



REPLIES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

TO THE EUROPEAN COURT OF
AUDITORS' SPECIAL REPORT

EU institutions and COVID-19

Responded rapidly, challenges still ahead to make
the best of the crisis-led innovation and flexibility

Contents

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMISSION REPLIES.....	2
II. COMMISSION REPLIES TO ECA RECOMMENDATIONS	2
Recommendation 1 - Include long-term disruptions and interinstitutional cooperation in the business continuity plans.....	2
Recommendation 2 - Further develop the digitalisation of administrative services.....	3
Recommendation 3 - Assess the suitability of new ways of working in the post COVID-19 environment.....	3

This document presents the replies of the European Commission to observations of a Special Report of the European Court of Auditors, in line with Article 259 of the [Financial Regulation](#) and to be published together with the Special Report.

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMISSION REPLIES

The Commission appreciates the overall positive result of the audit report and the acknowledgement of its timely and flexible response. The Commission also welcomes the forward-looking approach taken by the Court of Auditors in its recommendations.

The recommendations consider the work initiated by the Commission. In line with the first recommendation, a lessons-learned exercise was launched by the Secretariat-General of the Commission involving all key support services. The conclusions of this exercise will feed a review of the Commission's business continuity procedures, processes, and tools to adapt to the post-COVID-19 environment.

Similarly, the push for digitalising the Commission's administration already started before the COVID-19 crisis, yet the crisis provided a further boost to this initiative, resulting in an accelerated rollout of collaboration tools and reinforcement of cybersecurity. This work will continue under the upcoming new digital strategy of the Commission.

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way Commission staff works. On 24 March 2022, the Decision on Working Time and Hybrid Working was adopted. It introduces hybrid and result oriented working arrangements. A review clause in the Decision will allow the Commission to assess the new ways of working of the post COVID-19 environment. On 5 April 2022, the Commission adopted a new Human Resources Strategy as well as a Communication on Greening the Commission – both taking into account lessons-learned from the crisis – as well as accompanying action plans.

II. COMMISSION REPLIES TO ECA RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 - Include long-term disruptions and interinstitutional cooperation in the business continuity plans

Target implementation date: Q1 2023

The Commission accepts the recommendation insofar as it is concerned.

The Commission would like to emphasise that, while specific provisions for long-term disruptions and interinstitutional cooperation were not explicitly part of the business continuity plans, the underlying arrangements to quickly adapt to the COVID-19 crisis were in place. The Commission launched a lessons learnt exercise in early 2022 and will update the business continuity plans in line with its conclusions and the recommendations of the Court.

The Commission notes that, while it is committed to integrate interinstitutional cooperation in the business continuity plans, this also depends on the commitment of the other institutions.

Recommendation 2 - Further develop the digitalisation of administrative services

Target implementation date: Q4 2023

The Commission reiterates its commitment to further strengthening the digitalisation of administrative services and accepts the recommendation.

(a) Advancing the rollout of paperless workflows and extending the use of electronic signature, including qualified electronic signatures;

The Commission accepts recommendation 2a. However, due to the technical complexity and the amount of IT systems involved, the Commission cannot guarantee that by Q4 2023, a full integration of electronic signature (EU Sign) in all Commission's corporate IT Systems will have taken place. The Commission already provides web-based qualified electronic signatures to Authorising Officers by Sub-Delegation and will expand the use of qualified electronic signatures to every system/process identified as able to benefit from their use within the indicated timeframe.

(b) monitoring and extending the use of electronic invoices.

The Commission accepts recommendation 2b. The e-Procurement programme, which is under development, will include the e-Invoicing step. This will contribute to an extension of the use of electronic invoices.

Recommendation 3 - Assess the suitability of new ways of working in the post COVID-19 environment

Target implementation date: Q2 2024

The Commission accepts recommendation 3, its sub-recommendations, and notes that the recently adopted Decision on Working Time and Hybrid Working includes a review clause allowing the Commission to evaluate the implementation of the Decision end of September 2023. The Commission will assess whether adjustments to the Decision are required, after concertation with the trade unions.