



Brussels, 16.12.2021
SWD(2021) 388 final

PART 1/2

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
Accompanying the document

**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND
THE COUNCIL**

2021 Annual Report
on the implementation of the European Union's External Action Instruments
in 2020

{COM(2021) 816 final}

Table of Contents

0.	Introduction: EU response to world developments in 2020	1
0.1.	International Cooperation.....	3
0.2.	European Neighbourhood Policy.....	4
0.3.	Humanitarian aid and civil protection.....	5
0.4.	EU enlargement.....	6
0.5.	Security and defence	8
0.6.	Crisis response and preparedness.....	9
0.7.	Human rights and democracy	10
1.	Team Europe Approach: COVID-19 Response and Recovery.....	12
2.	Delivering On Global Commitments: Fostering Sustainable Development	15
2.1.	Implementing the 2030 Agenda comprehensively and coherently	15
2.2.	Means of implementation of the new agenda.....	16
2.3.	New instruments and aid modalities	17
2.4.	Working better together with Member States	18
2.5.	Policy Coherence for Development.....	19
2.6.	Development effectiveness.....	20
3.	International Partnerships – Thematic Overview	22
	Working together towards the SDGs and results achieved with EU support	22
3.1.	Human Development	22
	SDG #1 No Poverty	23
	SDG #3 Good Health and Well-being	24
	SDG #4 Quality Education.....	25
	SDG #5 Gender Equality	26
	SDG #6 Clean Water and Sanitation.....	27
	SDG #10 Reduced Inequality	28
	Selected results 2018-2020	29
3.2.	Green Deal.....	30
	SDG #2 Zero Hunger	31
	SDG #7 Affordable and Clean Energy	32
	SDG #11 Sustainable Cities and Communities.....	33
	SDG #12 Responsible Consumption and Production	34
	SDG #13 Climate Action.....	34
	SDG #14 Life below Water.....	35

SDG #15 Life on Land.....	36
Selected results 2018-2020	37
3.3. Sustainable Growth and Jobs	39
SDG #8 Decent Work and Economic Growth	40
SDG #17 Partnerships to achieve the Goal.....	42
Selected results 2018-2020	43
3.4. Science, Technology, Innovation and Digitalisation	44
SDG #9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	47
Selected results 2018-2020	48
3.5. Migration and assistance to refugees and displaced persons	48
Selected results 2018-2020	49
3.6. Governance, Peace and Security	50
SDG #16 Peace, justice and strong institutions.....	51
Selected results 2018-2020	52
4. Geographic Overview	54
4.1. Sub-Saharan Africa	54
4.1.1. Introduction (Policy developments).....	54
4.1.2. Working towards the SDGs.....	56
4.1.3. Implementation.....	57
4.1.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters	61
4.1.5. Crisis response and preparedness.....	63
4.2. Latin America and the Caribbean	65
4.2.1. Latin America.....	65
4.2.2. The Caribbean.....	71
4.3. Asia, Central Asia, Middle East/Gulf and Pacific	75
4.3.1. Asia	75
4.3.2. Central Asia.....	81
4.3.3. Middle East/Gulf region	85
4.3.4. The Pacific.....	90
4.4. Enlargement	93
4.4.1. Introduction (Policy developments).....	93
4.4.2. Working towards the SDGs.....	94
4.4.3. Implementation.....	94

4.4.4.	Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters	100
4.4.5.	Crisis response and preparedness.....	101
4.4.6.	The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) priorities.....	101
4.4.7.	IPA Performance Framework. Aim and coverage of the IPA PF. Overview of key results reported against the IPA PF.....	102
4.5.	European Neighbourhood.....	104
4.5.1.	European Neighbourhood East	104
4.5.2.	European Neighbourhood South.....	115
4.6.	Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs)	127
4.6.1.	Introduction (Policy developments).....	127
4.6.2.	Working towards the SDGs.....	127
4.6.3.	Implementation.....	129
4.6.4.	Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters	131
5.	Managing Aid.....	132
5.1.	Monitoring Systems.....	132
5.1.1.	New reporting system on SDGs.....	132
5.1.2.	Evaluation: review of the work programme	138
5.1.3.	Lessons learned	140
5.2.	Aid delivery modalities	145
5.2.1.	Budget Support.....	145
5.2.2.	Blending.....	148
5.2.3.	EU budget Guarantees	149
5.2.4.	Technical Assistance: TAIEX and Twinning	150
5.3.	Improving ways of working	150
5.3.1.	Simplification of procedures	150
5.4.	Communication & transparency	152
5.4.1.	Communication	152
5.4.2.	Transparency	153
5.4.3.	Learning	153

0. Introduction: EU response to world developments in 2020

The coronavirus pandemic was the all-consuming topic dominating world affairs – and subsequently the EU’s external action – in 2020. In response to the crisis, the EU and its Member States developed the ‘Team Europe approach’ and mobilised more than EUR 40 billion in support of fighting COVID-19 in our partner countries.¹ The Team Europe approach was a major innovation in terms of how the EU, Member States, their implementing agencies and European Development Finance Institutions work together, in particular with regard to projecting a united image vis-à-vis Third Countries. Following the logic that ‘no one is safe until everyone is safe’, the EU has committed to make the COVID-19 vaccines a global public good. To this end, the EU and its Member States have contributed over EUR 3 billion to the COVAX mechanism, making it one of the top donors. The goal is to provide vaccine doses for low and middle-income countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Pacific, as well as in Europe’s southern and eastern neighbourhood. Furthermore, in a unique repatriation effort, the EU assisted in bringing home more than 600 000 EU citizens who found themselves stranded abroad because of the pandemic.

While mitigating the impact of COVID-19 in the most vulnerable countries was the immediate priority, the EU also laid the ground for supporting an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable global recovery aligned with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The EU provided debt relief to vulnerable low-income countries via the IMF Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT) with a contribution of EUR 183 million making it the largest contributor. New financial guarantees were signed under the European External Investment Plan to help boost investment in countries neighbouring the EU and in Africa. Moreover, the EU successfully advanced two major structural negotiations: the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument for 2021-27 and the post-Cotonou framework for the EU’s relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

Regarding enlargement, the EU took an historic step by deciding to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. In addition, it launched an ambitious Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, accompanied by the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, to spur the long-term post-pandemic recovery. The plan is designed to boost economic growth, promoting both digital and green transitions and support the reforms required to advance the Western Balkan countries on their EU path. 2020 also saw an increased momentum in relations with Africa, as reflected by the Joint Communication ‘Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa’². Throughout 2020, the EU continued to give priority to the geopolitical developments of its bordering countries and regions by pulling together all its tools in support of conflict management and resolution. This included, among others, initiatives to support Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial unity, strengthen the healthcare system in Libya and support civil society in Syria. The EU’s efforts to promote peace and stability extends to the Sahel region (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania) and is a good example of the EU mobilising diplomacy, civilian and military missions, humanitarian, stabilisation and development aid in an integrated approach.

¹ The Team Europe approach combines resources, ways of working, expertise and tools of the EU, Member States, their implementing agencies and European Development Finance Institutions, while respecting EU competences and the decision-making procedures established by the EU Treaties.

² JOIN(2020) 4 final of 9 March 2020.

A joint communication on the post-2020 Eastern Partnership policy framework was adopted in March, focusing on strengthening resilience of the partners. After the Presidential elections in Belarus on 9 August and the ensuing protests, the EU took a position in support of the country's democratic aspirations, including through sanctions against those responsible for electoral fraud and the subsequent violence, but also by stepping up support to civil society, youth and independent media. In the Eastern Mediterranean, the tensions with Turkey continued to rise throughout the year. The EU remains committed to defending its interests and those of its Member States as well as to upholding regional stability. It also remains interested in a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey. This includes the full commitment to the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, which continued to be implemented, including after increased migratory pressure at the EU border with Turkey during February and March 2020.

On EU-US relations, the outcome of the November presidential elections presented a fresh opportunity to move the transatlantic agenda towards closer cooperation. This partnership, presented in the Joint Communication 'A new EU - US agenda for global change'³, will allow Europe and the United States to work together on several strategic issues, including climate change, health, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development. The EU furthermore sought to consolidate its partnership with China, working to establish a relationship based on the promotion of our values and greater reciprocity and a level playing field in economic, science, technology and innovation (STI), trade and investment relations.

The promotion and protection of human rights is a cornerstone of EU external action, reaffirmed through its Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024⁴. The adoption of the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime⁵ on 7 December and subsequent listings in March 2021 are tangible examples of the EU's determination to defend human rights globally, and has equipped the EU with a framework that allows it to target those responsible for, involved in or associated with serious human rights violations and abuses worldwide.

While the concept of multilateralism has been challenged in recent years, the EU has remained a staunch supporter of an international rules-based order, with the United Nations (UN) at its core. In 2020, when the UN celebrated its 75th anniversary, the EU strongly supported the conviction that multilateralism remains the best method to address ever increasing global challenges, including through the implementation of universally agreed frameworks for action, such as the SDGs and the Paris agreement. It was a key year for multilateralism as the worldwide impact of the pandemic demonstrated the need for intensified international cooperation between scientists, economists and policymakers at the UN, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and within the G7 and G20 and other international fora. In particular, the EU strongly engaged in promoting global health cooperation as the most effective response to the pandemic.

This Annual Report covers the following financing instruments managed by Commission departments during 2020: the European Development Fund (EDF) and all instruments funded by Budget Heading IV (Europe in the World), namely: the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA), the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the

³ JOIN(2020) 22 final of 2 December 2020.

⁴ JOIN(2020) 5 final of 25 March 2020.

⁵ OJ L 410I 7.12.2020, p. 1.

European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the Partnership Instrument (PI), Humanitarian Aid, the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation (INSC) and the Instrument for Greenland.

0.1. International Cooperation

In relation to international partnerships, action in 2020 has focused on promoting EU priorities externally, notably green alliances. At the same time, 2020 has been a particularly challenging year due to the pandemic, which wreaked havoc worldwide. Yet, it was the year in which nations saw that the way forward to rebuild a post COVID-19 world was through solid collaboration and partnerships and by investing in a renewed type of multilateralism. The pandemic forced the EU to revisit its objectives and design a new era of international cooperation, in a manner that truly balances economic, social and environmental progress as envisioned by the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs.

In 2020, the EU proved to be a reliable partner in tackling the COVID-19 crisis globally. The EU was at the forefront in aligning the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts with the SDGs to help address today's challenges while also building more inclusive economies within sustainable and resilient societies, in line with the Joint Communication on the Global EU response to COVID-19⁶. In doing so, the EU contributed through its actions to poverty eradication and to sustainable development while promoting European values and interests, namely peace, security, democracy, good governance, rule of law and respect of human rights. The EU embraced a multilateral approach in the COVID-19 response in Europe and outside. Working together in a 'Team Europe approach', the European Union, the European Investment Bank, the EU Member States and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development mobilised over EUR 40 billion. The commitment was to support partner countries with their emergency response, to strengthen health, water and sanitation systems and to help mitigate the socio-economic impact.

The EU, together with its partners, is working to deliver a global recovery that seeks to reduce inequalities and promote a just transition at the global level. At the High-Level Event on Financing for Development in the COVID-19 Era and Beyond in May 2020, President von der Leyen proposed a Global Recovery Initiative that links debt relief and investment to the SDGs with the aim of supporting a sustainable recovery that is green, digital, just, inclusive and resilient.

Inter-institutional discussions intensified throughout 2020 to finalise the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027. The new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) will be the main tool to fund external cooperation, covering the entire world except for pre-accession countries and EU overseas countries and territories. Work continued in parallel to prepare the next programming exercise. The guidelines for drafting multiannual indicative programmes were published in November, setting out how to implement the NDICI at country, regional, and thematic levels including through specifying the contribution to EU priorities and to the SDGs.

The EU continued to be actively engaged in development-related UN processes and strongly promote the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement, such as the High-Level Political Forum on

⁶ JOIN(2020) 11 final of 8 April 2020.

sustainable development and the Conferences of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In the margins of the virtual UN General Assembly, the EU also participated in several related events, such as the SDGs Business Forum. The EU also organised a side-event on Team Europe in the margins of the Special Session of the General Assembly. The EU also continued to reinforce its partnerships with the International Financial Institutions, in particular with the World Bank Group and the IMF, to cooperate in the pursuit of these universal commitments and shared priorities.

The EU's relationship with Africa remained a key priority for Commission departments. In March, the EU launched its vision for strengthening the EU's partnership with Africa in a Joint Communication 'Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa', which proposes to deepen EU-Africa cooperation through partnerships in five key areas closely related to EU political priorities and to the implementation of the SDGs as a shared agenda: green transition; digital transformation; sustainable growth and jobs; peace and governance; and migration and mobility. Negotiations continued towards a new Partnership Agreement with the 79 members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States.

0.2. European Neighbourhood Policy

In 2020, the EU continued to implement its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to advance reforms and build resilience and prosperity in the EU's neighbourhood. Throughout the year, despite delays in implementation caused by the pandemic, the ENP mobilised significant support for its four priorities⁷, in line with the principles of differentiation, shared ownership and an incentive-based approach. The EU continued to drive forward programmes to assist Neighbourhood countries in tackling the causes of instability, including through a sustained focus on health and economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as good governance, the rule of law and human rights. Funds committed by the EU and its Member States in 2020 for COVID-19 support in the Neighbourhood region amounted to more than EUR 12.1 billion (see Table 1 in Chapter 1), out of which over EUR 5.7 billion came from the Commission⁸. Significant efforts at bilateral and regional levels continued to increase the capacity of civil society across the region in terms of policy shaping to support human rights defenders and freedom, as well as the accountability of states to their citizens.

In the **Eastern Neighbourhood**, the 20 Deliverables for 2020 reform agenda⁹ continued to deliver tangible results across the region. Following the structured consultation on the future of the Eastern Partnership carried out in 2019, the EU adopted a new Joint Communication 'Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all'¹⁰ in March 2020. The Joint Communication sets out five long-term policy objectives under an overarching framework of resilience. These objectives are: resilient, sustainable and integrated economies; accountable institutions, the rule of law and security; environmental and climate resilience; a resilient digital transformation; and resilient, fair and inclusive societies. Based on this Joint Communication, the EU has been developing, in close cooperation with all stakeholders, a successor reform agenda to the 20 Deliverables for 2020, with a new set of Eastern Partnership targets and

⁷ The ENP's priority areas are: good governance, democracy, human rights and the rule of law; economic development for stabilisation; security; and migration and mobility.

⁸ This figure includes Macro-Financial Assistance loans amounting to EUR 2.25 billion.

⁹ SWD(2017) 300 final of 9 June 2017.

¹⁰ JOIN(2020) 7 final of 18 March 2020.

specific measures for post-Covid recovery. The work on shaping the post-2020 reform priorities continued in 2021 in view of endorsement at the sixth Eastern Partnership Summit. In addition to the multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership, the EU supported cross-regional cooperation such as the Black Sea Synergy and Northern Dimension policies.

In 2020, the situation in the **Southern Neighbourhood** remained challenging and was aggravated by the pandemic. Developments in the region varied between countries. Crises continued in Syria and Libya, although the conflict intensity decreased. Prospects of conflict settlements between Israel and Palestine*¹¹ remained weak, despite a series of normalisation agreements between Israel and some Arab countries. The dramatic socio-economic situation in Lebanon was aggravated by the Beirut port blast in August 2020 and plunged more of the population into poverty. The situation in several countries remained politically stable, and new cooperation initiatives, in particular with Morocco (on a green partnership and security cooperation), were developed. In general, the economic situation remained high priority in most partner countries. Moreover, the human rights situation and space left to civil society and independent media continued to deteriorate in many countries. The issue of migration and mobility remained high on the political agenda between the EU and the Southern Neighbourhood.

The 25th Anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration in November 2020 was an opportunity to reflect on the priorities of the EU partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood, especially in the context of a post-COVID recovery, leading to a Joint Communication on a renewed partnership with the Southern Mediterranean adopted on 9 February 2021¹². The Joint Communication proposes a new, ambitious and innovative Agenda for the Mediterranean, drawing on the full EU toolbox and the opportunities of the twin green and digital transitions to relaunch our cooperation and realise the untapped potential of our shared region. It sets the key directions for our partnership and a range of actions along five key policy areas. These are: Human development, good governance and the rule of law; Resilience, prosperity and the digital transformation; Peace and security; Migration and mobility; and Green transition, climate resilience, energy and environment. The new Agenda will guide the EU's bilateral, regional and cross-regional cooperation under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

0.3. Humanitarian aid and civil protection

The EU together with its Member States is the world's leading donor for humanitarian assistance and is consistently at the forefront of the response to humanitarian crises and disasters, acting on the basis of the Humanitarian Aid Regulation and the Union Civil Protection Mechanism. Activities in 2020 were largely driven by COVID-19: a global health emergency that required an unprecedented response both within and outside the EU. In this particularly challenging context, the EU provided a clear example of solidarity in action at home and around the world. Humanitarian needs were at an all-time high, driven by a resurgence in state-based conflicts, combined with the impact of climate change, environmental degradation, global population growth and failed governance. The EU delivered a strong and coordinated response in Europe and beyond and was a key player in responding to the COVID-19 crisis globally.

¹¹ *This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

¹² JOIN(2021) 2 final of 9 February 2021.

The Commission departments funded humanitarian organisations in a wide range of crises in more than 80 countries and regions including Syria, Turkey, Yemen, South Sudan, Venezuela, Afghanistan, the Sahel region and Ukraine. The larger part of EU humanitarian funding was dedicated to addressing needs arising from protracted crises. Conflict and COVID-19 were the main drivers of humanitarian needs, while natural disasters also triggered significant emergency aid. In response to unprecedented humanitarian needs, the EU's final humanitarian aid budget for 2020 amounted to EUR 2 138 million. In addition to being a key donor, the EU played an important role in developing thematic policies, supporting multilateral action, and coordinating approaches with the Member States.

To enable Member States and humanitarian partners to transport humanitarian staff and supplies to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, and to maintain the flow of humanitarian assistance and personnel, Commission departments put in place the EU Humanitarian Air Bridge (HAB) offering air transport to and from various destinations worldwide. The EU HAB operations focused on the most critical humanitarian emergencies with access difficulties, mainly in Africa, but also in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. A total of 67 flights supporting the distribution of more than 1 150 tonnes of supplies were delivered to over 20 countries¹³.

In total, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism was activated 102 times in 2020 for a variety of natural and human-induced disasters with 45 requests for assistance from within Europe, 55 requests from non-EU Participating States and 2 from international organisations.

0.4. EU enlargement

In 2020, major developments took place on the EU enlargement agenda. In February 2020, the Commission adopted proposals to enhance the accession process¹⁴, and in March, the members of the European Council endorsed the General Affairs Council's decision to open accession negotiations¹⁵ with the Republic of Albania and with the Republic of North Macedonia. At the EU-Western Balkans Summit¹⁶ on 6 May 2020, the EU leaders reaffirmed the Union's determination to intensify further its engagement with the region.

2020 was marked by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU, while being seriously affected itself by this crisis, has provided extensive support to the efforts of the governments, in particular in the Western Balkans, to address those challenges. The EU reallocated EU financial assistance in view of the urgencies faced by the region due to the crisis, both in terms of health and socio-economic needs. The Commission has mobilised a package of over EUR 1.6 billion to the benefit of Western Balkans citizens and businesses, while Turkey chose not to request the redirection of EU grant funding¹⁷ and the Commission mobilised around EUR 100 million in contingencies and savings under existing financial commitments for Turkey. Support from the EU and its Member States for the Western Balkans and Turkey amounted to more than EUR 5.2 billion (see Table 1 in Chapter 1).

¹³ Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Iraq, Iran, Ivory Coast, Lebanon, Nigeria, Peru, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Venezuela, Yemen.

¹⁴ [COM\(2020\) 57 final of 5 February 2020.](#)

¹⁵ [Council conclusions on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process.](#)

¹⁶ [Zagreb declaration.](#)

¹⁷ Funding allocated within the existing Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2020.

The annual enlargement package¹⁸ was adopted on 6 October, in parallel with the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans¹⁹ accompanied by the Guidelines on the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans²⁰. The Economic and Investment Plan aims to mobilise up to EUR 9 billion of IPA III funding for the period 2021-2027 to spur the long-term post-pandemic recovery, boost economic growth, encompassing the dual digital and green transition, and support reforms required for accession, including bringing the Western Balkans closer to the EU Single Market. It aims to unleash the untapped economic potential of the region and the significant scope for increased intraregional economic cooperation and trade. The investment capacity of the region will also be boosted by the mobilisation of a new Western Balkans Guarantee facility, with the ambition to potentially raise investments of up to EUR 20 billion.

The Berlin Process summit in Sofia in November 2020 under the joint chairmanship of Bulgaria and North Macedonia was an opportunity to kick-start the implementation of the Plan, with the Commission bringing to the table a package of six priority investment projects in connectivity worth EUR 120 million. The EU's political dialogue with the Western Balkans continued. Provisions under the Stabilisation and Association Agreements continued to be broadly implemented and the meetings of the joint bodies under the agreements took place at regular intervals. In 2020, EU–Turkey relations witnessed an all-time-low due to Turkey's increasingly assertive foreign policy actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, developments in Cyprus, its unilateral military action in Syria, regression on reform, its obligations under the Customs Union, and on migration cooperation. The EU continued to express serious concerns over the continued deterioration of democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights and the systemic lack of judicial independence in Turkey. The Council conclusions of June 2018 and June 2019, concluding that Turkey's accession negotiations have effectively come to a standstill and no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing and no further work towards modernising the EU–Turkey Customs Union is foreseen, remained in place.

In response to Turkey's unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, in February 2020, the Council decided to place two persons under restrictive measures. The December 2020 European Council invited the Council to adopt additional listings under the sanctions regime in view of Turkey's unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean and offered a positive EU–Turkey agenda, provided Turkey shows readiness to promote a genuine partnership with the EU and its Member States and to resolve differences through dialogue and in accordance with international law.

The Facility for Refugees in Turkey is a key component of the 2016 EU–Turkey Statement. It continued to coordinate existing EU assistance instruments to ensure that the needs of refugees and host communities in Turkey were addressed swiftly and effectively. By the end of 2020, the Facility's operational funding allocation of EUR 6 billion had been fully contracted, and more than EUR 4 billion of this disbursed, supporting refugee needs in the areas of education, health, livelihoods, protection, municipal infrastructure and socio-economic support.

¹⁸ [COM\(2020\) 660 final of 6 October 2020.](#)

¹⁹ [COM\(2020\) 641 final of 6 October 2020.](#)

²⁰ [SWD\(2020\) 223 final of 6 October 2020](#)

0.5. Security and defence

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already challenging security environment. The EU adopted a collaborative crisis management approach to ensure the best possible handling of the crisis in view of the severity of the coronavirus pandemic.

In particular, civilian-military cooperation in support of civil protection and for humanitarian assistance purposes has been made more relevant by the COVID-19 pandemic, as recourse to military assets and capabilities became needed. An ad-hoc European External Action Service (EEAS)/EU Military Staff Task Force was created and worked together with Commission departments on military support and assistance to civilian authorities during the first wave of the pandemic. The Task Force allowed information exchanges on national military support and assistance to civilian authorities, including EU efforts in the field of civil protection and humanitarian assistance. Military assistance in support of civilian authorities in emergency situations will be also taken up in the framework of the Strategic Compass.

Furthermore, in an unprecedented effort, the EEAS supported Member States with their consular assistance to EU citizens stranded abroad due to the COVID-19 pandemic, notably through its network of local consular correspondents in the 143 EU Delegations and a dedicated Task Force in Brussels. EU Delegations, working with Member State consular networks, provided practical information to EU citizens in third countries on their options and organised their repatriation to the EU. More than 625 000 EU citizens were repatriated to Europe from countries all over the world. This massive operation, the first-ever of this magnitude, took place from late January to July 2020. It mobilised around 2 600 commercial flights and 408 special flights funded by the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (EUCPM), which brought back home around 90 000 EU citizens. Special attention was also given to EU citizens stranded on cruise ships and EU seafarers.

On a longer-term strand of work, preparations for an EU Strategic Compass started in 2020. This forward-looking document will aim to give the EU a common strategic direction in the area of security and defence and enhance the implementation of the EU's ambitions in this field. As an initial step, the first ever threat analysis based on inputs coming from the intelligence services of all EU Member States was conducted. This threat analysis will be translated into a comprehensive strategy to respond to the growing threats and challenges faced by the EU on the international stage.

Regarding Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations, Operation Iriini (named after the Greek goddess for peace) was launched on 31 March 2020, with the mandate to support the implementation of the arms embargo on Libya under the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. The operation also has secondary tasks including monitoring illegal oil trafficking from Libya, contributing to countering human trafficking and smuggling activities and contributing to the training of the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy. Special on-line training courses have been rolled-out to raise awareness on COVID-19 and how to mitigate the limitations imposed by the current COVID-19 pandemic in continuing activities.

Support continued to the G5 Sahel countries, especially through the provision of security training tailored to the needs of the countries and to help foster their cross-border security cooperation. In the context of the holistic and coordinated strategic review of CSDP engagement in Somalia and the Horn of Africa, the mandate of Operation ATALANTA, the EU's executive military maritime operation, and of the two civilian missions (EUTM Somalia and EUCAP Somalia) was extended to 31 December 2022.

Furthermore, the EU's civilian crisis management abilities, in particular through civilian CSDP missions, remains crucial. In 2020, eleven civilian CSDP Missions (in Ukraine, Georgia, Kosovo*, Libya, the Palestinian Territories (Ramallah and Rafah), Niger, Mali, Somalia, Iraq and the Central African Republic) worked to increase human security. Around 2 000 staff work in the field, and around 100 at headquarters. The total cost of the civilian CSDP Missions is currently around EUR 281 million/year, out of which civilian missions returned EUR 40 million in unused funding to the Commission in 2020 due an average 80 % budget implementation rate.

In line with the negotiations for the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework, advances were made in relation to the new EU's external instruments toolbox. A provisional agreement was reached between the Council Presidency and European Parliament on a regulation setting up the **Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument** (NDICI), which will support actions for crisis management, conflict prevention, stability and peace building. Furthermore, a political agreement was reached on the establishment of the **European Peace Facility** (EPF), the new global off-budget instrument that will finance actions having military or defence implications, under the Common Foreign and Security Policy, with the aim of preventing conflict, preserving peace and strengthening international security and stability.

The 16 June 2020 Council conclusions²¹ on EU External Action for Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism emphasised the need for the EU to maintain focus on the EU's closest Neighbourhood and a more structured cooperation on counter terrorism and preventing or countering violent extremism.

0.6. Crisis response and preparedness

While the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic dominated 2020, the EU continued to implement its integrated approach to conflicts and crises through timely crisis response interventions under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) and through common foreign and security policy actions across the world.

Through its actions, the EU contributed to:

- conflict prevention;
- mediation, dialogue and peace building;
- stabilisation and human security;
- strengthening the rule of law;
- the fight against violent extremism, stigmatisation and disinformation; and
- security sector reforms.

The EU remains one of few actors with a global presence and a complete policy toolbox. The significant steps made in security and defence show that the EU is taking greater responsibility for its defence and in assisting partners in peace and security. Political agreements have been reached on the European Defence Fund and the European Peace Facility. Under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the EU operates civilian and military missions worldwide. These missions carry out a variety of tasks, ranging from supporting management of borders to training local police.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

²¹ Council conclusions on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, 16 June 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44446/st08868-en20.pdf> .

The EU is prioritising early warning and conflict analysis and, wherever possible, a focus on conflict prevention, for example in connection to electoral processes or the risk of tensions between migrants and host communities. Reforms in the area of the rule of law and anti-corruption are key for sustainable governance systems. Inspired by the EU strategic framework on Security Sector Reform (SSR), support to SSR activities remains important in contexts affected by, or at risk of, conflict. The IcSP and several CSDP missions support SSR-related actions with a continued emphasis on capacity building, training, promoting good governance and respect for universal human rights, and compliance with international humanitarian law.

The EU's engagement with international organisations continues to reflect its strong commitment to the rule-based multilateral order. Work to coordinate international efforts in conflict and post-conflict settings continued with the UN and other international organisations. In addition to continued support to the UN peace architecture, this also includes regular operational dialogues and working-level exchanges with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and its Conflict Prevention Centre on topics such as mediation, gender, and the inclusion of women and youth in peace processes.

The EU also continued to pursue its strategic interests through fostering dialogue on values and global challenges with key partners across the world and through economic cooperation, trade and investments. Human rights and gender equality, as well as support for women, peace and security, are central to all EU policies. The EU seeks to broaden conversations, defend and promote European values, build new cross-regional alliances and project influence, contributing in this way to the security of the EU and its citizens. Also of importance are the EU's dialogues on non-proliferation and disarmament, cyber security, maritime security and on the internal/external security nexus including in the area of counterterrorism.

0.7. Human rights and democracy

In a context of shrinking civic and democratic space, worsened by the current COVID crisis, the need for transparency and accountability over government actions is more important than ever. The EU re-affirmed its unconditional support to Human Rights and Democracy worldwide and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) remained the symbol of EU global leadership on these topics.

Among key democracy support actions this year, a highlight is the Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights a one-stop online global monitoring platform (tracker of trackers). Independent journalists and media outlets were supported to counter disinformation efforts and travel restrictions and restrictive measures taken by governments. The EU's service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) deployed 17 electoral missions and remote desk reviews and supported 14 electoral processes involving around 350 staff on the ground, with the objective to provide a comprehensive, independent and impartial assessment of electoral processes and enhance transparency and accountability. The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) further extended its operations in the Neighbourhood, Turkey and the Western Balkans with 320 new grants in 2020, and almost 40 % of funding going in support of journalists, independent media and social media platforms. In Belarus, for instance, EU4Belarus: Solidarity with the People of Belarus was launched in support of the unprecedented grassroots activism and mass protests. Support to human rights defenders remained a priority with ProtectDefenders and the Emergency Fund for human rights

defenders at risk providing life-saving support to thousands of defenders. In total, the EIDHR provided support to 1 711 human rights defenders and family members.

Throughout the year, civil society was a key partner in our democracy support. The EIDHR piloted an initiative empowering civil society to demand systemic change and to address accountability and anti-corruption deficits in 16 countries (SANCUS project). The EED, through an emergency small grants scheme, continued to support civil society organisations (CSOs), human rights activists and independent media. And, to respond to increasing levels of negligence and violence against children, a EUR 10 million project partnering with a consortium of CSOs was put in place to strengthen national child protection systems and raise children's voices in five African countries. At country level, the EU supported 196 new initiatives led by CSOs, in particular local organisations, totalling some EUR 123 million in over 82 partner countries. For instance, regional civil society projects such as Majalat or Med Dialogue for Rights and Equality continued their regional capacity building and policy dialogue with civil society related to Human Rights and Democracy at large.

At multilateral level, support continued for organisations such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Criminal Court and the Global Campus of Human Rights, a unique network of one hundred universities around the world playing a leading role in education, research and advocacy in human rights and democratisation. 200 students graduated in 2020 from one of its seven regional master programmes. Implementation of joint programmes continued focusing on human rights in the context of our strategic partnership with the Council of Europe in the Western Balkans and Turkey, and the Eastern and the Southern Neighbourhood regions through the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA) and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). Overall, the EU continued to support reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and reinforcing the protection of human rights.

In November 2020, the Council adopted conclusions on the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024. The Action Plan sets out the EU's level of ambition and priorities in this field in its relations with all third countries and will guide the programming of the EIDHR successor programme under the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. In a digital age plagued by disinformation, this Action Plan also promotes enhancement of democracy and transparency through media literacy.

1. Team Europe Approach: COVID-19 Response and Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has created extraordinary and unprecedented challenges in Europe and across the world, deepening inequalities within countries and regions, and between them. Against a backdrop of heightened geopolitical rivalries, disinformation and ‘battle of narratives’, the European Union has demonstrated its leadership and responsibility by putting together a collective, coordinated and coherent global response to the pandemic, bringing together the EU, its Member States, their diplomatic network, finance institutions including national development banks and implementing agencies, as well as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in a Team Europe approach.

The Team Europe approach sent a strong message of European solidarity with partner countries in all regions and set out the EU’s resolve to exercise global leadership for a sustainable recovery, aligned with the SDGs. Strategic joint communication at all levels and extensive use of the visual identity of Team Europe by all its members helped to further strengthen this message in 2020.

The Council conclusions on Team Europe Response to COVID-19²² set out the Team Europe approach in support of partner countries and multilateralism with a focus on three priorities: emergency response; support to health, water/sanitation and nutrition systems; and support to socio-economic recovery to help partner countries ‘build back better and greener’. The total Team Europe response amounted to over EUR 40 billion as of 1 January 2021,²³ 65 % of which has already been disbursed²⁴. See Table 1 below.

Team Europe - monitoring mechanism							
Region	Total Team Europe commitments	Team Europe Priorities (committed versus spent)					
		Emergency response to humanitarian need		Strengthening health, water and sanitation		Social and economic consequences	
		<i>committed</i>	<i>spent</i>	<i>committed</i>	<i>spent</i>	<i>committed</i>	<i>spent</i>
TOTAL EUR Millions	40,468	3,510	3,193	8,523	3,514	28,435	19,468
Global	7,233	2,465	2,380	1,959	966	2,809	1,606
Guarantees	3,270	0	0	245	0	3,025	1,880
Western Balkans and Turkey	5,225	103	75	580	187	4,541	3,688
Neighbourhood	12,180	310	208	2,347	761	9,522	7,275
Sub-Saharan Africa	6,220	318	282	2,097	1,299	3,805	2,312
Latin America and the Caribbean	2,474	76	67	500	181	1,897	803
Asia and the Pacific	2,762	189	180	598	119	1,975	1,495
ACP, regional	477	48	1	167	2	262	212
OCTs	627	0	0	30	0	598	197

Table 1. Team Europe approach and COVID-19 response and recovery

Under the emergency response, existing or planned humanitarian operations were adapted to factor in the COVID-19 situation and resulting needs. New funding was mobilised from the Emergency Aid Reserve, for example to support the World Health Organisation to enhance pandemic response and preparedness in the most effected African and Asian countries. In the first wave of the pandemic, the

²² Council Conclusions of Foreign Affairs Council (Development) 8 June 2020.

²³ The response through different instruments mentioned in this introduction was mainly reoriented and adapted ongoing actions to support COVID related activities and mitigate COVID impacts as well as additional funding.

²⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/eu-global-response-covid-19_en

EU set up an EU Humanitarian Air Bridge (EU HAB) to ensure continuity of humanitarian and medical supplies and personnel to third countries. In this context, 67 flights were organised to deliver more than 1 150 tons of medical and humanitarian equipment and to transport over 1 700 medical and humanitarian staff and other passengers.

Overall, more than 90 000 stranded EU citizens were repatriated on 408 flights, facilitated by the Union Civil Protection Mechanism²⁵. The EU also provided material assistance through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, facilitating the delivery of over 18 million items of critical personal protective and medical equipment, including over 3 million items from rescEU²⁶ stockpiles established in 2020.

The Team Europe approach emphasises the importance of cooperation between the EU and its Member States in response to the COVID-19 global crisis with coordination within multilateral institutions, in particular the United Nations system, and with regard to International Financial Institutions, the G7 and G20. In the UN Financing for Development High Level Event in September 2020, President von der Leyen called for a Global Recovery Initiative that links investment and debt relief to the SDGs and aims at a sustainable recovery that breaks the vicious circle created by the COVID crisis.

Through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), the response focused on the impact on people in conflict or in crisis-affected contexts mainly to prevent the aggravation of conflicts where specific groups were excluded from national response efforts or stigmatised; to counter dangerous disinformation and promote access to conflict-sensitive, accurate and reliable information; and to support the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. Support to crisis and conflict-prone countries helped them to plan for their recovery. In cooperation with the UN and the World Bank, the methodology of the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) and the Recovery and Peace Building Assessments (RPBA) were adapted to include COVID-19 Recovery Needs Assessments (CRNA). Such assessments were conducted in El Salvador, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic.

Under the Partnership Instrument, activities focused on leveraging the EU's role as policy maker and standard-setter to address the impact of COVID-19 on global health and in socio-economic terms. The response aimed to enhance cooperation with international and non-EU partners in addressing the adaptation to and mitigation of the pandemic and sharing of best practices.

In the same vein, the EU has been a firm supporter of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator. The 4 May Coronavirus Global Response pledging conference, co-convened by the Commission, raised EUR 15.9 billion to ensure the collaborative development and universal deployment of vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics against COVID-19. More than 70 % of these pledges came from the EU and its Member States. Moreover, the EU announced a EUR 500 million contribution to the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) initiative comprising EUR 100 million in grants (included in the global COVID response) and EUR 400 million in guarantees to ensure safe and effective vaccines for low and middle-income countries. This has been instrumental in achieving COVAX's target to deliver 1.3 billion doses for 92 low- and middle-income countries by the end of 2021. The EU and its Member States were among the lead contributors to COVAX in 2020 with over

²⁵ Through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC).

²⁶ RescEU is a reserve of emergency response capacities deployed as additional safety net under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism .

EUR 850 million. Furthermore, as part of its global COVID response, the European Commission adopted on 28 December 2020 a package of EUR 70 million under the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA II) to help fund the early access of Western Balkans partners to COVID-19 vaccines procured by EU Member States.

The success of this collective response to COVID-19 has since been made a more stable feature of the EU's external action. It should help position the EU in a changing geopolitical landscape that increasingly requires collective, swift and decisive action at multilateral and country level. The EU, together with Member States and European Development Financing Institutions are in the process of elaborating Team Europe Initiatives as part of the next programming cycle 2021-27. Drawing on the best mix of funding and support modalities, tools and partners, and using the wealth of the collective experience, expertise and resources, Team Europe Initiatives should contribute by delivering substantive results for partner countries, making the EU and its Member States the partner of reference in this priority area.

2. Delivering On Global Commitments: Fostering Sustainable Development

2.1. Implementing the 2030 Agenda comprehensively and coherently

The broad and interconnected impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is a reminder that full implementation of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is crucial to strengthen resilience and prepare the world for future shocks. In 2020, the Commission presented its comprehensive approach to deliver on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the years ahead. The Staff Working Document 'Delivering on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals – A comprehensive approach'²⁷ reaffirms the EU's commitment to the 2030 Agenda and explains how the SDGs are at the heart of the EU's policymaking and implementation. The SDGs are an intrinsic part of the political programme of Commission President von der Leyen and have been integrated into the main EU proposals, policies and strategies. An array of transformative policies has been presented throughout 2020, in conjunction with the European Green Deal. The Eurostat 2020 SDG report contained for the first time a visual presentation of the status and progress of the Member States towards the SDGs. Through its external action, the EU continues to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs globally. At the start of the UN Decade for Action, the SDGs have kept the EU focused on a sustainable growth path compatible with planetary boundaries, on wellbeing, inclusion and equity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reversed some of the global progress made towards the SDGs. At the same time, it also represents an opportunity to accelerate decisive joint action and gear investments towards the achievement of the SDG goals and targets. The EU's commitment on the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs has even greater relevance by providing an impetus to 'building back better' after the pandemic towards a more inclusive, sustainable, just and resilient future for all, based on the 2030 Agenda that leaves no one behind. In May 2020, President von der Leyen proposed a global recovery plan linking investment and debt relief to the SDGs. The purpose is to ensure a sustainable recovery that is green, digital, just, inclusive and resilient and brings countries closer to achieving the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. At the UN High-Level Political Forum in New York in July 2020, Commissioner Urpilainen invited partners to join the global recovery initiative in a global effort to 'build back better' together. This will require more international partnerships and more multilateralism.

In 2020, the EU has made progress to support developing countries' implementation of the SDGs through its cooperation programmes, financial flows and trade. During negotiations preparing the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III), the objective of supporting the implementation of the SDGs through external action has been fully integrated and made operational. Under NDICI, for the next programming period, geographic and thematic multiannual indicative programmes will include, among others, the context and justification of the priority areas, in relation to the relevant SDGs, in addition to EU policy objectives and mutual interests. In accordance with the European Consensus on Development, the Commission is continuously updating reporting systems, including its results framework, to show better how EU actions contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. To this end, EU institutions' headquarters and delegations are working closely with Member

²⁷ SWD(2020) 400 final of 18 November 2020.

States for greater impact at country level through joint programming, joint implementation and joint results frameworks.

2.2. Means of implementation of the new agenda

A mix of financial and non-financial resources are required to implement the 2030 Agenda, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the EU has a comprehensive and integrated approach to mobilising financing from all available sources (public and private, domestic and international) as well as promoting other means of implementation, including the establishment of good policies and policy coherence for sustainable development, to meet the SDGs.

The EU is helping partner countries make the most of the diverse financing sources available to support SDG implementation. In 2020, thanks to EU support, integrated national financing frameworks (INFFs) have been firmly established as a means to map the landscape for financing for sustainable development at country level and to develop country-led financing strategies to reach the SDGs. So far, 68 countries have confirmed their willingness to engage in an INFF (up from 16 in 2019). Together with partners at the UN, the EU has supported countries as they took first steps towards INFFs, including through missions in Indonesia, Cabo Verde and Kyrgyzstan. The EU was also instrumental in bringing together multilateral (including the IMF) and bilateral actors around this initiative.

In May 2020, at the initiative of the Group of Friends of Financing the SDGs, the UN convened a High-Level event on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID and beyond to consider how the world should respond to and recover from the COVID-19 crisis. At this High-Level Event, President von der Leyen called for a Global Recovery Initiative, linking debt relief and investment to the SDGs, and promoting a green, digital, just and resilient recovery. In the follow-up process, six discussion groups were established. The EU actively participated and was the co-chair of the Discussion Group II on Recovering Better for Sustainability to promote the objectives set out by the President.

Other more specific EU achievements in 2020 include bringing together aid, investment, trade, domestic resource mobilisation and policies designed to unlock the full potential of all financial flows.

Support for mobilisation of domestic resources is helping to improve the transparency, fairness, effectiveness and efficiency of tax systems in partner countries. The EU adapted and further developed its financial instruments and aid modalities for investments outside the EU in order to deliver on its ambitious commitments to sustainable development and the implementation of the SDGs. In 2020, the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) guarantees were refocused to help countries respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting investments in Africa and in the EU Neighbourhood.

The private sector is duly acknowledged as a major contributor to sustainable and inclusive growth and the creation of decent jobs and a key actor for the success of the SDGs. The EU has taken measures to promote local private sector development in partner countries, notably through entrepreneurship and access to finance support. Attractive investment climates and regulatory frameworks are also of paramount importance for the private sector and accordingly, the EU promotes public-private dialogue processes and events and has stepped up its assistance to investment climate reforms.

The EU is also facilitating the development of the total official support for sustainable development (TOSSD) statistical measure to help identify available means of implementation for the SDGs (e.g. global public goods, private mobilised resources, south–south and triangular cooperation). In 2020, the first TOSSD reporting cycle was launched and the European Commission completed its first full TOSSD reporting. Meanwhile, the international TOSSD task force, co-chaired by the European Commission and South Africa, continued refining the TOSSD methodology. Thanks to EU efforts, TOSSD got international recognition in the G20’s Financing for Sustainable Development Framework.

2.3. New instruments and aid modalities

In 2020, the EU adapted and further developed its financial instruments and aid modalities for investments outside the EU in order to deliver on its ambitious commitments to sustainable development. In the framework of the External Investment Plan (EIP), the European Commission has established the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) to support investments in Africa and the EU Neighbourhood. The overall aim of the EFSD is to contribute to the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular poverty eradication, as well as to the commitments under the recently revised European Neighbourhood Policy. In 2020, the EFSD contributed to bridging the gap between the financing already available and the financing still needed to create jobs, boost growth and meet the other SDGs.

EU budgetary guarantees for loans to banks and other financial intermediaries are particularly well suited to de-risk investment in partner countries and support their sustainable development. This has made EFSD an important part of the EU’s global response to COVID-19. Some guarantees have supported the health sector, such as the African Health Diagnostics Platform that supported COVAX to procure and deliver doses of vaccines for fair distribution around the world, and others, such as expanded guarantees for renewable energy, have focused on liquidity support to ensure the effective completion of investment projects despite the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic. The EFSD Guarantee covered portfolios of investments in targeted areas, such as energy and connectivity; micro, small and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) financing; sustainable agriculture and rural development; sustainable cities; and digital for development. By the end of 2020, the Commission signed guarantee agreements with partner financial institutions for EUR 1.55 billion, exceeding the initial EFSD Guarantee capacity (EUR 1.5 billion) as a result of additional contributions from donors.

In 2020, blending projects continue to contribute to sustainable growth and reduce poverty. Through blending, the EU used limited amounts of public grants to mobilise financing from partner financial institutions, such as international development banks and the private sector, for projects that do most to help countries develop. The strategic use of a limited grant element contributes to projects with low financial return but high economic (i.e. societal) benefit. The EU Blending Framework currently comprises seven active regional blending facilities²⁸. In 2020, these facilities invested over EUR 900 million in projects over the globe. From the creation of the first blending facilities in 2007, more than EUR 8 billion of EU grants are estimated to have leveraged around EUR

²⁸ Africa Investment Platform (AIP), Asia Investment Facility (AIF), Caribbean Investment Facility (CIF), Investment Facility for Central Asia (IFCA), Investment Facility for the Pacific’ (IFP), Latin American Investment Facility (LAIF), and Neighbourhood Investment Platform (NIP). It covers all regions of EU external cooperation (with the EU-Africa Infrastructure Trust Fund having allocated all its remaining resources in 2019).

70 billion of loans by financial institutions and regional development banks for a total investment volume of more than EUR 115 billion.

Budget support remained an important tool to support EU external action. Budget support has played a major role in the EU global response to COVID-19 through support to strategies or policies put in place by partner countries in response to the health crisis or to the socio-economic situation stemming from an unprecedented global slowdown. A total amount of EUR 1.9 billion was paid as budget support in 2020 for international partner countries, with the total amount rising to EUR 3 billion with the inclusion of budget support to European neighbourhood and Western Balkans countries. These funds provided urgent support to create fiscal space, allowing implementation of COVID-19 response plans, including health and economic recovery measures, and continued delivery of key public services.

2.4. Working better together with Member States

Working better together with Member States is about making our collective development cooperation and financial assistance more effective and coherent by reducing fragmentation and achieving greater impact as well as increasing and maximizing European visibility and influence. The essential focus is on actions at country level including joint programming and joint implementation.

Joint programming promotes a common European strategy to frame our relationship with partner countries that is responsive to local needs and brings together our European policy commitments in a single framework. Globally, by the end of 2020, there were 22 joint programming documents²⁹. There was only one new joint programming document published in 2020 (Ecuador). This is primarily a result of many joint programming processes targeting the new EU programming cycle as their starting point. In addition, European partners in 27 additional countries were involved in joint programming having either a joint analysis (17) or a roadmap (10)³⁰.

The importance of a coherent and coordinated European presence was further reinforced with the emergence of the Team Europe approach in 2020 as a rapid collective response to the COVID-19 crisis to support a sustainable recovery aligned with the SDGs. The Team Europe approach consists of the EU, its Member States, their diplomatic networks, finance institutions including national development banks, and implementing agencies, as well as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

During 2020, the success of the Team Europe approach to COVID showed the value added of a collective European response. Building on this, the programming guidelines for the proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) introduced Team Europe Initiatives to support transformational change by delivering clear results for partner countries, making the EU and its Member States the partner of reference in a priority area. Team

²⁹ Bolivia (2017-2020), Burkina Faso (2017-2021), Burundi (2019-2022), Cambodia (2014-2018/2019-2020), Central African Republic (2017-2021), Comoros (2015-2020), **Ecuador** (2020-2023), Egypt (2017-2020), Ethiopia (2017-2020), Ghana (2017-2020), Guatemala (2014-2020), Honduras (2018-2022), Ivory Coast (2017-2020), Kenya (2018-2022), Laos (2016-2020), **Mali** (2019/20-2023), Moldova (2017-2020), Nicaragua (2018-2020), Palestine (2017-2020), Senegal (2018-2023), Togo (2014-2020), Tunisia* (2017-2020). Review JPD in 2020: Palestine and Senegal.

³⁰ *Joint analysis*: Armenia, Belarus, Benin*, Cameroon*, Chad*, Congo Brazzaville, **Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Georgia, Jordan***, Lebanon, Madagascar, Morocco*, Nepal, Niger, Ukraine, Zambia – *Roadmap*: Azerbaijan, Djibouti*, Haiti, **Mongolia, Mozambique**, Pakistan*, Tajikistan, Uganda*, **Uzbekistan**, Zimbabwe (*: draft – **bold**: new in 2020).

Europe Initiatives (TEIs) get support both from the EU budget, and are therefore guided by NDICI programming guidelines, and from the relevant financial resources of the EU Member States. 2020 saw important steps in the preparation of TEIs, with extensive consultations with Member States, European Development Finance Institutions (EDFIs), Commission departments and others. Delegations played the most important role in identifying TEIs and consulting stakeholders at country level.

The Council was consulted and thoroughly discussed the Team Europe global response for COVID-19 and beyond, on which conclusions were agreed in June 2020, including an article on the longer-term 'Team Europe approach' perspective that should be included in future programming. Comprehensive information, including a joint letter in May 2020, communicated the Team Europe approach to all EU Delegations, Member States Embassies and the offices of EU development finance institutions and agencies, inviting them to engage with the initiative.

An updated version of the guidance Working Better Together as Team Europe – through joint programming and joint implementation was published in 2020³¹. The guidance outlines good practice with many case studies and operational recommendations linking the Team Europe approach to the concepts of Joint Programming and Working Better Together. Various rounds of consultations among the different Commission departments and the EEAS ensured the global scope of the guidance, which considers the specific policy framework of the different regions covered.

The cooperation continues with the inclusion of the Practitioners' Network (PN) through their newly set-up Task Force on Team Europe³². Commission departments and the PN, also joined forces to undertake a study on public sector expertise in 2020, as part of the inclusiveness agenda. Based on the empirical evidence from a preliminary mapping exercise on existing operational structures, frameworks and tools, the study analyses the strategic potential of public sector expertise as an innovation cooperation modality with partner countries and provides a set of recommendations. Commission departments covering Neighbourhood policy have also increased their participation in meetings with the Practitioner's Network, which has been an opportunity to provide an overview of the state of play of joint programming and clarify the neighbourhood specificities in the programming processes.

Training courses on Working Better Together through joint programming and joint implementation were organised in 2020³³ with the participation of EU and Member States staff from headquarters and field offices, to facilitate a joint understanding of the value added and operational challenges of the working better together approach, with a new dedicated module on joint implementation.

2.5. Policy Coherence for Development

In accordance with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the EU and its Member States are committed to take account of the objectives of development cooperation in all external and internal policies, which are likely to affect developing countries. The new European Consensus on Development reaffirmed the importance of this principle, generally known as Policy Coherence for Development (PCD), and recognised it as a fundamental part of the EU's contribution to achieving the SDGs. The EU's PCD ambition is twofold: to leverage on synergies between different policies to

³¹ E-version available since October 2020, as part of the Tools and Methods Series, Guidelines N°10.

³² The Task Force is limited to the EU Member States only. It met twice in 2020.

³³ Two half-day sessions in December 2020.

enhance effectiveness and, in case of trade-offs, to ensure mitigating measures to support sustainable development and just transition processes in partner countries.

Consequently, the Commission integrated its work on PCD in its overall work on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. In that context, it identified a number of key initiatives that were prepared in the course of the year and that had major PCD relevance (i.e. potentially having a significant impact on our partner countries' ability to achieve the SDGs). This inventory aims at promoting synergies between various policies and minimising incoherencies at an early stage of policy formulation.

The Commission initiated the review of its Better Regulation guidance. Better Regulation, notably the use of ex-ante impact assessments, is a crucial element to promote PCD and ensure that new initiatives take better account of possible impacts on developing countries. This works in conjunction with the commitment of the Commission to actively integrate the implementation of the SDGs in its Better Regulation tool.

Reporting from EU Delegations on PCD issues was further streamlined to better follow the impact of EU policies in partner countries.

The Commission continued to promote its approach to PCD both internally within the EU vis-à-vis the European Parliament, Member States and civil society, and at international level, in particular through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The Commission monitored progress and finalisation of the research project Sustainable Market Actors for Responsible Trade (SMART), which was funded under the Horizon 2020 programme and responded to the EU's call for research for the strengthening of PCD. The project delivered valuable findings on several policy issues of great importance to PCD, such as sustainable corporate governance and circular economy.

2.6. Development effectiveness

The EU is actively engaged in improving the effectiveness of its development cooperation to achieve the best, fastest and most sustainable impact for those most in need. In the new European Consensus on Development, the EU and its Member States reaffirm the commitment to applying the Busan principles of effectiveness (country ownership, results, inclusiveness, and transparency). The EU coordinates and supports Member States in the implementation of these principles, promoting common positions and practices on effectiveness in support of the 2030 Agenda.

The EU is a strong promoter of effectiveness. Our cooperation modalities operationalise the effectiveness principles in many ways, such as through budget support, capacity building tools, policy reform and political dialogue. In particular, in the current times of crisis, effectiveness is key when we need to achieve more with less. The EU, through the Team Europe approach, ensured a coordinated and effective European response to the pandemic in partner countries.

To achieve better impact through effectiveness the EU works to get the buy-in of all development actors at partner country level, including non-OECD donors. The EU actively uses its role as a member and supporter of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), where it represents European development providers on the GPEDC steering committee. In 2020, the EU took the leadership of the GPEDC Action Area on Demonstrating the Impact of Effectiveness implementing and enhancing development effectiveness at country level. Moreover, throughout the year, the EU

has promoted a renewed focus on effectiveness at the OECD- Development Assistance Committee (DAC) aimed at helping DAC members to strengthen the effectiveness of their programmes. A new work stream on Development Effectiveness has been included in the 2021-22 Programme of Work and Budget at the OECD-DAC.

In addition to EU's work to build global consensus on development effectiveness, it also pursues greater effectiveness in its own development cooperation and that of EU Member States, through the Team Europe approach and joint programming initiatives. In 2020, the EU published the study [Effective Development Cooperation - Does the EU deliver?](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/eu-development-effectiveness-monitoring-report-2020_en.pdf)³⁴ that explores how well the EU and its Member States are implementing the development effectiveness principles in their official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries and provides recommendations on how the effectiveness and impact of European assistance can be improved.

³⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/eu-development-effectiveness-monitoring-report-2020_en.pdf

3. International Partnerships – Thematic Overview

Working together towards the SDGs and results achieved with EU support

The priorities of the current Commission have been translated into development action: human development; green deal; sustainable growth and jobs; science, technology, innovation and digitalisation; migration; governance, peace and security. They provide the basic structure for the sections within this chapter on the thematic overview of international partnerships. At the same time, implementing these EU priorities is key to help our partners to implement the SDGs. In this report, the impacts of our actions in relation to SDGs are presented within the above-mentioned EU priorities, alongside the respective available results, based on the existing EU results framework. While for the purpose of this chapter, for readability purposes, each SDG is presented only once under an EU priority to which it is particularly related, the cross-cutting nature of the SDGs and the strong interlinkages among them imply that the content reported under each SDG will often also be relevant to other EU priorities³⁵.

Our partnerships are based on dialogues aiming at convergence between EU political priorities and the specific objectives of each partner country, with the SDGs as a central reference. Further to the collective commitment of the EU and its Member States in the European Consensus on Development to work together in partner countries, the key areas for working together towards the SDGs are joint programming, the joint results frameworks and joint implementation. This approach to development cooperation and international partnerships has been taken further in the COVID-19 response both at multilateral level and in partner countries, with EU actors, Member States, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development working together in a Team Europe approach. This is a key element of the collective EU contribution to a global sustainable recovery aligned with SDGs.

3.1. Human Development

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted societies in many ways reversing some human development progress achieved in recent years, putting pressure on the most vulnerable, exacerbating inequalities, and leading to limitations of the civil and democratic space in many fragile democracies. This has affected the implementation of a range of SDGs directly relevant to human development and progress on the commitment to leaving no one behind.

At country-level, the EU focused its efforts on adjusting immediate needs to current circumstances without losing sight of its overarching objectives and paying particular attention to not jeopardizing longer-term development needs.

At global level, the EU spearheaded the Coronavirus Global Response. The pledging marathon, chaired by the President of the European Commission, raised a total of EUR 15.9 billion for research, universal access to vaccines, diagnostics, treatment and sustainable health system strengthening in partner countries. The EU was an early and staunch supporter of the establishment of the Access to

³⁵ As an example, SDG 6 on water (and related results) is presented in the report under the EU priority on Green Deal (having regard to challenges such as water pollution, water efficiency, etc.), while a range of actions relevant to this SDG will also contribute to other priorities, including for instance human development (e.g. drinking water and sanitation), governance (e.g. integrated water management) or sustainable growth and jobs (e.g. economic use of water in key economic sectors).

COVID-19 Tools Accelerator and COVAX Facility. It was launched in April 2020 to ensure universal and equitable access to two billion vaccine doses for 92 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), 500 million tests and 245 million treatments in 2021. The EU further mobilised EUR 500 million for the COVAX Facility, a global procurement mechanism for the purchase of COVID-19 vaccines.

Through the Team Europe initiative, the EU and its Member States deployed strong national, regional and global responses to tackle the pandemic and helped prepare the basis for equitable access to vaccines for partner countries. The EU and its Member States have mobilised EUR 38.5 billion leading to higher impact interventions and a stronger EU role in the world. In 2020, the Commission reoriented and frontloaded close to EUR 1.3 billion to tackle the COVID-19 health impact in partner countries.

Beyond health, COVID-19 lockdowns resulted in more than 1.5 billion students and youth across the planet being affected by school and university closures. The focus of the European Commission has been to avoid a lost generation, i.e., shortfalls in education and learning activities that have negative long-term effects. We helped partner countries face the challenges, e.g., by ensuring continued learning during the pandemic, and by planning for a safe return of students and staff when schools re-open. Where possible, ongoing education support programmes have been reoriented to cater for the emerging needs, including use of distance learning modalities through both high- and low-tech solutions, with the aim of leaving no one behind. EU-funded global initiatives, such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW) rapidly provided emergency funding to countries most in need, overall reaching more than 355 million children in 66 countries.

The protection and promotion of the human rights of all women and girls was at the centre of the Team Europe package of EUR 20 billion in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, about 60 % of global Commission disbursements related to COVID-19 have supported gender equality and women's empowerment, mitigating the disproportionate economic and social impact of the pandemic on women and girls as well as placing emphasis on the importance of gender-sensitive research on the impact of the pandemic. The European Commission also started to engage more systematically with youth to ensure that young people, with a particular attention to girls, are heard and empowered as young leaders and actors of change to drive sustainable development in their countries. Through the #YourVoiceYourFuture digital campaign launched together with the African Union and UNICEF, about 450 000 children and young people across Africa and Europe aged between 14 and 35 raised their voices on topics ranging from climate change to digitalisation, education, jobs, governance, and peace and security.

The EU also laid the ground for programming to ensure that at least 20 % of the NDICI resources will be spent on human development and social inclusion. This involved the preparation of thematic notes, seminars and training with geographical units and EU delegations and exchanges with Member State experts.

SDG #1 No Poverty

Eradicating poverty in all its dimensions, tackling discrimination and inequalities and leaving no one behind are at the heart of the European Consensus on Development and of the EU's international partnerships. Tackling the various dimensions of poverty requires actions on all fronts. The EU and Member States' actions under all SDGs contribute in some way to the goal of eradicating poverty.

In terms of long-term trends, since 1999, the number of people living in extreme poverty worldwide has fallen by more than one billion people. On average, the poverty rate has halved in our partner countries. EU cooperation has helped achieve this result. For instance, 60 % of the EU budget support portfolio (around EUR 8 billion) implemented between 2014 and 2020 contributed to the fight against poverty and inequalities.

However, part of this positive trend in reducing poverty is set to be reversed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU has made its best efforts to help countries cope with the pandemic, using all instruments at its disposal and joining forces with Member States in a Team Europe approach. In this context, the EU disbursed EUR 3 billion of budget support to meet countries' fiscal needs and fund their health and socio-economic response. But, for the first time in 20 years, poverty is likely to significantly increase.

The estimated increase in global poverty in 2020 is unprecedented. In October 2020, the World Bank estimated that between 88 and 115 million people around the globe would be pushed into extreme poverty in 2020. It is now expected that the COVID-19-induced new poor in 2020 will rise to between 119 and 124 million. It is likely that for millions of people around the globe this crisis will not be short-lived. EU actions will continue to pursue the primary objective of poverty eradication.

The EU attaches great importance to the link between humanitarian aid and more medium- and long-term development action. More than 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced in 2020, most of them were hosted in developing countries with limited resources, which often raises concerns in terms of poverty, discrimination and inequalities. Throughout 2020, the EU continued to support refugees' self-reliance in protracted displacement.

SDG #3 Good Health and Well-being

In 2020, Commission departments have played an instrumental role in the global response to COVID-19 and contributed to progress towards the targets of SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being. The Commission, in a joint Team Europe approach, has deployed strong national, regional and global responses to tackle the pandemic and has ensured equitable access to vaccines for partner countries as noted above.

In support of EU partner countries in the Western Balkans, the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood as well as Turkey, Commission departments mobilised substantial packages of funding to address the immediate health emergencies, to support health systems and to help our partners facing the social and economic impact of the pandemic. In total, EUR 4.5 billion was committed, of which 57 % has been contracted in 2020.

In 2020, three actions in Latin America and in Asia, for a total of EUR 14 million, targeted the response to the COVID-19 crisis under the Partnership Instrument (PI). These actions seek to explore avenues for enhanced cooperation with multilateral and bilateral partners in response to this common challenge. Eight new PI actions, for a total of EUR 36 million, address COVID-19 as a significant objective. Furthermore, 59 existing actions, for a total of EUR 239 million have been reoriented to take into account the COVID-19 crisis. These reoriented actions address the adaptation to and mitigation of the pandemic and support the sharing of best practices, including on the socio-economic impact of the crisis.

The Commission made a key contribution to establish the COVAX facility, the global mechanism to purchase COVID-19 vaccines and committed a EUR 400 million EFSI Guarantee and EUR 100 million

grant to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (complemented by another EUR 500 million support pledged in February 2021.) This funding has helped secure 1.3 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines for use in 92 low- and middle-income countries by the end of 2020.

Commission departments also confirmed their commitment to continuity of health services during the pandemic by renewing commitments to routine immunisation in partner countries through a EUR 300 million pledge to GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, and to sexual and reproductive health and rights through a EUR 26.5 million grant to the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents.

Commission departments took immediate action through social protection measures to respond to the pandemic by leveraging existing programmes to protect livelihoods and restore income. Apart from speeding up disbursements in Budget Support operations, the Commission added cash transfer/food aid components to existing programmes and worked towards combined approaches in social protection linking humanitarian aid and development cooperation.

The Commission also adapted its thematic flagship programme Improving synergies between Social Protection and Public Finance Management to provide tailor-made financing assessments, sector policy advice, awareness building, delivery systems design, addressing special target groups in Bangladesh, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Malawi, Myanmar, Nigeria, Peru, Sri Lanka, and Togo.

In addition, the Commission laid the basis for planning investments with a long-term perspective to support partner countries in building shock responsive national social protection systems and strengthening health systems, and preparedness and response capacities.

SDG #4 Quality Education

The COVID-19 pandemic also exacerbated existing challenges and inequalities in access to quality education, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups and girls.

More than 1.5 billion students and youth across the planet were affected by school and university closures. The European Commission focused on avoiding a lost generation, helping partner countries face the challenge, e.g., by ensuring continued learning, and planning for a safe return of students and staff when schools re-open. Where possible, education support programmes have been reoriented to cater to emerging needs including use of distance learning modalities through both high- and low-tech solutions, with the aim of leaving no one behind. The same applied under the Erasmus+ programme which is supporting mobility of university students and staff and cooperation projects aiming to build the capacity of universities.

EU-funded global initiatives, such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW) rapidly provided emergency funding to countries most in need. ECW's additional support has reached over nine million children and youth and spans across 33 countries. GPE mobilised more than USD 500 million to support partner countries with planning and implementing their response to the pandemic. This funding is helping governments to sustain learning for up to 355 million children in 66 countries.

Despite additional funding needs, around two-thirds of low- and lower-middle-income countries have cut their public education budgets since the onset of the pandemic. Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen appealed at the Global Education Meeting to partner countries and the donor community

alike to protect and increase education financing as an essential component and a condition for an equitable, sustainable and inclusive recovery. Setting the example, Commissioner Urpilainen announced her ambition to increase education spending in her portfolio from 7 % to 10 %. Also, in the 2020 Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, the Commission announced increased funding in support of human capital development, including education and skills.

Investing in development education and awareness raising remains key to reach the EU's foreign policy and development goals. It becomes even more important in these challenging times when global solidarity is needed most. The EU, through its Development Education and Awareness (DEAR) programme has continued to support civil society and local authorities to raise awareness and encourage active engagement of Europeans, especially youth, in promoting sustainable development and addressing global challenges.

SDG #5 Gender Equality

The protection and promotion of the human rights of all women and girls was at the centre of the Team Europe's response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with about 60 % of global Commission disbursements related to COVID-19 in support of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Moreover, EU actions continued to promote gender equality in partnership with governments and non-government stakeholders along the thematic priorities of the Gender action plan II, fostering more coordination and coherence among EU actors, an increase of political and policy dialogues on gender equality issues, as well as a sustained and strong support to civil society organisations. The amount of funds specifically targeting gender equality continued to increase, reaching EUR 8.7 billion (64.71 % of all new actions) in 2019³⁶.

In addition, to support gender equality and institutional change in public bodies and research organisations, the Commission introduced a new eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe, the new framework programme for Research and Innovation. Legal entities from EU Member States and associated countries to the programme will need to have a Gender Equality Plan in place to apply for programme funding.

Action to stop violence against women and girls was targeted across regions and instruments. The EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, an unprecedented global effort to eliminate violence against women and girls, was up and running in 26 countries and six regions by the end of 2020, with EUR 497 million committed. The Spotlight Initiative #WithHer campaign launched in March 2020 contributed to raising awareness about gender norms and stereotypes, which perpetuate violence against women and girls, reaching more than 220 million users on social media. In view of the upsurge in domestic violence against women and children triggered by the COVID-19 crisis, the Commission swiftly redirected over EUR 20 million through the Spotlight Initiative to boost prevention and increase support for victims and women's grassroots organisations providing essential services. Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, in universities and research organisations is also a concern

³⁶ [Annual Implementation Report 2019 – EU Gender Action Plan II](#)

across the EU and the world. The European Commission launched a call in 2020 under Horizon 2020 to increase knowledge on the issue and provide recommendations for universities³⁷

In the Neighbourhood and Enlargement regions programmes like the EU4Gender Equality – Together against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence and Ending violence against women in the Western Balkan and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds aim to strengthen equal rights and opportunities for women and men. By working with the film sector, independent media and education, legal professionals, state bodies and CSOs, they aim to shift social perceptions, challenge gender stereotypes, champion men’s participation in care work and promote violence prevention programmes for perpetrators. Women refugees, internally displaced people and women in host communities were also supported in the framework of the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis.

Support to ending gender-based violence in humanitarian aid has also continued to be a priority. During 2019 and 2020, the EU allocated approximately EUR 56 million in humanitarian aid to prevent and respond to gender-based violence under its protection and health programming. The EU addressed prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and responded through a multi-sectoral approach including medical care, psychological support, referral to legal services and, where possible, livelihood support or socio-economic assistance.

Strong support to women’s economic empowerment continued during 2020. A EUR 20 million partnership was signed with the Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF) to support more than 2 500 African women entrepreneurs, through increased access to finance and venture capital investment. The WeEmpower programme (EUR 22.5 million) increased public and private sectors’ commitment to gender equality and to women’s empowerment in the world of work at all levels. Joint work between the EU, UN Women and the International Labour Organisation contributed to create sustainable, inclusive, and equitable global growth through increased women’s economic empowerment and leadership. An EU funded research project, GENDER STI, started in 2020 to accelerate the integration of gender equality in science, technology and innovation (STI) dialogues with third countries. These actions enabled the EU to engage with Asian and Latin American networks of women entrepreneurs, public institutions, and the private sector to ensure the full implementation of the Women’s Empowerment Principles.

Building on the evaluation of EU support to gender equality and stakeholder consultations, the Joint Communication on the new EU Gender action plan for 2021-2025 (GAPIII)³⁸ adopted in November 2020, sets out an ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment worldwide, including support for recovery plans that are inclusive, sustainable, and facilitating a green and just transition.

SDG #6 Clean Water and Sanitation

Progress under SDG6 is presented in this section, while noting that actions in this field contribute to various EU priorities beyond human development, such as the Green Deal. In 2020, the European Commission significantly increased its support to water access, sanitation and hygiene as the first line of defence in the fight against COVID-19 in countries including the Philippines, Pakistan, South Africa,

³⁷ The [UniSAFE](#) project started in 2021 and is developing operational tools and recommendations for higher education, research organisations and policymakers while collecting and analysing data across EU and associated countries.

³⁸ JOIN(2020) 17 final of 25 November 2020.

Ivory Coast, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal and Cameroon. In South Africa, grants were given to reduce the impact of COVID-19 by accelerating infection prevention and control through water, sanitation and hygiene. Moreover, good progress has been made in the deployment of major water infrastructures, some of them being completed in 2020 such as the water desalination plant at Djibouti that should ensure its water independence, as well as an important wastewater treatment facility in the West Bank and increased financial support to the Gaza desalination plant. New actions to support strategic infrastructure were launched including a EUR 41 million blending project that leveraged EUR 200 million for the Lesotho Lowlands Water Development Project- Phase II (LLWDP II).

At the same time, activities continued to support the good governance of water resources. Dialogues on the nexus between water, energy, food and environment continued in South America, Central Asia and all regions of Africa, with the aim to further improve the sustainable management of resources and mobilise related investments. Efforts towards the globalisation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Water Convention have progressed: in 2020, Ghana acceded to the convention and significant steps were taken particularly in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Togo, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

Through the Centre of Excellence initiative under IcSP Article 5, partners are assisted in developing measures to ensure the elimination of dumping and the minimal release of hazardous chemicals and materials, to improve water quality.

SDG #10 Reduced Inequality

In 2020, Commission departments actively worked on reinforcing their contribution towards the achievement of SDG 10 and reducing inequalities. A major step forward has been to mainstream inequality-reduction in operations through the development of the Reference Document - Addressing Income Inequalities through Development Cooperation, soon to be published under the Tools & Methods Series. The document will be the basis for future training and presents guidelines and tools to help EU officials enhance their work on inequality in their policy dialogue and development cooperation operations, and to engage national authorities and local actors in partner countries. This last part was specifically designed to support EU Delegations engage with partner countries and stakeholders to raise awareness of the importance of addressing both social and economic inequalities.

Substantial contributions have also come from our operations. The EU- Agence Française de Développement (AFD) Research Facility on Inequalities brought enhanced knowledge of economic and social inequalities, their underlying drivers at different spatial levels, and the most effective policies and approaches to address and reduce them. Twenty three research projects have covered global, country and city level studies, on numerous topics, developing policy recommendations for partner countries to target the reduction of inequalities and contribute to the work of EU Delegations.

The Commission also worked to review the Rights-based approach (RBA) toolbox to incorporate the 2030 Agenda and to align closer with commitments to reduce all forms of inequalities, including gender inequality. The update was also referenced by the European Council in its conclusions on Inequalities and the Action Plan for Democracy and Human Rights 2020-2024. In addition, the Council conclusions on the implementation of GAP II 2018 requested to fully integrate gender equality with the RBA. The GAP III and the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025 underline the need to update the

RBA methodology to better encompass all forms of discrimination and integrate gender mainstreaming.

Selected results 2018-2020³⁹

64 133 019 one-year-olds were fully immunised with EU support.

19 274 000 women of reproductive age had access to modern contraception methods with EU support.

33 931 000 students enrolled in primary education with EU support.

4 262 000 students enrolled in secondary education with EU support.

6 057 000 individuals had access to improved drinking water sources and/or sanitation facilities with EU support.

Source: EU Results Framework indicators⁴⁰

- Students from 84 countries around the world have been enrolled in primary and secondary education with EU support. A large share of students receive support via the Global Education Partnership, which is co-funded by the EU.
- The largest number of individuals with access to improved drinking water sources and/or sanitation facilities was reached in Sub-Saharan Africa (2 million), followed by South America (1.3 million) and South & Central Asia (1.2 million). The results are based on the people with access to newly built or rehabilitated water points and to newly constructed, rehabilitated or improved sanitation facilities to help eliminate open defecation in communities. In Afghanistan, 680 000 persons from urban and rural areas had access to improved drinking water.
- Considering the availability of sex-disaggregated data for EU results framework indicators, 42.2 % of data for EU RF indicators reporting individuals is not assigned to a sex. This is an increase by 8.1 percentage points compared to last year and points to the need for continuous efforts to collect sex-disaggregated data.

EU RF indicators disaggregated by sex

EU Results Framework indicator	Total	women/girls	men/boys	Not identified
2.5 Number of one-year-olds fully immunised with EU support	64 133 000	-	-	
2.6 Number of women of reproductive age using modern contraception methods with EU support	19 274 000	19 274 000	-	-
2.7 a) Number of students enrolled in education with EU support: a) primary education	33 931 000	15 550 000	16 962 000	1 419 000
2.7 b) Number of students enrolled in education with EU support: b) secondary	4 262 000	1 873 000	1 968 000	421 000

³⁹ 2018-2020 stands for the reporting year. The EU-funded interventions that contribute to this figure are ongoing or closed projects managed by INTPA and NEAR (ENI) that started between January 2014 and July 2019. The values reported for EU RF indicators are cumulative, including all results reported for these projects since start of implementation.

⁴⁰ Selected results from EU-funded interventions managed by NEAR (ENI) and INTPA. Further information on scope and methodology in chapter 6.

education				
2.8 Number of individuals with access to improved drinking water source and/or sanitation facility with EU support	6 057 000	66 000	57 000	5 934 000

3.2. Green Deal

The launch of the Green Deal in December 2019 sent a clear signal to the world that climate and environmental action are at the heart of the European growth agenda. The Green Deal sets a transformative agenda for the continent combining policies to tackle climate change, reverse biodiversity loss, reduce pollution and move to a circular economy.

Only a few months later, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic generated the biggest health crisis of recent years, hitting economies hard globally. Nevertheless, the European Union was clear that the post-COVID recovery needs to be green, just and resilient, using the Green Deal as Europe’s blueprint for implementing a green recovery model to ‘build back better’.

The Green Deal guides EU’s external action, in the areas of climate change, green energy transition, ecosystems and biodiversity sustainably, circular economies with fair value chains, green and smart urbanisation, and safe and sustainable agri-food production.

These challenges require joint efforts and integrated responses at national, regional and global level. The European Commission, through the ‘Team Europe’ approach is joining forces with Member States and other partners to foster a green and inclusive transition.

The combined impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been especially strong on food security and nutrition. Contributing to the achievement of SDG 2 and SDG 12, EU interventions have been instrumental in improving sustainable production and agricultural practices. To support innovation for farming system management, 19 DeSIRA (Development Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture initiative) projects were signed in 2020. EU budget support incentivised diversified agricultural production and better nutritional support for 55 000 rural families in Bolivia and Honduras, while contributing to raising the value of the dairy market in Nepal by 21 %.

Sustainable energy plays a key role in the external dimension of the Green Deal. The EU Partnership Instrument contributed to achieving SDG 7 by promoting policy cooperation especially with G20 partner countries, such as with India through the EU – India Clean Energy and Climate Partnership project and China through the EU-China Energy Cooperation Platform. Issues addressed included the development of renewable energy and necessary power market reforms, support to energy efficiency, and support to the global just energy transition. By the end of 2020, EU-supported sustainable energy activities in partner countries had contributed to the establishment of new renewable energy generation capacity of 18 Gigawatts and to more than 22 million people gaining access to sustainable energy and energy services improving their livelihoods and boosting the socio-economic development of their communities. During 2020, EU cooperation with the African Union Commission made a crucial contribution to the elaboration of the African Single Electricity Market proposal for establishing an integrated continental electricity market that can benefit people and economies across Africa.

The European Green Deal has also led to the adoption of important policy documents on biodiversity. With the Biodiversity Strategy 2030, the EU commits to an increased support for partners tackling the

root causes of biodiversity loss and calls for the adoption of an ambitious Global Biodiversity Framework in 2021. For this, the Commission has mainstreamed biodiversity across interventions, contributing to SDG 15 and developed specific initiatives such as the development of NaturAfrica and of Landscape for Future. The former is designed to protect biodiversity while creating better livelihoods and green/circular economic opportunities for rural populations. The latter was launched in 23 countries to tackle climate change adaptation and ecosystem conservation amongst other objectives. For the protection of life below water, the EU launched the Farm to Fork Strategy, which has an important impact for SDG 14. With the strategy, the EU promotes sustainable management of seafood resources and applies a zero tolerance for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. In 2020, the International Ocean Governance Forum was launched, creating a platform for stakeholders to exchange on ocean challenges and governance solutions to develop the EU International Ocean Governance Agenda.

The Circular Economy Action Plan adopted in March 2020 gave a mandate to mainstream circular economy across all interventions. The SWITCH to Circular Economy Value Chains project has a budget of EUR 19 million. For the countries covered by the enlargement and neighbourhood policies, circular economy was integrated in relevant fora, including the EU-Africa Business Forum but also in policy frameworks such as the Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans.

In the area of green and smart cities, the Commission is seeking to strengthen interlinkages between EU cities and cities in partner countries. Contributing to SDG 11, the International Urban Cooperation programme was further scaled up in 2020 and preparations for the upcoming phase in 2021 have been finalised. The city-to-city partnership for sustainable urban development has already contributed to the establishment of 42 partnerships active in the different dimensions of sustainable urban development.

The EU also launched a EUR 1 billion 'European Green Deal Call' for research and innovation projects in September 2020, under the Horizon 2020 programme. The programme is open to third country participants and the European Green Deal Call promotes opportunities for international cooperation in addressing the needs of less-developed nations, particularly in Africa, in the context of the Paris Agreement as well as the SDGs.

SDG #2 Zero Hunger

Progress under SDG2 is presented in this section, while noting that actions in this field contribute to various EU priorities beyond the Green Deal, such as human development and growth and jobs.

World hunger and food insecurity are still on the rise. It is estimated that almost 690 million people worldwide were undernourished in 2019⁴¹. Moreover, according to the 2020 Global Report on Food Crises, 135 million people in 55 countries or territories were in the midst of a food crisis in 2019. Africa remained the continent most affected by food crises, accounting for 54 % of the global total number of people in crisis or worse. Furthermore, in 2020, COVID-19 has compounded food security and nutrition issues. Malnutrition especially threatens to affect women and girls, who already represent 60 % of the world's food insecure. To respond to these challenges, the EU remained an important financier of interventions to improve sustainable production, food security and nutrition

⁴¹ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2020.

throughout the world, with an emphasis on Africa. In this context, the EU is an active contributor to the Global Network against Food Crises⁴².

In response to the 2020 desert locust threat to food security in Eastern Africa, the EU mobilised EUR 66 million for a broad humanitarian-development approach in East Africa. This included a contribution to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) regional control programme in response to a dramatically increased hunger situation in the region. In the field of sustainable agriculture, 19 DeSIRA projects signed in 2020 plan to address a range of topics related to agricultural research for innovation, targeting issues related to climate change including farming systems management in dry land or irrigated land, agroecology and more. The Sustainable Cocoa Initiative was launched in September 2020, building on the opportunity presented by the agreement between the Ivory Coast and Ghana (the world's main producers) to provide a Living Income Differential to its smallholder farmers, increasing the price received by USD 400 per tonne. The EU has acted as honest broker in this collaborative process, bringing together all stakeholders around a series of regular dialogues.

Rural development and agricultural productivity growth are crucial for poverty reduction. In the past years, 12 % of EU budget support contracts directly contributed to promote sustainable agriculture and fostering food security.

Preparations for the September 2021 UN Food Systems Summit (FSS) started in 2020. The EU supported the process through regular exchanges with the FSS Secretariat and through coordination with its Member States. EU financial support to the Secretariat through the Trust Fund and World Food Programme (WFP) has been agreed upon. In addition, the Commission has put in place, together with FAO and the Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement (CIRAD), a methodology on Food System assessments, which can be helpful for discussions around the FSS.

SDG #7 Affordable and Clean Energy

Sustainable energy is key in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement targets while also having a key role in the external dimension of the European Green Deal. In 2020, the EU continued to support actions to increase sustainable energy access and decarbonise the energy sector in our partner countries by spurring renewable energy generation and its integration into the energy systems through power market reforms, energy efficiency solutions, and promoting the phasing out of polluting fuels. Progress has also been made in 2020 to systematise this across humanitarian interventions, as part of the Clean Energy Challenge⁴³. During 2020, cooperation⁴⁴ with the African Union Commission to harmonise the regulatory framework for energy paved the way for the launch of the African Single Electricity Market at the African Union Summit that took place in February 2021. This will be a crucial step towards an enhanced cooperation framework between countries allowing for an expanded electricity market with common rules. This will enable the use of Africa's abundant renewable energy resources, spur trade and investment exchanges, and close energy infrastructure

⁴² A platform aiming at coordinating the actions of the main donors and implementing partners to combat hunger across the HDP nexus.

⁴³ For more information visit: www.unhcr.org/uk/clean-energy-challenge.html#_ga=2.154152632.1406946206.1616084639-1828368331.1616084639

⁴⁴ Since 2015 EU has supported the African Union Commission in its role of continental coordinator to develop the African Single Electricity Market. This cooperation draws from the European Union's 30-year experience and success of building the European Single Energy Market.

gaps between regions and countries. The EU supported the establishment of a Continental Electricity Transmission Masterplan that will form the infrastructure backbone for such cooperation. EU-China Energy Cooperation Platform provided a crucial support to the transition of the Chinese energy sector, which is considered the largest single polluting energy system in the world. Regulatory cooperation and exchange on more effective power and energy infrastructure planning and operation are key cooperation areas in this regard.

The investment portfolio of ongoing private sector-led sustainable projects boosted by EU programmes has expanded to 53 projects across Africa, Asia and Latin America, with an additional 61 projects in the pipeline for the coming years. Through the two programmes Demand Side Management, Social Infrastructures, Renewables and Energy Efficiency (DESIREE)⁴⁵ and strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem for the clean cooking sector (SEE Clean Cooking)⁴⁶, the EU is stepping up action in priority areas such as energy efficiency, the electrification of social infrastructure and clean cooking. Through the Strategic Partnerships for the Implementation of the Paris Agreement (SPIPA) project, the EU engaged G20 countries (Russia, Canada, Australia, South Africa, etc.) on topics related to energy transition such as energy efficiency, energy poverty and just transition, and clean energy technologies.

In the countries covered by the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policies, energy has been a key priority in the overall policy framework. In the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, three Flagship initiatives are related to clean energy transition, contributing to the decarbonisation pillar of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The post-2020 Eastern Partnership agenda identifies energy connectivity, the transition to clean energy and energy efficiency as priorities for the region. Extensive discussions on energy efficiency, environment and climate change took place in the context of the meetings of the Eastern Partnership Platform on Connectivity. In the context of the Energy Community, adoption and implementation of EU acquis has been pursued.

SDG #11 Sustainable Cities and Communities

With cities globally contributing 80 % of GDP, 70 % of global energy consumption and 70 % of global carbon emissions, the role of urban centres has increasingly shaped development challenges and opportunities in developing countries. In the next 30 years, the global urban population is projected to increase by two billion, 90 % of which will occur in Africa and developing countries in Asia. In 2020 the Commission has continued to support the development of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. The Commission has supported the mobilisation of finance in support of sustainable urban development, where a wide range of urban investments have benefitted from blended finance, both in neighbourhood countries and in partner countries in the developing world. In the context of the European External Investment Plan, the first guarantee programmes targeting sustainable cities were contracted in 2020, namely the Resilient City Development programme (RECIDE) implemented by *Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo* (AECID) and the World Bank.

⁴⁵ EUR 73.9 million programme implemented by the European Investment Bank (EIB), supporting the establishment of super-energy service companies, demand side management between power distribution utilities and local banks and de-risk business models for the sustainable electrification of social infrastructure.

⁴⁶ EUR 12 million project to pilot the transition towards clean cooking solutions, with a specific focus on gender and health.

Risk mitigation efforts developed through the Centre of Excellence Initiative under IcSP Article 5, alongside disaster management planning, are actions which contribute directly to reducing the number of deaths and the number of people affected by disasters, including water-related disasters. Developing institutional capabilities and resilience to disasters, alongside integrated policies and plans related to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) management is of great importance in this area.

The Commission is seeking to strengthen interlinkages between EU cities and cities in partner countries. The city-to-city partnership for sustainable urban development has so far contributed to the establishment of 42 partnerships active in the different dimensions of sustainable urban development. Within the Partnership Instruments, the International urban cooperation programme was further scaled up in 2020 and preparation for the next phase of the programme, starting in 2021, was finalised. The overall objective of the programme is to strengthen EU climate and urban diplomacy and leadership in the context of the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Agreement, and to support cities in addressing climate and sustainable development challenges.

SDG #12 Responsible Consumption and Production

The Circular Economy Action Plan adopted in March 2020 has reinforced EU ambition to achieve progress on sustainable consumption and production patterns, while contributing at the same time to other SDGs, including SDG 13 on combatting climate change. The new Action Plan has a strong external dimension and covers bilateral, regional and multilateral policy dialogues, environmental agreements, as well as pre-accession assistance and neighbourhood, development and international cooperation programmes, such as a stronger partnership with Africa to maximize the benefits of the green transition. New cooperation actions were launched in 2020, such as the SWITCH to Circular Economy Value Chains project launched in the context of the World Circular Economy Forum and with an allocation of EUR 19 million. Progress was also achieved as part of the Partnership for Action on Green Economy, which promotes economic policy reforms contributing to sustainable consumption and production in 20 countries. In the countries covered by the enlargement and neighbourhood policies, circular economy has been integrated in relevant fora (such as the EU-Africa business forum) and policy frameworks (like the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, Regional Economic Area in Western Balkans, and Eastern and Southern Partnership deliverables).

SDG #13 Climate Action

Climate change is a key priority of the EU's external action and a central theme of the European Green Deal, the aim of which is to reach climate neutrality by 2050 in Europe – something that cannot be achieved without the cooperation of EU's closest neighbours. Therefore, the EU is strongly committed to work with its partner countries to implement the Paris and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) 2015-2030. The Strategic Partnerships for the Implementation of the Paris Agreement (SPIPA) project, funded by the EU's Partnership Instrument (EUR 20 million) and the German government (EUR 5 million), encourage major economies to implement the Paris Agreement by facilitating the move from political commitment to action. In 2020, SPIPA produced knowledge tools, including quantitative modelling, studies and mappings to provide insights on climate change governance and institutional architecture in climate policy in SPIPA partner countries. SPIPA provided thematic papers on adaptation, just transition, long-term strategies, monitoring, reporting and verification, as well as sustainable finance. Under Article 5 of the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), an action contracted in 2020 focused on enhancing regional cooperation and

contributing to maintaining stability in the Central Asia region, which is crucial for security of the EU. The action aims to establish an integrated approach to climate security challenges and for climate risk resilient development opportunities. It will enhance early warning and prevention measures to help promote good neighbourly relations with a view to reduce tensions over limited natural resources.

In 2020, the EU provided a EUR 10 million financial contribution to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Adaptation Fund, which aims to contribute to global efforts to address climate change in the most vulnerable countries of the world. The EU also supports partner countries to implement their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in line with the Paris Agreement. Direct support was provided to 12 partner countries for upgrading their NDCs in view of their submission to the UNFCCC. In 2020, the EU initiated the establishment of a EUR 14 million NDC Technical Facility and a new Mainstreaming Facility (EUR 4 million) to support the implementation of the external dimension of the Green Deal. Through the Global Climate Change Alliance+ (GCCA+), the EU has contributed to more than 80 national climate change strategies in over 60 countries.

Through the Intra African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) 11th European Development Fund (EDF) Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Programme adopted in 2020 (EUR 100 million), the EU will contribute to reduce the impact of disasters, including those related to climate change and biological hazards such as COVID-19 and increase resilience in ACP countries. The EU supports countries in strengthening their capacities for preparedness for response through its humanitarian aid operations with the objective of protecting lives and livelihoods. In 2020, EUR 50 million were allocated for strengthening the response capacities of countries through humanitarian aid projects worldwide.

In the countries covered by the enlargement and neighbourhood policies, climate action has fully been integrated in policy frameworks, such as the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the post-2020 Eastern Partnership agenda. Specific bilateral and regional actions as well as blending instruments (Western Balkans Investment Framework and Neighbourhood Investment Platform) have been targeting approximation with EU climate acquis, floods risk management and decarbonisation at both national and local levels. Enhanced policy dialogues on the green transition supported the partner countries' ambition, leading to the launch of bilateral green partnerships with Ukraine and Morocco.

SDG #14 Life below Water

In 2020, the Commission published important policy documents as part of the European Green Deal addressing ocean-related issues, such as the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and the Circular Economy Action Plan. Through the Farm to Fork strategy the EU will apply zero tolerance in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU), promote sustainable management of seafood resources and strengthen ocean governance. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 calls for supporting partner countries and regional organisations to protect and sustainably use sensitive maritime ecosystems and species, focusing on marine biodiversity hotspots, and cooperation with Small Island Developing States. With the Circular Economy Action Plan, the EU commits to support international actions to promote a circular plastics economy in non-EU countries.

In 2020, the Commission launched the EU International Ocean Governance Forum. The Forum was created as a platform for ocean stakeholders within and beyond Europe to share understanding, experiences and good practices on ocean governance, and to support the further development of the

EU International Ocean Governance Agenda. Moreover, support for negotiations in the UN on a legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) has continued in 2020 including through the organisation of a dedicated international workshop in Brussels and participation in the extended intersessional work.

Under the Partnership Instrument the EU supports a EUR 9 million project to address marine litter in hotspot countries and rivers in east and south-east Asia.

The EU has been a strong driver of strengthening existing regional fisheries management bodies. In 2020, the implementation of the ECOFISH programme started with the objective of strengthening regional capacity to fight IUU fishing in the African part of the Indian Ocean and support fisheries management and governance initiatives in small-scale marine and inland fisheries. Similarly, implementation of the PESCAO programme continued in 2020 with the objective of improving regional fisheries governance in West Africa. A new programme that started in 2020 will support 12 ACP countries to tackle some of the underlying challenges in building sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. The programme is focussing on contributing to food security and nutrition and enhancing the productivity and competitiveness of value chains, while ensuring that economic improvements go hand in hand with the protection, management and sustainable use of aquatic resources and social inclusiveness.

SDG #15 Life on Land

In 2020, the Commission published important policy documents as part of the European Green Deal to tackle biodiversity loss and foster the green transition, such as the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and the Circular Economy Action Plan. With the Biodiversity Strategy 2030, the EU has committed to step up its support to partners to tackle the root causes of biodiversity loss and adopt an ambitious Global Biodiversity Framework in 2021. To implement its ambitions, the Commission has mainstreamed biodiversity across all its interventions and has developed specific actions such as the NaturAfrica initiative, designed to protect biodiversity while creating green economic opportunities and better livelihoods for local populations. The Landscape for Future joint initiative was launched in 23 countries tackling climate change adaptation and mitigation, ecosystem conservation, sustainable agriculture and food security. As forests host 80 % of the biodiversity, and in line with the 2019 Communication on the World's Forests, the Commission has proposed to develop Forest Partnerships to support sustainable forest management in partner countries. In the framework of the on-going implementation of the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan, progress has been made in many partner countries on Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPA). A new VPA with Honduras was finalised in 2020.

Through its Partnership Instrument, the EU has used its influence to halt biodiversity loss by shaping an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework and by advancing its environmental priorities with G7 and G20 partners. The EU action to protect biodiversity has mobilised experts, policymakers, young leaders, and scientists from the EU's key partner countries to design an ambitious follow-up framework to the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity (2011-2020).

Selected results 2018-2020⁴⁷

23 404 000 food-insecure people received EU assistance.

11 324 000 women of reproductive age, adolescent girls and children under five were reached by nutrition-related interventions supported by the EU – among whom 5 360 000 were food-insecure.

18 184 000 smallholders – 2 694 000 of whom were food-insecure – were reached with EU-supported interventions aimed at increasing their sustainable production, access to markets and/or security of land.

1 668 000 ha of agricultural and pastoral ecosystems were managed by sustainable land management practices with EU support.

Source: EU Results Framework indicators⁴⁸

- Food insecure people from 44 countries have received EU assistance. Assistance includes, for example, support to improve subsistence farming practices, provision of social transfers (in cash or in kind) to poor or vulnerable individuals aimed at reducing their deficits in food consumption or interventions that aim to improve nutritional adequacy of food intake.
- In Northern Nigeria, the EU Support to Food Security and Resilience programme reached 72 000 members of farming households who accessed reserves of grain and seeds for the new planting season.

EU RF indicators disaggregated by sex

EU Results Framework indicators	Total	women/girls	men/boys	Not identified
2.1 Number of food-insecure people receiving EU assistance	23 404 000	5 647 000	5 235 000	12 522 000
2.2 Number of women of reproductive age, adolescent girls and children under five reached by nutrition-related interventions supported by the EU	11 324 000	3 050 000	2 212 000	6 062 000
2.3 Number of smallholders reached with EU-supported interventions aimed to increase their sustainable production, access to markets and/or security of land	18 184 000	1 035 707	1 644 778	15 503 744

22 043 000 individuals accessing electricity with EU support through new or improved access.

18 000 megawatts of renewable energy generation capacity installed with EU support.

⁴⁷ 2018-2020 stands for the reporting year. The EU-funded interventions that contribute to this figure are ongoing or closed projects managed by INTPA and NEAR (ENI) that started between January 2014 and July 2019. The values reported for EU RF indicators are cumulative, including all results reported for these projects since start of implementation.

⁴⁸ Collecting results from EU-funded interventions managed by NEAR (ENI) and INTPA. Further information on scope and methodology in chapter 6.

158 countries and cities developed or implemented climate change and/or disaster risk reduction strategies with EU support.

19 000 MSMEs applied sustainable consumption practices with EU support.

57 356 000 tonnes of CO_{2e} greenhouse gas emissions avoided with EU support.

Source: EU Results Framework indicators⁴⁹

- The value for renewable energy generation capacity installed with EU support increased by 35 % since last year (from 13 000 megawatts for reporting year 2018-2019 to 18 000 megawatts for reporting year 2018-2020). The value for CO₂ greenhouse gas emissions avoided with EU support increased by 103 % since last year (from 28 204 000 tonnes CO_{2eq} for reporting year 2018-2019 to 57 356 000 tonnes CO_{2eq} for reporting year 2018-2020). These very large increases reflect improved reporting due to the systematic inclusion of all blending operations in the latest results data collection exercise.
- The value for new or improved connections to electricity with EU support increased by 9 % since last year (from 20 230 000 for reporting year 2018-2019 to 22 043 000 individuals for reporting year 2018-2020). 86 % of this increase reflects improvements to the infrastructure connecting households to the energy source, and 14 % reflects increased energy generation capacity.
- Of the 158 countries and cities that developed or implemented climate change and/or disaster risk strategies, 90 were countries and 68 were cities.
- The Sustainable Urban Development Projects Support Mechanism assists local authorities in the Eastern Neighbourhood Partnership (ENP) partner countries to address local sustainable development challenges, including dependency on fossil fuels, energy efficiency, security of energy supply, and economic growth, etc., by enabling them to implement measures incorporated in their Sustainable Energy Action Plans. So far, the measures implemented with project support have contributed to avoiding 9 919 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year, mainly in Belarus and Ukraine, but also in Armenia, Georgia and Moldova.

7 100 km² marine areas were under protection with EU support.

44 390 000 ha of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems were under protection with EU support.

63 682 000 ha of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems were under sustainable management with EU support.

Source: EU Results Framework indicators⁵⁰

- In Latin America, 25 million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems were under protection, and 13 million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems were managed to ensure biological diversity and to preserve natural heritage with EU support. In Bolivia, for example, the Budget Support Integrated water and natural resource management contributed to 250 000 hectares of forest with forest management plans.

⁴⁹ Collecting results from EU-funded interventions managed by NEAR (ENI) and INTPA. Further information on scope and methodology in chapter 6.

⁵⁰ Collecting results from EU-funded interventions managed by NEAR (ENI) and INTPA. Further information on scope and methodology in chapter 6.

- In the Caribbean, a multi-country project for civil society and small enterprises to conserve marine and coastal biodiversity has identified priority marine areas in Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Lucia, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Vincent and Grenadines and Grenada. Under this intervention, the EU has provided support for conservation of marine protected areas of 2 800 km².

3.3. Sustainable Growth and Jobs

In 2020, the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 crisis put a huge stress on public finances and debt sustainability of many developing countries, seriously affecting their ability to achieve sustainable growth and job creation. The crisis required a policy response that balances human development, economic concerns (growth and employment) and long-term sustainability. Therefore, in May 2020, President von der Leyen called for a Global Recovery Initiative, linking debt relief and investment to the SDGs to promote a green, digital, just and resilient recovery.

Budget support programmes played an essential role in providing a COVID-19 crisis response. The total budget support payments amounted to nearly EUR 3 billion in 2020. These funds provided urgent support to partner countries' fiscal space, allowing them to implement their COVID-19 response plans, including health and economic recovery measures, and to continue delivering key public services.

The EU applied an integrated approach to attracting more investment. With over EUR 1.55 billion of the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) Guarantee, the EU has shared the risks involved in investing together with development banks and private investors. By doing so, the EU encourages financial institutions to come in, lend to local entrepreneurs and finance development projects. In addition to EFSD guarantees and blending financing, the EU also provides technical assistance and investment in climate support. In 2020, the EU contributed over EUR 111 million for technical assistance accompanying the EFSD guarantees.

Despite the COVID-19 context, progress continued on improving the investment climate and de-risking sustainable investment in partner countries. The number of EU Delegations involved in facilitating public-private dialogue (PPD) increased from 32 in 2019 to 36 in 2020. Two new European Business Organisations were established, in Guinea Conakry and in Cameroon, and 15 webinars and 15 workshops were organised with EU Delegations, and public and private stakeholders in ACP countries.

Cooperation with Neighbourhood partners is aligned with the Commission's priorities and addresses structural and new challenges. Economic development and cooperation on youth, education and skills are key pillars in this partnership. As the COVID pandemic has affected all economics around the Neighbourhood region, efforts have been deployed to support countries to seize new trends and opportunities, including the twin green and digital transitions as accelerators of sustainable growth. In addition, an Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans⁵¹ set out a substantial investment package mobilising up to EUR 9 billion of funding for the region. It will support sustainable connectivity, human capital, competitiveness and inclusive growth, and the twin green and digital transition.

The creation of decent jobs in Africa remained a high priority for the Commission, following the political commitments made in 2018 in the Africa-Europe Alliance for Investment and Jobs. To address limited creation of decent jobs paired with high population growth putting stress on the

⁵¹ COM(2020) 641 final of 6 October 2020.

labour market in many African countries, the investment programme focused on job creation even though assessing employment impact continues to be a challenge.

The EU Aid for Trade (AfT) Strategy, including thematic support to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), continued to be implemented. The EU AfT Progress Report prepared in 2020 provides insights into EU progress related to Aid for Trade.

SDG #8 Decent Work and Economic Growth

In 2020, the EU supported SDG 8 through the implementation of ongoing actions and the adoption of several new initiatives. Faced with the severe economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis in partner countries, the Commission stepped in swiftly by reorienting and frontloading funds and setting-up the Team Europe approach to mobilise and make available resources as a basis for a building resilience and achieving a sustainable recovery globally.

The Sustainable Investment Climate and Value Chains Programme III worth EUR 10 million aims at increasing partner countries' capacity to implement sanitary and phytosanitary standards; improving transparency, accountability and good governance in mineral value chains; and supporting the improvement of the investment climate and the facilitation of public-private dialogue. A contract worth EUR 1 million was signed with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) to mark the Commission's formal joining of the G7 CONNEX initiative that supports governments in developing countries and economies in transition in negotiating complex contracts in the extractive sector. Moreover, the Commission strengthened its support to the implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) with an additional EUR 0.5 million, bringing the overall amount of EU support to EUR 1.5 million. Furthermore, in April 2020 the Commission formalised its position and participation in the EITI Board as Observer.

The Access to finance, knowledge management, and financial inclusion action worth EUR 92 million in favour of intra-ACP cooperation aims to support underserved segments of the ACP economies, especially those most impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 economic crisis. A contract of EUR 20 million for the programme 'Inclusive access to finance for women's economic empowerment' was signed with GIZ and implemented with the Tony Elemelu Foundation to increase the economic inclusion and empowerment of more than 2 500 women to create more decent jobs in African economies.

The Women's Financial Inclusion Facility (WFIF), a partnership with the Women's World Banking and KfW, reached its first financial closure having raised EUR 75 million in 2020 in support of women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion. The EUR 10 million EU contribution as the anchor investor has been instrumental in leveraging significant additional public and private investments to the fund and the EU contribution alone is set to reach 6.3 million women with improved financial inclusion, through access to financial products and services.

The EU Partnership for Responsible Minerals (EPRM), with its 10 projects active in the area of promotion of responsible practices among Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (ASM) communities, has contributed to setting up 22 cooperatives or organisations of miners in Colombia, Kenya, Uganda and Indonesia among others, enabling them to access formal markets. It is estimated that around 1 000 miners have benefitted so far from training and capacity building activities across several CAHRAs (Conflict Affected and High Risk Areas) worldwide.

A contract Leveraging digital finance to increase resilience of ACP countries with the UN Capital Development Fund of EUR 14.4 million supports key policy reforms for digital transformation as well as creating inclusive financial services. It will enable up to 300 000 women, young people and micro entrepreneurs to actively use new digital financial solutions.

The Promoting Sustainable Investment Climate through the EU support to World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA) project concluded with the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs aims to promote dialogue and action around the role of business in achieving the SDGs.

A EUR 6 million project Strengthen 2: employment impact assessment to maximise job creation in Africa signed with the International Labour Organization (ILO) aims to provide analysis on the employment outcome of envisaged investments, while building the capacity of stakeholders and working on harmonisation of approaches. The EUR 15 million project Vocational Educational Training (VET) toolbox 2: Enhanced delivery of demand-driven skills Development for investment in Africa signed with a consortium of EU Member States' agencies aims to identify investment related skills need and support local VET institutions to address the identified skills gaps, while drawing lessons from an opportunity driven VET response for policy enhancement.

An additional EUR 11 million was provided for project EU Expert Facility on Employment, Labour and Social Protection (SOCIEUX +) to enhance the capacities of partner countries to better design, manage and monitor effective, inclusive and sustainable employment and social protection strategies through peer-to-peer short-term technical assistance.

In the Western Balkans and Turkey, over 25 EU programmes contributed directly to labour market inclusion and decent work in the region. 13 targeted actions were launched in Kosovo committing a total of EUR 2.9 million over two years. At the regional level, the project Western Balkans & Turkey for EmploYouth started contributing to strengthening regional cooperation, participatory democracy and the wider convergence process toward the EU in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey.

Project Responsible Business Conduct (EUR 24.5 million) encouraged the uptake of the OECD's Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, ILO Tripartite Declaration, and the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in Latin American and Asian supply chains, levelling the playing field for businesses that integrate human rights considerations into their operations and supply chains.

The [EU Gateway | Business Avenues](#) project supported 2 200 European companies in establishing and strengthening their business relations in Asia by investing in the most promising sustainable technologies and products, turning the benefits of climate neutrality, digital solutions, and healthcare, into substantive business opportunities.

In the Southern Neighbourhood, the EU has been working with the ILO on the implementation of the regional programme on 'Mainstreaming Employment into Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood'. The programme aims to support policy makers in incorporating employment issues into trade and investment policies, and design and implement trade and investment interventions that ultimately optimise the quantity and quality of employment created in the region.

SDG #17 Partnerships to achieve the Goal

This section addresses the EU contribution to the various means of implementation for the SDGs, having regard to SDG17 and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

Finance: The EU supports domestic revenue mobilisation, as well as public finance management reform in the context of budget support operations and through policy dialogue and technical assistance. To assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability, the EU in 2020 strongly supported the G20/Paris Club Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) and took an active role in negotiating an agreement on the Common Framework for debt treatment beyond the DSSI. The EU also promotes investment in its partner countries, including Least Developed Countries (LDCs). In 2020, the Addis Tax Initiative declaration 2025 was adopted, providing a framework to monitor joint commitments on domestic revenue mobilisation.

In 2020, based on the OECD-DAC's preliminary data, the EU and its 27 Member States maintained their position as the biggest provider of official development assistance (ODA), accounting for 46 % of global ODA to developing countries from the EU and other DAC donors (0.50 % of gross national income (GNI)). In 2019, the EU and its then 28 Member States' ODA to LDCs stood at 0.12% of GNI (latest available data).

Technology: In 2020, the EU boosted its engagement in the digital transformation, set up new initiatives in the domain of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) and expanded work on the EU Copernicus Earth Observation satellite system globally.

Capacity-building: Also in 2020, the EU continued to support partner countries in their plans to implement the SDGs. This included engaging with UN Resident Coordinators and bringing together multilateral and bilateral actors on integrated national financing frameworks. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU played a leading role in linking the global effort to 'build back better' to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, in line with President von der Leyen's Global Recovery Initiative.

Trade: The EU and its Member States committed in 2017 in the Updated Joint Strategy on Aid for Trade (AfT) to increase the proportion of aid for trade directed towards LDCs progressively to 25 % of total EU aid for trade by 2030. In 2018 (latest available data), EU and Member States' AfT commitments to LDCs represented 22 % of their total AfT, which corresponds to almost EUR 3 billion in absolute figures.

Systemic issues

Policy and institutional coherence: In 2020 the Commission continued its efforts to advance policy coherence for development and to improve the effectiveness of development cooperation, including by playing a leading role within the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships: The EU continued to actively engage in various UN processes and was a strong supporter of UN reform. The Commission also continued to play an influential role in major OECD-DAC policies, acts and events, for example in negotiations for the new DAC Global Relations Strategy. The Commission further strengthened partnerships with international financial institutions, with high-level participation at the World Bank Group (WBG) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) spring and annual meetings and closer collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank. The EU was active in the G7 and G20, and endorsed the G20 Support to COVID-19 Response and Recovery in Developing Countries.

To promote cooperation and alliance building on global issues of mutual interest, the EU continued to build strong cooperation in 2020 with partner countries and middle-income countries through the Partnership Instrument.

The Commission continued its work in the core group of the donor competence network Learn4Dev, where 34 development organisations share best practices and promote joint learning and knowledge management.

The EU also continued to support the capacity and participation in policymaking of civil society organisations (CSOs) and of local authorities, including through Framework Partnership Agreements with 25 global and regional networks (20 networks of CSOs and five associations of local authorities). In 2020, the second call of the 'Local authorities: partnerships for sustainable cities' programme was launched to finance decentralised cooperation projects among local authorities of the EU and Member States and of partner countries.

Data, monitoring and accountability: The Commission continued to support Data for Decisions, an IMF-led Trust Fund aimed to improve the use of data at country level. The Commission also remained engaged with Eurostat in activities undertaken in the framework of the Bern Network on Financing Data for Development, an open, multi-stakeholder alliance to support more and better financing for data.

Selected results 2018-2020⁵²

521 000 jobs were supported or sustained by the EU.

110 countries were supported by the EU to strengthen their investment climate.

737 000 firms had access to financial services with EU support.

2 311 000 individuals had access to financial services with EU support.

33 000 quality schemes were adopted by economic operators with EU support.

1 684 000 people have benefited from institution- or workplace-based VET/skills development interventions supported by the EU.

153 countries were supported by the EU to strengthen revenue mobilisation, public financial management and/or budget transparency.

Source: EU Results Framework indicators⁵³

- Approximately a one-third of the jobs directly created or sustained with the support of the EU were located in the Sub-Saharan Africa (i.e. South Africa, Ethiopia, Somalia, etc), and a tenth took place in the energy sector.
- The Promoting Inclusive Economic Growth in Egypt Programme aims to strengthen the capacities of the private sector and civil society to deliver support services to MSMEs engaged in innovative and creative economic activities, including in cultural tourism projects. One of the projects in this programme, Visit Badrashin! A responsible tourism strategy for an inclusive and innovative rural

⁵² 2018-2020 stands for the reporting year. The EU-funded interventions that contribute to this figure are ongoing or closed projects managed by INTPA and NEAR (ENI) that started between January 2014 and July 2019. The values reported for EU RF indicators are cumulative, including all results reported for these projects since start of implementation.

⁵³ Collecting results from EU-funded interventions managed by NEAR (ENI) and INTPA. Further information on scope and methodology in chapter 6.

economy, is supporting the development of a hub to deliver Business Development Services in a rural area with high unemployment and high tourism potential. So far, the project has directly created 499 jobs.

- The EU supported financial inclusion in 62 countries, assisting MSMEs and individuals to access financial products (i.e. credit, insurance, leasing, etc), with blending operations being the most common instrument used to access financing by firms.
- Central America and the Caribbean registers the largest results figure in skills development through vocational education and training (VET) programmes. In the Dominican Republic, 660 000 individuals have obtained a vocational qualification with the public national institute of professional training.

EU RF indicators disaggregated by sex

EU Results Framework indicator	Total	women/girls	men/boys	Not identified
2.13b Number of beneficiaries with access to financial services with EU support: b) individuals	2 311 000	256 000	578 000	1 477 000
2.15 Number of people who have benefited from institution- or workplace-based VET/skills development interventions supported by the EU	1 684 000	684 000	595 000	405 000

3.4. Science, Technology, Innovation and Digitalisation

In 2020, digitalisation became one of the top priorities of the Commission and engagement in the digital transformation of partner countries increased. A total of EUR 60 million has been channelled for rapid digital COVID-19 response interventions in partner countries including the support of digital solutions for health and education systems and strengthening digital financial inclusion. December 2020 saw the high-level political launch of the Digital4Development (D4D) Hub as a strategic platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue and Member States coordination to boost investment and partnerships in digital transformation. Together with the African Union Commission (AUC) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Commission initiated the EU-AU Data Flagship creating an African-European Expert Group on data and elaborating a joint proposal for a data economy partnership between the two continents. Thematic support to EU delegations increased significantly in digitalisation, providing tailored assistance to strengthen the digital dimensions of their programmes.

In addition, under the EU-LAC **Policy Dialogue Support Facility** (EU-LAC PDSF, 2020-2023) a new action Support to wildfire management in the Amazon and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region was launched in 2020 (managed by the JRC, in coordination with EEAS and other DGs).

The action intends to enhance cooperation and dialogue between the EU, LAC partner countries and regional/international organisations (such as FAO, ACTO, Leticia Pact, UNEP, etc.), to address challenges in the Amazon and LAC region, by providing scientific evidence for policies and sharing EU lessons learned on wildfire management. The action contributes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the EU Green Deal, and the Digital Transition Strategy by promoting the transformation towards a green economy using EU research, technology and expertise; Investing in

knowledge and innovation, sharing EU knowledge on wildfire management with the LAC region; Advancing the digital economy management, notably using space technology (Copernicus and GEO, etc.). The activities under this action will continue after 2022 under the framework of the new TEI on the Amazon.

In 2020, the PRIDA project's prototype for monitoring and evaluation of harmonisation of ICT policy, legal and regulatory frameworks on the Pan-African scale was developed and tested in ten countries. PRIDA is a coordination platform between African, European and other EU supported associations of regulators worldwide to lay the foundation for sustainable regulatory cooperation. PRIDA continued training and online courses to build capacity on internet governance and its Digital Platform (for online training and consultations) was developed in 2020. PRIDA also started to support countries to set up their national/regional forums and schools.

The gender digital divide obtained greater attention and consideration in 2020. The Commission carried out a study Digital4Women: how to enable women empowerment in Africa through mainstreaming digital technologies and services in EU development programmes and disseminated the results. The digital dimension was also integrated in the third Gender Action Plan. Moreover, the increased importance of science, new technologies and innovation for inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development in the ACP regions was recognised the launch of a new EUR 60 million programme to strengthen innovation ecosystems and capabilities. In 2020 an ACP Innovation Fund was set-up to establish multi-stakeholder partnerships bringing together academia, governmental bodies, the private sector and civil society organisations to foster transfer of knowledge and technology as well as frugal innovation and indigenous knowledge. The priorities of the fund are to promote digital literacy and new technologies, link innovative skills with labour market demand, establish links with the private sector and integrate indigenous knowledge into the formal knowledge economy.

Throughout the year, the EU was working on the revamping of its strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation (later adopted in May 2021 as 'Global Approach to Research and Innovation – Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world'). The new strategy is designed to support the delivery of the EU's key strategic objectives and to adapt to the current geopolitical context, supporting the post-COVID-19 economic recovery and promoting and protecting Europe's strategic autonomy. International cooperation elements of the first Horizon Europe Work Programme (published in June 2021) are already based on this Global Approach.

Following the first European Union-African Union Research & Innovation (R&I) Ministerial, which took place in early July 2020 and put forward the main pillars for future R&I activities, two initiatives in the domain of STI were launched in 2020, namely the ARISE (African Research Initiative for Scientific Excellence) Pilot Programme and the Young African Leaders Programme. ARISE aims to empower early career African scientists in delivering cutting-edge research, while the Young African Leaders Programme pilot will provide training and exchanges for mid-career African civil servants, journalists, entrepreneurs and NGO practitioners. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) have continued to contribute to excellent research, boosting jobs, growth and investment by equipping researchers from across the world with new knowledge and skills and foster research cooperation across borders, sectors and disciplines. The Commission has also increased the visibility of the EU Space Programme in Latin America and Caribbean (LAC), Asia Pacific and Africa regions. Three studies have assessed the feasibility of setting up decentralised Copernicus data centres in different regions, including an emergency management centre in Panama. Discussions at the EU-LAC ministerial in

December 2020 confirmed the political interest in this project. Similarly in the Philippines a Copernicus mirror site for improved climate change mitigation and adaptation, assessments and reporting related to forestry (REDD+), Disaster Risk Reduction and Marine Spatial Planning could be established. Commission departments have also contributed to the BELLA project supporting improved connectivity and exchange of data between the EU and LAC. The strengthening of national cyber-resilience capacities and criminal justice systems of African States has also been supported enabling a more efficient response to cyber threats.

A specific topic in support of the EU-Africa Research and Innovation Partnership on Climate Change and Sustainable Energy was developed, contributing to the new comprehensive Africa strategy.

The EU put forward a proposal for an ambitious EU-China Joint Roadmap for Future Science, Technology and Innovation Cooperation, focused on reaching a level playing field and reciprocity in cooperation with this strategic partner. A China knowledge network was established, including experts from the Member States to exchange and enhance knowledge in the EU on China's Research & Innovation system and inform the establishment of a coordinated EU position in its R&I relations with the country.

The EU and CELAC senior officials met in October 2020 for the re-launched bi-regional dialogue in the framework of the Joint Initiative on Research and Innovation (JIRI) and negotiated a common Strategic Roadmap for 2021 – 2023, which outlines the joint priorities for research and innovation cooperation, in particular in the areas of health research, green transition, digital transformation and innovation. This is the first such strategic document agreed with the LAC region for R&I cooperation.

In the Enlargement and Neighbourhood countries, the Commission worked to increase the take-up of digital opportunities by strengthening institutional capacities in e-governance and data protection and supporting the development of digital skills and high-tech entrepreneurship.

In the Western Balkans, the digital transformation of the region has been reinforced through the adoption of the Economic and Investment Plan and the Common Regional Market. The implementation of the Regional Roaming Agreement is on track, with the Roam like At Home regime scheduled for introduction in 2021. In the Eastern Neighbourhood, the Commission continued to focus on the harmonisation of roaming, with a draft Regional Roaming Agreement proposed for signature, alongside a draft Regional Spectrum agreement, to prepare the roll-out of 5G technologies. Pilot projects in the areas of Telecom rules, Trust & Security, eTrade, ICT innovation, eHealth, and eSkills continued through the EU4Digital Facility. In the Southern Neighbourhood, the Commission continued to work on the harmonisation of rules in the telecom sector (EMERG) and providing high quality access to the EU research and innovation network GEANT through the EUMedConnect programmes.

Innovation initiatives continue to be supported at several levels. The main priorities focus on strengthening innovation policy planning, for example through support to Smart Specialisation Strategies, (in Enlargement and ENP countries, and LAC countries in particular) which prioritize investment into areas where impact and comparative advantage are highest, improving research and innovation policies and governance by strengthening institutional structures and developing interaction mechanisms (between ministries, private sector and academia) in each country, and support at enterprise level through access to finance for new ideas and start-up creation.

In the ENP region (East and South), a study to conduct a diagnostic analysis and comparative overview of the state of Technology Transfer in twelve Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood countries was carried out and reports presented in July 2021. The main objectives were to describe the main characteristics of the landscape, including relevant stakeholders, players and technology transfer models; identify strengths and weaknesses of each ecosystems; and provide conclusions and recommendations for each country with the ultimate goal of informing policy-making in this domain.

SDG #9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Sustainable investments in energy, transport and digital infrastructure, together with skills development, the modernisation of the regulatory framework and an enabling industrial environment are crucial drivers of economic growth and development. In 2020, the Commission continued to foster the connectivity agenda as a mean to advance EU values and policy priorities (Green Deal, Digitalisation and Sustainable Growth). Building from the 2018 Europe-Asia connectivity strategy⁵⁴, the Commission expanded its global reach increasing the focus on connectivity with Africa.

In October, the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans was adopted, accompanied by the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, better connecting the economies of the Western Balkans, within the region and with the EU, and promoting the green transition. In the context of the Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020, the Neighbourhood Investment Platform (NIP), with EUR 402 million of EU contributions in 2020, mobilised investments including in renewable energy, energy efficiency, irrigation, water and wastewater management, transport, financial inclusion, support to MSMEs, and social and education infrastructure. In the Southern Neighbourhood, in 2020, the EU provided support at policy as well as at legislative, institutional, technical and financial levels. The evaluation of the 2014-2020 Regional Transport Action Plan took stock of the good progress in the field of regulatory convergence. EuroMed Transport projects, mostly implemented by the EU transport agencies, have played a key role here. In 2020, the Communication 'Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy'⁵⁵ highlighted the role of the EU as world's connectivity hub and the importance of policy coherence when projecting EU policies in partner countries. The Commission also continued to support innovation at several levels. The main priorities focus on strengthening innovation policy planning, for example, through support to Smart Specialisation Strategies and prioritising investment into areas where impact and comparative advantage are highest. This includes support at enterprise level through access to finance for new ideas and start-up creation. In 2020, 13 countries in the EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Region were developing and implementing their Smart Specialisation Strategies to stimulate private and public investment in research and innovation, with a view to boosting growth and jobs.

The EU budgetary guarantee covered portfolios of investments in targeted areas, such as energy and connectivity; MSME financing; sustainable agriculture, rural development; sustainable cities; and digital for development. By the end of 2020, the Commission had signed guarantee agreements with partner financial institutions for EUR 1.55 billion. Budgetary guarantees for loans to banks and other financial intermediaries are particularly well suited to de-risk investment in partner countries and support their sustainable development. This has made budgetary guarantees an important part of the EU's global response to COVID-19. For example, budgetary guarantees for renewable energy

⁵⁴ [JOIN\(2018\) 31 final of 19 September 2018.](#)

⁵⁵ [Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.](#)

have focused on liquidity support to ensure the effective completion of investment projects despite the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic.

Selected results 2018-2020⁵⁶

80 000 km of road were supported by the EU through construction, rehabilitation and maintenance.

- Maintained roads accounted for the majority of support (62 000 km), followed by new construction (13 000 km) and rehabilitated roads (5 000 km).
- In Ethiopia, the Road Sector Policy Support Programme (SPSP IV) supported the establishment of an efficient road network at federal, regional and rural level. This Budget Support programme contributed to the maintenance of 28 000 km of road in the country.
- In the West Bank, the project Area C Development Programme in the West Bank - Package II supported communities with basic social and public infrastructure such as roads, schools, public parks, and public buildings. Among others, 10 km of road were constructed to improve access to basic infrastructure.

3.5. Migration and assistance to refugees and displaced persons

Migration and forced displacement were increasingly integrated in the EU's engagement and dialogue with partner countries, in line with the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted by the Commission in September 2020. Tailor-made migration partnerships were initiated or strengthened with a number of countries in Africa and Asia. They include policy dialogue and targeted EU support actions for the implementation of jointly agreed priorities at country, regional and global level.

The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF for Africa) provided coordinated responses by the EU, its Member States and other donors to multiple crises across the Sahel and Lake Chad, Horn of Africa and Northern Africa regions. It addressed urgent needs to ensure long-term stability and sustainable development for migrants and migration affected communities, supporting partner countries' efforts to provide alternatives to irregular migration, improving access to basic services and boosting employment opportunities, in particular for young people. The EUTF for Africa also worked in cross-border areas to stem conflict and bolster economic development, pioneering the Global Compact on Refugees and reinforcing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

In 2020, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration supported the voluntary return of 17 500 migrants mostly from Libya and Niger as well as from Mali and Djibouti. In the countries of origin, the Joint Initiative provided assistance to over 19 500 returnees. 10 500 migrants in transit benefitted from immediate assistance in North Africa and over 35 000 migrants were assisted with Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR)/ Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR). Some EUR 16 million was re-programmed to support COVID 19 responses, the opening of humanitarian corridors to support voluntary returns, as well as awareness raising and the

⁵⁶ 2018-2020 stands for the reporting year. The EU-funded interventions that contribute to this figure are ongoing or closed projects managed by INTPA and NEAR (ENI) that started between January 2014 and July 2019. The values reported for EU RF indicators are cumulative, including all results reported for these projects since start of implementation.

provision of personal protective equipment, hygiene material and training at borders and in migrants and refugee centres.

In the Neighbourhood and Enlargement regions, the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis (EUTF Syria) provided a coherent and integrated EU aid response to an unprecedented refugee crisis via large projects covering education, livelihoods and social assistance, health, water and sanitation, as well as protection, mostly in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq.

During 2020, new programmes worth EUR 561 million were approved under the EUTF for Africa for the Sahel, Lake Chad, Horn of Africa and Northern Africa, to contribute to safe, secure, legal and orderly migration from, to and within the regions, as well as to support an effective management of migration flows that protects human rights. Both the EUTF Africa and the EUTF Syria have been extended for an additional year in response to COVID-19 and to the Beirut port blast. The entire EUR 6 billion of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT) was contracted in 2020. The Commission provided an additional EUR 585 million in humanitarian funding to continue some key projects, in particular the Emergency Social Safety Net programme.

As an immediate follow-up to the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, new initiatives to address protracted displacement and support refugees as well as host countries were launched, including through an innovative support programme, mixing grants and loans. They addressed the Venezuela refugee crisis, forced displacement from and within the Silk Routes, and a focus on Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, with the EU taking a lead role in the support to the regional Afghan refugee support platform. As for the Rohingya situation, the assistance provided followed the nexus approach in Bangladesh and increasingly across the broader region.

With over 82.4 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, the EU continued to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable displaced populations around the globe, in line with commitments to the Global Compact on Refugees. Such assistance was delivered in most refugee hosting countries, including Turkey, Lebanon, Iran, Bangladesh, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda, as well as in countries affected by internal displacement, such as Syria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, and Colombia. Life-saving assistance and protection was also delivered to vulnerable migrants along major migratory routes in Yemen, Libya, and Central America.

In 2020 the COVID pandemic further increased the vulnerability of many migrants and refugees, with restricted possibilities for movement, including regarding the right to seek asylum across borders, loss of their livelihoods and restricted access to health and other services. The Commission advocated for inclusion of migrants and refugees in partner countries' COVID response plans, and redirected EU funded programmes to address the specific vulnerabilities faced by people on the move.

Selected results 2018-2020⁵⁷

14 416 000 migrants, forcibly displaced people or individuals from host communities were

⁵⁷ 2018-2020 stands for the reporting year. The EU-funded interventions that contribute to this figure are ongoing or closed projects managed by INTPA and NEAR (ENI) that started between January 2014 and July 2019. The values reported for EU RF indicators are cumulative, including all results reported for these projects since start of implementation.

protected or assisted with EU support – including 544 000 supported through EU Trust Fund for Africa projects.

65 migration management or forced displacement strategies or policies were developed or revised with EU support.

29 migration management or forced displacement strategies or policies were under implementation with EU support- including three supported through EU Trust Fund for Africa projects.

- Examples of protection measures or assistance for migrants, forcibly displaced people, or individuals from host communities include support in the areas of medical services and psycho-social assistance, access to basic services, skills development, and legal assistance.
- Projects providing protection or assistance reached people in 37 countries, including 500 000 persons in the North of Africa, 3.5 million in Sub-Saharan Africa, 8.7 million in Middle East Asia and 1.4 million in South & Central Asia.

EU RF indicator disaggregated by sex

EU Results Framework indicator	Total	women/girls	men/boys	Not identified
2.17 Number of migrants, forcibly displaced people or individuals from host communities protected or assisted with EU support	14 416 000	4 253 000	4 861 000	5 302 000

3.6. Governance, Peace and Security

EU interventions in this area focused on building strong democratic institutions and promoting the rule of law; preventing and countering terrorism, violence and crime; and peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

In the area of rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice, the IcSP EU Transitional Justice Facility supported accountability and justice through flexible, short-term actions and provision of expert advice in Yemen, Burkina Faso, Mali and Liberia. Other actions supported the transitional justice institutions set up under the Colombia peace agreement, the investigation and prosecution mechanism for crimes in Syria⁵⁸, implementation of justice sector reforms in Lesotho and the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

EU CSDP missions in Palestine, Libya, and in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED Sophia and IRINI 30) contributed to conflict de-escalation.

Two projects (EUROMED Police V and CT-INFLOW) associating enlargement and neighbourhood partners with the work of relevant EU Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) agencies were launched in April 2020.

⁵⁸ International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

The Global Action on Cybercrime (GLACY+) was extended to strengthen countries' capacities to apply legislation on cybercrime and electronic evidence, in compliance with international human rights standards and the rule of law.

Several EU programmes supported the development of criminal justice systems in the EU's neighbourhood and helped ensure their preparedness for potential terrorist attacks, and to operationalise strategic dialogues on counterterrorism⁵⁹. A regional network of national coordinators for preventing violent extremism is fully operational, and a new Action Plan on Firearms trafficking between the EU and Southeast Europe was adopted on 24 July 2020.

In line with Council Conclusions on Counter Terrorism adopted on 16 June 2020, prevention and countering of violent extremism remained a key component of the EU's counterterrorism policy. The EU consolidated its engagement in several international fora⁶⁰ and with a new grant the Commission became one of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund's (GCERF) most significant donors, allowing for engagement with grass-root communities worldwide.

The IcSP also continued to support reconciliation and peace processes in several countries (Syria, Yemen, Libya, Central Africa Republic, the Sahel and Mozambique). Throughout 2020, specific focus was given to risk reduction for vulnerable communities, including refugee and migrant communities in Latin America, the Western Balkans and South Asia. The IcSP responded to the increased risk of xenophobic reactions, including violence, arising from the COVID-19 pandemic; this included support to the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire to focus on combatting the virus.

In 2020, the Humanitarian Development Peace nexus was implemented in six pilot countries (Chad, Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan and Uganda). Other EU delegations also started introducing or deepened a nexus approach in their work and the EU Conflict Early Warning System analysed three priority countries. A systematic exercise on conflict analysis of fragile and crisis- or conflict- affected countries was launched jointly with the EEAS to allow for a better integration of conflict-sensitivity into programming. Commission departments and the EEAS jointly elaborated a practical guidance on steps to operationalise the nexus, which was shared with all Delegations.

SDG #16 Peace, justice and strong institutions

The COVID crisis has proven to be a real-life stress test for the resilience of national systems in times of crisis. States have taken exceptional measures to protect public health, and most have declared some form of public emergency, or granted special emergency powers, under constitutional provisions or public health protection laws. But changing or suspending customary checks and balances can pose challenges for the rule of law. Under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the EU supported the setup of the Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights a one-stop online global platform (or tracker of trackers) to monitor the implications of the pandemic for democracies and fundamental rights around the world. Other

⁵⁹ One aims to enhance operational practices in the field of justice and law enforcement and strengthen strategic cooperation to fight transnational crime, while the other supports partners in Africa and the Middle East to improve information exchanges, cross-border investigations and prosecutions, in particular of foreign terrorist fighters and individuals suspected of carrying out terrorist offences.

⁶⁰EU consolidated its engagement notably in the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF), the Hedayah Centre, l'Institut International pour la Justice et l'état de Droit (IIJ) and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF).

projects were launched to address accountability and anti-corruption deficits in 16 countries (SANCUS project).

Anti-pandemic restrictions in many aspects amplified the pressure on civil society bodies, including their financial sustainability and organisational survival. Civil society organisations emerged as key players in the response to the COVID crisis, demonstrating a unique capacity to assist and strengthen communities' resilience, support marginalised vulnerable groups, counter disinformation and monitor and react to changes in the enabling environment. At local level, the capacity of local governments to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 was strengthened through decentralised cooperation initiatives and partnerships with local authority alliances, associations and city networks. The thematic programme Local Authorities and Civil society adapted its programmes in 2020 to ensure that its support to global and regional civil society networks remained adequate in the COVID-19 context. The Policy Forum on Development, the EU's main platform for dialogue with civil society and local authorities on development matters, worked on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the SDGs, on enhancing CSOs' enabling environment, and engaged in virtual consultations on the programming of future EU cooperation.

Selected results 2018-2020⁶¹

39 countries were supported by the EU to conduct elections and/or improve their electoral processes.

730 government policies were developed or revised with CSO participation through EU support.

106 000 victims of human rights violations directly benefited from assistance funded by the EU.

4 343 000 people directly benefited from legal aid interventions supported by the EU.

660 000 individuals directly benefited from EU-supported interventions that specifically aim to support civilian post-conflict peacebuilding and/or conflict prevention.

6 100 state institutions and non-state actors were supported on security, border management, countering violent extremism, conflict prevention, protection of civilian population and human rights – including 20 supported through EU Trust Fund for Africa projects.

Source: EU Results Framework indicators⁶²

- More than 100 000 victims of human rights violation directly benefited from assistance funded by the EU. Examples of support provided include medical and psychosocial support, legal support, material support, temporary relocation, protection against intimidation and risk of retaliation.
- In Tanzania, 2.8 million people – more than half of them women - benefited from legal aid education with EU support which was conducted by paralegals through village assemblies, religious places, markets, or door to door.

⁶¹ 2018-2020 stands for the reporting year. The EU-funded interventions that contribute to this figure are ongoing or closed projects managed by INTPA and NEAR (ENI) that started between January 2014 and July 2019. The values reported for EU RF indicators are cumulative, including all results reported for these projects since start of implementation.

⁶² Collecting results from EU-funded interventions managed by NEAR (ENI) and INTPA. Further information on scope and methodology in chapter 6.

- The number of government policies developed or revised with CSO participation increased by 114 % since last year (from 340 to 730). In Georgia, 25 policies were developed with CSO participation. In the context of the project Improving the Agriculture Sector in Georgia, CSOs were part of public consultations on the policy work developed by the project, including a strategy for agriculture and rural development, an agricultural extension strategy and a law on aquaculture.

EU RF indicators disaggregated by sex

EU Results Framework indicator	Total	women/girls	men/boys	Not identified
2.26 Number of victims of human rights violations directly benefiting from assistance funded by the EU	106 000	12 000	15 000	79 000
2.27 Number of people directly benefiting from legal aid interventions supported by the EU	4 343 000	1 633 000	1 374 000	1 336 000
2.28 Number of individuals directly benefiting from EU-supported interventions that specifically aim to support civilian post-conflict peacebuilding and/or conflict prevention	660 000	92 000	81 000	487 000

4. Geographic Overview

4.1. Sub-Saharan Africa

4.1.1. Introduction (Policy developments)

The COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on our work programme with the African Union (AU) in 2020, the Ministerial meeting and the Summit being both postponed, but this did not prevent the EU from delivering on our partnership with the continent. In February 2020, the **10th AU Commission - European Commission** meeting was held at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa. The President of the European Commission led a delegation of 22 Commissioners, which was a testament to the priority that relations with Africa represent for the EU. Discussions focused on four main areas: sustainable growth, trade, investment and digitalisation; climate change and resilient infrastructure; peace, security and governance; and migration and mobility. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP) chaired sessions dedicated to peace and security and to migration and mobility. In all priority areas, the two sides reiterated their commitment to support multilateralism as an effective modality in addressing global challenges. The Joint Communication of the Commission and the High Representative Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa⁶³ was adopted on 9 March 2020. It proposed a comprehensive framework for future partnerships and focused on five key areas: green transition; digital transformation; sustainable growth and jobs; peace and governance; and migration and mobility. In June and October, Council Conclusions reaffirmed that the EU looks forward to stepping up an open and inclusive exchange with citizens, civil society, diaspora, young people, the private sector, and top-level thinkers and decision-makers from both continents. The Conclusions called for a closer partnership with Africa notably on multilateralism, peace, security and stability, sustainable and inclusive development and sustainable economic growth. The proposed partnerships set out in the Joint Communication remain valid for a sustainable, just, green and digital post-COVID recovery.

2020 also saw a political deal by the chief negotiators of the EU and the 79 African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) states on the Post-Cotonou agreement. The future post-Cotonou Agreement is intended to substantially upgrade and modernise our relations with the ACP countries. It is based strongly on mutual respect and dialogue and provides us with the main priorities on which to focus our cooperation at all levels, namely human rights, democracy and good governance, peace and security, inclusive and sustainable development, human development, environmental sustainability and climate change, and migration and mobility.

Horn of Africa and East Africa

The war in Tigray (Ethiopia) that started in November deeply shook the regional order, with the direct involvement of Eritrean troops and ramifications for the conflict affecting Sudan. This conflict is characterised by serious violations of human rights and international refugee law, as well as systematic and widespread violations of International Humanitarian Law by armed forces, which could amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity. It has resulted in a dire humanitarian crisis, profoundly affecting civilian populations. The spill over effect of the conflict in the region is compounded by pending disagreement on border demarcation between Ethiopia and Sudan as well as inconclusive negotiations on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Sudan's transition remains an important inspiration for all democratic forces in the region and was further consolidated

⁶³ JOIN(2020) 4 final of 9 March 2020.

by the successful implementation of political and economic reforms as well as the Juba Peace Agreement. The continued engagement with International Finance Institutions, as part of a broader international coalition, is crucial in view of an eventual debt relief agreement under the international HIPC initiative for Highly Indebted Poor Countries and a sustainable economic recovery. However, after the departure of the United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) tensions have persisted. In Somalia, the future remains uncertain, amid tensions between the Federal Government and the Federal Member States and the persistence of Al-Shabab in some areas. The international community, including the African Union, has not been able yet to shape the new security architecture that would replace the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). In Tanzania and Uganda, controversial electoral processes led to the re-election of incumbent Presidents, with an overall shrinking of the political space.

Southern Africa

The impact of COVID-19 brought serious human and socio-economic impacts, with both political and Rule of Law implications as state capacity was severely restricted in many countries due to lockdown. Governments faced tough choices in navigating between distancing rules on one hand and maintaining the rights to take part in public politics on the other. The worst security threat in the region came in northern Mozambique, where the insurgency in Cabo Delgado Province continued and its humanitarian and security impact significantly worsened, with over half a million internally displaced persons by the end of 2020. Climate change continues to have a significant impact on the Southern Africa region, bringing further water shortages and related hydroelectric power supply load shedding, though the situation was slightly less severe than in 2019. In addition to the ongoing crisis in northern Mozambique, trafficking, illicit flows linked to wildlife and minerals, and the international drugs trade continued to exert a negative influence on the region. The most positive developments were rerun elections in Malawi, representing an important achievement for the rule of law, and successful elections leading to a change of leadership in the Seychelles. After a change in government in Lesotho, the European Union continues to encourage implementation of the outcome of the national dialogue process. The European Union reiterated its openness to review its policies towards Zimbabwe in the event of demonstrable progress in human rights and the rule of law, but expressed regret that such progress was not evident.

Sahel and West Africa

The EU-G5 Sahel Summit on 28 April 2020 further deepened the relations between the G5 Sahel and the EU, supporting the Coalition for the Sahel and the *Partenariat pour la Sécurité et la Stabilité* (P3S). As tactical gains have been secured, weakening the leadership of major terrorist groupings in the three borders area (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), an acceleration of the deployment of state presence and basic services in the fragile zones has been identified as a priority with the EU coordinating through the P3S Secretariat established in November 2020. A series of major presidential elections took place in West Africa throughout 2020, in Guinea, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Niger, confirming the robustness of democracy in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Niger in particular, but also underlining structural fragilities in other countries.

Central Africa

In the Central African Republic, the electoral process for the presidential and legislative elections in December 2020 was marked by political tensions and was severely disrupted by some major armed groups and political actors, triggering a deep political and security crisis, worsening the humanitarian

situation and affecting the timid improvements that took place following the signature of the Political Peace and Reconciliation Agreement the year before. In Cameroon, little progress was made by the authorities in finding a political solution to the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions, where the situation further worsened, with continued serious human rights violations reported and important humanitarian and economic consequences. Chad continued to be confronted with multiple security threats from neighbouring countries (in particular from Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region), with the perspective of elections being postponed again. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the strategy of President Tshisekedi to free himself from the ruling political coalition with former President Kabila led to increased political tensions, further hampering the implementation of long-awaited reforms; in parallel, in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), human rights violations were on the rise following a sharp deterioration of the security situation. In Burundi however, the first peaceful political transition took place with the election of Evariste Ndayishimiye, opening a window of hope for the population, and new opportunities for increased regional cooperation and stability in the Great Lakes region, as well as for improving EU-Burundi relations still operating under the regime of Art.96 of the Cotonou Agreement.

4.1.2. Working towards the SDGs

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to strengthen our partnership with Africa, truly balancing economic, social and environmental progress as envisioned by the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. The framework of the SDGs has been key to identify priorities for a sustainable social and economic post COVID-19 recovery in Sub-Saharan Africa and to lead the way towards a more inclusive, just and resilient future for all, leaving no one behind.

