

Study supporting the evaluation of the EU Executive Agencies

European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive
Agency (CINEA)

Independent Expert Report



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Study supporting the evaluation of the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA)

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List of Abbreviations

AWP – annual work programme
CA – contract agent
CBA – cost-benefit analysis
CEF – Connecting Europe Facility
CINEA – European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency
DG – Directorate-General
DG BUDG – Directorate-General for Budget
DG CLIMA – Directorate-General for Climate Action
DG ENER – Directorate-General for Energy
DG ENV - Director-General of the Directorate-General for Environment
DG HR – Directorate-General for Human Resources and Security
DG MARE - Director-General of the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
DG MOVE – Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport
DG REGIO - Director-General of the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
DG RTD – Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
EA – Executive Agency
EASME – Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
ECA – European Court of Auditors
EU – European Union
FTE – full-time equivalent
HR – human resources
IAS – Internal Audit Service
ISG – Inter-Service Steering Group
INEA – Innovation and Networks Executive Agency
KPI – key performance indicators
MFF – multiannual financial framework
MoU – Memorandum of Understanding
PPPA – Pilot Project and Preparatory Action
PSA – Programme Support Actions
REA – European Research Executive Agency
SFS – Specific Financial Statement
TA – temporary agent
TEN-T – Trans-European Transport Network
TTG – time-to-grant
TTI – time-to-inform
TTP – time-to-pay
WP – work programme

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the external evaluation of the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) for the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2024. The evaluation, conducted in line with the European Commission's Better Regulation guidelines and Article 25 of Council Regulation (EC) No 58/2003, assesses CINEA's effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence in managing a broad portfolio of EU programmes delegated by seven parent Directorates-General (DGs).

The evaluation was conducted using a mixed-method, theory-based approach designed to provide a comprehensive and balanced assessment of the Agency's operations. The methodology combined both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Key elements included a systematic desk review of legislation, reports, and internal documents, as well as an analysis of monitoring data. Two large-scale online surveys were administered: one targeting beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants, and another aimed at external experts involved in proposal evaluation and project monitoring. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders, including European Commission officials, CINEA staff, beneficiaries, applicants, external experts, and National Contact Points. The study also incorporated a retrospective cost-benefit analysis comparing actual resource use and costs with ex-ante projections and alternative management scenarios.

CINEA's mandate is to implement EU programmes that support the European Green Deal and related policy priorities. During the evaluation period, CINEA managed an expanded and diversified portfolio, integrating new programmes and staff, and responded to external challenges and geopolitical developments.

Main study results

Effectiveness

Objectives and delivery

CINEA has demonstrated strong performance in implementing its delegated programmes, consistently meeting or exceeding key performance indicators for budget execution, timeliness, and stakeholder satisfaction. Beneficiaries and external experts expressed high satisfaction with the Agency's services, citing the professionalism and dedication of its staff.

Legal framework

CINEA operated fully within the boundaries of its legal framework during the evaluation period. The division of responsibilities between CINEA and its seven parent DGs was clear and appropriate, as set out in the Delegation Act and Memoranda of Understanding. No critical legal or governance irregularities were identified.

Internal Control

Internal control mechanisms were robust, with no major deficiencies identified by audits. Annual self-assessments and external audits confirmed that CINEA's internal controls were effective, with error rates consistently below the 2% materiality threshold. The Agency responded promptly to audit recommendations, and the overall risk at closure remained low throughout the period.

Communication

CINEA implemented comprehensive communication strategies, including multi-annual and social media strategies, which increased the visibility of EU funding opportunities and project results. Beneficiaries, unsuccessful applicants, and experts reported high levels of awareness of CINEA's programmes, though awareness of smaller or newer programmes was lower. The Agency's outreach activities and events were positively received.

Reporting to parent DGs

The Agency complied with its reporting obligations to its parent DGs, providing comprehensive, timely, and well-structured information. Stakeholders expressed high satisfaction with the reporting processes, with some suggestions for further improvements in the strategic depth and insights of reporting.

Efficiency

Programme management

CINEA consistently met its efficiency targets, demonstrating strong performance in programme management. The Agency maintained a low ratio of administrative to operational budget, managed a growing number of projects per staff member, and achieved full budget execution rates for both operational and administrative expenditures. The adoption of digital tools and process simplification measures, such as lump sum and unit cost grants, further enhanced operational efficiency.

Fit for purpose

CINEA's organisational structure was found to be fit for purpose and well-suited to its portfolio. The Agency maintained high staff engagement and low turnover, and actively addressed career development challenges through training, mobility schemes, and competency mapping. Some challenges remained regarding staff allocation and recruitment processes.

Environmental impact

CINEA implemented a wide range of environmental initiatives, including achieving EMAS accreditation in February 2024. The Agency promoted sustainable commuting, energy efficiency, waste reduction, and biodiversity initiatives.

Digitalisation

The Agency made substantial progress in digitalisation, streamlining internal processes through the increased adoption of corporate IT tools. The Agency also advanced in the use of data analytics and dashboards to support monitoring and decision-making.

Coherence

Coherence of the Programme Portfolio

CINEA's programme portfolio was well-aligned with EU policy priorities, particularly the European Green Deal. The portfolio is perceived as coherent and complementary, without significant overlaps or gaps.

Division of Tasks between the Agency and the Parent DG

The division of responsibilities between CINEA and its parent DGs was generally clear and effective, as defined in governing documents and regular communication. Coordination was

perceived positively by staff in both the Agency and the DGs, but some ambiguity persisted in areas such as procurement and pilot projects.

Feedback to Policy

Mechanisms for policy feedback were well-established and valued by parent DGs. CINEA provided effective policy feedback through structured channels, thematic portfolio analyses, and programme-specific tools. Some concerns were raised about the monitoring and systematic use of policy feedback, indicating potential for further enhancement.

Retrospective Cost-Benefit-Analysis

The retrospective cost-benefit analysis confirmed that delegating programme management to CINEA resulted in substantial cost savings and resource efficiencies compared to the in-house scenario. Over the evaluation period, CINEA operated with a lean administrative structure, requiring 7.4% fewer full-time equivalents (FTEs) than the in-house model and achieving cumulative savings of approximately EUR 137 million over the period 2021-2024. The Agency's productivity, measured as commitment appropriations per FTE, was slightly higher than estimated, reflecting increased efficiency in resource use.

1. Introduction

This document presents the Final report of the study supporting the evaluation of the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA). This evaluation support study was 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:

- The remainder of this section provides an overview of the purpose and scope of the evaluation, the evaluation criteria covered, and the methodology applied.
- Section 2 provides a description of the intervention and the baseline for the evaluation.
- Section 3 provides an overview of CINEA's evolution during the evaluation period
- Section 4 provides the evaluation findings
- Section 5 presents the conclusions and the recommendations of the study.

The annexes to the report include an overview of the methodology and analytical models, the approach and results of the Cost–Benefit Analysis, a synthesis report of the stakeholder consultation, the interview questionnaire and the survey questionnaire.

This external evaluation assesses the operations of the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2024, in line with Article 25 of Council Regulation (EC) No 58/2003, which mandates a review every three years. The evaluation focuses on the agency's effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence, following the European Commission's Better Regulation guidelines.

The study examines whether CINEA met its operational objectives, the efficiency of its resource use, and the alignment of its activities with institutional goals. It also evaluates the agency's interaction with its parent Directorates-General (parent DGs) and the coherence of its programme portfolio. Specifically, the following evaluation themes are covered, in line with the Commission's Better Regulation principles:

- **Effectiveness:** assessing whether the Agency has fulfilled its tasks effectively (including delivery of communication and outreach, internal control and reporting).
- **Efficiency:** assessing whether the Agency has fulfilled its tasks efficiently (including coverage of actions taken by CINEA to reduce its environmental impact and to enhance its level of digitalisation).
- **Coherence:** covering internal and external coherence assessing if there are overlaps, gaps or inconsistencies in its management of the programme portfolio, whether there is a clear delineation of tasks between CINEA and the parent DGs, and information flows on feedback to policy.

The evaluation was guided by 19 evaluation questions defined by the tender specifications and refined during the inception phase of the study. These questions focus on the operational delivery of the programme implementation. The study did not consider results and outcomes of individual programmes, because such results are evaluated separately.

A cost-benefit analysis undertaken as part of this study further assesses whether the expected efficiency gains from delegating tasks to the agency—versus managing them in-house—have been achieved, as projected in the 2021 ex-ante analysis and related financial statements.

The evaluation is a part of a broader evaluation of the European Commission's six executive agencies.¹The assignment covered all six agencies in a coordinated manner and followed a common evaluation methodology.

To answer the studies' evaluation questions, a mixed-method evaluation approach was applied, using a theory-based approach, accompanied by well-defined evaluation questions and relevant indicators. This approach has integrated both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to yield a comprehensive assessment of CINEA.

The research tools used involved notably a desk review of legislation, reports, meeting minutes and other available documents, an analysis of monitoring data, quantitative online surveys with beneficiaries and applicants as well as experts working for the Agency, qualitative interviews with CINEA's main stakeholders, and an ex-post cost-benefit analysis.

Document review and analysis of monitoring data

The purpose of the document review was to conduct a systematic qualitative and quantitative analysis of materials related to CINEA's operations. For the necessary documents, the evaluation team consulted publicly available sources and liaised with both DG RTD and CINEA to obtain additional non-publicly available data and documents. DG RTD and CINEA provided a wide range of documentation, delivered in several batches between February and June 2025.

In addition, the project team compiled a list of internal indicators relevant for the analysis. This list was shared with DG RTD, who subsequently provided further data. The final dataset of monitoring data was received in June 2025.

A comprehensive list of the documents reviewed for this evaluation is provided in Annex.

Surveys

Two quantitative online surveys were carried out in support of the study. One of the surveys targeted beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants, and the other aimed at external experts who support the work of CINEA in the evaluation of proposals and the monitoring of projects. The survey questionnaires were developed during the inception phase in exchange with DG RTD. The surveys were scripted and deployed on EU Survey, the online survey management tool developed and maintained by the European Commission. The survey was launched on 8 April 2025 and closed on 2 May 2025.

The selection of contacts followed a stratified sampling approach, ensuring that also beneficiaries and applicants to smaller programmes are sufficiently represented in the survey sample. A total of 1255 beneficiaries (response rate 20%), 882 unsuccessful applicants (response rate 5%) and 932 external experts (response rate 46%) have provided replies to the surveys.²This report incorporates survey insights relevant to the overarching findings, while a separate analysis in the Annex presents the complete survey results.

Interviews

The purpose of the interview programme was to provide qualitative insights into the performance and operational challenges of CINEA. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken across the following stakeholder groups: European Commission officials (DG CLIMA, DG ENER, DG ENV, DG MARE, DG MOVE, DG REGIO, DG RTD), staff members of CINEA, and external

¹ Evaluation of 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 The response rates of the surveys, the rates of the previous evaluation study and the obtained sample can be considered representative for the underlying population. A detailed explanation is provided in the methodological annex.

stakeholders (beneficiaries, unsuccessful applicants, external experts as well as National Contact Points). Overall, 51 interviews have been conducted.

Annex provides details on the interviews undertaken. The following table provides an overview of the interviews conducted.

Table 1: Interview programme

Stakeholder group	Target	Conducted
European Commission officials (DGs)	10-15	10
CINEA staff	15-28	19
Beneficiaries	10	11
Unsuccessful applicants	4	5
External experts	4	4
National Contact Points	3	2
Total	46-54	51

Cost benefit analysis and workload assessment

A retrospective cost-benefit analysis (CBA) for the period 2021-2024 was conducted by the study team. This CBA assesses 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 compares ex-ante estimates and actuals regarding full-time equivalents (FTEs) and staff costs (incl. Title I and Title II) at the levels of EAs and Directorates General (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. The methodology and the results of the analysis are presented in Annex.

Strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation approach

The evaluation of CINEA was conducted in line with the European Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines. It offers reliable evidence addressing the three core evaluation criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence of the Agency's operations. The findings and conclusions are strictly based on this evaluation evidence and focus on CINEA's business processes, management practices, and operational performance. For each evaluation criterion and question, indicators, assessment parameters, information sources, and methods were defined. This structured approach guided the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data enabling triangulation and ensuring a balanced mix of evidence to answer the evaluation questions.

Overall, the evaluation of CINEA is grounded in solid evidence, derived from a combination of quality data sources, including document analysis, desk research, cost-benefit analysis, and input from stakeholder consultations. However, some challenges were encountered during the evaluation, which imposed certain limitations on its results. These challenges related to the limited availability of quantitative data, which required that the findings for some evaluation questions rely on more qualitative evidence.³

³ Additional detailed on the methodology and implementation are provided in the methodological annex.

2. Background of the measure

The Framework Regulation for executive agencies⁴, 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. It also 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.⁵

The cost-benefit analysis also pointed to the optimised allocation of programmes scenario, 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.

CINEA's portfolio consists of successor programmes to programmes that were implemented by INEA in the 2014-2020 period, programmes that were implemented previously by EASME, and new instruments established in 2020 and 2021. The Agency manages large-scale programmes for research, innovation and infrastructure investment with grant sizes that are larger than average in most programmes. During the evaluation period (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2024), CINEA managed the following programmes or parts of programmes:

- **Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) - Transport and Energy sectors**, which is designed to support the development of high-performing, sustainable, and interconnected trans-European networks. CEF Transport focuses on modernising and integrating transport infrastructure across EU member states, including dual-use transport infrastructure under its Military Mobility budget envelope, while CEF Energy aims to enhance energy security, integrate renewable sources, and complete the internal energy market.
- **Horizon Europe (Pillar II) Cluster 5** which contains the climate, energy, and mobility **challenges** of the Horizon Europe programme and supports research and innovation projects that address climate change, promote sustainable energy systems, and develop smart, safe, and resilient transport solutions with funding. Additionally, CINEA is implementing three of the five missions under the Horizon Europe: Adaptation to Climate Change, Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030, and 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart cities by 2030.
- **LIFE Programme**, which is the EU's dedicated funding instrument for the environment and climate action. It includes subprogrammes for nature and biodiversity, circular economy and quality of life, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and clean energy transition.
- **Innovation Fund (IF or InnovFund)**, which supports the deployment of innovative low-carbon technologies. It funds projects in renewable energy, energy-intensive industries, energy storage, carbon capture, use and/or storage, aviation, shipping, road transport and buildings. The fund is solely financed through revenues generated from the auctioning of allowances under the European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS).

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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

- **European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)**, which supports projects on the EU's maritime and fisheries policies, promoting sustainable fisheries, marine conservation, and the development of a sustainable blue economy.
- **Public Sector Loan Facility under the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM-PSLF)**, which is designed to support regions most affected by the transition to a climate-neutral economy. Its primary objective is to mobilise public investments that address the social, economic, and environmental challenges arising from this transition.
- **EU Renewable Energy Financing Mechanism (RENEWFM)**, which facilitates cross-border cooperation between EU countries to finance renewable energy projects, helping to meet national and EU-wide renewable energy targets more cost-effectively.

Additionally, CINEA manages the Green Assist service (Green Advisory Service for Sustainable Investments Support), which is financed through the LIFE Programme, as well as procurement actions in various areas, and implements the Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PPPA) in connection with activities in its portfolio. Furthermore, CINEA implemented the legacy programmes mentioned in the Establishment and Delegation Decisions.

During the evaluation period, seven parent Directorates-General supervised CINEA:

- DG MOVE – Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (Lead DG)
- DG CLIMA – Directorate-General for Climate Action
- DG ENER – Directorate-General for Energy
- DG ENV – Directorate-General for Environment
- DG MARE – Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
- DG REGIO – Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
- DG RTD – Directorate-General for Research and Innovation

The intervention logic of CINEA is provided below. When implementing the programmes delegated to it, CINEA was responsible for:

- Proposal and tender management (after their approval by the Commission), which includes launching calls for proposals in coordination with the Commission;
- Evaluating and selecting proposals (grants) and tenders (procurement); Signing grant agreements and contracts;
- Monitoring of projects, managing grant agreements and contracts, and performance tracking;
- Outreach and support to applicants and other stakeholders (National Contact Points, National Agencies, and programme Desks);
- Supporting its parent DGs by providing feedback to policy, reporting, and communication support;
- Carrying out the necessary checks and recovery procedures;
- Performing budget implementation tasks covering revenue and expenditure under the EU Financial Regulation.

The key inputs are human resources, financial resources, IT tools and communication channels. The main outputs of CINEA's performance relate to the effective and cost-efficient management of the delegated programmes – delivering on the expected volume and nature of actions. The achievement of these results can be monitored by the achievement of key performance

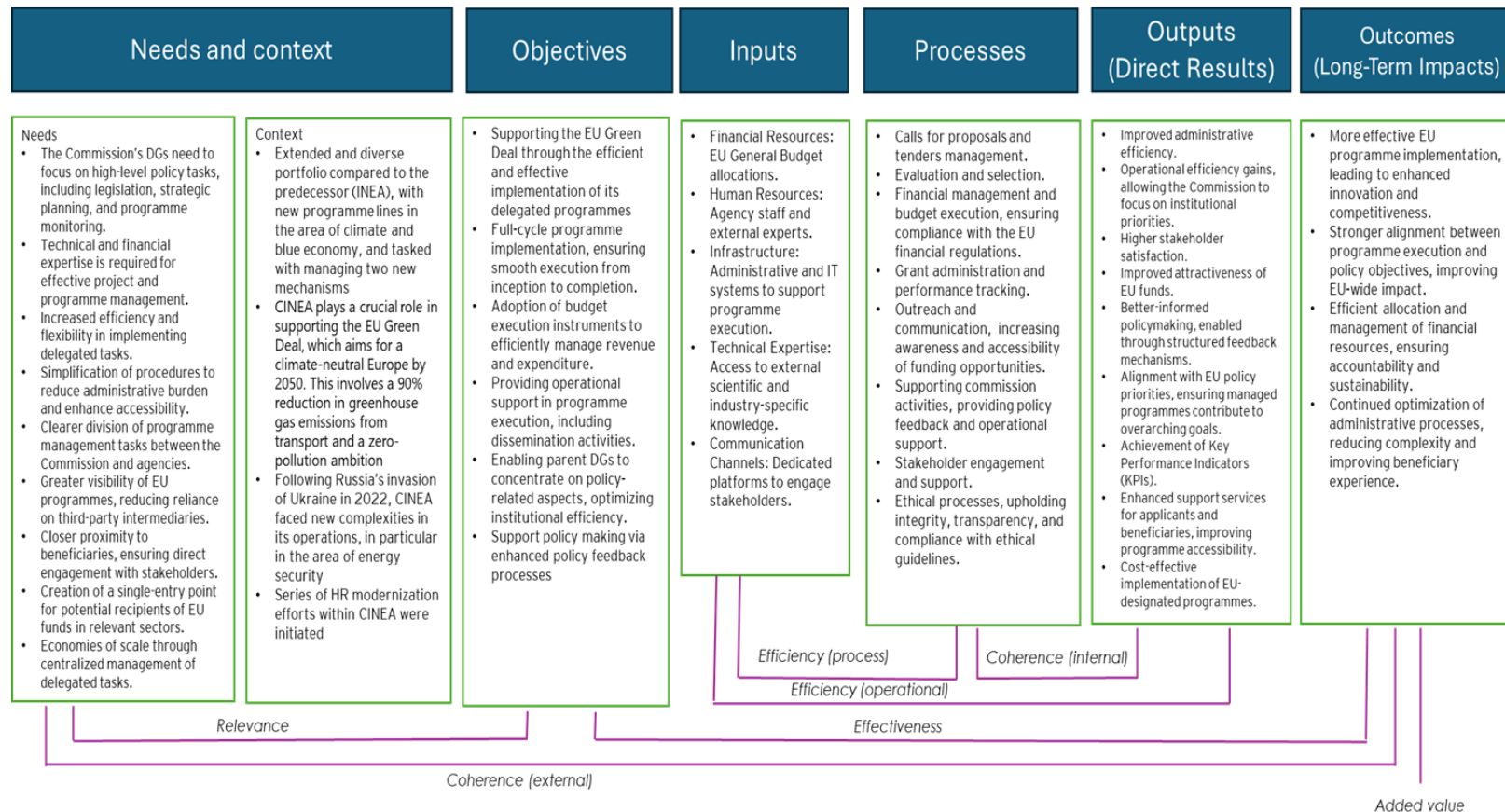
indicators. Policy feedback-related outputs are also critical. Outcomes relate to the key results and impacts achieved during the evaluation period (medium- to long-term outcomes).

To assess the implementation of EU programmes and achievement (as laid out in the intervention logic), key performance indicators, indicators of financial management, key metrics for the proposal and project management lifecycle (e.g. number of calls, proposals managed, number of running projects, etc.), and communication outreach indicators were used. In the evaluation, also feedback to policy outputs are considered. The satisfaction of unsuccessful applicants, beneficiaries and experts with the Agency's performance is considered to be an output and was measured via the surveys undertaken. The results of the quantitative cost-benefit analysis are also presented in this evaluation.

The most recent evaluation of INEA, CINEA's predecessor agency, covering the period 2017–2021, presented generally positive findings regarding the agency's efficiency, effectiveness, and coherence. Overall, the evaluation found that the delegation of programme management to INEA was highly effective and efficient, enabling the European Commission to achieve significant cost savings and operational benefits compared to in-house management. INEA consistently delivered on its mandate, demonstrating strong performance in technical and financial management, timely execution of calls and payments, and high satisfaction among beneficiaries and parent DGs.

The Agency's clear mandate, specialisation, and continuous efforts to simplify and standardise procedures contributed to its efficiency, while its flexibility allowed it to adapt to new programmes and challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation also highlighted some areas for improvement, particularly in enhancing transparency and feedback for unsuccessful applicants. Recommendations also concerned the importance of further streamlining internal processes, improving workload planning, and strengthening structured feedback to policy mechanisms between the Agency and the Commission.

Figure 1: Intervention logic of CINEA



Source: Consortium

3. State of play

CINEA was officially established by Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/173 and became operational on 1 April 2021. As stipulated in the CINEA Delegation Act, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between CINEA and the parent DGs. It established the detailed rules and procedures for interaction and set out delimitation of responsibilities between CINEA and its parent DGs.

Several developments during or immediately before the reference period had an important impact on the operation of CINEA. Compared to INEA, the programme portfolio expanded considerably. In addition to the integration of the new programmes and the programmes coming from EASME, also the size of the programmes increased. This concerns for example the EMFAF, whose funding envelopes grew with the transition from EMFF to EMFAF.

The delegated budget of the programmes under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) was projected to grow from EUR 37,721 million in the period 2014-2020 to EUR 39,177 million in constant prices in 2021-2027 (+4%), based on the optimised scenario of the ex-ante CBA of 2021.⁶ The overall increase is moderated because the CEF allocation was decreased in this scenario. Three programmes of the Agency are mostly financed outside of the MFF, which are the Innovation Fund (IF or InnovFund), the Public Sector Loan Facility under the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM-PSLF), and the EU Renewable Energy Financing Mechanism (RENEWFM). Of these programmes, the budget allocated to the Innovation Fund increased significantly, as more revenues from the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) became available. On the contrary, the budget allocated to the JTM-PSLF was slightly reduced compared to the estimated optimised scenario.

For the Agency as an organisation, the integration of the programmes and capacities from EASME played a significant role. Part of the restructuring and the transition from INEA to CINEA in 2021 was the integration of additional subprogrammes into the Horizon Cluster 5 (namely, combining the successors of Horizon 2020 Societal Challenge 3: Secure, clean and efficient energy, Societal Challenge 4: Smart, green and integrated transport, and parts of Societal Challenge 5: Climate action, resource efficiency and raw materials), the EMFAF, and LIFE into the Agency from the former Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME). The handover of these programmes also meant that a large number of staff members coming from EASME had to be integrated into the Agency.

The late approval of the MFF for 2021-2027 meant that the start of the implementation of some programmes occurred later than planned. This had in particular an effect on calls for the CEF programme, for which the budget was supposed to be frontloaded as per request of the parent DGs in the first part of the financial period. The Agency also experienced several adjustments of its portfolio during the period. The programmes JTM-PSLF and RENEWFM were delegated to the Agency in 2021 and expanded over the course of the evaluation period. Also, several additional actions at subprogramme level were further delegated. This includes procurement actions, pilot projects, calls and other actions under three EU Missions as well as under New European Bauhaus (NEB), Green Assist, CEF technical assistance projects and the acceleration of calls, and related budget front-loading, related to Military Mobility.

The COVID19 pandemic had an effect on CINEA beyond the immediate period of the pandemic itself. It required rapid adaptation to ensure the continuity of its operations and support for beneficiaries. During the outbreak, the Agency transitioned to remote project management and

⁶ 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)

teleworking, implementing new digital tools and procedures to maintain business continuity. CINEA also introduced flexible measures for project implementation, such as extending deadlines, increasing pre-financing for certain actions, and providing additional support to beneficiaries facing pandemic-related challenges. As the portfolio of CINEA consists in particular of large-scale research, innovation and infrastructure projects, as well as land and water restoration projects, which take several years to implement, the extension and delays in these projects meant that the work related to them in the Agency carried over in the reference period.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 also affected the Agency. The ongoing aggression influenced EU policy priorities and funding allocations. For instance, in response to the geopolitical crisis, the European Commission accelerated initiatives under the REPowerEU plan⁷, which aimed to reduce the EU's dependence on Russian fossil fuels and enhance energy security. Programmes like the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and the Innovation Fund became more strategically important. The war also had a limited direct effect on CINEA's operations, as the Agency's programmes support the implementation of projects in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. With regards to the entire portfolio managed by the Agency however, it did not lead to major disruptions or changes.

During the evaluation period, the Agency experienced a change in leadership. The new Director of CINEA, who had served as Acting Director since 1 January 2023, was officially appointed on 16 July 2023.

⁷ European Commission, REPowerEU. Affordable, secure and sustainable energy for Europe, available at: https://commission.europa.eu/topics/energy/repowerEU_en

4. Evaluation findings

This section represents a core component of the evaluation, examining the effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence of CINEA's activities between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2024. The sub-sections that follow are organised according to the evaluation criteria and questions set out in the Technical Specifications. Given the interconnected nature of many of the evaluation questions, and occasional overlaps, cross-references to related questions are provided where relevant to ensure clarity and coherence in the analysis.

4.1. Effectiveness

4.1.1. Objectives

EQ1: To what extent has the Agency achieved its objectives related to programme implementation, taking into account the interests of the participants and those of the EU?

Key findings: CINEA's objectives and activities have been well aligned with the plan of the parent DGs during the evaluation period. The Agency demonstrated an adequate operational performance, meeting most its KPIs during the period. The majority of applicants, beneficiaries and experts are satisfied with the services delivered.

During the evaluation period, the Agency's objectives and activities were aligned with the strategic plans of its parent DGs. The Annual Work Programmes reflected the programme and policy objectives of the DGs. The activities of the Agency, as presented in the Mid-Year and Annual Activity Reports, were aligned with the strategic goals which are reflected in the legal bases of the delegated instruments, the Commission delegation decision and the associated Memoranda of Understanding between the Agency and the parent DGs.⁸

The portfolio of the Agency includes overall seven programmes. At the beginning of the period, many activities of the Agency were still focused on the predecessor programmes, which had been administered by INEA and EASME in the period 2014-2020. The Agency continues to follow the project implementation for ongoing grants in these legacy programmes.

Table 2: Programmes delegated to CINEA by its parent DGs

Parent DGs	Scope of the delegation to CINEA
DG MOVE (lead DG)	DG MOVE and DG ENER delegated the implementation of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) – Transport and Energy sectors to CINEA. DG CLIMA, DG ENER, DG MOVE and DG RTD delegated the implementation of Horizon Europe (Pillar II, Cluster 5: Climate, energy and mobility) to CINEA. This also includes three missions: Adaptation to Climate Change, Restore our

⁸CINEA, Annual Work Programmes 2021-2024.

Parent DGs	Scope of the delegation to CINEA
	Ocean and Waters by 2030, and 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart cities by 2030, as well as the New European Bauhaus (NEB) .
DG CLIMA	<p>DG CLIMA, DG ENER, DG MOVE, and DG RTD delegated the implementation of Horizon Europe (Pillar II, Cluster 5: Climate, energy and mobility) to CINEA. This also includes three missions: Adaptation to Climate Change, Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030, and 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart cities by 2030, as well as the New European Bauhaus (NEB).</p> <p>DG ENV, DG CLIMA and DG ENER delegated the implementation of the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) - sub-programmes Nature and biodiversity, Circular economy and quality of life, Climate change mitigation and adaptation, and Clean energy transition to CINEA.</p> <p>DG CLIMA delegated the implementation of the Innovation Fund (IF) to CINEA.</p>
DG ENER	<p>DG MOVE and DG ENER delegated the implementation of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) – Transport and Energy sectors to CINEA.</p> <p>DG CLIMA, DG ENER, DG MOVE, and DG RTD delegated the implementation of Horizon Europe (Pillar II, Cluster 5: Climate, energy and mobility) to CINEA. This also includes three missions: Adaptation to Climate Change, Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030, and 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart cities by 2030, as well as the New European Bauhaus (NEB).</p> <p>DG ENV, DG CLIMA and DG ENER delegated the implementation of the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) - sub-programmes Nature and biodiversity, Circular economy and quality of life, Climate change mitigation and adaptation, and Clean energy transition to CINEA.</p> <p>DG ENER delegated the implementation of the Renewable Energy Financing Mechanism (RENEWFM) to CINEA.</p>
DG ENV	<p>DG ENV, DG CLIMA and DG ENER delegated the implementation of the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) - sub-programmes Nature and biodiversity, Circular economy and quality of life, Climate change mitigation and adaptation, and Clean energy transition to CINEA.</p>
DG MARE	<p>DG MARE delegated the implementation of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) to CINEA. The delegation also includes compulsory contributions to Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and other international organisations; as well as Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PPPA).</p>
DG REGIO	<p>DG REGIO delegated the implementation of the Public Sector Loan Facility under the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM-PSLF) to CINEA.</p>

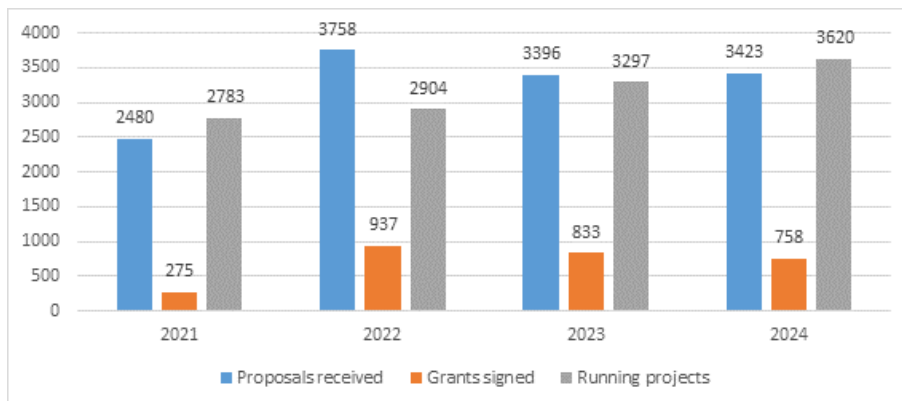
Parent DGs	Scope of the delegation to CINEA
DG RTD	DG CLIMA, DG ENER, DG MOVE, and DG RTD delegated the implementation of Horizon Europe (Pillar II, Cluster 5): Climate, energy and mobility) to CINEA. This also includes three missions: Adaptation to Climate Change, Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030, and 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart cities by 2030, as well as the New European Bauhaus (NEB) .

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on MoU and AARs 2021 – 2024

CINEA is entrusted with the technical and financial management of each programme under its remit. The parent DGs are responsible for the development of the work programmes, the overall policy vision and development for the programmes, and any decision-making related to the policy side of the programmes. In case of JTM-PSLF, DG REGIO is involved also in the evaluation of the project applications. In addition to the programmes listed above, DG ENV (in coordination with DG ECFIN) have delegated the implementation of the GREEN Advisory Service for Sustainable Investment Support (Green Assist) to CINEA, associated with InvestEU and funded through the LIFE programme.

The highest number of proposals received, and grants signed occurred in 2022, the year after the establishment of the Agency in its current structure. The number of running projects has been increasing steadily over the period, while the number of grants signed has been decreasing since 2022. The number of proposals received remained largely unchanged.

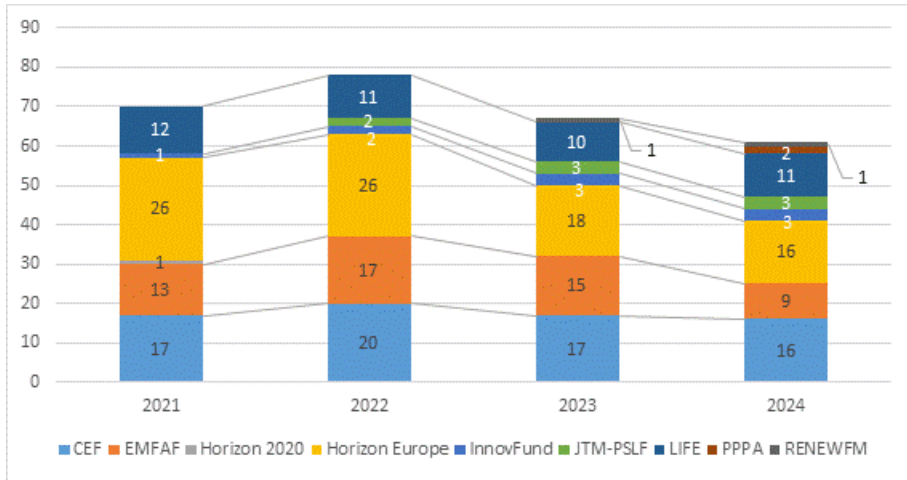
Figure 2: Number of proposals received, grants signed and running projects



Source: Authors' elaboration, based on data provided by European Commission

Looking at more detail at the individual programmes and the stages of the programme implementation, the picture is as follows. The highest number of calls were launched under the Horizon Europe programme (86) and CEF (70), followed by EMFAF (54) and LIFE (44). The overall number of calls launched has peaked in 2022 and decreased in the years after.

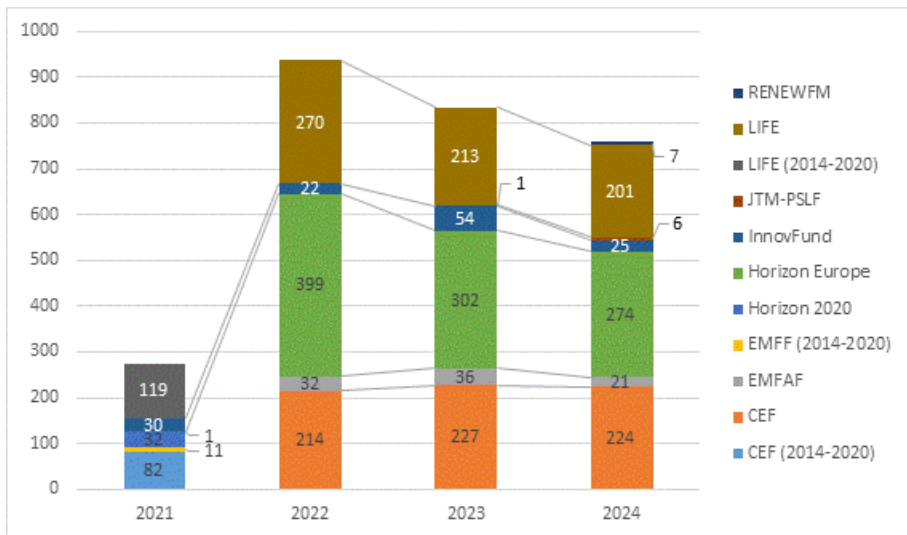
Figure 3: Number of calls by programme



Source: Authors' elaboration, based on data provided by European Commission

The total number of proposals received in the reference period was 13 057. The following chart shows the number of grant agreements signed by programme. In the evaluation period, the Agency signed overall 2803 grant agreements. The number of grant agreements signed increased sharply in 2022 and then it has been steadily decreasing since 2022.

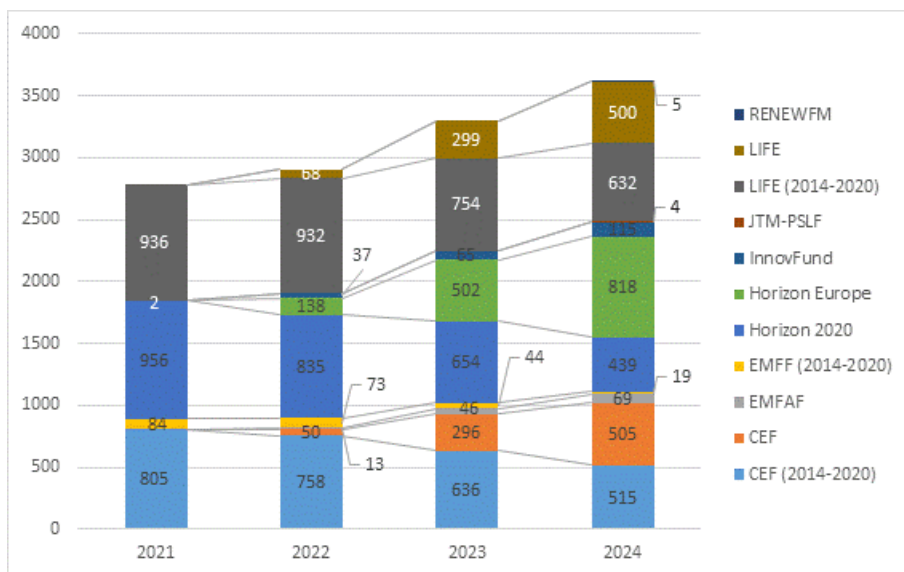
Figure 4: Number of grant agreements signed by programme



Source: Authors' elaboration, based on data provided by European Commission

Over the period, the average number of running projects which are followed by the Agency increased steadily from 2783 in 2021 to 3620 in 2024. Over time, the number of running projects also shifted from the legacy programmes to the new programmes.

Figure 5: Number of running projects by programme



Source: Authors' elaboration, based on data provided by European Commission

The evidence collected indicates that CINEA was able to deliver on most programmes as foreseen in its Annual Work Programmes. Implementation difficulties occurred for the Public Sector Loan Facility under the Just Transition Mechanisms (JTM-PSLF), with no PSLF uptake in the MS with the largest national allocations. The PSLF uptake is affected by several factors, which include, among others, the overlap with other financing instruments offering better conditions, limited administrative capacity, weak project pipelines, and beneficiaries' financial approach to debt-based instruments. A detailed assessment of these challenges is provided in the PSLF interim evaluation.⁹ To a lesser extent, also the EU Renewable Energy Financing Mechanism (RENEWFM) had a lower-than-expected uptake, with fewer grant agreements being signed than initially planned.¹⁰

During the evaluation period, CINEA experienced the growth of the Innovation Fund. Established in May 2020, most major calls of the Innovation Fund were launched during the evaluation period. The first large scale call of the Innovation Fund was issued on 3 July 2020 with a budget of EUR 1 billion. In the evaluation period, the Agency increased the number of calls and projects in this programme considerably.¹¹ The third large-scale call, launched on 3 November 2022, granted EUR 3.4 billion. The 2023 net-zero technologies (NZT) call (with the proposals evaluated in 2024) granted EUR 4.8 billion to projects of all scales.

Other actions within individual programmes have contributed to the Agency's effectiveness. In coordination with DG MOVE, the Agency fast-tracked and front-loaded the CEF Transport Military Mobility envelope, following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the European Commission's Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0 from November 2022.¹² Other actions include the establishment of the Green Assist initiative, funded through LIFE, in

⁹ European Commission (DG REGIO): Study to support the interim evaluation of the Public Sector Loan Facility (PSLF), online available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6b59efc2-1105-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

¹⁰ Interview with staff member CINEA.

¹¹ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports 2021-2024,

¹² European Commission, Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0, available at https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/action-plan-military-mobility-20_en. For the role of CINEA, see also https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/military-mobility-eu-supports-strategic-investments-dual-use-transport-infrastructure-eu807-million-2024-01-24_en.

November 2022 and the execution of procurement calls and pilot projects under Horizon Europe, LIFE, and EMFAF.¹³

The prevalent view among stakeholders in the parent DGs is that CINEA has been very effective in achieving the objectives related to programme implementation. The comprehensive review of the exchanges on the management of the Agency from 2021 to 2024 indicates that representatives of the parent DGs expressed continuously their satisfaction with the performance of CINEA during the reference period. This satisfaction is also reflected in the views expressed by stakeholders from the parent DGs who were interviewed for this study.¹⁴ CINEA is perceived as a highly effective and well-functioning Agency by the parent DGs.

External stakeholders, which include unsuccessful applicants, beneficiaries, and external experts, widely perceive CINEA as having been effective in achieving its programme implementation objectives during the evaluation period. The survey results and the interviews show that the work of CINEA is generally positively viewed.¹⁵ However, the evidence shows some differences and nuances between different stakeholder groups.

The satisfaction of beneficiaries with the work of the Agency is at 90% who strongly agree or agree that they are satisfied with the overall quality of the programme management services provided by CINEA, with 4% disagreeing and 7% remaining neutral.¹⁶ On the other hand, the overall satisfaction is 62% for unsuccessful applicants, with 11% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing and 28% taking a neutral view.¹⁷

¹³ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports 2021-2024.

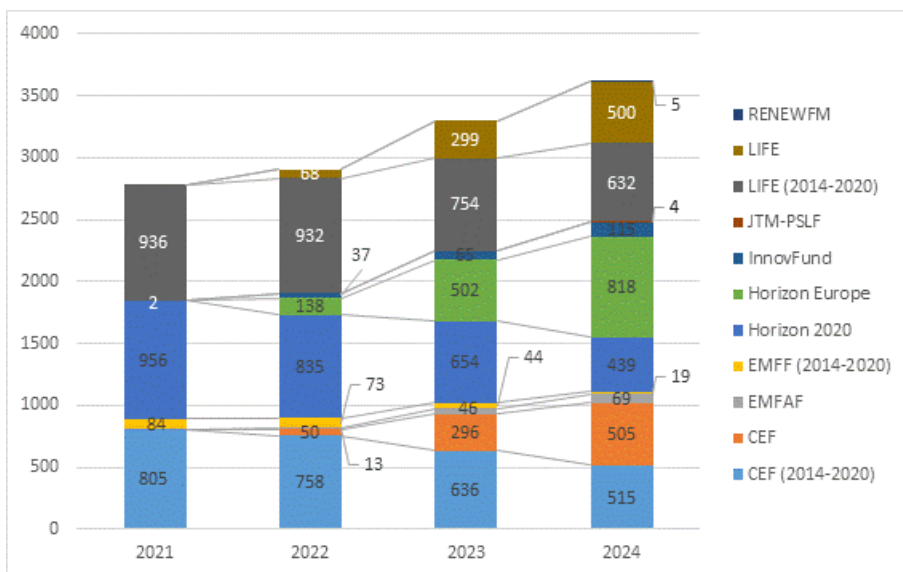
¹⁴ Interviews with staff members in all parent DGs (DG MOVE, DG CLIMA, DG ENER, DG ENV, DG MARE, DG REGIO, DG RTD)

¹⁵ Survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants, survey among external experts. Interviews with the same groups.

¹⁶ The survey result may not always add up to exactly 100% due to rounding that is applied.

¹⁷ These results are based on the quantitative stakeholder surveys conducted for the purpose of this study. CINEA also conducts every two years a Services Satisfaction Survey. The findings are used to devise action plans in the Agency to improve service provision.

Figure 6: Satisfaction of beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants



Source: Authors' elaboration, based on data provided by European Commission Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants

Base: beneficiaries (n=1082), unsuccessful applicants (n=697), excludes those who answered "Don't know"/"Refusal"

Item text: "I am satisfied with the overall quality of the programme management services provided by CINEA during the whole application and grant / contract implementation period." (beneficiaries), "I am satisfied with the overall quality of the services provided by CINEA during the whole application period" (unsuccessful applicants)

This marks a slight improvement compared to the previous period regarding the satisfaction of unsuccessful applicants. Using the same survey questionnaire, the study supporting the evaluation of INEA for the period 2017-2021 found satisfaction of beneficiaries at 92%, while the satisfaction of unsuccessful applicants was measured at 60%. Among unsuccessful applicants, those who disagree with the statement decreased from 15% to now 11%.

The results of this survey are similar to the biennial Services Satisfaction survey which is conducted by CINEA.¹⁸ In the most recent iteration (2024), this survey measured the satisfaction of beneficiaries at 88%, but with a higher satisfaction among unsuccessful applicants at 70%. This higher result might be due to differences in the sampling of survey respondents or wording of the survey questions. However, both results are within the same range.

The evidence collected in the qualitative interviews sheds a light on why unsuccessful applicants might have a lower level of satisfaction in regard to the services of the Agency. While they generally have a high satisfaction with the application process, the support and the information provided, they disagree with the outcome of their application.¹⁹ In some cases, they expressed their disappointment as - due to oversubscription - even well-rated proposals were not funded due to the limited availability of budget resources. It should be noted however that the Agency does not have control over the level of oversubscription of the calls, as the funding priorities and the call budget are determined by the Commission and all eligible proposals are evaluated.

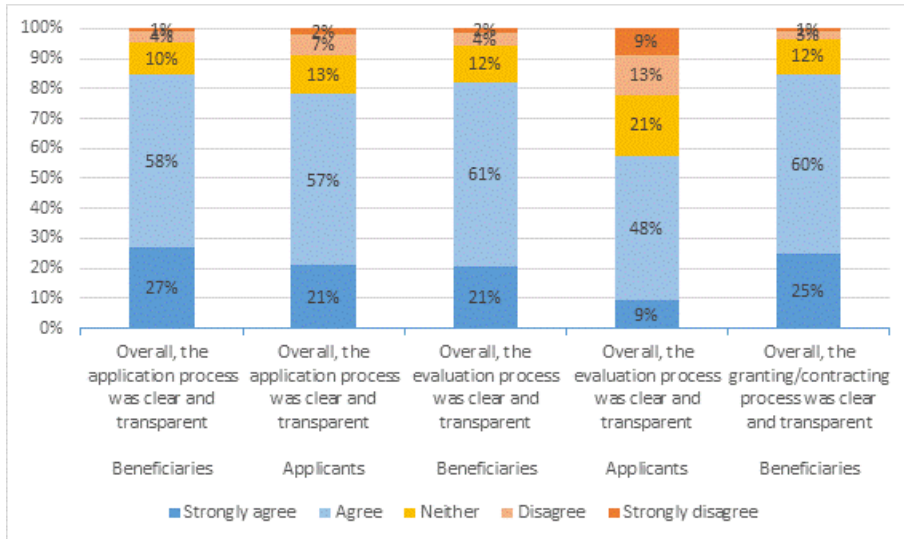
This impression of the external stakeholder interviews is also further supported by the more detailed results of the survey. When it comes to clarity and transparency of the different stages,

¹⁸ CINEA, Services Satisfaction Surveys 2022, 2024

¹⁹ Interviews with unsuccessful applicants.

results for both beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants are comparable. However, unsuccessful applicants are less likely to perceive the evaluation process as clear and transparent (57% versus 82%). The following Figure illustrates these findings.

Figure 7 :Process transparency for beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants



Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants
 Base: beneficiaries (n=1182), unsuccessful applicants (n=815), excludes those who answered “Don’t know”/“Refusal”

When it comes to the project implementation phase, beneficiaries perceive the processes as largely effective. The survey results show around 80%-90% of beneficiaries perceive the processes around the project implementation as smooth. This is further supported by the findings from the qualitative interviews with external stakeholders who expressed high or very high satisfaction with the work of CINEA during the project implementation phase.²⁰

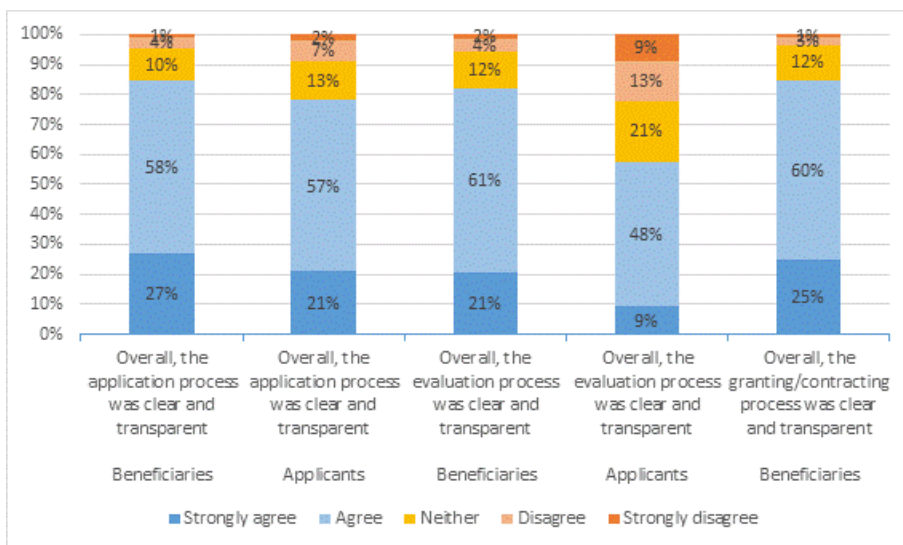
Some concern was expressed around the smoothness of the grant agreement amendment process. CINEA’s large-scale multi-year projects are commonly extended, which requires an amendment of the grant agreement. Grant amendments are mostly initiated by the beneficiaries and can include also changes such as a change of address. Around half (52%) of the surveyed beneficiaries reported that their grant agreement was amended. This process is perceived by some as less clear and effective and requiring a lot of effort from the beneficiaries.²¹ However, the majority is also satisfied with this process. In the survey, 78% agreed that the process was smooth, 11% disagreed with this statement.

The following Figure shows the perceived effectiveness of the project implementation processes.

²⁰ Interviews with beneficiaries.

²¹ Interviews with beneficiaries

Figure 8: Perceived effectiveness of the project implementation

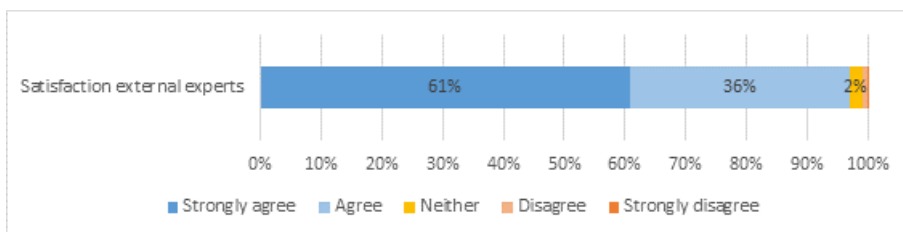


Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants

Base: beneficiaries (n=1117), for item 3: beneficiaries whose GA was amended (n=416), excludes those who answered "Don't know"/"Refusal"

Satisfaction among external experts who work on the evaluation of proposals or on the monitoring of projects, and assessing projects' final reports is particularly high. A total of 97% of experts surveyed strongly agree or agree that they are satisfied with the overall quality of services provided by CINEA during their work for the Agency, while 1% disagree and 2% express a neutral view.

Figure 9: Satisfaction of external experts



Source: survey among external experts

Base: external experts n=871, excludes those who answered "Don't know"/"Refusal".

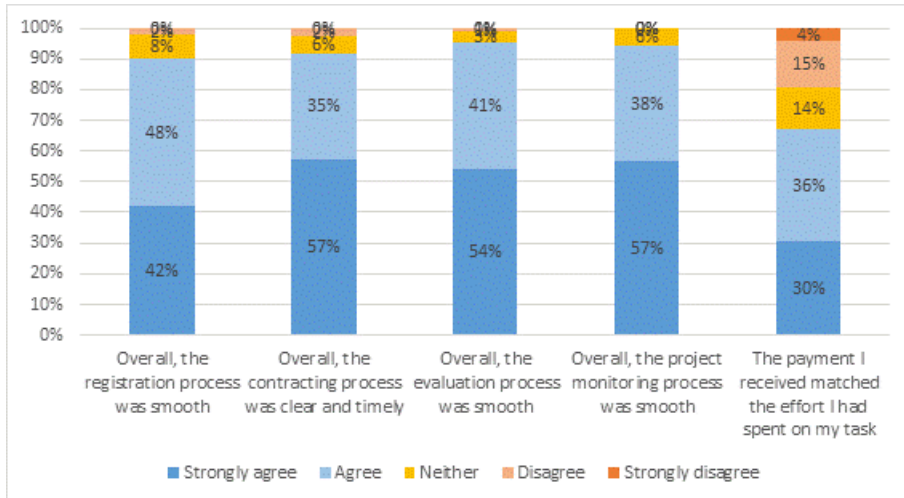
Item text: "I am satisfied with the overall quality of the services provided by CINEA during the execution of my tasks as an external expert."

When it comes to the perception of the effectiveness of CINEA in carrying out the delegated programme implementation tasks, the views of the external experts are very positive. When asked in the quantitative survey about the specific processes and different stages of the evaluation and project implementation processes of CINEA, positive views are at 90% or higher throughout all aspects. This finding is also supported by the evidence collected in the qualitative interviews with the external experts. They expressed very positive views about CINEA and view the Agency as very effective.²²

²² Interviews with external experts.

A common issue expressed by the external experts is the level of remuneration they receive for their work. Several experts interviewed mentioned that the remuneration is not matching their effort and the rate has not been increased for several years.²³ This finding is mirrored in the quantitative survey, where 19% of the responding experts disagreed with the statement that the payment received matched their efforts. It should be noted however that the Agency does not have control over the level of payments, as these rates are centrally determined by the European Commission.

Figure 10: Perceived effectiveness of processes by external experts



Source: survey among external experts

Base: external experts (n=877), Item 3 external experts involved in evaluation (n=835), item 4 external experts involved in project monitoring (n=90), excludes those who answered "Don't know"/"Refusal"

When it comes to the timeliness of the operation of CINEA, the Agency has reached most of the key performance indicators. There are two key indicators measuring the overall efficiency of the operations. These are the time-to-grant and the time-to-pay, measuring the share of grant agreements and payments respectively which were carried out within the foreseen timeline. The following table shows the time-to-grant and the time-to-pay indicators over time.

Table 3: Key performance indicators on CINEA's timeliness

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Time-to-grant (%)	96%	98%	98%	96%
Time-to-pay (%)	97%	100%	100%	100%

Source: CINEA, Annual Activity Reports 2021-2024

Since 2021, the Agency has reached its targets of 98% for both indicators. In 2024, the time-to-grant indicator dropped to 96%. This was caused by delayed signing of grant agreements in Horizon Europe and the Innovation Fund. The drop of the indicators is, according to the reporting of the Agency to the parent DGs, caused by delayed responses of beneficiaries, complex cases requiring consultation of Commission services, and contractual arrangement around the use of Large Research Infrastructures.

²³ Interviews with external experts.

Table 4: Performance on time-to-grant by programme

	2021	2022	2023	2024
CEF (legacy)	100%			
CEF2027		99%	99%	100%
EMFAF		97%	100%	100%
EMFF (legacy)	100%			
H2020 (legacy)	100%			
HORIZON	100%	97%	97%	90%
INNOVFUND	100%	100%	100%	88%
LIFE (legacy)	99%			
LIFE2027		99%	97%	98%

Source: authors' elaboration, based on data provided by European Commission

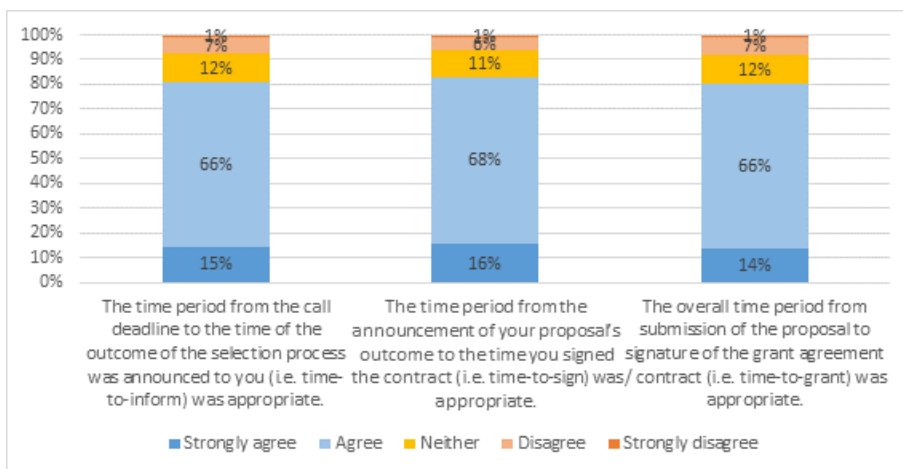
The findings from the stakeholder interviews as well as the review of management decisions indicate that CINEA is perceived as operating very efficiently. These views reinforce and expand upon the findings derived from the performance indicators. Staff members in the Agency and in the European Commission perceive the Agency as functioning effectively.²⁴ The evidence collected from desk research and the stakeholder interviews suggests that CINEA set up effective processes to reach targets at all stages of the programme implementation.

External stakeholders share the view that CINEA has functioned well and provided timely and effective support. The views expressed in the qualitative interviews of both unsuccessful applicants and beneficiaries were positive about the timeliness of CINEA's programme management.²⁵ In the quantitative survey, beneficiaries were also asked about their perception of the timeliness of the grant agreement process. Views are mostly positive, with over 80% who agree or strongly agree that the time it took was adequate, with less than 10% for each item expressing a negative view.

²⁴ Interviews with staff members CINEA, Interviews with staff members parent DGs.

²⁵ Interviews with unsuccessful applicants, Interviews with beneficiaries. However, minor points were raised in regard to the time it took for the evaluation process. Some beneficiaries felt that the time from the submission of the application until the information of the outcome was too long, in particular for companies.

Figure 11: Beneficiaries perception of the timeliness of the grant agreement process



Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants
 Base: beneficiaries (n=1105), excludes those who answered "Don't know"/"Refusal"

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

Key findings: Structural and technological factors have contributed to the achievement of objectives during the evaluation period. Driving factors highlighted were the staff's professionalism and dedication as well as the organisational structure and procedures of the agency. Hindering factors mentioned included delays in the MFF and approval of legal bases of programmes, difficulties in filling the vacant positions and oversubscription of most of the programmes.

In the case of CINEA, several factors have supported the achievement of objectives in the Agency. Nearly all interviewed stakeholders mentioned the **professionalism and dedication of the staff** in the Agency.²⁶ The project officers are perceived by staff members in the parent DGs and by external stakeholders as highly committed towards the programme objectives and willing to go the extra mile to support the programme implementation in their policy area. In addition, their high level of competence and technical qualification have been highlighted as a factor that contributed to the achievement of the Agency's objectives.

The effectiveness of CINEA in achieving its programme implementation objectives was also driven by **overall structure and well-defined procedures** of the Agency. Stakeholders view the Agency's organisational structure and internal processes as contributing positively to its overall effectiveness. Furthermore, staff in the operational Units of CINEA also highlighted the smooth internal decision-making processes, including the sub-delegation of tasks, the support from supervisors and the Agency's management, as well as the effective support through business intelligence and internal reporting tools which allow to monitor and steer the programmes implementation as important factors driving the Agency's effectiveness.

While the Agency has overall achieved its objectives, some factors have been highlighted as having had a negative effect on the programme implementation during the reference period. At the beginning of the period, the Agency was affected by the **delays in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 (MFF) and the approval of the legal bases** of several programmes, requiring it to accelerate the implementation efforts. In addition, due to the effects

²⁶ Interviews with staff members in parent DGs, interviews with management at CINEA, external stakeholders.

of the COVID-19 pandemic, more projects than expected were extended by several months. This caused unexpected additional workload for the Agency.²⁷

CINEA has reported issues with **re-allocating staff across programmes** which were perceived as hindering factors. Some Agency staff interviewed indicated that the flexibility in the allocation of staff was perceived as not sufficient and as an obstacle for effectiveness. Ad-hoc short term support for specific tasks is possible and has been used by CINEA, but the process for long term shifts of staff was seen as burdensome and requiring time.²⁸ It should be noted that under the current framework, a re-allocation of staff across programmes is feasible - taking into account the budget constraints - and can be used more extensively if and when appropriate.²⁹

In addition, some Agency staff described challenges for the Agency's effectiveness regarding the **filling of vacancies**. Compared to the previous evaluation period, the Agency has reduced its vacancy rate during 2021-2024 close to the set target of 5%, but filling vacancies remained a challenge, as indicated by staff members during the interviews and evidenced by the review of management decisions. This factor relates both to the attractiveness of the position for the right profiles as well as the formal hiring process which requires often a long time. However, to reduce the time to hire new staff, CINEA applied several simplifications in the selection and hiring procedures and has also introduced Inter-Agency mobility market. Also, the Executive Agencies agreed on sharing reserve lists both for Contract and Temporary Agents. CINEA also reported an **oversubscription** of most programmes during the evaluation period.³⁰ This trend is exacerbated by the increased use of Artificial Intelligence applications in the preparation of proposals by applicants in the most recent period.

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

Key findings: To improve manageability and quality, three possible measures were mentioned during the evaluation. This includes a better use of the existing processes for the reallocation of staff in the Agency, improvements when it comes to predictability and planning, and the introduction of a limit of possible amendments for projects, in particular in relation to delays in project completion.

Evidence collected for the evaluation points to three areas where actions can potentially improve the Agency's effectiveness. Firstly, it concerns the allocation of staff within the Agency. While the current legal framework allowed for short- and long-term reallocation of staff, some concerns were raised by staff members of the Agency regarding the flexibility that this mechanism provides. A better use of the existing mechanism for the re-allocation of staff in the Agency and sharing best practices with other Agencies could render the Agency more effective in achieving its objectives in the future.

²⁷ Interviews with staff members in CINEA.

²⁸ Interviews with staff members in CINEA.

²⁹ Rules on re-allocation of staff across programmes are clear: subject to the agreement of the Steering Committee (also via a written procedure), the director of an executive agency may propose a temporary redeployment of staff from one programme to another one, in order to efficiently respond to peaks of workload for a given programme. This solution is temporary as it must be applied only to one calendar year. In case this situation becomes structural and such redeployment of resources is necessary for more than one year, it should be addressed in cooperation with the parent DGs in the context of establishing the draft budget, on the basis of a workload assessment of all the programmes concerned by the redeployment (both the receiving and the originating ones). (Art 10.2.6. of Commission Decision C(2022)9328 establishing the Guidelines for the establishment and operation of executive agencies financed from the EU budget and other sources)

³⁰ Interviews with staff members in CINEA.

Another area which became evident in the evaluation relates to predictability and planning. As CINEA's operations relies on standardised procedures, it depends on timely input on the programme delegation. Both the review of management discussions and the stakeholder interviews with Agency staff and European Commission staff indicate that ad-hoc policy changes and requests, delays, and occasionally lack of planning by parent DGs are difficult for the Agency to absorb and have a negative effect on its effectiveness.

A third area where action can potentially lead to improvements in the Agency's effectiveness are measures to limit, when possible, the number of amendments, in particular due to delays in project completion. Extensions of projects are commonly granted, which is needed when justified delays occur in the completion. However, this can impact the workload of the Agency staff, so successive extensions of the same action should be avoided. A clear end date of the programme beyond which no extension can be granted, is a helpful tool.

4.1.2. Legal Framework

EQ4: To what extent has the Agency been operating according to the legal framework?

Key findings: CINEA's activities were found to be coherent with its mandate and assigned tasks. Interviews with both Agency staff and representatives of the parent DGs confirmed that CINEA consistently aligns its operations with its mandate. Minor concerns about the flexibility of the current legal framework were raised in regard to the mechanisms for the allocation of staff in the agency and the increasing delegation of instruments and actions like procurement and Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PPPAs).

The main documents that constitute the legal framework of CINEA are three:

- 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 programmes³¹
- 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.³²

Commission Decision of 12.2.2021 delegating powers to the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency with a view to the performance of tasks linked to the implementation of Union programmes in the field of transport and energy infrastructure; climate, energy and mobility research and innovation; environment, nature and biodiversity; transition to low-carbon technologies; and maritime and fisheries; comprising, in particular, implementation of appropriations entered in the general budget of the Union and those stemming from external assigned revenue.³³

CINEA is supervised by its Steering Committee and managed by CINEA's Director. The members and observers of the Steering Committee were appointed by Commission Decision

³¹ Online available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2003/58/oj/eng>.

³² Online available at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2021/173/oj/eng

³³ Online available at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=pi_com%3AC%282021%29947.

C(2021)2067 and subsequent amendments. The Steering Committee rules of procedures are defined in its Decision SC (2022) 009 of October 2022.³⁴ In addition, the operation of the Agency is governed by a General Memorandum of Understanding with horizontal provisions common to all agencies and parent DGs, and by individual Memoranda of Understanding, which detail the division of responsibilities and practical arrangements for interaction between the parent DGs and the agency on the implementation of the individual programmes. The Agency's yearly activities are established in its Annual Work Programmes, which are adopted by the Steering Committee following approval of the Commission.

During the evaluation period, adequate mechanisms were in place to ensure full control over CINEA by the Commission, which fulfilled its obligations for oversight in compliance with the Council Regulation establishing the legal framework for all agencies, to ascertain that the Agency did not exceed its mandate. In addition to the appointment of the Steering Committee and the Director of the Agency by the Commission, the Agency was subject to several yearly audits, and an external evaluation by the Commission every three years. Audits include the recurring financial audits by the ECA on the Statement of Assurance (SoA), including the audits on its administrative and operational annual accounts, as well as a number of special ECA audits and audits carried out by the Commission's Internal Audit Service (IAS).³⁵

The yearly audits carried out by the ECA of the EU Agencies did not find critical issues in relation to CINEA.³⁶ In the years for which reports are available (2021-23), CINEA received a clean (unqualified) opinion on the reliability of its accounts and the legality and regularity of its revenue and payments. No material financial or compliance irregularities were found in CINEA's operations during this period. In 2023, the Court issued an observation related to the implementation and management of the SUMMA financial system for the agency's administrative budget, particularly regarding user access rights and the need for updated procedures and controls. The observation was lifted in 2024.³⁷

This finding from the review of the audit reports is supported by the evidence collected in the stakeholder consultation. The view shared in the interviews was that the Agency is acting in accordance with the legal framework. Neither staff members in the parent DGs nor staff in the Agency recalled instances where the Agency acted outside of its legal framework. Despite several challenges experienced during the evaluation period, such as the introduction of SUMMA, the implementation of new programmes and the increased use of instruments such as PPPAs and procurement, the evidence indicates that the Agency remained firmly compliant with the legal framework.

Some Agency and parent DGs staff raised minor concerns about the flexibility of the legal framework. These points concerned the existing mechanism of the short- and long-term re-allocation of staff within the Agency across programmes. Furthermore, it was mentioned that if instruments and tasks like procurement or Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions are increasingly delegated to the Agency, the legal framework is not sufficiently flexible and would

³⁴ Decision SC (2022) 009 of the CINEA Steering Committee of 19 October 2022 Rules of Procedure of the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA). The appointments of members and observers to the Steering Committee are made in individual Commission Decisions which are listed in Annex A.

³⁵ The Audit findings are analysed in more detail in Section 4.1.3. Internal Control Framework.

³⁶ European Court of Auditors. (2022). Annual report on EU agencies for the financial year 2021. Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2865/46794>, European Court of Auditors. (2023). Annual report on EU agencies for the financial year 2022. Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2865/088>, European Court of Auditors. (2024). Annual report on EU agencies for the financial year 2023. Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2865/95608>.

³⁷ CINEA has been responsive to audit recommendations and has subsequently taken steps to address identified issues, with only minor open points remaining (ECAs report 2023)

require changes.³⁸ Still, overall, the legal framework is generally regarded as having provided the necessary flexible conditions for the Agency to operate during the evaluation period.³⁹

4.1.3. Internal Control Framework

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 act in line with internal control principles, notably sound financial and human resources management?

Key findings: CINEA's internal control framework is aligned with the broader Internal Control Framework adopted by the Commission. The Framework is robust and effective, maintaining error rates well below the 2% threshold. ICMC assessments confirm strong performance and continuous improvement, supported by a solid control culture and effective segregation of duties. IAS and European Court of Auditors reviews validated the overall soundness of CINEA's systems. Survey feedback indicates beneficiary satisfaction with the Agency's control and audit procedures.

During the evaluation period, CINEA implemented a comprehensive control framework in line with the guidelines of the European Commission.⁴⁰ Adherence to this framework, based on 5 components and 17 guiding principles, is a compulsory requirement for the Agency. An annual self-assessment of the effectiveness of the internal control system is built into the framework established by the Commission. It forms part of the basis on which the Declaration of Assurance relies on. This self-assessment is based on various sources such as, among others, result of staff surveys, results of external audits, risk management activities and deviations recorded in CINEA's register of exceptions and non-compliance events. A number of Internal Control Monitoring Criteria (ICMC) defined by CINEA based on the Agency's specific characteristics, also form part of the self-assessment. These criteria are reviewed and updated yearly to continue ensuring they serve the objectives of CINEA.⁴¹

In the years 2021-2024, CINEA assessed its internal control system and found that a majority of principles were present and functioning well. However, some weaknesses were detected over the period. These included weaknesses in CINEA's control strategy including ex-post controls in 2021, not meeting staff training targets on ethics in 2022, the adequacy of certain internal procedures relating to the CEF programme implementation – phase 1 (from work programme to call evaluation and grant preparation) in 2022, the LIFE Programme and Innovation Fund in 2023, and the Horizon Europe Grant Management – phase 1 in 2024.⁴² Measures were implemented to remedy the identified weaknesses. On the other hand, in 2023 and 2024, particular strengths of the system were also identified during the self-assessment of the internal control system. This included, for instance, the trend of decreasing error rates, a revised Control Strategy, improvements in CINEA's staff engagement and reduction in vacancy rates and turnover.⁴³

³⁸ Interview with staff in CINEA.

³⁹ Interviews with staff in parent DG, interview with staff in CINEA.

⁴⁰ European Commission. Communication to the Commission from Commissioner Oettinger. Revision of the Internal Control Framework, 2017, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/f163e193-bf9b-4823-bd4b-dceb8739f46e_en?filename=revision-internal-control-framework-c-2017-2373_2017_en.pdf. The requirements of the control framework are defined in the general MoU.

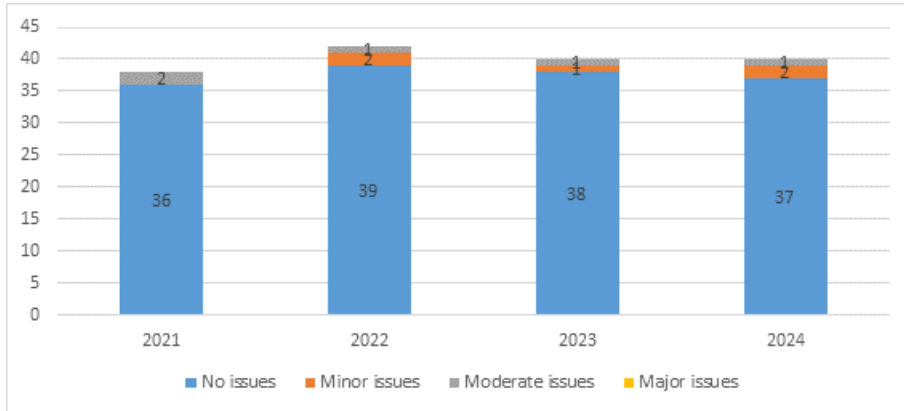
⁴¹ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports, 2021-2024.

⁴² CINEA, Annual Activity Reports, 2021-2024.

⁴³ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports, 2023 and 2024.

The assessment inferred that these weaknesses did not constitute major deficiencies, gaps or errors that could jeopardise the overall effectiveness of CINEA's internal control system. The results show that from an integrated perspective, the control system as a whole is present and functioning with only a limited number of recommended improvements. The following figure illustrates the results of the assessments of CINEA's internal control monitoring criteria.

Figure 12: Results of CINEA's assessments of the internal control monitoring criteria



Source: Authors' elaboration, based on CINEA, Internal Control self-assessment reports, 2021-2024

When it comes to financial control, the Agency has performed well during the evaluation period, based on its own reporting and available quantitative indicators, documentary evidence, and the views of stakeholders in the European Commission expressed in the interviews overall. At Agency level, the risk-at-closure remained low and did not exceed the 2% materiality threshold during the reference period.⁴⁴ Similarly, the residual error rate remained within target.⁴⁵

Table 5: Overall risk at closure (KPI)

Name	2021	2022	2023	2024
Overall risk at closure	0.97%	1.62%	1.41%	1.46%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on CINEA, Annual Activity Reports, 2021-2025

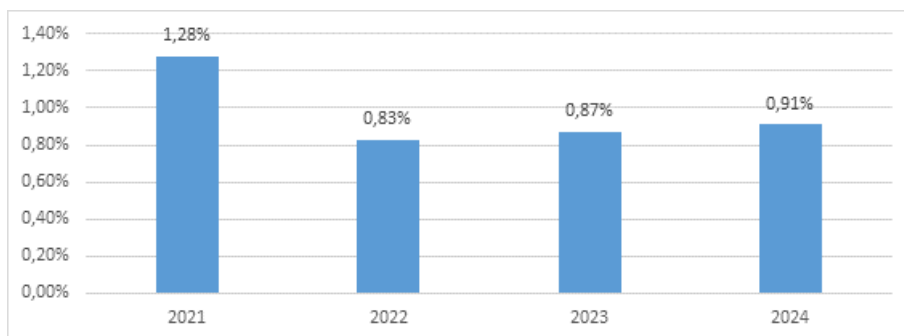
Following the European Commission guidelines, the Agency is tasked to strive for a cost-effective balance between the rate of errors detected and recovered, and the level of controls.⁴⁶ During the evaluation period, the costs of control of the Agency were monitored by CINEA and remained low, indicating an adequate efficiency of the internal control system. The following Figure provides an overview of the cost of controls over time.

⁴⁴ In 2021, the residual error rate in the CEF Energy subprogramme was at 2.6%, above the threshold of 2%. Following this, the Agency took actions to address this increase. An action plan was developed and implemented, which included an increased audit coverage from 2022 onwards to cover a higher proportion of the CEF Energy annual expenditure (CINEA, Annual Activity Reports 2021-2022, CINEA, Steering Committee meeting minutes 2021-2024).

⁴⁵ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports, 2021-2024.

⁴⁶ However, the European Commission does not proscribe a fixed benchmark for the cost of controls (European Commission, Revision of the Internal Control Framework, C(2017) 2373 final, Available at https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2018-10/revision-internal-control-framework-c-2017-2373_2017_en.pdf)

Figure 13: Cost controls of CINEA



Source: Authors' elaboration, based on CINEA, Annual Activity Reports, 2021-2025

Risk assessment is a core component of the Internal control framework and comprises an annual risk management exercise with a mid-term review of the Risk Register in line with the Commission's requirements. Identified risks are subjected to mitigation measures, while monitoring and reporting activities are established to ensure that the Agency can regularly assess the situation and implement further measures as necessary.⁴⁷ During the reference period, the risk assessment exercises showed that the work to continuously integrate control and mitigation measures in standard procedures contributed to decreasing the likelihood and the impact of risks, particularly those of an operational nature.⁴⁸

During the reference period, CINEA has been subject to different types of audits carried out by the Internal Audit Service of the European Commission (IAS) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA). As for IAS audits, the Agency was issued a number of recommendations, a limited number of which were very important recommendations, however, none were critical or related to major deficiencies. In 2023, the ECA raised an observation in relation to CINEA's ex ante control system for CEF grants in the transport and energy sectors. The recommendation was successfully addressed by CINEA and subsequently closed by the ECA with no impact on the assurance. The ECA did not raise any issues as regards human resources management during the evaluation period. CINEA's actions in reaction to all audit recommendations are well documented.⁴⁹

The internal control system of CINEA includes the maintenance of a register of exceptions and non-compliance events which keeps a formal record of any deviations from established rules, procedures, or internal controls in financial management and operations. The following Figure displays the number of exceptions and non-compliance events of the Agency over time. In most years, the number was below the target of 10 events. The Agency management clarified that the increased number in 2023 (11 events) is mainly attributed to non-compliance events during the introduction phase of the SUMMA financial system.⁵⁰ The registered events are primarily of qualitative nature, meaning that they concerned mostly legal considerations. Only in a limited number of events, they had a financial impact.⁵¹

⁴⁷ CINEA, Annual Activity Report Annexes, 2024.

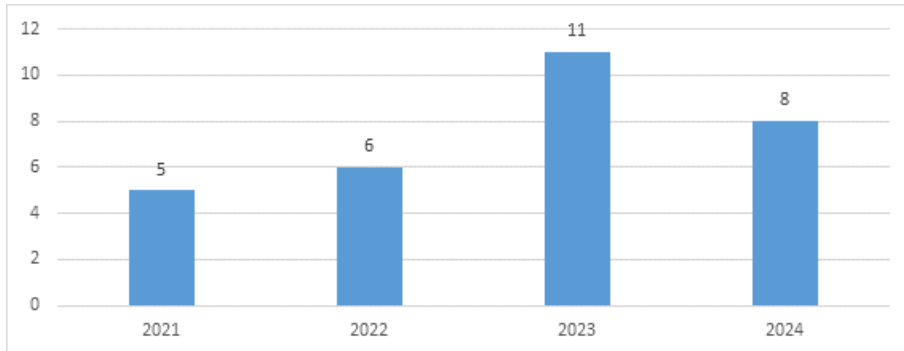
⁴⁸ CINEA, Annual Activity Report Annexes, 2022,2023,2024.

⁴⁹ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports annexes 2021-2024; Annex 8.

⁵⁰ See also CINEA, IC Self Assessments 2021-2024.

⁵¹ IC Self Assessments 2021-2024.

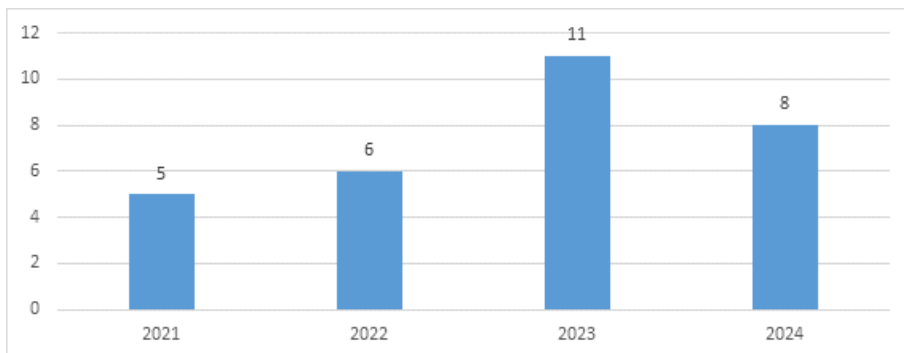
Figure 14: Exceptions and non-compliance events



Source: Authors' elaboration based on CINEA, IC Self-Assessment reports, 2021-2025

Based on the desk research and stakeholder consultation, the evaluation finds that CINEA's internal control framework functioned well and was effective during the evaluation period. Stakeholders interviewed also highlighted that the internal control framework was present and aligned with the requirements set out by DG BUDG. It is perceived as having been effective and functioning during the evaluation period without significant problems.⁵² As part of the quantitative survey, beneficiaries were asked about their perception of the control procedures when their project was selected for an audit or review. The views on these processes are largely positive across different aspects, with overall 88% reporting that the review/audit process was smooth.

Figure 15: Beneficiaries' views on the internal control measures



Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants

Base: beneficiaries who were selected for review/audit (n=261), excludes those who answered "Don't know"/"Refusal"

⁵² Interview with staff members DG MOVE, DG ENER.

4.1.4. Communication

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

Key findings: During the evaluation period, CINEA demonstrated a comprehensive and effective communication strategy aligned with the European Commission’s priorities, particularly the European Green Deal. The Agency developed multi-annual and social media strategies, implemented a wide range of internal and external communication activities, and significantly expanded its outreach. While stakeholders generally viewed CINEA’s communication as professional and helpful, some challenges remained in promoting lesser-known programmes and ensuring broader awareness among unsuccessful applicants.

The objectives and the scope of CINEA’s communication activities were defined in the Delegating Decision and the general Memorandum of Understanding.⁵³ CINEA is responsible for developing and implementing communication strategies and activities, ensuring effective internal and external communication for the programmes it manages. The Agency is tasked to align its activities with the European Commission and its parent Directorates-General.

In the evaluation period, CINEA developed a multi-annual communication strategy to support and direct its communication and outreach efforts.⁵⁴ The strategy aimed to raise visibility of funding opportunities, disseminate project results and success stories, engage with stakeholders, enhance internal communication, and build communication synergies across programmes. The Agency’s communication priorities were guided by the political priorities of the Commission and CINEA’s programmes and objectives, especially linking CINEA’s role in supporting the European Green Deal. The Agency has a dedicated communication function within Department A. In addition, the operational Units support the communication activities on each specific programme.

The communication activity of the Agency includes different aspects. The Agency’s internal communication efforts concern primarily knowledge sharing within the organisation as well as staff engagement. There is a dedicated Internal Communication Strategy and action plan. External communication includes general communication about the programmes as well as communication outreach to (potential) applicants, beneficiaries and other external stakeholders of the Agency. CINEA’s communication strategy during the evaluation period has been comprehensive in the sense that it covered all these aspects. The Agency has carried out a broad range of activities during the reference period. Communication activities included, among others, promoting funding opportunities through press releases with parent DGs, social media, the website or at events, organising info days, supporting policy events including organising project exhibitions organising public signings of grant agreements, managing the Agency’s website and social media accounts, producing publications (including thematic web pages, and

⁵³ COMMISSION DECISION Delegating Powers to the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency with a View to the Performance of Tasks Linked to the Implementation of Union Programmes in the Field of Transport and Energy Infrastructure; Climate, Energy and Mobility Research and Innovation; Environment, Nature and Biodiversity; Transition to Low-Carbon Technologies; and Maritime and Fisheries; Comprising, in Particular, Implementation of Appropriations Entered in the General Budget of the Union and Those Stemming from External Assigned Revenue (2021)., Memorandum of Understanding between the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency and DG Mobility and Transport, DG Energy, DG Climate Action, DG Research and Innovation, DG Environment, DG Regional and Urban Policy, and DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries – General Provisions. (2022).

⁵⁴ CINEA, Multi-Annual Communication Strategy 2021-2024. The strategy consists of three pillars: informing, promoting, engaging, and is directed both at internal and external stakeholders.

newsletters) and audio-visual material, promoting project results and success stories via all channels, as well as running campaigns and contributing to EC campaigns.⁵⁵

The Agency collected a comprehensive set of performance indicators on their communication activities during the evaluation period. Following these indicators, the work of the Agency in this area was highly effective. The main key performance indicator (KPI) for the Agency's communication, the communication potential reach, increased from 22 million in 2021 to 155 million in 2024, largely meeting the set targets.

Table 6: Communication reach (KPI) and other performance indicators

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Communication reach (in million)	22.0	33.8	102.7	155.0
Website unique page views	>1.5 million	>1.9 million	1.4 million	2 million
Unique visitors	625 208	782 115	1.1 million	1.1 million
Total events	52	73	73	NA
CINEA events	21	34	31	76
Info days	9	14	19	20
Other events	12	20	12	56
External events	31	39	42	NA

Source: authors' elaboration, based on CINEA Annual Activity Reports, 2021-2025, and CINEA Communication in Numbers 2021-24

When it comes to external communication, social media played an important role in CINEA's strategy.⁵⁶ CINEA ran 12 social media accounts across multiple platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and Twitter/X. These channels included thematic accounts such as the CleanEnergy_EU account on Twitter/X as well as corporate accounts showcasing the programmes, funding and projects managed by CINEA. For the years 2021-2024, CINEA developed a dedicated Social Media strategy, including an Action Plan with objectives and KPIs, emphasising the importance the Agency placed on social media activities. Guidance on Communication and raising EU visibility is provided on CINEA's website, and customised social media guidance were also provided for beneficiaries from the CEF, LIFE and Innovation Fund programmes in order to better plan their social media presence and activities.⁵⁷

Table 7: Performance indicators on CINEA's social media activity

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total impressions	20,730,257	10,810,000	15,111,229	14,179,413
Total number of posts	6,558	9,369	6,004	4,107

⁵⁵ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports 2021-2024.

⁵⁶ CINEA, Multi-Annual Communication Strategy 2021-2024.

⁵⁷ CINEA, Social Media guide for CEF beneficiaries, 12 November 2021, https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/publications/digital-publications/social-media-guide-cef-beneficiaries_en
 Social media guidelines for LIFE projects - European Commission 15 February 2022
 Innovation Fund - Social Media Guidelines - European Commission 1 March 2022

New followers	147,413	43,802	28,457	29,041
Total interactions	254,528	521,116	128,838	116,380
Overall engagement rate	1.25%	0.2%	0.51%	0.34%
Number of posts mentioning #EUGreenDeal	976	1,297	1,296	810
Total followers	177,656	221, 275	255,518	284,642

Source: data provided by CINEA

The Agency's social media accounts have steadily gained followers during the evaluation period and continuously surpassed its targets for audience reach that were set in the Annual Work Programmes and Social Media Strategy. In 2021, CINEA had 177,656 followers across its accounts, which in 2024 had increased to 284,642 followers. However, it should be noted that in the same period, the number of interactions reported by the Agency has decreased notably, from 254,528 and 521,116 in 2021 and 2022, respectively, to 116,380 in 2024. With the focus on social media, there has also been an increase in the Agency's production of attractive and easy-to-read media such as infographics, visuals, videos and animations. For instance, the CINEA YouTube channel registered 14.5 million video views in 2024.⁵⁸ The findings from the interviews suggest that the social media accounts of CINEA are a valuable resource for some beneficiaries and stakeholders to stay updated on the Agency's activities and opportunities.⁵⁹

In addition to social media and its websites, CINEA has also set up and developed a range of other communication channels. Notably, there has been a shift away from paper-based communication to online tools, as reported by one interviewee. Channels utilised by the Agency include online events, thematic online newsletters (LIFE and Clean Energy), online publications, communication campaigns, press media actions, audio-visual products, infographics and programme dashboards. In 2023, CINEA launched a public dashboard which provides detailed information across all programmes of the Agency.⁶⁰

The organisation of events was another key communication activity utilised by CINEA. In the evaluation period, the Agency organised regular information events at programme level for applicants and other stakeholders.⁶¹ For instance, in 2023, 19 info days were organised, which attracted 48,265 participants, and in 2024, 20 info days were organised with 21,222 participants.⁶² Several applicants and beneficiaries expressed in the interviews that they would like to see more information events organised by the Agency.⁶³ CINEA staff interviewed also confirmed that info days are helpful to applicants and help in maintaining close communication with key audiences, although these are linked to the launch of calls for proposals, planned by the parent DGs.

Furthermore, CINEA promoted its programmes by co-organising or participating in external events.⁶⁴ In 2023, CINEA co-organised or participated in 42 supported external events with 723

⁵⁸ CINEA, Communication in Numbers 2024.

⁵⁹ Interviews with beneficiaries, interviews with applicants.

⁶⁰ CINEA Online Public Dashboard, available at: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dashboard/sense/app/a429734c-ebed-4cf8-afe1-cd9c75f14032/sheet/4c9ea8df-f0f9-4c0d-b26b-99fc0218d9d9/state/analysis>

⁶¹ The number of events for each programme are provided in CINEA, Annual Activity Report annexes, 2021-24.

⁶² Based on Comm in Numbers 2023, and Comm in Numbers 2024,

⁶³ Interview with beneficiary, Interview with applicant.

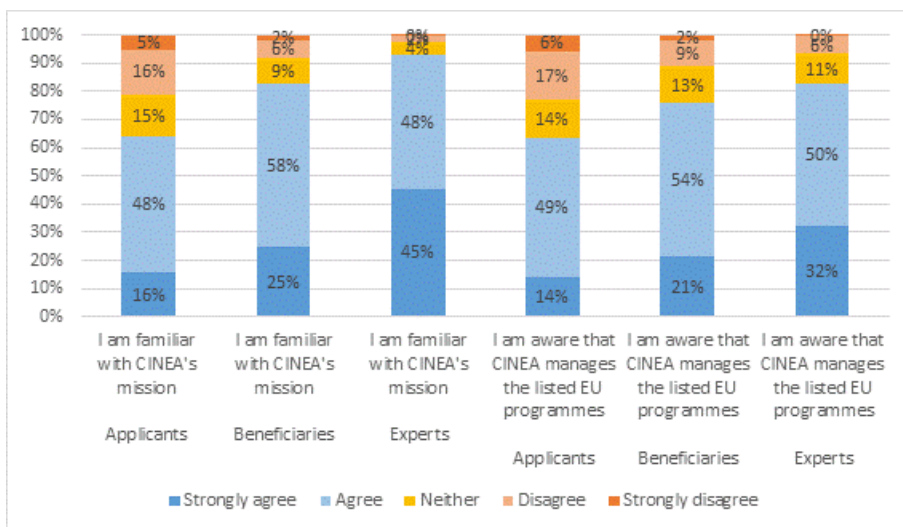
⁶⁴ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports 2021-2024.

992 estimated participants.⁶⁵ The evidence from the interviews suggests that these events are appreciated by external stakeholders and perceived as a helpful communication offer. CINEA uses these events to showcase projects, facilitate network building, engage with the projects consortia and build contacts with beneficiaries and other stakeholders. Internal and external stakeholders highlighted the role of the Agency in providing information and knowledge about the individual projects that are implemented in the Member States with the EU as promoter, for example through its information materials, databases, and dashboards.⁶⁶

Stakeholders' interviews confirmed that CINEA's communication efforts are generally aligned with the Commission's communication strategies. This is ensured through both formal and informal channels. The coordination with the communication functions in the parent DGs is described as constructive and effective by staff members both in the parent DGs and in CINEA.⁶⁷ The form of cooperation varies by programme. Most commonly, there is a direct exchange between the unit in CINEA responsible for the programme implementation, the corporate communication team and the communication teams in the parent DGs. The collaboration was described as particularly close with regard to some programmes (LIFE, EMFAF and CEF).⁶⁸

The results from the survey highlight that the awareness of CINEA's mission and programmes is high among external stakeholders, though it is lower among unsuccessful applicants compared to beneficiaries and external experts.

