

Annual Activity Report 2025

Directorate-General for Education,
Youth, Sport and Culture

Contents

Contents	2
DG EAC IN BRIEF	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
A. Key results and progress towards achieving the Commission's general objectives and department's specific objectives	4
B. Key performance indicators	7
C. Key conclusions on internal control and financial management	7
D. Provision of information to the Commissioners	8
1. KEY RESULTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE COMMISSION'S GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE DEPARTMENT	9
2. INTERNAL CONTROL AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	27
2.1. Control results	27
2.1.1. Overview of the budget and relevant control systems (RCS)	27
2.1.2. Effectiveness of controls	29
2.1.3. Efficiency of controls	34
2.1.4. Economy of controls	35
2.1.5. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls	36
2.2. Audit observations and recommendations	36
2.3. Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems	38
2.4. Conclusions on the assurance	38
2.5. Declaration of Assurance	40
3. A MODERN AND SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	41
3.1. Human resource management	41
3.2. Digital transformation and data management	42
3.3. Sound environmental management	44

DG EAC IN BRIEF

DG EAC designs and delivers EU policies and programmes that empower people, develop talents and strengthen societies through education, culture, youth, and sport.

DG EAC supports high-quality and inclusive education and training systems, attractive and sustainable research careers, cross-border mobility and solidarity, vibrant cultural and creative sectors, active youth engagement as well as a values-based sport model as essential pillars of the European project. Our work supports excellence, innovation and convergence across Member States and contributes to a resilient, competitive and prosperous European Union.

Under the political leadership of Executive Vice-President Mînzatu, Commissioner Micallef and Commissioner Zaharieva, DG EAC pursues the following core objectives:

- implementing the Union of Skills and completing the European Education Area, notably by building skills for life and competitiveness through a solid educational foundation and a 'whole-of-society' approach to education;
- promoting inclusive lifelong learning, from early childhood education and care to schools and higher education, from basic to advanced skills, including digital education skills and active citizenship;
- promoting cultural and linguistic diversity, artistic creation and access to Europe's cultural heritage, with a particular focus on young people as drivers of democratic resilience, European identity and values;
- strengthening the links between education, research and innovation through advancing the STEM ⁽¹⁾ uptake in education, the European Universities initiative, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and contributing to making Europe a global magnet for talent;
- supporting young people's education, training, development and mobility, notably through Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, enabling them to grow, connect and contribute across borders;
- fostering participation in sport and physical activity as part of healthy, active and cohesive communities, while promoting and strengthening a values-based European Sport Model;
- promoting intergenerational fairness by expanding opportunities across all age groups, investing sustainably in our youth, and helping ensure that the benefits of today's actions endure for future generations;
- ensuring effective and strategic implementation of EU flagship programmes: Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, Creative Europe, the Marie-Sklodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and the EIT under Horizon Europe;
- enhancing the coherence and impact of policies and programmes through robust evidence, cross-cutting synergies, and data-driven governance.

⁽¹⁾ STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

In 2025, DG EAC contributed to the Commission's **General Objective 1 - A new plan for Europe's sustainable prosperity and competitiveness** by steering policies and managing programmes that support Europe's competitiveness through high-quality, inclusive and future-proof education policies, equipping people with relevant skills and competences for Europe's green and digital transitions as well as policies and programmes that reinforce cutting-edge education and Europe's research talent pipeline and innovation ecosystems (Specific Objectives 1.1. and 1.2).

In particular, DG EAC contributed to the launch and implementation of the **Union of Skills** – a central pillar of the Competitiveness Compass – and advanced the development of the **European Education Area (EEA)** in preparation for its second cycle. These flagship initiatives are at the heart of DG EAC's work to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and preparedness, including through a strengthened Erasmus+ programme. In particular, the **Action Plan on Basic Skills** was adopted as part of the Union of Skills strategy. It recognises the urgent need to raise our performance across all basic skills, addresses underachievement and promotes inclusion and excellence from early years through all stages of school education and adult learning. The **STEM Education Strategic Plan** reinforces this ambition by increasing participation in STEM studies, especially among girls and women, to pursue future-ready careers and ensure Europe has the talent to drive the green and digital transitions.

As part of the Union of Skills strategy, a new **Choose Europe for Science initiative** was launched under the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions**. By enabling organisations to recruit researchers under excellent conditions and provide them with long term career prospects, this initiative aims to make research careers in Europe attractive to international talent, in line with the Choose Europe strategy. Beyond Choose Europe for Science, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions continued to support the career and skills development of researchers, fostering scientific excellence and strengthening Europe's capacity for Research and Innovation, with a total budget announced in funding of over EUR 1.25 billion in 2025.

In 2025, the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)** and its 9 Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) continued the integration of the Knowledge Triangle and thus providing key support to education, research and innovation in Europe. In 2025, the EIT achieved significant milestones, including the successful designation of the new Water KIC, reaching key targets in gender equality initiatives through the EIT Girls Go STEM programme.

In 2025, **Erasmus+** served as a crucial instrument in supporting the Commission's policy priorities, in particular in implementing the Union of Skills, the European Democracy Shield and the Preparedness Union Strategy. It also continued to contribute to specific policy objectives

such as the development of the EEA, the European Skills Agenda, the European strategy for universities, the Digital Education Action Plan, Europe's Digital Decade, the EU Youth Strategy, the EU youth work agenda and the EU work plan for Sport. A key milestone was the Commission proposal, accompanied by an impact assessment, in July 2025 for a strengthened Erasmus+ programme for the period 2028-2034, integrating the European Solidarity Corps and supporting education, training, youth and sport sectors through learning mobility and capacity building with a proposed budget nominally 50% higher than for the 2021-2027 programming cycle.

In addition, DG EAC also contributed to the Commission's **General Objective 3 - Supporting people, and strengthening our societies and our social models** with steering policies and managing programmes that support inclusion, social participation, cultural diversity or international cooperation under its remit in 2025 (Specific Objectives 3.1. to 3.4.)

Notably, the **European Solidarity Corps** continued to turn EU values into concrete action, giving young people opportunities to support communities while strengthening social cohesion across Europe. The interim evaluation of the programme, adopted in April, underlines its strong impact in terms of promoting inclusion, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities, diversity and democratic participation, reinforcing European values and a sense of European identity.

In the area of youth policy, the adoption of the **EU Youth Report** was a key milestone. In addition, DG EAC launched a listening process to engage young people and stakeholders in reflection about the post 2027 EU Youth Strategy, starting with the kick-off meeting of the EU Youth Stakeholders Group in March 2025.

In 2025, DG EAC intensified international cooperation in education, youth, and sport through **policy cooperation with third countries** and actions under the **international dimension of Erasmus+**, allowing to deliver on key international policies and flagship initiatives such as the **Union of Skills**, the Union's **enlargement policy** and the **Global Gateway Strategy**. It also delivered on cultural cooperation, with Moldova officially joining Creative Europe. DG EAC strengthened international cooperation by working closely with candidate and potential candidate countries to support the enlargement process, and agreement was signed on the association of Switzerland to Erasmus+ and negotiations were concluded on the UK's association to Erasmus+. Under Erasmus+, DG EAC ensured continuity of Ukraine's participation in relevant actions. In parallel, DG EAC stepped up support for Ukrainian culture through Creative Europe and strengthened cooperation with Member States under a pioneering Team Europe Initiative for cultural heritage in Ukraine.

In the area of cultural policy, the adoption of the **Culture Compass for Europe**, a new strategic framework for European cultural policy, was a major milestone in 2025. Other highlights included: a high-level round table on the working conditions of artists in Europe with the participation of EVP Mînzatu and Commissioner Micallef and the finalisation of two expert groups' reports under the **EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026** on culture and health and greening the **Culture and Creative Sectors** (CCS).

In the field of culture, DG EAC also reached major milestones for its programmes and initiatives with the adoption of three key evaluations: the final evaluation of Creative Europe 2014-2020

and interim evaluation of Creative Europe 2021-2027, the interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture 2020-2033, and the evaluation of the European Heritage Label. These evaluations enabled DG EAC to start drafting the new legal bases for these two actions and the future programme. DG EAC has been instrumental in the drafting of the Commission proposal for AgoraEU, the successor programme to Creative Europe under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) with a proposed total budget of EUR 8.582 billion, corresponding to a nominal increase of approximately 100% compared with the 2021-2027 MFF.

On the international front, key outcomes in the area of culture, beyond support to Ukraine, included, the contribution to the work of the G20 working group on culture and the adoption of the KwaDukuza Culture Ministers' declaration as well as participation in the Mondiacult 2025 world conference on culture including with a DG EAC-led side event on culture and health.

Concerning **sport**, DG EAC organised the annual EU Sport Forum and advanced the work on its Communication on "A Strategic Vision for Sport in Europe: Reinforcing the European Sport Model" by launching dedicated consultations with stakeholders. Furthermore, it initiated the procedure for the revision of the 2013 Council Recommendation on Health-Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA) and renewed the cooperation agreement with WHO. The 10th edition of the European Week of Sport engaged over 15 million participants in nearly 80 000 events in 39 countries across Europe and beyond.

Under **General Objective 5 - Protecting our democracy, upholding our values**, DG EAC launched its work on Enhancing Democratic Citizenship Education, focusing on the development of an EU citizenship competence framework and guidelines to strengthen citizenship education, as part of the European Democracy Shield.

Furthermore, Erasmus+ remained a key tool for strengthening citizenship competences and fostering active and engaged citizens, addressing throughout all its actions the challenges and barriers that limit citizens' participation in democratic processes, and contributing to their increased awareness and understanding of the EU and its values.

B. Key performance indicators

KPI #	KPI Title	Baseline (2024)	2025	Interim milestone (2027)	Target (2029)
Specific objective 1.1: Steering policies and managing programmes that support Europe's competitiveness through high-quality, inclusive and future-proof education policies, equipping people with relevant skills and					
1.1.1	Implementation of the 2030 Roadmap on the future digital education and skills	10% of EAC-led initiatives launched (2025)	Delayed - Postponed to Q4 2026	n.a.	50% of EAC-led initiatives launched
Specific objective 1.2: Steering policies and managing programmes that reinforce cutting-edge education and Europe's research talent pipeline and innovation ecosystems					
1.2.1	Number of participants in research promotion initiatives, bringing science closer to society and schools				
	Science is Wonderful!	4000	4500		12000
	European Researchers' Night	1500000	1500000		4000000
Specific objective 3.1: Steering policies and managing programmes that support inclusive and quality education to empower young people's social engagement, and solidarity across the EU, strengthening intergenerational					
3.1.1	Share of projects addressing inclusion and diversity				
	Erasmus+	40%	43%		40%
	European Solidarity Corps	72%	70%		72%
Specific objective 3.2: Steering policies and managing a programme that safeguards and promotes cultural diversity and heritage, fostering sustainable and innovative cultural and creative sectors, contributing to the					
3.2.1	Number and scale of transnational partnerships created with the support of the Programme				
	Partnerships	166	172		150
	Organisations	790	698		876
Specific objective 3.3: Developing policies and managing programme funds to develop an effective European dimension of sport, promoting healthy lifestyles, social participation, while promoting and reinforcing an inclusive, competitive and values-based European Sport Model					
3.3.1	Number partnerships in the field of sport	102	125		110
Specific objective 3.4: Supporting international cooperation in education, culture, youth, sport, and to enhance international partnerships, promote EU values and address shared global challenges					
3.4.1	Number of capacity building partnerships in education and training, youth and sport	270	321		281
Specific objective 5.1: Steering policies and managing programmes in education and training, youth, sport, and culture, promoting EU values, preparedness and resilience, fostering a sense of European identity and enhancing democratic participation and civic engagement					
5.5.1	Share of projects addressing participation and civic engagement	26%	30%		26%

Comments: The KPI 1.1.1 “Implementation of the 2030 Roadmap on the future digital education and skills” is delayed as the adoption of the roadmap has been postponed to Q4 2026. The latest known result for KPI 3.1.1 for the European Solidarity Corps is slightly below the baseline. Data on organisations under KPI 3.2.1 is not yet finalised. The numbers will further increase. All other KPIs are on track or even overperforming (i.e. KPI 3.1.1 for Erasmus+, 3.2.1. for partnerships, 3.3.1, and 5.1.1.).

C. Key conclusions on internal control and financial management

In line with the Commission's Internal Control Framework, DG EAC **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 well overall, but some improvements are needed as minor deficiencies were identified related to some Internal Control Principles.

DG EAC has **systematically examined the available control results and indicators, including those from supervised entities** to which it has entrusted budget implementation

tasks, **as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the internal auditor and the European Court of Auditors.**

The transition in 2025 to the Commission's new accounting system, SUMMA, has required the adjustment to a new system and has impacted budget implementation tasks, processes and financial management activities, particularly during the first part of the year. This has required careful management to ensure the same data quality as in previous years. In some cases, this may have resulted in lower performance for some standard financial indicators such as the timely payments.

All the above elements have been assessed to determine their impact on management's assurance about the achievement of the control objectives. Please refer for further details to section 2 on Internal Control and Financial Management.

In conclusion, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated. Improvements are necessary concerning Internal Control Principle 10 (Business Continuity Plan), Internal Control Principle 11 (selecting and developing general control activities over technology), Internal Control Principle 12 (deployment of control objectives), and Internal Control Principle 13 (data protection).

Please refer to the annual activity report section 2.3 for further details.

The Director-General, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation, has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

D. Provision of information to the Commissioners

In the context of the regular meetings during the year between DG EAC, the Executive Vice-President and the Commissioners on management matters, the main elements of this report and assurance declaration have been brought to the attention of Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu, responsible for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness, Commissioner Glenn Micallef, responsible for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, and Commissioner Ekaterina Zaharieva, responsible for Startups, Research and Innovation.

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

General Objective 1 - A new plan for Europe's sustainable prosperity and competitiveness

Specific Objective 1.1 – Steering policies and managing programmes that support Europe's competitiveness through high-quality, inclusive and future-proof education policies, equipping people with relevant skills and competences for Europe's green and digital transitions

As initiative announced in the 2025 Commission work programme, the **'Union of Skills' Communication**, co-drafted by DG EAC and DG EMPL, was adopted on 5 March. It was a major initiative of the first 100 days of the new Commission, and a key deliverable from the mission letter of EVP Mînzatu. The communication outlines the overall European strategy and key actions to support the development of the EU's human capital for a future-ready society and to strengthen EU competitiveness. It makes a crucial contribution to achieving the Competitiveness Compass, and to supporting people, strengthening our societies, and reinforcing our social models (General Objective 3).

As part of the Union of Skills, DG EAC contributed to the drafting of a new **EU-27 recommendation on human capital under the European Semester** which the Commission proposed in November as part of the Autumn Package to help address the most pressing and strategic decisions for skills and competitiveness. DG EAC contributed to the European Semester Country reports and country-specific recommendations, including those in the field of education for 26 Member States, and to monitoring reforms and investments in education and culture under the National Recovery and Resilience Plans. By the end of 2025, 277 milestones and targets were fulfilled and 80 were reported as completed by the Member States in the field of education. Similarly, in the field of culture (including tourism), 81 milestones and targets were fulfilled, and 23 were reported as completed.

The findings of the European Education Area (EEA) **interim evaluation**, published in June, showed clear added value of **European cooperation under the EEA strategic framework's** first (2021-2025) cycle and informed discussions on further improvements for the second (2026-2030) cycle to realise the EEA's full potential and provide a significant contribution to the Union of Skills. Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu's first **Implementation Dialogue** in June identified key issues for stepping up the implementation of the EEA.

The European **Education and Skills Summit "Fuelling Europe's Growth"**, hosted by the EVP in November, reaffirmed that education and skills must be placed at the centre of Europe's political agenda to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, social cohesion and strategic autonomy.

The Union of Skills Communication was accompanied by two key policy documents developed and led by DG EAC: i) an **Action Plan on Basic Skills** aimed at developing strong foundations for Europe's competitiveness and people's prospects in life and employment by decisively improving basic skills (literacy, mathematics, science, digital and citizenship, key for democracy and participation in society), and ii) a **STEM Education Strategic Plan**, one of the first deliverables of the Union of Skills, setting a comprehensive EU framework for increasing the quality and relevance of STEM education and developing STEM talent across Europe, including strengthening opportunities for women and girls. Its goal is to guide and inspire action at EU and Member State levels with a view to boosting Europe's competitiveness and preparedness. The 2030 Roadmap on the future of digital education and skills announced for Q4 2025 in the Communication on the Union of Skills on 5 March is now part of the **Education Package** announced in the Commission work programme 2026. During 2025, work has started on the preparation of the **package** which will also include a Basic Skills Support Scheme and the European school alliances.

Consultations also took place in view of improving working conditions, professional development, and career prospects for teachers, paving the way to an EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda announced for 2026 in the Action Plan on Basic Skills.

As part of the Union of Skills' governance framework, DG EAC also contributed to establishing the **European Skills Intelligence Observatory** for evidence-based policy to make education and skills policies future proof, and to the preparatory work on setting up the **European Skills High Level Board** as a sounding board for effective policymaking. The **2025 Education and Training Monitor** tracked the progress of EU Member States' education and training systems monitoring EU-level targets from the Union of Skills and the European Education Area Strategic Framework, with focus on STEM.

In January 2025, the **European Higher Education Sector Scoreboard** was launched with a first conference with a focus on monitoring the policy objectives of the European strategy for universities and the Union of Skills.

Council's adoption of the Council Resolution on a joint European degree label and the Council Recommendation on a quality assurance and recognition system in higher education on 12 May 2025 paved the way for the roll-out of a **joint European degree label** as from mid-2026. The 1st European Degree Forum jointly organised with the European University Institute in November 2025 brought together more than 500 stakeholders on site and online and

discussions resulted in the Florence Pledge: a framework guiding the next phase of work towards a joint European degree.

The high-level event **“Shaping the future: European Universities alliances for a competitive Europe”**, with keynote speeches inter alia by EVP Roxana Mînzatu and Enrico Letta, brought together rectors and coordinators of the 65 European Universities alliances as well as a wide range of higher education stakeholders. It allowed for a strategic discussion on further developing the alliances as cornerstones of making Europe’s higher education sector more competitive and fostering deep transnational cooperation and exchange. A call to provide the funding for 20 already existing alliances of higher education institutions until the end of the current MFF funding period was launched under the Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme 2026. Designing the future of the European Universities alliances, including investment pathways for them as outlined in the Union of Skills communication, is a key element of ongoing and future work, including different DGs as well as Member States and stakeholders of the higher education sector.

In 2025, Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps supported the implementation of the Union of Skills, the European Democracy Shield and the Preparedness Union Strategy.

The number of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects addressing the priority on inclusion increased in 2025, highlighting inclusion as both a driver of social engagement and a foundational principle of the EU’s social model.

Through the Erasmus+ programme, DG EAC continued promoting inclusive, high-quality education and skills development in key areas such as STEM and digital, ensuring that individuals are equipped for life and to meet evolving labour market demands.

2025 saw the successful launch of a new Erasmus+ action in school education, the European Partnerships for School Development, which aims at encouraging better cross-border cooperation and mobility between schools across Europe, with a sustainable and systemic impact. The action will prepare the ground for the future **European School Alliances**. Continuous support was given to partnerships for excellence, bringing the number of supported **Erasmus+ Teacher Academies** from 44 to 61.

The programmes supported initiatives that help people live and work more sustainably. Through for instance hands-on workshops and local training sessions, participants learn how to change everyday habits such as how they travel, what they buy, and how they use energy. For example, citizens take part in courses on sustainable farming or learn how renewable energy systems work in practice. By gaining these real-life skills, people are better prepared to support Europe’s green transition, helping to reduce CO₂ emissions while strengthening Europe’s competitiveness and future industries.

The interim evaluation of the European Solidarity Corps confirmed that participation in the programme contributes to strong individual-level results, such as improved personal, professional and study skills and social and civic awareness. Moreover, in 2025, the programme contributed to the green transition through a specific priority on waste management and recycling solutions for the Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas.

The Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP) continued to empower teachers, students and policymakers for the digital age, helping equip people with the necessary digital and critical-thinking skills to navigate the online world.

The second Digital Education Stakeholder Forum 2025 marked a crucial milestone in the consultation process carried out as part of the review of the DEAP 2021-2027. The evidence collected from the various stakeholders on the progress and impact of DEAP actions helped identify preliminary key thematic areas for the 2030 Roadmap on the future of digital education and skills.

To further feed the 2030 Roadmap preparation process, a Flash Eurobarometer on future needs in digital education was conducted in May 2025. The survey results, published on 11 December 2025, revealed citizens' views on the importance of digital skills in education, including the role of teachers, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), the benefits and challenges of technology in teaching and learning and the role of EU support in digital education.

Other achievements / highlights:

- The two new sets of guidelines for teachers and educators: on digital education content and on high-quality informatics education were finalised in 2025, together with the revision and subsequent update of two existing set of guidelines for teachers and educators from 2022 on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training and ethical use of AI and data in teaching and learning.
- Entitled “True or False – Truth in a Digital World. What skills young people need to fight disinformation”, EVP Mînzatu held her Youth Policy Dialogue on 20 January in Warsaw, examining challenges in the digital world like AI, social media and disinformation.
- Together with the OECD ⁽²⁾, the first draft of an AI literacy framework for primary and secondary education was launched in May 2025. Following the launch, the draft framework was shared with stakeholders for consultation until the end of October 2025. It will be finalised in the first half of 2026. The framework aims at offering a common understanding of the skills young people need to engage and interact with AI in a critical and confident manner as well as supporting education and training systems in integrating AI literacy in education.

The JRC and DG EAC finalised a “*Promoting Well-being in Digital Education: Proposal for a Model of Emerging Practices Science for Policy Report*” in December 2025. The report brings together the model and recommendations for policymakers, school leaders and educators, teachers, parents/carers and EdTech providers. The model promotes a whole-school approach to well-being through addressing seven core dimensions (i.e. such as empowering community actors and fostering schools’ digital readiness and inclusion) and includes guiding principles and examples of practices currently being implemented in Europe.

