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To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

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Delegations will find attached document COM(2025) 733 final.

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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 Interim evaluation of the Customs Control Equipment Instrument 2021-2027**

{SWD(2025) 385 final}

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The EU Customs Union, established in 1968, is an area of exclusive European Union competence. This means that only the EU can adopt customs legislation, while Member States are responsible for implementing it. Over time, the role of customs has grown beyond traditional revenue collection (including customs duties, VAT on imported goods and, where applicable, excise duties). Customs authorities now perform many other tasks and pursue wider objectives, such as protecting the security, safety, health and prosperity of people and businesses in the EU. Physical inspections by customs officers at border crossing points, (including land borders, airports, seaports and postal centres), and the analysis of samples taken during these inspections in customs laboratories, must be carried out in a harmonised manner to prevent illegal or dangerous goods from entering the EU while facilitating legitimate trade. To perform their tasks efficiently and effectively, customs officers, border crossing points and customs laboratories must be equipped with modern and reliable control equipment. The Customs Control Equipment Instrument ('CCEI' or 'the instrument') addresses Member States' need for financial support for purchasing such equipment.

The CCEI<sup>(1)</sup> is part of the Integrated Border Management Fund, along with the Border Management and Visa Instrument<sup>(2)</sup>, under Heading 4 (Migration and border management) of the EU budget. The instrument is a new EU funding programme in the field of customs policy<sup>(3)</sup> under the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework, with a budget of EUR 1.006 billion for this period. It provides grants to Member States' customs authorities for purchasing, maintaining and upgrading customs control equipment.

The objective of the instrument is to contribute to adequate and equivalent results in customs controls, with the long-term goal of achieving harmonised customs enforcement among all Member States. The programme aims to ensure customs offices to be adequately equipped with state-of-the art control equipment. This will reduce imbalances in the performance of customs controls by Member States due to differences in capacity. Ensuring the availability of equivalent control equipment also helps prevent goods being diverted to the weakest points in the customs control system<sup>(4)</sup>. The CCEI helps customs authorities to act as one and fulfil their mission to:

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<sup>(1)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1077 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing, as part of the Integrated Border Management Fund, the instrument for financial support for customs control equipment.

<sup>(2)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing, as part of the Integrated Border Management Fund, the Instrument for financial support for border management and visa policy.

<sup>(3)</sup> The customs programme (Regulation (EU) 2021/444) that facilitates and enhances customs cooperation between customs authorities, had predecessor programmes.

<sup>(4)</sup> This practice, known as 'import point shopping', undermines the effectiveness of the whole system.

- protect the financial and economic interests of the EU and its Member States;
- ensure security and safety within the EU;
- protect the EU from illegal trade while facilitating legitimate business activity.

Article 13 of the CCEI Regulation requires the Commission to carry out an interim evaluation of the instrument, assessing its performance in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance, synergies and added value to the EU. This report sets out the instrument's interim results for the 2021-2024 reference period and is based on a Commission evaluation <sup>(5)</sup>supported by an external study <sup>(6)</sup>. The evaluation covers all 27 Member States.

The purpose of the interim evaluation is to assess progress in achieving the instrument's objectives and identify areas for improvement to ensure the programme fulfils its purpose. The interim evaluation enables the Commission to make adjustments to the implementation of the CCEI on the basis of the experience gained and to draw lessons for future policy.

## **2. KEY ELEMENTS AND STATE OF PLAY OF IMPLEMENTATION**

The CCEI was launched in 2021 with the adoption and entry into force of the CCEI Regulation. It is implemented by DG TAXUD in direct management mode through multiannual work programmes. Its only beneficiaries are the customs authorities of the EU Member States. As set out in the first (2021-2022) and second (2023-2024) multiannual work programmes, two calls for proposals were launched, in October 2021 and December 2023 respectively. The first call had a budget of EUR 271.5 million, and the second EUR 284 million. Together, these represent around 55% of the instrument's financial allocation for 2021-2027.

Member States were eligible to submit applications for two topics: border crossing points (BCPs) and customs laboratories. Following evaluation of the applications for the first call, the full budget was used, with 24 grant agreements signed with Member States for BCPs and 18 for customs laboratories. The funds allocated allowed Member States to purchase, maintain or upgrade more than 1 300 pieces of customs control equipment for over 210 BCPs, and more than 500 pieces of equipment for over 30 customs laboratories.

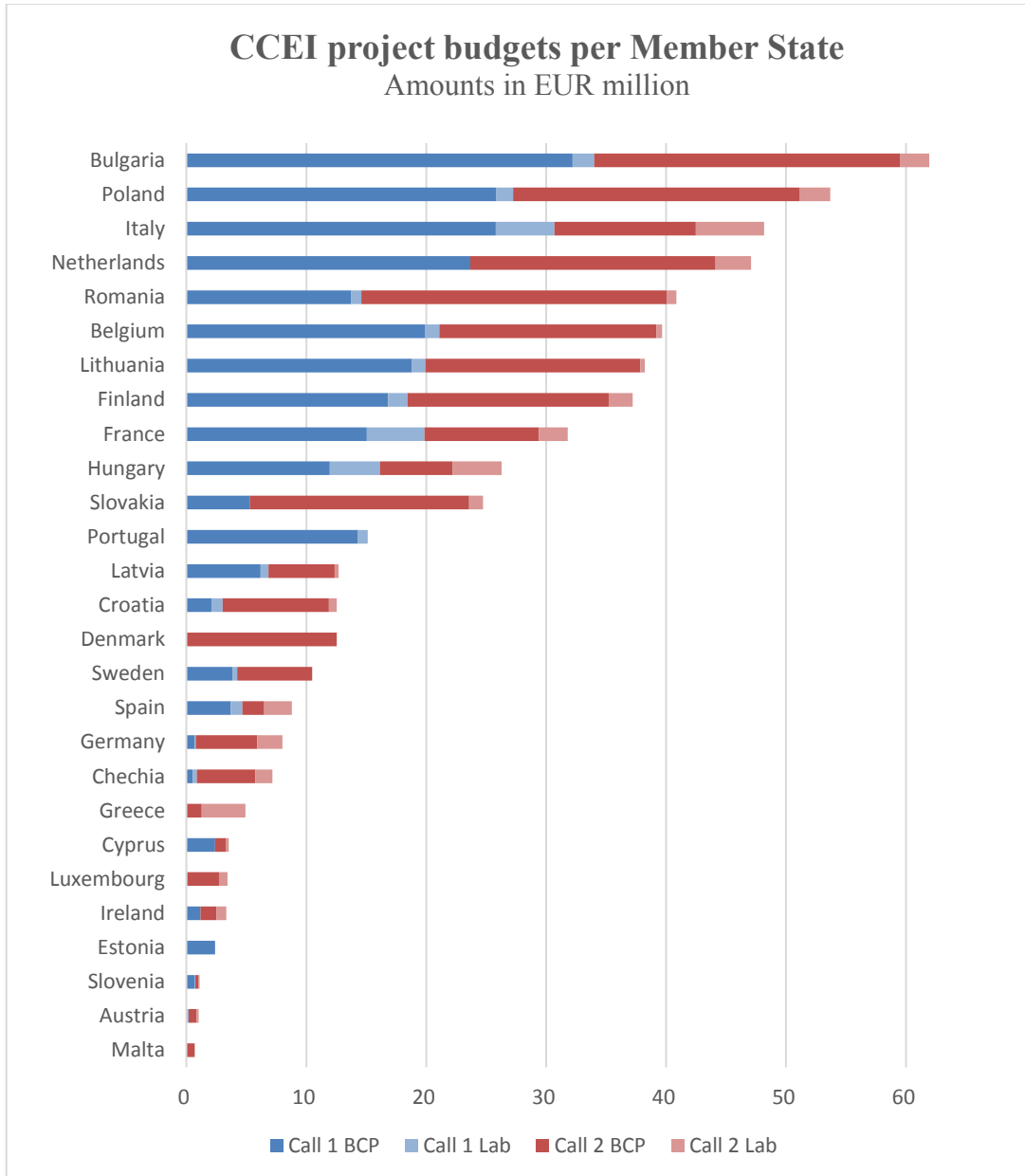
Following the evaluation of applications for the second call, the Commission signed 24 grant agreements with Member States for BCPs and 22 for customs laboratories. One application (from Bulgaria, for BCPs) was still pending finalisation in mid-2025. Including this last pending grant, the budget of the second call was also fully utilised. The value of the projects selected under the two calls is shown in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: Budget allocation per call topic and Member State*

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<sup>(5)</sup> SWD(2025) 385 final, Commission staff working document.

<sup>(6)</sup> Study supporting the interim evaluation of the CCEI 2021-2027, IPSOS and Synthesia, final report, April 2025.



Projects can last up to 36 months, with extensions possible in justified cases. At the time of the interim evaluation, the programme was still in the early stages of implementation. By mid-2025, 13 projects out of a total of 42 under the first call had been fully completed. A further 13 projects were expected to be completed in 2025, with 12 more in 2026 and four in 2027. Projects from the second call, starting in late 2024 or 2025, will run until 2027-2028 <sup>(7)</sup>.

The CCEI was designed to use a data-driven approach to policymaking. Data elements such as available customs control equipment, modes of transport, risks and threats for each BCP and customs laboratory are collected from Member States with each application submitted and in the annual and final project implementation reports. These

<sup>(7)</sup> The AT-BCP project from the call, with a planned duration of 12 months, is scheduled to conclude on 30 September 2025. The ES-BCP project from the same call is in the process of being terminated due to national considerations.

data feed into decisions on policy priorities and fund allocation and enable monitoring and evaluation at project and programme level.

### **3. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE INTERIM EVALUATION**

This section provides a summary of the evaluation. More details are available in the related staff working document.

#### **3.1 Effectiveness**

The activities planned under the CCEI have broadly been rolled out as anticipated, with two multiannual work programmes and two calls for proposals. All 27 Member States have received CCEI funding: 22 under both calls, two only under the first, and three only under the second). Demand for funding slightly exceeded the budget in both calls: by less than 1% for the first call, and 8% for the second.

The design of the CCEI has proven appropriate and fit for purpose. Over 90% of national customs administrations surveyed agreed that the CCEI budget was sufficient to fill performance gaps and make a difference to customs controls in their Member State. The fact that demand for co-financing was so closely aligned with the available budget also provides evidence that the amount of funding available is sufficient to meet Member States' main needs. However, decisions to apply for CCEI funding are not based solely on existing needs, as Member States must also consider other important factors, such as their operational and financial capacity to purchase and use the equipment (including their co-financing budget, trained staff, infrastructure and expected trade flows in BCPs.).

#### *Implementation delays*

A large proportion of projects under the first call have experienced delays in their implementation: 20 of the 42 grant agreements <sup>(8)</sup> have had their duration extended or are currently awaiting extension. Over half (53%) of national customs administrations said CCEI progress in their countries was slower than expected. These delays have an impact on both the overall performance of the instrument (e.g. delays in improving the Customs Union performance) and the Commission's financial planning capacity (as project delays slow the allocation of EU funds).

The most significant factor hindering progress of the CCEI projects has been difficulty completing national procurement procedures. National customs authorities reported the following problems as factors that slowed down the procurement of equipment: cumbersome procedures requiring multiple permits and approvals; a lack of expertise and human resources in procurement units; uncertainty about whether and how to exclude certain suppliers due to cybersecurity concerns; a lack of bidders; appeals or complaints from unsuccessful tenderers; and budget restrictions. These delays, combined with demand only marginally above the available budget under both calls, indicate that

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<sup>(8)</sup> As of July 2025.

Member States' customs authorities have limited absorption capacity for projects of this scale.

Cybersecurity considerations played a significant role in several projects. As concerns have emerged and intensified in recent years, efforts have been made to assess manufacturers' risk profiles and, where necessary, restrict high-risk bidders from procurement procedures for sensitive equipment. The aim is to ensure that only secure solutions receive EU (including CCEI) funding. However, several Member States have reported practical difficulties in doing so, as national legislation provides varying degrees of effectiveness in addressing these concerns. At EU level, the security and cybersecurity protection of equipment was addressed through specific Commission guidance issued as part of the 2022 call and reaffirmed in 2023 through the work of the CCEI Coordination Group. The second call provided additional requirements and guidance to ensure the security and cybersecurity of equipment funded under the CCEI. These included an obligation for beneficiary Member States to involve national security services and to provide supporting documentation showing compliance with security requirements. Nevertheless, this issue has not yet been tackled in a harmonised manner at EU level, with procurement processes sometimes cancelled, re-launched and/or re-designed to comply with national procurement rules and security priorities.

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has also affected some CCEI projects in countries bordering Ukraine, Belarus or Russia, causing delays or requiring the planned equipment to be moved to other locations as a result of significant changes in trade flows.

### *Emerging results*

Despite the delays and implementation hurdles set out above, the CCEI has begun to deliver tangible outputs. According to data submitted by Member States, 907 pieces of equipment had been purchased, maintained or upgraded through CCEI funds by the end of 2024. For BCPs, the deployed equipment represents 41% of all equipment under the first call; for laboratories, it represents 64%.

However, quantitative measurement of the results and impact of the CCEI remains difficult at this early stage. Experience to date shows that all results indicators listed in the CCEI monitoring and evaluation framework <sup>(9)</sup> are affected by significant challenges and limitations relating to the completeness, quality and comparability of the underlying data. By the end of 2024, the main result indicator measuring the percentage of BCPs fully adhering to the common list of equipment that should be available for each BCP type showed slow progress (10.67% against a target of 60%). The indicator measuring the percentage of Member States that have achieved their commitments (on the basis of baselines or targets set by themselves, e.g. the number or value of seizures of various types of goods or substances, the number of checks conducted, or hit rates) also shows

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<sup>(9)</sup> Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/1528 of 4 July 2022 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2021/1077 of the European Parliament and of the Council with provisions on the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation framework.

limited progress (between 10% and 21%, depending on the objective, against a target of 60%). These results also suggest that the targets set may be unrealistic and overly ambitious, as they describe an ideal scenario and do not sufficiently account for the specificities of individual BCPs and customs controls. As the impact of projects takes longer to manifest, it has not been possible to calculate the impact indicators <sup>(10)</sup> for the instrument so far.

In the stakeholder consultation, most Member States (74% of respondents) replied that, based on experience so far and expectations for the remainder of the programming period, the CCEI would make a ‘significant’ contribution towards its specific objective of ‘contributing to adequate and equivalent results of customs controls’. The remainder expected ‘some’ contribution (16%) or responded ‘don’t know’ (10%). National customs administrations also stated that equipment purchased and deployed to date was used effectively and as intended. Most respondents observed noticeable improvements in the performance of both BCPs (especially in detection accuracy, but also in the speed, capacity and number of controls) and customs laboratories. In terms of innovation, 91% of respondents agreed that the CCEI encourages and facilitates the purchase of innovative, cutting-edge equipment. 87% agreed that implementation of the CCEI takes due account of safety and environmental considerations.

#### *Allocation of funding to the highest priority areas*

The evaluation examined how needs are assessed and used to determine the allocation of funding. DG TAXUD identified priority areas in each multiannual work programme to address specific needs. However, these priorities were broad, leaving national customs authorities free to apply for any eligible equipment. The case studies conducted for this evaluation show that some, but not all, Member States focused on the highest risks. Moreover, the marginal oversubscription to the CCEI calls meant that there was essentially no competition for funding. Consequently, there was no need for the Commission to prioritise proposals or work packages most aligned with key needs or risks. The multipurpose nature of the equipment, which could in principle be used to counter a variety of threats and risks, also explains the lack of prioritisation between proposals. In essence, Member States received co-financing for any equipment they chose to apply for, as long as it was eligible under the CCEI. In addition, there are issues with the available data for the needs assessments, including what equipment is currently available at each BCP, compared with what should ideally be available on the basis of traffic volumes and risk profiles. Consequently, the CCEI, as implemented to date, may not always ensure that the most significant gaps and needs at EU level are addressed as effectively and efficiently as possible.

It is difficult to determine the appropriate degree of steering and prescriptiveness. A more centralised, top-down approach – where decisions about equipment purchases and

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<sup>(10)</sup> These impact indicators are related to the contribution of the CCEI to: (i) protecting the financial and economic interests of the EU; (ii) ensuring the safety and security of the EU and its citizens; and (iii) protecting the EU from illegal trade while facilitating of legitimate business activity.

deployment locations are taken at EU level – could in principle result in a more efficient allocation of resources and better address the challenges facing the EU as a whole. However, national competence for customs controls limits the extent of steering that would be politically and legally feasible. Providing all Member States with the opportunity to take part helps ensure broad support for the instrument. The decision to purchase equipment is complex, requiring consideration of multiple factors beyond the mere need for the equipment: existing infrastructure, available space, geographical location, sufficient skilled staff, budgetary constraints, traffic patterns, etc. Some of these factors can arguably only be adequately assessed from a Member State perspective or through on-site inspections by the Commission, assessing the BCPs or customs laboratories in their entirety.

### 3.2 Efficiency

The evaluation confirmed that the CCEI's implementation is largely efficient. National customs administrations reported high satisfaction with DG TAXUD's guidance, programme management and timeliness of support. Feedback on the grant application and award processes was also generally positive. Applicants raised no significant complaints, except on the administrative burden associated with preparing CCEI applications, which several Member States found particularly onerous.

This criticism of the application process relates primarily to the data model and, more specifically, the extensive quantitative data required. These data include: (i) a comprehensive inventory of the Member State's customs control equipment available at BCPs and customs laboratories; (ii), traffic statistics; (iii) risk information; and (iv) performance indicators. According to the data-driven approach enshrined in the CCEI Regulation, the purpose of collecting these data is to objectively identify gaps and needs so that CCEI funding can be targeted accordingly, and to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of the instrument.

However, most national customs administrations found it difficult and burdensome to provide the requested level of detail and granularity. Data collection and reporting often required significant manual effort, as the data typically had to be compiled from multiple sources and the categories were not always aligned with national procedures and frameworks. In some cases, data were not available at all. Several Member States questioned the relevance and usefulness of the data. While they generally understood the need for CCEI support to be informed by a clear understanding of actual needs and risks and supported the Commission's efforts in principle, many doubted whether the current data sheets contributed to this goal.

As a result, there are issues with the completeness, quality, reliability and comparability of CCEI data across Member States and categories. This hinders the full implementation and potential of the data model. The limitations of EU customs data are not unique to the CCEI. The Commission has proposed setting up a dedicated EU customs data hub to: (i) consolidate data currently dispersed across numerous sources; (ii) enable better data analytics; and (iii) enable better processes for risk management and control.

Consequently, there is significant potential for simplifying the data model. The framework could be streamlined to focus on elements for which reliable and comparable data can be collected with minimal additional effort and then used to identify real needs and monitor progress. The granularity of the data to be collected for the indicators should be revised, taking into account any methodological inconsistencies identified and other specificities so far unaccounted for. The indicator targets set at the start of the programme implementation should be reviewed to ensure they are all achievable, and most importantly, realistic.

### 3.3 Coherence

The CCEI's design is internally coherent: its various elements operate well together to achieve its objectives. The CCEI is designed as a relatively simple instrument that provides financial support for a single core activity: the purchase, maintenance and upgrade of customs control equipment by the national customs administrations of the 27 Member States. This support is provided according to a clear and sound intervention logic. Supporting activities (including the meetings and deliverables of the CCEI Coordination Group and the guidance and technical and administrative support provided to applicants by DG TAXUD) are consistent with the instrument's logic and objectives.

Externally, the CCEI is designed to maximise coherence with other EU programmes and funds. It encourages complementarities and synergies with: the customs programme<sup>(11)</sup>, the Border Management and Visa Instrument<sup>(12)</sup>, the EU anti-fraud programme, the Horizon Europe programme, the Technical Support Instrument, the Internal Security Fund and the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Specifically, the CCEI and the EU anti-fraud programme, which is managed by OLAF, are clearly complementary, addressing distinct yet interconnected objectives. Before the CCEI was set up as a standalone instrument, OLAF's Hercule programme played a key role in supporting beneficiaries seeking funding for border equipment. Since the CCEI's inception, the anti-fraud programme has reallocated its resources to other beneficiaries (e.g. other law enforcement agencies) and other types of tools and technologies.

The extent to which this has led to actual synergies and complementarities varies somewhat. This is partly due to differing levels of awareness. Based on questionnaire responses, almost all officials dealing with the CCEI in national customs administrations are familiar with the customs programme, whereas awareness of some other initiatives is considerably lower, despite guidance and information provided by the Commission. Consistent with this, most examples of synergies highlighted by respondents and interviewees related to aspects of the customs programme, such as training, meetings, expertise sharing, and forums such as the Customs Laboratories Expert Team, the

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<sup>(11)</sup> Among other things, the customs programme supports actions that complement the CCEI, such as the exchange of good practices, lessons learnt and training relating to the equipment concerned.

<sup>(12)</sup> The Border Management and Visa Instrument primarily focuses on the control of persons crossing the EU's external borders, thereby complementing the CCEI's focus on goods.

Customs Laboratories European Network and the Customs Eastern and South-Eastern Land Border Expert Team. However, only a handful of examples of complementary use of the CCEI alongside other EU instruments could be identified. For example, a few Member States indicated that they had used the anti-fraud programme to receive funding for items not covered by the CCEI but that complement CCEI-funded equipment (e.g. video recorders, IT equipment and vehicles). The overall impact of synergies with the Border Management and Visa Instrument has not yet become evident.

Many Member States have not yet shared CCEI-funded equipment with other border authorities. This is often due to the specific nature of the equipment, which is designed for customs use and requires trained personnel to operate it.

### 3.4 EU added value

The evaluation assessed whether the instrument made a difference for the primary beneficiaries, namely national customs authorities, beyond what could have been accomplished through national measures and funding alone. One reason for setting up the CCEI was the existence of imbalances between Member States in financial resources for customs control equipment, meaning many customs authorities would not have been able to mobilise sufficient resources for equipment without additional external funding. However, all Member States are eligible for CCEI funding, even if their customs authorities might have had been able to purchase the equipment themselves.

Data collected during the evaluation show that Member States broadly fell into two groups depending on their circumstances. The first group comprises countries for which CCEI funding clearly enabled equipment purchases that would not have been possible from other sources. Most customs authorities belong to this group, with almost two thirds (61%) of respondents stating they would not have been able to acquire the equipment requested in their grant applications without CCEI support. Only 9% held the opposite view, while the remaining 29% were either neutral or did not respond.

High levels of ‘additionality’ were found in six of the in-depth case studies conducted on 10 grants for the first CCEI call. Conversely, the other four case studies covered equipment needs that national officials acknowledged would have been met even without CCEI funding. In these Member States, the role of the CCEI was to accelerate the deployment of needed equipment or raise the political profile of customs control equipment, incentivising customs to pursue greater ambition. Overall, the findings confirm that CCEI funding was mostly additional, although in some cases it simply replaced national funding.

Most Member States either ‘strongly agreed’ (29%) or ‘tended to agree’ (55%) that the CCEI Coordination Group was an effective forum for collaboration in the EU. The expertise, advice and templates shared in the Coordination Group served to reduce national costs for drafting tender specifications, managing procurement and dealing with suppliers. This was especially appreciated by smaller Member States with less capacity.

However, examples of operational collaboration stemming from the CCEI remain extremely limited. Despite EU co-funding and a general enthusiasm to cooperate more closely, decisions on the equipment purchases and use are still largely made at national level. This is in line with both: (i) the CCEI's implementation model (where Member States procure the equipment); and (ii) customs policies more broadly (where individual customs authorities are responsible for risk analysis and controls).

### 3.5 Relevance

The evaluation examined how well the CCEI matches evolving EU needs and priorities, its ability to adapt to changes, and the extent to which it meets the needs of stakeholders.

The EU customs strategy<sup>(13)</sup> and customs action plan<sup>(14)</sup> provide the overarching framework for strengthening the Customs Union. They set out key priorities, such as modernising customs enforcement, enhancing risk analysis and management, improving data sharing, and fostering cooperation between Member States. These strategies emphasise the value of: (i) creating a more data-driven, resilient customs system; (ii) reinforcing risk-based control mechanisms; and (iii) equipping customs authorities with the necessary infrastructure and technologies to both improve enforcement and enable real-time, data-based decision-making. By funding equipment for national customs authorities, the CCEI supports these aims and helps harmonise data-driven enforcement capacity across the Customs Union.

The CCEI's multiannual work programmes and funding calls have remained relevant by adapting their scope to emerging priorities. During the stakeholder consultation, Member States expressed strong agreement with the specific priorities outlined in the first (2021-2022) and second multiannual work programmes (2023-2024).

The CCEI enjoys strong support among all 27 customs authorities. It is widely regarded as an essential tool for reducing disparities in customs enforcement capabilities and ensuring that all Member States can access state-of-the-art customs control equipment regardless of budgetary constraints. The overwhelming majority of customs administrations agree that the needs the CCEI addresses are genuine and correctly identified.

National customs authorities generally view the eligibility criteria as well-aligned with their equipment needs and priorities. However, several Member States identified additional needs that are not, or are only partly, covered by the current criteria. These include infrastructure costs, since some equipment requires specific infrastructure (e.g. new lorry lanes) to function effectively. Another need not covered by the current criteria is IT equipment that enables interoperability, integration (connections within common

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<sup>(13)</sup> Available at [https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/customs-4/eu-customs-strategy\\_en](https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/customs-4/eu-customs-strategy_en).

<sup>(14)</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee, *Taking the Customs Union to the next level: A plan for action*, COM(2020) 581 final, Brussels, 28.9.2020.

systems and networks), centralised control of equipment and centralised processing of data and images. In principle, infrastructure and IT equipment and costs are not eligible under the current CCEI.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

The evaluation highlights the importance of the CCEI as the only programme helping EU customs authorities to invest in modern customs control equipment to ensure consistent and effective customs controls across Member States. Although the instrument is still at an early stage of implementation, taking into account the findings presented in the previous section, the Commission considers the CCEI a valuable instrument, with notable initial achievements in strengthening customs control capacities across the EU. However, it has also identified issues and areas that could be improved to maximise the instrument's effectiveness, efficiency and impact on the harmonisation of customs practices.

The CCEI has responded to real policy and practical needs and largely provided effective and efficient support. The following **strengths** have been identified.

- Relevance and value. The CCEI addresses an important need: tackling disparities in customs control equipment across Member States. Participation by all 27 Member States demonstrates the CCEI's importance in closing gaps and modernising customs control equipment across the EU.
- Coherence with EU priorities. The CCEI is strongly aligned with the broader strategic objectives set out in the Union Customs Code <sup>(15)</sup> and the EU customs strategy and customs action plan, particularly the need for modern, data-driven, interconnected and resilient customs systems. Under the second call, over EUR 200 million in EU funding has been allocated to customs authorities for state-of-the-art equipment. This equipment supports the European Ports Alliance initiative and increases the effectiveness of customs risk management and controls related to illicit drugs and precursors.
- Effective design, management and support. The CCEI's main design features are appropriate for its objectives. Its management by DG TAXUD is widely regarded as effective and efficient by beneficiaries, who are very satisfied with the guidance, communication, and administrative support provided.
- Emerging results. Projects supported by the CCEI have begun to deliver results. Over 900 pieces of customs control equipment have been acquired to date, helping enhance the capabilities of the recipient BCPs and laboratories. While precise impact cannot yet be measured, the instrument is already strengthening beneficiaries' capacity for faster and more accurate controls. Taking into account possible implementation delays, the expectation is that the most urgent needs for

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<sup>(15)</sup> Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 October 2013 laying down the Union Customs Code.

customs control equipment in the EU Member States will be met by the end of this programming period through the grant agreements concluded under the 2021-2027 CCEI calls.

- Additionality of funding. CCEI financial support has provided real added value for many Member States, particularly those with budgetary constraints or extensive borders with non-EU countries. CCEI funding has been instrumental in enabling the purchase of customs control equipment that would otherwise have been unattainable.

As a new instrument, the CCEI has encountered several challenges during implementation. The following **problems and areas for improvement** have been identified and require attention.

- Implementation delays due to national procurement challenges. Nearly half of the grants under the first call required extensions despite the relatively long initial duration of the projects (31 months on average). Most of these were due to: (i) problems with the procurement processes (including a lack of expertise, insufficient resources, appeals and litigation); (ii) difficulty integrating security and cybersecurity requirements; and (iii) restricting access to tenders for high-risk manufacturers. Although action has already been taken within the CCEI to identify and share best practices, national procurement remains a significant bottleneck.

