



Annual Activity Report 2023

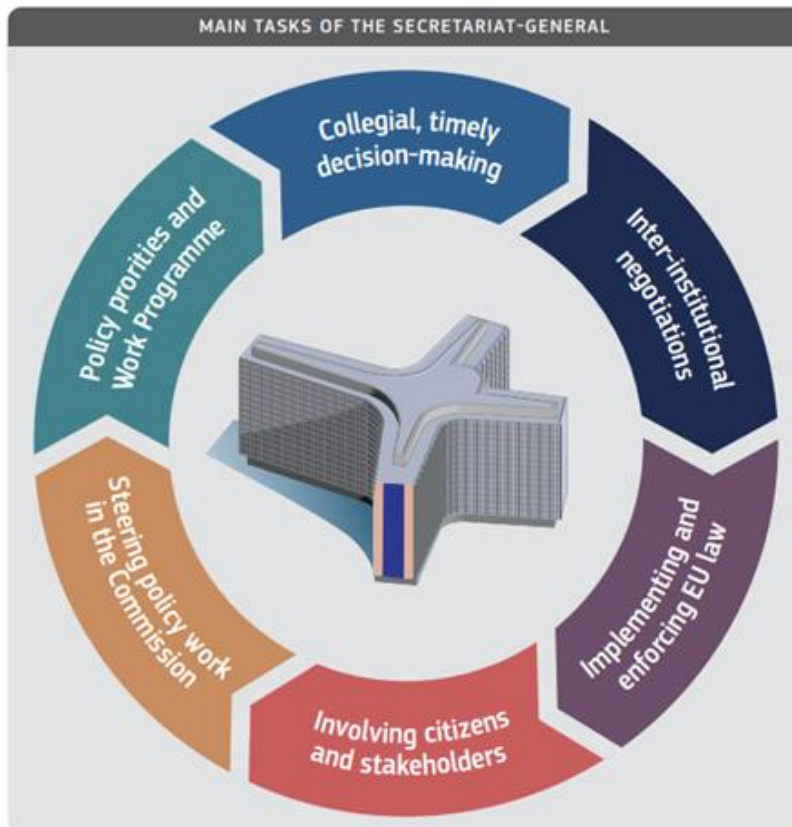
Secretariat-General

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THE SECRETARIAT-GENERAL IN BRIEF

Under the authority of the President, the Secretariat-General serves the College of Commissioners and oversees the implementation of the European Commission's political priorities ⁽¹⁾. It ensures the **collegiality, consistency, efficiency and regularity** of the Commission's activities.



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

The Secretariat-General oversees **good governance**

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

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Key results and progress towards achieving the Commission's general objectives and department's specific objectives

In 2023, the Secretariat-General continued to play its crucial role at the heart of the Commission, striving to **ensure collegiality and consistency** across policy areas. Intense work went into delivering the remaining promises of the six priorities of von der Leyen Commission, as well as standing up for Ukraine and responding to the worst energy crisis in decades.

Throughout 2023, the Secretariat-General continued steering the Commission's work to **support Ukraine** in the face of Russia's war of aggression across multiple work strands, from the accession track and EU financial support to sectorial policy coordination. The Secretariat-General coordinated the work on key files including the EUR 50 billion Ukraine Facility, as part of the Multiannual Financial Framework revision package and the extension of temporary protection for Ukrainians fleeing the war. It also steered work on additional sanctions packages on Russia's war machine, the proposals for the use of extraordinary revenues from Russia's immobilised sovereign assets and holding Russia accountable for its crimes. Furthermore, through the Act in Support of Ammunition Production the Secretariat-General engaged for the urgent delivery of ammunition to Ukraine and to help Member States refill their stocks. It also managed the Ukraine-EU Coordination Platform on Ukrainian agricultural exports.

In this challenging geopolitical situation, the Secretariat-General stayed the course on its **headline ambitions** and supported **the competitiveness of Europe's social market economy**, notably by preparing the Communication on the 30th anniversary of the Single Market, identifying key elements for EU's long-term competitiveness.

Another key achievement in this regard was the adoption of the **European Economic Security Strategy**. It sets out a common framework for achieving economic security by promoting the EU's economic base and competitiveness. The strategy also seeks to protect against risks and foster partnerships with the broadest possible range of countries to address shared concerns and interests. In the health area, important progress was achieved with regard to preventing and mitigating **shortages of critical medicines** at EU level.

Additionally, in close cooperation with DG ECFIN, the Secretariat-General helped the Commission put forward proposals to overhaul the **EU's economic governance framework**. The new rules will reduce high public debt ratios in a realistic, gradual and sustained manner and foster investments and reforms.

On the resources side, faced with unprecedented challenges, the EU budget was under heavy pressure in recent years. The Secretariat-General was tasked, together with DG

BUDG, to undertake a review of the Multiannual Financial Framework. Based on this, a **revision** of the **Multiannual Financial Framework** has been agreed, providing targeted reinforcements in a number of priority areas to ensure that the EU budget can continue to deliver on the most pressing urgencies.

2023 also saw the continued **implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility**, supporting economic resilience and competitiveness. The Recovery and Resilience Taskforce (SG RECOVER) in the Secretariat-General, together with DG ECFIN, worked closely to assist all 27 Member States revise their recovery and resilience plans and include reforms and investments that were to be financed by REPowerEU. Thanks to these modifications, more than EUR 275 billion will finance investments and reforms supporting the green transition.

On the legislative side, the Secretariat-General took the green transition forward by facilitating and supporting the **completion of the 'Fit for 55' legislation**. The EU now has legally binding climate targets covering all key sectors of the economy expected to reduce EU net greenhouse gas emissions by 57% by 2030. The reform of the EU's **electricity market design** was another key achievement of the year. The new proposal will accelerate a surge in renewables and the phase-out of gas, better protect consumers from future price spikes and enhance industrial competitiveness.

With regard to the other strand of the twin transition, the Secretariat-General took work forward on **the digital transition**. The **Artificial Intelligence Act**, the first first-ever comprehensive legal framework on artificial intelligence, was agreed by co-legislators, opening the door to innovation while safeguarding the safety and rights of people and businesses. Equally important, a provisional political agreement was reached on the key elements of the proposal for a legal framework for a European Digital Identity. The Secretariat-General also contributed to the preparation of the first **State of the Digital Decade** report.

At a time when democracy is challenged, the rule of law cycle proved to be a key driver for change and positive reforms in Member States. The fourth Rule of Law Report, prepared by the Secretariat-General jointly with DG Justice and Consumers, assessed for the first time the degree of take-up of country specific recommendations made in the 2022 report and provided new recommendations. Moreover, the **European Democracy Action Plan** reinforced the EU's democratic infrastructure, including promoting free and fair elections, strengthening media freedom and countering disinformation. 2023 also saw the formal closure of the **cooperation and verification mechanism** for Bulgaria and Romania, a transitional instrument introduced upon their EU accession. The mechanism spurred significant progress in the two countries in the fields of judicial reform and anti-corruption.

Furthermore, the Secretariat-General took forward key common work strands from the Political Guidelines with the **Security Union**. Another important achievement was the signature of a strategic partnership with Tunisia. Based on this, the European Union will provide financial support for macroeconomic stability, while Tunisia will strengthen migration control.

After intense work, the European Commission and the United Kingdom reached in 2023 a **political agreement on the Windsor Framework**, bringing a set of solutions to the practical challenges faced by citizens and businesses in Northern Ireland.

The Secretariat-General also led the preparation of the report on the state of play of **EU-Türkiye** political, economic and trade relations, as well as the **New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans** and its Facility which will more closely link reforms to financial support and promote the gradual integration of candidates into the Single Market. Following the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, the Secretariat-General coordinated policy responses and humanitarian support.

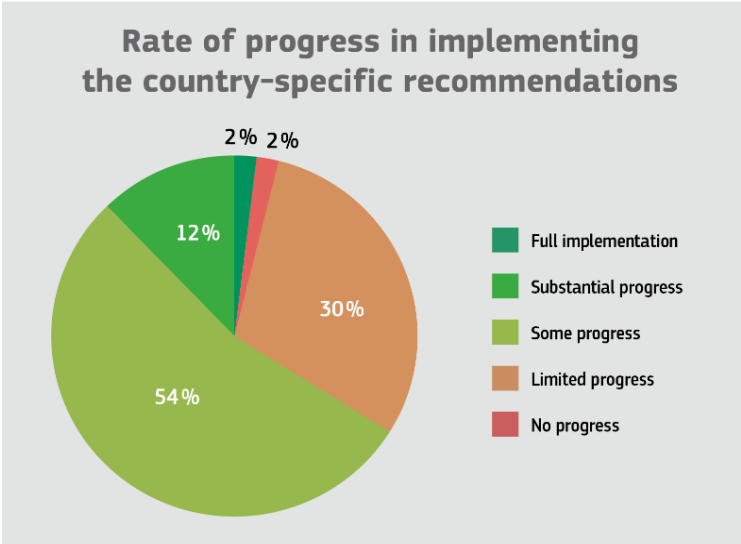
Internally, the Secretariat-General continued to steer and shape key **corporate policies**, working closely with other central services of the Commission. It remained at the core of the corporate governance framework, ensuring efficient use of the human and financial resources available. It was at the forefront of efforts to push forward the IT, cyber-security, information and data management policies of the Commission. The Secretariat-General facilitated the smooth functioning of the collegial decision-making process, resilience and business continuity at all times.

In its pursuit to maintain the competitiveness of European businesses, the Commission set a target in 2023 to **reduce burdens** associated with **reporting requirements** by 25%, without undermining the policy objectives of the initiatives concerned. The Secretariat-General is coordinating the efforts of Commission departments towards this ambitious goal.

B. Key performance indicators

Key performance indicator 1 - Rate of progress in implementing the country-specific recommendations ⁽²⁾

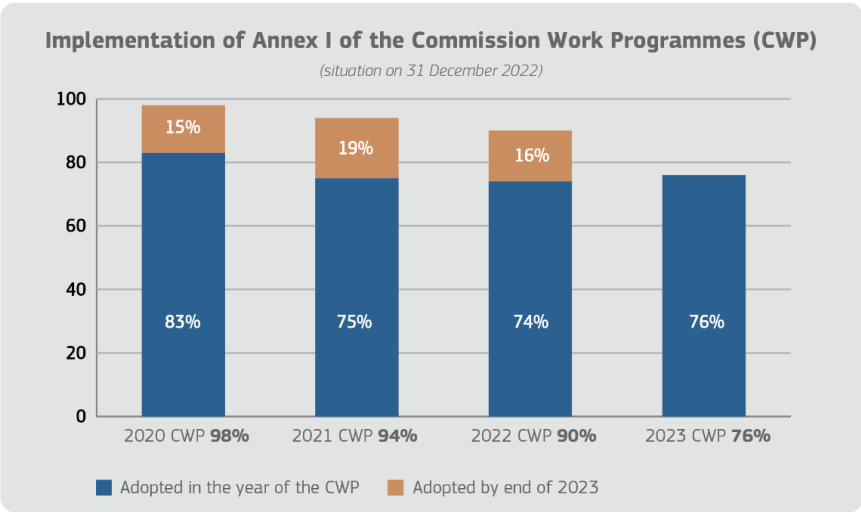
The Recovery and Resilience Facility has significantly accelerated policy action to implement country-specific recommendations which was considered slow in the past. The European Court of Auditors found that, over the 2011-2017 period, only 1.6 % of country-specific recommendations were deemed to have been ‘fully implemented’ within one year after issuance and that only 26 % of the country-specific recommendations have been



⁽²⁾ Key performance indicator 1 relates to specific objective 3.1.

implemented over the full 2011-2018 period. In the two years preceding the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the share of 2016-2017 country-specific recommendations reaching at least 'some progress' increased by only six percentage points from 53% in 2018 to 59% in 2020. In comparison, the share of 2019-2020 country-specific recommendations reaching at least 'some progress' increased by 17 percentage points from 52% in 2021 before the Recovery and Resilience Facility to almost 69% in 2023, after two years of Recovery and Resilience Facility implementation.

Key performance indicator 2 - Annual implementation rate of initiatives in Annex 1 of the Commission work programme (3)

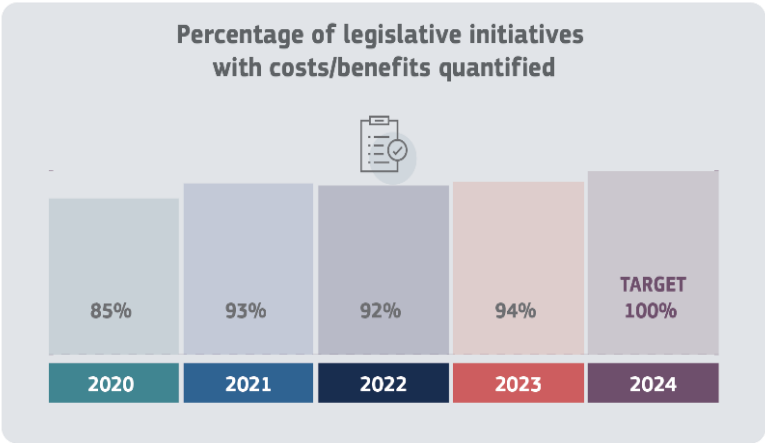


Three quarters of the new initiatives announced in the 2023 Commission work programme were adopted by the end of the year. Remaining initiatives are to be adopted in 2024. This situation reflects the need in 2023 to keep the programming of initiatives under review

in the light of changing circumstances, and to make scarce resources available for urgent new initiatives, such as the 466 measures that the Commission adopted in 2023 in response to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.

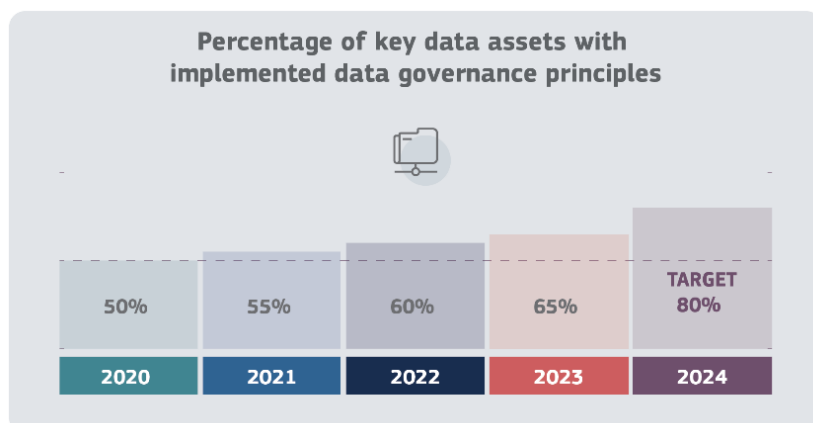
Key performance indicator 3 - Proportion of legislative initiatives (with an impact assessment) for which costs and/or benefits have been quantified (4)

In 2023, 94% (47 out of 50) of the impact assessments, all reviewed by the Regulatory Scrutiny Board, contained a quantification of costs and/or benefits, including partial quantification.



(3) Key performance indicator 2 relates to specific objective 7.1.
 (4) Key performance indicator 3 relates to specific objective 6.5.

Key performance indicator 4 - Percentage of Commission key data assets ⁽⁵⁾ for which corporate principles on data governance have been implemented ⁽⁶⁾:



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

of data governance by organising meetings among key local stakeholders.

C. Key conclusions on internal control and financial management

In line with the Commission's Internal Control Framework, the Secretariat-General has assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective, and the components and principles are present and functioning as intended. Please refer to annual activity report section 2.3 for details.

In addition, the Secretariat-General has examined systematically the available control results and indicators, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the Commission's internal auditor and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on the management's assurance about the achievement of the control objectives. Please refer to section 2 for further details.

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

D. Provision of information to the President

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

⁽⁵⁾ Key data assets are data relevant for decision-making processes across the organisation and for the functioning of the organisation itself.

⁽⁶⁾ Key performance indicator 4 relates to specific objective 7.6.

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

General objective 1 – A European Green Deal

Coordinating the European Green Deal

A major step forward on the road to meet the EU's mid-term target of cutting net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % by 2030 was the complete adoption by co-legislators in 2023 of the **'Fit for 55' climate and energy package**. The Secretariat-General ensured policy coherence in Commission negotiation positions



throughout the legislative process for this package, as well as for other proposals agreed in 2023, such as the **eco-design for sustainable products**.

The Secretariat-General also provided a strong steer for new initiatives presented under the European Green Deal. The Commission put forward a proposal to protect consumers from false or misleading claims relating to the environmental impact of products, as well as proposals to reduce textile and food waste. The Secretariat-General facilitated the adoption of a package of measures for **a sustainable use of key natural resources**, which include proposals for soil monitoring and rules on new genomic techniques easing the transition to more resilient food systems. The Secretariat-General steered the adoption of several policy packages on **sustainable mobility**, aimed at **greening transport**, improving **passenger mobility** and strengthening **road safety** in the EU.

In 2023, the EU continued phasing out Russian fossil fuels to safeguard its economy and increased its **renewable energy and energy efficiency targets** for 2030. A **new electricity market design** was also agreed, facilitating the deployment of renewable energy while providing consumers better protection against energy price shocks. The Secretariat-General coordinated implementing measures such as the **European Wind Power Action Plan** and the **Grids Action Plan** making sure electricity grids will operate more efficiently and will be rolled out further and faster. The emergency regulations on gas

solidarity measures, the market correction mechanism and permit-granting for renewable energy projects were prolonged by another 12 months.

The Secretariat-General has steered the work on the new **Green Deal Industrial Plan** with measures to enhance the competitiveness of Europe's net-zero industry and support the fast transition to climate neutrality. It also contributed significantly to the **Net Zero Industry Act** proposal, which is setting out measures to scale up manufacturing capacity for clean technologies.

The Secretariat-General also coordinated and prepared the first **voluntary review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** done by the European Union. The review provides an overview of how EU internal and external actions are contributing to delivering the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by all UN member countries in 2015.

General objective 2 – A Europe fit for the digital age

Shaping Europe's digital future

The Secretariat-General was deeply involved in the negotiations that led to the political agreement found on several key proposals advancing the digital agenda. The **Artificial Intelligence Act** is the first comprehensive legal framework for artificial intelligence in the world. It will support the development, deployment and uptake of trustworthy artificial intelligence in the EU. Additionally, the Regulation on a **European Digital Identity** will provide people and businesses with secure and trustworthy electronic identification and authentication, while the **Data Act** will boost the EU's data economy.



Under the steer of the Secretariat-General, the Commission adopted the first '**State of the Digital Decade**' report, enhancing the cooperation with the Member States towards achieving the objectives a human-centric digital transformation. The new Commission strategy on **Web 4.0 and virtual worlds** to steer the next technological transition aims to ensure an open, secure, trustworthy, fair and inclusive

digital environment in an extremely rapidly evolving landscape.

