



EN

THIS ACTION IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

ANNEX II

of the Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the multiannual action plan in favour of the Asia region for 2021-2022

Action Document for Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia (DARYA)

ANNUAL PLAN

This document constitutes the annual work programme in the sense of Article 110(2) of the Financial Regulation, and action plans in the sense of Article 23(2) of NDICI-Global Europe Regulation.

1. SYNOPSIS

1.1. Action Summary Table

1. Title CRIS/OPSYS business reference Basic Act	Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia (DARYA) CRIS number: 2021 / 43337 Financed under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe)
2. Team Europe Initiative	No
3. Zone benefiting from the action	The action shall be carried out in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) and Afghanistan
4. Programming document	Regional Multi-annual Indicative Programme for Asia and the Pacific 2021-2027
5. Link with relevant MIP(s) objectives/expected results	Support for “resilience” and “prosperity” – Education/TVET are identified as priority areas in the Central Asia window of the 2021-2027 Asia-Pacific Regional MIP
PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION	
6. Priority Area(s), sectors	Main DAC code:111110 – Education policy and administrative management Sub-code 2: 11182 Education Research – 15% Sub-code 3: 11330 Vocational Education and Training – 60% Sub-code 4 16020 Employment Policy and Administrative management – 25%
7. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Main SDG (1 only): SDG 4 – to ensure inclusive and quality education for all Other significant SDGs (up to 9) and where appropriate, targets: SDG 5 – to achieve gender equality SDG 8 – economic growth, productive employment and decent work
8 a) DAC code(s) ¹	Main DAC code:111110 – Education policy and administrative management Sub-code 2: 11182 Education Research – 10% Sub-code 3: 11330 Vocational Education and Training – 65% Sub-code 4 16020 Employment Policy and Administrative management – 25%

¹ DAC sectors (codes and descriptions) are indicated in the first and fourth columns of the tab ‘purpose codes’ in the following document: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-financestandards/dacandcrscodelists.htm>

8 b) Main Delivery Channel	42000 – EU Institutions			
9. Targets²	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Migration <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Climate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social inclusion and Human Development <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education ³ <input type="checkbox"/> Human Rights, Democracy and Governance ⁴			
10. Markers⁵ (from DAC form)	General policy objective	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Aid to environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Trade development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Disaster Risk Reduction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Inclusion of persons with Disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Nutrition	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	RIO Convention markers	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Biological diversity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Combat desertification	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change mitigation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change adaptation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Internal markers⁶ and Tags⁷:	Policy objectives	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Digitalisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tags: digital connectivity		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	digital governance		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	digital entrepreneurship			

² Actual contribution to targets will be confirmed ex-post based on a standardised methodology.

³ This target is specific to INTPA. If the action is marked as contributing to the Education target, please make sure the target on “Social inclusion and Human Development” is also marked.

⁴ Thematic target for geographic programmes (at least 15%) in delegated act.

⁵ For guidance, see <https://www.oecd.org/development/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/> (go to “Data collection and resources for reporters”, select Addendum 2, annexes 18 (policy) and 19 (Rio) of the reporting directive).

If an action is marked in the DAC form as contributing to one of the general policy objectives or to RIO principles as a principal objective or a significant objective, then this should be reflected in the logframe matrix (in the results chain and/or indicators).

⁶ The internal markers have been created to report on the implementation of the Commission's own policy priorities in areas where no DAC reporting tool is available. For the sake of consistency and comparability, the methodology is equivalent to the DAC markers, with three possible positions (main target, significant target, not targeted)

⁷ Methodology for additional tagging providing granularity on internal markers is under development.

	job creation digital skills/literacy digital services		<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	Connectivity Tags: transport people2people energy digital connectivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	Migration (methodology for tagging under development)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reduction of Inequalities (methodology for marker and tagging under development)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Covid-19	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
BUDGET INFORMATION				
12. Amounts concerned	Budget line(s) (article, item): 14.020130 NDICI Middle East and Central Asia Total estimated cost: EUR 10 000 000 Total amount of EU budget contribution EUR 10 000 000			
MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION				
13. Type of financing⁸	Indirect management with an EU decentralised agency			

1.2. Summary of the Action

Already prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, young people in Central Asia, and especially young women, faced multiple challenges to access quality skills development opportunities and subsequently to enter the labour market. As a result, many young people could at best access informal, precarious employment opportunities or had to resort to self-employment so that many had only limited prospects. Many young women have been relegated to employment in low wage sectors or inactivity, while for many young men migration represented the only opportunity to find employment.

These challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis and young people are among those most affected by the pandemic, both as participants in education and training provision but also as labour migrants, new labour market entrants or newcomers in labour markets affected by the Covid-19 shock and national or regional measures to contain the pandemic.

The proposed action DARYA (**D**ialogue and **A**ction for **R**esourceful **Y**outh in Central Asia) focuses on measures that support inclusive and labour market relevant skills development opportunities for young women and men in Central Asia. In line with the opportunity to “build back better” the action takes a system approach that considers immediate as well as medium-term (within the next five years) development requirements that will support better (more labour market relevant, more inclusive, more varied opportunities, enhanced employability) skills provision for young people. The action is articulated around three thematic areas that are required to sustain robust, yet adaptable skills development systems that supports youth employability. In view of the importance of regional economic integration and connectivity for the recovery and future development of the region and considering the importance of migration, the action covers activities at national and regional or multi-country level.

⁸ Art. 27 NDICI

The Overall Objective of DARYA is ‘to contribute to post-COVID recovery in Central Asia by fostering improved employability of young women and men in the regions through inclusive and labour-market oriented skills development’, while the two specific objectives foresee

- 1 To foster the quality and inclusiveness of education, training and employment systems in Central Asia
- 2 To foster participatory and inclusive dialogue and cooperation mechanisms at national and regional level

EU Member States will play a key role in sharing experiences and practice on EU level tools and policies in the sphere of skills development and (youth) employment with Central Asian stakeholders.

The action is planned over a 5-year period with a budget of EUR 10 000 000. In line with the 2019 EU-Central Asia Strategy, the action will have at its core the five Central Asian countries and will be open for participation of stakeholders from Afghanistan.

2 RATIONALE

2.1. Context

Consistent demographic growth in Central Asian countries and Afghanistan has led to a youth bulge, with young people under the age of 30 years, making up close to 65% of the population in Afghanistan (highest in the region) and just over 40% in Kazakhstan (lowest in the region)⁹. These large cohorts have been putting pressure on education and training systems¹⁰ as well as on labour markets.

Skills development context:

Despite years of reform efforts, Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the region continues to face many challenges. These range from important infrastructure limitations (including also internet access) and under-funding, poor inter-action with employers, resulting in limited relevance of qualifications but also an underpaid, ageing teaching force with few opportunities to take part in training, and thus often not capable to translate newer developments into teaching practice. VET is thus not only lacking attractiveness but also often fails to equip its graduates with the competences they would require to transition into the labour market. These quality challenges are even more acute in rural, remote or disadvantaged areas.

Although VET typically targets students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with limited education achievement, few efforts have been undertaken to adapt provision to the needs of different learner groups. Typical VET continues to be delivered on a full-time basis, with a study duration lasting from one to three years and a standardised ‘one size fits all’ approach to teaching. This results not only in high student drop-out in some countries, but also limits access for many potential learners¹¹, who would greatly benefit from skills development but cannot afford the opportunity cost or are not capable to attend full-time.

Young women face particular challenges in relation to VET. Due to gender stereotypes, VET is often seen as being less relevant to women. In many countries, the participation rate for women is much lower than the rate for men. While formally there are few limitations to access all professions, VET shows a strong gender bias, with women typically enrolled in so-called ‘female professions’, which later result in low-wage employment opportunities.

While in all countries there is also some informal training provision, this typically does not lead to a recognised qualification and can often only be accessed on a fee basis.

Labour market context:

⁹ For details see OECD 2020 ‘The sudden loss of a social buffer; COVID-19 and informality in Eurasia’ p. 17. [The OECD and Eurasia Regional Platform - OECD Eurasia Regional Platform](#)

¹⁰ In 2019 young people up to the age of 14, made up 42.5% of the population in AF, for KG 32.5%, for KZ 28.9%, TJ 37.1% , TM 30.8% , and UZ 28.8%. In many countries general and secondary education providers work in two or even three shifts, to cater for the rising number of pupils.

¹¹ Many Central Asian countries have large cohorts of general or secondary education drop-outs, or general and secondary education graduates who do not progress further and thus enter the labour market without any professional skills.

Despite sustained economic GDP growth in the region up to 2019¹², countries have not been able to diversify their economies and create a sufficient number of jobs. Poor job prospects and quality have fuelled both internal (all countries) as well as outward migration in a number of Central Asian countries. In these, personal remittances play a key role for the economy¹³. While these generally unfavourable conditions have affected the entire working age population, young people, and especially young women, have been the most disadvantaged. Youth unemployment rates¹⁴ are considerably higher in most countries than the rates for the population aged 15 and older¹⁵. The share of young people not in employment, education and training (NEET) is very high in the three poorest economies, with rates for women consistently exceeding the unemployment and NEET rates for men. Young people are also disproportionately represented in informal labour markets and often resort to self-employment. Many young women have been relegated to employment in low wage sectors or inactivity¹⁶, while young men predominate among both long-term and seasonal outbound migrants, working mostly in the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan.

The COVID crisis has accentuated these problems. The situation has been particularly challenging in VET, as providers were even less prepared than those in general or higher education. In addition, practical skills are extremely difficult to teach in distance mode, while due to containment measures, all enterprise-based student practice or training delivery had to be halted. As new labour market participants, mostly as workers in the informal sector, unpaid family workers or self-employed, young people found themselves in particularly vulnerable and precarious positions and mostly outside of official social protection schemes.

Women have been especially hard hit by the pandemic because they are over-represented in some of the sectors worst affected by the crisis and subsequent social distancing restrictions, such as accommodation, food, sales and low-wage manufacturing branches.

Building back better:

The COVID crisis has had the strongest negative impact on those that were already in a vulnerable position prior to the pandemic, among them young women and men. The crisis has also brought the already existing shortcomings of the skills development system to the forefront.

A well-functioning skills development system, that is more inclusive and labour market relevant, provides more varied opportunities and enhances the employability of learners and graduates. By the same token (?) it will also be crucial to provide more opportunities for young women and men in the future and support recovery at both national and regional level.

The importance of a regional dimension:

While the COVID crisis has had a negative impact on the region in 2020 and 2021, over the coming years Central Asian countries can expect significant opportunity to modernise their infrastructure and diversify their economies through better integration and connectivity within the region and with its neighbours. Regional integration initiatives but also global developments, including those initiated by the COVID crisis will have numerous consequences for skills demand for the years to come.

In order to supply an adaptable work force with the skills and competences that correspond to the new opportunities and conditions, the skills development systems of the region will have to become more responsive to labour market needs and accessible to diverse learners. The provision of equal opportunities for women and men to take part in skills development and in the labour market will represent a key factor for national and regional recovery as well as competitiveness and social cohesion.

In view of increasing economic integration and the importance of migration in the region, skills development system reform will have to be considered not only in a national, but also in a regional context.

Policy framework:

¹² In 2019 GDP growth was: AF 3.9%, KG 4.5%, KZ 4.5%, TJ 7.0%, TM 6.2% (2018 data), UZ 5.6%.

¹³ In 2019 Personal remittances received as % of GDP represented: AF 4.3%, KG 28.5%, KZ 0.03%, TJ 28.6%, UZ 14.8%

¹⁴ In 2019 the youth (15-24 years of age) unemployment rate was: AF 17.2%, KG 14.8%, KZ 3.7%, TJ 12.9%, TM 8%, UZ 11.3%

¹⁵ In 2019 the unemployment rate for the adult population (15+) was: AF 11.0%, KG 4.5% (2018), KZ 4.8%, TJ 6.7%, TM 3.9%, UZ 9.0%

¹⁶ See OECD 2020 'Gender Gaps in Eurasia: the daunting effects of COVID-19'; [The OECD & Eurasia - OECD Eurasia Week](#)

The action is in line with the “New European Consensus on Development”¹⁷, with focus on the “People” dimension (education) and to some extent also the “Prosperity” dimension (revenue, via the consideration for labour market oriented skills for young, women and men and an emphasis on entrepreneurship and digital skills). It contributes to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4, 5 and partially to 8.¹⁸

The action is also in line with the 2018 Joint Communication “Connecting Europe and Asia - Building blocks for an EU Strategy¹⁹” on chapter 3.4 “People-to-people connectivity” and 4.2 “Regional cooperation”. In line chapter 2.4²⁰ of the Joint Communication of 15 May 2019 “The EU and Central Asia – New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership²¹” the action will support inter and intra-regional cooperation in the areas of skills development for employment. The action will support converging approaches to qualifications and dialogue on mutual recognition of qualifications among countries and mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning, including for returning migrants. It thus contributes to chapter 1.2²² Via the work to be undertaken on entrepreneurship competences and digital skills, the action will contribute to chapters 2.2 and 2.3²³. In line with the possibility provided by the new EU-Central Asia strategy, the action will also provide cooperation opportunities for stakeholders from Afghanistan.

The action is in line with the 2020 Council Conclusion on Youth in external action²⁴. It supports partner countries’ efforts to address the secondary effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has on youth, with a specific focus on the promotion of equitable access and inclusive technical and vocational education and training but also non-formal and distance education with a focus on employability of young people.

In line with the EU U Gender Action Plan 2021-2025 (GAP III)²⁵, the action will contribute in particular to the thematic area of promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women, and to some extent, to the thematic area of addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by green transition and digital transformation.

The action is complementary and synergetic to bilateral actions foreseen in the bilateral MIPs under preparation for five Central Asian countries and Afghanistan. The action will put a strong focus on EU level developments and tools in education and training. EU Member states will play a key role in in sharing these tools as well as EU Member State experiences with Central Asian stakeholders.

2.2. Problem Analysis

Problem analysis:

Due to a **lack of forward looking and gender sensitive evidence and analysis** of education and training outcomes and skills needs, skills development systems and employment services in the region are not able to adapt to changing societal and socio-economic needs.

Qualifications still lack flexibility and permeability, limiting opportunities for learners with different needs, while insufficient involvement of skills development stakeholders in their development continues to limit the labour market and society relevance of qualifications. Many Central Asian countries continue to use Soviet era restrictions that limit the participation of women. Despite increasing regional economic integration and the importance of migration, countries have so far not cooperated on the development of joint qualifications or the development of a regional qualification framework.

¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/new-european-consensus-development-our-world-our-dignity-our-future_en

¹⁸ SDG 4: inclusive and quality education for all, SDG 5: gender equality, SDG 8: economic growth, productive employment and decent work.

¹⁹ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/50699/connecting-europe-asia-eu-strategy_en

²⁰ Chapter 2.4 - “Investing in Youth, Education, Innovation and Culture”

²¹ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/62411/european-union-and-central-asia-new-opportunities-stronger-partnership_en

²² Chapter 1.2 - “Strengthening Cooperation on Migration and Mobility”

²³ Chapter 2.2 – “Facilitating Intra-regional and Inter-regional Trade and Investment”; chapter 2.3 – “Promoting Sustainable Connectivity”

²⁴ [Youth in external action: Council adopts conclusions - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁵ [IMMC JOIN%282020%2917%20final.ENG.xhtml.1 EN ACT part1 v8.docx \(europa.eu\)](#)

Learning provision lacks flexibility and inclusiveness and is not yet fully based on learning outcomes, nor labour market relevant.

The COVID crisis has highlighted massive shortcomings in the area of digital preparedness of VET providers and their teaching staff.

Identification of main stakeholders and corresponding institutional and/or organisational issues (mandates, potential roles, and capacities) to be covered by the action:

At country level the action foresees the involvement of all **key stakeholders** in the sphere of VET and skills development and transition to employment, including national and sub-national authorities in charge of VET and skills development, national and sub-national authorities in charge of employment and labour market policies, agencies in charge of qualifications and quality assurance with a mandate for VET, social partners, including employers and sectoral organisations, business organisations and trade unions, VET and skills development providers (public and private), CSOs that support skills development for young women and men and that may be representing learners interests, regional and national youth organisations and groups, including independent (civil society) and government-sponsored organisations.

Key stakeholders among the **development partner community** and **EU Member States and EU Member State organisations**, taking into account the experience acquired in the context of the Eastern Neighbourhood, will also be engaged.

DARYA will also seek to interact with the Erasmus+ community in participating countries, particularly through seeking synergies with Erasmus+ higher education projects and their results which focus on vocational skills development and links with labour market needs. These synergies may also exist within the recently-created Central Asian Higher Education Area, initiated by Kazakhstan.

3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

3.1 Objectives and Expected Outputs

The Overall Objective (Impact) of this action is

To contribute to post-Covid recovery in Central Asia by fostering improved employability of young women and men in Central Asia through inclusive and labour-market oriented skills development

The Specific Objectives (Outcomes) of this action are

- 1 To foster the quality and inclusiveness of education, training and employment systems in Central Asia
- 2 To foster participatory and inclusive dialogue and cooperation mechanisms at national and regional level

The Outputs to be delivered by this action contributing to the corresponding Specific Objectives (Outcomes) are
Specific Objective/Outcome 1

- 1.1 Forward-looking and gender sensitive skills development and employment services enhanced through better evidence and analysis of education and training outcomes and skills needs
- 1.2 Stakeholder driven flexible and permeable approaches to qualifications are adopted at national and region level in order to allow equal opportunities to all
- 1.3 Increased use of flexible and inclusive teaching and learning approaches, based on learning outcomes and relevant to the labour market

Specific Objective/Outcome 2

- 2.1 The wider skills development for employment stakeholder community is actively involved through jointly designed and agreed governance mechanisms, learning programmes, sharing tools and piloting of new tools
- 2.2 Increased country-led regional cooperation and peer exchange on skills development for employment sector among Central Asian countries, EU Member States and the international development community

3.2 Indicative Activities

Indicative activities for the output 1.1-1.3

- Basic familiarisation and capacity building on key elements covered by the thematic module and introduction to EU level tools, to establish a **joint understanding** among countries and **support stock taking or self-assessment**
- Stock taking or self-assessment by partner country stakeholders of the state of play and recent developments in a thematic module. Where a country opts for self-assessment **support and coaching** to stakeholders will be provided.
- Mapping of ongoing and foreseen international donor support in the given thematic module
- Selection by each participating country of topics under a thematic module to be developed further under the action, in line with national strategies
- Provision of advanced learning and mutual learning programme in a thematic domain at national and regional level, **in cooperation with EU Member States, countries of the Eastern Partnership, the Western Balkans and Turkey and development partner community**
- Development and engagement in country or multi-country pilot projects in a thematic domain
- Engagement in on-line and face-to-face networks and communities for capacity building, co-creation and sharing purposes (including sharing of methodologies and concrete outputs)

Activities related to Output 2.1:

- Development of a governance mechanism for DARYA at national (central) level and for country engagement in modules and pilot activities.
- Facilitation of dialogue, information, knowledge sharing and co-creation among participants at national and regional level (national steering group, thematic working groups at national and regional level) via digital platform(s) and webinars
- Materials and tools that have been developed via the action (including tools that support independent learning) are accessible for policy makers and practitioners on the action website and virtual platform;
- Key materials and tools (especially those to be used by teachers and large stakeholder groups) are, in cooperation with participating countries, made available in national languages;
- Engagement and buy-in of end-users (teachers, students, parents, employers, local authorities, trade unions, youth organisations) is supported via production and dissemination of engaging digital and multimedia content using traditional and social media.

Activities related to Output 2.2:

- Developing a governance mechanism for DARYA regional actions and regular review
- Yearly regional gatherings (face-to-face or on-line) providing dialogue opportunities for the wider skills and youth employability community (either by thematic module or jointly) and involve stakeholders in proposing priorities for DARYA;
- Three high level regional conferences support the endorsement of priorities and agreement on deliverables and indicators (year1), monitor the progress made and adjust objectives (year 3), assess achievements and define further ways ahead in regional cooperation (year 5);
- Regular information exchange.

3.3 Mainstreaming

Environmental Protection & Climate Change

While the action does not primarily focus on environmental protection and climate change, greater knowledge of best available practices and techniques on the workplace can indirectly contribute to better environmental protection. In this respect, the action through training and awareness raising may positively impact on youth, who in turn can further disseminate the acquired sensitivity towards green aspects. Youth organisations with an environmental focus, such as the Central Asia Youth for Water Network may have an important role in this respect.

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

As per OECD Gender DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as G1 .

This implies that activities under this action will be designed and implemented in accordance with principles of good governance and gender equality²⁶ and the inclusion of socially or economically vulnerable groups (rural and urban, by gender, or with special needs) with a focus on young women and men/youth.

In line with the EU Gender Action Plan 2021-2025 (GAP III)²⁷, the programme will contribute in particular to the GAP III thematic area of *promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women*, and to some extent, to the thematic area of *addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by green transition and digital transformation*. - Wherever possible, the Action will seek to ensure youth participation and engagement, including through youth-led organisations.

In addition to the specific expected results regarding gender sensitive skills development policies and employment services and increased use of innovative and gender sensitive career guidance, teaching and learning methods based on learning outcomes with focus on key competences and work-based learning, the Action will:

- Put emphasis on the production of more disaggregated evidence on the education and labour market systems by gender, rural/urban, age cohort etc., in order to better understand the specific challenges with participation. Specific analyses on the inclusiveness of the education and training systems may be included.
- Encourage the inclusion of pilot projects addressing inequalities in education, training and employability, as well as the inclusion of related topics in the jointly defined and agreed learning programme.
- Strongly encourage participating countries to ensure that both sexes are equally represented in the benefit of learning activities, policy meetings and conferences.
- Support equal opportunities to express views and voices in national and regional dialogue for both men and women, and national authorities, private sector and civil society representatives
- Have targeted communication actions on the action's inclusiveness specific activities in the social media and national media for awareness raising purposes.

Human Rights

Not specifically targeted as part of this action. However, the Action will indirectly support the right to decent work. The human rights-based approach and its key principles (participation, non-discrimination, accountability and transparency) will be integrated throughout the action. Particular focus will be given to inclusive policies targeting women and persons living in vulnerable situations.

Disability

As per OECD Disability DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as D1.

This implies that due to the focus the action has on inclusion, one important area of attention is on means to make skills development provision more responsive to different learners and their needs. This also includes students and potential learners with special needs. Several approaches listed under the gender aspect (the availability of evidence on inclusion, encouraging pilot projects that focus on inclusion, targeted communication) are therefore also relevant in relation to students with special needs. In addition, under the teaching and learning component, the focus on personalised learning is likely to support more equitable skills development opportunities for students with special needs. The action has also committed to develop a governance approach that provides opportunities for Civil Society Organisation involvement.

In national consultations with stakeholders from Central Asia that took place in May 2020, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have confirmed that over recent years they have started to consider the issue of inclusion of special needs students in VET and skills development and would like to see this angle also covered within DARYA.

Democracy

Not specifically targeted as part of this action.

Conflict sensitivity, peace and resilience

Not specifically targeted as part of this action.

Disaster Risk Reduction

Not specifically targeted as part of this action.

²⁶ A brief analysis of gender related challenges in the spheres of education and training and the labour market can be found in attachment 5

²⁷ [IMMC.JOIN%282020%2917%20final.ENG.xhtml.1_EN_ACT_part1_v8.docx \(europa.eu\)](#)

Other considerations if relevant

Although environment and climate change aspects are not directly addressed by this action, issues such as the importance of the green economy, green skills and green jobs will be taken into account in the design and implementation of activities, as will be economic changes and skills requirements, new qualifications and teaching and learning approaches linked to digitalisation. The Action will maximise the use of on-line platforms for learning activities and meetings keeping travelling within the activities of the programme to the minimum necessary.

3.4 Risks and Lessons Learnt

Risks and Lessons Learnt Category	Risks	Likelihood (High/Medium/Low)	Impact (High/Medium/Low)	Mitigating measures
Planning, processes and systems	Uneven participation across the region and within countries, due to different capacity levels (including also availability of staff) and commitment of national authorities	M	L	<p>The provision of opportunities for each country to define specific results it expects to reach through its participation in the action.</p> <p>The use of differentiated approaches, corresponding to country possibilities and interests.</p> <p>The provision of opportunities to engage in pilot projects that are in line with national priorities</p> <p>Close involvement of EU Member States and Eastern Partnership countries in training and the sharing of examples and good practices can act as motivating factor</p>
Planning, processes and systems	Limited impact on policy reforms, due to the scope and nature of the proposed action (covering three important thematic areas at national and regional level)	M	M	<p>Establish governance mechanisms that ensure close inter-action between national reform priorities and DARYA activities selected by countries</p> <p>Building close links to EU bilateral actions and systematic use of already existing EU tools in education and training developed for the Copenhagen-Bruges-Osnabrueck Process</p> <p>Building close links with the donor community, to use and build upon existing results and tools</p> <p>Establish clear link between reaching of SDG 4 goals and the opportunities provided by the action</p>
External environment	Potential for instability in some of the participating countries	M	M	<p>Continuous contacts and dialogue with key stakeholders and regular monitoring and assessment of the political situation in order to adapt actions to changing circumstances</p> <p>The different engagement modalities foreseen under the thematic modules allow countries to adapt their level of engagement in DARYA in accordance with their situation.</p>

				The involvement of different stakeholder groups (national authorities, employers, Civic Society Organisations, individual practitioners) and the development of virtual networks and communities support engagement under changing circumstances
Communication and information	Limited integration of stakeholders from Afghanistan into an already existing network, including through language barriers (Russian as a joint language in Central Asia), differences in overall context and security situation	H	L	<p>Consistent attention to possible barriers (including through provision of sufficient language support)</p> <p>Provision of an introductory programme for stakeholders from Afghanistan</p> <p>Joint face-to-face meetings with neighbouring countries to support the integration of stakeholder from Afghanistan</p> <p>Strong focus on use of website and virtual platform, social media and webinars to engage stakeholders but also to provide more access opportunities</p> <p>Face to face meetings take place in neighbouring Central Asian Countries.</p>
<p>The action is based on the following assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – National authorities, the public and private sector recognise the importance of inclusive and labour market oriented skills development as key factor supporting post-COVID recovery as well as for overall competitiveness and social cohesion at national and regional level – Regional economic initiatives and integration efforts resume in the course of 2021, supporting job creation and regional workforce mobility – The interest in regional cooperation in the skills developments sphere is stable or grows – ICT infrastructure and use of ICT tools continue to develop; supporting inter-action and capacity building opportunities for stakeholders at national and multi-country level – EU Member states and the international development community engaged in skills development are interested in cooperation and partnership within DARYA <p>The biennial participatory and evidence-based assessment of human capital development issues and VET policy responses of Central Asian countries, carried out by the ETF since 2010²⁸ documents that despite differing levels of development, countries share a number of challenges and have initiated converging reforms to their skills development systems. This convergence has led to an increased interest by countries to engage in peer learning and joint developments, such as joint qualification or the exploration of opportunities for a regional qualification framework. Countries are also showing increasing interest in multi-country work in the sphere of teaching and learning.</p> <p>To cater for both differing development levels and joint interests, the action avoids a ‘one size fits all’ approach and instead is built upon a flexible framework articulated around three thematic modules and a number of possible engagement modalities. The modular approach allows stakeholders from countries to engage in all thematic areas, if they wish to do so. Countries would however not necessarily be engaged in all topics or all engagement modalities within a thematic area.</p> <p>The action also builds upon recommendations resulting from the evaluation in 2019 of the Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP, 2012-2019)²⁹ and analysis of participation in CAEP 2 (2015-2019)³⁰. CAEP covered the Vocational Education and Training as well as Higher Education sub-sectors.</p>				

²⁸ The ETF has involved Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the Torino Process since 2010.

²⁹ Project No. 2018/395783/2

³⁰ Based on the list of participants of CAEP 2 (2015-2019) events (face-to-face and webinars), carried out by the European Training Foundation (ETF) in 2019.

CAEP was organised in a centralised top-down manner. This resulted in limited country ownership. The platform was constrained by the time and resources available to the CAEP team³¹. As a consequence communication was limited to few stakeholders, inter-action between stakeholders took place during CAEP events only, rather than on a continuous basis. The numerous policy areas and themes identified in the Astana Declaration³² as priorities, could only be addressed in a superficial manner³³ and focused mainly on the Higher Education sub-sector. CAEP also did not manage to develop strong links with the development partner community.

The new action proposes a **paradigm shift**, inspired by the EU Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Emphasis will be put on the provision of opportunities for countries to take on an **active**, and wherever possible **leading role**. Over the course of the action a solid foundation for sustainable regional dialogue and cooperation, based on **distributed leadership and partnership**³⁴, will be established. **Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have signalled during the national on-line consultations that took place in May 2021, that they are interested to take on an active role.**

In line with the CAEP evaluation recommendations, the action will continue to work on a number of topics identified by the Astana Declaration³⁵, though in a more results oriented manner and in closer cooperation with partner country stakeholders and national skills development strategies. It will put a stronger emphasis on the involvement of the development partner community. The participation of EU MS will be strengthened and an EU dimension developed.

³¹ CAEP was managed as a classical project, in direct management modality and was implemented by a consortium of consultancy companies

³² The Astana Declaration was adopted at the June 2017 EU-Central Asian meeting of education ministers organised by CAEP. It identifies priority themes for regional cooperation. <https://www.caep-project.org/astana-declaration-agreed-at-2nd-ministerial-meeting/>

³³ Two priorities, namely financing of VET and higher education and innovative teaching methods were only addressed via one-off webinars, quality assurance was mainly covered from a higher education angle and with a focus on accreditation.

³⁴ The concept of partnership in this action encompasses EU Member States, Central Asian stakeholder organisations and development partner organisations, which are ready to commit to joint work with the action over a certain period of time, though not necessarily the entire duration of the action.

³⁵ The Astana Declaration identified the following priority areas: qualification systems and frameworks, quality of VET and higher education and quality assurance, financing of VET and higher education, education-business cooperation and the involvement of the private sector, employability and the availability and use of evidence for better labour market matching, innovative teaching methods, gender, inclusion and the prevention of radical extremism.

3.5 The Intervention Logic

The intervention logic is driven by the objectives of the national strategies and policies in education, training, skills development and employment of the five Central Asian countries and Afghanistan and the objectives of the European Union to support the quality of education and the employability of young women and men in the region, including through cooperative solutions at the regional level³⁶.

This action supports the implementation of the commitments of all the governments in Central Asia and Afghanistan through international agreements such as UN SDGs as adopted by the countries.

The assumption of the action is that the quality and inclusiveness of education and training and employment systems in Central Asia can contribute to post-COVID recovery in the region by fostering improved employability of young men and women. For this to happen, a certain level of economic and political stability and growth has to take place in the countries. It is considered that in the Central Asian context, the main success elements for high quality and relevant inclusive education, training and employment systems are:

- Forward looking and gender sensitive evidence and analysis of education and training outcomes and skills needs that support skills development and employment services
- Stakeholder driven flexible and permeable approaches to qualifications at national and regional level, that allow equal opportunities for all
- Flexible and inclusive learning approaches that are based on learning outcomes and are relevant to the labour market.
- Active engagement of the skills development for employment stakeholder community (public, private, state and non-state/civil society) in governance and implementation at both national and regional level.

Expertise and capacity building, pilot projects, peer learning, dialogue and sharing opportunities and on-line platforms will be deployed both at national and regional level to assist authorities and various stakeholders to achieve these objectives. The action will systematically share information on EU level developments and tools in the area of education and training and labour market policies that support the transition of young people into the labour market, as a source of inspiration for developments in Central Asia. EU Member states will be involved in peer learning and capacity building, as will representatives from the Eastern Partnership countries, the Western Balkans and Turkey. These third countries can bring their Erasmus+ experiences with capacity building projects in the VET sector to the table (these opportunities are not open to Central Asian countries).

The action foresees **multiple engagement modalities. The action proposes a differentiated approach, so does not envisage that all countries will take part in a uniform manner.** It is expected that countries will select areas of engagement that are particularly relevant for them in relation to their national education, skills and (youth) employment strategies. While some countries may become active in all proposed areas, others may decide to focus on selected topics and activities.

³⁶Chapter 2.4 https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/62411/european-union-and-central-asia-new-opportunities-stronger-partnership_en

3.6 Logical Framework Matrix

Results	Results chain: Main expected results (maximum 10)	Indicators: (at least one indicator per expected result)	Baselines (values and years)	Targets (values and years)	Sources of data	Assumptions
Impact	To contribute to post-Covid recovery in Central Asia by fostering improved employability of young women and men in Central Asia through inclusive and labour-market oriented skills development.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Youth employment rate by sex Youth activity rate by sex NEETs rate by sex (SDG 8) VET participation rate by sex 	For all see regional statistical data table	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> < Baseline (Year 5) < Baseline (Year 5) 	1-4 National statistical data from national statistical offices (LFS)	<i>Not applicable</i>
Outcome 1	To foster the quality and inclusiveness of education, training and employment systems in Central Asia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Number of participating countries with (systematic) evidence on recent VET graduates or on school to work transition disaggregated by sex and settlement Number of countries that introduced new policies/measures/tools in the following areas during the programme's implementation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> skills needs analysis qualifications teaching and learning Methods 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> No country with systematic evidence on recent VET graduates/school to work transition by sex and settlement (Year 0) No new policy/measure/tool in at least one thematic area (Year 0) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> At least 3 countries with systematic evidence on recent VET graduates/school to work transition by sex and settlement (Year 5) At least 4 countries with new policy/measure/tool in one of the thematic areas (Year 5) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Tracer study data or national statistical data from national statistical offices Government/Project documentation 	Political and economic stability in most participating countries
Outcome 2	To foster participatory and inclusive dialogue and cooperation mechanisms at national and regional level	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Governance mechanism for the programme at national and regional level agreed (roles and with the participating countries) Agreement between participating countries on a regional action plan on the future collaboration in the field of education and skills and youth employability 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> No governance mechanism (Year 0) No agreement on a regional action plan (Year 0) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Governance mechanism including roles and responsibilities agreed (Year 1) Agreement on a regional action plan (Year 5) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Project documentation Project documentation 	The interest in regional cooperation in the skills developments sphere is stable or grows

Output 1 related to Outcome 1	Forward looking and gender sensitive skills development and employment services enhanced through better evidence and analysis of education and training outcomes and skills needs	1.1.1 Newly-developed/adapted methodologies related to skills needs analysis tested within and/or with the support of the action (in countries participating in Module 1) 1.1.2 Number of skills needs analysis supported by the action with inclusion and gender considerations 1.1.3 Number of mutual learning activities on labour market transition/guidance implemented (all including inclusion aspects)	1.1.1 No new/adapted methodology tested (Year 0) 1.1.2 % of analysis produced with gender and inclusion considerations 1.1.3 No mutual learning activities (Year 0)	1.1.1 New/adapted methodology tested by at least 4 countries participating in Module 1 (Year 5) 1.1.2 80% of skills analysis developed with support of the action includes inclusion and gender consideration (all years) 1.1.3 At least 4 mutual learning activities on labour market transition/guidance implemented (Year 4)	1.1.1 - 1.1.4 project documentation/government/public documentation	
Output 2 related to Outcome 1	Stakeholder driven flexible and permeable approaches to qualifications are adopted at national and region level in order to allow equal opportunities to all	1.2.1 Number of (new) formalised partnerships with sectors and employers indicating co-decision making (in countries participating in Module 2) 1.2.2 Number of new qualifications and modules developed with DARYA supported methodologies (in countries participating in Module 2)	1.2.1 No (new) formalised partnership with sectors/employers (Year 0) 1.2.2 No (new) qualifications/modules (Year 0) 1.2.3 0 countries use VNFIL (year 0) 1.2.4 Nr of joint qualifications developed (Year 0 no joint qualifications exist)	1.2.1 At least 1 (new) formalised partnership with sectors/employers in at least 4 countries (Year 4) 1.2.2 At least 15 (new) qualification/ and 30 module developed (in total) in at least 2 sectors/participating country in at least 3 countries (Year 5)	1.2.1 Government/Project documentation 1.2.2 Government/Project documentation 1.2.3 Government/project documentation 1.2.4 Project documentation 1.2.5 Project documentation	Regional economic initiatives and integration efforts resume in the course of 2021, supporting job creation and regional workforce mobility

		<p>1.2.3 Number of countries testing VNFIL</p> <p>1.2.4 Nr. of joint qualifications developed involving at least 3 countries</p> <p>1.2.5 Concept for a regional qualification framework developed and discussed with participating countries</p>	<p>1.2.5 No regional qualification framework (Year 0)</p>	<p>1.2.3 At least 3 countries test VNFIL (year 4)</p> <p>1.2.4 At least 12 new joint qualifications (in total) developed (involving at least 3 countries in the region) in 3 different sectors (Year 5)</p> <p>1.2.5 Concept for regional qualification framework developed and discussed (year 5)</p>		
<p>Output 3 related to Outcome 1</p>	<p>Increased use of flexible and inclusive teaching and learning approaches, based on learning outcomes and relevant to the labour market</p>	<p>1.3.1 Number of countries piloting self-assessment tools in the sphere of digital skills</p> <p>1.3.2 Number of innovative teaching and learning methods, or EU tools and instruments on key competences and work-based learning incorporated into the teaching process (by type of innovation/country/level of adoption)</p> <p>1.3.3 Number of VET providers/ teachers and students engaging in DARYA actions on</p>	<p>1.3.1 No country (Year 0)</p> <p>1.3.2 No innovative teaching and learning methods related to key competences, EU tools/instruments tested and incorporated by VET providers (Year 0)</p> <p>1.3.3 0 schools and teachers (by sex) in year 1</p>	<p>1.3.1 At least 2 countries by year 1 and at least a third country by year 3</p> <p>1.3.2 At least 1 innovative teaching and learning method, or EU tool/instrument in at least 4 countries tested and incorporated by at least 30% of participating VET providers (Year 5)</p> <p>1.3.3 at least 30 VET providers across at least 3 countries take part</p>	<p>1.3.1 Project documentation</p> <p>1.3.2 Government/Project documentation</p> <p>1.3.3 Project documentation</p>	

		teaching and learning (by country, VET level , sex)		(as of year 1) / At least 60 teachers across at least 3 countries/ at least 100 students across at least 3 countries take part in DARYA activities on teaching and learning as of year 1		
Output 1 related Outcome 2	to The wider skills development for employment stakeholder community is actively involved through jointly designed and agreed governance mechanisms, learning programmes, sharing tools and piloting of new tools.	<p>2.1.1 Quality of stakeholder involvement in the governance of pilot activities (in accordance with focus activity: cross ministerial, involving employers and civil society organisation (CSO) agreement on role of responsibilities, level of engagement)</p> <p>2.1.2 Number of users (stakeholders) utilising the on- line sharing tools</p> <p>2.1.3 Number of articles/blogs/stories raising awareness on inclusion, including gender aspects shared in framework of DARYA</p>	<p>2.1.1 limited cross- ministerial involvement and limited employer and CSO participation (Year 0)</p> <p>2.1.2 0 (Year 0)</p> <p>2.1.3 0 (Year 0)</p>	<p>2.1.1 Intensified cross-ministerial, employer and CSO participation in pilot project governance (year 5)</p> <p>2.1.2 At least 100 in at least 3 countries (Year 5)</p> <p>2.1.3 At least 2 contributions/year address inclusion and gender aspects.</p>	<p>2.1.1 Project documentation (using mapping methodology)</p> <p>2.1.2 Project documentation</p> <p>2.1.3 Project documentation</p>	ICT infrastructure and use of ICT tools continue to develop
Output 2 related to Outcome 2	Increased country-led regional cooperation and peer exchange on skills development for employment sector among Central Asian countries, EU Member States and the international development community.	<p>2.2.1 Number of joint pilot projects among the participating countries within the framework of the programme</p> <p>2.2.2 Number of EU Member States and international development partner</p>	<p>2.2.1 0 (Year 0)</p> <p>2.2.2 0 (Year 0)</p>	<p>2.2.1 At least 1 multi-country pilot project in each Module (Year 4)</p> <p>2.2.2 At least 7 EU Member States or donor organisations</p>	<p>2.2.1 Project documentation</p> <p>2.2.2 Project documentation</p>	EU Member states and the international development community are interested in cooperation

		organisations engaging in project activities				and partnership within DARYA
--	--	---	--	--	--	---------------------------------------

4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

4.1 Financing Agreement

In order to implement this action, it is not envisaged to conclude a financing agreement.

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 60 months from the date of 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 measures³⁷.

4.3.1 Indirect Management with a EU decentralised (traditional/regulatory) agency

It is proposed to implement the action via indirect management, with the European Training Foundation (ETF), an EU decentralised agency, as implementing partner. The ETF has over 25 years of experience of work on skills development for employment in transition countries, including Central Asia. During this time, it has engaged on a continuous basis with the Central Asian key stakeholders to be involved in the action. The ETF uses a holistic approach covering the systemic, policy and technical level and has worked in Central Asia at both national and regional level. It has in-depth thematic experience and expertise and has developed tools and methodologies in all the areas to be covered by the action. As an EU Agency, the ETF follows closely developments on skills development at EU level and is a member of several EU level working groups³⁸. The ETF has unique access to EU Member State development cooperation agencies and education and training and labour market institutions through its Governing Board. It also has a strong track record of cooperation and partnership with international development partners.

If negotiations with the above-mentioned entity fail, that part of this action may be implemented in indirect management with an international organisation. The implementation by this alternative entity would be justified because of the following criteria: technical expertise and capacity to ensure buy-in from partner countries in Central Asia.

4.3.2. Changes from indirect management to direct management (and vice versa) due to exceptional circumstances (one alternative second option)

If negotiations fail both with the ETF and with the other IO to be selected with the criteria mentioned in the last subparagraph of the above section (4.3.1.), that part of this action may be implemented in direct management.

4.4 INDICATIVE BUDGET

³⁷ www.sanctionsmap.eu. Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website it is the OJ version that prevails.

³⁸ The ETF is a member of the European Qualification Framework advisory group, the working group on entrepreneurial and digital skills as well as a member of the Steering Committee for the European Quality Assurance System.

Indicative Budget components ³⁹	EU contribution (amount in EUR)
Implementation modalities – cf. section 4.3	
Indirect management with an EU decentralised agency – c.f. section 4.3.	
Objective 1	2 500 000
Objective 2	3 000 000
Objective 3	4 500 000
Indirect Management with an EU decentralised agency – total envelope under section 4.3.1	10 000 000
Evaluation – cf. section 0	N/A
Audit – cf. section 0	N/A
Contingencies ⁴⁰	N/A
Total	10 000 000

4.5 Organisational Set-up and Responsibilities

The implementing agency will maintain the overall coordination and management of the action and be in charge of the interaction with the key stakeholders in the partner countries and the EU. The implementing agency will liaise on a regular basis with EU Delegations in participating countries, to ensure visibility and direct access to policy dialogue at national and regional level.

In view of the emphasis the action puts on country ownership and the development of country led regional cooperation mechanisms, governance of the action will be structured into three, complementary levels: executive, regional and national.

The **executive steering committee (ESC)** will comprise the implementing agency, DG INTPA and EU Delegations at its core. The ESC will monitor overall project progress and take strategic decisions. It will convene at least twice per year (on-line, face-to-face or blended). The ESC will, as necessary also involve EU MS, development partners and Partner countries that have committed to play a leading role in a given project year. Involvement of non-core members will mainly take place on-line.

Each participating partner country will set up a **national steering group (NSG)**, comprising key stakeholders, such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, relevant specialised agencies, social partner and civil society representatives and education and training provider representatives. The national steering group will be responsible for the validation and monitoring of activities (the national work programme), including pilot projects, at national level. **It will represent the link to key ministries and thus ensure that actions at national level are in line with national policy priorities**, take key national developments into account as well as development partner support actions. The set-up of the NSG will differ from country to country in line with existing governance structures and may be aligned to the three thematic modules.

The NSG will identify cooperation opportunities with development partners and actively reach out to these. The NSG will encourage development partners to make their results and tools available for inclusion in the action on-line platform and repository. The NSG will also ensure that outputs produced by the action are brought to the attention of relevant authorities and are taken into consideration for further policy developments. The NSG will thus play a key role for the sustainability of the action. The NSG will also ensure that activities have the necessary support of authorities, thus providing the space for autonomous work by national thematic groups and pilot projects. The NSG

³⁹ N.B: The final text on audit/verification depends on the outcome of ongoing discussions on pooling of funding in (one or a limited number of) Decision(s) and the subsequent financial management, i.e. for the conclusion of audit contracts and payments.

⁴⁰ Consider that contracts where no financing agreement is concluded, contingencies have to be covered by individual and legal commitments by 31 December of N+1.

will be requested to meet at least twice per year and **will be requested to involve on a regular basis the EU Delegation, development partner representatives, and as necessary EU MS**, in case EU MS have committed to support specific actions in the partner country. EU MS or development partner participation may take place on-line or via video-conference. For Central Asian countries the implementing agency will regularly join discussions on-line and will, where possible, join one meeting in each Central Asian country/year face-to-face.

