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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**on the mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the Europe for Citizens
programme 2014-2020**

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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

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In his 2017 State of the Union address, President Juncker underlined the need to involve civil society at national, regional and local level more in the work on the future of Europe. The Europe for Citizens programme is one of the tools for engaging European citizens in the European project and in stimulating profound interest in and identification with the European Union.

This report sets out the mid-term results obtained by the Europe for Citizens programme and discusses the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation of the programme, as required by Article 15(4)(a) of Council Regulation No 390/2014 of 14 April 2014¹. It is based on the findings of an externally run mid-term evaluation² and a staff working document prepared by the European Commission³ and it builds on a European Parliament report on the implementation of the programme of March 2017⁴ and a public consultation carried out by the Commission between January and April 2017⁵.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The current Europe for Citizens programme 2014-2020 was established by Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014.

The Regulation sets its general objectives as being to:

- contribute to citizens' understanding of the EU, its history and diversity; and
- foster European citizenship and to improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at EU level.

Its specific objectives are to:

- raise awareness of remembrance, the common history and values of the EU and the EU's aim, namely to promote peace, the values of the EU and the well-being of its peoples by stimulating debate, reflection and the development of networks; and

¹ Council Regulation No 390/2014/EC of 14 April 2014 establishing the programme 'Europe for Citizens' programme for the period 2014-2020, OJ L 115, 17.4.2014.

² Mid-term evaluation of the Europe for Citizens Programme, Deloitte and Coffey International, July 2017.

³ Commission staff working document accompanying the report on the mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the Europe for Citizens programme 2014-2020

⁴ European Parliament Report on the implementation of Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 of 14 April 2014 establishing the Europe for Citizens programme (2015/2329(INI)).

⁵ See: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/public-consultation-mid-term-evaluation-europe-citizens-programme-2014-2020_en

- encourage democratic and civic participation of citizens at EU level, by developing citizens' understanding of the EU policy-making process and promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering at EU level.

The programme is implemented by the European Commission with the support of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

2. KEY ELEMENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

The programme supports a wide range of activities and organisations that promote active European citizenship through involving citizens across Europe. The programme's two strands — *European remembrance* and *democratic engagement and civic participation* — are complemented by a cross-cutting measure (*horizontal action: valorisation*) for analysis, dissemination and use of the projects' results. As provided by in the Regulation, the programme uses action grants to support projects of both strands and operating grants to support organisations working within the objectives of the programme.

2.1. The programme's strands

- *Strand 1: European remembrance*

This strand supports activities that invite reflection on European cultural diversity and the EU's common values in the broadest sense. It aims to finance projects that reflect on the causes of totalitarian regimes in Europe's modern history and commemorate the victims of their crimes.

It also supports activities relating to other defining moments and reference points in recent European history. Particular preference is given to projects which encourage tolerance, mutual understanding, intercultural dialogue and reconciliation as a means of moving beyond the past and building the future, with an emphasis on reaching younger generations.

- *Strand 2: Democratic engagement and civic participation*

This strand supports activities relating to civic participation, with a particular focus on activities directly linked to EU policies. Support is given with a view to increasing participation in shaping the EU's political agenda in areas related to the programme's objectives. This strand also covers projects and initiatives that develop opportunities for mutual understanding, intercultural learning, solidarity, civic engagement and volunteering at EU level.

The following types of activity are supported under Strand 2:

- **Town twinning:** This measure supports projects that bring together a wide range of citizens from twinned towns to discuss topics aligned with the objectives of the programme. By mobilising citizens at local and EU level to debate concrete issues on the European political agenda, these projects seek to promote civic participation and develop opportunities for civic engagement.
- **Networks of towns:** Municipalities, regions and associations working together on common themes over the long term can develop networks to make their cooperation more

sustainable and exchange good practice. Networks of towns organise activities around subjects of common interest in the context of the programme’s objectives or multi-annual priorities.

