



Press Release

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Auditors examine EU strategy to combat desertification

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) is conducting an audit on the EU's strategic framework for combating desertification – where previously fertile land becomes increasingly dry and unproductive. The audit will examine whether the risk of desertification in the EU is being effectively and efficiently addressed.

Desertification is defined by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as “land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities”. Desertification is a result, but also a cause, of climate change. It also results from unsustainable land management practices. It magnifies climate change, as desertified land loses its capacity to stock carbon, so lower volumes of greenhouse gases can be absorbed.

*“Desertification can lead to diminished food production, soil infertility, and a decrease in the land’s natural resilience and ability to store carbon”, said **Phil Wynn Owen, the ECA Member responsible for the audit.** “These in turn can cause poverty, aggravated health problems due to wind-blown dust, and a decline in biodiversity. It can result in loss of livelihoods, which can cause the affected people to migrate.”*

Soil erosion, combined with water shortages and higher temperatures which increase evaporation, further increases the risk of desertification. The situation is most serious in a large part of Spain, southern Portugal, southern Italy, south-eastern Greece, Cyprus, and areas of Bulgaria and Romania bordering the Black Sea. Research indicates that up to 44% of Spain, 33 % of Portugal, and nearly 20 % of Greece and Italy are at high risk of soil erosion. In Cyprus, according to their national action programme to combat desertification, 57 % of the territory is in a critical situation with regard to the risk of desertification.

EU funding for desertification projects comes from a variety of sources, such as the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the LIFE Programme and the EU's research programmes.

Thirteen EU Member States have so far declared themselves to the UNCCD as affected by desertification. The auditors are visiting five of them: Romania, Cyprus, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

The audit report is expected to be published by the end of 2018. A related audit on flood risk

ECA Press

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management in the EU is also scheduled for publication later this year.

Note to Editors

The thirteen Member States so far self-declared to the UNCCD as affected by desertification are Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.