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

**on the *ex post* evaluation of the 2014-2020 justice programme and *interim* evaluation of
the 2021-2027 justice programme**

{SWD(2025) 134 final}

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the evaluation¹ of the justice programme carried out by the European Commission. The evaluation is made up of two components. The first component is the *ex post* evaluation of the [2014-2020 justice programme](#)², assessing its longer-term impact and sustainability effects, based on the results of the first part of the *ex post* evaluation³ completed in 2022. The second component is the *interim* evaluation of the [2021-2027 justice programme](#)⁴, assessing its preliminary achievements. In line with the ‘better regulation’ guidelines⁵, the evaluation assesses the two programmes against the criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, EU added value, and relevance.

Since 2014, the justice programme has contributed to the development of a European area of justice based on the rule of law. From 2014 to 2020, the justice programme contributed to the further development of a European Union area of justice based on mutual recognition and mutual trust by: (i) promoting judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters; and (ii) helping to train judges and other legal practitioners. Since 2021, the justice programme has continued to contribute to the further development of a European area of justice based on the rule of law, including the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, on mutual recognition and mutual trust, and on judicial cooperation. It aims to strengthen democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of fundamental rights.

The evaluation is based on evidence gathered through a supporting study carried out by external experts⁶. The evaluation: (i) takes stock of an earlier impact assessment⁷ to analyse a proposal for a European programme on culture, rights and values; and (ii) acknowledges both the *interim* evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme⁸ and the first part of the *ex post* evaluation⁹ of the 2014-2020 programme. The *interim* evaluation of the 2021-2027 justice programme draws on the findings of both the first part and the second part of the *ex post* evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme¹⁰.

The *ex post* evaluation covers the implementation of the 2014-2020 justice programme from 1 January 2014 until 31 December 2020, and all of the programme’s activities that took place in all participating countries during that time. The *interim* evaluation covers the implementation of the 2021-2027 justice programme from 1 January 2021 until 31 December 2023, and all activities taking place in all participating countries during that time.

A wide range of stakeholders was consulted to prepare this evaluation, including representatives of: (i) EU Member States who are members of the relevant programme committees; (ii) programme applicants and beneficiaries; (iii) agencies; (iv) civil society organisations; and (v) the general public¹¹.

¹ See Commission staff working document accompanying the report.

² Regulation (EU) No 1382/2013 of 17 December 2013, OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, pp. 73-83, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1382/oj>.

³ Considering that a significant number of projects were still ongoing in 2021, the first part of the *ex post* evaluation of the 2014-2020 justice programme (COM/2022/121 final) provided an overview of the funding distribution and assessed preliminary achievements. This report presents the second part of the *ex post* evaluation and focuses on the long-term impacts and sustainability of the effects of the 2014-2020 justice programme.

⁴ Regulation (EU) No 2021/693 of 28 April 2021, OJ L 156, 5.5.2021, pp. 21-38, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/693/oj>.

⁵ [Better regulation: guidelines and toolbox](#).

⁶ Some data-quality challenges were identified, particularly with regards to the data availability and analysis for the 2014-2020 justice programme and mitigated to the extent possible to produce robust findings.

⁷ SWD(2018) 290 final.

⁸ COM(2018) 507 final.

⁹ COM/2022/121 final.

¹⁰ While the data collection activities for the *ex post* evaluation of the 2014-2020 justice programme (second part) and the *interim* evaluation of the 2021-2027 justice programme were carried out in parallel, the overall evaluation exercise was designed and planned as to allow for the findings of the *ex post* evaluation to feed the analysis of the *interim* one.

¹¹ Depending on the identified stakeholder group, dedicated methods and tools were used to conduct the consultations: questionnaire-based online public consultation, interviews, and targeted surveys. They complemented data and information collected through other methods, such as the desk research and case studies.

This report summarises the evaluation's key findings, and includes an assessment of the synergies between the two programmes (i.e. the 2014-2020 programme and the 2021-2027 programme). It points out observations and areas for improvement that the Commission could consider for the 2021-2027 programming period as well as for the following funding cycle.

2. Key evaluation findings

The key evaluation findings presented in the following sections are structured along the five evaluation criteria, with sub-sections for each programme¹².

2.1. Effectiveness

Justice programme 2014-2020

The *ex post* evaluation confirmed that the programme's implementation yielded the expected results across all its specific objectives.

The number and percentage of judiciary and judicial staff participating in training activities funded by the programme was set as an indicator of the specific objective related to judicial training. The threshold of 16 000 trainees was already reached in 2017, while the 13% threshold¹³ was reached in 2020, presumably due to the expansion of the justice programme's target group and the evolving legal context. The 2014-2020 justice programme's continued funding in this area was therefore effective, as it helped legal practitioners to engage in continued training.

Overall, the programme contributed to the cumulative number of 800 000 legal practitioners receiving training on EU law by 2020 ahead of schedule¹⁴. Although this achievement cannot be fully attributed to the justice programme, the stakeholder consultation confirmed that training was the most frequently mentioned activity associated with funded projects. Nearly all surveyed beneficiaries (96%) indicated that training led to the acquisition of new skills and knowledge.

The 2014-2020 programme met a significant number of targets, even though not all those targets related to the promotion of judicial cooperation. Although achievements in this area cannot be fully attributed to the justice programme, the qualitative data provided robust evidence to confirm its effectiveness.

The 2014-2020 programme also met its target on the total number of information exchanges carried out via the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS)^{15, 16, 17}. Qualitative evidence from the *ex post* evaluation showed that both mutual trust between members of the judiciary in different EU countries and consistent implementation of EU law are key to the effectiveness of the programme. Stakeholders consulted for the evaluation said that investments in judicial cooperation promoted the effective and comprehensive implementation of EU law. Projects promoting court-based support of judicial practitioners and probation practices have proven to be particularly suited to facilitating learning. The consultation activities showed that the programme was effective in disseminating best practices to address crucial issues such as gender-based violence and mental health in criminal justice systems. However, one target was not met. This was the target to reduce the average time taken to surrender a wanted person to a requesting country under the European arrest warrant to 10 days

¹² This report also refers to the 2014-2020 justice programme as the 'previous programme' and to the 2021-2027 justice programme as the 'current programme'.

¹³ Ratio between the number of supported participants and the total number of legal practitioners.

¹⁴ As early as 2016, this number had reached 820 000 people.

¹⁵ Council Decision 2009/316/JHA.

¹⁶ ECRIS is a decentralised IT system operated by Member States' central authorities to exchange information on criminals.

¹⁷ The final target of 3 500 000 exchanges in 2020 was exceeded by over 500 000 with a total of 4 136 249 exchanges.

by 2020. This target was not met by a margin of 11 days¹⁸ (i.e. this procedure still takes an average of 21 days). The observable tendency across Member States to increase the time taken for the surrender procedure, together with the COVID-19 pandemic's effects, are likely explanations for this trend.

The 2014-2020 programme also greatly exceeded its target for the number of 'hits' (i.e. individual website visits) on the EU's e-justice portal¹⁹, which was the criterion set by the programme for access to justice. As confirmed by the analysis, the e-justice portal was perceived by consulted stakeholders as an important tool to make information available. In addition, feedback from consultation activities stressed that the 2014-2020 programme effectively raised awareness of the important role of professionals who support victims of crime. Projects implemented by the programme helped underline the role of these professionals as trusted companions for victims of crime during court proceedings.

