Official Journal
of the European Union

EN
L series

2024/2295 10.10.2024

RESOLUTION (EU) 2024/2295 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

of 11 April 2024

with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Institute for Gender Equality for the financial year 2022

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,

— having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Institute for Gender Equality for the financial year 2022,

— having regard to Rule 100 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0096/2024),

A. whereas, according to its statement of revenue and expenditure [1], the final budget of the European Institute for Gender Equality (the 'Institute') for the financial year 2022 was EUR 8 432 919,91, representing a decrease of 2,99 % compared to 2021;

B. whereas the Court of Auditors (the 'Court'), in its report on the annual accounts of the European Institute for Gender Equality for the financial year 2022 (the 'Court's report'), states that it has obtained reasonable assurance that the Institute's annual accounts are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular;

C. whereas Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) states that in all its activities the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, thereby establishing the principle of gender mainstreaming, and to promote gender equality between men and women; whereas gender equality must be incorporated into all Union policies, including via gender budgeting at all levels of the budgetary process;

D. whereas the 2023 Gender Equality Index demonstrates that Member States have made a modest increase of only 1,6 points to reach 70,2, with some domains showing signs of regression, in particular in economic and income metrics [2]; whereas the Institute was established in order to contribute to, and strengthen the promotion of, gender equality in the Union, including gender mainstreaming in all Union policies and the resulting national policies, to fight against discrimination based on gender, and to raise Union citizens' awareness of gender equality;

Budget and financial management

1. Notes that the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2022 resulted in a budget implementation rate of current year commitment appropriations of 97,91 %, representing a decrease of 1,01 % compared to 2021; notes that the current year payment appropriations execution rate was 81,10 %, representing an increase of 9,72 % compared to 2021; commends the Institute for the close monitoring of budget implementation and the satisfactory budget implementation rates in 2022, despite the challenges of that year linked to the war of aggression against Ukraine and the economic volatility in the Union; acknowledges the decrease in the Institute's carry-over operating expenditure to 42,28 % in 2023, compared to 54,79 % in 2022;

2. Notes that the amount of the Institute's final budget is the result of amending budgets of a total of EUR 175 000 adopted by the Institute's management board due to the sharp rise in the rate of inflation in the Union and particularly in Lithuania in 2022, an indexation of salaries of 6,9 % and a rise in the correction coefficient applicable to Lithuania of 7,3 %;

3. Notes with concern that, according to the Court's report, the Institute had not disclosed, for a framework contract for event organisation services, the related earmarked budget appropriations of EUR 3,7 million in the Institute's single programming documents (SPD), thus undermining the budgetary transparency towards the Institute's board and other stakeholders; calls on the Institute to include all operational framework contracts in its single programming documents;

[1] OJ C 38, 31.1.2023, p. 63.
[2] https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023

Performance

4. Observes that the Institute uses certain key performance indicators in relation to operational objectives to assess the added value provided by its activities; notes with appreciation that the Institute achieved 96,1 % of its work programme in 2022 and reached the targets set in the amended 2022-2024 single programming document;

5. Welcomes the fact that in 2022 the Institute supported Union policymaking by monitoring gaps and trends in gender equality by launching the Gender Equality Index, and organised its first Gender Equality Forum, which featured various panel discussions, workshops and experience sessions by high-level political decision-makers and members of civil society; notes further that the Institute produced a policy brief regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young women and men, providing recommendations to engage and empower the youth; notes in addition that the Institute published a report entitled 'Artificial Intelligence, platform work and gender equality' showing that artificial intelligence and platform work have the potential to improve gender equality in the economy;

6. Recalls that the Institute was established in order to contribute to and strengthen the promotion of gender equality in the Union by providing quality research and comparable data, to help the Union institutions and the Member States to mainstream gender equality in all their policies and to combat gender-based discrimination; stresses, therefore, the fact that the Institute has a crucial role in collecting, analysing, processing and disseminating data and necessary information for policy makers and the policies of the Union and the Member States;

7. Stresses the importance of combating inequalities among and injustices against women; calls on the Commission and Member States to take urgent action to address poverty and increasing inequalities among women, especially among groups in vulnerable situations, including single mothers, women with disabilities, racialised women, LGBTIQ+ women, migrant women and refugees, elderly women and women in rural or scarcely populated areas; notes that that could be achieved by meeting the need for increased funding for gender equality actions in terms of employment and growth, as well as to combat gender-based violence and the pay gap between men and women, the pension pay gap between men and women, the impact of crises on women, gender mainstreaming and budgeting, the increasing poverty rate among women, as well as in terms of rights and democracy and the rule of law;

Efficiency and gains

8. Notes the Institute's synergies with, inter alia, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the European Agency for Safety and Health Work; observes that, according to the Institute's replies, the Institute is an active member of the justice and home affairs (JHA) agencies' network, keeps regular contact with all the other JHA agencies and actively participates in activities of the EU Agencies Network of Scientific Advice; further notes the Institute's cooperation with data providers such as Eurostat, FRA, Eurofound or Eurojust;

9. Commends the Institute for the progress made to improve its internal efficiency in 2022 through further digitalising its work processes as well as maximising the use of online communications and virtual participation in meetings and events; notes, in particular, that in 2022 the Institute developed or deployed several tools, such as the electronic signature tool, Sysper2 (the Commission's human resources management tool), the e-recruitment tool and the project management tool, contributing to the automatisation and digitalisation of key processes (human resources and project and financial management); observes that the Institute has shared its human and financial resources in order to use the inter-agency contract for the provision of services for the evaluation of projects; observes further that the Institute defined several measures to reduce CO_2 emissions and adopt environmentally friendly work practices (environmental sustainability clauses in the Institute's contracts, the recycling of paper and plastic, electronic workflows and the collection of data on CO_2 emissions caused by the Institute's business travels);

Staff policy

10. Notes that, on 31 December 2022, the establishment plan was 100 % filled, with 27 officials and temporary agents (TAs) appointed out of 27 TAs and officials authorised under the Union budget (the same number of posts as in 2021); notes that in addition in 2022 the Agency's staff turnover rate was 11 %, identical to the rates in 2021 and 2020;

11. Notes that the Institute completed the annual performance appraisal exercise for all 62 members of staff and ensured that members of staff were offered appropriate training opportunities aimed at improving their skills and competencies; welcomes that, in order to promote and facilitate professional development in the Institute, 19 different group training programmes were organised in 2022 with 414 participants, while 20 statutory members of staff took part in 42 individual training courses; notes that the Institute continued to promote language training for its TAs, contract agents, seconded national experts and trainees, reimbursing up to EUR 500 per staff member; encourages the Institute to keep focusing on career development by developing a long-term human resources policy on offering specific training possibilities for career development;

12. Welcomes the fact that balanced gender distribution, which was achieved in 2021 in senior and middle management (2 men (50 %) and 2 women (50 %)), was maintained in 2022 and notes the recurrent unbalanced gender distribution on the management board (8 men (21,62 %) and 29 women (78,38 %)) and among staff overall (14 men (29,17 %) and 34 women (70,83 %)); reiterates its call on the Institute to ensure gender balance in the future; acknowledges, nevertheless, that, according to the Institute's written replies, in order to achieve gender balance among its staff, it has taken concrete pro-active steps and measures such as increasing the reach of vacancy notices to attract a more diverse talent pool or the use of gender-sensitive wording in vacancy announcements to attract the attention of both women and men; asks the Commission and the Member States to take into account the importance of ensuring gender balance when nominating their members to the Institute's management board;

13. Notes that, according to the Institute's replies, there were no cases of harassment reported, investigated, concluded internally or taken before the courts in 2022; points out, however, that that does not automatically mean that there were no such cases, particularly because harassment might take various forms and remain unreported; calls on the Institute to continue its work in order to maintain the existing trend, while putting in place all relevant safeguards to ensure that no case remains unreported; commends the Institute for having organised in 2022, for both management and staff, training on the prevention of harassment; notes further that the Institute made use of its appointed external law firm to manage legally previous harassment cases; observes that the Institute does not have its own legal services unit or a post of legal advisor;

14. Notes that, in 2022, an ongoing case against company UAB Manpower Lit, instituted with the Vilnius City District Court at the beginning of 2018 by a number of former interim workers, was finalised; recalls that the judgment of the Court of Justice of 11 November 2021 ([3]) confirmed that Directive 2008/104/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council ([4]) applies to the decentralised agencies of the Union and confirmed the principle that interim workers and statutory members of staff be treated equally; notes that the Supreme Court of Lithuania upheld that ruling by the Court of Justice and ruled in favour of interim workers; welcomes the fact that the Institute no longer hires interim workers as of 1 January 2022;

15. Welcomes the Institute's comprehensive wellbeing policy, with a number of measures in place to support work-life balance, teleworking and a healthy lifestyle for its staff members; notes the Institute's sustained efforts to enhance the working environment in 2022 through a combination of respect and integrity, team spirit and cooperation across units to strengthen staff's understanding of and support for the Institute's zero tolerance on psychological and sexual harassment; further notes the Institute's measures to support staff such as extending the possibility for teleworking in the case of documented personal situations or reimbursing non-statutory staff for psychotherapeutic sessions;

Procurement

16. Notes with concern the observation from the Court's report regarding a framework contract, for which the payment by the Institute in 2022 of an amount of EUR 25 571,18 (out of a total of EUR 511 296 paid under that contract) for the cost category 'unforeseen expenditure' was found irregular due to the fact that that cost category was not included in the framework contract; welcomes the fact that the Institute has introduced a formal amendment to the framework contract defining the percentage of the budget for and the purpose of usage of unforeseen expenditure;

([3]) Judgment of the Court (Second Chamber) of 11 November 2021, *UAB 'Manpower Lit' v E.S. and Others*, ECLI:EU:C:2021:624.
([4]) Directive 2008/104/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on temporary agency work (OJ L 327, 5.12.2008, p. 9).

