This action is funded by the European Union

ANNEX

of the Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the individual measure in favour of Central Asia for 2019

Action Document for Supporting the Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

INDIVIDUAL MEASURE

This document constitutes the annual work programme in the sense of Article 110(2) of the Financial Regulation and action programme/measure in the sense of Articles 2 and 3 of Regulation N° 236/2014.

| 1. Title/basic act/CRIS number | Supporting the Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan  
CRIS number: ACA/2019/041-889  
financed under the Development Cooperation Instrument |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2. Zone benefiting from the action/location | Central Asia: Republic of Kazakhstan, Republic of Uzbekistan and South Asia: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.  
The action shall be carried out at the following locations: Republic of Kazakhstan, Republic of Uzbekistan, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan  
The project team will be based in Astana, Kazakhstan. |
| 4. SDGs | Main SDG(s) on the basis of section 4.4:  
SDG4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; SDG5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; SDG8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, fully |

[^1]: Decision C(2018)4741 of 20/07/2018
productive employment and decent work for all. Other significant SDG(s) on the basis of section 4.4: SDG10: Reduce inequality within and among countries, safe, regular and responsible mobility of people, and encouragement of ODA; SDG16: Peace, justice and strong institutions for promoting social and economic participation of women in peace-building and reconciliation processes; SDG17: Partnership for the Goals.

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| 8 a) DAC code(s) | 110 – Education; 31181 – agricultural education; 16062 – statistical capacity building; 11430 - Advanced technical and Managerial training |

| 8 b) Main Delivery Channel | UNDP - 41114 |

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| 10. Global Public Goods and Challenges (GPGC) | n/a |

[2]
SUMMARY

The Action is the first trilateral cooperation programme between the European Union, Afghanistan, and Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan). It aims to promote the academic, economic and social empowerment of women in Afghanistan, a factor contributing to peace, regional stability, and economic development.

The Action is designed around three interlinked components:

The first component provides for the development of a sustainable, gender responsive system for international learning mobility from Afghanistan to the two Central Asian host countries. Capacity building for Afghanistan’s Ministry of Higher Education will ensure transparent, inclusive and relevant student selection. Guidelines for outbound mobility of women and gender equality on campuses and in academic processes will enhance gender responsiveness.

The second component provides for specialised qualifications for programme participants. The priority subjects (namely Agriculture, Applied Statistics and Mining) are expected to contribute to the development of high-growth sectors in Afghanistan as well as women’s empowerment. Qualifications will include Masters, Bachelor degrees and VET qualifications. Short-term on-line language training before departure is intended to equip all students with the capacity to deal with daily needs while host country academic courses may incorporate a further full year of language training.

The third component is designed to strengthen women’s employability in private and public sector posts, including in universities where they can support further human capital development by teaching new higher education programmes. Afghanistan’s Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs will benefit from support to enhance its employment services for such highly qualified women, and women will gain skills to support their access to work opportunities.

With better qualifications, women may obtain higher-profile private or public sector jobs at decision-making levels. The benefits will include enhanced economic and social status for women, as well as important role models of women’s contributions to sector development and to gender equality in society.

1. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

1.1 Context Description

Afghanistan has been torn by conflict for nearly four decades. Security threats continue to challenge socio-economic progress.

The current conflict dates back to 1978 with the Saur Revolution which overthrew the government and officially ended in 1989 with the withdrawal of Soviet forces. The Taliban took over Kabul in September 1996, establishing the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Their
policies resulted in the exclusion of women from the public sphere, requiring women to wear a burqa (a full face and body covering garment) and banning them from leaving the home without an accompanying male relative. Women were not allowed to work, or to be schooled after the age of eight.

With peace prospects yet to materialise, Afghanistan has, however, made some progress towards economic development. The Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) 2017-2021\(^2\) sets out the government's economic outlook as well as its development strategy for economic growth and job creation. The ANPDF states that "Afghanistan needs to advance regional integration, improve governance, and transform its productive sectors to effect growth-inducing reforms and investments. We must adopt pro-active policies and support programmes".

Afghanistan remains highly dependent on foreign aid, which amounted to 13% of GDP in 2018. On the positive side, 2018 marked an increased momentum for peace at national, regional and international levels, as evidenced in the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan in March and the Geneva Ministerial Conference in November 2018. On this occasion the EU High Representative Vice President Federica Mogherini outlined a five-point agenda to support peace, reiterating earlier commitment to women education made at the Astana Conference on Empowering Women in Afghanistan in September 2018.

While women constitute nearly half of the estimated 35 million population of Afghanistan, their formal contribution to the country's development remains low. The country ranks 168\(^{th}\) out of 189 countries in the UNDP 2018 Human Development Report, and 153\(^{rd}\) on its Gender Inequality Index. High maternal mortality (396 per 100,000 live births), low achievement in secondary education (11.4 percent of women compared with 39.6 percent of men over 25 years), and female labour participation (19.5 percent for women, 86.7 percent for men among those 25+ years). The highest-ever female net attendance in Primary Education of 45.5 percent (65.5 percent for boys) drops markedly at Tertiary level to only 4.8 percent (14.9 percent for boys)\(^3\). According to World Bank estimates, only 19.9 percent of the female population is literate, versus 49.4 percent of men, although this figure nearly doubles to 38.7 percent if only the female population under 25 is counted, a testimony to the advances made over the past decade. Although the age of first marriage has increased to a mean of 17.6 years among women aged 20-24 years, overall fertility is still high at 4.4 living children per woman of child-bearing age, which perpetuates high population growth\(^4\). With 47.7 percent of the population consisting of children under 15 years and 2.7 percent elders over 65 years, the dependency ratio is 101.5. Women are expected to provide unpaid care work for both the young and old, while men have economic responsibility for all. In 2016-2017 more than half (54.5 percent) of the Afghan people was living below the national poverty line. Women’s economic contribution is not only desirable as an individual right (in particular art. 23 right to work and art.26 right to education of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights): it is essential to alleviate national poverty and accelerate development.

\(^4\) Ibidem
About 22 percent of students enrolled in public universities and higher education institutions in Afghanistan are women. Society, in general, is not supportive of girls’ equal access to university education beyond the home province. Across public universities, there are an estimated 5,090 faculty members of which 774 are women. Overall, Afghanistan has limited capacity at master’s level within a limited range of disciplines. The World Bank notes that there are only 210 women academics with a master’s qualification. Scholarships abroad provide diversified knowledge, fill national human capacity gaps, and expose people to a wider world.

Women’s labour is under-utilised, jobs are scarce, women earn 30 percent less than men for the same work, and enjoy only 4.3 percent of managerial posts in public and private work. Most women engage in informal work with rural agricultural activities accounting for a significant share of their labour, most of which is unpaid support to the family. Manufacturing employs only 24 percent of working women. Afghanistan’s private sector employs women in banking and insurance, media, communications, and information technology. Higher salaries may be attractive but their longer-term value can be undermined by low or no social insurance in alignment with ILO standards of ‘decent work’. The largest formal employer in Afghanistan continues to be its government. The country still struggles to increase women’s meaningful participation in the civil service (22 percent) as well as in the security sector and in all matters related to Peace and Reintegration, as is objective one of the Afghan National Action Plan for the implementation of Security Council Resolution (UNSCR)1325 on Women Peace and Security (July, 2015). At the 27/28 November 2018 Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan (November 2018), commitment to the 2030 SDG target of 30 percent was re-affirmed, but annual targets for 2019/2020 modified down to a more realistic 2 percent per year. The lack of women at high levels of government limits their influence in decision-making at all levels and in all spheres of the Afghan society.

1.2 Policy Framework (Global, EU)

At the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan of 27 November 2018 the EU announced a financial package worth €474 million5 to support state building and public sector reforms in Afghanistan. These further fulfil its development assistance targets in the areas of Peace, Stability and Democracy; Sustainable Growth and Jobs; and Basic Social Services. This extended assistance will further support a more enabling environment for Afghan women to participate in economic and public life. In November 2018, Council conclusions on Afghanistan6 appealed to all neighbouring countries to support the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to promote peace and stability. This appeal followed agreement on the EU Strategy for Connecting Europe and Asia7, pointing out the importance of political dialogue and economic cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries through the establishment of networks and partnerships as part of the peace process. In October 2017, the

EU underlined the importance of human development as a contribution towards a self-reliant Afghanistan in which empowerment of women is a cornerstone. The Action is fully consistent with the EU’s 2014-2020 Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) with Afghanistan in supporting economic and human development, including education for the most vulnerable segments of the population. The EU echoes the ANPDF 2017-2021 by supporting vital economic and employment sectors. These include agriculture, rural development, food security, sustainable management of natural resources (including mining) reinforce cross-cutting priorities of gender equality, human rights (empowerment of women), sustainable economic growth and job creation. The Programme notes that ‘changing societal attitudes towards women’s socio-economic roles requires accompanying programmatic measures in awareness raising, education and reform of the regulatory framework’.

The Action is also aligned with the Multi-Annual Indicative Regional Programme for Central Asia 2014-2020, which includes a focus on socio-development (inter alia) as part of the sustainable regional development agenda. The Programme emphasizes the need to develop dedicated regional capacity and a high quality connectivity network for education and research purposes, capitalising upon existing EU programmes such as Erasmus+ and the Central Asia Education Platform (CAEP).

The Action will help building capacity of Kazakh and Uzbek educational institutions to provide training to Afghanistan and partner countries in the region. The Action responds to the Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union⁸ through its emphasis on learning mobility as an enhancer of public diplomacy and a driving force for contact between people, ultimately benefiting regional stability. It also reflects the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations by promoting peace and fighting radicalisation through intercultural dialogue by means of educational mobility.

Finally, the Action supports the European Consensus on Development⁹ and the policy priorities of peace, people, and prosperity, and the Gender Action Plan II 2015, ‘Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020’¹⁰ in particular objectives 13. Equal access for girls and women to all levels of quality education and vocational education and training (VET) free from discrimination and art. 14 Access to decent work for women of all ages. It will further contribute to the fulfilment of the new EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (December, 2018).

### 1.3 Public Policy Analysis of the partner country/region

Central Asia has already seen its share of conflict since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, such as the Tajik civil war (1992-1997) and Uzbekistan’s clashes with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan whose remaining fighters have sworn loyalty to the Taliban. Thus, it is a national security interest for Central Asian governments to promote stabilisation,

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development and prosperity in Afghanistan, including through mediation efforts, investments and youth education.

**Kazakhstan.** In 2010, Kazakhstan launched a 10-year government-funded education programme for Afghan citizens. In the framework of this $50 million programme, the universities of Kazakhstan have trained a total of around 960 Afghan students, including around 50 women. Kazakhstan has stated interest in replicating this high level of educational support, presenting a $46 million proposal to the EU. In August 2016, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, UNDP, the Government of Japan and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) launched the project “Promoting Kazakhstan’s Official Development Assistance Cooperation with Afghanistan”, aimed at expanding economic independence and rights of Afghan women. Through this mechanism, Kazakhstan supported 40 female health workers and civil-servants with short-term specialised courses facilitated by UNDP and funded by Japan.

**Uzbekistan** has been strengthening its cooperation with Afghanistan. Tashkent is engaged in mediation efforts in the Afghan conflict. In July 2018, Uzbekistan pledged to 'invest $500 million into the construction of railway tracks from Mazar-i-Sharif city to Herat province' with training of human resources for this being provided to Afghan citizens at the Educational Centre for the Training of Afghan Citizens’ (ECTAC) established in Termez District, along the border with Afghanistan. Future cooperation may include a free trade zone between the two states to promote trade and development (bilateral trade in 2017 reached US$ 350 million).

**Trilateral cooperation** between the European Union, Afghanistan and Central Asian countries aims at building a sustained regional collaboration in the interest of women’s economic and social empowerment. Such regional cooperation can play a key role in both peace-building and economic development, where shared interests related to connectivity, trade and economic cooperation can facilitate progress. Both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan actively seek to support women’s empowerment through higher and vocational education. Both offer advantages of regional proximity; shared culture, history and religion; and lessons learnt from experience. Both countries have stated commitments to gender equality and, in terms of education and employment data, offer positive models for women of Afghanistan.

### 1.4 Stakeholder analysis

It is important to maintain high-level political dialogue to ensure support for this programme. The following high-level offices should be part of the process:

- Office of the President in each of the countries;
- Office of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Chair of the Women Committee of Uzbekistan;
- Heads of EU Delegations in all three countries, and
- Office of the Governor and Deputy Governor of Uzbekistan’s Surkhandarya Region where ECTAC is located.

Political cooperation and coordination are essential to smooth the way for student mobility (visas for travel, residence permits), facilitate diplomatic and technical exchange visits, maintain interest, and resolve issues at the diplomatic level. From the EU side, relations and
communication need to be maintained among donor organisations and Central Asian/Afghanistan leaderships.

Stakeholders involved in the learning mobility for the chosen sectors will include:

- Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan;
- Ministry of Higher Education in Afghanistan, Ministry of Education and Science in Kazakhstan, Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education in Uzbekistan;
- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Afghanistan;
- Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock; Ministry of Mines and Petroleum; National Statistics and Information Authority in Afghanistan;
- Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Water Resources in Uzbekistan;
- Embassies of Afghanistan to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan;
- Embassies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to Afghanistan;
- Representation of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to the European Union in Brussels;
- Donor organisations and implementing partners: European Commission, UNDP and relevant UN institutions
- Education and training institutions in Uzbekistan: Termez State University, Tashkent State Agrarian University and its branch at Termez, Tashkent State Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers, the Samarkand Institute of Veterinary Medicine
- In Kazakhstan: Committee on Statistics, Satpaev Technical University, Al-Farabi Kazakhstan National University, Nazarbayev University, Kazakh National Agricultural University.

1.5 Problem analysis/priority areas for support

The commitment of Afghanistan’s government to gender equality is evidenced by the number of women appointed in public office. There are currently 4 women ministers, 6 deputy ministers (including Ministry of Interior as of December 2018), 5 ambassadors, head of the Independent Human Rights Commission, and deputy of the High Peace Council. However, in both public and private service, women’s share of managerial posts remains at a low 4.3 percent. To enhance women’s employment within the civil service, the Afghanistan Independent Reform and Civil Service Commission maintains a policy of advancement for female candidates who are allotted a standard number of extra points in recruitments assessments, and whose appointments are favoured over men where candidates are equally eligible.

Faster progress is required to achieve the target of a 30 percent share for women in civil service employment by 2030. It is also essential to fulfil Afghanistan’s new approach to women’s economic empowerment, which aims to strengthen professional status and their entry into less traditional sectors.