However, regarding the programme's specific objective to support initiatives in the field of drugs policy as regards judicial cooperation and crime prevention aspects, the programme did not meet its target of assessing a set number of new psychoactive substances²⁰. According to the European Union Drugs Agency, the reason for the observed decline in the number of substances assessed is uncertain. Potential explanations for the decline are increased controls and interventions to reduce the sale and consumption of these substances.

The programme design allowed for the necessary flexibility to run projects that covered multiple countries. Projects were also effective in disseminating knowledge and best practices across participating countries. Cross-country networks of project participants created with the help of programme funding continued operating after the projects ended. Long-lasting partnerships created by the programme increased mutual learning and thereby increased both the operational capacity of funded organisations and the sustainability of results. Funding was distributed across all Member States, with organisations in Italy, Belgium and Spain featuring most frequently within funded projects.

Very significantly, the 2014-2020 justice programme was also effective in promoting digitalisation. Although promoting digitalisation was not a programme objective, when confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic, the associated constraints that came about raised the need to find alternative ways of conducting training and cooperating within project consortia. The programme therefore accelerated digitalisation by funding different types of activities, including activities related to information technology (IT) that fell under its remit. Nevertheless, evidence from projects showed that the uptake of digital tools has been uneven. Differing levels of digital literacy of participants, as well as differences in digital infrastructure in Member States, posed obstacles to legal practitioners.

Finally, the stakeholder consultation highlighted that the 2014-2020 justice programme could have provided more support to members of the public in helping them to access social-support services offered by civil society organisations (CSOs). Another challenge was the limited involvement of judges as a target group of the projects. This could be explained mainly by the limited time judges usually have at their disposal to engage in activities in addition to their duties in court.

¹⁸ The data showed that the average time increased from 16.7 days in 2019 to 21.26 days in 2020.

¹⁹ The indicator set a target of a yearly 20% increase starting from the baseline of 441 000 hits. In 2020, total hits amounted to 4 619 548.

²⁰ As of 2015, the number of new substances assessed decreased. Between 2016 and 2020 the number of substances assessed was around 50. In 2020, the programme set out to assess 95 new substances, but only assessed 46.

Justice programme 2021-2027

The *interim* evaluation of the 2021-2027 justice programme showed that the programme has been effective so far in reaching its objectives. For example, it has surpassed its goals for judicial training and cooperation, despite the negative impact of external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the political situation in some Member States. Overall, the findings gathered for this *interim* evaluation indicate that the programme is performing well, with most stakeholders expressing confidence in both its success and its alignment with the overarching goals of the EU's justice agenda.

Compared to its predecessor, and based on the findings of the *ex post* evaluation, the 2021-2027 justice programme incorporated: (i) better programme-management and administrative procedures; and (ii) better monitoring mechanisms²¹ and data-collection tools to track the effectiveness of the funded projects.

The stakeholder consultation also highlighted that beneficiaries of the 2021-2027 justice programme believed that their projects contributed to programme objectives more than previous projects under the 2014-2020 programme. The same areas remained significant in both programmes (i.e. improving the implementation of EU law, training, and raising public awareness). Nevertheless, beneficiaries of the 2021-2027 justice programme reported that their activities made an even greater contribution to improving access to CSO services and making cross-border systems more interoperable than projects and activities in the earlier programme. This indicates that progress was made in areas that had previously been regarded as more challenging. Overall, through its comprehensive approach and targeted initiatives, the 2021-2027 justice programme has fostered a significant improvement in the knowledge, skills and behaviour of its target groups, suggesting strong potential for long-term effects. Surveys conducted with the beneficiaries indicated that the 2021-2027 justice programme has raised awareness of the importance of the rule of law and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights among participants, with a marked difference in knowledge levels compared to the general public. This suggests that those reached by the programme activities increase their knowledge and understanding of both EU law and the rule of law. Rule-of-law aspects addressed by projects have continued to increase in importance, building on a foundation laid in the previous programming period.

Stakeholders and beneficiaries expressed confidence in the sustainability of the programme's outcomes²². The influence of the 2021-2027 justice programme is already visible through the connections and networks it has built, indicating a strong likelihood of long-term effects. The availability of training materials in multiple languages has also contributed to an even greater impact, ensuring that the benefits of the programme are accessible to a wider audience and will be of lasting use in the justice sector. A significant majority of beneficiaries believed that their projects have the potential to: (i) shape future legislation (such as in the field of victims' rights); (ii) improve judicial practices; and (iii) set new EU standards for judicial cooperation and access to justice. At the same time, some beneficiaries also expressed concern about their dependency on EU funding for the continuation of their initiatives. This dependency may limit these beneficiaries' contribution to the examination of emerging topics and their ability to respond to recent changes²³, thus limiting the longer-term impact of the programme.

The communication activities funded through the programme have demonstrated their significant capacity for informing and engaging stakeholders, as evidenced by the many people

²¹ The performance-monitoring framework was developed to take on board suggestions highlighted in the 2018 impact assessment and in the first part of the *ex-post* evaluation of the previous programme.

²² A high percentage of beneficiaries (94%) believe that the impact of their projects will extend beyond their conclusion.

²³ Such as the adoption of new legislation (for example, the adoption of the Artificial Intelligence Act).

reached through various initiatives²⁴. The webpages of the e-justice portal that deal with criminal matters have seen a 76% increase in visits between 2021 and 2022, with 2.25 million hits in 2022, reflecting a growing interest in the justice system across Member States. The EU Funding & Tenders portal²⁵ remains the primary source of information on the justice programme and its funding opportunities. Based on the evidence gathered through stakeholder consultations, it appeared that communication activities to raise awareness of the programme deriving from national, regional or local governments have decreased from 8.7% in the previous funding period to 3.7% in the current funding period. However, 71.6% of both successful and unsuccessful applicants said that the 2021-2027 justice programme was well-known among potential applicants, mirroring results from the previous funding period from 2014-2020. Nevertheless, evidence gathered for this evaluation highlighted a disparity in awareness among different stakeholder groups. Stakeholders in higher education and public authorities reported greater awareness of the programme than CSOs. This suggests that while the programme's communication activities are effective, they may not be reaching all sectors equally. This can be explained by the technical nature of the programme, which mainly focuses on the specialised needs of the judiciary and judicial staff. In addition, there may be a need to increase communication efforts in some EU regions to further increase the overall effectiveness of the programme and the diversity of partnerships across Member States. In fact, although geographical balance is not an objective of the programme per se, the data showed that, until the end of 2023, organisations based in some Member States applied and received funds more frequently than organisations based in other Member States.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme has put more emphasis on digitalisation. Beneficiaries have increasingly made use of digital tools in their activities, thereby increasing their effectiveness. At the same time, since the pandemic, the programme has also increasingly focused on gender mainstreaming. This focus includes: (i) implementation of a methodology to track data on how funded activities affect gender equality; (ii) more explicit requirements for gender equality in call documents and evaluation criteria; and (iii) a dedicated analysis of the gender dimension of project proposals. The requirement for a more dedicated focus on integrating gender mainstreaming in the projects co-funded by the justice programme improved the programme's effectiveness, as interventions were better aligned with the needs of target groups. Over 80% of the projects funded have incorporated measures to promote gender equality, and were able to effectively mainstream gender equality in their proposals. However, the evidence gathered for this evaluation highlighted that some applicants would still benefit from further guidance, such as more good-practice examples tailored to the specific objectives of the justice programme.

Overall, the 2021-2027 justice programme has increased efforts to ensure inclusivity, combat discrimination, and support vulnerable groups. This indicates that the programme has taken a forward-looking approach to creating a fair and equitable justice system across the EU²⁶. Ensuring non-discriminatory access to justice for all is a new component of the current programme that is already showing good progress, in part through supporting gender mainstreaming and mainstreaming non-discrimination in all its activities as required by the programme's legal basis.

²⁴ The programme's monitoring data indicates that 201 888 people were successfully reached through awareness-raising activities, while 379 mutual-learning activities have engaged a remarkable 2 288 580 people.

²⁵ [EU Funding & Tenders Portal](#) | [European Commission](#)

²⁶ Between 2021 and 2023, around 32% of programme-funded projects addressed the needs of migrants, refugees, LGBTI individuals, and persons with disabilities; 13% of projects focused on protecting children's rights in legal proceedings.

2.2. Efficiency

Justice programme 2014-2020

Overall, the evaluation found that the 2014-2020 justice programme was cost-effective²⁷ in attaining its objectives.

Feedback from beneficiaries largely confirmed that the benefits of participating in the programme outweighed associated costs. The benefits mainly lay in the formation of new partnerships promoting: (i) mutual trust between judicial actors; (ii) implementation and application of EU law; and (iii) awareness and promotion of the protection of fundamental rights.

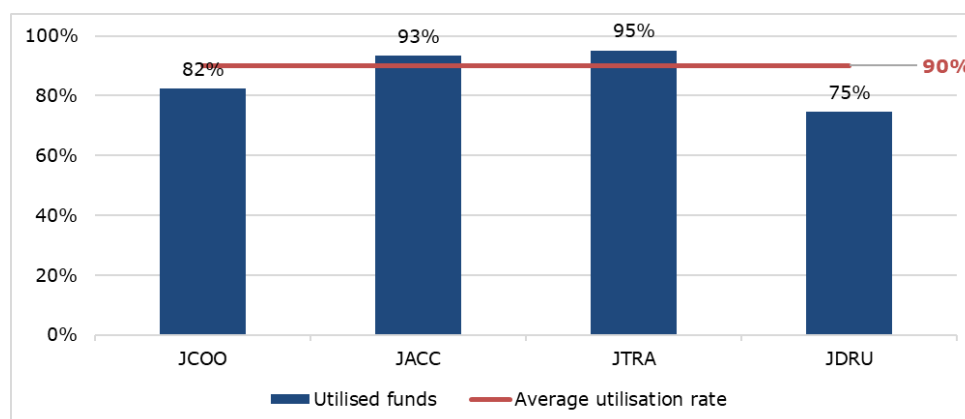
Despite an overall positive assessment of the programme by stakeholders, the application process and administrative burden of applying for programme funded projects is a resource- and time-intensive challenge for applicants, and first-time applicants in particular. More experienced applicants still perceived the process as burdensome, albeit to a lesser extent than first-time applicants. Consulted stakeholders also frequently mentioned administrative burden as a problem due to the extensive reporting requirements, with the highest staff costs attributed to administrative activities.

Notwithstanding these challenges, stakeholders valued the Commission actions to simplify the administrative process. The digitalisation of the application process with the introduction of the EU Funding & Tenders portal was considered by consulted stakeholders as the most significant simplification made by the Commission.

Regulation (EU) 1382/2013²⁸ set a budget of EUR 377 604 000 for the period 2014-2020, with yearly amounts set in the work programmes. Based on data collected for this evaluation, over 90% of the budget planned for grants and procurement (i.e. EUR 332 125 700) has been committed (i.e. more than EUR 304 000 000).

At the level of specific objectives, funding implemented under the specific objectives on access to justice and judicial training was slightly above the average ‘consumption rate’ (the ‘consumption rate’ or ‘utilisation rate’ is the percentage of planned funding allocated to a programme that has actually been awarded to activities under that programme). By contrast, funds implemented under judicial cooperation and drugs policy had below-average consumption rates.

Figure 1: Consumption rate of available budgets per specific objective



Source: Elaboration of programme data (DG JUST). Acronyms refer to specific objectives of the 2014-2020 justice programme: (1) facilitating and supporting judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters (JCOO); (2) supporting and

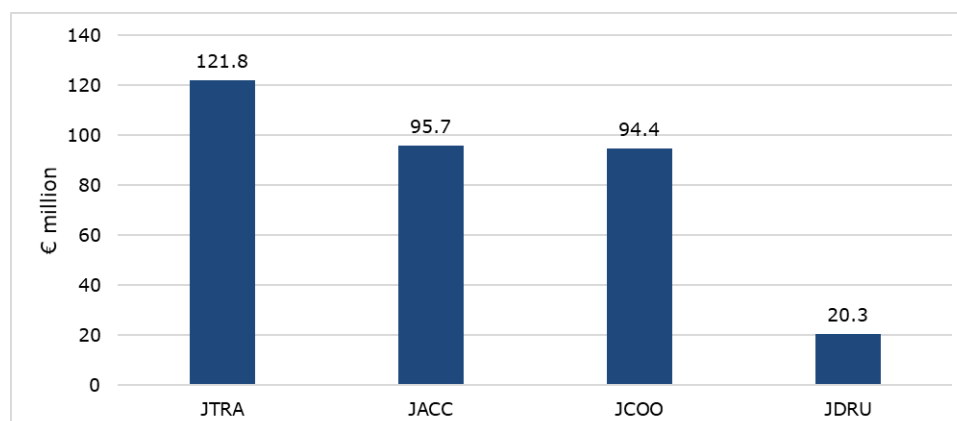
²⁷ Measuring the value provided for the investment made.

²⁸ Regulation (EU) No 1382/2013 of 17 December 2013, OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 73-83, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1382/oj>.

promoting judicial training (JTRA); (3) facilitating effective access to justice for all (JACC); (4) supporting initiatives in the field of drugs policy as regards judicial cooperation and crime prevention aspects (JDRU).

Juxtaposing the relative funding consumption rate against the planned budgets yields a more nuanced picture.

Figure 2: Planned budgets per specific objective



Source: Elaboration of programme data (DG JUST)

The 2014-2020 justice programme was effective in achieving its objectives, and the consumption rate shows it was effective in engaging almost all its planned funds. On the one hand, this high consumption rate helped ensure that the funding was extensively deployed. On the other hand, the unused budget, albeit not comparatively large, could have been used to further promote the programme's objectives. Interviews carried out for this evaluation confirmed that first-time beneficiaries in particular underestimated the resources they needed to implement their project, thus leading to lower funding requests than planned at programme level. This finding is in line with the evidence from the first part of the *ex post* evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme that identified the underestimation of project costs as a key reason for not utilising the programme's entire budget.

The evaluation criterion of efficiency was also assessed through cost-effectiveness ratios²⁹, which measured total annual costs in relation to outputs under a specific programme objective. For instance, the evaluation scrutinised the programme's investments in training activities and two large and important IT systems, which together trace the programme's performance in judicial cooperation, access to justice and judicial training. These investments in the two large and important IT systems and in training activities are therefore good proxies for the programme's cost-effectiveness.

