



Annual Activity Report 2024

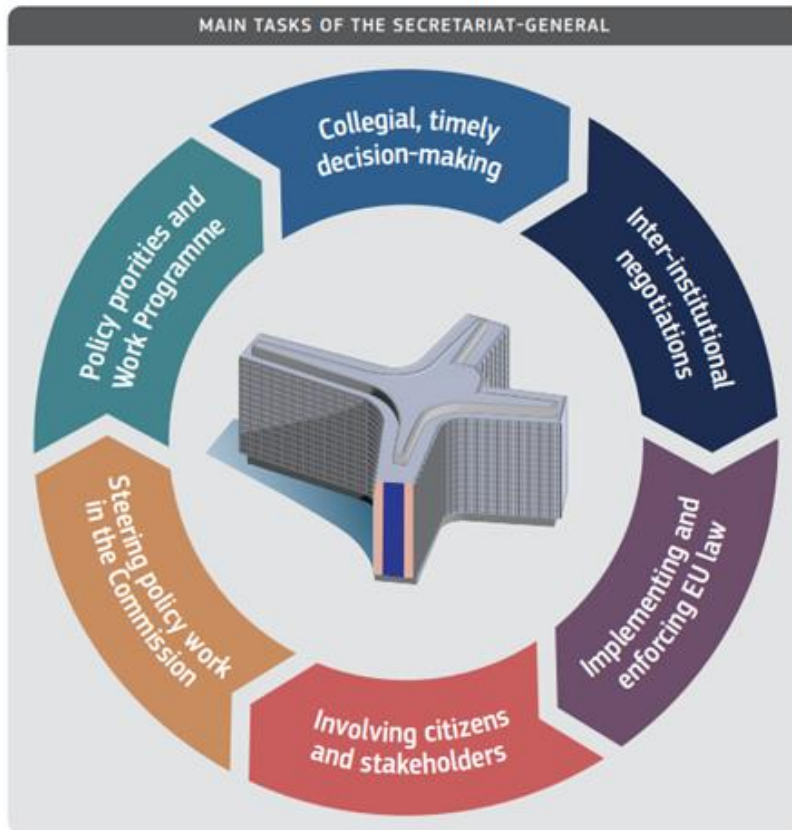
SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

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THE SECRETARIAT-GENERAL IN BRIEF

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



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

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

⁽¹⁾ 2024 was a transition year, in which the Secretariat-General worked both towards the delivery of the 2019-2024 political priorities and the definition and implementation of the political priorities for 2024-2029.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

In 2024, the Commission successfully managed the transition from Ursula von der Leyen's first to her second term as President. The transition required intensive and wide-ranging efforts.

On the one hand, the Secretariat-General was instrumental to complete the delivery of the 2019-2024 Political Guidelines, while contributing to finding solutions to some of the main challenges Europe has faced: from responding to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, to dealing with the consequences of climate change and to building Europe's digital leadership. In 2024, the Secretariat-General also facilitated **agreements between co-legislators** on key legislative proposals across all priority areas, such as the updated Schengen Borders Code or the reform of the economic governance rules.

At the same time, the Secretariat-General prepared the ground for a strong start for the **new College**. This preparatory work encompassed support to the candidate for President of the Commission in developing the Political Guidelines; support to the President-elect in drawing up the mission letters to the incoming Commissioners, and assistance to Commissioners-designate in preparing for their **hearings in the European Parliament**. The Secretariat-General also oversaw the practical preparations for the arrival of the new College. Finally, it coordinated the work on the reorganisation of a number of Commission departments, on the new rules of procedure, and on the strengthened transparency requirements.

While the process to renew the political leadership in the EU was ongoing, the Secretariat-General stayed the course on the Commission's priorities.

Throughout the year, the Secretariat-General steered the Commission's work on the EU's unwavering political, humanitarian, military and financial support for **Ukraine**, including through the adoption of the 13th, 14th, and 15th packages of sanctions against Russia respectively in February, June, and December 2024. The situation in the **Middle East** also required a coordinated response from the Commission. In addition, the Secretariat-General steered the preparedness work as regards the EU-US relations.

Boosting the EU's **competitiveness** was a key priority in 2024. The recommendations of the Draghi report on the future of EU competitiveness fed into the preparations for the Competitiveness Compass presented in February 2025, which will serve as the 'North Star' for the Commission's economic strategy over the 2024-2029 period. The Secretariat-General prepared the Compass as well as its immediate follow-up, the **Clean Industrial Deal**, an ambitious plan to boost competitiveness and decarbonise European industry.

Similarly, the Secretariat-General coordinated the Commission's follow-up work to the Letta report 'Much more than a market' and to the Niinistö report 'Safer Together – Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness'.

As an integral part of the competitiveness agenda, the Secretariat-General led the Commission's work on delivering President von der Leyen's goal to **reduce administrative burdens by 25%**. This simplification drive began in 2024 with a first set of 41 measures to lighten the load for European companies. The work has further intensified with the first two so-called Omnibus packages of simplification measures adopted in the first months of the new Commission, simplifying rules on sustainability reporting and EU investments.

The Secretariat-General, together with DG Budget, coordinated the **mid-term revision of the multiannual financial framework**. The revision helped ensure the Union was equipped to address new challenges, enabling a €50 billion support package for Ukraine and providing additional resources for key areas such as migration, natural disasters, and support for partners in the Western Balkans and the Southern Neighbourhood.

The Recovery and Resilience Taskforce continued to drive the **implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility**, together with DG Economic and Financial Affairs. Implementation accelerated significantly in 2024, allowing successful disbursement of EUR 85.3 billion in payments and supporting strategic investment and reforms across the Union.

The **rule of law** cycle, coordinated by the Secretariat-General together with DG Justice, continued to play a key role in strengthening democracy across the EU. For the first time, the 2024 Report included country chapters on four enlargement countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia). Their inclusion will support these countries' reform efforts to achieve lasting progress on democracy and the rule of law ahead of accession.

Following the agreement on the **Pact on Migration and Asylum**, the Secretariat-General supported the adoption of the Common Implementation Plan, setting out the key milestones for all Member States to put in place the legal and operational capabilities required to successfully start applying the new legislation by mid-2026.

Defence and security assumed particular importance in 2024 in the face of rising geopolitical tensions and hybrid threats. The Secretariat-General was instrumental in preparing the first-ever **European Defence Industrial Strategy**, an ambitious plan to enhance the competitiveness of the European defence industry. The Secretariat-General coordinated work on the Commission's progress report on the **Security Union Strategy** and monitored progress in the **economic security** risk assessments launched in 2023.

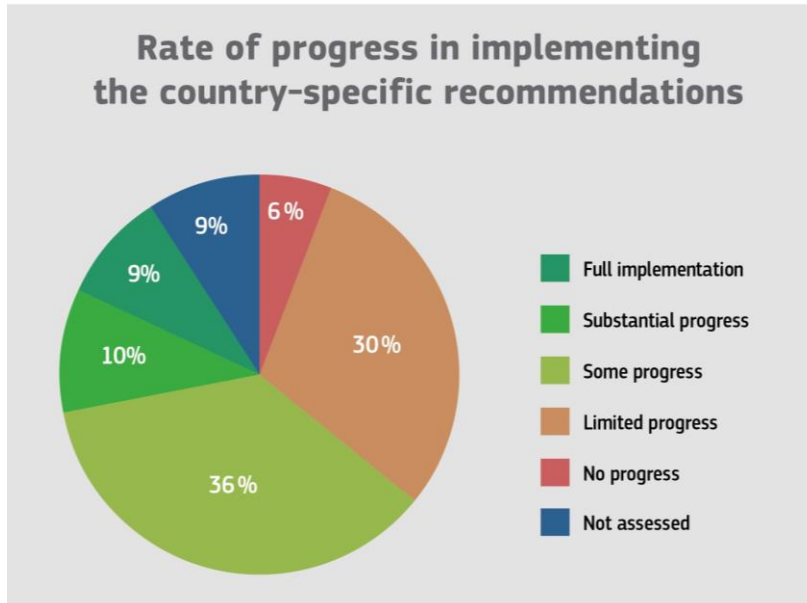
The Secretariat-General continued to lead on the Commission's relations with Western European partners. This included ensuring strong EU coordination on the implementation of the **EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, including the Windsor Framework**, the **Trade and Cooperation** Agreement and completing negotiations with **Switzerland** on a broad package of agreements deepening and expanding this important relationship.

The Secretariat-General negotiated, on behalf of the Commission, the agreement on a new **interinstitutional ethics body for ethical standards** for members of European institutions and advisory bodies. The new body is designed to develop common ethical standards and foster a joint culture of ethics and integrity among EU institutions.

Within the Commission, the Secretariat-General continued to steer and shape **key corporate policies**, working closely with other central services of the Commission. It remained at the core of the corporate governance framework, ensuring efficient use of human and financial resources and shaping the Commission's corporate policies in key areas such as cybersecurity, data protection, and information management.

The smooth functioning of the **collegial decision-making process** remains a core function of the Secretariat-General and further progress was made in 2024 to improve the efficiency and security of the Commission's internal processes, including through digitalisation.

B. Key performance indicators



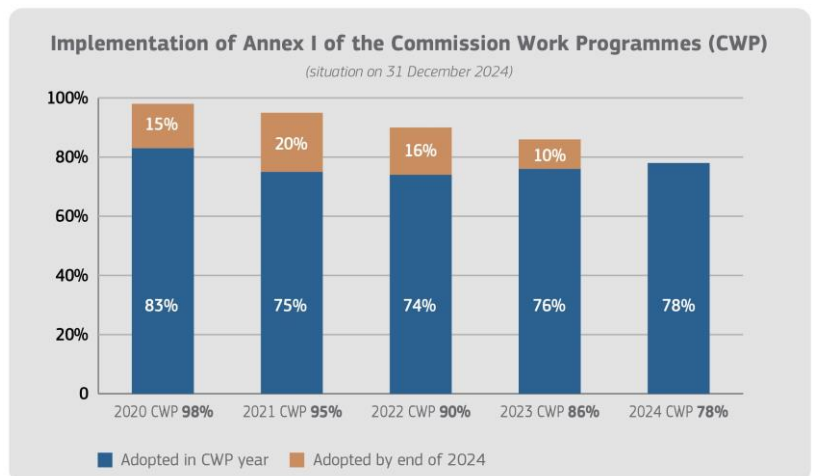
Key performance indicator 1 - Rate of progress in implementing the country-specific recommendations ⁽²⁾

The Recovery and Resilience Facility has significantly accelerated policy action to implement country-specific recommendations. The share of 2019-2020 country-specific

recommendations reaching at least 'some progress' increased by 12 percentage points from 52% in 2021 before the Recovery and Resilience Facility to 64% in 2024, after three years of Facility implementation.

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

Almost 80% ⁽⁴⁾ of the new initiatives announced in the 2024 Commission work programme were adopted by the end of the year. In addition, the Commission adopted several initiatives that remained from the 2023 Commission work programme.



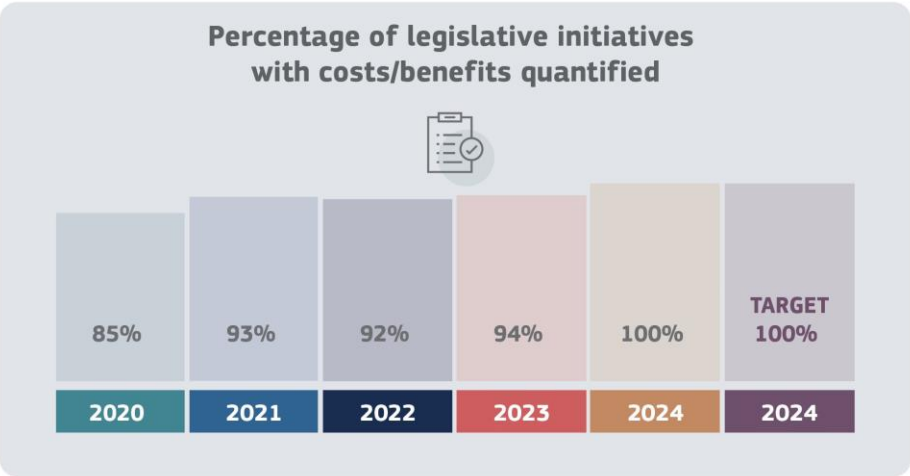
⁽²⁾ Key performance indicator 1 relates to specific objective 3.1.

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

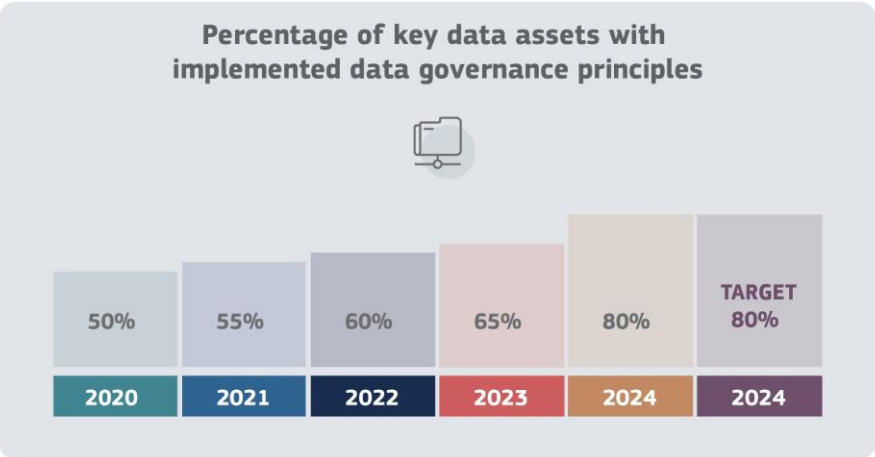
⁽⁴⁾ Out of 18 new initiatives announced in the 2024 Commission work programme, 14 were adopted by the end of the year. The remaining four were postponed to the new mandate.

Key performance indicator 3 - Proportion of legislative initiatives (with an impact assessment) for which costs and/or benefits have been quantified (5)

In 2024, 100% (3 out of 3 (6)) of the impact assessments conducted, all reviewed by the Regulatory Scrutiny Board, contained quantification of costs and/or benefits.



Key performance indicator 4 - Percentage of Commission key data assets (7) for which corporate principles on data governance have been implemented (8):



The Secretariat-General continued to improve its local governance of key data assets, through systematic reporting in the EC Data Catalogue, reinforcing data-related roles and responsibilities, and documenting data management

practices. A thorough mapping of data management practices was undertaken for all key data assets in the Secretariat-General. The exercise documented current data management practices, identified areas for improvement, and further raised awareness of corporate data governance principles. As a result, the Secretariat-General has reached the target of 80% implementation of corporate principles on data governance.

(5) Key performance indicator 3 relates to specific objective 6.5.
 (6) As 2024 was the last year of the previous Commission mandate, the number of new legislative proposals and impact assessments was limited.
 (7) Key data assets are data relevant for decision-making processes across the organisation and for the functioning of the organisation itself.
 (8) Key performance indicator 4 relates to specific objective 7.6.

C. Key conclusions on internal control and financial management

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

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

D. Provision of information to the Commissioner(s)

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

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

General objective 1 – A European Green Deal

Coordinating the European Green Deal

The Secretariat-General coordinated a communication in February 2024 launching a reflection on a **climate target for 2040**, a crucial step towards achieving a carbon-neutral Europe by 2050. The Secretariat-General also steered work on a communication on managing **climate risks**, setting out how the EU can effectively build greater resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Implementation efforts in 2024 focused on strengthening engagement with stakeholders.

President von der Leyen announced the launch of a series of **clean transition dialogues** in 2023 to discuss with European industry and social partners how to strengthen and support the implementation of the European Green Deal, contributing to a reinforced industrial approach. In 2024, the Secretariat-General provided support for these dialogues and prepared a stocktaking Communication, adopted in April 2024.

The Secretariat-General swiftly launched the preparatory process for the **Clean Industrial Deal**, aiming to strengthen European industries and support their timely transition to climate neutrality.



Based on the outcome of the strategic dialogue with major stakeholders on the future of agriculture, the Secretariat-General also launched preparations for the **Vision for Agriculture and Food**, presented early in 2025.

General objective 2 – A Europe fit for the digital age

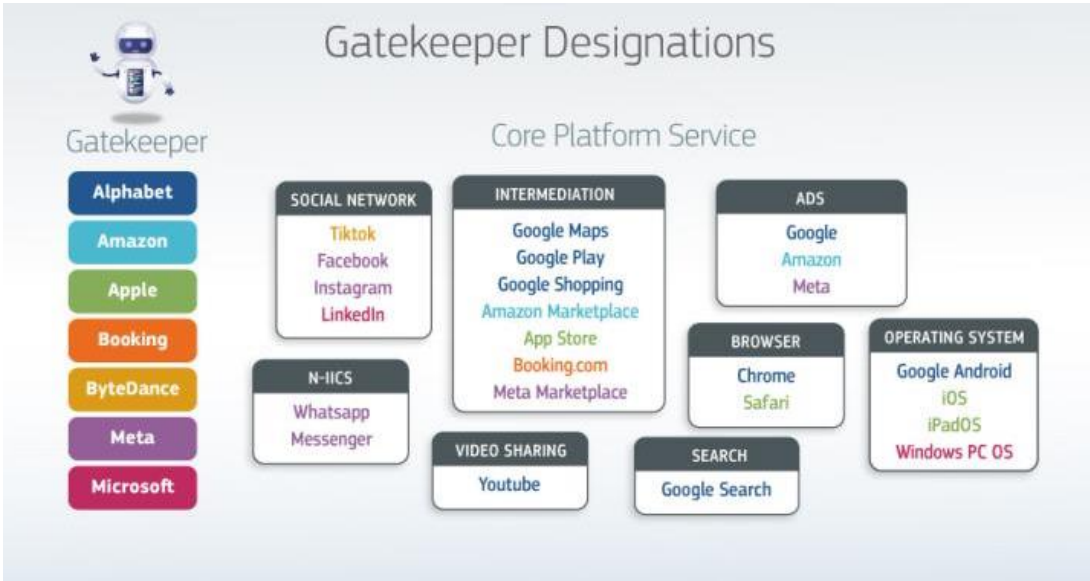
Shaping Europe's digital future

The Secretariat-General coordinated work together with the Commission services responsible to promote artificial intelligence in the EU, following the entry into force in August 2024 of the **European Artificial Intelligence Act**, the world's first comprehensive regulation on artificial intelligence. The Secretariat-General also steered initiatives such as

the **Gigabit Infrastructure Act**, landmark legislation that aims to ensure the widespread deployment of gigabit connectivity and 5G networks across the EU.

The yearly **Digital Decade report**, coordinated by the Secretariat-General, highlighted that the EU has strategically pivoted towards a more assertive digital policy framework, with strong regulatory efforts, significant investments, and good progress in areas such as high-performing computing and quantum technologies.

One of the key achievements was the successful implementation of the **Digital Services Act**. Under very tight deadlines, the Secretariat-General supported the process whereby 24 core platform services by 7 gatekeepers were designated under the **Digital Markets Act** and over 20 very large online platforms and services under the Digital Services Act.



General objective 3 – An economy that works for people

Reforming the economic governance framework and implementing the Recovery and Resilience Plans within the framework of the European Semester

Implementing the Recovery and Resilience Facility

In 2024, SG RECOVER and DG Economic and Financial Affairs jointly helped Member States **implement their national recovery and resilience plans**. The focus this year was on the revision of the plans for 17 Member States and the assessment of payment requests, which led to successful disbursement of EUR 85.3 billion in payments to 23 Member States, bringing total disbursements by the end of 2024 to EUR 306.1 billion. After some delays in 2023, mainly linked to the adoption of REPowerEU chapters, the speed of implementation and disbursements accelerated in the course of 2024.

Based on the independent study carried out in 2023, SG RECOVER and DG Economic and Financial Affairs published in February 2024 a Staff Working Document presenting the Commission’s **mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the facility**.

SG RECOVER and DG Economic and Financial Affairs regularly **met with representatives of Member States’ authorities** to share experiences and discuss common challenges. Monitoring **missions** were also organised with Member States, bringing together institutions, stakeholders, and recipients of support to discuss the progress of implementation.

In 2024, the Commission ensured a **high level of transparency and engagement with the European Parliament and the Council** throughout the implementation phase of the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The Commission swiftly shared modified plans submitted by Member States, as well as all preliminary assessments of payment requests, with the two institutions. Furthermore, the Commission held regular exchanges with the European Parliament to discuss horizontal topics concerning the Recovery and Resilience Facility.



Throughout 2024, the Commission regularly updated the **Recovery and Resilience scoreboard** showing the implementation status of the plans. Monitoring the fulfilment of Member States’ obligation to publish lists of their 100 biggest final recipients on the Recovery and Resilience Facility also continued.

The **Annual Recovery and Resilience Facility Report**, published in October 2024, took stock of the progress in implementing the facility. A

novelty of the 2024 report is the five annexes which enhance transparency on the eligibility period, recurring expenditure rules, the concept of double funding and the notion of final recipients.

Steering the European Semester

SG RECOVER prepared the Commission’s economic and social policy guidance to Member States under the European Semester by coordinating work on the country reports and the Commission’s proposals for **country-specific recommendations** in the 2024 **‘Spring Package’**. SG RECOVER ensured that the Semester remained focused on fostering competitive sustainability along its four key priorities (promoting environmental sustainability, productivity, fairness, and macroeconomic stability). It also considered

current challenges to competitiveness, such as high energy prices, skills shortages, and single market fragmentation. In addition, SG RECOVER led the preparation of the **Semester 'Autumn Package'**.

Steering the set-up of the Social Climate Fund

In 2024, SG RECOVER initiated work on the Social Climate Fund, a temporary €65 billion funding programme set to operate from 2026 to 2032. In cooperation with DG Climate Action and DG Employment, SG RECOVER prepared the guidance on social climate plans, designed to support Member States in submitting their plans by mid-2025.

Boosting the European single market and industrial base

The Secretariat-General coordinated the preparation of the first **Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report**, which was published in 2024. The report built on the nine key drivers identified in the 2023 communication on long-term competitiveness, which will be used every year to track the EU's progress.

Following the entry into force of the **Critical Raw Materials Act** and the **Net-Zero Industry Act**, the Secretariat-General oversaw their implementation through the project group meetings on industry, SMEs, single market and critical raw materials.

The Secretariat-General supported the adoption of several important and technical internal market regulations, such as the **Euro 7 Regulation** on road vehicle emissions or revising the Regulation on chemicals.

Aiming to tap into the growth and labour productivity potential of biotechnologies and biomanufacturing, the Secretariat-General led, in 2024, the preparation of the Communication 'Building the future with nature: Boosting Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing in the EU'.

Keeping the multiannual financial framework fit for purpose

Together with DG Budget, the Secretariat-General led the negotiations on the first-ever **revision of the multiannual financial framework**. The agreement in February 2024 allows the EU to continue delivering on common priorities, including critical support for Ukraine thanks to a new €50 billion Ukraine Facility, and further action on migration and external challenges. In addition, the midterm revision strengthened sovereignty and competitiveness thanks to the **Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform** and enhanced the EU's ability to respond to crises and unforeseen challenges by reinforcing the Flexibility Instrument and the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve.

The Secretariat-General, together with DG Budget, also launched reflections and technical preparations for the **post-2027 multiannual financial framework proposals**, which are due in 2025. The Secretariat-General supported DG Budget in concluding the

negotiations of the **recast of the Financial Regulation**, which entered into force in September 2024 to strengthen transparency and protection of the EU financial interests.

General objective 4 – A stronger Europe in the world

Strengthening coordination on strategic external policy issues

Throughout 2024, the Secretariat-General continued to steer the Commission's work in support of Ukraine in the face of Russia's war of aggression, including energy support measures. The Secretariat-General was instrumental in facilitating the **G7 loans** made possible through proceeds from Russia's immobilised sovereign assets. Other aspects of the EU response, such as holding Russia accountable for its crimes, countering disinformation, following the peace process, and providing humanitarian aid, have also been coordinated by the Secretariat-General.

The Secretariat-General led the work on three additional packages of **restrictive measures (sanctions)** in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, bringing the total number of such packages by end 2024 to fifteen. The EU's sanctions against Russia aim to reduce the Kremlin's ability to finance the war and impose economic and political costs on Putin's regime and its supporters. The Secretariat-General also coordinated the implementation of measures to prevent sanctions circumvention.

The coherent **implementation of the Economic Security Strategy** was a priority for the Secretariat-General in 2024. This entailed monitoring progress in the risk assessments launched in 2023 and the roll-out of new initiatives strengthening economic security adopted by the Commission in January 2024, notably in the areas of foreign direct investment screening, export controls, and research security.

Furthermore, the Secretariat-General ensured the timely adoption of several other proposals, such as the **Moldova Growth Plan and Facility**.

Boosting the Foreign, Security and Defence Policy

As the Commission took further steps in 2024 towards a European Defence Union, the Secretariat-General contributed to the delivery of an **EU Defence Industrial Strategy** and a proposal for **a European Defence Industry Programme**. The strategy has the twofold objective of supporting European defence industrial readiness and strengthening ties between the EU and the Ukrainian Defence Industries. The strategy has already delivered tangible results, such as the first EU-Ukraine defence Industry Forum and the opening of the EU Innovation Office in Kyiv. The Secretariat-General supported the implementation of the EU hybrid toolbox and the establishment of **Hybrid Rapid Response Teams**, including elaborating the operational guidance for their deployment.

The Secretariat-General continued to ensure systematic engagement at all levels with **NATO**, including close coordination on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Four new

structured dialogues were established: on climate and defence, emerging and disruptive technologies, cyber and defence industry.

Preparing the EU for enlargement

The Secretariat-General led the preparation of the **communication on pre-enlargement reforms** and policy reviews, which looked at the implications of a larger EU in four main areas: values, policies, budget and governance.

The **Western Balkans Facility** was operationalised throughout 2024. As every year, the Secretariat-General contributed to and facilitated work on the 2024 enlargement package, providing the state of play for each enlargement country in the merit-based accession process.

EU's relations with the United Kingdom and other western European partners

The Secretariat-General coordinated the full, timely, and faithful implementation, application, and enforcement of the **EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement** and the **EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement**. On the Withdrawal Agreement, efforts were made to ensure that beneficiaries can fully exercise their rights and that the Windsor Framework is implemented. Regarding the implementation of the **EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement**, there was a particular focus on level playing field issues, energy, and fisheries. The Secretariat-General also continued to lead negotiations with the UK on an EU-UK agreement in respect of Gibraltar.

Furthermore, the Secretariat-General led the **EU-Switzerland** negotiations on a broad package of measures to deepen and expand the bilateral relationship, completed in December 2024. Close work with the EEA States (**Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein**) took place and the Financial Mechanisms 2021-2028 were signed in September, setting out the contribution of these countries to reducing the economic and social disparities in the European Economic Area. Negotiations of an Association Agreement with Andorra and San Marino were finalised. The Commission's proposals for Council Decisions on the signature and provisional application of the Association Agreement are being discussed in the Council.

General objective 5 – Promoting our European way of life

Deepening the Security Union

In 2024, the Secretariat-General provided impetus for the final negotiations on all remaining initiatives of the **EU Security Union Strategy**. Nearly all initiatives on all pillars have now been adopted. Newly adopted legislation offers greater protection to all Europeans in relation to fighting terrorism and radicalisation, fighting organised crime, ensuring the security of borders, and supporting law enforcement and judicial cooperation. To tackle interconnected global threats such as terrorism and drug trafficking, the EU has

stepped up its negotiations with non-EU countries to strengthen law enforcement and judicial cooperation at international level.

Migration



Following the agreement in 2024 on the new **Pact on Migration and Asylum**, the Commission adopted, in June 2024, the **Common Implementation Plan** setting out the key actions required to implement the agreements. The Secretariat-General supported the successful launch of this plan. The Secretariat-General maintained a comprehensive overview of all aspects of migration policy, as reflected in

President von der Leyen's regular updates to the European Council.

The Secretariat-General provided strong support during the inter-institutional negotiations of legislative proposals on migration, such as measures on maximising the **potential of skills and talent mobility** and for more systematic recognition of professional qualifications of third country nationals. Recognising the importance of visa policy as an effective leverage in external relations, the Secretariat-General played an important role in the adoption by the College of the proposals requiring a visa for third country nationals entering the EU.

The Secretariat-General also ensured representation of European Union in bodies such as the **Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration** and in contributions to the action plans for key migration partners, the monitoring of implementation of strategic and comprehensive partnerships with key partners and the four main migratory routes (Western Balkans, Atlantic/Western Mediterranean, Central Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean).

