of women to elections, information on gender segregated data about the turnout of women voters in Western Balkans is lacking, although some advancement of political participation of women has been made in the region⁴. The action will also raise awareness on electoral reforms, targeting in particular media and civil society groups.

The final beneficiaries of this action are the citizens of the Western Balkans.

The action will be implemented in close coordination with the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to ensure full complementarity between the election review and assistance provided by ODIHR with EU political interactions with the relevant IPA II beneficiaries. In addition, OSCE/ODIHR will ensure coordination with the United Nations, the Council of Europe and non-governmental organisations. Such co-ordination will primarily be conducted through the convening committee of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

OUTLINE OF IPA II ASSISTANCE

The action will aim to improve the IPA II beneficiaries' implementation of electoral recommendations in 5 thematic areas, i.e. i) effectiveness of electoral management bodies (EMBs), ii) voter lists and voter registration processes, iii) capacity and know-how of media regulatory bodies and media coverage during elections, iv) election campaign rules, and v) capacity and know-how of electoral dispute resolution bodies. This will bring the conduct of elections closer in line with OSCE/ODIHR commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. Ultimately, the action will enhance public confidence in electoral management bodies and electoral processes and contribute to support targeted IPA II beneficiaries in meeting the political criteria for EU membership.

Support will include encouraging political will for reform; supporting sustainable electoral management capacities; promoting public consultation and inclusion; and encouraging the establishment of plans, public reporting and review mechanisms.

The expected outputs of the action are:

- 1) Knowledge and capacities of institutions and CSOs in 5 thematic areas enhanced;
- 2) Targeted on-demand legal expertise and in-depth technical assistance provided;
- 3) Information on the efforts and challenges in the implementation of electoral recommendations updated;
- 4) Exchange of best practice at the sub-regional and regional levels carried out;
- 5) Awareness of electoral reforms at regional and relevant IPA II beneficiary level enhanced.

Main indicative activities include capacity building at regional and relevant IPA II beneficiary level, such as workshops, peer-to-peer learning, exchanges amongst institutions' practitioners, legal expertise, and in-depth technical assistance and sharing of best practice.

⁴ Study on "Women's Rights in Western Balkans" commissioned by European Parliament FEE Committee, January 2019
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608852/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608852_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608852/IPOL_STU(2019)608852_EN.pdf)

The action will consolidate an approach allowing for responsiveness to the needs of beneficiaries. Activities will be structured around the political calendar, including upcoming elections and existing electoral reform agendas in each beneficiary. While the majority of the actions will be targeted to local needs, the regional scope of the action allows for peer-to-peer sharing of lessons learnt and best practice.

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

The revised IPA II Multi-country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020 stresses that horizontal support to the formulation and implementation of sector policies and related reform strategies includes the domain of electoral reforms, also in view of strengthening democratic institutions. As the media environment plays a particularly important role during elections, the IPA Multi-country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020 further highlights that support to open and pluralist media landscape is needed. The action will support media regulatory bodies during elections, as the independence of these bodies is constantly challenged and not sufficiently supported by law⁵.

The action is also supported by the Western Balkans Strategy of 6 February 2018. Furthermore, the importance of follow-up to election observation recommendations is underlined in the 2015 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, the 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy and Strategy and the EU Annual Reports⁶.

LESSONS LEARNED AND LINK TO PREVIOUS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

EU electoral support focuses on two complementary elements: *election assistance*⁷ and *election observation*. The EU has been active for almost twenty years in the field of electoral assistance and its activities have been a part of a wider support to strengthening democratic values. The support to electoral processes is usually a part of wider interventions to support good governance, the functioning of parliamentary institutions and political parties, the strengthening of media institutions, civil society, the promotion of human rights and the reinforcement of the rule of law.

Furthermore, the action relies on OSCE/ODIHR's experience as the leading agency in Europe in the field of election observation and on its methodology for following-up electoral recommendations. To note, election observation in the Western Balkans is carried out by OSCE/ODIHR with the sole exception of Kosovo, which counts on EU Election Observation Missions. Both the EU and OSCE/ODIHR use similar election observation methodology, inspired by OSCE/ODIHR commitments, international and other European standards that have proved to be successful and will be used in the course of the action.

