The early implementation of the 2021-2027 EU programmes Erasmus+, Creative Europe, European Solidarity Corps and the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (Strand 3)

Final Research Paper

This paper presents an evaluation of the Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps programmes and Strand 3 of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) at their early stage of implementation. The evaluation focuses on these four programmes' relevance, external coherence and effectiveness during the first two to three years of implementation. The combined findings from the individual programme assessments allow for drawing some cross-cutting findings and lessons for the future implementation of these programmes.

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Executive summary

The European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) has launched own-initiative reports for 'Erasmus+', 'Creative Europe' and the 'European Solidarity Corps' programmes and Strand 3 of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV). The present evaluation study supports the CULT Committee through delivering the evidence available on the early implementation of the four EU funding programmes. The evaluation considers the activities of the four programmes between 2021 and 2023 and assesses the status of their implementation by focusing on the design and implementation activities that can be assessed in this early stage. This includes the three evaluation dimensions relevance, external coherence and early implementation effectiveness. Due to of the early stage of the programmes' implementation, the effectiveness assessments in particular can only provide initial insights.

Based on guiding evaluation questions, *evaluation* findings were elaborated for each of the four programmes and supplemented by a cross-analysis leading to the overarching findings and recommendations. Taking into account the status of information available at this early stage of the programmes' implementation and the purpose of the evaluation, a theory-based evaluation approach is used. For each of the three evaluation dimensions a triangulation of methods is applied to answer the evaluation questions focusing at the EU-wide level.

The relevance assessment concentrates on *five EU challenges*, namely digital transition, green transition, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian aggression on Ukraine and the need of the EU to act more autonomously in strategic policy areas, as e.g., economic policies, defence and defending democratic values (EU strategic autonomy). The coherence assessment complements this with a focus on the *European Commission policy priorities 2019-2024* tackling these challenges. By investigating selected types of action of each programme and examples from certain Member States, additional in-depth insights provide illustrative examples contributing to the findings at EU level. Quantitative mapping of early implementation data complements the assessment.

Erasmus+ programme

Early implementation of the *Erasmus+ programme* suggests that its flexibility successfully responds to EU challenges. Although related to all five EU challenges, its relevance for the green and digital transitions is somewhat stronger than for the other challenges. It can be observed that the Erasmus+ programme tackles specific challenges depending on the importance for a certain Member State, such as demographic ageing or the internationalisation of education institutions.

In its design and early implementation, Erasmus+ demonstrates a high degree of alignment with all six European Commission priorities, indicating a solid potential for delivering results supporting the policy priorities. Four of the priorities are directly translated into the Erasmus+ programme. Coherence with the other priorities is achieved, inter alia, through skills and competence development and international partnerships that also reach beyond EU borders.

The launch of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme was successful, despite the challenges induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall uptake in 2021 was effective, and the commitment matched the funds earmarked for this year. However, there is a very high variation in success rates for different key actions. The combination of centralised and decentralised management appears to be effective at the early implementation stage. The beneficiaries appreciate the programme's flexibility in coping with external challenges and their consequences. This includes, inter alia, simplified procedures and the introduction of more lump-sum approaches. However, administrative complexity of the programme and the lack of functionality of the data entry tools, as well as the effects from recent inflation, negatively affect the early implementation of the programme.

Creative Europe programme

The *Creative Europe programme's* strength is in encouraging artists and creatives to tell their stories and to develop activities beyond the ordinary. The programme addresses the five overarching EU challenges to different degrees. Showing a general high flexibility, it has managed to react quickly to changing contexts and to respond to new challenges. The strongest focus of the programme lies on the digital transition while the relevance of green transition has been growing. However, the implementation of projects related to the Russian aggression on Ukraine generated new challenges. Due to its fully centralised implementation approach the Creative Europe programme does not address specific national culture-specific challenges.

The Creative Europe programme has the potential to further emphasise the positive transformation power of the cultural and creative sectors, in partnership with a wide range of EU policy areas, which suggests a high level of external coherence. It could become a good practice example of a 'green funding programme' through systematically addressing the ecological transition in and with the cultural and creative sectors. Nevertheless, it underplays its potential to address wider digital transformation challenges and frameworks and strategic autonomy issues, for example, related to international cultural relations.

The early implementation of the Creative Europe programme was effective despite the severe effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine. A frontloading of the budget and higher co-financing rates were adequate coping measures. Heavy administrative frameworks including the digital portal in use for Creative Europe limited the variety of applicants across institutions and countries. Corresponding experience of applicants can trigger negative effects for the European project. A focus on medium-sized projects can be a means to enhance the involvement of different applicants. Furthermore, better frameworks for the Creative Europe Desks could contribute to increase the support of applicants and beneficiaries in their countries.

European Solidarity Corps programme

The *European Solidarity Corps programme* is highly relevant to the digital and green transitions. It has been able to adjust to challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine. Although one of the programme's core values is democracy, EU strategic autonomy as a whole is not thoroughly ingrained within the programme.

The external coherence of the European Solidarity Corps programme varies across the European Commission priorities. It is the strongest for two priorities, namely 'A Europe fit for the digital age' and 'New push for European democracy'. Although humanitarian aid is an integral part of the European Solidarity Corps programme, references to the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations are scarce.

The programme's launch was challenged by delays and COVID-19 pandemic impacts but is still considered as being effective. Expectations for the launch were not high because the programme is still new. Yet, already at this early stage the European Solidarity Corps programme is considered as a valuable tool to promote solidarity, making young people more interested in volunteering and helping them transition from school to work. Further promotion may help in awareness raising beyond the increasing number of interested organisations. Despite the lack of well-established processes and routines, programme management is generally effective, although there is room for better communication channels. Improvements could also be introduced through lowering the administrative burden created through the use of the required ICT tools. Additionally, it would be useful to adjust for budgetary constraints resulting from the recent inflation.

CERV programme

The main objectives of the *CERV programme* are not directly related to the five identified EU challenges. They are, however, relevant and/or tackled by the CERV programme either in a cross-cutting level, at the individual CERV programme strand level and/or at the project level. Having been designed as a bottom-up programme, it has a certain degree of flexibility. This is illustrated by the responses of Strand 3 of the CERV programme to new challenges, such as its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine.

Strand 3 of the CERV programme aligns well overall with the European Commission priorities. In view of its strong foundation in European values, it has a high level of coherence with 'New push for European democracy' and 'Promoting our European way of life'. Furthermore, it incorporated many aspects of the digital and green transitions, while other policy priorities were considered to a lower degree.

The programme launch has faced challenges due to delays. Early implementation can only cautiously be considered as effective. Apart from impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, projects also suffered from operational issues. Further concerns exist regarding the ICT solution used for applications, changes in reporting, financial requirements, some information being only available in English, and relatively weak communication and promotion of the programme.

Cross-analysis

The *cross-analysis of the four programmes* highlights their different foci regarding the five overarching EU challenges. No programme addresses all of them equally. However, the relevance assessment should be considered with caution, as some references of the programmes to the challenges are generic rather than specific. Thus, the effective tackling of some challenges can be limited. The implementation approach seems to affect a programme's ability to simultaneously tackle EU as well as specific national challenges. Annual work programmes enable the programmes to react to new challenges relatively quickly without a need for larger programme revisions.

All four programmes show a high degree of coherence with all six European Commission priorities, although the coherence within the priorities varies strongly in terms of the specific policies subsumed under the six priorities. However, while the four programmes frequently refer to policies under the six priorities, this is not the case vice versa. Having the longest track record, only the Erasmus+ programme is commonly considered as a mechanism to implement wider EU policy objectives. Thus, there seems to be some incoherence in the reflection of the potential of, and expectations towards, the four programmes' contributions to achieving EU policy objectives. This may also require more systematic monitoring of these contributions as well as tracking the mentioning of the policies in the programmes' calls.

The programmes' launches were overall effective, except for Strand 3 of the CERV programme. During the early implementation the shares of the programmes' committed volumes differed considerably. Success rates vary strongly not only between the four programmes, but also within them, e.g., between the different types of actions and across strands.

A more balanced uptake across actions or strands throughout the programming period would be beneficial for an effective implementation. This could require budget reallocations as well as additional activities, depending on the preferred goals and expectations of the programmes' contributions. Cross-fertilisation of communication and coordination across programmes as well as more capacities to effectively manage the programmes at different levels and initiatives to reduce the administrative burden may support an effective implementation for the remaining programming period.

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List of abbreviations

ADC	Architectural Design Competitions
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
API	Application Programme Interface
AT	Austria
AV	Audiovisual
AWP	Annual Working Programme
CBHE	Capacity Building in Higher Education
CCS	Cross-Sectoral
CE	Creative Europe
CED	Creative Europe Desks
CERV	Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme
CoVE	Centres of Vocational Excellence
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CULT	European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education
EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EC	European Commission
EE	Estonia
EEA	European Education Area
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EPLUG	European Platform for Urban Greening
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESC	European Solidarity Corps
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FPA	Framework Partnership Agreement
HR	Croatia
ICT	Information and communication technology
IIEA	Irish Institute of International and European Affairs
IMZ	International Music + Media Centre
IT	Italy
JMO	Jean Monnet
KA	Key Action
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Inter*, Queer
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MOOC	Massive Open On-line Course

MS	Member State
MVP	Minimum Viable Product
NCPs	National Contact Points
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation
NEB	New European Bauhaus
NFT	Non-Fungible Token
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OMC	European Union Open Method of Coordination
PS	Programme Statement
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SE	Sweden
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the Europe Union
UA	Ukraine
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WP	Work Programme

1. Introduction

The European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT), responsible for various cultural aspects of the European Union (EU), including educational and media aspects, is involved in the policy-making of several EU programmes. In light of these responsibilities, *CULT has launched own-initiative reports for 'Erasmus+', 'Creative Europe' and the 'European Solidarity Corps' programmes and Strand 3 of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV)*. To support these activities, the Ex-Post Evaluation Unit (EVAL) of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and Foresight (within Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services of the European Parliament, DG EPRS) has launched an evaluation study to collect evidence on *the early implementation of these four programmes*.

The four funding programmes deal with different, though partially overlapping, aspects of culture and education. Commonalities of the four programmes go beyond thematic aspects. Three out of the four programmes are implemented under the leadership of the European Commission (EC) DG for Education and Culture (DG EAC). All four programmes are rolled out through direct management by the respective DGs and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), and all four are supported through a network of respective National Agencies in the 27 Member States.[1]

Despite these commonalities, the implementation of the four programmes differs significantly. The relevant actors work together in different roles, ranging from the implementation of entirely centrally managed programmes (e.g., the Creative Europe programme) to the combined implementation of centrally and decentrally managed programme activities (e.g., the Erasmus+ programme). Furthermore, each programme has its specific objectives and supports different types of actions. Consequently, this affects the selected indicators, which are used to assess results. The four programmes vary considerably in terms of size and complexity (i.e., variety of actions, strands, and others) in the 2021-2027 programming period:

- Erasmus+ with a total budget of €26 billion[2];
- Creative Europe with a total budget of €2.4 billion[3];
- European Solidarity Corps with a total budget of €1 billion[4];
- Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) with a total budget of €1.6 billion, of which €366 million were earmarked to Strand 3 of the programme[5].

The differences in budgets and other above-described characteristics are crucial factors for this assignment's evaluation methodology. The methodology allows for certain differences regarding the details of the evaluations performed across the programmes while aiming to achieve an overall comparable approach, enabling the successful exploration of each programme's specifics while allowing for comparison. To obtain both overarching and hands-on insights, this evaluation is selective in several respects:

- for each programme, two to three types of actions are in the analytical focus rather than covering all actions in detail;

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1 Apart from these agencies, programmes have also contacts in other partner countries. Some have a different structure from those in the EU Member States, e.g. National Erasmus+ Offices, whereas others do not distinguish between EU Member States and non-EU partner, e.g. Creative Europe Desks.

2 Regulation (EU) 2021/817, Art. 17.

3 Regulation (EU) 2021/818, Art. 8.

4 Regulation (EU) 2021/888, Art. 11.

5 Regulation (EU) 2021/692, Art. 7.

- apart from the EU level analysis, for each programme implementation insights are collected for a limited sample of four Member States each;
- in view of the early stage of implementation the analysis focuses on the three evaluation dimensions, namely relevance, coherence and effectiveness, whereas efficiency and EU added value cannot be considered systematically.

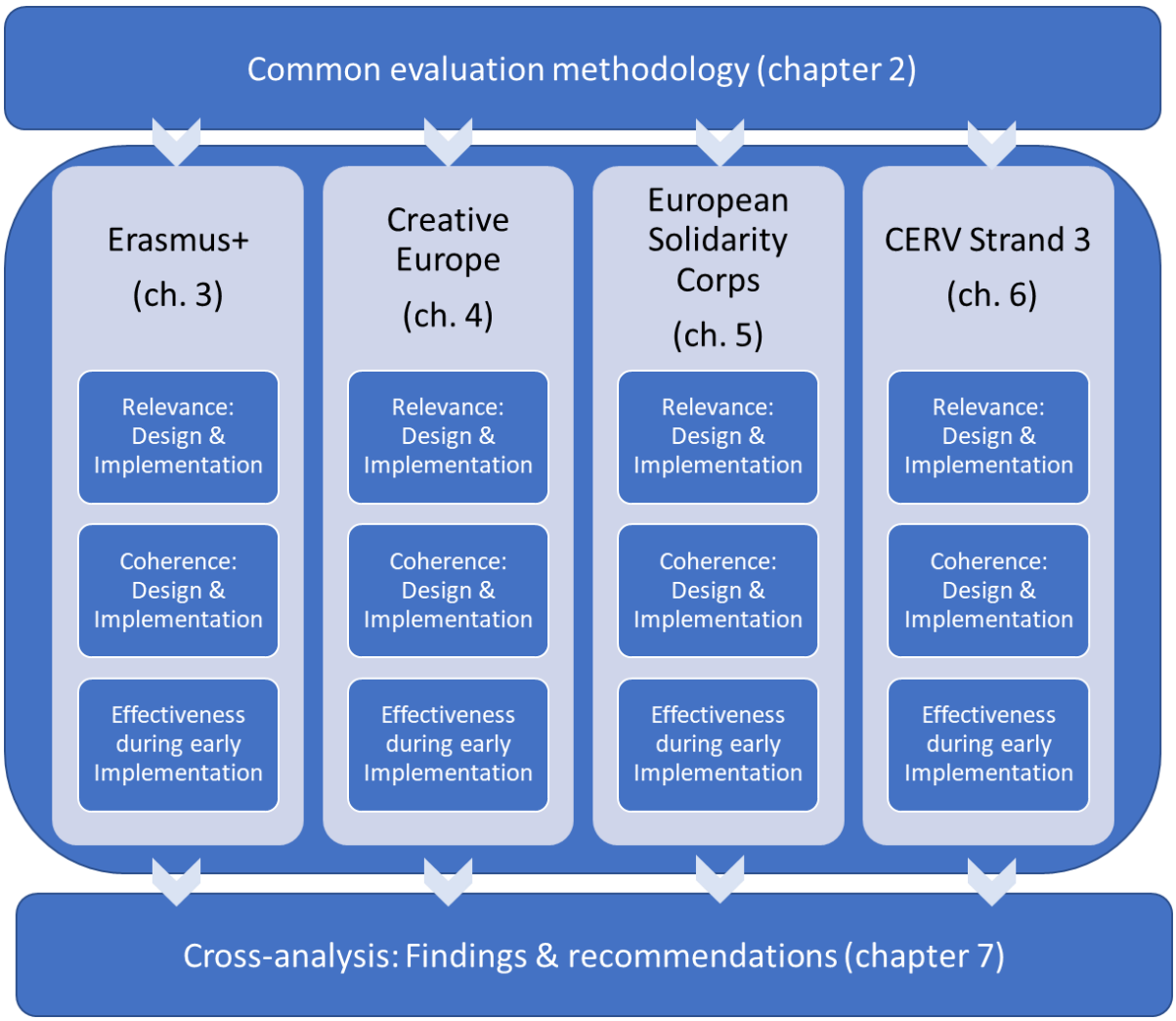
The evaluation assesses the status of programme implementation by focusing on the design and implementation activities that can be assessed in this early stage, such as annual work programmes, calls and the selection of initial projects. The evaluation covers the first three years as far as possible, i.e., 2021, 2022 and 2023, to consider potentially changing needs for action and different stages of implementation.

Within this context, the study starts with an outline of the methodology (chapter 2) which provides the basis for the common evaluation approach. Further detailed methodological information, for example, for each programme, is included in Annex I.

Chapters 3 to 6 present the evaluation findings for each programme. A short summary of the evaluation findings is presented at the beginning of each chapter. This is followed by a brief overview and introduction to the respective programme. Thereafter, each assessment chapter is structured along the three evaluation dimensions, differentiating between programme design and early implementation, and concluding with findings related to the guiding evaluation questions. Annex II complements chapters 3 to 6 with additional data and figures to support the findings.

Chapter 7 presents the cross-analysis of the four programmes highlighting common findings and key differences between them. A distinct focus is placed on findings and recommendations which are relevant for the further implementation of the four programmes. The following figure summarises the structure of the study to illustrate the coherent evaluation approach across the four programmes.

Figure 1: Overview of methodological approach and the study's structure



Source: own presentation.

2. Evaluation methodology

Guided by a theory-based evaluation approach, the evaluation methodology builds on a triangulation of methods:

- analysing quantitative programme data as available and as harmonised as possible;
- analysing programme documents at EU level;
- complementing the EU level analysis with examples from Member States (MS);
- performing semi-structured interviews or focus groups at EU- and especially at MS-level.

In view of the wide variety of practices or types of action implemented by the four programmes, *the early evaluation concentrates on the assessment of selected practices*, especially for the MS level analysis. The following sections describe the methodology as well as the territorial and practices foci to provide the basis for the programme specific analyses in the chapters thereafter.

2.1. Theory based evaluation approach

According to the European Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines[6] an evaluation covers the five mandatory evaluation dimensions: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value. Evaluations aim to enable continuous alignment of interventions to meet emerging challenges as well as to eliminate inconsistencies.

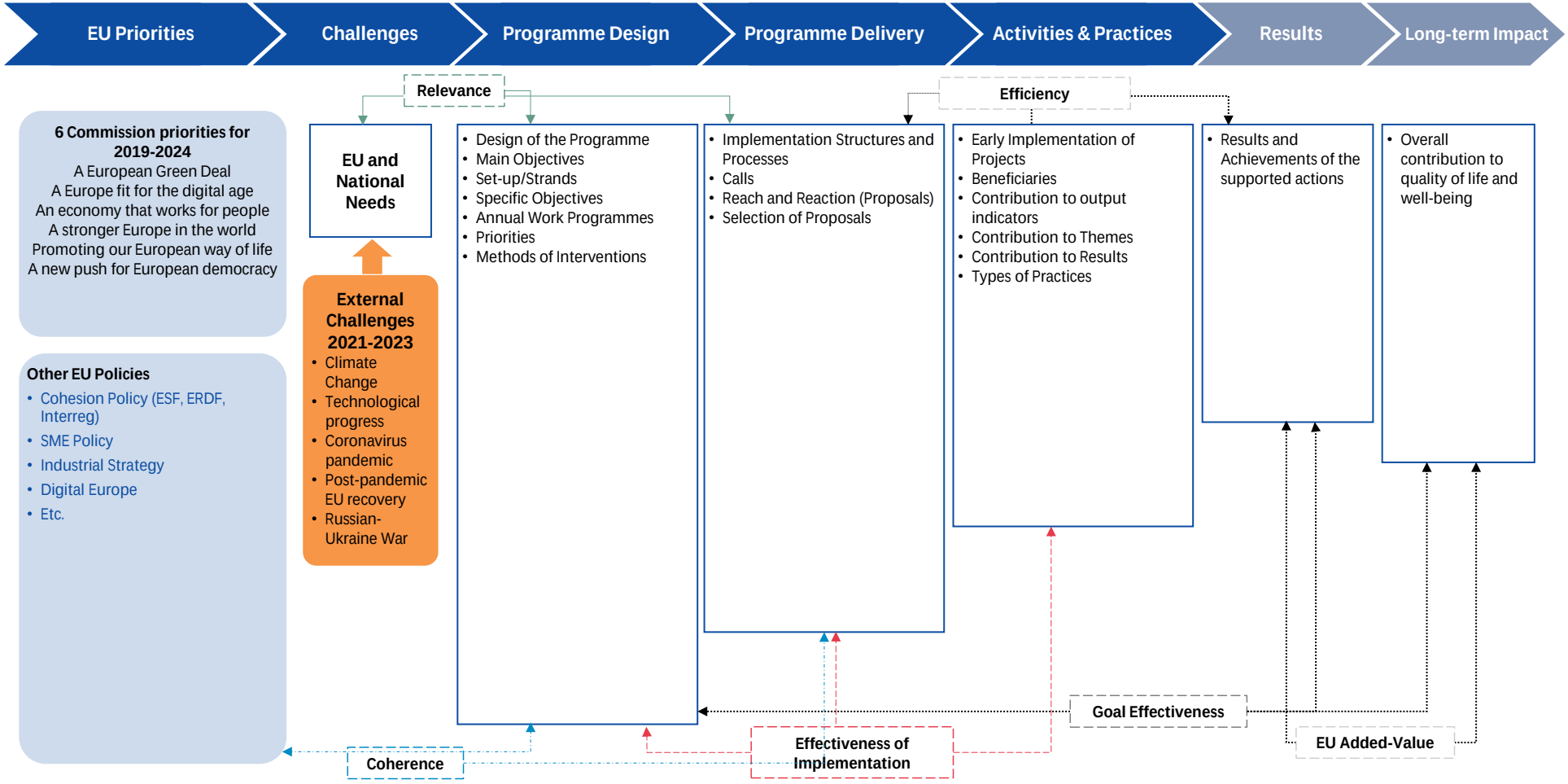
Due to the early stage of implementation of the programmes, tentative conclusions can be drawn focusing on the direction they have been progressing. This implies a focus on three of the five evaluation dimensions:

- *Relevance* describes the design and the early implementation in relation to EU and national needs and challenges.
- External *coherence* evaluates the design and the early implementation of the four programmes in the context of the 2019-2024 Commission priorities and other EU policies.
- *Effectiveness* tentatively assesses the adequate and timely setting-up of implementation structures and processes, a timely and effective launching of calls, a satisfactory reaction to calls, and the selection of proposals that lead to actions and practices in line with the objectives of the programmes and their annual work programmes.

The conceptual basis for the evaluation of each programme is a specific intervention logic as illustrated below. Corresponding to the evaluation focus, the dark blue arrows in the top row of the figure and the points below these are subject to this evaluation.

[6] Better Regulation Guidelines, 2021, p. 23.

Figure 2: Example of a specific intervention logic



Source: own representation.

To harmonise the overall evaluation approach across the four programmes, common guidance including evaluation questions and analytical tools were developed, while allowing for programme specific adjustments when necessary. The following sub-sections summarise the guiding evaluation questions and analytical approach for each of the three evaluation dimensions. Complementing information is included in Annex I.

2.1.1. Assessment of relevance

At the centre of the relevance assessment are the five main EU and national challenges. These five main EU challenges are overarching for many if not all EU policy processes and are thus considered crucial for the analysis. National challenges not subsumed under the overarching challenges have been added, when identified by the programme expert. Programme specific sub-challenges, as further explained in Annex I, or additional challenges, have been identified in the course of the relevance assessment. In view the guiding policies of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 and recent developments, the pre-defined challenges are:

- *EU digital transition* – Society and economy need to be empowered by digital solutions, and should be ensured technological sovereignty through adequate infrastructure, networks and framework conditions.[7]
- *Green transition* – Climate change and the loss of biodiversity create high risks that require actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase the resilience of the environment, society and economy to climate change risks and impacts.[8]
- *COVID-19 pandemic consequences* – The pandemic led to numerous consequences affecting many policy areas and impacting citizens' daily lives (health, economic, research, mobility etc.). Some of these consequences are still relevant for post-pandemic recovery and have led to numerous policy actions.[9]
- *Russian aggression on Ukraine* – Challenges from the Russian aggression arise both for Ukraine's responsiveness and resilience as well as for EU Member States and their societies due to refugee influxes, the induced energy crisis and interruptions in value chains.[10]
- *EU strategic autonomy* – Not least some of the previous challenges have highlighted the EU need to act more autonomously in various strategic policy areas, particularly with respect to economic policies, defence and the securing of democratic values.[11]

The assessment is based on a thorough review of the programme documents and the relevant literature available on each programme. Semi-structured interviews with 21 interview partners (partially interviewed in a focus group) complement the information collection. For a consistent and harmonised approach, a matrix tool (see Table 1) guided the comprehensive qualitative judgement for the different phases of the programme including the overall final judgement. Additional programme specific challenges were added as needed.

7 Shaping Europe's Digital Future

8 European Commission COM(2019) 640 final

9 COVID-19 legal documents EUR-Lex

10 See https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/index_en

11 EEU Strategic Autonomy 2013-2023: From Concept to Capacity

Table 1: Relevance evaluation matrix

RELEVANCE	Programme Design			Early implementation			Judge-ment
Challenges	Objectives/ strands/ priorities	Annual work pro-grammes	Other design aspects	Calls/ imple-mentation	Selected projects	Other im-plemen-tation asp.	-2/-1/0/ 1/2
EU digital transition							
Green transition							
COVID-19 pandemic effects							
Russian aggression							
EU strategic autonomy							

Source: own representation.

The final judgement summarises the relevance assessment:

- 0 = No reference at all was identified (neutral).
- 1 = There are 1-2 references or many indirect references (moderate).
- 2 = There are more than 2 direct references and/or other direct links (high).

With this approach, the assessment of relevance responds to the following evaluation questions for each programme:

- To what extent does the programme tackle the overarching EU challenges?
- To what extent does the programme consider and tackle specific EU and national challenges?
- Is the programme still relevant in view of changing external conditions?
- Has the programme been able to respond to needs arising from the change of external conditions?

Regarding the last question, special attention was paid to the extent of the programme implementation adjustments made in response to the changing needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding economic recovery, and the Russian aggression on Ukraine. If necessary, programme specific aspects were detailed or added.

2.1.2. Assessment of coherence

The assessment of coherence focuses on the six European Commission priorities for 2019-2024 and their related EU policies. This is complemented by the Recovery Plan for Europe 2020 as the additional overarching objective and by programme specific policies not included under any of these priorities. Thus, the pre-defined policies for the coherence assessment are[12]:

- A European Green Deal
- A Europe fit for the digital age
- An economy that works for the people
- A stronger Europe in the world
- Promoting our European way of life
- New push for European democracy
- Recovery Plan for Europe 2020

[12] The European Commission's priorities

Annex I contains additional descriptions of the related EU policies included in the analysis. The coherence assessment is mainly based on a thorough review of programme documents and literature detailing relevant policies. Semi-structured interviews complement the required information. For a consistent and harmonised approach, a coherence evaluation matrix (see Table 2) guided the comprehensive qualitative judgement for the different phases of the programme. This matrix includes an overall final judgement according to each policy and specific priority. Additional programme specific policies and priorities are added as needed in additional rows.

Table 2: Coherence evaluation matrix (examples of priorities and specific and policies)

COHERENCE		Commission Priorities & the Programme	Programme Design	Early implementation	Judgement
Priorities	Specific priority/policy	Programme links to relevant policy documents	Objectives/strands/ priorities/Annual work programmes …	Calls/selected projects/other implementation aspects	-2/-1/0/1/2
A European Green Deal					
	Social climate Fund …				
A Europe fit for the digital age					
	Digital decade …				
An economy that works for people …					

Source: own representation.

The final judgement summarises the coherence assessment:

- 0 = No reference at all was identified (neutral).
- 1 = There are 1-2 references or many indirect references (moderate).
- 2 = There are more than 2 direct references and/or other direct links (high).
- -1 = There are some contradictory or excluding relationships leading to a moderate negative coherence.
- -2 = There are serious contradictory or excluding relationships leading to a strong negative coherence.

Within this approach, the coherence assessment answers the following evaluation questions for each programme:

- Is the programme design coherent with Commission priorities and other relevant EU policies? To what extent do EU policy documents in relevant policy fields refer to the respective programme?
- To what extent do the respective programme documents refer to Commission priorities and relevant EU policies?
- Is the early implementation of the programme coherent with wider EU priorities and policies?

If necessary, programme specific aspects were detailed for each of the questions.

2.1.3. Assessment of effectiveness

As far as possible at this early stage of implementation, the assessment of effectiveness responds to the following evaluation questions for each programme:

- How effective was the launch of the programme and its uptake i.e., the reaction by applicants?
- How effective are direct and the indirect management[13] in supporting the programme's objectives?
- To what extent have the objectives of the programme been tackled during the early stages of implementation? How likely is it that practices will contribute to the attainment of programme goals in the coming years?
- Are the effects produced during the early implementation in line with the programme's objectives?
- Has the programme been able to respond to needs arising from the change of external conditions?
- What have been/are the specific challenges in the early implementation of each programme?
- What are the success stories of the early implementation of each programme?

Programme specific aspects were added to the questions, when required.

Due to the different implementation modes of the four programmes, the analysis of this evaluation dimension is more heterogeneous than the other two dimensions. The effectiveness assessment relies more strongly on the analysis of selected practices and examples from MS (see sections 2.3 and 2.4) and is thus less advanced given the stage of early implementation.

The effectiveness assessment builds on the triangulation of methods, including quantitative and qualitative data analyses, interviews and the use of samples. Annex I gives a detailed overview of how the seven evaluation questions could be linked to different information sources and analysis methods.

2.2. Quantitative mapping

The purpose of this exercise is to map the implementation of the four EU programmes. The task identifies, analyses and reports on selected key indicators depicting the programmes' activities over the years 2021 to 2023. The main output is a descriptive analysis of the selected indicators, including visual illustrations.

Specifically, the following types of information were analysed:

- the types of activities carried out by each programme, e.g., the financial volumes planned and implemented,
- the programmes' calls for proposals (e.g., number and thematic foci),
- the selected proposals (e.g., number and thematic foci by programme).

[13] In direct management, the EC is responsible for all steps of a programme's implementation. In case of indirect management, other national authorities or international organisations support the programme implementation (see Funding by management mode).

To do so, four distinct steps were followed:

- Step 1: Identification of possible data sources
- Step 2: Verification of the quality and consistency of the data, and identification of limitations
- Step 3: Extraction, aggregation and compilation of the data in a database (Excel file)
- Step 4: Reporting and production of graphs

Under Steps 1 and 2, the data available on the programmes' websites (Creative Europe, Erasmus+) and the Funding and Tender opportunities database[14] were reviewed. Due to the lack of a fully functioning Application Programme Interface (API) for the database (see 'limitations' below) only a limited amount of information could be gathered from this review. Thus, in parallel, a request for information was put forward to the respective contact persons at the EC via the EPRS. The EC made available a set of documents outlining the main aspects of the 2021 and 2022 funding years. Following a thorough review, a second request to improve data quality and quantity was made to the EC which led to little improvement of the data quality. Therefore, a follow-up manual extraction of basic information from the respective programmes' websites and the Funding and Tender opportunities database was conducted.

In Step 3, the different sources were compiled providing an overview of the available data and the quantitative analyses of early implementation for each programme. In general, an assessment of the following aspects was conducted:

- Number of submitted proposals (by strands/key action areas and topics etc.), number of selected proposals and success rate.
- Financial distribution per action area/strand etc., total and relative shares.

Finally, in Step 4 the information retrieved was presented in a set of graphs and accompanying analyses.

While performing these steps several limitations were identified:

- API for the Funding and Tender opportunities database does not provide access to the datasets required, but only to a limited number of programmes and only for the 2014-2020 period.
- There are inconsistencies between different types of sources, e.g., Funding and Tender opportunities databases, information received from the EC and information in the Annual Implementation Reports (AIR).
- The data received from the EC only covers limited types of projects (e.g., only direct management projects in the case of Erasmus+), which are not adequate for the foreseen analysis.
- The data received from the EC is not consistent in terms of aggregation/disaggregation (e.g., some activities are reported for the 2021-2022 aggregate, others are reported separately). For CERV, the information provided covers the whole programme and includes limited information focusing on the third strand itself.
- The data received from the EC includes some gaps, e.g., data on the number of calls is not available for the Culture Strand of the Creative Europe programme.
- The data received from the EC may include activities from the preceding programming period as reporting is based on reporting years. As such it is not possible to determine whether information on the calls for projects and their outcomes is linked to the current

[14] Funding&Tender database

or the previous programming period, which further limits the adequateness of the data for the anticipated analysis.
- Only a limited number of projects have been completed at the point of conducting the evaluation, limiting in particular the effectiveness assessment for each programme.
- The centrally available data (e.g., from the Funding and Tender opportunities database) covers only centrally managed programmes and programme strands which include only a minor part of the overall programme activities.

2.3. Selection of practices

According to the Terms of Reference for this assignment, for each programme, two practices shall be analysed in-depth that can support the discussion process of the European Parliament. They can be

- common for more than one programme;
- specific to a certain programme;
- successful practices (based on tentative or previous experience);
- challenging practices (based on tentative or previous experience);
- practices implemented at larger scale may be preferred to smaller ones;
- smaller or narrower practices, if they showcase something new or striking.

Figure 3: Overview of selected practices for all four programmes

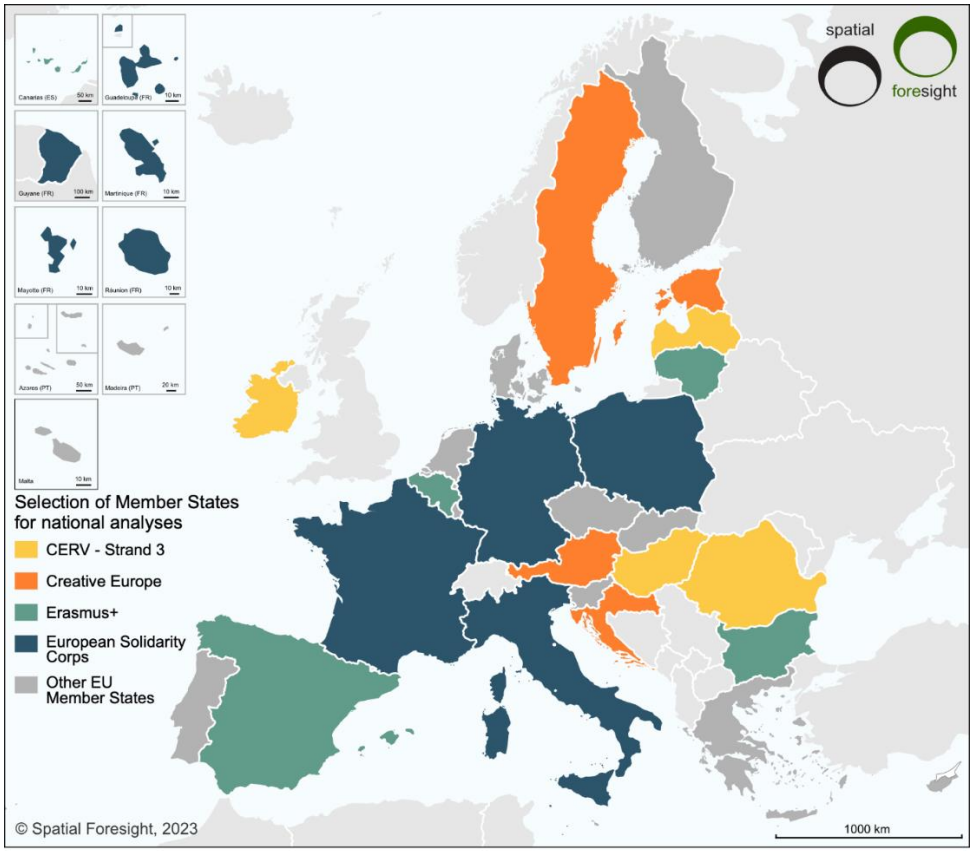
Source: own presentation.

For a balanced selection, ten practices have been selected: two each for Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), and three each for Creative Europe (CE) and CERV. The general selection criteria were slightly adapted for each programme. The following figure illustrates the final practice selection along the most important general criteria. This includes the combination of previously successful practices with new ones and innovative approaches. Looking at all programmes, at least one practice that has been implemented at a larger scale has been included. Annex I provides more details on the rationale behind the selection, presented per programme.

2.4. Selection of Member States

The evaluation illustrates the practical implementation of the four programmes and highlights potential differences between MS. Four MS have been selected per programme, enabling a sufficient variation across the different approaches of the national implementation (e.g., regarding the indirect management elements of the programmes) and varying achievements, while considering the limited timeline of the assignment. The selection aimed firstly to maximise the variation of geographic coverage across the EU territory for each programme and secondly to balance the coverage of MS across the four analysed programmes. For each programme, additional selection criteria were applied to achieve an adequate variation per programme. These additional criteria cover each programmes' particularities, ones that could not have otherwise been considered for all of them. For example, this includes different methods of MS-level implementation, territorial participation differences or specific trends or situations that are crucial for a programme's implementation in a country. Overall, 16 national level analyses were performed. Annex I provides more details on the selection rationales per programme. Figure 4 illustrates the final MS selection.

Figure 4: Overview of Member State evaluation coverage by programme



Administrative boundaries: Eurostat GISCO (2023)

Source: own representation.

3. Assessment of the early implementation of the Erasmus+ programme

Erasmus+ programme key findings:

- The early implementation demonstrates that the programme lives up to EC ambitions and is sufficiently flexible to respond to new challenges. Erasmus+ proves highly relevant to the twin transition – green and digital. These two priorities are tightly woven into the programme's 'fabric', and have been reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The existing Erasmus+ framework allows for a prompt response to external challenges. It is believed that the programme, by default, plays a relatively important role in the post-pandemic recovery. The Erasmus+ actions strengthened by its inclusive dimension contribute to personal, socio-educational and professional development of people in Europe, and beyond, thus mitigating the negative effects created by pandemic.
- The programme adequately responds to the Russian aggression on Ukraine. The extent to which Erasmus+ is relevant to this challenge, however, is somewhat smaller when compared to the twin transition or the EU strategic autonomy. The programme reacted swiftly to the arising educational needs of incoming Ukrainian refugees, as well as Ukrainian project partners.
- The programme has had increasing relevance for strengthening the EU strategic autonomy, which is likely to further augment in the future. This holds true for both of its perspectives, i.e., building the European identity and democracies, as well as for strengthening economy and entrepreneurial skills.
- The programme demonstrates a high degree of alignment with all six EC priorities. Furthermore, four of the priorities are directly translated into the programme, namely: 'Promoting our European way of life', 'A Europe fit for the digital age', 'A European Green Deal' and 'New push for European democracy'.
- Coherence with the EC priority 'An economy that works for people' is achieved by building professional competences and skills required on the labour market. Alignment with the EC priority 'A stronger Europe in the world' is ensured by, inter alia, international partnerships beyond the EU that are at the core of the programme's architecture.
- There has been an overall successful launch of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme. The overall uptake in 2021 was effective, i.e., the commitment matches the funds earmarked for this year.
- Both the centralised and decentralised management structures appear to be effective at the early implementation stage for Erasmus+ 2021-2027. Based on the experiences of the national authorities it seems that the beneficiaries appreciate the extent of the programme's flexibility in coping with external challenges and their consequences, including inter alia, the simplification of procedures and the introduction of more lump sum approaches.

3.1. Overview

Erasmus+ is the EU's flagship programme supporting and strengthening education, training, youth, and sport in Europe. At the core of the programme is the opportunity for students at different educational levels, youth and adults to study, train or gain work or volunteering experience in Europe, and beyond, as part of their lifelong learning, educational and professional development.

Erasmus+ recognises the fast-changing world, i.e., demographic, societal and technological changes and equips individuals with the right set of knowledge, skills and competence from a lifelong learning perspective to make them more resilient and able to sustain current standards of living, support high rates of employment and foster social cohesion. The programme places an emphasis on the need to overcome social exclusion and unequal access to education by providing alternative ways to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to improve social opportunities. It also strives to improve the awareness and understanding of the EU among citizens.

The three core objectives of Erasmus+ are:

- enabling learning mobility of individuals and groups as part of the education and training system;
- improving non-formal and informal learning mobility among youth;
- promoting learning mobility of sport staff.

Erasmus+ 2021-2027 has defined the following four priorities: (1) inclusion and diversity, (2) digital transformation, (3) environment and fight against climate change and (4) participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement.

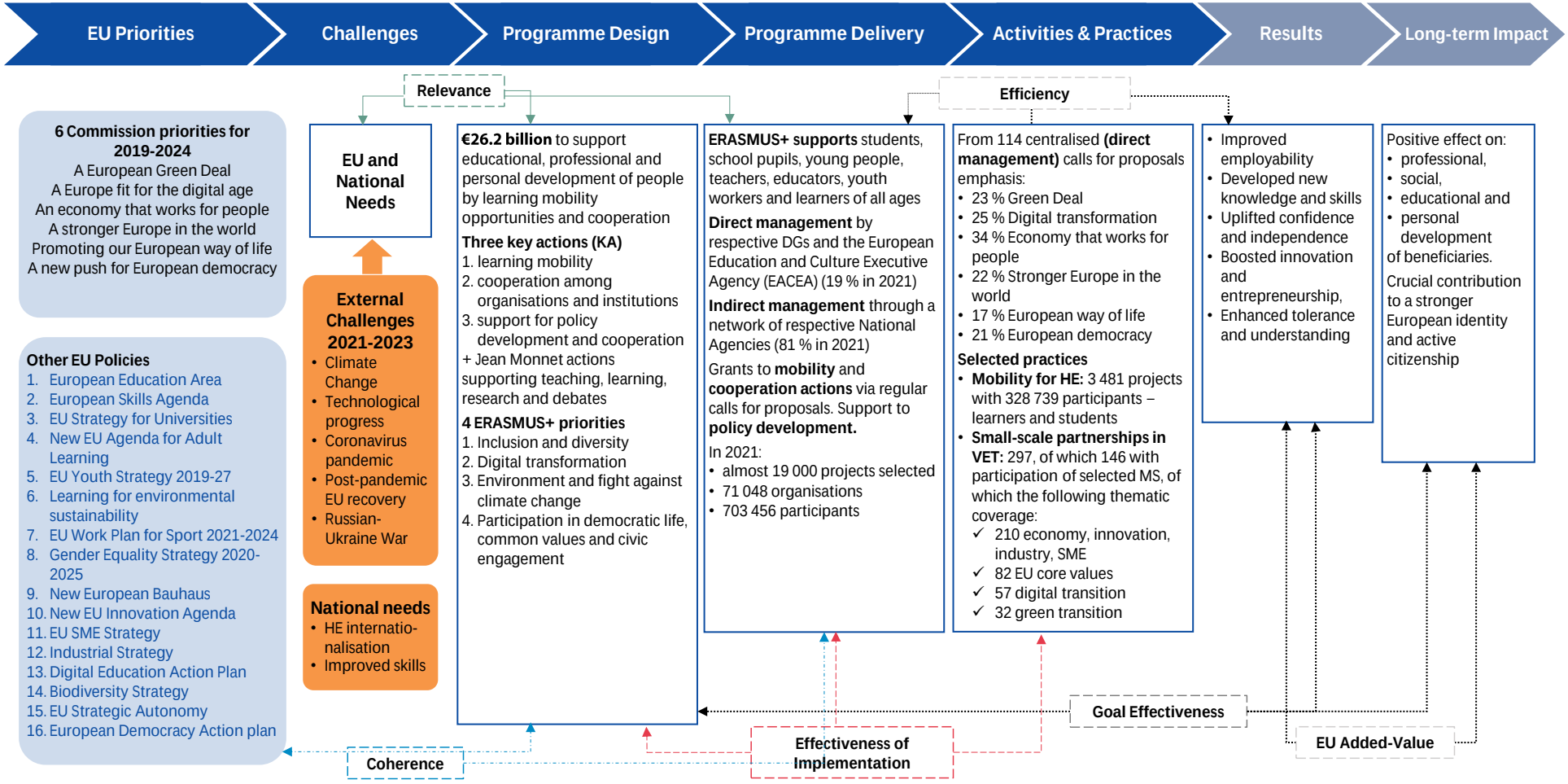
The programme is implemented through three key actions (KA): KA1 – Learning mobility, KA2 – Partnerships for cooperation and exchange of practices and KA3 – Support for policy reform. The programme includes the Jean Monnet (JMO) actions, specifically tailored to European integration matters and the future of the EU. It covers all four levels of education – (1) primary and secondary, (2) vocational education and training (VET), (3) higher education and (4) adult education – and youth and sports.

EU Member States participate fully in all actions of the Erasmus+ programme. In addition, in accordance with article 19 of the Erasmus+ Regulation[15] third countries, such as members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) which are members of the European Economic Area (EEA) and candidate countries are also eligible to participate in the programme.

The following overview provides insights in the implementation approach of the Erasmus+ programme and details the programme specific intervention logic:

[15] Regulation (EU) 2021/817

Figure 5: Erasmus+ intervention logic



Source: own representation.

Erasmus+ 2021-2027 has an estimated budget of around €26.2 billion which is almost twice compared to its predecessor programme (2014-2020). The financial envelope is complemented by around €2.2 billion from EU external cooperation instruments. Out of this financial envelope, 70 % supports mobility opportunities while the remaining 30 % is invested in cooperation projects and policy development activities.

The programme is mainly implemented through indirect management, i.e., approximately 80 % of its budget is entrusted to the National Agencies. EACEA is responsible for the direct management of approximately 17 % of the budget, the EC Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) for the remaining funds. The indirect management across the Member States is implemented either at the national level or differentiated based on various criteria (e.g. regionally, by key action).

The implementation of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 started in 2021. According to the EC Administrative Procedures document issued each year, there were 19 calls for proposals in 2021, and 28 calls for proposals in 2022 and 2023 respectively. The implementation of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 had already started in 2021. In April 2023, the Funding and Tender opportunities database[16] containing the centrally (directly) managed Erasmus+ calls for proposals had 114 calls, either open or closed, dating from 2021. A sub-site of the Erasmus+ main website[17] had 96 mainly decentralised open or closed calls for proposals over the same time period.

Although it is too early to expect any project results, an overview of some key achievements that characterise the early implementation of the programme is provided below.

Table 3: Key Achievements Erasmus+ in 2021 and 2022

Key Action	Projects		Organisations		Planned participants	
	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
KA1 – Learning mobility	13 797	19835	25 149	32 258	707 263	1 069 533
KA2 – Partnerships for cooperation and exchange of practices	4 829	3 357	14 280	10 838	n/a	n/a
KA3 – Support for policy reform	303	222	320	345	n/a	n/a
JMO – Jean Monnet Activities	200	407	214	330	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	**19 209**	**23 821**	**36 551**	**41 048**	**707 263**	**1 069 533**

Source: https ://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/?locale=de

To illustrate the evaluation findings with details on the following two Erasmus+ actions listed below, the selected practices were analysed in four case countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Lithuania and Spain[18]:

- Mobility of higher education students and staff
- Small-scale Partnerships in vocational education and training

16 Funding&Tender database

17 https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/funding

18 For the selection of MS see section 2.4 and Annex I (section AI.5).

Outcomes of the document review, data analysis and interviews are presented in the respective Erasmus+ related sections of this report.

3.2. Relevance assessment

This assessment addresses the four relevance evaluation questions formulated for all programmes including the relevance of recent developments as outlined in the methodology (see sub-section 2.1.1). For the assessment of the programme design, the following information sources have been reviewed:

- Regulation establishing Erasmus+[19]
- The Erasmus+ website[20]
- Erasmus+ Programme Guide (Guide)[21]
- Annual Working Programme (AWP) 2021[22], 2022[23], 2023[24]
- Programme Statement (PS) 2023[25]
- Annual report (AR) 2021[26] and its Statistic Annex[27]
- Implementation guidelines – Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2021[28]
- Implementation report of the current Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027[29]

To assess the extent to which the main EU challenges are addressed in the early implementation phase of the programme, i.e., from 2021 to the 1st quarter of 2023, the following data review, according to topics relevant to this research, was performed:

- All 114 centralised calls for proposals on the Funding and Tender opportunities database[30] were analysed. This represents approximately 20 % of the total programme budget.
- 146 Small-scale Partnerships in VET projects on the Erasmus+ Result Platform[31] selected for funding in 2021 and 2022 and having participants from the four selected MS in focus of this research were reviewed.

19 Regulation (EU) 2021/817

20 https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu

21 The Erasmus+ Programme Guide (Version 3)

22 2021 Annual Work Programme – Erasmus+

23 2022 Annual Work Programme – Erasmus+

24 2023 Annual Work Programme (amended) – Erasmus+

25 Programme Statements – Erasmus+

26 Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021

27 Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021: Statistical Annex

28 Implementation Guidelines – Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy

29 https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/?locale=de

30 Funding&Tender database

31 Funding&Tender database

3.2.1. Programme design

The relevance of Erasmus+ is more prominent for the challenges that have been directly translated into the programme priorities, such as digital and green transformation as well as the EU strategic autonomy concerned with Europe's capacity to uphold its democratic values and strengthen economic independence. These challenges have a profound place in the programme and, hence, are of a relatively high relevance.

Digital transformation is one of the four priorities of Erasmus+ 2021-2027. The relevance of the programme has been acknowledged in the respective policy documents as well as pinpointed in the Regulation establishing Erasmus+. The Regulation defines the programme's contribution to the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027[32]. Erasmus+ commits to the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem by building capacity and critical understanding in all types of education and training institutions. 'In line with the Digital Education Action Plan in particular, but also the European Education Area[33], the European Strategy for Universities, the renewed EU Youth Strategy[34], the Updated Skills Agenda[35] and the digital dimension are part of the programme's design, activities and underlying processes. Concretely, digital transformation incentives are mainstreamed throughout all sectors and key actions, and dedicated initiatives are supported. The digital dimension of the programme ranges along the following lines: mobility and cooperation projects, thematic priorities across the sectors, continued support to IT platforms, communities and tools, policy support, as well as digitalisation of the programme's implementation.'[36]

The Annual Work Programmes (AWP) of Erasmus+ ensure that the strategic focus is maintained throughout the entire programme implementation for an effective shift towards digital education. It has been specifically strengthened in response to unprecedented digital challenges caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Through the development of digital readiness, resilience and capacity the programme supports digital transformation plans of primary, secondary, vocational education and training, higher, and adult education institutions and facilitates the use of digital technologies in education, training, youth and sport for teaching, learning, assessment and engagement.

Green transition and the fight against climate change is another Erasmus+ priority highlighting the programme's relevance for the policy area. In fact, green and digital priorities are increasingly becoming inseparable to the point where both are often referred to as twin transition. The Erasmus+ Regulation notes that the 'programme remains instrumental in achieving the objectives of quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, and in preparing the Union to face the digital and green transitions'[37].

In line with the Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability[38] of January 2022 and the new European sustainability competence framework, sustainability and green transition remain key priorities for Erasmus+. The European sustainability competence framework[39] provides common ground for education stakeholders on the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to live, work and act more sustainably and maps the

32 Digital education action plan

33 Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024

34 https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en

35 European Commission COM/2020/274 final

36 Programme Statements – Erasmus+, p. 225

37 Regulation (EU) 2021/817, Recital 12

38 European Commission COM(2022) 11 final

39 GreenComp The European Sustainability Competence Framework

competences needed for the green transition, including critical thinking, initiative-taking, respecting nature and understanding the impact of everyday actions and decisions on the environment and the global climate. The programme design proves the readiness and increasing capabilities of Erasmus+ to address and tackle the challenges of the twin transition. The programme is also sufficiently flexible to react to emerging challenges.

Post-pandemic recovery has been well embedded into the programme design, however, given the temporary nature of this challenge, the relevance of Erasmus+ has been assessed comparatively lower than for the twin transition. Nevertheless, the Regulation on Erasmus+ makes a strong reference to the Recovery plan for Europe[40]. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that access to education is proving to be essential in ensuring a swift recovery, while promoting equal opportunities for all. Erasmus+ is well equipped for addressing these challenges, inter alia with its new Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2021[41].

By highlighting important digital needs and challenges the COVID-19 pandemic additionally incentivised the digital transition and accelerated it. 'The pandemic has accentuated the digital skills gap that already existed and new inequalities are emerging as many people do not have the required level of digital skills or are in workplaces or schools lagging behind in digitalisation.'[42] Now, more than ever, the EU needs a paradigm-shift focusing on 'skills and competences that are necessary to develop as individuals and to face the challenges and make the most of the opportunities of the 21st century'[43].

The programme actively tackles the new challenges 'as part of this recovery process, the Erasmus+ programme takes its inclusive dimension to a new horizon by supporting opportunities for personal, socio-educational and professional development of people in Europe and beyond, with the aim of leaving no-one behind'[44]. The topicality of post-pandemic recovery is also being maintained through the AWPs by being additionally specified according the main target groups. In this respect, for example, sports and the role of being physically active have been specifically emphasised as part of the post-pandemic recovery process in AWP 2023. The New European Agenda for Adult Learning[45] has also been integrated into the programme to ensure prompt recovery, and to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the green and digital transitions.

Despite the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the youth sector has relied on the key European youth programmes and actions developed over the last years to react to emerging priorities, such as, for example, health and safety of volunteers and inter-generational solidarity by exploring new forms of volunteering including digital volunteering. In 2022, Erasmus+ also contributed to the European Year of Youth.[46]

'The EU and its Member States stand united in their unwavering support for Ukraine and firmly condemn Russia's war of aggression'[47]. Erasmus+ also stands with Ukraine and in 2023 it has ensured a particular focus on projects addressing the consequences of the *Russian aggression on Ukraine* in the education and training sectors. The programme plays a crucial role in supporting the arrivals of

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40 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-recovery-plan/

41 Implementation Guidelines – Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy

42 European Skills Agenda, p. 1

43 Regulation (EU) 2021/817, Recital 9

44 The Erasmus+ Programme Guide, p. 4

45 Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021

46 https://youth.europa.eu/year-of-youth_en

47 European Council: EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine

people fleeing the war. It assists the education and training systems to cope by supporting learners and teachers on the ground, early childhood education and care providers, schools, vocational education and training institutes and higher education institutions, as well as youth work organisations and NGOs, to ensure continued learning and mobilise the support necessary to provide quality and inclusive learning.

The AWP 2023 makes strong commitments to 'addressing the educational challenges brought in by this dramatic situation and by a fast-changing geopolitical context'[48]. In this regard, for example, in 2023 the following two actions are anticipated: (1) partnerships supporting the Pact for Skills that aim 'to integrate refugees having fled Ukraine into the labour market' and (2) the Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) which will also include a special focus on Ukraine. It will thus support the creation of an open education digital environment to offer quality higher education for students fleeing from Ukraine or internally displaced students – as well as educational opportunities for the wide Ukrainian community abroad – based on cooperation between Ukrainian and other European universities and academic staff'[49].

Stakeholders in Flanders, Belgium, inform that as a result of the Russian aggression on Ukraine the programme allows for more flexibility, e.g., to permit inbound KA1 mobility from Ukraine even if this was not initially foreseen in the project, as well as in the domains of school education and adult education where such mobility is normally not possible. Regarding KA1 projects, ingoing and outgoing mobility from and to Russia remain possible, however, organisational support money cannot go to partner institutions in Russia.[50]

It has also been pointed out that the Erasmus+ regulation recalls the programme's key role in strengthening European identity and values and in contributing to a more democratic Union. This has become more important than ever in the context of the Russian aggression on Ukraine.

EU strategic autonomy refers to a wide range of areas, two of which are related to Erasmus+ objectives: (1) European identity and democracy and (2) economy and entrepreneurial skills. Both thematic areas are well reflected in the programme.

The regulation indicates a strong commitment of the programme towards active participation of individuals and civil society in democratic processes. Erasmus+ sets out participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement as one of its four priorities. Through supported mobility activities Erasmus+ reinforces participatory skills of civic society, as well as develops social and intercultural competences, critical thinking and media literacy.

AWP 2023 highlights the contribution of Jean Monnet actions to disseminating knowledge on European Union integration matters and fostering academic debates and exchange of best practices on values and democracy, including in third countries.

A Youth Participation Strategy[51] provides a common framework and fosters youth participation in democratic life. Complementary expertise and support to the programme is provided by the SALTO Resource Centre[52] that, inter alia, sets up strategic and innovative actions encouraging youth participation in civic and social life through volunteering or taking up a role in youth organisations.

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48 2023 Annual Work Programme – Erasmus+, p. 9

49 Ibid., p. 65

50 https://www.epos-vlaanderen.be/oekrainecrisis/

51 SALTO-YOUTH – Youth Participation Strategy

52 https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/

In addition to SALTO, the European Youth Portal[53] offers support by providing information and opportunities to young people living, learning and working in Europe. Youth participation in democratic life is also encouraged via the EU Youth Dialogue[54] and other initiatives engaging with young people to influence policy making. Taking the role of young people into account, in 2022 Erasmus+ also had a particular focus on youth.

In the context of the *EU strategic autonomy* it is also important to mention the programme's contribution to the development of overall economic and entrepreneurial skills. The debate on EU strategic autonomy is still on-going, but there is an agreement that for certain industries considered truly critical, such as pharmaceuticals and semi-conductors, efforts should be made for 'reshoring production to Europe' (contrary to the 'offshoring' of industries to low-income economies which had taken place in previous decades). This has the potential to deliberately increase the need for new skills in the industries where Erasmus+ can be instrumental.

The shock of Russia's invasion of Ukraine brought the debate back to difficult realities and introduced the need to react with concrete and practical actions. Both individual Member States and the EU as a whole took several prompt decisions to increase their capacity to act and decrease dependencies on Russia. This created additional challenges and surfaced more needs to be tackled by Erasmus+ in the near future, such as, for example, increased competencies and skills for production and the use of renewable energy resources.

3.2.2. Early implementation

Describing the first two years of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme launch, the Programme Statement 2023 notes: 'the Programme is not only more inclusive and innovative, it mobilises the education, training, youth and sport sectors for a rapid post-pandemic recovery and helps steer the European Union's economic model towards more sustainability, with green and digital transitions as drivers of transformation'[55]. It further informs that: 'In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic still had a strong impact on mobility opportunities, and the programme implementation had to be adapted accordingly; this was translated in budgetary terms as an overall reduction of the mobility budget foreseen under KA1, to the benefit of partnerships under KA2'[56].

The interviewed representatives of DG EAC acknowledge that the programme proved to be adequately flexible to respond to the external challenges within its current framework: 'It showed resilience to pandemics. 60 % of mobilities were continued while for most other cases virtual mobilities were introduced. Funds from mobilities (KA1) shifted to partnerships (KA2).' The interviewed representative of EACEA complements that 'it is only now in 2023 that mobility resumes to full scale'. Most of the interviewed national stakeholders of the selected Member States acknowledged appreciation of the mentioned flexibility by the programme's beneficiaries.

The EACEA confirmed that COVID-19 pushed to speed up digital transition. Analysis of the centralised Erasmus+ calls for proposals that have been launched since 2021 suggests that 28 out of 114 calls had a special emphasis on these challenges, though '*digital*' is also an underlying horizontal criterion in most of the other calls. The reviewed centralised calls for proposals evidence that Erasmus+ consistently pursues the need to develop digital skills in all of its target groups. The

53 https://youth.europa.eu/home_en

54 https://youth.europa.eu/d8/node/31278_en

55 Programme Statements – Erasmus+, p. 225

56 Ibid., p. 227

calls persistently focus on training and development of digital skills aimed at adapting to the new requirements of the labour market, especially considering the effects of the pandemic.

Additionally, there is a designated lot on digital education or the, so-called 'Forward-Looking Projects' in Erasmus+. These large-scale projects aim to identify, develop, test and/or assess innovative (policy) approaches that have the potential of becoming mainstreamed, thus improving education and training systems. Projects under Lot 1 'Digital education (cross-sectoral)'[57] 'can address different educational sectors or bridge educational sectors, and must support high quality and inclusive digital education, in line with the Digital Education Action Plan'[58].

The environment and the fight against global warming is another horizontal priority for the selection of Erasmus+ projects. The reviewed 114 centralised calls for proposals confirm that the *green transition* is central. In 26 calls of the current programming period the focus on green initiatives is particularly refined. The project proposals are further expected to address various related policy elements. Sustainability considerations are included in the selection criteria requiring the applicants to apply environmentally friendly practices in their projects. From the perspective of developing skills, the reviewed sample of calls also indicates that a priority is to develop 'green skills', especially in projects for the industrial sector. Examples of relevant calls are the Partnerships for Innovation, namely for Alliances for Education and Enterprises[59] and the Alliances for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills (Blueprint)[60].

An interesting example project financed under the Alliances for Education and Enterprises is the AddTex project, focusing on innovation, co-creation and exchange between the industrial sector, research and academia in the textile industry. Training and learning materials are developed, together with a Massive Open On-line Course (MOOC) platform, combined with a mobility programme aiming at industry upskilling[61].

15 out of 114 centralised calls for proposals since 2021 aimed at *reducing the pandemic impact* on specific groups, such as, for example, the European Youth Together call[62] that targets specific actions addressing the consequences of the pandemic on young people in line with the EU Youth Strategy. A total of 23 projects have been selected under this call.

Addressing the most recent external challenge – *the Russian aggression on Ukraine* the programme has come up with a prompt solution: '€100 million frontloaded from the 2027 budget will go in particular to cooperation partnership actions. These are the best-suited to support Ukrainian learners and staff currently displaced in other European countries.'[63]

The interviewed representatives of DG EAC reported that no new calls have been planned because Erasmus+ is already very flexible even within the present framework. In addition to this, the programme is not 'an emergency measure, but supports medium-term cooperation'. However, they mentioned the following practical steps being made: (a) new Ukrainian students are being accepted promptly, and existing students from Ukraine are having their stay prolonged beyond the initially planned duration, (b) all projects with participation of Russian and Belorussian partners have been terminated, (c) in special cases mobility project students of these countries have been allowed to

57 ERASMUS-EDU-2023-PI-FORWARD-LOT1

58 The Erasmus+ Programme Guide, p. 295

59 See ERASMUS-EDU-2022-PI-ALL-INNO-EDU-ENTERP or ERASMUS-EDU-2021-PI-ALL-INNO-EDU-ENTERP

60 See ERASMUS-EDU-2022-PI-ALL-INNO-BLUEPRINT or ERASMUS-EDU-2021-PI-ALL-INNO-BLUEPRINT

61 https://www.addtex.eu/

62 ERASMUS-YOUTH-2021-YOUTH-TOG

63 The Erasmus+ website

prolong their stay in instances of proven threats for them upon return to their respective countries, (d) partnerships have become more open to Ukrainian organisations, and (e) more profound integration with Ukrainian schools has been initiated. At the same time, an interviewed representative from one of the selected Member States admitted that they were not able to find ways in which Erasmus+ could help young Ukrainians fleeing the war in the same way as the ESC programme has, suggesting that at the national level, the programme might have been not sufficiently flexible.

The review of the centralised calls for proposals identified a specific financial allocation of €5 million assigned to the development of the Education digital environment in Ukraine, but more specifically to partnerships with Ukrainian higher education institutions (among other international EU partnerships).[64]

The Programme Statement 2023 concludes that 'the programme actively builds positive attitudes towards the European Union and contributes to the development of a European identity across all sectors funded, while improving knowledge and understanding of the EU through the Jean Monnet actions'[65]. 'In 2021 the new JMO activities for other levels of education and training were launched for the first time: 20 JMO Teacher Training activities and 2 JMO Networks for other levels of education and training could be selected for funding under the Erasmus+ call for 2021.'[66] One example is the Teacher Trainings call for proposals[67], whose projects are still under evaluation. It aims at preparing school teachers to engage and educate pupils on European values and the functioning of the EU.

3.2.3. Lessons learnt

The Erasmus+ programme actively addresses emerging EU wide challenges that are within the range of its thematic coverage, i.e., education and skills. It supports the Member States in equipping the Erasmus+ target groups with understanding and skills on sustainability, climate change and the environment. It further calls on: providing learners of all ages access to high-quality, equitable and inclusive education and training on climate change, biodiversity, environmental protection and sustainability; establishing learning for the green transition and sustainable development as a priority area in education and training policies and programmes; encouraging and facilitating whole-institution approaches to sustainability and mobilising national and EU funds for investment in infrastructure, training, tools and resources to increase preparedness of education and training for the green transition.

Analysis of the Erasmus+ programme design and insights from early implementation suggest that the programme addresses the following five challenges, in the focus of this study, with varied intensity:

- The programme is highly relevant to address the challenges of the twin – digital and green – transition. The extent of the relevance of these two challenges stands out in this assignment alongside their comparatively large scale and long-term character as well as the additional push that the two challenges have had as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic:
  - There is a high readiness and capacities for the programme to tackle digital transformation challenges, including those that have emerged since its launch.
  - The programme is also highly relevant to green transition.

64 ERASMUS-EDU-2023-CBHE-STRAND-2

65 Programme Statements – Erasmus+, p. 232

66 Ibid., p. 229

67 ERASMUS-JMO-2023-OFET-TT

- From the design perspective, Erasmus+ has proved to be well-equipped to tackle related external challenges. The programme is sufficiently flexible to react within the current framework. The extent of the programme's relevance in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic recovery and the Russian aggression on Ukraine has been assessed as adequate:
  - Erasmus+ addresses the post-pandemic recovery challenges well and provides the needed acceleration in related areas such as, e.g., digital transition. The Erasmus+ actions strengthened by their inclusive dimension contribute to personal, socio-educational and professional development of people in Europe, and beyond, thus mitigating the negative effects created by the pandemic. The programme aims to improve digital capacity in organisations, equip citizens and experts with the right skills to adapt to the new realities of online learning and teaching as well as to also raise awareness on the twin transition.
  - From the design perspective, Erasmus+ is also well-equipped to tackle the challenges imposed to the EU by the Russian aggression on Ukraine. However, it is too early to judge the implementation.
- As for the EU strategic autonomy, democratic life, common values and civic engagement are among the programme's priorities alongside with the digital and green transition. The programme, however, does not fully cover all aspects of the EU strategic autonomy. Due to the economic development related contribution to the green and digital transition processes Erasmus+ is assessed as being of high relevance for addressing external challenges and its relevance has been steadily increasing, thus strengthening the potential programme impact.

3.3. Coherence assessment

This assessment addresses the three coherence evaluation questions formulated for all programmes with a focus on the main EU-wide priorities and policies (see sub-section 2.1.2). Coherence with Commission priorities and strategic policies has been examined at the programme design stage and for early implementation.

As detailed in the relevance assessment, the Erasmus+ programme tackles many EU wide challenges that are subject to a wide range of policies. Thus, for the coherence analysis, apart from the Erasmus+ programme documents, the coherence assessment is based on the policies listed below. These have been selected based on the Programme Guide and the Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2019-2024 highlighting the EC priorities[68].

- European Education Area (EEA)[69]
- European Skills Agenda[70]
- European Strategy for Universities[71]
- New EU Agenda for Adult Learning[72]
- Commission proposal for a 'Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability of January 2022'[73]

68 Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024

69 Achieving the European Education Area by 2025

70 European Commission COM(2020) 274 final

71 European Commission COM(2022) 16 final

72 Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021

73 European Commission COM(2022) 11 final

- EU Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024[74]
- Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025[75]
- New European Bauhaus[76]
- New EU Innovation Agenda[77]
- EU SME Strategy[78]
- Industrial Strategy[79]
- Digital Education Action Plan[80]
- Biodiversity Strategy[81]
- European Democracy Action plan[82]
- EU Youth Strategy 2019-27[83]
- EU Strategic Autonomy Monitor of July 2022[84]

3.3.1. Programme design

There are many important aspects where the programme and EC priorities interface. The interviews with the DG EAC and EACEA representatives also acknowledged that the programme's architecture contributes to the overall EU objectives in one or another way. A brief overview is provided below.

A European Green Deal

The *European Green Deal* is coherently embedded in the Erasmus+ programme design and its alignment is being extended with every AWP. For example, the Erasmus+ programme is instrumental to support the key role of education institutions and their interaction with pupils, parents, and the wider community, who in turn are pivotal in introducing the changes needed for a successful transition for the EU to become climate neutral by 2050. Sustainability is increasingly becoming an integral part of education and training activities in Erasmus+ AWPs, including the curricula and professional development of educators, as well as buildings, infrastructure and operations.

Erasmus+ is gradually becoming the main tool for creating knowledge, skills, and attitudes on climate change and supporting sustainable development both within the European Union and beyond. It commits to increasing the number of mobility opportunities in green forward-looking domains, which foster the development of competences, enhance career prospects and engage participants in areas which are strategic for sustainable growth, with special attention to rural development (sustainable farming, management of natural resources, soil protection, bio-agriculture).

The two main policies underlying the European Green Deal that are relevant for Erasmus+ are the Biodiversity Strategy and the New European Bauhaus. Although there is no mention of these two policies in the Erasmus+ regulation and vice-versa, these thematic priorities are being gradually

74 Council resolution on EU work plan for sport 2020/C 419/01
75 European Commission COM(2020) 152 final
76 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_4626
77 European Commission COM(2022) 332 final
78 European Commission COM(2020) 103 final
79 European Commission COM(2020) 102 final
80 European Commission SWD(2020) 209 final
81 EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 Bringing Nature Back into Our Lives
82 European Commission COM(2020) 790 final
83 Council resolution on EU youth strategy 2018/C 456/01
84 EU Strategic Autonomy 2013-2023

introduced into the programme and reinforced year-to-year via the Annual Work Programmes. Green Erasmus+ in AWP 2021 specifically mentions, inter alia, bio agriculture, and the AWP 2022 emphasises the need for mainstreaming climate and biodiversity by prioritising green transition through cooperation activities and the promotion of green practices at the level of the projects throughout the programme. The most recent AWP 2023 introduces the Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development[85] adopted in June 2022 as well as the New European Competence Framework[86].

A Europe fit for the digital age

There is a strong coherence of the programme with the relevant EU policies of the Digital Decade 2030[87]. The Regulation establishing Erasmus+ defines that the programme should contribute to the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 by engaging learners, educators, youth workers, young people and organisations on the path to a *digital transformation*. The programme continuously focuses on the two strategic priorities of the Action Plan fostering the development of a high performing digital ecosystem and enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation. The programme is also a key component supporting the objectives of the European Education Area, the European Union Youth Strategy and the European Union Work Plan for Sport (2021-2024) and significantly contributes directly to the European Skills Agenda. The AWPs of Erasmus+ ensure the operational coherence of the programme to this dynamic challenge.

An economy that works for people

Erasmus+ is highly coherent and relevant to the EC priority *An economy that works for people*, and the broader socio-economic environment. It is a key instrument for building a European Education Area and supports the development of the professional competences and skills required on the labour market. The role of Erasmus+ is also emphasised in the relevant sectoral and cross-sectoral policies, such as, for example, the New EU Innovation Agenda, SME and Industrial Strategies.

The European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience commits to supporting these policies via, e.g., the European Universities, the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) and the Blueprints for sectoral cooperation on skills. The Agenda accentuates that Erasmus+, inter alia, is key to a substantial increase in physical and virtual learning mobility across the EU which opens up new learning opportunities that may not be accessible at home. Therefore, for example, the objective of mobility projects for higher education and staff is to contribute to establishing a European Education Area with a global outreach and to strengthen the link between education and research. Erasmus+ is a serious support measure for the European Strategy for Universities goals. There is also a strong coherence and commitment of the programme to vocational and the adult education initiatives. Training supports vocational excellence for smart and sustainable growth whereas in adult education the focus is on increased and improved provision, promotion and uptake of formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities for all. The CoVE initiative supports implementation of the European Green Deal, the new Digital Strategy, and the new Industrial and SME Strategies because skills are a key component to their success.

Innovation is one of the fundamental concepts underlying the programme as described in the Erasmus+ Regulation as well as other programme documents. There are also two practices bearing the name of innovation, i.e., Partnerships of Innovation and Alliances for Innovation. The New EU Innovation Agenda refers to the programme by, inter alia, emphasising that as of 2023, the

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85 Council conclusions 2022/C 159/07

86 GreenComp The European Sustainability Competence Framework

87 Europe's Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030 (Webpage)

Erasmus+ Alliances for Innovation will support the development of entrepreneurial skills with a particular focus on deep tech skills. The Alliances continuously foster cooperation between higher education, VET and enterprises aimed at boosting innovation and entrepreneurship. There are two lots within these practices, Lot 1 Alliances for Education and Enterprises and Lot 2 Alliances for Sectoral Cooperation in Skills. Both lots support future-proof skills development, including both green and digital skills, and entrepreneurship competences of graduates and the co-designing of curricula between industry, including SMEs, and higher education institutions in the strategically important industrial sectors identified in the updated industrial strategy.

Though Erasmus+ is less prominent in the SME Strategy, its role should not be underestimated. SMEs are among potential beneficiaries of the programme and there is also a separate programme for young entrepreneurs[88] allowing young men and women to learn business skills from peers globally. Overall, Erasmus+ extensively supports SMEs through many actions related to the Industrial Strategy, the European Education Area, Skills Agenda and Digital Education. Therefore, for example, the concept of Vocational Excellence 'is characterised by a holistic learner centred approach in which VET is an integrated part of skills ecosystems, […,] innovation, smart specialisation and clusters strategies as well as to specific value chains and industrial ecosystems'[89].

A stronger Europe in the world

The European Union is the world's biggest donor of development assistance and among the first global trading partners and foreign investors. The EU stands for peace, stability and a rules-based global order in an increasingly complex and inter-connected world. Prosperity and peace in the EU's neighbourhood and beyond are crucial for the stability and security within the EU itself.

The Erasmus+ Regulation sets out that the programme is open to the (1) members of the European Economic Area in the framework of the cooperation established under the Agreement on the European Economic Area, (2) acceding countries, candidate countries and potential candidates, (3) European Neighbourhood Policy countries and other third countries, in accordance with the conditions laid down in a specific agreement covering the participation of the third country in any Union programme.

The new Global Europe instrument[90] covers EU cooperation including cooperation with all third countries, beneficiaries and overseas countries and territories from the geographic programmes. The Global Europe 2021-2027 programme uses Erasmus+ as a channel to implement its education related measures. Besides the geographic and thematic programmes of the Global Europe instrument there is an ERASMUS+ Multiannual Indicative Programme[91]. It covers the Erasmus+ actions financed by the EU external action instruments Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe and Instrument of Pre-accession III (IPA III) for 7 years (2021-2027). Overall, more than €2 billion has been allocated to Erasmus+ priorities. As a result, it can be said that Erasmus+ has a strong international dimension in mobility, cooperation and policy dialogue activities not only within the EU, but also beyond. To this end, the programme is fully coherent with the Commission priority *a stronger Europe in the world.*

Promoting our European way of life

The Erasmus+ Regulation emphasises the European common values. 'The Programme should contribute to promoting common European values through sport, good governance and integrity

88 Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs Global scheme

89 The Erasmus+ Programme Guide, p. 243

90 Global Europe: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (Webpage)

91 ERASMUS+ Multiannual Indicative Programme, 2021

in sport, sustainable development, and education, training and skills in and through sport'[92]. The overall EU values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as stipulated in Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union are mirrored and supported in the programme design. Inclusion and diversity in all fields of education, training, youth and sport and common values, civic engagement and participation are two of the four Erasmus+ priorities. This strongly aligns the programme with the priority *Promoting our European way of life* and enables the implementation of its actions in a truly European spirit.

The Regulation furthermore accentuates: 'investing in learning mobility for all, regardless of background and means, and in cooperation and innovative policy development in the fields of education and training, youth and sport is key to building inclusive, cohesive and resilient societies and sustaining the competitiveness of the Union, and is all the more important in the context of rapid and profound change driven by technological revolution and globalisation. Furthermore, such an investment also contributes to strengthening European identity and values and to a more democratic Union'[93].

In line with European core values, inclusion and gender equality are among the main topics underpinning the programme. Erasmus+ aims to support more and better projects focusing on inclusion and diversity, opening doors to enhanced participation of newcomers and to small grassroots organisations, notably through the launch of simpler actions that are more accessible to people with fewer opportunities and for smaller organisations and newcomers to the programme. As a result of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps co-creation process an inclusion and diversity strategy has been elaborated to reinforce these dimensions. Erasmus+ has also been mentioned in the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. 'An Inclusion and Diversity Strategy for the future Erasmus+ programme will provide guidance on how the programme can help address gender inequalities in all education and training, youth and sport sectors'[94].

The Jean Monnet actions support teaching and research in the field of European Union studies worldwide. They promote active European citizenship and contribute to disseminating knowledge on manners through which EU policies can improve the daily lives of citizens in the EU as well as beyond EU borders. 'The Jean Monnet actions also strive to function as a vector of public diplomacy towards third countries, promoting EU values and enhancing the visibility of what the European Union stands for and what it intends to achieve'[95].

New push for European democracy

Erasmus+ has a prominent role in the European Democracy Action plan. 'Promoting active citizenship among young people is an important feature of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. The EU youth dialogue is being reinforced by youth participation activities under Erasmus+ and the European Youth Portal.[96]'

The Erasmus+ Regulation tackles this priority and defines that the 'Programme should encourage the participation of young people in Europe's democratic life, including by supporting activities that contribute to citizenship education and participation projects for young people to engage and learn to participate in civic society, thereby raising awareness of European common values, including

92 Regulation (EU) 2021/817, Recital 14

93 Regulation (EU) 2021/817, Recital 1

94 EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, p. 17

95 The Erasmus+ Programme Guide, p. 368

96 European Democracy Action plan, p. 10

fundamental rights, as well as European history and culture, bringing together young people and decision-makers at local, national and Union levels and contributing to the process of European integration'[97]. This commitment is further translated into the Programme Guide and relevant calls for proposals.

3.3.2. Early implementation

The reviewed 114 centralised calls for proposals and 146 Small-scale Partnerships in VET projects indicate consistent alignment with all Commission priorities at the early implementation of the programme. This is particularly prominent for the twin transition and *An economy that works for people* priorities.

The Erasmus+ website as well as the Programme Statement 2023 refer to biodiversity as one of the programme's horizontal priorities along with the climate. There is a financial commitment of almost €170 million made towards the climate in 2021 (please, see Table 4 below).

The Programme Statement 2023 does not report any explicit biodiversity contributions between 2021 and 2023. It does, however, acknowledge that the Erasmus+ programme contributes to the overall climate and biodiversity objective. For example, the Erasmus+ project 'European Platform for Urban Greening (EPLUG)'[98] is mentioned as it aims to increase the knowledge and skills required to address biodiversity, climate adaptation and well-being in urban areas and to broaden the expertise among professionals in Europe.

Table 4: Erasmus+ contribution to horizontal principles

EU budget contribution in 2021 (€ million)		
Climate	Biodiversity	Gender equality (*)
169.4	0	Score 0*: 2 663

(*) Based on the applied gender contribution methodology, the following scores are attributed at the most granular level of intervention possible:
- 2: interventions the principal objective of which is to improve gender equality;
- 1: interventions that have gender equality as an important and deliberate objective but not as the main reason for the intervention;
- 0: non-targeted interventions;
- 0*: score to be assigned to interventions with a likely but not yet clear positive impact on gender equality.

Source: own representation based on Erasmus+ Performance assessment accessed on the 20 April 2023.

Describing the Erasmus+ contribution to the SDGs, the Programme Statement 2023 provides an example in relation to SDG 15 'Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss', where the 4EU+ European University[99] aims at focusing its activities inter alia on biodiversity and sustainable development. It has been concluded that European Universities selected under Erasmus+ are ambitious transnational alliances of higher education institutions developing long-term structural and strategic cooperation. The New European Bauhaus, launched in 2020, first appeared in the Erasmus+ AWP 2022 and solidified a place under the Green Erasmus+ priority. Its ambition is to help make the Green Deal a cultural, human-centred, positive and tangible experience. AWP 2023 acknowledges that the new European Bauhaus initiative can also be a catalyst for contributions from the school sector, in particular, by

97 Regulation (EU) 2021/817, Recital 28

98 https://platformurbangreening.eu/

99 https://4euplus.eu/4EU-1.html

building on interrelations among culture, art and science with the aim of helping to devise a more sustainable future through creativity and innovation.

The reviewed calls for proposals confirm that the twin transition sees a steady uptake in the programme and its beneficiaries. 26 of 114 centralised calls on Funding and Tender opportunities database[100] specifically mention 'green' or Green Deal in their topic descriptions, two mention the New European Bauhaus and 28 emphasise 'digital'. It is, however, a presumption that the extent to which Erasmus+ is coherent with these two EC priorities is considerably higher and might apply to the majority of the calls for proposals. This has been confirmed by the interviewed national stakeholders of the selected Member States.

The interviewed MS representatives acknowledged that the 'green' and 'digital' topics are well embedded into different projects, even when the project itself does not directly address climate change or digitalisation. For example, university strategies in Spain highlight that international partnerships can contribute to their environmental transition and sustainable development efforts. In VET, 32 out of the 146 Small-scale Partnerships with participants from selected MS emphasise green transformation as one of their project topics, while 57 mention digitalisation.

The interviewed representatives from Bulgaria recognised that Erasmus+ projects are viewed as an important contributor to developing skills for the 21st century (as defined in national priorities as well), mostly from the perspective of digital skills. The new form of blended virtual and physical mobility has made the programme more accessible, especially to working students. They also conclude that digitalisation at all levels of education has increased due to the pandemic. The educational institutions have developed capacity to operate virtually and digitally whereas other organisations have engaged in projects to develop and deliver digital and remote education platforms.

The programme's coherence with the EC priorities *'Promoting our European Way of Life'* and *'A New Push for Democracy'* is well visible in 24 out of 114 calls for proposals emphasising democracy, common values and civic engagement and 19 calls having equality, human rights and rules of law specifically integrated into the topic descriptions.

For example, 'Capacity building in the field of youth' that has three calls[101] has a strong focus on the following thematic areas: (a) political participation and dialogue with decision-makers; (b) inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities; (c) democracy, rule of law and values; (d) empowerment/engagement/employability of young people; (e) peace and post-conflict reconciliation; (f) environment and climate; (g) anti-discrimination and gender equality and (h) digital and entrepreneurial skills. Thus, it is also relevant to most of the above analysed policy areas.

'European Youth Together' – both small and larger actions[102] encourage young people to participate in the democratic process and in society by organising trainings, showcasing commonalities among young Europeans and encouraging discussion and debate on their connection to the EU, its values and democratic foundations.

In the selected Member States the Erasmus+ programme is often used as a serious co-contributor to address certain national challenges, e.g., internationalisation of the higher and vocational educational establishments in Bulgaria and Spain and youth civic engagement in Lithuania. As a rule, these challenges stem out of the national sectoral or overall development strategies that are

100 Funding&Tender database

101 ERASMUS-YOUTH-2023-CB, ERASMUS-YOUTH-2022-CB and ERASMUS-YOUTH-2021-CB

102 e.g. ERASMUS-YOUTH-2021-YOUTH-TOG-LOT1, ERASMUS-YOUTH-2022-YOUTH-TOG-LOT1 and ERASMUS-YOUTH-2023-YOUTH-TOG

aligned with the overall EU objectives and EC priorities. Out of the 146 Small-scale Partnerships in VET selected for funding in 2021 and 2022 with participants from selected MS, 82 explicitly mention European core values as one of their project topics.

Concluding on the remaining two EC priorities and how they play out in the early implementation of Erasmus+ it must be said that the keywords related to the EC priority *'An Economy that works for People'* used in filtering 114 centralised calls for proposals by topics have been represented most frequently. 55 % of the calls for proposals specifically mention economy, innovation, industry and SMEs in their topic descriptions confirming high coherence of the programme to this priority already at its launch. Topics, such as innovation, industry, SMEs and similar terms appear 210 times in the topic descriptions of the 146 Small-scale Partnerships in VET. In Bulgaria for example, some specific projects have focused on developing open access curricula and targeted training activities for at-risk groups, thereby aiming to create ripple effects on the labour market to ensure improved employment perspectives within these target groups[103].

The MS representatives note the following challenges to which Erasmus+ is coherently contributing: (1) further internationalisation of education (BG, ES), (2) youth engagement in society and communities (LT) and (3) labour market adaptation for VET (ES). The interviewed national stakeholders also verify that economic improvements, especially an inclusion into the labour market, is a very prominent aspect in Erasmus+ projects that tackle related national issues, such as for example youth unemployment in Spain.

Finally, a high coherence with the sixth EC priority *'A Stronger Europe in the World'* is supported by placing the international partnerships at the core of the programme's architecture. Cooperation within Europe reinforces the Union itself while the globally positioned calls for proposals strengthen the European stance in the international arena. At least 25 out of 114 calls for proposals have neighbourhood and enlargement specifically mentioned in their topic descriptions. 19 out of 146 Small-scale Partnerships in VET projects in the selected MS have priority related topics. The interviewed representatives of Spain highlight that the new focus of the Erasmus+ programme on partnerships with countries outside of the EU has been beneficial for Spain, and the overall interest in this field is high.

3.3.3. Lessons learnt

The Erasmus+ programme demonstrates a high degree of alignment with all six EC priorities. Though there is a very concentrated and profound focus on the twin transition, Erasmus+ is also prominent in a broader socio-economic context, namely, for example, the development of economic and democratic processes.

- The EU policy documents very often refer to Erasmus+ as a cornerstone relevant for the implementation of the ambitious policy agenda of the European Education Area, Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, European Skills Agenda, EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the European Union Work Plan for Sport (2021-2024). With respect to learning, education, youth and sports the programme design aligns well with all six EC priorities and relevant EU policies.
- Four of the EC priorities, namely, *a European Green Deal, a Europe fit for the digital age, Promoting our European way of life* and *New push for European democracy* are directly embedded into the programme's priorities, which contributes to a strong coherence with many relevant EU policy documents.

[103] Project reference 2022-1-BG01-KA210-VET-000084442

- As the new relevant policy documents are being developed, they have been gradually introduced into the Erasmus+ programme with the help of the Annual Work Programmes as is the case, for example, with the New European Bauhaus and the New European Competence Framework.
- Coherence with the other two EC priorities is achieved via the programme's underlying objectives and its structure:
  - The EC priority *'An economy that works for people'* is achieved through the programme's aim of being a key instrument for building professional competences and skills required on the labour market. The role of Erasmus+ is emphasised in the relevant sectoral and cross-sectoral policies, such as, for example, the New EU Innovation Agenda, SME and Industrial Strategies.
  - The priority *'A stronger Europe in the world'* is ensured by the international partnerships at the core of the programme's architecture.
- Acknowledging the significance of education and training in transporting EU core values world-wide, the programme is expected to continue contributing to strengthening democracies, ensuring the rule of law and respect for human rights, not least through participation from non-EU countries, and building links through the new Global Europe instrument.
- Due to limited data at the early stage of the Erasmus+ programme it is not possible to explicitly confirm how coherent programme implementation is with respect to the mentioned EC priorities. However, judging from the available information, the programme and its projects are moving in the right direction and could potentially be coherent from this aspect as well.

The interviewed national stakeholders inform that Erasmus+ is able to address relevant international and national challenges. In an international context, for example, aging has been mentioned as an issue that is well-dealt with by the programme, at the national level the internationalisation of the educational establishments has been noted as an example. The national stakeholders further expressed their appreciation of the programme simplification efforts that ensure greater inclusion and diversity of the applicants.

3.4. Effectiveness

Effectiveness of the programme has been mainly assessed based on publicly available data on the Erasmus+ Result Platform[104]. Some data from the Annual Implementation Report 2021, the Programme Statement 2023 and the Implementation report of the current Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 provided by EPRS have also been used.

Efforts were made to obtain a general overview on programme effectiveness two years after its launch.

Table 5 showcases where the above mentioned two practices (highlighted in blue) belong in the overall palette of mainly indirectly managed programme actions.

[104] Erasmus+ Webpage

Table 5: Erasmus+ 2021-2027 Key Actions and Action Type fields (indirectly managed)

Action Type FIELD/ Strand / Key Actions	Education and Training				Youth	Sport
	HE	VET	School	Adult		
Mobility						
Cooperation partnerships						
Small-scale Partnerships						
Youth participation						
Discover EU						

Source: own representation

3.4.1. Programme launch

The available data indicates that overall the launch of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme has been successful. 43 % of the total Erasmus+ budget (€14 billion) was earmarked for the first three years of programme implementation, of which 11 % has already been committed in 2021. This indicates a launch of the programme with an annual increase in the total volume of available financing. Furthermore, the commitment for 2021 matches the funds earmarked for the year, supporting the finding that the overall uptake in the first year of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 has been effective.

Information on the success rate of various Erasmus+ actions, such as applications received versus projects supported, is mainly only available for directly managed actions. It points to varied results in 2021 and 2022, ranging from 22 % in the SPO-KA2 'Cooperation among organisations and institutions' to 100 % in 'Adult learning'. With the overall average being 39.2 %[105] this indicates a strong variation in demand for different actions compared to their budget allocation.

Table 6: Erasmus+ cumulative implementation rate at the end of 2021 (€ million)

	Implementation	2021-2027 Budget	Implementation rate
Commitments	€2 812.2	€25 372.7	11 %
Payments	€1 842.2	-	7 %

Source: Programme Statements – Erasmus+, p. 225

The Erasmus+ national stakeholders were very cautious in drawing any substantial conclusions on the effectiveness of the programme at such an early stage. Since the application processes of all calls, including the large share under decentralised management, are processed via the central application portal of the European Commission, Member States frequently lack sufficient information on applications and find it difficult to assess the interest of applicants. Only Spain was able to provide some concrete data in this regard, which seems to be linked to its own national co-funding mechanisms. Nevertheless, every interviewed national stakeholder confirmed a high interest towards almost all actions of the programme especially now in the post-pandemic period.

[105] Internal implementation report of the current Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027 by MEP Milan Zver

Mobility of higher education students and staff

AIR 2021 reports €753 422 802 contracted for projects under Mobility of HE students and staff in 2021, which is slightly above the earmarked budget (see Table 7 below).

Table 7: The total budget earmarked for Mobility of HE students and staff, €

Member States	2021	2022	2023
TOTAL EU-30*	€668 872 590	€955 452 601	€1 024 254 147

* EU-27 plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway
Source: Annual Work Programmes, 2021, 2022, 2023

AIR 2021 reports a total of 3 481 projects selected under mobility in higher education expecting 328 739 participants[106]. This figure positively exceeds the aim of related key monitoring indicator No 1 for SO1 'Number of participants in learning mobility activities in the Education and Training strand of the programme' in 2021[107], which was set at 308 000 total (250 000 learners and 58 000 staff).

A Member of Parliament (MEP) reports 'After a relative slowdown in 2021, Erasmus+ started to resume substantial support to mobility again in 2022'[108]. Additionally, the information from MS indicates that a high demand for Erasmus+ actions is back, in particular mobility. There is no information, however, on the success rate within the indirectly managed calls for proposals. Table 8, below, provides certain key data on the uptake of the actions in the selected MS.

Table 8: The total earmarked budget for Mobility of HE students and staff in 2021 and 2022 versus commitment in the selected Member States, €

Member States	2021			2022*		
	Earmarked	Committed	Number of projects	Earmarked	Committed	Number of projects
Belgium	€21 034 876	€26 426 669	67	€30 654 986	€32 007 778	69
Bulgaria	€12 568 245	€12 433 849	49	€18 957 312	€12 118 724	35
Lithuania	€9 571 744	€9 451 744	34	€14 437 539	€13 818 917	33
Spain	€65 307 071**	€90 571 349	695	€96 107 749**	€119 313 695	925

Source: Annual Work Programmes 2021, 2022 and Erasmus+ Results Platform[109], *Not a complete year, data cut-off date 25 April 2023, Green – exceeds the earmarked allocation, Orange – below earmarked allocation ;
** Additional national co-funding of €40 million is provided annually and not reflected in the table

It is also known that some Member States, such as Spain for example, provide additional national co-funding to the Erasmus+ programme to satisfy the high demand in some actions. Through such national co-financing efforts the Ministry of Universities in Spain manages to maintain an almost 100 % success rate in 'Mobility of higher education students and staff'.

106 Statistic Annex to Annual Implementation Report 2021, p. 20

107 Programme Statements – Erasmus+, p. 234

108 Internal implementation report of the current Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027 by MEP Milan Zver, p. 6

109 Funding&Tender database

In Belgium, namely, in Wallonia and Brussels, a study on the blended mobility strand[110] of the Erasmus+ programme concluded that there is interest in such opportunities. The strand can respond to challenges such as inclusion of individuals with fewer opportunities for instance. However, delays in setting up and carrying out projects were detected as well. Reasons for the delays include the administrative complexity of the programmes and the lack of functionality of the data entry tools. An inconsistency in the information available and financial constraints have also been observed.

Small-scale Partnerships in vocational education and training

Small-scale Partnerships in VET are among the new actions introduced to make the measure more accessible for smaller organisations and newcomers to the programme. AIR 2021 reports that €16 500 000 has been contracted for projects under Small-scale Partnerships in VET in 2021 covering a total of 297 projects[111], which can be assessed as an overall good start. Funding wise this accounts for approximately half of what has been earmarked for 2021.

The interviewed DG EAC representatives informed that the slightly bigger total funding amount allocated for Small-scale Partnerships in VET in 2021, compared to 2022 and 2023, was due to the reshuffling of funds from actions not completed in 2021 as a result of COVID-19 restrictions preventing travel.

The related key monitoring indicator No 10 aims for 1 800 Small-scale Partnerships to be supported under key action 2 of the Education and Training strand in 2021[112]. Therefore, in combination with the 1 037 partnerships supporting other levels of education (537 in school education and 500 in adult education), the 1 334 Small-scale Partnerships account for 74 % of what has been anticipated. Although this does not fulfil expectations at this stage, it can be expected that the action, will be able to catch up in the coming years.

Table 9: The total budget earmarked for Small-scale Partnerships in VET

Member States	2021	2022	2023
TOTAL EU-30	€30 000 000	€20 000 000	€23 493 236

* EU-27 plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway
Source: Annual Work Programmes, 2021, 2022, 2023

MS are signalling an overall high interest in VET related projects admitting insufficient funding to satisfy the demand. Small-scale Partnerships in vocational education and training in the calls for proposals in Spain in 2021 to 2023 have had an average success rate of 36 %.

The national stakeholders from Bulgaria highlighted that overall, the VET projects are particularly effective for contributing to the inclusion of socially disadvantaged and underrepresented groups (e.g., people with disabilities, migrants, refugees, marginalised communities, people from remote cities and villages). In the post-pandemic recovery, they improve educational quality in the country as well as for individual participants who they help develop the necessary skills needed in the labour market. An interesting example is the Therma Culture[113] project developing skills for the tourism industry for economically lagging areas, thus increasing the attractiveness of working in the tourism sector.

110 État des lieux des mobilité hybrides dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. 2023

111 Statistic Annex to Annual Implementation Report 2021, p. 20

112 Programme Statements – Erasmus+, p. 239

113 https://thermaculture.eu/

Table 10: The total earmarked budget for Small-scale Partnerships in VET in 2021 and 2022 versus commitment by selected Member States, €

Member States	2021			2022*		
	Earmarked	Committed	Number of projects**	Earmarked	Committed	Number of projects**
Belgium	€785 664	€510 000	10	€516 114	€240 000	4
Bulgaria	€544 445	€420 000	7	€384 082	€680 000	12
Lithuania	€463 841	€60 000	1	€304 704	€120 000	2
Spain	€2 857 081	€720 000	13	€1 876 859	€1 050 000	20

Source: Annual Work Programmes 2021, 2022 and Erasmus+ Results Platform[114], *Not complete year, data cut-off date 25 April 2023, Green – exceeds the earmarked allocation, Orange – below earmarked allocation; ** includes only the projects coordinated by MS

3.4.2. Programme management and responses to changing external conditions

Information on the Erasmus+ calls for proposals that are directly managed is available at the Funding and Tender opportunities database[115], while the indirect calls are managed via a joint Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps website[116]. In general, both direct and indirect management are effective in supporting the programme's objectives and in responding to the external challenges experienced upon launch. This has been confirmed both by the EU and national stakeholders.

Erasmus+ 2014-2020 was finalised in 2020, at the time that the global COVID-19 pandemic broke out. This had an effect on the programme as most actions directly target the mobility of people. The interviewed DG EAC representatives explained that virtual mobilities were introduced to compensate for the suddenly limited movement of individuals, and more funds were shifted to partnerships thus strengthening the educational establishments that had suffered. According to the representatives of EACEA, this reshuffling caused an extra administrative burden, however effective and prompt solutions were found. The solutions introduced were effective and the programme demonstrated great resilience to the pandemic overall. Moreover, 60 % of the mobilities continued, though it was not always deemed easy to navigate through the travel restrictions of the various countries involved. As a result, now in 2022 and 2023, the demand for mobility is exploding.

National stakeholders also confirmed a great deal of flexibility of the programme during the COVID-19 pandemic. The EC flexibly adjusted to virtual mobility, longer stays, and introduced other necessary measures. This established a good framework enabling the programmed activities to continue, in addition, digital skills have been observed to have benefited the most.

Being very flexible in terms of thematic areas is another advantage of Erasmus+. The representatives of EACEA highlighted that the programme is flexible enough to introduce the niche focus within the current framework whether this is the twin transition, inclusiveness, democratic processes or youth related topics, among others. Any related topic can be efficiently picked up and addressed via projects, including mental difficulties experienced by young people during the COVID-19 confinement. AWP is the basis for defining specific thematic topics for the call for proposals. Firstly

114 Funding&Tender database

115 Funding&Tender database

116 https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-esc/index/

discussed and agreed within the Programme Committee representing all MS, they are then adopted by the EC as the final step. The analysis of the three AWPs – 2021, 2022, 2023 within this study showed concrete evolution of certain topics throughout the period, such as those related to the twin transition.

In 2022, the Russian aggression on Ukraine was tackled very efficiently from the centralised management perspective. According to EACEA adaptation was needed at the contractual level depending on Ukrainian partner possibilities to proceed with the project. Funding for all Russian participation was terminated. This affected some partnerships, but, overall, a very small number of projects had to be terminated.

The interviewed national stakeholders reported a few issues related to effective management of this challenge from the decentralised management perspective. A representative of Bulgaria reported that due to traditionally stronger links with Russia (similar to many of the Eastern European countries) there has been a greater number of established partnerships especially at the academic level. The Russian aggression on Ukraine, and withdrawal of funding for Russian partners, affected these Erasmus+ projects. The new situation, however, was managed effectively. An interviewee stated that the beneficiaries were allowed to redirect funds to other partners outside of Russia. In the "traditional Erasmus" student mobility, Russian and Ukrainian students doing their exchange in Bulgaria were offered the possibility to extend their stay under the same conditions if they felt threatened or unsafe to go back due to the war. From the decentralised management perspective, certain challenges were evident related to the Ukrainian refugee influx. National agencies, other organisations, and ministries were unable to find ways in which Erasmus+ could help young Ukrainians fleeing the war the same way that was possible with the ESC. However, some projects that involve Ukraine and key partnerships for youth exchanges and mobility with Ukraine do exist, stated one of the interviewees.

Decentralised management proves to be effective due to the proximity of management to potential beneficiaries and the greater potential for providing assistance. One interviewee highlighted that, for example, many small-scale organisations, such as VET centres, do not have the necessary capacity to develop and manage projects. Therefore SEPIE[117], the Spanish National Agency for Internationalisation of Higher Education, assists them in the capacity development, e.g., 'building muscles' for applying for projects. The same was also mentioned by the Lithuanian stakeholders who emphasised that they specifically support young people and organisations to develop their networks by reaching out, travelling to the different cities and offering capacity building training. As a result of the direct work with potential beneficiaries, the respondent indicated having many high-quality projects.

A significant amount of appreciation has been expressed by the national stakeholders for the new financial management of the Erasmus+ programme in allocating lump sums to organisations. This approach makes the programme more accessible for smaller organisations. It has proven to be a clear benefit, one that is additionally supported by the simplified application procedure which has been highlighted as a significant positive change in the new period.

3.4.3. Programme objectives addressed during early implementation

Due to the early stage of implementation and limited data, it is only with some approximation that the extent to which the programme objectives are being addressed can be assessed. A clear trajectory of the early calls for proposals towards meeting programme objectives and EC priorities is visible, however, a definite judgement can be made only at a later stage. The preliminary

[117] http://sepie.es/internationalisation.html

assessment finds that the Erasmus+ actions are already contributing significantly to overall EC priorities as well as the two external challenges – the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine. The extent of this contribution has the necessary prerequisites to further increase toward the end of the programming period, especially as international mobility has been resumed.

It is also very likely that the two selected practices 'Mobility in Higher Education' and 'Small-scale partnership in VET' will contribute to the attainment of programme goals in the coming years. At this stage, it remains too early, however, to judge their effects. For 'Mobility in Higher Education' the assessment can be partly based on its past success and achievements. There are no indications at this stage that the undertaken course towards the common goals will change. Judging from the appreciation expressed by the Erasmus+ national stakeholders towards the 'Small-scale partnership in VET', this practice has the potential to contribute greatly to the overall aims by onboarding many smaller organisations that have not yet had a chance to participate due to their limited capacity. Extending the scope of the programme will certainly lead to greater policy effects.

The national stakeholders elaborated on how Erasmus+ has been addressing national challenges. A Lithuanian respondent assessed the programme as very relevant and coherent at a national level because the national priorities are also very focused on increasing youth civic engagement and inclusion and increasing the quality of youth work. It was mentioned that these three pillars are very connected to the Commission priorities as well, making them work very well altogether. It is a good support mechanism for youth organisations and opportunity to engage young people to contribute to these priorities.

3.4.4. Challenges in the early implementation

The mid- and longer-term challenge for programme management is the cyclical nature of EU funding. In the mid-term, when the programme has taken off, this has less of an impact. However, the programme needs time to pick-up after the beginning of a programming period and to successfully raise awareness, for instance, on new or amended actions. Toward the end of the programming period, wider awareness creates increased demand. While applicants are not necessarily aware of the cyclical nature, programme authorities are still placed in a position to decline applicants until the start of the next programming period, which is perceived as being counterproductive.

In the short term, the effectiveness of the Erasmus+ programme implementation and management at the project level is impeded by the consequences of the two major challenges analysed in this report. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine have led to unprecedented inflation that also affects project budgets. The Erasmus+ national stakeholders indicated that the beneficiaries have difficulties coping with the previously budgeted expenses being insufficient considering recent inflation trends.

Furthermore, the national Erasmus+ stakeholders report that their national budget allocations are too often insufficient, and this presents a challenge for beneficiaries as well. This issue has been exacerbated by the recent inflation trends across Europe, specifically concerning travel costs which are an important part of Erasmus+ budgets.

The national stakeholders also reported having certain issues utilising the digital online portals of the EC to apply for projects and to report results (as observed in Belgium, Spain and Bulgaria). The national stakeholders from Belgium added that monitoring of the programme can become problematic if the IT tools in place are not running efficiently. This can lead to gaps or mistakes in the figures reported.

Speaking about the programme's success in the early implementation stage, an EACEA representative mentions the new capacity building measures for sports and VET. They report that there has been sufficient interest to date, and the first projects are rolling out. Expansion of Jean Monnet actions at other levels of education, and schools in particular, have also been mentioned as one of the potential success stories. Despite some technical and practical issues (such as that most schools not being registered as legal entities) the action is being rolled out successfully and the number of applications is increasing from year to year.

3.4.5. Lessons learnt

Due to the data limitations and a very early stage of implementation, only some preliminary conclusions on the effectiveness of Erasmus+ can be made:

- There has been an overall good launch of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme. The overall uptake in 2021 was effective, and the commitment matched the funds earmarked for the year. For the centrally managed calls, the overall good launch is illustrated with an average success rate of 39 % of proposals.
- After suspending almost 40 % of mobilities due to travel restrictions, a high demand is back for Erasmus+ actions, especially concerning mobility.
- Both the direct and the indirect management mechanisms are effective in supporting the programme's objectives and responding to the external challenges experienced upon its launch. The programme demonstrated great resilience to the pandemic. It also tackled the Russian aggression on Ukraine related response efficiently.
- It can be expected, that the two selected practices analysed for this study will contribute greatly to the attainment of the programme goals. Mobility of higher education students and staff in 2021 attained the annual key monitoring indicator, while Small-scale Partnerships in VET did not. Nevertheless, they have been mentioned as a success of this programming period alongside the capacity building measures for sports and Jean Monnet actions for schools.
- National stakeholders signal certain drawbacks related to the administrative complexity of the programmes and the lack of functionality of the data entry tools.

4. Assessment of the early implementation of the Creative Europe programme

Creative Europe programme key findings:

- The programme Creative Europe is strong in connecting national perspectives. With creativity at the core of its objectives, it encourages artists and creatives to tell their stories and to develop activities beyond the ordinary.
- The programme has the potential to strengthen the positive transformation power of the cultural and creative sectors in partnership with a wide range of EU policy areas. However, the recognition of Creative Europe by other EU policies is so far widely underexploited.
- While highlighting the digital dimension throughout the programme documents, the programme underplays its potential role related to the digital transformation. The frontrunning EU digital policies are only weakly referred to in the work programmes and call documents. Thus, the awareness raising potential to the sector is underused.
- Creative Europe is on a good trajectory to become a reference practice for a 'green funding programme', which systematically addresses the ecological transition in and with the cultural and creative sectors. It demonstrates the wider potential a funding programme could have for transition areas and policies generally.
- Solidarity with the Ukraine is well-anchored in the Creative Europe programme which comprises specific calls and already operational projects. The activities targeting support to Ukraine could be further enhanced including the calls in the Media and Cross-Sectoral Strands.
- Creative Europe underplays its potential in view of strategic autonomy questions, which are considerably interlinked with new geopolitical as well as updated international cultural relations. Related references to EU international (culture) policies should be a minimum requirement for Creative Europe Work programmes.
- Heavy administrative conditions including the digital portal in use for Creative Europe can generate negative effects related to the variety of applicants including those from smaller countries and institutions, as well as inefficiencies for the implementation of selected projects. Negative experiences in view of the (perceived) poor access to information and funding can generate considerable negative collateral for the European project. Data availability should also be ensured for research purposes.
- Further attention is required for the working conditions and frameworks of the Creative Europe Desks including ensuring appropriate briefing and training on new funding streams.

The Creative Europe programme aims to safeguard, develop, and promote European cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage and to increase the competitiveness and economic potential of cultural and creative sectors, in particular the audio-visual sector.

In the programming period 2021-2027, the programme contributes to the recovery of relevant sectors, reinforcing their efforts to become more inclusive, more digitally developed, and more environmentally sustainable. In this programming period, there is an even stronger emphasis on transnational creation and on innovation, easier access to funding, supporting EU-level cooperation, the mobility scheme for artists and professionals and actions that target the needs of specific creative sectors, such as music, architecture, and cultural heritage.

The Creative Europe programme is open to individuals as well as cultural and creative organisations from EU Member States, as well as non-EU countries. The programme is fully managed by the EACEA.

The Creative Europe Desks are support structures at the national level financed from the CREATIVE EUROPE programme. In every participating country a Creative Europe Desk provides programme related assistance and helps cooperating with organisations in other countries.

4.1. Overview

The implementation of the Creative Europe programme started in 2021. For all three strands of the programme, a wide range of calls referring to the work programmes 2021, 2022, and 2023 were launched. The project results are mainly available for the calls launched up to 2022.

The Programme Statement[118] provided by the European Commission's DG Connect and DG EAC for the implementation of the Creative Europe programme highlights the following key achievements for the first implementation year 2021. This has been complemented with additional data received from the European Commission for the elaboration of this study and data extracted from the Funding and Tender opportunities portal.

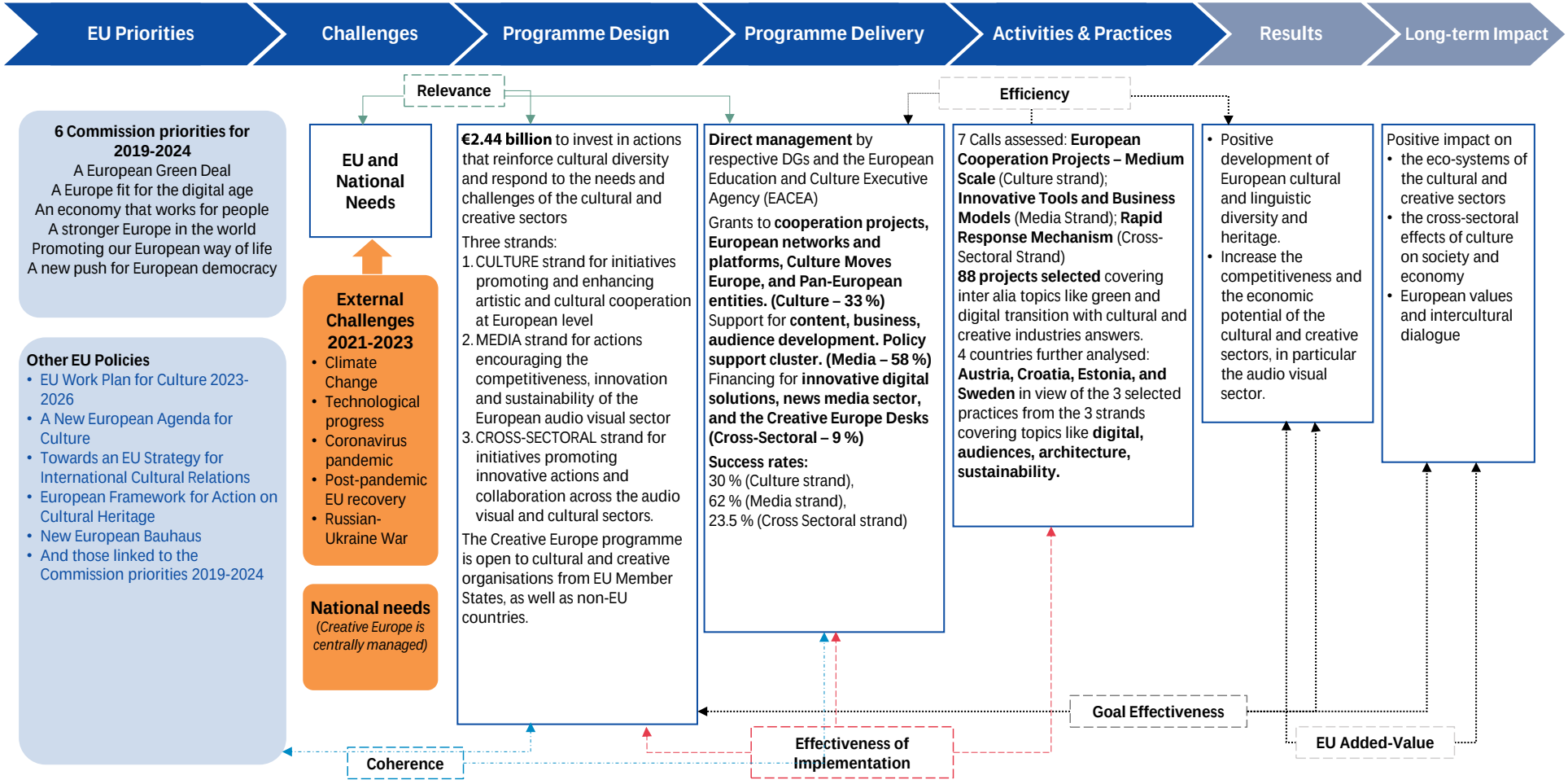
Table 11: Key Achievements Creative Europe

2 European Capitals of Culture	3 Oscars	36 European networks
68 European Cinema Night screenings	€520 million committed for grants	Nearly 13 500 awarded grants
1 536 Projects	3 220 Organisations Participations	49 Calls (until January 2023)

Source: DG EAC and DG Connect, 'Programme Statements – Creative Europe', 2022; DB 2023 and EC 2023 and own calculations for number of calls from the Funding and Tender opportunities portal.

[118] Programme Statements – Creative Europe

Figure 6: Creative Europe intervention logic



Source: own representation.

The following overview provides insights in the overarching results of the implementation of the Creative Europe programme and details the programme specific intervention logic. For the analysis of the project results the focus was on the pre-selected practices in four MS, namely Austria, Croatia, Estonia and Sweden.[119] Due to the central management of the Creative Europe programme, the MS perspective is not subject to the relevance and coherence dimension of the evaluation.

4.2. Relevance assessment

This assessment addresses the four relevance evaluation questions formulated for all programmes including the relevance of recent developments. The main EU-wide challenges (see sub-section 2.1.1) are complemented with challenges specifically relevant for the cultural and creative sectors. These were identified from following reference studies:

- Cultural and Creative Sectors in post-COVID-19-Europe – Crisis effects and policy recommendations[120]
- From Reaction to Action – Collaborative Transformation Policies in Culture and Beyond for Future-Oriented Policy Making and Action[121]
- Report of the European Union Open Method of Coordination (OMC) expert group on the cultural dimension of sustainable development[122]
- Report on the situation of artists and the cultural recovery in the EU[123]
- In the Face of War, a Year of Action in Ukraine[124]
- EU strategic autonomy 2013-2023 – From concept to capacity[125]

From these studies and documents the following challenges were identified in view of culture-specifics:

Table 12: Culture-Specific Challenges Related to Main EU Challenges

Main EU Challenges	Related Culture-Specific Challenges
Digital Transformation	The European Way of Digitalisation Digital Divide Rules-Based Digital Economy Digital Accessibility Digital and Interlinked Green Challenges Digital Business Models Culture in the Metaverse AI in Culture Production Cultural Diversity and the Digital World Digital Audiences and Societal/Health Effects

119 For the selection of MS see section 2.4 and Annex I (section AI.5).

120 Cultural and Creative Sectors in Post-COVID-19 Europe. Crisis Effects and Policy Recommendations

121 From Reaction to Action – Collaborative Transformation Policies in Culture and Beyond for Future-Oriented Policy Making and Action

122 Stormy Times: Nature and Humans : Cultural Courage for Change : 11 Messages for Action for and from Europe : Executive Summary

123 The Situation of Artists and the Cultural Recovery in the EU

124 In the Face of War, a Year of Action in Ukraine

125 EU Strategic Autonomy 2013-2023

Main EU Challenges	Related Culture-Specific Challenges
Green Transition	Raising Awareness with Culture Action Contribute to Change of Lifestyle of Europeans Overcoming Governance Silos Cultural Policy and Action Equally Involved in Global Initiatives A Circular Economy In/With Culture Measure What You Value Sustainability of Culture Climate Networks Culture and Biodiversity Territorial Segregation Local/Global Just Transition
Pandemic Consequences	The European Approach to a Social Market Economy Endangered Parts of the CCS Persisting Social Divide Decent Earning for All Workers Public Employers and related specificities Deployment of CCS (Cross-Sectoral) Innovation Forces, Societal Forces Broad Notion of Innovation International Cooperation and Solidarity Media in Democracy Recognise Intrinsic Value of Culture Culture as Essential for Societies and Economies Culture as Part of the EU Industrial Policy Framework Culture in NextGenerationEU Recognition of EU Added Value of Cross-Border-Cooperation Mobility Opportunities for Artists/Cultural Workers European Status of the Artist
Russian Aggression and Geopolitical Context	Preventing Destruction and Looting Assessing the Damage Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property Sustain Cultural Life and Artistic Production Refugee (Women) Artists Continuity of Education Key Equipment Provision Impacts on (Mental) Health Reliable Information Safety of Journalists Women in Culture/Arts Future of Cultural Diplomacy Culture(s) at Risk Cultural Diversity as Societal Resource Better Understanding of Culture and Conflict

Main EU Challenges	Related Culture-Specific Challenges
EU Strategic Autonomy	(Cultural) Institutions as Places of Democracy A New Media Culture Global (Cultural) Citizenship Cultural (Participation) Rights Challenges to Democracy and Artistic Freedom Youth Dialogue Collaborative Transformation Policies and CCS Eco-Systems A Strategy Culture

Source: own representation.

The relevance assessment of the Creative Europe programme is based on several documents: the regulation[126] and annual work programmes[127] were used for the design; the calls and related activities, selected practices and other implementation aspects were used for the early implementation information.

4.2.1. Programme design

The programme design of the *Creative Europe programme* addresses all five major EU challenges. While strong references are made to the digital transformation, the areas of green transition, post-pandemic recovery, and EU strategic autonomy are addressed to lesser extents in the *Regulation*. The Creative Europe regulation was already in place when the war in the Ukraine started. Thus, no references to the war were made in the Creative Europe regulation. However, the programme regulation already refers to migration and refugees.

The *Creative Europe Work Programmes 2021-2023* tackle all five major EU challenges:

In relation to the *digital transition,* the Creative Europe Work Programme 2021-2023 addresses related challenges (e.g., lack of digital skills) and opportunities like the digital and hybrid outreach to international markets. While the Work Programme 2021 seemed to be influenced by the then ongoing pandemic and the enhanced digital requirement for the cultural and creative sectors to reach out to the (digital) audiences and (online) markets, later Work Programmes highlight stronger challenges of the digital transition (e.g., the disruptive power of the digital world on the news media sector as well as the need of defending media pluralism in the digital era). Overall, the Work Programmes reflect the initial provisions of the Creative Europe regulations well, with a strong transversal reference to the digital transition.

The *green transition* is mentioned in the Work Programmes as a cross-cutting element. A study commissioned by the programme provides the related insights for a green EU funding programme.[128] Especially in the Media Strand of the Creative Europe programme, a series of calls are referred to for which the requirement of greening strategies have been applied and the refund of greening costs is foreseen.[129] The key areas of the green transition named in the different Work

126 Regulation (EU) 2021/818

127 Annual work programmes Creative Europe

128 Greening the Creative Europe Programme: Final Report

129 Creative Europe Work Programme 2022 (p. 18) states 'In parallel, the MEDIA support actions will introduce additional financial incentives for greening in 2022. For almost all schemes, beneficiaries will be required to present greening strategies, air travel will be reduced and greening costs will be funded. In 2022 the following schemes will introduce further greening incentives: TV and Online content; Talents and Skills; Markets and Networking; MEDIA 360; VOD Networks; Networks of Festivals; Networks of Cinemas; and Films on the Move.'

Programmes are: climate and biodiversity mainstreaming, greening of the (AV) sectors including green production and potentially a green label, raising awareness, risk management with respect to preservation of cultural heritage, testing and innovative green solutions, fostering green life cycle thinking as well as green recovery.

With reference to the *post-pandemic recovery challenges* several actions are highlighted in the priorities such as sectoral approaches in the Culture Strand (e.g., music) and a series of considerations related to the Media Strand (recovery of festivals, reconnecting with audiences, and cinemas). The adoption of the funding provisions due to the special needs of the cultural and creative sectors during the pandemic is another supporting element. It is expected that these provisions will soon be replaced by pre-pandemic settings as stated in the 2023 Work Programme. Furthermore, the Work Programme for the year 2023 highlights several measures related to a simplification of the programme management and project implementation settings (e.g., a wider application of lump sums). This could be an effect related to the lessons learnt from the pandemic years.

The Work Programmes refer in a more limited extent to the *Russian aggression on Ukraine*. However, the measures foreseen in the Culture Strand of the Work Programme for 2023 are more comprehensive in view of the enhanced participation of the representatives of the Ukrainian art and culture sectors in the European Cooperation projects, including a special call and training activities for the Ukrainian heritage sector. The wider geopolitical context and related conflicts are weakly covered in the Work Programmes. This considers, for example, references and frameworks for a wider range of refugee artists and cultural professionals.

The *strategic autonomy of the European Union* refers to a wide range of topical areas of which strengthening the European democracies is best reflected in the Creative Europe Work Programmes. Related to youth dialogue, as another relevant topic, the Creative Europe Work Programmes also refer to the European Year of Youth 2022. The newly introduced areas in the Cross-Sectoral Strands of the Creative Europe programme cover an important field to strengthen the democracy – namely media and journalism. The Work Programmes also refer to the European Democracy Action Plan when detailing the wider frameworks for action of the Creative Europe programme in this area.

4.2.2. Early implementation

The analysis of the early implementation of the Creative Europe programme is based on three selected practices as outlined in the methodology.[130] This approach allows for a related preliminary and exemplary understanding of how relevant the programme is for the identified challenges. The following calls were launched related to the three selected practices[131]:

- Culture Strand: European Cooperation Projects Medium Scale – 3 calls
- Media Strand: Innovative tools and business models – 3 calls
- Cross-Sectoral Strand: Rapid Response Mechanism – 1 call

When evaluating the *calls of the selected practices* in view of the five overarching challenges, the *digital transition* is reflected in the selected Culture Strand calls by objectives and priorities. These aim to enhance digital ways of producing and disseminating content, to take full advantage of digital technologies to improve competitiveness and more recently to develop audiences in the digital field. The digital dimension of sector-specific approaches is highlighted for cultural heritage, music, book and publishing, architecture, fashion and design, and sustainable cultural tourism. The

[130] For the selection criteria of the practices see Annex I (Section AI.4).

[131] Result based on Funding and Tender opportunities

selected calls in the Media Strand refer to the specific challenges of the European audio-visual sector in view of the digital transformation. The related Call 2023 is the most specific, highlighting activities such as improving accessibility across platforms as well as developing related business models, and use of technology for data gathering and analysis. The latest call also makes reference to AI, Big Data, blockchains, Metaverse, Non-Fungible Token (NFTs)[132], and others. The call 'Rapid Response Mechanism' under the Cross-Sectoral Strand aims at monitoring violations of press and media freedom and providing practical help to protect journalists under threat. This call specifically addresses the digital challenges in view of the digital media environment with reference e.g., to databases of media councils and actions for improvements of digital tools.

The *green transition* and related concrete greening activities of the Culture Strands calls have become more concrete and binding to be addressed by the applicants in the project work programmes. The related effects on the projects have not yet become visible as these measures were only taken in the call 2023 for which the results are not yet available. In the Media Strand calls, the greening of the European audio-visual sectors became one of the award criteria integrated in the project relevance assessment since 2022. The Cross Sectoral Strand call in Creative Europe does not refer to the green transition.

The *post-pandemic recovery challenges* were more prominently addressed in the 2021 and 2022 calls in the Culture Strand when the effects of the pandemic were still immediately visible. The call 2023 stresses the fact that the cultural and creative sectors require support for recovery and resilience and highlights the related digital acceleration in one of the priorities. The other selected calls do not have specific reference to the (post-)pandemic context.

With reference to the *Russian aggression on Ukraine*, the selected calls of the Culture Strand encourage applicants to take into account in their proposals, as much as possible, the Ukrainian cultural and creative sectors as well as the Ukrainian population. The Cross-Sectoral Strand call addresses the safety of journalists as a topical area including the organisation of related awareness campaigns. However, it covers journalists' safety only in EU Member States. The selected Media Strand calls do not refer to the war specifically.

The considerations related to the *EU strategic autonomy* are only mentioned in the Cross-Sectoral Strand by referring to democracy and the related role of the media and journalists.

A further *analysis on project level* confirmed the successful uptake in the areas of digital and green transition. An increasing importance of the ecological transformation can also be observed. Few projects address the pandemic recovery and the Russian aggression on Ukraine, whereas EU strategic autonomy aspects were only tackled to a minor extent by successful applicants.

4.2.3. Lessons learnt

The Creative Europe programme addresses the five overarching EU challenges with different intensity:

- The digital dimension is a strong topic anchored on all levels, strands and calls of the Creative Europe programme as a transversal feature. Upcoming challenges like the cultural dimension of the metaverse, interlinked green-digital impacts, effects on international relations as well as societal effects of digital practices are so far not systematically addressed, i.e., on programme-level.

[132] These are unique digital identifiers that are recorded on a blockchain, and used to certify ownership and authenticity.

- The green transition is a topic of increasing relevance. Related challenges are tackled structurally in the Creative Europe programme with specific measures (e.g., the objective to green the cultural and creative sectors). Based on this engagement, further attention on challenges, such as local and global just transition or enhanced cross-sectoral cooperation, could be beneficial. So far, the Creative Europe programme is less explicit on green challenges in the Cross-Sectoral Strand.
- The (post-) pandemic recovery is a topic mainly covered by the Culture Strand of the Creative Europe programme. Recovery is a broad topic for the cultural and creative sectors, which were heavily impacted by the pandemic and not all related challenges can be addressed with a funding programme (e.g., social security for creatives). However, challenges like fair payment could be addressed with related conditions in project implementation.
- The Russian aggression on Ukraine and related effects on the cultural and creative sectors so far play a minor role in Creative Europe, starting with the 2023 Work Programme and the calls in the Culture Strands. Despite the strong response to challenges related to the Russian aggression on Ukraine, the programme underplays highlighting other areas of concern like the growing numbers of artist refugees, the cultures at risk (beyond heritage), and the urgent need for updated international cooperation practices. This is even more relevant as the programme countries now reach widely beyond the EU Member States.
- The strategic autonomy considerations gain minor attention from the Creative Europe programme. While the support for media and journalists, which was introduced in the current programme, is an important element to support strategic autonomy, other strategic autonomy challenges gain less attention. These concern the need for a democratisation of cultural institutions and practices (e.g., including women's rights in cultural and artistic production, better reflecting diverse European societies in funding programmes). Furthermore, the intensification of the involvement of the next generation in the European (cultural) project is underplayed. Ensuring transformation ready cultural and creative sectors (e.g., addressing energy transition in cultural infrastructures) is a further topic not yet gaining sufficient attention.

Specifically assessing the different (culture-specific) challenges shows that the Creative Europe programme with its fully centralised mechanism does not specifically address national challenges as an explicit objective. However, a wide range of topics in Creative Europe are relevant for national cultural development (e.g., the greening of the sectors). Furthermore, it must be taken into account which national challenges can be adequately covered with support programmes, and which require other types of policy interventions (like e.g., regulations or laws). Annex II details the findings for culture-specific challenges.

The programme is still relevant despite changing external conditions as it is the only EU programme that directly addresses the cultural and creative sectors, the cultural dimension of the European project and of transformation, and related values and European identities. However, the programme underplays the potential of arts, culture, and the creative industries in view of an active cross-sectoral transformative power.

The programme reacted quickly to emerging needs in the context of the pandemic. Efforts were made to support the project implementation as well as to increase the available budgetary means in the first two years of programme implementation. Creative Europe also provided further support in the context of the Ukraine war. However, implementation projects in the specific calls related to the Ukraine have also led to new challenges. Focus group respondents reported that cultural actors have experienced difficulties in the project to cope with political agendas. The participants referred e.g., to the calls co-implemented with partners from Ukraine.

The transformation of the programme in view of the green transition is remarkable and demonstrates the potential a funding programme has to contribute to improved practices and projects.

4.3. Coherence assessment

This assessment addresses the three coherence evaluation questions formulated for all programmes. The main EU-wide priorities and policies (see sub-section 2.1.2) are complemented with policies specifically relevant for the cultural and creative sectors. These comprise of:

- the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026[133]
- A New European Agenda for Culture[134]
- Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations[135]
- the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage[136]
- the New European Bauhaus[137]

The corresponding overview of EU (cultural) policies is provided in Annex II, where the main policy objectives, general related policies and the culture specifics are jointly described.

The coherence analysis is based on the same programme documents as the relevance assessment. These documents were complemented with the strategies and publications available related to the European Commission Priorities 2019-2024[138].

4.3.1. Creative Europe in European Commission Priorities

Creative Europe is mentioned explicitly as a relevant support programme only in a minority of the Commission Priorities 2019-2024, namely the New European Bauhaus, the EU solidary with Ukraine initiative, the EU strategy combatting antisemitism, the European Democracy Action Plan and the European Media Freedom Action[139]. Surprisingly, highly relevant areas for culture policy and culture development like the European Skills Agenda or the Enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans do not refer to Creative Europe.

When further analysing the key documents of the EU actions in the field of culture policy, a full coverage of the Creative Europe programme could be observed. All strategic EU culture policy documents mention the programme.

133 Council resolution on EU work plan for culture 2023-2026 2022/C 466/01

134 European Commission SWD(2018) 267 final

135 Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations

136 European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage

137 https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/about/about-initiative_en

138 The European Commission's priorities (Webpage)

139 European Commission COM(2022) 457 final

4.3.2. Programme design

The *Creative Europe Programme Regulation* refers briefly to the EU Green Deal, the Digital Single Market[140], the European Industrial Strategy[141], the InvestEU programme[142] as well as to NextGenerationEU[143], and to Global Europe[144]. The regulation is more explicit in view of the European values which are considered as a key element of the cultural sphere anchored in the Treaty on European Union (Article 3). The values are further detailed in view of the industrial developments, the European films, arts education, promotion of cultural heritage as well as related to the inclusive communities and the integration of migrants. Another strong area of consideration by the regulation are the positive impacts the programme can generate by the means of interacting with the European citizens. Related references include the Baukultur (building culture), the European Capitals of Culture as well as the promotion of media literacy and critical understanding. In view of the explicit mention of EU cultural policy documents, the regulation refers strongly to the New European Agenda for Culture and mentions the EU strategy for International Cultural Relations.

The analysis of the *Creative Europe Work Programmes 2021-2023* yields the following observations on the European Commission priorities:

The European Green Deal as such was less referenced in the Work Programmes in the course of the implementation, but the New European Bauhaus (NEB) gained continuously more attention in the time span from 2021 to 2023. New aspects were introduced in the programmes like NEB elements related to mobility, the urban development (European Capital of Culture) and innovation labs. These considerations were limited to the Culture and Cross-Sectoral Strands of the Work Programmes.

The priority *A Europe fit for the digital age* is referred to in the Creative Europe Work Programmes with a focus on the mention of the European Digital Single Market. This is highlighted in the policy frameworks and also linked to related evaluations of the previous Creative Europe programme (2014-2020). The Work Programme 2023 highlights the European Industrial Strategy in view of the cultural and creative sectors eco-systems.

An economy that works for people is only partly addressed in the Work Programmes. They refer to SMEs and to the smaller organisations addressed with Creative Europe without explicitly mentioning related EU policy papers. However, the Work Programme 2023 becomes more comprehensive by dedicating further attention to working conditions (as mentioned in the Work Plan for Culture) and by mentioning the EU Pact for Skills.

Referring to the European Commission priority *A stronger Europe in the world*, the Creative Europe Work Programmes explicitly mention the Global Gateway initiative[145]. However, the global dimension of Creative Europe is highlighted in all three Work Programmes including global markets outreach, increasing global sales and connecting to global audiences. The Ukraine, Western Balkan and Mediterranean countries are mentioned in the Work Programmes in view of third country and candidate country participation. The Work Programme 2023 dedicates a considerable part of attention to the war in Ukraine which is specifically addressed in the Culture (focus) and Cross-Sectoral Stands (one element) of the programme.

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140 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/chapter/31.html

141 European Commission COM(2020) 102 final

142 Regulation (EU) 2021/523

143 https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_de

144 Global Europe: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument

145 JOIN(2021) 30 final

The European Commission priority *Promoting our European way of life* is widely addressed in the Work Programmes and across strands by highlighting the promotion and defence of European and common values. They cover activities like grants (Media Content Cluster), EU Prizes (such as the EU Prize for Popular and Contemporary Music) and Media Pluralism (Cross-Sectoral Strand). However, migration related policies are not specifically mentioned. Furthermore, the Work Programme 2022 addresses the EU Strategy on combatting antisemitism as one of the priorities of the Culture Strand and in view of the European Heritage Days (including the cooperation with the Council of Europe).

Regarding the *New push for European democracy*, the Work Programmes are explicit in view of the citizens dimensions of Creative Europe and aim to reach out to the hearts and minds of European citizens. Related actions highlighted are the European Capitals of Culture, the European Heritage Label, the initiative for sub-titling and the European Film Forum. Furthermore, the Creative Europe Desks should reach out to citizens. All three Work Programmes mention the European Democracy Action Plan but do not refer to the European Media Freedom Act. These plans and acts are mainly addressed by the Cross-Sectoral Stand of the programme.

Analysing the references to the *Recovery Plan for Europe* shows that the Work Programmes provide a wider insight in recovery needs and how these will be addressed by Creative Europe. The 2023 Work Programme refers explicitly to National Recovery Plans and their cultural dimension[146].

Main EU Cultural Policies are referred to in the Work Programmes 2021-2023 in what concerns the New European Agenda for Culture. With the adoption of the new Work Plan for Culture post-2022, this policy document was widely addressed in the Work Programmes. The strategic policy documents related to EU international cultural relations and to Cultural Heritage were no longer included in the Work Programme 2023.

4.3.3. Early implementation

Early implementation was assessed based on the selected practices and calls listed in the relevance assessment (sub-section 4.2.2).

The evaluation of the *calls of the selected practices* shows that the Culture Strand calls are the most explicit in view of major European Commission priorities. The Cross-Sectoral Strand Call only indirectly refers to one of the European Commission priorities (A new push for European democracy: The European Democracy Action Plan as thematic priority). The selected calls in the Media Strand highlight none of the priorities as well as none of the related policies and documents.

The European Green Deal including the New European Bauhaus are well-anchored in the selected calls of the Culture Strand. This is further enhanced as the Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus are mentioned as part of one of the Call priorities.

A Europe fit for the digital age is not broadly addressed in the Culture Strands calls. They refer generally to the Digital Single Market and the Digital4Culture Strategy[147]. Related policies like Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act are not mentioned in the Culture Strands calls.

The selected calls in the Culture Strand neither mention the NextGenerationEU nor the European Skills Agenda related to the priority *An economy that works for people*. However, the working conditions were especially referenced to in the Culture Strands calls 2021- 2022. These calls also further mention the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

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146 Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard. Thematic Analysis – Culture and Creative Industries

147 See European Commission SWD(2018) 267 final

When further analysing the uptake of the calls of the European Commission priority *A stronger Europe in the world*, the selected Culture Strand calls mentioned none of the related policies and considerations related to global scaling and branding (which were mentioned in the Work Programme 2021). The selected call 2023 in the Culture Strand refers briefly to the Ukraine war.

The priority *Promoting our European way of life* was addressed in the selected calls (Culture Strand) concretely in the context of the sectoral priorities in the field of architecture in 2022 as an element to promote cultural heritage reuse and to transfer related values. The EU Strategy on combatting antisemitism and fostering Jewish life was mentioned in the policy framework of the selected Culture Strand call of the same year.

Citizen-related sectoral priorities in architecture and culture heritage were highlighted in the analysed Culture Strand calls 2021-2022 – addressing the European Commission priority *New push for European democracy*. The Cross-Sectoral Strand highlights democracy as a thematic priority with the features of the European Democracy Action plan.

Neither of the selected calls has a specific reference to the *Recovery Plan for Europe*.

Main EU culture policies referred to in the selected calls from the Culture Strand are the New European Agenda for Culture, the EU Work Plans for Culture and a wider range of Council Conclusions from the field of Culture. The strategies for international cultural relations and in the field of heritage were not mentioned in the 2023 call. The Media and Cross-Sectoral Strands calls analysed made no reference to the main EU culture policies.

When further analysing the uptake of priorities and policies on the level of *projects*, the successful applicants from the analysed Culture and Media Strands were mainly implicitly referring to *A Europe fit for the digital age* and to a lesser extent to *A Europe stronger in the world*.

4.3.4. Lessons learnt

EU policy documents outside the cultural area address Creative Europe to a (very) limited extent. With respect to the European Commission priorities, the following findings have been observed:

- Creative Europe is exclusively mentioned in view of the New European Bauhaus and none of the other policy areas linked to *A European Green Deal*.
- The programme Creative Europe is not mentioned in the policy documents related to the priority *A Europe fit for the digital age*. However, the Cultural and Creative Sectors are mentioned in the European Industrial Strategy.
- Similarly, Creative Europe is not mentioned in the Commission priority *An economy that works for people*, even though there is e.g., an EU Pact for Skills for the Cultural and Creative Sectors.
- When analysing the priority *A stronger Europe in the world*, Creative Europe is mentioned in the EU Solidarity with Ukraine initiative, yet in none of the other strategies e.g., those referring to the Western Balkans or to the Mediterranean space.
- *Promoting our European way of life* refers to the Creative Europe programme with regard to the EU Strategy on combatting antisemitism.
- *A new push for European democracy* includes references to the Creative Europe programme and makes a reference in the European Democracy Action Plan.
- The *Recovery Plan for Europe* does not refer to the Creative Europe programme.
- Creative Europe is mentioned in all strategic *EU cultural policy documents*.

The very limited mention of Creative Europe (or the cultural dimension in general) in the documents related to the European Commission priorities is a shortcoming. The added value of culture

(including the activities which can be supported by Creative Europe) are manifold and would benefit from explicit mentions in these documents.

The programme design is generally coherent with all European Commission priorities and relevant EU policies, though the degree to which the programme documents of Creative Europe refer to these policies differs. The European Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus are well-mentioned, but further green topics from the European Commission priorities are not specifically highlighted. The digital dimensions are transversally addressed in the programme. However, a lack of explicitly mentioning related EU policies has been observed. This refers, for example, to the regulative policies for the digital world in which the EU is a global frontrunner. An economy that works for people must also include decent working conditions for the cultural and creative sectors. This topic is highlighted in the Creative Europe work programmes and linked to (some) related EU policies. The programme documents miss out on referring to global perspectives beyond the war in the Ukraine.

Highlighting (changing) global frameworks would not automatically mean providing funding in this direction, but would rather serve to draw attention to the wider context for the project applicants. The bridging role of culture in times of conflict could also be a related area of consideration. Promoting the European way of life and A new push for European democracy should be central areas for a cultural programme, but very few references can be found to the related policies in the Creative Europe work programmes. Recovery is a central topic in the work programmes of Creative Europe, but there is less mention of the related EU policies. The mentioning of EU cultural policy documents in work programmes was modified during early implementation. Especially remarkable and surprising is that the document "Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations" is no longer referred to in the latest editions of the work programme. The detailed findings are presented in Annex II.

The data availability is very limited when analysing the results in view of selected projects and the related references to EU policies and priorities do not seem to be common[148]. However, the calls launched for the selected practices make explicit reference to:

- The European Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus
- The Digital Single Market as one reference policy (limited to the Culture Strand)
- The EU Solidarity with Ukraine (limited to the Culture Strand)
- A reference to European values and to the EU Strategy on combatting antisemitism (limited to the Culture Strand)
- Citizens-related priorities in the Culture Strand of the Creative Europe programme and the European Democracy Action Plan in the Cross-Sectoral Strand

Mentioning policies in the calls for proposals seems to be underexploited especially in the Media and Cross-Sectoral Strands of the programme despite the beneficial effects this could generate for the uptake by project applicants.

4.4. Effectiveness assessment

The analysis of the effectiveness of the Creative Europe programme focuses on the early implementation and is based on the following information sources:

- The internal document 'The implementation of the current Creative Europe programme 2021-2027' drafted by Rapporteur: MEP Massimiliano Smeriglio

[148] The analysis is based only on available short project summaries rather than comprehensive project applications or descriptions.

- The Creative Europe websites on the servers of the European Commission[149] and the EACEA[150]
- The European Commission Funding and Tender opportunities portal[151], used to extract project level information
- The Performance as detailed in the Programme Statement on Creative Europe prepared by EAC and DG CONNECT[152]

The Creative Europe project results website[153] provides no results for projects selected in 2021 or later. Due to this fact, this website could not be used for the assessment of the effectiveness of the early implementation of the Creative Europe programme. Furthermore, due to the diversity of data sources that had to be used, potential inconsistencies are difficult to avoid, though they are not likely to affect the overall assessment.

4.4.1. Programme launch

The implementation of the Creative Europe programme started in the year 2021 in all three strands of the programme. A wide range of calls referring to the work programmes 2021, 2022, and 2023 were launched. The project results are mainly available for the calls launched in the first two years.

In 2021-2022, 28 calls for proposals have been issued for the Media Strand and six for the Cross-Sectoral Strand. The number of calls issued for the Culture Strand was not provided in the information received from the EC.

The success rate of the received proposals varies greatly between strands. In 2021-2022, the success rate of project applications was 30 % for culture projects and 62 % for media projects. The success rate of proposals submitted for the Cross-Sectoral Strand was 23 % and 24 % in 2021 and 2022, respectively. This variation is also visible in the different budget allocation of the three strands, with the Cross-Sectoral Strand having a much smaller budget.

The analysis of the number of selected projects by practice and call shows that the number of projects selected in the 2021 calls was higher than in 2022. For the Rapid Response Mechanism, the one call in 2022 yielded two applications of which one was selected (see Table A.20 in Annex II).

The overall effectiveness of the Creative Europe programme during the initial implementation phase seems to be appropriate. The significantly lower uptake of practices in the Media Strand in 2022 can be explained through budgetary framework conditions. Due to the frontloading of the Creative Europe budget in 2021 to cope with the severe effects of the pandemic on the cultural and creative sectors, budgetary means for the call in 2021 were doubled compared to 2022.

All four MS selected for in-depth analysis have at least one approved project as lead partner from the selected practices. Austria and Sweden each have two projects, and Croatia and Estonia one each. Apart from one project under the Innovative Tools and Business Models, they are all European Cooperation Projects Medium Scale. Data for the Rapid Response Mechanism is not sufficient to allow corresponding insights (see Table A.21 in Annex II).

149 The Creative Europe programme (Webpage) and Culture and creativity – Funding opportunities

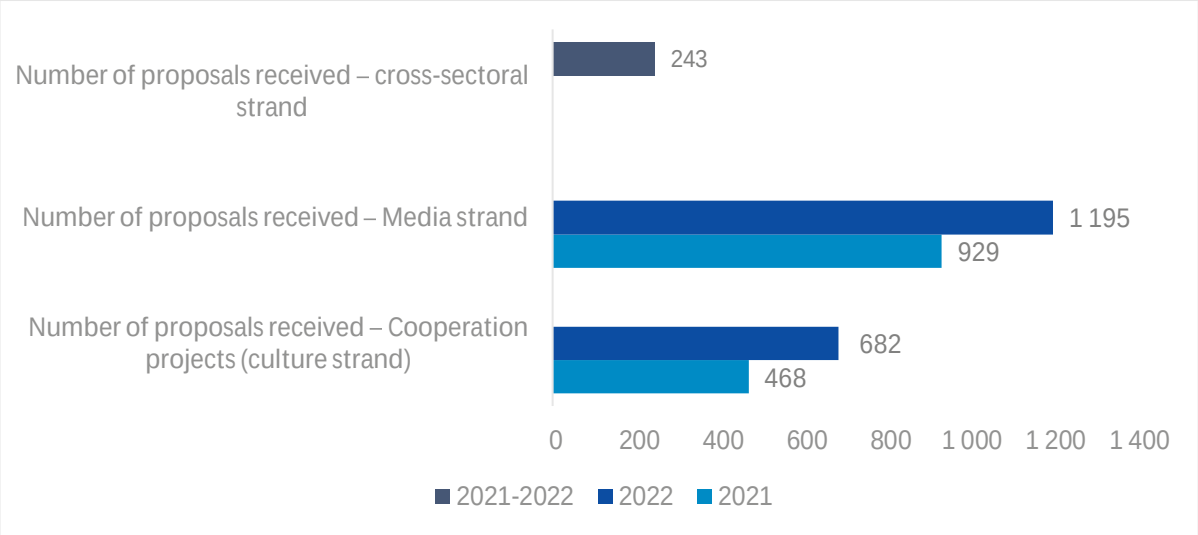
150 https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/grants/2021-2027/creative-europe_en

151 Funding and Tender opportunities

152 Programme Statements – Creative Europe, pp. 299

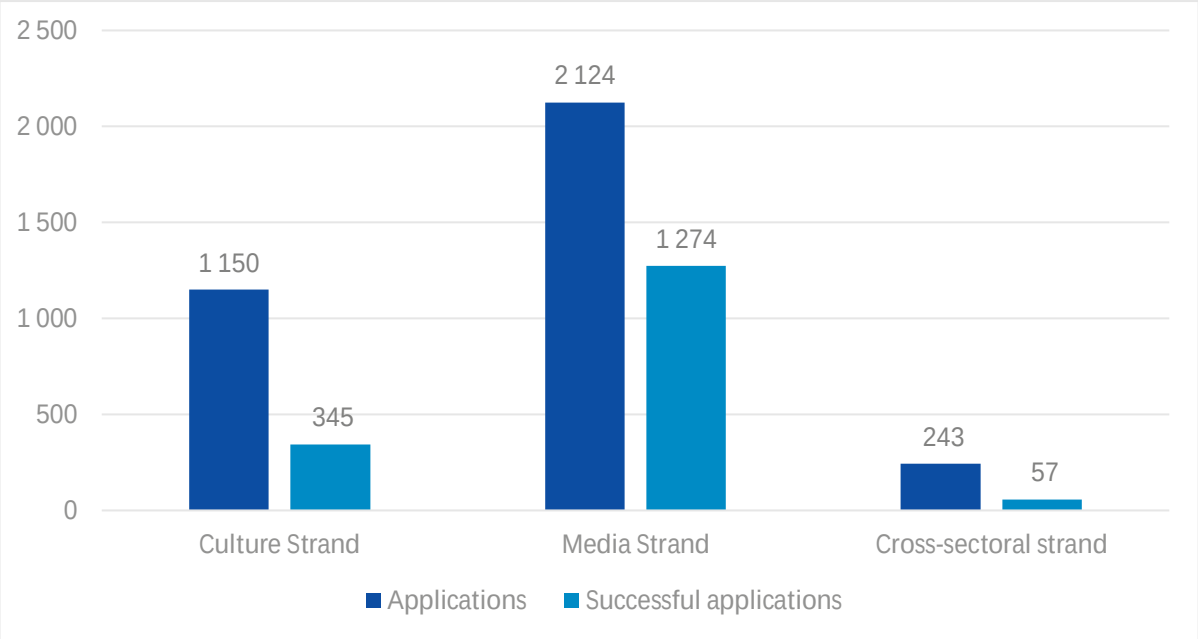
153 Culture and creativity – projects

Figure 7: Number of proposals received per strand



Source: own representation based on EC, 2023.

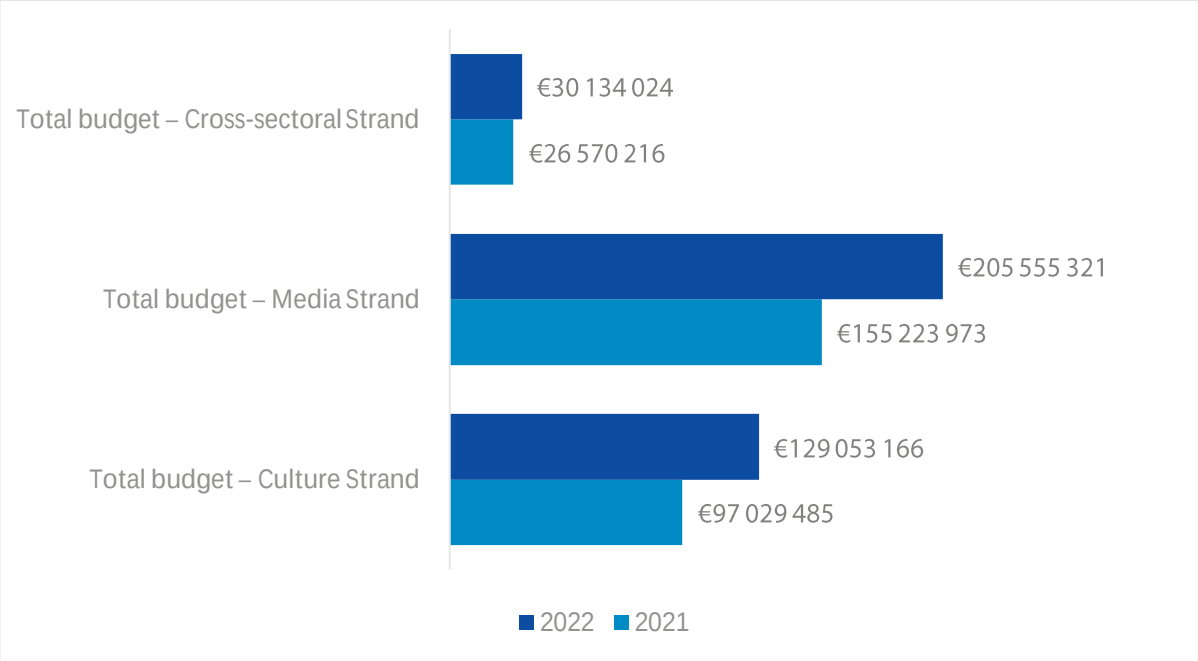
Figure 8: Creative Europe: Success rate per strand (number of applicants)



Source: EC, 2023

The effectiveness of the uptake of applicants from the four selected countries seems to be well-achieved related to the Culture Strand of the Creative Europe programme. The situation is different in the Media Strand with only one successful application. However, it has to be taken into account that in the selected practice of the Media Strand only very few countries are covered with a focus on bigger MS with very well developed creative and especially audio-visual industries. Nevertheless, a small country like Denmark is represented with several successful proposals in these calls. This leads to the conclusion that there is potential for wider uptake by media companies and organisations in the selected countries.

Figure 9: Creative Europe: total budget per strand (2021, 2022)



Source: own calculations, based on EC, 2023

4.4.2. Programme management and responses to changing external conditions

The implementation of the Creative Europe programme was fully affected by the pandemic and related crisis management when it was launched in 2021. The programme was further impacted by the Russian aggression on Ukraine which required a response related to the political decisions on the level of the European Union as well as support for the culture and heritage in the Ukraine and the refugees from the arts and culture sectors. In parallel, the programme must respond to the growing effects of climate change. The mentioned issues were addressed in the work programmes 2021 to 2023 and through a wider range of implementation settings on programme management level.

Related to the *pandemic*, immediate and longer-term lessons learnt are found to be well-summarised in the Creative Europe Work Programme 2023: 'The implementation of the Programme has been adapted to take into account the lasting challenging context resulting from the COVID19 pandemic. The overall budget was frontloaded, with a third of the Creative Europe budget committed in the first two years of the Programme. The profile of the programme has been frontloaded in 2021 and 2022, as a strong signal of the Union support to the recovery of the cultural and media sectors in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, the allocation of the programme returns to the regular profile, which explains the reduction of appropriations compared to previous years. Newly introduced higher co-financing rates for Culture co-operation projects as well as for several MEDIA actions, as a response to the urgent liquidity needs of the beneficiaries continue to be relevant due to the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector.'[154] The

[154] 2023 Annual Work Programme for the Implementation of Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions in the Area of Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, p. 24

concrete effects on the frontloading of budget are also visible in the selected Media Strand project results described above. Therefore, the implementation modalities seem to have been effective.

The *Russian aggression on Ukraine* was also tackled by the Creative Europe programme. The Work Programme 2023 published in August 2022 includes specific calls to support the cultural sectors in and from the Ukraine. Cooperation projects are foreseen as well as training for cultural heritage professionals in Ukraine. These actions are concentrated on the Culture Strand and complementary activities in the Media and Cross-Sectoral Strands of the programme are not visible. This approach bears the risk of not covering the full range of cultural support measures and related target groups e.g., from the Ukrainian audio-visual and creative industries.

Furthermore, the Work Programme is not explicit in view of potentially enlarging supporting and information tasks of the Creative Europe Desks (e.g., those in neighbouring countries to the Ukraine) to best support new applicants in submitting proposals.

When analysing the country-specific uptake in the three strands and the selected practices, as early as 2021 and 2022 projects involved partners from the Ukraine in the Culture Strand of the programme. One of the projects selected 'Tales of Ukraine' from the European Publishers Association in the Culture Call 2022 was a work prepared in response to the war. The selected Media Strand projects provided no visible coverage of, or project leadership by, Ukrainian innovative creative companies. The Cross-Sectoral Strand would be an additional area of action in favour of the Ukraine e.g., by strengthening free and democratic media.

The ongoing *climate crisis* was broadly addressed by the Creative Europe programme and the related early implementation programme settings. The Work Programme 2023 provides a comprehensive summary on the status of green provisions[155]. One example is a policy dialogue on greening with the audiovisual industry that was started in the context of the Media Strand[156]. The European Commission published a related study covering a Good Environmental Practices Guide, the Creative Europe Programme Greening Strategy, and the Creative Europe Monitoring Guide for Programme Greening[157]. This is a forward looking approach which can build on the already wider range of successful applicants addressing the ecological transformation in the analysed Culture Strand Calls. Furthermore, it provides the potential to generate a reference practice for other (EU) funding programmes. However, the further involvement of the Creative Europe Desks has not yet become visible in the programme implementation with potentially reduced effectiveness in view of the uptake by a large majority of project applicants. In addition, Media Strand provisions are responding well to the 'green' challenges on the level of programme documents. However, when analysing the selected projects, a wider greening is not yet visible[158].

4.4.3. Programme objectives addressed during early implementation

The extent of achievements refers to the selected practices in the four MS using their project results and have to be seen in the framework of the priorities of selected calls. Table A.22 to Table A.24 in Annex II list the corresponding priorities for the three types of practices.

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155 Ibid, pp. 13

156 Greening the European Audiovisual Industry. The Best Strategies and Their Costs

157 Greening the Creative Europe Programme

158 Nota bene: the Funding and Tender opportunities portal provides only a few lines project description and the required settings like the introduction of greening strategies as stated in the Work Programme might be simply not stated in these summaries.

The following insights indicate achievements of the projects in the four MS illustratively. The European Cooperation Projects – Medium Scale Calls aim at achieving 12 thematic priorities. The four analysed projects addressed four of these priorities (digital, audience, sustainability, architecture):

- The project 'Peripheral Visions – towards a trans(l)national publishing culture' led by UDRUGA ZA PROMICANJE KULTURA KULTURTREGER from *Croatia* addressed the pandemic context in semi-peripheral areas and aims to use new technologies to reach out to (new and) larger audiences. (*digital*, *audience*)
- The selected proposal from Trans Europe Hall (*Sweden*) 'Building to Last: Non-governmental Cultural Centres, Environmental Sustainability and Communities' aims at 'build(ing) the capacity of cultural spaces to address the sustainable futures of their buildings and organisations, inspiring and leading sustainable transition among cultural teams, audiences, communities and cities.' (*sustainability*, *architecture*)
- Implemented by the 'Bundeskammer der Ziviltechniker' in *Austria* together with a consortium of similar intermediaries, the project 'European Platform for Architectural Design Competitions' addresses 'the promotion of high-quality architectural solutions for the built environment by increasing the use of architectural design competitions (ADC) in Europe and overcoming cross border market barriers in the market for architectural services.' (*architecture*)
- The project 'MODINA – Movement, Digital Intelligence and Interactive Audience' led by Tallinn University in *Estonia* aims to 'expand the creative possibilities for contemporary dance performances, and augment the experience for the audience, using digital technology – with an emphasis on exploring artificial intelligence (AI) and audience interaction, on-site and online.' (*digital*, *audience*)

The one project example of the Media Strand Call on Innovative tools and business models addressed one out of five priorities covered by calls in 2021 and 2022. Due to the limited data, no general statement on the effectiveness of the uptake of the thematic priorities by the applicants can be provided:

- The successful project 'Content.Agent' from *Austria* is dedicated to a B2B marketplace addressing performing arts in and through audio-visual media. The marketplace aims at 'democratizing the audio-visual market and to promote competitiveness, scalability, cooperation, innovation and the development, creation, and distribution of audio-visual works across Europe and beyond. As a result of this funding period, we will have made a substantial roll-out of Content. Agent far beyond the IMZ membership and continuously developed and deployed its additional functionalities as well as conceptualized and delivered an MVP of the pitching, co-production, and financing services.' (*Business tools improving the efficiency and the transparency of the audio-visual markets*)

Due to a lack of project selection data of the Rapid Response Mechanism call in 2022 no assessment can be made on the thematic focus of the approved project within the eight thematic priorities of this call.

During the focus group organised with stakeholders from the Creative Europe programme in May 2022, the following achievements of the programme were highlighted:

- The programme is strong in connecting across borders, bringing people together and supporting networking. This enables it to contribute to overcome national perspectives. The minimum criteria to include organisations from three different programme countries is a useful requirement of the programme.
- The new type of cooperation for medium-sized projects in the Culture Strand was highlighted as especially well adapted to the needs of the cultural and creative sectors.

- The European Capitals of Culture initiative is perceived as an impressive flagship of the European cultural action and is recommended by the stakeholders to be continued.
- The Creative Europe programme, with creativity at the core of its objectives, encourages artists and creatives to tell their stories and to propel their activities and work beyond the ordinary. These features are also perceived as being positive vectors for personal development for those engaging in Creative Europe projects.
- The introduced lump sum funding is a real advantage with respect to administrative burden from the project applicants and during implementation.
- The programme adds a supranational funding opportunity for contemporary and experimental creative projects supplementing the existing national opportunities. National funding for culture is much more limited in many areas of the European Union, and in some cases favours traditional cultural expressions.
- Project applicants were also successful with experimental project proposals and appreciated that – despite a risky and highly creative approach – the projects were selected for funding. The selection process seems to be well in place for these needs of the innovative European cultural and creative sectors.
- The special programme addressing the cooperation with Ukrainian cultural and creative sectors is reported to have been well-operational as of May 2023 in view of project implementation, and it was found that the related funds have already reached project partners.
- European film production is well-supported with the Media Strand of the Creative Europe programme. The related films gain a lot of recognition in Europe and on the international scene (including being awarded prizes). This is a real success story.

4.4.4. Challenges for programme and project managers

Programme and project managers, together with representatives of Member States, gathered during a focus group meeting in May 2023 and highlighted the following challenges:

The digital portal introduced for Creative Europe project applications and their management is one of the biggest challenges for project managers. It is perceived as not state-of-the-art as stakeholders report that better digital solutions exist (e.g., Estonia) that are appreciated by applicants from at least some countries. The responsiveness of project officers seems to have slowed down considerably on the portal compared to other communication frameworks which were in place for previous Creative Europe programme editions. Due to technical shortcomings, it can take several days to post a message on the digital portal. Furthermore, stakeholders from project and programme management reported undesired side-effects of the digital communication platform (such as, difficult access to information, challenging capability of participation and related negative effects on equal access to funding, administrative burden and related costs, formation of a bad reputation for the European project). Creative Europe Desks (CED) face an increase of requests for finding solutions for problems encountered with the digital platform. This requires a considerable amount of time which the CED staff needs for other activities. Only one target group was identified by the stakeholders who is not facing substantial problems with the digital platform. This group consists of advanced tech companies with young staff applying for funding in the Media Strand. Participants in the focus group proposed – as a first step – to introduce a direct communication line with the project officers to speed-up international procedures.

Stakeholders recognise the efforts of the CED to disseminate information on the programme and the individual support they provide to applicants. However, the project managers have shared observations that newcomers and smaller entities are unable to cope with the requirements of the programme (e.g., application forms are perceived as being more adapted to research than to cultural projects). Furthermore, stakeholders of the focus group reported that the Creative Europe

programme is still unknown to many organisations especially outside the metropolises, which a recent survey in Estonia has brought to the foreground. Stakeholders emphasised that often the same or similar organisations are selected and that these are frequently bigger institutions in many cases based in Brussels. The financial capability to engage EU funding experts is another element which favours bigger institutions. There is no doubt about the quality and merit of the related projects, but the stakeholders wanted to draw the attention to the fact that a diversity of applying organisations and geographic contexts would be more beneficial for innovation in culture and the creative industries. Efforts in this direction would also further strengthen the European integration, including from smaller countries with often smaller institutions, and from rural and remote areas in general.

Challenges which specifically concern the CED are reported in view of late contracting and an ever-increasing list of activities and topics which should be covered. This concerns for example the awareness raising to EU funding programmes outside Creative Europe. Furthermore, representatives of CED report difficulties addressing new target groups. This relates e.g., to the new Cross-Sectoral Strand in Creative Europe, which is dedicated to journalists and media. In addition, the innovation labs in the Media Strand require a lot of effort. These labs aim to incentivise the creative sector's players to test innovative solutions for key challenges with the objective of achieving long-term impacts. The innovative and experimental setting of these calls is appreciated by the CED which were present at the focus group exchange. However, the CED staff might require more related (strategic and operative) support to provide high quality advice to (potential) applicants. One CED wished that the programme could have opened the calls in the Media Strand for the participation of Ukrainian organisations and creative companies. Stakeholders participating in the focus group shared the impression that the current communication on Ukraine support generates some inaccurate impressions for potential applicants particularly related to the access to Creative Europe calls.

Country-specific challenges were highlighted by stakeholders from Estonia, Croatia, and Sweden. The CED Sweden was honoured for having provided very good support to applicants. According to respondents, an even greater pro-active attitude could convince further application-ready organisations from Sweden to engage in the Creative Europe programme. In some cases, non-application is based on incorrect judgement of an organisation's effective capacities which can be circumvented with better outreach. Furthermore, project managers from Sweden think that the budget increase in Creative Europe could be more wisely spent on artistic and innovative creative production instead of a perceived enhanced focus on prices and bureaucratic frameworks.

Stakeholders from Estonia emphasise the specific challenges smaller countries face in participating in Creative Europe with their full capacities. From a programme level view, a multiannual debate to raise awareness for the specific needs of smaller countries has still not encouraged substantial changes in the Creative Europe programme frameworks and project results. The funding conditions and selection criteria should take account of capacities from smaller institutions as well as of smaller language spaces. The Creative Europe programme should be equally accessible for all geographic areas. This would have beneficial effects on innovation and on the diversity of views and institutions covered.

Croatian participants further highlighted the fact that current implementation frameworks of the programme seem to hinder a wider range of (smaller) organisations from countries, with a small creative sector, to equally participate in Creative Europe. Croatian focus group participants shared their perception that countries with a (perceived) lower audio-visual capacity find it specifically difficult to access Media Strand calls of Creative Europe.

4.4.5. Coping with future challenges

The programme has an overall good effectiveness related to the considerably changing frameworks in the course of the first years of implementation. Stakeholders from the focus group report that Creative Europe projects, which they have successfully submitted and co-implement with organisations from Ukraine, have now begun to be operational.

However, a general observation is that the uptake time-frame related to major disruptions is rather long. The content of the annual work programme reflects the frameworks of implementation in the summer (e.g., August 2021) before the year addressed (e.g., Work Programme 2022). The related calls for proposals are launched later (e.g., November 2021). The decision-making process, as well as contracting and project initiation and kick-off takes time. While this is a completely normal procedure for the implementation of funding programmes, it becomes too slow when transformative settings are accelerated. The delayed information on the selected proposal for the Rapid Response Mechanism also illustrates these time frames and delays.

4.4.6. Lessons learnt

The launch of Creative Europe was effective and some deviations in 2022 (e.g., in the Media Call) are due to structural changes of the programme. Project promoters from the MS covered by the analysis successfully participated in the Culture Strand of the programme. However, the geographic coverage of the analysed Media Strand calls is less balanced than in the Culture Strand.

The Creative Europe programme management was fully affected by disruptive events like the pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine since its start in 2021. The related coping measures were effective related to immediate emergency support (e.g., frontloading of budget) and longer-term lessons learnt (e.g., higher co-financing rates). The involvement of partner organisations from Ukraine was not equally effective in all programme strands with a weaker uptake in the Media and Cross-Sectoral Strands. Furthermore, the work programmes did not refer to an enhanced support of the Creative Europe Desks for the involvement of partners from the Ukraine. The need for a funding programme oriented towards green practices is substantially addressed by the Creative Europe programme. Overall, the programme was able to cope with the needs arising from changing external conditions.

The achievements of the work programmes' priorities are becoming appropriately visible for the Culture and Media Strands calls covered by this assessment. The calls addressed programme priorities to a large extent and can achieve a similar level in the upcoming years.

An assessment of the effects produced is not feasible due to the early implementation stage of the projects. For the Cross-Sectoral Strand call no sufficient data was available.

Specific challenges in the early implementation of the programme were linked to the new digital application and project management platform which is perceived as highly inefficient. Furthermore, stakeholders identify challenges related to the uptake and participation of smaller entities. Creative Europe Desks report on challenges related to new programme strands and the related mobilisation of applicants, number of staff related capacity challenges, as well as issues with long contracting periods.

Due to the early stage of implementation individual success stories cannot be identified . However, stakeholders emphasised a whole range of positive effects achieved by the programme like widening perspectives beyond one country, bringing people together, allowing for experimental implementations and complementing more traditional funding schemes in certain MS. The medium-sized projects were mentioned as being especially beneficial for the cultural development and involvement of applicants. Other highlights of the Creative Europe programme are the European Capitals of Culture as well as the support for the European film industry. These promote the programme and European cultural diversity on a global scale.

5. Assessment of the early implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme

European Solidarity Corps programme key findings:

- The programme is well-positioned to tackle emerging challenges, as visible in the reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine. The launch of the programme faced challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the nature of the projects during the pandemic show that volunteers quickly helped according to their capacities. Regarding the Russian aggression on Ukraine a number of projects have already been granted, such as aiding Ukrainian refugees. Stakeholders highlighted an increase in the interest towards the ESC as volunteers quickly began to look for ways to help.
- The programme has increased its relevance related to the digital transition, as shown by the increase in projects addressing digital skills, literacy, education and information and communication technologies. In the previous programming period, these categories were either non-existent or not highlighted.
- The programme has seen a rise in projects related to the green transition, thus increasing its relevance. Since 2021, hundreds of project descriptions have mentioned the environment, climate change or green skills.
- The programme is generally aligned with the Commission priorities. The level of coherence with 'A Europe fit for the digital age' is high, as evidenced through the significant increase in projects using digital tools or tackling digital challenges. Aspects of 'An economy that works for people', such as the European Education Area, the European Year of Skills 2023, and the European Skills Agenda show moderate to high levels of coherence. Little to no coherence was found with the NextGenerationEU and the 'Recovery Plan for Europe'.
- The programme launch was challenged due to delays and the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the projects. Programme implementation challenges result from issues with IT tools and budgetary constraints. The programme is still in its early stages and there is still a need for national authorities and organisations to familiarise themselves with the processes involved.
- In general, the early implementation of the ESC is deemed to be effective. Despite some delays and a decreased interest in the ESC due to the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders agree that the launch of the programme was successful. The programme is seen as a tool to promote solidarity, and increase young peoples' involvement and interest in volunteering. It helps young people develop their skills and transition from school to work.
- Stakeholders, however, pointed out that the further promotion of the programme is important.
- The management of the programme is deemed to be effective, with rapid sharing of information and good communication, although further improvements should be sought after.

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) 'brings together young people to build a more inclusive society, supporting vulnerable people and responding to societal and humanitarian challenges. It offers an inspiring and empowering experience for young people who want to help, learn and develop and

provides a single-entry point for such solidarity activities throughout the Union and beyond.'[159] It targets young people aged 18-30, or up to 35 in the case of humanitarian activities.

The ESC programme was established in 2018, with the aim of creating 'opportunities for young people across the Union to make a meaningful contribution to society, show solidarity and develop their skills, enabling them to obtain not only work experience but also an invaluable human experience.' During this period more than 450 000 young people expressed an interest in taking part, and more than 56 000 were able to take up opportunities.

Compared to the previous pilot[160] the current programme for 2021-2027 has a broader scope as it has taken over the role of two other initiatives that operated during the 2014-2020 financial cycle: the European Voluntary Service and the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative.

Figure 10: ESC programme structure

Source: based on Programme Statements – European Solidarity Corps (ESC), p. 270, accessed on the 18 April 2023

The European Voluntary Service was previously part of the Erasmus+ programme and is seen as a learning mobility programme. It has now been subsumed into a solidarity strand. The other former initiative that is now part of the European Solidarity Corps programme, the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative, supports humanitarian aid projects and has deployed nearly 1 200 volunteers between 2014 and 2020. This initiative has become a specific humanitarian aid strand in the new programme. Having a single structure makes it possible to exploit the strengths of the predecessor programmes synergistically and eliminates confusion from having three similar initiatives.[161] A schematic representation of the structure of the programme is shown in Figure 10.

159 European Solidarity Corps – Our Mission and Principles

160 European Solidarity Corps: Annual Report 2018-2019

161 See also European Solidarity Corps – Performance (Webpage)

5.1. Overview

The European Solidarity Corps programme supports EU youth policy, notably the European Youth Strategy 2019-2027, as well as (transnational) volunteering. The programme has one general and one specific objective:

The *general objective* of the European Solidarity Corps programme is to enhance the engagement of young people and organisations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities, primarily through volunteering, as a means to strengthen cohesion, solidarity, democracy, European identity and active citizenship in the Union and beyond. It has the aim of addressing societal and humanitarian challenges on the ground, with a particular focus on the promotion of sustainable development, social inclusion and equal opportunities.

The *specific objective* of the programme is to provide young people, including young people with fewer opportunities, with easily accessible opportunities for engagement in solidarity activities that induce positive societal changes in the Union and beyond EU borders, while improving and properly validating their competences, as well as facilitating their continuous engagement as active citizens.

The programme also has four transversal priorities. Three of the priorities have been unchanged in 2021-2023, these are inclusion and diversity, participation in democratic life and digital transformation. In 2021, reflecting on the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, prevention, promotion and support in the field of health was a priority. In 2022 and 2023, this was replaced by environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action due to the increasing mainstreaming of climate actions across programmes. However, calls under the different strands of the programme may also have specific additional priorities.

The countries participating in the European Solidarity Corps are the EU-27, Iceland and Liechtenstein (two EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries which are part of the European Economic Area (EEA)) and North Macedonia and Turkey. Organisations from participating countries can lead projects. Volunteers and project partner organisations can come from any of these countries or Norway, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria or Tunisia.

The European Solidarity Corps by strand

The *solidarity strand* of the programme supports volunteering, solidarity projects, networking activities, and quality and support measures. Two types of volunteering supported are volunteering projects and volunteering teams in high priority areas.

In volunteering projects, participating organisations provide individual young people or teams of young people with the opportunity to volunteer in their own country, or in another country, for up to 12 months. The volunteers' board and lodging, and local travel are paid for, they receive pocket money from the project (€4 to €7 per day depending on the country) and their travel costs are met. Participating organisations receive funding to meet management costs and, if appropriate, for language training for volunteers and inclusion support to support young people who have fewer opportunities.

Projects to provide volunteering teams in high priority areas can receive up to €400 000. They must involve participants from at least two countries, who will work on short-term projects in areas of particular need. The participating organisations receive support towards organisational costs, including the board and lodging of the volunteers, travel and pocket money for the volunteers and, where appropriate, inclusion support. In 2023, the priorities are relief and assistance for those fleeing armed conflicts and victims of natural or man-made disasters, and prevention, promotion and support in the field of health, particularly support for vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. These include health challenges brought on by events

such as COVID-19 or the Russian aggression on Ukraine, or related to EU policy priorities, such as Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. In 2022, the priorities were healthy lifestyles and preserving cultural heritage.

Solidarity projects are non-profit solidarity activities initiated, developed and implemented by young people themselves for a period of 2 to 12 months. They involve groups of at least five young people. They should address key challenges within their communities (including any identified jointly in border regions) and should be a non-formal learning experience. The funding meets project management costs, the cost of a coach and to support inclusion of those with fewer opportunities.

Under the *humanitarian aid strand*, humanitarian aid projects can involve individuals volunteering for 2 to 12 months (as part of projects with at least 15 volunteers) or teams of between 5 and 40 people from at least two participating countries lasting two weeks to two months. The maximum EU grant is €650 000 and meets similar expenses as the other projects. Projects are expected to prioritise inclusion and diversity, environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action, and digital transformation in their approach. Funding under the humanitarian aid strand became available from 2022.

There are provisions in the two strands to prevent young people from being exploited as cheap labour. In the case of the solidarity strand, volunteering must include a learning and training component, may not be a substitute for traineeships or jobs, must not be equated with employment and must be based on a written volunteering agreement. The humanitarian aid strand contains similar provisions, with the additional option of including development and capacity-building components involving highly skilled, highly trained and experienced coaches, mentors and experts.

The total budget for the 2021-2027 programme is €1 009 million, with 94 % foreseen for volunteering and solidarity projects and the remainder for humanitarian aid volunteering[162].

Table 13: European Solidarity Corps budget 2021-2027

	Budget available
Budget for volunteering and solidarity projects	€948.5 million
Budget for humanitarian aid volunteering	€60.5 million

Source: based on Regulation 2021/888, Art. 11

The programme is managed through annual work programmes, which establish the annual budget. The work programmes also contain annual breakdowns of the budget by country.

Table 14: Annual budget, 2021-2023[163]

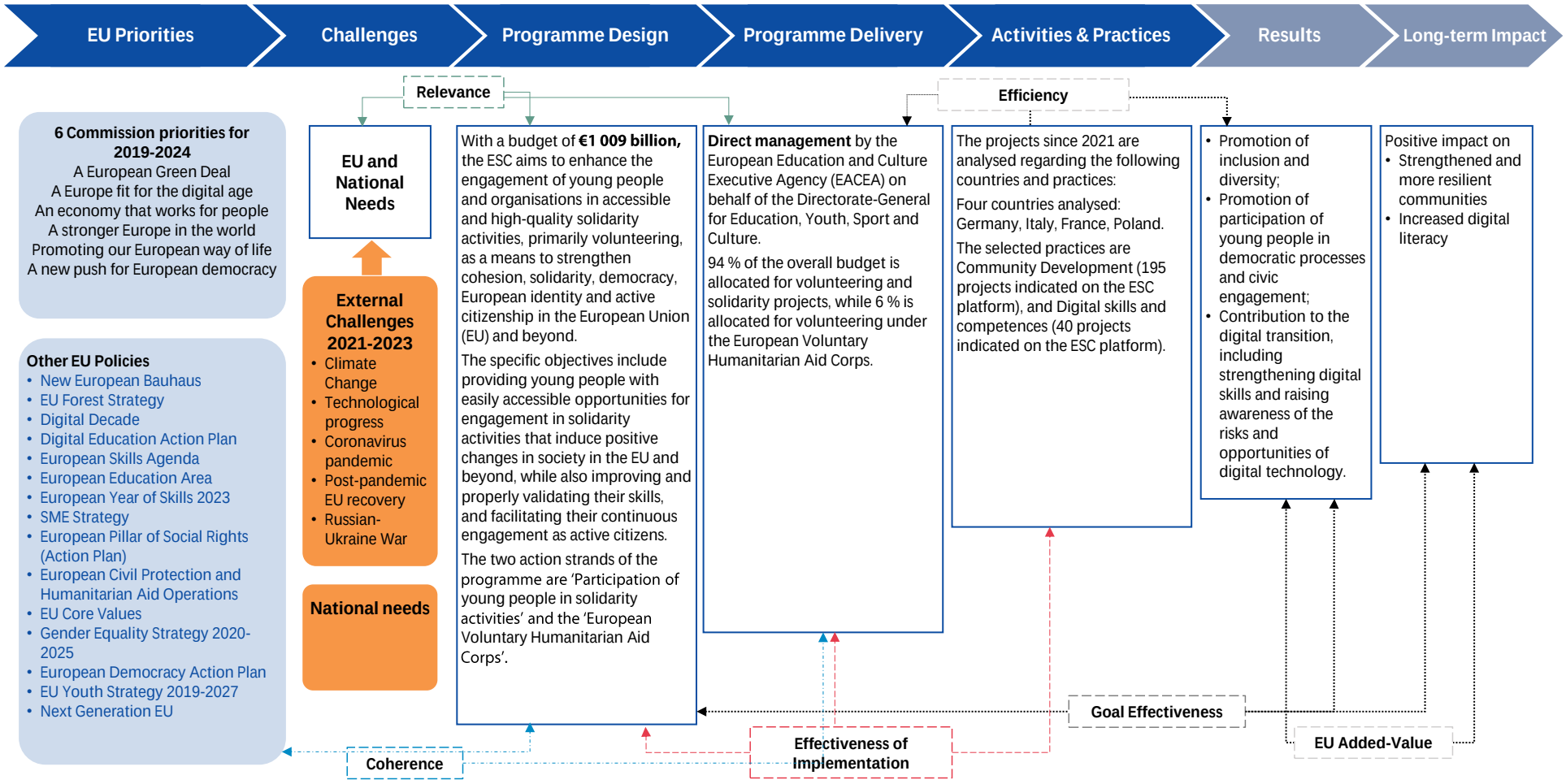
	Annual budget (€ m)	O/w indirect management	Indirect management as % of annual budget
2021	138.9	114.4	82.4
2022	150.0	126.4	84.3
2023	142.2	121.0	85.1

Source: Annual Work Programmes, 2021, 2022, 2023

[162] This budget figure is the amount in the programme Regulation. The final figure will be higher as a result of annual adjustments for inflation and contributions from Iceland and Liechtenstein.

[163] Figures rounded for ease of reading.

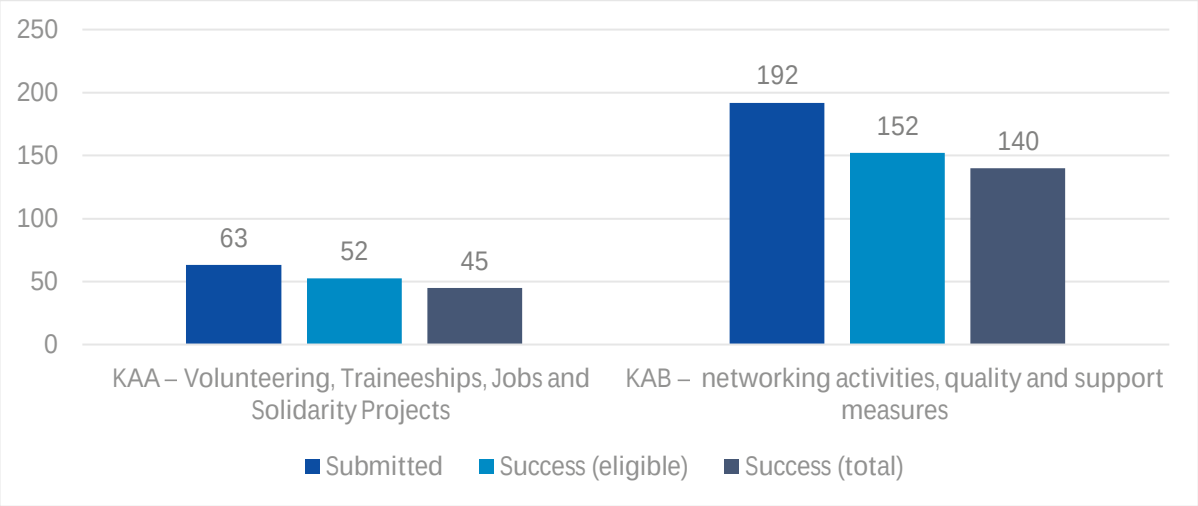
Figure 11: ESC intervention logic



Source: own representation.

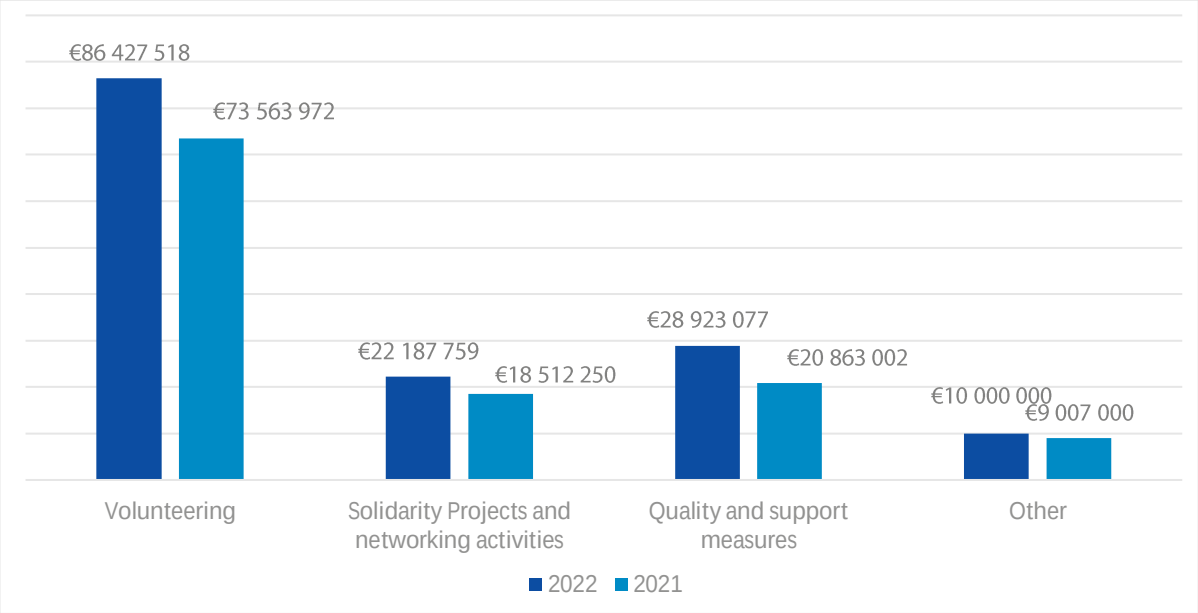
The key action 'Volunteering, traineeships, jobs and solidarity projects' has received 62 proposals, in the 2021-2022 period, 54 of which were eligible and 45 selected. Under the key action 'Networking activities, quality and support measures', 192 proposals were submitted over the same period, and 177 were deemed eligible from which 140 have been selected. This demonstrates a relatively high success rate of 83 % and 79 %, respectively.

Figure 12: ESC: Key actions – submitted proposals, success rate from eligible proposals, success rate total



Source: own representation based on EC, 2023

Figure 13: ESC: Sums of Budget per year (direct + indirect management)



Source: own representation based on EC, 2023 (all fund sources including EU voted budget and assigned revenues)

Figure 13 presents the total budget per action of the ESC programme. This includes work programme items of which implementation is both direct and indirect.

To illustrate the evaluation findings with details, the following two ESC actions were analysed with a focus on the four selected countries (Germany, France, Italy and Poland[164]):

- Community development
- Digital skills and competences

Outcomes of the document review, data analysis and interviews are presented in the respective ESC related sections of this report.

5.2. Relevance assessment

The assessment below has been made based on the document review conducted related to the ESC programme design. The most valuable sources of information are the Annual Work Programmes[165] and the Programme Statement 2023, providing both an overview on the programme design and the early implementation. This is complemented by initial outcomes of the early calls.

5.2.1. Programme design

Digital transformation

The digital transformation has been better integrated in the 2021-2027 programming period of the European Solidarity Corps, frequently mentioned alongside the green transition, reflecting the rising importance of these two important challenges Europe is facing.

In particular, the policy priorities of the ESC include the digital transformation. Furthermore, the priorities themselves are aligned with the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027[166], as stated in the 2021 Annual Work Programme. To this end, one of the goals of the ESC is to support individuals living in the digital age by providing projects that help improve digital literacy, including enhancing awareness on the risks and opportunities that lie within digital technology. This also extends to supporting older people to gain and improve their digital skills. For instance, one of the projects in this area covers related several activities[167], while another specifies that the volunteers will create a digital cookbook via which they will help retirees learn about the use of digital tools.[168]

In the ESC Programme Guide 2021[169], the organisations wishing to participate are encouraged to keep in mind the importance of the digital transition and incorporate digital tools[170] in their activities. In fact, the award criteria include the use of digital tools, therefore proposals including digital methods may receive a higher score. Programme information at the national level also includes the integration of digital tools in the projects.[171] For instance, in France, it is recommended

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164 For the selection of MS see section 2.4 and Annex I (section AI.5).

165 2021 Annual Work Programme – European Solidarity Corps, 2022 Annual Work Programme (amended) – European Solidarity Corps, and 2023 Annual Work Programme – European Solidarity Corps

166 European Commission SWD(2020) 209 final

167 The Polish project 'Nie starzej się za szybko'

168 The Croatian project 'Godine su samo broj'

169 European Solidarity Corps Guide – 2021 Call, Version 2(2021)

170 The use of digital tools in projects include designing digital information cards for social media use, e.g., in the Turkish project 'Temiz Hava Elçileri'; or the use of a quest game as in the Latvian project 'KOPĀ'

171 See e.g. 'Das Europäische Solidaritätskorps. The power of together. Infobroschüre für Fachkräfte der Jugendarbeit und aus dem Engagementbereich. 2021-2027'

for applicants to include digital tools in order to improve cooperation between partner organisations and enhance the quality of activities.[172]

Overall, it can be concluded that the ESC shows some relevance in addressing challenges stemming from the digital transformation. In fact, there is evidence of the inclination to embed digital skills and tools in the foundations of the European Solidarity Corps.

Green transition

As mentioned above, the green transition is one of the key challenges that has been emphasised in the 2021-2027 programming period of the ESC.

One of the key priorities of the ESC outlined in the 2021 Annual Work Programme is environmental sustainability and climate goals. The ESC aims to contribute to the commitment of the Commission to tackle climate and environmental-related challenges by supporting projects that address the topic, for example, by aiming to protect, conserve and enhance natural capital and by raising awareness of environmental sustainability issues.

Similar to the digital transformation, the ESC also emphasises the importance of incorporating green practices in its projects, and thus contributing to the European Green Deal. ESC projects also support several Sustainable Development Goals and are aligned with the Commission's Reflection Paper 'Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030'[173]. This could include an emphasis on walking or cycling throughout the project.[174]

The key documents of the programme also mention the New European Bauhaus[175] and the EU Forest Strategy[176], underlining the relevance of the ESC in tackling environmental challenges.

At the national level, programme information includes suggestions for applicants to incorporate the promotion of environmentally sustainable and responsible behaviour among participants, and raise awareness of the importance of taking actions to reduce or offset the environmental footprint of activities, for instance via waste reduction and recycling, and by using sustainable means of transport.

Overall, it can be concluded that high relevance of the green transition is shown in the key documents as well as the project objectives.

Post-pandemic recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the activities of the ESC in 2020, and as a result, a call for proposal was cancelled, and instead certain on-going projects received an extension. In 2021, as a reaction to the ongoing pandemic, volunteers under the projects of the European Solidarity Corps provided support to elderly people, particularly with food and medical shopping. For example, in Poland, projects related to the pandemic and its impacts aimed to alleviate the negative effects of the pandemic by organising activities that promote an active lifestyle among children, youth and

172 See e.g. 'Fiche d'aide à La Lecture Du Guide Du Corps Européen de Solidarité 2023 – ESC30'

173 Reflection Paper. Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030

174 See e.g., the German project 'Ich zeige dir mein Bremen'

175 https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index_en

176 European Commission COM(2021) 572 final

seniors[177], or that boost the digital skills of seniors in light of the increased use of digital tools in everyday lives[178].

In the 2021-2027 programming period, the policy priorities include prevention, promotion and support in the field of health. While much of the work in this area is directly related to addressing the impact of the pandemic and the post-pandemic recovery itself, the activities will also aim to involve volunteers in tackling other health-related challenges, such as cancer.

It can be concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a clear impact on the programme as a whole, and the current programming period includes many activities that address the post-pandemic recovery.

Russian aggression on Ukraine

Some references can be found to the Russian aggression on Ukraine in the key documents, although it broke out after the beginning of the current programming period. Nevertheless the relevance of the ESC in tackling these challenges is likely to be made more apparent in upcoming projects and reports on the results of the programme. In particular, this could be because more organisations may be looking for an avenue to organise activities and the ESC's 2023 Annual Work Programme referencing the war is likely to result in more applications, since this raises awareness about such potential projects.

In fact, the Russian aggression on Ukraine was directly referenced in the 2023 Annual Work Programme of the ESC. The Work Programme includes 'relief for persons fleeing armed conflicts and other victims of natural or man-made disasters'[179] as one of its policy priorities. This is a key element, whose importance has been increased due to the Russian aggression on Ukraine and the resulting arrival of Ukrainian refugees in EU Member States. Furthermore, the Russian aggression on Ukraine is also referenced under the priority 'Prevention, promotion and support in the field of health' as it had an impact on the physical and mental health of people.

Projects tackling the challenges created by the war can already be found, particularly in neighbouring countries, such as Poland.[180]

EU strategic autonomy

Although EU strategic autonomy is not mentioned in the ESC documents, the European Democracy Action Plan[181], which is closely related to one of the key elements of the EU strategic autonomy, namely the capacity to uphold democratic values, is mentioned.

In fact, the 2021 annual work programme of the ESC states that the programme is fully aligned with the European Democracy Action Plan. In addition, democracy in general is one of the core values of the European Solidarity Corps.

5.2.2. Early implementation

The early implementation of the current programming period of the ESC can be assessed based on the projects available on the programme website, which includes the activities of 2021 and 2022.

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177 2021-2-PL01-ESC30-SOL-000039047

178 2021-1-PL01-ESC30-SOL-000036204

179 2023 Annual Work Programme – European Solidarity Corps, p. 10

180 E.g. 2022-2-PL01-ESC30-SOL-000091084; 2022-2-PL01-ESC30-SOL-000090523; and 2022-2-PL01-ESC30-SOL-000091228

181 European Commission COM(2020) 790 final

Based on this, the programme shows a rise in projects addressing digital skills, digital literacy, digital education and information and communication technologies. In the previous programming period these categories were either non-existent or not flagged as such due to a lack of emphasis on the thematic area.

Regarding the green transition in 2021 and 2022, a significant number of projects were related to the areas of 'environment and climate change' (397 projects) and 'green skills' (267 projects).[182] Interviews with stakeholders in selected Member States also revealed that there is an increase in applications and projects focusing on sustainability and environmental challenges, particularly in Germany.

Looking at the post-pandemic recovery, many of the projects in the current programming period reference the COVID-19 pandemic, including to emphasise its lasting impact on the most vulnerable people in society or to show lessons learnt during the pandemic, such as the possibility of using digital tools for enhancing skills. The launch of the programme faced challenges due to the pandemic, and a decrease was expected in the number of applications submitted. Although there was a small dip in the number of applications received in 2021, by now, the figures have more or less recovered.

In connection with the Russian aggression on Ukraine, a number of projects aim to alleviate some of the impacts, particularly by focusing on aiding Ukrainian refugees in the EU Member States. Further applications for projects in the area are expected[183]. Highlighting this, stakeholders in Germany already recognised an increase in the interest in ESC projects, as young people looked for ways to help.

Finally, about 200 projects in the current programming period are organised around the thematic area of 'Democracy and inclusive democratic participation'.[184] This includes projects, such as the Greek 'Active citizen' project[185], which promotes the concept of active citizenship, or a Romanian project aiming to develop the social and civic competencies of young people, including via the promotion of EU citizenship.[186]

5.2.3. Lessons learnt

The European Solidarity Corps is well-positioned to contribute to tackling the above-mentioned challenges. In particular, the digital and green transitions have been thoroughly embedded. The ESC has many avenues open to support post-pandemic recovery and contribute to tackling challenges arising due to the Russian aggression on Ukraine.

The ESC has the capability to quickly react to upcoming challenges and changing external conditions, as seen with the 2021 efforts addressing the needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Other evidence is the increase in projects addressing the Russian aggression on Ukraine.

Although the ESC has the capacity to respond to the overarching challenges facing the EU, there are differences in the extent to which the early implementation of the current programming period is prepared to contribute to tackling the above-mentioned specific challenges. It can be concluded that there is a high relevance of the programme addressing challenges related to the twin transition

182 https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/projects/

183 2023 Annual Work Programme – European Solidarity Corps

184 https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/projects/

185 2022-3-EL02-ESC30-SOL-000102528

186 2021-2-RO01-ESC30-SOL-000039905

as well as the post-pandemic recovery. Regarding its degree of relevance vis-à-vis the Russian aggression on Ukraine, it may be a bit too early to draw conclusions, but the programme is well-positioned to help, for instance, the Ukrainian refugees who have fled to EU Member States. At the same time, it can be concluded that although one of the core values of the ESC is democracy, EU strategic autonomy as a whole is not thoroughly ingrained within the programme as indicated by the lack of corresponding mentioning in ESC documents.

5.3. Coherence assessment

This subchapter aims to assess the coherence of the European Solidarity Corps and specific policies that are relevant for the goals and scope of the programme. The following policies have been identified as showing relevance for this assessment:

- European Green Deal[187]
  - New European Bauhaus
  - EU Forest Strategy
- A Europe fit for the digital age[188]
  - Digital Decade[189]
  - Digital Education Action Plan
- An economy that works for the people[190]
  - European Skills Agenda[191]
  - European Education Area[192]
  - European Year of Skills 2023[193]
  - SME Strategy[194]
  - European Pillar of Social Rights (Action Plan)[195]
- A stronger Europe in the world[196]
  - European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations[197]
- Promoting our European way of life[198]
  - EU Core Values[199]
  - Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025[200]

187 A European Green Deal (Webpage)
188 A Europe fit the digital age (Webpage)
189 Europe's Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030 (Documents)
190 An economy that works for people (Webpage)
191 European Commission COM(2020) 274 final
192 Achieving the European Education Area by 2025
193 https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/index_en
194 SME Strategy for a Sustainable and Digital Europe
195 The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan
196 Europe's Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030
197 https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/index_en
198 Promoting our European way of life (Webpage)
199 Aims and values of the European Union
200 European Commission COM(2020) 152 final

- New push for European democracy[201]
  - European Democracy Action Plan
  - EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027[202]
- Recovery Plan for Europe[203]
  - NextGenerationEU[204]

5.3.1. Programme design

European Green Deal

The European Solidarity Corps is referred to in documents as related to the New European Bauhaus (NEB). Specifically, a Communication on the New European Bauhaus[205] states that the 2022 annual call for the ESC will include projects contributing to the New European Bauhaus, as the initiative is part of one of the horizontal priorities (environmental sustainability and climate goals) of the ESC. The 2023 Annual Work Programme of the ESC mentions the role of the ESC in contributing to the New European Bauhaus and the EU Forest Strategy, particularly the latter's '3 billion trees' initiative. Moreover, it mentions the general priority of being mindful of energy efficiency in the upcoming activities under the ESC. The Programme Statement of the ESC notes that 13 % of the projects of the ESC contribute to climate action, environment and nature protection. So far, in the implementation of the current programming period, 397 projects were included under the area of 'Environment and climate change' and 267 under 'green skills'[206].

A Europe fit for the digital age

As mentioned above, the ESC has been made more digital in the current programming period. Although the main documents on the Digital Decade and the Digital Education Action Plan do not directly mention the ESC, the digital transition is embedded in the ESC. The Digital Education Action Plan in particular is directly mentioned in the 2021, 2022 and 2023 Annual Work Programmes as a transversal priority to be addressed by the ESC as well as a key policy under the 'Digital transformation' thematic priority of the ESC.

The Digital Decade, although not directly mentioned, can be interpreted as a part of the ESC's goals due to the objectives of the programme including fostering digital literacy, and focusing on the use of digital technologies in its activities.

An economy that works for people

This thematic area includes a variety of specific policies and priorities at the EU-level that show some coherence with the European Solidarity Corps.

For instance, the European Skills Agenda, although not explicitly mentioned, is inherently connected with the ESC. On the other hand, the European Year of Skills 2023 specifically mentions the ESC as one of the programmes supporting skills development.

The SME Strategy has no direct link with the ESC. However, some coherence exists, since the SME Strategy includes a digital volunteers programme[207], which focuses on sharing digital competence

201 A new push for European democracy (Webpage)

202 The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027

203 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-recovery-plan/

204 https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en

205 European Commission COM(2021) 573 final

206 https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/projects/

207 See e.g. https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/about/digital-volunteers

with traditional businesses through the support of volunteers. Similarly, there is no direct mention of the ESC in the key documents of the European Pillar of Social Rights or vice versa, however, the ESC is connected with Principle 1: Education, training and life-long learning by nature.

The Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 mentions the ESC in connection with making education and training more inclusive and gender sensitive. Moreover, it elaborates on how the ESC has incorporated the learning value and its recognition in its aims. In turn, the 2023 Annual Work Programme of the ESC also mentioned that its activities and key priorities are aligned with the European Education Area.

A stronger Europe in the world

Regarding the priority 'A stronger Europe in the world', there is a connection between the European Solidarity Corps and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. Although not explicitly mentioned in the key documents, the ESC has extended its scope to humanitarian aid operations. The volunteering efforts in this area will be guided by the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid[208].

Promoting our European way of life

Regarding the European Core Values, solidarity, a fundamental aspect of the ESC, is included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union[209], and this value is also referenced in the Programme Statement of the ESC.

Another key priority in this thematic area is the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. Although the main documents on the strategy do not directly mention the European Solidarity Corps, the 2023 Annual Work Programme of the ESC is aligned with the Strategy and the gender equality perspective is intended to be mainstreamed throughout the programme as well. Furthermore, the Programme Statement of the ESC highlights gender equality as a key aspect. For instance, project promoters are encouraged to demonstrate how they will ensure gender balance in their activities, and there is a determination to address gender inequality via the projects of the ESC. For instance, the Czech project 'Horses heal and integrate' states that they strive for gender balance among the participants by setting a ratio of 60:40.[210] Moreover, the 2021-2027 programming period also includes gender equality as a specific topic which allows for the tracking of the number of projects, participants, and funding in the activities of the ESC.

New push for European democracy

Democracy is a core value integrated in the activities of the European Solidarity Corps. In particular, the European Democracy Action Plan mentions that the ESC offers a broad range of opportunities related to promoting active citizenship among young people. It also notes the role of the ESC in supporting media literacy. In turn, the 2023 Annual Work Programme of the ESC indicates its alignment with the European Democracy Action Plan.

Another key priority in this thematic area is the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. The main document on the Strategy refers to the ESC multiple times, e.g., in the context of the importance to reinforce the link between the youth policy of the EU and related EU programmes. Moreover, the Strategy elaborates on the part the EU has played in supporting volunteering among young people, in which the ESC plays a large role. The 2023 Annual Work Programme of the ESC explicitly mentions its coherence with the Youth Strategy. Moreover, it highlights a key objective of the Strategy, which is

208 European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, 2017

209 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

210 2022-2-CZ01-ESC30-SOL-000091264

inherently linked to the ESC, namely, to 'Encourage young people to become active citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change for communities across Europe, inspired by EU values and a European identity'[211].

Recovery Plan for Europe

Although the European Solidarity Corps shows relevance for the post-pandemic recovery, there is no direct mention in the key documents. Nevertheless, with the inclusion of 'Prevention, promotion and support in the field of health' in the Annual Work Programme of the ESC, there is a link to some extent between the programme and the recovery.

5.3.2. Early implementation

Regarding the early implementation of the ESC, a few figures can be noted in relation to the specific priorities[212].

For instance, 77 projects mention 'forest', and while some of these are indeed connected with the EU Forest Strategy as they pertain to reforestation, it should be noted that the word may be mentioned in a different context. For instance, it can refer to 'reforestation'[213], 'forest bathing,' a type of ecotherapy,[214] an activity taking place in a forest,[215] or even the description of a thematic weekend treasure hunt activity for children organised in the 'enchanted forest'.[216] A further analysis would be necessary to determine the extent to which this priority is taken into account in the specific projects.

Regarding the digital aspects of the projects, 221 projects can be found under the topic 'Digital skills and competences', 116 projects under the topic 'Digital literacy, Information, constructive dialogue, fake news', 80 projects under the topic 'Digital youth work', 42 projects under the topic 'Digital safety', and 34 projects under the topic 'Information and communication technologies.' Furthermore, there are 12 projects dealing specifically with digital education.

Humanitarian aid is mentioned in four projects, while the EU core values are mentioned three times. Gender equality, however, has been more explicitly embedded in the projects with 100 projects making mention of it.

Regarding democracy, 201 projects are included under the topic of 'Democracy and inclusive democratic participation'. 259 projects could be identified through the key word search 'democracy' and the Youth Strategy is mentioned in 21 projects. To put these figures into perspective, the highest number of projects are found under Community development, with 905 projects, out of a total 4 370 projects.

Although the Recovery Plan for Europe is not found to be explicitly coherent with the ESC, the NextGenerationEU is mentioned one time across all projects from 2021 and 2022.

211 2023 Annual Work Programme – European Solidarity Corps, p. 5

212 https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/projects/

213 See e.g. 2022-3-IT03-ESC30-SOL-000100460

214 See e.g. 2022-3-LT02-ESC30-SOL-000101070

215 See e.g. 2022-3-PL01-ESC30-SOL-000092618

216 See e.g. 2022-1-RO01-ESC30-SOL-000066796

5.3.3. Lessons learnt

Based on a preliminary review, it can be concluded that there is coherence with the key European Commission priorities to varying extents.

Regarding the European Green Deal, evidence for coherence is found, particularly in connection with the New European Bauhaus. Moreover, the green transition is an inherent part of the programme.

A high level of coherence was also found with 'A Europe fit for the digital age'. In particular, the ESC is aligned with the Digital Education Action Plan, while also aiming to incorporate digital technologies in different ways into the activities.

The ESC is coherent with the thematic area of 'An economy that works for people' in varying degrees. While overall, there is high coherence, the most important priorities from this aspect are the European Education Area, the European Year of Skills 2023, and, to a lesser extent, the European Skills Agenda.

Although humanitarian aid has been made an integral part of the European Solidarity Corps, references to the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations are scarce. Nevertheless, as a priority of the ESC, coherence can be found with the area of 'A stronger Europe in the world'.

Regarding the EU Core Values and the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, both fitting under the thematic area of 'Promoting our European way of life,' the ESC is found to be coherent. With both being embedded in the mission of the ESC, either from its creation (EU Core Values) or starting from the current programming period (Gender Equality).

The greatest evidence of coherence was found with the 'New push for European democracy'. Both the European Democracy Action Plan and the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 are extensively mentioned by, or mention, the ESC.

Finally, little to no coherence was found with the NextGenerationEU, and the wider 'Recovery Plan for Europe' priority, despite the post-pandemic recovery being found relevant vis-à-vis the ESC (see above).

5.4. Effectiveness assessment

The analysis of the effectiveness of the European Solidarity Corps programme is based on the following information sources:

- The European Solidarity Corps website on the European Youth Portal[217]
- Interviews with national authorities and volunteer organisations in selected countries.

It should be noted that only a few conclusions can be drawn at this stage of the implementation of the programme. This is due to the culmination of the facts that the implementation of the programme was delayed and that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the projects, and caused delays in their implementation. As a result, some projects which began in 2021 are still ongoing due to necessary extensions granted by the European Commission to projects severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[217] https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity_en

5.4.1. Programme launch

The implementation of the European Solidarity Corps began late in 2021, due to the delayed adoption of the legal basis for the programme in May 2021.

The total budget for the 2021-2027 programme is €1 009 million, most of which (94 %) is allocated for volunteering and solidarity projects. The annual budget for each year between 2021 and 2023 has ranged between €139 million and €150 million.[218]

Table 15 provides information on the number of projects that have been implemented in 2021 and 2022 per MS and the selected practices. Three of the four analysed Member States (Germany, Italy and Poland) have projects in both selected practices (Community development; Digital skills and competences). Only France does not yet have any approved projects in Digital skills and competences, with the number of projects under Community development still observed to be very low compared to the overall number of projects in France.

The table also shows the increase in total project numbers for most countries in line with EU-wide development. It should be noted, however, that the 2022 projects are still being uploaded and updated on the ESC platform, therefore the final number of projects for 2022 may change. Furthermore, while the below figures can give an indication regarding the share of projects within each country, it should be kept in mind that not all projects are categorised under a topic on the ESC platform. This is particularly true for the French projects, where the majority of projects do not flag the topics they are organised around.

Table 15: Projects in 2021 and 2022 by selected Member States and practices

Member State		2021	2022
Germany	All projects	160	214
	Community development	17	34
	Digital skills and competences	2	5
France*	All projects	114	107
	Community development	2	1
	Digital skills and competences	0	0
Italy	All projects	119	171
	Community development	31	51
	Digital skills and competences	9	6
Poland	All projects	144	222
	Community development	30	59
	Digital skills and competences	9	12

* Most French projects on the ESC platform do not include the topics they are organised around.
Source: https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/projects/

[218] Annual Work Programmes, 2021, 2022, 2023

Further data on the French projects[219] in general show that, since the beginning of the programme, 57 % of the applications for solidarity projects were successful and 85 % of the volunteering projects were successful.[220] Regarding the solidarity projects, the differences between the number of successful projects compared to all applications in 2021 and 2022 are striking. While in 2021, 82 % of applications were approved, in 2022, this fell to only 41 %. For 2023, only the results of the first call (out of two) are available, however, early findings also suggests a lower rate of success with only 50 % of the applications being successful. It should be noted that one of the reasons for these differences could be the increase (albeit small) in the number of applicants.

Regarding the effectiveness of the programme launch, the interviewed stakeholders expressed satisfaction, although one interviewee added that the expectations were low due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic at the time. Nevertheless, by 2023, the application and project numbers have more or less recovered. Another stakeholder noted that the decision to separate the ESC from the Erasmus+ programme was welcomed, as it added gravity to volunteering projects, and made the goals and objectives of the ESC clearer. It also introduced a positive change in terms of promoting the programme.

As the ESC is a new programme, the pilot for which was only launched in 2018[221], it is still in its growth phase. This means that both managing authorities and organisations wishing to implement projects need time to familiarise themselves with the processes of the programme.

5.4.2. Programme management and responses to changing external conditions

The overall communication at programme level, both with the EU-level management and with the other Member States is deemed to be very well organised and effective. Meetings with representatives of all countries are in place to find a common line on relevant issues. There is a ticket system for national agencies to solve doubts or challenges and provide answers that can be seen by other countries as well, which means that countries can learn from this problem-solving mechanism for themselves. Sharing documents on the rules of the programme implementation and eligibility is done quickly and effectively. Nevertheless, a stakeholder mentioned that further cooperation between the Commission and national agencies would be beneficial.

In 2021, when the programme was being implemented, the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing, therefore some activities were limited or reduced. Nevertheless, the networks and exchanges with other Member States could be adapted to virtual settings, which was aided by quick decisions made at the EU-level on the ESC, allowing for exceptions and changing the eligibility rules to allow online activities to replace in-person activities. To disseminate information on the new rules introduced as a result of the pandemic, relevant documents containing this new information were quickly published.

The Russian aggression on Ukraine also impacted the European Solidarity Corps programme, on the one hand because both Ukraine and Russia are partner countries in the programme, but also because of the influx of Ukrainian refugees to EU Member States. The latter resulted in both projects aiding Ukrainian refugees and the increased interest of organisations to work with people migrating

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219 The latest results were published on 23 May 2023.

220 There has been a total of 290 application, out of which 51 were for solidarity projects and 239 for volunteer funding for labelled structures. Out of these applications, 233 have been accepted, including 29 solidarity projects, 204 applications for volunteering projects.

221 European Solidarity Corps: Annual Report 2018-2019

from Ukraine. However, the war made it difficult to work with organisations and young people from Russia and Belarus.

Nevertheless, the projects that were accepted in response to the war included food collections, volunteering at train stations where refugees were arriving in order to provide them with information, as well as sending aid to Ukraine.

It is seen as a positive development that the European Commission quickly decided to consider the young people in Ukraine who ended up in EU Member States as international mobility, because in this manner they could take part in the programme without administrative restrictions.

National agencies' responses to the war included the suspension of projects involving travel to Ukraine, Russia or Belarus (as in France). In some countries this was complemented with additional activities. For instance, in Germany, the national authority quickly published a Frequently Asked Questions section for young people from Ukraine. Moreover, an extra application round was launched targeting working with refugees from Ukraine.

5.4.3. Programme objectives addressed during early implementation

As the programme is still in its initial phases, it is difficult to draw substantial conclusions. Nevertheless, some insights can illustrate the success of the early implementation of the programme.

Stakeholders from Poland have mentioned that the separation of the ESC from Erasmus+ has heightened awareness of the programme, and has elevated volunteering at the national level. In fact, the explicit inclusion of solidarity in the programme is seen as beneficial across Member States, and has been found to have increased awareness.

In Italy, the programme is seen as very beneficial in terms of making more young people interested in volunteering, and it is also deemed helpful in the transition from school to work. Furthermore, the programme helps young people develop soft skills, languages, and the ability to work in multicultural environments. An interviewee indicated that the response to sustainability and environmental solidarity projects is very positive.

Furthermore, German stakeholders pointed out that a high share of projects address young people with fewer opportunities or special needs.[222] In fact, specific projects and exchanges have been organised in the form of groups or teams, which opens up new inclusive opportunities for young people who likely would not be able to go abroad in the framework of such a project on their own.

Overall, the annual work programmes reflect changing needs, for instance, with the inclusion of the Russian aggression on Ukraine and the policy priority of 'relief for persons fleeing armed conflicts and other victims of natural or man-made disasters' in the 2023 Annual Work Programme. Moreover, the projects have embedded the digital and green transitions, as well as democracy, a core value of the ESC (see above in chapters 5.2.2 and 5.3.2).

5.4.4. Challenges in the early implementation

The challenges in the early implementation include the delays experienced with the late adoption of the legal framework, as well as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, as the programme is still in its early stages and does not have the kind of history that other programmes have, both the national authorities and the organisations wishing to participate

[222] See e.g., the projects 'Fostering Youth Participation and Athletisism Values – SIEG' or the project 'Together as One'.

need more time to become familiar with the programme and the processes involved. This includes, for example, the methods for calculating project funding, procedures related to the quality mark[223], and procedures related to awarding organisations.

With the separation of the ESC from the Erasmus+ programme, the administrative requirements have increased, which led to more administrative burden at the national level for both the national authorities and the organisations involved in the projects.

Stakeholders also pointed out issues with the IT tools, which for instance, frequently show system errors when trying to submit reports.

Another challenge is related to the budget. An interviewee mentioned the need for annual budget increases, to acknowledge the growing number of new organisations wishing to implement projects. This would allow for the extension of the cooperation, enabling new organisations to take part in the programme alongside organisations who have already joined the ESC community. Furthermore, due to inflation and the cost-of-living crisis in many countries, some organisations are unable to work with volunteers and have had to give up on certain projects.

5.4.5. Lessons learnt

The early implementation of the European Solidarity Corps is generally deemed to be effective.

The launch of the programme was deemed effective by the interviewed stakeholders. When starting the programme during the COVID-19 pandemic, expectations were low. Although several projects related to alleviating the negative impacts of the pandemic were taking place, many other activities were limited or did not take place. However, even taking this challenge into account, the launch of programme is seen as a success story.

Apart from the pandemic, the late acceptance of the legal basis also delayed the launch of the programme. Due to this, multiple stakeholders mentioned the need to be cautious with drawing conclusions on the results of the programme too early.

The programme is a valuable tool to promote solidarity, making young people more interested in volunteering and helping them transition from school to work. The programme helps young people to develop their skills, and it also provides opportunities for young people from vulnerable backgrounds and those with special needs.

Stakeholders noted that the programme is in its growth phase. It does not have the kind of history that, for instance, Erasmus+ has. As a relatively new programme, its further promotion would lead to more awareness. Nevertheless, there are more and more organisations interested in participating in the ESC.

The management of the programme is generally seen as effective. There is good communication across the programme, and important information is shared quickly and efficiently. It was, however, mentioned by one of the stakeholders that further communication avenues set up between the European Commission and the national agencies would be beneficial.

[223] The European Solidarity Corps Quality Label is used to certify that an organisation participating to the programme 'is able to provide the necessary conditions young people to take part in solidarity activities'. For more information, see: https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/organisations/quality-label_en

Besides the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Solidarity Corps programme was also affected by the Russian aggression on Ukraine. The programme was, however, quick to include references to it in its annual work programme. The quick sharing of information and clarifying/modifying rules (e.g., treating young refugees from Ukraine as international even as if they were already residing in an EU Member State) were welcomed positively by the national agencies in charge of the ESC.

Further challenges in the early implementation of the programme relate to the administrative burden stemming from the processes of the ESC, issues with the IT tools, and financial constraints. Regarding the latter, stakeholders suggested that an increase of the budget will be required as more and more organisations become interested in applying for projects.

6. Assessment of the early implementation of Strand 3 of the CERV programme

CERV programme Strand 3 key findings:

- The implementation of CERV is based on two-year work programmes. This is a change compared to the predecessor programmes which worked with annual programmes.
- The work programmes address different topics, including e.g., a focus on the impact of COVID-19 and on projects looking ahead to the 2024 European elections. Networks of Towns and the legacy of colonialism and transnational migrations were priorities.
- The programme has effectively addressed new challenges, such as its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine.
- The programme aligns well overall with the European Commission priorities.
- There is a high level of coherence with 'New push for European democracy' and 'Promoting our European way of life', and the programme has incorporated many aspects of the digital and green transitions.
- However, there is limited coherence with other priorities such as 'An economy that works for people' and 'A stronger Europe in the world'.
- The programme launch has faced challenges due to delays (the CERV Regulation was adopted only in April 2021) and the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the projects.
- Challenges in implementing the programme relate to the online portal used in the application for grants (seen as not sufficiently user-friendly for the target groups of CERV). The programme is also somewhat weak in communication and promotion.
- Programme contact points in the Member States are available to disseminate information about the programme and help with inquiries. However, in February 2023 contact points were missing in nine Member States.
- The programme is still in its early stages. Thus, there is not enough information regarding its outputs, results and impacts.

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme 2021-2027 (CERV) is the successor programme to the two EU programmes 'Rights, Equality and Citizenship 2014-2020 (REC)' and the 'Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020'. Strand 3 of the four CERV strands brings together the citizenship elements of the two predecessor programmes.

In proposing a single programme, the European Commission acknowledged that the fragmented nature and limited resources of the predecessor programmes have limited the ability to respond to new and emerging challenges at a time when emerging movements were challenging the idea of open, inclusive, cohesive and democratic societies. Such societies are those where civic participation and the enjoyment of rights make it possible to build a tolerant way of living together. Progress has been made in ensuring that citizens understand their rights, but more needs to be done to make them aware of the benefits of EU citizenship, to encourage a greater level of participation in political life and society, and to support a better understanding of the Union, its history, cultural heritage and diversity. Those rights are to be found in the Treaties. Article 20 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)[224] establishes the citizenship of the Union to which all persons holding the nationality of a Member State are entitled. It also lists the main rights and duties of citizens of the Union.

[224] Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

The Treaty on European Union guarantees that all Member State citizens are also citizens of the EU. This ensures equal treatment and specific rights, such as the ability to travel and reside anywhere in the EU, vote and run for office in European and local elections, and receive consular support and diplomatic protection from any other EU country. EU citizens can also voice concerns to the European Ombudsman, write to any EU institution in an official EU language, or participate in public exams to join the EU civil service.

6.1. Overview

CERV has an overarching general objective, which is 'to protect and promote rights and values as enshrined in the Treaties, the [EU] Charter [of Fundamental Rights] and the applicable international human rights conventions, in particular by supporting civil society organisations [(CSOs)] and other stakeholders active at local, regional, national and transnational level, and by encouraging civic and democratic participation, in order to sustain and further develop open, rights-based, democratic, equal and inclusive societies which are based on the rule of law'[225].

The overriding specific objective for Strand 3 – the citizens' engagement and participation strand – is to promote citizens' engagement and the participation of citizens in the life of the European Union. This is broken further down into three specific sub-objectives for Strand 3, which are to[226]:

- support projects aimed at remembering defining moments in modern European history, such as the coming to power of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, and projects aimed at raising awareness among European citizens of their common history, culture, cultural heritage and values, thereby enhancing their understanding of the Union and of the importance of mutual understanding and tolerance;
- promote citizens' and representative associations' participation in and contribution to the democratic and civic life of the Union by enabling them to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action;
- promote exchanges between citizens of different countries, in particular through Town-Twinning and Networks of Towns, so as to afford them practical experience of the richness and diversity of the common heritage of the Union.

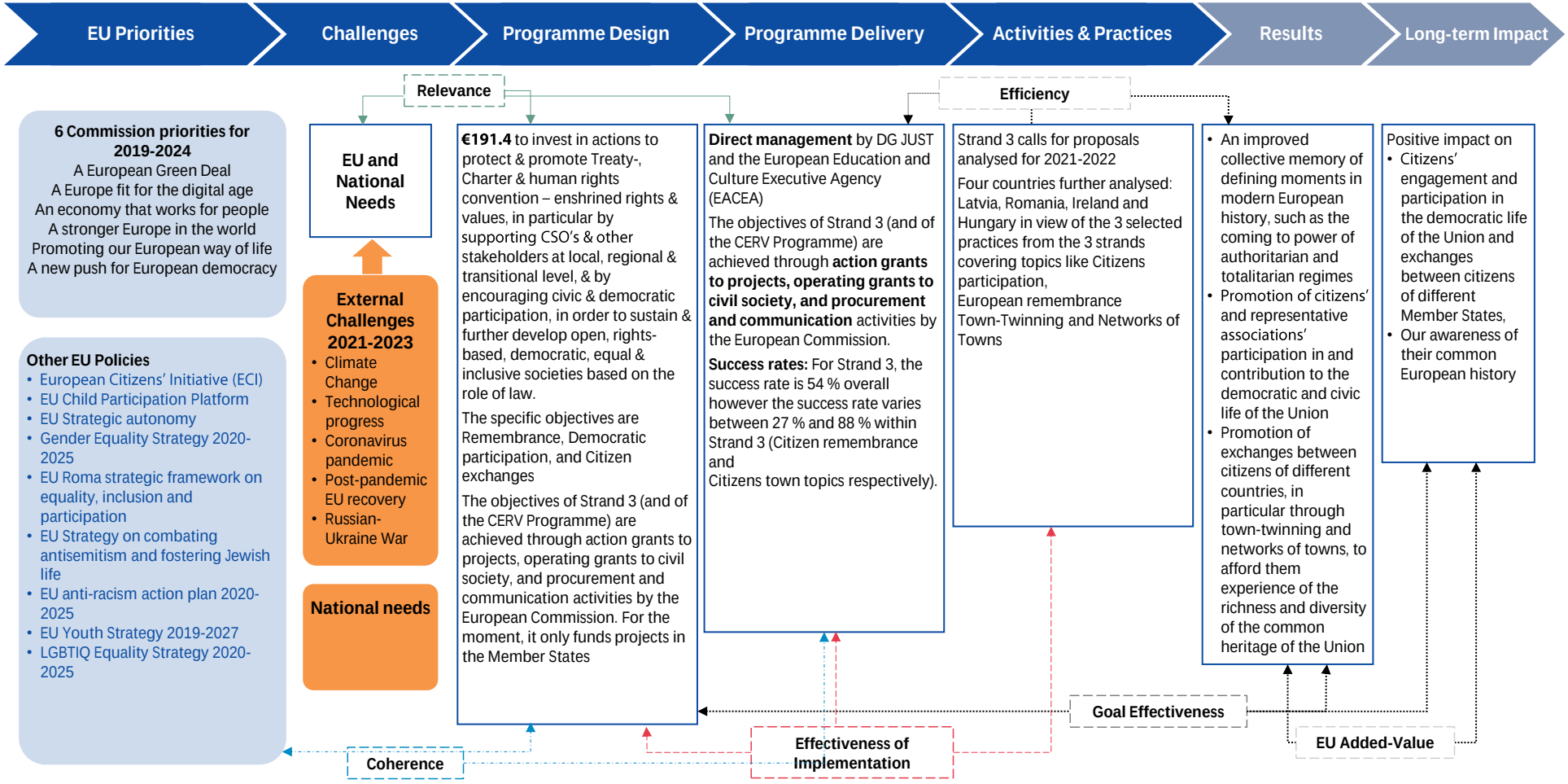
The objectives of Strand 3 (and of the CERV programme) are achieved through action grants to projects, operating grants to civil society, and procurement and communication activities by the European Commission. The range of activities applies to all strands. The activities, which the Commission funds, include national contact points (NCPs) in the Member States. NCPs are considered an innovation in the CERV programme, as they existed under the Europe for Citizens Programme but not under the REC programme.

An innovation in the CERV programme 2021-2027 is the creation of the Civil Dialogue Group to strengthen relations with stakeholders. A CERV Dialogue Week was held in May 2021 to launch the programme.

[225] Regulation (EU) 2021/692, Art. 2 (1)

[226] Regulation (EU) 2021/692, Art. 5

Figure 14: CERV intervention logic



Source: own representation.

For the moment, the CERV programme only funds projects in EU Member States. EFTA countries which are members of the EEA (Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein) are eligible to take part but have chosen not to. Six acceding, candidate and potential candidate countries have expressed an interest in joining the programme, but this has not yet been formalised. These countries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and the Ukraine.

Figure 14 illustrates the intervention logic of CERV Strand 3.

The policy aspects of implementation are the responsibility of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumer Affairs (DG JUST). The call and funding process is managed by EACEA, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency.

The total budget for the CERV programme 2021-2027 is €641.71 million in current prices plus a 'top-up' of €800 million from fines the European Commission collects, i.e., a greater amount than the initial budget, albeit this is at 2018 prices. Of that €174.9 million and up to €191.4 million are available for Strand 3 (Table 16). At least 65 % is to be earmarked to democratic participation and 15 % to remembrance activities[227].

Table 16: CERV Strand 3 budget 2020-2027

	Budget available	As a % of the total for CERV
Financial envelope for the Programme	€174 928 783	27.26 %
'Top-up'	Up to €191 440 000	23.93 %

Source: Regulation 2021/692, Art. 7

The implementation of CERV is based on two-year work programmes. This is an innovation compared to the predecessor programmes which worked with annual programmes. The goal is to give stakeholders better visibility of forthcoming priorities and calls for proposals, and thus facilitate their planning. The budgets for the first four years of the current cycle are in Table 17. The low budget for 2021 reflects a late start to implementation as the programme regulation was not adopted until April 2021.

Table 17: Annual budget allocations for Strand 3, 2021-2024 (€ million)

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total	13.98	39.67	32.15	55.67

Source: Multiannual Work Programmes 2021-2022, 2023-2024

Funding is available for two-year actions, either as project grants or as lump sums for smaller activities, or as operating grants within four-year Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs). Organisations which are funded under these agreements have to reapply for funding each year, but the process is simpler and should be a formality if they have fulfilled the requirements of the FPA. As of June 2023, there had been no calls for tenders for FPA's under Strand 3. The budget allocations for Strand 3 also include an allocation for technical support to European Citizens' Initiative.

Some funding is earmarked for restricted calls, e.g., for the national contact points financed by Strand 3 and Strand 4. In the case of Strand 3, there are two direct contributions to UNESCO in 2023-2024. One is for an action to reach the general public on the danger of Holocaust distortion and trivialisation and to train European educators, influencers, media, civil society organisations and

[227] A deviation from these percentages of 10 percentage points is allowed.

stakeholders to recognise and counter Holocaust distortion and trivialisation. The other is for UNESCO's 'Routes of Enslaved Peoples: Resistance, Liberty and Heritage' project.

The work programmes also set out annual priorities and describe the content of forthcoming calls. There are perceptible shifts in focus from year-to-year, e.g., a focus in 2021-2022[228] was placed on the impact of COVID-19 and on projects which looked ahead to the 2024 European elections. Networks of Towns were encouraged in 2021-2022 to propose ways to increase the turnout at the next European elections and to make candidacies more inclusive. In 2023-2024[229], there are mentions of the legacy of colonialism and transnational migrations, a gender-balanced view of history, and the Commission Recommendation on protecting journalists and human rights defenders who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded or abusive court proceedings[230]. These aspects were not expressly included in the previous work programme.

The Work Programme for 2023-2024 also sees the first call on the civic engagement of children with a call to 'encourage children's engagement and participation in the political and democratic life.' The climate and the environment, including energy-related issues, will be taken into account in proposals on Town-Twinning and Networks of Towns. The 2023-2024 Work Programme also highlights the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity award which recognises the work done by cities, towns, or regions in Europe to promote inclusion and create discrimination-free societies, under this strand.

Programme contact points in the Member States are available to disseminate information about the programme and help with inquiries. They are responsible for providing impartial guidance, practical information and assistance to applicants, stakeholders and beneficiaries, including on the application procedure, dissemination of user-friendly information and programme results, and inquiries for partners, training and formalities. However, there is no obligation for a Member State to set up a contact point and only 17 had done so by May 2022. Member States without a contact point at that date were Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Poland, and Slovakia. However, according to data from EACEA, there were 18 contact points as of February 2023[231].

Regarding the monitoring of the programme, there are monitoring indicators common to all strands, these are set in the Programme Regulation[232] as the:

- number of people reached by (a) training activities; (b) mutual learning activities and the exchange of good practices; (c) awareness raising, information and dissemination activities;
- number of civil society organisations reached by support and capacity-building activities;
- number of transnational networks and initiatives focusing on European memory and heritage as a result of the programme intervention.

228 Commission implementing decision C(2021) 2583 final

229 Commission implementing decision C(2022) 8588 final

230 Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/758

231 CERV 2021-2027 Programme – Contact Points

232 Regulation (EU) 2021/692, Annex II

There is also a Key Performance Indicator for DG JUST set by Eurobarometer related to Strand 3 objectives, i.e., Citizens' perception of democratic participation, 'my voice counts'. The aim is to increase the 2019 percentage of 48 %.[233]

With regards to quantitative data on implementation, data from 2021 provides some further information on the current state of the CERV programme.

For Strand 3, 814 proposals were received of which 438 were successful. This corresponds to a success rate of 54 %. The number of applications submitted across all CERV strands totalled 2 675. As such, approximately 30 % of proposals were submitted under Strand 3.[234]

A table in Annex II provides a breakdown of the Strand 3 proposals submitted under the individual practices and their respective success rate compared to Strand 1 and Strand 4. The wide differences in success rates across proposal themes (for example, Citizens Remembrance proposals has had a much lower chance of being funded compared to Citizens Town proposals) appear to be a result of oversubscription for some calls, according to interview feedback.

To illustrate the evaluation findings in detail, the following three CERV Strand 3 actions, i.e., the selected practices, were analysed with a focus on the four selected countries (Romania, Latvia, Hungary, and Ireland[235]):

- Citizens' participation
- European remembrance
- Town-Twinning and Networks of Towns

Outcomes of the document review, data analysis and interviews are presented in the respective CERV programme related sections of this report.

6.2. Relevance assessment

This assessment addresses the four relevance evaluation questions formulated for all programmes including the relevance of recent developments. Findings are based on a document review on programme design, the calls for proposals, and the results of scoping interviews.

The overarching finding with regard to relevance is that the programme's objectives are well designed to address national needs and are well-aligned with European Commission's priorities, including policies on integration, civil engagement, and participation.

233 Annual Activity Report 2021 – Justice and Consumers

234 European Commission, internal report 'Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme – 2021-2022 implementation'

235 For the selection of MS see section 2.4 and Annex I (section AI.5).

6.2.1. Programme design

Digital transformation

Digital transformation is highly relevant to the CERV programme, particularly for Strand 3. Even though it is not specifically mentioned in the 2023-2024 Work Programme (WP),[236] the programme supports and commits to different policies and strategies centering around digital transformation.

In the CERV – Citizens' engagement and participation – 2022 call for proposals, one of the priorities is funding 'innovative democratic approaches and tools to help citizens make their voices heard and publicly exchange views on all areas of EU action, notably digital tools ('e-democracy')'[237].

Moreover, the CERV programme commits to supporting the priorities specified in the EU Citizenship Report 2020[238] and the forthcoming EU Citizenship Report 2023[239]. These reports strongly emphasise digital transformation as a means of empowering citizens' participation in the democratic process as one of the key elements of the report.

The programme also commits to encouraging projects that collect citizens' views and ensure a practical link with the policymaking process through digital technologies, showing citizens how to become engaged. For instance, the WP highlights the Conference on the Future of Europe, where one of the main priorities discussed and deliberated by citizens was digital transformation.

Another key element of the programme is to ensure that children's voices are heard in the policymaking process, justifying the funding for the EU Children's Participation Platform[240]. The platform is not only a digital tool to engage in policymaking, but it also creates strategies to reduce digital inequalities and develop the digital skills children need.

Apart from engaging citizens and supporting them to develop necessary skills for the digital transition, the programme also focuses on its impacts on citizens' rights. The call for proposals to promote civil society organisations' awareness of capacity building and implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights[241] focuses on protecting fundamental rights in the digital age. This includes projects that aim to create guidelines, technical benchmarks, and tools for algorithm audits. These projects should also contribute to the practical application of the Artificial Intelligence Act[242] once it is adopted. Applicants are expected to develop a concrete tool or benchmark process in an area of their choice that demonstrates relevance for fundamental rights. The tool can be software, a benchmark dataset, a simulation environment, or a procedure. The priority is to protect fundamental rights by strengthening accountability for using automation where those rights are at stake. This includes addressing and combating bias and discrimination based on gender, ethnic and racial origin, and other grounds caused or intensified by artificial intelligence systems.

It can be stated that Strand 3 has a high degree of relevance regarding this challenge, as it focuses on both citizen engagement and the protection of rights. In the communication of the Commission regarding 2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade[243], it is stated that the ambition is to pursue digital policies that empower people and businesses to seize a human centred,

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236 Commission implementing decision C(2022) 8588 final

237 CERV-2022-CITIZENS-CIV, p. 7

238 EU Citizenship Report 2020. Empowering Citizens and Protecting Their Rights

239 European Citizenship: Report

240 EU Children's Participation Platform (Webpage)

241 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

242 European Commission COM(2021) 206 final

243 European Commission COM(2021) 118 final

sustainable and a more prosperous digital future. Strand 3 allows for putting humans in the centre of the transition as its mission is to make European citizens active participants by engaging them in this process.

Green transition

The environment and the fight against climate change is a policy priority of the CERV programme, which highlights its relevance for the policy area alongside the digital transition. In fact, green and digital transitions are increasingly becoming more intertwined.

This is sought to be achieved in Strand 3 by 'Engaging citizens and communities in discussions and action related to our climate and environment', which is stated in the WP 2023. In the call for proposals to foster citizens' engagement and participation, it is stated that this priority should boost citizens' and communities' engagement in discussions and actions related to the climate and environment. Switching to a 'green' way of living can only work if citizens are fully involved in designing the new policies. People are concerned about jobs, heating their homes and making ends meet. Therefore, they have to be able to engage in the policymaking process if the Green Deal is to succeed and deliver lasting change. Civil society and associations should promote citizens' dialogues that bring together citizens in all their diversity to discuss climate and green issues and propose solutions to decision-makers[244]. In 2023 and 2024, a specific focus will be put in bringing citizens together to discuss actions on the climate and the environment, including energy-related issues, solidarity and sharing best practices, and thus contributing to increasing citizens' engagement in society and ultimately to their active involvement in the democratic life of the Union.

Apart from digital transformation, another aspect that the Conference on the Future of Europe highlights is the fight for environmental justice. In fact, the latest panel hosted in December 2022 by the Commission focused on 'allowing citizens to provide their input on how to step up action to reduce food waste in the EU'[245]. There is general mention of the Green Deal insofar as the CERV Regulation states that the 'Programme ought to support activities that respect the climate and environmental standards and priorities of the Union and the 'do no harm' principle of the European Green Deal'[246].

Regarding the number of related projects, there is a total of 78 projects that were funded under the Call 'Citizens' engagement and participation' that make direct reference to supporting relevant activities.

Another important aspect is that the WP 2023 commits to providing technical support to the European Citizens' Initiative, which has a variety of calls and projects related to the green transition. This also showcases the programmes' relevance in tackling this challenge.

Overall, it can be stated that the Strand 3 is relevant to the green transition challenge, by ensuring the participation and engagement of citizens in this field. It highlights the importance of bottom-down approaches regarding the development of policies, as it seeks to involve grass-roots organisations in the process and aims to enable towns to engage citizens and communities in discussions and actions on the climate and the environment, including addressing energy-related issues, social solidarity and migration.

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244 Call-Fiche_cerv-2022-Citizens-Civ

245 Conference on the Future of Europe follow-up: Commission hosts first European Citizens' Panel on food waste reduction – European Food Banks Federation – FEBA (eurofoodbank.org)

246 Regulation (EU) 2021/692, Art. 34

Post-pandemic recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested European societies and economies. It has also disrupted citizen's rights and participation in democracy. As such, addressing the effects of the pandemic has been recognised as one of the priorities of the programme, stating that it will explore 'how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the democratic debate and the enjoyment of fundamental rights'[247]. Consequently, the effects of the pandemic have become an intrinsic aspect of many calls and proposals.

Several projects under Strand 3 relate to post-COVID efforts including the projects: COVIDemocracy in the Baltics[248]; Encouraging Women Participation in Times of Pandemic[249]; and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on diverse democratic perspectives through gender perspective[250].

The programme design for Town-Twinning's call for proposals incorporates post-pandemic recovery efforts. This programme promotes citizen exchanges between different countries through Town-Twinning, providing them with practical experience of the Union's diverse heritage which includes the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights that 'there may be a general, but not exclusive, reflection on any impact the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on life within the applicants' local communities, on the way in which their communities function and on the forms that civic participation and solidarity took in the applicants'[251] towns under the COVID-19 pandemic and how these forms could become sustainable in the future'.

Furthermore, the call for support from the Council of Europe includes the pandemic consequences by developing a series of seminars on racial and ethnic stereotypes. These seminars will bring together journalists, civil society organisations, and minority group representatives. According to the 2021 Impact of the coronavirus crisis on Roma and Travellers report[252], the COVID-19 pandemic has often fuelled anti-Roma rhetoric in the media and social networks, a sentiment sometimes echoed by public authorities as well. To combat this issue, a broad communication campaign to fight antigypsyism and anti-Roma discrimination is proposed. It includes a series of awareness-raising campaigns and events to fight stereotypes and prejudice, antigypsyism and discrimination and promote cultural diversity and mutual understanding, and foresees a series of seminars and workshops on racism and ethnic stereotypes bringing together journalists, media representatives and representatives of public authorities focused on different ethnic/racial groups.

Although post-pandemic recovery challenges are less present in the design of the programme, CERV remains relevant. Similarly, along with the digital and green transition and democratic life, protecting the most vulnerable groups from the consequences of the pandemic is one of the programme's priorities.

Russian aggression on Ukraine

CERV ensures that in 2023 a particular focus is given to projects aiming at addressing the consequences of the Russian aggression on Ukraine regarding the protection of democratic freedom and the enjoyment of fundamental rights for all, and in particular for people in the most vulnerable situations, such as women and children. These latest developments have proven the

247 Call-Fiche_cerv-2022-Citizens-Civ, p. 7

248 Funding and Tenders opportunities – project details

249 Funding and Tenders opportunities – project details

250 Funding and Tender opportunities – project details

251 CERV-2023-CITIZENS-TOWN-TT, p. 8

252 At a Glance – The Impact of the Coronavirus Crisis on Roma and Travellers

relevance of the strand, as it has made clear that 'Russia's aggression against Ukraine is a war against democracy itself'[253], and that European democracy cannot be taken for granted.

An important aspect regarding Strand 3 is that the Russian aggression on Ukraine and its consequences 'also emphasise the importance of a critical reflection on the past and the transmission of memory to future generations to tackle historical distortion and ensure European remembrance to avoid repeating past mistakes. Despite every effort to stop violence and hatred against groups at risk, vulnerable groups and women and children, continue to be the first to suffer.'[254]

Regarding the protection of children's rights, the call on rights of the child and children's participation states that 'this priority will aim at addressing mental health disorders experienced by children, which could be linked for instance to family circumstances, socio-economic vulnerabilities exacerbated during crisis, children in alternative care, victims of violence or of discrimination. This will also cover activities addressing the mental health problems affecting migrant and refugee children, notably unaccompanied and separated children, including those who fled the war in Ukraine'[255].

Moreover, tackling historical distortion and encouraging intergenerational work will be a key focus in the Work Programme 2023 by supporting 'projects that commemorate and educate about defining experiences in modern European history. These include the causes and consequences of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, resistance against these regimes, the Holocaust and other mass crimes, democratic transition and (re)-building democratic institutions, the legacy of colonialism, transnational migration, and European integration'[256].

EU strategic autonomy

Strand 3 is deeply rooted in EU democratic values. It aims to help people make their voices heard and increase inclusion and democratic participation in line with the Commission's political priorities, including those specified in the EU Citizenship Report 2020 and the European democracy action plan.

As such, Strand 3 covers a significant portion of the strategy by promoting citizens engagement and participation in the democratic life of the Union, exchanges between citizens of different Member States, and raising awareness of the common European history. It upholds EU's democratic values by fostering the active participation of individuals and civil society in democratic processes, which are crucial for the future of Europe and democratic societies. Furthermore, Strand 3 indicates a strong commitment to strengthening European identity and values, as the legacy of recent European history is a crucial pillar of the values the EU.

The strand addresses citizen engagement and participation by developing activities that will focus on debating the future of Europe. Debates on citizens' societal engagement, independent election observation, including monitoring by citizens, and innovative approaches and tools are also included to help citizens make their voices heard and publicly exchange views on all areas of EU action. The programme will particularly encourage projects that collect citizens' views but also ensure a practical link with the policymaking process, thus showing citizens how to engage in practice. The WP 2023 also mentions the Conference on the Future of Europe, a citizen-led series of

253 A new push for European democracy (Webpage)

254 Annex to Commission implementing decision C(2022) 8588 final, p. 5

255 Ibid, p. 49

256 Ibid, p. 8

debates and discussions that ran from April 2021 to May 2022 and enabled people from across Europe to share their ideas and help shape our common future.

Strand 3 further focuses on the Commission priority of 'A new push for European democracy'. Under the sixth priority – 'a Europe fit for the digital age'. Recently, the Commission adopted the 2022 Strategic Foresight Report. The Report highlights that the EU aims at accelerating both green and digital transformation, ultimately strengthening the EU's resilience and open strategic autonomy[257].

The relevance of the Strand in this area is clear as it touches on the promotion of EU values through citizen engagement and participation, on the protection of human rights, and on the development of resilience to make the Union more robust and ready to face current social, economic, and political challenges.

6.2.2. Early implementation

This section of the assessment is based on the data available on call and project level as well as findings from the interviews.

For the Europe fit for the digital age priority, online democratic participation can be identified as a cross-cutting issue relevant to many CERV funded projects under Strand 3. Stakeholders also mentioned the strong emphasis on this priority, agreeing that both the digital and green transition are well embedded in the projects. In some countries, such as Romania, there are certain projects[258] that even combine both priorities.

The green transition, as mentioned above, is well embedded in the programme. A total of 78 projects were funded under the Call Citizens' engagement and participation that make direct reference to supporting relevant activities. Many (more than ten) of these make direct reference to green transition topics including (inter alia) 'Active citizen for people and planet'.

Although the programme's objectives do not directly mention the post-pandemic recovery and the challenges of the Russian aggression on Ukraine, they are still included in the projects and have been taken into consideration during implementation.

Stakeholders have reported a decrease in applications due to the pandemic, but the numbers are slowly increasing as different technologies are incorporated into the projects. The implementation of the programme in Romania in 2021 was difficult due to the severity of the pandemic and the emergence of new challenges. Several projects under Strand 3 relate to post-COVID efforts including the projects: COVIDemocracy in the Baltics; Encouraging Women Participation in Times of Pandemic; and The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on diverse democratic perspectives through gender perspective.

Projects that include the remembrance component, which addresses wars and their impacts as well as totalitarian regimes, are aligned with the challenges created by the Russian aggression on Ukraine. This aspect of the projects is very well regarded, as this is the only programme that tackles this issue, which has become highly relevant in these times.

For Ireland, Brexit has had a lot of implications for the implementation of the programmes since the UK was a leading partner for Ireland prior to Brexit. However, Brexit has also had unexpected positive implications. As the new most prominent English-speaking country, there was significant opportunity for Irish organisations to partner with other countries.

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257 European Commission COM(2022) 289 final

258 Funding and Tender opportunities – project details

For the EU strategic autonomy priority, there is no mention in the CERV objectives, strands or priorities. However, there is a general reference in the Regulation.

6.2.3. Lessons learnt

At the programme level, the main objectives of the CERV programme are not directly related to the main EU challenges within the scope of the study. However, the challenges identified are still relevant and/or tackled by the CERV programme either at a cross-cutting level, at the individual CERV programme Strand level and/or at the project level. DG JUST takes into account EU's strategic priorities and mandates of the Commission and Parliament. Hence the main challenges of this study are in some way equally part of the overall political programme scope since the implementation of EU strategies around climate change, digitalisation, autonomy, and others, are part of the democratic dialogue promoted by CERV. However, the CERV programme is designed as a bottom-up programme. This implies a certain level of flexibility in implementation.

The research has identified a number of ways in which the CERV Strand 3 programme tackles relevant challenges. For example:

- One of the CERV programmes' primary objectives is to foster democratic engagement. Ergo, as part of project activities to reach this objective, participation across all of the challenges identified are relevant – including green and digital transition topics.
- The green transition is an objective mentioned in the Citizen engagement strand since it encourages project proposals that work to engage 'citizens and communities in discussions and action related to our climate and environment; there is a growing interest of civil society and associations in discussing climate and green issues and proposing solutions to decision makers.'[259]
- The initial analysis of the CERV Strand 3 projects shows that a significant number of projects are relevant to the three main challenges identified, i.e., to climate change, digitalisation, and addressing consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In terms of challenges beyond the three key issues identified, the CERV Strand 3 programme is closely linked to the European Democracy Action Plan and challenges related to disinformation.

The CERV Strand 3 programme has taken into account the main EU challenges – as far as they are within the programme scope. The scoping interviews in particular also support the claim that relevant national challenges are addressed. An example are grass roots organisations operating in EU countries, where the space for civil society is narrowed or obstructed and for which CERV support is principally important.

According to the CIVICUS Monitor[260], civic space is "narrowed" in 12 countries across Western Europe (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and the United Kingdom) and "obstructed" in one (Hungary). However, Member State analysis indicates that in countries where civil society is obstructed, actual evidence of implementation of Strand 3 of CERV is challenging to locate as this obstruction discourages civil society organisations from participating in the programme. The European Commission has explicitly incorporated some main challenges within the programme. For example, COVID-19 and post-pandemic effects were incorporated as a reference in the programme for the 2023/24 programming period.

259 CERV Work Programme 2021-2022, p. 43

260 https://ecnl.org/focus-areas/european-level-policies

Other challenges, like the Russian aggression on Ukraine are, however, not directly addressed but could theoretically be incorporated through the remembrance component which addresses the issues of wars and its impacts and totalitarian regimes.

According to stakeholders a lag in the implementation of the programme can be observed, which is due to the relatively late adoption of the CERV programmes in 2021. As a result, the programme is at the very beginning of its implementation.

6.3. Coherence assessment

Strand 3 of the CERV programme has a distinctive quality that enhances its coherence with the different policies and priorities. As its main aim is to make people's voices heard and increase democratic participation, it can adapt to the needs of current political, economic, and societal challenges. It has the potential to provide resources to make this participation happen while developing the programme in close collaboration with those working on the ground.

Regarding the specific policy objectives of the European Commission priorities, the degree of coherence can be observed as described in the section below.

6.3.1. Programme design

European Green Deal

The programme is coherent with this objective, as it works toward 'Bringing citizens together to discuss actions on the climate and the environment, including energy-related issues, solidarity and sharing best practices, and thus helping to increase citizens' engagement in society and ultimately to their active involvement in the democratic life of the Union'[261]. It states that people are concerned about jobs, heating their homes and making ends meet. Therefore, they must be able to engage in the policymaking process if the Green Deal is to succeed and deliver lasting change. Some of the specific policies that are linked to the programme are the New European Bauhaus[262] and more generally the Green Deal.

A Europe fit for the digital age

CERV works heavily to achieve this objective. As stated in the work programme, it aims to 'protect fundamental rights by strengthening accountability for the use of automation where rights are at stake, including through approaches for addressing and combatting bias and multiple/intersectional discrimination based on gender and on other grounds including ethnic and racial origin, caused or intensified by the use of artificial intelligence system'[263]. Apart from this, the right to personal data protection is critical in delivering the 'European way for the digital society', which is human-centred and ensures full respect of fundamental rights. Some specific policies linked to the programme are Europe's Digital Decade policy towards 2030[264] and European Digital Rights and Principles[265].

An economy that works for people

Through practices like the Networks of Towns, communities can engage in projects that focus on their local communities, how they function, and how civic participation and solidarity are expressed.

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261 Commission implementing decision C(2022) 8588 final, p. 55

262 https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/about/about-initiative_en

263 Commission implementing decision C(2022) 8588 final, p. 20

264 European Commission COM(2021) 118 final

265 European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade 2023/C 23/01

One example can include projects addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and how interventions could become sustainable in the future. Projects may also draw inspiration from, or be related to, the New European Bauhaus initiative in developing a sustainable future for all. Specific policies linked to the programme are The European Pillar of Social Rights[266], the European Social Fund (ESF)[267], and NextGenerationEU[268].

A stronger Europe in the world

To strengthen EU's role as a global leader while ensuring the highest standards of climate, environmental and labour protection, Strand 3 supports the UNESCO's project 'Routes of Enslaved Peoples: Resistance, Liberty and Heritage'[269]. This is one of UNESCO's global priorities. Moreover, the programme also supports many projects related to the Russian aggression on Ukraine and all of the issues deriving from it[270]. A specific policy linked to the programme is EU solidarity with Ukraine[271].

Promoting our European way of life

EU core values are at the centre of the third Strand. Some project calls involve the support of Civil Society Organisation that are active at the local, regional, national and transnational levels in promoting and cultivating human rights, thus also strengthening the protection and promotion of Union values. Apart from this, there are specific calls that work towards protecting human rights against hate speech and hate crimes[272]. Specific policies linked to the programme are the proposed New Pact on Migration and Asylum[273] and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)[274].

New push for European democracy

As enshrined in the EU Treaties, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (the Charter), and in international human rights conventions, the CERV acts as a key instrument to protect and promote human rights and values. It supports the implementation of the EU antiracism action plan for 2020-2025[275], the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025[276], the EU Roma strategic framework on equality, inclusion and participation[277], the EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish Life 2021-2030[278], the 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy[279], and the 2021-2030 strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities[280].

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266 The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

267 European Social Fund

268 https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_de

269 Commission implementing decision C(2022) 8588 final and for the project see https://www.unesco.org/en/routes-enslaved-peoples

270 Funding and Tender opportunities – project details

271 https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/index_en

272 See e.g. for Protecting EU values and rights by combating hate speech and hate crime CERV-2023-CHAR-LITI-SPEECH; European Remembrance – 2023 CERV-2023-CITIZENS-REM and the call for proposals to promote equality and to fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination CERV-2023-EQUAL

273 New Pact on Migration and Asylum of the EU (Webpage)

274 European Regional Development Fund

275 European Commission COM(2020) 565 final

276 European Commission COM(2020) 698 final

277 European Commission COM(2020) 620 final

278 Towards an EU free from antisemitism. EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life (2021 – 2030)

279 European Commission COM(2020) 152 final

280 European Commission COM(2021) 101 final

6.3.2. Early implementation

This section of the assessment is based on the data available on call and project level as well as findings from the scoping interviews.

For the Europe fit for the digital age priority, there are 33 projects that mention Europe's Digital Decade policy programme 2030 and European Digital Rights and Principles.[281] Most of these projects aim to develop innovative democratic approaches and tools (notably digital 'e-democracy' tools) to help citizens make their voices heard and to publicly exchange views on all areas of EU action are also encouraged[282].

Regarding the green transition, as mentioned above, it is well embedded in the programme. 33 projects mention the New European Bauhaus in total and two projects mention the Green Deal.

Regarding the priority 'an economy that works for people', there were 28 projects that mention The European Pillar of Social Rights, 33 projects that mention ESF, and 21 projects mention NextGenerationEU. Scoping interviews with national authorities showed that even though the projects could have a positive impact on the economy and promote inclusivity in the long run, CERV does not directly mention this priority.

Interviews with Member State representatives show that the programme is more concerned with strengthening the common values within the European Union rather that promoting them outside EU borders. There are, however, 19 projects that mention EU solidarity with Ukraine, which falls under this priority.

Information from national representatives confirmed that the EU values are key to the CERV programme. Regarding the specific projects, 26 mention the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, 28 mention the Migration and Integration Fund, and 20 the European Regional Development Fund.

Strand 3 Project example – Romania
Romanian municipalities are partners in the Strategic and Human Rebirth project in the local European community, funded under Strand 3 of the CERV programme, call for proposals CERV-2022-CITIZENS-TOWN, which operates through CERV Lump Sum Grants. This project's partners are located in Croatia, Italy, Poland, and Spain. The start date of the project was December 1st, 2022, and its end date will be November 30th, 2024. The project aims to establish a network of communities that will facilitate the sharing of knowledge and promote public, social, and labour policies at the local, regional, and European levels. The goal is to enhance citizen cohesion by promoting equality, offering opportunities for cultural enrichment, and fostering exchanges between citizens of different countries within the European Union. The project consists of 12 events (seven on-site and five online) and involves seven partners based in four other European countries. The events will invite various stakeholders to participate in the project.

Source: Funding&Tenders database and study interview

The analysis at the level of selected Member States highlighted that the European Democracy is the most coherent and tightly linked priority to the programme, and represents one of its main focuses. Overall, across Member States, there are 20 projects that mention EU strategic autonomy, 17 projects mention gender, 31 projects mention the EU Roma strategic framework on equality,

[281] These and the following project identifications are based on the Portal Funding and Tender opportunities.

[282] For examples see e.g. My Participation Revolution; Digital Civic Participation v2.0 or Opening Avenues: Empowering Participation

inclusion and participation, 29 projects mention EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, 22 projects mention the EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025, 21 projects mention the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, 21 projects mention LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, and 15 projects mention Horizon Europe. Romania and Ireland, for instance, have several projects that aim at strengthening civic spaces and promoting citizen participation.

Strand 3 Project example – Ireland
The Irish Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) receives an Operating Grant under Strand 3. The grant was worth €241 157 as of January 2022. The Institute is an independent, not-for-profit organisation with charitable status and aims to provide a forum for all those interested in EU and International affairs to engage in debate and discussion, and to evaluate and share policy options. The IIEA acts as a forum for dialogue, a catalyst for new ideas and a source of new policy options. Its work programme under this operating grant consists of a minimum of 70 events and 16 research publications, in addition to blogs, infographics and other materials aimed at disseminating information to citizens. This overall programme of work will be sub-divided into ten key policy areas for Ireland and the EU, and is designed to cover the broadest possible spectrum of EU policy areas, and communicate them to as diverse an audience as possible in Ireland and the EU. The work programme covers the following key areas: EU Affairs; UK-EU relations; France and Germany; Justice and Home Affairs; Geopolitics; Health; Digital Policy; Economics and financial governance; transatlantic relations; and a Young Professionals Network event series.

Source: Funding&Tenders database and study interview

6.3.3. Lessons learnt

At this early stage of the programme implementation, it can be concluded that Strand 3 both has the potential to be involved in a wide range of policy topics and is also coherent with the priorities of the Commission at project level.

CERV has a strong societal focus, which is clearly related to European values and the programme has contributed to European social wellbeing.

At this stage, programme objectives and overall design are able to respond to changing external conditions. It is sufficiently open and flexible to allow for the introduction of new topics and themes within the wider objective of promoting democratic values.

Despite this overall coherence, the implementation faces some challenges. Changes in the reporting and financial requirements, including introducing a new grant management system only available in English, have caused concern among CERV beneficiaries.

6.4. Effectiveness assessment

The analysis of the effectiveness of the CERV programme is based on the following information sources:

- The CERV websites on the servers of the European Commission[283] and the EACEA[284]
- The European Commission Funding and Tender opportunities portal[285]
- The Programme Statement on CERV[286]
- Interviews with MA of selected countries

The CERV project results website[287] provides results for projects selected in 2021. Because Strand 3 is the successor for Europe for citizens in 2021, its results for that year will be presented under its previous name. For the 2022 project results, the analysis focuses on the selected practices in the four Member States Romania, Latvia, Hungary, and Ireland. Furthermore, the evaluation focus is on the early implementation.

6.4.1. Programme launch

Between 2021 and 2022, there were 66 calls for proposals. Out of 2 675 proposals received, 814 (30 %) were for the third strand of the programme, which is focused on citizen engagement and participation. Compared to the other strands of the CERV programme, the success rate for Strand 3 is among the highest with 55 %. For the third strand, the success rate for Citizens' Remembrance calls is 27 %, while Town-Twinning and Networks of Towns calls have a success rate of 81 % (2021-2022).

For the call CERV-2021-CITIZENS-REM, 95 proposals were received. Ten were inadmissible and/or ineligible, and one was withdrawn by its coordinator. Out of the 84 proposals, only 27 were chosen for funding, amounting to a total of €4 503 005. Since the available budget was €4 515 000, the remaining funding (€11 995) was insufficient to support other projects. The funding threshold was 80.5, and the overall threshold was 70. The 28 proposals falling in between the funding threshold and the overall threshold were rejected due to a lack of budget availability.

In summary, only 27 out of the 84 applications were chosen for funding, which accounts for 32.1 %. Meanwhile, due to budget limitations, 28 applications (33.3 %), were not granted funding. Lastly, 29 applications (34.5 %), did not meet the required threshold for consideration. Out of the 95 applications that were submitted, 27 (28.4 %) were chosen for funding, 28 (29.5 %) fell short of the available budget, 29 (30.5 %) did not meet the threshold, ten (10.5 %) were deemed ineligible, and one (1.1 %) was withdrawn. For Town-Twinning and Networks of Towns proposals, all rejected proposals (23 %) were turned down based on budgetary reasons.

In 2021, 116 project beneficiaries signed a grant agreement for the Town-Twinning and Networks of Towns calls and 27 for the Citizens Remembrance calls In 2022. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic recovery can be observed, as 182 additional project beneficiaries signed a grant

283 DG JUST CERV programme website

284 EACEA CERV programme website

285 Funding and Tender opportunities

286 Programme Statements – Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme

287 CERV Projects & Results

agreement for the Town-Twinning and Networks of Towns calls and 34 for the Citizens Remembrance calls.[288]

According to the latest iteration of the Multiannual Work Programme, for 2021, the total budget of the CERV's third strand amounted to €13 977 154, which corresponds to 15 % of the total amount earmarked for the whole programme[289]. For the same year, and for the third strand, only 2 % of this budget has been paid out to the beneficiary projects[290]. The budget earmarked to the third strand increased to €39 671 295 in 2022[291] (20 % of the total CERV programme budget for the year), and in 2022, 48 % of the third strand's budget had been paid out[292].

Interviewees reported a delay in implementing the programme. Since the CERV programme was adopted only in 2021, it is still at the very beginning of the implementation phase. The desk research results indicate that the number of completed Strand 3 projects is small. However, an exact number of closed projects is not available. The European Commission also stated that final reports produced by beneficiaries are too few to assess results, in particular at the strand level.

For Ireland, there was a large issue with the programme's lunch. Since 2021, there has been no NCP for Ireland because it is the responsibility of the Department of Foreign Affairs to appoint an organisation to act on its behalf. At the end of the previous organisation's operation, the Russian aggression on Ukraine began, which resulted in the Department being overwhelmed with managing the influx of Ukrainian refugees and thus failing to appoint an NCP. Consequently, the launching of the programme was not very effective. Had there been an NCP, there would have been more national promotions and events tailored to the Irish audience, which was not the case.

6.4.2. Programme management and responses to changing external conditions

The first year of the programme (2021) was challenging for CERV implementation, in particular due to the transition between two multiannual financial frameworks, the very late adoption of the CERV programme regulation (28 April 2021) and the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic. DG JUST achieved, in their own assessment, a satisfactory level of implementation for the CERV programme, providing funding to grassroots organisations, to EU networks and IT systems, and for several key activities in support of policy and legislative developments.

To prevent significant delays in implementation, several measures were taken by DG JUST in 2021. The work programme and call documents were developed in conjunction with the Multiannual Financial Framework and CERV regulations. Additionally, targeted communication activities were initiated immediately after adopting the CERV regulation. The first CERV civil dialogue week was held from May 25th to May 28th, 2021, which presented the programme and upcoming calls for proposals to stakeholders and potential beneficiaries. The event included a high-level panel with Commissioner Reynders and hands-on technical sessions, attracting approximately 1000 participants.

According to national stakeholders, the programme was still dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022. The pandemic had a negative impact particularly on NGOs, for instance in terms of their available budget. Stakeholders of one Member State analysed for this study even

288 European Commission, internal report 'Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme – 2021-2022 implementation'

289 Commission implementing decision C(2021) 2583 final, p. 9

290 European Commission, internal report 'Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme – 2021-2022 implementation'

291 Commission implementing decision C(2021) 2583 final, p. 9

292 European Commission, internal report 'Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme – 2021-2022 implementation'

reported that NGOs faced challenges to manage their core tasks. As a result, they found it ever more difficult to engage in projects with new ideas and solutions. Thus, to participate in the CERV programme, many NGOs first need an enhanced capacity.

The Europe for Citizens programme 2014-2020 (Strand 3) was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, some projects experienced delays in their implementation. Despite this setback, interviewees believe that the overall performance of the projects should not be affected. Some projects successfully adapted by transforming their in-person events into online or hybrid meetings while maintaining the planned themes and content to minimise the impact on the schedule. However, for specific projects, this was not feasible, and these projects had to be postponed until it was safe to hold physical meetings to ensure high-quality results.

6.4.3. Programme objectives addressed during early implementation

In 2021, the Europe for Citizens programme 2014-2020 played an overall positive role in encouraging civic participation and democratic engagement while strengthening the mutual sense of belonging and supporting collective understanding and identification with Europe, thereby helping to support the European integration process in the longer term.

Regarding the selected practices for Strand 3, interviewees discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each. For the third selected practice, Town-Twinning focuses on small-scale projects that allow citizens to explore the cultural diversity of the European Union. Meanwhile, Networks of Towns aims to foster long-term cooperation between municipalities and their citizens through various thematic and policy-related activities on a larger scale[293]. The interviewees explained that Town-Twinning could be considered the first phase, with the historical component of the programme inherited from historical ways of fostering European citizens, while the Networks of Town the second phase. While it has larger projects, its mechanisms are very similar.

The small-scale and grassroots nature of the Town-Twinning practice has both its strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, it allows for significant initiatives and serves as the only direct link between the Union and citizens. However, this can also be a weakness as there may be a digital gap among participants, and participation relies on elected officials' motivation. Additionally, there may be a lack of administrative capacity to effectively deal with an EU programme, leading to low numbers of applications.

The Network of Towns practice operates with a larger budget and consortium, catering particularly to towns with experience in EU projects. One of the main focuses is on the green transition, a significant aspect of Strand 3. The interviewees have recognised this practice as the most successful among the three. In Romania, the ongoing project called Green IT Your Work[294] is aligned with the green and digital priorities and aims to engage young people in discussions about Europe's digital future.

The EU remembrance practice has a distinctive quality as the only one focused on this particular issue. The interviewees explained it received significant support from major EU platforms, and the current political discussions highlight the significance of the topic. This practice contributes significantly to the objectives of the CERV programme. The number of applications received is increasing.

Although some interviewees feel that the programme is still in its early stages, several areas were identified as having room for improvement. These include increasing the programme's visibility,

293 JUST – Call for proposals on Town-Twinning and Networks of Towns (europa.eu)

294 Funding and Tender opportunities – project data

adjusting the monitoring indicators, and enhancing collaboration with other relevant EU funding programmes and initiatives. National authorities from the selected countries expressed that they could only give very limited insights into achievements at this stage in the implementation process. They have implemented the programme as foreseen in the programming by the European Commission, and were able to spend all of the earmarked resources.

6.4.4. Challenges for programme and project managers

The programme's performance has been affected by internal and external factors. The internal factors are mainly related to issues with the application process. National authorities repeatedly mentioned the challenges national agencies and participating organisations face in managing the web portal. These challenges were not related to the programme's objectives or design but to the Funding and Tender opportunities portal. This issue was particularly problematic in Strand 3, where small-scale organisations with limited ICT resources have been applying.

There is also a lack of data regarding the application process. National authorities expressed that information on applications is not sufficiently available. Obtaining a clear view of the application process requires a breakdown by country rather than only accumulated numbers across Europe.

Another issue that national authorities identified was the limitation regarding the communication strategy of the Strand. For example, it was mentioned that the programme does not have a logo that they can use on their informative brochures and leaflets.

Common external factors relate to the impact of external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian aggression on Ukraine, and the challenge of involving public entities and stakeholders in planned activities.

The Latvian contact point mentioned an example of the types of challenges they face in the implementation processes of projects. The project, 'Baltic Train' on remembrance, was led by an Estonian University with a Latvian University participating. According to an interviewee, the Latvian University removed itself from the project because it became too complicated and a burden for them to continue. Because additional information was not shared with the contact point, it had no means of obtaining greater detail on precisely what had happened and why.

Hungarian stakeholders reported that they face financial and administrative obstacles throughout the CERV programme. Additionally, the government's unwillingness to engage in social dialogue and hostility towards civil society discourages participation in these programmes.

Irish stakeholders mentioned the changes in the application process when CERV was created, and that the new application platform represents a severe challenge for applicants. The interviewee stated that the change from the editable PDF to the new application channel has significantly impacted the number of applications they receive. Because most grants have a relatively small budget, applicants do not deem it worthwhile going through such a complicated application process. It has also hindered the participation of smaller communities that do not have the necessary resources or digital knowledge.

6.4.5. Lessons learnt

The early implementation of the CERV programme can be cautiously deemed as effective.

The programme's launch suffered delays. It was adopted in 2021, and most of the projects are still at the beginning of their implementation. The calls were launched, while final reports have not yet been submitted. Even though the number of applications has suffered a decrease because of the pandemic, they are now picking back up.

COVID-19 has not only had an impact on the applications but also on implementation. Many projects suffered from operational issues, however, introducing ICT tools allowed for most projects to be carried out.

Stakeholders expressed that the only way to assess the implementation so far is through process-based analysis rather than through impact analysis. In this regard, they explained that the programmes had been implemented as foreseen in the programming documents by the European Commission and that they were able to spend all earmarked resources.

The programme is highly valued for its unique topics, particularly its remembrance aspect. It is also seen as a bottom-up programme that seeks to work with grass-roots organisations, allowing for good engagement between authorities and citizens. However, the programme application process requires significant review, as it was considered as a challenge for small-scale organisations to participate. Specifically, the application portal is not considered user-friendly and demotivates organisations from applying – especially smaller organisations with fewer staff.

The programme is lacking a good communication strategy at the programme-level, and national authorities mentioned that it is difficult to create awareness of the programme.

Participants having questions during their project's implementation need more guidance. In some cases the contact points cannot help, because the requirements are outside of their scope of work.

7. Cross-analysis of the four programmes and lessons learnt

The following sections briefly review the main findings of the analysis of the four programmes in a comparative manner for each of the three evaluation dimensions, i.e., relevance, external coherence and effectiveness following the same structure as the assessment of the individual programmes.[295] Where adequate, a differentiation between the design of the programmes and their early implementation is provided.

7.1. Relevance assessment

The objective of the relevance assessment was to identify the degree to which the programmes tackle the overarching EU challenges and possibly additional national challenges and to assess how far the change of challenges could be considered or may have affected the relevance of the programmes. Changing conditions and new challenges have evolved, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine, which allows for a particular emphasis on the latter relevance assessments. In turn, these events have emphasised the previously identified need to strengthen EU strategic autonomy.

7.1.1. Key findings

Each programme has different foci within the five overarching EU challenges. None addresses all of them equally (see Table 18 and Table 19), neither in the design nor the early implementation phase. This is not least due to the main objectives of most of these programmes, for which the overarching challenges are frequently relevant in a cross-cutting sense or may be tackled by a certain number of projects. This implies partly generic references in the programmes' design documents to the overarching EU challenges that are not always equally mirrored in their early implementation.

Table 18: Relevance assessment for the programmes' design

Challenges	Erasmus+	Creative Europe	European Solidarity Corps	CERV Strand 3
Digital transition	High	High	Moderate	Moderate
Green transition	High	Moderate	High	Rather high
COVID-19 pandemic effects	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Rather low
Russian aggression	Moderate	Low	Low	None
EU strategic autonomy	High	Moderate	None	High

Source: own representation

Digital and green transition challenges are frequently considered as twin transition. They are more equally relevant across the four programmes than the other three challenges. However, the relevance of the digital transition during the early implementation seems to be less considered by the ESC and CERV Strand 3. Only the Erasmus+ programme explicitly has digital and green transitions among its main priorities, which are translated accordingly into the work programmes and mirrored in the early implementation. The Creative Europe programme addresses the digital

[295] The analysis of this chapter is fully based on the previous chapters rather than additional sources.

transition as a strong transversal topic. It demonstrates how green challenges can be tackled with a funding programme. CERV Strand 3 is an example of a more generic reference to these two challenges, especially the digital transition e.g., related to online democratic participation.

Table 19: Relevance assessment for the programmes' early implementation

Challenges	Erasmus+	Creative Europe	European Solidarity Corps	CERV Strand 3
Digital transition	High	High	Rather low	Rather low
Green transition	Rather high	Rather high	Rather high	High
COVID-19 pandemic effects	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Russian aggression	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	None
EU strategic autonomy	High	Rather low	None	High

Source: own representation

COVID-19 pandemic challenges are the most equally considered EU challenge across the four programmes, albeit less prominent than the digital and green transition. This holds true for both, the programmes' design and early implementation. Although challenges rooted in the pandemic occurred already during the development of the programmes, programme design references are mostly visible in the annual work programmes. Contributions of the four programmes to tackle these challenges range from general to very specific actions:

- The early implementation of the Erasmus+ programme was highly affected by the impacts on mobility opportunities and contributes (within the selected practices) mainly indirectly to the recovery process, e.g., through skills needed for recovery.
- The Creative Europe programme was immediately affected by the disruptive impacts of the pandemic. During early implementation these challenges were only considered through the Culture Strand despite its original impact on all strands.
- In line with its humanitarian aid objectives, the ESC programme contribution focuses on support for health and social care system challenges.
- Contributions from Strand 3 of the CERV programme are visible in relation to participation and democracy subject to limited fundamental rights.

The challenges related to the Russian aggression on Ukraine and EU strategic autonomy are most diverse in terms of their relevance to the four programmes, both in programme design and during early implementation. The tendency towards a low relevance of the *Russian aggression on Ukraine* in the design is at least partially related to the timing of its onset, which allowed this challenge to only be considered as of the 2023 annual work programmes. With the exception of Strand 3 of the CERV programme, all assessed programmes have considered this new challenge, mostly through specific projects. This demonstrates an increasing relevance of the Russian aggression on Ukraine for most of these programmes as they can respond to new challenges. This happens, however, with a time-lag due to the necessary programming amendments. An example from a call for proposals of the Erasmus+ programme illustrates how challenges can be combined to increase their relevance without risking neglecting one challenge at the benefit of another: specific funding has been allocated to international EU partnerships with Ukrainian higher education institutions with a focus on digital environment education.

EU strategic autonomy is not a newly emerging challenge, however, awareness of this challenge has been triggered not least through the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine. Thus, it is not surprising that this challenge is of relatively high relevance, and is included already in the design of three of the four programmes. The only exception is the ESC programme. Despite its potential contributions to strengthening European values, only a generic reference to European democracy is made. The relevance of this challenge is the highest within the Erasmus+ programme and Strand 3 of the CERV programme, though with different foci:

- For the Erasmus+ programme an increasing relevance was identified for European identity and democracy as well as economy and entrepreneurial skills, which are important to counteract a potential dependence on other countries.
- Strand 3 of the CERV programme predominantly tackles disinformation related challenges.

Besides these overarching EU challenges, the assessment also reviewed to what extent these programmes tackle national challenges in selected Member States. The analysis confirmed that programmes with a completely centrally managed implementation approach do not tackle specific national challenges. For example, culture-specific challenges of individual Member States are not considered by the Creative Europe programme.

In the analysed Member States the Erasmus+ programme is often used as a serious co-contributor to address certain national challenges, e.g., internationalisation of the higher and vocational educational establishments in Bulgaria and Spain and youth civic engagement in Lithuania. Inclusion in the labour market is also a very prominent aspect of Erasmus+ projects that tackle related national issues, for instance youth unemployment in Spain.

While not a purely national challenge, the European Solidarity Corps gained additional awareness in Poland in light of the high number of Ukrainian refugees entering the country. As most refugees entered the EU via the Polish border (whether they stayed in the country or moved on to other Member States), several projects were set up to provide assistance to Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

Particularly the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine have changed the *external conditions* in multiple ways. The comparison above shows that the four programmes have been able to respond to these newly arising needs, which indicates a common strength. Within their frameworks the programmes reacted quickly by either adding a new dimension, amending budget allocation, or developing dedicated calls, among other measures.

Apart from tackling newly arising challenges, changing external conditions could also reduce the overall relevance of the programmes. However, this was not confirmed for any of the four programmes. All programmes were found to still be relevant, not least with regard to the continued challenges that already existed prior to the development of the 2021-2027 programmes. The assessment shows however, that the degree of flexibility varies between the programmes.

7.1.2. Lessons learnt

The findings across programmes enable lessons and recommendations to be drawn for future implementation processes. They also complement programme specific lessons and recommendations detailed in the previous chapters. The main lessons learnt are as follows:

- ⇨ While the 'twin challenges' are principally relevant for all four programmes, in some cases this is a rather generic relevance at least in terms of the programme's design. This is often mirrored in the early implementation by less emphasis placed on the 'twin challenges' in corresponding programmes. Thus, such generic references to challenges should be mainly used to draw

attention to specific issues, and should be complemented with specific and concrete approaches (e.g., the greening of the Creative Europe programme is a case of good practice).

- ⇨ The future design of the annual work programmes can be better aligned to actual implementation expectations. Not every programme could or should contribute equally to all five overarching challenges. However, it could be beneficial to emphasise a few challenges, for example one to three, that are the most important in the respective programme. This has the potential to provide better guidance for the implementation and to help increase the positive impacts related to these challenges.
- ⇨ Considering national challenges can help to better embed activities not only in the EU context, but also to that of EU Member States. Acknowledging potentially different national needs without neglecting EU-wide needs could be beneficial, however, this relies on a combination of central and decentral implementation mechanisms.
- ⇨ New challenges do not necessarily require an extensive revision but a thorough reflection of how to create synergies. The more frequent (sudden) challenges become, the more important it will be to create such synergies in view of limited resources, and to avoid ad-hoc changes in programmes that are counter-productive to their overall strategic objectives. This can be a useful tool or approach to activate the comprehensive power of the programmes.
- ⇨ The annual work programmes (in contrast to multi-annual programme plans) seem to be a good tool to facilitate quicker reactions to changing external conditions. In terms of relevance, the annual approach to fine-tune the programmes' design seems to be adequate in times of change, without focusing too much on upcoming changes through even shorter planning periods.
- ⇨ Not all challenges that are at the heart of the programmes seem to be sufficiently considered by the programmes themselves, e.g., EU values by the ESC programme. This may require a better reflection on challenges. Furthermore, a more future oriented perspective anticipating challenges resulting from trends could help to further improve the programmes' readiness. An example is the Creative Europe programme, which could enhance its transformative power for the cultural and creative sectors by anticipating future development scenarios.

7.2. Coherence assessment

The coherence assessment focused on external coherence, meaning coherence between a programme and EU policies. The objective of the coherence assessment was to evaluate the links of the four programmes with key EU policy documents. In particular, the analysis focused on the coherence with the six Commission priorities 2019-2024, the Recovery Plan for Europe (2020) as main answer to the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and specific policies linked to either of the four programmes. The assessment considered the links from both perspectives, i.e., in how far the programmes are considered by these key policies and vice versa.

7.2.1. Key findings

All four programmes show a high degree of coherence with all six Commission priorities. Within these priorities, however, the links vary considerably. The following figure illustrates this by highlighting the policies that show coherence with more than one of the assessed programmes. The bigger the letters, the more programmes demonstrate links to the policy.

The New European Bauhaus is the only policy that is related to all four programmes. For any other policies subsumed under the European Green Deal coherence was identified by only one programme at a time. The only other priority with less commonalities across the programmes is 'A stronger Europe in the world'. For the latter, coherence with the EU Solidarity with Ukraine policy was identified for the Creative Europe programme and Strand 3 of the CERV programme.

Figure 15: Coherence across programmes with the six Commission priorities

Note: The larger the letters, the more programmes show coherence with the mentioned policy under the respective Commission priority. Only policies are listed for which a coherence with at least two of the four programmes could be identified.
Source: own presentation.

For the remaining four priorities between one to three policies show coherence with three of the assessed programmes. Coherence across them is the highest for the priority 'An economy that works for the people', for which five policies are coherent with at least two programmes.

For the Recovery Plan for Europe (2020) no common policies apart from the NextGenerationEU package were identified across the four programmes, which was already identified as a common policy under the priority 'An economy that works for the people'.

Apart from the overlapping coherence findings for the policies subsumed under either of the six European Commission priorities 2019-2024, the cross-analysis focused on the overarching priorities as outlined in the following tables. Table 20 illustrates to which extent each of the four programmes is considered by the priorities, i.e., is expected to contribute to achieving overarching Commission objectives. The direct mention of the four programmes is quite low across the six priorities. The existing links strongly vary between the programmes.

Table 20: The four programmes in key policy documents

Key EU policies	Erasmus+	Creative Europe	European Solidarity Corps	CERV (Strand 3)
A European Green Deal	None	Rather low	Rather low	None
A Europe fit for the digital age	Moderate	None	None	None
An economy that works for people	High	None	Moderate	None
A stronger Europe in the world	Low	Low	None	None
Promoting our European way of life	Moderate	Rather low	None	None
New push for European democracy	High	Rather low	Rather high	High

Source: own representation

Erasmus+ is the programme that is referred to by far the most frequently in policy documents of the European Commission priorities, which may illustrate its long-standing implementation and awareness. Moreover, this may also be linked to its overall complexity with numerous types of activities designed to support various objectives.

In contrast, references to the CERV programme is very limited. It is only directly referred to in various policies subsumed under the priority 'New push for European democracy', which is certainly the priority with the strongest direct links. However, with its objectives on civil rights and participation one could expect some direct references of the CERV programme for instance in policy documents subsumed under the priorities 'Promoting our European way of life' and/or 'A stronger Europe in the world'. The Creative Europe programme is also rarely mentioned in the overarching policy documents of the six priorities. Instead, this programme is deeply embedded in specific EU cultural policies.

Comparing the references to the four assessed programmes according to each of the six Commission priorities shows that the priority 'New push for European democracy' refers by far more often to these programmes than any other priority. This seems to mirror the thematic foci of these programmes that are mainly linked to social and cultural and less to technological and environmental issues.

In several cases for which 'none' is indicated in Table 20 indirect links are still visible, e.g., through pointing to priorities that are the subject of a programme. For example, the European Digital Rights and Principles declaration does not refer to the CERV programme, but the policy's aim to protect citizens' rights in the digital transition is coherent with this programme.

The following comparative coherence assessment does not systematically differentiate between design and early implementation, as differences are less pronounced than for the relevance assessment. Instead, the analysis focuses on the comparison between the policies' reliance on either of the four programmes (Table 20) and the programmes' planned and implemented links to the main policies and priorities (Table 21).

Overall, the coherence analysis indicates that all programmes contribute to all six Commission priorities 2019-2024. In most cases, the contribution in the programme's design is mirrored in the early implementation through dedicated calls and or projects that refer to one or more policies under the respective priority. For nearly all cases (cells in Table 21) the coherence assessment is higher than the mentioning of the programmes in the priorities (Table 20).

While relatively high coherence of the Erasmus+ programme with all six priorities may have been expected in view of its above described complexity and mentioning in most of the priorities, the

coherence findings for Strand 3 of the CERV programme may be more surprising. This programme was hardly considered as a source to contribute to five of the six priorities, however projects and, more rarely calls, target all priorities to a significant extent.

Table 21: Coherence of the four programmes with key policy documents

Key EU policies	Erasmus+	Creative Europe	European Solidarity Corps	CERV Strand 3
A European Green Deal	High	Moderate	High	Rather high
A Europe fit for the digital age	High	Rather low	High	Rather high
An economy that works for people	High	Rather low	Moderate	Rather high
A stronger Europe in the world	Moderate	Rather low	Rather low	Moderate
Promoting our European way of life	High	Moderate	Moderate	Rather high
New push for European democracy	High	Moderate	High	High

Source: own representation

In particular, the coherence of the programmes with the policies of the twin transition, i.e., under the 'European Green Deal' and 'A Europe fit for the digital age' is relatively high, which is in line with the relevance assessment (section 7.1) of the corresponding challenges. The coherence of the four programmes is the lowest for the priority 'A stronger Europe in the world'. While this is in line with the very rare links of this priority to either of the four programmes, one could argue that the programmes' policy coherence is not entirely aligned to the considerable relevance assigned for most programmes to the related challenge 'EU strategic autonomy'.

7.2.2. Lessons learnt

Few direct references in policy documents under the six Commission priorities 2019-2024 indicate that either the potential of these programmes to contribute to overarching priorities may be underestimated or the awareness of these programmes is, or was not, equally developed across Commission services when outlining the priorities and their corresponding policy documents. This may also mirror the different track-record of the four programmes, with Erasmus+ being well-known and established, whereas other programmes have been developed more recently. At the same time, the coherence of the programmes towards policies under the six priorities is much more strongly developed, which confirms their potential to contribute to the overarching EU policy agenda.

- ⇨ Combining these observations leads to the conclusion that the development of future European Commission priorities beyond 2024 should reflect the potential of and expectations towards the whole variety of EU programmes more thoroughly. In other words, the first objective of these programmes is to bring people together to support EU values and overcome national borders (in one or another context). This can then be complemented with an additional layer of objectives related to challenges to enhance programme content and create synergies.
- ⇨ At the same time, these observations also indicate an increasing complexity of EU funding instruments that becomes more difficult to grasp. Thus, rather than further extending funding opportunities and setting up new programmes, it may be time for consolidation. Not every topic requires a specific call or initiative. Many of these policies can be addressed by means of updated priorities in the annual work programmes.
- ⇨ While the coherence in the design of the programmes and their early implementation is confirmed, this does not directly imply similarly high effective contributions to the policies'

objectives (i.e., beyond the programmes' objectives). This could only be assessed through an analysis of 'goal effectiveness', 'efficiency' and 'EU Added-Value' that cannot yet been performed at the current stage of implementation. However, coherent design is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to ensure corresponding contributions to overarching EU objectives.

Since these analyses will provide useful insights on the coherence effects only at a very late stage, systematic monitoring of the programmes' contributions to the priorities could be an interim step that (1) delivers earlier insights while the programmes can still be adjusted and (2) provides valuable information for later (ex-post) evaluations. The Erasmus+ annual reporting results on contributions to the programme's transversal priorities may give food for thought in this direction, as e.g., the Annual Report 2021 provides monitoring links to the European Green Deal and the Digital Education Action Plan as part of the priority 'A Europe fit for the digital age'[296].

- ⇨ Project information on the programmes' early implementation suggest a considerable coherence with the six priorities and/or selected policies within them. However, corresponding references in the calls tend to be less frequent. Mentioning the policies more systematically in calls could be beneficial for the uptake by projects.
- ⇨ The comparison of relevance and coherence assessments indicates some weak links, e.g., when challenges are considered highly relevant but coherence with the corresponding EU policies is less pronounced. This may call for further fine-tuning of the programmes' expected contributions to EU policies.

7.3. Effectiveness assessment

The effectiveness assessment is focused on the early phase of the programmes' implementation and thus allows for only tentative insights. The objective of the effectiveness assessment was to evaluate the uptake of the programme and the extent to which programmes focus on their guiding objectives. This also explored the programmes' ability to overcome specific implementation challenges and to develop first success stories that could inspire future implementation. Overall, it is worth highlighting that any findings on the early implementation's effectiveness should be taken with caution, which is not least due to the challenges the programmes faced during programme design and early implementation. Due to the limited comparability of the early implementation data across the programmes, any comparison of the programmes' uptake has to be treated cautiously.

7.3.1. Key findings

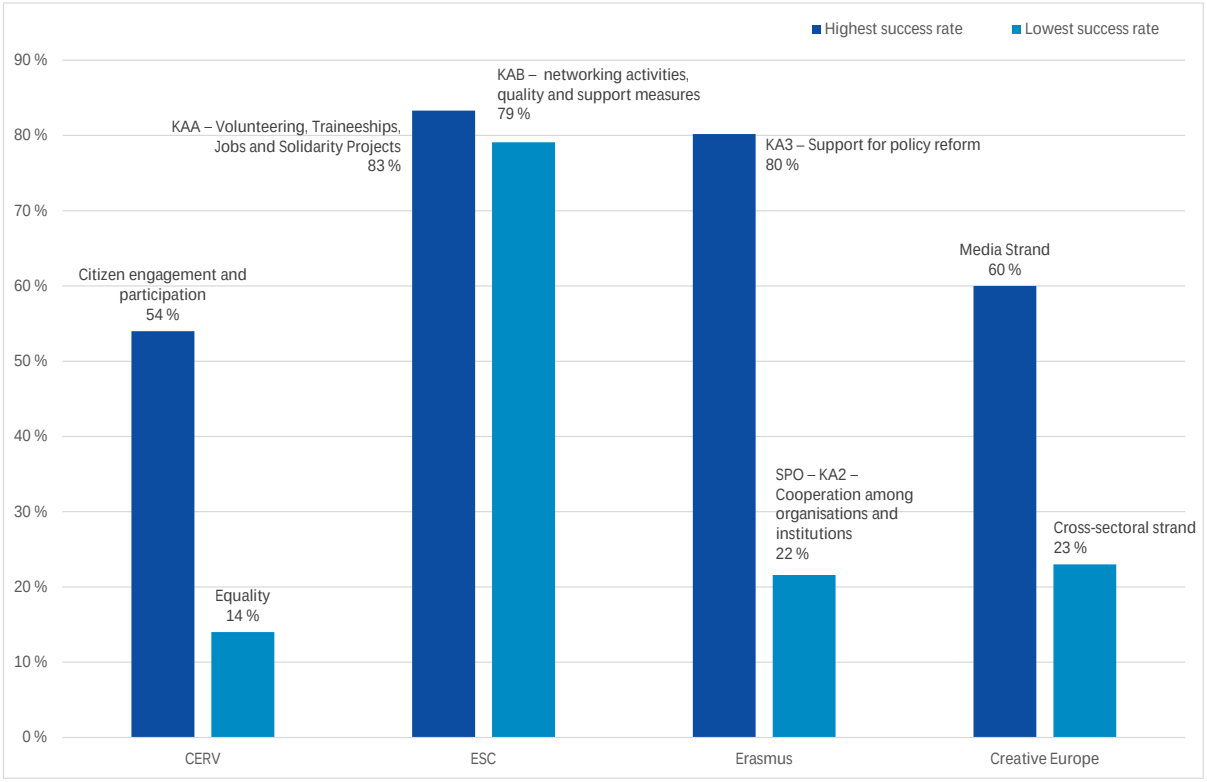
The effectiveness of the programmes' launches varied. Apart from Strand 3 of the CERV programme, the launches were considered to have been mostly effective following the delayed adoption of the programmes' regulations. For the Erasmus+ programme the commitment matched the earmarked funds for the year already in 2021. The launch of the Creative Europe programme was similarly effective with some limitations experienced due to structural programme changes during the early implementation. Expectations regarding the European Solidarity Corps programme were relatively low due to the COVID-19 pandemic challenges and the low level of previous experience with the programme prior to 2021. However, in 2021 approximately 88 % of the earmarked budget, and in 2022 nearly the entire budget, had been committed[297].

[296] Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021, pp. 87-96

[297] Based on European Commission, internal report 'Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme – 2021-2022 implementation'

The CERV programme's launch suffered more significantly from delays, which is not only visible in the low budget commitments in 2021 and 2022 compared to the earmarked budgets (2 % and 48 % respectively in Strand 3) but also in operational issues of the projects, for example, due to financial constraints of NGOs. In line with partially much higher earmarked budgets in 2022, increasing commitments have been achieved in 2022 compared to 2021.

Figure 16: Comparison of success rates for selected types of action across the four programmes (highest and lowest rates for 2021 and 2022 combined)



Source: EC, 2023.

Success rates also vary, not only between the four programmes, but also within the programmes for the different types of actions or across strands. High variations of the success rates are visible for directly managed Erasmus+ actions, ranging between 22 % and 80 % and for the Creative Europe programme, ranging between 23 % and 62 %. Only the European Solidarity Corps programme, at EU average, demonstrates a much lower variation between key actions. Apart from applications that were rejected due to quality reasons, this illustrates significant differences in the demand by programmes, strands and key actions.

At this stage it is not entirely possible to assess the extent to which the effects during early implementation are in line with the programmes' objectives and the likelihood of achieving the goals in the remaining programming period. The above detailed uptake provides a tentative indication on the potential of the programmes, however does not mirror actual effects achieved. In addition, stakeholder observations suggest that actions for which the uptake was lower than planned can also represent successes. One example are Small-scale VET partnerships in Erasmus+, an action that has been introduced more recently. Even for the relatively new European Solidarity Corps programme, an increasing interest could be observed. This suggests that the programmes' objectives can still be achieved if they manage to continuously attain the interest of their main target groups, although some caution may be raised in view of administrative burdens (see further below).

The limited progress of project implementation further limits the potential for presenting individual success stories. Positive effects can be observed mostly at a more general level, such as the widening of perspectives and the opportunities created for experimental activities (e.g., in the Creative Europe programme). In some cases, specific actions have more potential for visibility than others. Examples are the European Capitals of Culture and European film industry support under the Creative Europe programme which receive worldwide attention. Similarly, a relatively good uptake of newly introduced measures, such as the capacity building measures for sports and VET in Erasmus+, can be considered successful because they have been designed for a yet unmet demand. Despite the challenges connected to setting up a new programme, the European Solidarity Corps programme setup presents success in awareness raising mechanisms concerning volunteering and for addressing people with special needs, both of which can be linked to the explicit mentioning of 'solidarity' at programme level rather than within actions.

The combination of direct and indirect management of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes is considered to allow for effective implementation and to respond to external challenges. Good communication channels across the programme are particularly important. They seem to be better established for the Erasmus+ programme with its long-standing experience, whereas a newer programme like the European Solidarity Corps may need more time to further develop sufficient communication channels, especially between the EC and national agencies. The CERV programme illustrates the limitations of a purely centrally managed programme. Due to the limited capacities and tasks of the contact points their potential support to beneficiaries is not always sufficient.

As outlined above (section 7.1.1) all four programmes have been able to respond to changing external conditions. Generally, programme managements effectively amended work programmes, clarified or modified relevant rules and shared the information with their counterparts (e.g. national agencies). However, at least in the Media and Cross-Sectoral Strands of the Creative Europe programme it was not equally possible to effectively involve Ukrainian partner organisations to the same extent as in the Culture Strand. This may be partly grounded in a lack of visibility of accompanying measures in the programme documents.

Apart from issues arising from changing external conditions, the programmes faced further challenges. Several of these are linked to the administrative burden, information availability at national level, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) tools and budget issues arising from the recently higher inflation rate. Fewer challenges refer to other communication issues or a lack of awareness. The programmes are frequently considered as being highly complex in their administration, which is especially burdensome for small organisations or newcomers.

Since these programmes frequently target small organisations, the observed challenges bear considerable risks for the programmes' results in the medium- to long-term. In particular, a lack of functionality of the application and data entry tools was often raised, which has negative effects on the mobilisation of applicants. Frequently, small organisations may simply refrain from applying, thus limiting the potential variety of resources and creativity available to achieve the best results possible.

7.3.2. Lessons learnt

Findings across the programmes lead to certain lessons and recommendations, not only for their future implementation, but also for future programme development . These cross-cutting lessons complement programme specific lessons and recommendations:

- ⇨ In many cases (with the exception of the Creative Europe programme) a lower earmarking of budgets in the first year of programme implementation seems appropriate, because of the

often delayed adoption of regulations. Under the particular conditions in 2021, it prevented the programmes from early implementation pressure. However, an enhanced early implementation would have been positive for beneficiaries and their contributions to the programmes' objectives and EC goals. Thus, defining realistic goals may be the better guide to the budgetary planning.

Nevertheless, such delays imply 'cyclic' spending, which can also be a problem, because it leads to disruptions in funding flows. This suggests that programmes should aim for more continuous spending better continuity between programming periods.

- ⇨ Differences in the demand by programmes, strands and key actions are significant. This may indicate the need for more detailed budget planning, especially within the programmes to potentially achieve a more balanced uptake across actions or strands throughout the programming period. This contributes to a more efficient use of resources and can possibly speed up approval processes. In addition, this may help to obtain a similar level of quality of approved proposals across programmes, strands and key actions.
- ⇨ Different success rates may, however, also mirror certain priorities or may be linked to other causes, e.g., among those newly developed actions not yet well known. In these cases budget reallocation considerations should be accompanied by additional activities, e.g., better information and awareness raising of new actions. A review to determine whether certain conditions are counterproductive for achieving a higher number of applications could also be considered (e.g., whether the administrative burden is limiting the demand, or the variety, of applicants). Assessing these burdens requires detailed and in-depth insights per type of action.
- ⇨ An effective implementation also depends on sufficient budgets for beneficiaries. The recent inflation in 2022 and 2023 increasingly threatens this. Applicants are discouraged if they consider the available budget as being insufficient from the start, which seems to occur more frequently in recent years. This calls for budget amendments at project level, which may also imply further amendments of the overall programme budgets, or adjustments at the level of project and programme outcomes.
- ⇨ The example of the relatively new European Solidarity Corps programme illustrates the need for further promotion to improve awareness of the programme's opportunities. The same holds for newer types of actions of the other programmes. These delays in the awareness should be considered when introducing new elements, among others, in the programme plans.
- ⇨ In such cases, awareness raising can be highly complex, particularly if new target groups are to be addressed that may otherwise lack any knowledge of, or experience in accessing, relevant EU programmes. Extensive communication channels from EU level via national authorities and umbrella organisations are necessary to attract potential applicants.
- ⇨ Programme amendments may sometimes need more attention as the example of the involvement of Ukrainian partner organisations shows. A lack of visibility in changed processes and participation possibilities limits programme effectiveness and can create uncertainty thus hampering the expected success.
- ⇨ A transfer of experience between programmes on proven structures and communication channels and routines can be beneficial when setting up a new programme. Therefore, it could be useful to enhance cross-fertilisation of communication and coordination across programmes.
- ⇨ Better communication includes sufficient data and information availability not only at EU but at Member State level. Programmes with decentralised actions should always be able to access data on applications from their country in order to better target their own communication efforts.

⇨ Last but not least, there is a significant need to reduce the administrative burden, especially in view of the capacities typical for small organisations. If this is not generally possible in the ongoing programming period, e.g., as the use of ICT tools has been decided, programmes could consider this aspect through specific calls. For example, Creative Europe could have specific calls targeting only small organisations, requesting in these cases a much lower level of documentation. Such calls would reduce the entrance barrier for small organisations and especially newcomers. In addition, increasing the support and the support capacity provided by EC and national agencies seems to be necessary for applicants and beneficiaries to overcome some of the (currently) unavoidable administrative burden.

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Annex I – Methodological details

AI.1 Relevance assessment: EU and national challenges

The global economy finds itself at a crucial turning point. Together with the present climate crisis, the consequences of the global pandemic and the Russian aggression on Ukraine have brought up old patterns and changed the world in the last three years. In addition, one can observe the emergence of a 'new global map of political and economic relationships'[298] – one in which geopolitics is increasingly influencing the global economy This has important implications for Europe, which will define the years ahead.

The five overarching challenges can be detailed as follows:

- The *EU digital transformation* corresponding to technological progress that is needed to safeguard Europe's productivity and competitiveness in the context of demographic change. Related specific challenges are:
  - accessibility (broadband networks, internet platforms)
  - leaving behind places and vulnerable groups
  - digital transformation of jobs, education and training, new need for skills
  - create fair conditions and frameworks for Platform economy, social media
  - fight cybercrime
  - transformation and new opportunities (risks) for culture, media, conservation, heritage
  - AI and Metaverse as gamechangers (education, work, services etc.)
- The *green transition* challenge responding to the threats of climate change and biodiversity loss. Related challenges are:
  - need to reduce CO_2 emissions, increase energy efficiency, promote renewable energy
  - develop sustainable forms of living, working, transport, travelling, settlements, production etc.
  - enhance environmental protection and climate adaptation and environmental education
- The consequences of the *COVID-19 pandemic* and the post-pandemic recovery bring more challenges than merely the need for an economic recovery package and besides going digital and green. The consequences also accentuate the need to 'Make it Strong', targeting the young people as well as the culture and arts. National needs deriving from this challenge have been identified in the Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRP). Specific challenges are:
  - interrupted economic activity, loss of jobs especially in cultural and hospitality/tourism/transport sectors
  - interrupted supply chains, shortage of resources, goods etc.
  - troubled health systems, access to health services, lack of qualified workers in health and care
  - negative psychological effects of pandemic measures and lockdowns on vulnerable groups such as elderly, mentally ill, children and the youth, migrants etc.

[298] Christine Lagarde, President of the ECB, Keynote speech at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, Washington, D.C., 22 April 2022.

- The EU has responded strongly to the unprovoked *Russian aggression on Ukraine*. Since its start in February 2022, the EU, its Member States and its financial institutions have mobilised around €69 billion to support Ukraine's overall economic, social and financial resilience.[299] Specific challenges are/were:
  - displacement of people and refugee inflows in EU Member States
  - need for solidarity with Ukraine, increased involvement of Ukraine into EU Programmes, Ukraine as an EU candidate country, humanitarian aid and relief action in Ukraine
  - energy supply at risk, high energy prices, more energy poverty
  - interrupted food supply, food supply chains (less important for EU countries)
- The need to achieve *EU strategic autonomy* in strategically important policy areas has become apparent. This is not only about military and economic interests, but also about values. The EU is not only perceived as an economic but also a normative power recognised for its core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Specific challenges are:
  - need to support and 'export' EU values, democracy, citizen engagement, humans rights, rule of law
  - dealing with disinformation
  - IT (critical) supply chains and technology autonomy, support of technology-based start-ups, EU-based technology companies
  - European public goods

These challenges can be transposed into thematical areas as inspired by the JRC report 'Towards a green and digital future'[300].

Table A.1: Thematic areas of EU and national challenges

Thematic areas	The need to…
Social	… ensure just transitions … increase societal commitment to the need to change … ensure privacy and ethical use of technology
Technological	… implement innovation infrastructure … build a coherent and reliable technology ecosystem … ensure data availability and security
Environmental	… avoid rebound effects … reduce the environmental footprint of production and new technologies
Economic	… create enabling markets … ensure diversity of market players … equip labour with relevant skills
Political	… implement adequate (democratic) standards … ensure policy coherence … channel investments

Source: own representation based on JRC (2022).

299 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/FS_22_3862

300 Towards a Green & Digital Future: Key Requirements for Successful Twin Transitions in the European Union

AI.2 Coherence assessment: Priorities and related objectives and policies

The following table provides an overview of the pre-identified potentially relevant related EU policies. For some policies the potential relevance for one or more of the four programmes was indicatively assumed prior to the analysis (bold in the table).

Table A.2: European Commission Priorities 2019-2024, Recovery Plan for Europe and related EU policies

Commission Priorities	Related EU policies
A European Green Deal	'Fit for 55' – delivering the EU's 2030 climate target on the way to climate neutrality Revision of the Regulation on the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land use change and forestry Amendment to the Renewable Energy Directive to implement the ambition of the new 2030 climate target Proposal for a Directive on energy efficiency (recast) FuelEU Maritime – green European maritime space ReFuelEU Aviation – sustainable aviation fuels Revision of the EU Emission Trading System **Social Climate Fund** EU Biodiversity Strategy **New European Bauhaus**
A Europe fit for the digital age	Space Security and Defence Trade **Education and digital skills** European Research Area Reform support for the digital transition Recovery Plan for Europe Cohesion Policy and the Digital Age **European Digital Rights and Principles** International Relations
An economy that works for the people	Recovery Plan for Europe (2020) (NextGenerationEU) **Updated (2021) EU industrial strategy (transition pathways)** SME Strategy **Building capacity and supporting SMEs in their transition to sustainability** Programme for 'digital volunteers' to allow young skilled people and experienced seniors to share their digital competence with traditional businesses Digital Innovation Hubs Reducing regulatory burden and improving market access SME internationalisation beyond the EU Standardisation and SMEs European Entrepreneurial Regions Innovation and Research

Commission Priorities	Related EU policies
	European Skills Agenda, European Year of Skills 2023 **EIT Culture & Creativity** **European Pillar of Social Rights** Working conditions of platform workers Capital Markets Union
A stronger Europe in the world	EU's Development Policy European Neighbourhood EU enlargement Africa-EU partnership **European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)** Security and Defence Trade Policy International cooperation
Promoting our European way of life	**Education and training** Judicial cooperation Rule of law Fighting child sexual abuse Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union
New push for European democracy	EU Rural Action Plan and Long-term vision for rural areas Combatting discrimination Rule of Law Countering disinformation
Recovery Plan for Europe 2020	All EU policies

Source: own representation based on The European Commission's priorities 2019-2024.

AI.3 Effectiveness assessment: Questions – data – methods

Below table summarises the guidance for a consistent effectiveness assessment approach across the four programmes. When adequate, details in the matrix are adjusted to programme specific aspects and characteristics.

Table A.3: Evaluation matrix for effectiveness

Evaluation questions	Indicator/required information	Methods
How effective has been the launch of each programme and its uptake i.e. the reaction by applicants?	• No. of implementation activities (calls, procurement processes, prizes, etc.) • No. & type of applicants or response/reaction) • Has the implementation of each programme and its activities been successful according to programme objectives and according to initial expectations?	• Quantitative analysis of implementation activities per programme • Qualitative analysis of the activities, as far as possible (samples of calls, projects, practices) • Interviews to programme managers (EU, selected countries)
How effective are the direct and indirect management in supporting the programme's objectives?	• Opinion about the effectiveness (e.g. adequateness, lack of errors) at the level of programme managers	• Interviews to programme managers (EU, selected countries)
To what extent have the objectives of the programme been addressed during the early implementation? How likely is it that practices will contribute to the attainment of programme goals in the next years?	Per objective in each programme: • No. of implementation activities (calls, procurements etc.) • No. of applications or responses to each implementation activity • No. of selected projects (participants etc.) to each implementation activity	• Quantitative analysis of implementation activities per objective in each programme • Interviews to programme managers (EU, selected countries) & stakeholders • Assessment of contribution to programme goals in the future
Are the effects produced during the early implementation in line with the programme's objectives?	• Review of a sample of implementation activities and selected projects (participants etc.) per objective in each programme • Looking for good practice examples to show a meaningful contribution to programme objectives	• Sampling of projects • Qualitative analysis of the activities, as far as possible (samples of calls, projects, practices) • Interviews to programme managers (EU, selected countries) & stakeholders
Has the programme been able to respond to needs arising from the change of external conditions?	• Identifying changes in programme design or early implementation due to changes in the context • Identifying developments of the annual work programmes	• Review of annual work programmes • Interviews to programme managers (EU, selected countries) & stakeholders
What have been/are specific challenges in the early implementation of each programme?	• Challenges identified by programme managers & in the analysis of previous questions	• Interviews to programme managers (EU, selected countries) & stakeholders
What are success stories of the early implementation of each programme?	• Success stories identified by programme managers & in the analysis of the previous questions	• Interviews to programme managers (EU, selected countries) & stakeholders

Source: own representation.

AI.4 Selection of practices

AI.4.1 Erasmus+

Complementing the overall selection criteria, for the selection of practices of the Erasmus+ programme the following eight criteria have been considered:

- they consider different types of participation, i.e. individual and collective;
- this implies also a consideration of different target groups;
- different levels of education should be considered;
- the level of previous experience varies, i.e. firmly established and new on practices;
- some ore more popular and others are less known (designed for harder to reach target groups);
- they address wider and more specific and topical policy areas/aims;
- coverage of different Key actions of the Erasmus+ programme;
- inclusion of insights from previous evaluations.

Table A.4: Erasmus+ programme practice selection

Practices by strand	Links to challenges and policies	Level of education/ Target group	Indicative number of projects in the sample MS based on Erasmus+ Result Platform[301]	Justification
KEY ACTION 1: Learning mobility of individuals				
Mobility of higher education students and staff	Twin transition/ Ukraine war/ EU Strategic autonomy/ An economy that works for people	Higher	849	The longest standing and by far the most popular of Erasmus+ practices
KEY ACTION 2: Cooperation among organisations and institutions				
Small-scale Partnerships in vocational education and training	Twin transition/ Ukraine war/ An economy that works for people/ Promoting our European way of life (Inclusion)	Vocational education and training (VET)	39	Programming period aimed at widening access to the programme to small-scale actors and individuals who are hard to reach Lower grant amounts, shorter duration and simpler administrative requirements

[301] Funding&Tender database

AI.4.2 Creative Europe

Complementing the overall selection criteria, the selection of practices of the Creative Europe programme has been guided by five criteria:

- a combination of big and small calls/number of selected projects;
- combining new and well-established calls;
- coverage of all three strands;
- including different target groups, i.e. cultural organisations, key stakeholders, networks, creative industries;
- practices have a potential related to future topics (innovation, quality media, democracy, sustainability, …).

Deviating from the rule of two practices per programme, three practices were selected for Creative Europe to allow coverage of all programme strands.

Table A.5: Creative Europe programme practice selection

Practices by strand	Links to challenges and policies	Related potential good practices projects	Justification
Cultural strand			
European Cooperation Projects Medium Scale	Transversal to all cultural related challenges and policies	Total of 44 projects funded – still to be screened	New dimension of cooperation projects which gained considerable interest from applicants and possibility for a wider understanding of topical uptakes
Media strand			
Innovative tools and business models	Creative Industries Development Etc.	Total of 31 projects funded – still to be screened	What are innovation related topics in Creative Europe from the point of view of the applicants.
Cross-sectoral strand			
Rapid Response Mechanism	Russian aggression International solidarity and partnerships Etc.	Total of 2 projects funded – still to be screened	Update in the programme to react on changing frameworks and to understand better how flexible the programme can be

AI.4.3 European Solidarity Corps

Complementing the overall selection criteria, the selection of practices of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programme has been guided by four criteria:

- different size of practice in terms of number of projects in the sample MS (based on information of the ESC platform);
- roughly proportional share in the number of projects between the sample MS;
- combination of new and well-established topics;
- policy relevant link to EU-level trends and priorities.

Table A.6: ESC programme practice selection

Practices	Links to challenges and policies	Indicative number of projects in the sample MS as per the ESC platform	Justification
Community development	Primary mission of the ESC; ESF+; NextGenerationEU	195	The highest number of projects are under this topic and have been since 2018
Digital skills and competences	Digital transition	40	New topic which is closely linked to the current European Commission priorities

AI.4.4 CERV Strand 3

Complementing the overall selection criteria, for the selection of practices of the CERV programme three criteria have been considered:

- balance of funding earmarked in the first two years of the programme (to ensure sufficient information/number of projects upon which to draw an analysis);
- include different target groups;
- proposed practices have a potential related to current socioeconomic and geopolitical trends.

Deviating from the rule of two practices per programme, three practices were selected to adequately cover the needs of the CULT Committee.

Table A.7: Practice selection of Strand 3 of the CERV programme

Practices	Links to challenges and policies	% of funding earmarked to this topic of the total Strand budget in the 2021-22 WP	Justification
Citizens participation	NextGenerationEU Disinformation Cross-cutting issue/policy	37 %	Balance of funding Wide relevance of the calls Fundamental importance of citizens participation to the EU
European remembrance	Russian aggression on Ukraine EU Strategic autonomy Disinformation	22 %	Emerging trends and geopolitical events affecting the new programme period
Town-Twinning and Networks of Towns	EU Charter Cross-cutting issue/policy	34 %	Balance of funding Wide relevance of the calls

AI.5 Selection of Member States

AI.5.1 Erasmus+

The selection of Member States (MS) takes into account the provisional uptake of the budget for each MS (based on 2021 implementation reports) and incorporates considerations on their size and geography, including the division between EU-14 and EU-13. In addition, these MS use different management structures to deliver Erasmus+. Apart from the size of countries, the following table provides an overview of the selection criteria per MS.

Table A.8: MS selection criteria for the Erasmus+ programme

Member State	Geographic Coverage/ EU-14/EU-13	Early uptake of budget based on 2021 implementation report	Managing structures
Lithuania	North East-EU-13	Moderate uptake	Two authorities by target groups
Spain	South-EU-14	High uptake	Two authorities by target groups
Belgium	West-EU-14	High uptake	Regional and thematic division of authorities
Bulgaria	South East-EU-13	Moderate uptake	One authority

Source: own presentation based on Erasmus+ annual report 2021 and Erasmus+ National Agencies

AI.5.2 Creative Europe

The selection of MS for a further analysis related to national policies and priorities in view of Creative Europe programme implementation takes into account different degrees of advancement of cultural policies, which is mirrored in the variety of recovery instruments for the sector, and should differentiate by degree of urbanisation due to different abilities of cultural institutions to participate in the Creative Europe programme. Together with the joint criterion for all programmes the following criteria have been applied:

- geographic coverage of different parts of the EU territory,
- different range of recovery instruments available for the Cultural and Creative Sectors in EU MS,
- cultural participation in EU MS by degree of urbanisation.

Alternative options for MS selection referring for example to cultural employment levels were excluded as being less specific for the Creative Europe implementation. EUROSTAT data demonstrates a significant difference of cultural participation from urban and rural territories while e.g. cultural employment is rather an expression of cultural policies and industries priorities in different MS. A further indicator for specific frameworks in rural areas in view of the Creative Europe programme is the fact that most of the current (rural, regional) European Capitals of Culture provide specific training for local cultural organisation. Many of those express difficulties to access this EU funding programme. Furthermore, building a selection of different MS on the cultural policy models applied would be difficult to argue as the policy frameworks and related practices rely often on historic (decentralised/centralised) backgrounds not linked to EU governance. The proposed reference in view of the use of the cultural dimension of the NextGenerationEU framework also allows

to further reflect on the specific crisis-related response capacities of cultural policies. This links directly to the evaluation area 'adaptability to changing frameworks' of the Creative Europe programme.

Table A.9: MS selection criteria for the Creative Europe programme

Member State	Geographic Coverage/ EU-14/EU-13	Recovery Instrument with Culture	Cultural Participation in Urban/ Non-Urban areas
Sweden	North-EU-14	NO	Highest urban participation
Croatia	South-EU-13	YES	Low non-urban participation
Austria	West-EU-14	YES	High urban and high non-urban participation
Estonia	North East-EU-13	NO	High urban and low non-urban participation

Source: own presentation based on European Commission, 'Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard. Thematic Analysis – Culture and Creative Industries'; and Culture statistics – Cultural participation by degree of urbanisation

AI.5.3 European Solidarity Corps

The selection of MS for a further analysis related to national policies and priorities in view of the ESC programme implementation takes into account different volunteering trends. These trends illustrate the extent to which volunteering is historically embedded or to which the Programme has made a contribution in increasing volunteering activities in a MS, while at the same time indirectly mitigating the unemployment levels and favouring the transition to permanent employment. This is complemented with a criterion on MS having mostly a high number of projects in the ESC. This ensures that the selected MS sufficiently represent the different projects under the ESC, for instance, the variety of topics of the projects. Furthermore, due to the higher number of projects in three of the four MS, they can provide a more thorough insight into the intricacies of the programme leading to more robust findings.

Table A.10: MS selection criteria for the European Solidarity Corps

Member State	Geographic Coverage/ EU-14/EU-13	Volunteering trend in the country to be analysed	Mostly high number of projects*
Germany	North-EU-14	Continuously high	High – 162
Italy	South-EU-14	Rise in volunteering as a tool to promote the transition from studying to working	High – 129
France	West-EU-14	As volunteering is deeply embedded in French culture, the number of volunteers is stable over the years.	Low – 21
Poland	East-EU-13	Unusually high rate for Eastern European country to be explained (e.g. religious tradition)	Highest number – 246

* Project numbers for calls in 2021 & 2022 according to https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/projects/search (10 March 2023)

Source: own presentation based on European Economic and Social Committee, 'New Trends in the Development of Volunteering in the European Union', 2021; and https://youth.europa.eu

AI.5.4 CERV Strand 3

The MS selection for the CERV programme adds two criteria to the joint criterion for all analysed programmes. The first considers the situation of the civic space. Including MS with open and narrow civil spaces allows to explore different social and political contexts in which the CERV programme – and the programme beneficiaries – operate. This criterion is as such an important 'baseline' that contextualises the implementation and support obtained from CERV. This baseline is important when assessing (e.g.) effectiveness and relevance, since the outcomes depend at least partly on the specificities of the beneficiary countries. The other programme specific criterion assesses the extent to which the civil society organisations (CSO) can be considered to be more or less developed. This focuses on the beneficiary organisations – as opposed to the context in which they operate.

Table A.11: MS selection criteria for the CERV programme

Member State	Geographic Coverage/ EU-14/EU-13	Situation of civic space*	CSO landscape*
Latvia	North East-EU-13	Narrowed	Limited
Romania	South East-EU-13	Narrowed	Developing
Ireland	West-EU-14	Open	Developed
Hungary	East-EU-13	Obstructed	Difficult

Source: own presentation based on https://monitor.civicus.org/country/, https://civicus.org/index.php/es/component/tags/tag/hungary and Mary P. Murphy, 'Civil Society in the Shadow of the Irish State', Irish Journal of Sociology 19, no. 2 (1 November 2011): 170–87

Annex II – Complementary information on the assessments

The following sections complement the key findings described in chapters 3 to 6 for each of the four programmes.

AII.1 Erasmus+

AII.1.1 Supplementing information on the relevance assessment

Table A.12: Erasmus+ programme specific challenges

Main EU Challenges	Erasmus+ programme specific challenges
Digital Transformation	**Digitised economy** – digital transformation of jobs, education and training – wide deployment of artificial intelligence and robotics – new jobs including new job opportunities in the silver and care economies – need for an unparalleled shift in skill sets **Digital divide** – digital skills gap – digital Accessibility **Distance and online learning and teaching** – lack of digital capacity and of distance learning systems – lack of adequate pedagogical methods and insufficient guidance and skills of educators and youth workers – lack of robust online learning support and guidance **AI and Metaverse as gamechangers**
Green Transition	**Economy** – resource-efficient, circular and climate neutral economy – competitiveness of businesses – Local/Global Just Transition **Biodiversity** **Society** – change of a lifestyle
Pandemic Consequences	**Economy** – a serious strain on the economy, labour market, social, health and education and training systems of Member States – various impacts on different industries and economy in general (e.g. supply chains) – various effects on labour markets **Education systems** – challenges in organizing education activities online and ensuring equal access – possible structural barrier to learning and skills development – impact on the career opportunities employment prospects, earnings **Society** – the vulnerable are disproportionately affected (e.g. Digital Divide)

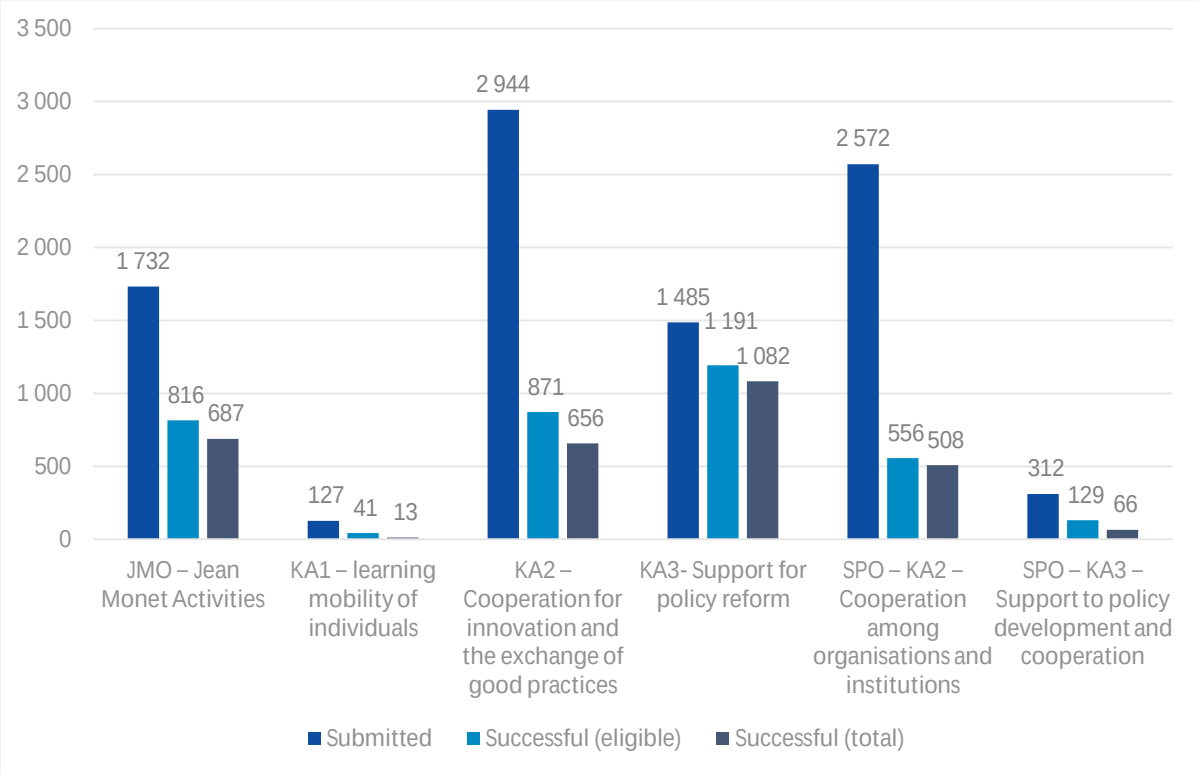
Main EU Challenges	Erasmus+ programme specific challenges
	– need for support from various new and existing target groups, such as: unemployed persons, parents, teachers, students and social workers **Work-life balance** – balancing learning with their working and caring responsibilities (mainly adult education)
Russian Aggression and Geopolitical Context	Socio-economic and educational consequences of the Russian aggression of Ukraine An unprecedented number of refugees Continuity of Education Reskilling Integration into labour market
EU Strategic Autonomy	**EU values and democracy** – lack of awareness and understanding of the EU's basic functioning, objectives, 'raison d'être', as well as of the EU's added value for its citizens – limited participation in democratic life as a result of lack of relevant participatory skills – intercultural understanding **Economy** – reshoring to Europe production of industries considered truly critical, such as pharmaceuticals and semi-conductors

Source: own representation.

AII.1.2 Supplementing information on early implementation

Between 2021 and 2022, a total of 9 172 proposals were submitted for calls under Erasmus+ key actions under *direct management*. The majority of the proposals (32 %) concerned the action on cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices. The success rate of the submitted proposals is however one of the lowest for this key action (29.6 %).

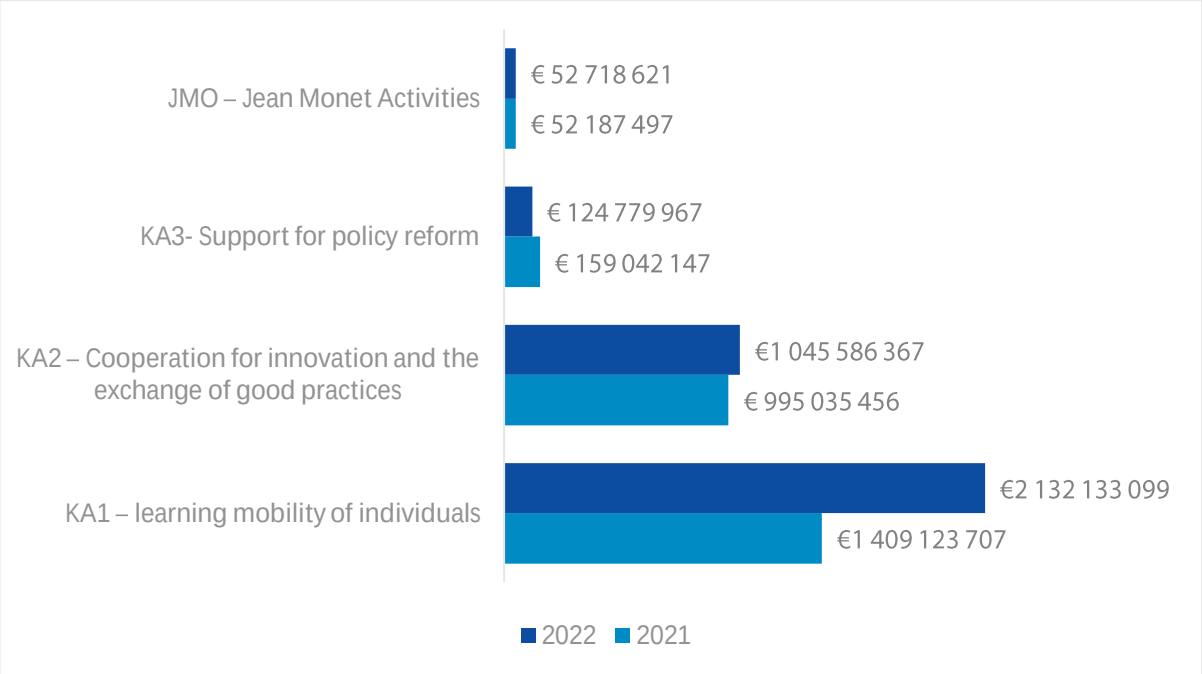
Figure A.1: Erasmus+: Proposals received and success rate



Source: own representation based on EC, 2023

Additional to the projects related to direct management, under KA 1 – learning mobility of individuals and KA 2 – Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices the majority of projects is linked to indirect management. This amounts to 33 505 projects under KA 1 and roughly 5 242 projects under KA 2. The highest budgetary spending (direct and indirect combined) is related to the key action 'learning Mobility of Individuals' with €1 499 123 707.00 and €2 132 133 099.00, respectively in 2021 and 2022.

Figure A.2: Erasmus+: Total budget programme per key action (2021, 2022)



Source: own representation based on EC, 2023 (all fund sources including EU voted budget and assigned revenues)

AII.2 Creative Europe

AII.2.1 Supplementing information on the relevance assessment

The following tables describe the culture-specific EU challenges and the detailed findings.

Table A.13: Digital transformation

Related Culture-Specific Challenges	Observations from the Assessment
The European Way of Digitalisation Digital Divide Rules-Based Digital Economy Digital Accessibility Digital and Interlinked Green Challenges Digital Business Models Culture in the Metaverse AI in Culture Production Cultural Diversity and the Digital World Digital Audiences and Societal/ Health Effects	The Creative Europe programme is strong in addressing opportunities offered by the digital world, and also raises awareness in view of digital audiences. Some (more recent) calls refer to areas like Artificial Intelligence and the Metaverse. However, in view of these fields with considerable disruptive power, these topics seem to underplay in the context of the programme. The rules-based digital economy is mainly tackled in view of the media frameworks and the working environment of journalists which is justified as rather regulations and not funding is required for this field of policy action. The Programme is less explicit in addressing the interlinked digital and green challenges, the global implications including related cultural diversity as well as the societal and health effects of digital practices.

Source: own representation.

Table A.14: Green transition

Related Culture-Specific Challenges	Observations from the Assessment
Raising Awareness with Culture Action Contribute to Change of Lifestyle of Europeans Overcoming Governance Silos Cultural Policy and Action Equally Involved in Global Initiatives A Circular Economy In/With Culture Measure What You Value Sustainability of Culture Climate Networks Culture and Biodiversity Territorial Segregation Local/Global Just Transition	The programme encourages the applicants to further investigate the potential of raising awareness with culture action. Creative Europe also furthers the greening of the cultural and creative sectors. This is linked to the greening of the Creative Europe programme itself. The programme could become a reference example for green funding. Measuring the negative impacts of cultural practices on the climate is another topic which was taken up by the programme. Furthermore, activities are under way to consider the establishment of a green label. The programme could further address related green topics like the territorial segregation which links inter alia to frameworks which ensure a local and global just transition. Strategic cross-sectoral cooperation settings in many green topics could be of considerable added value on the level of work programmes, calls, and projects. (Overcome silos) This element becomes already visible on the project level with e. g. artistic projects addressing water or landscape challenges (Culture Strand).

Source: own representation.

Table A.15: Post-pandemic recovery challenges

Related Culture-Specific Challenges	Observations from the Assessment
The European Approach to a Social Market Economy Endangered Parts of the CCS Persisting Social Divide Decent Earning for All Workers Public Employers Deployment of CCS (Cross-Sectoral) Innovation Forces, Societal Forces Broad Notion of Innovation International Cooperation and Solidarity Media in Democracy Recognise Intrinsic Value of Culture Culture as Essential Culture as Part of the EU Industrial Policy Framework Culture in NextGenerationEU Recognition of EU Added Value of Cross-Border-Cooperation Mobility Opportunities for Artists/ Cultural Workers European Status of the Artist	The structural deficits in the cultural and creative eco-systems which became better visible in the context of the pandemic cannot be fully addressed with a support programme. However, the valuable simplification which were introduced in the Creative Europe programme cover not yet the full range of options of a funding programme. For example, decent payment and contracting frameworks for the freelancers and experts working for funded projects are options which are not yet addressed. The mobility of artists and workers is at the core of the opportunities offered by the Creative Europe programme and well covered in the related reference documents and projects. Furthermore, the programme is cross-border by nature and the added value of cooperation can be well demonstrated. It remains open to which extent related (qualitative) data is used for the EU cultural policy development. Culture and recovery are addressed in Creative Europe but remain too vague especially in the long run and for structural improvements in the eco-systems (e. g. in the Calls 2023 as well as in the Media and Cross-Sectoral Strands of the programme). The social and societal value of culture which was underused to cope with the effects of the pandemic remains limited to programme priorities. Enhanced cross-sectoral initiatives become less visible.

Source: own representation.

Table A.16: Russian aggression and geopolitical context

Related Culture-Specific Challenges	Observations from the Assessment
Preventing Destruction and Looting Assessing the Damage Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property Sustain Cultural Life and Artistic Production Refugee (Women) Artists Continuity of Education Key Equipment Provision Impacts on (Mental) Health Reliable Information Safety of Journalists Women in Culture/Arts Future of Cultural Diplomacy Culture(s) at Risk Cultural Diversity as Societal Resource Better Understanding of Culture and Conflict	The Creative Europe programme underuses the wider potential for challenging geopolitical contexts, but – especially in the Culture Strands – provides appropriate answers to support the Ukrainian artists and cultural workers as well as the UA heritage sector. The area of social inclusion and in that sense of contributing to the understanding of the added value of diverse society is another relevant element in the Culture Strand of the programme. The programme with the new calls and projects related to the safety of journalists covers an important element in the framework of changing geopolitical contexts. However, these measures are (so far) limited to actions inside the European Union Member States. The wider effects on culture and creative sectors in geopolitical crisis situations and contexts of war and aggression are not well addressed by the programme. This is illustrated with the fact that no broader initiatives in view of the growing number of refugee (women) artists are foreseen in the context of the analysed programme documents. The wider consideration of culture(s) at risk or the future of cultural diplomacy are also no topics covered so far.

Source: own representation.

Table A.17: EU strategic autonomy

Related Culture-Specific Challenges	Observations from the Assessment
(Cultural) Institutions as Places of Democracy A New Media Culture Global (Cultural) Citizenship Cultural (Participation) Rights Challenges to Democracy and Artistic Freedom Youth Dialogue Collaborative Transformation Policies and CCS Eco-Systems A Strategy Culture	The new media initiatives in the Cross-Sectoral Strand of the programme are important steps towards a new media culture as an important pillar of democracy. However, highlighting the cultural institutions as places of democracy and at the same time initiating their further democratisation (e. g. in view of cultural rights, transparency, access for all strata of the society) are underplayed in the programme. The priority 'audiences' could be for example enlarged. A funding programme like Creative Europe could (similar as for the green transition) act as a related accelerator. Furthermore, the mention of youth (however implicitly addressed e. g. related to audiences) seem to be limited to the European Year of Youth 2022. This fact seems to underplay the role the next generations will play for the strategic securing of the European model. The strategic autonomy questions impact also considerably the cultural and creative eco-systems e. g. raising energy costs or interrupted supply chains. The programme encourages not sufficiently related cross-sectoral initiatives and projects for transformation ready systems.

Source: own representation.

AII.2.2 Supplementing information on the coherence assessment

Table A.18: Overview of EU (cultural) policies

Policy Objectives	General	Culture-Specific
A European Green Deal	REPower EU Climate Energy Environment and oceans Agriculture Transport Industry Research and innovation Finance and regional development	New European Bauhaus *(as linked to creativity and aesthetics)*
A Europe fit for the digital age	European Chips Act European Digital Identity Artificial Intelligence European data strategy European industrial strategy Contributing to European Defence Space EU-US Trade and Technology Council	Digital Services Act Digital Markets Act *(as digital creative companies are part of the cultural and creative sectors/creative industries)*

Policy Objectives	General	Culture-Specific
An economy that works for people	European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan New Consumer Agenda Adequate minimum wages in the EU Working conditions of platform workers New Business Taxation Agenda Small and medium-size enterprises strategy Capital Markets Union	NextGenerationEU *(as co-implemented by Ministries of Culture)* European Skills Agenda *(as of the EU Pact for Skills for Cultural and Creative Industries and Sectors)*
A stronger Europe in the world	Food security Global Gateway Global response to coronavirus EU-US trade and technology council Anti-Coercion instrument	EU solidarity with Ukraine Enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans A new agenda for the Mediterranean *(as culture-specific support was/is available for the Ukrainian cultural sector, the cultural operators from the Western Balkans as well as for Med-specific culture cooperation action)*
Promoting our European way of life	European Health Union New Pact on Migration and Asylum Strategy on the future of Schengen Europe's Bearing Cancer Plan European Health Data Space EU agenda to tackle organised crime and on counter-terrorism European Security Union European Care Strategy	EU strategy on combatting antisemitism *(as directly linked to European cultural heritage and History)*
New push for European democracy	European Citizens' panel Conference on the future of Europe LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025 Ending gender-based violence The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child Strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030 Rule of Law Mechanism Long-term vision for rural areas	European Democracy Action Plan European Media Freedom Act *(as directly linked to the Cross-Sectoral Strand in Creative Europe)*
Recovery Plan for Europe	NextGenerationEU National Recovery Plans	
Main EU Cultural Policies		EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 A New European Agenda for Culture Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations The European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage

Source: own representation.

Table A.19: Wider lessons learnt on the coherence between Commission Priorities and Creative Europe

Policy Objectives	General/*Culture-Specific*	Lessons Learnt
A European Green Deal	REPower EU Climate Energy Environment and oceans Agriculture Transport Industry Research and innovation Finance and regional development *New European Bauhaus (NEB) (as linked to creativity and aesthetics)*	The European Green Deal (and related initiatives) seem to underplay the cultural dimensions of the required transformations. The Creative Europe programme documents are comprehensive in view of the different dimensions of required greening and mention throughout the links to the EU Green Deal. This policy priority has untapped potential for further cross-sectoral initiatives far beyond the New European Bauhaus.
A Europe fit for the digital age	European Chips Act European Digital Identity Artificial Intelligence European data strategy European industrial strategy Contributing to European Defence Space EU-US Trade and Technology Council *Digital Services Act* *Digital Markets Act* *(as digital creative companies are part of the cultural and creative sectors/creative industries)*	The digital dimension of the Creative Europe programme is strong (e. g. related to the thematic priorities), but lacks of systematically highlighting the related policy initiatives in the programme documents. Those responsible for the EU digital policies seem not to refer explicitly to the Creative Europe Programme. Furthermore, a wide range of creative digital projects are implemented which could considerably contribute to this EC priority. There seem to be a potential for further cross-sectoral (information, experience) transfer and cooperation.
An economy that works for people	European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan New Consumer Agenda Adequate minimum wages in the EU Working conditions of platform workers New Business Taxation Agenda Small and medium-size enterprises strategy Capital Markets Union *NextGenerationEU (as co-implemented by Ministries of Culture)* *European Skills Agenda (as of the EU Pact for Skills for Cultural and Creative Industries and Sectors)*	The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan is well highlighted in the Creative Europe programme documents which is in line with the enhanced considerations on working conditions in the cultural and creative sectors. However, as none of the EU policy documents makes references to the Creative Europe programme, there seems to be further potential for highlighting links and common endeavours in view of an economic eco-systems that works better for people.
A stronger Europe in the world	Food security Global Gateway Global response to coronavirus EU-US trade and technology council Anti-Coercion instrument *EU solidarity with Ukraine*	The international and global policies are not specific-enough covered in the Creative Europe programme documents. The strong efforts related to the solidarity with the Ukraine seems to be too narrow in view of the

Policy Objectives	General/*Culture-Specific*	Lessons Learnt
	Enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans *A new agenda for the Mediterranean* *(as culture-specific support was/is available for the Ukrainian cultural sector, the cultural operators from the Western Balkans as well as for Med-specific culture cooperation action)*	importance of international exchange including in the area of culture and arts. Furthermore, actions which have been already taken e. g. for the better cultural development of the Western Balkans seem not to be taken into account by related major EU policies. Highlighting major EU internationalisation strategies should be also a priority in Creative Europe programme documents e. g. also in view of the thematic priority 'International dimension'.
Promoting our European way of life	European Health Union New Pact on Migration and Asylum Strategy on the future of Schengen Europe's Bearing Cancer Plan European Health Data Space EU agenda to tackle organised crime and on counter-terrorism European Security Union European Care Strategy *EU strategy on combatting antisemitism (as directly linked to European cultural heritage and History)*	Values and cultural practices are strongly linked. Therefore, it is surprising that the related EC priorities and policies make no reference to the Creative Europe Programme. The Programme has e. g. a focus on inclusion which is not mentioned in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. The Programme could be also ideally placed to encourage wider debates on European cultural values including the social and health dimensions of these policies – both are already high on the agendas of related EU cultural policies and well-visible from the engagements of the sectors.
New push for European democracy	European Citizens' panel Conference on the future of Europe LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025 Ending gender-based violence The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child Strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030 Rule of Law Mechanism Long-term vision for rural areas *European Democracy Action Plan* *European Media Freedom Act* *(as directly linked to the Cross-Sectoral Strand in Creative Europe)*	Reaching out to a wide range of citizens and connecting to a variety of audiences in Europe are cornerstones of the Creative Europe programme. Despite this fact the related EC priorities make no specific reference to the programme except related to the European Democracy Action Plan. Furthermore, the Creative Europe programme documents refers also to none of the policies except the European Democracy Action Plan (Cross-Sectoral Strand only). We consider that there could be substantial so far untapped potential for synergies related to common efforts for a new push for European democracy.
Recovery Plan for Europe	NextGenerationEU National Recovery Plans	The Programme documents mention recovery, but not specifically the Recovery Plan as such. We would like to consider this fact as a minor issue.

Policy Objectives	General/*Culture-Specific*	Lessons Learnt
Main EU Cultural Policies	*EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026* *A New European Agenda for Culture* *Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations* *The European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage*	It is remarkable that the Creative Europe programme documents stopped referring to some major EU cultural policy documents like the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations. The referencing of these documents e. g. in all Work Programme should be a common practice in order to ensure broad knowledge of e. g. all applicants about the existence of these policies and the related priorities.

Source: own representation.

AII.2.3 Supplementing information on the effectiveness assessment

Table A.20: Overview of number of calls and submitted and selected proposals, 2021-2023

Overview	Calls	Submitted	Selected
Culture Strand			
European Cooperation Projects – Medium Scale – 2021	1	n. a.	32
European Cooperation Projects – Medium Scale – 2022	1	n. a.	27
European Cooperation Projects – Medium Scale – 2023	1	n. a.	n. a.
Media Strand			
Innovative Tools and Business Models – 2021	1	52	22
Innovative Tools and Business Models – 2022	1	46	11
Innovative Tools and Business Models – 2023	1	n.a.	n. a.
Cross-Sectoral Strand			
A Rapid Response Mechanism – 2022	1	2	1

Source: Own Calculations, based on the Funding and Tender opportunities portal, consulted on 15.04.2023

Table A.21: Selected proposals and MS coverage by project leaders

Country Coverage	Selec -ted	AT	HR	EE	SE
Culture Strand					
European Cooperation Projects – Medium Scale – 2021	32	0	1	0	1
European Cooperation Projects – Medium Scale – 2022	27	1	0	1	1
Media Strand					
Innovative Tools and Business Models – 2021	22	1	0	0	0
Innovative Tools and Business Models – 2022	11	0	0	0	0
Cross-Sectoral Strand					
A Rapid Response Mechanism – 2022	1	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Source: Own Calculations, based on the Funding and Tender opportunities portal, consulted on 15.04.2023

Table A.22: Thematic Priorities of the European Cooperation Projects – Medium Scale calls

Thematic Priority	2021	2022	2023
Audience	X	X	X
Social inclusion	X	X	X
Sustainability	X	X	X
New technology (2021)/Digital (2022/2023)	X	X	X
International dimension	X	X	X
Sector-specific priorities – book (publishing) sector	X	X	X
Sector-specific priorities – music sector	X	X	X
Sector-specific priorities – architecture	X	X	X
Sector-specific priorities – cultural heritage	X	X	X
Sector-specific priorities – fashion and design		X	X
Sector-specific priorities – sustainable cultural tourism		X	X
Cross-cutting issues – inclusion, diversity, gender equality, environment (2021/2022)/greening Creative Europe (2023)	X	X	X

Source: European Cooperation Projects Calls for Proposals 2021-2023

Table A.23: Thematic Priorities of the Innovative Tools and Business Models calls

Thematic Priority/Actions Supported (Scope)	2021	2022	2023
Promotion and marketing tools, including on line and through the use of data analytics, to increase the prominence, visibility, cross-border access, and audience reach of European work.	X	X	X
Subtitling or accessibility/discoverability/recommendation tools	X		X
Business tools improving the efficiency and the transparency of the audio-visual markets	X		X
Business models seeking to optimise the synergies and complementarities between the distribution platforms	X		X
Business tools exploring new modes of production, financing, distribution or promotion enabled or enhanced by new technology (AI, big data, blockchain, etc. – 2021). (Metaverse, NFT – 2023)	X		X
Innovative tools and business models improving the greening process of the audiovisual industry			X

Source: Innovative tools and business models – Calls for Proposals 2021-2023

Table A.24: Thematic Priorities of the Rapid Response Mechanism call

Thematic Priority/Activities (Scope)	2022
European Democracy Action Plan (…) – Monitoring violations of press and media freedom and providing practical help to protect journalists under threat	X
Design and manage a Europe-wide rapid response mechanism to support media freedom and journalists' safety, covering all EU Member States	X
Provide legal and practical support to journalists and other media practitioners in need.	X
Organise advocacy missions to locations where journalists are under threat	X

Thematic Priority/Activities (Scope)	2022
Monitor the state of media freedom in the EU Member States and Candidate Countries	X
Organise awareness raising campaigns in the field of media freedom and safety of journalists	X
Ensure communication and dissemination activities	X
Monitor and evaluate the action	X

Source: Defending media freedom and pluralism – Rapid Response Mechanism – Call for Proposals 2022

AII.3 CERV

AII.3.1 Supplementing information on the relevance assessment

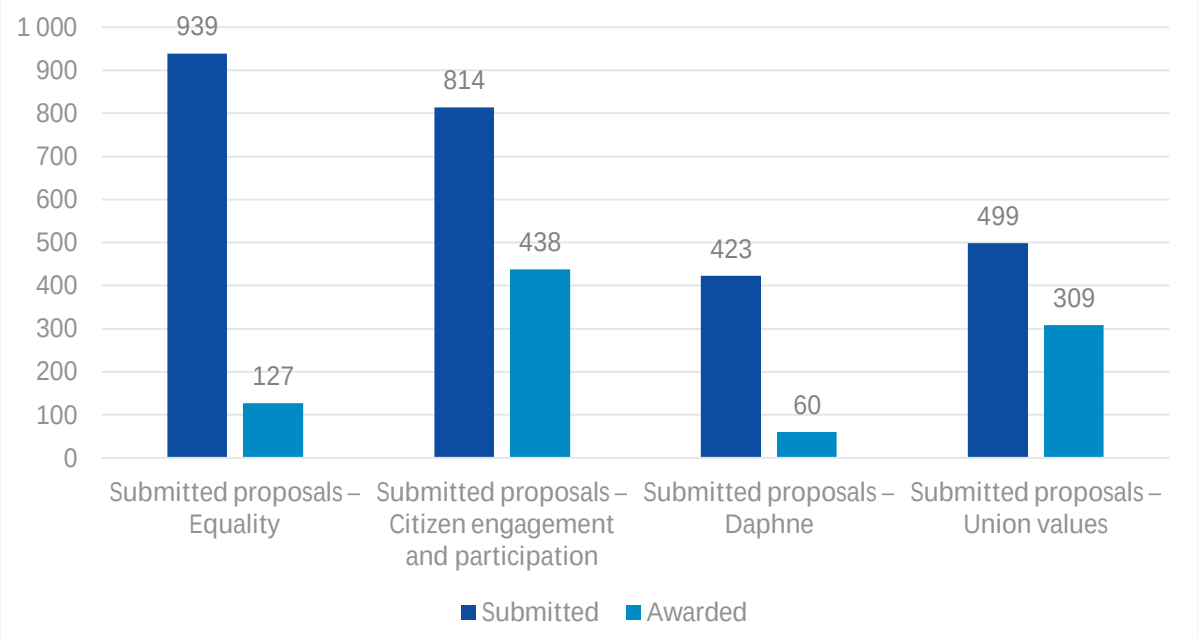
Table A.25: CERV Strand 3 programme specific challenges

Main EU Challenges	CERV Strand 3 programme specific challenges
Digital Transformation	Digital policy can be considered a cross-cutting topic and a tool for implementation of CERV priorities.
Green Transition	Strong alignment both in the policy documentation and in project implementation.
Pandemic Consequences	Stronger alignment in policy docs but so far there are few projects with relevance to the pandemic consequences few (3) actual projects
Russian Aggression and Geopolitical Context	Weak or no link in the programme documentation and project analysis to date
Strategic autonomy	Weak or no link in the programme documentation and project analysis to date
Disinformation	Strong alignment both in the policy documentation and in project implementation

Source: own representation.

AII.3.2 Supplementing information on early implementation

Figure A.3: CERV programme – applications submitted and awarded



Source: own representation.

Table A.26: CERV Strand 3 awarded proposals and success rates

Citizen engagement and participation strand	Awarded proposals	Success rate
Citizen remembrance	60	27 %
Citizens town	309	88 %
Daphne (Strand 4)	***86***	***20 %***
Union Values (Strand 1)	***275***	***55 %***

Source: own representation.