



## Press Release

Luxembourg, 1 September 2022

# Auditors commend the resilience of EU institutions during the pandemic

**The EU institutions demonstrated considerable resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, a report published today by the European Court of Auditors concludes. The European Parliament, the Council, the European Commission and the Court of Justice of the EU all responded rapidly and flexibly, and benefited from previous investments they had made in digitalisation. EU institutions nevertheless still have challenges ahead to make the best of the innovation and flexibility brought about by the crisis in the post-COVID world.**

At the end of January 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was officially recorded in Europe. In a matter of weeks, the disease had spread across the EU. With people urged to stay home and telework, companies and institutions had to find ways to ensure business continuity. The EU institutions had already been confronted with health and safety crises in the recent past: the Ebola outbreak (2014) for the EU delegations, and the Brussels (2016) and Strasbourg (2018) terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, the scale and duration of the COVID-19 crisis was unprecedented. To assess the resilience of the EU institutions in the face of this crisis, the EU auditors looked at the institutions' level of preparedness and assessed how they coped with the COVID-19 pandemic and what lessons they had drawn from it.

*"The EU institutions have not been immune to the COVID-19 crisis. The crisis has had profound and far-reaching effects on the way the institutions function, and how their staff members work",* said Marek Opiola, the ECA member responsible for the audit. *"Resilient organisations are ones that have the capacity to learn from a crisis and emerge stronger. We think that EU bodies have proved their resilience over the past two years of crisis."*

By the second half of February 2020, the four audited institutions had started to activate their business continuity plans. These provided a solid basis for their response to the crisis, the auditors say, although they were not really designed to deal with the kind of long-term disruption that COVID-19 caused. EU institutions therefore had to adapt and complement their plans with ad hoc decisions. They did so successfully, the auditors found, despite coordination being limited by the institutions' autonomy and by their different roles, and because the rules in force in the host Member States differed.

*The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' special report. The full report is available at [eca.europa.eu](https://eca.europa.eu).*

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This diversity of approaches did not prevent the institutions from minimising disruption and continuing to fulfil their roles. Activity was maintained at a level similar to that of previous years. The institutions even managed to adopt important policy initiatives – such as the €750 billion ‘NextGenerationEU’ recovery plan - and the EU seven-year budget for 2021-2027. All of this was achieved while protecting their staff members’ health and well-being, the auditors highlight. Despite uneven levels of preparedness, the audited EU institutions managed to equip all their staff with teleworking solutions within six weeks. The pandemic accelerated the deployment of communication and collaboration tools, as well as paperless workflows. Still, the digitalisation of administrative processes remains a work in progress, in particular for e-invoices.

As soon as the restrictions of spring 2020 were lifted, the EU institutions launched lessons-learned exercises on their responses to the COVID-19 crisis and started identifying innovations that could be kept for the post-crisis world. For instance, the extension of remote ways of working could bring significant savings, in particular on travel expenditure and potentially on office-building costs. Changes to travel arrangements and buildings, as well as the extension of telework, also offer opportunities in terms of environmental impact. However, these have not yet been clearly identified, say the auditors.

### **Background information**

The audit covers four EU institutions: the European Parliament, the Council, the European Commission, and the Court of Justice of the EU.

This report is part of the series of audit work done by the ECA on COVID-19. It provides a first assessment of the impact of the crisis on the functioning of the EU institutions.

Special report 18/2022, “*EU institutions and COVID-19 – Responded rapidly, challenges still ahead to make the best of the crisis-led innovation and flexibility*”, is available on the ECA website ([eca.europa.eu](https://eca.europa.eu)).

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