



Annual Activity Report 2021

EUROPEAN EDUCATION AND CULTURE
EXECUTIVE AGENCY

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EACEA IN BRIEF



EACEA's mission is to fund and support European projects connecting people and cultures, reaching out to the world.

Working together in education, culture, media, solidarity, sport, youth, citizenship and values, we foster innovation through the exchange of knowledge, ideas and skills in a spirit of cross-border cooperation and mutual respect.

We strive to provide excellent programme management and high quality service through transparent and objective procedures, showing Europe at its best.

EACEA¹ is an Executive Agency of the European Commission oriented towards citizens and civil society. EACEA's new mandate for the 2021-2027 MFF² provided a stable portfolio with greater ambitions, and changed the Agency's name to the **European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)**³.

EACEA is governed by a Steering Committee⁴ and operates under the supervision of six 'parent' Directorates-General (EAC, CNECT, JUST, INTPA, NEAR and EMPL). With a steadily growing portfolio of programmes⁵, the Agency contributes to the implementation of the specific political priorities of the European Commission⁶ in line with the [Strategic Plans](#) of the parent DGs.

The Agency has its own legal identity and is entrusted with its own operating budget (EUR 50.8 million⁷ in 2021) financed by the EU General Budget. The Director of EACEA is the Authorising Officer (AO) and has overall responsibility for implementing EACEA's

budget, in accordance with the principles of sound financial management⁸.

In spite of the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, EACEA continued to support its beneficiaries, launching 110 calls, managing an operational budget of EUR 815 million⁹ and monitoring a portfolio of over 6 500 running projects¹⁰.

Thanks to the dedication of its 454¹¹ staff members, whether supporting educational exchanges, safeguarding Europe's cultural heritage, promoting open and democratic society, or strengthening solidarity, the Agency fulfilled its mission.

¹ Established in 2006.

² Multiannual financial framework.

³ Establishment Act by Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/173 of 12 February 2021.

⁴ C(2021)2630 of 20 April 2021.

⁵ Commission Decision C(2021)951. EACEA programmes: Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV), the European Solidarity Corps, Neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instrument (NDICI), Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA III).

⁶ [The European Commission's priorities | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁷ Commitment appropriations in EUR-27.

⁸ As defined in the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Union

⁹ Value in the Work programmes 2021.

¹⁰ From which 95% represent legacy projects.

¹¹ See further details in section 2.2.2 Human resource management.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Annual Activity Report is a management report of the Director of EACEA to the College of Commissioners. Annual Activity Reports are the main instrument of management accountability within the Commission and constitute the basis on which the College takes political responsibility for the decisions it takes as well as for the coordinating, executive and management functions it exercises, as laid down in the Treaties¹².

A. Implementation of the Agency's Annual Work programme - Highlights of the year (executive summary of section 1)

Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme and the European Solidarity Corps are at the heart of European policies. The COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted the education, culture, sport and youth sectors, but it also highlighted more than ever the critical contribution of such policies in supporting the resilience of the education and training systems and more broadly the well-being of young people across Europe.

In a period of social distancing and confinement, cancellation of events, and the closing of sport facilities, EACEA's programmes have facilitated a safe resumption of cultural activities and a sustainable recovery of the cultural and creative sectors from the brink of disappearance. Under these circumstances, the Agency continued to stay in close contact with its beneficiaries, swiftly handling contract amendments and helping beneficiaries to cope in difficult times.

In the reporting period, EACEA contributed mainly¹³ to the following European Commission priorities:



Furthermore, the Agency's adoption of corporate IT tools has helped to accelerate and streamline daily administrative work. However, in 2021 the full potential of these tools was not yet met, and the use of eGrants was not sufficient to catch up with the delays in the adoption of the legal basis and the annual work programme. This significantly affected the Agency's budget implementation: calls for proposals could only be launched in spring 2021, and evaluation, awarding and contract signature could only start in the last trimester. Even

¹² Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

¹³ Furthermore, the Agency contributed to the environmental sustainability and climate goals of the Commission's European Green Deal objective within the EMAS group (see section 'Sound environmental management' for further details).

under a revised tight schedule, and despite excellent staff performance, the budget execution in 2021 was lower than in previous years.

All in all, the Agency demonstrated a high degree of resilience, facing several challenges (new IT tools, new MFF, COVID-19 pandemic) with a high standard of professionalism, and achieving a good overall performance in the implementation of the delegated programmes, as shown by the **highlights of the year in numbers**:



In addition, from 2020 to 2021 the Agency saw an increase of roughly 45% in the number of amendment requests, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the year, the Agency further strengthened its outreach to citizens and beneficiaries, whilst contributing to the European Commission's political priorities. Highlights of these achievements are as follows:

- Supporting **European teachers and digital skills-focused developments**. The Agency successfully implemented the first call supporting the creation of European partnerships for teacher-education and training providers. In the framework of the **Erasmus+ Teacher Academies**, 11 pioneering projects were selected in 2021 to support teachers' mobility and respond to multilingualism, digital and green transition competence needs. The selected projects will offer multiple training programmes including those specifically designed for teaching STEM¹⁴, environmental sustainability and democracy and civic rights teaching. A celebratory launch event prepared in cooperation with DG EAC and EMPL will take place in early 2022.
- By supporting the **digital transitions in teaching**, and through projects targeting schools, the potential of the eTwinning and EPALE (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe) **platforms** has been fully exploited. The **new EPALE platform**¹⁵ went live in April. The website has been re-designed, and is now faster, easier to

¹⁴ Science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

¹⁵ [EPALE | Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe](#)

navigate, richer in content and more user-friendly. It boasts several new features such as the Partner Search tool and the Policy tool. The new EPAL mobile app¹⁶ went live in Google Play and the Apple Store in December 2021 and the newly developed course catalogue is available as from early 2022. **eTwinning** celebrated its **millionth registered user**¹⁷. There are currently, 228 000 schools present in eTwinning, and in 2021 almost **120 000 users were involved in at least one project**. This is **25% more than 2020**, and **24% higher than in 2019** (pre-pandemic).

- As 2021 continued to be marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, with schools partially closed in many countries and emergency distance learning still part of the scenario, **eTwinning continued to support schools by providing tools, professional development and community help**, also with the activities of the specific group (eTwinning@home) which was launched in 2020. The new project category 'intra-school', initiated in 2020 and allowing teachers to set-up virtual classrooms in their school around an eTwinning project, gathered **more than 1 000 projects in 2 years**.
- The Agency also published the thematic policy report **Teachers in Europe: Careers, Development and Well-being**. The report was used thoroughly in DG EAC's flagship publication Education and Training Monitor 2021, specifically in relation to the well-being of teachers. The current **Council Conclusions on teachers' mobility**, under preparation by the **French presidency**, reference this report in the opening statements.
- Under the policy priorities for the Western Balkans region, the Agency launched the start of activities for the 13 selected EU/Western Balkans cooperation projects. Welcomed by Commissioners Gabriel and Várhelyi, these projects play an important role in strengthening cultural cooperation between the EU Member States and the Western Balkans.
- The 2021 Civil Dialogue Week proved an excellent way to engage with stakeholders while providing information on the calls under the CERV programme.
- Creative Europe supported news media, for the first time in 2021, to help industry face structural challenges stemming from the rise of global digital platforms. The Programme co-financed the first Journalism Partnerships with the aim of encouraging systemic cooperation between professional news media organisations and improving their viability and competitiveness. This action contributes concretely to the European Democracy Action Plan.
- The success of Creative Europe MEDIA was highlighted once again with the selection of MEDIA-supported films at the 71st Berlin International Film Festival and the 93rd Oscar Academy Awards. In total, nine EU-supported films and series were successful in different categories at the 71st Berlin International Film Festival, winning a Silver Bear and a Special Jury Award. Seven other MEDIA-supported films were nominated

¹⁶ [EPAL mobile app](#)

¹⁷ [eTwinning reaches 1 million registered users! \(europa.eu\)](#)

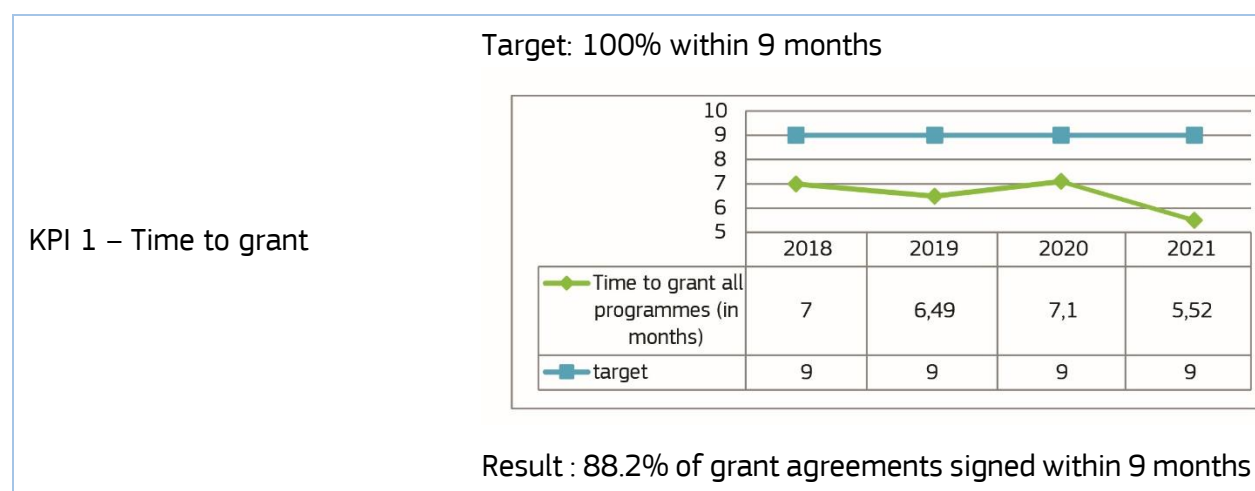
for this year's Oscars, competing in categories such as best director, best picture, best actor and best screenplay

As regards **horizontal activities**, over the first months of the year, the Agency focused on preparing to kick off the programmes. The Agency's Steering Committee successfully concluded the necessary approval process for the delegated programmes, and cooperation procedures with the parent DGs were reviewed, resulting in a new Memorandum of Understanding. As the composition of the Agency's Steering Committee was changed by the Commission Decision in April 2021¹⁸, a revision process for the internal rules of procedures was adopted. Triggered by the significantly increased portfolio of the Agency, HR selections and recruitments have almost doubled compared to 2020. A new competencies framework¹⁹ was developed to support staff professionalisation.

