



Press Release

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Focus on performance in EU cohesion spending should be strengthened, say Auditors

Stronger efforts are needed to embed effectiveness and efficiency in EU cohesion policy, according to a new briefing paper by the European Court of Auditors. Moves towards this goal in the design of the legislation have not always been matched by effective action on the ground, say the auditors. They identify a number of areas with scope for improvement, from strategic planning and policy implementation to monitoring and evaluation. They also warn that, while increased simplification has a number of benefits, it may reduce the focus on performance in cohesion spending in the 2021-2027 programme period.

Around one third of the EU's yearly €140 billion budget is devoted to cohesion policy. According to the European Commission, ensuring that cohesion spending is performance-oriented is one of the cornerstones of the 2014-2020 programme period. It is also one of the main objectives underpinning the Commission's legislative proposals for 2021-2027.

"At the heart of our review are 14 guiding principles based on our extensive audit work through the years. We believe that they are key to ensuring that EU cohesion policy is geared towards performance", said Iliana Ivanova, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the briefing paper. "While there have been positive developments in the legislative framework, a number of areas, such as strategic planning, policy implementation and ensuring sustainability, could be further improved."

The briefing paper looks at the evolution of the EU's efforts to make cohesion spending more performance-oriented. Overall, the auditors welcome the progress made in recent years. In particular, the Commission has taken steps to include key design features such as defining good performance and the conditions necessary to achieve it, how to measure performance and how to report on and evaluate it. However, these have not always been translated into effective implementation on the ground.

The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the briefing paper by the European Court of Auditors. The full paper is on www.eca.europa.eu.

ECA Press

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Moreover, in terms of the Commission's proposals for the next programme period (2021-2027), the auditors praise the way that EU funds are targeted to where they can have most impact, as well as the efforts made to strengthen the performance measurement framework. But they also point to the absence of an EU-wide strategy to succeed the Europe 2020 strategy, and to the risk that programme revisions will not be informed by performance considerations.

Finally, the auditors stress the importance of the legislative framework being adopted in good time by the European Parliament and the Council. Cumulative delays in implementation, together with overlapping eligibility periods, tend to shift Member States' focus away from performance considerations towards spending EU money quickly so that they do not lose it.

Notes to Editors

The aim of the EU's cohesion policy is to reduce disparities between EU regions in order to achieve balanced economic, social and territorial development. Approximately €350 billion, one third of the EU budget for 2014-2020, is spent under this policy.

A Briefing Paper is a descriptive and analytical document concerning a policy area. It does not contain new audit findings. In line with its responsibility to report on sound financial management, the ECA has contributed significantly to the move towards delivering performance. The analysis in this paper is based on extensive audit work in the area of cohesion in the last decade (69 reports), supplemented by reviews from other sources.

The ECA's briefing paper "Delivering performance in Cohesion" is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages.