

Research for CULT Committee –

EU funding programmes 2021-2027 in culture, media, education, youth and sports: first lessons, challenges and future perspectives: Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) – Strand 3 “Citizens’ engagement and participation”



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme 2021-2027 (CERV) is the successor of two EU programmes: the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme 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.

Strand 3 moreover promotes engagement with and participation of citizens in the life of the European Union – i.e. greater awareness of those rights and greater participation in civic life as an underpinning of democracy.

The policy aspects of implementation are the responsibility of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST). The call and funding process is managed by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The work programmes also set out annual priorities and describe the content of forthcoming calls.

The present document is the executive summary of the study on EU funding programmes 2021-2027 in culture, media, education, youth and sports: first lessons, challenges and future perspectives: Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) – Strand 3 “Citizens’ engagement and participation”. The full study, which is available in English can be downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/3RbQH1f>

The CERV programme regulation was adopted in 2021, but this delay was reabsorbed at implementation stage by the end of 2021. Although the implementation is so far on schedule, taking into account the number of projects finalised, the CERV implementation is in its early stages. In 2021-2022, 2,675 proposals were submitted for 66 calls launched under the CERV programme, with 30% focused on citizen engagement (Strand 3) and a 55% success rate.

A fundamental strength of the CERV Strand 3 programme is that it has integrated all rights and values programmes into a single system. This has many benefits, as the fragmented nature and limited resources of the predecessor programmes had restricted the ability to respond to new and emerging challenges. The strong societal focus of the CERV programme, including Strand 3, means that CERV activities contribute to European social well-being.

CERV National Contact Points (NCP) are optimistic about the level of progress made by projects towards reaching their objectives. Another strength is that gender equality is well-integrated into the programme, according to both stakeholders and NCPs.

However, despite the Commission's measures, there is still room for improvement in terms of the administrative burden placed on applicants and on beneficiaries, especially related to the current IT tool. The economic crisis and high inflation have also impacted the effectiveness of the lump sums available for projects.

Another weakness is that one-third of the Member States do not have NCPs.

The following set of recommendations can be formulated based on the analysis carried out:

Recommendation 1: Establish a network of national contact points for CERV

It is recommended that a NCP is established for each Member State to ensure efficient and effective support for applicants, stakeholders and beneficiaries of the CERV programme. As of June 2023, some 20 Member States had established contact points. It is important for the Member States without contact points¹ to establish their own NCPs as soon as possible to enhance accessibility and support for all stakeholders involved in the programme. Contact points should serve as reliable sources of unbiased advice, providing valuable information and assistance throughout the application process. They should also be capable of providing clear and easily understandable information regarding programme outcomes and of addressing inquiries related to partnering, training and other relevant procedures.

Recommendation 2: Prioritise communication and awareness-raising activities

The European Commission could prioritise communication and awareness-raising efforts for the CERV programme, as it is still a relatively new programme. To ensure effective campaigns, the European Commission could collaborate with local civil society organisations (CSOs) and programme operators since a partnership-based approach to communication is more likely to encourage potential beneficiaries in the CSO community to engage, leading to better organised and implemented information campaigns at the local level.

¹ Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Poland and Slovakia

Recommendation 3: Strengthen the network of CERV beneficiaries

The European Commission and the NCPs could help to coordinate and foster a stronger network of beneficiaries within the CERV programme, particularly emphasising the importance of knowledge sharing and the exchange of best practices under Strand 3. Encouraging beneficiaries to meet and establish a community dedicated to sharing experiences and expertise will enhance collaboration and facilitate the dissemination of successful approach. This network will contribute to the overall effectiveness and impact of the programme by promoting learning, innovation and the continuous improvement of projects and initiatives.

Recommendation 4: Simplify application submission procedures

CERV stakeholders express concerns that the small grassroots organisations targeted by the programme are unable to respond to Calls for Proposals under Strand 3 of CERV due to a lack of resources to handle the application procedures. To address this issue, the European Commission could consider conducting a thorough analysis to identify processes that can be further simplified. For example, the application submission platform should be made more user-friendly and supported with comprehensive tutorials to facilitate its use for applicants and beneficiaries.

Recommendation 5: Simplify and improve the adaption of the current IT tool

Building on Recommendation 4, the European Commission could also consider further adapting and simplifying the current IT tool, which both beneficiaries and NCPs say is cumbersome to use. In this regard, it would be important to first gain a better understanding of which elements of the tool and overall administrative procedures are a particularly high burden for applicants, beneficiaries and NCPs.

Recommendation 6: Review the adequacy of financial support available to beneficiaries

Although beneficiaries benefitting from CERV Strand 3 funding acknowledge and appreciate the efforts from the European Commission to increase the lump sums available for travel and conferences etc., the stakeholder consultations indicate that more support is needed to address the rise in inflation to ensure that funded projects can carry out their planned activities in full and avoid cancellations of activities in order to save costs.

Recommendation 7: Improve transparency of the portfolio of projects funded

The European Commission could consider increasing the transparency and searchability of the funding and tender opportunities portal (Single Electronic Data Interchange Area, SEDIA) where calls and funded projects are published to allow stakeholders and external parties to download and analyse project data per programme. In its current format, very limited analysis can be carried out on Commission programme implementation, which limits the transparency of allocated funding of the CERV programme.

Recommendation 8: Foster participation of CSOs in the decision-making processes

Based on stakeholder feedback and the mentioning of the Civil Dialogue Group in the programme regulation, the European Commission could increase the frequency and timing of the group's activities. This engagement would enable CSOs to contribute to the oversight, evaluation and strategic direction of the programme, thereby strengthening its impact and ensuring its alignment with the needs and priorities of the civil society sector.

Further information

This executive summary is available in the following languages: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The study, which is available in English, and the summaries can be downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/3RbQH1f>

More information on Policy Department research for CULT: <https://research4committees.blog/cult/>



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