



Press Release

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Link renewable energy better with rural policies, say EU Auditors

The EU should be doing more to more to exploit the synergies between its policies on renewable energy sources and rural development, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. The auditors examined the link between renewable energy and rural development. They concluded that while there were potential synergies, as yet these remained mostly unrealised.

Several EU and national funding programmes are available to incentivise the production and use of renewable energy, one EU source being the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). However, the auditors noted that the European Commission was unable to provide comprehensive up-to-date information on financial support for renewable energy, both overall and under the EAFRD.

“Funding for rural development can play a role in achieving the EU and national renewable energy targets, but rural areas should benefit where support for renewable energy has come from rural development funds,” said Samo Jereb, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. “The European Commission has not provided sufficient clarification or guidance on this.”

The auditors visited five Member States: Bulgaria, France (Basse-Normandie), Italy (Tuscany), Lithuania and Austria. They found that most of the Member States visited did not use the Rural Development funds to prioritise renewable energy projects, which also had the potential to contribute to sustainable rural development. Whilst many projects visited did have positive economic and environmental results, Member States also funded projects that had an economic benefit for the project owners but had little further positive impact on rural areas.

Overall, EU renewable energy policy could be more explicit in establishing the conditions for linking renewable energy successfully to rural development. The renewable energy policy framework currently under discussion has the potential to improve the situation, say the auditors. But neither the current nor the proposed sustainability framework for bioenergy provide an adequate basis for protecting rural areas sufficiently against environmental and socio-economic risks, nor for maximising potential further sustainable development.

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 www.eca.europa.eu.

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The auditors make the following recommendations:

- The Commission and the Member States should take the needs of rural areas into account when designing future renewable energy policy.
- The Commission, the European Parliament and the Council should design future bioenergy policy to better safeguard against the unsustainable sourcing of biomass for energy.

In addition, the Commission should:

- specify the purpose and role of rural development support for investments in renewables;
- require the Member States to provide pertinent information on renewables programme achievements in their 2019 implementation reports;
- reinforce with the Member States the need to give support only to viable renewable energy projects with a clear benefit for sustainable rural development - particularly in the case of support from the EAFRD.

Notes to Editors

Renewable energy is energy generated from renewable, non-fossil based energy sources, which are replenished in a human lifetime. Both production and consumption of renewable energy in the EU have been increasing, but further efforts are still needed if the EU's renewable energy targets of 20 % final energy consumption from renewable sources by 2020, rising to at least 27 % by 2030, are to be met. Using more renewable energy is crucial if the EU is to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to comply with the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

According to a study by the energy consultancy Ecofys, €99 billion of public money was paid in support for the EU energy sector in 2012, mainly from national budgets, of which €40 billion was for renewable energy.

The Commission presented its proposal for the Directive on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources in November 2016. The Council reached agreement on a general approach and the European Parliament adopted the amendments in January 2018. The Council has also prepared its position for the first trilogue meeting.

Special Report No 5/2018 "Renewable energy for sustainable rural development: significant potential synergies, but mostly unrealised" is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages.