



# Management Plan 2021

Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and  
Enlargement Negotiations - DG NEAR

**Contents**

INTRODUCTION ..... 3

PART 1. Delivering on the Commission’s priorities: main outputs for the year ..... 4

PART 2. Modernising the administration: main outputs for the year..... 24

    A. Human resource management ..... 24

    B. Sound financial management ..... 26

    C. Fraud risk management ..... 28

    D. Digital transformation and information management..... 29

    E. Sound environmental management..... 31

    F. Example(s) of initiatives to improve economy and efficiency of financial and non-financial activities ..... 32

## INTRODUCTION

The mission of DG NEAR is to take forward the EU's Neighbourhood and Enlargement policies. The DG coordinates the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and financial assistance delivered under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). It supports key reforms and democratic consolidation in partner countries, and contributes to strengthening stability and security around Europe, and fostering political and economic reforms. DG NEAR helps to promote EU values, policies and interests, and contributes to developing the special relationship of the EU with its neighbouring countries.

In the Enlargement field, DG NEAR assists those countries with the prospect of joining the EU in their efforts to meet the EU membership criteria, as defined by the Treaty on European Union and the European Council. DG NEAR closely monitors their progress and supports accession negotiations as required by the Council. The DG manages bilateral relations of the Union with candidate countries and potential candidates, frontloading reforms on rule of law, economic governance and reforms and public administration. In the Western Balkans, the DG develops and implements the EU stabilisation and association policy as defined by the European Council.

This management plan details the concrete outputs that DG NEAR will deliver in 2021.

In 2021, DG NEAR will continue taking forward the Enlargement and Neighbourhood policies, and address the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic in all partner countries. In all regions, DG NEAR will also significantly contribute to the external dimensions of key Commission priorities on the European Green Deal, a Europe fit for the digital age, an economy that works for people, and promoting our European way of life.

The DG will implement the revised enlargement methodology, continue the work on accession negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro, and take forward the first phase of accession negotiations (screening) with Albania and North Macedonia once the negotiating frameworks have been adopted.

The Commission will begin implementation of the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III). This will include implementation of the Commission's Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans adopted in October 2020 and the mobilisation of significant funding to support investments in favour of socio-economic convergence, jobs and growth. DG NEAR will implement the new approach under IPA III, ensuring stronger alignment between financial assistance and relevant reform priorities identified in the Commission's annual enlargement package.

DG NEAR will pursue all strands of cooperation and will continue engagement with Turkey, within the political margins defined by the Council.

As regards the EU's Neighbourhood, the Joint Communication on the future of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), adopted on 18 March 2020, contains a revised set of long-term policy

objectives. On the basis of the five policy objectives of the Joint Communication, new post-2020 deliverables for EaP, will be finalised with a view to their planned endorsement at the March 2021 EaP Summit. Cooperation with Southern Neighbourhood partners will be marked by the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration. The DG will work together with the EEAS and other services towards the adoption in early 2021 of a Joint Communication on the Southern Neighbourhood with a strong focus on stability, resilience, economic development and regional integration. This is an initiative included in the Commission's Work Programme 2021

## **PART 1. Delivering on the Commission's priorities: main outputs for the year**

In 2021 DG NEAR will contribute to the Commission's objective of making Europe stronger in the world by taking forward the enlargement and neighbourhood policies, and addressing the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic in partner countries.

DG NEAR aims to bring the Western Balkans closer to the EU based on a **credible, merit-based accession perspective and a revised enlargement methodology. It also aims to strengthen their socio-economic development** (*specific objective 4.1*). To that effect, it will continue to work on accession negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro, support Bosnia and Herzegovina in the implementation of the 14 Opinion key priorities, and continue to support Kosovo in implementing its SAA and European Reform Agenda. Following the adoption of negotiating frameworks for Albania and North Macedonia, the first Intergovernmental Conferences with the countries should be held in early 2021. DG NEAR will also focus on the implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan for the region and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, both adopted in 2020. DG NEAR will prepare the ground for its next Enlargement Package<sup>1</sup>, on the progress made by partners towards EU integration. Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) and Twinning activities will continue to help the enlargement countries address the recommendations of the EU enlargement strategy and of the accession negotiations. DG NEAR will also contribute to activities under the "Berlin Process".

---

<sup>1</sup> Each year the Commission adopts its "Enlargement package" - a set of documents explaining its policy on EU enlargement. Most importantly, this package includes a Communication on enlargement which sets out the way forward and takes stock of the situation in the candidate countries and potential candidates.

## General objective 4 A stronger Europe in the World

Specific objective 4.1:

**The Western Balkans are brought closer to the EU and their economic development is strengthened, based on a credible, merit-based accession perspective and application of the revised enlargement methodology**

*Related to spending programme(s)  
IPA II, IPA III*

### Main outputs in 2021:

Output	Indicator	Target
Accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia	Launch of screening process once negotiating frameworks adopted Preparations for opening the fundamentals cluster (TBC)	Q1-Q2 2021 Throughout 2021
Accession negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro: preparation of Benchmark Reports, and Draft Common Positions (DCPs); Monitoring progress in the rule of law area, in view of reporting twice a year to the Member States	Progress on accession negotiations with Montenegro / Serbia through preparation and submission of DCPs and benchmark assessment reports to COELA on chapters where the necessary conditions have been fulfilled  For Montenegro, preparation of the assessment report on interim benchmarks (once met) and the DCP with the closing benchmarks for chapter 23 and 24  Reporting to Member States on rule of law progress in Montenegro and Serbia	Throughout 2021  Q3-Q4 2021 (TBC)  Q2 and Q4
Follow-up to the key priorities set in the Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for EU membership and to commitments under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement	Meetings and follow up under the SAA completed	Q4 2021
Progress in delivery of Kosovo reform commitments under the SAA and European Reform Agenda	Meetings and follow up under the SAA completed	Q4 2021
Monitoring of and reporting on accession preparations	Preparations for next enlargement package (communication and individual reports - staff working documents - advanced	Q4 2021
Monitoring of Stabilisation and association agreements (SAA) and	SA Council and Committee, SA Sub-committees / Special	Each Western Balkans partner: - 1 SA Council - 1 SA Committee 7

implementation of structural reforms in the Western Balkans (WB)	Groups meetings held with the Western Balkans partners as planned	subcommittees +1 PAR Special Group (and 1 Normalisation Special Group for Kosovo)
Programming and implementation of bilateral assistance under IPA III	All IPA III bilateral action documents adopted	Q4 2021
Progress in implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan and Green Agenda	-Action plans adopted -Actions progressing as per plans	Dec 2021

### Evaluations<sup>2</sup> and fitness checks

Output	Indicator	Target
TAIEX evaluation	Evaluation started	Q1 2021
Country evaluation North Macedonia	Evaluation started	Q1 2021
Country evaluation Montenegro	Evaluation completed	Q2 2021
Country evaluation Serbia	Evaluation completed	Q1 2021

### External communication actions (covers also specific objective 4.2)

Output/ Result	Indicator	Target
Regional Communication Programme: Campaigns, events and communication activities aimed at improving perception of the EU and EU support in the Western Balkans	Social media	
	- Number of impressions	>60,000,000
	- Number of followers/subscribers	Facebook:>15,000, Instagram: >5,000
	- Number of posts	Facebook: >130, Instagram: >150
	- Number of engagements	More than 1,200,000
	- Number of #hashtag mentions	More than 5,000
	Website (dedicated)	
	- Number of visits	More than 650,000
	- Number of visitors	More than 500,000
	- Number of page views	More than 500,000
- Conversion rate	More than 3,000,000	
- Number of return visitors	More than 15% More than 90,000	
Integrated communication campaigns		
- Reach	More than 12,000,000	
- Number of page views	More than 3,500,000	
Number of young people acting as Young European		120

<sup>2</sup> This evaluation is part of the DG NEAR multi-annual strategic evaluations plan. While guided by Better Regulation, it is not an evaluation in the Better Regulation sense.

