

ANNEX 16

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 “Capacity building of veterinary and plant health services in the Western Balkans”

1. SYNOPSIS

1.1. Action Summary Table

Title	Capacity building of veterinary and plant health services in the Western Balkans Multi-country multiannual action plan in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2022			
CRIS/OPSYS number	IPA III/2021/NEAR>SANTE/16			
Basic Act	Financed under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)			
Team Europe Initiative	No			
Zone benefiting from the action	Western Balkans (Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, and Republic of Serbia)			
Programming document	IPA III Programming Framework			
PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION				
Window and thematic priority	Window 4 - Competitiveness and inclusive growth Thematic Priority 3 - Agriculture and rural development			
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Main SDG(s) on the basis of section 3: SDG 16 (achieve peaceful and inclusive societies, rule of law, effective and capable institutions) SDG 17 (strengthen means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development)			
DAC code(s)	31110 - Agricultural policy and administrative management – 20% 31192 - Plant and post-harvest protection and pest control – 40% 31195 - Livestock/veterinary services – 40%			
Main Delivery Channel @	Private sector institution - 60000			
Markers (from DAC form)	General policy objective @	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Participation development/good governance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Trade Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reproductive, maternal, newborn 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"/>
	RIO Convention markers @	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Biological diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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"/>
Internal markers	Policy objectives	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Digitalisation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Migration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	COVID-19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

BUDGET INFORMATION

Amounts concerned	Budget line: 15 02 02 01.02 Total estimated cost: EUR 4 000 000 Total amount of EU budget contribution: EUR 4 000 000 – year 2021
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MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Type of financing and method(s) of implementation	Project Modality Direct management through Procurement The action will be co-delegated to the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety
Relevant priorities and flagships from Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans	Priorities: Common Regional Market and Economic Integration
Final date for concluding contribution / delegation agreements, procurement and grant contracts	At the latest by 31 December 2022
Indicative operational implementation period	72 months following the adoption of the Financing Decision

1.2. Summary of the Action

Given the European perspective of the Western Balkans and the fact that the EU is its most significant trading partner, improved implementation by the targeted IPA III beneficiaries of EU-aligned veterinary and plant health regulations and quality controls is important to improve their EU market access. As such, the action implements the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) of the Western Balkans¹.

While building upon previous IPA funded actions in the area of animal health, the action extends support for the first time also to further alignment with EU standards in the field of plant health. It will contribute to further prepare the Western Balkans for accession in the area of animal and plant health. Being ready at accession they will benefit the most from intra- union trade as well as export of agricultural products.

This will be achieved by gradually building an agricultural sector progressively aligning with the EU legal framework in the field of agriculture and rural development and the relevant veterinary, food safety and phyto-sanitary standards (SPS standards). In particular, the action will support the alignment of Western Balkans with EU legislation and systems and improve capacities of beneficiaries to eradicate and provide surveillance of animal disease and plant pests.

The action will further build on the interregional cooperation platform put in place in the on-going IPA funded action.

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Context Analysis

The overall objective of the EU's assistance to candidate and potential candidates is to support the IPA beneficiaries in adopting and implementing the political, institutional, legal, administrative, social and economic reforms required by those beneficiaries to progressively align to Union rules, standards, policies and practices. The candidates and potential candidates in the Western Balkans are at different stages of accession negotiations with the EU which implies different level of transposition, implementation and enforcement of the EU *acquis*.

The action will address Window 4 – Competitiveness and inclusive Growth of the IPA III Programming Framework and in particular its Thematic Priority 3: Agriculture and Rural Development.

The specific objective of IPA III in this area is gradually building an agricultural sector capable of competing with market forces, while progressively aligning with the EU legal framework in the field of agriculture and rural development and the relevant veterinary, food safety and phytosanitary standards (SPS standards). Major efforts are still necessary for food safety and animal and plant health.

The action is aligned with the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)⁴ and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans² which highlight how major investments are still necessary for food safety, animal welfare and the transition towards sustainable food systems which is increasingly important in view of the necessary alignment with the EU food safety *acquis* and the EU Farm to Fork Strategy.

Agriculture plays an important role in the economy of the Western Balkans and is an important safety net for a number of households in terms of food and income security. Full alignment with the EU food safety rules and practices might boost export of agriculture products from the Western Balkans to the EU market. Data collected under the current IPA funded action show through simulation studies that initially export might grow from 120 to 150 million EUR in 3-5 years. Export potential shall be further enhanced if accompanied by noticeable structural shifts and reforms of agricultural systems.

Since the most significant trading partner of the Western Balkans is the EU, it is a very important task for the Western Balkans to implement the EU's veterinary and plant health regulations and quality control into their systems, and thus improve their future potential on the EU market. Since the structure of production is heavily biased towards plant production, which occupy a two third share of the overall production in agriculture in the largest producer of the region (Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina), it is of high importance to include the plant health sector in the pre-

¹ COM(2020) 641, 6.10.2020.

² SWD(2020) 223, 6.10.2020.

enlargement assistance and cooperation.

If the Western Balkans achieve the same animal disease status and an equivalent level in plant pests control at accession as the rest of the EU Member States, they will be in a favourable position to attain sustainable development towards increased trade and growth of production at agricultural level as well as retail and wholesale levels, and thus having to a solid start as Member States.

2.2. Problem analysis by areas of support

The Western Balkans produce quite a variety of agricultural products. A pre-requisite for their high value products to gain access to the EU market is to better respond to market signals, to be integrated in regional and international markets and, very important, to meet EU animal and plant health and food safety standards.

As candidates or potential candidates for EU membership, the Western Balkans are going to form part of the EU internal market. If the Western Balkans have a different animal health or plant pest status to the rest of the EU then they cannot safely trade (internally) with the other parts of the EU - the internal market thereby cannot operate as it should. By achieving the same animal health status as EU Member States, and an equivalent response preparedness in the plant health sector, the beneficiaries will be able to benefit from intra union trade to its full potential, Animal diseases are highly contagious and they can spread easily across borders, through the movement of farm animals and products thereof, through the movement of wild animals or spread by vectors.

The control of these diseases as the EU experience has shown, can only be dealt with from a regional perspective, but even better if regional programmes and measures are closely integrated and based on the same needs assessment.

All efforts in one beneficiary may be hampered by unsuccessful and un-coordinated eradication policies in another. An important focus of this action should be the support to disease eradication efforts for all the Western Balkans at a time.

Strengthening institutional plant health capacities will help the Western Balkans better mitigate climate-change related impacts on agriculture and plant health. Changes in food production patterns and trade will become apparent in the future. The resulting changes in plant health, such as anomalies in pest epidemiology and frequent expansion of pest distributions, will raise challenges, especially in the areas, which are in the focus of the present action – pest surveillance, monitoring and pest diagnosis. Since pest and plant distribution, pest epidemiology and pest impacts may change considerably as a result of climate change, robust surveillance, monitoring and diagnostic systems are vital at central, regional and EU levels.

Stakeholders most challenged are the competent authorities in the Western Balkans that should benefit from capacity building and technical support. But also farmers, traders and other stakeholders that will directly benefit from a better animal disease and pest status, and indirectly via an improvement of the export potential for animals, plants, and animal and plant products in the region, that is now under-utilised.

Food safety, and animal and plant health legislation are an important part of the EU *acquis*. Despite the changes introduced under former IPA II regional projects, managing and coordinating cross-border cooperation programmes remains complex. There is a need for technical and logistical support to a wide network of stakeholders to act in a coordinated, consistent and harmonised way.

In the current situation in the region, all beneficiaries have a legislation in the area of animal and plant health but the level of adjustment towards the EU *acquis* differs a lot from one to the other. There is still some implementation work to do. An important focus of this action should therefore be to maintain the coordination of disease eradication efforts at beneficiary level and between them, and include related bilateral IPA projects in the Western Balkans.