Overall, the time between Member States submitting CCEI project proposals and the actual deployment of the equipment in the field is considerable – typically at least two to three years for smaller projects and up to six or seven years for the most complex ones. This situation, which is further aggravated by the delays mentioned above, highlights the need to review the way in which the instrument is implemented, with particular attention to procurement, interoperability/interconnectivity, and the security/cybersecurity of the equipment.

- Insufficient targeting and prioritisation. The data-driven approach is intended to ensure that CCEI support focuses on the most significant risks and gaps across the EU. However, the first wave of projects primarily reflected national needs and priorities, with limited guidance to ensure they addressed the most pressing needs of the Customs Union as a whole <sup>(16)</sup>.
- Issues with the data model and reporting. National customs administrations found the data requirements difficult and burdensome to meet. There are significant concerns about the reliability and comparability of the data submitted by Member

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<sup>(16)</sup> For the second call, the Commission provided Member States with country-specific guidance recommending what equipment they should apply for to strengthen their weakest border crossing points and customs laboratories. These recommendations were based on an analysis of data provided by Member States during the first call.

States to DG TAXUD as part of their project applications and reports. In addition, the design of certain indicators and corresponding targets has been questioned. As a result, the data collected so far has only been partially usable for its intended purposes, namely (i) identifying gaps and needs to better target CCEI funding and (ii) supporting the monitoring and evaluation of the CCEI.

- Uneven additionality: In some instances, CCEI funding was used to purchase equipment that would have been procured with national resources anyway. Even in these cases, the CCEI funding added value by accelerating purchases and increasing resources.
- Limited impact on innovative equipment: Although innovation was encouraged in both funding calls, it has received little attention in the grants awarded so far. This represents a missed opportunity to deploy cutting-edge equipment to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of customs controls.
- Siloed implementation and limited synergies with other programmes: Despite the CCEI Coordination Group's work, implementation of CCEI grants essentially remains a national responsibility. Joint procurement by Member States has not yet been pursued. Beyond the customs programme, evidence of practical synergies with other EU programmes is limited.

During the remainder of the programming period, DG TAXUD will address all identified areas for improvement to ensure the instrument's general and specific objectives are achieved.

The instrument's policy and institutional framework is likely to evolve significantly in the coming years once the proposed EU customs reform<sup>(17)</sup> is adopted. As the Commission prepares the next EU multiannual financial framework (2028-2034), which seeks simpler, more streamlined and harmonised EU funding programmes with greater flexibility across the budget<sup>(18)</sup>, it is examining how best to achieve customs policy objectives and whether and how to continue supporting purchases of customs control equipment.

In line with the ongoing customs reform negotiations, the Commission proposes that any measures similar to the CCEI be implemented by the future EU Customs Authority. These measures could also be open to enlargement and neighbourhood countries, which are currently not eligible under the CCEI. In addition, they could be used to address urgent crisis situations within the EU. The relevant funding programme for these

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<sup>(17)</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee, *Customs reform: Taking the Customs Union to the next level*, COM(2023) 257 final, Brussels, 17.5.2023.

<sup>(18)</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *A dynamic EU budget for the priorities of the future – The Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034*, COM(2025) 570 final, Brussels, 16.7.2025.

measures would be the proposed single market and customs programme<sup>(19)</sup>, which includes the current customs programme.

Because of the delays in implementing projects under the first call, and to accommodate emerging policy priorities, the Commission has decided to redeploy EUR 84.95 million of the remaining EUR 448 million in CCEI commitments until the end of the current multiannual financial framework. This redeployment will be executed in three instalments: EUR 68.35 million in 2025, EUR 8.85 million in 2026, and EUR 7.75 million in 2027. This exceptional measure is intended to support centralised digital solutions related to customs policy, with EUR 60 million allocated under Heading 1 for the preparation of the customs data hub and EUR 24.95 million under Heading 3 for the carbon border adjustment mechanism. This decision took into account Member States' administrative capacity to absorb and deploy new CCEI projects in succession within a tight time frame.

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<sup>(19)</sup> Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Single Market and Customs Programme for the period 2028-2034 and repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/444, (EU) 2021/690, (EU) 2021/785, (EU) 2021/847 and (EU) 2021/1077, COM(2025) 590 final, Brussels, 3.9.2025.