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Study supporting the evaluation of the EU Executive Agencies

Cross analysis

Independent Expert Report

Study supporting the evaluation of the EU Executive Agencies. Final Report: Cross analysis
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Study supporting the evaluation of the EU Executive Agencies

Final Report: Cross analysis

2026 Directorate-General for Research and Innovation EN

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List of Abbreviations

AAR	Annual Activity Report
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AWP	Annual Work Programme
CA	Contract Agent
CBA	Cost-Benefit Analysis
CEF	Connecting Europe Facility
CERV	Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme
CHAFEA	Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency
CIC	Common Implementation Centre
CINEA	European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency
DG	Directorate-General
DG AGRI	Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
DG BUDG	Directorate-General for Budget
DG CLIMA	Directorate-General for Climate Action
DG CNECT	Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology
DG DEFIS	Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space
DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
DG ENER	Directorate-General for Energy
DG ENV	Directorate-General for Environment
DG GROW	Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
DG HOME	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs
DG JUST	Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
DG MOVE	Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
DG RTD	Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
DG SANTE	Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety
EA	Executive Agency
EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EASME	Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
ECA	European Court of Auditors
EIC	European Innovation Council
EISMEA	European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency
EMAS	Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
EMFAF	European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund
ERC	European Research Council
ERCEA	European Research Council Executive Agency
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EU	European Union
EU4Health	EU4Health programme
F2P	Feedback to Policy
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
HaDEA	European Health and Digital Executive Agency
HE	Horizon Europe
HR	Human resources
IAS	Internal Audit Service
IF	Innovation Fund

INEA	Innovation and Networks Executive Agency
ISG	Inter-Service Steering Group
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LIFE	Programme for the Environment and Climate Action
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSCA	Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
REA	European Research Executive Agency
ScC	Scientific Council
SEDIA	Single Electronic Data Interchange Area
SFS	Specific Financial Statement
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SMP	Single Market Programme
StC	Steering Committee
TA	Temporary Agent
TTG	Time-to-Grant
TTI	Time-to-Inform
TTP	Time-to-Pay
WLA	Workload assessment
WP	Work Programme

Executive Summary

This final evaluation report presents the cross-analysis of the evaluation of six EU executive agencies. (1) The study examines whether the executive agencies met their operational objectives, the efficiency of their resources use, and the alignment of their activities with institutional goals. It also evaluates the agencies' interaction with their parent Directorates-General and the coherence of their programme portfolio. The study does not consider results and outcomes of the projects managed, or programme results, which are subject to a separate programme evaluation cycle.

To answer the study's evaluation questions, a mixed-methods evaluation approach was applied. The cross-analysis performed largely builds on meta-analysis of the six individual evaluation reports, which were based on desk review and analysis of monitoring data, surveys with unsuccessful applicants, beneficiaries and experts, an interview programme and a cost-benefit analysis. The cross-analysis findings are complemented with the insights from transversal case studies, cross-agency interviews, and a comparison of quantitative indicators. Comparative Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) and assessment of workload methodologies was also an integral part of the cross-analysis report. The timeframe of the study covers from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2024. (2)

Main study results

Effectiveness

The six executive agencies have demonstrated effectiveness in delivering their delegated EU programmes, maintaining consistently high operational and financial performance throughout the 2021-2024 period. Operational budgets were executed close to 100% in nearly all cases, time-to-grant performance showed marked improvement, and estimated risk at closure remained well below the 2% threshold for all agencies except for EISMEA in 2024. Stakeholder satisfaction validates this performance, with beneficiaries reporting 82-95% satisfaction and external experts achieving 94-97% satisfaction rates.

There have also been some challenges in relation to the temporary or structural staff reallocation across programmes, as sometimes agencies do not use the alternatives envisaged under the current legal framework to a full extent, as they may face challenges to provide quantitative justification for reallocation needs. However, some agency staff noted practical challenges in implementing it, reluctance from some parent DGs to reallocate between programmes and difficulties in absorbing new work demands within existing structures. Communication effectiveness varies and correlates with relationship maturity and portfolio concentration: agencies with longstanding parent DG relationships (REA, ERCEA) report consistently smoother coordination, while agencies managing portfolios across multiple parent DGs experience variable effectiveness - coordination is strongest with lead parent DGs accounting for the largest programme shares (e.g., EACEA with DG EAC, EISMEA with DG RTD, CINEA with DG MOVE) but more challenging with the other parent DGs, particularly where agencies

(1) These six EU executive agencies are: European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA), European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA), European Research Council Executive Agency (ERCEA), European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA) and European Research Executive Agency (REA)

(2) While the formal evaluation period runs from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2024, most of the quantitative information used in the report comes from Annual Activity Reports (AARs), which cover full calendar years. As a result, data from the entire years of 2021 and 2024 were included in the analysis. The evaluation team also received additional harmonised datasets from the Commission, which were used only when the necessary data were not available in the AARs or their annexes; these datasets also cover full calendar years.

coordinate across multiple DGs with varying communication priorities (e.g., HaDEA across six DGs). A particular concern, for some parent DGs, relates to agencies using communication channels to promote their own brand identities rather than focusing on programme-related and institutional strategic communication objectives. Despite generally positive reception of communication activities, improvement is needed during the application phase, where unsuccessful applicants show notably lower satisfaction rates and require more comprehensive feedback.

Efficiency

The executive agency model has delivered substantial efficiency gains, with the retrospective cost-benefit analysis estimating actual aggregated savings of €702 million, exceeding initial estimates of €620 million by 13% under the assumptions of the 2021 CBA model for the different scenarios. Due to the fact that the staff costs at EA and DG level were higher in later years (2023 and 2024) driven by inflation (higher than the 2% used in the ex-ante CBA), the overall costs of the other two scenarios also exceeded initial estimates. Programme management costs (the ratio between the administrative and operational budget, in terms of executed commitments) ranged from 1% (CINEA) to 5% (EACEA) in 2024, demonstrating efficient resource utilisation across different scenarios of the CBA.

Individual evaluation reports consider all agencies being fit for purpose, successfully delivering high-quality programme management despite some challenges. The staff engagement and satisfaction levels are mostly high, with the only exception of EISMEA, for which the 2023 staff survey results indicated a significant decrease in staff satisfaction. Even if the results were overall positive, staff raised concerns mainly about limited career progress opportunities and staff mobility. Progress has been made since then through the inter-agency HR Strategy 2023-2027 and its specific actions, such as the Staff Exchange Programme and an Inter-institutional job shadowing.

Digital transformation has advanced substantially, with all agencies adopting corporate systems like eGrants, though implementation experiences varied: REA had the smoothest adoption, CINEA, ERCEA and EACEA overcame initial obstacles, while EISMEA faced more significant integration challenges with the atypical EIC framework.

Environmental sustainability measures have been introduced across all agencies and progress has been made, with the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) providing a framework for environmentally responsible management practices. However, significant performance variations persist, highlighting the need for more standardised tracking practices, in line with the “Greening the Commission” communication.

Workload assessment methodologies show a mix of shared practices and Agency-specific approaches, with notable differences in structure and implementation based on delegated programmes and their specificities. It is our understanding that, even though differences exist, each Agency is deploying the methodology that is best suited to them at this moment and serving its current needs. However, across agencies, this hinders decision-making on additional staff allocation and redeployments, as well as cross-Agency learning opportunities. Even if different approaches prevail, each agency managed to assess its workload and reallocate staff to cope with punctual needs.

Coherence

Executive agency portfolios are largely thematically coherent without major overlaps, gaps, or inconsistencies, though the diversity of delegated programmes and their specificities poses challenges in ensuring consistent operational practices across different thematic areas within agencies. The delimitation of responsibilities between agencies and parent DGs is generally clear and well-defined, with informal exchanges being particularly valued by stakeholders.

The evaluation period marked significant progress in Feedback to Policy (F2P) (3) mechanisms, with all agencies adopting more structured approaches that resulted in overall effective F2P channels and results/products. Agencies implemented various organisational models, from centralised coordination to hybrid or decentralised structures, each bringing distinct advantages in ensuring an adequate information flow with parent DGs. Parent DGs expressed broad satisfaction with F2P mechanisms, recognising agencies' full integration of F2P into their core functions and capacity to provide high-quality policy inputs. However, areas for improvement remain, including enhancing operational mechanisms to accommodate emerging policy needs, strengthening coordination among parent DGs to reduce fragmented requests, better monitoring and evaluating F2P activities, increasing the analytical depth of F2P outputs. Also, moving towards the next step in cross-programme cooperation (except CINEA, which already has put in place a dedicated strategy) and cross-agency cooperation in F2P, taking into account resource constrains. While the 2021 CBA granted an additional 3% staff resource allocation for F2P activities, the absence of a standardised monitoring framework for monitoring time allocation and resource expenditure for F2P activities, limits transparency in tracking and assessing the actual resources attributed to F2P activities, with agencies reporting varying compliance rates and some unable to provide reliable data due to the diffuse, multi-level nature of F2P work.

Lessons learned

Though the overall evaluation findings are positive, the evaluation team identified several factors that may have, in some cases, limited the effectiveness, efficiency, or coherence of the agencies during the 2021–2024 period. Some of these issues are already being addressed, while others could merit further reflection. The lessons learned below reflect areas that, based on the evaluation evidence, may be worth considering supporting continuous improvement across the agency network.

Specific lessons learned include:

- The evaluation suggests that better use of existing flexibility in staff allocation could be supported by improved workload monitoring.
- Improved clarity on the objectives in external communication could streamline collaboration between agencies and parent DGs and help align efforts with strategic programme and institutional objectives.
- Feedback points to a margin for more comprehensive and clearer guidance and feedback mechanisms, particularly to enhance applicants' understanding of procedures and outcomes. Strengthening communication, guidance and feedback practices, while ensuring equal treatment of applicants, may help improve applicants' experience.
- Further alignment in KPI definitions and reporting practices, including Annual Activity Reports and Annual Work Programmes, could improve comparability, streamline reporting, and support oversight (particularly for parent DGs working with multiple agencies). This process should, however, take into account the specificities of each agency.

(3) The CIC proposed definition in the document "Towards a "Feedback to Policy" Framework in Horizon Europe": Feedback to Policy is defined as a process whereby through close collaboration relevant knowledge acquired from the management of (research and innovation) projects and their results in the Executive Agencies, Joint Undertakings (hereafter the 'implementing bodies') is identified and reported to relevant policy makers, including different Commission Directorates-General, to serve as input for designing, monitoring, reviewing and rectifying (if necessary) existing policy and programmatic measures or shaping and supporting the implementation of new policy initiatives and decisions in a timely manner.

- Stronger cooperation between agencies and with the Common Implementation Centre could support the exchange of IT-related good practices and foster joint exploration of digital tools and innovation opportunities.
- A potential lesson is that when drafting work programmes of the delegated programmes, assessments of new actions or other new delegations proposed could also take into account IT implementability, alongside policy objectives. This may help reduce friction in implementation and better align operational and policy goals.
- A baseline workload assessment methodology, with common indicators and shared complexity scoring, could improve comparability and planning, while allowing for agency-specific adaptations. Supporting measures for such a baseline methodology like documentation, training, and IT solutions would further enhance consistency.
- Continued implementation of collaborative HR actions could support talent retention and mobility across the executive agencies. Enhancing inter-agency mobility, improving communication on career development opportunities, and monitoring talent flows may help address career-related concerns.
- Developing clearer guidance for reporting on environmental performance could support consistent application of sustainability principles and enable comparability across agencies. The use of automated IT tools, such as dashboards, may further enhance monitoring.
- More systematic and timely monitoring of feedback to policy (F2P), including consistent indicators and feedback loops, could strengthen its effectiveness. Providing agencies with insights on how their inputs are used and improving coordination among parent DGs may enhance coherence, particularly for agencies with multiple DGs.
- Improved consistency and transparency in tracking F2P-related efforts could help assess the use of the additional 3% resource allocation. Strengthening internal coordination and using light-touch tools may support better documentation, especially for cross-cutting activities.
- Enhancing cross-programme and cross-agency collaboration on Feedback to Policy could help generate more strategic, horizontal insights. Shared frameworks, joint initiatives, and knowledge-sharing platforms may strengthen synergies, reduce fragmentation, and improve the overall value of policy inputs.

1. Introduction

The overall package for the Study supporting the evaluation of the EU executive agencies (4) consists of six individual evaluation reports, one for each Agency being evaluated, and the report for cross-analysis. This document presents the final version for cross-analysis, which provides the final results from a comparative perspective of all six agencies under evaluation. This evaluation support study is being conducted under the Multiple Service Framework Contract RTD/2023/OP/0011 - Framework Contract for the Impact Assessments, Evaluations, Foresight and Strategic Analysis of Research and Innovation Policies and Programmes, Lot 3 - Studying, assessing and evaluating research and innovation programmes and policies (SARI).

In line with the tender specifications, the report is organised as follows:

- This section provides an overview of the purpose and scope of the evaluation, the evaluation criteria covered, and the methodology applied.
- Section 2: 'Background of the measure' briefly describes the executive agencies, their institutional maturity, mandates, and operational contexts; presents baseline elements and points of comparison, building on the key lessons from the previous evaluation cycle (2017/2018-2021).
- Section 3: 'Findings', is structured into three key parts:
  - 3.1. Organisational structures and human resources – offer a descriptive, process-oriented overview of two cross-cutting themes – organisational structures and human resources and complements the comparative findings presented in section 3.2.;
  - 3.2. Comparative analysis by evaluation criteria – provides a performance-focused cross-Agency assessment following the effectiveness, efficiency and coherence evaluation criteria.
  - 3.3. Comparative cost-benefit analysis (CBA) and workload assessment: reviews efficiency gains based on retrospective cost-benefit analysis; compares approaches to workload assessment across agencies.
- Section 4: 'Conclusions and lessons learned', summarises key cross-cutting conclusions and identifies areas for potential improvement and future coordination.

To improve usability and clarity, the annexes to this report are presented in two parts:

- Main report annexes are included at the end of this document. These annexes contain supplementary data and visual material (e.g. tables, figures) that are directly referenced in the main chapters and are necessary for interpreting the findings presented.
- Methodological and additional annexes (such as transversal case studies) are compiled in a separate document.

1.1. Purpose and scope of the study

This cross-analysis report complements the six individual evaluations of the EU executive agencies (EACEA, ERCEA, REA, CINEA, EISMEA, and HaDEA) covering the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2024. The overarching objective is to compare the overall findings

(4) European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA); European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA); European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA); European Research Council Executive Agency (ERCEA); European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HADEA); and European Research Executive Agency (REA)

presented across six reports, identify cross-cutting patterns, shared challenges, and good practices across agencies, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the functioning of the executive agency model under the current Multiannual Financial Framework.

The analysis is presented following the core evaluation criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence, in line with the European Commission's Better Regulation guidelines. The evaluation is guided by evaluation questions defined in the study's terms of reference. Assessment of evaluation themes centre on operational delivery. Policy results and programme outcomes are out of scope, as they are assessed through other evaluations and studies.

The report draws on evidence from the six individual evaluation reports, transversal case studies, cross-Agency interviews, assessment of workload methodologies and comparative cost-benefit analysis, as well as quantitative benchmarking.

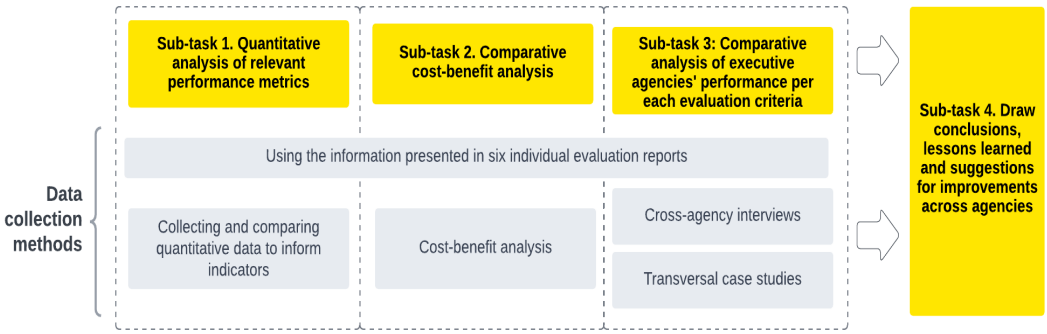
In addition, a retrospective comparative cost-benefit analysis (CBA) assesses whether the expected efficiency gains from delegating programme management to executive agencies, as projected in the 2021 ex-ante assessment, have been realised. The cross-analysis also includes an overview of the workload assessment methodologies applied by the agencies, with a view to identifying practices that support more consistent and efficient resource planning.

Furthermore, the cross-analysis incorporates several transversal case studies, annexed to this report in a separate document, which explore common thematic areas in greater depth (e.g. client orientation, coordination, Feedback to Policy, etc.).

1.2. Evaluation design and data collection approach

The cross-analysis is designed to synthesise the individual findings from the evaluations of six EU executive agencies to generate comparative insights and inform horizontal lessons learnt and suggestions for improvements.

Figure 1. Summarised approach to the implementation of cross-Agency analysis



Source: Prepared by the study team

The cross-analysis draws on a triangulation of the following data sources:

- Findings from six individual evaluation reports, including qualitative and quantitative evidence analysed within each Agency's assessment.
- Administrative and monitoring data available in the Annual Activity Reports and their Annexes, Commission-supplied and Agency-supplied quantitative data, including staff numbers, budgets, key performance indicators (KPIs), and operational output metrics.
- Transversal case studies, focusing on topics of shared relevance across agencies, such as client orientation and service management; coordination and communication;

Feedback to Policy, etc. These case studies are annexed to this report in a separate document.

- Comparative retrospective cost-benefit analysis (CBA), assessing the realisation of anticipated efficiency gains from decentralised programme management;
- Review of workload assessment methodologies, based on internal documents and structured interviews with Agency staff and parent DGs, with a view to understanding current practices and identifying areas for potential harmonisation or improvement;
- Survey data, collected as part of the six individual evaluations, including beneficiary, unsuccessful applicant, and external expert feedback on Agency services.
- Cross-Agency interviews, conducted across agencies and parent DGs, including targeted discussions relevant to cross-cutting themes and operational arrangements.

A more detailed methodology, including assumptions and limitations of the methodology, is presented in the annexes to this report, presented in a separate document.

2. Background information

2.1. Description of the intervention and its objectives

The Framework Regulation for executive agencies (5) states that the purpose of entrusting the executive agencies with programme implementation tasks is to enable the Commission to focus on its core policy activities and functions which cannot be outsourced. Moreover, delegation enables the Commission to achieve the objectives of the delegated EU programmes more effectively. The 2021 cost-benefit analysis indicated that it was more cost-efficient to delegate certain programme tasks to the Agency than to perform them in-house (6). The cost-benefit analysis also pointed to the optimised allocation of programmes scenario, (7) under which additional efficiency gains could be generated compared to the 2014-2020 baseline. Under this scenario, the optimised allocation of programmes should ensure a more effective implementation of EU programmes through a thematically coherent architecture of portfolios and more streamlined governance.

The six executive agencies under evaluation share a common legal framework and delegated management model but differ in terms of institutional maturity, thematic scope, programme portfolio, parent DG configurations, and delivery mechanisms. These differences are not merely organisational and might directly influence operational complexity, performance, and the interpretation of quantitative indicators presented in the sections below.

Institutional maturity and establishment

The current executive agencies include both long-standing entities with established structures, partially new entities but with continuity and newly established agencies formed at the start of the 2021–2027 programming period.

- Established agencies such as REA, EACEA, and ERCEA entered the 2021–2027 programming period with long-standing institutional structures, stable staffing, and operational continuity. These agencies had already overseen large programme portfolios in previous multiannual financial frameworks, and the new period represented an extension or expansion of existing responsibilities.
- Partially new but with continuity: CINEA and EISMEA were officially established in 2021. However, both agencies inherited substantial elements of their predecessors.
  - CINEA succeeded INEA and partly EASME, continuing the management of established programmes in transport, energy, environment, and climate, and incorporating new instruments established in 2020–2021.

(5) Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/173 of 12 February 2021 establishing the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency, the European Health and Digital Executive Agency, the European Research Executive Agency, the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency, the European Research Council Executive Agency, and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency and repealing Implementing Decisions 2013/801/EU, 2013/771/EU, 2013/778/EU, 2013/779/EU, 2013/776/EU and 2013/770/EU

(6) Commission staff working document, 2021, Cost-benefit analysis for the delegation of the management of the 2021-2027 EU programmes to executive agencies. C(2021) 946 final

(7) As explained in more detail in section 3.3, the three scenarios of the ex-ante CBA were the following : (1) In-house scenario, which is a theoretical re-internalisation of all EU programmes in the Commission; (2) Status quo scenario, in which the delegated budgets change in line with the new financial framework but the allocation of (sub)programmes in the agencies is unchanged compared to the current situation; (3) Optimised allocation of programmes scenario, which is based on the initial orientations provided by the Communication of 29 April 2020 and a further adaptation due to recent political developments. The retrospective CBA compared the estimates of the ex-ante CBA with the actual numbers in terms of FTEs, staff costs, savings and productivity.

- EISMEA evolved from EASME, and partly from CHAFEA and REA, as it took over programmes or their parts managed by these agencies in the previous MFF, maintaining continuity in SME and innovation programme implementation and drawing from a relatively consistent operational model and staff base.

- Newly established: HaDEA, created in 2021, brought together programmes from multiple prior agencies (e.g. CHAFEA, REA, INEA) and Commission services. It had no single institutional predecessor and had to rapidly build new operational, administrative, and governance structures, making it the most recently established Agency in this group.

Thematic breadth and programmes managed

Agencies range from highly focused entities to those with multi-sectoral mandates:

- ERCEA is the most specialised, managing only the ERC component under a part of Horizon Europe Pillar I – Excellence in Science. Its exclusive focus is on frontier research, with implementation guided by the ERC Scientific Council under DG RTD.

- REA is also focused on research, but with a broader horizontal remit. It manages a diverse set of components of the programme Horizon Europe (e.g. MSCA, Clusters 2, 3 and 6, research infrastructures, widening actions and ERA support actions, EU Soil Mission), and also implements activities outside the R&I framework programme (e.g. agri-food promotion, coal and steel research). It serves seven parent DG. Its scope is broad, but fairly coherent (as further explored by the evaluation of REA) around EU research objectives. In addition to programme management, REA also provides corporate services: administrative and logistical support services to EU bodies implementing HE and other programmes (8); it is responsible for the corporate Central Validation Service (CVS) (9) and SEDIA (10).

- EACEA, by contrast, operates across distinct policy domains, including education and training, culture, audiovisual, sport, citizen's engagement, Union values, and youth, with programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the Citizens, Equality Rights and Values programme, the European Solidarity Corps and the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme.

- HaDEA spans health, digital, food safety, industry and space, implementing EU4Health, the Digital Europe Programme, Horizon Europe Clusters 1 and 4, CEF-Digital and the Single Market Programme – Food Safety. It coordinates across six parent DGs and operates at the intersection of mainly public health policy, digital and technological infrastructures, digital transformation and industrial competitiveness.

- CINEA is thematically anchored in the European Green Deal, managing a mix of infrastructure, energy, climate, and environmental programmes. These include CEF Energy/Transport, LIFE, Horizon Europe Cluster 5, EU Renewable Energy Financing Mechanism (RENEWFM), European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), three of the five missions under the Horizon Europe framework programme (Adaptation to Climate Change, Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030 and 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart cities by 2030), NEB (New European Bauhaus), Innovation Fund and financing mechanisms such as the JTM-PSLF.

(8) Such as planning and support for publications of calls, logistical support for the evaluations, and contracting and payment of independent expert evaluators

(9) REA is responsible for the validation of legal entities, assessment of third-country control over participants of specific programmes (Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, European Defence Industrial Development Programme and EU Defence Fund), and the assessment of the financial capacity of applicants

(10) Through the Research Enquiry Service, REA answers validation questions from participants for all programmes under SEDIA and coordinates the thematic helpdesks dealing with general enquiries from citizens on EU research and innovation funding

- EISMEA supports innovation, industrial policy, SME development, and consumer protection, managing parts under Horizon Europe's Pillar III (Innovative Europe), parts of the Single Market Programme, and the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) instrument under ERDF. It combines grants including, blended and investment-based funding specifically for parts of the EIC under Horizon Europe, prizes and procurement, with a focus on Europe's startup ecosystem and strategic technologies.

In addition, during the evaluation period, the agencies continued managing the legacy programmes or their parts from the previous MFF 2014-2020.

Table 1. Programmes or programme parts managed by the agencies during current MFF

Executive agency	Programmes(s) or their part(s) implemented
HaDEA	EU4Health programme; Horizon Europe (Cluster 1) - Health Research and supports the implementation of the EU Mission on Cancer; Single Market Programme (Food); Horizon Europe Cluster 4 "Digital, Industry and Space"; Connecting Europe Facility - Digital (CEF-Digital); Digital Europe Programme
EACEA	Erasmus+; Creative Europe; Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme; European Solidarity Corps; Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme
ERCEA	Horizon Europe Pillar I Excellence in Science (Advanced grants, Synergy Grants, Consolidator Grants, Starting Grants, Proof of Concept grants)
REA	Horizon Europe (MSCA; Research infrastructures; Culture, creativity and inclusive society (Cluster 2); Civil security for society (Cluster 3); Food, bioeconomy, natural Resources, agriculture and environment (Cluster 6); Widening participation, spreading excellence; Reforming and enhancing European R&I; REA is responsible for the evaluation and implementation of EU Mission "A Soil Deal for Europe"), Research Fund for Coal and Steel and Agricultural promotion measures
CINEA	Connecting Europe Facility (CEF Energy and CEF Transport); Horizon Europe (Energy, Climate, and Mobility – Cluster 5; CINEA is managing and implementing three of the five missions under the Horizon Europe framework programme: Adaptation to Climate Change, Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030 and 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart cities by 2030.); EU Renewable Energy Financing Mechanism (RENEWFM); Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE); European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF); Innovation Fund (IF); Just Transition Mechanism - Public Sector Loan Facility (JTM-PSLF); NEB (New European Bauhaus)
EISMEA	Horizon Europe (pillar III Innovative Europe: EIC, EIE); Single Market Programme (SME pillar, Internal Market and support to standardisation, and Consumer protection pillar); ERDF (I3 Instrument)

Source: prepared by the study team based on AARs 2021-2024

In addition, REA is operating centralised support services benefitting all executive agencies and beyond. These include the coordination of call planning for all grant programmes (reaching also beyond the framework programme), coordination of the Research Enquiry Service (the one-stop shop for participants needing guidance and responses to their specific queries), Central Participant Validation under SEDIA (covering all of the Commission's directly managed grant and procurement operations), and support to proposal evaluation for all bodies implementing Horizon Europe through hosting the central evaluation facility, and contracting and paying expert

evaluators for the whole of the framework programme (except ERC). As this activity is specific to REA, it is only addressed in the evaluation study of REA and is not further addressed in this cross-analysis report.

Supervision and the parent Directorates-General

The configuration of lead and other parent Directorates-General (DGs) reflects the policy domains and programmes delegated to each executive agency. While most executive agencies operate under the oversight of multiple Commission Directorates-General due to their broad or multi-sectoral portfolios, ERCEA is the exception, being linked solely to DG RTD. These institutional arrangements might have implications for strategic alignment, administrative coordination, and reporting consistency, and are being explored in the individual evaluations.

Table 2. Parent DGs

Executive agency	Programmes(s) or their part(s) implemented	
	Lead parent DG	Other parent DGs
HaDEA	SANTE	RTD, CNECT, GROW, DEFIS, HERA
EACEA	EAC	CNECT, JUST, INTPA, NEAR (11), EMPL
ERCEA	RTD	
REA	RTD	EAC, AGRI, CNECT, HOME, ENV, EMPL
CINEA	MOVE	ENER, ENV, MARE, CLIMA, REGIO, RTD
EISMEA	RTD	CNECT, GROW, JUST, REGIO

Source: prepared by the study team based on AARs 2021-2024, excluding the observer representing EC horizontal services

Programme delivery models: grants and other financing approaches

The agencies differ in how they structure and deliver financial support through grants, procurement, investment instruments:

- EACEA, ERCEA, REA, and HaDEA are predominantly grant-based. HaDEA and EACEA also have a significant number and budget on procurement actions – 8 and 5.6% respectively in 2024. EISMEA has historically held the largest portfolio on procurement and still has a very significant procurement portfolio (5.2% in 2024).
- CINEA and EISMEA implement blended or investment-type instruments in addition to grants. Furthermore, EISMEA coordinates the equity element of the blended finance instruments as per the MoU. EISMEA is also managing a large portfolio of procurement actions with a significant budget.
- CINEA manages large-scale infrastructure financing (CEF, IF) and blending I facilities (e.g. JTM-PSLF), as well as procurements (GREEN ASSIST, HE and EMFAF) while EISMEA offers equity alongside grants and prizes through the European Innovation Council.

(11) As of 1 February 2025, DG NEAR was split into DG ENEST (Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood) and DG MENA (Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf)

2.2. Baseline and points of comparison

The previous round of evaluations of the executive agencies (covering the period of 2017/2018-2021) did not produce a dedicated cross-analysis report. Instead, it identified and synthesised several cross-cutting (horizontal) issues that emerged across the individual agency evaluations. These were presented within the respective agency reports, based on coordinated evaluation work covering CHAFEA, EACEA, EASME, ERCEA, INEA, and REA.

While not systematically developed into a standalone comparative framework, these horizontal insights formed an implicit baseline for assessing recurring structural and operational challenges across agencies and formed a relevant point of comparison for the current evaluation. Nine cross-cutting issues were identified, relevant to different agencies to a varying degree, and covering core dimensions such as governance, operational coherence, inter-Agency collaboration, and service quality. These included: (12)

- Thematic coherence and focus of portfolios – highlighting the need to avoid fragmentation and improve the alignment of programmes with agency mandates (e.g. the case of Horizon 2020 Energy split across agencies).
- Reinforcement of inter-Agency synergies – recommending joint guidelines, shared tools, and peer learning to exploit operational complementarities.
- Organisational change management – underlining the value of sharing lessons on transformation and transitions (e.g. CHAFEA's closure, EACEA's reorganisation).
- Improved services to applicants – particularly for first-time applicants, through better communication channels, clearer guidance, and transparent feedback.
- Optimisation of business processes – recommending structured exchanges on process simplification and digitalisation across agencies.
- HR and workload management – including career development pathways, workload assessment practices, and talent retention.
- Harmonised reporting frameworks – while maintaining programme-specific monitoring needs, clearer intervention logics were recommended.
- Structured Feedback to Policy mechanisms – suggesting systematic approaches and repositories for policy-relevant outputs, balanced with ad hoc needs.
- Executive agency involvement in Work Programme preparation of delegated programmes – proposing greater integration of Agency expertise in early programming phases.

(12) Study supporting the evaluation of CHAFEA, EACEA, EASME, ERCEA, INEA & REA (2017/2018-2021)

3. Findings

3.1. Organisational structures and human resources

While most dimensions of agency operations are analysed comparatively on the basis of each evaluation criterion and each evaluation question in Section 3.2, this section presents a more process-oriented analysis of two key organisational areas - **governance** and **human resource management** - that are foundational to agency functioning and, in most cases, cut across multiple evaluation criteria.

3.1.1. Organisational structures and governance

The organisational structures and governance arrangements of the EU executive agencies vary significantly, particularly between single-programme agencies such as ERCEA and multi-programme agencies like HaDEA, REA, EISMEA, CINEA, and EACEA. These differences influence the day-to-day management, decision-making, and internal oversight of each Agency, affecting operational performance and regulatory compliance.

Organisational Structures and Day-to-Day Management

The organisational setup of the executive agencies reflects their mandate, portfolio complexity, and operational demands. ERCEA, as the only Agency managing one single programme part, namely ERC, has adopted a streamlined and vertically integrated structure, which supports faster internal decision-making and more predictable workload distribution (13). In contrast, multi-programme agencies (REA, HaDEA, EISMEA, CINEA, and EACEA) operate (14) under more complex organisational models. These structures are designed to manage diverse portfolios, interface with multiple parent DGs, and ensure both programme delivery and regulatory compliance. Most agencies are organised in three to four departments, separating operational and support functions to varying degrees.

The table below provides a comparative overview of the agencies' structural models, summarising how each one organises its departments, support services, and internal coordination mechanisms to deliver on its mandate efficiently.

Table 3. Overview of the executive agencies' organisational structures

Agency	Structure summary	Organisation of support services	Operational-administrative integration
ERCEA	Manages only ERC; streamlined structure with three departments: Scientific Management, Grant Management, and Resources & Support. Administrative functions (HR, IT, legal, budget) are centralised in one department, enabling efficient internal coordination and quicker decision-making.	Fully centralised support services in the Resources & Support department ensure specialised assistance and reduce coordination complexity.	Streamlined vertical structure supports fast decision-making and efficient resource use.

(13) ERCEA organigramme.
(14) CINEA, EACEA, EISMEA, HADEA, REA organigrammes.

Agency	Structure summary	Organisation of support services	Operational-administrative integration
REA	Handles multiple Horizon Europe areas with four departments: three thematic (MSCA, Green Europe, Future Society) and one for coordination and corporate services. Thematic departments operate independently, while the central support ensures standardisation and compliance.	Corporate services department handles all administrative functions, providing consistent support across thematic units and agencies.	Thematic departments have autonomy, with central coordination and job-specific networks ensuring consistency.
HaDEA	Organised into three departments: Health & Food (A), Digital/Industry/Space (B), and Finance & Resources (C). Support functions like HR, IT, and procurement are centralised in Department C. Such structure facilitates collaboration with six parent DGs and ensures oversight.	Financial and administrative support functions are centralised in Department C, allowing thematic departments to focus on technical programme implementation.	Well-structured segregation supports effective oversight and DG coordination.
EISMEA	Hybrid structure with three departments. Support services like HR, IT, finance, procurement are centralised in Department C.	Support functions are centralised in Department C, allowing thematic departments to focus on programme implementation.	Well-structured segregation supports effective oversight and DG coordination.
CINEA	Consists of four departments: (A) Programme Support & Resources (B) Sustainable Networks and Investment (C) Green Research and Innovation (D) Natural Resources, Climate-Sustainable Blue Economy, and Clean Energy Dept. Support function like communication, legal affairs, external audits, administrative and operational finance, HR, IT, are centralised in Department A. Uses a deputy Head of Unit layer in some units to manage large portfolios. Separation of operations and support enhance focus on delivery.	Support department acts as a centralised service hub, enabling thematic units to concentrate on delivery of high-volume programmes.	Clear separation with additional complexity due to high programme volume.
EACEA	Divided into two departments: Department A manages programme operations, while Department B includes business processes and financial operations, and it is also a policy department covering	Support functions are grouped both at Directorate level (R1 and R2) and under Department B, allowing Department	Effective separation between support and operational functions.

Agency	Structure summary	Organisation of support services	Operational-administrative integration
	programmes CREA and CERV. At the same time, budget and control function are in Unit R2, whereas HR and Communications are in Unit R1.	A to maintain focus on programme implementation.	

Source: prepared by the study team based on agencies organigrammes

Governance and Oversight Mechanisms

Supervisory mechanisms also differ between agencies. ERCEA stands out as an Agency implementing only one part of the Specific Programme Horizon Europe, namely the European Research Council under Pillar I – Excellence in Science, European Research Council (ERC) component, under the oversight of a single parent DG - DG RTD. The governance model of the ERC, as described in the Specific Framework Programme, includes the ERC Scientific Council (ScC), which drafts the ERC Work Programme adopted by the Commission and serving as the legal basis for ERC funding each year.

As specified in the respective Memoranda of Understanding and agencies' Act of Delegation, each agency has a designated Lead Parent DG which is in charge, among other things, of specific responsibilities relating to the monitoring and supervision of horizontal issues in the Agency. The specific role of Lead Parent DG is described more in details in the Guidelines on executive agencies. Multi-programme agencies, also operate under multiple parent DGs, each with its own expectations for reporting, internal controls, and policy alignment. In these cases, a Steering Committee, representing all parent DGs and governed by clear voting rules, ensures coherent oversight. However, coordination across DGs may increase administrative burden, especially when implementing several programmes or meeting varied reporting expectations. HaDEA, for instance, reports to six DGs with varying levels of engagement and reporting requirements, the same pattern is observed at EACEA and EISMEA, where feedback loops to parent DGs differ in formality and frequency, depending on the maturity of the programme or DG's involvement (15).

To mitigate these issues, some agencies have introduced internal coordination committees and/or meetings, performance review boards, or cross-cutting task forces. REA, for instance, has introduced internal mechanisms to align multi-programme governance, including digital coordination bodies.

Impact on Operational Effectiveness and Compliance

The organisational structures of the EU executive agencies significantly shape their operational effectiveness and compliance performance, as evidenced in their respective evaluations. Agencies with a clear division between operational and support functions, such as REA, HaDEA, EISMEA and CINEA, benefit from greater procedural stability and stronger control environments. These agencies tend to house horizontal services like finance, HR, legal, and IT within dedicated departments, which reinforces accountability and facilitates consistent implementation across complex portfolios. It is also the case of EISMEA with a Department supporting operational ones with HR, procurement, finance, IT. This model has allowed REA, for instance, to maintain strong performance on internal controls and risk management, even amid major shifts such as the Horizon Europe transition. Similarly, HaDEA's departmentalised structure has supported robust compliance and audit-readiness across its diverse policy areas (16).

(15) EACEA individual evaluation report.
EISMEA individual evaluation report.
(16) Ibid.

In addition, HaDEA and EISMEA operate with a more integrated and functionally blended setup. Especially for the latter, this is applicable for the EIC, where certain administrative roles are embedded within the programme. While this structure enhances agility and responsiveness, it has also introduced coordination challenges, particularly during periods of portfolio growth or staffing gaps. This has sometimes affected workload distribution. Still, EISMEA has maintained overall effectiveness, though with room for improvement in certain processes (17).

CINEA, which also deals with a large and varied portfolio, benefits from a classic departmental model that clearly separates programme implementation from support services. This clarity has helped maintain operational consistency and low error rates (18). In contrast, EACEA, with its compact two-department model, operates with high transparency and strong compliance indicators. At the same time, its programme management cost ratio remained above average compared to the other executive agencies, indicating relatively higher overheads. However, direct comparisons are challenging due to differences in grant portfolios and the fact that EACEA also implements activities other than standard open calls for proposals (19).

ERCEA, as the only single-programme Agency among the six, illustrates the most direct relationship between organisational simplicity and effective operational control. It's clearly defined structure and tightly managed internal control framework facilitates fast, coordinated decision-making. At the same time, the high satisfaction among beneficiaries and Commission counterparts, along with consistently low error rates, is mainly due to the ERC delivery model. In this model, host institutions—usually major research organisations—handle administrative processes, reducing risk, rather than ERCEA's organisational structure. (20)

This contrasts with some of the feedback collected in interviews with staff from multi-programme agencies, where unclear role boundaries and coordination challenges can at times place a heavier burden on human resources, especially during peak periods. ERCEA's single programme model, having a clearly defined structure (similar grants where the eligibility criteria differ) appear to mitigate such issues by enabling more streamlined workflows, higher flexibility in work distribution on similar tasks (i.e. grant management) and reducing reporting complexity. This acknowledges that, where feasible, increasing programme standardisation helps manage workload and supports redeployments.

Despite structural differences, several synergies and best practices are evident. For instance, in 2024, HaDEA led the first-ever joint selection process across executive agencies, resulting in a significant shared reserve list available for all six agencies and paving the way for further collaborative recruitment efforts. Coordinated efforts to enhance training, promote knowledge-sharing, and streamline internal procedures have begun to bridge operational gaps. Further strengthening such horizontal mechanisms, related to HR management, internal control and reporting, or even best practices concerning F2P, particularly across multi-programme agencies, could lead to greater efficiency and consistency in programme delivery.

3.1.2. Human resource management and staff engagement

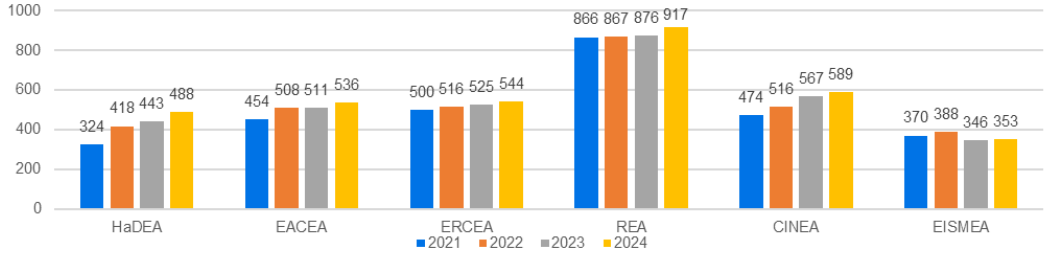
The Regulation laying down the statute for the executive agencies established the common rules across executive agencies in terms of staff composition. (21) According to the Regulation, the agencies should have an identical staff composition with a maximum 75% of Contract Agents (CA) and 25% of Temporary Agents (TA); whereas middle and senior management positions (Agency Director, Head of Department, Head of Unit) and a share of the other "posts of

(17) Ibid.
(18) CINEA individual evaluation report.
(19) EACEA individual evaluation report.
(20) Council Regulation (EC) No. 58/2003 of 19 December 2002 laying down the statute for executive agencies to be entrusted with certain tasks in the management of Community programmes.
(21) Council Regulation (EC) No. 58/2003 of 19 December 2002 laying down the statute for executive agencies to be entrusted with certain tasks in the management of Community programmes.

responsibility" in the agencies are held by seconded officials. On average, 47% of officials seconded to EAs serve as Director, Head of Department, or Head of Unit. (22) However, there are differences in the percentage of posts of responsibility (e.g. Deputy Head of Unit and Head of Sector) occupied by seconded officials. Notably, less than 10% of posts of responsibility in ERCEA and less than 18% in CINEA are occupied by seconded officials. (23) In the case of ERCEA, the position of Deputy Head of Unit does not exist.

The organisation of human resources differs among agencies based on their size and the quantity and nature of the programmes they manage on behalf of the respective parent DGs. Overall, the staffing levels in the EAs have increased during the evaluation period. Notably, newly established HaDEA recorded the most substantial increase, expanding its workforce by approximately 51% from 273 to 488 employees. The establishment plan of HaDEA included an ambitious target of 381 staff members in place by the end of 2021 (compared to 273 at the beginning of the year). The Agency therefore had to recruit more than 100 new colleagues within a timeframe of only nine months. (24) CINEA also experienced significant staff growth of nearly 20% during the same period, reflecting the Agency's expanding programme responsibilities. CINEA launched an ambitious recruitment plan carrying out more than 135 recruitment procedures in 2021 alone. (25)

Figure 2. Number of staff across the EAs



Source: prepared by the study team, based on the AARs and their annexes for 2021-2024.

EACEA, ERCEA, and REA reported moderate yet steady increases in staff numbers, suggesting stable operational capacity adjustments in line with their evolving mandates. In contrast, EISMEA has faced since its creation in 2021 a significant staff reduction foreseen for the overall period covered by the current MFF, amounting to almost 20% staff reduction between 2021 and 2027, which was however partly offset by the FTE reinforcements from the third country credits received throughout the period. In addition to the staff reduction anticipated in the Specific Financial Statement (SFS) for 2024 of 15 FTE, the agency undertook a significant organisational adjustment in 2023 due to the transfer of EIC Fund responsibilities to the Commission, leading to a reduction of 13 FTE posts reallocated to the Commission. The general staff reduction was intended to align staffing levels with financial allocations ensuring budget neutrality while maintaining operational effectiveness. Rather than terminating contracts, EISMEA implemented a strategic approach by freezing vacant posts, although this resulted in an increased vacancy rate within the Agency. (26)

The legal framework of the agencies allows for the possibility to reallocate staff internally across programmes temporarily or structurally. However, as it will be further indicated in section 3.2.1.1, Agency staff in CINEA and EACEA reported several challenges in reallocating staff due to the

(22) Data provided by Contracting Authority.
(23) Data provided by Contracting Authority.
(24) HaDEA Annual Activity Report 2021.
(25) CINEA Annual Activity Report 2021
(26) EISMEA individual evaluation report.

requirements to maintain proportionality with programme budgets. (27) (28) While some agencies managed to find short term solutions such as hiring temporary staff or providing ad-hoc short term support, other agencies, such as REA, perform annually a workload analysis and propose to the Steering Committee the reallocation of staff across programme parts accordingly. The transfer of staff across programmes was identified as easier for REA since they manage mostly different actions of the same programme (Horizon Europe). In this respect, as indicated by Agency staff, reallocations of staff impact on the financing share that each delegated programme has to contribute to the Agency's operating grant while DGs do not have the flexibility to adjust these financial contributions. Hence, REA as mainly working in a sole programme, has more flexibility to transfer staff resources. The level of satisfaction with being employed in each of the agencies was high according to the results of the 2021 and 2023 staff surveys – as further detailed in section 0. While staff satisfaction levels are generally high across agencies, concerns regarding limited career progression opportunities and staff mobility persist. (29) As previously mentioned, advancement to positions of responsibility are formally reserved for seconded Commission officials under Regulation 58/2003 (up to the level of Deputy Heads of unit). The legal framework still enables agencies to implement several initiatives to improve internal mobility such as establishing mobility schemes, rotation incentives, internal career paths, or prioritising internal candidates for vacancies. (30)

During the evaluation period, agencies undertook several initiatives to improve career development opportunities, as discussed under EQ10. These efforts were guided by the inter-agency HR Strategy 2023–2027. Notable initiatives, for example, included the launch of a Staff Exchange Programme and an inter-institutional job shadowing scheme.

More recently, in the period outside of the scope of this evaluation, the agencies have been further developing initiatives to improve mentoring and career guidance for the staff. Notably, in June 2024 they set up an inter-executive agencies Career Guidance Network; (31) while in June 2025 the agencies launched a mentorship programme. (32)

3.2. Comparative analysis of the operations of the agencies per evaluation criterion

This section presents a comparative analysis of the six executive agencies' operations structured around the core evaluation criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence. The analysis synthesises key findings from the six individual Agency evaluations and is further supported by evidence from cross-Agency interviews, transversal case studies, quantitative indicators, and the comparative cost-benefit analysis. While each Agency operates within distinct thematic and institutional contexts, this section highlights the key findings, focusing on common trends, recurring challenges, and notable differences in performance across agencies, offering a consolidated perspective on their functioning during the 2021–2024 period.

(27) EACEA individual evaluation report.
(28) CINEA and EACEA individual evaluation reports.
(29) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(30) Insights from commission staff participating in cross-Agency validation workshop.
(31) Memorandum of Understanding to set up an inter-executive agencies Career Guidance Network (12/06/2024).
(32) Practical guide for staff: inter-Agency Mentorship Programme.

3.2.1. Effectiveness

3.2.1.1. Programme implementation and results

EQ1: To what extent have the agencies achieved their objectives related to programme implementation, taking into account the interests of the participants and those of the EU?

Key findings:

The agencies have been overall effective in the implementation of their designated programmes despite a tendency towards an increase in applications received and/or projects running.

The agencies managed to keep a consistent achievement of KPIs with a few exceptions related to agency-specific challenges (e.g. IT issues, delays in programme implementation).

The overall levels of satisfaction among stakeholders were high – with satisfaction levels ranging from 82 to 95% for beneficiaries, 53-65% for unsuccessful applicants, and 94-97% for external experts.

Meta-analysis of the findings of the six individual evaluation reports indicates that the agencies have been overall effective in implementing their designated programmes while keeping high satisfaction levels from relevant stakeholders. (33) During the evaluation period 2021-2024, the agencies maintained a high standard of operational and financial performance as illustrated by the achievement of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The agencies experienced either increasing volumes of budget, number of proposals received or running projects, while others absorbed additional delegations from the Commission. During their continued expansion, the agencies managed to operate effectively as further detailed below.

Programme implementation

Several events took place that affected the operational effectiveness of the agencies. For instance, the agencies still dealt with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. issue of several grant amendments for extending the duration of projects) as well as administrative issues related to Brexit and the delayed association of the UK to the Framework Programme (e.g. replacement of UK coordinators or reshuffling of consortium partners). (34) Additionally, the agencies adapted their operations to newly launched programmes (e.g. Horizon Europe) or absorbed new responsibilities (e.g. introduction of AGRIP and RFCS programmes for REA). (35) Some of the agencies also went through major structural changes. In the case of EISMEA, the Agency transferred certain tasks from the EIC to DG RTD in 2023, which reshaped the Agency's mandate. (36)

The number of proposals received, grants signed, and running projects varied between the six executive agencies. In overall terms, across the six agencies, the tendency was towards an increase of one or various of these elements.

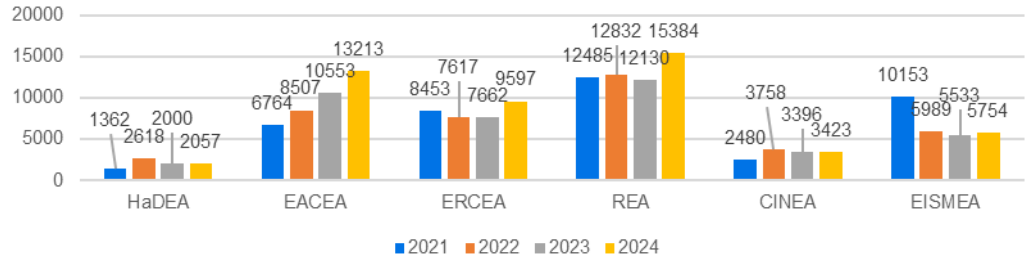
With regard to proposals received, the numbers reflected the number and maturity of the programmes managed by each Agency. REA, as the largest Agency, received over 15 000 proposals per year, which is the highest number of proposals (of which around 10 000 proposals

(33) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(34) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(35) ERCEA and REA individual evaluation reports.
(36) EISMEA individual evaluation report.

are evaluated on average per year as part of the MSCA action) (37), followed by EISMEA, while HaDEA received the lowest. If we take into consideration the number of proposals received per operational staff member, in 2021 ERCEA was the Agency that had the highest ratio (18.62) followed by EACEA (15.99). The ratio for EACEA considerably increased to 25.31 in 2024, surpassing ERCEA's ratio, which stood at 20.12. On the other hand, HaDEA was the Agency with the lowest number of proposals received per operational staff, although this could be influenced by the rate of procurement actions.

The number of proposals received by EACEA almost doubled during the evaluation period (although in 2021 the number of proposals was lower than in previous years), with a substantial increase in proposals received across most of the programmes managed by the Agency. In the case of grants signed, the EACEA had the highest number of grants signed, with a significant increase from 869 in 2021 to 3 942 in 2022. Similarly, EISMEA also experienced an increase from 245 grants signed in 2021 to 770 in 2022. While REA was the Agency that received the highest number of proposals, only around 15% of those proposals transformed into grants signed.

Figure 3. Number of proposals received

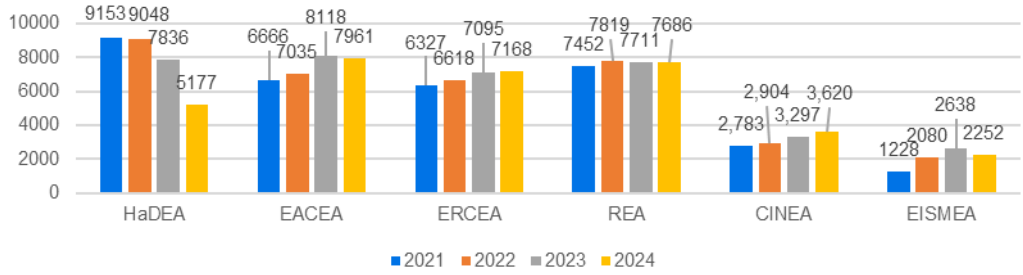


Source: Study team based on: for HaDEA and CINEA– dataset provided by the Commission; for EISMEA – dataset provided by the Agency on proposals submitted; for EACEA, ERCEA, REA – AARs and their annexes; for REA the data presents the proposals evaluated

The number of running projects decreased from 2023 to 2024 for most of the agencies – except ERCEA and CINEA. It is worth mentioning the case of HaDEA for which the number of running projects almost halved between 2022 and 2024. This is a consequence of the phasing out of some legacy programmes, which encompassed a high number of projects (e.g. WiFi4EU - legacy activity, a pioneering voucher scheme funded by the CEF-1 Telecom programme (2014-2020)). The number of running projects was relatively lower for CINEA and EISMEA. In the case of CINEA, the number of running projects considerably increased during the evaluation period from 2 783 in 2021 to 3 620 in 2024. The growing number of CINEA's running projects reflects a high volume of new grant agreements signed during this interval, as well as extensions which are partly explained by the inherent complexity of projects under CINEA's portfolio as well as a consequence of the effect of the pandemic in delaying the implementation of some of the projects, and in particular the completion of large multiyear projects which had to be followed in the years after for a longer period of time than originally planned. (38)

(37) REA individual evaluation report.
(38) CINEA individual evaluation report.

Figure 4. Number of running projects



Source: Study team based on: for REA, EACEA, ERCEA - AARs and their annexes; for HaDEA and CINEA - data source is the datasets provided by the Commission; for EISMEA - based on the data provided by EISMEA

Key Performance Indicators

The cross-analysis of KPIs across agencies for the evaluation period indicates that there are four KPIs common to all EAs: (1) budget execution (commitment and payment appropriations implemented), (2) time to grant, (3) overall risk at closure, and (4) time to pay. We provide a general overview on the achievement of common KPIs below, the graphs illustrating the analysed figures are provided as an Annex to this report (see Section 5.1).

Operational budget execution

Budget execution across all six executive agencies has remained consistently high throughout the 2021–2024 period. Nearly all agencies achieved 100% implementation of both commitment and payment appropriations for their operational budgets each year, indicating strong financial planning and execution capacities. Minor exceptions were found due to technical reasons, such as the automatic transfer of budget to the following year, or delays in the adoption of work programmes or complexity of grant preparation processes.

Time-to-grant (TTG)

Throughout the evaluation period, the agencies had a good performance in terms of TTG, with the majority of agencies achieving over 90% of grants signed within the target. While some annual and inter-Agency variations are observable, the data indicate a clear positive trend: by 2024, all agencies achieved or approached high levels of compliance with two minor but notable exceptions – EISMEA in 2024, and REA in 2022. In the case of EISMEA, the fall can be linked to challenges, among others, late signatures and/or unforeseen changes in consortia; lack of resources in concerned units; or the introduction of the use of lump sums. (39) In the case of REA, the delayed launch of Horizon Europe, combined with IT issues (e.g. eGrants not supporting non-standard or exceptional cases) and the concurrent processing of multiple calls, created additional complexity during the grant preparation phase for one high volume call (MSCA-postdoctoral Fellowships).

Time-to-pay

Time-to-pay performance for operational budget has been consistently strong across all six executive agencies during the 2021–2024 period. By 2024, four agencies (HaDEA, ERCEA, REA, and CINEA) achieved 100% of payments within the legal deadline while two had a 99% rate (EACEA and EISMEA), maintaining or improving their already high standards from previous years.

(39) EISMEA Annual Activity Report 2024.

Overall risk at closure (error rate)

The six executive agencies operated within the 2% residual risk threshold, except for EISMEA in 2024 (2.21%). According to the Agency's 2024 AAR, the increase in the error rate in 2024 was primarily due to a small number of isolated but high-impact errors identified through ex-post audits. (40) A trend toward gradual simplification of the programmes began with the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), resulting in low error rates (as mentioned above). This simplification continued into the current programming period through the widespread introduction and a steady increase in the use of simplified funding schemes for new projects. This is in line with the plan to reach 50% of lump sum funding in the relevant areas for the Work Programme 2026-2027.

Stakeholder satisfaction

Beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants

The stakeholder survey findings indicate generally high levels of **overall satisfaction** among beneficiaries of the EU executive agencies, with reported overall satisfaction ranging from 82% to 95% across the six agencies. (41) In the case of unsuccessful applicants, the levels of overall satisfaction are lower which is in line with expectations. Across agencies, more than half of unsuccessful respondents still showed high levels of satisfaction with the overall performance of the Agency. (42)

The gap between beneficiary and unsuccessful applicant satisfaction is a consistent trend also observed in the previous evaluations of the executive agencies. This is a systemic trend, reported in the scientific literature, by which unsuccessful applicants tend to be less satisfied simply because their application was rejected. (43) Other factors may also explain the lower levels of satisfaction of unsuccessful applicants compared to beneficiaries. One explanation may be related to the limited information provided during the application process as further detailed below or related to the difficulties in providing digestible and accessible information due to the complexity of certain programmes managed by agencies. (44) Dissatisfaction may also be a result of specific problems encountered with Agency-specific processes. For instance, in the case of EISMEA, insights from interviewees with Agency and parent DG staff note various challenges related to IT systems. Notably, in 2023, the EIC Accelerator gradually moved its IT platform for proposal submission to the Commission's eGrants platform (SEP). The change in the submission system created delays in the evaluation process, as certain tasks needed to be carried out manually. (45)

(40) EISMEA Annual Activity Report 2024

(41) The value of satisfaction for beneficiaries was derived from the share of beneficiaries, who "strongly agree" + "agree" with the statement: "I am satisfied with the overall quality of the programme management services provided by [Executive Agency] during the whole application and grant / contract implementation period".

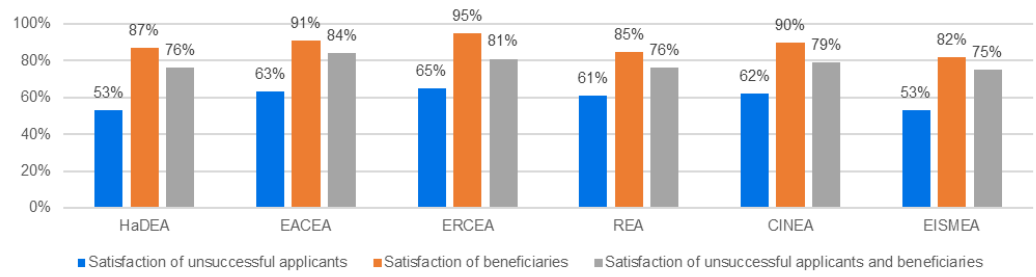
(42) The value of satisfaction for beneficiaries was derived from the share of beneficiaries, who "strongly agree" + "agree" with the statement: "I am satisfied with the overall quality of the services provided by [Executive Agency] during the whole application period".

(43) Examples of scientific research on the topic include: Melin, G. & Danell, R. (2006). The top eight percent: development of approved and rejected applicants for a prestigious grant in Sweden. *Science and Public Policy,* 33(10): 702-712; and Fackrell, K. et al. (2021). Identification and comparison of key criteria of feedback of funding decisions: mixed-methods analysis of funder and applicant perspectives. *BMJ Open,* 17;11(9): e048979.

(44) Insights from interviews conducted as part of the cross-cutting case study on communication.

(45) EISMEA individual evaluation report.

Figure 5. Beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants' overall satisfaction with performance of EAs



Source: prepared by the study team, based on the survey results. The total number of respondents is as follows: ERCEA – unsuccessful applicants N=649, beneficiaries N=695; REA – unsuccessful applicants N=502, beneficiaries N=892; CINEA – unsuccessful applicants N=674, beneficiaries N=1083; EISMEA – unsuccessful applicants N=676, beneficiaries N=592; EACEA – unsuccessful applicants N=529, beneficiaries N=1677; HaDEA – unsuccessful applicants N=391, beneficiaries N=862.

Note: The value for the overall satisfaction of unsuccessful applicants was derived from the share of unsuccessful applicants who "strongly agree" + "agree" with the statement: "I am satisfied with the overall quality of the services provided by [Executive Agency] during the whole application period". The value of satisfaction for beneficiaries was derived from the share of beneficiaries, who "strongly agree" + "agree" with the statement: "I am satisfied with the overall quality of the programme management services provided by [Executive Agency] during the whole application and grant / contract implementation period".

The survey also assessed stakeholder satisfaction with the clarity and transparency of the **application process** across the EAs (ranging from 79% to 86%). Overall, satisfaction levels are positive, though they vary between agencies and respondent groups. These findings indicate that, although perceptions are generally positive, some differences exist both between agencies and between unsuccessful applicants and beneficiaries. With regard to differences between unsuccessful applicants and beneficiaries, while many channels are used to communicate with applicants (e.g. info days, training sessions), communication remains limited to maintain equal treatment. According to Agency staff interviewed, it might be that applicants still struggled to understand the application process. (46)

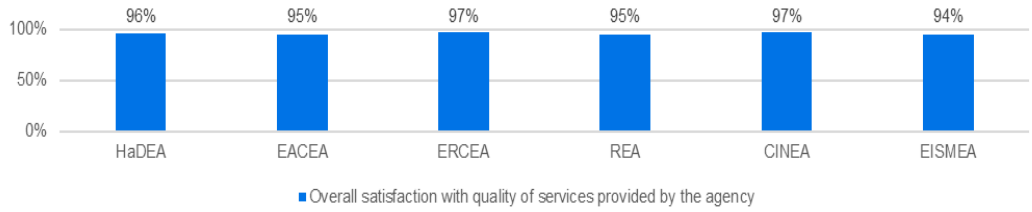
With regard to the clarity and transparency of the **evaluation process**, the survey findings reveal a more varied picture compared to other aspects of stakeholder satisfaction. These results suggest that while beneficiaries generally perceive the evaluation process as clear and transparent, unsuccessful applicants are less satisfied. With regard to the various stages of **project implementation**, the survey results reveal generally high satisfaction levels across EAs, indicating that beneficiaries largely view the processes as clear and transparent.

External experts

The evaluation also examined the **satisfaction of external experts** involved in the work of the EU executive agencies. The results reveal a very high and consistent level of satisfaction across all six agencies, with individual Agency scores ranging from 94% to 97%. The survey results show that experts are generally highly satisfied with the administrative processes related to their registration and contracting with the EAs. The survey results also indicate a very high level of satisfaction regarding the processes through which they support the work of the agencies, ranging from 89% to 98%.

(46) Interviews conducted with Agency staff to draft the cross-cutting case study on service delivery.

Figure 6. Satisfaction of experts with quality of services provided by the Agency



Source: prepared by the study team based on survey results. The total number of respondents (sum for two statements) is as follows: EISMEA N=2937, EACEA N=1074, REA N=1941, CINEA N=1731, ERCEA N=1392, HaDEA N=1524

Note. The value for the satisfaction of experts was obtained from the share of experts who "strongly agree" + "agree" with two statements: "I am satisfied with the overall quality of the services provided by [Executive Agency] during the process of becoming an expert for [Executive Agency]" and "I am satisfied with the overall quality of the services provided by [Executive Agency] during the execution of my tasks as an external expert".

EQ2: Which factors were driving or hindering the achievement of the objectives?

Key findings:

The agencies' structure and the engagement levels of their staff were identified as common factors driving the effectiveness of the agencies. Other factors were also identified, although they were not common for all agencies, such as strengthening the relationship with parent DGs.

Maintaining a continuous flow of information and a close cooperation between parent DGs and agencies via reporting, F2P mechanism, and joint working groups was regarded as pivotal to avoid widening the knowledge gap between the agencies and the Commission.

The synthesis of findings and conclusions of the six individual evaluation reports indicates that the agencies have been overall effective in their operations during the evaluation period. Some factors driving this operational effectiveness were identified as common across the agencies, such as the agencies' structure and the engagement levels of their staff. Some other positive factors were identified for some of the agencies which could be expanded to other agencies, such as strengthening the relationship with parent DGs. Despite overall effectiveness, some factors hindering the achievement of objectives were also identified. Some related to temporary factors, while others reflected structural issues such as high vacancy rates or increasing workload levels.

Stakeholders interviewed pointed out that the agencies were overall **well-organised and structured**, with clear processes and delimitation of roles and responsibilities in place. According to interviewees, this was a relevant factor driving the operational effectiveness of the agencies. (47) In the case of EACEA, the 2020 reorganisation of the Agency was positively viewed by Agency and Commission staff, creating a more efficient and lean structure for the Agency. (48)

Another common factor identified across agencies, which was perceived as driving the effectiveness of the Agency's operations, is the **level of dedication, motivation, and**

(47) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(48) EACEA individual evaluation report.

competence of the agencies' staff. (49) This is reflected in the high levels of satisfaction of both beneficiaries/unsuccessful applicants as well as external experts with the overall performance of each agency as indicated by the survey results. Stakeholders also stressed the **technical knowledge and consistency of staff**, particularly those working for ERCEA, REA and CINEA, in supporting the delivery of high-quality programme management. (50)

REA, which started operations in 2009 and is the oldest Agency implementing Horizon Europe, managed to build a **strong relationship with its parent DGs** over the years, fostering smooth communication channels and informal networks. This collaboration enables faster coordination, more nuanced handling of complex issues, and more pragmatic solutions to emerging challenges. (51) This strong relationship was also highlighted as an important factor by stakeholders interviewed from other agencies, although such relationships were less developed. In the case of CINEA, the Agency and parent DGs' staff also highlighted the good working relationship between the Agency and parent DGs as an important factor driving the Agency's effectiveness. (52) Interviewed staff from EISMEA and its parent DGs also stressed that they had fostered a close relationship with parent DGs, empowering the team to understand both policy needs and implementation procedures. (53) On the other hand, in the case of ERCEA, while formal communication and reporting obligations have largely been met, interviews with Commission staff and supporting desk research pointed to areas for improvement, particularly in the structure, timeliness, and strategic depth of communication with the parent DG (54) - see Section 3.2.1.3, evaluation question seven, for further reference. (55)

Despite the overall effectiveness of the agencies, some factors were identified as hindering the agencies' abilities to effectively achieve their objectives. One factor that was mentioned by several of the agencies' staff interviewed related to the **delays in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 (MFF) and the approval of the legal basis of several programmes**. This implied that the calls for proposals were launched later in 2021, with several evaluation processes overlapping. In addition, new funding programmes were introduced with increased complexity and with new evaluation requirements in line with the policies and priorities of the Commission and funding programmes regulation. Hence, staff in different agencies had to learn how to manage the new complex projects under new requirements.

Another factor mentioned by several interviewees from various agencies related to the transition to the eGrants platform. Whereas there is a consensus among agencies' staff on the benefits of the new platform, onboarding certain programmes to eGrants proved challenging. In this respect, investing considerable time and resources to introduce programmes in eGrants and train staff proved successful to take advantage of the benefits of the platform. Notably, the eGrants platform improved operations by streamlining processes, reducing unnecessary variation, and enforcing the use of standardise model grant agreements and contracts.

The effectiveness of some of the agencies was also affected by **factors of temporary nature**. For instance, Agency staff interviewed noted that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in delays in project implementation, translating in large increases in the number of amendments requested and processed. (56) In other instances, the late adoption of some programmes also led to delays in the launch of calls with overlaps that impacted staff's workload, as indicated by interviewed staff from HaDEA, REA and ERCEA. (57) To address such workload peaks, the

(49) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(50) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(51) REA individual evaluation report.
(52) CINEA individual evaluation report.
(53) EISMEA individual evaluation report.
(54) ERCEA individual evaluation report
(55) ERCEA individual evaluation report
(56) EACEA, CINEA, and ERCEA individual evaluation reports.
(57) HaDEA and ERCEA individual evaluation reports.

agencies effectively applied several strategies including simplifying the processes, restructuring the organisation of their staff and the hiring of interim staff. (58)

Whereas a strong relationship and collaboration between the agencies and the parent DGs was identified as a driver for effectiveness, some interviewed stakeholders noted some factors that may potentially impact such collaboration. (59) As indicated by both agencies and Commission staff interviewed, the **knowledge gap between the agencies and the Commission** may widen in the future due to the different nature of the activities performed by each of them. While Commission is mainly focused on policy-making, the agencies are focused on programme implementation tasks. (60) Thus, it is necessary to ensure a continuous flow of information and a close cooperation between parent DGs and agencies via reporting, F2P mechanism, joint working groups and informal cooperation. The means to ensure such exchange need to be sustained over time and effective. Having seconded officials in agencies contributes to facilitate such continuous exchange. (61) In this context, staff exchange programmes as the ones put forward by the inter-agency HR strategy have the potential to strengthen mutual understanding and preserve hands-on knowledge of implementation. For more information please also see evaluation question 18 (EQ18) and case study on F2P provided in the annexes.

EQ3: What could be done to render the agencies more effective in achieving its objectives?

Key findings:

Additional efforts could be placed to explore the use of AI tools to facilitate certain tasks related to project management.

The agencies via the inter-agency working group are strengthening their cooperation and sharing best practices to improve the selection process and reduce its duration.

The agencies could strengthen their knowledge exchange through regular reporting and exchange at all levels including joint working groups, staff secondments, joint trainings or thematic communities of practice.

During the evaluation period, several instances of actions taken by agencies to improve their effectiveness were identified. (62) These improvements were sought through similar mechanisms across the agencies in many instances, such as through the digitalisation and automation of tasks; improving hiring process; or strengthening knowledge exchange. For example, in the case of ERCEA, the Agency aims to improve its efficiency through the Continuous Improvement programme.

The majority of staff interviewed across the six agencies noted that additional efforts could be placed to **explore the use of AI tools to facilitate certain tasks** related to project management. (63) In some cases, such as for HaDEA and EACEA, agency staff noted that they were currently not leveraging from AI tools entirely. In other cases, such as for ERCEA, interviewed staff indicated several instances where they had used advanced IT tools to help in the identification of remote referees for specific evaluation panels. Furthermore, more recently and outside the evaluation period (April 2025), the ERCEA hired an AI expert to join the Agency's IT unit to further explore opportunities to facilitate processes. (64)

(58) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(59) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(60) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(61) REA individual evaluation report.
(62) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(63) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(64) ERCEA individual evaluation report.

Staff interviewed from CINEA, HaDEA, and EISMEA also indicated that the **hiring process tended to be long and complicated**. (65) In this regard, the agencies, via the inter-agency working group, strengthened their cooperation and sharing best practices to increase the efficiencies and synergies related to selection process and reduce its duration by organising multiple joint selection procedures, aligning the process and the job titles, sharing lists of selected candidates, which became a standard practice under a specific memorandum of understanding between agencies. Greater digitalisation of the hiring process was seen, in some cases, as a potential way of further achieving a simplified hiring process.

Knowledge exchange could also be strengthened within agencies through regular reporting and exchange at all levels, joint working groups, staff secondments, joint trainings, or thematic communities of practice. (66) This would help in keeping staff engagement within the agencies, as well as to preserve institutional memory and maintain a close alignment between policy and practice. Better career development opportunities were identified as a way to also improve institutional knowledge, as it would reduce turnover. Furthermore, agency staff interviewed noted in some cases that internal knowledge management processes could be improved. In the case of EACEA, interviewees noted that staff continued to rely on mail inboxes as personal knowledge management systems, limiting the development of a truly open and collaborative digital workplace.

3.2.1.2. Governance and compliance

EQ4: To what extent have agencies been operating according to their legal framework?

Key findings:

Executive agencies broadly operated in accordance with their legal mandates.

Minor operational or governance-related challenges emerged when legal mandates were complex or evolved during the evaluation period.

Remedial action was taken when challenges were noticed, particularly in line with audit recommendations, suggesting agencies had mechanisms in place to address evolving legal challenges over time.

Meta-analysis of the six individual evaluation reports and key findings presented there indicate that the executive agencies operate broadly in accordance with their legal mandates, with foundational instruments – including Establishment Acts, Delegation Acts, and Memoranda of Understanding ('MoU's) with parent DGs – providing a coherent legal basis for operations. Some stakeholders, both within agencies and in parent DGs, raised minor concerns about the flexibility of the legal framework. These referred primarily to limited flexibility in the mechanism for allocating staff across programmes raised by some agencies, and to the framework's adequacy for accommodating emerging additional responsibilities such as increased procurement tasks. (67)

Several agencies encountered governance-related challenges during transitional phases or as mandates evolved, whilst always operating according to its legal framework. HaDEA, for instance, began operations on 1 April 2021 in a transitional period under the direct management of the European Commission (under Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/173), until it built up the operational capacity in February 2022 to implement its own budget and operate

(65) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(66) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(67) CINEA individual evaluation report

independently. Throughout, however, it still successfully used the full set of legal instruments (68). The European Court of Auditors (ECA) flagged concerns about the delegation of authority from the Director-General of DG SANTE to another official, to serve as interim director, though the Agency is now fully operational within the legal framework and this was considered a one-off and a permanent director was appointed.

In the case of ERCEA, ECA made an observation in its annual report for 2023 relating to ERCEA's Steering Committee rules of procedure that required any majority decision to include at least one non-Commission member. The ECA noted this ran contrary to regulation, according to which the Commission must always be able to closely circumscribe the action of each agency and maintain real control over its operation. This prompted a formal response from the Agency to clarify the arrangement. In its annual report for 2024, the ECA followed up on the observation from 2023 noted the corrective action. In June 2025, the ERCEA Steering Committee adopted revised rules of procedure, fully incorporating the ECA's observation) and closed the 2023 observation. The ERCEA demonstrated its commitment not only to legal compliance but also to continuous improvement. (69)

Though operating fully within the provisions of its establishing and delegation acts, EISMEA experienced broader legal complexity following a revision of its delegation act after the restructuring of the EIC Fund by the European Commission in its 2022 and 2023 Decisions (70) in the context of the implementation of the EIC Accelerator under Horizon Europe. Moreover, the revised EISMEA delegation act and MoUs and other Guidance Documents, though beyond the MoUs, were introduced to reflect and clarify the scope of responsibility involved amongst the different stakeholders involved. This included the EIC Fund and the European Investment Bank (EIB) under indirect management mode —highlighting the evolving nature of legal governance in a shifting institutional landscape.

Legal risks also emerged in areas of operational implementation during the evaluation period, particularly where agencies were adapting to new or complex mandates. The ECA had such findings with regard to EISMEA, such as the transfer of intellectual property rights to third countries (specifically, the ECA found that the assessment regarding this transfer was not comprehensive and lacked objective criteria), weaknesses with SME status assessments, and broader challenges in managing delegated responsibilities particularly as regards the design and early implementation of the EIC, some of which were ultimately returned to DG RTD, together with the relevant staff (71). Recommendations encouraging EISMEA to strengthen its legal risk anticipation along these lines were implemented following the adoption of action plans, such as reinforcing controls and improved reporting dashboards.

Personal data protection was generally compliant across agencies, with minor or operational matters identified by external audits in, and subsequently addressed by, CINEA, EACEA, EISMEA, ERCEA, and REA. These do not undermine the overall legality of operations.

Where organisational or governance contexts remained stable, legal compliance was straightforward. CINEA, EACEA and REA agency reports generally find that agencies had coherent legal structures in place, within which they acted, with MoUs and working arrangements functioning as intended.

Taken together, agency reports find a high level of legal conformity across agencies, albeit with varying complexity. Where issues did arise—whether due to transitional arrangements, governance anomalies, or emerging risks—they were met with formal responses or structural changes. This suggests that the agencies not only operated within the legal framework but also

(68) HaDEA individual evaluation report
(69) ERCEA individual evaluation report
(70) COM Decisions C(2022)2408, C(2022)6818 and C(2023)8183
(71) ECA, Special report 08/2024: EU Artificial intelligence ambition – Stronger governance and increased, more focused investment essential going forward, 2024, available at: https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=sr-2024-08

had the mechanisms in place to identify, address, and adapt to legal and procedural challenges over time.

EQ5: To what extent was the agencies' internal control framework in line with the Commission's common control strategy and the programme-specific approaches, and to what extent did the Agency operate in line with internal control principles, notably sound financial and human resources management?

Key findings:

Internal control frameworks were found to be well-defined and robust, either the same as, or closely aligned with the Commission's control strategy.

During the evaluation period, the six Executive Agencies operated within the 2% residual risk threshold except for EISMEA in 2024, driven by some isolated, high-impact errors.

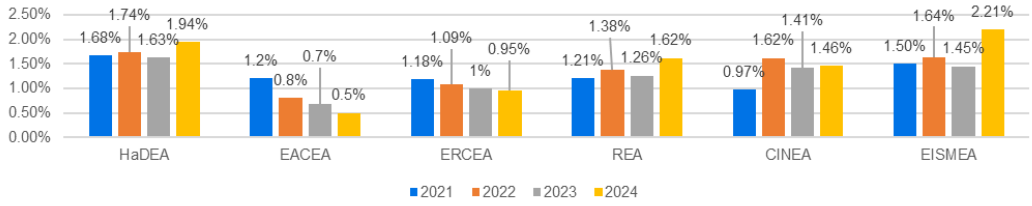
Auditing, both external and internal, remains essential, yet agencies continuously identified opportunities for improvements throughout the evaluation period.