In particular, ODIHR's *Handbook on the Follow-up of Electoral Recommendations*⁸ gathers a series of lessons learnt that are relevant for this action:

- **Using an electoral cycle perspective in electoral reform work.** The electoral cycle approach is a means of viewing elections as continuous processes rather than isolated events. It recognizes that elections are composed of a number of interconnected components that interact with and influence one another, beginning several years before an election and finishing long after election day. Viewing electoral reform from this perspective assists the overall framing and timing of follow-up support.

⁵ C(2018) 3442, 31.05.2018 - IPA II Multi-country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020 <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180817-revised-multi-country-indicative-strategy-paper-2014-2020.pdf>

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

⁷ The European Commission Communication 191 of April 2000 on "Election Assistance and Observation" defines election assistance as the technical or material support given to the electoral process. It may imply professional help to establish a legal framework for the elections. It may take the form of a general input to the National Election Commission, for example providing voting material and equipment, or helping in the registration of political parties and the registration of voters. It may also imply support to NGOs and civil society in areas such as voter and civic education or training of local observers as well as support to the media through media monitoring and training of journalists.

⁸ The EU-funded action "Support to the follow-up of electoral recommendation in the Western Balkans" envisioned translating the handbook (together with eight other) in Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian, Montenegrin and Serbian – in Latin and Cyrillic. See <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/244941>

- **Genuine political will is essential for effective follow-up.** While beneficiaries may be assisted through follow-up activities, in order to ensure sustainable electoral management capacities and ownership, it is imperative that the process of implementation of recommendations is internally driven.
- **Timing is important for successful electoral reform.** Implementing recommendations well in advance of an election allows time for consultation, drafting and adoption of legislation; testing and development of practices; voter education programmes; and training of electoral staff, potential candidates and other stakeholders.⁹ When an election is not imminent, there is also less risk of discussions becoming politically heated, meaning that positions can be more thoroughly considered. Significant value is placed on reviewing recommendations and initiating reform at the earliest opportunity after an election.
- **Consensus and inclusion on how to follow up on recommendations is critical in order to encourage participation in the reform process and acceptance of outcomes.** ODIHR encourages meaningful involvement, public consultation and inclusion, not only of the main opposition parties, but also of smaller political groups, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), local experts, civil society and other stakeholders, including those who are at risk of marginalization from the process such as women, minorities, particularly Roma, and persons with disabilities.
- **Agreed action plans.** Implementing recommendations can be administratively burdensome and politically divisive. Agreed objectives, frameworks and responsibilities can enhance the focus of the reform, transparency of the process, and accountability of actions. It is encouraged to establish agreed frameworks for reforms as well as periodic and public reporting on progress.
- **Co-ordination and cohesion.** Co-ordination between local and international agencies providing support to the implementation of recommendations increases the likelihood of such support being effective. Joint initiatives, co-ordination meetings and review mechanisms are suggested as a means to reduce duplication and create opportunities for a cohesive follow-up process.

This action also utilises the experience of previous EU funded actions implemented by ODIHR such as the "Facilitation of Municipal Elections in Northern Kosovo in 2013" and the IPA Multi-country action "Support to the Follow-up of Electoral recommendations in the Western Balkans". On the latter, a few lessons learnt are particularly relevant:

- The database of electoral recommendations developed under the regional action, proved to be particularly useful to gather information on the state of play of implementation of recommendations and will be continued outside this action as part of ODIHR work;
- The translation of the ODIHR *Handbook on the Follow-up of Electoral Recommendations* allowed beneficiaries access to a useful tool for following up on ODIHR's technical advice. The translation of other thematic handbooks will be envisioned under this action;
- Regional sharing has not been realised to its full potential and will be increased;
- Cooperation and communication with EU Delegations/Office and OSCE Field Operations will be intensified by the establishment of a coordination mechanism consisting of annual meetings in each beneficiary to be hosted by EU Delegations/Office, and;
- ODIHR's presence in the targeted IPA II beneficiaries has proved to be essential to ensure that the implementation and follow up of electoral recommendations remain high in the political agenda of the Western Balkans.

⁹ Section II.2.B of the 2002 Council of Europe's [Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) recommends that, in order to guarantee the stability of the law, the fundamental elements of electoral law should, in principle, not be open to amendment in the year before an election.