- **Civil society projects:** This measure offers grants to support projects promoted by transnational partnerships and networks that directly involve citizens. These projects bring together citizens from different backgrounds in activities that provide opportunities to participate in shaping the EU’s political agenda. As part of these projects, citizens are invited to collaborate on or debate multi-annual priority themes at local and European levels.

- *Horizontal Action: Valorisation*

This measure includes communication activities, studies, the dissemination of programme results, and support for the Europe for Citizens Contact Points (ECPs) appointed in Member States and participating countries. The ECPs provide advice to applicants, support searches for partners, and disseminate programme information.

2.2. Budget

The total budget for the programme for the 2014-2020 period is EUR 187 718 000⁶. The programme used all of its commitment and payment allocations during this reporting period. These were divided between the programme’s strands and activities as follows:

- EUR 9.46 million were granted to European remembrance projects.
- EUR 12.21 million were granted to town twinning projects.
- EUR 12.71 million were granted to networks of towns.
- EUR 10.32 million were granted to civil society projects.
- A total of EUR 3.64 million was granted as structural support for European remembrance organisations.
- A total of EUR 16.65 million was granted to think tanks and European civil society organisations active in the area of civic participation.
- The programme has also provided EUR 2.8 million of funding for cross-cutting activities, including to make best use of the programme’s results.

Table 1:2014 – 2016 programme’s annual expenditure:

Year	Amount spent (EUR)
2014	22 688 003
2015	22 352 785
2016	22 765 895
Total 2014-2016	67 806 683

Source: European Commission’s annual reports on the programme activities for 2014, 2015 and 2016

⁶ Following the outcome of the negotiations on the current Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 (MFF), this budget allocation was reduced by around EUR 29.5 million compared to the budget initially proposed by the Commission.

2.3. Applications received and projects selected

Between 2014 and 2016, more than 7 000 grant applications were submitted. Compared to the previous programme, fewer projects received a grant⁷. This is partly explained by the larger size of the projects that did receive grants and larger number of participants in the projects.

On average, less than 10 % of projects submitted in 2014-2016 were funded, except for town twinning projects. In 2016, 8 % of remembrance projects, 22 % of town twinning projects, 9 % of network of towns and 5 % of civil society projects were funded⁸. The high demand from grant applicants shows that there is scope for additional funding, including for follow-up and dissemination. Despite their positive evaluation, a significant number of projects – which could have helped the programme have a wider impact – could not be funded due to budget limitations. Stakeholders have stressed that this situation may discourage applicants from re-applying in future years. In its March 2017 report on the implementation of the programme during the 2014-2020 period⁹, the European Parliament called on the Council and the Commission to consider a total budget of approximately EUR 500 million for the successor programme under the next MFF¹⁰. The European Economic and Social Committee came to similar conclusions in its opinion on "Financing of civil society organisations" adopted in October 2017¹¹.

Table 2: Number of projects and operating grants awarded versus number of applications received¹²

Strand	Type of grant	No of appl. received	No of selected projects	% selected	No of appl. received	No of selected projects	% selected	No of appl. received	No of selected projects	% selected
		2014			2015			2016		
STRAND 1	Action Grants	472	36	8 %	538	33	6 %	468	38	8 %
	Operating Grants	22	6	27 %	6	6	100 % ¹³	6	6	100 %
STRAND 2	Town Twinning	667	252	38 %	1404	252	18 %	1093	237	22 %
	Networks of Towns	224	35	16 %	339	32	9 %	328	30	9 %
	Civil Society projects	538	29	5 %	440	27	6 %	541	25	5 %
	Operating Grants	139	29	21 %	37	31	84 %	31	30	97 %

⁷ For example, whereas in 2013, a total number of 544 projects had been funded, in 2016 only 395 projects were selected for funding. A total of 353 town-twinning projects and 41 networks of towns were funded in 2013, but only 237 town-twinning projects and 30 networks of towns in 2016.

⁸ European Commission's Annual Reports on the programme activities for 2014, 2015 and 2016.

⁹ See reference above.

¹⁰ Representing a symbolic '1 euro per citizen'.

¹¹ See: European Economic and Social Committee: "Financing of Civil Society Organisations by the EU", own-initiative opinion by Jean Marc Roirant of 19 October 2017, EESC 2017, 01953.

¹² Percentages are rounded.

¹³ Only organisations originally selected under the call for proposals for the first year of the programme were eligible to reapply in 2015 and 2016.

Total		2062	387		2764	381		2467	366	
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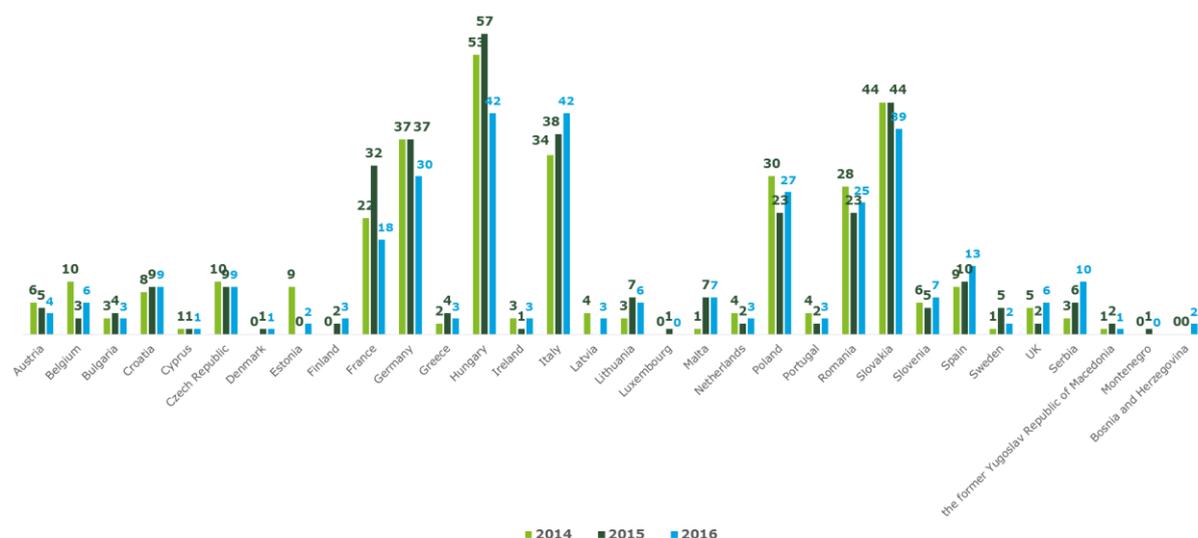
Source: 2017 mid-term evaluation of the programme, Deloitte and Coffey International

2.4. Geographical origin of projects

The programme is open to EU Member States, candidate countries, potential candidates (i.e. countries from the Western Balkans) and EFTA countries who are party to the EEA Agreement, provided they sign an international agreement setting out the details of their participation in the programme. In 2017, the programme ran in 33 participating countries¹⁴.

Taking into account the involvement of partner organisations, all countries participating in the programme received project grants. Hungary is consistently the country with the largest number of beneficiaries, having been awarded approximately 15 % of the total number of project grants between 2014 and 2016. Slovakia and Italy are close in terms of numbers of projects, with approximately 13 % and 11 % of grants awarded respectively. This is mainly due to the town twinning measure, where these three Member States account for almost half of the applications received.

Table 3: Number of applications received in 2014, 2015 and 2016 by country



Source: 2017 mid-term evaluation of the programme, Deloitte and Coffey International

2.5. Participants and partners

Between 2014 and 2016, grants were awarded to support more than 1 000 projects in the 33 participating countries. Altogether, 3.3 million citizens were directly involved in activities supported by the programme (for example participants in town twinning activities, participants at events organised by civil society organisations, etc.) and a further 3.9 million were indirectly involved (for example users of online material produced as part of the programme, readers of studies produced by think tanks, etc.). The data on first-time beneficiaries suggest that the programme is successful in reaching out to new audiences both by attracting new beneficiaries and through larger, more transnational partnerships.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ 28 EU Member States, as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

¹⁵ See chapter 3 of the staff working document accompanying this report

programme reached almost 4 500 towns in Europe through town twinning projects and networks of towns¹⁶.

