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ANNEX

Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe

Exceptional Assistance Measure regarding Great Lakes region

1. IDENTIFICATION

Action:	Support to social cohesion, peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and countering disinformation and hate speech in the Great Lakes region
Action Reference:	NDICI CR 2026 / 09 /9/ACT-63752
Cost:	EUR 10 000 000 (Union contribution).
Budget Line:	14 02 03 10
Duration:	Maximum 18 months. The authorising officer responsible may decide to extend this period twice by a further period of up to six months, up to a total maximum duration of 30 months, under the conditions laid down in Article 23(6) of Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council ('the NDICI Regulation').
Lead service:	FPI

2. ACTION SUMMARY

This 18-month exceptional assistance measure will support ongoing peace and stabilisation efforts in the Great Lakes region through four components. The first component will support critical actors, who are leading the implementation and coordination of peace initiatives and dialogue mechanisms in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and at the national level. The action will enhance the capacities to manage the various peace tracks, including the intra-Congolese process and its connection to high-level international agreements and mediation processes (e.g. Doha, Washington, African Union). Secondly, a flexible component will be included to allow for an agile support to EU political priorities and follow-up to mediation dialogues and peace agreements, including inter alia a possible DRC national inclusive dialogue. These components shall contribute to connecting women's, youth and civil society organisations at the local level with mediation efforts at the official level A third component will enhance capacities to monitor and respond to hate speech and information manipulation, building on a successful approach from previous FPI support in DRC, which will be expanded to include other Great Lakes countries. The fourth component will foster social cohesion and peace building amongst refugees, returnees, and host communities, mainly in Burundi.

3. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

3.1 BACKGROUND

The political, security, and humanitarian crisis situation in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and in the wider Great Lakes region is marked by instability, ongoing conflict and violence, and forced displacement. The 2025 offensive by the armed group M23, and its continued occupation of and around key urban centres in North and South Kivu, have further intensified the crisis context and an already fragile regional environment. Of particular concern is the protection of vulnerable populations. Women and girls are especially exposed in this protracted violent environment, including the brutality exerted by the plethora of armed groups active in Eastern DRC. Neighbouring Burundi is experiencing a deepening economic crisis and increasing humanitarian needs exacerbated by refugee flows from eastern DRC and the accelerated repatriation of Burundian refugees mainly from the closure of Nduta camp and a section of Nyarugusu camp in Tanzania. This is further exacerbating the already fragile social cohesion in the country, thus increasing the risk of localised conflicts. Linked to the ongoing conflict and the latest Ebola outbreak in the DRC and the region, a rise in hate speech, information manipulation and disinformation is aggravating tensions, fuelling polarisation and undermining trust, social cohesion and the conditions necessary for mediation, dialogue and conflict prevention. Despite several initiatives connected to the peace process in Eastern DRC, including the African Union-led process and the agreements in Washington D.C. and Doha/Montreux, progress has stalled, and the challenges in fostering an inclusive process and integrating the regional dimension of the conflict persist.

3.2 RATIONALE FOR CRISIS RESPONSE ACTIONS UNDER THE RAPID RESPONSE PILLAR OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION INSTRUMENT

With ongoing conflict in eastern DRC, the crisis in the Great Lakes region remains multi-layered and multi-faceted with numerous complex drivers, and a political, security, and humanitarian situation that is cause for alarm, compounded also by the current Ebola outbreak. This constitutes an exceptional and unforeseen situation in the sense of Article 4(4), point (a), of the NDICI Regulation. An adequate response cannot be provided under any other Union Instrument due to the urgency with which the funds are required and due to available resources already being firmly committed.

Annex IV, paragraph 1, third subparagraph, point (a) and (q) of Regulation (EU) 2021/947 specifically provides for the use of the NDICI rapid response pillar (a) support, through the provision of technical and logistical assistance, for the efforts undertaken by international, regional and local organisations and by State and civil society actors in promoting confidence-building, mediation, dialogue and reconciliation, transitional justice, women's and youth empowerment, in particular with regard to community tensions and protracted conflicts; (q) support for measures to promote the development and organisation of civil society and its participation in the political process, including measures to enhance the role of women in such processes and measures to promote independent, pluralist and professional media.

3.3 RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating measures
The political and security situation deteriorates, affecting the timely implementation of the project activities.	High	High	Flexible and adaptive implementation plans to be put in place, so implementing partners can respond to sudden changes in context. Continuous monitoring of the security environment will enable the timely anticipation and implementation of appropriate mitigation measures.
Stagnation or lack of progress in the track 1 peace process with decreased or disappearing international interest.	Medium	Low-Medium	Engagement to be kept high at local and national level. EU to continue being a reliable partner through support to project.
The Ebola outbreak does not remit, and the health crisis spreads and/or brings (further) movement restrictions, increased border control etc.	Medium	Medium	Implementing partners to anticipate risk management plans and adjust to the health situation as it develops taking into account the health and safety of staff and beneficiaries.

4. OBJECTIVES

4.1 OVERALL OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of the action is to support peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives in the Great Lakes region

4.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

4.2.1 Peace and mediation efforts in the DRC and the Great Lakes region are sustained and further strengthened.

4.2.2 Ability and capacity to counter hate speech, information manipulation and disinformation in the Great Lakes region is enhanced.

4.2.3 Conflicts and tensions between forcibly displaced populations and local communities are mitigated, and protection of vulnerable people is enhanced, with a focus on youth and women.

5. ACTION COMPONENTS AND EXPECTED RESULTS

The main expected results/outcomes include:

Expected Result (1): Ongoing peace initiatives and processes in the DRC and the Great Lakes region are strengthened.