Ambassadors	
Number of attendees in YEA webinars	More than 1,000
Public events	More than 500
Number of attendees (online)	More than 35,000
Indirect audience reach (online)	

**Improving regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations** in the Western Balkans (*specific objective 4.2*) will continue to be an important priority in 2021. Support in 2021 will continue to focus on three strands of connectivity: (i) transport, energy and digital infrastructures, (ii) economies, and (iii) people of the region. The Economic and Investment Plan, adopted in October 2020, will constitute the blueprint for economic development and regional integration for the years to come. Support to energy, transport and digital connectivity will include investments in infrastructure and related policy reforms.

The key mechanism for the implementation of connectivity under the Economic and Investment Plan is the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF). Support provided to underpin regional efforts as regards the rule of law agenda will include fight against corruption and organised crime.

DG NEAR will continue to support the organisation of EU-Western Balkans high level meetings as well as activities under the Berlin process. DG NEAR will further support the efforts of the EU Special Representative Lajčák with regard to the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. Regional security issues will be addressed among others through the Action Plan on the fight against Small Arms and Light Weapons and the set-up of the new Integrative Internal Security Governance secretariat.

## General objective 4 A stronger Europe in the World

Specific objective 4.2:

**Regional cooperation and neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans are improved**

*Related to spending programme(s)  
IPA II, IPA III*

### Main outputs in 2021:

Output	Indicator	Target
Progress in the implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan:		
- Align the Western Balkans Investment Framework to effectively contribute to the implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan for Western Balkans	WBIF Design of new Governance transition to new regulations	Q2-Q4 2021
- Start implementation of Economic and Investment Plan flagships projects	Signature of Delegation Agreement for transfer of funds to the European Western	Q3/Q4 2021

	<p>Balkans Joint Fund (EWBJF) for the 2020 Connectivity Package</p> <p>Commission Decision under IPA III for implementation of connectivity agenda under the Economic and Investment Plan adopted</p> <p>Screening of advanced projects pipeline.</p> <p>Approval of more advanced projects</p>	<p>Adopted by Q4 2021</p> <p>Q2 2021</p> <p>Q4 2021</p>
Support to the implementation of the Common Regional Market 2021-2024 for the Western Balkans	<p>One operational Mutual Recognition Agreement in place</p> <p>Adoption of a regional agreement on Freedom of Movement and Stay</p>	<p>Q4 2021</p> <p>Q4 2021</p>
<p>Progress in supporting Western Balkans' efforts to strengthen Rule of Law through regional cooperation and cooperation with the EU:</p> <p>a) Progress with trial monitoring project for cases of high-level corruption and organised crime</p> <p>b) Assessment of performance of Western Balkans justice systems</p> <p>c) Deeper links between EU security tools and networks promoted</p> <p>d) First regional security needs and response mapping produced under the Integrative Internal Security Governance mechanism</p>	<p>a) Adoption of trial monitoring methodology for cases of high-level corruption and organised crime</p> <p>b) Results of CEPEJ (Efficiency of Justice of the Council of Europe) and World Bank justice performance actions finalised for inclusion in Enlargement package</p> <p>c) Expertise by EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network provided to Western Balkans</p> <p>d) Mapping produced</p>	<p>a) Q2 2021</p> <p>b) Q3 2021</p> <p>c) Q1-Q4 2021</p> <p>d) Q2 2021</p>
Adoption of 2021 IPA III multicountry action programmes	<p>All IPA III action programmes adopted including on connectivity.</p> <p>Nine crossborder cooperation programmes adopted</p>	<p>Q4 2021</p>
Promote deepening of links among civil societies of the Western Balkans, including through the support for the Western Balkans Fund projects	<p>Contract with the Western Balkans Fund signed (EUR 1 million for subgranting to small-scale regional initiatives)</p>	<p>Q1 2021</p>
Strategic engagement and policy	<p>Revised DG NEAR guidelines on EU support for civil society</p>	<p>Q3 2021</p>



dialogue with civil society	under IPA III	
Implementation of TAIEX activities strengthening regional cooperation	Approximately 15 regional or multi-country activities (online or physical)	Throughout 2021
<b>Evaluations<sup>3</sup> and fitness checks</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Mid-term evaluation of IPA CBC programmes 2014-2020	Evaluation completed	Q1 2021

DG NEAR will work towards **ensuring a sustainable basis for improved relations with Turkey** (*specific objective 4.3*). This will be done by pursuing all strands of cooperation and continuing engagement, within the political margins defined by the Council, and in the framework of the EU-Turkey Association Agreement, the Customs Union, the 2016 EU-Turkey statement and other EU-Turkey bilateral agreements. In line with the European Council conclusions of 1 October 2020, DG NEAR will contribute to the development of the positive political EU-Turkey agenda if and when the conditions will be met. DG NEAR will implement the new approach under IPA III, ensuring stronger alignment between financial assistance and relevant reform priorities identified in the Commission's annual enlargement package.

<b>General objective 4 A stronger Europe in the World</b>		
Specific objective 4.3: <b>A sustainable basis for improved relations with Turkey is ensured</b>		<i>Related to spending programme(s) IPA II and IPA III</i>
<b>Main outputs in 2021:</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Follow up on the European Council conclusions on Turkey from December 2020	Strategic orientations for the agenda agreed, if conditions allow	2021
Continuation of the high level engagement with Turkey	Number of high level meetings, if political situation allows	3 meetings in 2021
Continuous implementation of the EU-Turkey Association Agreement	Number of sub-committee meetings held	7 meetings in 2021
Follow-up on the implementation of the EU-Turkey Customs Union	Number of meetings of the Customs Union Joint Committee held	1 meeting in Q1/Q2
Support DG TRADE in following discussions by Member States on the mandate and perspective of	Mandate approved by Council	in 2021, if political conditions allow

<sup>3</sup> This evaluation is part of the DG NEAR multi-annual strategic evaluations plan. While guided by Better Regulation, it is not an evaluation in the Better Regulation sense.

initiating negotiations on the modernisation of the EU-Turkey Customs Union, when political conditions are ripe		
Policy dialogue with Turkey on economic governance	Adoption of joint NEAR/ECFIN/EMPL assessment of Turkey's economic reform programme 2021-2022	Joint assessment adopted in Q2
Monitoring of the implementation of the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey	Number of meetings of the Facility Steering Committee	Two meetings in 2021; June & December
Implementation of the funds under NEAR responsibility of the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey	Progress in Facility implementation as measured in Facility Monitoring Reports	All Facility projects progressing as per their implementation schedule
Programming of possible additional refugee support in Turkey	Special Measures agreed with Turkey and adopted by the Commission if funding is made available	End 2021
Continuous monitoring of developments and providing policy recommendation on democracy, rule of law, judiciary, security as well as fundamental rights and freedoms	Preparations for next country report on Turkey (staff working document as part of Enlargement package) advanced	Q4 2021
Support political priorities through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance	Adoption of the 2021 programme	The assessment of the proposals received from Turkey by end 2021
Implementation of TAIEX and Twinning activities, contributing to improved EU-Turkey relations	Approximately 10 activities (online and physical) implemented in Turkey, depending on beneficiary demand	Throughout 2021

In our Eastern Neighbourhood, DG NEAR will **build upon the achievements of the “20 Deliverables for 2020”** (*specific objective 4.4*), and will outline how the EU will work together with Eastern partner countries, including through the TAIEX and Twinning instruments, to tackle common challenges and strengthen resilience as an overriding policy objective. In particular, DG NEAR will work together with EU Member States and partner countries on the endorsement of the post-2020 deliverables at the Eastern Partnership Summit 2021. The Joint Communication of 2020 will be the basis for the development of a new concrete reform agenda (“deliverables”) for the post-2020 Eastern Partnership policy. Endorsement by partner countries is planned for the Eastern Partnership Summit to be held in 2021.

<b>General objective 4 A stronger Europe in the World</b>		
<b>Specific objective 4.4. Take the Eastern Partnership to the next level</b>		<i>Related to spending programme(s) ENI, NDICI</i>
<b>Main outputs in 2021:</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Report on implementation of 20 Deliverables for 2020	Report approved	Q1 2021
New set of Deliverables post-2020	Approved by EaP Summit	Q1-Q2 2021
Multi-annual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) for EaP countries for the period 2021-2027	Adoption of MIPs	Q3 2021
Adoption and update of 2021 Annual Action Programmes (bilateral and regional), ensuring a strong EU response to Covid-19 pandemic across EaP countries. Ukraine: EU4Resilient regions	Adoption of 2021 Annual Action Programmes	Q4 2021
	Programme implementation started	Q3 2021
<b>Evaluations<sup>4</sup> and fitness checks</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Evaluation of EU cooperation with Georgia	Evaluation started	Q1 2021
Evaluation of EU's cooperation with Republic of Moldova (2014-2020)	Evaluation completed	Q1 2021
<b>External communication actions</b>		
<b>Output/ Result</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Regional Communication Programme: Campaigns, events and communication activities aimed at improving perception of the EU and EU support in the Eastern Neighbourhood	Social media - Number of impressions - Number of followers/subscribers - Number of posts - Number of engagements - Number of #hashtag	More than 2,000,000 180,000 2,000 7% average

<sup>4</sup> This evaluation is part of the DG NEAR multi-annual strategic evaluations plan. While guided by Better Regulation, it is not an evaluation in the Better Regulation sense.

	mentions	20,000
	Website (dedicated)	
	- Number of visits	372,890
	- Number of visitors	500,000
	- Number of page views	More than 2,000,000
	- Conversion rate	60,000
	- Number of return visitors	10%
	Integrated communication campaigns	
	- Reach	More than 50,000
	- Number of young people acting as Young European Ambassadors	More than 800
	Events	
	Number of attendees (online)	More than 10,000
	Indirect audience reach (online)	100,000
<b>Other important outputs</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Civil Society Facility		
Continue implementation of strong COVID response package at bilateral and regional level including the emergency response to the continuing health crisis and the response to its medium and long-term social and economic consequences	Programme implementation started	Q3 2021
	COVID response package as integral part of 2021 AAPs	Q1-Q4 2021

The cooperation and policy dialogue with Southern partner countries aims at **reinforcing stability, resilience, economic development and regional integration in the Southern Neighbourhood** (*specific objective 4.5*). In 2021, DG NEAR will continue addressing the impact of the Covid-19 in our partner countries; as per the Commission's Working Programme. It will adopt and start implementing the Joint Communication on the Southern Neighbourhood and its annex on an Economic Initiative, that re-set the relationships with the Southern Neighbourhood countries and it will contribute to the review of the Partnership Priorities, where necessary. DG NEAR will continue to be active in international fora to promote regional integration (e.g. Union for the Mediterranean) and contribute to mitigate effect and promote a positive agenda to protracted crisis (Syria, Libya, Israel-Palestine). TAIEX and Twinning activities will continue to support these objectives.

<b>General objective 4 A stronger Europe in the World</b>		
<b>Specific objective 4.5:</b> <b>Stability, resilience, economic development and regional integration are reinforced through our cooperation and policy dialogues in the Southern Neighbourhood</b>		<i>Related to spending programme(s) ENI, NDICI</i>
<b>Main outputs in 2021:</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Commission Work Programme 2021 Initiative: Joint Communication (JC) on Southern Neighbourhood and its economic plan (as annex)	JC and annex issued	Mid-2021
Review/extension of current partnership priorities or equivalent documents	Process launched in the different countries as per instructions	End 2021
Adoption of multiannual programming documents in line with the partnership priorities	Multiannual programming documents are in line with the Partnership Priorities	Throughout 2021.
NDICI annual programmes are adopted	Adoption of NDICI annual programmes using fully corresponding annual budget allocation	Throughout 2021
Explore possibility of organising a Brussels V Conference on the Future of Syria and the Region	If so decided, ministerial conference and consultation with Syrian civil society held; Funding pledges secured.	Mid 2021
Provide support to Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in particular in Lebanon and Jordan, as an important element of the EU response to the Syrian Crisis; manage transition to next MFF and from the EUTF to NDICI; commit and contract remaining EUTF Syria budget	Development of project pipeline in 2021 ; Actions adopted, all EUTF contracts signed before the end of the TF.	Throughout 2021
Support to the Berlin process on Libya	Technical expertise provided by the Commission; and EU co-chairing the Berlin Economic Working Group	Throughout 2021
Preparation of a new multi-annual financial decision in favour of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in line with the renewed Joint Declaration	Multi-annual Commission decision adopted	Mid 2021
Support the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) sector policy dialogue with partner countries	UfM ministerial meetings on Trade, Environment and Climate Action, Transport, Energy and	Throughout 2021

	Blue Economy are organised. UfM ministerial declarations are followed-up through yearly sector dialogues involving the full range of relevant stakeholders.	
Provide institutional support to the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)	The secretariat of the UfM is financed through the EC grant. The secretariat implements the annual work programme adopted by Senior Officials.	Throughout 2021
Strengthened security cooperation in line with the Global Strategy and the European Neighbourhood Policy security dimension	Technical expertise on fighting organised crime, provided by key partners such as Interpol and EU Agencies EUROPOL, EUROJUST, FRONTEX/EBCGA and EMCDDA, to justice and law enforcement entities in the partner countries.	Throughout 2021
EU response to the Covid-19 crisis impact in the Southern Neighbourhood	Amount of EU-funded Programmes committed to provide liquidities and support the health and socio-economic sectors	In 2021: EUR 2.31 billion fully committed for the Southern Neighbourhood, including EUR 1.3 billion to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the crisis
Strategic engagement and policy dialogue with civil society	Regular coordination meetings with strategic partners and regional meeting of Civil Society Forum Neighbourhood South	Throughout the year
<b>Evaluations<sup>5</sup> and fitness checks</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Country evaluation Tunisia	Evaluation completed	2nd quarter Q2 2021 (align with the format used above)
Evaluation of EU Budget support to Morocco	Evaluation completed	3rd quarter Q3 2021
<b>External communication actions</b>		
<b>Output/ Result</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Increasing knowledge and public awareness on Euro-Med partnership.	Commission's participation in the UfM communication campaign to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration / number of activities in the communication plan.	100% of activities in the communication plan have been implemented.
Regional Communication		

<sup>5</sup> This evaluation is part of the DG NEAR multi-annual strategic evaluations plan. While guided by Better Regulation, it is not an evaluation in the Better Regulation sense.

Programme: Campaigns, events and communication activities aimed at improving perception of the EU and EU support in the Southern Neighbourhood	Social media	
	- Number of impressions	55,000,000 (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
	- Number of followers/subscribers	450,000 (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube)
	- Number of posts	1,750 (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
	- Number of engagements	1,200,000 (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
	- Number of #hashtag mentions	EU4youth 25,000
	Website (dedicated)	
	- Number of visits	425,000
	- Number of visitors	350,000
	- Number of page views	800,000
	- Conversion rate	n/a
	- Number of return visitors	10%
	Integrated communication campaigns	
	- Reach	10,000,000
	- Number of young people acting as Young European Ambassadors	48
Events	12	
Number of attendees (online)	39,000	
Indirect audience reach (online)	360,000	

DG NEAR will **support the implementation of the external dimension of the European Green Deal in partner countries** (*specific objective 1*). In particular, DG NEAR will support the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, and will work towards strong environment, energy and climate partnerships with the Southern Neighbourhood and with the Eastern Partnership.

### General objective 1 A European Green Deal

Specific objective 1:

**The implementation of the external dimension of the European Green Deal is supported in partner countries**

*Related to spending programme(s) IPA II, IPA III, ENI, NDICI*

#### Main outputs in 2021:

Output	Indicator	Target
Extension of the Covenant of Mayors to Western Balkans and Turkey	Initiative launched	Q2 2021
Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans	6 national and 1 regional action plans adopted	Q3 2021
	Launch of EU funded project to support the implementation of	Q3 2021

	the Green Agenda by Western Balkan partners	
Ukraine: Strategic Partnership on Green Deal	Initiative launched	Q1 2021
Ukraine: Climate package for a sustainable economy	Programme implementation started	Q3 2021
Priority actions on Energy and Climate Change Policies: Strengthened dialogue and regional actions in the Southern Neighbourhood	Number of meetings with Neighbourhood partners in the framework of the UfM Energy platforms and UfM Climate Change Experts Group	At least one meeting per domain throughout 2021
	<p>Implementation of regional actions for the Southern Neighbourhood on clean energy transition and climate change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Four ongoing projects (with MEDREG association, OME MED TSO association and MEDENER/RCREEE) throughout 2021, supporting improved energy regulatory frameworks (that can better foster foreign and local investments), the enhancement of electrical interconnections, the increased use of untapped renewable energy sources (solar and wind mainly) and energy efficiency measures, and a stronger development and integration of gas markets at regional/sub-regional levels (in particular in the Eastern Mediterranean basin).</li> <li>- 1 ongoing project "Clima-MED" supporting Southern Neighbour partner countries' NDC implementation, as well as development of energy and climate actions at cities' level (more than 80 cities intensively supported technically as well as in their seek for financing sources).</li> <li>- 1 new regional call for proposals called "Climate for Cities" to be launched early 2021 (EUR 19 million)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Studies and training activities to support national regulatory authorities (e.g. training on the digitalisation of energy markets and new role of customers, and study on enhancing the sector regulation in Jordan) throughout 2021.</li> <li>- Initiation of the preparation of a Mediterranean Network Development Plan for 2022 by Q1 2021.</li> <li>- Setup of "Concerted Actions" processes at regional level on energy efficiency for buildings and appliances by Q3 2021.</li> <li>- Studies on potential small scale LNG applications in the Mediterranean region by Q3 2021.</li> <li>- Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans are finalised for 80 cities by Q2 2021.</li> <li>- 9-10 cities are awarded EU-funded grant contracts to finance a part of their Sustainable Energy</li> </ul>



	1 new regional call for proposals called "Climate for Cities" to be launched supporting the concrete implementation of 9-10 cities' Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans.	and Climate Action Plans by Q4 2021.
Priority actions on Environment policies including Circular economy, pollution reduction, biodiversity and water efficient use: strengthened dialogue and regional actions in the Southern Neighbourhood	Number of meetings with neighbourhood partners in the framework of the UfM Environment discussion groups and the water discussion groups	At least one meeting per domain throughout 2021
	Implementation of regional actions for the Southern Neighbourhood on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Implement the Swichtmed initiative on circular economy</li> <li>b) Improve the legislative framework within the Neighbourhood South countries to facilitate the reduction of pollution with a special focus on plastics pollution.</li> <li>c) Strengthen the Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean region.</li> <li>d) Improve the monitoring of the Mediterranean environmental status.</li> <li>e) Showcase good practices for water efficient use through Demonstration projects and improve the legislative framework within the Neighbourhood South countries to promote the efficient use of water.</li> </ul>	Throughout 2021  The national "Business support services" on Circular economy will be equipped with a toolbox to disseminate the CE concept within the industry.  A Gap analysis on the needs to reduce the plastic pollution in the ENI South countries will be available  Organisation of a regional workshop on effective management of MPA.  Organisation of specific 3 trainings on IMAP (integrated monitoring and assessment program for the Mediterranean)  Organisation of 3 regional trainings on efficient use of water and communication related to the implementation of 7 demonstration projects on efficient use of water.
Priority actions on Climate change: development of enhanced coordination with IFI's in support to cities in the Southern Neighbourhood	Number of meetings of the dedicated IFI working group (set up by DG NEAR B2 in January 2020 in the framework of the regional Clima-MED project).	4 meetings in 2021

Priority actions on Environment policies including Circular economy, pollution reduction, biodiversity and water efficient use: strengthened dialogue and regional actions in the Eastern Neighbourhood	Number of meetings in conjunction with the Eastern Partnership: Environment and Climate Panel  Definition of post-2020 agenda	1 Panel meeting 1 Ministerial meeting  Specific targets and activities identified
	Policy dialogue and technical support to the partner countries authorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overseeing the implementation of the on-going EU4Environment programme:</li> <li>Launch of EU4EMBLAS programme</li> <li>Launch of new regional project on water and environmental data</li> </ul>	Throughout 2021
Priority actions on green investments	Number of meetings related to the ESP multidonor fund  Number of assessed projects submitted for NIP funding.	7-9 meetings in 2021  At least 2-3 projects

#### Evaluations<sup>6</sup> and fitness checks

Output	Indicator	Target
Evaluation of the EU's support to climate change and environment in Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions	Evaluation started	Q1 2021

Under the Commission's priority on "an Economy that Works for People", DG NEAR will **support inclusive and sustainable economic growth, better employment and increased connectivity in partner countries** (*specific objective 3*). In 2021, DG NEAR will continue to assist partner countries to address the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. DG NEAR will also coordinate the completion of Economic Reform Programmes and country-specific recommendations for Enlargement countries. It will continue to implement comprehensive public administration and public financial management reform programmes, and it will support socio-economic development through notably the Neighbourhood Investment Platform, the European Fund for Sustainable Development, the

<sup>6</sup> This evaluation is part of the DG NEAR multi-annual strategic evaluations plan. While guided by Better Regulation, it is not an evaluation in the Better Regulation sense.

forthcoming European Fund for Sustainable Development +, and the Western Balkans Investment Facility.