Finally, although 2021 was a very challenging year, thanks to the continued dedication of its 454 staff members, EACEA has proved to be a resilient and agile solution-bringer, and a reliable, solid partner.

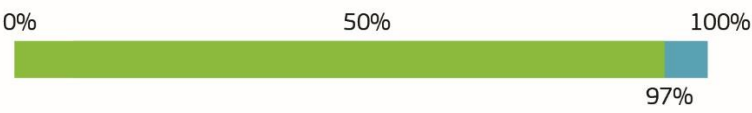



B. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

EACEA uses a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the effectiveness of the implementation of its delegated tasks. Since 2021, the Agency has also identified one key policy-oriented indicator for Erasmus+. The aggregated results for each of the five indicators are presented below, with more details in the annexes.



¹⁸ Commission Decision C(2021)2630 of 20 April 2021.

¹⁹ The workplace competencies (skills, knowledge and attitudes) have been divided in the three proficiency levels (starting, advances, expert).

<p>KPI 2 – Time to pay</p>	<p>Target: >96% of payments on time²⁰</p>  <p>0% 50% 100%</p> <p>97%</p> <p>Result: 97% of payments on time</p>
<p>KPI 3 – Budget execution</p>	<p>Target: 100%²¹</p>  <p>0% 50% 100%</p> <p>Result: 100%</p>
<p>KPI 4 – Estimated risk at closure</p>	<p>Target: <2% of relevant expenditure</p>  <p>2% 1% 0%</p> <p>1.2%</p> <p>Result: 1.2%</p>
<p>KPI 5 – Number of Higher Education Institutions taking part in the European University alliances</p> <p>(baseline 2020: 284)</p>	<p>Target (2024): To increase</p>  <p>284 baseline 2020</p> <p>increase target 2024</p> <p>There are no results in 2021 as there was no call publication (bi-annual). One call is currently running and will be reported on in next year's annual activity report.</p>

²⁰ In value, amount paid on time for operational budget (BGUE).

²¹ Commitment appropriations – operational budget, in C1, C5 and E0 appropriations.

C. Key conclusions on financial management and internal control (executive summary of Section 2.1)

In line with the Commission's internal control framework, EACEA assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluding that these are effective and that their components and principles are present and functioning well overall. However, some improvements are needed to fully comply with the internal data protection regulation (IDPR, please refer to Section 2.1.3 for further details).

In addition, EACEA has systematically examined the available control results and indicators, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the internal auditor and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on management's assurance about the achievement of the control objectives and to support the absence of reservations (see Section 2.1).

In conclusion, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and are working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated. Improvements are necessary concerning the protection of personal data and the following actions are being taken: strengthening compliance with the data protection regulation in the fields of grants, procurements, human resources, and events. Please refer to Section 2.2.2 for further details. The Director, in his capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation, has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

D. Provision of information to the Commissioner(s)

In the context of the regular meetings during the year between the Director and the parent DGs on management matters, the main elements of this report and assurance declaration have been brought to the attention of the Agency's Steering Committee and to the Directors-General of the parent DGs.

1. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGENCY'S ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME - HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

In 2021, the Agency managed various programmes under two MFFs: the legacy from the 2014-2020 MFF, which is steadily phasing out in line with the regular progression of project closures (1 000 projects closed during the reporting period), and the new 2021-2027 MFF for which the Agency started implementing the following key programmes:

- Erasmus+
- Creative Europe
- Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values
- European Solidarity Corps

ERASMUS+



General objective: Promoting our European way of life



Under Erasmus+, the Agency successfully published 68 calls, organised 109 tailored information events, delivered helpdesk services, video guides, and technical information sessions to applicants including FAQs, video tutorials and call-specific support material. This work was prepared and delivered within record time in the second half of the year, striving to catch up with delays in the legislative process.

EACEA worked with the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps National Agencies and presented the calls for proposals to targeted audiences in the Member States. The information activities were organised online, hosted largely in TEAMS and WebEx platforms.

Technical follow-up of the projects selected in previous years was performed in accordance with annual monitoring plans consisting of kick-off meetings for newly selected projects, project reviews, and cluster meetings aimed at gathering specific policy feedback and/or

²² Including 6 for Intra-Africa.

collecting information on preliminary results. To cope with the COVID-19 restrictions, project monitoring was carried out remotely, using various ICT tools. Efforts were made to provide tailored support, such as a survey on the adaptability of Higher Education Institutions to COVID-19 in third countries²³, and to facilitate effective communication with beneficiaries,

EACEA implemented activities under the following Erasmus+ Key Actions:

- Key Action 1: Learning Mobility
- Key Action 2: Cooperation among organisations and institutions
- Key Action 3: Support to policy development and cooperation

for Education and Training, Jean-Monnet, Youth and Sport fields and delivered outputs under the following specific objectives:

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

The **Erasmus Charter for Higher Education** has been awarded to 376 Higher Education Institutions across Europe, a first step for the institutions, allowing them to participate in Erasmus+ mobility opportunities and international cooperation projects.

With a budget of EUR 272 million, the **European Universities** call for proposals (published in November 2021 with a deadline in March 2022) will provide support for new or existing institutional transnational cooperation alliances, including (but not limited to) the European Universities alliances selected under the 2019 Erasmus+ call for proposals.

An information meeting with the National Agencies and the stakeholders' group took place on the day of the publication and a dedicated online Information event took place on 14 December with around 1 000 participants connected from 51 countries worldwide.

The 41 European Universities alliances²⁴, selected in 2019 and 2020 as pilot projects, involve more than 280 institutions from all over Europe and more than 1 000 partners. These alliances are testing models of transnational cooperation based on joint and shared long-term visions, including future development of the European Degrees concept.

Jean Monnet in other fields of education and training – Teacher Training: this was a **new action**, for the first time targeting **teachers and education providers** in the EU Member States and third countries associated to the programme, to develop and deliver content, methodologies and updated knowledge on European Union subjects. The Agency received good quality applications. The selected projects will implement and produce needs assessments for teachers; motivation surveys and curricula mapping to develop and deliver online courses; workshop materials; microlearning Curricula/Syllabus/Study Guides; portfolios

²³ [Survey report - Impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of Erasmus+ CBHE projects](#)

²⁴ [Factsheets on the 41 European Universities | European Education Area \(europa.eu\)](#)

of good practice; policy recommendations; create an ‘Ambassadors Network’; and organise a final conference. The selection is ongoing and due to be completed in early 2022.

The Agency selected 27 new **Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters** (EMJMs), increasing the overall offer of high-level integrated European study programmes to 175²⁵. EMJMs continued to be in high demand (2 600 students were selected from 12 200 applications) and continued to be praised by students. For the first time, inexperienced universities aspiring to implement EMJMs had the opportunity to apply for a grant supporting preparation of new EMJM concepts.

A retrospective on the achievements of Erasmus Mundus in the previous programming period (2014–2020) produced a series of six factsheets²⁶, presenting in-depth analysis of mobility flows, programme features, the universities, and other involved organisations.

A cluster meeting of **Erasmus+ Capacity-building for Higher Education (CBHE)** projects in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) was held in collaboration with the Erasmus+ CBHE Latin-American coordinators’ network and with technical support from the Asociación Colombiana de Universidades (ASCUN). The meeting generated wide interest with more than 160 participants, including project representatives from six generations of Erasmus+ CBHE projects (92 CBHE projects), EU Delegations in the regions, and representatives of the European Commission (DGs EAC and INTPA). A publication will be shared with stakeholders later in 2022.

The **First Capacity Building in Higher Education Fair** (26–27 October 2021) showcased the results of 100 CBHE projects. A total of 1 300 academics, university managers and policy makers gathered online to be inspired by successful examples and shape the next generation of CBHE projects. The event attracted 20 000 additional viewers who followed the 46 thematic sessions of the Fair via streaming on social media channels such as YouTube and a dedicated Facebook page. 200 speakers from 65 different countries led thematic sessions such as Health, Agriculture, Social Sciences, Engineering, and cross-disciplinary sessions showing achievements in topics such as digitalisation, innovation management, and plagiarism prevention (<http://cbhevirtualfair.com/>). The new generation of National Erasmus+ Offices in third countries have been designated and the evaluation of first grant applications is currently ongoing.

The establishment of **a new network of Erasmus+ National Focal Points** (ENFP) in third countries not associated to the Erasmus+ programme in the regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean has been launched. The national focal points will provide information and on-the-ground advice to potential applicants and beneficiaries and will play a key role in supporting the Erasmus+ programme’s objectives and impact by ensuring that it becomes known and accessible to potential applicants, irrespective of the sector. The designation process is supported by EU Delegations and will be completed in 2022.

²⁵ [Erasmus Mundus catalogue](#)

²⁶ [Statistical factsheets on the achievements of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees \(2014–2020\)](#)

Participation in the **Centres of Vocational Excellence** (CoVE) increased by 50% compared to 2020. The large variety of sectors involved reveals a very wide reach across the call's target groups. Proposals include the following sectors: arts and crafts, healthcare, water supply and offshore renewable energy, sustainable energy and education, business transformation, artificial intelligence, virtual reality and social innovation, advanced manufacturing, agriculture, dairy innovation, tourism and fashion. Selection and grant signature will be completed in early 2022.