Activities (indicative):

5.1.1 Provide technical assistance, capacity building, and logistical support to parties involved in the peace processes;
5.1.2 Facilitate inclusive and participatory consultations for relevant stakeholders in the peace processes, including local and national government authorities, armed groups, civil society, and communities, with the aim to increase inclusivity, legitimacy and local ownership of the peace processes;
5.1.3 Build capacity of relevant actors in conflict management and mediation;
5.1.4 Strengthen social cohesion through enhanced local mediation mechanisms, with a focus on eastern provinces in the DRC;
5.1.5 Support the implementation and follow-up of peace agreements.

Expected Result (2): Capacity to mitigate and counter hate speech, information manipulation and disinformation and their risks are enhanced, in full respect of freedom of speech and expression.

Activities (indicative):

5.2.1 Strengthen monitoring of hate speech, dis- and misiformation in the DRC and neighbouring countries including through innovative methods;
5.2.2 Enhance the analytical capacities of local actors (journalists, factcheckers, media institutions, civil society organisations) to identify, fact-check and monitor hate speech, information manipulation and disinformation;
5.2.3 Provide media literacy training to strengthen resilience of local populations to hate speech, information manipulation and disinformation;
5.2.4 Production and dissemination of content and reports to strengthen awareness and abilities to counter hate speech, information manipulation and disinformation.

Expected Result (3): Protection, social cohesion and conflict prevention mechanisms are strengthened for vulnerable populations, including forcibly displaced, refugees, returnees and host communities.

Activities (indicative):

5.3.1 Set-up and facilitate community dialogue and mediation platforms to bring together communitees of different backgrounds, including refugees, returnees, and host communities;
5.3.2 Strenghten local conflict prevention and protection mechanisms, including a focus on youth and women;
5.3.3 Support collective livelihood and economic initiatives to increase social cohesion between refugees, returnees, and host communities.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 IMPLEMENTATION MODALITIES

The Commission will ensure that the appropriate Union 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[1].

6.1.1 Grant: direct award (direct management)

(a) Purpose of the grant

The grants will contribute to achieving the specific objectives 4.2.1, 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 and the expected results 1, 2 and 3.

(b) Type of applicants targeted

The types of applicants targeted by this direct award are international and national non-governmental organisations and non-profit organisations, with consolidated experience in crisis affected or fragile contexts, including in the Great Lakes region. Applicants should have presence and experience on the ground and an ability to operate effectively in the region and engage with relevant stakeholders.

(c) Justification of a direct grant

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the recourse to an award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified because **the action entails crisis management aid as referred to in Article 198, point (a), and as defined in Article 2(22) of the Financial Regulation** at the date of the Financing Decision.

6.1.4 Changes from indirect to direct management mode (and vice versa) due to exceptional circumstances

In case the action, partly or entirely, cannot be implemented through direct management due to circumstances outside of the European Commission's control, the entire or part of the action may instead be implemented through indirect management. An entity, eligible to implement through indirect management, will be selected using the following criteria: trusted entity with specific in-country and/or regional experience in the Great Lakes region; existence of local partnerships/networks; ability to operate in conflict-affected areas; appropriate security risk management; and prior work under EU funding instruments.

6.2 INDICATIVE BUDGET

The total Union contribution under this Financing Decision **will not exceed EUR 10 000 000**. A breakdown among components is provided hereunder, and is indicative.

Indicative budget breakdown

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

Components	Union contribution (amount in EUR)	Indicative third party contribution, in currency identified
Component 1 and 2: Result 1 composed of		
6.1.1 – Direct grant (direct management)	4 500 000	N/A
Component 3: Result 2 composed of		
6.1.1 – Direct grant (direct management)	3 500 000	N/A
Component 4: Result 3 composed of		
6.1.1. – Direct grant (direct management)	2 000 000	N/A
Total	10 000 000	N/A

6.3 ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The action shall be implemented under direct management. It will be managed by the Commission, with the support of the Union Delegations to Burundi, Democratic Rebublic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda for the monitoring of the action.

6.4 PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS 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 report. Each 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 outcomes) as measured by corresponding indicators, using as reference the Logframe matrix. 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).

6.5 EVALUATION

Having regard to the nature of the action, an evaluation will not be carried out for this action or its components.

The Commission may, during implementation, decide to undertake such an evaluation for duly justified reasons either on its own decision or on the initiative of the partner.

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

6.6 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.

6.7 COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

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

In line with the 2022 "Communicating and Raising EU Visibility: Guidance for External Actions", it will remain a contractual obligation for all entities implementing Union-funded external actions to inform the relevant audiences of the Union's support for their work by displaying the Union emblem and a short funding statement as appropriate on all communication materials related to the actions concerned. This obligation will continue to apply equally, regardless of whether the actions concerned are implemented by the Commission, partner countries, service providers, grant beneficiaries or entrusted or delegated entities such as UN agencies, international financial institutions and agencies of Union Member States.

7. COMPLEMENTARITY, COORDINATION AND FOLLOW-UP

This measure contributes to the European Union's cooperation and humanitarian actions in the Great Lakes region and is complementary to previous and ongoing actions funded under the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments. This measure will be implemented in complementarity to and coordinated closely with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO) and the Directorate-General for International partnerships (DG INTPA), specifically for ongoing actions in the field of governance, peace, mediation, social cohesion, and media and information integrity support/FIMI. Furthermore, close coordination and leveraging of synergies with the engagement of the EU Special Representative for the Great Lakes region will be sought. The measure will also be designed in full complementarity to the interventions EU Member State agencies and like-minded donors and partners. Close cooperation and coordination will be sought to enhance synergies, maximise impact and avoid duplications.