RESOLUTION (EU) 2023/1884 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

of 10 May 2023

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 (EIGE) for the financial year 2021

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 2021,

— 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 (A9-0121/2023),

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 2021 was EUR 8 692 878, representing an increase of 12,17 % compared to 2020;

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 2021 (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 gender equality is a core value of the Union enshrined in Article 2 TEU; whereas Article 8 TFEU states that in all its activities the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women, establishing the principle of gender mainstreaming;

D. whereas gender equality in the Union has been particularly impacted by the consequences of the COVID pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the backlashes against gender equality and women's rights, especially sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in several Member States; whereas women are at risk of being disproportionately affected by rising energy prices and costs of living in general; whereas this has the potential to further deepen inequalities and hamper gender equality; whereas further research is needed of gendered impact of energy poverty in the Union; whereas the Gender Equality Index in 2022 is of 68,6 across the Union, representing an increase of only 0,6 point compared to 2021, thereby demonstrating that the Union's pace towards gender equality is slow;

Budget and financial management

1. Notes with satisfaction that the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2021 resulted in a budget implementation rate of current year commitment appropriations of 98,92 %, representing an increase of 1,18 % compared to 2020; notes that the current year payment appropriations execution rate was 71,39 %, representing a decrease of 3,44 % compared to 2020;

2. Notes that the amount of the Institute's final budget is the result of a first budgetary amendment of EUR 971 698, representing a budget increase of 12 % compared to the initial budget allocated for 2021 and of a second budgetary amendment of EUR 375 000, representing a 4,14 % reduction adopted by the Institute's management Board due to the COVID-19-related savings identified at year end;

3. Acknowledges an increase in the Institute's carry-over operating expenditure to 54,79 % in 2022 (49,49 % in 2021);

([1]) OJ C 141, 29.3.2022, p. 123.

Performance

4. Recalls that the Institute was established in order to contribute to, and strengthen, the promotion of gender equality in the Union; stresses the key role that the Institute plays in the promotion of gender equality in the Union, such as providing research and data, a task in which it has proven to be vital and effective; underlines therefore that the Institute needs to be provided with sufficient and stable financial and human resources to fulfil its tasks; recalls that the Institute's task is to collect, analyse and disseminate information as regards gender equality and to develop, analyse, evaluate and disseminate methodological tools in order to support the integration of gender equality into all Union policies and the resulting national policies; encourages collaboration between the Institute and other Union agencies;

5. 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 96,62 % of its work programme in 2021, thereby reaching the targets set out in the 2021-2023 single programming document;

6. Notes that in 2021 the Institute published a report analysing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for victims of intimate partner violence, and carried out its first wide survey which collected evidence on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in informal care and work-life balance, wellbeing, employment and working conditions; notes further that by developing the tool on tracking resource allocations for gender equality, the Institute finalised a step-by-step toolkit on gender budgeting aiming to assist managing authorities to mainstream gender under shared management; notes in addition that the Institute prepared a toolkit on gender-responsive public procurement for Union funds and national budgets, to complement the Commission's framework for socially responsible public procurement;

7. Notes that the Institute strengthened its cooperation with Union agencies throughout the year, especially with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound); notes the Institute's engagement in the Justice and Home Affairs agencies' network in the context of the COVID-19 crisis response and the Union's solidarity with Ukraine; further notes the Institute's involvement in the EU Agencies Network on Scientific Advice (EU-ANSA), in particular with the quantitative survey data cluster and the socioeconomic cluster; calls on the Institute to continue to develop its synergies (for instance human resources, building management, IT services and security), cooperation and exchange of good practices with other Union agencies with a view to improving efficiency;

8. Welcomes the ongoing cooperation between the Institute and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality; stresses the valuable contribution that the Institute can make to all of Parliament's committees, in order to better integrate the gender perspective in all policies of the Union; acknowledges the specialisation and insight of the Institute, especially in the provision of data and assessment of policies of Member States;

Staff policy

9. Notes that, on 31 December 2021, the establishment plan was 96 % executed, with 26 temporary agents appointed out of 27 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (the same number of posts as in 2020); notes that 12 calls for applications were launched, including four for contract agent posts, five for temporary agents posts, one for a seconded national expert and two for trainees; highlights that during the course of 2021, the turnover rate was 11 %; takes note of the staff screening exercise, with 77,6 % of the Institute's staff allocated to operational tasks, 14,5 % to administrative support and 7,9 % to neutral operations; observes that new rules on middle management staff were adopted on 27 May 2021;

10. Notes the balanced gender distribution in senior management (2 men (50 %) and 2 women (50 %)), and the unbalanced gender distribution on the management board (6 men (19 %) and 26 women (81 %)) and among staff overall (12 men (29 %) and 30 women (71 %)); reiterates its call on the Institute to ensure gender balance in the future; 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;

11. Notes that the Institute, excluding applications for traineeships and seconded national expert posts, received 513 applications in 2021, 68 % of which were submitted by women and 32 % by men; welcomes that gender balance has been achieved in the senior management team but is concerned of the imbalance among staff overall; welcomes the Institute's active participation since 2021 in the EU Agencies Network (EUAN) Diversity & Inclusion Working Group and the various actions taken to improve diversity and inclusion within the Institute;

12. Notes that in 2021 the Institute made arrangements to sign a one year contract with company UAB Manpower Lit for the provision of interim personnel; recalls that the judgment of 11 November 2021 of the Court of Justice of the European Union (case C-948/19) confirmed the applicability of Directive 2008/104/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council ([2]) to decentralised agencies of the Union, as well as the principle of equal treatment of interim workers with statutory members of staff, and that the Supreme Court of Lithuania upheld said judgment; observes in this context that the contracted company UAB Manpower Lit refused to extend the contract for the provision of interim workforce as of 2022;

13. Recommends the allocation of more staff to the Institute and sufficient funding taking into account the Institute's own assessment of its needs in order to cope with a sharp rise of requests for technical assistance on gender mainstreaming, such as in order to respond urgently to the worsening impact of different and successive social, economic and climate crises on women and gender equality and the backlashes against gender equality and women's rights, in several Member States and worldwide;

14. 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 members of staff; notes, with regard to psychological support, that one independent investigation into a claim of psychological harassment was concluded in 2021 and led to the dismissal of the staff member who was subject to investigation; commends the Institute's comprehensive training plan for its staff; encourages the Institute to develop a long term human resources policy on work-life balance, lifelong guidance and the offer of specific training possibilities for career development, gender balance at all staff levels, teleworking, the right to disconnect, the enhancement of a geographical balance to have an appropriate representation from all Member States, and the recruitment and integration of people with disabilities as well ensuring that they are treated equally and that their opportunities are widely promoted;

Procurement

15. Notes that 47 administrative procurement procedures and 62 operational procurement procedures were completed in 2021; notes that the Institute updated the procurement guidelines for staff, including checklists, internal timelines and procedural steps, in order to improve the quality of the documents produced in the framework of the procurement actions;

16. Notes with concern the Court's observation that in 2021 the Institute made irregular payments (amounting to EUR 12 200) for the purchase of translation services that were not in the scope of the related call for expression of interest;

17. Recalls the importance for all procurement procedures to ensure fair competition between tenderers and to procure goods and services at the best price, respecting the principles of transparency, proportionality, equal treatment and non-discrimination; asks for the implementation of the e-procurement IT tools developed by the Commission; calls for an updated clarification of the procedures and templates in the procurement guidelines; notes with concern the Court's observation that the public procurement weaknesses are increasing and remain the largest source of irregular payments in most of the agencies;

([2]) 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).

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 the protection of whistleblowers; notes that the Institute is finalising its conflicts of interest policy; notes that the 2021-2023 anti-fraud strategy was successfully implemented in 2021, in accordance with the related action plan, on the basis of the methodology provided by OLAF; welcomes that, in addition, several trainings in the area of ethics and integrity were conducted in 2021, as well as information sessions for fraud prevention; insists on the need to put in place or regularly update systematic rules on transparency, incompatibilities, conflicts of interest, illegal lobbying and revolving doors;

19. Notes that the Institute published on its website the CVs and the declarations of interests of its director and most of its management board members; recalls the importance of CVs and declarations of interests being published; calls on the Institute to publish CVs and declarations of interests of all its management board members;

Internal control

20. Welcomes the Institute's measures taken in 2021 to strengthen its internal control system; notes in this context the revision of its procedure for the performance of *ex-post* controls; commends in this regard that *ex-post* controls have been performed as of September 2021 and the related action linked to the Court's observation has been completed; further welcomes that the Institute updated its quality assurance policy defining specific control measures for projects;

21. Notes with concern the Court's observations highlighting several weaknesses in the area of management and control systems; notes that the first observation is linked to a recruitment procedure whereby the principles of transparency and equal treatment were undermined, and that the second observation reports on omissions in one selection procedure for seconded national experts that undermine the objectivity thereof and suggest weaknesses in the Institute's internal controls; notes that the third observation is in connection with a procurement procedure whereby all members of the evaluation committee belonged to the same administrative unit, which goes against Article 150(3) of the Financial Regulation; recalls that procedural deficiencies in recruitment procedures undermine the principles of transparency and equal treatment; requests that the Institute improves its internal recruitment procedure to clarify evaluation processes and vacancy notices;

22. Notes that, following the Commission's Internal Audit Service (IAS) Strategic Internal Audit Plan for 2019-2021, a total of 1 800 control operations were performed in 2021 on a sample of 40 transactions with a total budget controlled of EUR 920 776; notes that the final results show that the internal control system in place ensures the compliance of the transactions with the financial rules and with the internal procedures; notes that the report included four recommendations to enhance internal controls in order to address minor deficiencies; welcomes that all the recommendations, including from previous years, were fully implemented by the Institute and the related actions were closed by the IAS in February 2022;

23. Notes that a specific assessment of internal control for the year 2021 was performed in accordance with the Institute's internal control framework and guidelines for the assessment of internal control; notes the conclusion of that assessment that all principles are present and functioning as intended, with six moderate deficiencies identified in relation to components 2, 3 and 5 of the internal control system; calls on the Institute to keep the discharge authority informed about the progress made in addressing these deficiencies; welcomes the actions implemented by the Institute to mitigate areas of risk, including with regard to sensitive functions;

24. Calls on the Institute to further strengthen its internal control mechanisms, including the setting up of an internal anticorruption mechanism;

Digitalisation and the green transition

25. Notes the Institute's efforts to ensure a cost-effective and environmentally friendly working place; observes that the Institute set up a mission management tool to enable the monitoring of the CO_2 emissions produced by travels; takes note that the 2021 monitoring shows the CO_2 emissions of the Institute's missions amounted to 8 tonnes; notes that the Institute has included the requirements of environmental measures in several types of contracts; welcomes the Institute's commitment to install solar panels in its premises in Vilnius in order to improve the environmental performance of the building and to rely on green energy sources only; notes with interest that an application has been procured that would help the Institute keep track of its environmental footprint, and that the application should be deployed in 2022; calls on the Institute to keep the budgetary authority informed about the developments in this regard;

26. Takes note that the Institute has fully digitalised its key processes in 2021 by introducing electronic workflows and e-signature; notes the updating of the Institute's ICT security policy and information management policy; welcomes the Institute's reply that it has a cybersecurity in place and that it has implemented a number of measures regarding cybersecurity such as multi factor authentication system and security trainings for members of the IT team; encourages the Institute to carry out regular risk assessments of its IT infrastructure and to ensure regular audits and tests of its cyber defences;

Business continuity during the COVID-19 crisis

27. Notes that the Institute adapted quickly to ensure business continuity in accordance with the revised single programming document; appreciates the Institute's work in supporting the Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies of the Council, by providing new gender equality evidence as a basis for the respective Council conclusions on the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on gender equality; notes that joint initiatives for COVID-19 response and business continuity plans have been discussed within the network of Justice and Home Affairs agencies; welcomes that the Institute updated its business continuity plan in July 2022;

28. Encourages the Agency to put the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic regarding staff travel into practice, in order to better organise meetings, events and interviews that could be carried out more efficiently remotely than in-person in the future;

Other

29. Commends the Institute for the efforts to increase its public visibility through press briefings, press releases, media campaigns such as the 16 Days of Activism and close contact with journalists; notes the Institute's improved metrics regarding social media and media requests;

30. Refers, for other observations of a cross-cutting nature accompanying its decision on discharge, to its resolution of 10 May 2023 ([3]) on the performance, financial management and control of the agencies.

([3]) Texts adopted, P9 TA(2023)0190.