The Commission adopted the proposal on the **Critical Raw Materials Act** on which the political agreement was reached later in the year to ensure sustainable access to raw materials crucial for the green and digital transitions. Based on this work, the Secretariat-General provided key input on the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform proposal put forward as part of the revision of Multiannual Financial Framework which has been agreed by the co-legislators.

General objective 3 – An economy that works for people

Reforming economic governance and fostering competitiveness

In close cooperation with DG ECFIN, the Secretariat-General contributed to the preparation



of the Commission's legislative proposals to put in place the most comprehensive reform of the **EU's economic governance rules** since the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis. The central objective of the proposals is to strengthen public debt sustainability while promoting reforms and investments to support sustainable and inclusive growth. The agreed framework will provide clarity and predictability for fiscal policy and a

more integrated approach to economic policy coordination that allows for gradual debt reduction while allowing for the public investments that Europe needs to achieve its ambitious goals.

The Secretariat-General also helped advance key legislative initiatives to support Europe's **competitiveness**, resulting in the adoption of proposals to reform the bank crisis management and deposit insurance framework, to establish a digital euro and to put into place a new framework for business taxation.

In 2023, the Secretariat-General continued the work on **demography**. It published the Report on the Impact of Demographic Change in a changing environment, revisiting the demographic trends and the impacts that have been identified previously in light of recent developments. The Secretariat-General also ensured the adoption of the Communication on Demographic Change in Europe presenting the policy tools available to Member States for managing demographic change.

Organising Commission efforts to deliver on the promise of the national recovery and resilience plans

In 2023, SG RECOVER and DG ECFIN jointly helped all 27 Member States revise their **recovery and resilience plans** in line with the requirements of the amended Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation. The services have focused, in particular, on the addition into the plans of investments and reforms that were to be financed by **REPowerEU**.

SG RECOVER was involved in all phases of the preparation, negotiation and assessment of the plan revisions. Together with DG ECFIN, it provided **guidance to Member States** on their reform and investment efforts. This included answering questions asked by national authorities through the Q&A platform and organising forums to share knowledge and best practices.

The revised plans continue to be of high quality and fulfil all the criteria of the regulation while addressing challenges identified such as administrative bottlenecks, high inflation and supply chain disruptions. In addition, the **REPowerEU** chapters further strengthen the green dimension of the Recovery and Resilience Facility by saving energy and reducing dependency on Russian fossil fuels.

The impact of revisions on implementation

At the end of 2023, the total amount of committed resources after all 27 revised recovery and resilience plans were adopted by the Council rose to about EUR 356.8 billion in non-repayable financing and EUR 290.9 billion in loans. This is primarily due to the addition of REPowerEU chapters to 23 plans, as well as additional requests from Member States for loan support. With the 27 revised recovery and resilience plans including the 23 REPowerEU chapters, more than 42% (EUR 275 billion) of the total allocation will finance investments and reforms supporting the green transition, including energy efficiency, renewable energy, electricity grids and other green investments.

In the first half of 2023, the rate at which Member States submitted payment requests slowed down due to work on the plan revisions. Once all revisions were adopted, however, the number of submissions increased rapidly to a total of 31 payment requests received over the year. The assessment of three payment requests, two of which were submitted in 2022 and one in 2023, was partially positive due to the non-fulfilment of four milestones and lack of information to assess three milestones. The other requests were all evaluated positively. The assessments of payment requests carried out in 2023 were published on the dedicated Recovery and Resilience website⁷.

Continuous dialogue with Member States

SG RECOVER and DG ECFIN held six meetings of the Recovery and Resilience Facility informal expert group for Member States in 2023, including one specifically focused on the state of play on the Recovery and Resilience Facility mid-term evaluation. Additionally, the services organised a pilot in-person ‘matchmaking’ event in November with support from DG REFORM. At this event, representatives of Member States’ authorities could attend workshops to solve problems they face concerning the Recovery and Resilience Facility’s implementation from an administrative capacity point of view.

SG RECOVER, jointly with DG ECFIN, organised ten annual events with Member States, bringing together institutions, stakeholders and recipients of Recovery and Resilience Facility support to discuss the progress on the implementation of the respective plans.

Continuous cooperation with the European Parliament and the Council

In 2023, the Commission continued to closely engage with the European Parliament and the Council on the Recovery and Resilience Facility implementation. The Commission shared without delay modified plans submitted by Member States, as

(⁷) [Recovery and Resilience Facility - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/recovery-and-resilience-facility)

well as all preliminary assessments of payment requests, with both the European Parliament and the Council on equal terms. This ensured a transparent flow of information with a high level of engagement between the institutions throughout the implementation phase.

As regards the European Parliament, the Commission continued to hold regular exchanges to discuss horizontal topics concerning the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Since the setting-up of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Commission has been invited to and participated in fourteen high-level Recovery and Resilience Dialogues at Commissioner level, with five dialogues taking place in 2023. Moreover, the Commission engaged regularly with the Members of the European Parliament in the standing Working Group of the joint ECON-BUDG Committees and participated overall in 35 meetings at Director-General level, with five meetings taking place in 2023. In addition, the Commission is invited on a regular basis to various other committees to exchange views on matters related to the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Steering the reporting under the Recovery and Resilience Facility

Whilst reporting on the progress made in the implementation of their recovery and resilience plans, Member States biannually report on a set of 14 common indicators across all six policy pillars. The Commission uses the data provided in this biannual reporting to get an overview of the progress in the implementation of each plan and of the Recovery and Resilience Facility as a whole and to inform the discussions with Member States.

Throughout 2023, SG RECOVER and DG ECFIN regularly updated the content of the Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard as relevant in order to inform about the implementation status of the recovery and resilience plans (see Annex 14 for further details). SG RECOVER, jointly with DG ECFIN, also monitored the Member States' new obligation to begin publishing lists of their 100 biggest Recovery and Resilience Facility final recipients – to be updated in parallel to the biannual reporting on common indicators. By the end of 2023, all Member States published their list of 100 biggest final recipients.

SG RECOVER and DG ECFIN prepared the annual Recovery and Resilience Facility Report, published on 19 September 2023, which confirmed that the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility was continuing at a steady pace. The report also highlighted examples of implemented reforms and investments which already showcase tangible positive impact 'on the ground'.

SG RECOVER, jointly with DG ECFIN continued working on the preparation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility mid-term evaluation, published in February 2024. The mid-term evaluation analyses the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility in all Member States, from the setup of the instrument to a cut-off date set to 1 February 2024, along the five evaluation criteria defined under Better Regulation (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, EU added value and coherence). It also covers REPowerEU.

Steering the European Semester



In 2023, SG RECOVER prepared the Commission's economic and social policy guidance to Member States under the European Semester, by coordinating the publication of streamlined country reports and the Commission's proposals for country-specific recommendations in the 2023 'Spring Package'. SG RECOVER ensured that the Semester remained focused on fostering competitive sustainability along its four key priorities

(promoting environmental sustainability, productivity, fairness and macroeconomic stability) while taking into account current challenges such as high energy prices, high inflation rates and increased debt levels.

SG RECOVER led the preparation of the Semester 'Autumn Package', delivering a streamlined Annual Sustainable Growth Survey, outlining the key economic and social policy priorities for the 12 to 18 months to come and coordinating the work on the other elements of the 'Autumn Package' with DG ECFIN and DG EMPL. The publication of the 'Autumn Package' launched the 2024 Semester cycle, with an ambitious agenda to further strengthen a coordinated EU policy response to enhance the EU's competitiveness through the green and digital transitions, while ensuring social fairness and territorial cohesion.

Boosting the European single market and industrial base

The Secretariat-General prepared a communication to leaders, at the same time with the Communication celebrating the **30th anniversary of the Single Market**, which set out how to secure the **long-term competitiveness of the EU** based on sustainable competitiveness, economic security, open strategic autonomy and fair competition.

The Secretariat-General worked closely with other Commission departments to put forward measures offering support to small and medium enterprises. Measures included the **Small and Medium Enterprises Relief Package** which helps these enterprises raise capital and finance their growth, in particular in sectors of strategic importance to the EU.

The Secretariat-General also pushed forward the work on fostering a human-centric digital transformation, in cooperation with the EU's international partners. In 2023 took place the fourth **EU-US Trade and Technology Council** and the first **EU-India Trade and Technology Council**. The Secretariat-General further worked with services to steer the international agreement on the G7 Guiding Principles and a Code of Conduct on Artificial Intelligence ensuring its safety and trustworthiness.

Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 mid-term revision: providing a targeted adjustment to respond to new challenges



Together with DG BUDG, the Secretariat-General undertook a **review of the Multiannual Financial Framework**.

Based on the outcome of the review and in light of the series of unprecedented and unexpected challenges that the Union has been facing, the Commission proposed a way forward to provide the most essential funding to be able to deliver on the Union's shared priorities via a targeted and balanced adjustment of the long-term

budget. To this end, the Commission put forward the **revision package of the Multiannual Financial Framework**. The package included the proposal for the amendment of the Multiannual Financial Framework Regulation, the proposal for the **Ukraine Facility** and the proposal for the **Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform**. The Secretariat-General, together with the DG BUDG and DG NEAR, co-led and supported the negotiations on the package which have been successfully concluded in early 2024.

In parallel, the Secretariat-General helped put forward an **adjusted package for the next generation of own resources**. The package includes the proposal for a new temporary statistical own resource based on company profits and adjusted own resources proposals based on the Emissions Trading System and Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism updating the original proposals of December 2021.

The Secretariat-General continued to coordinate the association of **third countries in EU programmes**.