In December 2020, a political deal on a new Partnership Agreement was achieved between the EU and 79 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, representing another important step to upgrade international partnerships for sustainable global change (SDG 17).

On a regional level, 2020 has witnessed the launch of the AU-EU D4D Hub, which aims to be a powerful mechanism to facilitate the Team Europe approach to advance the implementation of the digital agenda in Africa, contributing to SDG 9. Concerning Science, Technology and Innovation, several actions continue to effectively support the Africa-EU partnership in the field of earth observation and satellite navigation. The African Research Initiative for Scientific Excellence was launched at the end of the year to support the very best African researchers, enabling young African talent to contribute to the development of the continent (SDG 8, 9) and the target of 35 000 mobilities of African students and staff to Europe under the Erasmus+ programme by 2020 was met (SDG 4, 8). The African Peace Facility (APF) has continued to ensure EU support for peace and peace-building processes in several African countries (SDG 16, 17).

The EU, together with other partners, had provided significant technical support to the Economic Community of Central Africa (ECCA) to enable it to open opportunities to relaunch the political and policy dialogue, particularly on issues around peace in the region, including maritime security and environment, management of natural resources and protection of biodiversity (SDG 14, 15, 16, 17).

In the very fragile context of West Africa, marked by food crises and deteriorated security situations in the Sahel and Lake Chad sub-regions, the COVID-19 response included reorientation of resources in support to the health systems (SDG 3) and measures to mitigate the economic and social impact of the pandemic (SDG 1, 2, 8, 10). In most cases partnership with other donors, including the IMF, was strengthened (SDG 17). In the Sahel, initiatives were launched to increase resilience and security,

targeting most vulnerable areas and contributing to improved peace and stability (SDG 16). Being a region limited by poor economic diversification and productivity, the EU has been proactive towards modernising and extending infrastructures (SDG 1, 8, 9) and supporting the generation and distribution of clean and reliable energy (SDG 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13). In addition, the EU's efforts were directed towards fighting poverty by supporting inclusive growth and regional economic integration and trade (SDGs 1, 8 and 9); and supporting improved governance of natural resources and protected areas with a view to contribute to a green economy, including the fight against climate change (SDGs 13, 15).

The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected the economies of the countries and livelihoods of people in East and Central Africa. Moreover, in 2020 the region experienced a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation. Efforts were made to strengthen the health sector (SDG 3), to support the electoral process and democratic transition (SDG 16). Health, water, and sanitation (SDG 6) programmes were revised and expanded to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. New EU actions focused on support to national statistics, tourism and investment promotion (SDG 8, 9). The region saw a relaunch of the political and policy dialogue, particularly on issues around peace in the region (SDG 16), including maritime security, green electricity production and environment (SDG 13, 14), management of natural resources and protection of biodiversity (SDG 15).

In Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean, further support was provided in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (SDG 1, 2, 3, 8, 10), and to the implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) in the region, as well as to the promotion of entrepreneurship (SDG 1, 8).

4.1.3. Implementation

2020 was a year with many challenges, and many lessons learnt, as COVID-19 affected all. African countries faced several shocks in addition to the health emergency linked to the COVID 19 pandemic: a steep drop in global demand for goods, plunging commodity prices, capital flight and lower remittances flows. These shocks added pressure to the pre-existing context, in some places marked by food crises, weak health systems and deteriorated security situation in the most fragile regions.

The EU and its Member States, their financial institutions and agencies, as well as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, acting together in a Team Europe approach, took comprehensive action to tackle the destructive impact of COVID-19 to enable a sustainable recovery. This entailed a massive reorientation of existing resources to support sanitary measures, health systems and to the mitigation of socio-economic impacts of the crisis.

The EU and its Member States mobilised more than EUR 8 billion to Africa's COVID response, out of which more than EUR 6.2 billion went to Sub-Saharan Africa (see Table 1 in Chapter 1). The EU also played a leading role in setting up the COVAX Facility and is one of the lead contributors providing more than EUR 3 billion of funding. This should help ensure fair, safe and equitable access to vaccines for vulnerable populations in Africa and elsewhere. The Team Europe approach has enabled coordinated actions, sharing of information and effective communication efforts at regional and country level, within the EU, in partner countries and in global and multilateral fora.

In West Africa, a notable action under the COVID-19 response was the reorientation of budget support in Senegal for a total of EUR 124 million in a Team Europe approach with Germany. Another example is the EU contribution towards protective and intensive care equipment for facilities and

health workers that was delivered to the West African Health Organisation (WAHO) for distribution to the Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

In Eastern and Central Africa, the EU and its Member States provided funds to those in need through the Productive Safety Net programme implemented in Ethiopia. In Central African Republic (CAR), health, water, and sanitation programmes were reoriented and expanded. In Cameroon, Central African Republic, Kenya, Rwanda, Sao Tomé e Príncipe, and Uganda the approval of payment of budget support fixed tranches was brought forward to meaningfully enable countries to respond to and mitigate the impact of the crisis.

Building on the success of the Team Europe response to the pandemic, the EU and its Member States started to develop initial concepts of Team Europe Initiatives in the framework of the programming of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. These will respond to the challenges around the Green Transition, Science Technology and Innovation, Digital, Growth and Jobs and Governance, peace and security, and human development, in line with the key priorities set in the European Commission and EEAS Joint Communication towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa of March 2020.

The EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) is another example of close partner coordination; its strategic board consists of donor representatives (EU Member States and other donors) as well as representatives of partner countries, regional organisations and European Parliament representatives as observers. In full dialogue with partner countries and implementing partners, in 2020 the EUTF for Africa specifically made use of its fast and effective decision-making process and flexible procedures to respond promptly to the COVID-19 pandemic. The redirection of funds and the adaptation of programmes helped to increase job stabilisation efforts, strengthen resilience and support migration management including voluntary return, sustainable reintegration and life-saving assistance to vulnerable refugees. In 2020, 27 new actions were approved for a total of EUR 438.05 million under the Sahel and Lake Chad and the Horn of Africa Window, and the European Commission decided to extend the EUTF until the end of 2021.

Increasingly, the EU has used ODA funding to leverage other sources of public and private finance, mainly through guarantees in support of private sector investment. In 2020, work with partners focused on creating conditions to generate sustainable growth and jobs, in the framework of the External Investment Plan. Lessons learnt linked to the more difficult roll out of these instruments in very fragile contexts will shape the new generation of guarantees under the EFSD+.

The approach included support in undertaking the necessary economic and regulatory reforms and in tackling the constraints, e.g., in terms of business environment, governance, infrastructure, customs and logistics. Countries were also supported in their efforts in implementing the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). While the latter can create opportunities and incentives, they can only influence the economic and social conditions in a country positively if their implementation is supported by a broader dynamic in line with the national development strategies, with a view to foster economic diversification and local value added, attract investment, and foster trade and regional integration.

The European Union and its Member States are long-standing supporters of economic integration for all in Africa and are collectively committed to support the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) as well as the ultimate long-term prospect of establishing an African single market. The EU is currently supporting the AfCFTA with EUR 74 million for the period 2014-

2020. In 2020, the EU support to the AfCFTA amounted to EUR 32 million, with four strands of action in the areas of Rules of Origin, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS), the African Trade Observatory, and the setup of an EU technical assistance facility in a Team Europe approach to support AfCFTA negotiation and implementation. The African Trade Observatory (ATO) is implemented by the International Trade Centre and will provide reliable real-time data to African traders. The ATO is one of the AU flagship initiatives embedded in Agenda 2063⁶⁴ and it is one of the examples of EU-AU successful partnership and cooperation. In addition, more than 30 National and Regional Strategies for AfCFTA implementation have been developed with EU financial support and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) technical support, in order to help AU Member States to tackle priority reforms to take advantage of the AfCFTA regime. As part of the support to the negotiations of the AfCFTA Protocol on Intellectual Property Rights, the AFRIPi programme, aiming to facilitate intra-African trade and African and European investment and the establishment of sustainable IP systems in Africa also kicked off in February 2020.

West Africa

In 2020, the EU continued supporting the Multi-National Joint Task Force against Boko Haram (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin, through the EU African Peace Facility, with a total contribution of EUR 44.7 million, providing services and equipment to strengthen MNJTF capacities to coordinate and conduct joint operations, in line with its mandate for stabilisation and protection of civilians. Lessons learned are shaping the second phase of support to the MNJTF, with improved processes regarding the provision of interoperable equipment and enabling African ownership of advanced security technologies.

In 2020, six joint programming documents were in place in West Africa, specifically in Ghana, Mali, Togo, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Senegal. Significantly, the EU has replaced its own bilateral programming (2018-2020) with the joint programming document in Senegal. In addition, Benin, Niger and Chad had a joint analysis. Together with the EU and its Member States, associated countries like Switzerland as well as the EIB are part of several joint programming processes, for example, in Mali, Ghana, Senegal and Ivory Coast.

Eastern and Central Africa

The Central African Republic (CAR) continued to struggle to overcome the effects of years of violent internal conflict and is facing a severe humanitarian crisis. In 2020, the EU mobilised over EUR 20 million in support to the electoral process in the Eastern and Central Africa region. First rounds of presidential and legislative elections took place in December 2020 in a highly insecure context.

Despite Somalia's complex operating context, progress was recorded in the areas where EU provided support, ensuring a true integrated approach that makes full use of all EU instruments. The EU's first budget support programme in the country proved to be an effective tool to promote political dialogue and to implement the necessary reforms that led Somalia to reach a Decision Point in March 2020 under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries' (HIPC) initiative.

In Sudan, the EU continued to support the democratic transition and provided substantial political and financial support, notably through the EU Trust Fund for Africa, but also with the use of EDF reserves. The EU was a strategic partner promoting and ensuring successful demarches on debt relief

⁶⁴ <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>

vis-à-vis the Government of Sudan, the IMF, the World Bank and the members of the Friends of Sudan group.

In Cameroon, the ongoing budget support programme is helping to tackle the issue of illegal origin of wood by introducing performance indicators and promoting fiscal reforms. In São Tomé e Príncipe, the EU supported the development and promotion of the country's agricultural export sectors, promoting sustainable agriculture and adaptability to climate change to consolidate traditional farming sectors such as cocoa, coffee and vanilla, as well as non-traditional sectors.

In Rwanda, new EU programmes focused on support to national statistics, tourism and investment promotion, and in Burundi, on resilience and rural entrepreneurship. In Uganda, the EU contributed to enhancing links between European and African businesses: the first Uganda-Europe Business Forum was organised in Kampala, a successful event that brought together over 800 investors, as well as public and private sector industry bodies.

In Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), new programmes were approved to support justice, public finance and security sector reform and to generate green electricity.

In 2020, two joint programming documents were in place in East Africa, namely Ethiopia (2017-2020) and Kenya (2018-2022). The two countries have established a joint monitoring and results framework. In addition, there was good progress recorded in other countries: Djibouti has a draft JPD, Uganda (2020-25) and Burundi (2019-22) have a Team Europe Vision, while Somalia and Tanzania agreed on a roadmap for joint programming. In 2020 in Central Africa, one full joint programming document was in place in the Central African Republic. In addition, good progress was recorded in the Congo and the DRC where joint analysis exists and has been validated by Member States.

Southern Africa and Indian Ocean

In 2020, one joint programming document was in place in Comoros (2015-2020). In addition, there was good progress recorded in several countries: a joint analysis exists in Madagascar and in Zambia, while Mozambique and Zimbabwe have agreed on a roadmap for joint programming.

In 2020 the EU hosted the fifth EU-South Africa Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) in the framework of the EU-South Africa enhanced dialogue on education and training, as well as a back-to-back Policy Seminar on Education and Training for Employability. Topics for further engagement identified in the SOM Conclusions included teacher education and professional development; graduate tracking; Quality assurance; Digital education/transformation; Entrepreneurship in education; Practices on priority skills; and Workplace learning in Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

CASE STUDY

West Africa

Team Europe approach: The EU and France support green energy in Benin by funding a solar power plant

2020 saw the beginning of the construction work of the **DEFISSOL solar power plant** in Benin, funded with support from the EU and France (AFD). The DEFISSOL plant will help generate and distribute clean and reliable energy for all the people of Benin. It will supply the country with 35 GWh of electricity a year, covering the consumption needs of around 180 000 people and reducing

greenhouse gas emissions at a total cost of EUR 60.85 million of which EUR 10 million was provided as an EU grant. This project is an example of the commitment of the EU and its Member States to clean energy in the region.

Another example is the Benin Team Europe Initiative, *Investir dans l'énergie durable et le port*, which will contribute to support the development of renewable energy as a strategic sector to reduce dependency on imports and boost the competitiveness of ports infrastructure, in particular the Port of Cotonou. Both sectors of intervention will support sustainable infrastructures and energy efficiency, with an emphasis on reducing the environmental and climate footprint, increasing productivity and creating jobs.

4.1.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters

While addressing immediate humanitarian needs, the EU worked actively on implementing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (triple nexus) to build the resilience of the affected populations, address the root causes of conflict and fragility, and reduce humanitarian needs.

Best practices of the triple nexus have been identified in several countries in the region, including those that were identified as pilots for the nexus approach in 2017 (Chad, Nigeria, Sudan and Uganda). The nexus approach is also highlighted in the Communication on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles⁶⁵ as a very efficient means to address underlying reasons for vulnerability and ultimately reduce humanitarian needs.

Ethiopia

The main humanitarian concerns were: inter-ethnic violence; the situation of Eritrean and South Sudanese refugees; Ethiopian deportees from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; and floods and locusts. Furthermore, the conflict in Tigray caused severe food insecurity for 4.5 million people and over 2 million internally displaced people (IDPs), which triggered an EU humanitarian response of EUR 24.8 million (including EUR 6 million for the refugees in Sudan). Overall, the EU allocated over EUR 63 million to the humanitarian response.

Kenya

Kenya hosts more than 500 000 refugees (and people awaiting registration) who are fully dependent on international assistance due to the country's encampment policy. COVID-19, locusts and floods affected Kenya and caused food insecurity for about 2.3 million people. The EU humanitarian funding amounted to EUR 18.45 million.

Somalia

Floods during the dry season, previous droughts, COVID-19, desert locusts and the armed conflict contributed to increase humanitarian needs in Somalia. In response, the Commission allocated over EUR 50.9 million of humanitarian aid.

South Sudan

Intensified conflict, sub-national violence, natural disasters (locusts and flooding) and the impact of COVID-19 hit hard on communities. Nearly 4 million people have been displaced since 2013, of which about 1.6 million people are internally displaced and 2.2 million are refugees in neighbouring

⁶⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0110&from=EN>

countries. Food insecurity worsened during the year, mainly triggered by intensified violence and two consecutive years of floods. In response to the multi-faceted crises, the EU allocated EUR 59 million for humanitarian aid.

Sudan

9.3 million people needed humanitarian assistance due to the economic crisis, conflict situations, natural disasters (locust and flooding), the impacts of COVID-19, and to the refugee crisis triggered by the conflict in Tigray. Overall, food insecurity worsened in the country. The EU allocated EUR 67.6 million for humanitarian aid in response to these crises.

Uganda

Uganda hosts the largest number of refugees (more than 1.4 million) in Africa, mainly from South Sudan and DRC. The constant influx of refugees has overstretched the capacity of reception and transit centres. The main needs relate to food assistance, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), and prevention of water-borne disease outbreaks and other basic services. Uganda is also prone to natural disasters and epidemics. During the year, the EU allocated EUR 34.45 million of humanitarian aid to the country.

Burundian crisis

The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) reported more than 120 000 assisted returns to Burundi by the end of 2020, but over 310 000 refugees remain in neighbouring countries. 1.74 million people in Burundi and all refugees in the neighbouring countries are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The EU has taken a regional approach to meet the basic protection needs of the Burundian refugees and returnees, and its humanitarian support amounted to EUR 8.5 million during 2020.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The magnitude of the humanitarian crisis in the DRC continued throughout 2020: up to 21.8 million people were acutely food insecure, over five million people were internally displaced, and over 900 000 refugees were hosted in neighbouring countries. The Congolese suffered from conflict and violence, natural disasters and recurrent epidemics. The EU allocated over EUR 40 million for life-saving activities in the DRC, complemented by EUR 7 million for humanitarian air services (ECHO Flights), and also supported emergency response to floods.

Central African Republic (CAR)

Due to the deteriorating regional crisis in CAR, the EU allocated EUR 22.7 million of humanitarian aid in 2020, focusing on food assistance and livelihood support, agricultural support, health, shelter, water, sanitation, education and protection of civilians. Support was also provided for humanitarian coordination, security and logistics.

Sahel regional crisis

In 2020, the EU addressed urgent humanitarian needs in seven countries affected by the Sahel crisis: Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon, by allocating over EUR 190 million (including EUR 125 million to assist the most vulnerable populations in the Sahel G5 countries). Humanitarian response in conflict areas included support to Rapid Reaction Mechanisms and to national structures, to maintain access to basic services. Moreover, the EU aid provided

protection services and supported Humanitarian Air Services enabling access to hard-to-reach areas, as well as humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination and security management. In addition, the EU provided food during the lean season and nutritional supplements for children in need of life-saving treatments.

Lake Chad Basin crisis

The decade-long crisis of the Lake Chad Basin region (Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger) received EUR 72 million from the EU in humanitarian aid funding. These funds provided relief, protection and assistance to conflict-stricken populations, in addition to supporting treatment for Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM).

Southern Africa

In the region, Emergency Response to natural and man-made disasters, Education in Emergencies (EiE), and Disaster Preparedness (DP) remained a priority. The outbreak of COVID-19 impacted already vulnerable populations. Food insecurity remained a serious humanitarian threat, affecting over 16 million people. In Zimbabwe the situation was compounded by an economic crisis, consecutive droughts, and the COVID-19 pandemic, with seven million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. From early 2020, the internal conflict in Cabo Delgado (Northern Mozambique) dramatically deteriorated, with increased population displacement and a rise in security incidents and casualties. In 2020, the EU humanitarian funding in the region amounted to EUR 64.9 million.

4.1.5. Crisis response and preparedness

With 19 new crisis response programmes related to sub-Saharan Africa launched in 2020, actions through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) helped the EU to respond to the numerous crises in the region, including specific COVID-19 related initiatives.

In the Central African Republic, IcSP actions continue to support the peace process and further strengthen local level ownership of the process with emphasis on the participation of sub-regions and on increased involvement of essential stakeholders in the search for a solution. A new action contributed to a peaceful, inclusive and transparent electoral process through the dissemination of independent and reliable information as a vector for social dialogue, accountability and citizen engagement. The IcSP further provided considerable support to the security sector in the country, notably for the gradual deployment of the national armed forces, under the provisions for Capacity-Building for Security and Development (CBSD) support, and the internal security services beyond the capital; and for strengthening trust and collaboration between communities and security forces. A new initiative in 2020 allowed the continued rehabilitation at Camp Leclerc in Bouar, extending social support to families of the deployed forces; and helping to strengthen relations with the neighbouring civilian communities. In addition, other IcSP actions continued to support the stabilisation of vulnerable communities. Previous IcSP support to the investigations of the Special Criminal Court was phased out and taken over by European Development Fund (EDF) support in late 2020, demonstrating good coordination and complementarity between different EU instruments.

The Sahel region, which is strategic for the EU, remains plagued by instability. The region faces a precarious economic situation, the threat of international terrorism, internal conflicts and tensions, climate-related and governance challenges. In 2020, IcSP support was provided for the implementation of security and stabilisation packages dedicated to vulnerable areas in the Tillabéri

region in Niger, the eastern and central-northern regions of Burkina Faso, and central Mali as well as the southern part of the country (Sikasso and Kayes regions). These activities focussed on peacebuilding, dialogue, mediation and stabilisation initiatives and included CBSD support to provide security for development. In addition, support was mobilised to fight against impunity in central Mali and to analyse justice related needs of the populations in fragile parts of Burkina Faso. After the military coup in Mali in August 2020, all security-related activities were suspended until an 18-month political transition process was announced in October 2020 under civilian leadership. Furthermore, new support to Côte d'Ivoire to address instability in the northern regions, where spill-over of conflict from the Sahel is of increasing concern, was developed.

In 2020, IcSP actions in Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have engaged with police forces to promote conflict-sensitive policing. In Ethiopia, the action aims at sustainable improvements to the Ethiopia Federal Police's transparency, efficiency, accountability and effectiveness. This includes efforts to develop a vision for policing and police reform, capacity-building and modernisation of the human resource management system as well as strengthening internal and external controls. Improved communications between the police and the population as well as human rights compliance are cross-cutting themes with a longer-term reform objective for security institutions to become more citizen-centred. In DRC, the action supports conflict-sensitive policing of restrictions related to COVID-19. The focus is on strengthening the links between the police and local populations, which enables the provision of responsive and accountable security services as well as participatory and inclusive security governance. An action also responded to the conflict situation in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, where the COVID-19 pandemic has put additional strain on the conflict-affected population.

In Somalia, an IcSP action provided timely support to ensure peaceful electoral processes in Somalia and Somaliland. At the same time, support to the consolidation of the Somali security architecture continues and has been instrumental in enabling EU support for the Somalia Transition Plan, specifically targeting capacity-building of the security sector and stabilisation activities. A second CBSD action assists the redeployment of state institutions to areas regained from Al Shabaab.

The IcSP also continued to support the transition process in Sudan as well as mediation and dialogue activities in South Sudan.

IcSP actions further engaged in initiatives to tackle conflicts and insecurity stemming from the exploitation of minerals, including in relation to the implementation of the Kimberley Process in the Mano River Union countries (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire), as well as gold mining in fragile areas of Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. There is continued engagement in the promotion of responsible sourcing and trading of gold and diamonds, strengthening governance of these sectors, and promoting the formalisation of artisanal mining activities.

Through the IcSP the EU has promoted a regional programme supporting civil society capacities to anticipate and prevent electoral violence as well as strengthening the engagement of civil society in the security sector to better consider and address people's security needs and concerns, including from a gender perspective.

4.2. Latin America and the Caribbean

4.2.1. Latin America

4.2.1.1. Introduction (Policy developments)

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries particularly hard. The region is facing its worst economic recession ever and an unprecedented long-term crisis with significant social consequences affecting primarily the most vulnerable. This pandemic has generated a sense of urgency in LAC countries regarding the importance of regional and international dialogue and cooperation.

The EU and its Member States took the initiative to convene two important meetings to resume high-level dialogue with the region: the informal ministerial videoconference organised by France on 10 July and co-chaired by the HRVP and Spain, and the LAC informal ministerial meeting hosted by Germany in Berlin on 14 December 2020 and chaired by the HRVP. These two meetings were an opportunity to put the focus on the other transatlantic relationship and move towards renewing the bi-regional agenda. The Berlin meeting in particular gave a political push by relaunching political engagement with the LAC region and revitalising cooperation. EU and LAC governments committed to join forces to build back better, with equality, notably through a robust green partnership and a digital alliance. The EU-LAC International Foundation continued to play its role as a forum for regular bi-regional dialogue giving new impetus and visibility to activities involving civil society and other social actors.

Dialogue with Central America continued adapting working modalities to digital formats. The EU further progressed on the ratification of the EU Central America Association Agreement. The EU renewed its autonomous sanctions regime for Nicaragua as the government reinforced its repressive legislative arsenal and failed to abide by its commitment for rule of law and electoral reforms.

The EU weighed in favour of a smooth transition of power in Guyana after the tense end to 2019 elections. The double pressure of COVID stopping tourism and Brexit requiring trade flow reorientation placed the Caribbean region in a delicate situation. The political deal by the chief negotiators on the Caribbean protocol to the future post-Cotonou agreement was highly positive news pointing to a closer future relationship together. The socio-economic crisis in Haiti combined with institutional tensions triggered reflection on the political engagement of the EU. The intense institutional dialogue agenda with Cuba and Mexico continued.

In June 2020, a historical agreement was reached on the political and cooperation pillar of the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement (the trade pillar of the agreement had already been concluded in 2019); this comprehensive agreement promises to be a game changer and is of geo-strategic importance. Negotiations also advanced on the modernisation of the EU-Chile Association Agreement.

The EU continued to provide substantial political and financial support to the implementation of the Peace Agreement in Colombia. In 2020, it negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding with a view to reinforce the EU-Colombia partnership, enhancing political dialogue and cooperation in areas of common interest. The EU also reinforced bilateral engagement with Brazil on sustainable development, environment and climate change issues. In Bolivia, the EU was actively engaged to find a democratic and sustainable outcome to a protracted political crisis. It undertook mediation efforts, together with UN and the Church, which contributed to peaceful and credible elections in October.

The political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela continued to deteriorate through 2020 with a significant impact on the region, due in particular to migration flows that reached more than 5.4 million by the end of 2020. The EU increased its diplomatic role maintaining a diplomatic presence and dialogue with the parties in Venezuela in order to promote the re-launching of meaningful and inclusive negotiations with a view to a democratic transition. The EU has also reached out to the main international actors to promote a concerted international engagement. Several meetings of the International Contact Group were organised, including at ministerial level and the HRVP personally engaged in exchanges with both the regime and the opposition.

4.2.1.2. Working towards the SDGs

Throughout 2020, the Commission departments have worked to provide an adequate policy response in Latin America to support a sustainable recovery aligned with the SDGs. The EU toolbox was used to support partner countries and regional constellations to achieve their development goals. New programmes and projects aimed at addressing the most pressing challenges such as climate change, security and the rule of law, investments for growth and jobs, and governance. Progress has been recorded in the areas of decent jobs and the green economy, climate change adaptation and mitigation, sustainable energy, peace and security, and capacity development in the public sector.

The Foreign Affairs Council of 12 October put Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) higher up the EU's external action agenda and the informal Ministerial meeting in Berlin on 14 December 2020 was a tangible step in reviving the high-level bi-regional dialogue. Ministers agreed that the COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity to build back better in line with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and agreed to join forces to develop robust green and digital partnerships.

LAC was hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. The region is going through the worst recession on record with increased poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Unsustainable debt levels restrict governments' room for manoeuvre.

The Team Europe COVID-19 response in the LAC region saw existing programmes and funds redirected where possible and frontloading of commitments and payments, whilst at the same time ensuring a sustainable approach and galvanising pre-COVID-19 gains and achievements. The funds were used to address the social and economic consequences of the crisis, also focused on health, water and sanitation issues, and on the emergency response and humanitarian needs in the countries. See Table 1 in Chapter 1 for more details.

Within the Partnership Instrument, three new actions in Latin America and in Asia were programmed in 2020 (EUR 14 million) mainly aimed at providing a response to the COVID-19 crisis. The actions explored avenues for enhanced cooperation with multilateral and bilateral partners in response to this common challenge. Eight new actions (EUR 36 million) and 59 existing actions (EUR 239 million) were reoriented to address the COVID-19 crisis including adaptation to the pandemic and its mitigation. They supported the sharing of best practices and the socio-economic impact of the crisis.

In 2020, there were five joint programming documents in place: in Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Three countries established a joint monitoring and results frameworks (Bolivia, Honduras and Nicaragua).

4.2.1.3. Implementation

In Latin America, the implementation of programmes and projects was adapted to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and the operational constraints it provoked. New programmes were launched in key sectors including water and climate change; education, sustainable growth and jobs, food security, private sector and investment; economic development; security, rule of law and governance.

New approaches to triangular cooperation were explored with key partners across the region, enabling engagement on projects but also on mutual cooperation priorities. The Commission has established close alliances with key institutions to define the regional agenda around the top priorities of the EU foreign policies. Those partnerships will enable the shaping of the regional agenda on the green deal, social cohesion, more diverse and inclusive growth, COVID-19 recovery, and digital transformation.

The EU Trust Fund for Colombia continued to support the implementation of the Peace Agreement via sustainable rural development, and the social and economic reincorporation of former FARC combatants. The Trust Fund includes 30 projects (EUR 110 million).

The **Venezuela** International Donor's Conference of May 2020 mobilised EUR 70 million to support Venezuelan migrants and refugees, and their hosting communities in neighbouring countries. The package includes financing for their COVID-19 response and for mitigating the impact of the Venezuelan migration crisis.

Central America faced the COVID-19 crisis and the aftermath of two significant storms, intensifying the challenges and difficulties in the region. The EU is contributing to the Regional Contingency Plan against COVID-19. The EU also mobilised funds in response to COVID-19 to support actions in health and socio-economic recovery. The EU continued to strengthen its partnership with Mexico through enhanced cooperation, in the broader context of Central America.

Regional programmes remained crucial to underpin the EU-Latin America partnership. Flagship programmes were increasingly structured around national dialogues, expanding the Team Europe approach for programmes to policy defining efforts. The launch of bilateral cooperation funds with key partner countries in the region (Chile, Uruguay, Mexico) is considered an innovative approach.

Euroclima+ remains the EU's flagship programme for Latin America in climate change and environment. It encompasses 60 projects in six sectors covering 18 countries. Its key achievements relate to the formulation of Chile's new climate change law, climate change scenarios in six countries in Central America; three national systems for monitoring and evaluating climate policies (Chile, Costa Rica and El Salvador); an indigenous climate platform in Peru; and the adoption/implementation of Early Warning Systems on droughts and floods in Bolivia and Peru.

EUROSociAL+ has enabled a rapid response related to social cohesion in the context of the COVID-19 crisis: mounting 34 actions in the area of gender equality, good governance and social policies in Latin America.

The Latin America Investment Facility, mainly geared towards environmental sustainability, climate change, and sustainable growth and jobs, tailored financing to the COVID-19 context. The projects include migration actions in Colombia, the first EU contribution to a Green Bond Fund LAGREEN and addressing sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and health.

The ADELANTE Programme for Triangular Cooperation aims to improve public policies through peer-to-peer learning and the exchange of experiences. It brings together 93 institutions from the EU and LAC and fosters policy coherence for development and opportunities for deepening the EU's strategic relations in areas of mutual interest.

AL-INVEST is the EU flagship programme for private sector development in Latin America. AL-INVEST 5.0 implemented 67 projects involving 110 EU and Latin American organisations from 18 countries and over 49 000 SMEs.

EL PACCTO, the programme on the rule of law, was instrumental in facilitating an immediate response to the pandemic. It created a space for exchange between the EU and Latin American security forces, representatives of the justice and penitentiary systems on substantive practices and protocols used during the pandemic.

The EUROFRONT programme fosters intra-Latin American and EU-LAC cooperation in the area of integrated border management. It contributes to the fight against trafficking in human beings and the smuggling of migrants.

The COPOLAD project targets drug policies within the region. It linked into the EU Drugs Strategy 2013-2020 and its Action Plan. Its goals are to reduce drugs supply and demand, reducing the social and health-related risks and harms caused by drug use.

The EU-LAC Digital Alliance will step up the EU engagement in digital transformation. The BELLA (Building the Europe Link with Latin America) programme enables a stronger digital cooperation between the two regions. It caters to the interconnectivity needs of EU and Latin American research and education communities through a submarine cable between the two continents and by improving connectivity between Latin American countries. Also contributing to the digital transition and knowledge and research sharing with LAC is a new action to support wildfire management in the Amazon and LAC region launched in 2020 and to be continued under the TEI Amazon after 2022. The action supports the creation of an Expert Group on wildfire management in LAC and exchange of EU good practices on the use of forest fire information systems in the region.

A new project was launched on 'Smart Specialisation Strategies for Sustainability in Latin America' with the aim to confirm the potential of the EU Smart Specialisation policy concept to steer innovation-driven territorial development in line with sustainable development principles. The project kicked off in 2020 and is implemented under the governance of the EU Regional Facility for Development in transition (DGINTPA). The territorial scope of the project is Mexico, Chile and Peru.

The EU-CELAC Common Research Area (CRA) remains a key policy objective in bi-regional research and innovation cooperation, working towards a shared space for scientists from the EU and LAC to contribute to the strategic priorities in both regions. The 2020 meeting of the delegates of the Joint Initiative on Research and Innovation, as the main coordination instrument of the CRA, managed to re-launch the bi-regional dialogue, previously overshadowed by the Venezuela crisis.

Erasmus+ supported students and staff mobility, full degree scholarships for Erasmus Mundus joint Masters degree students, and capacity building for higher education. In 2020, 1,277 Latin American students, researchers and teachers were provided with the opportunity under Erasmus+ to study or teach in another European higher education institution, while 922 European staff went to Latin America. 14 Capacity Building in Higher Education projects were funded in the region, as well as 40 Erasmus+ Capacity building projects in the field of youth, supporting 81 organisations.

CASE STUDY

Special Measure for the Latin America region related to the Venezuela crisis in the context of COVID-19

Context:

The Venezuelan refugee and migrant crisis constitutes the biggest population displacement in the Americas' recent history. Over 5.4 million people have fled the country. Response capacities of receiving countries were overwhelmed.

Objectives:

To strengthen the resilience of health and basic services, contribute towards longer-term socio-economic resilience of vulnerable communities in the region, and to ensure protection of human rights in the COVID-19 context. The main focus was on migrants and refugees, especially those most at risk, such as children, women, and older persons, in host communities in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Costa Rica, as well as the most vulnerable populations in Venezuela.

Results:

- Improved access of vulnerable populations to basic services, such as health, water and sanitation.
- Strengthened socio-economic recovery, including support to livelihoods, to the private sector and food production and commercialisation, and socio-economic integration of migrant and refugee populations, especially women and youth.
- Human rights and human rights defenders protected.



4.2.1.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters

Venezuela

Venezuela was one of the major humanitarian crises worldwide, with at least 14 million people in need of assistance inside the country. The impact of COVID-19, widespread violence, political

polarisation, legal insecurity, fuel and power shortages exacerbated people's hardship. The number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees had reached 5.4 million towards the end of 2020.

The Commission provided humanitarian support to those affected, in Venezuela and in the region, in the sectors of health and nutrition, water and sanitation, protection, education in emergencies, as well as support to host communities. In 2020, EUR 67.7 million was mobilised in humanitarian aid for a crisis that, nevertheless, remains severely underfunded.

The Commission has also continued its efforts in terms of humanitarian diplomacy (also through the International Contact Group for Venezuela). Together with EEAS, Commission departments were on the frontline in the organisation of the May 2020 Virtual Pledging conference in response to the Venezuela migration and refugee crisis. In a Team Europe approach, the Pledging Conference raised a total of EUR 2.5 billion (of which EUR 595 million in grants). The EU and EU Member States pledged EUR 236 million in grants (of which EUR 144.2 million was from Commission departments) and EUR 400 million in loans from the European Investment Bank.

The Commission remains the lead donor in Venezuela and, in order to ensure close follow up to operations, the field office in Caracas was reinforced with new personnel.

Colombia

The ongoing internal conflict, the huge impact of the more than 1.7 million Venezuelan refugees in the country and the consequences of COVID-19 aggravated the humanitarian situation in Colombia. As a result, the number of people in need increased from 5.1 million in 2019 to 6.7 million by the end of 2020.

Colombia is also highly prone to natural disasters and conflict-affected municipalities are particularly at risk. In total, over 590 000 people were directly impacted by natural disasters in 2020, including 330 000 people affected by Hurricane Iota and *La Niña*.

The Commission allocated a total of EUR 5.85 million in humanitarian aid, to help conflict-affected people in Colombia and in the region, as well as people affected by natural disasters inside Colombia. Aid sectors included protection, healthcare, water and sanitation for the most vulnerable groups, education in emergency, as well as disaster preparedness.

Central America

Climate shocks hit the Central America region over the last five years and caused average crop losses exceeding 75 % in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. This chronic situation was further aggravated by the impact of COVID-19 and the two successive hurricanes (Eta and Iota) at the end of 2020. As a consequence, approximately 5.5 million people were in food insecure situations, with an additional three million severely food insecure. This also led to a 30 % increase in acute malnutrition compared to the past two years.

Furthermore, pervasive organised violence in the Northern Triangle and Mexico increased in 2020, with armed gangs enforcing COVID-19 mobility restrictions in certain areas and systematically extorting the population in areas under their control. The situation in Northern Mexico was aggravated by a migration crisis.

Commission departments allocated a total of EUR 14.3 million in 2020 to address food and protection needs in the most affected countries of Central America. The funding also took into account the humanitarian and protection needs of a population on the move and asylum seekers across the region as well as the victims of the civil unrest prevailing in Nicaragua and its spill over effects in Costa Rica. Moreover, disaster preparedness actions reinforced the resilience capacity of vulnerable communities. An additional EUR 2.85 million was released in emergency response to the devastating effects of Hurricanes Eta and Iota.

4.2.1.5. Crisis response and preparedness

With Latin America amongst the hardest hit regions worldwide by COVID-19, the IcSP was rapidly deployed to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable populations with an emphasis on the health response to the pandemic and on reducing the risk of tensions between migrants and host communities triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a situation of saturation of public services in Northern Mexico, due to a considerable increase in migrants fleeing the violence and instability in the countries of Northern Central America as well as Venezuela, an action through the IcSP is improving the capacities of relevant public services in host communities along the northern border.

The IcSP continued to support the peace processes in Colombia, with a particular focus on part five of the Agreement regarding the Victims of the Conflict. This includes supporting the transitional justice process, notably the work of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace.

Conflict prevention actions aimed to reduce the risk of violence and conflict in connection with the electoral processes in Honduras and in Bolivia where the motivation was to bring the tense transition period to an end and to allow the country to move forward democratically. The timely support through IcSP helped ensure a peaceful, fair, inclusive and credible electoral process in Bolivia, through support to the Pluri-national Electoral Organ. Furthermore, in Bolivia, the IcSP supported the presidential elections.

4.2.2. The Caribbean

4.2.2.1. Introduction (Policy developments)

The chief negotiators reached a political deal on the Post-Cotonou Agreement. That agreement is intended to lay the foundation for a renewed relationship with the region, capitalising on the results of current cooperation and fulfilling EU geopolitical ambition. The Caribbean protocol reflects how much EU and Caribbean priorities are aligned: fighting climate change and fostering green growth (and recovery), modernising economies, creating employment and advancing connectivity through digitalisation, working together for peace and security and the promotion of human rights are identified as the focus for our common action. As such, the protocol is a tool to help the region address its key vulnerabilities: be it environmental (exposure to natural disasters and climate change), economic (small, non-diversified economies with limited access to resources) or social (inequalities, crime and security challenges due to being located on major drug trafficking routes). It may also facilitate forging a strong relationship with the region post Brexit, seizing the opportunity to create new linkages between the EU27 and the Caribbean countries in commercial, cultural and political areas.

4.2.2.2. Working towards the SDGs

In 2020, the vulnerability of the Caribbean region to external shocks has led to a significant economic recession following COVID-19 shutdowns. The region's GDP contraction is about 8 % and expected to last longer than in other regions due to its high dependency on tourism, commodities, and remittances.

The high indebtedness and consequent pressure on fiscal accounts, further weakens the financial resilience of the governments and their ability to invest in achieving the SDGs. Different strands of the population are being pushed back into extreme poverty. Employment rates and salary levels continue to fall throughout the region.

The EU support to the Caribbean partner countries has reaffirmed the commitment towards achieving the SDGs and leaving no one behind.

Budget support operations have been an efficient way to provide fiscal space. They have contributed to delivering sustainable results on the SDGs.

In Saint Lucia, Barbados, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, the EU actions have helped to progress on SDG 8 Decent work and Economic growth and SDG 5 Gender equality. In Haiti, the EU engagement has provided crucial support to progress on SDG 4 Education. In Barbados, a new budget support operation aims to strengthen Barbados' social protection system (SDG 3 and 10).

SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing has largely been addressed through the EU sanitary response to the COVID-19 at regional level. Through the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), the health systems of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries have been strengthened to include universal health coverage, and enabling the provision of essential protection material, tests and treatments, including vaccines. The EU has also been timely in providing support to fight the health-related impact of the pandemic in Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Cuba and Haiti.

The effects of climate change and the recurrent natural disasters continue to put pressure on the resilience of the countries in the Caribbean. This further emphasises the importance of the EU investment in the region to build back better in line with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Specifically, the EU has supported this approach in Dominica (SDG 9.1), Jamaica (SDG 15.2), Barbados, Guyana (SDG 14.2) and Suriname (SDG 13).

SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions has also been addressed with actions in Haiti, St. Kitts and Nevis and Antigua & Barbuda.

The Spotlight Initiative programme is playing a crucial role in achieving SDG 5 Gender Equality. It has now become even more important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to an increase in family violence. Specific actions in Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad, Jamaica, Haiti and Grenada contribute to educate, spread awareness, and provide a response and protection to victims of violence regardless of gender and age.

4.2.2.3. Implementation

The EU mobilised funds and delivered a response to the pandemic in the Caribbean using the build back better approach. On the health front, rapid support has been rolled out to strengthen the countries' response capacities. See Table 1 in Chapter 1 for more details.

The lion's share of the EU response has been devoted to economic recovery, and to preserving hard-won development gains. The decrease in the risk insurance cost for countries under the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility and the adoption of a new programme in Haiti illustrate the EU's solidarity and engagement in the region.

The Team Europe COVID-19 response included social protection in Barbados and TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) in St. Lucia. The first aims to strengthen resilience of the most vulnerable households and to extend the social protection system. The second aims to better align the skillsets of youth to the needs of the labour market.

In 2020, EU cooperation contributed to a further consolidation of the EU-Cuba relationship.

The Caribbean Investment Facility, mainly geared towards environmental sustainability, climate change, and sustainable growth and jobs, tailored financing to the COVID-19 context. The Facility turned out to be an important asset in responding to specific needs at country and regional level.

Erasmus+ supported students and staff mobility, full degree scholarships for Erasmus Mundus joint Masters degree students, and capacity building for higher education. In 2020, 59 students, researchers and teachers from the Caribbean were provided with the opportunity under Erasmus+ to study or teach in European higher education institutions, while 33 European staff went to the Caribbean. One project aiming to support the training capacities of professors of doctoral programmes in the subjects of peace, human rights, and inclusion was funded in the region, as well as one project in the field of youth.

CASE STUDY

Three countries, one goal: costal-marine conservation and restoration (SDG 14)

Context:

The Caribbean islands are considered a biodiversity hotspot for their natural wealth, they have a high percentage of endemic marine and terrestrial species, making the region one of the world's greatest centres of biodiversity. With 26 000 km² of coral reefs, this region represents 7 % of the world's total coral reef ecosystems.



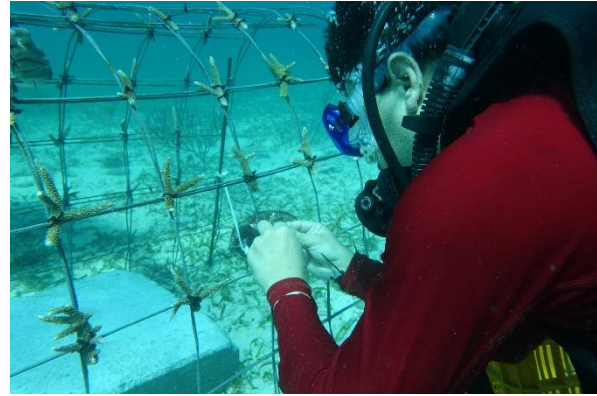
The marine-coastal biodiversity of the Caribbean region is threatened by various factors such as pollution, overfishing, invasive species, global warming, and unsustainable recreational practices. These events have an impact on a population of almost 43 million people directly or indirectly, on coral reefs, beaches, fisheries, and mangroves.

Objectives:

The project Business and Biodiversity has the objective of contributing to restoring and protecting the marine and coastal biological diversity of the Caribbean Sea through sustainable coastal tourism in the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Honduras.

Results:

Implemented by Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and co-financed by the EU, the action has helped to certify the area of Las Galeras, Samaná as the world's first sustainable tourist destination in terms of biodiversity and created 16 new coral gardens: 11 in the Dominican Republic, 3 in Haiti, and 2 in Honduras. With private sector participation, 14 new species were developed in four coral nurseries and environmental awareness raised using 11 new products for responsible tourism. With a citizen science approach and the participation of tourists, a mobile app called Samana Whale Watcher is helping to report on whale sightings. Other important elements to sustain the diversification and conservation of the marine-coastal biodiversity are the establishment of a financial mechanism for coral restoration and conservation, the training of 87 fishermen to monitor mangrove conservation and the certification of four dive instructors on coral gardening. Also, 35 Biodiversity Checks have been applied to determine the companies' impact on biodiversity, and 79 consultants have been trained in the Biodiversity Check Tourism tool.



(Pictures: Coral gardening as part of "Biodiversity and Business" project)

4.2.2.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters

The Caribbean

In 2020 the COVID-19 crisis has dramatically increased poverty in the Caribbean Developing Island States. WFP estimates that some 10 million people are food insecure, mostly in Cuba and the Dominican Republic but also in the Lesser Antilles. The pandemic also exacerbated vulnerabilities, notably of migrants and asylum seekers. Finally, the exceptional 2020 Hurricane season (with 17 tropical storms and 13 Hurricanes) had a significant impact on livelihoods and infrastructure especially in Cuba and Belize.

In 2020, EUR 2 million was allocated for Disaster Preparedness and EUR 0.5 million targeted Venezuelan migrants and refugees. Some EUR 600 000 has been redirected from on-going operations to COVID-19 responses in particular to include migrants in national social protection mechanisms. In addition, EUR 600 000 has been allocated to UNICEF to improve health system capacity and protect vulnerable populations in Cuba.

Haiti

The socio-political crisis was exacerbated in 2020 by the negative impact of COVID-19, the entrenchment of the political context, and a general expansion of violence and criminality (kidnappings, evictions, etc.).

While the impact of COVID-19 on the health sector has been, so far, less dramatic than expected (despite an extremely weak health system), its negative repercussions on livelihoods have seriously affected the ongoing food insecurity crisis. By the end of 2020, the number of people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance is estimated at over four million people, of which 900 000 people

were in a food emergency situation. The forecast scenario is that this food insecurity will further deteriorate in 2021.

The EU budget in Haiti for 2020 amounted to EUR 21 million with a particular focus on the response to the food crisis (following a nexus approach with longer term interventions), including EUR 10 million transferred to respond to the impact of the pandemic and EUR 3 million aiming to reinforce the local response capacities to face disasters.

4.2.2.5. Crisis response and preparedness

In the Caribbean, IcSP actions engage with local civil society to cultivate leadership for community mediation and peacebuilding in vulnerable communities in Haiti.

