



Annual Activity Report 2020

**Education, Audiovisual and Culture
Executive Agency**

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EACEA IN BRIEF



EACEA's mission is to support European projects that connect people and cultures, reach out to the world and make a difference.

Working together in education, culture, audio-visual, sport, youth, citizenship humanitarian aid and volunteering, 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.

The **Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)** is a multi-programme Agency. Through the implementation of its programmes (Erasmus+, 'Creative Europe', 'Europe for Citizens', 'European Solidarity Corps' and 'EU Aid Volunteers'), the Agency brings the European Union closer to its citizens in cooperation with the four parent Directorates-General of the Commission (DG EAC, DG CNECT, DG ECHO and DG JUST).

Under the supervision and monitoring of these four Directorates-General, the EACEA is responsible¹ for managing the full grant management cycle of the projects (from call publication to closure of the contracts) and procurement procedures.

The Agency has its own legal identity and is entrusted with its own operating budget for its running costs (staff expenditure, office-related costs, IT and other services). For this it receives an annual amount (in 2020: EUR 47.75 million²) from the EU General Budget (Section 3 – Commission).

The Director of EACEA is the Authorising Officer (AO) for this budget and has overall responsibility for implementing EACEA's revenues and expenditures, in accordance with the principles of sound financial management as defined in the Financial

Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Union.

Despite the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and thanks to the dedication of its 432³ staff members representing 25 EU nationalities, the Agency fulfilled in full its mission of connecting people and cultures, reaching out to the world and making a difference. Notably, EACEA managed in 2020 an operational budget of EUR 1.02 billion⁴ and had at the end of the year a portfolio of over 7 100 running projects.

Moreover, 2020 was the year of building a new and resilient "**ONE EACEA**"⁵ which came into being when the Agency's new balanced organisation chart came into effect on 16 March, the same day that nation-wide confinement measures were imposed in Belgium.

In line with the outcomes of the EACEA Transformation Project⁶, which ran from March 2019 to March 2020, the Agency also strengthened its organisational management and implemented

¹ EACEA's tasks are detailed in the Delegation Act C(2013)9189 and as most recently amended by Decision C(2020)5717 of 25 August 2020.

² Commitment appropriations in EUR-28.

³ See further details in section 2.2.2 Human resource management.

⁴ According to the 2020 work programmes of the programmes.

⁵ The new branding of the Agency was the outcome of a year-long process of reflection and staff consultation known as the EACEA Transformation Project (ETP). It resulted in the transformation of the Agency into ONE EACEA, 'speaking in one voice', by streamlining grant management processes and on-boarding to eGrants, and by centralising business processes and procedures related to financial management of projects across programmes.

wide-scale cultural change. Additionally, in an agile response to the COVID-19 crisis, standard business processes at the Agency became paperless. Training staff to use common tools for grant management and procurement was made a priority, and many workflows were streamlined.

Finally, the Agency demonstrated its role as a trustworthy contributor and partner for its parent DGs and ready to take on its new mandate in the new MFF⁷, following the adoption of the Delegation Act⁸ by the College.

⁶ The EACEA Transformation Project (ETP) was an entirely participatory process of internal reflection and change of culture, fully endorsed by the parent DGs, aimed at changing the Agency and transforming it into a more modern and fit-for-purpose organisation.

⁷ Multi-annual Financial Framework

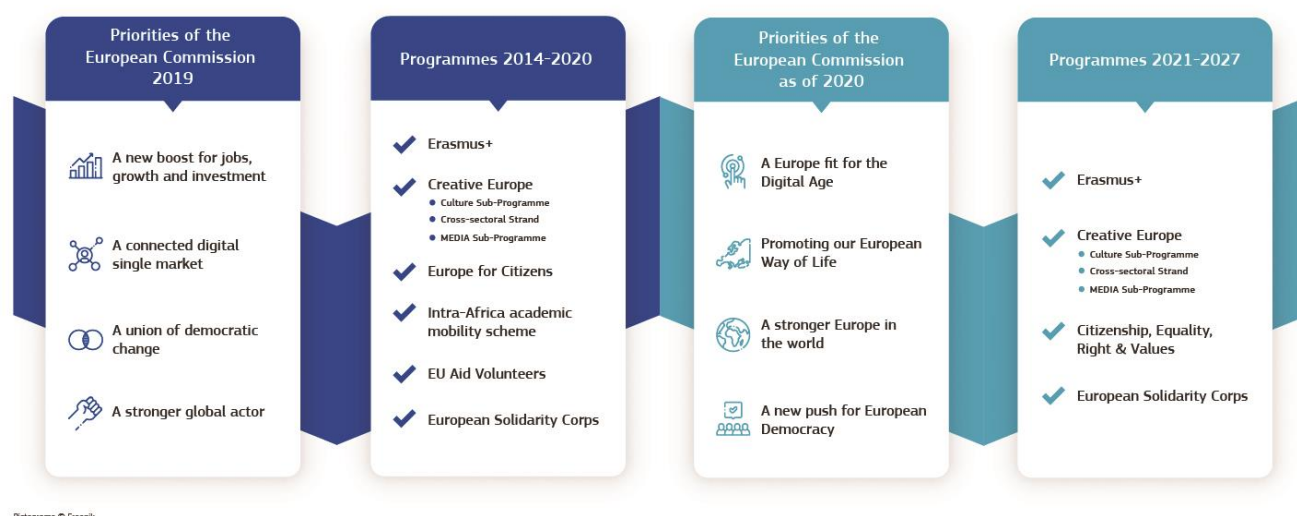
⁸ Commission Decision C(2021)951 as adopted by the European Commission on 12.2.2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Annual Activity Report is a management report from 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 Treaties⁹.

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

2020 was a transition year for Commission services, including Executive Agencies as illustrated below:



Pictograms © Freepik

In 2020 EACEA faced several challenges. From January to March the Agency underwent a far-reaching reorganisation, re-emerging as **ONE EACEA**. In mid-March, EACEA swiftly had to adapt to the COVID-19 crisis, which had significant implications for the Agency's operations. The EACEA Steering Committee adapted its composition to reflect the transfer of the Europe for Citizens programme from DG HOME to DG JUST, which took place on 1 January 2020.

Despite the COVID pandemic, the reorganisation of the Agency went ahead successfully and the Agency adapted its activities in call for proposal management, evaluation and the selection process, as well as its monitoring activities. Among the measures applied to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its operations and partners, it is worth to mention the extension of the deadlines for submission of proposals, the switch to online evaluation committees and digital monitoring meetings as well as extensions for the submission of final reports.

The main monitoring activities focused on communication with beneficiaries, including advice on how to handle the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, in particular with regard to cancelled or delayed activities for ongoing projects.

The cultural and creative sector was one of the first and hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis, and the Agency put in place the flexible measures as described above for grants in order to mitigate the negative consequences of the crisis.
















Calls for proposal, such as the European Youth Together call, were also quickly adapted to the needs of youth organisations facing the COVID-19 crisis. The Agency also provided helpdesks to support applicants in the preparation of their proposals, published lists of frequently asked questions to guide experts in the evaluation of applications, and used the Yammer online platform to work with experts and beneficiaries. The Agency also maintained regular contacts

⁹ Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union

with applicants to clarify technical aspects of the e-Grants tools.

EACEA's overall key operational figures for the period 1 January to 31 December 2020 are as follows:

Highlights of the year in numbers

	Budget: EUR 971.24 million		9 632 proposals received		229 events
	6 calls for proposals and 1 call for tender launched		2 923 proposals selected		3 160 reports assessed
	114 evaluations		2 647 grant agreements signed		14 procurement contracts signed
	1 026 experts contracted		4 new invitations to designated bodies to submit a proposal		91 selections finalised
	6 775 payments		2 310 grant agreements amended		12 procurement contracts amended

Throughout the year, the Agency expanded its outreach to citizens whilst contributing to the European Commission's political priorities, supporting young talents, enabling pioneering projects and fostering a shared European identity and purpose. **Highlights of these achievements** are as follows:

- **Record numbers of applications** received in the Jean Monnet, Capacity Building in Higher Education and Youth, EU Policy Experimentation, European Youth Together and Sport actions. This confirms the relevance and growing popularity of these actions.
- The **European Universities** initiative continued in its endeavours to enhance the quality and attractiveness of European higher education and boost cooperation between institutions. In 2020, 24 new alliances were selected, thereby enlarging the community of European Universities to a total of 41, with 280 Higher Education Institutions involved. The new alliances cover different fields of education, with some also being thematically specialised (e.g. neurosciences, engineering).
- The **European Solidarity Corps** launched its **General Online Training** (GOT) platform, offering non-formal training **for young people and volunteers**. The platform serves as a supporting measure the programme, and its the purpose is to offer training sessions to volunteers prior to deployment. The platform launched in November 2020 and contains 22 online courses with more than 40 videos and 300 library resources in 28 languages.
<https://europeansolidaritycorpsgot.eu/my/index.php?lang=en>
- In the field of **Capacity building in Higher Education (CBHE)**, the Agency published **Regional impact studies** assessing the impact and sustainability of CBHE projects in the Partner Countries of the different Regions as defined by the Erasmus+ programme.
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/resources/capacity-building-in-higher-education-cbhe-action_en.

- **The Bologna Process Implementation Report** highlighted the **progress made over two decades on mobility, quality assurance and recognition**. Unprecedented achievements have been made in developing convergent degree structures in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and countries have continued to join throughout these last twenty years. Today, total student numbers have reached more than 38 million. The report also points to the **work needed for the future in some areas, such as the social dimensions and the inclusion of under-represented groups**. This is vital, since the ideal that higher education should reflect societal diversity is far from being reached. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c90aaf32-4fce-11eb-b59f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-183354043>
- A specific call to address **cultural cooperation projects in the Western Balkans** region was launched with a budget of EUR 5 million, funded by the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance and delegated to the Agency by DG NEAR.
- To support the audiovisual industry and mitigate cash-flow problems, pre-financing payments were increased for the **Distribution Automatic and Sales Agent support call**. Similarly, an additional pre-financing payment of EUR 6 million was made to **Europa Cinema**, which will cascade the grant down to individual theatres.
- To ensure the continuity of activities, the contracts for the 41 **Creative Europe Desks** (which were set to run until 31 December 2020) have been extended for 6 months. Similarly, the operating grants under the **Europe for Citizens** programme received an additional amount of EUR 6.8 million to extend the Framework Partnership Agreements covering the period 2018-2020.

In addition to the operational output, the Agency's principal adaptation to the confinement has been to **become more digital** in the delivery of its services. To this end, EACEA worked closely with the Commission to introduce Microsoft 365 as a standard working tool, making it easier for staff to **work remotely**. Applicants for funding have also shown a wider interest in digital tools to support citizen engagement, audience development, and the enhancement of professional skills. The Agency also played a key role in ensuring the link between operations and IT tools, notably by coordinating the on-boarding of the Agency in e-Grants and e-Procurement while closely collaborating with the central services.

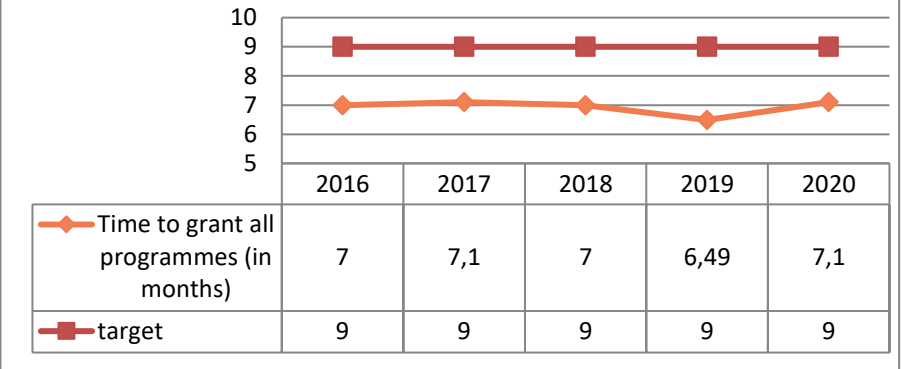

Alongside the activities outlined above, EACEA engaged with the future programmes in a forward-looking manner by (1) contributing heavily to the design of the new actions thanks to the Agency's experience in implementing the previous programmes, (2) taking a pro-active role in the specifics of the new contract for funding models, and (3) stepping up the migration process to the corporate e-Grants system (including the one-stop corporate Funding & Tender Opportunities Portal), which will help simplify the model agreements and budget schemes.

Finally, although 2020 was a very challenging year, EACEA has proved to be a resilient and agile solution-bringer, and a reliable, solid partner ready to take on the future in confidence. This is thanks in large part to the continued dedication of its 432 staff members.

B. Key Performance Indicators¹⁰ (KPIs)

For its 2020 Annual Work Programme, EACEA chose five key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure performance in its mandated tasks, and to ensure efficient delivery and successful achievement of the set goals.

The aggregated results for each of the five indicators are presented below and are detailed by programme in the specific sections and annexes.

<p>KPI 1 – time to grant</p>	 <table border="1" data-bbox="509 674 1365 868"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2016</th> <th>2017</th> <th>2018</th> <th>2019</th> <th>2020</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Time to grant all programmes (in months)</td> <td>7</td> <td>7,1</td> <td>7</td> <td>6,49</td> <td>7,1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>target</td> <td>9</td> <td>9</td> <td>9</td> <td>9</td> <td>9</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The average of TTG is 7.1 months which is a slight increase compared to last year. In total, 96.8% of contracts were signed within the target.</p> <p>An observed slower response from beneficiaries due to the overall lockdown has caused for some delays leading to a slight increase compared to 2019.</p>		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Time to grant all programmes (in months)	7	7,1	7	6,49	7,1	target	9	9	9	9	9
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020														
Time to grant all programmes (in months)	7	7,1	7	6,49	7,1														
target	9	9	9	9	9														
<p>KPI 2 – time to pay¹¹</p>	 <p>The average time to pay is 95% for operational budget.</p> <p>The deviation from the target (100% set in 2020) is mainly linked to low execution in the first months of the year, due to the need to redirect efforts towards other processes, namely the setting up of digital circuits to deal with the lockdown and the enforced teleworking situation.</p>																		

¹⁰ The data for the five KPIs is gathered through the IT systems used by the Agency as data source, such as PEGASUS, APPFIN, ABAC and MIPS, and has been subject to data quality control.

¹¹ This KPI is linked to the amount paid, not to the number of payments.

<p>KPI 3 – good management of the project portfolio</p>	<p>3 160 Interim/final reports were assessed.¹²</p> <p>Project reviews (defined as onsite monitoring (remote) mission) were carried out and the results shared with the relevant parent DGs. Due to COVID-19, all planned onsite monitoring visits were replaced by online meetings of different formats and scope, depending on the project risk level.</p> <p>The target of 100% was reached.</p> <p>In line with the annual monitoring plans, all projects were reviewed. The strategy is based on initial and continued (risk) assessment of projects, whereby the types of monitoring activities for each project are adjusted to the level of risk associated with its implementation. From mid-March, as a consequence to the pandemic restrictions, all monitoring activities were carried out remotely (i.e. through evaluation of regular reports and written feedback, virtual meetings). Monitoring of high-risk projects included more frequent contacts with beneficiaries through virtual and face-to-face meetings as well as on-site visits. In parallel, 3 160 reports were assessed during the reporting period.</p>
<p>KPI 4 – provision of information to Commission services and support for linking policy and programmes</p>	<p>For all 7 757 proposals/applications selected during the grant award decision¹³ process, the corresponding parent DGs were informed of the quality of the call output, including suggestions for improvements where applicable, and thus the target of 100% was achieved. For more information please see section 1.7 <i>Liaison with other services and policy feedback</i>.</p> <p>In 2020 the Agency organised 229 events (kick-off meetings, info-days, policy monitoring events and others) related to programme management. Due to the unique circumstances, from mid-March all events were held remotely. The overall positive satisfaction rate of participants reached 89.7%, thereby exceeding the target of 80% positive satisfaction rate.</p>
<p>KPI 5 – residual error rate¹⁴</p>	<p>The multiannual residual error rate for 2020 is below 2% for all programmes from the 2014-2020 generation. Detailed figures expressing the error rates by programme are provided in Part 2 of this document, and comply with the requirements of the European Court of Auditors and DG BUDG guidelines on error rate calculation.</p>

¹² Depending on the provisions of the grant agreement/decision, the beneficiary (mono) or coordinator (multi) may be expected to submit requests for further pre-financing or interim payments and a final report at the end of the eligibility period. The reports must be examined and compared against the grant agreement/decision, to verify that what the beneficiary has implemented corresponds to what they undertook to implement according to the grant agreement/decision. This also ensures that project results are validated and uploaded in the Project Results Platforms: <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/>.

¹³ For renewal of grants within the Framework Partnership Agreements, and for restricted calls to designated bodies, other procedures apply.

¹⁴ The calculation method has changed in comparison to previous years, hence a visual historical graph would not make sense.

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

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

To ensure the achievement of policy and management objectives, the Commission has adopted a set of internal control principles, based on international good practice. The financial regulation requires that the organisational structure and the internal control systems used to implement the budget be set up in accordance with these principles. EACEA has assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that these are effective and the components and principles are present and functioning well overall. However, some improvements are needed concerning the compliance with the internal data protection regulation (IDPR), in particular in the area of transfers of data outside the EU/EEA following the Schrems II judgement and the EDPS request. As a result, the Agency has taken action to minimise the risks linked to ongoing and future international transfers of personal data. (see section 2.1.3 and 2.2.2 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 (see section 2.1 for further details).

In conclusion, 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.

D. Provision of information to the Commissioner(s)

During regular meetings on management matters throughout the year between the Director and the parent DG(s), the main elements of this report and assurance declaration have been brought to the attention of the Agency's Steering Committee and to the Director(s)-General of the parent DG(s), who have taken these into consideration in their reports to Commissioner Mariya Gabriel (responsible for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth), Commissioner Margaritis Schinas (responsible for Promoting our European Way of Life), Commissioner Thierry Breton (responsible for the Internal Market), Commissioner Janez Lenarčič (responsible for Crisis Management) and Commissioner Didier Reynders (responsible for Justice).

E. Specific actions on COVID-19



In 2020, Europe was seriously impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commission organised a strong and coordinated response to the health crisis as well as to the impact on Europe's economy and society. COVID-19 has also posed challenges as regards performance, control, audit and assurance. in relation to the 2020 EU budget. In an exercise coordinated at

corporate level, all Commission services have promoted the consistent and rigorous protection of the EU budget, ensuring that appropriate mitigating measures were put in place.

- **Providing a consistent level of information to stakeholders**

EACEA published a banner on every page of its main website linking to a Coronavirus impact information page. This page set out EACEA's response to the Coronavirus pandemic. It displayed notably the flexibility measures for the eligibility of costs in ongoing actions or contracts, the necessary measures to consider in case COVID-19 prevents the implementation of action or contract and the necessity to collect and keep relevant documentation linked to COVID-19.

The Agency worked closely with the Task Force in DG EAC to coordinate activities in terms of information and support to project beneficiaries impacted by COVID-19. As a result, specific programme-related news messages and Frequently Asked Questions were regularly posted on the EACEA website for all delegated programmes. In addition to the practical measures for project management, EACEA ran also specific surveys on COVID-19 and published articles related to the COVID-19 impact on education (How is Covid-19 affecting schools in Europe?, How should students be admitted to higher education this year?). Furthermore, the Agency kept its parent DGs informed on the statistical evolution and the pandemic's impact on the delegated programmes in three EACEA Steering Committee meetings.

- **Showing flexibility to ensure business continuity for the stakeholders**

The Agency quickly reacted to the pandemic crisis by showing flexibility for the benefit of the stakeholders:

- deadlines for submission of proposals were postponed for 11 calls and clear information on the measures taken was provided, including the publication of Q&A documents.
- More than 2.000 requests for changes covering about 40% of all open projects were treated. Overall, 57% of all requests received are for formal amendments, with the vast majority (88%) relating to the extension of the eligibility period. Only 4% of the amendments were related to budget issues. Requests for adaptations of workplan activities are gradually increasing (6%). In addition, the Agency received 85 requests for suspension of project activities. Only two projects decided to terminate the grant agreement due to COVID-19. Despite the difficulties faced, many beneficiaries proposed alternative solutions for carrying out their activities.

In response to the pandemic, and to minimise the disruption caused by the confinement measures, EACEA cooperated closely with its parent DGs and the central services to put measures in place internally to ensure the continuity of its main activities:

- In order to provide centralised information for colleagues on the implications of COVID-19 for the management of grants and tenders, programme-related information was published on a specially created Intranet page managed by the Agency.
- Internally, the Agency set up a temporary procedure for paperless financial workflows to replace blue-ink or scanned signatures for commitments, amendments, payments or recovery orders. In addition, a temporary procedure was put in place for sending debit notes. Internal documentation to clarify the reporting and reimbursement of exceptional costs due to COVID-19 depending on the type of funding were issued. These measures ensured business continuity and timely dispatch of payments for stakeholders in compliance with DG BUDG's guidances.
- For the annual Commission Open Day, replaced this year by the online Europe Day on 9 May, the Agency identified stories and inspiring initiatives linked to COVID-19 that demonstrate the EU value of solidarity. The examples provided were shared by DG EAC on social media.

1. KEY RESULTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE COMMISSION'S GENERAL OBJECTIVES DG'S SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES¹⁵

In 2020 the Agency implemented the following programmes from the 2014-2020 generation:

Erasmus+

Creative Europe

Europe for Citizens

EU Aid Volunteers

Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme

European Solidarity Corps

In implementing these programmes, the Agency carried out the tasks described in the Delegation Acts (most recently C(2019)7856), as mentioned in Part 2: Mission Statement.

The Agency also continued to manage several legacy projects from the 2007-2013 generation of programmes, which still require final actions leading to their closure (e.g. report analysis, payment, ex-post audit, recovery order, etc.). Out of the 29 projects still running at the start of 2020, 12 were closed during the reporting period, leaving 17 remaining legacy projects¹⁶. The legacy projects represented less than 0.2% of the total number of open projects.

1.1 Erasmus+



In accordance with its mandate, and in cooperation with the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), and in association with the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), the Agency contributed to the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020 objectives under the following actions of the Erasmus+ work programme 2020:

- Learning mobility of individuals
- Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
- Support for policy reform
- Jean Monnet activities
- Sport

Education, training, youth and sport activities carried out in the reporting period were implemented in line with the objectives defined in the Annual Work Programme while also addressing the 2019–2024 European Commission priorities such as **'A stronger Europe in the world'** and **'Promoting our European way of life'**.

¹⁵ An Executive Agency uses as heading: "Implementation of the Agency's Annual Work programme - Highlights of the year".

¹⁶ The 17 remaining legacy projects are: 1 "Life long learning", 4 "Tempus", 10 "Intra APC Academic Mobility Scheme", 1 "Youth in Action" and 1 "Culture".



The open calls for proposals were published online through the Funding & Tender Opportunities Portal (F&TP), the Official Journal, and the EACEA website. Where appropriate, the Agency organised **Information days targeting potential applicants** and received positive feedback from the participants. One example was the 7th edition of the Sport Info Day that took place on 30 January. A new record was reached with 600 participants with more than 2 787 connections via web streaming. Commissioner Gabriel was present for the first time. The initiative has proven to be a major annual event in the field of sport, and the successful promotion of the call directly correlates with the 49% increase in the number of applications submitted compared to 2019. Increased call participation has also been observed in other actions such as Jean Monnet actions, European Charter in Higher Education, Capacity Building in Higher Education, EU Policy Experimentations, and European Youth Together.

The submission deadlines for several Erasmus+ calls were extended due to the COVID-19 crisis and most of the project selections were concluded in the second semester of 2020.

The **European Universities** selected in 2020 comprise holistic alliances covering different fields but also more thematic alliances specialised in a specific area (e.g. neurosciences or engineering). The participating organisations include comprehensive universities, universities of applied sciences, technical universities, entrepreneurial universities, research-intensive universities and more specialised universities such as medical universities and universities of fine arts. The Agency selected new set of **European Policy experimentations**, led by high-level public authorities and involving field trials on policy measures in several countries, based on sound evaluation methods. Most of the selected projects address the policy priority “Teaching and teachers” in Schools and VET sectors and “Digital education and competences”.

