



Brussels, 22.3.2022
COM(2022) 118 final

**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**assessing the implementation and achievements of the 2014 – 2020 rights, equality and
citizenship programme**

{SWD(2022) 58 final} - {SWD(2022) 59 final}

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The rights, equality and citizenship programme ('the REC programme') aimed to further develop a Europe of rights and equality in accordance with the Europe 2020 strategy. It promoted the key values upon which the European Union is founded and contributed to further developing an area where equality and the rights of persons, as enshrined in the Treaty of the European Union, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and international human rights conventions, are promoted, protected and effectively implemented.

This report sets out the results obtained by the programme, in line with the obligation in Article 13.2(c) of the programme's legal base¹ ('the Regulation'). The Regulation requires the European Commission to provide the European Parliament and the Council with an *ex post* evaluation report for the programme by 31 December 2021. This report must assess the long-term impact and the sustainability of the programme's effects, with a view to informing a decision on any subsequent programme. In 2021, however, a considerable number of projects (more than 40%) remained ongoing due to their multiannual life-span. This situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused the extension of the duration of several projects. Therefore a comprehensive evaluation of the programme's long-term results and impacts may only be possible at a later stage.

For these reasons, the *ex post* evaluation will be carried out in two parts. This report represents the first part of the evaluation. It is based on the data currently available, provides an overview of how the funding is distributed and assesses the programme's achievements to date. While the new citizens, equality, rights and values programme for 2021-2027 (hereinafter 'CERV programme') has already been adopted, based on, among other things, the results of the interim evaluation of the 2014-2020 REC programme, this first part of the *ex post* evaluation of the previous programme will shed light on potential areas for improvement as regards implementing the new CERV programme.

The second part of the evaluation will be carried out at a later stage once all final data are available and in conjunction with the interim evaluation of the succeeding CERV programme. This second part will assess the long-term impacts and the sustainability of the programme's effects. It will provide recommendations for the new multiannual financial framework after 2027, as appropriate.

Although this report analyses all of the annual work programmes from 2014 to 2020, not all activities had started at the time of this evaluation. Therefore, a cut-off date of 31/12/2020 was set, so as to define the scope of this report. The second part of the *ex post* evaluation will complete the overview by analysing the remaining activities.

This report is based on the findings of the evaluation² prepared by the European Commission, supported by a contractor.

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1381/2013 of 17 December 2013 establishing a rights, equality and citizenship programme for the period 2014 to 2020, (OJ L 354, 28.12.2013).

² Commission staff working document accompanying the report on the evaluation of the implementation of the rights, equality and citizenship programme 2014-2020.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The 2014-2020 REC programme replaced the programmes in force in the 2007-2013 programming period, namely the Daphne III programme, the fundamental rights and citizenship programme and two of the policy areas of the progress programme³, namely ‘anti-discrimination’ and ‘gender equality’.

The REC programme was set up by European Parliament and Council Regulation (EU) No 1381/2013.

The Regulation sets its **general objective** as:

- contribute to the further development of an area where equality and the rights of persons as enshrined in the TEU, in the TFEU, in the Charter and in the international human rights conventions to which the Union has acceded, are promoted, protected and effectively implemented.

Its **specific objectives** are to:

- promote the effective implementation of the principle of non-discrimination on grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation and to respect the principle of non-discrimination on the grounds provided for in Article 21 of the Charter;
- prevent and combat racism, xenophobia, homophobia and other forms of intolerance;
- promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities;
- promote equality between women and men and to advance gender mainstreaming;
- prevent and combat violence against children, young people and women, and other groups at risk;
- promote and protect the rights of the child;
- contribute to ensuring the highest level of protection of privacy and personal data;
- promote and enhance the exercise of rights deriving from EU citizenship;
- enable individuals in their capacity as consumers or entrepreneurs in the internal market to enforce their rights deriving from Union law, having regard to the projects funded under the consumer programme.

The programme is implemented by the European Commission via direct management.

In terms of **geographical coverage**, all EU Member States were eligible to participate in the programme and, for selected objectives, Liechtenstein, Iceland, and Serbia were also eligible.

³ European Commission (2015), *ex post* evaluation of five programmes implemented under the 2007-2013 financial perspective – final report. Specific programme evaluation: Daphne programme, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/files/expost_evaluations_2007_2013/daphne_programme_evaluation_final_report.pdf; Specific programme evaluation: Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/files/expost_evaluations_2007_2013/frc_programme_evaluation_final_report.pdf; *ex post* evaluation of the programme for employment and social solidarity – PROGRESS 2007-2013 and recommendations for the successor programmes to PROGRESS 2014-2020 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=12610&langId=en>.

2. KEY ELEMENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

In line with Article 5 of the Regulation, **the programme supported a wide range of activities**, including analytical activities, mutual learning, cooperation, awareness-raising and dissemination activities, training activities, the development of tools such as training kits/material/curricula, and actions to implement its specific objectives. The programme supported **organisations** active in the area of social and fundamental rights across Europe, including: European networks; public or private organisations usually non-profit-oriented; national, regional and local authorities in EU Member States; civil society organisations; and international organisations.

The general public in participating countries is also a **target group** (groups that would benefit either directly, by participating in the programme's activities, or indirectly, from the programme being implemented), since the programme's objectives and initiatives aim to promote, protect and implement effectively equality and people's rights, in particular people who face discrimination, intolerance or violence, including migrants and minorities.

As provided for by the Regulation, the programme used action grants, operating grants and procurement actions as the main funding mechanisms.

2.1. The programme's specific objectives

Specific objective 1: Promote non-discrimination

The programme supported projects to prevent and to combat discrimination on the grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. A particularly key area within this objective is the promotion of Roma integration. In this regard, the REC programme supported the national Roma platforms and worked closely with EU Member States and their national Roma contact points and with civil society organisations working in the field of non-discrimination and Roma integration. The programme also financed the activities of the European network of equality bodies. This network's core task is the strengthening of cooperation and exchange of information on topics relating to non-discrimination between the national equality bodies designated by the Member States.

Specific objective 2: Prevent and combat racism, xenophobia, homophobia and other forms of intolerance

Projects financed in this area contributed to the better implementation of existing EU legislation in the Member States and to combating hate crime and hate speech. In particular, the activities funded supported the protection of minorities against a surge of populism, extremism and intolerance.

Specific objective 3: Promote the rights of persons with disabilities

The aim of this specific objective was to increase awareness and improve implementation of the rights of people with disabilities, reducing barriers to their full participation in society and enjoyment of their rights. This was mostly done through operating grants supporting activities by European level networks advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, and through procurement activities focusing on data collection, training and awareness-raising activities. The 2014 annual work programme supported the launch of the European Disability Card in order to facilitate cross-border travel for persons with disabilities.

Specific objective 4: Promote equality between women and men

The programme financed projects to support participating countries and relevant stakeholders in improving gender balance in all spheres of life, especially in economic decision-making,

and promoting the equal economic independence of women and men. Funding under this objective also focused on reducing the gender gaps in pay, earnings and pensions.

Specific objective 5: Prevent and combat violence against children, young people and women, and other groups at risk

The programme primarily financed projects which help to protect and support victims of violence, such as women and children, and activities to raise awareness and prevent violence, engaging with civil society organisations working on the ground. It also supported the treatment of perpetrators of violence. Strengthening child protection systems is one of the Commission's priorities, and the programme supported the rights of migrant children by funding international organisations working directly for and with these children.

Specific objective 6: Promote the rights of the child

The rights of the child are promoted through projects focusing on child-friendly justice and on the protection of vulnerable children (such as children leaving foster care systems and children in conflict with the law), by supporting training activities for civil servants, civil society organisations and lawyers working with them.

Specific objective 7: Protect privacy and personal data

The programme is the EU main funding source with regard to data protection. The activities carried out within this specific objective were strongly linked with the data protection reform, adopted in 2016. Under this objective, the programme financed activities to support, in particular, the transposition and implementation of the new EU data protection legislation by the Member States and the training of data protection authorities and data protection officers.

Specific objective 8: EU citizenship

The programme financed projects, mostly awareness-raising activities, to support the inclusion of EU citizens in the civic and political life of the EU. These included projects to help citizens become more aware of their rights deriving from EU citizenship. Information campaigns on EU citizenship rights were financed under this specific objective, with a particular focus on electoral rights, in view of the 2019 European elections.

Specific objective 9: Consumers' or entrepreneurs' rights

The programme also financed activities to support individuals in their capacity as consumers or entrepreneurs in the single market, in order to enforce their rights deriving from EU law. EU funds in this area aim to help increase knowledge and awareness of consumers' rights, especially in the digital market.

