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Annex 1 – Description of the Action IPA/2020/420-517

Project Title: Strengthen national and local systems to support the effective socio-economic integration of returnees in the Western Balkans

Implementing Partner: UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub (IRH)

Responsible parties: UNDP IRH and UNDP Offices in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia

Brief Description

The project is part of the IPA II Multi-Country Action, *EU support to Fundamental Rights of Roma Community, and Reintegration of Returnees*, entrusted to the World Bank, UNDP and the CoE. Its overall objective is to support effective reintegration of vulnerable returnees from the EU with particular attention to Roma. The specific objective is to enhance the capacity of Western Balkan authorities at central and local level to implement successful returnee reintegration policies and respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable returnees.

Multi-dimensional vulnerabilities of returnees will be addressed by promoting holistic solutions of their immediate and longer-term needs through a mix of technical assistance, strategic advisory and institution building support. Moreover, the proposed activities will address the systemic gaps and institutional bottlenecks for effective governance of the process of returnees' integration. Bearing in mind that Roma constitute a large proportion of irregular migrants, results of the project will contribute to the implementation of the broader Roma inclusion agenda.

Success of the Action shall be measured by its impact on the social and economic wellbeing of returnees and their family members as well as by the level of integration of the tested models and approaches into national policies and local programmes for promotion of economic empowerment and social protection. Moreover, the Action will contribute to the socio-economic recovery of IPA beneficiaries from the devastating consequences of COVID-19 pandemic on local economies and vulnerable households.

Action results will be achieved through implementation of the following outputs.

Output 1. Local returnee reintegration strategies are developed with selected municipalities (ref. Key results 2.3. and 2.6 of the EU Action Document)

Output 2. Elements of local returnee reintegration strategies are implemented in selected municipalities, including innovative activities on livelihoods, skills building etc. (ref. Key results 2.4. and 2.6 of the EU Action Document)

Output 3. Significant number of urgent administrative issues faced by returnees are addressed. (ref. Key results 2.5. and 2.6 of the EU Action Document)

Contributing Outcome Regional Programme for Europe and the CIS for 2018-2021

RP Outcome 2. Addressing poverty and inequalities through more inclusive and sustainable development pathways.

Indicative Output(s) with gender marker: GEN2 (for the entire project)

RP Output 2.2. Regional innovative solutions for integrated and gender-responsive social protection and care services to promote access to basic services, sustainable jobs and livelihoods for vulnerable groups.

Total resources required:	EUR 4,609,988.00 ¹	
Total resources allocated:	EU	EUR 4,500,000.00
	UNDP:	EUR 109,988.00
Unfunded:	n/a	

¹ EUR/USD estimates will be calculated by applying the InforEuro exchange rate valid in the month of signing the agreement.

I. DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

Since the Western Balkans were declared “safe countries of origin” the region has seen a significant number of returnees from the EU member states. Based on the readmission agreements, 46,000² asylum seekers aged 18-29 returned to Albania in the period between 2009 and 2013³ and 9,053⁴ to North Macedonia between 2015 - 2018.

In 2017, four Western Balkan economies were ranked among the top 20 countries with the highest number of nationals with unregulated status in EU member states (Albania - 31,255, Kosovo^{5*} - 13,545, Serbia - 8,075 and North Macedonia - 5,570). Germany remains the most popular country of destination for asylum seekers from the region. In 2016 alone, German authorities completed 54,380 decisions for return, followed by France (3,280), Austria (1,625) and Belgium (1,305). COVID-19 related socio-economic impact assessments commissioned by UNDP in the Western Balkans underline the major impact on vulnerable groups and the difficulties they face due to their precarious status and the systemic flaws of social safety nets and public service delivery.

Still, the absence of an integrated registration system and limited institutional coordination between sending and home countries, makes the official statistics on returnees incomplete – the main reasons being the scarce information regarding the location of registration counters/info-points and available services. The low level of trust in institutions and the fear of eventual legal consequences related to the illegal stay abroad further disincentivizes returnees to register and seek support from local institutions.

Western Balkans is a region with long tradition of emigration. Limited work opportunities, low-paid jobs, large informal sector and the poor quality of health and education services, among others, due to long period of neglect and disinvestment in social infrastructure, are some of the main drivers of outward migration.

While, the irregular migration spreads across all demographic, social and ethnic groups, a lion share of irregular migrants and asylum seekers comprise of Roma men and women, ranging from 61.8% in North Macedonia to 82.6% in Serbia. These findings have been verified in EU-funded quantitative⁶ and qualitative⁷ surveys conducted by UNDP and the World Bank in 2017. The surveys reveal that the social and economic hardship of Roma men and women is predominant factor for the disproportionate share of Roma among irregular migrants and asylum seekers. For example, every third Roma in the region is inactive, more than half of the unemployed Roma have never worked in the formal sector, barely one in five Roma in the region is employed and almost two thirds of those employed work in the informal economy. Socio-economic profile of Roma women is even more vulnerable: 9 out of 10 young Roma women are NEETs and the employment rates vary from 13% to as low as 3-4%. On average half of employments of Roma women are precarious with no health or pension insurance coverage.

Insufficient support from national and local institutions makes the entire process of integration of returnees and their families in home communities difficult. Returnees often report that they feel worse off

² The survey on “Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania, 2013”, carried out by the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and the Office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This survey analyzes the main characteristics of the return migration and reintegration of the returned migrants is the first of its kind in Albania.

³ De Bruijn, B., Filipi, G., Nesturi, M., Galanxhi, E., (INSTAT), *Youth in Albania: Challenges in Changing Times*, November 2015

⁴ Official data from the Ministry of Interior

⁵ For the EU and UNDP this designation is without prejudice to position on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

⁶ Regional Roma Survey 2017 -Regional survey on socio-economic situation of marginalized Roma in the Western Balkans, commissioned by UNDP and the World Bank, with the support of the DG NEAR, 2017. Country factsheets (UNDP) More information at: <http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/library/roma/regional-roma-survey-2017-country-factsheets.html>

⁷ Micro-narratives collected from 1,175 Roma returnees, commissioned by UNDP, with the support of the DG NEAR, 2017

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compared to their peers who had never migrated. Children are in a particular vulnerable position, as they need to cope with both administrative obstacles to enrol in school and from unwelcoming attitude and prejudice displayed by their peers. Poor knowledge of local languages, long and cumbersome administrative procedures for certification of foreign school diploma etc. push young returnees to enrol in lower grades, which further affects their school performance, incentive and confidence for interaction with their peers.

Lack of personal identification documents and birth certificates is among the most frequently reported problem of returnees, in particular of children born in a third country, which is then a main obstacle to families in need of social assistance, health care, education and other forms of social protection.

Following the conclusion of readmission agreements, most IPA beneficiaries have improved the legislation and policy framework, which regulate the procedures and the response measures for reintegration of returnees. Nonetheless, the comparative overview suggests that the response measures have been still sector focused, with somewhat overlapping or vague distribution of competencies among institutions. Capacities for inter-institutional coordination and provision of a whole-of-government action remains a major challenge. The new generation of national reintegration strategies address some of these issues and foresee mechanisms for strengthened coordination, but no significant progress has been visible in practice, yet.

The incomplete decentralization of competences, in particular in the area of social protection, the limited financial resources of local authorities, and lack of mechanisms for profound engagement of civil society and private sector in addressing local issues pose a significant obstacle for local governments to pursue robust and sustainable solutions for returnees' reintegration in the formal economy and broader community life. Local development plans, which are typically underfunded, rarely tackle the specific challenges of the returnees, while lack of systematic data about the whereabouts and needs of returnees makes them invisible for the system and public service providers.

As part of the diagnostic work, UNDP and the World Bank carried out a comprehensive screening of the policy and institutional framework in the IPA beneficiaries; and during 2019 and 2020 held extensive consultations with national and local authorities, civil society, donor community and international organizations, including EU delegations. Consultation workshops organized in Skopje – North Macedonia on 14-15 November 2019 and in Belgrade – Serbia 22 January 2020, and online consultations with the national counterparts and representatives from the EU Delegation in Albania provided valuable insights and suggestions for adaptation of the proposed interventions under this Action.

Below section provides the main features of the policy and institutional backdrop in the three IPA beneficiaries covered with this Action.

Albania

Legal and policy framework While there is no specific legislation which regulates the procedure for registration of returnees and for the management of reintegration process, the Law on Emigration of Albanian Citizens for Employment Purposes stipulates a comprehensive set of services, which is available to returnees. It's worth noting that the sectoral laws in areas of education, employment and social safety recognize returnees as a particularly vulnerable group.

Different aspects of returnees' needs for supporting their reintegration in the home communities have been tackled in main strategic documents. The National Strategy for Development and Integration as well

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as the National Strategy for Employment and Skills Development and its Action Plan propose a range of measures for addressing the difficulties of returnees in accessing decent job the formal labour market. The Strategy on Development of Pre-University Education proposes measures for provision of free textbooks and psycho-social support for returnee pupils; and the National Youth Action Plan foresees the recognition of vocational training completed abroad, certification of skills and work experience acquired abroad.

On the other hand, while the National Strategy for Employment and Skills Development and the accompanying action plan, the National Health Strategy, the Social Housing Strategy and the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians, recognize Roma as a vulnerable group, none of these documents explicitly targets Roma returnees under readmission agreements.

The previous Strategy on Reintegration of Returned Albanian Citizens (2010), expired in 2015 and in the past five years, this policy area has been addressed through sectoral strategic policy documents. The Government is currently drafting the National Migration Strategy and related action plan, as the main policy document to address the issue of sustainable integration of returnees.

Outstanding challenges At the central level, a range of institutions hold a mandate to support vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers, upon their return in home communities, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, National Employment Agency, Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Ministry of Health and Social Protection. The previous Reintegration strategy foresaw establishment of 36 migration counters, collocated in the local and regional employment offices across the country. While the migration counters have been considered a useful info access point for returnees, the impression is that they served only a small percentage of the target group, and mainly the ones who registered voluntarily. Moreover, these were equipped to provide only a limited number of services and many important needs of returnees, such as access to personal identification cards, certifying school diplomas, legal aid etc. remained underserved.

The State Police Border and Migration Department collects data only about the age, gender and reason of return (forced or voluntary), and seldom registers the district of residence. No information or guidance on the rights of the returnees and the available institutional support is provided at this point.

Stakeholders consultations conducted in 2019 and 2020 reveal the following priorities:

- Adoption of the new national reintegration strategy to designate an entity, which shall coordinate the implementation of the policy priorities in the area of reintegration of returnees.
- Border and Migration Department and the migration counters to improve the coordination, thus increase the number of returnees using their services. Moreover, the range and format of offered services as well as capabilities of migration counters has to be enhanced to ensure better outreach.
- To increase awareness of the returnees about the services available in local institutions.
- To streamline procedures for recognition of education completed abroad.

North Macedonia

Legal and policy framework Government policies and measures targeting returnees are outlined in three strategic documents i.e. the Program for Reintegration Assistance and Support to Roma Returnees in accordance with readmission agreements (2010), the Law on Primary Education and related Action Plan

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2016–2020 and the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion 2014–2020. National sectoral policies in areas of social protection, housing, health care, employment and education address different dimensions of exclusion of disadvantaged population, but none explicitly tackles the specific challenges of vulnerable returnees.

Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy hold the policy making mandate, while day-to-day needs of returnees are serviced by 30 centers for social work available across the country, the network of Roma mediators and the Roma information centers.

Although the policy framework and implementation structures appear comprehensive, the incoherent policies and weak coordination between national and local level institutions keeps returnees at margins of the mainstream programmes for socio-economic inclusion. Local development strategies rarely make reference to returnees. The municipality of Suto Orizari is a rare example where the needs of returnees are being reflected in local programmes for sustainable inclusion of Roma.

Outstanding challenges The Government Coordinating Body on Returnees has been established back in 2011, however it was desolved by 2015. The Program for Reintegration Assistance and Support to Roma Returnees envisages measures for provision of legal aid, personal documentation, social protection, economic support, employment, health care and education in line with readmission agreements, but these have been barely implemented in practice. Moreover, the returnee reintegration measures, stipulated in the Law on Primary Education and in the National Action Plan on Education under the Roma Strategy inclusion, have neither been elaborated into concrete actions nor implemented in practice.

Although, there are a some positive examples of collaboration among the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Ministry of Health, these have been mainly ad-hock cases to resolve a particular problem of a returnee, for example related to readmission process, or for providing urgent medical help etc. None of institutional structures and governance tools envisaged in the National Strategy such as the coordinating body, centres for reintegration, databases and reception center has been established, hence local NGOs remain the primary reference point and service providers for returnees.

The most common problems reported by returnees still relate to their access to social assistance programmes, health care insurance, employment, decent housing, administrative obstacles for continuation of education by children, pinpointing also the prevailing social stigma and stereotypes.

Access to education of returnees has been declared a public policy priority, nonetheless implementation is lagging behind. While the government recognizes lack of employment as one of the main reasons in people decision to leave, labour migrants, seasonal workers, returnees and people with denied asylum request are not included as priority beneficiaries of active labor market measures. Missing information on the number of asylum applicants and returnees makes it difficult to design suitable support programmes.

Stakeholder consultations revealed the following priorities, which require immediate attention:

- Re-establishment of the coordinating body on returnees under the leadership of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy or other high level entity in the Government, with a mandate and available mechanisms for horizontal coordination.

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- Assessment of the feasibility for setting up a network of centers or other forms of one-stop-shops for integration of returnees, and the management arrangements for operation of the centres (local authorities, NGOs, institutions responsible for integration of returnees etc.).
- Facilitate and accelerate access to ID cards, birth certificates and other personal documents or free legal aid.
- Improve and streamline the procedure for recognition of prior knowledge and school diplomas of returnee children to allow children without citizenship to complete education and obtain official documentation.

Serbia

Legal and policy framework The Law on Migration Management (2012) is the umbrella law in the area of migration, which establishes the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration – a key government body responsible for managing the readmission process of returnees. The Commissariat adopts annual programs for the reintegration of returnees, which address housing conditions and economic empowerment of returnees. The Commissariat, in cooperation with other competent authorities, is the first point of reference and support for returnees upon their return to the country.

The policy on returnee's reintegration is regulated in several sectoral and horizontal strategies and action plans. The overarching document, which defines the institutional framework, objectives and specific measures is the Reintegration strategy for Returnees under the Readmission Agreement. The strategy highlights the specific risks and challenges that Roma migrants and asylum seekers are exposed to during the return process. The strategy and related action plans suggest measures and programmes for improved access of returnees to education, health care, personal ID documents, social welfare, housing conditions and employment.

Migration Management Strategy, National Employment Strategy 2011-2020 and related action plans, the Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women (2016- 2025) provide elaborated programmes for addressing the reintegration challenges of returnees.

On the institutional front, Serbia has established a comprehensive governance structure for managing returnees reintegration, which in addition to the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration and Office for Human Rights includes: Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and Ministry of Health.

Centers for social work, local migration councils, national employment service, health mediators, pedagogical assistants and municipal Roma coordinators are part of the local network of institutions responsible for provision of public services to returnees and their family members.

Outstanding challenges Serbia had made significant progress in the efforts to streamline procedures for accessing personal documentation, education, health care and social protection services. The important role played in this process by local commissioners for refugees and migration has been recognized by the policy makers, and sustained funding has been provided from the central budget.

Despite these positive developments, returnees in Serbia are in a precarious situation. Poor living conditions, high unemployment, the prevalence of low paid informal work for both men and women, lack

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of social protection and health insurance coverage keeps returnees in the vicious circle of poverty and pushes them on the margins of society without opportunities to exercise their social and economic rights, enjoy a decent well-being or move upward the social ladder. The significant increase in number of returnees puts additional pressure to already fragile economy, polarized labour market and overstretched social services. Financial poverty due to irregular income remains the main concern for the vulnerable returnees, along the access and quality of health care services, long and cumbersome application procedures for obtaining financial social assistance, lack of programmes for tackling housing needs. It is worth mentioning that the social protection system doesn't recognize returnees as eligible category for targeted social assistance, which combined with lack of information about the available social safety nets and services further aggravates already difficult position they are in.

A new Strategy for the Reintegration of Returnees under the Readmission Agreement until 2023 has been prepared, pending adoption by the Government. With this Strategy, the Government reinforces its ambition for improving the inter-institutional and stakeholders coordination and underlines the importance of partnerships for solving the complex problems of returnees.

The adopted methodology for preparing local action plans for the reintegration of returnees foresees establishment of a monitoring and evaluation framework and performance indicators and designates local migration council to serve as a main reporting body. However, the protocols for coordination and monitoring have hardly been implemented in practice.

Stakeholder consultations revealed the following priorities, which require immediate attention:

- Raise awareness among returnees about available services.
- Improve the availability of psycho-social services for returnees, in particular for Roma children.
- Empower returnees and improve employment opportunities by harnessing knowledge and skills acquired abroad.
- Provide mentoring and coaching support to returnees aspiring to start own business.
- Improve access to education, considering that 45% of the returnees are minors.
- Improve procedures for validation of knowledge and recognition of education certificates obtained abroad.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on returnees

In March 2020, COVID-19 pandemic hit the world with dramatic consequences. While the health, social and economic impact of COVID-19 is unfolding and the consequences of the crisis are trickling down and affecting all segments of society, the statistical evidences suggest that migrants, seasonal, informal and gig workers are among the hardest hit groups⁸.

The number of return migrants from EU countries to the Western Balkans has increased, due to perceived infection risks, restricted cross-border mobility and mandatory quarantines as well as the precarious employment conditions and reduced work opportunities caused by the lockdown of EU economies. In Serbia alone, some 50-60 thousand labour migrants have returned by March 2020. However, returnees often remain invisible for the social safety nets and in most instances, they have been bypassed by the

⁸ UNDP commissioned Socio-economic impact assessments (SEIAs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, aiming to scan the social and economic impact of Covid-19 of the households, micro, small and medium enterprises.

institutions and Government's COVID-19 related relief and recovery packages. The substandard living conditions and the increased transmission risks due to poor sanitation infrastructure, combined with limited savings to cushion declining incomes makes this groups particular vulnerable to cope with health, social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. STRATEGY

The Action has been designed in close cooperation with the World Bank as both UNDP and WB are implementing IPA II Multi-Country Action, *EU support to Fundamental Rights of Roma Community, and Reintegration of Returnees*. The parallel projects of both organisations are interlinked, with each feeding information into and shaping different components of the other. Altogether they promote a twofold approach to reintegration of vulnerable returnees, first by providing an immediate support to stabilize the distress of returnees from the readmission process and second by addressing the root causes and negative drivers of unregulated migration and re-migration. Results of the action will contribute to mainstreaming the challenges related to reintegration of returnees into the broader reform agenda on improving the system of social protection and public service provision.

The technical assistance and capacity building activities will be combined with community level interventions and personalized support to returnees and their families to proof the concept and demonstrate the advantage of applying integrated packages of economic, social and community inclusion measures.

The implementation strategy embraces a number of principles immanent for programmes that promote inclusion marginalized who experience multi-dimensional vulnerabilities, such as:

- Reintegration activities shall target all vulnerable returnees, including explicitly but not exclusively Roma;
- Activities will consider the distinct needs of men and women and tackle the pre-existing gender-based inequalities;
- Reintegration services will take into consideration the intertwined needs of vulnerable returnees at individual, family and community level;
- There is no silver bullet neither one-size-fits-all solutions for addressing the complex needs of people who are lagging behind. Individual and family profiling, vulnerability assessments of communities, ethnographic assessment and other alternative tools for gathering of qualitative and quantitative data will be applied to get an in-depth insight of the specific needs of returnees and home communities and to design a bespoke support to returnees;
- To address system deficiencies, governance issues will be addressed in parallel at both central and local level;
- Local reintegration programmes supported under this action will address both the immediate needs and structural challenges which propels the unregulated migration of men and women.

Activities will build on the good practices and models for reintegration of returnees developed by UNDP, the World Bank and other international organizations. For this purpose, during the consultation process, the team compiled a comprehensive overview of relevant ongoing and recently completed projects and established working relations with respective organizations and NGOs that are active in this area. Considering that the Action envisages establishment of local reintegration platforms, interested

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stakeholders and international organizations will be invited to take part and contribute to the broader reintegration agenda by building partnerships and synergies for joint actions.

The implementation strategy of the Action foresees a two-track approach:

1. In all six IPA beneficiaries in the Western Balkans, the World Bank will undertake assessments of the policy and institutional gaps and support national institutions in the development and implementation of national action plans as part of its parallel EU-funded project.
2. In Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia, UNDP will support the development and implementation of local level reintegration strategies that promote innovative and sustainable solutions to reintegration of returnees.

If during the inception phase the assessment reveals significant capacity gaps and low commitment of central and local level authorities to pursue the returnees reintegration agenda, UNDP and the World Bank will request the Steering Committee to re-prioritize the participating IPA beneficiaries and selected municipalities.

Under their respective projects, UNDP and the World Bank will also facilitate peer learning among IPA beneficiaries. Regional workshops will be organized to exchange views and experience from implemented policy solutions and mechanisms for effective socio-economic reintegration of returnees.

Considering that one of the main objectives of this Action is to enhance service delivery mechanisms and thus renew the trust of vulnerable returnees in public service providers, local NGOs will be engaged to partner in the provision of basic services. Their engagement will be essential for reaching out to vulnerable and underserved returnees and in facilitating their communication with local institutions.

To address the intersecting vulnerabilities of returnees, the Action will promote implementation of a case management approach to economic and social reintegration. In this way, institutions will demonstrate a commitment to discontinue the prevailing practice of fragmented and ad-hoc service provision and lay the foundations for a system, which supports returnees and their families along their pathway to full inclusion in the community. Services of public service providers will be reorganized to ensure a coordinated and continued support to returnees throughout the entire cycle of reintegration until a transformational impact on their socio-economic wellbeing is achieved. Moreover, the case management approach will promote holistic and personalized solutions, which meet the distinct needs of returnees.

III. RESULTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Objectives

The overall objective of the project is to contribute to the effective reintegration of vulnerable returnees from the EU with particular attention to Roma. The support to Roma returnees will also contribute to reducing the existing socio-economic gap between Roma and non-Roma women, men and children.

The specific objective of the Action is to enhance capacities of Western Balkan authorities at central and local level to develop and implement effective policies and programmes for reintegration of returnees.

UNDP activities will primarily address local level challenges with an ultimate objective to translate the tested models into policy recommendations for integration into the national regulation and government funded programmes.

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The Action will support three municipalities in each of the so-called first-wave IPA beneficiaries i.e. Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia. The final decision will, however, be made upon completion of a two-stage selection process.

During the inception phase, the UNDP project team will first conduct a rapid assessment of a wider group of municipalities from the perspective of: (i) number of returnees in the municipality; (ii) share of Roma in the total population; (iii) propensity to outward migration; (iv) availability of public facilities for service provision; (v) availability and capacities of NGOs for provision of social services; (vi) commitment and administrative capacities of local authorities to manage reintegration agenda and (vii) presence and engagement of other international organizations. The rapid assessment will help to narrow down the pool of short-listed municipalities to max 6 per IPA beneficiary.

During the second stage of the selection process, socio-economic potentials of the shortlisted municipalities will be assessed from the perspective of: (i) the size and structure of the private sector; (ii) the possibility for building local value chains or other forms of business partnerships with established companies; (iii) presence of business development support services and other support structures etc. The assessment will also reflect on the impact of COVID-19 on the local economy, the capacities and challenges of public service providers to cope with the pressure to deliver accessible and safe services to citizens and economic agents caused by the pandemic etc. Where feasible, the analytical work will be coordinated with the World Bank to optimise the resources and underpin synergies.

The final selection of target municipalities will be made in consultation with the relevant IPA beneficiary partners, the World Bank and EUD based on the findings from conducted assessments. The assessment will also utilize the available information and data collected by CoE from their early work with local authorities in the context of the Romacted project.

Once the assessment is completed, the work plan is completed and all relevant stakeholder identified and mobilized, hybrid (one and off-line kick off meetings shall be organized in the three IPA beneficiaries.

After the inception phase, the project results will be achieved by implementing the following three inter-connected outputs:

Output 1. Local returnee integration strategies are developed with selected municipalities (*ref. Key results 2.3 and 2.6 of the EU Action Document*)

This first output foresees development of local reintegration strategies in 9 municipalities i.e. 3 per IPA beneficiary. While the main focus of local strategies will be to improve the livelihoods and social wellbeing of returnees and the broader community, these will also tackle the local governance issues, capacity and institutional bottlenecks and gaps, which hinder the effective implementation of reintegration policies.