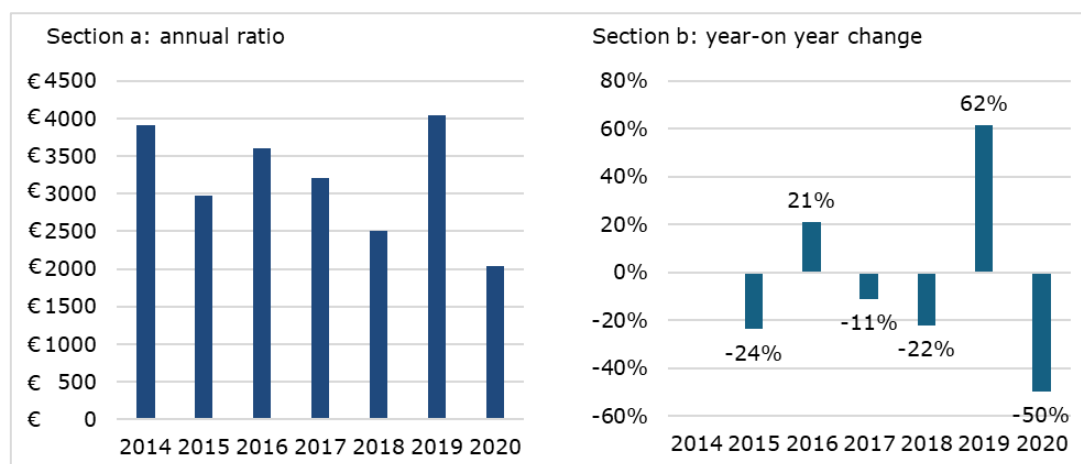
Firstly, the evaluation analysed the training sessions and produced a cost-effectiveness ratio based on this analysis³⁰. The annual cost-effectiveness ratio exhibited a decreasing trend until 2018, and then dropped even further, reaching its lowest level in 2020. The number of people trained was at its lowest in 2019 and at its highest in 2020. The rapid change in the number of people trained, and the corresponding change in associated costs, can be largely explained by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Triggered by the onset of the pandemic in 2020, the digitalisation of training courses increased. By funding remotely organised training, the programme improved its cost-effectiveness. However, these figures should be contextualised,

²⁹ Although the ratios are only an approximation of relative cost-effectiveness (because annual budgets varied), they still provide a longitudinal insight into the programme's efficiency.

³⁰ The total annual programme budget was weighted by the total number of people trained in training courses to produce the cost-effectiveness ratio.

as the work of the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN)³¹, focusing on in-person exchanges, illustrates. Networking and in-person exchanges remained important features contributing to the quality of judicial training courses.

Figure 3: Cost-effectiveness ratios of the number of the judiciary members trained (2014-2020)

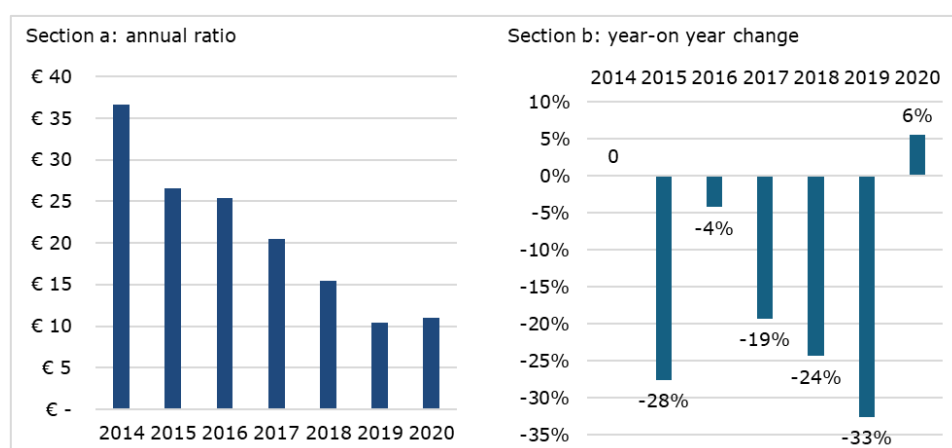


Source: Elaboration of programme data (DG JUST)

Another factor contributing to the programme's cost-effectiveness were EJTN activities at European level that created economies of scale. The EJTN established an enabling environment for large-scale and impactful judicial training. As a result, the programme was able to support training sessions at a lower cost.

The number of exchanges in ECRIS was another one of the indicators used to measure how the programme promoted judicial cooperation. It is therefore a good way to gauge cost-effectiveness. The cost of each exchange decreased continuously from 2014 until 2019. The number of exchanges via ECRIS also increased over the years and thus contributed to the good cost-output ratio. The pandemic also had an effect on the number of exchanges via ECRIS (pushing up costs slightly), albeit to a very small degree.

Figure 4: Cost-effectiveness ratios of ECRIS exchanges (2014-2020)



Source: Elaboration of ECRIS data (DG JUST)

The slight increase in costs in 2020 can be mainly attributed to the reduced activity of national competent authorities³². Among other factors, teleworking and a lack of skilled staff were the

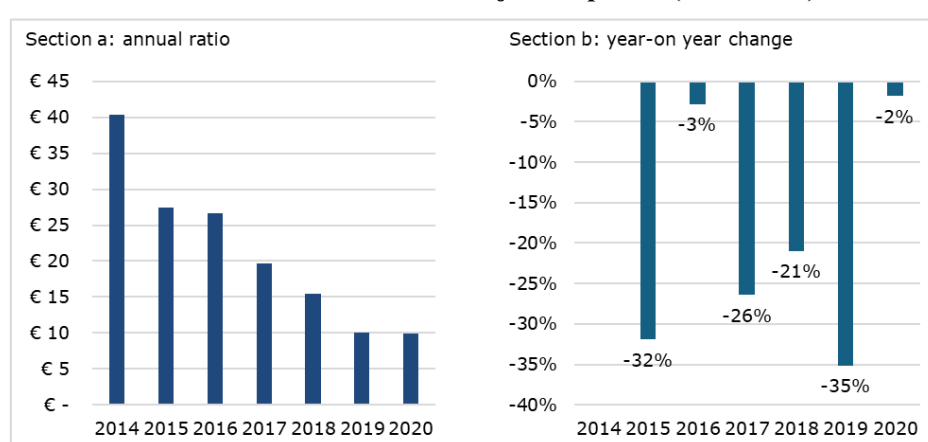
³¹ Regulation No 2021/693 establishing the 2021-2027 justice programme provides that the programme shall support EJTN's expenditure and that any operating grant to that effect shall be awarded without a call for proposal.

³² Based on Eurojust data. Available at: <https://db.eurocrim.org/db/en/doc/3528.pdf>.

underlying factors. However, after a short transition period, activities returned to normal. As a result, the reduced activity only slightly increased the cost of operating ECRIS. From a longitudinal perspective, the marginal cost (i.e. the cost for one additional exchange) dropped significantly between 2014 and 2020. The strong decrease in marginal costs illustrates the usefulness of ECRIS – and by extension its cost-effectiveness.

The number of hits on the e-justice portal³³ was used as a proxy in the programme’s impact assessment³⁴ to measure how the programme provided access to justice. Like investments in ECRIS, the cost of hits on the e-justice portal decreased over the period in which the programme was being implemented. The programme invested in expanding, maintaining and raising awareness of the e-justice portal. The impact of these actions is illustrated by the increased number of hits on the portal. The increased use of the e-justice portal therefore showed the cost-effectiveness of building a larger digital structure.