The total number of partners participating in each project also increased considerably. Applicants have become more experienced over time and as a consequence submitted more complex projects involving more partners. In total, more than 2 500 organisations were involved, split into approximately 700 remembrance organisations and 1 800 civil society organisations.

2.6. Quality of projects

The introduction of a system of multi-annual thematic priorities to replace the former system of annual priorities brought flexibility and major improvements at project level. Multi-annual priorities covering the remaining period of the programme (2016-2020) were introduced to give applicants more time to plan and prepare projects, allowing them to better focus on the programme's objectives and to submit more structured proposals with higher potential impacts. The programme's strong focus on citizens alongside an emphasis on topical issues such as migration, solidarity, cultural diversity, social inclusion, European cultural heritage and historical memory offered participants the opportunity to bring grassroots perspectives into the European debate while allowing EU institutions to directly engage with people on the ground.

This has helped to improve the overall quality of town twinning projects, demonstrated by the scores received during the evaluation. In the past, town twinning projects often consisted of meetings between people from different countries to address various topics such as environment or sport. As a result of this programme, targeted actions by the Commission and the Executive Agency have allowed programme-funded town twinning and networks of towns projects to become progressively more inclusive and structured. These projects now usually involve a large number of partners (an average of 5 for town twinning projects and of 10 for networks of towns)¹⁷ and focus on key issues such as migration or the debate on the future of Europe.

Content requirements were also made more stringent for European remembrance and civil society projects, creating a stronger link with the programme's objectives. In consequence, an increasing number of organisations introduced more innovative projects with a stronger European dimension¹⁸.

2.7. Structural support for organisations

Between 2014 and 2017, European civil society organisations and think tanks received multi-annual structural support through operating grants¹⁹. On the basis of their work programme for 2014-2017, the selected organisations were awarded annual operating grants. Following the externally run mid-term evaluation of the programme, multi-annual operating grants

¹⁶ Monitoring programme data, provided by EACEA.

¹⁷ See for example the French 'Festival of Europe' town twinning project, described in Annex 4 of the accompanying staff working document.

¹⁸ See for example the 'In Between?' remembrance project, described in Annex 4 of the accompanying staff working document.

¹⁹ Call for proposals for structural support for European public policy research organisations (think tanks) and for civil society organisations at European level — COMM-C2/01-2013.

allowed beneficiaries to work with a longer-term vision and therefore to increase the efficiency of their activities.

3. WHAT HAS THE EUROPE FOR CITIZENS PROGRAMME ACHIEVED?

As demonstrated in the accompanying staff working document, the programme is performing generally well at mid-term for both strands with regard to its specific objectives, based on the impact indicators in the impact assessment, the performance-related indicators set out in the Regulation and views expressed by stakeholders.

3.1. The programme's relevance and European added value

In a challenging political, social and economic climate, the programme played an important role in fostering the civic engagement of citizens across Europe. It has encouraged people to participate more actively in the development of the EU and promote its fundamental values such as tolerance, solidarity and non-discrimination, through projects and activities in which they could participate and make their voices heard. A large number of projects directly addressed current political and societal issues such as the migration and economic crises. The programme has also supported volunteering, in particular by providing placements for members of the newly established European Solidarity Corps.

The rise of Euroscepticism experienced during this period highlighted the programme's importance, reinforcing the need to encourage the development of a shared sense of European identity and to reflect on the causes underlying questions surrounding the attractiveness and added value of the European Union to participating countries and European citizens. Against this background, the programme offered a public forum that gives people the opportunity to express their ideas about the future of Europe through a grassroots approach.

Compared to the previous programme, the stronger focus on European historical memory in the current programme has been essential to achieving its objectives. It has in particular encouraged reflection on Europe's cultural diversity and common values, and has created links between lessons learned from recent European history and the debate about Europe's future.