2.2. Budget

The table 1 below shows the budget annual allocations, amounting to EUR 426.8 m for the entire programming period. The amounts increased every year from EUR 54.2 m in 2014 to EUR 67.9 m in 2020.

Table 1. Budget amount planned by year

Budget Year	Amount planned (EUR)	Annual increase (%)
2014	54 158 000	-
2015	56 323 637	4.0%
2016	58 852 000	4.5%
2017	62 515 000	6.2%
2018	62 282 000	-0.4%
2019	64 771 000	4.0%
2020	67 913 000	4.9%
Total	426 814 637	

Source: annual work programmes 2014-2020

The biggest proportion of the programme's budget (25%) was allocated to the specific objective to 'prevent violence (Daphne)'. The specific objective with the second largest budget allocation was the one to promote non-discrimination (22%). The full distribution is available in table 2 below.

Table 2. Specific objectives and the amounts planned

Specific Objective	Budget (EUR)	Share
Prevent violence against children, young people, women and other groups at risk (Daphne)	109 835 157	25.73%
Promote non-discrimination	93 294 280	21.86%
Prevent and combat racism, xenophobia, homophobia and other forms of intolerance	56 321 000	13.20%
Promote equality between women and men and gender mainstreaming	50 066 000	11.73%
Promote rights of persons with disabilities	44 034 000	10.32%
Promote the rights of the child	31 740 200	7.44%
Promote the rights deriving from EU citizenship	19 571 000	4.59%
Ensure the highest level of data protection	11 783 000	2.76%
Enforce consumer rights	10 170 000	2.38%
Total	426 814 637	100%

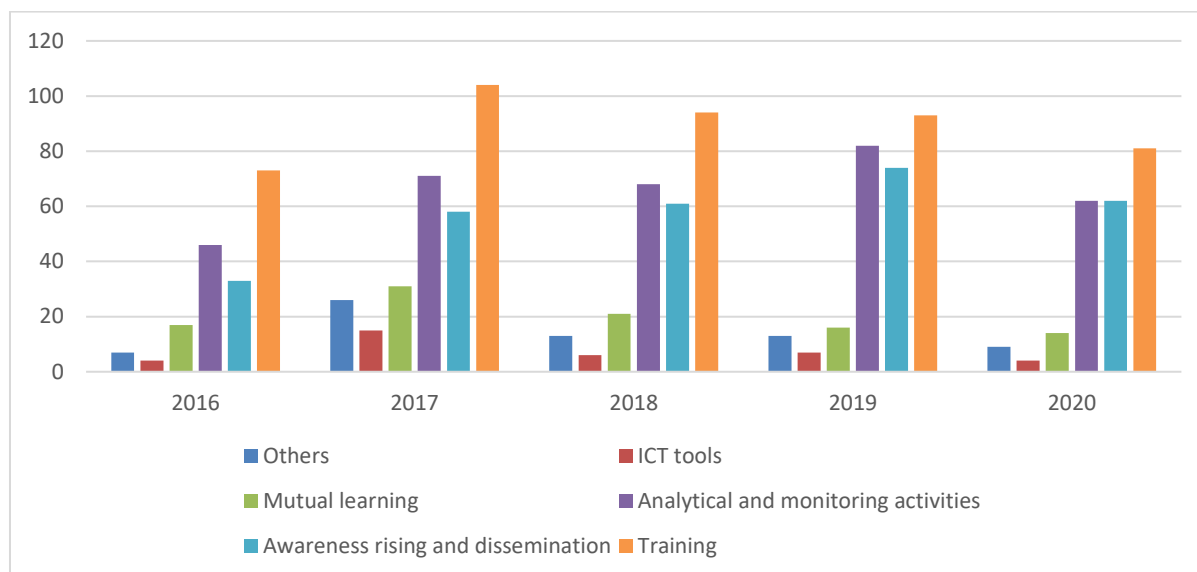
Source: 2014-2020 annual work programmes

2.3. Implementation

A total of **81 calls for proposals** were planned in the 2014-2020 period. The largest number of these calls covered the specific objective to 'prevent violence (Daphne)', with 18 calls. As the specific objective on 'consumers' rights' was funded through procurement only, there were no calls for proposals relating to this. Overall, **942 action grants and operating grants** were awarded throughout the duration of the programme.

The biggest proportion of activities funded by REC projects between 2016 and 2020 can be classified as 'training activities' (35%).

Figure 1. Types of activities funded by year (2016-2020)⁴



Note: Vertical axis measures the number of activities. Projects can be assigned to more than one type of activity. Data before introduction of e-grants in 2016 was in a different format and could not be used for this analysis.

Source: Project documents by DG JUST (Action grants and Operating grants).

Non-profit organisations accounted for the majority of beneficiaries in the 2016-2020 period (57%)⁵.

Procurement was an important funding mechanism for a number of specific objectives, amounting to a total of **345 contracts** over the entire period. ‘Racism and other forms of intolerance’ was the specific objective which most heavily used this funding option, with 112 procurement contracts over the period.

In total, approximately **EUR 81 million** were allocated to procurement contracts and services. The most common type of procurement was for analytical and monitoring activities.

According to the data collected, in 2014-2015 the group most targeted for support was young people (including children), followed by women and students. In 2016-2020, the granularity of the target groupings increased and professionals became the group most targeted for support, followed by women and children. Other significant groups are EU citizens, young people and communities.

2.4. The programme's main achievements

The introduction of a system of indicators for the REC programme was helpful for measuring its achievements. Article 14 of the REC Regulation lists indicators which serve as a basis for monitoring and evaluation.

The data collected from project reports shows that between 2016 and 2020, at least **80 million people** were reached by information and dissemination campaigns or took part in awareness-raising events. This figure includes various target groups, of which the most numerous are the general public (approximately 46 million); followed by EU citizens (approx. 19 million); women (approx. 4 million); and the scientific community, civil society, policymakers, media

⁴ Data for 2014-2015 are not available.

⁵ Data for 2014-2015 are not available.

(approx. 3 million); individuals belonging to the LGBT community (approx. 1 million) and representing businesses/companies (approx. 1 million).

In addition, approximately **85 000 individuals** participated in exchange and mutual learning events, and at least **1.5 million individuals** took part in training activities.

Based on the evidence available, **increased knowledge and awareness of stakeholders and end beneficiaries** is by far the most reported result, mentioned by **78% of projects** for which a technical report was available. This is in line with the programme's intervention logic: it intends to trigger a behavioural change in society, for which awareness-raising is crucial.

645 cross-border tools and mechanisms continued after the projects had ended, including formal advisory groups, memorandums of cooperation/cooperation agreements, and networks.

Over the course of its implementation period, the REC programme received a large number of applications (4 903). Approximately five applications were received for each grant awarded. Overall, the **average success rate of receiving a grant in the REC programme was 17%**. Projects were not equally distributed across the Member States. The main reason for this is that some countries submitted particularly large numbers of applications. It is important to emphasise that the operating grants, which mainly fund EU-wide networks, guaranteed fair geographic coverage at EU level.

Along with the indicators set out in the Regulation, several additional indicators have been developed to measure the programme's achievements.

Although data are only partially available at the time of writing, the achievement of the 2020 targets for most of the indicators in relation to the programme's general objective⁶, seems challenging, given that Europe is exiting a long financial recession, exacerbated in 2020 by the COVID-19 crisis. Only the target for the indicator on *'the percentage of Europeans who consider themselves as "well" or "very well" informed of the rights they enjoy as citizens of the Union'* has been achieved, well before 2020.

Several additional indicators have been used to evaluate the programme's performance at the level of individual specific objectives. The data available so far show that the targets for several indicators have been achieved or exceeded⁷.

In relation to the baseline situation, described in the 2011 impact assessment⁸ and the 2015 *ex post* evaluation of the three predecessor programmes (Daphne III, fundamental rights and citizenship and progress)⁹, the evidence shows that almost all difficulties identified at that time have been overcome in the REC programme, except for the persisting geographical imbalance.

⁶ To contribute to the further development of an area, where equality and the rights of persons (as enshrined in the Treaty on European Union, in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in the international human rights conventions to which the EU has acceded) are promoted, protected and effectively implemented.

⁷ Such as 'Share of the population considering themselves as well or very well informed of the rights they enjoy as citizens of the Union', 'Level of consumer confidence in cross-border shopping', 'Percentage of people that consider that domestic violence against women is unacceptable'.

⁸ SEC(2011) 1364 Final, *ibid*.

⁹ European Commission (2015), *ex post* evaluation of five programmes implemented under the 2007-2013 financial perspective – final report, *ibid*.