The Agency managed the new Alliances of Innovation which saw a considerable number of applications (317) supporting the popular trend observed in its predecessor calls. As for Alliances for Education and Enterprises (Lot 1): the twenty-five successful alliances, selected from over 300 applications, will bring together enterprises and both higher education and vocational training to set up high quality multi-stakeholder partnerships, within one or several different economic sectors. Finally, the Sectoral Cooperation Alliances implementing the "Blueprint" (Lot 2) will gather sectoral skills intelligence data and elaborate comprehensive sector-specific skills strategies, new occupational profiles and training programmes that will contribute to implementing the European Skills Agenda. The partnerships involve both vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) organisations, labour market actors, European sectoral associations and major industry stakeholders. The seven successful proposals cover the following industrial ecosystems: Tourism, Agri-food, Creative & Cultural Industries, Digital, Renewable Energy, Proximity & Social Economy, Health. The selection process is ongoing and due to be completed in 2022.

The Agency continued to successfully manage several networks and online platforms such as eTwinning, EPALE, Online Linguistic Support (OLS), School Education Gateway, National Policies Platforms - Eurydice, YouthWiki, Mobility Scoreboard, and worked on preparing the Digital Education Area Platform Hub in cooperation with DG EAC.

The **new EPALE platform**²⁷ went live on 13 April 2021. The adult learning community was invited to contribute. As part of the **2021 Community Stories initiative**²⁸, 100 user stories were collected and published on the website. The 2021 Storybook will be published on the website and available for registered users in the first quarter 2022. The EPALE annual **Community Conference**²⁹, held in October 2021, provided an opportunity to discuss how adult education and learning can help reshape our society by promoting inclusive and sustainable models.

Various new e-learning courses and educational materials were offered in 2021. The **EPALE MOOC**³⁰ provided free and flexible access to comprehensive knowledge on specific adult learning topics. In addition, four new EPALE **Open Educational Resources (OERs)**³¹ were made available to be used in an educational context.

²⁷ [EPALE | Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe](#)

²⁸ [2021 EPALE Community Stories initiative](#)

²⁹ [EPALE Community Conference 2021 | EPALE \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁰ [Massive Open Online Courses - MOOCs](#)

³¹ [OERs](#)

The OLS has become a familiar language learning tool among participants of Erasmus+ mobility opportunities. When measured in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), **OLS language assessment results show a considerable linguistic progression** (one or two CEFR levels) for participants who started with low initial levels. Linguistic progress increased exponentially with mobility duration and OLS language course usage.

Twice a year, mobility participants can demonstrate their creativity while honing their language skills by taking part in the **biannual OLS contests**. In 2021 the topic focused on expressing gestures as a means of learning a language. In April 2021 and November 2021, Marek with his 'Bici e Baci' and Fuad, with his gesture of kindness and surprise, were the grand prize winners of the contest. Several intercultural podcasts with students, teachers, activists and policy makers were organised in collaboration with the Erasmus Student Network (ESN).

In 2021 eTwinning celebrated its 1 000 000th registered user³². There are currently 228 000 schools present in eTwinning; in 2021 almost 120 000 users were involved in at least one project, 25% more than 2020, and 24% higher than in 2019 (pre-pandemic). Presuming that each user represents a teacher in a classroom of 20 pupils or students on average, it can be estimated that approximately 2 400 000 students were involved in eTwinning projects in 2021 alone.

To support education policy in Europe, the Agency published the following education analysis reports:

- Recommended Annual Instruction Time in Full-time Compulsory Education in Europe 2020/21 | Eurydice (europa.eu)
- The Organisation of School Time in Europe – Primary and General Secondary Education 2021/22 | Eurydice (europa.eu)
- Compulsory Education in Europe – 2021/22 | Eurydice (europa.eu)
- The Structure of the European Education Systems 2021/22: Schematic Diagrams | Eurydice (europa.eu)
- Teachers' and School Heads' Salaries and Allowances in Europe – 2019/20 | Eurydice (europa.eu)
- Structural Indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe - 2021 | Eurydice (europa.eu) and
- [Teachers in Europe: Careers, Development and Well-being](#)
- [Adult education and training in Europe: Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications](#). This report is referenced as a **source of evidence in the Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030 (2021)**. It was presented at the kick-off meeting of the DG EMPL-led Working Group on Adult Learning and will continue to be a valuable policy base for stakeholders, such as the network of adult learning national coordinators (coordinated by DG EMPL).

³² [eTwinning reaches 1 million registered users! \(europa.eu\)](#)

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

At the end of 2020, it was decided to prolong the framework partnership agreements for the **Civil Society Co-operation** action. No call was therefore published in 2021. An open call was published in the 2022 work programme for an annual grant covering 2022. This action now offers higher grant amounts in the youth sector, comparable with those already offered in the education sector.

The 2021 **European Youth Together** call offered a new grassroots profile with an emphasis on creating cross-border co-operation among youth organisation with no or limited experience in such co-operation. The new 2022 call (prepared and launched in 2021) covers two topics: the old large-scale action as run under the old programme as well as the new grassroots action.

Eyes on EU project is an excellent example of a grassroots initiative, in which young people created a web series of short films ([Eyes On EU - The Web Series - YouTube](#)) in which they engaged with issues relevant to youth in the EU. The project has inspired participants to pursue careers in youth work and even film. The results of the project were widely disseminated across social media, in the press, discussed in interviews on radio and episodes were shown on Croatian and Estonian television. The episodes were also submitted to and accepted at **various international film festivals, with some even winning awards**.

The **Co-operation Partnership for European NGOs** was a new call for 2021 targeted specifically at youth organisations. Despite the political interest and requests from ENGO stakeholders, participation was below expectations, with only 17 admissible applications. The call is also open for 2022 and more efforts have been put into promoting the action with its specific characteristics.

The **Capacity Building Youth** action was revised for the new programming period by focusing on the Western Balkan and South Mediterranean geographical areas. The implementation of projects was seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic: almost 50% of projects were suspended temporarily and the rest postponed mobility-related activities. The consequences were still being felt at the end of 2021 with many youth organisations only slowly restarting their activities. EACEA continues to monitor the situation closely.

Regarding **Youth Wiki developments**, the Agency updated its online maps on Social Inclusion and on Participation. The network of National Correspondents provided updated information on national policy measures in the two policy fields, which were used to develop two sets of comparative maps on the website. The website has been completely revised to make it more appealing and easier to navigate.

To support **Youth Policy developments**, the Agency was responsible for producing the **Commission Staff Working Document on the Situation of Young People in the EU**, part of the Youth Report. A chapter on youth work was drafted based on qualitative

information extracted from the Youth Wiki. The chapter 'Health – and focusing on youth mental wellbeing' will be instrumental in the production of a comparative paper for **the European Year of Youth**, covering the same subject.

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

The calls for sport actions remain very popular with an increased number of applications compared to past years. Their success reflects the high motivation of sport organisations and stakeholders (Olympic committees, national sport federations, etc.) to organise international activities addressing the sport policy objectives. The organisation of the annual Sport Info Day marked the launch of a renewed set-up of the call, simplifying the funding by moving to lump sum grants for all sub-actions.

Over 600 proposal applications – a record – were submitted under cooperation partnerships; 585 applications were received for small-scale partnerships, and 111 applications were received for not-for-profit European sport events.

More than half of proposals submitted under not-for-profit European sport events address the priority of **promoting physical activity**. For cooperation partnerships and small-scale cooperation partnerships, the majority of the project proposals focus on **inclusion and diversity** and on the popular topic of promoting physical activity. The selection will be finalised in early 2022, as initially planned.

The implementation of on-going projects has seen only a minor improvement after the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. A project on the inclusion of prisoners in society through sport faced difficulties in entering prisons in most countries and had to delay its activities several times. Another project on activities with children at school faced the barrier of strict COVID-19 rules that prevented external people from entering schools.

Sport Healing Rehabilitation is a good practice example (<http://www.ecos-europe.com/sphere>) of collaboration between the sport, mental health and education sectors. The project incorporates physical activity in the rehabilitation programs of psychiatric patients, since they are almost exclusively treated with pharmacological therapies which in the long run – as a consequence of the side effects associated with drug intake – may cause other psychophysical problems. The main aim of the project was to provide knowledge, rules and guidelines about the benefits of sport and physical activity for mental health and to promote psychiatric rehabilitation programmes focused on sport and physical activity.

CREATIVE EUROPE



General objectives: A Europe fit for the Digital Age, Promoting our European way of life



The Creative Europe programme³³ is the EU's multiannual programme targeting the cultural and creative sectors (CCS). Its objective is to safeguard, promote and develop European cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage. It also aims to increase the competitiveness of Europe's cultural and creative sectors as well as to support independent production and distribution companies in the audio-visual field and a wide range of operators in the cultural field.

2021 was again a challenging year that strongly impacted the creative and cultural sectors, forcing cultural venues and cinemas to temporarily interrupt their activities and restrict access to their venues. The Agency, together with the Commission, continued to support beneficiaries in these exceptional circumstances.

With the adoption of the relevant legal documents, the Agency launched all the calls planned in the Creative Europe annual work programme.

The number of applications submitted has once again confirmed the popularity of the programme. In parallel, the Agency contributed to the preparation for the 2022 work programme that will include pilot projects and preparatory actions, and will offer increased support to Europe's cultural and creative sectors, heavily impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

In 2021, EACEA carried out activities in the following strands:

- Culture
- MEDIA
- Cross-sectoral

and delivered outputs under the following specific objectives:

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

The Agency launched all planned calls under the Culture strand to support sector-specific projects dedicated to cooperation projects, networks, platforms and literary translation. The calls also include the new scheme to support pan-European cultural entities.

³³ Regulation (EU) 2021/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the Creative Europe programme (2021-2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 (OJ L189 of 28.5.2021, p.34).

The high attendance rates at the info sessions and the response to the calls launched under the Culture strand confirmed the high level of interest among stakeholders.

Monitoring activities continued to be carried out remotely, to continue supporting beneficiaries and assess reports of projects selected under the previous programme. Results of the 2020 programme implementation are available in the Creative Europe Monitoring Report 2020 published by DG CNECT and DG EAC, with the contribution of the Agency.

Meetings were organised with the Networks and Platforms to discuss issues of common concern, such as the response to the COVID-19 crisis and the creative sectors' contribution to sustainable development. On 6 May an event was held by the Agency to share the results of a survey³⁴ sent to over 600 beneficiary organisations, aiming to analyse the circumstances under which the beneficiaries of the Creative Europe Culture sub-programme were operating during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The event was an opportunity to share good practices and knowledge among beneficiaries and to improve the Agency's services for beneficiaries. The panellists shared many examples of good practices they had put in place and underlined those which they would never have considered in the past, but will continue using in the future.

In cooperation with DG EAC and DG NEAR, the Agency held an online event on 19 May with the participation of two Commissioners announcing the commencement of all projects selected under the call 'Cultural Cooperation Projects in the Western Balkans' (EACEA/39/2019). The call was financed by the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (EUR 5 million) to enhance regional cooperating in the Western Balkans. The call was intended to increase cooperation between entities based in both the EU and the Western Balkans, to enhance the competitiveness of organisations and operators in the field, and to promote reconciliation and good neighbourly relations through culture.

The first ever kick-off meeting for literary translation projects took place on remote.

The Agency also published a brochure on the music projects funded by Creative Europe in 2019 and 2020, demonstrating how music constitutes an important pillar of European culture and reaches the largest audience.

[Specific objective 6: A modern, open and pluralistic society in the digital age where online disinformation is countered and diverse cultural content is available to all Europeans]

2021 was the 30th anniversary of the MEDIA strand, and the Agency launched the 2021 calls through the revamped MEDIA strand's four clusters: Content, Business, Audience and Policy. The calls were accompanied by the launch of the Creative Europe MEDIA Database, a platform for searching for films created and qualified through MEDIA's calls for proposals.

³⁴ In total, 335 beneficiaries responded to the survey.

Following the adoption of the work programme and the publication of the calls, the Agency organised information sessions presenting the main features of the strand. Interest in the calls was generally high, including in the development slate call. However, the Agency received fewer applications than expected for certain calls, for example the calls for support to TV and festivals.

While the Agency continued to process the large number of applications, monitoring activities were held remotely. The Agency provided the European film and audiovisual sector with support by continuing to bring unique stories to European citizens and by helping them deal with the consequences of COVID-19. The successful results of video on demand (VOD) platforms supported under the 'Promotion of European works online' call have demonstrated that the COVID-19 crisis has also been an opportunity for European VOD platforms, which saw a significant increase in the number of subscribers.

Under the cross-sectoral strand, the Agency continued to promote cross-cutting activities spanning audiovisual and other cultural and creative sectors, while welcoming new actions. Actions managed by the Agency included the new actions related to news media, such as the first call on Journalism Partnerships, to support cross-border cooperation between news media professionals in Europe.

The Creative Europe Desks continued to play a major role as ambassadors of the programme, providing stakeholders with support and information, assisting potential applicants and supporting communication and dissemination activities. Meetings with the Desks took place to provide information on the launch of the calls and on available training, to enable the Desks to provide potential applicants with support.

The new support opportunity for the Creative Innovation Lab was adapted further to reflect the lessons learned from the 'Bridging cultural and audiovisual content through digital' call. It is the programme's main means of support for innovation that can be applied across the sectors of the cultural and creative industries. Additionally, an online kick-off meeting took place for the 15 beneficiary projects of the cross-sectoral action 'Bridging culture and audiovisual through digital', selected under the calls for proposals 06/2019 and 28/2019.

CITIZENS, EQUALITY RIGHTS AND VALUES



General objective: A new push for European democracy



EUR 36 million



12 calls for proposals



6 evaluation sessions launched



239 grant
agreements
signed



362 payments

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV), is the successor of the Europe for Citizens programme. It is the first big funding programme for European citizens, rights and values with the following objectives: to protect and promote rights and values as enshrined in the Treaties, the EU Charter of fundamental rights and in the applicable international human rights conventions; to sustain and further develop rights based, democratic, equal and inclusive societies based on the rule of law.

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme is made of four strands: Union values, Equality and rights, Citizens engagement and Daphne (combating violence).

EACEA implemented activities under the following strands:

- Union Values
- Citizens' engagement and participation

and delivered outputs under the following specific objective:

[Specific objective 3: Improved framework to protect democracy in the European Union]

Thanks to a substantial budget increase, the programme continued to support civil society organisations active at local, regional, national and transnational level in promoting EU values and rights, thereby strengthening respect for the rule of law and contributing to the construction of a more democratic Union.

The first calls were prepared by the Agency and published by DG JUST before the launch of the Civil Dialogue Week which took place from 25 to 28 May to launch the new programme. The 4-day event gathered more than 1 000 participants and included high-level panels on CERV priorities in the areas of EU citizenship, values, equality and non-discrimination, anti-racism, democracy, rule of law, and citizens' engagement as well as interactive sessions on CERV calls for proposals.

While monitoring the ongoing projects remotely, the Agency also followed up and processed amendment requests submitted by beneficiaries³⁵. Despite the challenging circumstances, beneficiaries demonstrated a great deal of creativity and resilience. They managed to adapt promptly and to transform physical events into online meetings very quickly and without jeopardising quality. On the contrary, the virtual approach often allowed an even higher number of participants to get involved. The final data is collected and integrated into the 2020 Europe for Citizens implementation report.

The year closed with the launch of the ambitious and awaited EU Values call. With a substantial budget of EUR 51 million, the call seeks to help strategic partners acting as

³⁵ In total, 295 requests for an extension of the eligibility period beyond the limit of contracts were received and 8 requests for termination of grant agreements were handled in line with the Agency's procedures.

intermediaries to get closer to civil society and to reach out to civil society organisations everywhere in the European Union, at regional, local and rural level.

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS



General objective: Promoting our European way of life



The European Solidarity Corps aims to strengthen the engagement of young people and organisations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities. The Corps is a means of helping to strengthen cohesion, solidarity and democracy in Europe and abroad and to address societal and humanitarian challenges on the ground, with a particular focus on promoting social inclusion.

EACEA implemented and managed actions and measures in the following fields:

- Volunteering
- Quality and support measures

and delivered outputs under the following specific objective:

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

Following the adoption of the work programme in March and the publication of the calls (and the 2021 Programme Guide in April), the Agency hosted an online info day, presenting the two main actions managed by the Agency: Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas (VTHPA) and the Quality Label for Humanitarian Aid Volunteering (QL).

More online information sessions took place in July. The aim was to familiarise interested applicants with eGrants and the application form. Promotion efforts were needed as the budget for Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas (VTHPA) was much higher than in previous years and had a clear focus on health issues.

The events were well attended with more than 100 participants each. The response to the VTHPA was low while the Quality Label certification attracted a higher number, with 120 applications. The award decisions are expected in the first semester of 2022.

The 2022 Programme Guide was published on 17 November 2021 and introduced a new action managed by EACEA: Volunteering under the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (HumAidVol). The volunteering activities take place in third countries where there are ongoing humanitarian aid operations with opportunities for young people between 18 and 35 years old. DG EAC and EACEA jointly promoted this new action at the Aidex event at the Brussels Expo venue in November, and EACEA held an info day in January 2022 with around 140 participants.

Online kick-off and monitoring meetings were held for all 33 VTHPA projects. Organisations had the opportunity to share their experiences of coping with COVID-19 restrictions. The pandemic greatly affected the implementation of projects. The Agency was mostly involved in helping the organisations through the crisis. Most projects requested an extension of their eligibility period, which was granted. For VTHPA an online leaflet was published with facts and figures, good practices and some story telling features³⁶. The publication was made available to a wider target group including organisations and National Agencies.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, many projects managed to achieve good results as illustrated in the following case:

GIVE (Gaziantep Integration by Volunteers from EU) from Scambieuropei is a 2-year Volunteering Teams High Priority Areas project that involved 40 young volunteers from Italy and Turkey in social and educational activities, with two local communities living in Gaziantep: the Turkish people and refugees and asylum seekers from Syria. Through workshops in schools and youth centres, as well as the creation of an educational centre and the dissemination of their activities, GIVE supported children and young people with fewer opportunities in their development process, promoted solidarity, social inclusion and intercultural awareness, and opened a cross-border dialogue and information channel. The project has had a strong, positive impact on both local communities as well as on European and local volunteers, who have experienced significant personal and professional growth.

The General Online Training (GOT) platform offered a wide range of courses in its first year for young people registered on the Youth Portal. General courses are the most popular (The EU and You, chose your path, discover the Corps). There were 27 000 logins with 14 000 unique users from mostly Turkey (18%), Spain (12%), Italy, France and Germany. More than half the users have a BA degree and are keen to participate in the Corps. The courses are offered in 28 languages and are adapted to young people with audio-visual difficulties. The most used languages are English (52%), followed by French (12%), Spanish, Turkish and Italian.

³⁶ [European Solidarity Corps - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](https://eacea.europa.eu/european-solidarity-corps)

The migration to EU Academy started in 2021 and will be completed in mid-2022. To increase the involvement of young people and to promote training during the European Year of Youth, a series of youth talks are planned for 2022.

The publication of the tender for centralised training under the Humanitarian Aid Strand was postponed to 2022.

In the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic the insurance service provider continued supporting young people involved in volunteering activities in a flexible manner, delivering good quality. There was a need to increase the budget as the initial estimations were exceeded in terms of participating volunteers.

A tender for insurance was published in December 2021 with a deadline at the beginning of February 2022. A high number of questions from different organisations were received in the submission phase.

In 2021, face-to-face EU Aid Volunteers training remained on hold and it became necessary to adapt the framework contract to the COVID-19 situation. Preparatory actions were carried out for the relaunch of the training programme in 2022. The new online training platform has been developed and preparations began in January 2022 for face-to-face training for an estimated 500 volunteers. The number of interested volunteer candidates applying for vacancies is below expectations.