All activities funded under Europe for Citizens programme have either a cross-border dimension, involving citizens and organisations from several participating countries, or are related to the European Union itself. Activities related, among others, to remembrance, town-twinning or pan-European networks are intended to broaden perspectives and to develop a sense of European identity and belonging. The programme demonstrates European added value in the aggregate effect of its impact on participants and its complementarity with other EU initiatives which is not likely to be attained by other means if it was not continued.

3.2. Achievement of the programme's objectives

Through the European remembrance strand, the programme helped raise awareness of European historical memory and remembrance, including through the development of activities linking remembrance with civic participation and democracy in the broadest sense. In the area of projects relating to the Holocaust and genocide, an exchange crossing national boundaries and promoting a European approach to history was encouraged thus adding substantial value to relevant debates. According to the externally run mid-term evaluation, participants concluded European remembrance projects by recognising that they share common values with citizens from other participating countries and that the projects had the

potential to contribute to lasting changes in participants' attitudes towards the EU and its history, values and culture²⁰.

In the area of town twinning, the programme achieves results by increasing and encouraging mutual understanding and friendship between citizens at a local level. Town twinning offers a grassroots approach to citizenship by involving citizens from local communities in experiencing and recognising the added value the EU provides²¹. These experiences in turn lead to an increased sense of belonging to the EU and finally to civic participation at EU level.

Networks of towns complemented the traditional town twinning measure by offering towns and municipalities the opportunity to develop larger-scale projects with the aim of increasing their projects' impact and sustainability. This allowed beneficiaries to develop more thematic and policy-related projects and forge lasting links with partner organisations²².

The programme targeted civil society organisations through operating grants and civil society projects. Both involved citizens in civic and democratic participation at the European level, and contributed to the overall programme objective of bringing the EU closer to its citizens. For both strands the available budget was spent at a relatively even rate each year. The high number of direct and indirect participants reached by Europe for Citizens projects illustrates that the programmes has been effective at a relatively low cost.

The participation of stakeholder organisations in the programme influenced their perceptions of Europe. Most participating organisations noted positive effects on their knowledge of Europe and were committed to becoming more engaged with civil society. Participation in the programme also allowed civil society organisations and their partners to build capacity and international experience, learn from each other, and, in some cases, form sustainable networks.

As regards sustainability of the programme's results, projects created long-lasting relationships between partners who in many cases continued to engage in further civic activities after the end of the project. As a result, for example, networks of towns were set up following town-twinning projects and follow-up events were organised between the same beneficiaries allowing for activities and projects to continue after their initial funding by the Europe for Citizens programme. However, some activities were also "one-off", such as events and meetings whose purpose was to strengthen the exchange of experience by focusing on social and cultural aspects

One of the simplifications implemented in the current programme was the introduction of only two strands accompanied by an horizontal action. This new structure has proved to be clearer to the applicants and to work satisfactorily, while the introduction of multi-annual priorities, the move to a lump-sum-system and a range of e-measures (reporting system) have brought further improvements.

²⁰ See for example, the Irish remembrance project 'Women, War and Peace', described in Annex 4 of the accompanying staff working document.

²¹ See for example the town-twinning project of San Bartolomé de las Abiertas (Spain) and Lavernose-Lacasse, described in Annex 4 of the accompanying staff working document.

²² See for example the Dutch network of towns 'Town to Town, People to People — Building A European Culture of Zero waste', described in Annex 4 of the accompanying staff working document.

The monitoring process however was challenging, as there were different sets of indicators in the regulation which were not directly comparable with the indicators used in the impact assessment.

3.3. Valorisation activities – making the most of the programme

Financially supporting the information structures in EU Member States and other participating countries — the Europe for Citizens Contact Points (ECPs)²³ — has been the main activity in this domain. The external mid-term evaluation confirms the effectiveness of the ECPs as actors at national level in promoting the programme, supporting potential applicants, and establishing links with grassroots organisations and stakeholders in participating countries.

In addition, dissemination tools such as the VALOR platform for project results²⁴ have been developed and maintained. This new online database helps to promote the exchange of good practice and synergies between EU funding programmes in the areas of education, culture and citizenship.

While dissemination activities have broadly helped raise awareness about the programme, it would be beneficial to develop a more strategic approach during the second half of the programme, to further improve the visibility of the activities and the transferability and sustainability of the projects' results.

3.4. Policy events and meetings

Events organised throughout the first half of the programme helped raising awareness and overall visibility of the programme and involving more actively stakeholders. Since 2010, the European Commission has organised yearly European Remembrance Networking Meetings, which bring together representatives of organisations that are active in the area of European remembrance. Since 2012, the European Commission has also organised a special annual event in Brussels to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January. In addition to encouraging the development of a pan-European remembrance network, these events improve dialogue on the multi-annual priorities of the remembrance strand of this programme and have the potential to raise the programme's overall profile.

Under the civic participation strand, two conferences have been organised in cooperation with stakeholder organisations (in 2014 in Rome and in 2016 in Barcelona), increasing the political visibility of activities funded under the programme.

Stakeholders participate in the programme's policy-making process through civil dialogue, consisting of regular meetings between Commission staff and around 50 key stakeholder organisations who are actively involved. Through its Civil Dialogue group, the programme ensures the presence of independent civil society voices in EU debates and offers them a forum for dialogue with the Commission and other institutions.

²³ Between 2014 and 2016, all Member States and participating countries except the United Kingdom, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro had designated ECPs.

²⁴ See: <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/europe-for-citizens/projects/>

3.5. Complementarities and synergies with other EU programmes

The Europe for Citizens programme is consistent with other EU policies and tools dedicated to increasing EU citizens' participation in EU civil society and is in line with other instruments in the areas of volunteering, youth, research and innovation. It complements other EU funding programmes, notably Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, Creative Europe's Culture sub-programme and the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 by adding a focus on participation and a strong emphasis on citizens and societal aspects of the EU.

While synergies are already developed in some areas, for example in the establishment of the VALOR platform mentioned above, or through occasional cooperation of Europe for Citizens Contact Points, the Creative Europe Desks and Erasmus+ National Agencies, the mid-term evaluation shows that the programme can further benefit more coordinated approach with other relevant programmes in the future.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Political and societal developments in Europe over the last decade have brought citizenship issues to the fore and emphasised the need to increase the value EU citizens see in the European project.

This report on the mid-term evaluation of the 2014-2020 Europe for Citizens programme confirms the programme's use in promoting civic participation, strengthening the sense of belonging together and supporting mutual understanding. The programme plays a positive overall role in encouraging civic participation and democratic engagement, reaching out to a large number of citizens who would not otherwise have engaged with the European project. Participation in the programme helps to strengthen awareness of EU issues and develop mutual understanding of and identification with Europe, thereby helping to support the European integration process in the longer term. Since its very beginning, the Europe for Citizens programme has been recognised as a step towards more consistent EU strategy and policy in the areas of civic participation and European remembrance. In this context, the programme can also have a positive impact on the interest and participation of citizens in the upcoming European elections.

The programme's current structure, with two strands and a cross-cutting measure on valorisation, has contributed to a debate on the future of the EU, based on lessons learned from its past. Both operating and action grants have helped deliver the desired outcomes.

While most EU funding programmes directly relate to specific EU policies, the Europe for Citizens programme fills a gap by addressing the Commission's overall objective of bringing citizens closer to the EU. By working directly with citizens, the programme provides a unique forum through which to involve people in the EU via a grassroots approach. The programme has demonstrated its added value at EU level both in its impact on participants and its role as a complement to other EU funding instruments and policy initiatives.

In the framework of the preparation of the next multiannual financial framework and the future EU funding programmes, the Commission will assess the findings of the mid-term evaluation and address all aspects that have been identified for improvement, in particular the increase of the programme's visibility, the revision of the monitoring indicators and the strengthening of synergies with other relevant EU funding programmes and initiatives.