2.3. Relevance and complementarity with strategies supported by key stakeholders

Through meetings and intensified cooperation with the services responsible for animal and plant health in the Western Balkans, the action will be aligned with beneficiary strategies relevant to their European path.

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

The 2020 European Commission Communication on "Enhancing the accession process - A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans"³ aims to generate renewed reform momentum in the Western Balkans and provide a significantly enhanced EU engagement to better support the European perspective of the Western Balkans. This action will provide support to sectors covered by chapter 12 -Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy included in cluster 5. Resources, agriculture and cohesion.

The regional cooperation in this action will build sustainable development activities in the Western Balkans. It will hereby support the intentions of SDG 16 (achieve peaceful and inclusive societies, rule of law, effective and capable institutions) and SDG 17 (strengthen means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development).

The Farm to Fork Strategy of the European Union is a new comprehensive approach to how Europeans value food sustainability. It is an opportunity to improve lifestyles, health, and the environment. It is urgent to reduce dependency on pesticides and antimicrobials, reduce excess fertilisation, increase organic farming, improve animal welfare, and reverse biodiversity loss.

This action seeks to strengthen eradication efforts for transboundary animal diseases and plants pests in the Western Balkans and thereby contribute to improved animal and plant health, in line with the thematic priority "Agriculture and rural development" in the Programming Framework. Outbreaks in the region are also a risk to the EU and consequently, limited capacities on disease and pest eradication can impact trade prospects/economic recovery of the region.

Control and eradication of diseases and pests at source using a regionally coordinated strategy benefits the EU by substantially eliminating them as a threat to animal and plant health, food safety, environment and trade. Now European food should also become the global standard for sustainability. This can benefit especially small and medium sized holdings.

The action contributes to the attainment of the objectives of the Economic and Investment Plan, including the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, to spur long-term recovery of the region- backed by a green and digital transition. In particular, it supports in the long-term the aim to enable investments in sustainable agricultural production and strengthens the competitiveness and viability of the agri-food sector.

If the Western Balkans have achieved at accession the same animal disease status and are able to control the relevant plant pests as well as the rest of the EU Member States, sustainable development as increased trade and growth of production at agricultural level as well as retail and wholesale level in the Western Balkans will contribute to a solid start as Member States.

2.5. Lessons learned and links with previous financial assistance

Experience from former projects show that without regional technical assistance, it is very hard to capitalise on lessons learnt and to keep on fostering a regional cooperation learning community based on good practice examples.

From 2011 to 2013 a similar project was organised under the IPA II Multi Beneficiary Cooperation, Europe Aid/129988/C/SER/MULTI, Contract No. 2009/212-678, called "Support for the control and eradication of animal disease". The main issues tackled at that time were the regional coordination for IPA II funded assistance in the area of animal health, focussing mainly on rabies and classical swine fever, to support veterinary authorities with technical expertise, from an animal health point of view focussing on local solutions for intricate problems, but also for complex procurement projects to acquire vaccines. Lessons learnt from this project was that for all the activities, it is essential that members of the veterinary service in the Western Balkans become involved in all the processes, not only to gain ownership for the work, but also to be able to continue the work after the project has ended.

³ COM(2020) 57 of 05.02.2020.

During 2020-2021 an IPA project EuropeAid140314/DH/SER/Multi "Regional action on Animal Disease Eradication in the Western Balkans" is running with the aim to enhance the capacity in the Veterinary Services in Western Balkans. Though the COVID-19 pandemic has hampered its implementation, this new action will build on its work, continuing with a particular focus on ownership.

Lessons learnt from the present project so far:

- Duration of two years for an action where initiation, establishment and continuous improvement of regional cooperation in various fields is not sufficient and could be 3 or more years.
- Although the Western Balkans have common overall goals, local and immediate priorities are different. These local priorities frequently influence the readiness and availability of the beneficiaries for full cooperation.
- There is a common expectation that an action shall substitute beneficiary veterinary authorities, instead of strengthening their work. This has been particularly visible with regards to discussions on rabies vaccination campaigns which have raised serious issues around ownership. The action will continue to feed its results into the broader policy engagement with the region and to advocate that issues such as rabies vaccinations need to be tackled within a structural/long term response, instead of addressing a yearly emergency.

Challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Communication which was entirely and solely based on online and internet tools and without regional travelling and meetings and physical interaction proved to be insufficient for extensive regional cooperation.
- On the positive side, remote working of project experts provided some flexibility in the planning process and enabled recruiting of high(er) profile experts which might not be available for physical presence and work on the project.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

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

The overall objective of this action is to contribute to improve animal and plant health in the Western Balkans by enhancing the capacity of the Veterinary and Plant Services and cooperation between them.

This will be achieved by contributing to gradually building an agricultural sector progressively aligning with the EU legal framework in the field of agriculture and rural development and the relevant veterinary, food safety and phytosanitary standards (SPS standards). The action consists of two separate components: component A on animal health and the second component B on plant health.

As indicated in the first line of this section a common activity between component A and B is the cooperation between the Veterinary Services and the Plant Health Services in the beneficiaries. The remaining project activities will run in parallel in the respective Animal Health Services and Plant Health Services in the beneficiaries.

The specific objectives (outcomes) of the action are:

- To strengthen cooperation within the region and with the EU on animal disease control as well as on plant pest control
- To improve effectiveness of Western Balkans in detecting, fighting and limiting the size of an outbreak of animal disease in line with EU standards
- To improve effectiveness of Western Balkans in detecting, fighting and limiting the size of an outbreak of plant pests in line with EU standards

Regional cooperation including with EU

As a base to the success of the components A and B, the action will establish an official cooperation and commitment amongst the higher political level in the Western Balkans as well as cooperation with the European Union.

An important pillar in the future cooperation work will be an adopted agreement between the Western Balkans Chief Veterinary Officers (CVO) on cross border cooperation in emergency management of transmissible animal diseases and plant pest. This agreement shall include yearly scheduled meetings as well as transparent communication and

cooperation in the case of disease or pest outbreak. Another important pillar will be the transparent sharing between the services of lessons learnt in disease and pests outbreak, as well as enhanced cooperation between the laboratories.

Component A- animal health

The aim of the action as far as animal health is concerned is to contribute to improved animal health as measured by the achievement of recognised disease free status from listed animal diseases by the EU as well as the World Organisation for Animal Health (hereafter “OIE”). The recognition by OIE will ensure worldwide trade possibilities because of the common agreements.

The disease free status will be achieved by supporting better knowledge and implementation of EU aligned legislation and standards and further capacity-building of the Veterinary services including through the support to surveillance activities, the development of contingency plans and their evaluation. A detailed and well prepared contingency plan has proved to be the best tool to fight transmissible animal diseases. Simulation exercises have over time proved to be a very successful tool to test/evaluate the contingency plans. There are different kind of simulation exercises from table top to full scale exercises, but common for all of them is that they will reveal existing weaknesses in the contingency plan and thus in the disease control program, as well as test if the legislation is in line with EU legislation. Internal and external audits will make sure that lessons learnt from simulation exercises will be implemented and the updated contingency plans.

Component B-plant health

The aim of the action as regards plant health is in principal similar to that of the component A, i.e. to contribute to improved plant health situation as measured by the achievement of recognised pest free status from priority EU plant quarantine pests by the EU or recognised equivalency with the EU in the level of control thereof.

The pest free status or an equivalent control status will be achieved by supporting better knowledge and implementation of EU aligned legislation and standards and further capacity-building of the Plant Health services including through the support to surveillance and diagnostic activities, the development of contingency plans and their evaluation. A detailed and well prepared contingency plan has proved to be an efficient tool to fight plant quarantine pests. In the same line, simulation exercises have over time proved to be a very successful tool to test/evaluate the contingency plans. Both contingency planning and its testing through simulation exercises are included in the building elements of the new EU plant health regime. There are different kind of simulation exercises from table top to full scale exercises, but common for all of them is that they will reveal existing weaknesses in the contingency plan and thus in the plant quarantine pest control program, as well as test if the legislation is in line with EU legislation. Internal and external audits will make sure that lessons learnt from simulation exercises will be implemented and the contingency plans updated.

