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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

**of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and its European Environment
Information and Observation Network (EIONET) for the period 2017-2021**

{SEC(2024) 218 final} - {SWD(2024) 204 final}

The EEA is one of the 35 EU decentralised agencies, established in 1990¹ and headquartered in Copenhagen with around 240 employees (in 2021). The EEA's founding Regulation encompassing the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET), defines its general objectives linked to data provision and knowledge to support EU environmental policies, and to inform the public about the state of the environment. For the purpose of this evaluation, these general objectives, together with the objectives of the EEA's work programmes, were translated into specific objectives² against which the EEA and Eionet performance from 2017 to 2021 are examined.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the performance of EEA and EIONET against the objectives of the Regulation and the work programmes during the period 2017 to 2021, as well as progress made since the last evaluation³ covering the period 2012-2016. In addition, it analyses if the Regulation remains fit for purpose in light of the current EU policy priorities, the European Green Deal (EGD) and the 8th Environment Action Programme (EAP). The evaluation's geographical scope covers the EEA's 32 member countries⁴ and 6 cooperating countries⁵. The previous evaluation serves as the baseline scenario.

The evaluation is done through the five standard evaluation criteria defined in the Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines: effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value. The evidence supporting the evaluation was mainly collected through an external supporting study that produced a final report⁶, based on a mixed approach combining secondary data (programming, annual activity reports, EEA internal documents, publications, etc.) and primary data (interviews, workshops, and online survey).

The evaluation encountered limitations including the low response rate of the online survey and the difficulty to engage stakeholders beyond the "inner circle" of those working directly for or with the EEA and Eionet, the absence of benchmarks, varying EEA Multiannual Work Programmes and lack of detail in EEA programming documents, inconsistencies in performance indicators and a difficulty to quantify benefits. Some mitigating measures were taken to ensure the robustness of the analysis but with an increased risk of over-reliance on qualitative information.

The available evidence indicates an overall good performance of the EEA and EIONET across four of the five evaluation criteria – effectiveness, coherence, relevance and EU added-value. However, the insufficient monitoring and evaluation framework and gaps in data availability (e.g. on precise allocation of resources) limit the assessment in particular as regards efficiency.

¹ Council Regulation (EEC) No 1210/90, amended by Council Regulation (EC) No 933/1999 and Regulation (EC) No 1641/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council and, subsequently, codified through [Regulation \(EC\) No 401/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009](#).

² : (i) inform EU environmental and climate policies, and global commitments; (ii) coordinate EIONET; (iii) conduct regular assessments on the state of the environment; (iv) inform public by ensuring access to environmental and climate data; (v) make full use of digitalisation to improve operations.

³ SWD (2018) 470 final, 19.11.2018.

⁴ Including the 27 EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Türkiye

⁵ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo

⁶ [Ares\(2023\)7746297](#)

Effectiveness

The EEA and EIONET have effectively contributed to the development and implementation of EU environmental and climate policies. Their data collection and data management efforts provided input for policy development, monitoring, and international commitments, with notably the SOER 2020 helping to shape EGD priorities. However, some misalignments with the policy agenda and issues with prioritisation of outputs point at areas for improvement. The positive impact of SOER 2020 suggests aligning future SOER releases with the EU legislative term to improve the EEA's policy relevance. Coordination of EIONET was effective with the Network promoting active collaboration and knowledge sharing, although the consistency of modernisation across countries requires attention and further assessment. The EEA's outreach was successful specifically with regard to institutional stakeholders, but it is difficult to assess the public's engagement. The Agency has incorporated advanced digital technologies in its strategy, but there is still untapped potential for further improvements, in particular for leveraging cutting-edge technologies and enhancing the use of Copernicus products.

Efficiency

Efficiency is difficult to gauge and presents shortcomings. Overall, the evidence suggests some efficiency improvements but also underlines remaining shortcomings. Despite improvements, including governance, where the Management Board (MB) now plays a more strategic role, limitations are still present, and a comprehensive assessment is hindered by data limitations. Costs have risen but benefits are difficult to monetise, making cost-benefit analyses inconclusive. The lack of detailed resource allocation data, the need for a comprehensive strategy for efficiency gains, and potential improvements in database interoperability and technology investment are issues to be addressed. The EEA should also explore opportunities for efficiency improvements and cost reductions for its publications. The current monitoring and reporting framework, which includes Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and internal controls, requires substantial improvement to allow better performance monitoring not only for future evaluations but also to strengthen the monitoring of operations by the governance bodies. This would include a more structured approach to activity prioritisation, more granular data on the allocation of resources and investments (including for EIONET and at sub-activity area), better monitoring of entire process for producing outputs, and an update of the current KPIs. Other specific areas such as data handling, networking activities and the streamlined SOER 2020 process, demonstrate efficiency gains compared to the previous evaluation.

