



Annual Activity Report 2023

EUROPEAN EDUCATION AND CULTURE
EXECUTIVE AGENCY

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EACEA IN BRIEF



EACEA's mission is to fund and support European projects connecting people and cultures, and reaching out to the world.

Working together in education, culture, media, solidarity, sport, youth, citizenship and values, we foster innovation through the exchange of knowledge, ideas and skills in a spirit of cross-border cooperation and mutual respect.

We strive to provide excellent programme management and high quality service through transparent and objective procedures, showing Europe at its best.

European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) is an Executive Agency of the European Commission whose goal is to empower citizens and civil society. EACEA's mandate for the 2021-2027 MFF ⁽¹⁾ comprises a broad portfolio of programmes ⁽²⁾ and the ambitious task of bringing the Commission's policies to life.

EACEA is governed by a Steering Committee ⁽³⁾ and operates under the supervision of six 'parent' Directorates-General (EAC, CNECT, JUST, INTPA, NEAR and EMPL). It contributes to the implementation of the [specific political priorities of the European Commission](#) in line with the parent DGs' [Strategic plans 2020-2024](#). The Agency has its own legal identity and is entrusted with its own operating budget (EUR 63.2 million ⁽⁴⁾ in 2023) financed by the EU General Budget. The Director of EACEA is the Authorising Officer (AO) and has overall responsibility for implementing EACEA's budget, in accordance with the principles of sound financial management ⁽⁵⁾.

In the current challenging geopolitical context, EACEA remains steadfast in managing the funding of important Commission's policies, adapting flexibly to new priorities and continuing to support its beneficiaries. In 2023 EACEA was entrusted with operational appropriations for EUR 1.6 billion ⁽⁶⁾, managed 67 calls and monitored a portfolio of around 8 000 running projects ⁽⁷⁾.

In 2023, the Agency fulfilled its mission thanks to the dedication of its 511 staff members, whether by supporting educational, youth and sport developments, safeguarding Europe's cultural heritage, promoting open and democratic society, or strengthening solidarity.

⁽¹⁾ Multiannual financial framework.

⁽²⁾ As described in the Commission Decision C(2022)5057 repealing Decision C(2021)951 and as amended by C(2022)9296 and C(2023)4617, EACEA programmes are: Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV), European Solidarity Corps, Neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instrument (NDICI) – part of it being Intra Africa Academic Mobility -, Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA III), Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions in the area of education, youth, sport, culture and media.

⁽³⁾ C(2021)2630 of 20 April 2021.

⁽⁴⁾ According to the 2023 initial Budget - Commitment appropriations EUR-27.

⁽⁵⁾ As defined in the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Union

⁽⁶⁾ According to the 2023 work programmes of the programmes

⁽⁷⁾ From which less than 16% represent legacy projects.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual activity report is a management report of the Director of EACEA to the College of Commissioners. Annual activity reports are the main instrument of management accountability within the Commission and constitute the basis on which the College takes political responsibility for the decisions it takes as well as for the coordinating, executive and management functions it exercises, as laid down in the Treaties ⁽⁸⁾.

A. Implementation of the Agency's Annual Work programme - Highlights of the year (executive summary of section 1)

In the current geopolitical landscape, the European Union values stated in Article 2 of the Treaty are at the very heart of European policies. By managing programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme, Intra-Africa Academic Mobility, the European Solidarity Corps and Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PPPAs) in the field of education, youth, sport, culture and media, EACEA directly contributes to implementing the European Commission's priorities. In 2023, EACEA contributed mainly ⁽⁹⁾ to the following European Commission priorities:



The Agency achieved a good overall performance in the implementation of the delegated programmes and actions and demonstrated a high degree of resilience while facing several challenges: the responsiveness in deploying measures triggered by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; a steep increase in budget volume managed, resulting in a higher ratio of budget execution per capita; an acceleration in phasing out of the legacy programmes. This performance was made possible by the high standard of professionalism and dedication exhibited by the Agency's staff.

The following **key figures illustrate the Agency's performance in 2023**:

⁽⁸⁾ Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

⁽⁹⁾ Furthermore, the Agency contributed to the environmental sustainability and climate goals of the Commission's European Green Deal objective through the activities of the EMAS group (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme – see section 'Sound environmental management' for further details).



To contribute to the European Commission unwavering support for Ukraine, EACEA deployed actions to assist Ukrainian citizens and ensure their continued participation:

- The 2023 Capacity Building in Higher Education selection provided support to a large-scale project to strengthen the digital environment for higher education in Ukraine. The project will develop a high-performance digital ecosystem for Ukraine's universities ensuring continuity in higher education for students enrolled at Ukrainian higher education institutions, also for those who have fled the country or are internally displaced.
- Moreover, as part of the support to the Neighborhood East region, some of the 19 Capacity Building projects involving Ukrainian universities and authorities look into the role of universities in reconstruction and curriculum reform proposals that focus on peace and multilateralism (as cross-cutting elements in studies, development of skills in energy efficiency).
- In European Universities initiative, nearly 25 higher education institutions from Ukraine joined the alliances as associated partners. An extensive promotion campaign for the Capacity Building in Youth action took place in autumn 2023 to facilitate participation of Ukrainian organisations in the upcoming calls 2024.
- In the field of Sport, the winner of the #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards, under the sport and peace category, was the project 'From Ukraine to Portugal' that aimed to help victims of the war build a new life and be included in the host country through community-building and sport activities.
- A new pilot project focused on young migrants within the EU and aimed at enhancing their adaptation skills and well-being by attending sport sessions. The initiative stemmed from the challenges faced by Ukrainian citizens due to Russia's war of aggression. The call for proposals ⁽¹⁰⁾ aimed to support youth and children

⁽¹⁰⁾ PPPA-Sport-2023-EMERGENCY-YOUTH

displaced by humanitarian crises, such as war, facilitating their recovery from trauma, adjustment to new surroundings environments and creating bonds with the temporary hosting communities within the EU.

- In the creative sector, a specific call was launched to support artists and creative industry professionals from Ukraine (Support to Ukrainian displaced people and the Ukrainian Cultural and Creative Sectors). 13 projects involving Ukrainian cultural organisations were selected under the European Cooperation Projects' call and as part of the literary translation call 51 European books will be translated into Ukrainian and 35 Ukrainian books will be translated into 15 European languages.

The Agency has actively participated to the **2023 European Year of Skills** campaign, which aimed at matching people's aspirations and skill sets with opportunities on the job market, particularly within the scope of **green/digital transitions and economic recovery**. The Agency invited the ongoing Erasmus+ skills projects to register and contribute populating the interactive event map on the [European Year of Skills website](#). For the European Vocational Skills Week 2023 (23 to 27 October 2023), the Agency also prepared a **brochure** highlighting a range of Erasmus+ actions that boost job-related skills. The brochure aims to provide insight into skills projects coordinated by EACEA and their impact on making the European Union more competitive and resilient.

Through the implementation of the delegated programmes, the Agency helped boosting the **post-pandemic economic recovery**. Thanks to cooperation projects, circulation of literary works, platforms, pan-European cultural entities and networks managed by the Agency, the Creative Europe programme has supported the recovery and resilience of the cultural and creative sectors in light of the COVID-19 crisis. Erasmus+ has enabled universities to adapt to changing conditions, thriving and contributing to Europe's global role, resilience and recovery.

Projects funded by **Alliances for Innovation** have been contributing to advancing the green transition and addressing climate change challenges, in line with the **European Green Deal** initiative. For example, the project '[TANGO-Circular](#)', aims to provide specialised training to agricultural workers and relevant stakeholders, to enable solutions for a sustainable agricultural waste management and footprint reduction. This project aspires to foster the development of regional eco-systems directly providing a valuable input to the economy.

In March 2023 the Agency adopted a **Feedback to Policy Framework** that establishes Agency-wide principles, practices, and governance to provide Commission policymaking with evidence from the projects, data and analyses under the EACEA remit. Implementation of the Feedback to Policy (F2P) Strategy and of its Action Plan for 2023-2024 has started, in collaboration with the parent DGs. The first Pilot Feedback to Policy Plan focuses on the Digital Transition, including a sub-theme of 'tackling disinformation,' with six concrete activities planned for 2024.

During the reporting period, the Agency developed some additional initiatives to improve its operations:

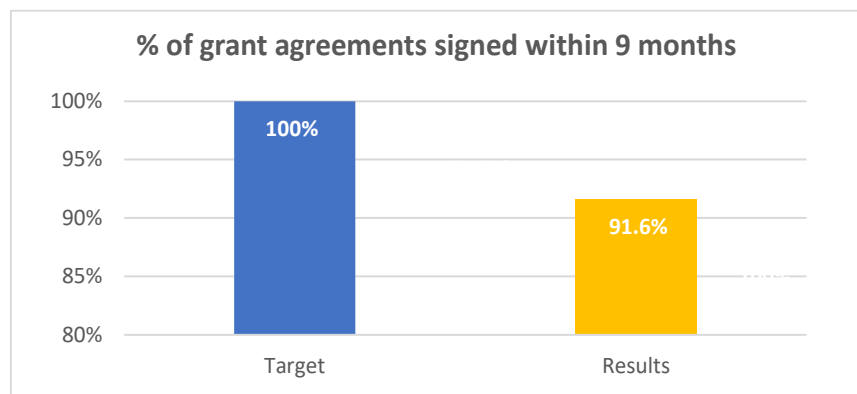
- It launched a continuous improvement exercise across all EACEA units by formalising a multi-annual action plan, regularly reviewed by management.
- the availability of programme-related data increased in 2023, with the new possibility to link topics of the calls to five monitoring trackers ⁽¹¹⁾ that address certain Commission-wide priorities. Additional statistical information will become available in 2024 following the deployment of the programme-specific KPI tools;
- the exercise of the simplification of the eligibility criteria was implemented in 2023 for the 2024 calls;
- preparatory work for the full on-boarding of the PPPAs expected for the implementation of the future calls has been done (model grant agreement and reporting documents became available).

With regard to staff matters, EACEA successfully organised a staff event at the end of 2023 in anticipation of the upcoming move to a new building, which will mark our commitment towards the EMAS ⁽¹²⁾ requirements. The purpose was to engage in conversations about resilience and adaptation to changes with external speakers and stakeholders, while also fostering a stronger sense of belonging and team spirit. A series of workshops has also been deployed, involving all EACEA units as well as its management. The result of the recent staff survey showed a significant increase on staff participation (from 46% in 2021 to 75% in 2023), as well as an increase in staff engagement (from 67% in 2021 to 71% in 2023).

B. Key performance indicators

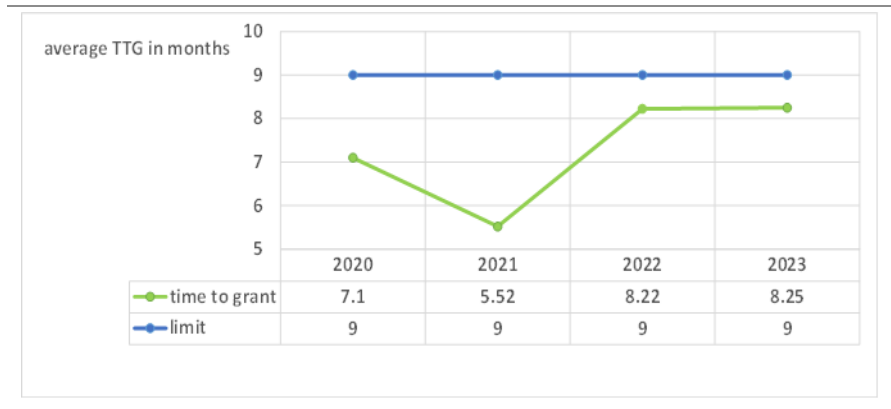
EACEA uses key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the effectiveness of the implementation of its delegated tasks. Since 2021, the Agency has identified one additional key policy-oriented indicator for Erasmus+. The aggregated results for each of the five indicators are presented below. Further details and any deviation from the targets for the first four indicators are explained in section 2.1.2 Efficiency of controls and in Annex 8.

KPI 1 – Time to grant

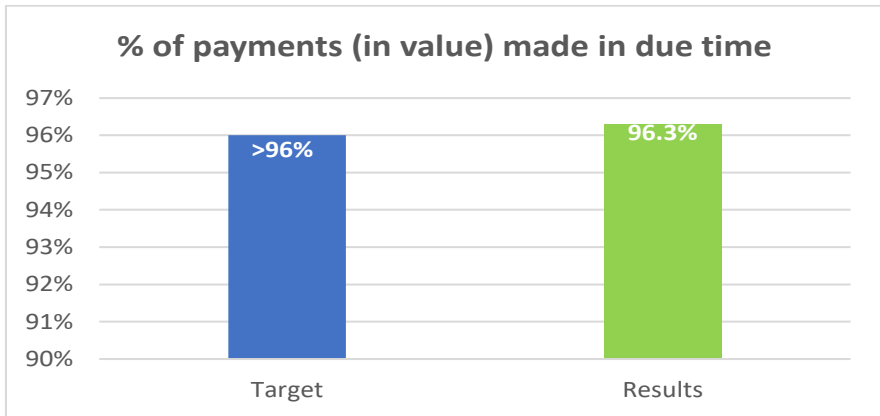


⁽¹¹⁾ Climate Action, Artificial Intelligence for Europe, Biodiversity, Europe fit for the Digital Age, Clean Air

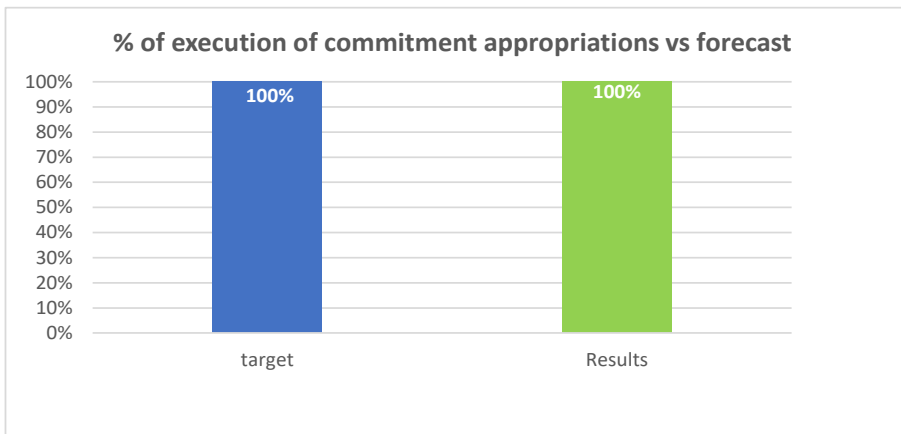
⁽¹²⁾ Environmental Management and Audit Scheme



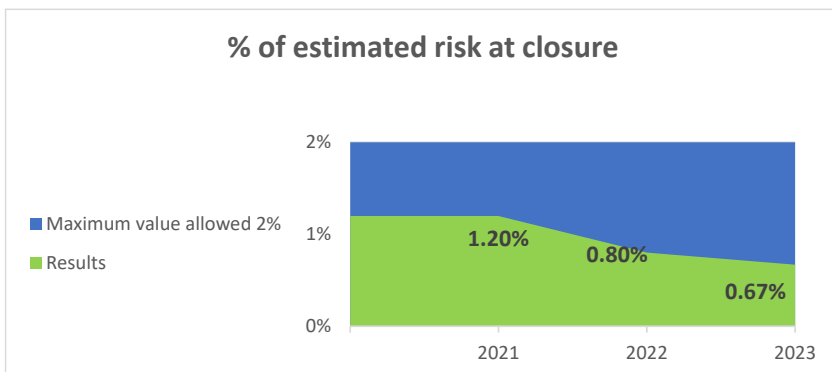
KPI 2 – Time to pay ⁽¹³⁾



KPI 3 – Budget execution ⁽¹⁴⁾



KPI 4 – Estimated risk at closure



⁽¹³⁾ Concerning transactions of the operational budget (FMA: BGUE) in C1, C5 and EO appropriations.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Concerning transactions of the operational budget (FMA: BGUE) in C1, C5 and EO appropriations.

**KPI 5 – Number
of Higher
Education
Institutions
taking part in
the European
University
alliances**



C. Key conclusions on internal control and financial management

In line with the Commission's Internal Control Framework EACEA has assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that is effective and the components and principles are present and functioning as intended.

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

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

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

D. Provision of information to the Commissioners

In the context of the regular meetings during the year between the Director and the parent DGs on management matters, the main elements of this report and assurance declaration, have been brought to the attention of the agency's Steering Committee and to the parent DGs Directors General.

1. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGENCY'S ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME – HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

In 2023, the Agency managed several programmes under two MFFs: the legacy programmes from the 2014-2020 MFF, gradually phasing out as projects concluded (1 897 projects closed during the reporting period), and the current 2021-2027 MFF, for which the Agency is implementing the following key programmes:

- Erasmus+
- Creative Europe
- Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values
- European Solidarity Corps
- Intra-Africa Academic Mobility V
- Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PPPAs) in the fields of education, youth, sport, culture and media

Reliability of information on programme performance

EC corporate processes and systems for programme and financial management are the source of nearly all information about the 2023 performance of the programmes delegated to EACEA. The business process owners of the corporate systems for programme management (eGrants) and financial management (ABAC) establish the procedures that the users (including EACEA) apply. As stated in 'Data governance and data policies at the European Commission', the business owner of each data asset is accountable for its proper implementation of data policies, including data quality safeguards. To ensure that eGrants and ABAC data is well-managed and reliable there are controls on, for example, staff access rights, the authorisation of corrections, and the protection of personal data, as well as on the compliance of beneficiaries' reports with their contractual obligations (via ex-ante checks, risk-based monitoring, and ex-post audits).

For the elements of the PPPA lifecycle that cannot be managed via eGrants, the Agency has officially adopted specific guidance, templates, and workflows that enable the reliable processing and monitoring of these Actions. The key performance data for the PPPA is extracted from the ARES corporate document management system (for example, consortium notifications) or ABAC (for example grant signatures and payments).

Additionally, local EACEA systems oversaw the remaining projects of legacy programmes. In line with the corporate data governance principles, the Agency has Data Owner and Data Steward roles for the legacy programme systems, contributing to an IT Legacy Management Working Group that reports to the senior management of the Agency. Therefore, there is already a robust structure in place to respond if data quality issues arise in the legacy programme systems.

1.1. ERASMUS+



General objective of the European Commission: Promoting our European way of life ⁽¹⁵⁾



Similar to previous years, the Agency delivered a successful information campaign around Erasmus+ calls managed by EACEA, offering applicants information and technical support sessions. Applicants also received guidance on the online application process, answers to FAQs, video tutorials and other support material.

The Agency continued to facilitate the access of newcomers to the programme and joined DG EAC and the European Research Executive Agency (REA) in organising a webinar in Spanish targeting organisations from Latin American and Caribbean countries. So far, more than 2 000 people have followed the event / watched the recording of the webinar ⁽¹⁷⁾.

Following a period of limited on-site events and on-the-spot monitoring visits, the Agency resumed organising face-to-face meetings and project monitoring visits in 2023. These efforts focused on providing reinforced support and monitoring to projects facing challenges and on identifying transferable success stories. Beneficiaries of the programme continued to receive the appropriate guidance for the implementation of their projects and a joint monitoring approach involving EACEA, DG EAC and DG EMPL has been implemented.

Organisations and participants with fewer opportunities are at the heart of Erasmus+. The programme therefore keeps supporting inclusion and diversity measures to provide better access to people with fewer opportunities. To this aim, on 5 April 2023, EACEA adopted an [Inclusion and Diversity Action plan](#). The Action Plan builds on the Commission Implementing Decision - framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27 - adopted in October 2021 ⁽¹⁸⁾, and the implementation guidelines - Erasmus+

⁽¹⁵⁾ More details on the results of each programme are presented in Annex 2

⁽¹⁶⁾ Including 3 for the call for tenders

⁽¹⁷⁾ [Erasmus+ y Acciones Marie Skłodowska-Curie – Webinar para organizaciones, estudiantes e investigadores de Latinoamérica y el Caribe](#)

⁽¹⁸⁾ [Commission Implementing Decision - framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27 | Erasmus+ \(europa.eu\)](#)

and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy ⁽¹⁹⁾. It serves as a practical tool to ensure wider access for people with fewer opportunities through capacity building, awareness raising, communication activities, and support for applicants and beneficiaries throughout the whole project cycle.

During the second semester, the Agency signed **Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with E+ and ESC National Agencies (NAs)**, setting up a formal framework for enhanced cooperation. This collaboration aims to improve the information about Erasmus+ and ESC calls implemented by EACEA, as well as the dissemination and exploitation of projects' results. EACEA has carried out several initiatives, including:

- revision of internal procedures for the communication of Call selection results;
- use of the NAconnECT – content helpdesk ticketing system (EAC SP), which helps improve efficiency in dealing with NAs' questions;
- revision of NAconnECT wiki pages to facilitate the access to centralised calls, results, communication material and other resources developed by EACEA.
- development of NAs dedicated QlikSense Dashboards, facilitating the access to data and information about projects and beneficiaries funded by EACEA;

EACEA implemented activities under the following Erasmus+ actions:

- Key Action 1: Learning Mobility
- Key Action 2: Cooperation among organisations and institutions
- Key Action 3: Support to policy development and cooperation
- Jean-Monnet actions

In 2023, the programme continued the roll-out of the big flagship actions supported in direct management (European Universities, Centres of Vocational Excellence, Erasmus+ Teacher academies, Alliances for Innovation) and delivered outputs under the following specific objectives:

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.

In the field of higher education, the results of the 2023 Erasmus+ European Universities call were announced on 3 July 2023. The 50 existing alliances, selected in 2022 and 2023, involve more than 430 higher education institutions in 35 countries, including all EU Member States, Iceland, the Republic of North-Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, and Türkiye, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. In 2023, the European Universities initiative expanded to include higher education institutions from the Western Balkans countries not associated to the programme. In autumn 2023, the 2024 Erasmus+ call for proposals for European Universities was launched, aiming to expand to at least 60 European Universities' alliances with more than 500 universities by mid-2024.

⁽¹⁹⁾ [Implementation guidelines - Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy | Erasmus+ \(europa.eu\)](#)

With the purpose to build synergies with other EU investment programmes, like the European Social Fund, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, the award of the Seal of Excellence was piloted in 2023. Nine European Universities alliances received a Seal of excellence certificate attesting the high quality of these proposals. These proposals are recommended for funding by other funding schemes.

In her State of the Union 2023 letter of intent, President von der Leyen highlighted a Blueprint for the joint European degree as a key priority for 2024. To this end, ten pilot projects funded under the 2022 call on European policy experimentation in higher education, involving 90 higher education institutions, are exploring new forms of transnational cooperation between higher education institutions. Six of these projects, encompassing over 60 higher education institutions from across Europe, are testing a joint European degree label to provide recommendations towards a joint European degree as a full qualification in the national frameworks. The remaining four projects allow alliances of higher education institutions, such as 'the European Universities', to test new forms of cooperation, such as a possible European legal status for European Universities' Alliances.

A two-day conference "Boosting the potential of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes" held in Brussels on 30 November and 1 December, gathered 260 participants. One of the topics was to present and discuss the outcomes of [a new report about Joint Degrees and Erasmus Mundus](#) and to seek synergies between the Joint Degrees and the European Degree initiative. Moreover, during the conference an [Erasmus Mundus platform](#) was launched for exchanges and networking within the Erasmus Mundus community, following the establishment of the 'Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative' (EMSI) service contract managed by EACEA. EMSI provides support to Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's consortia with the organisation of events and study visits, publication of studies and the above mentioned platform.

A new project funded by Erasmus Mundus Joint Master is the Service Design Strategies and Innovations (SDSI) implemented by the Art Academy of Latvia (Latvia), the University of Lapland (Finland) and the Estonian Academy of Arts (Estonia). The programme is committed to boosting a dynamic learning environment that combines theoretical rigour with practical applications. Through an interdisciplinary curriculum, students explore the intersection of design thinking, strategic management, and cutting-edge technologies, gaining comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in delivering innovative services. In its first edition 35 students participate.

The network of Erasmus+ National Focal Points (ENFPs) was successfully launched as an essential component and support structure in the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme. The ENFPs provide information and on-the-ground advice to potential applicants and beneficiaries in more than 70 third countries not associated by the Erasmus+ Programme. Among the activities organised in 2023, the most important ones were the Regional Erasmus+ Weeks that took place in all regions covered by the ENFPs, combining a regional ENFP gathering and training with cluster meeting and contact-making seminar. The events were marked by a good collaboration of EACEA with DG EAC and other Commission services such as DG INTPA and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Jean Monnet Actions have fostered international dialogue and supported policymakers at both national and international levels by connecting academics, researchers and policymakers. An example of a funded action is the 'Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence: EU External Actions in the contested global order – (in)coherence, (dis)continuity, resilience (EU EX/ACT)' which aims to enhance understanding of the European Union's role in international politics; [a dedicated website](#) has been created to engaged audience of the academic community.

Expanding the Jean Monnet activities to schools in Europe has presented some challenges, particularly due to the lengthy and complex legal entity validation process for public schools. To address this issue, the Agency and DG EAC worked together on possible solutions. Following guidance from Commission's central services, they will seek a proactive role of E+ Programme Committee members, in support to schools applying for E+ grant.

The Policy experimentation action under Erasmus+ aims at supporting evidence-informed policy by identifying and developing innovative (policy) approaches that have the potential of becoming mainstreamed. A call for proposals under the current Erasmus+ Programme (Key Action 3) was published in November 2023 which covers a whole spectrum of sectors and topics in the Education and Training area ⁽²⁰⁾. As for the flagship action 'Alliances for Innovation' following the call 2023 within Lot 1 'Alliances for Education and Enterprises' 32 proposals were selected for funding and within Lot 2 'Alliances for sectoral cooperation on skills' 5 proposals were selected for funding.

An important aspect of Erasmus+ is the **digital transformation**, focusing on the development of digital skills and competences. The Programme continued supporting the implementation of the Digital Education Action plan, with the European Digital Education Hub, the European School Education Platform (ESEP), the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE), as well as the Online Language Support (OLS).

Under the successful European Digital Education Hub, a dedicated Higher Education Interoperability workgroup was set up with the objective to co-develop a draft Higher Education Interoperability Framework, encompassing practical guidelines for implementation, maintenance and governance.

Moreover, on 16 November, the activities of the European Higher Education Sector Observatory kicked-off following the signature of the service contract. Its primary objective is to monitor the implementation of the European Strategy for Universities and to provide evidence on the institutional transformation progress across the EU.

The EPAL community contributed to the European Year of Skills through focusing on themes about skills development, learning communities and creativity and culture for social cohesion. The Agency published the relevant [community Storybook for 2023](#).

The OLS continued to expand its offer in 2023 and now provides courses for 29 languages at level A1 & A2 open to the public, plus 5 languages at level B1 & B2 for mobility

⁽²⁰⁾ Higher education, digital education, school education, vocational education and training, micro-credentials, adult education.

participants. In addition, a series of specialist Vocational Education & Training (VET) courses have been added with profession specific vocabulary. Since the launch of the OLS in July 2022, nearly 500 000 placement tests have been taken.

A project funded under Capacity Building in Higher Education that promotes the digital transformation in Southeast Asia, is the DX.SEA project. It involves 11 universities from Europe and Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, Cambodia, and Laos, with a focus on overcoming the impact of COVID-19 on education, enhancing digital competences, and improving digital education delivery.

In terms of **policy analysis and policy support**, the Agency delivered the following Eurydice reports throughout 2023:

[Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe – 2023 edition](#). The report contributes to the monitoring of policy developments in the field of language teaching in European schools. It outlines the main education policies related to the teaching of languages in schools in 39 European education systems.

[Mobility Scoreboard: Higher education background report – 2022/2023](#). The purpose of the report is to monitor progress made by European countries in promoting, and removing obstacles to, learning mobility.

[Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe](#). The report investigates existing national policies and measures in 39 European education systems that promote learners' access to quality, inclusive, mainstream education. It focuses on learners who are most likely to experience disadvantage and/or discrimination in schools. The report fed into the European Education Area (EEA) midterm evaluation and was launched and presented at the EEA midterm review event on 10 October 2023 in Brussels.

The above-mentioned reports were used in the DG EAC's flagship publication 'Education and Training Monitor 2023'. The Agency also worked for the publication of specific facts and figures ⁽²¹⁾ which are updated on regular basis and present highly focused comparative analysis and/or information on the specific topic they are addressing.

Part of the Eurydice products are being moved online for enhanced accessibility of the data, for example [Data and Visuals](#) and the [Mobility Scoreboard](#).

Specific objective 5.2 - Vocational education and training effectively addresses the labour market needs and prepares people for the green and digital transition.

Erasmus+ is the main source of EU funding that contributes to achieving the ambitious targets set out in the European Skills Agenda. The number of projects monitored in 2023 under actions dealing with skills and innovation showed a significant increase of 36% compared to 2022, with budgetary increase of 28% compared to 2022. The Blueprint for

⁽²¹⁾ Teachers' and school heads' salaries and allowances in Europe – 2021/2022, The structure of the European education systems 2023/2024: schematic diagrams, Compulsory education in Europe 2023/2024, The organisation of the academic year in Europe – 2023/2024, Recommended annual instruction time in full-time compulsory education in Europe – 2022/2023

Sectoral Cooperation on Skills, the Centres of Vocational Excellence, the European Policy Networks and the Teacher Academies regularly present flash reports summarising the progress achieved, with a focus on dissemination and exploitation strategy.

On 7 March 2023, to further enhance the professional development opportunities of teachers and the attractiveness of teachers' profession, 16 new Erasmus+ Teacher Academies were announced. They add up to the 11 projects funded in 2022 under the first call for proposals meeting the target of creating 25 Erasmus+ Teacher Academies earlier than 2025.

Efforts have been made to promote the call for Centres for Vocational Excellence (CoVE) with a factsheet and an online info session organised in January 2023, which resulted in receiving 109 applications (44% increase compared to 2022). 15 projects have been selected for funding, exceeding the target (13). There are 30 countries involved in the selected projects, including 26 Member States and third countries associated to the programme, as well as four countries not associated to the programme, including Ukraine. 410 organisations are involved in the projects, among which approximately a third are VET organisations. Their funding will allow the development of transnational networks of Centres of Vocational Excellence contributing to innovation, sustainable development and smart specialisation strategies. The sectors covered in the projects proposed for funding are diverse and within industrial ecosystems with a high growth and innovation potential.

Finally, the Agency continues to support the Europass network, promoting the European Commission's online services for the learning and career development of EU citizens.

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.

In the field of youth, the Agency continued to implement the work programme through calls for proposals addressing youth and youth policies based on the 2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy. These calls saw increased response rates in 2023. The youth actions also target activities related to the 2024 European Parliament elections, to the participation of young people in the democratic processes and to the legacy of the 2022 European Year of Youth.

The Agency is pursuing its action on Capacity Building in the Youth field promoting cooperation with the Western Balkans and Southern Mediterranean countries. The 2024 Call budget is increased to include Eastern partnership countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The emphasis is on improving the capacity of youth organisations in these regions. The action Civil Society Cooperation offers financial support to European youth organisations in the form of operating grants. Since 2023, this call benefitted from a significantly increased budget allocation.

Since 2022, the Agency has shared the responsibility for the DiscoverEU action with DG EAC. More than 1 million youngsters have applied for the 284 000 travel passes available over eight application rounds since 2018. The two rounds of calls in 2023 continued to be

highly successful with increasing number of applicants (nearly 290 000 applicants vis-à-vis around 70 000 available travel passes). The programme offers inspiration for different travel routes in line with various policy priorities (green, culture, digital, etc.) and this year, for the first time, the programme offered the New European Bauhaus route, which takes the participants through innovative and forward-thinking cities. Young participants can join the DiscoverEU community through social media.

[New online comparative maps](#) have been posted on the Youth Wiki's website, providing updated information in the areas of Education and Training, Employment and Entrepreneurship and Youth Work. Their objective is to present an overview of the policies and initiatives existing in the European countries to support young people, in a comparative perspective. The maps are updated regularly and allow the observation of progress across several years.

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.

In 2023, Erasmus+ sport actions gave visibility to the role of sport in society for people's physical and mental health, social inclusion, and well-being. More than ever, European organisations use sport as a constructive way to include people from all kinds of backgrounds in social activities.

Sport projects are supported under four types of actions: cooperation partnerships, small scale partnerships, not-for-profit European sport events as well as capacity building. The 2023 calls for proposals were met with an unprecedented interest, with 1 500 applications submitted by the deadline. Over 320 actions were selected altogether. In particular, the Programme will support 6 capacity building, 22 events, 114 cooperation partnership and 181 small scale partnership projects, focusing on a number of Erasmus+ general as well as sport-specific priorities, with Inclusion and Diversity and Healthy lifestyle for all featuring amongst the most addressed (29% and 24% respectively) followed by Education in and through sport (16%).

Through the small-scale partnerships, the Programme facilitates the participation of less experienced organisations and attracts newcomers. While the actions primarily support sport activities in the Programme countries, the capacity building strand provides an opportunity to foster collaboration with organisations based in the Western Balkans.

The monitoring of projects in the field of sport revealed a generally positive implementation and results that are well in line with the policy objectives for sport. One of the numerous success stories is the small-scale collaborative partnership project 'Therapeutic riding for youth and children with intellectual disabilities (TRYDE)'. The project aimed to bring positive and long-lasting effects on young people, parents and tutors, students, professionals, and experts of the EAI sector (Equine Assisted Therapeutic, Educative, and Leisure Interventions), enhancing – through the Virtual Training Course (VTC) - their know-how in supporting young people with intellectual disabilities to increase their autonomy and social inclusion through sport.

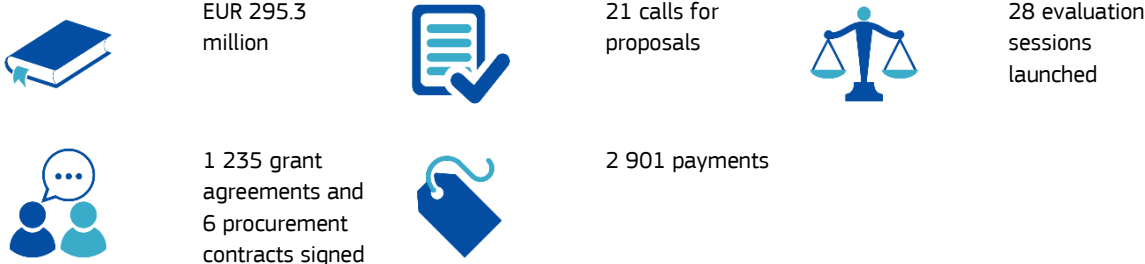
The #BeActive Awards are supporting and celebrating projects and individuals dedicated to promoting sport and physical activity across Europe. Commissioner Iliana Ivanova announced the winners of the 2023 #BeActive Awards at the annual gala in Brussels on 23 November. 12 finalists competed for the grand prize in the four different categories.

The #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards ceremony held during the EU Sport Forum in May in Stockholm. These awards underscore the critical role of sport-related activities in promoting social inclusion and empowerment. For the first time, there was an award category on promoting gender equality in sport, called 'Be Equal'. This category celebrates role models who make gender equality a reality by setting an inspiring example and links with the Report of the High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport. The second category 'Sport for Peace' was also introduced for the first time aiming to reward projects using sport as a vehicle to promote peace and European values through physical activity. The third category 'Breaking Barriers in Sport', rewarded projects that promote inclusion, dialogue and tolerance, in support of disadvantaged groups.

1.2. CREATIVE EUROPE



General objectives of the European Commission: A Europe fit for the Digital Age, Promoting our European way of life



The Creative Europe programme ⁽²²⁾ is the EU’s multiannual programme for supporting the cultural and creative sectors (CCS). Its objective is to safeguard, promote and develop European cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage. It aims to increase the competitiveness of Europe’s cultural and creative sectors and supports independent production and distribution companies in the audio-visual field, and a wide range of operators in the cultural field.

⁽²²⁾ Regulation (EU) 2021/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the Creative Europe programme (2021-2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 (OJ L189 of 28.5.2021, p.34).

In 2023, EACEA carried out activities in the following strands:

- Culture
- MEDIA
- Cross-sectoral

and delivered outputs under the following specific objectives

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

Culture

The steady increase of interest in the Creative Europe Culture calls has been noticed once more this year, with a large number of applications received (over 1 000), with the majority of them for the 2023 call for support to European Cooperation Projects.

The selections in the three new actions in the Culture strand (Music Moves Europe, Perform Europe and European Heritage label) were completed early in 2023. Several Creative Europe Culture-funded projects and beneficiaries were also selected to take part in the New European Bauhaus Festival. Many of these projects show how the Creative Europe Culture strand has, in recent years, served as a platform where beauty, sustainability and inclusion intersect, and where they can be tested and further developed at European level.

EACEA put considerable effort into activities supporting policy at Commission level, notably through the Focus meetings - co-organised with Creative Europe Cultural Networks.

To facilitate meetings between the Commission and the most structured beneficiaries (European Networks of Cultural and Creative Organisations, European Platforms for the promotion of emerging artists, and Pan European Cultural Entities (youth Orchestras) and to stay informed on how current policy priorities are tackled at the projects level, the Agency organised dedicated meetings involving DG EAC and the concerned projects. Two specific priorities were discussed: culture for the planet and artists working conditions.

A mapping of all projects selected under 2021 and 2022 calls for cooperation projects was prepared, structured around themes like green, digital, gender, health and democracy. The mapping will allow to cluster projects to networks, the Commission to have an overview of beneficiaries' interest in different policy priorities and EACEA to monitor these identified themes in a structured way. The Agency organised meetings for grant holders during which the mapping of projects was shared, and the Commission policy priorities presented.

In 2023, the Creative Europe Database was expanded to include the Literary Translation action of the Culture strand. The development of the Database for the inclusion of books and translations has been a collaborative work between EACEA and DG CNECT, representing a significant achievement for the Agency. It streamlines the application process for stakeholders and demonstrates synergies between different strands of the programme as well as between Commission services.

Lastly, the Agency prepared a brochure on support to creative sectors in Ukraine as well as other brochures on cultural heritage projects financed from 2018, on literary translation 2021-2022 projects and on programmes' support to the book sector 2021-2023.

Specific objective 6: A modern, open and pluralistic society in the digital age where online disinformation is countered and diverse cultural content is available to all Europeans.

MEDIA

The success of Creative Europe MEDIA was highlighted once again with the selection of MEDIA-supported films at the 73rd edition of the Berlin Film Festival and the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival that took place in February and in May. A total of 13 MEDIA-supported films were presented in different sections of the Berlinale, including eight films supported through Development. Four films co-funded by the MEDIA strand were screened during the Cannes Film Festival in its two parallel competitions: the Director's Fortnight (La Quinzaine des Réalisateurs) and La Semaine de la Critique. The Palme d'Or winner 'Anatomie d'une chute', which also won 4 European Film Awards, was supported for its distribution in 24 European countries.

The number of submitted proposals has increased for the MEDIA strand, in 2023. While the figures remained stable for few actions, the number of applications has increased in many actions compared to the previous year. The European Mini-Slate development stands out, as this action, created in 2021 to address the level playing field question, has continued to be successful among production companies of low production capacities countries. The number of proposals has increased from 75 in 2022 to 122 in 2023, with a good overall quality allowing to select 40 projects.

The tender, managed by the Agency, continues to ensure that the MEDIA stands are present at the major trade events in the audiovisual sector, such as the film markets in Berlin and Cannes. This year, the stand at the Cannes Marché Du Film hosted around 256 participants active in the audiovisual sector, who came from 25 different countries. This shows that participation is back to pre-Covid levels.

For the first time, a MEDIA umbrella stand was present during Gamescom in Cologne, the biggest event for Video Games professionals in Europe. The stand was organised within the relevant framework procurement contract and hosted 65 companies from 17 different European countries which could benefit from the venues and facilities of the stand in order to hold their business meetings. This new service confirms the trend, supported by the parent DG, of opening to innovative works and sectors.

Cross-sectoral

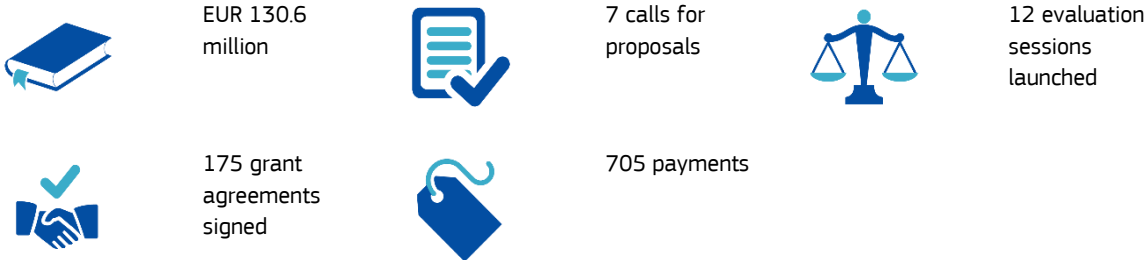
The new calls for proposals of the Cross Sectoral strand have continued to attract interest from stakeholders, with an overall increase of 42% of submitted proposals. The Media Literacy call was particularly popular, number of applications has more than doubled in comparison to the previous year, leading to a very competitive selection and consequent low success rate.

The Creative Europe Desks have continued to play a key role by organising information activities to present the Creative Europe programme’s activities in their countries. The Agency held an intensive series of workshops with them, focusing on the calls launched under the 2023 Work Programme and specifically the new features of the annual calls.

1.3. CITIZENS, EQUALITY RIGHTS AND VALUES



General objective of the European Commission: A new push for European democracy



The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme promotes EU citizenship and EU common values, and enhances citizens’ participation in EU democratic life. CERV brings together the former Rights, Equality and Citizenship and Europe for Citizens programmes. According to its mandate, and in cooperation with DG JUST, the Agency implements activities under the following strands:

- Citizens’ engagement and participation;
- Union values.

In 2023, EACEA delivered outputs under the following specific objective

Specific objective 3: Improved framework to protect democracy in the European Union.

With a substantial budget increase since its launch in 2021, the programme continues to support civil society organisations active at local, regional, national and transnational level in promoting EU values and rights, thereby strengthening respect for the rule of law and contributing to the construction of a more democratic European Union.

Throughout the reporting period, the Agency has consistently and systematically supported project beneficiaries and encouraged potential applicants to participate in future calls for proposals.

An example of a successful project is the EUHRENET (European Human Rights Network of Towns), funded under the Call Networks of Town (23). The main goal of EUHRENET was to integrate the human rights standards, as enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, in local governance. The project developed a set of policy recommendations on how to adopt human rights as a guiding norm at local level involving policy makers, policy officers and civil society members representing 12 EU countries.

Information sessions and awareness-raising activities were organised with a good response rate and high level of attendance. During these events, the Agency presented the funding opportunities available and provided hands-on guidance, while reaching out to potential new applicants. Information sessions on the CERV calls were attended by more than 1 500 participants. All calls for proposals experienced a significant increase in demand, with over 1 500 applications received from stakeholders. The National Contact Points also received intensive trainings on all CERV calls in 2023 and continued their support in promoting the CERV programme.

For the 4-year framework partnership agreements, all 73 beneficiaries applied by the deadline of 11 May and 72 were awarded a grant. These partnership agreements support European networks, civil society organisations active at EU level and European think tanks in the areas of Union values. Framework partners qualifying as European networks benefit from the re-granting scheme by giving the financial support to their member organisations. The annual meeting of the framework partners took place on 18-19 October in the framework of the CERV civil dialogue group.

Under the Union Values call, a risk monitoring strategy and internal monitoring systems were put in place and implemented for the projects receiving financial support to third parties. Network of towns and town twinning calls continued promoting EU values at local and regional levels, covering different topics including green deal, new European Bauhaus, EU integration and climate change priorities, amongst others.

The EU Charter on fundamental rights (Litigation) call, launched for the second time in 2023, generated significant interest with a tripled number of applications, thus ensuring the budget consumption of the call, which had been increased.

Finally, it is worth noting that nearly all legacy files under the previous Europe for Citizens' programme have been closed.

1.4. EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS



(23) CERV-2021-CITIZENS-TOWN-NT

General objective of the European Commission: Promoting our European way of life



EUR 16.9 million



2 calls for proposals



4 evaluation sessions launched



28 grant agreements and 5 procurement contracts signed



110 ⁽²⁴⁾ payments

The European Solidarity Corps ('the Corps') aims to strengthen the engagement of young people and organisations to volunteer for accessible and high-quality solidarity activities. The programme helps strengthen cohesion, solidarity and democracy in Europe and abroad and to address societal and humanitarian challenges on the ground, with a particular focus on promoting social inclusion.

In 2023, EACEA implemented and managed actions and measures in the following fields:

- Volunteering
- Quality and support measures

and delivered outputs under the following specific objective.

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.

For the Volunteering Teams in High Priority Areas (VTHPA) call, the selection results show an increase in the number of proposals compared to previous years (43 in 2023 vs 27 in 2022). The applications are geographically balanced and address both priority areas (relief for people fleeing armed conflicts and other victims of natural or man-made disasters, and prevention, promotion and support in the field of health). In 2023, a total of 21 projects were selected for funding with an increased budget.

