



2024/2292

10.10.2024

RESOLUTION (EU) 2024/2292 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 Food Safety Authority 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 Food Safety Authority 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 (A9-0129/2024),
- A. whereas, according to its statement of revenue and expenditure ⁽¹⁾, the final budget of the European Food Safety Authority (the 'Authority') for the financial year 2022 was EUR 149 841 816,93, representing an increase of 15,99 % compared to 2021; whereas the Authority's budget derives mainly from the Union budget;
- B. whereas the Court of Auditors (the 'Court'), in its report on the annual accounts of the Authority for the financial year 2022 (the 'Court's report'), states that it has obtained reasonable assurance that the Authority's annual accounts are reliable and that the underlying transactions are legal and regular;
- C. whereas with regard to the Authority'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;
- D. whereas with regard to the Authority's internal control systems, 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 appreciation that the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2022 resulted in a budget implementation of current year commitment appropriation rate of 99,95 % representing a slight decrease of 0,04 % compared to 2021; notes, furthermore, that the current year payment appropriations execution rate was at 89,77 % representing an increase of 0,92 % compared to 2021;
2. Notes that a lack of resources and posts for plant protection products regulatory authorities results in delays in approving low risk active substances and updating assessment methodologies according to scientific developments, which would lower the environmental impact of plant protection products in the long term; calls on the Commission to take appropriate steps to ensure that the Authority has sufficient resources and posts to support Member States to meet their deadlines as set in Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽²⁾, to double the amount of assessments of active substances for plant protection products per year and to triple the speed of development of methodologies to keep risk assessments abreast of the latest scientific developments and in line with societal expectations;

Performance

3. Welcomes the Authority's contribution to the safety of the Union food and feed chain, and its considerable efforts in providing risk managers with comprehensive, independent and up-to-date scientific advice on questions linked to the food chain, communicating clearly to the public on its outputs and the information on which they are based, and cooperating with interested parties and institutional partners to promote coherence and trust in the food safety system;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 178, 29.4.2022, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market and repealing Council Directives 79/117/EEC and 91/414/EEC (OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 1).

4. Notes with satisfaction that the Authority has implemented an integrated performance framework connecting resources and activities to outputs and expected results, complemented by a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor and drive performance; notes, furthermore, that the performance against the targets set out in the Performance Framework reached an overall rate of 96 %; observes that the areas of Strategic Objective 2 (Ensure preparedness for future risk analysis needs) and Strategic Objective 3 (Empower people and ensure organisational agility) featured a good performance overall, whilst the area of Strategic Objective 1 ('Deliver Trustworthy Scientific Advice and Communication of Risks from Farm to Fork'), heavily impacted by the implementation of new rules and procedures under Regulation (EU) 2019/1381 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽³⁾, featured a deviation from the target;
5. Highlights that the Authority has finalised 586 scientific questions out of the targeted 701 questions regarding the Objective 1: 'Deliver Trustworthy Scientific Advice and Communication of Risks from Farm to Fork'; notes that despite the number of scientific questions closed being lower than forecasted, it broadly equated the new incoming questions received during the year, thus ensuring that the stock of open questions did not increase;
6. Welcomes that the area of communication of findings registered very positive results, with the timeliness of publication on the Authority's Journal maintaining the positive performance achieved over the past 2 years;
7. Takes note that 2022 marked the first year of the implementation of the Strategy 2027; the Strategy 2027, designed as an evolution of the Strategy 2020, is focused on the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2019/1381 (in the short term) and prepares the Authority to address new evolving Union policies (in the longer term);
8. Welcomes the Authority's organisation of 'ONE Conference – Health, Environment, Society' in June 2022, highlighting the connection between human, animal and environmental health and leading to a 'one health-one environment';
9. Notes that the Authority has launched a campaign on African Swine Fever in partnership with 18 Member States; further notes that the Authority has made a contribution to the conception and implementation of the EU Chemicals Strategy;
10. Notes that, according to the Annual Strategy Survey launched by the Authority asking for feedback from its customers, partners, and stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in the delivery of the Authority's scientific opinions, the Authority's ability to provide its advice in a timely manner remains a point of attention;

Efficiency and gains

11. Observes that the Authority has been collaborating with the European Chemicals Authority, in the context of the new Union Chemicals Strategy, and with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control to develop systems for the collection and analysis of genome sequencing; notes moreover that the Authority has shared human resources and research resources with Sister Agencies and the Joint Research Centre; further emphasises the horizontal benefits of working together and adapting best practices;
12. Notes that the Authority has increased its efforts in 2022 on consolidating the implementation of new processes and IT tools, trying to achieve a high level of efficiency and to maximise synergies with other agencies; further notes that some of the Authority's results regarding efficiency and gains in IT tools taken in 2020-2022 has not been targeted until the end of 2023;
13. Welcomes the Authority's intention to strengthen joint data management with Member States and other agencies in order to improve data quality and interoperability (in line with the One Health approach);

⁽³⁾ Regulation (EU) 2019/1381 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the transparency and sustainability of the EU risk assessment in the food chain and amending Regulations (EC) No 178/2002, (EC) No 1829/2003, (EC) No 1831/2003, (EC) No 2065/2003, (EC) No 1935/2004, (EC) No 1331/2008, (EC) No 1107/2009, (EU) 2015/2283 and Directive 2001/18/EC (OJ L 231, 6.9.2019, p. 1).

Staff policy

14. Notes that, on 31 December 2022, the establishment plan was 95,55 % implemented, with five officials and 382 temporary agents appointed out of 405 posts authorised under the Union budget (compared to 380 authorised posts in 2021); notes that, in addition, 170 contract agents and 14 seconded national experts worked for the Authority in 2022; notes furthermore that in order to implement Regulation (EU) 2019/1381 the Authority was granted 31 new staff posts in 2022, and 15 extra contract agents (CAs) for the period 2022-2024;
15. Takes note that in 2022 gender balance was achieved within the Authority's overall staff, with 335 out of 557 (60,1 %) being women and within the Authority's management board with 37 out of 70 (52,9 %) being women; observes that in senior and management positions, there is a higher proportion of positions occupied by men (63 %) compared to women (37 %); calls on the Authority to intensify the efforts to bridge the gender gap in senior and managerial positions;
16. Takes note that three cases of burnout were reported in 2022 by the medical service; emphasises the critical importance of maintaining equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal life; calls on the Authority to continue promoting a healthy work-life balance among staff;
17. Notes that the Authority is committed to the values of the EU Agencies Network and the Charter on Diversity and Inclusion and is working for the adoption as soon as possible; further notes the Authority's participation in the EU Agencies Network Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion by way of sharing synergies, information and resources regarding diversity and inclusion; in addition, some internal initiatives were implemented, such as a new career website and video about working at the Authority, with a special topic on diversity and inclusion;
18. Observes that the Authority has adopted the Guidelines for the Implementation of Aid for Persons with Disabilities promoting social policy and equal treatment at the work place; notes, moreover, that the Authority's building has been designed in accordance with the Italian Accessibility Regulations for people with disabilities;
19. Notes that a new organisational structure designed to support the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2019/1381 and ambitions of the Authority's Strategy 2027 was implemented as of 1 January 2022;

Prevention and management of conflicts of interest and transparency

20. Notes that the Authority's management board and operational management have signed a Declaration of Conflict of Interest and it is published and available in the website; further notes that the CVs of the members and alternate members of the management board were to be published by the end of 2023;
21. Observes that in 2022 the Authority identified and managed seven conflicts of interest at the level of annual declarations of interest pertaining to external experts; notes that the Authority prevented them from participating in the scientific activity;
22. Acknowledges that the Authority has in place a voluntary code of conduct according to which management board members oblige themselves to communicate to the Authority occupational activities carried out within a period of 2 years following the the end of their mandate;
23. Takes note that the Authority plans to adopt a new post-employment standard procedure by the first quarter of 2024, which would include the criteria and procedure to discontinue the access to confidential information to staff leaving the service, monitoring and implementation requirements, and transparency standards;
24. Notes that the Authority has in place an anti-fraud strategy, developed in close cooperation with the European Anti-Fraud Office, accompanied by related implementing rules and an action plan to prevent fraud and corruption;

Other comments

25. Observes that in June 2022 the Internal Audit Service (IAS) issued the audit report on information security and disaster recovery, with the objective to assess the adequacy of the design and implementation of the governance, and identified two observations and three important observations on IT Security Governance; notes that the Authority accepted the recommendations of the IAS and is currently implementing an action plan;

26. Welcomes the Authority's efforts to increase its public visibility and online presence through the launch of the '#EUChooseSafeFood' campaign for a second year, delivered in partnership with Member State competent authorities, with the objective of explaining the science behind food safety in the Union in an accessible way, and the organisation of the 'ONE – Health, Environment, Society – Conference' in partnership with the other four ENVI agencies, which led to the launch of a joint Instagram channel called 'One Health One Environment'; further notes that the Authority invested in making its website multilingual, with artificial intelligence via the Commission's eTranslation widget; notes, moreover, that the Authority continued in 2022 to invest in developing its 'OpenEFSA' portal, in accordance with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2019/1381;
27. Welcomes that for the last few years the Authority has been one of the EMAS certified agencies; takes note that depending on the type of purchase the Authority applies 'Green Public Procurement (GPP)' standards as minimum tender specification requirements in selection and/or award criteria;
28. Refers, for other observations of a cross-cutting nature accompanying its decision on discharge, to its resolution of 11 April 2024 ⁽⁴⁾ on the performance, financial management and control of the agencies.

⁽⁴⁾ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2024)0280.