Figure 16: Reported familiarity with CINEA's mission and programmes



Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants, survey among external experts

Base: unsuccessful applicants (n=816), beneficiaries (n=1212), external experts (n=879), excludes those who answered "Don't know"/"Refusal"

The evaluation findings also highlight that among external stakeholders, the familiarity and awareness varied by individual programme. Evidence from the survey and the qualitative stakeholder interviews indicate that generally, there is a higher awareness of the larger funding programmes, such as Horizon Europe and LIFE. Awareness is lower for the smaller or more specialised programmes, such as Green Assist or the JTM-PSLF.

⁶⁵ CINEA, Comm in numbers 2023.

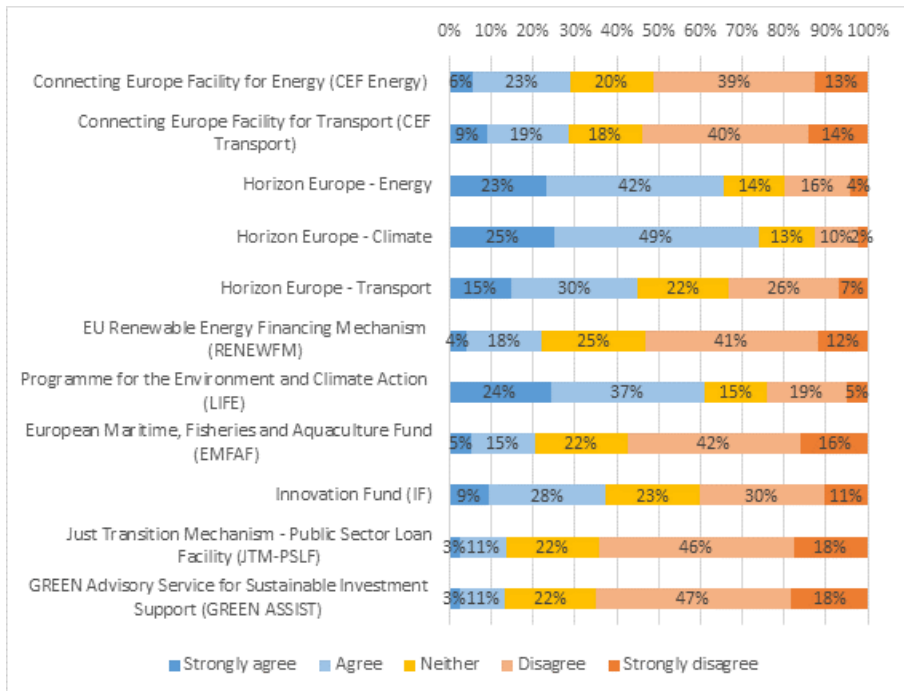
⁶⁶ Interview with staff in parent DG.

⁶⁷ Interview with staff in parent DG, interview with staff in CINEA.

⁶⁸ Interviews with staff in parent DGs, interview with staff in CINEA.

In the qualitative interviews, external stakeholders, such as applicants or beneficiaries, have reported particular challenges for CINEA in explaining its wide programme portfolio. In the reference period, the Agency has taken steps to foster synergies with the programmes within its portfolio and in organising cross-programme communication activities. Initiatives have been taken to showcase project results and funding opportunities bringing awareness of different programmes around a particular thematic priority.⁶⁹

Figure 17: Reported familiarity with CINEA’s programmes



Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants

Base: unsuccessful applicants and beneficiaries (n=2011), excludes those who answered “Don’t know”/“Refusal”

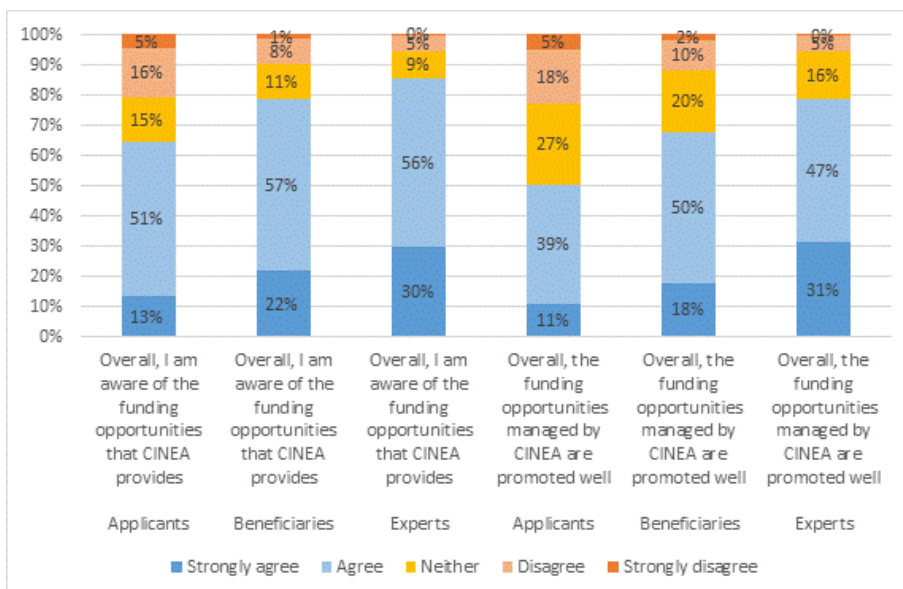
Question text: “Looking more closely at the programmes managed by CINEA and the funding opportunities provided, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I am familiar with [programme name]”

While CINEA had an effective outreach, for external stakeholders the main sources of information on CINEA seem to have remained prior experiences with funding applications and the EU Funding & Tenders Portal. In the survey, less than 1% of beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants mentioned media or social media as the first source of information where they heard about the funding opportunities CINEA provides, while 23% mentioned prior experience, 22% the EU Funding & Tenders Portal, and 19% professional networks.

The evaluation shows that external stakeholders see some room for improvement when it comes to the promotion of the funding opportunities. Among unsuccessful applicants, 50% agree that overall, the funding opportunities by CINEA are promoted well, while 23% do not think this is the case and 27% take a neutral position. The following Figure illustrates these findings.

⁶⁹ See further: Annual Activity Reports 2021-2024 under “Cross-cutting activities”.

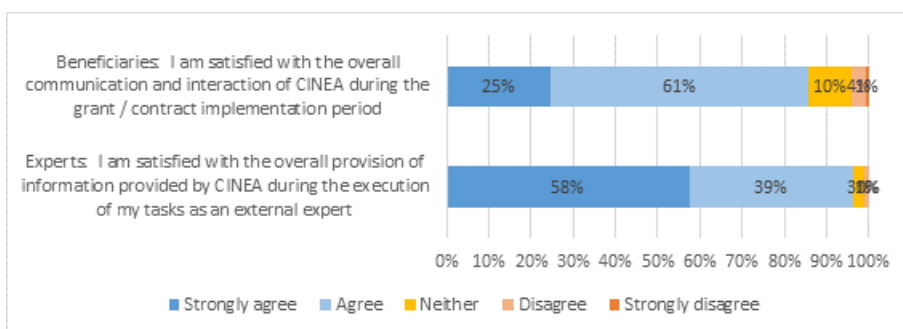
Figure 18: Awareness of funding opportunities and promotion



Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants, survey among external experts
 Base: unsuccessful applicants (n=823), beneficiaries (n=1209), external experts (n=874), excludes those who answered "Don't know"/"Refusal"

An additional aspect of CINEA's external communication is the direct contact with external stakeholders. The main means of communication with applicants and beneficiaries are email (74%) and the EU Funding & Tenders Portal (67%). The survey results show that unsuccessful applicants, beneficiaries, and external experts are fairly satisfied with the availability of CINEA staff and the information provided, with the satisfaction being higher among external experts. The evidence from the qualitative interview supports these findings from the survey. Views expressed in the stakeholder interviews highlighted that the communication with CINEA staff was widely perceived as helpful, professional and effective.⁷⁰

Figure 19: Satisfaction with direct communication



Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants, survey among external experts
 Base: beneficiaries (n=1050), external experts (n=866), excludes those who answered "Don't know"/"Refusal"

⁷⁰ Interviews with applicants. Interviews with beneficiaries.

4.1.5. Reporting to parent DGs

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

Key findings: The evaluation found that CINEA's reporting practices are well-structured, comprehensive, and effective, fulfilling legal obligations outlined in the Delegation Decision and various Memoranda of Understanding. The Agency also provides structured data and insights to support monitoring, evaluation, and policymaking. Stakeholder interviews revealed high satisfaction with the reporting processes, highlighting timely information flow, constructive collaboration, and a strong working relationship between CINEA and its parent DGs, which has positively contributed to the Agency's overall effectiveness.

The legal basis for the reporting obligations is set out in the Delegation Decision as well as the general and programme-specific Memoranda of Understanding.⁷¹ The evidence collected in the evaluation suggests that the Agency used formalised reporting procedures to inform DGs on programme operations, strategic developments, and risk-related issues. This was primarily achieved through regular Steering Committee meetings, where operational updates were presented and discussed. Another important element of the reporting process is the Mid-year Report and the Annual Activity Reports.

The reporting obligations of CINEA also included Programme-Specific and ad hoc reports, which CINEA provides upon request from parent DGs. The Agency also must provide structured, reusable data to parent DGs for monitoring, evaluation, and policy development. The Agency also provides insights and knowledge gained from programme implementation to inform policymaking of the parent DGs. The Agency is also required to contribute to mid-term evaluations of the programmes it manages and must cooperate with audits and checks by the Audit services and investigative bodies in the area of anti-fraud.

Operationally, reporting occurs through structured as well as informal mechanisms. The regular updates provided during the Steering Committee meetings are key as well as the direct exchanges between the administrative and operational Units of the Agency with parent DGs. Based on the review of management decisions and stakeholder interviews, the evaluation found a high level of satisfaction with the reporting structure, both among CINEA staff and within the parent Directorates-General, indicating that the governance framework and communication channels are functioning effectively.⁷² Neither staff members in the parent DGs nor in the Agency raised issues with the current reporting practices. The reporting is seen as comprehensive, timely and effective.

Stakeholders in both institutions highlighted the positive working relationship between the Agency and parent DGs which contributes to the exchange of information between the entities. Both formal and informal reporting mechanisms are seen as having worked well across the

⁷¹ COMMISSION DECISION Delegating Powers to the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency with a View to the Performance of Tasks Linked to the Implementation of Union Programmes in the Field of Transport and Energy Infrastructure; Climate, Energy and Mobility Research and Innovation; Environment, Nature and Biodiversity; Transition to Low-Carbon Technologies; and Maritime and Fisheries; Comprising, in Particular, Implementation of Appropriations Entered in the General Budget of the Union and Those Stemming from External Assigned Revenue (2021)., Memorandum of Understanding between the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency and DG Mobility and Transport, DG Energy, DG Climate Action, DG Research and Innovation, DG Environment, DG Regional and Urban Policy, and DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries – General Provisions. (2022).

⁷² Interviews with staff in CINEA, Interviews with staff in parent DGs.

different operational Units of CINEA and the parent DGs. The reporting relationship is positively perceived both at operational and managerial level. The findings from the stakeholder interviews suggest that the frequent and constructive exchange between the Agency and parent DGs has contributed to the Agency's effectiveness during the reference period.

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

Key findings: CINEA has enhanced its reporting practices and satisfaction with the current reporting practices is high in the Agency and parent DGs, though parent DGs occasionally call for deeper qualitative insights into project nature and outcomes.

CINEA has, since its transition from INEA in 2021, taken substantive steps to improve the quality, consistency and efficiency in reporting. As outlined above, performance reporting is assessed very positively. However, the interviews highlighted that on occasion, there is a call for more qualitative insights into the nature of the projects, and potentially their outcomes, from the parent DGs.⁷³

4.2. Efficiency

4.2.1. Programme Management

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: During the evaluation period, CINEA demonstrated strong financial and operational efficiency, maintaining a consistently low ratio of administrative to operational budget while successfully executing 100% of its budget commitments and payments. The Agency managed a growing number of projects per staff member, indicating increased productivity, and implemented simplified funding mechanisms, such as lump sum grants, to streamline programme management.

CINEA maintained a low ratio of administrative to operational budget. This is partially explained by the nature of the Agency's programmes, which includes funding opportunities for large research and infrastructure investments. In the reference period, the average grant size ranged from EUR 614 000 in the EMFAF to EUR 57 million in the Innovation Fund.⁷⁴ The table below provides an overview of the operational and administrative budget of CINEA during the evaluation period.

⁷³ Interview with staff member in parent DG.

⁷⁴ Figures on average grant sizes based on CINEA online public dashboard.

Table 8: Operational and administrative budget of CINEA in 2021-2024

Name	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amount of the operational budget to be delegated (million EUR)	6,915.57	9,901.14	10,646.94	7,151.60
Executed budget in commitment/commitments made (all types of credits) (million EUR)	6,901.16	9,722.55	10,612.43	7,097.18
Executed budget in payments (million EUR)	4,195.72	6,798.15	7,488.89	7,641.01
Administrative budget (million EUR), commitments made	43.75	53.57	61.87	68.46
Administrative budget (million EUR) executed payments	42.10	51.81	61.84	68.07
Ratio of administrative budget versus operational budget (commitments)	0.0063	0.0055	0.0058	0.0096

Source: authors' elaboration, based on CINEA, Annual Activity Reports 2021-2024.

During the evaluation period, CINEA carried out calls for proposals as foreseen in the Annual Work Programmes. The number of calls varied between 96 in 2022 and 60 in 2024. The Agency reached the key performance indicators for budget execution. This is true for both commitments and payments. The following Table shows the budget execution of the Agency.

Table 9: Key performance indicators on budget execution

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Budget execution (%), commitment appropriations	100%	100%	100%	100%
Budget execution (%), payment appropriations	100%	100%	100%	100%

Sources: Authors' elaboration, based on CINEA, Annual Activity Reports 2021-2024.

Considering the ratio between the number of running projects and FTEs over time shows a trend towards increased efficiency. Since 2022, the ratio has been consistently increasing, meaning that on average more projects were followed by the Agency per staff member. However, it should be noted that in the same period, the number of calls for proposals issued by the Agency has been declining.

Table 10: Ration of number of running projects and FTEs

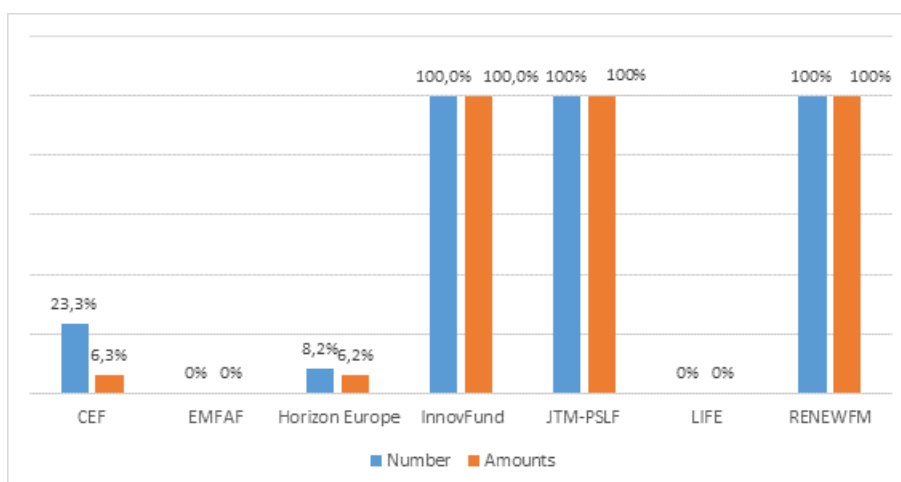
	2021	2022	2023	2024
Running projects	2783	2904	3297	3620
FTEs (TA and CA)	529	566	578	616
Ratio	5.3	5.1	5.7	5.9

Sources: data provided by European Commission/CINEA

Use of simplified funding mechanisms

During the evaluation period, CINEA implemented measures to simplify the programme management in individual programmes.⁷⁵ This included among others regular reviews of the processes and reporting requirements for beneficiaries. As a simplification measure, CINEA also implemented the use of simplified funding mechanisms in programme calls.⁷⁶ The use of simplified funding mechanisms, like unit contributions and lump sum grants, is a relevant element in enhancing the efficiency of programme management. In the reference period, the use of simplified cost options varied considerably by programme. The following Figure provides an overview of the use of lump sum grants in each of CINEA's programmes.⁷⁷

Figure 20: Share of lump sum grants/amounts by programme in 2021-2024



Source: Authors' elaboration, based on data provided by the European Commission

The use of simplified cost options has the potential to further enhance the efficiency of the programme management. The evidence from the qualitative interviews with external stakeholders also suggests that these funding mechanisms are positively perceived, but a few external experts noted that for these new forms of simplified grants, additional guidance in the

⁷⁵ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports, 2021-2024, Interviews with staff members in CINEA.

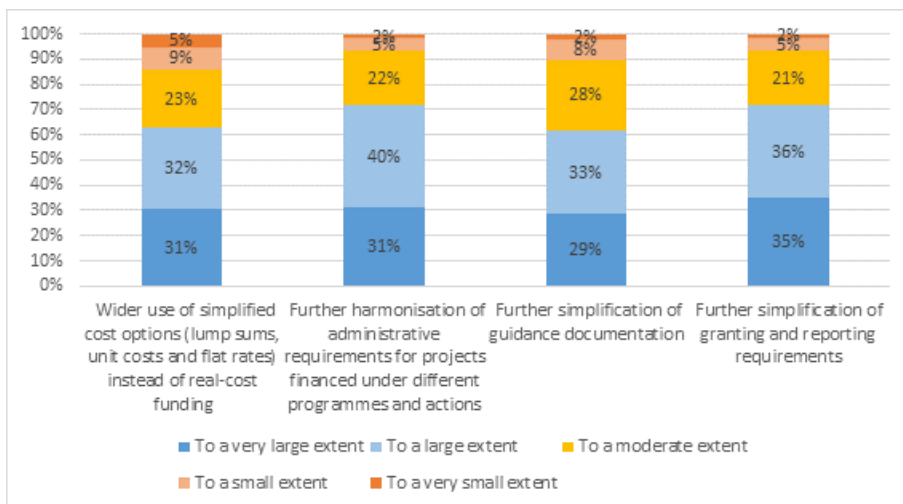
⁷⁶ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports, 2021-2024.

⁷⁷ There is a difference in lump sums absorption as shown in figure 24. While this analysis for Horizon Europe managed by CINEA was outside of the scope of the study, our analysis suggests that the transition to lump sums could be slower due to several factors such as maturity of work programme design, the need for alignment with parent DGs, and the interservice coordination.

evaluation of proposals would be needed, as the current guidelines have provided little support in this regard.⁷⁸

While overall CINEA’s processes are seen as efficient by external stakeholders, the evidence from the survey also suggests that beneficiaries and applicants would welcome further simplifications. Asked about different measures for further simplification, a majority think that these simplification measures would lead to better and more efficient implementation of the programmes in the future.

Figure 21: Support for simplification measures



Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants

Base: beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants (n=1846), excludes those who answered “Don’t know”/“Refusal”

4.2.2. Fit for Purpose

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

Key findings: CINEA’s organisational structure, combining central service units with programme-specific departments, is seen as fit for purpose and well-suited to its portfolio, supported by clear internal processes. The Agency has maintained high staff engagement and low turnover, while actively addressing career development challenges through training, mobility schemes, and competency mapping. Challenges remained regarding staff satisfaction with career progression and vacancy rates in the Agency.

The organisational structure provides a balance between central service units, clustered in Department A and the programme implementation units in Departments B, C, and D. The Agency has detailed documentation of internal processes in an e-Manual of Procedures (eMoP) available on its intranet site, which is regularly maintained and supports its efficiency.

CINEA’s structure mirrored that of the programmes delegated to the Agency and of its parent DGs, contributing to the efficiency of programme management. Each delegated group of programmes is managed by a dedicated department based on thematic proximity, with different

⁷⁸ Interviews with external experts.

operational Units of each department focusing on specific programmes or subprogrammes. The size of the Agency, with 589 employees at the end of 2024, grew proportionately to the increased programme portfolio, nonetheless with efficiency gains as requested by the ex-ante CBA.

Table 11: Number of employees by staff category

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Staff in place year end	474	516	567	589
Operational staff	424	463	510	528
Horizontal (management & support)	50	53	57	61
Share horizontal (management & support)	10,56%	10,23%	10,08%	10,38%

Source: data provided by CINEA

Based on the review of documentary sources and evidence from the stakeholder interviews, the evaluation found that the organisation structure and the size of the Agency are broadly perceived as appropriate.⁷⁹ Staff members in the Agency highlighted the well-functioning interplay between the programme Units in Departments B, C, and D and the support services in Department A.⁸⁰ ⁸¹CINEA has decentralised the previously central evaluation function to the programme implementation units, which is seen as having additionally increased the Agency's operational efficiency.⁸² The organisational structure is also seen as providing flexibility to react to novelties and unexpected changes efficiently.⁸³

The HR management of CINEA is guided by the Inter-Executive Agency Human Resources Strategy 2023-2027.⁸⁴ In the evaluation period, the Agency has had a high level of staff engagement, as evidenced by its staff engagement index, which exceeds the European Commission's average. The staff engagement index increased from 72% in 2021 to 75% in 2024.⁸⁵ The following Table shows the staff engagement index based on DG HR's regular Commission staff or pulse surveys.

Staff perception

In the evaluation period, the Agency has had a high level of staff engagement, as evidenced by its staff engagement index which exceeds the European Commission's average. The staff engagement index increased from 72% in 2021 to 73% in 2023, while staff wellbeing saw a more notable increase from 50% to 56%. Staff satisfaction with being employed in the EC remained consistently high at 80% across both years. These trends suggest a generally positive trajectory in employee sentiment, with wellbeing showing the most significant progress. The following figure shows the staff engagement index based on DG HR's regular Commission staff or pulse surveys.

⁷⁹ Interviews with staff in CINEA, interview with staff in parent DGs.

⁸⁰ Interviews with staff members in CINEA. The results from the European Commission's regular staff survey indicate that 65% of staff in CINEA think that Agency is organised in an efficient way (+11pp. compared to EC average).

