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ANNEX

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

Exceptional Assistance Measure regarding Central Asia

1. IDENTIFICATION

Action: EU-UN support to the States in Central Asia for their citizens returned from conflict zones

Action Reference: NDICI CR 2023 / 15

Cost: EUR 2 000 000 (European Union (EU) 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.

Lead service: FPI

2. ACTION SUMMARY

This action will aim to support Central Asian countries with a focus on Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to establish appropriate systems for the reintegration and rehabilitation of returnees from conflict zones. The support will be provided through child- and human rights-based, age and gender-sensitive assistance to the provision of services by the relevant authorities and stakeholders. It will support the effective reintegration of returnees, especially children and women, in an inclusive approach that is fully aligned with international norms and standards. Additionally, the action will strengthen national and local capacities to meet the needs of returnees and their families throughout the reintegration and rehabilitation processes as well as support the promotion of best practices, exchanges and cooperation at regional and sub-regional levels.

3. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

3.1 BACKGROUND

A large number of people travelled to Syria and Iraq to join Da'esh and other terrorist groups. Available data indicates that this number amounts to more than 30 000 individuals, including

family members, originating from more than 85 countries. It is not always possible to determine whether the individual family members also joined voluntarily or were forced, manipulated, or coerced to travel. Many foreign terrorist fighters were killed while fighting in Syria and Iraq, leaving behind a large number of women and children, who have been detained in camps, under precarious living conditions, in particular in Northeast Syria. As per the UN data, more than 11 000 foreign women and children, out of which 77% of children under the age of 12, were in camps in northeast Syria in 2021.

Several countries in Central Asia have repatriated their citizens since then. Returnees to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have so far formed the largest group, with 725 citizens, of which 526 children and 188 women, having returned to Kazakhstan and 530 citizens, of which 333 children and 102 women, having returned to Uzbekistan. Smaller groups have returned to Tajikistan (248 children and 44 women) and Kyrgyzstan (120 children and 18 women). Citizens continue to return from conflict zones, with an increased number of returnees expected, especially in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The latest arrival was in Kyrgyzstan, with 41 children and 18 mothers returning from Syria in February 2023.

The measure will be implemented on the basis of lessons learned and a needs assessment conclusion which was part of the previous EU crisis response funded action ‘EU-UN Support to the States in Central Asia for their citizens returned from conflict zones, primarily Syria and Iraq – Component 1’. The action helped over 1 000 children returned from Syria and Iraq to reunify with their extended families, join schools and receive psychosocial support. They will require longer term psychosocial support, while also other citizens continue to return from conflict zones. The participating governments and social services will therefore continue to require assistance to enable inclusive and sustainable reintegration.

While activities in each participating country will be tailored to the particular needs, the continued regional level engagement will help to progress towards reintegration efforts in line with international standards. Given the remaining sensitivity around the politics of return and reintegration in the region, regional level engagement will enable the sharing of experience and managing and mitigating political elements of the implementation.

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

The European Union is committed to support the countries in Central Asia in their efforts towards reintegration and rehabilitation of returnees as part of its external action. In June 2020, the Council adopted Conclusions on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism¹ stating that “*the EU stands ready to further assist priority partner countries, which are the most impacted by the ‘returnees’ phenomenon, in order to help them [...] support rehabilitation and reintegration activities, including of family members, as well as specialised services for returning children*”.

2019 EU Central Asia Strategy² indicates that “*cooperation in preventing violent extremism and radicalisation [...] and addressing the issue of returning terrorist fighters will remain a priority of the partnership, and will be developed [...] in cooperation with civil society and with*

¹ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8868-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

² https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/joint_communication_-_the_eu_and_central_asia_-_new_opportunities_for_a_stronger_partnership.pdf

continued attention for human rights”, as well as the importance of *“cooperating on [...] the reintegration of the returnees”* is highlighted.

The continuous return of families of foreign terrorist fighters to Central Asia, the lack of capacities of national governments in receiving the returned citizens and integrating them in local communities, as well as the conditions pertaining in the camps in Syria and Iraq are elements constituting an exceptional and unforeseen situation in the sense of Article 4(4) (a) of the NDICI Regulation. An adequate response cannot be provided under any other European 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, second paragraph, points (l), (m) and (p) of Regulation (EU) 2021/947 specifically provides for the use of the NDICI rapid response pillar to (l) support for measures to ensure that the specific needs of women and children in crisis and conflict situations, including preventing their exposure to gender-based violence, are adequately met; (m) support for the rehabilitation and reintegration of the victims of armed conflict, including measures to address the specific needs of women and children, and (p) support for measures to address the potential impact of sudden population movements with relevance to the political and security situation, including measures addressing the needs of host communities.

3.3 RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

The following table identifies general potential risks associated with the implementation of the programme and possible risk management measures that will be implemented to minimize the potential negative impact.

Risks	Likelihood (High/ Medium/ Low)	Impact (High/Medium/ Low)	Mitigation strategy
Implementation			
Implemented reintegration and rehabilitation activities not fully aligned with international human rights norms.	Medium	High	Careful monitoring of the actions; senior level engagement and support from EU; suspend activities as a last resort.
Rehabilitation, reintegration and return processes fail to consider gender-specific needs.	High	High	Inclusion of gender dimension in all oversight/monitoring mechanisms.
Uneven implementation of the actions across the countries.	Medium	Medium	Regional monitoring. Flexibility in the use of funds with potential transfer or reallocation if necessary.

