



Press Release

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EU climate action: risk of overstating climate spending without a reliable tracking method, say auditors

The Commission made a commitment, for the 2014-2020 period, to spend at least one euro in every five (20 %) of the EU budget on climate action. It has now raised this target to 25 % (one euro in every four) for the 2021-2027 period. According to a new review by the European Court of Auditors, setting such targets can be an effective step towards achieving the EU's climate objectives, as long as the methodology used to track the money is robust and applied consistently across policy areas.

Tackling climate change is a high priority for the EU. Rather than creating a dedicated funding instrument to address climate change, the Commission opted to set a target for the percentage of the EU budget to be spent on climate action. In this context, tracking climate-related spending means measuring the financial contribution made to climate objectives by different EU funding sources, and assessing whether these spending targets have been met.

“We all want a genuinely greener EU budget”, said Joëlle Elvinger, the member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the review. “Progress has been made, but the risk of overestimating EU climate action remains. Looking ahead to the post-2020 period, to the Commission’s Green Deal and the more ambitious target of 25 %, we need reliable reporting on climate-related spending”.

The auditors focused on the tracking of climate action in the policy areas of agriculture, cohesion and research, which together account for the majority of climate-related expenditure. They had previously ([special report 31/2016](#)) warned of the risk of falling short of the current 20 % target for EU spending on climate action. The new review reaffirms their concerns about the Commission's methodology for tracking climate-related spending. The negative impact of expenditure leading to an increase in emissions was not accounted for. Moreover, it overestimated the extent to which EU spending, and particularly certain common agricultural policy (CAP) schemes, could contribute to tackling climate change.

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' review. The full review is on eca.europa.eu.

ECA Press

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In May 2018, in its first proposal for the EU's long-term budget or 'multiannual financial framework' (MFF) for 2021-2027, the Commission increased its target for EU spending on climate change from 20 % to 25 %. Its proposal for a European Green Deal in December 2019 confirmed this increase.

The COVID-19 crisis may alter political priorities, shifting the focus towards addressing public health threats, boosting the economy or creating jobs. In May 2020, the Commission – at the request of the European Council and the European Parliament – presented a revised proposal for the 2021-2027 MFF period, including a debt-financed recovery plan to address the effects of the COVID-19 crisis. This proposal is currently under discussion. The EU's overall climate-related spending will depend on the outcome of these negotiations and the type of investments on which the additional EU funds will actually be spent. In any case, climate change will remain a global challenge and a central concern for citizens, policymakers and stakeholders.

Notes to Editors

The ECA's [special report 31/2016](#) found that the Commission's method for tracking climate-related spending in the EU budget was simple and pragmatic, but had several weaknesses, such as not estimating the carbon footprint of each action.

EU action on sustainability and climate change is a focal point of the ECA's work and remains a high priority in the [revised 2020 work programme](#). Our most recent publications on the matter include a [special report on biodiversity on farmland](#) and one on [pesticide use](#). Climate change is also the main topic of the most recent [ECA Journal](#).

The ECA's review "Tracking climate spending in the EU budget" is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages. This review is not an audit report. Its aim is to update the ECA's previous analysis of climate tracking in the EU budget, as requested by the Council and the European Parliament.

Information on the measures the ECA has taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic can be found [here](#).

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