



2023/2129(DEC)

08.2.2024

OPINION

of the Committee on Culture and Education

for the Committee on Budgetary Control

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2022, Section III – Commission and executive agencies
(2023/2129(DEC))

Rapporteur for opinion: Romeo Franz

PA_NonLeg

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Culture and Education calls on the Committee on Budgetary Control, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Welcomes the Commission's and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency's (EACEA) efforts to adapt Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and Creative Europe to a changing reality, for instance by reviewing upwards individual support rates for grants to safeguard their inclusive character, extending application deadlines and project duration, and a voluntary refocusing of activities on Ukraine, and expects more efforts to further reinforce inclusion measures and support to facilitate the participation of vulnerable groups;
2. Notes that, despite a challenging context created by long-lasting effects of the pandemic, the impact of rising inflation and energy prices on beneficiaries and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Erasmus+ programme could in 2022 fully resume its long-standing mission to support transnational learning mobility, with the number of mobilities supported comparable to pre-pandemic years;
3. Notes that 2022 saw the launch or further roll-out of important initiatives such as the European Education Area, the MediaInvest blending facility, the new mobility scheme Culture Moves Europe and the 2022 European Year of Youth; regrets the limitations included in the Culture Moves Europe scheme excluding air travel for journeys below 600 km and forcing participants to make lengthier, more expensive trips; notes that the top-up provided to offset such costs represents lost mobility opportunities for more potential participants;
4. Appreciates that the Commission and the EACEA managed to achieve nearly full budget execution for Erasmus+ and full budget execution for the European Solidarity Corps in 2022, making it even necessary to redeploy credits from other programmes to cover payment needs; notes the challenges to the payment implementation of Creative Europe in 2022, with some EUR 50 million having been deferred to 2023 as a result of operational issues and delays in the granting processes; recognises DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture's (DG EAC) and the EACEA's efforts to limit the impact of these delays and return to a normalised pace in 2023;
5. Notes that DG EAC's and the EACEA's overall risk at payment continued to be relatively low and their overall error rate remained below the 2 % materiality threshold in 2022;
6. Reaffirms the need for increasing further the budgetary envelopes of the EU's youth, cultural and educational programmes, in particular to increase the outreach to and involvement of young people, artists and professionals with fewer opportunities and to support citizenship education; in this respect, requests the Commission to continue cooperating closely with the Member States;
7. Reiterates its concern about the strongly backloaded budget profile of Erasmus+; welcomes the extra EUR 35 million awarded to Erasmus+ in 2022 due to the

Parliament's insistence, which is helping to reinforce support to pupils, students, teachers and qualified staff fleeing from Ukraine;

8. Notes with regret that the procedures to apply for EU funding under those programmes are often still too burdensome and create obstacles for potential beneficiaries; urges the Commission to simplify the application process for Erasmus+ applicants and make it less time-consuming in order to ensure that small and volunteer-based organisations can also successfully apply for funding; acknowledges that new measures, notably the extension of the accreditation scheme to the Erasmus+ programme's main sectors, have simplified access to funding for mobility activities;
9. Highlights that the Erasmus+ programme framework of inclusion measures adopted in 2021 seems to bear fruit, with 23% more projects having gender equality as their main or an important and deliberate objective in 2022 than in 2021;
10. Requests OLAF to carry out a thorough investigation on the possible misuse of EU funds through Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps by networks of associations that present false projects, with the aim of verifying recent reports on this matter by some national agencies, measuring the scale and importance of such cases of fraud, and analysing their treatment by competent authorities in the Member States;
11. Calls on the Commission to make proposals to strengthen trust in the newly established accreditation mechanisms by ensuring that applicants continue to fully respect European values even after their accreditation;
12. Welcomes the fact that, thanks to a EUR 3 million reinforcement of the 2022 European Year of Youth at the Parliament's insistence, a number of actions under the Year could be strengthened, such as solidarity projects, volunteering and networking activities; underlines that the successful results of the Year should now be sustainably implemented to ensure its lasting legacy;
13. Recalls the need for EU funded measures to bridge the digital gap in education and lifelong learning; calls on the Commission to provide an assessment of the Member States' Recovery and Resilience plans related to this topic; asks the Commission to assess and actively support the recommendations made by the Parliament related to a minimum 10% allocation for education, 2% for the cultural sector and 20% for digital transformation within the RRF plans; regrets that the EU budget does not adequately support the ethical use of artificial intelligence and robotics in the education and cultural sectors;
14. Notes the continued frontloading of the Creative Europe budget in 2022 for mitigating the persisting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cultural and creative sectors; notes that, thanks to this frontloading, a higher number of European cultural cooperation projects could be selected in 2022 than ever before; is, however, concerned that the frontloading of 2021 and 2022 may lead to a shortage of funding from 2023 and deplores that the programme as a whole remains underfinanced in relation to the objectives to be achieved, notably given its high subscription rate;
15. Welcomes the recent introduction of 'cascade funding' as a means to optimise Creative Europe's reach, especially to small organisations; invites the Commission to further

develop such schemes in all programmes of relevance to the sector;

16. Welcomes the fact that almost all proposals submitted in the Media Strand are requested to provide a strategy to improve the industry's greening measures; urges the Commission, building on these promising results and the recommendations of a 2022 study on greening Creative Europe, to push ahead more strongly; calls on the Commission to assess the practical implementation of the greening policy in EU programmes such as Erasmus+ and Creative Europe with a view to improving its effectiveness, for instance with regard to the current policy on sustainable travel modalities;
17. Reiterates its call to urgently address the outstanding issues related to personal data protection for beneficiaries of and participants in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, in particular as regards third country personal data transfers; urges DG EAC to roll out the new 'transfer tool' immediately following authorisation from the European Data Protection Supervisor to ensure appropriate safeguards for such transfers in the future;
18. Encourages DG EAC and DG CNECT to implement their Anti-Fraud Strategies fully;
19. Welcomes DG EAC's roll-out of a new project management tool for National Agencies, which includes a new risk and potential exclusions feature; encourages DG EAC and DG CNECT to implement their Anti-Fraud Strategies fully, including by offering mandatory fraud awareness raising and data protection training for staff, in particular newcomers, and entrusted bodies and organising a fraud awareness survey;
20. Is concerned that the EACEA's recurrent high rate of carry-overs could be indicative of structural issues in its implementation or budget planning cycles, which the EACEA should address;
21. Notes with concern the persisting challenges in 2022 with the e-Grant tools for beneficiaries of calls managed by the EACEA; strongly urges the Commission and EACEA to address these IT issues once and for all to avoid repercussions on target achievement, to reduce the risk of errors and to simplify procedures; believes that a more efficient and accessible IT infrastructure would also facilitate small beneficiaries' access to programme resources;
22. Stresses that Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and Creative Europe should focus even more on implementing the inclusion priority, in order to better reach local authorities from small, rural or remote communities, SMEs and NGOs working with vulnerable groups;
23. Encourages the EACEA to swiftly implement the recommendations of its internal audit service to improve the quality of transactions, such as the use of checklists, the modification of financial circuits and the harmonisation of processes;
24. Notes the positive development in the EACEA's staffing situation, with a significant increase of staff by the end of 2022;
25. Welcomes the EACEA's efforts to implement EMAS and encourages it to increase its

efforts by further implementing a sustainability plan and publishing the agency's sustainability report;

26. Emphasises the need for a stronger coordination between the different actors implementing education, youth and culture actions and the different programmes, as well as for better communication on those synergies;
27. Calls for a joint assessment of the current process of selecting pilot projects and preparatory actions, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency and fairness of the preassessment procedure for the purpose of maximising their full potential for advancing innovative policy ideas;
28. Encourages DG Connect to continue implementing media literacy strategies, such as the 2022 European Media Literacy Week, and underlines the need to continue the fight against disinformation in all relevant Commission initiatives.

**ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS
FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT**

The rapporteur has received input from the following entities or persons in the preparation of the opinion:

Entity and/or person
Network of European Voluntary Service Organisation (NEVSO) TR: 363064351314-63

The list above is drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteur.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	11.1.2024
Result of final vote	+ : 18 - : 1 0 : 0
Members present for the final vote	Asim Ademov, Christine Anderson, Andrea Bocskor, Tomasz Frankowski, Romeo Franz, Sylvie Guillaume, Irena Joveva, Petra Kammerevert, Niyazi Kizilyürek, Predrag Fred Matić, Peter Pollák, Marcos Ros Sempere, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Maria Walsh
Substitutes present for the final vote	Ibán García Del Blanco, Domènec Ruiz Devesa, Viola von Cramon-Taubadel
Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote	Clara Aguilera

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

18	+
NI	Andrea Bocskor
PPE	Asim Ademov, Tomasz Frankowski, Peter Pollák, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Maria Walsh
Renew	Irena Joveva
S&D	Clara Aguilera, Ibán García Del Blanco, Sylvie Guillaume, Petra Kammerevert, Predrag Fred Matić, Marcos Ros Sempere, Domènec Ruiz Devesa
The Left	Niyazi Kizilyürek
Verts/ALE	Romeo Franz, Viola von Cramon-Taubadel

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ID	Christine Anderson

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Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention