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ANNEX 8

to the Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the multi-country annual action plan in favour of the Western Balkans and Türkiye for 2024

Action Document for “EU4Youth: Supporting Regional Youth Cooperation”

ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

This document constitutes the annual work programme in the sense of Article 110(2) of the Financial Regulation, and annual and multiannual action plans and measures in the sense of Article 9 of IPA III Regulation.

1. SYNOPSIS

1.1. Action Summary Table

Title	EU4Youth: Supporting Regional Youth Cooperation Multi-country annual action plan in favour of the Western Balkans and Türkiye for 2024
OPSYS	ACT 61808; IPA III/2024/NEAR>EAC or EACEA.08
ABAC	ABAC Commitment level 1 number: JAD.1161483
Basic Act	Financed under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)
Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)	Yes Human Development (incl. human capital and youth), 100%
EIP Flagship	No
Team Europe	No
Beneficiary(y)/(ies) of the action	The action shall be carried out in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) and Türkiye ¹
Programming document	IPA III Programming Framework
PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION	
Window and thematic priority	Window 4: Competitiveness and inclusive growth Thematic Priority 1: Education, employment, social protection and inclusion policies, and health (70.7%)

* 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.

¹ Türkiye is only a beneficiary for the area of support n°4 of the action. Serbia and North Macedonia are not beneficiaries of the area of support n° 5 of the action.

	Window 2: Good governance, EU <i>acquis</i> alignment, good neighbourly relations and strategic communication Thematic Priority 1: Good governance (13.3%) Thematic Priority 3: Good neighbourly relations and reconciliation (16%):			
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Main SDG: SDG 4 - Quality Education Other significant SDGs (up to 9) and, where appropriate, targets: SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, SDG 17 – Partnerships for the goals, as well as the principle of “Leave No One Behind (LNOB)”, SDG3-Good health and well-being, SDG 5-Gender equality.			
DAC code	11230 – Basic life skills for youth and adults (80%) 16065 – Recreation and sport (20%)			
Main Delivery Channel @	Donor government - 11000 University, college or other teaching institution, research institute or think-tank - 51000 Recipient Government - 12000			
Targets	☐ Climate ☒ Gender ☐ Biodiversity			
Markers (from DAC form)	General policy objective	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Participation development/good governance	☐	☐	☒
	Aid to environment	☒	☐	☐
	Gender equality and women’s and girl’s empowerment	☐	☒	☐
	Reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health	☒	☐	☐
	Disaster Risk Reduction	☒	☐	☐
	Inclusion of persons with Disabilities	☒	☐	☐
	Nutrition	☒	☐	☐
	RIO Convention markers	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Biological diversity	☒	☐	☐
	Combat desertification	☒	☐	☐
	Climate change mitigation	☒	☐	☐
	Climate change adaptation	☒	☐	☐
Internal markers and Tags	Policy objectives	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	EIP	☐	☒	☐

EIP Flagship	YES ☐	NO ☒
Tags:	YES	NO
Transport	☐	☒
Energy	☐	☒
Environment and climate resilience	☐	☒
Digital	☐	☒
Economic development (incl. private sector, trade and macroeconomic support)	☐	☒
Human Development (incl. human capital and youth)	☒	☐
Health resilience	☒	☐
Migration and mobility	☒	☐
Agriculture, food security and rural development	☐	☒
Rule of law, governance and Public Administration reform	☐	☒
Other	☐	☒
Digitalisation	☒	☐
Tags	YES	NO
digital connectivity	☐	☒
digital governance	☐	☒
digital entrepreneurship	☐	☒
digital skills/literacy	☐	☒
digital services	☐	☒
Connectivity	☐	☒
Tags	YES	NO
digital connectivity	☐	☒
energy	☐	☒
transport	☐	☒
health	☒	☐
education and research	☒	☐
Migration	☒	☐
Reduction of Inequalities	☐	☒
COVID-19	☒	☐

BUDGET INFORMATION	
Amounts concerned	Total estimated cost: EUR 12 755 000 Total amount of EU budget contribution EUR 11 255 000 Budget line: 15 02 01 01.01 Total amount of EU budget contribution: EUR 3 300 000 Budget line: 15 02 02 01 Total amount of EU budget contribution: EUR 7 955 000 of which EUR 1 500 000 will be co-delegated to the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) and/or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). This action is co-financed by: - German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) for an amount of EUR 1 500 000
MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION	
Implementation modalities (management mode and delivery methods)	Direct management through grants Part of the action (European Week of Sport) will be co-delegated to DG EAC, and/or EACEA Indirect management with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Final date for concluding contribution / delegation agreements, procurement and grant contracts	At the latest by 31 December 2025
Indicative operational implementation period	72 months following the adoption of the Financing Decision

1.2. Summary of the Action

The action will contribute to fostering regional cooperation, trust, and reconciliation among young people by supporting regional mobility schemes, participation in sports and physical activities and youth participation in decision making processes.

This will be achieved through five areas of support and their specific objectives:

Area of Support 1 – Western Balkans Youth Lab: the action aims to support the co-creation of relevant policies for youth by increasing the involvement of young women and men in policy making and enhancing the co-creation of relevant policies with youth through structured Youth Policy Labs. It will strengthen the capacities of National Youth Councils (NYCs) and Youth Umbrella Organisations (YUOs) in the region.

Finally, it will facilitate cultural cooperation among young regional artists by increasing participation of Western Balkans young women and men in regional and international events.

Area of Support 2 – Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme: the action aims to increase institutional capacities of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) with regard to achieving its mission of promoting the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between youth in the Western Balkans. It will continue building the institutional/operational capacity of RYCO to manage regional cooperation projects and to strengthen the role of RYCO as a leading regional organisation for youth engagement in the Western Balkans. Finally, it will support RYCO in continuing implementation of its ‘Superschools’ exchange scheme, which contributes to change the perception of young people in the Western Balkans towards different ethnic, religious, and national groups.

Area of Support 3 – College of Europe in Tirana: the action aims to support the first academic year of the College of Europe campus in Tirana, Albania. After a preparatory phase of 16 months, the action will support the activities of the first year of the Master’s programme that will be offered and of the first cohort of students over the academic year 2024/2025. The new campus will provide to local and international students the necessary knowledge and skills to engage in the EU integration process and support the accession of the Western Balkans to the EU.

Area of Support 4 – EU diplomatic programme for the enlargement region: the action will set up a diplomatic programme for entry-level diplomats from the IPA III beneficiaries embedded in the College of Europe and seeking synergies with the EU Diplomatic Academy for diplomats from EU Member States. The programme will train these entry-level diplomats in the field of the Union’s external action, including the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), in order to develop and promote a common understanding on the role of the Union in the world as well as disseminate best practices in relation to the conduct of the Union’s diplomacy.

Area of Support 5 – European Week of Sport: The action aims to support the implementation of the #BeActive campaign of the European Week of Sport initiative in the Western Balkans. In addition, it will raise awareness and understanding in the individuals (especially young) and civil society about different cultures in the Western Balkans. The action builds on the success of the 2021-22 EU4Youth: European Week of Sport in the Western Balkans that has been successful in promoting health and physical activity despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The action supports SDG 4 and will contribute to quality education. It also supports SDG 16 by promoting peace, inclusiveness and more effective, accountable and inclusive institutions with a focus on young people. It also fosters healthy and sustainable habits and tolerance in line with SDG3 - Good health and well-being. It will also contribute to achieve Gender Equality, in line with SDG 5. By promoting cooperation and partnerships between governments and civil society, the organisation contributes to SDG 17.

The action will contribute to thematic priorities under Window 2 and Window 4 of the IPA III programming framework², in particular education, employment, social protection and inclusion policies, and health; good governance, and good neighbourly relations and reconciliation.

² COM(2021) 8914 final, 10.12.2021

1.3. Beneficiary(y)/(ies) of the Action

The action is to be carried out in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and Türkiye.

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Context

The history of the Western Balkans is closely interlinked and shared across the partners. It thereby represents both a common heritage and common challenges. The region can experience development and progress through joint action on promoting tolerance, solidarity and cooperation. Young people and new generations of leaders will be at the forefront of further advancing cooperation, which will be crucial for social, economic, and cultural development as well as normalising relationships and reconciliation.

Considerable efforts have been invested in the Western Balkans to support youth exchanges and facilitate encounters between young people in the region. This trend toward regional youth engagement is further supported by the establishment of regional platforms for youth cooperation in the Western Balkans. Most importantly RYCO, set up as part of the “Berlin process” with the aim to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between youth in the region through youth exchange programmes and the Regional Cooperation Council’s (RCC) Western Balkan Youth Lab, initiated following the conclusions of the Sofia Summit back in 2018.

The importance of this mission is substantiated by the fact that as per RCC’s Balkan Barometer, 84.7% of youth, aged 18-24, stated that regional initiatives on youth cooperation make them feel more optimistic about the future. As such, they represent the first of its kind with tangible governmental commitments. The developed Methodology of the Youth Policy Lab has been inspired by the EU Youth Dialogue, incorporating successfully elements of co-creation, co-management, active participation and equality. As such, it represents a regional co-creation platform which contributes to the implementation of the European Youth Goals and ensures meaningful participation of youth as per EU Youth Dialogue values.

In the EU-Western Balkans Summit of December 2022, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced her support for Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama’s idea to establish a College of Europe campus in Tirana. By opening a campus in Poland in the early 1990s, the College of Europe was a pioneer in supporting, through the means of education in EU affairs, the accession process of the first countries to become members of the EU at that time.

The EU Diplomatic Academy was established in 2022 by the European External Action Service (EEAS) on an initiative of the European Parliament. While young diplomats from the candidate countries and potential candidates attended the Academy in the first year, their participation is no longer foreseen as the EEAS moves to establish this Academy on a more permanent basis. Therefore, a parallel EU diplomatic programme for the enlargement region will be established under the action, with the idea that synergies will be created as participants from the two programmes will live together and learn from each other.

Since 2015, the European Week of Sport has been carried out in 44 countries across Europe. Its main aim is increasing the levels of participation in sport and physical activity for citizens in the EU and beyond (the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership). Since 2020, IPA has financed the participation of the European Week of Sport in the Western Balkans with a longer-term plan and a larger budget. This allowed the four beneficiary ministries to organise the European Week of Sport in the period 23-30 September 2021 and 2022, but also to organise events throughout the year.

The action is fully supportive of the Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU external action 2022 – 2027, by ensuring meaningful youth engagement in the region. The action is aligned with the priorities of the second and third pillars of the YAP, “Partnership to EMPOWER” and “Partnership to CONNECT”. The YAP stresses the need to support young people to transform their ideas in change-making initiatives by reinforcing their skills and network. Under the second pillar, it recalls the aim of the EU to promote youth mobility, exchanges and networking opportunities.

The action is also fully in line with national policies and strategies that are set in the region. The action will contribute to the objectives of the National Youth Strategy of Albania 2022- 2029 (supported by Western Balkans Youth Lab), National Youth Strategy 2016 – 2025 of North Macedonia, the draft National Youth Strategy of Montenegro, as well as National Youth Strategy of Serbia 2022-2030. In Kosovo, the “National Sport Strategy” is in the process of development, sport is currently covered by the Strategy for Youth 2019-2023. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the previous national strategies expired and the new one is currently in the process of development.

The action will support the achievement of overall and specific objectives of the Window 2 and Window 4 of the IPA III Programming Framework focusing on reconciliation, confidence building, strengthening formal and informal mechanisms of youth participation and strengthening the education offer for young women and men in the region. In line with the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans³ and the Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, the Action will support the development of human capital by increasing support to youth education and their involvement in policy making processes, health, employment, and culture.

The action is in line with the Enhanced partnership with the Western Balkans under the Erasmus+ programme announced at the Ministerial Meeting on Education and Training on 28 June 2022, which will open the possibility to all education organisations and institutions from the Western Balkans to take part in strategic actions of Erasmus+ such as the European Universities Initiative, and in the conclusions of the last EU-Western Balkans Summit of 6 December 2022.

The components of the action are covering areas identified by the Economic and Reform Programmes (ERPs). The action is in line with the Policy Guidance 6 for all relevant IPA beneficiaries, intervening in the areas of education and skills, particularly for young people. The Youth Labs will support the involvement of young people in decision-making and will have as a first topic the Green Agenda. The regional school exchange programme is aimed at reconciliation and supports the acquisition of skills that can contribute to closing the skills gap in the region. The College of Europe campus in Tirana, depending on the focus of the future academic programme can also contribute to the ERPs and will help the participant acquire relevant skills for the job markets.

The action creates synergies with the EU funded projects “Western Balkans and Turkey for EmployYouth” and “EU4Schools” in Albania, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and EU funded “RISE” project, as well as the German funded “Sport for Development” and “Supporting Young People in Rural Regions of Serbia” projects. The action also supports EU and German initiatives, such as the Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training (WB PET), the EU Western Balkans Summits, and the Berlin Process.

The Week of Sport action will be carried out with the close involvement of the four National Coordinating Bodies, in particular of the Erasmus+ associated partners (Serbia and North Macedonia are two of the programme countries of Erasmus+, therefore the support to these countries to take part in the Week of Sport will be provided under the Erasmus+ programme). The action will also be synergic with the Erasmus+ action Capacity Building in the field of Sport, whose main aim is to support the capacity of grassroots sport organisations in the region and which also addresses sport as a vehicle to develop human and entrepreneurial capacities.

2.2. Problem Analysis

Area of support 1 – Western Balkans Youth Lab

Short problem analysis

Young people in the Western Balkans feel insufficiently consulted in the processes that tackle them directly despite making up around 21% of Western Balkans population. The general perception is that youth is not

³ COM(2020) 641 final, 6.10.2020

experienced or interested in political and civic participation. Nevertheless, the data⁴ show that 93% of young people (aged 18-24) in the region believe that the public administrations should strengthen mechanisms for consulting and involving young people in the decision-making process. 74%⁵ of young women and men agree that regional cooperation can contribute to positive changes. In the past two decades, intra-regional youth cooperation in the Western Balkans has been encouraged by the EU and recently focused on youth, following the Berlin Process' impetus. In that regard, there is an urgent need to empower young women and men and equip them with needed knowledge and skills so as to ensure their meaningful participation in decision making processes.

Main stakeholders

The main stakeholders targeted by the action are young people who are members of the National Youth Councils and Youth Umbrella Organisations from the region, as well as line ministries responsible for the policies addressed. They will play a key role when it comes to Youth Policy Labs – from identification of issues to the implementation of Youth Policy Actions, while within each of the extended Working Groups the action will seek to target other actors, such as civil society organisations and international organisations. Whenever relevant, the action will ensure coordination with EU Delegations/EU Office, relevant regional and international organisations, bilateral partners and non-governmental organisations. Besides, young artists from the region will be targeted and selected by the Regional Culture & Arts Steering Committee, comprised of relevant individuals in the respective fields, such as university professors from art faculties or established regional artists. Young regional artists selected will be given an opportunity to participate in established and respected regional cultural events, and to present their work at the events' margins, as well as to meet with the respectively established regional artists.

Area of Support 2 – Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme

Short problem analysis

Western Balkans need to utilise the potential of young people, through strong institutional and financial support - not only to foster reconciliation, but also for the advancement of the Western Balkans path towards EU integration. The total youth population in the Western Balkans is around 3,6 million, which is around 21%⁶ of the total population of the Western Balkans according to the available Eurostat statistics. These high numbers represent a significant pool of potential for further strengthening of cooperation and reconciliation in the region.

Formal education systems are still struggling to provide students with the soft skills and competences, such as critical thinking, which will allow students to challenge social and political narratives of the region independently. This situation is severely aggravated by the fact that the Western Balkans lacks a culture of intra-regional mobility and inter-ethnic exchange. There are limited opportunities for youth to engage in regional volunteering, formal and non-formal education or to meet and socialise with other youth from the region. This lack of opportunities can mainly be attributed to insufficient governmental investment in youth. Furthermore, young people themselves are often disillusioned with their future perspectives in their home countries and regularly voice a strong desire to emigrate beyond the region, mostly to Western Europe.

As a result of the Western Balkans Initiative at the 2014 Western Balkans Summit in Berlin (known as the "Berlin Process") the Regional Youth Cooperation Office was founded in 2017 with exactly the aim of addressing these challenges and lack of youth exchange opportunities. However, despite its political importance, RYCO is still a young organisation that needs support in further strengthening of its capacities.

⁴ Data from the regional Balkan Barometer 2021 survey.

⁵ ibid

⁶ Basic figures on Western Balkans and Türkiye, Factsheets, 2022 edition.

Following the adoption of the GIZ/Deloitte led functional analysis and organisational redesign, further support is needed in order for all of the adopted changes to be implemented.

Main stakeholders

Main stakeholders of the action can be divided in three categories: a) RYCO as a regional organisation and project political partner b) schools, school representatives and representatives of the ministries of education and c) young girls and boys (age 15-17) taking part in the exchanges programmes and capacity development activities. They will be the target of capacity building activities organised by the action as well as taking part in the regional exchange programmes. Further project stakeholders will include other donor funded youth projects in the region, authorities responsible for education, EU Delegations/EU Offices, Member States embassies as well as international organisations dealing with topics of youth.

Area of Support 3 – College of Europe in Tirana

Short problem analysis

The educational offer in the Western Balkans does not yet allow young people to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to help support and prepare the accession of the Western Balkans to the EU. The establishment of a College of Europe campus in Tirana will have a significant impact on the education offer in EU affairs in the region, providing a high-quality educational programme that meets international standards and offering students the knowledge and skills to engage in the EU integration process. The College has a strong reputation as a leading institution in European studies and establishing a campus in Tirana will bring the institution in the region, allowing for more collaboration and partnerships with local universities, think tanks, and civil society organisations. Moreover, the potential benefits of the Western Balkans' accession to the EU are numerous and significant. The EU is the region's most important trade partner, accounting for almost 70% of its total trade. EU companies are also the largest investors in the region, representing over 65% of foreign direct investment. In addition to current opportunities for students and businesses to participate in EU programmes under programmes such as Erasmus+ and Creative Europe, the Campus will provide an additional opportunity for young people to acquire skills sought on the job market, gain international experience and develop their networks. In addition to the economic and employment challenges in the Western Balkans, the EU and the Western Balkans share common security challenges. Education and training of young professionals can help to address them by contributing to greater awareness and by providing the necessary skills to engage and support international cooperation in these areas.

Main stakeholders

The action consists of a grant to the College of Europe and as such the main stakeholder of this area of support is the College of Europe itself and the new Tirana campus. Throughout the preparatory phase, the College of Europe will closely engage with Albanian institutions, in particular with the Ministry of Education and Sport, for the signature of the cooperation agreement, obtaining the necessary infrastructures and the accreditation process for the Master's programmes. The opening of the new campus in Tirana will also contribute to reinforcing the collaboration and partnerships with local universities, think tanks, and civil society organisations.

Area of support 4 – EU diplomatic programme for the enlargement region

Short problem analysis

Currently there is no structured mechanism for cooperation and exchange between entry-level diplomats from Member States and the enlargement region. In line with the objectives of the CFSP established in 1993, the action will lay the foundations for a wide network of young diplomats capable of understanding and promoting the EU's fundamental values and foreign policy objectives on the basis of mutual trust and cooperation. Moreover, entry-level diplomats of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Western Balkans and Türkiye have a limited knowledge of EU affairs and in particular the EU external action, including the CFSP. The location of the programme in Belgium so close to the EU institutions with guest lecturers and study visits planned will allow access to a network not easily reached for entry-level diplomats in the region.

Main stakeholders

The Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the candidate countries and potential candidate are the main stakeholders of this area of support. They will each select 1-3 diplomats (with less than five years of experience) to participate in the diplomatic programme. The College of Europe will implement the grant and will be a stakeholder. It represents an ideal location to organise tailored visits to the EU institutions to gain real life experience of the EU's external policy. Regular visits to Brussels will be a key feature of the programme, ranging from visits to the EEAS, the Council and the Commission to the European Parliament and its committees, as well as the European Defence Agency and the EU Military Committee. In addition to this, NATO, Permanent Representations of EU Member States, Embassies and Missions of partners, as well as non-governmental stakeholders such as think tanks, NGOs and media organisations are other possible destinations.

Area of support 5 – European Week of Sport

Short problem analysis

Young people in the relevant IPA beneficiaries do not do enough sports. Investments in sports facilities, equipment etc. are very low across the region. There is a lack of exchange within the region, especially between youth. The legacy of the past is often still an obstacle for building better neighbourly relations and more frequent exchanges. The region as a whole is not yet as well-integrated with the EU and cooperation in Erasmus+ projects in sports is still relatively limited.⁷ Sport is an excellent vehicle to bring people together in a positive way, using a 'common language' that everyone can relate to. The joint events and occasions for cooperation among civil society and athletes will therefore help to contribute to the objective of building such a common narrative.

When it comes to health, even low levels of physical activity have the potential to prevent several non-communicable diseases, including cancer. Sport also creates positive feelings and after almost two years of closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the upcoming years promise to be years which allow being active all-year. This is particularly relevant for the young people whose well-being has suffered the most during the closures due to the pandemic.

Main stakeholders

The main responsible bodies for the action will be the relevant National Coordinating Bodies. These have been nominated by the administrations responsible for sport in the relevant IPA beneficiaries, i.e. the Ministry of Education and Sport of Albania, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Kosovo and the Ministry of Sports and Youth of Montenegro. At the time of the launch of the procedure for a direct grant, administrations responsible for sport in relevant IPA beneficiaries may propose different coordinating bodies.

The main role of the relevant coordinating bodies is to help ensure that the European Week of Sport initiative is successfully implemented with an important turnout of participants and gets good visibility in the participating IPA beneficiaries.

2.3. Lessons Learned

Area of support 1 – Western Balkans Youth Lab

The success of scaling up youth participation in decision-making in the Western Balkans within regional Youth Labs proved to have a great impact on the development of the youth sector in the Western Balkans.

⁷ See the [Erasmus+ project database](#)

The project enabled youth organisations to directly cooperate with the institutions responsible for youth, which has been identified as one of the main highlights of the project by the beneficiaries. Project tools such as technical assistance and capacity building instrument are defined as crucial for the further development of policies in accordance with youth needs.

Although the process as such is considered successful, the implementation by the national authorities is challenging due to constrained political processes and lack of communication and coordination between institutions at the central and local level. As per the Results-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) recommendations, representation of technical staff from the relevant ministries would allow for a more efficient dynamic in discussions on the specific policy-related topics. This would also contribute to an improved coordination and cooperation in the region. As per the report from the Final Conference of the Youth Policy Lab on Unemployment held in May 2022, youth highlighted that there is a need for high-level representatives of the region to demonstrate their support in real terms by attending similar events.

Area of Support 2 – Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme

RYCO needs to further build its organisational and operational capacities. Due to the high staff fluctuation, additional support is needed for the development of RYCO and its competencies to independently manage large-scale donor-funded projects. As recommended by the ROM team, the action should further prioritise the implementation of the GIZ/Deloitte elaborated Functional Analysis (FA) endorsed by the RYCO Governing Board and further support RYCO's institutional transformation that are mandatory, including adapting the funding mechanism.

The RYCO-led Superschools programme, which includes capacity development of teachers, student exchanges, as well as annual Youth Camps were proven as very successful during its first cycle. The previously implemented capacity training of teachers was evaluated as beneficial for 91.17% of participants. 88.23% expressed they know more about youth reconciliation, mobility, and cooperation. Students' questionnaire had proven additionally with 91,5%, that the exchanges made them feel more confident about how to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds in the Western Balkans. However, the implementation of exchanges is perceived as very demanding for the coordinating teachers, which again emphasise the need for further simplification of RYCO operating and financial procedures, as also stated and recommended by the ROM team.

Area of Support 3 – College of Europe in Tirana

The College of Europe benefits from an operating grant from the European Commission for the delivering of Masters in EU studies at its campus in Bruges, Belgium. In terms of outcomes, the College's main results are linked to two key aspects of the action implementation: the successful graduation of students and the promotion of EU values and interests. These outcomes are achieved through a set of general objectives that are focused on preparing EU students to become key actors in the areas of European cooperation and integration processes, either in the European institutions themselves or as leaders and decision makers in the public and private sectors. By the College's unique "formula", it ensures that the 340 students from around 50 nationalities are not only studying together but also living together and by doing so experience multiculturalism and embody the aims of the Erasmus+ programme. Over the last years the number of students from the Western Balkans did not significantly increase. The experience of the second campus in Natolin shows that placing a campus in an additional region with an additional thematic focus, could attract a different cohort of students. Therefore, opening a third campus in Tirana has the potential to attract additional students from the region but also new students with a particular interest for the Western Balkans, supporting the integration process and skills development in the region.