The sixth edition of the Digital Education Hackathon (DigiEduHack) took place between 7-16 November 2025. The increased participation in the initiative is testament for its continued success: This edition saw the organisation of 74 hackathons, bringing together almost 3 000 participants

(²) OECD: The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

from 31 countries across the globe, who developed almost 800 innovative solutions to the challenges proposed by the hackathon hosts.

The European Digital Education Hub continued to deliver a wide range of activities in 2025, supporting the implementation of the Digital Education Action Plan. Its membership increased to over 7 000 registered users. Activities included an EU mapping of innovative practices focusing on Digital Competences, Future Classroom and Digital Well-being, as well as monthly webinars on the Union of Skills, game-based learning, and accessible digital education. Compared to previous years, a more interactive and audience-centred format was adopted, and the community outreach was further supported by bi-monthly newsletter issues for more than 10 000 subscribers. Notable achievements include i) the launch of two working groups tasked with updating the ethical guidelines on the use of AI and data in teaching, and the guidelines on digital literacy and disinformation, and ii) the release of the European Higher Education Interoperability Framework. The Digital Education Ambassadors Programme was also launched this year, strengthening the link between the Hub, DigiEduHack, and local contexts.

Specific Objective 1.2 - Steering policies and managing programmes that reinforce cutting-edge education and Europe's research talent pipeline and innovation ecosystems

The **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions** (MSCA) announced **more than EUR 1.25 billion** in funding in 2025 to further support the career, skills development, training and mobility of thousands of researchers from all over the world and at all stages of their careers through innovative research training and knowledge exchange opportunities, including excellent international doctoral networks. In addition, as part of the Union of Skills strategy and the wider Choose Europe campaign, a new **MSCA Choose Europe for Science**⁽³⁾ initiative was launched in October 2025 with a budget of EUR 22.5 million to make Europe a magnet for researchers, increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of European research organisations, thus further advancing scientific excellence and strengthening Europe's capacity for Research and Innovation.

Seven MSCA calls were launched in 2025. Reflecting the **success of and ever-growing interest in the programme**, the Postdoctoral Fellowships call attracted the highest number of proposals ever received for any funding action in the 40 years of EU research and innovation framework programmes, with a record number of 17 058 applications. The results of six 2024 calls were also announced in 2025 for a total allocated budget of EUR 1.24 billion.

In 2025, the MSCA actively contributed to **advancing AI in research** through strategic collaborations, policy input and community engagement that led to the update of the Guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research⁽⁴⁾ and a public consultation on the AI in Science Strategy, as well as contributions to the 2025 AI in Science Summit. A new

⁽³⁾ <https://marie-skłodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/actions/choose-europe-for-science>

⁽⁴⁾ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/guidelines-responsible-use-generative-ai-research-developed-european-research-area-forum-2024-03-20_en

action, RAISE Doctoral Networks, was also launched in collaboration with DG RTD, under which AI-focussed MSCA Doctoral Network proposals which could be not funded under MSCA, could receive alternative funding.

In an ongoing effort to **promote greener research**, in 2025 the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Green Charter ⁽⁵⁾ was revised to offer fresh guidance for researchers and organisations to make their projects more sustainable.

The most international part of Horizon Europe, the MSCA also plays a key role in driving **international cooperation** in Research and Innovation. In this context, the new Global Cooperation Policy Enhancement and Strategic Promotion (GLOPOL) project ⁽⁶⁾ kicked off in June to further strengthen Europe's position as a global leader in research and innovation through policy enhancement, targeted institutional engagement, strategic promotion and strengthened synergies across 20 countries and 6 regions.

the **MSCA Annual Conference** brought together more than 400 researchers, university leaders, funders, policymakers, and industry partners in Denmark, under the Danish Presidency of the Council. The event produced strategic policy recommendations on how Europe can attract, retain, and empower talent through people-centred research careers.

In March, the annual **Science is Wonderful!** science fair gave 170 researchers from around the world the chance to showcase their work to over 4 500 pupils. For the first time, the fair extended to events in Dublin, Ireland and Warsaw, Poland, strengthening its European dimension and attracting an additional 170 000 visitors.

Finally, the 2025 **European Researchers' Night** attracted an estimated 1.5 million visitors in 460 cities across 25 countries. The largest science outreach event in Europe, displayed the diversity of science and its impact on citizens' daily lives.

Increasing the quality and relevance of STEM education in Europe is instrumental to enlarge the talent pool in sectors that are strategic for EU competitiveness by strengthening the pathways towards tertiary education and doctoral studies. The **STEM Education Strategic Plan** contributes to this objective by proposing a new EU level target on PhD student enrolment in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) PhD programmes of at least 5%, with at least 1 out of every 3 students female. Currently, only a small share of doctoral students (3.8%) is enrolled in ICT. While this target represents only a small increase, it holds a strategic weight in making ICT advanced studies a priority at EU level.

In 2025, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and its 9 Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) continued supporting education, research and innovation in Europe. The EIT **Deep Tech Talent Initiative**, a talent pool to fuel European innovation and close skill gaps, reached its major milestone of one million talents trained in deep tech in June, 6 months ahead of the December 2025 deadline. The 5th call of the **Higher Education Institutions Initiative**, implementing the STEM Education Strategic Plan and creating synergies between the European Universities Alliances and the EIT KICs, was also launched. The EIT also contributed to the Net Zero Industry Act with the launch of the **European Solar**

⁽⁵⁾ <https://marie-skłodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/about-msca/msca-green-charter>

⁽⁶⁾ <https://www.msca-glopoleu/>

Academy, the **Raw Materials** and **Advanced Materials Academies**. It also continued implementing the **European Battery Alliance Academy** and the **Critical Raw Materials Facility**.

The EIT also supported women entrepreneurship thanks to several actions, such as the **Girls Go Circular programme**, that already reached its objective of training 40 000 14–19-year-old girls three years ahead of schedule, and the **EIT Girls Go STEM programme**, that aims at training 100 000 girls in STEM fields by 2028 as part of the STEM Education Strategic Plan.

In 2025, the EIT, under the supervision of DG EAC, also concluded the designation process of a new **EIT KIC on Water, Marine and Maritime sectors and ecosystems** which was launched in November 2025.

Throughout 2025, DG EAC has continued supervising and monitoring the EIT activities according to its role. DG EAC drafted the **Commission opinion on the EIT Single Programming Document 2026-2028**, steered the EIT on international activities, and closely followed the selection process of the new Water KIC, as well as the ongoing discussions on the next MFF and the future of the EIT.

A first pilot project on the **Erasmus+ Scholarships** was prepared in 2025 to ensure the right design approach for the next funding period and help testing the initiative to retain talent in Europe to study in strategic fields.

Continuous support for partnerships for excellence under Erasmus+ – including the **European Universities Alliances and Teacher Academies** – played a vital role in developing world class talent. By fostering talent and collaboration across education, research, and innovation, DG EAC is helping drive a knowledge-based economy where competitiveness is underpinned by excellence, sustainability, and resilience.

General Objective 3 - Supporting people, and strengthening our societies and our social models

Specific Objective 3.1 - Steering policies and managing programmes that support inclusive and quality education to empower young people's social engagement and solidarity across the EU, strengthening intergenerational fairness and cohesion

To further develop the European Education Area (EEA), the Commission's evaluation report, part of the EEA interim evaluation package adopted in June ⁽⁷⁾, provided the evidence base for the Council's review of the EEA strategic framework for its second (2026–2030) cycle, including EU-level targets, governance, and working methods. DG EAC represented the Commission during the negotiations on the draft Council resolution, integrating union of skills objectives, actions and targets. All Member States supported it, but one. Formal adoption is pending.

The seven EEA working groups of the first cycle of the EEA cooperation framework continued to deliver key policy recommendations and outcomes supporting for example policy makers, teachers, school leaders and relevant stakeholders. The Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training organised two meetings of its Community of Practice and two tailored capacity building courses. The second call of expression of interest for counterfactual impact evaluations resulted in the selection of 3 applications, Belgium-Flanders and Belgium-French Community, and Slovenia. The evaluation will be performed in 2026 and 2027. The 2025 Investing in Education Report published in September provided economic arguments to prioritise public investment in education in support of Member States.

A key element of the vision of the EEA, to empower people through inclusive, high-quality education and training, as well as an enabler of the Union of Skills, is the **Action Plan on Basic Skills**, adopted on 5 March 2025. It addresses underachievement in basic skills and promotes inclusion and excellence across all stages of education and adult learning, guiding measures targeting learners, educators, policymakers, parents, and communities. A peer counselling cluster on basic skills was launched to support ten Member States. ENESET reports were published on effective literacy teaching practices and measures to promote excellence in basic skills. The EU aims to ensure that by 2030 fewer than 15% of young people underachieve in literacy, maths, science, or digital skills. A target for top performers was also proposed for the second EEA cycle (2026–2030), pending Council adoption. In line with the Preparedness Union Strategy, DG EAC supported DG ECHO in preparing guidelines to embed preparedness in early childhood and school curricula. The European School Education Platform has started to provide resources and professional development on preparedness, while Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps supported preparedness among pupils, students, and young people.

⁽⁷⁾ COM(2025) 340 final

Media and digital literacy education were highlighted as key enablers for preparedness under the Preparedness Union Strategy and the European Democracy Shield. The DEAP 2021–2027 contributed by promoting societal resilience and citizens’ engagement, including through media literacy education.

Erasmus+ continued strengthening democracy, active citizenship, and promoting EU values by harnessing its flagship actions in education, culture, youth, and sport. Democratic participation, civic engagement, inclusion, the fight against xenophobia and intolerance, intercultural dialogue, and cultural and linguistic diversity are central to the horizontal priorities of the programme.

In 2025, DG EAC cooperated with the Joint Research Centre (JRC), to consult and co-create the **Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness**, a flagship initiative under Commissioner Micallef’s mandate. This process included an extensive consultation with stakeholders and a dedicated European Citizens’ Panel. The Strategy sets out a new intergenerational ‘contract’ built on three foundations: fair policymaking, fair opportunities, and fair places. By promoting both formal and non-formal education through flagship programmes like Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, DG EAC continued to empower young people – especially those with fewer opportunities – to become active, informed, and responsible citizens.

Erasmus+ supported, including financially, the Citizens’ Panel on intergenerational fairness in autumn 2025. Key Action 30 of the Preparedness Union Strategy Action Plan was implemented by introducing a new priority on preparedness in the 2026 Annual Work Programmes of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. In 2025, the European Solidarity Corps provided young people with pathways to social engagement and solidarity, reinforcing inclusion, intergenerational fairness, and cohesion. Its interim evaluation confirmed the programme’s effectiveness in addressing societal needs and its widespread impact on individuals, organisations, and local communities.

The EU Youth Report was adopted in March 2025, highlighting progress under the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 and trends affecting young people in the EU. It established a baseline for future youth policies. DG EAC launched a listening process to shape the next EU Youth Strategy, engaging young people and stakeholders through the EU Youth Dialogue, EU Youth Conferences, DG Youth meetings, and the European Youth Work Convention.