Across the executive agencies, internal control frameworks broadly align with the European Commission's Common control strategy. Most agencies have adopted formal control mechanisms and internal strategies, with varying degrees of implementation maturity and effectiveness, and trust was broadly high in the executive agencies' ability to self-correct (72).

Synthesis of individual evaluation reports and the key findings presented there indicates that control strategies are generally robust and well-defined. All agencies operated according to an internal control framework that is either the same as, or closely aligned with, that of the European Commission. As part of this, efforts are made to continually improve processes, in particular via annual evaluations, internal controls, drawing on staff surveys, proactive engagement with external audits, and reviews of exceptions and non-compliance events. Fostering high levels of staff training and awareness is also broadly pursued across agencies. These efforts collectively aim to reinforce consistency and transparency in managing EU funds.

During the evaluation period, the six executive agencies operated within the 2% residual risk threshold except for EISMEA in 2024. According to the Agency's 2024 AAR, the increase in the error rate in 2024 was primarily due to a small number of isolated but high-impact errors identified through ex-post audits. (73)

Figure 7. KPI: Estimated risk at closure



Source: prepared by evaluation team based on AARs 2021-2024

The role of audits and oversight remains central to reinforcing accountability. Most agencies were subject to auditing activities by the Internal Audit Service (IAS) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA) and proactively responded to recommendations identified therein. Positively,

(72) Synthesis of all individual evaluation reports
(73) EISMEA Annual Activity Report 2024

agencies systematically undertook corrective actions in response to such recommendations from the IAS and ECA, such as EISMEA in relation to the EIC control environment, and REA with regards to fraud risk. Subsequent IAS reviews confirmed that, in EISMEA's case, this led to strengthening of its internal controls. Similar IAS reports for ERCEA, EACEA, HaDEA, though not issuing critical recommendations, still led to corrective action and reinforced procedures to safeguard the robustness of internal control frameworks (74).

In sum, agencies' internal control systems were largely aligned with the Commission's common control strategy without major deficiencies. Continuous improvements were identified and corrections made possible through self-assessment mechanisms, risk registers, and annual reviews, though to varying degrees across agencies. Some administrative inefficiencies were identified, which suggests that strong controls may still coexist with performance management challenges.

3.2.1.3. Communication and reporting

EQ6: To what extent did the Agencies' communication support the mission of the Agencies and contribute to the visibility of the EU as promoter of the programmes entrusted to it?

Key findings:
Agencies follow clear communication work plans & strategies, usually developed in collaboration with DGs, though some did largely independently, including branding the agency.

Communications strategies were easier to develop for agencies with thematically concentrated programme portfolios, and national or regional specificities added further complication.

Social media was used very successfully by agencies, exceeding KPIs, but heterogeneously.

Awareness of agencies among stakeholders was high, though visibility of non-flagship programmes and some of the applicant processes was lower.

Findings reported across the six agency evaluation reports and complemented by case studies on Communication and Service Delivery indicate that executive agencies are expected to conduct communication activities to support their missions, promote their programmes, provide information to applicants on tender and proposal submission procedures, and boost the visibility of the EU (75). Collaboration on communication with the respective parent DGs is governed by the specific provisions in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between each agency and its parent DGs. (76) Some agencies (e.g. ERCEA) chose to establish dedicated units with primary, centralised responsibility for communication across the agency, whilst other did not (e.g. EACEA), where external communication activities are mainly carried out by operational units, coordinated by a central unit, and planned collaboratively with an Agency network of communication correspondents. (77)

Each agency follows an annual communication work plan, developed in collaboration with parent DGs, which outlines the planned activities and sets priorities for the year. There was variation in the extent to which agencies engage with parent DGs when developing such plans.

(74) See relevant individual evaluation reports
(75) Detailed elaborations relevant to this Evaluation Question (EQ) are available in the devoted case studies on Communication and Service Delivery
(76) Cross-cutting case study on communication.
(77) Cross-cutting case study on communication.

Agencies such as CINEA, HaDEA and EISMEA worked 'hand in glove' with DGs, by coordinating all communications with them, aligning communications priorities with the political priorities of the Commission and parent DGs, and maintaining joint yearly communication plans.

Others developed such strategies somewhat more independently, though within their legal remit. Indeed, some interviewees felt agencies were instead promoting their own brand identities, not that of the EU or the programmes themselves, though not necessarily inappropriately (78). For example, ERCEA has its own external brand (appearing as the "European Research Council") and enjoying a large degree of autonomy from its parent DG, and the fourth strategic objective in REA's communication strategy was to enhance REA's institutional visibility as sole provider of unique services to specific segments of the R&I community – again, both within their legal remits.

Stakeholders at both agencies and DGs took opportunities in some programmes to improve the coordination, with some feeling it would reduce duplication of effort, ensure consistent messaging, and avoid unnecessary proliferation of requests to agencies (79). Occasional issues arose regarding alignment on communication with parent DGs, particularly around clear division of tasks, suggesting this was required.

Communications strategies and work plans were easier to develop for agencies with thematically concentrated programme portfolios: some agencies, such as REA and ERCEA, with clearer thematic portfolios, had more focused and in-depth communication strategies (80). Others, with more diverse programme portfolios (e.g. CINEA, EACEA, EISMEA, HaDEA) had to adapt to a more diverse range of stakeholders and communicate about a more diverse set of activities. HaDEA faced a unique challenge in building a new identity and communication strategy after inheriting programmes from multiple agencies, which complicated efforts to project a unified mission.

Additionally, some agencies had to tailor communication activities to national or regional specificities. For example, EISMEA tailored communication to regions on the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument; while CINEA took into account regional needs when communicating on the LIFE programme. (81)

Triangulation of evidence from individual evaluation reports indicates that, across agencies, external communication efforts generally show strong engagement with beneficiaries, applicants, and the general public, particularly through social media, high-profile events, and online tools. Some agencies developed communication toolkits for beneficiaries, and structures such as communication output reviews for continual improvement were common (82).

The use of social media channels is heterogeneous across agencies, with some having social media outreach as a priority. As shown in the table below, the use and popularity of social media accounts vary across agencies. ERCEA, presenting itself as the "European Research Council" and with its own brand, has a more extensive communication activity, which is reflected in the number of social media channels used and respective followers. In contrast, EACEA only operates the Eurydice Facebook account, although it also contributes with content for channels managed by the Commission, such as the Erasmus+ and European Youth accounts.

(78) Cross-cutting case study on communication.
(79) Cross-cutting case study on communication.
(80) Cross-cutting case study on communication.
(81) Cross-cutting case study on communication.
(82) Synthesis of individual evaluation reports

Figure 8. Agencies' social media accounts and follower numbers (2025, in thousands)

	Twitter/ X	LinkedIn	YouTube	Instagram	Facebook	Bluesky	WhatsApp	Mastodon
CINEA	36.5 K	93K	1.69K					
EACEA								
EISMEA	26.8K	100K	3.6K					
ERCEA	156.4K	264K	7.26K	16.2K	42K	15K	15K	
HaDEA	9,9K	39K						
REA	30.4K	75K						2.9K

Source: Study team elaboration based on data collected through desk research in June 2025. (83)

Agencies like REA and ERCEA successfully used a range of communication channels, including high-profile events and a growing social media presence, to extend their reach. Many surpassed their external communication targets and KPIs (e.g. REA, CINEA), and some targeted countries with low programme participation rates (e.g. HaDEA). Interviews suggest beneficiaries used this to stay up to date on the activities of CINEA, though external stakeholders professed to prefer to stick to traditional sources, such as past experience, or professional networks. Despite this success in achieving KPIs, and their essential role in evaluation and adaptation, parent DGs worried that agencies' focus on KPIs may come at the expense of the broader mission of promoting both the programmes and the EU's role behind them, with some interviewees calling for more digestible, timely and accessible information for external audiences to enhance EU visibility.

Awareness of individual programmes, as revealed by survey results, was heterogenous, with low or moderate levels of awareness still reported in several cases. This suggests that while agencies are active in outreach, the visibility of specific programmes, particularly beyond flagship ones, remains uneven. For instance, despite strong recognition for Horizon-related programmes across agencies, low visibility (e.g., 16% awareness) was reported for others, such as the Single Market Programme (food chain) or the Interregional Innovation Investments ('I3') instrument under EISMEA, or 'JTM-PSLF' for CINEA. To some extent, this is unavoidable, particularly in proportion to the disparities in budget between flagship and smaller programmes.

Nonetheless, budget was not the only factor; CINEA reported additional communication challenges due to its complex programme portfolio (84). In cases where general public awareness was lacking, such as for EISMEA, it was offset by high awareness among key stakeholder groups, who nonetheless saw the agencies' communication positively, as close to final beneficiaries and their networks.

Another important stakeholder group agencies communicated with were the applicants for various tenders and grant applications. Applicants are communicated with throughout the

(83) Cross cutting case study on communication: Follower numbers collected in June 2025 to ensure consistency and comparability across agencies. For Agency-level annual data, please refer to the Communication sections in the corresponding Final Reports

(84) CINEA individual evaluation report

application submission and evaluation phases. All agencies appear to have established clear communication strategies to provide guidance and technical assistance to applicants throughout these processes, such as info days or webinars. Findings suggest that, despite these efforts, applicants from all agencies sometimes still struggle to understand the process, with applicants expressing a desire for additional, clearer information on the process across several agencies. Despite this, a high proportion of surveyed applicants reported positively about communication efforts from agencies, with over 75% of applicants for every agency stating they were satisfied with the overall delivery of services.

Overall, the agencies exhibit strong foundational communication structures that contribute to the EU's visibility and programme awareness, particularly through digital and event-based outreach. However, varying levels of programme-specific awareness, internal coordination gaps (such as division of roles and responsibilities), and differing levels of mission alignment, with some agencies communicating about themselves over programmes or parent DGs, suggest a need for more consistent strategic integration across all communication levels.

EQ7: To what extent is the agencies' reporting to its parent Directorates-General reflecting the operations of their activities, and is it in line with the supervision requirements provided in the applicable legal basis and the Memoranda of Understanding?

Key findings:

Agencies had well-established, effective and solid annual reporting cycles and mechanisms in line with supervision requirements, with some variety according to number of parent DGs and programme portfolio.

Some parent DGs expressed a desire for more qualitative, analytical, substantive insights beyond supervision requirements.

Interviewees from agencies and parent DGs had a desire for more informal, flexible and spontaneous reporting exchanges.

Synthesis of individual evaluation reports reveals that agencies generally demonstrated compliance with the supervision requirements outlined in legal acts and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). This comprises regular reporting to parent DGs on financial execution, performance, and risk management. During the evaluation period, all agencies had well-established reporting mechanisms, underpinned by a common governance framework (85), including Delegation Acts (86) and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with their parent DGs, which set out formal supervision and reporting arrangements.

The reporting structure and practices across the agencies reflect a generally well-established and consistent approach to accurately communicating operational activities. In line with Regulation 58/2003, every agency produced Annual Activity Reports (AARs) giving an account of operational performance, achievement of KPIs, financial management, and internal control. In terms of planning, each agency prepares Annual Work Programmes, outlining planned operations, resources and outputs, supplemented by mid-year reports, though their exact content and frequency vary according to the definitions in the MoUs.

Some variation in reporting channels during the evaluation period was observed. This variation was attributed to the number of parent DGs and the complexity of the programme portfolios managed. For instance, REA opted to add additional reporting channels with each parent DG,

(85) Council Regulation (EC) No 58/2003

(86) Commission Decisions of 12.2.2021 delegating powers to the Executive Agencies (individual decisions are C(2021) 947 final, C(2021) 951 final, C(2021) 949 final, C(2021) 950 final, C(2021) 948 final, and C(2021) 952 final)

on top of its standardised reporting to all parent DGs, reflecting its wide-ranging portfolio, an approach also done by CINEA, EISMEA, HaDEA, and EACEA. Some agencies also developed additional arrangements to streamline communication with parent DGs, an approach that introduced additional complexity but improved the flexibility and adaptability of reporting.

Finally, all agencies also have Steering Committees meetings, at least four times a year, which is the highest level of supervision of the agencies by the Commission. These meetings convene all parent DGs, a representative of the Commission's central services and agency senior management to adopt the agency's annual work programmes, budget, HR rules and to assess progress, review risks and take key decisions. This is a major forum for discussion on the strategic direction of individual agencies. Ad-hoc and bilateral exchanges of information, documents, coordination meetings and similar processes supplement these formal structures.

Across the board, this solid and well-defined structure was seen as a strength, facilitating strong reporting from agencies to parent DGs. Agencies generally offered solid and structured reporting on KPIs, and stakeholders in both agencies and parent DGs praised the positive working relationship that facilitated information exchanges, both formal and informal. All agencies were in line with their legal reporting obligations.

Nonetheless, while strong on operational performance reporting, particularly on administrative and financial matters, interviewed staff in the parent DGs called for more qualitative but substantive insights, including monitoring and achievement of results, suggesting a possible gap between formal compliance and the evolving expectations of its supervising bodies. This reflected differences between agencies in the KPIs used for performance tracking. Whilst all agencies reported on a common set of KPIs according to financial regulations – time-to-grant, time-to-pay, budget execution, risk – KPIs beyond this diverged significantly (87). More substantively, some agencies defined and operationalised KPIs to integrate outcomes – such as client satisfaction and communication outreach – or even evaluation quality – e.g. redress rates – beyond this core (88).

Beyond formal structures, several agencies encountered limitations related to the depth and flexibility of reporting. For example, ERCEA's communication was described as too rigid, with interviewed staff in the parent DG expressing a desire for more informal and spontaneous exchanges with ERCEA and respectively across all agencies, including an improved inter-agency communication (89). This informality was felt to have had the twin advantage of being able to address ad hoc issues and facilitate greater depth beyond formal communication and reporting obligations. There was also interest from interviewees in making reporting analytical, particularly in areas like risk assessment, making use of better qualitative data to generate more substantive insights, beyond KPIs.

(87) KPI case study.
(88) KPI case study
(89) ERCEA evaluation report, Communication case study.

EQ8: What could be done to make the reporting to parent Directorates-General more effective and efficient?

Key findings:

A common call was for reporting that goes beyond requirements to focus on qualitative, analytical and substantive insights or on measuring outcomes.

Similarly, many stakeholders stressed greater use of informal feedback communication channels, and less over-regulation of reporting protocols.

One issue was over the lack of harmonisation of definition and methodologies around KPIs, and outcome-oriented KPIs.

Many called for greater digitalisation to reduce administrative burdens.

Overall, as made clear above, cross-agency analysis and synthesis shows that reporting was largely effective and efficient, with agencies' performance by and large viewed positively and in line with supervision requirements.

Nonetheless, as elaborated on in EQ7, a common theme across agencies and Commission staff was that reporting would be more effective if it went beyond minimum standards of performance metrics to include deeper, qualitative, analytical insights and strategic reflections that could connect operations to policy and strategy (90).

Similarly, as touched on in EQ7, an opportunity for efficiency is in striking a better balance between formal and informal reporting. Informal feedback communication channels were widely seen to be valuable (91). Indeed, interviewees note a risk of the *over*-regulation of reporting protocols, which are already burdensome and risk losing analytical value. Interviewees felt informal communication channels would generate insights that are more streamlined, actionable and relevant, reduce administrative burden for agencies, and foster better working relationships and better coordination. To this end, one related proposal was to facilitate and increase the secondment and the movement of staff between the agencies and their parent DGs.

Another recurrent opportunity is that of standardisation of certain reporting practices across agencies. This relates in particular to two practices: first, the timing of reporting around key reports (AWP, AAR) and Steering Committee meetings, for which agencies currently have slightly different practices as specified in Memoranda of Understanding or Annual Work Programmes. (92) Standardising or collaborating would enable efficiency gains in terms of scale, and facilitate parent DG and Steering Committee engagement, particularly for parent DGs that supervise multiple agencies and vice versa.

The second practice is standardised, harmonised reporting methods. This includes indicators and measurements for KPIs which, beyond core KPIs, are interpreted and operationalised differently by different agencies. This is, of course, not to overlook specificities in Agency structure or purpose that entail differences in reporting. Part of this opportunity is more technical – such as ensuring a consistent methodology in calculating agencies' occupancy rates, as one example. Other questions where further harmonisation could be looked into concerns which KPIs should be reported on, the extent to which agencies should report on outcome-oriented indicators, and what constitutes 'complete' reporting.

Digitalisation is another thematic area for efficiency gains around reporting. Some interviewees propose greater use of digital tools – supporting more efficient information exchange and

(90) Synthesis of all six Agency evaluation reports
(91) Communication case study; HaDEA, evaluation reports
(92) Cross-Agency interviews

Commission-level comparison and evaluation, whilst reducing administrative burdens. This is especially so for parent DGs that supervise multiple agencies, and agencies that report to multiple parent DGs. This goes further, as standardised reporting remains complicated for as long as there are divergent administrative practices, organisational structures and missions across agencies and divergent parent DGs' requirements and/or needs.

Indeed, thus far, digitalisation has been used to some effect: interviewees noted that new dashboards and IT systems had improved reporting, particularly due to better comparability and reduced burden (93). Yet they also suggested this was an ongoing process, and adoption of further technologies, especially AI, could be integrated into new dashboards to provide more up-to-date reporting and data sharing.

(93) See, for example, EISMEA or HaDEA evaluation report

3.2.2. Efficiency

3.2.2.1. Cost-efficiency and performance

EQ9: How efficient and flexible was the management of the delegated programmes and respectively execution of services, including the actual performance and productivity increase against the elements estimated in the ex-ante cost-benefit analysis of 2021, the actual costs (including cost of coordination and monitoring) and as compared to the alternative option of in-house scenario?

Key findings:

Overall, executive agencies demonstrated strong efficiency and performance, maintaining high-budget execution rates and solid delivery against core KPIs such as time-to-grant and time-to-payment.

Significant variation in programme management costs was observed across agencies, reflecting differences in programme portfolios and maturity. CINEA consistently showed the lowest administrative-to-operational cost ratio, while temporary anomalies were noted for EACEA (2021) and EISMEA (2024).

The introduction of simplified cost options, particularly lump sums, was widely welcomed as improving efficiency, predictability, and reducing administrative burden for beneficiaries.

Nonetheless, the shift to lump sum funding required internal process adjustments, particularly in evaluation, monitoring, and verification, with greater reliance on technical and scientific judgment rather than cost-based checks.

Programme management cost

The evidence collected supports the conclusion that there was a strong performance of the agencies in achieving their KPIs. As presented in the effectiveness chapter, budget execution rates have remained high (94), complemented by solid results across time-to-grant (TTG), time-to-payment (TTP), and other core delivery metrics.

However, when it comes to programme management costs, significant variations are observed across agencies. These differences are largely attributable to the varying nature of the programmes and project portfolios. CINEA consistently demonstrates the lowest ratio of administrative to operational expenditure in terms of commitments and payments, explained by its focus on capital-intense large-scale infrastructure projects. (95)

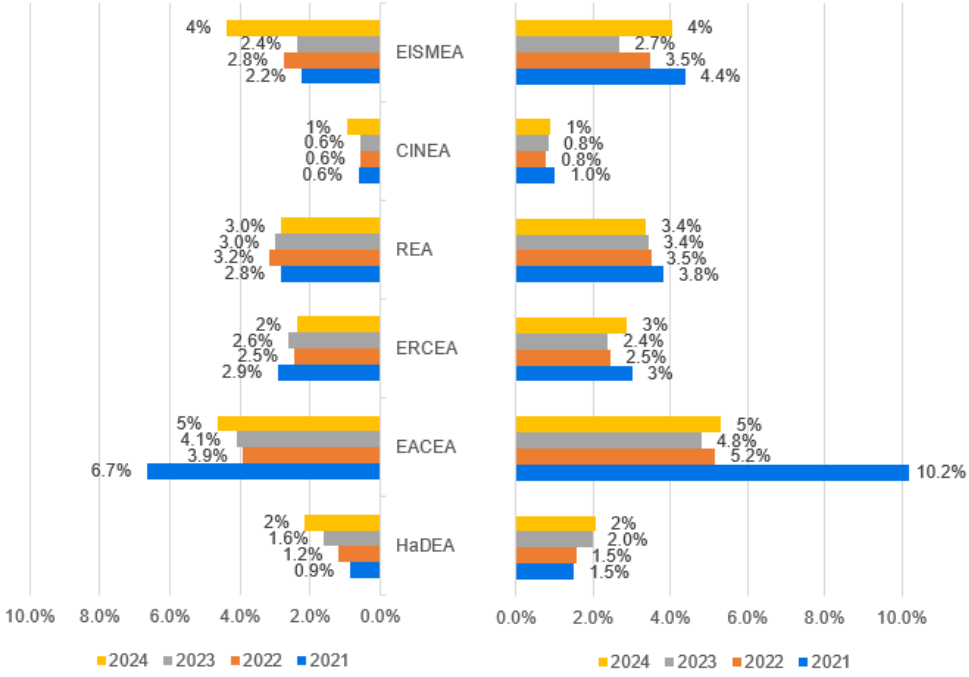
For most agencies, the ratio between administrative and operational budget is from 1% to 5%. Notable one-off anomalies include a spike for EACEA in 2021—resulting from the delayed adoption of the 2021 work programmes of Erasmus+, Creative Europe, CERV, and the European Solidarity Corps, which temporarily suppressed operational budget levels while administrative costs remained constant—and a peak for EISMEA in 2024, following the transition of the EIC Fund. (96)

HaDEA presents a particularly interesting trend: its administrative cost ratio has increased incrementally by approximately 0.4 percentage points annually since 2021. No single factor fully

(94) As mentioned in the effectiveness chapter, in interpreting budget execution figures (executed commitments), it is important to consider that results may be somewhat influenced by the practice of lead parent DGs absorbing unused, expiring commitments. This arrangement enables executive agencies to maintain high performance indicators—since they do not report unexecuted commitments—while placing the responsibility on the lead parent DGs to reallocate or manage these funds in order to avoid budgetary losses.
(95) Evaluation report CINEA.
(96) Evaluation reports EACEA, EISMEA.

explains this pattern. However, document review and interviews suggest this is related to the natural ramp-up of a newly created Agency—covering staff increases, IT investments, and capacity-building activities. Some stakeholders also pointed to cases where HaDEA had to frontload the implementation of activities, with having received corresponding staff allocations a bit delayed. (97)

Figure 9. Ratio of administrative to operational budget in terms of executed commitments (left) and executed payments (right) (98)



Source: Annual Activity Reports 2021-2024 and their annexes for all agencies.

Simplified cost options

The progressive introduction of simplified cost options—particularly lump sum funding agreements—has been widely acknowledged as a positive development, enhancing programme delivery across executive agencies. Lump sum funding strengthens output orientation at project level, as payments are linked to the achievement of predefined milestones and outputs, rather than cost reimbursement.

Evidence from beneficiary surveys and stakeholder interviews confirms the perception that lump sums have simplified and accelerated financial management, reducing administrative burdens. Beneficiaries consistently report greater clarity, predictability, and ease of implementation compared to traditional cost-based models. These improvements support efficiency of project execution. (99)

However, the shift to lump sum funding also introduced new operational demands for Agency staff. While the model enhanced flexibility and responsiveness, it required adjustments to

(97) Evaluation report HaDEA.
(98) The following table provides figure taking into account support services (CVS-participant validation and Expert management). At the same time, REA individual report provides more accurate insights and calculations, discounting CVS-participant validation and Expert management.
(99) Evaluation reports all agencies.

internal processes, particularly in the areas of proposal evaluation, grant agreement preparation (GAP), operational monitoring, and result verification.

Overall, lump sums are widely viewed as increasing flexibility and reducing administrative burden for beneficiaries. For the Agency, they shift the operational focus: evaluation, monitoring, and verification rely less online item cost checks and more on scientific/technical judgment of whether proposed budgets are appropriate for the planned work. This requires new skills and process adjustments, with experts in the relevant fields—and those with operational/financial knowledge—playing a more central role. Recovery is tied to incomplete delivery of outputs rather than financial disallowance, which can be more complex and demands careful assessment. As many calls are still in early stages, overall effects - particularly on finance roles - are still emerging. Some staff note possible trade-offs in precision and accountability alongside the reported benefits.

EQ10: To what extent is the Agency fit for purpose?

Key findings:

Organisational structures are broadly fit for purpose, with CINEA and EACEA demonstrating strong alignment between structure and objectives, while EISMEA faces challenges linked to programme novelties and staffing constraints though targeted actions under its Recovery Plan are beginning to stabilise the situation.

Staff engagement and wellbeing have generally improved, particularly in CINEA and ERCEA, reflecting effective HR planning and staff support measures.

Career development continues to be an important topic across Agencies, particularly for contract agents. The inter-Agency HR Strategy (2023–2027) and mobility initiatives represent meaningful steps toward addressing these needs.

The organisational structures of all agencies are, in general, appropriately designed to fulfil their respective objectives. CINEA and EACEA demonstrate particularly strong structural alignment. CINEA and HaDEA benefits from a well-functioning interplay between central service units and programme implementation units, while EACEA has seen positive outcomes from its 2020 reform, including a 10%-point increase in staff agreement with the statement that “EACEA is organised efficiently”. During the reference period, ERCEA updated its organisational structure, notably with the restructuring of Department C to distribute more evenly workload during peaks. Moreover, stakeholder interviews broadly confirm that REA’s organisational structure is fit for purpose, supporting effective implementation of programmes.

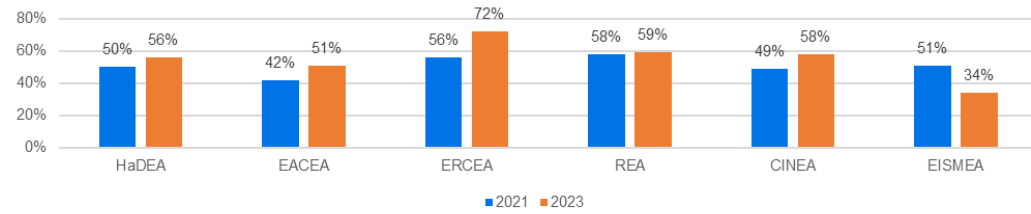
EISMEA’s structure is strained by the complexity of its programmes and staffing constraints, which have increased administrative burdens and slow down the agency capacity to consistently reach its KPIs. The staff reduction in the current MFF put further pressure on the agency to deliver on its diverse portfolio of tasks.

Staff engagement, wellbeing and HR responsiveness across the agencies is generally positive. CINEA, for instance, has shown a consistent rise in its staff engagement index, from 72% in 2021 to 75% in 2024, and at the same time, a significant reduction in vacancy rates from 10.4% to 4.4% emerged, reflecting effective HR planning and follow-up on staff surveys. This upward trend is also echoed in staff wellbeing indicator, where CINEA’s score improved from 49% to 58% between 2021 and 2023. ERCEA also demonstrates positive momentum, with a declining turnover rate attributed to targeted HR strategies such as inter-Agency exchanges and job

shadowing, and a notable increase in staff wellbeing from 56% to 72%, indicating enhanced staff support. (100)

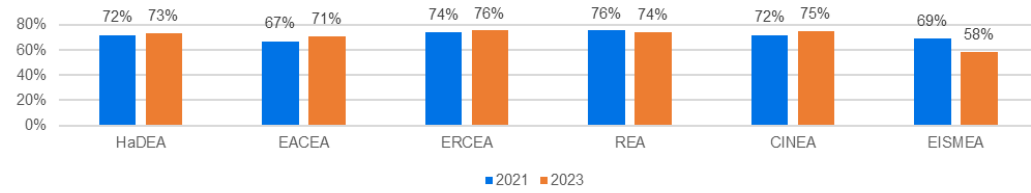
Other agencies show more nuanced progress. EACEA improved its occupancy rate from 91% to 95%, and its staff wellbeing score rose from 42% to 51%, though aligning staffing levels with evolving programme demands remains a challenge. In HaDEA, staff wellbeing increased from 50% to 56%. REA maintained a steady staff wellbeing rate, with scores remaining virtually consistent, from 58% in 2021 to 59% in 2023. Despite reported peaks in workload during this timeframe, REA has exhibited a stable and resilient work environment. In contrast, EISMEA continues to face pressure from reduced staffing and high administrative demands, with a sharp decline in staff wellbeing from 51% to 34%, and engagement index from 69% to 58%. Despite these challenges, certain areas with EISMEA's staff satisfaction remain robust: teamwork and colleague relations stayed positive at 72% in 2023 (down from 77% in 2021), and staff continued to feel adequately resourced in terms of digital skills and tools (62% positive in 2023). (101) To address these findings from the 2023 staff survey, EISMEA developed a targeted Recovery Plan aimed at improving internal management practices, staff engagement and organisational communication. While most agencies have taken concrete steps to enhance HR performance, their effectiveness varies: CINEA and ERCEA stand out in engagement and retention, with EISMEA successfully stabilising its workforce by implementing the recovery plan. (102)

Figure 10. Staff wellbeing (percentage)



Source: EC staff satisfaction survey 2021, 2023. Based on the statement: "I feel that my Directorate General [Service, Office or Executive Agency] cares about my wellbeing."

Figure 11. Staff engagement index



Source: EC staff satisfaction survey 2021, 2023.

Career development remains a persistent concern across the agencies, particularly for contract agents who face structural limitations in advancing beyond certain roles. These constraints have contributed to consistently low satisfaction with career prospects, with EISMEA reporting only 26% positive perception in 2023, almost unchanged from 28% in 2021. In 2024, only 41% of REA staff felt confident about their professional future due to limited advancement opportunities. (103)

(100) Evaluation report CINEA, ERCEA.
(101) EISMEA's individual evaluation report.
(102) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.
(103) Evaluation report EISMEA, REA.

To this end, during the evaluation period, the agencies implemented several initiatives to improve career prospects for their staff. These initiatives were outlined in the inter-Agency HR strategy 2023-2027, ([104]) launched as a collaborative effort in 2023. The strategy set out a common vision for the EAs in which all staff can work and develop in a supportive, trust-based and caring environment. The strategy included an action plan structured along three key priorities: attractiveness and staff retention; selection and recruitment; and career prospects.

As part of the inter-Agency HR strategy, a Staff Exchange Programme and an Inter-institutional job shadowing between agencies were launched. (105) The Exchange programme allows staff to work in the Commission or EAs on a specific project for a limited period of time. The objective is to help staff of the EAs and Commission to increase their skills and bring their experience back to the agencies/Commission. The job shadowing programme focuses on a short-term job exchange where a staff member is paired with another staff member in another institution of their choice, over a six-month period. The aim of the programme is to gain insights, create useful networks, exchange best practices, and strengthen collaboration among EU institutions and agencies.

In addition, ERCEA and EACEA have taken more proactive steps to support professional growth, including structured learning and development strategies and CINEA's and ERCEA's pilot staff exchange and job shadowing programmes. However, EACEA continues to struggle with high turnover in support functions and difficulties in attracting specialised profiles, particularly in Unit - EACEA.R2. Following the low results from the 2023 Staff Engagement Survey in EISMEA, the agency began implementing a recovery plan. One of the plan's four pillars is devoted to professional development, with 25 actions in this area on track to be implemented in 2025. (106)

EQ11: What were the factors driving or hindering the efficiency of the Agency?

Key findings:

Agencies benefited from strong staff professionalism and engagement. Digitalisation supported delivery through tools such as eGrants in HaDEA, EISMEA, and CINEA, while ERCEA and EACEA advanced internal tools like Power BI dashboards. Lump sum funding simplified grants management in EISMEA, HaDEA, REA, and EACEA.

Initial delays in annual work programme approvals affected the operations of some Agencies. Recruitment challenges and high turnover generally also emerged as a problematic to be faced. Flexibility in reallocating staff was uneven: ERCEA and HaDEA actively used interim and "floater" roles, while CINEA and EACEA applied measures mainly during challenging periods; EISMEA and REA faced practical constraints limiting full application.

Oversubscription of calls created workload spikes in specific Agencies, including EISMEA (WomenTechEU, EIC programmes) and ERCEA (Starting and Consolidator grants), highlighting the need for better alignment between call design, evaluation capacity, and applicant communication.

Between 2021 and 2024, the six executive agencies under evaluation operated in an environment shaped by both enabling and constraining factors that significantly affected the achievement of their objectives. Across the board, the **professionalism, motivation, and technical expertise** of Agency staff emerged as a key strength. (107) In particular, HaDEA,

(104) Inter-Executive Agency Human Resources Strategy 2023-2027.
(105) More information on the Exchange Programme and Inter-institutional job shadowing is provided below the next evaluation question.
(106) Evaluation reports EACEA, EISMEA, ERCEA.
(107) Evaluation reports CINEA, EACEA, EISMEA, ERCEA, HaDEA, REA.

ERCEA and CINEA consistently reported strong staff commitment and positive engagement indicators. HaDEA's rapid response to public health emergencies and REA's high degree of institutional memory further illustrate how internal human capital supported effective programme implementation. HaDEA, being a newly established Agency, achieved a high staff engagement as well in 2021 and with around 88% of posts filled by the end of 2021, ensured operational stability to support programme uptake.

Digitalisation also played a role in enabling delivery. The introduction and uptake of corporate tools such as eGrants improved the efficiency of processes in several agencies, including HaDEA, EISMEA and CINEA. ERCEA and EACEA made additional internal advances, using tools like Power BI and launching tailored dashboards. (108) However, the digital transition came with limitations. In several agencies, tools were reported as not always intuitive or adequately adapted to the specificities of diverse programme portfolios; at the same time this feedback sits within a context where agencies implement Commission work programmes while corporate systems—designed to harmonise modalities—follow standardised designs and may require lead time to support programme-specific requirements.

A major shift during the period was the i**ncreased adoption of lump sum** funding on some programmes. Lump sums were recognised by beneficiaries and staff as a positive change, simplifying financial management and reducing administrative burdens. (109) As discussed above, in EISMEA, HaDEA, REA and EACEA, lump sums improved programme delivery by shifting focus towards effective delivery of outputs.

Collaboration and alignment with parent Directorates-General proved to be another enabling factor. All the executive agencies benefited from structured governance and strong working relationships with their lead DGs, which facilitated responsiveness and policy alignment. REA, in particular, leveraged its feedback-to-policy mechanisms to ensure coherence between implementation and strategic direction. (110)

Delays in the adoption of certain work programme of delegated programmes posed a significant constraint for most agencies, especially during the 2021–2022 period. HaDEA, for example, faced substantial delays across multiple programmes, including EU4Health and the Digital Europe Programme, which resulted in compressed implementation schedules and administrative bottlenecks. (111) Similarly, EACEA and ERCEA struggled with late programme starts and had to deal with lower budget levels to execute and extended grant timelines. In some cases, such delays coincided with COVID-19-related adjustments, placing further strain on staff and systems.

Staffing flexibility, workload management and turnover rates and/or recruitment challenges, also emerged as key challenges. While the legal framework allows agencies to shift human resources between programmes in principle, in practice, implementation is uneven. (112) Further evidence gathered highlighted the high turnover rates and/or recruitment challenges that most agencies faced. (113) This impacts the Agency's ability to maintain institutional memory, expertise and operational efficiency. However, as much turnover relates to inter-agency mobility, this has offered opportunities to staff to explore new assignments, develop new skills and – for some – to access higher-level careers. Furthermore, limitations in career progression were also identified by agencies as a hindering factor, as discussed in EQ10. This was particularly the case when agencies' operational budgets and responsibilities were increased and hiring additional staff took time to meet the additional workload.

(108) Case Study IT tools.
(109) Evaluation reports all agencies.
(110) Evaluation report REA. Feedback to Policy case study.
(111) Evaluation report HaDEA.
(112) Evaluation report EACEA.
(113) Synthesis of six individual evaluation reports.

Agencies also reported a perceived lack of internal flexibility to reallocate staff to address workload peaks. At the same time, evaluation reports indicate that agencies have used tools such as internal reallocation, interim staff, and dedicated "floater" roles to support business continuity and manage demand spikes. ERCEA and HaDEA show active use of these arrangements; CINEA and EACEA have applied flexibility measures during crises or peak periods but note that existing arrangements may not fully address sustained or cross-cutting pressures; EISMEA and REA underline that, despite enabling provisions, practical constraints limit full application, such as the need to re-balance contributions of the various delegated programmes to REA's operating budget in line with such staff reallocations. Overall, the foundations for flexible staff allocation within the defined ceiling exist, but there is scope to strengthen workload monitoring, make fuller use of existing provisions, and share good practices across agencies to support more systematic and anticipatory workforce planning.

Finally, the **oversubscription of certain calls** strained Agency operations. (114) EISMEA reported high year-on-year increases in applications for some initiatives, such as WomenTechEU, and other innovation programmes (EIC) which significantly increased the workload of evaluators and administrators. ERCEA experienced similar issues due to high numbers of applications for Starting and Consolidator grants (115) These challenges highlight the importance of calibrating call design, evaluation capacity, and applicant communication to maintain programme quality and avoid bottlenecks.

EQ12: To what extent the measures envisaged in the ex-ante cost-benefit analysis of 2021 contributed to a proven increased productivity of the Agency?

Key findings:

Agencies have made varying progress in implementing the 2021 CBA efficiency measures, with divergent impacts on productivity across the network.

Productivity indicators, measured in terms of operational budget implemented per FTE show the highest performance for CINEA and HaDEA.

Continuous evaluation and adaptation of efficiency measures will be essential for all agencies to enhance their operational efficiency and effectively meet their objectives.

This EQ examines the extent to which the efficiency measures outlined in the 2021 ex-ante cost-benefit analysis (CBA) have effectively contributed to increased productivity within the agencies. The CBA aimed not only to generate scale effects, through larger budgets and programme groupings, but also to enhance productivity through structural and procedural improvements.

Based on the ex-ante CBA, (116) the executive agencies and DGs should implement a number of measures to become more efficient by:

- Organising more efficiently and effectively the necessary Feedback to Policy;
- Relying on new or improved IT tools;
- Implementing additional simplification measures made possible by the latest revision of Financial Regulation, like broader use of lump sums;

(114) Evaluation reports all agencies.
(115) Evaluation reports CINEA, ERCEA.
(116) COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Cost-benefit analysis for the delegation of the management of the 2021-2027 EU programmes to executive agencies accompanying the document Communication to the Commission Delegation of the management of the 2021-2027 EU programmes to executive agencies. (C(2021) 946 final}, p. 49.

