



Press Release

Luxembourg, 13 November 2020

Performance check for EU programmes: mixed results, while information quality should be further improved

The European Commission's reporting on how well the EU spending programmes perform shows mixed results, according to a new report published today by the European Court of Auditors (ECA). While the auditors welcome the fact that the reporting keeps improving and is becoming more balanced, they also point to a number of problems: the quality of the Commission's performance assessments still varies across programmes, and setting robust and informative performance indicators remains a challenge. They also say that the Commission should work with Member States to further ramp up data reliability in its reporting on budget performance.

The auditors examined whether the Commission has a robust process for high-level yearly reporting on the performance of EU policies and spending programmes and on whether they achieve their objectives effectively, efficiently and economically. *"The citizens want to know whether EU programmes deliver results and value for money," said Jan Gregor, the ECA Member responsible for the report. "The Commission has good procedures for preparing high-level performance reports and presents more balanced and clearer assessments than in the past. However, it does not clearly indicate the reliability of reported information."*

In recent years, the Commission's annual performance reporting has evolved from a collection of stand-alone reports into a more coherent package. It now includes sections on performance assessments per spending programme, which is a significant positive development. However, the auditors consider that the Commission's assessments in the more concise and high-level Annual Management and Performance Report (AMPR) tend to present an overly positive picture, compared to the more detailed reporting in the programme statements. In addition, the auditors say that a full performance assessment of certain programmes is still not possible, mainly due to the limited information provided. Nevertheless, based on the indicators presented for 2019 as well as recent Commission evaluations and their own audits, they assessed whether programmes in all main areas of the EU budget were "on track" to meet their objectives.

Competitiveness: for the EU's Horizon 2020 research programme, there are no indications that performance is at risk, and examples of successful projects are plentiful. The auditors found a strong case for the programme providing EU added value through its uniqueness and pan-European character. For another flagship programme, the EFSI fund ("Juncker plan"), the indicators show it is on track to mobilise €500 billion of investment. However, the auditors note the market could have accommodated a share of

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' report on EU budget performance. The full report is available at eca.europa.eu.

ECA Press

12, rue Alcide De Gasperi - L-1615 Luxembourg

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

those investments and warn of overstated multiplier calculations which may contribute to an overly positive assessment.

Cohesion: although the Commission and Member States had already revised the initial 2014-2020 targets, just over a third of indicators for the European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund show timely progress. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, most employment and education targets were likely to be met by 2020, but progress on R&D, poverty and social inclusion lagged behind. In this policy area, the Commission's own performance data indicates that the programmes fall short of initial expectations.

Natural resources: according to the auditors, the Commission's 2019 reporting on the CAP's performance presents an overly positive narrative and is not focusing on results. A key weakness is that the performance indicators for the 2014-2020 period are not based on a detailed intervention logic for providing CAP financial support. For example, direct payments to farmers have reduced farmers' income volatility, but they are not targeted at helping farmers achieve a fair standard of living. Moreover, the CAP measures are found to have low impact in addressing climate change.

Security and citizenship: the Commission's reporting does not indicate whether the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund is progressing well towards its objective, but the information available points to its relevance and EU added value. For integration and legal migration, indicators show its achievements in a positive light, also because long-term impacts (such as differences between migrants' and EU nationals' job prospects) cannot yet be assessed.

Global Europe: the Commission does not provide enough information for a robust performance assessment of two funding instruments, i.e. one for cooperation with developing countries and the other for relations with the EU's southern and eastern neighbours. For the latter, the indicators nevertheless reveal a positive trend for poverty reduction, education, gender equality and human development, and a worsening one on consolidating democracy, rule of law and political stability.

Finally, the auditors acknowledge that its auditees have put into practice the vast majority of their past recommendations for improving the performance of EU programmes. There is nevertheless scope for further progress.

Background information

The EU's 2014-2020 budget provides 1 092 billion euros through 58 spending programmes. The auditors sampled nine, which make up around 75 % of all payments made by the end of 2019. The ECA is increasingly assessing how well European policies and programmes perform and whether they deliver EU added value. It reports on performance of EU action mainly in [special reports](#). This year, it published for the first time a report on the performance of the EU budget which looks at the results and progress of EU programmes at the end of 2019 in each policy area of the multiannual financial framework and is currently available in English first at eca.europa.eu. This pilot report forms part of the ECA's annual reporting and complements the annual report on the implementation of the 2019 EU budget, which was published recently, and comes in response to the European Parliament and Council's call for more insight into the performance of each European policy.

Press contact for this report

Damijan Fišer – E: damijan.fiser@eca.europa.eu T: (+352) 4398 45510 / M: (+352) 621 552 224