



Annual Activity Report 2022

SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

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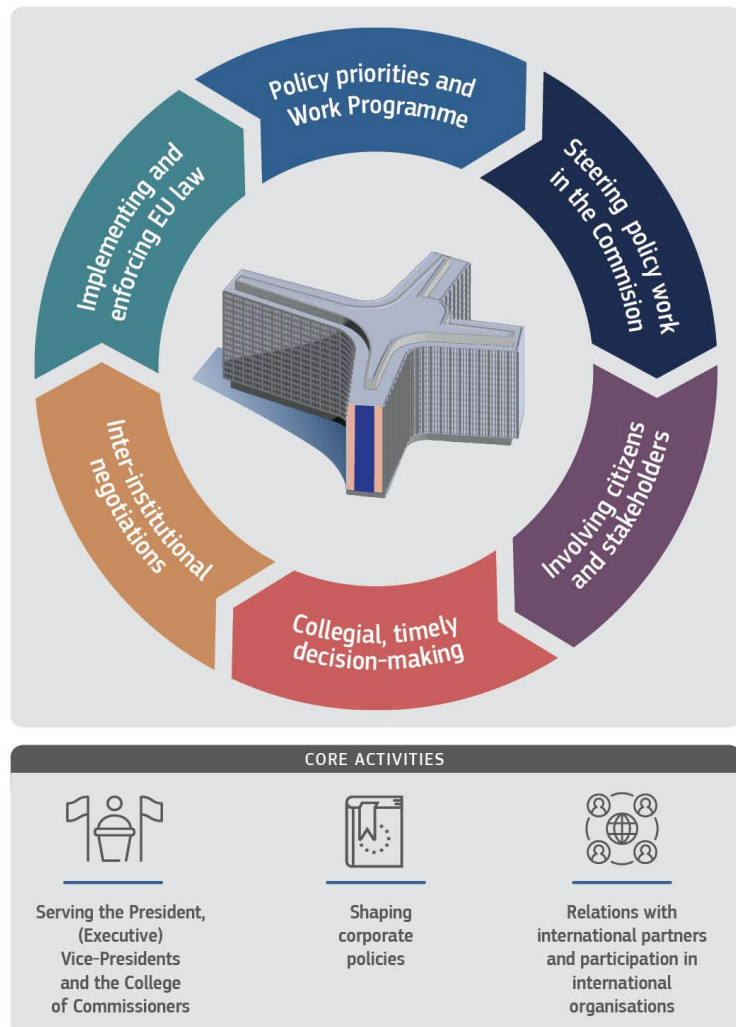
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THE SECRETARIAT-GENERAL IN BRIEF

Under the authority of the President, the Secretariat-General serves the College of Commissioners and oversees the implementation of the European Commission's political priorities¹. It ensures the **collegiality, consistency, efficiency and regularity** of the Commission's activities.

To this end, the Secretariat-General steers and coordinates the work of the Commission services across all policy areas to **ensure the consistency, quality and timely delivery of policy**, legislation and operations, promoting a 'whole of government' approach to policymaking. It does this from the early stages of policy development, through the internal decision-making process, to interinstitutional negotiations to agree the policy, then putting the policy into practice.

The Secretariat-General oversees **good governance within the Commission**, fostering a **modern, transparent and sustainable administration**. It acts together with the Cabinet of the President to ensure transparency and efficiency in the relationship between all members of the College of Commissioners. It supports the Executive Vice-Presidents and Vice-Presidents in their coordination tasks, including through the management of groups of Commissioners and project teams. The Secretariat-General also coordinates and steers the relations between the Commission and the other European institutions, national Parliaments, and international and non-governmental organisations.



Responsibilities of the Secretariat-General

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual activity report is a management report of the Secretary-General to the College of Commissioners. Annual activity reports are the main instrument of management accountability within the Commission. They constitute the basis on which the College takes political responsibility for its decisions as well as for its coordinating, executive and management functions, as laid down in the treaties².

A. Key results and progress towards achieving the Commission's general objectives and the Secretariat-General's specific objectives



2022 was marked by **Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine**, which has had an impact on nearly all policy areas. The Secretariat-General has played a central role, steering the work of all Commission services in support of Ukraine.

Overall assistance to Ukraine and its people from the EU and its Member States

amounted to **at least EUR 67 billion** between the start of the war and February 2023. Multiple measures were also taken to improve Ukraine's access to the EU's single market. The EU has also demonstrated its unwavering support to Ukraine by creating the EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes and providing humanitarian aid and energy equipment. The Secretariat-General provided guidance during the preparation of the Commission's opinion on Ukraine's application to become a member of the EU.

The Secretariat-General steered the provision of emergency assistance to **people fleeing the war in Ukraine**, including by activating the Temporary Protection Directive only a week after the start of the Russian invasion. The EU also helped host Member States by introducing maximum flexibility in the use of unspent 2014-2020 cohesion funds to support people fleeing the war.

The Secretariat-General led the work on **sanctions**, which include a total ban on the import of Russian oil and petroleum products, and on G7 price caps on these products. It also coordinated the work of Commission services on accountability for war crimes and on the use of Russian frozen assets.

The Secretariat-General steered the preparatory work to set up the **Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform**, which was launched in January 2023 to coordinate short- and longer-term support from international donors and financial institutions to the Ukrainian economy.

² Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

The Secretary-General also steered the **EU's response to the energy crisis** generated by Russia's aggression against Ukraine. A number of bold measures have been instrumental in ensuring that Europe was ready for winter and mitigating the worst effects of the massive increases in energy prices. With the adoption of **REPowerEU**, the EU has a plan to accelerate the energy transition away from Russian fossil fuels by diversifying energy supplies, speeding up the deployment of renewable energy, and reducing energy demand across the EU.

In 2022, the Commission, with the Secretariat-General at the forefront, pushed forward the **twin green and digital transitions** as the main vectors to help our economies recover and become more resilient. Key achievements included the political agreement reached on the **Fit for 55** package, and the proposal of new rules on treating urban wastewater, air quality and protecting nature.

In 2022, the EU kickstarted the **Digital Decade**, a vehicle to empower people and businesses to participate fully in the digital transformation. As digital sovereignty became increasingly important for the EU's competitiveness, the Secretariat-General also led the preparation of proposals on the security of supply and the Chips Act.

The Secretariat-General is also leading the Commission's efforts to implement the **Sustainable Development Goals** in the EU and abroad. In 2022, the Secretariat-General steered the preparation of the EU's first ever voluntary review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will be adopted in 2023 and subsequently presented at the United Nations.

The Recovery and Resilience Taskforce (SG RECOVER) in the Secretariat-General, together with the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN), led the work on the **recovery and resilience plans**. In 2022, all 27 national plans were approved and 13 payments were made to Member States, to a total of EUR 72.2 billion. SG RECOVER and DG ECFIN jointly assessed each payment request against the milestones and targets previously set, and made sure to have sufficient assurances that the national control and audit systems of Member States were suitable.

The Commission's third **rule of law report**, which was co-led by the Secretariat-General, examined recent developments in Member States and encouraged their reform efforts on the basis of shared values. Since 2022, the report has also included country-specific recommendations.

Significant efforts were made to step up coordination between Member States on defence matters through the adoption of the **Security and Defence package**.

In addition to its role in coordinating the **EU's relations with the UK**, the Secretariat-General became responsible for relations with the European Economic Area (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway), Switzerland, Andorra, Monaco and San Marino.

The **Conference on the Future of Europe** held citizen-led debates on topics of common interest. It mobilised more than five million visitors to the online platform and more than 700 000 people participated in events. Its work ended in May 2022 and a final report was

presented, comprising 49 proposals, to which the Commission responded by publishing a Communication with an overview of the envisaged follow-up.

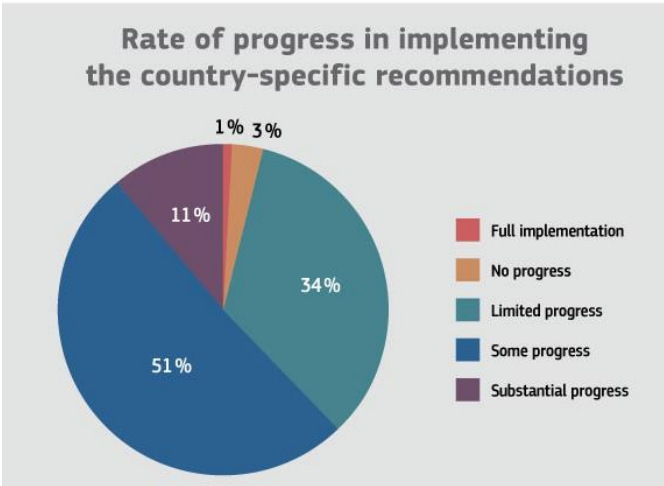
After a pilot project in 2021, the ‘one in, one out’ approach was fully rolled out in 2022 as a key element of the better regulation agenda. According to this approach, administrative costs resulting from Commission proposals are offset by an equivalent reduction of the burden in the same policy area, while adjustment costs are compensated to the greatest extent possible.

In 2022, the Secretariat-General was at the forefront of launching the new IT tool EASE (Electronic Access to European Commission Documents), which makes it easier to **access Commission documents** and consequently enhances transparency.

The Secretariat-General also continued to lead on a range of **corporate policies**, such as foresight, strategic planning and programming, business continuity and data protection. It also maintained its efforts to further improve the working methods of the Commission and to react quickly to fast-paced changes and challenges, in particular by accelerating the digitalisation of internal processes and streamlining workflows.

B. Key performance indicators

Key performance indicator 1 - Rate of progress in implementing the country-specific recommendations³



The adoption of recovery and resilience plans by the Council marks a new era in the European Semester. Adoption of the plans set in motion a sequence of reforms and investments that address all or a significant subset of challenges identified in the relevant country-specific recommendations made by the Council. As a consequence, the successive implementation of the plans until 2026 will accelerate the implementation of country-specific recommendations,

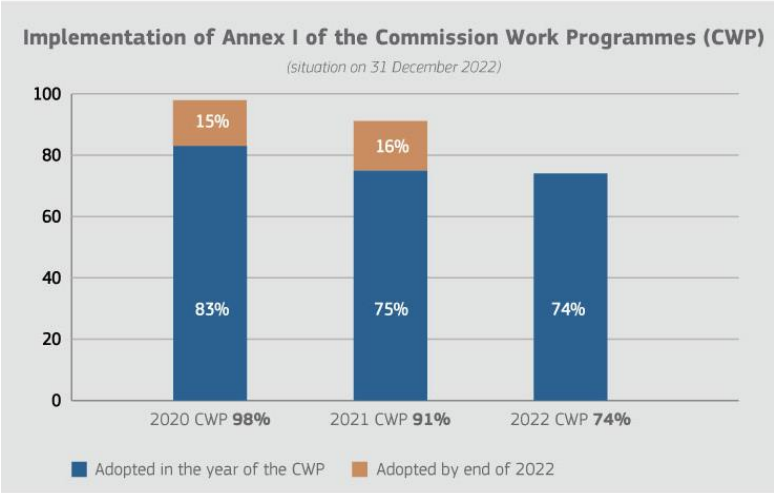
whereby the commitments included in the plans are the new benchmark for quantifying the progress in fulfilling the country-specific recommendations. At this early stage of implementing the recovery and resilience plans, 51% of the country-specific recommendations that focused on structural challenges in 2019 and 2020 have recorded at least ‘some progress’, while 34% recorded ‘limited progress’ (assessed in May 2022).⁴

³ Key performance indicator 1 relates to specific objective 3.1.

⁴ The Commission regularly assesses the coverage of the 2019-2021 country-specific recommendations in the context of the European Semester, published in the spring package in May 2022. The assessment takes into account the policy action taken by a Member States, as well as the commitments in the recovery and resilience plans.

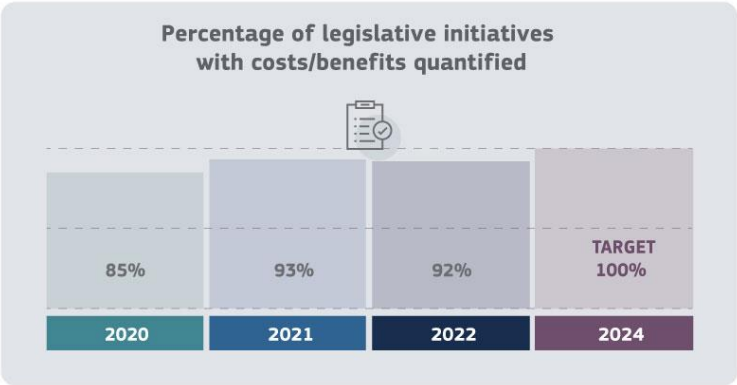
Key performance indicator 2 - Annual implementation rate of initiatives in Annex 1 of the Commission work programme⁵

Three quarters of the new initiatives announced in the 2022 Commission work programme were adopted by the end of the year. Remaining initiatives are to be adopted in 2023. This situation reflects the need in 2022 to keep the programming of initiatives under review in light of changing circumstances, and to make scarce resources available for urgent new initiatives, such as the more than 200 measures that the Commission adopted in 2022 in response to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.



Key performance indicator 3 - Proportion of legislative initiatives (with an impact assessment) for which costs and/or benefits have been quantified⁶

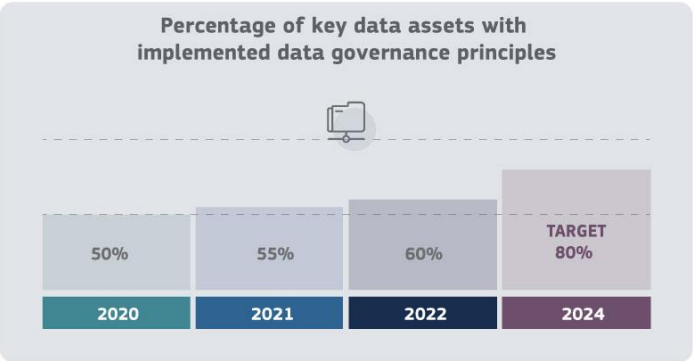
In 2022, 92% (61 out of 66) of the impact assessments reviewed by the Regulatory Scrutiny Board contained a quantification of costs and/or benefits, including partial quantification.



⁵ Key performance indicator 2 relates to specific objective 7.1.

⁶ Key performance indicator 3 relates to specific objective 6.5.

Key performance indicator 4 - Percentage of Commission key data assets⁷ for which corporate principles on data governance have been implemented⁸:



The Secretariat-General continued to improve its governance of local data, e.g. by updating the data assets under its direct responsibility in the corporate data catalogue and identifying data-related roles and responsibilities. The Secretariat-General also continued to raise awareness of the principles of data governance by organising

training activities and setting up a community of key local stakeholders.

C. Key conclusions on financial management and internal control

In line with the Commission’s internal control framework, the Secretariat-General has assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective, and the components and principles are present and functioning as intended. Further details can be found in Section 2.1.3.

In addition, the Secretariat-General has examined systematically the available control results and indicators, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the Commission’s internal auditor and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on the management’s assurance about the achievement of the control objectives. Please refer to Section 2.1 for further details.

In conclusion, the Secretariat-General’s management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated. The Secretary-General, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation, has signed the declaration of assurance.

D. Provision of information to the President

In the context of the regular meetings during the year between the Secretariat-General and the President on management matters, the main elements of this report and the declaration of assurance have been brought to the President’s attention.

⁷ Key data assets are data relevant for decision-making processes across the organisation and for the functioning of the organisation itself.

⁸ Key performance indicator 4 relates to specific objective 7.6.

KEY RESULTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE COMMISSION'S GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND THE SECRETARIAT-GENERAL'S SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

General objective 1 – A European Green Deal

Coordinating the European Green Deal⁹

In 2022, the Secretariat-General continued to ensure that all initiatives align with the Commission's political priorities. One of the key developments was the need to react urgently to the threat to **energy and food security** resulting from Russia's war of aggression.

The war has had a profound effect on the **EU energy market**. Throughout the year, the Commission adopted a number of initiatives to tackle this crisis. The Secretariat-General played a key role in designing and coordinating **REPowerEU**. This plan was a milestone in the EU's response to Russia's weaponization of energy, triggering a complete overhaul of our approaches to diversification, resilience, connectivity and industrial capacity. With the support of the Secretariat-General, the Commission swiftly made a proposal for a **Gas Storage Regulation** and four gas-related emergency regulations. These measures enhancing preparedness will reduce the amount of gas used, help reduce energy bills and improve solidarity between Member States if another emergency leads to a shortage of gas supplies. They will also facilitate joint gas purchases, reduce the volatility of prices and speed up the procedures to grant permits for renewable energy projects.

To ensure global **food security**, the Secretariat-General steered the Commission's response through the Communication on safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems, and the Communication on ensuring availability and affordability of fertilisers. Moreover, the Secretariat-General took the lead in preparing the analysis of the main drivers affecting food security, and helped establish the Solidarity Lanes that create new logistics routes to connect Ukraine to its global trading partners.



Another major milestone was the provisional **political agreement on the climate part of the Fit for 55** package at the end of 2022. This includes: (i) strengthening and expanding emissions trading; (ii) the revision of the Effort Sharing Regulation; (iii) the revision of the Regulation on Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry; (iv) the revision of the Regulation on CO₂ emissions standards for cars and vans; (v) the creation of the

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and (vi) the creation of the Social Climate Fund. In addition, the Secretariat-General continued to help deliver important initiatives on the circular economy, on fighting pollution (the revision of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and

⁹ See details in Annex 1 – specific objective 1.1

the revision of EU legislation on Ambient Air Quality) and on protecting nature (Nature Restoration Law).

In the framework of the **Farm to Fork Strategy** and the **Biodiversity Strategy**, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products, which aims to reduce the use of - and risk from - chemical pesticides and hazardous pesticides by 50% at EU level by 2030. The common agricultural policy strategic plans and the operational plans of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund for 2023-2027 were also successfully adopted.

General objective 2 – A Europe fit for the digital age

Shaping Europe's digital future¹⁰

The war also underlined the urgency of guaranteeing **Europe's digital sovereignty** and securing supply chains. The Secretariat-General played a crucial role in preparing the proposals tabled by the Commission on these issues. Additionally, two digital policy proposals tabled in 2020 were adopted by the co-legislators: the **Digital Services Act** and the **Digital Markets Act**. Their implementation began immediately, under the coordination of the Secretariat-General.

The adoption of two key documents marked the start of **Europe's Digital Decade**. The 2030 Digital Decade Policy Programme and the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles reinforced the EU's commitment to a value-based, human-centric digital transformation.

To foster reforms in the Member States and greater coordination between them, the Commission led a structured dialogue on **digital education and skills** throughout the year. The Secretariat-General was responsible for coordinating the various work streams and ensuring a holistic approach to tackling the shortage of digital skills, leading up to the 2023 Year of Skills.

The Secretariat-General also pushed forward the work on fostering a human-centric digital transformation, in cooperation with the **EU's international partners**. In 2022, the second and third EU-US Trade and Technology Council meetings took place in Paris and Washington, leading to tangible results such as the Joint Roadmap for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence.

General objective 3 – An economy that works for people

Steering the European Semester and integrating sustainability¹¹

The Secretariat-General continued to coordinate all policy initiatives related to the Commission's economic, social, financial and regional policy agendas. This included work on the **Economic Governance Review**, Capital Markets Union, the outstanding elements of the Banking Union, the implementation of the OECD agreement on taxation, on the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and on demography. In the area of

¹⁰ See details in Annex 1 – specific objective 2.1.

¹¹ See details in Annex 1 – specific objectives 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3.

cohesion policy, the Secretariat-General coordinated the assessment of the national partnership agreements and regional programmes for 2021-2027 and ensured their timely adoption.

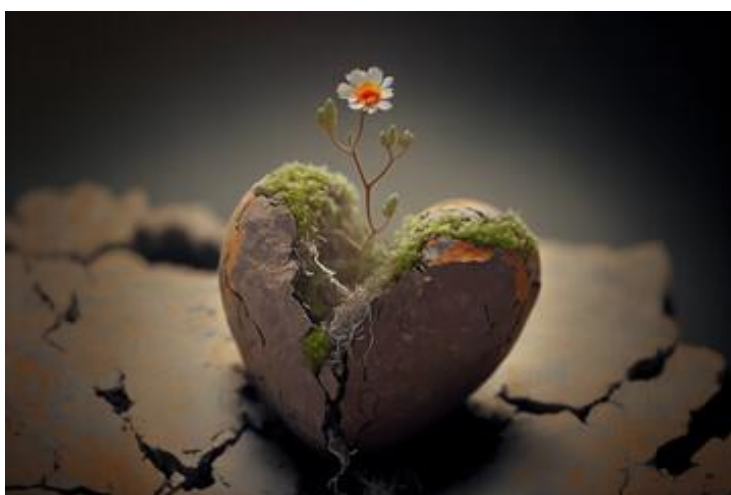
Responding to the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Secretariat-General also helped adopt several sets of amendments to the **Common Provisions Regulation**. This ensured that funds could be mobilised in a flexible manner to address the consequences of the war, for instance to host people fleeing Ukraine.