- Increasing the average grant size where possible, keeping in mind delivery of policy objectives;
- Organising calls and procurement in a less resource intensive way;
- Reassessing the reporting requirements;
- Increasing the flexibility in the allocation of staff between the various programmes implemented by an Agency, allowing to better reply to the variation in the workload in the different programmes of the Agency.

The cross-analysis reveals both commonalities and divergences in their implementation and impact on productivity across EAs. The findings presented below come from the interviews conducted on the selected programmes and the workload assessment methodologies, which were triangulated with the findings presented in the individual EA reports.

Table 4. Efficiency measures envisaged in ex ante CBA and implementation by executive agencies

Measure	Implementation
Organising more efficiently and effectively the necessary Feedback to Policy	F2P mechanisms have become increasingly structured and strategic across agencies. CINEA introduced a Cross-programme F2P strategy in late 2021, aligning feedback processes with parent DGs' priorities and agency resources, while fostering complementarities across programmes through coordinated dissemination of policy-relevant information. At programme level, this framework enabled more systematic planning of F2P activities and strengthened collaboration with parent DGs. ERCEA established a dedicated sector for F2P, while HaDEA adapted quickly to the new framework and met or exceeded its 2022 targets. EISMEA contributed through regular bilateral exchanges, informal inputs, trend analysis, monitoring tools, interservice coordination, and ad hoc reporting—measures that effectively supported strategic and legislative discussions. In addition, During the evaluation period, a Horizon Europe F2P Group was also established. Together with the Commission's Strategic Foresight Network, this group contributes on demand to HE joint teams where policy DGs and agencies collaborate on F2P activities linked to different HE clusters. These networks provide additional opportunities for agencies to exchange with parent DGs and other Commission services, ensuring internal F2P activities remain aligned with emerging needs. In this group, representatives from each Agency and parent DGs discuss the implementation of the common approach, act as a community of practice by sharing experiences and best practices, identify synergies, and anticipate policy needs. These formal channels run in parallel with informal exchanges, where parent DGs liaise directly with agency F2P sectors or scientific units to address more immediate requirements.
Relying on new or improved IT tools	In terms of IT tools, CINEA and EACEA reported significant advancements in digitalisation, with CINEA highlighting the successful onboarding to eGrants. In contrast, EISMEA faced challenges due to the fact that existing tools were not always adapted to the specific activities implemented by the Agency, leading to continued reliance on manual processes. HADEA developed dedicated IT platforms for specific initiatives, while ERCEA is still in the process of developing new tools, indicating a varied pace of digital transformation across

Measure	Implementation
	agencies. REA was less impacted as it was already fully onboarded in eGrants, thereby not benefitting from further/additional efficiency gains through digital support tools.
Implementing additional simplification measures made possible by the latest revision of Financial Regulation, like broader use of lump sums	Regarding simplification measures, CINEA, EACEA, ERCEA, REA and HADEA successfully implemented strategies such as the use of lump simplified cost options sums as decided at policy level, which reduced administrative burdens. However, EISMEA struggled with limited implementation of simplification despite discussions around it.
Organising calls and procurement in a less resource intensive way	Agencies have taken steps to streamline calls and procurement processes (for example REA clustered evaluation calls), but significant challenges remain due to regulatory complexity, resource intensity, and structural constraints. While some simplification measures have been introduced, such as ERCEA's adjustments to eligibility checks, ethics reviews, and interim payments, balancing efficiency with the thoroughness of evaluation processes continues to be difficult. HaDEA and REA have engaged in efforts and reflections to improve procurement and call management, yet the frequency and structure of certain Annual Work Programmes complicate resource planning and may require regulatory changes to achieve greater efficiency. EISMEA faces similar issues, as high-value procurement procedures and strict requirements continue to demand substantial resources. CINEA, reports an increase in smaller but more resource-intensive actions, including procurement and identified beneficiary actions, which the Agency did not manage under the previous evaluation period.
Reassessing reporting requirements	Agencies have taken steps to simplify reporting requirements, reducing administrative workload and improving efficiency, although challenges remain in some cases. CINEA, REA and HaDEA has focused on streamlined reporting periods and tailored monitoring, signalling progress in reassessing reporting obligations. ERCEA has implemented significant simplifications, including reducing reporting frequency from twelve to six periods per year (with three in a light format using automated data extraction), cancelling the transmission of C.0 reports to DG RTD, and eliminating last-minute updates before Steering Committees. In 2024, the cycle was further reduced to five reports, and scorecard data is now reused for Steering Committees, contributing to efficiency gains in line with previous evaluation recommendations and the 2021 CBA. By contrast, EISMEA reports that current reporting practices continue to impose a high administrative burden on both the Agency and beneficiaries.
Increasing the flexibility in the allocation of staff between the various programmes	Agencies recognise the importance of flexibility in staff allocation to manage workload peaks, though the degree of flexibility varies. CINEA staff reported that existing measures are not always sufficient to address workload fluctuations effectively. ERCEA and HaDEA have introduced flexible allocation mechanisms, such as interim staff and "floater" roles, and reorganised departments to anticipate increased

Measure	Implementation
implemented by an Agency, allowing to better reply to the variation in the workload in the different programmes of the Agency	workload, which has improved operational efficiency. REA applied a workload assessment model based on programme-specific drivers, ensuring stability but limiting rapid reallocation; most imbalances are structural, so cross-unit support remains exceptional and broader adjustments require long-term planning. EISMEA could further enhance flexibility to reallocate staff between programmes during high-demand periods.

The productivity indicator calculated in the retrospective CBA (see 3.3.1) confirms the qualitative findings. While the actual productivity indicator (i.e. commitment appropriations / FTEs) was highest for CINEA and HaDEA, agencies like EISMEA, REA, and EACEA didn't see improvements in productivity over the evaluation period. This was assessed as part of the CBA mid-term review launched in 2024 that led to cuts effective as of 2025.

The interviews with the Commission officials (117) reveal a complex and evolving perspective on the delegation of programme management to executive agencies while retaining policymaking within the Commission. Stakeholders generally acknowledge the model's continued relevance and cost-effectiveness, noting that agencies typically operate with lower administrative costs. The current model based on delegation of programme implementation is recognised for allowing the development of specialisation within EAs while freeing up internal resources within the European Commission for policy making. This reflects a clear role specialisation with the EC that sets policy and drafts work programmes, and EAs implement them. Continuous cooperation and effective F2P ensure operational insights inform policy, while agencies contribute input without decision-making power.

In conclusion, while the six executive agencies have made progress in implementing the efficiency measures outlined in the 2021 CBA, the degree of success and impact on productivity varies. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of these measures will be essential for all agencies to enhance their operational efficiency and effectively meet their objectives. Additionally, it could also explore further if there is room for further centralisation of certain horizontal functions across the agencies, following initial follow-up measures undertook after a joint exercise between EAs and DG HR in 2019. Some interviewees suggested (118) that greater integration in areas such as communication, and finance could enhance efficiency and reduce risk of duplication, particularly where functions are broadly similar across agencies. These observations point to potential avenues for optimisation that could be explored in case they would bring significant FTE gains. Nevertheless, there are clear limitations from the legal framework to be respected (Authorising Authority, budget implementation responsibilities, etc.) as well as clear differences in the programmes that entail specificities as regards horizontal support.

(117) Cross-Agency interviews
(118) Based on cross-Agency interviews with DGs

3.2.2.2. Environmental sustainability and digitalisation

EQ13: How did the Agency reduce its environmental impact during the period and to what extent could it be further minimised?

Key findings:

All agencies committed to the "Greening the Commission" agenda, introducing environmental management systems and achieving EMAS certification.

Environmental standards were set with guidance from OIB and HR; digital waste reduction was supported by DG DIGIT.

CO_2 emissions were reduced by encouraging low-emission travel, online events, and greener commuting.

Agencies implemented energy efficiency measures, with support from OIB. Some, like REA, EISMEA and EACEA, relocated to more efficient buildings.

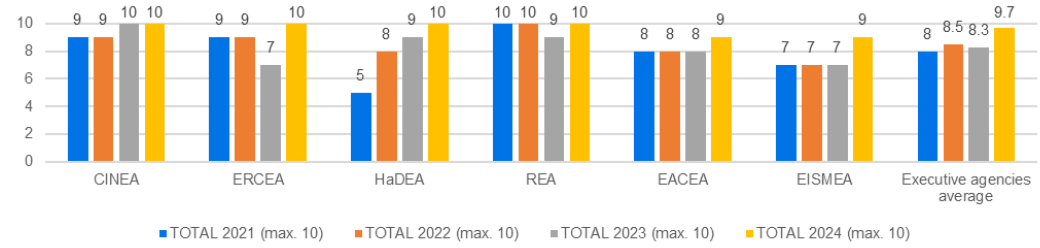
Monitoring systems are evolving. Not all indicators show continuous progress, partly due to expanded monitoring and the impact of the COVID pandemic.

During the evaluation period, all agencies implemented measures to reduce their environmental footprint in line with the Communication to the Commission "Greening the Commission" (DG HR, 5 April 2022) (119). The Communication outlines the Commission's objective to achieve corporate climate neutrality by 2030, including a 60% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 2005 levels. In this context, Agencies pursued actions such as EMAS accreditation, lowering building emissions, promoting sustainable commuting and low-emission travel, advancing waste reduction, and integrating green procurement practices. These initiatives were supported by DG HR, DG DIGIT, and OIB as part of the broader "Greening the Commission" strategy.

All agencies adopted the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS). Based on the scheme, targets were set, and action plans were set up to earn the registration. The processes were supported by DG HR and DG DIGIT and OIB. The plans were coupled with the EC Greening Strategy and the agencies' Greening Programmes. ERCEA has gone beyond baseline compliance by achieving full EMAS certification, setting the benchmark for environmental management among the agencies. The performance of the executive agencies concerning communication and staff awareness actions, as part of the EMAS Network annual benchmarking exercise, is presented in figure below.

(119) COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION "GREENING THE COMMISSION, Available at: Greening the European Commission - European Commission

Figure 12. EMAS benchmarking



Source: data provided by DG RTD

Across the six evaluated executive agencies, efforts to reduce environmental impact have also centred on buildings and working spaces, commuting and travel, IT operations and digitalisation, procurement and waste management, and staff engagement and awareness. In addition, several agencies have developed specific initiatives beyond these core areas, tailored to their operational or thematic context.

Buildings and working spaces:

- Three agencies (REA, EISMEA and EACEA) relocated the North Light Building (SB34) in 2023, which is rated “B+” in energy performance by the Brussels Region. The relocation is expected to enhance environmental sustainability through optimised space layouts, flexible work arrangements, and upgraded energy-saving infrastructure. While the positive effects for EACEA are already visible in terms of reduced energy use and improved workspace efficiency, EISMEA and REA continue to monitor the full environmental impact of the move as new occupancy data becomes available.
- ERCEA and HaDEA remained in the Covent Garden site. Efforts have been made as regards resource efficiency between 2021 and 2023 that were translated in measurable improvements. Electricity consumption decreased by 13%, gas by 9%, and water use by 36% over this period. These results reflect a positive trend in environmental management; however, the building retains a PEB energy label of “C”, and water consumption challenges persist due to evaporation losses linked to the roof cooling system.
- CINEA demonstrated incremental improvements in building performance. The energy efficiency rating of its premises increased to “D+” in 2021 (from “E” in 2020). Despite above-average consumption levels, the agency performed well on paper usage, water, and waste indicators, remaining within benchmark ranges.

Commuting and travel:

- All agencies encouraged sustainable commuting and limited duty travel, relying heavily on virtual meetings. CINEA and HaDEA, given their mandates focusing on environment, climate and health, actively promoted low-emission mobility options, such as cycling and the use of public transport. EACEA, REA, and ERCEA have institutionalised remote evaluation processes for (some) expert panels, drastically reducing travel-related emissions thereby generating significant environmental benefit as this measure has reduced airplane travelling by thousands of experts or applicants.
- HaDEA went beyond internal measures by aligning its mobility and event practices with the EU4Health programme’s sustainability principles, promoting eco-friendly events and offsetting emissions in major conferences.

IT operations and digitalisations:

- All agencies have expanded digital workflows, e-signatures, and e-archiving, contributing to a major reduction in paper use. CINEA, HaDEA, and EISMEA have streamlined their internal IT systems, migrating legacy programmes data to shared Commission platforms managed by DG DIGIT, cutting both duplication and energy consumption.
- Beyond standard measures, ERCEA leads in the digital transformation of grant evaluation systems, piloting AI-supported document handling, while EISMEA has introduced green IT procurement standards as part of its digital sustainability framework.

Procurement and waste management:

- Green procurement is now mainstream across agencies, with sustainability criteria incorporated into tenders and event planning. REA and EACEA use sustainability checklists for contracts and events, while CINEA and EISMEA have strengthened recycling and waste separation practices.
- REA has introduced environmental clauses in framework contracts for services and supplies.

Staff participation and engagement:

- Environmental awareness campaigns and behavioural initiatives are now part of the six agencies' culture. EISMEA, CINEA, and HaDEA have appointed "Greening Champions" to coordinate sustainability actions and monitor progress. EACEA and REA have introduced environmental training modules and promoted Commission-wide campaigns such as "Green Week." ERCEA organised energy efficiency workshops, hosted Earth Day awareness events, and took part in corporate energy-saving initiatives such as the BEST summer and winter campaigns.
- CINEA and HaDEA, in particular, have linked staff engagement with their operational missions, encouraging participation in green volunteering and awareness activities connected to environment, climate and health initiatives.

Moreover, all agencies have introduced measures for sustainable mobility. Staff are encouraged to switch to public or non-motorised transport for commuting. Some agencies have installed EV and ebike charging stations and joined inter-Agency campaigns on cycling. (120)

For business travel, specific policies have been introduced to reduce emissions from missions. These include a systematic switch to greener modes, specifically to use trains rather than aviation on distances below 550 km and active efforts to reduce the overall number of trips through greater use of hybrid and virtual meetings. Agencies have set internal reduction targets for mission-related CO2 emissions. For example, a further reduction of environmental costs of transport is achieved by organising events remotely. Agencies implement the EC guidelines for sustainable meetings and events. REA reported steady decreases in the number of short-haul flights and received awards for implementing environmentally responsible events and helped to develop the mentioned EC guidelines. Similarly, CINEA and HaDEA have encouraged low-emission travel modes in line with their strong environmental mandates.

Executive agencies reported measures in greening procurement. Respective plans set targets for facility management and purchases of office equipment and stationery that are more environmentally friendly. Internally, the agencies introduced waste management programmes alongside campaigns for more sustainable consumption.

(120) The reduction of emissions from the agencies' staff, experts and other mobility were guided by the Communication 'Greening the Commission'.

All agencies signal that they consider the efforts as ongoing, aiming at higher ratings in annual reviews of progress. The reviews are also evolving. Across the board, agencies acknowledge the need to better define and report on their environmental impact, in line with the Commission's broader sustainability goals. Under leadership of CINEA, all six EAs worked together on development of the Greening programme, aligned with the one of the Commission. It will be adopted in 2025. Data on emissions show an increase from 2021 to 2023, while remaining significantly below the emissions of 2019 (pre-covid reference period for the pledge to reduce emissions by 50%). They are reflecting the responses of agencies to the COVID pandemic and the return to normal operations afterwards. They are also showing the results of expanded monitoring. They are not useful for evaluation at face value.

EQ14 and EQ15: What did the Agency do to digitalise its activities? To what extent could more have been done to make the Agency more digitally efficient?

Key findings:

All agencies onboarded corporate IT tools under the Commissions' digitalisation rules. Efficiency gains have materialised while the timeline of adoption was uneven across agencies.

Digitalisation for communication and internal and external events have been strengthened.

Agency specific new systems for expert and knowledge management, performance monitoring and forecasting were introduced.

Adaptation of common IT tools and development of new ones for business intelligence and ethics have been done in close cooperation with the Common Implementation Centre (CIC).

All agencies relied on and benefited from the support of the Common Implementation Centre for development and maintenance of IT tools. The CIC's efforts to harmonise IT across agencies met with special demands of policy services and respective differences in programme cycles.

The Commission introduced IT systems and digital strategies to align the executive agencies with Commission-wide standards and policies, the Commission's digital strategy, and with the strategic objectives of the Commission and the agencies. (121), (122) The use of IT systems and of the common services is outlined in Article 8 of the Delegating Decisions of each Agency. (123)

In the interest of efficient implementation, the agencies have implemented common tools, adapted the common tools to agency-specific needs, and have developed new tools in certain areas.

The use of the common IT tools by the individual agencies is specified in the general and programme-specific Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the agencies and the parent DGs. (124) The general MoUs for all agencies contain provisions on the IT governance

(121) Council Regulation (EC) No 58/2003 of 19 December 2002 laying down the statute for Executive Agencies to be entrusted with certain tasks in the management of Community programmes

(122) Communication to the Commission: European Commission digital strategy. Next generation digital Commission. C(2022) 4388 final.

(123) The text in Article 8, Paragraph 1, of the Delegating Decision is the same for the four Agencies: "Where appropriate, the Commission shall make available to the Agency common IT tools, for its operational and administrative management, in order to integrate the Agency as much as possible within the IT environment of the Commission. That may be done on the basis of service-level agreements where appropriate." (CINEA, Delegating Decision 2021, Article 8, Paragraph 1)

(124) Memorandum of Understanding between the Executive Agency and the parent DGs - General Provisions for CINEA, EISMEA, ERCEA, and REA.

in the agencies, and, in some cases, also include points on the use of corporate IT tools. Programme specific MoUs contain in many cases detailed provisions on the tools to be used for the programme implementation. Each agency has its own IT functions, typically led by an Information Resources Manager. These local IT units coordinate closely with the central IT body, the Directorate-General for Informatics (DIGIT), which provides corporate IT services, infrastructure, and cybersecurity support, (125) and the Common Implementation Centre (CIC-RTD).

The timeline of adoption of the eGrants platform varied between agencies as it depended on the programmes implemented: REA and ERCEA were already using these solutions before 2021, while most programmes managed by CINEA, partially EISMEA, EACEA and HaDEA (for some programmes) transitioned from existing solutions to the corporate eGrants suite during the evaluation period. (126) Efficiency gains through digitalisation, compared to the period prior to the reference period of this evaluation study, were therefore higher for the programmes recently onboarding eGrants. Efficiency gains were achieved by harmonising documents and IT related processes across all agencies and Joint Undertakings. The common management also achieved major reduction of IT resources.

At the same time, some agencies (e.g. ERCEA, REA, EISMEA, CINEA, and HaDEA) maintain very specific processes that require further tailoring of the common IT tools. Some agencies (for example ERCEA) feel constrained in exercising supervisory and ethics monitoring functions by the common tools. CINEA maintains legacy tools to continue certain functionalities in parallel to the eGrants system.

The Common Implementation Centre works closely with the agencies to tailor the common IT to the needs of the agencies. It also responds to the needs of new policy initiatives by adapting the corporate tools. ERCEA delegated staff to CIC to integrate tailor-made functionalities into the common tools.

Parallel to the use of the common tools and adaptations for the agencies' needs, some of them use specific systems for knowledge management, business intelligence and forecasting. CINEA and ERCEA are the agencies with advanced own systems.

In addition, the CIC developed new IT instruments operated primarily by REA and ERCEA, like the new expert management system (ECS). It reduced the burden of administrative processes and is more user-friendly.

Agency-level digital strategies have matured considerably, with measurable implementation progress reported. For example, HaDEA's digital strategy saw steady uptake, while REA and EACEA achieved implementation rates of key principles, measures as an operational performance indicator, exceeding 95% by 2024. (127)

In the IT governance of the agencies, also the central coordination through DG RTD and the Common Implementation Centre (CIC) plays an important role. The agencies are in regular contact with DG RTD and discuss issues related to IT development and the use of corporate tools. Also, DG RTD's participation in the IT Steering Committees of REA, ERCEA and EISMEA supports the alignment with corporate IT strategies. (128) When it comes to collaboration, there is generally a high satisfaction regarding the exchange across agencies and the working relation with the CIC. However, there is an interest in having more central coordination and a more institutional exchange as well as a quicker reaction from the central services to solve issues related to the use of corporate solutions. (129)

(125) https://commission.europa.eu/about/departments-and-executive-Agencies/digital-services/it-governance_en
(126) Cross-cutting case study on IT integration.
(127) Analysis of six individual evaluation reports
(128) DG RTD is not member of IT Steering Committees of the agencies of which it is not a lead parent DG.
(129) IT integration case study

The interviews with the EAs show their commitment and the expectation of further productivity increases. However, the implementation of the digitalisation schemes varies considerably between the agencies.

Alignment with corporate tools and transition challenges

All agencies have integrated or are in the process of integrating corporate IT tools, such as eGrants and eProcurement. The eGrants system, in particular, has become the standard for grant lifecycle management across most agencies and other implementing bodies. EACEA, CINEA, and REA have fully adopted eGrants across programmes, while ERCEA contributed to the adaptation of the suite for ERC-specific needs. HaDEA and EISMEA have phased onboarding depending on programme maturity.

Despite its advantages in legal base and business process enforcement, standardisation and transparency, eGrants caused challenges in adaptability to programme-specific requirements, particularly for smaller or decentralised programmes (EACEA, CINEA). Agencies have reported that onboarding was resource-intensive and occasionally created additional workload due to manual workarounds and gaps in compatibility. In some cases, legacy systems were retained in parallel to cover functional limitations.

Internal digital tools and process automation

Several agencies introduced new IT tools to enhance process automation and internal workflows:

- The Common Implementation Centre (RTD), in close collaboration with REA, replaced the (outdated) EMI system with the Expert Common Service (ECS).
- HaDEA introduced an automated lump sum calculator integrated into eGrants developed by the CIC, improving funding transparency and efficiency.
- EISMEA deployed an AI-based platform for EIC Accelerator proposals. However, the decision to quit this platform in 2023 and to transit on eGrants triggered significant adaptation time.
- ERCEA launched a new intranet, redesigned to be user-centric and improve information access.
- CINEA developed the MAP-IT tool to collect geographical information for the CEF programme and is developing for the Innovation Fund programme a flexible AI-enhanced tool integrated in eGrants for gathering and exploiting data from projects for knowledge sharing and policy feedback.

Digital dashboards (e.g. QlikSense, Power BI) have been widely adopted (e.g. EACEA, HaDEA, EISMEA, CINEA and REA) to support real-time analytics, performance tracking, and feedback to policy functions. These platforms have significantly improved transparency and decision-making capabilities.

Data governance, cybersecurity, and digital strategy

Agencies have made substantial investments in data governance and cybersecurity:

- HaDEA fully implemented corporate data governance principles by 2024 and launched the Data Intelligence Network.
- REA performed well in cyber-readiness assessments and reported high compliance with data protection requirements despite a rise in security incidents in 2024.
- ERCEA strengthened data protection compliance and launched a Business Intelligence community of practice.

- EACEA and CINEA completed SharePoint migrations and enhanced cybersecurity awareness through internal initiatives.
- EISMEA strengthened data protection compliance, implemented risk mitigation measures for its IT tools and ran cybersecurity awareness campaigns.

Challenges and constraints

Despite notable progress in digitalisation, several cross-cutting challenges persist, alongside important lessons and emerging good practices:

- Limited ability of corporate IT tools to accommodate programme-specific requirements: while systems like eGrants have increasingly streamlined programme management, agencies continue to face delays and/or impossibility (for cost-effectiveness reasons) in getting them adapted to specific programme needs. This occasionally results in inefficient manual workarounds and increased workload, particularly for non-research or decentralised programmes. Digital implementability (including cost-efficiency for corporate systems) of programme-specific features should be assessed upfront, at the time these features are decided by the services in charge of the policymaking.
- User-friendliness and onboarding challenges: initial onboarding to corporate tools remains resource-intensive, especially where programme requirements diverge from standard templates. Smaller or first-time applicants often report difficulties navigating eGrants, which affects user experience (notably in EACEA and CINEA).
- Data quality and harmonisation issues: agencies using corporate platforms for business intelligence (e.g. CINEA, REA) noted concerns about the reliability and timeliness of centrally provided data (e.g. from CORDA), as well as inconsistencies in data structures across programmes and tools.
- Cybersecurity and data sovereignty considerations: while systems are generally seen as robust, some concerns were raised about reliance on third-party providers for data processing and the need for stronger attention to data sovereignty, especially where non-EU cloud services are used.

Despite these constraints, agencies generally acknowledge the benefits of increased digitalisation and the use of corporate tools, particularly the streamlining of administrative processes, the integration of business intelligence tools, and the improved user experience of unified systems like eGrants.

Emerging practices and innovation

Analysis of individual evaluation reports and IT integration case study shows that agencies are increasingly integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into their operations. EACEA has piloted internal GPT-based tools and is exploring broader AI applications for service delivery. Other agencies, including REA, CINEA and ERCEA, have established internal working groups on AI to assess potential use cases and implications, recognising that AI may significantly reshape core aspects of programme management. Several agencies are actively collecting internal knowledge on AI use cases to inform their strategies. While these early-stage initiatives reflect a growing commitment to digital innovation, they also illustrate the need for increased inter-Agency collaboration and a more centrally coordinated approach. Stakeholders noted that greater alignment in AI-related investments and governance could yield more efficient and harmonised outcomes across the executive agencies.

3.2.3. Coherence

3.2.3.1. Portfolio alignment and roles

EQ16: To what extent have there been overlaps, gaps, inconsistencies, complementarities within the programme portfolio managed by the Agency and how are these addressed?

Key findings:

There was strong thematic coherence of the programme portfolios of the agencies during the evaluation period, and no significant overlaps, gaps or inconsistencies.

Strong monitoring mechanisms were in place to ensure and facilitate this coherence.

A limited number of portfolio challenges did emerge on cross-cutting EU priorities, but were proactively addressed by agencies, either by cooperation or clarification of portfolios.

Findings reported across the six Agency evaluation reports show that the portfolios of the agencies were thematically coherent, and free from significant overlaps or inconsistencies. Most agencies manage a clearly defined set of programmes (or parts thereof) with little significant overlap or inconsistency at the programme level. Similarly, portfolio management is largely not felt to duplicate other agencies work.

This evaluation of the portfolio alignment and the assignment of roles between the Agencies and the DGs is largely based on stakeholder consultation and interviews with agencies' staff and relevant DGs.

Several agencies reported particularly strong coherence within their portfolios. CINEA's portfolio was assessed as highly coherent and free of overlaps, with external stakeholders demonstrating particularly clear awareness of its programme scope. For HaDEA, both Commission and agency stakeholders reported coherence and no major gaps. EISMEA, ERCEA, REA, and EACEA similarly reported no major overlaps, gaps, or inconsistencies. Indeed, this filtered into the grant structure at the ERCEA, which followed essentially the same structure, evaluation methods, and management, only differentiating in eligibility requirements (130).

Most agencies had developed a management and monitoring system to ensure portfolio alignment and address shortcomings. This was often both vertical and horizontal, requiring both proactive management and effective unit-level and other horizontal coordination mechanisms. The use of digital tools such as the eGrants system further supported coherence and integration, though was applied asymmetrically across agencies. Various structured coordination tools were used in various agencies to great effect, including inter-unit working groups, regular check-ins with parent DGs, internal mapping exercises, and a unified KPI and reporting system, all of which help monitor and streamline programme implementation.

Where potential overlaps exist, they are often addressed collaboratively, and synergies are leveraged to the benefit of both agencies. For example, REA and EACEA collaborate on Cultural Heritage projects (131). Similarly, HaDEA and CINEA collaborate in the management of the programme parts related to hydrogen (132). Interviews also show some ongoing similarity in

(130) ERCEA evaluation report
(131) REA evaluation report
(132) HaDEA evaluation report

scope between HaDEA and EISMEA on industrial and SME actions. However, this is closely coordinated between them and parent DGs to ensure coherence (133) (134).

Nonetheless, a limited number of portfolio challenges have emerged, often where programme mandates have expanded or where cross-cutting EU priorities—such as climate, environment or digitalisation—are addressed by multiple agencies (135): EACEA's decentralised call management occasionally led to overlaps and lack of clarity, especially in cross-cutting areas like digitalisation (136). This was particularly related to its expansion to include new delegated programmes under the EU's external policy instruments and pilot actions, which introduced additional complexity. The introduction of EU Missions and broad thematic priorities resulted in cross-cutting calls that sometimes overlapped. For example, steel research under the Research Fund for Coal and Steel (RFCS), managed by REA, was reported to overlap with steel research under Horizon cluster 4, managed by HaDEA, both supporting the Clean Steel Partnership, creating confusion among applicants (137).

Where such issues exist, several agencies have proactively taken steps to address overlaps and fragmentation, often either cooperating operationally between agencies and sharing responsibilities, or clarifying their portfolios to distinguish different funding streams. EACEA, for instance, upon realising there was duplication, integrated platforms such as eTwinning and School Education Gateway into a unified 'European School Education Platform' to solve this problem and streamline access. Agencies, especially REA, have increasingly engaged in inter-agency coordination, often informally, and REA adopted a clustering strategy that groups related projects under themes, which has helped mitigate fragmentation and ensure coherence. Similarly, EISMEA has clarified its portfolio through guidance tools to distinguish the scope and eligibility of overlapping funding streams—particularly between the EIC Accelerator and SME support under the Single Market Programme. Additionally, procedural inconsistencies (e.g. in differences in templates and timelines) between the Single Market Programme and Horizon Europe were harmonised through internal corrections. (138).

In sum, while some limited overlaps, gaps, and inconsistencies exist across the portfolios managed by EU executive agencies, these are generally clear, well understood and proactively addressed. Agencies show a strong baseline of portfolio coherence, supported by internal coordination mechanisms, digital systems, and close collaboration with parent DGs. Areas of overlap tend to arise from thematic convergence or programme evolution, but are mitigated through a combination of strategic integration, informal cooperation, and adaptive procedural tools. There is ongoing potential to systematise coordination further, particularly where informal mechanisms currently serve as the primary means of managing cross-agency coherence.

(133) HaDEA evaluation report
(134) REA evaluation report
(135) REA evaluation report
(136) EACEA evaluation report
(137) REA evaluation report
(138) EISMEA evaluation report

EQ17: To what extent is there a clear and appropriate delimitation of responsibilities and tasks between the Agency and the parent Directorates-General?

Key findings:

Delimitation of responsibilities is broadly clear, appropriate, well-defined, well-supported by governance tools and well-operationalised.

A common model: agencies handle the technical and operational aspects of programme management and implementation, while DGs handle strategic direction, policy development, and objectives

Minor unclarities of tasks emerged, mostly of new tasks, which were solved.

Synthesis of all six evaluation reports reveals that the delimitation of responsibilities between agencies and their parent DGs is broadly clear, appropriate, well-defined, and well-operationalised. The common operational model is evident: agencies handle the technical and operational aspects of programme management and are accountable for the implementation of the operational budget delegated to them, while DGs are responsible for strategic direction, policy development, and the setting of objectives (139). In line with this division, governance structures were generally felt to be fit for purpose and well-aligned with the agencies' core objectives, despite a few areas identified for potential improvement (140).

Various formal systems and governance tools underpin this role division. Steering Committees, Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), and Delegation Acts serve as key instruments to underpin the delegation of responsibilities and guide collaboration. The Guidelines on executive agencies provided also a more detailed framework for the various roles and the collaboration between agencies and DGs. All agencies maintain up-to-date supervision mechanisms, including daily contact between units, coordination meetings, and frequent communication with DGs supported by clear reporting lines, and regularly updated organisational charts and decision-making pathways. These systems are broadly regarded by senior management as effective (141). Definition of tasks at the programme level also broadly functions well, such as the division of roles between REA and DGs RTD and AGRI as parent DGs for RFCS and AGRIP, with parent DGs assuming responsibility for overseeing the programmes for which they are responsible (142). Across agencies, strong personal relationships often complement formal structures, helping to reinforce operational clarity and collaboration.

While most agencies report clear role separation, some limited overlaps and uncertainties have emerged, largely due to the task being new or being approached in a new way. For instance, CINEA had to adapt its standard practice to integrate Commission's involvement in evaluations for the JTM-PSLF. REA also found that, for some new features under Horizon Europe such as EU Missions, there was occasional blurring of responsibility due to the newness requiring close Agency-DG collaboration. CINEA similarly noted unclear roles in some delegated procurement tasks which CINEA had taken over from some parent DGs, with Agency stakeholders left feeling there was a lack of procedure or clear guidance on this, even if tasks were technically appropriately delimited (143). Some Commission interviews noted that sometimes the *nature* of the tasks blurred the lines of responsibility, as the demands of policy direction and operational

[139] Some exceptions to this model exist. For example, certain DGs, such as DG CNECT, continue to implement parts of their programmes in-house. In the case of the Digital Europe Programme, HaDEA implements only around 10% of the programme budget, with the remainder managed directly by the DG
(140) ERCEA evaluation report
(141) EISMEA evaluation report
(142) HaDEA and REA evaluation reports
(143) CINEA evaluation report

implementation can overlap, for instance where the Agency provides feedback to policymakers through the Common Framework for Feedback to Policy regarding EU Missions (144).

Other challenges were minor and operational. EISMEA encountered two cases in 2022 involving differences in interpreting implementation responsibilities and programming reviews. In the case of ERCEA there is a clear delimitation of responsibility between the agency and its parent DG. HaDEA experienced inconsistent levels between parent DGs, with some DGs involving HaDEA more in planning, events and communication than others, contributing to some confusion.

Reassuringly, most issues were effectively dealt with through agencies' internal coordination mechanisms. For instance, EISMEA resolved its two cases within six weeks using established escalation channels. Minor operational unclarities were similarly effectively handled internally. The ERCEA evaluation report notes one space for improvement, suggesting that their unique structure could be improved through more structured and consistent communication – especially between the Scientific Council and DG RTD.

Finally, while internal clarity is generally strong, external understanding of task division is limited. Although of limited significance, given agency and parent DGs ought to be working hand in glove, fewer than 40% of surveyed unsuccessful applicants across all agencies agreed that the delimitation of tasks was clear to them. This number is higher for beneficiaries and still higher for experts, usually comfortably above half, yet still below ideal numbers. There was some variation across agencies on this, with only 25% of unsuccessful applicants and 55% of experts knowing this division of tasks for ERCEA, but 38% of the former, and 73% of the latter for CINEA (145).

In conclusion, the division of tasks and responsibilities between agencies and their parent DGs is, in most cases, well-established and functional, supported by a combination of formal agreements, governance structures, and interpersonal coordination. Occasional ambiguities do arise, especially in the context of complex, evolving programme features or atypical Commission involvement, but these are typically addressed through existing communication and adjustment mechanisms.

While internal stakeholders largely perceive the structure to be clear and appropriate, external stakeholders often lack clarity on who is responsible for what. This indicates a need for better external communication and possibly more visible articulation of roles in public-facing materials and guidance documents.

(144) REA evaluation report
(145) ERCEA and CINEA evaluation reports

3.2.3.2. Feedback to Policy (F2P)

EQ18: How effective are the Feedback to Policy channels, means and methods and to what extent do they ensure an adequate information flow between the Agency and the Commission services, notably on the content of the projects and their results? To what extent did the Agency identify and inform parent Directorates-General on the projects with the most relevant results for policy? To what extent the Feedback to Policy activities are monitored? What are the areas for improvement, if any?

Key findings:

Agencies shifted from a situation where parent DGs used to ask for information on a need basis to more structured planning cycles and specific F2P strategies, often co-designed with parent DGs. Most agencies adopted centralised coordination models, with focal points in operational units ensuring alignment with DG counterparts.

F2P is discussed and monitored at different levels, with agencies having developed specific reporting mechanisms and tools. All agencies also report on F2P activities in Annual Activity Reports, with few agencies introducing F2P specific indicators. Impact measurement remains challenging.

Several agencies introduced mechanisms and tools to facilitate internal knowledge sharing and enable synergies across the programmes they manage.

The lack of a standardised monitoring framework for the allocation of resources to F2P significantly limits transparency and makes it difficult to assess the actual investment in F2P activities across the board during the reference period.

Persisting issues related to F2P mechanisms include limited coordination among DGs, reduced responsiveness of feedback channels to rapidly evolving policy contexts, some ambiguity between agencies and policy DGs regarding the scope of F2P activities, and fragmented and uneven data systems across the agencies.

Processes and structures for Feedback to Policy (F2P)

The evaluation period (2021–2024) marks a turning point in the formalisation and institutionalisation of F2P – a specific area of policy and programming-oriented reporting to parent DGs. Agencies have moved from fragmented, reactive approaches to more structured, coordinated, and, to some extent, strategically anchored F2P systems (146). The new version of the Guidelines on executive agencies adopted during this period, provided for the first time a dedicated section to set the general frame applicable to all agencies and all programmes.

In terms of **strategy and planning**, during the evaluation period, one of the key developments in F2P practices was the shift from reactive, ad-hoc information requests to structured anticipation and joint planning of policy needs (147). Starting with the Horizon Europe F2P Framework, all agencies progressively adopted a specific F2P strategy (148), and by 2024, each had developed F2P plans, either at agency level or programme specific. Despite differences in timing and maturity, this marked a collective move toward more institutionalised collaboration, with agency staff and DG mirror units co-designing annual priorities.

(146) More detailed analysis of F2P mechanisms and practices across six EU executive agencies is provided in the dedicated F2P case study.

(147) F2P case study

(148) CINEA developed a strategy only for cross-programme F2P 'Strategy on synergies and cross-programme Feedback to Policy'. It addresses specific needs of two or more of the Agency's departments or parent DGs and is complementary to the feedback provided on a programme basis.

According to multiple interviews with agencies' staff, planning processes worked more smoothly for Horizon Europe programmes, where the framework was directly applicable, while for others, agencies often had to invest additional effort in building awareness among DGs about the value and purpose of F2P. Most F2P plans are largely **demand-driven**, responding to DG-defined policy needs. However, agencies like ERCEA, CINEA and EISMEA, managing more forward-looking or bottom-up programmes, incorporated anticipatory elements and foresight actions. EISMEA works closely with its parent DGs to ensure coherence of approach and priorities in the F2P.

