



Annual Activity Report 2020

DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR EDUCATION,
YOUTH, SPORT, AND CULTURE

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THE DG IN BRIEF

Guided by the Treaty on the European Union¹, **DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture** (DG EAC) mission and political priorities for 2020 were defined on the basis of President Von der Leyen's political guidelines² set for the Commission 2019-2024 and its translation in Vice-President Schinas³ and Commissioner Gabriel's mission letter⁴. In line with the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan setting out the mission and vision for a five-year period and the 2020 Management plan, DG EAC contributes in particular to all general objectives of the European Commission: to Promoting our European way of life, in matters relating to education, culture, youth and sport, and to A Europe fit for a Digital Age, in matters relating to digital education, research and innovation. Through the international dimension of the different policies, programmes and actions, DG EAC not only contributes to a *Stronger Europe in the world* but also to a *European Green Deal* and *an economy that works for people*. DG EAC is constantly striving towards contributing to a *new push for European democracy*, particularly through the youth actions. Furthermore, with the mission of the EC library, DG EAC was working towards a *modern, high-performing and sustainable European Commission*.

DG EAC furthermore contributes to a knowledge-based Europe that reconciles a **competitive economy** and an **inclusive society**, while addressing both the necessary **green transition** and **digital transformation**.

Domain	Education & Training				Sport	Youth	Culture	Research and Innovation
	Higher education	Vocational education and training	Adult education	School education				
Programme	Erasmus+					European Solidarity Corps	Creative Europe	Horizon 2020 (*)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key action 1: Learning mobility of individuals (excl. Sport) - Key action 2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices; - Key action 3: Support for policy reform - Jean Monnet activities 					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volunteering - Traineeships and Jobs - Solidarity projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Media (DG CNECT) - Culture (DG EAC) - Cross sectoral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marie Skłodowska-Curie action European Institute of technology
Operational appropriations	65% (including international dimension)					3%	4%	28%
	Direct (EACEA, DG EAC, DG EMPL) Indirect (National Agencies)					Direct (EACEA, DG EAC, DG CNECT)		Direct (REA, DG EAC) Indirect (EIT)
Management Mode								

(*) Coordinated by DG RTD

DG EAC ensures the strategic implementation of three EU flagship programmes – **Erasmus+**, the **European Solidarity Corps**, and **Creative Europe** – while also contributing through **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions** and the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology** to part of Horizon 2020.

¹ [OJ C 326, 26.10.2012](#)

² [President Von der Leyen's Political Guidelines, 16 July 2019](#)

³ [Vice-President Schinas' Mission letter, 1 December 2019](#)

⁴ [Commissioner Gabriel's mission letter, 1 December 2019](#)

DG EAC not only develops policies and actions but fosters cooperation with Member States, with the objective of advancing equity, excellence and agility in education systems; promoting culture as a catalyst for European values; stimulating competitive research and innovation; empowering young people to become active citizens in democratic life, developing the European dimension in sport and strengthening international cooperation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Key results and progress towards the achievement of the Commission's general objectives and DG's specific objectives (executive summary of section 1)

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected around 100 million learners and teachers and has tested not only the resilience of education and training systems across Europe, but also the well-being of our young people. It has affected millions of artists in the cultural and creative sectors as well as athletes, with the cancellation of events and the closing of tracks, festivals and premises, bringing numerous small organisations to the brink of disappearance.

DG EAC has demonstrated its agility and resilience, adapting its programmes, supporting its stakeholders and reshaping its priorities, while fully embracing the strategic objectives of shaping Europe's digital future as set in the European Commission's 'A Europe fit for the digital age'.

With the aim of mitigating the impact of the pandemic on stakeholders, DG EAC took a number of measures, based on the activation of the **force majeure** clause⁵. These actions were aimed at enabling direct and indirect beneficiaries to use possibilities under the force majeure clause of the agreements to respond to the emergency. These included amongst others extension of application deadlines, extension of duration for on-going projects, supporting additional costs up to the maximum amounts granted to projects under the applicable legal frameworks, and further flexibility towards blended activities. In spite of the disruption caused by the pandemic, DG EAC was able to assure continuity of the programmes and support to the National Agencies and the end beneficiaries. In view of borders closing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, mobility had to be substituted with blended and fully digital learning/teaching.

In August 2020, the Erasmus+ programme announced two new calls for proposals, each providing €100 million to respond to the **educational challenges** resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding for digital education readiness will support projects in school education, vocational education and training, and higher education. It aims to enhance online, distance and blended learning, support teachers and trainers, and ensure inclusivity in digital learning opportunities. Funding for partnerships for creativity will support projects in the fields of youth, school education and adult education. It aims to develop skills and competences that encourage creativity and boost quality, innovation and recognition of youth work, and links education, training and youth with the cultural and creative sectors.

A two-year preparation by DG EAC with stakeholders made it possible for the College to adopt the Communication on achieving the **European Education Area (EEA)** by 2025 on 30 September.

⁵ 'Force majeure': any unforeseeable, exceptional situation or event beyond the control of the parties that prevents either of them from fulfilling any of their obligations under the Agreement, which is not attributable to error or negligence on their part or on the part of the subcontractors affiliated entities or third parties in receipt of financial support and which proves to be inevitable despite their exercising due diligence. The following cannot be invoked as force majeure: labour disputes, strikes, financial difficulties or any default of a service, defect in equipment or materials or delays in making them available, unless they stem directly from a relevant case of force majeure

The Communication seeks to foster cooperation between Member States in order to further enrich the quality and inclusiveness of national education and training systems as well as to prevent the health crisis from creating structural barriers to learning and to competence development and from impacting citizens' employment prospects and participation in society. The European Education Area, therefore, ties in with Next Generation EU, the EU's COVID-19 recovery plan to lead the Union out of the crisis and towards a modern and more sustainable Europe, fit to face the digital and green transitions.

The **European Education Area** aims to develop a holistic approach to EU action in education and training to create a genuine European space of learning, which benefits all learners, teachers and institutions. The Communication set out six key dimensions to guide the work on achieving the European Education Area by 2025: 1. Quality 2. Inclusion and gender equality 3. Green and digital transitions 4. Teachers and trainers 5. Higher education and 6. Geopolitical dimension. The EEA Communication sets out the means and milestones to achieve the European Education Area by 2025, supported by Europe's Recovery Plan (Next Generation EU) and the Erasmus+ Programme. In addition, it proposes to establish an enabling framework for cooperation with Member States and engagement with stakeholders, including a reporting and analysis structure, with EU targets, to track and encourage reforms.

The European Universities initiative is paving the way for higher education transformation, by building the universities of the future. On 9 July 2020, the Commission announced 24 additional European Universities. Now, 41 European Universities gathering more than 280 higher education institutions across all parts of Europe are part of this flagship initiative, whose ambition it is to enhance the quality and attractiveness of European higher education and boost cooperation between institutions, their students and staff.

The COVID-19 crisis and the rapid switch to distance and online learning demonstrated the **importance of digital solutions** for teaching and learning, and highlighted existing challenges related to disparities in infrastructure, digital equipment, digital readiness at institutional level, including teacher training as well as low levels of digital skills and competences among young people and adults. Today more than ever, ensuring inclusive and quality education and training, that respond to the lifelong learning need to develop the necessary competences for future life and employment, requires that education and training institutions use digital technologies in a critical, purposeful and effective way.

In 2020, DG EAC continued the implementation of the **Digital Education Action Plan 2018-2020** in partnership with DGs CNECT, RTD, EMPL, JRC, DIGIT and the cooperation of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities. One of the main initiatives led by DG EAC in this context is the **SELFIE** self-reflection tool, which was further developed in the EU and Western Balkans and reached more than 850 000 users. Another important action is the **Digital Education Hackathon**, which took place on 12 and 13 November 2020 in more than 50 locations across 34 countries globally, engaging more than 2 000 participants from education stakeholders (schools, higher education institutions, research centres, innovation labs, private sector). By the end of 2020, SELFIE, EU Code Week, and the #SaferInternet4EU campaign reached more than 40 million individuals across Europe and globally.

Furthermore, in 2020, DG EAC led the preparation of the **Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027**, adopted by the Commission in September 2020. The new Action Plan outlines a comprehensive and long-term vision for digital education in Europe, while reflecting the COVID-19 implications for the education and training systems. Based on

extensive stakeholder consultations, the new Digital Education Action Plan outlines an ambitious seven year strategy for education and training in the digital age, underpinned by high quality, inclusion and lifelong learning. Among its flagship actions is the establishment of a **European Digital Education Hub**.

DG EAC has, furthermore, progressed on the **European Student Card initiative**. Throughout 2020, the number of higher education institutions involved in the initiative grew substantially, reaching almost 3 000 by the end of 2020. Moreover, the first release of the new Erasmus+ mobile App became available to users at the end of December.

DG EAC continued to significantly strengthen **its analysis and knowledge capacity in 2020** regarding education and training systems. A key output to support evidence-based education policies was the 9th **Education and Training Monitor**, which in 2020 had a special focus on teaching and learning in the digital age.

In line with the **2016-2020 Strategic Plan**, DG EAC contributed to both the competitiveness and social inclusiveness dimensions. It focused on implementing relevant policy work contributing to these goals, and fully mobilised its programmes⁶ to this effect.

The European Solidarity Corps enhanced the engagement of young people and organisations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities. Three priorities were particularly addressed in 2020, through the 'Volunteering Teams in High-Priority Areas' action, comprising environmental and climate challenges as well as inclusive societies mental health and well-being. The volunteers helped support people during the COVID-19 pandemic, with projects such as helping the elderly with their groceries or sewing masks.

With 2020's extenuating circumstances, the **European Week of Sport** was more necessary than ever before. Therefore, the European Commission created the #BeActiveAtHome campaign. It was also an occasion to celebrate a #BeActive lifestyle together with the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries and regions for the third time. In this context, the November 2020 online 'Expert Seminar on the European Week of Sport Beyond Borders' gathered participants from EU Member States, Erasmus+ Programme countries and eight countries and regions from the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership, shared good practices and initiated discussions regarding EU funding opportunities and ways to adapt the sport sector to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic measures.

In 2020, the **Jean Monnet activities** received a record number of applications. Out of 1 447 eligible proposals, with the available budget of €21.5 million, the Commission was able to fund some 400 applications.

Furthermore, the **European Semester process** of cooperation was adapted to reflect the new Commission priorities, the Green Deal, the **UN Sustainable Development Goals** and later to respond to the pandemic and to drive economic recovery, thanks to the EU Recovery Plan launched in May 2020. The European Semester Winter Package country reports, published in February, identified education, research, innovation and skills as key drivers for a successful green and digital transition that leaves no one behind. DG EAC provided detailed analysis of the education and training landscape across the EU with a strong focus on basic skills (as evidenced by PISA 2018) and the many

⁶ Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the European Solidarity Corps, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology.

challenges facing the teaching profession. the Commission's agenda. The work on the 2021 country reports have been replaced by a new work strand on the Recovery and Resilience Plans.

DG EAC's international activities continued to contribute to the Commission's overall geopolitical priorities with a focus on the Western Balkans, Eastern and South Neighbourhood. Regarding the **EU's cooperation with Africa**, policy dialogues were held with the African Union (EU-Africa High Level Policy Dialogue meeting on Research and innovation in June 2020 followed by an EU-AU Ministerial meeting for Research Ministers in July 2020).

DG EAC is co-responsible with DG RTD and the JRC for the long-term forward-looking Agenda for **cooperation with the Western Balkans**. On 3 December 2020, the joint education and training, culture and research and innovation ministerial meeting was held. It was the opportunity for Ministries of Western Balkans to agree on the overall content of the cooperation Agenda.

The 5th EU-China **High Level People-to-People Dialogue** (HPPD) in education, youth, culture and sport was held virtually on 9 and 10 November. The high level dialogue between Commissioner Gabriel and Vice Premier of the PRC, Ms Sun Chunlan, was an occasion to exchange views on EU and Chinese policy in areas covered by the HPPD, take stock of HPPD cooperation to date, and discuss future opportunities for cooperation, on the basis of reciprocity and level playing field.

The **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)** continued to have a pronounced structuring effect on universities and other stakeholders, through the development of excellent doctoral programmes and training of postdoctoral researchers and research staff. As the last calls under Horizon 2020 were launched, the programme is on track to meet its target of 65 000 researchers over the 2014-2020 period.

As the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated the need for a strong, resilient, flexible and creative human resource base for Europe, the MSCA helped to further develop researchers' resilience to adapt to a changing global environment and improve their preparedness to address new global challenges.

The **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)** continued to support innovation in Europe by bringing together business, education, and research actors to form dynamic pan-European partnerships. Furthermore in 2020, the Commission negotiated the EIT's new legislative framework which will allow the EIT to have a stronger role in the EU innovation landscape and deliver on its key priorities by making EIT operation more efficient and strengthening geographical coverage and education strand.

On 14 May, the **EIT** launched the 'EIT Crisis Response Initiative', mobilising €60 million of additional funding to 207 innovation projects and ventures from 32 countries, to help address COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.

Under the 2018 **New European Agenda for Culture** and the 2019-2022 Council Work Plan, DG EAC worked in 2020 to promote European cooperation on cultural diversity notably through several working groups of Member State experts on aspects such as gender equality, social cohesion and multilingualism and translation. Under this policy framework, DG EAC also launched in 2020 the Cultural Heritage in Action initiative for the exchange of knowledge on cultural heritage by local and regional policymakers.

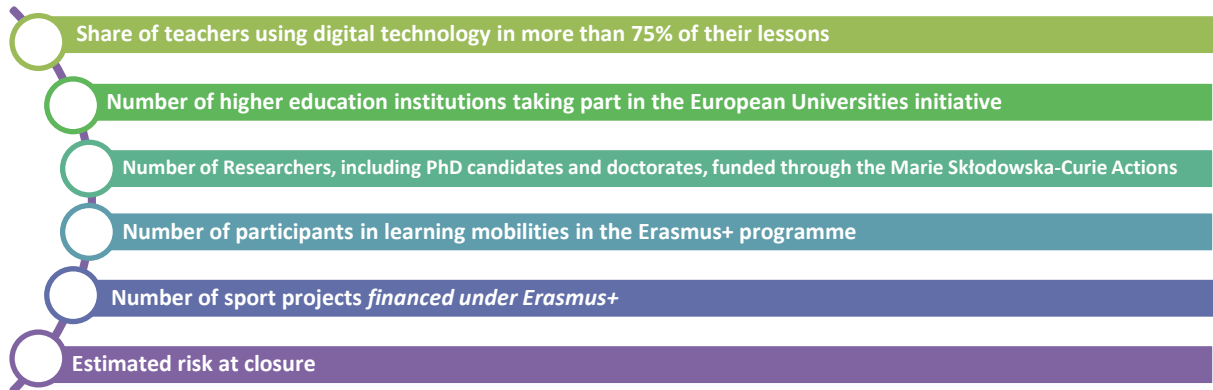
A specific platform for the online and offline circulation of performing artworks was launched to allow this badly hit cultural sector to continue engaging in cross-border

creation and exchange in a challenging context. The first **European Theatre Forum** and the first comprehensive study on the theatre in Europe, map the impact of the crisis and opportunities for future recovery. Furthermore, a new study on the **status and working conditions of artists**, cultural and creative professionals was published in November.

In 2020, DG EAC also contributed actively to concluding the negotiations in the Council and the European Parliament for the next generation of programmes under its responsibility within the future **Multiannual Financial Framework**: Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, Creative Europe, and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology as part of Horizon Europe.

B. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

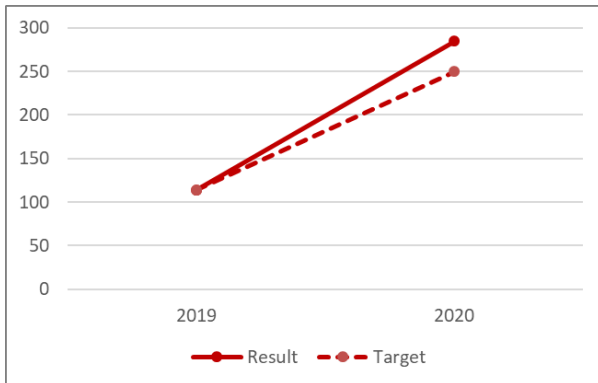
The following six present the key performance indicators of DG EAC:



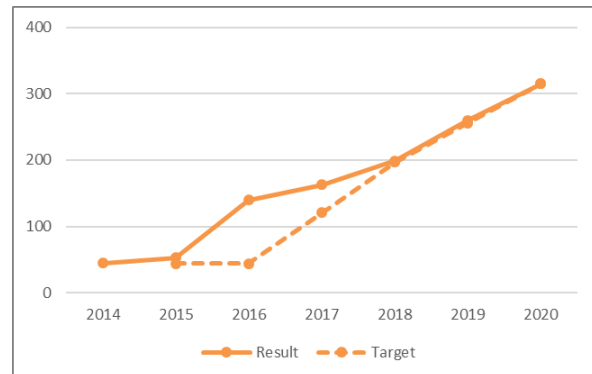
Share of teachers using digital technology in more than 75% of their lessons

At the moment of this report, the data for 2020 was not available.

Number of higher education institutions taking part in European Universities



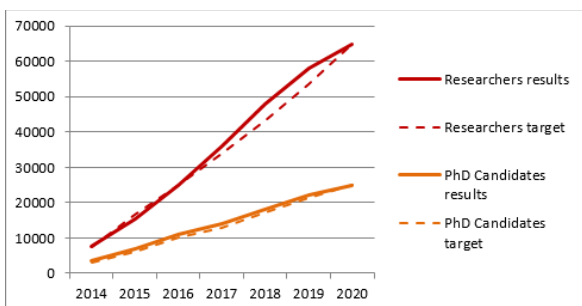
Number of sport projects financed under Erasmus+



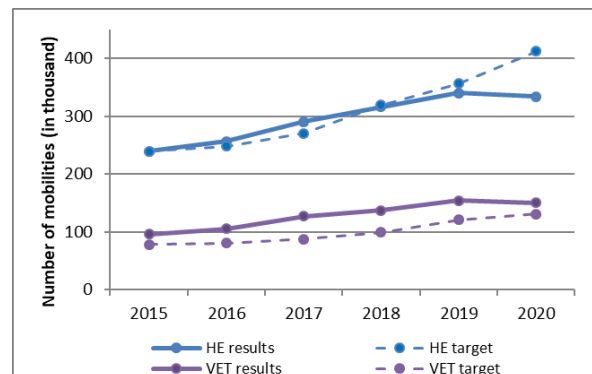
Estimated risk at closure

For 2020, the estimated risk at closure was less than 1%.

Number of Researchers, including PhD candidates and doctorates, funded through the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)



Participants in learning mobilities in the Erasmus+ programme



C. Key conclusions on Financial management and Internal control (executive summary of section 2.1)

In accordance with the governance arrangements of the European Commission, (the staff of) DG EAC conducts its operations in compliance with the applicable laws and regulations, working in an open and transparent manner and meeting the expected high level of professional and ethical standards.

To ensure the achievement of policy and management objectives, the Commission has adopted a set of internal control principles, based on international good practice. The financial regulation requires that the organisational structure and the internal control systems used to implement the budget be set up in accordance with these principles. DG EAC has assessed its **internal control systems** during the reporting year and has concluded that it is partially effective as the principle 13 is not fully present and functioning. A number⁷ of recommendations were issued as part of a 2020 audit of the IAS finalised in early 2021 as regards the effectiveness of the protection of personal data of beneficiaries and participants in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, in particular concerning the **transfer of personal data to third countries**. For the principle 11, on selecting and developing general control activities over technology, concerted efforts are focused on the transition to the new programmes. Continued follow-up will also be given to ongoing audit recommendations from the 2019 IAS audit on information technology governance and project management. Please refer to AAR section 2.1.3 for further details.

In addition, DG EAC has systematically examined the available **control results and indicators**, including those for supervising entities to which it has entrusted budget implementation tasks, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the internal auditor and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on management's assurance about the achievement of the control objectives. Please refer to Section 2.1 for further details.

In conclusion, the management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; **risks are being appropriately monitored** and mitigated; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Director General, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

D. Provision of information to the Commissioner(s)

In the context of the regular meetings between the DG and the Commissioner on management matters held during the year, the main elements of this report and assurance declaration have been brought to the attention of the Commissioner responsible for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth.

⁷ One 'critical' and four 'very important' recommendations (of which two were downgraded respectively from 'critical' to 'very important' and from 'very important' to 'important')

E. Specific actions on COVID-19

In 2020, Europe was strongly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commission has proposed a strong and coordinated response to the health crisis as well as to the impact on Europe's economy and society. COVID-19 has also posed challenges as regards performance, control, audit and assurance in relation to the 2020 EU budget. In an exercise coordinated at corporate level, all Commission services have promoted the consistent and rigorous protection of the EU budget ensuring that appropriate mitigating measures were put in place.

A detailed list of DG EAC's performance tables can be found in Annex 2. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, and in light of the actions taken below, most of DG EAC's targets were achieved, however some events, learning activities and mobilities had to be cancelled or postponed due to the unique situation.

DG EAC actions to mitigate the effects of the pandemic were as follows:

Sharing information and outreach

- **Reinforcing guidance** to National Agencies, Creative Desks and National Contact Points, together with the Executive Agencies, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and Research Executive Agency (REA), to apply maximum flexibility and authorisation to invoke the force majeure clause;
- Setting up **additional online fora** where Member States and stakeholders could communicate on education ('Distance Learning Network' for Member State representatives in school and higher education), culture ('Creatives Unite' platform for cultural and creative sectors in Europe and beyond, to share their initiatives and actions in response to the COVID-19 crisis; and the dedicated Yammer online platform for national ministries) or Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) (reinforcing consultations with key MSCA stakeholders).
- Further **promoting and mobilising online platforms**: eTwinning, Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE), School Education; new information pages on the Europa website highlighting existing education platforms, online resources from a selection of EU-funded projects, a dedicated COVID-19 section on the European Youth Portal and outreach through the EU Youth Strategy Stakeholders platform, a coronavirus-related section on the DG EAC Culture website and a revamped cultural heritage site, a dedicated section on the MSCA website with projects, results and testimonials relevant to COVID-19.
- Several **social media campaigns**, such as #CreativeEuropeAtHome, #BeActiveAtHome, MSCA #SpecialFellowoftheWeek engaged our stakeholders. Under the hashtag #EuropeForCulture, the social media campaign 'Europe's culture – close to you' on sustainable cultural tourism took place over summer. The campaign had more than 18 million impressions, close to 16 thousand interactions/engagements and 230 participants in the competition.
- Promoting healthy life style and physical activity through the **European Week of Sport**.
- Investing in data gathering, for example measuring the impact of COVID-19 on the sport sector, or surveying participants in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees, and in **MSCA** projects.

Redirecting important funding to the Covid-19 response

- Reprogramming **the Music Moves Europe initiative**: the Preparatory Action was reprogrammed and a €2.5 million call for proposals was launched mid-July to help address the music sector's sustainable recovery.
- Launching **two extraordinary calls under Erasmus+ cooperation partnerships**: € 100 million were made available to support distance learning through digital education readiness. Another €100 million fund the call to support creativity, linking our education, training and youth stakeholders with our cultural and creative sector grassroots organisations. Both calls mobilised unused individual mobility funding. 4 440 applications have been received for the two calls.
- Providing more **targeted support for youth organisations** to cooperate across Europe in a COVID-19 context through a refocused 'European Youth Together' call.
- **Accelerating funding for Creative Europe** cooperation projects to assist the cultural sectors most in need and additional funding for translation.
- Contributing to the **EU pledge for the Coronavirus Global Response** pledging marathon: substantial contributions, through our programmes, to the EU pledge (€32.5 million from MSCA and €6 million from European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)).
- **EIT's Crisis Response Initiative**: €60 million of additional funding were mobilised in order to help innovators power high-impact solutions that address the COVID-19 crisis.
- Increasing and reaching out to funded **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions projects** that are potentially relevant to COVID-19: the outreach helped redirect these projects' activities and maximise the contribution of EU funding to the fight against the virus.
- Extending deadlines for ongoing calls under all EAC-managed programmes, with the aim to alleviate the difficulties for applicants.

Adapting internal work to support the funding efforts, while ensuring sound financial management and risk assessment:

- Giving maximum legally allowed **flexibility to beneficiaries** so they could deliver on their contractual obligations in the situation of a force majeure (substitute or delayed performance, extension of deadlines);
- **Simplifying procedures**, developing tools and maximising efforts to recover unused funding.

Adapting to the Covid-19 reality

- **The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027** was rolled out and adapted to take into account the major impact of COVID-19 on the youth sector. Exchanges with the youth stakeholders took place to find ways to mitigate the effects of the crisis. It also resulted in travel restrictions, which had a major impact on **DiscoverEU**. Both application rounds (planned in March and November) had to be cancelled in 2020. Travellers awarded under the 2019 November round got an extension of their travel period up until summer 2021.
- Adapting the **Blue Book Traineeship**: preparations and arrangements for the

October 2020 Blue Book traineeships session were adapted, for it to be rolled out safely while remaining an enriching personal and professional experience.

- Amending the timing of the next **European Capitals of Culture**: the European Commission has proposed to give Rijeka (Croatia) and Galway (Ireland) the possibility to extend their year as 2020 European Capitals of Culture until 30 April 2021. Moreover, it was proposed to postpone the year in which Novi Sad (Serbia) is due to host a European Capital of Culture from 2021 to 2022 and the year in which Timisoara (Romania) and Elefsina (Greece) will hold the title from 2021 to 2023.
- In March 2020, the EC has activated its Business Continuity Plan and requested all staff to pass in teleworking mode due to the Covid-19 pandemic. DG EAC has consequently activated its own **Business Continuity Plan** shared by the Director-General, with the Deputy Director-General, and coordinated by the Director responsible for Performance Management, Supervision and Resources. The Crisis Management Team of DG EAC ensured the successful implementation of the business continuity plan, with the least possible disruption of activity throughout the DG.

1 Key results and progress towards the achievement of the Commission's general objectives and DG's specific objectives

In September 2020, the Commission adopted two initiatives that will strengthen the contribution of education and training to the EU's recovery from the coronavirus crisis, and help build a green and digital Europe.

First, setting out a vision of the European Education Area to be achieved by 2025; the Commission proposes new initiatives, more investment and stronger cooperation of Member States to help all Europeans, of all ages, benefit from the EU's rich education and training offer via the **Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025**⁸.

Secondly, adopting the **Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027** on the 30 September 2020, addressing the implications of the pandemic for the education and training systems, as well as putting forward an ambitious strategy for a European digital education in the next seven years.

In order to achieve the Commission's general objectives, DG EAC's strategy consists of seven specific objectives.

Below we will give a non-exhaustive summary of some of the outputs achieved during 2020 to meet these specific objectives. Detailed information on all initiatives can be found in Annex 2.

General Objective 1 - A European Green Deal

Specific Objective 1.1 - Promote behavioural changes and support education towards a sustainable economy

The 2020 **Erasmus+ annual work programme** outlined awareness raising of environmental and climate- change challenges as a horizontal priority for the cooperation action 'Strategic Partnerships' in the field of education, training and youth.

Priority will be given to projects aimed at developing competences in various sustainability-relevant sectors, developing green sectorial skills strategies and methodologies, as well as future-oriented curricula that better meet the needs of individuals.

The aim of these partnerships is to support the development, transfer and/or implementation of innovative practices as well as the implementation of joint initiatives promoting cooperation, peer learning and exchanges of experience at European level. For the 2020 call, around 1 200 project proposals were submitted, indicating environmental and climate goals as a priority. More than 300 projects, including 1 700 organisations, were supported, amounting to a total value of € 65 million.

⁸ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on **achieving the European Education Area by 2025** (COM(2020) 624 final; SWD(2020) 209 final)

Adopted together with the Communication – **Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027** – Resetting education and training for the digital age (COM(2020) 625 final; SWD(2020) 212 final) and the Communication – **A new ERA for Research and Innovation** (COM(2020) 628 final; SWD(2020) 214 final)

In 2020, intense preparatory work was undertaken to support green measures in a coherent manner, and to set-up a new Green Strategy for the new **Erasmus+** and **European Solidarity Corps** programmes. The aim of the strategy is to pursue environmental and climate goals, while raising awareness and developing competences in sustainability-relevant sectors and creating synergies between the different participants of the programme towards achieving a carbon neutral programme.

The draft Green Strategy was discussed in a dedicated forum during the Co-creation Stakeholder event, organised by DG EAC in January 2020 and attended by 600 delegates.

Work on the Commission proposal for a **Council Recommendation on Education for Environmental Sustainability**, foreseen for adoption in 2021, was kicked-off with the Member States, the Director Generals for Schools, the Directors-General for Higher Education, the European Universities and the Director-Generals for Higher Education in fourth quarter of 2020.

The **Education for Climate Coalition**, a flagship initiative of the Communication on the European Education Area, launched by Commissioner Gabriel at the Education Summit 2020, aims to engage the education community in the green transition through pledges for change at EU and national levels. The Coalition will be jointly developed by EAC and the JRC with a budget of €800 000.

While **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)** promote cross-border mobility of researchers both within Europe and globally, which implies greenhouse gas emissions, they have started to address the ever-growing environmental challenges by promoting sustainable actions and structural changes. A new MSCA Green Charter was developed in 2020 and will be promoted under the new Horizon Europe programme, to minimize the environmental impact of the research activities funded by the programme.

The **EIT** provides a key contribution to the EU's priorities, including the Green Deal, by channelling innovations based on technological and social progress to those areas where they can advance society and directly benefit citizens. Through its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) it strengthens sustainable ecosystems and addresses systematic challenges in transitioning to a low-carbon and circular economy.

The **Culture and creative sectors** are increasingly aware of their role in fighting climate change and leading our societies to adopt more environmental-friendly habits. In line with the **New European Agenda for Culture** and the Council Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022, work continued with the Member States and stakeholders to foster the sector's adaptation to climate change and to promote the cultural dimension of sustainable development.

In 2020, Commissioner Gabriel launched a social media campaign '**this summer, I visit Europe**', inviting people to re-discover Europe's treasures, be they natural or cultural, and to enjoy again visits to museums and heritage sites in their surroundings. The objective was the promotion of local, **sustainable cultural tourism** as a reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign featured sites, events and initiatives in EU27 and had more than 18 million impressions and close to 16 thousand interactions/engagements.

General Objective 2 - Europe fit for the digital age

A - Digital Education Action Plan

In her political guidelines, President von der Leyen announced the update of the Digital Education Action Plan as a key initiative to help unlock the **potential of digital technologies** for learning and teaching and to develop **digital skills** for all. Education and training are key for personal fulfilment, social cohesion, economic growth and innovation. They are called upon to contribute to a European society powered by digital solutions that are strongly rooted in our common values and respond to the lifelong needs of people and organisations. Raising the quality and inclusiveness of education and training systems and improving the provision of digital skills for all during the digital and green transitions is of strategic importance for the EU.



Specific objective 2.1 - Increase the use of digital technologies for teaching and learning

The COVID-19 pandemic had a disruptive effect on the education sector and traditional classroom teaching practices. This underlined the need for supporting capacity building and digital education readiness - improving digital competences for educators and citizens, developing fit-for-purpose educational content, and addressing inequality of access and use of digital tools. The **Erasmus+ programme** supported the take-up of digital technology, capacity building and innovative teaching practices through calls for proposals for Strategic Partnerships in the field of education, training and youth. In 2020, the programme was mobilised to respond to the emergency and recovery process, while continuing to contribute to the necessary digital transformation of education, training, youth and sport.

In 2020, DG EAC continued its work on the implementation of the **Digital Education Action Plan 2018-2020** in partnership with DGs CNECT, RTD, EMPL, JRC, DIGIT and the cooperation of the EIT and its KICs. Actions have been delivered as planned. Overall, six calls for funding were published, as well as three reports and one study. In terms of outreach, SELFIE, EU Code Week, and the #SaferInternet4EU campaign have reached more than 40 million students, teachers and parents in Europe.

The **SELFIE self-reflection tool**, which helps schools embed digital technologies into teaching, learning and assessment, was further rolled out in the EU and Western Balkans and reached more than 850 000 users. The SELFIE tool is particularly appreciated by Ministries of Education and regularly updated with new features. The latest release for instance included questions related to remote education to support schools in managing the need to ensure continuity of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 crisis.

The second edition of the **Digital Education Hackathon** took place on 12 and 13 November 2020 with a main stage event hosted by the German Presidency of the Council of the EU and local events happening in more than 50 locations across 34 countries globally, overall engaging more than 2 700 participants from a wide range

of education and training stakeholders (e.g. students, teachers and educators, entrepreneurs, young innovators, etc.). The event was officially opened by Commissioner Gabriel with the overarching topic being 'teaching and learning in the digital age' and it included the launch of the **2020 Edition of the Education and Training Monitor**, which this year had a special focus on digital education.

The digital transformation of Europe's education systems in the context of the COVID-19 recovery was also the topic of the 3rd **European Education Summit** which took place on 10 December. This first online edition of the Summit was hosted by Commissioner Mariya Gabriel and featured Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Vice-President Margaritis Schinas as well as Education Ministers, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and of the Committee of the Region as well as key education and training stakeholders. More than 300 000 viewers followed the event.

Specific objective 2.2 - Invest in the development of digital skills

Well before the COVID-19 crisis, evidence was clear on the need to support digital competence development of adults and young people in Europe. Digital competence development is a key priority of Erasmus+ and different initiatives are in place to address the digital divides related to gender, socio-economic background and urban/rural areas that still persist across Europe.

In 2020, DG EAC led the preparation of the **Digital Education Action Plan update**. To this end, DG EAC ran a series of stakeholder consultations in the months between February and September, capturing views and experiences related to the switching to distance and online learning and the increased importance of digital competences as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The related open public consultation ran between June and September 2020 and received more than 2 700 replies and 135 position papers from 66 countries. The process was complemented by an online campaign across Member States and a series of outreach events at high political level, hosted by the Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager, Vice-President Margaritis Schinas and Commissioner Gabriel, gathering the views of a variety of stakeholders including the European Parliament and Higher Education Sector.

The **Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027** was adopted by the Commission on the 30 September 2020, addressing the implications of the pandemic for the education and training systems, as well as putting forward an ambitious strategy for digital transformation in education and training in the next seven years.

Longer in duration (until 2027) and in scope (beyond formal education and including lifelong learning), the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 is based on **two strategic priorities** aiming at fostering the development a high performing digital education ecosystem and enhancing digital skills and competences. In line with the Council Conclusions on digital education in Europe's knowledge societies, the objective is to increase the quality and inclusiveness of education and training across Europe and boost cross-sectoral collaboration on digital education.

The Action Plan, coordinated by DG EAC, brings together the actions of six DGs (EAC, CNECT, JRC, RTD, EMPL, GROW), the EIT and its KICs. Key actions for 2021 include, among others:

- The adoption of a proposal for a **Council Recommendation on online and distance learning** which outlines a vision for primary and secondary education to increase the inclusiveness and flexibility of school education and to improve learners' competence development.

- The set-up of a **Strategic Dialogue on the enabling factors for successful digital education** to support Member States and their education and training institutions with know-how on how to adapt and digitise in an inclusive manner.
- The launch of **multi-stakeholder groups to support the preparation of common guidelines for teachers and educational to promote digital literacy and address disinformation** through education and training and ethical guidelines for using Artificial Intelligence in education and training.
- The creation of the **European Digital Education Hub** to stimulate cross-sectoral cooperation on digital education. This will be done by, among others, creating a network of National Advisory Services supporting Member States. Also, a survey was launched in late 2020 with results to be provided in 2021 which will inform of the structure and implementation of the National Advisory Services.

The preparation of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 was also actively supported by the members of ET2020 Working Group on Digital Education: Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DELTA). In 2020, the Working Group also finished its 2018-2020 mandate.

B- Contribution to Research and innovation

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)

Specific objective 2.3 - Through the Horizon 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, promote excellence in research, generate innovation and strengthen skills, training and career development for researchers notably through excellent international doctoral networks

In 2020, while continuing the development of excellent doctoral programmes, the **MSCA** helped to further develop researchers' resilience to adapt to the changing global environment by equipping them with the right inter-sectoral knowledge, skills, and international exposure needed to address new emerging global challenges.

The development of digital skills remains a transversal component of the MSCA, as the actions aim to address key transferable digital skills and competences, to foster the culture of Open Science, innovation and entrepreneurship. The MSCA also aim to strengthen researchers' capabilities for increased research collaboration and information-sharing made possible by new digital technologies.

As the last calls under Horizon 2020 were launched, the programme is on track to meet its target of 65 000 researchers over the 2014-2020 period. The MSCA Individual Fellowships 2020 call in particular had a record-breaking number of over 11 500 applications, showing a 17% increase compared to the previous year.

Every year the **European Researchers' Night** brings research and researchers closer to the public at large. Since the first call for proposals was launched in 2006 (under FP6), the European Researchers' Night has become the largest research communication and promotion event in Europe. It is held annually across Europe and beyond on the last Friday of September. In 2020, due to the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, the event initially scheduled for 25 September 2020 was postponed to 27 November 2020. The 51 projects selected adapted their events to the situation in their country and organized physical and online activities in 388 cities across 29 countries.

Since 2015, **Science is Wonderful!** has been organised in Brussels every year. It is an open exhibition of MSCA and other Horizon 2020 projects presenting the world of science

to the public and in particular to young people, schools and families. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time the event took place fully online during the European Research and Innovations Days (22 to 24 September 2020); showcasing 40 EU-funded projects (20 by Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions fellows and 20 from other Horizon 2020 programmes). The online event reached more citizens and schools than ever before with over 11 600 visitors, including 6 700 pupils and students (between 6 and 17 years old) from 214 schools.

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)

Specific objective 2.4 - Through the Horizon 2020 EIT, strengthen innovation ecosystems that help to tackle global challenges, by fostering the integration of education, research and business.

In 2020, the highest ever EIT financial contribution of €600 million was allocated to the eight EIT's Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) for the implementation of their 2020 Business Plans.

In 2020 itself, the achievements of the EIT are embedded in the following key performance indicators⁹:

- 961 graduates from EIT labelled master and doctoral programmes
- 34 start-ups created by students on EIT programmes
- 60 start-ups created as a result of EIT innovation projects
- 1 100 start-ups supported by KICs
- over €300 million investments attracted by the supported start-ups
- 400 new products/services launched on the market

C –Culture

In 2020 DG EAC contributed to the work-streams of a number of **Commission actions** and initiatives, including among others: the guidelines for the implementation of the revised Audio-visual Media Services Directive, the Action Plan on Intellectual Property and the Media Action Plan.

The new Creative Europe programme specifically caters for the digital dimension of projects to be developed, as a continuation of what had been already a priority under the 2014-2020 programme and eventually accelerated through the situation triggered by the pandemic. More specifically, digitalisation of the culture and creative sectors is one of the key priorities of our larger schemes (cooperation and networks).

⁹ KPIs projects in the KICs business plans 2020. Reported and validated figures will be only available in Q2 2021.

General Objective 3 - An economy that works for people

Specific objective 3.1 - Ensure effective and efficient European cooperation and develop optimised strategic investments for modernised, high quality education and training systems fostering EU social cohesion and economic growth

In 2020, the **European Semester** was adapted to reflect the new Commission priorities, the Green Deal, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and later to respond to the pandemic and to drive economic recovery.

In relation to the European Semester Winter Package **country reports** DG EAC provided detailed analysis of the education and training landscape across the EU with a strong focus on basic skills (as evidenced by PISA 2018) and the many challenges facing the teaching profession.



In 2020, **Country specific recommendations** were substantially refocused on crisis response and recovery, with education and skills remaining a key priority. Supported by the robust analysis of DG EAC, as many as 24 Member States received 2020 country-specific recommendations on education and skills with a strong focus on digital skills.

It was decided in 2020 that the Commission will not publish country reports nor country specific recommendations under the European Semester in 2021. This work has been replaced by the preparation process for the Recovery and Resilience Facility. In this context, DG EAC contributed to the preparation of EU-level strategic documents, such as the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021, as well as of a series of guidance documents issued by the Commission. By end of 2020, more than half of the Member States shared initial drafts of their **Recovery and Resilience Plans**, with a good coverage of education reforms and investments.

General Objective 4 - A stronger Europe in the world

DG EAC's international activities continued to contribute to the Commission's overall geopolitical priorities and overarching priorities, in particular green and digital transitions. Higher education is a key component not only of the EU's response to the challenges of quality and modernisation in Partner countries, but also its relevance in socio-economic recovery, growth and prosperity. The international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) will be the main tool to deliver on these priorities by shaping the new international actions.

DG EAC is co-responsible with DG R&I and the JRC for the long-term forward-looking Agenda for cooperation with the **Western Balkans**. The second Vocational education and training (VET) pilot call targeting the Western Balkans closed on 24 June 2020 and led to the selection of four new projects in December 2020.

Human capital development is a key objective of **EU-Africa cooperation** and reflected in the objectives of the Joint Communication 'Towards a comprehensive Strategy with

Africa' adopted in March 2020. DG EAC has also continued to support the harmonisation of higher education through the Harmonisation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA).

People-to-people cooperation is a pillar of the wider agenda for **EU-China cooperation**. This provided the context for the 5th EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD) in education, youth, culture and sport. This meeting was held virtually on 10 November, and enabled exchanges between Commissioner Gabriel and Vice-Premier Sun Chunlan. The Commission was able to give an overview of the ways in which it seeks to continue cooperation with China, and also to make clear where the limits of this cooperation stand. It was also an opportunity for the Commissioner to raise concerns about the necessity to enhance level playing field and reciprocity, particularly for access to China for European academics.

In 2020, the Saudi Arabian presidency of the **Group of Twenty (G20)** promoted a **strong education agenda**, focusing on internationalisation of education and equity and quality of early childhood education and care. DG EAC represented the EU in the education working group, leading to the ministerial meeting in September, which Commissioner Gabriel attended.

Culture was also included in the G20 framework. A high level event was held on 5 November 2020 co-hosted by the Saudi and Italian G20 current and future presidencies, leading to a new stream of activities to be developed in 2021. DG EAC represented the EU in this event.

The **Bologna Policy Forum**, now renamed the **Global Policy Dialogue** was held in November. DG EAC was involved in the preparation of the event. It brought together representatives of Ministries from Third Countries to exchange on new developments and opportunities to enhance global cooperation in Higher Education (HE). Panellists discussed elements of a rationale for a global policy dialogue on HE, how future global cooperation in HE can be built and how HE policies and institutions can contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (not only SDG4) by 2030.

Specific objective 4.1 - Promote and strengthen international cooperation in the fields of education, training, youth, sport, culture, and research and innovation

A - Education and Training, Youth

Erasmus+ International

The last call of **Erasmus+** included the largest budget to date (€~600 million¹⁰) for international actions. It included additional budget for a number of geographic areas identified as political priorities (Africa, Western Balkans, Neighbourhood etc.) in both education and training, Jean Monnet, and Youth actions. Under the International Credit Mobility action, a total of 1 526 eligible applications for the International credit mobility action were received by the National Agencies, out of which 1 151 projects were selected for funding. With a 9% increase of the actions' budget compared to 2019, over 62 000 new short term academic mobilities were awarded to students and staff.

The 2020 selection exercise resulted in a record 164 new Capacity building projects in higher education and 46 new Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters.

¹⁰ For International Credit Mobility (H4), Capacity Building in Higher Education (H4) and the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master degree (both H1 and H4), as well as H4 top-ups for Jean Monnet and Youth actions

In 2020 the **Jean Monnet activities** received a record number of applications. Out of 1 447 eligible proposals, with a budget available of some €16.5 million¹¹ plus the external actions budget of €5 million¹², the Commission was able to select some 400 of the best ranked applications for funding.

In line with the mid-term evaluation of the **Jean Monnet activities**, the Commission has prepared the actions to be integrated in the future Jean Monnet actions - Erasmus programme 2021/2027. DG EAC has taken into account suggestions of the stakeholders with a view to bringing fact and knowledge about the European Union to pupils and students. A fully-fledged set of sub-actions has been designed for schools and vocational education and training institutes (VET).

While for **Higher Education**, the core international activities will be maintained and reinforced, new capacity building activities for **VET** and Sport supported by external funding will be launched in the new funding period.

In the field of youth, the non-formal learning exchange activities for young people and youth workers are open for programme countries as well as partner countries neighbouring the EU. Three of the SALTO centres (which provide expertise, information and training in specific areas for National Agencies) have a geographical focus: Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia, Southern Mediterranean, Western Balkans.

In addition, for capacity-building projects in the field of youth, 457 eligible proposals were received (+ 16.5% as compared to the 2019) under the 2020 call: 126 for the Western Balkans, 14 for South Mediterranean (Tunisia), and 317 for the ACPALA countries (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific and Latin America). With a total available budget of €14.25 million¹³, 112 projects were selected for funding (79 for ACPALA, 28 for the Western Balkans and 8 for SouthMed).

After the successful implementation of the **Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (EVE)** pilot project launched in 2018, DG EAC is currently defining the modalities for its full integration into the future Erasmus programme, including a possible extension to other regions. By the end of 2020, the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange pilot project reached over 30 000 participants in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean.

European Solidarity Corps

The **European Solidarity Corps** includes an international dimension through its volunteering strand. In 2020, numerous information and promotion activities were carried out through the regional SALTO Resource Centres, which has intensified the interest of organisations from Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership and South Mediterranean countries to join the European Solidarity Corps.

The ambitious initiatives of the European Education Area will act as a motor for the **Bologna Process**, while the tools developed within the context of the European Higher Education Area will help to fulfil the EU's ambitions. The **ministerial conference of the Bologna Process** took place on 19 November 2020, where Commissioner Mariya Gabriel delivered a keynote speech. **The Communiqué, adopted by the 50 members**, sets out the priorities for the coming decade and more precisely until the next ministerial conference in 2024.

¹¹ Ref. Commission WP (amended on 3/3/2020) <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmusplus/node/3456>

¹² Ref. Commission decision C(2019)4074 of 6 May 2019; Commission Annual Action Programme 2018 C(2018)8064 and C(2018)7715, equivalent to a funding decision of 28 November 2018

¹³ Including €3 million from IPA II for the WBs and €0.5 million from ENI for Tunisia

B – Sport

Sport is a powerful tool, bringing people together at international, national, regional and local levels. Cooperation, partnerships and exchanges at grassroots level inside the EU as well as with non-EU countries can contribute to the development of new skills and positively influence societal change. Moreover, sport organisations at all levels are by nature open to international cooperation. The Preparatory Action on **Exchanges and mobility in sport** aims to contribute to the efforts of sport organisations by supporting the learning mobility of their staff. Particularly, this action supports cooperation with different regions, namely the Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership, Asia, Latin America and Africa. **In 2020, 10 projects out of 95 applications were selected.**

DG EAC launched the **EU4Youth: European Week of Sport Beyond Borders in the Western Balkans** in cooperation with DG NEAR. The purpose of this action is to increase mobility in the region as well as to enhance cooperation with EU countries.

C – Culture

The **new Creative Europe programme**, for the first time, foresees an explicitly international dimension to align funding with the New European Agenda for Culture. The cultural dimension of EU international relations is fundamental to promoting better mutual understanding, dialogue, peace-building, and inclusive and sustainable development. Concrete cooperation via Creative Europe actions can help to realise these ambitions. In addition, international actions are foreseen such as cooperation projects aimed at collaborations between cultural organisations from associated countries and other regions of the world, and possibly extending the mobility scheme beyond the associated countries.

A special call worth €5 million for **cultural cooperation with the Western Balkans** was organised to boost the participation of the Western Balkans in the Creative Europe programme in 2020.

DG EAC remained active with our Asian partnerships including South Korea and China.

Cooperation with UNESCO: DG EAC continued co-operation with UNESCO on inter-regional and cross-cutting action aiming to strengthen the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property via a joint project (€750 000, 2019-2021).

D – Contribution to Research and Innovation

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)

In 2020, the MSCA remained the **most international part of Horizon 2020** with an outstanding international dimension (over half of all third-country participations in Horizon 2020).

Following the study on the MSCA international dimension carried out in 2019, which highlighted the need to better exploit the international outreach of MSCA at policy level, in 2020 DG EAC participated and contributed to a number of Joint Science and Technology (JTSCC) meetings and policy dialogues with third countries including bilateral dialogues for instance with Russia in June 2020, or with China in November 2020. Other JTSCC meetings allowed promoting of cooperation through MSCA including with Mexico, Argentina, Israel, Jordan and Canada.

At regional level, policy dialogues were held with the African Union, the Eastern

Partnership, the Community of Latin America and Caribbean States, the Mediterranean and Middle East, and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Additional events for the promotion of the MSCA, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe were held in 2020 in cooperation with United States organisations, and with Euraxess on a regular basis (Canada, Australia, Thailand, and Vietnam).

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)

An important goal of the EIT international activities is to **set up joint innovation programmes and activities** between European partners and the international partners including a combination of research and development, education, and innovation activities based on needs. The key objective of the EIT international cooperation is to reinforce the attractiveness of the European economy and its innovation capacity towards third countries. To this extent, the EIT and the KICs are attracting partner organisations, researchers and students from all over the world, by encouraging their mobility and cooperating with third-country organisations.

In Western Balkans, five different EIT Hubs were created through which the EIT supports local partner organisations working on innovation projects in areas such as climate change, health, and sustainable raw materials through.

The established EIT Hubs in US (Silicon Valley) and Israel (Tel Aviv) have supported KIC Partners and start-ups in soft international landing and carried out tailored activities.

General Objective 5 - Promoting our European way of life

A - Education and Training



Under the umbrella of the so-called 'ET 2020 framework', 2020 gave us an opportunity to look back at ten years of European cooperation in the field of education and training. The **Education and Training Monitor** 'teaching and learning in the digital age', not only highlighted progress in reducing early school leaving, but also an increase in participation in all education sectors, from early childhood through to

tertiary education. Challenges, however, still exist in terms of equipping all young people with basic skills. Around one in five, 15-year-olds, still fails to demonstrate a sufficient level of competence in reading, maths and science to fully participate in society.

In addition to an EU-wide analysis, the Monitor also contains 27 country profiles, which this year had a special focus on Member States' responses to the pandemic and digital education.

While showing further progress on reaching important EU education and training targets, this year's edition of the Monitor shows that despite Member State investment in digital infrastructure in recent years, large disparities persist, both between and within countries.

DG EAC prepared a 'highlights' brochure, to be published in 2021, to showcase the results of the two-year period, involving around 400 experts representing Member States

administrations and other stakeholders.

To step up the dissemination of the [Education and Training Monitor](#) a [new web page](#), easily accessible via smart phone, was launched in 2020. Due to the relevance of its topic in a time of pandemic and distance learning, this Commission's flagship publication was the most downloaded item from the EAC webpage in 2020. The launch event also proved to be a success, with the Monitor's session recording the highest number of YouTube Live viewers of the second day of the Digital Education Hackathon (about 180 participants).

During the year, DG EAC has focused on preparing the Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, and contributed to mainstreaming education policy in other priority policy areas of the incoming Commission, programmes and financial instruments.

To better reach out to citizens and stakeholders, DG EAC has continuously improved the [Education and Training website](#). As a result, user traffic has increased by 400% since 2018 in relation to the European Education Area.

The results of the [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study \(TIMSS\) 2019](#), which tests the competences of students in the fourth and eighth grades in mathematics and science, were released on 8 December 2020.

B - European Education Area

Specific objective 5.1 – Make the European Education Area a reality, removing barriers to learning, improving access to quality education and making it easier for learners to move between countries

Achieving the European Education Area by 2025

As mentioned in the Executive Summary, the College adopted the [Communication on achieving the European Education Area](#) (EEA) **by 2025**¹⁴ on 30 September.

The European Education Area aims to develop a holistic approach to EU action in education and training to create a genuine European space of learning, which benefits all learners, teachers and institutions. The means and milestones are detailed in terms of around **45 thematic actions** to achieve the EEA's objectives together with EU Member States and education and training stakeholders. It builds on and takes forward work on a series of policies and initiatives in education and trainings adopted in 2018 and 2019.

¹⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (COM(2020) 624 final; SWD(2020) 209 final)

Adopted together with the Communication – Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 – Resetting education and training for the digital age (COM(2020) 625 final; SWD(2020) 212 final) and the Communication – A new ERA for Research and Innovation (COM(2020) 628 final; SWD(2020) 214 final)

The Commission's vision for the European Education Area is set out on the basis of six dimensions:

- *quality in education*
- *inclusion, fairness and gender equity in education*
- *education in the context of the green and the digital transitions*
- *teachers and trainers*
- *higher education transformation*
- *geopolitical dimension*

To support the achievement of the European Education Area and to mobilise funding, tools and expertise in view of supporting policy learning and reforms, the Commission has proposed to establish '**an enabling framework**' including a **reporting and analysis structure**, with EU targets, to track and encourage reforms.

At the end of 2020, two informal workshops with Member States, hosted by the trio Presidency of the Council, were dedicated to pursue discussions with the Commission on the proposed governance arrangements and the EEA targets and indicators, in view of the planned adoption of a Council Resolution on the EEA and the next cycle of European cooperation in education and training in early 2021.

DG EAC established an informal consultative group in May 2020, to not only provide advice and expertise but also to prepare an 'economic paper' establishing a strong and realistic business case for investing in education in the national context and providing input that helped to set up an official expert group which will promote quality investment in inclusive education and training.

The European Education Area will also act as a motor for the **Bologna Process**, inspiring and supporting other member countries of the European Higher Education Area to benefit from a similar path. The **ministerial conference of the Bologna Process** took place on 19 November 2020, where Commissioner Gabriel delivered a keynote speech. **The Rome Communiqué adopted by the 50 members'** sets out the priorities for the coming decade and more precisely until the next ministerial conference in 2024.

1. European Universities

The Erasmus+ European Universities act as testbeds for higher education transformation, by building the universities of the future. On 9 July 2020, the Commission announced that **24 additional European Universities** had been **selected**. **41 European Universities gathering more than 280 higher education institutions across all parts of Europe are now part** of this flagship initiative.

On 4 November, DG EAC organised a kick-off meeting for the 24 new European Universities and a **joint meeting** with the rectors of **the 41 European Universities, the Directors-Generals** of the EU Member States responsible for higher education, and student representatives on the transformative potential of the European Universities Initiative and on tackling remaining barriers. **A survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic** on European Universities was conducted in spring. During the Education Summit on 10 December, a high-level panel was organised on 'European Universities – paving the way for higher education transformation post COVID-19', with Commissioner Gabriel and several ministers of Member States in the panel.

In order to measure progress towards the European Education Area and the Universities of the future, DG EAC is strengthening its institution-level data instruments including the renewal of a grant financed by the Erasmus+ Programme with **U-Multirank**. A call to

continue the **European Tertiary Education Register** (ETER) was launched in October 2020. In order to harvest the full potential of data tools for higher education, DG EAC has finalised its work with the JRC on developing a **Knowledge Hub for Higher Education** in 2020.

2. European Approach for Micro-credentials

In 2020, DG EAC set up a **micro-credentials higher education consultation group**, with the objective to develop common characteristics for a European Approach to Micro-



credentials to be taken by the EU, by national authorities, by higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders, to ensure the take-up, quality, validation, recognition and portability of micro-credentials across the EU. The group presented its final recommendations, including a common definition, an EU standard and a roadmap of actions to Commissioner Gabriel on 14 December. On the same day, a study mapping the current state of play with micro-credentials in Europe and beyond was presented.

3. Automatic mutual Recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad

Work focused on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on promoting **automatic mutual recognition** of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad.

The **27th Joint Annual European Network of Information Centres in the European Region - National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (ENIC-NARIC)** discussed the recognition of qualifications in times of COVID-19, the UNESCO Global Convention on Recognition of qualifications, a European approach to micro-credentials, the Bologna Process and the recognition and digitalisation of student data.

4. European graduate tracking mechanism

DG EAC's **Expert Group on graduate tracking** worked on formulating a final set of recommendations on how to achieve comparable EU data on graduate outcomes, the final report to be published in the first quarter of 2021. In June 2020, DG EAC published the results of the **pilot Eurograduate survey**, covering eight Member States, and the results of a study mapping the state of graduate tracking measures in EU and EEA countries.

In order to support Member States in the implementation of the Council Recommendation, DG EAC started a **Europe-wide Erasmus+ capacity building project** in September 2020.

5. European Student Card Initiative

The **European Student Card Initiative** is one of the key actions to further simplify and **promote student mobility in Europe** by digitalising and standardising administrative processes for implementing student mobility, and establishing a European student eID for online cross-border authentication.

Throughout 2020, the **number of higher education institutions involved** in the initiative grew substantially, reaching **almost 3 000** by the end of 2020. In 2020, **several**

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online meetings - including a webinar in March which was viewed by over 1 600 higher education institutions and other stakeholders - to discuss the initiative were organised by DG EAC.

In January, work on significant enhancements of the **Erasmus+ Mobile App** for the next Erasmus+ programme started to turn it into a digital **one-stop-shop for students** participating in the next Erasmus+ programme. Work progressed well throughout 2020 and the first release of the new App became available to users at the end of December.

6. Early childhood education and care systems (ECEC)

The Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is supporting Member States' implementation of the Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems. It aims at supporting countries in their reflections and designing policy measures, primarily on the topics of social inclusion and the professionalization of staff. It produced a **Toolkit for inclusion in early childhood education and care**, and a Policy Guide on How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff in early childhood education and care.

7. 'Pathway to School Success'

Work on the new initiative 'Pathways to School Success' was started in the last quarter of 2020. Its purpose is to prepare a new Council Recommendation in 2022, aimed at helping all pupils **reach a certain level of proficiency in basic skills and complete upper secondary education**. A study looking into successful curriculum reforms to address the key competences and basic skills development by all learners was launched in December. At the same time, secondary research on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on educational outcomes and on a systemic, whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing in schools was launched.

8. The role of teachers

In May 2020, the Council adopted conclusions on **European teachers and trainers for the future**, recognising that teachers and trainers are an indispensable driving force of education and training, and acknowledging their commitment during the current COVID-19 crisis. Following the Council conclusions, the Communication on achieving the European Education Area announces the plan for voluntary cooperation and networking of national teacher education institutions in the form of **Erasmus Teacher Academies**, to develop policy guidance on the mobility of students and practicing teachers, and to support member states to diversify teaching careers.

The **ET2020 Working Group Schools** concluded its mandate with a **policy guide** addressing a number of concerns and challenges facing school education systems in their capacity to best recruit and nurture their teachers and school leaders. It offers new understandings and approaches to careers in school education, together with numerous recent examples of policy action from countries across Europe.



