



Press Release

Luxembourg, 29 February 2016

Rural infrastructure funds “could achieve much more”, say EU Auditors

EU-financed projects to improve rural areas by building roads, water supply schemes, schools and other facilities provide only limited value for money, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. Although some of these Rural Development projects have made a positive contribution to rural areas, the auditors say that “significantly more” could be achieved with the money available.

Between 2007 and 2013, €13 billion of EU funds were allocated to rural infrastructure through Rural Development Programmes. National spending brought the total to almost €19 billion. The aim was to boost economic growth, enhance the attractiveness of rural areas and improve their links with major infrastructure. Several other sources of funding available at EU, national, regional and local level also support such investments.

In the report, the auditors examined whether the European Commission and the Member States had achieved value for money with the measures they financed. Five Member States were visited: Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland and Romania. Even though some of the infrastructure projects have made a positive contribution to rural areas, the auditors found that the Member States and the Commission, acting through shared management, had achieved only limited value for money,

“The European Commission and the Member States share responsibility for a huge number of infrastructure projects in rural areas”, said Mr Nikolaos Milionis, the Member of the Court of Auditors responsible for the report. “Far more could be achieved if they worked together more effectively.”

Member States did not always clearly justify the use of EU rural development funds and focused on avoiding double funding rather than on achieving an effective coordination with other funds. The risk that projects would have gone ahead anyway without EU money was not effectively managed, although some good practices were identified. Selection procedures did not always direct funding towards the most cost-effective and sustainable projects, while long delays in administrative processes limited the measures’ efficiency and effectiveness.

*The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors.
The full report is on www.eca.europa.eu*

ECA Press

Mark Rogerson – Spokesperson T: (+352) 4398 47063

Damijan Fišer – Press Officer T: (+352) 4398 45410

12, rue Alcide De Gasperi - L-1615 Luxembourg

E: press@eca.europa.eu @EUAuditorsECA eca.europa.eu

M: (+352) 691 55 30 63

M: (+352) 621 55 22 24

Reliable information on what had actually been achieved was often unavailable, making it difficult to direct future policy and manage the budget by results.

Since 2012, the Commission has adopted a more proactive and coordinated approach, say the auditors. If implemented properly, this should lead to better financial management in the 2014-2020 period. However, they warn that weaknesses in the coordination of funds and in performance information are likely to persist.

The auditors recommend that:

Member States should have a more coordinated approach for supporting rural infrastructure, which quantifies needs and funding gaps and justifies the use of rural development measures, with clear, specific objectives for projects. They should also ensure the selection of the most cost-effective projects, take into account the useful life of the investments when establishing sustainability-related requirements and respect a reasonable timeframe for approving projects and making payments.

The Commission should build on the first steps taken to ensure effective coordination and assess whether the different EU funds to be used for infrastructure investments complement each other.

In order to manage the spending by results, the Commission and the Member States should collect timely, relevant and reliable data.

Special Report No 25/2015 "EU support for rural infrastructure: potential to achieve significantly greater value for money" is available in 23 EU languages.