To mobilize a broad-based engagement of relevant stakeholders both during the preparation and implementation of developed strategies, the Action will support establishment of local reintegration platforms, which will include representatives from public service providers, business community and civil society. Representatives of bilateral donors, international organizations or NGOs with relevant portfolios will be invited to take part in the activities organized by the platform.

Diversity of engaged stakeholders and public service providers will ensure that all aspects of reintegration process are adequately reflected in the local strategies. Moreover, the broad-based format of dialogue makes the local platforms a credible mechanism for providing feedback to policy makers regarding the

effectiveness of the relevant policies and regulation as well as on the encountered administrative bottlenecks which require action.

Activity 1.1. Creation of multi-stakeholders' platforms in 9 municipalities

Following the selection of beneficiary municipalities, the Action will support establishment of 9 local reintegration platforms. The format of the engagement and the thematic focus of the platforms may vary in different municipalities and will be commensurated to their distinct development features and institutional context. Considering that access to decent employment has been underscored by the returnees as their main concern, deliberations and finding solutions for the economic reintegration of returnees is likely to prevail. However, reintegration platforms will also seek solutions for other pressing needs of vulnerable returnees, such as limited access to communal services, care services (kindergartens, day care and home care), education, housing, legal aid etc.

While local authorities will be in the driving seat, they might decide to delegate the operational responsibility for the day-to-day management of reintegration platforms and strategy implementation to a local entity with proven technical capacity to manage multi-stakeholder responses. Selection of the local entity will be made based on the assessment of the local institutional context and designated competencies regarding the reintegration agenda. During the consultations process for this Action, several entities demonstrated strong capacity and commitment to play this role, such as the local migration councils in Serbia, local socio-economic councils in North Macedonia and municipal migration counters in Albania. UNDP will support the capacity assessment and selection of local coordinating entities in the beneficiary municipalities.

The role of local NGOs active in supporting the reintegration of returnees and socio-economic inclusion of Roma will be instrumental for ensuring that the voice and the needs of returnees are adequately reflected in the local priorities. This is crucial to avoid the eventual risk of elite capture and asymmetrical access to information regarding the available economic empowerment programmes and public services, which will be prioritized in the local reintegration strategy and respectively supported under this Action.

The selected local coordination entities will be the first point of contact for UNDP in conducting the proposed analytical studies as well as in designing and implementation of local reintegration strategies. UNDP teams will be in regular communication and along the process support their technical capacities for performance of the coordination role. Local coordination entities will ensure engagement of platform members in different formats of online and offline communication. Local platforms will be of open nature and will initiate thematic dialogues with relevant stakeholders on specific issues of concern for returnees. On a three-month basis, all members of local platforms will be invited to meet in-person to take a broader perspective into the issue and recommend the relevant action.

Local platforms will also serve as a forum for promoting a new narrative to counter the prevailing stigma and prejudice regarding the returnees, hence improve the confidence between returnees and resident population and their trust in local institutions and public service providers. In this regard, local CSO and NGOs will be playing an important role in building coalitions and voicing the concerns and needs of the vulnerable returnees.

To support the preparation of the local strategies for reintegration of returnees, UNDP will hire international and local experts to conduct three in-depth analytical studies i.e. i) assessment of social and economic vulnerabilities of returnees; ii) assessment of the economic potentials of municipalities and

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mapping out the prospective value chains and iii) assessment of institutional gaps and system weaknesses in the delivery of public services of relevance for the socio-economic integration of returnees.

Should the initial assessment of beneficiary municipalities lead to a decision of UNDP's and the World Bank's engagement in a same group of municipalities, both organizations will ensure complementarity and coherence of the analytical work and foster coordination and synergies in the implementation of the economic empowerment programmes.

Activity 1.2 Development of local strategies and innovative programs for the social and economic reintegration of returnees

Under this Activity technical assistance will be provided to synthesize the information and inputs collected from the local platform members and from the conducted assessments as described in the Activity 1.1. and translate them into local strategies and respective action plans. A team of international and local consultants will be engaged to elaborate the identified strategic priorities, programmes and action plans.

Line ministries with a mandate in employment, social protection, education and health care will be involved in the consultation process and in the final design of local strategies and actionable programmes. Their engagement is particularly important considering the shared mandate of central and local authorities on a number of social issues due to unfinished decentralization of competences and fiscal revenues. The engagement of national institutions in this process will ensure coherency and alignment of local actions with the relevant national policies and regulation. Their role will be also important for ensuring that identified priorities are included in the programmes, which are financed from the central budget. Policy makers from central authorities will be invited to take part in the work of local platforms on the specific topics of relevance. Before rolling out the implementation, some IPA beneficiaries is likely to require prior review and clearance of local strategies by the relevant central level coordination entity.

In parallel, the Action will provide technical assistance for setting up a data collection system to monitor the progress in the implementation of local returnees' strategies. This will entail analysis of the available administrative data and information gathered by the local NGOs and international organizations active in this area. Moreover, the Action intends to explore the possibility of using alternative data sources, which can provide quantitative and quality insights regarding the social and economic wellbeing of returnees. On annual basis, surveys, micro-narratives, ethnographic assessments or other alternative data collection tools will be used to monitor the progress against the established targets.

Considering that this Action can provide only partial funding, priority for implementation will be given to the novel programmes and approaches, which tackle the most pressing needs of returnees. Therefore, before the roll out of the specific programmes, UNDP with support of external experts to provide technical assistance in elaborating the design and procedures for implementation of innovative economic empowerment programmes for the returnees, which will be tailored made to the investment potentials in the local communities.

Output 2 Elements of local returnee integration strategies are implemented in selected municipalities, including innovative activities on livelihoods, skills building, etc. (ref. Key results 2.4 and 2.6 of the EU Action Document)

Nb: the strategic elements relating to streamlined social service provision and inter-institutional coordination are addressed under Output 3.

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Activities under this output will support local authorities together with members of local platforms to implement the local reintegration strategies and action plans in practice. While, the Action will provide seed funds for the prioritized programmes, efforts will be made to mobilize additional funds and to nurture partnerships for full implementation of the action plans.

The Action will aim to demonstrate new approaches to economic empowerment programmes and social cohesion, which will form the main pillars of the local reintegration strategies.

The employability sub-set of activities will apply the concept of personalized support to individual's growth, which is reflective of individual's education, skills, experience, preferences and professional aspirations. Such holistic approach will help to set up a foundation for future implementation of integrated case management in this area. Business startup and social cohesion programmes will promote various forms of partnerships between returnees, local business community and the resident population. Moreover, the intense communication with the returnees, which will be established by the engagement of local NGOs and mentors will help to identify and harness the experience, knowledge and life-skills acquired by returnees during their stay abroad. The comparative literature on the migrants' entrepreneurial behavior indicates that only 3 percent of the income from migrant work is invested in entrepreneurial activities, pointing out to the lack of access to market intelligence, local and international business networks and business support services as main obstacles. The Action aims to address those gaps and to support the returnees in brokering new partnerships.

Activities under this output will also address some of the community needs which involve the returnees and the local population. The increased number of returnees due to shrinking employment opportunities in the, diminished capacities of local economy to retain workers and generate new jobs as well as reduced revenues of municipalities which can be allocated for provision of social infrastructure or community services due to COVID-19 crisis may create tensions and mistrust between returnees and the resident population. This can add additional layer of complexity in the multi-ethnic communities and trigger tensions. In line with identified priorities, this output will therefore support implementation of activities, which promote community cohesion, improve the interaction and collaboration between returnees and resident population, or help to fill in the gaps of locally available services.

Experiences and lessons learned collected from the implementation of the novel programmes in the three IPA beneficiaries will be used as evidence for organizing regional thematic workshops for peer-learning and exchange of good practices among policy makers and practitioners from the 6 IPA beneficiaries.

Activity 2.1. Integrated support to improve employability of returnees

Under this activity returnees will be equipped with a suit of soft, technical and digital skills to improve their employability in the formal labour market. Based on identified skills gaps and local demand, which will be identified in the local assessments conducted under Output 1, and the assessment of individual's skills profile and readiness for employment, public employment counsellors and social workers will prepare individual employability improvement plans for the returnees. In this process, public service providers will collaborate with the local employers, NGOs and where available the network of mediators.

Individual employability improvement plans will assist vulnerable returnees to redress the gaps in education and skills, which is a major hurdle for accessing a decent job. Particular attention will be paid to

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the improvement of digital and soft skills and competencies of returnees, which gained even bigger significance during the COVID-19 crisis.

UNDP will procure training courses from certified training providers, licensed by the relevant entity responsible for the advancement of adult education. In addition to the actual delivery of training, the certified training providers will be asked to develop curricula for the programmes, which are not readily available, in partnership with the employers and institutions responsible for the improvement of vocational and adult education.

Local NGOs, which will be trained under this Action will be responsible to reach out, encourage and support returnees to take part and sustain in the training programmes. The details regarding the proposed forms of collaboration between public service providers and the NGOs and the support, which is going to be provided under this Action is described under Output 3.

Skills development programmes will be provided in a form of individual and group training. Considering the multi-dimensional vulnerabilities experienced by returnees, participants in this programme will be offered a professional coaching and mentoring during the learning process, including a psycho-social and confidence building support. Individual employability improvement plans will also reflect the distinct needs for mentoring support of women, arising from the disproportional burden which is being shouldered by women in terms of housework, care duties as well and in some cases physical and emotional distress caused by incidents of gender-based violence, both being exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learning opportunities will not be limited to the formal training, but will also include opportunities for on-the-job learning, internship and apprenticeship in local companies, attendance of relevant modules for completion of primary education and validation of other skills obtained through informal trainings. For returnees who have dropped out from school, efforts will be made to encourage and support them to complete the compulsory primary education through the available adult education programmes. In this initiative, a close coordination and cooperation will be established with REF and REDI. Design of the employability improvement programme might consider provision of learning stipends for covering the daily needs during the training.

The project will support public sector providers i.e. public employment offices, centres for social work, VET centres. The UNDP team and local public service providers will take a lead in the implementation of this activity, while NGOs and individual mentors will be contracted to support the implementation.

Considering that the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic displays severe impacts on local economies, local businesses might not be fit to generate new jobs and take up new employees. To mitigate further deterioration of socio-economic hardship and prevent the risk of falling into or deepening income poverty, the project might need to adapt the economic empowerment component to include a public works programme. In such case, a public works programme will be designed. However, the new design will address the usual weaknesses of such schemes, which typically engage the unemployed in maintaining the hygiene of public spaces. In partnership with local authorities, opportunities for engagement of the vulnerable job seekers in providing community and social services will be explored. In parallel, participants in the public works programmes will be offered training, that will allow a gradual transition of the unemployed returnees from welfare to formal decent jobs.

Activity 2.2. Implement innovative programmes in supporting business start-ups and productive partnerships with local businesses

Under this set of activities, returnees with entrepreneurial potential will be identified and mobilized to start their own business. Moreover, the project will promote a culture of partnership and peer support among returnees by encouraging knowledge transfer, use of co-working spaces, business partnerships or other forms of collaboration with the established businesses in the local value chains etc.

The detailed assessments carried out under Output 1, such as the analysis of the niche economic sectors, potential value chains and possibilities for business collaboration with the established companies, the mapping of available business support services and financing opportunities, will be defining the specific features of the business start-up and entrepreneurship development programme.

This activity will be implemented by organizing calls for business ideas. During the project implementation three calls for business ideas will be organized in all 9 beneficiary municipalities, which should support creation of 90 new businesses by the returnees. Priority will be given to proposals focusing on businesses with higher job creation potential, businesses established by women or youth, businesses, which can expand or complete existing local value chains or businesses with significant environmental or energy efficiency impact. Detailed procedure, eligibility and assessment criteria will be developed by UNDP project teams.

The best business ideas will be awarded a grant with a maximum value of 10,000 EUR in line with the approved business plan. The grant amount will vary depending on the number of newly created jobs. UNDP will be responsible for the grant management and for the procurement of the approved equipment, raw materials as well as small-scale infrastructure and adaptation of the physical space, which might be required. Opportunities will be explored for blending the grant component with financing from private sector investors and financial intermediaries.

Returnees with the most advanced businesses ideas will be provided with training in entrepreneurship and business development, mentoring support before and after the registration of the business.

The entrepreneurship training, which will be organized under this activity will be also provided to other participants in the call, with viable business ideas. During the training they will be supported to further improve and fine-tune the business plan and to seek financing from other available business support programmes in the IPA beneficiaries. Training methodology will be designed to enable in-person and online delivery of the training content to prevent possible learning disruptions due to COVID-19 containment measures.

To ensure the sustainability of supported businesses, which provide for decent earning and have a potential to growth, the new entrepreneurs will be supported with mentoring support before and after the establishment of the business. Where available, the non-for-profit networks of certified mentors and business counsellors will be engaged, which have been established and supported by UNDP or other international organizations. A pool of vetted experts (mentors) will be engaged through a competitive process to support the new start-ups in areas that are considered critical for success performance of the businesses such as digitalization, product and service design, marketing and promotion, introduction of quality assurance systems, accounting and financial services etc. Mentors will also be responsible to facilitate the interaction between the new entrepreneurs and local businesses and encourage productive business connections and partnerships in small value chains, cooperatives or joint investments.

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UNDP will explore the legal requirements and comparative advantages for establishing social enterprises, cooperatives or co-working spaces, which might be suitable for encouraging business partnerships among returnees or between the returnees and established businesses. Under this activity, the project aims to contribute to development of inclusive business ecosystem, by providing free access to resources for the participants of the business start up programme. In each IPA beneficiary two technical solutions (web-based or mobile phone) will be developed to provide the new entrepreneurs with market intelligence, short thematic trainings on how to start and improve the business, how to adapt the training to a COVID-19 and post pandemic context etc. In the initial stage, development of the tools and the content will be managed by UNDP, with an objective to transfer the ownership and administration to relevant public authority. Developed digital tools will be publicly available and aim to contribute to the broader business start-up community. The thematic focus, including the preferred format for presentation of the content of the digital tools will be developed based on needs and preferences identified by the participants in the project.

Activity 2.3. Promoting social cohesion by organizing community-based programmes

This set of activities will support implementation of the community cohesion component of local reintegration strategies, which will be developed under Output 1 of this Action. A public call for small grants will be organized to support innovative ideas for strengthening social cohesion in the beneficiary municipalities. The thematic priorities will be defined based on identified issues and community development gaps identified by the members of the local reintegration platforms and broader community.

Both, local government units and local NGOs will be eligible to apply for a small grant, but in both cases the proposed initiatives will have to demonstrate partnership in the implementation. Moreover, the proposed initiatives are expected to contribute to a strengthened communication between local authorities, returnees and resident population.

The small grants programme will encourage engagement of returnees and their families in the design and implementation of the community cohesion initiatives, and where feasible by sharing their technical knowledge, experience and skills obtained during their stay abroad. Supported activities will vary and may include organization of education, cultural, environmental and other programmes for promoting a public good. The issues of social cohesion and confidence building, in particular among the youth will be mainstreamed and training modules will be developed and delivered as part of the community cohesion activities.

A consultant will be hired to elaborate the procedures, the eligibility and assessment criteria for the programme. A total of 36 small grants will be supported under this action i.e. 4 per beneficiary municipality with a maximum value of EUR 20,000 per individual grant.

Activity 2.4 Regional dialogue among policy makers and practitioners in the area of sustainable reintegration of returnees

Implementation of local level activities will generate important insights and lessons from the first wave IPA beneficiaries i.e. Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia. UNDP in collaboration with the World Bank will convene a regional structured dialogue among policy makers and practitioners on topics of significance for

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the sustainable reintegration of returnees. During the implementation of this Action, two regional dialogue forums will be organized covering all IPA beneficiaries in the region.

The regional dialogue forums will ensure that the feedback loop between policy making and policy implementation process is established and voice from practitioners is heard. The practical experience from the implementation of reintegration programmes will be instrumental for fine-tuning the existing national policy frameworks and regulation, but also provide valuable insights for the other three IPA beneficiaries, which potentially shall be included in the second wave of local returnees reintegration programme i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Montenegro.

During the consultation process, two priority policy topics have been identified: i) inter-institutional coordination and service gaps for effective reintegration of returnees; ii) incentives for transitioning the informal work into formal business; Nonetheless, during the implementation some other priority issues might emerge, which will be presented to the Steering Committee for approval.

The body of evidence and practical experience collected by UNDP during the implementation of local level strategies and programmes will be used for preparation of the thematic policy notes on Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia. For the other three IPA beneficiaries i.e. BiH, Kosovo and Montenegro, UNDP will engage short-term international experts to prepare a stock-taking analysis of service gaps for reintegration of returnees at local level. The analysis will build on relevant studies and sector assessments carried out by EU, the World Bank and other international organizations with a focus on local level challenges and good practices in reintegration of vulnerable returnees. A minimum of three municipalities in each of the second wave IPA beneficiaries will be included in the analysis. Selection of municipalities will consider the number of returnees and Roma community and the propensity for (re)migration of local population. These will help in setting up a baseline on topics of relevance for reintegration of returnees in the second wave IPA beneficiaries, but also promote the culture of evidence-based deliberations among the peers from the region.

UNDP and the World Bank will closely collaborate in the organization of the regional forums by exchanging analytical studies, data and evidences, identification of resource experts, and speakers from IPA beneficiaries. This initiative should contribute to the gradual development of a Western Balkans platform for policy dialogue on the topic of reintegration of returnees.

Collected inputs and proceedings from the discussions will be synthesized into policy notes and knowledge products for sharing with decision makers and practitioners. The budget for this activity is estimated based on the assumption that travel restrictions will be lifted and the protocols for organizing conferences with physical presence of the participants relaxed.

Output 3. Significant number of urgent administrative issues faced by returnees are addressed (*ref. Key results 2.4 and 2.6 of the EU Action Document*)

(Nb: This output will also include work on the overall governance of services for returnees in order to promote integrated case management and sustainability of tested approaches)

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the structural deficiencies of current social protection systems and limited capacities of institutions to effectively respond to sudden shocks. The first set of government support programmes and response measures to COVID-19 crisis make no reference to migrants and returnees as a specific group, which is being affected by the pandemic. The lack of personal identification documents, fragmented information systems and weak coordination keeps the returnees and their family

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members invisible for the broader social protection system. Due to missing documents, returnees have difficulties to access social assistance; while due to missing school certificates children from return families are often placed in lower grades in schools, thus causing demotivation, dissociation and frequent drop-out from the education system. Long procedures for accessing social protection support, unaffordable fees for obtaining or retrofitting civil documents, health cards, nostrification and apostilles of school certificates etc., are among the most frequently reported problem of returnees and their family members in the interaction with institutions and private sector providers.

Activities under this output will aim to strengthen capacities of public service providers, improve the mechanisms for collaboration among local public service providers and foster inclusion of local NGOs into programmes for social service delivery, with an ultimate objective to increase access and quality of provided support.

In this way, along the directly support that will be rendered to returnees, the project will seek to identify and develop approaches for improved governance in public service provision, which can be institutionalized at the end of the Action implementation. To ease the access and expand the outreach in service delivery, a number of digitalized tools will be developed and applied. The different elements of the system improvement will lay the foundation for introducing integrated case management along the principles described earlier in this document. Methodologies and approaches applied will build on UNDP's experience and lessons learned from the implementation of integrated case management model in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia.

As NGOs play an essential role in the outreach and in the delivery of social services to vulnerable returnees, capacities of local NGOs will be strengthened to become an effective partner of public service providers and local businesses. In addition, models for engagement of NGOs in the service delivery will be developed and proposed for institutionalization by the policy makers.

Activity 3.1. Improve access to social and administrative services by returnees including by use of digital tools

Based on the analysis of the vulnerabilities of returnees, the service gaps and administrative bottlenecks at local level carried out under Output 1, this activity aims to provide direct support to returnees in overcoming the immediate distress upon the return and in improving the access to required public services and social assistance.

This will be achieved by: i) developing content for accurate and easy to access information by the returnees regarding the available assistance, which can be provided by public sector providers and NGOs; ii) engagement of local NGOs and civil society organizations to reach out to the most vulnerable returnees and their families and provide direct support in obtaining personal IDs, access to health care social services and free legal aid, school enrolment and nostrification of school diplomas and recognition of informal education; and iii) development of a methodology, guidelines, standard forms and protocols for the assessment of multi-dimensional vulnerabilities and case management for returnees for use of public service providers and NGOs.

Practical information and messages will be developed in different formats and for use by different channels of communication, which will enable public service providers to ease the access to accurate and easy to

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access information by the returnees regarding their social protection entitlements, available services, legal aid, psychosocial support, health care etc.

UNDP will organise a call for small grants to NGOs and CSOs to support returnees and their family members in accessing social services. Moreover, NGOs will be included in the direct provision of services, which are missing in the local communities. The community outreach and established trust, in many instances makes the local NGOs first point of contact for the vulnerable returnees. Local NGOs will be invited to propose effective programmes for supporting returnees on issues pertaining personal IDs, school certificates, recognition of informal education, access to health care and social services, information dissemination etc

For holistic assessment of the returnees' vulnerabilities and needs for social, health care, education or legal support, public service providers and local NGOs will be trained to conduct in-depth assessment and profiling. The project will support development of standard forms, methodology and guidelines for conducting such socio-economic assessments and will organize training to public service providers and local NGOs in new methodologies such as individual profiling and developing individual integration plans. Returnees' participation in the profiling will be voluntary. In addition to public service providers, local NGOs will be engaged in reaching out to local communities and expressing the benefits of the registration in the system.

Activity 3.2. Strengthen capacities of NGOs and public service providers for effective provision of services including with the application of new digital tools

This activity aims to develop and deploy sustainable solutions for the improvement of the local governance of returnees reintegration.

Based on the capacity gaps and institutional bottleneck analysis carried out under Activity 1.1., this Activity will provide technical assistance and capacity building to: i) to support institutions in streamlining the relevant for returnees services including by application of new digital tools; ii) develop training materials and deliver training in new services for public service providers and the NGOs; iii) develop a methodology for introducing models for outsourcing and financing of NGOs as local service providers and iv) develop methodologies to determine the costs per services, KPIs for performance based payment

Activities for streamlining the service provision for returnees will be in line with vulnerability assessments, identified administrative bottlenecks and priorities of the local reintegration strategies, implemented under Activities 1.1 and 1.2. Digital solutions will be developed and deployed to further improve the internal processes, inter-institutional coordination and access to services by the returnees. Developed digital tools will aim to improve the collection and systematization of information regarding the vulnerabilities and the specific needs of returnees, gathered through the protocols and standards for returnees profiling. Web or mobile-based applications will be developed for information dissemination and outreach or for the improved access by returnees to social safety nets and locally available services.

The implementation of the new services and economic empowerment and social inclusion measures, which will be implemented under Output 2 (Activities, 2.1.- 2.3.) and Output 3 (Activity 3.1.), will require a new set of skills of public service providers and local NGOs, new tools and protocols of work and administrative procedures. Experts will be engaged to develop training curricula and deliver training to

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public service providers and selected NGOs. The toolkit and training materials will be published online and will be available in the local languages.

Considering that local NGOs are expected to play an important role in the outreach and in the delivery of social services, participation of local NGOs in these trainings will be instrumental for the development of their capabilities for coaching and mentoring of unemployed returnees and for a strengthened collaboration with public service providers. In addition, UNDP team will provide a day-to-day guidance to local NGOs, which is expected to further empower the NGOs in applying the obtained skills in practice and prepare them to become a competent partner to public service providers in the service delivery.

According the preliminary set of identified issues, the training programme will cover issues related to career counselling, communication with local businesses to facilitate internship placement; delivering training in soft skills, social mentoring, free legal aid, information dissemination regarding available vocational and other training opportunities, such as in digital skills etc. Local NGOs will be trained in the identification and encouragement of the returnees to participate in the formal labour market.

Local experts will develop standards and protocols for cooperation of the NGOs with training providers, public institutions such as public employment offices, centres for social work as well as models for outsourcing of services to local NGOs.

A methodology will be developed for introducing new models for financing the engagement of local NGOs or social enterprises in provision of services, including by social contracting of non-governmental entities. The model of social contracting will allow for the possibility of local NGOs to receive funding from public sources for a continued provision of services, which are of interest to returnees. Social contracting is a process by which government resources are used to fund entities which are not part of government structure, such as civil society organizations and NGOs to provide services which the government has a responsibility to provide. This model can be instrumental to support public sector providers in the development of alternative forms of service provision, particularly now when Covid-19 poses significant challenges to existing social protection systems.

Building on the tested models under this action, external experts will be engaged to provide technical assistance to assess the feasibility of introducing social contracting and performance-based payment. The technical assistance will include assessment of the national legislation and regulation, estimation of costs of services; development of key performance indicators; criteria and minimum capacities and credentials for obtaining licence for service provision, protocols for engagement of the NGO sector with the relevant public institutions etc. Ministries of Labour and Social Policy will be involved in all steps of the process to ensure consistency with national policies and reform efforts in this area as well as integration into the regular national programme for financially supporting local plans for provision of social services. The tested models will be systematized and shared with the national policy makers as a contribution to the ongoing efforts to improve quality and accessibility of public services.

Some IPA beneficiaries in the Western Balkans have already introduced performance-based payment to NGOs - e.g. for provision of free legal aid they are getting paid for successful court cases. However, the results are limited due to weak capacities of participating NGOs and the low unit prices set up by governments for payment of provided services by the NGOs.

Risks and Assumptions

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The main risk associated with the project is eventual shifted interest of central and local authorities, caused by the COVID health, social and economic crisis, and thus inability to participate with full operational capacity and financial commitment in the implementation. Linking the reintegration with the broader social protection reform agenda, the leverage of international organisations and the enlargement negotiations should mitigate the risk. The involvement of civil society will be instrumental for keeping the political discourse on the issue.

Government turnover can help or hinder reintegration efforts, depending on the attitude of those in power. The risk can only be mitigated by the non-partisan nature of the programme. Therefore, the project team shall engage constructively with the officials in power in participating municipalities and will maintain contacts with the relevant public institutions. In case local government turnover in some of the localities happen, the programme will need to put additional efforts in order to continue its implementation and build upon the achieved progress.

Matrix of project risks

Description of the risk	Likelihood	Possible impact	Prevention/ and or mitigation measures
Political risk			
Shifted interested by central and local towards addressing the post COVID recovery agenda.	medium	high	Alignment of the policies on returnees' reintegration with the broader reforms on social protection of vulnerable including Roma; high-level advocacy by international organizations and the enlargement negotiations with central authority. Keeping regular involvement of senior policy officials throughout the project implementation. Involvement of the civil society, Roma NGOs etc. can ensure greater political engagement.
The cascading effect of COVID induced lockdown of the economy on central and local level public revenues, fiscal space and capacities of private sector to retain and create new jobs	high	high	Socio-economic impact of COVID-19 will be assessed and analysed at macro, community and individual level. High frequency quantitative and qualitative data will be collected on a longitudinal basis and used to develop COVID-informed measures and solutions.
Changes in the policy priorities due to Government turnover or Cabinet reshuffling may hamper the implementation	medium	medium	Ensure political neutrality of project deliverables i.e. central and local programmes for reintegration of returnees developed and implemented with broad stakeholders' participation.
Implicit scepticism in the impact of project-based funding of Roma inclusion measures	medium	medium	The project addresses systemic and institutional capacity gaps and applies the "mainstreaming" approach.
Inconsistency in applied approaches in projects supporting returnees' reintegration	medium	high	EC-WB-UNDP trilateral partnership will be leveraged to foster coordination.
Potential sensitivities/tensions between returnees and the local population. Increased number of returnees due to closed border, lack of opportunities for	medium	medium	Increased attention in the management of the community cohesion related acutities, ensure active and early engagement of local authorities and local NGOs in co-designing the local

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seasonal work in neighbouring countries and EU member states can increase intra and inter-ethnic tensions			programs; implement local level interventions, which will be of benefit for the entire community.
While the ultimate impact of COVID-pandemic on public revenues is yet to be assessed, it is very likely that central and local authorities will be operated under strained fiscal space.	medium	high	Project will work with local authorities and position the project as part of the broader COVID-19 response programme.
Political will of Western Balkan governments to implement strategies for reintegration of returnees and action plans on Roma and returnees. Willingness and capacities of public institutions to cooperate with all relevant actors on a local level. Low capacities of NGOs to implement small grants programmes in the area of social and employment service delivery Commitment for allocation of sufficient human and financial resources.	medium	high	Regular consultations will be undertaken with the counterparts through local offices to keep the momentum and reinforce government commitment regarding legislative as well as capacity-development activities.
Weak capacities (central and local level of governments) and the responsible staff endorse and implement whole of government and integrated approaches to service delivery. Transparent systems, openness for including user perspective in developing innovative solutions.	medium	medium	Alignment of the policies on returnees' reintegration with the broader reforms on social inclusion of vulnerable including Roma; high-level advocacy by international organizations and the enlargement negotiations with central authority. Keeping regular involvement of senior policy officials throughout the project implementation. Involvement of the civil society, Roma NGOs etc. can ensure greater political engagement
Commitment and capacities of local governance and public service providers to: i) reform governance practices; ii) to expand the stakeholders base for alternative collaborative structures; iii) accept local NGOs as reliable source of information that can help in the implementing personalized approaches to service delivery; iv) willingness to support the work of social enterprises and partner with employers; Flexibility from the central government to recognize and apply the results and tested models Employers have interest in becoming more inclusive and diverse at the workplace. Stakeholders are open to participate in creation of innovative solutions to integration of vulnerable people and see benefits of addressing the issue of reintegration for the broader community	medium	medium	Ensure active and early engagement of local authorities and local NGOs in co-designing the local programs; implement local level interventions, which will be of benefit for the entire community. Necessary regular consultations will be undertaken with the counterparts through local offices to keep the momentum and reinforce government commitment regarding legislative as well as capacity-development activities.

Stakeholder Engagement

Target Group

The project targets individual returnees, who face multiple vulnerabilities and barriers to integrate into the mainstream socio-economic life. The intersecting vulnerabilities are related to lack of regular income, long unemployment spells, precarious employment in informal sector, early school dropout and incomplete education, ethnic affiliation, prevailing gender norms and stereotypes and residence in underserved communities etc.

Beneficiaries

Considering that the improvement of the local governance systems for public service provision will be a central milestone for measuring the success of this Action, it will primarily target local government officials responsible for local economic development, public service providers e.g. PES offices, CSWs, VET centres as well as the economic agents e.g. small businesses, providers of business development services, financial intermediaries. NGOs will play a two-fold role as end-beneficiary and implementation partners. The Action targets both policymakers and frontline practitioners responsible for delivery of public services. In addition to centres for social welfare as key agents for the provision of immediate social safety for the returnees, the Action will closely engage and build capacities of public employment services, VET centres, schools, business development centres, employers etc.

The ultimate beneficiaries are the vulnerable returnees, their families and peers in local communities with improved access to public services and protection, employment and business opportunities.

Sustainability and Scaling Up

Ensuring sustainability of the project results is imperative, both to maximize the long-lasting impact of implemented activities on the wellbeing of individual beneficiaries' and receiving communities, and on the determination and commitment of central and local authorities to scale up the good practices beyond the test communities. It is in that context that the project aims at supporting systemic changes i.e. enhancing models of governance and financing of programmes for sustainable reintegration of the returnees. EC-WB-UNDP trilateral partnership will be harnessed to put leverage engagement on the topic.

To foster sustainability, the project activities have been formulated on the basis of the following three-pronged approach.

Firstly, the project has been designed by using an evidence-based approach. It builds upon the findings of the Regional Roma Survey, as well as the qualitative studies conducted by the UNDP and the World Bank: Roma Returnees to the Western Balkans, Breaking the Cycle of Roma Exclusion in the Western Balkans and Supporting Effective Reintegration of Roma Returnees in the Western Balkans. It is also in line with the EU's external migration policy and the overall EU policies on Roma integration, which are also reflected in the policies of pre-accession and accession countries where the Action will be implemented.

Secondly, the project has been designed by using a systemic approach to the reintegration of returnees, thus ensuring that this issue is mainstreamed in the broader social inclusion agenda through the implementation of a set of community-based livelihood and social cohesion activities. It will support a more coherent policy response towards the reintegration of returnees, in particular by working with the relevant authorities at the national and local levels and by strengthening the capacities of all relevant stakeholders. Along with the roll-out of the MIS, which will constitute the main repository of data on returnees, Integrated Case Management measures will provide a more holistic support to returnees, from employment to social protection services.

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Finally, sustainability will be enhanced by linking the project to other initiatives implemented by UNDP, World Bank, national IPA programmes and other organizations working in the area of empowerment, migration, promotion of human rights and social inclusion policies, which particularly target returnees and other vulnerable groups

Careful planning of measures, constant monitoring and roll-out of feedback mechanisms, as well as the inclusion of relevant stakeholders throughout the implementation process will be carried out to maximize the impact of the project.

The Institutional sustainability of the project will be fostered by enhancing governance mechanisms for coordination of local responses to migration and reintegration of returnees. The institutional response on migration and returnees is currently fragmented, leading to many parallel initiatives, being agreed without proper coordination, which in turn create overlaps and minimize impact. As a response, the Action will set up local platforms for designing and steering the implementation of local reintegration strategies and strengthen protocols for inter-institutional coordination, including through the use of digital tools to streamline administrative procedures and access to services by the returnees.

Political will and commitment for providing the requisite human and financial resources remain central for the successful implementation and sustainability of the results.

Communication and Visibility

Communication and visibility will be given high importance during the implementation of the action. A fully-fledged communications and visibility plan, detailed in Annex VI of the present Contribution Agreement, has been developed with communications experts in UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub and the UNDP Offices. The communication plan includes the preparation of project identity, templates and visibility guideline for reference, and audio-visual dissemination materials to be produced.

Communication products include: i) information and communication materials; ii) human-stories of end-beneficiaries with professionally captured photographs; iii) video stories, infographics, brochures leaflets, flyers, booklets developed. Video stories will be translated into local languages and will be published electronically on the UNDP IRH <http://www.eurasia.undp.org> and websites of the UNDP offices in the participating IPA beneficiaries. The video-tutorials or other e-services to be developed under this project shall be uploaded on the web portals of respective institutions.

EU Delegations in each IPA beneficiary participating in the project as well as DG NEAR will be provided with regular information briefs. Links can be available to EUD webpages.

In the inception phase, the IRH team and UNDP Offices will organize at least one public event in each of the participating IPA beneficiaries to present the action, aiming to ensure transparency regarding the use of funds, coordination with other relevant activities being implemented and ultimately raising awareness about the issue and the need for action. Bearing in mind that social distancing measures are in place to contain the spread of COVID-19 infections, inception meetings might be organized virtually or in a combined format with physical and online presence.

Regional workshops and policy clinics will be held to promote peer to peer exchange and to disseminate information on the progress and the final results. Media representatives will be regularly briefed and fed with project updates.

The communication and visibility plan will be customized to different target audiences (policy and decision makers, business community, civil society, general public, etc.).

Visibility activities will be implemented in accordance with the provisions of Art. 8 of the General Conditions (Annex II to the Contribution Agreement) and with the Joint visibility guidelines for EC-UN

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actions in the field⁹. The implementation of the communication activities shall be funded from the amounts allocated to the action.

IV. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Cost Efficiency and Effectiveness

This Action will be implemented by UNDP under Direct Implementation Modality. During the implementation, a regular communication and coordination will be ensured with the World Bank, responsible for the implementation of Activity 2.1. *Central level reintegration strategies and other relevant policy documents* under Component 2 of the EU Action Document. This will entail technical assistance and capacity building of central level authorities of IPA beneficiaries to design and implement effective returnee reintegration policies as well as to implement local level livelihoods programmes for returnees. A regular communication and coordination between UNDP and the World Bank experts at regional level and in IPA beneficiaries will ensure coherence and consistency in policy-related issues.

Project Management and Project Office Costs

Sustainable Development Team Leader at Istanbul Regional Hub (IRH) will be responsible for providing strategic guidance, and direction to the project team and for liaising with UNDP senior management in the Istanbul Regional Hub and in country offices on strategic issues. This will ensure effective linkages of this action with strategic policy and other project initiatives of relevance for migration agenda.

Day-to-day implementation and monitoring will be vested with the Project Management Team (regional and country-level). The Project Management Team will include staff responsible for providing technical assistance, expertise and guidance. Regional Manager will also provide capacity to link up to with regional platforms which tackle issues relevant to returnees social and economic inclusion.

The UNDP Country Offices will carry the primary responsibility for implementation of activities and dissemination of information about the Action; a two-member management team in each IPA beneficiaries from the first wave will be hired, comprising of local project coordinator (70% of work time) and a full-time project associates. The team will be responsible for the operational implementation of local activities, contribute to quality control of field work and building and expanding partnership networks of central/local level institutions and organizations involved in the specific activities. UNDP offices will moreover, carry the main responsibility regarding financial transparency, administrative and procurement support during the project implementation

The human resources required for the implementation of the project at regional level will comprise of a full time Regional Project Manager, a half time project associate and one part time communication specialist. Additional expertise will be contracted for specific tasks. In the three IPA beneficiaries from the first wave a two-member team, comprising of a local project coordinator and a project assistant will be hired.

1. Regional Project Manager

The Regional Project Manager will be responsible for day-to-day management of the Action. More specifically this includes timely and efficient delivery of the envisaged results. The Regional Project Manager will carry the ultimate responsibility for the quality assurance of the technical assistance and transparent and credible implementation of operational, financial and administrative procedures. Moreover, he/she will also serve as a resource person for national level activities, ensure coherence and technical credibility in applied methodologies, policy approaches and offered solutions; advocate and promote the issues of reintegration of vulnerable returnees at regional level and facilitate peer-level

⁹ https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/rome/documents/eu_united_nations/ec_un_joint_visibility_guidelines_en.pdf

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exchange. Regional Project Manager will be responsible for ensuring high professional standards and quality of commissioned policy and technical studies.

2. Local Project Coordinators (3)

Three local project coordinators will be hired to manage day-to-day implementation of the activities in the three IPA beneficiaries included in the first wave i.e. Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia. Local project coordinators shall be responsible for supervision of contracted experts and engaged NGOs, outreach and coordination with national and local counterparts, as well as with international organizations and donors active in this area, primarily the World Bank and EUD. They will be responsible for and the first level of quality assurance of the technical assistance products of contracted experts. The local project coordinators will provide regular updates to the Regional Project Manager on the progress achieved and impediments and risks faced in the course of the implementation and escalate the critical issues for attention of the Regional Project Manager and the Senior Management in case they arise.

3. Communications Specialist:

Supporting the Project Manager in technical aspects of communication and visibility activities, including production of audio-visual products. The communication specialist will ensure that all awareness-raising activities adhere to and are fully aligned with the Communication & Visibility Plan and strategy agreed between the EU and UNDP. Overall, the Communications Specialist will commit 12 months to support the project implementation.

4. Project Assistants (4):

In total 4 Project Assistants will be engaged under the Project (1 in IRH and 3 in the participating IPA beneficiaries). These will be responsible for providing support in the project implementation, identification of suitable procurement modalities transparent, effective and streamlined procurement; providing support in preparation of budget revisions, supporting the financial monitoring and reporting; assisting in logistics and organizing events etc.

In addition, services of external companies and individual experts will be used for implementation of selected activities. This external expertise will be contracted based on a competitive selection process in accordance to the UNDP's Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures.

In implementing this project, there are several categories of costs that are envisaged, such as office rent, internet, telecommunication, stationary, translation, printing, use of vehicles for transportation and other general expenses necessary for the functioning of UNDP IRH and 3 CO project teams at as indicated in the Budget of the Action, Annex 3 to the EU-UNDP Contribution Agreement.

Financial support to third parties

1. The objectives and results to be obtained with the financial support

Three small grants programmes will be developed to support the implementation of the local returnee reintegration strategies.

- i) Local NGOs, will be eligible to apply for a small grant for implementation of innovative approaches to provision of social services that reach out to returnees and other marginalized groups;
- ii) Local government authorities and local NGOs will be eligible to apply for a small grant for designing and implementation of community cohesion programmes;
- iii) Individual returnees or group of returnees will be eligible to apply for innovative programmes for business start up and partnership with employers.

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Small grant programmes is expected to identify and mobilize the marginalized and underserved returnees, who are typically invisible for the public sector providers. Moreover, small grants programme aim to showcase successful models of strategic partnerships with the private sector.

Local NGOs are in a unique position to reach out to the most marginalized and disadvantage families, to provide personalized support as well as to accompany the vulnerable in each and every step of the process of economic empowerment and social inclusion of returnees. Under *Activity 3.1. Development of (digital) tools for the public service providers and NGOs for streamlined service provision to returnees*, three calls for small grants will be organized for engagement of local NGOs for providing social services to returnees. In total 27 small grants will be awarded i.e. three per beneficiary municipality with a maximum value of EUR 10,000 per grant during the Year 2 and Year 3 and EUR 5,000 per grant during the Year 4. Depending on the locally identified priorities, it is estimated that the small grants may support the provision of services up to 2,350 returnees and their family members in obtaining personal IDs, accessing health care, targeted social assistance, school certificates, dissemination of information, assessment of individual vulnerabilities and development of individual and family profiles etc. The exact number of beneficiaries will be determined during the implementatino period.

Local government authorities have a unique position and capacities to mobilize all locally available resources and relevant stakeholders to take part in the social cohesion programmes. For this purpose, under *Activity 2.3. Promoting social cohesion by organizing community-based programmes*, two calls for proposals will be launched in each of the 9 beneficiary municipalities for supporting community social cohesion programmes. In total, this Action will support 36 small grants i.e. 4 per beneficiary municipality with a maximum value of EUR 20,000 per individual grant, targeting an estimated number of 5,400 returnees and their neighbours. The exact number of targeted individuals will be determined during the implementatino period. The thematic focus of the calls will be aligned with the priorities identified in the local reintegration strategies related to the community needs in the area of education, culture, health, environmental and other public goods.

The final decision regarding the eligibility criteria of the local government authorities, NGOs individual returnees or groups of individuals for accessing the grant scheme will be made by UNDP upon the detailed design of the grant schemes to be supported under this programme.

The small grants programme will enable the beneficiary local government units and NGOs to apply into practice the knowledge and skills that will be acquired under the capacity building component. The main objective of such implementation arrangement is on one hand to seize the comparative advantages of local NGOs and local government authorities hence ensuring effective implementation of the local strategies and action plans and on the other hand to develop and test the methodologies and procedures for introduction of social contracting as a future model for engagement of local NGOs as service providers and innovative solutions for reaching out to vulnerable people.

The third type of call for small grants will be related to the implementation of Activity 2.2. Innovative programmes in supporting business start-ups and productive partnerships with local businesses under. Individual returnees or a group of returnees will be invited to submit business ideas for starting an own business or for entering into business partnerships with other returnees or unemployed from identified vulnerable groups. The programme will pay particular attention and target the integration of women and youth in the entrepreneurship programmes. Details regarding the eligibility criteria, assessment and evaluation of the business ideas will be developed, once a detailed insights of the economic potentials and opportunities will be obtained. Nonetheless, considering the ultimate objective of the Action to ensure sustainable reintegration of the returnees, the criteria will be designed to prioritize business ideas with higher job creation potential, possibility to expand or complete existing local value chains or businesses with significant environmental or energy efficiency impact etc. Women or youth candiates will be given advantage. Different legal formats of business partnerships will be explored and promoted, suitable to the

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types of proposed businesses. In total, 90 small grants will be awarded i.e. 10 per beneficiary municipality, which is expected to generate during the second or third year 270 new jobs in targeted communities. The exact number of new jobs will be determined during the implementatino period.

The award of grant will need to be done in line with UNDP's rules and regulations.

2. The different types of activities eligible for financial support

- Outreach activities of NGOs to potential participants for dissemination of information regarding the available services for returnees, opportunities for participation in skills development programmes, internships and entrepreneurship and business start-up programmes;
- Provision of social services to returnees and their families by local NGOs relate to legal aid, psycho-social support, access to personal IDs, access to targeted social assistance etc.;
- Supporting implementation of community cohesion programmes in the area of education, culture, health and care services, envrionment or energy efficiency;
- Investment in equipment, raw materials and small adaptation of the infrustructure for starting a new business.

3. The types of persons or categories of persons that may receive financial support

- Local returnees that will participated in the vocational training and other skills development programmes in a form of a small financial stipend for covering daily costs;
- Individual returnees or group of individuals engaged in the business start-up programme. However, it's worth noting that the smal grant will be provided in kind in the amount of the grant.

4. The criteria for selecting entities and individuals and giving the financial support

- i) Local NGOs will have to demonstrate: i) experience in implementing programmes for socio-economic empowerment of vulnerable people ii) experience facilitating community dialogue iii) established trust in local community; iv) proven capacity and knowledge of relevant laws, national public policies and regulation; v) fieldwork experience in activities related to socio-economic inclusion of returnees, Roma and/or other groups at risk for social exclusion.
- ii) All beneficiary municipalities and local government units will be eligible to participate in the small grants programme.
- iii) Based on a competitive process, individuals with best business ideas will be awarded a grant. Business ideas will be evaluated based on the following criteria: job creation and growth potential; businesses that can expand or complete existing local value chains; businesses with significant environmental or energy efficiency impact; businesses established by women or youth.

5. The criteria for determining the exact amount of financial support for each third entity

For the small grants, awarded to local NGOs or local government authorities, the exact amount will be determined based on the established targets in terms of number of direct and indirect beneficiaries and the methodology for estimation of the value/cost per service, which is going to be developed under the project.

For businees start-up programmes, the grant amount will be approved based on the presented business plan and technical specification, which will be evaluated by external experts. Moreover, the total amount may vary depending on the number of new jobs created under the programme.

6. The maximum amount that may be given

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- i) 10,000 EUR per grant to a local NGOs or in total EUR 225,000 for provision of social services to returnees described under Activity 3.1.
- ii) 20,000 EUR per grant of in total EUR 720,000 for local government authorities or local NGOs for the implementation of community cohesion programmes, described under Activity 2.3.
- iii) 10,000 EUR per individual returnee or a group of returnees and non-returnees who will decide to partner in a joint business or in total EUR 900,000, described under Activity 2.2..

7. Contracting

Grantees will be contracted using UNDP procurement /programmatic contracts - the Low Value Grants or Responsible Party Agreements or contract on goods or services. Budgets of the contract shall be scrutinized by the Project Team to get the best value for money with cost effective results.

8. Implementation

Grantees will be expected to implement their projects according to the contractual arrangements that are stipulated in the UNDP Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures. As needed, consultations and technical assistance will be provided to the grantees to help with troubleshooting and to ensure proper implementation. The grantees will be periodically invited to attend trainings, networking meetings to enhance their operational capacities and to have the opportunities to develop new partnerships. In case of delays related to unexpected changes due to the political circumstances or other objective reasons, the Project Management Team will assess the need for issuing a no-cost extension for the grantees.

9. Monitoring

Rigorous monitoring will be undertaken by the Project Management Team by means of field visits and participation in key public events. Joint EUD-UNDP monitoring missions will be organized as well based on prior agreement and in line with Article 10 of the General Conditions of the EU-UNDP Contribution Agreement. On-site monitoring visits will be documented through monitoring reports. Furthermore, organizations that will receive grants will have to submit to UNDP interim narrative and financial reports according to their individual schedule of payment. Transfer of next instalments will be subject to successful implementation of activities by grantees.