These internal and external audits focussing on the regional cooperation, the contingency plans and the implementation of them will allow to measure progresses (ref. chap. 3.6 Logical Framework). The auditors will examine the existing emergency systems and legislation to see if they fulfil the demands in the EU legislation. An audit will validate the existing systems by following the procedures forth and back to see if they are followed, to check if derogations are followed up and lessons learnt implemented. The audits will be performed by internal trained staff as well as professional external hired auditors. On the road to accession the European Commission will perform the same kind of audits also called pre-accession audits. The audits will be followed by audit reports which will describe the areas where the beneficiaries comply with their disease/pest management plans, derogations and will include recommendations to achieve improvements.

Long-time experience has shown that controlling and eradicating diseases and pests at source is the most efficient. Qualified technical assistance will be given to produce the needed paperwork, training events, dedicated missions and simulation exercises of contingency plans will be the basis for such capacity building, together with technical reports on related issues.

Vaccination is a major tool to control and eradicate many transboundary animal diseases. Support should be given where necessary to veterinary authorities in the Western Balkans to organise vaccine procurement and improve laboratory capacity. Vaccination impact progress in the field should be well documented and the relevant surveillance to ensure that

the vaccination campaign is done properly, be in place.

Therefore the action will support relevant authorities in the Western Balkan in setting up a solid and long term vaccination strategy - if not already available. Development and implementation of surveillance programs for listed diseases such as rabies will be a priority. The funds would not be used for actually buying the vaccine, but they could support the relevant authorities in setting up successful procurement actions to buy the necessary vaccines. This would ensure synergies, harmonisation of policies and, together with a sustainable vaccination strategy, would also ensure that the efficient use of the vaccines.

Similarly, support would also be provided to plant health diagnostic laboratories, focusing on their diagnostic capacities to provide reliable data on EU priority pests and other quarantine pests, and thus assisting pest surveillance, control and eradication activities in the Western Balkans, and the collaboration of diagnostic laboratories at regional level and with EU reference laboratories. Support to the functioning of regional cooperation and coordination between the Western Balkans plant health services, in particular in plant health diagnostics, eradication programs for quarantine pests and cross-border simulation exercises.

The action is expected to generate the **following outputs**:

1. In the veterinary sector:

- Improved regional and inter-regional (with EU) co-operation and coordination on animal disease control. An agreement between the Western Balkan on yearly scheduled meetings at Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) level about co-operation and coordination on animal disease control is adopted.
- Improved capacity of Veterinary Service (including laboratories) in the Western Balkans. Response time on disease outbreak has improved considerably. Surveillance programs on rabies with sufficient data collected to declare the area free from Rabies are established. The new EU Animal Health law is implemented in the regional legislation and inter-regional vaccination strategies are developed.
- Improved competence and capacity level of veterinary laboratory. Cooperation agreement between regional laboratories are signed at CVO level. Every year the CVO should achieve their participation in the yearly laboratory simulation exercises arranged by the European Union Reference Laboratories (EURL).

2. In the plant health sector:

- Functioning of the regional cooperation and coordination between the different plant health services, in particular in plant health diagnostics, eradication programs for quarantine pests and cross-border simulation exercises has been improved.
- Performance of the plant health services in surveillance and diagnostic areas, and in contingency preparedness in the Western Balkans has been improved and has been brought closer to the EU standards.

3.2. Indicative type of activities

The action will provide technical assistance, expert advice and capacity building including through training and study visits across all outputs. In addition to planned activities, the action should provide continuous demand-driven ad hoc technical assistance to ensure a flexible response to needs.

The action will support and organise meetings, workshops, best practise sharing at local, regional and inter-regional levels. Full-scale simulation exercises and audits/assessments in various technical areas will be implemented.

It will also set up and implement common models and platforms for sharing epidemiological and laboratory data, and to improve the quality of information available on disease/pest outbreaks in the region.

The action will not fund equipment or vaccines for the Western Balkans. This is expected to be covered directly by the beneficiaries outside this action.

The action will aim to establish wider links with EU Member States and relevant international organisations like the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), FAO, International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO). It will also cooperate with the European Union Reference Laboratories (EURL).

3.3. Risks and assumptions

Risks and assumptions	Risk level (H/M/L)	Mitigating measures
Risk 1 Restriction measures particularly on movement of persons in Europe and in the Western Balkan due to COVID-19 pandemic continue throughout the years to come	High	The daily work, consultations and discussions with the Contracting Authority, between Project experts and with the Western Balkans authorities will be maintained using internet-based communication tools. The Contractor's backstopping team shall also be ensured to sufficiently support Project experts in line with action needs.
Risk 2 Insufficient technical capacity to improve the management of Multi-country projects.	Medium	All Western Balkans appointed technical contact points to support the action key experts and short term experts. The action team shall establish close professional relations and will maintain such relations with regular and continuous communication, where relevant coordination meetings, and reporting to the Steering Committee.
Risk 3 High turnover in key staff members involved in the action.	Low	The action team shall advocate through the Action Steering Committee for allocation of staff, delegation of responsibilities and promote continuity to enable smooth implementation of the action's activities. In case if key staff of a beneficiary is replaced, the action team will quickly respond and provide intensified support to strengthen the position of the newly appointed staff.
Risk 4 Insufficient support from the political level.	Low	The action team will monitor the situation and inform the Action Steering Committee. Action team will maintain close relations with the Western Balkans authorities and will promote high professional standards, adopted to the beneficiaries priorities.
Risk 5 Limitation on staff. A sufficient number of key staff members needs to be available at all levels from the veterinary or plant health services. Delegation of work to staff from the competent authorities is crucial to gain the most from the action and to ensure continuation of the work after it. The action is there to support the competent authority, not to take over the work.	Medium	The action team shall advocate through the Action Steering Committee for allocation of staff, delegation of responsibilities and promote continuity to enable smooth implementation of the action's activities. Team leader shall make sure that the Veterinary and Plant Health Chief officers support the action and agree to allocate the necessary staff. In case key beneficiary staff is replaced, the action team will quickly respond and provide intensified support to strengthen the position of the newly appointed staff.
Risk 6 Lack of commitment of Western Balkans authorities to implement harmonised procedures and to coordinate.	Low to medium	The action team will adopt participatory approach from the outset of the action to develop strategies and other respective documentation in close consultation with the beneficiaries and in line with standards established by the respective international institutions (EC, OIE, FAO-EUFMD, WHO, IPPC and similar). A flexible approach will be taken towards beneficiaries'

		needs and priorities. In any case, the action team shall duly inform the Contracting Authority and the Steering Committee when such efforts are not successful.
Risk 7 Emergence of other animal health or plant health priorities (African swine fever or other animal diseases) may change priorities of beneficiary and hamper action implementation	High	The action team will closely monitor the development of the epidemiological situation in the region, and adopt flexible approach: activities will be prioritised and aim to support beneficiary priorities, at the same time activities will remain relevant and fulfilling the overall action objectives.
Risk 8 Relations between the Western Balkans authorities deteriorate.	Low	Communication on high professional level will benefit all beneficiaries and will be continuously propagated and strongly supported by the action team. In case of deterioration of relations, meetings and workshops will be organised in a way to limit such impact.

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)?

Gender equality will be respected in all activities of the action.

How does this Action address Environment and Climate change?

While climate change has an impact on the occurrence of animal diseases and plant pests, and in particular their spread, this action does not directly contribute to climate change. Capacity building of veterinary and plant health services will have a positive effect on how the Western Balkans will be able to deal with incursions of diseases or pests that cannot survive yet in this area.

How does this Action address the Rights Based Approach?

The action is not relevant to the Rights Based Approach.

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

Consultations with civil society (e.g. farmers and farmers association) is foreseen during the implementation of the action.

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

Minority and vulnerable groups' concerns will be reflected in all activities, in particular when it concerns public services, legislative matters and socio-economic development. Equal opportunities and non-discrimination will be respected.

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. This includes the provision of sufficient laboratory capacity, IT equipment, equipment to deal with an outbreak of transmissible animal disease as well as budget for vaccines. It also includes having in place agreements with other cooperation partners and stakeholders in the industry necessary to help combat the animal diseases (civil forces, lorry companies, container companies, etc). 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 ACTION 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
Impact	To contribute to improved animal and plant health in the Western Balkans by enhancing the capacity of the Veterinary and Plant health services and cooperation between them	Number of animal diseases which the beneficiaries are recognised as being free from	Baseline 0 (2022)	2 (African Swine Fever and Rabies) (2025)	OIE reports Commission reports Beneficiary reports	Not applicable
		Number of priority plant quarantine pests ⁴ which the beneficiaries are recognised as being free from or have an EU-equivalent level of control thereof	Baseline 0 (2022)	Baseline level established (2025)	Audit internal at the end of action as well as future audits from the EU Commission	
Outcome 1	Strengthened cooperation within the region and with the EU on animal disease control as well as on plant pest control	Regional cooperation agreement between Animal Health Services as well as between Plant Health Services at CVO level developed (Y/N)	No(2022)	Yes(2025)	Project reports	Commitment and willingness by beneficiaries to cooperate regionally
		Inter-regional vaccination strategy developed (Y/N)	No (2022)	Yes (2025)	Audits	
		Number of inter-regional simulation exercises organised	0 (2022)	At least 1 simulation exercise in place (2025)	Audits	
Outcome 2	Improved effectiveness of Western Balkans in detecting, fighting and limiting the size of an outbreak of animal disease in line with EU standards	Response time to animal disease outbreak	Baseline to be established during action	Improved response time (2025)	Beneficiary reports	Animal health situation does not

⁴ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/1702 of 1 August 2019 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and of the Council by establishing the list of priority pests (OJ L 260, p.8)

		<p>Level of uptake of EU compliant legislation on animal health</p> <p>Number of beneficiary multiannual survey programmes compliant with the EU requirements⁵</p>	<p>Limited uptake (2022)</p> <p>0 (2022)</p>	<p>Increased uptake (2025)</p> <p>1 (2025)</p>	<p>Commission reports</p> <p>Audits</p>	deteriorate
Outcome 3	Improved effectiveness of Western Balkans in detecting, fighting and limiting the size of an outbreak of plant pests in line with EU standards	<p>Response time to plant pest outbreak</p> <p>Level of uptake of EU compliant legislation</p>	<p>Baseline to be established during action</p> <p>Limited uptake (2022)</p>	<p>Improved response time (2025)</p> <p>Increased uptake (2025)</p>	<p>Beneficiary reports</p> <p>Commission reports</p> <p>Audits</p>	Plant health situation does not deteriorate
Output 1 related to outcome 1	Western Balkans are better prepared to cooperate regionally and with the EU on animal and plant health	Extent of use of regional cooperation network. Number of planned meetings and minutes of the meetings	Limited (2022)	Increased (2025)	<p>Beneficiary reports</p> <p>Commission reports</p> <p>Audits</p>	
Output 1 related to outcome 2	Western Balkans are further acquainted and better equipped to implement EU aligned animal health legislation and systems	<p>Number of contingency plans for all the required animal diseases as per the EU Animal Health Law developed/improved</p> <p>Level of knowledge of relevant staff of EU aligned disease control management</p>	<p>0 (2022)</p> <p>Limited knowledge (2022)</p>	<p>4 per beneficiary (2025)</p> <p>Increased knowledge (2025)</p>	<p>Project reports</p> <p>Audits</p>	
Output 2 related to outcome 2	Western Balkans veterinary services and laboratories have improved capacity to eradicate and provide surveillance for animal disease	<p>Number of rabies surveillance programs presenting sufficient data to evaluate disease freedom developed/improved</p> <p>Number of laboratory quality systems</p>	<p>0 (2022)</p> <p>BASELINE 0</p>	<p>6 (2025)</p> <p>TARGET 6</p>	<p>Project reports</p> <p>Audits</p>	Beneficiaries commit to ensure the necessary operational budget for