<b>General objective 3: An Economy that Works for People</b>		
<b>Specific objective 3:</b> <b>Inclusive and sustainable economic growth, better employment and increased connectivity are supported in partner countries</b>		<i>Related to spending programme(s)</i> <i>IPA II, IPA III, ENI NDICI...</i>
<b>Main outputs in 2021:</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
DG NEAR contribution to 'Team Europe' package proposed in the 'Joint Communication on Global EU Response to COVID-19'	Communication actions	2021
Completion of Economic Reform Programmes (ERP) for Enlargement countries and adoption of Council conclusions	2021 ERPs completed and Council conclusions adopted	First semester 2021
Key Policy Guidance feeds policy dialogue and programming process	Policy Dialogue and programming based on Key Policy Guidance	Second Semester 2021
Implementation and/or adoption of comprehensive public administration reform (PAR) programmes and public financial management reform programmes (PFM) to support the development of horizontal capacities to implement the acquis	Number of countries	By end 2021
	Participation in PAR Special Groups/PAR policy dialogue	All Western Balkans countries and at least 2 ENP countries.
	Contribution to preparation and/or participation in PFM Dialogue	At least 5 Western Balkans countries and 1 ENP East
Support socio-economic development: economic growth, private sector development, trade facilitation and regional integration, access to finance is facilitated.	Revision of PAR principles – support open consultation process	By end 2021
	Support partner countries to develop Innovation and Smart Specialisation Strategies endorsed by the Commission:	
	1 Assessment of Innovation and Smart Specialisation National Strategy done by end 2021.	Second Semester 2021
	Training, study on value chains and capacity building to WB by	Second Semester 2021

	end 2021	
	Support to the publication of Competitiveness Outlook Assessment for the WB (OECD)	Second Semester 2021
	Aid-For-Trade Report (DEVCO/NEAR Joint exercise) for all NEAR regions	Second Semester 2021
	Launching Study on Diaspora contribution to socio-economic development	Second Semester 2021
	Launch steps required to make available SOCIEUX+ to WB: Social Protection and Employment EU Member States TA Facility	Second Semester 2021
Partner countries are supported in building more resilient, efficient and sustainable education systems	Policy dialogue on education with partner countries based on evidence-based diagnosis (reform needs and challenges: governance, financing, quality and resilience aspects):	
	Launching 3 diagnoses in Western Balkans	By end 2021
	Follow up of Neighbourhood-South Diagnosis (1 country)	By end 2021
Support increased socio-economic development and connectivity with Eastern Partnership countries	Adoption of the long-term Eastern Partnership policy objectives beyond 2020 that will include targets in the fields of: transport, energy, environmental & climate resilience, green growth, energy security & nuclear safety, and sustainable & smart mobility	First Semester 2021
Priority actions on innovation in the Neighbourhood South	Design of new regional initiatives in support of start-ups and cluster cooperation	Actions for EUR 15 million contracted by the end of 2021
EuroMed Transport cooperation maintains regional regulatory convergence agenda and	Regional Transport Action Plan 2014-2020 evaluation finalised RTAP 2021-2027 adopted	Early 2021 End 2021

connectivity investment frameworks	New EuroMed sustainable connectivity projects launched	End 2021
Western Balkans Guarantee Facility (EFSD+)** <sup>7</sup>	Draft investment windows Launch of the guarantee call for proposals	Q4 2021
Western Balkans Guarantee* <sup>8</sup>	Signature of up to 3 guarantee agreements	Q3 2021
EU support to agriculture and small farm development in Ukraine	Programme implementation started	Q3 2021
EU4BUSINESS: Support to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Ukraine	Programme implementation started	Q3 2021
<b>Evaluations<sup>9</sup> and fitness checks</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Evaluation of the EU support to local authorities in Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions	Evaluations completed	1st quarter

With its priority on “A Europe fit for the digital age”, the Commission seeks to harness the full potential of the digital transformation for European citizens. In the Enlargement and Neighbourhood countries, DG NEAR will work to **increase the take-up of digital opportunities** (*specific objective 2*), by strengthening the institutional capacities in e-governance and data protection, and supporting the development of digital skills and high tech entrepreneurship.

<b>General objective 2 A Europe fit for the digital age</b>		
Specific objective 2 <b>Increased take-up of digital opportunities in partner countries</b>		<i>Related to spending programme(s) IPA II, IPA III, ENI, NDICI</i>
<b>Main outputs in 2021:</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Identification of EuroMed Digital priorities	Regional digital projects are programmed on the basis of the 2020 study findings	Mid 2021
Progress in reducing roaming tariffs	Signature of a regional roaming	Q2 2021

<sup>7</sup> \*\*IPAIII

<sup>8</sup> \*IPA II

<sup>9</sup> This evaluation is part of the DG NEAR multi-annual strategic evaluations plan. While guided by Better Regulation, it is not an evaluation in the Better Regulation sense.

among Eastern Partnership countries	agreement among the 6 Eastern partners	
Progress in the development of a new Action to strengthen cybersecurity capacities in the Western Balkans	Finalisation of the study	Q4 2021
Support to the implementation of the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans	Finalisation of the Roadmap for lowering of the roaming charges between EU and the Western Balkans	Q4 2021
	Introduction of the Roam Like at Home (RLAH) regime	Q2 2021
Progress in developing the cyber-resilience of the EaP countries	Implementation of the Council of Europe's Budapest Convention and the EU's NS Directive	Ongoing
Harmonisation of Digital Markets	Extend the European Union's Digital Single Market to the Eastern Partner states: develop high-speed broadband and harmonise digital frameworks across society (and eliminating barriers to pan-European online services)	Ongoing

Under the objective of “Promoting our European Way of Life”, the Commission is committed to keeping Europe safe while upholding the EU’s core values. DG NEAR will work towards the **establishment of effective migration management with partner countries** (*specific objective 5*), aiming at mutually beneficial partnerships. In 2021, this will be done in particular by following the priorities of the recently published New Pact on Migration and Asylum<sup>10</sup> and its external dimension. Key areas of work identified in the Pact are: supporting other countries hosting refugees and host communities; Creating economic opportunities close to home, especially for youth; Fighting migrant smuggling; Improving return and readmission, stepping up voluntary returns and helping reintegration; Developing orderly channels for legal migration. Specific actions will continue to enable partners in better addressing issues relevant to migration and forced displacement through implementation of projects selected under our main instruments: the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis, the North Africa Window of the Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement in Africa, and the Facility for Refugees in Turkey. Migration will need to be integrated more consistently in bilateral and regional programming with the entry into force of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the

<sup>10</sup> New Pact on Migration and Asylum COM Proposal of 23 September 2020, summary and key documents: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en)

new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III), in application of the new pact on migration. In December 2020, the European Council reconfirmed the need for the EU to continue supporting refugees in Turkey.