General objective 4 – A stronger Europe in the world

Strengthening the EU's position on the global stage

Throughout 2023, the Secretariat-General continued to spearhead the Commission's work in support to **Ukraine** in the face of Russia's war of aggression. Key work strands included the **EU's financial support**, notably the **Ukraine Facility proposal**, assisting Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction, the legal **proposals for the use of extraordinary revenues from Russia's immobilised sovereign assets** to support Ukraine, ensuring that Russia is held **accountable** for its crimes, countering **disinformation**, provision of **humanitarian aid** and the extension of **temporary protection** for Ukrainians fleeing the war.

The Secretariat-General contributed to the preparation of the historic **enlargement package** in which the Commission recommended opening accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova and granting candidate status to Georgia.



The Secretariat-General also managed the **Ukraine-EU Coordination Platform on Ukrainian agricultural exports**, with the purpose of improving the trade flows of Ukrainian grain and ensure the full functioning of the Solidarity Lanes. The Platform monitored trade flows, identified actions and their implementation and was instrumental in bringing about a Ukrainian action plan that contained an export licencing scheme.

In 2023, the Secretariat-General led the preparation of important and politically sensitive Communications. In particular, the Joint Communication of the Commission and the High Representative on the **European Economic Security Strategy** provides a framework for assessing and addressing risks to EU economic security, while ensuring that the EU remains one of the most open and attractive destinations for business and investment.

A major achievement was also the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding for a **strategic and global partnership with Tunisia**. The Memorandum provides a framework for a comprehensive cooperation with Tunisia, with the aim to stabilise the country's economy and address societal imbalances by intensifying existing cooperation, tackling common challenges and seizing opportunities, while reducing migratory pressure from Tunisia and supporting Tunisia in developing a comprehensive migration policy with protection and respect of human rights of migrants and refugees as a crucial element of this cooperation. The report on the **state of play of EU-Türkiye** political, economic and trade relations followed up on a request from the European Council and outlined the state of play of bilateral relations in key areas and sets out recommendations, aiming to advance relations.

Furthermore, the Secretariat-General coordinated several other important proposals such as the Regulation establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the **Western Balkans**, together with the Communication on the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. The new facility will more closely link performed reforms to financial support and promote the gradual integration of candidates into the Single Market.

Following the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, the Secretariat-General coordinated policy responses and humanitarian support on a continuous basis.

Boosting the Foreign, Security and Defence Policy

In 2023, the Secretariat-General led the work on three additional packages of **restrictive measures** (sanctions) in response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, bringing the total

number of such packages to twelve. The EU's sanctions against Russia aim to reduce the Kremlin's ability to finance the war and impose economic and political costs on Putin's regime and its supporters. The Secretariat-General has also played a coordination role in implementation, enforcement and cracking down on sanctions circumvention.

As the Commission took further steps in 2023 towards a European Defence Union – to ensure that the EU is prepared for all sorts of scenarios from traditional to hybrid, be it on land, at sea, in the air, in outer space or cyberspace – the Secretariat-General contributed to and coordinated the delivery of several important initiatives. **The Act in Support of Ammunition Production**, prepared and adopted in record time, will be instrumental in mobilising Europe's defence industry to sustain a war effort by improving its production capacity, with an aim to help EU continues to deliver the necessary artillery ammunition and missiles to Ukraine. The **European Space Strategy for Security and Defence** will help deter hostile activities and protect the EU's space systems and services that are crucial for the functioning of our society and economy, as well as for security and defence. At sea, the **revised EU Maritime Security Strategy and Action Plan** sets out further measures to protect EU citizens and economy against new threats.

The Secretariat-General continued to ensure high-level engagement with **NATO**. This resulted in unprecedented levels of cooperation, in particular on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The Secretariat-General also led the launch of the **EU-NATO Task Force on resilience of critical infrastructure**, as well as the delivery of its assessment report.

EU's relations with the UK and other western European partners

In 2023, the Secretariat-General led on the implementation of existing agreements with western European partners and made progress towards the conclusion of new agreements.

The Secretariat-General continued to coordinate the implementation, application and enforcement of the **EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement** and co-chaired for the EU all its specialised Committees. In 2023, following the intensive engagement between the Commission and the UK Government, the **Windsor Framework** was politically agreed and then legally formalised. Significant work has also been done in the area of citizens' rights to ensure that beneficiaries of the Withdrawal Agreement can fully enjoy their rights.

The application and enforcement of the **EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement** progressed well, allowing cooperation in areas such as trade, transport, energy, and security, as well as cybersecurity and financial services. The UK and the EU reached an agreement on the UK's participation in Horizon Europe and Copernicus.

The Secretariat-General also continued to lead negotiations with the UK on an EU-UK agreement in respect of Gibraltar.

The Secretariat-General worked closely with the EFTA Secretariat and the three **EEA EFTA States**⁽⁸⁾ to ensure the smooth implementation of the EEA Agreement. Negotiations on the

⁽⁸⁾ Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway

financial contribution of the EEA EFTA States for 2021-2028 to reduce the economic and social disparities in the EEA have been finalised at negotiators level in 2023.

The Secretariat-General led the exploratory talks regarding a possible restart of **negotiations with Switzerland**, which led to a Common Understanding between the European Commission and Switzerland and the adoption of a European Commission Recommendation for a negotiating mandate.

The Secretariat-General oversaw the negotiations on an **Association Agreement with Andorra and San Marino**, presenting its successful outcome at the General Affairs Council on 12 December 2023.

General objective 5 – Promoting our European way of life

Deepening the Security Union

Three years since the adoption of the **Security Union Strategy**, the Commission has continued breaking down barriers between policy areas and increasing collective resilience against escalating security threats. There is already a strong record of delivery on all pillars of the strategy, with more than half of the 36 legislative initiatives already adopted by co-legislators. Thanks to the work done in 2023, now solid legislation is in force in the areas of cybersecurity and resilience of critical infrastructure, modern law enforcement, cooperation and information exchange for stronger external borders. The Secretariat-General provided impetus on all these files, as well as on the new EU Roadmap to fight Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime which included the **European Ports Alliance**, an initiative which brings together ports and customs authorities in the fight against drugs smuggling and criminal infiltration of logistic hubs.



In 2023, new proposals were also tabled by the Commission, with contributions from the Secretariat-General, on the **fight against migrant smuggling** and the fight against **child sexual abuse**. The Secretariat-General also steered the preparation of the **6th Commission report on progress** in the implementation of the EU Security Union Strategy. The report pointed out the key Security Union legislative files where interinstitutional work needs to intensify to deliver on outstanding files. It also highlighted where the action of Member States and/or EU agencies is central to delivery.

Migration

The Secretariat-General elaborated the overview of progress in the area of **migration and asylum** presented to five European Councils in 2023. It played a strong coordination role on migration matters, supporting the successful completion of interinstitutional

negotiations on the legislative proposals under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum and relevant legislation on borders.

At the same time, as part of coordination on external aspects of migration, the Secretariat-General ensured representation of Member States in bodies such as the **Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration** and in contributions to the action plans for key migration partners and the four key migratory routes (Western Balkans, Atlantic/Western Mediterranean Central Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean).

Recognising the importance of legal pathways in offering comprehensive and mutually beneficial partnerships to countries of origin and transit, the Secretariat-General led the preparation of the package of measures on maximising the potential of **skills and talent mobility**, including proposals for the Talent Pool, and for more systematic recognition of professional qualifications of third country nationals.

Health Union



The Secretariat-General provided impetus for the deepening of the European health union and took the lead on some cross-cutting files. This included in particular the pressing issue of **medicines shortages in the EU**. A Communication on this topic was adopted in October 2023 and was immediately followed up with a new coordination mechanism to ensure implementation. A key file requiring particular attention from the Secretariat-

General, given high stakeholder interest, was the proposal to reform the EU's **pharmaceutical legislation**, requiring a careful balance between the needs of patients across the EU and the competitiveness of a key strategic industry.

Another file where the Secretariat-General supported a wide cross-service effort reflecting the many policies involved was on the Communication on a **Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health**. These new proposals complemented existing initiatives on which the Secretariat-General was closely involved in the inter-institutional phase, including on Substances of Human Origin and the European Health Data Space.

May 2023 saw the declaration to end COVID-19 as a global health emergency. Building on the success of the **EU Digital COVID Certificate technology**, the Secretariat-General steered work towards the WHO launch in July 2023 of the Global Digital Health Certification Network. It also coordinated follow-up to the Global Health Strategy, supporting the work to take forward the negotiations on Pandemic Agreement and International Health Regulation.

Education and youth

The Secretariat-General supported the progress on the **European Education Area**, including the November 2023 recommendation on Learning Mobility within the **talent mobility package**. It also helped to take forward the work on supporting Member States in developing the digital skills of all European citizens and addressing the digital divide, as well as the practical follow-up to the European Year of Skills.

Stepping up European cooperation on crisis management

The Secretariat-General steered the work of the various Directorates-General involved in the response to ongoing major crises, whether within the EU or elsewhere in the world. It ensured that the Commission provided the first response to any new crisis that occurred, which included but not limited to humanitarian and financial aid in response to the earthquake in **Türkiye and Syria**, as well as the situation in the **Middle East**.

The Secretariat-General continued to work on enhancing EU crisis management by managing the Commission's main transboundary crisis management process ARGUS, by mapping and analysing new crisis management tools, delivering training programme and supporting efforts on exercising, including the preparation of the exercise policy for the Commission and by continuing its **cooperation with NATO** on parallel and coordinated exercises.

The Secretariat-General contributed to the revision of the **Integrated Political Crisis Response arrangements** in the Council based on lessons learned from the recent crises, by making the mechanism more flexible, easier to deactivate and by strengthening its focus on preparedness and crisis communication.

General objective 6 – A new push for European democracy

Strengthening democracy and rule of law

The Secretariat-General continued to push forward initiatives to strengthen the EU's capacity to promote and uphold the rule of law. It co-led the **fourth EU-wide Rule of Law Report**, which looked at developments since July 2022. It also included **the assessment of the implementation of country-specific recommendations** made, for the first time, in the 2022 report. Overall, rule of law reports prompted a positive reform dynamic in Member States, with 65% of 2022 report recommendations already fully or partially implemented. The Secretariat-General worked with other relevant Directorates-General to

ensure that the annual rule of law report process is rigorous and effective and that it is consistent with other tools at the Commission's disposal to promote the rule of law.

The Secretariat-General led the work on the closing of **the Cooperation and Verification**



Mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania. The mechanism had been introduced in 2007 as a transitional measure to facilitate progress in the fields of judicial reform and anti-corruption, as well as on organised crime for Bulgaria. On 15 September 2023, the Commission repealed the two decisions that had established that mechanism, as all benchmarks have been satisfactorily met.

Monitoring continues under the rule of law cycle, as for all Member States.

The other key strand steered by the Secretariat-General was the implementation of **the European Democracy Action Plan**. The action plan aimed to strengthen the resilience of EU democracies, identifying key actions to address the areas where our systems are most vulnerable and promoting civic engagement. As part of the **Defence of Democracy Package**, the Secretariat-General prepared the stocktaking of how the action plan was implemented, setting out how the Commission has worked to strengthen democratic resilience by promoting election integrity, protecting media freedom and pluralism and strengthening the fight against disinformation. Many key proposals under this action plan – such as the European Media Freedom Act and legislation on political advertising – were the subject of intensive inter-institutional negotiations in 2023.

Strengthening the Commission's better regulation policy

The Secretariat-General has a pivotal role in the development and implementation of the Commission's better regulation agenda for evidence-based policy making.

In 2023, the Commission placed particular emphasis on burden reduction, in particular on reducing burdens from **reporting requirements** on businesses and administrations by 25%, without undermining policy objectives. Based on the steer and coordination of the Secretariat-General, 41 initiatives were tabled aiming to rationalise and simplify reporting requirements. Once adopted by co-legislators, these proposals will cut reporting burdens for companies and administration by several billion euro. The Secretariat-General further developed a roadmap to progress towards the overall objective, which was presented in the SME relief package communication. By the end of 2023, under the coordination of the Secretariat-General, all actions have been achieved. The Secretariat-General carried out a call for evidence to identify priority areas to focus the rationalisation work. The Secretariat-General has also launched a mapping exercise of reporting requirements with standardised means and steered the work of Commission departments to develop rationalisation plans.

Better regulation also gives more prominence to the analysis of competitiveness of European businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises. A new **competitiveness check**, which is now a mandatory annex in all impact assessments, presents in an integrated and visible manner the impacts of the Commission's proposals on competitiveness.

Simplification and burden reduction is also the focus of the **one-in, one-out** approach which aims to compensate adjustments costs to the greatest extent possible and to offset administrative costs stemming from Commission proposals. The Secretariat-General steers the implementation of the approach. In 2022, as shown in the Annual Burden Survey, the 52 initiatives in the scope of the one-in, one-out approach reduced administrative burdens by EUR 7.3 billion.



The full implementation of better regulation principles also means ensuring that the Commission's working methods in **enforcing EU law** remain future-proof. To that end, the Secretariat-General has conducted a stocktaking exercise which led to the publication of a report presenting specific recommendations. This will guide the work on supporting Member States to implement EU law and enforcing it, where necessary. In 2023, infringement procedures showed once again that they work: the Commission could close over 1 000 infringement cases as Member States achieved compliance with EU law. 95% of these were resolved before being referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union, saving time and demonstrating the effectiveness of the infringement procedure's early stages.

Embedding strategic foresight in the policy process

The Secretariat-General supported various efforts across the Commission to embed strategic foresight at the heart of the EU policy-making process. The 2023 **Strategic Foresight Report** provided a future-oriented perspective on the social and economic factors influencing the EU sustainability transition towards 2050. The report was drafted by the Secretariat-General, based on an inclusive foresight process run by the Joint Research Centre. The identified challenges and recommendations form part of the policy discussions leading up to the European elections and the strategic agenda for the next legislature.

Promoting transparency and stakeholder involvement The Transparency Register is the EU's key tool to increase the transparency of interest representation in the EU policy-making process. In 2023, the Secretariat-General managed the register jointly with the European Parliament and the Council. In an effort to improve the **overall data quality in the Transparency Register**, the Secretariat-General carried out 2 111 checks on registrations and screened 1 498 new applications for registration during the year. In addition, it prepared the new version of the Transparency Register website to bring it up to newest technological standards. The Secretariat-General also contributed to the

development of the interinstitutional **Joint Legislative Portal** that will be delivered by the Publications Office in 2024. The portal will provide greater transparency and traceability of the legislative process.

Giving citizens a say in policy-making

To further boost citizen participation in EU policy-making, the Secretariat-General started work to set up the new **Have Your Say** page as a one-stop-shop providing access to public consultations and feedback on Commission initiatives, to European Citizens' Initiatives and to a citizens' engagement platform for Europe-wide debates on issues of public interest.

In 2023, a record number of three **citizens initiatives** reached the one million signature threshold and were submitted for Commission's reply. All three of them received a reply ('Stop finning – stop the trade', 'Save cruelty-free cosmetics' and 'Fur Free Europe'), as well as the successful initiative submitted in end 2022 ('Save bees and farmers!').

In addition, the Commission also adopted its first report on the **implementation of the revised** European Citizens' Initiative **regulation**. The report concludes that the revised rules deliver a more user-friendly framework for European Citizens' Initiative organisers and supporters, even though their full potential can only be assessed over a longer period of application. In the report, the Commission also announced a set of actions to further improve the European Citizens' Initiative functioning and infrastructure, as well as to further increase its visibility.

Promoting the highest ethical standards

In view of creating an interinstitutional ethics body whilst respecting the autonomy and independence of all institutions, the Commission invited in 2022 the eight other institutions and advisory bodies to take part in discussions on the issue. Based on these contacts, in 2023 the Commission adopted a proposal for an agreement establishing an **Interinstitutional Body for Ethical Standards** for the Members of the Institutions and advisory bodies mentioned in Article 13 of the Treaty on European Union. After the adoption of this proposal, the Secretariat-General was closely involved in the political and technical meetings that sought to find an agreement. These negotiations will continue in 2024.

The Secretariat-General continued to promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity among staff and Members of the Commission, in cooperation with DG HR and the Cabinets. The Secretariat-General also provided secretarial support to the Commission's Independent Ethical Committee. The Annual Report on the application of the Code of Conduct for the Members of the European Commission provides more information on this matter.

Coordinating the Equality Task Force

The Task Force on Equality and its secretariat, provided by the Secretariat-General, continued to work on mainstreaming equality in all EU policies, as set out in the Treaties. The task force contributed actively to the implementation of the five Union of Equality strategies adopted in 2020-2021. This included the adoption of targeted legislative

proposals such as the **European Disability Card** and **European Parking Card for persons with disabilities** and reporting on the implementation of the strategies (e.g. assessment of Member States' national Roma strategic frameworks, the annual report on gender equality).

The secretariat of the task force provided guidance to Commission departments on **equality mainstreaming**, updated the equality mainstreaming toolbox on the Commission's internal website and held awareness-raising sessions. By the end of the year, 35 Directorates-General and offices endorsed equality mainstreaming work plans.

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

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

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

Leading the Commission's strategic planning and programming

The strategic planning process underpins the performance culture in the Commission, by requiring all Commission departments to set clear objectives and monitor achievements. In 2023, the Secretariat-General steered the preparation of the **2024 management plans and annual work programmes of the executive agencies** across the Commission under the strategic framework set for 2020-2024.

The **2022 Annual Activity Reports** were the basis for reporting in the Commission's **2022 Annual Management and Performance Report**⁽⁹⁾, jointly prepared by the Secretariat-General and DG BUDG. The Secretariat-General and DG BUDG also organised the Commission-wide critical risk assessment exercises.

⁽⁹⁾ [Annual management and performance report 2022 - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic-annual-management-and-performance-report-2022-2023)

Preparing the Commission Work Programme and coordinating the policy-making process

The Commission prepared its **2024 work programme** against the backdrop of an increasingly challenging geopolitical context, including the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the Middle-East crisis.

In addition to committing to continued support for Ukraine and underlining the need for renewed efforts to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process, the 2024 Commission work programme outlines the Commission's new proposals for the months ahead and puts a strong focus on simplifying rules for citizens and businesses across the European Union. This follows up on President von der Leyen's goal to reduce reporting requirements by 25%.

Managing the Commission's relations with the other institutions

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

The Secretariat-General monitored developments in the legislative process for all pending legislative proposals in the **Interinstitutional Relations Group**. It also made sure that the positions of the European Parliament and the Council were given the necessary political attention. This approach smoothed the legislative process and secured the adoption of pending proposals.

The Secretariat-General was fully engaged in all aspects of the **European Parliament's** work, in plenary sessions, in parliamentary committee meetings and meetings of the parliamentary governing bodies. It also coordinated the Commission's replies to the Parliament's written and oral questions and petitions.