17. Notes another observation from the Court's report regarding the irregularity of the procedure and the resulting contract in connection with an audited negotiated procedure with at least three candidates, with a value below EUR 60 000; acknowledges, nevertheless, with regard to the latter observation that in 2022 no payments were made under that contract; calls on the Institute to address the shortcomings of its internal control deficiencies in the area of procurement;

Prevention and management of conflicts of interest and transparency

18. Notes the Institute's existing measures and ongoing efforts to secure transparency, the prevention and management of conflicts of interest and whistle-blower protection; notes in particular that the Institute prevents and manages conflicts of interest by raising awareness and by monitoring the validity of the declarations of interest signed by its management board, senior management and staff involved in recruitment and procurement procedures; further notes that the Institute updated its conflicts of interest policy in 2023 to take into account the recommendations on 'revolving doors' issued by the Court in its 2021 audit report on decentralised agencies of the Union and other relevant reports or studies issued by the discharge authority and the European Ombudsman; calls on the Court to include the Institute's new conflicts of interest policy in the Court's future audit plans;

19. Notes that the Institute published on its website the CVs and declarations of interests of its Director and management board members; recalls the importance of CVs and declarations of interests being published; calls on the Institute to publish its meetings with interest representatives without delay and provide the discharge authority with information on the webpage where such meetings are published;

Internal control

20. Welcomes the Institute's measures taken in 2022 to strengthen its internal control system; notes in that context that the Institute is on track with regard to the progress made in its internal control and audit related activities, such as the implementation of the recommendations or observations issued by the Court and the Internal Audit Service (IAS) in their audit reports from 2021 and the actions and measures set out in the Institute's 2021-2023 anti-fraud strategy; welcomes the fact that those actions and measures include the provision of fraud prevention training, awareness-raising though a dedicated anti-fraud intranet page and dedicated controls and fraud risk assessments;

21. Notes that the IAS performed a specific assessment of the Institute's internal control system in 2022; notes further the results of that assessment, in which four moderate deficiencies related to components I (the control environment), III (control activities) and IV (information and communication) and one major deficiency related to component III and the need for the improvement or significant improvement of various principles (4, 10, 11 and 13) were identified; calls on the Institute to report to the discharge authority on the progress made in addressing the IAS's findings;

22. Observes that a second independent external evaluation of the Institute was published in 2022; notes in that context that the Institute's management board has addressed to the Commission a letter with recommendations regarding the Institute's experts' forum, the functioning of the management board and staffing issues; understands from that letter that addressing those recommendations might require an amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1922/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council ([5]) that established the Institute; calls on the Commission to support the Institute in the follow-up analysis and discussions regarding the outcome of that external evaluation;

23. Commends the Institute for having taken the necessary actions with regard to the Court's observations from 2021, which have all been deemed closed by the Court;

Other

24. Notes that the Institute signed in 2022 a new lease contract for its premises in Vilnius for a period of 10 years; further notes that the Brussels liaison office started its activities in 2022 and helped strengthen the visibility of the Institute as a stakeholder;

([5]) Regulation (EC) No 1922/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on establishing a European Institute for Gender Equality (OJ L 403, 30.12.2006, p. 9).

25. Welcomes the Institute's commitment to digitalise its procurement procedures through the onboarding of the Public Procurement Management Tool, expected to be completed in Q4 of 2023; notes that, according to the Institute's replies to the questions from Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control, it updated its cybersecurity policy in 2022 to enhance security measures; recalls the importance of regularly updating arrangements for cybersecurity audits, tests and IT risk assessments;

26. Notes that the Institute has further increased its public visibility and online presence by launching or hosting several campaigns or events such as the #SafeSpaces campaign to show, inter alia, how cyber violence undermines the safety of women and girls; and the Institute's first Gender Equality Forum with forum sessions open to public via livestreaming and recordings;

27. Insists on the importance of its report on feminicide published in 2022 entitled 'Feminicide indicators: pilot study of data availability and feasibility assessment' and encourages the Institute to continue its campaign to raise the visibility of feminicide in national policies and highlight the potential benefits of recognising it as a separate criminal offence;

28. Refers, for other observations of a cross-cutting nature accompanying its decision on discharge, to its resolution of 11 April 2024 ([6]) on the performance, financial management and control of the agencies.

([6]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2024)0280.