ANNEX

to the

Commission Decision

approving the work programme 2022 of the European Research Council Executive Agency

European Commission

Annex

Annual work programme 2022

European Research Council Executive Agency

Contents

FOREWORD. Message from the Director

In 2022, the ERCEA will continue implementing the ERC programme under the new framework programme, Horizon Europe (HE). This is the third framework programme covering the ERC single principal investigator frontier research actions.

The following key challenges for 2022 arise:

- In 2022, the ERCEA will run calls for all five ERC funding schemes, Starting (StG), Consolidator (CoG), Advanced (AdG), Synergy (SyG) and Proof of Concept (PoC) Grants. The evaluation calendar for 2022 is packed because the agency will still be catching up from the time delay that stems from the transition to a new framework programme. The ERCEA will, for the first time, grant five year projects that will operate with only two financial reporting periods instead of the current four under the previous framework programme, a major simplification in the implementation of HE agreed in 2021.

- The ERCEA expects that 1060 HE grants will be signed in 2022. The ERCEA will also manage an important legacy of 6260 ongoing Horizon 2020 (H2020) projects with 857 mid-term and 1307 final scientific reports to be monitored. In addition, 5580 payments from H2020 and HE are expected to be made.

- With respect to the association of third countries to the HE programme, the ERCEA will need additional resources to support programme implementation. This will also be important considering the ambitious efficiency gain goals that the Commission has set out in relation to staffing for the implementation of the ERC programme in HE and keeping in mind that HE has an increased budget from around 20% compared to the previous MFF. The non-association to HE of Switzerland and the delay in the negotiation of the association of the UK (these two countries represented together around 25% – both in terms of budget and participations – of the total ERC grantees in H2020) pose a challenge for staff planning (reduction vs. increase) in this starting phase of HE implementation. For the 2022 ERC Work Programme (WP) 15% of additional budget was allocated based on the assumption of third countries association. Should planned third country associations not materialise, the ERCEA would need guidance to navigate the new situation.

- The Commission is working to promote lump sum funding schemes to further simplify HE grants and achieve better error rates for the research chapter. The ERCEA is carrying out a Continuous Improvement (CI) project to study how some of the ERC main grant schemes could be converted to lump sum grants as early as possible, bearing in mind that the key features of portability and the principal investigator's discretion on managing the budget must be preserved. Based on this analysis and identified mitigating actions, as well as the availability of IT tools and agreement on new submission templates, this could be introduced in the ERC WP after Scientific Council's approval. The use of lump sums should strart in a limited manner already in 2023 (e.g., in one of the main ERC grant schemes). In 2024 and beyond, the stepwise introduction of lump sum funding should continue in line with

lessons learned. The agency is also ensuring, together with the Scientific Council, that the high quality of the evaluation process is maintained and the "Excellence" only criteria preserved. The transition to lump sum funding will have a major impact on the organisational structure in the long term not only in relation to grant implementation but also in terms of grant preparation and detection of errors and irregularities. Hence the transition to lump sum scheme will need to be carefully managed.

- The ERCEA completed a CI project in 2021 on the newly delegated task in HE – Feedback to Policy (F2P). This has resulted in the creation of a new sector that will perform a more systematic project portfolio analysis in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders including the parent DG. F2P will illustrate how bottom-up frontier research carried out by some of brightest minds based in Europe contributes to EC policies and in particular the 'EU Green Deal', the 'Digital Agenda' and 'Health'. It will add to the already existing tools used for the evaluation and monitoring strategy of the ERC projects (e.g. ERIS, SBP and SAP[1]) that will all be coordinated within the ERCEA Knowledge Management Steering Committee created end of 2021.

- 2022 is a critical year for investing in staff wellbeing and motivation. Managers and the HR Unit will have to bring along the staff on the sustained quest for improving the agency's operations with a view to efficiency gains while maintaining quality of operations. Staff will also need to adjust to a reduced working space with more shared working stations following the Commission's plan to reduce office space at the same time as adapting to a new teleworking and HR policy for the Commission services. Furthermore, in the context of the coronavirus pandemic and the Green Deal ambitions, uncertainties on the implementation of key ERC operations – namely the evaluations which were designed to be 'on site' – will persist. A "new normal" will emerge in which work and the workplace will be different. It will be a collective challenge for the ERCEA staff and management as well as the Scientific Council to adapt the ERC programme and its implementation to this 'new normal' without compromising its label of excellence. Finally, the agency's director has retired at the beginning of the year. Managing the transition and helping the setting up of a new head of the agency will be an important task for the ERCEA's management team and the ERC Scientific Council alike.

A challenging yet exciting year lies ahead of the ERCEA. The agency will invest in inspecting its processes to face the 2022 challenges, caring for its staff and collaborating with the parent DG, its partners in the other executive agencies as well as the ERC Scientific Council under the new leadership of Professor Maria Leptin.

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Laurence Moreau
ERCEA Acting Director

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[1] ERIS stands for ERC Research Information System, SBP stands for the Science behing projects initiative and SAP for the Scientific assessment of completed projects.

PART 1. Mission statement

The European Union created the European Research Council (ERC) in 2007 to respond to the scientific community's need for a pan-European funding agency focusing on bottom-up frontier research with the intention of retaining and attracting top scientific talent and the most accomplished researchers to work in Europe and the associated countries. The ERC supports the best principal investigators in Europe in all fields of science and selects research projects on the sole basis of scientific excellence.

The ERC is composed on the one hand, of an independent Scientific Council of 22 scientists, scholars and engineers of the highest repute who establish the overall ERC's scientific strategy and have full authority over decisions on the type of research to be funded. On the other hand, the ERCEA supports the work of the ERC and implements the funding strategy established by the ERC Scientific Council under the oversight of its parent DG, DG Research and Innovation (DG RTD).

The ERCEA is committed to funding cutting-edge research aimed at bringing about major scientific breakthroughs. Furthermore, the ERCEA is supporting the European Commission's evidence-based policy-making activities, by providing valuable input drawn from its project portfolio. To this end, on 1 December 2021, the ERCEA established a new sector dedicated to Scientific Impact and Feedback to Policy. The sector will develop and coordinate the 'bottom up' feedback to policy approach for the ERCEA, as well as the related activities and outputs in close connection with the monitoring and analysis of scientific impacts of ERC funded research.

By implementing effectively and efficiently the specific objectives of HE[2], the ERCEA will continue to support its parent DG in achieving its specific objectives related to the implementation of the HE programme, as it has done for H2020 and FP7.

As reflected in its mission statement, the ERCEA is "Dedicated to selecting and funding the excellent ideas that have not happened yet and the scientists that are dreaming them up".

The ERCEA's core values are commitment, continuous improvement and integrity[3].

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[2]   Cf. Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulation (EU) N° 1290/2013 and EU (N° 1291/2013.

[3]   As voiced by staff, continuous improvement encompassed the additional dimension of efficiency and creativity and integrity also referred to honesty and respect.

PART 2. Key performance indicators

The following key performance indicators (KPIs) have been selected to measure the implementation of the programmes entrusted to the ERCEA. They cover the main activities of the ERCEA and consist of financial management and internal control indicators. One indicator measuring the quality of the evaluations is also part of this list.

1. Overall percentage of redress cases received
2. Time to grant measured (average) from call deadline to signature of grants
3. Time to pay
4. Budget execution
5. Estimated risk at closure

Objectives	Indicators	Baselines (December 2021)	2022 targets
Evaluations: Feedback to all applicants on the evaluation result is timely, unbiased and transparent	Overall percentage of redress cases received	0.6%	1.3%
Time to grant: To minimise the duration of the granting process aiming at ensuring a prompt implementation of the grant agreements through a simple and transparent grant preparation process	Time to grant measured (average) from call deadline to signature of grants	Starting Grant (StG), Consolidator Grant (CoG), Advanced Grant (AdG), Synergy Grant (SyG): n/a[4] PoC: 220 days	StG 2021: 391 days CoG 2021: 462 days AdG 2021: 375 days PoC 2022: 220 days
Minimise financial and legal transaction time for ERC beneficiaries	Time to pay (% according to milestones & budget table specified in the Description of Work and processing payments *ie* economic target days)	- Pre-financing payments HE: n/a[5] - Pre-financing H2020: 100% within 30 days, (average of 5.2 days) - Interim payments H2020: 99.96% within 90 days , (average of 19.7 days) - Final payments FP7: 92.8% within 90 days, (average of 53.5 days) - Final payments H2020: 99.25% within the target, (average of 46.7 days)	95% within 30 days 95% within 30 days 95% within 90 days 95% within 90 days 95% within 90 days

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[4]   Call baselines for StG, CoG, AdG and SyG are not relevant as they depend on each year's call calendar.
[5]   Baseline not applicable as first prefinancing payments for HE will start in 2022;

Objectives	Indicators	Baselines (December 2021)	2022 targets
<u>Expert management:</u> To fully execute the yearly experts' operational budget by executing efficient payment process	Time to pay experts	Time to pay H2020 experts: 98.83% within 30 days, (average of 10.2 days) Time to pay HE experts: 99.86% within 30 days, (average of 8.2 days)	100% within 30 days 100% within 30 days
To maximise execution of the operational commitment credits delegated to ERCEA by the European Commission	– % execution of L1 commitment – % execution of L2/L1 commitment (C8) – % execution of payment credits (C1)	100% 99.6% 100%	100% 100% 100%
To ensure full yearly execution of payments credits (operational budget) through careful planning and monitoring	% of experts payments budget execution (C1)	H2020: 100% HE: 100%	H2020/HE: 100%
To ensure sound financial management of ERCEA's operating budget as well as the regularity and legality of its underlying transactions	– % budget execution commitments – % budget execution payments – % of final payments execution/appropriations (C1+C8)	100% 94.9% 97.2%	99% 99% 99%
Effective and reliable internal control system giving the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and the regularity of the underlying transactions	Estimated risk at closure	1.51%	<2% of relevant expenditure

PART 3. Delivering on the Commission's priorities: main outputs for 2022

The management of the specific objectives delegated to the ERC by HE as well as H2020 programmes is defined in the annual ERC WP. The ERC WP 2022[6], which is established by the Scientific Council and adopted by the Commission, describes in detail the different funding instruments aiming at reinforcing excellence, dynamism and creativity in European research by providing attractive long-term funding to support excellent investigators and their research teams.

In order to measure the implementation of specific programmes entrusted to the ERCEA, the following result indicator stemming from the H2020 legal basis is measured:

H2020 SP SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1	Excellent science – European Research Council (ERC) – Strengthening frontier research	
Indicator	Share of publications from ERC-funded projects which are among the top 1% highly cited per field of science	
Baseline	Milestone	Target for Horizon 2020[7]
	2018	
New approach[8]	1.5%	1.8%

The H2020 Specific Programme started in 2014[9], in line with the policy priorities of the Juncker Commission. It now contributes to the advanced knowledge needed to evidence-base the implementation of the headline ambitions of the von der Leyen Commission[10].

HE has established a number of common key impact pathway indicators (KIPs) for the whole framework programme[11] but does not set specific targets for the ERC. Indeed, the Regulation stipulates that individual programme parts will contribute to these indicators to a different degree and through different mechanisms. It also foresees that additional indicators may be used to monitor individual programme parts, where relevant. Hence, as part of its mandate, the ERC Scientific Council will establish the modalities and

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[6]   Cf. Commission implementing decision C(2021)4860 of 14 July 2021 on the financing of actions under the component 'European Research Council" of the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe – The Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) and the adoption of the work programme for 2022.

[7]   The reference for this target is the year when the last actions financed under Horizon 2020 will be finished *i.e.* several years after the formal end of the programme in 2020.

[8]   A baseline could not be defined for this indicator as it was not monitored before H2020 started.

[9]   Cf. Council Decision 2013/74 of 3 December 2013 establishing a specific programme implementing Horizon 2020 – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020).

[10]   Cf. footnote 12.

[11]   Cf. Annex V of Regulation (EU)2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulation (EU) N°1290/2013 and (EU) N°1291/2013.

methodologies (both quantitative and qualitative) to contribute to HE indicators, and will propose additional indicators if appropriate.

The ERCEA will contribute to the achievement of the specific objectives defined by its parent DG to support the achievement of the headline ambitions of the von der Leyen Commission. Considering the bottom up nature of the ERC, the ERCEA is *de facto* contributing to the six headline ambitions of the von der Leyen Commission[12]. However, for the same reason, it is not possible to plan *ex ante* what the ERCEA will effectively deliver to support each Commission's objective nor to define related targets. Also, the Commission general objectives have been considered globally in the table below summarising ERCEA's main outputs for 2022. The ERCEA will be able to illustrate its support to its parent DG and to the Commission's priorities when the first HE calls are completed.

For example, the ERCEA participated actively with its parent DG in the gathering of ERC projects' data related to both the H2020 Climate action and sustainable development priority and the health priority focused on the COVID-19 crisis, priority of the Commission, which was integrated in the H2020 Dashboard.

The ERC's priorities in the area of external communication are set out in the strategy approved by the Scientific Council. This reflects the Scientific Council's mandate to communicate with the scientific community, key stakeholders and the general public. It is also designed to support the overall narrative on Horizon Europe[13]. Priority communication actions in 2022 are expected to include: the second edition of the Public Engagement with Research Award; preparations for a new CSA project on science journalism; an event on citizens' science; the promotion of ERC grant schemes and calls (with a particular focus on widening countries) and communication support for the ERC President. External communication will also support work on feedback to policy by highlighting relevant examples from the ERC's project portfolio.