To implement F2P effectively, agencies developed **distinct organisational set-ups**, shaped by the specificities of the programmes managed, collaboration patterns with parent DGs, and available resources. Most agencies (REA, EACEA, HaDEA, ERCEA (149)) opted for a centralised coordination model, where a central team oversees planning and liaison (and in ERCEA's case also implements F2P actions). Others adopted hybrid models (CINEA, EISMEA), reflecting the complexity and diversity of their portfolios (150).

Both centralised coordination and partially decentralised models brought advantages and disadvantages in ensuring adequate information flow between the agencies and the parent DGs:

- Central coordination played a key role in enhancing the value and coherence of F2P activities (151). It enabled the adoption of horizontal initiatives at agency level that, to varying degrees, helped structure and streamline F2P efforts. These included the development of a planning guide (REA, EISMEA), internal workshops to support strategy implementation (HaDEA), shared repositories and knowledge-sharing activities (REA, CINEA, EACEA, ERCEA), and the centralisation of data analysis functions (EACEA, REA, ERCEA, EISMEA). Similarly, ERCEA was one of the first agencies to set up a dedicated F2P sector, enabling rapid implementation, systematisation of activities, and robust quality assurance of outputs. Central F2P teams facilitated cross-programme feedback by providing a horizontal view of the Agency portfolio and coordinating efforts to respond to cross-cutting requests (152). However, while central coordination strengthened consistency and visibility, it could also increase administrative overheads and require additional resources to maintain the necessary level of coordination across services.
- In contrast, more decentralised approaches, like the one adopted in EISMEA and in CINEA (for individual programme feedback) left the implementation of F2P to individual programme/instrument units and allowed them to manage their own feedback processes independently. This structure allowed for agility in responding to evolving policy needs at the operational level, though it also demanded stronger horizontal coordination across various teams to ensure coherence and alignment (153).

Despite these structural differences, **the actual execution of F2P activities - collecting, validating, and synthesising inputs - remains decentralised across all agencies**. Operational units are the main contributors, integrating F2P into their day-to-day work. The exception is the ERCEA where a dedicated sector not only coordinates but also implements F2P activities, with the support from operational units.

To ensure coordination across levels, **all agencies designated F2P focal points** in operational units, who maintain regular contact with their DG counterparts. These exchanges, both formal

(149) In ERCEA's case, the F2P sector not only coordinates but also implements the F2P plan, carrying out the related analyses itself.
(150) F2P case study.
(151) F2P cases study report
(152) Based on interviews with six Executive Agency staff.
(153) EISMEA evaluation report.

and informal, support alignment and responsiveness. In line with the 2021 guidelines (154), some parent DGs have also appointed F2P correspondents, helping streamline incoming requests and coordinate internally across DG units. Collaboration is further supported through shared virtual workspaces (e.g. Teams, SharePoint) in all agencies which facilitate document sharing, version control, and joint drafting of outputs.

Monitoring of F2P activities

Regarding the **monitoring of F2P activities and outputs**, all the agencies report on F2P activities through their Annual Activity Reports (AARs) (155), though the level of detail varies. While all agencies include major outputs and strategic developments, a few (such as HaDEA, EISMEA and CINEA) have introduced F2P-specific indicators (156) to enhance visibility. Beyond AARs, agencies have developed internal tools or separate reporting mechanisms to track F2P more systematically (157). Some agencies have introduced measures to assess the usefulness of F2P outputs. For example, EISMEA's KPI 3 - "Policy Support Impact of EIC Programme Managers' F2P Workshop" - measures and reports on the perceived usefulness of Feedback to Policy among workshop participants, who mainly come from various Commission Directorates-General and other EU bodies. However, as confirmed by multiple Agency staff interviews, across all agencies, F2P is not yet evaluated in terms of its actual influence or impact on policymaking, which is difficult to measure. The F2P information is part of a wider amount of information received by policy makers and that shape the policy decision, while being difficult to attribute to one or the other F2P deliverable a specific element of a policy decision. As a consequence, there are some limitations for executive agencies to improve the effectiveness of their efforts or refine their approach to better meet DGs' needs.

Effectiveness and adequacy of the F2P channels, means and methods within EAs

Analysis of evidence from six individual EU executive agency evaluations, interviews with parent DGs and agency staff, and case study reports indicate that, while there has been a general move towards more structured F2P processes during the evaluation period, **the degree of effectiveness of F2P channels varies across agencies**. In several cases, more formalised channels have contributed to improving the flow of timely information between agencies and Commission services, though challenges and areas for improvement remain.

The Feedback to Policy **strategies and annual plans developed by the executive agencies proved to be effective mechanisms for systematically gathering inputs on key policy priorities and for better understanding the information needs of the parent DGs**. These structured planning processes strengthened the alignment of agency activities with the evolving strategic agendas of the Commission and fostered more targeted and responsive Feedback to Policy. For example, ERCEA's annual F2P plans, co-developed with the parent DG and the ERC Scientific Council (ScC), allowed for early identification of policy priorities and structured internal coordination of information needs with the parent DG and ScC (158). EACEA's 2023 F2P strategy introduced clearer planning formats and outputs to support both programme-level and cross-programme priorities (159). REA's annual planning cycle, developed jointly with DGs, ensured timely and targeted feedback aligned with major policy needs (160). Informal exchanges between the Agency and parents DGs were important in ensuring alignment on

(154) Commission, Guidelines for the Establishment of executive agencies, April 2021
(155) Based on analysis of AARs 2021-2024 of EACEA, ERCEA, REA, HaDEA, CINEAR, EISMEA.
(156) CINEA included F2P output indicators (e.g. 'Quality and timely output provided') and reported on the F2P output delivered during the year by explaining reasons behind changes or delays (if any). HaDEA stands out as the only Agency having included a F2P process indicator ('Implementation rate of the F2P plan') to measure progression in the implementation of its F2P plans. EISMEA has a dedicated F2P indicator for F2P seminars organised by EIC Programme Managers; the indicator measures satisfaction level of participants coming mainly from many different DGs and other EU bodies.
(157) F2P case study
(158) ERCEA evaluation report
(159) EACEA evaluation report
(160) REA evaluation report

policy priorities and information needs: e.g. regular exchanges between HaDEA and its parents DGs were identified as crucial in jointly developing annual F2P plans, which defined priorities, deliverables, timelines, and indicators (161).

The available evidence also indicates that F2P plans and strategies were usually designed with a degree of flexibility to allow executive agencies to adapt their activities and outputs in response to evolving EU policy needs and emerging priorities and leaving room for ad-hoc requests. This adaptability helped ensure the continued relevance and responsiveness of the feedback provided. For example, ERCEA's F2P plans were adjusted to reflect new policy developments and scientific advances, while also leaving space to accommodate ad hoc requests from the ERC ScC, the parent DG and other Commission services (162). Similarly, HaDEA's F2P framework (163) combined structured annual planning with flexible mechanisms for ad hoc input, enabling timely responses to urgent or unforeseen policy demands. Based on the case study findings (164), in addition to formal strategies and plans, regular and informal exchanges between operational units in the agencies and their counterparts in the parent DGs were also crucial in ensuring both the flexibility and the relevance of the services delivered.

An analysis of the tools and F2P outputs developed by executive agencies during the reference period indicates these mechanisms were often tailored to the specific thematic and programme portfolios of each agency, reflecting the diversity of policy areas and management structures within their mandates. A key feature of these mechanisms was the development of programme-specific F2P processes, with agencies aligning their approaches to the nature and structure of the programmes they managed and building dedicated tools and reporting channels.

Although these approaches varied, they converged around a common objective: to systematically **extract, synthesise, and convey relevant insights from** programme/**project implementation supporting EU policymaking**. For ERCEA, for instance, the characterisation and mapping of projects against policy priorities appears to be more complex than in other agencies due to the bottom-up nature of the ERC funded research and the absence of pre-defined topics or policy objectives. Even before formalisation of F2P activities, the ERCEA developed tools such as "Mapping Frontier Research" and text-mining systems to identify relevant projects and support in the analysis of how scientific outputs relate to EU policy priorities. ERCEA, REA (with respect to MSCA) and EISMEA, all operating bottom-up programmes, are sharing experiences and practices to improve input from these programmes to thematic F2P demands of various policy DGs. Likewise, CINEA established programme-level feedback mechanisms tailored to different thematic areas. In the CEF programme, for example, it deployed tools such as MAP-IT to collect geo-tagged implementation data and used this to support policy input in areas such as hydrogen infrastructure. Similarly, EISMEA contributed to policy feedback through analytical outputs such as the EIC Tech Report, inputs to Horizon Europe Pillar II topics, and thematic workshops led by Programme Managers engaging multiple policy DGs.

Cross-analysis shows that the **effectiveness of F2P mechanisms varied by programme. The most advanced models were developed under Horizon Europe, where DG RTD worked jointly with agencies to establish a common F2P framework built around joint planning, and shared tools (165)**. This was most clearly exemplified by the 'Collaborative Framework for Feedback to Policy (166)', which was designed by the CIC DG RTD as part of the new common Dissemination & Exploitation Strategy for the results of HE. The Guidelines for executive

(161) HaDEA evaluation report
(162) ERCEA evaluation report
(163) HaDEA, Feedback to Policy Framework between HaDEA and its parent DGs, November 2021
(164) F2P case study report
(165) F2P case study report.
(166) Common Implementation Centre, Towards a "Feedback to Policy" framework in Horizon Europe, 2020 and Commission Decision of 15.12.2022 establishing guidelines for the establishment and operation of executive agencies financed from the EU budget and other sources.

agencies applicable to all agencies and programmes also provide a common definition of F2P aligned with Horizon Europe F2P framework.

Mechanisms for cross-programme collaboration

While most F2P activities during the evaluation period remained focused at the level of individual programmes, several agencies, such as CINEA, HaDEA, EACEA, ERCEA, and REA, also **produced F2P outputs that addressed issues cutting across multiple programmes**, albeit with varying degrees of structure and formality (167). CINEA distinguished itself as the only Agency to adopt a dedicated cross-programme F2P strategy, explicitly aiming to structure and systematise feedback activities that span different parts of its portfolio. In the case of ERCEA, cross-programme F2P was included in the Agency' F2P annual plans. In contrast, other agencies pursued cross-programme F2P in a more informal and ad hoc manner, mostly as their portfolio of delegated programmes did not provide for upstream or downstream links and often driven by specific policy needs or internal coordination efforts rather than by a formal strategic approach. To be noted that these cross-programme actions remained almost exclusively within the portfolio of programmes allocated to an agency.

The cross-programme F2P activities also meant that agencies had to develop **methods and knowledge transfer channels suitable for cross-programme analysis**. For example, REA strengthened internal collaboration by setting up a Knowledge Network and a central coordination team, enabling it to generate horizontal insights and exchange practices across operational units (168). EACEA advanced its cross-programme F2P approach through the 2024 Pilot Plan on Digital Transition, which brought together data, thematic analysis, and stakeholder engagement tools across several programme areas (169). Meanwhile, CINEA applied its cross-cutting strategy through a dedicated task force with F2P coordinators within each programme and sub-programme, as well as dedicated BI and communication team (170).

Satisfaction of parent DGs with Feedback to Policy channels, means and methods

Overall, evidence from Agency evaluations, interviews, and desk research suggests that **parent Directorates-General recognised considerable progress with the Feedback to Policy (F2P) products delivered by the executive agencies and the mechanisms developed and implemented by the executive agencies during the evaluation period**. While differences in structure and maturity exist across agencies, the mechanisms put in place were generally seen as adequate in supporting knowledge transfer, improving the relevance of policy inputs, and aligning programme/project insights with evolving policy needs. Interviews with agency representatives highlighted the strong motivation of staff involved in F2P, while representatives from policy DGs confirmed that agencies have fully embedded F2P into their core functions and are willing and well-positioned to support Commission services with high-quality inputs (171).

Examples from individual agencies show that the parent DGs recognised both the formalisation of F2P processes and the **agencies' efforts to tailor their outputs to policy priorities**. In ERCEA, for example, interviewees from both the Agency and the parent DG highlighted the benefits of the newly established F2P organisational structure, which enabled stronger internal coordination and more visible, policy-relevant outputs (172). Similarly, in CINEA, feedback mechanisms were seen as effective and relevant across a diverse programme portfolio by stakeholders from both the Agency and Commission services (173).

(167) F2P Case study report
(168) REA evaluation report
(169) EACEA evaluation report
(170) CINEA evaluation report;
(171) Interview – seven representatives from DGs.; F2P case study report.
(172) ERCEA report. Interviews with three representatives from the Agency staff, StC members, Parent DG, and internal document.
(173) CINEA report Interviews CINEA staff, Interview EC staff.

Key areas for improvement

Although significant progress was made during the reference period in structuring and maturing F2P channels across the agencies, evidence from individual agencies, interviews with parent DGs, and case study findings highlight **several areas where F2P products, policy channels, approaches, and methods could still be improved**:

- Several Commission interviewees noted that the annual planning cycle may constrain flexibility, limiting the responsiveness of feedback channels to rapidly changing policy contexts. Evidence from several agencies underscores the importance of regular, informal exchanges with parent DGs as a key mechanism for ensuring more agile and forward-looking identification of emerging policy needs (174). A notable good practice in this regard is ERCEA's and EISMEA's distinctive use of thematic foresight (175), which complements the more standard reactive approach to F2P. Through anticipatory initiatives focused on strategic scientific and policy developments, such as artificial intelligence and democracy, ERCEA and REA have enhanced their F2P capacity to align with evolving priorities, a practice that has been positively recognised by its parent DG (176).
- Another area for improvement is related to a certain lack of a shared understanding between agencies and policy DGs regarding the scope of F2P activities (177). While agencies have drawn on delegation acts, common definition of F2P in the Guidelines on executive agencies applicable to all agencies and programmes, Memoranda of Understanding and the Horizon Europe F2P framework, adopting either the same or slightly adapted definitions, some uncertainties remain about the boundaries between F2P and other activities. Stakeholders from parent DGs and agencies reported some/limited challenges in agreeing on the content of F2P plans due to differing interpretations. The common definition introduced by the Guidelines on executive agencies is part of the factors that helped improve the F2P exercise over the last year. However, as it is general and with an objective of being applicable to all programmes, it remains broad, leaving flexibility and by consequence in some instances ambiguity regarding expected outputs and their level of detail, notably for programmes where it is not complemented by a specific F2P framework (such as Horizon Europe F2P framework).
- At the same time, in some cases, limited coordination between parent DGs or timeliness in the communication of needs from parent DGs was identified as a potential challenge, occasionally making it more difficult for agencies to effectively deliver on the requested output (178). This coordination challenge is particularly pronounced for agencies working with multiple parent DGs, where diverging expectations or fragmented feedback can complicate the alignment process. For instance, staff from some agencies reported receiving input from several policy officers in an uncoordinated manner when submitting outputs for review. When such feedback points in different directions, agencies face difficulties in formulating a clear and coherent response (179). Strengthened coordination among parent DGs is also essential to avoid overlaps in requests (180), particularly given the sometimes-blurred boundary between communication on project outcomes and Feedback to Policy. Some agency staff perceived that this lack of clarity led to similar requests from different DGs requiring

(174) HaDEA report, REA report.
(175) Foresight Concept Note and Plan (2023-2024).
(176) ERCEA report.
(177) F2P case study.
(178) EACEA report; REA report; EISMEA report.
(179) F2P case study.
(180) ERCEA report.

distinct outputs, suggesting that greater synergies and alignment could be achieved through more coordinated engagement (181).

- Project data extraction for F2P remains suboptimal due to decentralised practices, varying tool usage across agencies, inconsistent analytical capacity, and limitations in document usability, often requiring manual effort and agency support, particularly where data from projects is not easily translatable in policy documents and where DG policy officers face challenges using available IT systems (182).
- Feedback to policy mechanisms remain fragmented across agencies, as exemplified by inconsistent tracking practices and programme-based management structures. DGs' F2P requests were sometimes cross-cutting, going beyond the portfolio of projects of one single agency, and could not be satisfied. It is notably due to the fact that agencies monitor DG requests and F2P activity using different tools and criteria (e.g. requesting units, topics, timing, political relevance), and F2P work is still largely managed within individual programme lines (183). This fragmentation in F2P sometimes extended to programme-level within the agencies: despite increasing convergence in digital tools and systems, the separation of programme-level and cross-programme feedback efforts sometimes limited the ability to obtain a coherent, comprehensive view of overall policy contributions, as in the case of EACEA (184). This challenge was particularly evident in agencies with partially decentralised approaches, such as EISMEA, where staff reported that fragmented responsibilities across programmes, coupled with the absence of efficient coordination mechanisms, hampered real-time monitoring of emerging results and the timely transmission of relevant insights to inform Commission policy (185).

Resource allocation for F2P

The ex-ante cost-benefit analysis of 2021 established 3% of additional staff resources in executive agencies to be dedicated to improving Feedback to Policy (F2P) activities—an important step in reinforcing the link between implementation and policymaking. However, at the evaluation time, **no consistent, system-wide framework existed to verify whether this 3% has been used for F2P activities or to evaluate the effectiveness of these resource allocations and whether they are proportionate to the needs**. Agencies have adopted varying approaches to tracking F2P efforts, often relying on internal assessments or self-reporting.

- REA, for instance, conducted an internal workload assessment in 2024, estimating that 4.1% of its staff effort (excluding RFCS and AGRIP) was devoted to F2P. Yet, the exercise also revealed the lack of a harmonised methodology to capture and categorise such work across departments (186).
- ERCEA reported that only 2.25% (187) of its full-time equivalents (FTEs) were engaged in F2P, based on a similar internal workload analysis and the Agency's self-reporting (188).

(181) Case study on communication practices
(182) Interviews with Agency staff and representatives from DGs. F2P case study report.
(183) Cross-analysis validation workshop
(184) EACEA report
(185) EISMEA report
(186) REA report; Research Executive Agency (REA). (2024). *REA Feedback to Policy Effort Measurement – 2024 F2P Data Collection – Methodological note and summary findings.* Internal document, Brussels.
(187) In 2024 around 2.25% of ERCEA staff was involved in F2P activities including the F2P team working in the dedicated sector (9.33 FTEs) and the time equivalent of 4.25 resources from the Scientific Department and unit A2 who contributed to F2P with part of their working time on a project basis (Sources: Workload assessment by Deloitte and written input from the Agency).
(188) ERCEA report

- EISMEA and EACEA both estimated that they dedicated around 3% of staff resource to F2P activities (189). EACEA also acknowledged difficulties in accurately measuring staff effort due to the diffuse and multi-level nature of F2P work, and the absence of systematic data collection.
- In 2023, HaDEA carried out a workload assessment in which staff self-assessed their time spent on Feedback to Policy activities for 2022. The results indicated an estimated 2.64% of total FTEs dedicated to F2P, based on self-reported data.
- Conversely, CINEA was unable to provide up-to-date data, due to the limited availability of monitoring information on F2P resource use (190).

In sum, while some agencies have dedicated about 3% of their resources for F2P activities, based on self-reporting and internal assessment data, the lack of a standardised monitoring framework significantly limits transparency and makes it difficult to assess the actual investment in F2P activities across the board during the reference period.

Additional analysis of F2P is also available in the dedicated case study, which is annexed to this report.

EQ19: To what extent did the agencies provide effective Feedback to Policy to the policy-making Directorates-General?

Key findings:

As agencies moved towards more systematic F2P practices, they produced outputs that increasingly informed high-level discussions and policy planning. DGs acknowledged the relevance of agencies' inputs but noted that some reports remained somewhat descriptive or operational and could benefit from more forward-looking analysis and synthesis.

Joint F2P initiatives remain limited, though isolated examples of coordinated responses to DG requests demonstrate potential for greater inter-agency collaboration.

While F2P activities are increasingly tracked, evidence of their actual policy impact is tangible while remaining limited; indicators mostly capture outputs rather than outcomes.

As evidenced in the previous section, between 2021 and 2024, F2P mechanisms across executive agencies became increasingly structured and better aligned with evolving policy priorities. While the role of F2P remains focused on efficiently identifying and providing evidence to inform the programming and policymaking needs of the parent DGs, this evolution reflects a broader institutional shift towards more systematic and demand-driven policy support. Although comprehensive, system-wide evidence on the direct impact of F2P outputs remains limited (191), multiple sources, including agency-level evaluations, interviews with parent DGs, and documentary analysis, point to tangible contributions of agency F2P activities to policymaking processes.

In several cases, outputs produced by the agencies, were used to inform high-level strategic discussions and decisions. ERCEA's reports contributed to scientific opinions by the European Commission's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors and the Scientific Advice Mechanism, and were referenced in key events and official communications, including statements on AI and

(189) EISMEA report; EACEA report.
(190) CINEA report; HaDEA report.
191 The F2P information is part of a wider amount of information received by policy makers and that shape the policy decision, while being difficult to attribute to one or the other report a specific element of a policy decision. As a consequence, there are some limitations to measure the impact of F2P outputs on policymaking.

democracy (192) (193). EISMEA provided analytical inputs such as tech reports and thematic briefings that fed into preparations for the 10th EU Framework Programme (FP10), particularly supporting DG RTD and DG CNCT (194). CINEA's feedback was also perceived as timely and policy-relevant, with stakeholders from parent DGs noting its utility in shaping future policy directions (195).

However, despite these positive examples, available evidence also points to persistent challenges regarding the overall effectiveness of F2P outputs in directly informing decision-making. A recurring observation from several representatives of parent DGs is that, while F2P outputs are generally informative and relevant, they can at times be too descriptive or operational in nature, lacking the level of synthesis or forward-looking perspective that would further enhance their policy usefulness. In certain cases, DG representatives noted that F2P contributions tend to summarise activities or present implementation data, whereas more analytical or strategic insights would be valuable for informing higher-level policy discussions. This issue was raised in several agencies. In REA, for example, although some DGs appreciated the relevance of its inputs, others, particularly in dynamic policy areas such as those managed by DG RTD, noted that certain briefs were based on outdated data and therefore insufficiently aligned with current priorities (196). In HaDEA, the growing volume of outputs was not matched by greater strategic value; feedback was sometimes seen by some of the interviewees as focused on metrics such as project counts and funding volumes, without deeper interpretation (197). Similarly, EACEA's outputs were often seen as concentrated on participation data and general themes, lacking the targeted insights needed to inform higher-level decisions, prompting some DGs to rely on internal policy analysis instead (198). At ERCEA, although the quality of scientific analysis was widely recognised, feedback from the parent DG indicated that the policy relevance of outputs could be further enhanced through clearer strategic framing. Strategic framing refers to the explicit positioning of analytical findings in relation to key EU policy priorities and audiences, for example by systematically highlighting how results inform specific policy objectives, flagging implications for ongoing legislative or programming processes, and situating the research within current strategic debates (199). In EISMEA, while feedback under Horizon Europe and I3 instrument was viewed as more demand-driven and sometimes foresight-oriented, the input provided under the SMP was often seen as overly operational and fragmented—requiring additional synthesis to support strategic-level policy discussions (200).

Beyond these programme-specific dynamics, DGs also expressed F2P requests that were wider than one agency's portfolio of projects (e.g. typically the case for environment topics which are cross-cutting) but **cross-programme F2P that extended beyond individual agency portfolios remained limited**. Joint analysis across agencies was rare, though there were occasional cases, such as coordinated responses to DG queries (e.g. via CORTEX), where agencies aligned approaches through established communication channels. This can be partly explained by the fact that, during the evaluation period, agencies prioritised setting up and structuring their internal F2P processes. These instances show potential for broader inter-agency cooperation, though they are still the exception rather than the norm (201). Such coordination should also be supported by DGs, notably as regards the scope of the requests, as well as of the strategic needs and what would serve them best.

(192) ERCEA Annual Activity Reports 2021-2024.
(193) ERCEA report.
(194) EISMEA report.
(195) CINEA report
(196) REA report
(197) HaDEA report
(198) EACEA report
(199) ERCEA report.
(200) EISMEA report. F2P case study.
(201) Based on interviews with Commission and Agency staff; F2P case study.

The second key concern is related to monitoring and the available evidence of the impact and usefulness of F2P outputs for the policymakers within the DGs. Measuring the impact of F2P outputs is difficult as F2P outputs are only one element among many others when a DG is designing a policy. Hence the indicators used by agencies were limited to output-level measures. For several agencies, this **limited awareness of the use and impact of F2P outputs was identified as a key weakness in the feedback loop** that was also seen as a limitation to improve the quality of F2P outputs in the future. Interviews with Agency staff consistently confirmed that the limitations to assess the policy use of F2P is seen as one of the constraints for improving the effectiveness of their efforts or refining their approach to better meet the needs of parent DGs (202) (203). While recognising inherent difficulties in identifying the impacts to policy decisions of specific reports, several agencies have recently initiated dedicated measures to more systemically track the use and usefulness of F2P for parent DGs:

- REA, EACEA, HaDEA were planning to deploy ad-hoc surveys to parent DGs to assess the effectiveness of the support provided (204).
- EACEA's 2025 F2P plan template includes a dedicated field for parent DGs to specify the intended use of the requested output, with the aim of improving the monitoring of how policy feedback is actually used (205). A similar approach has also been introduced by REA before the 2025 F2P plan.
- REA was planning to organise dedicated thematic meetings with the DGs to make the link between a F2P output delivered by REA and a policy initiative adopted by the Commission to keep both sides informed.
- EISMEA's ten EIC Programme Managers (PMs) organise annual F2P workshops, to which all EISMEA's parent and other policy DGs are invited. The workshops measure the satisfaction of the participants in terms of usefulness of Feedback to Policy and are reported in EISMEA's AAR.

The above examples highlight the importance of actively engaging agencies and parent DGs to exchange feedback on the usefulness of F2P outputs, while also reflecting the varying degrees of effort made by agencies to establish systematic feedback loops. Looking ahead, several agencies and parent DGs identified a gap in the current performance indicator framework, also noting that existing data collection rarely extends to capturing the outcomes and impacts of supported projects due also to other limitations (e.g. diversity of inputs received at the time of elaborating a policy). Expanding the use of indicators in these areas could not only enhance the quality and strategic relevance of F2P outputs but also strengthen the overall policy feedback cycle (206).

(202) ERCEA, REA, EISMEA, ECEA reports.
(203) F2P case study
(204) Interview - REA, EACEA, HaDEA; F2P case study.
(205) F2P case study.
(206) KPIs case study.

3.3. Comparative analysis of the agencies from the perspective of the results of the retrospective cost-benefit analysis

This section provides the findings of the comparative retrospective CBA (3.3.1). As mentioned in the efficiency Section (3.2.2.1), this chapter presents the whole analysis and exploits the Annexes for more details. Despite that, section 0 provides the findings of the comparison of the workload assessment methodologies across EAs.

3.3.1. Comparative CBA

This section provides the detailed results of the comparative retrospective CBA in terms of Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), staff costs, and productivity. The methodology, data sources and assumptions can be found in the methodological Annex, which is presented in a separate document.

3.3.1.1. Introduction and methodology

Objective and scope

The objective of the retrospective cost-benefit analysis (CBA) was to what extent the executive agencies have achieved the expected savings and productivity gains outlined in the 2021 ex-ante assessment. It examines whether delegating programme management to the executive agencies (EAs) was justified.

The CBA compared ex-ante estimates and actuals regarding full-time equivalents (FTEs) and staff costs (incl. Title I, staff expenditure and Title II, expenditure for building and infrastructure) at the levels of EA and Directorate Generals (DG) for contract agents (CA) and temporary agents (TA), as well as commitment appropriations (in million EUR) at programme/pillar level for the years 2021-2024. (207)

The CBA only includes those programmes / pillars which were delegated to the EAs in the current Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) through the respective Specific Financial Statement (SFS). (208)

This ensures the comparability of the initial CBA and commitments in the SFS with the actuals estimated for the different scenarios.

It is also important to note that the CBA does not cover third country contributions.

Why does it not cover third country contributions?

The 2021 ex-ante CBA specifically focuses on and is limited to the analysis of programmes implementing actions primarily tied to EU policies. Therefore, it covers programmes financed from EU budget (including Next Generation EU (NGEU)) and other contributions from the European Trading Scheme for the Innovation Fund, reflows from financial instruments for the PLF-JTM and voluntary contributions from Member States for the Renewable Energy Financing Mechanism.

Third-country contributions are, therefore, not considered in the retrospective CBA as they (1) pertain to different funding frameworks and governance structures; and (2) would jeopardise the comparability with the ex-ante estimates and the actuals (i.e. C1 credits with EU budget and non-C1 credits against NGEU).

(207) Please note that the evaluation assesses the operations of the Agency in 2021 from 1 April to 31 December, i.e. 9 months, in line with the tender specification. In the CBA, 2021 was a full year with 12 months.
(208) This approach was agreed with the Commission to ensure comparability with the initial CBA.

It is, therefore, important to mention that the comparison of the estimated and actual productivity (i.e. the ratio of commitment appropriations in million Euro per full-time equivalent of staff (FTE)) does not include legacy and additional programmes that were managed by EAs with available FTEs. Therefore, the analysis below does not represent the entirety of EAs' actual workload and productivity.

Approach and methodology

The retrospective CBA analyses the actual programme implementation by the EA ("optimised scenario") in comparison to an in-house scenario and the status quo scenario, by using the same assumptions of the ex-ante CBA for the FTEs and replacing the estimated average costs assumptions with the actual average cost assumptions.

The three scenarios of the ex-ante CBA were the following (209):

- **In-house scenario**, which is a theoretical re-internalisation of all EU programmes in the Commission;
- **Status quo scenario**, in which the delegated budgets change in line with the new financial framework but the allocation of (sub)programmes in the agencies is unchanged compared to the current situation;
- **Optimised allocation of programmes scenario**, which is based on the initial orientations provided by the Communication of 29 April 2020 and a further adaptation due to recent political developments.

The average staff costs at EA level were calculated based on the Title I (staff expenditure) and Title II, which include expenditure for building and infrastructure.

Cost equation for the average staff costs at agencies:

Average staff costs by category = average staff expenditure (Title I) by category (CA/TA) + average other costs (Title II) per FTE

The costs related to Title III, the costs related to management of programmes are not included in the calculations, as these are the same between the different scenarios considered and would not help to identify the most efficient scenario. Staff financed from third-party contributions were not included in the analysis.

Data and assumptions

The assumptions follow the original CBA assumptions. It was not feasible in the context of this evaluation to consider real 'in-house' data for the few programmes still being implemented by the Commission and extrapolate to a whole in-house scenario while ensuring full comparability with the agencies' scenario in terms of overheads.

Several data sources were used to conduct the CBA, which are highlighted in the following table.

(209) See Cost-benefit analysis for the delegation of the management of the 2021-2027 EU programmes to executive agencies (European Commission, 2021, p.3).

Table 5: Data sources used in the retrospective CBA

Data point	Estimated	Actuals
FTEs and commitment appropriations	SFS / ex-ante CBA (210)	1. FTEs: Annual Work Programmes (AWPs) (211) 2. Commitment appropriations: Annual Activity Reports, Inputs concerning actual commitment appropriations received from EAs directly for programmes / pillars not
	- C1 credits	- EU Budget
	- Non-C1 credits	- Next Generation EU Budget (NGEU), Emission Trading Scheme for IF, MS voluntary contributions for REFM, financial instrument reflows for JTM.
Average cost per FTE	SFS / ex-ante CBA	Final annual accounts of the EAs on Title I & II (based on commitment appropriations)

Source: Authors elaboration.

The following table summarises the main assumptions made in the retrospective CBA in order to perform the comparison between actual and estimated numbers and between the three scenarios.

The assumptions for the staffing mix and the number of staff shown in the table below are the same as in the 2021 ex-ante CBA.

Table 6. Main assumptions of the retrospective CBA

Context	Assumption
Staffing mix (same assumption as in ex ante CBA)	**DGs** - Temporary Agents (TA)/ Establishment plan posts: 70% - Contract agents (CA)/ External personnel: 30% **EAs** - TA: 25% - CA: 75%

Number of staff (same assumption as in ex ante CBA)	**Optimised scenario**
	- Actual total FTE DG: 2.4% of actual total FTE EA
	In-house scenario
	- Actual total FTE DG: +10% of actual total FTE EA in optimal scenario
	Status quo scenario
	- Actual total FTE DG: 2.4% of actual total FTE EA
	- Actual total FTE EA:
	  ○ For split programmes: +5% of actual total FTE EA in optimised scenario
	  ○ For all other programmes: Same as actual total FTE EA in optimised scenario

(210) Including the Excel file on the CBA model received from DG BUDG and the Staff working document of the CBA.

(211) The data concerning FTEs includes the number of Seconded National Experts (SNEs) was included in the numbers for the Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs). This data is available in the AWPs.

Context	Assumption

Average staff costs (other assumptions as in ex ante CBA)	**Optimised scenario**
	- Actual average cost per FTE at EA = Average Title I per FTE + Average Title II per FTE (212):
	  o Average cost per FTE (Title I) = Title I / FTE TA and FTE CA
	  o Average cost per FTE (Title II) = Title II / Total FTE
	- Actual DG cost of coordination: Actual average costs per FTE at DG per TA and CA (213)
	In-house scenario
	Actual average costs per FTE at DG per TA and CA **Status quo scenario**
	- Actual average cost per FTE at EA
	  o For BBA (Brussels Based Agencies): same as for optimised scenario
	  o For LBA (Luxembourg Based Agencies): Same ratio as in the estimated costs was applied, i.e. +23% of average cost per FTE CA of BBA CA; +17% of average cost per FTE TA of BBA TA
	- Actual DG cost of coordination: Actual average costs per FTE at DG per TA and CA received from DG RTD

Source: Authors' elaboration.

A more detailed description of the underlying assumptions for the CBA is provided in the methodological Annex (section 1), including (1) the average cost calculation for the actual average FTE costs in the optimised scenario; (2) the cost assumptions for average cost per FTE (214) by scenario.

Structure of this CBA chapter

The following section comprises the core data analysed as part of this CBA:

- Full-time equivalents;
- Staff costs and savings; and
- Productivity.

In relation to each of these aspects, we present estimated data (from the previous CBA / SFS) and actuals for each of the three scenarios (optimised, status quo, in-house) and for each of the years 2021-2024. However, actual productivity data for programmes currently implemented in-house was not considered, instead the analysis follows the same assumptions as in the original model updated with actual average costs for the Commission.

The data is presented in a graphic format in order to visualise the overall results of the CBA as the bottom line for the EAs as a whole. More granular data is provided in the Annex (see section 5.2.1 to 5.2.4).

The sections afterwards elaborate on the EAs workload assessment methodology.

(212) Note that the numbers for Title I and Title II are based on the financial accounts – initial adopted budget. See also the Table below for the exact numbers.

(213) The data was provided by the Commission.

(214) Average staff cost for: DG TA (Directorate General Temporary agents), DG CA (Directorate General Contract agents), FTE EA CA (Full-Time Equivalents at Executive Agencies Contract Agents), FTE EA CA (Full-Time Equivalents at Executive Agencies Temporary Agents), BBA CA (Brussel Based Agencies Contract Agents), BBA TA (Brussel Based Agencies Temporary Agents); DG cost of coordination (sum of total DG cost at TA and CA level for overseeing EAs).

3.3.1.2. Main findings of the cost-benefits analysis

This section presents the main findings of the retrospective CBA, which was carried out to examine the efficiency in comparison to initial expectations and alternative scenarios. (215) Methodologically, it compares the assumptions of the SFS/ex-ante CBA with those developed during the period 2021-2024. (216). Please note that when we compare the scenarios, the actual in-house scenario is a hypothetical model and does not reflect actual figures.

The findings of the retrospective cost-benefit analysis support the Commission's decision to outsource the work to the six executive agencies. As shown in the figure below, the aggregated actual estimated savings (EUR 702 million) of the optimised scenario compared to the in-house scenario were **13% higher** than the savings estimated in the 2021 exercise (EUR 620 million), under the hypothetical assumption that the Commission productivity would be 10% lower. The additional savings of the optimised scenario amounted to **EUR 82.6 million** over the four-year period.

In terms of costs, most EAs faced an increase in staff costs from 2021-2024. The comparison between estimated and actual staff costs reveals that most EAs experienced higher actual costs than initially projected, particularly in 2023 and 2024. This suggests that inflation and recruitment challenges (in particular at the beginning of the evaluation period) significantly impacted actual costs, leading to a shift from lower costs in the earlier years to higher costs in the later years. For the entire time period from 2021 to 2024, EACEA, EISMEA, and ERCEA had higher staff costs of EUR 3-6 million. Conversely, CINEA, HADEA and REA reported lower costs than estimated, with HADEA undercutting estimates by EUR 8.3 million, mainly due to its uptake of activities in 2021.

The productivity levels (i.e. commitment appropriations / FTEs) across the EAs for the evaluation period displayed significant variability from its estimates, influenced by fluctuations in commitment appropriations and staffing changes. All agencies exceeded estimated productivity levels.

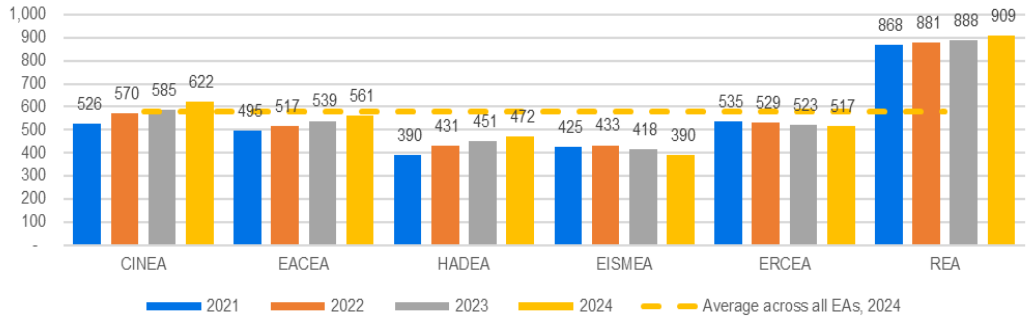
Full-time equivalents (FTEs)

When examining the actual FTEs in the optimised scenario over the years, a consistent upward trend could be observed across most EAs, with REA maintaining the highest number of FTEs of 909 in 2024. For CINEA, EACEA, HaDEA and REA the number of FTEs increased over the evaluation period. In contrast, EISMEA's figures fluctuated, peaking in 2022 to 433 FTEs before declining in subsequent years due to the staff cuts, resulting in 390 FTEs in 2024. Similarly, ERCEA showed a slight decrease in FTEs over time, from 535 FTEs in 2021 to 517 FTEs in 2024. The actual average number of FTEs across EAs in 2024 amounted to 559 FTEs (see yellow line in the figure below).

(215) EQ understanding and relevance: This evaluation question deals with examining the efficiency in comparison to initial expectations and alternative scenarios. It seeks to assess whether the actual performance, productivity gains, and costs align with the projections made in the 2021 ex-ante cost-benefit analysis and how these outcomes compare to an in-house management scenario. This question is highly relevant as it evaluates the efficiency of resource allocation and decision-making, providing insights into whether the chosen management approach delivered optimal value.

(216) Methodology: The retrospective CBA analysis aims to evaluate the extent to which Executive Agency has realised the anticipated savings and productivity gains outlined in the ex-ante CBA for the period 2021-2024. To conduct this analysis, the study compares ex-ante estimates with actual data on full-time equivalents (FTEs), staff costs, and commitment appropriations, assessing the performance of the EA ("optimised scenario") against both the in-house and the status quo scenario. The actual FTE numbers were taken from the AWPs and the estimated from the SFS/ex-ante CBA. The detailed description of the methodology and the assumptions can be found in the Methodological Annex presented in a separate document to this report.

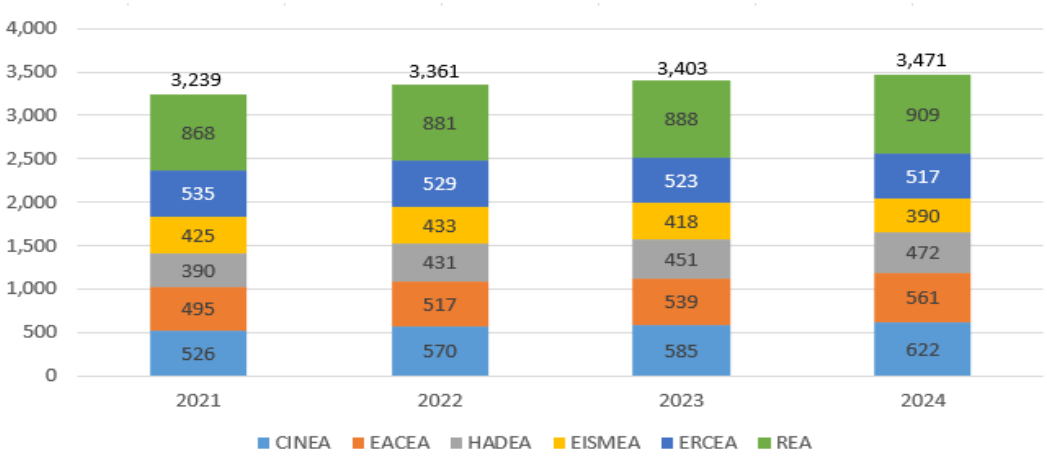
Figure 13. Actual FTEs in the optimised scenario across EAs for 2021-2024



Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

Overall, the actual total number of FTEs increased from 3,239 FTEs in 2021 to 3,471 FTEs in 2024 as can be seen in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Actual FTEs in the optimised scenario per year across EAs

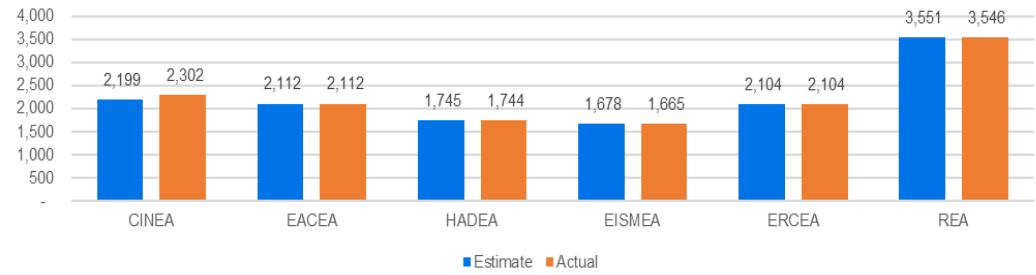


Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

The comparison of the **estimated versus actual FTEs** from 2021 to 2024 in the optimised scenario indicated only minor deviations for all EAs, except for CINEA. In the optimised scenario, actual FTEs at CINEA were higher than estimated FTEs, with an actual count of 2,302 (4-year aggregate) compared to an estimate of 2,199 (4-year aggregate), resulting in a difference of 104 FTEs. EACEA and ERCEA aligned perfectly with their estimates. HADEA demonstrated a minimal discrepancy of 1 FTE, while EISMEA fell short of its estimate by 13 FTEs. REA, with a difference of 5 FTEs, also showed a close match to its estimate.

The deviations in FTEs across the six EAs were influenced by several factors. CINEA saw an increase in FTEs due to an amended mandate that delegated new actions, necessitating the creation of additional positions. In contrast, EISMEA faced recruitment difficulties stemming from the late finalisation of its established plan, which delayed formal recruitment procedures. Additionally, the transfer of 13 FTEs back to the European Commission in 2023 led to a significant reduction in staffing levels. HADEA maintained stable FTE numbers, with actual staffing closely mirroring estimates, reflecting a steady growth in its activities. REA reported minor discrepancies between estimated and actual FTEs, indicating stable staffing levels throughout the evaluation period.

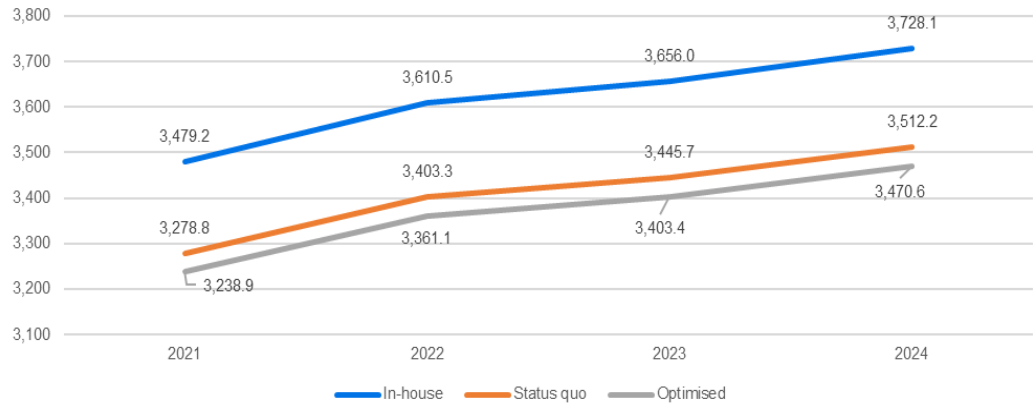
Figure 15. Estimated vs. actual FTEs in the optimised scenario for the six EAs, aggregated for 2021-2024



Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

The analysis of the actual aggregated number of FTEs across all EAs in the three scenarios confirms that the optimised scenario outperformed the status quo and confirmed lower average staff costs compared to in-house scenario.

Figure 16. Aggregated FTEs by scenario for 2021-2024



Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

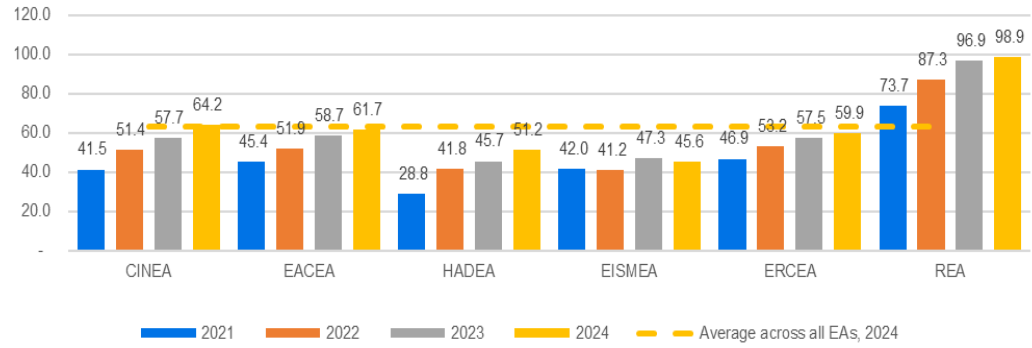
Table 8 in Annex 5.2.1 shows the estimated and actual FTEs by scenario for all EAs for the years 2021 to 2024 as well as on an aggregated level. Additionally, Annex 5.2.3 includes the figures at FTE level differentiating between contract agents and temporary agents in the optimised and the in-house scenario at the aggregated level.

Staff costs

In terms of **actual staff costs** (incl. Title I and Title II of the agencies' administrative budget), the analysis of the optimised scenario revealed significant variations across the six EAs from 2021 to 2024. By 2024, CINEA's costs have risen to EUR 64.2 million, reflecting a steady increase from EUR 41.5 million in 2021. EACEA followed a similar trend, with costs rising from EUR 45.4 million in 2021 to EUR 61.7 million in 2024. HADEA showed a notable increase as well, with costs increasing from EUR 28.8 million to EUR 51.2 million, which is in line with the rising number of FTEs over the evaluation period. In contrast, EISMEA's costs exhibited a less consistent pattern, starting at EUR 42.0 million in 2021, increasing to 47.3 million in 2023 and slightly decreasing to EUR 45.6 million by 2024. ERCEA's costs also demonstrated a steady increase, from EUR 46.9 million to EUR 59.9million. REA, while maintaining the highest costs

overall, witnessed a rise of staff costs from EUR 73.7 million in 2021 to EUR 98.9 million in 2024. The average staff cost across all agencies in 2024 amounted to EUR 63.6 million (see yellow line in the figure below).

Figure 17. Actual staff costs in the optimised scenario per EA for 2021-2024, in million EUR

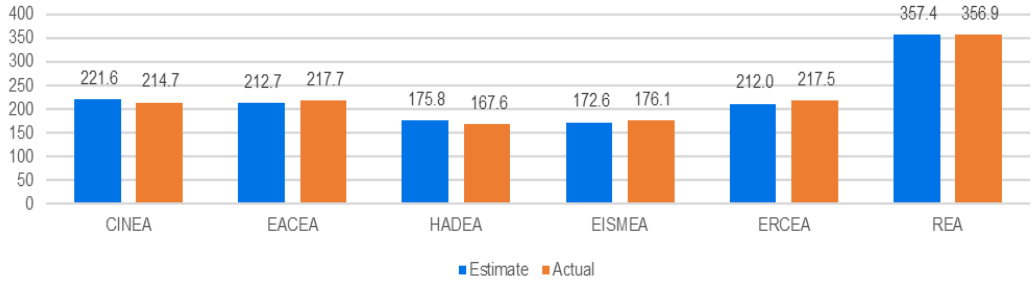


Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

The comparison of the **estimated versus actual staff costs** from 2021 to 2024 in the optimised (EA) scenario indicated only minor deviations for all EAs. As shown in Figure 18, EACEA, EISMEA and ERCEA experienced slightly higher staff costs than estimated. In contrast, CINEA and HADEA faced lower costs than estimated (EUR -6.9 and -8.3 million, respectively), while REA slightly undercut its estimated costs by EUR 0.5 million.

The analysis of the staff costs per year showed that most agencies witnessed lower staff costs than estimated in 2021 and 2022, but higher actual staff costs than estimated in 2023 and 2024 (see Annex 5.2.2 for a more detailed analysis). As this trend is common among most agencies, it suggests a common underlying factor, likely driven by higher-than-expected inflation rates (ex-ante CBA assumed 2% inflation).

Figure 18. Actual vs. estimated staff costs in the optimised scenario per EA for 2021-2024, in million EUR



Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

An analysis of the actual average costs per FTE revealed that all agencies witnessed an increase in average costs per FTE both across contract agents (CA) and temporary agents (TA) from 2021 to 2024, which might be largely due to inflation and raising salary cost because of staff's career progression over the last 15 years. As highlighted in the individual reports, CINEA experienced a significant increase in actual costs from 2021 to 2024, due to inflationary pressures. EISMEA's staff costs were impacted by recruitment challenges and the

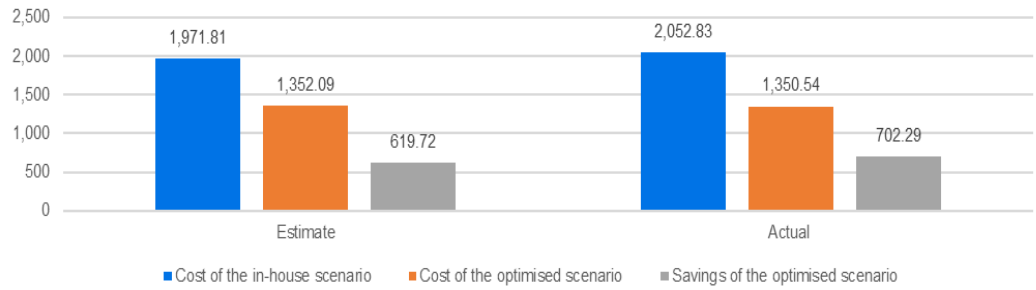
organisational adjustments following the transfer of EIC activities, which resulted in a reduction of FTEs. HaDEA, on the other hand, achieved substantial cost savings compared to estimates in the first two years, which may be due to delays in recruitment in the run-up period as a newly established Agency. Overall, the interplay of inflation, recruitment challenges, and organisational changes significantly influenced the staff costs across the agencies.

Table 9 in Annex 5.2.2 shows the comparison of estimated and the actual staff costs for each scenario as well as the savings of the optimised scenario vs. the other two scenarios for each EA as well as at an aggregated level for the examined period. Additionally, Annex 5.2.3 includes the staff costs differentiating between contract agents and temporary agents in the optimised and the in-house scenario at the aggregated level.

Savings

As shown in the figure below, the aggregated actual savings (EUR 702 million) of the optimised scenario compared to the in-house scenario were **13% higher** than the estimated savings (EUR 620 million) under the hypothetical assumptions previously described. The additional savings of the optimised scenario amounted to **EUR 82.6 million** over the four-year period.

Figure 19. 2021-2024 aggregated cost per scenario and estimated savings for all six EAs, million EUR

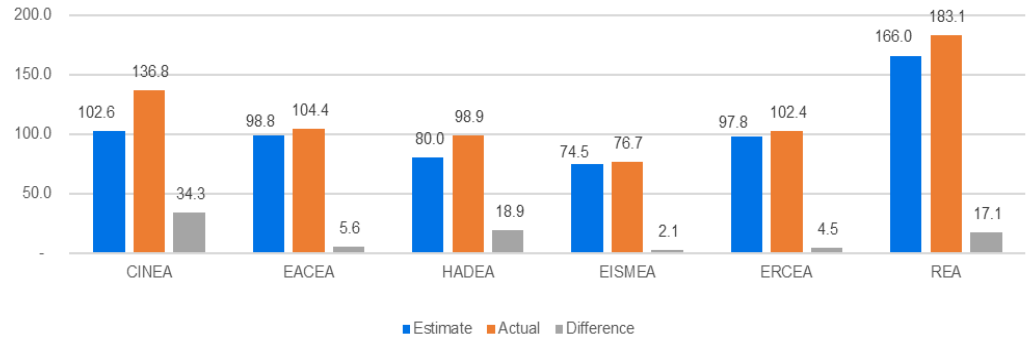


Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

The figure below shows the comparison of the estimated and actual savings of the optimised compared to the in-house scenario per Agency. The optimised scenario has delivered **greater-than-expected actual savings** across all EAs compared to the estimates. While all agencies achieved higher actual savings than estimated, the degree of variation differed. Notably, CINEA exhibited the largest discrepancy, with actual savings of EUR 136.8 million surpassing the estimate of EUR 102.6 million (i.e. 33% more savings than estimated). Similarly, HADEA and REA demonstrated a substantial difference, achieving EUR 18.9 million (+24%) and 17.1 million (+10%) higher savings than estimated, respectively. While EACEA, EISMEA and ERCEA showed smaller variances between 3% and 6%, the overall trend underscores the effectiveness of outsourcing.

To be noted that these savings would have been significantly higher if inflation would not have been as high: the estimates were based on an annual inflation of 2%, while actual costs were significantly raised by higher inflation impacting on salaries, logistics costs and procurement of services.

Figure 20. Estimated and actual savings (217) from the optimised, in 2021-2024 for the six EAs, in million EUR



Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

Further details are provided in the individual Agency reports, e.g. concerning the productivity per Agency and per year, the amount of savings due to inflation in salary costs per agency and per year etc.

The savings of the **optimised vs. the in-house scenario** can be attributed to the higher number of FTEs assumed in the model, higher staff costs at the DGs compared to the EAs, and the varying mix of staff categories (higher share of contract staff for the optimised scenario). As described in the methodological section, the CBA model estimated that, due to economies of scale, the executive agencies scenario was on average 10% more productive than the in-house scenario given the specialisation and expertise as well as IT tools in place, which translates into a higher number of FTEs required under the in-house scenario. The deviation between the **estimated vs. actual savings** of the optimised scenario compared to the in-house scenario can be explained as follows:

- Actual average cost per FTE were higher for most agencies compared to the estimated average cost per FTE in the ex-ante CBA
- Therefore, the corresponding delta between actual in-house and actual optimised is higher than estimated.
- This is partially due to inflation, but also differences between agencies in relation to the grades of their staff (higher costs for longer-tenured staff in 'older' agencies).

Additionally, the slight deviations between actual and estimated FTEs due to e.g. recruitment challenges, shifts of programmes, or organisational amendments in the agencies, have a large effect on the actual costs in the optimised scenario. For instance, a higher number of actual FTEs increases total staff costs, which was not foreseen in the ex-ante CBA. The higher total costs incurred under the optimised scenario, then also translate into higher costs of the hypothetical actual in-house scenario (as per assumption of the CBA requires 10% more staff). This widens the gap between actual optimised and actual in-house, thereby increasing the savings of the optimised vs. the in-house scenario.

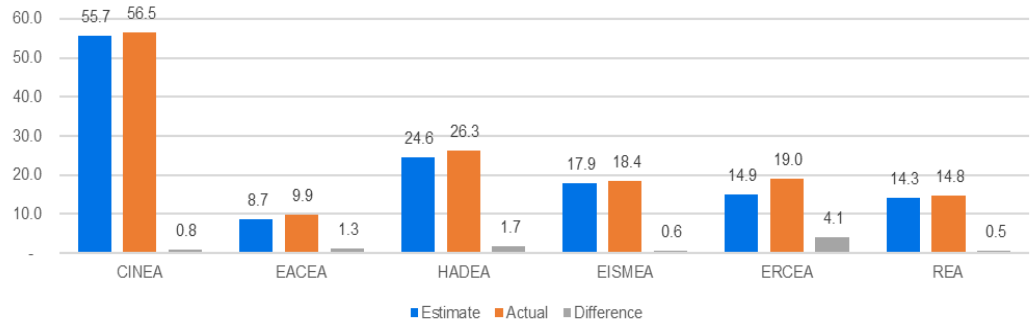
(217) The savings are calculated from the delta between the in-house vs. the optimised scenario.

Productivity

The productivity indicator has been calculated by dividing the commitment appropriations (in million EUR) by the number of FTEs for each EA. (218) The main finding is that productivity levels among the EAs are higher than originally estimated. (219)

The comparison of actual and estimated productivity levels indicates that all EAs exceeded their estimated productivity levels, but with differing degrees of deviations among agencies mostly resulting from EC decisions on delegated budget.

Figure 21. Actual productivity levels in the optimised scenario per EA for 2021-2024, in million EUR of commitment appropriations per FTE



Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

Table 13 in Annex 5.2.4 presents the productivity indicator of all EAs in the estimated and actual optimised scenario for the evaluation period.

As described above, productivity levels vary significantly among the agencies, reflecting differences in operational efficiency and external factors. EACEA demonstrated higher productivity than estimated, driven by an increased delegation of commitment appropriations and the allocation of additional tasks without additional resource allocation. In contrast, EISMEA's productivity faced challenges due to a significant reduction in appropriations in 2024 and a reduction of staff in 2023 because of the transfer of the EIC, resulting in a negative compound annual growth rate.

For comparison, Table 14 in Annex 5.2.4 shows productivity levels of all executive agencies and aggregated for the estimated and actual **in-house scenario** over the years examined. The productivity levels of all executive agencies presented in the table are influenced by the CBA assumptions for the staffing estimates in each scenario.

(218) Please note that the staff devoted to administrative support services (Expert management and CVS) was not discounted from the productivity calculations.

(219) We acknowledge that staff devoted to support services (CVS & expert management) do not implement any budget but have not been discounted from the calculations underlying the ex-post CBA

3.3.2. Comparison of the workload assessment methodologies

The six EU executive agencies - CINEA, EACEA, HaDEA, EISMEA, ERCEA, and REA - have each developed different methodologies to assess and manage their workload. This section contains aggregate findings across the agencies and a comparison between them. Details on individual agencies are provided in section 5.3. Agencies' approaches have evolved in response to the specific mandates, operational scales, and the complexity of the programmes managed by the agencies. While diverse in execution, the methodologies reveal a number of common principles and recurring challenges.

This section outlines both the shared foundations and the key differences in how workload is assessed across agencies, offering insights into areas of good practice and opportunities for greater coherence. Table 15 in Annex 5.3 includes a comprehensive table presenting the comparison of the workload assessment methodologies along different aspects.

In addition to the comparison of the workload assessment methodologies, the study team also conducted interviews with agencies to illustrate workload drivers for selected programmes.

Commonalities

There are five main areas in which commonalities can be found across agencies:

- Data-driven approach;
- Complexity considerations;
- Importance of flexibility mechanisms;
- Stakeholder engagement; and
- Continuous improvement.

All agencies rely on data-driven approaches that combine **quantitative metrics with qualitative insights** to assess workload. These assessments typically draw on internal operational systems, historical workload data, and staff feedback, ensuring that evaluations are both evidence-based and context-sensitive.

A key element across agencies is the integration of **complexity considerations**. Recognising that not all projects or tasks require the same level of effort, agencies incorporate programme-specific variables - such as technical difficulty, stakeholder coordination needs, or policy relevance - into their models. This is operationalised through tools like structured scoring systems or indicator matrices, which help estimate workload more precisely and inform the distribution of tasks and the allocation of human resources.

Besides the complexity of the task, **flexibility** of the workforce also plays a critical role. Most agencies have developed mechanisms, formal or informal, for dynamically adjusting staffing in response to policy changes, new priorities, or fluctuations in demand. This includes the ability to redeploy staff, bring in temporary support (e.g. through floaters), or adapt team structures to align with evolving workloads. However, as indicated in Section 3.2.1.1, the flexibility is limited due to legal constraints. Still, agencies seem to find ways to implement flexible mechanisms (e.g. REA and its 'guided flexibility', see below in the section on differences).

As part of the development of the methodologies, different **internal and external stakeholders** have been consulted or are actively consulted in the workload assessment process. Agencies involve staff committees or working groups, not only in data validation, but also in the development and refinement of the methodologies themselves. This inclusive approach fosters transparency and enhances the legitimacy of the models used. Additionally, some agencies have developed their methodologies together with an external consultancy.

Finally, all agencies show a commitment to continuous **improvement**. Methodologies are not static; they evolve in response to lessons learned, external reviews, and changing operational contexts. This reflects an adaptive mindset that values learning and innovation.

Differences

Despite these commonalities, there are notable differences in how agencies operationalise their workload assessment, mostly in relation to the following four main areas:

- Scope and detail of indicators;
- Recency of updates of methodologies;
- Design of flexibility mechanisms and complexity scorings; and
- Automation.

A major area of variation lies in the **scope and detail of indicators**. Whereas one Agency has deployed an approach based on 71 activities each linked to one unique indicator, other agencies rather rely on a select few indicators. There is also one Agency using only one indicator in its workload assessment methodology (similar to the ex-ante CBA).

Both approaches – multiple or only a few indicators – have their pros and cons. Whereas the former enables detailed, granular, in-depth comparisons, steering, monitoring, management etc., the latter emphasises transparency, simplicity and limits agencies' burden and overhead in terms of data collection, analysis etc.

The rationale for a 'simpler' workload assessment methodology is also grounded in practical difficulties implementing changes suggested through the implementation of the methodology: while the legal framework permits staff reallocation across programmes, whether temporary or structural, Agency staff consistently noted practical challenges in implementing it, reluctance from some parent DGs to reallocate between programmes and difficulties in absorbing new work demands within existing structures. It has been reported by REA, for instance, that this is the main reason why the Agency has chosen a rather simple approach to workload assessment.

It is at this stage not possible to say if one or the other is 'better'. What is important, though, is that the indicators need to fit each Agency as an organisation and answer the question the Agency has in relation to the assessment of the workload effectively and efficiently. This being said, there is of course merit in streamlining indicators, data collection, analysis, and overall methodologies across agencies. It is also true, however, that agencies have deliberately chosen the path that is most suitable for them and, therefore, variance in approach, assessment methodologies, and indicators is not viewed as an impediment for the agencies to deliver their tasks effectively and efficiently (as evidenced through the results of the retrospective CBA).

The extent to which methodologies have been **updated recently** varies across agencies. While a few agencies continued to work on their assessment and introduced their latest systems as recently as 2024, others continue to work with models that have seen limited updates since their launch in 2020 to ensure consistency and predictability for impacted units. The degree of refinement, testing, and institutional learning embedded in each methodology differs accordingly.

Although, we have argued above that flexibility mechanisms are a commonality across agencies, the types of **flexibility mechanisms** deployed still differ in design and availability. REA emphasises a system of guided flexibility, rather than rigid rules. (220) ERCEA has

(220) Changes in resource deployment are coordinated within steering committees and reviewed on a regular basis. Where necessary, personnel resources are redistributed between units, particularly when programme components expand or contract. This mechanism enables a targeted response to peak workloads without requiring a full reorganisation of the system. Past decisions and their impacts are systematically considered, ensuring that each cycle yields new insights to inform future allocations

introduced staffing buffers, such as “floaters” or interim support staff, to respond to sudden increases in workload. In contrast, other agencies operate without such built-in flexibility, potentially limiting their capacity to absorb shocks or surges in applications for instance. Similarly, **complexity scoring** approaches range in depth and granularity, with some agencies using detailed quantitative indicators and others, relying on more qualitative based assessments.

Finally, the level of **automation** presents a clear point of contrast. Some agencies have made significant progress in automating data collection and analysis, using dashboards and real-time monitoring tools. Others still rely heavily on manual inputs and spreadsheet-based processes, which may limit efficiency and scalability.

Overall comparison across agencies

The analysis reveals a mix of shared practices and Agency-specific approaches in how workload is assessed across the six EAs. While all agencies have made significant strides in developing data-informed and context-sensitive methodologies, notable differences remain in the structure, scope, and implementation of these methodologies. These variations reflect the diverse mandates and operational realities of each Agency, but they also highlight areas where greater alignment is potentially possible.

As indicated above, each Agency has developed and deploys the workload assessment methodology that, at this moment, is most suitable to them. Some are more complex, some are less complex. However, this is not to say that one is ‘better’ than the other or a specific approach should be considered the ‘gold standard’. Still, from an external perspective, the agencies differ with regard to the workload assessment methodologies.

The table below tries to summarise the findings of the analysis per Agency. We have identified several areas for comparison and have tried to provide an indication of the comparative sophistication of the workload assessment methodology of each Agency.

As argued above, each Agency is deploying the methodology that is most suitable to them at this moment in time. Therefore, the overall comparison across agencies can only compare the sophistication of methodologies between agencies and cannot indicate that a specific Agency’s methodology possesses particular strengths, is more advanced, mature, elaborated etc. compared to all different types of methodologies that are potentially possible. As a consequence, the table below provides only an indication where each of the agencies’ workload assessment methodologies stand in terms of maturity among each other. Again, this does not mean that one methodology is ‘better’ than the other.

Table 7. Comparative sophistication of WLA methodologies

Attribute	CINEA	EACEA	HADEA	REA	ERCEA	EISMEA ([221])
Data- and evidence-driven planning						
Proactivity and automation						
Flexibility and adaptability (222)						
Complexity-awareness						

(221) EISMEA is included in this comparison to enrich the cross-agency view. However, EISMEA did not yet have a workload assessment methodology during the evaluation period. Instead, their methodology was only developed and started to be applied during the evaluation period.

(222) E.g. dynamically adjusting staffing in response to policy changes, new priorities, or fluctuations in demand

Feedback mechanisms						
Monitoring and follow-up						

Legend:	Does not apply	Partially applies	Applies

Source: Prepared by the study team

As can be seen from the table above, in relation to each attribute, there are agencies that are more sophisticated than others. Nevertheless, the feedback obtained from agencies also indicates that, by and large, agencies are confident that their workload assessment methodology suits their needs.

Recommendations for improvement

It may be worthwhile to reflect on whether a more **harmonised approach** to workload assessment across the six Agencies could be beneficial.

A harmonised workload assessment methodology presents several advantages, particularly regarding consistency and comparability. By implementing a uniform framework, agencies can improve their capacity to compare data, thereby enhancing transparency and facilitating benchmarking. This consistency not only supports more informed decision-making but also boosts operational efficiency, reduces the resources required at the Agency level to develop individual methodologies, and enables a more accurate identification of resource needs across the agencies.

However, the analysis showed that the programmes managed by each Agency vary significantly in terms of complexity, tasks involved, and payment structure applied. Thus, a harmonised approach would need to factor in such peculiarities and allow the agencies the necessary flexibility to tailor the methodology to their needs in order to continue to ensure effective and efficient resource allocation and operational capability.

In light of these considerations, the Commission could find a balance between a fully standardised approach and a fragmented approach ("status quo"), including based on the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Establishing a baseline workload assessment methodology aligned with the CBA

The Commission could consider establishing a baseline methodology that can be adapted for each Agency. Part of this baseline methodology could be a **unified set of workload drivers** that balances quantitative and qualitative aspects, ensuring comparability within and across agencies. Building on the standard set of indicators, each Agency may add specific workload indicators deemed necessary to capture the specificities of their work. This could go hand in hand with the development of a nuanced **complexity scoring system** at each Agency to better capture variations in project types and operational challenges across agencies.

To enhance the effectiveness of both the workload assessment methodology employed by the EAs and the CBA performed by DG BUDG, it is crucial that these two processes build on each other.

Recommendation 2: Establishing clear documentation and providing training

Clear documentation and communication of the baseline workload assessment methodology, along with underlying processes, calculations, and assumptions, should be employed to strengthen stakeholder understanding and build trust in the system. Enhanced reporting mechanisms could also support accountability and inform strategic decision-making at higher governance levels. Additionally, organising training sessions on the baseline methodology is

crucial to ensure that all relevant stakeholders, including staff from the executive agencies and the Commission, are well-equipped to implement the methodology effectively.

Recommendation 3: Investing in IT infrastructure

To reduce reliance on manual data entries and improve data quality and reliability in workload assessments, the Commission may consider bridging the existing gaps when it comes to procurements and forecasting of the budget. This could not only improve the precision of assessments but also reduce administrative burden and facilitate more responsive planning.

Recommendation 4: Conducting regular workload reviews

Regular workload reviews could be considered to ensure that the baseline methodology and the specific adaptation of the EAs is effectively employed and remains fit for purpose. These reviews can be built upon the already existing staff surveys in the agencies to minimize administrative burden. In addition to validating the accuracy and relevance of workload indicators, the reviews should capture qualitative feedback to identify operational challenges and emerging needs. In addition to the reviews, coordination between agencies can help to share best practices, align methodologies, and address common challenges. Findings from the reviews should feed into a continuous improvement process, ensuring that the methodology evolves in line with operational realities and supports strategic resource planning.

4. Conclusions and lessons learned

This section provides the main conclusions and lessons learned of the present evaluation of operation of six EU executive agencies (CINEA, EACEA, ERCEA, EISMEA, HaDEA, and REA) in the period from April 2021 to March 2024. These conclusions and lessons learned are based on the cross-analysis and triangulation of a broad range of data and information sources (including meta-analysis of six individual evaluation reports, transversal case studies, cross-agency interviews, surveys, quantitative indicators and KPIs and a CBA).

Conclusions

The cross-analysis of six EU executive agencies demonstrates that the executive agencies continue to deliver substantial value to the European Commission and its stakeholders. Evaluated against the criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence, the agencies have largely achieved their operational objectives while maintaining high standards of performance. The retrospective cost-benefit analysis confirmed that aggregated actual savings (EUR 702 million) of the optimised scenario were 13% higher than the estimated savings (EUR 620 million) when compared to the estimated in-house scenario, under the hypothetical assumptions previously described.223

Effectiveness

Objectives

The six executive agencies have **overall performed effectively in delivering their delegated EU programmes or parts thereof.** Across the 2021–2024 period, agencies consistently demonstrated high operational and financial performance. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) point to well-functioning implementation systems and sound financial management. Operational budgets were executed close to 100% in nearly all cases, and time-to-grant performance showed marked improvement. Estimated risk at closure, in all agencies except EISMEA, remained well below the 2% threshold, confirming adherence to internal control.

Stakeholder feedback further validates this performance. Survey results show high overall satisfaction among beneficiaries (82-95%) and external experts (94–97%), confirming the agencies' continued responsiveness and service quality. The evidence suggests that agencies not only implemented their tasks effectively but also maintained high service standards for their key constituencies.

The agencies have demonstrated a**daptive capacity in managing evolving mandates and fluctuating workloads.** However, **some agencies perceived a lack of flexibility when reallocating staff internally across programmes to address workload peaks**. While the legal framework permits staff reallocation across programmes, whether temporary or structural, some agency staff noted practical challenges in implementing it, reluctance from some parent DGs to reallocate between programmes and difficulties in absorbing new work demands within existing structures. However, the limited use of the flexibility on staff allocation may also be related to the difficulty of some agencies to provide quantitative justification for staff reallocation needs. Additionally, when dealing with increased workload, the agencies and the parent DGs (preparing the work programmes for the delegated activities) should also analyse the underlying causes and consider appropriate measures, which may cover a wide range of aspects - from organisational and planning aspects to resource management and improvements in operational efficiency.

223 In other words, while estimated savings amounted to 31% (i.e. EUR 620 million savings from the optimised scenario / EUR 1,972 million costs of in-house scenario), the actual savings amounted to 34% (i.e. EUR 702 million savings from the optimised scenario / EUR 2,053 million costs of in-house scenario).

Legal framework and internal control

Executive agencies demonstrate **strong compliance with legal frameworks**, with only minor challenges on operational-level, or those caused by evolving or complex mandates, identified in specific cases. The legal framework is generally perceived as providing sufficient flexibility for Agency operations, though some opportunities for enhanced flexibility were expressed.

All agencies have established r**obust internal control frameworks aligned with European Commission principles and Financial Regulation requirements**. The systematic approach to addressing audit recommendations demonstrates continuous improvement and organisational learning.

Communication

Communication activities **generally showed active outreach to** beneficiaries, unsuccessful applicants, and the public, especially through social media when used. However, the cross-analysis reveals areas for improvement, particularly during the application phase, and programme visibility beyond flagship programmes.

The quality and consistency of collaboration between agencies and parent DGs on external communication varies and correlates with relationship maturity and portfolio concentration: agencies with longstanding parent DG relationships (REA, ERCEA) report consistently smoother coordination, while agencies managing portfolios across multiple parent DGs experience variable effectiveness - coordination is strongest with lead parent DGs accounting for the largest programme shares (e.g., EACEA with DG EAC, EISMEA with DG RTD, CINEA with DG MOVE) but more challenging with secondary parent DGs, particularly where agencies coordinate across multiple DGs with varying communication priorities (e.g., HaDEA across six DGs). A particular concern raised by parent DGs relates to agencies using communication channels to promote themselves rather than maintaining focus on programme-related communication and making the programmes as recognisable to (potential) applicants as much as possible.

Reporting to parent DGs

The agencies consistently **fulfil their formal reporting requirements as defined in legal frameworks and Memoranda of Understanding with parent DGs, with coordination meetings, bilateral exchanges, and Steering Committee interactions** providing adequate channels for regular supervision and oversight. Parent DGs particularly value informal channels and bilateral exchanges for receiving timely, actionable insights that complement formal reporting structures. However, the cross-analysis identifies areas for enhancement, including the need to standardise reporting templates across DGs to reduce complexity for agencies serving multiple parent DGs, further harmonisation of the reporting of KPIs, and the potential for more analytical reporting that contextualises operational data, highlights implementation challenges and policy risks, and better informs senior management at early-stage policy development.

Efficiency

Programme Management and Cost-Efficiency

The agencies have **achieved strong programme management performance with generally high KPI achievement.** Programme management costs (in executed commitments) ranged from 1% (CINEA) to 5% (EACEA) in 2024, demonstrating generally efficient resource utilisation.

The retrospective cost-benefit analysis supports that the executive agency model has delivered substantial efficiency gains, with actual aggregated savings rising from 31% estimated to 34% realised across all agencies. This is estimated in total savings of EUR 702 million compared to projected EUR 620 million for the 2021-2024 period, validating the continued strategic value of this delivery model.

Fit for purpose

All agencies **are considered broadly fit for purpose, successfully delivering high-quality programme management despite some challenges**. Their organisational structures are generally well-suited to their mandates. Most agencies demonstrated positive trends in staff engagement, wellbeing, and HR responsiveness, supported by the implementation of the inter-agency HR Strategy 2023–2027. However, challenges persist. Across agencies, structural limits to internal career progression remain a concern, though several have taken targeted steps to improve professional development and retention. Staff engagement levels vary across agencies (ranging from 58% for EISMEA to 76% for ERCEA in 2023), with persistent concerns regarding limited career progression opportunities, confidence in the professional future, and staff mobility.

Digital Transformation and Innovation

All agencies **have made substantial progress in adopting corporate digital tools such as eGrants to digitalise grant management and internal operations**, supported by established IT governance structures including steering committees and strategic planning processes. However, the transition experience has varied across agencies, with some experiencing fewer integration challenges while others faced difficulties. The agencies demonstrate varying levels of sophistication in their use of analytics tools, with some developing very advanced business intelligence solutions while others remain at earlier stages of development.

Environmental Impact and Sustainability

All agencies **have introduced measures during the evaluation period to reduce their environmental impact, including EMAS accreditations**, promotion of sustainable commuting practices, and limitations on business travel. Moving to a building with a better environmental footprint also helped to reduce the agencies' environmental impact. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 resulted in an exceptionally low carbon footprint across all agencies that highlights the potential for sustained environmental improvements while data on emissions show an increase over the post-pandemic period, while remaining significantly below the emissions of 2019 (pre-covid reference). Also, there is a room for improvement when it comes to the harmonised tracking of environmental impact KPIs across the agencies, including the better use of IT tools to support this process.

Workload Assessment Methodologies

The analysis reveals a mix of shared practices and agency-specific approaches in how workload is assessed across the six EAs. While all agencies have made significant strides in developing data-informed and context-sensitive methodologies, notable differences remain in the structure, scope, and implementation of these models. These variations reflect the diverse mandates and operational realities of each agency, but they also highlight areas where greater alignment is both possible and desirable.

Coherence

Programme Portfolio Coherence

The portfolios **of executive agencies are largely thematically coherent without major overlaps**, gaps, or inconsistencies, and systems are in place to address such issues when they do arise. Where overlaps exist (a very limited number of cases), agencies often leverage them collaboratively to benefit from economies of scale. However, the diversity of delegated programmes poses challenges in ensuring consistent operational practices. Alignment could be pursued more systematically and formally.

Division of Responsibilities

The delimitation of responsibilities and tasks between agencies and parent DGs is broadly clear, appropriate, and well-defined, following a common operational model where agencies handle technical and operational aspects while DGs maintain responsibility for

strategic direction and policy development. In the case of ERCEA, this model is adapted to reflect the governance structure of the European Research Council, where the Scientific Council establishes the overall scientific strategy for the ERC. This division is supported by formal governance structures including Steering Committees, Memoranda of Understanding, and Delegation Acts, complemented by interpersonal relationships and regular coordination mechanisms. While occasional ambiguities arise, these issues are typically resolved effectively through established internal coordination and escalation channels.

Feedback to Policy (F2P)

The evaluation period marked a phase of consolidation and maturation of Feedback to Policy (F2P) strategies across all six agencies, **with a clear trend toward systematisation that has resulted in overall effective feedback channels.** Agencies adopted differentiated organisational approaches, ranging from centralised coordination (and implementation) models to hybrid or partially decentralised structures, each bringing distinct advantages in ensuring adequate information flow with parent DGs. The development of formal F2P frameworks and annual planning processes, combined with flexible mechanisms for ad hoc responses, has strengthened alignment with evolving Commission priorities and enhanced the policy relevance of Agency inputs. Parent DGs acknowledged the progress made with developing the F2P mechanisms during this period, recognising agencies' full integration of F2P into their core functions and their capacity to provide high-quality policy inputs. However, areas for improvement remain, including enhancing operational mechanisms to better accommodate emerging policy needs, strengthening coordination among parent DGs to reduce fragmented requests, improving project data extraction processes, and addressing the fragmentation of F2P mechanisms across agencies (e.g. in terms of F2P monitoring). Additionally, while the CBA allocated additional 3% staff resources for F2P activities, the absence of a standardised monitoring framework limits transparency in assessing actual investment levels across agencies.

Comparative CBA

The retrospective CBA found that outsourcing to six executive agencies resulted in estimated savings of EUR 702 million, exceeding initial estimates of EUR 620 million by 13%, under the assumptions above described for the scenarios. Most agencies faced increased staff costs due to inflation, raising salary cost because of staff's career progression and recruitment challenges, although some, like HADEA, reported lower costs than expected. Despite variability in productivity levels, all agencies surpassed their estimated productivity. Overall, the analysis supports the Commission's decision to outsource, demonstrating greater efficiency and savings than anticipated.

Lessons learned

Though overall evaluation results are positive, the cross-analysis has identified a number of factors, which, in some cases, have limited the effectiveness, efficiency or coherence of the executive agencies in the study period. Some of the shortcomings are currently in process of being addressed, while in other cases further actions could be explored to try to address those shortcomings. Below, we provide a list of lessons learned from the evaluation period 2021-2024:

- **Flexibility mechanisms for reallocating staff across programmes contribute to timely and effective programme implementation, especially during the peak workload periods**. While the current legal framework enables such reallocation, challenges remain in fully utilising these mechanisms during workload fluctuations. It should be noted that this challenge does not occur for the ERCEA due to its focused implementation of the ERC programme only. The evaluation suggests that it would be useful to further explore possibilities for enhancing the use of the flexibility in staff allocation across programmes. Developing an internal mechanism for monitoring

workload across programmes and its underlying causes could support the planning and, in turn, decision-making on staff reallocation across the programmes and on potential reinforcements. Sharing good practices across agencies on the use of the flexibility in staff allocation may also enhance the use of current possibilities provided by the legal framework. In periods of increased workload, agencies could additionally consider other measures to enhance operational capacity, including improvements in organisational setup, planning, and/or increased efficiency and synergies.

- **The variation observed in the effectiveness of communication and the relationships with parent DGs in external communication activities suggests that closer collaboration and alignment could help guide communication activities across agencies**. Improved alignment on roles, responsibilities, and messaging between the agencies and parent DGs, along with clearer definitions of scope, expectations, and outputs, may support more coherent and effective communication efforts that prioritise programme and institutional strategic communication objectives.
- **While the overall satisfaction rate among beneficiaries with the overall quality of the services provided by the agencies is high**, lower satisfaction rates among unsuccessful applicants and qualitative feedback received from them indicate that the application phase communication, guidance and feedback could be further improved. Feedback points to room for more comprehensive and clearer guidance mechanisms, and an improved Funding and Tenders Portal, particularly to enhance applicants' understanding of procedures and outcomes. Strengthening communication, guidance and feedback practices, while ensuring equal treatment of applicants, may help improve applicants' experience.
- **While reporting practices across the executive agencies were generally effective and aligned with formal requirements, the evaluation suggests that further harmonisation could be beneficial.** Although several KPIs are in use, differences in definitions, calculation methods, and reporting formats may limit comparability. More consistent approaches could help streamline reporting and facilitate oversight, especially for parent DGs working with multiple agencies. Continued development of shared dashboards and digital tools may also support these efforts over time.
- **The evaluation highlights the potential benefits of enhanced cooperation between executive agencies and the Common Implementation Centre (CIC) in DG RTD and the central services of the Commission** involved in defining corporate procedures and providing corporate IT solutions (DG BUDG, DG DIGIT), as well as among the agencies' own IT units. Establishing a cross-agency working group could facilitate the exchange of IT-related good practices, support joint exploration of emerging digital tools, and strengthen alignment on common challenges and innovation opportunities.
- **The evaluation highlights the complexity agencies face when implementing programme modalities that diverge from corporate standards**. While policy services may seek programme-specific adaptations to enhance effectiveness, such changes can challenge the capabilities and timelines of corporate IT systems. Agencies often find themselves navigating between programme-specific requirements and corporate-level goals of harmonisation, simplification, and efficiency. A potential lesson is that when drafting work programmes of the delegated programmes, assessments of

new actions or other new delegations could also take into account IT implementability, alongside policy objectives, as it affects simplification efforts and user friendliness. This may also help reduce friction in implementation and better align operational and policy goals.

- **The diversity of workload assessment approaches across agencies can limit the effectiveness of strategic planning and resource optimisation**. Although similar core indicators are used, differences in the level of sophistication and implementation suggest that greater harmonisation is feasible and could potentially be beneficial. Establishing a baseline methodology with a unified set of workload indicators, alongside a shared understanding of complexity scoring, could support improved comparability, transparency, and planning, while still allowing for agency-specific adaptations where necessary. Supporting measures such as clear documentation, training, IT solution, and regular workload reviews may also facilitate more consistent and effective compilation and use of workload data.

- **While staff engagement levels are generally high across agencies, the evaluation revealed that persistent concerns regarding limited career progression opportunities and staff mobility persist and could be one of the areas of focus.** Although management positions remain reserved for seconded Commission officials as per the legal framework, agencies have made significant progress in addressing career development challenges through collaborative initiatives, including the inter-agency HR Strategy 2023-2027, which has led to concrete measures such as inter-agency exchange programmes, job shadowing initiatives, and the establishment of an inter-agency Career Guidance Network and mentorship programme. Future initiatives could benefit from continuing and expanding implementation of such collaborative HR strategies, with particular focus on talent retention and mobility. This might include further supporting inter-agency mobility schemes to retain skilled staff within the EU administration where internal advancement within a specific agency is not feasible, enhancing transparency and communication of existing career development opportunities (including horizontal mobility, upskilling initiatives, and role diversification) within the limits of the current legal framework, and monitoring talent flows between agencies and the Commission to assess how HR policies can better support long-term career development across the EU institutional ecosystem, particularly for staff in roles with limited upward mobility.

- **While all agencies have introduced measures to reduce their environmental impact during the evaluation period, and many have achieved EMAS registration with high scores, significant variations in environmental performance persist across agencies**. EMAS registration and the “Greening the Commission” Communication provide a structured and uniform framework for assessing, monitoring, and reporting environmental performance, with indicators and targets followed annually and subject to audits. However, challenges remain in ensuring that these frameworks are applied in a fully consistent manner across the agency network, particularly regarding the practical implementation of measurement and reporting approaches. In this context, it could be beneficial to develop further guidance to support the alignment of regular reporting and monitoring practices, building on the existing EMAS and “Greening the Commission” framework, so as to ensure consistent application of sustainability principles and enable more meaningful comparison of environmental

performance across agencies. Automated corporate IT tools (e.g. dashboards) could also be considered for reporting on environmental KPIs.

- **The evolution of F2P mechanisms demonstrates progress made during the evaluation period towards more systematic, structured approaches that produce more coherent and valuable policy input**s. However, F2P **monitoring practices vary across agencies**, including a somewhat lacking unified understanding of what F2P entails, and areas for improvement remain in accommodating emerging policy needs and coordinating requests from multiple parent DGs. It could be beneficial establishing more systematic F2P monitoring and further exploring possibilities for evaluation mechanisms and feedback loops, including more consistent indicators. It may also be valuable to provide further feedback to executive agencies on how their policy inputs are utilised in decision-making processes and to strengthen coordination among parent DGs to ensure coherent and non-duplicative F2P requests, particularly for agencies serving multiple parent DGs. Building on existing good practice examples from some agencies, future work might consider seeking feedback more proactively on F2P activities being implemented to enhance responsiveness to emerging policy needs and quality of F2P.
- **While an additional 3% staff resources allocation for F2P activities was established, the evaluation found no consistent, system-wide framework to verify compliance or evaluate resource allocation effectiveness.** Agencies have adopted varying tracking approaches. Some agencies report they allocate either about 3% or below 3% of their staff to F2P activities; others cannot provide reliable data due to the diffuse, multi-level nature of F2P work that often cuts across units and involves staff for whom F2P is not a primary function. It could be considered to improve consistency and proportional transparency in tracking F2P-related efforts to measure the resources allocated to such activity in contrast to the additional 3% resource granted in 2021. It may be valuable to strengthen internal coordination and documentation practices for F2P activities, especially where work is distributed across units or performed by staff not directly assigned to F2P roles. Drawing on emerging practices from some agencies, future work might consider using light-touch tools to better capture the scope and nature of contributions, particularly for more resource-intensive or cross-cutting inputs.
- **While the cross-analysis shows that all agencies have progressively adopted more structured F2P approaches, making the overall landscape more coherent than in the previous MFF, F2P activities remain primarily linked to individual programmes**. The diversity of programmes managed by each agency and the thematic complementarities across agencies present untapped opportunities for generating more comprehensive, strategic policy insights. Feedback to Policy could benefit from enhancing and formally establishing cross-programme and cross-agency F2P collaboration through shared analytical frameworks and joint initiatives. This might include developing systematic cross-programme F2P approaches within agencies, building on existing good practices such as CINEA's dedicated strategy and REA's Knowledge Network, to generate horizontal insights that address complex policy challenges spanning multiple programme areas. It may also be valuable to establish mechanisms for cross-agency F2P collaboration to maximise synergies, reduce fragmentation, and enhance the strategic value of policy inputs. These could include

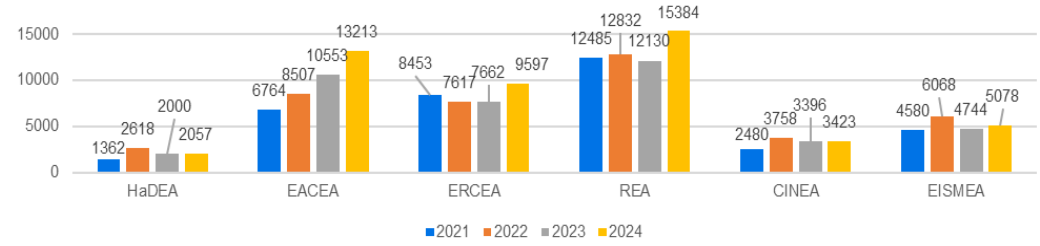
shared analytical frameworks, joint F2P initiatives on thematic areas where programme portfolios complement each other, and coordinated knowledge sharing platforms across the agency network, with appropriate staffing considerations to handle these additional demanding tasks. The effectiveness of cross-agency F2P also depends on enhanced coordination on the demand side, particularly among parent DGs, as agencies alone may lack the strategic overview needed to fully align inputs with evolving policy priorities.

5. Main Report Annexes

5.1. Effectiveness – graphs on KPIs and survey results

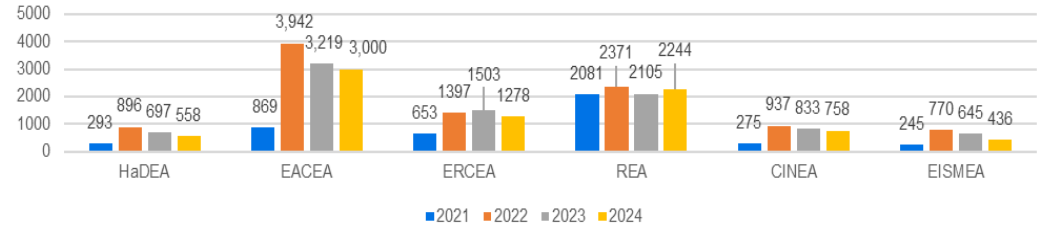
Programme implementation

Figure 22. Number of proposals received



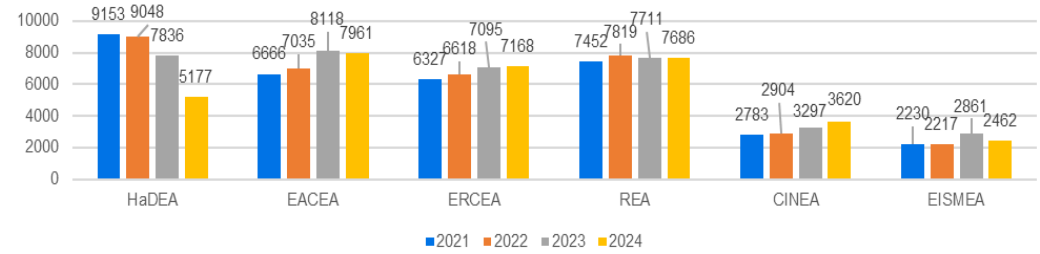
Source: Source: Study team based on: for HaDEA, CINEA, EISMEA – dataset provided by the Commission; for EACEA, ERCEA, REA – AARs and their annexes; for REA the data presents the proposals evaluated

Figure 23. Number of grants signed



Source: Study team based on the AARs and their annexes for 2021-2024. For EISMEA – the dataset provided by the Commission

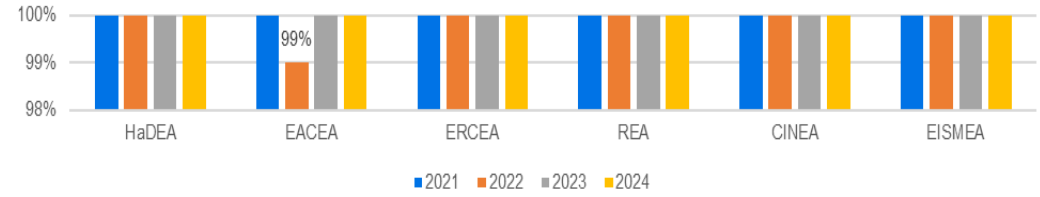
Figure 24. Number of running projects



Source: Study team based on: for REA, EACEA, ERCEA - AARs and their annexes; for HaDEA and CINEA - data source is the datasets provided by the Commission; for EISMEA - based on the data provided by EISMEA

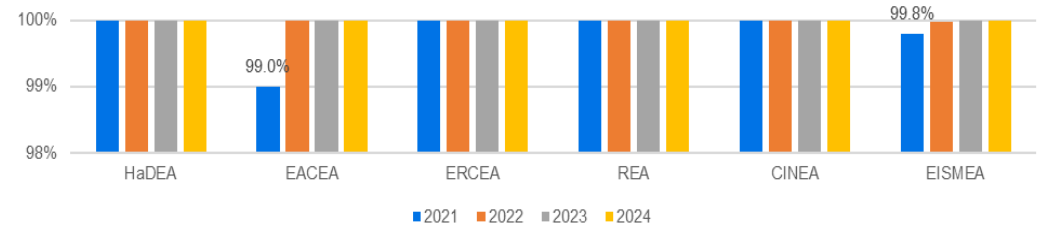
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Figure 25. Budget execution (%) Commitment appropriations for operational budget



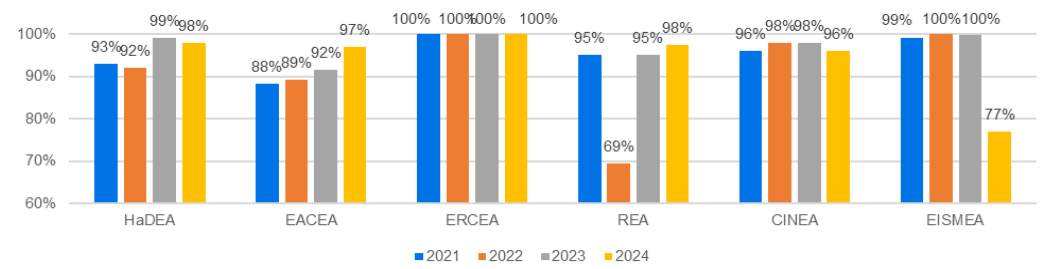
Source: Study team based on the AARs and their annexes for 2021-2024.

Figure 26. Payment appropriations for operational budget



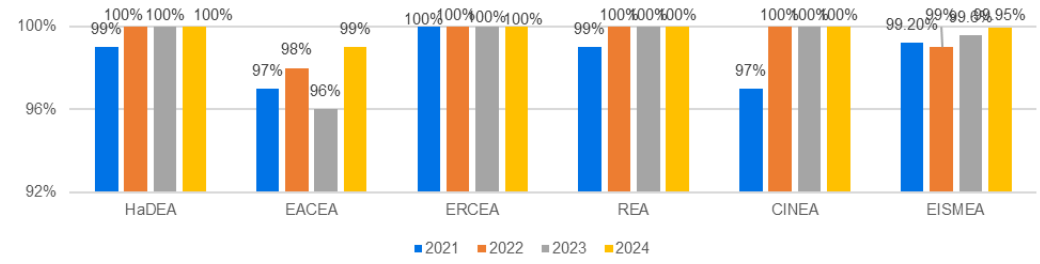
Source: Study team based on the AARs and their annexes for 2021-2024.

Figure 27. Time-to-Grant



Source: Study team based on the AARs and their annexes for 2021-2024.

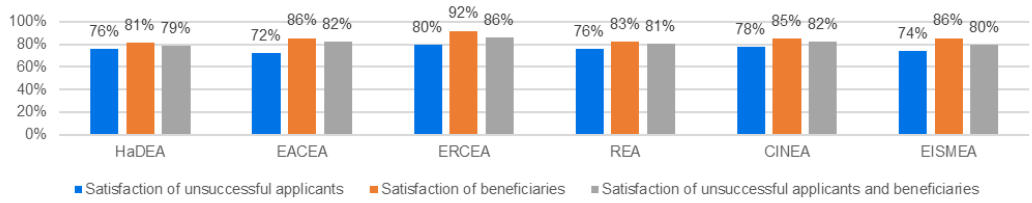
Figure 28. Time-to-Pay



Source: Study team based on the AARs and their annexes for 2021-2024.

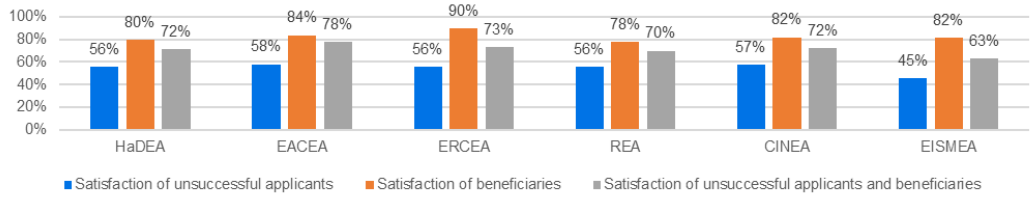
Stakeholder satisfaction

Figure 29. Overall, the application process was clear and transparent



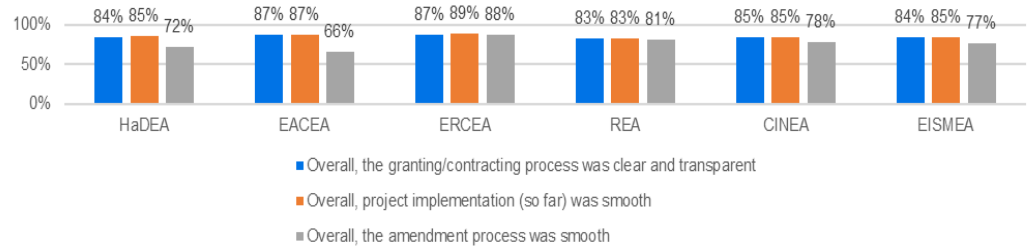
Source: prepared by the study team, based on the survey results. The total number of respondents is as follows: ERCEA – unsuccessful applicants N=627, beneficiaries N=679; REA – unsuccessful applicants N=572, beneficiaries N=1,000; CINEA – unsuccessful applicants N=787, beneficiaries N=1,183; EISMEA – unsuccessful applicants N=763, beneficiaries N=714; EACEA – unsuccessful applicants N=552, beneficiaries N=1,755; HaDEA – unsuccessful applicants N=507, beneficiaries N=977.

Figure 30. Overall, the evaluation process was clear and transparent



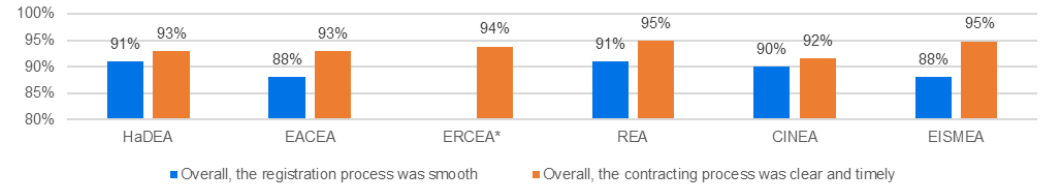
Source: prepared by the study team, based on the survey results. The total number of respondents is as follows: ERCEA – unsuccessful applicants N=616, beneficiaries N=658; REA – unsuccessful applicants N=544, beneficiaries N=976; CINEA – unsuccessful applicants N=763, beneficiaries N=1162; EISMEA – unsuccessful applicants N=754, beneficiaries N=703; EACEA – unsuccessful applicants N=540, beneficiaries N=1727; HaDEA – unsuccessful applicants N=507, beneficiaries N=931.

Figure 31. Satisfaction of beneficiaries with project implementation processes



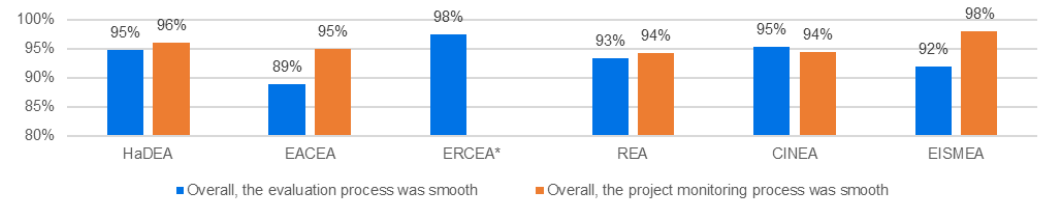
Source: prepared by the study team, based on the survey results. The total number of respondents is as follows: ERCEA – beneficiaries N=1410; REA –beneficiaries N=2084; CINEA –beneficiaries N=2610; EISMEA – beneficiaries N=1744; EACEA – beneficiaries N=3545; HaDEA –beneficiaries N=2257.

Figure 32. Satisfaction of experts with registration and contracting processes



Source: prepared by the study team based on survey results. The total number of respondents is as follows: HaDEA 1st statement N=689, 2nd statement N=767; EACEA 1st statement N=524, 2nd statement N=547; ERCEA 2nd statement N=692; REA 1st statement N=929, 2nd statement N=976; CINEA 1st statement N=819, 2nd statement N=877; EISMEA 1st statement N=1342, 2nd statement N=1487 *Note: for ERCEA, the statement on experts' registration process is not relevant, as different procedures for ERCEA apply and experts are invited by appointed letter.

Figure 33. Satisfaction of experts with project evaluation and monitoring processes



Source: prepared by the study team based on survey results. The total number of respondents is as follows: HaDEA 1st statement N=670, 2nd statement N=501; EACEA 1st statement N=422, 2nd statement N=35; ERCEA 1st statement N=567; REA 1st statement N=912, 2nd statement N=194; CINEA 1st statement N=662, 2nd statement N=72; EISMEA 1st statement N=1433, 2nd statement N=283

*Note: for ERCEA, the statement on project monitoring is not applicable, as different procedures apply for ERCEA and internal staff conduct project monitoring

5.2. CBA

In the following, we present the more specific tables for FTEs, staff costs and productivity of the retrospective CBA, which were referenced to in the main text.

5.2.1. FTEs

The following table provides a detailed overview of actual and estimated FTEs across the three scenarios for the years 2021 to 2024, per EA and aggregated for all EAs.

Overall, the differences between estimated and actual FTEs are minimal, with deviations consistently in the range of 0–1%. This indicates a strong alignment between planning and execution.

The comparison between the optimised and status quo scenario for the actual **aggregated figures across all agencies**, showed that the optimised scenario required slightly fewer FTEs compared to the status quo scenario – with differences ranging from -39.9 in 2021 to -41.7 in 2024. When comparing the actual numbers of the optimised to the in-house scenario, under the hypothetical assumption that the Commission productivity would be 10% lower, the gap ranged from -240.3 in 2021 to -257.5 in 2024. Overall, the in-house scenario consistently reflected the highest FTE demand. The optimised scenario struck a balance between maintaining operational capacity and achieving efficiency gains.

On **an individual Agency level**, most agencies demonstrated a similar trend, where actual FTEs closely matched the estimated values in most years. Notably, EACEA, HADEA, ERCEA, and REA reported stable actual FTE numbers, aligning perfectly with estimates and showing deviations of around 0%. CINEA experienced some deviations in the most recent years (2022-2024), with differences of approximately 4-9%. EISMEA stood out slightly, with a deviation of around -3% in 2024.

Despite these patterns, some differences among individual agencies were observed. The absolute number of FTEs varied significantly across agencies, reflecting differences in size and mandate. For example, in 2024, REA reported an actual FTE count of 909.3 under the optimised scenario, compared to only 621.6 for CINEA. Temporal developments also varied: HADEA's actual FTEs increased from 390.1 in 2021 to 471.9 in 2024, whereas EISMEA saw a decline from 425.0 to 389.5 over the same period. Additionally, EACEA achieved a perfect match between estimated and actual FTEs in most years, while REA showed larger deviations, e.g. in 2023 and 2024.

Table 8. Comparison of FTEs across scenarios: Estimate vs. actual for all EAs and aggregated for 2021-2024

EA	Scenario		2021				2022				2023				2024			
			Estimate	Actual	Diff (224)	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff (225)	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff (226)	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff (227)	%
All EAs	Optimised	In EA	3,162.6	3,162.9	0.3	0%	3,258.7	3,282.3	23.5	1%	3,302.9	3,323.6	20.7	1%	3,350.1	3,389.2	39.0	1%
		DG supervision	75.9	76.0	0.1	0%	78.2	78.9	0.6	1%	79.3	79.7	0.5	1%	80.4	81.4	1.0	1%
		Total	3,238.5	3,238.9	0.4	0%	3,337.0	3,361.1	24.2	1%	3,382.2	3,403.4	21.2	1%	3,430.5	3,470.6	40.0	1%
	Status Quo	In EA	3,201.9	3,201.9	0.0	0%	3,300.5	3,323.6	23.0	1%	3,344.9	3,365.0	20.0	1%	3,392.4	3,429.9	37.5	1%
		DG supervision	76.8	76.8	0.0	0%	79.2	79.8	0.6	1%	80.3	80.8	0.5	1%	81.4	82.3	0.9	1%
		Total	3,278.7	3,278.8	0.0	0%	3,379.7	3,403.3	23.6	1%	3,425.2	3,445.7	20.5	1%	3,473.8	3,512.2	38.4	1%
	In-house	DG	3,474.8	3,479.2	4.4	0%	3,581.2	3,610.5	29.3	1%	3,630.5	3,656.0	25.5	1%	3,683.1	3,728.1	45.0	1%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-40.2	-39.9	0.3	-1%	-42.8	-42.2	0.6	-1%	-43.0	-42.3	0.7	-2%	-43.2	-41.7	1.6	-4%
		Status quo vs. In-house	-196.1	-200.4	-4.3	2%	-201.5	-207.1	-5.7	3%	-205.3	-210.3	-5.0	2%	-209.3	-215.9	-6.5	3%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-236.3	-240.3	-4.0	2%	-244.3	-249.4	-5.1	2%	-248.3	-252.6	-4.3	2%	-252.6	-257.5	-5.0	2%
CINEA	Optimised	In EA	513.9	513.9	0.0	0%	533.3	556.3	23.0	4%	543.4	571.4	28.0	5%	556.5	607.0	50.5	9%
		DG supervision	12.3	12.3	0.0	0%	12.8	13.4	0.6	4%	13.0	13.7	0.7	5%	13.4	14.6	1.2	9%
		Total	526.2	526.2	0.0	0%	546.1	569.6	23.5	4%	556.4	585.1	28.7	5%	569.8	621.6	51.7	9%
	Status Quo	In EA	521.2	521.2	0.0	0%	541.2	564.2	23.0	4%	551.2	579.5	28.3	5%	564.2	615.0	50.8	9%
		DG supervision	12.5	12.5	0.0	0%	13.0	13.5	0.6	4%	13.2	13.9	0.7	5%	13.5	14.8	1.2	9%
		Total	533.7	533.7	0.0	0%	554.2	577.8	23.5	4%	564.4	593.4	29.0	5%	577.8	629.8	52.0	9%
	In-house	DG	565.3	565.3	0.0	0%	586.6	611.9	25.3	4%	597.7	628.5	30.8	5%	612.1	667.7	55.6	9%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-7.5	-7.5	0.0	0%	-8.1	-8.1	0.0	0%	-8.0	-8.3	-0.3	4%	-7.9	-8.2	-0.3	3%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-39.1	-39.1	0.0	0%	-40.5	-42.3	-1.7	4%	-41.3	-43.4	-2.1	5%	-42.3	-46.1	-3.8	9%
EACEA	Optimised	In EA	483.0	483.0	0.0	0%	504.7	505.0	0.3	0%	526.4	526.0	-0.4	0%	548.1	548.0	-0.1	0%
		DG supervision	11.6	11.7	0.1	1%	12.1	12.2	0.1	1%	12.6	12.6	0.0	0%	13.2	13.2	0.0	0%
		Total	494.6	494.7	0.1	0%	516.8	517.2	0.4	0%	539.0	538.6	-0.4	0%	561.2	561.2	0.0	0%
		In EA	483.0	483.0	0.0	0%	504.7	505.0	0.3	0%	526.4	526.0	-0.4	0%	548.1	548.0	-0.1	0%

224 Diff = Difference between actual and estimate.
225 Diff = Difference between actual and estimate.
226 Diff = Difference between actual and estimate.
227 Diff = Difference between actual and estimate.

	Status Quo	DG supervision	11.6	11.6	0.0	0%	12.1	12.1	0.0	0%	12.6	12.6	0.0	0%	13.2	13.2	0.0	0%
		Total	494.6	494.6	0.0	0%	516.8	517.1	0.3	0%	539.0	538.6	-0.4	0%	561.2	561.2	-0.1	0%
	In-house	DG	531.3	531.3	0.0	0%	555.2	555.5	0.3	0%	579.0	578.6	-0.4	0%	602.9	602.8	-0.1	0%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	0.0	0.1	0.1	-	0.0	0.1	0.1	-	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	0.0	0.0	0.0	-
		Optimised vs. In-house	-36.7	-36.6	0.1	0%	-38.4	-38.3	0.1	0%	-40.0	-40.0	0.0	0%	-41.7	-41.6	0.1	0%
HaDEA	Optimised	In EA	381.2	381.0	-0.2	0%	421.0	421.0	0.0	0%	441.0	440.5	-0.5	0%	460.9	460.8	-0.1	0%
		DG supervision	9.1	9.1	0.0	0%	10.1	10.1	0.0	0%	10.6	10.6	0.0	0%	11.1	11.1	0.0	0%
		Total	390.4	390.1	-0.2	0%	431.1	431.1	0.0	0%	451.6	451.1	-0.5	0%	472.0	471.9	-0.1	0%
	Status Quo	In EA	386.8	386.6	-0.2	0%	427.3	427.3	0.0	0%	447.6	447.1	-0.5	0%	467.8	467.7	-0.1	0%
		DG supervision	9.3	9.3	0.0	0%	10.3	10.3	0.0	0%	10.7	10.7	0.0	0%	11.2	11.2	0.0	0%
		Total	396.1	395.8	-0.2	0%	437.6	437.6	0.0	0%	458.3	457.9	-0.5	0%	479.1	478.9	-0.1	0%
	In-house	DG	415.3	419.1	3.8	1%	459.7	463.1	3.4	1%	482.3	484.6	2.2	0%	505.0	506.9	1.9	0%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-5.7	-5.7	0.0	0%	-6.5	-6.5	0.0	0%	-6.8	-6.8	0.0	0%	-7.1	-7.1	0.0	0%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-24.9	-29.0	-4.1	16%	-28.6	-32.0	-3.4	12%	-30.8	-33.5	-2.7	9%	-33.0	-35.0	-2.0	6%
EISMEA	Optimised	In EA	414.7	415.0	0.3	0%	422.8	423.0	0.2	0%	408.1	407.8	-0.4	0%	393.4	380.4	-13.0	-3%
		DG supervision	10.0	10.0	0.0	0%	10.1	10.2	0.0	0%	9.8	9.8	0.0	0%	9.4	9.1	-0.3	-3%
		Total	424.7	425.0	0.3	0%	433.0	433.2	0.2	0%	417.9	417.5	-0.4	0%	402.8	389.5	-13.3	-3%
	Status Quo	In EA	429.1	429.4	0.3	0%	437.8	437.8	0.0	0%	422.5	422.1	-0.4	0%	407.2	393.5	-13.7	-3%
		DG supervision	10.3	10.3	0.0	0%	10.5	10.5	0.0	0%	10.1	10.1	0.0	0%	9.8	9.4	-0.3	-3%
		Total	439.4	439.7	0.3	0%	448.3	448.3	0.0	0%	432.6	432.2	-0.4	0%	417.0	403.0	-14.0	-3%
	In-house	DG	456.2	456.5	0.3	0%	465.1	465.3	0.2	0%	448.9	448.5	-0.4	0%	432.7	418.4	-14.3	-3%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-14.7	-14.7	0.0	0%	-15.3	-15.2	0.1	-1%	-14.7	-14.7	0.0	0%	-14.1	-13.5	0.7	-5%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-31.5	-31.5	0.0	0%	-32.1	-32.1	0.0	0%	-31.0	-31.0	0.0	0%	-29.9	-28.9	1.0	-3%
ERCEA	Optimised	In EA	522.2	522.0	-0.2	0%	516.5	517.0	0.5	0%	510.7	511.0	0.3	0%	504.9	505.0	0.1	0%
		DG supervision	12.5	12.5	0.0	0%	12.4	12.4	0.0	0%	12.3	12.3	0.0	0%	12.1	12.1	0.0	0%
		Total	534.8	534.5	-0.2	0%	528.8	529.4	0.6	0%	522.9	523.3	0.3	0%	517.0	517.1	0.1	0%
	Status Quo	In EA	522.2	522.0	-0.2	0%	516.5	517.0	0.5	0%	510.7	511.0	0.3	0%	504.9	505.0	0.1	0%
		DG supervision	12.5	12.5	0.0	0%	12.4	12.4	0.0	0%	12.3	12.3	0.0	0%	12.1	12.1	0.0	0%
		Total	534.8	534.5	-0.2	0%	528.8	529.4	0.6	0%	522.9	523.3	0.3	0%	517.0	517.1	0.1	0%
	In-house	DG	574.5	574.2	-0.3	0%	568.1	568.7	0.6	0%	561.8	562.1	0.3	0%	555.4	555.5	0.1	0%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	0.0	0.0	0.0	-

		Optimised vs. In-house	-39.7	-39.7	0.0	0%	-39.3	-39.3	0.0	0%	-38.8	-38.8	0.0	0%	-38.4	-38.4	0.0	0%
REA	Optimised	In EA	847.5	848.0	0.5	0%	860.5	860.0	-0.5	0%	873.4	867.0	-6.4	-1%	886.3	888.0	1.6	0%
		DG supervision	20.3	20.4	0.0	0%	20.7	20.6	0.0	0%	21.0	20.8	-0.2	-1%	21.3	21.3	0.0	0%
		Total	867.9	868.4	0.5	0%	881.1	880.6	-0.5	0%	894.4	887.8	-6.6	-1%	907.6	909.3	1.7	0%
	Status Quo	In EA	859.5	859.8	0.3	0%	873.0	872.3	-0.8	0%	886.6	879.2	-7.4	-1%	900.1	900.7	0.6	0%
		DG supervision	20.6	20.6	0.0	0%	21.0	20.9	0.0	0%	21.3	21.1	-0.2	-1%	21.6	21.6	0.0	0%
		Total	880.1	880.4	0.3	0%	894.0	893.2	-0.8	0%	907.8	900.3	-7.5	-1%	921.7	922.3	0.6	0%
	In-house	DG	932.3	932.8	0.5	0%	946.5	946.0	-0.5	0%	960.7	953.7	-7.0	-1%	975.0	976.8	1.8	0%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-12.3	-12.0	0.2	-2%	-12.9	-12.6	0.3	-2%	-13.5	-12.5	1.0	-7%	-14.1	-13.0	1.1	-8%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-64.4	-64.4	0.0	0%	-65.4	-65.4	0.0	0%	-66.4	-65.9	0.5	-1%	-67.4	-67.5	-0.1	0%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

5.2.2. Staff costs

The following table provides a comprehensive overview of the actual and estimated staff costs in the three scenarios - optimised, status quo, and in-house — for all agencies and aggregated for the period 2021 to 2024.