PILOT PROJECTS AND PREPARATORY ACTIONS



For the first time, in accordance with the annual work programme, the Agency implemented one Pilot Project and two Preparatory Actions (PPPA) in the field of sport. A Pilot Project is an initiative of an experimental nature designed to test the feasibility of an action and its usefulness, while a Preparatory Action (normally the successor of a successful Pilot Project on the same topic) is designed to prepare proposals for the adoption of future actions.

The core task of the projects applying for the **Pilot Project call on Building capacity to better fight doping in sport in Europe** is to develop protocols for European Anti-Doping Organisations (ADOs) to support evidence gathering and information sharing between them and law enforcement. The winning projects will enable ADOs to partner with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to conduct investigations, protect whistle-blowers and cooperate on joint investigations with law enforcement agencies and the global network of investigators. This should build the capacity of the European anti-doping system, reduce the prevalence of doping in sport and maximise the health benefits generated by the practice of clean sport among Europe's youth. A budget of EUR 1.4 million is allocated to this pilot project. Two good quality applications were submitted and the successful proposal will be announced in 2022.

Preparatory Actions:

i. Grassroots sport programmes and infrastructure innovation

The specific objective of this action is to support the promotion of physical activity through flexible, modern ways of practising sport both in terms of offer (trainings, activities) and in terms of infrastructure. This action has a budget of EUR 1.9 million. A total of 44 applications were submitted and the successful proposals will be announced in 2022.

The proposals will promote and develop actions around new forms of practising sport and physical activities in different areas (outdoor sport activities both in urban areas and in the countryside, fitness, football, water sports) and for the benefit of multiple target groups through inclusive and multigenerational approaches. These projects also include renovation or development of light sport facilities and communication activities to support dissemination and raise awareness about these activities and their benefit, including through the development or use of digital platforms or applications.

ii. Sport as a tool for integration and social inclusion of refugees

The specific objective of this action is to promote the direct engagement of refugees and host communities within the EU and to promote a Europe-wide approach, increasing the potential for European host communities to successfully engage and integrate refugees through sport. This action has a budget of EUR 1.9 million. 28 applications were submitted, and the successful proposals will be announced in 2022.

The proposals will use local sport activities **to support the integration of refugees into their new communities**. The intention is to bring together refugees and local citizens in sport and physical activity to eliminate cultural barriers and promote mutual understanding. Some projects will also develop toolkits to assist other cities and regions across Europe in organising similar sport activities locally.

2. MODERN AND EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION AND INTERNAL CONTROL

2.1. 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 management, 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 Director. The following reports have been considered:

- the periodic reports submitted by the Authorising Officers by Sub-Delegation (AOSDs) on implementation progress in their respective areas of responsibilities, including on achievements and internal control in their Unit/Department;
- the contribution of the Risk Management and Internal Control (RMIC) manager, including the results of internal control monitoring and risk assessment at Agency level;
- the register of exceptions and non-compliance events and its corresponding analysis;
- the summary reports on the *ex post* audit results;
- the DG BUDG report on the validation of the local systems;
- the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control, the observations and follow-up carried out by the Internal Audit Service (IAS);
- the observations and the recommendations reported by the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

These reports result from a systematic analysis of the available evidence. This approach provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in a complete coverage of the budget delegated to the Director of EACEA.

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.

2.1.1. Control results

This section reports and assesses the elements identified by management which support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives (ICO)³⁷. The Agency's assurance-building and materiality criteria are outlined in AAR Annex 5. The AAR Annex 6

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

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.

In the reporting year, the Agency has implemented actions under the **2007-2013** and **2014-2020** programming periods and it started the implementation of actions under the **current 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework** (MFF). For the current MFF, despite late approval of the legal basis, the Agency has succeeded in starting the process of contract signature, which will be completed in 2022.

EACEA 2021 operational and operating budget

In 2021, EACEA processed 4 158 payments under the operational budget and 422 payments under the operating budget or administrative budget for a total executed payments respectively equal to **EUR 495 936 815.99** and **EUR 50 464 146.02**.

Total payments execution (EUR) – 2021		
	All EACEA programmes	EDF
Operational budget	495 936 815.99	5 923 156.00
Operating budget	50 464 146.02	

In addition, the Agency implemented part of the budget (**EUR 5 923 156**) allocated to Intra-ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) through the European Development Fund (EDF).

As for the share of expenditures, grant management represents more than 90% of the total 'payments made' while procurements accounts for 4.6% and expert payments for 0.5%.

The following table presents the operational expenditures for grant management sorted by programming period and by specific programme:

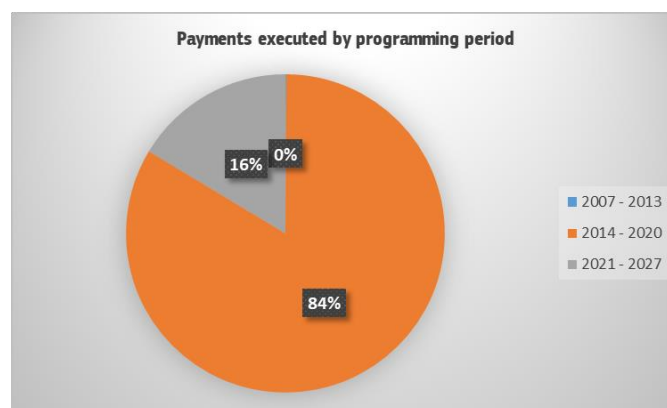
Overview table (amounts in EUR million) ³⁸

Programmes	Grants (e.g. actual costs based, or lump sums, or entitlements)	Procurement	Experts	Total Expenditure
LLP 2007-2013				0,00
Erasmus Mundus 2007-2013	373.400,00			373.400,00
Tempus 2007-2013	4.680,86			4.680,86
Youth in Action 2007-2013				0,00
MEDIA 2007-2013				0,00
ERASMUS + 2014-2020	283.715.173,43	16.201.378,06	88.644,66	300.005.196,15
Creative Europe 2014-2020	91.681.518,33	648.066,73	0,00	92.329.585,06
Europe for Citizens 2014-2020	13.894.098,67	0,00	0,00	13.894.098,67
EU Aid Volunteers 2014-2020	3.053.948,76	1.138.526,20	12.240,00	4.204.714,96
Solidarity Corps 2014-2020	120.980,92	3.808.071,41	0,00	3.929.052,33
Erasmus+ 2021-2027	56.744.359,20		1.588.950,00	58.333.309,20
Creative Europe 2021-2027	20.541.091,77	842.482,99	763.380,00	22.146.954,76
CERV 2021-2027	534.924,00		180.900,00	715.824,00
Solidarity Corps 2021-2027	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Totals (coverage)	470.664.175,94	22.638.525,39	2.634.114,66	495.936.815,99

The table shows that the oldest legacy programmes (2007-2013 MFF) are phasing out (0.08% of the total operational expenditure in 2021). The 2014-2020 MFF accounts for the biggest share of payments executed, while the current MFF only accounts for 16% of the payments executed, which are all pre-financing payments.

Compared to previous years, the Agency has made fewer operational payments overall: roughly 40% fewer than in 2020. This is due to the late implementation of the 2021-2027 MFF and will require swifter implementation in 2022, possibly by leveraging the efficiency gains expected from the adoption of the corporate eGrants IT tool.

³⁸ Source: EACEA accounting



The budget was implemented within the limits imposed by the 2018 Financial Regulation (FR). Specifically, EACEA's assessment for the new reporting requirement is the following:

- Cases of "confirmation of instructions" (new FR art 92.3): none
- Cases of financing not linked to costs (new FR art 125.3): none
- Financial Framework Partnerships (FFP) >4 years (new FR art 130.4): 21 FFPs related to Creative Europe (Culture), prolonged due to COVID-19 measures to allow beneficiaries to complete their projects.
- Cases of flat-rates >7% for indirect costs (new FR art 181.6): none
- Cases of "Derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity of grants pursuant to Article 193 FR" (new Financial Regulation Article 193.2): none

1. Effectiveness of controls

a) Legality and regularity of the transactions

EACEA 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.

For grant management, which represents the majority of expenditures, EACEA has put in place the necessary controls to ensure the legality and regularity of the transactions and to confirm a multiannual error rate below the materiality level, in line with the principles illustrated in Annex 5. The benefits of those controls are both quantifiable and non-quantifiable³⁹ (further details in Annex 7).

³⁹ The main benefits can be summarised as follows:

- compliance with the rules and good quality **selection** process, thus addressing the objectives of the work programmes to achieve the highest added value for the EU;
- clarity and legal security both for the beneficiaries and the Agency, for all the selected applications (**contracting** phase);
- detection of ineligible costs (quantifiable benefit) when analysing the payment requests (**monitoring** phase) or during ex-post audits (**ex-post controls** phase), which normally lead to recovery orders.

As a result, the **multiannual error rates** for the **2014-2020** programming period⁴⁰ show a materiality below the 2% target for all programmes⁴¹, which contributes to supporting the absence of reservations for 2021. The table below illustrates the detected error rate (DER) and the residual error rate (RER, after ex post corrections).

Programming period 2014-2020	DER	RER	Reservation?
Erasmus+	0.82%	0.79%	No
Creative Europe	1.66%	1.61%	No
Europe for Citizens	0.96%	0.93%	No
EU Aid Volunteers (only two random audit results available, with 0% error rate)	Not yet available*	Not yet available	N/A
Solidarity Corps (no audit results yet available)	Not yet available*	Not yet available	N/A
* Auditable projects are hardly available for these two programmes, EU Aid Volunteers being partly "on hold" since COVID2019 pandemic start and Solidarity Corps having been delegated late to the Agency			

Thus for all programmes of the 2014-2020 MFF, EACEA has a low error rate (below the materiality level).

The current programming period brings a paradigm shift in grant management: simplified cost models (SCO). This is a new approach in EU grants that aims to simplify grant management for both beneficiaries and EU staff. The adoption of SCO for the large majority of grants managed by the Agency is therefore expected to have a positive impact and help maintain a low error rate in the current MFF.