The EU Youth Dialogue alone consulted 40 000 young people in the last 18 months cycle. In May 2025, the 4th European Youth Work Convention took place in Valletta, Malta, with over 500 participants from more than 40 countries. It focused on strengthening recognition, quality, and sustainability of youth work, addressing challenges such as policy prioritisation, funding stability, professional recognition, and access to training. The Convention highlighted youth work’s role in democratic participation, inclusion, well-being, and resilience, and concluded with a shared five-year roadmap.

In 2025, the Commission applied a ‘youth check’ for the first time to the Commission Work Programme and consulted young people on 12 Annex I initiatives, ensuring that the perspective of young people was integrated in key Commission proposals.

In line with President von der Leyen’s 2024–2029 Political Guidelines, all Commissioners organised Youth Policy Dialogues within the first 100 days of this Commission mandate. These

Dialogues, to be repeated annually, serve as a platform for young people aged 16 to 30, to share their views, concerns, and aspirations directly with top EU decision-makers. More than 40 Youth Policy Dialogues were organised since the start of this mandate.

In June, the President's Youth Advisory Board was established as an expert group composed of National Youth Councils from EU and candidate countries (as observers) and the European Youth Forum to advise and share input with the President of the Commission. The first meeting with President von der Leyen in December focused on social media and young people.

Specific Objective 3.2 - Steering policies and managing a programme that safeguards and promotes cultural diversity and heritage, fostering sustainable and innovative cultural and creative sectors, contributing to the Culture Compass

The Communication "**A Culture Compass for Europe**" and a proposal for an interinstitutional Joint Declaration "Europe for Culture, Culture for Europe", were adopted on 12 November 2025, providing a new overarching strategic framework and shared principles for cultural policy cooperation at EU level. With its 20 flagship initiatives, the Culture Compass was the result of extensive consultations with cultural stakeholders, Member States, different DGs and services and the public at large. A Eurobarometer survey on Europeans' attitudes towards culture (Special Eurobarometer 562) was published in May 2025 on a sample of over 26 000 Europeans.

In parallel, cultural cooperation with Member States continued under the **EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026**, with the publication of two expert groups' reports on "Culture and health: time to act" and "Creative shifts: empowering culture for sustainable living". Work towards the finalisation of a study on the discoverability of European cultural content online progressed.

A high-level round table on the working conditions of artists in Europe was organised on 8 December 2025, with the participation of EVP Mînzatu, Commissioner Micallef, two European Parliament Committee Chairs, sectoral social dialogue partners, relevant cultural stakeholders and artists.

To support the implementation of the **European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage**, DG EAC convened two meetings of the cultural heritage expert group in March and December 2025, as well as a meeting of the sub-group on dialogue with the art market in February 2025.

DG EAC worked closely with ESTAT on updating the **EU Framework on cultural statistics** which was adopted by the Eurostat's Member States' Expert Group in June 2025 and further improving cultural data collection.

DG EAC intensified its work on the multiple legal and policy implications of artificial intelligence on the cultural and creative sectors and industries. As part of the preparatory work for the **Apply AI strategy**, DG EAC organised together with CNECT a sector-specific consultation

workshop in April 2025 and co-drafted the relevant Culture and Creative Sectors chapter in the **Apply AI strategy Communication**.

Dialogue and engagement with stakeholders as well as with some 20 different DGs and services remained an essential aspect of DG EAC's policy work on culture, ensuring the mainstreaming of culture in other EU policies, actions (New European Bauhaus, Action Plan on illicit trafficking of cultural goods) as well as EU programmes/financial instruments (e.g. Horizon Europe; RRF, where e.g. the amount devoted to culture reached EUR 11.7 billion).

In 2025, the **Creative Europe** programme continued to provide a coherent policy framework for safeguarding, developing and promoting European cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage, while fostering sustainable, innovative and competitive cultural and creative sectors in line with the **Culture Compass**.

Programme implementation demonstrated strong relevance and demand, notably through a record level of applications under the **European Cooperation Projects** call. Flagship actions such as **Culture Moves Europe** reached a key implementation milestone with the successful completion of their first phase, confirming their role in supporting cross-border artistic cooperation and professional mobility.

In parallel, the **European Capitals of Culture initiative** and the **European Heritage Label** were steered and implemented as core place-based actions supporting the long-term valorisation of culture and heritage at European level. In 2025, Chemnitz and Nova Gorica held the title of European Capitals of Culture, marking the 40th anniversary of the initiative, while Leuven was selected as European Capital of Culture 2030. In addition, 13 new sites were awarded the European Heritage Label, further consolidating the framework for recognising heritage sites of symbolic European value.

Overall, programme steering in 2025 contributed to reinforcing cooperation at European level and to strengthening the structural capacity of the cultural and creative sectors.

Specific Objective 3.3 – Developing policies and managing programme funds to develop an effective European dimension of sport, promoting healthy lifestyles, social participation, while promoting and reinforcing an inclusive, competitive and values-based European Sport Model

In April 2025, the annual **EU Sport Forum** took place in Krakow, Poland, and united 350 key players in defining EU Sport policy. On this occasion, Commissioner Micallef announced the upcoming **Communication on “A Strategic Vision for Sport in Europe: Reinforcing the European Sport Model”** to be published in the second half of 2026.

Key activities included the **launch of a public consultation and a call for evidence, an interservice group, and dedicated stakeholder consultations**. Examples of these include dialogues with Member States, via the Working Party on Sport, a high-level roundtable with

Presidents of EU National Olympic Committees, and targeted consultations with a wide variety of sport federations and bodies, all aimed at gathering comprehensive stakeholder input.

International cooperation in the field of sport has produced valuable outcomes for both the Commission and stakeholders. Notably, the **ongoing collaboration with UEFA** is set to be extended in early 2026. This partnership also saw the participation of a Team EU in the Unity EURO Cup, an official tournament aimed at promoting refugee inclusion through sport, showing the shared commitment of the EU and UEFA to this priority.

Cooperation with the Council of Europe continued in 2025 with two joint projects, one launched in March (“Sport for All: Promoting Inclusion and Combating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities”) and one concluded in December (“Balance S4 — Strengthening the Safety and Service Pillars of the Saint Denis Convention”).

The **European Week of Sport** celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2025. Since 2015, it has been introduced in 42 countries and regions, witnessed more than 103 million participants and more than 353 000 events. The **#BeActive campaign**, launched on Olympic Day (23 June), highlighted the success of the first decade of the Week and promoted healthy digital habits (Move More, Scroll Less: swapping screen time for activities that energise us) as well as mental well-being through physical activity. The campaign culminated in the Week at the end of September that gathered more than 15 million participants in nearly 80 000 events in 39 countries across Europe and beyond.

During an awards ceremony that took place in Brussels in May, Commissioner Micallef, together with Commissioner Kos and Executive Vice-President Mînzatu, announced the winners of the 2025 #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards. A call for proposals for the new **#BeActive EU Sport Awards** was launched in June, building on the success of the past #BeActive Awards and #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards. The new awards have five categories, including a newly introduced category for volunteering and increased funding for finalists and winners. By its closing date, the call had received a record number of applications.

During 2025, preparations were carried out for a **Special Eurobarometer on Sport and Physical Activity**. Numerous **reports on sport statistics** were published in September 2025, including the Vilnius definition and methodology on **Sport Satellite Accounts** as well as studies on measuring physical activity participation in the EU and on the socio-economic value of sport.

Furthermore, the **process for the revision of the 2013 Council Recommendation on Health-Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA)** was launched in 2025. The cooperation agreement with WHO was renewed for another two years in November and the first surveys on the updated HEPA recommendation were carried out.

Throughout the year, the **sport-related expert group** (OMC group) on ‘Fight against hate speech in sport’ progressed towards the drafting phase of the final report. The group on ‘Promoting athletes’ rights within the context of good governance in sport’ was also launched in 2025.

The **SHARE 2.0** initiative offered eight capacity building activities on key areas such as artificial intelligence and sport, linking sport and education, and supporting the greening of the

sport sector. With its members, it also co-created and published six papers on how to develop health-enhancing environments, supporting an entrepreneurial ecosystem in sport. Moreover, the **Green Sport Manifesto**, which is both a call for action and a guide for adopting more environmentally sustainable practices in sport, was published in September. At the end of the year, SHARE 2.0 also reached an important milestone by increasing membership to over 500 members.

Erasmus+ sport actions were on the rise in 2025. With a total available budget of more than EUR 67 million for Key Action 2, 350 proposals were recommended for funding responding to the 2025 Erasmus+ Sport calls for proposals. EACEA received 2 390 proposals, an increase of 34% compared to the previous calls in 2024. EUR 12 million were dedicated to mobility of sport staff. This action also saw an increased demand in 2025.

In December 2025, the European Commission and EACEA invited the sport community to the annual **Erasmus+ Sport Info Day**. Around 570 participants attended in person, with over 6 000 connecting online. The event unveiled exciting opportunities for potential applicants, highlighting key policy priorities as well as the main aspects and novelties of the 2026 Erasmus+ Sport calls for proposals.

Specific Objective 3.4 - Supporting international cooperation in education, culture, youth, sport, and to enhance international partnerships, promote EU values and address shared global challenges

In 2025, international cooperation in education, youth, and sport has been further strengthened through **policy cooperation with third countries** and actions under the **international dimension of Erasmus+**. This has contributed to key international policies and flagship initiatives such as the Union of Skills, enlargement and the Global Gateway Strategy.

DG EAC reinforced its role in **EU enlargement**, with a strong focus on Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans. It organised a TAIEX workshop with candidate and potential candidate countries not yet associated with Erasmus+ to support preparation for full association after 2027. DG EAC contributed to the 2025 enlargement reports and supported Ukraine's and Moldova's bilateral screening for Chapter 26 (Education and Culture). Youth-led organisations from Moldova, Ukraine, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo were granted observer status in the President's Youth Advisory Board. In 2025, DG EAC delivered concrete political and programme outcomes for Ukraine. It contributed to the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2025 in Rome and ensured continuity of Ukraine's participation in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps actions, including targeted support for displaced learners and institutional capacity-building. Support for Ukrainian culture was increased through EUR 7 million in special Creative Europe calls and a Team Europe initiative on cultural heritage, comprising 76 actions from 24 Member States and the Commission. DG EAC also published case studies to support the design of the Ukrainian Heritage Fund. DG EAC contributed to the **EU-Moldova** High-Level Dialogue on Education, Skills, Labour, Social and Children Policies under the leadership of Executive Vice-President Mînzatu and also secured Moldova's

participation to the Creative Europe programme, a key deliverable of the EU-Moldova Summit of July 2025.

DG EAC substantially contributed to the preparation of the New Pact for the Mediterranean, providing input on education, youth, sport, and culture, and laid the groundwork for the first Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting on Higher Education planned for 2026. DG EAC contributed to the **Joint Communication on a new Strategic EU-India Agenda**, announcing the first ever **EU-India Education and Skills Dialogue**, foreseen for 2026.

In 2025, DG EAC helped put two additional countries on track for association to Erasmus+ as of 1 January 2027. The EU–Switzerland agreement on Union programmes was signed on 10 November 2025, and DG EAC supported the successful conclusion of negotiations on the UK’s association to Erasmus+. DG EAC represented the EU in G20 education and culture strands and contributed to the New Visa Strategy and the Recommendation on Attracting Talent, in line with the Union of Skills.

Under the Study in Europe initiative, study fairs and events were organised in Kenya, Colombia, Albania, and at STEM and NAFSA events, strengthening Europe’s global attractiveness as a study destination.

DG EAC co-organised the eighth **EU–US Young Leaders Seminar** on artificial intelligence and signed a EUR 2.8 million contract to extend the Fulbright–Schuman Programme for 2026–2028.

Under the international dimension of Erasmus+, **International Credit Mobility** enabled around 52 000 higher education students and staff to participate in mobility activities in 2025, and 39 **Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters** were selected. **Capacity Building actions** expanded, with 174 projects selected in higher education, 74 in VET, 56 in youth, and 15 in sport. A dedicated EU–North America **Jean Monnet** Policy Debate call was launched, alongside the selection of an internal policy network on EU enlargement. DG EAC organised the third Erasmus+ Weeks in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia, Pacific and the Middle East, training 94 National Focal Points and engaging stakeholders on education’s role in the green transition. Preparatory work also began on strengthening the international dimension of the next Erasmus+ programme.

The European Solidarity Corps continued to offer volunteering opportunities in third countries, with the Humanitarian Aid strand enabling nearly 400 young people to support vulnerable communities in 35 countries.

DG EAC engaged with UNESCO in preparing the **Mondiacult 2025** Conference in Barcelona, including a side event on culture and health.

Countries from the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans participated in the **#BeActive** campaign and the **European Week of Sport**, engaging around 190 000 citizens across 130 events, while sport organisations continued to benefit from Erasmus+ Capacity Building projects.

General Objective 5 - Protecting our democracy, upholding our values

Specific Objective 5.1 - Steering policies and managing programmes in education and training, youth, sport, and culture, promoting EU values, preparedness and resilience, fostering a sense of European identity and enhancing democratic participation and civic engagement

DG EAC launched work on *Enhancing Democratic Citizenship Education*, focusing on the development of an EU citizenship competence framework and guidelines to strengthen citizenship education, as part of the European Democracy Shield.

The **European Education Area (EEA) Working Group on Equality and Values** in education and training published an issue paper on countering hate through education, an input paper on the European dimension of citizenship education, and a reflection paper on special educational needs.

The Annual Progress Reports on Simplification, Implementation and Enforcement by Executive Vice-President Mînzatu and Commissioner Micallef were presented to the Council on 27 and 28 November 2025 respectively, and to the European Parliament on 2 December 2025.

Erasmus+ remained a key tool for strengthening citizenship competences and fostering active and engaged citizens, addressing throughout all its actions the challenges and barriers that limit citizens' participation in democratic processes, and contributing to their increased awareness and understanding of the EU and its values. The promotion of active citizenship and of a European identity is also firmly enshrined in the Commission proposal for a post-2027 programme. In particular, **Jean Monnet actions** enhanced understanding of EU matters through expanded teaching, learning and debate in higher and general education, improving the quality of education and training on EU topics within and beyond the Union.

The programme supported projects developing critical thinking, media literacy and digital skills to enable meaningful democratic participation and counter disinformation. Through cooperation and exchange of good practices, it supported education and training systems in embedding citizenship education across lifelong learning. In 2025, both the **European Innovative Teaching Award** and eTwinning highlighted citizenship education through their annual themes.

Promoting a European identity based on EU values remains a core objective of Erasmus+. In 2025, the programme continued to promote EU values, particularly through youth actions, while strengthening citizens' resilience and preparedness for climate disasters, geopolitical instability, pandemics and cyber threats, contributing to the Preparedness Union Strategy. The DEAP 2021–2027 supported these objectives through work on societal resilience and media literacy.

In 2025, the **European Solidarity Corps** continued to translate EU values into practice through structured, high-quality activities for young people. The programme strengthened community-level preparedness and resilience, fostered a shared European identity through cross-border cooperation, and increased democratic participation and civic engagement. Relief for people fleeing armed conflicts and victims of natural or man-made disasters was an annual priority under Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas.

In line with the **Culture Compass for Europe**, DG EAC promoted culture, cultural heritage and diversity as central elements of European identity and values.

In 2025, **Creative Europe** supported citizen participation through culture-related actions, notably European Authors' Day (#ReadForReal). Its third edition took place in November and December 2025, with 6,573 events in 34 countries, reaching over 300 000 people and involving a wide range of stakeholders. The programme also supported emerging talent through culture prizes, including the Music Moves Europe Awards and the European Union Prize for Literature. Preparatory work for the Simone Veil Prize was completed with the nomination of a consortium, and the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards recognised 30 cultural heritage achievements from 24 countries.

Creative Europe continued to support cross-border cooperation and circulation through European Cooperation Projects and the circulation of European literary works, strengthening collaboration and access to European cultural works.

Finally, in 2025, the final evaluation of Creative Europe 2014–2020, the interim evaluation of Creative Europe 2021–2027, the interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture initiative (2020–2033), and the evaluation of the European Heritage Label were adopted, providing evidence for the preparation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework and future legal bases.

Regarding the reliability of performance information for EU programmes under DG EAC's remit, intensive efforts reiterated in 2025 to further enhance a more standardised and reliable MFF performance reporting framework. Progress continued to be made on key improvements and analytical features in programme monitoring, advancing the use of data analytics for results exploitation, and strengthening in-depth insights to support programme evaluations. In addition, DG EAC contributed actively to the development and establishment of the future performance framework - in the areas under its remit - in cooperation with central services.

Cross-cutting efforts – implementation, simplification, stress-testing and enforcement activities

According to the Communication on implementation and simplification ⁽⁸⁾, DG EAC organised one implementation dialogues with stakeholders for Executive Vice-President (EVP) Mînzatu and two for Commissioner Micallef in 2025. Additionally, DG EAC supported the EVP as well as Commissioner Micallef on drafting the annual progress reports on enforcement and implementation. In 2025, the first implementation dialogue of EVP Mînzatu (3 June 2025) explored how to step up the implementation and simplification of the European Education Area to meet the evolving needs of our society, in line with the vision of the Union of Skills.

Commissioner Micallef held two implementation dialogues in 2025. The first, on 26 June, focused on EU youth policy tools and youth programmes, confirming the Commission’s objectives to strengthen Erasmus+, simplify access to EU funding and enhance youth participation, particularly for those with fewer opportunities. The second, on 18 September, addressed programme progress, challenges and good practices with Creative Europe Cooperation projects grant holders.

During 2025 DG EAC engaged in dialogues and information gathering with certain Member States on possible breaches of EU law in the area of education, in line with the Communication [EU law: Better results through better application](#) (C/2016/8600), complemented by Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: “Enforcing EU law for a Europe that delivers” (COM/2022/518 final).

In December 2025, DG EAC shared its multi-annual stress-testing plan with SG. The note gives a concise overview of DG EAC’s review of its policy areas, programmes and initiatives under its remit in the framework of the Commission-wide stress-testing of the acquis.

DG EAC’s responsibilities are primarily centred on programme management, policy coordination and strategic frameworks under the Open Method of Coordination, with a limited number of autonomous acts. Accordingly, DG EAC’s contribution to the stress-test relies predominantly on non-legislative instruments, drawing on existing evaluations, studies, consultations and strategic initiatives.

The Union of Skills Communication (COM(2025) 90 final) presents a range of actions and EU support instruments in the field of education and training and foresees voluntary cooperation at EU level that help review how national and European education policies and instruments contribute to skills development. From a stress-testing perspective, it enables a review of governance, impact and relevance without creating new regulatory obligations.

The STEM Education Strategic Plan ([COM\(2025\) 89 final](#)), published in March 2025, provides a strategic framework for strengthening STEM education, talent development and inclusiveness. From a stress-testing perspective, the Plan enables a review of the coherence and

⁽⁸⁾ [A simpler and faster Europe: Communication on implementation and simplification](#)

effectiveness of existing STEM-related education actions, including their alignment with labour-market and innovation needs, without introducing new regulatory requirements. Its implementation therefore constitutes an existing non-legislative mechanism contributing to stress-testing of education policy approaches.

The Culture Compass for Europe ([COM/2025/785 final](#)) provides a strategic framework to review the coherence and orientation of EU cultural policy. It enables an assessment of alignment and coordination of existing actions.

As regards Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and Creative Europe, the final evaluations of the 2014–2020 programmes and the interim evaluations of the 2021–2027 programmes constitute comprehensive stress-tests of these programmes. They assess relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value, including aspects related to administrative burden, delivery mechanisms and implementation complexity. Their publication in 2025 therefore represents a key stress-testing milestone.

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions are implemented under Horizon Europe and are subject to programme-level evaluation and monitoring. The Interim Evaluation of Horizon Europe, published in April 2025, provides the most recent comprehensive assessment of MSCA performance, implementation and efficiency, including administrative aspects.

Following a significant reduction in the amount of information required in the Erasmus+ National Agencies' yearly reports for 2024, further simplification of reporting by National Agencies has been prepared in 2025. In particular, the preparations for a fully automation for the extraction and filling out of all data needed in the context of the National Agencies (NAs) yearly reports exercise have started. In this regard, data will be prefilled in by DG EAC, and the 54 NAs ⁽⁹⁾ will no longer need to execute this task themselves in the future.

DG EAC conducts systematic data analytics on programme implementation and structured feedback collected from hundred million participants in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. These analyses provide continuous, implementation-level insights that complement formal evaluation findings.

Following consultations with E+ National Agencies, DG EAC has developed a multiple organisations' dashboard. Its purpose is to automate the process for National Agencies of checking whether an organisation has applied for multiple projects or not (currently done in Excel). This will be completed at Q4 2025 after testing and will be followed by a webinar to ensure that National Agencies learn how to properly use it.

⁽⁹⁾ entrusted with the implementation of the decentralised actions of the Erasmus+ programme

2. INTERNAL CONTROL AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Management monitors the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis and carries out an objective assessment of their efficiency and effectiveness. In annex 7, there is a list and details of the reports that have been considered. The results of the above assessment are explicitly documented and reported to the Director-General.

2.1. Control results

Management uses control results to support its assurance and reach a conclusion about the cost-effectiveness of those controls, meaning whether the right balance between the following elements is achieved:

- **Effectiveness** The level of error found, based on the controls carried out.
- **Efficiency** The average time taken to inform or pay.
- **Economy** The proportionality between the costs of controls and the funds managed.

2.1.1. Overview of the budget and relevant control systems (RCS)

Two significant segments and their corresponding Relevant Control Systems (RCS) are defined in DG EAC. The first segment involves the indirect budget managed for Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) by National Agencies, known as "RCS 1 Erasmus+ and ESC indirect." This segment also includes the Student Loan Guarantee Fund (SLGF), a financial instrument part of the 2014-2020 programme legacy. The second segment involves the budget entrusted to the European Institute of Innovation and Technology ("RCS 2 EIT").

Additionally, there are usually payments to the European Development Fund ("EDF") and the "Contribution to the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)". All remaining payments are categorised under "Other" and encompass direct management by DG EAC, including Creative Europe, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) under Horizon Europe, co-delegated payments to PMO and the Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions.

DG EAC's assurance building, and materiality criteria are outlined in Annex 5. Annex 6 outlines the main risks for each RCS, along with the control processes and indicators. The general objective is to have a residual error rate below 2% of the budget for a specific implementation mode during the multiannual period.

The table below shows an analysis of the payments made in 2025. It includes the contribution paid to EACEA ⁽¹⁰⁾. It does not include the appropriations managed on DG EAC's behalf by the executive agencies EACEA and REA (Research Executive Agency).

EAC has revenues of EUR 602 million which refer to external assigned revenues stemming from the financial contributions paid by associated third countries participating to DG EAC programmes as well as for internal assigned revenues from recoveries (see section "Budget execution").

DG EAC also identified one non-expenditure item (NEI): "Intangible assets".

Payments 2025	Direct	Indirect	Contribution to agency	Total	%
RCS Erasmus+ and ESC indirect		4,272,584,365.41		4,272,584,365.41	88.06%
Erasmus + Indirect		4,128,014,669.52			
ESC Indirect		144,569,695.89			
RCS EIT		425,997,598.57		425,997,598.57	8.78%
Other	69,483,833.66	8,570,000.00		78,053,833.66	1.61%
Erasmus+ Direct	48,182,044.71				
Creative Europe	8,255,695.14	8,570,000.00			
ESC Direct	5,337,915.74				
Pilot projects and preparatory actions	3,000,000.00				
MSCA	2,882,341.51				
Miscellaneous	1,825,836.56				
EACEA			75,353,949.00	75,353,949.00	1.55%
Total	69,483,833.66	4,707,151,963.98	75,353,949.00	4,851,989,746.64	100.00%

Payments 2025	Direct	Indirect	Other	Total
EDF	0.00			0.00

⁽¹⁰⁾ Commission Decision C 2021 953

2.1.2. Effectiveness of controls

a) Assessment of control results per segment of expenditure



RCS 1 Erasmus+ and ESC indirect

The management information reported by the National Authorities and National Agencies for 2024, and received in 2025, is sufficient for the relevant AOSD (Authorising Officer by Subdelegation) to draw reasonable assurance conclusions, with some exceptions relating to the National Agency in North Macedonia and the Youth National Agency in Germany where weaknesses have been identified and are expected to be rectified in 2026. For more details, see Annex 7.

Most of relevant reported expenditure for 2025 is related to the 2021-2027 programmes. Given the high number of recurring beneficiaries and the continuity of the programme design and underlying control system, low inherent risks apply to the current programme.

The representative error rate is initially estimated to be 0.67%. Error rate information on a multi-annual basis from a variety of sources is used, including, the errors based on risk and coverage sampling in line with the overall supervision strategy. This evidence shows an error rate between 0.5% and 1% (see Annex 9), and **therefore a global conservative 1% is used to estimate the amount at risk**. As this is below the 2% threshold, there is no need to make a reservation for this management mode.

The estimated future corrections are rated at a conservative 200 000 EUR (0.020%), due to the fact that the historic average rate of recoveries and financial corrections of 0.022% includes many “one-off” items (recoveries on fraud cases) not likely to recur in the future.

For the 2014-2020 Multi Financial Framework (MFF), DG EAC entrusted management of funds related to the **Student Loan Guarantee Fund Financial Instrument to the European Investment Fund (EIF), DG EAC does not consider there is any significant reasonable assurance risk for EIF relating to 2025.** This is based on the management declaration and the report of the Independent Audit Body as regards the Erasmus+ Student Loan Guarantee Fund (now managed as legacy ⁽¹¹⁾).

RCS 2 EIT

For **EIT** the most recent reported error rate is 0.8% for 2024 grants ⁽¹²⁾. **A conservative rate of 2% is chosen for the amount at risk** considering the higher error rates observed in the Horizon Europe environment. Future corrections are expected to be 0, as they are negligibly small amounts and, historically, ex post corrections are not material. The European Court of Auditors gives EIT a clean opinion regarding legality and regularity in its 2024 report ⁽¹³⁾. DG EAC has taken a conservative approach to reflecting this situation in the amount at risk, using the maximum 2% error rate which is also consistent with overall reasonable assurance on the EIT subsidy, which is the medium-term trend of previous years. Further details are included in Annex 7 and on the follow-up of audits in Annex 8.

Other

Authorising Officers by Subdelegation reported no issues putting in doubt the reasonable assurance on this management mode; DG EAC has closely followed up non-compliances and exceptions during 2025. As no issues have been identified which are material with respect to the budget as a whole, it is considered that **DG EAC has reasonable assurance on direct management managed by DG EAC for 2025.** For direct management and other expenditure, the risk has been assessed as low and an **error rate of 1% is used.** Future corrections are expected to be 0, as they are not material.

EDF

No EDF budget was committed in 2025 due to the phaseout of the instrument and its integration in NDICI (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument). Likewise, no payments and pre-financing occurred for EDF for 2025. An insignificant amount of pre-financing was cleared in 2025. Its risk has been assessed as low (2%) and the EDF has an insignificant amount of risk at closure.

Contribution to European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)

⁽¹¹⁾ No payments were made to EIF in 2025

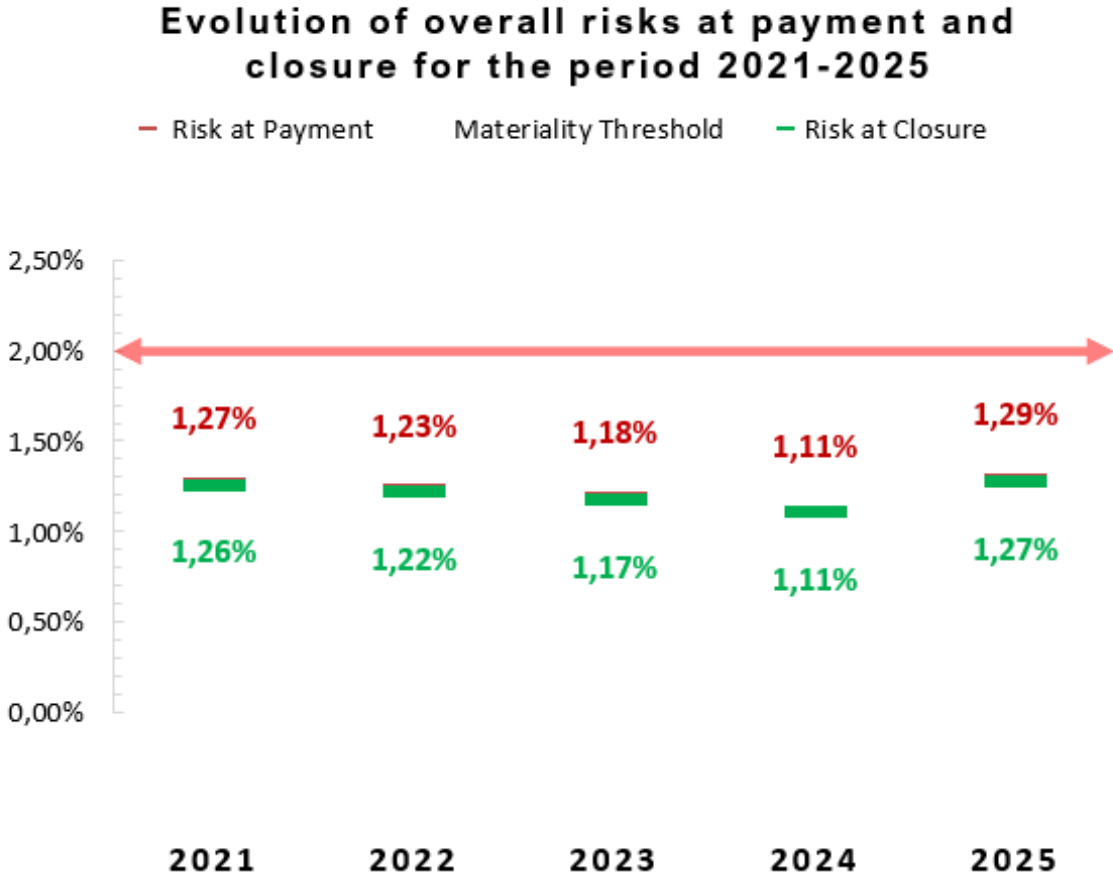
⁽¹²⁾ The 2024 error rate is not identified in the 2024 EIT CAAR (Consolidated Annual Activity Report), as it was adopted before the finalisation of the 2024 ECA Report on EU Agencies. As such, the final value indicated here is the one included in the latter (p. 87).

⁽¹³⁾ Annual report on EU agencies for the financial year 2024. (p. 89)

DG EAC as the main parent DG of EACEA considers that its supervision of the EACEA has been effective and sufficient in 2025. For EACEA an **error rate of 0%** ⁽¹⁴⁾ is used for the annual contribution to the operating budget. The reports foreseen in the MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) between EACEA and its parent DGs, as well as the EACEA performance dashboard, have enabled DG EAC to closely monitor the implementation of Erasmus+ and Creative Europe by this Executive Agency. Further details are included in Annex 7 and in the AAR (Annual Activity Report) of EACEA.

DG EAC considers that its supervision of REA has been effective and sufficient in 2024. Based on reporting from REA and the results of controls as presented in REA’s AAR, DG EAC considers that it has reasonable assurance regarding Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.

b) Estimation of the overall risk at payment and risk at closure



The estimated overall risk at payment for 2025 expenditure is the AOD's (Authorising Officer by Delegation) best conservative estimate of the amount of relevant expenditure during the year that is not in conformity with the contractual and

⁽¹⁴⁾ Considered error-free type of expenditure (considering the actual payment transaction from DG EAC to EACEA).

regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made. A proportion of the underlying errors will be corrected in subsequent years and until the end of the programming cycle, corresponding to the conservatively estimated future corrections for 2025 expenditure. The difference between the risk at payment and the estimated future corrections results in the estimated overall risk at closure ⁽¹⁵⁾.

There is a stable trend since 2021 mainly due to the composition of DG EAC's portfolio which includes segments with a relatively low error rate thanks to the inherent risk profile of having: recurring beneficiaries, particularly in higher education; simplified entitlement-based funding modalities; and the performance of the related control systems as implemented by National Agencies under indirect management.

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 (AMPR).

c) Quantitative benefits of controls: Preventive and corrective measures

With its ex-ante and ex-post controls, **DG EAC has an effective mechanism in place for detecting and correcting errors**, reaching in total EUR 1.544 million of preventive and corrective measures for 2025. Ex-ante controls resulted in preventive measures of EUR 1.445 million and ex-post controls resulted in corrective measures of EUR 0.099 million. In 2025, due to the transition to SUMMA, only preventive measures exceeding EUR 500 000 are reported. Please see details in annex 3.

Compared to 2024, with EUR 0.36 million and EUR 2.97 million respectively, there is a slight decrease, which is mostly explained by some “one-off” OLAF notified recover orders.

National Agencies that implement the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes through indirect management contribute to this corrective mechanism, with EUR 25.0 million for preventive measures and EUR 2.2 million for corrective measures ⁽¹⁶⁾.

d) Assessment of control results for non-expenditure items

DG EAC manages non-expenditure items, specifically EUR 10 million in **intangible assets**. These concern the capitalization of IT projects from previous years (before 2025) and are being depreciated according to accounting rules. The key indicator used to measure the control effectiveness is the accurate certification of their depreciation and the absence of impairment. Usual financial controls are applied as per all financial transactions. As such, it can be

⁽¹⁵⁾ This is the AOD's best, conservative estimation of the expenditure authorised during the year that would remain not in conformity of applicable regulatory and contractual provisions by the end of implementation of the programme.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Source: DG EAC IT systems.

concluded that the assets are safeguarded and no materiality criteria as indicated in Annex 5 are breached.

e) Fraud: prevention, detection, and correction

DG EAC has developed and implemented its own anti-fraud strategy since 2015, based on the methodology provided by OLAF (European Anti-Fraud Office). It is updated every 2 -3 years and was last updated in November 2024 following a fraud risk assessment. Its implementation is being monitored and reported to the management twice a year (in the context of the Annual Activity Report and Mid-Term Report and whenever needed). All necessary actions except the action related to the deployment of a monitoring tool in the Project Management Module (see below), have been implemented. The implementation of this action is in progress; its completion is expected for Q1 2026.

Corrective measures based on OLAF recommendations are reported on in the context of annual monitoring exercises conducted by OLAF, in accordance with Article 11 of Regulation 883/2013 ⁽¹⁷⁾.

Other results achieved during the year thanks to the anti-fraud measures in place can be summarised as follows: DG EAC contributed to the Commission anti-fraud strategy, ensured alignment of legal and guidance documents with the updated central guidance, and organised working groups for entrusted bodies, with discussion of recent fraud and irregularity cases. To ensure compliance with the exclusion pillar of the Financial Regulation, DG EAC developed its internal procedures for the submission of organisations to the EDES (Early Detection and Exclusion System) Panel. Several cases have been launched in 2024 and more EDES submissions followed in 2025. The measures in the revised Control Strategy reinforced the identification and handling of high-risk beneficiaries, as well as issues such as double funding and conflict of interest. During 2025, DG EAC initiated the development of a reinforced monitoring tool in the Project Management Module which allows national agencies to indicate if entities are high risk or if they fall under the exclusion criteria. The module, went in production in March 2026 (some delays were encountered due to complexities in the IT development), and will allow national agencies to take effective measures to protect the EU funds.

EIT and REA contributed to and implement the Research Anti-Fraud Strategy (RAFS).

Suspected irregularities or fraud and ongoing investigations of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) were considered in assessing the reasonable assurance assigned to the National Agencies over the reporting period.

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

(17) [REGULATION \(EU, EURATOM\) No 883/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 September 2013 concerning investigations conducted by the European Anti-Fraud Office \(OLAF\) and repealing Regulation \(EC\) No 1073/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation \(Euratom\) No 1074/1999](#)

2.1.3. Efficiency of controls

Reporting on time-to-pay, time-to-inform and time-to-grant

Two grants resulting from calls for proposals under direct management were signed by DG EAC in 2025. In terms of efficiency indicators time-to-inform and time-to-grant (Art 197.2 FR), an average time of respectively of 50 and 54 days has been measured.

As in previous years following the treatment of the Yearly Reports received from the National Agencies in 2025 DG EAC was able to recover an important amount (+/- EUR 371 million). The bulk of this money will be reinjected in next year programmes activities.

Timely Payments	EAC Score	EC Score
	100%	97%

The transition in 2025 to the Commission's new accounting system, SUMMA, has required the adjustment to a new system and has impacted budget implementation tasks, processes and financial management activities, particularly during the first part of the year. This has required careful management to ensure the same data quality as in previous years. In some cases, this may have resulted in lower performance for some standard financial indicators such as the timely payments (see Annex 4). At the end of 2025 the DG managed to consume all the available credits both in commitments and payments.

The DG made considerable efforts to simplify and rationalise the number of transactions and the tool SUMMA also imposed changes on the way complex transactions are registered. As a result, the number of invoices and the number of payments decreased compared to 2024, however, the budget and financial monitoring efforts outside of the system needed to be reinforced.

EUR 13.1 million payments made were paid late in 2025. These late payments generated in 2025 a total of EUR 29 481.45 in interest (EUR 611 in 2024).

In 2025, DG EAC registered 1 941 invoices (2 415 in 2024), of which 235 invoices (12%) were registered late (60 – 2.5% in 2023). The substantial increase in late registration relates to technical issues experienced in the first months with the new system.

In 2025 DG EAC needed to recreate most of the control mechanisms aligned with the new data universe of SUMMA, eProcurement and ABAC Assets in order to ensure proper follow up of transactions and efficient and sound financial management:

- a) Reporting tools for data quality to facilitate the monitoring of operations with national agencies (Annex II to Data Store Produce, Clearings Data Production, E+ Link Dynamic Reports, ABAC Data Explorer, Daily Trackers),

- b) Tools for the follow-up of DG EAC financial transactions (Late Payments & Invoices Tracker, Transactions Plan vs Actual, Workflow Risk Analysis, SUMMA Data Explorer),
- c) The monitoring indicators in the monthly strategic dashboard for grant, procurement and other procedures (overview of procedures not started/on-going/closed, overview of on-going procedures per stage 1/2/3 and overview of delayed procedures).

In 2025 DG EAC also put considerable efforts in training users of the new system and also in data cleansing and improving data analytics in absence of the central reporting.

Budget execution

DG EAC together with Executive agencies (EACEA and REA) reached once more outstanding budgetary performance in 2025, achieving a 100 % budget execution both in commitment and payment appropriations in VOB (voted budget). This included an additional reinforcement of approximately EUR 48 million in payments received through the Global Transfer exercise, as well as further unused credits reallocated from other funding programmes at year-end.

These excellent budget performances confirm that DG EAC's programmes are operating at full capacity, showing faster implementation than in the first years of this programming period and demonstrating capacity absorb additional credits.

2025 has also been marked by a significant level of assigned revenues (recoveries), mainly from Erasmus+ National Agencies ⁽¹⁸⁾ due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mobility measures, during budget years 2020-2021. However, these assigned revenues automatically return to the programme and are mostly carried over to the following year increasing the resources available. These additional resources will allow implementing the programme's priorities while further contributing to boosting learning mobility, notably by supporting participants with fewer opportunities.

2.1.4. Economy of controls

Where indirect management is concerned, the cost of controls borne by the Commission, the Member States and the Entrusted Entities ⁽¹⁹⁾ needs to be reported separately. The sources of these figures and how they were estimated are to be reported together with the assessment of their completeness and reliability.

The global total of DG EAC's estimated cost of controls at Commission level is 1.34% (EUR 65.12 million) ⁽²⁰⁾ (see Annex 7). For the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps indirect Relevant Control System, the cost of control is 1.44% (EUR 63.60 million) (incl. all other direct

⁽¹⁸⁾ The National Agencies transmit to the Commission on an annual basis the final accounts presenting the implementation of Erasmus+ measures in participating Member States. This procedure is finalised in the fourth year following the implementation. When the total payment made to the National Agencies exceeds the amounts actually due, the difference is recovered.

⁽¹⁹⁾ For Entrusted Entities: any types of management, administrative or other remuneration fees paid to them by the Commission are to be reported separately from the DG's supervision or monitoring costs.

⁽²⁰⁾ Out of the EUR 65.12 million costs of controls at Commission level, EUR 64.93 million is related to ex ante controls and EUR 0.19 million is related to ex post controls.

management and supervision of EACEA) ⁽²¹⁾. For the EIT Relevant Control System, the cost of control is 0.36% (EUR 1.52 million). When considering the additional costs of control incurred at the level of National Agencies responsible for implementing Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, the overall cost of control is estimated to be 7.46%.

DG EAC concludes that the structures in place are cost effective on a multi-annual basis.

Details about the estimated cost of the control activities provided by REA, are reported in the Annual activity report of REA.

2.1.5. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

DG EAC's control environment and control strategy remained stable during 2025, and the conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls is unchanged from last year. The factors contributing to the stability of the control environment include the continuity of the spending programmes and related types of transactions, and the stability of the DG's organisation.

The applied control strategy is the best suited to fulfil the intended control objectives efficiently and at a reasonable cost. This control strategy ensures an adequate balance between low error rates, fast payments and low costs of controls.

Based on the most relevant key indicators and control results reported above, **DG EAC has assessed the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of its controls of its financial management and reached a positive conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of the controls for which it is responsible.**







2.2. Audit observations and recommendations






This section sets out briefly the state of play for all audit observations and recommendations reported by auditors related either to performance aspects or to internal control and financial management. Further details for IAS (Internal Audit Service) and ECA audits can be found in Annex 8.

Where an audit has detected weaknesses affecting an internal control principle or the department's assurance, a detailed analysis is provided further below in section 2.3 and, where applicable, the incidence on the AOD's assurance is presented in section 2.4, accordingly.



⁽²¹⁾ Direct management payments represent below 2% of total payments. Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps payments contain indirect and direct management payments including the contribution payments to the running costs of EACEA. A separate calculation would insignificantly change the final result.

Internal Audit Service






Reported	Audit Title	Accepted Recommendation (critical or very important)	State of play in 2025	Impact on the assurance for 2025
2022	Effectiveness of the protection of personal data of beneficiaries of and participants in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes managed by DG EAC	Very important: nr 5		
2023	IT security management in DG EAC	Very important: nr 1		
2025	Reliability of audit opinions on the legality and regularity of Erasmus+ expenditure declared by National Agencies in the DG EAC	Very important: nr 2		

State of play		Assurance	
	Action plan implemented or awaiting review from IAS		No impact on the assurance
	Action plan implementation is ongoing		Impact on the assurance
	Preparation of the action plan		

European Court of Auditors

Reported	Audit Title	Accepted Recommendation	State of play in 2025	Impact on the assurance for 2025
2024	Statement of Assurance (DAS)	N/A		

Choose an item.

State of play		Assurance	
	Action plan implemented		No impact on the assurance
	Action plan implementation is ongoing		Impact on the assurance
	Preparation of the action plan		

2.3. Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems

The Commission has adopted an Internal Control Framework based on the highest international standards. ⁽²²⁾

DG EAC has adapted the Internal Control Framework to its specific characteristics and organisational structure. The internal control systems are suited to achieving its policy and internal control objectives in accordance with the internal control principles, having due regard to the risks associated with the environment in which it operates.

DG EAC has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and as outlined in Annex 8, has concluded that **it is effective and the components and principles are present and functioning well overall, but some improvements are needed** as minor deficiencies were identified related to Internal Control Principle 10 (Business Continuity Plan), Internal Control Principle 11 (selecting and developing general control activities over technology), Internal Control Principle 12 (deployment of control objectives), and Internal Control Principle 13 (data protection).