4.3. Asia, Central Asia, Middle East/Gulf and Pacific

4.3.1. Asia

4.3.1.1. Introduction (Policy developments)

In 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU has managed to maintain strong connections with key strategic partners, through summits with India, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (RoK), a leaders' meeting with China's leadership and a first-ever leaders' meeting with Australia.

The political conclusion of the negotiations of an EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) in December marked a significant step towards rebalancing economic relations, as promoting greater reciprocity across the EU-China relationship remains a priority. The EU's multi-faceted approach, as set out in the 2019 Joint Communication EU-China - A Strategic Outlook⁶⁶ (reaffirmed by the European Council in October 2020) remains valid.

The EU-India Summit endorsed an EU-India Roadmap 2025, as a guide for cooperation in the next five years, and enhanced cooperation on environment, climate change and maritime security. In December, the EU and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) agreed in a Ministerial meeting to launch a Strategic Partnership. The EU continued to work with Thailand on a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA), while discussions on a PCA with Malaysia and negotiations with Australia and New Zealand on Free Trade Agreements advanced well.

In 2020, negotiators reached political deal on a successor to the Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the African-Caribbean-Pacific countries, including the EU-Pacific Protocol. This will strengthen the political partnership and allow the EU and Pacific countries to step up cooperation on peace and security and address regional challenges.

The EU continued to engage with partner countries, civil society organisations and the private sector in Asia and the Pacific to promote respect for human rights, while strengthening democracy, the rule of law and environmental protection. In Afghanistan, the EU was vocal on protecting and promoting fundamental freedoms, and helping to advance financial governance and anti-corruption efforts and emphasised these positions in its document Key Elements for Sustained International Support to Peace and Development in Afghanistan, agreed with other major development partners. It was prominently reflected in the outcome documents of the 2020 Afghanistan Conference in Geneva, in which the EU participated at high level and maintained the level of its 2016 financial pledge for

⁶⁶ JOIN(2019) 5 final of 12 March 2019.

Afghanistan (EUR 1.2 billion for four years). The EU and Afghanistan also completed negotiations on the Joint Declaration on Migration Cooperation.

In Bangladesh, the EEAS engaged on the humanitarian challenge caused by the Rohingya crisis and co-hosted a donor conference to promote further support and worked on strengthening compliance with labour and human rights in the framework of the Everything But Arms (EBA) unilateral trade preferences. In Sri Lanka, an EU Election Expert Mission observed the parliamentary elections, and the EU engaged proactively with the new authorities focusing on human rights and reconciliation. In April, the Council prolonged the restrictive measures on Myanmar/Burma for a year, while in November the EU deployed an Election Expert Mission for the general elections. In August, the EU partially withdrew EBA trade preferences from Cambodia due to serious human rights concerns, while remaining open to engage on necessary reforms.

The EU continued to promote peace and security and strengthen security cooperation with partners in Asia and the Pacific. In May, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted Conclusions reaffirming the EU's principled position on the need for an immediate ceasefire in Afghanistan and a political settlement to the conflict. The EU facilitated civil society organisations' access to the peace negotiations. Also on the security front, the EU Naval Force-Operation Atalanta carried out a naval exercise with Japan in the Gulf of Aden, followed by a joint port call on Djibouti. In December, Vietnam invited the HRVP for the first time as a Guest of the Chair at the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus.

The EU played a key role in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia and the Pacific. Under the Team Europe approach, the EU frontloaded programmed funds and mobilised new financial support. For instance, the EU and its Member States mobilised EUR 800 million to support ASEAN countries in coping with the economic and social impact. An amount of almost EUR 150 million was mobilised for Afghanistan to reinforce the health system and mitigate the economic and food security impact, and EUR 120 million helped support Pacific Island Countries whose tourism sectors were heavily affected. A total of more than EUR 2.7 billion was either newly committed or redirected towards the COVID-19 response by the EU and its Member States for Asia and the Pacific (see Table 1 in Chapter 1 for more details).

The EU also supported Member States in providing consular assistance to more than 200 000 EU citizens stranded in Asia and the Pacific, notably in Australia, India, New Zealand, Singapore and Thailand.

4.3.1.2. Working towards the SDGs

EU actions in Asia promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by supporting corporate social responsibility and responsible business practices in global supply chains (SDG 12 and 8); address environmental challenges and climate change promoting the circular economy to reduce and reuse plastic waste (SDG 12, 13 and 14); and support local authorities and cities in developing a long-term vision to tackle climate change (SDG 11 and 13). Actions also contribute to strengthened women's role and their access to business opportunities and leadership within the private sector (SDG 5) and to enhanced partnerships in and with Asia for global peace and stability, key to achieving the SDGs.

The EU is a longstanding supporter of the Education sector (SDG 4) in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal. In Bangladesh for example, the EU supports the Government's Fourth Primary Education Development Programme contributing to substantial progress in enrolment and school attendance rates, reduced dropout rates and better survival rates to grade 5.

Rural development and agricultural productivity growth are crucial for poverty reduction and for advancing SDG 2 (Zero hunger) by promoting sustainable agriculture and fostering food security. In Nepal, EU budget support has contributed to developing the agriculture sector, raising the value of the dairy market by 21 % and rice paddy production by 8.9 %.

The EU continues to support climate action (SDG 13) to both mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. In Bhutan, budget support has contributed to improving climate resilience through the construction or renovation of close to 3 000 km of irrigation channels. 2 765 hectares were afforested or reforested and about 262 949 hectares of forest area were brought under sustainable management.

In all South Asian countries, special attention is given to the advancement of democracy, rule of law, Human Rights and civil society (SDG 16 and 17).

For instance, in Cambodia, in February 2020, the Commission adopted a Regulation on a temporary and partial withdrawal of the Everything But Arms (EBA) tariff preferences granted to Cambodia due to systematic violations of human rights principles (ICCPR).

In October 2020, the EU and the Government of Myanmar held the 6th session of the Human Rights Dialogue. The delegations exchanged on topics of mutual interest including the situation in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States; the state of play on the observance of fundamental rights and freedoms; and cooperation on human rights issues in multilateral fora.

The year 2020 marked the 45th anniversary of relations between the EU and Lao PDR. This provided a great opportunity to elevate the profile of EU's cooperation in Laos, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak.

On 1 August 2020, the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement entered into force. This is the most comprehensive trade agreement the EU has concluded with a developing country. It takes fully into account Vietnam's development needs by giving Vietnam a longer, 10-year period to eliminate its duties on EU imports. At the same time, the trade agreement expresses the strong commitment of both sides to environment and social rights.

At the inaugural meeting of the EU-Philippines Joint Committee, the EU highlighted its common vision with the Philippines when it came to sustaining peace in Mindanao and combatting extremists, improving quality of life, expanding renewable energy access, promoting an inclusive economy, sustainable development, environmental protection and developing a circular economy.

4.3.1.3. Implementation

The implementation of projects continued effectively in all countries despite sometimes difficult circumstances.

Joint programming documents are in place for Cambodia and Laos, both with established joint monitoring and results frameworks. There was progress in proceeding to joint analysis in Nepal. Roadmaps for joint programming were drafted in Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.

The EU paid budget support instalments in Bangladesh, after a positive review of progress in the primary education sector and the National Social Security Strategy.

The EU continued to support India's transition to upper middle-income status in a carbon-friendly manner, including through the Partnership Instrument Action 'EU - India Clean Energy and Climate

Partnership'. The EU also continued policy exchange in the framework of the EU-China Energy Cooperation Platform to tackle the sheer size of global emissions generated by the largest power market in the world. The EU also supported Bhutan's graduation from least developed country including its environmentally conscious social and economic growth priorities and the transition of Nepal to federalism by building its sub-national capacities and supporting the rollout of national policies.

In Pakistan, the EU focused on socio-economic recovery by strengthening macroeconomic resilience and stability.

In Sri Lanka and the Maldives, the EU reacted to COVID-19 with response packages focussed on health, tourism and agriculture.

In South and Southeast Asia, several programmes were adopted related to nutrition, sustainable growth, peace building, education, climate change, water and energy. 2020 saw a further improvement and acceleration of EU-Philippines cooperation with the signature of five financing agreements. In Myanmar, the financing agreement for the Sector Reform Contract on Agriculture and Nutrition (EUR 112 million) was signed.

In Vietnam, two financing decisions were adopted on the Sustainable Energy Transition Programme (EUR 142 million) and the Economic Governance Programme (EUR 18 million).

The EU Delegation to Lao PDR coordinated the Team Europe in-country response to COVID-19, amounting to EUR 80 million. The Team Europe response to the COVID-19 crisis in Cambodia amounted to EUR 443 million with the EU being the largest contributor with EUR 111 million.

Also, the Partnership Instrument funded the International Urban Cooperation Programme: several city pairings have been supported between EU cities and cities from Japan and India.

Erasmus+ supported students and staff mobility, full degree scholarships for Erasmus Mundus joint Masters degree students, and capacity building for higher education. In 2020, over 3 500 Asian students, researchers and university staff were provided with the opportunity under Erasmus+ to study or teach in another European higher education institution, while over 2 400 Europeans went to Asia. More than 680 Asian students have been awarded a scholarship to pursue an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree.

Countries from the region have also participated in 44 new Capacity Building in Higher Education Projects. In the field of youth, 38 new Erasmus+ Capacity building projects in the field of youth have been funded in 2020, supporting 78 organisations.

CASE STUDY

Education in Cambodia

Context

The EU is one of the biggest donors in the education sector in Cambodia. This includes a large budget support component.

Objectives

The objective is to support a safe reopening of schools after the long pandemic-induced closure. This

will also contribute to encouraging children to go back to school to counter the increasing level of dropouts.

Results

As well as the COVID response, the education budget support has further supported the country's education sector and has contributed to reinforcing the capacity of the Ministry of Education. The policy dialogue remains solid. In addition, the partnership under Education Capacity Development Partnership Fund (CDPF – EUR 27 million pool-fund supported by EU (50 %), SIDA, USAID and GPE and managed by UNICEF) continued its support to technical departments and subnational offices of the Ministry for the implementation of its major reforms. The country is also one of the main beneficiaries of Erasmus Plus support in capacity building in higher education. This significantly complements the EU's cooperation portfolio.

The EU, its Member States and the EDFs have worked closer than ever in South Asia to improve the collective capacity to recover from the COVID-19 crisis. They have joined forces in Team Europe initiatives in a way that is sustainable, human-rights-based, inclusive, green, digital, and which strengthens gender equality and boosts human development. These TEIs align with the policy priorities of the Commission, and particularly with regard to the Green Deal, Jobs and Growth, and STI and Digital transformation.

In December 2020, the EU and ASEAN elevated their relationship to a Strategic Partnership, building on a long-standing, dynamic and broad-based cooperation. On this occasion, Commissioner Urpilainen presented the EUR 20 million South-East Asia Pandemic Response and Preparedness programme, which is part of the EU's EUR 350 million solidarity response to support our ASEAN partners in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU and ASEAN also adopted a Joint Ministerial Statement on Connectivity, reaffirming their joint commitment to promote connectivity within and between ASEAN and the EU. Earlier in the year, the Commissioner opened the 2nd ASEAN-EU Dialogue on Sustainable Development which provided a platform to discuss and take stock of joint priority areas.

The European Commission also adopted a New Pact on Migration and Asylum. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq and Pakistan are considered as priority countries for the migration partnerships. The EU approach targets poverty and inclusive growth, thereby addressing root causes of fragility and migration. Activities aimed both at improving the reintegration of returnees in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan (approximately EUR 97 million), and at providing a comprehensive response to the challenges of migration and forced displacement (approximately EUR 215 million). EUR 35 million was also allocated to support Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Cox's Bazar, and respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

The EU remains a committed partner to peace and development in Afghanistan. At the 2020 Geneva Conference, the EU pledged EUR 1.2 billion in development, humanitarian and crisis response assistance for the period 2021 to 2024. This continues the high level of support from the previous programming cycles while making this support linked to Afghanistan's continued commitment to democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and gender equality. The EU continued its support to community-based development through the provision of basic services and adopted a decision to support the electrification of the northernmost region of Badakhshan, with clean energy. The EU also

continued efforts to mainstream women's rights and to address their needs across all EU-funded actions. The EU also provided active support to human rights defenders and reinforced the dialogue with civil society. It also maintained its efforts to support the sustainable reintegration of returning migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.

Overall, the EU supported Afghanistan during the COVID-19 outbreak through a total of almost EUR 150 million to tackle the epidemic and address the health and socio-economic impacts of the crisis.

4.3.1.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters

The Afghan crisis (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran)

Afghanistan is exposed to one of the deadliest conflicts worldwide and suffers a massive food crisis. 17 million people live in areas highly affected by conflict, and 3.4 million are internally displaced. There are some 10 million Afghan refugees worldwide, most of whom are hosted by Iran and Pakistan. In the three countries, the gap between needs and available resources has widened and has been compounded by COVID-19. In Iran, an increased pressure from US sanctions has had consequences for the civilian population, such as limiting access to basic services. Pakistan's food insecurity and malnutrition crisis remained beyond emergency levels. In addition, natural disasters affected the three countries. In Afghanistan, EUR 69 million was allocated to life-saving humanitarian aid, with a focus on emergency response and trauma care. In Iran and Pakistan, the EU continued to assist Afghan refugees as well as the most vulnerable local populations with approximately EUR 60.9 million in humanitarian aid, focusing on education, WASH, food security and livelihoods, shelter and preparation for winter, protection and health. In November 2020, the international conference on Afghanistan raised some USD 2.35 billion over 2021-2024, and the European Commission co-organised a side-event on Humanitarian Assistance, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Protection of Civilians, reaffirming the centrality of IHL.

Rohingya Crisis (Myanmar, Bangladesh and South-East Asia region)

Systematic discrimination and targeted violence have pushed the Rohingya population of Myanmar to flee to Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries. About 900 000 stateless refugees reside in Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh), of which a majority live in a congested mega-camp, completely reliant on humanitarian aid. Their presence has had an enormous impact on the host communities in Cox's Bazar and put considerable pressure on the environment. About 600 000 Rohingyas live in Rakhine State in Myanmar under dire conditions, some of them in confinement camps, being fully dependent on humanitarian assistance. In 2020, the EU organised the 6th EU-Myanmar Human Rights Dialogue with a focus on humanitarian access and camps closure, and also co-organised a Rohingya Donors Conference raising about USD 600 million. The EU provided EUR 56.5 million in humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya crisis for basic healthcare, water, sanitation, shelter, nutrition, education, protection, psychosocial support and disaster risk reduction.

Philippines

Mindanao in the Philippines has endured long-standing internal conflicts between government armed forces and different non-state armed groups. An estimated 300 000 people needed humanitarian assistance (including IDPs and returnees), to which the EU has provided assistance for emergency shelters, WASH services, health, food and non-food items, and education. In addition, the Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world and is frequently affected by

typhoons, volcanic eruptions, monsoon rains, landslides, drought and earthquakes. In 2020, the EU allocated EUR 2.5 million of humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected people in Mindanao.

Disasters Preparedness and Response

In 2020, the EU consolidated the achievements of previous Disaster Preparedness interventions, mainly in Bangladesh, Myanmar, the Philippines, Nepal, and through regional initiatives in the ASEAN countries. A total of EUR 12 million was allocated for this purpose. Given the high exposure of the Asia-Pacific region to natural disasters, the Commission continued in 2020 to monitor the situation and provided emergency assistance when national and local capacities were overwhelmed. 24 emergency operations were implemented for a total of EUR 10.1 million.

4.3.1.5. Crisis response and preparedness

In Afghanistan, the new Afghanistan Peace Mechanism initiated in 2019 to follow-up on EU commitments to help make the peace process more inclusive was continued through a second phase initiated at the end of 2020. The mechanism supports formal and informal talks with the emphasis on the process remaining Afghan-led and Afghan-owned while making efforts to ensure the involvement of local, regional and international stakeholders to create broad consensus on peace. In line with the EU offer to help make the process inclusive, the Mechanism puts particular emphasis on engagement with Afghan civil society throughout the country at local or regional level. This includes specific attention to women's rights groups and associations to ensure women's active participation in framing and defining a future peace agreement. In addition, a new action focuses on the dissemination of reliable factual information about COVID-19 to conflict prone areas in Afghanistan, including through engagement with armed groups. Another regional initiative is covering conflict-affected parts of South Asia to help counter disinformation and to strengthen community resilience to the negative impact of COVID-19.

The IcSP support to adolescents and youth as agents of change for peace in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh also continued with a second phase, as was the regional initiative on the prevention of violent extremism in Southeast Asia.

4.3.2. Central Asia

4.3.2.1. Introduction (Policy developments)

The COVID-19 pandemic had a serious socio-economic impact in all Central Asia countries and in most of them the response to it dominated the political agenda throughout the year.

In response to the pandemic Kazakhstan declared a state of emergency in March. The authorities introduced direct support to firms and financial support to poor households and affected individuals. Despite the challenges, Kazakhstan continued its modernisation and reform agenda. The EU-Kazakhstan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement entered into force on 1 March 2020. In May, President Tokayev signed laws on public assemblies, elections and political parties, which have drawn criticism from the OSCE/DIHR and human rights' groups. In September, President Tokayev announced a new stage of reforms, in particular on law enforcement, the judicial system and prioritising human rights and established a Supreme Council for Reforms. Kazakhstan signed the 2nd Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that entirely abolishes the death penalty in law and in practice. Since the state of emergency, civil rights activists in Kazakhstan have been under mounting pressure as the authorities impose even stricter controls.

The political landscape of the Kyrgyz Republic was dominated by the uprisings that followed the parliamentary elections of October and the cancellation of their results, which eventually led to the resignation of President Jeenbekov. Mr Japarov was appointed acting Prime Minister and acting President on 16 October. COVID-19 had a severe socio-economic impact on the country. Border tensions with Tajikistan persisted, with a few violent incidents a reminder of the fragility of some border areas.

On 1 March, Tajikistan conducted elections to the lower house of the Parliament, where the People's Democratic Party, led by President Rahmon, took the majority of the seats. Presidential elections on 11 October concluded with an undisputed re-election of the incumbent President. They took place within an environment tightly controlled by state authorities and characterised by long-standing restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms, including of association, assembly, expression, and the media. The COVID-19 crisis had a significant impact on the economy through trade disruptions, lower remittances and lower commodity prices. After having acknowledged the threat of the pandemic rather late, the government has taken support measures for the private sector and households.

Although the government officially denied the existence of any COVID-19 cases in Turkmenistan, the pandemic had an impact on all areas of the economy, including its strategic oil and gas industry. The country experienced shortages of subsidised food products and of foreign and domestic currency. It remained politically stable thanks to a sophisticated system of internal security, fear and repression, non-existence of domestic opposition and suppression of any call for a change. The worrying human rights situation was further exacerbated by worsening living standards. In September, the constitution was amended to a bicameral parliament. Turkmenistan continued to pursue a policy of neutrality and celebrated in December the 25th anniversary of its permanent neutrality status.

2020 saw the formation of a new government in Uzbekistan following parliamentary and local elections in December 2019 and January 2020. While the new intake of parliamentarians included many younger legislators, and more women, selected to stand as candidates in a nod to President Mirziyoyev's reformist intentions, continuity is the key feature of this government with most chief ministers, including the Prime Minister, staying unchanged. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic dominated Uzbekistan's political agenda, however the President and his government were nevertheless able to take forward their reforms with a focus in the agricultural sector, which has strong EU support through a budget support programme. Negotiations with the EU on an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement made good progress. Uzbekistan also applied to join the EU's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP+).

4.3.2.2. Working towards the SDGs

EU funded actions across the region continued to address a wide range of SDGs in line with the multiannual indicative programmes at country and regional level and the new EU strategy on Central Asia. All Central Asian countries could benefit from the regional programme, including the regional response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The EU approved two new bilateral programmes for cooperation with Kyrgyzstan (SDGs 4, 5, 9, 10 and 16): Justice for All: Mainstreaming People Centred Reform in the Justice Sector (EU contribution EUR 11.6 million), and Digitalisation Sector Reform Performance Contract in the Kyrgyz Republic (EUR 21.76 million). In addition, in April 2020, the EU announced a EUR 36 million crisis response package to assist Kyrgyzstan's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Tajikistan the EU approved three programmes, totalling EUR 112.2 million, addressing SDG 3, 4, 5, 6, 16 and 17. EUR 48 million of this overall package was allocated for COVID-19 support. These actions will strengthen Tajikistan's primary healthcare and infection prevention and control systems, improve water, sanitation and hygiene standards in schools, and strengthen distance learning preparedness.

In Uzbekistan two new actions were approved. The first of these, EU Budget Support to the Agriculture sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan (EUR 40 million), was the first ever EU budget support action in Uzbekistan (SDG 2 and 8). The second action (EUR 2.2 million) contributes to the fight against the pandemic through procurement of medical supplies and personal protective equipment.

The Partnership Instrument has supported actions underpinning the EU strategy for China, such as the establishment of a national emission-trading scheme, environmental governance, wildlife protection, water management, and actions on energy, notably power market reform and integration of renewables, as well as ocean governance. It also contributed to strengthen the bilateral dialogue, namely on migration and mobility, decent employment and social protection, and product safety for consumer protection.

The first ever EU Budget Support programme in Mongolia aims to foster reforms in the employment sector and public finance management (total budget of EUR 50.8 million). It addresses SDG 1, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 16. In the scope of the COVID-19 response, the EU mobilised EUR 37.5 million in grants, both to strengthen the health sector and to mitigate socio-economic impacts.

The Regional Programme launched a Rule of Law Programme (EUR 8 million), implemented by the Council of Europe, which aims to reinforce the rule of law, good governance, democracy and human rights (SDG 5, 8 and 16). Two other programmes were also approved to support intra-regional and international trade and entrepreneurship in particular Small and Medium Enterprises, totalling EUR 25 million (SDG 5, 8, 10, 12 and 17). The disruption of trade caused by the pandemic gave particular relevance to these programmes. In the energy sector, the Sustainable Energy Connectivity for Central Asia programme (EUR 8 million) will serve as the first vehicle to support the EU's regional policy dialogue on sustainable energy targets (SDG 7).

In direct response to the COVID-19 crisis, the EU was able through special measures to rapidly initiate a EUR 4 million programme, implemented by the WHO, to directly address the impact of the pandemic on health systems. The programme addresses SDG 3 and has a broad approach, including information and awareness raising, national planning, surveillance and monitoring capacity, pharmaceutical, laboratory and hospital capacity. The general capacity and systems strengthening will also improve the preparedness of these countries to address future pandemics.

4.3.2.3. Implementation

Working better together is the European approach for development cooperation to add value to the EU as a whole in terms of policy dialogue, technical and financial support. While in some countries in Central Asia work is ongoing for preparing joint programming strategies, the EU and its Member states, and the EDFs have worked more closely than ever, in a Team Europe approach, to improve collective capacity to recover from the COVID-19 crisis in a way that is sustainable, human rights based, inclusive, green, digital, and which strengthens gender equality and boosts human development. This vision was translated in the co-creation of three preliminary Team Europe

Initiatives aligned with the policy priorities of the Commission, and particularly with regard to the Green Deal and Job and Growth.

Erasmus+ supported students and staff mobility, full degree scholarships for Erasmus Mundus joint Masters degree students, and capacity building for higher education. In 2020, over 850 Central Asian students, researchers and university staff were provided with the opportunity under Erasmus+ to study or teach in another European higher education institution, while 360 Europeans went to Central Asia. Around 80 Central Asian students have been awarded a scholarship to pursue an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree.

Countries from the region have also participated in 30 new Capacity Building in Higher Education Projects. In the field of youth, four new Erasmus+ Capacity building projects in the field of youth have been funded in 2020, supporting seven organisations.

Team Europe Initiative in Mongolia – Support to sustainable natural resources’ management and value chain

This initiative responds to the Commission priorities and those jointly identified with the EU and several Member States in the framework of the joint programming exercise and has found the interest in participation of two development financial institutions. The overall TEI objective is to support transitioning to a greener economy where rural development, jobs creation and income generation builds on agricultural production, strengthened value chains, and exports through enhanced and sustainable natural resources management.

4.3.2.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters

After closing its disaster preparedness operations in Central Asia in 2018, the EU humanitarian assistance to Central Asia supports the response to natural disasters through small scale interventions, such as in Tajikistan for the floods of June 2020, where EUR 80 000 was allocated through the IFRC Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the region, the EU humanitarian assistance contributed EUR 500 000 through UNICEF in Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan and Uzbekistan for health and WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) support.

4.3.2.5. Crisis response and preparedness

Actions through the IcSP continue to contribute to regional stability in Central Asia and, in particular, support actions intended to prevent violent extremism and to support stability, social cohesion, as well as cross-border dialogue, directly implementing the priorities set in the new EU strategy on Central Asia. The on-going regional action on disinformation was reinforced to also address the disinformation challenges linked to the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, the first CBSD action in Central Asia was launched in cooperation with the OSCE to improve capacity for border control in Tajikistan on the border with Afghanistan.

4.3.3. Middle East/Gulf region

4.3.3.1. Introduction (Policy developments)

Iraq: EU and Iraq further strengthened bilateral relations through the implementation of the EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). The EU-Iraq Political Dialogue was hosted by the EU in January and focused on domestic developments in Iraq, bilateral relations and regional matters. This was followed by constructive engagements in the PCA Subcommittee on Human Rights and Democracy in September, and the Subcommittee on Trade in December. At political level, the EU HRVP Borrell received the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs in September, which allowed the EU to reaffirm its political priorities and support. In parallel, the EU continued to work on various areas such as governance, human capital, reconstruction, human rights, migration, employment opportunities, socio-economic reforms, dialogue reconciliation, stabilisation, accountability for Da'esh crimes (UNITAD) and civilian security sector reform (notably through the ongoing EU Advisory Mission/EUAM, whose mandate was extended in 2020 and the IcSP). Following the extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on 10 January 2020 and the decision to reinforce the EU's engagement with Iraq and the region, the EU also continued its support for stability and prosperity in Iraq and the region, including through its support to the Global Coalition against Da'esh. In addition, a first meeting of the Iraq Economic Contact Group (IECG) was held in October to assist Iraq with international expertise on its economic reform path.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Negotiation efforts headed by US and Kuwait in 2020 led to the normalisation of relations among GCC members in early January 2021, marking the end of the Gulf rift that had been ongoing since 2017. This significant breakthrough offers an unprecedented opportunity for regional de-escalation, to revive EU-GCC cooperation, including on FTA negotiations, and resume full EU-GCC institutional engagement.

In June 2020, EU organised the 29th session of the EU-GCC Joint Cooperation Committee - almost three years after the last JCC was held. A noteworthy step to restart dialogue with GCC on areas of mutual interest (development coordination, trade relations, macroeconomic dialogue, energy, climate, digital transformation and counterterrorism) as well as to discuss common challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with the region-to-region cooperation, the EU continued engaging bilaterally with GCC countries through the non-binding cooperation arrangements.

A Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) was held with Kuwait (June). Negotiations with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to conclude Cooperation Arrangements with EEAS were finalised.

The informal Human Rights Dialogue with Kuwait was launched, and the first meeting took place in February 2020. During the same month, the EEAS and UAE held the 9th working group of the Human Rights Dialogue. Negotiations with Saudi Arabia for the same purpose concluded and, following the Council's endorsement of the Terms of Reference for the EU-KSA Human Rights Dialogue, preparatory activities to organise a first meeting in 2021 started.

Preparations continued for the EU participation in the Dubai EXPO 2020 that was postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Yemen: The EU works on all pillars of the peace-development-humanitarian nexus. Hence, the EU has continued to work with and support the UN and engage with all parties in Yemen for a political

solution to the crisis. The EU has continued to work to establish an Economic Platform to promote practical policy measures to revive the crippled economy and has co-organised two Senior Humanitarian Officials Meetings which have enhanced coordination, advocacy and monitoring. The EU continues to be a major provider of both development, peace building and humanitarian assistance. EU support to The United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM), mine action and the Yemeni Coast Guard have been critical to ensure a continued operation of the port of Hodeida. Women's rights are vigorously promoted by the EU. Moreover, the EU engages actively in the area of Children in Armed Conflict. In the summer of 2020, to address the additional challenges posed by COVID-19, the EU organised a Humanitarian Air Bridge and a dedicated COVID-19 response measure was adopted in June 2020 to specifically support maternal and new-born health in the context of the health crisis.

4.3.3.2. Working towards the SDGs

The Commission's activities in Iraq comprise a series of multi-sector and multi-stakeholder measures focusing on sustained improvements in governance, fostering fair and sustainable employment opportunities and building a solid human capital. The EU's integrated approach contributes to promoting progress towards SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 9 (infrastructure), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

The conflict in Yemen has resulted in a deep humanitarian crisis but it has also undermined human development, reversing hard-won progress on the SDGs and setting back development by more than 47 years⁶⁷. The EU has mobilised its development assistance towards the preservation of functioning local institutions, basic services and economic activity in order to preserve the social and economic fabric of Yemen. Through an integrated approach, the EU supports actions towards the prevention of hunger, eradication of poverty and provision of quality basic services, including healthcare, education, clean water and sanitation, as well as affordable and clean energy. In addition, gender equality and peace objectives are mainstreamed across EU development actions.

Iran does not participate in the Voluntary National Review process. The Sustainable Development Report 2020 is the only source indicating Iran's progress towards SDGs. However, the 2030 Agenda and SDGs are to a large extent integrated in the country's Sixth Five-year Development Plan (2017-2021). SDG 4 (Quality Education) remains the only achieved SDG. A positive trend is noted in terms of SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for SDGs). Major challenges remain in achieving SDG 2 (Hunger), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

In Gulf countries, cooperation with the EU through the EU-GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) Clean Energy network and the EU-GCC Economic diversification dialogue has continued to address SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). There are intense

⁶⁷ UNDP Report on the impact of war on human development and SDG attainment in Yemen, more information here: <https://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/library/assessing-the-impact-of-war-on-development-in-yemen-SDGs.html>.

cooperation and dialogue at technical and political levels under these two projects towards achievement of these SDGs.

In December 2020, the Commission launched a new ambitious project to enhance EU-GCC political dialogue, cooperation and outreach. This project will support activities and dialogues in direct relation to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality) but also SDG 16 as strengthening of judicial cooperation between the EU and Gulf countries is foreseen.

4.3.3.3. Implementation

In response to the current and past challenges in Iraq, the European Commission adopted two Special Measures to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable, to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide support to democratic governance.

The EU and its Member States coordinated and cooperated closely. 2020 saw the continuation of the process towards joint programming under the working better together approach. In the framework of the preparation of the EU response to the COVID-19 crisis, there was a strong coordination with Member States to put in place a coordinated and synergistic support scheme for Iraq that makes use of the various EU and Member State' mechanisms.

Five joint analyses on key development sectors (economics, education, agriculture, gender, and civil society) with a pronounced shared interest were finalised and approved in 2020 as a framework for agreed joint action. In addition, the EU and Member States have identified a Team Europe Initiative in the field of inclusive socio-economic perspectives for Iraq. This Team Europe Initiative has been developed within the framework of joint programming and the working better together approach and is based on the first joint sector analysis.

With an ongoing envelope of EUR 347.3 million, the EU is among the leading development contributors in Yemen. Development actions are designed based on a shared context analysis with humanitarian and political services, to ensure a coherent EU integrated approach to the conflict.

So far, the Commission's sizeable development assistance has supported the resilience of the Yemeni population and helped prevent state institutions from collapsing. This approach was reinforced in 2020 with the adoption a special measure in support of local authorities, which aims to improve basic service delivery across the country. In addition, in 2020 the EU mobilised dedicated support to the ailing health sector in Yemen in response to the onset of COVID-19. This measure targets the provision of maternal and new-born health in a pandemic context.

In 2020, in the framework of programming of EU external action under the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the EU conducted consultations between services and Member States towards the preparation of a medium-term development strategy for Yemen to guide development actions.

The European Commission continued its extensive engagement in the field of supporting more than three million Afghan nationals in Iran through both UN agencies and international NGOs. Specifically, this work focuses on health, education, creation of livelihoods as well as civil documentation and positively contributed to achieving SDGs 2, 6, 8 and 16.

Further, in 2020 the Commission launched three large projects. One is technically assisting Iran's Ministry of Energy and Department of Environment in the areas of water management, air quality, waste management and maritime management. The other aims to create livelihoods for border

Iranian and Afghan populations in the Hamoun wetlands region by addressing the issues of water and dust storms. These two projects constitute a strategic engagement that contributes to achieving environmental and climate change SDGs where significant challenges remain. The third project focuses on enhancing resilience of children, youth and women and contributes to achieving SDG 5 and 10.

After supporting Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade in developing Iran's National Export Strategy, 2020 provided fresh impetus to the EU-Iran Trade Development project.

Although the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) led to the lifting of all EU economic and financial sanctions imposed in connection with the Iranian nuclear programme, a number of EU sanctions concerning Iran remain in force. Some of these are related to serious human rights violations⁶⁸, while others concern the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction⁶⁹. In line with its commitment to the JCPOA, the EU has developed the Due Diligence Helpdesk on EU Sanctions and the EU Sanctions Tool, two online platforms where EU operators can obtain the necessary guidance to engage with confidence in business with Iranian counterparts.

The pace and quality of implementation suffers from the lack of an EU Delegation in Tehran.

Gulf countries: The EU GCC Clean Energy Network acts as a catalyst and facilitator for cooperation between the EU and GCC countries in the area of clean energy technologies and policies. The topics covered under this project are renewable energy sources, energy efficiency and demand side management, clean natural gas and related technologies, electricity interconnections and market integration, carbon capture, usage and storage. Climate change and research cooperation are horizontal themes across these areas.

The project on Economic diversification dialogue supports the implementation of the economic diversification strategies in the Gulf region in the context of sustainable development, the Paris agreement on climate change and commitments by the individual countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Specific initiatives are conducted to provide EU expertise, exchange of best practices and to create opportunities for environmental, technology and business cooperation in areas of common interest.

In Middle East, Erasmus+ supported students and staff mobility, full degree scholarships for Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters degree students, and capacity building for higher education. For the Gulf countries only Erasmus Mundus Master scholarships were available.

In 2020, over 600 students, researchers and university staff from Middle East were provided with the opportunity under Erasmus+ to study or teach in another European higher education institution, while 160 Europeans went to the region. More than 50 students from Middle East and the Gulf have been awarded a scholarship to pursue an Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degree, with Iranians accounting for more than 80 % of the scholarships.

Iran and Iraq have also participated in five new Capacity Building in Higher Education Projects.

⁶⁸ Council Decision 2011/235/CFSP; Council Regulation (EU) No 359/2011.

⁶⁹ Council Decision 2010/413/CFSP; Council Regulation (EU) No 267/2012.

4.3.3.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters

The Syria Crisis

The Syria crisis, in its tenth year in 2020, continued to cause massive displacement, casualties and tremendous suffering of the civilian population, with more than 11 million people in need of humanitarian assistance inside the country. A total of EUR 263 million was allocated by the Commission to support the most vulnerable impacted by this crisis, including Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. This assistance contributed to the vital delivery of food, medicine, water, and shelter items for millions of Syrians directly affected and/or internally displaced by the conflict. In neighbouring Lebanon and Jordan, EU humanitarian funding has contributed to improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable refugee families, including in the sectors of health, protection and education as well as through cash assistance.

Commission departments were also directly involved in international diplomatic initiatives such as the Conference Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region in Brussels in June 2020 and the Humanitarian Task Force of the International Syria Support Group in Geneva organised a meeting at senior officials level on humanitarian access in Syria, and engaged in other advocacy efforts to promote the respect of humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law.

In addition to coping with the impact of the Syria crisis, Lebanon was struck by a devastating explosion in Beirut on 4 August 2020, and the Commission mobilised more than EUR 30 million for emergency humanitarian needs in the immediate aftermath of the blast.

Palestine

In Palestine, the Commission provided EUR 22.7 million to assist and protect increasingly vulnerable civilians in Gaza exposed to conflict in a sharply deteriorating socio-economic environment, and to support the most vulnerable communities at risk of forced displacement and lacking access to basic services in the West Bank. Commission departments also continued to advocate for the respect of International Humanitarian Law in Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Iraq

In 2020, Iraq continued facing concurrent crises of political, security and socio-economic nature, within a highly unstable context exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly three years after the military defeat of the Islamic State group (Da'esh), 1.4 million people remain internally displaced and nearly 1.8 million are in acute humanitarian need. The Government campaign for the closure and consolidation of IDPs camps in Federal Iraq resumed in the last quarter of the year, after months of suspension, triggering significant secondary displacement to informal sites.

With EUR 35 million in humanitarian funding, the Commission supported access to basic services for displaced populations living in camps and in informal sites outside camps, through cash assistance, water and hygiene support, health, protection and legal assistance. Up to 356 000 IDPs benefited from the assistance, and 14 000 children were provided with basic education services in camps. In parallel, Commission departments provided COVID-19 emergency response country-wide supporting nine COVID-19 referral hospitals and 64 health facilities in camps and hard to reach areas, and providing equipment and drugs to front line partners.

Yemen

The world's largest humanitarian crisis has further deteriorated in 2020 as a result of escalating conflict and a protracted economic blockade that has brought the country to a deep economic crisis and its services close to collapse. The situation was compounded by natural disasters and COVID-19. The conflict in Yemen and its disproportionate economic consequences on civilians are driving the largest food security emergency in the world. With an alarming 24.3 million people in need of humanitarian and/or protection assistance, and over 14 million of those in acute need, Yemen is again confronted with famine-like conditions. A total of 13.5 million people (45 % of the population) are facing severe food insecurity (Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 3 and above), including 16 500 people in IPC 5 (Famine). More than 4 million people are internally displaced. With EUR 891.7 million since 2015, the EU is one of the major contributors of humanitarian aid to Yemen. Humanitarian projects funded by the Commission address the needs of populations displaced or directly affected by the conflict as well as critical food insecurity, malnutrition and health requirements, including epidemics preparedness and response against cholera and COVID-19. Humanitarian access has been shrinking and the operating environment continues to be extremely restricted, hindering a principled delivery of aid. Furthermore, humanitarian actors have suffered a significant reduction in funding, largely due to a drastic drop in humanitarian contributions from Gulf countries. These challenges are at the core of the humanitarian advocacy work of the Commission, who is playing a leading role among donors. In response to the deteriorating situation, an additional EUR 5 million was mobilised in December 2020, bringing the total EU humanitarian funding for Yemen to EUR 119 million.

4.3.3.5. Crisis response and preparedness

In Iraq, a new IcSP action will support efforts to organise transparent elections that respond to the legitimate aspirations of the Iraqi population. In addition, work continued to support the essential process of accountability for the crimes of Da'esh, with a programme with the UN on the digitalisation of evidence as well as on stabilisation and dialogue initiatives.

In Yemen, stabilisation efforts and the peace process continue to be supported through IcSP. In response to the Stockholm agreement at the end of 2018, the IcSP actions provide support to mediation efforts and to the UN's Peace Support Facility for Yemen as well as to specific initiatives such as the agreement concerning the port city of Hodeidah where the IcSP is used to support both the Yemeni coast guard and demining activities.

4.3.4. The Pacific

4.3.4.1. Introduction (Policy developments)

The Pacific region is home to around 12 million people, including over 500 000 European citizens. The EU has a long-standing engagement there as a major donor and a partner with a shared vision on important global public goods, including environment, climate change, maritime security and cooperative regional order.

The constructive EU engagement and cooperation continued in 2020 with particular focus on how the escalating strategic competition in the Pacific might affect regional cooperation and respect for international law and multilateralism. Combined with the unique challenges the region is facing (climate change, protection of the environment, sustainable management of global public goods including fish stocks and the oceans, maritime security, and connectivity), it requires strong political

engagement of all like-minded partners to support a cooperative regional order. During the year, the EU held high-level political dialogues with Samoa, Fiji and Papua-New-Guinea, focusing on developing more political and strategic relationships. The EU also supported regional integration, encouraging Pacific countries to speak and act as one and increasingly engage from region to region.

Policy developments and engagements in 2020 were overshadowed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that strongly affected the vulnerable and heavily tourism-reliant economies of Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and their fragile health sectors. The border closures and travel bans to contain the spread of the virus had great socio-economic impacts, followed by the aftershocks of a global recession.

While the EU's external cooperation programmes under the 11th EDF continued to focus on regional economic integration, sustainable management of natural resources, and inclusive and accountable governance, the COVID-19 impact triggered an EU-response package of EUR 120 million as part of the Team Europe approach: to help PICs cope with socio-economic impacts caused by the pandemic, budget support payments (EUR 95 million) were advanced and EUR 25 million redirected from existing programmes and reserves to health-related activities.

The work with the pre-programming phase for the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework continued throughout the year in order to provide the basis for the finalisation of the programming in 2021.

In 2020, the chief negotiators from the EU and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific states reached a political deal on the Post-Cotonou Agreement. The future Agreement and its Pacific Protocol will provide the framework to strengthen the EU-Pacific political partnership for the next two decades, with increased cooperation on important issues such as peace and security, human rights, civil society, democracy and elections, climate change, connectivity, good tax governance, and ocean governance. Economic and trade areas are also at the core of the Protocol.

4.3.4.2. Working towards the SDGs

Working better together is the European approach for development cooperation to add value to the EU as a whole in terms of policy dialogue, technical and financial support. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU and its Member states, and the EDFs, have worked closer than ever in a Team Europe approach, to improve collective capacity to react and to deliver with greater impact and visibility.

Beyond the urgency, to respond to medium and longer-term development challenges, the European actors joined forces to support a recovery that is sustainable, human rights based, inclusive, green, digital, strengthens gender equality and boosts human development. This vision was translated in the co-creation of Team Europe Initiatives.

4.3.4.3. Implementation

During 2020, with regard to the Pacific region, three TEIs were preliminary identified; these will be further developed and confirmed in the course of 2021, in the framework of the 2021-27 MFF.

Given the regional context, for the Pacific preliminary TEIs main policy priority area relates to the Green Deal, but also address other important values, such as peace and stability through inclusive and more equal societies and job creation.

Team Europe Initiative - Green Blue alliance for the Pacific

The Team Europe Initiative Green Blue Alliance for the Pacific will be the backbone of regional engagement in the Pacific. The key elements of this TEI address climate action across policies with attention to promote equal societies, fundamental values, human development and thus peace and security. The EU interest shows a preliminary commitment of several Member States, development agencies and EDFs to achieve a transformative impact. This Team Europe Initiative may also contribute to the EU's action at international and multilateral meetings, such as COP26.

Budget support proved to be a good modality for implementation of bilateral support in the Pacific Countries. Only in four countries (Federated States of Micronesia, Niue, Nauru and Palau), budget support was not an option due to lack of capacity.

In 2020, the COVID-19 situation obliged the EU to respond quickly to the economic downturn that the Pacific countries were facing. The socio-economic response was two-fold: reorienting funds from existing programmes, and advancing budget support payments. Channelling this response through budget support alleviated the macro and fiscal situation of the countries and territories and supported Pacific Countries' strategies and policies to address the impacts of the unprecedented slow down by supporting jobs, SMEs, livelihoods and incomes.

At regional level, cooperation continued mainly through projects implemented by regional or international organisations. Good relations with the regional authorising officer allowed for a swift reorientation of funding from the investment facility towards the Joint Incident Management Team supporting the health services in the Pacific Island states to address urgent needs created by the COVID-19 outbreak.

In Papua New Guinea (PNG), implementation of projects remained difficult due to the lack of good counterparts. An already slow delivery was further aggravated due to the impact of COVID-19. As no EU-Member State agencies are operating in PNG, a high percentage of the Delegation's geographic portfolio is implemented by International Organisations, often resulting in low visibility for the EU. Previous attempts to move to budget support failed due to the absence of adequate institutional capacity and policy frameworks. The development of a fully-fledged and budgeted strategic framework for the social, law and order sectors, offered a unique window of opportunity to join forces to address good governance and the fight against corruption in support of a responsive government. This resulted in a first Budget support programme for PNG signed in 2020.

In Timor-Leste, the budget support modality was a major part of the EU's engagement in the country, during the period 2014-2020. The EU is supporting the nutrition, the public finance management and the decentralisation sectors. The EU COVID-19 response to Timor-Leste is twofold: strengthening the health systems and mitigation of the socio-economic impacts.

The health response is implemented both through the WHO programme and UN awareness campaigns. The socio-economic response comes from the reorientation of funds from existing programmes.

CASE STUDY

STREIT Programme in Papua New Guinea

Context

In Papua New Guinea, the EU's Support to Rural Entrepreneurship, Investment and Trade (STREIT) programme was launched in March 2020.

Objectives

It aims to make the local economy stronger and more climate-resilient, by empowering registered farmer groups and improving the overall investment environment. It connects hard components (transport infrastructure and energy access) with soft components (financing, training, market access, trade and other value chain support services), facilitating the link through the sustainable implementation of digital technologies, services and solutions.

Results

Although still young, the programme already delivered training to about 120 cocoa farmers and 432 vanilla farmers (32 % of whom are women) and provided more than 10 000 farmers with over 60 000 cocoa seedlings with enhanced pest resistance. The monitoring of existing cocoa and vanilla plantations is being improved through mapping and data collection. A video on the support to local cocoa farmers has been prepared and widely distributed on social media and showcased at high-level events. Moreover, the support resulted in an agreement signed with a local private cocoa processing company committing them to use exclusively smallholder-sourced raw materials provided by the project.

4.3.4.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters

In 2020, EU humanitarian interventions in the Pacific focused on the provision of emergency response in case of major disasters and when the capacities of local authorities were overwhelmed. This was the case, for instance, in Vanuatu and Fiji following the Tropical Cyclones Harold and Yasa.

4.4. Enlargement

4.4.1. Introduction (Policy developments)

The objective of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) II is to help beneficiaries adopt and implement the political, institutional, legal, administrative, social and economic reforms required to comply with EU values and to align progressively with the EU's rules, standards, policies and practices, with a view to becoming members. The beneficiaries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey. In the period 2014–2020, the envelope for supporting preparation for accession as well as regional support and cross-border cooperation reached about EUR 12.8 billion.

In 2020, which is the last year of programming under IPA II, 14 new IPA country programmes were adopted. These included eight annual action programmes, two special measures to support Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia in managing migration flows, two special measures to support Albania in post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction, one special measure to support Bosnia and Herzegovina on COVID-19 impact mitigation and one individual measure (support to the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina). The total operational commitments for IPA II in 2020 amounted to around EUR 1.23 billion.