⁵ Regulation 2020/1231

		supported				veterinary services and laboratories and for potential outbreaks
Output 1 related to outcome 3	Western Balkans are further acquainted and better equipped to implement EU aligned priority pest legislation and systems	Number of contingency plans following EU legislation for priority pests developed/improved Level of knowledge of relevant staff of EU aligned pest control management	0 (2022) Limited knowledge (2022)	6 contingency plans for 3 priority quarantine pests in place (2025) Increased knowledge (2025)	Project reports Audits	
Output 2 related to outcome 3	Western Balkans plant health services and laboratories have improved capacity to eradicate and provide surveillance for plant pests	Number of quarantine pest eradication programmes updated Number of priority pests covered by the expertise and capacity of plant health diagnostic laboratories	0 (2022) 0 (2022)	5 (2025) At least 10 priority pests covered (2025)	Project reports Audits	Beneficiaries commit to ensure the necessary operational budget for plant health services and laboratories and for potential outbreaks

4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

4.1. Financing agreement

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

4.2. Implementation modalities

The Commission will ensure that the EU appropriate rules and procedures for providing financing to third parties are respected, including review procedures, where appropriate, and compliance of the action with EU restrictive measures⁶.

4.2.1. Direct Management (Procurement)

The procurements, through two separate contracts, will contribute to:

- strengthen cooperation within the region and with the EU on animal disease control as well as on plant pest control;
- improve effectiveness of Western Balkans in detecting, fighting and limiting the size of an outbreak of animal disease in line with EU standards;
- improve effectiveness of Western Balkans in detecting, fighting and limiting the size of an outbreak of plant pests in line with EU standards.

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

	EU contribution (amount in EUR)	Indicative third party contribution, in currency identified 2021
	2021	
All outcomes and outputs		
Direct management (Procurement) – total envelope under section 4.2.1	4 000 000	N/A
Totals	4 000 000	N/A

⁶ 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.

4.5. Organisational set-up and responsibilities

The contractors will be required to set up an operational base hosting their experts in the Western Balkans region.

The contractors and the responsible team leader will report directly to a contact person in SANTE.

5. PERFORMANCE/RESULTS MONITORING AND REPORTING

5.1. Internal monitoring

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

The Contractors will establish a project Steering Committee consisting of members from all the Western Balkans veterinary organisations, a contact person from the Commission and the project Team Leader in the Region (the members from the Western Balkans need to have a mandate to make decisions). It will meet regularly at least once a year to discuss progress and approve work plans and budget. The Contractor is tasked with sharing regularly information on contract implementation with the relevant beneficiary authorities in the Western Balkans and with EU Delegations/EU Office in the region, in order to ensure that they are sufficiently informed on the progress of the action.

The action Steering Committee will facilitate proper coordination and harmonisation of activities, implementation of activities to be agreed, developed and coordinated.

The aim of the action Steering Committee will be to discuss action progress and decide upon the work plan related to the implementation of this service contract. The action Steering Committee will meet at least two times per year.

The action Steering Committee will also contribute to the setup of processes and conditions to be met for the effective action implementation.

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

The Contractors 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: 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 final evaluation will be carried out for this action or its components via independent consultants, included in the procured services.

The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least one 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 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 partner beneficiary, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the action.

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 sustainability of this action is dependent on the ownership by the relevant IPA III beneficiaries. It is therefore crucial to involve staff from the veterinary and plant health services, and, if appropriate, the respective ministers in all the intended activities at an early stage of planning.

Via the establishment of a close cooperation and involvement of the local staff as well as running simulation exercises to see how well the developed contingency plans are implemented the basis for a sustainable and solid emergency management tool is established.