



Press Release

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European environmental economic accounts should be made more useful, say Auditors

European environmental economic accounts (EEEAs) should be made more useful for policymakers, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. EEEAs are an important source of information for monitoring and evaluating environmental policies. But several issues prevent them from reaching their full potential, say the auditors.

EEEAs provide a statistical framework to help describe the relationship between the environment and the economy. For instance, they make it possible to identify how much protecting the environment costs and who pays for it. As such, EEEAs are important for evaluating key policies, such as the EU's 7th Environment Action Programme (7th EAP), and for measuring progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The auditors assessed how the European Commission had set up, managed and used the EEEAs and whether it had taken account of data needs when designing and developing them. They also examined the quality assessment procedures for EEEA data.

“Environmental pressures are increasing and it is essential that policy-makers have at their disposal up-to-date and reliable information to monitor progress towards sustainable development”, said João Figueiredo, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. “Our audit shows that European Environmental Economic Accounts must be further improved to maximise their impact and allow for timely and effective action.”

The auditors found that the Commission had not compiled a full set of EEEA data needs for environmental policy-making. Although they acknowledge the cooperation between the Commission services using the accounts, they found that the Commission should ensure that relevant data is available to support policy developments and monitoring. While the EEEA's strategic framework proposes several objectives, some of these have been repeated for more than a decade, and there is no thorough action plan including milestones and estimates of the budget needed to achieve them. The auditors therefore conclude that the framework is not yet comprehensive.

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 eca.europa.eu.

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The auditors also found shortcomings in the implementation of the EEEA modules, which reduced their relevance to the policymaking process. Proposals to make modules mandatory were largely based on data availability and administrative considerations in the Member States, rather than on data necessity. Moreover, their implementation has taken too long (around ten years) to meet short and medium-term data needs. Finally, the auditors found that the EEEA modules were not used to their full potential for monitoring progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Europe and evaluating the 7th EAP.

Timeliness of data is a major criterion in the EEEA legal framework, which states that the Commission should provide EEEA data with a time lag of two years. Although the auditors note that the time taken to publish data has gradually improved, Member States do not always send the required data on time. Above all, receiving data earlier could greatly improve the EEEAs' usefulness. As regards data quality, the auditors found that issues were generally detected during the validation process. However, they also point out weaknesses in this phase: Member States' reports do not necessarily include enough information to properly assess data quality and comparability.

To enhance the usefulness of the EEEAs, the auditors recommend in particular that the Commission should improve:

- the strategic framework;
- the relevance of the modules; and
- the timeliness of the data.

Notes to Editors

In 1994, the European Commission presented its first strategy on “green national accounting”. Since then, it has worked together with Member States, the UN and the OECD to analyse the range of statistical data available for the European Environmental Economic Accounts. The Commission and Member States implement the EEEAs under the European Strategy for Environmental Accounts in line with the UN System of Environmental Economic Accounting. Eurostat, as the statistical office of the EU, is the main EEEA data provider.

Special report 16/2019 “European Environmental Economic Accounts: usefulness for policymakers can be improved” is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages. It follows other ECA publications in recent years on that topic, notably a [review on sustainability reporting in the EU](#) published in June 2019. In the coming weeks, the ECA will also issue a special report on EU greenhouse gas inventory.

The ECA presents its special reports to the European Parliament and the 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.

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