A **new feature** of 2020 was the call for proposals for the creation of **Centers of Vocational Excellence** (CoVEs). CoVEs aim to provide high-quality vocational skills, support entrepreneurial activities, and act as knowledge and innovation hubs for companies (particularly small and medium-sized enterprises). More than 1 300 partner organisations across 55 consortia from all 27 EU Member States and 25 non-EU countries applied for funding. The average quality of the proposals was excellent. The **selected projects will establish business-education partnerships for apprenticeships**, internships, and work together with partners to anticipate future skills needs. This will help provide young people with high-quality vocational skills, empowering them to land their first job, and enabling both young workers and adults to better thrive in the future world of work. The CoVEs will actively contribute to the partnerships for upskilling and re-skilling of the workforce **in the context of the European Pact for Skills**.



One of the newly-selected **Capacity Building Higher Education projects** promoted by the partnership of the University of Pretoria, University of Fort, University of Limpopo, University of Venda, University of Mpumalanga and the Southern African Wildlife College (SA) together with the European University of Utrecht (NL) and the University of Bologna (IT), aims to boost innovative research capacities in health and welfare management. This is being done through the creation of a multidisciplinary Health Network and a virtual research platform. Collaboration will be initiated and enhanced between government authorities and local communities. **In South Africa**, inclusiveness also means addressing some of the needs highlighted in the **National Development Plan 2030** and the Agricultural Policy Action Plan (APAP). This action plan seeks to strengthen and promote broad-based black economic empowerment (BBBEE). In this light, **the ELEPHANT project will address this priority through ensuring the full participation of historically disadvantaged communities** in mainstream agricultural value-chains.

In 2020, **the Agency's monitoring approach** was based on risk assessment of all projects. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all planned in-situ events and various types of bilateral and multilateral meetings took place online, using a variety of ICT tools. Kick-off meetings and other monitoring meetings for projects selected in 2019 and 2020 were organised to provide essential support in the early stages of project implementation and for those preparing their progress reports.

Throughout the year, the Agency strove to remain in close contact with beneficiaries and provided advice and support during the challenging circumstances caused by the pandemic. The Agency organised online events, and published video tutorials and FAQs advising on project implementation under COVID-19 restrictions.

A **task force** was set up to support the Intra-Africa and Erasmus Mundus schemes and respond to the many questions received concerning the **payment of scholarships to students**. This task force met more than 125 times (at least twice a week) to treat more than 600 questions leading to 19 amendments and more than 150 registered derogations to various conditions.

The digital platforms, such as the **School Education Gateway, EPALE, eTwinning** and the Youth Wiki, continued to be crucial sources of information and knowledge for schoolteachers and educators during the confinement.

The **Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (EVE)** project ended on 30 December 2020. It ran as a pilot project from 2018 to 2020 with 33 541 participants. The exchanges were led by facilitators and designed to produce specific learning outcomes, such as intercultural dialogue, critical thinking, media literacy, active citizenship and 21st century soft skills to boost employability. In total, 49.1% of participants came from the Southern Mediterranean region and 50.6% from EU countries.

The 2020 EVE impact study showed that there was a significant increase in participants' self-esteem and intercultural communication skills after participating in Virtual Exchange. A 2020 survey of participants showed 91% perceived that they had improved their communication skills, 84%, their critical thinking skills and 79%, their foreign language skills. Meanwhile, 72% felt they had built meaningful relationships through the programme.

The evaluation of projects' progress and final reports in 2020 revealed a high quality of results and confirmed the dedication and commitment by project promoters. However, the evaluations also, understandably, highlighted the challenges imposed on project implementation by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the field of **Vocational Education and Training**, the Sector Skills Alliances project described below is an example demonstrating the link to EU priorities as well as synergies between education and culture sectors:

The **MUseum Sector Alliance (Mu.SA)** project helped to close the digital skills gap in the cultural sector. To help **professionals working in museums and other cultural organisations acquire missing digital skills**, the partnership from Greece, Italy and Portugal prepared specific trainings aligned with various competency frameworks. The training courses were flexible, had a modular structure and focused on students' learning outcomes. They are freely available at <http://www.project-musa.eu/results/oers/>

In the field of **Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE)** the Agency held the **Central Asia regional cluster meeting**. This very successful meeting on the implementation success of CBHE projects in Central Asia was held in November 2020 together with the Central Asian National Erasmus+ Offices and with the support of the Ministries of Educations of the Central Asian Countries. More information about the event is available here: https://erasmusplus.kg/ca_cluster_meeting/

To support the transition to the new Erasmus+ programme and to ensure the continuity of activities by the **National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs)**, the agreements with the NEOs were extended until the end of 2021. To discuss the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, several meetings were held with NEOs in Belarus, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo during 2020.

Another example of excellent project results is the Sport project below.



The Funball project supports "Building solid and healthy FUNdamentals for volleyball in early age (6-9) group" <https://funball.zos.hr/> The new FUN for volleyBALL project was set up – called FUNBALL for short – to address the lack of adequate non-specialised programmes covering the fundamentals of volleyball for young people in Croatia, Italy, France, Slovenia and Slovakia.

The main objective was to encourage children to participate in sport and physical activity with a focus on affirmation of volleyball within as large as possible group of children; to develop fundamental movement and improvement of general motor skills, and to promote and raise children's awareness of the benefits and importance of daily physical exercise for their current and future health, and for leading a productive life.

To reach these objectives, the project developed an innovative training programme and produced multiple high-quality transferable results that include specialised training programmes, handbooks for practitioners, research papers and diverse multimedia content: <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details/#project/590816-EPP-1-2017-1-HR-SPO-SCP>

1.2 Creative Europe



In cooperation with DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) and DG Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CNECT), the Agency contributes to the implementation of the Creative Europe Programme 2014-2020 and to its General Objectives. In accordance with its mandate, the Agency implements the actions of the Creative Europe Work Programme 2020. It has been entrusted with activities under the following parts of the programme:

- Culture sub-programme
- MEDIA sub-programme
- Cross-sectoral strand (in particular support to the Creative Europe Desks)



The **Creative Europe programme** is the flagship means of support for the cultural and creative sectors. It has been critical for promoting Europe's cultural diversity as well as the competitiveness of the cultural and creative sectors.

The cultural and creative sector was one of the first and hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis. In response to the catastrophic impact that the pandemic and the consequent restrictive measures had on these sectors, the Agency put in place flexible measures for grants in order to mitigate the negative consequences of the crisis, including postponement of deadlines and grant extensions.

Under the **Culture sub-programme**, which is the only funding instrument supporting transnational cultural cooperation, selections were completed for the **2020 Cooperation Projects** call which represents 60% of the sub-programme's budget. The results showed that proposals have concentrated on how arts and cultural activities can offer time and space for the development of an empowered citizenship and the development of a critical approach to current issues. Cultural operators in 34 eligible countries submitted applications and the coordinators of the proposed selected projects are based in 25 countries, thereby reaching 627 cooperation partners and ensuring a good geographical spread. Mapping of the projects highlighted the Commission priorities addressed, policy-related issues and cultural sectors involved.

A high degree of interest was shown by applicants in response to the specific call to address **cultural cooperation projects in the Western Balkans** region, an initiative funded by the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance and delegated to the Agency by DG NEAR. Overall, 320 applications were received – exceeding expectations – with a high number of proposals whose coordinators were based in the target region.

In October, more than 500 beneficiaries involved in the cooperation projects attended the online kick-off meeting. The project coordinators and partner organisations received guidance information in parallel with session on the practical requirements and political priorities allowing them to make further links to their projects.

The calls for the renewal of the final year of activity of the **European Platforms and Networks** were finalised while the Agency contributed to the design of the successor calls, which are of strategic importance for structuring the culture and creative sectors at European level. For the **Support to Literary translation projects** an additional amount of EUR 1 million was allocated to support publishers, and notably small publishers in the difficult circumstances of the pandemic.

The results of several actions launched under the **MEDIA sub-programme** during the first half of 2020 show a reduction in the number of applications submitted compared to 2019. At the same time, submissions actions such as Slate Funding saw an increase of almost 50% compared to the previous year.

The current crisis will have a significant impact on some of the supported actions and on the audiovisual industry in general. Activities have been cancelled, suspended or delayed with a significant impact on the eligible costs and cash-flow and co-financing capacities of the beneficiaries.

To support the audiovisual industry and mitigate cash-flow problems, the Guidelines for **Distribution Automatic and Sales Agent support** were amended to increase the pre-financing payment. Deadlines in the **Festivals and Promotion of European Audiovisual Works Online** actions were extended to take into account the difficult situation in many European countries at the beginning of the lockdown.

With decisions to close cinemas across a number of European countries in response to COVID-19, this is undeniably one of the most challenging period faced by European cinemas in their long history. An additional pre-financing payment of EUR 6 million was made to **Europa Cinema** which was tasked with cascading the grant down to individual theatres before the summer. A remote kick-off meeting was consequently organised with the specific purpose of discussing with the beneficiary the challenges of 2021 and the general aim of improving mutual communication and cooperation.

Despite the unprecedented circumstances, the relevance of the programme remains high, showing the valuable support offered in the audiovisual field. Several films and series that received **MEDIA development funding** have been circulating across Europe and selected for premieres at European and international festivals. The projects that received MEDIA support show that the MEDIA logo is a label of quality and increases international value. Furthermore, the variety of partners involved in the supported projects show a very important European dimension with different European partners involved from various fields. The projects supported in recent years have also experimented with technology, releasing the first Virtual Reality experiences.

For the 33rd European Film Awards, 18 films that received EU funding through the Creative Europe MEDIA programme were nominated. Overall, over EUR 3 million were invested through the programme to support the development and distribution of the 18 films.

While pending agreement on the political negotiations, the contracts for the 41 **Creative Europe Desks**, which were set to run until 31 December 2020 have been extended for 6 months. The Desks which are supported through the **cross-sectoral strand** provide a wide range of services from promoting, encouraging and facilitating cross-border cooperation to assisting organisations with their applications, organising specific info-days and workshops as well as advising potential applicants. The meetings that took place with the Creative Europe

Desks Culture & MEDIA coordination group, chaired by DG EAC, confirmed the continuation and evolution of the network in the next programme.

The call **Bridging culture and audiovisual content through digital**, which was introduced under the **cross-sectoral strand**, saw a 76% increase in applications submitted (112 vs 63) compared to the same call in 2019. This highlighted the trend and interest in innovative approaches. The action will be further developed in the next programming period.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the Agency received more than 100 official notifications from beneficiaries signalling problems related to the impact of COVID-19 on their projects and asking for guidance. Beneficiaries of the Networks, Platforms and Literary Translation calls sent collective open letters to the whole sector, as well as to a large number of direct and indirect beneficiaries.

To compensate for the lockdown measures in Europe, monitoring activities shifted online and emphasis was placed on communication with beneficiaries. Online kick-off meetings were organised with the objective of providing beneficiaries with useful information on technical aspects of the implementation of the project including the contractual obligations, amendment rules, reporting and payment arrangements.

While the sector as a whole does not consider the digital shift to be the best solution to the current crisis, feedback also showed that the pandemic represented an opportunity to renew certain practices.

1.3 Europe for Citizens



The Europe for Citizens programme continues to bring Europe closer to its citizens and to enable them to participate fully in the European project. It supports remembrance projects, think-tanks and civil society organisations at EU level, town twinning, citizens' meetings and networks, civil society projects, and information structures in Member States and participating countries.

In 2020 the Agency received in response to the calls launched under the programme almost 2 000 applications from 33 countries all over Europe and beyond – an overwhelming response that shows just how much creative and imaginative action is being taken by citizens, cultural actors and campaigners across Europe to mobilise democracy.

Following the adoption of the 2020 General Budget of the European Union, an additional amount of EUR 1 million was allocated to the Europe for Citizens budget for 2020. The importance of the programme has also been confirmed by the increase in budget approved for the successor programme Citizens, Equality Rights and Values (CERV).

The CERV programme will incorporate features from the different evaluation processes carried out by the Agency, including the revision of eligibility and award criteria, and the introduction of a system of ‘cascading grants’ for further simplification. Concerning the calls for Town Twinning and Networks of Towns, the launch of two rounds per year has proven not to be cost-effective for the Agency nor beneficial for the applicants. It has therefore been agreed to reduce the call to one single round for each action per year as from 2021. Merging both calls into one single call is also envisaged under the new programme.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, numerous amendment requests were received from ongoing Town Twinning, Networks of Towns, Remembrance and Civil Society projects requesting an extension of eligibility periods beyond the limit of the contracts, as the nature of some projects involves the implementation of short-duration physical meetings.