⁸¹ Interviews with staff in parent DGs, interviews with staff in CINEA.

⁸² Interviews with staff in CINEA.

⁸³ Interviews with staff in CINEA.

⁸⁴ European Commission, Inter-Executive Agency Human Resources Strategy 2023-2027. February 2023.

⁸⁵ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports annexes, 2021-2024, CINEA Tableau de bord/Performance Reports 2021-2024

Table 12: Staff engagement index

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Staff engagement index	72%		75%	
Agency is an attractive employer	64%		68%	
Workload is acceptable	46%		51%	
Relation performance and career progression	35%		29%	

Source: Authors, based on CINEA, Annual Activity Reports 2021-2025, European Commission Staff Survey results.

At the same time, the professional career perspective within the Agency remained a concern for the staff as in the previous period.⁸⁶ Career progress within the Agency is limited as non-seconded staff cannot be appointed to management positions beyond Head of Sector and they do not have access to the internal competitions of the European Commission. The Agency has undertaken measures to address the issues of career development and mobility with staff mobility schemes and offers for training and professional development.⁸⁷ The Agency developed the competency mapping for 8 main profiles and provided relevant learning paths. It developed job shadowing programme which was further developed as the Inter-Agency job shadowing programme. It provided coaching, personalised career guidance sessions using Performance tool that allows to identify staff member's competencies and areas to further develop. In addition, the Agency continued with newcomer and exit surveys, to collect data on engagement and professional trajectories of the staff.

The Agency, together with other Executive Agencies, worked on the development of their multi-annual HR strategy (2023-2027) that addresses 3 main pillars: attractiveness and staff retention; selection and recruitment; and career prospects with 39 actions for all EAs to implement.

The Agency has put in place follow up action plans to staff surveys with the objective to improve the staff satisfaction and efficient performance of the Agency.⁸⁸ During the evaluation period, the Agency reduced its vacancy rate, from 11.3% in March 2021 (10.4% end of year) to 8.6% in March 2024 (4.4% end of year). The overall staff turnover rate remained low.

Table 13: Staff turnover and vacancy rate

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Staffing in the AWP (programmed)	529	566	585	616
Staff in place year end (actuals)	474	516	567	589
Vacancy rate	10.4%	8.8%	3.1%	4.4%
Staff turnover rate	10	11%	7.6%	6.8%

Source: data provided by CINEA

As regards the HR reporting, the Agency has its HR Annual Reporting plan, providing regularly to management figures on gender, geographical balance, age, time management issues, internal mobility, career development, turnover, etc. HR reporting/overview is also included in the agenda of the Steering Committee meetings and it also forms a part of the quarterly/monthly

⁸⁶ Interviews with staff members in CINEA. The results of the European Commission's regular staff survey also support this finding, with low satisfaction in regard to professional future.

⁸⁷ The Agency is created several schemes to created staff mobility within and between Agencies as well as with the European Commission during the reference period.

⁸⁸ CINEA, Staff Survey 2021 – CINEA Detailed Analysis; CINEA, 2023 Staff Survey CINEA's Results; CINEA, CINEA Action Plan Following the 2023 Staff Survey.

performance reports of the Agency. The Annual Activity Reports contain two indicators related to HR management and an HR section reporting on Attractiveness & Staff Retention, Selection and Recruitment. In line with the corporate instructions, the number of quantitative indicators on HR matters reported in the Annual Activity Reports remained limited.

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

Key findings: CINEA's efficiency is supported by a clear organisational structure, standardised procedures, and effective sub-delegation and simplification measures that streamlined decision-making during the evaluation period. Challenges highlighted included lengthy recruitment processes and the disproportionate effort required to manage small-scale delegated actions.

Factors driving the efficiency of the Agency

- The evidence collected in the evaluation process highlights several factors which have contributed to the efficiency of the Agency. The findings based on the desk research and the stakeholder interviews highlight the **organisational structure and the clear definition of procedures** as important factors which have driven the Agency's efficiency during the evaluation period. The high level of standardisation in its processes and the well-developed procedures for planning and decision-making are seen as positive factor which have contributed to the Agency's efficiency.⁸⁹ Furthermore, views expressed in the stakeholder interviews describe the **sub-delegation measures** as very effective in having improved the Agency's operational efficiency. It allowed for quicker decision-making and faster processes, e.g. in the sign-off of transactions, without having increased the risk exposure of the Agency. In addition, other simplification measures developed in simplification/delegation exercises or in the Innovation Lab exercise were seen as positive contributions to the overall efficiency of the organisation.

Factors hindering the efficiency of the Agency

- There are perceived obstacles related to **recruitment** which are seen as hindrances by some staff members in the Agency.⁹⁰ While the vacancy rate has decreased during the evaluation period, it remained in some years above the target threshold of 5%. Related to this, the Agency reports difficulties in attracting people with certain skill sets and limitations through the recruitment procedures, which require long formal procedures and partially relies on services provided by EPSO (with regard to CAST competitions). The common reserve lists for Executive Agencies which were introduced during the reference period was seen as an improvement, which however has not fully solved the issues pertaining to recruitment.
- Another issue raised in several instances concerns the **delegation of atypical or small-scale actions to the Agency**, such as Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PPAs). These actions are often perceived as inefficient to manage, as they demand a disproportionate amount of administrative effort and resources relative to their size and impact. Unlike larger, more standardised operations, these smaller actions do not benefit from economies of scale, making their implementation less cost-effective. This can divert attention from core activities and reduce the overall efficiency of programme delivery.

⁸⁹ Interviews with staff members in CINEA. Interviews with staff members in the parent DGs.

⁹⁰ This point has been discussed previously in section 4.1.1. Objectives.

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: CINEA has implemented several of the measures envisaged in the ex-ante cost-benefit analysis (CBA). These measures have contributed to observable improvements in CINEA's productivity and efficiency.

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 Agency. 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.

As a recommendation following from the ex-ante CBA,⁹¹ the Executive Agencies and the DGs were asked to develop several strategies to align implementation with the productivity targets. They should implement a number of measures to allow the Agencies 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;
- Increasing the average grant size where possible, keeping in mind delivery of policy objectives and actual project impact which does not always correlate to the size of the budget;
- 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.

Based on the insights from interviews with Agency staff and European Commission officials, in particular to gain an advanced understanding of the Agency's workload assessment methodology, it appears that the measures outlined in the ex ante cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of 2021 have had varying degrees of materialisation and impact on the Agency's productivity.

Table 14: Efficiency measures and implementation by the Agency

Measure	Implementation
Efficient feedback to policy	The importance of feedback mechanisms was emphasised. In particular, the adoption of CINEA's Cross-programme feedback to

⁹¹ 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.

	policy strategy (at the end of 2021), which introduced a structured approach to feedback to policy, aligned with the priorities of the parent DGs and the Agency's resources. This strategy also enhances efficient feedback to policy as it supports the identification of complementarities across programmes through coordination and dissemination of policy-relevant information from more than one programme. At programme level, a more solid framework allowed to plan feedback to policy activities more efficiently, while keeping close ongoing collaboration with the parent DGs. Recently, the Agency enhanced the use of IT tools for F2P (e.g. MAP-IT, IF KS tool). However, ad hoc requests from parent DGs remain frequent.
New or improved IT tools	The implementation of fully digitalised processes has been highlighted as a significant advancement (e.g. use of eGrants), streamlining operations and reducing administrative burdens. This indicates a positive materialisation of this measure, although further improvements allowing higher flexibility to specific programme requirements would enable higher efficiency.
Simplification measures	The Agency and the Parent DGs have made efforts to standardise proposals and evaluation processes, as well as the use of lump sums and unit costs for some programmes and the introduction of auctions. These simplifications have contributed to more efficient project management, suggesting that this measure has been successfully realised. The Agency also regularly contributes to simplification discussions with Commission services.
Increasing average grant size	In the period 2021-2024, the average grant size has fluctuated within programmes, without a clear trend towards smaller or larger grant sizes.
Less resource-intensive calls and procurement	While a direct and quantifiable comparison with the previous period is not possible, the Agency has recently experienced an increase in smaller, more resource intense actions (including procurement or identified beneficiary actions).
Reassessing reporting requirements	The emphasis on streamlined reporting periods and tailored monitoring indicates progress in reassessing reporting requirements, contributing to reduced administrative workload.
Flexibility in staff allocation	CINEA reported challenges in staff allocation. However, CINEA might look into using more extensively the available flexibility measures and exploring the other Agencies' best practices.

Source: Authors' elaboration

In conclusion, while several measures from the ex-ante CBA have been successfully implemented at CINEA, particularly in terms of digitalisation, simplification, and reassessing reporting requirements, there are areas that require further attention, such as improving further feedback mechanisms based on clearly defined needs by the DGs.

During the evaluation period, CINEA has implemented simplification measures to improve the efficiency of its processes. The Agency conducted several bottom-up simplification exercises to streamline processes. It also used the format of Innovation Labs, which involved working groups discussing different processes with both horizontal and operational units.⁹² The outcome of the Innovation Lab exercise was an action plan to improve the internal processes. Staff members in the Agency highlighted in the interviews most often the positive effect of the sub-delegation

⁹² Interviews with staff in CINEA

measures, which shifted decision making to lower levels of the organisation.⁹³ For instance, within the operational units, deputy heads of unit and heads of sector were given additional authority to approve transactions related to contracting and payments. This is perceived by the Agency staff as having increased the efficiency, as it allowed decision making to take place at lower levels.⁹⁴

4.2.3. Environmental impact

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

Key findings: During the evaluation period, CINEA implemented a wide range of environmental initiatives and obtained EMAS accreditation in February 2024, which confirmed its commitment to sustainable practices. It should be noted that impact data on the effect of these initiatives was limited.

During the evaluation period, the Agency implemented several measures to reduce its environmental impact. The actions implemented by CINEA between 2021 and 2024 supported several of the overarching objectives of the European Green Deal and the Commission's "GREENING THE COMMISSION" Communication (Directorate-General Human Resources and Security, 05/04/2022).⁹⁵ The "GREENING THE COMMISSION" Communication outlines the EU's pathway to climate neutrality by 2030, setting a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% compared to 2005 levels, with remaining emissions to be offset through carbon removal. It identifies key areas of environmental performance, ranging from buildings and travel to IT and staff engagement, each accompanied by specific actions and targets designed to support this ambition⁹⁶.

The Agency worked towards the accreditation of Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) which was obtained in February 2024.⁹⁷ EMAS certifies that CINEA implements an

⁹³ Interviews with staff in CINEA

⁹⁴ This also implements one of the recommendations from the previous evaluation of INEA, which had pointed out the lack of agile decision making in INEA (European Commission 2024, Study supporting the evaluation of CHAFAEA, EACEA, EASME, ERCEA, INEA & REA (2017/2018-2021): final report INEA, p. 22)

⁹⁵ European Commission, COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION, GREENING THE COMMISSION, Directorate General Human Resources and Security, 05/04/2022, Available at: [c_2022_2230_2_en_act_part1_v11.pdf](#). The Communication charts the course toward achieving climate neutrality within the Commission by 2030, identifying key areas for improving environmental performance. Among its targets is a 60% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 compared to 2005 levels, with remaining emissions to be offset through carbon removal measures. The commitment to reach corporate climate neutrality by 2030 is a distinct pledge made by the Commission under the Green Deal, separate from the broader EU-wide targets set for the same year.

⁹⁶ The GREENING THE COMMISSION Communication identifies seven key areas of environmental performance to be monitored and improved in support of the EU's climate neutrality objective by 2030. These include: (1) *Buildings and working space* – improving energy efficiency and reducing consumption; (2) *Business travel* – minimising emissions through videoconferencing and sustainable transport; (3) *Commuting* – promoting low-carbon commuting options such as public transport and cycling; (4) *Commission vehicles* – increasing the use of electric or hybrid vehicles; (5) *IT operations and assets* – optimising digital infrastructure to reduce energy use; (6) *Procurement and waste management* – implementing sustainable purchasing practices and reducing waste; (7) *Staff participation and engagement* – fostering environmentally responsible behaviours through training and awareness initiatives.

⁹⁷ The requirements of the EMAS audit are documented at: https://green-forum.ec.europa.eu/green-business/emas_en

Environmental Management System (EMS) and complies with, monitors, and improves its performance regarding environmental standards.

Initiatives of the Agency included several actions.⁹⁸ CINEA promoted sustainable commuting and mobility among staff. The Agency installed additional bike racks and electric plugs for e-bikes, reduced car parking spaces, and promoted cycling and walking challenges (e.g., VeloMai, Walking Challenge). In line with Commission policy, CINEA adopted a travel policy favouring train travel for missions and promoted remote meetings to reduce emissions from business travel. Waste reduction was another priority: the Agency participated in the European Week for Waste Reduction, organized zero-waste cooking sessions, and improved waste sorting and recycling practices. Sustainable meeting guidelines were applied to eliminate single-use plastics.

Energy efficiency and resource use were also key areas of action. CINEA joined the “Buildings Energy Savings Together” (BEST) initiative, lowered building temperatures, and closed offices during holiday periods to save energy. These efforts resulted in a 22% reduction in energy consumption in 2023 compared to 2022. The building’s energy performance rating improved from “E-” in 2020 to “D+” in 2021 and “C-” in 2022 and 2023. Staff were encouraged to use resources efficiently, including water and paper, and awareness campaigns promoted biodiversity through urban gardens, insect hotels, and green roofs.

CINEA also focused on reducing the environmental impact of events. Meetings and conferences followed EC sustainability guidelines, minimizing travel and waste while using digital tools. In 2023, the Agency won the EU Sustainable Events Award for the European Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW), recognized for CO₂ offsetting, organic catering, recycling, and inclusivity. Staff engagement was strong, with initiatives such as the first joint Green Week with other Executive Agencies, featuring activities like recycled toy exchanges, clothing swaps, zero-waste cooking, and climate discussions. Regular updates, tips, and news on sustainability were shared via newsletters and the intranet.

The evidence collected in the desk research and stakeholder interviews highlights the large number of initiatives in CINEA and the dedication of its staff to reduce the environmental impact of the Agency, in line with the Agency’s focus on ‘Green Deal’ policy implementation programmes. In addition to these measures, CINEA increased the number of performance indicators that are collected in relation to sound environmental management.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports, 2021-2024.

⁹⁹ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports annexes, 2021-2024.

4.2.4. Digitalisation

EQ14: What did the Agency do to digitalise its activities?

Key findings: During the evaluation period, CINEA made substantial progress in digitalisation, streamlining internal processes through the increased adoption of corporate tools. The implementation of eGrants across most programmes improved efficiency, though legacy systems and programme-specific needs posed integration challenges. The Agency also advanced in the use of tools for data analytics.

In the evaluation period, CINEA has undertaken efforts to increase its level of digitalisation. This includes several aspects. Firstly, the Agency has increasingly digitalised its processes and administrative procedures.¹⁰⁰ Following the COVID-19 pandemic, teleworking and online collaboration has been widely adopted and remain important and effective. The Agency has implemented collaborative digital tools such as Microsoft 365 and Microsoft Teams to enhance teamwork and communication. The Agency has generally increased workflow and process digitalisation during the evaluation period, with most processes now paperless where possible. The Agency has adopted electronic signature processes.

An important change in the evaluation period in regard to digitalisation of the administrative processes was the introduction of the SUMMA financial system which replaced ABAC. CINEA volunteered to pilot the introduction of SUMMA, and the system was used for its administrative budget for the first time in 2022. Since this was a pilot, there were some challenges related to training, reporting, and some instability of the system which had an impact on some payments and led to a few delays.

When it comes to indicators measuring the performance of the Agency, the values consistently improved over time. The following table shows the results for the three KPIs on this topic during the evaluation period.

Table 15: Key performance indicators on digitalisation

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Degree of implementation of the digital strategy principles by the most important IT solutions	60%	65%	57%	69%
Percentage of CINEA key data assets for which corporate principles for data governance have been implemented	N/A	64%	71%	81%
Percentage of staff attending awareness raising activities on data protection compliance	62%	69%	84%	100%

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on CINEA, Annual Activity Reports, 2021-2025.

Another area of digitalisation in the Agency was the increasing adoption of corporate IT tools for the programme management. During the evaluation period, the Agency has adopted the use of the corporate eGrants tool for the management of its programmes. For most programmes, the programme-specific Memoranda of Understanding contain provisions about the IT tools to use in the programme implementation.¹⁰¹ In some programmes however the Agency had to maintain legacy systems in parallel, for example Butler in LIFE and TENtec and MAP-IT for

¹⁰⁰ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports, 2021-2024.

¹⁰¹ The individual Memoranda of Understanding are listed in the Annex of this study.

CEF, as they are needed for the management of legacy projects and provide data and functionality that could not be covered by eGrants.

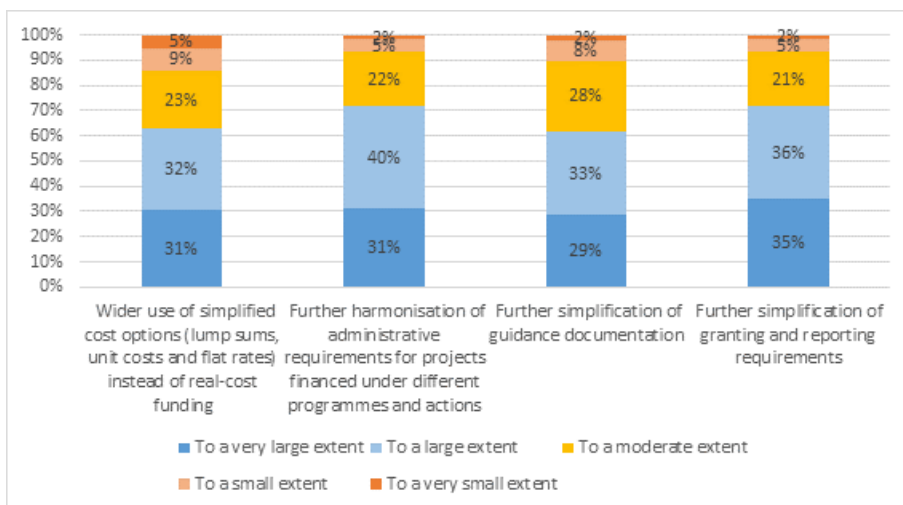
The Agency has also undertaken efforts to use digital tools for analytics. This concerns business analytics on the one hand. CINEA has implemented a datawarehouse concept, which combines data from different sources and provides analytical capabilities for the Agency. CINEA uses dashboards to support monitoring of performance and forecasting in the Agency. On the other hand, IT tools for analytics are also used to support the feedback to policy and communication functions of the Agency. Among other initiatives, CINEA launched a public dashboard in 2023, which provides analytical insights for the entire programme portfolio of the Agency.

Part of the digitalisation work of the Agency are cybersecurity and data protection. Here the Agency has put protocols in place, which follow closely the standards set by DG DIGIT. The current systems have been regularly tested and benchmarked during the evaluation period, without issues or doubts about their effectiveness.

The implementation of a fully digitalised process (e.g. eGrants) has markedly streamlined CINEA's operations, leading to a reduction in workload and enhanced efficiency. This advancement reflects the Agency's commitment to leveraging technology to improve project oversight and management. However, legacy programmes still need to be managed using other systems due to functional limitations of eGrants, creating a multiplicity of tools which is complicated for both staff and beneficiaries. Furthermore, the interviewees mentioned that the eGrants system could be modernised and a certified corporate AI tool should be established to enhance the efficiency of programme management.

The digitalisation processes are generally positively perceived in the Agency and seen as having contributed to the efficiency of the Agency. While the introduction of corporate tools, in particular eGrants for the programme management, required transitions and had to overcome difficulties and sometimes resistance, they are now largely perceived as a powerful solution which supports the Agency work. However, a common issue raised by staff members in the Agency is that the corporate tools did not take by default some specificities of certain programmes into account and adaption and integration took time. This posed operational challenges for the Agency, which initially negatively impacted its efficiency. However, it should be noted that this stems from the overarching corporate objective to harmonise IT tools across EU programmes, ensuring that applicants and beneficiaries can use the same IT system. The consultation of external stakeholders indicates that corporate IT solutions are seen as functional and adequate. During the qualitative interviews, unsuccessful applicants, beneficiaries and experts mostly stated that the tools for programme management and the evaluation process are fairly functional, although the interfaces of the platforms were often highlighted as complicated and old-fashioned. However, they see room for improvement when it comes to user-friendliness of the IT tools for application submission and the tools for project management and reporting. Among unsuccessful applicants and beneficiaries, 62% agreed to a large extent or very large extent that increased user-friendliness of IT tools for application submission would lead to a better and more efficient implementation of the programmes in the future, and 67% did so regarding IT tools for project management and reporting.

Figure 22: Support for increased user friendliness of IT tools



Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants

Base: beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants (n=1781)

Question text: To what extent do you think the following simplifications would lead to a better and more efficient implementation of the programmes managed by CINEA in the future?

EQ15: To what extent could more have been done to make the Agency more digitally efficient?

Key findings: While CINEA has made progress in digital efficiency through the adoption of corporate IT tools, further improvements could be achieved by better tailoring these systems to programme-specific needs and integrating currently manual or external processes into the corporate platforms. Staff feedback also suggest that more flexibility and innovation, including the strategic use of emerging technologies like AI, could enhance digital workflows.

Some issues around the process of digitalisation were raised in relation to the use of the corporate tools. Some staff members in the Agency perceive these tools as too generic in some respects and **not taking sufficiently into account the specificities of the individual programmes**. However, it should be noted that this perspective is limited and does not take into account the main corporate goal, which consists in harmonising IT tools so that applicants/beneficiaries are able to use the same system when dealing with EU programmes. On the other hand, several staff members in the Agency highlighted the increased efficiency from the use of the corporate IT tools after the introduction phase. The perception of the efficiency of the IT tools varies from programme to programme.

There are some **actions that currently remain outside of the corporate IT solutions**. For instance, Pilot Actions and Membership Fee Contributions are managed externally to eGrants. Even within eGrants, certain processes such as appeals, interventions under the Mutual Insurance Mechanism (MIM) for Horizon Europe, bankruptcy claim management, waivers, and enforced recoveries are either not automated or only partially automated, making them relatively resource intensive. Similarly, in the procurement domain, a significant number of contracts, payments, and tenders continue to be handled outside the eProcurements system. An integration of these actions into the corporate IT solutions can potentially increase the Agency's digital efficiency.

When it comes to further development of IT to support the effectiveness and efficiency of the Agency, some staff members in the Agency highlighted the **potential of Artificial Intelligence applications** to support their work in the future. This requires corporate guidance, especially as regards the use of AI tools for the proposal evaluation. The Agency has established an AI working group with representatives from across all its departments to share and exchange information on guidance and good practice in relation to the use of AI and to collect information on ongoing and desired use cases, for instance in relation to the use AI tools to analyse project portfolios. In addition, an important project on knowledge sharing which includes AI capabilities is under preparation. However, the practical applications in this area appear to be only emerging during the evaluation period.

