



Press Release

Luxembourg, 14 March 2022

EU auditors to check the EU's support for workers during the pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020, Member States introduced schemes to support workers whose livelihoods had been destabilised by the large-scale closure of various sectors of the EU economy. The EU provided its own support to these measures in the form of the SURE instrument – temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency. The scheme has allowed the EU to provide loans up to the value of €100 billion to support Member States' own schemes aimed at supporting workers whose income was at risk as a result of the pandemic. The European Court of Auditors is preparing an audit to determine whether the European Commission responded effectively to the risk of pandemic-related unemployment in the EU through the SURE instrument.

The SURE instrument was conceived and implemented in response to the unfolding COVID-19 crisis. It was designed as a complement to Member States' own employment-preservation schemes ranging from traditional short-time work and wage-subsidy schemes for workers to new income support schemes for the self-employed. SURE can also support some health-related measures. The SURE instrument represents a significant development in how EU funding is financed, as it is funded through loans raised on capital markets by the Commission. Those funds have been provided to the 19 Member States participating in the instrument to use in their national COVID-19 response schemes. But in a show of solidarity, all of the EU's 27 Member States have agreed to guarantee the loans jointly. If a Member State fails to make a repayment on the loans in future, all of the other Member States can be held jointly liable for 25% of the overall loan amount in proportion to their relative prosperity. The rest is guaranteed by the EU budget.

"The latest estimates suggest that around 31 million people and 2.5 million companies received support under the SURE instrument in 2020," said Iliana Ivanova, the ECA member who will lead the audit. "Almost €90 billion has already been disbursed. That's a huge amount of EU support. We want to investigate whether the European Commission's response was effective in its aim of helping crisis-hit workers and businesses in the EU to keep jobs intact. The conclusions and recommendations of our audit report will help the EU to learn lessons for similar schemes if a crisis on this scale ever happens again."

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' audit preview, which is available at eca.europa.eu.

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The auditors will assess whether the Commission's actions in respect of the SURE instrument were timely and appropriate, and whether the Commission has developed a robust framework for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the instrument.

Background information

The SURE instrument is a temporary instrument aimed at supporting Member States' own responses to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on employment. By the end of January 2022, the Council of the EU had approved almost €95 billion in financial support under the scheme, of which €90 billion had already been disbursed.

Audit previews are based on preparatory work undertaken before the start of an audit. They should not be regarded as audit observations, conclusions or recommendations. Audit preview 01/2022, "*Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE)*", is available in English on the [ECA website](#).

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