The following actions will be taken in this respect: for Internal Control Principle 10, the Business Continuity Plan of DG EAC will be updated in 2026; for Internal Control Principle 11: further improvements will be made to increase the overall IT security; for Internal Control Principle 12: improvement will be made for the management of observations of Independent Audit Bodies and control activities will be updated due to the introduction of SUMMA; for Internal Control Principle 13: the formal confirmation being received from the European Data Protection Supervisor, the annexes on data-protection to the Contribution agreements with Türkiye, Serbia and North Macedonia will be updated.

2.4. Conclusions on the assurance

This section reviews the assessment of the elements already reported above (in Sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.3.), and the sub-conclusions already reached. It draws an overall conclusion to support the declaration of assurance and whether it should be qualified with reservations.

The information reported in Section 2 is comprehensive and complete as regards the coverage of the budget delegated to the AOD, and information has been reported for all significant budget areas. The reliability of the information is supported by the building blocks of assurance as described in Annex 7 and 8.

The true and fair view is supported by the supervisory verification of the error rates calculated by entrusted bodies. The regular reporting on all aspects of the programmes ensures that resources are used for the intended purpose. The programme design, its rules, and its

⁽²²⁾ The Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO) Internal Control Integrated Framework, the golden standard for internal control systems.

implementation ensure sound financial management, legality and regularity, non-omission of significant information, as well as the other internal control objectives.

As mentioned for EIT in Annex 7, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) issued a clean opinion in relation to the regularity of the EIT ex post grant payments for 2024 but made an emphasis of matter regarding the fact that regularity of prefinancing payments can only be ascertained in future years. There is also another matter reported regarding recoveries related to OLAF reports in the ECA report. In the 2024 Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR) the EIT Director made a reservation concerning three OLAF-investigated irregularities. These elements do not lead to a reservation for DG EAC considering its supervision responsibilities and the fact that the EIT has taken appropriate action together with its Governing Board, where DG EAC acts as an observer. The corrective actions are fully the responsibility of the EIT and are being carried out with the support of Commission services.

In conclusion, based on the elements reported above, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, effective controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Director-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,

Director-General of the Directorate for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture.

In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation

Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view ⁽²³⁾.

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, 31 March 2026

(e-signed)

Pia AHRENKILDE HANSEN

⁽²³⁾ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG/Executive Agency.

3. A MODERN AND SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

3.1. Human resource management

In 2025, the HR Correspondent (HRC) continued delivering quality HR services within the DG, supporting the Director-General in optimally (re-)allocating the shrinking resources, in order to mitigate the growing workload and evolving priorities.

Two selections of senior managers were successfully completed in 2025.

The HRC worked hand-in-hand with the internal communication function to complete the actions devised following the 2023 Staff opinion survey. The main areas concerned staff wellbeing and social connection (examples of actions are coffees with random colleagues, videos to present teams and their work, videos with managers, or “EAC’s got talent” to discover colleagues’ hidden talents, including an exhibition), as well as learning and professional development. An all-staff event was organised to gather the staff views on the organisation structure, communicate on new political priorities and create networking opportunities.

Support to the uptake of collaborative working methods was extended to AI. Under the umbrella of EAC Sharing Sessions, 13 learning events took place during the year. There was also a Commission-wide policy talk on the Culture Compass by the Director-General. The HRC continued supporting DG EAC’s teams to organise Learning and Development activities within the new rules.

HR issues (including Ethics) were addressed in Internal Control meetings with middle-managers in order to ensure adherence to the internal control principles. Awareness of Ethics was also raised among staff.

The HRC team continued to actively participate in DG EAC Equality network, sharing experiences and good practices on HR issues and following the developments in this area. DG EAC reached the target for 1st female appointments to middle-managers in 2023 and has since maintained an excellent gender balance (50%).

The HRC continued the good practice to welcome newcomers and trainees.

3.2. Digital transformation and data management

Digital transformation and cybersecurity

In 2025, DG EAC focused on enhancing digital transformation and cybersecurity by improving the Indirect Grant Management Platform for programmes such as Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, was in 2025 in its fifth year.

Notable new features supported improving user experience, system reliability, and simplicity, with over 92 000 applications and over EUR 4.8 billion in grant requests. Information exchange services were expanded for stakeholders to access relevant data easily.

EAC utilised 18 digital solutions across its IT landscape, migrating its dissemination platform to open-source tools and supporting the Drupal project. By end-2025, 85% of IT systems were supported and 31% moved to cloud infrastructure, with ambitions for 60% cloud adoption by end-2026. Contributions to AI initiatives for German and French National Agencies were noted, alongside maintaining a healthy IT approach with a balanced ratio between reuse, buy, and build initiatives. Efforts to simplify processes resulted in reduced document categories and more efficient workflows. These simplifications leveraged a unified interface across IT modules, facilitating cloud adoption. Data management improvements were seen through bulk data exports and automated payment solutions for National Agencies (NAs).

The **European Youth Portal** supported youth volunteer activities, while the European Student Card Initiative continued transitioning management to EACEA, with Erasmus Without Paper set for Erasmus+ monopoly grant management in 2026.

Green, secure and resilient infrastructure

In 2025, DG EAC advanced its' **Cybersecurity** posture, enhancing digital infrastructure protection and resilience in line with the **Commission's Digital Strategy**. Improvements included stricter security protocols, increased system stability, and reinforced cybersecurity measures. By the end of 2025, 17 out of 19 EAC-owned systems had valid IT Security Plans, with the remainder finalizing their update by Q1 2026 ⁽²⁴⁾. All sensitive non-classified systems (i.e. BM, NAM and EYP) implemented **Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)** for enhanced security. Regarding the annual IT security compliance exercise, the 2025 attestation process has been successfully completed demonstrating a strong commitment to security governance and continuous improvement with re-attestation due by Q1 2026 for most systems. DG EAC invested heavily in a **structured framework to support compliance efforts**. In practice, all IT Security Priority Controls and related evidence are now managed using the tracking tool that project managers already use. Additionally, the guidelines are kept and regularly improved in a wiki. This approach makes it easier for project managers to track and monitor security measures as part of their daily tasks. It also helps standardise evidence and simplifies coordination between everyone involved. In 2025, IT Security incidents were managed using the

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for incident response and reporting established in 2024. All incidents were closed by end-2025, and more than half of the incidents were false positive.

EAC maintained a high completion rate of 43% in IT training among its statutory staff, with an 87% cyber awareness rate.

Data management

As digital technologies continue to reshape Commission operations, DG EAC recognises that data is a strategic asset to be leveraged throughout the entire policy and programme lifecycle – from design and delivery to monitoring and evaluation. In 2025, DG EAC has prepared with a view to launch early 2026 its first integrated Data and AI Strategy, aiming to transform the way data is governed, used and valorised for policy and implementation excellence.

In 2025, DG EAC's maturity in corporate data governance stood at 'Established' overall, with 'Established' in Data Management, Ownership & Responsibilities, Data Quality and Data Skills. To reach 'Advanced' maturity by 2029, EAC implemented concrete measures across the four pillars starting in 2025:

- **Data Management:** A modern, secure, and modular EAC-wide data platform was rolled out in 2025, consolidating core datasets across decentralised actions (e.g. Erasmus+), centralised projects, financial data, and policy data, including metadata. The aim is to support the development of reusable data products, automated reporting pipelines, and advanced analytics features for strategic dashboards and evaluations. All metadata follows the corporate Metadata Quality Assurance (MQA) methodology.
- **Ownership & Responsibilities:** In Q4 2025, EAC has updated its Data Governance Framework, clarifying and raising awareness on data stewardship roles and responsibilities. This was done also in close cooperation with EACEA, under the revised cooperation understanding on data governance and analytics reached in 2024, ensuring alignment and shared accountability across implementation modes.
- **Data Quality:** An integrated Data Quality Dashboard has been launched to follow up on the robustness of key performance indicators. The regular check of data quality is essential in the context of reports, performance statements and evaluations.
- **Data Skills:** EAC has scaled up its data and AI literacy programme, including at least four capacity-building sessions in 2025 on topics such as data storytelling, evaluation-ready data preparation, and AI use cases. Special attention was placed in upskilling both headquarters and decentralised actors, such as National Agencies and EACEA staff.

DG EAC advanced towards responsible AI integration, ensuring compliance with the Commission's framework for Sensitive Non-Classified (SNC) data in AI systems and the AI@EC guidance. A new data platform for AI solutions has been established, ensuring AI-enabled analytics pilots to begin, building on the existing reporting and data analytics capacity.

The **Data Management Committee**, with its expanded mandate covering AI governance, oversaw the implementation of these changes, tracking progress, addressing compliance issues, and ensuring alignment with Commission-wide digital transformation goals. Through these actions, DG EAC consolidated a **secure, interoperable, and insight-driven data ecosystem**,

improved operational efficiency, enhanced MFF reporting, and supported **evidence-based policymaking and communication** on programme achievements.

Further, DG EAC continued to work on data literacy and visualisation using data storytelling to support communication on the programmes' performance. EAC also continued its seamless cooperation with EACEA ⁽²⁵⁾ and RTD in the data analytics sphere, enabling a fully integrated data and performance governance on its programmes, regardless of the implementing mode.

Data Protection

In 2025, DG EAC initiated the archiving of 3 records that became obsolete, published 2 new records corresponding to newly identified processing activities and reviewed 7 records whose previous versions were published in 2023. In total, at the end of 2025, DG EAC had now 18 data protection records published in the European Commission public registry.

Approximately 75% of the invited staff, including the data protection representatives in DG EAC units, attended the 2 informative sessions that took place on data protection in 2025. The invited staff received instructions to further disseminate the received information and content in all units. The information shared in the meetings should reach 100% of staff. All newcomers to DG EAC received basic information on data protection included in the Welcome package.

The awareness raising activity on managing personal data breaches in IT Security Incidents gathered approximately 20 participants from various units in DG EAC.

3.3. Sound environmental management

DG EAC has published 11 articles and executed a series of actions to support the process to reduce its net greenhouse gas emissions, waste reduction/circular textile, a tree as a retirement gift, sustainable traveling and mobility etc.

In terms of reducing **energy usage** (=BEST ⁽²⁶⁾ energy saving actions) in buildings and workspaces, DG EAC has participated in the summer and end-of-year energy saving actions.

Following the Green Travel Pledge, EAC emissions for 2019 were at 380 tCO_{2e} (Source: MIPS-Qlik dashboard), for 2025, emissions were at 202 tCO_{2e} which suggests a reduction of ~47%.

In 2025, DG EAC started to develop a comprehensive "EAC Greening Action Plan" (for 2026-2028), which is planned to be endorsed in 2026.

With this Plan, DG EAC is confident being enabled implementing actions to further reduce its environmental impact.

⁽²⁵⁾ EACEA uses EAC's data analytics infrastructure and governance framework, developments being operated using common methodologies (data decisions validated at EAC's Data Management Committee).

⁽²⁶⁾ BEST - Building Energy Savings Together