While providing support to beneficiaries, the Agency also reinforced communication with the National Contact Points about the flexibility measures in place.

In order to ensure the continuity of activities for the operating grants, an additional amount of EUR 6.8 million was granted and the Framework Partnership Agreements covering the period 2018-2020 were extended

In terms of monitoring, activities shifted online and beneficiaries were provided with constant support. Moving certain of the beneficiaries’ activities online facilitated monitoring, as was the case for the Webinar ‘COVID-19: A threat to liberal democracy in the EU?’ featuring Commissioner Reynders.

Despite the circumstances, EACEA cooperated with DG JUST to organise an online panel discussion for the 18th European Week of Regions and Cities, the biggest annual Brussels-based event dedicated to regional policy. The event took place on 6 October 2020 under one of the three general cluster themes of the 2020 edition: Empowering Citizens. Given the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and its direct impact on citizens’ daily life and engagement, the theme of the session was particularly timely: ‘No lockdown for e-democracy: The promises and challenges of local e-democracy projects in Europe’.

Overall, the supported projects contribute to the construction of the Future of Europe by creating spaces for expression, debate and exchange about the future of Europe and promote the European Tools of Citizens’ Participation. Strong links with the citizens were also established in the Civil Society project coordinated by Lunaria Associazione di Promozione Sociale, whose activities focused on analysing political discourses that exacerbate xenophobia, intolerance and discriminations against migrants, refugees and minorities, and to improve the capacity of citizens, Civil Society Organisations and institutions to prevent and respond to hate speech.

Europe for Citizens projects were brought together by EUROM – the EUROpean Observatory on Memories in the context of the conference entitled “Taking stock of European memory policies contributing to promote a deeper understanding of the history and values of the EU to preserve its democratic future”. EUROM is a transnational network of institutions and organizations committed to the analysis and promotion of public policies of memory. It aims to reflect on the recent history of the struggle for democracy and freedom in Europe, advocating for a plurality of memories.

1.4 EU Aid Volunteers



The EU Aid Volunteers (EU AV) initiative brings together volunteers and organisations from different countries, provides practical support to humanitarian aid projects, and contributes to

a strengthening of local capacity, resilience and disaster risk management in fragile or disaster-affected communities.

2020 marked the last year of EU AV implementation. The humanitarian aid volunteering component will, from 2021, be integrated into the new European Solidarity Corps programme as a specific programme strand.

DG ECHO, in cooperation with the Agency, carried out an evaluation of the overall EUAV implementation and the results are expected in the first quarter of 2021.



The final deadline for applying for the multiannual open call for EUAV Certification, which is a necessary for Sending and Host Organisations to submit a grant application, was 30 September 2020. The number of applications received between January and September 2020 exceeded expectations (120 applications for certification against 35 planned in the 2020 Annual Work Plan). The peak of applications for certification was in June, due to the upcoming deadline for the last EU-Aid deployment call in early July.

The last Deployment call for proposals was launched in May. The Agency received 18 applications – the highest number ever – requesting a total budget of EUR 19.7 million for around 650 volunteers involving 250 organisations. **Eventually, due to consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on deployment projects**, DG ECHO instructed the Agency **to terminate the 2020 Deployment call**. The reasons which led to this decision are linked to the magnitude and duration of the impact which could not be anticipated at the date of publication of the call. The safety and security of volunteers is an essential requirement of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. **Major and mandatory elements of the initiative could no longer be implemented in line with the programme’s legal base**. In particular, the preparatory face-to-face training session had to be first postponed and then cancelled as from spring 2020 due to the travel restrictions and the need for social distancing. Most currently running deployment projects funded under previous selections had to be interrupted and most volunteers were repatriated to their home countries. As a result, implementing the EU Aid Volunteers initiative deployment call for proposals 2020 would not have been possible in compliance with the requirements of the Regulation and within a reasonable timeframe.

In February the Agency organised a **kick-off meeting for Technical Assistance and Capacity Building projects** selected in 2019, and a mid-term review meeting with projects selected in previous years. The mid-term review meeting was a new monitoring concept introduced for the first time in 2020. The beneficiaries appreciated the networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities during these events.

From March 2020 onwards, monitoring activities focused on mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on volunteering activities. Beneficiaries of the EUAV programme have been significantly impacted.

¹⁷ EUAV certification framework.

The Agency organised two larger **virtual meetings with EU Aid Volunteers beneficiaries** – one in May and a follow-up meeting in October – focusing on the COVID-19 situation and measures for adapting actions to the new circumstances. **FAQs** (agreed with DG ECHO and regularly updated) were published on the EACEA website. A high number of volunteers had to be evacuated during the first months of the pandemic and **many continued their deployment via online activities**. An example is an experience of Denis, EUAV volunteer in the Philippines:

*“Looking back at my recent months in the Philippines defined by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown, I remain under the impression of having been through the strangest months of my life. Although I had to adapt overnight to a completely new living and working environment, these new circumstances were an **opportunity for self-discovery**. The situation allowed me to **tackle professional challenges** such as presenting to various stakeholders my organisation’s COVID-19 response and adapting projects with donors to provide medical centres and beneficiaries with masks and disinfectants.*

Living in Manila during COVID-19** was neither boring nor dull. And not only because the confinement measures were adapted every two weeks. In **this new world, I learned again to work, socialize and even enjoy some much-needed leisure moments. Despite everything, I also believe that I learned a lot about the Philippines and myself.

A high number of projects required postponement of their activities (asking for an extension of eligibility periods and/or deadlines for submission of final reports). The obligatory in-situ volunteer training courses, usually organised in different European countries, had to be cancelled. For the majority of deployment projects selected in 2019 this meant that for more than a year they could not start to deploy volunteers to third countries.

The **volunteer training programme has been significantly impacted by the pandemic**. The training cycles planned from April onwards had to be cancelled due to travel restrictions and social distancing requirements. The expected number of volunteers to be trained in 2020 (1 200) has not been reached. Only 54 volunteers were able to follow the last training course held in Pisa at the end of February 2020. It is expected that the online part of the training course will resume in spring 2021 and that the face-to-face training course will follow.

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, **volunteer insurance service provision continued without major incidents**. Currently, there are only around 60 volunteers deployed instead of the 500 planned.

1.5 Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme



The mobility scheme, financed under the Pan-Africa Programme, promotes higher education cooperation between countries in Africa. It aims to improve the skills and competences of students and staff in African countries through networking, mobility, institutional support and innovation between African countries.

Financial support is granted to partnerships between African higher education institutions (HEIs) for the organisation and implementation of student and staff mobility across the continent.



1 call for proposals launched



148 proposals received



6 events



In 2020, the results of the Intra-ACP students' satisfaction survey were published. The **publication is a collection of more than 900 completed questionnaires**, in which an overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that the Intra-ACP Academic Mobility Scheme had had a **favourable effect on their personal development, skillset and professional growth**. At the same time, it identified potential challenges for further reflection.

The 4th and **last call of the Intra-Africa academic mobility scheme**, promoted with the support of the African Union and Embassies of African countries in Brussels and the EU Delegations to the African countries, closed on 19 May and attracted a remarkably high number of applications compared to the past (148 compared to 75 applications in 2019). The participation in the last call confirms the continued attractiveness of the scheme and the interest of African HEIs in this mobility action. As a result, seven projects were selected, covering all five African regions. In total, 29 higher education institutions from 20 African countries are involved.

In this last selection, the countries with the highest participation were South Africa, followed by Nigeria and Uganda. Two countries were also involved as Lead applicant for the first time (Côte d'Ivoire and Mozambique) as well as three newcomer institutions as Lead applicant.

Among the thematic fields prioritised by the call for proposals, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) were favoured by the majority of the best proposals. This was also in line with the continental priorities. Moreover, health sciences is also a focus area of two selected projects in view of responding to existing and **emerging medical health challenges** and for strengthening the capacity of the health sector in Africa.

To support the project implementation in its early stages, the Agency organised a kick-off meeting for the 2019 generation of projects in Brussels on 6-7 February with 60 participants representing the selected projects. The objective was to provide the project representatives with information and guidance on the management of the projects, to train the staff involved in the daily management of the project activities, and to share experience and good practices. The event was also an opportunity for bilateral discussions between beneficiaries and Agency officers monitoring the implementation of their projects.

Implementation of the mobility activities during the COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges. Due to the closure of many universities, the interruption of academic activities, and the impact of travel restrictions, a large number of selected students and staff were affected. Projects had to deal with scholarship holders stuck in the host country at the end of their mobility period due to the closure of the borders. Some had to interrupt their academic activities and prolong the mobility period; some newly selected students had to postpone the start of their mobility. Based on the principle of force majeure and the guidelines provided by the Commission services, the Agency addressed the various requests from the projects to support smooth implementation of the activities under difficult circumstances.

All Intra-Africa projects are still on-going and progressing well in achieving the desired results. The value and impact of the Intra-Africa programme on individual students can be demonstrated through the following quote from a student who benefitted from the **Intra-Africa scholarship**: *"It has been a great life experience because I was able to learn a lot, even more than I expected, both from a professional and personal point of view. During this first year I developed several extra activities, including a partnership with the United States Embassy in Maputo, to give lectures on entrepreneurship and youth empowerment. This*

opportunity gave me much more than I expected and enabled me to have high knowledge in sociology and sustainable development”.

1.6 European Solidarity Corps



The European Solidarity Corps is the EU's programme for promoting solidarity as a value, mainly through volunteering. It aims to enhance the engagement of young people and organisations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities. The activities carried out in the reporting period were implemented in line with the objectives defined in the Annual Work Programme while also addressing the 2019–2024 European Commission priority **‘Promoting our European way of life’**.



Organisations willing to send or host volunteers need to obtain the Solidarity Corps Quality Label (QL). A central call for quality label applications has been open throughout the duration of the current programme. The Agency managed two¹⁸ QL evaluation of applications submitted by international organisations and Europe-wide networks¹⁹. Due to this limited scope, the number of applications (10) was low.

The Agency managed the selection of the call for proposals EAC/A05/2018 on Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas, which was published in December 2018 with an amendment in July 2019 (Annual Work Plan 2019). The original deadline for this call was postponed from September 2019 to 24 January 2020. Although a dedicated information event was organised (and web-streamed) in November 2019, the call did not attract a satisfactory number of applications (8). The total budget earmarked for the co-financing of projects under this call was EUR 1.2 million. The requested budget of the eligible proposals amounted to EUR 514 000 and was thus far below the available amount. One reason for the low number of applications in this round could be that there were only 4 months between the last call deadline and the next one. The award decision resulted in seven successful projects starting the eligibility period in September 2020.

For the subsequent call (EAC/A03/2019), which was published on 11 November 2019 with a deadline of 17 September 2020 and an available budget of EUR 1.1 million, the number of proposals increased to 26. The requested budget of the eligible proposals was EUR 1.2 million. The number of successful projects selected was 15 with an awarded amount of EUR 1.1 million. The calls for both selections allowed flexibility in terms of the starting date of

¹⁸ one evaluation has not been completed yet.

¹⁹ QL applications by other types of organisations were submitted to and evaluated by ESC National Agencies.

volunteering activities, which is probably why the projects have not yet indicated difficulties for the implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first analysis of the action **Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas** (2018-2020) shows that for the total of 33 selected projects, 28 different organisations from 10 different participating countries were involved (top: Greece, Italy and Spain). In total 81 organisations contributed from 31 different countries, with the same group of leading countries, closely followed by Turkey, Portugal, Belgium and Poland. The participation of Neighbourhood Countries varies but is led by Ukraine, Morocco and Georgia. This shows that the international character of this action with cross-border activities is well reflected in the selected proposals. Overall, 2 000 volunteers between 18 and 30 years old had the opportunity to engage in solidarity activities. Of these, 30% were expected to be young people with fewer opportunities, thus aiming to achieve one of the policy requirements. In terms of the priority areas, projects could tackle more than one topic. The preferred areas were **inclusive societies and integration**, covered by 20 projects, and response to **environmental and climate** challenges, addressed by 19 projects.

