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REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

ACTION DOCUMENT <NUMBER>: EU FOR MODERN EDUCATION AND SKILLS

1. SYNOPSIS

1.1. Action Summary Table¹

Title of the action	EU for Modern Education and Skills
Beneficiary(y)/(ies) of the action	Republic of North Macedonia
Proposed year of financing	2025
OPSYS	[OPSYS business reference]: <reference>
ABAC	ABAC Commitment level 1 number: <reference>
Basic Act	Financed under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)
Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)	Yes Priorities: “Human Development” (100%)
EIP Flagship	No
Team Europe	No
Programming document	IPA III Programming Framework
PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION	
Window and thematic priority	Window 4: Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth Thematic Priority 1: Education, employment, social protection and inclusion policies, and health (100%)
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Main SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all Other significant SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels
DAC code(s)	Main DAC code: 111 Education, Level Unspecified (100%) 11110 Education policy and administrative management (35%) 11130 Teacher training (45%) 11182 Educational research (20%)
Main Delivery Channel	12000 Recipient Government

¹ This section is to be completed by the EU Office/Delegation.

Targets	<input type="checkbox"/> Climate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity			
Markers (from DAC form)	General policy objective @	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Aid to environment @	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Disaster Risk Reduction @	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Inclusion of persons with Disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Nutrition ² @	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	RIO Convention markers @	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Biological diversity @	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Combat desertification @	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change mitigation @	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change adaptation @	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Internal markers and Tags	Policy objectives	Not targeted	Significant objective
EIP		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
EIP Flagship		NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	
Tags:		NO	YES	
Transport		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Energy		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Environment and climate resilience		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Digital	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Economic development (incl. private sector, trade and macroeconomic support)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

	Human Development (incl. human capital and youth)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Health resilience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Migration and mobility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Agriculture, food security and rural development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Rule of law, governance and Public Administration reform	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Digitalisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Tags	NO	YES
	digital connectivity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	digital governance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	digital entrepreneurship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	digital skills/literacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	digital services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Connectivity @	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Tags	NO	YES
	digital connectivity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	energy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	transport	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	education and research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Migration @	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reduction of Inequalities @	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	COVID-19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

BUDGET INFORMATION

Amounts concerned	Budget line: <budget line> Total estimated cost: EUR 5 000 000.00 Total amount of EU budget contribution EUR 5 000 000.00
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MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation modalities (management mode and delivery methods)	Direct management through: - Procurement
Final Date for conclusion of Financing Agreement	At the latest by 31 December 2026

Final date for concluding contribution / delegation agreements, procurement and grant contracts	3 years following the date of conclusion of the financing agreement, with the exception of cases listed under Article 114(2) of the Financial Regulation
Indicative [operational implementation] period	72 months following the conclusion of the Financing Agreement
Final date for implementing the Financing Agreement	12 years following the conclusion of the Financing Agreement

1.2. Summary of the Action

The action "EU for Modern Education and Skills" aims to support comprehensive reforms in North Macedonia's education system, addressing critical challenges in alignment with national priorities, the European Commission's recommendations and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Overall Objective is to support the development of individuals' capacities to their full potential for prosperous, inclusive, greener, safer and sustainable, while the Specific Objective focuses on improving completion of inclusive and equitable quality primary and secondary education and training.

By supporting the development and revision of the legal framework, transitioning the pre-school sector under the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), developing an Action Plan for interinstitutional cooperation to improve student achievements, and strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of education policies, the action lays a solid foundation for coherent policy implementation. Simultaneously, empowering educational professionals through a reinforced system for continuous professional development (CPD), building a knowledge-sharing system among communities of practice, and strengthening initial teacher education (ITE) ensures a capable and skilled workforce. Additionally, the action will support the development and establishment of Centres for Excellence in VET (CoVEs), which will enhance vocational education quality and relevance. Inclusive education practices are reinforced by building the capacity of school staff to work with vulnerable groups, including Roma children and students with special educational needs (SEN), as well as supporting a sustainable school support system for students at risk. These reforms collectively aim to enhance the quality of education, promote inclusivity, and align national curricula with international standards, ultimately leading to better student outcomes and contributing to the broader socio-economic development of North Macedonia.

The action directly supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) by improving access to quality education for all, and SDG 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels) by building institutional capacities and fostering inclusive education systems. The objectives are in line with the priorities for Chapter 26 of the North Macedonia 2023 Report as well as the recommendations from the Sub-Committee on Innovation, Information Society and Social Policy.

The action is fully aligned with the IPA III Programming Framework's Thematic Priority 1, which focuses on education, employment, and social inclusion policies. It supports the specific objective of strengthening access to and the quality of inclusive education, vocational education, and lifelong learning opportunities at all levels. By addressing skills mismatches and enhancing initial teacher education, the action contributes to developing a skilled workforce capable of responding to labour market demands, in line with EU education and social policy goals.

This approach not only strengthens the resilience of the education system but also ensures that young people are equipped with the skills necessary for the digital and green transitions. Furthermore, the sustainability of the action is reinforced by the commitment of national institutions, particularly the Ministry of Education and Science, to integrate the reforms into long-term policy frameworks, ensuring that the benefits continue beyond the project's implementation period.

1.3 Beneficiary of the Action

The action shall be carried out in the Republic of North Macedonia.

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Context

The current situation with human capital and education in North Macedonia highlights both progress and ongoing challenges. Between 2010 and 2020, the country's Human Capital Index (HCI) increased slightly from 0.54 to 0.56, indicating that a child born in North Macedonia today would achieve only 56% of their potential human capital by adulthood, compared to their full potential if they had access to quality education and optimal health conditions. This figure remains below the average for European countries with similar development levels (63%) and is significantly lower than the EU average of 74%. A key contributor to this shortfall is the poor educational outcomes, which result in a significant loss of productivity over the course of an individual's life.

Educational challenges begin early and accumulate as children progress through the system. Although children are expected to complete 11 years of schooling by age 18, when adjusted for learning quality, this equates to only 7.3 years of effective education, meaning a loss of 3.7 years. This gap between the time spent in school and actual learning outcomes is a critical issue in North Macedonia. Although enrolment rates have improved across all levels of education in recent years, access remains relatively low compared to other countries in the region, especially in pre-school education, where only 42% of children are enrolled, far below the EU average of over 90%. Disparities in access to education are also pronounced among vulnerable groups. Children from poorer families and ethnic minorities, such as Roma, face higher rates of early school leaving and lower enrolment rates across all educational levels. For instance, less than 10% of children from the poorest quintile attend kindergarten, compared to nearly half from the wealthiest quintile. This gap persists through secondary and higher education, where only 15% of the poorest children are enrolled, compared to 65% from the wealthiest quintile. These inequities are reflected in academic performance as well, with PISA 2022 results showing that half of 15-year-olds in North Macedonia do not meet basic proficiency in science, mathematics, or reading. Socio-economic disparities exacerbate these outcomes, as students from lower-income families lag behind their wealthier peers by an equivalent of two years of schooling. Despite some improvements in educational access, the quality of education remains a major issue. Higher education in North Macedonia also faces quality concerns, with the country's higher education quality index significantly below the EU average and that of many regional peers. Addressing these gaps in access, quality, and equity is essential to improving human capital and unlocking the country's potential for long-term growth and development. Progress in legal reforms within the education sector has been slow, hindered by political instability and limited institutional capacity. Despite ongoing efforts, educational challenges persist at all levels, from primary to tertiary education. The **2018-2025 Education Strategy** remains the foundation for institutional activities in the education sector, aiming to address these challenges and support gradual development in line with established priorities.

The key policy priorities of the European Commission under the **IPA III framework** focus on strengthening access to and the quality of inclusive education at all levels and promoting lifelong learning. The framework emphasizes improving the governance and financing of education systems, fostering inter-sectoral cooperation, and addressing the skills gap by aligning education with labour market needs. Special attention is given to enhancing digital, technological, and innovative skills to prepare a resilient workforce for the future, while supporting low-skilled individuals and marginalized communities. This action directly contributes to these priorities by supporting ongoing legal reforms, empowering all educational professionals through targeted capacity development and system reforms promoting inclusive education, building school

environment for well-being and tackling basic literacy of vulnerable groups. Moreover, the action's emphasis on capacity building of national and local institutions aligns with the Commission's goal of strengthening the governance and strategic planning of education systems, ensuring a more effective allocation of resources and fostering long-term sustainability in education reform efforts.

The **Green Agenda for the Western Balkans** and the **Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans** provide the framework for the region's transition towards a more sustainable, green, and digital economy. These strategic initiatives have been aligned with the European Green Deal and emphasize decarbonisation, circular economy, biodiversity, and pollution control. For North Macedonia, this action directly contributes to these goals by supporting human capital development and legal reforms in education, enhancing the inclusivity of the school environment, and promoting lifelong learning. The activities under the action, such as strengthening policy development in the education sector (Output 1.1) and improving educational access for vulnerable groups (Output 1.4), are in line with the Green Agenda's pillars of inclusive growth and human capital development. Additionally, the support for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of teachers (Output 1.2) plays a crucial role in preparing citizens for a green and sustainable economy. By integrating education reforms with green and digital initiatives, the action supports North Macedonia's alignment with both the Green Agenda and the Economic and Investment Plan's focus on human capital and sustainable economic growth.

The action contributes to several key strategic objectives and measures outlined in North Macedonia's **Education Strategy for 2018-2025**. The action's focus on empowering teachers and educational professionals is aligned with *Priority IV: Improve Capacities of Human Resources*, which emphasizes the continuous improvement of teaching staff competencies and performance across all education levels. By supporting teacher training, particularly in digital competencies and green skills, this action will directly address the Strategy's goals of increasing professional competence and ensuring teachers are equipped to meet modern educational needs. Additionally, the action's work to strengthen the mentoring system for novel teachers and enhance institutional capacities is aligned with *Priority I: Improve and Harmonize the Legislative Base of Education* and *Priority III: Ensure Digital Literacy and Wide Use of ICT in Education and Training*. These objectives emphasize creating a solid legal foundation for reforms and advancing the integration of new technologies in the classroom, which are critical to improving the overall quality of education and making it more relevant to labour market demands. Moreover, the focus on inclusive education for marginalized groups, including children with disabilities and Roma students, supports the Strategy's emphasis on inclusive and multicultural education and ensuring full coverage and support for learners with special educational needs. Following the objectives defined in the Strategy, three Regional VET centres were established in 2021 and two new were introduced in 2023. The five Regional VET centres were selected by mapping out the potential in the VET sector, labour market and on the grounds of criteria such as performance level, private sector engagement and local support. Regional VET Centres provide VET and adult education, streamline reforms in the education process and are focused on enabling young people and adults to enter or re-enter the labour market with relevant qualification. While the further development of the Regional Centres will be supported through the Reform Agenda, this action will support the development of the concept for Centres for Excellence in VET (CoVEs).

This action contributes to North Macedonia's **Human Capital Strategy 2024–2030** within the objective to modernize the legal framework and improve governance. By supporting the further policy development of new laws for Vocational Education and Training, Adult Education and Secondary Education, the action will strengthen governance in the education sector and ensures the necessary legal and administrative frameworks are in place to drive educational reform. It is also aligned with the objective of improving the quality of teaching and learning by enhancing the continuous professional development of teachers, particularly in key areas such as digital skills and mentoring, which directly contributes to building the human capital needed for sustainable economic growth.

The action also supports the **National Action Plan for Mental Health** by promoting student well-being in schools through inclusive education policies and interventions. By fostering supportive school environments that address both educational and psychosocial needs, the action contributes to the broader goal of improving mental health outcomes for students and creating supportive learning environments.

The 2023 **North Macedonia Report** highlights that progress in reforming education curricula and reducing skills mismatches in North Macedonia is hindered by insufficient funding and human capacity. Despite an increase in the number of people with higher education qualifications, the curricula do not align well with labour market demands. State financial support for education is inadequate, and coordination between the education sector and businesses is weak. In 2022, public spending on education and training was 3.7% of GDP, below both the EU average (5%) and peer-country averages, obstructing the implementation of the 2018-2025 education strategy. This Action aligns with the EC recommendations by addressing key gaps in education reform, including enhancing teacher and institutional capacity, improving curricula for better students' achievements, while also tackling the funding and human capacity challenges highlighted in the 2023 North Macedonia Report.

This Action complements the North Macedonia **Reform Agenda 2024–2027** by focusing on areas that support and enhance education reform without overlapping the specific VET, adult education, and funding interventions for primary and secondary education outlined in the Reform Agenda. While the Reform Agenda emphasizes addressing skills mismatches through improved vocational education, enhanced access to work-based learning, and strengthened private sector partnerships, this Action concentrates on bolstering the foundational capacities of educational professionals, institutions, and the overall legal and strategic education framework. Specifically, it enhances continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, strengthens initial teacher education, builds professional competencies, and promotes inclusive education for marginalized groups such as students with disabilities and Roma children. By focusing on capacity development for teachers, future teachers, and other educational experts, this action contributes to improving the quality of education across all levels—from pre-school to secondary education—which indirectly supports the success of the reforms outlined in the Reform Agenda. Through capacity building of educational professionals and institutional stakeholders, the action enables the education system to better implement curriculum reforms, thus complementing the Reform Agenda's emphasis on VET, adult education, and funding of primary and secondary education, while avoiding duplication by concentrating on professional development and institutional capacity essential for sustaining long-term educational reforms.

The action also complements the Erasmus+ project "Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning in North Macedonia" by building on efforts to address the challenges in the adult education sector, particularly low participation in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) and the lack of coordinated actions in this area. While the Erasmus+ project focuses on creating a framework for adult education, digitalizing program verification processes, and enhancing the capacity of Regional VET Centres, this action will further support adult learning by organizing in-service training for teachers transitioning to adult education and supporting development and implementation of adult literacy programs.

The action also contributes to the achievement of the conclusions made on the **19th Sub-Committee on Innovation, Information Society and Social Policy** as it will ensure further steps to increase the enrolment rate and improve the quality of early and higher education; will step up efforts to increase enrolment and attendance of Roma children and children with disabilities in the mainstream school system, especially at primary level; and as well will take further steps in addressing the issues linked to the quality of education at primary and secondary level, as shown from the international tests' results.

2.2. Problem Analysis

Short problem analysis

The legal reform of the education system in North Macedonia is still ongoing, with key legislation—such as the Laws on Vocational Education and Training (VET), Adult Education, and Secondary Education—yet to be adopted by the parliament, a process anticipated to occur in 2025. In addition, MoES is currently reviewing the Law on Primary Education and the Law on National Qualification Framework (NQF) in order to proceed with its alignment with EU practices. Progress in drafting and enacting legal documents that contribute to the modernisation of the education sector has been lagging for years. Once these laws are adopted, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), along with other stakeholders, will require substantial support to develop the necessary bylaws and supplementary documents that will define the processes and procedures for implementation. Moreover, the newly elected government has announced plans to transfer the governance of

pre-school education—currently under the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth—to the MoES. For this transition to be effective, legal and organisational changes within the MoES will be essential. Currently, the 2018–2025 Education Strategy remains the primary guiding document for the education sector. However, the mechanisms for monitoring its implementation are not clearly defined, and existing targets and indicators are inadequate for a proper evaluation of reform progress. The newly elected government has also committed to developing a new Education Strategy by the end of 2025, which will define key objectives for the modernisation of the education system in North Macedonia, aligned with international standards. In addition, a new Adult Education Strategy is expected to be enacted by parliament in the same year. Given the capacity constraints within the MoES, there will be a significant need for support to effectively monitor, coordinate, and implement these strategic documents. This action will play a critical role in providing the necessary support to the MoES and other stakeholders for the development of a robust legal framework for the education system. It will also assist in the monitoring and evaluation of educational policies, while offering capacity-building support to ensure that all actors involved are capable of effectively carrying out these policies. Additionally, this action will support an institutional review process aimed at enhancing efficiency, enabling better coordination among stakeholders, and ensuring that the education system adapts to evolving needs and standards.

In North Macedonia, access to education and the right to lifelong learning are fundamental human rights, as recognised in international conventions, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. However, many adults, particularly from vulnerable groups, have been denied this right due to economic, social, and structural barriers. This has resulted in low levels of education, which in turn limits their employment opportunities and deepens social exclusion. Statistical data reveals significant educational challenges in the country: 61% of the registered unemployed are individuals without primary education or with only primary education, and 24.5% of the population over the age of 25 have an unsatisfactory level of education. In penitentiary institutions, 19.3% of inmates lack primary education, and each year, around 364 young people do not complete primary school. These figures demonstrate a pervasive lack of basic education and skills among the population, hindering individuals from participating fully in society or accessing the labour market. Adult education, particularly at the primary level, is often inaccessible, unattractive, and not tailored to meet the diverse needs of these populations. As a result, adults who missed out on education in their youth face persistent barriers to improving their skills and accessing employment. The limited availability of adult education and learning opportunities through the development of policies, system and programs as well as through capacity building of institutions that should implement adult literacy programs.

One of the permanent issues in the education sector is the insufficient availability of high-quality and accessible professional development opportunities for teachers. Despite the legal requirement that teachers complete 60 hours of training over three years, funding limitations—especially at the Bureau for the Development of Education—severely restrict teachers’ ability to meet these requirements. This funding gap threatens to lower the overall quality of instruction provided in schools and hinders the professional growth of teachers, impacting their ability to adapt to modern pedagogical practices.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) also faces challenges. While the Law on Higher Education Institutions for Teaching Staff was designed to regulate teacher education, its implementation has been delayed due to a lack of human and financial resources. This has postponed the law's entry into force, hindering the overall quality and standardisation of ITE programmes. Admission to ITE programmes is generally non-competitive, with most students securing places without meeting high entry requirements. While incentives, such as scholarships for mathematics and physics students, are in place to address teacher shortages in specific fields, the broader teacher pipeline remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, alternative pathways into the teaching profession, while available, face bureaucratic and practical barriers. Mid-career professionals seeking to transition into teaching must complete rigorous pedagogical preparation and a 45-day practicum, which can deter many potential candidates. Once teachers enter the profession, they face additional challenges. The one-year traineeship, guided by a mentor selected by the school principal, culminates in an exam, but the mentorship system is underdeveloped and lacks standardisation.

Professional development requirements, though enshrined in the 2019 Law on Teachers and Professional Associates, are not fully met due to budgetary constraints. Teachers must engage in CPD to progress through the career ladder, yet there is a severe shortage of accredited training programmes, and online training and

peer-learning opportunities are largely absent. While donor support has provided temporary relief by funding training programmes and creating a catalogue of accredited courses (namely through the World Bank), the sustainability of these initiatives is questionable. Without substantial state funding and commitment to teacher development, these opportunities may diminish, leaving teachers without the resources needed for their professional growth. The lack of systemic support for CPD not only undermines the professional competencies of teachers but also affects their ability to meet evolving educational needs, particularly in a system undergoing significant reforms. This action will provide critical support to strengthen both ITE and CPD systems, ensuring that teachers have access to continuous professional development opportunities that align with national standards and are adequately funded. Capacity-building efforts will also target the MoES and other educational institutions to create sustainable mechanisms for teacher development, essential for improving overall educational outcomes in North Macedonia. Additionally, the National Council for Higher Education, Science, and Research, established in 2021, has been tasked with policy development in these areas. However, the Council, consisting of 15 members elected by the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, faces challenges due to its lack of experience and capacity to adequately develop procedures and policies, which hinders the modernization of the higher education system.

According to the Education Strategy 2018-2025, three Regional VET Centres were established in 2021, with two additional centres introduced in 2023. The selection of these five Regional VET Centres was based on a comprehensive mapping of the potential within the VET sector, the labour market, and criteria such as performance levels, private sector engagement, and local support. The Regional VET Centres provide vocational education and training (VET) as well as adult education, spearheading reforms in the education system. Their primary focus is on equipping young people and adults with the relevant qualifications needed to enter or re-enter the labour market. Additionally, they offer services for the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNIL). To continue advancing reforms in vocational education and enhance students' skills during their studies, it is planned to establish Regional VET Centres in seven out of the eight planning regions by the end of 2027. These centres will be reconstructed, fully equipped, and made operational through the ongoing reform agenda. The next step will be the development of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs). CoVEs are formed through networks of partners that create local "skills ecosystems," offering high-quality vocational skills to both young people and adults. They contribute to regional development, innovation, industrial clusters, smart specialisation strategies, and social inclusion. CoVEs stimulate local business development and innovation by working closely with companies, particularly SMEs, on applied research projects. They act as hubs for knowledge and innovation and support entrepreneurial initiatives among learners. The action will support the establishment of the CoVEs concept in North Macedonia.

Improving access and inclusion for vulnerable children in the education system is one of the key priorities. The Law on Primary Education requires primary schools to establish inclusive teams to support students with individual educational plans. However, only 34% of schools have developed such programs for students in need. Several barriers hinder inclusion, including inaccessible infrastructure, unsuitable learning environments, negative attitudes, lack of acceptance, underdeveloped professional competencies, overcrowded classrooms, and a shortage of teaching assistants and systematic support. As a result, students with disabilities in inclusive schools often receive lower-quality teaching and acquire fewer skills compared to their peers in mainstream schools. A significant number of Roma children remain outside the education system, with high dropout rates and low literacy levels among Roma children. The most common reasons for this situation include insufficient proficiency in Macedonian language, the low educational levels of parents, and poor socio-economic conditions. This action aims to promote inclusive education for vulnerable children and students, including Roma and children with special educational needs (SEN). It builds on a successful model that has supported the integration of Roma students into schools, enhancing and expanding it to include a wider range of vulnerable children, such as those with disabilities and other marginalized groups. Planned interventions, including capacity-building initiatives to strengthen the skills and motivation of teachers working with vulnerable students and their families, are expected to increase student retention rates, improve academic performance, and reduce dropout rates. These efforts align with the EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child—Leave No Child Behind. Recent data from a UNICEF study highlights elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and self-harm among children and adolescents, with marked disparities in mental health issues. While 79% of young people reported knowing who to approach for

psychosocial support, 70% have never sought professional help. A key reason for not seeking mental health support is discomfort, cited by 18% of respondents. Although more than half of the participants expressed feeling relatively comfortable discussing mental health with family and friends, fear of stigma and social judgment remains the most significant barrier to accessing mental health services. This concern outweighs issues such as the availability of services or lack of information in their communities, particularly schools. Within the action support will be provided to develop sustainable support systems for student well-being and increase awareness of all the actors in the process.

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

The main stakeholders in the action have been actively involved in the development of the action and the measures reflect their areas of competence, thus underlining their commitment. Roles and responsibilities are clear and reflected in the relevant organisational frameworks, procedures and legislation.

The Ministry of Education and Science, the Department of Primary and Secondary Education and the Department of Higher Education are responsible for the corresponding levels of education. Due to the specificity of Vocational Education and Training and adult education system structure in the country, no individual unit is responsible for these sectors within the MoES, coordination of this sector is a responsibility of the Unit for Secondary Education.

The Bureau for Development of Education (BDE) is a body of the state administration subordinated to the MoES, assigned with performing expert tasks of significance to the development and promotion of upbringing and education in the country. BDE is responsible for monitoring, expert review, research, promotion and development of upbringing and educational activities in the field of pre-school education, primary education, secondary general and secondary art education, secondary vocational and postsecondary education, education of children with special educational needs, adult education, educational activities of student dormitories, as well as for the education of Macedonian citizens' children abroad in relation of acquiring the language and culture.

The State Examination Centre (SEC) is responsible for organising and proving different types of assessments of students (such as the national testing (state testing) and state Matura exams) including international assessments (such as PISA and TIMSS). In addition, it provides training, assessment and certification of principals (candidates for principals) of educational institutions. The Centre produces regular reports and owns extensive information about the academic progression of pupils at national, regional and community levels.

The State Education Inspectorate (SEI) supervises the level of educational standards, ensuring the quality of education, evaluating the effectiveness of the work of educational institutions, as well as the application of laws, other regulations and general acts in the field of education.

The Centre for Adult Education (AEC) promotes the adult education and coordinate cooperation with international institutions and other adult education organisations, to ensure quality particularly through establishment of standards and criteria for formal and non-formal adult education.

National Council for Higher Education, Science and Research is independent body consisting of 16 members in charged for development of legal framework for higher education, science and research.

Primary and Secondary Schools – in total 347 primary schools in the country and 124 secondary schools, 108 are public while the remainder 16 are private. Out of the secondary public schools, 23 are general education schools, 43 are vocational schools, 33 offer both general and vocational education, 4 schools are for pupils with special educational needs and 5 are art schools.

Initial Teacher's Education Institutions - Five of them prepare teachers to work with students from first to fifth grade in primary schools in North Macedonia (Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje, Bitola and Tetovo, Faculty of Education in Stip and Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje), and others train subject teachers (UKIM -Skopje: Philosophical, Philological, Natural-Mathematical, Faculty of Fine Arts, Faculty of Music, Faculty of Physical Education, Sports and Health; Bitola: Faculty of Pedagogy; Stip: Faculty of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Philology, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Faculty of Technology sciences, Faculty of Informatics, Academy

of Music, Academy of Fine Arts; Tetovo: Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Faculty of Philology, Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Physical Education, Faculty of Arts).

2.3. Lessons Learned

From past projects in the education sector, several key lessons have emerged that are critical for the successful implementation of this action. These lessons highlight the importance of continuous professional development of educational professionals, stakeholder engagement, and systemic approaches to reform, all of which are relevant to the current efforts to modernize North Macedonia's education system.

One major lesson is that teachers require continuous guidance and training, especially when new curricula or subjects are introduced, or when educational models, such as Whole Day Schooling, are implemented. This points to the need for sustained professional development and resources to help educators adapt to changes effectively. In addition, teachers have shown enthusiasm for incorporating topics like environmental education and experiential learning into their classrooms, provided they receive adequate support. Therefore, any successful education reform must ensure that teachers are equipped not only with new skills but also with the necessary tools and resources to implement these changes.

Another key insight is that the involvement of teachers in planning educational reforms and clear communication from the outset is crucial. Teachers play a frontline role in implementing reforms, and their buy-in is critical to the success of any changes. When reforms are introduced, it is equally important to communicate the rationale and benefits of the changes clearly to parents and students to ensure their support. This reinforces the importance of coordinated efforts between all stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education and Science, schools, and local communities, for managing reforms more efficiently and addressing potential concerns early on.

It has also become clear that improving the quality of education requires a systemic approach. Coordinated efforts must focus on high-impact areas, ensuring that funding is adequate and targeted, and optimizing the school network to meet the diverse needs of students. Systemic changes happen only through strong stakeholder commitment and should be driven by strategic planning and advocacy at the policy level. Systemic changes can be accelerated through intensive policy-level advocacy, particularly when clear goals are established and shared across sectors.

Additionally, establishing a teacher training needs assessment system is essential to continuously upgrade teachers' professional competencies in response to real classroom demands. Teachers' interest in training, particularly in areas like ICT and inclusive education, underscores the need for professional development programs that are both responsive to their needs and aligned with national education goals.

Lastly, in order to have sustainability of the educational results, the ownership of the process by the national and local stakeholders is crucial. In this context it is proven that it is needed a time for building a partnership between the technical assistance and schools, municipalities, parents as a base towards achieving the goals for safe and productive school environment. It is recommended to have a project with time frame more then 3,5 years.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

3.1. Intervention Logic

The Overall Objective (Impact) of this action is to support the development of individuals' capacities to their full potential for prosperous, inclusive, greener, safer and sustainable societies.

The Specific Objective (Outcome) of this action is:

1. Improved completion of inclusive and equitable quality primary and secondary education and training

The Outputs to be delivered by this action contributing to the corresponding Specific Objective1 (Outcome 1) are:

- 1.1. Further strengthened policy and legislative framework in the education sector

1.2. Empowered educational professionals³

1.3. Improved initial teachers' education

1.4. Ensured inclusive and accessible school environment for student diversity and well-being

The underlying intervention logic for this action is based on a structured approach that begins with the necessary preconditions, such as enacting key legal reforms, including laws on Vocational Education and Training (VET), Adult Education, and Secondary Education, as well as transitioning the pre-school sector under the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). Once these preconditions are in place, the planned activities can commence, laying the groundwork for comprehensive reforms in the education sector.

IF the policy and legislative framework is further strengthened AND the legislative process allows for timely enactment of new laws and revisions to the legal framework, as well as stakeholders, including educators and administrators, are willing to adopt changes and work within the new legal frameworks, THEN the learning outcomes of students in North Macedonia will be improved BECAUSE a robust and responsive legal framework creates the foundation for coherent, accountable, and inclusive education policies.

IF educational professionals are empowered AND there is political stability and prioritization of education as a sector warranting ongoing investment in human resource development, as well as teachers and education professionals are receptive to new programs, mentoring systems, and capacity-building efforts, THEN the learning outcomes of students in North Macedonia will be improved BECAUSE an empowered and well-supported educational workforce can deliver higher-quality, relevant education that aligns with national development goals.

IF initial teachers' education is improved AND educational institutions, including universities and teacher training institutes, remain open to revising and enhancing their curricula and programs for teacher education, THEN the learning outcomes of students in North Macedonia will be improved BECAUSE teachers who are well-prepared in contemporary pedagogy, digital skills, and inclusive education are better equipped to meet diverse student needs and foster a positive learning environment.

IF an inclusive and accessible school environment for student diversity and well-being is ensured AND government policies and societal attitudes support inclusion, diversity, and student well-being, adequate financial and technical resources are allocated to schools to implement and sustain inclusive education practices, cooperation from communities, parents, and civil society groups remains positive, and schools are willing to integrate well-being initiatives as a core component of student support, THEN the learning outcomes of students in North Macedonia will be improved BECAUSE a supportive and inclusive school environment fosters student engagement, attendance, and success.

IF the policy and legislative framework is further strengthened, educational professionals are empowered, initial teacher education is improved, and an inclusive and accessible school environment for student diversity and well-being is ensured AND North Macedonia maintains a consistent commitment to educational reform, there is sustained financial support and interinstitutional collaboration, and societal attitudes favour inclusive education and skill development, THEN the impact will be achieved BECAUSE a comprehensive, well-supported, and inclusive education system is crucial for ensuring that capacities of all individuals can be raised to their full potential for prosperous, inclusive, greener, safer and sustainable societies.

3.2. Indicative Activities

Activities related to Output 1.1:

- Support the development and revision of the legal framework within the education sector

³ Under the Educational Professionals are considered: *teachers, professional associates (psychologists, pedagogist, sociologist, social worker, librarian, special educator and rehabilitator), managerial staff and public servants in education on local and national level, according to the Law on Primary Education, Law on Secondary Education, Law on Vocational Education and Training and Law on Teachers and Professional Associates)*

- Assist in transitioning the pre-school sector to fall under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES)
- Development of the action Plan for interinstitutional cooperation for improving students' achievements
- Conduct institutional review and functional assessment of the institutions in education sector
- Support the monitoring and evaluation of education policies
- Revise existing strategic documents and plans, or develop new ones, to advance the education sector
- Support the implementation of key strategic documents and plans within the education sector
- Assess the current system of school assistants for children with disabilities and provide recommendations for policy improvement
- Align the national curriculums for pre-school, primary and secondary education with international standards and offer recommendations for enhancing student achievements
- Development of policy, system and programs for enabling adult literacy and completion of primary education for adults
- Support for establishment of Centres for Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) promoting innovation in education and research through applicable Artificial Intelligence technologies, enhancing collaboration between education, labour market and industry.

Activities related to Output 1.2:

- Support of the system for the continuous professional development (CPD) of educational professionals across primary and secondary education
- Capacity building for teachers in developing classroom environment for implementing materials for better students' achievement's according to the large-scale international assessments
- Strengthen system for knowledge sharing among communities of practice (Actives – Subject Teachers unites) allowing teachers to exchange resources and strategies.
- Organize in-service training for teachers transitioning to adult education
- Provide further support for the implementation of the new State Matura concepts and capacity building of the State Examination Centre (SEC)
- Strengthen the existing mentoring system for supporting the novice teachers and teachers by analysing current practices and building the capacity of teacher - mentors and teacher - advisors
- Develop the capacities of public servants within key institutions in the education sector
- Strengthen the capacity of the institutions dealing with the higher education, science, and research to improve the effectiveness and impact
- Support capacity building of teachers for implementation of adult literacy programs

Activities related to Output 1.3:

- Improvement of the initial teachers' programs on blended learning, active learning strategies and digital integration
- Capacity building and implementation of subject-specific workshops and ongoing coaching for future teachers
- Development of the Strategy and Action Plan for partnership between universities (faculties for teacher education) and educational institutions⁴ for analyses and implementation of effectively and efficiently educational reforms
- Pilot innovative teaching methods in select schools and scale up the successful models within initial teachers' education
- Develop a structured approach ensuring the individual needs of school students are addressed, and monitoring and evaluation for fostering students' development
- Develop training modules on inclusive education for future teachers
- Supporting better student enrolment in initial teachers' education programs

⁴ Educational institutions: schools, institutions on local and national level responsibilities for education, including the Ministry of Education and Science and other educational public bodies.

Activities related to Output 1.4:

- Strengthen the implementation of inclusive education and student well-being policies through monitoring, analysis and the development of targeted interventions
- Build the capacity of pre-school and school staff working with Roma children and children with special educational needs (SEN)⁵ to enhance inclusive education practices
- Implement educational modules and training programmes for teachers, professional staff, school management, and parents to foster inclusivity in the educational process
- Support Roma students in transitioning to higher levels of education and participating in remedial programmes
- Establish a sustainable school support system for pupils at risk and promoting their well-being
- Pilot awareness-raising programmes on well-being in schools for educational professionals, parents, and pupils

3.3. Mainstreaming

Environmental Protection, Climate Change and Biodiversity

This action does not pursue specific objectives as regards the environment and climate change. The action is soft and will not negatively impact or jeopardise the environment. The proposed interventions within the action will not directly impact the environment, so environmental screening, including for climate change and biodiversity impacts, was not undertaken at the level of activities. However, green mainstreaming will be taken as a horizontal issue under the action as there are specific interventions in which environmental protection and sustainable development will be promoted. Specifically, within the Output 1.2. through the continuous professional development (CPD) of educational professionals across pre-school, primary, and secondary education where also emphasis will be given on teachers' competencies to introduce new technologies in education as well as competencies for green skills by introducing new elective subjects.

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

As per OECD Disability DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this programme is labelled as G1. This implies that the principle of gender equality is taken on board at all stages of the implementation of this action - programming, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Within all four outputs gender equality will be the core principle. The needs and constraints of men and women and the potential impact on the activities of men and women will be considered. Specific activities targeting women directly will be implemented, particularly under Output 1.4 through supporting Roma returnee students in transitioning to higher levels of education and participating in remedial programs. All activities are intended to minimise the adverse implications of prejudices and discrimination women suffer when accessing education. Furthermore, all actions and activities will consider the principle of gender mainstreaming. The beneficiary will take measures so that men and women benefit equally from the activities through close monitoring and advising target groups. The number and percentage of women benefiting from project activities, which can be expressed as the situation about the output and outcome indicators, is one of the most important signs of the importance given to women's participation in planned activities within this action.

Human Rights

Implementation of the activities planned under this action will follow basic principle that ensures the protection and promotion of human rights. The principle of diversity and inclusiveness for all social categories following the principles of fair and adequate representation of ethnic, gender, religious, racial or any other vulnerable category of citizens, per the standards and practices of the United Nations. In addition, including

⁵ In the Strategy for Education special education needs implies for students (pupils) who independently and without educational interventions and support by education factors cannot achieve learning standards anticipated for their age. So, provision of additional assistance in education is needed in order to achieve the learning standards. There is a wide range of reasons due to which certain students may have special education needs: (A) mental and physical disability in the development, (B) socio-emotional and behavioural reasons, and (C) unfavourable conditions for education, due to socio-economic, cultural, and/ or language factors.

Roma people in education (regular education, remedial activities) will be one of the cornerstones of this Action. Also, this action will further invest in a capacities, transparency and accountability of the education institutions in Country, which are supposed to effectively ensure the children’s rights in participating in education.

Disability

As per OECD Disability DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as D1. This implies that the principle of inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwD) is ensured within all activities of this action. Specifically, through the Output 1.3 it is expected to strengthen the implementation of inclusive education through monitoring, analysis, and the development of targeted measures. In addition, the planned activities will include building the capacities of school staff working with children with special needs (including children with disabilities) to enhance inclusive education practices. The action will also include piloting educational modules and training programs for teachers, professional staff, school management, and parents to promote inclusiveness in the educational process.

Democracy

The action will foster a functioning pluralistic, participatory, and representative democracy through legal reforms conducted within the Output 1.1. The planned development of the different legal documents (laws, bylaws) for education system as well as revision and development of strategic documents will be done in participatory manner, including all key stakeholders and consulting them in the process of legal reforms.

Conflict sensitivity, peace and resilience

With regards to peace and resilience, the most significant contribution of this action in building community resilience will be a multi-faceted effort based on supporting policy and capacity building in schools from the different ethnic communities in the Country.

3.4. Risks and Assumptions

Category	Risks	Likelihood (High/ Medium/ Low)	Impact (High/ Medium/ Low)	Mitigating measures
1-external environment	Socio-political resistance to inclusive education and well-being policies may hinder full implementation.	Medium	Medium	Conducting public awareness campaigns to promote the importance of inclusive education and student well-being policies, and engaging community to foster local support.
2-planning, processes, and systems	Insufficient technological infrastructure in some schools may limit the success of introducing new technologies in education process.	Low	High	Conducting an assessment of schools’ technological infrastructure at the beginning to adjust digital competency programs based on level of technological infrastructure. Ensure that digital technology is secured in most needed schools.
3-people and organisation	Some educational institutions and stakeholders may resist changes to the legal framework, delaying implementation.	Medium	Medium	Ensuring continues communication with education institutions and providing training to institutions on the benefits of the new framework to encourage adoption.
3-people and organisation	Teachers may be overburdened by existing	Medium	High	Organisation will provide flexible training schedules and provide

	workloads and reluctant to participate in additional training.			ongoing support to ensure engagement and reduce the burden on teachers. Also, all costs (transportation, accommodation, meals) will be covered during the training.
3-People and Organisation	Teachers and school staff may lack adequate skills to fully support inclusive education and mental health initiatives, potentially perpetuating inequalities.	Medium	High	Ensuring comprehensive and ongoing training for teachers and school staff, with a particular focus on inclusivity and mental health support.
5-communication and information	Awareness-raising efforts for VNFL, mental health in schools, and inclusive education practices may not reach all levels of society or key groups, limiting their impact.	Low	Medium	Use multi-channel communication strategies, involving local communities and influencers, to ensure that messages are well-received and understood by all stakeholders.
5-communication and information	Insufficient communication with Roma families may limit their willingness to participate in education programs.	Medium	High	Developing targeted outreach initiatives to build trust and engagement with Roma communities, ensuring cultural sensitivity and continuous dialogue.

External Assumptions:

Assumptions at the level of outcome:

- Long-term political and economic stability is maintained, allowing educational reforms to take full effect over time.
- Sustained funding is secured to support educational infrastructure, teacher training, and inclusive education practices.
- Social inequalities and barriers (e.g., poverty, discrimination, geographic access) do not significantly impede students' ability to participate in the reformed education system.
- Stakeholders across the education sector, from government bodies to private entities and civil society, maintain consistent support for reforms aimed at improving learning outcomes.

Assumptions at the level of outputs:

- The legislative process allows for timely enactment of new laws and revisions to the legal framework.
- Stakeholders, including educators and administrators, are willing to adopt changes and work within the new legal frameworks.
- There is political stability and prioritization of education as a sector that warrants ongoing investment in human resource development.
- Teachers and education professionals are receptive to new programs, mentoring systems, and capacity-building efforts.
- Educational institutions (universities, teacher training institutes) remain open to revising and enhancing their curricula and programs for teacher education.
- Government policies and societal attitudes support inclusion, diversity, and student well-being.
- Adequate financial and technical resources are allocated to schools to implement and sustain inclusive education practices.

- Cooperation from communities, parents, and civil society groups (especially regarding Roma children and students with disabilities) remains positive and active.
- Schools are willing to integrate well-being initiatives as a core component of student support.

3.5. Indicative Logical Framework Matrix

Results	Results chain: Main expected results [maximum 10 @]	Indicators [it least one indicator per expected result @]	Baselines (values and years)	Targets (values and years)	Sources of data	Assumptions
Impact	To support the development of individuals' capacities to their full potential for prosperous, inclusive, greener, safer and sustainable societies	Educational attainment of population 25 and over	<p>Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2) Total: 27,4% Male: 21,9% Female: 33,1%</p> <p>Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4) Total: 49,3% Male: 56,7% Female: 41,8%</p> <p>Tertiary education (levels 5-8) Total: 23,2% Male: 21,4% Female: 25,1%</p> <p>(2020)</p>	<p>Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2) Total: 22,5% Male: 17,5% Female: 25,5%</p> <p>Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4) Total: 47,5% Male: 56,0% Female: 45,0%</p> <p>Tertiary education (levels 5-8) Total: 30,0% Male: 26,5% Female: 29,5%</p> <p>(2032)</p>	Eurostat Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%) - main indicators	<i>Not applicable</i>
Outcome 1	Improved completion of inclusive and equitable quality primary and secondary education and training	1.1 Completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)	<p>Primary: Total – 99,43% Male – 99,36% Female – 99,50%</p> <p>Lower secondary: Total – 97,56% Male – 96,67% Female – 98,50%</p> <p>Upper secondary: Total – 84,42% Male – 83,19% Female – 85,72%</p> <p>(2023)</p>	<p>Primary: Total – 99,85% Male – 99,75% Female – 99,90%</p> <p>Lower secondary: Total – 98,5% Male – 97,8% Female – 99,2%</p> <p>Upper secondary: Total – 89,0% Male – 85,5% Female – 92,5%</p> <p>(2032)</p>	Global SDG Indicators Database	<p>Long-term political and economic stability is maintained, allowing educational reforms to take full effect over time.</p> <p>Sustained funding is secured to support educational infrastructure, teacher training, and inclusive education practices.</p> <p>Social inequalities and barriers (e.g., poverty, discrimination, geographic access) do not significantly impede students'</p>

						<p>ability to participate in the reformed education system.</p> <p>Stakeholders across the education sector, from government bodies to private entities and civil society, maintain consistent support for reforms aimed at improving learning outcomes.</p>
Output 1 related to Outcome 1	1.1 Further strengthened policy and legislative framework in the education sector	1.1.1 Extent to which research studies and other evidence developed and/or supported by the EU-funded intervention are utilised in the generation of new government policy and strategy in education	0 (2024)	≥15 (2032)	Project final report	<p>The legislative process allows for timely enactment of new laws and revisions to the legal framework.</p> <p>Stakeholders, including educators and administrators, are willing to adopt changes and work within the new legal frameworks.</p>
Output 2 related to Outcome 1	1.2. Empowered educational professionals	1.2.1 Percentage of teachers qualified according to national standards	70% (2024)	100% (2032)	Bureau for Development of Education Annual Report	<p>There is political stability and prioritization of education as a sector that warrants ongoing investment in human resource development.</p> <p>Teachers and education professionals are receptive to new programs, mentoring systems, and capacity-building efforts.</p>
		1.2.2 Number of partnerships with higher education institutions, adult education institutions, businesses and industries	0 (2024)	≥ 20 (2032)	MoES Interim and Final Reports Reports on implementation of Education Strategy	
Output 3 related to Outcome 1	1.3. Improved initial teachers' education	1.3.1 Percentage of students enrolled improved initial teacher education programme	0 (2024)	≥ 60% (2032)	MoES Report on implementation of initial teachers' education programmes	<p>Educational institutions (universities, teacher training institutes) remain open to revising and enhancing their curricula and programs for teacher education.</p>
		1.3.2. Number of improved curricula of initial teacher education with the EU support	0 (2024)	≥ 8 (2032)	MoES Report on implementation of initial teachers' education programmes	

Output 4 related to Outcome 1	1.4. Ensured inclusive and accessible school environment for student diversity and well-being	1.4.1 Number of teachers and professional associates trained to work with children with special educational needs (primary and secondary)	3 561 (2023)	≥ 6 000 (2032)	Education Management Information System (EMIS)	Government policies and societal attitudes support inclusion, diversity, and student well-being. Adequate financial and technical resources are allocated to schools to implement and sustain inclusive education practices.
		1.4.2 Transition rate of Roma pupils from primary to secondary education	87,8% (2024/2025)	92% (2031/2032)	State Statistical Office Yearly Report	
		1.4.3 Number of schools with a sustainable support system in place for students at risk of mental health challenges and well-being	3 (2024)	≥ 60 (2032)	MoES Interim and Final Reports	Cooperation from communities, parents, and civil society groups (especially regarding Roma children and students with disabilities) remains positive and active. Schools are willing to integrate well-being initiatives as a core component of student support.

4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS⁶

4.1. Financing Agreement

In order to implement this Action, it is envisaged to conclude a financing agreement with North Macedonia

4.2. Indicative Implementation Period

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

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

4.3. Implementation Modalities

The Commission will ensure that the EU appropriate rules and procedures for providing financing to third parties are respected, including review procedures, where appropriate, and compliance of the action with EU restrictive measures⁷.

4.3.1. Direct Management (Procurement)

Procurement will contribute to achieving outcome and all outputs identified in Section 3.

4.4. Scope of geographical eligibility for procurement and grants

The geographical eligibility in terms of place of establishment for participating in procurement and grant award procedures and in terms of origin of supplies purchased as established in the basic act and set out in the relevant contractual documents shall apply, subject to the following provisions.

The Commission's authorising officer responsible may extend the geographical eligibility on the basis of urgency or of unavailability of services in the markets of the Partners or territories concerned, or in other duly substantiated cases where application of the eligibility rules would make the realisation of this action impossible or exceedingly difficult (Article 28(10) NDICI-Global Europe Regulation).

4.5. Indicative Budget

Indicative Budget components	EU contribution (amount in EUR)
Methods of implementation – cf. section 4.3	
Outcome 1 Improved effectiveness, inclusiveness and accessibility of education	5 000 000.00
Procurement (direct management) – cf. section 4.3.1	N.A.
Procurement – total envelope under section 4.3.11	5 000 000.00

⁶ This section is to be completed by the EU Office/Delegation.

⁷ [EU Sanctions Map](#). Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website it is the OJ version that prevails.

Evaluation – cf. section 5.2 Audit – cf. section 5.3	Will be covered by another Decision
Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy – cf. section 6	Will be covered by another Decision
Contingencies	0.00
Totals	5 000 000.00

4.6. Organisational Set-up and Responsibilities

The Delegation of the European Union (EUD) to North Macedonia is in charge of implementing the action. It will collaborate with the NIPAC Office within the Ministry of European Affairs, the line ministries, and all stakeholders and implementing partners.

At the policy level, the implementing partners will be accountable to the relevant Sector Working Group(s), the IPA Monitoring Committee and the respective Sector Monitoring Committee/s.

At the contract level, the implementation arrangements will be discussed through the project Steering Committees having advisory functions and composed of EUD, the relevant national authorities and all relevant implementing partners.

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

4.7. Pre-conditions

The following pre-conditions are for the action:

- New Law on VET adopted by the Parliament (deadline: March 2025)
- New Law on Adult Education adopted by the Parliament (deadline: March 2025)
- New Law on Secondary Education adopted by the Parliament (deadline: March 2025)
- New Education Strategy developed (deadline: January 2026)

5. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

5.1. Monitoring and Reporting

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

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

Arrangements for monitoring and reporting, including roles and responsibilities for data collection, analysis and monitoring:

The European Commission will monitor the action using Result Oriented Monitoring (ROM), which includes on the spot monitoring visits, data collection, and analysis. Beneficiaries and the NIPAC Office will participate

in the interviews and meetings as well as ensure provision of relevant data and documentation upon request, that shall provide an impartial assessment of the ongoing or post-action performance of the action.

The relevant data will be collected, processed and analysed by the EU Delegation on the regular bases in close cooperation with NIPAC Office. The main beneficiaries will have the obligation to collect and analyse data, and report on progress by indicators and towards the achievement of planned results to NIPAC Office. Monitoring of the action implementation will be ensured through the relevant semi-annual Sectoral Monitoring Committee (SMC) and annual IPA Monitoring Committee including follow up of the recommendations.

In addition, on the sector policy level, the Sector Working Groups will ensure synergies between interventions and sector policies and priorities. Monitoring of the progress by impact level indicators of the sector policies will be ensured through the established 2020 Performance Assessment Framework (PAF).

5.2. Evaluation

Having regard to the importance of the action, a final evaluation will be carried out for this action or its components via independent consultants. It will be carried out for accountability and learning purposes at various levels (including for policy revision). The Commission shall form a Reference Group (RG) composed by representatives from the main stakeholders at both EU and national (representatives from the government, from civil society organisations (private sector, NGOs, etc.), etc.) levels. If deemed necessary, other donors will be invited to join. The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least 2 months in advance of the dates envisaged for the evaluation exercise and missions. The implementing partner shall collaborate efficiently and effectively with the evaluation experts, and inter alia provide them with all necessary information and documentation, as well as access to the project premises and activities.

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

Evaluation services may be contracted under a framework contract.

5.3. Audit and Verifications

Without prejudice to the obligations applicable to contracts concluded for the implementation of this action, the Commission may, on the basis of a risk assessment, contract independent audit or verification assignments for one or several contracts or agreements.

6. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

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

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

Any actions related to communication and visibility will be coordinated with the strategic communication actions of the EU Delegations, to ensure coherence of narrative and message, as well as horizontal strategic communication.

7. SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability of the planned action is ensured through several key factors that will promote the continuation of benefits and results beyond the implementation period. First, the focus on capacity building for teachers, educational professionals, and institutions is designed to foster long-term skills development and institutional resilience. By equipping teachers with digital competencies, green skills, and improved pedagogical methods, the action empowers educators to continue applying these skills independently, ensuring that the impact on educational quality is sustained.

Institutional ownership is a crucial aspect of sustainability. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), along with national and local educational bodies, are key stakeholders involved throughout the implementation. This collaboration builds institutional capacity and embeds the reforms into existing structures, allowing the results to be maintained and scaled beyond the project's lifespan. Furthermore, the involvement of the National Council for Higher Education, Science, and Research in the development of policy frameworks strengthens the governance and strategic management of education reforms, ensuring that monitoring mechanisms and continuous professional development are institutionalized.

Additionally, the resources committed by beneficiaries will play a significant role in sustaining outcomes. The government's commitment to aligning the education system with national and EU strategies, coupled with the allocation of resources for ongoing teacher training and school infrastructure improvements, ensures that the results will be maintained. By integrating the action's outcomes into national education strategies and ensuring consistent funding streams for professional development and educational monitoring, the action will enable the continuation of its benefits and contribute to the long-term sustainability of education reforms.

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

A Primary intervention⁸ (project/programme) is a coherent set of results structured in a logical framework aiming at delivering development change or progress. Identifying the level of the primary intervention will allow for:

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

Please delete this box after filling in the section below

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

The level of the Primary Intervention chosen can be modified (directly in OPSYS) and the modification does not constitute an amendment of the action document.

Please select in the left side column one of the four possible options for the level of the Primary Intervention(s).

In the case of ‘Group of actions’ level, add references to the present action and other action(s) concerning the same Primary Intervention.

In the case of ‘Contract level’ and ‘Group of contracts’, add the reference(s) to the corresponding budgetary items in point 4.5, Indicative Budget.

The present Action identifies as

Action level (i.e. Budget support, Blending)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Single action	Present action: all contracts in the present action
Group of actions level (i.e: i) top-up cases, ii) second, third, etc. phases of a programme)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Group of actions	Actions reference (CRIS#/OPSYS#): <Present action> <Other action>
Contract level (i.e. Grants, Contribution Agreements, any case in which foreseen individual legal commitments identified in the budget will have different log frames, even if part of the same Action Document)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Single Contract 1	<foreseen individual legal commitment (or contract)>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Single Contract 2	<foreseen individual legal commitment (or contract)>

⁸ For the purpose of consistency between terms in OPSYS, DG INTPA, DG NEAR and FPI have harmonised 5 key terms, including ‘Action’ and ‘Intervention’ where an ‘Action’ is the content (or part of the content) of a Commission financing Decision and ‘Intervention’ is a coherent set of activities and results which constitutes an effective level for the operational follow-up by the EC of its operations on the ground. See more on the [concept of intervention \[to access the link an EU Login is needed\]](#).

<input type="checkbox"/>	Single Contract 3	<foreseen individual legal commitment (or contract)>
	(...)	
<p>Group of contracts level (i.e: i) series of programme estimates, ii) cases in which an Action Document foresees many foreseen individual legal commitments (for instance four contracts and one of them being a Technical Assistance) and two of them, a technical assistance contract and a contribution agreement, aim at the same objectives and complement each other, iii) follow up contracts that share the same log frame of the original contract)</p>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Group of contracts	<foreseen individual legal commitment (or contract) 1> <foreseen individual legal commitment (or contract) 2> <foreseen individual legal commitment (or contract) #>