148 Quality Labels for Humanitarian Aid Volunteering have been awarded during the period 2021 to 2023. The highest number of Quality Label holders are located in Italy, Spain and Turkey (support organisations in programme countries) and in Latin America (host organisations in third countries). The Quality Label certifies that an organisation is able to carry out high quality solidarity activities in compliance with the principles, objectives and requirements of the action 'European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps'. Under the 2023 call, the number of proposals doubled in comparison to 2022 and 14 projects were selected for funding compared to 11 in 2022.

⁽²⁴⁾ Including 12 for of the EU Aid Volunteers legacy programme.

In November, the Agency held a monitoring meeting for the first cohort of Humanitarian Aid Volunteering projects of the current MFF. The meeting brought together all projects with representatives from both host and support organisations, for an intensive and highly interactive full-day event. Beyond the traditional agenda related to the project and grant life cycle, the meeting also offered the opportunity to address the specific features of Humanitarian Aid Volunteering, such as the mandatory training of candidate volunteers, the primary worldwide insurance coverage for volunteers and the European Youth Portal that connects trained candidate volunteers with projects publishing volunteering vacancies.

The launch of the training in humanitarian aid volunteering was successful and around 800 young people followed it. In reply to surveys, participants confirm their satisfaction with the quality of the courses and the services provided.

Following the migration of the General Online Training (GOT) courses to the [EU Academy platform](#), the number of young people accessing GOT and the Youth Talks has been steadily increasing. To improve the performance in EU Academy, EACEA has been continuing cooperation with a service provider for updates and maintenance of the courses. EACEA presented GOT in its new environment during a webinar with the National Agencies. Additionally, EACEA collaborated with DG EAC to promote the European Solidarity Corps at the Ukraine village during the #EuropeDay open-doors event in Brussels. Since 2023, the awarding of the grant to the designated beneficiary European Youth Card Association (EYCA) has been delegated to EACEA.

1.5. INTRA-AFRICA ACADEMIC MOBILITY V



General objective of the European Commission: A stronger Europe in the world

	EUR 27.5 million ⁽²⁵⁾		1 call for proposals		1 evaluation session launched
	15 grant agreements		77 payments		

The newly launched Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme (MOBAF) is the EU’s programme to encourage international learning mobility across the African continent by providing support for consortia of African Higher Education Institutions and scholarship opportunities for African trainees, students and staff. By building on its successful past experience, the new Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme (2022-2027) aims to contribute to the

⁽²⁵⁾ C8 credits transferred from the parent DG

economic, social and human development of Africa by improving the skills and competences of individuals in different areas, in particular those linked to climate change and green transitioning. Beyond supporting mobility flows, the new scheme intends to build up the capacities of the African Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), exchange practice among institutions and exploit the expertise of the EU partner universities.

In 2023, EACEA delivered outputs under the following specific objective:

Specific objective 14: Human development for all is improved, in particular for youth, women and girls, and the most marginalised and vulnerable populations.

The Agency implemented the first Intra-Africa call of the current MFF. The call was published on 4 April with a deadline set for 15 June. A total of 127 applications were submitted, underscoring the interest of the African academic community. By the end of 2023, the grant agreements had been finalised. The success of the call is due to an intense communication campaign organised by the Agency: two main online information events attracted around 1 000 participants. In parallel, the Agency’s dedicated team continued to monitor the ongoing projects from the preceding cycle of the programme.

1.6. PILOT PROJECTS AND PREPARATORY ACTIONS



A Pilot Project is an initiative of an experimental nature designed to test the feasibility of an action and its usefulness. They test new policy ideas for which there is no legal base yet. As such, they may be implemented without a basic act, provided that the actions they intend to finance fall within the European Union’s competences. A Preparatory Action – normally the successor of a successful pilot project on the same matter – is designed to prepare new actions, such as EU policies, legislation and programmes.

Since 2021, the Agency has been tasked to launch and manage calls for Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PPAs) in the fields of education, youth, sport, culture and media.

Education, Youth and Sport

The handover to EACEA of the two pilot calls for proposals related to VET was smoothly implemented. Proactive support was provided to the beneficiary consortia and meticulous monitoring was applied to their activities.

The number of applications received for the 2022 calls in the field of sport witnessed an increase of 136% compared to 2021. As the allocated budget remained stable, the selections, which were finalised during the reporting period, became increasingly competitive. Nearly all Member States were represented among the applications received, while the 2022 grants were awarded to beneficiaries established in eight countries and concern the following actions:

- the Preparatory Action (PA) 'Grassroots sport programmes and infrastructure innovation' about supporting a healthy active lifestyle through improving the accessibility of light sport infrastructure, diversifying the offer of sport organisations, expanding and promoting the opportunities for recreational sport, and adapting urban areas for sport practices.
- the Pilot Project 'Sport for people and planet' related to efficient water management and protection in water sports. It supports the adaptation of the carbon handprint in winter sports, fosters environmental awareness among sports people and involves a diverse spectrum of sport fans in climate action and environmental sustainability efforts, including biodiversity preservation in golf infrastructure management.

Additionally, two new calls for proposals were launched with the aim to support activities implemented in the framework of two Pilot Projects: a continuation of 'Sport for people and planet – a new approach on sustainability through sport in Europe' and a new Pilot Project 'Sport supports – emergency sport actions for youth'. Their selection procedures started in Q4 2023 and will be finalised in 2024.

Culture and media

The Pilot Project that has been contracted under the call 'Establishing a European Heritage hub' has commenced its activities. These activities include:

- the organisation of a forum in Venice placing culture and heritage at the heart of climate action;
- the setting up of a small-grant scheme for heritage projects led by civil society;
- the creation and support of the regional hubs in Athens and Krakow. Regional hubs in Lisbon, Venice and Nicosia as well as a hub Liaison office in Kyiv are currently in pipeline.

Several quality projects following the selection for the Preparatory Action 'Writing European' have received their grants. The new call for proposals for 2023 was published and closed with an increased number of submissions, with assessment slated for completion in early 2024.

2. INTERNAL CONTROL AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Assurance is provided on the basis of information on the efficiency and effectiveness of internal control systems and governance processes. The management monitors the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis and carries out an objective examination with internal and external auditors. The results are explicitly documented and reported to the Director. The following reports / documentation have been considered:

- the periodic reports submitted by the Authorising Officers by Sub-Delegation (AOSDs) on implementation progress in their respective areas of responsibilities, including on achievements and internal control in their Unit/Department;
- the contribution of the Risk Management and Internal Control (RMIC) manager, including the results of internal control monitoring and risk assessment at Agency level;
- the register of exceptions and non-compliance events and its corresponding analysis;
- the results of the EACEA 2023 internal control survey;
- the DG BUDG report on the validation of the local systems;
- the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control, the observations and follow-up carried out by the Internal Audit Service (IAS);
- the observations and the recommendations reported by the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

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

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

2.1. Control results

This section reports on the control results used by management to support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives (ICO) ⁽²⁶⁾.

⁽²⁶⁾ 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.

The EACEA’s assurance building is based on a number of control system in place that include the use of defined financial circuits, a structured and systematic reporting (monthly dashboard) allowing for constant monitoring of the budget implementation and of the agency performance against its KPIs, an effective anti-fraud strategy and activity, combined with a relevant correction capacity through a balanced mix of ex-ante and ex-post controls; last not least a regular risk assessment exercise. The effectiveness of these relevant controls systems is periodically assessed and confirmed through AOSD reports to the Director. Any internal control weakness is thereby reported and triggers an action plan and a close follow-up. In addition, the EACEA performs a yearly self-assessment exercise (ICAT) whose results are reported in the AAR and used to identify actions toward targeted improvement objectives.

The EACEA’s assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in annual activity report annex 5. The annual activity report annex 6 outlines the main risks together with the control processes to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the relevant control systems.

EACEA’s 2023 operational and operating budget

In 2023, EACEA processed 8 305 payments under the operational budget and 614 payments under the operating (administrative) budget for a total executed payments respectively equal to EUR 1.323 million and EUR 63 million. In addition, the Agency implemented part of the budget (EUR 4.3 million) allocated to Intra-ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) through the European Development Fund (EDF).

2023 Total Payments execution in MEUR		
	All EACEA Programmes	EDF
Operational Budget	1 323.46	4.33
Operating Budget	63.48	

As for the share of expenditures, grant management represents more than 90% of the total ‘payments made’ while procurements account for 4.9% (2.9% in 2022) and expert payments for 0.7% (0.5% in 2022).

In the reporting year, the Agency implemented actions under the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 programming periods. No payments were executed under the 2007-2013 multiannual financial framework (MFF) in 2023 ⁽²⁷⁾.

⁽²⁷⁾ Only EUR 767.302 prefinancing payment were cleared for recovery.

in MEUR Total Payments 2023 by Programming period	
Programming period 2014-2020	
Erasmus+	182.25
Creative Europe	37.57
Europe for Citizens	5.87
EU Aid Volunteers	1.42
Solidarity Corps	1.25
Programming period 2021-2027	
Erasmus+	695.32
Creative Europe	313.96
CERV	65.22
Solidarity Corps	20.60
TOTAL (without EDF)	1 323.46
EDF	4.33

The 2021-2027 MFF accounts for 83% of payments executed, while the 2014-2020 MFF only accounts for 17% of payments executed. Compared to previous years, the Agency has executed a higher volume of operational payments (in value): 14% more than in 2022.

The budget was implemented, in line with the 2018 Financial Regulation. Specifically, EACEA's assessment for the new reporting requirement is as follows:

- Cases of "confirmation of instructions" (FR art 92.3): none
- Cases of financing not linked to costs (FR art 125.3): none
- Financial Framework Partnerships >4 years (FR art 130.4): none
- Cases of flat-rates >7% for indirect costs (FR art 181.6): none
- Derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity pursuant to Article 193 of the Financial Regulation: 517 cases were reported concerning projects started before the date of signature of the grant agreements (see Annex 7 for details).

2.1.1. Effectiveness of controls

a) Legality and regularity of the transactions

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

1) Control objective

For grant management, which represents the vast majority of expenditures, EACEA has put in place the necessary controls to ensure the legality and regularity of the transactions, which are summarised in a multiannual error rate below the materiality level, in line with the principles illustrated in Annex 5. The benefits of those controls are both quantifiable and non-quantifiable ⁽²⁸⁾ (further details are in Annex 7).

2) Assessment of the control results

Programming period 2014-2020	DER	RER	Reservation?
Erasmus+	0.65%	0.62%	No
Creative Europe	1.06%	1.02%	No
Europe for Citizens	0.90%	0.87%	No
EU Aid Volunteers (only six random audit results available with 0% error rate)	Not yet* available	Not yet available	N/A
Solidarity Corps (no audit results yet available)	Not yet* available	Not yet available	N/A

** Auditable closed projects are hardly available due to the extensions granted during COVID pandemic (both programmes were hardly affected by travel restrictions and Solidarity Corps was also delegated late to EACEA)*

The table illustrates the multiannual detected error rate (DER) and the residual error rate (RER, after *ex post* corrections) for the **2014-2020** programming period, leading to a materiality below the 2% target for all programmes, which contributes to supporting the absence of reservations for 2023. The relevant expenditures under this programming period represent the vast majority of the total EACEA relevant expenditures for 2023, so 2014-2020 projects were still subject to ex-post audit in the reporting year.

As already stated, the **2007-2013** programming period has been completely phased out (no payments were executed only a recovery order was implemented).

Under the current **2021-2027** MFF, the Agency executed 83% of its payments. Nevertheless, more than 90% of their value is represented by pre-financing payments. In other words, in 2023 there are not yet enough closed auditable projects, so no ex-post audit results can be illustrated in terms of detected error rate (DER) and residual error rate (RER) for the current MFF.

⁽²⁸⁾ The main benefits can be summarised as follows:

- compliance with the rules and high-quality selection process, thus addressing the objectives of the work programmes to achieve the highest added value for the EU;
- clarity and legal security both for the beneficiaries and the Agency, for all the selected applications (contracting phase);
- detection of ineligible costs (quantifiable benefit) when analysing the payment requests (monitoring phase) or during ex post audits (ex post controls phase), which normally lead to recovery orders.

3) Overview of EACEA risk profile

EACEA's portfolio consists of segments with a relatively low error rate concerning the 2014-2020 programming period.

The 2021-2027 portfolio remains stable in terms of programmes content, but with a much higher presence of grants based on simplified funding schemes. This element of increased simplification is expected to reduce the errors made by beneficiaries during projects' implementation, paving the way to low DER and RER, following ex post audits.

4) Table (X): Estimated risk at payment and at closure

Based on all the above, EACEA presents in the following Table X an estimation of the risk at payment and risk at closure for the expenditure managed during the reporting year:

Table (X): Estimated risk at payment and at closure (amounts in EUR million)

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

Table X : Estimated risk at payment and at closure (amounts in EUR mios) - for Executive Agencies

DG EACEA	Payments made	Relevant expenditure	Estimated risk (error rate %) at payment		Estimated future corrections and deductions		Estimated risk (error rate %) at closure	
	m EUR	m EUR	m EUR	%	m EUR	%	m EUR	%
Tempus 2007-2013	0.00	0.77	0.01	1.50%	0.00	0.36%	0.01	1.13%
Erasmus+ 2014-2020	173.79	440.79	3.57	0.81%	0.47	0.11%	3.11	0.70%
Creative Europe 2014-2020	37.57	89.66	0.73	0.81%	0.09	0.11%	0.63	0.70%
Europe for Citizens 2014-2020	5.87	13.69	0.11	0.81%	0.01	0.11%	0.10	0.70%
EU Aid Volunteers 2014-2020	1.31	8.68	0.07	0.81%	0.01	0.11%	0.06	0.70%
Solidarity Corps 2014-2020	0.19	1.05	0.01	0.81%	0.00	0.11%	0.01	0.70%
Erasmus+ 2021-2027	645.32	63.44	0.51	0.81%	0.07	0.11%	0.45	0.70%
Creative Europe 2021-2027	308.76	73.10	0.59	0.81%	0.08	0.11%	0.51	0.70%
CERV 2021-2027	64.72	24.86	0.20	0.81%	0.03	0.11%	0.18	0.70%
Solidarity Corps 2021-2027	12.00	0.00	0.00	0.81%	0.00	0.11%	0.00	0.00%
Experts	8.89	8.89	0.04	0.50%	0.00	0.00%	0.04	0.50%
Procurement	65.04	62.62	0.31	0.50%	0.00	0.00%	0.31	0.50%
EDF	4.33	9.66	0.08	0.81%	0.01	0.11%	0.07	0.70%
Sub-total	1 327.79	797.19	6.24	0.78%	0.77	0.10%	5.47	0.69%
operating budget	63.48	63.48	0.32	0.50%	0.00	0.00%	0.32	0.50%
total EA (operational + operating)	1 391.26	860.67	6.56	0.76%	0.77	0.09%	5.79	0.67%

Additional information to be provided by the DGs managing EDF and contributing to and/or managing EUTF (amounts in EUR mios)

DG EACEA	Payments made	Relevant expenditure	Estimated risk (error rate %) at payment		Estimated future corrections and deductions		Estimated risk (error rate %) at closure	
	m EUR	m EUR	m EUR	%	m EUR	%	m EUR	%
Total EDF	4.33	9.66	0.08	0.81%	0.01	0.11%	0.07	0.70%

The estimated overall risk at payment for 2023 expenditure, 0.76%, is the AOD's best conservative estimate of the amount of relevant expenditure during the year, not in conformity with the contractual and regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made. This expenditure will subsequently be subject to ex-post controls and a proportion of the underlying errors will be detected and corrected in subsequent years,

corresponding to the conservatively estimated future corrections for 2023 expenditure ⁽²⁹⁾, 0.09%.

The difference between those two, results in the estimated overall risk at closure ⁽³⁰⁾ 0.67%. This is a decrease compared to 2022 (0.79%) mainly due to a much higher volume of relevant expenditures that were implemented in 2023 (denominator of the ratio).

No audit results were available for the 2021-2027 programming period. Thus, for the calculation of the amount at risk in the current MFF, EACEA prudently estimated an error rate at payment on the relevant expenditures executed in 2023 equal to the average error rate calculated for the 2014-2020 MFF, even though the greater programme simplifications in the current MFF are expected to generate lower error rates.

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

5) Preventive and corrective measures

As regards the corrections carried out in 2023, EACEA has in place an effective mechanism for correcting errors, through ex-ante and ex-post controls, resulting in preventive and corrective measures, amounting to EUR 6.91 million and EUR 0.58 million respectively ⁽³¹⁾. This represents a decrease compared to 2022, with EUR 7.89 million and EUR 1.89 million respectively, which is mostly explained by a number of concurrent factors:

1) with regard to ex-ante controls, the change of methodology introduced by DG BUDG at the end of 2023 stipulates that the Recoveries of the Full Prefinancing Amount should not be qualified as Irregularity;

2) with regard to ex-post controls, the underperformance of the main external contractor recorded in the execution of the Annual Audit Plans 21-22 caused delays in the finalization of reports and consequently the implementation of the audit results beyond the calendar year. However, this does not affect the corrective capacity: the analysis of the Preliminary Audit Reports (PAR) shows potential for corrective capacity in line with previous years.

⁽²⁹⁾ To calculate the overall amount at risk at payment: for the 2014-2020 programming period, the Agency follows a conservative approach. To estimate the average error rate, EACEA uses, as a basis for all programmes, risk-based and random audit results related to that MFF. Furthermore, the Agency has prudently calculated its corrective capacity as 0.11% based on the 2014-2020 results of ex post controls only (ex post audits). The figure (ARC) provided by DG BUDG had to be adjusted as it included corrections made for the 2007-2013 programmes.

⁽³⁰⁾ This is the AOD's best, conservative estimation of the expenditure authorised during the year that would remain not in conformity of applicable regulatory and contractual provisions by the end of implementation of the programme.

⁽³¹⁾ See Annex 3, Table 8

b) Fraud prevention, detection and correction

EACEA has developed and implemented its own anti-fraud strategy since 2012 based on the methodology provided by OLAF. It is updated every three years and was last updated in 2021. Its implementation is being monitored and reported to the management every six months, through the mid-term and annual reports. All necessary actions, except the revision of the anti-fraud procedure, have been implemented. The drafting of the new antifraud strategy is in progress as the outcomes of the implementation of the previous strategy need first to be analysed. Its completion and approval could be expected for the end of 2024.

EACEA also contributed to the revised Commission anti-fraud strategy Action Plan of July 2023. EACEA followed up OLAF's financial recommendations with the following results: 100% of recommendations were implemented.

The results achieved during the year thanks to the anti-fraud measures in place can be summarised as follows:

- i. EACEA reported timely on the implementation of OLAF financial and administrative requirements: The recovery order pending a Court judgement from the previous reporting period has been issued. Three OLAF reports received in 2022-2023 are under implementation which takes time due to the number of projects concerned and successive appeals following the receipt of the pre-information letters. The new OLAF report received at the end of 2023 has been already assessed and two recovery orders are set to be issued in the first quarter of 2024. Over the reporting period, the Agency replied on time to 15 OLAF requests with ten being dismissed. The Agency forwarded three new cases to OLAF, leading to the initiation of three investigations.
- ii. A number of dissemination activities were organised targeting the Agency's staff including: two training sessions on fraud awareness and procedural aspects and on fraud detection, a presentation on anti-fraud was given at three conferences for newcomers and three presentations were made to the Project Officers Network on antifraud topics. Furthermore, six newsletter articles on anti-fraud matters were published, and documents on detection tools, red flags and a leaflet for newcomers were made available on the Agency's updated anti-fraud intranet page.

Efficient cooperation among the six executive agencies and EPPO led to the signature of the working arrangements with EPPO on 11 July 2023. The Agency replied to four requests from EPPO. Several judicial proceedings are still ongoing. All usual precautionary measures continue to be taken (i.e. risk ratio, enforced monitoring, audits). Regular communication with the operational units analysing problematic reports proves beneficial in addressing potential risks and enhancing project monitoring in the different actions and financing schemes.

Corrective measures also continue to be taken, sometimes exceeding OLAF recommendations (termination of grants or participation in awarded grants, audits, legal proceedings).

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

c) Safeguarding of assets and information

The Agency protects its fixed assets and inventory through a sound internal control system which guards against theft or errors and provides reasonable assurance regarding prevention or timely detection of unauthorised acquisition, use or disposal of its assets that could have a material financial effect. The financial assets managed by the Agency consist of pre-financing payments made to the beneficiaries of grants. They are protected by various preventive measures set out in the rules and regulations – mainly financial guarantees and limitations on the amount of the pre-financing payment.

d) Reliability of reporting

EACEA local systems were assessed by DG BUDG providing a clean validation.

2.1.2. Efficiency of controls

Efficiency is key in the 2021-2027 programming period. The funds entrusted to the Agency have increased at a greater proportion than the increase in the Agency's staff (which stayed largely stable compared to 2022). However, thanks to the eGrants corporate grant management system, the Agency can aim at the correct balance between budget volume, staff and process automation to optimise operational efficiency. The key control indicators for grant management (the main operating process for the Agency) are the Time to Grant (TTG), made up of the Time to Inform (TTI) + Time to Contract (TTC), and Time to Pay (TTP).

Time-to-Grant:

According to the Financial Regulation (FR), the Agency has 9 months after the call deadline to sign grants (TTG - Article 194.2 FR). This deadline is split into two sub-periods: time to inform (TTI with a 6-month target) and time to contract (TTC with a 3-month target). In common with the other EU programmes managed in the eGrants system, these deadlines are transposed into numbers of days (TTG: 275 days, TTI: 183 days). The average number of days for the signature of agreements was 251 days. The average number for the TTI was 137 days. Both indicators are below limits.

The TTG performance achieved in 2023 expressed in % of grant agreements signed in 9 months is 91.6%. The table below demonstrates the evolution of the indicator in relation to 2022.

TTG per Year of Last GA Signature - Including PPPAs

Year GA Signature	# GA signed (including reserve list)	# GA signed (TTG)	# GA signed in time	% GA signed in time
2022	3 942	3 913	3 490	89.2%
2023	3 219	3 160	2 895	91.6%

The target of 100% was not reached due to a number of concurrent causes:

- **delays in the validation** process involving a **large number of brand-new beneficiaries**, not yet acquainted with eGrants, **often located in remote regions or included in large consortia**.
- the validation process revealed particularly lengthy and complex for **public schools participating to the Jean Monnet actions**. This required the involvement of national, regional, or local authorities with a negative impact on TTG.
- the **high number of grants** to be signed in the period 2022-2023. Although this increase in numbers was well known and planned, the unforeseen delays in the validation process caused a peak workload in the grant preparation process, which made it more difficult to recover delays. However, this effect was well contained and should fade out gradually.

