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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT

Accompanying the document

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the 'AgoraEU' programme for the period 2028-2034, and repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/692 and (EU) 2021/818

and

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2028-2034, and repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/817 and (EU) 2021/888

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This impact assessment (IA) focuses on EU funding supporting the policy areas of **cross-border education, training, solidarity, youth, media, culture and creative sectors, values, and civil society**. It aims to assess the most important policy choices underpinning the legislative proposals for programmes under the next multiannual financial framework (MFF).

Based on the results of the mid-term evaluations of the current funding instruments for the period 2021-2027, this impact assessment also considers the ambition, set out in the Political Guidelines, which envisions the new long-term EU budget to be more focused, simpler, more impactful, and articulated through fewer programmes.

Policy aspects are considered in the analysis of the context, the problem definition and the objectives, informing the choices on funding architecture. Given that the structure of the next MFF will significantly differ from the current one¹, **this impact assessment does not include budgetary scenarios at this stage.**

In addition to the results of the mid-term evaluations of the current programmes and the final evaluations of preceding programmes, this IA builds on the spending review exercises, various sectorial reports, studies and research. It also reflects the outcomes of the Open Public Consultation (OPC), which gathered 5,845 valid replies, as well as other stakeholders' consultations organised by the Commission as part of this exercise.

Problems

The starting point for this impact assessment is the analysis of the current challenges and problem drivers in the policy areas covered within the cluster. In line with the political guidelines for the MFF exercise, and in particular with the objective of building a policy-based budget, policy aspects are considered in the analysis of the problem definition and the objectives, in turn informing the architectural choice of future funding programmes.

The analysis identified that the EU budget has an unachieved potential to help address the challenges affecting the policy areas in this cluster. It led to the definition of **three problems** affecting the EU financial intervention: two of them relating to policy content, the third concerning challenges affecting the design and implementation of the financial intervention.

Problem 1: Threats to democracy, fundamental rights and EU values, culture and cultural diversity, and shrinking civic and media spaces

Problem 2: Shortfall of skills and key competences for life and jobs

Problem 3: Challenges to the design and architecture of the EU financing instruments to address the policy-related problems.

Each problem is then further explained through a series of drivers, which describe specific aspects of the problem and detail the main issues to be addressed through EU financial intervention. The impact assessment also illustrates how such problems and drivers are likely

¹ Communication on [The road to the next multiannual financial framework](#) (COM/2025/46 final).

to persist without EU financial support, by analysing them through the lens of the set of megatrends identified by the European Commission's Competence Centre on Foresight².

Objectives

The response that future funding EU instruments may offer to address these problems is then articulated in general and specific objectives. In particular, the IA associates one general objective to each of the three problems identified:

General objective 1: *Enhance and deepen the EU ability to financially contribute, provide added value and promote fundamental rights and EU values, democracy, media and culture.*

General objective 2: *Enhance and deepen the EU ability to financially contribute, support and provide added value to cross-border education and training, youth, sport and solidarity, contributing to skills for life and jobs.*

General objective 3: *Enhance and deepen the EU ability to financially contribute and provide added value in these policies with a design fostering adequacy of funding to policy, simplification, coordination and synergies.*

Each general objective is then further articulated in specific objectives, which describe to a higher level of granularity the contribution that EU financial intervention can make to achieve the overall objective(s).

The necessity and added value of EU action

The policy areas covered by this IA are firmly anchored in the EU Treaties, which provide the legal bases for EU action through financial interventions. The EU budget in these areas is crucial to the foundations of the EU, it drives progress across all Member States and is particularly necessary to: (1) address transnational and common challenges; (2) achieve systemic impact by filling gaps and ensuring a European approach; and (3) enhance coherence between internal and external policies.

In line with the principle of subsidiarity, the added value of EU action is shown with regard to: (1) Nurturing a sense of EU citizenship, solidarity and belonging; (2) Ensuring high standards across the EU; (3) Supporting and reinforcing the Single Market and improving fair access across the EU; and (4) Adding value through better delivery. The added value and impact need to be interpreted in the context of available budgetary resources.

Policy options

In order to address the challenges described in the previous section, considering that they are likely to persist in the future and that EU intervention in this field is needed and adds value, the IA contemplates **three alternative options for the architecture of future EU funding**. Additional options, which were considered yet discarded at an early stage, are also presented

² 14 megatrends have been identified by the [Commission's Megatrends Hub](#).

– namely the discontinuation of EU funding; the merger of the Justice programme and other merging configurations.

The options were designed through a series of criteria³ identified through an initial mapping and analysis of components and implementation aspects of the current programming period's EU funding instruments supporting the relevant policy areas.

The **first option represents the baseline**, continuing existing programmes as stand-alone (option 1 - Continuity). The **second option proposes two programmes**, each of them primarily supporting one of the two policy-driven problems and corresponding general objectives (option 2 – objective-based consolidation). The **third option proposes one single programme**, supporting the implementation of all policies areas covered under this cluster (option 3 – Full integration). The Justice programme remains standalone in all scenarios, due to reasons related to its legal basis.

After the presentation of the three policy options, the IA offers an analysis of their main potential impact across the most relevant social (e.g. contribution to democratic and societal resilience; contribution to social inclusion and cohesion, impact on citizens' personal, social, civic and professional development), economic (e.g. competitiveness; employability) and environmental dimensions. In addition, it presents a costs and benefits analysis, and the options' impacts on digitalisation, fundamental rights and equality. It also analyses the options' contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

In addition to the impacts analysis, the IA also includes a **comparison between the three options based on the Social Multi-Criteria Evaluation (SMCE) model**, which was considered appropriate to this specific exercise due to the large scope and diversity of this cluster's interventions. Through the SMCE, the three options are compared along four dimensions, namely their **effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and proportionality**. For each of these dimensions, a set of objectives were agreed upon, reflecting the priorities outlined under General Objectives 1, 2 and 3. The impact of the three options was then scored against a set of 39 agreed indicators, using the following range: --- (the most negative), --, -, =, +, ++, +++ (the most positive). The scoring was based on an expert assessment, relying on results of current evaluations, spending reviews, political guidelines and policy reports, studies, OPC, and independent sectoral reports and surveys. The ranking was obtained, under the assumption that all indicators have the same weight, by applying the SOCRATES model.⁴ The robustness of the results obtained was verified through local and global sensitivity analyses, despite some limitations in the data availability for the triangulation of the results. Annex 4 of the IA provides further explanation of the above methodology and the ranking of the policy options.

Preferred option

³ Aspects used for comparison included: the political context, IA problem drivers, legal basis, competence/subsidiarity, third countries participation, implementation modes, governance, internal architecture, target groups, branding, and funding.

⁴ See Tool #62 of Better Regulation. To obtain a policy ranking consistent with the information contained in the impact matrix, the analysis applied a non-compensatory mathematical aggregation rule.

The outcome of this comparison results in demonstrating that **option 2 (“objective-based consolidation”)** offers better potential compared to the other options considered. In particular, it allows for stronger coordination, flexibility, and a more impactful use of the EU budget – while preserving a clear focus with policy goals. In short, option 2 offers the optimal balance between simplification and policy relevance. In addition, this option responds to the greatest extent to the requests expressed by stakeholders and the public, namely better accessibility to funding, flexibility of resource allocation, as well as the maintenance of the visibility of well-established brands under this cluster.

The success of the initiative will be monitored through the performance framework for the post 2027 budget.