Figure 5: Cost-effectiveness ratios of hits on the e-justice portal (2014-2020)



Source: Elaboration of e-justice portal’s data (DG JUST)

In conclusion, the three cost-effectiveness assessments illustrate the programme’s long-term cost-effectiveness through training and increases in the use of established IT systems.

Justice programme 2021-2027

Evidence gathered for the evaluation showed that the 2021-2027 justice programme has so far been cost effective overall. This means that the programme is producing optimum results for the investment made. Stakeholder feedback also corroborates this view, as most respondents confirmed that the benefits of the justice programme 2021-2027 outweigh its costs. As for the 2014-2020 justice programme, collaboration and long-term partnerships led to several main benefits for target groups, such as: (i) increased awareness and knowledge of the issues addressed by the programme; (ii) increased skills; and (iii) greater cooperation.

The programme-management and administrative procedures have improved over the years in the 2021-2027 programme compared with the 2014-2020 programme. Challenges remain for beneficiaries and applicants to complete the administrative tasks associated with the application process and reporting. These administrative tasks remain costly and time-consuming. Nevertheless, many stakeholders also acknowledged the improvements brought by the simplified procedures introduced by the Commission.

³³ The e-justice portal instead provides online access to information for members of the public when trying to obtain information on legal matters, procedures or legal practitioners to aid them.

³⁴ [SWD\(2018\) 290 final](#).

Overall, and even if it is too early to draw definitive conclusions, stakeholders said that the simplification measures introduced in the 2021-2027 programming period have been positive and largely reduced the administrative burden compared with the previous programming period. These simplified procedures include the use of lump-sum contributions, a simpler reporting process and the introduction of the e-Grants system. These changes have simplified administrative and application procedures.

The introduction of lump sums should also help simplify – and increase the quality of – final reporting, which is still challenging for some beneficiaries. However, the introduction, at Commission corporate level, of standardised unit costs for travel and accommodation, was assessed less positively by stakeholders. This was because these unit costs often fail to reflect actual market rates. In addition, when it comes to financial reporting, it remains difficult to maintain two separate bookkeeping records (i.e. one based on actual costs and another one on standardised unit costs). This adds a layer of complexity, especially for public authorities.

Furthermore, thanks to a more structured approach for assessing the performance of funded activities, the current programme is better equipped than the 2014-2020 programme to ensure that funds are used efficiently. This is a significant improvement compared with the previous funding period. The performance monitoring framework for the 2021-2027 programme supports efforts to ensure that the programme remains responsive to beneficiaries' needs and emerging challenges.

Collaboration with existing networks, such as the EJTN, has continued to show the potential for improving the cost-effectiveness of the programme. As highlighted by the *ex post* evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme, these networks enable beneficiaries to organise large-scale events with extensive outreach at reduced costs, thus achieving economies of scale.

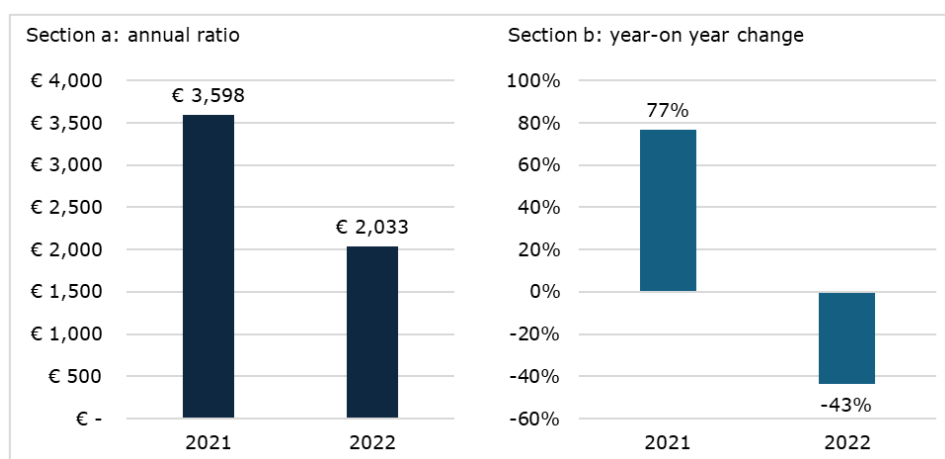
There were also several external factors influencing the efficiency of the programme. Stakeholders particularly highlighted economic and political factors (e.g. inflationary pressures caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine). Challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic were no longer considered an issue after early 2022, since the programme had been quick and flexible in adopting mitigating measures. In the longer term, COVID-19 has even increased the efficiency of projects funded under the justice programme by accelerating the uptake of digitalisation³⁵.

On the number of judicial staff trained under the current justice programme, findings indicate that, overall, cost effectiveness improved between 2021 and 2022³⁶.

³⁵ Approximately 29% of projects funded over the period under analysis redirected funds to support the transition to digital platforms and to cover increased IT support costs.

³⁶ In 2021, a sharp increase in the ratio reversed the trend of improved cost-effectiveness. The reasons for this could be varied, including potential changes in programme execution, increased costs, or external factors. The subsequent decrease in 2022 brought the ratio back down to a level very similar to that of 2020, essentially recovering from the spike in 2021 and returning to a more cost-effective state.

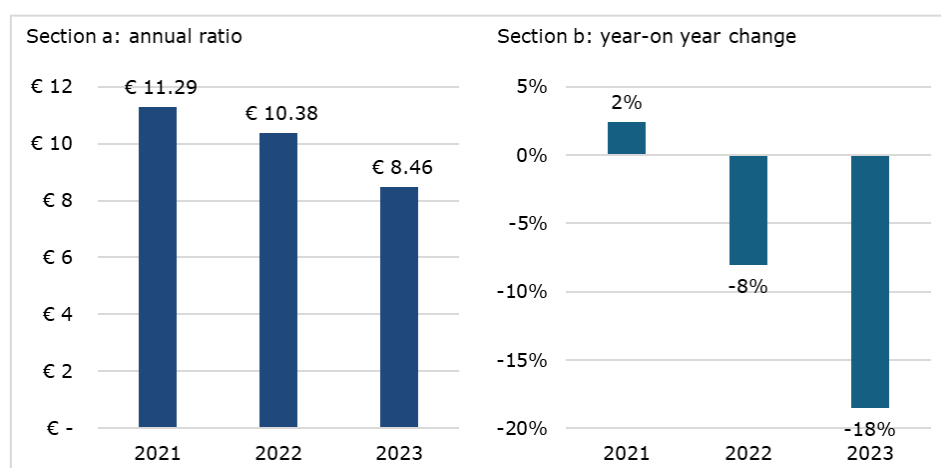
Figure 6: Cost-effectiveness ratio for the number of members of the judiciary trained (2021-2027)



Source: Elaboration of programme data (DG JUST). Note: 2023 data not yet available at the time of carrying out the analysis

On exchanges of information in ECRIS, data showed increases in cost effectiveness over the period 2021-2023. The combined data from 2014 to 2023 showed a predominant trend of increasing cost-effectiveness, given the steady decrease in the cost per exchange of information on ECRIS.

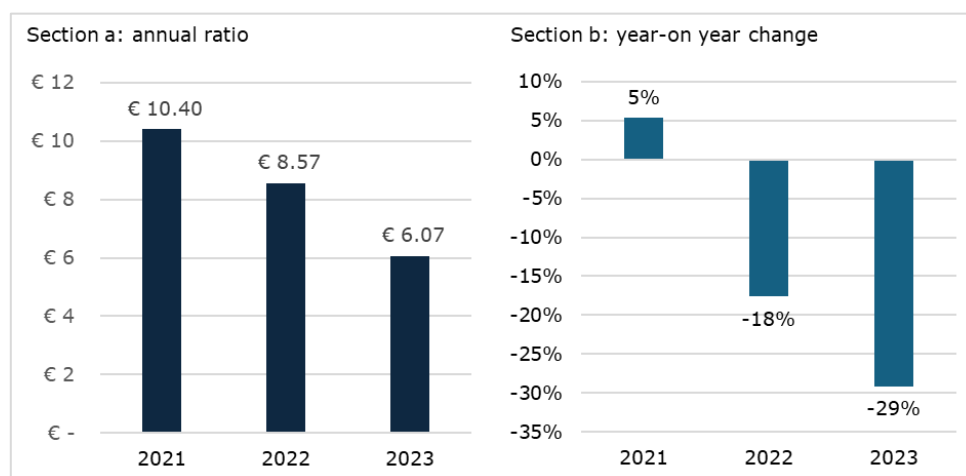
Figure 7: Cost-effectiveness ratio of ECRIS exchanges (2021-2027)



Source: Elaboration of ECRIS data (DG JUST)

Finally, looking at the number of hits on the e-justice portal, despite a brief increase in costs in 2021, the programme demonstrated a strong ability to improve its cost-effectiveness for this indicator over subsequent years, culminating in a significant reduction in costs per hit by 2023. This suggests that the programme became increasingly efficient in delivering its intended results over time, with the cost per hit on the e-justice portal decreasing substantially.

Figure 8: Cost-effectiveness ratio of hits on the e-justice portal (2021-2027)



Source: Elaboration of e-justice portal's data (DG JUST)

2.3. Coherence

Justice programme 2014-2020

The *ex post* evaluation showed that the 2014-2020 programme reached its goals overall and in a coherent way. In particular, the programme succeeded in: (i) enhancing the protection of fundamental rights; (ii) ensuring effective remedies; (iii) promoting judicial training; and (iv) promoting cooperation without duplicating other EU funding programmes. Survey results indicated that the programme has been unique in offering funding that addressed stakeholders' specific needs. 70% of surveyed beneficiaries said they would not have been able to secure other EU funding without the justice programme.

At programming level, the evaluation of the EU drugs strategy³⁷ confirmed the 2014-2020 justice programme's complementarity in the area of EU drugs policy. Interventions funded by the justice programme specifically focused on judicial cooperation and crime prevention, thereby addressing areas that were not covered by the EU's internal security fund^{38 39}. Nevertheless, although interventions funded through the programme did not overlap with initiatives funded by the EU's internal security fund, justice-programme stakeholders confirmed that interventions related to the EU drugs policy fitted much better within the remit of the internal security fund (thus validating the soundness of their transfer there under the 2021-2027 justice programme).

Furthermore, projects focusing on the digitalisation of justice effectively added to national digitalisation initiatives. The evaluation identified synergies in this area with the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)⁴⁰: funding for digital infrastructure projects under CEF was aligned with projects advancing judicial training online funded under the justice programme.

Finally, there were also salient synergies between the justice programme and the EU's rights, equality and citizenship (REC) programme⁴¹, in part thanks to the close coordination between

³⁷ Final assessment of the EU drugs strategy 2013, available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/daf5ddf5-cd52-11ea-adf7-01aa75ed71a1>.

³⁸ Regulation (EU) 2021/1149.

³⁹ The complementarity between the 2014-2020 justice programme and the internal security fund was further confirmed by the fund's *interim* evaluation (SWD (2018) 341).

⁴⁰ Regulation (EU) No 1316/2013.

⁴¹ Regulation (EU) No 1381/2013.

the Commission departments responsible for the two programmes. This close coordination helped align the approaches of the justice programme and the REC programme when evaluating funding proposals.

Justice programme 2021-2027

The actions funded under the 2021-2027 justice programme and the objectives of these actions were shown to be coherent with EU policies in the justice field. The actions funded under the current programme have a stronger focus on e-justice, the digitalisation of judicial systems and cross-border information-exchange tools than actions funded under the previous programme for 2014-2020. The stakeholder consultation confirmed that, so far, the current programme also aligns well with national policies in these areas⁴².

Thanks in part to its focus on three specific objectives⁴³, the 2021-2027 justice programme is coherent and has created synergies with other funding programmes, such as the citizenship, equality, rights and values programme⁴⁴, in particular in relation to support provided to victims of crime and other vulnerable groups. Furthermore, since the current programme plays an important role in helping Member States to interconnect with existing EU instruments and IT systems, there is complementarity and synergies between the 2021-2027 justice programme and programmes dealing with both EU-level IT systems and the digitalisation of national judicial systems (such as the digital Europe programme⁴⁵, the Technical Support Instrument⁴⁶ and the Recovery and Resilience Facility)⁴⁷.

The 2021-2027 justice programme is also coherent with EU international commitments and objectives, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically goal 16⁴⁸.

Finally, only a small percentage of beneficiaries said that they believed they could secure alternative EU funding if the justice programme were unavailable – public authorities and higher education institutions being the most optimistic about this possibility. CSOs said they were very unlikely to find alternative sources of funding if the programme were to be discontinued.

2.4. EU added value

Justice programme 2014-2020

The stakeholder consultation indicated that beneficiaries would not have been able to implement their projects in the absence of the justice programme⁴⁹. Beneficiaries pointed specifically to the projects' geographical scope, which would have been smaller if they had been based on national funding. The projects' thematic scope would also have been limited if it had relied only on national funding. According to beneficiaries, national funding is typically tailored to specific groups, such as victims of a specific kind of crime. By contrast, the justice programme was perceived as more flexible. Finally, the beneficiary organisations said that their ability to implement projects of a larger scope would not have been sufficient if they did not have access to EU funding.

Public authorities such as courts, ministries and higher education institutions were among the stakeholders that reported most frequently that they would have been able to secure national

⁴² Based on feedback from programme committee members, who generally belong to ministries of justice of Member States.

⁴³ Regulation (EU) No 2021/693, Article 3(2).

⁴⁴ Regulation (EU) No 2021/692.

⁴⁵ [The Digital Europe Programme](#) (Regulation (EU) 2021/694).

⁴⁶ [Technical Support Instrument \(TSI\)](#) (Regulation (EU) 2021/240).

⁴⁷ [The Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) (Regulation (EU) 2021/241).

⁴⁸ SDG 16: 'promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'.

⁴⁹ This finding is echoed by the results of the online survey. Only 9% of surveyed beneficiaries were confident that if the justice programme had not existed, Member States would have been a viable alternative source of funding for them.

funding in the absence of funding from the justice programme. By contrast, CSOs were less confident that they would have been able to find alternative funding sources. The underlying reasons for beneficiaries to rely on EU funding from the 2014-2020 justice programme included the specificity of national funding instruments⁵⁰, which was excessively restrictive in the view of stakeholders.

Feedback from programme committee members contextualised these limitations by identifying two areas in which the 2014-2020 justice programme had helped level the playing field among Member States. The first is the added value from training sessions co-funded by the programme, which were perceived to be very valuable and impactful for programme stakeholders. The second is the programme's contribution to digitalising justice systems and making them interoperable with the justice systems of other Member States. Digitalisation proved particularly important to overcoming issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Justice programme 2021-2027

The 2021-2027 justice programme continues to provide a unique added value that is difficult to replicate at national level. The programme adds value over and above that created by Member States acting alone. Beneficiaries still believe that, although alternative funding sources exist⁵¹, the support offered by the justice programme is unparalleled in its scope and impact. So far, the programme has enabled organisations to undertake extensive activities that would otherwise have taken years to accomplish or would have been significantly scaled down. In most cases, no national funding was available to provide the same kind of support to EU justice policies, such as cross-border digitalisation or inherently transnational activities. Beneficiaries acknowledged the programme's role in accelerating processes and facilitating cross-border projects, which would be limited in scope and scale without its support. The 2021-2027 justice programme therefore fills in a crucial funding gap, especially in areas requiring: (i) international cooperation; and (2) victims' support.

Stakeholders and participants particularly value the justice programme for fostering the creation and awareness of EU-level networks and enabling smaller Member States to undertake projects that would be beyond their capacity otherwise. Cross-border collaboration increased from 69% of all funded projects in the 2014-2020 period to 78% in the 2021-2023 period, showing a continued focus on increasing cooperation among different legal professionals across EU Member States. Institutional participation also grew as 69% of justice programme projects in 2014-2020 involved universities, national training academies and judicial authorities, against 78% in 2021-2023⁵². This suggests that stopping the programme would likely significantly reduce the scope of justice-related activities, particularly those involving cross-border initiatives.

The arguments based on the subsidiarity principle, put forward as part of the 2018 impact assessment, are still valid. The objectives set out in the impact assessment are still better addressed at EU level due to: (i) the persistent nature of the difficulties facing cross-border cooperation in the area of justice; (ii) the paradigm shift needed for a true change in the legal cultures of Member States to cooperate with each other's judicial systems; and (iii) the need for EU law to be applied coherently by national courts.

The added value of the 2021-2027 justice programme also lies in its more targeted approach, greater focus on digitalisation, and use of improved monitoring systems. These improvements

⁵⁰ Interviews clarified that this limited scope of national funding related to specific budgets earmarked under targeted national funding programmes.

⁵¹ Such as private entities, regional and national research projects or other EU-level opportunities (amongst those more frequently mentioned in consultations).

⁵² Based on results of text-mining analysis.

render the current programme even more effective in meeting the evolving needs for justice of the EU and its citizens.

2.5. Relevance

Justice programme 2014-2020

The evaluation confirmed the relevance of the 2014-2020 justice programme previously identified in both the *interim* evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme and the first part of the 2014-2020 programme's *ex post* evaluation. The stakeholder consultations confirmed that the programme sufficiently met the needs of its target groups. Successful and unsuccessful applicants alike both agreed in surveys that the programme was relevant, with no statistically significant link between perceptions based on the applicant's geographic location or organisational type. Beneficiaries also confirmed that the programme helped address needs at national level⁵³.

A third of all beneficiaries participated in either a follow-up project or a different project, pointing to the programme's relevance to its stakeholders over time. This long-lasting relevance is in part thanks to the programme's ability to adjust its priorities and address emerging needs, also following the merge of the formerly separate civil justice programme⁵⁴, criminal justice programme⁵⁵ and drug prevention and information programme⁵⁶.

The programme further proved its flexibility throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Reporting extensions, reallocations of funds, and shifting from in-person to online and hybrid project activities made it possible to implement projects throughout the pandemic.

Notwithstanding their positive feedback and high level of engagement, stakeholders said that they would have appreciated additional support in disseminating project results.

The first part of the *ex post* evaluation identified a need to broaden the justice programme's target group, in particular by actively supporting CSOs working on victims' rights. However, this evaluation did not find strong evidence for this need, as only scattered feedback suggested a need to better include correctional services and prison staff in the target groups. These mixed findings indicate that the current justice programme should closely monitor its relevance to CSOs working on victims' rights.

Justice programme 2021-2027

Some of the needs and challenges identified in the 2021-2027 justice programme's intervention logic still exist and need to be addressed. This is despite some of the recent progress made in this area. For instance, insights from the EU Justice Scoreboard⁵⁷ and data collected via recent Eurobarometer surveys⁵⁸ highlighted progress in Member States' efforts to deliver effective national justice systems, but these insights also suggest that there is a continued need for

⁵³ 84% of surveyed beneficiaries believed that the 2014-2020 justice programme corresponded to the needs of the justice sector in their country.

⁵⁴ Decision No 1149/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 September 2007 establishing for the period 2007-2013 the Specific Programme 'Civil Justice' as part of the General Programme 'Fundamental Rights and Justice' ([OJ L 257, 3.10.2007, p. 16](#)).

⁵⁵ Decision 2007/126/JHA of 12 February 2007 establishing for the period 2007-2013, as part of the General Programme on Fundamental Rights and Justice, the Specific Programme 'Criminal Justice' ([OJ L 58, 24.2.2007, p. 13](#)).

⁵⁶ Decision No 1150/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 September 2007 establishing for the period 2007-2013 the Specific Programme 'Drug prevention and information' as part of the General Programme 'Fundamental Rights and Justice' ([OJ L 257, 3.10.2007, p. 23](#)).

⁵⁷ See EU Justice Scoreboard 2024/ *The EU Justice Scoreboard 2024*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions COM(2024) 950.

⁵⁸ Flash Eurobarometer 540 – *Perceived independence of the national justice systems in the EU among the general public*, February 2024. For this Flash Eurobarometer, a representative sample of EU citizens, aged 15 and over, in each of the 27 EU Member States, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia was interviewed. Between 14 and 27 February 2024, 29 484 interviews were conducted over the telephone.

improvement⁵⁹. Several challenges persist such as variations in judicial efficiency, uneven implementation of judicial reforms and barriers in citizens' access to justice. Furthermore, issues such as cross-border judicial cooperation and consistency in judicial training continue to require sustained attention. These current and evolving needs prove the continued relevance across the EU of the programme's objectives of promoting judicial cooperation, judicial training and access to justice.

As was the case under the 2014-2020 programme, the evidence collected for this evaluation confirmed that the 2021-2027 justice programme is meeting the needs of its key stakeholders, i.e. beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries. The programme not only aligns the expectations, but also plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of the justice sector at national level. Additionally, beneficiaries confirmed that the outputs of their project correspond to the needs of the relevant target groups within the justice sector and the needs of society more broadly.

All this underlines the continued relevance of the justice programme's specific objectives⁶⁰. The architecture of the current programme brought significant added value compared with the previous programme in this regard, particularly through its more streamlined and focused design. In fact, the removal of drugs policy from the 2021-2027 justice programme led to a sharper programme focus through the three specific objectives of the 2021-2027 justice programme, which are key for the field of justice, allowing for greater impact in the programme's core areas.

Another key element of the programme's ability to maintain its relevance to its beneficiaries and target groups in recent years has been its capacity to harness digital technologies. This is particularly important given the uneven progress and sometimes fragmented approach seen in Member States' efforts to digitalise their national justice systems. Although the digitalisation of national justice systems in the EU is not one of the specific objectives of the justice programmes, digitalisation of justice informs all three specific objectives in a cross-cutting manner and enables more accessible, efficient and interconnected judicial processes across the EU.

The digitalisation of justice systems has the potential to create justice ecosystems that are more resilient, adaptable and aligned with the EU's broader digital transformation goals. This will ultimately strengthen public trust in the judicial system and support a more cohesive European area of justice. Digitalisation is bringing both new opportunities and challenges in the area of justice, and needs in this area are evolving due to the digital transition. In particular, the increasing reliance on digital tools necessitates addressing challenges linked to cybersecurity, data protection, artificial intelligence applications, and the ethical implications associated with digital justice tools.

Stakeholders and beneficiaries noted that there are already several areas where funding for the digitalisation of justice would be highly relevant, both in terms of thematic areas (artificial intelligence regulation, copyright infringement, combating cyberbullying and ensuring transparency in the digital space) and types of activities such as digital skills training for justice professionals⁶¹.

⁵⁹ Possible improvements include: (i) the need to reduce the burden of court fees; (ii) the availability of legal aid; (iii) the promotion of voluntary use of alternative dispute resolution methods (ADRs); (iv) support for the participation of persons with disabilities as professionals in the justice system; and (v) facilitating access to justice by electronic means, as the uptake of digitalisation in national justice systems across EU Member States remains uneven. In addition, cross-border crimes have continued to rise since 2020, suggesting cross-border judicial cooperation will only become more important.

⁶⁰ Regulation (EU) No 2021/693, Article 3(2).

⁶¹ This includes: (i) developing digital tools (e.g. for improving communication, access to information, and comparable data collection); (ii) supporting the practical implementation of digital tools; (iii) improving interoperability; and (iv) raising awareness of the opportunities and benefits of digitalisation in the justice sector.

There remains scope to ensure a more strategic and focused approach to address: (i) the challenges of an uneven level of digitalisation of justice in the Member States, and (ii) all opportunities presented by the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

3. Conclusions and lessons learnt

Overall, the 2014-2020 justice programme achieved its objectives. Based on the combined findings of this evaluation, the 2021-2027 programme is also progressing well towards its objectives.

Both programmes have successfully contributed so far to supporting the mutual recognition of judicial decisions across Member States and improving cross-border cooperation. The programmes' contribution has helped to create long-term impact in further developing a cohesive European area of justice built on mutual trust and cooperation between Member States. The programmes' joint **focus on judicial training creates synergies.** The 2014-2020 programme fostered a shared legal culture across Member States by training thousands of judges, lawyers, and court staff in both national and EU law. The 2021-2027 programme builds on these achievements to further develop and unify the legal landscape across the EU. **Ensuring access to justice, particularly for vulnerable groups, has been a fundamental objective of both programmes.** In the 2014-2020 funding period, substantial efforts were made to reduce barriers to access to justice, resulting in improved frameworks and increased protections for marginalised individuals. This progress informs the approach of the 2021-2027 programme, ensuring that lessons learnt continue to drive forward a fairer and more inclusive EU legal system. **The digitalisation of justice systems is also an area in which the two programmes are mutually complementary.** The 2014-2020 period saw the further improvement of digital tools like the European e-justice portal, which continues in the 2021-2027 programme. This facilitates easier access to legal information and cross-border cooperation. The 2021-2027 programme builds on this foundation, continuing to expand digital initiatives and modernising judicial-cooperation mechanisms. This continuity supports the EU's broader digital transformation goals, making the justice system more efficient and accessible.

Both programmes have contributed to achieve the correct, coherent and consistent application of EU law. By facilitating exchanges of best practices, the 2014-2020 programme fostered collaboration among Member States, resulting in the more uniform application of EU law by judicial practitioners. This ongoing synergy increases the integrity of EU legislation and promotes legal coherence across borders, an approach furthered in the current programme. Finally, **the support for European networks and civil society in the field of justice continues across both programmes.** The provision of funding for networks such as the EJTN allows for sustained collaboration and capacity building across the EU. This ensures that projects have long-term impact and strengthens cooperation between Member States. This ongoing support helps ensure that legal professionals and organisations can engage in sustained, high-quality collaboration on justice matters across the EU.

Based on an assessment of its efficiency, the **programmes' benefits outweighed their costs.** Direct funding to beneficiaries led to immediate and tangible benefits to the target groups of the projects' activities.

Streamlining administrative processes with the introduction of the EU Funding & Tenders portal and the e-Grants system for the 2014-2020 justice programme made the application and grant-management process easier for applicants. The new simplification measures applied to the 2021-2027 justice programme show promising results, even though it is too early to assess their full impact and margins for improvement remain. **It is important that the Commission**

maintains the current level of support and guidance and increases the visibility of existing training materials before developing new ones. Providing additional targeted support might also be considered.

The COVID-19 pandemic promoted the uptake of digital technologies for project implementation. **The increased use of digital tools helped the programmes reach a wider audience** through their funded activities. It thus led to economies of scale allowing funded actions to better reach their target groups at a lower cost.

The programme's objectives were coherent with EU policies and priorities over the 2014-2020 programming period, **and these objectives continue to be coherent today, with an increased focus on digitalisation.** The actions funded are also coherent with policies at national level and with other EU international commitments and objectives, such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

The justice programme ensures a high level of coherence among the different available EU funding instruments. Greater coherence is also due to the current programme's focus on three specific objectives. In hindsight, and based on feedback from stakeholders, moving the specific objective related to drugs policy from the justice programme to the internal security fund was an appropriate measure.

The 2021-2027 programme is playing an important role in helping Member States to develop national tools to create the interfaces required between EU-wide systems and national systems. In this regard, the most extended synergies identified were between the justice programme on the one hand and the digital Europe programme and Recovery and Resilience Fund investments in the field of digitalisation on the other. Funding for digital projects could benefit from a clear identification of needs at EU, national and local level in terms of IT infrastructure and training to ensure that the full potential of existing and future investments is reached.

Only a small percentage of beneficiaries believe they could secure alternative EU funding if the justice programme was unavailable. **CSOs would be very unlikely to find alternative sources of funding if the programme were to be discontinued.**

The 2014-2020 justice programme provided funding for activities that yielded an impact which Member States would not have achieved on their own. Under the current programming period, and by addressing EU-level issues and needs, **the justice programme provides unique added value that would be difficult to replicate at national level.**

The 2014-2020 justice programme's EU added value was evident in the activities' geographic scope, content and size. Without the programme's funding, stakeholders would have required much more time and effort to build and develop their capacities. **The programme succeeded in contributing to a more level playing field in the areas of judicial training, interoperability of IT systems and digitalisation.** Judicial staff and national judiciaries largely benefited from training and investments in digital capacities.

Today, the 2021-2027 programme plays an important role in accelerating processes and facilitating cross-border projects. According to some beneficiaries, these cross-border projects would be limited in scope and scale without the programme's support, and in some cases might even not exist. The justice programme is also particularly valued for **helping to build EU-level networks – and raising awareness of these networks – and enabling smaller Member States to undertake projects they otherwise could not.**

Stopping the programme would likely result in a significant reduction in the scope of justice-related activities in the EU, particularly those involving cross-border initiatives, as the

programme is filling a crucial funding gap. **The added value of the 2021-2027 justice programme lies also in its more targeted approach, greater focus on digitalisation, and improved monitoring system.** These improvements enable the current programme to be effective in meeting the evolving justice needs of the EU and its citizens.

In part thanks to its more streamlined and focused design, the 2021-2027 justice programme is maintaining a high degree of relevance, a conclusion in keeping with the findings from the *interim* evaluation and the *ex post* evaluation of the previous programme. **The programme's specific objectives are still highly relevant to the needs of its beneficiaries and target groups** in the wider justice sector.

The programme could play a key role in bridging the gaps that still exist in the next funding period by further increasing its EU added value.