

COMMISSION DELEGATED REGULATION (EU) 2021/2128**of 1 October 2021****supplementing Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council, as regards setting out certain specific objectives and thematic priorities for assistance under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)****(Text with EEA relevance)**

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,

Having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) ⁽¹⁾, and in particular Article 3(6) thereof,

Whereas:

- (1) Annexes II and III of Regulation 2021/1529 set out the thematic priorities for assistance.
- (2) Specific objectives and thematic priorities for assistance should be further developed through additional provisions supplementing Regulation 2021/1529.
- (3) This Regulation covers certain specific objectives and thematic priorities for assistance referred to in Article 3, paragraph 6, of Regulation 2021/1529,
- (4) In order to ensure the adoption of the programming and financing decisions under Regulation 2021/1529 without delay, this Regulation should enter into force on the day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*,

HAS ADOPTED THIS REGULATION:

Article 1

The specific objectives and thematic priorities for assistance related to the matters referred to in Article 3, paragraph 3, points (a) to (m) and point (r) and in Article 3, paragraph 4, points (a) to (j) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1529, are set out in the Annex to this Regulation.

Article 2

This Regulation shall enter into force on the day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

This Regulation shall be binding in its entirety and directly applicable in all Member States.

Done at Brussels, 1 October 2021.

For the Commission
The President
Ursula VON DER LEYEN

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 330, 20.9.2021, p. 1.

ANNEX

The specific objectives and thematic priorities for assistance, referred to in Article 3(6) and set out specifically in Article 3(3) points (a) to (m) and (r), and Article 3(4), points (a) to (j), of Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 (IPA III) set out by this Delegated Regulation, are the following:

- (1) **Establishing and promoting from an early stage the proper functioning of the institutions necessary in order to secure the rule of law and consolidating further democratic institutions**
 - a) Establishing independent, accountable, impartial, professional, depoliticised, and efficient judicial systems, including through transparent and merit-based recruitment, evaluation and promotion systems and effective disciplinary procedures in cases of wrongdoing, and promote judicial cooperation; ensuring access to justice;
 - b) Strengthening fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, freedom of the media, freedom of assembly and association and data protection;
 - c) Promoting and protecting human rights, including non-discrimination and gender equality, the rights of the child and the rights of persons belonging to minorities;
 - d) Promoting and strengthening the fight against corruption;
 - e) Promoting law enforcement cooperation and information exchange; developing effective tools to prevent and fight organised crime, trafficking in human beings and of illicit firearms, small arms and light weapons, drug trafficking, money laundering/financing of terrorism; supporting engagement with the Union on counter-terrorism and preventing radicalisation.
- (2) **Strengthening capacities to face migration challenges at regional and international level and to further consolidate border and migration management**
 - a) Sharing relevant information;
 - b) Ensuring access to international protection, and strengthening asylum management;
 - c) Strengthening capacities for border management, and in the area of return and reintegration, and efforts to tackle irregular migration, including the fight against migrant smuggling;
 - d) Addressing forced displacement.
- (3) **Enhancing capacities of strategic communication, including communicating to the public on necessary reforms for meeting the EU membership criteria**
 - a) Supporting further development of independent and pluralistic media and media literacy;
 - b) Increasing state and societal resilience to disinformation and other forms of hybrid threats, including capacity building in the area of cyber security.
- (4) **Enhancing good governance and reforming public administrations in line with the principles of public administration**
 - a) Strengthening public administration reform frameworks, including in the field of public procurement, improving strategic planning and inclusive and evidence-based policy and legislative development;
 - b) Enhancing professionalisation and de-politicisation of public service by embedding meritocratic principles;
 - c) Promoting transparency and accountability, including public access to information;
 - d) Improving quality and delivery of services, including adequate administrative procedures and the use of interoperable and citizen centred eGovernment;
 - e) Strengthening public financial management and the production of good quality statistics.
- (5) **Strengthening fiscal and economic governance**
 - a) Supporting implementation of the economic reform programmes (ERP) and systematic cooperation with international financial institutions on fundamentals of economic policy and strengthening of economic institutions;

- b) Enhancing the capacity to strengthen macroeconomic stability and social cohesion;
 - c) Supporting sustainable development and progress towards becoming a functioning market economy;
 - d) Advancing towards the Western Balkans Common Regional Market.
- (6) **Strengthening all aspects of good neighbourly relations, regional stability and mutual cooperation**
- (7) **Strengthening the capacity of the Union and its partners to prevent conflict, build peace, address pre- and post-crisis situations**
- a) Promoting people to people networking, reconciliation, peace-building and confidence-building measures, early warning and conflict-sensitive risk analysis, initiatives promoting reconciliation, transitional justice, truth-seeking, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence;
 - b) Supporting capacity building in support of security and development (CBSD) actions.
- (8) **Strengthening the capacities, independence and plurality of civil society organisations and social partners' organisations, including professional associations**
- a) Strengthening capacity, independence and plurality of civil society organisations and empowering civil society organisations at regional and local levels, including youth organisations;
 - b) Reinforcing social partners' organisations, including professional associations;
 - c) Encouraging networking at all levels among Union-based organisations and those of beneficiaries, enabling them to engage in an effective dialogue with public and private actors.
- (9) **Promoting the alignment of beneficiaries rules, standards, policies and practices to those of the Union, including public procurement and state aid rules**
- (10) **Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls**
- a) Establishing a more enabling environment for the fulfilment of girls' and women's rights;
 - b) Tackling all forms of gender-based violence, discrimination and inequalities;
 - c) Promoting equal participation and leadership of women and girls, including in policy and decision making;
 - d) Promoting gender budgeting.
- (11) **Strengthening access to and quality of education, training and lifelong learning at all levels, and offering support to cultural and creative sectors and sport**
- a) Promoting equal access to quality early-childhood education and care, primary and secondary education, improving the provision of basic skills;
 - b) Increasing educational attainment levels, tackling brain drain, reducing early school-leaving and reinforcing teachers' training;
 - c) Developing vocational education and training (VET) systems and promoting work-based learning systems to facilitate the transition to the labour market, including for persons with disabilities;
 - d) Improving the quality and relevance of higher education and research;
 - e) Encouraging alumni related activities;
 - f) Enhancing access to lifelong learning and supporting investment in education and accessible training infrastructure particularly with a view to reducing territorial disparities and fostering non-segregated inclusive education including through the use of accessible digital technologies.
 - g) Enhancing cooperation across the cultural, creative and sport sectors.

(12) Fostering quality employment and access to the labour market

- a) Tackling high unemployment and inactivity by supporting sustainable labour market integration in particular of young people, women, long-term unemployed and all under-represented groups;
- b) Stimulating quality job creation and support the effective enforcement of labour rules and standards;
- c) Supporting gender equality and youth, promoting employability and productivity, the adaptation of workers and enterprises to change, the establishment of a sustainable social dialogue and the modernisation and strengthening of labour market institutions such as public employment services and labour inspectorates.

(13) Promoting social protection and inclusion and combating poverty

- a) Modernising social protection systems to provide effective, efficient, and adequate protection throughout all stages of a person's life;
- b) Promoting the transition from institutional to family and community-based care;
- c) Fostering social inclusion, promoting equal opportunities and addressing inequalities and poverty;
- d) Integrating marginalised communities such as the Roma;
- e) Combating all forms of discrimination;
- f) Enhancing access to affordable, sustainable and high quality services, such as early childhood education and care, housing, healthcare and essential social services and long term care, including through the modernisation of social protection systems.

(14) Protecting the environment and improving the quality of the environment

- a) Addressing environmental degradation, and halting biodiversity loss;
- b) Promoting the conservation and sustainable management of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and natural resources;
- c) Investing in air quality, water and waste management and sustainable chemical management;
- d) Promoting resource efficiency, sustainable consumption and production and tackling pollution;
- e) Supporting the transition to green and circular economies, contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, increasing resilience to climate change, promoting climate action governance and information, and promoting energy efficiency;
- f) Promoting policies to support the shift towards a resource-efficient, safe and sustainable low-carbon economy, energy efficiency and strengthen disaster resilience as well as disaster prevention, preparedness and response.

(15) Thematic priorities for Cross-border cooperation between IPA III beneficiaries

- a) Promoting employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across borders;
- b) Protecting the environment and promoting adaptation to climate change and mitigation of climate change, risk prevention and management and promoting the use of renewable energy sources;
- c) Promoting sustainable transport and improving public infrastructures;
- d) Promoting the digital economy and society;
- e) Encouraging tourism, especially sustainable tourism, and preserving and promoting cultural and natural heritage;
- f) Investing in youth, sport, education and skills;
- g) Promoting local and regional governance and enhancing the planning and administrative capacity of local and regional authorities;

- h) Promoting cross-border initiatives to foster reconciliation and transitional justice;
 - i) Enhancing competitiveness, the business environment and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, trade and investment;
 - j) Strengthening research, technological development, innovation and digital technologies.
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