



Press Release

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Rural Development: new planning process too long and complex, say EU Auditors

A new process for planning EU rural development spending is too long and complex, with shortcomings that hinder both performance and results, according to a report from the European Court of Auditors. The auditors also found that, despite efforts by the European Commission, implementation of programmes did not start earlier and spending began more slowly than in the previous period.

EU rural development policy aims to make agriculture more competitive, ensure the sustainable management of natural resources and achieve balanced development of rural economies and communities. The EU plans to spend nearly €100 billion on rural development over the period 2014 to 2020.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development provides financial support for measures carried out by the Member States through national or regional Rural Development Programmes, which are prepared by the Member States and approved by the Commission.

“Planning for a new period always faces the problem of starting before adequate, relevant data are available from previous periods”, said Janusz Wojciechowski, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. “We found that the programming documents are too complex and voluminous and yet insufficiently focused on expected results”.

The auditors examined whether the new EU strategic framework for 2014-2020 reflected a greater focus on performance and whether the new process resulted in good quality Rural Development Programmes which would lead to better results.

They found that even though the framework aimed at a results-based approach, the approved programmes were long and complex, with shortcomings that would hinder the focus on performance and results. They also looked at programming for rural development policy between 2014 and 2020 to check whether it allowed Rural Development Programmes to be implemented earlier and thus avoid the negative consequences of delays. They found that, despite the Commission’s efforts, implementation did not start earlier and planned spending began more

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

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slowly than before.

To improve the process, the auditors recommend that, in future, the Commission should:

- ensure its proposals help develop consistency between individual programmes;
- simplify the programming documents and reduce the number of requirements;
- work with the Member States to ensure reporting for 2019 provides clear and comprehensive information;
- define the various indicators more accurately;
- take stock of the experience gained from the current system;
- prepare the proposals for rural development policy after 2020 in good time.

The auditors also recommend that the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission should consider aligning the long-term strategy with the EU budget cycle and conduct a comprehensive spending review before a new long-term budget is set.

Special Report No 16/2017: “Rural Development Programming: less complexity and more focus on results needed” is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages.