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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

Accompanying the document

**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 implementation of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship
programme 2014-2020**

{COM(2018) 508 final} - {SWD(2018) 358 final}

The report and the staff working document (accompanying the report) represent the results of the interim evaluation of the first half time implementation of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (from 2014 to mid-2017). The Programme was designed to further develop a Europe of rights and equality in accordance with the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Therefore, its general objective is the further development of an area where equality and the rights of persons, as enshrined in the Treaty, the Charter and international human rights conventions, are promoted and protected by addressing fundamental rights in nine areas (violence, anti-racism, non-discrimination, protection of the rights of people with disabilities, of children and of consumers, gender equality and gender mainstreaming, data protection, EU citizenship) corresponding to its specific objectives.

The evaluation carried out assessed the Programme's current progress towards its objectives. The findings will contribute to the last work programmes for 2019-2020 and will also inform the design of the Programme for the post-2020 funding period.

The interim evaluation illustrated that the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme is performing generally well at midterm with regard to its specific objectives. In particular, in terms of:

- **Effectiveness**

As the progress in achieving the Programme's outputs and outcomes has been good so far, **it is reasonable to expect that the Programme is making good progress towards achieving also its general objective.** However, **sometimes is challenging to trace and attribute the changes in the global indicators to the interventions of the Programme.** Concerning, in particular, its specific objectives, **the progress in the achievement of targets in relation to the nine objectives is uneven.** With regard to three specific objectives (namely the ones on promoting non-discrimination, promoting the rights deriving from the citizenship of the Union and promoting consumer rights), the Programme's contribution is direct and substantial and their targets are likely to be achieved. Instead, the evidence on the impact of the Programme on the achievement of other specific objectives showed that the Programme activities are contributing to the achievement of their targets, but this impact is more moderate, due both to the limited amount of Programme resources, as well as change being influenced by many other different factors.

In any case, **the key result achieved across the specific objectives is the improved skills and competences of professionals.** Another important achievement of the Programme is **the contribution to systemic change by project results, including better tools, procedures, services and policies developed across the specific objectives.**

The monitoring indicators selected for measuring the achievements of the Programme are overall adequate, but some improvements could be implemented.

According to the majority of beneficiaries, **the communication activities undertaken by the Commission to promote the Programme have been largely successful** and the popularity of the Programme has, therefore, increased compared to the predecessor programmes. However, efforts need to be maintained to ensure all potential applicants in all Member States are reached.

The benefit of the Programme has been high compared to the predecessor programmes also in terms of applications received and awards granted.

An additional positive development has been **the high level of financial implementation of the Programme** since the level of funding requested by applicants and granted in relation to each specific objective in years 2014-2015 is slightly higher than in the predecessor programmes.

Moreover, based on several indicators and according to the surveyed and interviewed stakeholders, the evaluation showed positive progress in delivering **improvements in the level of knowledge of EU law and EU policies, rights and values**. Moreover, the partnerships formed during the Programme activities have had positive impacts on beneficiaries and Programme participants' skills and capacities.

Concerning the **sustainability** of the Programme's activities after the end of the funding, the majority of surveyed stakeholders considered that actions are very highly likely to be sustained in terms of acquiring new skills and knowledge, increased awareness and the creation of tools and procedures outlasting the projects. Slightly lower was the expectation of the training activities lasting after the project completion. However, only a third of respondents expected the partnerships which were funded during the project to last beyond the funding period. Similarly, low is the proportion of the stakeholders who considered that the partnerships formed during the projects financed by the Programme have increased their fundraising capabilities. In general, there is very little evidence about the sustainability of project results after the end of funding.

Finally, more than 80 % of survey respondents state that **the Programme is (very) highly effective in meeting the needs of the relevant target groups**. Over 70% of the Programme beneficiaries surveyed in the evaluation also considered that the Programme has been highly and very effective in targeting the right policy areas and the most relevant target groups.

▪ **Relevance**

The Programme is highly relevant to the needs of its stakeholders and beneficiaries, e.g. in terms of knowledge development, training, awareness raising and structural support. Indeed, the stakeholders surveyed in the evaluation were very positive about the relevance of the Programme actions in meeting their needs. However, the evaluation also found some gaps in relation to the needs of some stakeholders and citizens that could receive greater attention by the Programme, such as women subject to multiple discrimination (e.g. migrant, disabled, and older women).

The needs identified at the time of the Programme's adoption are still relevant, since, as demonstrated by the evaluation carried out, the achievement of several targets, relating, in particular, to gender equality or rights of disabled people is unlikely as progress has been slow.

The Programme is also flexible enough to incorporate emerging needs.

Another indication of the continuing relevance of the Programme to the current needs is the **increase of demand for grants funded compared to previous programmes**, especially concerning the specific objectives relating to the violence against children, non-discrimination and combating racism.

▪ **Efficiency**

According to the majority of beneficiaries and Member States representatives, **the costs of the Programme are either proportionate to benefits or outweighing them.**

A key achievement of the Programme, compared to its predecessors, has also been the **lower demand on beneficiaries in terms of time and financial resources**.

Moreover, according to stakeholders, **the changes in the design of the Programme, compared to 2007-2013, are the most important factor for the efficiency of projects in achieving the results**.

