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2025
ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

***Simplification,
Implementation
& Enforcement***

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Youth, Culture and Sport

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1. Introduction

This report outlines the key developments in the simplification, implementation and enforcement of Union law and policies in areas under my responsibility as Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, covering the period from 1 January to 31 July 2025. It presents how EU instruments have been leveraged to empower young people and promote participation in culture and sport. The report also identifies implementation challenges, lessons learned and good practices that help align national measures with EU-level objectives, support convergence between Member States, and contribute to the long-term resilience and cohesion of the European Union. In line with the priorities set out in the Commission Communication *Delivering Better Implementation and Simplification for EU Citizens and Businesses* (COM(2025) 65 final of 19 February 2025)¹, it highlights how ongoing efforts in my portfolio contribute to reducing administrative burden, improving delivery on the ground and reinforcing trust in Union action.

For the purpose of this report, the programmes covered by my portfolio as stated in my [mission letter](#) include the culture strand of Creative Europe, the youth and sport strands of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. For a full overview of the simplification, implementation and enforcement of the Erasmus+ programme as a whole, please refer to the report of Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness Roxana Minzatu.

2. Executive Summary

Under my leadership, the EU stepped up its efforts to deliver meaningful policies for young people and future generations. Flagship programmes such as Creative Europe (culture strand), Erasmus+ (youth and sport strands) and the European Solidarity Corps became more accessible through streamlined procedures and the integration of digital tools supporting youth participation, solidarity and mobility. In June 2025, I held my first implementation dialogue and engaged with youth stakeholders on the youth policy toolbox identifying concrete needs such as better outreach, simpler access and sustained support for youth civil society. Stakeholders proposed concrete measures to simplify and enhance programme delivery, including the introduction of micro-grants, clearer digital guidance, broader use of AI tools to reduce administrative burdens, stronger national coordination and better recognition of youth work, all aimed at making Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes more accessible, coherent and impactful.

All Commissioners held at least one Youth Policy Dialogue in the first 100 days of the mandate. These are complementary to the implementation dialogues and provide direct input from young people that is highly relevant to advancing the simplification and implementation agenda by making EU programmes more accessible, inclusive and impactful.

My services completed the **interim evaluation of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme** (including the youth and sport strands) and **European Solidarity Corps**, as well as the **final evaluations of the 2018-2020 Erasmus+ programme** (including the youth and sport strands)² and **European Solidarity Corps** and of the

¹ European Commission: COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS A simpler and faster Europe: Communication on implementation and simplification, COM(2025) 47 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025DC0047>

² European Commission, REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on the interim evaluation of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme, COM(2025) 395 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0395>.

2014-2020 EU Aid Volunteers initiative³. These fed into the Commission proposals for the new Erasmus+ and AgoraEU programmes for 2028-2034 and also reaffirmed the current programmes' crucial role in strengthening the role of sport as catalyst for social inclusion, values and skills development, innovation and growth as well as fostering youth engagement and social cohesion, while serving as unique drivers for solidarity and volunteering in Europe. The culture strand of the Creative Europe programme continued to promote cultural and linguistic diversity and support freedom of artistic expression, including dedicated actions in solidarity with Ukraine.

In parallel, my services addressed potentially discriminatory national practices through the use of enforcement tools, ensuring the consistent application of Union law. Looking ahead, the simplification and implementation agenda is set to advance through AI-driven innovation and digitalisation, improving programme delivery on the ground and supporting more effective implementation by national authorities and stakeholders, while maintaining high quality, transparency and integrity standards. By prioritising proximity to citizens, fairness across generations and values-based policy-making, EU policies and programmes under this portfolio are delivering tangible benefits and contributing to the democratic resilience of the Union.

3. Delivering Results: Key Measures

A. Simplification

Simplification remains a central priority in the implementation of programmes in my portfolio. Efforts during the reporting period focused on reducing administrative burden, improving accessibility and increasing efficiency across the programme cycle and prioritising delegated and implementing acts. Building on insights from previous evaluations, concrete progress was made in streamlining application and reporting procedures, upgrading digital tools, and reinforcing internal control systems, while maintaining high standards of quality and sound financial management. These measures have helped to make EU programmes more user-friendly, resilient and results-oriented. Concrete simplification examples can be found in the Annex at the end of this report.

A key focus was placed on National Agencies ('NAs'), which are responsible for implementing over 80% of the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programme budgets under indirect management. Simplification efforts in the reporting period prioritised the operational needs of NAs, focusing on shorter and simplified reporting requirements for their annual reports, striking a balance between burden reduction and upholding accountability rules. At the same time, strong focus was given to simplifying access and management processes for beneficiaries. An example is the [European Youth Portal](#), which hosts the registration tool for European Solidarity Corps participants. During the first half of 2025, the registration process was further streamlined and improvements were made in language accessibility. Similar technical discussions were held in the area of sport, with a view to improving the implementation of the mobility action for sport coaches and staff.

All implemented simplification measures were developed in close consultation with the NAs. They will further enhance the reputation of the youth and sport strands of Erasmus+ and of the European Solidarity Corps for providing effective support, with experienced organisations already noting administrative improvements compared to the previous programming period, as highlighted in the interim evaluations. In European Solidarity Corps, among over 700 survey respondents, 51%, 45% and 40% confirmed simplified project proposals, funding mechanisms and reporting processes respectively. The initial feedback from the agencies has been positive, and the full impact of the

³ European Commission. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, BearingPoint, PPMI, PPMI, and BearingPoint, Interim evaluation for the 2021-2027 European Solidarity Corps, final evaluation for the 2018-2020 European Solidarity Corps and final evaluation for the 2014-2020 EU Aid Volunteers Initiative – Final report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/5736339>.

new simplification measures will be assessed over the medium to long term, in accordance with the regular project lifecycle.

During the reporting period, the Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture ('DG EAC') and the Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology ('DG CNECT') prepared the interim evaluation of the 2021-2027 Creative Europe programme. It confirmed the programme's strong EU added value and effectiveness, while underlining the progress made through simplification measures such as cascading grants, e-applications via the eGrants portal and broader use of lump sums, which have eased application, management and reporting. Time to grant has improved, with 97% of grant agreements concluded within the nine-month target (established in Article 197(2) of the Financial Regulation⁴), and in some cases even faster (e.g., eight weeks for Culture Moves Europe). At the same time, the evaluation showed that administrative burden remains high, particularly for smaller organisations, confirming the need for further simplification.

The **Educational, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)**, operating under the remit of DG EAC, continued to deliver their programmes efficiently, advancing simplification and leveraging digital tools.⁵ Efficiency gains were achieved through a combination of internal measures, such as process reorganisations and procedural simplification, and broader corporate and cross-cutting actions. The continuous improvement of both local and corporate IT systems further contributed to improved agencies' performance. The Educational, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency modernised its internal control system through the Internal Control Transformation Project, establishing a reliable and fully effective control environment, reducing administrative burden, and strengthening sound financial management. For beneficiaries, these improvements meant faster time-to-grant, smoother payment processes, simpler cost options and more user-friendly digital procedures, reducing bureaucracy especially for smaller civil-society organisations. High satisfaction rates among beneficiaries (over 85%) and experts confirm that these changes not only improved access to EU funding but also supported a more diverse and inclusive participation in Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps, thereby generating positive societal effects through stronger youth engagement, cultural exchange and volunteering.

B. Implementation

Implementation efforts during the reporting period focused on strengthening youth participation, sport cooperation, cultural resilience and cross-border solidarity through the effective delivery of EU programmes and instruments. Flagship programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps continued to yield tangible results, facilitating access to learning, volunteering, and culture. Policy dialogues, targeted funding mechanisms and digital platforms helped align national action with EU-level priorities. Despite notable progress, several implementation challenges persisted, including limited structural support for youth work and the need for more effective outreach to disadvantaged groups. Progress was driven by responsive delivery tools, evidence-based monitoring and close cooperation with Member States and civil society across all policy areas in my portfolio. Specific examples of implementation support can be found in the annex.

A key deliverable was my first implementation dialogue on the youth policy toolbox, held on 26 June. Stakeholders welcomed the introduction of new participatory tools under the 2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy and reaffirmed the value of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in promoting EU values. They also identified key implementation challenges, such as the low political prioritisation of youth work, complex procedures and insufficient structural funding. Calls were made for simpler access, improved outreach to disadvantaged youth, and sustained support for youth civil society.

⁴ European Commission: Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (recast), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/2509/oj/eng>

⁵ European Commission, COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT: Evaluation of the Educational, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), SWD(2025) 89 final, 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025SC0089>.

In January 2025, I engaged young people in a [Youth Policy Dialogue](#) on the upcoming Culture Compass, and on sport as a source and driver for social inclusion, the #BeActive EU Sport Awards and the actions supported under the sport strand of Erasmus+.

EU instruments, combined with reforms and implementation support, continued to play a vital role in promoting **fairness across age groups** and fostering **inclusive youth participation**. Since its launch in 2016, the European Solidarity Corps has been a **key driver of civic engagement and solidarity** among young Europeans. The interim evaluation for the 2021-2027 European Solidarity Corps confirmed that the programme effectively responds to evolving societal needs, particularly in promoting participation in democratic life, inclusion and diversity. It offers unique volunteering and solidarity opportunities, with approximately 40% of participants coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Moreover, the programme has also demonstrated its resilience in times of crisis, contributing to the COVID-19 pandemic recovery, supporting Ukraine since the start of Russia's war of aggression, and mitigating the impact of disasters on EU citizens. Positive outcomes include increased social and civic competences among participants – over 80% reported greater tolerance towards different values and behaviours, and nearly 90% improved their skills in interacting with people from diverse backgrounds. The Quality Label has strengthened project delivery and organisational capacity, driving improvements in the quality of youth work across Europe.

My services further strengthened the implementation of the Commission's youth toolbox through digital enhancements and outreach. For example, dedicated communication efforts carried out for [DiscoverEU](#), an Erasmus+ youth strand action, successfully increased visibility among the public, stakeholders, and press. Additionally, the Education and Training Monitor introduced disaggregated equity indicators that **help identify youth-specific challenges** in education and participation, helping policymakers design more targeted and inclusive responses. These indicators support the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy enabling more targeted and inclusive policy responses.

The culture strand of Creative Europe continued to promote **cultural diversity, resilience of the cultural and creative sectors and cross-border cultural expression**. Deliverables in the area included the publication of a report supporting local authorities with architectural planning, several flagship awards, and facilitating exchanges of cultural professionals through the [Culture Moves Europe programme](#). Targeted support for Ukraine remained a priority. In July 2025, my services launched the Team Europe initiative for cultural heritage in Ukraine, aimed to strengthen coordination and professional capacity building in the sector. Furthermore, the Creative Europe special call for Ukraine was reinforced with an additional EUR 2 million, bringing the total EU cultural support since the start of the war to over EUR 50 million. These actions underscore the EU's sustained commitment to defending cultural identity, fostering resilience, and supporting international partners through culture in times of crisis.

C. Enforcement

No [infringement procedures](#) were initiated in the policy area in my responsibility during the reporting period.

My services remained responsive to concerns raised by EU citizens regarding potential breaches of Union law, particularly in relation to non-discrimination and equal access to cultural and digital services. My services opened [pre-infringement dialogues](#) on these issues with four Member States during the first half of 2025.

A complaint was received regarding access to the free eBiblio platform. The Commission initiated a pre-infringement dialogue with Spain during the reporting period to examine the issue and ensure alignment with Union law.

More information about the enforcement tools of the Commission can be found [here](#). The Commission also publishes information on its enforcement activities on a [webpage](#), where the public can perform targeted searches and customise graphs.

4. Way forward

Looking ahead, efforts will focus on enhancing programme delivery, improving inclusiveness and efficiency and responding more effectively to evolving policy needs at local, national and European levels. Continued emphasis will be placed on simplifying procedures, strengthening evidence-based decision-making, and supporting long-term impact. The results from the evaluations of Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps will help inform future improvements and have fed into the preparation for the successor programmes under the next 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

The proposed 2028-2034 Erasmus+ Regulation offers an opportunity to further simplify management of youth and sport actions. The proposed regulation will integrate all volunteering actions currently supported under the European Solidarity Corps, including volunteering activities, volunteering teams in high priority areas and humanitarian aid volunteering. The unified programme will offer a single-entry point to EU opportunities for young people across the EU and abroad, making access simpler, clearer and more visible, as well as reducing the number of calls for proposals.