Key NSG members constitute the **Regional Steering Group (RSG)**. The RSG will meet at least once per year either on-line or during a regional conference to agree on, and monitor aspects with a regional dimension, such as multi-country or regional pilot projects, regional feasibility assessments or regional action plans on joint developments. The RSG will thus ensure a close link between national and regional developments. In addition to national representatives the implementing agency, as well as DG INTPA, EU Delegations, EU MS and development partners which have committed to support specific actions, will take part in RSG meetings (face-to-face, on-line or blended).

The implementing agency, will be in charge of the overall implementation of the action. It will establish appropriate working and institutional relations with the institutions and key stakeholders responsible for the thematic areas to be covered by the action as well as development partners and EU MS. It will agree with these on membership, role and operationalisation of the ESC, NSGs and RSG.

The implementing agency will determine modalities for implementation, using as much as possible existing structures in the public and private sector and civil society organisations. It will propose the detailed modalities for implementation during the inception period. It will develop work plans, using also the input of NSGs and the RSG, will provide advice, training and other inputs, including through external resources (i.e. identify, contract and guide consultants and companies), undertake monitoring and provide requested reporting.

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 results (Outputs and direct Outcomes) as measured by corresponding indicators, using as reference the logframe matrix (for project modality) and the partner's strategy, policy or reform action plan list (for budget support).

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).

Roles and responsibilities for data collection, analysis and monitoring:

The action foresees stocktaking or self-assessment on the state of play for each module a country opts to take part in (see section 3.2). This exercise will contribute to quantitative and qualitative base line data in addition to evidence that is already accessible via national statistical and administrative data. In view of the difference in size (population, size of skills development system in number of providers, students) and capacity of participating countries, indicators will be defined for each country and followed up with and for each country (proposed indicators in the LFM in this document represent an average). Where there is a commitment by countries to take part in multi-country or regional developments (such as on the development of joint qualifications or the development of a concept for a regional qualification framework) joint baseline and results indicators will be defined.

Based upon a first prioritisation of country engagement in DARYA during the inception phase and decisions on multi-country and regional developments, the action will then engage stakeholders at different governance levels in accordance with the specific themes and topics selected, considering that a topic may be most relevant at national

level or sub-national/ local level, while some topics may be more relevant in an economic sectoral perspective. Stakeholders will be engaged in design and planning, implementation (taking part in familiarisation of a given topic, capacity building, peer learning or testing and piloting a new approach) and monitoring. The action will use a distributed leadership approach, which will provide the opportunity to different stakeholder categories to actively engage in the thematic modules and topics. In view of the actions' focus on inclusive approaches it is committed to involve stakeholders from all governance levels and representing different socio-economic realities.

Any monitoring and evaluation will be gender-sensitive, assess gender equality results and implementation of rights-based approach working method principles (participation, non-discrimination, accountability and transparency) in terms of implementation of the project and project outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation will be based on indicators that are disaggregated by sex and where applicable also age, location, urban/rural, institutional affiliation and education sub-sector (the latter two in particular for stakeholder participation). Key stakeholders at national and regional level will be involved in the monitoring process.

5.2 Evaluation

Having regard to the importance and nature of the action, a mid-term and final evaluation will be carried out for this action or its components via independent consultants.

The mid-term evaluation will be carried out for problem-solving and learning purposes, in particular with respect to eventual corrective measures.

The final evaluation will be carried out for accountability and learning purposes at various levels (including for policy revision), taking into account in particular the fact that a follow-up phase might be programmed, to further support developments at regional level.

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

The evaluation reports shall be shared with the partner country and other key stakeholders following the best practice of evaluation dissemination⁴¹. The implementing partner and the Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, where appropriate, in agreement with the partner country, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the project.

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

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

The 2021-2027 programming cycle will adopt a new approach to pooling, programming and deploying strategic communication and public diplomacy resources.

It will remain a contractual obligation for all entities implementing EU-funded external actions 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. This obligation will continue to apply equally, regardless of whether the actions concerned are implemented by the Commission, partner countries, service providers, grant beneficiaries or entrusted or delegated entities such as UN agencies, international financial institutions and agencies of EU member states.

However, action documents for specific sector programmes are no longer required to include a provision for communication and visibility actions promoting the programmes concerned. These resources will instead be consolidated in Cooperation Facilities

⁴¹ See best [practice of evaluation dissemination](#)

established by support measure action documents, allowing Delegations to plan and execute multiannual strategic communication and public diplomacy actions with sufficient critical mass to be effective on

APPENDIX 1 REPORTING IN OPSYS

An Intervention⁴² (also generally called project/programme) is the operational entity associated to a coherent set of activities and results structured in a logical framework aiming at delivering development change or progress. Interventions are the most effective (hence optimal) entities for the operational follow-up by the Commission of its external development operations. As such, Interventions constitute the base unit for managing operational implementations, assessing performance, monitoring, evaluation, internal and external communication, reporting and aggregation.

Primary Interventions are those contracts or groups of contracts bearing reportable results and respecting the following business rule: 'a given contract can only contribute to one primary intervention and not more than one'. An individual contract that does not produce direct reportable results and cannot be logically grouped with other result reportable contracts is considered a 'support entities'. The addition of all primary interventions and support entities is equivalent to the full development portfolio of the Institution.

Primary Interventions are identified during the design of each action by the responsible service (Delegation or Headquarters operational Unit).

The level of the Primary Intervention is defined in the related Action Document and it is revisable; it can be a(n) (group of) action(s) or a (group of) contract(s).

Tick in the left side column one of the three possible options for the level of definition of the Primary Intervention(s) identified in this action.

In the case of 'Group of actions' level, add references to the present action and other action concerning the same Primary Intervention.

In the case of 'Contract level', add the reference to the corresponding budgetary items in point 0, Indicative Budget.

Option 1: Action level		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Single action	Present action: all contracts in the present action
Option 2: Group of actions level		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Group of actions	Actions reference (CRIS#/043-337)
Option 3: Contract level		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Single Contract 1	Contribution Agreement
<input type="checkbox"/>	Single Contract 2	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Single Contract 3	
	(...)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Group of contracts 1	

⁴² [ARES \(2021\)4204912](#) - For the purpose of consistency between terms in OPSYS, DG INTPA, DG NEAR and FPI have harmonised 5 key terms, including 'action' and 'Intervention' where an 'action' is the content (or part of the content) of a Commission Financing Decision and 'Intervention' is a coherent set of activities and results which constitutes an effective level for the operational follow-up by the EC of its operations on the ground. See more on the [concept of intervention](#).