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[12]   These are: 1) A European Green Deal, 2) A Europe fit for the digital age, 3) An economy that works for people, 4) A stronger Europe in the world, 5) Promoting our European way of life, 6) A new push for European democracy.

[13]   And more specifically in compliance with the provisions laid down in Article 51 "Information, communication, publicity and dissemination and exploitation" of Regulation 2021/695.

General objective:	All headline ambitions[14]	
Specific objective:	**DG RTD's specific objectives related to the implementation of HE FP**	
From 2020-2024 strategic plan		

Main outputs in 2022:		
Output	**Indicator**	**Target**
Launch of 2022 calls	Number of calls for proposals successfully launched according to agreed deadlines	1 (AdG2022[15])
Evaluation of 2022 calls	Number of calls evaluated in 2022	8 (CoG 2021 step 2 and AdG 2021) StG2022, SyG2022, PoC2022-1, CoG2022 step 1, PoC2022-2 (2 deadlines) Step 1 of AdG2022
Grants signed in 2022	% of proposals selected under 2021 calls granted in 2022	100% [16]

External Communication actions:			
Output	**Indicator**	**Target**	**Baseline** (December 2021)
Promote ERC activities and grant schemes	Number of visits to website	1 million	908 977
	Number of media mentions	12 000	13 400
	Number of new social media followers	40 000	46.564
	Number of participants / views of ERC events	20 000	23 700
Share ERC research results	Number of ERC stories	200	305

A. ERC funding instruments and calls for proposals

The Scientific Council establishes among other tasks the methods and procedures for the peer review and proposal evaluation based on which proposals to be funded are selected, while the ERCEA ensures the administrative implementation and the programme execution.

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[14] These are: 1) A European Green Deal, 2) A Europe fit for the digital age, 3) An economy that works for people, 4) A stronger Europe in the world, 5) Promoting our European way of life, 6) A new push for European democracy.

[15] Five out of six 2022 calls were already launched in 2021, only AdG 2022 was launched in January 2022. In addition, some 2023 calls will be launched during the second semester of 2022, further to the adoption of the ERC WP 2023 by the Commission.

[16] Covering all succesfully concluded projects e.g. excluding terminations, withdrawals, etc.

The ERC WP 2022[17] provides all the information related to the research activities implemented through calls for proposals as well as other types of activities allowing the ERC to carry out its duties and mandate.

As planned in the ERC WP 2022, the ERCEA has launched six calls, namely, the StG, the CoG, the SyG, the AdG and two PoC2022 calls. In addition, it will evaluate AdG2021 and will complete the evaluation of CoG2021 call. StG, SyG and PoC2022-1, PoC2022-2 (two deadlines) will be completely evaluated in 2022 and the evaluation of step 1 of CoG2022 and AdG2022 will be completed. Step 2 of these two calls will be completed in 2023.

The objective of StG and CoG is to boost the independent careers of excellent researchers by providing adequate support at the critical stage where they are starting or consolidating their own independent research team and research programme whilst AdG encourages substantial advances at the frontier of knowledge by supporting excellent, leading advanced investigators to pursue ground breaking, high-risk/high-gain research. The aim of SyG is to promote substantial advances at the frontier of knowledge, to stimulate cross-fertilisation among scientific fields and to encourage new productive lines of enquiry and new methods and techniques including unconventional approaches and investigations at the interface between established disciplines. Finally, the aim of the PoC instrument is to bridge the gap between research and the early phases of its commercialisation[18].

The 2022 operational budget will be distributed between young scientists (StG and CoG), established research leaders (AdG) and SyG (which tends to attract mainly senior researchers but open to all cohorts including StG and CoG ones that the Scientific Council encourages to participate in researcher teams).

Call identifier	Opening date	Closing date	Indicative n° of outputs	Budget € million
ERC-2022-StG	23/09/2021	13/01/2022	502	749
ERC-2022-CoG	19/10/2021	17/03/2022	388	776
ERC-2022-AdG	20/01/2022	28/04/2022	223	555
ERC-2022-SyG	15/07/2021	10/11/2021	33	297
ERC-2022-PoC-1 **ERC-2022-PoC-2**	15/07/2021 16/11/2021	14/10/2021 1) 15/02/2022, 2) 19/05/2022, 3) 29/09/2022	167 167	25 25

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[17] Cf. Commission implementing decision C(2021)4860 of 14 July 2021 on the financing of actions under the component 'European Research Council" of the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe – The Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) and the adoption of the Work Programme for 2022.

[18] For additional information, cf. C(2021)4860 adopting the ERC Work Programme 2022.

The implementation of the ERC WP by the ERCEA covers various processes from the management of calls and experts, the evaluation of proposals received, to the granting process as well as the financial[19] and scientific follow up. Below are listed their related operational objectives together with indicators and targets enabling to measure their achievement.

Objectives	Indicators	2022 targets	Latest known results (December 2021)
Call management: Clear and stable guidance on the application procedures provided to applicants	% of ineligible proposals / total proposals submitted, per call	2022 StG, CoG, AdG, SyG, PoC calls: 1.5%	2021-StG: 0.96% 2021-CoG: 1.8% 2021-AdG: 2.1%
	% success rate per call[20]	2022-StG: 12% 2022-CoG: 12% 2022-AdG: 12% 2022-SyG: 10% 2022-PoC: 35%	2020-AdG: 7.6% 2021-StG: 9.8% 2021-CoG: on-going 2021-AdG:on-going
Evaluations: Feedback to all applicants on the evaluation result is timely, unbiased and transparent	Time to inform successful applicants on the outcome of their application from the final date for submission of completed proposals	2022-StG: 330 (WP) 2022-CoG: 321 (WP) 2022-AdG: 340 (WP) 2022-SyG: 363 (WP) 2022-PoC: 100 (WP)	2020-AdG: 229 2021-StG: 271 2021-CoG: on-going 2021-AdG: on-going
	Overall average number of remote referee reviews per proposal	All calls (except PoC): 2	2020-AdG: 3.9 2021-StG: 3.4 2021-CoG: on-going 2021-AdG: on-going
	% of re-evaluations out of overall proposals submitted and following request for redress	StG/CoG/AdG/SyG calls: 0.03% PoC calls: 0.2%	2020-AdG: 0.03% 2021-StG: 0% 2021-CoG: 0.04% 2021-AdG: 0%
Ethical review: To ensure that ERC grants comply with the ethics principles and relevant legislation by providing timely ethical review and monitoring	Time to ethics clearance (average)[21]	45 days	2020 calls: 52.87 2021 calls: on-going
Time to grant: To minimise the	Time to sign grant agreements from the date of informing	2021-StG: 120 days 2021-CoG: 120 days	2020-AdG: 90.6 2020-StG: 100.9