<b>General objective 5: Promoting European Way of Life</b>		
<b>Specific objective 5: Effective migration management with partner countries is in place</b>		<i>Related to spending programme(s) IPA II, IPA III, ENI, NDICI...</i>
<b>Main outputs in 2021:</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa - North Africa: implementation of the funds and monitoring of the implementation	Implementation of the funds and monitoring of the implementation	Throughout 2021
Implementation of the funds under NEAR responsibility of the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey <sup>11</sup>	Progress in Facility implementation as measured in Facility Monitoring Reports	All Facility projects progressing as per their implementation schedule
Monitoring of the implementation of the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey	Number of meetings of the Facility Steering Committee	Two meetings in 2021; June & December
EU regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis: implementation of the funds and transition to the new MFF and NDICI	Decisions adopted programmes signed, future actions prepared	Throughout 2021
Programming of additional support on migration and forced displacement (to be defined)	New Measures agreed and adopted	End-2021
<b>Evaluations<sup>12</sup> and fitness checks</b>		
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Evaluation of the EU's external action support in the area of migration	Completed	Q1 2021
Evaluation of the EU cooperation with the United Nations	Evaluation started	Q1 2021

In 2021, **communication activities** will continue to focus on major moments for DG NEAR and the Commission, for example around the implementation of the Economic and

<sup>11</sup> Outputs for Turkey are covered under objective 4.3 and added here for additional reference

<sup>12</sup> This evaluation is part of the DG NEAR multi-annual strategic evaluations plan. While guided by Better Regulation, it is not an evaluation in the Better Regulation sense.

Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, the adoption of the Joint Communication on the Southern Neighbourhood and the Eastern Partnership Summit. Integrated and social media campaigns, including through the regional communication programmes will provide examples of delivered EU support, and the achievements and impacts our support has had on people. These programmes will also aim to inform diverse target audiences about EU values, policies and programmes and increase recognition among local audiences of the EU's role as the main political and economic partner and provider of financial assistance and support to reforms. In 2021 DG NEAR will actively support the work of the Commission on fighting disinformation. In 2021 DG NEAR will also support efforts for the recovery phase and provide stories for and participate actively in the corporate 'Recovery Campaign'.

In 2021, DG NEAR **institution-building tools - TAIEX and Twinning** - will continue supporting the implementation of the Commission's priorities in partner countries and beyond. High-level flagship events are being prepared in selected sectors such as Green Deal, digital transformation, health, economic recovery, education and cybersecurity. In addition, TAIEX and Twinning will continue prioritising activities with a COVID-19 dimension. Taking full advantage of the digital tools will improve the overall efficiency and impact of TAIEX.



## **PART 2. Modernising the administration: main outputs for the year**

In line with the priorities of the Von der Leyen Commission, which set out to push forward the digitalisation and modernisation of the European Commission during its mandate, DG NEAR's focus of 2021 will be on the allocation of human, financial, and information technology resources to further accelerate this process within the DG and promote digital skills and talent. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of continuing this process. In line with the target of the Commission to become climate neutral as an employer by 2030, DG NEAR will also continue to deliver a set of actions aiming at reducing its environmental impact.

In its efforts to contribute to the modernisation of the administration, DG NEAR will follow the corporate policies and strategies, notably the European Commission's HR strategy, the Anti Fraud Strategy, the Digital Strategy and the 2016 communication on data, information and knowledge management.

The internal control framework<sup>13</sup> supports sound management and decision-making. It notably ensures that risks to the achievement of objectives are taken into account and reduced to acceptable levels through cost-effective controls.

DG NEAR has established an internal control system tailored to its particular characteristics and circumstances. The effective functioning of the service's internal control system will be assessed on an ongoing basis throughout the year and be subject to a specific annual assessment covering all internal control principles.

### **A. Human resource management**

DG NEAR aims at maintaining a knowledgeable, motivated and healthy workforce in Headquarters and EU Delegations and will continue defining the HR strategy and supporting the DG in the human resources management area. Under the umbrella of the corporate HR strategy, DG NEAR will propose locally implemented actions which will be rolled out throughout 2021 and will constitute the core of DG NEAR's HR strategy.

To deliver on its overall human resource objective of effectively deploying resources, ensuring a competent and engaged workforce led by a gender balanced management, DG NEAR will focus in 2021 its HR strategy on the following areas:

Further to the 2018 staff survey and as follow up of the actions implemented in 2020, additional efforts will be undertaken in 2021 to maintain at least and possibly improve

---

<sup>13</sup> Communication C(2017)2373 - Revision of the Internal Control Framework

staff engagement, improve work/life balance, career development and talent management, including through adequate training activities. The specialised competitions organised in 2019/2020 will contribute to maintaining the high level of expertise of staff. Additional actions will be dedicated to helping staff develop skills and knowledge that match the needs of the DG with a view to ensuring the best possible compatibility between staff competencies and service needs.

The DG will set up a welcome package for newcomers which will include mentoring and coaching to ensure a quick and successful onboarding of new colleagues, which proves particularly difficult by working from distance due to the pandemic.

DG NEAR will continue working on the promotion and support the appointment of first female managers, in line with the Commission's target for female representation in management positions. The DG will develop or participate in programmes which will be offered to female colleagues in different grades and functions both in Headquarters and in EU Delegations. DG NEAR will aim at reaching the target of first female appointed managers in 2021 by encouraging applications from female managers to middle management publications.

In response to the results of the 360' evaluation of middle managers, in which pilot DG NEAR participated in 2020, the DG will reinforce coaching and training with the aim to reinforce the interpersonal and leadership skills.

The DG will support its staff by providing specific information and training on topics of relevance during the confinement period such as ergonomics at home, maintaining a positive mental health and teleworking with children. DG NEAR will collect and share the ideas and feedback of staff with DG HR to help shape the future working methods. The DG will help its staff by showing flexibility to their needs and promptly replying to questions and requests during the difficult pandemic period.

Work will continue through participatory processes and supported by the group OurNEAR<sup>14</sup> on issues jointly identified by management and staff relating to staff engagement, management practices and efficiency in confinement and beyond.

---

<sup>14</sup> OurNEAR is an organisational change project that was launched in 2016. See also section F.

**Objective: DG NEAR employs a competent and engaged workforce and contributes to gender equality at all levels of management to effectively deliver on the Commission's priorities and core business**

**Main outputs in 2021:**

<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Maintain or increase staff satisfaction	staff engagement index <sup>15</sup> baseline 59 (2018)	=>59 ( by 2024)
Increase number of women appointed to first time middle management functions	Number and percentage of first female appointments to middle management positions <sup>16</sup> Baseline (2019) 11 female middle managers, representing 50% of middle managers	2 first female appointments ( by 2022)
Promote awareness of fit@ home campaign including mental and physical health & wellbeing activities	Staff attend and participate in activities which increase staff understanding of the importance of mental and physical health to their overall well being	At least 3 fit@home workshops organised for DG NEAR on: Ergonomics Mental health Digital overload

## **B. Sound financial management**

DG NEAR strives to achieve the highest standards of financial management, in order to ensure the best use of the financial resources allocated to it. The DG adopted an internal control strategy, taking into account the risks to the achievement of objectives and related mitigating measures. The strategy is regularly reassessed and adjusted to consider the evolution of the identified risks, including those related to the COVID-19 crisis.

In order to measure its progress toward the achievement of this corporate strategic goal, DG NEAR monitors the results relating to global residual error rate (RER). The RER provides an estimation of the residual errors not detected by the internal control system, in order to conclude on its effectiveness. In particular, it is the level of error identified in the completed transactions once all possibilities for detection through ordinary controls have been exhausted; it is calculated as the ratio between the value of the undetected ineligible expenses and the total amount of payments for the contracts closed in a certain year. A RER below the materiality threshold of 2% is a strong indicator that the controls put in place at all levels of the DG are effective.

DG NEAR's objective is to ensure the best use of financial resources, resulting in an error rate below 2% for all DG NEAR programmes, regardless of the method of implementation.

