

ECA Report on Results of EU Spending Programmes

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News

On 15 October 2021, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) published its [Report on the performance of the EU budget – Status at the end of 2020](#). In the report, the ECA examined the results achieved by EU spending programmes financed by the EU budget, based on performance information from the Commission and other sources, including its own recent audit and review work.

The report noted that, while some of the spending programmes were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (such as Erasmus+ activities, progress has been made – as indicated by the available information. The ECA stressed that the Commission had generally taken into account the lessons learned from the relevant evaluations and audits.

In the area of “Competitiveness for growth and jobs” the principal programmes are Horizon 2020 (H2020) for research and innovation and Erasmus+ for education, training, youth, and sport. The ECA remarked that Erasmus+ is valued by stakeholders and the public as a useful programme that achieves its objectives. Overall, the auditors noted the positive added value of the programme. Individuals participating in it report positive effects on their professional skills. Although the programme had a concrete effect on organisations, as it allows them to strengthen and broaden international networks, there is less evidence of fundamental changes to institutional or pedagogical practices. The COVID-19 pandemic had major disruptive effects in Europe and negatively impacted many Erasmus+ activities, especially individual activities requiring mobility.

In the area of “Economic, social and territorial cohesion” the auditors selected the European Social Fund (ESF) – which promotes employment and social inclusion, integrating disadvantaged people into society, and ensuring fairer life opportunities – for the performance analysis. The ECA found that the performance framework increased the availability of such information; however, the focus was on financial input and output rather than on results. The auditors noted that progress towards the Europe 2020 target on employment was positive but that, results were lacking, mainly due to the pandemic.

In the area of “Natural resources” – covering expenditure linked to policies on the sustainable use of natural resources and financing the Common Agricultural Policy, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), and environmental and climate action – the ECA selected the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) for its analysis. The EMFF supports the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) – objectives such as addressing unsustainable fishing and preventing the degradation of the marine environment. The auditors commented that performance information produced or obtained by the Commission should reflect the results achieved through the EMFF intervention, highlight any unsatisfactory progress, and trigger corrective action. The ECA stressed that the CFP target of reaching the desired conservation status for all fish stocks by 2020 is unlikely to have been met and criticises the key indicator used to monitor progress in this area

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(fishing at maximum sustainable yield levels), as it does not contain sufficient information indicating the level of progress made. The auditors pointed out that problems persist in regard to the fisheries control system, which is a crucial factor in implementing the objectives of the CFP.

In the area of “Security and Citizenship” the ECA decided to analyse the Internal Security Fund Borders and Visa (ISF-BV), an instrument that provides support for border measures. The auditors noted that the ISF-BV has provided substantial support to help Member States handle the costs and challenges that emerged during the migration crisis and which have put enormous pressure on the EU’s external borders. They concluded that the indicator measuring progress in accomplishing the instrument’s overarching objective had been too broadly defined, undermining conclusions on the fund’s overall performance. Regarding the specific objective of support for a common visa policy, the report pointed out that the ISF-BV has helped upgrade more than 2 620 consulates, thereby creating more secure and efficient visa processing centres.

Regarding the area of “Global Europe” the ECA analysed the performance of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance II (IPA II), which provides pre-accession assistance to candidate countries and potential candidates. The auditors observed that the indicators reported by the Commission in the programme statement show a modest performance for IPA II. While IPA II contributed to modernisation in the agri-food and rural development sectors, the auditors concluded that the overall progress of IPA II beneficiaries’ economic, social, and territorial development is slower than expected.

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