



# Annual Activity Report 2021

Directorate-General for Education, Youth,  
Sport and Culture

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## THE DG IN BRIEF

In line with the 2020–2024 Strategic Plan setting out the vision for a five-year period, and as highlighted in Commissioner Gabriel’s mission letter, **DG Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture** contributes in particular to two general objectives of the European Commission: to *Promoting the European way of life*, in matters relating to education, culture, youth and sport, and to *A Europe fit for a Digital Age*, in matters relating to digital education, research and innovation. Through the international dimension of the different policies, programmes and actions, DG EAC also contributes to *a Stronger Europe in the world*.

As illustrated below, **DG EAC** furthermore contributes to a **knowledge-based Europe** that reconciles a **competitive economy** and an **inclusive society**, while addressing both the necessary **green transition** and **digital transformation**.

Domain	Education & Training				Sport	Youth	Culture	Research and Innovation
	Higher Education	Vocational Education and Training	Schools	Adult Education				
Programme	Erasmus+					European Solidarity Corps	Creative Europe	Horizon Europe (*)
	<b>Strands</b> - Key action 1: Individual learning mobility - Key action 2: Cooperation among organisations and institutions - Key action 3: Support to policy development and cooperation - Jean Monnet					<b>Strands</b> - Volunteering projects - Individual volunteering - Volunteering teams - Volunteering teams in high priority areas - Solidarity projects	<b>Strands</b> - Culture (DG EAC) - Media (DG CNECT) - Cross sectoral	Marie Skłodowska-Curie action <i>(Horizon Europe Pillar I)</i>  Cluster Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Societies <i>(Horizon Europe Pillar II)</i>  European Institute of technology <i>(Horizon Europe Pillar III)</i>  (*) Coordinated by DG RTD
Management Mode	Direct (EACEA*, DG EAC, DG EMPL)					Direct (EACEA*, DG EAC, DG CNECT)		Direct (REA*, DG EAC)
	Indirect (55 National Agencies in programme countries for Erasmus, some take part in the European Solidarity Corps)							Indirect (EIT*)
Priorities 2019-2024	A European Green Deal							
	A Europe Fit For Digital Age							
	An Economy that works for people							
	A Stronger Europe in the world							
	Promoting our European way of life							
	A new push for European democracy							

EACEA: Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, REA: Research Executive Agency, EIT: European Institute of innovation and Technology

DG EAC ensures the strategic implementation of **3 EU flagships programmes – Erasmus+** with an estimated budget of around €26.2 billion<sup>1</sup> for the period 2021–2027 complemented by about €2.2 billion from the EU’s external instruments., the **European Solidarity Corps** with an estimated budget of €1 billion for the period 2021–2027, and **Creative Europe** with

<sup>1</sup> The Erasmus+ programme budget is made of €24.574 billion in current prices as part of the new MFF (2021–2027) and an additional top-up of €1.7 billion in 2018 prices (Art.5 MFF)

an estimated budget of €2.44 billion<sup>2</sup> for the period of 2021-2027 – while also contributing through **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions** and the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology** as part of Horizon Europe.

DG EAC **develops policies and actions** in the above mentioned areas and fosters cooperation with Member States, with the objective of advancing equity, excellence and agility in education systems; promoting culture as a catalyst for European values; stimulating competitive research and innovation; empowering young people to become active citizens in democratic life, developing the European dimension in sport and strengthening international cooperation.

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<sup>2</sup> The Creative Europe programme budget is made of €1.842 billion in current prices as part of the new MFF (2021-2027) and an additional top-up of €0.6 billion in 2018 prices (Art.5 MFF)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

#### 1. What have we delivered - including achievements in burden reduction, simplification, shortcomings encountered where relevant

2021 was a **landmark year** for setting the direction for cooperation in education and training for the next years. First tangible results were achieved as regards the **progress towards the European Education Area (EEA)**.

DG EAC successfully concluded negotiations with the Member States **on the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training** towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030). The Council Resolution on this matter adopted in February sets out that the achievement and further development of the European Education Area will be the overarching political objective of the new strategic framework for the current decade, the modalities of which were adopted in the Council Resolution on the governance structure of the framework in November. This was the result of, among others three meetings of the **High Level Group on Education and Training**, where the Commission together with EU Member States thoroughly debated the way forward to make the governance structure of the new framework able to meet its objectives and priorities.

**Seven new EEA strategic framework Working Groups** (2021-2025) have been launched to promote mutual learning on policy reforms of national education systems and to make the European Education Area a reality in tune with the Digital Education Action Plan, the European Skills Agenda, the Union of Equality and other EU policy flagships in education, training and skills. Among the other new Commission expert groups launched, the Expert Group on Quality Investment in Education and Training delivered its Interim Report at the end of 2021. First tangible results were achieved as regards the progress towards the European Education Area, along the strategic priorities with concrete issues and actions identified in the Resolution, that correspond to the six dimensions of the Commission Communication on the EEA3: Quality, Green and Digital transitions, Higher education, Inclusion and Gender equality, Teachers and Trainers, and the Geopolitical dimension. A co-creation EAC-EMPL EEA Task Force contributed to this progress.

In 2021, all consultations and preparatory work in preparation for the adoption of **the higher education package** took place, including the European strategy for universities and the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation.

In 2021, DG EAC started the implementation of the **new Digital Education Action Plan** (2021-2027) which provides an ambitious vision for high quality, inclusive and accessible

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<sup>3</sup> Commission Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, COM(2020)624; SWD(2020)209)

digital education for all learners across Europe. Throughout the year, several actions were launched including the Structured Dialogue with Member States on digital education and skills which was announced by President von der Leyen in the 2021 State of the Union Address. The Structured Dialogue, led by a dedicated Commissioners' Project Group, will contribute to the targets on skills, laid down in Digital Decade, and inform the upcoming proposals for Council Recommendations on the enabling factors for digital education and on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training. Two dedicated Commission Expert Groups were set up to support the Commission in developing guidelines on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy for teachers and educators; as well as on ethical guidelines on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data usage in teaching and learning. The Commission also adopted a proposal for a European Competence Framework on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education, which was agreed by the Council in November. Also, as of 21 December 2021, **SELFIE** has more than 2 200 000 users in 18 255 schools across 86 countries and far exceeds its target of 1 million users to be reached by April 2021. Furthermore, SELFIE for Teachers and SELFIE for Work-based Learning were both launched in 2021.

In 2021, political agreement was reached between the European Parliament and the Council on a recast of the Council Regulation of the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)** as well as its new Strategic Innovation Agenda for 2021-2027. Both legal texts have been adopted by the co-legislators and published in the Official Journal on 28 May 2021. DG EAC has worked closely with the EIT in the transition to Horizon Europe and in the implementation of the new Legislative Package, the launch of the new EIT initiative for Innovation Capacity Building for HEIs as well as supported the preparation of the call for the new Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) on Cultural Creative Sectors and Industries and the set-up of the Member State Representatives Group and National Contact Points.

With more than 45 000 events all over Europe, the **2021 European Week of Sport** was an occasion to celebrate a **#BeActive** lifestyle together for the fourth time with the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries and regions. On 23 September, the day of the Opening of European Week of Sport, Commissioner Gabriel launched the **HealthyLifestyle4All**, a 2-year campaign that aims to link sport and active lifestyles with health, food and other policies showcasing the Commission's commitment to promoting healthy lifestyles for all, across generations and social groups. A high level group on gender equality in sport and two expert groups on green sport and the recovery of the sport sector from the COVID-19 were also launched in 2021.

The **Erasmus+ programme Regulation** and **European Solidarity Corps Regulation** were formally adopted in May 2021 enabling the launch of the implementation for 2021 and 2022. Both programmes have a reinforced focus on inclusion, green, and digitalisation as underlined in the Annual work programmes and through the calls launched<sup>4</sup>. DG EAC had to devise mitigating measures to allow for the implementation of these programmes in 2021 despite the late adoption of their legal basis; financing decisions and general calls for 2021

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<sup>4</sup> [Documents and guidelines | Erasmus+ \(europa.eu\)](#)

and 2022 were both adopted in 2021, so that the implementation could resume its normal path from 2022 onwards. In the context of COVID-19 DG EAC has furthermore continued to extend application deadlines and the duration for on-going projects, support additional costs and allow for further flexibility towards blended activities.

DG EAC took several measures to address the heavy impact of the crisis on the cultural and creative sectors (CCS), including the preparation of the **EU guidelines on the safe resumption of activities in the cultural and creative sectors**, a Commission Communication adopted in June.

At the end of 2021, DG EAC published an innovative web tool and guide to EU funding for Culture, **CulturEU**, giving access to over 70 funding opportunities in 20 EU programmes; it was praised by Member States and stakeholders.

On the cultural policy side, DG EAC managed the work of 4 **Open Method of Coordination** groups, composed of Member States' experts (topics: climate change, multilingualism, sustainability, artists working conditions), organised three **EU conferences** (topics: complementary funding for cultural heritage, diversity and competitiveness of the music sector, artistic freedom), continued the civil society dialogue and expert work (through **Voices of Culture**) on topical themes (sustainable development, re-engaging with digital audiences), and led the work of the **cultural heritage expert group**. Moreover, the cultural dimension of the **New European Bauhaus initiative** was considerably strengthened.

In 2021 the European Youth Portal (EYP) hosted the DiscoverEU mega-round with more than 330 000 applications for the 60 000 available travel passes.

DG EAC's **international activities** contributed to reinforcing cooperation with EU's strategic partners, particularly in the Western Balkans, the Neighbourhood and Africa, while reinforcing EU's voice globally, through active participation in relevant international and multilateral fora, such as G20 or ASEM. At the second EU-Japan high level policy dialogue on education, culture and sport in May 2021, Commissioner Gabriel and H.E. HAGIUDA Koichi, Minister of Education Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), confirmed their commitment to further promote initiatives and international cooperation between the EU and Japan in the fields of education, culture and sport.

Finally, President von der Leyen announced 2022 as the **European Year of Youth** in her State of the Union address in September 2021. DG EAC quickly set up a Task Force and prepared the draft Decision. The draft proposal underwent a fast-track inter-service consultation and was adopted by the College of Commissioners on 14 October. Negotiations with the co-legislators started immediately afterwards. The trilogue took place on 6 December and the European Parliament and the Council reached a political agreement. This is a record time as the agreement comes only 3 months after the announcement of President von der Leyen. The European Parliament formally adopted the Decision in its Plenary session on 14 December and the Council on 20 December. This enabled DG EAC to start the Year in 2022 under the French Presidency.

## 2. COVID-19 actions performed

In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on learners, teachers and youth workers, artists and athletes while testing the resilience of education and training systems across Europe, including the well-being of young people.

In this context, the mobility targets for the programme originally set for 2021 have not been met. While these unused funds can be recycled, there will be an overall performance impact on the programme that will only be possible to assess in the coming years.

The **EU Youth Report 2021** highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people, youth workers and the youth sector in general. The 2021 **'Study on youth work in the EU'** focused on the needs of youth workers at grassroots level and existing public policies in the context of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected and put unprecedented pressure on education and training systems worldwide and across the European Union. Restrictions have caused major changes to teaching and learning and to communication and collaboration within education communities. These restrictions have had an impact on learners, their families, teachers, trainers, researchers and institution leaders, as well as on community professionals who support education and youth.

Learning has often been made more difficult due to the lack of close interaction with educators and fellow learners, less detail and delays, Physical and emotional well-being has been compromised, with schools and universities unable to offer structured activities or access to facilities and support services. The socialising dimension of education have been heavily affected and many youngsters have experienced feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression. Furthermore, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have been more likely exposed to stressful home environments.

DG EAC demonstrated its agility and resilience by adapting its programmes, supporting its stakeholders and reshaping its priorities, while fully embracing the strategic objectives of shaping Europe's digital future with initiatives such as the **Digital Education Action Plan**. Specific initiatives such as the **new Council Recommendation on blended learning** and the open public consultation on **Pathways to School Success** addressed the pandemic's consequences on education. We also increased efforts in involving young people in key European initiatives such as the European Year of Youth.

In May 2021, the **Creative Europe Annual Work Programme 2021** was adopted and allocated around €300 million to promote the diversity and competitiveness of the cultural and creative sectors across Europe, while contributing to their recovery and resilience in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. More than €80 million (almost a 30% increase compared to 2020) were allocated to support cooperation projects, circulation of literary works, platforms and networks in the culture field.

Additionally, the **Recovery and Resilience Facility** as part of **'Next Generation EU'** will provide substantial support for Member States' reform initiatives, including education and



training as well as culture. DG EAC has closely worked with other services on the national recovery and resilience plans (NRRPs) and is analysing the contribution of the plans to education and cultural policies.

Addressing the crises' impact on the cultural and creatives sectors and the recovery of these sectors have been priorities in discussions on culture with Member States and stakeholders. DG EAC was in the lead for issuing the **EU guidelines on the safe resumption of activities in the cultural and creative sectors**, a Commission Communication adopted in June.

Thanks to its bottom-up approach, the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions** (MSCA) have provided support to new research and innovation projects tackling COVID-19 and its consequences – with an increasing number of proposals addressing these topics. A recent study shows that together with the European Research Council (ERC) and the Health Programme, MSCA funding has supported a significant number of COVID-19 relevant scientific publications, with a sharp increase in 2020 and 2021.

Using the power of the **EIT** Health network, the EIT has contributed to the response to the COVID-19 crisis with over €6 millions of funds, dedicated to 15 health innovation projects across Europe. It has also facilitated the establishment of a matchmaking platform for the knowledge sharing of those working in the areas of research, product development and frontline healthcare.

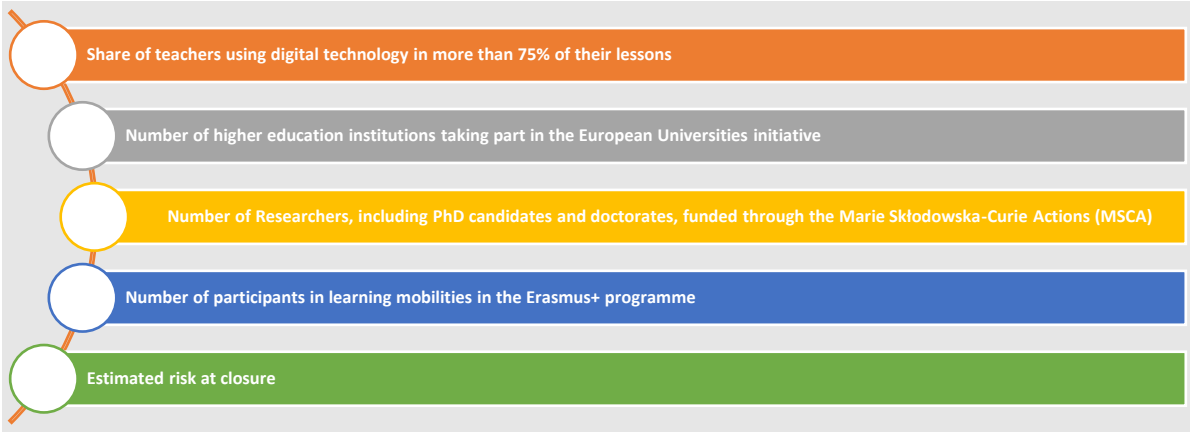
As part of the EU Work Plan for Sport (2021- 2024), DG EAC launched an expert group on the recovery from COVID 19, the publication of a background paper of available resources through the SHARE initiative and raised the issue in the context of our cooperation with other institutions. A high-level workshop on 'Healthy recovery through Active Development in our regions' (promoting also the HealthyLifeStyle4All initiative) was organised during the European Week of Regions and Cities between 11 and 14 October 2021.

Opportunities offered by the **European Solidarity Corps (ESC)** further energised solidarity between Europeans and mobilised young Europeans to support their local communities, bringing relief to one another during isolation or confinement, including helping older generations gain digital skills to stay connected and offering care for those hardest hit by the crisis. For the ESC's 2021 Annual Work Programme, a specific priority was added on 'Prevention, promotion and support in the field of health' to mobilise volunteers to address the impact of the pandemic and recovery.

The Traineeships Office adapted the format of the learning dimension of the traineeship programme so that trainees could make the most of their experience despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

**B. The most relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to illustrate the policy highlights identified in the DGs 2020-2024 Strategic Plan.**

The following five present the key performance indicators of DG EAC<sup>5</sup>:



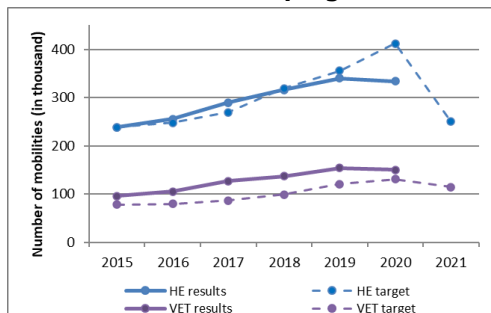
Due to late adoption of the legal bases in 2021, the programmes implementation were delayed and the achievements are not available at the time of drafting this report.

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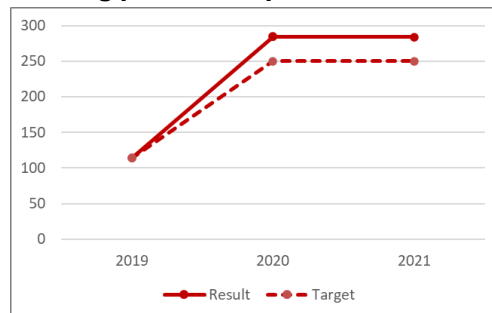
<sup>5</sup> The late adoption of the legal basis in May 2021 (linked to the delayed adoption of the Multiannual Financial Framework) resulted in some delays in implementation even though the Commission took mitigating measures to minimise consequences as much as possible, in cooperation with national authorities, national agencies and the Executive Agency. We will thus only be able to add finalised and consolidated data at a later stage regarding this year.

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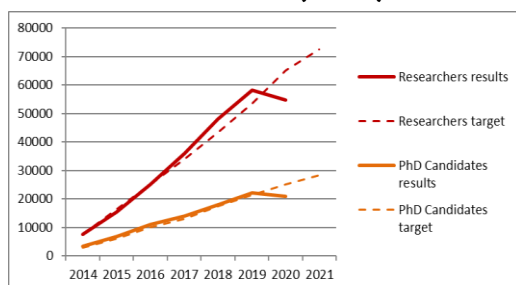
### Number of participants in learning mobilities in the Erasmus+ programme



### Number of higher education institutions taking part in European Universities



### Cross-sector and cross-country circulation of researchers (MSCA)




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### Estimated risk at closure and residual error rate

€26m and error rate less than 2%

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## C. Key conclusions on Financial management and Internal control (executive summary of section 2.1; how we have delivered)

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

DG EAC has paid close attention to how its internal control system has so far met the twin challenges of a late start of the new programmes and the impact on performance regarding mobilities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with its possible repercussions also on longer-term budget implementation. The possible impacts will be again carefully and strategically assessed in particular based on the corresponding final reports provided by National Agencies in the coming years, following each action's complete project lifecycle (up to four years). Any potentially unused funds to be ultimately recovered from National Agencies (internal assigned revenues for the Commission) will be reinvested on an annual basis in the annual work programmes of the subsequent years, hence addressing the EU's most pressing policy priorities optimally and flexibly. In this context, marked by the need to continuously adapt to circumstance on the ground, the budgetary and financial internal controls will be further upgraded in 2022-2023, in order to optimise forecasting, mitigate any risks of under-

implementation<sup>6</sup> and to maintain a continued robust performance as was achieved in 2021.

To ensure the achievement of policy and management objectives, the Commission has adopted a set of internal control principles, based on international good practice. The financial regulation requires that the organisational structure and the internal control systems used to implement the budget be set up in accordance with these principles. DG EAC has assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that it is partially effective<sup>7</sup> (is not fully present and functioning regarding one specific issue: an outstanding very important recommendation issued by the IAS in 2020 as regards the effectiveness of the protection of personal data of beneficiaries of and participants in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, in particular as regards **transfer of personal data to third countries**). Considerable progress has been achieved regarding five of the six recommendations, of which one has now been closed, and four are 'ready for review' following concerted action by an internal task force throughout 2021. Considerable progress has been made in identifying an appropriate approach and implementing this in a "transfer tool" which will take the form of a legally binding agreement with the entrusted bodies in 3<sup>rd</sup> countries who need access to personal data to implement the programme.

For **principle 11 as regards selecting and developing general control activities over technology**, improvements are on-going in the continuous delivery of key components used by National Agencies. The roll-out in 2021 resulted in a successful launch of the programme despite the highly compressed timetable due to the late adoption of the legal bases.

In addition, DG EAC has systematically examined the available control results and indicators, including those for supervising entities to which it has entrusted budget implementation tasks, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the internal auditor and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on management's assurance about the achievement of the control objectives. Please refer to Section 2.1 for further details.

In conclusion, while highlighting the outstanding issue on data protection, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; **risks are being appropriately monitored** and mitigated; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Director General, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation, has signed the Declaration of Assurance accordingly.

## **D. Informing the Commissioner**

In the context of the regular meetings during the year between the DG and Commissioner Mariya Gabriel on management matters, the main elements of this report and assurance declaration, have been brought to the attention of the Commissioner responsible for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth.

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<sup>6</sup> Including the risk of potential future unused commitments due to cancelled or modified activities in NAs (de-commitments)

<sup>7</sup> In particular: "Information systems process relevant data, captured from internal and external sources, to obtain the required and expected quality information, in compliance with applicable security, document management and data protection rules."

## 1. KEY RESULTS and progress towards achieving the Commission's general objectives and DG's specific objectives

The new **Erasmus+ programme** and **European Solidarity Corps Regulations** were formally adopted in May 2021 enabling the launch of the implementation for 2021 and 2022. Both programmes have a reinforced focus on inclusion, green, and digitalisation as underlined in the Annual work programmes and calls launched for these two years.

DG EAC also continued contributing to the New European Bauhaus, the “Soul of Europe” and a driving force that will bring the European Green Deal to life in an attractive, innovative and human-centred way.

DG EAC has also contributed to the dialogue with Member States on their draft National Recovery and Resilience Plans and their assessment, leading to adoption of 22 Plans by end 2021. In total, measures related to pillar 6 ‘Policies for the next generation, children and the youth, such as education and skills’ account for €49 bn, representing approximately 11% of the total envelope. The type of measures and the extent to which these may contribute to the achievement of the Commission's general objectives is specified in the next sections.

In the field of **culture**, DG EAC has closely cooperated with other services (e.g. DGs RTD, JRC, CLIMA, ENV) to help achieve the ambitions of the Green Deal (e.g. expert work on cultural heritage and climate change, council recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability, the education for climate coalition). Likewise, DG EAC helped ensure that culture's role in other cross-cutting and horizontal themes, such as digitisation, gender equality or sustainable development, is reflected in relevant policies, programmes and initiatives. DG EAC has also continued its close collaboration with the external services to foster international cultural relations.

DG EAC's three flagship initiatives continued to roll out in 2021 under the European Education Area, the Digital Education Action Plan, and the HealthyLifeStyle4All.

In line with President von der Leyen's State of the Union Address 2021, DG EAC has started working on making 2022 “a year dedicated to empowering those who have dedicated so much to others” a reality, in the form of the **European Year of Youth**<sup>8</sup>.

In order to achieve the Commission's general objectives, DG EAC's strategy consists of seven specific objectives. Below we will give a non-exhaustive summary of some of the outputs achieved during 2021 to meet these specific objectives. Detailed information on all initiatives can be found in Annex 2.

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<sup>8</sup>Working together with other EU institutions, Member States, civil society organisations and young people, DG EAC will organise a number of activities throughout 2022 at European, national, regional and local level and consider new initiatives. The scope of activities will cover issues that mostly affect young people, following the priorities highlighted in the Youth Goals, such as equality and inclusion, sustainability, mental health and well-being, and quality employment. They will involve young people beyond the EU. The outputs - events and activities - are not yet known at time of drafting of this document.

## General Objective 1 - A European Green Deal

### Specific Objective 1.1 - Promote behavioural changes and support education towards a sustainable economy

A key pillar of DG EAC's action for a green and sustainable economy is the work of two working groups, made up of experts from the Member States under the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which the Commission launched in early 2021 in the framework of the Council Work Plan for Culture.

The first group entitled **“Strengthening Cultural Heritage Resilience for Climate Change”** focuses specifically on how to strengthen the sector's resilience to climate change, but also on how heritage can mitigate and even fight climate change. The second group works on the **“Cultural dimension of sustainable development”**. Through the work of this group, the ongoing works with other Commission services to prepare a “Non-paper on culture and sustainable development”, and the work with UNESCO towards the MONDIACULT event (Mexico, September 2022), DG EAC set up preparatory activities where culture is promoted and assessed in its different contributions to sustainable development policies and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Thus, DG EAC has mobilised several key players and stakeholders to reinforce the role of cultural policies as a driver of sustainable development in specific areas, including education, climate action and creativity-driven innovation to support behavioural changes.

In 2021, DG EAC supported the green and digital transitions through the European Education Area including further work on an Education for Climate Coalition. The **Education for Climate Coalition**, launched at the third European Education Summit in 2020, was further fully rolled out in 2021, with the aim of reaching the widest possible mobilisation of the education community in support of the green transition. As a flagship initiative of the Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, the Coalition will be a key instrument for effectively capturing and sharing initiatives and projects of the educational community in support of the transition to climate neutrality.



In 2021, the Education for Climate Coalition was developed in two phases, a phase of design and a phase of outreach. The design phase consisted of a survey in January 2021 that was addressed to the whole education community, from kindergartens to higher education, across the EU. It resulted in a total of 576 responses, with strong representation of countries from Eastern and Central Europe. Between February and May, the Coalition's design and mission statement was developed in a participatory co-creation process with students, teachers and stakeholders. The outreach phase included various public events, such as the side-events at the Pre-COP26 in Milan in September and at the COP26 on the 11 November. This phase was

concluded with the 1st Education for Climate Day on the 25 November, when some 400 activists and (future) community members co-created the first concrete, agreed ‘community challenges’. The **Education for Climate platform**<sup>9</sup> enables the Coalition to inform about its aims, current pledges and concrete successes, while allowing the community to directly communicate, cooperate and co-create. Erasmus+ also contributes to the Education for Climate Coalition, for instance via the Partnerships for innovation.

The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** (RRF), which is part of NextGenerationEU, supports inter alia the investment in education and training infrastructure. In many countries, the plans foresee the renovation of education infrastructure and the creation of ‘green schools’ that combine environmental friendly learning spaces with teaching about sustainable development. In the field of culture, countries have included measures targeting the green transition, such as the renovation of cultural buildings to increase energy efficiency, the acquisition of green skills or the support to cultural organisations and businesses for environmental projects.

Thanks to the prioritisation of the **green transition** in cooperation activities, and the bottom-up implementation approach of the Erasmus+ and Creative Europe programmes, education and cultural institutions and organisations may submit projects addressing climate objectives. Environmental sustainability and the fight against global warming have been set out as a horizontal priority for the selection of cooperation projects in the new Erasmus+ and Creative Europe in their main calls for proposals 2021 and 2022. This priority also enables the programmes to contribute to the New European Bauhaus.

The proposal for the **Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability** – adopted on 14 January 2022 – was prepared based on input gathered during the public consultation on education for environmental sustainability which ran in 2021 as well as during a series of online workshops.

To gather input for the proposal, three studies were commissioned: (i) mapping curricula, policies and other measures in the Member States related to education for environmental sustainability; (ii) mapping of Erasmus+ projects related to education for environmental sustainability and; (iii) study on education for sustainable development in the context of Covid-19 and the twin transition. The review also took note of reports and studies from UNESCO, OECD and the Commission’s Joint Research Centre.

On 14 January 2022, the Commission also released the European Sustainability Competence Framework to establish a shared understanding of sustainability competences for learners at all phases and stages of education.

The green dimension is also a **transversal priority** of the European Solidarity Corps and strengthened efforts in this field are pursued in the main calls for proposals for

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<sup>9</sup> <https://education-for-climate.ec.europa.eu/>

2021 and 2022. This includes initiatives to prevent, mitigate or repair the adverse effects of extreme weather events and natural disasters, and to provide support to affected communities in their aftermath. Activities contributing to other existing EU initiatives in the area of environmental sustainability such as the EU Forest Strategy - more specifically its “3 billion trees” initiative - and the EU Climate Missions, are also highly encouraged.

In addition to encouraging cooperation on environmental challenges in all sectors, the Erasmus+ programme, like the European Solidarity Corps, is gradually striving for carbon-neutrality by promoting and facilitating the use of low-carbon means transport modes (in particular by rail). This includes the introduction since 2021 of financial incentives as extra economic assistance for the travel costs for those participants using low-carbon means of transport, together with the possibility of having more days for travelling.

The incorporation of green practices is part of the award criteria in order to encourage participants and participating organisations to take an environmental-friendly approach when designing the activity, discuss and learn about environmental issues as well as to reflect about local actions and to come up with greener ways of implementing their activities.

The revamped 2021 version of the **European Youth Portal** <sup>10</sup> has an entire section dedicated to “sustainable development” tackling ‘green’ topics of interest to young people



The **MSCA Green Charter**, published in 2021, promotes the sustainable implementation of research activities. This is in line with the goals of the European Green Deal, which aims to make Europe’s economy sustainable. The MSCA Green Charter is a code of good practice for individuals and

institutions who are in receipt of MSCA funding. All participants are expected to adhere to the Green Charter on a "best effort" basis and to commit to as many of its provisions as possible during the implementation of their projects.

At final reporting stage, all MSCA projects will be asked to report on the ways they have sought to minimise the environmental impact of their research activities and how they applied the principles of the Green Charter.

The MSCA also contribute to the European Green Deal through the Horizon Europe Missions, in close cooperation with other DGs (mainly RTD, but also MARE, CLIMA, ENV, ENER etc.). This cooperation happens through the Mission Owners Groups as well as other working groups such as the Biodiversity Working Group.

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<sup>10</sup> [https://europa.eu/youth/get-involved/sustainable-development\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/get-involved/sustainable-development_en)



The **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)** and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) contribute to the green and digital twin transition, the transformation of European economy, industry and society as well as the recovery from the ongoing crisis through innovation, education and business support activities. This was also the case in 2021. The EIT runs a range of education programmes across Europe to help students and professionals develop the skills, competences and capacities required for European industries which are being modernised and digitally transformed.

**EIT InnoEnergy** is successfully accelerating innovative solutions that help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, decrease the cost of energy and increase the security of the energy system.

As part of the **EU Work Plan for Sport** (2021-2024), DG EAC has launched an expert group on Green sport. A peer learning activity in the field of sport and sustainability called **“SustainSport”** involved 52 participants from 13 EU Member States and Israel on the topic “Sustainability of Sports Facilities: Ecological, Economical and Social Aspects”.

The **New European Bauhaus (NEB)** brings a cultural dimension to the Green Deal and acknowledges the key role of youth, education and culture as agents of change. The Commission Communication on the New European Bauhaus adopted on 15 September 2021 presents a rich diversity of actions, such as collaborative processes, the NEB Festival and a series of financial opportunities. Since the Communication was adopted, DG EAC has mobilised the programmes under its remit and launched several dedicated and contributing calls linked to the New European Bauhaus initiative, such as:

- the EIT Community Booster to scale up NEB ventures,
- Erasmus+ call for “European Youth Together” 2022,
- the 2022 call under the European Solidarity Corps,
- the Erasmus+ call for Alliances for innovation 2022,
- the Creative Innovation Labs calls under Creative Europe,
- the DiscoverEU.

## General Objective 2 - Europe fit for the digital age

Member States made use of the **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)** to invest in digital education and culture. Estimates based on 22 national Recovery and Resilience Plans indicate that current planning for digital education makes up about 30% of the total spending on education (€13 800 bn). The plans submitted by the Member States throughout 2021 as part of the Recovery and Resilience Facility clearly indicate a substantial coverage of investments linked to Digital Education in areas including digital infrastructure and equipment, digital skills of the adult population, availability of cultural content and teacher training on digital education.

In line with the strategic priorities of the new **Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)**, during 2021, the Erasmus+ programme supported actions in the digital field, aiming to engage learners, educators, youth workers, young people and organisations in the path towards digital transformation.

Moreover, the strategic implementation of the new Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) and delivery on its two key priorities (developing a high performing digital education eco-system and enhancing the digital skills and competences for the digital transformation) provide the ambitious roadmap to help achieve the goals of the European Education Area, the Digital Decade and the Skills Agenda.

The **eTwinning annual theme 2021** was "Media literacy and disinformation". Commissioner Gabriel kicked-off and led the eTwinning Spring campaign (March/April 2021). The campaign's motto was "How to be smart online". Over 8 700 teachers joined the eTwinning Media Literacy and Disinformation Group where many activities were held. A total of 730 teachers took part in 3 webinars. Commissioner Gabriel opened a webinar organised by Lie Detectors, an eTwinning friend, with about 400 live participants. A recorded interview with the Commissioner in view of the celebration of "eTwinning Day" that is always held on Europe Day was published on 9 May 2021. In June 2021, Commissioner Gabriel visited the House of European History, which is also an eTwinning friend, and highlighted its exhibition "Fake for Real: a history of forgery and falsification" and gave an interview on this occasion. The Commissioner met with eTwinning ambassadors on 16 September to kick off the Ambassadors' Online Course. In autumn, Commissioner Gabriel led another campaign with a view to encourage eTwinners to create quality projects around the annual theme. The campaign "eTwinning Weeks" took place from September to October where more than 70 new projects involving more than 500 eTwinners were created.

## A - Digital Education Action Plan

The **Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)** supports the sustainable and effective adaptation of the education and training systems of EU Member States to the digital age through accelerating the rollout of high quality digital education, seeking stronger cooperation at the EU level on digital education, whilst aiming to achieve this through addressing the challenges and opportunities posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Specific objective 2.1 - Promote the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem in Europe

The first objective focuses on strengthening effective digital capacity planning, boosting infrastructure and connectivity, providing high-quality learning content and secure platforms as well as enhancing the digital competences of teachers and educators.

In October 2021, a project group of nine Commissioners announced the launch of the **Structured Dialogue** with Member States on digital education and skills (Action 1). Education Ministers held the first policy debate in the context of the Structured Dialogue at the Education Council in November 2021 and a dedicated high-level panel on digital transformation took place at the European Education Summit in December 2021.

The Commission adopted the proposal for a **Council Recommendation on Blended learning** approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education (Action 2) which supports Member States in adapting their school education systems to be more flexible and inclusive of a broad range of learner needs, changing circumstances and pedagogical approaches. The Recommendation was adopted by the Council on 29 November 2021.

DG EAC commissioned a feasibility study on the creation of a **European exchange platform (Action 3)** to share certified digital education resources and link existing education platforms. The study kicked-off in April 2021 and was finalised in November 2021. The main objective of the study was to provide sufficient information and analysis for a decision to be taken by the European Commission on whether to launch a European exchange platform.

Furthermore, with the aim to develop a **Digital Education Content Framework** and based on the results of the Action Plan's Open Public Consultation and stakeholders' consultations, a study fiche has been validated and technical specifications have been prepared. A call for a preparatory study aiming to provide the Commission with a solid basis of knowledge and analysis of digital education content in the EU and to propose and evaluate options for the development of a robust digital education framework at EU level can be launched.

Support for **connectivity and digital equipment for education (Action 4)** continues to be a priority under the Connecting for Europe Facility. Its Annual Work Programme was adopted in December 2021 and the first Calls are foreseen for early 2022.

As relates to the **Digital transformation plans** supported under Erasmus+ (**Action 5**), the Cooperation partnerships call was in 2021 expanded to all levels/sectors of education and training institutions to join forces with other relevant stakeholders and develop and/or implement their digital transformation plans.

### **Specific objective 2.2 - Enhance digital skills and competences for the digital transformation for all**

The second objective focuses on the importance of digital skills for societal participation, inclusion as well as economic growth and innovation.

The **Girls Go Circular Project** stemming from **Action 8**, implemented by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and coordinated by the Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) EIT RawMaterials, has started its new cycle under the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027. The aim is to bridge the gender gap all while building the digital and entrepreneurial skills of girls, boys and young women.

The third edition of the **Digital Education Hackathon** took place on 9-10 November 2021, with a hybrid Main Stage event hosted by the Slovenian Presidency and the International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence under the auspices of UNESCO (IRCAI). The annual theme of the Hackathon was 'Digital education for a sustainable world', bringing together the twin transition goals of the EU for the future of education and training, while continuing to promote user-driven innovation.

In order to support digital transformation, the **Erasmus+ General Call 2022** included digital education as a key priority in its forward-looking projects under **Key Action 2**. More specifically, projects will address at least one of the following three areas: key success factors for inclusive and high quality digital education and training; Artificial Intelligence in education; and high quality digital education content. The duration of a project is 24 to 48 months, and the deadline for applying is 15 March 2022.

Following the 2020 Council resolution on the **European Youth Work Agenda**, a European digital platform on youth work and a new Expert group on youth work are being developed. These two new tools will help in gathering information, statistics and good practices and promoting digital youth work and new ways of cooperation between young people all over Europe.

Digital transformation is one of the **transversal priorities of the European Solidarity Corps** programme, pursued in its main 2021 and 2022 calls for proposals. The Corps supports projects and activities that help improve digital skills, foster digital literacy and develop an understanding of the risks and opportunities of digital technology.

The new **EU Youth Portal** continues to provide information about Erasmus+, including DiscoverEU, the European Solidarity Corps, and the EU Youth Dialogue, and to support these and other initiatives with more tools and services, including a dedicated space for the European Year of Youth.

In 2021, closer cooperation between the Commission and the **European Education Technology (EdTech)** sector was established. Structured discussions between Commissioner Gabriel and founders of leading European EdTech companies focusing on how to best overcome market fragmentation and to support the sector in establishing its place in the European digital education ecosystem were organised.

In the second part of 2021, a call for a new **SALTO Digital Resource Centre** was prepared. It will support, in line with the Digital Education Action Plan, the implementation of the digital priorities in both the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes, seeking to better shape digital transformation in the youth field.

Finally, the **European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group** on Digital Education: Learning Teaching and Assessment (DELTA) was launched under its new mandate and held its first plenary meeting on 18 November 2021. The Working Group will support the structured dialogue and contribute to defining and addressing the enabling factors for digital education; explore how to improve the provision of digital skills in education and training; and examine how best to deliver on digital education content and platforms as well as effective digital pedagogy.

In terms of communication and outreach, several events have taken place including:

- A specific session on digital education with a particular focus on the Digital Education Hub took place on 24 January within the **EU R&I Days**;
- A SELFIE Workshop on Education focusing on the digital capacity of schools took place on 10 February 2021 which was followed up by a meeting of the DELTA Working Group dedicated to the SELFIE for Teachers self-reflection tool.
- The second **SELFIE Forum** took place on 7-8 October 2021 during which the SELFIE For Work-Based Learning was launched and the SELFIE for Teachers was presented.
- On 28 October 2021, the first-ever *Women and Girls in STEM Forum* took place gathering over 500 policymakers, researchers, industry leaders as well as secondary school students and teachers who participated in the Girls Go Circular.
- A high-level panel on the Structured Dialogue with Member States on digital education and skills took part during the Education Summit on 9 December 2021.
- The Ask Me Anything podcast dedicated to digital education and skills was launched on 16 December 2021.



## ***The key role of digital for culture***

Investments in culture strongly focus on the **digital transition of cultural sectors**, which means improving digital skills in the cultural and creative sectors.

DG EAC contributed to relevant work-streams such as the finalisation of the guidance for the implementation of the new copyright rules for the use of creative works on online content sharing platforms adopted on 4 June 2021<sup>11</sup>, the Commission Recommendation on a **European Data Space for Cultural Heritage**<sup>12</sup>, adopted on 10 November 2021, the reports in the field of copyright on collective management and extended licensing<sup>13</sup> and the steering of studies to harness the potential of new technologies like Artificial Intelligence for the cultural and creative sectors.

## **B - Contribution to Research and innovation**

### ***Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)***

**Specific objective 2.3 - Through the Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, promote excellence in research, generate innovation and strengthen skills, training and career development for researchers notably through excellent international doctoral networks**

2021 marked the first year of the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions** under the new Horizon Europe Research Framework Programme. With a budget of around €822 million, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions continued to support the development of excellent doctoral programmes and to equip researchers with the right inter-sectoral knowledge, skills, and international exposure needed to address new emerging global challenges, through its five main actions: Doctoral Networks, Postdoctoral Fellowships, COFUND, Staff Exchanges and MSCA and Citizens.

Several information events were organised during the course of the year in order to explain the main novelties of the programme and to promote it towards stakeholders and potential applicants.

The 2021-2022 **MSCA Work Programme** was adopted on 15 June 2021. Technical revisions of the 2022 Work Programme were subsequently discussed with the MSCA configuration of the Horizon Europe Programme Committee in October and December, together with the draft orientations for the next 2023-2024 MSCA Work Programme.

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11 COM(2021) 288 final

12 COM(2021)7953 final

13 Report on the application of Directive 2014/26/EU on collective management of copyright and related rights and multi-territorial licensing of rights in musical works for online use in the internal market - SWD (2021) 338 final- and Report on the use of collective licensing mechanisms with an extended effect as required under Article 12(6) of Directive 2019/790/EU on copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market - SWD (2021) 337 final.

The first eight MSCA calls under Horizon Europe were launched during the course of the year: calls for Doctoral Networks, Postdoctoral Fellowships, COFUND, Staff Exchanges and MSCA and Citizens, as well as three calls for Coordination and Support Actions for trans-national cooperation among MSCA National Contact Points, to support Researchers at Risk and to foster international cooperation in MSCA. The yearly **Science is Wonderful!** exhibition was launched on 10 November with an Inauguration Ceremony featuring Commissioner Gabriel and the launch of Science is Wonderful! Digital, the new online platform which provides, for free, educational materials and pedagogical activities developed by MSCA fellows for teachers, pupils, parents and citizens. The Science is Wonderful! Live event took place online 22 to 26 November. A total of 33 webinars and almost 600 meetings between schools and researchers were organised. The event gathered 480 MSCA researchers and almost 20 000 pupils.

**Falling Walls Lab MSCA** is a world-class pitch showcasing the quality, diversity and passion of the most innovative minds taking part in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions – in 2021, the event took place on 30 September with 700 participants. 15 MSCA fellows presented their research topic, innovative project, social initiative, business model or idea in front of a high-calibre jury that selected 2 finalists to attend the Falling Walls Lab finale in Berlin.

**The European Researchers' Night**, funded by the MSCA, is the largest research communication and promotion event in Europe, showing citizens, and young people in particular, the impact of research on their daily lives. It is held annually across Europe and beyond on the last Friday of September. In 2021, 44 projects and 12 associated events were implemented in 30 countries. The event gathered 1.1 million visitors around activities which focused notably on the European Green Deal.

The **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Conference of the Slovenian Presidency**, dedicated to the issue of brain circulation within the research community in Europe, took place on 15 November 2021, with over 330 participants.

Two **MSCA cluster events** were organised in March and July 2021, focusing on Cancer and the European Green Deal. These cluster events are part of the Commission's and European Research Executive Agency's efforts to provide policy feedback and brought together policymakers and relevant R&I projects funded by the MSCA, but also Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology.

MSCA also contributed to the **EU Research and Innovation Days 2021** with a workshop on "The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions: Developing talents, advancing research", which gathered 500 participants and highlighted the key dimensions and policy novelties of the programme under Horizon Europe.

In order to strengthen and streamline the programme's communication, the **MSCA** website was revamped and the MSCA Newsletter was launched in June 2021, gathering over 2 100 monthly subscribers so far.

DG EAC prepared detailed replies to the inquiry launched by the **Ombudsman** on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the work of researchers participating in MSCA and implemented the recommendations of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman was satisfied with the Commission's replies and follow-up, and therefore closed the case.

## ***The European Institute of Innovation and Technology***

**Specific objective 2.4 - As part of Horizon Europe, the EIT will further foster the integration of education, research and business, strengthen innovation ecosystems that help to tackle global challenges and deliver concrete solutions aimed at mitigating the effects of the crisis and contributing to the recovery.**

During the year, DG EAC has continued supervising the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and monitoring the EIT KICs activities as envisaged by the recasted legal basis and the new **Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027**. While supporting the EIT in completing its transition to the Horizon Europe programme, DG EAC has also facilitated the signature of grant agreements between the EIT and the 8 existing KICs amounting to €357.500 million in order to implement their KIC Business Plans.

In 2021, 1 006 persons graduated from EIT-labelled master and doctoral programmes; 32 start-ups were created by students on EIT programmes; 79 start-ups were created as a result of EIT innovation projects, of which 22 in EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS) Countries; 1 025 start-ups were supported by KICs, of which 353 in RIS countries; over €450 million in investments were attracted by the supported start-ups, of which €56 million in RIS Countries; 278 new products/services were launched on the market.

The **EIT HEI Initiative**: Innovation Capacity Building for Higher Education, has been launched to improve the entrepreneurial and innovation capacity of HEIs. Run as a joint EIT Community activity and coordinated by EIT RawMaterials, the first Pilot Call with a budget of €1.2 million per project, gave the opportunity to fund 24 projects, including 142 participating HEIs from 32 countries, to start collaborating from July 2021. The Pilot Call received a total of 64 applications, including 319 HEIs and 429 non-HEIs from 36 countries. 6 out of the 24 selected projects are being implemented by European University Alliances, ensuring synergies between both initiatives.

In October 2021, in line with the EIT's Strategic Innovation Agenda for 2021-2027, the EIT launched a call for proposals to create a new knowledge and innovation community to strengthen Europe's **Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI KIC)** and unlock their innovation potential. The new KIC will be selected in 2022.

In order to foster the integration of the knowledge triangle and ensure synergies and added value within Horizon Europe, DG EAC has also facilitated together with DG RTD and EISMEA, the signature of a **Memorandum of Understanding** between the European Innovation Council (EIC) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) with the ultimate goal of creating an environment conducive to innovation and a new generation of entrepreneurs across the Horizon Europe instruments.



## General Objective 3 - An economy that works for people

### Specific objective 3.1 - Ensure effective and efficient European cooperation and develop optimised strategic investments for modernised, high quality education and training systems fostering EU social cohesion and economic welfare

Together with structural funding under the European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the National Recovery and Resilience Plans and the funding related to it, will play a key role in carrying out **major reforms** in education and training in many Member States. More than 10% of the total available budget is contributing to education and 2% to culture, including some investments in tourism. This is an unprecedented level of EU funding, which will support our policy areas.

**National Recovery and Resilience Plans** (NRRPs) were adopted by late 2021. Measures worth €45.55 billion, representing approximately 10% of the total budget of the 22 adopted plans, contain investments relevant for education. Investments and reforms cover early childhood education and care, primary and secondary school education, initial vocational and training, and higher education. Specifically €7.29 billion will be devoted to early childhood education and care and €38.26 billion on general, initial vocational, and higher education.

The cultural and creative sectors and industries (CCSIs) will benefit to a large extent from the support under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), directly through measures targeting the CCSIs in the national plans and indirectly through measures benefitting all sectors, such as those fostering skills or business digitalisation. The 22 approved National Recovery and Resilience Plans envisage a number of reforms and investments contributing to the cultural sector, including tourism, corresponding to more than €10 billion. Measures included in the 22 approved plans address challenges faced by CCSIs already prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the reforms intended to improve the status of the artists.

The **2021 European Semester** responded to the exceptional situation in 2021. The assessment of the national RRP replaced the Country Reports; non-fiscal country-specific recommendations (CSRs) were not issued. Nevertheless, in March 2021, the Employment Committee in cooperation with the Education Committee conducted a multilateral review of the 2019 and 2020 CSRs in education and training in view of ensuring that the national Reform and Resilience Plans respond to the key messages of the CSRs. The 2022 European Semester started with the **Annual Sustainable Growth Survey** in November 2021, highlighting the role of education, training and skills in the context of the recovery from the pandemic and the importance of equal access to high quality education and training for all.

As one of the key actions of the European Education Area, the Commission established a multidisciplinary **Expert Group on Quality Investment in Education and Training** in May 2021 to support Member States in their investment policies. The Group's mission is to carry out an evidence-based evaluation of education and training policies that deliver major return on investment. Its work helps to boost education outcomes and inclusiveness while improving the efficiency of spending. The expert group delivered its Interim Report by the end of 2021 in view of its publication in the beginning of 2022.

## General Objective 4 - A stronger Europe in the world

### Specific objective 4.1 - Promote and strengthen international cooperation in the fields of education, training, youth, sport, culture, and research and innovation

On 9 February 2021, the Joint Communication on a **'Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood'** was adopted. EAC policy areas feature highly in the Joint Communication with a series of concrete action points relevant for EAC, such as increasing the uptake of the Creative Europe programme in the region or cooperating in digital education under the Digital Education Action Plan. The Commission continued to engage in bilateral dialogues with the countries that hold relevant sectorial subcommittees with the EU in the course of 2021 (e.g. Morocco, Israel, and Palestine).

10 May, the **2nd EU-Japan Policy Dialogue** on Education, Culture and Sport took place. Both sides shared practices in relevant policy areas and agreed to build on the already successful people-to-people cooperation especially with regard to the MSCA, agreeing to further increase and support researchers' exchanges.

EAC is contributing to the development of an **African Education and Research Space** and the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework. In addition, DG EAC put emphasis on promoting the new funding opportunities of Erasmus+ for Sub-Saharan Africa which increased budget compared to the previous programming period for this region. DG EAC contributed to the policy statement and the main deliverables, such as the investment package and the EU-African Union Innovation Agenda.

In October 2021, following months of preparatory work, the **Western Balkans Agenda for Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport**, was launched at the joint EU-Western Balkans summit in Brdo.

The post 2020 **Eastern Partnership** priorities were endorsed at the Eastern Partnership Summit on 15 December 2021, together with a selection of Top Ten Targets for Eastern Partnership to be achieved until 2025. One of them refers to 70 000 individual mobility opportunities and exchanges for students and staff, researchers, young people and youth workers, to be implemented via Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, European Solidarity Corps and the regional EU4Youth initiative.

DG EAC cooperated with the **Italian Presidency** of the G20 in view of the preparation of the Education Ministerial meeting in Catania, the joint education and labour ministerial meeting, the Culture Ministerial meeting in Rome and the Higher Education and Research ministerial meeting in Trieste. For the first time, culture features in a G20 leader's declaration (Rome Declaration, 30-31 October).

The 8th ASEM **Education Ministers Meeting** (ASEMME8) took place on 15 December 2021, hosted online by Thailand and with active participation from DG EAC. The meeting launched the new ASEM Education Strategy and its Action Plan for 2030.

## A - Education and Training, Youth

### Erasmus+ International

A major part of the international dimension of Erasmus+ is funded by the Instrument for Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation (NDICI) and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) under Heading 6 of the EU budget. The Erasmus+ Multiannual indicative programme for the period 2021-2027 was adopted on 27 August 2021. It foresees an overall amount of €1.8 billion from NDICI and €374 million from IPA III. Two regions, namely Sub-Sahara Africa and the Western Balkans have seen a major budget increase in this programme period compared to 2014-2020, reflecting the overall geopolitical priorities of President Von der Leyen.

Given the delay in the negotiation of the external instruments, only a limited number of Heading 6 funded international actions were made available in the Erasmus+ 2021 Annual Work Programme (e.g. Capacity in Youth and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchanges, as well as a top-up for the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters).

In 2021, following political agreement, the association of countries to Erasmus+, including Norway, Lichtenstein, Iceland, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey were renewed.

The **Jean Monnet activities**, open to Higher Education Institutions worldwide, contribute to the active outreach and to educational activities that spread knowledge about the EU to the wider society, supporting the Team Europe approach and the EU's foreign relations objectives. In 2021, the external dimension of the Jean Monnet Actions was further developed, inter alia through a thematic focus ("The Future of Europe" and "Europe in the World") of the Jean Monnet Higher Education Networks implemented under the Erasmus+ call 2022 to allow for a more strategic approach.

### European Solidary Corps

In 2021, following political agreement, the association of countries to the European Solidarity Corps, including Iceland, North Macedonia and Turkey and Liechtenstein, were renewed. The European Solidarity Corps includes a strong international dimension.

## B – Sport

In the context of the European Week of Sport Beyond Borders's Initiative, an online seminar took place on 19 April to discuss sport policy and neighbourhood cooperation. DG EAC, in cooperation with DG NEAR, is implementing the EU4Youth: European Week of Sport in the Western Balkans action through dedicated grants of a total worth of €1 million.

## C – Culture

In 2021, following political agreement, the association agreements for 10 countries already associated to the Creative Europe programme, were signed and the process of associating other countries that have an expressed an interest to join the programme was started.

In December 2021, the Commission signed a contribution agreement with a consortium led by UNESCO, with the Italian Agency for Development (AICS) and the British Council, to implement an action to support the culture and creative sectors in the Western Balkans. The budget of €8 million, from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II) Multi-Country Programme 2020, delegated to DG EAC by DG NEAR, will contribute to fostering reconciliation and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans through culture.

DG EAC continued working with the **European Union National Institutes for Culture** (EUNIC) to implement the Preparatory Action “European Houses of Culture, aiming at testing new models of cooperation, together with the Member States, the Delegations and the local civil society partners. In addition, EUNIC was selected through a call for proposals to implement the third phase of the Preparatory Action in 2022-2023.

## **D – Contribution to Research and Innovation**

### ***Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions***

In 2021, MSCA remained by far the **most international component of Horizon 2020**, accounting alone for more than half of the total number of participations from third country organisations in the Framework Programme, and with nationals from non-EU countries representing a share of 39% of the total researchers’ population involved in MSCA.

### ***The European Institute of Innovation and Technology***

In 2022, the EIT continued linking business, research and education to create market opportunities in key locations outside Europe, connecting Europe’s thriving innovation ecosystem with other hotspots worldwide and supporting Europe’s ability to take on key global societal challenges. Activities were conducted through the EIT hubs in US (Silicon Valley) and Israel (Tel Aviv). Following the launch in 2021 of a dedicated cross-KIC activity in the Western Balkan in line with the commitments of the Action Plan of the Western Balkan Agenda for R&I, the EIT KICs have intensified their regional network-building in the region and initiated pilot actions in education, innovation and business creation.

### ***University-Business Cooperation***

In 2021 work on the **HEInnovate Country Reviews**, in cooperation with the OECD, was continued and brought to completion. Final Reports on Sweden, Lithuania, Slovenia and Greece were published and launched at specific events in the last quarter of the year, bringing to a total 13 country reviews on countries’ Higher Education Systems and their entrepreneurial and innovative capacities.

**HEInnovate** continued to be an important self-reflection tool to help HEIs to assess their entrepreneurial and innovative capacities. The website was entirely revamped in 2021 to make it more user friendly and also to link in better the overall work and other initiatives of the wider university-business cooperation community. To date, over 1 300 HEIs use HEInnovate and over 26 000 self-assessments have been carried out. HEInnovate has also continued to hold workshops and train the trainers meetings in 2021. In addition, a series of monthly webinars has been run in 2021 to bring to public attention a whole host of salient issues related to university-business cooperation.

**The Higher Education for Smart Specialisation (HESS)** project focuses on the crucial role the HEIs have in designing and implementing Smart Specialisation Strategies. In 2021, the work focused on finalising the HESS III phase by updating the Handbook for regional authorities as well as completing and launching 5 regional reports and 2 countries reports and in starting the HESS IV phase. In particular, a set of new work packages (WP) have been initiated for HESS IV. Their aim is to improve synergies between the HESS initiative and HEInnovate, the EIT, the European Universities and the former Knowledge Alliances. Some of these WP activities have been started (like the one focusing on HESS and Knowledge Alliances and European Universities and on the synergies with the EIT), and they will be finalised in 2022.

**Labour Market Relevance and Outcomes II (LMRO II)** continued throughout 2021. The LMRO Partnership Initiative is an initiative implemented in cooperation with the OECD. It aims to enhance the relevance and labour market outcomes of higher education by improving connections between higher education systems and the labour market. At present, the initiative involves Austria, Hungary, Portugal and Slovenia. Country reports are prepared based on the country-specific analysis of the labour market outcomes and policies proposing a set of peer learning activities and recommendations. This initiative will continue until March 2022.

## General Objective 5 - Promoting our European way of life

### A - Education and Training

DG EAC successfully concluded negotiations with the Member States on the **new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training** towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030). The Council Resolution on this matter adopted in February sets out that the achievement and further development of the European Education Area will be the overarching political objective of the new strategic framework for the current decade.

The modalities of this cooperation have been further worked out in the Council Resolution on the **governance structure** of the framework adopted by the Council in November. This was the result of, among others, three meetings of the **High Level Group on Education and Training (HLG)** in May, July and December 2021, where the Commission discussed and agreed with EU Member States on a reformed EEA strategic framework governance, following the commitment in the February Council Resolution. This Council Resolution addresses the gaps identified in the ET2020 governance in particular through strengthening the role of the informal High Level Group on Education and Training, and through establishing a coordination body – the HLG Coordination Board. Amongst others, the Board will also contribute to ensuring a comprehensive stocktaking of progress towards achieving the European Education Area.

As part of the new cycle of European cooperation in education and training (2021-2030) and building on the results of the ET 2020 Working Groups, as of November 2021, **seven Working Groups** under EEA Governance until 2025 have been launched, of which the overall objective is to promote mutual learning on policy reform of national education systems and through tangible outputs support the EU Member States and the Commission to make the European Education Area a reality in tune with the Digital Education Action Plan, the European Skills Agenda, the Union of Equality and other EU policy flagships in education, training and skills.

In 2021, DG EAC monitored and reported on **progress towards the EEA** on the basis of seven EU-level targets, as adopted by the Council on 18 February 2021<sup>14</sup>. It has started to work on proposals, together with the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB), to improve data collection and analysis for the existing EU-level targets and indicators, as well as to develop indicators in the areas of inclusion and equity, the teaching profession and sustainability. The latter was achieved at the 51<sup>st</sup> SGIB meeting of November 2021. This should contribute to upgrading EAC's performance monitoring of Member States' education and training systems through a more comprehensive and meaningful approach.

In 2021, DG EAC continued strengthening its analysis and knowledge capacity through studies and evaluations and the collection and use of data from relevant knowledge providers including studies on the impact of COVID-19 by the **EENEE** (European Expert Network on

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<sup>14</sup> Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area (EEA) and beyond (2021-2030) (2021/C 66/01)



Economics of Education) and **NESET** (Network of Experts working on the Social dimension of Education and Training) networks.

A key output in this field was the **10<sup>th</sup> Education and Training Monitor** 'Well-being in education', presented by the Director-General Themis Christophidou on 9 December 2021 at the Fourth European Education Summit. It is the first report under the reformed governance towards the European Education Area: it assessed EU's performance against a new set of EU-level targets in education and training towards EEA and beyond (2021-2030) adopted by the Council on 18 February 2021. This year's edition also provided an overview of planned reforms and investments in the field of education and training under the Recovery and Resilience

Facility.

In addition to an EU-wide analysis, the 2021 Monitor also contains 27 country profiles, which assessed the performance of Member States against EU level targets, as well as recent policy developments, which will feed the next European Semester exercise.

In the decade preceding the current cooperation framework in education and training, the Monitor highlighted improvement in the participation of children in 'early childhood education and care' across the EU. Similarly, progress has been made in reducing the share of 'early leavers from education and training' and in increasing steadily the 'tertiary educational attainment rates'. However, no progress has been achieved in reducing low-achievement in 'basic skills' in reading, mathematics, science and in the development of 'digital skills'. The pandemic has reinforced the message that digital skills are prerequisite for participation in learning, working and socialising.

**The Education and Training Monitor webpage**<sup>15</sup>, which was created in 2020, gives an easier access to the full digital version of the Monitor through multilingual menus and to data visualisation. Building on the success of the initiative and based on the results of an EU survey, the website was further improved in 2021. The three main improvements are the digitalisation of the leaflet on EU-level targets and the translation of the leaflet into all official languages, an easy access to the five previous editions of the Monitor and the creation of a News page on education statistics, which is updated monthly.

The online event of the **4th European Education Summit on 9 December** allowed participants to discuss ideas and best practices on shaping the future of education and training in the European Union towards the achievement of the European Education Area. Discussing how the well-being of teachers can be improved, how education can be made more inclusive and what can be done to progress the green and digital transformations were among the major topics on the agenda of a successful summit.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/en/>

## B - European Education Area – strategic actions and initiatives

### Specific objective 5.1 – Make the European Education Area a reality, removing barriers to learning, improving access to quality education and making it easier for learners to move between countries

The **European Education Area (EEA)** embraces a future-looking, holistic and people-centred vision of education. It aims to contribute to strengthening the resilience of European education and training systems to face the digital and green transitions, while being deeply rooted in quality and inclusive education for all and across the whole life-course.

The **European Education Area Portal**, a new online presence of the EEA, reflects the vision of the EEA to improve access to quality education and training for all in its very structure: ten sections, dedicated to focus topics and education levels, make it intuitive for visitors to find relevant information.

2021 was a year of action, turning the EEA vision into first tangible results. Below follow the main highlights and achievements of EEA actions.



These actions and initiatives cover all areas set out under the February 2021 Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training and the Communication published in September 2020<sup>16</sup>, and will support mutual learning and cooperation, sharing of good practices and their dissemination, development of new teaching methods and innovation in the area of education.

In line with the European Education Area Communication, these actions are ordered along **six dimensions**: Quality, Inclusion and Gender equality, Green and Digital transitions, Teachers and Trainers, Higher education and Geopolitical dimension.

Co-creation through the **EAC-EMPL EEA Task Force** contributed to the progress towards achieving the EEA. This task force met 7 times in 2021, with the aim to guide and coordinate Commission services' work on the European Education Area, including the follow-up of its actions and work on governance.

### Quality

In order to promote EU citizenship education from an early stage on, the Jean Monnet actions were extended to “other levels of education and training” for the new Erasmus+ funding period. Under this new **“Jean Monnet for Schools”** strand, several activities aiming at training teachers on EU issues and supporting better learning about the EU in primary, secondary, and vocational education were launched in the Erasmus+ calls 2021 and 2022.

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<sup>16</sup> COM(2020)625 final.



The newly designed Jean Monnet Actions are: (1) the Jean Monnet Teacher training activities, launched already in the Erasmus+ call 2021 for the first time, with 20 projects selected from the first call; (2) The Jean Monnet Learning EU initiatives, launched in the Erasmus+ call 2022 for the first time, support for the first time EU teaching in particular schools; (3) Jean Monnet **Networks of schools and VET institutions** in different countries were part of the Erasmus+ call 2021, with two networks being selected.

## **Inclusion and Gender Equality**

Micro-credentials certify the learning outcomes following a small learning experience (e.g. a short course or training). During an open online public consultation more than 500 contributions and 90 position papers from 43 countries were received. The resulting proposal for a **Council Recommendation on micro-credentials** was adopted on 10 December. It will strengthen the role of higher education, vocational education and training institutions in making lifelong learning a reality across the EU, and foster their accessibility to a more diverse group of learners. This European approach to micro-credentials presents a common definition and European standards for better quality, transparency, transnational comparability, recognition and portability of micro-credentials across the EU.

Throughout 2021, DG EAC has been working on a new flagship initiative under the European Education Area called **Pathways to School Success**. An open public consultation and other consultation activities have allowed to gather inputs from a wide range of stakeholders and policy makers, experts, practitioners and learners on ways to address insufficient education outcomes, including the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, a proposal for a Council Recommendation is under preparation, which will outline policy guidance for Member States on concrete strategies and actions to reduce early leaving from education and training and help all pupils reach a certain level of proficiency in basic skills and complete upper secondary education.

Another Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation, on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union, constituted a major focus of work of DG EAC during 2021. This proposal, which was adopted by the Commission on 13 January 2022 and is to replace a Council Recommendation of 2008 on the same topic, recommends measures to Member States to facilitate the access to transnational volunteering activities for young people with fewer opportunities. The Commission committed to facilitating transnational volunteering of young people with disabilities by proposing, by the end of 2023, a European Disability Card with a view to being recognised in all EU Member States.

The new **EEA strategic framework Working Group on Equality and Values** established in 2021 builds on the relevant outcomes of the previous ET 2020 Working Group on Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education and continues focusing on reforms relevant for promoting equality in education and training. The Working Group takes a dual approach to inclusive education for all, targeting specific population groups to ensure their effective equal access to quality education. This includes both group-focused approaches (e.g. gender equality, anti-racism, equality of Roma, inclusion of people with migrant background, LGBTIQ people and people living with disabilities) and cross-cutting (horizontal) issues (e.g. fighting segregation in education, managing diversity and building a sense of

belonging in a lifelong learning perspective). Concerning the gender equality issues, the Working Group will produce a thematic fiche on promoting gender equality in education to help share good practice across Member States and other participating countries. Meetings in Q1 2022 and a potential peer learning event (PLA) in Q2 2022 will look at gender equality issues (e.g. gender sensitive teaching, gender gaps in educational choices, gender segregation, sex disaggregated data as a precondition for gender mainstreaming, prevention of gender-based violence in and around educational settings, addressing boys' underachievement etc.).

The new EEA Working Group Schools was established in 2021; its activities are accompanying the preparation (and will support the subsequent implementation) of the Council Recommendation by promoting mutual learning and exchange of practices.

The ET2020 Working group on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) concluded its work and published its final report, as well as a **Toolkit for inclusive ECEC** and guidelines on how to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified ECEC staff. These were disseminated throughout the year, with six webinars. In addition, DG EAC prepared the report ECEC and the Covid-19 pandemic – Understanding and managing the impact of the crisis on the sector. It was also presented during a webinar, along with the NESET report commissioned by DG EAC, Governing quality ECEC in a global crisis: first lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Green and Digital Transitions**

Under the Green Deal (see General Objective 1), the **Education for Climate Coalition** was further rolled out in 2021.

The proposal for a **Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability was prepared**, see General Objective 1 for more information.

The Commission also adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education, which was agreed by the Council in November.

Under the Digital transition, work is ongoing on the Structured Dialogue with Member States on digital education and skills. The proposal for a Council Recommendation on blended learning for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education was adopted in November (more information under General Objective 2). Implementation of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027 is key in ensuring the uptake of digital skills; technology in classrooms; and access to high quality digital content is crucial if learners are to thrive and shape Europe's digital societies. It is a key enabler of the European Education Area and contributes to Europe's recovery and resilience strategy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. (More information under General Objective 2)

## **Teachers and Trainers**

The **Erasmus+ Teacher Academies** have been launched. The academies take the form of Erasmus+ partnerships with the aim of developing joint programmes between institutions, with mobility as a regular feature. The Work Programme 2021 foresaw 10 projects to be

launched with a duration of three years and a maximum budget of €1.5 million each. The first call for proposal to set up Erasmus+ Teacher Academies was publicised widely and brought us more than 50 applications that have been evaluated by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency with a view to launching the projects at the beginning of 2022. Moreover, the second call for proposals was published as part of the general call in November 2021.

In 2021 the Commission launched a peer learning process with six countries to develop European guidelines for the development of national career frameworks for teachers and school leaders. The guidelines will be based on the experiences of those participating countries and the previous work by the ET2020 working groups on schools. The guidelines will be available in the second half of 2022.

In 2021, the Commission established a **European Innovative Teaching Award** to recognise the work of teachers and their schools (as stated in the Communication on achieving the European Education Area). The initiative was launched on 16 September 2021 with the aim to recognise achievements within the Erasmus+ programme, displaying projects that incorporate outstanding innovative teaching practices. The Award is one of the means to increase the appreciation and attractiveness of the teaching profession.

The thematic focus of the 2021 Award was distance and blended learning. The laureates participated in the European Award Ceremony on 20 October 2021 in a virtual format. Moreover, the 2021 European Education Summit on 9 December 2021 acknowledged the European Innovative Teaching Award and its winners.

## Higher Education

Throughout 2021, 12 targeted consultation meetings took place with the higher education stakeholder group, the Ad-hoc expert group involving Member States representatives and with coordinators of European Universities to co-create the **European strategy for universities**, and to discuss on the further roll-out of the European Universities initiative. A consultation event with rectors of European Universities was organised, together with Vice-President Schinas and Commissioner Gabriel. Commissioner Gabriel also hosted a related consultation event with Members of the European Parliament, as well as with Members of the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, and with Universities and Student Networks. For the development of a **Proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation** back-to-back discussions took place to identify and address hurdles faced by European Universities or other types of cooperation arrangements during the above mentioned targeted consultation events, meetings and conferences. Both the strategy and the proposal for a Council Recommendation were adopted by the college on 18 January 2022.

The further roll out of the **European Universities initiative** was ensured through the launch of the Erasmus+ 2022 Call for Proposals on 30 November 2021, in close cooperation with EACEA. This competitive open Call will target support for sustainability of existing alliances, while being also open for higher education institutions to either join existing alliances or to setup new alliances.

DG EAC has cooperated with Member States and stakeholders on the development of the concept of the joint **European Degree** in the framework of a study on the scope, impact and feasibility of different policy options for implementation of such new European-level initiative. The first results have fed into the European strategy for universities and the proposal for a Council Recommendation on “Building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation” adopted on 18 January 2022.

During its consultation on the European strategy for universities and the Council Recommendation on “Building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation” with Member States and stakeholders, DG EAC also consulted on the necessity and feasibility of a **legal statute for alliances of higher education institutions**, such as European Universities. Based on the results and the outcomes, a related study was launched in autumn 2021, with results expected in autumn 2022. In addition, a policy experimentation was prepared for the review of the 2022 Erasmus+ Work Programme, to allow the higher education sector to test bottom-up options and feasibility of a legal statute and of a joint European degree.

Relating to the Council Recommendation on **promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education** and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, dedicated expert group meetings and online webinars were organised, as well as the Annual European Network of Information Centres in the European Region (ENIC) - National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC) meeting and the Annual NARIC Network meeting. A study was launched in autumn 2021 on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Promoting Automatic Mutual Recognition of Higher Education and Upper Secondary Education and Training Qualifications and the Outcomes of Learning Periods Abroad. The implementation of the European Parliament Preparatory Action “expert network on recognition of learning period abroad in general upper secondary education” was finalised, providing basis for further improvements and online information for stakeholders and general public.

To support the implementation of the Council recommendation on tracking graduates, the final report of the Expert Group on **Graduate Tracking** was published on 19 February. Building on this report, the Commission has requested EU/EEA countries to set up a National Reference Point. Capacity-building support was provided to national authorities to support them in implementing the Council recommendation on tracking graduates. A contractor was selected to coordinate their cooperation in the context of the newly established European Network on Graduate Tracking, aiming towards achieving a European-wide implementation of better comparable graduate tracking by 2025.

The **European Student Card Initiative** is one of the key actions to further simplify and promote student mobility in Europe by digitalising and standardising administrative processes for implementing student mobility, and establishing a European student eID for online cross-border authentication. The tender for a framework contract that will oversee the progressive rollout of the European Student Card initiative over the next two years was launched. The total budgetary ceiling is €38 million for a duration of 4 years, with €6 million already committed. On 21 September 2021, during a launch event, Commissioner Gabriel launched the new Erasmus+ application with an integrated digital European Student Card, marking a new milestone in the digitalisation of the Erasmus+ programme. The new

application, available in all EU languages, provides a digital European Student Card to each student, valid throughout the European Union. All students can now discover events and useful tips about their destination, and get in touch with other students and obtain their European Student Card to get access to services, museums, cultural activities and special deals in their host university and country.

### **Geopolitical dimension**

Under the geopolitical dimension of the EEA, in 2021 work has continued to strengthen cooperation with the Western Balkans, neighbouring countries (both East and South), and Africa, as well as other strategic international partners, such as for example Japan, with the organisation of the second EU-Japan high level policy dialogue in education, culture and sport in May 2021. Strong engagement has also continued in international fora, particularly G20 under the Italian presidency as well as the ASEM education ministerial, offering excellent opportunities to showcase the EEA and relevant initiatives.

### **Erasmus+ Programme**

After more than two years of co-creation process with National Agencies and stakeholders, on 25 March the first call of the new Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 was officially launched, together with the publication of the annual programme and of the Erasmus+ Programme Guide for 2021.

A Commission implementing decision adopted in October 2021 outlines general measures to be implemented over the 7-year period for the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps<sup>17</sup>. A strategy for inclusion and diversity<sup>18</sup> covering all fields of both programmes has been devised to increase the qualitative impact of the programme and to ensure equal opportunities by reaching out to people with fewer opportunities. Small-scale Partnerships is a new action designed to widen access to the programme to small-scale actors and individuals who are hard to reach. With lower grant amounts awarded to organisations, shorter duration and simpler administrative requirements compared to the Cooperation Partnerships, this action seeks to reach out to grassroots organisations, less experienced organisations and newcomers to the Programme, reducing entry barriers to the programme for organisations with smaller organisational capacity.

### **Specific objective 5.2 - With the support of the Erasmus+ programme, promote learning mobility of individuals, as well as cooperation, inclusion, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of education and training**

The launch of the new Erasmus+ programme introduced new opportunities in the fields of School Education, Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-decision-framework-inclusion-2021-27>

<sup>18</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity_en)

The 2021 call included the introduction of the awaited pupil and adult learner mobility activities within KA1, opening individual and group mobility opportunities to new fields. In the VET field, mobility was possible for the first time worldwide. All activities included specific provisions for to learner and staff with fewer opportunities to support inclusion.

An enhanced accreditation system was successfully introduced in the fields of School Education and Adult Education, and enlarged in Vocational Education and Training. The first organisations were accredited and received the first funds in 2021. At the same time, opportunities for non-accredited organisations remain available in the form of short-term projects for mobility of learners and staff. This dual entry system contributed to simplifying the access to the programme by tailoring the opportunities to diverse organisations interested in Erasmus+ in the school education, VET and adult education sectors.

**The Alliances for Innovation**, a brand-new action, was launched under the Erasmus+ General call in 2021. It received a lot of attention with an audience of over one thousand listening in at the on-line Info Day. By the deadline in September, 317 applications were received which were then evaluated by the experts throughout the autumn of 2021. The selection process will be completed in February 2022 and 25 projects for Lot One and 7 for Lot Two are expected to be selected, for a total of 32.

The new Erasmus+ programme was launched in 2021 and already higher education students and staff have started their mobility journeys throughout the EU and beyond.

Some highlights of the new programme include a greater variety of mobility formats than before, such as blended mobility and blended intensive programmes, additional travel support for participants travelling by sustainable means, and new opportunities for mobilities to third countries not associated to the Erasmus+ Programme. The new programme also offers more financial support to students with fewer opportunities in higher education. The general grant ranges have increased by 15% and, in addition, certain types of students with fewer opportunities are also eligible for a top-up amount to the individual support grant.

Higher education institutions also had to reapply for the **Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE)** to participate in the new programme. Institutions who were awarded the Charter have committed to reach out to underrepresented groups in mobility through inclusion strategies, to ensure green practices in organising Erasmus+ activities, to implement digitalisation through the European Student Card Initiative and the Erasmus+ Mobile App, and to enhance the civic engagement of mobile students.

The work to strengthen the links between the Erasmus+ programme and the **European Language Label**, an established tool for quality recognition of projects in all sectors of education and training continued in 2021. The European Language Label Working Group meeting took place in April 2021, chaired by DG EAC. In 2021, 35 European Language Labels supporting the priorities “Enhance language learning through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and digital media”, “Language learning and promotion of equity, social cohesion and active citizenship” and “Professional development of language teachers” were awarded.

**eTwinning** has continued to expand further, with 133 202 new users registered, and connecting more teachers and classrooms across Europe. By end of DG EAC\_aar\_2021

2021, 1 030 251 registered users since inception of the platform were reached. Surpassing 1 000 000 eTwinners was celebrated on 1 December<sup>19</sup>. eTwinning continued in supporting teachers during school closures by allowing intra-school projects and thus offering an instant online space for teachers and their students. In all its activities, eTwinning promoted the 2021 annual theme 'Media Literacy and Disinformation'. In spring, Commissioner Gabriel launched the eTwinning Spring Campaign on social media: 'How to be smart online' and opened a webinar on media literacy. She also visited the "Fake for Real" exhibition at the House of European History.



The **School Education Gateway** surpassed 111 884 registered users at the end of 2021 (+ 14 476). It continued with its broad offer of news and expert articles, tutorials and videos, webinars and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) on diverse topics to all education stakeholders across Europe and beyond, as well as the European Toolkit for schools.

Throughout the period under review, preparations were underway on conceptual and technical level for the integration of eTwinning and the School Education Gateway in a single **European School Education Platform**.

**EPALE**, the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, has continued its growth path. The number of visitors was more than 150 000 on average per month, the number of registered users was 107 000 by the end of the year, which was the highest increase (+ 25 000 or + 30 % ) since its launch in 2015.

A number of EPALE of enhancement were introduced in 2021. To name a few, the new EPALE look and feel went live in April. EPALE is now faster, smoother, easier to navigate, richer in content, more colourful and user-friendly. **Erasmus+Space** was built as a dedicated community to space to facilitate blended mobility. The EPALE App was launched for both Android and iOS devices in December 2021.

### **Erasmus+ Programme – Youth**

The **EU Youth Report 2021**<sup>20</sup> was adopted on 14 October 2021. The report assessed the first three years (2019-2021) of implementation of the current EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027). The report focused on the priorities of the two Presidency Trios for 2019-2021: "Creating opportunities for youth" and "Europe for YOUTH – YOUTH for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation" and showed their linkage with the three core areas of the

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/newsroom/highlights/we-are-1-million.htm>

<sup>20</sup> [REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy \(2019-2021\) - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

Strategy: ENGAGE, CONNECT, EMPOWER. It also puts a strong emphasis on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on young people, youth work and youth organisations.

The **2021-2027 EU Youth Strategy**

has shown that it provides a strong and impactful roadmap to foster cooperation between Member States and support youth policies both at EU and national level. The youth sector can rely on the instruments developed over the last few years to implement the Strategy e.g. EU Youth Dialogue, EU Youth strategy platform, the European Youth Portal, European Youth Week, Youth Wiki or National Activity Planners. **European Youth Week 2021** focused on the theme “Our future in our hands” took place during the week of 24-30 May with around 700 events organised across Europe by the National Agencies involving 120 000 participants. The **EYE2021** (European Youth Event) took place 8-9 October 2021 and brought together 10 000 young people online and in Strasbourg. DG EAC participated on site with its stand in partnership with DG COMM and organised the webinar ‘New beginnings for Erasmus+’. The European Year of Youth was announced during this dedicated session by the Youth Coordinator, Biliana Sirakova.



**Specific objective 5.3 - With the support of the Erasmus+ programme, promote non-formal learning mobility and active participation among young people, as well as cooperation, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of youth**

The launch of the new Erasmus+ programme, introduced **new actions in the field of youth**, notably Youth participation activities and DiscoverEU. A new E+ Youth accreditation system was introduced, alongside standard projects, for organisations active in Youth exchanges and Youth worker mobility.

**Youth participation activities** promote youth participation in Europe's democratic life and bring together young people and decision makers at local, regional, national and transnational level and/or contribute to the EU Youth Dialogue. They help young people to engage and learn how to participate in civic society, raise their awareness about European common values and fundamental rights and contribute to the European integration process, and to develop digital competences and media literacy. Youth participation action fits well



within the overall objectives of the European Year of 2022, and will offer young people from all backgrounds a chance to engage and learn how to participate in civic society.

In 2021, the new Erasmus+ action **DiscoverEU** was still implemented along the European Parliamentary Preparatory Action rules and budget. The DiscoverEU calls initially foreseen in 2020 had to be cancelled due to the Covid pandemic. The budget was transferred to 2021 and used for the October 2021 call, which attracted an outstanding number of applicants for the 60 950 available travel passes.



The Partnerships for cooperation were of particular interest under the 2021 call as they were seen to be less vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic than the mobility actions. The cooperation activities supported horizontal and sector specific priorities, and most frequently the promotion of active citizenship, young people's sense of initiative and youth entrepreneurship and inclusion and diversity. Quality, innovation and recognition of youth work, topics central to the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda, are also very much present in the awarded proposals. The 2021 call featured the new Small scale partnerships, well suited for newcomer organisations and the less experienced.

### **European Solidarity Corps**

**Specific objective 5.4 - With the support of the European Solidarity Corps, enhance the engagement of young people and organisations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities as a means to contribute to strengthening cohesion, solidarity and democracy in the Union and abroad, addressing societal and humanitarian challenges on the ground, with particular effort to promote social inclusion**



The launch of the new European Solidarity Corps programme, was marked by consolidation and a focus on volunteering and solidarity projects. The main novelty is the launch of the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, a new centralised action which will allow the deployment of young volunteers in third countries. Following intense preparatory work included in the 2021 Annual Work Programme, the 2022 work programme includes the first call for proposals enabling organisations to request funding for their projects in the area of humanitarian aid.

### **C – Sport**

**Specific objective 5.5 - With the support of the Erasmus+ programme, promote learning mobility of sport coaches and staff, as well as cooperation, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of sport organisations and sport policies**

2021 marked a new phase in EU sport policy with the adoption of both the Fourth EU Work Plan for Sport (2021-2024) and the launch of the new Erasmus+ and its new sport actions. On 23 November the European Parliament adopted the resolution on EU sports policy acknowledging the value of EU sport policy and the contribution of sport to social, civic and economic developments.

On 23 September 2021, Commissioner Gabriel's launched the **HealthyLifeStyle4All** initiative, aiming to build on the successful Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle. Moreover, the High-Level Group on gender equality in sport has gathered in six main platforms for the structured dialogue between the European Commission and the sport stakeholders. Under the overarching theme "*Towards a healthier, resilient & sustainable European sport*", the Forum focused on greener sport, opportunities after Covid-19, gender equality and a healthy lifestyle.

From 23 to 30 September, the **European Week of Sport** saw national coordinating bodies and partners organising more than 45 000 events all over Europe and beyond. The #Beactive Awards supported projects and individuals dedicated to promoting sport and physical activity across Europe. To highlight inspiring examples of promoting equality, diversity and social inclusion in sport, DG EAC, with the support of EACEA, launched a new edition of the #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards.



The **SHARE** initiative published new background documents on how sport and physical activity could contribute to the New European Bauhaus initiative as well as opportunities for the sport sector within the Next Generation EU package.

A **Mapping study** on the fight against anabolic steroids and human growth hormones in sport was published on 12 July. The study maps EU legislation on performance enhancing drugs and formulates recommendations at EU but also national level.

The third edition of the Physical Activity Fact Sheets are the result of the collaboration between Member States, WHO and the Commission. The fact sheets provide a snapshot of the epidemiology of physical activity in EU and related supportive policy initiatives.

### **Erasmus+ Programme – Sport**

The 2021 Erasmus + calls for cooperation and small-scale partnerships, and non-for-profit events were presented at the Erasmus+ Sport Info Day on 23 and 24 March. The event informed potential applicants about the context, future programme and funding opportunities in 2021, giving advice on preparing and submitting proposals, and on the financial aspects of the 2021 Erasmus+ calls. The **Preparatory Actions** in the field of social inclusion of refugees and the promotion of grassroots sports programmes and infrastructure innovation continued in 2021. A new preparatory action building the investigative capacity of national authorities to better fight doping in sport in Europe was launched in 2021.

## **D – Culture**

To implement the Council **Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022**, DG EAC organised and contributed to the work of 4 Open Method of Coordination Member States' expert groups (on multilingualism and translation, cultural heritage and climate change, the cultural dimension of sustainable development, working conditions of artists and cultural professionals) and organised several EU level conferences (complementary funding for cultural heritage – January 2021; diversity and competitiveness of the European music sector – March 2021; artistic freedom – October 2021). DG EAC also presented a mid-term report on the implementation of the Work Plan for Culture to the Council's Cultural Affairs Committee (in June 2021) and, later that year, started preparing the final Report from the Commission, for adoption in June 2022. In December, DG EAC launched an EU study on culture, democracy and citizenship.

In June 2021, the Commission adopted its **Communication on EU guidelines** on the safe resumption of activities in the cultural and creative sectors, to support the coordinated re-opening and recovery of the cultural sector in Europe.

Throughout 2021, DG EAC continued to help ensure that culture and cultural heritage are promoted and supported through other EU policies (e.g. policies linked to digitisation, skills, employment, cohesion) and programmes (e.g. Horizon Europe).

DG EAC contributed to the design, development and implementation of the **New European Bauhaus** initiative and in promoting the cultural dimension of the NEB.

An important part of the work in DG EAC in the second half of the year was dedicated to the **RRF's contribution to culture** and "culture in the national recovery and resilience plans".

At the end of November 2021, DG EAC published an innovative web tool and guide to EU funding for Culture (**CulturEU**), very much praised by Member States and stakeholders. It gives access to over 70 funding opportunities across 20 EU programmes in 3 clicks.

Additionally, DG EAC organised three meetings of the Commission's informal expert group on cultural heritage in 2021. EAC has also launched through the **Voices of Culture** platform, a dialogue on sustainable development (report published mid-2021) and expert discussions on Re-engaging with digital audiences (report expected mid-2022).



DG EAC continued the implementation of the **Music Moves Europe** initiative, the Commission's integrated approach to support diversity, competitiveness and sustainability of Europe's music sector, notably by continuing its support to ongoing projects and the steering of two studies (music export, musicians' health), as well as the launch, in the autumn, of a new project to support the sustainable recovery of Europe's music sector. DG EAC also steered the implementation of the Music Moves Europe Talent Awards, the EU prize for popular and contemporary music.

Regarding the **regional dimension of culture**,

DG EAC continued the successful "Cultural heritage in Action!" project. DG EAC also contributed to the preparation of the Commission action plan on illicit trafficking in cultural goods led by DG HOME. Throughout the year, DG EAC also continued to manage the implementation of a series of European Parliament Pilot projects and Preparatory actions, including on important themes such as culture and well-being, Music Moves Europe, Jewish cemeteries, European Houses of Culture, Measuring the cultural and creative sectors.

DG EAC also coordinated the preparation of the **EU's report to UNESCO** under the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (4-year periodic reporting by the parties to the Convention) - submitted in July.

## ***Creative Europe Programme***

### **Specific objective 5.6 - With the support of the Creative Europe programme, promote European cooperation on cultural and linguistic diversity**



The Creative Europe Programme of new generation (period 2021-2027) entered into force in May 2021 and the first calls were successfully launched already in June.

In its first year of implementation, the Programme mainstreamed through its actions the cross-cutting issues of inclusion and diversity, notably gender balance, and the green dimension.

As part of the Cross-sectoral strand, all the Creative Europe Desks in EU Member States were designated and their contracts were signed for the activities implemented in the first years of the new programming period.

In 2021, through its actions, the Creative Europe contributed to:

- Resilience and recovery: More than €80 million (almost a 30% increase compared to 2020) were allocated to support European cooperation projects, circulation of Literary works, European platforms for the promotion of emerging artists and networks of cultural organisations in the culture field. Through these actions, the Programme was able to launch calls for the selection of a wide range of projects and initiatives to help cultural operators, artists and workers in the culture field get out of the crisis, with creative ideas with partners from all over Europe. Creative Europe also provided grants for mobility to about 600 artists or cultural professions selected from over 5 000 applicants.
- Innovation and joint creations: the Programme supported the joint creation and production of innovative European works and their dissemination to a wide and diverse audience. Areas of innovation can encompass a social or societal dimension such as audience engagement/development, gender equality or the inclusion of people with disabilities, people belonging to minorities and people belonging to socially marginalised groups, fighting climate change, digitisation, etc..
- Cooperation and exchanges of practices: the Programme gave organisations of all sizes the possibility to cooperate and learn at cross-border level, giving rise to many artistic creations; helping the circulation and dissemination of artists and works; increasing the initiatives that allow more people to participate in cultural activities and projects.
- Capacity-building of artists: the Programme helped European artists and cultural and creative professionals move up to the European level by supporting (emerging) talents, skills development, innovation and the transnational creation and circulation of European works.