Area of support 4 – EU diplomatic programme for the enlargement region

A detailed quality management plan has been designed based on the lessons learnt and experiences from the implementation of the first pilot programme of establishing the EU Diplomatic Academy in 2022-2023, which

included both EU Member States and enlargement region diplomats. The plan includes detailed procedures such as checklists for the implementation of modules, structured and regular communications among staff and participants, quality control mechanisms for the trainings as well as response mechanisms for risk management and business continuity.

Overall, the assessment of the pilot programme by the participants was very positive. The programme reinforced their knowledge of EU internal processes in areas related to the CFSP and allowed to create personal and professional bonds. The residential format of the programme was a strong added value, allowing the participants to study, work and live together. The combination of formal and informal settings was found to be very useful in developing a common understanding of EU policies and fostering mutual trust between participants. The format will be replicated in the new diplomatic programme as it will be set up and run parallel with the EU Diplomatic Academy with partially integrated course work. Based on lessons learned from the first year, participants will also be guided in their visa applications to avoid difficulties related to administrative registration.

Area of support 5 – European Week of Sport

Preliminary reports from the previous and ongoing support to the Week of Sport in the Western Balkans showed that the main outputs include:

1. The previous action is expanding opportunities for regional cooperation in sport and not only among the four beneficiaries. A key element in the EU4Youth project is the increased opportunities of cooperation with the National Coordinating Bodies of the Erasmus+ associated countries. Thanks to this cooperation, new synergies can be found.
2. The previous action is successfully encouraging tens of thousands of individuals (including many school children) to be active. This is a very positive result since the levels of physical activity in the EU remain very low from 2018-2022 as the most recent Eurobarometer shows. The levels in the Western Balkans are not expected to be different than the average of EU27.
3. The previous action is laying down the foundations for a healthier society thanks to the promotion of more physical activity and healthy habits. Since the pandemic broke out in 2020, health became more important than ever both from an individual but also from a societal standpoint.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

3.1. Intervention Logic

The overall objective of this action is **to foster regional cooperation, trust, and reconciliation among young women and men in the Western Balkans and with the EU.**

To this end, the outcomes of the action are:

1. Youth policies and initiatives in the Western Balkans are better aligned and coherent with the needs of young women and men in the region.
2. The spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between young women and men in the Western Balkans is increased.
3. The *esprit de corps* and knowledge in EU affairs among young women and men from the EU and the Western Balkans are strengthened.

The outputs to be delivered by the action contributing to the corresponding specific objectives (outcomes) are:

1. Contributing to Outcome 1:

- 1.1 Strengthened capacities and increased involvement of young women and men in policy-making.

2. Contributing to Outcome 2:

- 2.1 Improved institutional/operational capacity of RYCO to manage regional cooperation projects and successful exchange of students and staff between the Western Balkans ensured.

2.2 Enhanced cooperation to support healthy lifestyles and active citizenship of young women and men in the Western Balkans.

3. Contributing to Outcome 3:

3.1 A master's programme in European studies offered in the Western Balkans to select students of excellence.

3.2 A training programme on the EU common foreign and security policy is offered to entry-level diplomats from candidate countries and potential candidates.

The underlying intervention logic for the action is that by increasing the capacities and the involvement of young women and men in policy making, it will be ensured that youth policies and initiatives in the Western Balkans are better aligned with the needs of young women and men in the region. Moreover, by improving the capacity of RYCO and ensuring successful exchanges at school level and by enhancing cooperation to support healthy lifestyles, the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between young women and men in the Western Balkans will be increased. Lastly, if a master's programme in European studies to students and a training programme for entry-level diplomats from the Western Balkans is offered, then the *esprit de corps* among young women and men in the EU and the Western Balkans will be strengthened.

3.2. Indicative Activities

Activities related to **Output 1.1 aim to strengthen capacities and increase the involvement of young women and men in policy making.** These are to be done through Youth Policy Labs consisting of several milestone events and focusing on activities at the national level. The capacities of young people will be reinforced thanks to a mini-mobility scheme between the National Youth Councils of the Western Balkans and the EU as well as a continuous support to the strategic development of the Western Balkans Youth Councils.

Activities related to **Output 2.1 will improve the institutional/operational capacity of RYCO to manage regional cooperation projects and become the leading regional organisation for youth engagement in the Western Balkans.** The capacity-building activities will build on recommendations stemming from the RYCO functional analysis and provide tailor-made capacity development measures for RYCO staff. These activities shall ensure RYCO's functionality and ability to implement projects, among which the Superschools exchange programme. An exchange programme of students and staff between the Western Balkans will be implemented, allowing students to travel through the region and meet their peers. The programme will also include capacity development measures for the teachers and the school partnerships.

Activities related to **Output 2.2 aim to enhance cooperation to support healthy lifestyles and active citizenship of young women and men in the Western Balkans.** Western Balkans sport stakeholders, including from the relevant Ministries of Sport will take part in relevant meetings with EU partners and all meetings organised by the European Commission in relation to the implementation of the European #BeActive campaign. These will be complemented by additional sport events and activities, such as year-round events to promote sport and physical activity, including outdoor and indoor, and healthy lifestyles, opportunities for dialogue and discussion on values through sport and on-line communication campaigns in each relevant IPA beneficiary.

Activities related to **Output 3.1 aim to offer a master's programme in European studies to select students of excellence from the Western Balkans and EU Member States** to study together. They include costs of the new campus for the first academic year of operations.

Activities related to **Output 3.2 A training programme on the EU common foreign and security policy is offered to entry-level diplomats from candidate countries and potential candidates.** The programme, open to diplomats from candidate countries and potential candidates will include a focus on the EU's enlargement policy, and will be composed of learning modules, skills-oriented workshops, guest lectures, events and study-visits in Brussels, as well as simulation exercises.

3.3. Mainstreaming

Environmental Protection, Climate Change and Biodiversity

As previously proposed and as per the consultation process conducted with youth, the proposed topic of the first Youth Policy Lab is Green Agenda. Young people in the Western Balkans point this out as a burning issue that needs to be addressed especially due to the high air, water, and soil pollution in the region. The aim of the activities is to align the region with the EU's 2050 ambition to make Europe a carbon-neutral continent, fight pollution and focus on biodiversity protection and restoration of ecosystems. Activities are to be in line with the *Green Agenda for the Western Balkan* (GAWB), and the GAWB Action Plan. Added value to this is that RCC has coordinated the process of drafting the GAWB Declaration and Action Plan, based on intense consultations with all stakeholders, as well as ensures and maintains a platform for dialogue with the European Commission services. Therefore, beside raising awareness among youth on importance of nurturing and taking care of the environment, the action will support youth participation in decision making processes related to the environmental issues affecting well-being of Western Balkan citizens. In each area of support, participants shall be offered opportunities to discuss and learn about environmental issues, reflecting about what can be done at different levels. Projects within the European Week of Sport shall be designed in an eco-friendly way and shall incorporate green practices in all its facets. All related events and activities will minimise the use of single-use plastics (including bottles) and of non-recyclable materials.

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

The action will strive to ensure gender balance among the participants in all activities carried out by incorporating appropriate gender-specific and gender-disaggregated indicators across all target groups. Action reports will help monitoring gender balance in the activities and will encourage the participation of women in decision making processes. The action will not discriminate in its activities against any of the people involved regardless of gender, race, colour, religion, place of origin, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability or age, and will encourage the participation of vulnerable/marginalised groups. Activities planned are fully in line with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

As per the OECD Gender DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as G1. This implies that gender equality is a significant objective.

The action will tackle the potential discrepancy between schools from urban and rural areas by selecting diverse areas for funding of exchange projects. The potential of schools viewing gender equality merely through ensuring equal participation, is being approached by including gender as a cross-cutting issue into the capacity development of teachers. In order to prevent gender inequality from hindering girls to participate in the exchanges, parents are included in the preparation phase of the project and the information phase before the implementation of exchanges.

In sport-related activities, a special attention will be given to young women and men, including young talented athletes and staff, since the gender gap is still very high in this area (female participation in sport and in coaching). The award criteria will mention gender sensitive aspects in order to balance the share of men and women participating in this action, as well as to encourage vulnerable groups to actively participate. An appropriate gender balance will be sought on all the managing bodies and activities of the action.

Activities focusing on gender inequalities will be proposed in the design of the College of Europe programme in Tirana and the European Diplomatic Academy, with the aim of tackling both structural and cultural barriers to gender equality.

Human Rights

Reports on non-discrimination of European Equality Law Network suggest that raising awareness for human rights, on discrimination and possibilities to claim rights is strongly needed to empower marginalised groups. The activities within the action respect all five rights-based approach principles: participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, empowerment, and legality. The action will contribute to encouraging youth and policy makers from the Western Balkans to adhere to legal standards of transparency, accountability and citizen participation when co-creating policies. Sport is also an effective tool power to unite, build bridges between cultures, and enhance understanding between people. Sport is a factor of inclusion of minorities and vulnerable groups.

Disability

As per OECD Disability DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as D1. This implies that the action is relevant for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Young women and men with disabilities will have a chance to be actively involved in both Areas of Support, especially within Youth Policy Lab. Furthermore, schools working with this target group will receive additional consideration in the selection process for funding partnerships. The call for applications is designed through an inclusive approach giving the chance to actively involve young people with disabilities. In the first open call, two partnerships involved the exchange of young people with mental disabilities and visual impairment. The College of Europe, which will take care of the Tirana campus and the Diplomatic Academy, also contributes to increasing diversity, equal opportunity, and inclusion. In the preparation of the European Week of Sports, National Coordinating Bodies will cooperate with national parasport organisation with a view to include parasport athletes in the activities.

Democracy

An accountable, transparent, and well-functioning public administration is not only a democratic right of citizens but also guarantor of delivery of quality services and the key driver of economic growth and competitiveness. By strengthening the voice of youth and encouraging their participation in the decision-making process, everyone's opinions and ideas are to be taken into account. The action also promotes greater transparency in government policies, which is essential for a fair and healthy democracy. Furthermore, the action works to ensure that all citizens have access to the same rights and opportunities regardless of their background or financial status which ultimately helps create a stronger and more equal society for all.

Conflict sensitivity, peace and resilience

Conflict sensitivity, peace and resilience are vital components of any successful action, especially in the Western Balkans. Being mindful of the history of the region and striving to create a positive environment in which everyone can thrive is leading to the long-term positive domino effect on youth. By encouraging collaboration between stakeholders from the entire region, the action is promoting open dialogue and mutual understanding. Recognising the importance of these factors, peace, resilience, and stabilisation in the region are built up. The action helps to ensure an inclusive and transparent dialogue, consultation, and communication with all relevant stakeholders in the respective sectors. The action will ensure equal representation from all participating IPA beneficiaries, as well as a proportionate participation of rural vs. urban beneficiary schools and/or participants, as well as youth participating at high level events.

3.4. Risks and Assumptions

Category	Risks	Likelihood (High/ Medium/ Low)	Impact (High/ Medium/ Low)	Mitigating measures
1-External environment	Political developments in the region may influence RYCO's governing structures, its operations and implementation of the project activities. RYCO highly depends on approvals by its Governing Board (GB) members, each having a veto power of any activity/project.	Medium	Medium	By engaging directly with GB members, attending the GB meeting as well as securing continuous support from both the EU Headquarters, EU Delegations/ EU Offices as well as the German Ministry, this risk is constantly being mitigated.
1-External environment	COVID-19 or other pandemics cancelling events (in particular, sport activities).	Low	High	If the impact of COVID or other pandemic cases will rise again, grant holders will be invited to take measures to reduce physical contacts or plan alternative events (e.g. outdoors)
3-People and the organisation	Youth's lack of motivation to participate in policy processes , due to the fact that the overall process of one Youth Lab lasts for one year and a half and requires constant efforts and motivation of young people engaged.	Low	Medium	This risk can be mitigated by engaging directly with the youth and by providing them with continuous support and education. The action will be designed to continuously promote previous outcomes and underline how youth involvement can make a difference. Additionally, providing capacity building to the NYC will ensure knowledge and skills transfer on importance of youth participation in policy-making to the next generation.
3-People and the organisation	Low interest of sport organisations in the Western Balkans to participate in the Week of Sport activities.	Low	Medium	Mitigation would include broad promotion of the action and involvement of main sport actors such as the National Olympic Committees and sport federations.
3-People and the organisation	Lack of capacities within RYCO to implement all activities, as the project is strongly dependant on RYCO's implementation capacities (e.g. its human resources). Limited implementation capacities of relevant coordinating bodies of the European Week of Sports.	Medium	Medium	The mitigating measure for this risk includes the comprehensive support to improve RYCO's institutional and operational capacity as described in the project activities above. Capacity building measures for newcomers will also be included to mitigate the risk. A continuous support to the four National Coordinating Bodies of the Week of Sport will be provided, to

				resolve any issues related to implementation.
4-Planning, processes and systems	Delayed finalisation of the inception phase of the new campus of College of Europe as the setting-up of the new campus has only just started. The recruitment process for the first student cohort of the Tirana campus is foreseen to start late October 2023, 6 months after the start of the preparatory phase and end by June 2024.	Medium	Medium	The risk can be mitigated through a comprehensive methodology that will be set up by the College of Europe, taking into account the local context, stakeholders' needs and interests, and the College of Europe's standards and requirements.
4-External environment	Lack of commitment of the Albanian government in providing the necessary authorisations, facilities and support for the set-up of the campus.	Low	High	The risk can be mitigated through a close dialogue with the Albanian government in the implementation of the action.

External Assumptions

The implementation of the action will highly depend on the political commitment of all beneficiaries. Public administrations in the Western Balkans are effective in responding to the action requests, but the political dynamic in times of crises such as COVID-19 is highly sensitive and could result in delays and difficulties to coordinate internally. The action assumes commitment from administrations sending entry-level diplomats in the European Diplomatic Academy. In addition, the complex structures of some beneficiaries in the Western Balkans can pose challenges to the effectiveness and efficiency of engagement at the bilateral level.

A basic level of interest in EU matters, physical activity and fostering good neighbourly relations among key players in the Week of Sport activities in the region will be necessary. This includes willingness to promote the event at a national level and a cooperative attitude within the region and with the EU from the side of the National Coordinating Bodies, as well as interest of young women and men in participating in proposed sport activities.

For successful implementation of the school-related activities, it is important to ensure the support from the relevant ministries in charge of education and youth which should provide an enabling environment and moreover encourage schools to participate in the project as well as RYCO's activities. High staff turnover is a permanent issue with youth organisations (national youth councils and youth umbrella organisations) and it could slow down the time framed processes, but nurturing relationships by direct constant communication with youth leadership is seen as a good practice crucial for continuation of Youth Labs, school exchanges, as well as the process and knowledge sharing.

Regarding the Tirana campus, the inception phase will be finalised by August 2024 and professors, non-academic staff and students will be successfully recruited/selected by June 2024 to start the first academic year in September 2024. The provision of the building/location shall be ensured in a timely manner by the Government of Albania.

3.5 Indicative Logical Framework Matrix

Results	Results chain: Main expected results	Indicators	Baselines (values and years)	Targets (values and years)	Sources of data	Assumptions
Impact	To foster regional cooperation, trust, and reconciliation among young women and men in the Western Balkans and with the EU.	Good neighbourly relations, such as number of organisations participating in cross-border partnerships	1085 (2021)	1508 (2027)	National statistics, Regional Cooperation Council	<i>Not applicable</i>
Outcome 1	Youth policies and initiatives in the Western Balkans are better aligned and coherent with the needs of young women and men in the region.	1.1 Number of policies co-created with young women and men 1.2 Number of organised Regional Fireside Talks with High-Level Officials 1.3 Number of talented young artists (female/male) supported in the field of visual arts, cinematography and fashion, disaggregated by sex	1.1 2 (2023) 1.2 0 (2023) 1.3 0 (2023)	1.1 6 (2026) 1.2 8 (2026) 1.3 18 (2026)	Action reports; meeting minutes	Political will and genuine commitment of policy makers to create safe space and co-create policies with youth Continuous involvement of youth from National youth Councils Motivation of unrecognised young artist to apply for the opportunities provided
Outcome 2	The spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between young women and men in the Western Balkans is increased.	2.1 Level of RYCO staff satisfaction, disaggregated by sex 2.2 Extent to which RYCO is perceived by relevant stakeholders (such as youth, ministries, schools, NGOs) as a key intergovernmental organisation in charge of promoting the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region, disaggregated by sex 2.3. Number of joint sport events (share of male and female participants) 2.4 Number of sport events	2.1 n/a (2023) 2.2 n/a (2023) 2.3 50 (at least 40% for the gender with the lowest share) 2.4 180	2.1 30% increase (2026) 2.2 30% increase (2026) 2.3 150 (at least 40% for the gender with the lowest share) 2.4 250	Action Reports; Questionnaire; survey results; RYCO's reports; Evaluation	Political stability in the region Continuous political support of RYCO Continuous interest of schools, teachers and students participating in Superschools exchanges