2. INTERVENTION LOGIC

LOGICAL FRAMEWORK MATRIX

OVERALL OBJECTIVE(S) / (IMPACT(S))	INDICATOR'S NAME	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS			SOURCES & MEANS OF VERIFICATION	
		BASELINES (INCL. VALUE & REFERENCE YEAR)	MILESTONES (INCL. VALUE & REFERENCE YEAR)	TARGETS (INCL. VALUE & REFERENCE YEAR)		
To contribute to strengthening democratic institutions and processes in the Western Balkans through support to electoral reform	Degree to which elections are in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections Degree of implementation of reforms in the areas of political rights and civil liberties as fundamental rights	To be defined at the start of the action To be defined at the start of the action	Existence of process of reform (2021/22) Existence of process of reform (2021/22)	Advancement in conduct of elections (2023) Advancement in the areas of political rights and civil liberties as fundamental rights (2023)	EU enlargement reports Assessments by ODIHR and EU election observations Other benchmarking reports, including CSOs reports	
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE(S) / OUTCOME(S)	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)				SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
To improve the implementation of electoral recommendations in 5 thematic areas in IPA II beneficiaries	Degree of implementation of electoral recommendations, i.e. full or partial implementation. Number of recommendations implemented through specific policy, legislative or other measures	To be defined at the start of the action 0	Improvements in at least 2 out of 5 thematic areas in mid-action implementation (2021/22) At least 30% of electoral recommendations in the thematic areas covered by the action are implemented (2021/22)	Findings and improvement in 5 thematic areas by the end of the action (2023) At least 50% of electoral recommendations in the thematic areas covered by the action are implemented (2023)	Assessments by ODIHR and EU election observations Action reports CSOs reports	Targeted IPA II beneficiaries demonstrate the political will to implement recommendations related to election management, voter registration, media oversight, elections and campaign finance, and electoral dispute resolution.
OUTPUTS	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)				SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
OUTPUT 1 Knowledge and capacities of institutions and CSOs in 5 thematic areas enhanced	Number of institutions' and CSOs' representatives reached by the action Degree to which participants report increased knowledge as a result of capacity building	0 0	200 representatives (2021/22) More than 50% of participants report an increase in knowledge	400 representatives (2023) More than 70% of participants report a	Event reports Participant evaluation of activities Action reports	The stakeholders/action beneficiaries are willing to take part in action activities

			(2021/22)	significant increase in knowledge (2023)		Capacity building activities are well-targeted
OUTPUT 2 Targeted on-demand legal expertise and in-depth technical assistance provided	Number of expert visits	0	At least 3 expert visits (1 expert visit per each IPA beneficiary) has taken place (2021/22)	At least 18 expert visits (3 experts visit have been conducted in each beneficiary (2023)	Expert reports Action reports Technical assistance requests and answers	
	Number of technical assistance requests answered, including disaggregated by typology of request received (legal framework, implementation/enforcement, inclusiveness)	0	At least 6 requests (1 request per each IPA beneficiary) has been answered (2021/22)	At least 12 requests (2 request per each IPA beneficiary) has been answered (2023)		
OUTPUT 3 Information on the efforts and challenges in the implementation of electoral recommendations updated	Number of mid-term reviews	0	3 exercises (2021/22)	6 exercises (2023)	Mid-term review reports Action reports Official communications	
	Level of domestic response to the information provided to IPA II beneficiaries during the action	To be defined at the start of the action	Low level reported (2021/22)	High level reported (2023)		
	Number of official communications sent to IPA beneficiaries	0	9 official communications (2021/22)	18 official communications (2023)		
OUTPUT 4 Exchange of best practice at the sub-regional and regional levels carried out	Number of events/exchanges	0	At least 6 events/exchanges (2021/22)	At least 9 events/exchanges (2023)	Event reports Action reports Participant evaluation of activities	
	Degree to which participants report increased knowledge as a result of exchange	0	More than 50% of participants report an increase in knowledge (2021/22)	More than 70 % of participants report a significant increase in knowledge (2023)		
OUTPUT 5 Awareness of electoral reforms at regional and relevant IPA II beneficiary level enhanced	Number of CSOs reached by the action	0	10	20	Experts reports Action reports	
	Number of material produced and level of dissemination, including press releases	0	8	12	Press releases CSO contacts	

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

The action envisages a series of inter-linked activities and allow for flexibility to adapt in view of results of consultative processes and to respond to new requests for assistance.

