



Press Release

Luxembourg, 2 October 2020

Proposed changes to EU civil protection mechanism should be finalised carefully

The recent proposal on amending the EU's 'Union civil protection mechanism' (UCPM) needs further clarification, according to an Opinion published today by the European Court of Auditors. In particular, it remains to be decided how its increased resources will be used and monitored. While speeding up the EU's response to crises is essential, the principles of sound financial management and accountability need to prevail, the auditors warn.

On 26 March 2020, the European Council discussed the EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It subsequently invited the European Commission to make proposals to establish "a more ambitious and wide-ranging crisis management system" in the EU. With this in mind, the Commission proposed, within less than two months, amending the Union Civil Protection Mechanism. The overall aim of this legislative proposal is to ensure that the EU can provide its citizens in Europe and beyond with better crisis and emergency support.

"Crises are by definition unpredictable. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a stark indication of the absolute need for the EU to be better prepared and able to respond swiftly", said Leo Brincat, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the Opinion. "The recent proposal amending the UCPM is a step forward in that respect. But when establishing its future crisis management response, the Commission should not confuse speed with haste".

The Commission's proposal boosts the UCPM budget capacities from €1.4 billion to €3.5 billion for 2021-2027 to help the mechanism take on new responsibilities, such as creating strategic reserves of medical equipment, developing medical evacuation capacities, or forming emergency medical teams. However, the auditors point out the absence of a proper needs assessment. There is very little evidence in the proposal of the need for this €2 billion budget increase, as it does not provide any estimate of the costs associated with those new tasks. This makes it impossible to determine whether the proposed budget is appropriate for achieving the intended objectives.

Furthermore, some of the new objectives proposed lack any corresponding performance indicators or specific monitoring. The proposal no longer guarantees a minimum share of spending for each of the three key strategic pillars of the EU's crisis response strategy (prevention, preparedness and response). The auditors therefore consider it would be helpful to include a mechanism for reporting the UCPM's actual spending for each of these pillars.

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' opinion. The full opinion is available at eca.europa.eu.

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Regarding procurement rules, the auditors welcome the proposed amendments. The current legislation on joint procurement procedures has certain inherent limitations, as recently illustrated during the COVID-19 crisis: the first procedure was launched only four weeks after the first confirmed cases. Moreover, under joint procurement rules, even though the Commission is responsible for signing the framework contract, only Member States can buy the equipment directly. Under the proposal, the Commission will be able to undertake procurement directly in order to play a more autonomous role in the process. According to the auditors, this could allow the EU to react more quickly while reducing the burden on Member States. Similarly, the Commission's proposal to use indirect management in addition to direct management to implement the UCPM budget also has the potential to make the EU's crisis response more flexible.

Notes to editors

Responsibility still lies primarily with the EU Member States for preventing, preparing for and responding to disasters and crises on their territory. However, the European Commission plays a supporting role in the area of civil protection. This means that some action in this area is taken at EU level, and that the EU itself will play a more prominent role in responding to future health threats.

The UCPM was established in 2013 to improve cooperation between the EU and the participating states with a view to preventing, preparing for and responding to natural and man-made disasters more effectively. Any country in the world can call for assistance within the UCPM framework.

This opinion on the UCPM complements others the ECA has recently published on exceptional flexibility in the use of the [European Structural and Investments Funds](#), on [REACT-EU](#) and the [Common Provisions Regulation](#), on the [Just Transition Fund](#) and the [Just Transition Mechanism](#), and on the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#).

The ECA contributes to improving EU financial governance by publishing opinions on proposals for new or revised legislation with a financial impact. These opinions provide an independent assessment of the legislative proposals by the EU's external auditor.

The legal basis for the Commission's proposal makes it mandatory to consult the ECA; the Council therefore wrote to the ECA to obtain its views.

ECA Opinion No 9/2020 accompanying the Commission's proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism is currently available on the ECA website eca.europa.eu in English; other languages will follow shortly.

Information on the measures the ECA has taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic may be found [here](#).

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