The interim evaluation of the 2021-2027 Creative Europe programme identified several areas for further simplification, such as improving the user-friendliness of corporate tools, better aligning the eGrants portal to the needs of cultural stakeholders across application, implementation and reporting phases, as well as revising application forms in preparation for the next MFF. In this context, the proposed AgoraEU programme offers further rationalisation potential by integrating EU actions supporting culture, media and civil society into a more cohesive framework. Another option being explored to further improve the programme's efficiency is to move all actions still managed with actual costs to a lump sum system. Furthermore, the next EU Work Plan for Culture, expected for adoption in 2026, will provide another opportunity to improve simplification, implementation and enforcement across the Commission's cultural action. My next implementation dialogue – planned for September 2025 – will discuss improvements for the Creative Europe Culture programme.

More generally, the simplification agenda will advance through the deployment of advanced data analytics and AI tools, without compromising policy objectives or compliance with the Financial Regulation. These efforts are not an end in themselves but aim to reduce administrative burden, free up resources for learning mobility and volunteering, and make EU programmes more accessible and inclusive for citizens and organisations. A 'multiple organisations dashboard' is being developed to help National Agencies identify links between applicants using structured data and intelligent search functions, with rollout foreseen by the end of 2025. Such tools will allow agencies to focus more on quality and impact, rather than manual checks. In parallel, my services are exploring how AI can support NAs in routine tasks such as data consolidation and document checks. Feedback from NAs will guide future applications, including AI-powered chatbots to improve user support. A proof of concept is also underway for an AI-based dashboard to detect double funding and plagiarism, strengthening integrity and trust in EU funding, while full automation of national agency reporting is planned for 2026.

Annex: Simplification and implementation examples

1. Creative Europe: Improved project monitoring and evaluation

Targeted efforts and additional resources were allocated to enhance reporting tools under the culture strand of Creative Europe, for a simpler, more complete and efficient reporting. Improvements focus on expanding search functionalities and enriching data sources beyond the eGrants system and are being implemented with special emphasis on not increasing burdens on beneficiaries. More complete reporting tools will improve the general overview and accuracy of reporting of programme outputs. In parallel, work has begun to integrate Culture Moves Europe into all relevant reporting and valorisation platforms, further supporting transparency and impact assessment. The gradual enhancement of the [valorisation platform](#) with Culture Moves Europe projects will benefit stakeholders and the general public, allowing a more complete overview of supported projects, facilitated by tailor-

made filters, through a single-entry point. This will ensure that EU funding is transparent, results are clearly visible and benefits are tangible for citizens. By making information more accessible and easier to use, these tools not only help policymakers but also empower cultural operators, researchers and citizens to see the impact of EU investment in culture. Additionally, discussions with the industries (mostly music and book sectors) are ongoing to assess how better industry data can be shared and used to analyse the impact of the relevant initiatives of the programme on them.

2. Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps: More efficient project selection procedures

To help reduce administrative burden and improve efficiency in project evaluation, the Commission issued updated guidelines to National Agencies (NAs) in April 2025. Under these guidelines, NAs have the option to assess the 'Relevance' criterion first and may choose to discontinue the evaluation of proposals that do not meet the minimum funding threshold. This pragmatic approach has already led to shorter processing times and enabled evaluators to focus resources where they are most needed.

3. Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps: Improved project monitoring and evaluation

A new data export functionality was introduced to support the monitoring of Erasmus+ accreditations and European Solidarity Corps Quality Labels. This upgrade has streamlined reporting processes for NAs and improved the transparency, overall project oversight and NAs' responsiveness. For beneficiaries, participant surveys are now automatically integrated into final reports, reducing administrative burdens while improving the quality of data collected on programme outcomes.

4. European Solidarity Corps: Digitalising volunteer engagement

Volunteer agreements under the European Solidarity Corps can now be generated and signed electronically via the PASS system. This digital shift has simplified administrative procedures for youth organisations, improved data quality and made participation more accessible for young volunteers across the EU.

5. European Youth Portal: Strengthening support to implementation partners

The helpdesk responsible for replying to NAs' requests and participants' queries related to the registration IT system has been reinforced with additional capacity to manage support tickets more efficiently and expanded access to the European Youth Portal for basic tasks, which sped up responses and reduced the burden on the core team.