

# ECA: EU Money Granted to NGOs Still Not Transparent

Thomas Wahl

## News

On 7 April 2025, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) published its [special report no 11/2025](#) in which it examined the transparency of EU funding granted to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in EU internal policies.

The ECA highlighted that, in the audited period 2021-2023, over 12,000 NGOs received money from the EU internal policy programmes (e.g., cohesion, research, migration and the environment) amounting to €7.4 billion. Over the past decade, a substantial part of the Commission's direct funding went to a small number of NGOs. ECA's auditors doubt, however, whether these figures are fully correct as a reliable overview is lacking. The information is published in a fragmented way, which hampers transparency, impedes analysis of whether EU funds are overly concentrated on a small number of NGOs, and restricts insight into the role of NGOs in EU policies. Other shortcomings found are, *inter alia*:

- Disclosure of information is insufficient, and Member States do not monitor or report on the EU funding granted to NGOs;
- The definition of "NGO" is unclear and varies at the EU and Member State levels; thus it cannot be ensured that NGO's are correctly classified in the EU's financial transparency system. In addition, there are no checks on important aspects of the NGOs' status;
- The Commission did not properly disclose certain EU-funded advocacy activities such as lobbying;
- EU fund managers do not proactively search for potential NGO breaches of EU values, such as the rule of law and human rights, but rely mainly on self-declarations.

Against this background, the ECA recommends that the Commission should do the following:

- Improve guidance on classifying non-governmental organisations;
- Improve the quality of information on EU spending in the financial transparency system;
- Strengthen verification of compliance with EU values.

ECA's special report no 11/2025 was drafted against the background of calls by the European Parliament to strengthen transparency and accountability of EU funding granted to recipients, including NGOs, as a consequence of the 2022 "Qatargate" scandal (→ [eucrim 4/2022, 242-243](#)). The present ECA report follows the ECA's 2018 [audit report](#) on EU funding granted to NGOs in external action policy and the 2024 [special report](#) on the EU's transparency register. The ECA states that only minor improvements have been made compared to its 2018 audit.

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