In relation to the **Council**, the Secretariat-General ensured optimal Commission representation in Coreper⁽¹⁰⁾ I, Coreper II and meetings of the Political and Security Committee. The Secretariat-General also provided all necessary support to the Commission's Vice-Presidents and Commissioners who attended meetings of the General Affairs Council. Furthermore, the Secretariat-General was responsible for the preparation of European Council meetings, Leaders' meetings and Euro Area summits.

The Secretariat-General continued to lead for the Commission in the long-standing collaboration with **national Parliaments, the European Economic and Social Committee** (in the first year of application of the renewed Protocol of Cooperation) and the **European Committee of the Regions** (where a new Protocol on Cooperation has equally been negotiated in 2023). It also fosters good relations with the **European**

⁽¹⁰⁾ The Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States

Ombudsman, in particular by coordinating the Commission replies in response to requests from the Ombudsman.

The Commission continued to strengthen its relations with **EU decentralised agencies**. The network of the Commission's representatives on the management boards of EU decentralised agencies continued to meet regularly under the chairmanship of the Secretariat-General, with the objective of supporting agencies and further improving their governance, performance and cooperation in policy matters.

Providing briefings and political intelligence

The Secretariat-General prepared a wide range of **briefings** for President von der Leyen, the (Executive) Vice-Presidents and the Secretary-General. This included preparing President von der Leyen's participation in meetings of the European Parliament and European Council, Summits with third countries and in other high-level meetings and events, both in Europe and internationally.

Overseeing the Commission's respect of personal data protection rules

In 2023, the Data Protection Office of the Commission closely monitored how the institution applied the guarantees laid down by law for the protection of the personal data of both the citizens it serves and its own staff.

The investigations by the Data Protection Office identified several areas that required more attention and resulted in appropriate recommendations to individual Commission departments. The Data Protection Office supported Commission departments in their work to keep the processing records up to date, to address data subject requests and to deal with personal data breaches. It also continued to provide ongoing ad-hoc advice on new processing operations in a context where the Commission is being tasked with ever more complex and sensitive activities. Awareness-raising and training remained a priority.

The monitoring exercises in 2023 confirmed the commitment of Commission departments to compliance with data protection rules and the overall maturity of the systems in place.

Ensuring business continuity

In a worsening political context and increased threats to its operations, the Commission continued to enhance its preparedness to handle disruptive events.

For this purpose, the Secretariat-General, in cooperation with DG HR, worked on improving workflows for internal decision-making and communication in case of major crises, notably by preparing a checklist for immediate response and a comprehensive protocol for the Corporate Management Board. The Secretariat-General also launched the review of critical functions and IT systems and supported the update of local business continuity plans.

Given the importance of testing and exercising the established arrangements, in the second half of the year the Secretariat-General carried out a corporate communication cascade test and a targeted test involving the members of the Crisis Corporate Management Board.

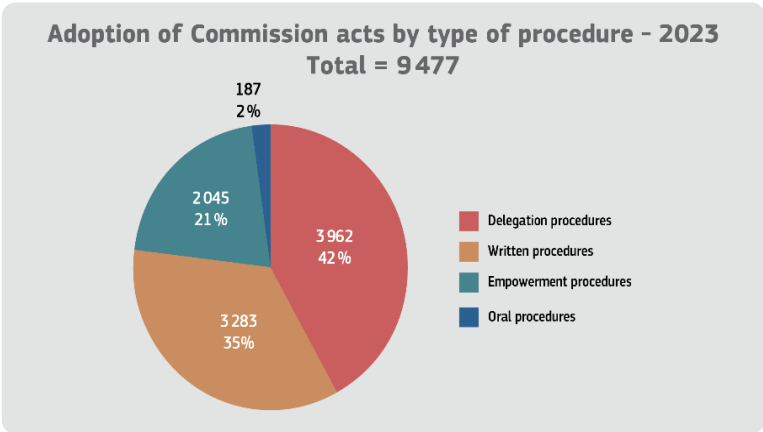
Managing the Commission’s IT, cyber-security, information and data management policies

The Information Technology and Cybersecurity Board monitored the implementation of the Commission’s digital strategy based on the set of defined indicators. The Board also approved action to promote the use of cloud services and provided guidance for major corporate digital transformation projects in the domains of finance, human resources or risks and fraud management. The board endorsed the revision of the **IT security strategy** for 2023-2024 which updated the strategic vision towards the strengthening of cybersecurity in the Commission organised in five cybersecurity domains: identify, protect, detect, respond and recover. The board also continued to monitor the entire range of cyber threats affecting the Commission and the maturity in the implementation of its IT security policies.

The Information Management Steering Board steered the implementation of the corporate data, information and knowledge management policy through activities under the Rolling Action Plan and by addressing emerging technologies such as **artificial intelligence**. The board has steered the development of the **AI@EC Communication** to the Commission, which aims to take advantage of the opportunities related to using artificial intelligence in Commission work, while safeguarding against the associated risks. Work has continued to facilitate effective knowledge sharing and collaborative work practices with the help of a rationalised toolset centred on M365. Significant progress has also been achieved in developing corporate approaches to reference data, data acquisition, data discovery through the EC Data Catalogue exploitation of data and to enhancing data skills of staff.

Managing the decision-making procedures

While ensuring legality, collegiality and the quality of the decision-making process, the Secretariat-General facilitated the swift adoption of urgent decisions linked to the Commission’s political priorities. The Commission adopted a total of 9 477 decisions in 2023 out of which 466 in response to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.



The Secretariat-General also continued the digital transformation of the decision-making process by further extending the scope of Decide, the Commission’s corporate decision-making tool, and by streamlining the related working methods. Since April 2023, the Commission’s replies to national Parliaments’ opinions are fully handled in Decide, leading to the decommissioning of the outdated ASAP system. The extension of Decide to the interinstitutional steps of the legislative lifecycle of proposals was finalised end 2023 and

will be made available to all services in January 2024. EdiT, the new legislative drafting tool, was further enhanced following users' feedback, especially as concerns collaborative features, and its performance was considerably increased.

Information sessions were provided to policy officers, decision-making managers and coordinators, with particular focus on the security aspects. GoPro, the guide to Commission procedures, is being updated and redesigned to fit into the new intranet platform and offer the most relevant information in the clearest way. It is available since March 2024.

2. INTERNAL CONTROL AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Assurance is provided on the basis of information on the efficiency and effectiveness of internal control systems and governance processes. The management monitors the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis and carries out an objective examination with internal and external auditors. The results are explicitly documented and reported to the Secretary-General.

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

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

This section covers the control results and other relevant elements that support management's assurance. It is structured into 2.1. Control results, 2.2. Audit observations and recommendations, 2.3. Effectiveness of internal control systems and resulting in 2.4. Conclusions on the assurance.

2.1. Control results

This section reports on the control results used by management to support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives (ICO) ⁽¹¹⁾. The Secretariat-General's assurance-building and materiality criteria are outlined in annual activity report annex 5. The annual activity report 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 Secretariat-General uses the following definitions of a positive conclusion for the five internal control objectives and their associated indicators:

- Residual error rate: below 2%;
- Cost-effectiveness: error rates, time-to-pay and time-to-contract and costs of controls leading to a positive conclusion on cost-effectiveness;
- Anti-fraud strategy: the 2023 action plan is implemented and recommendations are accepted by management;
- Safeguarding of assets: all pre-financings are correctly recorded;
- Reliability of reporting: no material error and no reservations.

| Overview table of the Secretariat-General | Procurement and administrative expenditure | | Revenues including revenues transferred to other Directorates- | Total of expenses and coverage percentage | |
|--|--|-------|--|---|------|
| | m EUR | m EUR | m EUR | m EUR | % |
| Procurement, administrative expenses and grant without a call for proposal | 2.6 | 8.6 | 4.6 | 11.2 | 100% |

In line with the 2018 Financial Regulation, the Secretariat-General's assessment for the new reporting requirement is as follows:

- No cases of "confirmation of instructions" (FR art 92.3);
- No cases of financing not linked to costs (FR art 125.3);

⁽¹¹⁾ 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.

- No Financial Framework Partnerships >4 years (FR art 130.4);
- No cases of flat rates >7% for indirect costs (FR art 181.6);
- No derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity pursuant to Article 193 of the Financial Regulation.

The assurance-building process relies on positive conclusions for each of the different sections under the main section “control results”. In addition to the indicators for the 5 control objectives listed above, the risk at payment has to remain below 2%, the Secretariat-General should not be subject to fraud and assets and information are adequately protected. Payments are processed timely, the costs of the controls are within a 10%-15% range, there are no very significant or critical open recommendations from auditors and all control principles are present and functioning. The Secretariat-General has a single control system: there’s a single grant without a call for proposals and an open procurement procedure every three years. For those reasons, they are included in the control system that applies to administrative expenditures. No risks were identified that would impact negatively the achievements of the control objectives.

2.1.1. Effectiveness of controls

a) Legality and regularity of the transactions

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

1) Control objective

The control objective is to keep the estimated risk at closure below 2%.

2) Assessment of the control results

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

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

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

The bulk of the grant's expenses are for personnel who belong to a dedicated administrative entity and whose costs are standardised. Furthermore, the ex post control carried out at the end of 2021 confirmed the results of previous audit work carried out by an external consultant. These showed that adequate control procedures are in place, such as: (i) the correct identification of the staff working on the activities financed by the grant;

(ii) the prevention of double payments; (iii) the presence of supporting documents and related invoices for payments made; (iv) the beneficiary's reliable accounts; (v) very minor claims for non-eligible payments.