Beneficiaries consider current funding instruments as adequate for the Programme. However, they consider that there can be scope for using alternative measures, such as microcredit and small loans.

Finally, several beneficiaries pointed out to the issue of the relative **long time span between the application and the start of project activities as problematic for their efficiency**, since, in this long period, contextual factors may change, requesting an additional effort in adapting the project to the new context.

- **Coherence, Complementarity, Synergies**

According to beneficiaries, **the Programme presents a high level of internal coherence (between the specific objectives and interventions) and a high level of external coherence and complementarity with other EU instruments, programmes and actions**.

No significant overlaps with other EU funded programmes have been found in the evaluation. This would seem to confirm that specific objectives are more streamlined and clearly defined if compared to the predecessor programmes.

Moreover, the Programme is highly coherent with the internationally agreed principles, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In addition, according to almost 90% of beneficiaries, **the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme is also overall consistent, in its objectives, targets and types of actions, with national policies in the same field**.

- **EU added value**

The inherent “European” and transnational dimension is at the core of the EU added value of the Programme. According to the majority of beneficiaries, in the absence of the Programme activities, similar projects would not have taken place or not be possible with the same coverage in terms of beneficiaries and target groups, due to lack of available resources at Member State level. This is particularly relevant for the training actions in the field of prevention of all forms of violence and in the field of data protection. Similarly, EU funding for EU level organisations is particularly vital as national funding for a transnational network would be even more difficult to obtain. Moreover, **projects financed by the Programme, according to surveyed stakeholders, seem to have higher quality and to be more innovative than those funded at the national level.** In particular, these projects, by allowing innovative approaches to be experimented with, can be used to show national governments the benefits of the activities undertaken.

Finally, **the demand for Programme funding has continued to be high throughout the implementation of the Programme.** All these findings suggest that there is sustained demand for EU-level action in the fields covered by the Programme.

- **Equity**

The Programme has provided specific support to the promotion of the cross-cutting priorities of gender equality, rights of child and rights of people with disabilities.

The issue of the gender mainstreaming is promoted through a dedicated specific objective. Furthermore, gender equality specific actions have also been funded under other specific objectives. This means that significant financial resources have been dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming directly. Gender mainstreaming principles and mechanisms are reflected in all Programme phases of programming, implementation and monitoring but still there is scope for strengthening the protection of women facing multiple disadvantages and also for involving more the equality bodies in the setting of Programme priorities.

Concerning the protection of the rights of the child, the Programme has two specific objectives directly targeting the promotion of the rights of the child. Furthermore, also other specific objectives could fund actions potentially relevant for children. Moreover, the respect of the rights of the child is enhanced by the fact that organisations applying for funding, which will work directly with children during the project implementation, must provide the Commission with a description of their child protection policy. However, the mainstreaming of rights of child across all Programme phases could be further improved, in particular through the involvement of bodies representing the interest of children in the setting of Programme priorities.

The Programme envisages a specific objective for the **promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities** and one on the promotion of the effective implementation of the principle of non-discrimination, including based on disability. All applications submitted under this specific objective have been awarded. The mainstreaming of rights of rights of disabled people across all Programme phases needs to be increased, in particular through a direct link with the EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and a more involvement of bodies representing the interests of disabled people in the setting of Programme priorities.

Always in relation to equity, **the Programme does not seem to capture the needs of people suffering from multiple disadvantages**, as the specific objectives do not support synergies and actions for groups falling under two or more of them.

In addition, **co-financing seems to be a barrier for small non-governmental organisations wishing to participate in the Programme**.

Finally, in the future, the Programme should try to distribute its resources in a more balanced manner across the different target groups of beneficiaries and Member States.

To understand better how the Programme promotes equity through the funded activities, participants' data broken down by sex, disability status or age, as required by the Regulation, shall be collected. This is however not yet done.

▪ **Scope for simplification**

According to the evaluation, **the current direct management mode is adequate given the size and objectives of the Programme**. However, according to the majority of beneficiaries, **there is scope for further simplification of the implementation, management and design of the Programme**. Among the reasons provided, beneficiaries indicated, in particular, that the financial reporting is too detailed, especially compared to the ones applied within other EU Programmes (e.g. Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+) and underlined the possibility to reduce the current administrative burden in terms of proposal drafting and monitoring and reporting requirements.

Another current key suggestion from beneficiaries concerns **the operating grants**, whose duration in their view could be extended to cover at least two years (instead of one) in order to

reduce the administrative burden in terms of project application and management procedures. Furthermore, the absence of **standard costs** implies sometimes lengthy negotiations among project partners on the costs of the different activities.

On the positive side, beneficiaries and Commission officials agreed that **the recently introduced system for applications (Participant Portal) goes in the direction of simplifying the application process and improving the collection and aggregation of monitoring data**. However, there could be still room for further simplifying the process, particularly in relation to the administrative documentation to be provided.

Moreover, another key issue according to beneficiaries is that most of the funding available in the Programme is relatively inaccessible to small civil society non-governmental organisations, due to the co-financing amounts required for the set size of grants.

Finally, an element of administrative burden, as widely shared by all beneficiaries, is the excessive length of the period from the application until the start of project activities.