The **General Online Training (GOT)** platform offers training courses in the form of **non-formal learning for young people and volunteers**. As a supporting measure to the European Solidarity Corps, the purpose is to make training sessions available to volunteers prior to deployment. The platform was launched in November 2020 and contains 22 online courses with more than 40 videos and 300 library resources. The courses are designed to match the different stages of the volunteering experience. Videos are subtitled and content is available in 28 languages with inclusive features. Guidebooks for organisations are also made available in all the programme languages. To better reach the target group (young people between 17 and 30 years old) experiences and testimonials from volunteers are also available online. Over 200 000 volunteers are registered on the platform. Further planned initiatives include EU Youth Talks designed in the TED Talks format.

<https://europeansolidaritycorpsgot.eu/my/index.php?lang=en>

The Agency worked with DG EAC to prepare the **new European Solidarity Corps programme**, particularly on the **Quality Label for the humanitarian aid strand** and on **humanitarian aid volunteering**, which will only be launched in 2022.

The Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas action will continue under the new programme with a **focus on health issues in 2021**.

1.7 Liaison with other services and policy feedback



The Agency continued to work closely with the parent DGs while contributing to the definition of the new programmes.

Highlights of the Agency's achievements in policy support include the following initiatives:

- **Creative Europe Monitoring report 2019**. The Agency provided input and examples of successful projects selected for support. The analysis of the results provided an opportunity to review certain elements in preparation for the next programme. The eligibility criteria for the EU ownership of the applicant companies under the MEDIA sub-programme led to discussions with DG CNECT with a view to redesigning this criterion for the 2021 Work Programme.

- **Music Moves Europe.** EACEA colleagues were regularly involved in the evaluations of the DG EAC 2019 calls for proposals under the preparatory action ‘Music Moves Europe: Boosting European diversity and talent’.

- Examples of projects were collected in the **Europe for Citizens Results 2019** brochure, published in 2020. The report, initially produced together with DG HOME, includes a foreword from Commissioner Reynders and provides an overview of the Europe for Citizens programme implementation in 2019, together with data measuring the overall impact for the period 2014-2019. It also includes policy feedback per action on the main achievements, and examples of good projects selected or monitored in 2019. The report highlights the importance of the programme’s wide geographical spread, providing useful elements for the design of the priorities and objectives of the next programme.

For the **Erasmus+ programme**, the Agency produced a report on **implementation of the concept of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus**. This study, which was begun in 2019, was based on a macro-analysis of the national and regional legal environments in the Erasmus+ Programme Countries and a micro-analysis at project level. The results will be useful for the European Universities action and will feed into the relevant policies of DG EAC.

Synthesis reports presenting the implementation results of the **EQAVET** 2017-2019 projects, the **Joint Qualification in VET** projects, **Social Inclusion** 2016 projects and **Sector Skills Alliances** (SSA 2015 generation) have been completed and submitted to the Commission. The reports provide an insight into strengths and successes, and point towards areas in need of continued development. They also present good practices for dissemination and valorisation purposes.

To mark the **40th anniversary of the Eurydice network and the 5th anniversary of the Youth Wiki**, the Agency developed a comprehensive celebratory campaign which included a video message from Commissioner Mariya Gabriel; short video clips presenting the Eurydice and Youth Wiki Networks²⁰; ‘Happy birthday – selfie videos’ by National Units and National Correspondents; and Virtual discussion panels with Agency policy analysts and external speakers, discussing issues like Digital Education challenges and opportunities and Digital Skills²¹. A ‘happy birthday’ video which also gives a general overview of the Youth Wiki’s mission was created and shared on the Eurydice Facebook page and on the European Youth Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/EurydiceEU/>



²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/v=332136334893532>;
<https://www.facebook.com/EurydiceEU/posts/2500338676734898>;
<https://www.facebook.com/180307152071407/videos/673151783235593>

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/EurydiceEU/videos/387294675756745/>;
<https://www.facebook.com/EurydiceEU/videos/882530345619021/>;
<https://www.facebook.com/EurydiceEU/videos/697710441130315/>

Regular structural dialogue meetings were organised with the parent DGs to discuss progress in preparation of the new programmes, the planning of upcoming selections, monitoring issues - including feedback from monitoring activities - identifying success stories, and future changes to the calls.

The Agency also published the following, education policy reports:

National student fees and financial support systems in European higher education:

The report presents a comparative overview of the main features of national student fee and financial support systems in European higher education in the 2020/21 academic year.

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/01ea3b55-5160-11eb-b59f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-184435368>

Structural indicators: The report contains more than 35 updated structural indicators on education policies for the 2019/20 school/academic year in six policy areas: **early childhood education and care** (ECEC), achievement in **basic skills, early leaving from education and training** (ELET), **higher education, graduate employability and learning mobility**. It additionally provides a short overview of the major reforms since the start of the 2014/15 school/academic year in these policy areas.

Part of the information in this report was published in the Education and Training Monitor 2020. Link: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1538f2e6-3907-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-178475363>

The Bologna Process Implementation Report highlighted the **progress made over two decades on mobility, quality assurance and recognition**. Degree structures in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have been reformed so that bachelor, master and doctoral programmes are commonplace, and systems are understandable across national borders. Today, 49 countries participate in the European Higher Education Area and total student numbers have reached more than 38 million. The report also points to **work needed for the future, including tackling equity issues and supporting under-represented groups to access and successfully complete higher education programmes**. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c90aaf32-4fce-11eb-b59f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-183354043>

Schematic information on the structure of mainstream educational systems in European countries: This report illustrates schematic information on the structure of mainstream educational systems in European countries, **from pre-primary to tertiary level**. It includes national schematic diagrams, a guide to reading the diagrams and a map showing the main organisational models of primary and lower secondary education. The information is available for 43 European educational systems covering 38 countries participating in the Erasmus+ programme. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f4784939-1f15-11eb-b57e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search>

Equity in school education in Europe: The report provides an overview of education structures and policies that influence equity in school education. It connects these system-level features to student performance in international student assessment surveys (PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS). <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a18e3a88-1e4d-11eb-b57e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-170147202>

Teachers' and School Heads' Salaries and Allowances in Europe 2018/19: The comparative overview examines the statutory salaries for new teachers, and the prospects for salary increases throughout their career. Teachers' remuneration and career prospects are an intrinsic part of policies aiming to attract the best-qualified graduates and retain the best teachers. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/90e96d48-11bd-11eb-9a54-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-166346631>

The Organisation of the Academic Year in Europe 2020/21: This publication, based on national data, gives accurate information on the beginning of the academic year, term times,

holidays and examination periods. Differences between university and non-university study programmes are also highlighted. The information is available for 37 countries. <https://op.europa.eu/en-GB/publication-detail/-/publication/75464545-1346-11eb-9a54-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

The Organisation of School Time in Europe - Primary and General Secondary Education 2020/21: The report gives national data on the length of the school year. For instance, the number of school days varies between 165 days in Albania and 200 days in Denmark and Italy. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7260fb98-0dcc-11eb-bc07-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search>

Mobility Scoreboard: Higher Education Background Report – 2018/19: The purpose of the [Mobility Scoreboard](#) is to provide a framework for monitoring progress made by European countries in promoting and removing obstacles to learning mobility. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0f751de6-5782-11ea-8b81-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-120474453>

The Eurydice network also examined **COVID-19's impact on education** in five online **Focus On articles**. These articles analyse how the pandemic has affected education systems (schools, higher education, online teaching and online safety issues).

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 monitors the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis, and by internal and external auditors. The results are explicitly documented²² and reported to the Director.

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

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

2.1.1 Control results

This section reports on and assesses the elements supporting the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives²³. The Agency's assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in AAR Annex 5. Annex 6 outlines the main risks together with the control processes to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the relevant control systems.

The report's scope is comprehensive. It includes the legacy programmes, and the programmes from the 2014-2020 programming period. Indications of the level of error and payment appropriations are detailed by programme. The control results are complete and reliable, thus providing the necessary assurance to draw conclusions on the control objectives for each phase of the grant management process.

In 2020, there are no such cases for EACEA to be reported on:

- Confirmation of instructions (FR art 92.3);
- Cases of financing not linked to costs (FR art 125.3)³⁴;
- Financial Framework Partnerships >4 years (FR art 130.4)
- Cases of flat rates >7% for indirect costs (FR art 181.6)

²² The following reports have been considered:

- The periodic reports submitted by the 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 reports on the ex-post audit results;
- The DG BUDG report on the validation of the local systems;
- The observations and recommendations reported by the Internal Audit Service (IAS);
- The observations and the recommendations reported by the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

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

Concerning derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity [of grants] pursuant to Art 193.2 FR, in 2020 there were no deviations filed in the register of exceptions and non-compliance events. For further details, see Annex 7.

In 2020, EACEA processed 6,775 payments under the operational budget and 594 payments under the operating (or administrative) budget.²⁴

Operating budget

Regarding the operating budget, the execution of 2020 commitment appropriations was EUR 49.9 million (99.73% of the available budget – EUR 50.094 million), which exceeds the target of 99%. The execution of **payment** appropriations against the 2019 commitments (C1+C8) was EUR 50.5 million (98.90%), which is just above the target of 96%. The total amount of payment appropriation in 2020 was **EUR 51.58 million**.

Operational budget

All the Agency's programmes are implemented under direct management mode. With regard to the operational budget, the execution of commitment credits was EUR 958.62 million or 98.87% of the available budget. If compared with EACEA's 2020 Work Programme, the commitment execution against C1 and C5 appropriations is 100%, in line with the target (100%). The execution of **payment** credits was **EUR 814.43 million**, representing 96.32% of the available budget. The payments against C1 and C5 appropriations reaches 100% and is above the target (99%).

These figures do not include the European Development Fund (EDF) relating to Intra ACP (Afrique Caraïbes Pacifique) allocations. For the sake of transparency, the corresponding appropriations are:

- Commitments: the execution amounts to EUR 12.62 million over the full year 2020 for a budget forecast of EUR 12.29 million (103% of execution rate).
- Payments: the payments executed amount to **EUR 9.29 million** over the full year 2020 (operational credits) against a planned budget of EUR 10.46 million (89% of execution rate). The payments executed starting from 1 July 2020 are EUR 7.28 million

The **total operational expenditure of the Agency amounts to EUR 814.43 million** for grant management (including experts and procurement and not including EDF). Given that the procurement share of this expenditure represents only 2.7% (and experts 0.5%)²⁵, the sub-total for grant management expenditure represents more than 90% of the total "payments made". Given the sheer predominance of grant management expenditure, the objectives, indicators and assessments in this section will cover only the related expenditures and revenues.

The net operational expenditure of the Agency for grant management is presented by programme and programming period as follows:

²⁴ Source: EACEA ACCOUNTING

²⁵Source: EACEA budget execution in terms of executed payments by 31.12.2020.

Overall Conclusion

Programming period 2007-2013					Programming period 2014-2020					Total
	Legacy	Internal control indicator available?	Independent info from auditors?	Reservation ?	Programme	Current programming period (2014-2020)	Internal control indicator available?	Independent info from auditors?	Reservation ?	Total in Mio €
Erasmus+ (1)	0,0					594,1				594,1
LLP	0,0	Multiannual detected error rate "DER" : 4,42% for LLP 2007-2013	Audited in previous years, notably by IAS (LLP). Follow-up finalised by the IAS in 2016 without comments.	No (nopayments: phasing out)	Erasmus+	594,1	Multiannual detected error rate "DER" : 0,57%.	Audited by the IAS: -in 2015 (Audit on the effectiveness and efficiency of Erasmus+ control strategy). - in 2017 (Audit on grant-management phase I)*. - in 2018 (Audit on grant management-phase II)* - Audit on ex post controls (phase III) concluded with 2 important recommendations under implementation.	No	594,1
Erasmus Mundus	0,0	Multiannual detected error rate "DER": 0,28% for Erasmus Mundus	Audited in previous years by the former IAC. Follow-up by the IAS in 2016 without comments.	No						
Tempus	0,0	Multiannual detected error rate "DER": 2,43% for Tempus	No	No (no payments: phasing out)						
Youth	0,0	N/A (programme phased-out)	N/A	N/A						
Sport	0,0	N/A	N/A	N/A						
Creative Europe	0,4					167,5				167,9
Culture and desks	0,4	Multiannual detected error rate "DER": 9,18%	Audited in previous years, notably by the former IAC. All recommendations implemented.	No due to de minimis rule	Creative Europe	167,5	Multiannual detected error rate "DER" : 1,62%	Audited by the IAS: -in 2017 (Audit on grant-management phase I)*. -in 2018 (Audit on grant management-phase II)* -Audit on ex post controls (phase III) concluded with 2 important recommendations under implementation.	No	167,9
MEDIA	0,0	N/A (programme phased-out)	N/A	N/A						
Europe for Citizens	0,0					22,0				22,0
Europe for Citizens	0,0	N/A (programme phased-out)	N/A	No		22,0	Multiannual detected error rate "DER" :0,96%	Audit on ex post controls (phase III) ended with 2 important recommendations under implementation.	No	22,0
Solidarity Corps	0,0					1,7				1,7
Solidarity Corps	0,0	N/A	N/A	N/A		1,7	Not yet available	No	No	1,7
EU Aid Volunteers	0,0					2,3				2,3
EU Aid Volunteers	0,0	N/A	N/A	N/A		2,3	Not yet available (2).	Audit on ex post controls (phase III) ended with 2 important recommendations under implementation.	No	2,3
TOTAL	0,4					787,6				787,984

(1) Includes Title 19 (FPI), Title 21 (DEVCO) and Title 22 (ELARG). See Annex for further details. - There are only two randomly audited projects on EU Aid Volunteers (with error equal to zero).