Stepping up European cooperation on crisis management

An important milestone in the Secretariat-General's efforts to improve preparedness in anticipation of potential crises was the organisation of the first ever **high-level conference** on crisis management. Other Secretariat-General actions to strengthen crisis management have included the mapping and analysis of new tools, the delivery of trainings, the establishment of an exercise policy, and continuous cooperation with NATO on parallel and coordinated exercises. Inspired by the Niinistö report on EU civil and military preparedness, the Secretariat-General launched the work on a Preparedness Union Strategy, adopted in March 2025.

Building a Health Union

The Secretariat-General supported the negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council on the reform of the **pharmaceutical package**, which aims to ensure timely and equal access to medicines for all EU patients, foster innovation, and ensure the attractiveness of the EU for the pharmaceutical industry.

The Secretariat-General worked with relevant Commission services to address **medicine shortages** in the EU. In this context, a consultative mechanism bringing together stakeholders from EU Member States, key industries, civil society and the scientific community – **the Critical Medicines Alliance** – was set up in January 2024. The Alliance



aims to identify key areas for action to prevent and address vulnerabilities in the supply chain of critical medicines, serving as the basis for developing a Critical Medicines Act.

The Secretariat-General plays an active part in the **external dimension** of the European Health Union. It ensured close follow-up to the Global Health Strategy and supported the negotiations on the Pandemic Agreement and the International Health Regulation. This included coordination of the Commission's response following the August declaration of the World Health Organization that the mpox outbreak was a public health emergency of international concern.

Education and Youth

The Secretariat-General coordinated the preparation of a package of proposals adopted in March 2024 aiming to work towards a **European degree**.

The Secretariat-General contributed to efforts to incorporate young people's views into EU policymaking. Concrete action in this regard involved designing the new **'youth check'**, which will be applied as of 2025 on new major initiatives in the Commission work programme. A concept for the Commissioners' annual **Youth Policy Dialogues** was developed with support from the Secretariat-General.

General objective 6 – A new push for European democracy

Strengthening democracy and the rule of law

The Secretariat-General continued to move forward with initiatives strengthening the EU's capacity to promote and uphold the rule of law. It co-led the preparation of the fifth annual **Rule of Law Report**. The report's role as a driver of positive reforms has been confirmed, as two-thirds of its recommendations issued in the previous year have been fully or

partially addressed. The 2024 report included, for the first time, four country chapters on developments in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The integration of these first **enlargement countries** in the report is designed to support their reform efforts in the accession process and prepare for the continuation of work on the rule of law as future Member States. The Secretariat-General worked with other services to ensure that the annual rule of law report process continues to be rigorous, effective, and consistent with other tools at the Commission's disposal to promote and safeguard the rule of law.

The Secretariat-General also followed up on the implementation of the 2020 European Democracy Action Plan and the 2023 Defence of Democracy Package, coordinating the work of relevant Commission departments.

Promoting equality

The **Task Force on Equality** and its secretariat, provided by the Secretariat-General, actively contributed to the implementation and reporting on the Union of Equality strategies adopted in 2020-2021. These include the annual report on gender equality, the report on the implementation of EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025, the report on the implementation of the 2020-2025 LGBTIQ equality strategy, and the report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks.

The Secretariat of the task force provided further guidance to Commission departments on equality mainstreaming in EU policies, monitored and reviewed equality mainstreaming work plans of Commission services, and organised awareness-raising sessions and trainings.

Strengthening the Commission's Better Regulation policy

In 2024, the Commission's better regulation policy focused on the commitment to simplification and burden reduction, including reporting requirements.

The **'one in, one out'** approach has resulted in substantial positive outcomes, bringing in EUR 6,3 billion net administrative cost savings in 2023 for businesses and citizens. The approach also had **positive results in 2024, with EUR 260 million expected net cost savings** resulting from Commission proposals. Under the steer of the Secretariat-General, the Commission departments continued to work towards the goal of **reducing reporting burdens by 25%**, without undermining related policy objectives. In addition to the 41 simplification measures presented in the 2024 Commission work programme, **notable simplification initiatives adopted in 2024** include the farmers simplification package, estimated to reduce administrative burden by EUR 165 million, in particular for smaller farms, the simplification to the drinking water directive, which is estimated to save about EUR 530 million, or the setting up of the multilingual public interface for the declaration of posted workers, with savings of about EUR 259 million. From its launch in March 2023, the reduction of reporting burdens resulted in net savings of around EUR 5 billion.

Building on the progress made in 2024, burden reduction is now a shared agenda of the whole College. Each Member of the College will **stress-test** the EU acquis to **make proposals to simplify EU legislation** and contribute to **reducing administrative burdens by at least 25% and 35% for SMEs**. The Commission will also organise regular implementation dialogues with stakeholders and reality checks with practitioners.

In 2024, the **Fit for Future Platform**, a high-level group supporting the Commission's regulatory simplification work, concluded its current mandate. Over the course of its four-year mandate, the Platform adopted 41 opinions, containing 260 specific suggestions to help the Commission simplify and modernise EU laws and reduce unnecessary burdens for citizens and businesses. The Commission's simplification efforts were brought together under the **Regulatory Fitness programme**, part of the better regulation policy, which aims to make EU laws simpler, more targeted, and easier to comply with.

Embedding strategic foresight in the strategic planning and policy-making process

Thanks to the work of the Secretariat-General and the Joint Research Centre, strategic foresight is now recognised as an integral part of the Commission's policy-making process and toolbox. That has been achieved through the stronger coordination of foresight activities across the Commission, the provision of support to Member State capacities, as well as dedicated and regular foresight reports, e.g., the Annual Strategic Foresight Reports and horizon scanning.

The Secretariat-General contributed to the drafting of the '**Global Trends to 2040: Choosing Europe's Future**' report published under the umbrella of the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System in the spring of 2024. This report reflects on the future of the EU, its role in the world, and its ability to adapt to meet fresh challenges and harness new opportunities.

Promoting transparency and stakeholder involvement

In 2024, the Secretariat-General contributed to improving the **Transparency Register**, a key tool to promote ethical and transparent interest representation at EU level. This included the implementation of the Register's annual priorities for the year, which in 2024 have included targeted data quality checks of the register's content, modernising the register's digital platform and website, and increased synergies with other EU actors that expressed an interest in being involved in the Transparency Register. The Secretariat-General coordinated the adoption of new Commission decisions extending the requirements of the Transparency Register to meetings held between interest representatives and Commissioners or Commission managers and establishing a new obligation to publish minutes of all meetings with interest representatives.

The **Have Your Say** Portal has become the central hub for citizen engagement, federating Public Consultations and Feedback, European Citizens' Initiatives, and the Citizen's Engagement Platform for various forms of contributions to policy and law-making. The

Secretariat-General enhanced accessibility, integrated services via the Open Data Portal to connect with Member States, and forged collaborations with academic networks to engage younger generations.

The **EU Law Tracker** was launched in April 2024 and allows EU citizens to monitor the full EU legislative process. The Secretariat-General feeds the portal with information on the Commission's decision-making process.

Giving citizens a say in policymaking: the European Citizens' initiative

In 2024, the Commission registered 11 **new European citizens' initiatives** that called for EU action in areas such as the protection of European agriculture, food security, and water resilience, the provision of EU financial support for safe abortion, or protection of consumer rights in relation to videogames.

The Commission continued its campaign to inform citizens of their right to use the European citizens' initiative through online and offline activities, with the support of a network of partners from all Member States. The **ImagineEU** video competition for secondary schools received more than 400 entries from schools across the EU; the three winning teams (from France, Italy, and Romania) visited the EU institutions to learn more about how the EU works. Through the European citizens' forum, the Commission also ensured continued support and guidance to organisers of initiatives.

Promoting the highest ethical standards

In the run-up to the European elections of 6-9 June 2024, the Secretariat-General strengthened the internal guidelines ensuring that the participation of Members of the Commission in European election campaigns is conducted in a transparent and ethical manner. The Secretariat-General also monitored their correct implementation.

The Secretariat-General continued to promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity among staff and Members of the Commission, in cooperation with DG Human Resources and Security and the Cabinets. This included information for Members of the Commission who left the Commission about their post-mandate obligations and information on the ethical obligations of new Members of the Commission. The Secretariat-General also provided secretarial support to the Commission's Independent Ethical Committee. The Annual Report on the application of the Code of Conduct for the Members of the European Commission provides more information on the matter.

The European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Court of Justice, the European Central Bank, the Court of Auditors, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concluded, in May 2024, an agreement establishing an **interinstitutional body for ethical standards** for members of European institutions and advisory bodies. The Secretariat-General was instrumental in the political and technical meetings that led to the agreement.

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

Leading the Commission's strategic planning and programming

In 2024, the Secretariat-General and DG Budget reviewed the **strategic planning and programming framework for 2025-2029** to better focus on performance and streamline the reporting process for the next five years, while also reflecting the new political priorities. The new architecture will be composed of a single multiannual strategic plan developed for the entire Commission and annual management plans for each Commission department.

The Secretariat-General co-led the preparation of the **2023 Annual Activity Reports**, which constituted the basis for the Commission's **2023 Annual Management and Performance Report**, jointly prepared by the Secretariat-General and DG Budget.

The two services also organised the Commission-wide **peer reviews** on the 2024 critical risk assessment exercise and on the 2023 Annual Activity Reports, to ensure coherence and to exchange best practices among departments.

Preparing the Commission work programme and coordinating the policy making process

The Secretariat-General launched the preparation of the **2025 work programme**, which sets out the actions deriving from the new Political Guidelines of the President for 2024-2029. The Commission work programme was adopted on 11 February 2025, two months after the new College took office.