4.3. Coherence

4.3.1. Coherence of the Programme Portfolio

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: The evaluation found that while CINEA’s programme portfolio is generally well-structured and aligned with its delegated responsibilities, some challenges remained in relation to smaller or atypical actions such as Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions, which are less efficient to manage. In addition, the evaluation findings showed that the full scope of the portfolio is not always fully visible for and understood by stakeholders.

CINEA is responsible for the grant management cycle of EU programmes with thematic focus on transport, energy, climate action, nature, environment and maritime fisheries and aquaculture and has a broad portfolio with overall seven programmes delegated to the Agency. The Agency’s programmes aimed at contributing to the policy objectives of the EU Green Deal.¹⁰² While the programmes share the policy focus on “Green Deal” policy topics, they considerably differ in scope and size. In the period 2021-2024, the largest programme was CEF, with grant contributions of EUR 23.32 billion within the current financial framework. This compares to EUR 54 million of grant contributions in the EMFAF programme, one of the smaller programmes of the Agency.¹⁰³

¹⁰² The mission is documented at https://commission.europa.eu/about/departments-and-executive-agencies/european-climate-infrastructure-and-environment-executive-agency_en

¹⁰³ Data based on the information from CINEA Online Public Dashboard.

Table 16: Overview of CINEA programme portfolio

Programme	Focus Area	2024 delegated operational appropriations
Horizon Europe (Cluster 5)	Research and Innovation in climate, energy, mobility	1,443,675,528
Innovation Fund (IF)	Low-carbon technologies, renewables, hydrogen, energy storage, CCS, mobility, buildings	3,100,000,000
CEF (Connecting Europe Facility)	Transport and energy infrastructure	4,451,469,479
LIFE Programme	Environment, nature, climate action	601,000,000
EMFAF (European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund)	Sustainable maritime and fisheries sectors	44,678,750
JTM-PSLF (Public Sector Load Facility under the Just Transition Mechanism)	Support for regions transitioning away from fossil fuels	250,000,000
RENEWFM (Renewable Energy Financing Mechanism)	Cross-border renewable energy projects	40,000,000

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on CINEA, Annual Activity Reports 2021-2025, and CINEA, Annual Work Programmes, 2021-2025.

Delegated operational appropriations: commitment appropriations

The programmes target different stakeholders and types of projects. For instance, while Horizon Europe Cluster 5 provides primarily support for research, programmes like LIFE and CEF are primarily focussed on the application of environment, climate solutions and infrastructure development. The focus of the Innovation Fund is unique in the sense that it focuses on accelerating the deployment of innovative low-carbon technologies to support the EU's transition to climate neutrality with a KPI related to avoidance of Greenhouse Gas emissions. It bridges research and development and deployment of new technology.

The delegation of the RENEWFM and JTM-PSLF programmes, provided for in the Establishment and Delegation decisions, was formally accepted by the Agency in July and August 2021, respectively. The portfolio of the Agency also includes Pilot Project and Preparatory Actions (PPPAs). For 2024, this includes two larger projects under the EMFAF: Fostering energy transition (EUR 2.2 million commitment appropriation) and Saving our Seas (EUR 5.59 million commitment appropriation).

The Agency carried out public procurement actions delegated to it by parent DGs during the evaluation period, again mostly under the EMFAF programme on behalf of DG MARE. Some public procurement was also carried out under Horizon Europe and LIFE on behalf of the respective parent DGs.

The portfolio of the Agency was also affected by the constant growth of the Innovation Fund. Established in May 2020, most major calls of the programme were launched during the evaluation period. The Fund has an overall size of EUR 40 billion until 2030¹⁰⁴. The first large

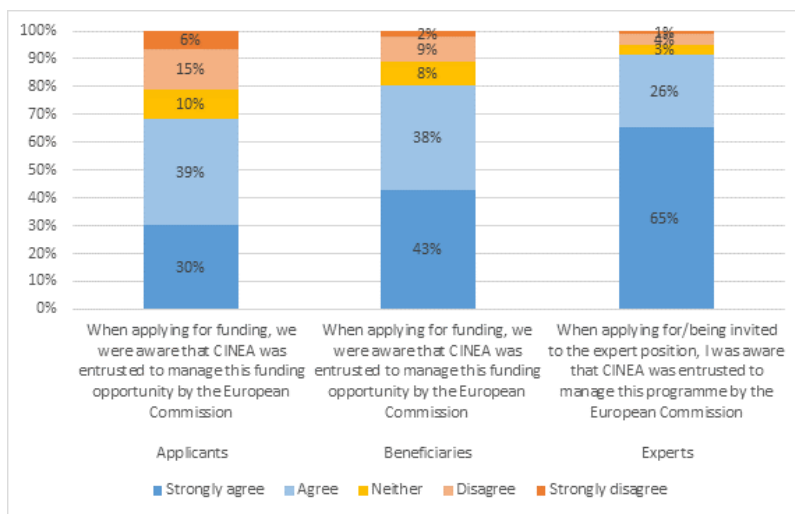
¹⁰⁴ subject to the assumed ETS allowance price of 75 EUR/tonCO₂eq.

scale call of the Innovation Fund was issued on 3 July 2020 with a budget of 1 billion euros. In the evaluation period, the number of calls and projects in this programme has increased considerably.¹⁰⁵ The third large-scale call, launched on 3 November 2022, granted 3.4 billion euros. The 2023 net-zero technologies (NZE) call (with the proposals evaluated in 2024) granted EUR 4.8 billion funding to projects of all scales.

The evidence from the stakeholder consultation suggests that the Agency’s portfolio is largely seen as consistent, without overlaps or gaps between the Agency’s programmes or with programmes from other Executive Agencies. This view is shared by both staff in the Agency and staff in the parent DGs. The programmes of CINEA are seen as complementary, having different policy goals, targeting different beneficiary groups, or providing different grant and project formats. Furthermore, the label of CINEA as the ‘Green Deal’ agency to describe its portfolio is largely positively perceived by the stakeholders interviewed. Several stakeholders highlight the value of this ‘brand’ of CINEA and the positive effect that this label had for the visibility of the Agency’s portfolio and the EU actions on these issues.

When it comes to external stakeholders, the evidence collected for the evaluation shows that there is general awareness of CINEA’s profile and programme portfolio. In addition, as the survey results below show, there is a general awareness of CINEA’s role in the implementation of the delegated programmes.

Figure 23: Awareness of programme delegation



Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants and survey among experts
 Base: unsuccessful applicants (n=794), beneficiaries (n=1178), experts (n=867)

Yet, the detailed survey results showed that familiarity with individual programmes varies significantly by programme among beneficiaries and applicants.¹⁰⁶ In the interviews with staff members in the Agency and in the European Commission, some concerns were raised that the portfolio of CINEA may appear less clear to external stakeholders, in particular to potential applicants.¹⁰⁷ This view was shared in some of the interviews with unsuccessful applicants and beneficiaries.¹⁰⁸ During the evaluation period, the Agency set up a one-stop-shop model on its website to increase clarity in its programme portfolio for external stakeholders.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ CINEA, Annual Activity Report 2024, p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ As shown in Section 0. Communication

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with staff in parent DGs, CINEA.

¹⁰⁸ Interviews with beneficiary, Interviews with applicants.

¹⁰⁹ CINEA One Stop Shop, available at https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/index_en

4.3.2. Division of Tasks between the Agency and the Parent DGs

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: The evaluation found that CINEA's relationship with its seven parent DGs is generally well-defined, with clear task division and coordination perceived positively by staff in both Agency and parent DGs. Some exceptions were highlighted as areas needing clarification, such as the involvement of DGs in proposal evaluations and unclear roles in delegated procurement actions.

CINEA operates under the oversight of seven parent DGs, with DG MOVE serving as the lead. The other DGs include DG CLIMA, DG ENER, DG ENV, DG MARE, DG REGIO, and DG RTD. The Agency's relationship with these DGs is defined through a set of governing documents. The relationship is primarily governed by the Delegating Act,¹¹⁰ the Memoranda of Understanding,¹¹¹ and the provisions outlined in the Annual Work Programmes.¹¹²

Overall, the delimitation of responsibilities and tasks between the Agency and the parent DGs, although it can be different from programme to programme, was perceived as clear and well defined. The evidence from the desk research and the interviews indicates that generally, responsibilities were clearly assigned and the division of roles between the Agency and the parent DGs was well established.

Another area where roles remain currently insufficiently defined is the delegation of procurement actions to the Agency. The evidence collected in the evaluation indicates that there is a lack of clarity in the role and processes of the Agency, which has taken on the implementation of procurement actions from some parent DGs. Interviews with staff in the Agency indicate that there is to some extent a lack of procedures and guidance in this part of the work. Some stakeholders mentioned that they see a need to clarify the roles when it comes to work that is not part of the established core business of the Agency (e.g. politically sensitive studies), in particular regarding procurements actions for which close cooperation with the parent DGs is required with risk of interference and duplication of work.

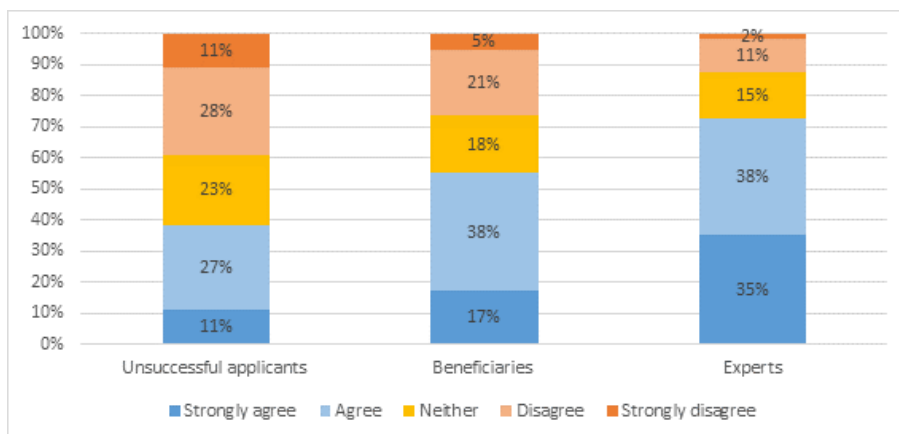
For external stakeholders, the delineation of roles and responsibilities between CINEA and the parent DGs in the European Commission was less clear. In the survey, 38% of unsuccessful applicants agreed or strongly agreed that the delineation of responsibilities and tasks between CINEA and the European Commission was clear to them, with 39% disagreeing and 23% providing a neutral answer. Agreement is higher among beneficiaries (55%) and external experts (73%).

¹¹⁰ COMMISSION DECISION of 12.2.2021 delegating powers to the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency with a view to the performance of tasks linked to the implementation of Union programmes in the field of transport and energy infrastructure; climate, energy and mobility research and innovation; environment, nature and biodiversity; transition to low-carbon technologies; and maritime and fisheries; comprising, in particular, implementation of appropriations entered in the general budget of the Union and those stemming from external assigned revenue

¹¹¹ The Memoranda of Understanding are listed in Annex of this report.

¹¹² CINEA, Annual Work Programmes, 2021-2024.

Figure 24: Perception of role division between Agency and Commission



Source: survey among beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants and survey among experts

Base: unsuccessful applicants (n=794), beneficiaries (n=1178), experts (n=867)

Question text: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your familiarity with CINEA and awareness of various aspects of CINEA’s operations? The delineation of responsibilities and tasks between CINEA and the European Commission is clear to me.

4.3.3. Feedback to Policy

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: The policy feedback channels between CINEA and its parent DGs are generally effective, supported by clear governance documents and well-established coordination mechanisms. CINEA has established a range of mechanisms to provide policy feedback to its parent DGs, including a cross-programme strategy, thematic portfolio analyses, and programme-specific tools and reporting channels. These efforts are complemented by informal exchanges, ad hoc responses, and participation in policy task forces. The evaluation uncovered some concerns that monitoring of policy feedback activities is not systematically structured, indicating potential to enhance tracking and strategic use of project insights for policy development.

CINEA has several mechanisms in place to provide feedback to policy to the policy making DGs. At the end of 2021, the Agency adopted a “Strategy on synergies and cross-programme feedback to policy”¹¹³, which provides the basis for its horizontal activities to collect policy feedback across programmes. CINEA has put reporting and meeting channels in place to provide cross-programme feedback to policy to the parent DGs.

The Agency produces portfolio analyses and overviews by thematic areas (e.g., solar energy, heat pumps, biomethane, carbon capture and storage, smart grids, energy efficiency,

¹¹³ CINEA, 2021 Strategy on synergies and cross-programme feedback to policy.

sustainable mobility, blue economy, buildings, and biodiversity) which are used to inform the development or revision of EU strategies, legislation, and action plans.¹¹⁴ Other cross-programme initiatives include policy workshops and knowledge sharing events, support for policy implementation and monitoring, as well as feedback on horizontal actions.

In addition to CINEA's activities on cross-programme feedback to policy, the operational Units of the Agency provided feedback to policy to the parent DGs at programme and project level. The channels and mechanisms for this feedback were programme specific. Underlying was often an agreement between the operational Unit in CINEA and parent DGs. While in these cases sometimes also formal agreements were in place, informal exchange and working relations are seen as equally important channels. The evidence from the qualitative interviews shows that many in the Agency see the individual requests they receive from the parent DGs as the most important mechanism for providing policy feedback.

The mechanisms and channels for providing feedback to policy at programme level vary considerably. For instance, in Horizon Europe, Cluster 5, feedback to policy was coordinated by a Joint Team of the Cluster 5 co-chairs (DG CLIMA, DG ENER, DG MOVE and DG RTD) under the lead of DG RTD. The DGs, together with CINEA, draft every year the feedback-to-policy plan, which is an essential tool to provide feedback to policy in a structured and collaborative manner. In the CEF programme, CINEA has developed different tools to collect structured data on project implementation, including geographical information with the MAP-IT tool. This data collection played a significant role in providing feedback to policy for this programme. The Agency was involved in a broad range of activities, including sector-based discussion and providing Intelligence and analytics for specific topics, for example on Hydrogen-related projects.

The Innovation Fund is an instance where the Agency was deeply involved in providing feedback to policy and exchanged closely with DG CLIMA as the lead DG on this programme. The Agency analysed proposals of the Innovation Fund to understand market trends and help design new instruments. Furthermore, the feedback to policy of the Innovation Fund is supported by a new IT tool being developed which will integrate with eGrants and allow to collect and provide information from the project implementation. Similarly, the feedback to policy mechanism within the LIFE programme involves close collaboration with the three parent DGs for the design or refinement of the instruments (e.g. strategic projects) or in informing policies through systematic data-driven insights, based upon ad-hoc feedback from project groups. This feedback process follows a structured approach, with the Agency leveraging project databases—including data collected through the Butler and LIFE Project Indicator (LPI) systems—to regularly provide the parent DGs with evidence on project impacts and feedback for policy relevance.

The feedback to policy mechanisms in the EMFAF were described as very policy oriented. This includes a variety of actions agreed upon with DG MARE, such as scientific advice for the common fisheries policy and support for policy implementation and formulation. Agency staff have also actively participated in thematic task forces of the parent DGs, while also providing ad hoc feedback at the project or subprogramme level, as well as in response to targeted requests

The evaluation team found that across this variety and differences in approaches of the feedback to policy mechanism, the satisfaction across the parent DGs with the input provided by CINEA during the evaluation period is high, based on the review of documentary evidence and the analysis of stakeholder consultation. Most interviewees consulted both in the Agency and in the European Commission expressed their satisfaction with the way that feedback to

¹¹⁴ CINEA, Annual Activity Reports 2021-2024,

policy was provided and consider the channels as being very effective.¹¹⁵ Staff members of the Agency and European Commission officials stressed during the qualitative interviews the relevance and importance of the provided feedback for the parent DGs. According to them, the information provided is regularly taken up in the policy process and helps in shaping future EU policy.¹¹⁶

Some concerns evolved around the resources dedicated to the feedback to policy function. Based on the ex-ante CBA of 2021, CINEA should allocate 3% of the total FTE to fulfil this function. In some cases, Agency staff voiced the view that the resources in the Agency for providing effective policy feedback were underestimated and not matching the increasing policy needs. Based on the data available in the evaluation, no quantitative assessment of the actual use of resources on feedback to policy in the programmes can be made.

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

Key findings: CINEA provided effective policy feedback to the policy-making Directorates-General by delivering annual, cross-programme input clustered around key European Green Deal themes. This feedback was considered relevant and useful by DG staff, influencing future policy development and programme design.

At Agency level, CINEA has provided cross-programme policy feedback to the policy making DGs with yearly activities.¹¹⁷ These activities are clustered around thematic areas and include several horizontal actions. For instance, in 2023, CINEA's agency-level policy feedback was clustered around the six thematic areas of the European Green Deal, on topics such as "Cleaning our energy system" and "Making transport sustainable for all".¹¹⁸

The evidence emerging from the stakeholder interviews shows that overall, CINEA's policy feedback is perceived as effective and relevant by staff members in the parent DGs.¹¹⁹ Several stakeholders emphasised that the feedback was actively used in shaping future policy of their DGs. Also, stakeholders within the Agency highlighted some positive effects of the feedback to policy function on their work in CINEA. The exchange on policy feedback allowed them to remain informed on the development of future policies in the DGs and future programme delegation. Moreover, it offers an opportunity to influence the practical design of the delegated programmes, thereby contributing to their effective and efficient implementation.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ However, staff both in the Agency and in the parent DGs for the LIFE programme expressed that they see a widening gap between both entities which in their view has a negative effect on feedback to policy for their programme (Interview CINEA, Interview DG ENV).

¹¹⁶ Interviews CINEA staff, Interview EC staff.

¹¹⁷ CINEA, Report on the implementation of the Agency's 2022 cross-programme feedback to policy and synergies action plan; CINEA 2023 Cross-programme Feedback to Policy and Synergies Action Plan - End of year report; CINEA, 2024 Cross-programme Feedback to Policy and Synergies Action Plan Mid-Year Review & Report

¹¹⁸ CINEA, 2023 Cross-programme Feedback to Policy and Synergies Action Plan - End of year report.

¹¹⁹ Interviews with staff in parent DGs.

¹²⁰ Interviews with staff in CINEA.

4.4. Retrospective Cost-benefit analysis

4.4.1. Introduction and methodology

Objective and scope

The objective of the retrospective cost-benefit analysis (CBA) was to determine 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 2021-2024.¹²¹

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).¹²²

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).

Thus, the CBA covers the following programmes:

- EU4Health
- Connecting Europe Facility
- Energy
- Transport (including CEF transport Cohesion Funds and military mobility)
- Horizon Europe: Pillar 2, Cluster 5: Climate, Energy and Mobility + Missions Ocean, Climate, Cities, NEB, and horizontal + WIDERA (Hop On), NGEU
- LIFE

¹²¹ 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.

¹²² This approach was agreed with the Commission to ensure comparability with the initial CBA.

- Climate Action
- Clean energy transition
- Environment - circular economy, nature & Biodiversity
 - EMFAF & MARE activities
 - Innovation Fund
 - JTM / 3rd pillar
 - REFM

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 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 cost assumptions with the actual average cost assumptions.

The three scenarios of the ex-ante CBA were the following¹²³:

- **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 political developments resulting from the Covid 19 pandemic.

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:

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

The costs related to Title III, i.e. those 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 was 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.

¹²³ See Cost-benefit analysis for the delegation of the management of the 2021-2027 EU programmes to executive agencies (European Commission, 2021, p.3).

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

Table 17: Data sources used in the retrospective CBA

Data point	Estimated	Actuals
FTEs and commitment appropriations	SFS / ex-ante CBA ¹²⁴	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. FTEs: Annual Work Programmes (AWPs) 2. Commitment appropriations: Annual Activity Reports (AARs), Inputs concerning actual commitment appropriations received from EAs directly for programmes / pillars not reported <i>en detail</i> in the AARs.
	C1 credits	EU Budget
	Non-C1 credits	Next Generation EU Budget (NGEU) for Horizon Europe pillar 2, cluster 5; Emission Trading Scheme for IF, MS voluntary contributions for RENEWFM and financial instruments refunds 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 18: Main assumptions of the retrospective CBA

Context	Assumption
Staffing mix (same assumption as in ex ante CBA)	<p>DGs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary Agents (TA)/ Establishment plan posts: 70% • Contract agents (CA)/ External personnel: 30% <p>EAs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA: 25% • CA: 75%
Number of staff (same assumption as in ex ante CBA)	<p>Optimised scenario</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual total FTE DG: 2.4% of actual total FTE EA <p>In-house scenario</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual total FTE DG: +10 % of actual total FTE EA in optimal scenario <p>Status quo scenario</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual total FTE DG: 2.4% of actual total FTE EA

¹²⁴ Including the Excel file on the CBA model received from DG BUDG and the Staff working document of the CBA.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<p>Average staff costs (other assumption as in ex ante CBA)</p>	<p>Optimised scenario</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual average cost per FTE at EA = Average Title I per FTE + Average Title II per FTE¹²⁵ (): - Average cost per FTE (Title I) = Title I / FTE TA and FTE CA - 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 CA¹²⁶ <p>In-house scenario</p> <p>Actual average costs per FTE at DG per TA and CA Status quo scenario</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual average cost per FTE at EA - For BBA (Brussel Based Agencies): same as for optimised scenario - 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 Annex (section 1.2.1), including (1) the average cost calculation for the actual average FTE costs in the optimised scenario; (2) the cost assumptions for average cost per FTE¹²⁷ 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.

¹²⁵ 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.

¹²⁶ The data was provided by the Commission.

¹²⁷ 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 TA (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).

In relation to each of these aspects, we present estimated data (from the previous CBA / SFS) and actuals based on the EAs' AARs for each of the three scenarios (optimised, status quo, in-house) and for each of the years 2021-2024.

The data is presented in a graphic format in order to visualise the overall results of the CBA as the bottom line for the EA as a whole. More granular data at the level of the programmes and pillars is provided in the Annex (see section 1.2).

The sections afterwards elaborate on the EA's workload assessment methodology.

4.4.2. Key findings from the retrospective Cost-Benefit-Analysis

The following analysis presents the main findings of the retrospective CBA, which was carried out to examine the efficiency in comparison to initial expectations and alternative scenarios. Methodologically, it compares the assumptions of the ex-ante CBA with developments during the period 2021-2024.¹²⁸ Please note that when we compare the scenarios, the actual in-house scenario is a hypothetical model and does not reflect actual figures.