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[19]   Cf. p. 20 for the indicators related to financial activities
[20]   This indicator is calculated as follows: Main / Evaluated proposals.
[21]   Data relates to the pre-granting ethics review. This time span runs in parallel to the granting process.

duration of the granting process aiming at ensuring a prompt implementation of the grant agreements through a simple and transparent grant preparation process	successful applicants (average values)	2021-AdG: 120 days 2022-Poc: 120 days	2020-CoG: 104.8 2020-PoC-3: 99.2 2020-SyG: 125.3
	Time to grant measured (average) from call deadline to signature of grants	2021-StG: 391 days 2021-CoG: 462 days 2021-AdG: 375 days 2022-Poc: 220 days	2020-AdG: 319.6 2020-StG: 380.9 2020-CoG: 405.8 2020-PoC-3: 188.2 2020-SyG: 476.3
Scientific follow up: Timely communicate the assessment of PI's final scientific reports	% of final reports which exceeded 60 days	StG/CoG/AdG/SyG/PoC calls: 3%	StG: 0% CoG: 0% AdG: 0% SyG: 20%[22] PoC: 2%

B. Support to the ERC Scientific Council

The ERCEA is mandated[23] to support the Scientific Council in all its tasks it performs[24]. Hence, the ERCEA provides strategy support to the Scientific Council and related bodies (standing committees, working groups, task forces, ERC Board), and produces briefings, papers, reports in relation to the ERC's scientific strategy. Furthermore, it supports the ERC President and Scientific Council members in their institutional relations and networking activities, coordinates and supports the ERC's external communication and performs ERC programme-level monitoring and evaluation activities.

The ERCEA mandate to support the Scientific Council remains unchanged under HE.

In 2022, the ERCEA will, as a priority, support the Scientific Council in the implementation of the ERC WP 2022, and in the preparation of the ERC WP 2023. It will also assist the newly appointed ERC President in taking up her duties. Furthermore, the ERCEA will support the Scientific Council in the process of monitoring the peer review system through the on-going provision of data analysis and strategic documents. By mid-2022, the ERCEA aims to deliver the "ERC Funding Activities Report 2014-2020" based on the analysis of the operation and achievements of the ERC under H2020. Moreover, the ERC WP 2022 foresees the recruitment of independent external experts to assist the ERC in the qualitative evaluation of the frontier nature of ERC funded research.

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[22]   One report out of five exceeded 60 days.
[23]   Cf. Council Decision 5EU) 2021/764 of 10 May 2021 establishing the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and repealing Decision 2013/743/EU.
[24]   Establishment of the overall strategy for the ERC, the work programme for the implementation of ERC activities, the methods and procedures for the peer review and proposal evaluation on the basis of which the proposals to be funded are determined, its position on any matter which from a scientific perspective may enhance achievements and impact on the ERC and the quality of the research carried out, a code of conduct addressing, inter alia the avoidance of conflict of interest.

Finally, the ERCEA will keep developing its monitoring and evaluation tools in order to assist the Scientific Council in assessing the impact of ERC funding on frontier scientific knowledge, technology transfer, national research policies, host institutions, research careers, and other aspect described in the ERC Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy. At the same time, the ERCEA will contribute to the preparations for the overall ex-post evaluation of H2020, which is to be completed by the end of 2023.

PART 4. Modernising the administration: main outputs for 2022

The internal control framework[25] supports sound management and decision-making. It notably ensures that risks to the achievement of objectives are taken into account and reduced to acceptable levels through cost-effective controls.

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

A. Human resource management

The mission of the ERCEA's HR Unit is to manage the agency's human resources and to provide logistics and infrastructure support. The unit acts as a strategic partner aligned with the ERCEA's mission, objectives and priorities and actively supports management and staff in view of ensuring its smooth operations.

In light of the new HR Strategy of the Commission, the ERCEA's HR Unit will adopt its own three-year HR Strategy reinforcing its focus on long-term organisational goals such as the wellbeing, staff motivation and reorganisation of office spaces.

A cornerstone of the work in 2022, and a key challenge, will include the optimisation of staff allocation against the background of budgetary constraints in order to ensure the effectiveness of the ERCEA's operations. This will likely entail a re-scoping of certain job profiles and will be supported by the Continuous Improvement (CI) efforts of the agency.

A further focus of the ERCEA's human resources management will also be the recruitment, retention and development of staff. The evolution of the staffing of the ERCEA will depend on the level of third countries' credits. Negotiations with some third countries have not yet been concluded and the outcome is uncertain. This will have a significant impact on the budget and staffing. In view of serving the ERCEA units in the best way possible in spite of uncertainty over the staffing situation relating to third countries' participation, the HR Unit will strive to reach at least 98% and possibly 100%, depending on the final staffing level for 2022.

Based on the recent trend, an average turnover of about 5% is expected. The ERCEA will analyse the need of selection processes, taking into account the evolution of the staffing beyond 2022. The ERCEA will perform a thorough check of current open reserve lists throughout 2022 in light of the needs identified by the different units for the staffing and profiles needed in the context of the new framework programme. Staff selections will be

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[25]   Communication C(2017)2373 - Revision of the Internal Control Framework.

organised jointly with other agencies where appropriate, opening up pools of candidates from which all executive agencies can draw.

At the same time, additional efforts in retaining and motivating staff will be put in place with a series of targeted actions. In particular, measures relating to career mobility will be undertaken. Initiatives that are aimed at raising awareness on the psycho-social and physical wellbeing of ERCEA staff will be particularly high on the agenda. Also, the new ways of working in hybrid teams and the implementation of the upcoming related Commission Decision will lead to a change in management methods, hence the HR Unit will support the ERCEA staff and management in this transition phase.

The ERCEA will also continue to pursue an engaged social dialogue in particular with the newly elected Staff Committee, to champion key issues for the staff and to align its approach to various topics with the other executive agencies.

The ERCEA learning and development activities will be guided by the ERCEA Learning and Development Strategy (LDS) 2021-2023. Special attention will be allocated to training of newcomers and supporting women in their career development via implementation of the inter-agency women talent programme. In addition, the agency will put in place a special scheme for heads of sector to give the latter access to individual coaching sessions with external coaches. Finally, the learning and development activities will strive to enhance staff skills for working in a virtual/hybrid environment, as well as address staff well-being under the new ways of working.

The ERCEA will also develop a new multiannual Staff Engagement Strategy to guide the internal communication activities and outputs. Particular effort will be put to reinforce ERCEA's organisational culture and staff engagement, considering long-term teleworking induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Attention will continue to be given to further connecting each staff member to the core business of the agency, work that will be carried out jointly by the HR Unit and the Internal Communication team.

Finally, the HR Unit will complete leading the project, in the context of the ERCEA's CI project, aiming at accommodating its budget, staff constrains and working spaces of the future while keeping the high motivation of its staff. In the short term, in order to allow the HaDEA to reunite its staff in COV2, the ERCEA will give back half of one of its floors and put into place a shared desk policy of eight desks for ten people while keeping the existing offices arrangement. In the longer term, depending on several crucial unknown parameters[26] the ERCEA will further analyse its staff wishes as expressed and gathered in surveys and CI focus groups and align them with the various possible scenarios for an ERCEA's tailor made workspace of the future.

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[26]   Such as the relative staffing of each of the four EAs, the handover of the negotiation of the renting to OIB, the Commission real estate strategy in relation with the Green Deal commitments, etc.

Objective: The ERCEA employs a competent and engaged workforce and contributes to gender equality at all levels of management to effectively deliver on the agency's priorities and core business.	
Indicator 1[27] **Number and percentage of female representation in middle management**[28] **Source of data: DG HR**	
Baseline (female representation in middle management) (31/12/2021)	**Final Target** 50% by 2024 [29]
60%	50% in 2022
Indicator 2: **ERCEA staff engagement index** **Source of data: Commission staff or pulse survey**	
Baseline: (latest European Commission Staff survey – December 2021)	(next European Commission Staff survey)
74%	Equal to or above 73%

Main outputs in 2022:		
Output	**Indicator**	**Target**
To support ERCEA' core business by providing the required number of staff on time	Occupation rate at year end	98%

B. Sound financial management

With the launch of the first HE grant preparation process and the parallel running of the framework programmes entailing, among others, an increasing number of transactions (also due to the COVID19-related project extensions), the Grant Management Department will continue to invest on measures for improving effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations.

In this context, efforts will relate to further simplification of the existing dedicated tailor-made guidance, to the elaboration of simple and clear HE guides tailor-made to the ERC schemes and to the training of financial actors and ERCEA beneficiaries, for due understanding and application of the rules. Moreover, intense management monitoring as to an efficient processing of transactions and the minimization of any risk for error will also serve the intended purpose. Furthermore, effective inter-service communication and

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[27] Seconded middle managers are part of the seconding DGs' staff: The responsibility for achieving the targets is at DG level. The agency is responsible for providing with a regular overview to its parent DGs of the gender representation in middle management within the agency and coordinate between them.

[28] The functions of head of unit and head of department are hereby defined as middle management functions with the vacant positions being excluded from the calculation.

[29] In line with the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

meaningful active participation and contributions to the inter-service dedicated HE groups ensured by key ERCEA staff will also result to simpler common guidance, help prevent errors in their source and maintain the low error rate target. In HE, the correct understanding of rules will continue to be very important.

Objective: 1 The authorising officer by delegation (AOD) has reasonable assurance that resources have been used in accordance with the principle of sound financial management and that cost-effective controls are in place which give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of underlying transactions

Indicator 1 : ERCEA H2020 Estimated residual error rate

Source of data: ERCEA AAR 2021

Baseline: 2021	Target
1.22%	Remains < 2% of relevant expenditure

Main outputs in 2022:

Output	Indicator	Target
Effective controls: Legal and regular transactions	Risk at payment	Remains < 2 % of relevant expenditure
	Estimated risk at closure	Remains < 2 % of relevant expenditure
Effective controls: Ensure adequate quality and consideration of specificities of ERC grants in H2020 audit results	Review of Preliminary / Draft Audit Reports (PARs) by the ERCEA	100% of PARs submitted by CAS reviewed by ERCEA Audit Liaison Officers
Efficient controls	Budget execution	Remains 100% of payment appropriations
	Time-to-pay	Remains 95% of payments (in value) on time
		See table on page 20 for more details
Economical controls	Overall estimated cost of controls	Remains less than 3 % of funds managed

The ERCEA is committed to continuously monitor and report on the compliance and effectiveness of its internal control system while being proportionate to its risks as to ensure that reasonable assurance can be given. As in previous years, the ERCEA will manage in 2022 financial and non-financial risks related to the delegated programmes and to its administrative budget.

The number of payments from H2020 programme will increase in the coming years in line with the maturity of the grants' portfolio. The ex-post control activities related to H2020 payments are managed by the Common Audit Service (CAS).

The H2020 Audit Strategy defines audit targets for each service of the Research family, and the version of the strategy valid at the end of 2020 foresees the closure of 200 participations. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ERCEA agreed with the CAS to

officially revise the ERCEA multiannual targets in 2021. In 2022 the CAS will complete audits of 110 ERCEA participations. The 2021 campaign has also been impacted by the pandemic, with a reduction from 180 to 90 participations, which will result by the end of 2022 in 630 audited ERCEA participations cumulatively since the beginning of H2020 audit campaign.

In order to ensure completion of 2022 audit targets and timely and appropriate selection of participations for 2023 targets, the ERCEA will continuously monitor and report on the progress of CAS audits, coordinate with CAS selection of participations for new audits, and escalate if the partial completion of targets underpinning the declaration of assurance may be at risk.

Within the ex-post control framework, the ERCEA will use internal resources to perform technical audits as needed. In line with CAS working arrangement, such audits should be organised and executed by the ERCEA with the participation of the CAS if needed to ensure adequate treatment of financial aspects.

While the trust-based approach is well rooted in the ERCEA payments process as per the H2020 ex-ante control strategy, the agency applies effective controls ensuring a regular update of guides and procedures relevant to all its key business processes and applicable to all financial actors. In parallel, it provides continuous support to beneficiaries with the aim to prevent errors, maintain the low error rate target and meet the objective for legality and regularity of operations. In this view, training and seminars/webinars to beneficiaries will continue to be delivered in 2022 via the ERC Host Institution (HI)/Principal Investigator (PI) Events, for their familiarisation with H2020 rules and reporting modalities and enhance the timeliness and quality of reporting. In this context, targeted support and/or training is also envisaged, to be tailor-made to the needs of accounting and legal (including Intellectual Property Rights) and human resources departments of beneficiaries facing "difficulties" during grant implementation or with a demonstrated "high risk record". Finally, with the launch of HE, intensified efforts will be put in place in order to ensure timely a similar robust grant implementation context of workflows, business processes, training and support for beneficiaries and financial actors. The common aim of all undertaken actions is to ensure sound financial operations, efficient handling of transactions, and an effective and high quality of service to beneficiaries.