Women face numerous challenges in accessing higher education opportunities within Afghanistan, including lack of accommodation, reduced academic choices, exacerbated by the lack of qualified faculty staff. International learning mobility offers an opportunity to fill the national human capital deficit, and support individuals to achieve higher qualifications in new
fields of knowledge. Currently Afghanistan’s outbound learning mobility totals around 2,500 to 3,000 students per year to around 40 countries, though information on the share of women is not readily accessible. As is usual for international learning mobility, these study opportunities abroad are dependent on the interests of individual students and host countries. As a result, qualifications do not necessarily match sector-specific needs. Exceptions have included Uzbekistan’s recent support to training for Uzbek language teachers and railway personnel, and individual requests emanating from sector ministries or donors. Both Kazakhstan, with its support to around 1,000 students (5 per cent women), and Uzbekistan with its initial support to 115 students (11.5 per cent women) are important contributors to this strategy. Both countries are participating members of the Istanbul Process, and both have made specific commitment to achieving regional stability through economic empowerment of Afghan women.

For Afghan women, the most favourable employment opportunities could stem from acquiring qualifications that fill knowledge gaps in sectors with high growth potential. Employment opportunities exist in the formal sector which is still public to a large extent. This provides basic social insurance, childcare support and, in public perceptions, ranks third on the list of acceptable places for women to work after health and female education services. Policies and procedures against gender harassment within government service contribute to a safer work environment for women. National priority sectors for development and economic growth include agriculture, applied statistics and mining as summarised in sections below. Official authorities, as well as the private service partners with whom they cooperate, have vacancies, which, if filled, would facilitate sector development in these fields.

**Agriculture**

The Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2017-21 highlights the dominant share of agriculture in Afghanistan’s exports. The National Priority Programme on Women’s Economic Empowerment (NPP WEE) emphasises the role of women in rural development. The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) is a key partner to the NPP WEE: it employs a total of 50 female workers who are responsible for transferring new knowledge and skills to rural women in support of national productivity as well as women’s control over resources and benefits of their labour. While the training for these female trainers is not currently a priority for the Ministry, women skilled at higher, decision-making levels could help strengthen sector development, with multiplier effects that could positively impact the life of rural women.

**Applied Statistics**

The low capacity in applied statistics, including sex disaggregated data, is an impediment to sector analysis and thus of planning, reporting, and identification of research needs in a gender sensitive way. Many sector ministries have very limited, if any, capacity, and thus are neither able to contextualise their work nationally, regionally or globally, nor to make it beneficial for women or men. The NPP WEE specifically calls for enhanced capacity for sector-oriented gender analysis.

The National Statistics Information Authority (NSIA) has expressed specific needs and listed job opportunities within the Authority itself as well as several priority sector ministries. The NSIA highlighted the lack of specialists qualified in applied statistics and proposed employment in NSIA and line ministries when students return to Afghanistan, also assuming higher positions within the NSIA or sector ministries.
Mining

The ANPDF notes that national economic growth requires strengthening of the extractive sector, maximising revenue from mineral exploitation, increasing the sustainability and predictability of mining revenues, expanding oil and gas exploration. There is a clear need to professionalise internal governance and build capacities to establish full control over the mining area where human resources are sparse or non-existent. Significant gaps in technical knowledge, qualified resources and human capacity persist. Developing skills in new technologies would help expand employment opportunities, including in the private sector, as expressed by the Minister of Mines and Petroleum of Afghanistan. Women who enter this sector would both challenge the boundaries of traditional gender roles and gain unique work opportunities.

All degree students enrolled in the programme would commit to serve public entities for at least two years after their return, although it is important to recognise that there is no mechanism by which such an agreement is enforceable. It is envisaged that about 2/3 of all students will study in Kazakhstan.

2. RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

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<tr>
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| Security                    | H          | • Mitigated through a concerted international political and policy dialogue, including EU diplomatic engagement in peace and regional cooperation efforts
  Safety of project staff and students may be affected by the security situation in Afghanistan. |
| Political                   | H          | • Close monitoring of the political context and regular consultations with Afghan authorities, capitalising on EU support to elections and election monitoring
  Afghanistan’s 2019 presidential election could result in new leadership with a different vision of regional cooperation and its focus. The election process may also impact programme progress. |
| Sociocultural limitations   | H          | • Sensitisation of project stakeholders and beneficiaries, including men, on women’s socio-cultural barriers.
  Gender inequalities and cultural constraints limiting women’s access to the programme, The implementing agency will guide women applicants at the selection stage. |
| Lack of women applicants, and/or risks of sexual and gender based violence. Cultural constrains may also challenge women’s acceptance in their community upon return. | • Sustained efforts to preserve anonymity of individuals at all stages (candidate testing, visa applications, logistics).  
• Inform and train the participating women about their rights as well as how to establish an increased personal security.  
• Analyse and address the risks that women who are entering the public sphere face from family, relatives, neighbours and extremist groups.  
• Establish a dialogue with religious leaders explaining the programme and its benefits to the community.  
• Identify mentors who can provide advice to candidates including at the selection stage and establish a prevention and reporting mechanism for gender-based violence  
• Introduce a quota of 10% for men participants if women applicants are scarce. |
| --- | --- |
| **Weak ownership and capacity**  
Insufficient ownership and delays in implementation. | **M**  
• Link to policy dialogue agenda in Central Asia and existing EU cooperation portfolio in Afghanistan  
• Devise work strategy through government-approved partners  
• Make key government agencies part of the central Steering Committee, and part of the country-specific program design and monitoring bodies  
• Promote ownership of the project by the Government of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan by positioning the project activities as part of their national development assistance agenda |
| **Social – motivation gaps, elite capture**  
Lack of commitment from the beneficiaries to participate in trainings, apply new skills in their future work, or return to Afghanistan | **M**  
• Careful design of selection criteria and close monitoring in Afghanistan at the selection stage.  
• Be mindful about the equal participation among the different Afghan ethnic groups.  
• Engagement with students throughout the programme to keep track of motivation levels  
• Written agreements to be signed by students before departure |
| **Lack of opportunities**  
Lack of commitment from potential employers in Afghanistan to employ the graduates upon return to Afghanistan, issues of diploma recognition | **M**  
• Ensure diplomas are recognised – Afghanistan is a signatory to the Bologna Declaration  
• Anticipate at early stage and mobilise existing networks in Afghanistan to develop a sustainable employment scheme  
• Share Kazakhstan’s experience of building the “Bolashak” programme and positive spillover effect from this programme for the political and economic development of the country |
| **Assumptions** | The primary underlying assumption is that all regional actors will maintain their commitment to Afghan women’s empowerment through learning mobility which will translate into comprehensive cooperation on facilitating permissions, collaboration on education, delivery on all obligations, and working together to resolve any problems |
that may arise during the course of the programme.
Additionally, it is assumed that Afghan women will be interested in this opportunity. The level of motivation may be higher in women nominated by their current employers or academic faculties.

3. LESSONS LEARNT AND COMPLEMENTARITY

3.1. Lessons learnt

The proposed Action has taken into account valuable lessons learnt from nearly all stakeholders involved with the existing collaborations on Afghanistan’s learning mobility to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The high levels of competence, ownership and capacity in both host countries to deliver higher education and TVET learning mobility set high standards for the programme. Support for learning mobility is gradually shifting away from ad-hoc individual interests toward learning opportunities that reflect specific needs for human capital development in Afghanistan. This has been the case with both intakes to Uzbekistan’s ECTAC, and to the smaller programme implemented by UNDP/JICA for Kazakhstan.

Key lessons and shortcomings have included:
- Low numbers of female students and women’s security concerns in their home country related to studying abroad. These are consistent with the findings of a national perception survey;
- Inconsistent application of scholarship selection procedures which led to tensions between Kazakhstan and Afghanistan authorities;
- For Central Asian programmes, the timing of language training should allow for very basic language acquisition before departure to meet women’s basic needs upon arrival;
- Absence of an adequate mechanism to link returning graduates to work opportunities. This together with random selection of academic opportunities, also led to shortcomings in the assessment of human capital development;
- There is a necessity for long-run investments in human capacity development in priority sectors of need, and future trainings should be demand-driven;
- There needs to be a clear strategy for replication and scale-up.

3.2 Complementarity, Synergy and Donor Coordination

Universities, educational ministries and other educational stakeholders in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have benefited from capacity-building under the EU’s Erasmus+ programme, including potential host institutions envisaged as part of the Action. Existing cooperation among universities in the region, as well as with the EU and other countries has strengthened contacts between people and raised inter-cultural awareness. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan entities have developed knowledge of the rules of implementation of EU grants and service contracts. Such experience brings value to Afghanistan in its effort to strengthen its own system of international learning mobility. The Action will benefit from ongoing EU assistance to all three participating countries in relevant sectors; agriculture, rural development and cross-border cooperation. This action will ensure coherence with existing Erasmus+ activities.
The proposed Action will build synergies with other donors providing similar schemes through a coordination mechanism in the office responsible for international learning mobility at the Ministry of Higher Education in Kabul, which can facilitate the exchange of lessons learnt. In particular, this may include a World Bank programme exclusively aimed at women working in sectors of high economic growth potential.

An ongoing project funded by USAID aims to promote women in Government by providing internships for female graduates in Afghanistan's civil service in order to reform the workplace policy and protect female employees, as well as to impact the public opinion in favour of women's participation in work force. This experience is highly relevant and will be further explored during the Inception phase of the Action.

4 DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

4.1 Overall objective, specific objectives, expected outputs and indicative activities

The overall objective is to strengthen human capacity development in Afghanistan by increasing women’s access to quality higher education and TVET through cooperation with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The Specific Objectives are:
SO1: To provide quality academic learning opportunities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for women of Afghanistan in selected fields.
SO2: To support selected women in obtaining specialised qualifications from education institutions of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.
SO3: To enhance employability of women participating in the programme.

The expected outputs are:
R1.1. Enhanced government policy and technical capacity for the establishment and implementation of the outgoing learning mobility mechanism
R2.1. Scholarships awarded to women to pursue specific qualifications in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan
R2.2. Enhanced knowledge of potential applicants on languages and cultures of the host countries
R3.1. Enhanced government capacity to design and implement a national job placement system

Indicative activities include:
1.1.1 Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan is supported to establish an outgoing mobility mechanism;
1.1.2 Initial guidelines on Risk Mitigation for international learning mobility of Afghan women developed, implemented and monitored;
1.1.3. Online platform created to steer and manage the selection and implementing process;
1.1.4. Women-Friendly Campuses guidelines developed, implemented and monitored;
2.1.1 Scholarships to study in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are awarded to Afghan women in selected areas;
2.1.2. Online foundation training in languages and cultures of the host countries for potential applicants developed and implemented;

3.1.1. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Afghanistan and Ministry of Higher Education are supported in enhancing women's employability upon return;
3.1.2. Practical activities to support women’s job applications and recruitment by public and private sector employers;
3.1.3. Support in designing a national system for providing job opportunities for the graduates participating in the international learning mobility scheme;
3.1.4. Study tour for the responsible authorities to Kazakhstan to learn about the established national system of education and employability (Bolashak International Scholarship);

4.2 Intervention Logic
The intervention logic of the action rests on the assumption that regional security will improve if more women in Afghanistan are economically empowered with better jobs and that the chances to obtain such jobs will improve if access to better education is facilitated. With better qualifications, women are also expected to gain higher-profile private or public sector jobs at decision-making levels. The benefits will include enhanced economic and social status for women, as well as important role models of women’s unique contributions to sector development and to gender equality in society.

Moreover, the triangular approach is deemed to provide for a more efficient delivery of higher education due to the proximity and the experience of government and higher education institutions in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and their incentive to work for regional stability.

The action is intended as a pilot that will facilitate the development of a sustainable system of learning mobility, providing women from Afghanistan with academic opportunities in Central Asia beyond the project lifetime. A midterm review will assess the feasibility of continuing and/or scaling up the programme and applying different implementation modalities, including the possibility to work directly through Kazakh and Uzbek aid delivery agencies.

4.3 Mainstreaming

Human rights - The Action is a women-specific initiative to redress well-recognised inequalities with men in Afghanistan in terms of access and participation in higher education in general and to international scholarships in particular. It will uphold principles of inclusion of diversity and bar no-one on the basis of age, ethnicity, different abilities, or beliefs. Equal opportunities will be inherent in criteria for beneficiary selection under Activity 1.1.1. Ministry of Higher Education is supported with guidance in establishment of the outgoing mobility mechanism. Fundamental values will be further reflected in Activity 2.1.1. Online foundation training in languages and cultures of the host countries for Afghan potential applicants.

Gender perspective - Activity 1.2.1 Initial guidelines on Risk Mitigation for international learning mobility of Afghan women and Activity 1.4.1 on Women Friendly Campuses both strengthen gender equality within the project life and offer broader future potential as models
of good practice. The Action seeks training in gender statistics under Activity 2.2.1 *Mobility scholarships to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are awarded to Afghan women* which ultimately will influence multiple sectors of Afghanistan’s development. Gender equality is further addressed by Activity 3.1.1 *Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Afghanistan is supported with guidance in enhancing women’s employability upon return* and Activity 3.2.1 *Practical activities to support women’s job applications and recruitment*. Together these are expected to introduce women with sound qualifications in unique specialised knowledge/technologies/skills to higher level jobs where their presence and anticipated influence on decisions on sector development will provide strong role models of women’s contribution to society.

**Environment and climate change** – Project activities in themselves do not pose threats in terms of the environment. Subject matter in Agriculture and in Mining identified under Activity 2.1.1 is fully expected to directly build capacity in appropriate technologies and approaches that conserve and promote the Earth’s resources. It is envisaged that all cross-cutting issues will be fully addressed.

**Resilience and conflict sensitivity** - Women’s knowledge, skills and intercultural awareness, as well as their professional networks at country and regional levels, are expanded by Activity 2.1.1. *Mobility scholarships to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan*. The Action offers wider social impact through activities 1.1.1. and 3.1.1. that support Afghanistan’s Ministry of Higher Education to establish an international learning mobility mechanism and support the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to provide employment services. This will provide an example to other women and men that change through education can be peaceful and sustainable. This action supports a deeply fractured society to rediscover unity and resilience to internal and external risks.

### 4. 4. Contribution to SDGs

The Action reflects the Sustainable Development Goals agenda and contributes specifically to **SDG 4** on inclusive, equitable and quality vocational and higher education; **SDG 5** on empowering women and girls by contributing to women’s participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life, and by contributing to elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres; **SDG 8** on promoting sustainable economic growth and productive employment and decent work for all; **SDG 10** on reducing inequality within and among countries, safe, regular and responsible mobility of people, and encouragement of ODA; **SDG 16** on peace, justice and strong institutions for promoting social and economic participation of women in peace-building and reconciliation processes; and **SDG 17** on partnership for the goals, with particular reference to collaborative efforts on Statistics which will help Afghanistan to monitor its development agenda. The interlinkages between SDGs will be addressed in partnership between the EU, UNDP, UN Women and governments of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Interlinkages are reflected in the Logframe matrix of the Action.
5. **IMPLEMENTATION**

5.1. Financing agreement
In order to implement this action, it is not foreseen to conclude a financing agreement with the partner countries.

5.2. Indicative implementation period
The indicative operational implementation period of this action, during which the activities described in section 4 will be carried out and the corresponding contracts and agreements implemented, is 84 months (7 years) from the date of adoption by the Commission of this Financing Decision.

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

5.3. 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 measures.

5.3.1. Indirect management with an international organisation.
This action may be implemented in indirect management with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The project team may be based in Kazakhstan. The agency will ensure cooperation among its offices in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, and with UN Women and/or other relevant UN agencies. The envisaged entity has been selected on the basis of its strong field and regional presence with technical, operational and country specialists in all participating countries.

The UNDP Country Office (CO) in Kazakhstan has been present in the country since 1993. Since then, a strong and trusted relationship with the Government and other non-state national partners has been built. This is proven by a growing project portfolio co-funded by the Government of Kazakhstan from its national budget. During the two decades of cooperation with Kazakhstan, the UNDP implemented close to 200 projects that in total amount to over USD 110 million. The UNDP supports the Government of Kazakhstan in its role of emerging donor. The UNDP has provided capacity building for the establishment of the national initiative - KazAid, a development assistance agency focusing on Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Existing relationships will facilitate implementation of the proposed Action, notably based on recent experience with the KAZODA project, for which UNDP organised trainings in Kazakhstan for participants from Afghanistan, Central Asia and 42 African countries. The trainings focused mostly on vocational skills.

5.4. 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 products and services in the markets of the countries concerned, or in other duly substantiated cases where the eligibility rules would make the realisation of this action impossible or exceedingly difficult.

5.5. Indicative budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EU contribution (amount in EUR)</th>
<th>Indicative third party contribution (EUR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1 Indirect management with an international organisation</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation, Audit</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Visibility</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.6. Organisational set-up and responsibilities

A contribution agreement will be signed between the European Commission and the UNDP Country Office in Kazakhstan. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Kazakhstan – with its regional knowledge, sound infrastructure and capacity, experienced team and proven relevant experience on learning mobility and TVET between Afghanistan and Kazakhstan – will be responsible for the overall management in cooperation with:

- UNDP Country Offices in Uzbekistan and Afghanistan for country-specific support,
- UN Women Kazakhstan, which has extensive regional knowledge, presence in 2 of the 3 countries, and expertise in gender mainstreaming, gender sensitivity guidance and action-oriented gender analysis of the education campuses and processes. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) may also be involved in capacity building for the Ministry of Higher Education’s international learning mobility system and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs on employment services for graduates.

A Steering Committee will be established in the Inception phase of the project. It will comprise representatives of all stakeholders listed in Section 1.4 above, and particularly ensure representation of student beneficiaries. The Steering Committee is expected to meet at least once a year. It 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. The Project Steering Committee shall hold an end-of-project review to capture and disseminate lessons learned with relevant audiences.

Delegations of the European Union in Afghanistan and Central Asia will be consulted and closely associated with the implementation of the Action.
5.7. Performance and Results monitoring and reporting
The day-to-day technical and financial monitoring of the implementation of this action will fall under the implementing partner’s responsibilities. To this aim, the implementing partner shall establish a permanent internal, technical and financial monitoring system for the action and elaborate regular progress reports (not less than annual) and final reports. Every report shall provide an accurate account of implementation of the action, difficulties encountered, changes introduced, as well as the degree of achievement of its results (outputs and direct outcomes) as measured by corresponding indicators, using as reference the Logframe matrix.

In addition, the implementing partner will conduct a baseline survey and final data collection.

SDGs indicators and, if applicable, any jointly agreed indicators as for instance per Joint Programming document should be taken into account.

The report shall be laid out in such a way as to allow monitoring of the means envisaged and employed and of the budget details for the action. The final report, narrative and financial, will cover the entire period of the action implementation.

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).

5.8. Evaluation
Having regard to the importance of the action, mid-term and ex-post evaluations will be carried out for this action or its components via independent consultants contracted by the Commission.

The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least 2 months in advance of the dates foreseen for the evaluation missions. The implementing partner shall collaborate efficiently and effectively with the evaluation experts, and inter alia provide them with all necessary information and documentation, as well as access to the project premises and activities.

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

The financing of the evaluation shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing decision.
5.9. Audit

Without prejudice to the obligations applicable to contracts concluded for the implementation of this action, the Commission may, on the basis of a risk assessment, contract independent audits or expenditure verification assignments for one or several contracts or agreements. The financing of the audit shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing decision.

5.10. Communication and visibility

Communication and visibility of the EU is a legal obligation for all external actions funded by the EU.

This action shall contain communication and visibility measures which shall be based on a specific Communication and Visibility Plan of the Action, to be elaborated at the start of implementation.