3. RESULTS OF EVALUATION

3.1. Effectiveness

Based on qualitative evidence collected, the implementation of the REC programme was effective and contributed to the achievement of its overall objectives. In particular, its success was due to the **quality of most of the projects**, allowing the implementation of targeted actions such as awareness campaigns, training and training courses, publication of materials, research and relevant data. Both desk research and fieldwork show that **almost all finalised projects have achieved the expected results**.

The activities and achievements of all projects sampled were directly relevant to the programme's specific objectives. Overall, the evidence gathered suggests that the REC programme has contributed to **increasing knowledge of EU soft and hard law**.

A complex interplay of internal and external factors supported and hindered the programme's delivery. Internal factors mainly relate to difficulties linked with the application process, the internal capacity of project partners, and the type and quality of the project consortium. Common external factors relate to the impact of external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenge of involving public entities and stakeholders in the activities planned.

The analysis found that the success factors in REC projects include the quality of partnerships, bringing together organisations with complementary expertise, covering managerial and coordination skills with experience of working with target groups on the ground. Another element of success is the capacity of the projects to respond to the aims of the calls while also pursuing the longer-term strategies of the implementing organisations.

3.2. Efficiency

Existing qualitative evidence demonstrates that the **benefits of projects' implementation outweigh the costs** and, in this sense, efficiency was achieved. However, the costs linked to the administrative burden are still considered an issue by beneficiaries, especially in relation to application and reporting procedures. While most beneficiaries identified the administrative burden as an important cost component, they also recognised that burdensome administrative requirements are legitimate when transparency and fairness in the use of public funding is at stake.

REC administrative costs are perceived on average to be higher in comparison with other non-EU alternatives or with national programmes. National and international funding instruments are considered to be less demanding when it comes to application and reporting requirements.

In terms of **benefits**, the REC programme offers the possibility of working on a transnational level, sharing best practice and build relationships with consortium partners and strengthening internal capacity and expertise. There are also intangible gains such as a better reputation and **increased trustworthiness of their organisation** as a result of participation in EU-funded projects.

The evaluation identified **underspending in 82% of the projects** sampled. While underspending is widespread in the sample analysed, most projects interviewed reported underspending of around 10-12%, which was mainly attributed to the COVID-19 outbreak and the consequent halt in meetings and activities requiring a physical presence, which led to savings in terms of travel and subsistence costs for physical meetings, workshops and other events.

Compared to its predecessors, there has been an improvement in the prompt adoption/publication of calls published under the REC programme and the predictability of these. Information collected through interviews with recurring beneficiaries shows that **merging the predecessor programmes considerably simplified the management and implementation procedures.**

3.3. Relevance

The **needs** identified at the time the REC programme regulation was adopted are **still relevant** to ensuring that equality and the rights enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and other legally binding instruments continue to be promoted across the EU. Furthermore, the programme has continued to adapt to the emergence of new needs and threats, such as the increase in hate speech.

The analysis also confirmed that the actions implemented under the REC programme are relevant to the needs of its stakeholders, such as improving the knowledge base, sharing best practice through mutual learning, capacity building and structural support for specific organisational structures. Furthermore, the programme was relevant in targeting the intended end beneficiaries – ultimately, EU public. This has been confirmed through several strands of evaluation evidence, such as the text mining analysis, a sampling of projects and stakeholder consultations.

In terms of the programme's ability to select the most relevant beneficiaries, two types of beneficiaries were identified as being particularly relevant but at less likely to be involved: (i) public authorities, for whom obstacles to participation are mainly traceable to a lack of administrative capacity and dedicated human resources; (ii) small grassroots organisations, for whom the application process is very complex and the requirement to secure co-financing is challenging.

3.4. Coherence

In the REC programme, the calls for proposals are guided by the specific strategic developments and the EU priorities. In this way, the REC programme acted as a link across EU priorities, in line and coherent with other EU initiatives, such as the EU justice agenda for 2020, the 2016-2020 strategic engagement for gender equality, the 2010-2020 European disability strategy, the list of actions by the Commission to advance LGBTI equality, and the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020. The analysis also indicates a certain level of coherence with national policies and developments at project level.

3.5. EU added value

The EU added value of the REC programme was assessed according to the following four criteria:

- 1) supporting implementation of EU law and raising awareness about the rights deriving from it;
- 2) increasing mutual trust among Member States and cross-border cooperation;
- 3) developing and disseminating best practice;
- 4) creating standards, practical tools and solutions that address EU-wide challenges.

The programme was successful in all these aspects, thanks to its transnational nature. The analysis identified additional elements of the EU added value of the programme:

- It represents an important source of financing, allowing the beneficiaries to implement additional projects addressing the challenges the REC programme was set up to tackle.

- Receiving EU funding and implementing activities under the umbrella of the REC programme had positive consequences for the projects in terms of improved reputation and increased visibility that no national input could have developed.
- REC programme was an important driver for innovation, since little national funding is available for testing innovative and transnational actions.
- REC programme generated a scope effect¹⁰, by broadening the actions implemented by the beneficiaries in a way that could hardly be sustained by the national level interventions.

Beneficiaries note that cross-border cooperation and transnational partnerships and networks, and mutual learning among partners are key results of their participation in the programme. The transnational dimension is particularly evident for beneficiaries of operating grants, due to their European remit; their activities could not have been similarly developed through national or non-EU funding.

3.6. Equity

The REC programme's resources and support were **not distributed equally across participating countries**, and the distribution of REC resources focused on a small number of countries – foremost Italy, Belgium, Greece and Spain, from where the applicants apply more often. However, this picture changes once the population of participating countries is taken into account, as some smaller countries have a large number of beneficiaries compared to their population (e.g. Malta and Cyprus). Furthermore, there was quite a high level of participation in Romania and Bulgaria.

Overall, programmed funding reaches **different target groups in an equitable way**, despite the concentration of the REC programme resources on three specific objectives. Often the same target groups were targeted across different specific objectives.

Significant financial resources were dedicated to promoting the cross-cutting priorities of gender equality, children's rights and the rights of people with disabilities. In the implementation phase, the calls for proposals which focused on gender, rights of persons with disabilities and children's rights were mostly those organised under the relevant specific objectives. While there is good awareness of the importance of gender mainstreaming, there is a general lack of knowledge of good practice among the approved REC projects on the best approaches to address gender mainstreaming in activities funded outside dedicated projects. Beneficiaries have difficulty in formulating a gender approach when developing their application.

3.7. Simplification

The recently introduced system for submitting applications (the funding & tenders portal) simplified the application process and improved the collection and aggregation of monitoring data. The beneficiaries generally positively assess the new IT tools developed for the application and for grant management and find these effective and easy to use. The trend toward increased digitalisation is clearly viewed as a positive development, although there could still be room for further simplifying the process, particularly in relation to the administrative burden regarding documentation required from applicants.

¹⁰ Scope effect means 'broadening existing actions by supporting groups or policy areas that would not have received such support otherwise'.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The 2014-2020 REC programme was launched when the effects of the economic and financial crisis had led to a general reduction in the amount of national resources and funding available for social and rights issues. In this dire political and economic context, the programme has proven its **EU added value and its crucial role in developing a European area of equality and rights**.

The REC programme **continues to be relevant** to the changing needs of stakeholders and EU public. This was ensured via its **flexible programming nature**, including the annual prioritisation of emerging policy needs and issues, and dialogue with civil society organisations.

Overall, based on the qualitative evidence collected, the implementation of the REC programme was **effective and contributed to the achievement of the overall objectives**. In particular, this was due to the **quality of most of the projects** implemented with REC funding, allowing the implementation of concrete actions, directly **relevant to the changing needs on the ground**.

Both desk research and fieldwork show that the projects were largely successful in implementing the planned activities and **almost all finalised projects have achieved the expected results**.

Qualitative evidence collected by the study suggests that **benefits of the REC programme outweigh the costs**.

In relation to the baseline situation, described in the 2011 impact assessment¹¹ and the 2015 *ex post* evaluation of the three predecessor programmes (Daphne III, fundamental rights and citizenship and progress)¹², the evaluation evidence shows that almost all difficulties identified at that time have been overcome in the REC programme, except for the persisting geographical imbalance.

The evaluation also identified a number of lessons which are being addressed for the REC programme's successor, the CERV programme, in particular the need to develop a more robust monitoring framework that systematically collects information on outputs and results achieved, to consider further measures to improve geographical balance, to apply a more result-oriented approach, to decrease the administrative burden for applicants and beneficiaries and to strengthen gender mainstreaming.

¹¹ SEC(2011) 1364 Final, *ibid*.

¹² European Commission (2015), *ex post* evaluation of five programmes implemented under the 2007-2013 financial perspective – final report, *ibid*.