Objectives	Performance indictors	2022 Targets			Latest known results December 2021		
		HE	H2020	FP7	HE	H2020	FP7
To maximise execution of the operational commitment credits delegated to ERCEA by the European Commission	% execution of L1 commitment	100%			100%		
	% execution of L2/L1 commitment (C8)	100%	100%		n.a	99.6%	
To ensure full yearly execution of payments credits (operational budget) through careful planning and monitoring	% execution of payment credits (C1)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Minimise financial and legal transaction time for ERC beneficiaries	a) time to pay (% according to milestones & budget table specified in the Description of Work and processing payments ie economic target days)	Pre-financing: 95% within 30 days	Pre-financing: 95% within 30 days			100% within the target (average 5.2 days)	
			Interim payment: 95% within 90 days			99.6% within the target (average 19.7 days)	100% within the target (average 32.3 days)
			Final payment: 95% within 90 days	FP: 95% within 90 days		99.25% within the target (average 46.7 days)	92.8% within the target (average 53.5 days)
	b) time to invoice (% within 5 days)	95%	95%	95	100%	99.84%	100%
	c) time to amend (% approved or rejected within 45 days upon receipt of valid request)	85%	85%	95%		99.9% (average 6.5 days	100% (average 14.6 days)
Expert management: To fully execute the yearly experts' operational budget by executing efficient payment process	a) time to pay (average)	100% within 30 days	100% within 30 days		98.86% within the target (average 8.2 days)	98.83% within the target (average 10.2 days)	
	b) % of experts payments budget execution (C1)	100%	100		100%	100%	

C. Fraud risk management

During 2021 and further to the Internal Audit Service (IAS) audit on anti-fraud finalised in early 2021, the ERCEA implemented on time two out of three recommendations agreed in the action plan, while the third one was implemented with a slight delay.

Objective: The risk of fraud is minimised through the application of effective anti-fraud measures and the implementation of the Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy (CAFS)[30] aimed at the prevention, detection and correction[31] of fraud		
Indicator: Implementation of the actions included in the ERCEA anti-fraud strategy over the strategy's lifecycle		
Source of data: ERCEA's annual activity report, ERCEA's anti-fraud strategy, OLAF reporting		
Baseline 2020	**Target** (2021)	**Target** (2022)
0% of action points implemented	75% of action points implemented in time	100% of action points implemented in time

Main outputs in 2022:		
Output	**Indicator**	**Target**
1. To effectively prevent, detect and report internal and external irregularities and potential fraud to OLAF / EPPO/ DG BUDG/ IDOC.	1.1 Targeted risk assessment on fraud.	Update of fraud risk assessment twice a year.
	1.2 Awareness of ERCEA staff in particular newcomers through targeted internal trainings, info sessions etc… on ethics and integrity and on irregularities and fraud.	80% participation rate
2. To swiftly and effectively assess all reported/detected cases – which are within the remit of the agency – and ensure protective and/or corrective actions are implemented.	2.1 Advise on potential irregularities and fraud cases, including any protective/corrective actions,	15 working days for 80% of requests.
	2.2 Monitoring of the Implementation of protective / corrective actions (own /OLAF / EPPO…).	50 % of actions implemented within deadline.
3. To promote a zero fraud tolerance through an effective internal and external communication on ERCEA actions against fraud.	3.1 Maintenance of the register of potential irregularities and fraud cases updated.	5 working days from the date of the case being reported to the unit managing fraud cases.
	3.2 Regular and comprehensive reporting on fraud cases to key responsible actors. Timely issuance of bi-annual reports.	Issuance of 2 reports Issuance end of February and July

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[30] Communication from the Commission "Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy: enhanced action to protect the EU budget', COM(2019) 176 of 29 April 2019 – 'the CAFS Communication' – and the accompanying action plan, SWD(2019) 170 – 'the CAFS Action Plan'.

[31] Correction of fraud is an umbrella term, which notably refers to the recovery of amounts unduly spent and to administrative sanctions.

D. Digital transformation and information management

The most important IT solutions used by the ERCEA to implement the tasks it has been entrusted with are the eGrants suite. In addition, the ERCEA collaborates with the Common Implementation Centre (CIC) to integrate its specific requirements in the common systems in the areas of evaluation, expert and grant management of the HE programme. The most important activities in 2022 will concern the new framework programme HE. This includes improving financial reporting, i.e. data quality and business needs coverage. Part of the improvements consists in migrating to the corporate reporting system. This will be analysed together with the research family. The eligibility check of proposals and the support for the ethics assessment and monitoring will be further improved. The semantic referee finding will be extended to support SyG calls. The ERCEA will continue to help implementing common features in corporate systems (e.g. eGrants) and data sources.

To improve transparency, the Science behind the projects (SBP) will be extended with facts sheets for the general public and the support to the ERC Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy – (ERC ERIS) will be further enhanced.

With respect to the digital workplace of the future, the ERCEA will be providing a consolidated, reliable and secure IT infrastructure, the right IT tools, platforms and services, enabling users to work and collaborate anywhere, anytime with a fit-for purpose security and optimising their work experience and productivity. In the framework of the CI initiative, the project "Workplace of the Future" embraces fully the opportunities for new ways of working which emerged with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the field of administration, the ERCEA will be maintaining a local set of IT tools to manage its administration in the operational areas as well as resources and support services, aiming at increasing the productivity of the business operations. The strategy will be to migrate to the corporate systems as soon as the required functionality becomes available. The eProcurement project covers the entire eProcurement value chain (end-to-end eProcurement) split into five distinct business processes: Preparation, Publication, Submission and Evaluation, Contract management, Asset management and logistics. For the preparation process, Public Procurement Management tool (PPMT) is compulsory for all European Commission services, executive agencies and EEAS for procedures above the Directive[32] threshold while the ERCEA has adopted it since 1 January 2020 for all procedures, regardless of their value. The tools for the budget management and the workflow for the payments have been presented to DIGIT and DG BUDG as an input for the requirements to the future implementation of SUMMA.

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[32]   Cf. Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC.

For the specific requirements in the common IT systems[33] IT development and procurement choices will be subject to pre-approval by the European Commission Information Technology and Cybersecurity Board.

For information and knowledge management, the ERCEA will work together with the CIC on the identification of the different data related roles as part of the general governance bodies. The ERCEA will be contributing to the feedback to policy. For this, data related to the implementation of the different framework programmes for Research and Innovation in relation with the component "the European Research Council" will be collected, organised and linked to external data sources.

The ERCEA will finalise the Security Plans for ERCEA Communication and Information systems and implement the measures to ensure their effective security.