The implementation of the action will be structured around the political calendar, including upcoming elections and existing electoral reform agendas in each beneficiary. Follow-up to election observation missions should ideally start as soon as possible after an electoral process has concluded.

The following main indicative activities are foreseen:

(Expected) Output 1. Knowledge and capacities of institutions and CSOs in 5 thematic areas enhanced

The action will implement capacity building activities, mainly consisting of face-to-face inter-active workshops in the five thematic areas covered by the action, i.e. effectiveness of electoral management bodies (EMBs), voter lists and voter registration processes, capacity and know-how of media regulatory bodies and media coverage during elections, election campaign rules, and capacity and know-how of electoral dispute resolution bodies. Cross-cutting subjects such as women's participation and representation, minorities, Roma and other politically under-represented groups' participation, including persons with disabilities, in electoral processes will also be covered.

The thematic workshops will expose participants to in-depth expertise and allow for comparative experiences to be shared. The selection of participants will be crucial for the success of the capacity-building efforts. The selection will be determined according to the specific subject matter and target both institutional and non-institutional representatives at the necessarily level of seniority.

Other capacity-building actions can be identified in the course of the action in response to particular requests/needs.

(Expected) Output 2. Targeted on-demand legal expertise and in-depth technical assistance provided

The action will deploy on-demand legal expertise and in-depth technical assistance in response to specific requests from IPA II beneficiaries. The tailor-made assistance is particularly useful to address electoral recommendations according to the specificities in each beneficiary. The assistance will be provided through inter alia expert reviews, bilateral meetings and experts' visits, and participation in working groups and parliamentary committees.

The assistance will be provided to public institutions, including parliaments, parliamentary bodies, election administration and management bodies, media regulatory bodies, bodies responsible for oversight and enforcement of campaign and campaign finance regulations, as well as civil society groups.

In providing legal expertise and in-depth technical assistance to public institutions, the action will aim to develop and improve the legal frameworks, regulations, by-laws, and facilitate the adoption, implementation, and enforcement of legal provisions on electoral recommendations of the IPA II beneficiaries. Beneficiaries will be encouraged by the action to utilise the legal support to tackle especially any potential gaps/issues in their legal framework.

Technical assistance to civil society groups, including citizens' observer groups and organizations, will mainly consist of providing technical advice on how to promote the involvement of underrepresented groups, minorities, Roma and persons with disabilities in election processes and to improve their capacity of monitoring the coverage of campaigns and specific actors in the media.

(Expected) Output 3. Information on the efforts and challenges in the implementation of electoral recommendations updated

The extent to which electoral recommendations have been implemented by targeted IPA II beneficiaries will be systematically monitored throughout the action, including in view of supporting tailor-made reforms.

Indicative activities include mid-term review visits, consultation meetings, and/or expert evaluations of legal amendments. These will allow for constant updates on the efforts and challenges in the implementation of electoral recommendations and provide guidance to electoral stakeholders on election reform processes, also in light of upcoming elections and electoral reform agendas in the beneficiaries

Official communications to beneficiaries' authorities highlighting any additional step that should be considered ahead of future elections and further raising awareness on the electoral recommendations and the need to implement them, will be shared. If relevant, specific policy dialogue with a beneficiary can be supported.

(Expected) Output 4. Exchange of best practice at the sub-regional and regional levels carried out

Taking a regional outlook and considering common challenges in the implementation of electoral recommendations across IPA II beneficiaries, the action will support exchange of best practices and lesson learnt as a way to build further knowledge and share and identify possible common solutions. Exchanges can take the form of peer-to-peer sharing, exchanges amongst practitioners, events at the sub-regional and regional level and thematic study visits.

Activities will target at the local, sub-region and regional levels, as relevant, representatives of institutions responsible for implementing OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, relevant authorities, political parties and civil society groups, including citizen election observer groups, and representatives of politically under-represented groups and other vulnerable groups, such as Roma and persons with disabilities.

Events can be organised in a sub-regional format if relevant due to need to reflect on specificities and needs demonstrated only in certain beneficiaries.

(Expected) 5. Awareness of electoral reforms at regional and relevant IPA II beneficiary level enhanced

The action will support increased awareness of electoral reforms among in particular media and civil society organisations. Civil society organisations are an important stakeholder across the envisaged activities and they will be supported including through the provision of press releases and information materials of ODIHR's work to conduct outreach to wider society on the importance of electoral reform. Similar engagement will be conducted with media.