With respect of the implementation of 2021-2027 MFF, the late adoption of the MFF has limited the observability of the programme, as the Agency has only started with the contract signature process and is still at an early stage of the grant management process with few audits findings available. However, the combination of a wide adoption of the SCO model together with a certain degree of continuity in the content and policy objectives of the programmes, supports the effectiveness of control for the new MFF as well.

Through recoveries and financial corrections, EACEA has in place an effective mechanism for correcting errors. During the reporting year the executed corrective capacity amounted in

⁴⁰ The 2007-2013 MFF is fully phasing out, with 0.08% of the total operational expenditure of 2021 paid only on Erasmus Mundus and Tempus. After the clearing of pre-financing amounts carried out in 2021, the *de minimis* rule applies, supporting the absence of reservations..

⁴¹ In line with the materiality criteria illustrated in Annex 5.

total to EUR 13.73 million⁴² representing 2.7% of the relevant expenditure⁴³. The benefit of *ex ante* control amounts to EUR 10.88 million, whilst recoveries and financial corrections following the results of *ex post* controls amounted to EUR 2.85 million (for more details see Annex 7).

Based on the error rate target values achieved for all programmes audited and the regular execution of the *ex post* audit strategy during 2021⁴⁴, it can be concluded that controls on legality and regularity are effective.

Calculation of the amount at risk

Table X: estimated risk at payment⁴⁵ and at closure represents EACEA's relevant expenditure, its estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure.

The **estimated overall risk at payment** for 2021 expenditure amounts to EUR 7.91 million, representing 1.54% of the Agency's total relevant expenditure for 2021. This is the AOD'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.

This expenditure will subsequently be subject to *ex post* controls and a proportion of the underlying errors will be detected and corrected in subsequent years. The conservatively **estimated future corrections**⁴⁶ for 2021 expenditure amount to EUR 1.61 million⁴⁷.

⁴² Source: DG BUDG Datawarehouse (DWH) report *Average recoveries per GD*.

⁴³ EUR 510.6 million as per Summary Key data table –SKD– (including EDF and operating budget).

⁴⁴ In 2021, the Agency focused on finalising the 2014-2020 open audits with very good results (157 audits closed), catching up on the delay caused by the COVID-19 and the related travel restrictions. In 2021, the Agency and the auditors showed resilience in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁴⁵ To calculate the overall amount at risk at payment:

- For the 2007-2013 programming period, the Agency used the multiannual detected error rates by programme.
- For the 2014-2020 programming period, the Agency follows a conservative approach. To estimate the average error rate, EACEA uses, as a basis for all programmes, both the past programming periods and risk-based and random audits. For 2021, the overall average error rate is estimated at 1.73%. (1.67% last year). The Agency also uses 1.73% as the AOD's best estimate for the European Development Fund (EDF) and those programmes for which it does not have enough available audit results to show a meaningful error rate.

⁴⁶ The Agency has prudently calculated its corrective capacity as 0.37% (it was 0.34% in 2019 and 0.35% in 2020). This estimate is based on past performance of the *ex post* controls only (*ex post* audits), namely on the average recoveries implemented since 2011, after the payment was authorised by the Commission. As in previous years, the figure provided by DG BUDG (2.217% for 2021) had to be adjusted as it included corrections made prior to the payment (*ex ante*).

⁴⁷ This amount is coherent with the historical average corrections linked to *ex post* audits.

The difference between those two amounts results in the **estimated overall risk at closure** of EUR 6.29 million, representing 1.2% of the Agency's total relevant expenditure for 2021. This is a small decrease mainly due to the phasing out of the 2007-2013 programmes, having higher error rates due to more complex schemes, and lower levels of simplification. In other words, a relevant source of risk is slowly disappearing with the phasing out of the oldest EACEA programmes.

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

EACEA	Relevant expenditure	Estimated risk (error rate %) at payment		Estimated future corrections and deductions		Estimated risk (error rate %) at closure	
(1)	(2)	(3)		(4)		(5)	
Programmes	m EUR	m EUR	%	m EUR	%	m EUR	%
Operational budget:							
LLP 2007-2013	0,02	0,00	4,42%	0,00	0,37%	0,0007	4,05%
Erasmus Mundus 2007-2013	0,37	0,00	0,47%	0,00	0,37%	0,0004	0,10%
Tempus 2007-2013	0,54	0,01	2,73%	0,00	0,37%	0,0127	2,36%
Youth in Action 2007-2013	0,03	0,00	3,20%	0,00	0,37%	0,0009	2,83%
MEDIA 2007-2013	0,06	0,00	0,53%	0,00	0,37%	0,0001	0,16%
ERASMUS + 2014-2020	258,65	4,46	1,73%	0,96	0,37%	3,51	1,36%
Creative Europe 2014-2020	137,36	2,37	1,73%	0,51	0,37%	1,86	1,36%
Europe for Citizens 2014-2020	12,70	0,22	1,73%	0,05	0,37%	0,17	1,36%
EU Aid Volunteers 2014-2020	19,17	0,33	1,73%	0,07	0,37%	0,26	1,36%
Solidarity Corps 2014-2020	0,05	0,00	1,73%	0,00	0,37%	0,00	1,36%
Erasmus+ 2021-2027	0,00	0,00	0,00%	0,00	0,00%	0,00	-
Creative Europe 2021-2027	0,00	0,00	0,00%	0,00	0,00%	0,00	-
CERV 2021-2027	0,00	0,00	0,00%	0,00	0,00%	0,00	-
Experts & Procurements	25,27	0,13	0,50%	0,00	0,00%	0,13	0,50%
EDF	7,35	0,13	1,73%	0,03	0,37%	0,10	1,36%
Sub-total	461,55	7,65	1,66%	1,61	0,35%	6,04	1,31%
Operating budget	50,46	0,25	0,5%	0,00	0	0,25	0
Total EA (operational + operating)	512,02	7,91	1,54%	1,61	0,3%	6,29	1,23%

EACEA	Relevant expenditure	Estimated risk (error rate %) at payment		Estimated future corrections and deductions		Estimated risk (error rate %) at closure	
(1)	(2)	(3)		(4)		(5)	
	million EUR	million EUR	%	million EUR	%	million EUR	%
European Development Fund (EDF)	7.35	0.13	1.73%	0.03	0.37%	0.10	1.36%

b) Fraud prevention, detection and correction

EACEA has developed and implemented its own anti-fraud strategy since 2012, on the basis of the methodology provided by OLAF. It is updated every 3 years and it was last updated in 2021, covering the period 2021–2023. Its implementation is being monitored and reported to management twice a year through the semestrial and annual reports as well as on an ad hoc basis for each case. Overall, 90% of the necessary actions planned for 2021 have been implemented and 10% (revised procedure to be finalised) were postponed until the following

strategic period. EACEA also contributed to the Commission's anti-fraud strategy and followed up 100% of OLAF's **financial** recommendations. The results achieved during the year thanks to the anti-fraud measures in place can be summarised as follows:

Several awareness-raising actions on anti-fraud strategy and activities were conducted successfully. This includes presentation of the anti-fraud strategy at several unit meetings, publication of newsletters, participation in newcomers' sessions, OLAF training, a leaflet on anti-fraud aspects for newcomers, and an updated anti-fraud intranet page. Cooperation with OLAF and other DGs was strengthened through the anti-fraud networks and contributions to working groups.

On case handling, the EACEA anti-fraud team closed 11 cases. Over the reporting period, the Agency replied on time to six OLAF requests and transmitted three new cases to OLAF leading to the opening of two new investigations and one still under evaluation.

Seven judicial actions are still ongoing. In two OLAF cases (2016), the Court ruled in favour of the Agency leading to a recovery of EUR 1.8 million.

On the basis of the available information, the Agency has reasonable assurance that the anti-fraud measures in place are effective overall. However the programmes in 2021-2027 will largely make use of simplified costs schemes. The challenges posed by this new budget implementation mode and the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be monitored to identify potential risks or fraud patterns and reduce them at an early stage.

c) **Other control objectives: safeguarding of assets and information, reliability of reporting (if applicable)**

The Agency protects its fixed assets and inventory through a sound internal control system which guards against theft or errors and provides reasonable assurance regarding prevention or timely detection of unauthorised acquisition, use or disposal of its assets that could have a material financial effect.

The financial assets managed by the Agency consist of pre-financing payments made to the beneficiaries of grants. They are protected by various preventive measures set out in the rules and regulations – mainly financial guarantees and limitations on the amount of the pre-financing payment.

2. Efficiency of controls

Efficiency is the key word for the Agency in 2021. Not only because as an executive agency, EACEA has in its DNA an efficient use of its resources, but also because in the 2021-2027 MFF the funds entrusted to the Agency have increased at a greater proportion than the increase in staff allocated to EACEA (see sections on budget implementation and human resources). Under these conditions, operational efficiency is a critical element for the success of the Agency.

The key control indicators for grant management (the main operating process for the Agency) are the **Time to Inform (TTI), Time to Contract (TTC) and Time to Grant (TTG)**.

Understanding how these measures evolved in 2021 provides meaningful indications on the efficiency of the core business of the Agency.

According to the Financial Regulation (FR), the Agency has 9 months after the call deadline to sign grants (TTG - Article 194.2 FR). This deadline is split into two sub-periods: time to inform (TTI with a 6-month target) and time to contract (TTC with a 3-months target).

