



# Study supporting the Evaluation of the EEA and Eionet 2017-2021

Final Report

Written by Ipsos and Trinomics

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Directorate-General for Environment  
Directorate A – General Affairs, Knowledge & Resources  
Unit A.3 – Green Knowledge & Research Hub, LIFE

*European Commission  
B-1049 Brussels*

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# Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to support the European Commission's evaluation of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and its European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet) during the period 2017-2021.

The EEA is one of the 37 decentralised agencies of the EU. Founded in 1994, it is headquartered in Copenhagen (Denmark), and at the end of the evaluation period (2021) had around 230 employees. Its main purpose is to deliver knowledge and data to support Europe's environment and climate goals. The EEA's core tasks are defined in its founding regulation and include supporting policy development and key global processes; offering analytical expertise; and providing and maintaining an efficient reporting infrastructure for national and international data flows. Eionet is a partnership network of the EEA, its 32 member countries and six cooperating countries. Its main goal is to gather and develop data, knowledge and advice, and to help disseminate this knowledge among policy makers across Europe.

The previous evaluation of the EEA, which was published in 2018, covered the period 2012-2016. This evaluation covers the period 2017-2021, which includes parts of two multiannual programmes: the Multi-annual Work Programme 2014-2020 and the new EEA/Eionet Strategy for 2021-2030 adopted by the Management Board in December 2020. The geographical scope of the study covers the EEA's 32 member countries and 6 cooperating countries. The study assesses the standard evaluation criteria as defined in the Commission's Better Regulation guidelines, namely the EEA's effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value.

The study was carried out by Ipsos and Trinomics between October 2022 and September 2023. It relies on a mixed-methods approach, drawing on both primary and secondary, qualitative and quantitative data collected via the following main methods:

- Desk research to review and analyse a large number of relevant documents, including policy documents, EEA programming and strategy documents, key EEA outputs, statistics and monitoring data, and various other relevant sources.
- An extensive stakeholder consultation programme, which involved:
  - in-depth interviews with 78 stakeholders from EEA governance bodies, EEA senior management and staff, European Commission staff, Eionet representatives (including NFPs and ETCs), other EU Agencies and bodies and external stakeholders;
  - an online survey targeting EEA staff, European Commission staff working with the EEA, and broader EEA audiences; and
  - four workshops with the EEA Management Board, Eionet National Focal Points and representatives of the European Topic Centres, the Scientific Committee, and external stakeholders.

## Effectiveness

Overall, the EEA has operated in an effective manner over the period of the evaluation. The EEA has successfully delivered against the objectives defined in its founding regulation as well as its other legal obligations and has, to a large extent, implemented the 15 core tasks set out in its founding regulation. Stakeholders who were consulted for this study overwhelmingly considered that the EEA provides objective, reliable, and comparable information. DG ENV and DG CLIMA in particular reported they were heavily reliant on data provided by the EEA, but the use of EEA data extends to several other policy areas

and Commission services. The EEA also provided valuable support for the preparation, implementation and assessment of relevant EU legislation.

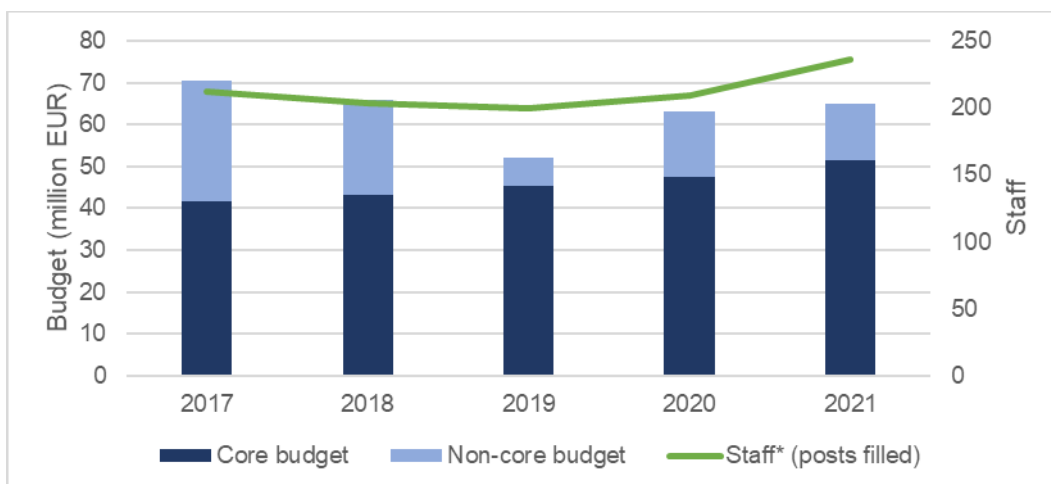
The State and Outlook of the Environment Report (SOER) 2020 is a key example of the impact of the EEA's work: it is among the most widely known and appreciated EEA outputs, and was used extensively in the development and justification of the EGD. It is also one of several EEA outputs that have contributed to mainstreaming environmental and climate issues into other policy areas. Stakeholders also acknowledged the EEA's efforts and the progress it has made in reaching out to stakeholders beyond the Commission, namely at the national level and the general public, to disseminate information about the state of the environment.

The EEA dealt well with the major challenges it faced during the evaluation period, in particular the COVID-19 crisis, and ensured continuation of operations without any major disruptions. However, resource constraints (see below) were the main barrier to fully implementing all tasks. The increased demand for its services, especially in reflection of the EGD, also presented challenges as the EEA increased its support across different policy areas.

### Efficiency

The direct costs of the EEA (i.e., the funding allocated to it) increased during the assessment period. By 2021, the annual core budget had increased by approximately €10 million compared with 2017. Fluctuations in non-core funding were mainly attributed to uneven distribution of certain grant agreements. EEA staff (posts actually filled) initially decreased (from 212 in 2017 to 200 in 2019), before new posts allocated in the context of the EGD brought it up to 236 in 2021 (see the figure below). The study found that the resources at the disposal of the EEA at the end of the evaluation period were adequate, but it was widely felt in the agency that the EEA was operating at full capacity, meaning any further additional tasks would continue to have to be accompanied by additional resources, considering also further synergies, efficiency gains or prioritisation. However, as stated in recent Commission Opinions on the EEA SPDs, the Commission considers that the EEA can absorb additional tasks in light of the additional resources received.

### Evolution of EEA budget and staff over the evaluation period



\* Staff numbers do not include structural service providers.  
Source: EEA Consolidated annual activity reports (2017-2021).

Although it is not possible to quantify or monetise the many and heterogeneous direct and indirect benefits generated by the EEA, the study concluded that these benefits are considerable, ultimately contributing to more effective and efficient environmental, climate and other policies and legislation. More tangibly, the



EEA completed most outputs for the years 2017-2021 with some variations across years and some areas partially due to resource constraints, Covid-19, management changes and heavy workload.

The Agency managed to make improvements in efficiency during the 2017-2021 evaluation period. This particularly related to data handling and reporting, the increased use of reporting databases, more streamlined reporting and the introduction of Reportnet 3.0. The EEA now handles 250 times more data than in 2002, and the number of dataflows increased from around 30 immediately before the evaluation period, to approximately 120 in 2021. Efficiency gains are also due to a rethinking of the EEA's way of working, partly prompted by the austerity conditions it operated under until 2019. The period has also seen a prioritisation of activities related to or resulting from legal reporting obligations, and the development of the SOER 2020.

While increased interest in the Agency from all sides was seen as a positive development in general, there were some concerns regarding the increasing number of service-level agreements with other DGs, in particular because such non-core funding provides the Agency with more operational resources but not always additional support resources, which can put excessive pressure on existing support staff. Early signs of dissatisfaction are apparent in the negative trends in the 2021 staff satisfaction survey.

### Coherence

Overall, the EEA's work, structure and governance are coherent, and efforts are being made to further improve the internal as well as external coherence of the EEA's work. The EEA's working relationship with the Commission and other agencies are positive. In particular, the collaboration with DG ENV (the EEA's partner DG) is positive overall, although some challenges and different opinions on the role of DG ENV as the partner DG remained. Coordination is being improved via several mechanisms introduced at, or shortly after, the end of the evaluation period, including a structured dialogue at senior management level, an intergroup at Director level and an Inter Service Group. The EEA's relations with DG CLIMA appeared well structured and were perceived as positive and impactful overall. The EEA's collaboration with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) encountered some issues, but efforts to harmonise and improve collaboration through joint responsibilities and working groups are taking place. Otherwise, the study found that the EEA works cooperatively and coherently with Commission DGs as well as other EU agencies on common environmental and climate issues, and has made a positive contribution to the mainstreaming agenda and the EGD.

The EEA has set up internal processes for seeking synergies and coordinating core and non-core activities. While efforts to exploit synergies and avoid duplications are evident, there is room for further improvement in internal coordination and communication, especially with the Scientific Committee, whose role and input is useful at a strategic level, but which is less able to influence detailed outputs. The EEA's mandate and activities are largely coherent with the Common Approach to EU decentralised agencies, as it aligns well with the key principles. However, further articulation of the mandate and activities could potentially enhance clarity and coherence.

### Relevance

The outputs of the EEA are generally perceived as relevant and impactful by its stakeholders (although naturally the relevance of different outputs differs per stakeholder group). The European Commission is the main 'customer' of the EEA and relies heavily on several of its outputs. National authorities (including NFPs) are also users of the EEA's outputs and also benefit from its services in terms of their data reporting obligations. Civil society and business organisations also reported using EEA data and reports as a trustworthy source that can be helpful for influencing policy makers. In relation to the general public, the



EEA made efforts to make environment and climate information relatable and usable and to engage with the public directly, and improved its online presence.

The tasks of the EEA are aligned with EU policy and the Agency demonstrated a high degree of flexibility in terms of prioritising tasks in light of the evolving policy context. The general view among stakeholders was that the EEA adequately covers all EU climate and environmental policy priorities, and is not missing any significant issues related to the EGD. Based on an analysis of the content of the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP, the EEA's tasks as outlined in its founding regulation are flexible enough to adapt to the current policy priorities of EU to a very large extent. It is worth noting that some of the current policy priorities stemming from the EGD and/or the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP (i.e. biodiversity, zero pollution, climate adaptation and mitigation, and circular economy) are not explicitly covered by the EEA's founding regulation, but addressed in the EEA/Eionet Strategy 2021-2030 and the EEA multi-annual and annual work programmes.

### EU added value

The EEA's EU added value stems mainly from the fact that the tasks assigned to it are relevant to stakeholders at both the EU level and in the Member States, and that, by and large, it delivers these tasks more effectively, efficiently and coherently than would be possible for national authorities acting alone. Stakeholders felt that, in the absence of the EEA, the European Commission would need to take responsibility for providing its services, which were described as indispensable by the Member States. The EEA was found to add value at an EU-level particularly related to its role in providing comparable data that can serve a benchmarking function and its role in bringing stakeholders together to facilitate knowledge and data sharing.

As an EU-level body, EEA also supports international engagement activities. Through its inclusion of non-EU European countries, the EEA is able to provide a more comprehensive picture of the data and thus the state of the environment in Europe, recognising the fact that environment and climate transcend borders. The EEA, through Eionet, was also found to increase collaboration and, crucially, play a part in supporting EU candidate countries in familiarising themselves with the EU environmental acquis, and facilitating the adoption thereof.

### Key achievements, challenges encountered and lessons learned

Since the adoption of the EGD, the EEA now works across more policy areas, with and for more stakeholders (including Commission DGs) and has taken on additional tasks (including taking on new, and increasing the intensity of, its involvement in some existing reporting obligations). Overall, it has adapted well to this new environment – the EEA Strategy 2021-2030 reflects the enhanced need to work in a more systemic way that cuts across different policy areas, and the Agency has demonstrated a high level of flexibility to adapt to emerging issues and priorities. The EEA continues to deliver well on all its main tasks, and is widely recognised and appreciated by stakeholders and partners for its indispensable role in collecting and analysing relevant data, including by offering support and coordination for data providers in its member countries. But its role goes well beyond data collection – it also supports stakeholders (in particular the Commission) in assessing the results of environmental measures and in meeting obligations stemming from EU legislation, and endeavours to disseminate information about the state of the environment as widely as possible. Its reports, datasets and other outputs are reliable and high-quality, and there are numerous instances where they have been used by policy-makers at EU and national level to help design and implement policies.

The study has also identified several issues that warrant further attention with a view to further maximising the EEA's effectiveness and efficiency. These are all related to a greater or lesser extent to the ongoing

efforts of the EEA (as well as the organisations it works closely with) to adapt to the more systemic, cross-cutting approach to environmental and climate policy introduced by the EGD. In some cases, the challenges in question are already being addressed by measures that were introduced after the end of the evaluation period, and therefore their effects could not yet be assessed fully by this study, but should nonetheless be kept in mind when considering these issues:

- **Prioritisation of tasks:** The growing demands on the EEA across various policy areas in the context of limited resources and budgetary constraints, and the manifest need for more joined up working to mainstream environmental and climate policy objectives into other areas, raise questions as to what the EEA should prioritise (and de-prioritise), including the extent to which it should engage in tasks beyond data collection, such as the provision of policy assessments and advice. While the EEA was generally thought to have adapted well to the evolving context, there were different views among key stakeholders regarding the appropriate balance between different tasks. A stronger mechanism may be needed to handle priorities, through reinforced coordination with the Commission (for which new mechanisms have already been set up shortly before and after the end of the evaluation period), and reinforcing strategic discussions on additional tasks and prioritisation at the MB level (facilitated by more systematic and explicit reporting by the EEA on additional tasks and their resource implications, as well as tasks that have to be de-prioritised).
- **Relationship with the European Commission:** Overall, the working relationships between the EEA and all relevant Commission DGs are good. However, as noted above, the expansion of the activities of the EEA, the increasingly numerous and complex demands from other Commission DGs, as well as (in some instances) different views on the core tasks of the EEA, have led the EEA to question the role of DG ENV as partner DG, which is to provide the necessary strategic oversight and facilitate effective coordination with other DGs. Steps have already been taken to address this, but it remains to be seen whether these are sufficient to foster more effective relations not only at the operational, but also at the strategic level.
- **Eionet modernisation:** While the Eionet modernisation process was generally welcomed by stakeholders, the re-alignment of the Eionet (introduced in early 2022) along more cross-cutting lines implies significant challenges for member countries, where authorities are frequently organised by themes rather than cross-cutting priorities, and many also face tight resource constraints. Although the principle is sound and in line with the strategic direction of Commission environmental policy, the transition process towards the realisation and implementation of the modernisation requires further attention, resources and support, including from the Management Board, in order for it to be embedded and accepted fully.
- **KPIs and annual reporting:** The EEA Strategy 2021-2030 – with its reduced number of work areas, and emphasis on the understanding of interlinkages within and between these – was widely considered to be an appropriate response to the evolving policy context in which the EEA operates. Nonetheless, there are concerns around whether the less detailed annual reporting on outputs, coupled with the relatively low numbers of KPIs, could lead to a reduction in the transparency and accountability of the EEA and the important work it delivers.
- **Staffing situation:** Non-core funding has proven to be an important enabler to provide the resources for certain new tasks, but is typically allocated for additional operational staff only. This has meant that, over time, the number of operational staff at the EEA has increased, but support functions have not increased at the same rate. This has led to a severe strain on some

support functions, which is an unsustainable situation that would need to be addressed if further growth is envisaged.

- **Risks from reliance on non-core funding:** Also, the heavy reliance on non-core, project-specific funding, and the resulting need to rely on temporary staff, means long-term planning, efficient resource allocation (in particular re-allocation in light of evolving priorities), and timely recruitment can be difficult. More broadly, there are also certain questions about the coherence between core tasks and non-core activities that warrant further reflection, as well as the issue of non-core activities that implement long-term strands of work.
- **Scope for further efficiency gains:** The study identified several areas where there is likely to be potential for the EEA to achieve further efficiency gains. Most of these are related to taking full advantage of the opportunities provided by new technologies and digitalisation, in particular IT developments in years to come (including enhancing interoperability with the databases of member countries to facilitate more automatised reporting), use of other data sources (potentially including Copernicus data, 'big' data and citizen science) and digital technologies (including Artificial Intelligence) that could be used to monitor the state of the environment in a more dynamic way. Other areas where there is room to make further efficiency gains include providing better access to (raw) data, more transparency on how data can or cannot be used for multiple purposes, a review of the cost-efficiency of the Scientific Committee, a standardised approach for tracking reporting obligations, and improved communication between EEA and relevant stakeholders, including NFPs and the Commission, regarding planned publications, specifically to give more advance notice.

A revision of the EEA's mandate (i.e., its founding regulation) could potentially be *helpful* in terms of updating and consolidating the reporting obligations the EEA is involved in and clarifying the interpretation of its EEA's remit and priorities. However, there are also potential drawbacks to reopening the founding regulation, such as risks linked to the political negotiation. This study has found nothing to suggest that such a revision is *urgently needed* to address these issues.

# 1 Introduction

Ipsos and Trinomics were commissioned to undertake a study to support the European Commission's evaluation of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and its European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet) in the period 2017-2021. The Commission's evaluation, which will be published in the form of a Staff Working Document (SWD), is expected to draw on the evidence and analysis produced by this study. This report is the final report of the study.

## 1.1 Objectives, scope, and rationale of the evaluation

The Commission's evaluation (and hence this supporting study) responds to the common practice and expectation that **all EU Agencies are evaluated every five years**. Although the EEA's founding regulation (unlike those of many other Agencies) does not include an obligation for periodic external evaluations, the European Parliament, in its discharge of the Agency's 2005 budget, requested an evaluation "before 1 January 2010 and every five years thereafter". Additionally, the Common Approach on EU decentralised agencies agreed in July 2012 by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, envisages an evaluation every five years and application of a sunset/review clause every second evaluation. The Financial Regulation also envisages regular evaluation of EU interventions of over €5 million, which includes the Agency.

Regarding the **scope of the study**, it is important to note that the previous evaluation of the EEA, which was published in 2018, covered the period 2012-2016 and a sunset/review clause. This evaluation covers the period 2017-2021, which includes parts of two multiannual programmes: the Multi-annual Work Programme 2014-2020 and the new EEA/EIONET Strategy for 2021-2030 adopted by the Management Board in December 2020. The geographical scope of the study covers the EEA's 32 member countries (which include the 27 EU Member States as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Türkiye) and 6 cooperating countries (the West Balkan countries Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo).<sup>1</sup> The study assesses the standard evaluation criteria as defined in the Commission's Better Regulation guidelines, namely the EEA's effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value.

The **purpose of this study** is to assist the Commission in assessing how well the EEA has performed during the period in question (2017-2021) and how far the mandate and core missions of the Agency (established by its founding regulation) have been adapted to the significant change in the EU's political context and policy priorities brought about by the adoption of the European Green Deal (EGD) in December 2019. It builds on the previous evaluation and analyses inter alia how the recommendations and findings have been taken into consideration, in particular in the preparation of the new EEA/EIONET Strategy for 2021-2030 and its ongoing implementation. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study are expected to inform reflections on further policy development, including a possible re-alignment of the Agency's mandate to the new policy priorities through a revision of the founding regulation.

## 1.2 Reading guide

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the United Kingdom withdrew from the EU on 31 January 2020, i.e. ceased to be an EEA member country during the period covered by the evaluation. The effects of its departure on EEA are also assessed, to the extent relevant, by the evaluation.

- Chapter 2 briefly introduces the subject of the evaluation (the EEA and its Eionet), and presents the intervention logic that underpins the evaluation.
- Chapter 3 presents the evaluation questions the study aims to answer.
- Chapter 4 describes the evaluation methodology used, including an assessment of the strength of the evidence and limitations.
- Chapter 5 provides an overview of the main activities implemented by the EEA and Eionet during the period covered by the evaluation.
- Chapter 6 presents the main findings by evaluation theme and question.
- Chapter 7 presents the key conclusions and lessons learned.

## 2 The EEA and the Eionet

This chapter is intended to set the scene for the study, by very briefly describing the subject of the evaluation: the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet), including an outline of their intervention logic.

### 2.1 The European Environment Agency

The EEA is one of the 37 decentralised agencies of the EU. It was created in 1994, pursuant to its founding regulation adopted in 1990.<sup>2</sup> The EEA is headquartered in Copenhagen (Denmark), and at the end of the evaluation period (2021) had around 230 employees. Its main purpose is to deliver knowledge and data to support Europe's environment and climate goals. The EEA's core tasks (as defined in its founding regulation) include supporting policy development and key global processes; offering analytical expertise; and providing and maintaining an efficient reporting infrastructure for national and international data flows.

To support sustainable development and to help achieve significant and measurable improvement in Europe's environment, the Agency seeks to provide “timely, relevant and accessible European environmental data, information, knowledge and assessments”.<sup>3</sup> The EEA describes itself as being at the science-policy interface. Its work is mainly addressed at policy makers in the EU institutions. In addition, the Agency also aims to ensure that wider audiences (such as policy makers at the national level, interest groups at both the national and the EU-level, as well as the general public) are provided with relevant information and data.

The EEA's mission was first laid out in the Agency's founding regulation and reiterated in the Multiannual Work Programme (MAWP) 2014-2020<sup>4</sup> and current EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030<sup>5</sup>. As outlined in the MAWP 2014-2020, as scientific understanding of environmental challenges changes and improves, so do information flows and assessments. This logic underpinned the key goals of the EEA during the MAWP 2014-2020, which are as follows:

- To be the prime source of knowledge at European level informing the implementation of European and national environment and climate policies;
- to be a leading knowledge centre supporting long-term transition challenges and objectives;
- to be the lead organisation at European level facilitating knowledge-sharing and capacity-building in the field of environment and climate change.

The EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030 defines the vision to “enable a sustainable Europe through trusted and actionable knowledge for informed decision-making on environment and climate priorities and solutions, in line with Europe's policy ambitions.” To make this vision a reality, it sets out five strategic objectives:

#### 1. Supporting policy implementation and sustainability transitions

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<sup>2</sup> Council Regulation (EEC) No 1210/90 on the establishment of the European Environment Agency and the European Information and Observation Network. Regulation (EEC) No 1201/90 was amended by Council Regulation (EC) No 933/1999 in April 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Who we are. European Environment Agency's home page. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/about-us/what>

<sup>4</sup> Multiannual work programme 2014–2020 (2020) European Environment Agency. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/multiannual-work-programme-2014-2020>

<sup>5</sup> EEA-Eionet strategy 2021-2030 (2022) European Environment Agency. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/eea-eionet-strategy-2021-2030>

2. Providing timely input to solutions for sustainability challenges
3. Building stronger networks and partnerships
4. Making full use of the potential of data, technology and digitalisation
5. Resourcing our shared ambitions

## 2.2 The European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet)

Eionet was established by Article 4 of the EEA founding regulation as a partnership that is open to EU member States as well as countries which are not members of the EU. Currently, it has 32 member countries and six cooperating countries.<sup>6</sup> The main goal of Eionet is to gather and develop data, knowledge and advice with regard to the environment, and to help disseminate this knowledge among policy makers across Europe.

Eionet's functioning needs strong institutional cooperation across governance levels and consistency in terms of the usage, delivery and measurements of data, information, standards and tools, and analysis and shared infrastructure. The provision of high-quality data by Eionet is fundamental for the EEA to achieve its mission to provide timely, targeted, relevant and reliable information to policy-makers and the public. Through the data provided via the Eionet, EEA is able to obtain a comprehensive view of the status of the environment in Europe, which makes it possible to set a benchmark against which countries can compare their environmental performances.

The EEA works closely with the National Focal Points (NFPs), which are the main contact points for the EEA in the member and cooperating countries. Among other tasks, the NFPs help to coordinate all the activities for Eionet, including the networks of Eionet Groups (EGs) (previously referred to as National Reference Centres), where environmental experts from national institutions come together.

Besides NFPs, Eionet covers the European Topic Centres (ETCs). These are consortia of organisations in EEA member countries with expertise in specific environmental areas, contracted by the EEA through multi-year Framework Partnership Agreements to support the implementation of the EEA strategic priorities and work programmes. Following a review process undertaken by the Management Board in 2020-2021, with effect from 1 January 2022 the ETCs were re-organised to better align with the new Strategy, with the thematic ETCs that existed previously (i.e., during the period covered by the evaluation)<sup>7</sup> replaced by seven more cross-cutting ETCs.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.3 The EEA's Intervention Logic

The intervention logic is a graphic description of the rationale and purpose of the EEA and Eionet, and of the sequence of steps (the 'causal chain') from objectives, inputs and activities, to results at different levels. The intervention logic is an important underpinning of the evaluation, as it depicts the results the EEA and

<sup>6</sup> The EEA's member countries include the 27 EU Member States, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey. The cooperating countries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo. The designation of Kosovo as a member country is without prejudice to positions on its status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

<sup>7</sup> Until 2018, the ETCs were: Air Pollution and Climate Change Mitigation (ETC/ACM); Biological Diversity (ETC/BD); Climate Change Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation (ETC/CCA); Inland, Coastal and Marine Waters (ETC/ICM); Urban, Land and Soil Systems (ETC/ULS); and Waste and Materials in a Green Economy (ETC/WMGE). For the period 2019-2022, ETC/ACM was discontinued, and two new ETCs were created to replace it: Climate change Mitigation and Energy (ETC/CME), and Air pollution, Transport, Noise and Industrial pollution (ETC/ATNI)

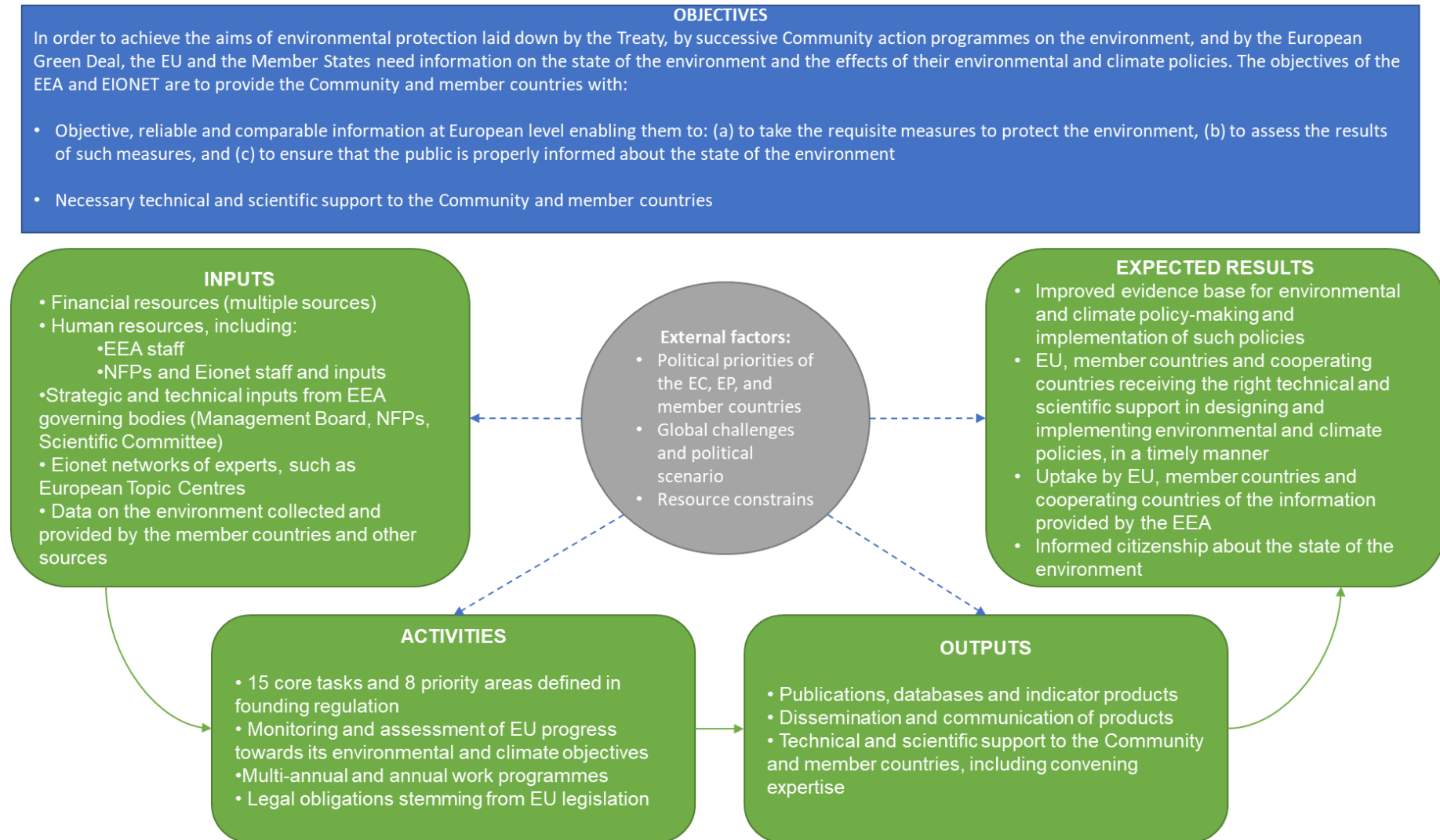
<sup>8</sup> The new ETCs as of 2023 are: Biodiversity and Ecosystems (ETC/BE); Circular Economy and Resource Use (ETC/CE); Climate Change Adaptation and LULUCF (ETC/CA); Climate Change Mitigation (ETC/CM); Data Integration and Digitalisation (ETC/DI); Human Health and the Environment (ETC/HE); and Sustainability Transitions (ETC/ST)



Eionet are assessed against, as well as their objectives and the resources they have to achieve them, and thus enables the evaluation to systematically explore and test to what extent, why and how the expected results have been generated and the corresponding objectives achieved. Key external factors that can have a (positive or negative) effect on EEA's ability to generate the desired results are also depicted. The intervention logic diagram is accompanied by a narrative.

A draft intervention logic for the EEA and Eionet was developed during the initial stages of the study (taking the intervention logic developed for the previous evaluation, a draft intervention logic included in the Terms of Reference for this study, and work undertaken by the EEA itself as a starting point), and revisited and updated over the course of the assignment based on additional information that became available. The figure overleaf represents the final version of the intervention logic of the EEA and Eionet.

**Figure 2.1: EEA and Eionet intervention logic**



The component parts of the intervention logic can be briefly summarised as follows (for a more detailed and comprehensive explanatory narrative, please refer to Annex 1):

- **Objectives:** Its founding regulation assigns the Agency two key objectives (to make available reliable information and to provide technical and scientific support). Ultimately, by meeting these objectives, the EEA is intended to help the EU and its member countries take the requisite measures to protect the environment; assess the results of such measures; and ensure that the public is properly informed about the state of the environment.
- **Inputs:** The EEA's funding can be divided into two main blocks – the core budget, which is financed from EU subventions and other member country contributions, and other revenue for non-core activities, financed from other EU programmes through Service-Level, Grant and Contribution agreements between the EEA and different DGs (for details on the EEA budget, see section 5.1). Other inputs include EEA staff (the number of posts actually filled grew from 212 in 2017 to 236 in 2021), the work of the governing bodies (including the Management Board, NFPs and Scientific Committee), the time invested by Eionet experts (including the ETCs), and the environmental data that is collected and provided by EEA member countries (mainly via an EEA IT tool called Reportnet).
- **Activities:** The EEA's and Eionet's tasks are primarily defined by Articles 2 and 3 of the founding regulation and by other sectoral legislation of the EU environmental and climate acquis, which define the scope of the activities and the extent of the support provided by the EEA. In broad terms, the EEA's work can be categorised into the following three activities: (1) the EEA ensures collection of consistent data on the state of the environment and gathers these to enable pan-European monitoring and assessments; (2) the EEA also produces analyses, assessments and knowledge products based on this data and drawing on its own and its network's expertise; and (3) the EEA in itself, but in particular through its Eionet network, provides policy makers with access to technical and scientific expertise. More specifically, the EEA-Eionet have multi-annual work programmes (MAWPs) and single programming documents (SPDs) that provide further details on specific activities to be delivered in any given year. It is worth noting that the way activities are categorised and reported on changed during the period under evaluation. Whereas the MAWP 2014-2020 consists of four strategic areas (SAs) and each of these are divided into sub-areas (e.g., SA1.1), the 2021-2030 Strategy (which has been aligned with new policy priorities including the EGD and the 8<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme) seeks to deliver five strategic objectives (SOs) across five interlinked areas of work.
- **Outputs:** The EEA and Eionet, through the activities outlined above, produce a large number of outputs. This includes reports, briefings and other publications (for instance, there were 49 publications in 2021 and 62 in 2020), indicators (a core set of 109 indicators across different environmental and cross-cutting themes), and data (including datasets, databases, maps and Eionet core data flows). All of these outputs are then made available to EEA's audiences, as well as technical and scientific support to specific stakeholders (e.g., within the Commission).
- **Expected results:** These are the outcomes and impacts that are expected to be generated by EEA's and Eionet's activities and outputs. Broadly speaking, the expectation is that the EU, member countries and cooperating countries make use of the evidence base and knowledge the EEA makes available to them, as well as the technical and scientific support they receive, to develop and implement effective, evidence-based environmental and climate policies. In addition to this, the EEA's awareness raising and engagement contributes to a citizenship that is better

informed about the state of the environment. Eventually, the better environmental / climate policies and the increased public awareness that EEA contributes to are expected to lead to improvements in the state of the environment – but this impact is very indirect, i.e., subject to many other interfering or contributing factors that are ultimately outside of the control of the EEA. It is therefore not mapped out explicitly in the intervention logic.

- **External factors:** In the EEA-Eionet intervention logic, external factors are depicted in the middle of the chart, and they have arrows going in nearly every direction, as they can affect all aspects of the Agency. The main external factors that have been identified over the period 2017-2021 are the EU's and member countries environmental policy priorities (e.g., the EGD and the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP introduced new tasks and areas of work for the EEA); global challenges (such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and other consequences); and resource constraints (the EEA was facing significant budgetary pressures during the first half of the period under evaluation, when the resources for Agencies that were considered to be operating at “full speed” were reduced under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, but the funding available increased from 2020).

### 3 Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation addresses the five key evaluation criteria defined in the Commission's Better Regulation guidelines:

- **Effectiveness** assesses how successful the EEA and its Eionet have been in implementing their tasks and delivering the desired impact, including the results obtained compared to the planned and foreseen outcomes, and the main success factors and obstacles.
- **Efficiency** evaluates the extent to which the EEA and Eionet have operated in a way that is conducive to achieving its objectives at the lowest possible cost, taking into account elements relating to governance and structure, operation, programming of activities and resources, accountability and controls.
- **Coherence** is about whether the work of the EEA is coherent both externally (in terms of how well it interacts with and supports stakeholders including the European Commission, while avoiding duplication of work or overlaps) and internally (in terms of ensuring coherence between different activities carried out by the Agency itself).
- **Relevance** considers the extent to which the EEA's mandate, tasks and activities are aligned with current EU policy priorities (especially in the field of environment and climate), as well as the extent to which they are relevant for the stakeholders it works for and the general public it aims to inform.
- **EU added value** assesses the value the EEA and Eionet add, compared to what would be achieved by national, regional and local authorities acting alone, taking into account the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

Under these criteria, the study seeks to respond to 27 specific evaluation questions, as shown in the table below.<sup>9</sup> Chapter 6 of this report presents the key findings and responses to each of these questions. Given that some questions address similar themes, issues and topics, they are addressed in the same section in order to enhance reader-friendliness and avoid unnecessary repetitions or overlaps. In a couple of instances, this also means that specific questions are addressed under a different evaluation criterion than they were listed under in the terms of Reference. This is shown in the final column below.

**Table 3.1: Overview of evaluation criteria, questions, and themes**

Evaluation criteria	#	Evaluation questions	Response in section
Effective-ness	1	To what extent have the tasks of the EEA and the Eionet achieved their objectives as set out in the Regulation 401/2009?	6.1.1

<sup>9</sup> The original Terms of Reference for the study included 31 evaluation questions. In order to enhance clarity and minimise overlaps, a few of these were refined and/or merged during the inception phase of the study, based on suggestions by the study team, which were subsequently validated by the Commission's Inter-Service Group. Specifically, EQ 6 is the result of merging the original questions 5 and 7; EQ 14 is the result of merging the original questions 15 and 16; EQ 16 is the results of merging the original questions 18 and 19; and EQ 17 is the result of merging the original questions 20 and 21.

Evaluation criteria	#	Evaluation questions	Response in section
	2	How effective was EEA's work against the environmental and climate objectives and obligations stemming from the EU legislation and across all activities including international ones (management of reporting data flows, assessment of policies, prospective analyses)?	6.1.1
	3	To what extent have the tasks of the EEA, as defined in the founding regulation and complementary legislation, been implemented in the multi-annual and annual work programmes and other programming documents? If applicable, what are the factors that have hindered the implementation?	6.1.1
	4	To what extent has the EEA taken into account the outcomes of the previous evaluation, in particular for developing the new EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030?	6.1.3
	5	How effective is EEA-Eionet in responding to major crisis (based on the COVID-19 pandemics experience in 2020-2021) and change in geopolitics?	6.1.4
	6	To what extent have the tasks of the EEA produced the desired impact and expected results? In particular, to what extent is the work of the EEA enabling the mainstreaming of the environmental and climate issues in other policy areas?	6.1.2
Efficiency	7	To what extent have the EEA and Eionet been efficient in implementing the tasks set out in their mandate and programming documents?	6.2.1
	8	To what extent are the internal mechanisms for programming, monitoring, reporting and evaluating the EEA work and activities adequate for ensuring accountability and appropriate assessment of the overall performance of the EEA while minimising the administrative burden of the EEA and its stakeholders (established procedures, layers of hierarchy, division of work between groups or programmes, IT systems, initiative for streamlining and simplification, etc.)?	6.2.5
	9	Does the EEA undertake any prioritisation screening of certain environmental and climate topics or tasks and, if so, has this prioritisation been efficient taking into account its resources (including prioritisation between tasks that respond to legal obligations or policy priorities over other tasks that do not respond to any particular policy priority)? Has the Agency done so in response to new policy needs?	6.4.3 (relevance)
	10	Did the EEA conduct any analysis of tasks (old and newly assumed) in view of finding synergies between them? E.g. synergies between tasks related to the creation and maintenance of databases, data collection and reporting? Is the EEA strategy for efficiency gains appropriate and sufficient?	6.2.3
	11	How efficiently has the EEA managed to align to new policy priorities taking into account its resources? To what extent are the resources adequate for the mandate of the Agency?	6.2.4
	12	To what extent is the Agency's organisation (governance and structure) fit for purpose and conducive to efficiency (maximising synergies and avoiding overlaps) and economies of scale?	6.2.5
	13	To what extent has the EEA implemented its activities, the annual budgets (including non-core budgets that may be of a multiannual nature if the activity covers multiple years), and achieved the expected results in a cost-efficient and timely manner?	6.2.2

Evaluation criteria	#	Evaluation questions	Response in section
	14	To what extent is the allocation of staff across the different activities efficient? Is the allocation consistent with the Agency's (and EU) priorities? Is the Agency reallocating or allocating (new) staff to its priority tasks in an efficient way? Is there a correct balance between the number of staff assigned to administrative tasks and the number of staff assigned to the operational tasks?	6.2.4
	15	To what extent do EEA and Eionet make full use of the potential of digital technologies (big data, artificial intelligence, Earth Observation, analytics) and scientific state of the art?	6.2.6
	16	To what extent do shared projects (co-financed by DG ENVIRONMENT and the EEA) define roles and responsibilities at the planning stage, including the financial sources to ensure optimal financing practices? What are the challenges and what remedial actions/best practices are worth flagging?	6.2.4
Coherence	17	How does the EEA coordinate with the EU institutions (in particular the Commission), the member and cooperating countries, other EU agencies (including but not limited to ECHA, EFSA and EMSA) and other environmental knowledge providers to enhance synergies and avoid duplication of work? Did the EEA identify any such synergies, in particular in areas where there might be overlaps or complementarities with the work performed by other Agencies and the JRC?	6.3.1
	18	To what extent is the work of the EEA and Eionet (both core and non-core activities) coherent with EU environmental policy priorities, such as reaching the zero pollution ambition, achieving climate neutrality, preserving and protecting nature and ecosystem and enhancing circular economy?	6.4.2 (relevance)
	19	To what extent are the Agency's mandate and activities, as defined in its founding regulation, coherent with the Common Approach to EU decentralised agencies?	6.3.2
	20	To what extent are the non-core activities and core activities coherent with each other?	6.3.3
Relevance	21	To what extent are the EEA's objectives and mandate, as set out in the founding regulation and complementary legislation, still relevant and aligned with the current EU policy priorities?	6.4.2
	22	How far are the EEA's tasks and resources aligned with key EU policy priorities? How appropriate is the balance between 'regulatory tasks' corresponding to EU legal obligations, other tasks in support to EU policy development and implementation, and other tasks not responding to specific EU policy needs? To what extent is it possible to envisage a reprioritisation of certain tasks to make the Agency's work more relevant in the context of new policy priorities?	6.4.4
	23	To what extent have the EEA and Eionet shown flexibility, within the boundaries set by the founding regulation, and accommodated new tasks to respond to new policy priority needs?	6.4.5
	24	To what extent is the work of the EEA relevant for the stakeholders (EU institutions, policy makers, member countries, etc.) and the general public it aims to inform?	6.4.1
EU added value	25	What is the European added value of the work done by the EEA and Eionet compared to what could have been achieved by the Member States at national and/or regional levels in its absence? What has been the impact of the EEA and Eionet on national, regional and local authorities?	6.5.1



Evaluation criteria	#	Evaluation questions	Response in section
	26	What is the EU added value of having the EEA collaborating with countries that are not part of the EU in terms of acquis alignment and implementation as well as regional cooperation?	6.5.2
	27	What would be the consequences at EU level if the EEA and Eionet were terminated?	6.5.1

## 4 Methodology

This section describes the approach and methods used to respond to the evaluation questions. It includes an assessment of the strength of evidence, limitations, challenges encountered and solutions found.

### 4.1 Overall approach and analytical framework

The study uses a theory-based evaluation approach, founded in a detailed intervention logic of the EEA (see chapter 2). The intervention logic served as the basis for identifying key objectives, expected outputs, outcomes and impacts, and the causal relationships between them, which allowed these to be systematically investigated.

The study addresses 27 evaluation questions across all five evaluation criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and EU added value (see chapter 3). Annex 8 of this report presents the evaluation question matrix, which was developed during the initial stage of the study and provides further information on how the study has endeavoured to answer each question. It includes a narrative of our understanding of the scope of the question, as well as judgment criteria / indicators and the key analytical methods and data sources used to answer the question.

### 4.2 Data collection methods

To gather evidence, the study used a mixed-method approach relying on both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools, as well as primary and secondary data. The remainder of this section briefly summarises the data collection activities undertaken.

#### 4.2.1 Desk research

During the inception phase, the EEA and DG ENV provided over 500 documents to the study team, including the following key sources:

- EEA's Single Programming Documents (SPD), Consolidated Annual Activity Reports (CAAR) and multiannual work programmes for the period 2017-2021.
- Management Board and Bureau decisions made between 2017-2021.
- Management Board and Bureau agendas and minutes from meetings held between 2017-2021.
- Minutes from meetings held by the Advisory Committee on mapping of Eionet resources during 2021.
- Minutes from meetings held by the Advisory Committee on EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030 between 2019 and 2020.
- Management Board briefing documents for the purpose of aiding decision-making, approving amendments, and providing guidance.
- Lists of decisions and guidance from management board meetings.
- Presentations used at Management Board meetings.
- Documents used for the 2019 EEA and Eionet seminar held on the 19th of June 2019.
- Audits conducted by the Internal Audit Service (IAS) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

The study team logged all the documents in a database and ranked them by level of relevance, so as to prioritise those that were deemed most useful to answer the evaluation questions. In total,

around 200 documents were found to be very relevant or potentially relevant, and subsequently reviewed in detail.

Through the desk research, the study team developed the following analytical tasks. These are used to help answer a number of the evaluation questions and also to help test and triangulate opinions:

- **Six case studies** which rely mostly on desk-based research, covering the following topics: 7th Environmental Action Programme (EAP) and 7th EAP Monitoring Framework, The new Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP), Trends and projections work, the State of the Environment Report (SOER), the EEA and Eionet's use of new technologies, and the Eionet modernisation process (this includes analysis of the process that led to the renewal of the ETCs, and their alignment with current policy priorities). These are presented in Annex 4.
- **Analysis of the reporting obligations ascribed to EEA and Eionet.** An important source of information for this analysis are the reports from the Commission on Actions to Streamline Environmental Reporting and the accompanying 2017 Fitness Check of monitoring and reporting obligations (ROs) arising from EU environmental legislation<sup>10</sup>, as well as the Single Programming Documents and the EEA Reporting Obligation Database. The full list of ROs is presented in Annex 10 and the synthesis is presented in Chapter 5. The list is used to support analysis under a number of questions in effectiveness, efficiency and relevance.
- **Comparative analysis of the MAWP 2014-2020 and the 2021-2030 EEA-Eionet strategy**, and rationale underpinning the changes made in the new strategy compared to the previous MAWP. A detailed overview is presented in Annex 11. Analysis is presented under efficiency in Chapter 6. In relation to this, the study team also mapped and analysed the new tasks assigned to the EEA and Eionet by the EU Green Deal and the 8th EAP (alignment of the activities undertaken by the Agency with these tasks, prioritisation of activities, and adequacy of the level of resources allocated to perform the new tasks). This analytical output relied both on desk research and interviews.
- Listing of **all the publications produced in two years (2020 and 2021)** and analysis of whether they respond to legal obligations, policy priorities, or whether they were produced for other reasons. This is presented in Chapter 5.
- **Analysis of the processes undertaken by the EEA and the Commission to improve coordination** (e.g., effectiveness of the Environment Knowledge Community and structured dialogue between EEA, DG ENV and CLIMA). This task relied partially on desk research (e.g., Management Board papers), as these processes are not all specifically documented. This analysis also relied heavily on information from interviews and it is therefore not presented as a standalone output.
- **Further analysis of the evolution of resources** (both human and financial) allocated to the EEA and Eionet, as well as the impact that this has had on the EU budget, in particular on the LIFE budget. This aspect has been further explored during interviews, and information has been added to the detailed intervention logic (see efficiency / Annex 1).
- **Analysis of EEA programming documents and annual reports** in order to assess the extent to which tasks have been implemented to plan during the period covered by the evaluation. This also includes an analysis of how costs have evolved by strategic priority over

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<sup>10</sup> European Commission (2017). Fitness Check of Reporting and Monitoring of EU Environment Policy.

the evaluation period. This is presented in Annex 2 and the synthesis is presented in Chapter 5.

- Analysis whether the **conformity analysis of 2018 of the EEA's operations and the Common Approach on Decentralised Agencies** still holds, and whether connections can be drawn between such an assessment and a potential revision of the Founding Regulation. This is presented in Annex 3.