Outcome 3	Strengthened <i>esprit de corps</i> and knowledge in EU affairs among young women and men from the EU and the Western Balkans	3.1 Number of students from the EU participating in the Master's programme of the Tirana campus	3.1 0 (2023)	3.1 tbd (2025)	Action reports College of Europe reports	Provision of the building/location shall be ensured in a timely manner by the Government of Albania Commitment from administrations sending entry-level diplomats in the European Diplomatic Academy
		3.2 Number of joint activities or events organised with students from EU campuses	3.2 0 (2023)	3.2 tbd (2025)		
		3.3 Number of joint activities organised with the European Union (EU) Diplomatic Academy	3.3 0 (2023)	3.3. tbd (2025)		
Output 1 related to Outcome 1	1.1 Strengthened capacities and increased involvement of young women and men in policy-making	1.1.1 Number of young people (female/male) and policy makers actively participating in youth labs, disaggregated by sex	1.1.1 100 (2023)	1.1.1 200 (2026)	Developed policy proposals by youth and policy makers	Political will and genuine commitment of policy makers to create safe space and co-create policies with youth
		1.1.2 Number of youth (female/male) participating at mini-mobility scheme between National Youth councils from the Western Balkans and the EU, disaggregated by sex	1.1.2 25 (2023)	1.1.2 50 (2026)	Reports on Technical Assistance and Capacity Building	Continuous involvement of youth from National youth Councils in policy-making processes through Youth Labs
Output 1 related to Outcome 2	2.1 Improved institutional/ operational capacity of RYCO to manage regional cooperation projects and become the leading regional organisation for youth engagement in the Western Balkans and successful exchange of students and staff between the Western Balkans ensured.	2.1.1 Degree of implementation of recommendations stemming from the RYCO functional analysis	2.1.1 0% (2023)	2.1.1 75% (2026)	2.1.1 RYCO's reports Documentation Reports Evaluations 2.1.2 Questionnaires / survey results Evaluation 2.1.3. RYCO's reports Event reports Participants lists	Political stability in the region
		2.1.2 Percentage of RYCO staff, that participated in capacity development measures, confirm a substantial improvement of their management competencies; disaggregated by sex	2.1.2 0% (2023)	2.1.2 75% (2026)		Continuous political support of RYCO
		2.1.3 Number of organised regional meetings with representatives of national authorities in charge for education in the Western Balkans, disaggregated by sex	2.1.3 3 (2023)	2.1.3 6 (2026)		Continuous interest of schools, teachers and students participating in Superschools exchanges
		2.1.4 Number of teachers/representatives that participated in capacity building measures, disaggregated by sex	2.1.4 200 (2023)	2.1.4 500 (2026)		Schools and teachers motivated to participate in the action's activities
		2.1.5 Number of students (female/male) that participated in activities organised	2.1.5 2500 (2023)			Selected grantees willing to participate at

		through Superschools exchange programme, disaggregated by sex		2.1.5 5000 (2026)		the capacity building trainings
Output 2 related to Outcome 2	2.2 Enhanced cooperation to support healthy lifestyles and active citizenship of young women and men in the Western Balkans.	2.2.1. EU and Erasmus+ Programme countries National Coordinating Bodies invited to events 2.2.2 Number of projects with cross-border participation 2.2.3. Number of young women and men reached with messages promoting healthy lifestyles and active citizenship, disaggregated by sex	2.2.1 30 2.2.2. At least one per beneficiary 2.2.3. 350 000 increase compared to previous reporting period	2.2.1 100 2.2.2. At least one per beneficiary 2.2.3. 500 000	Action reports	Political stability in the region The number of COVID-19 cases remains stable (do not increase in a significant manner) Commitment of national coordinating bodies and interest of sport organisations
Output 1 related to Outcome 3	3.1 A master's programme in European studies offered to select students of excellence from EU Member States and the Western Balkans	3.1.1 Number of students enrolled in the first academic year (disaggregated by sex) 3.1.2 Number of students that graduate with a degree from the College of Europe in Tirana (disaggregated by sex)	3.1.1 0 (2023) 3.1.2 0 (2023)	3.1.1. 20-35 students (2024) 3.1.2. tbd (2025)	College of Europe reports College of Europe reports	Local and international students will be interested in enrolling in the Master's programme
Output 2 related to Outcome 3	3.2. A training programme on the EU common foreign and security policy is offered to entry-level diplomats from candidate countries and potential candidates	3.2.1 Number of training programmes offered to entry-level diplomats 3.2.2 Number of entry-level diplomats from candidate and potential candidate countries participating in the training (disaggregated by sex)	3.2.1 0 (2023) 3.2.2 0 (2023)	3.2.1 6 (2026) 3.2.2 tbd (2026)	College of Europe reports	Commitment from administrations sending entry-level diplomats in the European Diplomatic Academy

4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

4.1. Financing Agreement

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

4.2. Indicative Implementation Period

The indicative operational implementation period of this action, during which the activities described in section 3 will be carried out and the corresponding contracts and agreements implemented, is 72 months from the date of the adoption by the Commission of this Financing Decision.

Extensions of the implementation period may be agreed by the Commission's responsible authorising officer by amending this Financing Decision and the relevant contracts and agreements.

4.3. 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 measures⁸.

4.3.1. Direct Management (Grants)

Area of support 1 - Western Balkans Youth Lab

(a) Purpose of the grant

The grant will contribute to achieving Outcome 1.

(b) Justification of a direct grant

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the grant may be awarded without a call for proposals to the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat (RCC).

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the recourse to an award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified based on Article 195 (f) of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, i.e. "for activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative powers, on condition that the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals". More concretely, the recourse to an award of a grant to the RCC is justified due to its high degree of specialisation, technical competence and experience. The leaders of the EU and its Member States concluded under the Sofia Priority Agenda in May 2018 to establish the Western Balkans Youth Lab, which would provide space for innovative policy-making addressing the needs of young people, and tackling brain drain. The Western Balkans Youth Labs supports the co-creation of relevant policies for youth by increasing the direct involvement of young women and men in policy making, in relation with government representatives and policy-makers. The implementation of this action requires an organisation able to directly involve the governments from the Western Balkans IPA III beneficiaries. Launched in the framework of the South-East European Cooperation

⁸ [EU Sanctions Map](#). 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.

Process (SEECF) in Sofia, on 27 February 2008, the RCC has a mandate to function as an all-inclusive, regionally owned and led cooperation framework, which engages governments from the Western Balkans IPA III beneficiaries. The RCC is hence uniquely placed to implement an action which requires access to regional policy-makers, youth and other relevant regional stakeholders. RCC has been successfully implementing the Youth Lab Phase I in the Western Balkans region, demonstrating expertise and the ability to convene civil society, including RYCO, in support of the action. These elements, together with RCC's broad mandate to work on regional cooperation and its regional presence, will ensure the regional implementation of the Phase II, the sustainability of the action and will add value to the overall approach of the Western Balkans Youth Lab.

Areas of support 3 and 4 – College of Europe in Tirana & EU diplomatic programme for the enlargement region

(a) Purpose of the grant (s)

The grants will contribute to achieving Outcome 3.

(b) Justification of a direct grant

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the grants may be awarded without a call for proposals to the College of Europe.

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the recourse to an award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified based on Article 195 (f) of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, i.e. "for activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative powers, on condition that the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals". More concretely, the recourse to an award of grants to the College of Europe is justified due to its high degree of specialisation, technical competence and experience.

The two areas of support will support the implementation of a high-quality post-graduate academic programme in the field of European Affairs for students to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to engage in the EU integration process and support the accession of the Western Balkans to the EU and a diplomatic training programme in the field of the Union's external action, including the CFSP, in order to develop and promote a common understanding among diplomats on the role of the Union in the world. The College of Europe was the first post-graduate institution entirely devoted to European affairs and, differently from most of the academic institutions, its work programme is exclusively devoted to European affairs, to the promotion of the European Union and to the contribution to its construction. Since its creation 72 years ago, it had more than 15 000 students studying European affairs.

The College of Europe has been at the forefront of educating graduates from candidate countries that do not (yet) belong to the European Union. In the early 1990s, the College expanded its selection procedures to the Central and Eastern European countries, and it was the first European educational institution to create a new campus in 1992 in one of the candidate countries at the time, Poland.

From its creation, the College has always looked for adapting its academic programmes in order to better reflect the European cooperation and integration in its increasing diversity and complexity (political, legal, economic, international), recruiting its professors from leading universities and qualified practitioners from the public and private sectors, ensuring high levels of expertise and teaching quality. The relevance and the quality of the academic programmes are maintained thanks to the participation of around 235 professors and practitioners with cutting-edge expertise within their respective fields and coming from diverse professional backgrounds. Most of them are visiting professors, which allows for a constant adaptation of the academic programme content.

Their postgraduate programmes offer specialised tracks specifically dedicated to EU diplomacy: their Master's programme on EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies was founded as early as 2006 and is the only postgraduate programme focusing on the EU external action. It has attracted promising young graduates, many of whom aspiring to join the EEAS and EU Member States diplomatic services. Parallel to the master's programmes experience is the specific expertise of the College in designing and delivering executive training courses for diplomats. This unique expertise that combines academic programmes and executive training programmes results in a wide network of highly specialised trainers and professors with a variety of profiles, nationalities and backgrounds.

Therefore, its high degree of specialisation, technical competence and experience explain its reputation of excellence and its special position to be the most suitable structure to ensure the appropriate implementation of this part of the action.

Area of support 5 – European Week of Sport

(a) Purpose of the grant(s)

The grants will contribute to achieving Outcome 2, and its related Output 2.2. The purpose of the grants is to organise the European Week of Sport on an annual basis and year-round events in the Western Balkans. The grants have as main aims to promote sport and physical activity in the region and to promote common European values to ultimately support good neighbourhood relations.

The European Week of Sport initiative is part of an overall policy aiming at increasing the levels of participation in sport and physical activity in the EU. This level is stagnating and in some Member States even declining (as the 2018 Eurobarometer survey demonstrates). The situation in the Western Balkans is similar. This has an impact on society, people's health and results in direct and indirect economic costs (e.g., health care, employability, productivity). The need for action to better promote sport and physical activity has been regularly underlined at the policy level.

(b) Justification of a direct grant

Under the responsibility of the Commission's and/or of the Executive Agency (EACEA)'s authorising officer responsible, the grants may be awarded without a call for proposals to the National Coordinating Bodies for the European Week of Sport. The main responsibility for the action will be with the relevant National Coordinating Bodies (same as in the current call). These have been nominated by the administrations responsible for sport in the relevant IPA beneficiaries following an official request sent by DG EAC:

- Albania: the Ministry of Education and Sport
- Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Ministry of Civil Affairs
- Kosovo: the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports
- Montenegro: the Ministry of Sports and Youth

Under the responsibility of the Commission's and/or of the Executive Agency (EACEA)'s authorising officer responsible, the recourse to an award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified based on Article 195 (c) of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, i.e. "bodies with a de facto monopoly". These ministries of sport have the key coordinating function for sport and sport policies and are the only organisations with the necessary structures and networks to implement the action, considering the multifaceted nature of the action, ranging from the organisation of events including physical activity, to sharing of values and organising domestic and international mobility opportunities. In case of actions managed by the EACEA, they are implemented according to the establishment and delegation act entrusting the EACEA with certain tasks related to the management of the pilot projects and preparatory actions in the field of education, youth, culture and sport, and in accordance with the conditions set out in Article 4(4) of the Commission Decision C(2021)951 delegating powers to the European Education and Culture Executive

Agency with a view to the performance of tasks linked to the implementation of Union programmes in the field of education, audiovisual and culture, citizenship and solidarity comprising, in particular, implementation of appropriations entered in the general budget of the Union; as well as according to the co-delegation agreement NEAR /EACEA as per standard practice in co-delegation.

The part of the action related to areas of support 1, 3 and 4 under the budgetary envelope reserved for grants may, partially or totally and including where an entity is designated for receiving a grant without a call for proposals, be implemented in indirect management with an entity, which will be selected by the Commission's services using the criteria defined in sections 4.3.1.b)s above.

4.3.2. Indirect Management with a pillar-assessed entity

A part of this action may be implemented in indirect management with GIZ, German Agency for International Cooperation. This implementation entails the management and implementation of the Area of support 2, the Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme. It will contribute to increase institutional capacities of RYCO to achieve its mission of promoting the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between young women and men in the Western Balkans region (Outcome 2). Coherently with the objective of ensuring the ownership and building capacities of RYCO, the implementation of Output 2.3 "Successful exchange of students and staff between all six Western Balkans beneficiaries ensured".

The envisaged entity has been selected using the following criteria: (1) demonstrated financial and operational capacity, (2) strong technical expertise, previous experience in implementing similar regional actions and in working with the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), which implies a proved solid knowledge of its working culture. This is particularly important due to the nature of the action, whose scope requires governance development and capacity building of RYCO.

4.3.3. Changes from indirect to direct management (and vice versa) mode due to exceptional circumstances

If the implementation modality under direct management as defined in section 4.3.1.(grants) related to areas of support 1, 3, and 4 cannot be implemented due to circumstances beyond the control of the Commission, the modality of implementation by indirect management with pillar-assessed entities would be used according to sections 4.3.1.b)s.

4.4. 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 (Article 28(10) NDICI-Global Europe Regulation).

4.5. Indicative Budget

Indicative Budget components	EU contribution (amount in EUR)	Indicative third-party contribution (amount in EUR)
Methods of implementation – cf. section 4.3		
1 - Western Balkan Youth Labs (Outcome 1/Output 1.1) composed of	1 500 000	N/A
Grants (direct management) – cf. section 4.3.1	1 500 000	N/A
2 - Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme (Outcome 2/Output 2.1) composed of	4 500 000	1 500 000
Indirect management with GIZ – cf. section 4.3.2	4 500 000	1 500 000
3 - College of Europe Tirana (Outcome 3/Output 3.1) composed of	1 955 000	N/A
Grants (direct management) – cf. section 4.3.1	1 955 000	N/A
4 - EU diplomatic programme (Outcome 3/Output 3.2) composed of	1 800 000	N/A
Grants (direct management) – cf. section 4.3.1	1 800 000	N/A
5 - Week of Sport (Outcome 2/Output 2.2) composed of	1 500 000	N/A
Grants (direct management) – cf. section 4.3.1	1 500 000	N/A
Grants – total envelope under section 4.3.1	6 755 000	N/A
Evaluation – cf. section 5.2 Audit – cf. section 5.3	may be covered by another Decision	N/A
Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy – cf. section 6	will be covered by another Decision	N/A
Totals	11 255 000	1 500 000

4.6. Organisational Set-up and Responsibilities

The main stakeholders targeted by this **Area of Support 1** are young people who are members of the National Youth Councils or Youth Umbrella Organisations from the Western Balkans, as well as line ministries responsible for the policies addressed. They will play a key role when it comes to Youth Policy Labs – from identification of issues to the implementation of Youth Policy Action, while within each of extended Working Groups the action will seek to target other actors, such as civil society organisations gathering youth and international organisations. Whenever relevant, the contractor will ensure coordination with EU Delegations/EU Office from the region, relevant regional and international organisations, bilateral partners and non-governmental organisations.

For the **Area of Support 2** the action strategic steering shall be done by a Project Steering Committee (PSC), composed of the members representing EU, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), GIZ and RYCO. The PSC will meet once a year and shall review progress, give strategic guidance and recommendations for the implementation of the action and, when applicable, review and discuss monitoring and evaluations. This action will also seek complementarities and synergies with other existing projects in the region, in particular those related to the Berlin Process, and will ensure permanent coordination with all EU Delegations/EU Office by regular exchange (at least twice per year) in order to inform and receive feedback concerning the implementation of the action.

For the **Area of Support 3 and 4**, the organisational set-up will be based on the College of Europe's standards and requirements, while considering the local context and stakeholders' needs and interests. A project steering committee will be set up composed of members from the European Commission (DG NEAR) and the College of Europe that will meet on an annual basis. The College of Europe will also establish a monitoring framework to ensure that the needs and interests of local actors and institutions are being met. The monitoring framework

will include regular reporting, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms to ensure that the programmes are achieving their objectives and contributing to the development of the local and regional context.