SG RECOVER **prepared the Commission's guidance** to Member States by coordinating the publication of streamlined country reports and the Commission's proposals for country-specific recommendations in the 2022 **European Semester spring package**. SG RECOVER prepared the **Semester autumn package**, in particular the annual sustainable growth survey, which outlines the key economic and social policy priorities for the 12 to 18 months following its adoption.

SG RECOVER supported a strong drive for reform and investment in 2022 in all Member States by coordinating, jointly with DG ECFIN, the implementation of the national recovery and resilience plans. These plans should reflect reform and investment needs for Member States identified in the context of the European Semester.

All 27 recovery and resilience plans had been approved by the end of 2022, after the Council adopted the plans of Bulgaria, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland and Sweden. SG RECOVER, jointly with DG ECFIN, lead the work in all phases of the **preparation, negotiation and assessment** of these plans (see Annex 14 for further details).

Steering commission work on the national recovery and resilience plans¹²



In 2022, the Commission (SG RECOVER and DG ECFIN) worked closely together with all 27 Member States to help them implement their national recovery and resilience plans in line with the requirements of the Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation.

SG RECOVER, jointly with DG ECFIN, had a leading role in all phases of the preparation, negotiation and assessment of these plans. As in 2021, SG RECOVER, jointly with DG

ECFIN, provided guidance to Member States including by answering questions asked by national authorities through the Recovery and Resilience Facility Q&A platform, and by preparing and circulating comprehensive guidance documents.

¹² For more details, see Annex 14

Implementation is being rolled-out

The 27 recovery and resilience plans approved by the Council account for a total allocation of EUR 335.1 billion in non-repayable financing and EUR 165.4 billion in loans. In support to the green and digital transitions, the reforms and investments proposed by the Member States have exceeded the objective to dedicate at least 37% of the expenditure to measures contributing to climate objectives and at least 20% of the expenditure to digital objectives. For the Facility as a whole, the estimated climate expenditure amounts to about 40% and the digital expenditure to 26%. In 2022, the Commission disbursed 13 payments to Member States for a total of EUR 72.2 billion (out of which EUR 25.2 billion in loans) following the satisfactory fulfilment of 366 milestones and targets. In addition, for two plans adopted at the end of 2021 (Finland and Romania – loan part), the prefinancing was paid at the beginning of 2022 for a global amount of EUR 2.2 billion.

23 payment requests were submitted by Member States over the course of the year. In many cases, the Commission had to seek additional information to enable a comprehensive assessment, but all assessments of payment requests in 2022 were concluded positively and were published on the dedicated Recovery and Resilience Facility website.

The implementation of the recovery and resilience plans was broadly on track at the end of 2022, with progress on most milestones and targets in line with initial expectations (see Annex 14).

Delivering on the REPowerEU Plan

In the context of the unprecedented geopolitical developments linked to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, SG RECOVER, jointly with DG ECFIN, led the work towards the adoption of the Commission proposal (COM(2022) 231 final) for a Regulation amending the Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation as regards REPowerEU chapters in recovery and resilience plans.

This proposal is part of the broader Commission REPowerEU plan, the objective of which is to rapidly reduce the EU's dependence on Russian fossil fuels by accelerating the clean energy transition and joining forces to achieve a more resilient energy system and a true Energy Union. SG RECOVER actively participated to the Inter Services Group dedicated to the preparation of the REPowerEU plan.

SG RECOVER, jointly with DG ECFIN, engaged closely with co-legislators to facilitate their work and was intensely involved in political and technical trilogues between co-legislators. A political agreement was reached on 13 December 2022 on the Regulation on REPowerEU chapters in the recovery and resilience plans, making the Recovery and Resilience Facility better equipped to effectively address the objectives of the REPowerEU plan. The Regulation provides the necessary framework to ensure that investments and reforms strengthening the EU energy security and resilience are mobilised as soon as possible. It defines a specific set of REPowerEU objectives that should underpin the investments and reforms to be included in the existing recovery and resilience plans as part of dedicated REPowerEU chapters. In addition, the Regulation provides for dedicated funding sources to finance the relevant measures.

To guide Member States in adjusting their recovery and resilience plans in relation to both the update of the maximum Financial Contribution (calculated in June 2022 in line with Article 11(2) of the Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation) and the prospect of the inclusion of a REPowerEU chapter, SG RECOVER, jointly with ECFIN, prepared the guidance on recovery and resilience plans in the context of REPowerEU, adopted on 18 May 2022. An updated version of the guidance, taking into account the final Regulation agreed by the co-legislators, was adopted by the Commission on 1 February 2023.

Continuous dialogue with Member States

SG RECOVER and DG ECFIN held five meetings of the Recovery and Resilience Facility informal expert group for Member States in 2022, including one specifically focused on exchange of good practices. In this meeting of the informal expert group on the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Member States had the opportunity to present their good practices on three topics: (1) the role of the coordinating authority and the governance of Recovery and Resilience Facility implementation, (2) the involvement of stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of the recovery and resilience plans, and (3) communication and visibility aspects of the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The exchange of views allowed the Member States to benefit from the experience of other Member States in these aspects of Recovery and Resilience Facility implementation. The Commission has drawn up a set of good practices in this regard for the Member States.

SG RECOVER, jointly with DG ECFIN, also organised together with Member States annual events, bringing together institutions, stakeholders (in particular social partners and civil society) and beneficiaries of Recovery and Resilience Facility support to discuss the progress and state of play of the RRP implementation. 15 Annual Events took place in 2022 (EE, LV, MT, PT, ES, LT, FR, SI, RO, IE, BG, IT, CY, HR, SK).

Steering the reporting under the Recovery and Resilience Facility

In addition to reporting on the progress made in the achievement of their recovery and resilience plans, Member States shall report biannually on a set of 14 common indicators across all six policy pillars. The Commission uses the data provided in this biannual reporting to get an overview of the progress in the implementation of each plan and of the Recovery and Resilience Facility as a whole and to inform the discussions with the Member States. Based on this information, SG RECOVER, jointly with DG ECFIN, updated the content of the Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard regularly and as relevant throughout 2022 to inform about the implementation status of the recovery and resilience plans (see Annex 14 for further details).

SG RECOVER and DG ECFIN prepared the annual Recovery and Resilience Facility Report which was published on 1 March 2022 and the Recovery and Resilience Facility Review report, published on 29 July 2022, which both confirmed that the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility was well underway. They also started preparing the mid-term evaluation report on the implementation of the Facility, which is due by February 2024.

SG RECOVER, jointly with DG ECFIN and in close collaboration with other DGs responsible for

large funding instruments, developed an approach aimed at defining the concept of double funding under the Recovery and Resilience Facility. In the context of the informal Expert Group on Recovery and Resilience Facility implementation, discussions were held with Member States to explain and illustrate the approach. In parallel, a specific reporting module was developed in FENIX to allow Member States to report on the support received from other EU funds by any measures supported under the Recovery and Resilience Facility. A first reporting round was held in November 2022.

A dedicated control environment to ensure the protection of EU funds

The Recovery and Resilience Facility is a fully performance-based instrument, which means that, and unlike for other EU funding programmes, the Commission does not reimburse Member States based on actual costs incurred for the reforms and investments included in the Recovery and Resilience Plans. Instead, the Commission pays pre-defined instalments solely when agreed milestones and targets are satisfactorily fulfilled. As a result, the legality and regularity of the payments is solely based on the satisfactory fulfilment of milestones and targets. The Recovery and Resilience Facility funds, once disbursed, enter the national budget with no direct link to the expenditure incurred to finance the reforms and investments.

The control framework is tailored to the unique nature of the Recovery and Resilience Facility as an EU spending programme that provides adequate financial and reputational protection for the EU budget. Article 22 and Recital 54 of the RRF regulation set out the respective roles and responsibilities of the Member States and the Commission for protecting the Union budget. The Recovery and Resilience Facility control strategy is built upon **two main pillars**:

- controls to provide reasonable assurance over the **legality and regularity of commitments and payments**, based on specific controls related to the achievement of the agreed milestones and targets, which are further detailed in Annex 14.
- controls to ensure adequate **protection of the financial interests of the Union**, in the manner prescribed by Article 22 of the Recovery and Resilience Facility regulation setting out the respective roles and responsibilities of Member States and of the Commission. These controls are further detailed in DG ECFIN's own annual activity report.

Implementing the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework¹³

Together with Directorate-General for Budget (DG BUDG), the Secretariat-General continued to steer the **implementation of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework**. Programmes were fully rolled out, following the adoption of the necessary legal acts in the course of 2021. Through the interservice group on third country association in EU programmes, coordinated by the Secretariat-General, in close cooperation with the Legal Service, DG BUDG and DG NEAR, 20 association agreements were concluded in 2022, mainly with EU candidate

¹³ See in details Annex 1 – specific objective 3.4.

countries and potential candidates (Ukraine, Albania, Georgia, North Macedonia, Kosovo¹⁴, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Armenia, Faroe islands). The Secretariat-General oversaw the allocation of human resources across the Commission services and the preparations of the 2023 draft budget. It also helped DG BUDG in coordinating the implementation of methodologies to report on spending on climate change and gender equality. It worked closely with DG BUDG in implementing the conditionality regulation, preparing a Council implementing decision concerning breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary. The Secretariat-General contributed to the proposal to recast the Financial Regulation, which would align the financial rules with the new financial framework and better protect the EU budget.

In parallel, the Secretariat-General contributed to the negotiations on the first package of **new own resources**, tabled on 22 December 2021. The proposal aimed at contributing to the repayment of NextGenerationEU borrowing, through three new own resources, based on the EU Emissions Trading System, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, and the OECD Pillar One agreement.

General objective 4 – A stronger Europe in the world

Strengthening coordination on strategic external policy issues¹⁵

Against the backdrop of **Russia's war against Ukraine**, the Secretariat-General steered many work strands within the Commission to ensure timely assistance for Ukraine, the political condemnation of Russia in international forums, and responses to the geopolitical impact of Russia's aggression on energy and food prices worldwide.

On the **external aspects of EU policies**, the Secretariat-General helped prepare three joint communications: one on the EU's external energy engagement, one on ocean governance and one on building a strategic partnership with the Gulf. The Secretariat-General also drafted many briefings for key international events such as the EU-Africa Summit, the EU-ASEAN Summit and the EU-African Union Commission to Commission meeting. The President of the Commission chaired the first steering board of the Global Gateway initiative. The Secretariat-General continued to support and advise the President of the Commission in the preparations and coordination of G7 and G20 summits.