Key results of these analyses are included in this report at appropriate places, particularly in the sections which answer the effectiveness (6.1) and efficiency (6.2) questions.

#### 4.2.2 In-depth interviews

Our consultation strategy included 80 in-depth interviews with stakeholders with different levels of involvement and interest in the EEA and Eionet. In total, 78 interviews were conducted (see Table 4.1 for more detail on this).

The EEA, DG ENV and DG CLIMA identified and provided the contacts of suitable interview candidates (as per the consultation strategy agreed during the inception phase), covering a wide range of organisations and services, roles and positions, at both the EU and national level. As part of the interview programme, members of the study team spoke with members of the EEA Management Board, EEA Senior Management and Staff, Eionet National Focal Points (NFPs), European Topic Centres (ETCs), EEA Scientific Committee, Environment Protection Agencies (EPA), European Parliament, Council of the European Union, different European Commission DGs and EU Agencies and representatives of other stakeholders based in Brussels. Stakeholders were invited to take part via email (this included an initial email and two follow-up emails, when there was no response to the initial email). Interviews were conducted on the MS Teams platform and lasted approximately one hour, for both individual and group stakeholder interviews.

When targets with certain groups were not reached (due, for instance, to unavailability of interviewees), the evaluation team reached out to alternative groups so as to maximise the resources available for the evaluation. As a result, the study reached or got very close to reaching its target for all groups except two – members of the EPA Network and of the European Parliament.

**Table 4.1: Number of interviews completed**

Stakeholder type	Target	Contacted	Conducted <sup>11</sup>
EEA Management Board	12	16	11
EEA Senior Management and staff	15	17	17
Eionet National Focal Points (NFPs)	10	10	8
Eionet representatives: European Topic Centres (ETCs)	3	3	3
EEA Scientific Committee	3	3	3
Other EU Agencies and the EU Agency Network	4	4	3
Members of the European Network of the Heads of Environment Protection Agencies (EPA Network)	5	6	1

<sup>11</sup> Stakeholder groups for which the study fell short of the targeted number of interviews by more than 25% are colour-coded in red.

Stakeholder type	Target	Contacted	Conducted <sup>11</sup>
European Commission DG Environment (ENV)	8	12	12
European Commission DG Climate Action (CLIMA)	6	8	7
Other European Commission DGs directly working with the EEA / members of the Inter-Service Group	9	11	10
European Parliament	4	11	1
Council of the European Union	1	1	1
Other stakeholders based in Brussels	0	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>78</b>

The interviews were semi-structured, i.e. a topic guide with pre-defined questions was used, but some of the questions were adapted to reflect the specific role, experience and expertise of each counterpart, and interviewers had the flexibility to pursue issues in more or less depth, being led to some extent by the responses of the interviewee. By following this approach, the interviews generated a large amount of rich qualitative data, which was an important source of evidence for the evaluation study. However, it should be noted that, in line with widely used good practices for qualitative research, this report refrains from attempting to specify exact numbers of interviewees who held specific views, because in-depth interviewing does not lend itself to these kinds of assertions. Since not all interviewees were asked about and/or able to comment on all issues, reporting exact numbers would create a false sense of specificity or representativeness. Instead, where relevant, we use 'semi-quantitative' terms to provide an indication of the extent to which certain views were shared by groups of interviewees.<sup>12</sup> The same approach was used to report the results of the workshops (see below).

### 4.2.3 Workshops

Four workshops to collect input from different stakeholders were held:

- A one-day workshop with the EEA Management Board was held in Copenhagen on 7 December 2022. It was attended by 33 members of the Management Board (including representatives of 22 member countries), as well as representatives of the EEA and DG ENV in an observer capacity. Following the workshop, a member of the study team observed the Management Board meeting on 8 December 2022.
- A one-day workshop with the National Focal Points (NFPs) and European Topic Centres (ETCs) was held on 28 February 2023, in Copenhagen. It was attended by 49 NFPs and ETCs Directors (representing 16 different countries), as well as representatives of the EEA and DG ENV in an observer capacity. Following the workshop, two members of the study team observed the EEA-Eionet day on 1 March 2023.

<sup>12</sup> As a rule of thumb, this report refers to "many" stakeholders for views expressed by at least 8; "several" for 5 or more; and "some" for at least 3 interviewees. For further information about why not to report numbers for features that have not been assessed for all interviewees in a manner that allows for comparison, see for example Neale (2014): Reporting quantitative information in qualitative research: guidance for authors and reviewers. URL: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/add.12408>

- An online workshop with the EEA Scientific Committee, lasting approximately 2.5 hours, was held on 7 March 2023. It was attended by 13 members of the Scientific Committee, as well as representatives of the EEA and DG ENV in an observer capacity.
- An online workshop with external stakeholders, lasting 1.5 hours, was held on 23 May 2023. It was attended by 10 representatives of civil society organisations, business associations and other EU Agencies, as well as representatives of the EEA and DG ENV in an observer capacity.

Participants were sent an outline of the format and purpose of each workshop, and of key topics to be discussed, in advance. The workshops were structured to include both plenary discussion sessions and breakout groups and served to gather evidence on participants' perceptions on the EEA's efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, coherence and the EU-added value it brings, as well as their role within this.

#### 4.2.4 Online survey

An online survey was deployed in early March 2023. It was distributed through an open link, targeting EEA staff, European Commission staff working with the EEA, and broader EEA audiences. The survey was promoted by the EEA through direct communications with EEA employees, and by DG ENV through direct communication with EC staff, as well as via the EEA's social media accounts. The survey closed in late April 2023, and the total number of respondents was 52. A breakdown of respondents is shown in Table 4.2 below.

**Table 4.2: Breakdown of survey respondents**

	EEA Staff	European Commission staff	National Environmental Protection Agency	Other EU institutions	Other public organisations at the national or local level
<b>Number of respondents (n = 52)</b>	28	9	9	1	5
<b>Percentage of respondents</b>	54%	17%	17%	2%	10%

Source: Online Survey (10/2/2023 – 28/3/2023)

### 4.3 Strength of evidence and limitations

Overall, the evidence collected for the study, via the methods outlined above, provides a sound basis for drawing robust conclusions. The comprehensive review of existing secondary data, and the large volume of primary data generated via consulting relevant stakeholders, means we can be confident in the validity of the results, in spite of the challenges and limitations outlined in what follows.

#### Limited engagement of certain stakeholder groups

It needs to be acknowledged that the study has faced some challenges in gathering feedback from stakeholders beyond the 'inner circle' of those who work directly with (or at) the EEA and its Eionet. Despite the study team's best efforts (including inviting additional stakeholders to take part in interviews and the final workshop, and sending multiple reminders), the participation of certain target groups (in particular members of the EPA Network, representatives of the European Parliament, and wider potential users of the EEA's outputs, such as civil society organisations or academic researchers) in the interview programme and workshops remained low.

The response rate to the online survey was also lower than expected, especially as regards such external stakeholders. The study team did not hold contact details of potential survey participants and relied on EEA and DG ENV to disseminate it. Despite their best efforts, response was low. One key challenge was the reliance on indirect dissemination channels (e.g., Intranet, social media) or general emails, instead of more targeted and personalised emails (which was not possible for the study team to use due to data protection regulation). In an effort to increase the response rate, the study team delayed the closing of the survey by two weeks, but this only achieved marginal improvements. As shown in the table above, the survey only generated 52 responses, slightly over half of which from EEA staff. To reflect this, and facilitate the detection of any bias, the results for EEA staff and other respondents are presented separately throughout this report. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that due to the low number of responses, the results of the survey are not necessarily representative of the wider universe of stakeholders (especially those who are not EEA staff).

Overall, the stakeholder feedback collected for this study (via the online survey, interviews and workshops) came mainly from those organisations and individuals that work most closely with (or for) the EEA and its Eionet – in particular representatives of different European Commission DGs (primary EEA customers), members of the EEA Management Board, Eionet National Focal Points, and management and staff of the EEA itself. When this imbalance became apparent, additional efforts were made to recruit interviewees from beyond the ‘inner circle’, and an additional online workshop for external stakeholders was organised (see above). However, the success of these mitigation measures remained limited. This is likely to reflect the fact that the ‘wider’ (potential) users of EEA outputs are typically less well informed on the way the EEA operates, and therefore less willing and able to comment on its functioning, and less motivated to dedicate time to contributing to such an evaluation.

This represents a limitation of the evidence base, but does not detract from the validity of the results, since most of the evaluation questions (see chapter 3) were focused on the organisational effectiveness and efficiency of the EEA, including its usefulness for and coordination with its ‘inner circle’ of stakeholders. To answer these questions, the study did receive stakeholder input of a sufficient quantity and quality. The gaps left by the limited input from other stakeholders were partly filled by using secondary data, such as the number of downloads of EEA’s outputs and number of citations in the media, and three studies conducted for the EEA in 2020 which included, inter alia: a mapping of EEA and Eionet stakeholders, analysis of their feedback on product content and design, analysis of EEA and Eionet’s policy makers audience and their needs, and analysis of the implications of the European Green Deal for the EEA.

### Not possible to quantify EEA benefits

Finally, it is also worth pointing out that the benefits generated by the EEA (cp. the expected results in the intervention logic in chapter 2) are not amenable to a quantitative or even monetised assessment. This is because the main intended *direct* benefit of the EEA’s work is improved environmental and climate knowledge for the public and for policy-making at the EU and national levels (which by definition are hardly quantifiable). This would ultimately be expected to lead to a range of *indirect* benefits (e.g., reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved biodiversity, etc.) that could be quantified in principle. However, these impacts would accrue at many different levels, over different (but usually quite long) time horizons, and so attempting to measure them in a rigorous and comprehensive way would far exceed the scope of this evaluation. Furthermore, even if data on the ultimate impacts of policies that were inspired (partly) by the EEA’s work could be compiled, this



would still leave open the question of the extent to which such impacts could be attributed to the EEA. It is clear that a wide range of factors (including but not limited to EEA data, analyses and expertise) play a role in the definition and implementation of EU and national policies, and that isolating the influence of the EEA on these would be extremely challenging. Therefore, the study is not in a position to provide a quantified cost-benefit analysis. Instead, it approaches the analysis of efficiency from a variety of relevant (and feasible) angles, as detailed in chapter 6.2 on Efficiency.

## 5 Implementation

This chapter provides a descriptive overview of the inputs received, activities conducted, and outputs produced by EEA and Eionet over the evaluation period 2017-2021. This provides the basis for the assessment of the extent to which the EEA has fulfilled its tasks and objectives, as detailed in Chapter 6.

The following key points emerge from our factual review of implementation:

- **The overall budget of the EEA** decreased from approximately 70.5 million EUR in 2017 to approximately 65 million EUR in 2021, which was mainly driven by fluctuations in non-core funding. Over the evaluation period, the core budget increased by approximately 10 million EUR from the value in the previous evaluation period due to the assignment of new tasks to the Agency, inflation correction and increased funding for existing tasks. Non-core funding fluctuated over the whole period between around 30 million EUR in 2017 and 7 million EUR in 2019.
- **Over the evaluation period, the EEA implemented most of its tasks as planned in its annual work programmes.** Some instances of postponement and cancellations, due to resource constraints, were noted. The rate of completion of planned outputs decreased somewhat in 2021, with COVID-19 playing a significant role in this as in-person events for example had to be cancelled at short-notice.
- **The EEA's tasks related to reporting obligations increased over the period of the evaluation,** both in terms of the level of support the Agency provides (i.e., how many steps in the reporting process it provides substantial support, or has responsibility, for) and of the relative size of its involvement across obligations (the amount of resources required). The EEA's involvement in reporting on climate legislation in particular increased markedly over the last years.
- **Looking at the publication plan of the EEA in 2020 and 2021, the Agency published 84% and 80% of its planned publication in each year, respectively.** In both years, half of the publications not published according to the plans were cancelled, and half were postponed to the following year.

### 5.1 Inputs

This section provides an overview of the financial inputs received by EEA and its staff levels, over the evaluation period. It only considers inputs directly at the disposal of the Agency and does not extend to include inputs from other bodies (such as staff time of the Commission, or resources at national level to facilitate Eionet), as, although these are necessary to facilitate the working of the EEA and Eionet, this falls outside the scope of the evaluation.

#### The EEA budget and its execution during the 2017-2021 period

The EEA's sources of funding can be divided into two main blocks:

- the **core budget**, which is financed from EU subventions (provided through the Multiannual Financial Framework, and which can be equated with the direct costs accrued

for EU Member States), EFTA and candidate countries' subsidy, and Switzerland's contributions (separate from the contributions under EFTA<sup>13</sup>)

- the **non-core budget**, which refers to other **revenue for non-core activities**, financed from other EU programmes through Service-Level Agreements (SLAs), Grant agreements, Delegation and Contribution agreements between the EEA and different DGs which are used to execute the strategy and work programme.

Detailed figures of EU core and non-core budget are included in Annex 1 and discussion of the resources and its impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the EEA and Eionet is presented in section 6.2.4.

**Table 5.1: EEA revenue (core and non-core budget) 2017 – 2021, EUR**

	2014-20 MFF				2021-27 MFF
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Core budget</b>					
EU subvention <sup>14</sup>	36,309,240	37,724,481	39,733,971	41,972,000	45,398,000
Contributions from other member countries (EFTA and others)	5,251,553	5,343,822	5,479,257	5,639,067	6,020,177
<b>Total</b>	<b>41,560,793</b>	<b>43,068,303</b>	<b>45,213,228</b>	<b>47,611,067</b>	<b>51,418,177</b>
<b>Non-core budget</b>					
Grant, contribution and service-level agreements (earmarked funds)	29,061,000	22,731,874	6,846,000	15,618,000	13,449,000
<b>Total revenue</b>					
	<b>70,621,793</b>	<b>65,800,177</b>	<b>52,059,228</b>	<b>63,229,066</b>	<b>64,867,177</b>

Sources: EEA Consolidated annual activity reports (2017-2021).

The EEA's core budget is shaped by the EU's long-term budget, the **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**, which allocates resources in the EU across policy areas during a 7-year period. Within the evaluation period, EEA and Eionet operated under two very different MFFs: MFF 2014-2020, which introduced austerity measures for decentralised agencies, namely through the objective of reducing staffing levels in agencies by 5% over five years, and MFF 2021-2030, which reflected the increased focus on environmental and climate policy introduced by the European Green Deal.

**Overall, the EEA core budget increased by about 25% in nominal terms from 2017 to 2021.** This stemmed from a general inflation-related increase of the EU subvention; an increase in funds designated to new tasks, namely in response to the European Green Deal; and an increase in existing tasks such as for example for the Governance of the Energy Union and the Fitness check on Environmental Reporting.

<sup>13</sup> It was noted that following Brexit, both third-country contributions and specifically contributions from Switzerland increased to make up for the shortfall.

<sup>14</sup> Named EU subsidy until 2019

External assigned revenue (**non-core funding** in support of European Commission projects) experienced some noticeable fluctuations over the evaluation period, with an overall decrease between 2017 and 2021 (-53%). In 2019 specifically, a sharp drop in non-core funding can be seen, but this can be explained by the funding arrangements of Copernicus, rather than any other budgetary issues or austerity measures per se. As a direct consequence of the EGD and environmental objectives being embedded in other policy areas, new grants and agreements were concluded, and some agreements were renewed with larger funding than in previous years (see details in Annex 1, particularly Table 1.3).

### EEA Staff

The total posts filled by the Agency (excluding structural service providers) **increased by 11%** over the period covered by the evaluation (2017-2021), **from 212 in 2017 to 236 in 2021 (+24 posts)**. This increase came mainly from establishment plan posts (+13 staff) and contractual agents (+13 staff), while the number of Seconded National Experts decreased by 2 during the period (in particular the number of SNEs decreased drastically in 2020, reportedly due to the COVID crisis that affected the renewal of SNEs in 2020) and started to increase again in 2021. The proportion of Establishment posts remained relatively stable in the composition of staff (59%), and the proportion of contract agents slightly increased (from 31 to 33%). From 2017 to 2021 the Agency also had 16 structural service providers (paid by contract but working in EEA premises); however, this information was removed from the CAAR 2021, therefore they are considered separately to avoid a bias in the comparison of total staff.

**Table 5.2: Staff development 2017-2021 (actually filled posts)**

Staff development (actually filled posts)										
	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
Administrators (AD)	62	29%	60	29%	60	30%	68	32%	79	34%
Assistants (AST)	64	30%	62	30%	60	30%	58	28%	60	25%
Assistants/secretaries (AST/SC)	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<i>Establishment plan posts (all of the above: AD, AST, SC)</i>	126	59%	122	60%	120	60%	126	60%	139	59%
Contract agents (CA)	66	31%	63	31%	61	31%	71	34%	79	33%
Seconded national experts (SNEs)	20	9%	19	9%	19	9%	12	6%	18	8%
<b>Total staff – filled posts</b>	<b>212</b>		<b>204</b>		<b>200</b>		<b>209</b>		<b>236</b>	
<i>Structural service providers</i>	16		16		16		16		N/A	
<b>Total staff – filled posts including service providers</b>	<b>228</b>		<b>220</b>		<b>216</b>		<b>225</b>		<b>236</b>	

Source: EEA Consolidated annual activity reports (2017-2021). CAAR 2021 does not include information on structural service providers

The evolution of staff numbers over the evaluation period was mainly determined by the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 and by the European Green Deal.

- As part of austerity measures, the MFF 2014-2020 required all EU institutions and bodies to reduce staffing by 5%. In addition, as the EEA was labelled a ‘cruising speed’ agency<sup>15</sup>, a further 5% reduction was made during the same period. By 2018, the EEA had completed the required 10% reduction.
- The increase in the number of Contractual Agent (CAs) and Administrator (AD) posts in 2020 and 2021 reflects the fact that the Agency received additional resources to cover new tasks arising from the EGD<sup>16</sup>, in particular:
  - In 2020 the Agency received 8 Temporary Agents (AD) and 10 CAs, including (i) 5 TAs and 2 CAs posts provided by amendments to the budget by the European Parliament in support to LULUCF, Drinking Water Directive, new legislation on water reuse and monitoring of Invasive Alien Species, (ii) 2 additional posts (1 TA and 1 CA) for the sustainable finance initiative (taxonomy), and (iii) one additional CA to support the new task of the Energy Union Governance. At the same time, however, there was a reduction of 2 CA posts proposed by DG BUDG for under execution of CA posts.
  - In 2021, 15 additional staff (9 TAs and 6 CAs) were received to cover 8<sup>th</sup> EAP additional task in support of the EGD, plus an additional TA and for expanded tasks to support Sustainable Finance.

The ‘non-core’ budget also provided additional staff to the Agency. In 2021, there were 12 CAs (Group Function IV) financed from grant, contribution or service level agreements.<sup>17</sup> Further detail on staff evolution is provided in Annex 1.

## 5.2 Activities

The EEA is guided in its activities by the tasks and responsibilities set out in its founding regulation, by the tasks assigned to it by other EU legislative texts, and by the areas of activities and corresponding multi-annual objectives set out in the multi-annual work programmes (the period of the evaluation covers two such programmes, the MAWP 2014-2020 and the EEA and Eionet Strategy 2021-2030). The EEA’s activities between 2014 and 2020 were categorised into four strategic areas (SAs): Informing policy implementation (SA1), Assessing systemic challenges (SA2), Knowledge co-creation, sharing and use (SA3), and EEA Management (SA4). In 2021, with the new Strategy, the EEA introduced five strategic objectives across five thematic work areas. Further details are provided in Annex 1.

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<sup>15</sup> In its Communication „Programming of human and financial resources for decentralized agencies 2014-2020” from 10 July 2013, the Commission categorised decentralised agencies in three categories (‘cruising-speed’ agencies, ‘new tasks’ agencies and ‘start-up phase’ agencies) to follow a differentiated approach regarding budget envelopes and staff reductions. ‘Cruising speed’ agencies are well-established agencies with stable tasks. See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0519&from=EN>

<sup>16</sup> In addition to receiving additional posts, two AST posts were converted to AD posts in 2020. On the other hand, two CA posts for existing tasks were reduced.

<sup>17</sup> EEA Consolidated annual activity report 2021.

This section provides an overview of the activities completed by the EEA over the evaluation period, and notably the scale thereof.

### Main tasks implemented in 2017-2021

This section provides an overview of the main tasks implemented by the EEA in 2017-2021. Annex 2 contains the detailed compilation of the EEA's progress in implementation over the course of the evaluation.

Between 2017 and 2020, the EEA's AWP and CAARs provided figures for the numbers of outputs planned for each year, and the number of specific outputs completed each year. Outputs here refer not only to specific reports or datasets, but also completed activities achieved, e.g., 'Support to the Commission with the preparation of the report on the application of the EU ETS Directive (as required under Article 21)' and therefore serves as the measure by which EEA's activities can be traced over the evaluation period. In the 2021 AWP and CAAR, this information was no longer provided.

Overall, between 2017 and 2021, the EEA produced most of the outputs it had set out to do. Between 2017 and 2020, the EEA completed around 90% of its planned outputs across all SAs. The rates of KPIs achieved in 2021 were mostly on target, except notably in the first activity where the EEA had a comparatively lower completion rate in reports produced, core set indicators updated, and Eionet core data flows delivered.

As can be seen, the EEA completed most outputs it had set out in its AWP, with some noticeable variations between Strategic Areas, as well as between years. However, it needs to be considered that the total number of outputs planned per strategic area also varied, and that areas with a small number of planned outputs tended to have lower completion rates (as one postponed output has a comparatively bigger effect).

- Completion rates in 2017 were comparatively lower than those in subsequent years. Reasons for non-completion of outputs varied, but resource constraints were cited in several instances, leading to reprioritisations. Partially, however, this may also reflect the fact that fewer outputs were planned for that year (especially as a change in the way outputs are reported led to an increase in the number of outputs in 2019 and 2020).
- Completion rates in 2020 were comparatively lower across SA1 and SA2 than in previous years. In many cases, this was due the impact of COVID-19 on planned outputs, such as various Eionet workshops which had to be postponed.

Table 5.3 below shows the number of planned outputs and the number of completed outputs (and the completion rate) as reported by the EEA in its AWP and CAARs between 2017 and 2020. A completion rate above 90% is marked in green, completion rates of 75% up to 90% are coloured orange, and completion rates of below 75% are marked red.

**Table 5.3: EEA outputs completion rate, 2017 – 2020**

Strategic Area (SA)	2017	2018	2019	2020
1.1: Air Pollution, Transport and Noise	15 / 16 (94%)	14 / 14 (100%)	27 / 28 (96%)	14 / 14 (100%)
1.2: Industrial Pollution	12 / 12 (100%)	10 / 12 (83%)	12 / 12 (100%)	9 / 9 (100%)
1.3: Climate change mitigation, energy (and transport)	11 / 13 (85%)	16 / 17 (94%)	34 / 39 (87%)	34 / 37 (92%)

Strategic Area (SA)	2017	2018	2019	2020
1.4: Climate change impacts, vulnerability and adaptation (climate change adaptation and LULUCF)	7 / 7 (100%)	9 / 10 (90%)	16 / 16 (100%)	13 / 14 (93%)
SA 1.5: Water management, resources and ecosystems	11 / 12 (92%)	9 / 10 (90%)	18 / 19 (95%)	20 / 21 (95%)
1.6: Marine and coastal environment and maritime activities	8 / 8 (100%)	9 / 10 (90%)	14 / 15 (93%)	12 / 14 (86%)
1.7: Biodiversity and ecosystems, agriculture and forests	12 / 13 (92%)	15 / 15 (100%)	19/19 (100%)	27 / 33 (81%)
1.8: Urban, land use and soil	7 / 8 (88%)	8 / 98 (89%)	6 / 6 (100%)	8 / 13 (61%)
1.9: Waste and material resource	5 / 7 (71%)	3 / 4 (75%)	5 / 5 (100%)	4 / 5 (80%)
2.1: Resource-efficient economy and the environment	4 / 4 (100%)	4 / 5 (90%)	10 / 11 (91%)	9 / 9 (78%) <sup>18</sup>
2.2: Environment, human health and well-being	4 / 5 (80%)	6 / 5 (100%) <sup>19</sup>	4 / 5 (80%)	3 / 3 (100%)
2.3: Megatrends and transitions	3 / 4 (75%)	5 / 6 (83%)	5 / 6 (83%)	3 / 5 (60%)
2.4: Sustainability assessments and state of the environment reporting	7 / 8 (88%)	9 / 9 (100%)	12 / 13 (92%)	15 / 16 (81%)
3.1: Networking and partnerships	8 / 9 (89%)	8 / 8 (100%)	9 / 10 (90%)	2 / 2 (100%)
3.2: Technical systems development	5 / 6 (83%)	7 / 7 (100%)	4 / 4 (100%)	4 / 4 (100%)
3.3: Monitoring, data and information management	5 / 6 (83%)	7 / 7 (100%)	4 / 4 (100%)	4 / 4 (100%)
3.4: Communication, outreach and user analysis	11 / 11 (100%)	10 / 11 (91%)	15 / 15 (100%)	14 / 15 (93%)
3.5: Quality management and operational services	4 / 4 (100%)	4 / 4 (100%)	7 / 7 (100%)	2 / 2 (100%)
3.6: Copernicus operational services	4 / 4 (100%)	3 / 3 (100%)	4 / 4 (100%)	4 / 4 (100%)
3.7: Capacity building in West Balkan and European Neighbourhood Countries	4 / 4 (100%)	4 / 4 (100%)	8 / 10 (80%)	2 / 2 (100%)
4.1: Governance and management	6 / 7 (85%)	6 / 6 (100%)	7 / 7 (100%)	3 / 3 (100%)
4.2: Administration	4 / 4 (100%)	4 / 4 (100%)	4 / 4 (100%)	3 / 4 (75%)
<b>Total (across all SAs)</b>	<b>142 / 156 (91%)</b>	<b>156 / 166 (94%)</b>	<b>217 / 231 (94%)</b>	<b>195 / 219 (89%)</b>

Source: EEA SPDs and CAARs between 2017 and 2020

It can also be noted that the number of outputs increased over the years from 2017-2020. Partially, this reflects a change in reporting, as from 2019 onwards updated indicators were reported as separate outputs (per indicator), whereas previously these would have constituted one 'joint' output. Additionally, the EEA actively shifted away from producing long reports to producing shorter briefings (e.g., several short briefings replace what was previously one long report). The EEA also took on additional tasks over the evaluation period which were not planned in the MAWP 2014-2020, such as through the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action Regulation (including support in its development and implementation).

<sup>18</sup> The EEA produced two outputs not mentioned in the AWP in 2020, but did not complete two outputs that were planned.

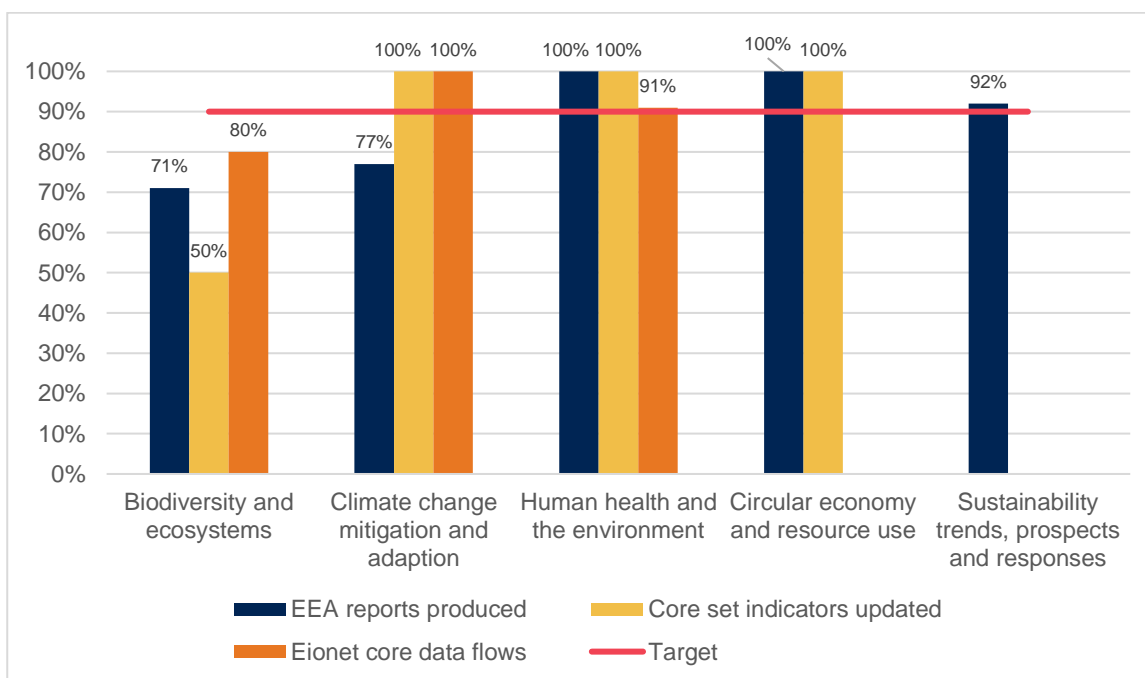
<sup>19</sup> The EEA further produced an additional output not mentioned in the AWP in 2018.



From 2019 onwards, the EEA also had defined KPIs in each SA and started reporting against these in the CAARs, for each SA. The reporting of KPIs largely overlaps with the reporting of outputs delivered against outputs planned but differs in the sense that the KPIs correspond only to a sub-set of EEA outputs per SA that were selected by the EEA. Annex 2 contains a table with the KPIs achieved in 2019 and 2020. Again, it is noticeable that the completion rate for 2020 was lower than 2019, reflecting the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of tasks. Additionally, the target for a majority of KPIs was not met in 2020 in SAs 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 2.1 and 2.4.

With the introduction of the new Strategy in 2021, new Areas of Work (activities) were introduced. Unlike in the MAWP 2014-2020, the outputs associated with each activity were not specified in the 2021-2030 Strategy. Instead, the EEA reported implementation of tasks in the form of KPIs against the main group of outputs (EEA reports produced, core set indicators updated, Eionet core dataflows, and Network meeting satisfaction) in each activity, presented in Table 5.5 below. The EEA set itself a target of achieving 90% across each of the planned outputs (Eionet reports produced, core set indicators updated, Eionet core data flows) in the respective Areas of Work.

**Figure 5.1: KPIs achieved in 2021, per Area of Work**



NB: It was not possible to break down the KPI 'Network meeting satisfaction' by activity area. There were no Eionet core data flows for the areas 'Circular economy and resource use' and 'sustainability trends, prospects and responses', and no core indicator for the latter either.

Source: CAAR 2021

In a similar trend to the preceding years, the EEA implemented most of its activities and delivered the key outputs it had planned. Noteworthy is the comparatively worse performance in the area 'biodiversity and ecosystems', considering especially that this was the most resource-intensive area of work in 2021 (accounting for 29% of staff time and 33% of operational cost execution<sup>20</sup>). This can be explained by the fact that, of the four core set indicators, two were not updated in 2021; one was postponed to 2022 due to a delay in the availability of the underlying dataset (thus also impacting on

<sup>20</sup> EEA (2022), CAAR 2021.

the achievement of the Eionet core data flows KPI) and the other one was postponed and released in April 2022 (although no reason for the delay was stated in the CAAR).

### Staff time per activity

The EEA monitors the time spent by their staff per strategic activity (see Table 5.4). Time spent per sub-activity is not available. Annex 1 furthermore contains detailed figures of staff allocation per programme.

In 2021, the new EEA-Eionet strategy meant that the headings by which the EEA reports time spent changed. As can be seen, “Informing policy implementation”, “knowledge co-creation” and “governance and management” are the areas which consumed more time for EEA staff in the period 2017-2020. This reflects the number of sub-activities under SA1 and SA3 particularly, and the number of outputs (as seen in Table 5.3 above). In 2021, when reporting of time was done by policy area, the figures show that “climate change” and “biodiversity and ecosystems” were the areas where more resources were used.

**Table 5.4: Staff time by strategic activity 2017-2021**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
SA1: Informing policy implementation	31%	30%	32%	31%	N/A
SA 2: Assessing systemic challenges	8%	9%	11%	8%	
SA 3: Knowledge co-creation, sharing and use	28%	28%	25%	26%	
SA 4.1: EEA Management: Governance and management	20%	21%	21%	23%	
SA 4.2: EEA Management: Administration	13%	12%	11%	12%	
Biodiversity and ecosystems	N/A				29%
Climate change mitigation and adaptation					30%
Human health and the environment					11%
Resource use and the circular economy					8%
Sustainability, trends, prospects and responses					22%

Source: EEA Consolidated annual activity reports (2017-2021).

### Reporting Obligations

European environmental and climate legislative instruments impose several reporting obligations (ROs) on Member States, industries and other relevant stakeholders. These play a crucial role in ensuring accountability and monitoring progress towards Europe’s various environmental and climate ambitions and targets. The EEA’s Reporting Obligations Database (ROD) currently lists over 390 reporting obligations.<sup>21</sup> The EEA plays a vital role in facilitating the collection and use of data pursuant to reporting obligations, as they support the collection, analysis and dissemination of data and indicators at various scales.

This analysis focuses on three different aspects of the EEA’s contributions to the ROs: (1) the level of support and relative size of involvement of the EEA, (2) the overall changes in legislation and reporting obligations observed, and (3) the changes of the EEA’s involvement through the reporting

<sup>21</sup> The ROD is part of Reportnet and is a database that records the environmental reporting obligations that countries have stemming from EU legislations as well as towards international organisations.

cycle steps. The description of the methodological approach, the full assessment, and the complete dataset (including a comparison with the previous evaluation period) is found in Annex 10.

For **(1), the level of support and relative size of involvement of the EEA**, it is important to be aware of the EEA's own categorisation of support and involvement in ROs, as presented in the box below.

### Categorisation of EEA support and magnitude of involvement

#### Level of EEA support

- o Level 1: EEA fully supports data flow and countries through staff, ETC and consultants (extent of support varies) (previous 'Full support')
- o Level 2: Reporting is hosted in EEA systems but managed by Commission, so not EEA staff or ETC, but specific agreement using EEA FWC uses EEA consultants to implement. (previous 'Partial support')
- o Level 3: Reporting only into Reportnet and no further use of EEA resources in reporting cycles. Post processing done by commission taking the data elsewhere. (previous 'CDR')

#### Relative size of EEA involvement in Level 1 support

- o XL: Involves EEA staff, ETC and consultants – 6+ months EEA/ETC and EUR 100k+ resources
- o L: Involves EEA staff, ETC and consultants – 3-6 months EEA/ETC and EUR 50k+ resources
- o M: Involves EEA staff, ETC (maybe) and consultants – 1-3 months EEA/ETC and EUR 10k+ resources
- o S: Involves EEA staff, ETC (maybe) and consultants - <1 month EEA/ETC and < EUR 10k resources

Overall, the EEA supports 36 EU legislative instruments. Within these, the EEA is directly involved in the management of 123 EU reporting obligations. Following from this, the analysis shows that for 80% of the legislations the EEA provided full support (level 1) where the EEA supports the full data flow through staff, ETC and consultants. Two instruments require partial (level 2) support (5%), and only 5 legislative instruments require minimal support (level 3) from the EEA (13%). The 80% of legislation requiring level 1 support represent 113 Ros out of 123, indicating that 90% of reporting obligations currently require full support of the EEA. As regards the relative size of level 1 support, over 50% of level 1 support by the EEA requires substantial time and resources of over EUR 50,000 (XL and L). Only very few legislative instruments with level 1 support require limited resources (S) from the EEA. This indicates that when the EEA is fully involved in the reporting cycle of a legislation it mostly does so with at least significant (M) if not substantial involvement and resource commitment. Looking at the breakdown in policy areas only within involvements of XL size, Ros related to air and nature legislation emerge as the most resource intensive for the EEA.

Regarding **(2), changes in legislation and reporting obligations**, the analysis shows that the majority of pieces of legislation that are relevant for the EEA had undergone significant amendments between the last and current evaluation period. The previous evaluation considered a total of 46 legislative instruments of relevance, whereas for the period of 2017-2021 36 instruments were determined to be of relevance. A total of 29 instruments had undergone amendments. Also, five new legislative instruments that affected ROs supported by the EEA were introduced, including the Union Space Programme. Only two Instruments, covering 3 ROs, were terminated.

While the previous evaluation reported 136 relevant ROs to the EEA, 23 of these were considered as receiving 'no support'. Hence, only 113 obligations were considered. While this study identified a decrease in legislative instruments, the total number of ROs actually increases to 123. Thus, the

EEA has increased its total level of support to ROs by around 9%. The 2017 Fitness Check<sup>22</sup> noted five pieces of legislation with ROs relevant to the EEA that required further streamlining to improve effectiveness<sup>23</sup>. However, no changes in ROs could be identified in three of these five. In the other two pieces of legislation (VOC Paints Directive and Waste Framework Directive), one RO was dropped, and one was added, respectively. Both were categorised as level 3 involvements.

Regarding changes in the number of ROs under a specific policy area, substantial increases in support level are observed in the areas of climate change (+125% increase, from 12 ROs in level 1 to 27), water and marine (70% increase, from 10 ROs in level 1 to 17), industrial emissions (800% increase, from 1 RO in level 1 to 8) and nature (60% increase, from 5 ROs in level 1 to 8). Within the horizontal policy area, there is also growing involvement and needs for the EEA's support with the introduction of the Union Space Programme and the associated Copernicus CLMS dataflows that substantially increased the level 1 support required from EEA. The Union Space Programme is a level 1 RO with a relative involvement of XL of the EEA.

As for **(3), step by step involvement of the EEA**, building on the 10-steps methodology, which was developed for the previously mentioned Fitness Check and which is also further described in Annex 10, a significant increase can notably be seen in steps 7 – 10 (quality assurance, data processing, web presentation, report publication). While the previous evaluation study also built on this 10-steps methodology, the EEA itself does not track its support level or magnitude of involvement across individual ROs in this manner. Furthermore, step 10 was not as comprehensive in the previous evaluation, where in the current evaluation there is no differentiation between specific and integrated data uses for publication. Provided that the assumption of the EEA – that all level 1 supported ROs therefore require support from the EEA from step 2 – 10 consistently – is correct, then the EEAs support for ROs has significantly increased. Due to these limitations, a precise one-to-one comparison between the EEAs involvement in the 10-steps is at this stage not possible.

In order to accurately, and consistently, track the EEAs involvement and workload associated with ROs, it is suggested that a standard tracking of support and involvement approach be implemented. Most importantly, the EEA should be able to track and report where ROs are being used (or supporting) publications either led by the EEA or externally. This is critical not only to better track the usage of data, but moreover, allows insights into the usefulness of data collection which can further support bringing added value to data reporting.

### 5.3 Outputs

The EEA's activities and outputs are often inter-related. In this study, a clear distinction was undertaken and only output-focused results within a given timeframe are being included in this section – KPI results, publication plan outcomes for 2020 and 2021, and reflections on EEA perceptions for given years.

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<sup>22</sup> European Commission (2017). Fitness Check of Reporting and Monitoring of EU Environmental Policy. COM(2017) 312 Final.

<sup>23</sup> Habitats Directive (HD), Bird Directive (BD), Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, Volatile Organic Compounds Directive (VOC), Waste Framework Directive

## Key Performance Indicators

With the Single Programming Document in 2019, the EEA has taken up 17 measurable key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure progress and developments in relation to input (in terms of budget and staff), output (key products), uptake (in terms of visibility, web traffic and date usage), as well as development (to capture organisational aspects). These KPIs are presented in the table below, together with the ratings for the years 2019, 2020 and 2021. KPIs 1-7 and 14-17 are mandatory KPIs for the Director. Chapter 6.2.5 contains an analysis of the current KPIs and considerations regarding their possible revision.

**Table 5.5: Agency-wide KPIs (KPIs marked with an \* are mandatory for the Executive Director)**

Type	No	Progr amme	KPI	Baseline (year)	Target	Realisation		
						2019	2020	2021
INPUT	1*	ADS	Staff occupancy rate — realised staff resources in annual establishment plan	99% (2016)	Min. 95%	96.70%	97%	99.30%
	2*	ADS	Budget execution — rate of annual budgetary commitments	99.9% (2016)	Min. 98%	100%	99.50%	100%
	3*	ADS	Budget execution — cancellation rate of payment appropriations in year N-1 (unused carryover)	0.10%	Max. 2% of core budget	0.50%	0.05%	0.00%
	4*	ADS	Budget execution — payments executed within legal / contractual deadline (%)	99.4% (2017)	100%	99.50%	99.70%	95.20%
OUTPUT	5*	COM	Reports / assessments — delivery rate of key reports / assessments (%) as planned in the AWP	(2019)	Min. 90%	93.10%	87.50%	89%
	6*	IAS	Indicators — share of core set indicators updated as planned in the AWP (%)	/	Min. 90%	96%	88.20%	>90%
	7*	DIS	Data flows — annual performance for Eionet core data flows	86% (2017)	90% by 2018	92%	96%	86%
UPTAKE	8	COM	Media visibility — articles with reference to EEA (No)	13,800 (2017)	Stable / increase	14,152	25,626	23,066
	9	COM	Followers on social media (No)	97,000 (2017)	Stable / increase	114,046	178,593	207,404
	10	COM	Web traffic— registered sessions on the EEA website (No)	4,400,000 (2017)	Stable / increase	6,345,995	8,200,866	9,817,181
	11	DIS	Downloads— registered use of map services (No) ('Machine to machine' traffic)	175,000,000 (2017)	Stable / increase	375,218,782	533,072,168	658,948,125
	12	ADS	Stakeholder interaction — delivery rate of planned Eionet meetings	/	90%	95%	100%	95%
	13	CAS	Stakeholder interaction — average participant satisfaction rating	/	80%	95%	94%	93%

Type	No	Programme	KPI	Baseline (year)	Target	Realisation		
						2019	2020	2021
DEVELOPMENT	14*	ADS	Staff satisfaction — average favourable rate for common items for agencies (%)	67% (2017)	/	61%	66%	63%
	15*	ADS	Learning — average registered time for learning and development (days)	6.4	7	4.11	3.9	4
	16*	ADS	Absence — annual average short-term sick leave (days)	10.4	Stable / decrease	9.7	4.7	5
	17*	EDO	Audit compliance — rate (%) of ECA recommendations implemented (with deadline in current year)	75% (2017)	/	80%	50%	Not applicable

### EEA's publications

In December each year, the EEA prepares a status report on the publication plan for that year, noting whether each publication has been published as planned, cancelled, postponed or delayed. Cancellation refers to a publication that was taken out of planning altogether, and for postponed cancellations, the EEA would note in the plan that it was carried over to a subsequent year. For publications where work was able to commence in the respective year, but actual publication simply moved over to the subsequent year, the EEA marked the final publication date, and these publications are referred to as “delayed” in this review. In these plans, the EEA furthermore labels publications when they constitute a higher priority publication as “key assessment/mandatory/by regulation R\*” (with R\* referring to a regular report under an EU legislation and/or international convention), however does not distinguish further between these three categories. An overview of the review is presented in the table and the charts below, a full overview is contained in Annex 10.

As can be seen from Table 5.6, the share of postponed or cancelled publications of a higher priority order was low in both years. Taking into account delayed publications, the share triples in 2020 but only marginally changes in 2021, nothing though that overall, the publications marked as a higher priority was significantly lower in 2021. The overall decrease in publication numbers could be related, on the one hand, to the shift in priority settings and the introduction of the new EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030. On the other hand, it could also be a reflection of changes in the way data can increasingly be presented digitally, which allows for a greater focus on the actual established and required publications, such as monitoring reports.

**Table 5.6: Review of publication plans 2020 and 2021**

	Total number of publications	Number of key assessments /mandatory / R* publications	Number of delayed publications	Number of postponed or cancelled publications	Share of postponed / cancelled that are key assessment / mandatory / R*	Share of postponed, cancelled and delayed that are key assessment / mandatory / R*
Publication plan 2020	73	35	18	12	5%	18%
Publication plan 2021	61	10	14	12	2%	3%

Source: EEA publication plans 2020 and 2021



A further breakdown per Strategic Area and Work Area is presented in the figures 5.2 and 5.3 below, with those areas that foresaw publications of a higher priority (i.e. labelled as “key assessment / mandatory / R\*”).

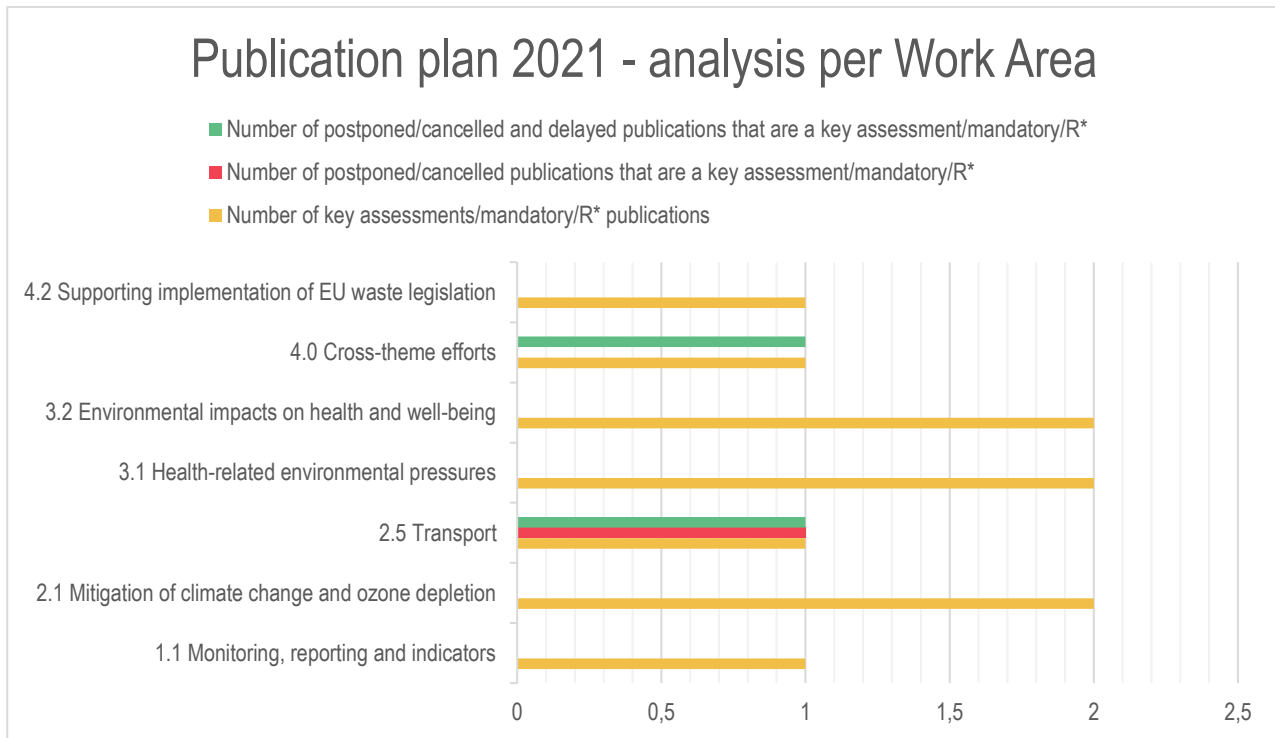
**Figure 5.2: Publication plan 2020 analysis per Strategic Area**



Source: EEA Publication Plan 2020

For 2020 no delays, postponements and cancellations were registered in the areas air pollution, adaptation/LULUCF, monitoring/data and information management, as well as in communication. Postponements and cancellations were registered in the area biodiversity and ecosystems, resource-efficiency and sustainability assessments. Adding delays in the mix, it is also the biodiversity and ecosystem area where the number is highest. While this includes a topic where publications were foreseen in two formats (briefing and report), in essence this matches results in other areas of this study (see Chapter 6.2.2), and which can be explained through implementation delays caused by COVID-19.