The mitigating measures put in place by end of 2022 to closely follow up of the validation of new beneficiaries and ensure a smooth grant preparation process are proving effective and limited the impact on TTG. In addition, EACEA undertook action to improve information and communication towards its beneficiaries, in view to increase their reactivity and speed up grant agreement preparation (GAP)

Even tough, delays already cumulated could not be fully recovered, in 2023, **the Agency improved its performance on TTG (from 89.2% in 2022 to 91.6% in 2023)**.

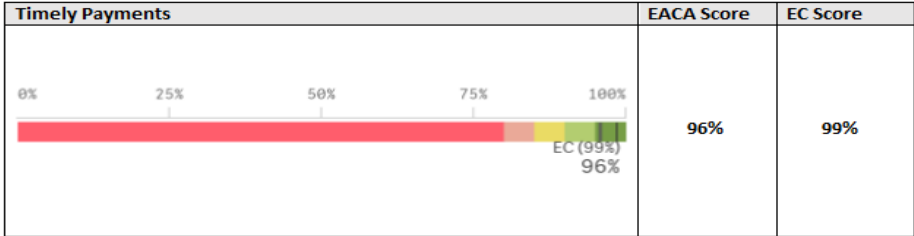
These circumstances confirm that the control system is solid and functions as expected: it detected the negative impact of external factors, it allowed identifying the root causes and led to the implementation of effective actions, mitigating (TTG 91.6%) albeit not fully reversing (TTG target 100%) the final impact on TTG.

Having reached its cruising speed in terms of volume of grants and yearly budget managed, the Agency is now more acquainted with the process and should be able to improve on this KPI over time.

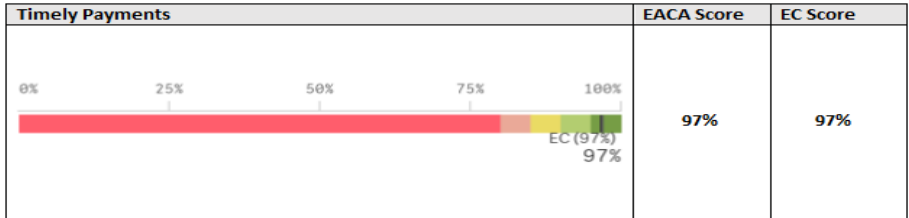
Time-To-Pay (TTP)

The average time-to-pay respects the different deadlines for the different type of payments and more details are provided in Table 6 of Annex 3. As for the timely payments:

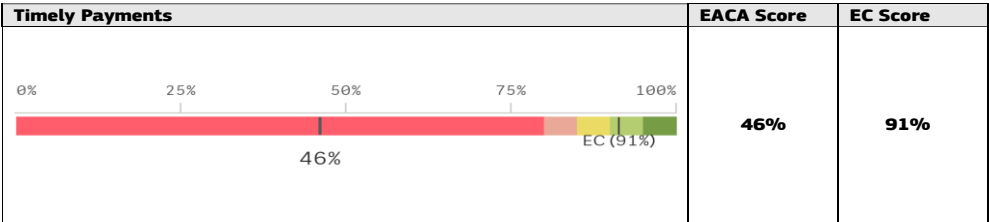
For the payments of the **operational budget**, the results indicate a level of compliance with the payment deadlines of 96.3% (98% in 2022) of the total amount paid on time. **EACEA performance slightly exceeds the target of >96% (in the chart below the result is rounded).**



For the payments of the **operating budget**, the result improved considerably in 2023 compared to the previous year (89%).



For the payments of **EDF** the result shows that 46% of payments in value were paid on time. This is a decrease in comparison with last year’s results (90%). This year’s result corresponds to 14 payments out of 50 not meeting the legal deadlines. These are mostly due to lack of availability of funds (delays in the transfer of the budget form relevant DG to EACEA). Within the 14 late payments, only 6 payments account for 45% of the total amount paid in 2023 for EDF. The projects related to these payments are in the final stage and will be closed soon.



Other indicators relevant to the efficiency of controls: Budget execution in terms of commitments and payments – Operational budget

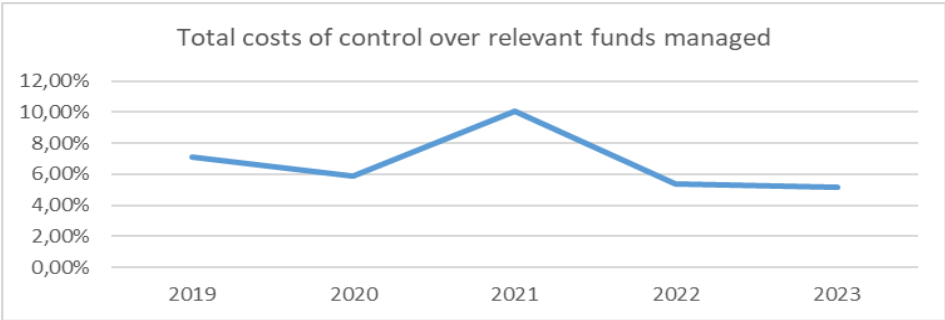
100% of commitment appropriations ⁽³²⁾ were executed vs forecast meeting the target. 100% of payment appropriations ⁽³³⁾ were executed vs forecast exceeding the target of 99%.

⁽³²⁾ C1, C5, E0 credits
⁽³³⁾ C1, C2, C4, C5, E0 credits

2.1.3. Economy of controls

According to Article 36 of the Financial Regulation 2018, economy is - together with effectiveness and efficiency (see above) - a key objective that internal controls should achieve. In 2023 the total costs of controls for grant management are EUR 66.1 million (EUR 60.6 million in 2022, 48.3 million in 2021, EUR 47.5 million in 2020). The increase in 2023 of the total costs of controls, in absolute value, compared to 2022 is largely due to the increase in the average cost of staff (calculated according to corporate guidelines).

The total costs of controls compared to relevant funds managed ⁽³⁴⁾ is 66.1/1.263=**5.2%** (it was 5.4% in 2022, 10.1% in 2021, 5.9% in 2020 and 7.1% in 2019). The improvement in the ratio compared to last year is mainly due to the higher volume of amounts managed by the Agency in 2023. The Agency also monitors the share of operating costs over the operational budget, both figures expressed in terms of payments executed (see picture below). In 2023 this ratio is (1 323.46/63.47) equal to **4.8%** (it was 5.16% in 2022, 10.18% in 2021, 6.33% in 2020 and 6.70% in 2019). Again, the ratio improvement is mainly due to the high volume of payments executed in 2023. In conclusion, the total costs of controls and operating costs have increased this year (see below), in line with the increase of average cost of staff, but the above-mentioned ratios improved due to the high volume of payments executed. In other words, EACEA is reaching cruising speed in the current MFF, thus enabling a more and more economical use of resources, despite the typically small size ⁽³⁵⁾ of (labour intensive) grants to be processed by EACEA staff.



⁽³⁴⁾ Total relevant funds managed are equal to operational payments in 2023 (Including EDF and excluding procurement)

⁽³⁵⁾ The average size of EACEA grants is estimated as approximately equal to EUR 260 000 for 2014-2020 and EUR 290 000 for 2021-2027

Details of the estimated cost related to shared/pooled control activities carried out by DG REA and hosted by DG RTD (Common Implementation Centre including Common Audit Service) for the Research and Innovation family are reported in the annual activity reports of DG REA and DG RTD.

Concerning the benefits of the controls (for details refer to Annex 7), in addition to the quantifiable benefits at each stage (e.g. recoveries from ex post audits), there are several benefits which cannot be quantified, such as the deterrent effect of ex post controls or the beneficial effects of annual information/kick-off meetings with new grant beneficiaries, both reducing the probability of errors, or increasing the potential success of projects.

2.1.4. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

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

2.2. Audit observations and recommendations

This section sets out 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 included, together with an assessment of the likely material impact of the findings on the achievement of the internal control objectives, and therefore on management's assurance.

In 2023 EACEA had no new or overdue critical or very important IAS audit recommendations or recommendations by the ECA relating to the Agency's control systems

European Court of Auditors (ECA)

(1) Operating budget – 2022

ECA Opinion on the audit of the Agency's 2022 annual accounts for

administrative expenditures (reliability of the accounts): in the Court's opinion, the accounts of the Agency for the year ending on 31 December 2022 present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Agency, the results of its operations, its cash flows, and the changes in net assets for the year then ended, in accordance with its Financial Regulation and with accounting rules adopted by the Commission's accounting officer. These are based on internationally accepted accounting standards for the public sector.

Opinion on the legality and the regularity of the transactions underlying the accounts: in the Court's opinion, the transactions underlying the annual accounts for the year are legal and regular in all material respects.

(2) Operational budget – statement of assurance (DAS) 2023

Concerning Statement of Assurance 2022 the Agency received one request in 2023 and this did not lead to any finding. In 2023 the ECA also selected a number of transactions (Erasmus+, Media and Europe for Citizen) for their audit on the Reliability of Accounts 2022. The Court did not identify any findings.

Internal Audit Service (IAS)

(1) Audit engagements

Audit on protection of personal data: The IAS verified the implementation of the action plan of EACEA.

Audit on the ‘preparedness of the management and control systems regarding the implementation of the new programmes (CERV, Justice)’: the IAS completed the audit field work and issued four recommendations for EACEA. An action plan is in place and 2 actions are already submitted to IAS for review. The remaining two actions are to be implemented in 2024.

Audit on ‘the preparedness of the management and control systems for new MFF programmes for the programmes Erasmus +, Creative Europe and European Solidarity Corps’: the IAS completed the audit fieldwork and issued a final report with one recommendation (important). An action plan was submitted for review to the IAS with a deadline in December 2024.

(2) Limited conclusion of the IAS on the state of internal control

The internal control systems in place for the audited processes are effective.

(3) Conclusions

EACEA acknowledges the positive assessment issued by the IAS in its limited opinion as a valuable piece of information concerning its control system.

2.3. Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems

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

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

Management's assessment of the effectiveness of the internal control system has been carried out according to the methodology established in the Implementation Guide of the Internal Control Framework of the Commission, and following the general principles included in the Communication on the Revision of the Internal Control Framework, with the support of all relevant sources of information ⁽³⁶⁾.

EACEA has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and has concluded that:

it is effective and the components and principles are present and functioning well overall, but some improvements are needed as some deficiencies were identified related to full respect of TTG (ICP10). EACEA proactively monitors the indicator with regular follow up on internal and external actors impacting on it. Awareness raising actions are in place vis a vis of the staff, beneficiaries and other services involved in the validation process, to improve its performance and speed up this initial part of the project life cycle.

2.4. Conclusions on the assurance

The assessment given on the effectiveness of controls (Section 2.1.1) refers to all programmes managed by the Agency and gives a comprehensive overview of the budget delegated to the Director of EACEA. It gives a true and fair view of the operations carried out in the reporting year and provides assurance on the use of resources based on the principle of sound financial management and in respect of legality and regularity. The conclusions give, overall, a positive picture. The conclusions of Sections 2.2 on 'Audit observations and recommendations' and 2.3 on the 'Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems' are positive.

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

2.5. Declaration of Assurance

Declaration of Assurance

I, the undersigned,

Director of EACEA

⁽³⁶⁾ Self-assessment, register of exceptions and non-compliance events and any internal control weaknesses identified, results of internal control monitoring criteria and corporate indicators, AOSD reports, risk assessment, EACEA's 2023 internal control survey, programme error rates, relevant audit results (ECA, IAS) and DG BUDG validation of the accounting system of the Agency.

In my capacity as authorising officer for the operating (administrative) budget and authorising officer by delegation for the operational budget

Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view ⁽³⁷⁾.

State that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in this report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of the self-assessment, ex-post controls, the work of the Internal Audit Service and the lessons learnt from the reports of the Court of Auditors for years prior to the year of this declaration.

Confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported here which could harm the interests of EACEA or those of the Commission.

Brussels,

(e-signed)

Sophie BEERNAERTS

⁽³⁷⁾ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG/Executive Agency.

3. MODERNISING THE ADMINISTRATION

3.1. Human resource management

Human resources

The Agency continued to work closely with the parent DGs in a joint effort to ensure increased female representation in middle management positions, aiming to achieve better gender balance. At the end of 2023, the Agency had 2 female Heads of Department (out of 2) and 5 female Heads of Unit (out of 14), representing 44% of the middle management roles. Additionally, 54% of the Deputy Heads of Unit are female (6 out of 11) and 50% of the Agency's Heads of Sector are women (15 out of 30).

In 2023, the Human Resources department (HR) continued to work intensively on selecting and recruiting new staff, both contract and temporary agents, to support the successful delivery of the Commission's objectives by recruiting the best available candidates. To do so, selections were launched through external procedures, but also via the inter-agency job market and internal mobility exercises ⁽³⁸⁾. Overall, 45 new staff members took up duty at the Agency in the reporting period, out of which 30 are contract agents, 10 temporary agents and 5 seconded officials. To successfully on-board this new staff, 3 onboarding sessions were organised in 2023.

The Agency has implemented almost all actions identified with a short-term deadline of the **Inter-Agency HR Strategy 2023-2027** and together with other Executive Agencies has started working for the actions with a mid-term deadline. At the same time, it is participating and organizing a number of corporate initiatives like the Women Talent Programme, Staff Exchange Programme, Job Shadowing, etc.

The EACEA Learning & Development team implemented several well-being initiatives, tackling both the physical and mental pillars (such as Pilates and Meditation sessions, and Mindful Teleworking), and kept promoting and improving its well-being intranet page, to reach out to as many colleagues as possible.

Workplace

In 2023, the focus was on the move to the new building North Light (SB34). In February 2023, EACEA set up the "MOVE Project Team" in preparation for the move. This team consists of representatives from the two departments, the administration, and the Staff Committee. In this context, a workplan has been prepared and the following main actions have been implemented throughout the year:

⁽³⁸⁾ A total of 8 selections were launched (1 external selection and 2 inter-agency job market for temporary agents, as well as 1 external selection and 4 inter-agency job market for contract agents). Additionally, HR managed 23 internal mobility exercises.

- the EACEA on the MOVE - Town Hall meeting took place on 21 April inviting EACEA senior management, DG HR and OIB. The objective was to inform and start involving the staff in the move process. A dedicated intranet section was also set up for this purpose.
- a workshop for managers was organised in June, and some Move Project Team members presented useful information to the Units, providing colleagues the opportunity to voice comments and questions.
- regular guided walks in the Northern Quarter.

The floor plans were agreed with the staff and provided to OIB.

Communication and staff survey

As part of the 2023 internal communication action plan, it was decided the transition to the European Commission's new intranet environment, with the migration of EACEA MyIntracomm. It is set to be completed in early 2024.

The EACEA Staff survey action plan 2022-2023 was fully implemented. Amongst the actions taken in this context, there were the launch of a weekly video debrief of the Management meeting, a renewed package of well-being activities, the development of a mid-term plan for selections, and the strengthening of the mentoring process for newcomers.

In the last corporate Staff Survey launched in November 2023 the EACEA participation has been remarkably high, with a response rate reaching 75% (compared to 46% in 2021); EACEA's Staff engagement has been made available beginning of 2024 and resulted to be 71%.

3.2. Digital transformation and information management

Digital transformation

In 2023, the Agency continued its digital transformation and improvement of information management as fundamental components of a modern and efficient organisation. This involved a series of actions targeting both internal and external stakeholders:

- The Agency adopted its Digital Strategy for 2023/2025, building on the principles and objectives of the EC Digital Strategy, and revamped its IT Governance. The Digital strategy addresses four main domains of activity relevant to the Agency: IT legacy management; data, information and knowledge management; outward digital presence; and compliance. The IT Steering Committee, which currently comprises four Working Groups, oversees the growing number of IT systems, platforms, or initiatives that come with actions delegated to the Agency.
- In parallel, the Agency made significant progress in the orderly decommissioning of legacy systems and preparedness for the shutdown of ABAC and the introduction of SUMMA, now delayed. The EACEA IT Steering Committee decided to keep the

systems currently integrated with ABAC in production for one more year to ensure business continuity and allow for supporting operational units in closing as many projects without extra efforts. EACEA has started a project to implement the long-term preservation of the relevant digital assets once our legacy systems are shut down, in line with the Commission Digital Preservation Strategy.

- To facilitate the ongoing migration, EACEA transferred its legacy systems to Welcome, with nearly all (99.66%) accounts already migrated.
- EACEA received the delegation to implement the phase II of the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI), where the Agency is applying the dual pillar approach ⁽³⁹⁾, similar to other new digital solutions.

The Agency also continues to make very good progress in the modernisation, technological convergence, and further improvement of the Agency's ad hoc platforms for stakeholder engagement, policies, knowledge-sharing, community-building and online training. Advisory support was given to the various evaluation and steering committees for the programme actions like the recently created Erasmus+ Networks Platform based on DIGIT's new Europa Communities Platform SaaS (OpenSocial).

In 2023, the 3 most expensive Information Systems of the Agency were DiscoverEU, the National Policies Platform and the European School Education Platform. They reached a degree of implementation of the digital strategy principles of 71%. The previous milestone target for 2023 (88%) was recalculated following the inclusion of a new system and the subsequent evolution of the indicator assessment. The new target set for 2024 is 80%.

At DG BUDG's request, EACEA established its own task force (SUMMA4EACEA – STIG), in order to facilitate the transition to the new corporate tool for the financial transactions SUMMA that will soon replace ABAC. The purpose is to closely follow developments and news, and to take the necessary actions (e.g. check migration tests, appoint people for specific tests, inform colleagues, etc.). In parallel, a group of staff representatives has started simulating the different roles in the workflows during SUMMA tests based on scenarios to detect possible critical problems. EACEA has also participated actively in the Activation Lab and has appointed a change lead and change coordinator. Staff received regular updates and news on SUMMA through the EACEA intranet; a training plan is envisaged that will be deployed in three phases and will target the different user profiles.

Information and IT security rules

Regarding information and IT security regulations, the Agency prioritised various actions outlined in the Commission IT Security Strategy for 2023-2024, with a particular emphasis on IT Security Risk and Compliance processes. A significant progress was made in the creation and update of the IT Security Plans (ITSP) for the different Information Systems in respect of the IT Security Risk Management Methodology (ITSRM). This exercise was

⁽³⁹⁾ *'For digital solutions, the dual pillar approach is about reusing existing solutions, including corporate building blocks, before considering ready-made market solutions. Customised development is the last option'*. European Commission digital strategy – Next generation digital Commission C(2022)4388 final.

conducted by using the IT Security Plan as a Service (ITSPaaS) proposed by DIGIT for DiscoverEU, EPALÉ and the National Policy Platform (NPP), and in cooperation with DG CNECT for the Creative Europe Database. The use of the ITSPaaS in 2024 is already planned to update the security plans for PEGASUS and ESEP.

Regarding Compliance Management, the Agency attested all the system priority controls for most of its Information Systems.

Data, information and knowledge management

Regarding information management, the Agency has continued to increase its implementation level of the corporate data governance principles, from 56% at the end of 2022 to 61% now. It is on track to meet the corporate target of 80% by the end of 2024.

In line with the Agency's Strategy for the deployment of data governance, documented interviews took place with the Data Stewards of all EACEA key data assets, except for the legacy programme data system Pegasus: this is to address via the new IT Legacy Management Working Group. The Data Owner for each key data asset approved a file summarising the status of each required element of data management, such as data protection, information security, conditions for data re-use, access rights, data preservation/deletion, and data quality. Each file stated the priority level and deadline for any necessary actions, which are tracked centrally in the Agency. Four of the five actions scheduled for 2023 were closed, with the result that the fifteen EACEA key data assets already fulfil over two-thirds of the corporate dimensions of data governance.

To prepare for EACEA's move to the new building, the Document Management Officer's (DMO) team focused on implementing the part of the Work Plan relating to the archives. A systematic follow-up process between the DMO, correspondents in the operational units and the OIB Archives services occurred until end of 2023 and will continue in the first quarter of 2024. The DMO team, in collaboration with operational units and OIB Historical Services, conducted a massive closure of files, elimination of obsolete files, and sampling/selection of files for longer preservation of operational units.

In 2023, DMO was additionally nominated as Seal Authorizing Officer (SAO) to coordinate the implementation and support related to the qualified electronic signature and seal services in EACEA, in line with SG and DIGIT requirements. Weekly newsletter items on ARES and NomCom were provided to keep staff up to date on all developments.

Data protection

On data protection, the Agency pursued efforts to strengthen its adherence to data protection regulations across various fields including grants, procurements, human resources and events. It continued publishing data protection records for new processing operations on the EACEA public register.

Multiple training sessions were organised to raise awareness about data protection general principles and on procedures for handling personal data breaches. As a result, more than 88% of EACEA staff attended at least one awareness-raising event on data protection

within their first 6 months of service, thus exceeding the 2023 performance target. The Agency actively participated in various data protection networks, bringing together data protection officers from other executive agencies, the parent DGs and the Commission central services.

3.3. Sound environmental management

In 2023, EACEA joined several corporate initiatives and launched local actions to continue promoting the Commission's Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS). The Agency took part in the Building Energy Saving Together (BEST) campaign, both in the winter and in the summer edition.

To raise awareness about the Commission's environmental performance and what EACEA - as an EMAS-certified institution - is doing to move towards a sustainable future, the Agency launched the Greener EACEA Challenge. For one month, staff members could participate in a weekly poll published on the EACEA Intranet. The challenge included questions aiming at increasing awareness about EMAS and the reduction of energy consumption.

EACEA designed and participated in various initiatives to promote waste reduction and recycling, namely:

- the 'Toys, Toys, Toys' campaign organised by the Executive Agencies.
- EACEA joined the corporate green collection event, in collaboration with Cyreo.be and CYCLUP, where used electrical appliances and clothes were collected to give them a second life.
- Moreover, to mark Women's Day, EACEA teamed up with NASCI to collect all kinds of new and reused items to help mothers and children living in poverty.
- EACEA also relaunched the corporate campaign to collect and recycle bottle caps, to donate them to the "Groupe d'entraide pour hémiplegiques" (GEH).

The Agency also cooperated closely with the bottom-up Green EACEA group. The group has continued raising awareness through successful initiatives such as the digital frugality videos.

3.4. Examples of economy and efficiency

EACEA Network of Procurement Officers and Change Procurement Team

The EACEA Network of Procurement Officers (NPRO), created at the end of 2022, continued to grow in his role as a central information hub for all matters concerning procurement management. More specifically on eProcurement, the Agency established a Change Procurement Team, to support and champion the transition to eProcurement on the contractual business processes. The team will work alongside the SUMMA Change Team to align integration efforts and ensure efficient communication of information to EACEA senior management, the Network of Procurement Officers (NPRO) and all relevant stakeholders within EACEA.