- For procurement and other administrative expenses: 0.5%.

Controls aim to systematically detect and prevent breaches of legality and regularity; the first measure of the error rate is therefore the one resulting from the analysis of the recording of exceptions: control overrides and non-compliant events. The analysis of these exceptions shows that 0.5% is the best estimate. The Secretariat-General's portfolio consists of segments with a relatively low error rate, i.e. administrative expenses and a grant without a call for proposals. This is due to the inherent risk profile of the financial transactions and the performance of the relevant control systems. Given the nature of the transactions and the absence of errors, except occasionally and marginally, the Secretariat-General does not process recoveries and financial corrections to correct errors and did not do so during the reporting year.

- Overall risk at payment: 0.5%.

The estimated overall risk at payment for 2023 expenditure amounts to EUR 0.06 million, representing 0.5% of the Secretariat-General's total relevant expenditure for 2023. This is the Authorising Officer by Delegation's best, conservative, estimate of the amount of relevant expenditure during the year not in conformity with the contractual and regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made. As explained above, this expenditure will subsequently not be subject to ex post controls to have a proportion of the underlying errors detected and corrected in subsequent years. The conservatively estimated future corrections for 2023 expenditure amount to EUR 0.0 million.

3) Overview of the Secretariat-General's risk profile

The Secretariat-General's portfolio consists of segments with a low error rate i.e. the small size of its budget, almost all contracts entered into that are part of framework contracts, a single grant, exempt from the requirement to have a call for proposals. Based on all the above, the Secretary-General presents in the following table an estimation of the risk at payment and risk at closure for the expenditure managed during 2023:

4) Estimated risk at payment and at closure (amounts in EUR million)

| SG | Payments made | Relevant expenditure | Estimated risk (error rate %) at payment | | Estimated future corrections and deductions | | Estimated risk (error rate %) at closure | |
|--|---------------|----------------------|--|------|---|----|--|-----|
| | | | m EUR | % | m EUR | % | m EUR | % |
| Procurement, grant and administrative expenses under direct management | 11.25 | 11.35 | 0.06 | 0.5% | 0 | 0% | 0.06 | 0.5 |

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

The estimated overall risk at payment for 2023 expenditure, 0.5%, is the Authorising Officer by Delegation's best conservative estimate of the amount of relevant expenditure during the year, not in conformity with the contractual and regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made. The Secretariat-General does not carry out ex-post controls (as explained in annex 6) no further corrections to the expenditure are expected and the estimated future corrections are thus set at 0%. As a result, the estimated overall risk at closure corresponds to the estimated overall risk at payment.

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

5) Preventive and corrective measures

As regards the corrections carried out in 2023, the Secretariat-General has in place an effective mechanism for correcting errors, through ex-ante controls, resulting in preventive measures, amounting to EUR 0.02 million. This is similar to last year with EUR 0.02 million.

b) Fraud prevention, detection and correction

The Secretariat-General has developed and implemented its own anti-fraud strategy since 2014 on the basis of a methodology provided by OLAF. It is updated every three years, last time in 2023, and an additional fraud risk assessment was carried out the same year.

The implementation of the rolling action plan that forms part of the anti-fraud strategy is being monitored and reported to the management annually. All necessary actions have been implemented, with the exception of the 'certified correct' for contracts with deliverables to be performed in 2024. The 'certified correct' is the check mark provided by the operational unit in the financial and accounting system that the services or the goods were delivered in accordance with the contract.

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

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

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

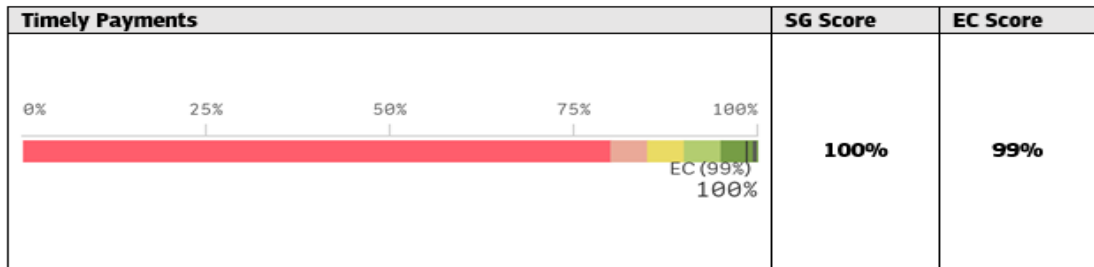
c) Safeguarding of assets and information

The Secretariat-General plays a key role in managing sensitive and classified information, both in relation to its own activities and in its corporate role. The core principles in this respect are confidentiality on a 'need to know' basis, integrity and availability. The Secretariat-General also protects access to assets and information by managing access to the offices of the Secretary-General and her staff, the President, Vice-Presidents and Commissioners, as well as their Cabinets, and Directorates-General/Services that do not have a local EUCI registry. The Secretariat-General takes the necessary measures to protect the security of its IT systems and services - including the information and knowledge held on them. To safeguard classified information, the Secretariat-General operates the Commission's Central EU Classified Information Registry. Newcomers are informed about the main principles, rights and obligations under the Staff Regulation, with a particular focus on the obligation of discretion and the importance of avoiding any leaks of information or documents. The Secretary-General has emphasised the importance of strengthening the security culture in the Secretariat-General and the Local Security Officer is helping to raise staff's awareness of security-related topics.

2.1.2. Efficiency of controls

Two main indicators are used to measure efficiency: time to pay and time to contract (time to inform and time to grant do not apply to the historical archives grant, which is exempt from the requirement to have a call for proposals). In 2023 (see Annex 3) the average time to pay with suspension with PMO's payments excluded was 9 days (and 8 days in 2022). The financial scorecard shows that 100% of payments were made on time (see Annex 4), which demonstrates the close monitoring of payment deadlines. Monthly reports were provided to the operational units to monitor uncommitted and unpaid appropriations. The controls are deemed to be efficient.

The average time to contract, starting from reception of the offer and ending with signature of the contract by both parties, was 6 days (8.5 days in 2022). The use of eOrders, which allows contracts to be signed electronically with all signatures being collected within one day is an essential element of this positive result.



2.1.3. Economy of controls

Being a low-spending Directorate-General, the Secretariat-General has a single indicator for the costs of controls per control system. The costs of controls amounts to EUR 1.2 million and are based on staff work activities, as recorded by the screening exercise and with the Activities & Tasks Logging for Allocation of Staff nomenclature. These include financial management, programme management, budget and accounting, management, general coordination and information and communication technology (see Annex 7).

These costs amount to 11.3% of the total payments (10.9% in 2022). This figure can be explained by the scope and diversity of activities linked to the cost of controls, the number of operational units involved and the low number and low magnitude of the financial transactions at the Secretariat-General. As there were no significant changes to the budget and the staff carrying out controls, the control environment remained stable, but the total amount of expenses increased.

The costs of controls related to the Recover and Resilience Facility that SG RECOVER incurred amount to EUR 19.8 million (see Annex 7), for corresponding payments of EUR 82.1 billion (as can be found in DG ECFIN's AAR).

2.1.4. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

Based on the most relevant key indicators and control results, the Secretariat-General has assessed the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of its control system and reached a positive conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of the controls for which it is responsible.

Three main indicators are used to determine the cost-effectiveness of controls: the error rate, the time-to-pay/timely payment (and the time-to-contract) and the cost of controls. The respective indicators were: a 0.5% error rate, 9 days on average to pay/ 100% of payments made on time (and 6 days on average to contract) and a cost of controls of 11.3% (as a percentage of the total payments).

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

2.2. 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.

Internal Audit Service

The Internal Audit Service's limited conclusion on the state of the Secretariat-General's internal control is based on the audit work carried out in 2019-2023. The IAS concludes that the internal control systems in place for the audited processes are effective, except for one very important recommendation on the IT controls to protect sensitive non-classified information.

The Secretariat-General has planned different actions in order to address the recommendation and findings of the IAS. Firstly, it will draft guidelines and Frequently Asked Questions explaining how to lift encryption of sensitive non-classified documents before registering them in Ares ⁽¹²⁾. Secondly, it will assess the need for further technical controls in Ares for the proper management and use of security and distribution markings. Thirdly, it will send a written reminder to document management officers and organise a meeting or workshop with them regarding their obligations regarding security markings management in Ares. Lastly, it will prepare awareness raising actions with data management officers and in coordination with DG.HR. The action plan was sent to the IAS, approved by IAS and all actions are proceeding as planned.

European Court of Auditors

Together with DG BUDG, the Secretariat-General prepared the annual meeting of the College of Commissioners with the members of the Court of Auditors to discuss priorities and collaboration between the Commission and the Court. The meeting took place on 13 November at the Commission premises in Brussels. Both institutions reaffirmed their commitment to continuing their constructive cooperation as the EU's executive and audit powers. In November 2023, the European Court of Auditors published a review of volume I of the Annual Management and Performance Report, the Commission's high-level performance report on the EU budget, and part of the Commission's annual financial reporting package. The review noted that the Commission has good procedures for its preparation, but highlighted that the Court and the Commission reach divergent conclusions in specific expenditure areas, and that there was scope to improve the quality of performance data. The Secretariat-General is working with other Commission services to further improve the quality of performance data.

⁽¹²⁾ Ares is the Commission's internal records system

The European Court of Auditors issued three Special Reports in 2023 where the Secretariat-General was associated:

'EU's financial landscape - A patchwork construction requiring further simplification and accountability': The audit aimed to provide insight into the design of the current arrangements and to identify the potential scope for simplifying and streamlining the EU's financial landscape. The Court concluded that the EU's financial landscape is a patchwork of instruments whose accountability could be improved. It thus provided recommendations aimed at improving prior assessments of proposed instruments, with a view of further consolidating the EU's financial landscape and improving its accountability.

'Design of the Commission's control system for the RRF – Assurance and accountability gap remains at EU level in the new delivery model, despite extensive work being planned': The European Court of Auditors examined the design of the Commission's control system for the Recovery and Resilience Facility to assess. It found that, in a relatively short time, the Commission had designed a control system that provided for an extensive process for verifying the fulfilment of milestones and targets, although gaps remained concerning assurance and accountability. The Court provided recommendations concerning the identification of measures to improve assurance, as well as to enhance guidance on corrections and on how to act in case of reversals of previously fulfilled targets and milestones.

'The Recovery and Resilience Facility's performance monitoring framework - Measuring implementation progress but not sufficient to capture performance': The European Court of Auditors examined whether the Recovery and Resilience Facility's performance monitoring framework would be appropriate for measuring its performance over time. The Court concluded that the Recovery and Resilience Facility's performance monitoring framework measures implementation progress, but only partly the Recovery and Resilience Facility's performance, and thus provided recommendations aimed at improving the quality of Recovery and Resilience Facility's reporting and of performance monitoring in future instruments based on financing, not linked costs.

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

The assessment of the Secretariat-General's internal control system, conducted in 2022, is based on the following criteria: reports by the operational units on the five internal control objectives; reports by the second-line units on the values of the monitoring indicators;

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

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

2.4. Conclusions on the assurance

The five internal control objectives for financial management were assessed for the whole budget delegated to the Secretariat-General under Section 2.1, complemented where necessary by Sections 2.2 and 2.3. The objectives of having resources used for their intended purpose and the non-omission of significant information were assessed on the basis of the reports from the authorising officers where this was explicitly spelled out. There is no element to be reported that would qualify the declaration of the Secretary-General.

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

2.5. Declaration of Assurance

Declaration of Assurance

I, the undersigned,

Secretary-General,

In my capacity as authorising officer

Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view ⁽¹³⁾.

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 years prior to the year of this declaration.

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

Brussels, 28 May 2024

(signature)

Ilze JUHANSONE

⁽¹³⁾ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG/Executive Agency.

3. MODERNISING THE ADMINISTRATION

3.1. Human resource management

In 2023 the Secretariat-General continued to be strongly burdened with a heavy workload. The tasks entrusted to it following the COVID, Ukraine and energy crises, with the additional tasks co-legislators gave to the Commission, continued adding to the already heavy pressure on staff. In this difficult context, the Secretariat-General's human resources policy ensured the best use of its available resources to contribute to all the political objectives of the Commission. Working under the constraint of stable staffing, it ensured swift recruitments and maintained a low vacancy rate in 2023.

To save energy and costs, a majority of the Secretariat-General services moved to the 'dynamic collaborative space'. Most directorates organised reflection days for their staff to foster the cohesion of the teams and prepare the transition to the new College the following year. The Secretariat-General kept developing its objectives to be a positive, inclusive and efficient workplace as outlined in its human resources strategy. The Secretariat-General also continued to invest in promoting gender parity in its management team and as a result half of both middle and senior managers were women at the end of 2023.

New colleagues in the Secretariat-General received support to integrate smoothly through training and guidance. A comprehensive, needs-based digital skills training and coaching programme, together with the network of digital ambassadors, continued helping members of staff to adjust to the hybrid working environment. The EU Policymaking Hub, managed by the Secretariat-General, launched specialised learning packages for staff who are involved in policy-making.

Internal communication actions, such as weekly debriefs to all staff from management meetings and the weekly 'Newsflash' newsletter, helped to strengthen staff engagement. Information published on the MySGNet intranet page highlighted the achievements of various teams and included information about learning opportunities.

3.2. Digital transformation and information management

➤ *Digital culture*

The Secretariat-General continued to tailor its comprehensive digital skills training and coaching programme by providing information sessions for practitioners, ad hoc training sessions and digital information in the format of newsletters and intranet pages.

➤ *Business-driven digital transformation*

The Secretariat-General managed digital solutions designed to support key processes and policies in the Commission: decision-making, transparency, business continuity, crisis

management, document management, implementation and enforcement of EU law, data protection, mediation.

It introduced a process efficiency programme aimed at improving its productivity by reviewing and where feasible automating its processes. In this context, the Secretariat-General also invested in exploring the potential of artificial intelligence enhanced digital solutions and launched a Network for Artificial Intelligence and Process Efficiency aimed at promoting the exchange of good practices and stimulating reuse of common solutions.

➤ *Seamless Digital Environment*

Records and archives management: Document management at the Commission was made easier by providing a link that allows staff to register documents directly from collaborative platforms into the corporate records management system, Hermes-Ares-NomCom. The Secretariat-General continued to integrate other information systems with this platform to further automate and streamline business processes.

Monitoring EU law: Thanks to the introduction of the new THEMIS/Complaints module in 2023, handling complaints on the application of EU law is much easier for the Commission services. Following this success, the Secretariat-General has focused on improving two other aspects of the Commission's enforcement work: transparency (through the redesign of the European Commission web site on enforcement of EU law) and the exchange of information with the Member States (through the development of a new THEMIS module for pre-infringement investigations).

Decision-making: see page 27

➤ *Green, resilient and secure infrastructure*

The Secretariat-General has launched a comprehensive assessment of the cloud-readiness of its information systems.

IT security

To counter the evolving cybersecurity threats, the Secretariat-General draws up annual cybersecurity plans taking into account the evolving landscape of cyberthreats. They combine an effective blend of measures designed to comply with the corporate IT security policy including the periodic assessment, in the IT security plans, of the level of risk and definition of countermeasures.

Furthermore, the Secretariat-General continued to raise awareness on cybersecurity, physical and information security. It organised dedicated information sessions and enforced cybersecurity upstream in its information systems by promoting secure development and scanning the systems for potential security vulnerabilities.

Information and knowledge management

The Secretariat-General continued to improve the local governance of its key data assets, in accordance with its corporate policy. It has updated the data assets under its responsibility and documented data-related roles and responsibilities within the Secretariat-General. It also continued to raise awareness of the principles of data governance among key local stakeholders.

The Secretariat-General has continued to co-lead the corporate activity to develop corporate reference data and has taken an active role in the development of the AI@EC Communication to the Commission and the associated work strands. It continued to contribute to corporate activities to promote collaborative ways of working. To do so, the Secretariat-General started to integrate platforms for collaborative working with the corporate records management system and to develop guidance for records and content management across those systems.

Data protection

In 2023, the Secretariat-General continued to raise awareness of data protection rules among its staff, aimed at ensuring appropriate and accountable processing of personal data as well as to build capacities for a relevant response should a personal data breach occur. To ensure accountability for Commission-wide processing operations and to establish efficient, swift, and sound handling of data subject requests or breaches of personal data, the Secretariat-General has put in place four new internal arrangements with other Commission departments in the areas of archives, parliamentary questions, petitions, and the register of expert groups. The Secretariat-General continued to ensure a high level of protection of the personal data it processes thus implementing the Commission's data protection action plan. It published transparent and up-to-date information for all its personal data processing operations. The Secretariat-General implemented appropriate measures for new or modified IT systems to ensure data protection by design and by default.

3.3. Sound environmental management

The Secretariat-General actively engaged with its staff on the Communication on the greening of the Commission, adopted in April 2022. In line with the Commission's building policy, half of the Secretariat-General's staff moved to more energy-efficient office space. On average, the project resulted in the Secretariat-General reducing its surface-related costs by 27%. Resources, such as old furniture and building components, were recycled resulting in a significant reduction of the project's costs and environmental impact. The Secretariat-General used solely natural and biodegradable materials and re-introduced green elements within the workspace.

The Secretariat-General made further efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions from business travel, notably by encouraging travel by train instead of plane. The international situation, however, required a sustained activity of the Commission's Protocol Service to accompany the President. The services of the Secretariat-General responsible for external relations

were also required to participate in far-ranging missions, such as the G7 Summit in Japan and the G20 Summit in India. Monitoring professional trips' emissions will continue being an important element in measuring the objective's progress.

Promoting environmentally friendly behaviour among staff was a key priority. In line with the main corporate campaigns, staff were exposed to success stories illustrating the benefits of circular economy, paperless practices and the environmental impact of packaging. In addition, the Secretariat-General staff gained valuable insight into consumption habits of societies, as well as the environmental impact of their waste management practices through an awareness raising campaign. Participants shared positive feedback with the organising team, which showcased the positive impact on their experience. As part of a pilot project aiming at reducing energy consumption in the workplace, the Secretariat-General successfully implemented a measure that involved deactivating 50% of the corridors' lights. The latter contributed to a more sustainable environment and resulted in important energy savings.

3.4. Examples of economy and efficiency

The Secretariat-General continued to improve EdiT, the new legislative editor, and in particular worked closely with the Legal Service to meet specific needs for the benefit of the Legal Service and the Commission as a whole. In addition, the integration of opinions from national Parliaments in Decide allowed the decommissioning of the legacy system ASAP and an annual saving in maintenance costs. Furthermore, work also continued to extend the Decide timeline to the inter-institutional part of the legislative lifecycle, to be delivered in January 2024. This will allow users in the Commission to follow the progress of a proposal from preparation in the Commission to final adoption by the co-legislators. Instead of consulting several systems to get the information, they will have easy access to it in Decide. This will make their work easier and save them a great deal of time.