For the **Area of Support 5**, the main responsibility for the implementation lies with the relevant National Coordinating Bodies. These have been nominated by the administrations responsible for sport in the relevant IPA beneficiaries and are:

- **Albania:** The Ministry of Education and Sport
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** The Ministry of Civil Affairs
- **Kosovo:** The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport
- **Montenegro:** The Ministry of Sports and Youth

The Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) and/or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) will monitor the implementation of the projects with scheduled meetings and request ad hoc reports. These meetings and reports will be an occasion to learn more about the accomplishment of each project, the challenges and the state of implementation of all the activities.

As part of its prerogative of budget implementation and to safeguard the financial interests of the Union, the Commission may participate in the above governance structures set up for governing the implementation of the action.

5. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

5.1. Monitoring and Reporting

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. To this aim, the implementing partner shall establish a permanent internal, technical and financial monitoring system for the action and elaborate regular progress reports (not less than annual) and final reports. Every report shall provide an accurate account of implementation of the action, difficulties encountered, changes introduced, as well as the degree of achievement of its Outputs and contribution to the achievement of its Outcomes, and if possible at the time of reporting, contribution to the achievement of its impacts, as measured by corresponding indicators, using as reference the log frame matrix.

The Commission may undertake additional project monitoring visits both through its own staff and through independent consultants recruited directly by the Commission for independent monitoring reviews (or recruited by the responsible agent contracted by the Commission for implementing such reviews).

Arrangements for monitoring and reporting, including roles and responsibilities for data collection, analysis and monitoring: contract execution will be monitored through regular reports (indicatively: 6-monthly and final), with clearly identified results indicators linked to each output as well as updates on the overall logical framework. Regular meetings/video conferences between the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (Headquarters and EU Delegations/EU Offices) and the implementing partners will further ensure that any issues are addressed in a timely manner so that results are achieved in due time. A relevant Steering Committee will monitor and steer the implementation of Areas of Support 1, 2, 3, 4. These will be chaired by the European Commission and will include implementing partners and relevant stakeholders. The Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) and/or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) will be in charge of the activities of data collection analysis and monitoring for the Area of Support 5.

Additional tools include ad hoc and on-the-spot visits will ensure monitoring of progress and a Result Oriented Assessment might be undertaken approximately mid-term.

5.2. Evaluation

Having regard to the importance of the action, mid-term evaluations might be carried out for this action or its components via independent consultants contracted by the implementing partners.

The evaluation may be carried out for learning purposes, in particular with respect to the multi-regional and multi-disciplinary approach of the action.

In case an evaluation will be carried out, the evaluation reports shall be shared with the Beneficiaries and other key stakeholders following the best practice of evaluation dissemination. The implementing partner and the Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, where appropriate, in agreement with the Beneficiaries, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the project.

The Commission shall form a Reference Group (RG) composed by representatives from the main stakeholders at both EU and national (representatives from the government, from civil society organisations (private sector, NGOs, etc.), etc.) levels. If deemed necessary, other donors will be invited to join. The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least 1 month in advance of the dates envisaged for the evaluation exercise and 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 financing of the evaluation shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing Decision.

5.3. Audit and Verifications

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 audit or verification assignments for one or several contracts or agreements.

6. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

All entities implementing EU-funded external actions have the contractual obligation to inform the relevant audiences of the Union's support for their work by displaying the EU emblem and a short funding statement as appropriate on all communication materials related to the actions concerned. To that end they must comply with the instructions given in the 2022 guidance document [*Communicating and raising EU visibility: Guidance for external actions*](#) (or any successor document).

This obligation will apply equally, regardless of whether the actions concerned are implemented by the Commission, the Beneficiaries, service providers, grant beneficiaries or entrusted or delegated entities such as UN agencies, international financial institutions and agencies of EU Member States. In each case, a reference to the relevant contractual obligations must be included in the respective financing agreement, procurement and grant contracts, and contribution agreements.

For the purpose of enhancing the visibility of the EU and its contribution to this action, the Commission may sign or enter into joint declarations or statements, as part of its prerogative of budget implementation and to safeguard the financial interests of the Union. Visibility and communication measures should also promote transparency and accountability on the use of funds. Effectiveness of communication activities on awareness about the action and its objectives as well as on EU funding of the action should be measured.

Implementing partners shall keep the Commission/Executive Agency and the EU Delegation/EU Office fully informed of the planning and implementation of specific visibility and communication activities before the implementation. Implementing partners will ensure adequate visibility of EU financing and will report on visibility and communication actions as well as the results of the overall action to the relevant monitoring committees.

7. SUSTAINABILITY

Area of support 1 – Western Balkans Youth Lab: this action aims to empower young women and men to take active participation in the policy making processes by providing them with skills and methodology, involving them in the decision-making process, and actively engaging the National Youth Councils in the activities. This will increase the sense of ownership of the process of young people in the region and is leading to their greater commitment to sustain its outputs and outcomes beyond its implementation period. As through previous Youth Policy Labs, the outcomes are being implemented at the national level in form of strategies and law amendments, thus ensuring a great impact on the future generation.

Furthermore, the action builds Youth National Councils' institutional management capacities, thus ensuring continuity in the implementation of the activities, beyond its implementation period. As the Action is focusing on regional cooperation and dialogue, long-term partnerships between youth and Youth Councils from the region and EU will be established and ensure the continuation of youth involvement across the region.

Area of Support 2 – Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme: the action will improve the institutional and operational capacity of RYCO, ensuring that, as an international organisation, it is capable of implementing regional projects and more efficiently absorbing funds provided by different donors as well as the ones provided by the Western Balkans governments (core budget). RYCO is a regional organisation with a great potential for attracting donor funds, but unfortunately due to lack of capacities was not able to do so on a larger scale in the past. Furthermore, as shown in the previous Superschools exchange implementation cycle, schools possess great potential for long-term partnerships which are to be only partly funded (co-funding between RYCO and schools) and are suitable for long term exchanges funded from the RYCO core budget as well as locally fund-raised resources by the schools themselves, therefore not being external donor dependent.

Area of Support 3 – College of Europe in Tirana: The College of Europe is committed to exploring all feasible options to ensure its long-term financial viability, while continuing to pursue its core mission of promoting academic excellence and fostering the next generation of leaders. The long-term financing of the Tirana campus will rely on the financial support of public institutions at the EU, regional and central level. The potential growth of the student number and expansion of the campus's offer from the second academic year (2025/26) onwards will also be determinant. The beneficiaries of the first academic year would – after graduation in 2025 – become part of and profit from the College of Europe's alumni network, counting more than 16,000 former students.

Area of Support 4 – EU diplomatic programme for the enlargement region: The quality control system of the programme aims at guaranteeing the quality of the services and at acquiring data and lessons for the future of the programme. The model is based on regular surveys, feedback sessions, questionnaires and an end of year evaluation. It will allow the College of Europe to understand the level of satisfaction, how the programme is fostering an *esprit de corps* and ensure the continuity with future training programmes.

Area of Support 5 – European Week of Sport: This area of support is meant to be sustainable in the medium to long run. While the outcomes and outputs of the action are unlikely to produce immediate results (e.g. uptake of physical activity and spreading of European values), in the medium to long run, the action is expected to reach an increasingly wide share of the youth and therefore spread positive habits and values among a wider population. After a few years of implementation of the European Week of Sport at a small scale and several years of funding from the previous IPA EU4 Youth instrument, it is already possible to notice a great level of enthusiasm from the youth that is willing to be part of this action.

Appendix 1: IDENTIFICATION OF THE PRIMARY INTERVENTION LEVEL FOR REPORTING IN OPSYS

A Primary intervention (project/programme) is a coherent set of results structured in a logical framework aiming at delivering development change or progress. Identifying the level of the primary intervention will allow for:

- ✓ Differentiating these Actions or Contracts from those that do not produce direct reportable development results, defined as support entities (i.e. audits, evaluations);
- ✓ Articulating Actions and/or Contracts according to an expected common chain of results and therefore allowing them to ensure a more efficient and aggregated monitoring and reporting of performance;
- ✓ Having a complete and exhaustive mapping of all results-bearing Actions and Contracts.

The present Action identifies as

Contract level (i.e. Grants, Contribution Agreements, any case in which foreseen individual legal commitments identified in the budget will have different log frames, even if part of the same Action Document)		
☒	Single Contract 1	Separate contracts per area of support: • RCC • GIZ • College of Europe (2) • Sports National Coordinating Bodies (4)