The translation and dissemination of relevant ODIHR handbooks will also be covered by this action. This will increase overall access to relevant information, tools and methodologies for beneficiaries on key subjects related to the implementation of electoral recommendations.

A **horizontal element** of this action is to support multi-stakeholder cooperation, particularly between institutions and civil society. The action will promote their common understanding and facilitate joint action.

RISKS

Addressing electoral recommendations is complex and involves a variety of actors. A number of reasons can be identified as to why beneficiaries may be unwilling or unable to follow up on electoral recommendations. The table below summarizes the key risks and mitigation strategy for managing and minimizing them. An indication, High (H), Medium (M) or Low (L) is given to indicate both their likelihood and potential impact on the action. Overall the major risks posed by this action are of a political nature or are related the numerous and, at times, early elections, which reduce the period for the follow-up process. There are no significant organizational or security related risks.

Risk	Impact L/M/H	Likelihood L/M/H	Management
Beneficiaries do not engage in electoral reform or do so in a manner that lacks good faith and genuine commitment. The success and deliverables are hampered by the environment for reform becoming increasingly politically charged.	H	M	OSCE/ODIHR will engage in continued consultations on the ground with key action stakeholders to support reform efforts. Reform efforts are likely to intensify after the next electoral events in the beneficiaries.
OSCE/ODIHR is not invited to support follow-up activities in the targeted IPA II beneficiaries.	H	L	OSCE/ODIHR enjoys longstanding relations with all beneficiaries and will continue to work with other international actors to mobilize support for and promote the importance of electoral reform, including through EU delegations and EU reporting mechanisms.
Unforeseen political instability or electoral developments, including parliamentary boycotts, lack of a clear majority or the calling of early elections, leading to possible delays or the cancellation of planned activities.	M	M	To mitigate this, OSCE/ODIHR encourages early electoral reform and with a wide and inclusive number of stakeholders. In addition, it is important to maintain OSCE/ODIHR's position as an objective, impartial, neutral and independent facilitator. The bulk of activities are relevant for the entire electoral cycle and are thus less likely to be affected by delays in the electoral calendar. However, the announcement of early elections would affect ODIHR follow-up activities as activities would need to stop from the time of deployment of the Needs Assessment Mission ahead of a potential election observation activity until the completion of the electoral process and publication of the observation final report.

CONDITIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The relevant IPA II beneficiaries should commit to cooperate for the effective implementation of this action. In co-ordination with OSCE/ODIHR, the EU will, as necessary, engage with host authorities to secure this cooperation.

IPA II beneficiaries are encouraged to task a lead agency to co-ordinate institutions and facilitate information exchange and discussion among election stakeholders. The lead agency would be the primary contact point for the implementing partner.

3. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This action will be implemented by OSCE/ODIHR as a specialised institution of the OSCE, operating regionally. The core expertise of OSCE/ODIHR is in electoral recommendations with the view to improving electoral processes and bringing them in line with OSCE and other international standards.

A coordination mechanism, consisting of annual meetings in each beneficiary to be hosted by EU Delegations/Office with the implementing partner, OSCE offices, EU Delegation/Office and other counterparts, as relevant, will be established.

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

The action will be implemented in indirect management with an international organisation (OSCE/ODIHR). The indicative duration of the contract will be 36 months.

4. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

METHODOLOGY FOR MONITORING (AND EVALUATION)

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

In case a mid-term evaluation is foreseen: it will be carried out for learning purposes, in particular with respect to possible continued support.

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

The evaluations should be carried out following the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations guidelines on linking planning/programming, monitoring and evaluation¹⁰. It is recommended that a Reference Group comprising the key stakeholders of this action be set up to steer the evaluation process and ensure the required quality level of the evaluation outputs as well as the proper follow-up of the recommendations of the evaluation.

In addition, the action might be subject to external monitoring in line with the European Commission rules and procedures.

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.

5. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender issues permeate all aspects of an electoral process and are an integral part of election observation, electoral recommendations and electoral follow-up process. Although certain IPA II beneficiaries have demonstrated some progress, women remain under-represented in the election administration, as candidates and ultimately as elected officials. Women also face challenges with regards to participation in electoral processes.

Gender considerations will thus be taken into account during the implementation of the action with the aim to advance the equal participation of men and women in political life and elections, in line with OSCE commitments and other international standards.

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/near_guidelines.zip

The action will aim at including at least 40% of women as participants in its activities on capacity building and knowledge exchange.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Participation in the implementation of the action will be based on equal access, regardless of racial or ethnic origin, religion and beliefs, age or sexual orientation. The action will further aim to systematically and formally address specific concerns and different needs of women and men, and of under-represented groups.

During implementation, monitoring and evaluation, data will be collected in a disaggregated manner (e.g. by sex, disability).

The implementing partner will also take appropriate steps to ensure equal opportunities for women and other groups to participate in the action as action staff and experts. The expert teams will be balanced and will have gender expertise.

Translation of ODIHR's handbooks in all languages of IPA II beneficiaries will also promote equal access to information to a wide audience.

MINORITIES AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

Electoral reforms shall be inclusive towards all groups of the population without distinction, including people belonging to minorities, Roma and vulnerable groups, and with particular focus on persons with disabilities.

The assessment of minorities, Roma and other politically under-represented groups' participation - including persons with disabilities - will be integrated into the overall election observation methodology and electoral recommendations to mainstream their involvement in the follow-up of all recommendations. Specific attention will be paid to Roma minorities, considering that Roma belong both to a minority and vulnerable population. Another important aspect of election processes is that persons with disabilities face challenges to express their right to vote, so this subject will be tackled with the aim to bring IPA II beneficiaries closer to OSCE standards and other obligations in this domain.

The action will take care not to promote reforms and processes that would harm minorities and vulnerable groups, and will aim to support processes that help to protect minority representation, empowerment and identity affirmation.

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

Civil society organizations and in particular citizens' observer groups, human rights organizations, women groups, minorities' groups and media all play an essential role in electoral reform processes. They contribute to monitor the implementation of electoral recommendations and standards for democratic elections, and raise public awareness on them.

Engagement with particularly civil society and media will be a key component of the action. Specific steps for engagement will include consulting these groups during consultation and planning visits, and seeking their participation in the activities, as relevant. Information materials will be made available to civil society and media in view of encouraging broader outreach on the importance of electoral reform.

The action will also undertake regular assessments of the civil society and media views on the inclusiveness and transparency of the follow-up process, as well as the status of implementation of recommendations. This, in turn, will be used to identify areas where improvement is still needed.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE (AND IF RELEVANT DISASTER RESILIENCE)

The action does not have a direct link to EU environmental *acquis* nor does the action have a direct environmental impact in terms of its objectives or target groups. The implementing organisation will, however, integrate consideration of not only political and legal but also environmental sustainability into the project implementation.

6. SUSTAINABILITY

While the action will assist IPA II beneficiaries on the implementation of electoral recommendations, reform processes need to be internally driven. In this context, the action will be responsive to the needs of the beneficiaries in order to ensure local ownership. Local ownership and the focus on strengthening sustainable electoral management capacities throughout the electoral cycle will support long-term institutional development and sustainability.

The sustainability of the action will also be strengthened by activities geared towards building consensus on the reform process and encouraging inclusive participation. For this purpose, a key feature of the action is inclusive consultations and activities.

Further, sustainability will be secured through synergies created with other relevant actors present in the targeted IPA II beneficiaries, which may include, amongst others, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

7. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

Visibility and communication aspects shall be complementary to the activities implemented by the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations and the EU Delegations/Office in the field. It is the responsibility of the implementing partner(s) to keep the EU Delegations/Office and the European Commission fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities.

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

Visibility and communication actions shall demonstrate how the intervention contributes to the agreed programme objectives, as well as the benefits of the action for the general public. Actions shall be aimed at strengthening general public awareness and support of interventions financed and the objectives pursued. The actions shall also 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.

The communication and visibility of the action by ODIHR may be additionally supported by the OSCE Secretariat and/or field operation communication teams co-ordinated by ODIHR. The entrusted entities and the European Commission's actions should ensure enhanced donor visibility and give more visibility to the objectives and results achieved. Communication actions should ensure that all relevant stakeholders, and where possible also final beneficiaries, are informed about donors' involvement, joint actions and their results. When relevant for a specific intervention envisaged under the action, the communication and visibility plan will be based on an agreed communication narrative and master messages customised for the different target audiences.