(2) For the overall calculation of the amount at risk, the Agency has used the 2020 multiannual average error rate.

* Both audits are closed, with related recommendations fully implemented

Based on the figures above, it is apparent that the legacy (2007-2013) is now fully in the phasing-out stage, only representing 0.05% of the total operational expenditure of 2020 (25% in 2016, 7% in 2017, 1.2% in 2018, 0.3% in 2019), with some payments executed only in the Culture programme.

1. Effectiveness = the control results and benefits

• Legality and regularity of the transactions

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

At each stage of the grant management cycle (in accordance with Annex 6) EACEA has in place the necessary controls to ensure the legality and regularity of the transactions. Often the benefits of the controls in place at each stage are non-quantifiable and 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.

A good indication of the outcome of the controls in place at each stage is the multiannual error rate by programme for the current programming period, which is below the 2% threshold for all programmes, as illustrated below (for further details, please see Annex 7 where this information is set out in a more comprehensive context):

Programming period 2014-2020	DER	RER	Reservation?
Erasmus+	0.57%	0.55%	No
Creative Europe	1.62%	1.58%	No
Europe for Citizens	0.96%	0.92%	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

DER= multiannual detected error rate; RER= multiannual residual error rate - see Annex 4 for more details.

For 2014-2020²⁶, EACEA has calculated the detected error rates (DER) by programme using the error amount detected in ex-post audits over the EACEA share of audited population related to those audited projects. This methodology addresses the concerns of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) regarding a methodological weakness in the way a sample of Commission services calculated the error rate, leading to possible understatement of the rate. The revised EACEA methodology is also in line with DG BUDG's "Guidance on the calculation of the error rates, financial exposure as amount at risk, the materiality for a potential reservation and the impact on the AOD's declaration - 2019 version" (see further details in Annex 5).

During 2020, the Agency was able to carry out audits, all outsourced to an external contractor, despite the COVID19 pandemic. The contractor, following the adaptation of his methodology, managed to rapidly switch from "on the spot" to "remote" audit assignments,

In conclusion, controls are in place for each grant management stage and cover the entirety of the Agency's expenditures. Overall, they are effective, thus ensuring that the error rate level and the materiality of the amount at risk remain below 2% for the 2014-2020 programming period, so that no reservations on programmes are granted for the current reporting year.

Calculation of the amount at risk

EACEA's relevant expenditure, estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are presented in the following table. For EACEA, the estimated overall amount at risk at payment for the 2020 expenditure (EUR 866.01 million, including the operating and operational budget) is EUR 9.18 million²⁷, representing 1.8 % of the EACEA total relevant expenditure for 2020. This is the AOD's best, conservative estimation 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

²⁶ For the legacy programmes (2007-2013), the revised methodology has not been applied. The residual error rates (RERs) are higher than 2% for Tempus (2,22%), Youth in Action (3,12%) and Culture (8,87%). These legacy programmes are clearly phasing out, therefore the "De Minimis" rule applies (see section 2.1.3 for further details).

²⁷ In order to calculate the overall amount at risk: at payment

- For the 2007-2013 programming period, the Agency has used the multiannual detected error rates by programme. In terms of the revised calculation of the DER according to the ECA and DG BUDG indications, the legacy now only represents around 0.05% of the total operational expenditure of 2020 and this share will further decrease in the coming years. Therefore, no revision of the DER for the old programming period has been performed, due to the very limited potential impact on the amount at risk.
- For the 2014-2020 programming period, the Agency has for years followed a very prudent and conservative approach, using as a basis for the estimation for all programmes, both the programming periods and risk-based and random audits. For 2020, the overall average error rate is estimated at 1.67%. (1.79% last year due to a prudent top-up). The Agency also uses 1.67% as the AOD's best estimate for those programmes which do not have enough available audit results to show a meaningful error rate.

estimated future corrections²⁸ for 2020 expenditure amount to EUR 1.74 million²⁹. This is the conservative estimation of the amount affected by errors that the Agency will identify and correct thanks to controls implemented in subsequent years.

The difference between those two amounts results in the estimated overall risk at closure of EUR 7.4 million, representing 1.4% of the Agency's total relevant expenditure for 2020.

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

The amount at risk at payment and at closure are slightly lower this year compared to the stable trend observed in the previous years (e.g. the risk at payment was EUR 10.8 million in 2017, EUR 10.5 million in 2018, EUR 10.73 million in 2019). This reduction in 2020 is mainly due to the decreasing payments and relevant expenditure related to the programming period 2007-2013, which is currently phasing out. In addition, the old generation of programmes used to have higher error rates (above 2%), compared to the 2014-2020 programmes, 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 old programmes. It is also worth noting that in 2019 AAR the Agency used a specifically prudent average error rate for the programming period 2014-2020³⁰ equal to 1.79%, (based on an aggregated calculation), replaced this year by a detailed calculation, resulting in a rate of 1.67%. More details concerning the calculation can be found in the table below:

²⁸ The Agency has prudently recalculated its corrective capacity as equal to 0.35% (it was 0.34% in 2019). 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 (2,293 for 2020) had to be adjusted as it included corrections made prior to the payment (ex-ante).

²⁹ This amount is coherent with the historical average of ex-post control corrections linked to audits and in line with this year's corrections amounting to EUR 1.8 million.

³⁰ To cover the risk of underestimation which was generally raised by the ECA on the methodology used by some Commission Services to calculate the error rate. The aggregated calculation performed in 2019 within very short timeframe was replaced in 2020 with a refined calculation, in line with the revised methodology of the Agency to calculate the error rate.

Table X - Estimated risk at closure

in EUR	Payments Made in 2020	Prefinancing	Cleared pre-financing	Relevant expenditure	Average Error rate in %	Estimated overall amount at risk at payment	Average Recoveries and Corrections (Adjusted ARC) in %	Estimated future corrections and deductions	Estimated overall amount at risk at closure
Programming period 2007-2013									
Erasmus Mundus	0	0	9.633.875	9.633.875	0,28%	26.975	0,35%	33.254	
Tempus	0	0	1.129.476	1.129.476	2,43%	27.446	0,35%	3.899	
Youth in Action	0	0	69.392	69.392	3,20%	2.221	0,35%	240	
Culture	417.689	0	2.000.000	2.417.689	9,18%	221.944	0,35%	8.345	
MEDIA	0	0		0	0,53%	0	0,35%	0	
Citizenship	0	0	0	0	1,81%	0	0,35%	0	
Programming period 2014-2020									
Erasmus+	594.126.229	556.115.123	283.667.813	321.678.918	1,67%	5.374.406	0,35%	1.110.370	
Creative Europe	167.460.443	117.676.902	78.837.793	128.621.335	1,67%	2.148.923	0,35%	443.975	
Europe for Citizens	21.979.318	14.938.691	10.611.386	17.652.013	1,67%	294.919	0,35%	60.931	
EU Aid Volunteers	2.262.381	1.834.890	5.859.515	6.287.007	1,67%	105.039	0,35%	21.701	
Solidarity Corps	1.738.259	1.586.849	0	151.410	1,67%	2.530	0,35%	523	
Experts	4.394.369	0	0	4.394.369	0,50%	21.972	0%	0	
Procurement	22.056.287	0	1.868.191	23.924.478	0,50%	119.622	0%	0	
TOTAL (without EDF)	814.434.975	692.152.455	393.677.441	515.959.962		8.345.997		1.683.238	6.662.759
EDF	9.289.956	8.711.352	18.609.228	19.187.832	1,67%	320.578	0,35%	66.232	254.346
	a	b	c	d= a-b+c		e	f	g=d x f	h='e-g
Administrative expenditure	51.582.234			Amount at risk on administrative expenditure		515.822			515.822
Expected Error rate on administrative expenditure:1%						i			i
Total payments	866.017.209	Total amount at risk at payments including on administrative expenditure: e+i				9.182.397			
		Total amount at risk at closure, including on administrative expenditure h+i							7.432.927
					In percentage of the total relevant expenditure				1,4%

-**Payments made in 2020**: the amounts related to procurement and experts are indicated separately, not per programme.

-**Average error rate in %**: for the 2007-2013 programming period, the Agency uses the multiannual detected error rates by programme. For the 2014-2020 programming period, the Agency uses a prudent approach, meaning an average error rate, combining both programming periods as well as random and risk-based audits.

-For **procurement and expert** payments the Agency uses a conservative rate of 0.5%, and for **administrative expenditure** a prudent rate of 1%.

- **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 three years, most recently in 2018, and is regularly monitored and reported on to management. All necessary actions have been implemented except for training and analysis of the new risks related to the new MFF. The missing actions will be considered and strengthened in the anti-fraud strategy 2021-2023.

The Agency contributed to the Commission anti-fraud strategy and followed up 100% of OLAF's financial recommendations.

Thanks to the anti-fraud measures in place, the following results were achieved in 2020:

- Strengthened cooperation and exchanges with OLAF and other DGs and Agencies through the FPDNet and FAIR network on horizontal matters, data collection and specific cases;
- Identification of double financing cases through improved IT tools made available to the operational units on the EACEA Intranet's Anti-Fraud page;
- Staff awareness raised through the continuous follow up of potential cases in collaboration with the teams and an anti-fraud corner in the weekly internal newsletters, as no training took place in 2020 due to the COVID-19 measures and reorganisation;
- Projects officers/experts' awareness of sound financial management and double financing was reinforced through online briefings and the use of specific IT tools;
- The risks linked to COVID-19 were analysed and addressed at corporate level; the identification and analysis of new risks linked to the new MFF and use of new corporate tools could only be partially implemented. Indeed the new MFF was approved late and there was very limited experience in the Agency of the new IT tools (e-grants, e-procurements and e-experts).

On the basis of the available information, the Agency has reasonable assurance that the anti-fraud measures in place are effective overall. The usual measures of prevention and detection such as audits and enforced monitoring are still in place, although due to the COVID-19 pandemic monitoring visits did not take place and some "on the field" visits by auditors were delayed.

The new EACEA anti-fraud strategy 2021-2023 will be developed in line with the Commission's anti-fraud strategy and the revised OLAF guidelines, considering new potential risks linked to the new MFF and COVID-19.

Collaboration with OLAF in 2020

In 2020, OLAF decided to open an investigation into four new cases. In addition, EACEA transmitted two cases to the parent DG before transmission to OLAF at the end of 2020, and five cases are still under analysis/treatment. Among the cases transferred to OLAF in the previous years, three investigations are still on-going.

One new OLAF report related to an investigation opened in 2017 was received and analysed in 2020.

A beneficiary that contested the recovery orders that were issued after an OLAF report and audit reports lost its appeal at the Court of Justice. The Court dismissed all the applicant's pleas.

The Agency dealt with nine new OLAF requests for information. OLAF dismissed three 2020 cases without investigations.

In conclusion, the number of investigations opened by OLAF in 2020 significantly increased compared to the previous years and closer cooperation took place for the management of the cases as well as for contributions to documents through the Fraud Prevention Detection Network.

The most significant data on fraud prevention, detection and correction are summarised below.

Indicator	Results
Participation in anti-fraud trainings (staff)	none (due to COVID-19/ reorganisation/ workload). Replaced by newsletters and case by case support.
Number of audits (1 risk-based and 2 random) having led to the identification/confirmation of serious irregularities/fraud	3
Number of new entities submitted to monitoring measures as a result of suspicious of irregularities/fraud	9 entities with 10 projects
Total amounts paid in the past related to these entities and subject to reinforced monitoring measures	EUR 2,683,322
Number of grant agreements or participation of a co-beneficiary terminated for serious irregularities/fraud	0
Number and amount of recoveries issued for serious irregularities/fraud	EUR 1,003,029.80 (2 beneficiaries, 4 projects)
Number of new cases sent to OLAF	3
New registration in Early Detection and Exclusion database	0

- **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 disposition 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 secured 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 = the Time-to-... indicators and other efficiency indicators

In 2020, the Agency improved efficiency in financial management through the implementation of new partially decentralised financial circuits (shifting from fully decentralised ones), as part of a new organisational structure intended to address the present and future challenges of the Agency (the new organisational structure has been operational since 16 March 2020).

The efficiency of the controls implemented at each stage is assessed, based on the most relevant indicators illustrated hereafter.

Time to Inform, Time to Grant and Time to Contract. According to the Financial Regulation, the Agency has 9 months after the call deadline to sign the selected grants (Article 194.2 of the FR). This deadline consists of two periods and two primary time limits to comply with: time to inform (TTI) and time to contract (TTC). The figures are as follows:

TTG	2018	2019	2020
Time to inform (TTI)-art 194.2 FR- maximum 6 months	4.7	4.4	4.8
Time to contract (TTC)-art 194.2 FR-max 3 months	2.3	2.1	2.4
Time to grant (TTG) (total of TTI and TTC) - max 9 months	7.0	6.5	7.1

The Agency meets the limits set by the Financial Regulation for the three indicators. As shown in the above table, the **TTG has slightly increased**³¹ compared to last year, due to a slight increase both in TTI and the TTC. The indicator remains in line with the average of the last 3 years.

Time-To-Pay (TTP)

A key indicator of the monitoring phase is 'Time-To-Pay' (TTP), which is defined as the

³¹ In 2020 some running selections have already informed the applicants (TTI), but are still in the process of contractualisation, so without TTC. That is why the sum TTI + TTC does not add up to 7.2.

amount accepted on time for payment (in percentage), within deadlines set by the Financial Regulation.

Concerning the operational budget, the results indicate a level of compliance with the payment deadlines of **95% of all payments processed on time** (98% in 2019).

Operational budget

Timely Payments	EA Score	EC Score
<p>0% 25% 50% 75% 100%</p> <p>EC (99%) 95%</p>	95%	99%

In 2020 the Agency was not able to counter the structurally low execution of the first months of the year, due to the need to direct efforts towards other processes, namely, the setting up of digital circuits to deal with the lockdown and the enforced teleworking situation.

For 2020 the Agency set an ambitious target (100% compliance) which has not been achieved (see table above). The average gross payment time for 2020 is equal to **27.3 days**³² (28.8 days in 2019).

Operating Budget

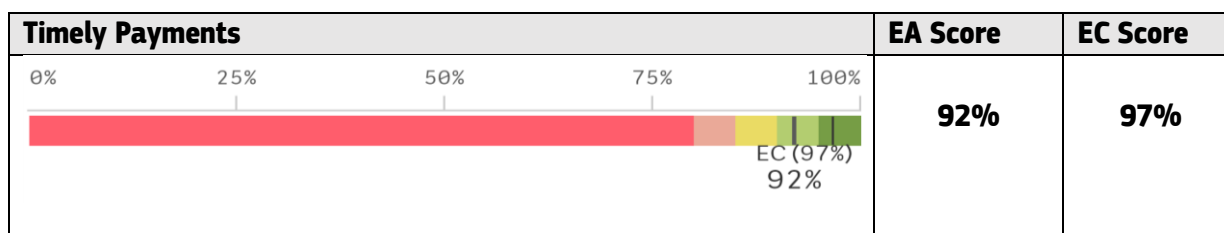
Timely Payments	DG Score	EC Score
<p>0% 25% 50% 75% 100%</p> <p>EC (98%) 98%</p>	98%	98%

EACEA achieved the same result as the Commission. This happened thanks to close monitoring of payments on the administrative budget. The new treasury management system and the follow-up of transactions with DG BUDG also played a significant role in achieving a positive result.

In 2020 the average **time to pay** on the operating budget was **15.4 days**, with **98%** total amounts paid on time, thus slightly improving on the 2019 average of 15.8 days.

³² Source: Annex 3, table 6 of AAR 2020

EDF payments



In 2020 The Agency was not able to counter the structurally low execution of the first months of the year, due to the need to direct efforts towards other processes, namely the setting up of digital circuits to deal with the lockdown and the enforced teleworking situation.

Another indicator signals EACEA's increased efficiency in managing its core business: running projects increased by 15% compared to 2019 (up to 7 210 from 6 289) and this with the total number of staff members remaining substantially unchanged.

3. Economy = the estimated cost of controls

In 2020 the total costs of grant management are EUR 47.5 million (EUR 50.9 million in 2019). The slight decrease is mainly due to more detailed calculation, achieved thanks to the greater visibility afforded by the new EACEA organisational structure. **In terms of payments executed, the ratio is** as follows: $47.5/801.67 = 5.92\%$ (7.13% in 2019). The improvement is due to both the increase of the amount managed and the decrease in the total costs of controls previously illustrated.

In addition, on the cost side, the Agency monitors the share of **operating costs over the operational budget** in terms of payments executed. In 2020 this ratio (EUR 51.6 million/ EUR 814.4 million) is **6.33%** (6.70% in 2019). This figure, which has remained relatively stable since 2014³³ (see below), shows a decreasing trend for the last 2 years and is considered to be adequate, both overall and also taking into account the Agency's cost drivers; in particular the increasing number of running projects in 2020 (+15% compared to 2019) and the typical small size of (labour intensive) grants to be processed.



³³ The figure in previous years was the following: (2014-7.41%), (2015-8.13%) (2016-7.20%) (2017-7.52%) (2018-7.37%), (2019-6.70%)

Concerning the benefits of the controls, in addition to the quantifiable benefits at each stage, there are several 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, thus 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.

The controls outlined above are a compulsory requirement for ensuring the compliance of appropriations. Taking into account that in 2020 the Agency respected the Time to Pay its beneficiaries in 95% of cases, while the controls in place kept the multiannual detected error rate by programme for the current programming period below 2% at a decreasing cost compared to the average of the last 7 years, EACEA considers that an adequate balance between the three elements (TTP, error rate and cost) has been reached and that 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 – 2019

In summer 2020, the European Court of Auditors issued its opinion related to the audit of the Agency's 2019 annual accounts for administrative expenditure.³⁴

Opinion on the reliability of the accounts

In the Court's opinion, the accounts of the Agency for the year ending on 31 December 2019 present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the

³⁴ The audit is performed each year in order to obtain reasonable assurance that the Agency's annual accounts are free of material misstatement and that the transactions processed by the Agency are legal and regular.

Agency, the results of its operations, its cash flows, and the changes in net assets for the year, in accordance with its Financial Regulation and with accounting rules adopted by the Commission's accounting officer 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 2019 and 2020

Concerning DAS 2019, three audits were concluded in 2020. Concerning DAS 2020, one audit was concluded with a finding relating to VAT. For other two audits, EACEA did not receive any conclusions by the end of 2020.

Internal Audit Service (IAS)

(1) Audit Engagements

Audit on Erasmus+ and Creative Europe – Grant Management phase III (ex post controls in the EACEA)

The final audit report related to this audit was delivered on 7 September 2020.

It contains two important recommendations including no significant issues. EACEA accepted those recommendations and presented an action plan, approved by the IAS on 19 October 2020. Even though both recommendations are broken down into sub-recommendations with respective intermediate milestones set for March 2021, the overall deadline for both recommendations is June 2021. The implementation is proceeding as planned.

Audit on the protection of personal data

On 14 September 2020 the IAS announced an audit on the protection of personal data of beneficiaries and participants of programmes under the responsibility of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME) and the Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA). The Opening meeting was held on 19 October, and the interview with the DPO of EACEA on 27 October 2020. The kick-off meeting has not taken place yet³⁵.

³⁵ It was expected to take place in January 2021, pending a decision on the scope of the audit. IAS informed the Agency that the audit would be substantially delayed. In the meantime, EACEA has been involved in the task force of DG EAC created to deal with recommendations made by the IAS in its audit on data protection in EAC, with a view to proactively share lessons learnt and improvement actions.

(2) Follow-up Engagements

Audit on Erasmus+ and Creative Europe – Grant Management phase II (from project monitoring to payment)

The Follow-up engagement for this audit was announced on 17 January 2020³⁶.

In September 2020 EACEA completed the implementation of the remaining three Important recommendations³⁷. Consequently, all recommendations have been flagged as implemented in the IAS's IT tool by the agreed deadline. The follow-up was concluded by the IAS on 15 January 2021 and all recommendations have been closed.

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

Based on all work undertaken by the Internal Audit Service in the period 2018-2020, namely, **Audit on Erasmus+ and creative Europe – grant management Phase II** (from project management to payment) in EACEA (2018), and **Audit on grant management phase III** – ex-post controls (2020), and taking into account that:

- Management has accepted all the recommendations issued in 2018-2020;
- Management has adopted action plans to implement all the accepted recommendations. The IAS considers that these action plans are adequate for addressing 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**.

(4) Conclusion

EACEA acknowledges the positive assessment expressed 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.

³⁶ During which the IAS closed the originally critical recommendation and downgraded two Very Important recommendations to Important as they were implemented in most aspects.

³⁷ Recommendation 1 on project management and payment, Recommendation 2 on project monitoring and Recommendation 4 on documentation in Pegasus.

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 gives 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"*. Therefore, in addition to the continuous assessment carried out throughout the whole of 2020, EACEA performed a specific assessment at year-end with the support of all relevant sources of information listed hereafter:

- internal control survey (self-assessment based on ICAT³⁸,
- register of exceptions and non-compliance events³⁹,
- results of the corporate indicators reported in the new Annex 4,
- analysis of any internal control weakness or control failures recorded during the year⁴⁰,
- AOSD reports,
- risk assessment⁴¹,
- any past reservations and weaknesses,
- all outstanding audit recommendations – see previous section,
- DG BUDG validation of the accounting system of the Agency⁴².

The purpose of these management assessments is to provide reasonable assurance that the internal control principles adopted by the Commission are implemented and functioning in the Agency.

³⁸ In 2020 EACEA conducted an internal control survey to assess the effectiveness of the internal control principles. The results represent the opinion of 34% of EACEA staff.

³⁹ This year the EACEA 2020 register of exceptions and non-compliance events includes seven cases and regular reporting of the deviations was provided to the Steering Committee quarterly throughout 2020.

⁴⁰ Ex-post audit findings, fraud cases and any relevant, formal and informal reporting/feedback have been analysed to ensure that any control weaknesses in the system are detected, analysed and considered for improvements.

⁴¹ A full bottom-up risk assessment exercise was carried out at year-end, as well as two targeted COVID-19 risk assessments in summer and autumn 2020.

⁴² BUDG.C.3 has assessed the level of accounting risk for EACEA in 2020 as low.

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the elements above, the Agency concludes that the principles are implemented and functioning, even if improvements are needed concerning protection of personal data.

In parallel with the IAS Audit on personal data (see the previous section 2.1.2) and following the EDPS order to report on certain international data transfers, in 2020 the Agency performed a review of the existing procedures implementing the regulation 2018/1725 and identified some issues in relation to the compliance with the internal data protection regulation (IDPR), in particular in the area of transfers of data outside the EU/EEA.. As a consequence, EACEA will continue to assess its processing activities in light of the requirements of the Schrems II ruling⁴³ and will coordinate with relevant Commission services and IT governance bodies, as well as the Data Protection Officer, to be able to draw from horizontal approaches to similar situations.. EACEA is in close contact with the EDPS and DG EAC. As previously stated, the Agency also participates in the task force created by DG EAC at the end of 2020, which aims to tackle weaknesses identified following the IAS audit on data protection.

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 some improvements are needed concerning the protection of personal data.

The improvement measures have been identified and work has already started.

2.1.4 Conclusions on the assurance

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

During the reporting year, the robustness of the Agency's internal control system has improved, thanks to various elements illustrated hereafter.

Financial circuits: the new organizational structure which came into force in March 2020 provides for increased assurance concerning the functioning of financial circuits, and offers a greater degree of decentralisation compared to the past.

Internal control culture: the 2020 internal control survey confirms that internal control is increasingly part of the Agency's culture⁴⁴. This is the consequence of various factual elements resulting in an increase in the importance, presence and role of internal control at the Agency.

⁴³Court of Justice judgement of 16 July 2020 (Case C-311/18) which invalidated the EU-U.S. Privacy Shield. () It poses concrete challenges for services transferring personal data to third countries.

⁴⁴ The positive answers rose from 65% last year to 72% this year.

In 2020 the legacy programmes (2007-2013) continued to phase out. Except for the Culture programme⁴⁵, no payments were made. Even if taking into account the cleared pre-financing carried out in 2020, the conditions of application of the “de minimis” rule apply, thus supporting the absence of reservations. The last generation of programmes (2014-2020) does not present issues in terms of level of error rate, whose calculation has been refined and is fully compliant with the methodology of the ECA.

Taking into account these elements and the internal assessment carried out in 2020 on the overall effectiveness of its internal control system, EACEA concludes that its internal control system is effective and the components and principles are present and functioning overall.

Overall Conclusion

In conclusion, 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 view⁴⁶.

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

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

⁴⁵ The payments executed in 2020 only amount to EUR 417 689, representing 0.05% of the total payments executed on the operational budget in 2020.

⁴⁶ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG/Executive Agency.

years prior to the year of this declaration.

Confirm that I am not aware for years prior to the year of this declaration of anything not reported here which could harm the interests of the EACEA or those of the Commission”.

Brussels, 31 March 2021

(signature)

Roberto CARLINI

2.2 Modern and efficient administration – other aspects

2.2.1 Human resource management and EACEA transformation

The key achievement of 2020 was the successful launch and branding of ‘ONE EACEA’, which reflects a cultural change and the final step of the ‘EACEA Transformation Project’, which ran from March 2019 to March 2020.

The new organisational set-up, which kicked off on 16 March 2020 – the same day that confinement measures were imposed in Belgium – was conceived to be fit-for-purpose and agile, with two balanced Departments aiming to increase efficiency from day one, despite the exceptional circumstances caused by the pandemic outbreak.

The HR and internal communication functions teamed up to implement the changes more smoothly and carefully, taking staff wishes and concerns into account when (1) designing the new organisational structure, and (2) allocating staff to the newly created units. A thorough participatory process involving staff at all levels, and a call for expression of interest in internal mobility, were the main tools utilised to achieve this objective.

In this context, a remarkable achievement concerns staff engagement which, despite the difficulties created by the pandemic and the kick-off a new organisational structure while working remotely, increased up to 67%⁴⁷. Indeed, confronted with such challenging circumstances, the Agency demonstrated organisational resilience and the strong commitment of its staff.

In close cooperation with the communication function, the HR team created a number of training initiatives from scratch, aimed at equipping Agency staff to be fully operational in

⁴⁷ Pulse survey 13 and 14. The baseline of the 2018 Staff Satisfaction Survey was 59%.

the new, challenging circumstances, and in coping with the crisis. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that the results of the pulse surveys⁴⁸ show that staff well-being reached 47%, thus increasing if compared with the target of 45% set for 2020 and the baseline of the 2018 Staff Satisfaction Survey, which was 39%. Efforts to support staff in coping with the challenging circumstances will continue throughout 2021.

In parallel, HR processes – like many other Agency business processes – evolved very rapidly towards a paperless and fully digital delivery mode in response to the corporate needs and to ensure timely delivery. This was necessary due to the unprecedented scenario of the workforce teleworking at 100%.

2.2.2 Knowledge Sharing and information management

• Information management (DMO)

A smooth reorganisation of the Agency taking into account the new Programmes and has been underpinned by a high investment to assure user rights, access and applications were in place as of the first day of One EACEA. In close cooperation with the DMO Correspondents' network across the Agency, DIGIT and the SG, the DMO team planned and carried out all relevant tasks in Ares and NomCom before, during and after the reorganisation.

To respond to the challenging circumstances triggered by COVID-19, the EACEA DMO team rapidly put in place specific remote working methods for the Agency staff in terms of electronic workflows and replacing the handwritten signature by a new Qualified Electronic Signature (QES), the DMO team has taken all preparatory measures for its implementation in the Agency. This exercise will continue during the 1st quarter of 2021.

With a view to the future programmes, a new structure of the filing plan in NomCom for the management of grants under the new MFF 2021-2027 (new headings reflecting the corporate approach) is currently under preparation to be completed once the Delegation of Activities sets in.

• Data Protection (DPO)

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

Moreover, the invalidation of the EU-U.S. Privacy Shield (the Schrems II judgement) poses concrete challenges for services transferring personal data to third countries or using international cloud services. EACEA will continue to assess its processing activities in light of the requirements of the Schrems II ruling and will coordinate with relevant Commission services and IT governance bodies, as well as the Data Protection Officer, to be able to draw from horizontal approaches to similar situations. EACEA, coordinated by its Data

⁴⁸ Pulse survey 15.

Protection Officer, replied to a request from the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) to all EU institutions and bodies to identify and map their international transfers and to report certain categories of transfers. EACEA is currently awaiting the EDPS' feedback. The goal is to minimise the risks linked to ongoing and future international transfers of personal data, in order for operations undertaken by EACEA services to comply with EU data protection law.

Besides the international transfers issues, EACEA continues to improve compliance with data protection obligations while promoting a 'data protection culture' within the Agency.

The Data Protection Officer:

- supports the operational units on questions relating to the management of the online platforms of the Agency;
- responds to requests from citizens;
- informs stakeholders about the principles of collecting and using personal data;
- keeps a register of the respective privacy statements linked to the activities of the Agency.

Concerning the awareness raising activities, the DPO is an active member of the EACEA Communication Network, which organises monthly meetings during which appropriate information and updates on data protection matters are provided. Furthermore, presentation and training are given to both senior management and colleagues across the Agency focusing on general principles of data protection and more targeted sessions such as the presentation on international transfers (which were both planned in 2020, and implemented early in January and early in February 2021).

To increase synergies and efficiencies, cooperation with the DPOs of the other Executive Agencies has been strengthened and good relations with the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) have been established. In addition, the Agency participates in the DG EAC Working Group on Data Protection with amongst others the aim to have a common vision and implementation of the international dimension of transfer of data to third countries.

- **Improving data evidence and reporting support**

In line with the reorganisation's aim of improving the financial circuits, the financial monitoring of the Agency has been enhanced, providing management with a detailed monthly dashboard which supports an early-alert anticipative approach for comparing the different financial indicators to the budget forecast.

On grant management reporting, the transition to the corporate e-Grants tool will increase reporting coherence, data reliability and verification of the project portfolio of the Agency.

In parallel, analysis is being conducted in collaboration with the parent DGs regarding the different options for future reporting needs in the next MFF, aiming for a seamless integration with different datasources⁴⁹ in use by the Agency.

- **Informatics**

In 2020, 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, 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 value-added tasks with a greater return on investment.

To support a wider exchange of knowledge, the Agency worked closely with the Commission to pilot Microsoft 365 Teams at the Agency as part of the new digital workplace. The Agency has successfully run its first pilot projects and will continue making extensive use of the platform to support its collaborative work, both internally and with external stakeholders.

Extra support was provided to colleagues throughout the period of compulsory teleworking due to COVID-19. Technical advice was given to the various Evaluation and Steering Committees for the Programme actions, e.g. eTwinning-SEG, EPALE, OLS School Education Gateway (SEG), Online Linguistic Support (OLS), and the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE).

- **Litigation cases and European Ombudsman**

The Agency was informed by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) about the rejection of two actions for annulment, thus confirming the Agency's decision. The judgment on two other Court Cases is still pending.

In 2020, the Agency received seven requests⁵⁰ (six for Creative Europe, one for Erasmus+) to provide comments following **Administrative proceedings** (Art.22). Three cases were closed, confirming the Agency's decision. For the four remaining cases, the Agency is awaiting input from DG EAC (in two cases) and DG CNECT (in the other two cases).

The European Ombudsman closed five complaints and concluded in all cases that there was no maladministration. One complaint from a Lifelong Learning Programme project regarding the eligibility of costs is still pending the European Ombudsman's conclusion.

The volume of requests for review following rejections of grant applications remained stable compared to 2019 (98 cases vs 102 cases in 2019). The requests relate equally to Creative Europe and Erasmus+. The time limit of 4 months to reply has been respected on average.

⁴⁹ e.g. ABAC, Pegaus, Mobility tool, the Film Data Base, Valor.

⁵⁰ In four cases, applicants contested the rejection of their grant application.

2.2.3 Economy & efficiency of financial and non-financial activities

• Increase synergies and efficiencies between Executive Agencies

As part of the Commission-wide exercise, the Agency led the exercise on 'synergies and efficiencies' in human resources in the Executive Agencies. The topics considered ranged for example from staff selections, ethics, individual rights, legal issues on HR, to well-being activities, time-management, training, and allocation of resources. Eventually, the focus was mainly on encouraging reflection on how efficiency gains could be achieved in (1) selections through closer cooperation, and (2) in time-management by pooling resources.

As a result the following has been put in place amongst the six Agencies:

- joint selections with the involvement of two or more Executive Agencies⁵¹,
- enhancing mutual knowledge of procedures and sharing of best practices.

• Simplification of Selection and Evaluation processes

The on-boarding to e-Grants will standardise the processes, bringing them into line with the corporate approach. Furthermore, the Agency has reduced the complexity of the application forms and the Model Grant Agreements for the four programmes (Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) and the European Solidarity Corps). In addition, a simplified validation workflow at evaluation stage has been put in place for the calls involving designated bodies.

The Agency developed a funding scheme strategy and shared it with the parent DGs in early 2020. Consequently, the Agency drafted decisions authorising the use of lump sums and unit costs for the Erasmus+, Creative Europe, CERV and European Solidarity Corps programmes, valid for the whole MFF period. A review of the simplifications in expert management was also finalised.

2.2.4 External communication

EACEA's external communication continued to make a valuable contribution to a positive outward image of the European Union. EACEA's communication activities make EU funding accessible to potential applicants and beneficiaries, and feed into wider communication activities.

The EACEA website remains one of the most visited sites on the Europa web domain (8th place in visits). The average number of visitors per month increased by 24% in 2020 (529 836 compared to 424 985 in 2019). All calls were published on time, and special attention was given to the announcements on the impact of COVID-19 on EACEA's

⁵¹ The Agencies have established a mechanism whereby one Agency leads the selection process according to its own procedures and other participating Agencies may be involved in the process (e.g. be represented in the selection board) and can use the reserve lists. There are currently four ongoing joint selection procedures.

programmes. The pilot projects on the corporate Funding & Tender opportunities Portal (F&TP)⁵² were linked to the EACEA website. Calls for the new programmes are due to start being published on F&TP in spring 2021, and guidance for potential beneficiaries on how to use the new platform will be made available when the homepage of F&TP has been updated to incorporate the new programming period.

2.2.5 Sound environmental management

In line with the commitments of the Commission towards climate neutrality and waste reduction, the Agency ran a pilot project in one of its buildings. The initiative consisted of removing garbage bins from the offices and installing waste stations on each floor. Towards the end of the year, taking advantage of the buildings' very low occupancy-rate (<10%), the Agency joined the corporate action "BEST- Building Energy Savings Together" to reduce energy consumption and CO₂ emissions by powering down its buildings. Participation in the initiative brought significant results with regards to the main Agency building: Electricity consumption during BEST period (1 December – 23 December) decreased by 15100 kWh, representing -34%; Gas consumption (figures for the whole month) decreased by 46000 kWh, representing a staggering - 67%; Total energy (whole month of December) decreased by 64000 kWh, representing - 52%, and the total CO₂ (whole month) was reduced by 9.6 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.

⁵² Funding & Tender opportunities Portal