Risks	Likelihood (High/ Medium/ Low)	Impact (High/Medium/ Low)	Mitigation strategy
Security situation in the region deteriorates, with incidents impacting project actions.	Medium	Medium	Safety and security of staff and partners prioritised in line with implementing partners' standards and in close cooperation with EU Delegations.
Political			
Misperceptions and/or misrepresentation of the intervention (by political forces, media, and/or other groups).	High	High	Proactive communication strategies including addressing disinformation. Provision of information to local and international stakeholders on the balanced approach between protection and accountability.

4. OBJECTIVES

4.1 OVERALL OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of the action is to support Central Asian countries to establish appropriate systems for the reintegration and rehabilitation of returnees from the conflict zones.

4.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

4.2.1. Help the receiving countries to properly respond to the protection, humanitarian, reintegration and rehabilitation needs of returning women and children and their families.

4.2.2. Leverage experience gained from work in the participating countries through information exchange and dialogue at the regional level.

5. ACTION COMPONENTS AND EXPECTED RESULTS

The main expected results/outcomes include:

Expected Result (1): Effective reintegration and rehabilitation of returnees, especially children and women, in an inclusive approach aligned with international norms.

Activities (indicative):

- 5.1.1 Support the implementation of reintegration strategies and action plans;
- 5.1.2 Support self-returned children in communities and repatriated children in temporary reception centres;
- 5.1.3 Provide mental health and psychosocial support including to children, women, and their extended families;
- 5.1.4 Improve income-generating abilities through capacity building;
- 5.1.5 Human rights-based awareness raising and advocacy to address harmful practices, stigma and false information against returnees.

Expected Result (2): Strengthened national and local capacities to meet the needs of returnees, especially children and women, and their families throughout the reintegration and rehabilitation process.

Activities (indicative):

- 5.2.1 Strengthen national capacities and develop standards of education and child protection sectors on community-based reintegration;
- 5.2.2 Conduct capacity building activities and provide supervision support for service providers in reintegration and rehabilitation;
- 5.2.3 Support line ministries to increase their professional and coordination capacities;
- 5.2.4 Develop and advocate for a Minimum Package of Multi-Sectoral Child Protection Services to meet the requirements of vulnerable and returning children.

Expected Result (3): Reinforced knowledge sharing and cooperation at regional and sub-regional level.

Activities (indicative):

- 5.3.1 Provide technical expertise and support to countries to document good practices and lessons learned, including exchanges with other countries;
- 5.3.2 Disseminate positive practices to a wider group of the stakeholders and professionals inside the countries and cross-border.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 IMPLEMENTATION MODALITIES

The Commission will ensure that the appropriate EU rules and procedures for providing financing to third parties are respected, including review procedures, where appropriate, and compliance of the action with EU restrictive measures³.

6.1.1 Indirect management with a pillar assessed entity

This action may be implemented in indirect management with an entity which will be selected by the Commission's services using the following criteria: experience in repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration activities and experience and presence in the region. The

³ 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.

implementation by this entity entails the activities necessary to achieve objectives 4.1 and 4.2 as specified under the result areas in section 5.

Exception to the non-retroactivity of costs

The Commission authorises that the costs incurred may be recognised as eligible as of 1 May 2023 because of the new arrivals of families returning back from conflict zones, while the governments are lacking the sufficient systems in place to provide the full support to their needs.

6.1.2 Changes from indirect to direct management mode due to exceptional circumstances

If negotiations with an entrusted pillar assessed entity for the implementation as foreseen under 6.1.1 for Result 1 or 2, or 3 or parts of the expected result areas fail, the achievement of objectives 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, as set out in detail in section 5 above, may be wholly or partially implemented in direct management, with the direct award of grants.

6.2 INDICATIVE BUDGET

The total European Union contribution under this Financing Decision **will not exceed EUR 2 000 000**. A breakdown among components is provided hereunder, and is indicative.

Indicative budget breakdown

Components	EU contribution (amount in EUR)	Indicative third party contribution, in currency identified
EU-UN support to the States in Central Asia for their citizens returned from conflict zones	2 000 000	
6.1.1 – Indirect management with a pillar-assessed entity	2 000 000	N/A
Total	2 000 000	

6.3 ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The action shall be implemented under indirect management. It will be managed by the Commission, with the support of the European Union Delegations 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.

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

6.7 COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

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

It will remain a contractual obligation for all entities implementing EU-funded external actions 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. 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 EU member states.

The 2022 "Communicating and Raising EU Visibility: Guidance for external actions" reference document shall be used to establish the appropriate contractual obligations.

7. COMPLEMENTARITY, COORDINATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The action will ensure the complementarity with related EU programmes, such as the 'Law Enforcement in Central Asia programme', 'Spotlight initiative on eliminating violence against women and girls' and 'Displacement Tracking and Evidence for Migration Analysis and Policy in Asia (DATA)' as well as 'Improving Migration Management and Migrant Protection in selected Silk Route countries'.