Supporting teacher and school leader careers: A policy guide

Available online are:

- [Full report](#) (PDF)
- [Summary](#) (PDF) in 24 EU languages
- Four Info sheets – [Diverse paths](#); [Creating a framework](#), [Policy measures](#), [School heads](#) (PDF) in 24 EU languages
- [Video](#) – on the report and the working process of the group (YouTube)
- A [Webinar](#) (recorded March 2020) for teachers and other stakeholders across Europe.

In 2021 and supported by the DG, a number of countries will begin to explore the development of national frameworks for school education careers as a pilot implementation of this work.

9. University-Business Cooperation

In 2020, the **HEInnovate platform** with its community of HEIs and businesses continued its work fostering greater innovation and entrepreneurship in the EU and beyond. Despite the COVID-19 issues, a number of work-shops and Train the Trainers sessions were carried out, and a series of webinars that discussed the challenges that HEIs were facing during the confinement were set up. There is also close collaboration with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) on Higher Education and Smart Specialisation (HESS). A direct outcome of the work that DG EAC initiated, and carried out in collaboration with the JRC, was the inclusion of a priority focusing on 'human capital' into the Commission's proposal for the next period of the European Regional and Development Funds ('Skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship').

10. Languages

The collaboration between Member States in the context of the Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages provided the content for a new report, published in July, entitled **Education begins with language**. A conference in four languages was carried out on the occasion of the European Day of Languages in September. More than 1 000 participants participated in a roundtable focusing on the report and the policy priorities.



They also saw the release of a new video, celebrating languages in Erasmus+ and the European Language Label award throughout the programme period that concluded 2020.

Erasmus+ Programme

Specific objective 5.2 - With the support of the Erasmus+ programme, promote learning mobility of individuals, as well as cooperation, inclusion, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of education and training

DG EAC has undertaken targeted extraordinary measures to allow for **more flexibility in mobility activities in order** to counter the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including blended, digital and remote solutions.

These extraordinary measures included:

- Providing beneficiary organisations with the maximum flexibility, within the limits of the applicable legal framework, to adapt their activities and to support participants in mobility projects.
- Recent graduates who had to postpone their planned mobilities were allowed to carry out their mobilities within 18 months from their graduation, instead of the normal 12-month timeframe.
- In order to ensure smooth continuation of the Erasmus+ programme, participants were allowed to have a 'blended mobility'; to start or end their mobility 'virtually' and, if the situation allows, go on a physical mobility.



In school education, planned class exchanges for primary and secondary schools could kick-off online exchanges through the collaboration in the eTwinning platform.

Further to this, in August 2020 DG EAC launched two extraordinary calls for **proposals for strategic partnerships in Erasmus**, each providing €100 million to support respectively digital education readiness and creative skills in order to respond to the educational challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding for digital education readiness will support projects in school education, vocational education and training, and higher education. It aims to enhance online, distance and blended learning, support teachers and trainers, and ensure inclusivity in digital learning opportunities. Funding for partnerships for creativity will support projects in the fields of youth, school education and adult education. It aims to develop skills and competences that encourage creativity and boost quality, innovation and recognition of youth work. The aim of both was to link education, training and youth organisations with the cultural and creative sectors.

Notwithstanding the challenges imposed by the pandemic, the programme continued to focus on supporting opportunities for all in acquiring and **developing key competences** in order to foster employability, socio-educational and personal development, as well as participation in civic and social life. **Social inclusion** remained an overarching priority across all sectors of the programme. The programme also aimed to promote **active citizenship, support climate goals**, and **building digital education readiness**. An important novelty was the launch of a pilot action to support the Centres of Vocational Excellence aimed at establishing world-class reference points for both initial as well as continuing training in specific sectors.

Looking forward to the next generation of the programme, in January 2020, DG EAC hosted a large stakeholder consultation event on the co-creation process for the future Erasmus+. The end of the year marked the conclusion of the inter-institutional legislative negotiations between the Council and the European Parliament which started back in 2018. The co-legislators reached a political agreement on the future Erasmus+ Regulation 2021-2027 in December 2020. The final outcome, including an almost doubled envelope for the future Erasmus+ and several ambitious actions, is a great success and a recognition of Erasmus+ as an emblematic EU flagship programme valued by generations of Europeans.

The Erasmus+ programme also supports **policy reforms** co-funding initiatives for transnational cooperation. In 2020 eleven projects with a view to implement innovative policies were financed for a total amount of some €18 million. These projects will last three years and pursue mutual learning among public authorities aiming to foster systematic improvement and innovation in the education and training fields. Furthermore, it will enhance the collection and analysis of substantive evidence to ensure the successful implementation of innovative measures or facilitate the transferability and scalability of effective innovative measures.

A call on **social inclusion** through Education, Training and Youth has allowed the Commission to support 44 new cooperation activities with a total amount of €18 million in 2020. This call aims at upscaling and disseminating innovative good practices falling under the scope of the Council Recommendation on Common values, Inclusive Education and the European Dimension of Teaching.

In the field of **higher education**, work on the new Erasmus+ programme continued with some novelties such as blended mobility, short-term mobility for doctoral candidates and more opportunities for international mobility. These concepts and their potential impact were promoted in meetings and conferences.

In **school education**, the Erasmus+ programme continued to support policy priorities such as reinforcing the development of key competences, strengthening the profiles of the teaching profession and increasing the levels of achievement and interest in STEM. DG EAC and the National Agencies also strengthened the promotion of mobility of staff and pupils. The good results of the call, despite the early signs of the COVID-19 pandemic, confirmed the attractiveness of the format of 'school exchange partnership'.

In the **vocational education and training (VET)** field, the Erasmus+ programme continued to support policy priorities such as the uptake of innovative approaches and digital technologies for teaching and learning, work-based learning, professional development of VET teachers, and further strengthening key competences in vocational education and training. DG EAC was involved in the selection process of two VET related centralised calls aiming at the establishment and development of the transnational cooperation platform 'Centres of Vocational Excellence' and the sector skills alliance for implementing new strategic approach to sectoral skills cooperation ('Blueprint'). Promotion of long-term mobility of VET learners ('ErasmusPro') also remained a priority under the mobility projects.

In the **adult education** field, the Erasmus+ programme continued to support policy priorities such as the supply of high quality learning opportunities and the development of the competences of educators, the setting up of upskilling pathways and the promotion of Erasmus+ among all citizens and generations by offering educational activities and exchanges of experiences to seniors.

In all the three field (**school education, VET and adult education**), the work on preparing the programme 2021-2027 has intensified, particularly the development of the

accreditation system aiming at facilitating access to mobility activities. Additional calls for partnerships aimed at 'Innovative practices in a digital era' and 'Skills development and inclusion through creativity and the arts' were launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

eTwinning has continued to expand further, with 137 000 new users registered (+6%) and over 21 000 new schools, connecting more teachers and classrooms across Europe. It is to be noted that following the outbreak of COVID-19, the global number of new registrations remained globally equivalent to that of the same period in 2019, but with marked differences among countries. Over the year, 15 411 new projects were launched. With a view to acknowledge their entire commitment to eTwinning and their pioneer role, 2 139 schools were awarded the eTwinning school label, compared to 1 212 in 2019.

In all its activities, eTwinning promoted the **2020 annual theme 'Climate change and environmental sustainability'**. Under the title 'Classrooms in action: teaching climate change with eTwinning' two major deliverables were: the annual Conference (first time online) that gathered some 500 participants plus 5 400 views of the recordings; and the eTwinning book, helping teachers to better understand the topic and offering resources, examples and ideas for projects and activities.

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19, the **eTwinning** community immediately started exploring on how the variety of eTwinning tools could be usefully mobilised, including articles and stories on the public portal. Research indicates that many teachers engaged in eTwinning were better prepared to transition to teaching online.

The **School Education Gateway** surpassed 97 000 registered users at the end of 2020. It continued with its broad offer of news and expert articles, tutorials and videos, webinars and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) on diverse topics to all education stakeholders across Europe and beyond, as well as the **European Toolkit for schools**. It made a specific contribution during the period of school-site closures with additional resources about online and distance learning.

EPALE, the **Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe**, has demonstrated its best result since it was founded. There has been an increase of 26% (year to year) in numbers of visitors who were registered, reaching more than 82 000 registered users.

EPALE has stepped up its potential to effectively serve the adult .The successful launch of the 'Community stories' gathered contributions on distance learning for inspiring members and the first fully online EPALE community conference brought together more than 3 800 adult learning practitioners discussing the future of adult learning in Europe.

Following an initiative of the European Parliament (Pilot Projects), during the year 2020 **the European Commission has awarded two prizes:**

The '**Jan Amos Comenius Prize**' for high quality teaching about the European Union rewarded 22 secondary schools around Europe with €8 000 for their innovative and creative projects, to help their pupils learn about the European Union in ways that inspire. Awarded by Vice-President Margaritis Schinas and Commissioner Mariya Gabriel on 9 May 2020, the Prize sheds light on the importance of teaching and learning about the European Union at a young age through a wide range of engaging teaching methods.



The '**Altiero Spinelli Prize**' for Outreach celebrates outstanding works and activities which promote understanding of the European Union and its values as an integration project. The prize, of €25 000 each, was awarded to 16 finalists with the focus being on initiatives to help young citizens engage in the democratic processes that shape the future of the Union.

C – Youth

The **EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027** has been rolled out according to plan during the reporting period. A study on the landscape of youth representation in the EU was released and provided new evidence on youth representation at the European level in the context of the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy, with particular regard to the 'Engage' priority concerning youth participation in democratic life. At the same time, the implementation of the Strategy has been adapted to take into account the major impact of COVID-19 on the youth sector. In order to better capture and share experiences on how to tackle this impact on young people and on the sector itself, Commissioner Gabriel has announced a series of live on-line sessions organised for the EU Youth Strategy Stakeholders Platform. These exchanges with the youth stakeholders addressed ways to mitigate the effects of the crisis. Building on these exchanges, the Commission also started to prepare the 2021 EU Youth Report, which will dedicate particular attention to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on youth and the youth sector.



In May, Commissioner Gabriel endorsed the main axes of DG EAC's proposal to revise the existing Council Recommendation on the cross-border mobility of young volunteers in Europe, in light of the new political and institutional context, and of the creation of the European Solidarity Corps. The preparatory work in 2020 included an expert group and a study on removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities¹⁵.

Under the Croatian Presidency, Council conclusions on raising opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas¹⁶ have also been adopted, which invited Member States to promote approaches aimed at reducing inequalities between urban and remote/rural areas, and to develop measures which reflect the views and perspective of young people in these areas.

A Council resolution on a **European Youth Work Agenda**¹⁷ was adopted in November, followed by the third **European Youth Work Convention** organised by the German Presidency of the EU. The Council Resolution aims to set up the European Youth Work Agenda, a strategic



¹⁵<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1a7042cb-e678-11ea-ad25-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

¹⁶ Official Journal of the European Union, *OJ C 193*, 9.6.2020

¹⁷ Official Journal of the European Union, *OJ C 415*, 1.12.2020

framework for strengthening and developing quality, innovation, and recognition of youth work.

In consultation with young people across the EU for elaboration and testing purposes, the **European Youth Portal** was thoroughly revamped, with a view to adapting its layout to reflect today's user expectations. The revamp also included a new structure for content to be more easily accessible and to integrate material on European youth policy. Young people were also invited to be active in online community building events hosted on the European Solidarity Corps Portal, which is part of the European Youth Portal, in particular via a series of online competitions including photo, poem, and T-Shirt design contests.

The **European Solidarity Corps** focus on young people, their living conditions, their health and wellbeing, and their active participation in democratic society is essential in the crisis and post-crisis era. Responding to the COVID-19 crisis, new priorities are emerging including particularly, health and safety of volunteers, inter-generational solidarity and online volunteering.

The European Solidarity Corps also sought to offer the necessary flexibility and support, such as the extension of project duration, a simpler approach regarding the eligibility of costs incurred during the crisis and the extension of submission deadlines for open calls.

Up to 10 000 young people were supposed to take part in European Solidarity Corps through volunteering, traineeships, jobs and projects planned for the summer and autumn. Given the restrictions to mobility, alternative solutions have been looked at, (for future calls) increasing the support to in-country activities to the extent possible.



The COVID-19 outbreak resulted in travel restrictions for affected areas, which entailed a major impact on **DiscoverEU**. Both application rounds (planned in March and November) were cancelled in 2020. Participants selected in November 2019, who were due to start their travels as of April 2020, were advised to change their tickets to a later date. The travelling period for those participants is being extended to summer 2021. Next applications rounds have

been postponed to 2021. Prospective applicants are informed about the latest developments via the DiscoverEU Portal, part of the European Youth Portal.

Preparations for the 2021 edition of the **European Youth Week** started in 2020, in particular by asking National Agencies to nominate each a contact point with a view to organising the usual events at national level. The main Brussels-based event will not take place to maintain an alternating cycle and synergies with another centrally organised event with similar goals and addressing similar audience - the European Youth Event (EYE) - steered by the European Parliament, which is tentatively postponed to May 2021 due to the pandemic. This way, there will be higher potential to achieve stronger impact, more visibility and better outreach in mobilising young people across Europe.

Erasmus+ Programme – Youth

Specific objective 5.3 - With the support of the Erasmus+ programme, promote non-formal learning mobility and active participation among young people, as well as cooperation, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of youth

The pandemic outbreak has heavily impacted on young people and the youth sector in general. Against this background, the Erasmus+ Youth programme has continued to provide support to the possible extent and to provide medium-term solutions for the recovery phase. In order to provide potential beneficiaries with additional flexibility, DG EAC extended deadlines for ongoing calls. It was also decided to adapt the 'European Youth Together' call, published in May, to better cater for specific needs that may arise from the COVID-19 crisis. With a €5 million budget, this call intends to support new ways of mobilising youth organisations to cope with the pandemic and its consequences.

The Youth strand of Erasmus+ sought to support activities for the benefit of the youth sector, whilst at the same time promoting cross-sector cooperation.

In line with the EU Youth strategy, the programme put a particular emphasis on:

- **Projects aiming at engaging, connecting and empowering young people:** priority was given to strengthening cross-sectorial cooperation, allowing for greater synergies across different areas of actions that matter for young people. A special focus was put on participation –including alternative and innovative forms of participation –and active citizenship of young people, notably those involving youth at risk of social exclusion.
- **Projects contributing to quality and innovation in Youth Work and its recognition,** in particular by supporting capacity-building of youth workers and youth work practices, and by supporting youth workers in developing and sharing effective methods in reaching out to marginalised young people, in preventing racism and intolerance among youth, and in addressing the risks, opportunities, and implications of digitalisation
- **Projects promoting entrepreneurship and creative learning and social entrepreneurship among young people,** particularly in the form of transnational youth initiatives that allow groups of young people to put ideas into practice, including through social enterprises, tackling challenges and identified problems in their daily lives.