---

<sup>15</sup> Source of data: 2018 Commission staff survey

<sup>16</sup> Source of data: SEC(2020) 146

DG NEAR has achieved a consistently low overall RER in the previous strategic planning period (0.53% in 2019). In past years, weaknesses have been detected in a specific part of its portfolio, namely in grants in direct management (RER above 2%, but below 3%, over 2017-2019). DG NEAR has put in place several measures to address these weaknesses and further measures could be envisaged depending on the results of the 2020 RER study (e.g. if new causes or types of errors are identified or if the current measures would need to be enhanced).

Based on the overall low level of errors in the previous strategic planning period, DG NEAR will also focus on achieving an adequate balance between the benefits (e.g. reducing/avoiding the financial/reputational impact of errors) and the costs of controls. DG NEAR aims to keep the cost of controls under the ceiling of 5% of the total value of funds managed. The DG NEAR internal control strategy will be continuously reassessed to enhance controls where necessary, taking into account the evolution of risks, in relation also to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on project monitoring. In addition, in order to mitigate the risks related to the lack of field monitoring in the conflict zones of Syria and Libya, DG NEAR will continue to implement special measures in order to ensure an increased understanding of local dynamics and a quicker and better reaction to address a very unstable and erratic environment (by realigning, suspending or cancelling ongoing projects).

As regards the other indicators in terms of effective and efficient controls, DG NEAR aims to safeguard and reinforce the results achieved in previous years, in order to continue providing adequate assurance on the functioning of the internal control system. In particular, DG NEAR will focus on enhancing the effectiveness of the audit system, tackling in cooperation with DEVCO the issues related to the implementation of the new tool Opsys. In addition, DG NEAR will step up its efforts (such as closely following up on clearings, closures and decommitments of both contracts and decisions) to address the long RAL absorption period (above 4 years in 2018 and 2019 and in the first 10 months of 2020), which is however inherent to some types of contracts (e.g. the ones with International Financial Institutions - IFIs).

**Objective:** The authorising officer by delegation has reasonable assurance that resources have been used in accordance with the principles of sound financial management and that cost-effective controls are in place which give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of underlying transactions

#### Main outputs in 2021:

Output	Indicator	Target
Effective controls: Legal and regular transactions	Risk at payment	Remains < 2 % of relevant global expenditure at DG level Becomes <2% for direct grant management
	Estimated risk at closure	Remains < 2 % of relevant global expenditure at DG level Becomes <2% for direct grant management
Effective controls	Number of critical or very important IAS recommendations	<i>Remains zero</i>

	<p>overdue for more than 6 months</p> <p>Effectiveness of the audit system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- % contracted of the Annual Control Plan: Year N,</li> <li>- % implementation of the Annual Control Plan: Year N-1,</li> <li>- % implementation of the Annual Control Plan: Year N-2</li> <li>- % of closed audits (subsequent to all follow-up actions and their recording in the Audit Module) of the expired audit plans i.e. those equal and prior to Year N-3</li> </ul> <p>RAL absorption period<sup>17</sup></p>	<p><i>Becomes &gt;70%</i></p> <p><i>Becomes &gt;60%</i></p> <p><i>Remains &gt;70%</i></p> <p><i>Becomes &gt;30%<sup>18</sup></i></p> <p><i>Becomes &lt;4 years</i></p>
Efficient controls	<p>Budget execution and</p> <p>Time to pay</p>	<p>Remains &gt;90% of payment appropriations</p> <p>Remains &gt;90% of payments made within the contractual deadline</p>
Economical controls	Overall estimated cost of controls	Remains <5% of funds managed

### C. Fraud risk management

DG NEAR is entrusted with the implementation - performed in HQ and in Delegations - of large amounts of financial assistance, through a high number of operations and associated financial transactions, under different methods of implementation and across different partner countries, with diverse political, economic, legal and social complexities. In addition, DG NEAR works with different public and private organisations, from small to very large, from private firms to NGOs and beneficiary states. Therefore, DG NEAR is more exposed than other services to risks of fraud (and irregularities) linked to the implementation of projects or contracts.

Considering its complex and challenging geographical, political and organisational setting, in 2021 DG NEAR will be fully engaged in implementing the **Commission's (CAFS)** and its **new DG anti-fraud strategy (AFS)** in order to ensure high vigilance against the risk of fraud, corruption and other intentional irregularities, including wrongdoing committed by

<sup>17</sup> The RAL or "reste à liquider" represents the outstanding commitments, meaning the sum of commitments agreed but not yet turned into payments. The RAL absorption period represents then the implementation capacity estimated as the number of the years needed to pay the full committed amounts.

<sup>18</sup> This is an indicator (agreed with DEVCO) which covers the entire multiannual audit life cycle; it measures the audits closed on the total number of completed audits of the Annual Control Plan of the Year N-3; therefore, it is sound to expect that in the year 2021 at least 30% of the audits included in the 2018 Control Plan will be closed. Even if this target is arithmetically lower than the others related to the audit system, it is equally challenging, since the implementation of the recommended actions depends on several factors and usually takes several months. In addition, the closure of audits can only take place once all the follow up actions after a completed audit

insiders, and to tailor controls to the developments in its (anti-)fraud landscape (following also the impact of COVID-19 pandemic) and to its instruments and operations.

In this respect, DG NEAR intends to further enhance its comprehensive anti-fraud capacity and closely monitor the developments of new fraud risks, including the ones related to the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting its operations in 2021. Fraud awareness campaigns will be regularly targeted to staff in HQ and EUDs and to partner countries, particularly in order to strengthen the fraud detection capacity by operational and financial staff. DG NEAR will also further reinforce the monitoring and reporting to senior management on ongoing cases and enhance the follow-up of financial and non-financial findings. It will cooperate with services in the external action family (through the External Action Fraud Prevention and Detection Network Subgroup) and with OLAF and other Commission services, in particular in implementing the action plan of the CAFS.

**Objective:** The risk of fraud is minimised through the application of effective anti-fraud measures and the implementation of the Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy (CAFS)<sup>19</sup> aimed at the prevention, detection and correction<sup>20</sup> of fraud

#### Main outputs in 2021:

Output	Indicator	Target
Implementation of the DG NEAR anti-fraud strategy 2020-2024	Implementation of the actions under the strategy	At least 75% of the 2021 actions to be implemented by the end of the year <sup>21</sup>
Fraud awareness initiatives	% of staff reached by initiatives	At least 75%
Implementation of the recommendations included in the OLAF reports	Timely completion of the assessment on the implementation of the OLAF recommendations	100% of OLAF recommendations are assessed for implementation by competent AOSD within 3 months
	Reinforced monitoring on the implementation of the recommendations	Reminders are sent to action owners for outstanding recommendations at least every 4 months
Regular reporting to Commissioner and to Senior Management on the implementation of the anti-fraud strategies and on the OLAF cases	Reports to the Commissioner	2 per year (at least)
	Reports to Senior Management	2 per year (at least)

<sup>19</sup> Communication from the Commission 'Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy: enhanced action to protect the EU budget', COM(2019) 176 of 29 April 2019 – 'the CAFS Communication' – and the accompanying action plan, SWD(2019) 170 – 'the CAFS Action Plan'.

<sup>20</sup> Correction of fraud is an umbrella term, which notably refers to the recovery of amounts unduly spent and to administrative sanctions.