As regards regional programming, last year four annual action programmes were adopted, one Support Measure for Technical Assistance for Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes 2020 and one Special Measure on EU regional support to COVID-19 SME recovery in the Western Balkans. There were 11 amendments (substantial and non-substantial) to the decisions and two updates. The amount committed was over EUR 476 million.

The programmes adopted in 2020 are in line with the enlargement strategy, reinforced in February 2020 through the enhanced enlargement methodology, and reflect the priorities stemming from the Western Balkans strategy and the Sofia priority agenda. However, 2020 was marked first and foremost by the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU, while being seriously affected itself by this crisis, has provided extensive support to the efforts of governments outside the EU, and in the Western Balkans acted quickly and comprehensively to address those challenges. The European Union mobilised EUR 3.3 billion of unparalleled financial assistance for the Western Balkans to address the immediate needs and the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. This included almost EUR 900 million of IPA funds, which were reprogrammed in record time, EUR 750 million of Macro-Financial Assistance and a EUR 1.7 billion from the European Investment Bank.

Turkey chose not to request the redirection of EU grant funding under the IPA programme or the Facility for Refugees. However, under existing financial commitments, around EUR 100 million in contingencies and savings were mobilised for the COVID-19 response notably to mitigate the impact on the most vulnerable. Of this, around EUR 60 million is being mobilised under the Facility for Refugees. Also, Team Europe COVID-19 support is being largely channelled through European and Member States' financial institutions.

The institution-building tools (TAIEX and Twinning) actively supported the IPA countries in their bilateral reform processes. In 2020, TAIEX organised 143 events and 53 Twinning projects were ongoing.

4.4.2. Working towards the SDGs

EU assistance in the region contributes to several SDGs. The IPA focus on fundamentals first contributes significantly to SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. At the same time, the re-programming efforts to respond to COVID-19 have dramatically increased the contribution to SDG 3 on good health and well-being as well as to SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth. These actions were combined with the continuation of sector support programmes in favour of health, education, employment and social policies, which targets multiple SDGs. Finally, substantial IPA support for infrastructures, both at bilateral and regional levels, continued to support affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), environment and climate action (SDG 13), and innovation and industry (SDG 9).

4.4.3. Implementation

Albania

The EU is the main contributor in Albania, providing an indicative EUR 758 million in assistance to support reforms in the period 2014–2020. The year 2020 was extraordinary in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. The efforts to fight the impact of the pandemic were made in parallel to the work needed to respond to another major disaster: the strong earthquake of November 2019. One year after the earthquake, the EU has translated its EUR 115 million earthquake support into two programmes reconstructing damaged education facilities and rehabilitating cultural heritage sites, helping Albania to recover from the shock and to increase resilience to future natural disasters. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, more than EUR 50 million was reprogrammed from existing programmes to support Albania in responding to the urgent medical needs and socio-economic impact of the pandemic. Also, ongoing budget support programmes were frontloaded to allow for liquidity. At the same time, EU assistance has continued to contribute to the ability of the country to deliver on key reforms

necessary to advance on the European path. Significant progress has been made especially in the field of justice reform, notably in the vetting of judges and prosecutors, and in supporting the specialised structures against corruption and organised crime (SPAK and SPAK courts).

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The EU is the main donor in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), providing an indicative EUR 530 million of assistance for the period 2014–2020. The year 2020 was characterised by the need to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and to the ongoing migration crisis which was further complicated by the pandemic and turned into a humanitarian crisis at the end of the year due to the inaction of the relevant BiH authorities. In response to the COVID-19, the Commission reprogrammed EUR 81.75 million, freeing resources for urgent medical supplies and for economic recovery under the saving lives and saving jobs operations. To guarantee the continued provision of services to asylum seekers and migrants, the EU allocated an additional EUR 45 million, to be implemented through international partners. In addition, the Foreign Policy Instrument (FPI) allocated EUR 8 million regional migration related assistance to support COVID-19 preventive measures. In the area of Rule of Law, IPA assistance contributed with technical support to the criminal justice chain, institutions, including law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and judges to enable a more effective response to serious crime. Technical assistance provides support in establishing strategies and action plans at all levels for the anti-corruption bodies in the country. On public administration reform (PAR) and public financial management (PFM), funding worth EUR 5.8 million was contracted, to support implementation of the PAR Action Plan, and the PFM strategy, which needs to be adopted.

Kosovo

Financial assistance programmes continue to provide support in implementing key sector reforms to advance Kosovo on its European path. The EU Office completed (on time and on budget) the construction of a kindergarten in Pristina in 2020. In 2020 the programming of IPA 2019 and the programming of IPA 2020 were completed including significant reprogramming efforts to respond to the emerging needs from the COVID-19 pandemic. Under IPA 2019, EUR 38.36 million was reprogrammed to support social and economic recovery from COVID-19. This includes budget support in the form of a resilience contract for EUR 26.5 million, the largest budget support operation in Kosovo to date, of which EUR 20.5 million was disbursed before the end of the year. Under IPA 2020, some EUR 11.6 million was reprogrammed in order to make available EUR 6 million under the approximation facility for possible emergency use, and EUR 5.2 million for digitalisation that in principle will be focused on the economic recovery and resilience of SMEs.

Montenegro

The EU continues to be the main contributor in Montenegro providing EUR 279.1 million of assistance to support reforms in the period 2014–2020. In 2020, IPA funds focused on helping Montenegro to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. From March onwards the original objectives of several annual programmes were adapted as a EUR 53 million COVID-19 response was put in place. This revised response comprised a EUR 3 million programme of immediate emergency assistance for medical equipment purposes, a EUR 40.5 million Budget Support Resilience Contract supporting the social and economic recovery measures of the Government, and a EUR 9.5 million Health programme. During 2020, programmes from all previous IPA years continued on a range of sectors, including rule of law and fundamental rights, agriculture and rural development and civil society. A running Budget Support Programme in public administration reform (PAR) alongside a previous one

on integrated border management continued to make a key impact to support reforms in the country. Additional support also continued as part of the EUR 15.3 million investment in the multi annual social, education and employment operational (SOPEES 2015-2017) programme. A range of other social programmes also continued to be implemented with the aim of addressing the integration of Roma and other vulnerable communities in addition to tackling issues such as gender discrimination.

North Macedonia

Financial assistance programmes continue to provide support to North Macedonia in making progress on fundamental reforms in rule of law and home affairs, public finance and economic governance. Through the multiannual programme on environment, the action 'Improving the management of protected areas' promotes the sustainable use of natural resources in North Macedonia. EUR 4 million was invested in improving the management of the protected areas in an inclusive, professional and sustainable way. The public investment policy of North Macedonia was significantly improved with the adoption of new legislation which enhanced compliance with the EU acquis, standards and practices. The IPA II 2020 programming exercise was completed at the beginning of 2020 with support in the area of justice and home affairs and good governance, and was continued with the EUR 50 million Performance Reward shifted to support the national efforts to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic effects. This includes budget support in the form of a resilience contract for EUR 40 million, the largest budget support operation in North Macedonia to date, of which EUR 32 million was disbursed before the end of the year.

Serbia

The EU is the largest provider of financial assistance to Serbia. An indicative amount of EUR 1.54 billion of assistance was earmarked to support reforms in the country in the period 2014–2020. In 2020, assistance focused on four key sectors: democracy and governance; competitiveness and innovation; environment, climate action, energy and education; and employment and social policies. Programmed actions were designed to directly contribute to socio-economic recovery and sustainable and inclusive social development and the economic growth of Serbian society in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, a new special measure was prepared to support Serbia in managing migration flows in a protection sensitive manner, including enhancing shelter capacity and delivery of services in light of the challenges posed by COVID-19. Implementation of sector reform performance contracts introduced under IPA II has entered its final stage with tangible results achieved. Whereas the public administration reform sector contract has helped Serbia in strengthening their management of public funds during crisis situations, the Integrated Border Management (IBM) programme has been instrumental in the Commission response to the COVID-19 crisis. Not only have the available funds contributed to the continued implementation of the sector reforms during the crisis period, but also the programme has helped the authorities with migration management during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. The education sector reform contract has contributed to improving quality, equity and relevance of education, focusing also on the education needs of underprivileged students. Finally, as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission made available EUR 15 million to help Serbia to cope with the emergency situation and has set aside up to EUR 78.4 million to address short and medium-term socio-economic needs.

Turkey

For the IPA 2020 allocation, the budgetary authority authorised an amount of EUR 168.2 million. In light of the country's backsliding in the areas of rule of law, fundamental rights and public administration reform, EUR 122 million was allocated to EU's key priorities (people-to-people exchange, support to civil society organisations and Human Rights activists) and the EU's strategic interests, such as migration management and border control. The remaining part of the envelope was allocated to the rural development programme (EUR 18.2 million) and the multi-beneficiary programme on civil society facility (EUR 28 million). No funds were allocated for economic and social cooperation.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission, in cooperation with Turkish authorities, agreed to use savings and contingencies to support Turkey's response and mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable. Among these initiatives, a new Action on strengthening the national capacities against COVID-19 (EUR 5.3 million) was launched in partnership with the WHO to increase antigen testing and improve genome sequencing. Also, a special call to support civil society to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 was launched and provided support to over 200 CSOs and activists from across the country, focusing on children's and women's rights, and other areas.

Regional cooperation

Regional cooperation is a cornerstone of the EU's approach to the region and an essential element of the European perspective on the Western Balkans. IPA funds for the multi-country/regional programme in 2020 amounted to EUR 667.5 million, with a special focus on infrastructures, economy, and people of the region. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has required a significant reprogramming of financial assistance. Within months of the outbreak, a major exercise was undertaken to set up a EUR 475 million response from IPA 2019 and 2020 regional funds, including an Economic Reactivation Package, mobilised through International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and a package of support to vulnerable groups and to the health sector, including access to vaccines. In addition, EUR 3.5 million was further allocated to support health at the end of 2020.

At the Summit in Sofia in November 2020, the 6th Connectivity Agenda package (including one rail, three road, one waterway and one energy project) was endorsed, successfully completing the EUR 1 billion pledge made in 2015 for transport and energy interconnection investments (45 projects approved) in the Western Balkans. Once completed, it is expected that the EU pledge will leverage overall investments of more than EUR 3.7 billion in the Western Balkans.

The focus on young people continued with the first thematic Youth Lab held in the Western Balkans region. A major new programme to improve the situation for returnees from the EU to the Western Balkans was approved. Work on Roma also continued with key projects such as the Roma Integration and Roma Education Fund. The Regional Housing Programme has provided 7 805 homes to refugees and persons (23 415 persons of families of three) displaced by conflict in the region in the 1990s up to the end of 2020. The last civil society facility and media programmes under IPA II, including the highly innovative support to media businesses were adopted, bringing to 53 the number of CSOs currently supported.

In higher education, Erasmus+ supported students and staff mobility, full degree scholarships for Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters degree students, and capacity building for higher education. From 2014 to 2020, over 48 000 students, researchers and teachers were provided with the opportunity

under Erasmus+ to study or teach in another European higher education institution. Of these 29 910 came from the Western Balkans to Europe (Eligible Erasmus+ Programme countries include North Macedonia and Turkey, and since 2019 Serbia) and 18 224 came from Europe to the region (39 % student, 61 % staff). Countries from the region have also participated in Capacity Building in Higher Education Projects with 202 projects funded. In the field of youth, between 2014 and 2020, 266 Erasmus+ Capacity Building projects in the field of youth have been funded, supporting 546 organisations and 39 297 individuals. In the Erasmus+ call 2020, more than 11 000 international credit mobilities, of which around 7 000 are going from the Western Balkans and around 4 000 are going to the Western Balkans were selected. Eight Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters and 46 projects in Capacity Building for Higher Education involving partners from the Western Balkans were selected.

In the field of youth, 28 Erasmus+ Capacity building projects were selected, and around 2 300 individuals from the region went on youth mobility.

In December 2020, the Ministerial Meetings of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Education and Training and Research and Innovation took place in an online full-day event and the draft Western Balkans Agenda for Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport was presented to the Western Balkan Ministers.

In the areas of mobility and people-to-people contacts, all the Western Balkan countries participated in the Creative Europe programme 2014-2020, supporting the cultural sectors. To date, more than 300 cultural organisations have taken part in projects under this programme as partners and 112 of these have been coordinators of small projects. The Western Balkans have received about EUR 22 million in support from the Creative Europe programme. In total 51 projects out of the 175 projects selected in 2020 had participation from Western Balkan organisations, and the projects are expected to receive EUR 2.4 million out of the nearly EUR 70 million grant budget committed in 2020 by Culture.

From 2017 to 2020, the EU fostered research and innovation cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey. Western Balkans entities have participated 906 times in 531 Horizon 2020 grants, receiving EUR 160.9 million of direct EU contributions. Turkish participants were engaged 1 104 times in 762 Horizon 2020 grants, receiving EUR 259.1 million of direct EU contributions. In the same period, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie scheme support benefited a total of 341 researchers in the Western Balkans and 443 in Turkey. All Western Balkans economies have improved their performance in Horizon 2020 compared to the previous Framework programme (FP7): doubling the number of participants and doubling the competitive funding gained. Turkey's performance in Horizon 2020 has also substantially improved in 2019 and 2020 (+50 % in 2019 compared to previous years) but is still low level compared to Turkey's R&I capacity.

Rule of law programmes continued to act in support of the reform agendas of Western Balkans partners. In the field of security, the reformed Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG) initiative was launched under the umbrella of the Regional Cooperation Council. Moreover, an action was approved to support the implementation of the Western Balkans Small Arms and Light Weapon control roadmap. 2020 also saw continued commitment to the culture and creative sectors as key actors of change in the promotion of more resilient societies through 13 projects awarded under the Creative Europe Programme.

Cross border cooperation

During 2020, great focus was placed on monitoring and performance measurement of on-going cross border cooperation (CBC) projects. With the significant increase of resources (about a 9 % increase of committed funds compared to 2019), these programmes and projects have triggered real change for local communities.

Some of the ongoing CBC projects also provided an immediate response to the needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the Microenterprise development project for women in the cross-border area protective masks, natural sanitisers and soaps were manufactured and distributed in the border areas of North Macedonia and Albania. The Skilled women's workforce for better future project trained caregivers to provide immediate assistance to the elderly population during the COVID-19 lockdowns in the cross-border area of Serbia and Montenegro.

Other important CBC projects are addressing water and waste management, pollution, emergency situations and natural hazards, as well as supporting vulnerable groups and their inclusion into society, sustainable usage of natural and cultural resources and enhancement of regional tourism. In peripheral cross-border areas, and embedded in the local communities, these projects provide solid support and give good visibility to the EU.

CASE STUDY

The EU response to the COVID-19 crisis in the Western Balkans

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented global crisis in which no country has been spared. In the face of this unprecedented challenge, it was crucial to demonstrate that the Western Balkans can count on the European Union to overcome the emergency phase and also to relaunch the recovery of their economies and societies as early as possible.

Objective

The European Union decided to act rapidly and comprehensively to support the Western Balkans in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, mobilising an unparalleled financial assistance package of around EUR 3.3 billion, to address both immediate needs and the longer-term socio-economic consequences of the pandemic.

Results

The package includes EUR 38 million of immediate IPA support for the health sector, in particular through the provision of essential supplies to save lives. By the end of 2020, the EU had delivered more than 60 ambulances, almost 200 ventilators, and about 12 million pieces of personal protective equipment, and many other items.

The Commission also entirely reprogrammed EUR 475 million for medium- and longer-term support to the health systems, for the protection of vulnerable groups hit by the pandemic and to socio-economic recovery. A significant part of this support was delivered quickly through budget support (State and Resilience Building Contracts and Reform Performance Contracts) and EUR 70 million was set aside to cover the delivery of vaccines. The last strand of EUR 385 million of IPA support is geared towards support to the real economy, including SMEs, and supporting liquidity, notably in the

banking sector; almost 50 % of this amount is already disbursed to partner International Financial Institutions.

By the end of the year 95 % of this IPA assistance was fully reprogrammed, almost 60 % contracted and more than 30 % paid. This was an unprecedented effort, set up in record time, thanks also to the utilisation of extraordinary emergency and flexibility clauses foreseen in the IPA regulations and procedures.

Finally, the package includes also EUR 750 million of Macro-Financial Assistance, allocated to five Western Balkans countries, and a EUR 1.7 billion from the European Investment Bank for both public and private sector programmes.

Support to Western Balkans countries was extended beyond financial assistance. Given their European perspective, the EU is treating the Western Balkans as privileged partners by granting them access to many initiatives and instruments reserved for EU Member States. This includes for instance enabling them to join the EU joint procurement agreement for medical countermeasures, exempting the region from the EU's export authorisation scheme for personal protective equipment, ensuring the fast flow of essential goods across land borders through green lanes, and the EU supply of testing material to ensure the correct functioning of coronavirus tests in the Western Balkans. In addition, the Western Balkans activated the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and received assistance through delivery of equipment and repatriation of citizens from the UCPM Member States and Participating States. The candidate countries are eligible for funding under the EU Solidarity Fund. The EU is also sharing information from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) with the Western Balkans and enabled them to join the EU Health Security Committee as observers, giving them access to the EU's Early Warning and Response system. Lastly the European Commission has initiated discussion with EU Member States to try to get donation or re-sale of vaccines from the Advance Purchase Agreements, reimbursed by EUR 70 million of IPA grants.

4.4.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters

Turkey

Turkey currently hosts the largest refugee population in the world – close to four million people. Some 3.6 million of them are Syrians who fled the ongoing conflict that has ravaged their country for ten years. Since 2015, the EU has supported more than 80 humanitarian projects through 22 partner organisations. Under the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, created in 2016 to assist the country in its large-scale efforts to support refugees with funding from the EU budget and additional contributions from EU Member States, EUR 2.4 billion of humanitarian projects have been fully contracted. COVID-19 has however added a complex new dimension, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and increasing the needs of the refugees. The EU therefore adapted several humanitarian actions for the COVID-19 response. These actions amounted to more than EUR 50 million. In addition to ongoing projects funded via the Facility, the EU has allocated an additional EUR 531.7 million in humanitarian funding for 2020, including EUR 485 million to ensure that the two flagship programmes, Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) and the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE), continue supporting the most vulnerable refugees in Turkey until early 2022. The ESSN provides monthly cash payments directly to refugees through a debit card to help meet their basic needs. By the end of 2020, the programme was supporting over 1.8 million refugees on a

monthly basis. The CCE is the biggest Education in Emergencies programme. It provides cash transfers to vulnerable families to promote school enrolment and regular attendance for refugee children. By the end of 2020, the programme reached nearly 670 000 children.

Western Balkans

While Bosnia and Herzegovina had seen a sharp rise in refugee and migrant arrivals in 2019, restrictive coronavirus measures sharply reduced movement along the Western Balkans route in 2020. Around 8 000 refugees and migrants are stranded in the country, with more than 1 700 persons sleeping outside in dire conditions, including many unaccompanied children and families. In 2020, the Commission allocated EUR 5.5 million to cover the most urgent needs of refugees and migrants in and outside the temporary reception centres. This included access to primary and secondary healthcare services, mental health and psychological support, protection response (identification and referrals), support to unaccompanied minors, and life-saving assistance, including warm clothing, sleeping bags and food for those without proper accommodation.

4.4.5. Crisis response and preparedness

In the Western Balkans, the IcSP was mobilised to respond to the urgent needs of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable host communities related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, existing IcSP engagement in the Western Balkans continued, notably on the implementation of the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue as well as with a new set of confidence building measures through cultural heritage protection in Kosovo.

In Turkey, actions through the IcSP continue to respond to the regional consequences of the conflicts in Syria, notably by enhancing access to services and facilitating integration of refugees and migrants as well as strengthening resilience of host communities. Support to the search and rescue capacities of the Turkish Coast Guard continued during 2020.

4.4.6. The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) priorities

The priorities of pre-accession assistance derive from the IPA regulation (specific objectives and thematic priorities) and are aligned with the core principles of the enlargement policy. Preparing the candidate countries and potential candidates to meet the requirements of membership requires a strong focus on fundamental reforms in the rule of law, the economy and functioning of democratic institutions and public administration. Efforts in these areas are indivisible and mutually reinforcing and must be pursued more forcefully and with clearer political commitment. The enhanced enlargement methodology of February 2020 puts an even stronger emphasis on the implementation of these fundamental reforms. In line with these priorities, EU pre-accession assistance remains focused on supporting these fundamental areas.

In 2020, the Commission also continued to focus on the implementation of actions foreseen in its 2018 Communication on A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced engagement with the Western Balkans⁷⁰ and the related Sofia priority agenda. These actions fall under flagship initiatives in six areas: rule of law, security and migration, socio-economic development, connectivity, a digital agenda, and reconciliation and good neighbourly relations. Financial assistance under IPA was focused on delivering on these priorities both at regional and bilateral level.

⁷⁰ COM(2018) 65 final of 6 February 2018.

Many of the ongoing activities under this strategy are now streamlined in the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans and the associated Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The Economic and Investment Plan aims to spur the long-term post-pandemic recovery, boost economic growth, encompassing the dual digital and green transition, and support reforms required to move forward on the EU path, including bringing the Western Balkans closer to the EU Single Market.

EU assistance continued to be also directed at fostering good relations with neighbours in the region to help overcome legacy issues.

4.4.7. IPA Performance Framework. Aim and coverage of the IPA PF. Overview of key results reported against the IPA PF

EU aid to the Western Balkans and Turkey (WBT) region⁷¹ is mainly channelled via the Instrument for Pre-accession (IPA), in accordance with the enlargement policy framework defined by the European Council. EU pre-accession assistance, planned by the Commission in conjunction with accession candidates and potential candidate authorities, aims to support candidates in their progressive alignment with the standards and policies of the EU, including where appropriate the EU acquis, with a view to EU membership.

Assistance under IPA II, provided in the period 2014-2020, is mainly focused on a selected number of policy areas that would help the beneficiaries strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law, reform the judiciary and public administration, respect fundamental rights and promote gender equality, tolerance, social inclusion and non-discrimination.

In view of the specific nature of the assistance provided in this region, a separate results framework, the IPA PF, was developed, partially modelled on the EU RF.

Aim and coverage of the IPA PF

The IPA PF is aligned to IPA II strategic objectives and that of the Communication 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans'⁷².

It aims to report on accession candidates and potential candidates' results supported by the EU at an aggregated level. It also aims to improve decision-making and promote learning.

The results from the IPA PF are presented on a contribution basis, which means that they represent the combined efforts of a variety of partners including the EU.

Performance data were collected from a set of interventions (funded by the EU through IPA I and IPA II with a contribution above EUR 750 000) and matched to the IPA PF indicators. The interventions are ongoing and completed interventions that started since January 2014 and were under implementation for at least 12 months at the time of project selection (June 2020). This is consistent with the Commission's aim of further increasing data coverage and obtaining more timely information.

Overview of key results reported against the IPA PF

The total EU allocation for the interventions that were able to report against the IPA PF indicators was EUR 1 593.6 million. Of this amount: 58 % was allocated to human rights (refugee support); 20.4

⁷¹ The WBT region covers Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey.

⁷² COM(2018) 65 final of 6 February 2018.

% was allocated in the area of public administration reform (Public sector policy and administrative management, public finance management and decentralisation and support to subnational government areas); 8.8 % in the competitiveness area (business policy and administration, small and medium-sized enterprises, job creation) and 8.0 % was allocated to rule of law and fundamental rights (legal and judicial development, democratic participation and civil society, security system management and reform, legal and judicial development and anti-corruption organisations and institutions areas). Table 2 below contains the key results reported for 2020.

2.01	Number of electoral recommendations (of the international election observation missions done by the OSCE/ODIHR or the EU EOM (case of Kosovo)) followed up and/or implemented with EU Support.	127
2.02a	Number of legal/administrative acts (inc. at Constitutional level) to enhance the effectiveness, accountability and/or transparency of the functioning of democratic institutions a) adopted.	13
2.03	Number of legal/administrative acts/measures (inc. at constitutional level) (i) adopted and/or (ii) implemented with EU support with the objective of increasing independence and impartiality, and/or accountability, and/or professionalism and/or competence, and/or efficiency of the national justice system.	10
2.04a	Number of a) judges trained with EU support on European standards and EU acquis.	3 008
2.04b	Number of b) prosecutors trained with EU support on European standards and EU acquis.	107
2.04c	Number of c) lawyers trained with EU support on European standards and EU acquis.	1 018
2.05a	Number of security sector reforms that are compliant with human rights standards.	16
	(i) adopted with EU support	1
	(ii) implemented with EU support	15
2.06b	Number of preventive/repressive anticorruption measures (i) adopted and/or (ii) implemented with EU support.	15
2.09	Number of countries having (i) adopted and/or (ii) implemented the legal framework for the protection, promotion and/or enforcement of human/fundamental rights (including freedom of expression and Media, freedom of assembly and freedom of association and non-discrimination and rights of minorities) with EU support.	9
2.10	Number of initiatives led by civil society and supported by the EU.	38
2.11	Number of public policies developed and/or revised with internal and external consultations with EU support.	75
2.12	Number of EU funded assistance interventions (Twinning, TA, SBS) producing consistent results with ongoing horizontal PAR efforts with EU support.	14
2.13	The number of strategies or policies on migration management or forced displacement a) developed/revised, or b) under implementation with EU support.	2
2.13a	a) developed/revised, with EU support	1
2.13b	b) under implementation with EU support	1
2.14	Number of EU funded assistance interventions reporting improvement of compliance of border and security systems with EU /Schengen Acquis.	4
2.15	Number of EU funded assistance interventions reporting improvement of state institutions capacities - a) law enforcement, b) judiciary and c) administration -	9

	involved in the prevention and fight against organised crime with EU support.	
2.15a	(a) law enforcement, involved in the prevention and fight against organised crime through EU support	8
2.15b	(b) judiciary involved in the prevention and fight against organised crime through EU support	1
2.16a	Number of public policies to strengthen revenue mobilisation, public financial management and/or budget transparency:	19
	a) developed with EU support	13
	b) under implementation with EU support	6
2.17a	Number of public policies to strengthen investment climate:	8
	a) developed/ revised with EU support	6
	b) under implementation with EU support	2
2.19	Number of beneficiaries with access to financial services with EU support:	
2.19a	a) firms	180
2.19b	b) individuals	70
2.21	Number of direct jobs supported/sustained by the EU.	7 521
2.22a	Number of public policies promoting social inclusion a) developed/revised with EU support.	42
2.28	Number of public policies promoting digitalisation:	5
	a) developed/revised with EU support	1
	b) under implementation with EU support	4
2.31	Number of smallholders reached with EU supported interventions aimed to increase their sustainable production, access to market and/or security of land.	30
2.32	Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions avoided with EU support (tonnes CO _{2eq}).	921 042
2.33a	Number of public policies for the implementation of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement a) developed/revised with EU support.	2
2.34a	Number of public policies to further align with Birds and Habitats Directive/set-up Natura 2000 Networks. a) developed/revised with EU support.	1

Table 2. IPA II PF – Aggregated results achieved with EU support

4.5. European Neighbourhood

4.5.1. European Neighbourhood East

4.5.1.1. Introduction (ENI Priorities and Policy developments)

During 2020 the EU continued to develop its relations with its six eastern partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) bilaterally under the European Neighbourhood Policy and under the Eastern Partnership framework. Both dimensions are firmly based on common values, mutual interests, and the principles of shared ownership, responsibility, differentiation and mutual accountability.

Despite the challenges linked to the COVID 19 pandemic, the implementation of the reform agenda of 20 deliverables for 2020⁷³ continued. To strengthen our joint resilience and the partnership, the EU provided quick and substantive support to partners by addressing immediate needs and the long-term socio-economic recovery. Work on a successor to this agenda had begun in 2019 with a broad and inclusive consultation. The resulting Joint Communication 'Eastern Partnership Policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all'⁷⁴ was adopted in March 2020. It proposes five long-term policy objectives in key priority areas: economy and connectivity; rule of law and security; environment and climate; digital; and fair and inclusive societies, under the overarching framework of resilience. Based on this agreed framework, the shaping of this new agenda took place in the second half of 2020 through a further consultation process involving partner countries, Member States and other stakeholders. The expected outcome is a series of substantive targets to be achieved by 2025 to strengthen resilience of the partner countries, accompanied by an Economic and Investment Plan.

The bilateral EU relations with Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova are guided by very ambitious Association Agreements/DCFTA offering clear blueprints for reforms. Discussions with Armenia on the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership were successful with the agreement coming into force in 2021 and providing for close approximation and cooperation with Armenia in numerous sectors. Negotiations continued for a new agreement with Azerbaijan, where significant progress is still needed to conclude the negotiations. The negotiations with Belarus on the new Partnership priorities were put on hold due to political developments.

The political situation in the region has been very dynamic. Elections were held in Belarus, Georgia and Moldova. In Belarus, the falsified Presidential elections on 9 August 2020 triggered an unprecedented popular protest that was met with brutal repression by the Belarusian authorities. The EU has been in the forefront of the international reactions and imposed sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for the falsification of elections and for human rights violations. The EU downscaled cooperation with Belarusian authorities while maintaining limited engagement on issues of interest to the EU and Belarusian society. The EU recalibrated financial assistance directing it away from central authorities and ensuring it benefits the population at large. At the same time, it substantially stepped-up support to the people of Belarus.

In the Republic of Moldova, 2020 was a year marked by political instability particularly in the second half of the year and overall slow progress in the implementation of reforms in line with the EU Moldova Association Agreement. The onset of the Coronavirus pandemic in March severely impacted the country's ageing health system and fatality rates were high through most of the year. Former Prime Minister Maia Sandu convincingly won the Presidential elections in November on a pro-reform and pro-EU agenda which also prioritised a more active response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic effects. The EU has expressed its strong support to the reform agenda of the new President.

The elections in Georgia resulted in political instability which has continued into 2021. Political polarisation in Georgia increased in 2020 ahead of parliamentary elections. Following the first round of elections on 31 October the opposition parties refused to take part in the second round and subsequently to join the parliament and called for new elections, claiming the election results were

⁷³ https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/20_deliverables_for_2020.pdf

⁷⁴ JOIN(2020) 7 final of 18 March 2020.

rigged. The EU supported the preliminary conclusions by the OSCE/ODHIR and other international observers that the elections had been overall competitive and freedoms respected, despite a number of shortcomings particularly in the allocation of media time and state resources. The Parliament reconvened on 10 December without the main opposition parties present. The EU and US continued to facilitate dialogue to find a solution to the political impasse. Georgia was less seriously impacted by the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic was overall very well managed but from late summer the situation deteriorated during a second COVID-19 wave.

Ukraine continued reform efforts. Notably, the banking sector and land reform were further advanced thanks to the leadership of the President and the governing party. However, the Constitutional Court decisions of last autumn on the unconstitutionality of some of the anti-corruption architecture elements posed a serious threat to anti-corruption efforts, undermining anti-corruption institutions established after 2014. The EU, together with international partners, in particular the G7, continued to support the reform of the judiciary as a priority. The EU maintained an active dialogue with Ukraine at the highest political level. This included the physical Summit in Brussels in October 2020. The EU passed a strong message of support to Ukraine facing the illegal annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in the east.

The 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan ended on 10 November with a ceasefire. During and after the conflict, the EU has been actively engaged calling the sides to cease hostilities immediately and return to negotiations. Following the conflict, the EU mobilised humanitarian aid for all populations affected by the war and expressed its readiness to support post-conflict recovery and to effectively contribute to the shaping of a durable and comprehensive settlement of the conflict, including through support for post conflict rehabilitation and confidence building measures.

4.5.1.2. Working towards the SDGs

The EU's relations with its Eastern neighbours are well aligned with and contribute to the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030. The response to COVID-19 has led to a significant reprogramming of resources in support of SDG 3 health and well-being and SDG 8 decent employment and economic growth. Within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, bilateral and regional actions have contributed to strengthen the economies and favour an appropriate business environment, in particular for SMEs (SDGs 8, 9, and 12), supporting institutional reforms, CSOs and promoting good governance (SDG 16), supporting infrastructure development for better connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change (SDGs 6, 7 and 13) and promoting human development while favouring mobility and people to people contacts (SDGs 3, 4, 5 and 10).

4.5.1.3. Implementation

Armenia

The EU focused on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh to strengthen the country's resilience, as well as keeping momentum on domestic reform implementation. The government has been committed to the implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which it considers a blueprint for strategic reforms. This commitment was reconfirmed during the EU-Armenia Partnership Council in December 2020. By the end of 2020, almost all EU Member States had ratified the CEPA agreement.

In 2020, the EU was the key reform partner and the largest contributor in Armenia. EU support addressed the Sector Reform Contract on Justice Reform and Police Reform. Implementation progress was made despite setbacks related to COVID-19 and the hostilities. The assistance portfolio for Armenia was adapted to the broader Team Europe approach to COVID-19, redirecting funds to health resilience while ensuring continued support to good governance reforms, private sector development and infrastructure investments (blending).

All tools at the EU's disposal were used, including technical assistance to increase the capacity of the Armenian government. In 2020, four new Twinning projects were contracted covering Civil Service, Civil Protection, National Assembly and Biodiversity activities and two more are in the pipeline on Accreditation and Ethics/Anti-Corruption. On budget support programmes, EUR 65.3 million was paid to Armenia in recognition of its democratic achievements of 2019. AAP 2020 mostly focused on budget support with a new EUR 30 million COVID-19 Resilience Contract and a EUR 30 million Justice Reform contract.

Azerbaijan

Negotiations on a new EU-Azerbaijan agreement stalled throughout 2020 and there has been no progress in the negotiations on the EU-Azerbaijan Aviation agreement. A Partnership Priorities Facility worth EUR 27 million was set up to help Azerbaijan in implementing the Partnership Priorities, focusing in the medium term on the economic resilience of the country in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Implementation will start in 2021. Through its ongoing programmes, the EU continued to support the economic diversification of Azerbaijan and to promote reforms to improve the business climate in the country, including through assistance for agriculture and rural development as well as vocational education and training.

The EU remains the largest foreign donor supporting civil society in Azerbaijan. In 2020, a new contribution agreement under the Civil Society Facility was signed to support CSO capacity building and social entrepreneurship.

The EU also continued to support the government's reform agenda in areas such as energy management, environmental policy, gender equality, cybersecurity and e-government, including through active use of the TAIEX instrument. Twinning has remained a successful tool in supporting the government's efforts to modernise its administration and to start aligning with European standards and practices.

Belarus

The EU focused on responding to the political crisis following the rigged presidential elections in August and provided support to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU was at the forefront of efforts to support the people of Belarus. In reaction to developments in their country, the EU mobilised an emergency assistance package of EUR 3.7 million for the victims of oppression and independent media immediately after the Belarus presidential elections and followed up with a EUR 24 million assistance package of sustained support to civil society, youth and small and medium-sized enterprises, and to improve health capacities adopted in December. This package was further complemented with EUR 6 million access to finance support for SMEs. In line with Council conclusions on Belarus of 12 October 2020, the EU conducted a review of EU-Belarus relations including its financial assistance to Belarus. As a result, about half of ENI bilateral assistance has been suspended. Belarus also benefitted from a massive delivery of personal protective equipment

totalling EUR 2.8 million as part of the EU regional COVID-19 support package for the Eastern Partnership countries. A rehabilitated wastewater treatment facility in Brest, with funding in the form of grants from the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) and loans from the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB), became operational in 2020, bringing significant reductions in nitrogen and phosphorus runoff into the Baltic Sea.

Georgia

Georgia remains committed to the implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. Alignment to the EU acquis and European standards has continued despite the COVID-19 related challenges. Further efforts are however needed, notably in the field of judicial reform and tackling political polarisation. The EU is continuing to support these reforms, in particular in the justice sector including the full implementation of the fourth wave and the inclusive adoption by Parliament of the fifth wave of judicial reforms.

EU assistance for Georgia in 2020 focused on the response to the socio-economic and health challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to two rapidly designed interventions under the Annual Action Programme 2020 (EUR 102.7 million), the EU provided support to the Government's Anti-Crisis Economic Plan and the health system. In addition, bilateral funds were channelled through the Neighbourhood Investment Platform (NIP) to provide local currency loans for SMEs to help them in the aftermath of COVID-19. Ongoing programmes were reoriented where necessary to provide additional support to those belonging to vulnerable groups, businesses and people living in rural and remote areas.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, EU Member States, International Finance Institutions and the European Union joined forces under the umbrella of the Team Europe approach. This approach has led to a more unified approach towards cooperation with Georgia. First consultations on future Team Europe initiatives for Georgia have already taken place and will be crucial for the upcoming multiannual indicative programming.

Moldova

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU redirected, accelerated, and mobilised new programmes worth EUR 127 million in bilateral grant support for the emergency response to the outbreak, the resilience of the healthcare system, and socio-economic recovery.

Following progress on key conditions, a disbursement of EUR 30 million of Macro-Financial Assistance was made in July. The programme expired shortly thereafter, and the third, final tranche was not disbursed due to the applicable conditions not being met. An emergency Macro-Financial Assistance programme worth EUR 100 million in loans was also adopted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, of which the first tranche (EUR 50 million) was disbursed in November.

The 2020 funding package for Moldova was adopted in two parts and contained three actions: EU4Moldova: Local Communities; EU4Moldova: Facility to Support the Health Response to the COVID-crisis and Association Agreement Related Reforms; and a COVID-19 Resilience Contract (budget support) to support Moldova in dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ukraine

Ukraine remained committed to its ambitious and comprehensive reform agenda based on the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Progress was achieved in a

wide range of areas due to EU-funded support programmes and intensive political and policy dialogues. The comprehensive Association4U phase II programme, supporting horizontal issues of Association Agreement (AA) implementation, continued successfully in 2020.

The year 2020 was especially challenging due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that partially diverted the attention of the Ukrainian authorities to addressing the public health crisis and the socio-economic consequences of this unexpected event. The EU mobilised a timely EUR 190 million assistance package as part of the EU response to COVID-19 crisis⁷⁵.

The EU continued its support for energy efficiency in the residential sector, in particular via the Energy Efficiency Support Programme for Ukraine. Private Sector Development remains a priority for EU support in Ukraine with a number of ongoing projects in three areas of intervention: access to finance for SMEs, business development services, and promoting a better business environment.

The year 2020 was historic for Ukraine's decentralisation process, as it marked the completion of the administrative part of the decentralisation reform and empowering local self-government, which was supported by the EU through the flagship EU-funded programme U-LEAD with Europe with a budget of EUR 158.3 million and contributed to numerous initiatives.

In 2020, the EU continued supporting the implementation of public administration reform in Ukraine. In the area of anti-corruption, the EU continued providing comprehensive support to Ukraine's frontline anti-corruption agencies, local authorities, civil society and investigative media through its flagship programme EU Anti-Corruption Initiative (EUACI) and numerous civil society projects.

EU support to civil society in Ukraine seeks to increase the capacities of civil society organisations, particularly outside Kyiv, promote policy dialogue between civil society and authorities, and facilitate the enabling environment for civic participation. Throughout 2020, 43 projects supported the work of over 500 organisations in a wide range of issues starting with the response to the COVID-19 crisis, but also cultural heritage, social services provision, anti-corruption and justice reform.

The EU's comprehensive support for eastern Ukraine continued in 2020 with the second full implementation year of a dedicated EUR 60 million programme that comes on top of humanitarian assistance and early recovery work such as demining. The programme responded to specific COVID-19 needs in eastern Ukraine by providing equipment to hospitals, supporting local small businesses and working via civil society to reach out to vulnerable populations, including those who live near the contact line.

The Support for Migration and Asylum Management project continued to support Ukraine in developing advanced integrated IT solutions for the management of migration processes. The IT systems include MFA visa biometrics, an Advance Passenger Information system (APIS), Bearer Verification when crossing the border, E-readmission, and Administrative Offences including Checks of foreigners applying for citizenship. The common biometric matching system, which is shared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Migration service and the State Border Guards service was developed and tested, with training on its use provided.

Despite challenges posed by the pandemic, donor coordination in Ukraine has taken substantial steps forward in 2020 and the EU plays an important role in the process. The coordination mechanism for International Technical Assistance has been successfully launched.

⁷⁵ In addition to this amount, the Commission mobilised EUR 1,200 million of Macro-Financial Assistance loans.

Regional cooperation

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the efforts of the EU and its Member States in the region, the EU rapidly redirected well over EUR 1 billion of grant assistance in support of the six partners of the Eastern Partnership. This included financial assistance for the immediate needs of the public health sector, civil society, and independent media, and support for longer-term socio-economic recovery.

The dedicated civil society component of the COVID-19 Solidarity Programme in the Eastern Partnership mitigated the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable people, including the elderly, people with disabilities, persons belonging to minorities, and others disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

In the area of good governance, to strengthen the rule of law, anti-corruption mechanisms and justice sector reform for the Eastern partnership countries, the EU continued its cooperation with the Council of Europe under the Framework Partnership for Good Governance phase II and Justice Dashboard Action, supporting EaP countries in their monitoring and evaluation on the efficiency, independence and accountability of their justice systems. In addition, further support was directed to the fight against corruption through the EU for Integrity Programme. A strengthened focus on security and unresolved conflicts was also implemented with the EU 4Dialogue Programme. The focus of the EU's assistance to EaP countries therefore continued to be the rule of law, anti-corruption, judicial reforms and anti-discrimination, in line with Deliverables 9 and 10 of the 20 Deliverables for 2020.

Concerning market opportunities and economic development, more than 40 regional and bilateral programmes under the EU4Business initiative continued as the key collective tool to deliver substantive support for development of SMEs, complementing national reform plans.

In the area of connectivity, to develop the digital economy, during the third EaP Ministerial meeting on Digital Economy held on 28 February 2019 in Bucharest the Eastern partnership countries affirmed their commitment to reduce roaming tariffs through the signature of a regional roaming agreement among the Eastern partners by 2020. This objective was not achieved but steps were taken toward the signature of a regional roaming agreement in 2021, and the text of the agreement was negotiated and agreed at a technical level with all Eastern partnership countries. In addition, support for policy work in six priority topics (electronic communications and infrastructure, trust and security, eTrade, digital skills, ICT innovation and start-up ecosystems and eHealth) is streamlined through the EU4Digital initiative and the related technical assistance programmes. Through the EU blending facility, the Neighbourhood Investment Platform, grant funding will leverage loans from partner international financial institutions for investments in broadband. The European Investment Plan also provides financial guarantees to attract private sector investments in several areas, including digital for development.

Continuing in the area of connectivity and green transition, in 2020 regional cooperation focused on pushing forward these deliverables. Despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, unrest in Belarus and a conflict in the Caucasus, the regional assistance programmes to prepare the EaP countries for the historic challenge of following the European Green Deal has continued. Policy-dialogue on climate and environment protection issues was continued through technological means, and some new programmes were launched, while some running programmes saw their implementation intensified: 2020 saw the signature of EU4Environment - Ecosystems and Livelihoods

with the World Bank for EUR 6 million. The programme with the European Environment Agency implementing the Shared Environmental Information System in the EaP for EUR 6.6 million was finalised. The EU Water Initiative Plus (EUR 23.5 million) saw one result component finalised, and another two extended to mid-2021 because of implementing issues surrounding the pandemic. The programme Environmental Monitoring of the Black Sea (EMBLAS – EUR 1.5 million) was finalised and a new monitoring programme that follows this has been developed. A second phase of EU4Energy was signed, focusing on promoting the green transition, while EU4Climate continued its activities to support partner countries to fulfil their commitments under the Paris agreement.

A EUR 15.4 million programme with the EBRD called FINTECC was launched that will help SMEs and mid-sized companies to reduce their impact on the environment, as well as their energy and water costs by adapting innovative and green technologies. Under the Covenant of Mayors, an initiative working with municipalities to introduce the EU climate and energy goals, the number of signatories has risen to over 450 (compared to 431 in 2019 and 397 at the end of 2018). Additional investments for the private sector are expected through the Sustainable Energy and Connectivity investment window of the recently launched External Investment Plan. Work under the programme EU4Climate was intensified. In the period 2019-2022 this will support the development and implementation of climate-related policies by the Eastern Partnership countries which contribute to lowering emissions, climate resilient development and their commitments to the 2016 Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The phase II of EU4Energy was signed and the EU4Energy phase I successfully finalised.

In the areas of mobility and people-to-people contacts, the emphasis remains – in line with the Youth and Education Package (almost EUR 330 million of support under 2017–2020 budgets) under the ‘20 Deliverables for 2020’ – on youth employment and employability, entrepreneurship, inclusion, social entrepreneurship as well youth civic engagement.

In higher education, Erasmus+ supports students and staff mobility, full degree scholarships for Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters degree students, and capacity building for higher education. From 2017 - 2020, more than 16 000 students, researchers and teachers from EaP countries were provided with the opportunity under Erasmus+ to study or teach in another European higher education institutes. More than 34 000 young people and youth workers from Partner Countries took part in non-formal learning opportunities under Erasmus+ and other EU funded youth initiatives such as the EU4Youth initiative (EUR 35.6 million for the period). On the bilateral and regional levels, substantial steps were undertaken to increase the quality and attractiveness of their vocational education and training systems and to invest in young people’s skills development according to labour market needs. Also in the areas of mobility and people-to-people contacts, four of the Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) participate in the Creative Europe programme, supporting the cultural sectors. To date, 70 cultural organisations have taken part in projects under this programme as partners and 22 of these have been coordinators of small projects. In addition, the four countries took part in the new pilot mobility scheme, i-Portunus, resulting in almost 50 individual artist exchanges.

The 3rd Eastern Partnership Panel on Education, Culture and Youth, took place on 3 and 4 December 2020. It presented the achievements in Eastern Partnership up to 2020 and then continued discussing priorities for post-2020 Eastern Partnership cooperation in Education, Youth and Culture in line with the Joint Communication on the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020 from March 2020. The panel gathered around 100 participants, representing all six Eastern Partnership countries,

representatives from 11 EU Member States, representatives of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, the Council of Europe, European Training Foundation and EU institutions. The Panel enabled policy dialogue and exchange of good practice on delivering high quality, inclusive and innovative teaching and learning in the Eastern Partnership countries, with a focus on digital education, teachers' policies and the new Erasmus programme (2021-2027).

From 2017 to 2020, the EU fostered research and innovation cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries. Eastern Partnerships entities have participated 363 times in 227 Horizon 2020 grants, receiving EUR 46.3 million of direct EU contributions. In the same period, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie scheme support benefited a total of 406 EaP researchers. Various activities were performed through the Horizon 2020 policy support facility (PSF) to improve the framework conditions for EU scientific cooperation in the region.

For the Black Sea Synergy, the EU actions focused on implementing Green Deal elements, with a Black Sea Green Diplomacy event in November 2020. Furthermore, the Common Maritime Agenda and the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea promoted a sustainable and circular blue economy recovery approach, better connectivity, environmental protection, and stronger research and innovation. Engagement with civil society was further enhanced, particularly with the Black Sea NGO Forum and the implementation of the activities of the second year of their EU direct grant of EUR 400 000. The interaction with the international Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation was stepped up, including through financial support, with direct grants for discussions on three small-scale projects (EUR 400 000).

In the Northern Dimension (ND), a renewed focus on people-to-people relations, culture and health has been accompanied by increased EU funding for the activities of the ND Partnership for Health and Social Wellbeing, as well as the ND Culture Partnership (in cooperation with EU National Institutes of Culture) and the ND Institute (circa EUR 4 million in 2020). The resulting cooperation is expected to benefit sectoral post-COVID-19 best practice exchanges, regional youth initiatives, cultural and creative industries, and academic exchanges. These initiatives have complemented continued efforts to address Soviet legacy nuclear safety concerns in the Kola peninsula, excess nutrient runoff into the Baltic Sea, and black carbon emissions in proximity to the European Arctic through the ND Environmental Partnership. Efforts to improve regional connectivity in the Baltic and Barents Sea areas through the ND transport and logistics partnership have also continued, with a renewed focus on digital solutions and the decarbonisation of transport. The EU also engaged in the work of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), with high-level meetings to address shared regional concerns, ranging from the pandemic to sustainable development, as well as selecting new leadership in both organisations' secretariats.

In Spring 2020 additional flexibilities to use EU funds for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic were granted to the 13 ENI cross-border cooperation (CBC) multiannual programmes under shared management, operating on EU external borders with the Eastern Neighbourhood countries and Russia. In 2020 these programmes committed most of their (ERDF and ENI) funding to a wide variety of projects involving local and regional stakeholders in the Member States and partner countries based on principle of partnership on an equal footing. Support to the environment, SME development and people-to-people cooperation are among the most prominent features of the programmes. Some programmes also managed to successfully tackle cross-border health issues related to the pandemic (e.g. Poland-Belarus-Ukraine ENI CBC programme).

CASE STUDY

EU COVID-19 Solidarity support for vulnerable groups

The EU COVID-19 Solidarity support for vulnerable groups has already enabled more than 100 local civil society organisations to provide essential social and legal services, distribute supplies, give psychosocial support, and promote economic recovery. The currently ongoing EU support of EUR 8 million spans across all six countries of the Eastern Partnership.



One example is from September 2020 in Moldova, where Ruslan, an eight-year-old boy from a small village in eastern Moldova, arrived at the Oncological Institute of the Republic of Moldova to be treated for leukaemia⁷⁶. Being hospitalised in the capital, far from home, was a challenge for Ruslan and his family alike. At the same time, Ruslan had to continue learning during his long-term treatment. The family did not know how to organise this, as the COVID-19 pandemic brought additional complications as classes moved online and the only way to connect with teachers was through electronic devices. Ruslan and the other children being treated in the oncological units were provided with laptops and headphones to continue attending the online classes. Thanks to the project, children could keep up with their education and enjoy new forms of entertainment while undergoing chemotherapy.

⁷⁶ <https://www.clovekvtsni.cz/en/enabling-online-education-for-young-cancer-patients-moldova-7342gp>

4.5.1.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters

Ukraine

After more than six years of an increasingly protracted and complex crisis, the humanitarian situation in Ukraine remains volatile. It is especially grim along both sides of the line of contact, with 3.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. The elderly make up one-third of all people in need. The coronavirus pandemic is further aggravating the already dire humanitarian situation as prices have gone up and food insecurity is increasing. The closure of the line of contact due to the pandemic significantly affects the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs) and the access of civilians to pensions.

The EU is one of the largest humanitarian donors to the crisis in eastern Ukraine and has provided nearly EUR 190 million in emergency financial assistance since the beginning of the conflict. More than half of the assistance benefits vulnerable people living in the NGCAs. EU-funded humanitarian projects include multi-purpose cash assistance, provision of basic needs, shelter, water, protection, health assistance including psychosocial support, education in emergencies, mine risk education, and the distribution of essential items for winter. The 2020 support also addressed COVID-19 related needs in eastern Ukraine, with around EUR 10 million of grants adapted to address the impact of the pandemic. The funding helps support Primary Health Centres and hospitals to provide medical equipment, personal protective equipment and hygiene kits, as well as awareness raising.

Nagorno Karabakh

Starting in September 2020, the seven-week long hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan have resulted in thousands of casualties in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, including civilian deaths and injuries. The hostilities have also pushed hundreds of thousands to flee their homes. Between October and December 2020, the EU allocated EUR 3.9 million in humanitarian support to address the needs of the most vulnerable among the people directly affected by the conflict in the three territories. This emergency support allows the EU humanitarian partners to cover the basic needs of those affected by the conflict, including food, multi-purpose cash assistance, winter items, health support including psychosocial support, medical equipment, and other urgent assistance.

4.5.1.5. Crisis response and preparedness

In 2020, the IcSP responded to the crisis unfolding in Belarus, with a capacity building programme for civil society stakeholders to maintain their capacities despite the repression they are facing, allowing for the possibility of constructive dialogue. The EU continued to support actions through the IcSP responding to the needs caused by the crisis in Ukraine, including support to the OSCE special monitoring mission (SMM), mine action and support for resilience in the Azov Sea region.

The IcSP continues to be a major supporter of confidence-building and conflict-prevention actions in the South Caucasus. Following the cease-fire agreement over Nagorno-Karabakh, the IcSP was quickly mobilised to help rebuild dialogue networks among non-governmental organisations, local organisations and individuals across the conflict line as well as to support confidence-building activities to support the OSCE Minsk Group's efforts.

When it comes to counter-terrorism actions in Neighbourhood East, the EU focused on the prevention of radicalisation, with a regional high-level Conference on current challenges posed by Foreign Terrorist Fighters that took place in Vienna in February 2020. The Conference addressed

issues such as the use of passenger data collection systems and the challenges of the effective prosecution of Foreign Terrorist Fighters.

4.5.2. European Neighbourhood South

4.5.2.1. Introduction (ENI Priorities and Policy developments)

The year 2020 marked the 25th Anniversary of the launch of the Barcelona Process and the tenth anniversary of the Arab spring. In this context, and to also answer the challenges and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region, the EU and its Member States decided to relaunch and strengthen its relations with its Southern Neighbours. To this end, the Foreign Affairs Council held discussions in May and September addressing, amongst other items, the security, economic and governance situation in the region, and identifying shared challenges. In November, the Ministerial Meeting with Southern Neighbours held in Barcelona in parallel with the fifth forum of the Union for the Mediterranean, provided the opportunity for an open dialogue where Southern partners expressed strong interest in the new approach. A strategic debate on the relations with the Southern Neighbourhood took place at the European Council meeting in December. EU leaders agreed that a democratic, more stable, greener and more prosperous Southern Neighbourhood is a strategic priority for the EU. It was confirmed that future cooperation will be guided by the key principles of the European Neighbourhood Policy. This paved the way to the preparation of the Joint Communication on the renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood, accompanied by an economic and investment plan for the region, adopted in 2021⁷⁷.

EU and Southern Neighbours continued developing their bilateral cooperation in the framework of the Joint Documents under the European Neighbourhood Instrument. In December, the EU proposed to partner countries the extension of the validity of the existing Joint Documents until post-2020 documents are agreed. New or updated Joint Documents will inform the preparation of the multiannual programming for the next cycle under the EU's new financial instruments architecture.

Tunisia has been going through a delicate socio-economic situation in 2020 aggravated by the pandemic. In the framework of the Privileged Partnership, and underpinned by the Strategic Priorities 2018-2020, the country has been a major beneficiary of the Team Europe initiative with the acceleration of the payments of budget support planned for 2020 and 2021 and strengthened support to the health sector.

The dynamics of the EU-Morocco relationship picked up following the adoption of the Joint EU-Morocco Political Declaration in June 2019. Based on the latter, discussions about the strategic priorities of the long-term partnership continued with a view to their endorsement by the next Association Council in 2021. An EU-Morocco Green Deal and a digital partnership are being considered while cooperation on migration has gathered further momentum. The Sub-Committees stemming from the Association Agreement resumed in July.

Institutional meetings between EU and Algeria resumed with several sectoral EU-Algeria sub-committee meetings, which took place in the autumn. The EU-Algeria Association Council in December confirmed the renewed commitment to deepening the partnership in order to achieve its full potential. Strengthening stability in the region, governance and human rights, economic cooperation and trade, the environment, energy and migration were at the core of mutual interests.

⁷⁷*ibid* page 5.

The EU and Egypt maintained close, regular contacts at various levels on foreign and security matters in the neighbourhood and beyond. The High Representative made his first visit to Cairo in September. Egypt's human rights situation remained a challenge in bilateral relations.

The EU continued engaging with Jordan in pursuing policy dialogue and assistance programmes in the broad range of areas covered by the EU-Jordan partnership priorities. In particular, the EU added exceptional macro-financial assistance of EUR 200 million to the existing EUR 500 million assistance programme, to help Jordan meet the urgent external financing needs caused by COVID-19.

In Lebanon, the EU continued to address the country's political and socio-economic crises, compounded by the explosion in Beirut port on 4 August and the COVID-19 pandemic. The President of the European Council Charles Michel visited Beirut on 8 August. The EU participated in the Conferences in support of the Lebanese people on 8 August and 2 December. The Council Conclusions of December reinforced calls for the urgent formation of a credible and accountable government and the implementation of necessary reforms as conditions for the release of substantial EU assistance.

The EU remained committed to a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine and throughout the year reiterated its clear position that all settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory are against the international law. The EU has welcomed the successful brokering of normalisation agreements between Israel and several key Arab countries, followed by similar agreements with Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. The Middle East Peace Process remained high in the European agenda. EU Foreign Ministers discussed this issue in several informal meetings, with the participation of both Israeli and Palestinian Foreign Ministers. The EU has also continued supporting, politically and financially, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in close cooperation with the international donor community.

The EU continued to provide assistance across Syria and in neighbouring refugee-hosting countries. The EU supported the efforts to finding a lasting solution to the conflict negotiated under the auspices of the UN according to Security Council Resolution 2254, notably through the Constitutional Committee in Geneva and supporting the work of the UN Special Envoy for Syria. The EU is a partner to the Global Coalition to defeat Da'esh and maintains substantial restrictive measures on the Assad regime. The fourth Brussels Conference in March 2020 generated pledges worth EUR 4.9 billion for Syria and kept the Syrian conflict at the top of the international agenda.

The EU continued its efforts to support a return to peace and a resumption of the transition to democracy and provided substantial assistance to Libya across a wide range of sectors, as one of the largest donors. Through its active involvement in the UN-led Berlin Process following the Berlin Conference in January 2020, the EU supported international efforts towards a political solution to the conflict. Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI was launched on 31 March as one of the major EU contributions to the implementation of the UN arms embargo. The EU Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission (EUBAM) Libya continued to build Libyan authorities' capacities in the areas of border management, law enforcement and criminal justice. The EU Liaison and Planning Cell (EULPC) provided key security, intelligence and planning expertise to the EU and to the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). These are examples of EU-UN coordination, as part of the EU-UN Strategic Partnership on Crisis Management implementation.

The implementation of the European Investment Plan made major progress in 2020. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related reorientation of the European Fund for

Sustainable Development (EFSD) Guarantee, focus is on support to small businesses, addressing their financing needs in this difficult period by encouraging local banks to lend to these businesses more and by making their borrowing more affordable. The other element of this reoriented support focuses on healthcare, especially on testing laboratories.

4.5.2.2. Working towards the SDGs

In the South Neighbourhood, the response to COVID-19 led to a significant reprogramming of funds and activities, including those of the Trust Funds, in support of a range of SDGs, such as the health sector (SDG 3) and economic recovery (SDG 8). Besides these actions, the primary focus of cooperation in the Neighbourhood South was on good governance, the rule of law and human rights (SDG 16) to help consolidate democratic processes and contribute to enhancing peace and security in the region. In almost all countries, the EU continued to support basic needs and inclusive human development (health - SDG 3, gender equality - SDG 5 and education - SDG 4), in particular for the most vulnerable, for migrants and for refugees. Support for industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9) as well as for the environment and climate action (SDG 13) was also provided both bilaterally and at regional level.

4.5.2.3. Implementation

Algeria

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 prompted an incisive reorientation of the Annual Action Programme for 2019 and 2020 and the associated available funding towards an EU COVID-response package of EUR 75 million for Algeria. This package comprises a major medical and sanitary component of EUR 43 million (medical equipment and capacity building of the Ministry of Health), as well as a EUR 32 million component supporting socio-economic recovery (Blue Economy programme - EUR 22 million- and Youth and Tourism - EUR 10 million).

Egypt

Egypt failed to sign Financing Agreements (FA) linked to the Annual Action Programme 2019 owing to the perception that references to human rights in the FA amounted to political conditionality which means that EUR 55 million will be de-committed.

Three projects were approved under the Neighbourhood Investment Platform in 2020, the Green Economy Financing Facility with the EBRD (EUR 24.86 million), the Helwan Wastewater Treatment Plan with AFD and the EIB (EUR 25.602 million), and the AFD Finance in Common project (EUR 13.25 million).

Since March 2020, the Team Europe approach has provided the framework for a coordinated COVID-19 response in Egypt. The EU together with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the European Investment Bank provided around EUR 3 billion to support Egypt's recovery from the crisis. To support Egypt's public health system, the EU has mobilised EUR 89 million remaining under the budget support programme on health. The EU also has a specific EUR 10 million programme for an immediate socio-economic response.

EU funds under the Annual Action Programme 2020 (EUR 110 million) aim to support civil society and sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development (water, energy, trade, growth, environment, rural and urban development). An intervention under the AAP 2020 specifically aims to improve the

quality of life for the Egyptian population through enhanced environmental performance, and climate change mitigation, adaptation, and mainstreaming in development sectors.

Israel

Being an OECD member country, Israel benefits from technical assistance for public bodies, through the institutional twinning tool. Two twinning projects are on-going on a waste management regulatory framework with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and on development of a competitive regulatory framework including the retail and wholesale markets and other forms of network access with the Ministry of Communication.

A regional programme is jointly managed by the EU Delegation to Israel together with the Office of the EU Representative in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The European Peacebuilding Initiative (formerly EU Partnership for Peace Programme) supports civil society organisations promoting the peace process at the societal level and fostering direct civil society relationships between Palestinians and Israelis.

Jordan

During 2020, the EU was quick to revise and reorient funds from on-going and planned activities, making available around EUR 416 million for COVID-19 response and together with its Member States mobilised their humanitarian and development instruments making EUR 722 million available. This contributed to address urgent humanitarian needs, improve the provision of health services and address the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on the population.

In general, the EU continued support the governance and rule of law sector, through assistance to National Parliament digitalisation, to training of judges and digitalisation of criminal records. Civil Society Organisations were supported in parallel.

The EU provides higher education and vocational training to around 5 000 Syrian refugee students and disadvantaged youth in host communities in the form of language training, academic readiness skills, coaching and distance education programmes.

In the domain of trade and private sector development, the EU continued to work to promote a better business environment, increase capacity to export by local companies, support entrepreneurship and innovation, and facilitate access to credit. Additional support was given to green energy, solid waste management and water.

In 2020, new programmes were launched. One is supporting the improvement of integrity and accountability in Jordanian public administration at central and local level (EUR 15 million) and aims at reinforcing the capacity of Jordanian administrations to adhere to rules and regulations and to monitor and assess the outcome of their policies and to promote citizen's participation in the planning and monitoring of Government actions. The second programme addresses social inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable Jordanians (EUR 24 million) in extending social support to vulnerable people irrespective of their status (e.g. refugees, in particular).

Libya

In 2020, the EU stepped up its assistance to Libya in the context of the European Neighbourhood Instrument and under thematic budget lines. New projects were signed in the fields of governance and the economy (EUR 23.5 million), support to Civil Society Organisations (EUR 2 million), promotion of human rights (EUR 0.7 million), and support to local authorities (EUR 4.2 million).

In the framework of the UN-led Berlin process, specific expertise was provided to support the Berlin process Economic Working Group which is co-chaired by the EU together with the UN, US and Egypt.

The EU contributed to the COVID-19 response in Libya by focusing on the reinforcement of the health system, fighting disinformation, and supporting the post-crisis economic recovery for a total of over EUR 66 million. Under the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, three new programmes for Libya were adopted (EUR 45.5 million of fresh funding and EUR 30 million reallocated funds), to improve the resilience of both Libyans and migrants and refugees, including actions focused on the protection of the most vulnerable, community stabilisation and COVID-19.

The 2020 ENI Special measure for Libya (EUR 10 million) was adopted in August 2020 to strengthen the healthcare system at local level, bringing the total allocation to Libya under the ENI to EUR 98 million for 2014-2020. It will focus on making available a minimum package of health services in targeted areas and on improving data collection for local planning and decision-making through the expansion of the Health Management Information System. This will contribute to increase Libya's readiness to deal with ongoing and future outbreaks.

Lebanon

Already facing a major financial and economic crisis, Lebanon was hit by the Beirut port blast in August that killed more than 200 people and injured many thousands. The explosion added a tremendous strain on the country's general economy, and created additional despair, loss of jobs and tensions. Approximately 23.2 % of the Lebanese people have been plunged into extreme poverty.

In response to the port explosion, the EU reoriented more than EUR 70 million for immediate needs and mobilised a package of almost EUR 100 million to address the consequences at the port and neighbouring areas. The EU developed with the United Nations and World Bank the Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) that sets out a roadmap towards sustainable and people-centred recovery as well as key reforms required to mobilise investment. From the Annual Action Programme 2020, EUR 34 million were reoriented to the 3RF, to make it relevant to the country's crisis situation, through programmes addressing governance and help to restore trust in the State and support civil society, economic recovery and jobs, while restoring and improving basic services and infrastructures. In 2020, the EU also supported Lebanon with specific actions to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. Around EUR 370 million was reoriented or allocated for interventions in emergency response, health, water and hygiene, social assistance and socio-economic recovery in line with the framework of the EU's global response to COVID-19.

Morocco

In March 2020, the EU announced an exceptional support package for the Moroccan budget for 2020, leading to the immediate reallocation of EUR 150 million, dedicated to the needs of the Moroccan Special Fund for the Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic. On top of this, EUR 300 million of funds already allocated to Morocco was reoriented towards the response to the pandemic, by accelerating their mobilisation to meet the exceptional budgetary needs of the country. The EU strongly supported the implementation of these emergency policies as part of a dedicated programme - European Support for the Response to the COVID-19 Crisis in Morocco, with a budget of EUR 111 million - and by a massive reallocation of the resources available to other ongoing sectoral budget support programmes. In total, EUR 433 million was disbursed in the form of budget support in 2020.

Regarding the implementation of migration and mobility programmes, the partnerships concluded with civil society through the Regional Development and Protection Programme, the UNICEF project on the rights of migrant children, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa project implemented by UNHCR and the project Legal empowerment of migrants have enabled a rapid response to alleviate the consequences of the sanitary crisis on the vulnerable migrant population with the distribution of health and food kits and access to basic services.

Another success in 2020 was the *Programme d'appui de l'Union européenne à la croissance et la compétitivité du Maroc* that supports the implementation of a multichannel payment service, which allows integration of online payments via bank card, ATMs, e-banking sites, payment applications and mobile banking.

The blending facility contributed in 2020 to deliver employment, sustainable and inclusive growth, and renewable energy.

A total of EUR 263 million was approved to support programmes in areas of education and health, to finance the action plan in response to COVID-19, to expand the justice programme, increase the participation of citizens in civil society, and to create new opportunities of triangular cooperation between the EU, Morocco and Africa. In addition, a new programme was launched to enhance information and the visibility of EU cooperation activities with Morocco.

Palestine*⁷⁸

EU assistance to Palestine is allocated in line with the multiannual European Joint Strategy.

The bulk of EU support to Palestine is channelled through the PEGASE instrument (EUR 159.05 million of which EUR 85 million is for salaries and pensions, EUR 22.5 million to support the response of the East Jerusalem Hospitals to COVID-19 and EUR 45 million to support the incomes of the most vulnerable households), contributing to the stability and resilience of the Palestinian Authority. The mechanism is accompanied by a policy dialogue aimed at encouraging reforms, which includes an incentive-based framework that links part of this support to reforms in key sectors. In addition, EU support to UNRWA (EUR 86.6 million) is of critical significance in maintaining the agency's operations and in preserving basic services to Palestine refugees.

To support the roll-out of the EU External Investment Plan, the EU-Palestine Investment Platform was launched with the Prime Minister. An EIB major loan (EUR 120 million) granted in 2020 to three Palestinian banks was a major success.

Due to the pandemic, Palestine is facing significant healthcare needs. In this context, the EU is providing support to the health sector in particular, EUR 9.5 million allocated to the six East Jerusalem hospitals to help cover coronavirus costs and allow them to provide urgent health services to COVID-19 patients from East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. To support the economy, the EU has put together with European Development Banks a comprehensive package of economic assistance to support SMEs, the backbone of the Palestinian economy, and vulnerable economic groups. The package amounts to EUR 76.7 million through a contribution in financial instruments and grants, which will allow mobilisation of EUR 285 million in soft loans and investment from the private sector.

⁷⁸ *This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

In Palestine, the EU and its Member States, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the European Investment Bank designed a Team Europe package of EUR 373 million to support the Palestinian Authority response to the crisis.

Syria

The continuous highly volatile humanitarian, political and security situation on the ground was further exacerbated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, thus substantially affecting the implementation of EU assistance to the Syrian population through the European Neighbourhood Instrument and the thematic budget lines (CSO-LA, EIDHR, PROACT). Robust risk monitoring of projects and mitigation measures continued to be activated in 2020.

EU support to Syrian civil society remained significant, with activities focused on dialogue spaces, social cohesion and community empowerment. Almost all projects with small grant components have had a disproportionately positive impact on local communities compared to the small amounts invested. In the health sector, a study identified entry points for engagement in human resources for health in Syria and neighbouring countries. The progressive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020 led to reprogramming of health and livelihoods interventions. On Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) rights and civil documentation, a considerable amount of analytical work was produced, contributing to a better understanding of the HLP legal framework. Legal aid and counselling were provided to beneficiaries, which included informal mediation support that helped resolving HLP cases at community level. In the area of human rights, progress was observed in the implementation of a number of projects with a specific focus on media freedom, transitional justice, human rights defenders and the fight against Gender-Based Violence.

Tunisia

In 2020, cooperation activities have mostly targeted the three priority sectors of political governance and rule of law; sustainable economic growth and employment; and social and regional cohesion.

The disbursement of over EUR 240 million in budget support covering all sectors of EU assistance was frontloaded to support Tunisia in responding to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

The AAP 2020 was also adapted in light of the EU response to COVID-19. The previously planned programmes for environment (EUR 120 million) and commercial justice (EUR 33 million) were put on hold until 2021. These amounts were used to top up the Economic Governance programme by EUR 183 million. In addition, the top-up to the ongoing health programme was increased from EUR 20 million to EUR 70 million, by postponing the Youth programme until 2021.

A key achievement in 2020 included the inclusion of gender in the cooperation framework, which allowed considerable progress in the realm of political and constitutional reforms. Another notable achievement was the favourable response regarding Tunisia's adherence to the Council of Europe's Istanbul convention.

In Tunisia, the EU together with France, Germany, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the European Investment Bank provided EUR 2 billion to provide equipment to the health sector, emergency financial support to enterprises and to the state budget finances.

Since 2017, Tunisia has taken preliminary steps in the implementation of the Smart Specialisation process: organisation of awareness and capacity building events and establishment of the national Smart Specialisation team. A mapping exercise was carried out by the IRADA programme, which now

is being complemented by the analysis of economic, innovative and scientific potential undertaken by JRC experts. Following this phase, the Smart Specialisation process will continue with the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process where all stakeholders, including the private sector, will come to a consensus on the priority areas for investment in research and innovation. This will lead to the preparation and adoption of the Smart Specialisation strategy document, which will be followed by an informal assessment of the strategy by the JRC.

CASE STUDY

The Trust Funds

Since its creation in 2014, the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis (EUTF Syria) has mobilised over EUR 2.3 billion to provide a coherent and integrated EU aid response to an unprecedented refugee crisis via large scale and flexible projects on education, livelihoods and social assistance, health, water and sanitation, as well as protection, most importantly in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq. Complementing the EU's humanitarian assistance and the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, the EUTF Syria operates along the humanitarian-development nexus, supporting refugees from Syria and vulnerable people in the host communities while helping the overstretched countries to strengthen their national systems to ensure service delivery to the population. The EUTF Syria is implementing an important part of the EU pledges made at the Brussels conferences on the future of Syria and the Region in line with the relevant international frameworks. By December 2020, 110 contracts have been signed, reaching more than seven million beneficiaries.

A decade into the Syrian crisis, in the year of COVID-19 and in the wake of the Beirut port blast of August 2020, the EUTF Syria demonstrated once again its fast and flexible response capacity, by adapting quickly to the new needs of the host countries, whose capacities to respond adequately to the protracted refugee crisis have been affected. The EUTF Syria mobilised a specific COVID-19 package worth EUR 55 million for Jordan and Lebanon only three months after the pandemic outbreak. In view of the end of the EUTF Syria mandate in December 2021, work is ongoing to ensure a smooth transition of the EU's Syria Crisis Response to NDICI to continue sending a strong signal of support to Syria's neighbours in their unprecedented efforts to help the refugees.

The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF Africa) was created at the Valletta Summit on Migration in November 2015 to address the root causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migration and to contribute to better migration management. The global objective of the North of Africa window (worth EUR 899.8 million) is to contribute to safe, secure, legal and orderly migration from, to and within the region and support an effective management of migration flows that protects human rights.

In 2020, the EUTF North Africa Operational Committee approved new programmes worth EUR 109.7 million, including a re-allocation of EUR 30 million from the Support to integrated Border and migration management in Libya – second phase programme. EUR 13.3 million was added to ongoing actions with new components in support of improved migration governance; labour migration and mobility; protection of vulnerable migrants, voluntary return and sustainable reintegration; as well as community stabilisation. Two new specific COVID-19 programmes were approved: a EUR 10 million regional COVID-19 response facility implemented in all EUTF North Africa countries except Libya and a EUR 20 million COVID-19 response programme for Libya.

The Commission has approved a one-year technical extension of both the EUTF Africa and the EUTF Syria to allow more time to commit and contract the contributions received in 2020 from the EU and EU Member States, in particular for programmes in response to COVID-19 and the Beirut port blast, and to compensate for the delays in the implementation of actions caused by COVID-19 and the necessary reorientation of funds.

Regional cooperation

At regional level, ENI funds continued supporting inclusive economic development, environment and climate change, independent media and civil society, as well as cooperation on security matters. However, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the economies of the Southern Neighbourhood, and regional Annual Action Programmes 2019 and 2020 were adapted for a total of EUR 26 million to address the long-lasting economic consequences of the pandemic on employment. In this context, regional initiatives with a focus on job creation were brought forward, notably trade and investment programmes with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Labour Organisation, and a regional programme on innovation and cluster cooperation.

Particular emphasis was also put on social economy as an innovative model addressing social problems and inequality in Arab countries, while providing an economic perspective, especially for young people. Since 2018, the MedUP programme promotes the development of social entrepreneurship in the Southern Mediterranean by increasing economic inclusiveness and fair employment in Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan.

In addition, a specific and highly visible regional programme on health security was signed with the European Centre for Disease Control as part of the COVID-19 emergency reaction to enhance response capacities in partner countries, focusing on capacity building of epidemiologists and frontline staff. An additional EUR 2.5 million was also added to EU4BorderSecurity in June 2020 in support integrated border management to strengthen the public health and surveillance capacities of participating countries at designated airport, harbour and land Border Crossing Points.

Under the Neighbourhood Investment Platform (NIP), blending continued to be a powerful instrument to leverage investments in the region through the approval of 14 operations for a total amount of EUR 276 million in 2020. Moreover, as part of the COVID-19 response, Commission departments signed three regional facilities totalling EUR 95 million, topping-up existing facilities and accelerating new programmes with European Financial Institutions, to support mostly Small and Medium Enterprises and financial intermediaries, by providing immediate liquidity, more local currency funding, and support to green recovery.

In higher education, Erasmus+ supported students and staff mobility, full degree scholarships for Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters degree students, and capacity building for higher education. From 2014 to 2020, over 60 000 students, researchers and teachers were provided with the opportunity under Erasmus+ to study or teach in another higher education institution. Of these 38 135 came from the region to Europe and 22 278 from Europe to the region (34 % students, 66 % staff).

For the period 2014-2020, 658 Masters students have received scholarships to take part in the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degree programme. Countries from the region have also participated in Capacity Building in Higher Education Projects with 206 projects funded.

In the field of youth between 2014 and 2020, 11 447 Southern Mediterranean young people participated in Erasmus+ youth exchange projects in Europe while 8 310 participants were hosted in Southern Mediterranean countries. Between 2014 and 2020, 5 186 Southern Mediterranean youth workers participated in youth projects (including training and job shadowing) in Europe while over 2 242 youth workers were hosted in Southern Mediterranean countries.

eTwinningPlus and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange offered a safe web-based platform for staff in schools (teachers, head teachers, and librarians, etc.) to collaborate and develop projects with schools in Europe and in some neighbouring countries such as Tunisia, Jordan and Lebanon. The Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange was a ground-breaking project carried out between 2018 and 2020 that enabled over 30 000 youth from Europe and the Southern Mediterranean countries to engage in intercultural experiences online and to follow different training programmes.

The EU also continued to assist the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) networks and fora to foster dialogues from political to technical levels in energy, transport, environment, trade, economy and job creation throughout 2020.

Cross border cooperation overview: Neighbourhood east and south

ENI CBC (to be renamed Interreg NEXT) is an important element of EU policy towards its eastern and southern neighbours, adding cohesion and territorial cooperation to EU relations from the Arctic to the Mediterranean. These multiannual, shared management programmes offer an opportunity for the Neighbourhood partner countries on regional and local level to cooperate with Member States counterparts on an equal footing. They contribute to trust building between stakeholders in the Neighbourhood and the EU. Further, the programmes provide an apolitical platform for cooperation at regional and local level to tackle common practical problems such as environmental protection, including in some sensitive political and even conflict afflicted areas.

In 2020, the 15 European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) CBC programmes (13 of which are in the east) for the period 2014-2020 totalling around EUR 1 billion were in full implementation mode. By January 2021, 768 projects were contracted, representing 83 % of all projects selected for support and including 49 large infrastructure projects. The projects to be implemented under these programmes support sustainable economic development along the EU's external borders, thus reducing differences in living standards and addressing common challenges across these borders. For each of these programmes, the participating countries have selected up to four thematic objectives, such as SME development, culture and environment, and climate change.

The ENI CBC projects also contributed to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. For example, the RESCUE project supported under the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine programme was promoted among 15 other exemplary projects fighting the pandemic by the Commission.

Furthermore, the preparation of Interreg NEXT 2021-2027 has progressed during 2020 with 16 out of 17 programming committees or task forces set-up. The future programmes' implementation will be governed by the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) regulation.

4.5.2.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters

Libya

The armed conflict in Libya ended in June 2020, leaving 316 000 people internally displaced and 1.3 million in need of humanitarian assistance. Despite the signature of a ceasefire agreement in October

2020, the disruption in the provision of basic services and the presence of explosive hazards remained major constraints to safe and dignified returns. The COVID-19 outbreak pushed the already ailing health system to the verge of collapse. The most vulnerable displaced people, returnees, migrants and refugees also need food, shelter, and essential non-food items. International humanitarian law violations and human trafficking are rampant, with reports of abduction, abuse, and smuggling. Humanitarian access has improved, including a field mission by Commission departments' staff starting in late 2020, but with limitations due to the pandemic and related bureaucratic hurdles.

In 2020, Commission departments deployed operations worth EUR 9 million providing assistance in conflict-affected areas to vulnerable IDPs, refugees and migrants, as well as returnees and host communities. It supported essential healthcare for victims of the conflict, including emergency war surgery, trauma kits, physical rehabilitation, prosthesis and psychosocial support, provision of essential medicines, and care for survivors of gender-based violence. It also contributed to the restoration of primary healthcare services in conflict-affected areas. In Eastern Libya, the most vulnerable conflict-affected children received Education in Emergencies (EiE) and psychosocial support. Humanitarian partners adapted on-going programmes to respond to the pandemic and stepped-up awareness campaigns and hygiene promotion. The Commission also contributed to coordination and logistics support of the humanitarian response, including UNHAS flights.

Egypt

Egypt remains a country of destination and transit for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, with people arriving from the Middle East and East Africa. Almost 260 000 registered refugees and asylum seekers are stranded in the most overcrowded and poorest neighbourhoods of Egypt's large cities, where hosting communities suffer from similar levels of vulnerability. Syrians account for 50 % of the refugee population, while other refugees are mainly from East Africa, Iraq and Yemen. Many refugees live near or below the poverty line, with 50 % reporting that they have resorted to begging to meet their daily basic needs. The situation has been compounded by the COVID-19 crisis, which has caused a drastic reduction of already precarious livelihood opportunities, leading many more to resort to negative coping mechanisms.

In 2020, Commission departments deployed operations worth EUR 5 million with a focus on humanitarian protection, multi-purpose cash assistance for basic needs, and Education in Emergencies. 38 % of all refugees are children, with 2020 seeing a sharp and ongoing increase of unaccompanied and separated children.

Sahrawi Crisis

After four decades of unresolved political conflict with humanitarian consequences, tens of thousands of Sahrawi refugees are stranded in a forgotten and protracted crisis. They live in five camps in the desert of southwest Algeria with little access to outside resources, making humanitarian aid essential to their survival.

In 2020, Commission departments deployed operations worth EUR 9 million, supplying safe drinking water and food to tackle the rising malnutrition among Sahrawi refugee children and women. Thanks to an EU-funded project, the dependency on water trucking has been gradually diminished. The Commission provided essential medicines covering 80 % of the health needs of the population in the camps, and specific support for people with disabilities. Humanitarian assistance also contributed to

camps preparedness for a potential COVID-19 outbreak, by providing medicines, hand washing stations and protective equipment. The EU has funded an introductory project within the framework of education in emergencies, to equip the schooling infrastructure with sanitary facilities.

4.5.2.5. Crisis response and preparedness

Syria continues to constitute a significant part of the IcSP portfolio. In 2020, two new IcSP exceptional assistance measures were adopted for Syria, while funding for two existing actions was increased. This new support focuses on the delivery of basic health services and on an inclusive political process in North-East Syria. It complements ongoing actions dedicated to stabilisation in the North-East, notably through demining, as well as continued support to accountability and to the UN-led peace process. This includes the Syria peace process support initiative, co-funded by Germany, as well as the promotion of an inclusive peace process through the Women Advisory Board.

When a massive explosion hit Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, on 4 August 2020, the Commission quickly mobilised additional support under the IcSP to assist the strained medical sector. There were thousands of injured people, several hospitals had been severely damaged, and the COVID-19 pandemic continued. An IcSP action that had started in April 2020 to help the Lebanese public health system respond to COVID-19 was reinforced to quickly increase the number of beds and equipment available in public hospitals to deal with the double crisis. In Palestine, a new action supported the UNRWA health services to address the immediate needs for health and related services linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Libya, support through the IcSP has been specifically designed to support the UN-led efforts to promote and facilitate the Libyan Political Process and the implementation of the January 2020 Berlin Conference. This includes logistical support related to the process itself; support to human security for the civilian Libyan population, including de-mining action; as well as sophisticated support for ceasefire monitoring. Mediation efforts supported through the IcSP continued and directly contributed to the Montreux agreement in September 2020, which was a central step toward the relaunching of the Libyan Political Process.

The EU has also taken specific actions to fight terrorism in Neighbourhood South. Support provided to Tunisian magistrates helped carry out counter radicalisation-related investigations and contributed to the better management of terrorist detainees in prisons. In Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, the EU provided training and expertise to Counter-terrorism officials and security services with a law enforcement, investigation or prosecution mandate. Finally, the EU also contributed to developing a Libyan National Strategy on Counterterrorism. However, with the current circumstances, as well as the longstanding lack of solid security institutions in Libya, its implementation remains very challenging.

Delivering on its set priorities on fighting terrorism in external relations, the EU has undertaken a number of specific actions to support partner countries. In Lebanon, the EU helped to operationalise the 2018 National Strategy to combat Violent Extremism and assisted in the drafting of Lebanon's National Action Plan, aiming to reinforce intra/inter-agency cooperation and tackling the issue of overcrowded prisons and the risk of radicalisation of detainees. In Jordan, an EU-funded project aimed at youth empowerment via the promotion of (social) media literacy in schools contributed to countering radicalisation and fostering mutual understanding among youth in four governorates.

4.6. Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs)

4.6.1. Introduction (Policy developments)

The Overseas Association Decision (OAD)⁷⁹ establishes the legal framework for relations among the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs)⁸⁰, the Member States to which they are linked and the EU. As stated in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the purpose of the association is to promote the economic and social development of the OCTs, to establish close economic relations between them and the EU as a whole, and to promote EU values in the wider world.

In this context, the EU provided financial support to the OCTs for 2014-2020, through the EDF, with EUR 364.5 million allocated under the 11th EDF–OCT, and through the Greenland Instrument with EUR 217.8 million from the EU budget⁸¹.

The 11th EDF–OCT resources available to the OCTs are (Annex 2 of the OAD): EUR 229.5 million for territorial allocations to 16 OCTs, in accordance with the criteria established in the Decision; EUR 100 million for regional cooperation and integration; EUR 21.5 million in Envelope B to finance humanitarian and emergency assistance; EUR 5 million to finance interest subsidies and technical assistance through the OCT Investment Facility managed by the EIB; and EUR 8.5 million for studies and technical assistance.

Regional programmes seek to foster cooperation among OCTs in the same region that share similar challenges and priorities. Partnerships with other funding sources, including other EU financial instruments, are encouraged through cooperation with the neighbouring ACP and/or third countries as well as the EU's outermost regions.

In addition to territorial and regional programmes, an allocation for the Thematic programme covering all OCTs fosters inter-OCT cooperation.

Despite the departure of the 12 UK OCTs on 31 January 2020 (Brexit) following the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement, all 12 UK OCTs have benefitted from the EDF (and budget funds) related to the 2014-2020 MFF. Nevertheless, as from the Brexit date they are no longer entitled to participate in the institutional set-up of the OAD.

4.6.2. Working towards the SDGs

The EU actively supported the OCTs on Agenda 2030 during the 2014-2020 programming period.

⁷⁹<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013D0755>

⁸⁰Until 31 January 2020, the EU OCTs depended constitutionally on four of the EU Member States: Denmark, France, United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The 25 EU OCTs were: Anguilla, Aruba, Bermuda, Bonaire, British Antarctic Territory, British Indian Ocean Territory, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curaçao, Falkland Islands, French Polynesia, French Southern and Antarctic Territories, Greenland, Montserrat, New Caledonia, Pitcairn Islands, Saba, Saint Helena and Dependencies, Saint Martin, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Saint Barthélemy, St Eustatius, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands and Wallis and Futuna.

After the UK withdrawal on 31 January 2020, 13 EU OCTs remain: Greenland (DK), French Polynesia (FR), French Southern and Antarctic Territories (FR), New Caledonia and Dependencies (FR), Saint Barthelemy (FR), St. Pierre and Miquelon (FR), Wallis and Futuna Islands (FR), Aruba (NL), Bonaire (NL), Curaçao (NL), Saba (NL), Sint Eustatius (NL), Sint Maarten (NL).

⁸¹ The European Council's decision on relations between the EU and Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014D0137&from=EN>) allocates EUR 217.8 million for the period 2014–2020 to encourage cooperation between the Union and Greenland in areas of mutual interest.

SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing

EU budget support helped to finance the connection of Wallis and Futuna to the Tui-Samoa digital cable. The introduction of broadband has made it possible to have over 300 remote medical consultations a year for a population of 11 558 people.

SDG 4 Quality education

Access to quality education fosters equality and is an essential means of achieving sustainable growth and jobs. This is the rationale for EU cooperation with Greenland. This budget support programme (almost EUR 215 million for the period 2014-2020) is the most substantial EU-OCT cooperation programme.

Aruba's cooperation (total EUR 13.05 million) aims at offering innovative STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) curricula in a consortium with European learning centres of excellence.

With EU support, Anguilla and the Turks and Caicos Islands addressed the impacts of the pandemic on the education sector and continued to rebuild and improve school infrastructure following the devastation of hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Through the Erasmus+ programme, the EU also supported OCTs in facilitating mobility of individuals, and reinforcing intercultural dialogue and understanding. OCT participation has more than doubled since 2018, in the number of both projects and beneficiaries. From 87 projects with 41 beneficiaries (total EUR 3.2 million) in 2018, participation grew to 177 projects and 95 beneficiaries (EUR 5.5 million) in 2020.

SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation

As part of the broader EU support to access to water and sanitation, the construction of wastewater collection systems and of treatment facilities contributes to delivery on SDG 6. The programme for Sint Maarten (EUR 7 million) aims to enhance resilient public service infrastructures through the expansion of the sewerage network in the territory.

SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy

Sustainable energy is key to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement with the long-term objective to decarbonise economic activity. In Saba (total EUR 3.55 million) and Sint Eustatius (total EUR 2.45 million) the EU supported the development of the necessary policy and legal framework in the energy sector, providing further impetus to ensure access to sustainable energy.

SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth

Bilateral programmes for French OCTs (total of EUR 105.7 million) contributed to the implementation of SDG 8. The EU support on employment (New Caledonia), sustainable tourism (French Polynesia and Saint Pierre et Miquelon) and digital (Wallis et Futuna) drives progress in ensuring sustained economic growth, full employment and decent work.

SDG 13 Climate action, SDG 14 Life below water and SDG 15 Life on land

As islands, the OCTs are very vulnerable to climate change and environmental degradation. The all-OCT Thematic Programme and the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific regional programmes (for a total of EUR 97.8 million) are dedicated to ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources, protecting biodiversity and supporting climate actions and resilience, showing the vital importance of

these areas and SDGs for all OCTs. The European Green Deal will provide further impetus to EU-OCT cooperation on global challenges, like the environment and climate change.

4.6.3. Implementation

Institutional dialogue

The institutional political and policy dialogues foreseen in the OAD have continued throughout the year despite the exceptional circumstances prevailing in 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis. The main political event, the 18th EU-OCT Forum, was chaired by Commissioner Urpilainen on 10 December 2020 in Brussels. It took place by video conference under the auspices of Curaçao as Chair of the OCT Association (OCTA) and saw the participation of high-level representatives from the OCTs and relevant Member-States. Two tripartite consultation meetings were held in February and November, also chaired by the European Commission, with participation from OCTs and relevant EU Member States. No partnership ad hoc working parties took place, as the bulk of the work focused on the COVID-19 response.

Bilateral cooperation

As part of the EU global response to COVID-19, OCTs benefited in 2020 from the reorientation of on-going programmes and the front-loading of budget support operations. Together with the mobilisation of all remaining funds from the EDF OCT B-envelope (emergency assistance), the total amount of the Commission's COVID-19 response to OCTs went up to EUR 111 million. For more details on the global COVID-19 response, see Table 1 in Chapter 1.

OCTs in the Caribbean region

With the adoption of the 11th EDF programming documents for Curaçao and Sint Maarten in 2020, all OCTs have finalised their programming and the entire territorial envelope was committed before the end of 2020. The programme for Curaçao will enhance climate and social resilience through improved basic infrastructure and community strengthening. In Sint Maarten work will focus on the extension of the sewerage system, while providing technical assistance for the potential strengthening of cross-border cooperation with Saint-Martin.

COVID-19 support to the Caribbean OCTs was channelled through the topping up of the regional cooperation programme and the frontloading of budget support operations, bringing total support to EUR 28.1 million.

OCTs in the Pacific region

To support the Pacific OCTs during the COVID-19 crisis, budget support operations were frontloaded and topped up from the B-envelope, for a total of EUR 19.86 million. New Caledonia continued to undertake efforts in the employment sector through better access to training programmes. French Polynesia mitigated adverse effects of the pandemic on the tourism sector and started reviewing its sustainable tourism strategy to foster resilience. Wallis and Futuna expanded digital services linked to the Tui-Samoa broadband cable⁸², improving tele-medicine facilities in the territory.

⁸²The Tui-Samoa submarine cable runs between Apia, Samoa and Suva, Fiji, with landing stations in Savai'i, Savusavu and Wallis and Futuna.

Greenland

Greenland benefited from a contribution of EUR 33.22 million from the 2020 EU budget focusing on education. This programme supports the reform of the elementary school system, contributing to improve school management and to upgrade skills of teachers.

Regional and all-OCTs cooperation

One thematic and three regional programmes are being implemented under the 11th EDF. UK territories will continue to benefit from these programmes, despite the UK's withdrawal from the EU, until the programmes are concluded. The Pacific regional programme (EUR 36 million) contributes to protecting biodiversity and renewable natural resources, the Caribbean regional programme (EUR 40 million) focuses on resilience, sustainable energy and marine biodiversity, and the Indian Ocean regional programme (EUR 4 million) aims to improve the surveillance of terrestrial and marine ecosystems in the French Southern and Antarctic Lands, restoring ecosystems and reinforcing prevention. The all-OCTs thematic programme (EUR 17.8 million) focuses on sustainable energy, climate change and COVID-19 response measures.

Finally, through an operating grant in 2020, the Commission supported the OCT Association with its mandate of representing OCTs and facilitating dialogue with OCT partners.

Lessons learnt

Budget support is generally the preferred implementation modality for OCTs' territorial allocations (14 partners out of 17, including Greenland). It is an efficient way of addressing crosscutting, long-term and structural challenges, of focusing on the results of territorial policies and of maintaining a constructive policy dialogue. Practice confirms that this modality provides satisfactory results in OCTs through a high level of appropriation from local authorities. Thanks to front-loading, budget support proved also very appropriate for tackling emerging needs due to the COVID-19 crisis. Overall, nearly EUR 83 million of direct budget support was agreed for disbursement in favour of OCTs in 2020.

CASE STUDY

Greenland-EU Cooperation: Expanding education opportunities in the Arctic

Greenland is the world's largest island, accounting for 20 % of the total EU surface. With 0.03 people per square kilometre (or 35 km² per each inhabitant), it has the lowest population density in the world. Combined with limited infrastructure, this poses formidable challenges for ensuring equal access to quality education.

The EU and Greenland joined hands through the Greenland Education Programme. This partnership pools budget support, technical expertise and policy dialogue to achieve a higher standard of living and quality of life in Greenland. Our cooperation has yielded positive results. The island registered a 7 % increase in graduations between 2013 and 2019. Better quality of education increased employability with about 99.3 % of students finding a job within one year of graduation. In particular girls and women benefitted from this cooperation. They account for 54 % of vocational training graduates, 60 % of high school graduates and 70 % of graduates from tertiary education. Innovation and digital technologies are pivotal elements of this success. Greenland initiated a distance learning high school programme (eGUX) in 2018, which has proved especially valuable during the COVID-19 crisis, fostering resilience. Our policy dialogue informed a draft new Law on Higher Education inspired by international education quality standards, and an education strategy for the period 2020-

2030 to consolidate the achievements of the reform. Finally, Greenland's strong commitment to education is also demonstrated in the budgetary allocations to the sector, which increased from 14.8 % in 2005 to 25 % of the total budget in the past few years.

4.6.4. Humanitarian aid and civil protection – responding to the emergency needs of people affected by conflicts and disasters

In 2020, the EU continued to support the provision of relief assistance and protection to vulnerable Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the southern Caribbean, including the Nederland Antilles. This assistance has been channelled through the Commission's network of humanitarian mandated organisations. Moreover, during 2020, following the EU Civil Protection Mechanism activation, the Netherlands offered in-kind assistance to the Dutch Caribbean islands, including medical equipment, tests, personal protective equipment, ventilators and medicines. In-kind assistance was delivered to Curacao, Aruba and Sint Maarten by air and sea transport.

5. Managing Aid

5.1. Monitoring Systems

5.1.1. New reporting system on SDGs

At the end of 2018, the Working Party on Development Finance Statistics of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC WP-STAT) that supervises ODA reporting among DAC members, decided to start reporting on SDGs in ODA statistics.














The decision made before the end of 2018 to adjust reporting rules allowed reporters to have complete annual data sets by SDGs as of year 2019. However, before starting to compile data, there was no time to create any rules to support consistency of reporting, or to support the input of statistics by operational teams. The data quality of the SDG field therefore remains a work in progress. It is expected that a first set of business rules for enhancing the consistent encoding of SDGs will be operational before the end of 2021.


In addition, electronic tools using artificial intelligence and text mining techniques are currently in development to support the mapping of relevant SDGs at project and programme level. They should provide a helpful data quality instrument for agents in charge of designing projects and encoding project data in IT systems and reporting.

Targeted SDGs are recorded at commitment and payment level as per ODA taxonomy. The transversal nature of SDGs is taken into account, as one single commitment is often connected to several SDGs (with the system allowing up to 10 entries). This allows presenting the multiple benefits of any action in relation to the SDGs, and the compilation of all actions that contribute to a particular SDG. Consequently, unlike vertical sectoral statistical breakdowns such as the DAC purpose codes, the aggregate total is larger than the figure for total ODA as several SDGs can be targeted simultaneously. In order to address this issue while preserving the reporting of interlinkages between SDGs, a change has been implemented at the end of 2020. It is now mandatory to report one single main SDG and up to 9 significant SDGs for each project. With the new system, the sum of financial flows related to the main SDG will always equal the total amount of financial flows, but it will still be possible to report several SDGs for one project by using the significant SDG field. Year 2021 data will be the first to benefit from this new system.

The coverage of SDG reporting has improved since 2019 and will further improve in future reporting years. For year 2020, SDGs were reported for 97 % of committed amounts excluding administrative costs (compared to 80 % in 2019) and 74 % of disbursements (51 % in 2019). With the caveats mentioned above about methodological approaches under constant review and improvement, it is possible to trace all the projects, and aggregate the related volume of commitments, which contribute to the implementation of each individual SDG in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Synthesis of the volume of commitments for each SDGs in 2020 (EUR)

 <p>1 NO POVERTY</p>		3.18 billion
 <p>2 ZERO HUNGER</p>		1.72 billion
 <p>3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</p>		9.63 billion
 <p>4 QUALITY EDUCATION</p>		1.7 billion
 <p>5 GENDER EQUALITY</p>		3.74 billion
 <p>6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION</p>		1.82 billion
 <p>7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY</p>		1.94 billion
 <p>8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p>		4.61 billion
 <p>9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE</p>		1.93 billion
 <p>10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</p>		3.3 billion
 <p>11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</p>		1.72 billion
 <p>12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION</p>		1.14 billion
 <p>13 CLIMATE ACTION</p>		2.68 billion

		110.4 million
		831.2 million
		3.35 billion
		2.59 billion

In 2020, the proportion of commitments that have been reported with more than one SDG has substantially increased (50 % up from 9 % in 2019) and 14 % of commitments are reported with more than five SDGs (up from 1 % in 2019). This denotes a better understanding of the notion of interlinkages between SDGs and that each action can create synergies across the whole framework, contributing to the pursuit of sustainable development. At the same time, it makes all the more necessary to have a reporting system that presents a main and other significant SDGs in order to handle aggregated information better.

A preliminary analysis has shown that the SDGs used most in a multiple combination are SDG 1, 5, 8 and 9, reflecting their highly transversal nature⁸³.

In this context of recognised complexity and recalling that most projects contribute to several SDGs, the top five targeted SDGs in 2020 is quite similar to the list from 2019: SDG 1 (Poverty reduction - pursued by projects amounting to EUR 3.18 billion), SDG 5 (Gender equality – EUR 3.74 billion), SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth – EUR 4.61 billion), SDG 10 (Reducing inequalities – EUR 3.3 billion) and SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions – EUR 3.35 billion). Consistent with the nature of the SDGs, which balance the three dimensions of sustainable development, this reporting also shows a significant and growing effort to contribute to the SDGs that are closer to environmental concerns.

The statistics also allows examination of the geographic breakdown of specific SDGs. The two examples below show the geographical focus of SDG 10 (reducing inequalities – see Figure 2), where Africa dominates, and SDG 4 (quality education – see Figure 3) where the breakdown is more even.

⁸³ A more detailed analysis of interlinkages of SDGs and related guidance remains to be elaborated further, to enhance consistency in the reporting of projects that contribute to several SDGs, including a coherent presentation of the main SDG and other significant SDGs.

Figure 2. Funds committed to projects contributing to SDG 10 in 2020

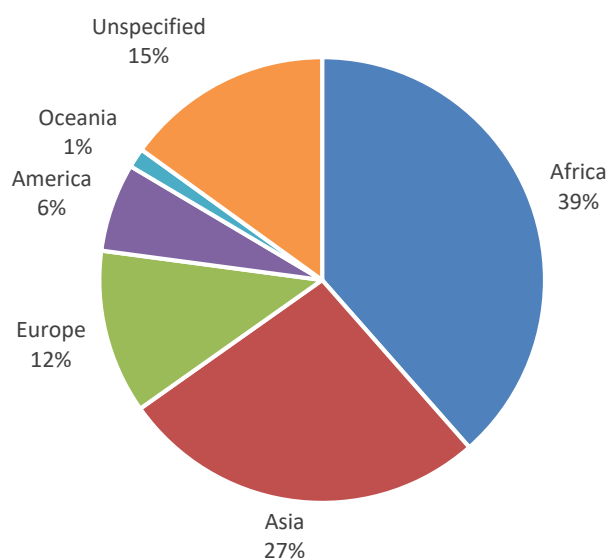
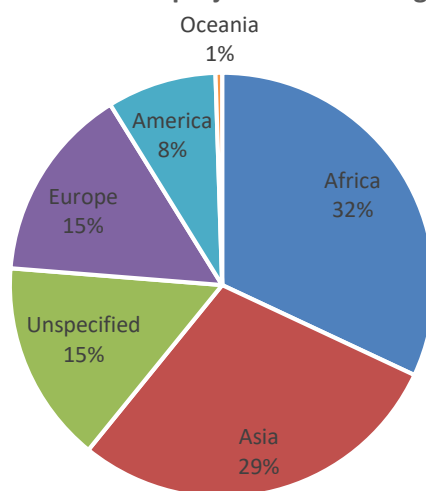















Figure 3. Funds committed to projects contributing to SDG 4 in 2020



Another way to look at the data is to focus of the Commission interventions in one or several SDGs in a given country or group of countries.

As an example, the two figures below show the SDG targeted by the Commission in Least Developed Countries (Figure 4) and Upper Middle-Income countries (Figure 5) in 2020 (commitments). While poverty reduction and basic services dominate in LDCs, the SDGs targeted are much more evenly spread in UMICs with a focus on growth and environmental issues. Again, the quantitative information below indicates the volume of commitments of all projects that contribute to a particular SDG, but these figures should be considered as they stand, without further aggregation, given that most projects contribute to several SDGs.

Figure 4. Commitments by SDG to Least Developed Countries in 2020 (EUR)

 <p>1 NO POVERTY</p>	983 million
 <p>2 ZERO HUNGER</p>	599.6 million
 <p>3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</p>	842.1 million
 <p>4 QUALITY EDUCATION</p>	420.7 million
 <p>5 GENDER EQUALITY</p>	951.8 million
 <p>6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION</p>	409 million
 <p>7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY</p>	339.3 million
 <p>8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p>	1.07 billion
 <p>9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE</p>	356.1 million
 <p>10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</p>	621.5 million
 <p>11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</p>	97.75 million
 <p>12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION</p>	33.16 million
 <p>13 CLIMATE ACTION</p>	380.2 million














	0
	99.4 million
	1.06 billion
	363.2 million

Figure 5. Commitments by SDG to Upper Middle-Income countries in 2020 (EUR)

	385 million
	67.16 million
	90.63 million
	257.4 million
	405 million
	255.3 million
	75.9 million
	655.8 million

	264.5 million
	304 million
	123.4 million
	234 million
	364.4 million
	30.9 million
	97.43 million
	491.8 million
	458.3 million

The exercise of reporting on SDGs is only at the end of its second year and is improving constantly. With the new Multiannual Financial Framework starting in 2021, the objective remains to incorporate it in the financial annexes of the annual report starting next year, based on methodological improvements and supporting tools and guidance under elaboration both at OECD and at Commission level.

5.1.2. Evaluation: review of the work programme

Commission evaluation services are responsible for steering, coordination, monitoring and reporting of the evaluation function. They produce timely, high-quality evaluation results to ensure evidence for informed decision-making and accountability. They carry out strategic evaluations, which can be geographic, thematic, sectoral or focused on specific financing instruments or budget support. They also monitor and support the evaluations carried out by other Commission departments that implement EU projects and programmes.

In 2020, the Commission published eleven strategic evaluations in the field of EU external action, comprising:

- Two thematic evaluations, on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and on gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment (2010-2018);
- Two country-level evaluations on EU cooperation with Myanmar and Armenia;
- A mid-term evaluation of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa (2015-2019);
- A Strategic evaluation of EU's State Building Contracts (2012-2018);
- An evaluation of the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities thematic programme (2014-2019);
- An evaluation of the EU's engagement with Civil Society in the enlargement, neighbourhood regions and Russia over the period 2007-2018;
- An evaluation of EU Support to local authorities in Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions;
- An evaluation of the performance of EU Info Centres in the Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions (2011–2017); and
- An evaluation of Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development, in accordance with the requirements of the amendment to the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace Regulation, from 2017.

As of December 2020, strategic evaluations were in progress for the following areas:

- 1) Ten thematic/instrument evaluations on:
 - a) Migration;
 - b) Sustainable food systems;
 - c) Rule of Law and anti-corruption;
 - d) 'Collect More, Spend Better': PFM including domestic resource mobilisation and utilisation;
 - e) EU cooperation with the World Bank;
 - f) EU cooperation with the UN;
 - g) The EU initial response to COVID-19;
 - h) IPA CBC mid-term evaluation;
 - i) EU support to climate change and environment in neighbourhood and enlargement regions; and
 - j) TAIEX.

- 2) Thirteen country-level evaluations on:
 - a) Angola;
 - b) Central African Republic;
 - c) Guatemala;
 - d) Mauritania;
 - e) Tajikistan
 - f) Tunisia;
 - g) Serbia;
 - h) Montenegro;
 - i) North Macedonia;
 - j) Moldova;
 - k) Georgia;
 - l) Iraq; and

- m) Ukraine.

- 3) Two budget support evaluation on:
 - a) Kyrgyzstan; and
 - b) Morocco.

5.1.3. Lessons learned

Some key lessons emerged from the evaluations of EU cooperation published in 2020.

Mid-term evaluation of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa (2015-2019)

The evaluation assessed the extent to which this Emergency Trust Fund, whose implementation activities started only in 2016, has achieved its objectives at this point in time (mid-term). The evaluation concluded that the EUTF, being a short-term emergency instrument, seemed to have too wide a mandate; despite its time-limited nature it was tasked with addressing the root causes of some of the most intractable societal challenges that are faced by partner countries. Important results have been achieved in building the capacity of national bodies responsible for migration management throughout the EUTF region and cross-border cooperation between these bodies has been an important development in some cases. However, the EUTF's focus on irregular migration, combined with weak migration policy frameworks in partner countries, has somewhat undermined attempts to engage in effective dialogue on the larger migration challenges. Still, with a focus on some of the world's most vulnerable groups, the EUTF has established a solid and comprehensive system for knowledge production and quality assurance in the area of migration.

Evaluation of the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities thematic programme (2014-2019)

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the EU support given to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Local Authorities (LAs) partners through the CSO-LA Thematic Programme, focusing on the support made at country level and managed by the EU Delegations. The evaluation found that the ambition level of the programme was too high, reaching its ambition would require more attention to the challenges of political economy (and especially which opportunities to seize) as well as to whole-of-EU approaches. The adoption of a predominantly project-based approach, the choice of mechanisms, and available procedures were not ideal for reaching the ambitious and highly complex aims of the programme. Better use of resources implies more flexible modalities and more attention to supporting interventions that are likely to be transformative or contribute to transformation either by being linked to wider processes or because they are genuinely catalytic.

External Evaluation of EU's Support to Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding (2013-2018)

The evaluation assessed the extent to which the EU has achieved its conflict prevention and peacebuilding (CPPB) objectives and the impact of EU CPPB support on the ground between 2011 and 2018⁸⁴. Furthermore, it was intended to examine the progress recorded by the EU in its support for CPPB since the 2001-2010 evaluation. EU support to CPPB has clearly generated an added value by its substantial financial resources, long-term commitment, convening power, relative political

⁸⁴ Although the evaluation as commissioned referred to the 2013 - 2017 timeframe, 2018 was also included.

neutrality and willingness to invest in complex situations of conflict and protracted crisis. There has been progress on mainstreaming CPPB at higher policy and strategic levels but insufficient progress at regional, country-related strategic and intervention levels.

In addition, there is a need to provide guidance on how to translate high-level CPPB political priorities and objectives into programming and implementation. The EU frequently adopts a reactive rather than a proactive stance in delivering support for CPPB. Translating early warning into early action remains difficult. Human rights integration was overall appropriate, but there is room to improve the mainstreaming of gender sensitivity, in particular at the implementation level.

External Evaluation of the EU's Cooperation with Myanmar (2012-2017)

The evaluation assessed the extent to which the EU has achieved its development cooperation objectives and impact on the ground during the period 2012-2017. The EU pursued a comprehensive approach to support peace in Myanmar. Peace was addressed across four sectors, and interventions were in general conflict-sensitive although this was not always approached in a formalised and systematic manner. Significant results were achieved. However, some intended results were not achieved, such as linking education to the labour market. Positive results were achieved on gender and human rights at the intervention level, however, without resulting in substantial nation-wide advances towards greater respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and gender. Environment and climate change considerations were insufficiently integrated into programming. In general, there is a need to implement a systematic approach to conflict sensitivity across the EU country programme, in order to ensure sustainability and continuity.

Evaluation of EU cooperation with Armenia

The timeframe covered by the evaluation was 2010–2017. The EU's geopolitical, cultural and economic influence and the range of instruments and modalities available have provided considerable added value to its cooperation with Armenia. System-wide changes were realised in the areas of vocational education and training, agriculture and rural development. The justice sector improved largely in terms of legislation and institutional reforms, but improvements in the actual performance of the judiciary and criminal justice system were constrained by inadequate resources and political will from the side of the Government. Public administration reform was constrained by the absence of a central government authority to coordinate and implement reforms, while public financial management progressed well. Legislative and constitutional changes improved the formal situation with regard to human rights, supported by an innovative EU human rights budget support programme. Engagement with and support for civil society organisations has contributed to a more healthy and vibrant civil society scene; their involvement in policy and dialogue has strengthened policy making in some areas. The EU has emerged at the end of this evaluation period with clearer objectives and a coherent and powerful range of instruments to support Armenia's resilience, development and reforms within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. More work is needed, however, to strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning at the level of the EU's strategic support to the country. Larger interventions can be improved with more realistic assessments of political economy factors and organisational capacities at the design stage, together with greater responsiveness to events during implementation. Staff levels in the delegation need to be proportional to the workload.

Evaluation of EU Support to local authorities in Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions

The evaluation's scope covered the 2010-2018 period, during which the EU has increasingly been taking local authorities seriously as policy interlocutors, development actors and key entry points for strengthening democracy at local level. Furthermore, the EU has progressively been using a wider set of modalities and instruments to assist local authorities, and in a conducive environment this has led to comprehensive and truly integrated approaches, enabling local authorities, benefiting local citizens and businesses, as well as improving accountability and effective service delivery. The EU used two types of engagement for empowerment: The first is aimed at fostering more systemic reforms through, for example, increased allocation from central government and increased share of taxes retained locally. Secondly, the EU also uses smaller project approaches, such as local economic development interventions, with the ambition of raising the economic activity level to catalyse job-creation and increase the local tax base. Clearly, the systemic reforms are often more sustainable and transformative. However, in a less conducive environment, stand-alone projects, particularly those with a longer-term vision to progressively strengthen local authorities and change national framework conditions can be a strategic option. In all cases, the issue of politics is central in explaining success and failure - especially with more comprehensive reform efforts. The outcomes of the EU's work have been most impressive when embedded in wider government-led efforts to improve the framework conditions.

The Evaluation of the performance of EU Info Centres in the Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions (2011–2017)

The evaluation was intended to support EU Info Centre communication performance improvements in the enlargement region and to assess the potential for the introduction of similar structures in the neighbourhood region. EU Delegations in the Western Balkans and Turkey are overall pleased with the support received from the EU Info Centres and believe they contribute to improving awareness of EU policies, projects and values, and of the accession process. In neighbourhood partner countries communication agencies are running multi-channel campaigns, are a good contribution to awareness and some examples of behaviour change can be identified. The assessment of performance in both regions tends to focus on reach data and observations while opportunities for analysis and learning of lessons are not harnessed. Despite the lack of available evidence to draw conclusions on efficiency and effectiveness, which is therefore a significant weakness in the Info Centre approach, it is concluded that contractors performed well in meeting EU Delegation expectations for communication support, including in generating additional visibility of the EU, in particular in relation to Europe Days and the other similar events. On the other hand, EU Info Centres have not performed well as walk-in information centres, and this relates to the low relevance of this type of service to public needs. Several targeted recommendations for reviewing the human and financial resources as well as the intervention logic underpinning the work of the EU Info Centres have been developed.

Evaluation of the EU's engagement with Civil Society in the enlargement, neighbourhood regions and Russia over the period 2007-2018

The evaluation assessed the range of ways in which the EU has supported and engaged with civil society in these regions through targeted financial support; mainstreamed support, i.e., support to civil society, as implementing partners; and policy-level engagement with civil society, e.g., through policy dialogue and multi-stakeholder fora. The evaluation highlighted the relevance of EU support, particularly in countries where there is shrinking space for CSOs to participate in democratic

processes, and the well-defined complementarities in the cooperation of EU and Member States. Consultation with CSOs on needs and priorities has become increasingly systematic and the use of Financial Support to Third Parties has increased opportunities for smaller CSOs. On the more negative side, the evaluation found that the commitment and contracting of funds to support civil society does not fully reflect strong EU policy statements in favour of civil society. Also, the evaluation found that EU Monitoring and Evaluation systems do not effectively capture and report on the quantity and quality of civil society support and that sustainability of civil society interventions is not adequately addressed by grant beneficiaries or the EU.

Evaluation of the EU's external action support in the area of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment (2010-2018)

The evaluation assessed the contribution of EU external action support in the policy area of gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE), in particular the relevance, conditions of implementation and performance of EU external action (provided by the EU, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and EU Member States) to promote GEWE and its mainstreaming, particularly its efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and the EU added value.

Making further progress on GEWE requires strong leadership, i.e., at HQ and partner country level, strongly embedded in the institutional and organisational set-up and processes. Gender expertise needs to be in place in influential positions in the hierarchy, both at HQ and at EUD level; gender task forces cutting across sectors help to reinforce mainstreaming. The absence of comprehensive and coherent approaches, based on initiatives already in place in the partner country, hampers the consolidation of positive experiences at local level and limits the possibilities to strategically address root causes of gender inequality. Gender analysis has proven its value for enhancing gender mainstreaming in EU support, but needs to be further systematised and deepened (in sectors of cooperation not yet covered). It is useful to combine activities focussing on the EU's rights-based approach with activities focusing on GEWE, as it contributes to increasing synergies between internal EU processes. Multi-country initiatives with international organisations, such as UN agencies, can provide clear benefits at various levels for the EU, including access to expertise; however, they cannot compensate for the absence of leadership on GEWE at EU level. Actively involving national CSOs in structured programming and policy processes of EU external action in the area of GEWE, such as CSO Roadmaps, is a pre-condition for ensuring that the support to GEWE going through these actors contributes to the expected objectives at macro level. Non-spending activities promoting GEWE at country level (such as ad hoc events or site visits by high level officials) need to be better connected to EU support in the main areas of cooperation and related spending actions on GEWE; this would further enhance their value added in terms of contribution to the expected outcomes.

Combined Evaluation of the European Union's Humanitarian Interventions in Iraq and in the Protection Sector, 2014-2018

This combined, independent evaluation focused on Commission department's humanitarian interventions in Iraq and its humanitarian protection interventions globally from 2014 to 2018; it included a case study on child protection and education. Programming in Iraq and globally in the Protection sector generally achieved short-term objectives; addressing broader threats and deeper vulnerabilities encountered more challenges. Advocacy in Iraq had multiple areas of success. Efficiency and cost-effectiveness in Iraq were appropriate, with possibilities for building staff capacities. Nexus results were relatively weak despite some successes. There was some variability in

the quality of needs analyses in Iraq and globally, with good relevance of programming relative to needs identified and the context, though with questions regarding the decreased funding in 2018. Recommendations focus on strengthening protection programming, advocacy, strategic planning, capacity for assessing efficiency and cost-effectiveness, deliberation around humanitarian principles, and the nexus.

Evaluation of the European Union's humanitarian assistance in Ukraine, 2014-2018

This evaluation covers Commission programming in Ukraine 2014-2018 (EUR 118.4 million). In total 65 actions were delivered by 21 Implementing Partners and covered Protection, Health, Basic Needs (including Food Security, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), and Education in Emergencies. The evaluation found that Commission departments were rapid and effective, and overall performed very well. They demonstrated system-wide leadership in strategic thinking and coordination. Member States highly regarded the field team's strength and its access to the Non-Government-Controlled Areas (NGCAs). In Ukraine, Commission departments supported several innovations: notably system-wide joint and impartial needs assessment, advancing an explicit Joint Humanitarian-Development Framework with the other European Union services, and supporting the creation of the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund. All donors, including Commission departments, were somewhat slow to adapt their programming to the unusually high proportion of vulnerable elderly persons in the affected population. Government, development and humanitarian actors were also slow to connect and work together in the most-affected Government-Controlled Areas. Although access is difficult, needs in the NGCAs remain high, and should continue to be the focus of advocacy and programming in 2020 and beyond.

Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development evaluation (2020)

This initial evaluation of CBSD reached positive preliminary conclusions about the added value of the initiative, in line with SDG 16. Lessons learned include: i) Balancing crisis response needs and longer-term engagement: Ensuring that actions realistically reflect what can be achieved in the time available is key; ii) Sustainability: While it is desirable that capacity-building efforts are sustainable in the long term, in the context of crisis-response actions, the primary objective is short-term crisis response with a view to achieving development, not military, objectives. From this perspective, capacity-building of military actors is a means to a short-term, civilian end. A close link between CBSD actions and the political dialogue conducted by the EU with national authorities is needed to achieve and sustain positive outcomes; iii) CBSD conditionality: The recourse to military actors to undertake development activities where they are the only actors who can do so under the given circumstances poses several challenges. One is to ensure that they add value while not undermining civilian efforts to carry out similar activities elsewhere or as soon as conditions allow civilian actors to take up their role again; iv) Respect for human rights and the rule of law: ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law is a cornerstone of CBSD engagement. CBSD actions are found to include relevant activities to strengthen respect for human rights and the rule of law; v) Managing expectations: CBSD actions do not, and will not, provide comprehensive military assistance. CBSD actions are to be used exclusively in the specific, exceptional circumstances outlined in the Regulation and must focus on civilian ends; vi) Integrated approach: Benefits of CBSD actions are particularly notable where they form part of an integrated approach, combining different development or humanitarian instruments and forms of engagement toward a common objective, with a view also to ensuring effective civil-military coordination.

5.2. Aid delivery modalities

5.2.1. Budget Support

EU budget support has been instrumental in helping 95 countries and OCTs in their response to the pandemic and to the global slowdown – quickly, tangibly and meaningfully.

For that purpose, the European Union disbursed EUR 3 billion of budget support grants in 2020 reaching an exceptionally high level compared to payments in the recent past that have ranged from EUR 1.6 to 1.8 billion annually between 2014 and 2019. In 2020, budget support accounted for 24 % of all payments made by Commission departments International Partnerships and Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations.

The EU has demonstrated a great deal of flexibility by redesigning and/or topping-up on-going budget support programmes, front-loading payments and designing new operations where needed, notably Resilience Contracts in the Western Balkans (Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Montenegro) and in the Neighbourhood (Armenia, Georgia, and Morocco). Policy dialogue, support to reforms, budget support eligibility checks, and progress monitoring continued to be performed despite the circumstances.



Assisting poor households in Paraguay

With the contribution of EU budget support and additional technical assistance, more than two million vulnerable people benefitted from state subsidies for food and social assistance to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic. The EU supported the government of Paraguay to accelerate the rollout of its social protection scheme *Vamos!*

These funds provided the partner countries with additional fiscal space to cope with revenue shortfall, to meet additional costs for health systems and to finance their efforts towards households or local businesses in need. In some instances, it was essential to preserve macroeconomic stability and ensure business continuity for states' key functions and essential public services⁸⁵. This financial support contributed to fostering countries' resilience, allowed them to keep a focus on the reforms pursued in different sectors and prevented further economic and social setbacks.

⁸⁵ Examples of EU budget support contribution to countries' COVID-19 response plans and to SDGs more broadly can be found in the [Budget Support – Trends and Results report 2021](#).



Delivering public services in Afghanistan

The Citizens' Charter is a government-led programme in Afghanistan to bring basic public services to the population and to empower local bodies to decide over the use of funds. With EU support, it delivers clean water, irrigation, electricity, roads, healthcare and education to communities. Since 2016, it has benefited more than 13 million people, notably providing access to clean drinking water for over two million people in rural communities.

In devising this response, the EU has built on its extensive experience with budget support in fragile situations and post-crisis/disaster contexts. An evaluation of 42 State and Resilience Building Contracts⁸⁶, implemented in 23 countries between 2012 and 2018, was carried out in 2020 and provided insights on delivering assistance in difficult settings. It showed how EU budget support had contributed to strengthen health systems and administrative capacities more generally, and how it made countries more resilient, when the COVID-19 crisis hit. It assessed that the EU programmes have contributed to gains in access to social services, notably for girls and women. However, the evaluation recommended paying more attention to equitable access to those services and to their quality.

Investments over the years to upgrade country systems through budget support proved to be critical to meet needs stemming from the crisis, with more effective public services. This was true for health (e.g. in Burkina Faso and Morocco), social protection (e.g. in Bangladesh, Paraguay and Rwanda), education (e.g. Kyrgyzstan), agriculture (e.g. Guatemala) and business environment (e.g. North Macedonia, Georgia and Senegal). The promotion of digitalisation also led to efficiency and accessibility gains for administrations, which helped during the crisis (e.g. Dominican Republic and Tunisia).



Fostering resilience in North Macedonia

With EU contributions, more than 2 000 micro and small companies, employing some 15 000 workers, received support with loans and conditional grants (subject to environment and socio-economic objectives). 64 % of the companies were run by women and 9 % by young persons. Almost one-quarter of beneficiaries were active in the area of green economy or in the digitalisation of their operations.

With an additional EUR 10 million of EU budget support, nearly 1 400 people started their own business, of which 32 % were women and 36 % young people, and 111 new jobs were created, of which for 59 were for women. The scheme was successful in reaching out to 135 people who had lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 crisis including 20 persons with disabilities and 26 persons from the Roma community.

Budget support has been a key element of the Team Europe response to COVID-19. It allowed the EU to engage in discussions with our partner countries on their COVID response plans and to become an active player in their rollout. By providing the EU with a platform for dialogue with the authorities on

⁸⁶ See https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/evaluation-eu-state-building-contracts-2012-2018_en

their plans, EU budget support contributed to including essential safeguards and promoting accountability in the use of public funds in response to the COVID-19 crisis.



Improving social protection in Rwanda

The EU supported Rwanda’s COVID-19 response with a view to mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on the poorest. The EU helped to improve social protection coverage of at least 400 000 vulnerable households with cash transfers, food assistance, access to finance and improved basic services. In addition, with the EU budget support contribution, two million families could benefit from health insurance.

When amending existing programmes or designing new ones, additional requirements were included in the financing agreements to mitigate risks, e.g., requiring reporting on exceptional fiscal measures or special funds, asking for audits by the relevant public institutions (and sometimes by private audit firms in support) and empowering civil society organisations in this follow-up. The EU also joined forces with Member States (Team Europe approach); the IMF, other international institutions (notably WHO) in its support to countries and in its monitoring of the situation.

In the Enlargement and the Eastern Neighbourhood regions, budget support has a strong emphasis on public administration and public finance management reforms, which contribute to transforming the national legislative and regulatory frameworks. Strengthened public administration and public finance management improve quality assurance processes for more streamlined strategic planning, coordination, monitoring and human resources management across administrations. This focus helped in 2020 to provide for reinforced oversight and safeguards regarding exceptional COVID-related procedures used by the authorities.

EU budget support was provided in full complementarity with other EU interventions (e.g. ACP-IF with the EIB for sovereign lending or EFSD for private sector financing with DFIs) and with Member States’ actions more widely (such as budget support by Member States). It was fully coordinated with EU macro-financial assistance in the Neighbourhood and Pre-Accession countries (in Georgia, Jordan, Moldova, Ukraine and in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia).



Reforming waste management in Jordan

With more than EUR 120 million since 2015, the EU has contributed to the reform of the waste management sector in Jordan. As part of EU-funded reforms, Jordan has upgraded its solid waste management law and modernised its sector monitoring system. The framework in place now provides for environmental standards in line with international best practises.

In addition, the EU has contributed to the rehabilitation of two landfills and to four pilot recycling projects within refugee camps and host communities, creating new jobs for Jordanians and Syrian refugees alike. This investment in environmental protection paves the way for further EU efforts towards a green recovery In Jordan.

This exceptional effort was also coordinated with on-going discussions on debt, which the EU has been supporting with its Member States at G20 level. The EU supported the Debt Service Suspension Initiative, promoted the Common Framework on Debt Treatments and contributed with EUR 183 million to the IMF Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust, to meet eligible low-income countries' debt service obligations to the IMF and free up money for their COVID-19 response.

EU budget support, as well as the EU contribution to debt relief, provided additional budgetary resources to partner countries in 2020 and will continue to do so in coming years, in order to deal with the consequences of the crisis and to build back better. In this perspective, the European Commission announced a Global Recovery Initiative bringing together budget support, sustainable investment and debt relief around an ambitious policy agenda for promoting SDGs. The synergies between budget support, budgetary guarantees and targeted support to improve the investment climate as part of the new integrated NDICI-Global Europe will be essential to fund a sustainable, digital and inclusive recovery and to meet countries' medium-term financing needs.

5.2.2. Blending

To finance the SDGs and respond to an increasingly complex world, development finance needs to rely on a combination of funding sources. To increase the impact of ODA, public and private funds must be leveraged as efficiently as possible. The EU must be ready to adapt and further develop its financial instruments and policy tools for investments outside the EU if it is to deliver on its ambitious commitments to sustainable development.

In this context, the EU through blending uses limited amounts of public grants to mobilise financing from partner financial institutions, like international development banks and the private sector, for projects that will do most to help countries develop. The strategic use of a limited grant element can support projects with low financial return but a high economic (i.e. societal) return. Blending projects aim to achieve sustainable growth and reduce poverty.

The EU Blending Framework currently comprises seven active regional blending facilities⁸⁷ (Africa Investment Platform (AIP), Asia Investment Facility (AIF), Caribbean Investment Facility (CIF), Investment Facility for Central Asia (IFCA), Investment Facility for the Pacific (IFP), Latin American Investment Facility (LAIF), and Neighbourhood Investment Platform (NIP)) and covers all regions of EU external cooperation (with the EU-Africa Infrastructure Trust Fund having allocated all its remaining resources in 2019). From the creation of the first blending facilities in 2007, more than EUR 8 billion of EU grants are estimated to have leveraged around EUR 70 billion of loans by financial institutions and regional development banks for a total investment volume of more than EUR 115 billion.

⁸⁷ A regional blending facility in the Western Balkans, the Western Balkans Investment Framework is not covered by this report. For more information please see: www.wbif.eu/.

The amounts approved in 2020 are presented in the Table 3 below.

2020	
NIP	406.2
AIP	212.91
ITF	0
LAIF	28.35
Thematic	131.13
IFCA	15.08
AIF	85.17
CIF	23.0
IFP	16.2
Total	918.04

Table 3. EU Blending contributions approved in 2020

(EUR million – not including fees)

In addition, in 2017 the European Commission developed the External Investment plan (EIP), a new EU initiative offering an innovative way to attract more investment, in particular from businesses and private investors, to countries in Africa and the EU Neighbourhood. At the core of the EIP, the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) combines a new guarantee instrument with two regional investment platforms (the Africa Investment Platform (AIP) and the Neighbourhood Investment Platform, NIP).

The EFSD has approved guarantees and blending investments in over 200 projects in Sub-Saharan Africa and the EU Neighbourhood, with an EU contribution exceeding EUR 5.3 billion to date. This financing is expected to mobilise over EUR 53 billion of investments in financial inclusion and support to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, as well as in renewable energy, energy efficiency, irrigation, water and wastewater management, agriculture, transport, cities and digital sectors, and social and education sectors.

Both within the EFSD framework and the other Regional Facilities, investments in the year 2020 were reoriented to support the EU global response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic consequences. Several projects provided support to the health sector, while others focused on providing finance to sectors and entrepreneurs most likely to be affected from the crisis. This included sectors such as MSMEs and entrepreneurs such as women, young people and other marginalised groups.

5.2.3. EU budget Guarantees

The European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD), the financial arm of the External Investment Plan and a powerful de-risking tool, is one of the largest public guarantee programmes in support of private sector investment for development. In 2020, the EFSD contributed to bridging the gap between the financing already available and the financing still needed to create jobs, boost growth and meet the other United Nations SDGs.

EU budgetary guarantees for loans to banks and other financial intermediaries are particularly well suited to de-risk investment in partner countries and support their sustainable development. This has made EFSD an important part of the EU's global response to COVID-19. Some guarantees have supported the health sector, such as the African Health Diagnostics Platform that supported COVAX to procure and deliver doses of vaccines for fair distribution around the world. Other guarantees, such as expanded guarantees for renewable energy, have focused on liquidity support to ensure the effective completion of investment projects despite the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic.

By the end of 2020, the Commission signed guarantee agreements with partner financial institutions for EUR 1.55 billion, exceeding the initial EFSD Guarantee capacity. This achievement marked the conclusion of the implementation of the External Investment Plan's overall guarantee which enabled partner financial institutions to generate billions of euros in much-needed investment, in particular across Africa and EU neighbourhood countries.

5.2.4. Technical Assistance: TAiEX and Twinning

The geographic scope of the Institutional Building instruments TAiEX and Twinning was extended to all developing countries and territories in 2020. TAiEX and Twinning mobilise EU Member States' public expertise to support partner countries in SDG-related issues and also supports requests related to COVID-19 responses.

The two instruments have integrated the Team Europe approach, aiming to ensure collaboration and coherence for interventions whenever and wherever they are operating. Both institutional building instruments operate within the context of the Agenda 2030 and aim at supporting partner countries to achieve the SDGs.

In its first year of implementation, TAiEX activities supported partner country's beneficiary institutions in various fields of cooperation (digitalisation, statistics and census, justice reform, health, and agriculture etc). Given the COVID-19 context, TAiEX organised events through online means, sharing the Member States' public expertise with Cape Verde, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Honduras.

The extension of Twinning to EU partner countries marks a significant moment in the development of the Instrument as it is the first time that Twinning has been put in action outside of the EU's Western Balkan and Neighbourhood regions and Turkey. The first international Twinning pilot projects were identified and will be put in place in Indonesia, Dominican Republic, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Namibia and Zambia.

5.3. Improving ways of working

5.3.1. Simplification of procedures

As of 2021, under the new Multiannual Financial Framework, most external financing instruments, including the EDF, have been replaced by a single instrument, the NDICI-Global Europe, designed to cover the entire world, with the exception of the EU candidates and potential candidates (covered by the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance) and the Overseas Countries and Territories (covered by the Overseas Association Decision). The European Instrument for International Nuclear Safety Cooperation, which has a distinct legal basis, will complement the NDICI-Global Europe instrument. This will simplify processes and result in one single set of rules applicable to external actions. While

the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) remains distinct, its implementation provisions have been harmonised with those of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument.

Indirect Management

The new Financial Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2018/1046) provides a number of simplifications to facilitate better cooperation with partner organisations.

In 2020, the Commission has signed new or updated Financial Framework Partnership Agreements, which simplify discussions on substantive actions by framing rights and obligations in advance, with the European Investment Fund⁸⁸, The International Monetary Fund⁸⁹, the Inter-American Development Bank⁹⁰, the Council of Europe⁹¹, the Council of Europe Development Bank⁹² and the World Bank Group⁹³. Negotiations have continued with the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

A Commission Decision, approved on 7 September 2020⁹⁴, now allows partner organisations to recover eligible costs based on simplified cost options (SCOs) established in line with the partner organisations' cost accounting practices and assessed by the Commission. The use of such SCOs is expected to greatly reduce the administrative burden as well as financial errors.

Also, after having finalised, in 2019, the template for contribution agreements for financial instruments, Commission departments have been working on the drafting of the corresponding manual, which will provide detailed guidance to Commission staff.

Lastly, Commission departments have worked on designing the operational and legal parameters for the first pilot project to be implemented through financing not linked to costs, a new form of Union contribution, which may be based, on the achievement of results measured by reference to previously set milestones or through performance indicators.

Direct Management

As of 1 August 2020, all Commission departments adopted the same corporate system for publication of contract notices, namely the PPMT (Public Procurement Management Tool). Under this new decentralised procedure, each Contracting Authority encodes the notices via the corporate tool PPMT, and validates them in eNotices, which transmits them electronically to the Publications Office for publication in the Official Journal of the EU. The time needed for publication of notices in the Official Journal is now much shorter: five days rather than 12.

The objective of simplifying procedures has been supported by modernisation of IT systems through the adoption of a wide corporate software suite consisting of MyWorkplace, eProcurement/eGrant and OPSYS.

⁸⁸ C(2020) 650. Signed on 11 February 2020.

⁸⁹ C(2020) 475. Signed on 28 January 2020.

⁹⁰ C(2020) 6738. Signed on 28 September 2020.

⁹¹ C(2020) 6645. Signed on 19 October 2020.

⁹² C(2020) 3713. Signed on 29 June 2020.

⁹³ C(2020) 4712. Signed on 07 July 2020.

⁹⁴ C(2020) 5790. Signed 7 September 2020.

Commission departments are currently on-boarding the Model Grant Agreement (eGrant) developed for research and innovation programmes to address external action specificities and contribute to the development of a more straightforward and user-friendly contract template.

As for the further streamlining of procurement, the main priority is to complete OPSYS's development and to on-board eProcurement. However, OPSYS is not ready to take over the new MFF from the outset of the new financial period with all the required capabilities. Alternative plans have been drawn up and focus on combinations of OPSYS, ABAC and CRIS that will allow business-continuity until OPSYS is fully developed and deployed.

5.4. Communication & transparency

5.4.1. Communication

Despite particularly challenging circumstances related to COVID-19 that led to the rescheduling of planned activities, the Commission continued to communicate on the results and achievements of EU development programmes and projects in 2020, mainly through digital events and campaigns such as the Lorenzo Natali Prize, #Faces2Hearts (cooperation with vloggers), #2030IsNow (on Sustainable Development Goals), #WithHer and Gender Action Plan III (on gender issues).

The Commission continued to work with the EEAS on strategic communication in the European Neighbourhood and to complement activities addressing disinformation and misperceptions of the EU with positive messages and success stories of people who benefited from EU assistance. Social media activities specifically targeted young audiences both inside and outside the EU and there was healthy growth of the @EuropeAid and @NEAR social media accounts.

The successful SDG-themed campaign #2030IsNow featured at 19 festivals and events across 13 Member States in 2019 and a second iteration was planned in 2020 with a new interactive installation and a greater focus on the green agenda. However, only five Member States were able to stage events, with restrictions on visitor numbers, due to the pandemic. The campaign will be implemented in digital format during the first half of 2021.

Communication of the EU and its activities in enlargement and neighbourhood partner countries was increasingly based on thematic or country-specific campaigns that reached millions of citizens. The new EU regional communication programme for the Western Balkans launched in 2020 set up the web portal WeBalkans.eu; launched the first large-scale integrated communication campaign on EU programmes open to the Western Balkans; and set up the Young European Ambassadors Network, with 60 young people from across the region. In the Neighbourhood South and East, activities continued to focus on the implementation of the two regional communication programmes: EU-Neighbours.eu. Activities included thematic online campaigns (e.g. with influencers in the South and more than 730 Young European Ambassadors in the East) and outreach events (e.g. virtual events, webinars, and briefing for Eastern Partnership media).

A major new campaign inspired by the Africa-EU Alliance was launched in 2020 with the aim of connecting directly with young Africans in their own languages, through the faces and voices of national celebrities and local heroes. With the strap line #TogetherTomorrowToday, it is the first large-scale public campaign the EU has conducted outside its borders.

The annual European Development Days, scheduled to take place on 9-10 June 2020, had to be postponed to June 2021.

All EuropeAid InfoPoint activities were digitalised. Six Kapuscinski Development Lectures (KDL) lectures were organised online between September and December in New York, Milan, Istanbul, Tartu, Luxembourg and Warsaw. The move to digital lectures led to an increase in participants with an average of 250 online viewers compared to 100 with previous lectures.

Seminars on strategic communication for country government officials as well as a press trip from the region to the Albania donor conference were organised in the Western Balkans.

5.4.2. Transparency

The Commission is firmly committed to transparency in line with the new European Consensus on Development in which the EU and its Member States reaffirm their commitment to applying the key principles of development effectiveness. The Commission has continued to improve the accountability and openness of its development assistance through publishing timely, comprehensive and forward-looking data in line with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard, the OECD-DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS) and Forward Spending Survey, and completed its first reporting on Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD). In addition, the Commission launched a joint reporting mechanism to collect and share data on the global response to COVID-19 in a Team Europe approach, consisting of the EU institutions and its Member States.

The Commission continues to be an active member of IATI and has taken several measures to increase the quality and comprehensiveness of published data. These include the upgrade to the 2.03 version of the IATI standard, increased coherence between the OECD CRS and IATI reporting, and a continued emphasis on SDG reporting. In the 2020 Aid Transparency Index, all Commission departments assessed were part of the 'good' category of donors.

The Commission remains committed to developing innovative tools to present and use development cooperation data more effectively, such as the new version of the EU Aid Explorer tool, launched in 2020, which allows users to freely explore EU and Member States' spending on official development assistance. The updated version includes enhanced functionalities and more information on project activities implementation, disbursements at country level and progress towards SDGs. The Commission also continues to engage in bilateral outreach with its Member States on transparency issues and has organised online training courses on reporting sources and tools to encourage transparency and improve overall quality of data reporting.

5.4.3. Learning

The Commission departments organise a wide range of learning events to train colleagues in Delegations and at HQ on the various priorities and key thematic development topics. The learning possibilities are also often open to a wider community, such as to practitioners from Member States or, in the case of the e-learning platform EU International Partnerships Academy, to the general public.

In 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, relevant Commission departments learning teams organised 330 different learning events gathering more than 6 300 participants. Classroom courses were organised until mid-March, and they were replaced by distance learning solutions (virtual

classes, online courses, and webinars). The themes covered a large range of topics such as development policies, thematic areas, aid delivery methods, finance and IT systems.

Also, the International Partnerships Academy, the Commission's first open online learning platform, in response to the COVID-19 crisis and the need to offer content currently conveyed through face-to-face training (still suspended) increased its efforts and in 2020 organised over 100 live webinars and 40 virtual classes where approximately 3 364 users participated. Compared to 2019, the amount of all training materials available on the website has increased by 40 % and 5 896 new users enrolled on the platform, bringing the total of enrolled users to more than 13 100 at the end of 2020 with more than 500 000 site visits.