Coherence

The EEA maintains good internal coherence, particularly in its collaboration with Eionet countries for reporting and knowledge production, whereas external coherence warrants attention. Challenges arise with the expanding scope of the EEA's work, especially affecting the coordination with DG ENV due to the complex harmonisation of priorities vis-à-vis a growing stakeholder base. To manage the risks associated with expanding beyond its core tasks, the EEA should focus on synergising core and non-core activities. Relations with the other DGs represented within the MB, CLIMA, RTD and ESTAT are positive, marked by a

clear division of roles. There is a need to enhance coherence with the JRC to reduce overlaps, which have started to be addressed through improved cooperation.

EU Added Value and Producing Impacts

The EEA and Eionet provide added value by streamlining knowledge exchange and data sharing across Member States, easing the burden of policy monitoring and providing the necessary technical infrastructure. The collaboration with non-EU countries enriches the European environmental perspective by ensuring access to “external” data and supports capacity building in candidate countries. However, a coherent framework for non-EU member participation is missing. The EEA is also instrumental in expanding environmental considerations into other policy areas, thus elevating environmental priorities.

Relevance

The Agency remains relevant, effectively aligning its objectives and core tasks with EU environmental policy priorities, including those set out by the EGD. The EEA's founding Regulation, despite being over 30 years old and its work areas not reflecting a cross-cutting and integrated approach, has not hindered its work and ability to adapt to the changing priorities. Through successive multi-annual and annual work programmes, the EEA and Eionet have managed to stay aligned with evolving environmental challenges, addressing key issues such as circular economy, biodiversity, pollution, and climate change which are absent from its legal mandate. To enhance relevance further, a revision of the Regulation has been considered but without sufficient evidence to reach a firm conclusion.

Lessons learned and recommendations

Following the evaluation period, important developments have occurred with the adoption of an unprecedented number of environment and climate legislations under the European Green Deal. In this new context, increased attention to the green transition in different policy areas is reflected e.g. in the increasing number of agreements of the EEA with other DGs which requires reflection on coherence with the EEA's core activities. It is also reflected in the additional tasks for the EEA, an expansion with a financial offset of corresponding additional resources from the LIFE programme.

Against this background, improved coordination with the Commission, especially DG ENV as partner DG, will be key. This has recently been established through structured dialogues and a dedicated Inter-Service Group. Ensuring that this close cooperation is effective and looks after policy coherence will be essential. In addition, a more strategic role of the EEA Management Board well as finding synergies with other decentralised agencies will be other ways to address the challenges of the new policy context.

Ongoing initiatives of the Agency such as the EEA-EIONET Strategy 2021-2030, stronger digitisation and communication efforts and EIONET modernisation are expected to tackle some of the challenges highlighted by the evaluation, in particular public access to environmental information and data, a more responsive EIONET network and streamlined data

collection and reporting. Despite recent discussions to update internal KPIs, concrete actions remain to be initiated.

Against this backdrop, the evaluation provides the following recommendations:

- (i) Develop a comprehensive monitoring system including metrics measuring the performance of processes (data collection, reporting and publications), prioritisation, investments and resource allocation, public outreach, reporting obligations, impact/benefits for EU policies, and KPI revision for better performance monitoring and facilitate the assessment of effectiveness, efficiency and relevance.
- (ii) Further enhance coordination with the Commission to align EEA activities with EU policy priorities and avoid overlaps.
- (iii) Address EEA-JRC coordination on a more structured basis through an ad-hoc coordination group and ensure continuous coordination between the EEA and EUROSTAT.
- (iv) Explore additional synergies with other EU decentralised agencies.
- (v) Consider the integration of long-term non-core activities into EEA core activities.
- (vi) Adapt the SOER cycle for maximum impact on policy.
- (vii) Involve more the Management Board in strategic processes such as the follow-up to the evaluation, updating KPIs, defining Vice-Chairs' roles, and adopting new Rules of Procedure.
- (viii) Improve prioritisation of publications and explore opportunities for efficiency improvements.
- (ix) Enhance the digitalisation strategy to expand the uptake of Copernicus services and products, include modern technologies, facilitate data access, integrate new data sources, and build capacity.
- (x) Closely monitor and document the Eionet modernisation.