## **D. Digital transformation and information management**

### **Digital Transformation**

Work on digital transformation and information management in DG NEAR will continue in 2021 with a focus on the continuation of support to the development of OPSYS. OPSYS is considered the first corporate tool, which is incorporating key principles from the EC Digital Strategy, such as digital by default and interoperability. It will support electronic signature, automatic creation of files and electronic exchange of information with third parties. In 2021 local NEAR applications will also be further developed and adapted to the future (e.g. interaction with OPSYS). Lastly, a DG NEAR specific plan for modernisation of digital solutions (expected to be formally endorsed in December 2020) will start to be implemented.

On an administrative level, DG NEAR will continue to be guided by the facilities provided in My Workplace by DG DIGIT. Using electronic signatures for administrative and contractual actions will be further stimulated. In addition, the use of collaborative tools will be encouraged (also facilitated by the Commission-wide roll-out of M365 in 2021). Lessons learnt on the use of collaborative tools will be put in practice. Lastly, DG NEAR, as part of the external actions DGs, will continue to push for improved IT harmonisation between the Commission and the European External Action Service, which will allow to engage more efficiently with colleagues in the 24 delegations.

### **Information and Knowledge Management**

With regard to information and knowledge management, DG NEAR primarily will continue to use the data services provided by DG DEVCO (through their Data WareHouse) and its governance structures (DEVCO Data Governance Board) in 2021. In addition, DG NEAR has started to participate in the corporate Information Management Team (IMT), in addition to the ongoing participation in the Local Data Correspondents-network (LDC).

DG NEAR will start sharing the metadata from its own key data assets, in line with the phased approach in the DataStrategy@EC action plan and the availability of corporate tools (such as the data catalogue)..

Recognising the importance of digital skills in reaping the benefits of digitalisation, DG NEAR will place particular attention in developing these skills (based on the training opportunities provided by DG HR) in 2021.

### **Data Protection**

With regard to the implementation of data protection rules, DG NEAR will continue the actions put in place following the entry into force of the Regulation (EU) 2018/1725. One of the main actions that should be carried on is reinforcing the accountability and the ownership of the management for the processing operations of personal data performed

under the responsibility of our DG. In addition, identifying the processing operations and ensuring that they are properly recorded with appropriate risk-based assessment on the responsible operational controllers are essential steps in continuing the implementation of the new data protection rules.

Transparency is at the core of DG NEAR's activities and the proper information of the data subjects with regard to processing their personal data in the context of the activities is a prerequisite condition that will continue to be implemented. Raising awareness of staff with regard to the data protection obligations and their embedment in the daily work will continue in 2021.

The general level of knowledge about data protection obligations among DG NEAR staff must be further improved. This requires that participation in data protection trainings for staff and dedicated trainings for senior and middle management regularly organised by the Commission and EDPS should be significantly increased, ensuring at the same time that the knowledge is balanced dispersed within the services for a coherent application of the data protection rules.

The Data Protection Coordinator of the DG will provide practical guidance and short presentations on setting in the data protection rules in the daily work of DG NEAR staff in 2021. Monitoring compliance and ensuring follow-up on the actions taken in order to evaluate the progress made during the year are mandatory steps in ensuring a rigorous implementation of data protection rules.

**Objective: DG NEAR is using innovative, trusted digital solutions for better policy-shaping, information management and administrative processes to forge a truly digitally transformed, user-focused and data-driven Commission**

**Main outputs in 2021:**

<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>
Improve implementation of digital solutions modernisation plan (DSMP)	DG NEAR DSMP available	December 2021
Improved IT security of local NEAR applications	Positive DIGIT Vulnerability Assessment Report for TMS Back-Office applications	Dec 2021
Improve digital way of working	Number of AOSDs for commitments with QES enabled	90%
Improve digital way of working	number of contract-related documents signed electronically (outside OPSYS)	120 <sup>22</sup>
Increase information	% of NEAR files available in reading	2% (baseline 2020: 0%)

<sup>22</sup> Baseline is 36



sharing	to all Commission	
Stimulate use of collaborative tools	Number of Active MS Teams users in DG NEAR HQ	500 (baseline Oct 2020:339)
Improve implementation of corporate data governance policy	Sharing of meta data of key data assets in COM data catalogue	Dec 2021
Improve digital skills	% colleagues in HQ having followed introductory course on use of Teams	80 (Dec 2021)
Improve data protection compliance	% of staff attending awareness raising activities	20%

## E. Sound environmental management

The Communication on the Green Deal stipulates that the Commission, as an institution and employer, aims to be climate neutral by 2030. DG NEAR will actively contribute to achieving this target by promoting EMAS corporate campaigns at local level and implementing dedicated local environmental actions in 2021.

In the strategic plan, two priority areas for action have been defined, namely: the reduction of waste production (target for 2021: 0.18 ton/person) and reduction of emission of CO2 per capita (target for 2021: less than 1,700 tonnes/person for missions by air, by increasingly replacing missions with videoconferences). The target for emissions has been adjusted based on 2019 EMAS data. When the post-Covid data becomes available (less on mission, less at the office), the targets may be revised.

An essential part of DG NEAR's environmental management policy shall be raising the awareness of staff. To this effect, in 2021 DG NEAR will strengthen the corporate awareness raising communication within DG NEAR. Furthermore, local actions will be defined to progressively 1) reduce plastic use, 2) go paperless (reduce paper waste), 3) reduce food-waste, 4) green the cafeteria and 5) strengthen the internal communication.

**Objective: DG NEAR takes full account of its environmental impact in all its actions and actively promotes measures to reduce the related day-to-day impact of the administration and its work**

### Main outputs in 2021:

Output	Indicator	Target
Reduced waste production	Waste production per person	0.18 ton/person
Reduced CO2 emission	CO2 emission per person for missions by air	1,7 tonnes/person
Raised environmental awareness of staff	Number of thematic local action plans developed	5

## **F. Example(s) of initiatives to improve economy and efficiency of financial and non-financial activities**

### **COVID-19 Project Team to effectively coordinate the EU response to the COVID-19 outbreak in NEAR regions**

This project team was set up in spring 2020 and has assumed a key role in co-ordinating EU support in response to the spring and, more recently, the autumn Covid 19 wave, including the access to vaccines.

In 2021 the Project Team will continue to focus on ensuring financial support for emergency needs and mitigating the mid-term socio-economic impact on partner countries. It will ensure the monitoring of implementation, report regularly to senior management and the Commissioner's Cabinet, and follow up on the regulatory developments in the EU and their effects on the NEAR countries.

By bringing together representatives of all DG NEAR departments with diverse competences, the NEAR Covid-19 Project Team is able to deliver on its responsibilities and tasks in a timely, comprehensive and efficient manner.

### **Our NEAR**

OurNEAR is an organisational change project that was launched in 2016. It has converted since then into an organisational development capacity which is an integrated part of the DG. A core working group meets regularly to discuss new projects and initiatives in an inclusive way.

The objective of the OurNEAR is to support ways of working that allow the organisation to best engage with collective intelligence and respond to organisational challenges. The priorities are set by the Director General. In 2021 they will build on what has started in 2020 depending on the needs of the organisation. This could possibly include work on the preparation of a Management Charter for the DG, use of collaborative tools and processes, organisational challenges deriving from the Covid 19 crisis, including through coaching, participatory reflections involving all staff and support to stress resilience. Other work could involve Staff engagement processes related to organisational change and processes to support the organisation to become more agile (learning from the COVID-19 experience, working in project teams and moving from online to hybrid forms of working - i.e. online/onsite). Finally OurNEAR will support team buildings and good management practices based on demand.