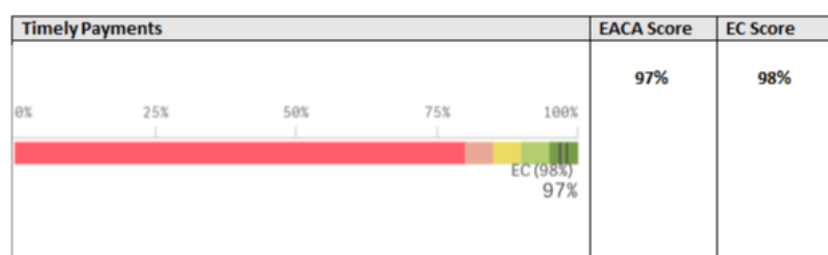
Average Time-to indicators 2021	Calls of 2014-2020 MFF	Calls of 2021-2027 MFF	Combined total (both MFFs)
Average TTI of contracts signed in 2021	4.51	3.74	3.93
Average TTC of contracts signed in 2021	3.95	0.8	1.59
Average TTG of contracts signed in 2021	8.46	4.54	5.52
% of contracts signed in 2021 within TTG 9 month deadline	52.5%	100%	88.2%

In 2021, the average TTG is equal to 5.52 months, well below the 9-month target, but only 88.2% of the contracts were signed before the 9-month limit (while the target was set at 100%). This delay is mainly due to two 2014-2020 calls from Creative Europe/MEDIA which were launched at the end of 2020, whose budgetary commitment could not be made with the 2021 budget of the new programme until the legal basis was adopted. It is interesting to note that the calls launched in 2021 had better performances (**4.54 months, 100%** of grants signed within the limit).

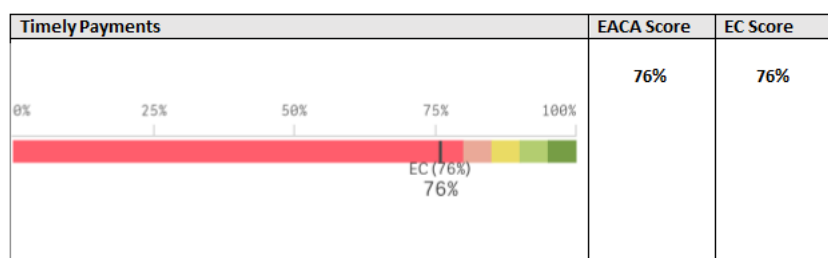
The performance of the calls from the 2021-2027 MFF is notable for several reasons. Firstly, the time-to-grant is significantly lower than in the previous 5 years (which all had an average time-to-grant of approximately 7 months). Furthermore, compliance with the 9-month time-to-grant deadline has increased from 2020, when it was 96.8%. These noteworthy results were achieved despite the challenges linked to the late adoption of the legal bases (call planning often rescheduled).

Most of the success is due to the migration to the corporate eGrants IT tool for programme implementation (see the section on digital transformation). The Agency processed all 66 calls/invitations to submit from the 2021 work programme in eGrants, after intensive preparation for and adaptation to this major change.

Time-To-Pay (TTP): For the **operational budget**, in 2021, the results indicate a level of compliance with the payment deadlines of 97% of all payments processed on time (up from 95% in 2020).

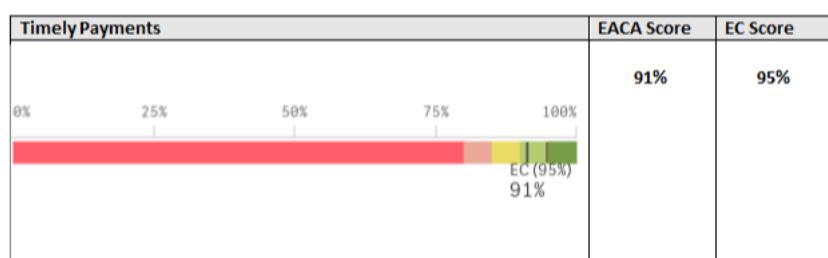


For the **operating budget**: 76% of the total amount paid in 2021 was within the legal deadlines. However, the delay, which is an average of 5 days, is mainly (90%) due to two payments.



In one case, this concerns the advance payment of the Service Level Agreement with the Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels (OIB) for 2021. The second concerns the payment of social security contributions (paid in early January 2021).

EDF payments: 91% of the total amount paid in 2021 was within the legal deadlines, as for 2020.



The picture given by the time indicators is completed by a workload indicator represented by the **total number of running projects**. In 2021 the Agency processed 6 666 projects, above the average of the last 3 years (6 592), despite the late start of project implementation.

3. Economy of controls

Another pillar in the assessment of the functioning of the internal control system, and consequently, of the Agency, is the measure of the economical use of its resources (for this purpose, the operating budget is used as reference).

In 2021 the **total costs of controls** for grant management are **EUR 48.3 million** (EUR 47.5 million in 2020 and EUR 50.9 million in 2019). In 2021, the total costs of controls, in absolute value, remain below the average of the last 3 years. The slight increase compared to 2020 is largely due to the growth of the number of staff (see section on human resources), a trend which will continue over the current MFF. A large share of these additional staff is devoted to controls⁴⁸ thus increasing their total cost for 2021.

⁴⁸ EACEA follows ATLAS profiles to identify staff involved in controls

The total **costs of controls in terms of payments executed** is $48.3/479.22^{49}=10.1\%$ (it was $47.5/801.67 = 5.92\%$ in 2020 and 7.13% in 2019). The worsening of the ratio is almost fully due to the limited amounts of payments the Agency was able to execute this year (as already reported) because of the delays in the approval of the legal basis. The Agency also monitors the share of **operating costs over the operational budget**, both figures expressed in terms of payments executed. In 2021 this ratio is $(50.4/495.9)$ equal to **10.18%** (it was 6.33% in 2020 and 6.70% in 2019). Again, despite the total operating costs decrease compared to 2020, the total payments dropped more than proportionally, leaving this ratio significantly higher than in 2020.

The large drop in the amount of payments finalised in 2021 reduces the significance of the signals generated by the latter two indicators, especially because the drop is due to specific circumstances of the first year of implementation of the MMF. In conclusion, the total costs of controls and the operating costs have remained relatively stable across this time (see below), and in 2021 they are in line with the average of the last 3 years. It is reasonable to consider them adequate, taking into account the volume of running projects in 2021 (above the average of the last 3 years), the new staff recruited (+5.1% vs 2020) and the typically small size⁵⁰ of (labour intensive) grants to be processed.

€ m	2019	2020	2021	Average 3Y
Total operating costs	49,3	51,6	50,5	50,4
Total costs of controls	50,9	47,5	48,3	48,9

Note that details of the estimated cost related to shared/pooled control activities carried out by REA and hosted by DG RTD (Common Implementation Centre) for the Research and Innovation family are reported on in the Annual Activity Reports of REA and RTD.

Concerning **the benefits of the controls** (for details refer to Annex 7), in addition to the quantifiable benefits at each stage (e.g. recoveries from *ex post* audits), there are several benefits which cannot be quantified, such as the deterrent effect of *ex post* controls or the beneficial effects of annual information/kick-off meetings with new grant beneficiaries, both reducing the probability of errors, or increasing the potential success of projects.

4. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

Based on the most relevant key indicators and control results, EACEA 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.

⁴⁹ Total operational payments executed, minus costs of procurement, plus payments executed linked to EDF.

⁵⁰ The average size of EACEA grants is estimated approximately equal to EUR 260 000 for 2014-2020 and EUR 290 000 for 2021-2027.

As highlighted in the previous section, in 2021 the Agency met the target for the Time to Pay its beneficiaries⁵¹ and the controls in place kept the multiannual detected error rate by programme for the current programming period below 2%, at a cost below the average of the last 3 years. A positive conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls can be drawn.

2.1.2. Audit observations and recommendations

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

European Court of Auditors (ECA)

(1) Operating budget – 2020⁵²

The European Court of Auditors issued its opinion on the audit of the Agency's 2020 annual accounts for administrative expenditures⁵³.

Opinion on the reliability of the accounts: in the Court's opinion, the accounts of the Agency for the year ending on 31 December 2020 present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Agency, the results of its operations, its cash flows, and the changes in net assets for the year then ended, in accordance with its Financial Regulation and with accounting rules adopted by the Commission's accounting officer. These are based on internationally accepted accounting standards for the public sector.

Opinion on the legality and the regularity of the transactions underlying the accounts: in the Court's opinion, the transactions underlying the annual accounts for the year are legal and regular in all material respects.

(2) Operational budget – statement of assurance 2020 and 2021

Concerning the 2020 statement of assurance (DAS), two audits were concluded in 2020. One ended without observations and the second ended with one finding relating to staff costs. Concerning DAS 2021, the Agency did not receive any request.

Internal Audit Service (IAS)

(1) Audit engagements

⁵¹ For 97% of the payment volume.

⁵² EACEA took into consideration ECA observations included in the Annual Report on EU agencies for the financial year 2020.

⁵³ The audit is performed each year to obtain reasonable assurance that the Agency's annual accounts are free of material misstatements and that the transactions processed by the Agency are legal and regular.

Audit on the protection of personal data: although initially started in 2020, the outcome of the preliminary survey by the IAS resulted in extending the audit to all executive agencies and the Common Implementation Centre (CIC) of DG RTD. During the reporting year the fieldwork took place with a focus on HR personnel files and the processing of personal data for the Erasmus Virtual Exchange (EVE) platform. The 'Findings Table Document' and draft audit report are expected in the first quarter of 2022.

Audit on Erasmus+ and Creative Europe – Grant Management phase III (*ex post* controls at EACEA). Following full implementation by EACEA of the corresponding action plan, the IAS performed a follow-up, concluding that all recommendations were adequately and effectively implemented, and hence closed the audit in October 2021.

(2) Limited conclusion of the IAS on the state of internal control

Based on the work undertaken by the Internal Audit Service in the period 2019-2021, namely

- Audit on grant management phase III – *ex post* controls (2020);

and taking into account that:

- management has accepted all the recommendations issued in 2019-2021;
- management has adopted action plans to implement all the accepted recommendations, and that the IAS considers that these action plans are adequate to address the residual risks identified by the auditors;
- the implementation of these action plans is monitored through reports by management and follow-up audits by the IAS;

the IAS concluded that the internal control systems in place for the audited processes are effective.

(3) Conclusions

EACEA acknowledges the positive assessment issued by the IAS in its limited opinion as a valuable piece of information concerning its control system. In drawing its overall conclusions on the functioning of the internal control system, the Agency takes into account all the available sources of information including the ongoing audit on the protection of personal data.

2.1.3. Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems

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

EACEA uses the 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.