European Solidarity Corps

Specific objective 5.4 - With the support of the European Solidarity Corps, enhance the engagement of young people and organisations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities as a means to contribute to strengthening cohesion, solidarity and democracy in the Union and abroad, addressing societal and humanitarian challenges on the ground, with particular effort to promote social inclusion

Three priorities were addressed particularly in 2020, through the 'Volunteering Teams in High-Priority Areas' action:

- response to **environmental and climate challenges** (excluding immediate disaster response)
- projects building **inclusive societies** including through bridging the intergenerational and social divide or addressing challenges linked to geographical remoteness

- projects aimed at improving **mental health** and well-being

D - Sport

Specific objective 5.5 - With the support of the Erasmus+ programme, promote learning mobility of sport coaches and staff, as well as cooperation, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of sport organisations and sport policies

The COVID-19 crisis underlined the importance of sport and physical activity for developing both physical and social resilience. In the spirit of promoting physical activity, DG EAC launched the **#BeActiveAtHome social media campaign** to motivate people, to keep fit whilst confined. In addition, a specific on-line platform was launched to allow Member States to share good practices related to COVID-19 among other. A High Level Conference on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sport sector and the way to recovery was organised on 17 November.



DG EAC established a High Level Group (HLG) in the field of gender equality in sport on the bases of the new **EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025**. DG EAC published a call for experts in this field.

DG EAC continued to tackle cross-border challenges that impact the integrity of sport such as anti-doping, match-fixing, and violence in sport. DG EAC also continued to provide expert input on anti-doping issues and match-fixing. In addition, it hosted an online seminar on traditional sports and games on 29 September and a workshop to promote **greener sport** at the European Week of Regions and Cities on 23 September.

On 4 December 2020, the Council adopted the 4th **EU Work Plan for Sport** (1 January 2021 - 30 June 2024). This Resolution of the Council is the guiding document setting out the key priority areas, topics and deliverables in the field of sport that the EU Member States and the Commission should prioritise between 2021 and 2024. The key priority areas are the following: 1) Protect integrity and values in sport: 2) Socio-economic and environmental dimension in sport and 3) Promotion of participation in sport and health-enhancing physical activity.

Erasmus+ Programme – Sport

The implementation of the Erasmus+ sport programme and the European Week of Sport were adapted to assist sporting organisations and clubs in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

The 7th edition of the **SportInfoDay** was organised on 30 January 2020. The 2020 Erasmus+ sport call saw an unprecedented success with over 1 200 applications received. In 2020, in the Sport chapter, priority was given to grassroots sport, increased participation in sport and awareness of the importance of health-enhancing physical activity. It also promoted and supported good governance in sport and dual careers of athletes, and voluntary activities in sport, together with social inclusion, including refugees and migrants.

The **6th edition of the European Week of Sport**, organised during the last week of



September 2020, reached a new record with the participation of over 15.6 million Europeans in more than 32 600 events. The European Week of Sport was open to the participation of Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans countries and regions.

The **#Beactive awards** supported projects and individuals dedicated to promoting sport and physical activity across Europe.

The fourth edition of the **#Beinclusive EU sports awards** recognised organisations using the power of sport to increase social inclusion for disadvantaged groups. The online gala was organised in December.



One of this years' winners of the **#Beinclusive EU sports awards winner** was Surf Art (Surf.ART - Atreve-te | Realiza-te | Transforma-te - To Dare, To Accomplish and To Transform) a long-standing well established education through sport project, by Pressley Ridge. The Portuguese NGO has a therapeutic surfing approach and it focuses on youth from a community in Lisbon characterised by high levels of poverty and limited opportunities. Since its start in 2013 it directly worked with 184 youths (ages 7-13) and 553 indirectly (teachers, families).

Four preparatory actions were published as planned: Sport as a tool for integration and social inclusion of the refugees; Monitoring and coaching, through sports, of youngsters at risk of radicalisation; Exchanges and mobility in sport; and Grassroots sports programmes and infrastructure innovation.

DG EAC continued to support evidence-based policy in the field of sport, including a mapping on intergenerational sport and on the impact of COVID-19 on the sport sector. In addition DG EAC prepared a report on the third EU Work Plan for Sport (2017-2020).



The SHARE initiative and its activities have gained momentum in 2020 not least through a continuous process of knowledge exchange and peer learning between stakeholders including cities, regions, universities, small and medium enterprises and business support organisations to promote the role of sport and physical activity in regional development.

E - Culture

Specific objective 5.6 - With the support of the Creative Europe programme, promote European cooperation on cultural and linguistic diversity

In 2020, the Creative Europe programme continued to support cooperation between European arts and cultural organisations to promote **cultural and linguistic diversity**. Creative Europe's literary translation funds also remained available to support the translation and circulation of books from 'less-spoken' and minority languages. In order to adequately respond to the crisis, the calls were speeded up and their budgets were increased. Furthermore, a first ever comprehensive study regarding the situation of

European theatre was launched and, the **first European Theatre Forum** took place in November 2020.

The EU remained an active party to the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, led by DG EAC, who began work in 2020.

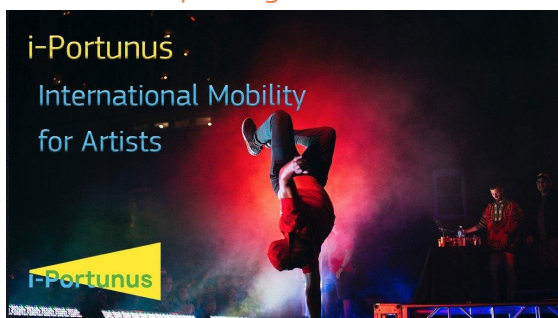
In 2020, DG EAC promoted European cooperation on cultural diversity including several working groups of Member State experts under the Open Method of Coordination (OMC groups), notably one on the **gender equality in the cultural and creative sectors**. The study on **gender** gaps in cultural and creative sectors was updated and published in September 2020. Cultural and creative sector organisations also met under the Voices of Culture structured dialogue, to discuss gender balance in the cultural and creative sectors, publishing their report in February 2020.

A 2-day online workshop on **culture for social cohesion**, hosted and moderated by DG EAC in November with over 50 participants nominated by EU Member States, was complemented by a Voices of Culture dialogue with the cultural sector on the role of culture in non-urban areas of the European Union, which finalised its report in April.

A working group of Member State experts on **multilingualism and translation**, convened by DG EAC, began work on 30 June 2020. In 2020 DG EAC also contributed to inter-service work on linguistic diversity in response to the **Minority Safepack Citizens' Initiative**, led by the Secretariat General.

In 2020, the European Commission launched [Cultural Heritage in Action](#), a peer-learning programme for local and regional policymakers to exchange knowledge on cultural heritage. In November 2020, a catalogue of 32 best practices was published on the website, focusing on Participatory governance of cultural heritage; Adaptive reuse of built heritage; Quality of interventions on cultural heritage. The initiative is one of the actions of the [European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage](#).

Creative Europe Programme



The second trial of **i-Portunus** continued in 2020. Two new projects led by the Goethe Institute and the European Cultural Foundation were selected for implementation. The first call was launched to cover the Music and Literary Translation sectors. New calls will be launched until June 2021.

#CreativeEurope@Home was a social media campaign on the Creative Europe accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram at the beginning of the first confinement period in March 2020, and aimed at showcasing online initiatives supported by Creative Europe.



The measures taken by Member States' Governments to curb the spread of the coronavirus have affected the activities of the **2020 European Capitals of Culture** (ECOC), as well as the preparation of the 2021

ECOC. On 18 August the European Commission presented a proposal to the Council and the European Parliament that would give Rijeka and Galway the possibility to have their title year prolonged until 30 April 2021. The Commission also proposed to postpone the year in which Novi Sad (Serbia) is due to host a European Capital of Culture from 2021 to 2022 and the year in which Timisoara (Romania) and Elefsina (Greece) will hold the title from 2021 to 2023. This proposal was formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on 23 December.

General Objective 6 - A new push for European democracy

Specific objective 6.1 – Provide European young people opportunities to participate in civic society and democratic life

Under the EU Youth Strategy, there is an established EU youth dialogue that allows European youth organisations and national platforms in all EU Member States to express their opinions, ideas and needs so that these are taken into account when defining relevant EU policies. Every cycle of dialogue actively brings over 50 000 young people to the table, who are mobilised through national working groups. **The 7th EU Youth Dialogue Cycle under the Romanian/ Finnish/Croatian trio Presidency** mobilised 56 000 young people in around 500 events and national consultations under the common theme '**Creating opportunities for youth**'.

In July, a new 18-month cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue started, with the topic of '**Europe for YOUth-YOUth for Europe. Space and Democracy and Participation**'. Council conclusions on fostering democratic awareness and democratic engagement among young people in Europe¹⁸ were adopted by the Council in November, reflecting the input gathered at the EU Youth Conference in Berlin at the beginning of October.

Traineeships Office

The COVID-19 outbreak heavily affected the Commission **Blue Book Traineeship** programme. In order to ensure trainees' safety and to offer them the best traineeship experience possible, under the given circumstances, three options were exceptionally offered to each March 2020 trainee: to continue their traineeship normally; to continue their traineeship normally and benefit from a second five-month traineeship; or to interrupt their traineeship on 30 April and to come back in October to re-start a full five-month traineeship.



The October session started in a fully virtual mode and its rolling out benefitted from the lessons learnt in handling the previous one under comparable circumstances.

¹⁸ Official Journal of the European Union, OJ C 415, 1.12.2020

General Objective 7 - A modern, high-performing and sustainable European Commission

EC library and e-Resources

The Library and e-Resources unit aims to develop and deliver high-quality and innovative information services to support Commission staff in evidence-based policy development and decision-making processes.

Over the past few years, the EC Library and e-Resources unit has moved away from the traditional 'brick and mortar' library to become a modern information and knowledge service, which mainly focuses on the delivery of high-quality electronic information. For this reason, the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 only had a very limited impact on the daily activities of the EC Library. User-driven acquisition significantly improved again this year, as our eBooks platform – introduced at the end of 2017 - was used more than 265 000 times (number of successful section requests), representing an increase of 70% compared with 2019. At the same time, the number of full-text articles downloaded from e-journals, increased by more than 25% this year (492 037 downloads in 2020, against 390 296 in 2019).

On 15 July 2020, the EC Corporate Management Board decided to integrate the EC Library and e-Resources unit into Publication Office, with effect of 1 January 2021. For this reason, the Library worked closely together with several units in the Publication Office during the last quarter of 2020, in order to organise a smooth handover of the unit and to ensure business continuity as of January 2021.

2 : Modern and efficient administration and internal control

This section explains *how* the DG delivered the achievements described in the previous section. It is divided into two subsections.

The first subsection reports on the control results and other relevant information that support management's assurance on the achievement of the financial management and internal control objectives¹⁹. It includes any additional information necessary to establish that the available evidence is reliable, complete and comprehensive. It covers all activities, programmes and management modes relevant to the DG.

The second subsection deals with the other components of organisational management: human resources, better regulation principles, information management and external communication.

The table below shows an analysis of the payments made in 2020:

Payments 2020	Direct	Entrusted	Proportion
EACEA		46.330.985,88	1,32%
EIT		546.629.182,74	15,63%
Erasmus+ handled by National Agencies		2.681.539.761,39	76,67%
European Solidarity Corps handled by National Agencies		124.207.420,37	3,55%
Creative Europe	10.349.527,33		0,30%
Traineeships	9.620.984,49		0,28%
Library	2.747.415,71		0,08%
MSCA and H2020 & FP7	3.435.207,42		0,10%
Erasmus+ direct	42.175.951,00		1,21%
European Solidarity Corps direct	3.980.736,12		0,11%
Pilot projects and preparatory actions	20.827.762,53		0,60%
House of European History managed by European Parliament		3.000.000,00	0,09%
Other	2.729.639,34		0,08%
Total (includes EFTA, third country contributions (RO), etc.)	95.867.223,94	3.401.707.350,38	3.497.574.574
	2,74%	97,26%	100,00%

It should be noted that the above table does not include the appropriations managed on DG EAC's behalf by the executive agencies EACEA and REA, which are covered in their respective AARs.

DG EAC and EACEA have also managed a small proportion of payments from the **European Development Fund (EDF)**. The total EDF budget allocated in 2020 amounts to €42 million and was implemented through the National Agencies (€29 million for Mobility projects) and the EACEA (€5.6 million for Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees

¹⁹ Art 36.2 FR: a) effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; b) reliability of reporting; c) safeguarding of assets and information; d) prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; and e) adequate management of risks relating to the legality and regularity of underlying transactions

and €6.7 million for Capacity Building). 68% of the total allocated budget was paid in 2020. These amounts are not material in the context of DG EAC's overall activity and are thus not reported on separately.

2.1 Financial management and internal control

Assurance is an objective examination of evidence for the purpose of providing an assessment of the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

This examination is carried out by management, who monitors the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis, and by internal and external auditors. The results are explicitly documented and reported to the Director-General.

These reports result from a systematic analysis of the evidence available. This approach provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in a complete coverage of the budget delegated to the Director-General of DG EAC. Further information on the key sources relied on are provided in Annex 7.

This section is for reporting the control results and other relevant elements that support management's assurance. It is structured into (a) Control results, (b) Audit observations and recommendations, (c) Effectiveness of internal control systems, and resulting in (d) Conclusions on the assurance.

Indicators related to this section are reported in Annex 9.

Specific actions on Covid-19

In March 2020, the Commission activated its **Business Continuity Plan** and requested all staff to telework due to the Covid-19 pandemic. DG EAC has consequently activated its own Business Continuity Plan. The **Crisis Management Team** of DG EAC ensured the implementation of the business continuity plan, with the least possible disruption of activity throughout the DG.

With regard to this section of the AAR, **business continuity** was ensured in the fields of financial and contractual management, budget, legal, advice, supervision, HR, IT by providing guidance and support across the DG to handle the effects of the crisis. **Electronic financial circuits** were put in place in a very short time to substitute the usual paper circuits. **Force Majeure situations** were invoked for all 5 DG EAC programmes, also including the Traineeship scheme of the Commission and measures needed to put in place and communicated urgently. Guidelines for implementing force majeure measures have been prepared and communicated to all stakeholders. **Flexibility was introduced for affected beneficiaries**, some deadlines for calls have been postponed and new specific actions to address immediate needs have been put in place.

Targeted ad hoc risk management exercises in relation to the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and the Commission's responses on **budget compliance and budget performance** were performed, and mitigating measures continue to be monitored and implemented.

To mitigate the impact on **financial/budget-related compliance and on performance, the following main measures were and are being taken:**

As regards the financial procedures, adjustments in line with guidance from central services are applied on a case-by-case basis and are appropriately documented. DG EAC

communicated its measures with its external stakeholders as effectively as possible and provided guidance as necessary. Ex post checks on transactions were performed to specifically check the newly introduced use of electronic financial workflows.