In terms of legal obligations on communication and visibility, the measures shall be implemented by the Commission, the partner country, contractors, grant beneficiaries and/or entrusted entities. Appropriate contractual obligations shall be included in, respectively, the financing agreement, procurement and grant contracts, and delegation agreements.

The Communication and Visibility Requirements for European Union External Action (or any succeeding document) shall be used to establish the Communication and Visibility Plan of the Action and the appropriate contractual obligations.
## APPENDIX - INDICATIVE LOGFRAME MATRIX (FOR PROJECT MODALITY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results chain: Main expected results (maximum 10)</th>
<th>Indicators (at least one indicator per expected result)</th>
<th>Sources of data</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Objective</strong></td>
<td>1. # of higher education diplomas awarded</td>
<td>1. Qualitative /quantitative reports from participating institutions of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. % of employed graduates one year after completing the programme</td>
<td>2. Survey of beneficiaries to be commissioned by the project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Agreement in place for continuation of the programme beyond EU funding</td>
<td>3. Inter-governmental agreement between Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in place aiming at continuation of this Programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Objective 1</strong></td>
<td>1.1. # of applications received disaggregated by sex</td>
<td>1.1. – 1.4. Database of enrolled students (disaggregated by sex)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2. # of women enrolled in the academic programmes</td>
<td>1.5. Report on gender-sensitive living standards</td>
<td>All parties maintain commitment to cooperation on learning mobility and to empowering Afghan women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.3. Status of Selection Committee membership and regulations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Afghan students and women in particular willing and able to participate in the programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.4. Status of development of an agreement upon Selection Guide Note by the Selection Committee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5. Status of adoption of Standards for Gender sensitive academic environment by host universities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific</strong></td>
<td>2.1. % of applicants completing the</td>
<td>2.1. – 2.2. Reports/records of host</td>
<td>Sector bodies and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To support selected women in</td>
<td>2.1. % of applicants completing the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[20]
| Objective 2 | obtaining specialised qualifications from education institutions of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. | language module successfully 2.2. Status of overall programme graduation rate (disaggregated by sex) 2.3. Status of learning mobility programme dropout rate (disaggregated by sex) 2.4. # of BA, MA, TVET certificates awarded (disaggregated by sex of recipient) | institutions; 2.3. Sector body reports 2.4. New Mobility system records of new graduates. | maintain interest in the opportunities. Favourable conditions exist for women’s learning mobility. Parties in all 3 countries collaborate on facilitating all arrangements for learning mobility. |
| Specific Objective 3 | To enhance employability of women participating in the programme. | 3.1. % of graduates receiving a job offer upon return (disaggregated by sex) 3.2. % of graduates in a job position relevant to their qualifications (disaggregated by sex) | 3.1. Reports of the graduates on their employment status 3.2. Beneficiary survey, HR records of targeted sector bodies, Ministry annual reports | Afghanistan participating bodies fulfil commitment to collaborative work in support of women’s economic empowerment and employability. |
| Outputs | 1.1. Enhanced government policy and technical capacity for the establishment and implementation of the outgoing learning mobility mechanism 1.1.1. # of potential students informed about the learning mobility programme (disaggregated by sex) 1.1.2. # of Afghan students applying to learning mobility under the programme (disaggregated by sex) 1.1.3. Status of the Guidelines on Risk Mitigation for international learning mobility of Afghan women 1.1.4. # of exchange sessions per month between participating institutions (distance or in person) | 1.1.1. – 1.1.2. Database of programme applicants (disaggregated by sex) 1.1.3. Guidelines document 1.1.4. Records/protocols of participation institutions | Political stability in Afghanistan. Continuous commitment by the host countries. |
| 2.1. Scholarships awarded to women to pursue specific qualifications in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan | 2.1.1. # of scholarships to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan awarded to Afghan students (disaggregated by sex) 2.1.2. At least 10 BA, 10 MA diplomas and 20 TVET certificates awarded by participating institutions (at 90% of them are women) | 2.1.1. – 2.1.2. Records/protocols of participation institutions | Relevant Afghan authorities facilitate permissions to study abroad for Afghan women  Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan educational institutions provide favourable study and learning conditions |
| 2.2. Enhanced knowledge of potential applicants on languages and cultures of the host countries | 2.2.1. # of Afghan students participating in the online foundation language trainings | 2.2.1. Database of scholarship beneficiaries | Access to studies for potential students is open, transparent and equal |
| 3.1. Enhanced government capacity to design and implement a national job placement system | 3.1.1. # of placement agreements concluded with support of the Action with Afghan ministries and private sector entities 3.1.2. # of students benefitting from a placement in a private company during their studies thanks to this Action (disaggregated by sex) 3.1.3. # of study visits on national system of education to Kazakhstan 3.1.4. # of Afghan authorities staff acquainted with the best international systems of employability | 3.1.1.- 3.1.2 Offers/Agreements with Afghan public/private entities 3.1.3. Study Visit Reports 3.1.4. Ministry annual report | Government of Afghanistan continues its policy on improving employment system |