The work programme identifies the key new initiatives of the Commission for 2025, with an emphasis on initiatives reflected in President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines, as well as initiatives aiming to reduce administrative burden. It also includes an annual plan on evaluation and fitness checks, a list of priority pending proposals that should get prior attention in the legislative process, a list of pending proposals the Commission intends to withdraw and a list of acts the Commission intends to repeal. The Secretariat-General also coordinated the successful delivery of the 2024 Commission work programme.

Managing the Commission's relations with the other institutions

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



The Secretariat-General coordinated the developments in the legislative process for all pending legislative proposals in the **Interinstitutional Relations Group**, notably in the busy legislative period in the run-up to the European elections. It ensured that the positions of the European Parliament and the Council were given the necessary political attention. This approach smoothed the legislative process and secured the adoption of pending proposals.

The Secretariat-General has been fully engaged in all aspects of the **European Parliament's** work, notably plenary sessions, parliamentary committee meetings, including structured dialogues and meetings of the governing bodies. It also coordinated the Commission's follow-up to Parliament's resolutions, written and oral questions and the provision of information regarding citizens' petitions.

In 2024, the work was marked by the elections to the European Parliament. The Secretariat-General provided extensive support in the transition from the 9th to the 10th legislature and in the process of setting up the new Commission. This included the preparation of the new draft political guidelines, and the process leading to the confirmation of the Commissioners-designate.

In relation to the **Council**, the Secretariat-General represented the Commission in Coreper I, Coreper II, and meetings of the Political and Security Committee. The Secretariat-General also provided support to the Commission's (Executive) Vice-Presidents and Commissioners who attended meetings of the General Affairs Council and other Council formations. Furthermore, the Secretariat-General prepared and supported President von der Leyen's participation in European Council meetings, Leaders' meetings, and Euro summits.

The Secretariat-General continued to lead on the Commission's relations with **national Parliaments, the European Economic and Social Committee** and the **European Committee of the Regions**, where a new Protocol on Cooperation was applied starting in 2024. It coordinated the replies to national Parliaments' opinions in the context of the subsidiarity control procedure and the political dialogue and to the inquiries of the **European Ombudsman**.

The Commission continued strengthening its relations with EU decentralised agencies and the EU Agencies' Network. The Secretariat-General continued to lead the **network of the Commission's representatives on the management boards of EU decentralised agencies**, coordinating the work to support agencies and further improving their governance, performance, and cooperation. Finally, the Secretariat-General was involved in

the seat selection process for the Anti-Money Laundering Authority that was set up in June 2024.

The Secretariat-General helped the Corporate Management Board oversee the follow-up of **OLAF recommendations** and organised the annual high-level review of the cooperation with the **European Public Prosecutor's Office**. The Secretariat-General also prepared an amendment to the Commission-European Public Prosecutor's Office Agreement establishing the modalities of cooperation between the two institutions.

Providing briefings and political intelligence

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

Overseeing the Commission's respect of personal data protection rules

In 2024, the Data Protection Office of the Commission continued to closely monitor how the institution complied with the legal guarantees for protecting the personal data of both citizens and its own staff.

The Data Protection Office supported Commission departments in their work to keep processing records up to date, assess risks through data protection impact assessments, address data subject requests, and manage personal data breaches. In particular, the office launched a **cross-cutting investigation** into breaches relating to document access rights in collaborative tools. This led to corrective, preventive, and awareness-raising actions across numerous departments. A set of **simplification measures** was taken to reduce the administrative burden on departments.

The monitoring exercises for 2024 confirmed the ongoing commitment of Commission departments to achieving and demonstrating compliance with data protection rules and the overall maturity of the systems in place.

Business continuity

The Commission enhanced its resilience in the context of a worsening security situation and increased threats. For this purpose, the Secretariat-General strengthened the preparedness of the Crisis Corporate Management Board by running an **exercise** for its members, by introducing new supporting protocols and by testing the technical infrastructure. The Secretariat-General also carried out several corporate business continuity exercises involving all Commission departments. Furthermore, the Secretariat-General supported Commission departments in adjusting the business continuity framework at local level.

Corporate governance

The Corporate Management Board held 12 meetings in 2024, where it provided coordination, oversight, and strategic guidance on corporate management items relating to human resources policy, risk management, audit, budget and financial management, security, anti-fraud, information technology, as well as logistics. Following concerns over the Commission's **financing of specific activities of non-governmental organisations**, the Board instructed the relevant departments to issue guidance on funding for activities related to the development, implementation, monitoring and enforcement of Union legislation and policy. The Board also asked to ensure swift alignment of all ongoing contracts and strict adherence of future contracts with such guidance.



The Information Technology and Cybersecurity Board monitored the implementation of the Commission's **digital strategy** based on the set of defined indicators. The Board also approved actions to promote the use of cloud services and provided guidance for major corporate digital transformation projects in the domains of finance, human resources

and risks and fraud management. The board continued to monitor the entire range of cyber threats affecting the Commission and the maturity in the implementation of its IT security policies. It also implemented the actions imposed by the regulation, laying down measures for a high common level of cybersecurity at the institutions, bodies, offices, and agencies of the Union.

The Information Management Steering Board monitored the implementation of the **AI@EC Communication**, which aims to take advantage of the opportunities of using artificial intelligence in the Commission's work while safeguarding against the associated risks and preparing compliance with the Artificial Intelligence Act.

Managing the decision-making procedures

The Commission adopted a total of 9486 acts in 2024. It continued to apply procedural flexibilities to allow for the swift adoption of 383 initiatives related to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

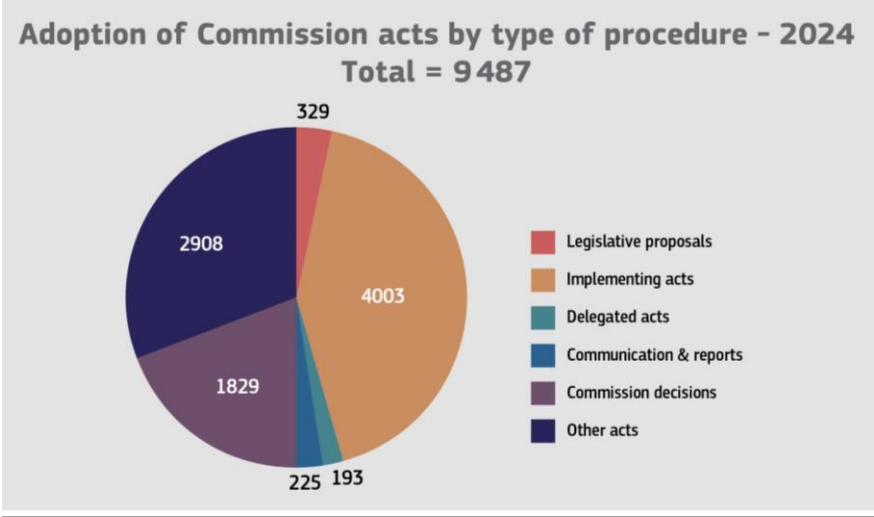
The new **Rules of Procedure** of the Commission were adopted in December, ensuring a modern, efficient, and fully digital decision-making process and paving the way for the e-authentication of acts.

The scope of **Decide**, the Commission's corporate decision-making tool, was extended to cover all types of interinstitutional requests, including replies to the European Parliament's resolutions and opinions of the consultative committees. The extension of Decide to the

interinstitutional steps of the legislative lifecycle of proposals was made available to all services in January 2024. **EdiT**, the new legislative drafting tool, was delivered at the end of 2024 to allow for the preparation of new legislative proposals as of January 2025.

Types of acts adopted by the Commission in 2024

Source: *Decide*



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. A list and details of the reports that have been considered is contained in Annex 7. The results of this assessment are explicitly documented and reported to the Secretary-General.

2.1. Control results

The Secretariat-General uses the five main internal control objectives and their associated indicators:

- Residual error rate: below 2%;
- Cost-effectiveness: error rates, time-to-pay and time-to-contract and costs of controls leading to a positive conclusion on cost-effectiveness;
- Anti-fraud strategy: the 2023 rolling action plan is implemented, except one action to be implemented in 2025/2026 (*A review on how the ‘certified correct’ is delivered for contracts for which outputs and deliverables form part of the contractual obligations linked to the payments is scheduled for 2025-2026*)
- Safeguarding of assets: all pre-financings are correctly recorded;
- Reliability of reporting: no material error and no reservations.

Overview table of the Secretariat-General	Grant	Procurement and administrative expenditure	Revenues including revenues transferred to other DGs	Total of expenses and coverage percentage	
	m EUR	m EUR	m EUR	m EUR	%
Procurement, administrative expenses and grant without a call for proposal	2.8	8.3	5.5 (9)	11.1	100%

The assurance-building process relies on positive conclusions for each of the sections under the main section “control results”. In addition to the indicators for the five control objectives listed above, the risk at payment has to remain below 2%, the Secretariat-General should not be subject to fraud, and assets and information should be adequately protected. Payments are processed in a timely manner, the costs of the controls are within a 10%-15% range, there are no very significant or critical open recommendations from auditors not adequately addressed and all control principles are present and functioning.

(⁹) Amount cashed in 2024.

The Secretariat-General has a single control system for all kinds of expenditures: administrative, grants, procurement. Indeed, on top of the administrative budget, the Secretariat-General has annually a single grant without a call for proposals and every three years an open procurement procedure. These procedures are therefore included in the same control system that applies to administrative expenditures. No risks were identified that would impact negatively on the achievement of the control objectives.

Finally, according to the 2024 Financial Regulation, the Secretariat-General has also assessed the new reporting requirement as follows:

- No cases of "confirmation of instructions" (FR art 92.3);
- No cases of financing not linked to costs (FR art 125.3);
- No Financial Framework Partnerships >4 years (FR art 131.4);
- No cases of flat rates >7% for indirect costs (FR art 184.6);
- No derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity pursuant to Article 196 of the Financial Regulation.

No risks were identified that would impact negatively on the achievements of control objectives.

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

DG SG	Payments made (2024;MEUR)	Minus new prefinancing [plus retentions made] (in 2024;MEUR)	Plus cleared prefinancing [minus retentions released and deductions of expenditure made by MS] (in 2024;MEUR)	Relevant expenditure (for 2024;MEUR)	Detected error rate or equivalent estimates
Procurement, grant and administrative expenditures under direct management	11,20	-2,60	2,41	11,01	0,00% - 0,50%
DG total	11,20	-2,60	2,41	11,01	

The Secretariat-General budget is all under direct management: procurement, grant and administrative expenditures. In 2024, the total payments made amounted to EUR 11.2 million. The Secretariat-General has a single control system for all kinds of expenditures: administrative, grants, procurement. The Secretariat-General concludes a single grant without a call for proposals and an open procurement procedure every three years. For those reasons, the grant is included in the control system that applies to administrative expenditures.

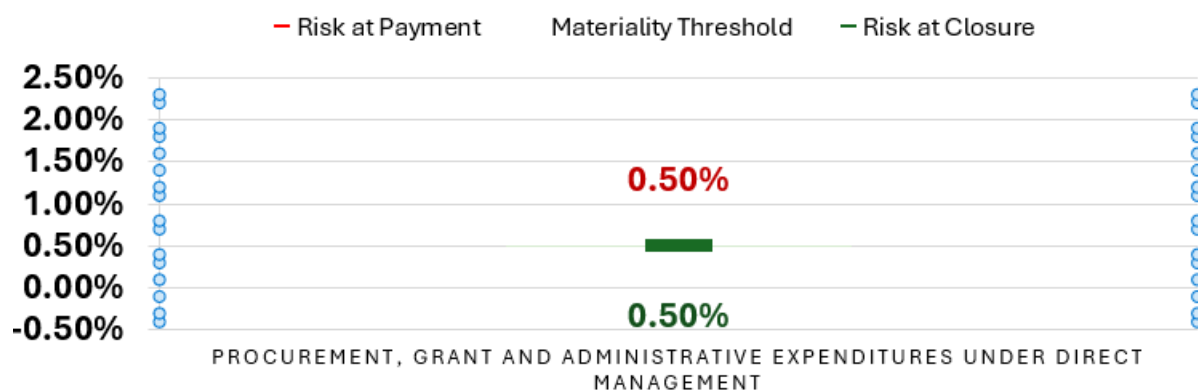
The Secretariat-General's materiality criteria are outlined in Annex 5. The main risks together with the control processes to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the relevant control systems are detailed in Annex 6.

2.1.2. Effectiveness of controls

a) Assessment of control results per RCS for expenditure

SG	Management Mode (1)	Payments Made (in €) (2)	New Pre-financings (in €) (3)	Cleared Pre-financings (in €) (4)	Relevant Expenditure (in €) (2) - (3) + (4) + (5) - (6) = (7)	Average or detected Error rate (range in %) (8)	
ALL BUDGETS: Operational and Administrative expenditure (including EC, EDF, EUTF and RRF not in NGEU Fund source) * and performance based excluded						Low	High
Procurement, grant and administrative expenditures under direct management	Direct	11.195.184,58 €	2.595.220,89 €	2.407.153,29 €	11.007.116,98 €	0.00 %	0.50 %

Estimated Risks (error rates) per Relevant Control System



The Secretariat-General's portfolio consists of expenditures with a relatively low error rate.

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

The bulk of the grant's expenses are for personnel who belong to a dedicated administrative entity and whose costs are standardised. Furthermore, the ex-post control carried out at the end of 2021 confirmed the results of previous audit work carried out by an external consultant. These verifications showed that adequate control procedures are in place, such as: (i) the correct identification of the staff working on the activities financed by the grant; (ii) the prevention of double payments; (iii) the presence of supporting documents and related invoices for payments made; (iv) the beneficiary's reliable accounts; (v) very

minor claims for non-eligible payments.

- For procurement and other administrative expenses: 0.5%.

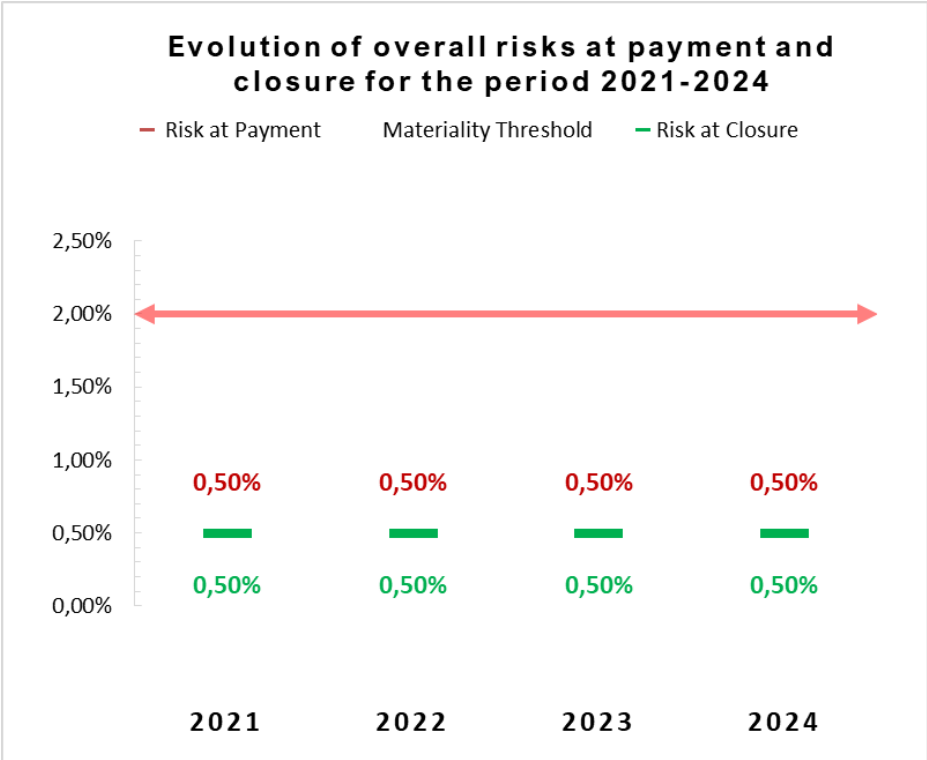
Controls aim to systematically detect and prevent breaches of legality and regularity. The first measure of the error rate is therefore the one resulting from the analysis of the recording of exceptions: control overrides and non-compliant events. The analysis of these exceptions (zero for 2024) shows that 0.5% maximum error rate is the average estimate. Given the nature of the transactions and the absence of errors, the Secretariat-General does not process recoveries and financial corrections to correct errors. There were no recoveries or financial corrections to correct errors in 2024.

- Overall risk at payment: 0.5%.

The estimated overall risk at payment for 2024 expenditure amounts to 0.5 % of the total payments or EUR 0.05 million. This is the Authorising Officer by Delegation’s best conservative estimate of the amount of expenditure in conformity with the contractual or regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made. The estimated future corrections for 2024 expenditure amount to EUR 0.

Based on control results and all other relevant information available, the Authorising Officer by Delegation can conclude that no reservation should be made for each kind of expenditure, and subject to the same control system.

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



The Secretariat-General's portfolio consists of expenditures with a relatively low error rate, i.e. administrative expenses, a grant without a call for proposals. Moreover, no ex post controls were organised because of the very low risk types of expenditures. As the Secretariat-General carries out only ex ante controls, consequently, for the risk at payment and risk at closure department, Secretariat-General is using the Commissions' flat rate of 0.5% as a conservative estimate for low-risk types of expenditure.

c) Quantitative benefits of controls: Preventive and corrective measures

With its ex-ante controls, the Secretariat-General has an effective mechanism in place for detecting and correcting errors, reaching in total EUR 0 million of corrections for 2024. Please see details in Annex 3 table 8. This is a decrease from last year with a correction of EUR 0.02 million. The decrease, compared to 2023, is mostly explained by constant attention to ex ante controls.

d) Assessment of control results for non-expenditure items

Not applicable

e) Fraud: prevention, detection, and correction

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

The implementation of the rolling action plan that forms part of the anti-fraud strategy is being monitored and reported to the management annually. All necessary actions have been implemented, with the exception of the review on the existing control procedures applied to give the certified correct for service contracts with deliverables. The 'certified correct' is the check mark provided to certify that the services have been properly provided, the supplies properly delivered, or that the work has been properly carried out and in accordance with the contract⁽¹⁰⁾. The programmed assessment of how the 'certified correct' is delivered for contracts for which outputs and deliverables form part of the contractual obligations linked to the payments is scheduled for 2026.

The Secretariat-General also contributed to the Commission anti-fraud strategy and does not have any financial recommendations to implement. The results achieved during the year thanks to the anti-fraud measures in place can be summarised as follows: all newcomers were offered training in ethics and anti-fraud measures and the local anti-fraud strategy reflected the actions taken at corporate level. Newcomers represent the most important target population and sessions have been organised remotely, but also in situ. In addition, a very detailed intranet page, updated regularly, guides all staff through

⁽¹⁰⁾ Financial Regulation, Article 111.4.

the complexities of the anti-fraud activities, including links to OLAF. Similar links are provided to DG HR’s pages on ethics.

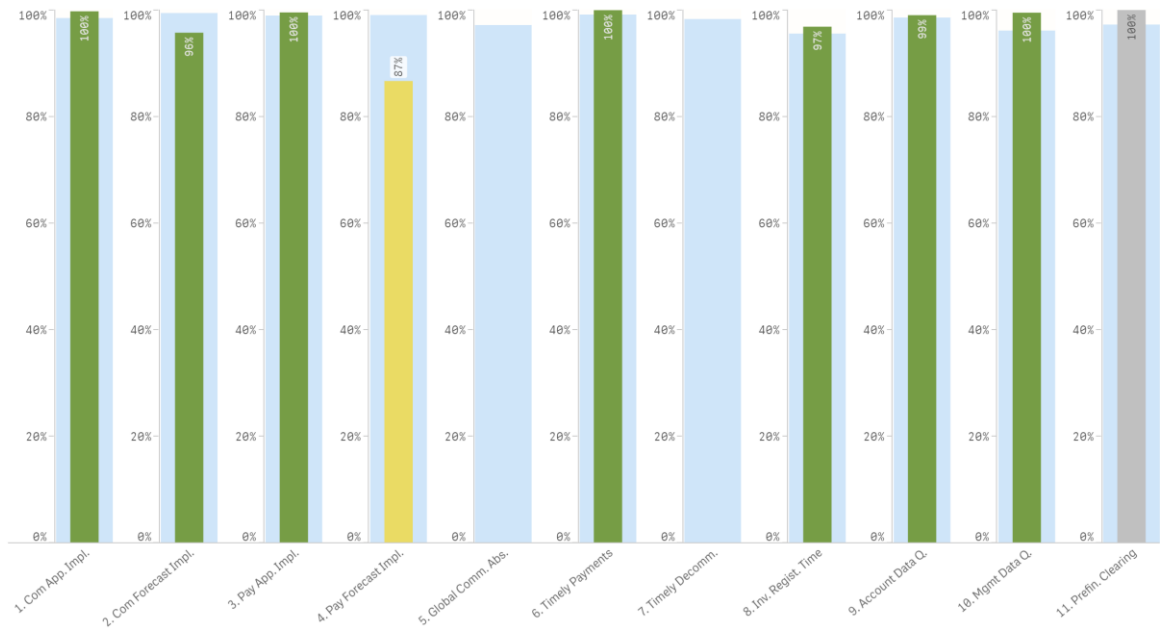
On the basis of the available information, the Secretariat-General has reasonable assurance that the anti-fraud measures in place are effective.

f) Safeguarding of assets and information

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

2.1.3. Efficiency of controls ⁽¹¹⁾

SG Indicator Scores for 2024 12

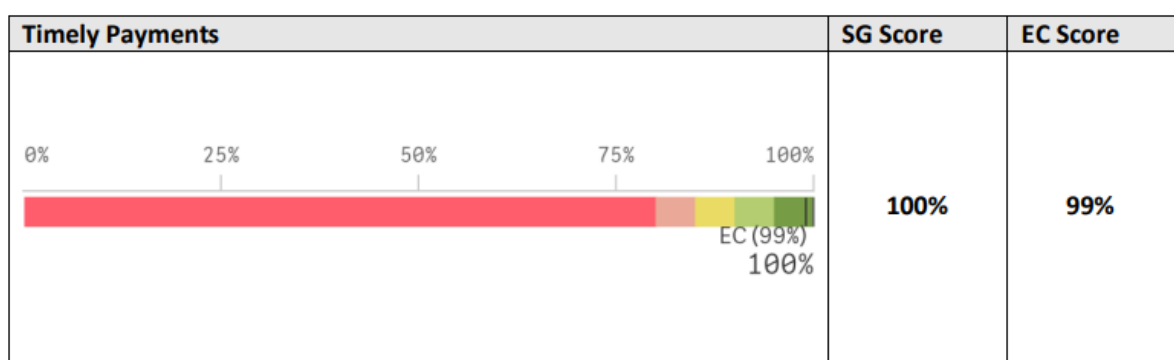


For each indicator the light blue bar denotes the EC Score.

⁽¹¹⁾ Green indicates >95% of target; yellow 85-90% of target; grey, not material for SG.

Indicator	Objective	Comment	SG Score	EC Score
1. Commitment Appropriations Implementation	Ensure efficient use of commitment appropriations expiring at the end of Financial Year		100%	99%
2. Commitment Forecast Implementation	Ensure the cumulative alignment of the commitment implementation with the commitment forecast in a financial year		96%	99%
3. Payment Appropriations Implementation	Ensure efficient use of payment appropriations expiring at the end of Financial Year		100%	99%
4. Payment Forecast Implementation	Ensure the cumulative alignment of the payment implementation with the payment forecast in a financial year		87%	99%
5. Global Commitment Absorption ⁽¹²⁾	Ensure efficient use of already earmarked commitment appropriations (at L1 level)	The indicator is not applicable for SG in 2024 due to the lack of underlying transactions recorded by SG in 2024.	-	97%
6. Timely Payments	Ensure efficient processing of payments within the legal deadlines		100%	99%
7. Timely Decommittments	Ensure efficient decommitment of outstanding RAL at the end of commitment life cycle	The indicator is not applicable for SG in 2024 due to the lack of underlying transactions recorded by SG in 2024.	-	98%
8. Invoice Registration Time	Monitor the accounting risk stemming from late registration of invoices in the central accounting system ABAC		97%	96%

In 2024, the average time to pay with suspension - PMO's payments excluded - was 8 days ⁽¹³⁾ (and 9 days in 2023). The financial scorecard shows that 100% of payments were made on time (see Annex 4), which demonstrates the close monitoring of payment deadlines. Monthly reports were provided to the operational units to monitor uncommitted and unpaid appropriations. The controls are deemed to be efficient.



⁽¹³⁾ See Annex 3.

2.1.4. Economy of controls

Being a low-spending Directorate-General, the Secretariat-General has a single indicator for the costs of controls per control system. The costs of controls amount to EUR 1.5 million and are based on staff work activities, as recorded by the screening exercise and with the Activities & Tasks Logging for Allocation of Staff nomenclature. These include financial management, programme management, budget and accounting, management, general coordination and information and communication technology (see Annex 7).

These costs amount to 13.06 % of the total payments (11.3% in 2023). This figure can be explained by the scope and diversity of activities linked to the cost of controls, the number of operational units involved, and the number of the financial transactions at the Secretariat-General.

2.1.5. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

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: 0.5 % of the total payments
- **Efficiency** The average time taken to pay: 8 days
- **Economy** The proportionality between the costs of controls and the funds managed: 13.06 %

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

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 to internal control and financial management – including the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control. Further details for IAS and ECA audits can be found in Annex 8. Where an audit has detected weaknesses affecting any internal control principle or the department's assurance, a detailed analysis is provided further below in section 2.3 and 2.4, accordingly.

Internal Audit Service

The Internal Audit Service's limited conclusion on the state of the Secretariat-General's internal control is based on the audit works carried out in 2020-2024. The Secretariat-General accepted all the recommendations issued by the IAS and adopted action plans to implement them. The IAS considers that the action plans adopted are adequate to address

the residual risks identified by the auditors. The implementation of these action plans is monitored through management reports and follow-up audits by the IAS.

Based on all these elements, the IAS concludes that the internal control systems in place for the audited processes are effective, except for the observations giving rise to the 'very important' recommendations listed below. The Secretariat-General has planned various actions to address all recommendations of the IAS.

The IAS issued two very important recommendations from the audit on the assessment of HR needs in the Commission at corporate level. The recommendation on the support to the assessment of HR needs by the corporate services at local level is due in September 2025, and on the quality checks of the Commission’s HR needs by the corporate services in 2026. Implementation has already started, in particular with the introduction of a revised Legislative Financial and Digital Statement to accompany each new legislative proposal, which was adopted in 2024. Details on the implementation of the agreed actions are included in Annex 8.

Regarding the protection of sensitive non-classified information at corporate level, the IAS recommended to DG DIGIT, DG HR, and the Secretariat-General to contribute jointly to improve the protection of sensitive non-classified information in transit or at rest by (a) providing Commission users with common guidance and training where applicable and (b) improving the practical application of the current technologies and increase process efficiency. The Hermes-Ares-NomCom platform now offers a solution for users to seamlessly upload and manage sensitive non-classified documents that bear the sensitive non-classified label and encryption from Microsoft 365. This improvement is explained in F.A.Q. format on the intranet and in other guidelines and manuals of the platform. The Secretariat-General has also recalled the responsibilities of document management officers for guiding users on the proper application of security markings in the platform. Details on the implementation of the agreed actions are included in Annex 8.



Reported	Audit Title	Accepted Recommendation	State of play in 2024	Impact on the assurance for 2024
2024	Assessment of HR needs in the Commission at corporate level	Very important: Support from the central services for the assessment of HR needs at local level		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		Very important: Quality checks of the Commission’s HR needs by the central services stemming from the audit on assessment of HR needs		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2023	Protection of confidentiality of information at corporate level (HR, SG, DIGIT)	Very important: IT controls to ensure protection of sensitive non classified information		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

- Action plan implemented and closed by IAS or ECA / No impact on the assurance
- Action plan implementation is ongoing or awaiting review from IAS or ECA
- Preparation of the action plan
- Impact on the assurance

European Court of Auditors

In 2024, the Secretariat-General was involved in the coordination work with DG Budget on the ECA’s Annual Report on the implementation of the EU budget for the financial year 2023. The Secretariat-General was not directly addressed by the ECA on any of these recommendations. The Secretariat-General was consulted on all other special ECA reports established in 2024.

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) issued two Special Reports in 2024 where the Secretariat-General was in the lead:

Reported	Audit Title	Accepted Recommendations	State of play in 2024	Impact on the assurance for 2024
2024	EU Transparency Register’ ⁽¹⁴⁾	Partially accepted		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2024	Enforcing EU law/infringement procedures’ ⁽¹⁵⁾	Partially accepted		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

‘EU Transparency Register’: The audit aimed to assess whether the transparency register is a useful means of providing transparency on the lobbying activities in EU policy and decision-making. The audit focused on the period 2019-2022. The ECA concluded that it provides useful information to citizens, but that weaknesses and gaps in that information reduce the transparency. The ECA recommended strengthening the register’s framework, publishing information on non-scheduled meetings with lobbyists, improving data quality checks, the user-friendliness and relevance of the public website.

‘Enforcing EU law/infringement procedures’: The audit aimed to assess whether the Commission’s management ensured timely detection, follow-up, appropriate monitoring and reporting of infringement cases. The ECA concluded that the Commission has improved its management to detect and correct infringements of EU law, but that it still takes too long to close infringement cases. The Commission regularly monitors and reports on EU law enforcement, but adherence to benchmarks is neither improving nor reported. The ECA recommended that the Commission should improve planning and documentation of checks, improve handling of complaints, petitions and informal dialogues; reinforce its infringement case and sanctions; and strengthen its monitoring and reporting.

For both special reports, the recommendations were partially accepted. The implementation of the recommendations is ongoing within the foreseen timeframe. See details of recommendations in Annex 8.

⁽¹⁴⁾ <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=SR-2024-05>
⁽¹⁵⁾ <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=SR-2024-28>

2.3. Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems

The Commission has adopted an *Internal Control Framework* based on the highest international standards⁽¹⁶⁾. The Secretariat-General has adapted this *Internal Control Framework* to its specific characteristics and organisational structure. The internal control systems are suited to achieving the Secretariat-General's 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.

For 2024, the Secretariat-General assesses the effectiveness of its internal control system, based on its self-assessment and on the following sources: reporting on the five internal control objectives; reporting on the monitoring indicators; registry of non-compliance events and exceptions recorded in 2024; results of the corporate indicators analysed in Annex 4 of the annual activity report; reports by the authorising officers.

The Secretariat-General also takes into account that:

- There were no open or overdue reservations in the preceding annual activity reports;
- all open 'very important' IAS recommendations are accepted and will be implemented;
- all recommendations of the Court of Auditors or other supervisory bodies were adequately addressed.

The results of the assessment were the following:

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

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

2.4. Conclusions on the assurance

The information and the assessments are comprehensive and cover the complete budget delegated to the Secretariat-General.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission Internal Control Integrated Framework, the golden standard for internal control systems.

In this report, the five internal control objectives of 1) having a true and fair view on financial management, 2) of the non-omission of significant information, 3) of resources used for their intended purpose, 4) of a sound financial management, and finally, 5) on legality and regularity of financial management, were positively assessed for the complete budget delegated to the Secretariat-General. Moreover, in 2024, the risk at payment remained well below 2%; the Secretariat-General was not subject to fraud. Assets and information were adequately protected. Payments were well processed on time and the costs of the controls remained within a 10%-15% range. Finally, all significant or critical open recommendations from auditors were adequately addressed to be soon implemented. Therefore, no risks were identified that would impact negatively the achievements of the control objectives. This positive conclusion supports the declaration of the Secretary-General.

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

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

2.5. Declaration of Assurance

Declaration of Assurance:

I, the undersigned,

Secretary-General,

In my capacity as authorising officer,

Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view ⁽¹⁷⁾.

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 Commission.

Brussels,

4 June 2025

[electronically signed]

Ilze JUHANSONE

⁽¹⁷⁾ 'True and fair' in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG/Executive Agency.

3. MODERNISING THE ADMINISTRATION

3.1. Human resource management

2024 was another year of heavy workload for staff in the Secretariat-General. The response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the conflict in the Middle East and energy crisis, the European elections and the arrival of a new College of Commissioners all brought additional tasks. Secretariat-General staff deployed sustained efforts and proved their resilience and dedication by successfully delivering on all fronts, under tight time constraints.

This is also demonstrated by the results of the 2023 staff survey, which showed that staff engagement in the Secretariat-General remained high at 73%. For the areas where staff felt that improvement is necessary, follow-up actions are currently being implemented. Internal communication actions, such as weekly debriefs to all staff from management meetings and the weekly newsletter, also contributed to strengthening staff engagement.

It also significantly invested in promoting gender parity in its management team and, as a result, half of both middle and senior managers at the end of 2024 were women. New colleagues in the Secretariat-General received training and guidance to help them integrate smoothly in their new team. The EU Policymaking Hub, managed by the Secretariat-General, launched learning packages for Commission staff who are involved in policy-making.

3.2. Digital transformation and information management

Digital Transformation

➤ Digital culture

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

➤ Business-driven digital transformation

The Secretariat-General managed digital solutions designed to support key processes and policies in the Commission, including decision-making, legislative drafting, transparency, business continuity, crisis management, records management, implementation and enforcement of EU law, data protection, mediation. In addition to its process efficiency and simplification initiative, the Secretariat-General has launched an AI action plan aimed at awareness raising, as well as leveraging AI for policymaking and in its working methods and information systems.

➤ Seamless Digital Environment

Records and archives management: The Secretariat-General designed a plan to simplify the corporate records management system in the next five years. It continued to promote the 'digital by default' principle by automating the capture of records from internal collaborative platforms including sensitive-non-classified information. The Secretariat-General also completed a comprehensive exercise to organise SG directorates' archives.

Monitoring EU law: Thanks to the revision of the webpage 'Report a breach of EU law by an EU country' and the introduction of the new complaint form in 2024, potential complainants are now better guided before they lodge a complaint with the Commission, which should result in efficiency gains for Commission services, as well as streamline external communication on complaints. The Secretariat-General continued to improve transparency (through the redesign of the Commission website on enforcement of EU law) and exchange of information with Member States (through the development of a new THEMIS module for pre-infringement investigations).

Decision-making: see the '[Managing the decision-making procedures](#)' section in part 1 of the report, p.26.

➤ Green, resilient and secure infrastructure

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

IT security

To counter the evolving cybersecurity threats, the Secretariat-General draws up annual cybersecurity plans addressing the evolving threat landscape. They combine an effective blend of measures designed to comply with the corporate IT security policy including the periodic assessment, in the IT security plans, of the level of risk and definition of countermeasures. Furthermore, the Secretariat-General continued to raise awareness on cybersecurity, physical and information security. It organised dedicated information sessions and enforced cybersecurity upstream in its information systems by promoting secure software development and scanning the systems for potential security vulnerabilities.

Data, information and knowledge management

The Secretariat-General continued to improve the local governance of its key data assets, in accordance with corporate policy. It has co-led actions of the Rolling Action Plan such as the refinement of the corporate reference data management policy and the consolidation of the corporate data advisory service. Regarding the local implementation of the data governance and data policies, the Secretariat-General raised awareness of corporate policies and good practices and the existing data management practices. Furthermore, the

Secretariat-General monitored the documentation of key data assets in the EC Data Catalogue and updated the list of key data assets' owners and stewards.

Data Protection

The Secretariat-General raised awareness internally on data protection rules. This was aimed at ensuring appropriate and accountable processing of personal data, as well as training staff to provide appropriate responses should a personal data breach occur. The Secretariat-General continued to implement the Commission's data protection action plan, as well as appropriate measures for IT systems to ensure respect of the principle of 'data protection by design and by default'.

To ensure accountability for Commission-wide processing operations and to establish efficient and prompt handling of data subject requests or breaches of personal data, the Secretariat-General prepared two new internal arrangements with other Commission departments that will be applicable in 2025.

The Secretariat-General also continued to publish transparent and up-to-date information for its personal data processing operations and monitored the use of appropriate data protection clauses in its agreements with third parties.

3.3. Sound environmental management

Monitoring professional trips and reducing emissions continued to be an important objective. The Secretariat-General encouraged the use of more sustainable modes of transport for business trips and proposed more videoconference facilities. Increasing the proportion of expert group meetings held online or in hybrid mode also enabled the Secretariat-General to achieve reductions in emissions from experts' travel.

The promotion of environmentally friendly behaviour among staff was a key priority. In line with the main corporate campaigns, staff were regularly informed about the priorities of the Green Commission and encouraged to adopt environmentally friendly and energy-efficient ways of working and commuting. A workshop was organised with directors' assistants to discuss new developments in the area of sound environmental management and gather proposals for further improvement.

Another contribution to the efforts to green the Commission was the finalisation of the move to the dynamic collaborative space, a more efficient office space use, as well as the reduction of energy consumption by replacement of corridor lights in the Secretariat-General with new, more energy-efficient, led lights with movement detectors. This contributed to a more sustainable environment and resulted in important energy savings.

3.4. Examples of economy and efficiency

The Secretariat-General strived to make its activities more efficient and use resources more economically. In the human resources area, steps were taken to adjust the workforce to the needs of the next College and the new political priorities of the Commission. Each time a post became vacant, the Secretary-General and the Chief Operating Officer assessed the possibility of reallocating it to another area or file. This allowed to effectively address changes in workload and in priorities. The practice of putting colleagues at the disposal of another unit in order to provide expertise for a limited period of time has also been pursued in 2024.

Moreover, the Secretariat-General succeeded to integrate the Commission's replies to the resolutions of the European Parliament and the opinions of the consultative committees into Decide Replies. This has significantly increased the efficiency of the process.

The arrival of the new Commission provided opportunity to further improve synergies and efficiencies in logistics services at the Berlaymont building. As a result, Secretariat-General ushers providing support to high-level meetings and to the President's Cabinet were integrated into OIB Services.