To **reduce** the **risk of pre-financing losses**, the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES)-database was used to check the status of economic operators, especially during the Evaluation and Award phases. Horizontal guidance provided by DG BUDG was applied on how to deal with recoveries and internal provisions on recovery, temporarily doubling the period allowed for payment.

To **reduce** the **risk of fraud or corruption**, DG EAC is keeping the appropriateness of the mitigating measures to prevent and detect fraud under close review in consultation with OLAF and in coordination with National Agencies.

As fewer on the spot visits are possible, DG EAC adapted its **supervision and auditing approach (supervisory visits/primary checks)**. Specific guidance on COVID-19 was given for the reporting by NAs and IABs on the year 2020 which was provided in February and March 2021. Implementation of this guidance should contribute to assess the impact of Covid-19 on the performance of the programmes, the effectiveness and performance of NA's monitoring systems and the implementation of the force majeure measures at project level.

To mitigate the risk of unused commitment and payment appropriations due to cancelled or modified activities and events, **all the possible funds inside Erasmus+ were mobilized**, while redirecting some funds from other actions, and by injecting funds from internal assigned revenue. Unused commitment and payments appropriations were eventually recycled into future calls. DG EAC revised the 2020 Erasmus+ Work programme to launch important new initiatives aiming on one hand, to reinforce the ability of education and training institutions to provide high quality, inclusive digital learning, and on the other hand to support and build resilience in the cultural and creative sectors.

2.1.1 Control results

This section reports and assesses the elements identified by management which support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives²⁰. The DG's assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in AAR Annex 5. Annex 6 outlines the main risks together with the control processes to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the relevant control systems. Annex 7 provides further details as regards the control results.

- **Effectiveness = the control results and benefits**

In order to be considered effective, controls are expected to meet the internal control objectives (to be detailed hereafter) and for each of those control objectives, the controls should result in identifiable benefits. The manner in which those control objectives have been met is detailed in **Annex 7**, together with an overview of the relevant

²⁰ 1) Effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; 2) *reliability of reporting*; 3) *safeguarding of assets and information*; 4) prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; and 5) adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes as well as the nature of the payments (FR Art 36.2). *The 2nd and/or 3rd Internal Control Objective(s) (ICO) only when applicable, given the DG's activities.*

appropriations managed by programme and entrusted entity.

- **Legality and regularity of the transactions**

DG EAC is using internal control processes to ensure the adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions it is responsible for, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes and the nature of the payments concerned.

National Agencies (Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps)

Following the control results described in detail in Annex 7, DG EAC considers it has a sufficiently complete knowledge of the way in which its programmes are implemented by NAs. The management information reported by the NAUs and NAs for the year 2019, which was received in 2020, is sufficient for the relevant AOSD to draw reasonable assurance conclusions, with some exceptions relating to the National Agency in Bulgaria where weaknesses in the internal control system, particularly regarding selection, have been identified and are being rectified.

- The aggregate 2014-2020 residual error rate for the implementation through NAs is estimated to be 0.78% (0.82% over 2014-2019).

- As this is below the 2% threshold, there is **no need to make a reservation for this management mode.**

Supervision of entrusted bodies: EACEA, REA, EIT and EIF

DG EAC considers that its supervision of the EACEA and REA, whose Authorising Officer receives delegation directly from the Commission, has been effective and sufficient in 2020.

All the reports foreseen in the Memorandum of Understanding between EACEA and its parent DGs, as well as the reinforced measures, were provided and enabled DG EAC to closely monitor the implementation of Erasmus+ and Creative Europe by this Executive Agency. Based on the results of controls as presented in REA's AAR, DG EAC considers to have reasonable assurance regarding Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA).

In view of the positive declaration of assurance from the European Court of Auditors on the entirety of its budget, no assurance issues are noted regarding the EIT.

Based on the management declaration and the report of the Independent Audit Body as regards the Erasmus+ Student Loan Guarantee Fund, DG EAC does not consider there is any significant reasonable assurance risk for EIF relating to 2020 or arising from its supervisory activities as member of the Steering Committee and designated service for the instrument during the year. For further information see Annex 7.

Direct management managed by DG EAC

Authorising Officers by sub-delegation have reported **no issues that would put into doubt the reasonable assurance** on this management mode, and previous accounting controls indicate the regularity and legality of transactions introduced in ABAC are reliable. DG EAC has ensured a close follow up of non-compliances and exceptions during 2020.

As no issues have been identified which are material with respect to the budget as a

whole, it is considered that **DG EAC has reasonable assurance on direct management managed by DG EAC for 2020.**

Risk at closure

In the context of the protection of the EU budget, the DGs' estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are consolidated at Commission level. For DG EAC, the situation has remained stable.

DG EAC estimates the amount at risk on a conservative and prudent basis. Error rate information on a multi-annual basis from a variety of sources is used. This evidence shows an error rate that is between 0.5% and 1% (see Annex 7), and therefore a global 1% is used to estimate the amount at risk for programmes outside EIT. For EIT itself, the most recent reported error rate is 1.4%, so a conservative rate of 2% is chosen for the amount at risk.

DG EAC's data is shown in the table and its accompanying notes below. The estimated overall risk at payment for **2020 expenditure is €26,83 million**. This is the AOD's best, conservative estimation of the amount of *relevant expenditure* during the year (€2.287 million) not in conformity with the contractual and regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made.

This expenditure will subsequently be subject to **ex-post controls** and a proportion of the underlying errors will be detected and corrected in successive years. The conservatively estimated future corrections for 2020 expenditure are €0.2 million²¹. This is the amount of errors that the DG conservatively estimates will be identified and corrected by controls planned to be carried out in succeeding years. The difference between those two amounts leads to the estimated overall risk at closure for the 2020 expenditure of €26,63 million.

In the context of the protection of the EU budget, the DG's estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are consolidated at Commission level in the AMPR.

DG EAC's portfolio consists of diverse actions which have a relatively low error rate.

This is, respectively, thanks to the inherent risk profile of having recurring beneficiaries, particularly in higher education; simplified entitlement-based funding modalities; and the performance of the related control systems as implemented by National Agencies under indirect management, which combine a coherent approach across the programme with proximity to the target beneficiaries.

Nevertheless, DG EAC closely follows up the independent audit opinions, supervisory visits and audits and the resulting recommendations to ensure that mitigating actions are implemented promptly.

²¹ Conservatively at 0.01%, this is estimated as lower than the historical rate of 0.06% which relates to one-off items which are not guaranteed to be repeated in future years

Estimated overall risk at closure

DG EAC	"payments made" (FY; m€)	<i>minus</i> new prefinancing [plus retentions made*] (in FY; m€)	<i>plus</i> cleared prefinancing [minus retentions released* and deductions of expenditure made by MS] (in FY; m€)	relevant expenditure (for the FY; m€)	Average Error Rate (<i>weighted AER</i> ; %)	estimated overall amount at risk at payment (FY; m€)	Average Recoveries and Corrections (<i>adjusted ARC</i> ; %)	estimated future corrections [and deductions] (for FY; m€)	estimated overall amount at risk at closure (m€)
-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7	-8	-9	-10
Programme,	as per AAR annex 3, table 2	as per ABAC DWH BO report on prefinancing	as per ABAC DWH BO report on prefinancing	= (2) -/+ (3) +/- (4)	Detected error rates, or equivalent estimates	= (5) x (6)	H-ARC (as per ABAC DWH BO report on corrective capacity), <u>but adjusted</u>	= (5) x (8)	= (7) - (9)
All EAC programmes and activities except EIT	2.904,61	-2.878,27	1.795,53	1.821,87	1%	18,22	0	0,2	18,02
EIT	546,63	-546,63	418,93	418,93	2%	8,38	0	0	8,38
EACEA subsidy	46,33	-	-	46,33	0,5%	0,23			0,23
EDF	23,79	-23,79	0,18	0,18	2%	0,00	0	0	0,00
Overall, total	3.521,36	-3.448,68	2.214,64	2.287,31	1,2%	26,83	0	0,20	26,63
Overall, total	mEUR	mEUR	mEUR	mEUR	x%	= X mEUR; and a% of (5)	y%	= Y mEUR; and b% of (5)	= Z mEUR; and c% of (5)

- **Fraud prevention, detection and correction**

DG EAC has developed and implemented its own anti-fraud strategy since 2015, on the basis of the methodology provided by OLAF. It is updated every 2-3 years. It was last updated in 2020 and the action plan will be implemented during 2021. Anti-fraud monitoring is carried out via regular contacts with the National Agencies and is covered in the Yearly Management Declaration process, and is reported to senior management twice a year, with more regular updates on key cases. The main action during the year was to inform National Agencies of Covid-related fraud risks and ensure appropriate measures were included in the design of the next generation of programmes.

DG EAC also contributed to the Commission anti-fraud strategy and followed up OLAF's financial recommendations, by making appropriate recoveries. 3 recommendations are still in process which for DG EAC do not represent a material budgetary amount. The reason for not implementing a recommendation is normally due to the bankruptcy of the legal entity making it impossible to obtain a recovery. Considering the level of fraud impact faced by the DG, in particular the financial prejudice recorded by the European Anti-fraud Office in the remit of DG EAC, the residual risk of fraud does not justify additional measures beyond those included in the anti-fraud strategy. DG EAC maintains close cooperation with OLAF and follows the small number of ongoing cases closely. In addition, the follow-up of OLAF's financial recommendations is being undertaken in cooperation with NAs.

Suspected irregularities or fraud and ongoing investigations of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) were taken into account in assessing the reasonable assurance assigned to the NAs over the reporting period.

On the basis of the available information, DG EAC has reasonable assurance that the anti-fraud measures in place are effective overall. However the measures in the revised Anti-Fraud Strategy will reinforce the identification and handling of high risk beneficiaries, as well as issues such as double funding and conflict of interest.

- **Other control objectives: safeguarding of assets and information, reliability of reporting**

DG EAC has entrusted management of funds related to the **Student Loan Guarantee Fund Financial Instrument to the European Investment Fund (EIF)**, as stipulated in the Erasmus+ legal base. EIF manages a minimum reserve (set at €10 million in the Delegation Act, revised in mutual agreement to €5 million in early 2016), and also manages non-Euro currency where non-Eurozone financial intermediaries are participating in the instrument. Asset management is conducted via the 'Asset Management Designated Service (AMDS)', DG ECFIN, according to agreed Asset Management Guidelines (AMG). The main asset management goal is to maintain the value of the fiduciary (and subaccounts) in the context of a negative interest rate environment, while ensuring the necessary liquidity for the instrument.

Pre-financing is also managed and controlled mainly in the context of Delegation Agreements with National Agencies. No issues have been identified as regards the reasonable assurance on safeguarding of assets, and NAs take measures on limitation of negative interest appropriate to their circumstances.

Accounting controls

In the context of the accounts quality exercise, DG EAC has established **a work programme for accounting controls in 2020**, based on the risk assessment carried out at the beginning of the year. This work programme, which contributes to the quality of the final financial data, includes regular controls to verify the correctness and completeness of the accounting registrations in the DG.

The controls carried out in 2020 do not show significant or systematic errors, which confirm the **accuracy of the central financial cell**.

There were no cases of 'confirmation of instructions' as specified in Article 92,3 of the Financial Regulation.

Budget execution

The total available budget including all types of appropriations in DG EAC's 'domain' (including amounts implemented by Executive agencies) amounted to €6.043 billion in commitment appropriations (CA) and €5.913 billion in payment appropriations (PA).

In terms of voted appropriations (C1) of the year:

- Commitments appropriations: the operational credits showed **a 100% execution rate on every budgetary chapter**. As regard the administrative expenditures, the execution rate reached 96%.
- Payment appropriations: The **overall execution rate** reached **99.6% of available appropriations (same as 2019)**. The operational credits have been fully executed. The overall execution rate for administrative expenditures reached 77% which was slightly below the forecast (84%).

Cross-sub-delegations

No new cross-subdelegations were received in 2020.

1. Efficiency = the Time-to- indicators and other efficiency indicators

In terms of the efficiency indicators **time-to-inform and time-to-grant** (Art 194.2 FR), an average time of respectively 138 and 179 days has been measured. 53 grants have been signed in 2020. Deadlines could not be respected in case of two procedures. For one procedure, the time to grant was exceeded due to covid restrictions and was covered by a documented authorisation under force major. In the case of the second procedure, the evaluation took more time than foreseen as it had to be reopened.

As illustrated in Annex 4, the **Financial Scoreboard**, in 2020 DG EAC has executed 11 734 payments (including the payments to the trainees). Despite the specific COVID19 situation this year only 217 were paid late (2%) which remains relatively stable compared to 2019 (1%). This corresponds to a **total amount** paid of €3.496.411.806,01 out of which €9.766.270,15 were **paid late (0%)**. Out of the 217 late payments 11 have generated late interest for a total amount of €4.713,32.

Timely Payments	DG Score	EC Score
	100%	99%

In 2020, DG EAC has registered **3 375 invoices**. Due to the specific COVID-19 situation this year 195 were registered late (5.8%) which is an increase compared to 2019 (2.5%).

The **increase in the volume of financial transactions between 2019 and 2020** can be explained as follows:

- The overall growth of DG EAC budget from 2019 to 2020 (see back-loaded MFF 2014-2020) and in particular for the budget lines covering the pilot projects and preparatory actions. The bigger (almost doubled) IT budget in 2020 justified by the need to update and adapt the IT tools before the start of the new MFF.
- The extra transactions (recovery orders, complimentary commitments and subsequent payments) related to the 2 extra COVID-19 Erasmus+ calls: 'Partnerships for Digital Education Readiness' and 'Partnerships for Creativity'
- The intensified use of experts by the operational units (#Beinclusive Awards, Refugees call, European City Of Culture, European Heritage Label).
- This in spite of a reduced workforce in the financial cell of DG EAC's Finance Unit.

As outlined in section 1.4 of Annex 7, **the high-volume, low-value nature of EAC's actions** means that there are inherent limitations to achieving control efficiency while achieving programme objectives. NAs have also improved their payment times due to increased experience and more efficient monitoring tools being available. On the basis of this continually improving performance, DG EAC concludes that transactions are handled in an efficient manner given the context of the programmes.

The following initiatives have been taken during the year to **improve controls efficiency in financial management**:

- Set-up of **electronic workflows** covering 98% of the financial transactions to maintain business continuity after the lockdown,
- **Legal advice** provided in a very **active way** to support operational units in their management of the COVID19 emergency and its impact on running contracts and grants as well as on the launch of new procedures,
- **Building-up, training and coaching of a renewed team dealing with financial transactions** with the **national agencies** and in particular the challenging exercise of the yearly reports analysis,
- Providing **legal and financial support** to organising 2 Erasmus Plus special calls to address the effects of the emergency,
- **Introduction of PPMT** to be **systematically used** by operational units for all new

open calls,

- **Kick-off and deployment phase with RTD and JRC** for the introduction of **EMI** (Experts Management Internal, corporate tool for an atomized management of the experts contracts).

2. Economy = the cost of controls

Where indirect management is concerned, the cost of controls borne by the Commission, the Member States and the Entrusted Entities²² needs to be reported separately. The sources of these figures and how they were estimated are to be reported together with the assessment of their completeness and reliability. As set out below, DG EAC concludes that the structures in place are considered to be cost effective.

Overall, the revised global DG EAC cost of control for **NAs** including an estimate of entrusted entity costs for 2020 is 8.43% of the budget managed (see table in annex 7) and is a prudent and conservative estimate. The structures in place are considered to be cost-effective.

Overall, the revised global DG EAC cost of control for the **EIT** including an estimate of entrusted entity costs for 2020 is 1.90% of the budget managed (see table in annex 7) and is a prudent and conservative estimate. The structures in place are considered to be cost-effective.

3. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

Based on the most relevant key indicators and control results as outlined in section 1.6 of Annex 7, DG EAC has assessed the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of its control system and reached a positive conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of the controls for which it is responsible.

2.1.2 Audit observations and recommendations

This section sets out the observations, opinions and conclusions reported by auditors – including the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control. Summaries of the management measures taken in response to the audit recommendations are also included, together with an assessment of the likely material impact of the findings on the achievement of the internal control objectives, and therefore on management's assurance.

Audits by the Internal Audit Service (IAS)

The IAS has, before their later follow-up described below, concluded that the internal control systems in place for the audited processes are effective, except for the control

²² For indirect management with Entrusted Entities: any types of management, administrative or other remuneration fees paid to them by the Commission (even though it is acknowledged that those contributions cover broader elements than only control costs in the strict sense) are to be reported separately from the DG's supervision or monitoring costs. (Fees 'paid' can also be a % withheld on the gross amount of funds transferred.)

systems for data protection.

IAS recommendations have increased during the period covered by AAR 2020. There were no IAS open recommendations at the end of 2019. There were four 'important' open recommendations in January 2020 from the '**IAS audit on IT governance and project management in DG EAC**' launched in 2019, and initially six new open recommendations (one 'critical', four 'very important' and one 'important') from the **IAS audit 'Effectiveness of the protection of personal data** of beneficiaries of and participants in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes managed by DG EAC' which was finalised on 28th January 2021. DG EAC has immediately taken extensive proactive measures in response to the findings and has prepared and begun implementing an action plan to address the recommendations of the latter report. Four out of the six actions to mitigate the risks identified by the IAS are now substantially completed or launched. Two of the six recommendations require additional time due to the roll-out of the new programme and the process regarding 3rd country transfers of contact data, respectively. Looking at the plan as a whole by sub-action, half of the sub-actions specified in the overall plan are now complete.

On 25th March, the **IAS concluded a first follow-up of the audit** on protection of personal data. Based on their review of the information and supporting documents provided, the IAS consider that DG EAC partially mitigated the risks related to observations on 3rd country transfers of personal data (by improving the transparency about the level of protection of the data in the host countries) and the procedure on data breaches (a revised coherent procedure has been adopted). The IAS decided, on that basis, to **downgrade the recommendations** respectively from 'critical' to 'very important' and from 'very important' to 'important'.

This means that overall as at 31 March 2021, **DG EAC has four 'very important' and six 'important' recommendations open from two audits**. The corresponding action plans are being implemented on schedule.

More detail is provided in section 1.1 of Annex 8.

Audits by the Court of Auditors

For its **2019 Declaration of Assurance (DAS)** the Court observed an increase of errors in the area of Competitiveness for growth and jobs (Chapter 5 of the Court's Annual Report) from the previous year, which also includes the education and culture policy area. For 2019, the estimated level of error communicated by the Court for **Chapter 5 is 4%, 2%** in 2018 and 4.2% in 2017. This error rate is not broken down by policy area, so there is no 'DG EAC' rate from the ECA, but the multi-annual rate suggested by the ECA's result year-on-year is coherent with the results found by DG EAC and presented in this AAR.

More detail is provided in section 1.1 of Annex 8.

As a result of the assessment of the risks underlying the observations made together with the management measures taken in response to the audit observations, described in section 1.1 of Annex 8, **the management of DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture considers that the downgrading of the critical recommendation and one very important recommendation issued, confirms its assessment that the residual risk does not require a reservation in this AAR**. The recommendations are being implemented as part of on-going continuous efforts in terms of further improvements, and the situation is transparently presented in this AAR.

2.1.3 Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems

The Commission has adopted an Internal Control Framework based on international good practice, to ensure the achievement of its policy and management objectives. Compliance with the internal control framework is compulsory.

DG EAC's organisational structure and the internal control systems are suited to achieving its policy and internal control objectives, in accordance with the internal control principles. DG EAC pays due regard to the risks associated with the environment in which it operates.

DG EAC has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and, as outlined in section 1.2 of Annex 8, and has concluded that it is partially effective as **internal control principle 13** in relation to compliance with **applicable data protection rules** is **partially present and functioning** as one 'critical' and four 'very important' recommendations (of which two have been downgraded respectively from 'critical' to 'very important' and from 'very important' to 'important') were issued as part of the 2020 audit of the IAS as regards compliance with the internal data protection regulation (IDPR), in particular for transfers outside the EU/EEA. As a main **remedial measure**, a **DG EAC internal task force** has been addressing the audit findings and recommendations via an action plan submitted to the IAS as a matter of priority, on which a number of actions have already been completed. Concerning the recommendations, for which significant progress has been made, the actions taken are not yet sufficiently advanced to enable a downgrade by the IAS. However, the actions are fully in line with the action plan agreed and consequently their effective implementation will contribute to the strengthening of the processes related to data protection in DG EAC. Due to the fact that the data protection issues on 3rd country data transfers concerned 5% of mobilities, the assessment of partial effectiveness during 2020 **does not justify a reservation** given the analysis of overall risks as presented in Annex 8.

DG EAC has integrated personal data protection in the context of the implementation of the **new technological framework and a new IT landscape** which implements the principle of personal data 'by design and by default'. This will remove many of the inconveniences of the past architecture of DG EAC's mature IT environment related to the protection of personal data.

As the main operational objective of international actions is sending participants outside the EU/EEA, this issue regarding data protection and the surrounding legal context has to be resolved to enable these successful operational activities to continue in 2021. Based on the detailed risk assessment provided in annex 8, it is not deemed necessary to stop the data transfers but nevertheless a full presentation of the risk assessment is provided to ensure full transparency.

2.1.4 Conclusions on the assurance

This section reviews the assessment of the elements already reported above (in Sections 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3.), and the sub-conclusions already reached. It draws an overall conclusion to support the declaration of assurance and whether it should be qualified with reservations.

The information reported in Section 2.1 is comprehensive and complete as regards the coverage of the budget delegated to the AOD, and information has been reported for all

significant budget areas. The reliability of the information is supported by the building blocks of assurance as described in Annex 7 and 8, including supervision and monitoring, independent audits and regular review and assessment.

The true and fair view is supported by the testing and retesting of the error rates calculated by entrusted bodies. The regular reporting on all aspects of the programmes (especially the yearly management declarations) ensures that resources are used for the intended purpose. The programme design, its rules, and its implementation ensure sound financial management, legality and regularity, non-omission of significant information, as well as the other internal control objectives (safeguarding of assets and information; and the prevention, detection and correction of fraud and irregularities).

Overall Conclusion

In conclusion, the **management has reasonable assurance** that, overall, suitable controls are **in place and working as intended**; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated; and **necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented**. In the context of the conclusion of an audit by the Internal Audit Service, DG EAC has recently taken action to **minimise the risks linked to ongoing and future international transfers of personal data**, notably by informing all data subjects of the legal situation in which such transfers take place, in order for operations undertaken by the Commission services to comply with EU data protection law. This Annual Activity Report reflects the situation having taken these actions into account and the corresponding downgrade of the risks by the Internal Audit Service. The Director-General, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

2.1.5 Declaration of Assurance

Declaration of Assurance

I, the undersigned,

Director-General of the Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation, declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view²³.

State that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in this report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of the self-assessment, ex-post controls, the work of the Internal Audit Service, and the lessons learnt from the reports of the Court of Auditors for the years prior to the year of this declaration.

Confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported here which could harm the interests of the institution.

Brussels, 31 March 2021

(Signed)

Themis Christophidou

²³ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG/Executive Agency.

2.2 Modern and efficient administration – other aspects

In 2020, DG EAC has further implemented a streamlined and integrated performance framework, Results@EAC, aiming at reinforcing the monitoring of performance within the DG, in alignment with corporate processes and the Management Plan for 2020.

2.2.1 Human resource management

A major achievement of 2020 was the **mini reorganisation of the DG** (date of entry into force: 1 January 2021). The reorganisation implemented the decision of the Corporate Management Board to **move the Central Library** to the Publication Office, addressing the Commission political priorities with the **creation of a new unit 'Digital Education'**.

In line with the commitment of **boosting managerial excellence** and in the context of the **analysis of sensitive functions**, a **mobility exercise** for middle managers took place. The Director-General individually consulted and involved middle managers on their career perspectives and offered mobility opportunities according to their interests and skills. In total, eight Heads of Unit took up a new post. Moreover, pre-management positions (Deputy Heads of Unit), were also tackled by a similar mobility exercise, in order to offer opportunities to colleagues to develop managerial skills.

By the end of 2020, DG EAC reached the **target of three first-time appointments of female middle managers** that was set for 2022.

The **finalisation of DG EAC's local HR strategy** was postponed to the first quarter of 2021 due to uncertainties (delayed Multi-Annual Financial Framework, absence of establishment plan 2021 and the delay of the corporate HR strategy). However, the Business Correspondent prepared a draft outline, which will be the basis for the finalisation of HR Strategy in early 2021.

A pilot exercise on **evaluation '360 degrees'** was carried out with four Heads of Unit; the experience will be assessed and, if positive, could be further rolled out. **To address poor performance**, the Business Correspondent in collaboration with DG HR organised sessions with Heads of Unit and staff members.

DG EAC started the assessment of sensitive posts in line with the new Commission guidelines. **The Learning and Development Strategy** was adopted as planned.

Despite the circumstances imposed by the pandemic, the Business Correspondent in collaboration with the IC function deployed actions to strengthen the feeling of **connection and caring**, such as the voting on DG EAC values. Some concrete actions had to be postponed as they require physical presence.

Furthermore, there was an increase in the Staff Engagement Index in the year 2020.

2.2.2 Digital transformation and information management

Significant efforts have been spent in 2020 to prepare and gradually implement **digital solutions for the new IT Landscape** following the goals formulated in the Programme Charter, Management Plan 2020 & DSMP 2020, ICA 2020, UPMR of R4 etc.

In the light of the **11 principles**, DG EAC had chosen to start partially implementing the

following ones:

- **Digital by default** (all Application / Accreditation Forms will be available online and by any public user accredited)
- **Security** (A common IT Security Plan is available targeting approval by the System Owner and DIGIT S early 2021)
- **Privacy** (Specific Data protection compliancy rules are identified per new IT Module and planned to be verifying in terms of specific data protection tests using an external supplier)
- **Transparency** (new IT Systems will allow to share data and information by design (e.g. Data Exchange Service for National Agencies))
- **Interoperability** (new IT Systems target implementing standard methods of interaction via the corporate reusable solutions platform and via the data exchange service used)
- **User centric** (First Single entry-point (EESCP) related target completion, common user experience, solutions for end-users are work process and task oriented e.g. in PMM)
- **Agile** (All new IT Module Development Teams have been introduced to Agile way of working, in particular training is provided to PMM and BM teams)

Through its **EAC Data Analytics initiative**, composed of 20 individual modernisation projects, DG EAC has worked in 2020 to sustain significant new analytics capabilities, with a view to ensure modern data analytics fully underpin DG EAC processes and are leveraged fully to extract relevant and timely insights from all data on programmes, policies and processes. In 2020, Data Analytics projects have worked to replace legacy tools and enable the modernisation and digitalisation of core DG EAC processes. In addition, DG EAC worked in 2020 to establish **Data Governance** – data being a critical asset – for optimal functioning of the DG's performance information and operational processes, including programme performance monitoring. The mitigation of data risks (and in particular as regards data integration consistency) has remained a high priority throughout the year.

In the field of **Data Protection**, a series of activities were carried out, which aimed both at raising awareness for all staff and at broadening and deepening their knowledge of Data Protection. Typical approaches were developed and were offered to different categories of staff, depending on their involvement and responsibilities or accountability.

The category of general awareness raising activities addressed all staff and offered brief **announcements/flashes in the news section of MyEAC** and – in that same section - regular 'shortest quizz ever' (one question of practical value). All these actions aimed to be eye-catching and referred to the Data Protection page on MyEAC, which is continuously enhanced.

Both management and staff were informed about the **new Implementing rules** on data protection through a nominative e-mail to all management levels and the publication on the Intranet, both containing an overview of the most important issues and a link to the Commission Decision.

As a continuous follow-up, this topic will be integrated in the **training sessions on Data**

protection and repeated and stressed in meetings with management.

The current data protection legislation allows international transfers of personal data in principle if the EU standards for the protection of the rights and freedoms of the data subject are guaranteed also after the transfer.

Moreover, the **invalidation of the EU-U.S. Privacy Shield (the Schrems II judgement)** poses concrete challenges for services transferring personal data to third countries or using international cloud services. DG EAC will continue to assess its processing activities in light of the requirements of the Schrems II ruling and will coordinate with relevant Commission services and IT governance bodies, as well as the Data Protection Officer, to be able to draw from horizontal approaches to similar situations. The Commission services, coordinated by the Data Protection Officer, replied to a request from the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) to all EU institutions to identify and map their international transfers and to report certain categories of transfers and are awaiting the EDPS' reaction. In this context, DG EAC will also address the recommendations of the IAS following the audit on Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps (see section 2.1.2). The goal is to minimise the risks linked to ongoing and future international transfers of personal data, notably by informing all data subjects of the legal situation in which such transfers take place, in order for operations undertaken by the Commission services to comply with EU data protection law.

2.2.3 Sound environmental management

In 2020, DG EAC continued its efforts in the framework of a '**Green Commission**', namely in the area of energy, paper consumption and CO₂ emissions.

DG EAC has published four EMAS or environmental related information on EAC's intranet:

- First corporate competition on sustainable conferences and events (04/02/2020)
- [What about the environmental impact of single-use face masks?](#) (20/07/2020)
- [Upcoming events on sustainability during September and October](#) (14/09/2020)

Moreover, a campaign was launched targeting the 120 DG EAC Users of individual printers. DG EAC has signalled to DIGIT (in November 2020), that 42 personal printers can be decommissioned immediately. For another 32 personal printers, DG EAC asked DIGIT to follow-up with the individual users.