The main objective of the Document Management Centre (DMC) is to apply an e-Domec-compatible policy at the ERCEA by fulfilling the legal obligations related to document management. To this end, the DMC will continue to assess the risks related to document management, provide advice to services, manage access rights to official documents, train and support ERCEA staff in using the dedicated tools (Hermes-Ares-Nomcom). It will also raise awareness on working methods in a hybrid working environment (paper and electronic), and contribute to the information management policy. In 2022, the main objective is to introduce the qualified electronic signature (QES) in the ERCEA.

The ERCEA considers the protection of personal data as a high priority in the implementation of its activities. In particular, the aim is to follow the privacy by default and privacy by design principles in its business processes and IT systems, guaranteeing high standards of compliance with Regulation (EU) 1725/2018[34]. To this end, the ERCEA has developed a system for ensuring the proper records of processing operations by applying a risk-based approach and by making accessible to the public its register, in line with the transparency principle. In 2022, the ERCEA will ensure that the register of records is kept updated and continue to organise awareness-raising session for its staff, whilst designing its processes and IT systems respectfully of the principles of necessity, data minimisation, risk management and confidentiality.

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[33]   This concerns the areas of evaluation, expert and grant management of the HE programme
[34]   Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, officies and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and reapealing Regulation (EC) N°45/2001 and Decision N°1247/2002/EC

Objective: The ERCEA is using innovative, trusted digital solutions for better information management and administrative processes to become a truly digitally transformed, user-focused and data-driven agency		

Indicator 1: Degree of implementation of the digital strategy principles by the most important IT solutions[35]

Source of data: ERCEA

Baseline	Interim milestone	Target
(2020)	(2022)	(2024)
42%	60%	75%

Indicator 2: Percentage of implementation of the corporate principle for data governance for ERCEA key data assets[36]

Baseline	Interim milestone	Target
(2020)	(2022)	(2024)
0%	50%	80%

Indicator 3: Percentage of completion of the Security Plans for ERCEA Communication and Information Systems

Source of data: ERCEA

Baseline	Target
(2020)	(2022)
0%	100%

Indicator 4: Percentage of staff attending awareness raising activities on data protection compliance

Source of data: ERCEA

Baseline	Interim milestone	Target
(2018)	(2022)	(2024)
0%	100 % of newcomers staff dealing with data protection matters 30% of total staff	100% of newcomers staff dealing with data protection matters 50% of total staff

Main output in 2022:		
Evaluation forms for the ERCEA calls	Percentage of forms adapted for the ERC programme	100%
Meeting rooms are equipped with video/web conferencing equipment	Percentage of meeting rooms equipped with video / web conferencing equipment	60%

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[35] The European Commission Digital Strategy (C(2018)7118) (https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/3/2018/EN/C-2018-7118-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF) calls on Commission services to digitally transform their business processes by developing new innovative digital solutions or make evolve the existing ones in line with the principles of the strategy.

[36] The Key data assets relate to the common IT systems. Their governance does not take place at the ERCEA but at a higher level (ie DG RTD/DIGIT) in the Research family.

New and current staff is being trained to use Microsoft 365 and Teams	Percentage of staff having benefitted from training or coaching in Microsoft M365 and Teams	45% of staff trained
Increase the awareness of the data protection framework	Number of events, info-sessions, awareness raising, or tailored training on data protection	4

E. Sound environmental management

While the ERCEA is finalising the EMAS registration, it will continue to promote internally the EMAS corporate campaigns and to identify environmental actions in order to support the Commission's commitment to implement the objectives of the Green Deal for its own administration, including becoming climate neutral by 2030.

Actions related to fostering environmentally friendly working methods will be promoted by means of staff awareness actions for the reduced consumption of energy, water, paper and the use of sustainable mobility means. Specifically, EMAS-related news will be published regularly and timely on the ERCEA Intranet. The ERCEA will reinforce the visibility of its financial contribution scheme for staff members who commute to and from work by bicycle, which aims to increase the share of staff choosing this means of transport. A related aim is to expand the biking facilities in agreement with the OIB to the extent possible.

In 2022, the ERCEA will continue to use water fountains, waste-sorting stations, and further increase its in-house videoconferencing facilities. As in past years, the ERCEA will participate in the end-of-year energy saving action; the Covent Garden building will be closed down during the Christmas and New Year's holiday period.

The "greening" of daily operations and working methods is a pursuit shared with the staff-led "ERCEA Greening Group," which contributes to ensuring a two-way communication between the staff and the ERCEA EMAS Correspondents. The administration will offer learning and opportunities aimed at encouraging the use of digital collaborative working tools such as M365, leading to increasing paperless work. Beyond the professional environment, the ERCEA will also champion the pursuit of climate-responsible activities in the private sphere.

Finally, in view of the expectations of increased teleworking in the "new normal" post-COVID-19, the Commission objectives related to the workplace of the future and to achieve climate neutrality, the ERCEA will consider ways of optimising its use of office space.

Objective:

The ERCEA takes account of their environmental impact in their actions and actively promote measures to reduce the related day-to-day impact of the administration and its work and promote climate and biodiversity mainstreaming, with the support of their respective EMAS Correspondents.

Main outputs in 2022:

I. More efficient use of resources (energy, water, paper):

Output	Indicator	Target (2021 as baseline)
Staff awareness actions to reduce energy use in the framework of EMAS corporate campaigns and/or awareness actions about EA's total energy consumption in collaboration with OIB[37] where appropriate.	% of staff informed	100%
Staff awareness actions to reduce water use (for example ensuring that staff use the technical services hotline to report leaks) in the framework of EMAS corporate campaigns and/or awareness raising actions about EA's water consumption in collaboration with OIB/OIL where appropriate.	% of staff informed	100%
Paperless working methods at EA level (such as paperless working: e-signatories, financial circuits, collaborative working tools) and staff awareness actions to reduce office paper use in the framework of EMAS corporate campaigns and/or raise awareness about EA's office paper use in collaboration with OIB where appropriate.	% of staff informed	100%

II. Reducing CO$_2$, equivalent CO$_2$ and other atmospheric emissions

Output	Indicator	Target (2021 as baseline)
Staff awareness actions on reducing GHG emissions (such as actions on sustainable commuting during EU Mobility week and VeloWalk corporate events) and/or raise staff awareness on sustainable commuting in collaboration with OIB (e.g. availability of bike parking facilities, lockers and showers, promote the reduction of parking spaces' use amongst staff).	% of staff informed	100%
	% increase of staff participating in VeloMai	5 %
	% increase of staff joining the biking contribution scheme	5%
Gradual increased use (and number of) VC[38] meeting rooms for meetings with stakeholders (avoiding business trips) in the EA, in collaboration with DG SCIC and OIB.	Number of VC meeting rooms	4 additional VC meeting rooms in the COVE/COV2 building

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[37]   See OIB – Environmental Building Performances for Brussels.

[38]   VC (Videoconferencing) room

III. Reducing and management of waste		
Output	**Indicator**	**Target (2021 as baseline)**
Staff awareness actions about waste reduction and sorting in the framework of EMAS corporate campaigns and/or staff awareness actions about EA's waste generation in collaboration with OIB where appropriate (for example, promote and label the waste sorting schemes in place).	% of staff informed	100%
Implementation of the EC Guidelines for sustainable meetings and events, e.g. reduce/eliminate single-use plastics, gadgets/gifts.	Number of green events	5
IV. Supporting biodiversity		
Output	**Indicator**	**Target (2021 as baseline)**
Staff awareness actions on supporting biodiversity (for example for urban sites, sponsor the creation and maintenance of urban gardens, insect hotels and green roofs within EC-premises with the support of volunteers)	% of staff involved in the planting seeds action	5%

F. Initiatives to improve economy and efficiency of financial and non-financial activities

An area of efficiency gains likely to be implemented in 2022 relates to the identification, nomination and recruitment of remote referees for the step 2 of the ERC evaluation process. This is critical for the quality of the evaluation and a high-volume and high-importance task both for ERC panel members and scientific officers (SOs). Assisting panel members in selecting the most appropriate experts for the remote referee tasks can significantly increase the rate of successfully recruited remote referees, thus improving the efficiency and economy of the related tasks of SOs. The ERCEA has launched a public procurement and published an Open call for tender in 2021, to purchase a tool based on machine learning algorithms for the next four years. The tool – covering all domains[39] - will provide panel members with lists of the most appropriate experts for each and every proposal supporting the identification of panel members by the Scientific Council. The public procurement procedure is still ongoing, and the tool is foreseen to be operational for the 2021 AdG call. The tool will support all domains. Feedback on the quality of the proposed matches between experts and proposals is regularly sought from panel members.

Moreover, the Scientific Management Department will continue the development of tools (e.g. re-applicant eligibility for all calls, domain pre-classification and scheduling for SyG calls) using algorithms and machine learning techniques, developed by the Data Analysis Group to improve the efficiency of evaluation operations. Last but not least, a more 'trust

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[39]   i.e. Physical Science and Engineering, Life Sciences and Social Sciences and Humanities

based' approach to checks on Open Access has been approved by the Scientific Council and will reduce the administrative burden while complying with the legal basis.

In 2022, the Grant Management Department will improve the ERC procedures and internal guidelines for H2020 interim and final payments as necessary. Moreover, it will start defining, also in cooperation with the Scientific Management Department, the internal procedures, guidelines and templates applicable to ERC grants under the HE programme. These documents will be prepared in line with the reference documents established by the CIC (e.g. the Guidance Horizon Europe-ex-ante controls), while taking into account the ERC scheme needs, financial circuits and workflows. The aim is to facilitate and simplify processes, maximise efficiencies of operations as per the family's ex-ante controls and implementation framework, while ensuring consistent interpretation and application of rules, effective risk prevention and monitoring,

In addition to the guidance material, internal training for all financial actors will be delivered during 2022. The parallel running of programmes processed requires that all actors involved acquire timely, high level of skills and competencies to be able to master the rules of the different framework programs, their IT tools as to tackle effectively the increased complexity of their related tasks. In light of the objective for a residual error rate lower than 2% at closure of HE, specific guidance will be dedicated to the effective performance by the project officers of risk-based ex-ante checks (the prevention, detection and correction of irregularities and fraud and their follow-up), with a focus on the effective use of the reinforced monitoring tool for cases under OLAF's investigation.

Constant adaptations and a certain level of flexibility were needed during the pandemic to respond to the disruptions it created in the daily operations of the agency's beneficiaries. Based on the experience of these last months, the ERCEA may decide to keep in 2022 some good practices that were introduced to ease the life of the PIs and HIs. For example, scanned signatures were generally accepted (i.e. in the case of the supplementary agreements), or internal procedures were alleviated to speed up processes (i.e. no consultation of the Scientific Management Department in case of extension due to pandemic related delays). The ERCEA will take stock of the best practices and discuss to which extent they may be maintained and extended in the "post-COVID-19" era.

ANNEX: Resources: staff and budget

A. Administrative budget

Programmes	Title 1 (€ million)	Title 2 (€ million)	Title 3 (€ million)	Total			Grand total
				EU Budget	EFTA/ EEA	Third countries contrib.	
HE	44 178	8 871	1 743	54 792	1 353	1 285	57 430
Total per source of financing within each Title	**44 178**	**8 871**	**1 743**	**54 792**	**1 353**	**1 285**	**57 430**
Total per Budget Title	**54 792**			**2 638**			**57 430**

Objective	Performance indicators	2022 targets	Latest known results (December 2021)	
			Budget 2021 (C1)	Budget 2020 (C1+C8)
To ensure sound financial management of ERCEA's operating budget as well as the regularity and legality of its underlying transactions	% budget execution commitments	99%	100%	
	% budget execution payments	99%		97.2%
	% of error in transactions related to staff expenditure (salaries) detected through ex-ante checks	1%	0.95%	
	Time to pay	<15 days	11 days	
	Number (and % of total) of late payments for the administrative budget	<20 (<1%)	2 (0.4%)	
To ensure safeguarding of assets	Yearly physical inventory control of items – furniture and equipement – % of scanned items vs permanent inventory (ABAC Assets)	95%	97%	

B. Human resources

The following figures are indicative.

Programmes	Staff (EU budget)					Staff from other fund sources[40]	Total all staff
	TAs	**Of which seconded officials**	**CAs**	**SNEs**	**Total staff EU budget**	**EFTA/EEA, Third countries contributions**	
HE							
Operational staff for HE	124.6	20	324.7	16	465.3		
Management and administrative support staff for HE	6.4	/	45.3	/	51.7		
Total	131	20	370	16	517		

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[40]   Number of staff under EFTA/Third countries contributions to be determined at a later stage. No information yet available for the EA.

C. Delegated operational appropriations

Budget lines		Commitment appropriations (€ million)				Payment appropriations (€ million)			
		EU Budget	EFTA/ EEA	Third countries contrib. [41]	Total	EU Budget	EFTA/ EEA[42]	Third countries contrib. [43]	Total
FP7									
Budget line	01.029901.44	/	/	/	/	4	0.1		4.2
H2020									
Budget line	01.029901.01	/	/	/	/	1 175	30		1 205
HE									
	1.020101	2 085	51		2 136	748	18		766
Total of operational appropriations managed by the Executive Agency		**2 085**	**51**		**2 136**	**1 927**	**48**		**1 975**

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[41] Final third countries contribution is not known yet.
[42] Computed with the new rate of 2.47%.
[43] Final third countries contribution is not known yet.