Management's assessment of the effectiveness of the internal control system has been carried out, according to the methodology established in the Implementation Guide of the Internal Control Framework of the Commission, and following the general principles included

in the Communication on the Revision of the Internal Control Framework, with the support of all relevant sources of information⁵⁴.

As such, EACEA has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective, and the components and principles are present and functioning well overall, but improvements are needed concerning the full integration of the provisions of data protection regulation 2018/1725 in its procedures.

2.1.4. Conclusions on the assurance

The assessment given in Section 2.1.1 refers to all programmes managed by the Agency and allows for a comprehensive coverage of the budget delegated to the Director of EACEA. It gives a true and fair view of the operations carried out in the reporting year and provides assurance on the use of resources based on the principle of sound financial management and in respect of legality and regularity. The conclusions give, overall, a positive picture.

The conclusions of Sections 2.1.2 ‘Audit observations and recommendations’ and 2.1.3 on the ‘Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems’ are positive.

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

2.1.5. Declaration of Assurance

I, the undersigned,

Director of EACEA

In my capacity as authorising officer for the operating (administrative) budget and authorising officer by delegation for the operational budget,

Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view⁵⁵.

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.

⁵⁴ Register of exceptions and non-compliance events, results of internal and corporate indicators reported in the new Annex 4, AOSD reports, risk assessment, all outstanding audit recommendations and DG BUDG validation of the accounting system of the Agency.

⁵⁵ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG/Executive Agency.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of the self-assessment, ex-post controls, the work of the Internal Audit Service and the lessons learnt from the reports of the Court of Auditors for 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 EACEA or those of the Commission.

Brussels,

(e-signed)

Roberto Carlini

2.2. MODERN AND EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION – OTHER ASPECTS

2.2.1. Human resource management

In 2021 the new multiannual financial framework kicked off. The new MFF will bring a significant increase in EACEA staff over the next 6 years. As a result, the HR sector's key priorities were intense selections and timely **recruitment** to allow the Agency to bolster its ranks of both contract agents and temporary agents, to contribute to a successful delivery on Commission priorities. Overall, a total of 23 selections – almost double that of 2020⁵⁶ – were launched through internal procedures, external procedures, and via the job market, to facilitate mobility across the agencies and with the Commission. During the reporting period, the Agency finalised 49⁵⁷ new recruitments, a remarkable result in comparison with 2020, when the Agency recruited 24 new colleagues. Thanks to intense recruitment, the occupational rate reached 91% at the end of the year. Pending the approval of the new corporate HR strategy, the Agency put on hold the preparation of its own HR strategy. .

As regards **female representation** in middle management positions, the Agency has 2 female Heads of Department (out of 2) and 1 female Head of Unit (out of 13)⁵⁸. Nevertheless, more than 50% of the Agency's Heads of Sector are women (17 out of 31).

To continue boosting **staff engagement** and to facilitate two-way **communication**, the HR and communication teams pursued their joint efforts.

In order to promote the ONE EACEA concept, the Agency organised two all-staff events led by the Director and senior management: a New Year's event to welcome staff back to work, and a Q&A session in April to discuss the Agency's role in the 2021-2027 MFF and explain

⁵⁶ In 2020, the Agency launched 12 selections.

⁵⁷ This figure includes also 6 seconded officials.

⁵⁸ That makes a total of 3 out of 15 currently occupied posts in global middle management population that are occupied by women (20%). Total posts available in middle management are 16.

the upcoming staff selection procedures. A total of 10 Connecting EACEA virtual events were held, covering key topics linked to Agency's work.

To help strengthen a sense of corporate empowerment, the Agency supported staff initiatives through the EACEA Empowered initiative, for example by raising awareness about staff activities (newsletter articles, conference...), by providing support (e.g. the **Green EACEA initiative**) and advice, and by facilitating dialogue with management.

A final report on the Staff Satisfaction Survey Development Plan was presented to the management meeting on 27 November 2021. The report outlined all actions that were undertaken following the 2018 Staff Survey.

To support professional development, the Agency worked on the **competency framework**, adding 15 new profiles to the 5 existing ones, and promoted the use of the self assessment tool, currently being used by 4 of the 6 agencies. As regards staff professionalisation, 14 eGrants training courses were organised thanks to the cooperation of DG RTD. In-house, a total of 84 training courses were delivered, focusing on continuous professional development and supporting colleagues to adjust to the new normal⁵⁹. To support **gender equality**, the Agency is actively participating in the 'inter-agency gender working group', and was one of the driving forces of the interagency women talent programme launched in November.

Finally, to ensure consistency in the way the Agency communicates, a new **EACEA internal communication strategy** and action plan were drafted, and were subsequently approved by the EACEA management team.

2.2.2. Digital transformation and information management

In 2021, the Agency continued its **digital modernisation**, thereby contributing to the implementation of the Commission Digital Strategy. Priority was given to the use of corporate solutions, such as eGrants, eProcurement and other Commission services (Open Europa, EU Academy, EU Login, etc hosted in DIGIT managed Cloud) for web platforms thus achieving a double objective: on the one hand ensuring that the core principles of the Commission Digital Strategy were respected, and on the other hand concentrating its digital competences on higher added-value tasks with a greater return on investment.

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⁵⁹ E.g. resilience, working in times of change, building trust.

Building on the experience gained with the pilot projects, the Agency introduced Microsoft 365 and Teams as part of the digital workplace environment. The use of the platform now supports collaborative work, both internally and with external stakeholders.

The Agency made very good progress in the modernisation of ad hoc platforms. To that effect, close cooperation was established with the Commission and the various Evaluation and Steering Committees for the programme actions, e.g. eTwinning-School Education Gateway / European School Education Platform, Online Linguistic Support (OLS), and the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE).

Furthermore, the Agency made good progress in the field of cyber-security and completed a first IT Security Plan for its legacy grant management systems.

On **management reporting**, the Agency opted for a new dashboard-like monthly report summarising the key performance indicators, as defined in the 2021 annual work plan. This new structured approach accelerated the completion of the mid-term report by 4 weeks compared to the previous years. In parallel, the reporting team started developing a performance dashboard based on Qlik Sense Technologies, with modules on calls, proposals, and project management now up and running. The development work will continue in 2022 with the inclusion of ABAC-based elements, internal control features and the automatisisation of the monthly report using Nprinting features.

On **grant management reporting**, the transition to the corporate eGrants tool has been completed, thus increasing reporting coherence and data reliability. With the appointment of the Local Data Correspondent in 2021, the Agency started to implement the Commission's policies on **data governance**. As a first step, the Agency has drawn up a list of its data assets in coordination with DG EAC (the lead parent DG EAC), which, after final consolidation in January 2022, will be made available together with associated descriptive metadata to other Commission services via the Commission data catalogue hosted by the JRC.

On **data protection**, the Agency continued strengthening compliance with the data protection regulation in the fields of grants, procurements, human resources, and events. It also adopted and published the EACEA Data Protection Officer's implementing rules and new data protection records, and published the restriction decision under Article 25 of the data protection regulation. In addition, guidelines setting out a uniform procedure for handling personal data breaches have been adopted. Several data protection awareness-raising training sessions were organised for staff. Finally, the Agency actively participated in various data protection networks, gathering Data Protection Officers from other executive agencies, the parent DGs and the Commission central services.

Following the introduction of the **Qualified Electronic Signature** (QES) in April 2021, the Document Management Officer (DMO), in cooperation with the EU SIGN services and in full respect of the data protection requirements, took the lead to deliver the Qualified Electronic Signing certificates, which are an indispensable prerequisite for the QES. In total, the Agency was granted over 50 certificates, making sure that each unit could sign all legally binding documents with a QES, thus complying fully with the relevant rules. Document Management Awareness-raising events (specific training, an intranet page) were organised.

The migration to eGrants also triggered significant changes in the field of **document management**. Ensuring that operational units could smoothly work in eGrants required adaptation of the filing plan and configuration in ARES/NOMCOM to the corporate structure. Several integration processes of different parts of eGrants with HAN (Hermes-Ares-NomCom) were carried out by the DMO in cooperation with DG RTD, SG, DIGIT and the EACEA IT team. Although the creation, filing and closure of files are normally automatic, the DMO still needed to modify the metadata and the content of files at the request of RTD or operational units. Nonetheless, the level of filing in the Agency continued to be good.

Citizens' requests for **access to documents** continued to be a DMO priority in 2021. During the year, six initial replies with partial or full disclosure were provided.

2.2.3. Sound environmental management

In 2021, the Agency continued to promote the Commission's Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (**EMAS**) at local level, in cooperation with the Green EACEA group.

To raise awareness about greener behaviour and encourage both newcomers and long-term staff to achieve the EU Green Deal climate neutrality objective, the Agency launched several local initiatives and participated in actions organised at corporate level. To share the Agency's green objectives with newcomers, the new on-boarding programme included a presentation with basic information on how staff can reduce their carbon footprint when performing their daily work and promoting the Agency's green initiatives.

In November the Agency organised a lunchtime conference titled **Working together towards a more sustainable Agency**. It included a poll in which 77% of respondents supported the initiative proposed: replacing individual bins in each office with communal bins in the corners of each floor. Towards the end of the year, the Green EACEA group organised a lunchtime conference titled **Greening Projects and Project Management with EACEA**.

To promote paperless working, the Agency strongly encouraged the use of the collaborative tools available in M365 with the help of so-called M365 champions, who act as facilitators for less proficient colleagues.

During the year, paper and stationery consumption dropped significantly thanks to the use of electronic workflows. This positive trend is expected to continue in the future.

To save energy and decrease its carbon footprint, the Agency again participated in the end-of-year energy-saving corporate initiative by completely closing down all its buildings during the Christmas and New Year holidays.

Efficient and tailor-made communications helped to promote all the initiatives mentioned above. Various news items were published on the intranet during the reporting year. The HR team created an intranet page containing tips on how to reduce the environmental impact at work, and encouraging colleagues to take an active role in greening the Agency. In addition, the Green EACEA group published three issues of their **Green Agency Magazine**, offering advice on how to be greener when working from home.