



Press Release

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EU Auditors highlight key areas for simplifying Cohesion policy after 2020

Simplifying rules for Cohesion spending is a key challenge to be addressed for the post-2020 period. In a new Briefing Paper from the European Court of Auditors, the auditors set out a series of principles to be followed and key areas that need attention by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States when deciding on new rules.

“Over the years, the delivery of Cohesion policy has become too complex, despite the efforts of the European Commission”, said Ladislav Balko, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the Briefing Paper. “There is agreement on the need for further simplification after 2020, but there also must be clarity on the objectives of simplification and how to do it.”

In general, the auditors propose that the guiding principles for simplifying the policy after 2020 should entail a well-defined strategy with an evidence-based and structured approach. In order to achieve effective simplification the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council and the Member States all need to demonstrate firm commitment; they should also keep in mind that simplification is not a goal in itself and should not jeopardise improvements already achieved in internal controls.

The auditors identify five key areas that require particular attention by the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council and Member States.

- Simple, clear and stable rules and harmonisation of the rules between different funds and programmes.
- The management structure of Operational Programmes. The current arrangements involve more than 390 programmes with some 1,400 authorities in charge of their management and control. This creates unnecessary complexity and hinders efficient policy delivery.

The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the briefing paper by the European Court of Auditors. The full paper is on www.eca.europa.eu.

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- “Gold-plating” (adding greater complexity at Member State level) and administrative inefficiency in project selection and programme monitoring. There is a significant potential for savings through better use of modern technology.
- The use of simplified cost options and other measures based on conditions. The Commission and the Member States should ensure a greater focus on performance when payments are made against fulfilment of conditions.
- The efficiency and effectiveness of controls. The Commission should set out clear arrangements for the scope and frequency of verifications at all levels. Member States should address problems such as the need for multiple submissions of the same documents.

Notes to Editors

A Briefing Paper is not an audit report, but a review based on publicly available information and the auditors’ work in the policy area.

Cohesion policy aims to reduce disparities between the levels of development of Member States and regions. The total budget for the Cohesion Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund is €350 billion for the 2014-2020 period.

The Commission is expected to present its legislative proposals for Cohesion policy tomorrow.

The ECA’s briefing paper “Simplification in post-2020 delivery of Cohesion Policy” is currently available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in English; other languages will be available in due course.