In the **aggregated comparison**, the optimised scenario consistently showed the lowest costs, thereby confirming higher efficiency compared to the other two scenarios. While the difference between the optimised and the status quo scenario amounted to EUR 2.1 million in 2021, it decreased to EUR 487.8 thousand by 2024, which may be partially due to the higher actual costs of the optimised scenario due to inflation. The differences of the optimised compared to the in-house scenario were significantly larger: in 2021, estimated actual costs in the in-house scenario were EUR 177.4 million higher than in the optimised scenario, and even in 2024, the gap remained substantial at EUR 189.3 million.

It is also notable that actual costs in all scenarios tended to exceed the initial estimates in the later years, particularly in 2023 and 2024. In the optimised scenario, the deviation from forecasts during these years ranged between 7% and 8%. The reason for the deviation of actual to estimated costs can be partially attributed to higher than anticipated inflation in those years.

A detailed review of the **staff costs across the individual agencies** confirmed the general trend of rising costs. In 2021 and 2022, many agencies showed negative variances between estimated and actual costs. For example, in 2021, HADEA recorded a deviation of –24% of the actual costs vs. the estimated costs in the optimised scenario, corresponding to savings of around EUR 9.3 million. By 2024, this trend reversed: actual costs were 5% above the estimated costs in the optimised scenario, resulting in EUR 2.3 million higher costs than estimated. Similar patterns were observed for CINEA, which had 19% (around EUR 10 million) lower costs than estimated in 2021, but faced higher actual costs than estimated of 9% in 2024, resulting in higher actual costs by EUR 5 million.

The inter-scenario comparison shows clear efficiency gains of the optimised scenario compared to the other two scenarios. The optimised scenario showed significant lower costs for all EAs across all years of the evaluation period.

Besides the common pattern of overall cost increases, there were also minor deviations between agencies. From a long-term perspective, some agencies exhibited significantly higher cost growth than others. While EISMEA maintained a relatively stable trajectory with actual costs of EUR 42.0 million in 2021 and EUR 45.6 million in 2024, costs at REA rose from EUR 73.7 million to EUR 98.9 million, and at EACEA from EUR 45.4 million to EUR 61.7 million during the same period. The differences in the size of the costs can be partially attributed to the differences in FTEs and average staff costs.

Table 9. Comparison of staff costs across scenarios: Estimated vs. actual for EAs and aggregated for 2021-2024

EA	Scenario		2021				2022				2023				2024			
			Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%
All EAs	Optimised	In EA	307,180,128	268,432,917	-38,747,210	-13%	322,879,781	316,287,497	-6,592,284	-2%	333,762,291	352,320,513	18,558,221	6%	345,207,726	369,188,769	23,981,043	7%
		DG supervision	10,103,455	9,892,435	-211,020	-2%	10,618,722	10,545,688	-73,034	-1%	10,977,999	11,602,179	624,180	6%	11,357,587	12,274,777	917,190	8%
		Total	317,283,583	278,325,352	-38,958,231	-12%	333,498,502	326,833,184	-6,665,318	-2%	344,740,290	363,922,692	19,182,402	6%	356,565,313	381,463,545	24,898,233	7%
	Status Quo	In EA	313,988,174	273,096,813	-40,891,360	-13%	330,309,642	321,946,687	-8,362,955	-3%	341,557,066	358,959,801	17,402,735	5%	353,537,135	376,845,460	23,308,324	7%
		DG supervision	10,228,842	10,066,849	-161,993	-2%	10,754,858	10,800,257	45,399	0%	11,117,576	11,871,599	754,023	7%	11,500,690	12,602,839	1,102,149	10%
		Total	324,217,015	283,163,663	-41,053,353	-13%	341,064,500	332,746,944	-8,317,556	-2%	352,674,642	370,831,400	18,156,758	5%	365,037,825	389,448,298	24,410,473	7%
	In-house	DG	462,531,353	455,772,449	-6,758,904	-1%	486,229,280	488,858,315	2,629,035	1%	502,781,173	537,431,348	34,650,175	7%	520,267,576	570,769,927	50,502,352	10%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-6,933,432	-4,838,311	2,095,122	-30%	-7,565,997	-5,913,760	1,652,238	-22%	-7,934,352	-6,908,709	1,025,644	-13%	-8,472,512	-7,984,753	487,760	-6%
		Status quo vs. in-house	-138,314,338	-172,608,786	-34,294,449	25%	-145,164,780	-156,111,371	-10,946,591	8%	-150,106,531	-166,599,948	-16,493,417	11%	-155,229,751	-181,321,629	-26,091,879	17%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-145,247,770	-177,447,097	-32,199,327	22%	-152,730,778	-162,025,131	-9,294,353	6%	-158,040,883	-173,508,656	-15,467,773	10%	-163,702,263	-189,306,382	-25,604,119	16%
CINEA	Optimised	In EA	49,785,087	39,837,321	-9,947,766	-20%	52,695,150	49,681,072	-3,014,077	-6%	54,817,408	55,740,588	923,180	2%	57,190,581	62,098,380	4,907,799	9%
		DG supervision	1,641,644	1,612,851	-28,793	-2%	1,737,664	1,737,517	-148	0%	1,806,002	1,919,486	113,484	6%	1,886,549	2,067,738	181,189	10%
		Total	51,426,731	41,450,172	-9,976,559	-19%	54,432,814	51,418,589	-3,014,225	-6%	56,623,410	57,660,074	1,036,664	2%	59,077,130	64,166,118	5,088,988	9%
	Status Quo	In EA	50,447,029	40,407,552	-10,039,478	-20%	53,430,400	50,391,336	-3,039,064	-6%	55,505,849	56,641,504	1,135,654	2%	57,951,077	63,012,385	5,061,309	9%
		DG supervision	1,665,106	1,638,728	-26,378	-2%	1,763,578	1,833,465	69,887	4%	1,832,083	2,044,571	212,489	12%	1,912,792	2,259,756	346,964	18%
		Total	52,112,135	42,046,280	-10,065,855	-19%	55,193,978	52,224,801	-2,969,178	-5%	57,337,932	58,686,075	1,348,143	2%	59,863,869	65,272,141	5,408,272	9%
	In-house	DG	75,242,015	74,050,108	-1,191,907	-2%	79,642,941	82,849,364	3,206,423	4%	82,775,100	92,392,146	9,617,046	12%	86,466,837	102,224,870	15,758,033	18%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-685,404	-596,108	89,297	-13%	-761,164	-806,212	-45,047	6%	-714,522	-1,026,001	-311,479	44%	-786,739	-1,106,024	-319,284	41%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-23,815,284	-32,599,936	-8,784,652	37%	-25,210,128	-31,430,775	-6,220,648	25%	-26,151,690	-34,732,072	-8,580,382	33%	-27,389,707	-38,058,752	-10,669,045	39%
EACEA	Optimised	In EA	46,752,061	43,864,973	-2,887,087	-6%	49,827,657	50,272,355	444,698	1%	53,007,577	56,900,909	3,893,331	7%	56,294,762	59,711,489	3,416,726	6%
		DG supervision	1,543,146	1,510,739	-32,407	-2%	1,644,662	1,631,737	-12,925	-1%	1,749,622	1,847,325	97,703	6%	1,858,122	2,003,428	145,306	8%
		Total	48,295,207	45,375,712	-2,919,495	-6%	51,472,320	51,904,092	431,772	1%	54,757,199	58,748,234	3,991,035	7%	58,152,885	61,714,917	3,562,032	6%
	Status Quo	In EA	46,752,061	43,864,973	-2,887,087	-6%	49,827,657	50,272,355	444,698	1%	53,007,577	56,900,909	3,893,331	7%	56,294,762	59,711,489	3,416,726	6%
		DG supervision	1,543,146	1,518,552	-24,594	-2%	1,644,662	1,641,048	-3,614	0%	1,749,622	1,855,728	106,106	6%	1,858,122	2,013,571	155,449	8%
		Total	48,295,207	45,383,525	-2,911,681	-6%	51,472,320	51,913,403	441,083	1%	54,757,199	58,756,637	3,999,437	7%	58,152,885	61,725,060	3,572,175	6%
	In-house	DG	70,727,531	69,600,300	-1,127,231	-2%	75,380,360	75,214,700	-165,660	0%	80,191,012	85,054,200	4,863,188	6%	85,163,937	92,288,680	7,124,743	8%

EA	Scenario		2021				2022				2023				2024			
			Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-	-7,813	-7,813	-	-	-9,311	-9,311	-	-	-8,403	-8,403	-	-	-10,143	-10,143	-
		Optimised vs. In-house	-22,432,324	-24,224,588	-1,792,264	8%	-23,908,040	-23,310,608	597,432	-2%	-25,433,812	-26,305,966	-872,154	3%	-27,011,052	-30,573,763	-3,562,711	13%
HaDEA	Optimised	In EA	36,897,561	27,644,000	-9,253,561	-25%	41,562,217	40,458,044	-1,104,173	-3%	44,404,386	44,159,910	-244,476	-1%	47,343,617	49,517,945	2,174,328	5%
		DG supervision	1,217,878	1,192,192	-25,687	-2%	1,371,845	1,360,927	-10,918	-1%	1,465,656	1,547,607	81,950	6%	1,562,672	1,684,830	122,158	8%
		Total	38,115,439	28,836,192	-9,279,248	-24%	42,934,062	41,818,971	-1,115,091	-3%	45,870,042	45,707,517	-162,526	0%	48,906,289	51,202,775	2,296,486	5%
	Status Quo	In EA	39,797,675	29,859,246	-9,938,428	-25%	44,850,028	43,695,210	-1,154,818	-3%	48,048,162	47,850,526	-197,636	0%	51,356,281	53,630,988	2,274,707	4%
		DG supervision	1,235,635	1,215,313	-20,322	-2%	1,392,412	1,388,554	-3,858	0%	1,487,618	1,577,457	89,839	6%	1,586,075	1,718,535	132,460	8%
		Total	41,033,310	31,074,559	-9,958,750	-24%	46,242,440	45,083,764	-1,158,676	-3%	49,535,780	49,427,983	-107,797	0%	52,942,357	55,349,523	2,407,167	5%
	In-house	DG	55,275,751	54,902,100	-373,651	-1%	62,414,095	62,703,740	289,645	0%	66,798,822	71,228,850	4,430,028	7%	71,333,972	77,603,328	6,269,356	9%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-2,917,870	-2,238,368	679,503	-23%	-3,308,378	-3,264,793	43,585	-1%	-3,665,738	-3,720,467	-54,729	1%	-4,036,068	-4,146,748	-110,681	3%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-17,160,311	-26,065,908	-8,905,597	52%	-19,480,033	-20,884,769	-1,404,736	7%	-20,928,779	-25,521,333	-4,592,554	22%	-22,427,683	-26,400,553	-3,972,870	18%
EISMEA	Optimised	In EA	41,078,846	40,709,600	-369,246	-1%	42,737,328	39,820,000	-2,917,328	-7%	42,070,375	45,897,897	3,827,523	9%	41,359,648	44,156,523	2,796,875	7%
		DG supervision	1,324,963	1,297,305	-27,659	-2%	1,377,839	1,366,969	-10,870	-1%	1,356,450	1,433,862	77,411	6%	1,333,655	1,429,340	95,684	7%
		Total	42,403,810	42,006,905	-396,905	-1%	44,115,167	41,186,969	-2,928,199	-7%	43,426,825	47,331,759	3,904,934	9%	42,693,303	45,585,862	2,892,559	7%
	Status Quo	In EA	42,654,781	41,782,595	-872,186	-2%	44,367,025	40,503,455	-3,863,570	-9%	43,645,194	46,776,588	3,131,394	7%	42,913,783	45,346,148	2,432,365	6%
		DG supervision	1,370,893	1,350,034	-20,860	-2%	1,426,540	1,422,675	-3,865	0%	1,404,222	1,489,195	84,972	6%	1,380,441	1,445,982	65,541	5%
		Total	44,025,674	43,132,629	-893,046	-2%	45,793,565	41,926,130	-3,867,435	-8%	45,049,416	48,265,783	3,216,367	7%	44,294,225	46,792,131	2,497,906	6%
	In-house	DG	60,727,474	59,801,500	-925,974	-2%	63,150,950	63,001,620	-149,330	0%	62,170,646	65,933,552	3,762,906	6%	61,125,870	64,059,604	2,933,734	5%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-1,621,865	-1,125,724	496,141	-31%	-1,678,398	-739,161	939,236	-56%	-1,622,591	-934,024	688,567	-42%	-1,600,921	-1,206,268	394,653	-25%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-18,323,664	-17,794,595	529,069	-3%	-19,035,783	-21,814,651	-2,778,869	15%	-18,743,821	-18,601,793	142,028	-1%	-18,432,566	-18,473,741	-41,175	0%
ERCEA	Optimised	In EA	50,638,713	45,285,430	-5,353,283	-11%	51,111,062	51,507,150	396,088	1%	51,514,244	55,735,863	4,221,619	8%	51,982,270	58,052,546	6,070,276	12%
		DG supervision	1,668,329	1,633,188	-35,141	-2%	1,682,885	1,669,816	-13,069	-1%	1,697,356	1,792,595	95,239	6%	1,711,733	1,845,707	133,973	8%
		Total	52,307,042	46,918,618	-5,388,424	-10%	52,793,946	53,176,966	383,020	1%	53,211,600	57,528,458	4,316,858	8%	53,694,003	59,898,252	6,204,249	12%
		In EA	50,638,713	45,285,430	-5,353,283	-11%	51,111,062	51,507,150	396,088	1%	51,514,244	55,735,863	4,221,619	8%	51,982,270	58,052,546	6,070,276	12%

EA	Scenario		2021				2022				2023				2024			
			Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%
	Status Quo	DG supervision	1,668,329	1,641,168	-27,161	-2%	1,682,885	1,680,043	-2,842	0%	1,697,356	1,802,808	105,452	6%	1,711,733	1,855,572	143,839	8%
		Total	52,307,042	46,926,598	-5,380,444	-10%	52,793,946	53,187,193	393,247	1%	53,211,600	57,538,671	4,327,071	8%	53,694,003	59,908,118	6,214,115	12%
	In-house	DG	76,465,060	75,220,200	-1,244,860	-2%	77,132,228	77,001,980	-130,248	0%	77,795,497	82,628,700	4,833,203	6%	78,454,444	85,047,050	6,592,606	8%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-	-7,980	-7,980	-	-	-10,227	-10,227	-	-	-10,213	-10,213	-	-	-9,865	-9,865	-
		Optimised vs. In-house	-24,158,018	-28,301,582	-4,143,564	17%	-24,338,281	-23,825,014	513,268	-2%	-24,583,896	-25,100,242	-516,345	2%	-24,760,440	-25,148,798	-388,357	2%
REA	Optimised	In EA	82,027,859	71,091,593	-10,936,266	-13%	84,946,367	84,548,875	-397,492	0%	87,948,301	93,885,345	5,937,044	7%	91,036,848	95,651,886	4,615,039	5%
		DG supervision	2,707,495	2,646,161	-61,334	-2%	2,803,826	2,778,723	-25,104	-1%	2,902,911	3,061,304	158,393	5%	3,004,855	3,243,734	238,880	8%
		Total	84,735,354	73,737,754	-10,997,601	-13%	87,750,194	87,327,598	-422,596	0%	90,851,213	96,946,650	6,095,437	7%	94,041,702	98,895,621	4,853,918	5%
	Status Quo	In EA	83,697,915	71,897,017	-11,800,898	-14%	86,723,470	85,577,182	-1,146,288	-1%	89,836,039	95,054,411	5,218,371	6%	93,038,961	97,091,903	4,052,942	4%
		DG supervision	2,745,732	2,703,054	-42,678	-2%	2,844,781	2,834,472	-10,309	0%	2,946,675	3,101,841	155,165	5%	3,051,525	3,309,422	257,896	8%
		Total	86,443,647	74,600,071	-11,843,576	-14%	89,568,251	88,411,653	-1,156,597	-1%	92,782,715	98,156,251	5,373,537	6%	96,090,487	100,401,325	4,310,838	4%
	In-house	DG	124,093,524	122,198,241	-1,895,283	-2%	128,508,706	128,086,911	-421,795	0%	133,050,097	140,193,900	7,143,803	5%	137,722,516	149,546,396	11,823,879	9%
	Difference	Optimised vs. Status quo	-1,708,293	-862,318	845,975	-50%	-1,818,057	-1,084,055	734,001	-40%	-1,931,502	-1,209,601	721,901	-37%	-2,048,784	-1,505,704	543,080	-27%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-39,358,169	-48,460,487	-9,102,318	23%	-40,758,512	-40,759,313	-801	0%	-42,198,884	-43,247,250	-1,048,366	2%	-43,680,814	-50,650,775	-6,969,961	16%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

Table 10: Comparison of staff costs across scenarios: Estimated vs. actual for EAs, sum for 2021-2024

EA	Scenario		2021-2024			
			Estimate	Actual	Diff	%
CINEA	Diff	Optimised vs. Status quo	-2,947,830	-3,534,344	-586,514	20%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-102,566,807	-136,821,535	-34,254,728	**33%**
EACEA	Diff	Optimised vs. Status quo	-	-35,670	-35,670	-
		Optimised vs. In-house	-98,785,229	-104,414,925	-5,629,696	**6%**
HaDEA	Diff	Optimised vs. Status quo	-13,928,054	-13,370,376	557,678	-4%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-79,996,807	-98,872,564	-18,875,756	**24%**

EA	Scenario		2021-2024			
			Estimate	Actual	Diff	%
EISMEA	Diff	Optimised vs. Status quo	-6,523,775	-4,005,178	2,518,597	-39%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-74,535,834	-76,684,781	-2,148,946	**3%**
ERCEA	Diff	Optimised vs. Status quo	-	-38,285	-38,285	-
		Optimised vs. In-house	-97,840,636	-102,375,635	-4,534,999	**5%**
REA	Diff	Optimised vs. Status quo	-7,506,636	-4,661,679	2,844,957	-38%
		Optimised vs. In-house	-165,996,380	-183,117,826	-17,121,446	**10%**

Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

5.2.3. Performance FTEs and staff costs incl. CA and TA level

The following table presents the performance of all six executive agencies aggregated, measured by FTE and staff costs, in the estimated optimised scenario and the actual optimised scenario.

Table 11. Aggregated performance (FTEs and staff costs): Estimated optimised scenario vs. Actual optimised scenario (EA level)

All EA	2021				2022				2023				2024			
	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%
FTEs – CA	2,356.8	2,359.4	2.6	0%	2,428.8	2,447.5	18.7	1%	2,462.1	2,480.5	18.4	1%	2,498.4	2,535.2	36.8	1%
CA cost	189,595,268	168,356,496	-21,238,772	-11%	199,222,737	194,806,638	-4,416,099	-2%	206,015,049	214,701,437	8,686,388	4%	213,255,947	226,135,002	12,879,055	6%
FTEs - TA	807.2	803.5	-3.7	0%	832.3	834.2	1.9	0%	842.9	842.8	-0.1	0%	853.7	853.0	-0.6	0%
TA costs	117,584,859	100,076,421	-17,508,438	-15%	123,657,044	121,480,859	-2,176,185	-2%	127,747,242	137,619,076	9,871,833	8%	131,951,779	143,053,767	11,101,987	8%
DG cost of coordination	10,103,455	9,892,435	-211,020	-2%	10,618,722	10,545,688	-73,034	-1%	10,977,999	11,602,179	624,180	6%	11,357,587	12,274,777	917,190	8%
Total EA and DG cost	317,283,583	278,325,352	-38,958,231	-12%	333,498,502	326,833,184	-6,665,318	-2%	344,740,290	363,922,692	19,182,402	6%	356,565,313	381,463,545	24,898,233	7%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

A key finding of the table above is that actual costs in 2021 were significantly lower than estimated in the optimised scenario, with total EA and DG costs being 11% (EUR 21.2 million) below estimates. This was driven by lower-than-expected costs for both contract- and temporary agents. However, from 2023 onwards, actual costs began to exceed estimates, with a notable 6% (EUR 19.2 million) increase in 2023 and a 7% (EUR 24.9 million) increase in 2024.

The aggregated FTE values remained largely stable over the period, with hardly any deviations between estimates and actual figures. For CA, actual FTEs were slightly below estimates in 2021, but higher than estimated by 1% for 2022-2024. Similarly, TA FTEs showed minimal deviation, with actual figures closely aligned with estimates throughout the period. Despite stable FTE levels, actual staff costs for both CA and TA rose significantly in 2023 and 2024, with CA costs exceeding estimates by 6% (EUR 12.9 million) in 2024 and TA costs surpassing estimates by 8% (EUR 11.1 million) in 2024. As explained above, this can be partially attributed to inflation and accordingly higher average staff costs.

The DG cost of coordination followed a similar trend, with actual costs slightly below estimates in 2021 and 2022 but exceeding estimates by 6% in 2023 and 8% in 2024. Overall, while the optimised scenario achieved aggregated actual cost savings compared to estimates in the earlier years, an increasing divergence between estimated and actual costs in later years was evident.

The following table quantifies and compares the performance of all executive agencies aggregated, measured by FTEs and staff costs, in the estimated in-house scenario and the actual “hypothetical” in-house scenario at Agency level for the years 2021 to 2024.

Table 12. Aggregated performance (FTEs and staff costs): Estimated in-house scenario vs. actual “Hypothetical” in-house scenario

All EA	2021				2022				2023				2024			
	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%	Estimate	Actual	Diff	%
FTEs – CA	1,042.4	1,043.8	1.3	0%	1,074.4	1,083.1	8.8	1%	1,089.2	1,096.8	7.6	1%	1,104.9	1,118.4	13.5	1%
CA cost	90,379,690	85,587,803	-4,791,886	-5%	95,010,319	92,067,113	-2,943,207	-3%	98,244,597	99,808,679	1,564,082	2%	101,661,480	106,250,444	4,588,963	5%
FTEs - TA	2,432.4	2,435.4	3.1	0%	2,506.8	2,527.3	20.5	1%	2,541.4	2,559.2	17.8	1%	2,578.2	2,609.7	31.5	1%
TA costs	372,151,663	370,184,646	-1,967,018	-1%	391,218,961	396,791,203	5,572,241	1%	404,536,576	437,622,669	33,086,093	8%	418,606,095	464,519,484	45,913,388	11%
Total EA and DG cost	462,531,353	455,772,449	-6,758,904	-1%	486,229,280	488,858,315	2,629,035	1%	502,781,173	537,431,348	34,650,175	7%	520,267,576	570,769,927	50,502,352	10%

Source: Authors’ elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AWP.

The table presented above exhibits a key finding that actual total DG costs in the in-house scenario were consistently lower than estimates in 2021 (-1%) and 2022 but began to exceed estimates from 2023 onwards, with a significant 7% (EUR 34.7 million) increase in 2023 and 10% (EUR 50.5 million) in 2024.

For CA, actual FTEs remained highly close to estimates, with 1% variance by 2024. However, CA costs were consistently below estimates in 2021 (-5%) and 2022 (-3%) but exceeded estimates by 5% (EUR 4.6 million) in 2024. Similarly, TA FTEs closely aligned with estimates, with a 1% variance by 2024. However, TA costs showed a more pronounced increase, surpassing estimates by 8% (EUR 33.1 million) in 2023 and 11% (EUR 45.9 million) in 2024.

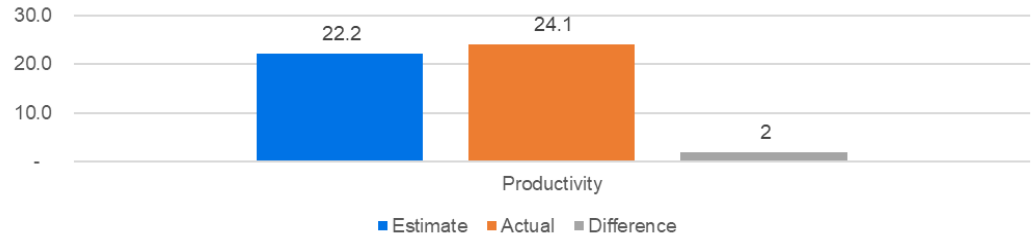
Overall, while FTE levels remained stable and close to estimates, staff costs, particularly for TA, rose significantly in later years, driving the overall increase in total DG costs in 2023 and 2024.

5.2.4 Productivity

The following tables show the productivity indicator calculated by dividing the commitment appropriations by the number of FTEs across all EAs in the optimised (Table 13) and the in-house scenario (Table 14) for the evaluation period 2021-2024.

The analysis of productivity levels in the **optimised scenario** across the six EAs for the evaluation period revealed significant variations when comparing estimated with actual commitment appropriations and FTEs. Overall, the actual aggregated productivity of all EAs was 9% (+2) higher than estimated, indicating that the EAs have been even more productive than anticipated ex-ante.

Figure 34: Estimated vs. actual productivity of the optimised scenario for 2021-2024



Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AAR.

As can be seen in the table below, CINEA, EISMEA and REA show 1-4% higher productivity levels than estimated, while HaDEA, EACEA and ERCEA significantly exceed estimates by 7%, 15% and 27%, respectively, reflecting the efficiency of outsourcing the tasks to the EAs. The main driver behind the higher-than-estimated productivity rates were the increased commitment appropriations, which were managed by almost the same number of FTEs.

The productivity analysis for the **in-house scenario** across the six EAs for the evaluation period 2021 to 2024 shows a similar picture, however differences in magnitude. The actual aggregated productivity for all EAs was 21.9 exceeding the estimate by 9% (20.2). Overall, the productivity levels are lower in the in-house scenario for all EAs compared to the optimised scenario. The lower magnitude of productivity for the in-house scenario is rooted in the fact that it requires a higher amount of FTEs compared to the optimised scenario, while commitment appropriations stay the same. However, as previously mentioned in the report, actual productivity data for programmes currently implemented in-house was not considered, instead the analysis follows the same assumptions as in the original model updated with actual average costs for the Commission.

Table 13. Productivity: Estimated vs. actuals in the optimised scenario per EA and aggregated for all EA over the evaluation period 2021-2024

EA	Indicator	2021-2024			
		Estimate	Actual	Diff	%
All EAs	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	74,270	81,578	7,309	10%
	FTEs EA 2024	3,350	3,389	39	1%
	Productivity	22.2	24.1	2	9%
CINEA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	30,985	34,291	3,306	11%
	FTEs EA 2024	556.5	607.0	50.5	9%
	Productivity	55.7	56.5	0.8	1%
EACEA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	4,753	5,452	699	15%
	FTEs EA 2024	548.1	548.0	-0.1	0%
	Productivity	8.7	9.9	1.3	15%
HaDEA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	11,317	12,115	799	7%
	FTEs EA 2024	460.9	460.8	-0.1	0%
	Productivity	24.6	26.3	1.7	7%
EISMEA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	7,030	7,013	-17	0%
	FTEs EA 2024	393.4	380.4	-13.0	-3%
	Productivity	17.9	18.4	0.6	3%
ERCEA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	7,546	9,600	2,054	27%
	FTEs EA 2024	504.9	505.0	0.1	0%
	Productivity	14.9	19.0	4.1	27%
REA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	12,639	13,107	467	4%
	FTEs EA 2024	886.3	888.0	1.6	0%
	Productivity	14.3	14.8	0.5	4%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA, AWP and AAR.

Table 14. Productivity: Estimated vs. actuals "hypothetical" in the in-house scenario per EA and aggregated for all EA over the evaluation period 2021-2024

EA	Indicator	2021-2024			
		Estimate	Actual	Diff	%
All EAs	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	74,270	81,578	7,309	10%
	FTEs EA 2024	3,683	3,728	45	1%
	Productivity	20.2	21.9	2	9%
CINEA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	30,985	34,291	3,306	11%
	FTEs EA 2024	612.1	667.7	55.6	9%
	Productivity	50.6	51.4	0.7	1%
EACEA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	4,753	5,452	699	15%
	FTEs EA 2024	602.9	602.8	-0.1	0%
	Productivity	7.9	9.0	1.2	15%
HaDEA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	11,317	12,115	799	7%
	FTEs EA 2024	505.0	506.9	1.9	0%
	Productivity	22.4	23.9	1.5	7%
EISMEA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	7,030	7,013	-17	0%
	FTEs EA 2024	432.7	418.4	-14.3	-3%
	Productivity	16.2	16.8	0.5	3%
ERCEA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	7,546	9,600	2,054	27%
	FTEs EA 2024	555.4	555.5	0.1	0%
	Productivity	13.6	17.3	3.7	27%
REA	Commitment appropr. (in million EUR) 2021-2024	12,639	13,107	467	4%
	FTEs EA 2024	975.0	976.8	1.8	0%
	Productivity	13.0	13.4	0.5	4%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA, AWP and AAR.

5.3 Workload assessment methodologies

The following table shows a comprehensive comparison of the workload assessment methodologies employed by the six EAs. Each methodology varies in its approach, with some utilising data-driven, bottom-up strategies while others incorporate qualitative assessments and complexity matrices. The table outlines specific workload indicators used by each Agency, highlighting their unique focus areas and the evolution of their methodologies over time. Additionally, it addresses staffing allocation strategies, flexibility measures, and the involvement of stakeholders in the assessment process. Overall, the table emphasises the strengths and challenges faced by each Agency, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness and adaptability of their workload assessment practices.

Table 15. Comparison of workload assessment methodologies

	CINEA	EACEA	HaDEA	EISMEA	ERCEA	REA
Workload assessment methodology	Data-driven, bottom-up approach with structured indicators for grants and procurements.	Methodology based on four weighted indicators reflecting workload complexity (using a complexity value matrix) and significance.	Bottom-up activity-based model combining quantitative indicators with qualitative assessments of task complexity, developed in collaboration with Deloitte.	Methodology is still in development but based on CINEA's approach of identifying workload drivers and task completion times.	Data-driven methodology with a comprehensive set of indicators defined in collaboration with Deloitte.	Simplified approach, focusing on one key indicator - the number of ongoing projects per post.
Workload indicators	Four grant workload drivers: Number of proposals to be evaluated Grant agreements to be signed Number of ongoing projects to be evaluated. Number of projects until entry into operations (Specific for INNOVFUND	Four workload indicators: Total budget allocation, Number of calls, Number of estimated projects, Number of evaluations conducted.	47 core activities identified, with specific workload indicators for each.	Still in development Ten common tasks /workload indicators identified.	71 activities identified with specific workload indicators for measurement.	One main indicator: Number of ongoing projects per post. Supplemented by qualitative and quantitative aspects.

	CINEA	EACEA	HaDEA	EISMEA	ERCEA	REA
	and RENEWFM) Procurement procedures: Tenders Offers to be evaluated Contracts to be prepared Ongoing contracts to be managed Framework contracts to be prepared Ongoing Framework contracts to be managed					
Development over time	Significant advancement from previous simplified approaches; continuously refined using historical data and evolving programme inputs.	The methodology evolved to include a complexity matrix and year-to-year comparisons to track trends and forecast workload.	Evolved from initial benchmarking against other EAs to a tailored approach for current needs.	Incremental development shaped by operational pressures, as there was no formal system in place to systematically capture or manage workload levels.	Current workload methodology was introduced in 2024 after a major reform, moving from decentralised to centralised and data-driven methodology.	Simplified methodology developed in 2021 based on the 2021 CBA to enhance transparency and adaptability (replacing REA's previous more detailed model). Methodological

	CINEA	EACEA	HaDEA	EISMEA	ERCEA	REA
						refinements since then.
Data sources and inputs	Current and historical data from IT systems and internal data warehouse.	Combination of quantitative and qualitative data sources, including staff perception surveys.	Quantitative and qualitative data from HR, previous analyses, and qualitative feedback from staff.	Internal operational systems, manual inputs, and project lists for complex activities.	Systematic collection of quantitative and qualitative data from various sources.	Combination of quantitative work programme data, legacy project portfolio data, and qualitative input about complexity factors for different types of projects.
Staffing allocation and adjustments	Translation of total workload into staffing needs based on productivity rates for each programme (bottom-up assessment). Staffing needs are calculated by dividing the total number of person-days by the annual work time of one FTE (220 working days per year). Additionally, 10% is added	Staffing allocation based on the workload estimated through the four indicators and a max. of 15% for horizontal staff, as well as considerations from staff perception surveys.	Staff allocation based on reference profiles, which reflect task distributions and time allocation for each unit. Forward-looking assessments factor in anticipated changes in programme scope, task complexity, and operational demands.	Monthly calculations of staffing needs based on workload drivers and task completion times.	Staff allocation based on three calculation steps: (1) Conversion of time allocation per activity to an average profile per unit; (2) Analysis of the workload evolution per activity/unit; (3) FTE increase/decrease per unit calculated with the %-change in step (2) from the average profiles.	The allocation of staff is based on a strategic alignment between available staffing levels and the expected development of the project portfolio, within the constraints imposed by the CBA.

	CINEA	EACEA	HaDEA	EISMEA	ERCEA	REA
	to account for horizontal support.					
Flexibility measures	Staffing needs are reviewed annually. However, no temporary shifting of staff between programmes has been performed due to task complexity and specificity of each programme.	Staffing allocation includes flexibility for temporary adjustments during peak periods.	Staffing allocation is tailored to the complexity of each programme, allowing for internal resource reallocation e.g. in order to strengthen specific units	Not in place yet.	Dynamic adjustment mechanisms, including the use of "floaters" and interim staff, are implemented to respond to short-term workload fluctuations.	Use a relatively flexible system in resource allocation, with due consideration of CBA constraints. Where necessary, staff is redistributed between units, e.g. programme components expand or contract in order to respond to peak workloads.
Complexity analysis	The complexity and characteristics of each programme and task is considered during the staff allocation process. A set of productivity	A complexity value matrix is used to assign weights to various actions based on their complexity.	A programme-level complexity scoring is introduced, considering factors like stakeholder involvement and administrative processes.	Complexity analysis is ongoing, with a focus on identifying workload drivers and task complexity.	Complexity is measured through a comprehensive set of quantitative indicators, reflecting the depth and difficulty of tasks.	The workload indicator is complemented by a number of aspects on complexity and characteristics of each programme and task.

	CINEA	EACEA	HaDEA	EISMEA	ERCEA	REA
	indicators per programme and project type measures the complexity of the grants.					
Stakeholder involvement	Involvement of internal stakeholders for validation of the results of the analysis. Data is only collected from stakeholders concerning future budgets and procurements that are not in the IT system.	Regular consultations with staff committees and feedback mechanisms.	Cross-sectoral working group and staff self-assessments for data validation.	Stakeholder involvement through cross-functional working groups and strategic input.	Collaboration with internal stakeholders for methodology development and feedback.	Data checked and corroborated by each unit. Management-level involvement with consideration of operational challenges.
Strengths	Robust, data-driven estimation of staffing needs; adaptability to workload changes.	Proactive data collection and annual updates; multidimensional complexity measure (complexity value matrix).	Comprehensive activity mapping, self-assessment of staff and complexity scoring provide detailed insights; detailed list of workload drivers and indicators.	Focus on workload drivers allows for proactive planning; structured data collection.	Centralised, and standard methodology will improve transparency and understanding of workload.	Simplified approach enhances adaptability and responsiveness to workload changes. Methodological stability and consultative approach create buy-in from units.
Challenges	Complexity in categorising	Managing increase in	Complexity of legacy	No structured methodology in	Lack of systematic	Evolving programme

	CINEA	EACEA	HaDEA	EISMEA	ERCEA	REA
	diverse project types. Complexity in capturing the peculiarities (like Feedback to Policy intensity) of each project type when defining the values of the productivity indicators	applications which may lead to staff taking over multiple tasks, and ensuring qualitative factors are reflected in the workload methodology.	programs and variations in task complexity complicate assessments.	place yet; limited capacity for forecasting procurement activities; reliance on manual inputs.	tracking of actual time spent on activities; need for full automation to reduce reliance on Excel sheets (which is already in progress at the Agency).	landscape complicates establishing reliable benchmarks; reliance on a single workload indicator; lack of continuous monitoring and review of actual workload.
Lessons learned	Importance of robust historical data and stakeholder engagement for accurate assessments.	Need for additional indicators to provide a comprehensive view of workload.	Value of structured, data-driven assessment tools and staff engagement for acceptance.	Recognising the need for a more strategic approach to workforce planning.	Shift to a centralised model led to improved transparency and better understanding of workload.	Need for greater flexibility and ongoing monitoring to respond to short-term developments. No need for an overly complex system to support management decisions when the margin to make redeployments is so small.

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According to Article 25 of Council Regulation (EC) No 58/2003 laying down the statute for the executive agencies, an external evaluation of the operation of each agency must be carried out every three years. This report presents the findings of the cross-analysis of the external evaluations of six EU executive agencies for the 2021–2024 period: the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA), the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA), the European Research Council Executive Agency (ERCEA), the European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA), and the European Research Executive Agency (REA). The analysis examined the agencies' operational performance, the efficiency of their resource use, and the coherence of their programme portfolios and interactions with parent Directorates-General. A mixed-methods approach was applied, drawing on the six individual evaluation reports, transversal case studies, cross-agency interviews, comparative quantitative indicators, and a cost-benefit analysis.

The cross-analysis finds that the agencies effectively delivered their delegated programmes, meeting key performance indicators and achieving high stakeholder satisfaction. Efficiency gains exceeded initial expectations, with substantial cost savings and lean administrative structures. Portfolios were largely coherent and aligned with EU policy priorities, supported by generally clear divisions of responsibilities with parent DGs. Progress was noted in workload assessment, digital transformation, environmental management, and Feedback to Policy mechanisms, although some variability persists across agencies. The analysis confirms that the executive agency model remains effective, efficient, and coherent, while also highlighting several areas where further improvements could strengthen consistency, coordination, and operational practices across the EU executive agencies.

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