



Press Release
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EU auditors' activity in 2020: a shift in work and missions

2020 was a year like no other, marked by particularly difficult and sometimes destabilising moments. But these moments never proved to be entirely insuperable. The European Court of Auditors (ECA) coped very well with all the challenges, as shown in its activity report, which is published today.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis in early 2020 did not prevent the ECA from auditing the performance and regularity of EU actions. Business continuity was maintained throughout the year. The ECA continued to provide EU citizens and policymakers with independent assessments on key issues, highlighting what had worked well and drawing attention to what had not.

In 2020, EU auditors examined many of the challenges the EU is facing across the different areas of EU spending, including environment (biodiversity on farmland, pesticides, climate action spending, marine environment), mobility (urban congestion, roads and transport projects across Europe), social (child poverty, cultural investments) and economy (competition policy, capital markets union, trade defence), to name but a few.

The ECA also showed flexibility in adapting its work programme to the new situation and changing circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, some ongoing tasks were re-scoped, and two major reviews on the EU's economic and public health response to the COVID-19 crisis were launched within very tight schedules.

Overall, despite drastically reduced capacity to carry out on-the-spot checks, EU auditors managed to publish all of the annual reports within the official deadlines and brought out 32 special reports and reviews. They also issued 11 Opinions, mainly dealing with the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework and the 'Next Generation EU' initiative.

"Also for us as EU auditors, there is a time 'before' and a time 'after' the COVID-19 crisis. 2020 has changed the way we work. 2020 has also been a turning point in EU finances: over the next seven years, the EU will be able to spend €1.8 trillion, of which €750 billion will be spent in direct response to the COVID-19 crisis. We are being entrusted with major new responsibilities", said ECA President Klaus-Heiner Lehne. "You can rest assured that we will do everything we can to continue fulfilling our role as the EU's independent external auditor to protect European taxpayers' interests."

The full annual activity report is available at eca.europa.eu.

ECA Press

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In 2020, EU auditors have also been very much forward-looking, preparing for the future. They set up a new strategy for the 2021-2025 period that will guide their efforts in the five coming years. The ECA 2021+ work programme highlights audit priorities and details the 73 special reports and reviews to be published in 2021 and 2022. One in four audit tasks to be started this year will be related to the EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the 'Next Generation EU' (NGEU) initiative.

Background information

The ECA is the EU's independent external audit institution based in Luxembourg; it has been operating since 1977. It employs around 900 people. Two thirds of its workforce are auditors of all EU nationalities, and around half of the staff are female. The ECA's 2020 budget was around €152 million, which is less than 0.1 % of total EU spending and around 1.5 % of its administrative spending.

Its audit reports, reviews and opinions are an essential element of the EU's accountability chain. They help the European Parliament and the Council to monitor and scrutinise the achievement of the EU's policy objectives and to hold to account – particularly in the context of the annual discharge procedure – those responsible for managing the EU budget.

The ECA's 2020 activity report is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages.

The activity report gives a full account of the ECA's audits and publications, the checks it performed in Member States and non-EU countries, and engagement with its main stakeholders in 2020. It also provides key information on staff, governance and finances.

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