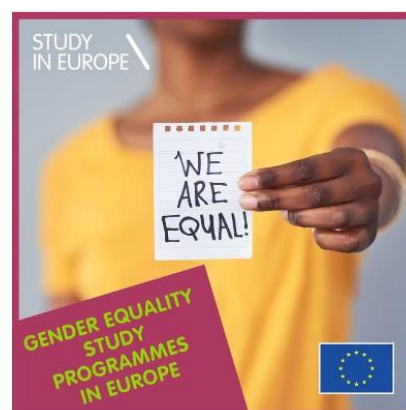
In 2021, the CULTURE strand of Creative Europe also continued to support the organisation of four yearly **European prizes** in the areas of music, literature, architecture and cultural heritage, as well as the implementation of special actions such as the European Capitals of Culture, the European Heritage Days and the European Heritage Label. The ex-post evaluation on the European Capitals of Culture 2019 (Plovdiv and Matera) was finalised in August 2021 with the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the

Committee of the Regions. Moreover, two European Capitals of Culture were selected for the year 2026: Oulu in Finland and Trenčín in Slovakia (pending official designation by the relevant Slovak authorities) while the €1.5 million Melina Mercouri Prize was paid to the three European Capitals of Culture 2022: Novi Sad in Serbia, Kaunas in Lithuania and Esch-sur-Alzette in Luxembourg.

## General Objective 6 - A new push for European democracy

In line with the Commission's objective to 'strengthen Europe's commitment to inclusion and equality in all of its senses, irrespective of sex, racial or ethnic origin, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion or belief', DG EAC adopted its **equality mainstreaming work plan** on 3 December 2021. It is a direct contribution to the work of the Commission's **Taskforce on Equality** and it covers all policy areas and funding instruments of DG EAC competence.

From the education policy perspective, this implies the need for a substantial targeted support to **learners from disadvantaged backgrounds**. Indeed, learning delays due to school lockdowns and the switch to online and blended education lead to long-term learning losses, dramatically increasing inequalities. Therefore, the work towards the achievement of **the European Education Area** and the related EU level targets is a major contribution to promoting equality and inclusion. In 2021, a **new Working Group on Equality and Values** (under the EEA strategic framework) was launched and focused on structural reform to promote equality in education and training. In December 2021, DG EAC launched an important EU study on culture, democracy and citizenship (action in the Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022). It also organised a workshop for EU Member States on freedom of artistic creation.



### Specific objective 6.1 – Provide European young people opportunities to participate in civic society and democratic life

In the programmes 2021-2027 this role has been emphasised with the objective of encouraging the participation of young people in Europe's democratic life, inter alia by supporting youth participation activities which were a new action launched in 2021.

The **EU Youth dialogue** has been instrumental in fostering young people's participation in decision-making processes and in the co-construction of public policies through consultations and exchanges. It has provided a space when young people's voice can be heard and develop civic skills and engagement. Furthermore, the youth conferences organised by the Portuguese and Slovenian presidencies gave visibility to the outcomes of the 8<sup>th</sup> cycle of the EU Youth dialogue dedicated to **"Europe for YOUTH – YOUTH for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation"**.

### *Traineeships Office*

Despite an upsurge in the pandemic at the beginning of the year, the March session was launched with a total virtual environment and ended with more flexible working conditions, which was greatly appreciated by the trainees who benefited from their experience despite the circumstances. The October session started in better conditions and the Traineeships Office even managed to welcome trainees face-to-face.

## 2. MODERN AND EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION AND INTERNAL CONTROL

This section explains *how* the DG delivered the achievements described in the previous section. It is divided into two subsections.

The first subsection reports on the control results and other relevant information that support management's assurance on the achievement of the financial management and internal control objectives<sup>21</sup>. It includes any additional information necessary to establish that the available evidence is reliable, complete and comprehensive. It covers all activities, programmes and management modes relevant to the DG.

The second subsection deals with the other components of organisational management: human resources, better regulation principles, information management and external communication.

The table below shows an analysis of the payments made in 2021:

Payments 2021	Direct	Entrusted	Proportion
EACEA		48.267.212	1,80%
EIT (HE & H2020 combined)		397.871.765	14,83%
Erasmus+ handled by National Agencies 2021-27		1.768.053.516	65,92%
Erasmus+ handled by National Agencies 2014-20		316.108.685	11,79%
European Solidarity Corps handled by National Agencies 2021-27		71.561.495	2,67%
European Solidarity Corps handled by National Agencies 2018-20		9.676.781	0,36%
Creative Europe 2021-27	2.617.978	360.000	0,11%
Creative Europe 2014-20	3.562.971,89		0,13%
Traineeships	9.970.152,87		0,37%
Library			0,00%
MSCA HE and H2020	2.174.380,89		0,08%
Erasmus+ direct	34.563.103,17		1,29%
European Solidarity Corps direct	4.903.557,16		0,18%
Pilot projects and preparatory actions	6.395.576,17		0,24%
House of European History managed by European Parliament		3.000.000	0,11%
Other	2.177.422,12	1.000.000	0,12%
<b>Total (includes EFTA, third country contributions (R0), etc.)</b>	<b>66.365.141,86</b>	<b>2.615.899.455,17</b>	<b>2.682.264.597,03</b>
	2,5%	97,5%	100,0%

It should be noted that the above table does not include the appropriations managed on DG EAC's behalf by the executive agencies EACEA and REA, which are covered in their respective Annual Activity Reports.

DG EAC and EACEA have also managed a small proportion of payments from the **European Development Fund (EDF)**. No EDF budget was allocated in 2021 at the level of commitments due to the phase out of the instrument and its integration in the NDICI.

<sup>21</sup> Art 36.2 FR: a) effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; b) reliability of reporting; c) safeguarding of assets and information; d) prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; and e) adequate management of risks relating to the legality and regularity of underlying transactions

Payment amounts of € 2.7 million were mainly implemented through the National Agencies (€2.5 million for Mobility projects). These amounts are not material in the context of DG EAC's overall activity and are thus not reported on separately.

## 2.1 Financial management and internal control

Assurance is provided on the basis of an objective examination of evidence of the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

This examination is carried out by management, who monitors the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis, and by internal and external auditors. The results are explicitly documented and reported to the Director-General. Further information on the key sources relied on are provided in Annex 7.

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

This section covers the control results and other relevant elements that support management's assurance. It is structured into 2.1.1 Control results, 2.1.2 Audit observations and recommendations, 2.1.3 Effectiveness of internal control systems, and resulting in 2.1.4 Conclusions on the assurance.

Indicators related to this section are reported in the Annex 2 Performance tables, part II.

### Specific actions on Covid-19

Since March 2020, the EC has been implementing its **Business Continuity Plan** and requested all staff to telework due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Crisis Management Team of DG EAC ensures the implementation of DG EAC's business continuity plan, with the least possible disruption of activity throughout the DG.

With regard to this section of the AAR, business continuity has been successfully ensured in the fields of financial and contractual management, budget, legal advice, supervision, HR, IT by providing guidance and support across the DG to handle the effects of the crisis. Electronic financial circuits are now well established with progressive use of qualified electronic signatures (QES). **Force Majeure** measures remained in use as the crisis situation continued. Flexibility continues to be offered for affected beneficiaries.

The assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and the Commission's responses on **budget compliance and budget performance** has been integrated in the risk management process, and mitigating measures continue to be monitored and implemented.



To mitigate the impact on financial/budget-related compliance and on performance, the following main measures were and are being taken:

Concerning the **financial procedures**, adjustments in line with guidance from central services are applied on a case-by-case basis and are appropriately documented. DG EAC communicated its measures with its external stakeholders as effectively as possible and provided guidance as necessary.

To reduce the risk of fraud or corruption, DG EAC is keeping the appropriateness of the mitigating measures to prevent and detect fraud under close review in consultation with OLAF and in coordination with National Agencies.

As less on the spot audits are possible, DG EAC continues to apply its **adapted supervision and auditing approach** (supervisory visits/primary checks). National Agencies are required to report on the effectiveness and performance of their monitoring systems and the implementation of the force majeure measures at project level in the content of COVID-19.

To mitigate the **risk of unused commitment and payment appropriations** a very close monitoring has been ensured during the whole year on the budget implementation taking appropriate measures to rebalance some funds between actions where possible due to cancelled and modified activities. As a result, all operational commitments appropriations of the EU budget (C1 credits) have been fully consumed. Unused assigned revenues have been automatically carried-over and are planned to be used the year to come.

This close monitoring strategy allowed DG EAC to promptly return the unnecessary payment appropriations detected in the revision of forecasts (only very partly due to the COVID-19 as the main reason was the late adoption of Regulations) and ensured DG EAC could eventually optimise its budget execution (see infra). With regard to National Agencies, any payment appropriations which remain unused will be recovered and eventually reinvested into future work programmes. DG EAC also revised the 2022 Erasmus+ Work programme in order to launch the European Year of Youth which will focus on re-establishing a positive outlook for European young people negatively affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 2.1.1 Control results

This section reports and assesses the elements identified by management which support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives<sup>22</sup>. The DG's assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in AAR Annex 5. Annex 6 outlines the main risks together with the control processes to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the relevant control systems. Annex 7 provides further details.

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<sup>22</sup>1) Effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; 2) *reliability of reporting*; 3) *safeguarding of assets and information*; 4) prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; and 5) adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes as well as the nature of the payments (FR Art 36.2). *The 2<sup>nd</sup> and/or 3<sup>rd</sup> Internal Control Objective(s) (ICO) only when applicable, given the DG's activities.*

## **1. Effectiveness of controls**

In order to be considered effective, controls are expected to meet the internal control objectives (to be detailed hereafter) and for each of those control objectives, the controls should result in identifiable benefits. The manner in which those control objectives have been met is detailed in **Annex 7**, together with an overview of the relevant appropriations managed by programme and entrusted entity

### **Legality and regularity of the transactions**

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

#### **a) National Agencies (Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps)**

Following the control results described in detail in Annex 7, DG EAC considers it has a sufficiently complete knowledge of the way in which its programmes are implemented by National Agencies. The management information reported by the National Authorities and National Agencies for the year 2020, which was received in 2021, is sufficient for the relevant AOSD to draw reasonable assurance conclusions, with some exceptions relating to the National Agencies in Bulgaria and North Macedonia where weaknesses have been identified and are expected to be rectified in 2022.

As the majority of relevant expenditure for 2021 is still related to the 2014-20 programmes this is the focus of the reporting in this AAR. Error rates for the 2021-2027 programme should become progressively available from AAR 2023.

- The aggregate 2014-2020 residual error rate for the implementation through NAs is estimated to be 0.83% (the 0.78% reported in AAR 2020 has been adjusted based on the additional controls completed in 2021, and the assessment of assurance at the NAs).
- As this is below the 2% threshold, there is no need to make a reservation for this management mode.

#### **b) Supervision of entrusted bodies: EACEA, REA, EIT and EIF**

DG EAC considers that its supervision of the EACEA and REA, whose Authorising Officer receives delegation directly from the Commission, has been effective and sufficient in 2021.

All the reports foreseen in the Memorandum of Understanding between EACEA and its parent DGs, as well as the reinforced supervision measures, were provided and enabled DG EAC to closely monitor the implementation of Erasmus+ and Creative Europe by this Executive Agency. Based on the results of controls as presented in REA's AAR, DG EAC considers to have reasonable assurance regarding Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA).

In view of the positive declaration of assurance from the European Court of Auditors on the entirety of its budget, no assurance issues are noted regarding the EIT.

Based on the management declaration and the report of the Independent Audit Body as regards the Erasmus+ Student Loan Guarantee Fund (which is now closed and managed as legacy), DG EAC does not consider there is any significant reasonable assurance risk for EIF relating to 2021. For further information see Annex 7.

### c) Direct management managed by DG EAC

**Authorising Officers by sub-delegation** have reported no issues that would put into doubt the reasonable assurance on this management mode, and previous accounting controls indicate the regularity and legality of transactions introduced in ABAC are reliable. DG EAC has ensured a close follow up of non-compliances and exceptions during 2021.

As no issues have been identified which are material with respect to the budget as a whole, it is considered that DG EAC has reasonable assurance on direct management managed by DG EAC for 2021.

### d) Risk at closure

In the context of the protection of the EU budget, the DGs' estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are consolidated at Commission level. For DG EAC, the situation has remained stable.

DG EAC estimates the amount at risk on a conservative and prudent basis. Error rate information on a multi-annual basis from a variety of sources is used. This evidence shows an error rate that is between 0.5% and 1% (see Annex 7), and therefore a global 1% is used to estimate the amount at risk for programmes outside EIT. For EIT itself, the most recent reported error rate is 0,08%<sup>23</sup>, so a conservative rate of 2% is chosen for the amount at risk.

DG EAC's data is shown in the table and its accompanying notes below. The estimated overall risk at payment for 2021 expenditure is €26.17 million. This is the AOD's best, conservative estimation of the amount of *relevant expenditure*<sup>24</sup> during the year (€2,112 million) not in conformity with the contractual and regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made. The relevant figures for the EACEA and the EDF are also presented in the table below, which have a risk at closure of €0,23m and €0,08m respectively.

This expenditure will subsequently be subject to ex-post controls and a proportion of the underlying errors will be detected and corrected in successive years. The conservatively estimated future corrections for 2021 expenditure are €0.2 million<sup>25</sup>. This is the amount of errors that the DG conservatively estimates will be identified and corrected by controls planned to be carried out in succeeding years. The difference between those two amounts leads to the estimated overall risk at closure for the 2021 expenditure of € 25.97 million.

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<sup>23</sup> [gb\\_decisions\\_and\\_eit\\_caar\\_2020.pdf.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> The Commission defines 'relevant expenditure' as "payments made minus new pre-financing plus cleared pre-financing"

<sup>25</sup> Conservatively at 0,01%, this is estimated as lower than the historical rate of 0,06% which relates to one-off items which are not guaranteed to be repeated in future years

Amunt at risk for DG EAC

DG EAC	'payments made' (2021;MEUR)	minus new prefinancing [plus retentions made] (in 2021;MEUR)	plus cleared prefinancing [minus retentions released and deductions of expenditure made by MS] (in 2021;MEUR)	'relevant expenditure' (for 2021;MEUR)	Detected error rate or equivalent estimates	estimated risk at payment (2021;MEUR)	Adjusted Average Recoveries and Corrections (adjusted ARC; %)	estimated future corrections [and deductions] (for 2021;MEUR)	estimated risk at Closure (2021;MEUR)
-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7	-8	-9	-10
Erasmus indirect	2 084,16	-2 084,09	1 429,86	1 429,93	1,00% - 1,00%	14,30 - 14,30	0,01% - 0,01%	0,19 - 0,19	14,11 - 14,11
Erasmus direct	36,29	- 2,92	4,22	37,59	1,00% - 1,00%	0,38 - 0,38	0,00% - 0,00%	0,00 - 0,00	0,38 - 0,38
European Solidarity Corps indirect	82,24	- 82,67	12,36	11,93	1,00% - 1,00%	0,12 - 0,12	0,00% - 0,00%	0,00 - 0,00	0,12 - 0,12
European Solidarity Corps direct	5,12	0,00	0,00	5,12	1,00% - 1,00%	0,05 - 0,05	0,00% - 0,00%	0,00 - 0,00	0,05 - 0,05
EIT	397,87	- 397,87	550,51	550,51	2,00% - 2,00%	11,01 - 11,01	0,00% - 0,00%	0,00 - 0,00	11,01 - 11,01
Horizon and EIT	2,17	- 0,12	1,57	3,62	1,00% - 1,00%	0,04 - 0,04	0,00% - 0,00%	0,00 - 0,00	0,04 - 0,04
Creative Europe	6,54	- 2,01	2,51	7,03	1,00% - 1,00%	0,07 - 0,07	0,00% - 0,00%	0,00 - 0,00	0,07 - 0,07
Other	22,34	- 8,85	7,10	20,58	1,00% - 1,00%	0,21 - 0,21	0,00% - 0,00%	0,00 - 0,00	0,21 - 0,21
<b>Total without contribution to EA's operating budget</b>	<b>2 636,73</b>	<b>-2 578,53</b>	<b>2 008,13</b>	<b>2 066,32</b>		<b>26,17 - 26,17</b>	<b>0,01% 0,01%</b>	<b>0,19 - 0,19</b>	<b>25,97 - 25,97</b>
					<b>Overall risk at payment in %</b>	<b>1,27% - 1,27%</b> <i>(7) / (5)</i>		<b>Overall risk at closure in %</b>	<b>1,26% - 1,26%</b> <i>(10) / (5)</i>
EACEA	48,27	- 48,27	46,33	46,33	0,01% - 0,01%	0,23 - 0,23	0,00% - 0,00%	0,00 - 0,00	0,23 - 0,23
<b>Total DG (with contributions to EAs)</b>	<b>2 684,99</b>	<b>-2 626,80</b>	<b>2 054,46</b>	<b>2 112,65</b>					

Additional information to be provided by the DGs managing EDF and contributing to and/or managing EUTF

EAC	'payments made' (2021;MEUR)	minus new prefinancing (in 2021;MEUR)	plus cleared prefinancing (in 2021;MEUR)	'relevant expenditure' (for 2021;MEUR)	Average Error Rate (weighted AER; %)	estimated risk at payment (2021;MEUR)	Adjusted Average Recoveries and Corrections (adjusted ARC; %)	estimated future corrections [and deductions] (for 2021;MEUR)	estimated risk at Closure (2021;MEUR)
-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7	-8	-9	-10
Total EDF	2,73	2,73	4,18	4,18	2,00% - 2,00%		0,00% - 0,00%	0,00 - 0,00	,08 0,08

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

DG EAC's portfolio consists of diverse actions which have a **relatively low error rate**.

