



Press Release
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EU Floods Directive 2007 had positive effects overall, but planning and implementation now need improvements, warn auditors

The EU Directive of 2007 led to progress in assessing the risks of floods, but the planning and implementation of flood protection should now be improved, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. The auditors warn that major challenges remain in the much fuller integration of climate change, flood insurance and spatial planning into flood risk management. They are critical of weaknesses in allocating funding.

Flood events have become more frequent in Europe since 1985. In recent years, the trend shows that more than twice as many flash floods of medium to large magnitude have been registered as in the late eighties. As the climate changes, the EU is experiencing heavier rainfall, harsher storms and rising sea levels. According to the European Environment Agency, the consequences of fluvial, pluvial and coastal floods in Europe will overall worsen as a result of local and regional increases in the intensity and frequency of flooding. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other research indicate that rainfall events are likely to become more intense across Europe, and sea levels will continue to rise. Research shows that damage caused by flooding could rise to €20 billion a year by the 2020s, €46 billion by the 2050s, and €98 billion by the 2080s.

The auditors checked whether flood prevention, protection and preparedness under the Floods Directive were based on sound analysis and whether the approach employed was likely to be effective. The auditors carried out visits to river basin projects in eight Member States - Slovenia, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria and the Czech Republic, as well as in the Netherlands.

“Major future challenges remain concerning the much fuller integration of climate change, flood insurance and spatial planning in flood risk management. Floods can cause injury, loss of life, considerable economic costs, damage to the environment and cultural heritage,” said Phil Wynn Owen, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. “We found that the EU’s Floods Directive of 2007 had positive effects overall, but implementation plans suffered from weaknesses in allocating funding.”

The auditors found that the Directive improved coordination between the Member States and the Commission, particularly through the latter’s supervisory and monitoring role, sharing of knowledge and best practices. They found that all Member States visited have begun implementing the flood risk management plans, but that improvements are needed. The flood-related action suffers from weaknesses in allocating funds: the sources of financing were only partially identified and secured in the Member States’ flood risk management plans, funding for cross-border investment was limited, and money was generally not allocated in line with the priorities. In one river basin district, the auditors estimated a gap of over €1.1 billion between planned spending and available financing.

Most Member States used cost-benefit analysis in order to achieve the best value for money from flood-related projects, but the auditors found weaknesses in its use. Two thirds of the Member States did not focus in their

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.

ECA Press

Mark Rogerson – Spokesperson T: (+352) 4398 47063

Damijan Fišer – Press Officer T: (+352) 4398 45410

12, rue Alcide De Gasperi - L-1615 Luxembourg

E: press@eca.europa.eu @EUAuditors eca.europa.eu

M: (+352) 691 55 30 63

M: (+352) 621 55 22 24

plans on green infrastructure projects, which are a cost-efficient means of reducing flood risks. One Member State planned to use grey infrastructure made of concrete to reinforce a six-kilometre long riverbank without considering green solutions.

The auditors warn that major future challenges remain concerning the much fuller integration of climate change, flood insurance systems and land use planning into flood risk management. For example, the Member States visited could not factor in the impact of climate change on the magnitude, frequency and location of floods. Moreover, they generally used historical data, which carries a risk of not reflecting future weather conditions or potential changes in the frequency and severity of floods.

The auditors make a number of recommendations to the Commission:

- check that Member States improve accountability through quantifiable and time-bound objectives for flood-related action in their flood risk plans;
- assess whether Member States identify financial resources to cover the needs arising from the flood risk plans, and set relevant timelines, including for cross-border action in international river basins;
- only co-finance measures prioritised on the basis of objective and relevant criteria, such as cost-benefit analysis and, where relevant, an assessment of cross-border impacts;
- enforce compliance with the Water Framework Directive for new floods infrastructure identified within Member States' flood risk plans,
- whenever Member States request EU funds for new proposed flood infrastructure, check whether they have examined the feasibility of implementing significant green measures;
- check that Member States' flood risk plans include measures to improve knowledge and the tools necessary to understand the impact of climate change, including flash floods and rising sea-levels, and that they better integrate the effects of climate change into flood risk management;
- check whether Member States have planned action to raise public awareness of the benefits of flood insurance and increase its coverage;
- check that Member States have used their flood risk plans to assess the extent to which land use planning rules are adequately designed and enforced in areas at risk of flooding.

Notes to Editors

Emergency and recovery action concerning floods was excluded from the scope of this study. It is not in the remit of the Floods Directive.

The ECA will shortly issue a special report on desertification in the EU.

The ECA presents its special reports to the European Parliament and Council of the EU, as well as to other interested parties such as national parliaments, industry stakeholders and representatives of civil society. The vast majority of the recommendations we make in our reports are put into practice. This high level of take-up underlines the benefit of our work to EU citizens.

Special report 25/2018 "Floods Directive: progress in assessing risks, while planning and implementation need to improve" is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages.