



2024/2280

10.10.2024

RESOLUTION (EU) 2024/2280 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

of 11 April 2024

with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control for the financial year 2022

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,

- having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control for the financial year 2022,
- having regard to Rule 100 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0109/2024),
- A. whereas, according to its statement of revenue and expenditure ⁽¹⁾, the final budget of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (the 'Centre') for the financial year 2022 was EUR 99 872 000, representing a decrease of 40,59 % compared to 2021, as a result of changes in European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) grants; whereas the Centre's budget derives mainly from the Union budget;
- B. whereas the Court of Auditors (the 'Court'), in its report on the Centre's annual accounts for the financial year 2022 (the 'Court's report'), states that it has obtained reasonable assurance that the Centre's annual accounts are reliable and that the underlying transactions as regards revenue are legal and regular; whereas the Court audited four grant agreements with a total value of EUR 7,9 million and detected that three of those included VAT to the value of EUR 0,6 million (8,1 %) among the eligible costs; whereas the beneficiaries were engaging in activities as public authorities and consequently VAT is not an eligible cost under Article 186(4), second subparagraph, point (c), of the Financial Regulation; whereas the estimated total amount of non-compliant expenditure based on the rate and amount of VAT found in the sample described above represents 2,8 % of the total payment appropriations available in 2022 which exceeds the materiality threshold set for the audit and, consequently, resulted in a qualified opinion on the legality and regularity of payments underlying the Centre's accounts; whereas, except for the matter explained above, the Court concluded that the revenue and payments underlying the accounts of the Centre for the financial year that ended 31 December 2022 are legal and regular in all material respects;
- C. whereas with regard to the Centre's procurement sector, no issues requiring corrective actions were reported for 2022, nor are there ongoing or outstanding corrective actions from previous years' audits and assessments;

Budget and financial management

1. Notes with satisfaction that the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2022 resulted in a budget implementation rate of current year commitment appropriations of 98,86 %, representing an increase of 0,49 % compared to 2021; notes that the current year payment appropriations execution rate was 73,61 %, representing an increase of 9,53 % compared to the previous year;
2. Calls on the Commission to grant to the Centre the necessary resources to fulfil the objectives of the Strategy 2021-2027 and to implement the Centre's revised mandate in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2022/2370 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽²⁾;

Performance

3. Recalls that the mission of the Centre is to identify, assess and communicate current and emerging threats to human health posed by infectious diseases and works within the six following fields, namely surveillance, outbreak preparedness and response support, scientific advice, microbiology surveillance, public health training and communication;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 38, 31.1.2023, p. 24.

⁽²⁾ Regulation (EU) 2022/2370 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022 amending Regulation (EC) No 851/2004 establishing a European centre for disease prevention and control (OJ L 314, 6.12.2022, p. 1).

4. Notes that the Centre delivered 89 % of the outputs planned in its Single Programming Document 2022–2024; notes that 8 % of the planned outputs were postponed, while 3 % were delayed or cancelled by the end of the year; takes note that most of the outputs that have been postponed or delayed were dependant on the adoption and publication of the Centre's revised mandate, which took place at the end of 2022; calls on the Centre to analyse the postponed outputs and report back to the discharge authority about its plan to deliver them;
5. Notes that throughout 2022, for the third consecutive year, the Centre maintained its public health emergency (PHE) plan in response to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic; takes note that in June the PHE level was gradually downgraded from Level 2 (Acute Phase) to Level 1 (Maintenance Phase); is of the opinion that the Centre acted speedily and efficiently throughout the entire period of the pandemic; considers that there could be a larger role for the Centre in shaping the European crisis response agenda for the future;
6. Notes that following Russia's aggression in Ukraine and the influx of refugees fleeing the country, the Centre worked with the authorities of the five countries surrounding Ukraine providing technical and operational response activities within its remit, based on identified needs; takes note that in the second half of the year, the focus shifted from operational response to more medium-/longer-term and strategic response actions and the Centre's experts were deployed to Poland and Romania in support of national authorities and the World Health Organization which were assisting Ukrainian displaced populations;
7. Observes that during the spring and summer of 2022, the Centre supported simultaneously three ongoing PHEs, namely COVID-19, Mpox, and hepatitis of unknown origin in children; notes with satisfaction that this experience was unique for the Centre and tested the limits of the Centre's capacity to develop risk assessments and guidance for multiple health threats;
8. Welcomes the Centre's modalities for the implementation of its reinforced mandate which entered into force in December 2022, as well as the transformation programme Aspire (Anticipate, Support, Prepare, Inform, Respond and Empower) developed to aid the implementation;

Efficiency and gains

9. Recalls the importance of increasing the digitalisation of the Centre in terms of internal operation and management but also in order to speed up the digitalisation of procedures; stresses the need for the Centre to continue to be proactive in this regard in order to avoid a digital gap between the agencies; draws attention, however, to the need to take all the necessary security measures to avoid any risk to the online security of the information processed and insists on the need to step up action against cyberattacks or infiltration attempts particularly those originating from Russia or China;
10. Welcomes the fact that the Centre continued its efforts towards delivering efficiency gains with the introduction of new methodologies, including the automation of support and operational processes; notes that during the year, four new administrative processes were automated through electronic workflows and a new cost-effective solution for the electronic workflows platform was also implemented to replace K2; notes that an overall analysis of the use of the electronic workflows already shows that a significant number of users have adopted them and that they have markedly reduced processing time, due to the elimination of unnecessary steps, while ensuring legal compliance;

Staff policy

11. Notes that, on 31 December 2022, the establishment plan consisted of 215 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared to 208 authorised posts in 2021); notes that, in addition, 112 contract agents and 5 seconded national experts worked for the Centre in 2022;
12. Notes with concern the lack of gender balance within the Centre's senior and middle management, with four out of six (66,67 %) being men; notes the gender distribution among the Centre's overall staff, with 198 out of 331 (60 %) being women and 133 out of 331 (40 %) being men; welcomes the fact that the Centre is in the process of adopting the charter on diversity and inclusion and it will be in place by Q4 2023; recalls the importance of ensuring gender balance and calls on the Centre to take that aspect into consideration with regard to future recruitment of staff and appointments within its senior and middle management; asks the Commission and the Member States to take into account the importance of ensuring gender balance when nominating their members for appointment to the Centre's management board;

13. Raises concerns about the geographical balance within the Centre's senior and middle management; asks the Centre to report back on this to the discharge authority;
14. Notes that the first draft of the 'People Strategy' was developed in 2022, which aims to guide the modernisation and consolidation of the Centre's HR management services; notes, furthermore, that individual strategy projects, such as the e-recruitment tool and the online induction programme were finalised in 2022, while others are underway; calls on the Centre to report to the discharge authority on any development in that regard; takes note that the Centre further enhanced its support to staff learning and development by increasing the allowance for individual training and facilitating staff access to e-learning platforms (EU Learn, LinkedIn Learning and the Centre's Virtual Academy);
15. Notes that the Centre has a policy on protecting the dignity of the person and preventing psychological and sexual harassment, and that the Centre is part of the interagency task force of confidential counsellors; looks forward to receiving their report and recommendations; notes that there were no reported cases of harassment in 2022 and encourages the Centre to continue to develop the work to prevent cases in the future as well;
16. Notes that the additional posts allocated to the Centre following the extension of its mandate have been filled in 2022; underlines that the addition of new tasks and its increasing workload must be accompanied by adequate corresponding increases in the Centre's staff and resources, and that a shortage of staff puts the continuity of its operations under significant pressure and threatens the quality of the Centre's work;
17. Notes with concern the overlapping mandate between the Centre and HERA and calls for reduction of duplication of efforts between the two entities and clear division of tasks;

Prevention and management of conflicts of interest, and transparency

18. Notes that the Centre continued to apply and strengthen its independence policy for non-staff and staff members; observes that in 2022, the Centre lacked a small percentage of declarations of interest; notes furthermore that all external experts consulted during the production of rapid risk assessments declared their interests before publication; notes that all members of the management board and advisory forum attending the meetings and thus contributing to the discussions had valid annual declarations of interest and the director and heads of unit filled their annual declarations of interest as well as 99 % of external experts attending the Centre's meetings that required a conflicts of interest check submitted an annual declaration of interest;
19. Calls on the Centre to ensure that all management board members, advisory forum members and their alternates have dutifully submitted the required annual declarations of interest; calls on the Centre to ensure that appropriate experts are engaged in the Centre's work throughout its activities and that a high level of compliance with conflict of interest rules is maintained;
20. Takes note that the Centre's independence policy for persons that are not members of staff provides for the procedure to be followed to identify and avoid potential conflicts of interest; notes that in summary, this involves the collection of declarations of interest in particular circumstances, for example when a scientific output will be produced, which are then assessed by the Centre's member of staff responsible for the relevant activity, with support of the Centre's compliance officer; notes that no actual conflict of interest was reported in 2022;
21. Notes that the internal procedure for the Centre's meetings with commercial organisations active in the field of its mandate was developed in 2022 and formally implemented in January 2023; notes, furthermore, that the Centre did not, however, hold any such meetings in 2022;
22. Acknowledges the visibility the Centre has developed during the pandemic; is of the opinion that there is still room for greater visibility in the media, on the internet, and on social media in order to make its work known to citizens of the Union;
23. Calls on the Centre to ensure there is full transparency in the publishing of scientific studies and to enhance its external communications capacity as regards the general public, by ensuring that all key information, especially related to public health emergencies is available in all official languages of the Union and making it easily accessible and understandable to citizens of the Union;

Internal control

24. Highlights the Court's qualified opinion on the legality and regularity of payments due to the inclusion of VAT as an eligible expense under grant agreements whose beneficiaries engage in activities as public authorities representing 2,8 % of the payment appropriations available in 2022; recalls that when managing grants, the Centre should ensure compliance with the applicable rules, in particular regarding the reimbursement of VAT to beneficiaries which are public authorities;
25. Notes that the Centre assesses the effectiveness of the internal control system at least once a year by assessing the implementation of the internal control framework, including the implementation of the indicators defined, and by evaluating the main shortcomings identified by the Centre itself or reported by others, including the Internal Audit Service and the Court; notes, furthermore, that in 2022, a number of improvements were made to the internal control framework, such as an improved control strategy, including new indicators, an improved information asset catalogue and the development of a new internal communications policy;

Other comments

26. Welcomes the fact that the Centre aimed to be EMAS registered in 2023 and is planning a project for CO₂ offsetting (to commence in Q1 2024) that will include measures on calculating its CO₂ impact and how to minimise it; notes that specific targets will be part of the EMAS implementation, commencing in 2024;
27. Commends the Centre for moving in 2022 more towards using electronic tools in the procurement process; notes that the Centre now uses the Commission Public Procurement Management Tool (PPMT) for the registration and publication of all procurement procedures, including *ex ante* publications; notes that the PPMT system is linked to eTendering, where the publication as well as Q&A during the publication is handled; notes, furthermore, that the Centre also uses an internal eWorkflow for purchases under framework contracts and for the review before launch;
28. Welcomes the fact that overall stakeholder satisfaction with the Centre's work reached 86 % in 2022;
29. Refers, for other observations of a cross-cutting nature accompanying its decision on discharge, to its resolution of 11 April 2024 ⁽³⁾ on the performance, financial management and control of the agencies.

⁽³⁾ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2024)0280.