Main findings of the cost-benefits analysis

The findings of the retrospective cost-benefit analysis justify the Commission's decision to outsource the work to CINEA as the expected savings of the optimised scenario (EA scenario) have been exceeded compared to the inhouse scenario. More specifically, the actual savings (EUR 137 million) of the optimised scenario compared to the in-house scenario were 33% higher than the estimated savings (EUR 103 million).

This conclusion is supported by the performance of the optimised scenario in terms of resource efficiency and cost-effectiveness. For instance, by the end of 2024, the optimised scenario required 7.4% fewer full-time equivalents (FTEs) than the in-house scenario, translating to a reduction of 46.1 FTEs. While all scenarios experienced an increase in staffing needs over the 2021–2024 period, the optimised scenario demonstrated the most moderate growth compared to the in-house and status quo scenario.

In terms of staff costs, the optimised scenario consistently proved to be the most cost-efficient option. Over the 2021–2024 period, its total actual costs amounted to EUR 214.69 million, representing a saving of EUR 137 million compared to the in-house approach. Notably, the actual savings exceeded initial projections in each year from 2021-2024.

The productivity indicator, calculated as commitment appropriations over FTEs, under the optimised scenario was slightly higher than estimated. The higher productivity was driven by a higher percentage increase in commitment appropriations than in FTEs. Overall, the optimised scenario demonstrated clear advantages in terms of efficiency and cost savings.

Full-time equivalents

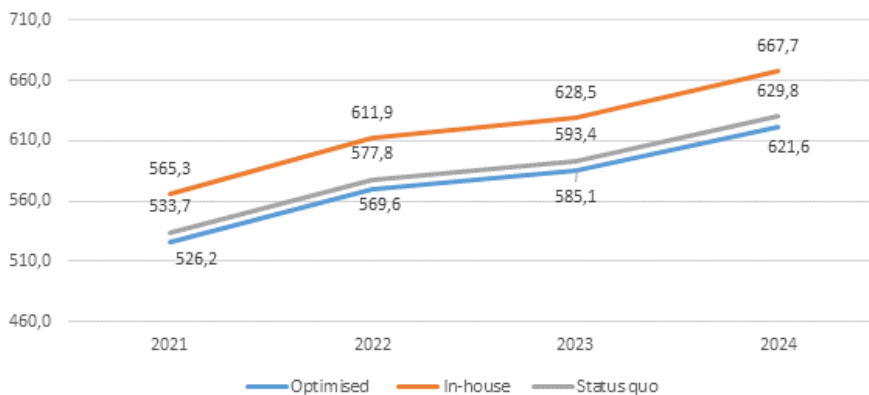
Regarding the total number of FTEs, the analysis indicates that the optimised scenario performed significantly better than both the status quo and the in-house approach. By the end

¹²⁸ 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. As agreed upon with the European Commission, the FTE actual numbers were taken from the AWP and the estimated from the SFS/ex-ante CBA.

of the period in 2024, the optimised scenario required 7.4% fewer FTEs than the in-house scenario, translating to 46.1 fewer FTEs, the widest gap observed between the optimised and in-house approach during the analysed timeframe.

While all scenarios experienced a gradual increase of FTEs over the 2021–2024 period, the optimised scenario showed the most moderate growth, with an increase of 95.4 FTEs from the start to the end of the period. In contrast, the in-house scenario registered the highest increase at 102.4 FTEs, whereas the status quo lay in between, performing only slightly less efficiently than the optimised approach.

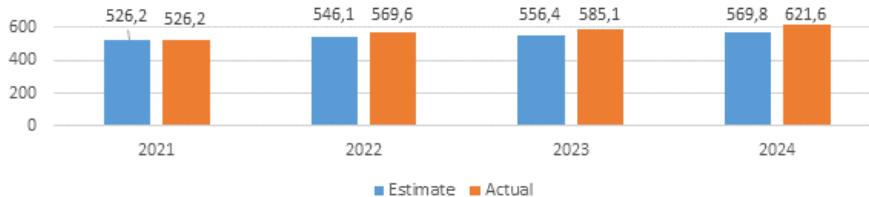
Figure 25: Actual total FTEs under the three scenarios



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

The estimated number of FTEs closely mirrored actual staffing levels in 2021. However, in 2022-2024 the actual FTEs exceed the estimates mainly due to an increase in staff under the Innovation Fund. Despite that a lower amount of FTEs is employed in 2024 for the JTM and REFМ than estimated.

Figure 26: Estimated vs. actual FTEs in optimised scenario



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

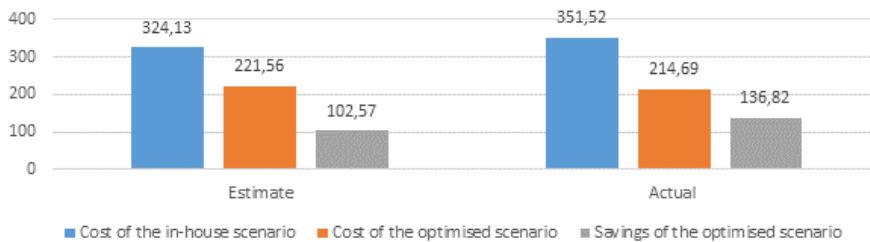
For the Innovation Fund, the higher increase in staffing is due to significantly higher delegated budget due to faster frontloading of ETS revenues, and overall increase in the complexity of the programme design and implementation (e.g. development and launch of new Auction calls). In addition, the delegation of three EU Missions to the Agency, which was not foreseen in the estimation have contributed to an increase in the actual staff figures compared to the ex-ante estimation of the optimised scenario. Further data and analysis are provided in the Annex in section 1.2.2 to 1.2.4

Staff costs

The average staff costs, derived from Title I and Title II (“habillage”), were calculated in alignment with the ex-ante Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA), encompassing not only staff

expenditure but also costs related to building and IT infrastructure (see also Annex section 1.2.1). The analysis shows that for the period 2021–2024, the total actual costs of the optimised scenario amounted to EUR 214.69 million. This figure is approximately 3% lower than the estimate provided in the SFS. The cost savings of the optimised compared to the in-house scenario amount to EUR 136.82 million. Most notably, the actual savings (EUR 136.82 million) of the optimised scenario compared to the in-house scenario were 33% higher than the estimated savings (EUR 102.57 million).

Figure 27: Estimated and actual costs and savings of the executive Agency scenario in 2021-2024, million EUR

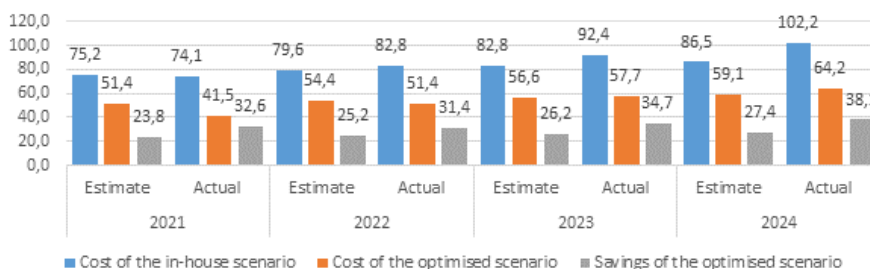


Source: Authors' elaboration based on SFS, ex-ante CBA and AAR.

The analysis of annual actual vs. estimated costs and savings from 2021 to 2024 reveals a clear distinction between the in-house and optimised scenarios, underscoring the efficiency of the latter.

The increase of actual costs of both the in-house and the optimised scenario over the evaluation period is rooted in the increase in actual average staff costs in later years, 2023 and 2024, partly due to inflation. The analysis of the cost drivers indicated that the increase in average costs is driven more by Title I than Title II (i.e. rather staff expenditure than expenditure for building and infrastructure), which reflects that average administrative cost per staff member has increased, due to salary progression and the high inflation figures during the period.

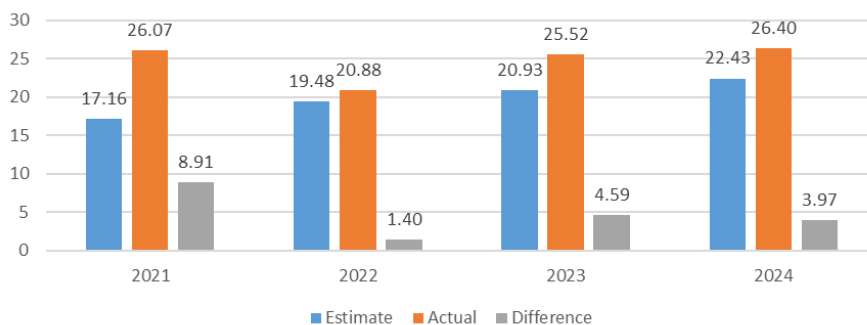
Figure 28: Estimated vs. actual costs and savings of the executive Agency scenario per year for 2021-2024, million EUR



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

Examining the annual savings of the optimised vs. the in-house scenario (i.e. looking only at the grey bars from the figure above but now comparing estimated and actual savings, as shown in the figure below), indicates that the optimised scenario, in comparison to the in-house scenario, delivered higher-than-estimated savings. Due to the fact that the actual costs were higher than estimated, the actual difference between the optimised and the in-house scenario is larger than estimated.

Figure 29: Estimated vs. actual savings of the optimised vs. the in-house scenario for 2021-2024, million EUR



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

Further data and analysis are provided in the Annex in section 1.2.2 to 1.2.4.

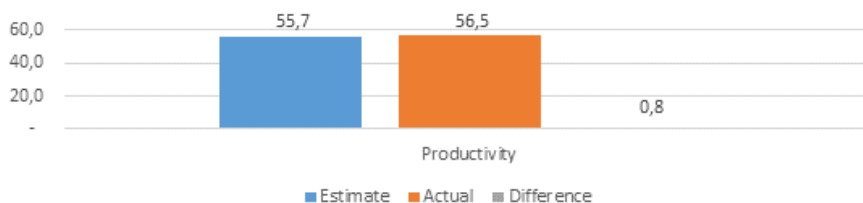
Productivity

The productivity of the EA is calculated by dividing the commitment appropriations (in million Euro) by the number of FTE managing them. This means that the higher the budget managed per FTE, the more productive the EA overall is.

$$\text{Productivity} = \text{Commitment appropriations (in million EUR)} / \text{FTEs}$$

The analysis shows that the productivity indicator was slightly higher (by 0.8) than estimated over the evaluation period from 2021-2024.

Figure 30: Estimated vs. actual productivity of the optimised scenario for 2021-2024



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

As shown in the Annex, the percentage difference between actual and estimated commitment appropriations was higher than the percentage difference of the FTEs, leading to the productivity increase (i.e. fewer staff managed a higher amount of commitments).

The Annex, section 1.2.2 presents the analysis of the productivity indicator in the estimated optimised scenario and the actual optimised scenario.

Further data and analysis are provided in the Annex in section 1.2.2 to 1.2.4.

4.4.3. Analysis of workload assessment methodology

The Agency has developed an elaborate workload assessment methodology, which supports the efficiency of its operation. During the evaluation period, CINEA employed a data-driven, bottom-up approach to determine staffing needs, using structured indicators derived from both current and historical data available through its IT tools. It incorporates a set of specific workload

indicators tailored to the characteristics of funding programmes (grants) and procurement processes.

The overall assessment process relies on a structured indicator system, divided into two main categories: Grants and procurements.

Grants: Four core indicators are analysed: 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. Additional relevant indicators are acknowledged but do not significantly influence the overall workload trend. The methodology adapts to the availability of data, using historical averages and projections for open calls and future work programmes. The foundation of accurate forecasting lies in integrating current and historical data from the European Commission’s core IT systems into CINEA’s internal data warehouse, which includes systems like CPS/CCM2, COMPASS, and SEP, among others. These data sources are crucial for workload forecasting, allowing for realistic projections even when complete data is unavailable. The timing of workload is aligned with the phases of activities, considering realistic timeframes for evaluations and ongoing projects.

Procurement: For procurement activities, the workload assessment methodology applies a structured indicator system that captures the entire lifecycle of procurement procedures, including tenders, contract preparation, and ongoing management of individual and framework contracts. It considers the number of tenders launched, offers evaluated, contracts prepared, and contracts under management, as well as framework agreements. Additional structured tasks, such as expressions of interest or policy-related support to the parent Directorate-General, are included when they meet predefined thresholds for significance. Each indicator is translated into person-days using productivity rates that reflect the complexity and type of procurement activity, ensuring that procurement workload is realistically quantified and integrated into overall staffing forecasts.

Workload is quantified through a structured indicator system. The indicators are converted into working time measured in person-days, applying specific productivity rates based on task complexity. The total workload is then translated into staffing needs by dividing the person-days by the annual working time of one FTE, with an additional percentage added for support functions, ensuring a comprehensive estimation of staffing requirements.

This methodology ensured that resource allocation was aligned with actual operational demands as closely as possible taking into account the constraints of the framework. CINEA’s workload assessment has contributed to the efficient operation of the Agency.¹²⁹

The following table briefly highlights the merits and disadvantages of the workload assessment methodology applied.

Table 19: Merits and disadvantages of the workload assessment methodology applied

Merits	Disadvantages
Robust, data driven estimation of staffing needs with indicators for grants and procurement procedures	Complexity in categorising diverse project types and capturing the peculiarities of each project type
Use of current and historical data from IT systems and an internal data warehouse	Reliance on Excel to some extent

Source: Authors elaboration

Agency representatives indicated that for some programmes, there is a particularly high internal workload during the initial years of the funding period due to the more labour-intensive

¹²⁹ CINEA, Steering Committee meetings notes 2021-2024, Interviews with staff members in CINEA.

evaluation phase. The Agency faces significant demands in terms of application evaluation processing of **the new projects**, monitoring, and reporting of the ongoing projects.

Across programmes, the complexity of projects varies widely, with some requiring extensive oversight due to their scale, nature and intricacy, while others may be more straightforward. CINEA staff managing CEF, JTM-PSLF and IF indicated the main **financial reporting scheme** used for CEF transport is based on actual costs incurred or unit costs (to a lesser extent), while lump sums are used under PSLF and under Horizon Europe (even though to lesser extent).

Reporting schemes and payment structures in CINEA's programmes.

For grants, CINEA manages a majority of actions based on actual costs declarations, though the portfolio of grants with simplified costs options is progressively growing.

For CEF, with the exception of few funding priorities that use unit costs, the actual costs-based structure requires beneficiaries to submit detailed financial statements and supporting documents (e.g. invoices, contracts, procurement procedures and documents) for sampled cost items, which CINEA rigorously evaluates to ensure legality and regularity before disbursing funds. This method is labour-intensive but provides better assurance and more accurate financial oversight, particularly for complex projects.

For other programmes based on actual costs declarations, the level of financial reporting and the extent of the checks depends on the risks identified per programme, to ensure legality and regularity of the expenditure as well as sound financial management. Invoices and / or supporting documents are not systematically required; this depends on the programme's ex-ante control strategy. For instance, Horizon Europe uses a trust-based approach for the ex-ante controls, which are complemented by ex-post audits, as per the HE Control Strategy. On the other side, for LIFE, sampling of documents are performed based on set thresholds. For EMFAF, beneficiaries have to provide a detailed cost reporting, which require a lot of consistency checks, both from the beneficiaries and from CINEA. However, as a general rule, no supporting documents are required, except if specific issues or risks are identified.

5. Conclusions and lessons learned

This section provides the main conclusions and recommendations of the present evaluation of CINEA's operation in the period from April 2021 to March 2024.

Conclusions

Effectiveness

CINEA's objectives and activities have been well aligned with the policy objectives of the parent DGs during the evaluation period. CINEA has generally succeeded in implementing its delegated programmes, consistently meeting performance targets and KPIs. Satisfaction with the Agency regarding the programme implementation is high within the Commission and external stakeholders. Some challenges remain regarding the satisfaction of unsuccessful applicants and the implementation of newer programmes, in particular the JTM-PSLF and RENEWFM.

The Agency's activities were found to be coherent with its mandate and assigned tasks. The Agency has operated effectively within its legal framework, with no documented instances where CINEA operated outside of the legal framework. Minor concerns about the flexibility of the current legal framework were raised in regard to the mechanisms for the allocation of staff in the agency and the increasing delegation of instruments and actions like procurement and Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PPPAs).

The evaluation found that CINEA's internal control framework was well aligned with the broader Internal Control Framework adopted by the Commission. The framework has been robust and effective, maintaining error rates well below the 2% threshold. ICMC assessments confirm strong performance and continuous improvement, supported by a solid control culture and effective segregation of duties. IAS and European Court of Auditors reviews validated the overall soundness of CINEA's systems. Audits during the evaluation period pinpointed specific weaknesses, which the Agency addressed effectively. Survey feedback indicates beneficiary satisfaction with the Agency's control and audit procedures.

During the evaluation period, CINEA demonstrated a comprehensive and effective communication strategy aligned with the European Commission's priorities. The Agency developed multi-annual and social media strategies, implemented a wide range of internal and external communication activities, and significantly expanded its outreach. While stakeholders generally viewed CINEA's communication as professional and helpful, some challenges remained in promoting lesser-known programmes and ensuring broader awareness among unsuccessful applicants.

The evaluation found that CINEA's reporting practices are well-structured, comprehensive, and effective, fulfilling legal obligations. The Agency also provides structured data and insights to support monitoring, evaluation, and policymaking. Stakeholder interviews revealed high satisfaction with the reporting processes, highlighting timely information flow, constructive collaboration, and a strong working relationship between CINEA and its parent DGs, which has positively contributed to the Agency's overall effectiveness.

Efficiency

CINEA demonstrated strong financial and operational efficiency, maintaining a consistently low ratio of administrative to operational budget while successfully fully executing its budget commitments and payments. The Agency managed a growing number of projects per staff member, indicating increased productivity, and in coordination with the Parent DGs implemented simplified funding mechanisms, such as lump sum and unit cost grants, to streamline programme management.

The Agency's organisational structure, combining central service units with programme-specific departments, is seen as fit for purpose and well-suited to its portfolio, supported by clear internal processes. The Agency has maintained high staff engagement and low turnover, while actively addressing career development challenges through training, mobility schemes, and competency mapping. Some challenges remained regarding staff satisfaction with career progression and vacancy rates in the Agency.

During the evaluation period, CINEA implemented a wide range of environmental initiatives and obtained EMAS accreditation in February 2024, which confirmed its commitment to sustainable practices. It should be noted that impact data on the effect of these initiatives was limited. The assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of these actions is limited due to a shortage of available data.

During the evaluation period, CINEA made substantial progress in digitalisation, streamlining internal processes through the increased adoption of corporate tools. The implementation of eGrants across most programmes improved efficiency, though legacy systems and programme-specific needs posed integration challenges. The Agency also advanced in the use of tools for data analytics. The findings indicate that further improvements in digitalisation could be achieved by better tailoring these systems to programme-specific needs and integrating current manual or external processes into the corporate platforms.

Coherence

CINEA's programme portfolio is broad but overall perceived as well aligned with EU policy priorities (notably the Green Deal), without significant overlaps or gaps. The evaluation found that CINEA's programme portfolio is generally well-structured and aligned with its delegated responsibilities. However, the evaluation findings showed that the full scope of the portfolio is less coherent for some external stakeholders.

The evaluation found that CINEA's relationship with its seven parent DGs is generally well-defined, with clear task division and coordination perceived positively by staff in both Agency and parent DGs. Some exceptions were highlighted as areas needing clarification, such as the involvement of DGs in proposal evaluations and unclear roles in delegated procurement actions.

The policy feedback channels between CINEA and its parent DGs are generally effective, supported by clear governance documents and well-established coordination mechanisms. CINEA has established a range of mechanisms to provide policy feedback to its parent DGs, including a cross-programme strategy, thematic portfolio analyses, and programme-specific tools and reporting channels. These efforts are complemented by informal exchanges, ad hoc responses, and participation in policy task forces.

Lessons learned

Though overall evaluation results are positive, the evaluation has identified a number of factors which have limited the effectiveness, efficiency or coherence of the agency in the study period. Some of the shortcomings are currently in process of being addressed.

To address shortcomings identified, there may be benefits in working on the following aspects:

- It could be beneficial to explore options to further improve the satisfaction of unsuccessful applicants with the services provided by the Agency, increase transparency and feedback for unsuccessful applicants, including clearer communication on evaluation outcomes and more targeted support, while maintaining equal treatment.
- Another area for improvement could be the communication activities regarding smaller and newer programmes. It could be advised to develop specific actions as part of the targeted programme communication strategies and outreach activities to raise

awareness of smaller and newer programmes, for example by leveraging digital channels and stakeholder networks.

- Furthermore, it can be advised to further simplify and streamline processes in the programme management for applicants and beneficiaries, specifically by increasing the use of lump sum grants and other simplified cost options across programmes where these options bring benefits.
- When it comes to digitalisation, it can be beneficial to further increase the integration of corporate digital tools across programmes, for example to include processes and actions that are currently handled outside of the existing corporate IT tools and include them in these IT solutions. Further, it can be beneficial to consider actions to increase the coordination between Agency and the Commission in the use of digital tools for programme implementation and business intelligence, for example when it comes to the use of administrative data to monitor performance indicators.
- In relation to the programme portfolio, efforts to further clarify and formalise the division of tasks and delimitation of responsibility in relation to the evolving mandate, in particular regarding procurement, prizes and pilot projects, can bring potential benefits for the Agency's operation.
- Regarding feedback to policy, it can be advised to reflect systematically on the feedback to policy mechanisms at programme level, to ensure that they are fit for purpose, resource-efficient, and reflect the needs of each programme and the parent DGs involved. Also, the resources dedicated to F2P activities should be estimated, and it should be assessed if the Agency dedicates 3% of their FTEs to this activity.

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According to Article 25 of Council Regulation (EC) No 58/2003 laying down the statute for executive agencies, an external evaluation on the operation of each agency must be carried out every three years. This Report presents the findings of the external evaluation of the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) during 2021-2024, which assessed the operation of the Agency and its performance results (in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and coherence). A comprehensive methodology was deployed during the evaluation, consisting of extensive desk research, various stakeholder consultation activities, and a cost-benefit analysis.

During the evaluation period, CINEA effectively delivered on its mandate, meeting key performance indicators and achieving high stakeholder satisfaction. CINEA's portfolio was well-aligned with EU policy priorities, especially the European Green Deal, and mechanisms for policy feedback were robust. The division of tasks with parent Directorates-General was clear and supported strong programme management. Delegation to CINEA resulted in significant cost savings and operational efficiencies compared to in-house management. The evaluation identified CINEA as an effective, efficient, and coherent agency, while also highlighting areas for further improvement..

Studies and reports