This is, respectively, thanks to the inherent risk profile of having recurring beneficiaries, particularly in higher education; simplified entitlement-based funding modalities; and the performance of the related control systems as implemented by National Agencies under indirect management, which combine a coherent approach across the programme with proximity to the target beneficiaries.

Nevertheless, DG EAC closely follows up the independent audit opinions, supervisory visits and audits and the resulting recommendations to ensure that mitigating actions are implemented promptly.

This section reports and assesses the elements identified by management which support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives (ICO)<sup>26</sup>. The DG's assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in AAR Annex 5. The AAR Annex 6 outlines the main risks together with the control processes to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the relevant control systems.

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<sup>26</sup>1) Effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; 2) reliability of reporting; 3) safeguarding of assets and information; 4) prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; and 5) adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes as well as the nature of the payments (FR Art 36.2). The 2nd and/or 3rd Internal Control Objective(s) (ICO) only when applicable, given the DG's activities.

**Overview table (amounts in EUR million)**

Risk-type / Activities	Grants (e.g. actual costs based, or lump sums, or entitlements)	Procurement (e.g. minor or major values)	Indirect mngt + EAC (for NAs)	Cross-delegations to other DGs (other AOXDs)	Contributions and/or funds to EE (EU Agency, EA, JU)	Delegation / Contribution agreements with EE (EIB, Int-Org, etc.)	Other (describe any other expenditure not covered by the previous columns)	Total Expenditure	NEI, e.g. Revenues, Assets, OBS ((in)tangible or financial assets & liabilities)
<b>Creative Europe</b>	2,60	3,93	-		14,73			21,26	
<b>Erasmus+</b>	5,89	27,69	2.063,48		27,14			2.124,20	
<b>European Solidarity Corps</b>	20,53	5,12	61,70		1,60			88,96	
<b>Horizon Europe</b>	162,13	0,66	-		237,26			400,05	
<b>Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation and Partnership Instruments</b>	19,56	14,03	-		4,80			38,39	
<b>Other</b>	2,40	0,60	-		-			3,00	
<b>Pilot and Preparatory Actions</b>	4,34	2,06	-		-			6,40	
<b>Rights and Values</b>	-	0,02	-		-			0,02	
<b>Totals (coverage)</b>									
<b>Links to AAR Annex 3</b>	<b>Overall total (m EUR); see Table 2 – payments made</b>						<b>Overall total (m EUR)</b>	<b>2.682,26</b>	<b>Table 4 – assets</b>

Legend for the abbreviations: OP=Operational Programme, PA=Paying Agency, NA=National Agency, AOXDs =Authorising Officer by Cross-Delegation, EA=Executive Agency, JU=Joint Undertaking, NEI =Non-Expenditure Item(s), OBS= Off-Balance Sheet, ICO = Internal Control Objective, L&R=Legality and Regularity, SFM= Sound Financial Management, AFS= Anti-Fraud Strategy measures, SAI=Safeguarding Assets and Information, TFV=True and Fair View, RER=Residual Error Rate, CEC=Cost-effectiveness of controls, Mngt =Management

## Fraud prevention, detection and correction

DG EAC has developed and implemented its own **anti-fraud strategy** since 2015, on the basis of the methodology provided by OLAF. It is updated every 2-3 years. It was last updated in December 2020 and the action plan was implemented during 2021. Anti-fraud monitoring is carried out via regular contacts with the National Agencies and is covered in the Yearly Management Declaration process, and is reported to senior management twice a year, with more regular updates on key cases. During 2021, DG EAC contributed to the Commission anti-fraud strategy via participation in relevant networks and sub-groups. DG EAC verified alignment of the various legal and guidance documents with the updated central guidance in the areas of fraud prevention. Awareness raising exercises for entrusted bodies were also conducted with discussion of recent fraud cases. As part of remote supervisory visits, National Agencies were asked to evaluate fraud risks and vulnerabilities with regard to spending in emergency situations. In addition, DG EAC rolled out the new project management tool for National Agencies, which includes a new risk and potential exclusions feature.

In 2021, DG EAC introduced an internal reporting tool to detect double submission, double funding and accreditation plagiarism. The tool allows National Agencies to compare the applications received with applications received and projects granted by other National Agencies. The tool crosschecks the database and looks for matches within several aspects of all applications and projects: title of the application, amount requested, project summary, and the organisations involved. The more matches there are found for the four individual aspects, the higher the percentage of the total match. If there is a total or almost total match between an application received by a National Agency and an application received by another National Agency, both entries will be marked in red and show a 100% matching rate. The National Agencies will then use the results of the queries as a basis for further investigations. Several webinars were organised in 2021 to inform the National Agencies on how to use the new tool, aimed at detecting this kind of fraud.

DG EAC followed up **OLAF's financial recommendations**, by making appropriate recoveries for 2 final OLAF reports in 2021 for a total amount of €748 346. Three recommendations are still in process, which for DG EAC do not represent a material budgetary amount. The reason for not implementing a recommendation is normally due to the bankruptcy of the legal entity making it impossible to obtain a recovery. Considering the level of fraud impact faced by the DG, in particular the financial prejudice recorded by the European Anti-fraud Office in the remit of DG EAC, the residual risk of fraud does not justify additional measures beyond those included in the anti-fraud strategy. DG EAC maintains close cooperation with OLAF and follows the small number of ongoing cases closely. In addition, the follow-up of OLAF's financial recommendations is being undertaken in cooperation with NAs.

Suspected irregularities or fraud and ongoing investigations of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) were taken into account in assessing the reasonable assurance assigned to the NAs over the reporting period.

On the basis of the available information, DG EAC has reasonable assurance that the anti-fraud measures in place are effective overall. The measures in the revised Anti-Fraud Strategy reinforced the identification and handling of high-risk beneficiaries, as well as issues such as double funding and conflict of interest.

### **Other control objectives: safeguarding of assets and information, reliability of reporting**

For the 2014-2020 MFF, DG EAC entrusted management of funds related to the **Student Loan Guarantee Fund Financial Instrument to the European Investment Fund (EIF)**, as stipulated in the Erasmus+ legal base for that period. EIF manages a minimum reserve (set at €10 million in the Delegation Act, revised in mutual agreement to €5 million in early 2016), and also manages non-Euro currency where non-Eurozone financial intermediaries are participating in the instrument. Asset management is conducted via the 'Asset Management Designated Service (AMDS)', DG ECFIN, according to agreed Asset Management Guidelines (AMG). The main asset management goal is to maintain the value of the fiduciary (and subaccounts) in the context of a negative interest rate environment, while ensuring the necessary liquidity for the instrument.

Pre-financing is also managed and controlled mainly in the context of Delegation/Contribution Agreements with National Agencies. No issues have been identified as regards the reasonable assurance on safeguarding of assets, and NAs take measures on limitation of negative interest appropriate to their circumstances.

### **Accounting controls**

In the context of the accounts quality exercise, DG EAC has established a work programme for accounting controls in 2021, based on the risk assessment carried out at the beginning of the year. This work programme, which contributes to the quality of the final financial data, includes regular controls to verify the correctness and completeness of the accounting registrations in the DG. In 2021, the accounting revision programme could unfortunately not be implemented fully due to a prolonged absence of the accounting assistant. Therefore, during that period, the emphasis was put on the most important controls. Upon her return, the situation was regularised as all controls were resumed in particular those including outstanding transactions. The related controls in this respect covering the recovery orders, invoices and credit notes have been executed and the necessary corrections made within the set deadline by DG BUDG in the closure instructions 2021. As a result, the controls carried out in 2021 do not show significant or systematic errors, which confirm the accuracy of the central financial cell.

In line with the 2018 Financial Regulation, DG EAC's assessment for the relevant reporting requirements is as follows:

- Cases of "confirmation of instructions" (new FR art 92.3): None
- Cases of financing not linked to costs (new FR art 125.3) :
  - EAC/P02/2020: European Capitals of Culture (ECOC): Elefsina
  - EAC/P03/2020: European Capitals of Culture (ECOC): Timisoara
  - EAC/P01/2021 2021 Be active - Awards- Prizes (June-December 2021)



- EAC/PO2/2021 European Capitals of Culture (ECOC): Esch
- EAC/PO3/2021 European Capitals of Culture (ECOC): Kaunas
  
- Financial Framework Partnerships >4 years (new FR art 130.4) : None
- Cases of flat-rates >7% for indirect costs (new FR art 181.6) : None
- Cases of "Derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity of grants pursuant to Article 193 FR" (new Financial Regulation Article 193.2):
  - EAC/S01/2021 Presidency,
  - EAC/S02/2021 Presidency,
  - EAC/S04/2021 OECD,
  - EAC/S13/2021 EU Prize for music 2022,
  - EAC/S14/2021 EU Prize for culture Heritage,
  - EAC/S16/2021 Presidency,
  - EAC/S19/2021 Presidency,
  - EAC/S20/2021 Presidency,
  - EAC/S24/2021 OECD,
  - EAC/S27/2021 Presidency,
  - EAC/S28/2021 Presidency,
  - EAC/S35/2021 Presidency.

### ***Budget execution***

This first year of implementation of DG EAC's programmes has been exceptionally challenging in terms of budget management. The late adoption of programme's regulations has exceptionally pushed forward the start of some activities (calls, selection, agreements, contracts) to the second part of the year, definitely affecting the budget management in 2021. Moreover, the long lasting procedure for the signature of agreements with associated countries participating in DG EAC programmes has considerably delayed the availability of external assigned revenues which made the budget management of our programmes even more complex. The extension of eligibility periods granted (by amendment to signed agreements) had also a slight technical effect of reducing payments scheduled in 2021. In some limited cases, the non-receipt of interim reports in time led to a reduced volume of payment appropriations consumed this year. Finally, the integration into the EACEA's processes of the corporate Grant Management IT tools (eGrants), which previously did not support actions of the Agency's programs, turned out to be slower and more complex than initially expected, with impacts on some award selection processes and on the opening of the granting phase in the third quarter.

As a result, following a close monitoring of the forecasts and in order to mitigate the risk of under-implementation at the end of the year, payment appropriations have been returned to DG BUDG, first in the context of the Global transfer (€ 488 million) and then during the end-of-year transfer (€191 million).

However, this exceptional situation has no influence on the funding absorption capacity of our programmes, for which all the operational commitments appropriations of the 2021 EU budget have been fully implemented, both for activities implemented by DG EAC and by Executive agencies.

The total available budget including all types of appropriations in DG EAC's 'domain' (including amounts implemented by Executive agencies) amounted to € 4 778 billion in commitment appropriations (CA) and € 4 320 billion in payment appropriations (PA).

In terms of EU adopted budget C1 appropriations:

- Commitment appropriations: the operational credits showed a 100% execution rate on every budgetary chapter. As regard the administrative expenditures, the execution rate reached 95, 7%.
- Payment appropriations: The **overall execution rate** reached 99,17% of available appropriations at the end of the year. The operational credits have been mostly fully executed (99.82%). The overall execution rate for administrative expenditures reached 73% which was slightly below the forecast (7%). However, administrative credits (non-dissociated credits) can be used until end N+1.

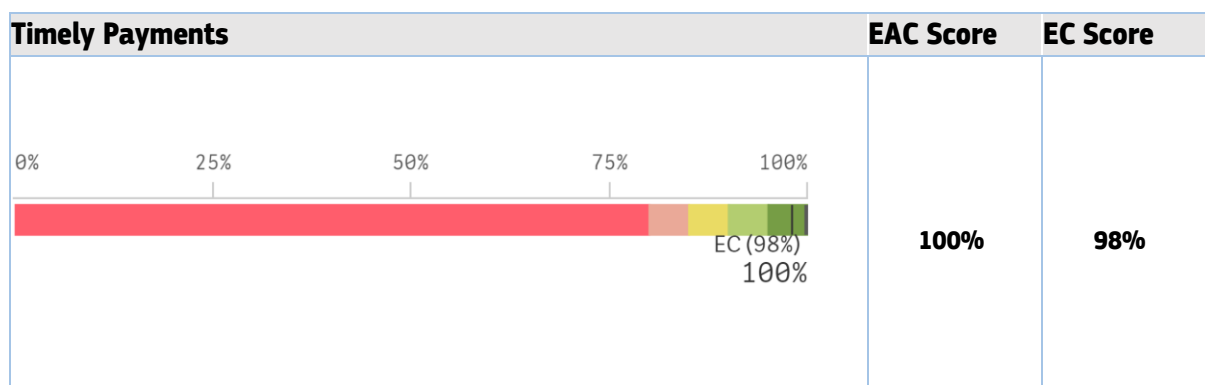
### ***Cross-sub-delegations***

No new cross-subdelegations were received in 2021.

## **2. Efficiency of controls**

In terms of the efficiency indicators time-to-inform and time-to-grant (Art 194.2 FR), an average time of respectively 90 and 132 days has been measured. 5 grants under direct management by DG EAC were signed in 2021. Deadlines could not be respected in case of one procedure, Preparatory Action - Music Moves Europe - Supporting Mechanisms for which the time to inform was of 104 days.

As illustrated in Annex 4, the Final Scoreboard, in 2021 DG EAC has executed 10.700 payments (including the payments to the trainees). Despite the specific COVID19 situation again in 2021 only 145 were paid late (1%) which remains stable compared to previous year and is even slightly lower compared to 2020 (2%). This corresponds to a total amount paid of €2.683.717.291,17 of which €6.086.287,43 were paid late (0%). Out of the 145 late payments 6 have generated late interest for a total amount of €13.709,16.



In 2021, DG EAC registered 2 220 invoices. In 2021, 82 invoices were registered late (3.7%) which is much better than in 2020 where 195 were registered late (5.8%). The decrease in the volume of financial transactions between 2020 and 2021 can be explained by the fact that this was the first year of the 2021-2027 MFF during which the late adoption of the legal bases delayed the implementation of the activities, and the continued effect of the pandemic restrained the implementation of others. The reduction of invoices may be linked to the impact of COVID 19 which was more important in 2020 than in 2021 and the positive effect of the electronic workflows introduction.

The following initiatives have been taken during the year to improve controls efficiency in financial management:

- revision of the electronic workflows one year after their introduction to rectify some inconsistencies, adopt best practices and further standardise them,
- introduction of the Qualified Electronic Signature (QES) which became fully operational in the whole DG as from June 2021,
- delegation of the Legal and Financial Validation of beneficiaries to REA's corporate services and adoption of corporate methodology for Financial Capacity Check (FCC),
- organisation of training sessions for colleagues from the operational units on Legal Entity Files/Bank Account Files (with DG BUDG) and on AOSD duties and ABAC,
- development of reporting tools and investment in data quality to facilitate the monitoring of operations with national agencies (Annex II to Data Store Produce, Clearings Data Production, E+ Link Dynamic Reports, ABAC Data Explorer, Daily Trackers),
- development of tools for the follow-up of DG EAC financial transactions (Late Payments & Invoices Tracker, Transactions Plan vs Actual, Workflow Risk Analysis, ABAC Data Explorer),
- Inclusion of the procedures monitoring indicators in the monthly strategic dashboard (overview of procedures not started/on-going/closed, overview of on-going procedures per stage 1/2/3 and overview of delayed procedures).

### **3. Economy of controls**

Where indirect management is concerned, the cost of controls borne by the Commission, the Member States and the Entrusted Entities<sup>27</sup> needs to be reported separately. The sources of these figures and how they were estimated are to be reported together with the assessment of their completeness and reliability. As set out below, DG EAC concludes that the structures in place are considered to be cost effective on a multi-annual basis, notwithstanding the fact that the 2021 percentage is above the DG's overall target of 10%, due to an abnormally low level of payments in 2021.

Overall, the revised global DG EAC cost of control for **NAs** including an estimate of entrusted entity costs for 2021 is 11.78% of the budget managed (see table in annex 7) and is a prudent and conservative estimate. The structures in place are considered to be cost-effective. Overall, the revised global DG EAC cost of control for **EIT** including an estimate of entrusted entity costs for 2021 is 2.6% of the budget managed (see table in annex 7) and is a prudent and conservative estimate. The structures in place are considered to be cost-effective.

### **4. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls**

The revised global DG EAC cost of control for NAs including an estimate of entrusted entity costs for 2021 is 11,78% of the budget managed (exceeding the target of 10%) and is a prudent and conservative estimate. This is a transitory issue, as the 2021 figure is a result of the comparatively lower level of payments carried out in 2021 which will progressively increase over 2021-2027. Based on the most relevant key indicators and control results as outlined in Annex 7, DG EAC 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.

#### **2.1.2 Audit observations and recommendations**

This section sets out the observations, opinions and conclusions reported by auditors – including the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control. Summaries of the management measures taken in response to the audit recommendations are also included, together with an assessment of the likely material impact of the findings on the achievement of the internal control objectives, and thus on management's assurance.

#### **Audits by the Internal Audit Service (IAS)**

The IAS has concluded that the internal control systems in place for the audited processes are effective, except for the control systems for data protection based on an audit finalised in January 2021.

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<sup>27</sup> For indirect management with Entrusted Entities: any types of management, administrative or other remuneration fees paid to them by the Commission (even though it is acknowledged that those contributions cover broader elements than only control costs in the strict sense) are to be reported separately from the DG's supervision or monitoring costs. (Fees 'paid' can also be a % withheld on the gross amount of funds transferred.)

No new IAS recommendations were received during the period covered by AAR 2021. There are two open recommendations from January 2020 from the 'IAS audit on IT governance and project management in DG EAC', and five open recommendations from the IAS audit 'Effectiveness of the protection of personal data of beneficiaries of and participants in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes managed by DG EAC' which was finalised in January 2021. DG EAC has submitted to the IAS as "ready for review" one of the two open recommendations from the first audit and four of the remaining five open recommendations from the second audit. Substantial progress has been made on the remaining two open recommendations, which are on track for completion in early 2022.

More detail is provided in Annex 8.

### ***Audits by the Court of Auditors***

For its 2020 Declaration of Assurance (DAS) the estimated level of error communicated by the Court for Chapter 4, mainly covering the Research budget, is 3.9%, 4.0% in 2019, 2% in 2018 and 4.2% in 2017. This error rate is not broken down by policy area, so there is no 'DG EAC' rate from the ECA, but the multi-annual rate suggested by ECA's results provided year-on-year to DG EAC is coherent with the results found by DG EAC and presented in this AAR.

More detail is provided in Annex 8.

As a result of the assessment of the risks underlying the observations made together with the management measures taken in response, described in section 1.1 of Annex 8, **the management of DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture considers that the recommendations issued and the action plan implementation progress confirm its assessment that the residual risk does not require a reservation in this AAR, while noting the cross-cutting critical risk on 3<sup>rd</sup> country data transfers identified at corporate level for 2022.** The recommendations are being implemented as part of on-going continuous efforts in terms of further improvements.

### **2.1.3 Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems**

The Commission has adopted an Internal Control Framework based on international good practice, to ensure the achievement of its policy and management objectives. Compliance with the internal control framework is compulsory.

DG EAC's organisational structure and the internal control systems are suited to achieving its policy and internal control objectives, in accordance with the internal control principles. DG EAC pays due regard to the risks associated with the environment in which it operates.

DG EAC has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and, as outlined in Annex 8, has concluded that it is partially effective as regards internal control principle 13 in relation to compliance with applicable data protection rules.

This principle is partially present and functioning based on the recommendations which have been issued as part of the audit of the IAS as regards compliance with the internal data protection regulation (IDPR), in particular for transfers outside the EU/EEA, where the action plan is still ongoing, although four of five remaining open recommendations are ready for

review. As a main remedial measure, a **DG EAC internal task force** has been addressing the audit findings and particularly the remaining recommendation on third country transfers where a legally binding mechanism should be formalised in early 2022.

As the main operational objective of international actions is sending participants outside the EU/EEA, this issue regarding data protection and the surrounding legal context has to be resolved to enable these successful operational activities to continue in the 2021-2027 period in full compliance. Based on the detailed risk assessment provided in annex 8, it is not deemed necessary to stop the data transfers.

The overall conclusion of the assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems is 'partially effective' as internal control principle 13 needs major improvements, which could have a significant impact on the assurance.

### **2.1.4 Conclusions on the assurance**

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

The information reported in Section 2.1 is comprehensive and complete as regards the coverage of the budget delegated to the AOD, and information has been reported for all significant budget areas. The reliability of the information is supported by the building blocks of assurance as described in Annex 7 and 8, including supervision and monitoring, independent audits and regular review and assessment.

The true and fair view is supported by the supervisory verification of the error rates calculated by entrusted bodies. The regular reporting on all aspects of the programmes (especially the yearly management declarations) ensures that resources are used for the intended purpose. The programme design, its rules, and its implementation ensure sound financial management, legality and regularity, non-omission of significant information, as well as the other internal control objectives (safeguarding of assets and information; and the prevention, detection and correction of fraud and irregularities).

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

### **2.1.5 Declaration of Assurance**

*I, the undersigned,*

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

In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation, declare that the information contained

in this report gives a true and fair view<sup>28</sup>.

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 the years prior to the year of this declaration.

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

Brussels, 31 March 2022

(Signed)

Themis Christophidou

## **2.2 Modern and efficient administration – other aspects**

### **2.2.1 Human resource management**

In 2021, the Business Correspondent (BC) function was placed at the level of Head of Unit in order to strengthen its strategic role.

A significant achievement in 2021 was the set-up of a local HR strategy and the implementation of a HR Annual Plan; the BC also followed up the development of the corporate HR strategy and organised a local consultation.

In order to optimise the organisational structure of the DG and achieve its political objectives, the BC supervised the limited but effective reorganisation at the beginning of 2021, accompanied by a middle-management mobility exercise; furthermore, as a follow-up of the January 2021 reorganisation, the BC implemented a mini-reorganisation of the sectors in some units.

A major achievement was the completion of a 360-feedback exercise, responding to the strategic priority to focus on managerial excellence. Building on a pilot carried out in 2020, in total 16 out of 20 middle-managers participated. The exercise included individual and group coaching; it was very successful not only for the individual participants but also to create a sense of community among the participants.

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<sup>28</sup>True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG/Executive Agency.

The BC also executed the Learning and Development budget as planned, with only a small under-execution due to the uncertainties caused by the covid-19 pandemic. This affected mostly team events where in-situ events were maximized to the extent possible to maintain team connections. Nevertheless a significant number had to be moved online or postponed to comply with sanitary restrictions.

<b>Objective: DG EAC employs a competent and engaged workforce and contributes to gender equality at all levels of management to effectively deliver on the Commission’s priorities and core business</b>			
<b>Main outputs in 2021:</b>			
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target for 2021</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
First time appointments of <b>female middle managers</b> [SEC(2020)146]	3 new appointments of female middle managers (50% of total middle managers in the DG) (by 2022 as per COM requirement).	By end of 2020, 3 first time appointments of female middle managers have already taken place (COM target has already been achieved)	Achieved
Increase the <b>staff engagement</b> index (66% in Staff Survey 2018)	1% of increase each year	By 2024, 70%	69%
<b>EAC Values pledge</b> for staff and management. Values were voted for and a communication campaign took place in 2020 on intranet and via posters	COVID-19 lockdown had a big impact on the awareness raising level among staff. In 2021, all Senior and Middle Management to put forward actions promoting EAC values.	By end of 2021, 80% of staff to be aware of EAC values and how they are implemented in our DG	Awareness activities still ongoing
360° exercise for middle managers on a voluntary basis to promote <b>managerial excellence</b> and satisfaction survey to assess the 360° exercise	% of middle managers (MM) participating in the exercise.	Q3 2021 at least 50% of middle managers to participate in this exercise	80% have participated in the 2020-21 exercise
	% of positive feedback on the exercise by MM partaking in the exercise and colleagues involved in the 360° process	By Q4 2021, to have 70% positive feedback regarding the value-added of the 360° exercise	Feedback positive pending survey

**2.2.2 Sound financial management**

- automating the processes linked to the transactions
- corporate application E-experts
- Qualified Electronic Signature
- optimising the electronic financial workflows



**Objective:** The authorising officer by delegation has reasonable assurance that resources have been used in accordance with the principles of sound financial management and that cost-effective controls are in place which give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of underlying transactions

**Main outputs in 2021:**

- revision of the electronic workflows one year after their introduction to rectify some inconsistencies, adopt best practices and further standardise them,
- introduction of the Qualified Electronic Signature (QES) which became fully operational in the whole DG as from June 2021,
- delegation of the Legal and Financial Validation of beneficiaries to REA's corporate services and adoption of corporate methodology for Financial Capacity Check (FCC),
- organisation of training sessions for colleagues from the operational units on LEF/BAF (with DG BUDG) and on AOSD duties and ABAC;
- completion of the NA working group discussions on the control framework for the 2021-27,
- development of reporting tools and investment in data quality to facilitate the monitoring of operations with national agencies (Annex II to DataStore Produce, Clearings Data Production, E+ Link Dynamic Reports, ABAC Data Explorer, Daily Trackers),
- development of tools for the follow-up of DG EAC financial transactions (Late Payments & Invoices Tracker, Transactions Plan vs Actual, Workflow Risk Analysis, ABAC Data Explorer),
- inclusion of the procedures monitoring indicators in the monthly strategic dashboard (overview of procedures not started/on-going/closed, overview of on-going procedures per stage 1/2/3 and overview of delayed procedures).

Output	Indicator	Target for 2021	Achieved
Effective controls: Legal and regular transactions	Risk at payment	remains < 2 % of relevant expenditure	Multiannual error rate around 1%
Effective controls: Legal and regular transactions	Estimated risk at closure	remains < 2 % of relevant expenditure	Multiannual error rate around 1%
Efficient controls	Budget execution and / or time-to-pay	Remains >95% of payment appropriations and remains 95% of payments (in value) on time	In line with forecasts
Economical controls	Overall estimated cost of controls	Remains < 10% of funds managed	11,78% for 2021 due to reduction in payments compared to 2020, will revert below 10% from 2022 onwards

## 2.2.3 Fraud risk management

- Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy

**Objective:** The risk of fraud is minimised through the application of effective anti-fraud measures and the implementation of the Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy (CAFS)<sup>29</sup> aimed at the prevention, detection and correction<sup>30</sup> of fraud

### Main outputs in 2021:

Output	Indicator	Target for 2021	Achieved
Verify alignment of the various legal and guidance documents with the updated central guidance in the areas of fraud prevention	% of relevant documents reviewed	100%	Done
Conduct awareness raising exercise for entrusted bodies and present case studies of known fraud cases	Number of webinars	2	Done in context of NA meetings
Evaluate fraud risks and vulnerabilities with regard to spending in emergency situations	Fraud risk assessment	Completion by end 2021 with an action plan	NAs and IABs have assessed no major impact on fraud risk

<sup>29</sup> Communication from the Commission 'Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy: enhanced action to protect the EU budget', COM(2019) 176 of 29 April 2019 – 'the CAFS Communication' – and the accompanying action plan, SWD(2019) 170 – 'the CAFS Action Plan'.

<sup>30</sup> Correction of fraud is an umbrella term, which notably refers to the recovery of amounts unduly spent and to administrative sanctions.

## 2.2.4 Digital transformation and information management

### A. Digital Transformation

#### EAC IT Landscape

The new **EAC IT Landscape** implementing DG EAC's Erasmus + and European Solidarity Corps Programmes has continued to follow the 11 principles of the Digital Strategy and made use of corporate services such as EU Access, EU Login, HERMES/Ares/NomCom records management services to register and store documents, corporate notification services and multilingualism services to simplify the translation process for application forms, as well as tightly integration of reusable components such as, COMPASS corporate for workflow management, EUSurvey, data exchange services for NAs etc.. Following the approved **IT Security Plan** of the EAC IT Landscape (May 2021) in line with the EC IT Security Risk Management Methodology (ITSRM<sup>2</sup>) 54 security measures mitigating identified, out of which 22 (41%) have been fully or partially implemented. All of the above activities represent having implemented 45% of the digital solutions modernisation plan (DSMP) by end 2021.

#### New corporate Stage system (TFM)

DG EAC also continued to integrate digital solutions in the **new corporate Stage systems** (Trainee File Management Module - TFM) and nearly completed the new application submission and selection process (via an off-the shelf product GestMax). This represents having implemented 20% of the digital solutions modernisation plan (DSMP) in the new Stages system. The new Stage system is planned to be integrated into Compass Corporate during 2022.

#### Reporting and data analytics

DG EAC also worked to substantially develop and strengthen its MFF performance reporting and data analytics capabilities, recognising the strategic role of data to maximise the digital potential of the programmes, to modernise core data processes and improve performance (organisational and programme operations) through systematic data-driven monitoring. Efforts went into the upgrading of EAC's integrated data and analytics platform, replacing the legacy data warehouse, and delivering on the implementation of Data Governance, through the work of the Data Management Committee focusing DG-wide efforts, focusing on data governance, data quality projects, performance framework validation, data protection by design.

The practical data integration in a single platform for all EAC programmes across direct and indirect management modes will support all aspects of programmes reporting, from the National Agencies and EAC daily operational monitoring to central services performance reporting, ensuring a full metrics alignment from end to end. In 2021, the platform development focussed on the most urgent features to support the launch of the programmes and delivered key follow-up tools for calls and projects. This newly integrated approach allowed the analysis of projects submitted by the applicant organisations and helped to define the climate posting criteria setup in Abac to report on climate contribution for Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. The platform should be fully operational by the

end of 2022, with about 16 data sources required to cover EAC's programmes, works continues on integration and shifts progressively towards making data more accessible for end users and corporate systems.

## B. Data Protection

- Data Protection Action plan

In the field of Data Protection, a series of activities were carried out, which aimed both at raising awareness for all staff and at broadening and deepening their knowledge of Data Protection. Typical approaches were developed and were offered to different categories of staff, depending on their involvement and responsibilities or accountability.

The DG EAC Data Protection Network, composed of all data controller delegates, business managers, project managers of IT systems processing personal data and at least one colleague from each unit, was set up and had a first meeting, which approached topics of general interest for all EAC units. The scope of this advisory body network is to facilitate the exchange of information, support the DPC in raising awareness throughout the DG and ensure that all Units have access to the basic information on data protection issues.

The category of general awareness raising activities addressed all staff and consisted of the following activities which sought to reach the targets set: brief announcements/flashs in the news section of MyEAC on trainings, latest developments etc., a quiz organised for the Data Protection Day as well as updates in the context of meetings on internal control within DG EAC and with the National Agencies. All these actions aimed to be eye-catching and referred to the Data Protection page on MyEAC, which is regularly updated with data protection topics.

Specific guidance and assistance on different topics (e.g. privacy statements, data subject rights, data breaches) was given to the operational units in DG EAC.

New procedures (on handling data subject rights and on dealing with personal data breaches) were adopted by DSC and communicated to DG EAC units.

All existent data protection records were updated at the request of DPO and new ones were created for new processing activities (i.e. like the ones linked with the European Year of Youth).

The update of the inventory of agreements with external processors (including both service contracts and contribution agreements concluded by DG EAC) was validated by DSC and regular updates will take place on a yearly basis.

DG EAC also addressed the recommendations of the IAS following the audit on Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. The goal was to minimise the risks linked to ongoing and future international transfers of personal data, notably by informing all data subjects of the legal situation in which such transfers take place, in order for operations undertaken by the Commission services to comply with EU data protection law. Discussions are ongoing with

the horizontal services (DPO, Legal Service, DG JUST) in order to identify the most appropriate tool that ensures appropriate safeguards for international transfers to third countries.

<b>Objective:</b> DG EAC targets maximising staff awareness of data protection rules and practices in order to guarantee compliance with Data Protection Regulation and Action Plan			
<b>Main outputs in 2021: Staff awareness activities</b>			
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target for 2021</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Awareness raising publications (news flashes, announcements, etc.)	Number of publications	20	8 news items
General and topical trainings, quizzes	Attendance or number and quality of replies	60% (DG EAC staff involved in different awareness raising activities)	Quiz: 47 replies  Data Protection Network meeting: 22 participants (representation from all Units)  News: Open to all colleagues through EAC intranet

### C. Knowledge Management

<b>Objective:</b> DG EAC targets using innovative, trusted digital solutions for better policy-shaping, information management and administrative processes to forge a truly digitally transformed, user-focused and data-driven Commission			
<b>Main outputs in 2021: Digital transformation and information management</b>			
<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target for 2021</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Implementation of the Single Entry Point	% of IT Modules accessible via Single Entry Point	90%	Achieved
Implementation of Compass Corporate workflows	Number of workflows fully automated per business process	90%	Achieved
Implementation of EU Access	Number of IT Modules using EU Access	90%	Achieved

Implementation of HERMES/ARES for Records' management	Number of IT Modules using Hermes/Ares	95%	Achieved
Data Analytics & AI modernisation	Rate of realisation of the 20 data modernisation projects 2020-2022	70%	45%
Implementation of Data Governance	Minimum percentage of DG EAC key data assets for which corporate principles for data governance have been implemented	20%	20%

### 2.2.5 Sound environmental management

For 2021, DG EAC had planned to carry out two activities (switching off the lights, advertising alternative transportation) initially scheduled for 2020, as they had been postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis. As the crisis continued throughout 2021 and is still ongoing, it is expected that this action will be carried out during Q2/Q3 2022 when more people will be back in the office. For increasing awareness on environmental information, DG EAC has published the information received from the Commission wide EMAS group on EAC's Intranet.

DG EAC engaged in several clean energy efficiency activities. DG EAC followed one of the key principles for the clean energy transition in the Green Deal, (which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by prioritizing energy efficiency, and improving the energy performance of buildings) by turning off the lights and heating in the Directorate's building during the holidays. In addition, in 2021 there were more than 12 news items that promoted green initiatives and events in DG EAC's intranet, including various articles with suggestions on green activities inside and outside the workplace.

**Objective:** DG EAC takes full account of its environmental impact in all its actions and actively promotes measures to reduce the related day-to-day impact of the administration and its work account of its environmental impact in all its actions and actively promotes measures to reduce the related day-to-day impact of the administration and its work

#### Main results and outputs in 2021: Sound environmental management

Output	Indicator	Target for 2021	Achieved
Communication on switching off the lights	One publication on EAC intranet	Q3 2021	Postponed to 2022
Advertise on alternative transportation	One publication on EAC intranet	Q2 2021	Postponed to 2022
Inform on possible uses of qualified electronic signature (QES)	One publication on EAC intranet	Q4 2021	Done
Increase awareness about environmental information	One publication on EAC intranet	Q1 2021	Done Feb/March 2022