V. RESULTS FRAMEWORK/LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

EXPECTED OUTPUTS	OUTCOME/OUTPUT INDICATORS ¹⁰	TARGETS					DATA COLLECTION METHODS & RISKS
		Value	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	
Impact (Overall objective) To contribute to reducing the socio-economic gap between Roma and non-Roma populations and the discrimination of Roma women, men and children in the Western Balkans and contribute to support effective reintegration of vulnerable returnees from the EU with particular attention to Roma.	Indicator # 0 Socio-economic gap between Roma and non-Roma decreased, in the five priority areas by 2024 in the IPA II Beneficiaries, reflected in concrete improvements in the living conditions of Roma communities and an access to public services equal to that of other citizens						Data source and collection method: Annual government reports on the progress; Independent assessment by civil society organisations and international organizations, such as Roma Inclusion Index. Regional Surveys, if available EU progress reports and regional surveys if available; Frequency: every 6-month in the mid-year reviews and annual progress reports. Responsibility: UNDP Project Manager and Local Coordinators
Outcome (Specific Objective 2) To enhance the capacity of Western Balkan authorities at central and local level to implement successful returnee reintegration policies and respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable returnees	Indicator # 1 Local level action plans for the reintegration of returnees adopted and successfully implemented in a selected number of localities.	Weak central and local systems to support effective socio-economic integration of returnees in the Western Balkans <i>Baseline: 2019</i>	All 9 target municipalities have developed draft local reintegration strategies	All 9 municipalities have adopted local reintegration strategies, and allocated budget funds for implementation	Annual reviews and allocated budgets for implementation of 9 local strategies for reintegration of returnees	Annual reviews and allocated budgets for implementation of 9 local strategies for reintegration of returnees	Data source and collection method: Surveys and data assessment from the same action; Independent assessment by civil society and international organisations Budgetary commitments, statistics Reports, Minutes of Municipal decisions. Frequency: every 6-month in the mid-year reviews and annual progress reports. Responsibility: UNDP Project Manager and Local Coordinators

¹⁰ It is recommended that projects use output indicators from the Strategic Plan IRRF, as relevant, in addition to project-specific results indicators. Indicators should be disaggregated by sex or for other targeted groups where relevant.

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Output 1 (ref. to key results 2.3 and 2.6 of the EU Action Document) Local returnee integration strategies are developed with selected municipalities	Indicator # 1.1. Number of local returnees reintegration strategies in place	The issue of reintegration of returnees is not systematically addressed at local level. Returnees' needs are mainly addressed by local NGOs from donor funding. <i>Baseline: 2019</i>	0% of activities in the local reintegration strategies	20% of activities in the local reintegration strategies implemented	40% of activities in the local reintegration strategies implemented	50% of activities in the local reintegration strategies implemented	Data source and collection method: Reports produced during the action implementation including government reports and shadow reporting by NGOs Municipalities and local council reports and minutes Surveys and data assessment from the same action Independent assessment by civil society and international organisations Budgetary commitments, statistics Reports, Minutes of Municipal decisions Municipal annual reports on social service delivery; Mapping of social services report Minutes of Municipal decisions PES reports CSW and PES reports
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	<p>Indicator # 1.1.1 Number of functional local multi-stakeholder platforms that promote returnees' reintegration</p>	<p>Some municipalities have experience in facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships for promoting employment. As part of ROMACTD Council of Europe has conducted a number of local level capacity building activities and advocacy on the issue of reintegration.</p> <p><i>Baseline: 2019</i></p>	<p>Local multi-stakeholders platforms for reintegration of returnees established in 9 beneficiary municipalities</p>	<p>Local multi-stakeholder platforms functional: 4 meetings held; 2 partnerships per beneficiary municipalities established</p>	<p>Local multi-stakeholder platforms functional: 4 meetings held 2 partnerships per beneficiary municipalities established</p>	<p>Local multi-stakeholder platforms functional: 2 meetings held 1 partnerships per beneficiary municipalities established</p>	
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<p>Output 2 (ref. to key results 2.4. and 2.6 of the EU Action Document)</p> <p>Elements of local returnee integration strategies are implemented in selected municipalities, including innovative activities on livelihoods, skills building, etc.</p>	<p>Indicator # 2.1. Number and quality of local returnee reintegration strategies components implemented including number of returnees involved in activities aimed at improving their livelihoods, number of returnees accessing mental health support, number of kids reintegrated in the education system:</p>	<p>Limited models operational on a local level to support inclusion of vulnerable groups</p> <p>Vulnerable returnees have limited access to local employment services</p> <p>No available data regarding clients assessment of the quality of local services</p> <p><i>Baseline: 2019</i></p>	0	30 % of surveyed clients (service providers and end-beneficiaries) satisfied with the quality of delivered services	50 % of surveyed clients (service providers and end-beneficiaries) satisfied with the quality of delivered services	70 % of surveyed clients (service providers and end-beneficiaries) satisfied with the quality of delivered services	<p>Data source and collection method:</p> <p>Surveys and data assessment from the same action</p> <p>Independent assessment by civil society and international organisations</p> <p>Budgetary commitments, statistics Reports, Minutes of Municipal decisions</p> <p>Municipal annual reports on social service delivery; Mapping of social services report</p> <p>Activity progress reports, PES, CSW and MLSP Reports,</p> <p>Reports produced during the action implementation including government reports and shadow reporting by NGOs</p> <p>Frequency: every 6-month in the mid-year reviews and annual progress reports.</p> <p>Responsibility: UNDP Project Manager and Local Coordinators</p>
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	Indicator # 2.1.1. Number men and women returnees participating in employability programmes a) digital skills b) technical skills c) soft skills and d) internships		n.a.	630	630	180	
	Indicator # 2.1.2 Number men and women returnees receiving psycho-social support		n.a.	90	90	30	
	Indicator # 2.1.3. Number of unemployed men and women returnees employed in local companies		0	45	45	18	
	Indicator # 2.2.1. Number of unemployed returnees starting their own business or partnering with local companies		n.a.	27 ¹¹	36	27	
	Indicator # 2.2.2. Number of unemployed returnees employed in the new businesses started by the returnees		n.a.	27 ¹²	72	27	
	Indicator # 2.3.1. Number of activities carried out addressing social barriers etc.).		n.a.	9	12	6	
	Indicator # 2.3.2. Number ¹³ of men and women (returnees, family members and neighbours) benefiting from community-based activities promoting social cohesion.		n.a.	1800	2400	1200	

¹¹ The number reflects direct beneficiaries; however, the expected number of employments is expected to be higher, considering that the project will pilot innovative models of co-working spaces, social cooperative, business partnerships

¹² The number reflects direct beneficiaries; however, the expected number of employments is expected to be higher, considering that the project will pilot innovative models of co-working spaces, social cooperative, business partnerships

¹³ Number of men and women benefiting from the community-based activities will be defined once the specific project is prioritized. As a rule, the project will prioritize broad-based initiatives, covering a higher number of community members

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	Indicator # 2.4. Number participants in regional peer dialogue		n.a.	45	n.q.	45	
Output 3 (ref. Key results 2.5. and 2.6 of the EU Action Document) Significant number of urgent administrative issues faced by returnees are addressed.	Indicator # 3.1. Number ¹⁴ of men and women returnees benefiting from the streamlined access to social safety nets e.g. number of children from returnee families enrolled in schools, number of men and women obtaining personal IDs, number of men and women getting access to social financial assistance, number of men and women receiving free legal aid etc	Countries have data related to registered returnees under readmission arrangement. None of the Western Balkan IPA beneficiaries implements integrated service delivery in a systematic manner. Some countries have some form of legal document envisioning integrated service delivery for returnees but not operational in practice. NGOs and public service providers lack practical knowledge <i>Baseline: 2019</i>	n.a.	900	900	450	Data source and collection method: Information obtained by public institutions and/or NGOs involved in first interview; Technical Reports from the MLSP Reports produced during the action implementation including government reports and shadow reporting by NGOs Municipalities and local council reports and minutes Data in official registries and schools Frequency: every 6-month as reported through interim Progress reports. Responsibility: UNDP Project Manager and Local Coordinators

¹⁴ Target numbers can be defined, once the municipalities are selected and a stock taking analysis of the number and vulnerabilities profile of returnees is completed

	Indicator # 3.2. Number of specialists from public service providers and NGO representatives trained in a) profiling; b) case management process; c) newly introduced services and % of the trained reporting they have improved their skills for providing services to returnees		n.a.	270 ¹⁵	270	n.a.	
	Indicator # 3.3. Number of NGOs having been engaged under social contracting model for delivering services to returnees		n.a.	9 ¹⁶	18	9	

¹⁵ As a minimum, the project will develop the protocols and strengthen capacities in socio-economic profiling of local employment centres, centres for social work and local NGOs

¹⁶ Some NGOs may appear as service providers during year 2 and 3



MONITORING AND EVALUATION

In accordance with the programming policies and procedures outlined in the UNDP User Guide, the Action will be monitored on a regular basis and will provide to the Steering Committee annual progress reports.

Progress will be monitored and assessed against the qualitative and quantitative indicators outlined in the Results and Resources Framework.

Within the annual cycle, the following monitoring actions shall be carried out as specified in detail in the Monitoring Plan presented below.

Annual Review Report shall be prepared by the Project Manager and shared with the Steering Committee members, two months after completion of 12-month implementation period. The annual report will provide, among others, an in-depth context and stakeholders analysis, describe the achievements against the annual targets and pinpoint the eventual adaptation required in the project strategy and work plan.

At the latest within six months after the Action's completion, the final narrative and financial report will be submitted to the Steering Committee and, upon approval, to the European Commission.

In the reporting process, a strong emphasis will be placed on soliciting feedback from end users. Where feasible monitoring frameworks will ensure that reports and collected data capture the tangible impact of the action on men and women and on different categories of vulnerable groups etc.

External evaluation will be commissioned at the end of the Action in accordance with the UNDP evaluation policies.

In accordance with UNDP's programming policies and procedures, the project will be monitored through the following monitoring and evaluation plans:

Monitoring Plan					
Monitoring Activity	Purpose	Frequency	Expected Action	Partners	Cost
Track results progress	Progress data against the results indicators in the RRF will be collected and analysed to assess the progress of the project in achieving the agreed outputs.	Quarterly	The project will be monitored by assessing progress against the qualitative and quantitative indicators outlined in the Project Results and Resources Framework. The indicators will be further refined during the inception phase of the project. Slower than expected progress will be addressed by project management.	UNDP IRH and UNDP Offices	
Monitoring	Monitoring the progress and early detection of issues and emerging implementation risks. Ensuring compliance with UNDP's Social and Environmental Standards	In line with monitoring plan	A monitoring plan shall be activated in the Corporate information management system -ATLAS and updated at regular intervals to track the key management actions/event. To assess the progress, periodic monitoring shall be conducted through site visits in accordance with proposed schedule in the annual work plan. Upon expressed interest, members of the Steering Committee shall be informed on the timing and invited to join the field visits.	UNDP IRH and UNDP Offices	
Risk Management	Identify specific risks that may threaten the achievement of intended results. Identify and monitor risk management actions.	Quarterly	Based on the initial risk analysis, a risk log will be activated and regularly updated by reviewing the external environment that may affect the implementation. Major risks and obstacles, which might affect the theory of change will be escalated for review and approval by the Project Steering Committee.		
Learn	Knowledge, good practices and lessons will be captured from the project onset, as well as actively sourced from partners and integrated back into the project.	At least annually	From the onset, a lessons-learned log shall be activated and updated regularly to ensure continuous organizational learning and adaptation of methodological approach in implementing similar actions in the future. This log will also facilitate the preparation of the Lessons-learned Report at the end of the implementation.	UNDP IRH and UNDP Offices	
Annual Project Quality Assurance	Implementation process and results will be assessed against UNDP's quality standards to	Annually	Areas of strength and weakness will be reviewed by project management and used to inform decisions	UNDP IRH and	

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	identify the strengths and weaknesses hence make informed decisions to improve the project.		to improve project performance.	UNDP Offices	
Review and Make Course Corrections	Internal review of data and evidence from all monitoring actions to inform decision making.	At least annually	Performance data, risks, lessons and quality will be discussed by the project board and used to make course corrections.	UNDP IRH and UNDP Offices	
Project Reports	A progress report will be presented to the Steering Committee and key stakeholders, providing quantitative and qualitative evidence of achieved progress against pre-defined annual targets, an updated risk log with mitigation measures, and any other short-term review reports prepared during the reporting period.	Annual reports and Final Project Report at the end of the project	Reporting will be provided in accordance to the provisions of Article 3 of the General Conditions (Annex II to the Contribution Agreement). Annual Progress Report shall be prepared by the Project Coordinators and shared with the Steering Committee and submitted to EU. Annual reviews reports will form a basis for refinement of the approaches and activities envisaged for the next phase of project implementation. Within six months after project completion, the final report shall be submitted to EU.	UNDP IRH and UNDP Offices	
Project Review (Steering Committee)	The Steering Committee will hold regular project reviews to assess the performance of the project and review the Multi-Year Work Plan to ensure realistic budgeting over the life of the project. Steering Committee reviews will take place once a year, upon submission of the annual progress report. In the project's final year, the Steering Committee shall hold an end-of project review to capture lessons learned and discuss opportunities for scaling up and to socialize project results and lessons learned with relevant audiences.	Once a year with physical presence unless travel restrictions are in place	Any quality concerns or slower than expected progress should be discussed by the project board and management actions agreed to address the issues identified.	UNDP IRH and UNDP Offices	EUR 20,000

Evaluation Plan

A final external project evaluation will be commissioned at the end of the project in accordance with UNDP's evaluation policies¹⁷. This is without prejudice to European Union's prerogative set out in Art. 10 of the General Conditions. Parties will agree on the purpose, use, timing, financing mechanisms and Terms of reference for the external independent evaluator(s), in consultation with the project stakeholders. Before commissioning the external consultants, TORs will be shared with DG NEAR for comment.

Evaluation Title	Partners (if joint)	Related Strategic Plan Output	UNDAF/CPD Outcome	Planned Completion Date	Key Evaluation Stakeholders	Cost and Source of Funding
Final Evaluation		2.2	2	June 2024	Ministries of Labour and Social Policies, Ministries of Interior, national institutions and entities mandated to coordinate migration related issues and/or Roma Inclusion, State Employment Agencies, Centres for Social Welfare, local authorities, CSOs	EUR 50,000 project budget

¹⁷ UNDP Evaluation policy: http://www.UNDP.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_168289/lang--en/index.htm

VI. MULTI-YEAR WORKPLAN

EXPECTED OUTPUTS	PLANNED ACTIVITIES	TIMELINE ¹⁸															
		Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Year 4			
Output 1 (ref. to key results 2.3 and 2.6 of the EU Action Document) Local returnee integration strategies are developed with selected municipalities	Activity 1.1 Creation of multi-stakeholders' platforms in 9 municipalities (3 per IPA beneficiary)																
	1.1.1. Assessment of social and economic vulnerabilities of returnees in selected municipalities;																
	1.1.2. Assessment of local development potentials in selected municipalities, preparation of investment intelligence reviews, identification of local supply and value chains;																
	1.1.3. Assessment of institutional and individual capacity bottlenecks for accessing quality local services by the returnees both from public sector service providers and local NGO;																
	1.1.4. Technical support for multi-stakeholder platforms, organize periodic reviews of the progress and updates of local action plans implementation;																
	Activity 1.2. Preparation of local strategies, action plans and monitoring frameworks																
	1.2.1. Preparation of local strategies, action plans and monitoring frameworks;																
	1.2.2. Technical assistance for setting up a system for regular data collection to monitor the progress in the implementation of local returnees strategies;																
	1.2.3. Technical assistance for designing innovative economic empowerment programmes, based on identified investment potentials;																
Output 2 (ref. to key results	Activity 2.1. Integrated support to improve																

¹⁸ Dates are approximative and depend on when the travel restrictions will be lifted, and the team will be able to arrange missions. Considering that majority of activities will be implemented at local level, dates will be finalized once the preliminary findings of the local socio-economic and institutional capacity assessments will be completed.

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2.4. and 2.6 of the EU Action Document) Elements of local returnee integration strategies are implemented in selected municipalities, including innovative activities on livelihoods, skills building, etc.	employability of returnees																	
	2.1.1. Develop standard forms and guidelines for the preparation of individual employability improvement plans;																	
	2.1.2. Develop training curricula and deliver training in soft skills identified in the skills analysis;																	
	2.1.3. Develop training curricula and deliver training in digital and VET skills identified in the skills analysis;																	
	2.1.4. Develop curricula and deliver training in technical and VET skills;																	
	2.1.5. On-job training, apprenticeship and internship programmes;																	
	Activity 2.2. Implement innovative programmes in supporting business start-ups and productive partnerships with local businesses																	
	2.2.1. Implementation of innovative programmes for business start up, co-working spaces, creation of local value chains;																	
	2.2.2. Organize in person and online trainings in entrepreneurship, business start up and business growth;																	
	2.2.3. Provide coaching and mentoring support and business development services;																	
	2.2.4. Develop digital tools and applications in support of start up and growth of business, including in COVID-19 context;																	
	Activity 2.3. Promoting social cohesion by organizing community-based programmes																	
	2.3.1. Design SOP, eligibility and evaluation criteria for organizing social-cohesion programmes;																	
	2.3.2. Implement community-cohesion programmes;																	
	Activity 2.4. Regional dialogue among policy makers																	

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	and practitioners in the area of sustainable reintegration of returnees																
	2.4.1. Analysis of service gaps for reintegration of returnees at local level of the second wave of IPA beneficiaries;																
	2.4.2. Policy notes on experience and lessons learned from implemented strategies and programme;																
	2.4.3. Peer exchange of experiences among policy makers and practitioners from 6 IPA beneficiaries;																
Output 3 Significant number of urgent administrative issues faced by returnees are addressed. (ref. Key results 2.5. and 2.6 of the EU Action Document)	Activity 3.1. Streamline access and improve quality of services of returnees, including through digital tools by public service providers and local NGOs																
	3.1.1. Information materials for returnees regarding social protection entitlements, available services, including legal aid, psychosocial protection, health care etc.;																
	3.1.2. NGOs and civil society organizations support returnees and their family members in obtaining personal IDs, including for accessing health care, social services and school certificates, recognition of informal education;																
	3.1.3. Guidelines, standard forms and protocols for assessment of multi-dimensional vulnerabilities and case management of returnees;																
	Activity 3.2. Strengthen capacities of public service providers and local NGOs																
	3.2.1. Develop training materials and deliver training in new services for public service providers and the NGOs;																
	3.2.2. Support institutions in streamlining services including with the application of new digital tools;																
	3.2.3. Methodology for introducing models for outsourcing and financing of NGOs as local service providers;																
	3.2.4. Develop methodologies to determine the costs per services, KPIs for performance based payment;																

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Output 0	Project Management	Activity 0.1. Project Inception															
		0.1.1.Kick-off Workshops															
		0.1.2. Rapid assessment of potential municipalities															
		Activity 0.3. Steering Committee (one per year)															

List of key deliverables

Key Deliverables	TIMELINE ¹⁹
Output 1: Local returnee integration strategies are developed with selected municipalities	
3 country assessment reports for identifying potential beneficiary municipalities reflecting on socio-economic potentials, vulnerability assessment of returnees, institutional partners	Country assessment reports to be delivered at end of Q1
9 reports on assessment of social and economic vulnerabilities of returnees in beneficiary municipalities	Local vulnerabilities assessments to be delivered in Q3 and Q4
9 reports on assessment of socio-economic potentials of beneficiary municipalities	Local economic potential assessments to be delivered in Q3 and Q4
9 reports on assessment of institutional and individual capacity bottlenecks of public service providers and NGOs for delivery services to returnees	Local institutional capacity assessments to be delivered in Q3 and Q4
9 local multi-stakeholders' platforms established in beneficiary municipalities	Local multi-stakeholders platforms established and functional at the end of Q3
9 local returnees reintegration strategies, action plans and system for progress monitoring adopted by the beneficiary municipalities	Local reintegration strategies endorsed by local authorities in 5Q
18 reports from annual reviews and updates of local returnees' action plans	Annual reviews of local returnees strategies will be delivered during Q10 and Q14
Model methodology and operating procedures for implementation of innovative economic empowerment programmes	Methodologies for economic empowerment programmes will be delivered in Q5 and Q6
Output 2: Elements of local returnee integration strategies are implemented in selected municipalities, including innovative activities on livelihoods, skills building etc.	
Methodology and format of individual employability improvement plans developed for the 3 IPA beneficiaries	The envisaged methodologies will be delivered in the period Q4 – Q6
6 digital-based tools for supporting new entrepreneurs on how to start and grow their business developed	digital tools will be developed at the end of Q8 and Q13, following a co-designing process
6 thematic policy notes with recommendations and lessons learned from the implementation of socio-economic integration measures for returnees	The policy notes will be finalized in Q8 and Q13
2 reports on service gaps for reintegration of returnees at local level of the second wave of IPA beneficiaries	Reports will be delivered in Q6 and Q11
2 Proceedings from regional meetings	Reports will be delivered in Q9 and Q14
Output 3: Significant number of urgent administrative issues faced by returnees are addressed	
3 country specific guidelines, standard forms and protocols for assessment of multi-dimensional vulnerabilities and case management	Guidelines, standard forms and protocols, will be delivered during Q8
Training materials for public service providers and local NGOs in new services	Training materials will be delivered during Q9 and Q10
Methodology for introducing models for outsourcing and financing of NGOs as local service providers (costing, eligibility	Methodologies to be delivered during Q9-Q11

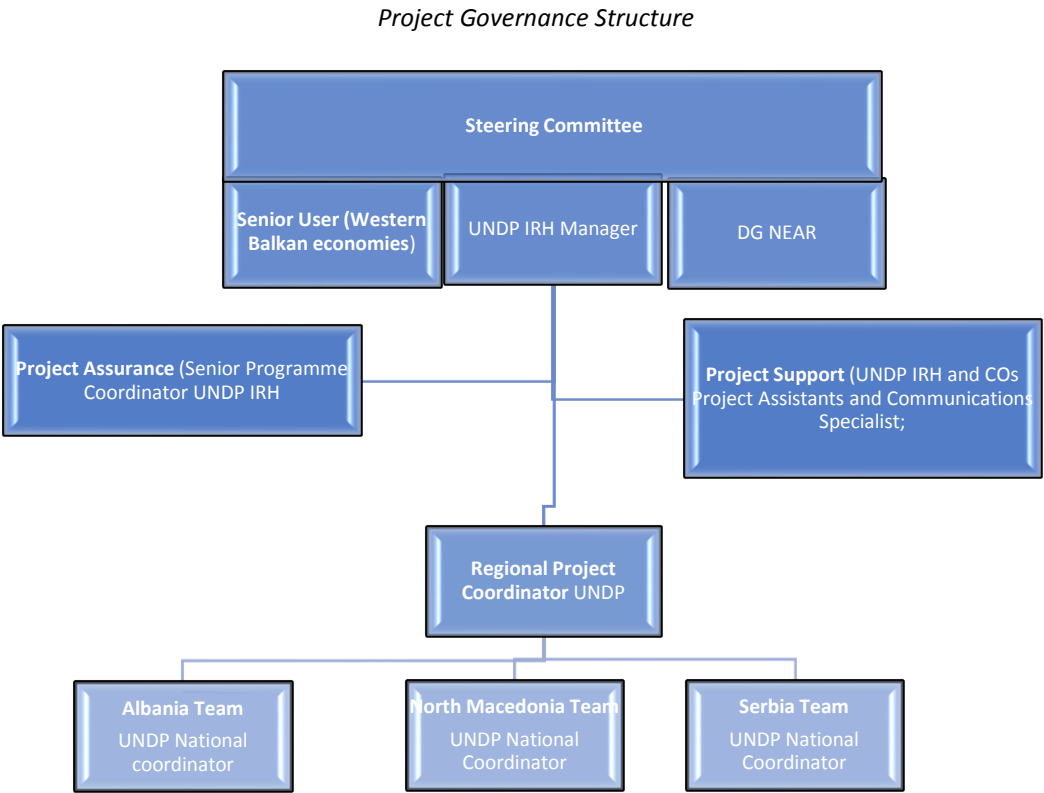
¹⁹ Dates are approximative and depend on when the travel restrictions will be lifted, and the team will be able to arrange missions. Considering that majority of activities will be implemented at local level, dates will be finalized once the preliminary findings of the local socio-economic and institutional capacity assessments will be completed.

criteria, performance-based management, KPIs)	
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VII. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The implementation of the Action will be overseen and guided by a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will include representatives from the European Commission and UNDP. Where relevant and appropriate, a representative from the World Bank and/or Council of Europe shall be invited as observes.

The Steering Committee will meet at least once a year to review the progress and discuss the priority issues in the next period. Project activities will be implemented in a period of 44.5 months, starting as of 15 October 2020.



The Steering Committee will be responsible to:

- Provide overall leadership and steer results towards the policy objectives identified with the project partners;
- Take strategic decisions by consensus, including the approval of substantive project revisions i.e. changes in the project document;
- Approve annual work plans, annual budgets and progress reports as needed;
- Address any relevant project issues raised by the Project manager and authorise any deviation from agreed work plans;

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- Provide guidance on new and emerging project risks and agree on possible countermeasures and management actions.
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