

Commission 'failing' to monitor its sustainable development activities, says EU auditors

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News

The European Court of Auditors has said the EU is failing to providing citizens with reliable information on it contributes to sustainable development in areas such as climate change



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The European Commission does not report on or monitor how the EU budget and its policies contribute to sustainable development and achieving the SDGs, according to a new review by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) released at their press conference in Brussels on Wednesday.

This failing, says the ECA, is despite the EU's much vaunted commitment to sustainability and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Speaking on Wednesday, Eva Lindström, the member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the review, said, "Citizens want and need reliable information on how the EU contributes to sustainable development in areas such as climate change."

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“Given the EU’s commitment to the SDGs, we would expect the Commission to be able to report on the results achieved.”

The EU says it is committed to sustainability and implementing the SDGs and EU law requires certain large companies to report on sustainability, and they increasingly include the SDGs in their reports.

However, the auditors said the “building blocks for meaningful sustainability reporting” at EU level are largely not yet in place.

The Commission has not yet built sustainability into reporting on performance due to the absence of a long-term strategy on sustainable development up to 2030, said the report published on Wednesday.

“Citizens want and need reliable information on how the EU contributes to sustainable development in areas such as climate change” ***Eva Lindström, European Court of Auditors***

The auditors examined whether the Commission “leads by example” in reporting on sustainable development. They also checked whether other EU institutions publish sustainability reports.

Two EU institutions and agencies currently publish a sustainability report, while reporting by others was described as “piecemeal.”

Through sustainability reporting – also known as corporate social responsibility or non-financial reporting – an organisation publishes information about its economic, environmental and social impact.

A sustainability report also demonstrates the link between strategy and commitment to a sustainable global economy.

“Given the EU’s commitment to the SDGs, we would expect the Commission to be able to report on the results achieved” ***Eva Lindström***

Currently, Eurostat already presents statistical trends on the SDGs in the EU, largely drawing on information provided by member states. However, the Commission does not yet report on the contribution of the EU’s budget and policies towards the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

The ECA report says external action is one exception, where the Commission is adapting its

performance reporting system towards sustainability.

In this context, the auditors note that the EU “still lacks a strategy” on sustainable development up to 2030 setting out the SDGs relevant for the EU, and the objectives and targets to report on. The Commission has recently “taken steps in the right direction” and published a “reflection paper” outlining scenarios for a sustainable Europe.

However, the auditors say the paper does not include a “gap analysis” of what more the EU needs to do in terms of budget, policy and legislation. Nor does it present the contribution of EU spending programmes towards implementing the SDGs.

About the author

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