Boosting the EU's foreign, security and defence policy¹⁶

In 2022, the Secretariat-General continued to monitor the implementation of the EU's foreign, security and defence policy. This included coordinating the relevant Commission departments in the preparation of the **nine packages of restrictive measures** adopted in response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

¹⁴ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

¹⁵ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 4.1.

¹⁶ See more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 4.2.

The Secretariat-General led the preparation of the **defence package** presented in February 2022, consisting of the 'Commission contribution to European defence' and the 'Roadmap on critical technologies for security and defence'. The Secretariat-General was the driver behind the joint Communication 'Defence investment gaps analysis and way forward', which was published in response to a request from the European Council. In addition, the Secretariat-General contributed to the preparation of a proposal for a Regulation on establishing the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through a common Procurement Act, published in July 2022. It also contributed to the publication of a second defence package, in November 2022, consisting of two joint communications: EU policy on cyber defence and the action plan on military mobility 2.0.

The Secretariat-General prepared the first progress report of the action plan on synergies between the **civil, defence and space** industries. Furthermore, it led the preparation of the space package presented in February 2022, which consists of a proposal for a regulation for a secure connectivity programme and a joint communication on space traffic management.

The Secretariat-General ensured high-level **engagement with NATO** by the President and Members of the College, and continued to represent the Commission in the EU-NATO Core Group and Steering Group. It steered contacts between more than 15 Directorates-General and NATO staff, resulting in unprecedented levels of cooperation, in particular on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Implementation of the agreements that govern the EU's relations with the UK

The Secretariat-General continued to work on the implementation, application and enforcement of **the agreements that govern the EU's relations with the UK**: the Withdrawal Agreement, the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the Security of Information Agreement and the Agreement on cooperation in the safe and peaceful uses of nuclear energy.



On the **Withdrawal Agreement**, the Secretariat-General represented the EU in the meeting of the EU-UK Joint Committee and the meetings of the specialised committees¹⁷.

On the **Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland**, the Secretariat-General, together with the relevant Directorates-General, proposed a wide range of solutions to tackle the concerns of people and businesses in Northern Ireland, and to protect the integrity of the EU's single market. The Secretariat-General led the technical discussions with UK counterparts on these proposed solutions. In addition, legal action has been launched to address the UK's failure to implement a number of provisions of the Protocol.

¹⁷ In 2022 there were three meetings of the Committee on citizens' rights, one meeting of the Committee on the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, two meetings of the Committee on financial provisions and one meeting of the Committee on implementation of the Protocol relating to the Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus.

The Secretariat-General coordinated work on the implementation of the **Trade and Cooperation Agreement**. This took place through meetings of the joint bodies established by the agreement, including the Trade Partnership Committee, eight specialised committees and ten trade specialised committees. The implementation of the agreement in the area of fisheries, energy and a level playing field for open and fair competition and sustainable development required particular attention.

The Secretariat-General also proposed **two regulations¹⁸ governing the enforcement** of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and the Withdrawal Agreement. It helped with the political agreement that was reached between the European Parliament and the Council on one of them¹⁹.

The Secretariat-General also led negotiations with the UK on an EU-UK agreement on **Gibraltar**, based on the negotiating directives adopted by the Council in October 2021, following the Commission's proposal in July 2021.

Relations with other western European partners

On 1 January 2022, a new unit in the Secretariat-General was created to continue the implementation of the **Agreement on the European Economic Area**, as well as negotiations with **Switzerland, Andorra, Monaco and San Marino**.

The Secretariat-General worked closely with the EFTA Secretariat and the three **EEA EFTA States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway)** to ensure the smooth implementation of the EEA Agreement. It represented the EU in the meetings of the EEA Joint Committee and Joint subcommittees. In 2022, the EEA Joint Committee adopted 354 decisions, incorporating 628 EU legal acts into the EEA Agreement. In June 2022, the Secretariat-General launched the negotiations on the future EEA and Norwegian financial mechanisms.

The Secretariat-General conducted exploratory discussions with the Swiss government to determine whether their new proposals would form a solid basis for the reopening of negotiations following the Swiss Federal Council's termination of the negotiations on the Institutional Framework Agreement in May 2021. The Secretariat-General represented the EU in the meeting of the Joint Committee set up by the Free Movement of Persons Agreement.

In 2022, the Secretariat-General held a total of 19 rounds of negotiations with **Andorra, Monaco and San Marino** with the aim of concluding association agreements between the EU and these countries. Substantial progress was made and on 30 June 2022 the Secretariat-General presented a roadmap to implement the Council conclusions of 21 June 2022, with the objective of concluding these negotiations by the end of 2023.

General objective 5 – Promoting our European way of life

Showing solidarity with refugees and those fleeing the war in Ukraine

¹⁸ COM/2022/89 final; COM/2022/100 final.

¹⁹ COM/2022/89 final

The Secretariat-General played a leading role in the preparation of two policy communications²⁰ that set out the support that the EU quickly gave to **people fleeing the war in Ukraine and the Member States that are hosting them**. The Commission proposed to provide direct humanitarian aid, emergency civil protection assistance and support at the border. Additionally, it proposed to activate the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time, giving a clear legal status to those fleeing the war, which allowed them to receive immediate protection in the EU. The Council adopted the relevant Decision on 4 March. The assistance included humanitarian assistance and protection for those fleeing the war, recognition of academic and professional qualifications, access to the job market, and the right to welfare support and education. Support was provided to Member States to help them manage arrivals at the borders with Ukraine quickly, efficiently and with a high level of security. Additional financial support was made available via cohesion policy actions for refugees in Europe (e.g. CARE or FastCARE). Encouraged by the Commission, telecom operators agreed to provide free or affordable roaming services to Ukrainian refugees in Europe.

Deepening the Security Union²¹

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine increased the risk of trafficking in human beings, the threat of chemical and nuclear incidents, and of the illicit circulation of firearms. The war has also sparked an increase in foreign information manipulation and interference. The attack on the Nord Stream pipeline also underlined the importance of strengthening the resilience of critical infrastructure in essential sectors, particularly energy, digital infrastructure, transport and space. The Secretariat-General steered the work on a recommendation aimed at maximising the protection of critical infrastructure.

In 2022, the Secretariat-General coordinated the preparation of two Commission reports on progress in implementing the **EU Security Union strategy**: the fourth report since the beginning of this College's term was published in May 2022 and the fifth one in December 2022. These reports focused on the impact of the war in Ukraine, but also aimed to provide a mid-term overview of the implementation of the strategy.

Stepping up European cooperation on crisis management²²

The Secretariat-General plays a central role in ensuring that the Commission is able to respond, in an effective and consistent way, to crises that require action at EU level.

The Secretariat-General continued to coordinate various **COVID-19 initiatives** in different areas of the EU's response including the single market, free movement (including the EU Digital COVID-19 Certificate), civil protection and communication. The Commission continued to work on the EU vaccines strategy, including a mechanism to share vaccines. It continued to invest in research and innovation for new and improved vaccines and treatments for COVID-19.

²⁰ Communication 'European solidarity with refugees and those fleeing war in Ukraine', COM (2022) 107 of 8 March 2022, and Communication 'Welcoming those fleeing war in Ukraine: Ready Europe to meet the needs' COM(2022) 131 of 23 March 2022.

²¹ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 5.1

²² For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 5.2.

The Secretariat-General steered the work of the various Directorates-General involved in the response to ongoing crises, whether within the EU or elsewhere in the world. It ensured that the Commission stood ready to provide the first response to any new crisis that appears.

The Secretariat-General represented the Commission in the **Integrated Political Crisis Response** (IPCR) arrangements of the Council and in the ad hoc Working Party on Enhancing Resilience and Countering Hybrid Threats. It contributed to the ongoing revision of the IPCR's standard operating procedures, based on lessons learned from crises such as migration and refugee situation since 2015, COVID-19 and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. The Commission supported a more flexible system to activate the EU's crisis response and to scale it up when necessary, and a stronger focus on preparedness.

European Year of Youth

The Secretariat-General coordinated and supported the work of DG EAC and other DGs, contributing to the success of the European Year of Youth. Following the initiative, youth and **youth policies** have gained visibility in European and national agendas. Over 12,000 activities have been put on the activity map of the portal supporting the four objectives of the Year with 'youth participation' as one of the most popular topic. More than EUR 127 million coming from 25 different EU programmes and budget schemes across the Commission have contributed to achieving the Year's objectives. New youth participation formats and tools were launched at European level, such as the Youth voices platform (where more than 2000 young people have recorded messages), the Youth Talks (Ted-like talks of young people to young people), and the pool of European young journalists. The Secretariat-General was instrumental in organising the youth policy dialogues with Commissioners (attended by more than 300 young people in person in Brussels).

General objective 6 – A new push for European democracy



Embedding strategic foresight in the policy process²³

The Secretariat-General supported efforts across the Commission to embed strategic foresight at the heart of the EU policymaking process. With a renewed sense of urgency because of the rapid evolution of the geopolitical situation, the 2022 Strategic Foresight Report on **Twinning the green and digital transitions in the new geopolitical context**²⁴ took a forward-looking and comprehensive view of the interplay between the twin transitions until 2050. Drafted by the Secretariat-General, based on an inclusive foresight process run by the Commission's Joint Research Centre,

²³ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 6.11.

²⁴ COM(2022) 289.

the report identified key areas for action. Many of these were reflected in the Commission's work programme 2023.

The Secretariat-General continued to coordinate the foresight activities of the Directorates-General through the Strategic Foresight Network. The Secretariat-General also helped to strengthen collaboration on foresight with other EU institutions through the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System, and with Member States through the EU-wide Foresight Network, managed by the Secretariat-General. The **pilot horizon scanning exercise**, which captures early signals of changes that are relevant to the future of the EU, also helped strengthen the Commission's capacities to develop future-proof EU policies.

Strengthening the Commission's Better Regulation policy²⁵

Better regulation is at the heart of evidence-based policymaking in the Commission and the Secretariat-General oversees its implementation.

In 2022, the Commission began to fully apply the **'one in, one out' approach** for all work programme initiatives. It also applied this approach to initiatives adopted in 2022 and which implied significant costs or cost savings, but which were outside the Commission work programme. The Secretariat-General coordinated the implementation of this approach by the Commission services throughout the year to achieve its overall objectives. It set up internal procedures and monitoring, drafted guidance on the methodology and organised peer exchanges between the Commission services to provide the framework and training necessary to successfully implement this approach.

The Commission's **regulatory fitness and performance (REFIT) programme** aims to simplify the regulatory process and reduce unnecessary costs, while achieving the Commission's policy objectives and maintaining high economic, environmental and social standards. In 2022, the Secretariat-General worked to ensure that the REFIT objectives were taken into account systematically in all revisions of legislation, impact assessments and evaluations. The Secretariat-General worked closely with Commission services to update the online REFIT scoreboard with information on the evolution of REFIT initiatives throughout their policy cycle.

The Secretariat-General also managed the **Fit for future platform**, a group chaired by Vice-President Šefčovič, which helps the Commission identify ways to simplify legislation and reduce administrative burdens. In 2022, the platform adopted ten opinions with recommendations to the Commission on how to simplify and modernise EU legislation and reduce administrative burdens. The policy areas concerned range from access to capital for SMEs to food waste.

The EU's efforts to simplify and modernise legislation and reduce administrative burdens are presented in the **annual burden survey**, prepared by the Secretariat-General. The 2021 survey, published in 2022, reported on the results of the Commission's work to make legislation more efficient, on the achievements of REFIT and the work of the Fit for Future

²⁵ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objectives 6.4 and 6.5.

platform. The annual burden survey also presented the outcome of the ‘one in, one out’ pilot project, based on ten initiatives on which the Commission tested this approach and drew lessons for its implementation.

The Secretariat-General and the OECD organised a **conference on measuring regulatory performance** to launch the report on better regulation practices across the EU²⁶. OECD members were able to exchange information on best regulatory practices and the Commission had the opportunity to showcase its top ranking in the OECD regulatory policy outlook²⁷.

The full implementation of Better Regulation principles also means ensuring that initiatives adopted by the legislators deliver their full benefits to people and businesses. To that end, the Secretariat-General prepared a new communication on its **enforcement policy**, recalling in particular that smart enforcement is about preventing breaches of EU law from happening in the first place. The Commission also reviewed its approach to financial sanctions in infringement proceedings, updating the calculation method and related data, to ensure that sanctions remain dissuasive so that Member States comply with EU legislation swiftly.

Promoting transparency²⁸

In September 2022, a new IT tool, **Electronic Access to European Commission Documents**, went live. The new portal allows people to submit their requests for access to Commission documents, have an overview of their ongoing and closed cases, manage their personal data, communicate with the Commission and receive a reply to their request electronically. It also allows people to submit a request for review.

In 2022, the Secretariat-General continued to manage the **Transparency Register** set up by the Interinstitutional Agreement adopted in 2021²⁹. This is the key tool of the EU institutions to promote the transparent and ethical representation of interest groups at EU level. Improving the quality of data in the Transparency Register remained a key priority in 2022, in accordance with the annual priorities determined by the management board of the register. To make it easier to monitor registrations, the register’s secretariat compiled and applied new automatic quality checks. It also improved the register’s security by implementing EU Login authentication in the system.

Due to the investigations launched in the context of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, in July 2022 the Commission suspended the registration of and meetings with representatives of interest groups headquartered in Russia and which are the subject of investigations.

²⁶ [OECD Better regulation practices across the European Union 2022](#)

²⁷ [OECD Regulatory policy outlook 2021](#)

²⁸ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objectives 6.6 and 6.7.

²⁹ Interinstitutional Agreement of 20 May 2021 between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on a mandatory transparency register, OJ L 207, 11.6.2021, p. 1.

The European Citizens' Initiative: ten years of participatory democracy³⁰

The new rules introduced in 2020 saw the Commission register all **ten European citizens initiatives (ECI) that were received in 2022**, leading to a total of 26 initiatives registered since 2020. The upward trend in the use of the Commission's secure online collection system also continued in 2022, with seven of the ten registered initiatives deciding to use this tool³¹. One of the initiatives that successfully collected more than one million statements of support was submitted for the Commission's reply in 2022, making it the seventh successful initiative since the launch of the ECI in 2012.

In 2022, the European Citizens' Initiative celebrated its tenth anniversary, which featured in the **'EU Take the Initiative'** communication campaign with targeted social media posts and local promotion campaigns and events in the Member States. This campaign helped increase traffic to the ECI website by 20%, and to the ECI Forum by 11%.

Building a European Rule of Law Mechanism³²

The Secretariat-General pushed forward initiatives to strengthen the EU's capacity to promote and uphold the rule of law. The EU has expanded the range of tools at its disposal and launched an inclusive debate on the rule-of-law culture across the EU, with the annual Rule of Law Report at the heart of the process. In July 2022, the Secretariat-General contributed to the third **EU-wide Rule of Law Report**, which looked at the developments since July



2021. The 2022 report deepened the assessment of issues identified in the previous report and introduced **country-specific recommendations** for the first time. Overall, the report noted many positive developments in the Member States, including where challenges identified in the 2021 report are being addressed. The Secretariat-General worked with other relevant Directorates-General to ensure that the annual rule of law report process is rigorous and effective, and that it is consistent with other tools at the Commission's disposal to promote the rule of law.

³⁰ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 6.9.

³¹ Use of the online collection tool is still pending for one initiative registered in 2022.

³² For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 6.1.

Implementing the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism³³

The Secretariat-General is leading the work of Commission services on the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism³⁴. On Romania, the report published in November 2022 concluded that all its **benchmarks have been satisfactorily met**, with a few remaining political commitments that still need to be implemented. Monitoring and reporting on wider rule of law issues in Romania also took place in the context of the rule of law mechanism. There was also some progress in Bulgaria, where all benchmarks have been satisfactorily met, but one important outstanding action noted in the conclusion of the report remained to be finalised. The Cooperation and Verification Mechanism remained formally in place for both Member States, but it is expected that, after the European Parliament and the Council have an opportunity to comment, the decisions made according to the mechanism could be repealed in 2023. Monitoring and reporting at EU level of developments in Bulgaria and Romania is already carried out by the Commission in the context of the rule of law mechanism.

The Conference on the Future of Europe³⁵

The Conference on the Future of Europe, organised jointly by the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, was launched in 2021 and finished on 9 May 2022 with the publication of **the final report comprised of 49 proposals**. The multilingual digital platform was visited over five million times during the Conference. A total of 53,630 participants registered on the platform and submitted 18 845 ideas in total. This was in addition to the ideas stemming from the **721,487 people** who took part in **6,661 events** organised all over Europe and beyond. The deliberative pan-European Citizens' Panels ended with two sessions in January 2022. The results of the panels fed the discussions in the five Conference plenary sessions in 2022. The Secretariat-General was responsible for collecting and relaying substantial amounts of information from the Conference to and from Commissioners' Cabinets, Commission Directorates-General and other services, both in terms of EU policies and the organisational aspects of the Conference. The Secretariat-General also participated as an observer in European Citizens' Panels and Conference working groups. It monitored debates on topics under its cross-cutting competence, and, upon request, provided assistance as fact-checkers.

The Commission published its Communication 'Putting vision into concrete action' on 17 June³⁶, containing an assessment of the 49 proposals, the principles governing follow-up and an **outlook on the future of the Commission's activities to engage with citizens**. The first set of new Commission proposals to follow up on the Conference was announced by President von der Leyen in her State of the Union address on 14 September. The 2023 Commission work programme was also driven by the Conference, with an average of four out of five new initiatives directly or indirectly following up on a Conference proposal. On 2 December,

³³ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 6.2.

³⁴ The Cooperation and Verification Mechanism is a transitional measure aimed at assisting the the two countries to remedy the shortcomings of their national systems in fields of judicial reform, corruption and (for Bulgaria) organised crime.

³⁵ For more details, Annex 1 – specific objective 6.3.

³⁶ COM (2022) 404 final.

participants in the European Citizens' Panels took part in an online feedback event, organised jointly by the three European institutions, and discussed follow-up actions.

Promoting the highest ethical standards³⁷

In February 2022, the Commission replied to the European Parliament's resolution on 'Strengthening transparency and integrity in the EU institutions by setting up an independent EU ethics body'. In view of creating such a body, the Commission subsequently invited the seven other institutions and advisory bodies to explore their readiness to take part in interinstitutional discussions on the issue. Based on the six replies received, the Secretariat-General held a first technical meeting with representatives of the interested institutions and bodies: the European Parliament, the European Central Bank, the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. Council representatives also participated in the discussion.

In 2022, the Secretariat-General continued to help promote and ensure the highest standards of ethics and integrity among staff and Members of the Commission. It cooperated, in particular, with the Directorate-General for Human Resources and Security and the cabinets of the Members of the Commission. The Secretariat-General also provided secretarial support to the Commission's Independent Ethical Committee. The Annual Report on the application of the Code of Conduct for the Members of the European Commission provides more information on this issue³⁸.

Promoting equality for all³⁹

The Task Force on Equality and its secretariat (provided by the Secretariat-General) continued to work on mainstreaming equality in all EU policies, as set out in the Treaty. The task force contributed actively to the implementation of the five **Union of Equality strategies** adopted in 2020-2021. This included legislative proposals (equality bodies and violence against women), reporting (assessment of Member States' national Roma strategic frameworks, the annual report on gender equality) and policy measures (the disability employment package).

The secretariat of the task force provided **guidance on equality mainstreaming** through regular meetings with equality coordinators in the Commission services, updated the equality mainstreaming toolbox on the Commission's internal website, and held training and awareness-raising sessions. The secretariat also continued to support services in implementing and reviewing their equality mainstreaming work plans. In collaboration with DG HR, it published on the Commission's internal website the results of the survey carried out in 2021 on diversity and inclusion of staff. In December 2022, the task force held its third annual event, devoted to equality in times of crisis and specifically discussing equality mainstreaming in the response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

³⁷ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 6.8.

³⁸ SEC(2022) 226; https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-05/sec2022226_en.pdf.

³⁹ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 6.10.

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

Preparing the Commission work programme and coordinating the policymaking process⁴⁰

The centrepiece of the Commission’s corporate governance arrangements is the **Corporate Management Board**. It provides coordination, oversight and strategic guidance on all aspects of corporate management in the Commission, including on human resources management, strategic planning, security, business continuity, information technology governance and information management. It is chaired by the Secretary-General and brings together the Directors-General responsible for budget, human resources and security and the Legal Service, as well as their respective cabinets.

The Board is supported by its **four sub-groups**, all chaired by the Commission’s Chief Operating Officer: 1. Information Technology and Cybersecurity Board; 2. Information Management Steering Board; 3. Group of Resource Directors; 4. Corporate Communication Steering Committee

In 2022, the Secretariat-General prepared the 2023 **Commission work programme** against the backdrop of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. The work programme set out an ambitious agenda to support Ukraine and respond to the impact of the war on the everyday lives of Europeans, including by tackling high energy prices to reduce the burden for people and businesses across Europe, while accelerating the green transition. The work programme included further action to defend democracy and the rule of law. Many of the key initiatives followed up on the outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Additionally, the work programme delivered on the remaining commitments set out in President von der Leyen’s political guidelines.

Managing the Commission’s relations with the other European institutions



In 2022, the Secretariat-General continued to lead the Commission’s relations with other institutions and bodies, in particular the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, national Parliaments and consultative committees.

The Secretariat-General was fully engaged in all aspects of the **European Parliament’s** work, in plenary sessions, in parliamentary

⁴⁰ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 7.1.

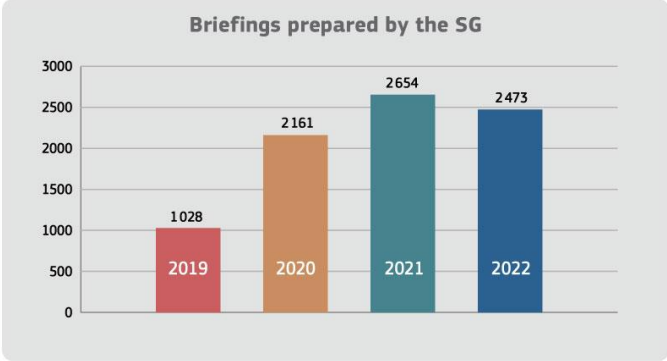
committee meetings, and meetings of the parliamentary governing bodies. It also coordinated the Commission’s replies to the Parliament’s written and oral questions and petitions.

In relation to the **Council**, the Secretariat-General ensured optimal Commission representation in Coreper⁴¹ I, Coreper II and meetings of the Political and Security Committee. The Secretariat-General also provided all necessary support to the Commission’s Vice-Presidents and Commissioners who attended meetings of the General Affairs Council. Furthermore, the Secretariat-General was responsible for the preparation of European Council meetings, Leaders’ meetings and Euro Area summits, as well as for all relevant briefings for the President and her team.

The Secretariat-General monitored developments in the legislative process for all pending legislative proposals in the **Interinstitutional Relations Group**. A modern and efficient framework for the Commission to take positions on interinstitutional questions ensured collegiality on new positions. It also made sure that the positions of the European Parliament and the Council were given the necessary political attention. This approach aimed to smoothen the legislative process and secure the adoption of pending proposals. In 2022, 81 legislative proposals were agreed by the co-legislators. Since the beginning of this Commission’s mandate, 427 legislative proposals have been agreed, 327 of which were presented by the von der Leyen Commission and 100 by the previous Commission.

The Secretariat-General took the lead for the Commission in the long-standing collaboration with **national Parliaments**, the **European Economic and Social Committee** (including via the conclusion of a renewed Protocol of Cooperation) and the **European Committee of the Regions**. It also fosters good relations with the European Ombudsman, in particular by ensuring that around 200 replies were sent in response to requests from the Ombudsman.

The Commission also continued to nurture its relations with **EU decentralised agencies**, including with the EU Agencies’ Network (EUAN), participating and intervening in the meetings of the latter. In 2022, the Secretariat-General created a network of the Commission’s representatives on the management boards of EU decentralised agencies which meets regularly to discuss issues of the work of the Commission on agencies’ boards and various matters concerning agencies, including administrative and budgetary questions as well as issues of coordination and cooperation in policy matters and international relations.



Providing briefings and political intelligence⁴²

The Secretariat-General prepared **briefings** for the President, the (Executive) Vice-Presidents and the Secretary-General.

⁴¹ The Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States

⁴² For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 7.2.

In 2022, the Secretariat-General produced many **flash reports**, to share timely information about relevant political and institutional developments.

The Secretariat-General prepared President von der Leyen's participation in meetings of the European Parliament and European Council, and in other high-level meetings and events, both in Europe and internationally.

Leading the Commission's strategic planning and programming⁴³

The strategic planning process underpins the performance culture in the Commission, by requiring all services to set clear objectives and monitor achievements. The Secretariat-General steered the preparation of the 2023 management plans across the Commission and, together with DG BUDG, the 2021 Annual Activity Reports, under the strategic framework set for 2020-2024. The final plans and reports were published on the Europa website.

The 2021 Annual Activity Reports were the basis for reporting in the Commission's 2021 Annual Management and Performance Report⁴⁴, published on 7 June 2022, and prepared by the Secretariat-General and DG BUDG. The Secretariat-General and DG BUDG also organised the annual Commission-wide critical risk assessment exercise, which focused on the management and spending of the EU budget, as well as the measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the staff and the work of the Commission.

Overseeing the implementation of stronger data protection rules⁴⁵

In 2022, the Data Protection Officer of the Commission closely monitored the implementation of data protection rules in line with the review of the Commission's data protection action plan. It identified several areas that required more attention and made recommendations to the Corporate Management Board (including the Information Technology and Cybersecurity Board) and the Group of Resource Directors.

The Data Protection Officer also produced guidance that completes the **structural reforms of data protection** in the Commission in the areas of internal arrangements, data protection impact assessments, data protection by design and by default, and data subject rights. In addition, the Data Protection Officer produced guidance (in the form of templates) on protecting the rights of data subjects. The monitoring exercises in 2022 showed the clear commitment of Commission departments to complying with data protection rules. Data protection is an integral part of all Commission activities due to, among other things, comprehensive awareness-raising efforts by all the relevant players.

Ensuring a high level of business continuity⁴⁶

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the Commission worked in business continuity mode, which was lifted on 1 April 2022 by a decision of the President. The Secretariat-General prepared a

⁴³ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 7.3.

⁴⁴ https://commission.europa.eu/publications/annual-management-and-performance-report-2021_en

⁴⁵ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 7.4.

⁴⁶ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 7.5.

report on the lessons learned from the Commission’s response to the COVID-19 crisis. The Corporate Management Board approved the report and its action plan on 28 October 2022. In parallel, the Secretariat-General contributed to the European Court of Auditor’s interinstitutional audit that assessed the preparedness for business continuity of several EU institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The auditors’ recommendations, published on 1 September 2022, resonated to a large extent with the conclusions of the Commission’s lessons learned exercise.

Alongside these processes, the Secretariat-General continued to adapt the corporate business continuity framework to the digital working environment and to the challenges created by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and the energy crisis. On 16 February 2022, the various committees relevant to emergency situations, involving security, cybersecurity and business continuity, were merged into a single crisis management body, the **Crisis Corporate Management Board**. This action has simplified internal procedures, to foster joined-up decision-making and better internal communication in preparation for any future crises.

Managing the Commission’s IT, cyber-security, information and data management policies⁴⁷

The Secretariat-General launched an inventory of the preservation needs of information systems as part of its corporate digital preservation strategy. It also provided guidelines to already address preservation needs during the design phase of new systems. The Secretariat-General expanded the **automated capture of records** in the corporate records management system, primarily by extending its coverage to new IT systems. The Information Technology and Cybersecurity Board endorsed the Commission’s new digital strategy, ‘**Next Generation Digital Commission**’⁴⁸. It was adopted by the College in June, and contained a set of indicators by which it can be monitored. The board continued to monitor the implementation of the IT security strategy for 2021-2022 and the entire range of cyber threats affecting the Commission. The board also approved action to address the legacy of IT solutions, and provided guidance for major corporate digital transformation projects in the domains of finance, human resources and grants.

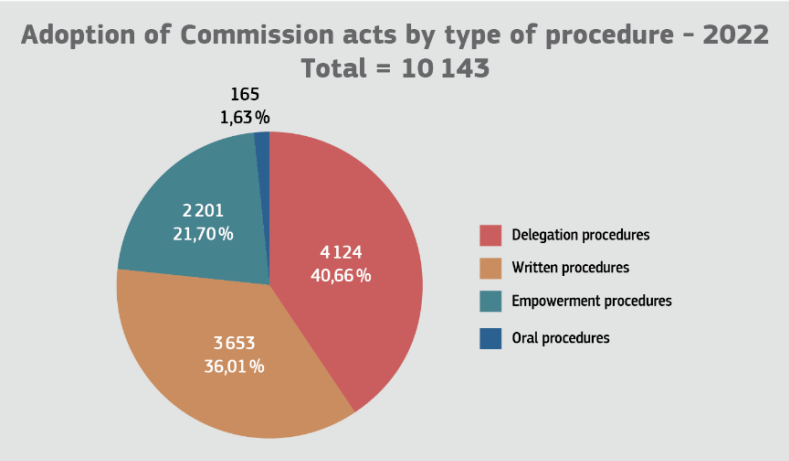
The Information Management Steering Board focused on the implementation of corporate activities on effective knowledge sharing, collaborative work practices, exploitation of data, and enhancing data skills. The Secretariat-General monitored and reported on the implementation of the Board’s rolling action plan for 2022-2024.

⁴⁷ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objective 7.6.

⁴⁸ C(2022) 4388.

Managing the decision-making procedures⁴⁹

While ensuring legality, collegiality, transparency and proper cooperation both at service and political level, the Secretariat-General continued to apply flexibility in procedures to allow for the swift adoption of **urgent decisions** to respond to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and to continue tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commission adopted a total of 10 143 Decisions in 2022, of which 375 initiatives were related to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and 545 were files related to COVID-19. The Secretariat-General continued to digitalise the decision-making process by further extending the scope of the Decide application, and by **streamlining the related procedures and working methods** (see Section 2.2.2).



⁴⁹ For more details, see Annex 1 – specific objectives 7.7 and 7.8.

MODERN AND EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION AND INTERNAL CONTROL

A. Financial management and internal control

Assurance is provided on the basis of an objective examination of evidence of the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. This examination is carried out by managers, who monitor 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 Secretary-General. The following reports / documentation have been considered:

- the reports from Authorising Officers by Sub-Delegation;
- the reports from Authorising Officers in other DGs managing budget appropriations in cross-delegation;
- the contribution by the Director in charge of Risk Management and Internal Control, including the results of internal control monitoring at DG level;
- the reports on recorded exceptions, non-compliance events and any cases of 'confirmation of instructions' (Art 92.3 FR);
- the reports on ex post supervision and/or audit results;
- the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control, and the observations and recommendations reported by the Internal Audit Service;
- the observations and the recommendations reported by the European Court of Auditors.

The systematic analysis of the available evidence provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in the full coverage of the budget delegated to the Secretary-General.

This section covers the control results and other relevant elements that support management's assurance. It is structured into 2.1.1 Control results, 2.1.2 Audit observations and recommendations, 2.1.3 Effectiveness of internal control systems, and resulting in 2.1.4 Conclusions on the assurance.

Control results

This section reports and assesses the elements identified by management which support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives⁵⁰. The Secretariat-General's assurance-building and materiality criteria are outlined in 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.

⁵⁰ 1) Effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; 2) reliability of reporting only when applicable, given the DG's activities; 3) safeguarding of assets and information reporting only when applicable, given the DG's activities; 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

The Secretariat-General uses the following definitions of a positive conclusion for the five internal control objectives and their associated indicators:

- Residual error rate: below 2%;
- Cost-effectiveness: error rates, time-to-pay and time-to-contract, and costs of controls leading to a positive conclusion on cost-effectiveness;
- Anti-fraud strategy: the 2022 action plan is implemented and recommendations are accepted by management;
- Safeguarding of assets: all pre-financings are correctly recorded;
- Reliability of reporting: no material error and no reservations.

The Secretariat-General has a low-risk profile in financial management mainly because of the small size of its budget and because almost all contracts entered into are part of framework contracts. Furthermore, the Secretariat-General manages a single grant, exempt from the requirement to have a call for proposals.

Overview table of the Secretariat-General	Grant	Procurement and administrative expenditure	Revenues including revenues transferred to other Directorates-General	Total of expenses and coverage percentage	
	<i>m EUR</i>	<i>m EUR</i>	<i>m EUR</i>	<i>m EUR</i>	%
Procurement, administrative expenses and grant without a call for proposal	2.55	8.05	3.7	10.60	100

In line with the Financial Regulation, the Secretariat-General's assessment for the new reporting requirement is as follows:

- No cases of 'confirmation of instructions' (Article 92.3 of the Financial Regulation);
- No cases of financing not linked to costs (Article 125.3 of the Financial Regulation);
- No financial framework partnerships of more than 4 years (Article 130.4 of the Financial Regulation);
- No cases of flat-rates greater than 7% for indirect costs (Article 181.6 of the Financial Regulation);
- No cases of 'Derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity [of grants] pursuant to Article 193 of the Financial Regulation' (Article 193.2 of the Financial Regulation).

Cost-effective controls are those that are effective in fulfilling the intended control objectives in an efficient manner and at a reasonable cost. In order to decide whether controls are cost-effective, it is necessary to assess their effectiveness, efficiency and economy.

account the multiannual character of programmes as well as the nature of the payments (Financial Regulation Art 36.2). The 2nd and/or 3rd Internal Control Objective(s) (ICO) only when applicable, given the DG's activities.

A. Effectiveness of controls

Legality and regularity of the transactions

The Secretariat-General uses internal control processes to ensure sound management of 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.

Based on control results and all other relevant information available, the Authorising Officer by Delegation can conclude that for each segment of expenditure with a given risk profile, and subject to the same or a similar control system, no reservation should be made.

The error rates for each key segment (or sub-segment) are as follows:

- For the grant to the European University Institute: 0.5%.

The bulk of the grant's expenses are for personnel who belong to a dedicated administrative entity and whose costs are standardised. Furthermore, the *ex post* control carried out at the end of 2021 confirmed the results of previous audit work carried out by an external consultant. These showed that adequate control procedures are in place, such as: (i) the correct identification of the staff working on the activities financed by the grant; (ii) the prevention of double payments; (iii) the presence of supporting documents and related invoices for payments made; (iv) the beneficiary's reliable accounts; (v) very minor claims for non-eligible payments.

- For procurement and other administrative expenses: 0.5%.

Controls aim to systematically detect and prevent breaches of legality and regularity; the first measure of the error rate is therefore the one resulting from the analysis of the recording of exceptions: control overrides and non-compliant events. The analysis of these exceptions shows that 0.5% is the best estimate. The Secretariat-General's portfolio consists of segments with a relatively low error rate, i.e. administrative expenses and a grant without a call for proposals. This is due to the inherent risk profile of the financial transactions and the performance of the relevant control systems.

Given the nature of the transactions and the absence of errors, except occasionally and marginally, the Secretariat-General does not process recoveries and financial corrections to correct errors and did not do so during the reporting year

- Overall risk at payment: 0.5%.

The estimated overall risk at payment for 2022 expenditure amounts to EUR 0.05 million, representing 0.5% of the Secretariat-General's total relevant expenditure for 2022. This is the Authorising Officer by Delegation's best, conservative, estimate of the amount of relevant expenditure during the year not in conformity with the contractual and regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made. As explained above, this expenditure will subsequently not be subject to *ex post* controls to have a proportion of the underlying errors detected and corrected in subsequent years. The conservatively estimated future corrections for 2022 expenditure amount to EUR 0.0 million.

Based on all the above, Table X presents an estimation of the risk at payment and risk at closure for the expenditure managed during the reporting year:

Table X: Estimated risk at payment and at closure (amounts in EUR million)

The full, detailed version of the table is provided in Annex 9.

Department	Payments made	Relevant expenditure	Estimated risk (error rate %) <i>at payment</i>		Estimated future corrections and deductions		Estimated risk (error rate %) <i>at closure</i>	
	<i>m EUR</i>	<i>m EUR</i>	<i>m EUR</i>	%	<i>m EUR</i>	%	<i>m EUR</i>	%
SG	10.6	10.6	0.05	0.5%	0	0%	0.05	0.5%

For an overview at Commission level, the services' estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are consolidated in the Annual Management and Performance Report.

Fraud prevention, detection and correction

The Secretariat-General has developed and implemented its own anti-fraud strategy since 2014 on the basis of a methodology provided by OLAF. It is updated every three years. It was last updated in 2020, and the current revision was finalised in February 2023.

Further to its adoption, a more in-depth and bottom-up approach will be used in 2023 for the fraud risk assessment in order to properly inform senior management of possible fraud risks, including fraud links with other identified risks such as inadequate cybersecurity.

The implementation of the rolling action plan that forms part of the anti-fraud strategy is being monitored and reported to the management annually. All necessary actions have been implemented, with the exception of the 'certified correct' form for contracts with deliverables to be performed in 2023. The 'certified correct' is the check mark provided by the operational unit in the financial and accounting system that the services or the goods were delivered in accordance with the contract.

The Secretariat-General also contributed to the Commission anti-fraud strategy and does not have any financial recommendations to implement.

The results achieved during the year thanks to the anti-fraud measures in place can be summarised as follows: all newcomers were offered training in ethics and anti-fraud measures and the local anti-fraud strategy reflected the actions taken at corporate level. Newcomers represent the most important target population and sessions have been organised remotely, but also *in situ*. In addition, a very detailed intranet page, updated regularly, guides all staff through the complexities of the anti-fraud activities, including links to OLAF. Similar links are provided to DG HR's pages on ethics.

On the basis of the available information, the Secretariat-General has reasonable assurance that the anti-fraud measures in place are effective.

The Secretariat-General continued to ensure appropriate corporate oversight of anti-fraud policy, via the Corporate Management Board. The Board continued to work with all relevant cross-cutting services and to follow up on OLAF recommendations addressed to the Commission. Taking into account the first comprehensive overview (2021) of the state of implementation of financial recommendations issued by OLAF during 2012-2019, the Corporate Management Board welcomed the corporate guidance on recoveries issued in 2022.

A similar overview of the state of follow-up to OLAF’s administrative recommendations by Commission services was completed in 2022. The Secretariat-General thus continued to contribute to one of the two main axes of the 2019 Corporate Anti-Fraud Strategy, which is to enhance the governance of anti-fraud policy.

Other control objectives: safeguarding of information

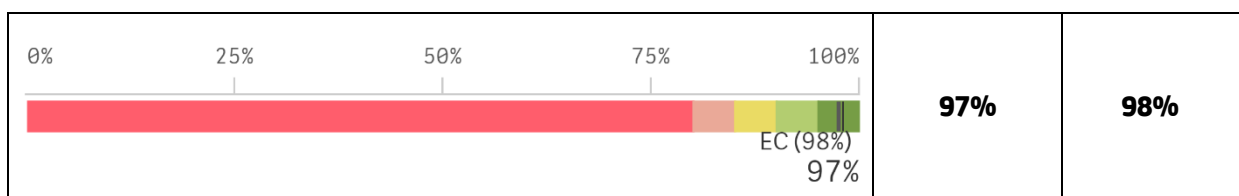
The Secretariat-General plays a key role in managing sensitive and classified information, both in relation to its own activities and in its corporate role. The core principles in this respect are confidentiality on a ‘need to know’ basis, integrity and availability. The Secretariat-General also protects access to assets and information by managing access to the offices of the Secretary-General and her staff. The Secretariat-General takes the necessary measures to protect the security of its IT systems and services - including the information and knowledge held on them. To safeguard classified information, the Secretariat-General operates the Commission’s Central EU Classified Information Registry. During the induction day, the Secretariat-General’s newcomers are informed about the main principles, rights and obligations under the Staff Regulation, with a particular focus on the obligation of discretion and the importance of avoiding any leaks of information or documents. The Secretary-General has emphasised the importance of strengthening the security culture in the Secretariat-General, and the Local Security Officer is helping to raise staff’s awareness of security-related topics.

B. Efficiency of controls

Two main indicators are used to measure efficiency: time to pay and time to contract (time to inform and time to grant do not apply to the historical archives grant, which is exempt from the requirement to have a call for proposals). In 2022 (see Annex 3) the average time to pay with suspension was 8 days (and 8 days in 2021). The periods specified in Article 116(1) of the Financial Regulation were complied with and 3.8% of the transactions exceeded the legal time limits with none exceeding the target time limits. The financial scorecard shows that 97% of payments were made on time (see Annex 4), which demonstrates the high level of professionalism of the Secretariat-General’s staff and their close monitoring of payment deadlines. Monthly reports were provided to the operational units to monitor uncommitted and unpaid appropriations. The controls are deemed to be efficient.

The average time to contract, starting from reception of the offer and ending with signature of the contract by both parties, was 8.5 days (10 days in 2021). The use of eOrders, which allows contracts to be signed electronically with all signatures being collected within one day is an essential element of this positive result.

Timely Payments	SG Score	EC Score
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C. Economy of controls

Being a low-spending Directorate-General, the Secretariat-General has a single indicator for the costs of controls per control system. The cost of controls amount to EUR 1.15 million and are based on staff work activities, as recorded by the screening exercise and with the Activities & Tasks Logging for Allocation of Staff (ATLAS) nomenclature. These include financial management, programme management, budget and accounting; management; general coordination; and information and communication technology, depending on the persons involved (see Annex 6).

These costs amount to 10.85% of the total payments (12.6% in 2021). This figure can be explained by the scope and diversity of activities linked to the cost of controls; the number of operational units involved; and the low number and low magnitude of the financial transactions at the Secretariat-General. As there were no significant changes to the budget and the staff carrying out controls, the control environment remained stable, but the total amount of expenses increased.

D. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

Based on the most relevant key indicators and control results, the Secretariat-General 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. Three main indicators are used to determine the cost-effectiveness of controls: the error rate, the time-to-pay/timely payment (and the time-to-contract), and the cost of controls. The respective indicators were: a 0.5 % error rate, 8 days on average to pay/97% of payments made on time (and 8.5 days on average to contract), and a cost of controls of 10.85% (as a percentage of the total payments).

Since the Secretariat-General is a low-spending Directorate-General, these error rates and times-to-pay are well within acceptable margins, and the cost of controls is not excessively high, the conclusions of the control strategy (details of which are provided in Annex 7), and on the cost-effectiveness of controls, are positive.

Audit observations and recommendations

This section sets out the observations, opinions and conclusions made 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 achieving the internal control objectives, and therefore on management's assurance.

Internal Audit Service

The Internal Audit Service's limited conclusion on the state of the Secretariat-General's internal control is based on the audit work carried out in 2018-2022. The IAS concludes that the internal control systems in place for the audited processes are effective, except for an observation that gave rise to one very important recommendation to the Secretariat-General and DG BUDG (for which details are provided under Annex 7) after an audit engagement on the reliability of performance information on EU financial programmes. A joint action plan with DG BUDG was prepared and accepted by the IAS.

European Court of Auditors

In July 2022, the College of Commissioners met with the members of the Court of Auditors to discuss priorities and collaboration between the Commission and the Court. Both institutions reaffirmed their commitment to continuing their constructive cooperation as the EU's executive and audit powers, while at the same time exploring ways to deepen their cooperation in full respect of their respective roles. They also reaffirmed their shared commitment to ensuring that EU funds are managed in accordance with the highest standards of accountability, transparency and sound financial management.

The recommendations from the Internal Audit Service and from the European Court of Auditors do not have a negative impact on the state of internal control, or on the declaration of assurance by the Authorising Officer by Delegation.

Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems

The Commission has adopted an internal control framework, based on international good practice, to ensure that it achieves its policy and management objectives. Compliance with the internal control framework is a compulsory requirement.

The Secretariat-General uses its organisational structure and the internal control systems suited to achieving its policy and internal control objectives, in accordance with the internal control principles, and has due regard to the risks associated with the environment in which it operates.

The assessment of the Secretariat-General's internal control system, conducted in 2022, is based on the following criteria:

- reports by the operational units on the five internal control objectives;
- reports by the second-line units on the values of the monitoring indicators;
- registry of non-compliance events and exceptions;
- reports by the authorising officers.

All reports on the internal control objectives show full compliance with the requirements. No deficiencies of the monitoring indicators were identified by the operational units. The registry of non-compliance events and exceptions does not contain any non-compliance events or exceptions that would negatively affect the declaration. Finally, authorising officers did not report any elements that would negatively affect the declaration.

As a consequence, the Secretariat-General has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective and that the components and principles are present and functioning as intended.

Conclusions on the assurance

The five internal control objectives for financial management were assessed for the whole budget delegated to the Secretariat-General under Section 2.1.1, complemented where necessary by Sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3. The objectives of having resources used for their intended purpose and the non-omission of significant information were assessed on the basis of the reports from the authorising officers where this was explicitly spelled out. There is no element to be reported that would qualify the declaration of the Secretary-General.

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

Declaration of Assurance

Declaration of Assurance

I, the undersigned,

Secretary-General,

In my capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation

Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view ⁽⁵¹⁾.

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 learned from the reports of the Court of Auditors for 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, June 2023

(signature)

⁵¹ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the Directorate-General.

Ilze JUHANSONE

B. Modern and efficient administration – other aspects

Human resource management

2022 saw the Secretariat-General strongly burdened in terms of staffing. The new tasks entrusted to following, among others, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine added to the already heavy workload due to the other crisis and the additional tasks co-legislators gave to the Commission. In this difficult context, the Secretariat-General's HR policy ensured the best use of its available resources to attain all its political objectives. Working under the constraint of stable staffing, it continued to ensure swift recruitments and maintained a very low vacancy rate in 2022. To help staff to cope with a fast-paced working environment, the Secretariat-General organised awareness raising sessions on resilience and wellbeing. Wellbeing was the focus of internal communication throughout the year. Key actions to develop the Secretariat-General as a positive, inclusive and efficient workplace were outlined in the new HR strategy, which was endorsed in May 2022. These actions included training sessions on improving resilience and on tackling unconscious bias in selection and recruitment, and the organisation of team building events to strengthen teamwork.

The Secretariat-General continued to invest in promoting gender parity in its management team. By December 2022, 45% of both middle managers and senior managers were women.

New colleagues in the Secretariat-General received support through training and guidance to integrate successfully in the DG. A comprehensive, needs-based digital skills training and coaching programme, together with the network of digital ambassadors, helped members of staff to adjust to the new hybrid working environment. Over 100 training and coaching sessions and four meetings of the digital ambassadors network took place. The EU Policymaking Hub, managed by the Secretariat-General, launched specialised learning packages for staff who are involved in policymaking. Overall, 20,281⁵² Commission members of staff took part in the courses on EU policy and decision-making organised by the EU Policymaking Hub.

Internal communication actions, such as weekly debriefs to all staff from management meetings and the weekly 'Newsflash' newsletter, helped to strengthen staff engagement in 2022. Information published on the MySGNet intranet page highlighted the achievements of various teams and included information about learning opportunities. According to a user survey, the staff of the Secretariat-General appreciated the internal communications on offer.

Digital transformation and information management

To enable the transformation to a digital, agile, flexible and transparent institution, the Secretariat-General improved the way that data, information and knowledge are managed. The aim is to harness the opportunities brought by digital solutions and progressively achieve compliance with data protection obligations.

⁵² Total number; one staff member could have attended several sessions

Digital Transformation

Building on the principles identified by the Commission's digital strategy, in 2022 the Secretariat-General continued to improve and digitalise corporate processes in the domains described below.

Decision-making:

The workflow at planning stage was further digitalised with the introduction of senior management agreements in Decide Planning, enabling SG Directors, Deputy Secretaries-General and the Secretary-General to give their agreement to screening comments directly in the system, as part of the political validation of politically sensitive and/or important initiatives. Likewise, Directors-General can validate new planned initiatives directly in the system. These two enhancements avoid parallel validations by e-mail or ARES and boost transparency, traceability and efficiency.

EdiT – the new legislative drafting tool – has been used in pilot mode for the drafting of legislative proposals and interservice consultations involving all Commission departments in Decide.

Records and archive management:

The Commission's corporate records management system, Hermes/Ares/NomCom (HAN), was further developed to allow the redaction of documents in case of requests for public access to documents, and to more easily find and retrieve documents that were disclosed following previous requests. Personal data protection was strengthened by a flagging mechanism to signal the presence of such data. The Secretariat-General adopted an updated and simplified version of the Common Commission-level retention list for European Commission files. It continued to develop the new archives management system to manage the paper and digital archives of the Commission and exchange data with the EU Historical Archives in Florence. The Secretariat-General launched the inventory of preservation needs of operational and legacy information systems and presented a proposal for guidelines to address preservation aspects of new information systems.

Monitoring EU law:

THEMIS is the set of applications managing the full life-cycle of infringements of EU Law. In 2022, the Secretariat-General focused on developing THEMIS/Complaints, the new module designed to facilitate the management of complaints on the application of EU law and further developed the THEMIS/Infringements module. The Secretariat-General was subject to an IAS audit on information technology governance and project management (including software development). The action plan to address the three audit recommendations will be implemented in 2023 and 2024.

Data, information and knowledge management

As part of the implementation of the corporate data governance and data policies, the Secretariat-General updated its key data assets in the corporate data catalogue, identifying and documenting data-related roles and responsibilities where possible. In collaboration with other Commission services, the Secretariat-General continued to organise awareness and

training activities on data governance and policies, to enhance data management and use in the Secretariat-General.

Data protection

In 2022, the Secretariat-General continued its efforts to raise awareness of data protection rules among its staff, aiming to prevent data breaches as well as to build capacities for an appropriate response should a breach occur. The Secretariat-General continued to ensure a high level of protection of the personal data it processes and to implement the Commission's data protection action plan. It published transparent and detailed information for all of its personal data processing operations. To ensure accountability for Commission-wide processing operations and to establish efficient, swift and sound handling of data subject requests or breaches of personal data, the Secretariat-General has put in place three new internal arrangements with other Commission departments. The Secretariat-General monitored the use of appropriate data protection clauses in its agreements with third parties.

The Secretariat-General was audited by the European Data Protection Supervisor, who made four recommendations and subsequently closed the audit in the light of the follow-up measures implemented by the Secretariat-General.

Sound environmental management

The Secretariat-General actively engaged with its staff on the Communication on the greening of the Commission, adopted in April 2022. The Secretariat-General ran four environmental campaigns about environmental initiatives and best practice to encourage environmentally friendly behaviour among its staff. This included a session on how staff could help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by adjusting their behaviour in the digital sphere. The increased use of digital tools and workflows helped the Secretariat-General to reduce its use of paper. Staff showed a lot of interest in implementing further energy saving measures in the Berlaymont building. A proposal to reduce corridor lighting outside core working hours was therefore sent to the Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels. To reduce CO₂ emissions from business travel, the SG fully enforced the rule, which required staff to travel by train for trips within the range of 500 km. The staff's strong awareness of good environmental behaviour was reflected in DG HR's corporate survey.

Examples of economy and efficiency

Secretariat-General's registers

The new Register of Commission Documents (RegDoc) contains new search functionalities, an improved user interface and a better presentation of documents. In 2022, more types of documents began to be published on RegDoc, which will be integrated with other registers, including the comitology register in the first phase. Thanks to these integrations, documents published on other registers will also be available via RegDoc, ultimately transforming RegDoc into a single entry point for Commission documents.

New digital solution for handling requests for access to documents

EASE, the portal for electronic access to European Commission documents went live in September 2022⁵³. EASE is already bringing substantial efficiency gains by covering the full life cycle of requests for access to documents. It uses multilingual templates, and allows for the direct registration of incoming and outgoing correspondence in Ares. Several features in EASE also make it easier to manage requests.

New digital solution for handling mediation cases

Eirini is the Commission's new system for managing mediation cases. It provides a central place for their management and reporting. As it deals with sensitive information, it has been developed to ensure a high level level of security.

EdiT - the new legislative drafting tool

See section on digital transformation, page 41.

Reporting on infringement actions

In 2022, the annual report on the monitoring of the application of EU law was streamlined to focus on the most important infringement actions launched under each headline ambition of the von der Leyen Commission. The accompanying staff working documents with detailed statistics were scrapped and the relevant information was moved online. The report was made more user-friendly and appealing through interactive graphs. The Secretariat-General also launched a feasibility study, together with the Publications Office of the EU, to further improve this data visualisation and to streamline and update the information in real time.

⁵³ See more details in the section on 'Promoting transparency', p.24.