ECA measures taken in view of the COVID-19 pandemic

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) has taken the necessary steps to be able to continue providing an effective public audit service in the EU, and to deliver timely audit reports, opinions and reviews, during the COVID-19 pandemic, as far as this is possible in these challenging times. At the same time, we express our gratitude to all those who work to save lives and fight the pandemic, in Luxembourg, in the EU and around the world. We also remain committed to supporting the Luxembourg government’s policy on safeguarding public health. We are mitigating the effects of the ongoing health crisis on our staff and have taken precautionary measures to minimise to the extent possible the risk for them and their families.

Press Release
Luxembourg, 15 April 2020

Mitigating the COVID-19 outbreak using EU structural funds requires a balance between more flexibility and accountability, say Auditors

The European Commission is proposing a temporary relaxation of spending rules for the European structural and investment (ESI) funds in order to help Member States in mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak. While EU support needs to be available to Member States as soon as possible, relaxing the procedures in place entails risks, according to a new opinion from the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

The Commission’s proposal is part of the EU’s response to the COVID-19 crisis. In particular, as an exceptional measure, new rules are proposed to transfer ESI funds faster to the Member States and give them greater flexibility to target EU support where it is most needed. For example, this would allow Member States to request 100 % EU funding without putting up their own co-financing or needing to devote a fixed share to key topics such as research or climate. In addition, they could more easily transfer funds between their programmes and regions and decide themselves where they want to target them.

“The current situation requires the urgent mobilisation of all available financial means to address the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on health, businesses and citizens,” said Iliana Ivanova, the ECA Member responsible for the opinion. “This short-term reaction proposed by the Commission is

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors’ opinion. The full opinion is available at eca.europa.eu.

ECA Press
12, rue Alcide De Gasperi - L-1615 Luxembourg
E: press@eca.europa.eu @EUAuditors eca.europa.eu
necessary to support Member States in mitigating the crisis effects, but the right balance should be set and this proposal should not lead to substantial compromises in terms of accountability”.

The auditors note that the proposal does not provide additional clarification on the intended nature of operations for fostering crisis response capacities. They also highlight that reliable information about ESI fund spending in response to the COVID-19 outbreak would not be readily available to the Commission or the legislators, potentially affecting accountability to EU citizens for the use of funds.

The Commission will have to monitor the developing situation carefully to ensure the temporary and exceptional measures are in place only as long as the extraordinary situation requires, say the auditors. While some measures would be available for a fixed period, others could remain until the end of 2023, when the current programme payment period ends. This would allow Member States to finance their crisis response operations, and fund COVID-19-related measures that they have already undertaken.

The Commission’s proposal is currently being discussed by the two legislators – the European Parliament and the Council – and is expected to be finalised in the coming weeks.

Notes to editors

The ECA’s Opinion 3/2020 on amending the EU regulation on the use of the European Structural and Investments Funds in response to the COVID-19 outbreak was requested by the European Parliament and Council in line with the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. It is currently available on the ECA website eca.europa.eu in English; other languages to follow shortly. The auditors previously issued an opinion on the proposed 2021-2027 Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) in 2018 and will shortly issue another one on the proposed modified CPR proposal for 2021-2027.

Press contact for this opinion:
Damijan Fišer – E: damijan.fiser@eca.europa.eu T: (+352) 4398 45 510 / M: (+352) 621 55 22 24