For 2021 two areas showed delays and postponements for higher priority publications. One publication affected a microplastics in textiles briefing, which was published in February 2022, and the second was related to CO2 emissions in heavy-duty vehicles which was postponed to be published together with the TERM report in 2022.

**Figure 5.3: Publication plan 2021 analysis per Work Area**

Source: EEA Publication Plan 2021

The full analysis also foresaw a review how many of these publications actually constituted a legally binding reporting obligation or an explicit Commission request, and how many were own-initiative publications. This information is not contained in the publication plans. Regarding legally binding reporting obligations it has to be noted that “R\*”-label (i.e. referring back to an EU or international reporting obligation) was used in SPDs and CAARs until 2020. However, the use of the R\*-label did not appear consistent across strategic areas, since in some areas it was used to label reports, and in other data flows and indicators instead. For this reason, and for the reason that reporting in SPDs and CAARs changed considerably in 2021, it was not possible to confidently relate publications back to actual reporting obligations. The EEA hence provided additional information in relation to the origin of the publications that were executed under the 2020 publication plan (i.e. cancelled publications were not included), distinguishing three different categories for classifying the publications: (1) publications on the basis of EU legislation and/or international conventions and/or requested by the European Commission, (2) publications requested by other EEA stakeholders and (3) EEA-own initiative publications. This information is contained in Table 5.7 below. While it shows that 70% of the publications are associated with a legislative instrument or a Commission request, it is not possible to link a number to distinguish between legislative instrument or Commission request. The alternative classification to the publication plan also resulted in a re-classification of some publications compared to the 2020 publication plan. For this reason, this information cannot be compared back to the analysis presented above.

**Table 5.7: Origin of executed 2020 publications**

Total number of publications executed in 2020	Number of publications on the basis of EU legislation and/or international conventions and/or requested by the EC	Number of publications requested by other EEA stakeholders	EEA-own initiative publications
67	49	10	7



Source: Additional information provided by EEA

For comparability in the future, one recommendation could be to define categories in advance to label the origins of publications as well as their status at the end of a reporting year, and to keep track of those through the publication plans. This would also allow publications to be related back to concrete legislative instruments and/or related reporting obligations.

## 6 Main findings

This chapter presents the main findings of the evaluation support study, taking each evaluation criterion (effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value) and evaluation question in turn.

### 6.1 Effectiveness

Effectiveness assesses how successful the EEA and its Eionet have been in implementing their tasks and delivering the desired impact, including the results obtained compared to the planned and foreseen outcomes, and the main success factors and obstacles.

#### 6.1.1 Performance and achievement of objectives and tasks

This section addresses the following three evaluation questions:

- *EQ 1: To what extent have the tasks of the EEA and the Eionet achieved their objectives as set out in the Regulation 401/2009?*
- *EQ2: How effective was EEA's work against its core objectives as defined in its founding regulation and also across the environmental and climate objectives and obligations stemming from the EU legislation and across all activities (management of reporting data flows, assessment of policies, prospective analyses)?*
- *EQ 3: To what extent have the tasks of the EEA, as defined in the founding regulation and complementary legislation, been implemented in the multi-annual and annual work programmes and other programming documents? If applicable, what are the factors that have hindered the implementation?*

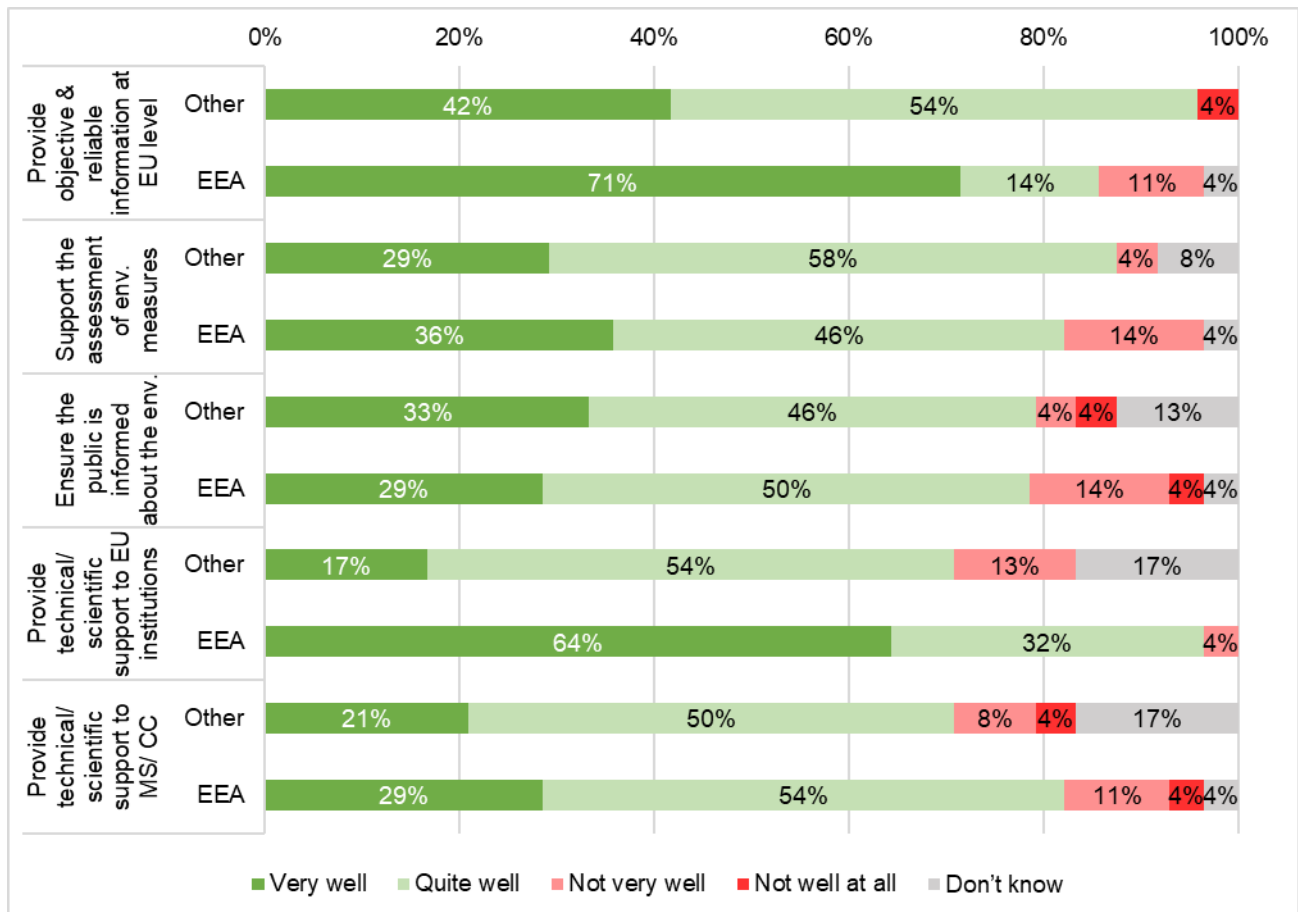
**Main issues considered:** This section considers the extent to which the EEA has fulfilled its core objectives (namely to provide objective, reliable and comparable information at European level, to support the assessment of results of environmental measures, to ensure that the public is properly informed about the state of the environment, and to provide the necessary technical and scientific support to the European Union and the Member States) the extent to which the EEA achieved its objectives and obligations stemming from the EU legislation in its work programmes. It also provides an assessment of the extent to which the EEA achieved its core tasks.

**Main findings:** By and large, stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the EEA's performance, and the evaluation found that the Agency had met its objectives and fulfilled its tasks to a very large extent. The EEA implemented the vast majority of the activities it had set out in its AWP and mostly achieved its output-related KPIs between 2017 and 2021. In particular, the EEA and Eionet delivered the vast majority of core indicators and data flows over the evaluation period, to high quality. Through the provision of this data they increased the evidence base on the state of the environment in Europe, and through associated outputs such as reports or briefings (including the SOER) they ensured that this information was effectively disseminated.

In the first instance, this section examines the extent to which the EEA achieved each of its core objectives as set out in Regulation 401/2009. The results of the online survey (see Figure 6.1) suggest that the EEA performs well against all of its objectives, with at least 70% of respondents agreeing it met all of them at least quite well. Both EEA staff and other survey respondents believe the Agency did especially well in providing objective, reliable and comparable information at the European level. EEA staff also responded the Agency excelled at providing technical and scientific

support on environmental matters to EU institutions, while other respondents appeared to give it more credit for ensuring the public is properly informed about the state of the environment. However, in view of the low number of responses to the survey (especially from non-EEA staff), these results need to be viewed with a degree of caution and considered alongside the other evidence presented below.

**Figure 6.1: Thinking of the period 2017-2021, how well did the EEA and its network, the Eionet, meet the following objectives?**



Source: Online Survey (10/02/2023 – 28/03/2023). Q9, N=51. Split by respondents from EEA and other respondents (N=28 for EEA staff, N= 23 for 'other').

**Provision of objective, reliable and comparable information at the European level**

The EEA, over the course of the evaluation, has provided objective, reliable and comparable information at the European level through the collation, amalgamation and analysis of data from member countries, and the presentation and dissemination thereof through published indicators as well as specific outputs (such as reports or briefings). The EEA has consistently delivered these outputs over the evaluation period: between 2017 and 2020, the EEA has produced at least 94% of the outputs foreseen in its AWP. It has also delivered the majority of its core reports and data flows in 2021. In 2019 and 2020 (since the EEA reports KPIs on this), the EEA has delivered 100% of core set indicators and core data flows in all cases except under SA 1.6, where work on indicators and core data flows was cancelled due to limited resources. In 2021, the EEA met its targets related to updating core indicators and delivering Eionet core dataflows across for most, but not all areas of work (see section 5.2 for further detail).

More specifically, the EEA was directly involved in discussions around what and how data ought to be reported. For example, the EEA supported the Commission in establishing the online reporting

platform to support the implementation of the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action (SA 1.3) and also provided technical support to the Commission on developing reporting protocols for industrial emissions data under IED, ETS, E-PRTR, etc. with national GHG and air pollutant emission inventory reporting (SA 1.2) and others. A Commission representative outlined the importance of the EEA's contribution to the monitoring component of the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action in particular: in the adopted implementing act, the EEA was very involved in the development of the monitoring templates and processes and provided substantial suggestions on how to improve the guidance to Member States.

The majority of stakeholders consulted across all groups agreed that the data and the outputs the EEA is providing represent objective, reliable and comparable information at the European level. Overall, stakeholders indicated that data published by the EEA was consistently of high quality, and it was perceived as objective by end-users. According to interviewees, this is achieved through the well-structured data flows the EEA has put in place, clear procedures on data transfers, and a thorough quality assurance process. Stakeholders noted that over the years, the EEA had become a 'mature' agency, which had established itself as a reference point for policy makers at EU and national level.

However, in a few instances the EEA did not deliver data on certain indicators on time, or sufficiently frequently. For example:

**The quality is already there in the products, but the challenge is the timeliness and the frequency. In the past, some products and indicators were provided every 3-6 years, but we will need these much more frequently [referring to land take and land degradation in functional urban areas and Natura 2000] – European Commission representative**

To enable the provision of objective, reliable and comparable information at the European level, and specifically to fulfil its core task, as defined in Article 2 (f) 'to help ensure that environmental data at European level are comparable and [...] encourage by appropriate means improved harmonisation of methods of measurement', the EEA is reliant on the provision of (high quality) data from member countries.

The EEA undertakes various activities, such as the provision of a continuously improved reporting platform (Reportnet), helpdesks, or Eionet groups and webinars to provide thematic support and help ensure countries are able to share the required data, or the establishment of a regular data flow process for the ENP partner countries in line with on-going Eionet practice (as was delivered under SA 3.7 in the MAWP 2017-2020). Apart from a lower completion rate in 2017 (83%), the EEA has completed all its intended outputs under SA 3.2 (Technical systems development) between 2017 and 2020, which includes facilitating the technological platforms, including Reportnet, and data infrastructure to fulfil its tasks (see section 5.2 and Annex 2).

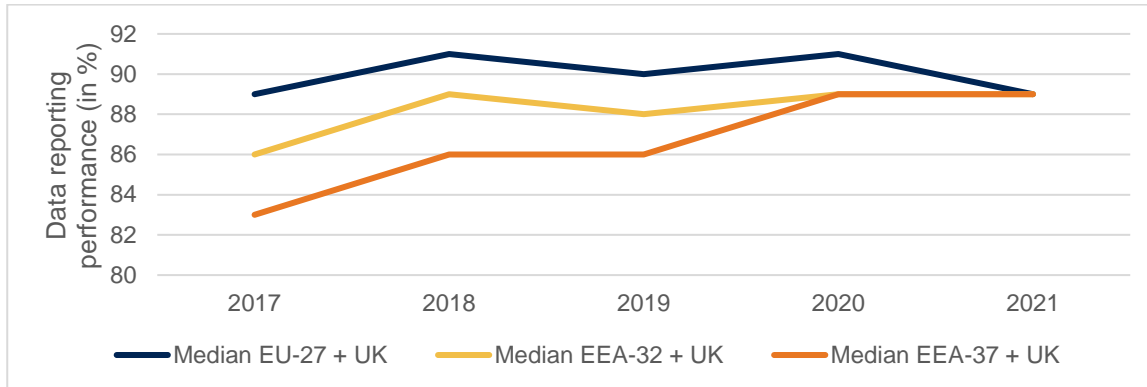
The effectiveness of the EEA's efforts to facilitate reporting from member countries is reflected in the data reporting performance rate of the Eionet core data flows. Figure 6.2 below shows the development of countries' data reporting performance<sup>24</sup> over the evaluation period. There is a

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<sup>24</sup> This refers to the rate at which countries provided relevant data, and not the rate at which the underlying environmental targets may have been met.

general tendency towards an increase of data performance rates between 2017 and 2021. The underlying data further shows that this trend was consistent across all countries except one, which showed a very persistent downwards trend, reaching the lowest rate of 8% in 2021. With the exception of this country, all others had a reporting rate of 50% or higher.<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 6.2: Data reporting performance on the basis of EIONET core data flows for the years 2017-2021 (in %), median values**



Source: EEA<sup>26</sup>

On the point of comparability, it was also argued that, whilst the process of data gathering and validation is overall solid and managed with specific timeframes, member countries have different ways of collecting data and different institutions are involved in the process. Some stakeholders argued that these factors could slightly undermine the overall data quality, objectivity, and comparability, which could potentially undermine efforts to ensure high quality data. In addition to this, some stakeholders pointed to differences in the data collection in some instances between member countries, which results in the EEA having to interpret the data and ultimately making a comparative assessment at the EU level difficult. In one case, the methodological approach of the EEA in dealing with missing data (i.e., if certain monitoring stations in member countries are not working) was questioned as providing a distorted picture.

Alongside this, some interviewees mentioned the EEA's recent integration of **novel data sources** in its portfolio, especially important as nowadays, according to EEA sources, the majority of data collected by the EEA comes from sources other than Eionet dataflows. Some stakeholders indicated this as a clear example of the EEA's efforts to meet stakeholders' demands, such as for real-time data, and thus an example of it effectively meeting its objective to provide objective, reliable and comparable data.

**“We need to balance accuracy and timeliness. We need to have a database of approved providers that coexist with country-validated data”** - Management Board member

Nevertheless, some concerns were raised around the use of this type of data, which is not subject to the same quality assurance processes as other traditional data flows. As explained by stakeholders, this is because near-real-time data, for example data obtained via machine learning, might be subject to inaccuracies. Additionally, provisional data could be used before it has been

<sup>25</sup> Following the exit of the UK from the European Union, the UK did not provide data in 2021.

<sup>26</sup> EEA (2022). History of data reporting performance. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/history-of-eionet-core-data-1>

subject to the full quality assurance process, under the condition that it might be subject to adjustments (which are normally minor). However, in the opinion of a national representative, using alternative data sources would not compromise the overall quality of the EEA's data and reporting outputs, and would provide near real-time insights into relevant issues.

### Supporting the assessment of results of environmental measures

As shown in section 5.2, the EEA provides support to 123 reporting obligations across 36 legal instruments and provides full support (including support beyond simply hosting the systems and datasets but also tasks related to analysis and reporting) to the majority of the obligations it supports it. All legal frameworks supported by EEA (status 2021) are listed below. Stakeholders across all groups, both in interviews as well as in the online survey (see Figure 6.1 above) were generally of the opinion that the EEA's work was instrumental in supporting the assessment of environmental measures.

**Table 6.1: Legal frameworks supported by EEA, as of 2021**

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Air Quality Implementing Decision (2011/850/EU)
Ambient Air Quality Directive (2008/50/EC)
Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC)
Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)
Circular Economy Action Plan, COM (2020) 98 final
Clean Air Policy Package (2013)
Climate Monitoring Mechanism (MMR) Regulation (EU) 525/2013 and Implementing/Delegated Acts
Common Agricultural Policy COM (2018) 393
Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) Regulation (1380/2013/EU)
Copernicus Programme Regulation (377/2014/EU)
Drinking Water Directive (98/83/EC)
Effort Sharing Decision (406/2009/EC)
Effort Sharing Regulation (EU) 2018/842
Emission Trading System Directive (2003/87/EC)
Energy Efficiency Directive (2012/27/EU)
Energy performance of buildings Directive (2018/844/EU)
Environmental Noise Directive (2002/49/EC)
Environmental Quality Standards Directive (2013/39/EU)
EU Adaptation strategy COM (2013) 216
EU Industrial Strategy, COM (2020) 102 final
European Climate Law proposal COM) (2020) 80
European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (E-PRTR) Regulation (166/2006/EC)
European Strategy for Low-Emission Mobility COM (2016) 501
European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy COM (2018) 28
F-gas Regulation (EU) 517/2014
Directive (2007/60/EC)
Forest strategy COM (2013) 6595

Fourth Air Quality Daughter Directive (2004/107/EC)
Fuel Quality Directive (98/70/EC)
Green Infrastructure Strategy COM (2013) 0249
Groundwater Directive (2006/118/EC)
Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)
Industrial Emissions Directive (IED) (2010/75/EU) and its implementing decisions
Inspire Directive (2007/2/EC)
Integrated Maritime Policy (Regulation (EU) No 1255/2011)
Invasive alien species (Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014)
Landfill of Waste Directive (1999/31/EC as amended) and supporting legislation addressing specific waste streams.
Long-term strategy 'A Clean Planet for all - A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy' COM (2018) 773
Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC)
Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSP) (2014/89/EU)
Medium Combustion Plants (MCP) Directive (2015/2193/EU)
National Emission Ceilings Directive (2016/2284/EU)
Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC)
Ozone Regulation (EU) 1005/2009
Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWD) (94/62/EC as amended)
Pollinators initiative COM (2018) 395 final
Regulation (EU) 2017/852 on mercury
Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action and implementing and delegated acts
Regulation (EU) 2018/841 on the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land use change and forestry in the 2030 climate and energy framework
Regulation (EU) 2019/1242 setting CO2 emission performance standards for new heavy-duty vehicles and Regulation (EU) 2018/956 on the monitoring and reporting of CO2 emissions from and fuel consumption of new heavy-duty vehicles
Regulation (EU) 2019/631 setting CO2 emission performance standards for new passenger cars and for new light commercial vehicles and Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/22 as regards the monitoring of CO2 emissions from new light commercial vehicles type-approved in a multi-stage process
Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC) and recast (EU) 2018/2001
Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe COM (2011) 571
Sustainable Finance initiative
Updated 2018 Bio-economy strategy COM (2018) 673/2 and SWD (2018)431/2
Urban agenda for the EU (Pact of Amsterdam 2016)
Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC)

Source: EEA Single Programming Document 2021-2023

Feedback from interviews and the workshops provided a number of examples of where the data provided by the Agency is useful to monitor the implementation of environmental measures. This includes the EEA's work to provide updated compilation of noise data under the Noise Directive 2002/49/EC, the EEA's support to the Air Quality Directives 2008/50/EC and 2004/107/EC and Implementing Decision 2011/850/EU by publishing published air quality data, statistics, and maps,



including maps showing exceedances of threshold, and updated core indicators related to air quality throughout the evaluation period or the Industrial Emissions Portal and the database related to the European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (E-PRTR), which the EEA updated continuously throughout the evaluation period. Additionally, in several instances the EEA has provided concrete support to the Commission to support policy implementation; for example, it supported the Common Implementation Strategy under the WFD (Water Framework Directive) and FD (Floods Directive) under SA 1.5, provided assessments of progress on the implementation of waste-management policies in countries under SA 1.9, and provided progress / implementation reports related to the Birds Directive under SA 1.7.

Several European Commission stakeholders shared the view that the EEA could play a greater role in supporting the assessment of non-compliance in more areas (as it is done already in some), as it would be well-placed thanks to its in-depth knowledge of EU Member States' performance. One example where the EEA data is clearly used to as part of the process to assess legislative compliance is the EEA's role in the 'early warning' reports regarding waste and recycling. This is described in the case study on waste and the circular economy (see Annex 4).

Beyond the provision of data and the support to reporting obligations, stakeholders also highlighted EEA reports and other outputs as informative and useful to support the implementation of environmental measures. Air quality was specifically mentioned as an example where the data provided by the Agency is essential to DG ENV, in particular in relation to the assessment of the impact of air pollution on health. Examples of EEA outputs in this field mentioned were the annual report on Air Quality in Europe and the European Air Quality Index (which starting in 2019 was published as a stand-alone product). The work that the EEA conducts in the context of reporting on ozone-depleting substances was mentioned as helpful, and in particular the role that the Agency plays in responding to questions posed by the Ozone Secretariat (UNEP).

Nevertheless, some shortcomings have also been identified. Some stakeholders considered that some indicators that inform the assessment of results of environmental measures (e.g., in the field of biodiversity) were not always produced in a timely manner, or fulfilling sufficient quality criteria so as to effectively inform how well EU Directives are being implemented at the national level. An analysis of the EEA's progress in implementation (see Annex 2) shows that throughout the evaluation period, the EEA had delivered updated data flows and indicators as set out in its AWP's in most cases, but that in a few instances publication of core set indicators or other data was postponed. Sometimes this was due to changes in legal reporting deadlines (beyond the control of the EEA) which meant data was received later, as happened for example for reporting on the Fuel quality monitoring under the Fuel Quality Directive in 2017<sup>27</sup>, but at other times no rationale was given for delays.

Importantly, some stakeholders underlined the EEA's role in supporting countries in building capacity for the assessment of environmental measures (see section 6.5).

### Ensuring the public is properly informed about the state of the environment

Dissemination of its outputs is a key focus of the EEA. The EEA is tasked by Article 2(m) of its Founding Regulation: 'to ensure the broad dissemination of reliable and comparable environmental

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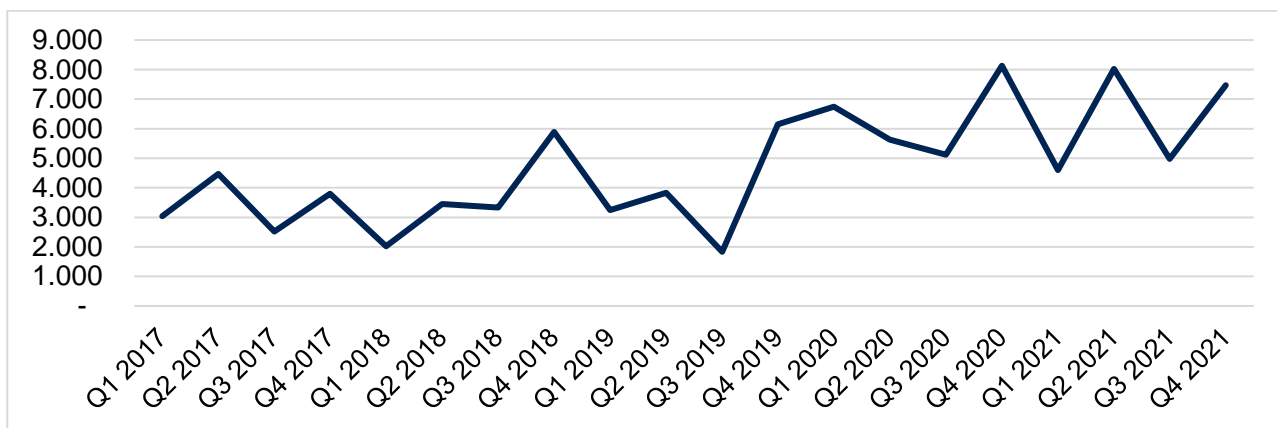
<sup>27</sup> EEA (2018). CAAR 2017.



information, in particular on the state of the environment, to the general public and, to this end, to promote the use of new telematics technology for this purpose'. Findings of this evaluation suggest that the EEA has successfully reached its stakeholders with outputs that are considered relevant, and that the Agency has worked (and continues to work) to address challenges and improve its outreach.

Over the period of the evaluation, stakeholders across groups reported that the EEA had improved its communication strategies. As indicated in Table 5.5 in section 5.3, the EEA recorded an increase in all its communication related KPIs between 2019 (when the EEA started measuring these KPIs) and 2021. The EEA's media visibility (KPI 8: number of articles with reference to EEA) has increased over the period of the evaluation, and the EEA has increased its Twitter and LinkedIn follower count progressively between 2017 (in the case of LinkedIn 2019) and 2021 (also captured in KPI 9: number of followers on social media). Traffic to the EEA website also increased (KPI 10: number of registered sessions on the EEA website). Section 6.4.1 further discusses the EEA's increased presence in social media.

**Figure 6.3: EEA media coverage (number of articles), 2017–2021**



Source: EEA data

Examples of EEA reports highlighted by several stakeholders were the annual bathing waters report, which is also popular beyond policy makers amongst external stakeholders (and is frequently picked up in the media) and the annual trends and projections report.

The EEA has undertaken concrete steps to ensure its outputs are relevant to its intended audiences. With SA 3.4, the EEA also had a dedicated area of activity focused on its communication efforts and performed an evaluation of its impact on an annual basis. While less prominent in the EEA and Eionet Strategy 2021-2030 (also because the Strategy takes a different format and outlines planned activities in less detail), the EEA still has the ambition to 'make all our data findable, interoperable, accessible and reusable as the leading European environment data centre'.

In 2020, the EEA commissioned a mapping of its online presence, a product review and a stakeholder analysis, inter alia to inform the design of the Agency's new website. The product review identified room for improvement regarding the coherence across EEA websites and its user friendliness, especially regarding its search function. This echoes some criticism voiced by various interviewees that EEA data at times is hard to find and difficult to access. The EEA has sought to address these issues with the launch of the new website in early 2023 (however, this falls outside of this evaluation period).

As identified in the stakeholder analysis commissioned by the EEA in 2020, EEA's audience is heterogeneous, i.e. includes groups with different needs and preferences: stakeholders involved in policy prefer reports, among non-governmental profiles there is a preference for shorter, more visual and interactive formats, and scientists look for detailed information such as reports, datasets or indicators (feedback from the Scientific Committee highlighted the importance of data accessibility, including accessibility in formats commonly used in research, as key).<sup>28</sup>

**“The ‘public’ is a diverse audience and it’s not possible to satisfy them all with one product: there are varying level of knowledge.” – Management Board member**

Stakeholders believed that the EEA had successfully adopted different strategies to amplify its messages, although in doing so it faced resource constraints. As EEA interviewees explained, communication efforts take care to produce outputs in plain language, using social media channels for general outreach and engagement activities, and cooperating with national authorities to improve dissemination at national level. Furthermore, in the latter years of the evaluation period, the EEA shifted from producing one long report to several shorter outputs (such as briefings or articles) on a topic (evident in the outputs planned and produced in the AWP, see Annex 2).

In addition to this, members of the Management Board noted that in recent years the EEA had tried to raise its profile by having the Executive Director present key topics at national events. According to some interviewees, the EEA had also made efforts to try to reach other national actors, such as regional authorities, that might not be formally part of Eionet but are still involved in the implementation and monitoring of environment and climate policies.

However, some interviewees highlighted several challenges the EEA still faced when trying to reach stakeholders beyond policy making circles. One barrier mentioned repeatedly was the fact that most publications are only available in English – and therefore cooperation with national authorities to relay key messages is vital. It was observed that there are differences in the use of EEA outputs at national level, with some countries circulating key publications like SOER widely, and some others being less active. Additionally, as mentioned by NFPs, the EEA does not always give sufficient advance notice of when reports or other outputs will be published, thus limiting the extent to which NFPs can further use and disseminate these outputs within their countries. Beyond the evaluated period, from 2024 onwards, improvements to Eionet planner tools should make advance planning clearer, although it is not possible to predict whether or not this will be efficacious.

Stakeholders also noted that the EEA was actively trying to exploit ‘multiplier effects’ to maximise its impact given the resources available. For example, the EEA provides short summaries that can be readily used by the press or tries to emphasise the impact of some of the issues on citizens. An example in this regard is the publication of data on bathing water quality during summer holiday periods.

**“I don’t expect the ordinary citizen to go onto the EEA’s website and read reports. [...] Communicating to the public directly would be very resource-consuming; it’s easier to get to [citizens] via the press” – EEA Senior Management and staff**

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<sup>28</sup> EEA, Ipsos and Marco (2020), *Stakeholder Analysis 2020: Integrated report*.

### Achieving objectives and obligations stemming from the EU legislation and across all activities

There is some overlap between this question and the assessment of how well the EEA fulfilled its role in collecting, analysing and reporting data to provide comparable information at the European level and to support the assessment of environmental results, and relevant points are therefore discussed above under those objectives.

Section 5.2 above outlines the EEA's role in fulfilling its reporting obligations, showing that the EEA is directly involved in the management of 123 reporting obligations, supporting 36 EU legislative instruments. Few interviewees commented directly on EEA's effectiveness of achieving objectives and obligations stemming from the EU legislation, but among those who did have a view on this, there was a general consensus that the EEA fulfilled its tasks. Some interviewees from the Commission, however, criticised that in some instances the EEA appeared to go beyond their role of data and evidence provider, for example by proposing policy recommendations to the European Commission.

In addition to its support in the scope of EU legislation, the EEA also has various tasks related to international commitments and programmes, such as those established by the United Nations (listed below).

**Figure 6.4: EU submissions to international bodies managed by EEA (status 2021)**

International legislation	Link to EU legislation
UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP Convention)	NEC Directive
UNECE Pollutant Release and Transfer Register Protocol (PRTR Protocol) under the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters	E-PRTR Regulation <sup>10</sup>
UN Minamata Convention on Mercury	Mercury Regulation
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action
UN Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (Montreal Protocol), under the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer	Ozone Regulation and F-gas Regulation

Source: EEA SPD 2021-2023

As detailed in Annex 2, various tasks related to this were completed. For example, under SA 3.1 the EEA provided support to the EU and EEA member countries in the context of UNEP assessments and the post-Rio+20 process.

Feedback from Commission stakeholders shows that the EEA fulfilled this task throughout the evaluation period. One interviewee highlighted the key role of the EEA in the monitoring and reporting processes related to ozone-depleting substances under the Montreal protocol and the fluorinated gases under the so-called F-Gas Regulation. The EEA also assisted DG CLIMA in the submission of data to UNEP and supported DG ENV in the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity and within the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA).

Furthermore, the EEA actively participated in and supported the European Commission work in the UNECE Air Convention<sup>29</sup> and acts as one of the co-chairs of the Air Convention Task Force on Emission Inventories and Projections, on behalf of the EU as task force lead Party. This includes significant work on developing the EMEP/EEA emission inventory guidebook. The EEA provides highly valuable support to the European Commission in compiling the EU emission inventories and projections for the EU to the Air Convention. Support and scientific advice are also provided for various Air Convention work strands of relevance, including on the monitoring of air pollution impacts on ecosystems.

The EEA also interacted regularly with the OECD and is part of the OECD task force on adaptation. However, no outputs resulting from cooperation with international organisations such as the OECD or the IEA were mentioned in EEA programming documents (beyond collaboration with the OECD and other organisations as part of the European Human Biomonitoring Initiative, through a Horizon 2020 grant-funded project). Stakeholders consulted indicated that such international outreach work had been deprioritised over the course of the evaluation period (as well as in the preceding years) due to resource constraints and these tasks being deemed non-essential. Nonetheless, as outlined above, the EEA continued and fulfilled its obligations as relates to international commitments throughout the evaluation period.

The founding regulation also tasks the EEA with a more forward-looking role. The EEA has been less prominent in this role than in its 'traditional' task of a data provider, and implemented the planned outputs in the MAWP related to its more proactive tasks (e.g., tasks related to foresight activities such as the EEA's collaboration with DG ENV on FORENV, or to stimulate the development and knowledge exchange around new methodologies or technologies) to a lesser degree, likely also reflecting that the reporting and legal obligations ascribe the EEA an active role there, whereas its work on forecasting and methodological developments is guided by the EEA/Eionet Regulation but also by the increased emphasis on policy outlooks (e.g. the Zero Pollution Monitoring and Outlook) and strategic foresight introduced by the European Green Deal.

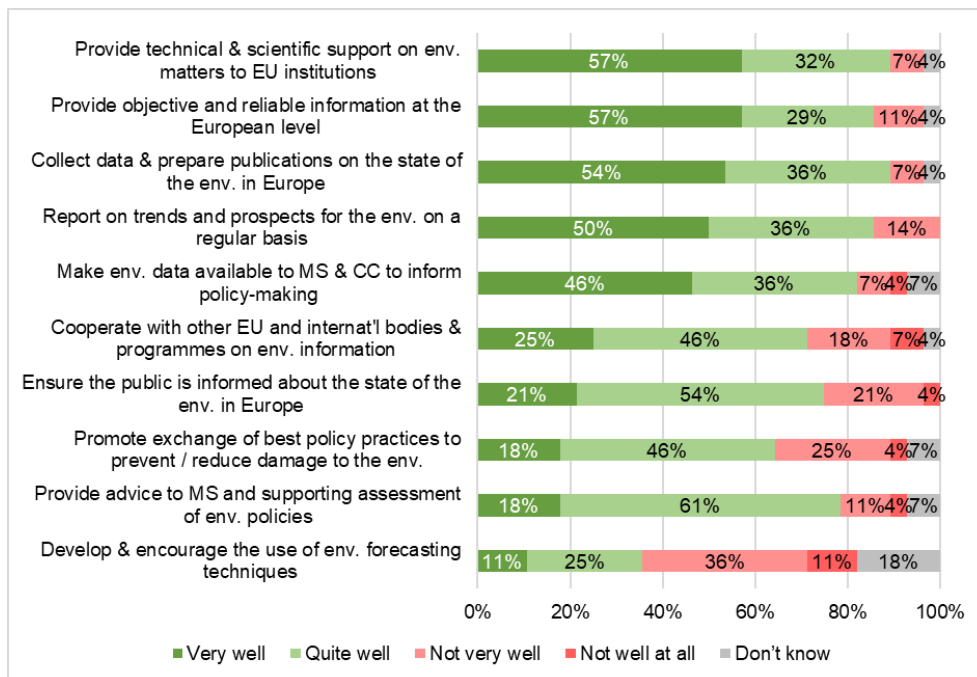
### Core tasks

As shown in the figures overleaf, a majority of respondents to the online survey considered the EEA to have delivered its core activities well. EEA staff were especially positive about how well the Agency provides technical and scientific support on environmental matters to EU institutions, and provides objective and reliable information at the European level (Figure 6.5), while other respondents rated its performance in terms of collecting data and preparing publications on the state of the environment in Europe the highest (Figure 6.6). Both groups coincided in their assessment that the activity the EEA delivers the least well is developing and encouraging the application of environmental forecasting techniques. Again, it needs to be kept in mind that the low number of responses to the survey means these results may not be representative of the views of the EEA's stakeholders as a whole.

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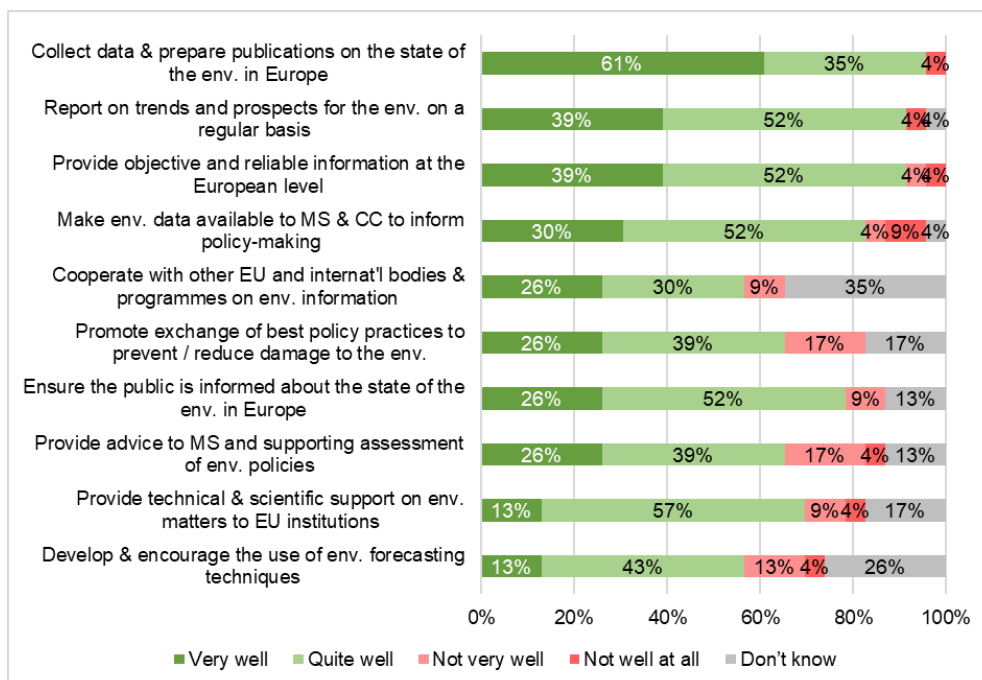
<sup>29</sup> UNECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution, 1979, <https://unece.org/environmental-policy-1/air>

**Figure 6.5: Thinking of the period 2017-2021, how well did the EEA and its network, the Eionet, deliver the following core activities? (EEA staff)**



Source: Online Survey (10/02/2023 – 28/03/2023). Q9, N=28

**Figure 6.6: Thinking of the period 2017-2021, how well did the EEA and its network, the Eionet, deliver the following core activities? (Other respondents)**



Source: Online Survey (10/02/2023 – 28/03/2023). Q9, N=23

The following table provides a detail assessment, largely drawing on the evidence presented in this section above, as to whether the EEA achieved the tasks set in the Founding Regulation.

**Table 6.2: Assessment of the extent to which the EEA delivered against each of its main tasks**

Article	Definition	Assessment
2(a)	To establish, in cooperation with the Member States, and coordinate the Network, in addition to being responsible for the collection, processing and analysis of data in the following fields: air quality and atmospheric emissions, water quality, pollutants and water resources, the state of soil, fauna and flora, and of biotopes, land use and natural resources, waste management, noise emissions, chemical substances which are hazardous to the environment, and coastal and marine protection’.	As evidenced above (and further in Annex 2) EEA has completed tasks related to the collection, processing and analysis of data in these fields. In MAWP 2014-2020, dedicated Strategic Areas cover the EEA’s commitment to these tasks: air pollution (SA 1.1), climate change (SA 1.3), water management (SA 1.5), nature protection (SA 1.7), land use and natural resources (SA 1.8), waste management (SA 1.9), noise, coastal and marine protection (SA 1.6) (with chemicals being covered under strategic area SA 2.2). The new EEA and Eionet Strategy 2021-2030, the EEA outlines its tasks and planned outputs less clearly but references the objectives to ‘Further develop and use our broad range of high-quality datasets with long time-series supporting a wide range of environment and climate policies’ within its strategic objective 1 (SO1). Section 5.3 provides an overview of the extent to which EEA publications map onto these topics.
2(b)	To provide the Community and the Member States with the objective information necessary for framing and implementing sound and effective environmental policies; to that end, in particular to provide the Commission with the information that it needs to be able to successfully carry out its tasks of identifying, preparing and evaluating measures and legislation in the field of the environment	Both the MAWP 2014-2020 and the 2021-2030 Strategy make clear reference to the fact that through the provision of data (and accompanying analyses and knowledge products) the EEA seeks to support policy implementation.  As shown above, EU and national stakeholders reportedly use EEA outputs to inform policy making, and Commission staff rate EEA data and information as necessary to carry out their tasks in the field of environment. The increasing number of times EEA outputs are cited by the Commission and other Brussels stakeholder further puts testament to this.
2(c)	To assist the monitoring of environmental measures through appropriate support for reporting requirements (including through involvement in the development of questionnaires and the processing of reports from Member States, alongside the distribution of results), in accordance with its multiannual work programme and with the aim of coordinating reporting	As indicated above, EEA’s support to numerous reporting requirements shows that the Agency has fulfilled this task, corroborated through positive feedback from stakeholders within the Commission.
2(d)	To advise individual Member States, upon their request, and where this is consistent with the Agency’s annual work programme, on the development, establishment and expansion of their systems for the monitoring of environmental measures, provided such activities do not endanger the fulfilment of the	While no direct activities and outputs related to such advice were included in the MAWPs, the EEA delivered against this task through its work with Eionet and the support provided (e.g., the delivery of Eionet/NRC workshops on various topics) as discussed above helped member countries develop and expand monitoring systems, as evidenced by the improved reporting performance.

Article	Definition	Assessment
	other tasks established by Article 2; such advice may also include peer reviews by experts at the specific request of Member States	
2(e)	To record, collate and assess data on the state of the environment, to draw up expert reports on the quality, sensitivity and pressures on the environment within the territory of the Community; to provide uniform assessment criteria for environmental data to be applied in all Member States; to develop further and maintain a reference centre of information on the environment.	The EEA records, collates and assesses data on all elements of the environment (to high quality) and translated these into numerous reports during the evaluation period. Stakeholders considered the EEA to be a reliable and trusted source of environmental data and information about the environment.
2(f)	To help ensure that environmental data at European level are comparable and, if necessary, to encourage by appropriate means improved harmonisation of methods of measurement	EEA activities to support member states in their reporting efforts were implemented during the evaluation period, and stakeholders valued the EEA's role in managing data to ensure its comparability. However, some data quality as well as methodological issues were raised by a few stakeholders.
2(g)	To promote the incorporation of European environmental information into international environment monitoring programmes such as those established by the United Nations and its specialised agencies	<p>This task has been implemented in the MAWP 2014-2020 in various instances, with specific annual outputs related to supporting either Member States or the Commission in preparing and submitting relevant data to international fora. DG CLIMA representatives especially highlighted the important role EEA played in their international work, such as on the ODS reporting for UNEP for example.</p> <p>In 2018, the EEA published a framework for international engagement to provide a structure to support the planning and carrying out of EEA's international activities, aligned to the multiannual work programme 2013-2020. A new Strategy for cooperation with third countries and international organisations, aligned with the new EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030 and the ambitions of the EU policy framework set by the EGD and the 8th EAP objectives, was introduced in 2023.<sup>30</sup></p>

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<sup>30</sup> EEA (2022). Single programming document 2023-2025.

Article	Definition	Assessment
2(h)	To publish a report on the state of, trends in and prospects for the environment every five years, supplemented by indicator reports focusing upon specific issues.	Within the evaluation period, the EEA published the SOER 2020. The report was published in December 2019, to align with the launch of the EGD. The SOER (and its reception) are further discussed in section 6.1.2 below, and in a dedicated case study in Annex 4.
2(i)	To stimulate the development and application of environmental forecasting techniques so that adequate preventive measures can be taken in good time.	<p>The MAWP 2014-2020 did include a few multi-annual outputs related to this task. Under SA 2.3, the EEA had two outputs working towards improving the use of Forward Looking Information and Services (FLIS), specifically focused on supporting capacity building at the country-level to aid implementation of forward-looking information in policy making. The EEA delivered the related activities during the evaluation period from 2017 to 2020 (not reported in 2021).</p> <p>Stakeholders in interviews and workshops did not comment, and generally considered tasks related to forecasting to fall within the JRC's remit. However, 47% of EEA stakeholders responding to the online survey thought that the Agency did not deliver this task well over the evaluation period (as opposed to only 36% who reported that the EEA delivered this well). This was a more negative view than that of other stakeholders responding to the survey: 56% of them thought the EEA delivered well against this task.</p> <p>This indicates that there is room for improvement for the EEA to further the development and application of environmental forecasting techniques.</p> <p>Similarly, stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation did not mention any of the EEA's activities related to forecasting – it was generally considered much more within the remit of the JRC to work on this area.</p>
2(j)	To stimulate the development of methods of assessing the cost of damage to the environment and the costs of environmental preventive, protection and restoration policies.	Over the evaluation period, the EEA produced several reports related to trade-offs (social, economic, health) of environmental policies, such as for example a report on fiscal incentives on passenger car emissions in 2019 or a briefing estimating health impacts caused by exposure to environmental noise in 2020 (see Annex 2 for further details).
2(k)	To stimulate the exchange of information on the best technologies available for preventing or reducing damage to the environment	The MAWP 2014-2020 includes the output to deliver further methodological reports on accounting methods for different greenhouse gases and air pollutants (including territorial, consumption, and production methods). For example, the EEA delivered a



Article	Definition	Assessment
		<p>report on complementary emissions estimate produced by EU organisations<sup>31</sup> as an online output, which is regularly updated.</p> <p>The EEA also delivered several outputs to facilitate the exchange of best practices between member countries. Examples include the EEA's work to deliver assessments and methodological work on monitoring, reporting and evaluation of national adaptation policies (resulting in several 'best-practice reports'), or a workshop on 'Frameworks and methodologies for sustainability monitoring – examples of best practice across Europe', delivered in 2020. However, other planned outputs related to this task were not delivered, namely the development (in partnership with transition networks and others) of methodologies for assessing transition pathways using research and other findings as relevant under SA 2.3.</p>
2(l)	<p>To cooperate with the following bodies and programmes:</p> <p>The Joint Research Centre; The Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat); The Community's environmental research and development programmes; European Space Agency; The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); The Council of Europe; The International Energy Agency; The United Nations and its specialised agencies, particularly the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Meteorological Organisation and the International Atomic Energy Authority.</p>	<p>An analysis of the activities planned and implemented between 2017 and 2021 shows that the EEA continued to work with a number of these bodies, in particular Commission services such as the JRC and Eurostat (further discussed in section 6.3.1). Examples of cooperations with various international bodies (such as OECD or the UN) is provided above.</p>
2(m)	<p>Broad dissemination of reliable and comparable environmental information, in particular on the state of the environment, to the general public</p>	<p>As discussed above, the EEA improved its communication and outreach efforts over the evaluation period, including when promoting the SOER, and increased the number of social media followers between 2019 and 2021 (since data was collected).</p>

<sup>31</sup> EEA (2023), Complementary emission estimates produced by EU organisations. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/climate-change-mitigation-reducing-emissions/complementary-emission-estimates-produced-by-eu-organisations>

Article	Definition	Assessment
2(n)	To support the Commission in the process of exchange of information on the development of environmental assessment methodologies and best practice.	<p>As mentioned further above, the EEA provided inputs and support to the Commission in several instances to the design and implementation of monitoring components of (new) regulations which indirectly also facilitate knowledge exchange, such as EEA contribution to indicators and indicator-based analysis to contribute to the monitoring of the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP under SA 2.4 or the delivery of a workshop on frameworks and methodologies for sustainability monitoring, showcasing examples of best practice across Europe.</p> <p>Section 6.3. discusses EEA's collaboration with the European Commission in greater detail and analyses the extent to which EEA successfully worked with other knowledge providers such as the JRC or Eurostat.</p>
2(o)	To assist the Commission in the diffusion of information on the results of relevant environmental research and in a form which can best assist policy development.	<p>As reported, Commission staff considered the EEA's data and reporting outputs helpful and used these in their reporting. The example of the SOER in particular, and its use in the European Green Deal (and in the lead-up to the EGD's launch, when data from the SOER, with the support of the EEA's Executive Director's participation in talks, was reportedly used across the Commission).</p>

## Barriers to implementation

As mentioned, while the EEA completed most of its tasks, in some cases tasks had to be deprioritised (see section 6.4.3), due to resource constraints. This referred in particular to human resources (more so than financial resources). In one specific instance, a lack of project management capacity (and capability) at the EEA was also raised as an issue. As detailed in Annex 2, in a few instances the EEA had to postpone or cancel outputs due to competing resource demands or due to absences of staff which could not be replaced. The issues related to resource constraints are discussed in greater detail in section 6.2.4.

Several stakeholders consulted raised that this further related to the more recent change in role perceived by the EEA, which no longer sees itself as 'just' a provider of data but also has an interest in shaping knowledge and more actively responding to the questions related to the sustainability transition. This emerged in particular more recently with the European Green Deal. As outlined by one stakeholder, the EGD is a cross-cutting initiative involving most areas of policy. However, according to EEA stakeholders, this systemic approach is not reflected by the fact that the Agency (like all other agencies under EU law) has one partner-DG (DG ENV) in charge of coordinating the relations between the Commission and the EEA and responsible for control on the financial management of the EEA, including across the Commission. The fact that the EEA has increased its collaboration with other parts of the Commission has led (in some cases) to a more complex relationship between the partner DG and the EEA, as noted by several stakeholders from both the Commission and from within the EEA (see section 6.3 for further detail).

Additionally, the Agency's recruitment and contract practices (namely, that due to the increasing reliance on non-core funding, a significant number of staff are hired on fixed-term project contracts) meant it was difficult to hire the required skills to foray into new areas (see section 6.2.4 for details), which led to 'growing pains' over the first few years of the EEA trying to take a more holistic approach and moving on from 'just' the data work. However, in the opinion of a member of the Scientific Committee, the EEA improved its ability to reflect on the economic and social implications of policies, for example, over the evaluation period, and the restructuring of Eionet as well as the internal restructuring of the EEA are considered to have supported this.

A final barrier to implementation highlighted by stakeholders was a lack of clarity (and agreement) on the EEA's remit itself. Some Commission representatives reported that they were not sure about the role of the EEA in the policy decision making process and the extent to which the EEA was more than a data provider (leaving others to draw conclusions from the data) and the extent to which EEA should take a role in providing analytical outputs and thus shape the narrative around policy decisions. In some instances, disagreements between different stakeholders on this question emerged, as the EEA, being a decentralised agency, does not have a formal role in the policy making process at EU level. As explained by one stakeholder, this also concerns the objective of ensuring that the public is properly informed about the state of the environment (and also task 13 of its founding regulation: 'to ensure the broad dissemination of reliable and comparable environmental information, in particular on the state of the environment, to the general public and, to this end, to promote the use of new telematics technology for this purpose').

## 6.1.2 Mainstreaming environmental objectives and producing impact

This section addresses *EQ 6: To what extent have the tasks of the EEA produced the desired impact and expected results? In particular, to what extent is the work of the EEA enabling the mainstreaming of the environmental and climate issues in other policy areas?*

**Main issues considered:** The EEA's tasks ultimately aim to improve the evidence base and provide the rationale for environmental action, across policy areas. This section explores the extent to which the EEA's and Eionet's activities and outputs have contributed to that.

**Main findings:** While the direct impact of the EEAs work on mainstreaming environmental objectives cannot be assessed, data collected for the evaluation indicates that the EEA had (and continues to have) a very important role in mainstreaming environmental objectives into policy. The number of EEA mentions in EU documents increased greatly over the evaluation period, notably in key documents such as the European Green Deal.

This section focuses on the EEA's impact on policy making, as this is the main focus of the EEA's work, and policy makers were identified as the EEA's main audience. The EEA's success in reaching other audiences (namely the general public) are discussed in section 6.1.1. above. Section 6.2.1 provides an overview of the direct benefits generated by EEA and Eionet.

According to CAAR 2021<sup>32</sup>, the EEA is perceived as a major source of information for both individuals involved in the development, adoption, implementation, and evaluation of environmental policy, and for the general public. As outlined in the preceding section, EEA data is crucial to inform policy making and support the assessment of results of environmental policies. Between 2017 and 2021, the number of mentions of EEA and EEA products in documents of the Commission, European Parliament, European Council, other EU Agencies and other select Brussels stakeholders increased from 295 to 994 (see section 5.3).

Examples of the EEA enabling the mainstreaming of environmental and climate issues can be seen in transport policy, where the EEA's TERM publications played a substantial role in ensuring that environmental objectives are considered. Interviewees felt that most DGs rely (to a greater or lesser extent) on data provided by the EEA and described the EEA's work as a progressively increasing 'horizontal influence'. Representatives of several DGs (in particular DG ENV, CLIMA, ENER and NEAR) as well as external stakeholders reported they actively consult the Agency on their products. Furthermore, stakeholders mentioned energy policy and agricultural policy as two key examples of policy areas where experts and policy makers use EEA outputs to inform policies. For example, according to a member of the Scientific Committee, parts of the Farm to Fork Strategy<sup>33</sup> draw on arguments provided by the EEA.

<sup>32</sup> Consolidated annual activity report 2021 (CAAR) – EEA annual report (2023) European Environment Agency. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/consolidated-annual-activity-report-2021>

<sup>33</sup> In particular, the Farm to Fork Strategy references the EEA's 2019 Annual European Union greenhouse gas inventory 1990-2017 and Inventory report 2019. See European Commission (2020): A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system (COM/2020/381 final)

## Case study: The State of the Environment Report

The most valued example of the EEA's impact in mainstreaming environmental objectives in policy areas is 'The European environment - state and outlook 2020: knowledge for transition to a sustainable Europe' (SOER)<sup>34</sup>. The report is intended to contribute to better environmental policy-making, and feedback from interviewees suggests that it has been taken into account for the development of new policies, including most notably for the development of the European Green Deal. The EEA's 2019 CAAR claimed that several policy stakeholders referred to SOER 2020 as the "main evidence underpinning the European Green Deal proposal". According to Frans Timmermans (Executive Vice President of the European Commission), the SOER was "perfectly timed to give us the added impetus we need as we start a new five-year cycle in the European Commission and as we prepare to present the European Green Deal." According to interviewees, SOER is also an important document for Member States as it allows them to compare and, where possible, align their national environmental goals with the EU approach.

The EEA's impact on mainstreaming environmental objectives on the international stage was also highlighted. In addition to their contributions to international work, the EEA also serves as a best practice example for how to collect comparable, transparent data on the state of the environment, encouraging other countries to follow the EU's lead. The Commission draws on the Agency's help to provide capacity building to improve the transparency of climate and environmental reporting rule under the Governance Regulation of the Energy Community in other countries (outside of the EU), thus spreading the Agency's best practices.

Publications tend to not be 'technical' or 'scientific' enough for a scientific audience (a few exceptions were noted, such as for example the EEA's work on the Horizon 2020 Human Biomonitoring Initiative (HMB4EU)<sup>35</sup>), but it was widely acknowledged by representatives of the Scientific Committee (and echoed by other stakeholders) that this was not the primary purpose and audience of the EEA. Nevertheless, some stakeholders believed that dissemination of knowledge into the scientific society could be improved, including through making more use of the Scientific Committee and fostering connections between the Committee and the ETCs.

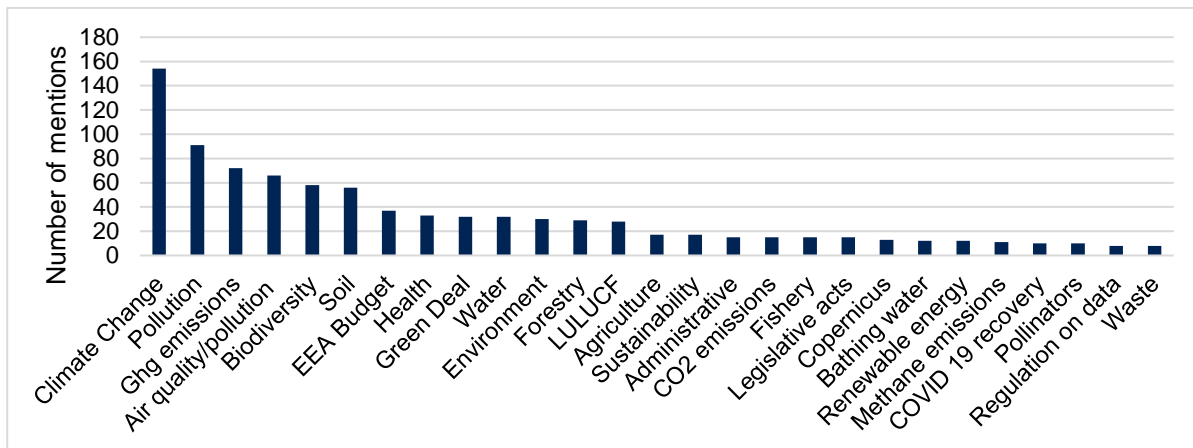
With the introduction of the EGD, the scope of interest for the EEA has arguably expanded to most policy areas. For example, this is reflected in the increasing number of service-level agreements the EEA entered (in 2021, the EEA entered into three new SLAs with the Commission for the first time: a 3-year project with DG RTD, a 4-year agreement with DG SANTE and a 3-year agreement with DG REGIO) and further echoed by key stakeholders across the various EEA departments as well as by Commission interviewees. Additionally, the thematic range of EEA products mentioned by EU stakeholders (see section 5.3) has also expanded greatly. In 2017, the EEA products mentioned by the stakeholders monitored covered 14 themes (with Transport, Air, Energy, Climate Change, Waste and Water the most prevalent). However, in 2021 EEA products mentioned covered 27 thematic areas (illustrated in Figure 6.7). While outputs related to Climate change and Air quality and

<sup>34</sup> The European Environment - State and Outlook 2020: Knowledge for transition to a Sustainable Europe (2022) European Environment Agency. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer/2020>

<sup>35</sup> Govarts et al. (2023). Harmonized human biomonitoring in European children, teenagers and adults: EU-wide exposure data of 11 chemical substance groups from the HBM4EU Aligned Studies (2014–2021). *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health* (249) and Vicente et al. (2023). HBM4EU results support the Chemicals' Strategy for Sustainability and the Zero-Pollution Action Plan. *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health* (248).

pollution remained some of the most-mentioned, EEA products covered all areas within its remit, including Biodiversity, Soil, Water, Agriculture, GHG Emissions, Renewable Energy to name a few.<sup>36</sup>

**Figure 6.7: Number of EEA products mentioned by themes, 2021**



Source: Data provided by EEA (internal statistics from EEA Communications department)

One example of the Agency's work in other policy areas is the *European maritime transport environmental report 2021*, published in 2021. This report was a joint effort between the EEA and the European Maritime Safety Agency (in close collaboration also with the Commission). The report received over 1 million impressions on Twitter in the first week of its launch.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to directly influencing policy makers by providing data, the Agency also mobilises networks and stakeholders to further raise awareness of environmental and climate issues; for instance, in 2021, the EEA engaged in several networking activities around plastics, with the scope of informing EU discussions for potential future international agreements around plastics.

According to some interviewees, despite the positive influence of the EEA in mainstreaming environmental and climate objectives across policy areas, its involvement in this raises the risk of the Agency spreading itself too thinly (especially considering resource constraints, further detailed in section 6.2.4) and requires careful consideration of the cooperation with other agencies and Commission services already active in certain fields, such as the JRC, to avoid overlap. Additionally, it was noted by a representative of the Scientific Committee that impact on policy at national level could be improved, both through ensuring publication of EEA outputs in more languages,<sup>38</sup> and taking national policy priorities into account, which may differ from the EEA's (one of the EU member countries noted, for example, that their national policy is currently focused on illegal waste, which is not a priority for the Agency).

Interviewees provided a range of recommendations to improve the EEA's influence in mainstreaming environmental objectives in different policy areas. While some Commission stakeholders reported that EEA data was frequently used to inform Impact Assessments, and that the EEA was sufficiently often invited to contribute to IAs and contribute to the development of environmental and climate

<sup>36</sup> Source: Data provided by EEA (internal statistics from EEA Communications department)

<sup>37</sup> Media Analysis report (week 35), prepared for the EEA by Newton Media.

<sup>38</sup> The EEA's Translation Policy states that EEA outputs are drafted in English and outlines the criteria considered when deciding the content for translation and the target languages.

legislative proposals, others noted that the Agency ought to be involved more and more frequently. Other recommendations were focused on improving communication and strengthening the engagement between the EEA and other DGs, particularly with the JRC. To improve communication and increase the impact of the EEA on different policy areas, some stakeholders interviewed also felt that the Agency should place greater focus on acknowledging the progress made in a particular policy area, rather than solely highlighting the gaps. Finally, it was also suggested that more could be done to track the effective use of EEA's indicators and data in policy-making.

### 6.1.3 Follow-up of the previous evaluation and EEA-Eionet strategy 2021-2030

This section addresses the following evaluation question:

- *EQ 4: To what extent has the EEA taken into account the outcomes of the previous evaluation, in particular for developing the new EEA/EIONET Strategy 2021-2030?*

**Issues considered:** It looks at the extent to which the areas for improvement and recommendations identified in the 2018 Evaluation<sup>39,40</sup> have been addressed by the EEA, and in particular explores how this has influenced the development of the EEA/Eionet Strategy 2021-2030. The 2018 Evaluation<sup>41,42</sup> found that the EEA and Eionet had broadly fulfilled the main objectives set by the Founding Regulation, and that the EEA and Eionet worked well overall but identified margin for improvement in certain areas, namely:

- the need for improved strategic oversight by the EEA Management Board (particularly regarding prioritisation),
- the utilisation of new technologies and the e-reporting infrastructure,
- improved coordination between the EEA and the Commission, and
- clarifying the role of Eionet and improving its visibility.

**Main findings:** Overall, the EEA has taken the outcomes of the previous evaluation into account and taken appropriate action to address the shortcomings identified therein, to the extent that the ability to respond lies within the Agency's control. The findings of the previous evaluation have actively shaped the development of the new EEA/Eionet Strategy. However, it is too early for this evaluation to assess the extent to which most of these changes have been implemented successfully.

#### Management Board Governance

The 2018 evaluation concluded that "The EEA Management Board has not always fully played its role of strategic steer, including on resource prioritisation". As a result of this, and also in response an internal review in 2018<sup>43</sup>, the Management Board streamlined the working methods of the Board and the Bureau, with the Bureau taking on the administrative / bureaucratic functions (such as preparing decisions) to allow the Management Board more time for strategic discussion.

<sup>39</sup> SWD (2018) 470 final, page 61.

<sup>40</sup> European Commission (2018). Support study on the evaluation of the EEA and Eionet. ISBN 978-92-79-9628-0

<sup>41</sup> SWD (2018) 470 final, page 61.

<sup>42</sup> European Commission (2018). Support study on the evaluation of the EEA and Eionet. ISBN 978-92-79-9628-0

<sup>43</sup> The EEA Management Board established a Review Committee for the Rules of Procedure (RoP) of the EEA Management Board and Bureau



Section 6.2.5 discusses the functioning of the EEA Management Board, and EEA wider governance structure, over the period of the evaluation in more detail, finding that the issue of adequate involvement of the MB in priority-setting had not been satisfactorily resolved yet, but recognising this as an ongoing process.

### Use of digital technologies

The 2018 evaluation's recommendation that the EEA and Eionet could make better use of the potential of digital technologies was reflective as well of the findings of the 2017 Fitness Check on Reporting and Monitoring of EU Environment Policy, which "identified the potential to harmonise and centralise (some) process provisions and make better use of technology to make reporting more effective and to reduce burden" (p.80), specifically suggesting improvements to Reportnet.<sup>44</sup>

In its response, the EEA Management Board committed to reflect this recommendation as one of the key drivers for the EEA/Eionet strategy beyond 2020.

Section 6.2.6 further below outlines in detail how the EEA has endeavoured to make fuller use of digital technologies and the scientific state of the art over the evaluation period, and a dedicated case study in Annex 4 provides a further deep dive on some of these technologies. Overall, it was found that the EEA generally made good use of the potential of digital technologies between 2017 and 2021, to the extent possible within the context, and the EEA was considered by stakeholders to have adapted to and adopted digital innovation throughout to improve effectiveness and efficiency.

### Improved coordination between the EEA and the European Commission

Another shortcoming identified in the 2018 evaluation regarded the limited connection between the overall framework for cooperation between the European Commission and the EEA with some of the issue-specific technical co-ordination mechanisms. This was found to have resulted in some divergent approaches across tasks and themes and missed certain co-ordination opportunities especially in cross-cutting areas.

In response to this, the Management Board encouraged greater collaboration between the EEA and the Commission. Mechanisms has been setup to improve coordination between EEA with the Commission (and other EU Agencies), which is discussed in further detail in section 6.3.1.

### Eionet modernisation

In response to the observations of the 2018 evaluation that Eionet's role could be clarified and its visibility improved, EEA and Eionet launched a modernisation exercise that sought to "support, operationalise, and revitalise EEA/Eionet engagement to assist the delivery of the Strategy 2021-2030".<sup>45</sup> The impact of the new set-up of Eionet (introduced in January 2022) cannot yet be assessed, but stakeholders interviewed for this study widely agree that the ongoing modernisation process addresses the issues highlighted in the previous evaluation and will support the implementation of the new 2021-2030 Strategy.

A detailed case study on the Eionet modernisation process is presented in Annex 4.

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<sup>44</sup> European Commission (2017). Fitness Check of Reporting and Monitoring of EU Environment Policy.

<sup>45</sup> De Brabanter, E., and Bruun, M. (2020). Eionet Modernisation "From data delivery to knowledge development" Update 90th Management Board Meeting 10 December 2020.

## Adapting to policy and knowledge developments

In addition to the specific recommendations of the previous evaluation, the overall finding of the evaluation was that EEA/Eionet's scope of work continuously expanded and would continue to do so. The EEA therefore proposed to frame the Strategy in this new context of policy and knowledge developments.<sup>46</sup> This is reflected in the introduction of the cross-cutting strategic objectives, alongside 5 thematic areas. This reflects a more holistic, systems-based way of thinking about environmental and climate-related challenges, which is representative of current policy debate, and is a move away from the linear way in which monitoring and data collection were transformed into information and knowledge to inform policy making that was described in the previous MAWP 2014-2020, and which was no longer deemed adequate.

## Alignment of EEA/Eionet resources and EEA/Eionet expanded scope of work

The 2018 evaluation recognised that the scope of the EEA's work had increased as a result of increased demand from the Commission and new tasks. While the EEA received additional temporary resources accompanying specific requests for services, the 2018 evaluation identified that in some cases, the EEA had to de-prioritise and eventually de-select certain activities and tasks, hindering a full implementation of the work programme. Section 5.1 includes a detailed overview of the evolution of resources of the EEA over the evaluation period, and section 6.2.4 discusses the adequacy thereof.

As stated in the Management Board's response to the findings of the 2018 evaluation<sup>47</sup>, addressing this issue is beyond the Agency's control. Instead, the Management Board called on the Commission and the Budgetary Authority (consisting of the European Parliament and Council) to ensure resources for the EEA and Eionet in the proposed MFF 2021-2027 were consistent with the positive conclusions of the 2018 evaluation and with the increased policy mainstreaming of environment and climate. The Management Board further highlighted the need for the Commission, but also for the co-legislators, the European Parliament and European Council, to ensure that new proposals, initiatives and legislation that assign new tasks to the EEA and Eionet also include additional allocation of core resources to cover these.

Nevertheless, the EEA took action to the extent possible: during the development of the EEA/Eionet 2021-2030 Strategy, the need to diversify the EEA's funding base was a key consideration in reflection of the Commission's proposal at the time, which represented a de facto 15% cut to the EEA budget in the MFF 2021-2027.<sup>48</sup> The new Strategy reflects this with the inclusion of strategic objective 5 (SO5): 'Resourcing our shared ambitions', which set out to "Develop structures, expertise and capacity across our network to meet evolving knowledge needs, securing and diversifying the resources needed to achieve our joint vision".

### 6.1.4 EEA's responsiveness to major crisis

This section addresses EQ 5: *How effective is EEA-Eionet in responding to major crisis (based on the COVID-19 pandemic experience in 2020-2021) and change in geopolitics?*

<sup>46</sup> European Environment Agency (2019). Minutes of the First meeting of the Advisory Committee on EEA Eionet/Strategy 2021-2030.

<sup>47</sup> European Environment Agency (2019). Management Board Response to the Commission Evaluation of EEA and Eionet, 25 June 2019.

<sup>48</sup> European Environment Agency (2019). Minutes of the First meeting of the Advisory Committee on EEA Eionet/Strategy 2021-2030.

**Main issues considered:** It explores specifically how and how well EEA and Eionet reacted to the COVID-19 crisis, and to the changes brought by Brexit.

**Main findings:** In both cases, it was found that the EEA responded well and ensured business as usual could continue. The EEA and Eionet was quick to successfully adapt their internal processes as well as its engagement and collaboration with its partners during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure business continuity and also guarantee staff's safety. In a few cases, the EEA also provided relevant outputs, thus quickly responding to an information need.

### EEA response to the COVID-19 pandemic

The Agency introduced remote working for its staff in early 2020, which went smoothly according to EEA staff consulted. As outlined in the 2020 CAAR, the EEA quickly provided the necessary tools and set-up to enable staff to work from home securely. However, one member of EEA staff highlighted a decrease in staff wellbeing as the pandemic went on (as evidenced also by results of the staff satisfaction survey, detailed in section 6.2.4). Additionally, in both 2020 and 2021, the staff time spent on learning and development were below 2019 levels (when figures were first reported): 3.9 and 4 days, respectively, which was well below the target of 7 days on average<sup>49</sup>.

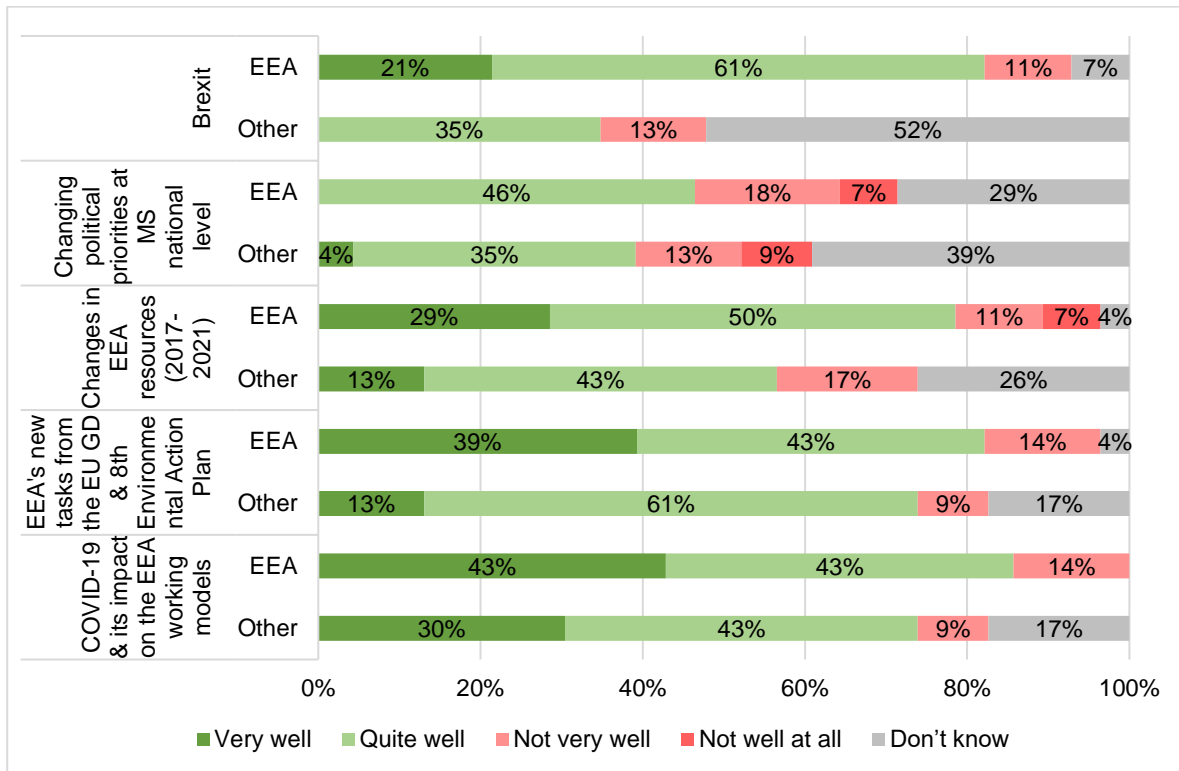
The EEA also shifted towards online meetings for all its engagement and coordination activities. Stakeholders reported that this generated mostly advantages related to efficiency and reducing the Agency's environmental footprint, but in some cases, it was found to negatively impact on the quality of interactions (e.g., the CAAR 2020 notes 'restricted interactions with the EEA SC on new knowledge developments'). The EEA has since shifted to a hybrid approach, and most stakeholders consulted now consider there to be a good balance between physical and online meetings.

Overall, stakeholders agreed that COVID-19 did not have an impact on the EEA's ability to carry out its tasks, or on the quality of its work. The EEA still delivered the vast majority of its outputs as planned in the AWP in 2020 and 2021 (as detailed in section 5.2). Interviewees from the Commission reported positively on the EEA 'keeping things going' and did not mention any negative impacts on delivery, which was echoed by respondents to the online survey, especially EEA staff (see Figure 6.8). It was reported that the pandemic slightly delayed the approval of the 2021-2030 Strategy, but this was not significant and did not have a further impact on the work of the Agency.

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<sup>49</sup> However, as outlined in the 2020 CAAR, one explanation for this could be that due to COVID-19, the EEA shifted its learning and development offer towards online sessions, which tend to be of a shorter duration.

**Figure 6.8: Overall, how well did the EEA deal with the following challenges that affected its areas of activity in 2017-2021?**



Source: Online Survey (10/02/2023 – 28/03/2023). Q11, N=51 (incl. 28 EEA staff and 23 Other respondents).

It is worth highlighting that the Eionet workplan was particularly impacted by COVID-19, perhaps more strongly than other areas of EEA activity (as Eionet activity is centred around networking and facilitating collaboration). Most activities with NFPs and Eionet groups had to be moved online, with a few events (such as the NRC meeting on soil use and spatial planning, scheduled for April 2020) cancelled altogether. On the other hand, the easy accessibility of online meetings allowed for a higher frequency of plenary and working group webinars. NFPs consulted were positive on this change and appreciated having webinars on different topics more frequently, and also noted that the EEA had developed tools to assist with remote working.

The EEA was also flexible and adapted their thematic priorities. Examples include the EEA producing a viewer documenting the impact of lockdown measures on air quality and related health impacts in European cities, assessing the effect of COVID-19 lockdown measures on air pollutant concentration<sup>50</sup> (which was particularly praised by Commission representatives), and launching a specific project: 'COVID-19 and Europe's environment: Impacts of a global pandemic'. The EEA also hosted a series of online debates to contribute to knowledge and policy debates around COVID-19, its impacts and a sustainable recovery, which attracted thousands of views on social media.<sup>51</sup> While interviewees from the Scientific Committee suggested that the EEA could have gone further in this, for example exploring the impact of the COVID-19 global crisis on knowledge priorities, Commission stakeholders considered the EEA to have done enough.

<sup>50</sup> EEA (2021), CAAR 2020.

<sup>51</sup> CAAR 2020

The EEA also adapted its communication strategy to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic. The EEA report “*Healthy environment, healthy lives: How the environment influences health and well-being in Europe*” was finalised in 2019, but publication thereof was postponed to Q3 of 2020 due to the pandemic, in order to increase media visibility instead of competing with COVID-19. This could potentially have been a lesson learned from the impact the emergence of the pandemic had on the promotion of the SOER 2020, which was published in December 2019 – as one EEA representative indicated, COVID-19 was detrimental to the visibility of the SOER, with media and policy makers’ attention completely shifting away to the new crisis and a lot of outreach activities being cancelled (also given the fact that online working and online events were still a new thing).

### EEA response to other crises

While COVID-19 was the major crisis faced by the EEA (and the world) during the evaluation period, Brexit also required the EEA to respond to changing circumstances.

The EEA was considered to have responded to Brexit in an appropriate way. The EEA began the process of preparing for the UK’s withdrawal from the EU in 2019, which required changes to IT systems and data collection. These were handled in a timely manner.<sup>52</sup> UK staff at the EEA was also able to stay on, in line with overall Commission rules and guidelines. Brexit did not have a direct impact on the financial contribution of the EEA, but indirectly meant that the EU subvention (and the Swiss contribution, which is calculated on the basis of this) has to be shouldered by 27 instead of 28 Member States.

While some stakeholders lamented the fact that the UK left the EU and highlighted that the lack of data from the UK would reduce the overall comprehensiveness of the European data on the environment the EEA compiles and analyses, it was acknowledged that there was nothing the EEA could have done differently.

## 6.2 Efficiency

This section details the research and analysis conducted in order to achieve an assessment of the efficiency of the Agency.

Efficiency considers the costs required for an intervention/activity compared to its benefits. In this context, the main costs are the financial and human resources provided to the Agency. The benefits are multiple and include delivery of the Agency’s activities as set out in its programming documents, data handling, management and storage, support to EU legislation, capacity-building for member countries, and provisions of information for the general public. These outcomes are described in sections 5 and 6 and further detailed in Annexes 2, 9, 10 and 12.

This section looks at efficiency from different angles, in order to present as comprehensive a picture as possible. These angles are: **efficiency in overall terms** (section 6.2.1), **cost-efficient achievement of results** (section 6.2.2), **synergies for enabling greater efficiency** (section 6.2.3), **adequacy of resources** (section 6.2.4), **governance structure and monitoring arrangements** (section 6.2.5), and **use of digital technologies** (section 6.2.6).

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<sup>52</sup> EEA (2021), CAAR 2020.

In order to arrive at an assessment of overall efficiency, the ideal method is arguably a quantified comparison between costs and benefits to identify whether the net effect of the resources used is positive or negative. While the costs of EEA are largely quantifiable, its benefits are often not. This is often the case for environmental or climate interventions, where benefits tend to emerge over time, cannot be isolated to one stakeholder group, but rather benefit society as a whole, and are often not easily measured in monetary equivalents<sup>53</sup>, partly due to the fact that the benefits of environmental knowledge and/or monitoring activities can hardly be isolated from the overall benefits of an intervention.

The complexity on both the costs and benefits side means that attempting to isolate the costs and benefits of the EEA's contribution across each of the policy areas it is involved in, is complex, and subject to numerous assumptions.

With the following sections we aim to provide tangible evidence for the findings that we have made. We will outline the limitations where this is not possible, or where the logic is weaker. We also include comparisons with results from the 2018 Evaluation Support Study, where possible. In general, the **2018 Evaluation Support Study** found that over the last evaluation period (2012-2016), costs remained relatively constant. It also acknowledged the wide range of benefits that the EEA and Eionet accrued, noting that a quantification of benefits related to the implementation of environmental and climate legislation was not possible, but based on a qualitative assessment, there was good reason to assume that the benefits exceeded the costs.

### 6.2.1 Overall efficiency in implementing tasks

This section addresses *EQ 7: To what extent have the EEA and Eionet been efficient in implementing the tasks set out in their mandate and programming documents?*

**Main issues considered:** This section considers the costs and benefits associated with EEA in order to arrive at a general assessment of overall efficiency.

**Main findings:** As for costs, the core budget in 2017 had a comparable level to the level in the previous evaluation period, but gradually increased by 10 million EUR over the next five years. This was mostly due to an expansion of tasks (old and new) and inflation correction. By contrast, the non-core budget fluctuated over the whole period, but essentially increased the EEA's revenues for operational activities overall.

As for benefits, and in light of the fact that quantification of benefits in context of environmental policy is hardly ever an easy undertaking, the benefits that the EEA provides are found to be of continual and diverse nature, notably with regard to being able to maintain data over a long period of time and provide long-term assessments, and to provide assessments that give greater insights on systemic interlinkages between environmental, climate and other policies. Through the increased engagement of EEA in new areas and expanded tasks in established ones (see for example section 5.3 on reporting obligations), benefits have been equally expanded in these fields. For an overview table of costs and benefits as well as savings (achieved and potential) see Annex 9.

<sup>53</sup> See also Better Regulation Toolbox #56: [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-02/br\\_toolbox-nov\\_2021\\_en.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-02/br_toolbox-nov_2021_en.pdf)



In the section below, costs and benefits are further detailed. Overall, in the stakeholder consultations, many interviewees across all stakeholder groups remarked that **the EEA was working efficiently**. Members of the Management Board commended in particular its **dedicated staff**, and the efficiency benefits stemming from the **close cooperation with Member States and their experts**, on whom the EEA depends for many of its outcomes.

EEA staff felt that the EEA was working efficiently, but also suggested **three areas that could be improved**: First, some felt that there was undue strain on the **administrative staff**. Second, **decision-making** within the EEA was described as sometimes lengthy and not always efficient due to the need to involve Member States. Third, some felt that **EEA-internal activity planning** should be better aligned with the timing and delivery of the EEA Strategy (previously MAWP).

With regard to efficiency being considered as a comparison of costs and benefits, the sections below outline the general costs associated with the Agency and Eionet and further analyse its benefits.

### Costs

Costs can be incurred directly or indirectly<sup>54</sup>. In the context of the EEA and Eionet, **direct costs** are incurred through the need for financing the Agency's operations. These operating costs can be presented through one clear proxy, i.e., the EEA's budget, with the financial contributions of Member States and Cooperating Countries. **Indirect costs** could include the costs that are incurred by Member States and Cooperating Countries in addition to the membership fee provided via the budget, and also include time and effort spent by the national Ministries or Agencies representatives to participate in the EEA's activities. In order to establish such costs, analytical methods exist (e.g. surveys), however comparability across administrations is likely to be low, and activities at national level are very difficult / not possible to relate back to the EEA's activities. Results could only be an approximation at best. Due to these limitations, such an analysis was not foreseen in the setup of this study.

For the purposes of this study an assessment of the direct costs was undertaken. **Direct costs of the Agency can be identified through its budget**, as presented in section 5.1. As described there, the core budget is financed via the EU subvention to EEA from the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) (to which the EU Member States contribute by definition), and contributions of Third countries (EFTA countries, Turkey and Switzerland). Non-core budget is financed via grant, delegation or service-level agreements for whom the counterpart is a Commission DG other than DG ENV and are in essence also financed via the MFF).

As detailed in the analysis in section 5.1, the **core budget** in 2017 was a comparable level to the previous evaluation period, but gradually increased by 10 million EUR in total over the five years covered by this evaluation. This was mostly due to an expansion of tasks (old and new) and inflation correction. The **non-core budget** by contrast fluctuated over the whole period, however, as is also explained in section 5.1, this depends on the way in which contributions are committed and paid. While this is being presented as a decrease over the whole period, essentially the non-core budget **increased the EEA's revenues for operational activities overall**.

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<sup>54</sup> Compare also BR Toolbox #56: [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/br\\_toolbox\\_-\\_nov\\_2021\\_-\\_chapter\\_8.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/br_toolbox_-_nov_2021_-_chapter_8.pdf)



## Benefits

Benefits in general can be divided in two sub-categories: direct and indirect. Direct benefits in this context are those that immediately accrue from Agency activities. Indirect benefits occur as secondary impacts of an activity, and as described in Better Regulation Toolbox#56<sup>55</sup>, can also be called co-benefits. These can be spill-over effects on individuals that are not the direct addressees of the initiative; they can also be wider macroeconomic benefits, or other non-monetary benefits.

**This study focuses on the direct benefits**, as a clear distinction between direct or indirect benefits cannot be achieved in the context of the Agency activities for the following reasons:

- 1) *Spill-over effects to third parties*: As highlighted in the Founding Regulation, the Agency was set up in order to achieve the aim of environmental protection and improvement laid down by the Treaty. The Agency's activities include those directed towards the general public at large, for example, the broad dissemination of reliable and comparable environmental information. Hence, a clear distinction between direct beneficiaries and indirect beneficiaries is not possible; one could even argue that spill-over effects are inherently expected via the operation of the Agency.
- 2) *Wider macroeconomic benefits*: The Agency collates information and data that is required to amend or develop environmental and climate legislation. While these pieces of legislation can have macroeconomic benefits (e.g., higher GDP, productivity enhancements, greater employment rates), and there is an indirect link between Agency and legislative results, a full assessment would require a complete overview of these pieces of legislation, an identification of their macroeconomic benefits, and how these relate back to the Agency's activities (i.e., how much of the benefits are related to the quality of the data), which would go beyond the scope of this study.
- 3) *Other non-monetary benefits*: These include benefits such as protection of fundamental rights, social cohesion or reduced gender discrimination. While it is likely that such co-benefits arise through, for example, a better-informed general public, again they would be extremely difficult to establish comprehensively.

The table below demonstrates the direct benefits that were reported by stakeholders who were consulted for this study. It should be noted that many of the benefits that the EEA provides also have an *indirect* character – such as less environmental degradation through a legislative act that was set up based on EEA data. Also, those benefits can be observed, but are difficult to monetise.

**Table 6.3: EEA Direct Benefits**

Benefit	Justification or indicator	For more details see sections
<b>Delivery of high-quality data and information on environmental issues to inform policy-making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As of 2021, the EEA supported activities under 56 EU legislative or policy frameworks and managed EU submissions to 5 international bodies (UNECE LRTAP and PRTR Protocol, Minamata Convention, UNFCCC and Montreal Protocol)<sup>56</sup></li> </ul>	Sections 5.2, 5.3, 6.1.1, 6.2.2 and 6.2.3 Annex 10

<sup>55</sup> European Commission (2021). Better Regulation toolbox, Chapter 8.

<sup>56</sup> EEA Single Programming Document 2021-2023

Benefit	Justification or indicator	For more details see sections
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As of 2021, the EEA managed 16 EU-wide policy information and knowledge platforms involving DGs ENV, CLIMA, DEFIS and NEAR</li> <li>▪ Regular output of reporting obligations: EEA has increased its total commitment to supporting reporting obligations by 9% (a total of 123 reporting obligations)</li> <li>▪ Provision of reports and assessments: the delivery rate of key reports/assessments according to the associated KPI was 93.1% in 2019, 87.5% in 2020 and 89% in 2021 (against a baseline of 2019 and a target of min. 90%).</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Delivery of knowledge from EU-wide environmental assessments that is relevant for policy making (even beyond “purely” environmental areas)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Flagship product “State of the Environment” Report</li> <li>▪ Provided important data input to the European Green Deal</li> <li>▪ SOER 2020 systemic character that looks at interlinkages with other policy areas</li> <li>▪ Greater focus on systemic perspective in recent years, i.e., how environmental/climate policies interact with others (e.g. Eionet groups through modernisation process)</li> </ul>	<p>Sections 6.1.1, 6.1.3, 6.2.3, 6.3.1, 6.3.2 and 6.4.1 Case Study on SOER Case Study on Eionet modernisation process</p>
<p><b>Maintains and archives environmental data over a long period of time, allowing for longevity and long-term assessments</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reporting and assessment core task of the EEA since its inception</li> <li>▪ In some cases data goes back to 1900</li> </ul>	<p>Sections 5.2, 5.3, 6.1.1 and 6.2.2 Annex 10</p>
<p><b>EEA products provide reliable information on the state of environment of countries, and allow for benchmarking the performance of countries against each other</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ EEA delivers reports and comparable and harmonised data from member countries</li> </ul>	<p>Section 6.5.1</p>
<p><b>Constant evolution of EEA reporting facilitates development and use of standardised tools and methods, thereby permitting collection of comparable data</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ EEA handles 250 times more data than in 2002</li> <li>▪ The number of dataflows handled internally by EEA increased from around 30 in 2016 to around 70 in 2018 and approximately 120 in 2021.</li> </ul>	<p>Section 6.1.1 and Section 6.2.3</p>
<p><b>The way how EEA works allows for the exchange of knowledge and best practice among national experts in the member countries</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eionet networking</li> <li>▪ ETCs</li> </ul>	<p>Section 6.5.1 and 6.5.2</p>
<p><b>It provides opportunities for national experts to learn about new and innovative techniques for environmental monitoring and reporting</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reporting training and capacity-building</li> <li>▪ Eionet core data flows performance rates</li> </ul>	<p>Sections 5.3, 6.1 and 6.5</p>
<p><b>It facilitates reporting on EU environmental and climate legislation for Member States but also manufacturers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reporting training and capacity-building</li> <li>▪ Tailor-made reporting tools that allow for multiple data usage</li> <li>▪ Reportnet</li> </ul>	<p>Sections 5.2, 6.1.3, 6.2.3 and 6.2.6 Annex 10</p>
<p><b>It reduces burden associated with reporting for EU environmental and climate legislation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tailor-made reporting tools that allow for multiple data usage</li> <li>▪ Reportnet</li> </ul>	<p>Sections 5.2, 6.1.3, 6.2.3 and 6.2.6 Annex 10</p>

Benefit	Justification or indicator	For more details see sections
<b>It reduces burden of delivering environmental and climate data to the UN and other bodies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support to member countries and the Commission to submit relevant data to UN and other bodies</li> </ul>	Section 6.1.2 and 6.5
<b>EEA's work positively influences quality of reporting standards internationally</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides best practice internationally, e.g., regarding the Transparency Framework under the Paris Agreement</li> </ul>	Section 6.5
<b>The EEA supports improved quality of implementation of environmental legislation beyond reporting requirements.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contribution to dedicated assessments, e.g., Waste early warning system, Environmental Implementation Reviews</li> <li>▪ Exchange of best practices via workshops and consultations in different Eionet groups</li> </ul>	Sections 6.1.1 and 6.4, Annex 4
<b>By providing support to legislative acts and reporting requirements, the EEA helps Commission and Member States to better understand the respective requirements and limitations.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Instrumental in the definition of monitoring and reporting methodologies, requirements and guidance, and delivers support to Eionet to facilitate compliance</li> </ul>	Section 6.1.2 and 6.5
<b>The EEA has comparative advantages in undertaking its work compared to other international or national equivalent bodies and/or institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Long-term experience</li> <li>▪ Specific staff profiles</li> <li>▪ Greater flexibility than Commission DGs</li> </ul>	Section 6.2.1

From the consultations, several interviewees from the Management Board, NFPs, the Scientific Committee and Commission found **an assessment of the EEA's efficiency, and particularly of the benefits, difficult**. This was either due to a lack of in-depth experience / familiarity with the organisation (Management Board, other EU agencies), or to the difficulty of putting a monetary value on benefits such as information exchange, human well-being or health (NFP, Scientific Committee). Suggestions for assessing and quantifying benefits included the number of publications, reports and communications or the Agency's ability to prioritise between core and non-core activities.

In the interviews, **the EEA's function as a repository** – its ability to keep data and information over a long period of time – was highlighted as a specific benefit, and even the 'defining asset'. Many interviewees from Commission, NFP and EEA staff deemed that the EEA was **efficient in reporting procedures and handling of data**<sup>57</sup>, with the EEA now handling 250 times more data than in 2002. Commission staff also highlighted the **training and support** that EEA provided to Member States in data reporting, which has led to **efficiency gains**, since delays from even only one data reporter could have a big impact on delivery of the overall output.

<sup>57</sup> See sections 5.2 and 6.2.3

## 6.2.2 EEA's ability to achieve the results in a cost-efficient and timely manner

This section addresses *EQ 13*: To what extent has the EEA implemented its activities, the annual budgets (including non-core budgets that may be of a multiannual nature if the activity covers multiple years), and achieved the expected results in a cost-efficient and timely manner?

**Main issues considered:** This section considers the outcomes from the analysis of the implementation of activities undertaken by the EEA during the evaluation period, as well as resource allocation.

**Main findings:** The EEA completed most outputs it had set out in its annual work programmes for the years 2017 – 2020 with some variations across years (2017 as a consequence of resource constraints, and 2020 as impacted by Covid-19) and Strategic Areas (SA 1 – informing policy implementation and SA 2 – assessing systemic challenges). For 2021 a lower delivery rate can be noted for the area of biodiversity and ecosystems and partly for the area of climate change.

Through a triangulation exercise some efficiency gains could be identified for some areas in the years 2017 – 2020, mostly relating to data handling and reporting, the increased use of reporting databases, more streamlined reporting and Reportnet 3. It also shows that the austerity period was a period of rethinking the EEA's way of working, which led to efficiency achievements in particular in stable and mature areas such as air pollution, industrial pollution and water. The EEA seemed to have prioritised activities related to, or resulting from, legal reporting obligations and to the SOER 2020 over other activities. Nevertheless, the analysis also suggests there were areas where staff shortages had an impact on delivery of work and on staff well-being (as reported further in section 6.2.4). A full presentation of deprioritised tasks over the period is not possible on the basis of the information contained in SPDs and CAARs, and – while acknowledging improved practices in reporting and joint EEA-ENV efforts to support monitoring within the Inter service group – it is recommended that this information should be presented in greater detail in the future to assist evaluation and a more active engagement in priority-setting by the Management Board.

Publication plans of the EEA for the years 2020 and 2021 were considered in the implementation analysis. Due to a lack of standardised classification / methodology of publications that would also allow the tracking of whether a publication is associated with a legislative instrument/reporting obligation, that analysis could not be performed. Such a standardised methodology would need to be developed and used to allow for future assessments and comparisons over different periods.

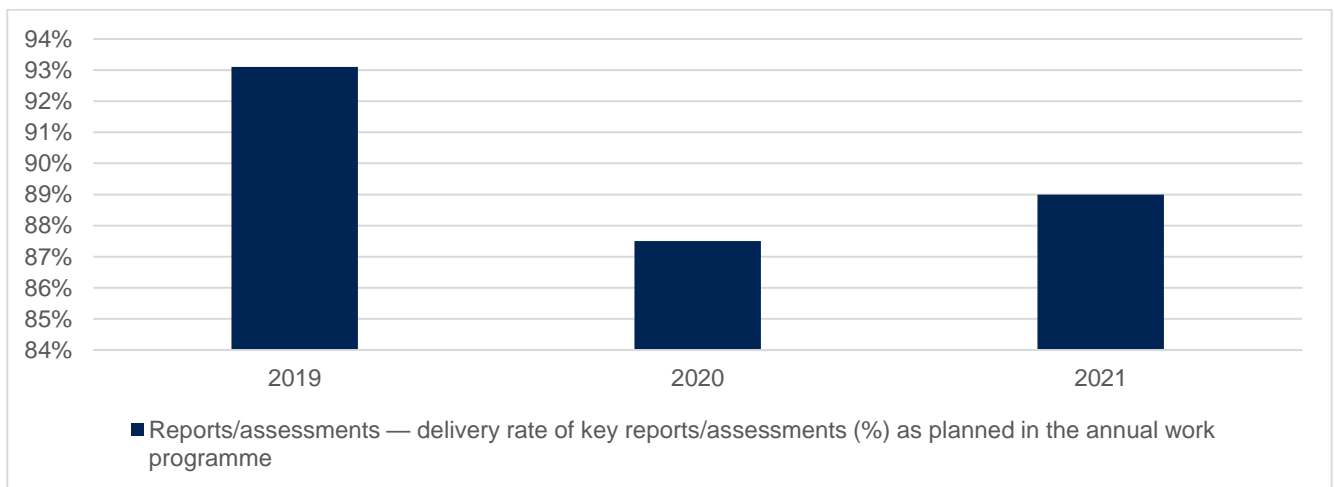
### Progress in implementation and resource allocation

The analysis provided in Chapter 5 demonstrates that the EEA completed most outputs it had set out in its AWP, with some variations between Strategic Areas, as well as between years. To summarise, the analysis also confirmed what was mentioned in the interviews, namely that overall completion rates in 2017 were comparatively lower than those in subsequent years due to resource constraints, reprioritisation and a lower number of planned activities. Completion rates in 2020 were comparatively lower across SA1 (informing policy implementation) and SA2 (assessing systemic challenges) than in previous years. In many cases, this was due to the impact of COVID-19 on planned outputs, such as various Eionet workshops which had to be postponed. As reported in Chapter 5.2 this matches KPI performance per strategic area that also showed a lower overall completion rate in 2020 than in 2019 (reflecting the impact of COVID-19) and that the target for a majority of KPIs was not met in 2020 in SAs 1.6 (marine), 1.7 (biodiversity and ecosystems), 1.8 (urban, land use and soil), 2.1 (resource-efficiency) and 2.4 (sustainability assessments).

Due to the change in reporting moving from the MAWP to the EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030, a comparison of 2021 to the previous years is not possible. However, it can be noted that 2021 saw a lower than intended delivery rate for reports, indicators and core data flows, in particular in the area of biodiversity and ecosystems, and to a certain extent in the area of climate change. This development can also be seen in the EEA's publication plan as analysed in Chapter 5. With regard to the area of biodiversity and ecosystems, this was due to the fact that the Programme was in a transitional stage with new management, leading to a review and changed and more targeted approach to publications that year with shorter, more focused communications products like briefings instead of extensive reports. Regarding the climate change area, the lower than planned number of publications was due to a change in project management and a high workload, in particular as related to the first reporting cycle under the Governance Regulation.

In Chapter 5, a review was undertaken for the years 2020 and 2021 of whether publications were delivered on time, whether there were cancellations or postponements and whether any of these were related to a publication that EEA marks with "R\*" (mandatory under EU and/or international conventions). While only one delayed publication in 2021 was an "R\*-publication", it was noted that the overall number of publications decreased from 2020 to 2021. This could be related either to a change in priority setting with the new EEA-Eionet strategy 2021-2030, or a reflection of changes in the way data can increasingly be presented digitally. The KPI regarding reports/assessments shows a slightly different picture (see Figure 6.9), the reason for this being that only key reports/assessments are included in the KPI, whereas our review included all publications.

**Figure 6.9: KPI implementation rate for Reports/Assessments for the years 2019 – 2021**



Source: CAAR 2019, CAAR 2020, CAAR 2021

Looking at resource allocation per activity in the period 2017-2020<sup>58</sup>, and as presented in greater detail in Annex 11, decreases in financial resources are particularly noteworthy for SA1 (informing

<sup>58</sup> Since activity and financial reporting changed significantly with the introduction of the EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030, a comparative analysis between MAWP output and 2021 output is not feasible. Therefore the section below focuses on the 2017-2020 period so as to be able to draw some conclusions on efficiency. For completeness however it has to be stated that the situation in 2021 in particular as regards staffing changed for the EEA. As can be seen in Annex 1, the following Programmes saw an increase in staff in 2021 as compared to 2020: Administrative Services; Climate Change, Energy and Transport; Data and Information Services; Health and Sustainable Resource Use; and Integrated Assessments for Sustainability.

policy implementation) and SA2 (assessing systemic challenges), and for SA 1 also in relation to human resources (see Table 6.4).

**Table 6.4: Resource allocation per activity (level 1), 2017-2020**

SA	Strategic action / Project group	Resources (million EUR)				% Change	Full time equivalents (FTEs)				% Change
		2017	2018	2019	2020	2017-2020	2017	2018	2019	2020	2017-2020
1	Informing policy implementation	10	10.2	10.2	9.7	-5.9%	71	57.9	58.1	65	-8.5%
2	Assessing systemic challenges	2	1.5	1.4	1.6	-7.4%	17	19.2	24.9	19.4	14.12
3	Knowledge co-creation, sharing & use	3	2.9	12.9	16.7	438.1%	51	50.5	53.4	50.6	-0.8%
4	EEA Management	0	0.9	0.8	1	152.3%	62	67.8	69.4	68.5	10.5%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>28.96</b>	<b>86.9%</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>195.3</b>	<b>205.8</b>	<b>203.5</b>	<b>1.8%</b>

Source: SDP 2017-2019, SPD 2018-2020, SPD 2019-2021, SPD 2020-2022, SPD 2021-2023

To assess whether these decreases were due to adjustments in the austerity period, greater efficiency in data reporting/handling, structural shifts of areas, or merely differences in reporting, an analysis at sub-activity level was undertaken for those areas in SA 1 and 2 that saw a decrease in financial and human resources<sup>59</sup>. Information is correlated with views expressed in stakeholder consultation, where possible.

In order to see what happened as a consequence of the austerity measures, information provided in Annex 2 was compared with information in Annex C of the 2018 Evaluation Support Study. It should be noted that a fully correlated comparison is not possible due to differences in how sub-activities were assigned under MAWP activities in each of the respective studies. However, all sub-activities had been reported in the previous evaluation and in this one, hence it can be seen where an activity was continued and where it was not.

**Table 6.5: Analysis of SA 1 and 2 sub-activities with decreased financial and human resources**

<p><b>SA 1.1 Air pollution</b></p> <p>Financial resources in this SA over the 2017-2020 period declined by 20.9%, and human resources by 28.2%, or 3.1 FTE.</p> <p>Several factors appear to have contributed to this development. First, the “transport” area was shifted from SA 1.1 to SA 1.3 (climate change mitigation) after 2018. This was in line with the reorganisation of the EEA that took place in September 2018 and notably included the TERM report (report assessing the integration of environmental considerations into transport policies in Europe), as well as CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reporting related to cars, vans, heavy-duty vehicles as well as reports under the Fuels Quality Directive. Second, in 2017 differences can be noted in reported outcomes for example as regards stand-alone reporting on ozone and city air-quality, or changes in reporting on real-time data on air quality. Under the sub-activity on trend reports and impact assessments, only SOER contributions and policy support are</p>
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<sup>59</sup> SA 1.1, SA 1.2, SA 1.5, SA 1.6, SA 1.8, SA 2.3



reported after 2017, and no extra assessments or reports were undertaken in contrast to the previous evaluation period. This leads to the assumption that work was clearly prioritised in favour of SOER and ongoing policy support.

Regarding noise, there is one activity that clearly was discontinued, i.e., on real-time data on noise. From 2019 onwards, a clearer distinction was drawn between air pollution and noise, which in previous years had been reported jointly. However, it seems that all planned activities were taken forward, and an additional state of noise report was delivered in 2019/2020 building on data reported under the Environmental Noise Directive.

For this area, it seems that decreases in resources were due to a combination of factors: discontinuation of activities, convergence of activities for greater efficiency in reporting, and a shift from one topic area to another SA. It is also visible that activities were priorities that were connected to legal reporting obligations with deadlines. The additional noise report is also built on data available from a legal reporting obligation.

### **SA 1.2. Industrial pollution**

This area experienced a considerable decrease in financial (down 59.1%) and human resources (down 40%), but stable delivery rates over the period.

Factors that might have influenced this are the following. The area is largely focussed on implementation of reporting obligations, hence no significant differences were visible from 2016 to 2017. The area on f-gases and ozone-depleting substances was shifted into SA 1.3 after 2017. On the remaining items particular emphasis was placed on streamlining of reporting especially under the Industrial Emission Directive (integrating the Large Combustion Plants Directive). As reported in the interviews above, this allowed staff numbers to reduce from 6 to 2. In 2020, new data flows were added to the SA, including for reporting under the Mercury Regulation.

For this SA apart from the shift of areas into another SA, it seems that the maturity levels of data handling and streamlining (as a result of the work undertaken following the Reporting Fitness Check to better use the INSPIRE Directive to improve interoperability) have led to greater efficiencies to an extent, so that new data flow obligations could have been taken up with a lower staff rate.

### **SA 1.5 Water management, resources and ecosystems**

In this SA there was a slight financial decrease (-3%) and a considerable decrease in human resources (-25%) over the period. Output levels in this SA however are all higher than 90%.

In contrast to the previous evaluation period, work on the water resource efficiency indicator (including support) was seemingly halted. This SA is characterised by a focus on the WISE database and water-related legislation. Reporting work on the Drinking Water Directive was also taken up again and selected as a pilot reporting for Reportnet 3. Work under integrated assessments was directed towards the Water Framework Directive and the EU Biodiversity Strategy (protected areas). Output activities that had to be cancelled or postponed were due to technical data processing issues, COVID-19 and delayed reporting by Member States.

These developments also seem to imply that an indication of level of efficiency has been reached, which might be due to the continuous development of WISE and the possibilities of integrated reporting.

### **SA 1.6 Marine and coastal environment and maritime activities**

Financial resources for this SA decreased by 37%, human resources by 15.7%. Output levels were stable but saw a decline in 2020.

Work on indicators as foreseen in the MAWP was in fact only taken up in 2017 and were executed for the rest of the evaluation period. However, activities under harmonised data on marine Nature 2000 sites and on the Marine Litter Watch were no longer reported after 2017 implying that these had been put to a halt. Furthermore, the period saw a clear focus on legislative work and development of the marine part of WISE. The majority of elements that could not be delivered were all reportedly related to lack of resources and long-term staff absences.

. While delivery rates were above 90% in 2017 – 2019 implying hence a good level of efficiency, activity delivery started to suffer in 2020 related to the lower availability of staff. Since that staff was not replaced



or re-allocated in this period, it is assumed that certain activities were prioritised internally vis-à-vis others. Given that the focus was on legislative work and the marine part of WISE, it is assumed that other activities were deprioritised.

### SA 1.8 Urban, land use and soil

SA 1.8 saw a significant decrease in financial and human resources over the period – 40.3% and 72.2% respectively. SA 1.8 was reorganised in line with the new EEA Work Areas (1-5, and 6, as now in MPS) and aligned with the new EEA/Eionet Strategy. SA1.8 was also impacted by the EEA reorganisation in 2019, after which the group 'Land use' was eliminated and staff distributed across programmes.

This SA is characterised by the fact that activities are not necessarily annual but time-bound, and by the lack of legal reporting obligations at EU or international level. Therefore, also a comparison with the previous evaluation period is not possible due to different deadlines of MAWP activities. It seems however that the SA stands in close interaction with other areas, such as air pollution and climate change (including LULUCF-related activities). The lowest output rate for the area was reached in 2020, by which human resources had been cut by around 72%. Elements that were not delivered in 2020 included two indicator sets that depended on external inputs, but also a joint report with the JRC on soil condition in Europe. This postponement of the joint report was also reported in stakeholder consultations highlighting that while the subject was of critical importance to the environment, JRC had built up knowledge and a team around the area since years, and that it would not be efficient for the EEA with only one staff that could be dedicated to the topic to take this up.

As a cross-cutting topic Urban has been balancing for more than 25 years between a distributed approach close to the thematic areas and a more centralised approach for strategic and assessment purposes. This area seemed to have been characterised by competing demands of other areas where there are clear legal reporting needs and deadlines. The soil report can serve both as an example of this, but also for the EEA improving cooperation and coordination with other agencies and each working towards their comparative strengths.

### SA 2.3 Megatrends and transitions

SA 2.3 is an area with significant relative financial and human decreases, with 81.4% and 70% respectively.

In comparing with the previous evaluation period results can largely be summarised that all activities have been reduced in intensity, both for assessing of global megatrends as well as for work on the Forward-Looking Information and Services (FLIS) platform. This is in line with the trend in SA 2 of shifting resources towards supporting the SOER 2020 development.

The analysis presented in the table above assumes in some places that changes in output and activities were related to the need for (negative) priority setting, relying on information provided in stakeholder consultations (see below and Chapter 6.1.1 on barriers to implementation). Nevertheless, the study found that **a full presentation of activities that were de-prioritised during the evaluation period is not possible.**

Although the EEA programming documents frequently highlight the need to prioritise and deprioritise tasks in light of resource constraints (cp. e.g. CAAR 2018: “that the EEA is now facing the impossibility to fulfil adequately any new tasks without additional resources, further prioritisation and/or discontinuation of current core tasks”), they do not provide information on tasks that were actually de-prioritised, beyond occasional references (e.g. CAAR 2017: Annual update of the energy efficiency index to evaluate energy efficiency policies across countries and sectors and their impact on meeting energy efficiency targets – Not done (cancelled due to changes in internal resources and subsequent reprioritisation of activities)).

The SPDs 2017 – 2020 contain sections on “negative priorities”, but they remain at a relatively generic and headline level. For example, the cancellation of the energy efficiency index due to reprioritisation is not reported in these sections in either the SPD 2017 (forward-looking), or the SPD 2018 (backward-looking). The SPD 2018 reports instead that the activity “tourism and environment assessment” had to be stopped and that the Eionet Helpdesk functions had to be redistributed. The SPD 2019 contains a longer listing that points to a prioritisation of Copernicus in lieu of GEO/GEOSS and to the halting of activities, such as international engagement<sup>60</sup>, the “tourism and environment” assessment, reduced mission budgets and paper publications. The SPD 2020 reports in a generic manner about the implementation of staff reductions over the 2014 – 2020 Work Programme, and highlights concerns about the proposed MFF 2021 – 2027. The SPD 2021 does not contain a section on negative priorities.

As a result, although in interviews EEA staff pointed out activities that were de-prioritised, it is not possible for this study to provide a comprehensive list. It has to be noted that from 2022 onwards, the information on negative priorities contained in the SPDs has become more specific, and this practice is being continued in the subsequent SDPs (2023 and 2024). Furthermore, joint EEA-ENV efforts are being put in place to better monitor prioritisation of tasks, in particular through the joint senior management meetings, the Intergroup and the Inter Service Group. These developments should enable the Management Board to play a stronger role in priority-setting (see also Chapter 6.2.5), and will support future evaluations. It is strongly recommended to maintain these efforts and new practices.

In the consultation, the following views were brought forward: EEA staff were of the opinion that **positive developments on efficiency gains** had happened and felt that the Agency had exploited all its potential, which was easier for data flows in light of automation and IT developments, and less so for knowledge generation. EEA Senior Management and staff provided the following examples of efficient implementation of activities over the evaluation period: In the **period of austerity**, and in particular in 2017 – 2018, a number of **activities were stopped**. During that time, reflections also took place on **how to do things differently and more efficiently** Also as a result of the 2017 Reporting Fitness Check. Greater emphasis was placed on **indicator sets** or shorter online briefings instead of comprehensive reports on specific data sets, and on more **efficient ways to collect and process data** (see Annex 10 and section 6.2.6). Automation of data handling in one case (industrial emissions) even resulted in a reduction of staff from 6 to 2 people.

Commission representatives highlighted **some barriers that sometimes impact timely and cost-efficient delivery by the Agency** and on which the Agency only has limited influence. Importantly, it was acknowledged that the EEA **depends on data input from other entities**, such as Member States or manufacturers. Delays from only one data reporter can have a significant impact on the timely delivery of a whole report. It was also highlighted that **legislative requirements** could impact on results from three different perspectives:

- In the past the EEA’s role in legislative acts was often poorly defined. While this has changed (improved) following the Fitness Check on environmental reporting, and the

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<sup>60</sup> More specifically: international conventions (focus on EU reporting support activities), international engagement as regards the Central Asian region, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Latin America; partnerships with specific regional conventions (Alps, Carpathians) and support to EU Macro-Regions Strategies (e.g. Baltic, Adriatic, Danube) support to the EU-Arctic file in accordance with EEA planned work on Marine activities (see SA.1.6);

EEA's role in new obligations is now better defined, the situation is still unclear with regard to legacy legislation, for example for some water legislation.

- The deadlines set by a legislative act can be a challenge.
- Legislative revisions often bring changes to the datasets. For example, for Regulation 2019/631 on the CO<sub>2</sub> performance standards for cars and vans, the original datasets were expanded significantly, which implied a larger burden for processing and assessing data. This was also highlighted by EEA staff as an example where data requirements had been underestimated and adjustments had to be made to Reportnet. These changes implied a need for more intense and complex procedures which need adapting over time.

As regards efficiency gains or losses through outsourcing of work, interviewees had converging opinions that **less outsourcing was preferable**: EEA staff noted that in some cases growth of the Agency led to a decreased need for outsourcing activities, and more work could be performed by the EEA itself. As a consequence, the EEA also has more control over the budget and can make better use of staff. While Commission staff acknowledged that contracting work out was often easier given difficulties finding knowledgeable staff, it was seen as less efficient than having in-house capacity, as was also reported in section 6.2.1. Also, for IT, outsourcing has the risk of compromising the technical expertise of in-house staff, and IT developments were sometimes slow due to having to rely on external companies.

### 6.2.3 Synergies between tasks for greater efficiency and coordination processes

This section addresses *EQ 10*: Did the EEA conduct any analysis of tasks (old and newly assumed) in view of finding synergies between them? E.g. synergies between tasks related to the creation and maintenance of databases, data collection and reporting? Is the EEA strategy for efficiency gains appropriate and sufficient?

**Main issues considered:** This section reviews the EEA's approach towards efficiency gains from an administrative and operative perspective.

**Main findings:** Although the EEA has no *formal* strategy for efficiency gains, it reports on efficiency gains from an administrative perspective under the heading "strategy for efficiency gains" in the CAARs. In terms of operative efficiency, the EEA has increased efficiency in relation to reporting obligations, data handling and management. The EEA now handles 250 times more data than it did in 2002 when Reportnet was launched, and dataflows increased from around 30 right before the evaluation period, to approximately 120 in 2021. More than half of reporting obligations for which the EEA fully handles operations require substantial time and resources. EEA involvement for these operations has notably increased for quality assurance, data processing, web presentation and report publication. The EEA provided this increased support with a stable/declining number of staff, which was only possible through more advanced working methods and IT developments.

Savings were also possible in this evaluation period in the area of networking through increased use of online meetings prompted by the travel restrictions through Covid-19. These savings amounted to approx. 1.4 million EUR in 2020 and approx. 630,000 EUR in 2021, which were redirected to for example IT developments. A review of 2022 gives a first indication that travel expenses have gone up again, but not to the same level as in the pre-Covid-19 years (with the exception of the Scientific Committee).

Resulting from the analysis and consultations, there are certain areas with potential for facilitating future efficiency gains. One is that greater transparency towards the multiple use of data or use of existing data for new purposes would be seen as helpful for justifying new resource requirements for the EEA associated with new tasks. Second, there seems to be more room for exploring synergies between the EEA and the Scientific Committee (SC) in relation to EEA publications and involvement of EEA technical staff. In relation to the SC, a cost efficiency review in the future could be supported through a dedicated analysis setup that also reviews time invested by SC members. Third, a standardised approach for tracking reporting obligations would be useful to be able to compare developments over several evaluation periods and gaining better insights in efficiency or resource intensity developments. Information on costs and cost developments associated with each activity would furthermore be useful to facilitate efficiency assessments.

### EEA's Strategy for efficiency gains

The EEA has not established a formal self-standing strategy on efficiency gains. In line with the European Commission's template for CAARs published in 2020<sup>61</sup>, the EEA, reports about ongoing efforts to make efficiency gains under a section entitled "Strategy for efficiency gains". These efforts are **particularly focused on administrative tools**, such as the increased use of shared services, such as joint procurement together with the Commission, the use of several Commission services (e.g., payroll, IT security) and systems (e.g., ABAC, Sysper, Ares, e-Prior).

The EEA also reports that the conversion to electronic administration processes for procurement, finance and human resources has resulted in efficiency gains on administrative tasks and has helped in the COVID-19 transition. In this regard, online recruitment (supported by the recruitment platform Systal) was helpful for the recruitment processes in 2020 and 2021.

From consultations, several interview partners from across stakeholder groups felt that the Agency was **continuously looking for synergies** (see below on process synergies and more synergies with the Scientific Committee). It was also said that the restructuring of the EEA, which was partly undertaken because of previous evaluation findings, was aimed at establishing a cross-cutting structure connected to the entire green transition process and the ambition for a more systems-oriented perspective (see Chapter 6.2.5). It was noted that ETCs also had the ambition to look for greater synergies, however in practice topics were often too diverse to lend themselves to a more integrated mechanism.

NFPs felt that with more time and resources, more effort could be placed on **identifying more synergies**, while Commission representatives mentioned more sophisticated business processes and data management as entry points. While EEA staff found it difficult to link efficiency gains and data shared, Commission staff stated that **a more transparent presentation of what kind of data can be used synergistically** across topics (and which could not) would help in justifying new resource requirements. Both EEA and Commission representatives saw room for improvement regarding **internal coordination within the EEA**.

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<sup>61</sup> European Commission Communication C(2020)2297, April 2020

## Greater efficiency in reporting obligations, data handling and networking

This study has identified two areas for the evaluation period 2017- 2021, where EEA was able to make considerable efficiency gains in terms of their operation: **data handling and reporting obligations, as well as networking.**

### Reporting obligations, data handling and management

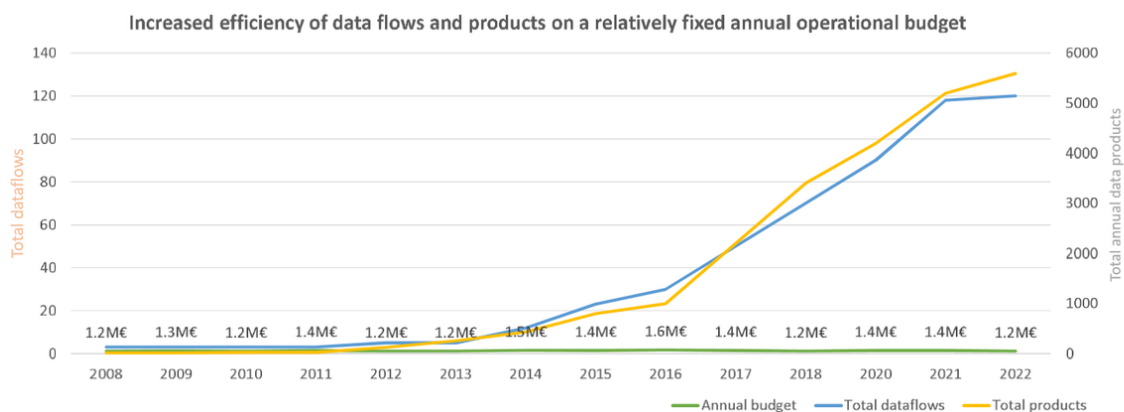
As regards data handling and management, the EEA Eionet Strategy 2021 – 2030 highlights that the **EEA now handles 250 times more data than it did in 2002 when Reportnet was launched;** a fact that was also repeated by several interviewees. Over the past years, and with data management being amongst the core activities of the EEA, the EEA has adapted its working methods, as reported by many stakeholders.

**Reportnet 3.0** was seen as an important tool to enable efficient data collection and data quality checks. For future efficiency gains, interoperability of Member State databases with the EEA database was seen as key, and the expectation was voiced by one interviewee that in 5-7 years' time, countries will be starting to use automatic reporting. Further potential still lies within improved IT where high costs may in the future become the limiting factor, and also potentially in artificial intelligence.

The EEA has a highly important role when it comes to supporting reporting obligations in the fields of environment and climate change. A full analysis of the EEA's role and how it has increased since the previous evaluation period has been conducted. A synopsis is included in section 5.2, and the full analysis is provided in Annex 10.

In summary, the EEA has **increased its total level of support to reporting obligations by around 9% in the evaluation period**, meaning that the EEA has taken on new reporting obligations as compared to the previous evaluation period. More reporting obligations can also be traced back to increased dataflows handled internally by EEA (see Figure 6.10) from around 30 in 2016 to around 70 in 2018 and approximately 120 in 2021<sup>62</sup>.

**Figure 6.10: EEA-handled dataflow increases**



<sup>62</sup> „Total data products“ as presented in the figure refer to data products that are generated by product portals such as Tableau and ArcGIS. These products come from different systems and are not hosted by EEA.

Source: graph provided by EEA

Involvement by the EEA has also increased regarding the level of support for reporting obligations, **with most requiring a full level 1 support** from the EEA.

The EEA categorises its level of support distinguishing levels 1 – 3 ranging from full support to reporting only to Reportnet. Importantly also, the relative size of EEA involvement in level 1 can vary. For the purposes of this analysis, a typology was agreed with EEA to classify this support intensity ranging from XL - S. This classification is explained in section 5.2.

Regarding the support intensity, the analysis shows that over **50% of level 1 support by the EEA requires substantial time and resources of exceeding 50,000 EUR (XL and L)**.

As for **step-by-step involvement of the EEA**, it was observed that for level 1 support for reporting obligations and building on the 10-steps methodology, which was developed for the previously mentioned Fitness Check and which is also further described in Annex 10, a significant increase of EEA involvement can notably be seen in steps 7 – 10 (quality assurance, data processing, web presentation, report publication).

The increased number of reporting obligations and expanded relative size of support was delivered with a budget that has remained more or less stable over the evaluation period (while the number of staff employed by the Data Information Service (DIS) programme even declined from 58 in 2018 to app. 50 in 2021). This performance was only possible by more advanced working methods and IT developments as described in Section 6.2.6.

In relation to the overall analysis of reporting obligations it has to be noted that the EEA itself does not track its support level or magnitude of involvement across individual ROs using the 10-step process. Data obtained from the EEA focused on level of support and relevant size of involvement based only on a legislative instrument total ROs. This resulted in the fact that certain assumptions had to be made but importantly also that comparability with the previous evaluation was limited. A **standardised approach for the future** would also benefit achievement of comparable results in the future.

**The multiple usage of data and tools** was another method of achieving greater efficiencies, and this is especially relevant for integrated assessments. The 2019-2021 SPD highlights that one of the objectives of the biodiversity strategic area was to ensure interoperability between BISE, EUNIS and other EEA and Commission-financed information systems (WISE, FISE, Climate-Adapt). The 2020 CAAR reports that several measures in this regard were implemented (BISE relaunch with links to FISE, renovation of the EUNIS database including services to BISE, support to the FISE development and links back to BISE).

While in general improvements in streamlining of reporting and avoiding duplication of efforts are still required in the future, another example is the WISE database that combines all water-related components. Reporting on the Drinking Water Directive (DWD) has been taken up by the EEA during this evaluation period. Some data points on the DWD already existed through the reporting under the Water Framework Directive (WFD), and the WISE system allows for a flexible combination of data points as needed for reporting under the respective legislative instruments. Importantly, this means that double reporting is already avoided to a certain extent. The EEA and Member States can access the integrated assessment database and can pull together all data related to the water

components. WISE not only incorporates the WFD and the DWD, but also the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and the Bathing Water Directive.

Multiple data usage was confirmed in interviews. An ETC reported that data curated by the EEA was being reused in many ways and for many different purposes, and highlighted air quality data as a specific example. Another example mentioned by Commission staff was ozone-related data reporting and reporting to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and the use of the Business Data Repository tool beyond reporting of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of vehicles.

While these efficiency achievements in data handling and management have been positive and widely welcomed, there are warning signs as regards the sustainability of the system. These developments, as shown in the figure above, have been completed for the same amount of funding and staff; in particular support staff rates have remained unchanged (see section 6.2.4). In fact, the number of staff allocated to IT decreased since 2018, from 58 to 50. Furthermore, demands for data handling and management are constantly increasing, thus the Agency is internally already discussing sustainability of the system from an IT perspective (see section 6.2.6 regarding the EEA's Digitalisation Strategy). It has been noted that there was further potential related to IT developments (which might be costly, e.g. annual costs for Reportnet 3.0 since its beta development in 2019 fluctuated between roughly 900,000 EUR and 1.3 million EUR), using alternative data sources or artificial intelligence (which is still an area where further regulation will be required).

### Networking

EEA staff highlighted that the experience with COVID-19, the travel restrictions and subsequent more frequent use of online meetings and webinars has demonstrated the possibility for improved efficiency.

This can be observed through comparing the reserved mission budget with the actual consumption (see Table 6.6): From the mission budget available in 2020 (600,000 EUR), only around 92,000 EUR (15%) were actually consumed. In 2021 only half of the 2020 budget was foreseen, but also only around 51,000 EUR (17%) were spent on missions.

Travel restrictions resulted in similar cost savings in all other areas: expert meetings, meetings of the Management Board and meetings of the Scientific Committee.

**Table 6.6: Reserved and consumed budget for missions, expert meetings, Management Board and Scientific Committee for 2020 and 2021 (excluding activities funded by grant, contribution- or service-level agreement), in EUR**

	Available Appropriation		Transfer Out from Budget Line		Actual Consumption	
	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
<b>Missions - 1300</b>	600,000	300,000	507,985	246,000	92,009	50,987
<b>Management Board - 2501</b>	115,000	60,000	103,828	54,995	11,172	5,007
<b>Scientific Committee - BL2502</b>	97,000	41,382	60,204	-	32,407	41,382
<b>Expert Meetings - BL3312</b>	818,100	400,000	686,585	324,753	131,515	75,247

Source: Data provided by EEA



Thus, due to the travel restrictions, approx. 1.4 million EUR in 2020 and approx. 630,000 EUR in 2021 were no longer required for mission budgets and were transferred out from the budget line. As reported in the CAAR 2020 and 2021, these transfers allowed for topping-up expenditures of the EEA's strategic actions, IT developments and the upgrade of the office space in the EEA's main building in Copenhagen.

It is also interesting to compare the actual consumption of the years 2020 and 2021 with the previous years, as presented in the table below. The effect of the travel restrictions is clearly visible: The general consumption for missions declined by 75%, for the Management Board by 90%, for the Scientific Committee by 59% and for expert meetings by 83%. A review of 2022 gives a first indication that travel expenses have gone up again, but not to the same extent as in the pre-Covid-19 years (with the exception of the Scientific Committee).

**Table 6.7: Consumed mission budget 2017 - 2022**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Missions</b>	604.787	515.000	535.500	92.015	54.000	313.000
<b>Management Board</b>	100.000	84.000	114.000	11.172	5.005	60.374
<b>Scientific Committee</b>	95.000	82.323	90.700	36.796	41.382	95.139
<b>Expert Meetings</b>	567.130	549.000	528.600	131.515	75.247	198.000

Source: Data provided by EEA

Since online meetings and webinars have now become part of the working culture globally, these efficiency gains will remain and funding that originally would have been earmarked for mission budgets will be programmed differently. However, as a networking organisation, the EEA cannot solely rely on online meetings to effectively perform its functions. While the online meetings allow for more frequent and ad-hoc interactions where necessary, interviewed stakeholders also pointed out that a good balance needs to be found to avoid online meeting fatigue.

#### Greater efficiency through synergies at process level

The **development of the SOER and the development of the new EEA-Eionet Strategy** were seen as good examples of synergies between projects and between different EEA-internal entities and the EEA's governance system. The SOER development process is indeed a good example showcasing the efficient process set up by the EEA to deliver one of their key reports (see Annex 4 for the full case study). The SOER was delivered by a team of colleagues from different units and programmes and contributions to the SOER under the different Strategic Areas (SAs) were reported as distinct tasks in the EEA's Single-Programming Documents (SPDs). Agreements between programmes contained detailed breakdowns on resources provided by each programme per year and assigned responsibility for producing report sections, e.g., sign-off, review, feedback, and implementation plans. Stakeholders interviewed expressed positive views on this process and reported that time, resources, and tasks at the EEA were very clearly structured for the SOER.

In addition to its internal processes, the development of the SOER also relied on extensive engagement with Eionet, which was handled efficiently. During the review process, 3,000 comments from the Eionet were received. The EEA created a database of all comments, indicating how they were addressed, i.e., the extent to which they were incorporated ('fully', 'partly', 'not at all') and the

reasons for doing so. This allowed the Agency to keep track of progress and deal with the review process in an efficient and timely manner.

#### Greater efficiency through synergies at governance level

Further efforts for synergies reported by stakeholders included inviting external speakers to webinars, and the discussions and seminars within the Scientific Committee (SC). Nevertheless, it was felt that the **link between EEA's work and the SC engagement** could be improved. While the Committee was aware of the publication plan of the EEA, there was no clear indication of on which publications Committee engagement would be welcomed by the EEA. It was also highlighted that EEA technical staff used to attend SC meetings, but that this practice stopped in 2021 as a consequence of COVID-19, and that this should be reversed. Efforts in this regard have already been initiated, as described in section 6.2.5.

#### 6.2.4 Adequacy of EEA's resources

This section addresses the following evaluation questions:

- *EQ 11: How efficiently has the EEA managed to align to new policy priorities taking into account its resources? To what extent are the resources adequate for the mandate of the Agency?*
- *EQ 14: To what extent is the allocation of staff across the different activities efficient? Is the allocation consistent with the Agency's (and EU) priorities? Is the Agency reallocating or allocating (new) staff to its priority tasks in an efficient way? Is there a correct balance between the number of staff assigned to administrative tasks and the number of staff assigned to the operational tasks?*
- *EQ 16: To what extent do shared projects (co-financed by DG ENVIRONMENT and the EEA) define roles and responsibilities at the planning stage, including the financial sources to ensure optimal financing practices? What are the challenges and what remedial actions/best practices are worth flagging?*

**Main issues considered:** Issues considered included impacts of increased resources on the LIFE budget, the development of shared projects, staff development and staff well-being.

**Main findings:** The period of austerity until 2019 had a palpable effect, as resource constraints resulted in cancelled or postponed activities. At the end of the evaluation period, it was widely felt that the budget was adequate, but that the Agency was operating at its limit and that any further additional tasks would need to come with additional resources. In particular, it was noted there is increased demand for the Agency's support to other DGs, which materialised in additional service-level agreements.

Impacts on the LIFE budget need to be kept under observation for the whole MFF period. While in 2021 the increased funds required for new EEA tasks amounted to approx. 4% of the LIFE envelope for procurement, projections suggest that this share might rise to approx. 20% in the last few years of the MFF. As for shared projects, they produced a wide range of important IT platforms and constitute a possibility for additional revenue.

After the period of austerity, staff levels increased as new tasks came with new human resources. This was true in particular for the areas related to the EGD – sustainable finance, Climate Law and the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP. Demand for the EEA went up, not only in relation to other

DGs but also by other institutions. While this was seen as a positive development in general, it was also reported that this situation led to increased stress levels. For new tasks it seems that the emphasis is on operational staff: between 2020 and 2024, the EEA will have a projected staff increase of 79; however, the vast majority of these were reported to be operational rather than technical support staff. This is likely to be an unsustainable situation that puts excessive pressure on technical support staff and creates dissatisfaction, which can be seen in the developments of results in the recent staff satisfaction surveys.

As detailed in Chapter 5, the EEA receives core and non-core revenues. This section reviews the consequences of increased resources for the LIFE budget, as well as shared projects. Information on revenues of service-level agreements and their nature are included in Annex 1.

### Increased resources and LIFE budget consequences

As mentioned previously, the EGD brought increasing tasks and responsibilities for the EEA. However, resourcing these tasks posed (and continues to pose) challenges. The EEA's core subvention was set in the current MFF and was determined before certain pieces of legislation, which include additional tasks for EEA, were adopted, thus requiring the Commission to fund these via another route.

In 2020 and 2021, the EEA received additional resources in response to new tasks (see section 5.1). Since these additional resources (requested in financial fiches accompanying the legislative proposals) were not covered nor foreseen in the newly adopted MFF 2021-2027, they had to be offset from the LIFE budgetary envelope. The MFF lays down the maximum annual amounts ("ceilings") for EU expenditure for the main categories of expenditure (headings), and transfers to the EEA to cover these new tasks must be offset by an equivalent transfer under the same heading. Since the EEA and LIFE programme are both under MFF heading 3 (although in separate budget lines), it was possible to offset the EEA additional resources from the LIFE programme.

As stipulated in Regulation (EU) 2021/783 establishing the LIFE programme<sup>63</sup>, at least 85% of the LIFE budgetary envelope is to be allocated to grants or projects, leaving only the remaining 15% (termed the procurement envelope) for ancillary services needed to support the LIFE programme.<sup>64</sup> The additional resources required for the EEA's new tasks therefore need to be taken from this procurement envelope.

A review of the increased funds required for new EEA tasks to be financed outside of the core subvention shows that in 2021, this amounted to approximately 4% of the envelope available for procurement. However, while outside of the evaluation period, it has to be noted that this is the beginning of a clear trend. Projections, taking into account only those legislative proposals already adopted as of summer 2023 show that the amount of extra funding for EEA required is set to rise to approximately 20% of the overall procurement envelope in the last few years of the current MFF. If further legislation with a role for EEA are added, this might increase further.

<sup>63</sup> REGULATION (EU) 2021/783 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 29 April 2021 establishing a Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE), and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1293/2013.

<sup>64</sup> While what is termed marginal funding could technically be used to fund some of the additional tasks, there is a reluctance to do so at such an early stage in the MFF.

There was general agreement among interviewees who were able to comment on this issue that there was no obvious alternative route to provide the resources needed to fund these additional tasks. A change in approach – finding or setting up a different funding source for the EEA other than LIFE – was not seen as possible in the European Union’s budgetary system. Consideration of alternative routes goes beyond the scope of this evaluation.

### Shared projects

“Shared projects”<sup>65</sup> aim to cover specific technical activities (e.g., development and operation of databases or IT platforms) performed by the EEA and financed both through contracts procured by the EEA on its core budget and through contracts procured by DG ENV or DG CLIMA on the LIFE programme. As such, they are an additional significant financial top-up of the EU subvention. These contracts are procured through interinstitutional Framework Contracts accessible to both EEA and the Commission, with the EEA being responsible for launching the calls for tenders (following consultation with DG ENV) and for managing the Framework Contracts. The specific contracts are procured and paid by the DG.

Shared projects are initiated when, for example, there is a need to finance a specific IT development in a tool/platform which is hosted by the EEA, but which cannot be funded in full by the EEA core budget due to lack of resources.

In stakeholder consultations, it was highlighted that while shared projects can be useful as a means to procure further funding for EEA, the situation was far from ideal as budget lines and divisions in this setting were not clear. Also the 2021 IAS on relations with decentralised agencies recommended that DG ENV and CLIMA clarify roles and responsibilities for projects shared between the Commission and the EEA.

According to information provided by DG ENV roles and responsibilities have been clarified: In principle the DG covers costs for the IT development, whereas the EEA covers costs for maintenance and hosting. In the development phase, the DG takes on the role as political supervisor and is responsible for obtaining the desired political outcome, and the Agency is responsible for the technical aspects and supervision of technical implementation. According to input by the EEA terms relating to maintenance and updating could be clarified.

The following applications have been successfully developed as products from shared projects: The Forest Information System for Europe (FISE), the Biodiversity Information System for Europe (BISE), the Water Information System for Europe (WISE) and WISE Marine, the Nature 2000 viewer, the European Climate Adaptation Platform (Climate ADAPT), the Air Quality Web App, and functionalities under Reportnet 3 for reporting obligations by Member States according to Art 18(1) (c)-(e) of the Drinking Water Directive.

Costs for shared projects associated with the framework contracts over the evaluation period, i.e., additional expenses dispersed through the LIFE Programme, are presented in the Annex 1.

In summary a range of applications that are important tools also in view of enhanced efficiency, such as WISE, Reportnet, FISE, have been successfully developed through shared projects over the past

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<sup>65</sup> Information on this subject matter was provided by DG Environment.

evaluation period. The recommendation from the 2021 audit report have reportedly been taken up and roles and responsibilities have been clarified. Further shared projects are in the pipeline.

### Review of staff development over the evaluation period

Section 5.1 provides an overview of staff development over the evaluation period, and further detail on this is provided in Annex 1.

Several interviewees from among MB members, EEA staff members, NFP and SC members **explicitly welcomed that additional tasks came with additional operational staff**. Examples mentioned included the 8<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme, Sustainable Finance/Taxonomy Regulation and the European Climate Law. However, others (including MB members, EEA staff members, SC members and Commission representatives) felt that **there was still a lack of administrative/support staff** (see below for figures). It was reported that requests for more administrative staff remained unanswered, because the focus in the preparation of legislative proposals was more on operational than support staff. Stress levels amongst EEA staff have reportedly increased over the years, first in times of decreasing budgets, and later in times of increasing expectations.

Furthermore, at the end of 2021 EEA had 236 members of staff; by 2024 this is projected to increase to 304 including adopted legislation, proposals still under negotiation as well as planned upcoming proposals until the end of the current Commission mandate. However, reportedly only a small number of new staff have been allocated to support departments, including IT, communication, strategy and administration (HR, finance, procurement and legal). The following sub-section provides further detail on the development of number of staff in support functions as compared to operational staff. Strategic assessment was also still said to be under-resourced. A new development beyond the evaluation period was reported with the creation of a new independent European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change, where an EEA-hosted secretariat of 14 FTEs was established in 2022 as part of the Agency's staff and administration but otherwise independent from the EEA. Furthermore, while also outside the evaluation period, it is worth noting that in 2023 several new procurement officers joined the EEA.

Looking at the CAARs, each annual report mentions the austerity measures, and how they have been implemented, although with negative effects on coping with the workload for the remaining staff. Put together, they provide the following story on staff measures:

Looking at the reasons provided above, austerity measures appear to have been the greatest determinant of staff set-up and development in the period 2017-2019. That said, new tasks/programmes also appear to be influential in the increase of staff, as seen in the two later years.

Interviewees from the EEA expressed similar views, stating that the current set-up of receiving additional contractual agents for specific tasks (which is the principle of assigning new resources to the Agency) was sub-optimal. Increasing the overall core staff was considered a more efficient option, because additional staff assigned as part of specific legislation meant that these agents were ring-fenced, thus reducing the flexibility of the EEA in allocating staff across areas of work. However, assigning additional staff in response to additional specific needs is seen as the core principle and justification for additional staff. It was also mentioned that it was more difficult to recruit agents for time-limited posts, and that such agents fell into different, less attractive salary categories. Finally, one EEA stakeholder also stated that the practice of ad-hoc allocation of additional staff made long-

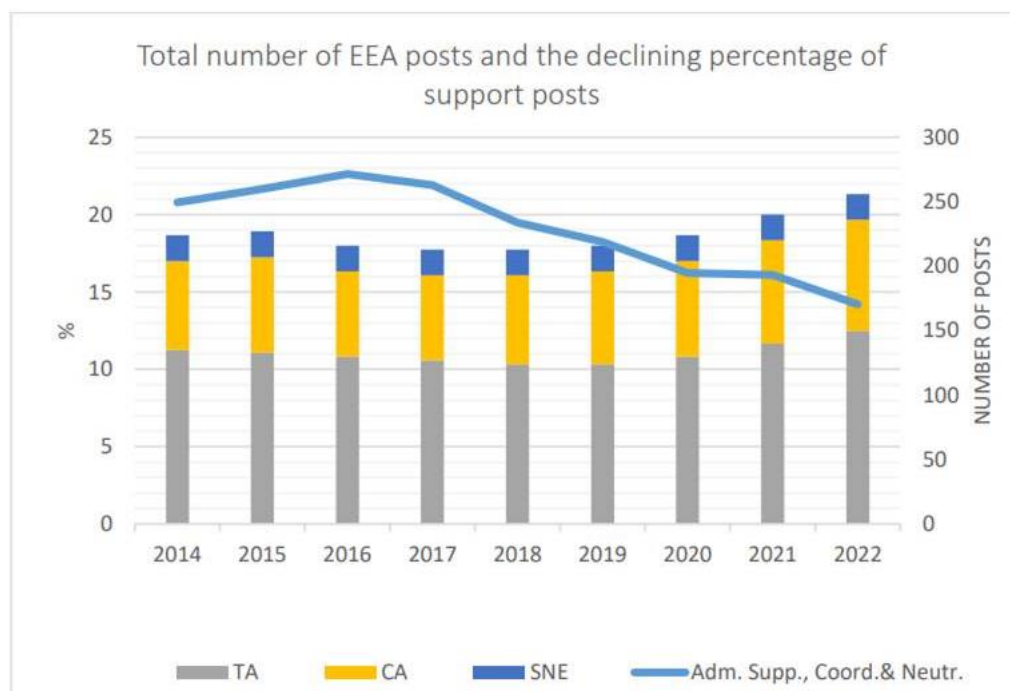


term planning from the Agency’s perspective, related to the necessary support and administrative functions, more difficult.

### Review of balance between operational and support staff

One issue consistently raised by interview partners from all stakeholder groups was the **imbalance between operational and support staff**. The increase in staff of the EEA in 2021 compared to 2017 has almost exclusively been operational staff, while human resources for the support functions (such as the human resource department and communications) did not increase at the same rate. As reported by one interviewee from the EEA, an internal benchmarking of different staff categories that has been undertaken internally since 2014/2015, shows that while staff in operational and finance categories have increased, the percentage of staff in support functions went down from over 20% in 2017 to a little above 15% in 2021. This was also reported in the EEA’s Single Programming Document 2023-2025 (p. 39), which stated that: “Under the austerity measures of the [...] MFF 2014-20 and in the drive to achieve efficiency gains, the EEA has reduced its support staff since 2016. The finance fiches for legislative acts assigning new tasks to the EEA have given the EEA additional operational staff for the period 2018-2025 but no additional support staff. This has exacerbated the declining ratio of support staff to operational staff”, as shown in the figure below.

**Figure 6.11: EEA staff – ratio of support staff to operational staff**



Source: EEA Single Programming Document 2023-2025

This was explained by several EEA staff, MB and Commission representatives as being largely due to the fact that as the EEA has taken on additional tasks, the resourcing of these was not covered by the core budget (i.e. part of and specified in the respective legislation) but these roles are operational only, thus shifting the balance and increasing the workload of the support functions.

As highlighted above, several interviewees from EEA staff, MB and Commission noted that the Agency was operating at its limit. It was also noted that small errors are starting to happen within the support functions, and attributed this to the high workload and pressure staff were under. It was also reported that recruitment processes in 2020 took a long time due to a lack of available resource within the human resources department. Additionally, several interviewees reported more than one

case of burnout within the EEA's administrative staff. While these may partially be attributable to the additional stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the disproportionate workload of staff was suggested as a significant contributing factor. While the EEA was still working efficiently, it was stated by some EEA staff, MB and Commission representatives that they were close to reaching the limit and warned that continuing the current trends would be unsustainable. It was also reported that as a result of this development, the EEA has strengthened their interest in protecting staff well-being (see below) to help staff members deal with the higher workload.

### Reflection of the EEA's expanded role in the context of the European Green Deal

Several interviewees from the Management Board reported that, due to the fact that the SOER 2020 was published within the period of the formation of the new Commission, it – coincidentally or not – contributed to the data narrative for the EGD and thus consolidated the EEA's role. **Interest in the EEA across Commission services has increased significantly with the EGD**, as have citations of EEA products (see section 5.3). Interviewees from other EU agencies acknowledged this trend but stated that greater demand was also due to the fact that legislation has become more and more horizontal, and that EEA was not an isolated case in this regard.

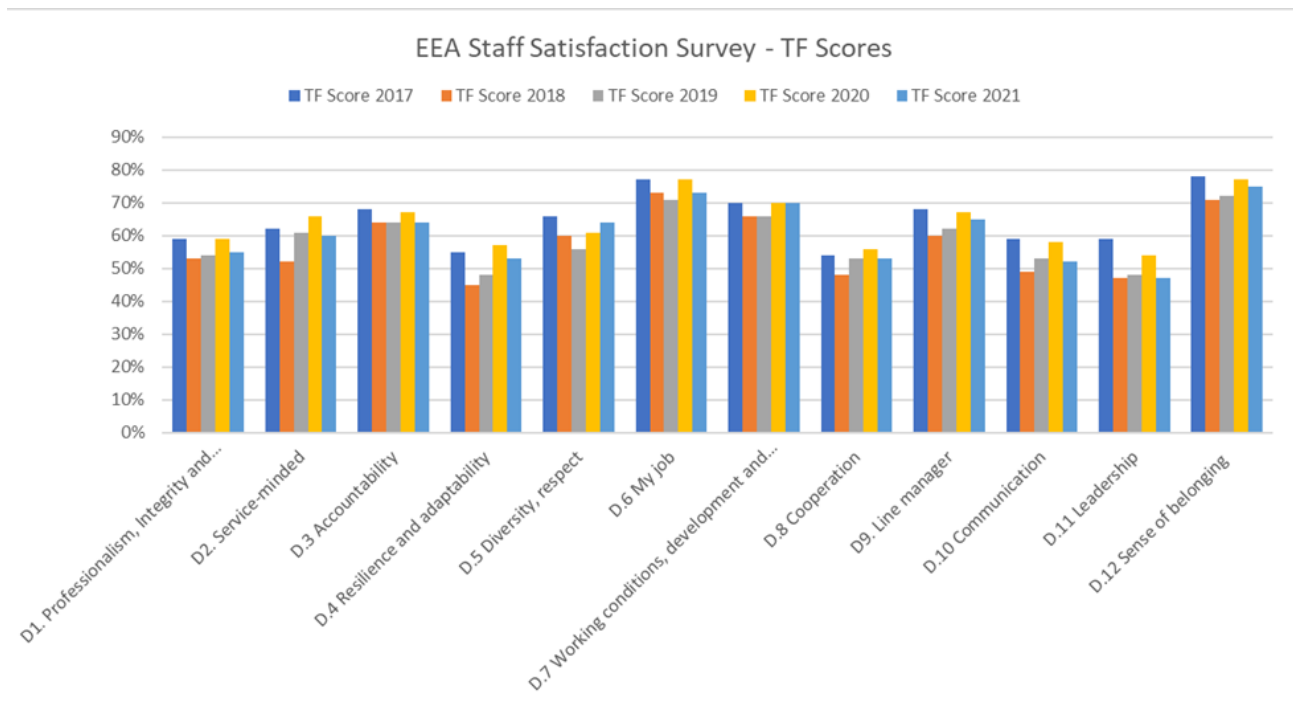
Several interviewees from different stakeholder groups shared their views regarding the **EEA's future strategic orientation**: It was said that any new tasks or activities should be clearly justified, for example the EEA's more active engagement internationally. One interviewee suggested that there was room for EEA to engage more actively in compliance assessment of Member States. However, several other interviewees from ETCs, Commission staff and MB members thought this to be counterproductive and an area where EEA could risk compromising its good and trusted relationships with them, which has been built over time, and which was necessary to facilitate effective data collection. Another interviewee from an EU institution saw an important role for the EEA in supporting the evaluation of progress on climate targets within the EU. From the perspective of the SC, the need to improve and expand knowledge production and to shift the focus to the real causes of the environmental challenges, and how these systems (e.g., food and mobility) are working, developing and interacting, was brought forward.

### EEA staff wellbeing

Staff wellbeing was an issue that was **brought up by several EEA staff interviewees**. Resourcing issues reportedly weighed heavily on the EEA staff. The staff wellbeing coordinator post that was created in 2017 proved very important, and in view of increased tension caused by the pandemic, the coordinator played an important role in mediating tensions and assisting in stress management. Pressure on staff also increased further through long-term absences caused by burnouts. Decreasing staff satisfaction was also reflected in the results of the latest staff satisfaction survey. One interviewee questioned whether the new employment contract types were conducive to attracting high quality staff and smooth staff cooperation without tensions about levels of salary and contract durations, and that staff wellbeing needed to remain a matter of attention in the future.

Fluctuations in resources – both human and financial – over the five years of the evaluation period are reflected in the EEA's annual Staff Engagement Surveys. For the following section, information was extracted from the Survey reports covering the years 2017-2021 and focuses on the "Totally Favourable Scores" (TF Scores) of the 12 dimensions covered in the standard closed-ended questions: Professionalism, Integrity and Independence; Service-minded; Accountability; Resilience and Adaptability; Diversity, respect; My job; Working conditions, Development and Reward; Cooperation; Line Manager; Communication; Leadership; Sense of belonging.



**Figure 6.12: EEA Staff Satisfaction Survey, TF Scores 2017-2021**

Source: Data provided by EEA

The following analysis and comparisons were made in relation to the individual years: In 2017 TF scores increased for all dimensions in comparison to 2016, and in particular for dimensions Leadership and Diversity. In 2018 there was an overall decrease in TF scores. The Resilience and Adaptability Dimension saw its lowest score in 5 years, presumed to be linked to the then recent reorganisation of the EEA.

2019 saw similar results to 2018, with Service-minded increasing again. In 2020 all 12 dimensions positively increased compared to 2019, with notable increases in Resilience and Adaptability, Service-minded, My job, and Leadership. At the same time also the overall response rate went up, which can be interpreted as a sign of a greater sense of staff engagement. The 2020 survey report noted that the top five dimensions (Organisation/sense of belonging, My job, Working conditions, Line Manager, Accountability) were the same top five as recorded in the previous five surveys, which can be interpreted as indicating consistency around the core strengths of the EEA.

2021 by contrast saw a negative trend. Negative changes in three dimensions (Leadership, Service-minded and Communication) were reported as statistically significant.

Triangulating these results, it is notable that in 2017 TF scores reached a peak in all 12 dimensions, which was – with the exception of D2 and D4 – never replicated over the evaluation period. The 2018/2019 results can be interpreted as coinciding with the moment that the consequences of the austerity period started to be felt, with the EEA having to offset a total of 10% of staff and activities having been stopped. With the new dynamics after the publication of SOER 2020 and the European Green Deal, coinciding with the recognition the Agency received in relation to several new legislative acts, 2020 survey results also went up. This also fits with reports from the stakeholder consultation that at the beginning of the COVID-19 period there was still a strong sense of belonging and achievement amongst EEA staff, related to overcoming the new obstacles together. This was followed by a period of Covid-fatigue, which can be seen in the survey results in 2021 with the negative developments on leadership, service-mindedness and communication.

Views among consultees on the **general adequacy of the EEA's resources** differed. Several stakeholders from across all groups noted that current resources were at their limit and/or the staff vs. demands ratio was tight. The EEA also noted in several instances in the CAARs that outputs could not be delivered or had to be postponed due to resource constraints, which was confirmed by other stakeholder groups.

Via interviews and opinions on the SPDs, the Commission confirmed that the **demands on the Agency were high and had increased with the EGD, while stating that the current budget and resources were adequate to deliver the required additional tasks** in particular with the successive reinforcements stemming from the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP and new legislative proposals (during and beyond the evaluation period). One interviewee noted pressure regarding resource allocation towards decentralised Agencies in general, and particular attention was placed on the EEA, since it was, along with Frontex, the fastest growing Agency since the beginning of the new MFF. For every request for additional resources for newly assigned task(s), a justification should be provided taking account of optimisation of resources, synergies and de-prioritisation of other activities.; Some Commission representatives perceived a certain reluctance by the Agency for the latter.

Regarding **new and more tasks** it was underlined by several Commission representatives, several MB members, and one NFP that additional activities through the increased number of pieces of legislation, new responsibilities through for example the Copernicus Programme incorporation, and Eionet coordination **would require more resources and more staff**. One MB member noted in particular that part of the role of the Eionet modernisation process was to reflect on how to resource the EEA in the coming years.

EEA staff, SC and the Commission also stated that since the adoption of the European Green Deal, **many other DGs have become interested in working with the EEA**, and have concluded agreements with the EEA for specific tasks, via service-level agreements, grants or contributing agreements. These figures are provided in Annex 1.

A few interviewees from the EEA felt that this had come at the expense of the traditional working areas of the Agency, and that DG ENV had concerns regarding coordination of increased or new demands. However, it was also suggested by the EEA and DG ENV that this development was a sign that the funding mechanism of the Agency required rethinking, and potentially also its mandate whether the Agency should remain focused on 'core' environment and climate policies, or should be active for the Commission as a whole.

Views differed as to the impact and usefulness of **service-level agreements (SLAs)**: It was noted positively that SLAs provided an opportunity for EEA to work on specific tasks across policy areas as well as to cover expenses for operational and administrative costs. SLAs also provided a possibility for increased resources, as well as for greater budgetary control and transparency, since SLAs necessitate a clear breakdown of budget allocation. However, it was stated that in practice, administrative cost had in some cases not been sufficiently integrated in SLAs (see also section 6.2.5 on review of internal administrative procedures in relation to outcomes of the "Final Audit Report on Project-Financed Actions"). SLAs were also criticised for two additional reasons, which suggests that SLAs are not always the best suited vehicle to perform certain tasks: they could be insufficient if the task at hand was not time-limited, as is the case for reporting under the Governance Regulation for non-EU countries such as Moldova or the Ukraine, where long-term funding is then not guaranteed. The execution of SLAs also risks relying on contract agents (staff) that are hired for the period of the SLA only, which makes it difficult to attract staff.

## 6.2.5 Adequacy of governance structure and internal programming, monitoring and reporting mechanisms

This section addresses the following EQs:

- *EQ 8: To what extent are the internal mechanisms for programming, monitoring, reporting and evaluating the EEA work and activities adequate for ensuring accountability and appropriate assessment of the overall performance of the EEA while minimising the administrative burden of the EEA and its stakeholders (established procedures, layers of hierarchy, division of work between groups or programmes, IT systems, initiative for streamlining and simplification, etc.)?*
- *EQ 12: To what extent is the Agency's organisation (governance and structure) fit for purpose and conducive to efficiency (maximising synergies and avoiding overlaps) and economies of scale?*

**Main issues considered:** This section considers the internal mechanisms in relation to programming, monitoring and reporting, as well as administrative procedures in relation to procurement, contract management and project management. It also reviews the recent reorganisation of the Agency, its Management Board/Bureau and the Scientific Committee (ETCs and Eionet are reviewed in the context of the dedicated case study in Annex 4).

**Main findings:** SPDs and CAARs remain the main vehicle for **annual programming and reporting**, while the MAWP was replaced by the EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030. While SPDs and CAARs have been aligned with the guidelines and templates provided by the European Commission in view of achieving greater homogeneity across Union bodies, the level of detail they contain has decreased considerably since 2021 in comparison with the documents prior to this period and information is reported in a more aggregated fashion. This will make it more difficult for future evaluations to draw comparisons with previous evaluation periods and to adequately assess delivery of results.

The EEA has furthermore introduced **17 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** for better monitoring. While in general welcomed as having increased the efficiency of decision-making by the MB, a strategic discussion within the MB on the potential revision of the performance indicator system, in particular in light of the new Strategy, might be beneficial.

Regarding **internal procedures** on procurement and project-financed actions, the IAS advised EEA to take measures and training to improve procurement management and to set up and project management methodology or guidelines for the ever increasing share of project-financed actions. Recommendations stemming from both reports were formally accepted by the Agency, and the EEA is implementing Action Plans to address those.

A review of the 2018 **re-organisation of the Agency** confirmed that the organisational structure was aligned to the work areas of the new Strategy, and that newly introduced central programmes and a greater focus on "sustainability" aimed at fostering interlinkages between the various programmes, allowing for a more systemic perspective.

The **EEA's governance system was generally seen as fit for purpose**, however views expressed by stakeholders suggest that the issue of adequate **involvement of the MB in priority-setting** had not been satisfactorily resolved during the evaluation period. Engagement of the Scientific Committee with the MB could also be improved, though it has to be noted that the SC has recently set up an engagement plan to improve their interactions across the organisation.

## Mechanisms for programming, monitoring and reporting

**Programming** takes place on a multi-annual as well as annual basis. Regarding multi-annual programming, the major part of the period is still covered by the Multi-annual Work Programme 2014-2020, which was then replaced by the EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030. Both documents were the subject of wide consultation with the entities involved in the EEA's governance structure.

Annual programming and reporting is undertaken via two documents – first the **(single) programming document (SPD)**, which usually cover a two year period and contains the annual work programme, and second, the **consolidated annual activity report (CAAR)**. The SPD for an upcoming period is put forward for consultation one year in advance and seeks formalised input from the Management Board, the NFPs, EEA Scientific Committee, the European Parliament, and the European Commission. On that basis, the programming document is adapted and revised and put forward to the Board for adoption usually at their last meeting of the year. For findings on prioritisation of tasks including alignment of EEA tasks and resources with key EU policy priorities and flexibility of the EEA and Eionet to accommodate new tasks, please refer to section 6.4.3.

In relation to the evaluation period, the following observations can be made: The programming documents 2017-2019 and 2018-2020 were still called “Programming Document” and contained reporting that mirrored the general headings of the MAWP. For the programming documents 2019-2021 and 2020-2022 some changes became obvious – first, (following adoption of the Financial Regulation 2018/1046) the change of name to “Single Programming Document” and second, the introduction of categories “key” and “supporting” for qualifying activities. The style of reporting items also changed with the introduction of, for example, reporting of core data flows, and the indication when a report constitutes a regular report under an EU legislation and/or international obligation (“R\*”). Notably the SPD 2021-2023 took on a fundamentally changed outlook and reporting content. This relates to changes adopted through the new MFF.<sup>66</sup>

In relation to priority-setting, the SPDs prior to 2021 contain sections on efficiency gains and negative priorities. These are, however, not put in direct relation to the items as reported in the annual work programmes. Regarding efficiency gains, SPDs in 2017, 2018 and 2019 report that scope is limited, that gains would probably be offset by resource needs on programming, monitoring, control and reporting, and highlighting the ETC's particular situation in relation to costing. In 2020, similar items were reported, and in addition a review of administrative simplification for funding mechanisms for additional EEA-Eionet activities was suggested. The 2021 SDP does not include a specific section on efficiency gains.

In relation to negative priorities, 2017-2019 SPDs included generic paragraphs implying that staff cuts should not come at the detriment of the quality of EEA work. The only areas that were suggested to be halted or reallocated were tourism and environment assessment, as well as the Eionet helpdesk. 2021 no longer contained information on negative priorities. Given that the more detailed reporting on annual activities (also presented in sections 5.2 or 6.2.2) included little information on

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<sup>66</sup> In order to ensure consistency in the way Union bodies plan and report their activities and to align those with the Financial Regulation mentioned above, the Commission developed guidelines for the Single Programming Document, and a template for the Consolidated Activity Report for all Union bodies. Timing was also aligned and all Union bodies are now required to submit a Single Programming Document by 31 January each year, and a Consolidated Activity Report no later than 1 July each year. The guidelines and the template are contained in the Commission Communication C(2020)2297 from April 2020.

consolidated activities due to efficiency gains, or priority setting, the information in the SPDs seemed limited for the MB to make an informed decision on resource allocation.

While the SPD format and content of the EEA was adapted to the guidelines contained in the Communication, the level of content reported was reduced drastically and is now reported in a more aggregated fashion than in comparison to the PDs of previous years. Comparability between the years 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 therefore declined, and direct comparisons with 2021 are no longer possible. Furthermore, the programming documents no longer constitute a full overview of all planned activities of the EEA for a given year. The same can also be said for the CAARs 2020 and 2021. While aligned with the Commission's template, the degree to which content and activities are presented is lower.

Regarding monitoring, the EEA is also employing **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** and use them for planning and reporting. The list of KPIs and the implementation status for the years 2019-2021 can be found in Chapter 5.3.

Noteworthy developments in these KPIs over the three years are:

- On the input side, figures have remained relatively stable, with the exception of KPI 4 on budget execution, which decreased in 2021.
- On the output side, there was in fact a general decrease over all three KPIs. KPI 5 reflects what is also reported within this study on the review of the publication plan. KPI 7 does not correspond to the data that is available on the core data flows online and that was taken for the assessment in section 6.2.1.
- As for development, the average favourable rate in staff satisfaction has remained relatively stable with some fluctuations, however the days registered on average for learning has diminished by around one third (which was reportedly (and understandably) due to COVID-19).
- As for the visibility indicators, KPIs 8-11 have all seen an increase over the years – this is in line with the analysis of EEA mentions in section 6.2.4, and a reflection of higher EEA profile related to the Green Deal and the SOER 2020.

With the introduction of these KPIs, the EEA has responded to criticism in the 2018 Evaluation Support Study related to the previous set of KPIs. These were formulated in a more theoretical manner than in a manner that would allow for a quantification and comparison against previous data flows. As an example, one indicator was defined as “prompt delivery of SOER 2015 and annual indicator reports 2014-2018” but lacked a definition of “prompt” in this context.

Consultations have highlighted that a discussion topic within the Management Board is the usefulness and necessity of increasing the number of KPIs. Several interviewees from the MB stated that KPIs should be selected carefully to still be meaningful in the context of the EEA, and their purpose should be to facilitate an informed and critical discussion in situations where a deficiency was to be addressed. Several additional KPIs have been discussed, such as risks of implementation of the Work Programme, delay indicators for reports, or achievement of Eionet objectives, but none have so far materialised, reportedly at least partly due to resistance / lack of interest from the EEA. EEA staff noted, however, that while the EEA has fewer KPIs (17) than other agencies (typically 30-

60 KPIs), a larger number of KPIs would not automatically be a guarantee of improving efficiency / effectiveness.

Given this, it appears that **a strategic discussion within the Management Board on the possibility to revise the KPIs would be beneficial**. The following considerations could feed into such a discussion:

In general, the EEA has 17 KPIs to track progress on input, output, uptake and development, and has in addition also defined performance indicators per strategic area which should be seen as part of the total indicator set. Within the 17 overall KPIs, the interlinkage between EEA KPIs and ED KPIs is not very clear. 11 of the 17 KPIs reported in the SPDs and CAARs are said to be “mandatory” for the Executive Director (ED) but are not presented separately, which might give an undue representation of the responsibilities of the ED towards the performance of the Agency. In this regard it has to be noted that the Guidelines of the European Commission on key performance indicators for directors of EU decentralised agencies states that “KPIs should be explicitly stated in an Agency’s AWP/Programming document and reported in the Agency’s Consolidated Annual Activity Report (“CAAR”) to indicate the actual performance achieved. The assessment of the CAAR by the Agency’s Management Board should refer to them.”<sup>67</sup>

Second, the KPI system is characterised by a lack of specificity, which becomes evident if compared to other decentralised Agencies. There are no KPIs tailored to the five main work areas. ECHA and EMSA, for example, have more focussed and detailed KPIs. Whether or not the lack of detailed KPIs is a shortcoming is debatable. On one hand the risk is that the overall performance goes unnoticed with too many specific KPIs, whilst on the other hand, focussing only on general aspects does not provide a comprehensive understanding, hiding potential challenges or positive features of each work area. In some instances it would also be useful to highlight the percentage of an indicator achieved, and also the totals related to it, as for example for the reports/assessment indicator, where it would be helpful to understand the total number of reports and assessments in a given year and the total number that constitutes the share achieved.

The current performance indicator system was further developed under the previous multi-annual work programme and extended to the new Eionet/Strategy without a revision as initially planned. Since the two multiannual work programmes are different, some important strategic objectives are not covered. This seems to be case for Strategic Objective 4 “making full use of the potential of data, technology and digitalisation”. Currently, there are no specific KPIs tracking developments in this area.

Another aspect that cannot be appreciated through the existing indicators is the impact of EEA activities and their contribution to the implementation of EU policies. Even though the impact is difficult to define / quantify in the case of the EEA, the special report of ECA on Future of EU Agencies (2020) underlined how important it is that Agencies link their performance with the contribution to EU policies more clearly. Potential indicators in this regard could be e.g. on reporting obligations (including level of support) and the citation of EEA knowledge/data in EU legislation and EP debates.

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<sup>67</sup> European Commission SWD(2015) 62 final

A further limitation of the current KPIs is that, being so focused on the outputs, they do not allow for an assessment of the Agency's efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate and achieving these outputs. The disaggregated indicators per activity should be considered as part of the total number of KPIs, and disaggregation might also be considered for the Eionet indicators to have more granular information per activity.

### Review of internal administrative procedures

In stakeholder consultations, limited criticism was voiced regarding the **EEA's internal budgeting system** for contracting external services, such as for the ETCs, being inefficient and complicated, for example regarding the template for calculating personnel costs, and a lack of prioritisation in view of limited budgets. However, it was noted from within ETCs that the situation has improved and prioritisation and delivery within the available budget for a given project are now being discussed better in advance. Nevertheless, the way in which the EEA contracts ETCs was regarded as somewhat 'old-fashioned' and even unrealistic, and did not respond well to, for example, a few countries not operating in Euros. Commission staff reported negative experiences in relation to **project management** in one project on SEIS2 where they also felt that the hiring process, project management skills and quality assurance within the Agency could be improved.

The above views were confirmed by findings from the Internal Audit Service in relation to the audit report on procurement and contract management and on project-financed actions in the EEA, as detailed below:

#### Final Audit Report on Procurement and Contract Management in the European Environment Agency (EEA)

In 2019 the IAS prepared an audit report on procurement and contract management in the EEA, covering the period 2016-2018. The IAS findings were overall positive but concluded that there was an important weakness in the monitoring of procurement procedures and contract management.

The audit found that the EEA did not have a formalised methodology or procedure describing the process of monitoring and reporting on procurement procedures and contract management. Indicators (e.g., payment delays, overdue contract deliverables, rejected contract deliverables, etc.) which would enable management to detect problems and delays in procurement procedures and during the implementation of the contracts have not been defined and as a consequence they are not monitored. Also, overdue payments were not reported.

It was recommended that the Agency should enhance its reporting on procurement and contract management by systematically reporting on the delays in the individual procurement procedures, accumulated backlog and the risks related to these delays. The recommendation also included the establishment of indicators enabling management to detect problems and decide on corrective measures, including actions, deadlines and responsible persons, as well as training for staff for the IT system. Payment deadlines should be monitored better with a view to meeting these deadlines more systematically.

The **Agency** replied to the draft audit report on 19 March 2019, confirming the **acceptance of the recommendations**. The EEA reports in the CAAR 2019 that an action plan was developed and accepted by the Internal Audit Service, with the implementing measures reducing the risks identified during the audit. Implementing measures include the review of the current system, training for



finance and resource officers, periodic reports on payment delays, expansion of the training system, checklists and reporting templates.

### Final audit report on Project-financed actions in the European Environment Agency

In 2020, the Internal Audit Service (IAS) of the Commission presented an audit report on project-financed actions in the EEA, which was undertaken between January 2018 and November 2019. The project-financed actions were Copernicus, the European Neighbourhood Instrument East (ENI East), the European Neighbourhood Instrument South (ENI South), the Instrument for Pre-accession Western Balkans (IPA 2018) and the European Human Biomonitoring Initiative (HBM4EU). The audit was motivated by the potential reputational risk for the EEA in case of ineffective or inefficient project delivery, and the limited human resources foreseen in the agreements imposing an operational risk on the Agency.

The IAS found that the EEA's management and control system were in general adequate, that teams were staffed with qualified personnel and that monitoring internally and externally was effective. The following recommendations were brought forward as areas for improvement:

It was recommended that the EEA calculate/estimate its resource impact of the project-financed actions. It should include a comparison between its real input of resources in these actions and the related costs incurred in the past with the costs that it can recover through the grant and delegation agreements. This recommendation was given in view of the fact that indirect costs related to planning, preparation, management and implementation of these project-finance actions, such as negotiation of funding arrangements, HR management, IT and office space, were not recoverable through the delegation or grant agreements.

It was also recommended that the EEA improve documentation of project-financed actions, such as project organisation, reporting lines, timetables, deliverables, cost estimates and the need for thematic expertise from core EEA staff. The third recommendation was that the EEA defined project management principles. The EEA had not implemented a particular project management methodology or guidelines, and project management depended on the individuals in charge of the project.

In its response to the draft audit report on 4 June 2020 the **EEA confirmed the acceptance** of all three recommendations. Actions foresaw the review of the EEA's real resource input and costs incurred on project-financed actions versus the costs recoverable through the grant and delegation agreements, a more uniform approach to project-finance actions, and an external review of input for enhanced project management. The EEA reported in the CAAR 2021 that the implementation of the recommendations were reviewed by the auditors, with one of the three being considered not fully implemented (while the other two were not yet addressed).

### EEA Reorganisation in 2018

In 2018, the EEA underwent an internal reorganisation, reportedly partly in response to the previous evaluation study, as can be seen from EEA briefing documentation to the EEA's Management Board. The objective was an improved overall alignment between the organisational thematic programme structure and the five work areas defined in the new 2021 – 2030 Strategy.

The EEA's organisational charts prior to the reorganisation and following the reorganisation are contained in Annex 12. In comparing these two, the following observations can be made: While the overall number of programmes remained the same (9), a new hierarchy level was introduced in the new structure to turn Administrative Services into a central programme and to establish the Coordination and Strategy programme (later renamed to Coordination, Networks and Strategy). This

programme was established to strengthen the coordination of the Agency with its networks and key stakeholders, coupled with internal organisational governance. Therefore, the former self-standing programme Partnerships and Networks was moved under the CNS.

Furthermore, the new structure saw the introduction of a new content-related programme to encompass Health and Sustainable Resources Use and a reorganisation around the programmes Natural Capital and Ecosystems, as well as Climate Change, Energy and Transport. Integrated Environmental Assessments was renamed to Integrated Assessments for Sustainability. The IT programme was renamed as Data and Information Services, and the Communication programme remained unchanged. All programme offices related to each programme were removed from the organigramme. An interesting observation is that an Internal Audit Capability was introduced into the organisational structure, directly linked with the Executive Director's Office.

Overall, the reorganisation seemed to have brought about a consolidation of content-related programmes, a stronger direction towards sustainability vs. "environment-only", an alignment with contemporary terminology, the introduction of the two central programmes to serve the entire organisation, and the explicit introduction of the Internal Audit Capability as being of direct ED-concern.

The EEA's bodies are the Management Board and its Bureau, and the Scientific Committee, as well as the European Topic Centres (ETCs) and the Eionet structure. ETCs and Eionet are considered separately in the dedicated Case Study on Eionet modernisation contained in Annex 4. This section reviews the Management Board and its Bureau, as well as the Scientific Committee.

## Management Board

The **EEA's Management Board (MB)** is the main decision-making body of the EEA. Its make-up and a description of its functions is included in Annex 1. consists of one representative from each member country, two representatives of the European Commission (DG ENV and DG RTD), and two scientific experts designated by the European Parliament. Member countries and the European Commission also designate an alternate per representative. For the Commission, alternates are the JRC and Eurostat. DG CLIMA is represented as an observer, as is the chair of the Scientific Committee. While the fact that DG CLIMA has mere observer status in the MB is explained through the split of DG ENV into DG ENV and DG CLIMA in 2010, it was remarked upon repeatedly in the consultations by some interviewees from the Management Board, Commission and EEA staff.

The MB elects from a chairperson and up to five vice-chairpersons by a two-thirds majority. The chairperson and the vice-chairpersons, together with one European Commission representative and one member designated by the European Parliament form the Bureau that assists the MB in accordance with the Founding Regulation.

Looking at the composition and turnover for the members in the Management Board in the period of 2017-2021, the following distribution was observed among member country representatives:

**Table 6.8: Affiliation of member country representatives on the EEA MB (2017-2021)**

	Member	Alternate
Ministry	21	16
National environment protection agency	8	12
Varies	1	

	Member	Alternate
Other	2	2
No alternate		2

This shows that diversity within the Board is limited. About two-thirds of the members are represented by ministry officials, while one quarter is represented by the national environment protection agency. Only one member does not appear to have a fixed distribution of competences as regard their representation. As for alternates, the situation shows a lower share in ministry representatives (50%) and a higher share of EPA representatives (38%), but again no real effect in terms of diversity.

As regards turnover, the MB composition appears to be rather stable. 8 countries were represented by the same member throughout the period, and only two showed a high turnover rate exceeding 4 changes. The majority of countries saw one or two changes during the period. As for the European Parliament, a change happened once, while the member representatives for the European Commission remained the same throughout the term.

The interaction between the MB and the Bureau is very important, since the Bureau can have a decisive role in preparing the decisions of the MB. As described in section 6.1.4, in order to address the recommendations from the previous evaluation in particular on the lack of involvement of the Management Board on strategic decision-making and priority-setting, a committee was convened to review the Rules of Procedure and to also take in the ongoing internal process of reviewing working methods. The general aim of the committee was to “improve effectiveness and efficiency of the EEA Management Board in performing its governance mandate, by limiting the number of administrative issues and creating more space for strategic discussions at Board meetings”<sup>68</sup>.

The recommendations by the ROP Review Committee were brought to the Management Board in 2018 and included, for example, that some of the procedures that are already current practice should be codified in the Rules of Procedure. It also suggested a more coordinated involvement of support bodies in the work of the Board and Bureau, more delegation of items to the Bureau, or greater time lags between distribution of documentation to the Board/Bureau in preparation of meetings. By the end of 2021 the process was still ongoing, as reflected in stakeholder opinions where the interaction between Management Board and Bureau, as well as involvement of the Management Board in priority-setting, were items seen by some as still requiring improvement. The intention was to finalise the review by December 2022<sup>69</sup>.

Nevertheless, the MB decided that by January 2019 more decisions were already to be outsourced to the Bureau. Judging from consultation results, the desired effect in relation to freeing up capacity for the MB to be more involved in strategic decision-making however does not seem to have been fully achieved. Some MB members still thought there should be a mechanism allowing MB members to explore issues in greater detail, in particular on assessments of budget-related issues, prioritisation or performance discussions (including synergies and efficiency gains). The current structure was not universally thought to be conducive to a sufficiently in-depth information exchange and review. It was suggested that for information regarding the day-to-day business of the EEA

<sup>68</sup> Doc. EEA/MB/83/06

<sup>69</sup> Doc. EEA/MB/97/13E

(reports published, active areas of ongoing research) an electronic dashboard should be set up where such information could be retrieved at any given moment.

Regarding the composition of the MB, a few MB members had views regarding how it affects decision-making, as they felt that (while in general also diversity was appreciated) greater homogeneity within the MB and/or Bureau could be beneficial. Also, role descriptions for vice-chairs could facilitate in that regard, since more management experience would be helpful in the Bureau setting. Continuity was also seen as an important factor. EEA staff felt that faster and more decisive decision-making within the MB/Bureau would be useful, but also acknowledged that the networking nature of the agency required time-consuming reconciliation of many different interests and views.

## Scientific Committee

In the consultations, **Scientific Committee (SC)** members provided a positive assessment as to their own governance role, notably with regard to the rotation principle and the independent and interdisciplinary nature of the SC. The rotation principle was seen as an opportunity to engage new areas of expertise and different aspects in the work of the SC, and to ensure that the knowledge generation within the EEA stays up to date. Through the independent and interdisciplinary nature of the SC new topics could be taken up pro-actively by the Committee. However, there were also a few critical voices towards the Committee and its role, questioning whether the SC was not taking too many resources and diverting too much attention from core activities, recalling that the EEA was not an academic think tank.

Strategically, it was suggested by a few stakeholders that the MB and SC could work more closely together. One mentioned that the definition of work priorities for the EEA could present such an opportunity in areas that might be over-politicised and where a purely scientific view could be helpful (the SC opinion on biofuels was quoted as a precedent).

Stakeholders are in general appreciative of their work, but it was also felt that there was still room to improve information exchange between the Committee and in particular EEA staff. With COVID-19 the common practice of EEA technical staff attending meetings of the Committee had become dormant, and efforts are underway to restart such information exchange and increase interaction with the Management Board.

In 2020, the term of office of several members of the SC came to an end, and a call for expression of interest was issued. The timing was described as convenient, as this call was tailored in particular to the scientific knowledge and expertise required for implementation of the European Green Deal and the forthcoming EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030. In 2021, the renewed SC agreed on a four-year rolling engagement plan in line with the objectives and work areas of the new EEA strategy<sup>70</sup>. The plan covers SC engagement through seminars, reviewing EEA products, and working as individual members with EEA staff on particular knowledge developments. The SC has also strengthened its engagement in the recruitment of EEA experts.

The Common Approach on Decentralised Agencies recommends that when evaluations are undertaken, selection procedures of scientific committees should be reviewed. The 2018 Evaluation

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<sup>70</sup> [SC Engagement Plan 2021-2024 — European Environment Agency \(europa.eu\)](#)

Support Study undertook such an evaluation with regard to transparency, cost-effectiveness, and suitability to ensure independence and competence to prevent conflicts of interest, and found no particular reason for criticism. Since these procedures have not changed during this evaluation period, it can be assumed that the conclusions are still valid, which were: Transparency is provided through publication of calls for expression of interest on the EEA website with a clear outline of selection criteria and selection process. An assessment of cost-effectiveness cannot be provided as there is no data on the exact costs involved. It can be assumed that costs occur on both sides – interested candidate and EEA / Management Board / SC – however that was seen as a necessity. As for suitability, the study concluded that selection procedures have worked well during that period. In addition to this, and with a view to the current evaluation period, it has to be highlighted that for the major renewal round in 2020, an Evaluation Committee was established to achieve greater efficiency and to prepare the eventual decision by the Management Board.

### 6.2.6 Use of digital technologies

This section addresses *EQ 15: To what extent do EEA and Eionet make full use of the potential of digital technologies (big data, artificial intelligence, Earth Observation, analytics) and scientific state of the art?*

**Main issues considered:** This section considers how well the EEA and Eionet have used and adapted to digital technologies and novel data sources in their processes and reporting streams over the period of the evaluation, and how this has impacted their efficiency.

**Main findings:** The EEA was generally found to have made good use of the potential of digital technologies and scientific state of the art, to the extent this was possible within the resources and context the Agency found itself in. The Agency adapted to and adopted digital innovation throughout the evaluation period, both in terms of its internal processes and reporting systems (with the introduction of Reportnet 3.0 a notable achievement), as well as in its use of novel data sources. Resource constraints, both within the Agency as well as at the national level, were identified as the main barrier to further adopt new technologies and the existing provisions of the underlying reporting obligations prevent the use of novel data sources for monitoring in most cases.

Throughout the evaluation period, the EEA implemented several changes in order to improve efficiencies (and also effectiveness) in the way in which it uses digital technologies. Furthermore, this trend is expected to continue; one of the five strategic objectives of the new EEA and Eionet Strategy 2021 – 2030 specifically is to ‘make full use of the potential of data, technology and digitalisation’ (SO4), and a new digitalisation strategy with the aim of increasing investment, enhancing processing capacities and introducing new expertise in data monitoring and handling was presented to the EEA’s Management Board in 2021. Following a review and decision to restructure the ETCs by the EEA management Board, the EEA also commissioned a new ETC on Data Integration and Digitalisation (ETC DI), which will play an important role in the digitalisation process going forward. However, the ETC DI only became operational in 2022 and therefore falls outside the evaluation period.

As reported above, the amount of data processed by the EEA increased exponentially over the evaluation period. Stakeholders within the EEA reported that new processes and technologies allowed them to control the data flows and process data faster. This included improvements in standardisation and automation of data streams, such as through specialised data transformation

software, and the EEA was able to automate manual data processing which reduced errors, cost and time. Changes in how data and processes are governed have also led to greater efficiencies over time, namely the centralising of the EEA's data management platform on a common workspace, which gives access to data providers across Europe relevant to the EEA (including EEA staff, consultants and ETCs) and creates a collaborative working environment.

**A notable achievement over the evaluation period was the introduction of Reportnet 3.0**, an update to the EEA's reporting system, which is further detailed in a case study in Annex 4. Reportnet 3.0 was viewed positively by most stakeholders consulted, with one EU level organisation even reporting they adopted best practice from the EEA in the development of their own reporting platform and reportedly two EEA member countries also interested in and trialling certain features of the system in at the national level. EEA staff report that the new platform is lowering the time and cost of dataflow implementation, and also permitting a much wider range of stakeholders, for example in the thematic areas and in the ETCs, to design and manage the reporting dataflows.

Supporting these changes, the EEA has also bundled responsibilities for the reporting dataflows and data management within one data management strand, which has reduced inefficiencies formerly created by conflicting coordination and has enhanced resource use and increased collaboration within the thematic teams. The creation of the roles of data steward (person with thematic expertise and liaison with DG ENV/CLIMA) and data custodian (person within EEA IT service responsible for data handling, quality, management) in reporting dataflows has brought about greater efficiency where there are shared responsibilities between the thematic programmes and the Data and Information Service (DIS).

Some interviewees identified potential for further improvement, however, suggesting the EEA could increase efficiencies and add value by linking data across different datasets or using such interlinkages to quality assure data. For example, the EEA's European Air Quality Index uses and links Member State and Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service (CAMS) inputs, which works well. An area for improvement could be to link the European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (E-PRTR) and air quality data to check and validate data, and also assess whether industrial sources may be underreported and vice versa. Commission stakeholders also suggested that improvements could be made in the process for data validation more generally, as there are common reporting processes which can cause datasets to lag behind the current state of play and become outdated.

As regards the **use of novel data sources**, interviewees from the Commission and the EEA highlighted the EEA's work with Copernicus and the EEA was also praised by Commission stakeholders for its ability to present and communicate data and trends more effectively than other scientific organisations, particularly through the use of visuals. Nevertheless, apart from Copernicus several stakeholders expressed that the EEA could be doing more to be at the forefront of developments in this area and making the most of the possibilities available to them (e.g., artificial intelligence, citizen science, the Internet of Things, but also making full use of Copernicus).

As elaborated in section 6.1.1, the EEA also adapted its communication strategies to take into account the potential of digital technologies, with a shift towards more interactive outputs noticeable. This was facilitated for example through computer software customised specifically to EEA-needs to facilitate the creation and management of interactive products) and improvements in how data processing can be integrated into data collection, which means that interactive data products can instantly be fed with new data.



## Barriers to the use of digital technologies

Resource constraints were cited as the biggest barrier to the EEA making full use of the possibilities offered by digital technologies by stakeholders from both the EEA and the Commission. Innovating and adopting new technologies not only come with capital costs, but also requires resources and especially skills that the EEA (during the evaluation period) did not necessarily have. As explained by one interviewee (with insight into another EU Agency), while the EEA was given resources to produce data with new technology (Copernicus), the EEA as an organisation is too small to be able to have an IT function that implements cross-cutting IT solutions at a large scale. This was echoed by a representative of the EEA, who further added that due to the need to outsource, the EEA was bound by the technology widely used (which by definition will not be cutting-edge).

**When you're forced to outsource because there's a limit on headcount, that comes with certain risks, and you are dependent on other people's choices of tech. If we were allowed and could afford to in terms of budget and people to insource, I think we could deliver more. – EEA senior management and staff**

However, it was also suggested by one Commission interviewee that the EEA could make better use of Commission services, especially in relation to IT solutions that could support it in improving the way it disseminates information. Additionally, one stakeholder mentioned the example of the European Air Quality Index developed by the EEA, which could be seen as competing against other similar platforms created by the likes of Apple and Android. This indicates that there is room for efficiency gains in the relation to using existing building blocks (where appropriate and fit for purpose), rather than developing something new. In most cases where the EEA did develop and maintain IT platforms this was funded through shared projects, as in the case of WISE or the CLIMATE-ADAPT platform.

The EEA also needs to be conscious (and is hampered by) what member countries will be able to implement. Resources at the country-level differ greatly, and as explained by one Commission stakeholder interviewed, nothing is happening to build up digital capacities and capabilities in some countries. The new ETC DI, launched in 2022, has an objective to address this and to support member countries using new technologies.

In addition to resources, the second biggest limitation that prevents the EEA from making full use of the potential of digital technologies is the way in which legislations set reporting requirements. EU Directives prescribe the type of data and format to be collected and reported, and the way in which this is to be done. Currently, according to stakeholders consulted, due to many of these Directives having been developed and adopted years ago, these reporting obligations still refer to older methods and data sources, and many newer legislations also include monitoring methods and data requirements which don't reflect novel and innovative reporting mechanisms but rely on the 'traditional' approaches. Legacy systems in place make changes to monitoring systems difficult, which is compounded by the above-mentioned limitations of resources at the country level.

## 6.3 Coherence

### 6.3.1 Coherence with EU institutions

This section addresses EQ 17: *How does the EEA coordinate with the EU institutions (in particular the Commission), the member and cooperating countries, other EU agencies*



*(including but not limited to ECHA, EFSA and EMSA) and other environmental knowledge providers to enhance synergies and avoid duplication of work? Did the EEA identify any such synergies, in particular in areas where there might be overlaps or complementarities with the work performed by other Agencies and the JRC?*

**Main issues considered:** This section considers the strategic relationship between the EEA and the Commission DGs, as well as other agencies. There is a particular focus on the EEA's relationship with DG CLIMA, DG ENV and the JRC

**Main findings:** With regard to the DG ENV EEA relationship, there are multiple examples of a good working relationship and multiple outputs that all are happy with. At a strategic level, some challenges remain. These concern prioritising between core and non core work, the level of strategic influence that ENV have over the EEA and the extent to which the EEA interpret data. These challenges come alongside the need to balance the workload of the EEA, with the budget available and the expectations of the EEA, DG ENV, DG CLIMA, other Commission Services and the EEA's member countries. DG ENV – also need to provide effective central oversight (as emphasised inter alia by the IAS) and balance this with the need for the EEA to have a certain amount of leeway in managing its workload and increasingly complex relationships with other collaborators.

In relation to DG CLIMA, the EEA is perceived as having a coherent and positive relationship. The opinions by stakeholders generally reflect a coordinated, and well organised communication and task assignment approach, where the EEA and DG CLIMA can focus on data integration opportunities. The good relationship with DG CLIMA appears to be helped by the high level of EEA data use by CLIMA. The lack of clear mentions of climate data streams in the EEA's Founding Regulation is recognised as a gap.

As a result of the EGD, and the demand for EEA services from an increasing number of DGs, there was a growing need for improving coordination and communication, particularly in prioritising tasks and responsibilities. The coordination mechanisms between the EEA and Commission, first the pre existing Environmental Knowledge Community (EKC) and then the Inter-service Group (ISG) for the coordination with the EEA were and are in place to (inter-alia) enable communication and alignment. The EKC was generally regarded as a useful platform for information sharing and achieving common goals, and some stakeholders have suggested that it should be reactivated. Synergies between the EEA and other Commission Services have generally improved over time, with positive collaboration reported in various environmental topics. However, there are occasional overlaps and challenges in allocating responsibilities between the EEA and the JRC and Eurostat. Some concerns remain in terms of data management and handling, particularly in areas where there are overlaps or opportunities for shared responsibilities. Nonetheless, the role of the EEA and JRC, as well as with Eurostat, are generally perceived as complementary.

Regarding other agencies, the EEA is cooperating well with the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

## Relationship between the EEA and DG ENV

The strategic relationship between the EEA and DG ENV is important to this evaluation and is important to both DG ENV and the EEA given the role of DG ENV as the EEA's partner DG. During the evaluation period this relationship has been the subject of an Internal Audit Service (IAS) report. There have also been some challenges encountered in balancing the workload of the EEA, with the budget available and the expectations of the EEA, DG ENV, DG CLIMA, other Commission Services and the EEA's member countries.

At the operational level (i.e. on specific policy files) there are generally good relationships between EEA and DG ENV directors, heads of unit and desk officers, and the day to day collaboration with DG ENV was described as very positive. There are multiple examples of positive collaborations and of the EEA delivering outputs that are fully in line with DG ENV's needs and expectations.

At the strategic level, interviews with senior management staff from DG ENV and the EEA indicate that there have been some differences of interpretation between some in DG ENV and some in the EEA. These differences do not cause significant day to day problems, but there is value in listing and describing the most frequently raised discussion points, as they are all important in balancing workload, with budget and expectations.

*The priority between 'core' (i.e. DG ENV and DG CLIMA work that is required in legislation) and 'non-core' work (everything else the EEA do).* From our EEA output analysis, and according to most of those interviewed the core work is delivered and prioritised. However, during times of growing 'non core' demand on the EEA, and during the first part of the evaluation period when EEA resources were constrained the EEA's ability to do this is put under pressure. The EEA also need to help service the environmental data needs of the Commission as a whole, and particularly post European Green Deal, these needs now come from an increasing diversity of DGs, despite DG ENV and CLIMA remaining key. The Interservice Group (ISG) is intended to help manage the needs of the various DGs, and there do not appear to be any significant gaps (in terms of DGs being able to get what they need). However, the increasing use of service level agreements may not be the best long term administrative / financial route for the EEA to meet the long-term needs of other DGs. Consideration is needed on whether any of these needs could be considered core to the purpose and function of the EEA. If this needs are considered core there would need to be a revision of the founding Regulation. This structural adjustment would need to reflect the future expected mix of demands on the EEA (i.e. a wider range of DGs), potentially using different funding lines to reflect this mix (i.e. so the core budget is not all associated with DG ENV)

*The appropriate level of DG ENV strategic influence on the EEA.* The majority of EEA senior managers interviewed expressed the opinion that, at times, they felt that DG ENV had sought to exert too much "control" over the EEA's activities. The governance arrangements of the EEA are described under efficiency (section 6.2). DG ENV has a clear lead role in coordinating the Commission's response to / acceptance of the EEA's annual plans and the Commission have two seats on the EEA's management board, with DG CLIMA having a seat as an observer<sup>71</sup>. Much of the EEA's budget also comes via a DG ENV budget line and the majority of work that the EEA do relates to policy and legislation under the remit of DG ENV/CLIMA. However, the EEA have to balance the views of DG ENV, with that of other Commission Services, their Member Countries and the obligations described in their founding regulation. The founding regulation also describes the EEA as having legal autonomy, as is the case for all EU decentralised agencies.

*The extent to which the EEA should interpret data.* This question centres on interpretation of the EEA's founding regulations and on where the EEA should pitch their outputs. The nature of the outputs can be on a range between just presenting the data (in a similar way to Eurostat) to interpreting the data and making, what some would see as, political statements on progress. Some

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<sup>71</sup> DG ENV and DG RTD are regular members, the JRC and Eurostat are alternate members, and DG CLIMA have a place as an observer. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/about/who-we-are/governance/list-of-management-board-members>

in DG ENV feel that the EEA go too far in terms of interpreting. However, the response from the EEA is that the Founding Regulation calls for the EEA to do ‘analysis’ of data, assessment of results and consideration of socio economic aspects and sustainable development, so there is justification (and need) for some interpretation. The EEA have to strike a difficult balance in their analysis of the data. What can be intended as analysis, e.g., highlighting the policies used in a Member State that the data shows as performing well in an environmental issue, can be interpreted by some as ‘policy advice’ or even NGO style advocacy, and the EEA going beyond their remit. During this evaluation we were not offered any examples of EEA outputs that were obviously beyond their remit. The Management Board and the consultation process on the EEA’s annual work plan also provides a mechanism for any concerns of this nature to be aired and discussed.

### Relationship between the EEA and DG CLIMA

With the exception of DG ENV, the DG that the EEA works most closely with is DG CLIMA. The volume of collaboration between the EEA and CLIMA is increasing via EEA involvement in new climate related legislative instruments and reporting, but also for climate adaptation and resilience. DG CLIMA and the EEA have three service level agreements since 2022 (all after the evaluation period). Overall, the relationship between DG CLIMA and the EEA was regarded as positive, synergistic and supportive. DG CLIMA interviewees noted that the DG relies on the data and assessments provided by the EEA to inform legislative processes as well as their data quality checks, and aggregation. This data is essential for DG CLIMA’s work on implementing EU climate legislation, including assessments, policy recommendations, and international cooperation. Interviewees commented that the data provided by the EEA is of high quality, on time and reliable, even when at times there are constraints in resources. Some interviewees described the EEA’s contributions as integral to the development and implementation of legislation related to climate action and environmental protection. Specific examples include the EEA’s role in the Ozone Regulation, the CO<sub>2</sub> monitoring data across various directives and the maintenance and processing of the Business Data Repository (BDR), which was highlighted by several interviewees as critical. The BDR platform specifically was noted as a significant example of success in creating synergies across sectors.

A possible reason for the successful collaboration on these topics may be the clear division of roles and responsibilities between DG CLIMA and the EEA, which several DG CLIMA interviewees mentioning that the EEA was clearly assigned the reporting and data handling, while DG CLIMA is responsible for compliance assessment and legislative issues. One interviewee from DG CLIMA noted that in relation to the Climate Adapt platform, DG CLIMA and EEA always discuss priorities and roles very clearly, and as such work remains coherent and efficient. In another example, an interviewee noted that prior to the start of real-world monitoring for heavy duty vehicles in 2022, there were transparent conversations between CLIMA and the EEA regarding resource needs. During these conversations, it became clear what the EEA could provide based on the resources available, both in terms of IT and people.

Regular and structured communication thus appears to be fundamental in the coherent collaboration between DG CLIMA and EEA. The communication between DG CLIMA and EEA was noted by some interviewees as having significantly improved over time. Some interviewees noted that there have been issues with the EEA’s role relating to policy evaluation and recommendations, versus just providing data and factual assessments, with some interviewees feeling that the EEA can at times overstep their role here. In response, actions to improve dialogue were taken to clarify roles and responsibilities. The establishment of the ISG in 2022 has helped facilitate this communication between DG ENV, DG CLIMA and the EEA. In addition, some interviewees noted an increase in

more regular coordination meetings and bilateral communication meetings, on a monthly or annual basis that in the past were not structurally planned but rather ad-hoc.

In response to the 2021 audit, DG CLIMA (as well as DG ENV) developed an internal document on how to coordinate its different units work with the EEA, and to best structure related activities, thus allowing for more synergy, coherence and efficiency for their working relations.

Several stakeholders noted the EEA's timeliness and ability to support internal EU and international obligations. In relation to DG CLIMA, interviewees felt that the EEA has made substantial efforts in creating systematic and integrated approaches to facilitate data collection, handling and reporting in EU and international context. The EEA was considered as fundamental in supporting DG CLIMA in its international work. Interviewees highlighted the EEAs role in reporting of the ozone depleting substances (ODS) and the monitoring and reporting verification (MRV). Specifically in the context of ODS, some interviewees acknowledged the EEA's efforts in introducing machine-to-machine learning with the UNEP reporting system, which has made reporting to the international framework more efficient. In addition, one stakeholder noted that the EEA has already begun collecting data on substances that are not obligatory under international conventions, but that are important at EU level to DG CLIMA to consider future legislative changes to the Ozone Regulation.

As such, a number of interviewees felt that the EEA was thinking ahead and supporting forward looking ambitions of the Green Deal. The EEA's awareness and ability to adapt to the EGD objectives and priorities was seen as an asset in its support to DG CLIMA, as well as to other DGs. In particular, some stakeholders praised the Executive Director of the EEA for his flexibility and ability to look ahead on what's coming, and how to have integrated data, knowledge and understanding. It was highlighted that one of the upcoming challenges the EEA will face is that, on top of handling regulatory data from Member States, it will receive data on earth observation from the Copernicus programme. One interviewee noted that learning how to turn this data into information that is tangible and useful to the Commission as well as scientists and the general public will be a key focus area.

DG CLIMA Interviewees noted that 80% of data they manage is provided by the EEA, and that the EEA has helped with guidance on the necessary processes for data collection and aggregation, notably under the Governance Regulation, that have facilitated the work for DG CLIMA. DG CLIMA have a clear view on the fundamental split between the JRC and EEA, with everything that is related to ex-post reporting is the responsibility of the EEA, while all ex-ante related modelling is collaborated on with the JRC.

Some DG CLIMA interviewees felt that the EEA's mandate could be updated in relation to a number of their tasks in order to formally describe the work done in the climate realm. It was expressed by some, that the work of the EEA in relation to climate mitigation was very clear, but that in the case of adaptation it is more complex. One interviewee noted the example of recently growing interest of linking environment and health. A service agreement was set up with DG SANTE in 2021 to enable this work. One interviewee noted that since this topic is in relation to adaptation, and as this task is not laid down in the legislation it is difficult to find resources.

Overall, DG CLIMA see the EEA as flexible and adaptable. The EEA has been responsive to the changing priorities and needs of DG CLIMA as policy or new legislative requirements emerge, thus further highlighting the positive relation between the two. Several stakeholders interviewed noted that the EEA is open to discuss new reporting requirements and help determine what are the most suitable data indicators and embrace new technologies and tools to improve reporting systems and

integration of data. Some interviewees noted that EEA adapts to new challenges on requirements very well, citing specifically the EEA's involvement in the land use mapping under LULUCF. Here, DG CLIMA made additional requests regarding data to the EEA in 2019. In response, the EEA was noted as having become more involved than previously anticipated, and they did so without any extra resources.

### The Internal Audit Service report on DG ENV, DG CLIMA and EEA

An Internal Audit Service (IAS) audit report<sup>72</sup> noted the following risks that may impact the ability of DG ENV and CLIMA to work with the EEA:

- Without a detailed overview of the EEA activities at the adequate level and without a more centralised monitoring, DG ENV may not have the necessary information on which to base its decision to prioritise the activities requested from the EEA or to identify synergies or overlaps.
- If DG ENV has not developed an adequate supervision strategy to oversee the activities of the EEA, this may lead to inefficiencies and performance gaps not being detected in a timely manner and corrected.
- Gaps in the coordination between Commission services may lead to an inefficient use of resources, overlaps or gaps, which ultimately may negatively impact the delivery of activities key for the achievement of the policy objectives.
- If resources are not adequately and timely planned for the activities that the EEA has to deliver as policy support to DG ENV and DG CLIMA, this may lead to inefficiencies and may negatively impact the implementation of the activities.
- If there is no proper coordination with other Commission services on resources and priorities, there may be further resourcing gaps that could jeopardise the effective delivery of the projects.
- If roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined, this may negatively impact the transparency in the use of the budget and ultimately jeopardise sound financial management.

The IAS recommended the following:

- DG ENV should establish a process including a written description to monitor the progress of activities that DG ENV requests to the EEA,
- Establish a supervision strategy vis-à-vis the EEA with key elements and initiate discussion with Central services to find ways to strengthen the coordination with other DGs requesting activities to the EEA.
- DG ENV and DG CLIMA should enhance controls and guidance for the preparation of the financial fiches, strengthen the coordination with other Commission Services and clarify roles and responsibilities for projects shared among the EC and the EEA at planning stage including, to the extent possible, the financing sources to ensure optimal financing practices.

In light of the above, the role of DG ENV in supervising the EEA has been reinforced. DG ENV created a dialogue at senior management level, an intergroup at Director level (with DG CLIMA) and an Inter-Service Group (with all DGs and the EEA on an ad hoc basis) to address these limitations.

<sup>72</sup> IAS (2021). Final audit report on relations with decentralized agencies (EEA and ECHA) in the Directorates-General for Environment and Climate Action. IAS.A3-2020-Y-COMM-002.

This has proved to be a good starting step in the direction of strengthening the collaboration between the EEA and other DGs.

### DG ENV / DG CLIMA and the EEA

With the growing demand on the EEA, due to the increasing need to provide support for various Commission services as well as legislative reporting obligations, and as highlighted in section 6.2.4, there has been an increasing need for improved coordination, communication and priority setting. It was reported by EEA senior staff that whenever additional tasks are introduced through new legislation, additional resource allocations have to be duly justified within the Commission (for example to cover additional EEA costs if the additional tasks cannot be met via synergies and/or internal redeployment ) and efforts should be made to identify areas where de-prioritisation is possible. In view of this, Commission staff mentioned that the (post 2020) period of growth and the need for clear priority setting has created some challenges for the EEA in prioritising their efforts between; different policy areas within DG ENV and between different Commission services. To address these challenges, several coordination mechanisms have been improved/set up within DG ENV, between DG ENV and the EEA at management level, and within the Commission, which were intended to improve communication and alignment.

The Environmental Knowledge Community (EKC) was set up in 2015 as a Commission internal inter-service group involving the five Commission Services discussed in this Section (DG ENV, DG CLIMA, JRC, DG Research & Innovation and Eurostat). It was not a mechanism specifically created to improve cooperation with the EEA, but was regarded by EEA and ENV staff as having a positive contribution on this and one that reinforced and improved cooperation between knowledge providers. Stakeholders across DGs, Scientific Committee and NFPs also acknowledged the importance of the EKC in the past for information sharing and achieving common goals, including joint seminars, reports and project financing collaboration with the EEA. Most members of the EEA Scientific Committee, NFPs and representatives of DGs working with the EEA noted that they were aware of the EKC, and had considered it useful, but that they were unaware of the details of its discussions and their outcomes. Interviewees from DGs working with the EEA directly, expressed different views on the EKC. Some considered that the community has lost its purpose given that this forum had been partially replaced by the Inter-Service Group processes, although the goals of the ISG and EKC are different (see next paragraph), while some others suggested the need for reactivation. It should also be noted that the ISG was set up as an internal mechanism to improve coordination within the Commission vis-à-vis the EEA, whilst the EKC was created to optimise the generation of knowledge on the environment, improve cooperation on environmental knowledge for policy making, strengthen the Commission's capacity to anticipate emerging issues, and find innovative ways to environmental knowledge creation. In 2019. The EEA Management Board recommended that the Executive Director and European Commission work more closely in relation to the EKC, to help ensure articulation, prioritisation and distribution of responsibilities between knowledge providers<sup>73</sup>. Despite being dormant some of the projects of the EKC continue to operate, e.g. the biodiversity knowledge centre and the task force on green data, but not under the official umbrella of the EKC. |

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<sup>73</sup> EEA (2019). Decision EEA/MB/2019/015



Following the IAS audit on the relations between DG ENV and DG CLIMA and decentralised agencies in 2021<sup>74</sup>, a permanent Interservice Group (ISG) on the coordination between the Commission and the European Environment Agency (EEA) was created in February 2022 (just after the end of the evaluation period). The inter-service group (ISG) is an internal mechanism of the Commission bringing together DG ENV and 22 Commission services (including central services, DG CLIMA, RTD, JRC and other DGs interested in EEA activities). It serves as a platform for evaluation of the Agency, for consulting the services in preparation of the annual Commission Opinions on the SPDs, and for anticipating requests for support and discussing agreements with the EEA. The EEA is invited on a case-by-case basis to the ISG meetings, e.g. for presenting draft SPDs, but has no formal role in it. The ISG aims to strengthen the coordination between the Commission and the EEA. This includes efforts to prevent overlap between DGs. Members of other DGs working with the EEA generally acknowledged that the ISG has facilitated the communication between DGs and was generally considered a helpful tool to coordinate the work in different units. However, a few representatives of other DGs mentioned that the communication through the ISG with the EEA was not always transparent, even with additional processes in place.

Another concern relates to DGs each having their own reporting of data for which they sometimes seek ad-hoc support from the EEA, but where overlaps still exist. For example, one member of another DG working with the EEA mentioned instances where the EEA published reports with data and conclusions that were relevant to their policy work, but the DG was unaware of the report being prepared in advance of its release. The need for improved coordination between DGs' data requests to the EEA was already highlighted in the internal audit report<sup>75</sup>, where it was found that more efforts to strengthen the communication and the overview of the EEA's tasks for other DGs was needed, also in terms of monitoring resources. As such, there is a need to improve the awareness and coordination concerning the monitoring of publications and consultations. However, from the views expressed by some representatives of DGs working with the EEA suggest that this is still a work in progress that requires further improvements, although the ISG was widely viewed as a suitable mechanism for doing this.

### EEA's relationship with other Commission Services

Synergies with Commission services overall have appeared to improve over time. Generally, European Commission DGs that work directly with the EEA reported positive collaboration with frequent communication and cross-fertilisation in various topics including marine, water and air quality. However, others reported certain overlaps and a lack of clear allocation of responsibilities between the EEA and other Commission services including the JRC and ESTAT, Examples of this include the fact that ESTAT lead the Circular Economy (CE) Monitoring Framework, the EEA explore and develop experimental CE indicators and the JRC are also active in this field with Environmental Footprint data (which is included in the CE Monitoring framework indicator set), However coordination on this issue has improved, and it appears that the three groups involved do make efforts to avoid duplication. A recent (post evaluation period) positive example was the cooperation between the JRC and the EEA, under the steer of DG ENV, around the Zero Pollution Monitoring

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<sup>74</sup> IAS (2021). Final audit report on relations with decentralized agencies (EEA and ECHA) in the Directorates-General for Environment and Climate Action. IAS.A3-2020-Y-COMM-002.

<sup>75</sup> IAS (2021). Final audit report on relations with decentralized agencies (EEA and ECHA) in the Directorates-General for Environment and Climate Action. IAS.A3-2020-Y-COMM-002.



and Outlook report, with the JRC being responsible for the outlook<sup>76</sup>, and the EEA being responsible for the monitoring part<sup>77</sup>. Another example was the campaign around the International Year of Forests. While these examples were successful, not every subject would necessarily lend itself to this level of collaboration.

The increase in profile of the EEA (which is also a reflection of the Commission's wider environment /climate mainstreaming agenda<sup>78</sup>) with other DGs has led to increased demands from beyond DG ENV and CLIMA. This is evident in the increase in the number of service-level-agreements (see section 6.2.4) with other DGs. As discussed elsewhere (e.g. 6.3 and 6.4.3), this puts more pressure on the EEA, which puts efficiency and effectiveness at risk. However, from an overall (Commission wide) coherence perspective, this broadening is a clear positive and reflects the strategic direction of the Commission and the EEA's desire (and success) to reflect this strategy in their approach and work.

Scientific Committee members suggested that there was potential for more synergies to be generated with past projects funded by **DG RTD**. For example, there may well be results from completed Horizon 2020 / Horizon Europe projects of relevance to the data collection and analysis work of the EEA, but there does not appear to be a process for such synergies to be identified and promoted (other than the professional development of EEA staff, and the presence of DG RTD on the EEA Management Board). One Management Board member noted that while cooperation between the EEA and DG RTD at the operational level is good, and there are low risks of overlap, the potential exists for DG RTD to more actively seek synergies with the EEA. However, active efforts in improving coherence, and some success in doing so, is evident through a new service level-agreement between EEA and DG RTD that was signed in 2021, and which has reportedly already resulted in better alignment of activities and implementation strategies.<sup>79</sup>

During the evaluation period (2017-2021) the EEA has extended/renewed various existing agreements (e.g., IPA agreements that started before 2018, and Copernicus contribution agreements). A number of new agreements have also been implemented. This shows that the EEA continues to work collaboratively with a number of Commission services and EU agencies in areas of common interest. The extension of existing agreements indicate that the involved parties are satisfied that they remain effective and beneficial.

In relation to **ESTAT**, the EEA is generally considered as working with them in a coherent way. Interviewees generally perceive the responsibilities of the two as clearly defined allowing for – in theory – separation of their roles. Most interviewees note that the work of the EEA and ESTAT is complementary. The two have coordinated on their work programmes work programmes for a number of years (e.g., first Technical Agreement dates back to 2005<sup>80</sup>, and ESTAT continues to

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<sup>76</sup> Press corner (2022). European Commission - European Commission. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_22\\_7594](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_22_7594)

<sup>77</sup> Zero pollution: 2030 targets within reach but need stronger action (2022) European Environment Agency's home page. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/newsroom/news/zero-pollution-2030-targets-within-reach-but-need-stronger-action>

<sup>78</sup> 30% climate relevant spending target in the current MFF: [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/horizontal-priorities/green-budgeting/climate-mainstreaming\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/horizontal-priorities/green-budgeting/climate-mainstreaming_en)

<sup>79</sup> Consolidated annual activity report (2021)

<sup>80</sup> Technical Arrangement between DG ENV, ESTAT, JRC and EEA on Environmental Data Centres, 14 November 2005.

provide direct comments in the MAWPs), and ESTAT work programmes and cooperation/alignment with EEA work programmes are discussed annually at the Management Board level. Responses from interviewees across various stakeholders also noted that there were efforts, especially on a project-by-project basis, for frequent and improved communication, driven by individuals from both sides working together. However, interviews with members of Commission DGs revealed that concerns remained in relation to general data management and handling – the question of why certain data files remained with Eurostat versus the EEA. A specific example noted by a senior manager of the EEA was in relation to waste data, which remains with Eurostat although similar data (for example data on air, water and pollution) were already housed with the EEA. While waste data has historically been the responsibility of ESTAT, such opinions indicate that further clarifications are needed where there are overlaps or opportunities for shared responsibilities. As such, the separation of the roles between EEA and ESTAT could be further refined. Other stakeholders from Commission DGs noted that in general more cooperation between the EEA and ESTAT was needed, since there were still some gaps. Examples provided by members of DGs working with the EEA include the SDG and circular economy indicators. SDG indicators are managed by ESTAT but used by EEA, and the stakeholder notes that the cooperation in these instances where indicators sets are generated and used in published analysis reports should be higher. In the case of circular economy indicators, stakeholders noted that the generation of indicator sets between EEA and ESTAT converged, at times leading to a possible risk of duplication in efforts – although in the case of the CE indicators sets, this risk is well recognised and efforts have been taken to avoid it.

A view shared by several interviewees was that the EEA and the **JRC** have clear interlinkages, but that the risk of duplication remains. This risk was also highlighted in the previous evaluation. Several interviewees from DGs working with the EEA also noted that coordination of strategic objectives between EEA and JRC should be improved, and that the overlaps and sometimes lack of communication and alignment in work programmes has occasionally led to tension and competition between the two. One EEA senior manager also reflected a similar sentiment, noting that while there had been long-standing cooperation between the EEA and JRC, there was still room for improvement. There were also comments from members of DGs working with the EEA that there were also instances of overlaps between the EEA and JRC. Stakeholders noted, however, that there have been efforts made to improve coordination and cooperation between the EEA and the JRC, through various means including meetings between senior management, increased communication at all levels, more frequent workshops for knowledge exchange and other means of information sharing. As a result, it was noted that on a day-to-day basis the cooperation with the JRC had improved in the later stages of the evaluation period and more recently. An example provided by an interviewee from a DG working with the EEA was the core group implemented for the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP monitoring framework bringing together the EEA, the JRC and ESTAT. The Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity<sup>81</sup> is another positive example of improved collaboration between the EEA and JRC. Improving the overall communication strategy between the EEA and JRC was repeatedly noted by stakeholders as a key necessity to maximise synergies, and more clearly defining the boundaries and responsibilities between the institutions. A member of the Management Board pointed out that a closer cooperation between the EEA, JRC and the NFPs could provide better access to data from the JRC, and allow for more regionally informed research and results.

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<sup>81</sup>[https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/biodiversity/about\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/biodiversity/about_en)

Synergies and collaboration with JRC and ESTAT mainly concern data and information sharing. A member of the ISG suggested that improved collaboration could be put into practice through a potential reviving of the EKC that ensures the following joint responsibilities and duties with new working groups:

- A 'fast lane' for data sharing between JRC-EEA-ESTAT with direct access to the databases and per topic, and shared / joint data-stewardship for the trio JRC-EEA-ESTAT.
- A common definition of the indicators which are the basis of the integrated assessments between JRC and EEA, to ensure coherent messaging.
- The use of cross-referenced data platforms, so that users can find underlying information and scientific studies on the EEA website with links to the original JRC or ESTAT website.

Finally, the EEA has extended and renewed its cooperation agreements with DG DEFIS on Copernicus, with the EEA having a substantial role in supporting the CLMS reporting obligations (see section 5.2 on Reporting Obligations). The new 2021 Copernicus work programme clearly describes activities and defines roles for the EEA. A couple of EEA senior management interviewees noted that in relation to global monitoring and Copernicus data, the JRC and EEA are actively discussing and coordinating their resources and capacities. Significant efforts appear to have been made, and continue to be made, to harmonise and improve the working relationship between the EEA, JRC and DEFIS on Copernicus. Overall, in comparison with the previous evaluation period, the relationship between the EEA and JRC appear to have improved, with significant efforts in streamlining and creating better synergies.

### Synergies between the EEA and other Agencies

Regarding the EEA's cooperation with other EU agencies, there are agreements (through MoUs) as well as ad-hoc cooperation structures depending on needs and specific topics. The EEA retains cooperative relations with the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Along with various agencies and DGs, the EEA contributes to analytical and communication outputs in support of HBM4EU<sup>82</sup>, and continues to be a key partner in the EU inter-institutional Information Platform for Chemical Monitoring (IPCHEM)<sup>83</sup>. Cooperation and coordination activities are framed under the EU's Agencies Network (EUAN), which brings together all the EU decentralised agencies. These have continued to improve the coherence between agencies, ensuring a regular exchange and coordination at a governance level. Within EUAN, the EEA is viewed as a positive member that is easy to work with, and with knowledgeable staff. The EEA successfully chaired EUAN, including most of its sub-networks during the COVID-19 pandemic, and despite this managed to successfully coordinate communication activities under the new communication framework for the networks<sup>84</sup>. The EEA also pursued efficiency gains, through taking part in shared and joint procurements, including with EUAN.

However, cooperation with other agencies is often limited by their mandates. Commission staff noted that agencies can facilitate their cooperation through bilateral agreements and MoUs. Various

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<sup>82</sup> The HBM4EU project was launched in 2016 with the aim of improving the collective understanding of human exposure to hazardous chemicals and developing HBM as an exposure assessment method <https://www.hbm4eu.eu/>

<sup>83</sup> EEA (2021). Single Programming Document 2019 -2021.

<sup>84</sup> EEA Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2021

stakeholders across NFPs, EEA senior staff and DGs working with the EEA mentioned that efforts had been made to avoid overlaps between EEA's role and other agencies. One EEA senior management interviewee noted that agreements with other agencies had facilitated the creation of new partnerships to support each other and identify existing gaps and complementarities. A positive example for this is the 2021 European Maritime Transport and Environment Report, led by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMAS), which invited the EEA to support the process. The EEA contributed to key processes on marine data, dataflows and information in particular in relation to governance/assessment development in the Arctic<sup>85</sup>. The collaboration between the agencies was noted as fruitful and a success, as both agencies complemented each other well and were able to provide necessary expertise. In addition, stakeholders noted the positive collaborations, clear understanding that they had on projects, and co-ownership that exists when collaborating. The SPD 2019-2021<sup>86</sup> indicated that there was active ongoing coordination between the EEA and partner agencies, especially EFSA and ECHA. The EEA continues close collaboration on exchange of monitoring data information with ECHA regarding the monitoring of presence of chemicals in the environment, and ECHA uses data produced by the EEA under the E-PRTR.

### 6.3.2 Coherence of EEA's mandate and activities with the Common Approach to EU decentralised agencies

This section addresses *EQ 19: To what extent are the Agency's mandate and activities, as defined in its founding regulation, coherent with the Common Approach to EU decentralised agencies?*

**Main issues considered:** This section considers the alignment of the EEA mandate, activities and KPIs with the Common Approach to EU decentralised agencies. It discusses the EEA's implementation of key principles under the Common Approach and its collaboration with EU institutions, Member States and the public.

**Main findings:** The EEA generally aligns with the Common Approach, and the assessment shows that the EEA implements most principle indicators fully or to a large extent, with only a few not being fully achieved. Stakeholders responded positively to the coherence of the EEA's mandate and activities, considering them reasonably comparable to other agencies.

The alignment of the EEA's mandate, activities and KPIs with the Common Approach to EU decentralised agencies is reviewed in detail in Annex 3 of this report. The assessment focuses on the key principle indicators under the Common Approach, and maps the degree of implementation in the EEA. The EEA provides information and assessment on the environment and climate, and supports policy development and implementation across a large range of policy areas. It continues to provide, with a growing role, data collection tools/mechanisms, conducting assessment and provision of scientific expertise. Furthermore, the EEA collaborates with a broad range of EU institutions, Member States and the public to fulfil its mandate. Similarly to other agencies, the EEA involves Member States in its governance structure, reinforcing the composite nature of the EU executive. The EEA is also subject to parliamentary scrutiny through various forms of reporting (MAWPs, CAARs and SPDs). Further elaboration of the EEA's implementation of the Common Approach, and its relevance can be found in section 6.4.2. Overall, the assessment shows that the

<sup>85</sup> EEA (2021). Single Programming Document 2020-2022.

<sup>86</sup> EEA (2021). Single Programming Document 2019 -2021.

EEA implements most principle indicators either fully or to a large extent, with only a limited number not being achieved.

Stakeholders responded positively regarding the coherence of the EEA's mandate and activities with the Common Approach to EU decentralised agencies. It was mentioned that the EEA's activities and mandate are coherent and reasonably comparable in terms of activities in scope to the Fundamental Rights Agency and Eurofound, which work in a similar manner with the Commission. However, a number of EEA representatives noted that the coherence between the founding regulation and the actual mandate of the EEA has been a recurring question over the past evaluations, and in this stakeholder's view these need to be better articulated in order to be fit for purpose – the same recommendation that has been made by several previous evaluations. Overall, the EEA's mandate thus remains coherent and aligned with expectations set in the Common Approach.

### 6.3.3 Coherence of core and non-core activities

This section addresses *EQ 20: To what extent are the non-core activities and core activities coherent with each other?*

**Main issues considered:** This section considers the coherence between the EEA's core and non-core activities,. It assesses the EEA's efforts in creating synergies and improving coordination between its various activities.

**Main findings:** There are active efforts and continuous improvements in the EEA's internal coherence and between its projects. Stakeholders generally acknowledged that the EEA strives to exploit synergies between projects and avoid duplication of work, particularly in data and reporting obligations. EEA staff also expressed that internal coherence for data handling had significantly improved, contributing to cost-efficiency. Generally, stakeholders perceived the coherence between core and non-core activities as high, although there were some suggestions that certain activities that are currently non-core could be considered for inclusion as part of the EEA's core activities.

Stakeholders from other DGs working with the EEA acknowledged that there had been increasing collaboration of other DGs with the EEA, which have (and will continue to) impact their non-core activities. One specific stakeholder from a Commission DG working with the EEA noted that setting up and preparing service level agreements is resource intensive and considered a significant additional task, which often remains mainly with the EEA. Efficiency assessments on synergies at process, data and governance level (6.2.3) show that the EEA actively searches for internal synergies, but that there remains room for improvement regarding internal coordination within the EEA and with the Scientific Committee.

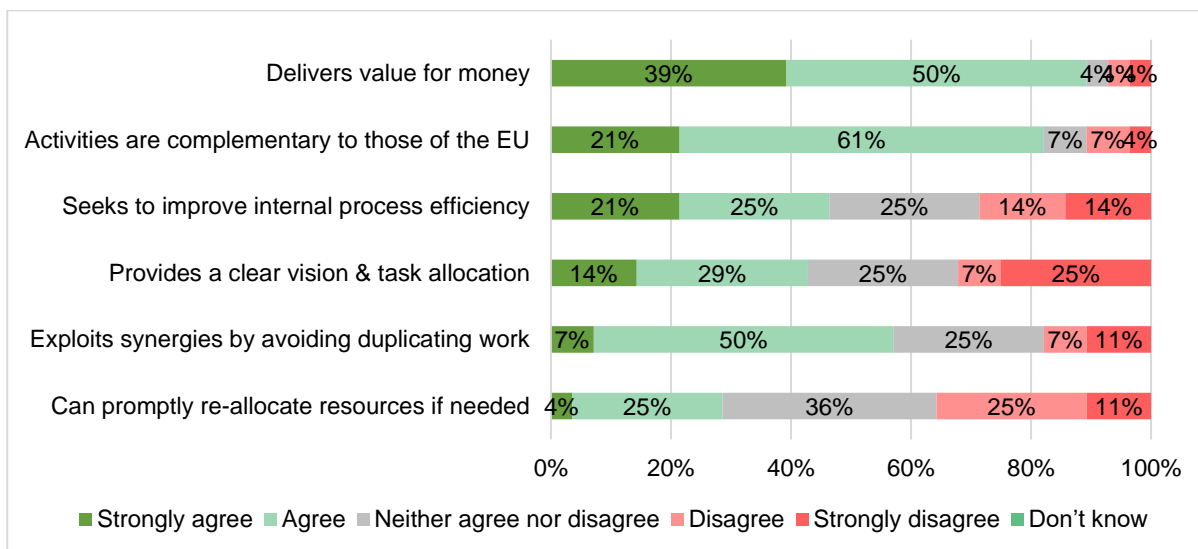
Stakeholders generally acknowledged that the EEA was striving to exploit synergies among/between projects, and avoid duplication of work. Interviews with EEA staff confirmed that, in particular when it came to data and reporting obligations, there were strong efforts to build reference data bases that make other data flows more efficient and thus improve data management, which is also reflected in section 6.2.3. Thus, our findings indicate that there are active efforts and continuous improvements in the EEA's internal coherence - between its cores and non- core activities.

Interviewees from across stakeholder groups appeared content with the current coherence between core and non- core activities. Multiple efforts, with Commission Services and other agencies (see

section 6.3.1) show that non-core activities are often linked and synergistic to core activities (e.g., HBM4EU contributions complements core activities on environment and health, Copernicus support for air quality and land-use change monitoring across policy areas (see section 6.2.6)). Non-core activities are therefore linked or otherwise used for core activities information. During the 2021 audit<sup>87</sup> it was noted that the EEA's amount of non-core activities was increasing and will continue to increase in the coming years. Thus, one of the key recommendations was the need to reflect on the planning and budgeting of the EEA and ensure that the roles of coordination in the EEA were being closely monitored. This required a clearer definition of roles and responsibilities, especially in relation to DG ENV. Stakeholders from DGs working with the EEA noted that efficiency and coordination within the EEA remain areas for improvements, especially as non-core activities will continue to increase. The complexity of the reporting system involving multiple actors, such as the EEA core team, Environmental Topic Centres (ETCs), DG ENV staff, and external consultants, has led to inefficiencies in the past but there was recognition that these are slowly improving.

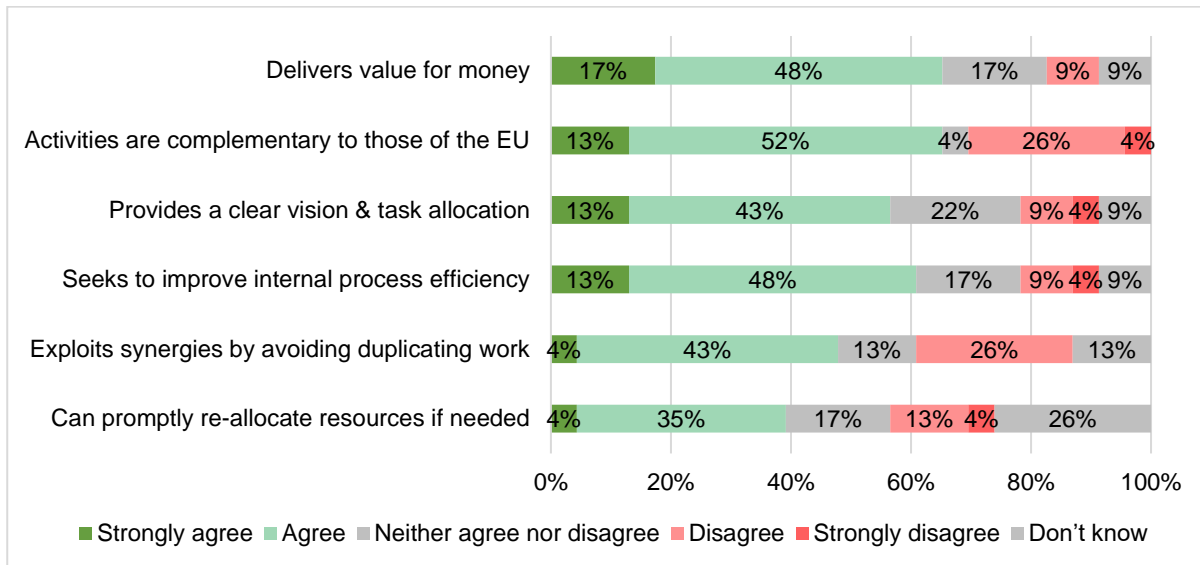
A question in the survey sought opinions on seeking synergies to avoid duplication of work. This is relevant to core vs. non-core synergies because such synergies should exist between the core and non-core. The results shows that both EEA and non-EEA respondents have a positive view on looking for synergies, but the EEA respondents are slightly more positive. This could relate to the EEA staff having a better view of the work that is reused between core and non-core activities.

**Figure 6.13: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements – the EEA...**  
**EEA staff respondents**



<sup>87</sup> IAS (2021). Final audit report on relations with decentralized agencies (EEA and ECHA) in the Directorates-General for Environment and Climate Action. IAS.A3-2020-Y-COMM-002.

### Other respondents



Source: Online Survey (10/02/2023 – 28/03/2023). Q32, N=28 for EEA staff, N=23 for Other respondents

One Scientific Committee member noted that the issue of internal coherence needed to be considered in light of the fact that where the EEA is today is the result of an evolutionary process. The stakeholder mentioned that if one started the EEA today many of its non-core activities would probably be considered core. Hence, what is important is not the coherence of core and non-core activities, but rather their complementarity, which the stakeholder regarded as very high. There was only one direct suggestion from a non-core activities to be included as part of the EEA’s core activities, suggesting that generally the stakeholders perceived coherence between core and non-core activities as high. However, as a matter of principle the agreements for non-core activities are not intended to finance long term activities. Therefore, if permanent activities are classified as non-core activities, their integration into the core tasks of the EEA should be considered. This point is picked up in section 6.4.2 regarding the Founding Regulations.

The potential role of the EEA in supporting Copernicus services and data accessibility was mentioned by several people – as this is an area where there is much (future) potential for synergy between EEA areas of activity, including the core and non-core. In general, stakeholders felt that the need for new activities and technical expertise within the EEA were growing, but that the EEA had generally balanced its core and non-core activities well.

## 6.4 Relevance

### 6.4.1 Relevance of the work of the EEA for its stakeholders

This section addresses EQ 24: *To what extent is the work of the EEA relevant for the stakeholders (EU institutions, policy makers, member countries, etc.) and the general public it aims to inform?*

**Main issues considered:** This section reviewed literature and consultation results as to the relevance of the work and outputs of the EEA for its main stakeholders (e.g. the European Commission, Member States, European Parliament, NGOs, etc.), as well as EEA products directed towards the general public and its resonance on social media.



**Main findings:** The outputs of the EEA are generally perceived as relevant and impactful by its stakeholders. Generally speaking, the State of the Environment report (SOER) has been indicated as the most well-known and relevant output of the EEA, and the Environment Indicator Report is also highly regarded. The SOER was also particularly relevant to the preparation and introduction of the Green Deal. The perceived relevance of different outputs of the EEA differs per stakeholder group. The European Commission is the main ‘customer’ of the EEA, relying on several of its outputs (e.g., support in revision of different policies, preparation of technical guidance and/or support in meeting EU’s international obligation). Likewise, NFPs are users of the EEA’s outputs. NGOs make use of EEA’s verified data, regarding it as a trustworthy source, which is helpful to them in making a case for calls for action to policy makers.

In relation to the general public, throughout the evaluation period the EEA has been consistent in its efforts to engage with the public directly (e.g., via site visits, public photo competitions, etc.). This was hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic, as in-person events had to be replaced with online events. The EEA also made efforts to make environment and climate information relatable and usable for the general public. An improvement relevant to the evaluation period can be seen in relation to EEA’s online presence, including the launch of a dedicated LinkedIn account in 2019. Stakeholders, to some extent, positively recognise the EEA’s efforts. However, they still see some room for improvement, stating that despite the fact that the public is not the EEA’s direct client, the efforts to approach them should be maintained.

### Relevance of the work of the EEA to its stakeholders

The **EEA has consistently supported air quality policy implementation, which was timed to help inform the Commission's revision of the Ambient Air Quality Directives (AAQDs)**. In 2021 and 2022, the EEA specifically supported the work of the European Commission in preparing the impact assessment for the revision of the AAQDs. The 2021 briefing on the status of air quality was launched in the same week as the World Health Organization (WHO) published new air quality guidelines and the Commission organised the first stakeholder meeting on the revision of the ambient air quality directives, generating considerable press coverage. The 2021 briefing on the health impacts of air pollution was published prior to the Clean Air Forum held in Madrid, and it estimated the health benefits of meeting the new WHO guideline for fine particulate matter, as well as progress made towards the relevant Zero Pollution Action Plan target. These briefings were updated and combined as the first online EEA air quality report to accompany the Commission's public consultation on the revision.

A case study on the new Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) found that the ‘early warning reports’, to which the EEA contributes, also play a role in implementation of waste and recycling policies of the EU. The box below provides a summary of the findings of the case studies – for more details please refer to Annex 4.

#### “Early Warning Reports”: The new Circular Economy Action Plan

The European Commission, in cooperation with the EEA, is required (see below) to publish early warning reports three years ahead of the waste legislation target years. The purpose of the early warning reports is to identify each Member State’s prospects of meeting the targets, as well as to anticipate barriers to implementation. This is intended to improve policy implementation and provide guidance on appropriate action that needs to be taken ahead of the target deadlines to achieve compliance. The first early warning report, with a focus on the 2020 recycling target for municipal waste, was published by the European Commission in 2018.

The three elements of the early warning reports are:

- 1) an estimate of the attainment of the targets by each Member State;
- 2) a list of the Member States at risk of not attaining the target(s) by the deadlines, accompanied by recommended remediating measures for the Member States concerned;
- 3) examples of best practices that could drive progress towards attaining the targets.

The EEA's publications relating to resource efficiency / circular economy from 2017 to 2020 can be seen (from their titles / subjects) to be responding to the policy developments that DG ENV / the Commission were developing in the CEAP and its sector and material specific follow ups, and alignment of work of EEA, the Commission and ESTAT had increased over the period. The EEA's contribution includes the collection and collation of data that is directly used in the early warning reports.

The comparative analysis of the MAWP 2014 – 2020 and the Strategy 2021 - 2030 (see Annex 11 for details) found that the newer programme emphasises work at the country-level to a larger extent than its predecessor, which should increase its visibility and “relevance” as seen by the general population. Regarding actual relevance, the more specific goal-setting seems like an effective way of ensuring that tasks performed are relevant.

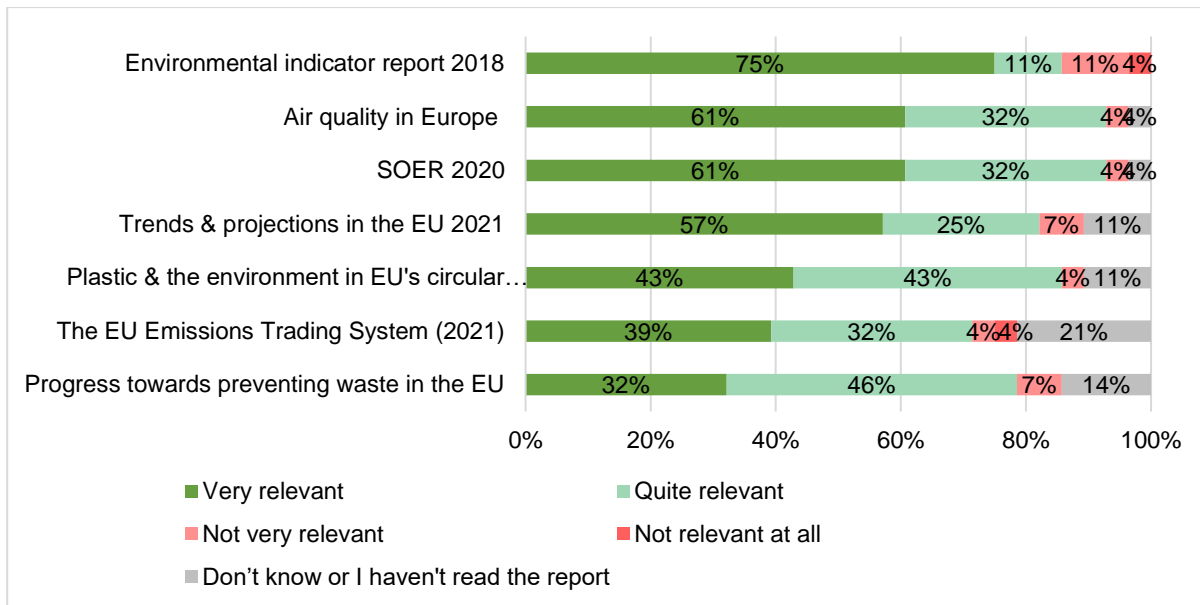
To gain insight on the relevance of the EEA, respondents to the stakeholder **survey** carried out for the purpose of the study were asked how relevant selected EEA publications were. All of these were deemed to be at least “quite” relevant by at least two thirds of respondents. The Environmental Indicator Report<sup>88</sup> which tracked overall progress of the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP, published in 2018, was the most highly valued publication, both by the EEA (86% of respondents found it very and/or quite relevant) and by other stakeholders (100% of respondents found it very and/or quite relevant). The publication that other stakeholders ranked the least relevant was The EU Emissions Trading System in 2021, while EEA representatives thought it to be ‘Progress towards preventing waste in the EU’. The figures below provide further information on the relevance of the rest of the publications presented, both from the perspective of the EEA and of the remaining stakeholder groups.

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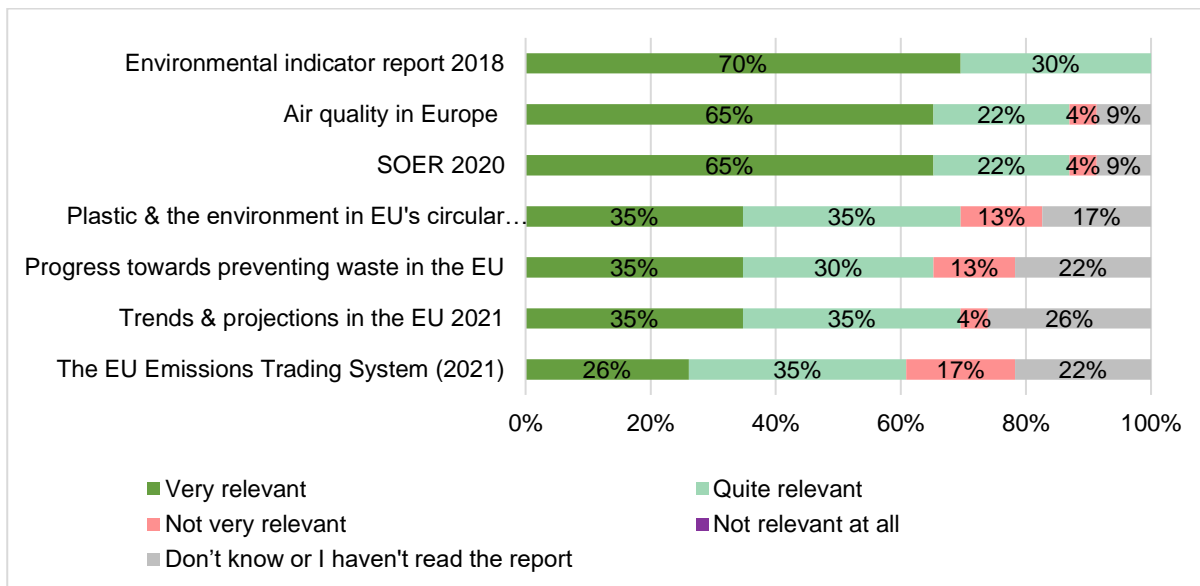
<sup>88</sup> EEA (2018) Environmental indicator report 2018. Available at <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/environmental-indicator-report-2018>

**Figure 6.14: “Given the broader context in your policy areas of expertise, how relevant do you think the following EEA publications are?”**

**EEA respondents**



**Other respondents**



Source: Online Survey (10/02/2023 – 28/03/2023). Q14, N=51 (incl. 28 EEA staff and 23 Other respondents).

Stakeholders also provided extensive inputs regarding the relevance of the EEA to its stakeholders during the **interviews**. Here, inputs were mainly provided by European Commission DGs directly working with the EEA / members of the Inter-Service Group, but also EEA Management Board representatives, NFPs, EEA Senior Staff and Management, NGOs or representatives of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU.

The majority of stakeholders answering this question (European Commission DGs directly working with the EEA / members of the Inter-Service Group) were very happy with the outputs the EEA provides and considered them **relevant and impactful**, both for the European Commission and for Member States. Broadly speaking, the EEA was reported as playing an important role in mainstreaming environmental topics to other policy areas (e.g., into regional policy). NGOs, during

a workshop discussion, also recognised the importance of the EEA; it provides verified data from trustworthy sources, which is helpful when making a case for calls for action towards policy makers. The **SOER**, which is discussed in detail in above sections (for example under sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.3) was recognised by several stakeholders as the most important and impactful output of the EEA for stakeholders. The importance of the SOER for the EGD was also recognised – this is further shown in a case study on 7th Environmental Action Programme (EAP) / 7th EAP Monitoring Framework, which is discussed in more details below under section 6.4.2.

A number of **specific examples** were provided, where (mainly stakeholders representing the EC) directly rely on EEA's outputs:

- Support when revising specific EU legislation, for example in the areas of CO<sub>2</sub> emission performance of cars, LULUCF;
- Governance Regulation – the EEA was heavily involved in the preparation of guidance on how to implement a new implementing act;
- Effort Sharing Regulation –the EEA provides annual emissions data to track progress and Member States compliance;
- Data on bathing water quality (which has been found by the study to be generally one of the most popular (with the public) data sets);
- Support when revising specific legislation on pollution, e.g. on air quality, industrial emission, urban wastewater or water pollutants.
- The data and analysis in the Trends and Projections reports<sup>89</sup>, which were praised for providing up to date data and for being regularly updated.
- The EEA's 7th Environmental Action Programme (EAP) progress reports, which were used in the European Commission's evaluation of the 7th EAP. Interviewees mentioned that EEA's work on the 7th EAP was important in design the monitoring set up for the 8th EAP (see case study box).
- Work on collecting data for international conventions (e.g., inputs for UNEP and for the Montreal Protocol, as foreseen by the Ozone Regulation).

Only a couple of interviewees from DGs directly working with the EEA stated they **do not rely on the outputs** of the EEA. One referred specifically to reports; they thought the EEA's reports are rather descriptive and cannot be used for policy making. Instead, they rely solely on data. The second stakeholder stated that there are also alternative sources next to the EEA, for example the UNFCCC. However, it should be noted that this was mentioned by two interviewees only and does not align with the overall sentiment that stakeholders shared.

**NFPs** also mentioned that they consider themselves as users of the EEA's outputs, but did not provide further specific details.

According to an interview with one representative of the **European Parliament** (the ENVI Committee) also relies on the outputs of the EEA, for example in relation to reports on air quality or F-gases. At times, the EP issues specific requests for outputs from the EEA, and when this is done, the EEA does its best to accommodate the requests as quickly as possible (e.g. in relation to

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<sup>89</sup> EEA (n.d.) Trends and projections in Europe. Available at <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/climate/trends-and-projections-in-europe>

providing specific data, which the ENVI Committee uses to update their briefings and reports on topics such as water and/or pollution). During another interview, one representative of the **Council** of the EU, stated that they do not proactively use or share EEA's outputs with their respective Member States. However, they do sometimes help with dissemination, if requested.

One stakeholder also mentioned there was **room for improvement** in the EEA's relevance for its stakeholders, namely improving its visibility in the West Balkans regions. This means both to help with expertise and support national agencies, but to also present in the media, approach local citizens and politicians.

### Relevance to the general public

The second aspect of the EQ 24 is the relevance of the EEA to the general public. In order to help answer this question, desk research and analysis of statistics on outreach of the EEA's social media has been carried out, as well as consideration of the EEA's own reporting on the efforts they have made to reach out to citizens. This is combined with stakeholder opinions on the EEA's relevance to the public.

The reporting in the CAARs of the different years of the evaluation period was compared, to identify the efforts the EEA has made to reach out to citizens. The table below provides an overview of the reported activities in terms of communication and efforts made to make the EEA's outputs accessible and relevant to the general public.

**Table 6.9: Overview of EEA's activities targeted at the general public**

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Launch of European Air Quality Index EEA Signals 2017 Publication of a new data viewer facilitating public access to noise exposure maps reported by countries 32 visiting groups and 770 public enquiries 'NATURE@work' photo competition: photo competition	EEA Signals 2018 Total of 25 visiting groups and 816 public inquiries 'WaterPIX' photo competition, which received more than 2 000 photos from 34 countries.	Data viewer for information reported under the NEC Directive EEA Signals 2019 Sustainably Yours photo competition Facebook live events Site visit by journalists to the EEA premises	EEA Signals 2020 'REDISCOVER Nature' photo competition (record number of high-quality entries (> 2 800), finalists were recognised by the Commission, the WWF and the Guardian Growing media coverage - 25 626 media articles by the end of 2020, an 80 % increase compared to 2019	First launch of the European City Air Quality Viewer and the mobile app of the European Air Quality Index EEA Signals 2021 Photo competition Climate Change Pix Audio-visuals and online debates

Source: EEA CAARs of the evaluation period.

The data on EEA's outreach to the public via their social media and regular newsletters (see below) can also be used to consider the effectiveness of the EEA's efforts to reach out to the general public. As discussed above, the EEA recognises social media as an important communication tool and uses it actively. Since 2018 the EEA has also put an increasing effort into distributing their quarterly newsletter to more stakeholders.

Stakeholders provided limited inputs regarding the relevance of the EEA and its outputs to the general public (only a few members of the Management Board). As already mentioned under section

6.1.1 (on ensuring that the public is properly informed), in relation to this evaluation question it was also recognised that the general public is not the main client of the EEA. Nevertheless, there is an added value of the public having access to the EEA's outputs and stakeholders believed there would be no harm in further outreach. Generally speaking, there was seen to be some room for improvement in reaching out to the younger generations. What stakeholders (especially the NFPs) recognised as helpful is the effort the EEA is putting into preparing outputs targeted to the public in plain language and in translating some of its outputs in national languages (for example the Executive Summary of the 2020 SOER, and the EEA Signals report). At the same time, NFPs also considered it to be a negative step that printed copies of EEA's outputs are not foreseen for the future. The NFPs anticipate a lesser impact of online copies compared to their printed versions when distributed to the general public.

During the workshops and interviews some stakeholders provided specific examples of how and where EEA's outputs can be relevant for the general public. For example, during their dedicated workshop the NFPs recognised that the awareness of the EEA's work among citizens is very topic-related, for example it is high in relation to air quality and/or bathing water quality monitoring. It was also pointed out that some EEA outputs are distributed at Member State level, e.g., the EEA Signals reports was sent to secondary schools in Sweden and Poland.

During the EEA-Eionet Day the EEA also reflected on their activities that are targeted on the public. It was mentioned that the approach of the EEA when bringing environment and climate to the public is to make the information personal and relatable, e.g., by monetising the costs of air pollution. The following specific examples were mentioned:

- Developing factsheets on how specific chemical substances can affect people's health, with advice on how citizens can protect themselves;
- Information on air quality (the Air Quality Index) and/or on the quality of local bathing water;
- Information on flood threats to individual neighbourhoods if sea level rises, for citizens to see the number of people impacted as well as their own area.

#### External perception - EEA citations/mentions and its social media activity

This section looks at the **mentions of EEA or of EEA products and services in EU-related documents** by European Commission, European Parliament, Council, other EU institutions, EP and EC debates, adopted legislation and stakeholders, based on information collected by the EEA's Communications department. While a drastic increase over the evaluation period as a whole is apparent, there was a short period of decreased mentions in 2019. The following steep rise of mentions in 2020 (+56% compared to 2019) and in 2021 (+232% compared to 2019) coincides with the publication of the State of the Environment Report 2020 and of the European Green Deal.

**Table 6.10: Number of total mentions**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of total mentions	295	359	299	467	994

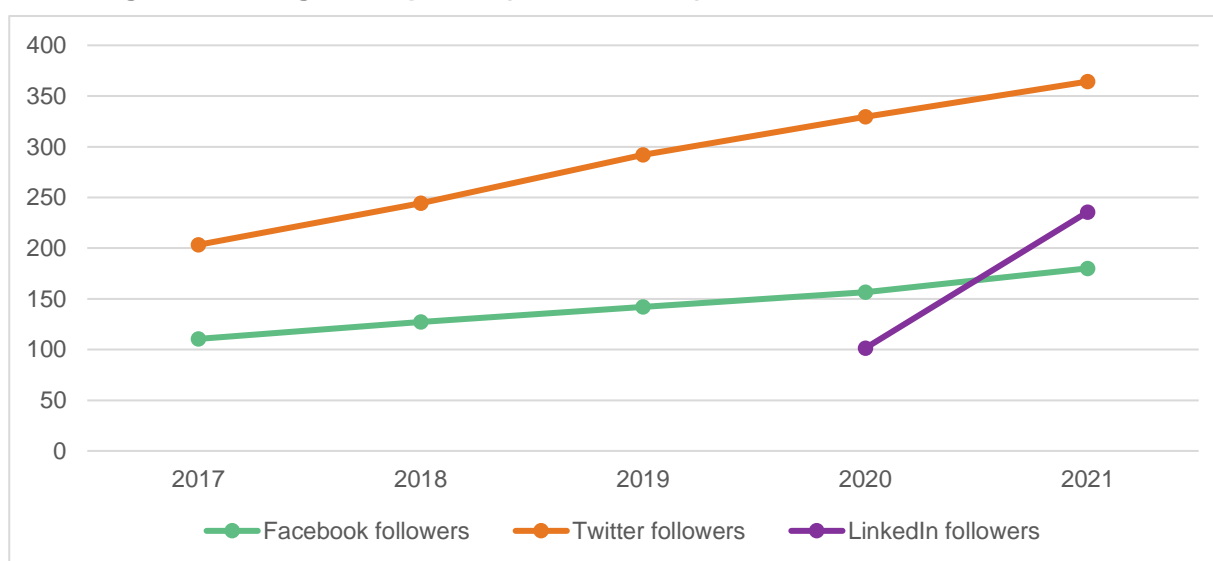
Source: Data provided by EEA (internal statistics from EEA Communications department)

The highest number of mentions were recorded in both years with the European Parliament: 149 mentions (51% of the total number) in 2017 and 426 mentions (43% of the total number) in 2021.

The European Commission follows second in both years with 74 mentions (25% of the total number) in 2017 and 361 (36% of the total number) in 2021.

In addition to the EEA citations and mentions, the EEA's internal statistics on communication have been used to compare the **outreach of their different social media accounts**. During the evaluation period, an increasing use of social media was observed. The EEA used different social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to communicate with the users and general public. Overall, social media was recognised by the EEA as an important communication tool and was actively used. The figure below shows a comparison of followers of EEA's Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn account. Over the years relevant for the evaluation period, there was a gradual and ongoing increase in followers of all social media accounts (noting that the LinkedIn account appears to be active only since 2019 as data from earlier years are not available).

**Figure 6.15: Overview of followers of EEA's social media accounts targeted at the general public (in thousands)**



Source: From data provided by the EEA

During the EEA-Eionet Day held on 1 March 2023 (that the project team was invited to observe) some further insights were provided on the EEA's online presence. The two most active accounts appear to be the LinkedIn and Twitter pages, which engage with policy makers, NGOs and researchers (on Twitter) and with researchers, other organisations and students (on LinkedIn). The EEA also has a joint Instagram account (together with ECDC, ECHA, EFSA, EMA and DG SANTE).

It was also mentioned that the EEA's Facebook presence is being slowly phased out. This (together with the general decline of Facebook over the last years) might explain the slow decrease in Facebook content views; from approx. 1.4 million in 2017 to 1.09 million in 2021.

A review of the total numbers of the **EEA's newsletters** that have been distributed has also been undertaken. There was a significant dip between 2017 and 2018 (from a little over 40,000 to just under 25,000), however since 2018 the EEA has put increasing effort into sending their quarterly newsletter, and the number had gone back up to around 35,000 by 2021. According to the data provided by the EEA, the rate of the received newsletters that were opened varied between approximately 20 and 30%, across the entire evaluation period.



## 6.4.2 Relevance of EEA and Eionet work for EU policy

This section addresses two evaluation questions:

*EQ 18: To what extent is the work of the EEA and Eionet (both core and non-core activities) coherent with EU environmental policy priorities, such as reaching the zero pollution ambition, achieving climate neutrality, preserving and protecting nature and ecosystem and enhancing circular economy?*

*EQ 21: To what extent do the tasks of the EEA and the Eionet align with the EEA's objectives as set out in Regulation 401/2009?*

**Main issues considered:** This section discusses two main topics. Firstly, it focuses on the alignment of the EEA's efforts and tasks with the current priorities and policy topics of the EU. Secondly, it addresses the relevance of the EEA's Founding Regulation. Specifically, it touches upon whether the current tasks of the EEA are well reflected in the Founding Regulation and whether there is a need to revise its contents.

**Main findings:** In terms of EEA's relevance in relation to current policy priorities, it was found that the EEA played an important role in tracking the 7th EAP. This again helped inform the development of the 8th EAP, which is one of the most important policy documents in the environment field, and the EGD. The 8th EAP was also used to assess whether the EEA's tasks as outlined by the Founding Regulation still match the current policy priorities of the EU, which remains the case. However, it was also found that the broader and/or cross-cutting aspects which the EEA frequently works on (e.g. circular economy, biodiversity, climate change, pollution or sustainability as a whole) are not reflected in the Founding Regulation. Nevertheless, the EEA is addressing all the tasks and topics it is expected to within its core business.

As to the need to reopen and/or revise the Founding Regulation, it was found that there are both benefits and drawbacks, which were also recognised by stakeholders. Benefits include a clearer formulation and delineation of EEA's tasks, aligning the mandate with policy priorities such as CE, climate change, biodiversity, addressing some gaps in the Regulation (linked to digitisation, new technologies and data source), further aligning with the Common Approach, ensuring that outdated terminology is updated, It could also be an opportunity to reinforce the mandate of EEA in reporting obligations, or (possibly) to incorporate some long-term agreements into core tasks and to diversify the funding mechanisms. At the same time, it could become a costly and long process with uncertain outcomes of the political negotiations. The current Regulation is also considered to be broad enough to incorporate new tasks and activities and there is a risk that by being more precise this flexibility will be lost. There are options to achieve some of these benefits that would not involve reopening the regulation. These options include defining specific tasks in a Memorandum of Understanding between the EEA and the Commission, in a new or revised legislations, by relying on the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making or by revising the Regulation through the ordinary legislative procedure.

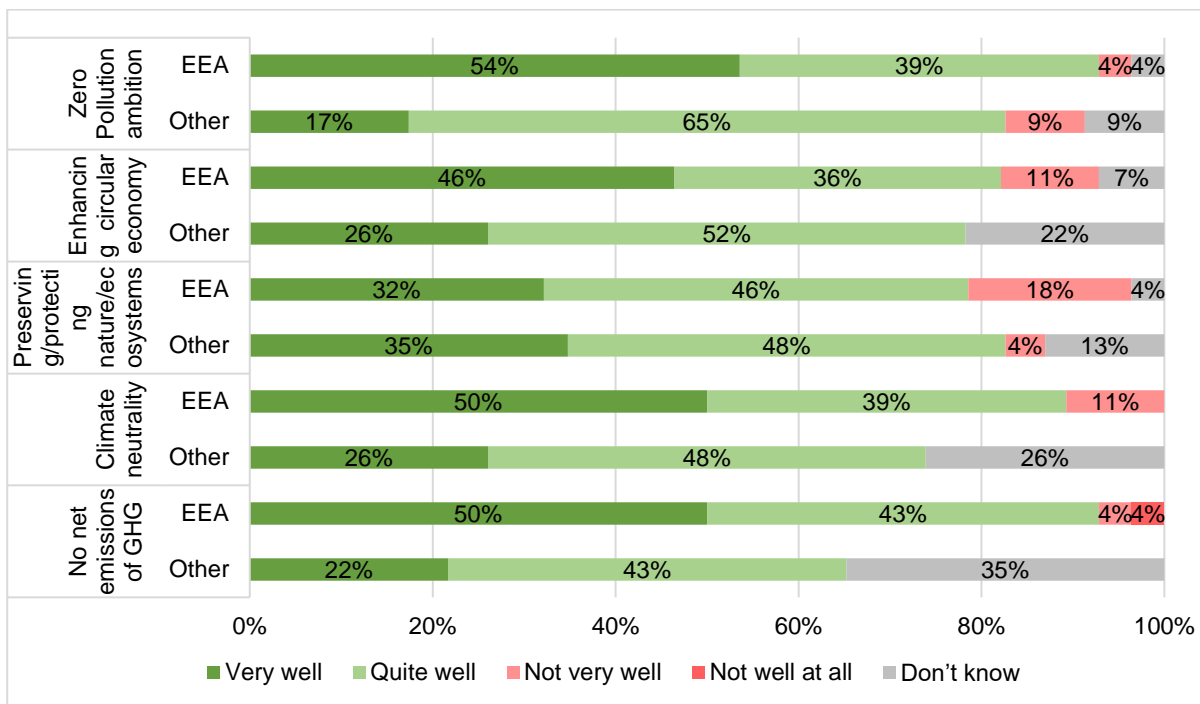
### Alignment of the EEA and Eionet's work with current EU policy priorities

An important aspect of 'relevance' is the alignment of the EEA's and Eionet's work with the current policy priorities of the EU.

Annex 4 presents a case study of the EEA's work on the 7th Environmental Action Programme (EAP) / 7th EAP Monitoring Framework. In summary, the case study found that the EEA played a role in the monitoring of the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP. This helped to inform the development of the monitoring approach in the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP, which is an important policy document in the environment field, as well as the EGD.

The opinions of stakeholders on this issue were sought during the **stakeholder survey**. Respondents were asked how well they felt the EEA supports five different EU environmental policies. As shown in the figure below, stakeholders thought the key policies were supported rather equally by the work carried out by the EEA and Eionet. Respondents from EEA had a slightly more positive outlook on the effect of their work on EU policy priorities, which could be either explained by their greater insights on EEA products, or simply as internal bias.

**Figure 6.16: “Thinking of the work that EEA and Eionet do, to what extent does it support the following EU policy priorities?”**



Source: Online Survey (10/02/2023 - 28/03/2023). Q21, N=28 for EEA staff, N=23 for Other respondents

Generally, interviewed stakeholders were of the opinion that the EEA’s work is **well aligned** with the current EU policy priorities, as per the EGD. Several stakeholders (NFPs, EEA Senior staff and management and representatives of the European Commission’s DGs directly working with the EEA / members of the Inter-Service Group) also mentioned that the **Eionet’s** work is also well aligned with the EGD policy priorities. It was mentioned that it is very responsive to policy developments, and that the alignment has improved since the modernisation process. The new Strategy was felt to have helped facilitate the shift. For some years, the EEA and Eionet have tried to use different data and to bring in integrated messages. With the introduction of the EGD, they have included this in their Strategic Programme.

Stakeholders also expressed their opinions regarding whether there are any topics missing, i.e., whether there are any topics the EEA should focus on, which is not currently doing. Generally speaking, stakeholders were of the opinion that the EEA is covering all the tasks it is required to. However, there were some suggestions for **topics in which the EEA could expand its level of activity**. Stakeholders saw an added value in an increased involvement of the EEA in these topics, because jointly they all have an impact on the environment. Stakeholders mentioned:

- Soils and the agri-food sector;
- Waste;
- Chemicals; and

- Social dimension of climate and environmental policy.

With regard to chemicals, stakeholders explained that the EEA should specifically look into the impacts of chemicals on the environment. They felt that this would not overlap with the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), as its (the ECHA's) focus is very specific and EEA's involvement in the topic would be of added value. For example, it was suggested that the EEA could also look into 'early warning reports' for Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). Member States often collect good data regarding this, which the EEA could utilise.

In addition to specific environmental topics, some stakeholders also suggested that the EEA could consider playing a more direct and increasing role in **monitoring and non-compliance**. With regard to monitoring, stakeholders suggested that EEA would play a role in monitoring of (environmental and social) impacts of EU policies in Member States. Regarding non-compliance, the EEA could play a role through Environmental Implementation Reviews<sup>90</sup>, due to its good relations with Member States. As such, it could contribute to a review of how well EGD policies are being implemented. This is closely connected to the 'early warning' reports, which are already being developed by the EEA – please refer to the case study new Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) and its excerpt under section 6.4.1. However, other stakeholders pointed out downsides to more direct involvement of the EEA in monitoring as it risks damaging the good relationship between the EEA and its member countries and also because compliance assessment should be the role of DG ENV.

One topic mentioned **where the EEA should limit its activities**, was biomass. One stakeholder mentioned that the EEA started looking into this because it was a topic with increasing traction, however it is a topic on which the JRC has worked for many years. As such, the stakeholder felt that it is not necessary for the EEA to be involved, to avoid duplication of efforts. However, if the EEA were to be involved, its connections within Member States would be beneficial.

### Relevance of Regulation 401/2009

The relevance of the mandate and objectives of the EEA as outlined in the Founding Regulation were also addressed in the support study to the previous evaluation<sup>91</sup>. It was concluded that, at the time, the current mandate and overall objective of the EEA as stated in Article 1 were still valid and fit for purpose. It provides a broad mandate and a frame within which activities and outputs can be planned, taking into account the changing policy framework and needs as expressed in the environmental action programmes to which the objective refers. It also noted that the objectives were based on somewhat outdated language not reflecting how environmental issues are analysed in a more integrated way and taking into account the mainstreaming of environmental concerns in other policy areas.

The following reviews the Founding Regulation from three different angles: first, in terms of a comparison of the EEA's current tasks with the Regulation's objectives; second, in terms of elements missing from the Regulation; and third, in terms of alignment with the Common Approach of Decentralised Agencies.

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<sup>90</sup> The Environmental Implementation Review (EIR) is a regular reporting tool designed to improve the implementation of EU environmental laws and policies. See [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/law-and-governance/environmental-implementation-review\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/law-and-governance/environmental-implementation-review_en)

<sup>91</sup> See <https://www.eea.europa.eu/about-us/documents/support-study-on-the-evaluation/view>

## Analysis of current tasks of the EEA compared to the objectives of the Regulation

Building upon the previous evaluation, we carried out **desk research on the relevance of areas of work of the EEA against the objectives of the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP**. We are aware that the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP was introduced at the end of the evaluation period. However, it is considered highly relevant for two reasons:

- The previous evaluation considered the alignment of the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP. It found that all areas of work in Article 3(2) a-h of the Founding Regulation are reflected in one or more priority objectives of the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP.
- On the basis of inputs from stakeholders the introduction of the European Green Deal has had a significant impact on the relevance of the work of the EEA, and the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP builds on (but is not limited to) the EGD's priority areas.

Art. 3(2) of the Founding Regulation defines the principal areas of work of the EEA as:

- air quality and atmospheric emissions;
- water quality, pollutants and water resources;
- the state of the soil, of the fauna and flora, and of biotopes;
- land use and natural resources;
- waste management;
- noise emissions;
- chemical substances which are hazardous for the environment; and
- coastal and marine protection.

It also stipulates that, in addition to the priority areas of work, transfrontier, plurinational and global phenomena shall be covered; the socioeconomic dimension shall also be taken into account; and exchange of information with other bodies should take place.

Art. 2 of the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP sets out the long-term objective that *'by 2050 at the latest, people live well, within the planetary boundaries in a well-being economy where nothing is wasted, growth is regenerative, climate neutrality in the Union has been achieved and inequalities have been significantly reduced. A healthy environment underpins the well-being of all people and is an environment in which biodiversity is conserved, ecosystems thrive, and nature is protected and restored, leading to increased resilience to climate change, weather- and climate-related disasters and other environmental risks. The Union sets the pace for ensuring the prosperity of present and future generations globally, guided by intergenerational responsibility'*. Art. 2(2) sets out 6 priority objectives, for the period until 2030:

1. Achieving the **2030 greenhouse gas emission reduction target** and **climate neutrality by 2050**;
2. Enhancing adaptive capacity, **strengthening resilience** and **reducing vulnerability to climate change**;
3. Advancing towards a regenerative growth model, decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation, and accelerating the transition to a **circular economy**;
4. Pursuing a **zero-pollution ambition**, including for **air, water and soil** and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans;
5. Protecting, preserving and restoring **biodiversity**, and enhancing natural capital; and

6. Reducing environmental and climate pressures related to **production and consumption** (particularly in the areas of energy, industry, buildings and infrastructure, mobility, tourism, international trade and the food system).

The table below provides a comparison of the areas of work in the EEA's Regulation and in the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP.

**Table 6.11: Areas of work and their relevance compared to the 8th EAP priority objectives**

Areas of work in EEA Regulation	Areas of work / priority objectives of the 8 <sup>th</sup> EAP
Air quality and atmospheric emissions	4: Pursuing a <b>zero-pollution ambition</b> , including for <b>air, water and soil</b> and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans
Water quality, pollutants and water resources	4: Pursuing a <b>zero-pollution ambition</b> , including for <b>air, water and soil</b> and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans
The state of the soil, flora and fauna, and of biotopes	4: Pursuing a <b>zero-pollution ambition</b> , including for <b>air, water and soil</b> and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans 5: Protecting, preserving and restoring <b>biodiversity</b> , and enhancing natural capital
Land use and natural resources	3: Advancing towards a regenerative growth model, decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation, and accelerating the transition to a <b>circular economy</b> ; 4: Pursuing a <b>zero-pollution ambition</b> , including for <b>air, water and soil</b> and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans 5: Protecting, preserving and restoring <b>biodiversity</b> , and enhancing natural capital 6: Reducing environmental and climate <b>pressures related to production and consumption</b> (particularly in the areas of energy, industry, buildings and infrastructure, mobility, tourism, international trade and the food system)
Waste management	3: Advancing towards a regenerative growth model, decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation, and accelerating the transition to a <b>circular economy</b> 6: Reducing environmental and climate <b>pressures related to production and consumption</b> (particularly in the areas of energy, industry, buildings and infrastructure, mobility, tourism, international trade and the food system)
Noise emissions	4: Pursuing a <b>zero-pollution ambition</b> , including for <b>air, water and soil</b> and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans
Chemical substances hazardous for the environment	4: Pursuing a <b>zero-pollution ambition</b> , including for <b>air, water and soil</b> and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans 6: Reducing environmental and climate <b>pressures related to production and consumption</b> (particularly in the areas of energy, industry, buildings and infrastructure, mobility, tourism, international trade and the food system)
Coastal and marine protection	4: Pursuing a <b>zero-pollution ambition</b> , including for <b>air, water and soil</b> and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans

Areas of work in EEA Regulation	Areas of work / priority objectives of the 8 <sup>th</sup> EAP
	5: Protecting, preserving and restoring <b>biodiversity</b> , and enhancing natural capital
Transfrontier, plurinational and global phenomena	<p>1: Achieving the <b>2030 greenhouse gas emission reduction target</b> and <b>climate neutrality by 2050</b>;</p> <p>2: Enhancing adaptive capacity, <b>strengthening resilience</b> and <b>reducing vulnerability to climate change</b>;</p> <p>3: Advancing towards a regenerative growth model, decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation, and accelerating the transition to a <b>circular economy</b>;</p> <p>4: Pursuing a <b>zero-pollution ambition</b>, including for <b>air, water and soil</b> and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans;</p> <p>5: Protecting, preserving and restoring <b>biodiversity</b>, and enhancing natural capital; and</p> <p>6: Reducing environmental and climate pressures related to <b>production and consumption</b> (particularly in the areas of energy, industry, buildings and infrastructure, mobility, tourism, international trade and the food system).</p>
Socioeconomic dimension	<p>1: Achieving the 2030 greenhouse gas emission reduction target and <b>climate neutrality by 2050</b>;</p> <p>2: Enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening <b>resilience</b> and <b>reducing vulnerability to climate change</b>;</p> <p>3: Advancing towards a regenerative growth model, decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation, and accelerating the transition to a <b>circular economy</b>;</p> <p>4: Pursuing a <b>zero-pollution ambition</b>, including for air, water and soil and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans;</p> <p>5: Protecting, preserving and restoring <b>biodiversity</b>, and enhancing natural capital; and</p> <p>6: Reducing environmental and climate pressures related to <b>production and consumption</b> (particularly in the areas of energy, industry, buildings and infrastructure, mobility, tourism, international trade and the food system).</p>

With regard to the relevance of the areas of work, the table shows that all areas of work in Article 3(2) a-h of the Founding Regulation are reflected in one or more priority objectives of the 8th EAP. This is also the case for the cross-cutting areas of work on transfrontier, plurinational and global phenomena and the socioeconomic dimension.

The comparison of the core tasks as per the Regulation next to the objectives of the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP can further be used as a basis for **analysis of whether the tasks of the EEA have been broadened compared to its original tasks**. To that end, the new EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030 and its ‘Strategic Objectives’ and ‘Areas of work’ can be considered. The Strategic Objectives read as follows:

- SO1: Supporting policy implementation and sustainability transitions;
- SO2: Providing timely input to solutions for sustainability challenges;
- SO3: Building stronger networks and partnerships

- SO4: Making full use of the potential of data, technology and digitalisation; and
- SO5: Resourcing our shared ambitions.

From the SOs 1-4, it can be seen that the EEA has shifted to include the more cross-cutting topics of 'sustainability' and 'digitalisation', rather than focusing on the topical areas of air, waste, noise, etc. as defined in the Founding Regulation. The shift towards the cross-cutting topics is further reflected in the 'Areas of work' as outlined in the Strategy: Work area 2 includes climate change mitigation and ozone depletion, climate change impacts and adaptation, energy and transport – four work areas that need to be tackled simultaneously to achieve integrated and effective results. Work area 4 for circular economy and resource use encompasses circular economy and industrial transformation, support to the implementation of the EU waste legislation, and material flows. Work area 5 is the expression of integrated and cross-cutting approaches with a focus on sustainability transition enablers economics, finance, innovation governance, and knowledge co-creation with stakeholders.

This shift towards cross-cutting topics can also be observed even before the introduction of the Strategy in 2021, in the EEA's publication plans for 2017-2021. Each year of the evaluation period, a number of publications have been put forward that reflect this shift, for example:

- 2017: Climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in Europe; or Circular economy by design – products in the circular economy.
- 2018: National policies and measures on climate change mitigation in Europe; National climate change vulnerability and risk assessments in Europe; Mapping Europe's ecosystem; or The circular economy and bioeconomy – Partners in sustainability.
- 2019: Paving the way for a circular economy: insights on status and potentials; Sustainability transitions: policy and practice; or Climate change adaptation in the agriculture sector in Europe.
- 2020: Monitoring and evaluation of national adaptation policies throughout the policy cycle; or Urban adaptation in Europe: how cities and towns respond to climate change.

While the areas of work of the EEA as per the Founding Regulation can be identified within the objectives of the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP, a shift towards and cross-topical, integrated approach can be observed, which is a shift away the sectoral approach taken by the Regulation.

The formulation of the Founding Regulation also omits the activities of the EEA in relation to use of digital technologies, integration of other sources of data, Copernicus, INSPIRE, etc. In relation to digital technologies, as discussed above in section 6.2.6, the EEA has made good use of digital technologies. Furthermore, SO 4 of the EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030 directly touches upon this, as well as the fact that EEA adopted its digitalisation strategy.

### Current EEA activities missing from the Regulation

As has been recognised above, **the range of topics the EEA now works on has become broader than those explicitly listed in the Founding Regulation**. A specific example of a missing topic is 'climate change' and its mitigation and adaptation. However, thanks to complementary climate legislation that lays down the role and tasks of the EEA in supporting it, climate change has become one of the Agency's key tasks, and the case could be made that this should be reflected in the EEA's legal basis. For some areas, activities are not missing per se, however wording could be aligned to more contemporary use of terminology, for example "land use and natural resources"/"state of the



soil, flora and fauna and of biotopes” compared to the now more commonly used “biodiversity and ecosystems”.

Other gaps / differences in terminology between the Founding Regulation and the EEA’s current activities include:

- Reference to the use of digital technologies.
- Certain aspects of Circular Economy, with the exception of waste, and wider socio-economic issues.
- Integrated and cross-cutting perspective of current policy priorities (e.g. biodiversity and ecosystems, environmental pollution).

There are also some aspects where the EEA’s current activities and roles could be clarified, and defined in a clearer way. These include:

- EEA’s role in supporting environmental reporting obligations;
- EEA’s role in supporting to the Commission’s role in assuring enforcement and compliance with EU legislation;
- EEA’s current ‘non-core’ activities.

### **Common Approach on Decentralised Agencies**

In addition, the need to review the Regulation from the perspective of non-conformity with the Common Approach on Decentralised Agencies<sup>92</sup> has also been considered (see Annex 3 for details).

As was pointed out in stakeholder consultations, one reason for amending the constituting regulation of an existing agency would be non-conformity with the Common Approach. The 2018 Evaluation Support Study already carried out an assessment of the level of conformity of the EEA with the Common Approach. Since the question has remained topical for this evaluation, the assessment has been updated below to explore how the EEA setup matches the various principles and whether changes have occurred in the past five years.

From the detailed assessment in in Annex 3, it can be seen that the majority of principles are either covered in the Founding Regulation, the Rules of Procedure of the Management Board and of the Scientific Committee, or are being applied as current practice (and have also been streamlined further in comparison to the 2018 Evaluation Support Study through for example further guidance/templates by the Commission).

As for missing elements, the Founding Regulation does not contain an evaluation clause, with a sunset or review clause for inclusion within (typically every other) evaluation. There is no clear

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<sup>92</sup> The European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission adopted in 2012 a Joint Statement outlining a “Common Approach on Decentralised Agencies”. This approach sets out common principles on the role and position of the agencies in the EU’s institutional landscape, the creation, structure and operation of these agencies, together with funding, budgetary, supervision and management issues. While non-binding, the three institutions have committed to adhere to the principles in the establishment of future agencies, and have urged existing agencies to implement the principles in their ongoing activities and operations.

indication on the term limits for the Executive Director, and no specific procedure for the ED's dismissal in case of misconduct. There are no specifications as to the competences of the members of the Management Board and their term is not limited in time.

It has to be noted that none of the missing elements need to be specified at the level of a constituent act, such as the Founding Regulation. In terms of **regular review** (i.e. evaluations every five years), the Agency has been subject to regular review since 2008, which lies firmly within the Commission's right to act, and is also codified in Art. 34 of the Financial Regulation 2018/1046.

As regards **procedures related to the Executive Director**, the Management Board could take a decision on the term limitation and on procedural aspects for dismissal in case of misconduct. In the latter, general staff regulations of the Commission apply as well.

Further specifications regarding **competences of the members of the MB or a time-limitation in their term** could be addressed within the Rules of Procedure. In this regard though there might be compelling reasons why this has not been taken up in previous iterations of the Rules of Procedure (e.g., nomination of members to the MB is the prerogative of the Member State, and organisational systems within Member States would not allow for frequent rotation of a member).

Changes during the evaluation period compared to the previous one pertain to the provisions of the Financial Regulation 2018/1046 which introduced greater alignment of budget cycles and standardised reporting across agencies. While improvements were reportedly made in relation to greater alignment of communication activities between the agency and the Commission, there is room for improvement.

In summary, the outcome of the assessment agrees with interviewees' assessments that a revision of the Founding Regulation on mere grounds of these missing elements that are not fully met within the Common Approach on Decentralised Agencies does not seem necessary or proportionate. Although, if a decision were to be taken that the Founding Regulation should be revised for other reasons, this would be an opportunity to codify missing elements.

### **Stakeholders' views**

Stakeholders also expressed their views on **whether the objectives of the Regulation are aligned with the current policy objectives**. During the stakeholder interviews, it was mentioned by a few stakeholders specifically (EEA Management Board and EEA Senior Management and Staff) that the EGD gave the EEA the opportunity to respond to further, higher-level, and relevant knowledge demands that respond to the systemic challenges we are facing. Since the EGD was published the EEA have worked on broader knowledge areas than in the past.

A majority of stakeholders who expressed their views (i.e., EEA Management Board, EEA Senior Staff and Management, representatives of DG ENER of the European Commission; many stakeholders) were of the opinion that the objectives of the Regulation are aligned with current policy objectives, including regarding work on energy or climate topics. Nevertheless, one stakeholder (representative of EEA staff) also mentioned that over time the focus of the EEA shifts more towards the needs of the EU rather than addressing the needs of the Member States.

There were, however, some remarks regarding the contents and/or the wording of the Regulation:

- The topic of *climate mitigation and adaptation is not included* in the Regulation (Art. 3), even though it is a topic on which the EEA works. At the same time, stakeholders were mainly of the opinion that the lack of the specific mention of ‘climate’ within the Regulation did not prevent the Agency from working on climate-related topics.
- Another aspect missing from the Regulation that was mentioned by one stakeholder (EEA Management Board) was the fact ‘sustainability’ following the adoption of the SDGs has not been properly reflected in the Regulation.
- The second most mentioned aspect regarding the contents and the wording of the Regulation is the fact that, given the age of the Regulation, *some of its terminology is outdated*. For example, it was mentioned that the term ‘waste’ could be complemented with ‘circular economy’ and that the phrase ‘telematics’ is outdated.

Several stakeholders were of the opinion that **there is no need to re-open** the Regulation. Because of its broad formulation new tasks fit within the scope and the current wording does not limit the EEA’s ability to work on new topics (e.g., LULUCF). It was also suggested that Art. 3 of the Regulation does not necessarily have to be read as an exhaustive list. Instead, if there are aspects that are not mentioned but there is a mutual agreement between the EEA, Eionet, Commission and Member States, these can be internally added (which stakeholders have seen happen in the past).

However, there were mixed opinions regarding the need to re-open the Regulation. Half of the stakeholders who expressed their views found that reopening was not necessary, while the other half thought that **there would be some benefits** to it. First of all, it was mentioned that, generally speaking, it was an old regulation. Secondly, it could be used as an opportunity to clearly formulate and delineate the EEA’s tasks, aligning them with the current policy priorities. Lastly, the revision could clarify governance on EC’s side as well as the relationships between the EEA and DG ENV and DG CLIMA and generally more recognition of engagements with other DGs.

However, a somewhat equally sized group of stakeholders were not sure whether a reopening is necessary and that it might **not be worth the risks** it may bring about. The main reservations touched upon the fact that there is a danger of the scope becoming too broad and the Agency could lose its specialisation (turning from an environment agency to a ‘sustainability agency’). Secondly the revision could become too political, in terms of negotiations with the Council and Parliament, which could bring about undesirable changes to the Regulation. Lastly, stakeholders also pointed out that the Regulation can be adjusted through different means other than by a full reopening of the Regulation. It was mentioned that specific tasks and/or constituencies have been added in the past (e.g., in relation to the Stabilisation and Association Process or the Advisory Board on Climate Change).

A few stakeholders also touched upon the importance of the revision of the Regulation for the **Eionet**, specifically. One stakeholder said there was no added value as the Regulation remains valid for the purposes of the Eionet. The same sentiment was expressed by the NFPs and Directors of ETCs (during an in-person workshop in Copenhagen). However, another stakeholder flagged that it could help Eionet in a sense of formalising the working relationships between the Eionet and the EEA, which could improve the efficiency of some formal activities. The ETC Directors also felt like reopening the Regulation could provide an opportunity to better specify their role within the legislation.

### **Potential benefits and drawbacks of reopening and revising the Regulation**

Based on the findings and discussions above, the following summary table describes the potential benefits and drawbacks of reopening and revising the Founding Regulation.

Benefits of reopening the Regulation	Drawbacks of reopening the Regulation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear formulation and delineation of EEA's tasks;</li> <li>▪ Aligning the scope and objectives with the new priorities, integrated and systemic approach: climate change policies, circular economy, biodiversity, pollution to the environment, sustainability, etc.</li> <li>▪ Gaps in the Regulation can be addressed, e.g. adding a reference to digital technologies, Copernicus, INSPIRE, use/integration of various sources of data etc.;</li> <li>▪ Further formal alignment with the Common Approach (e.g. provision on evaluation every 5 years, sunset clause etc.);</li> <li>▪ Possibility to add long-term agreements in what are current non-core activities for ensuring their continuity including resources aspects;</li> <li>▪ Opportunity to consider the diversification of funding sources in the legislation;</li> <li>▪ Reinforcement of the role of EEA in support to environmental reporting obligations;</li> <li>▪ Possibility to revise outdated terminology (e.g., transfrontier, plurinational, telematics);</li> <li>▪ There is precedent for reviewing an Agency's mandate (e.g. the European Medicines Agency);</li> <li>▪ Inclusion of a systematic way of working to streamline the informal manner of working within the Eionet and the EEA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No pressing need – the Regulation remains broad enough to accommodate EEA's current and additional tasks;</li> <li>▪ New tasks can be added and defined in detail in other specific/sectorial legislations (as it is already the case) instead of the EEA Regulation;</li> <li>▪ The Regulation does not have to be precise, and detailed on tasks which are incorporated in the MAWPs and SPDs; the governance aspects stipulated in the Regulation are still relevant;</li> <li>▪ Formulating tasks more precisely could result in an inability to add new tasks and/or priorities in the future;</li> <li>▪ The Regulation is sufficiently aligned with the Common Approach;</li> <li>▪ Revision of a Regulation is lengthy and resource intensive;</li> <li>▪ Risk of unknown impacts and outcomes of political negotiations of the revision;</li> <li>▪ Methods other than a full reopening exist that would enable adjusting the working practices. These are less resource intensive and do not present the same risks as adjustments to the Regulation via the full policy cycle and ordinary legislative procedure (see below).</li> </ul>

### Possibilities for revising the tasks of the EEA

Since the setup of the EEA, the constituent acts of Agencies (which is the vast majority) have become more detailed. In general, two approaches to drafting a Founding Regulation exist (the choice of the approach often lies with the leading DG introducing a given Agency):

- 1) Specific and detailed, ensuring all tasks are codified. This maximises clarity and transparency, but limits flexibility; or
- 2) More general wording of the Regulation, which allows for more flexibility but can lead to different interpretations.

If the decision to change the tasks of the EEA outlined in the Founding Regulation was to be taken, several options for this exist, legal or political. **Legal options include:**

- Amendment to the EEA's Regulation through other legal instruments. This has taken place recently with the adoption of the European Climate Law (Regulation (EU) 2021/1119). The European Climate Law (Art. 12) amends the EEA Regulation by inserting in it a new article (10a) establishing a European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change.
- Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on Better Law-Making where, in accordance with Section VIII (46) on simplification, the Commission, Parliament and Council '*confirm their commitment to using the legislative technique of recasting for the modification of existing legislation more frequently and in full respect of the Interinstitutional Agreement of 28 November 2001 on a more structured use of the recasting technique for legal acts*'.
- The full policy cycle under the ordinary legislative procedure, which would reopen the Founding Regulation in its entirety. The ordinary legislative procedure starts with a legislative proposal from the Commission and consists of up to three readings, with the possibility for the co-legislators to agree on a joint text - and thereby conclude the procedure - at any reading.

From a political perspective, a determining factor is that – while DG Environment remains the lead partner DG for the EEA – the EEA now cooperates with several other DGs. This process began with the formation of DG CLIMA, who took some of the work of DG ENV which is relatively visible in the Founding Regulation (e.g. f-gases) but have expanded into areas which are not explicitly listed, such as greenhouse gas emissions, and vehicle data. This has expanded with the additions of multiple so called 'non core' aspects of EEA work, covered in Chapters 5 and 6.3.3. in this report.

It was suggested by the Secretariat-General that one way of helping to address some of the issues, particularly relating to the core and non-core activities, without reopening the Founding Regulation would be to draft and sign a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Agency and DG ENV**. This MoU would not be a legal instrument but could help clarify the work of the Agency with multiple DGs. This approach has been used especially where an Agency has one lead DG but also receives subventions/funding from other DGs. The idea of developing MoUs between the partner DGs and a decentralised agency comes from recent (non-compulsory) recommendations by the Sec Gen, to clarify the coordination role of the partner DGs and working practices with the Agencies. An example of such an approach is the MoU between DG EMPL and the European Labour Authority.

### 6.4.3 Prioritisation of tasks and alignment with EU priorities

This section addresses:

*EQ 9: Does the EEA undertake any prioritisation screening of certain environmental and climate topics or tasks and, if so, has this prioritisation been efficient taking into account its resources (including prioritisation between tasks that respond to legal obligations or policy priorities over other tasks that do not respond to any particular policy priority)? Has the Agency done so in response to new policy needs?*

*EQ 22: How far are the EEA's tasks and resources aligned with key EU policy priorities? How appropriate is the balance between 'regulatory tasks' corresponding to EU legal obligations, other tasks in support to EU policy development and implementation, and other tasks not responding to specific EU policy needs? To what extent is it possible to envisage a reprioritisation of certain tasks to make the Agency's work more relevant in the context of new policy priorities?*

**Main issues considered:** This section considers the mechanisms in place for the EEA to prioritise tasks and the experiences recorded by the EEA and DGs in this regard. In doing so it also provides findings on overall collaboration between the EEA and the European Commission. It also considers alignment with EU key priorities, the balance between legal obligations and other tasks, insights experiences of the EEA with reprioritisation, including some examples of work that could be deprioritised.

**Main findings:** There are various mechanisms in place for the EEA to carry out prioritisation of tasks based on the Commission priorities, through the ISG and the annual Commission Opinions on the SPDs, as well as the structured dialogue between the Commission and the EEA. While these mechanisms have allowed the EEA to prioritise its tasks somewhat efficiently, there is a need for better coordination and more consultation between DG ENV and the EEA, albeit this seems changing after the evaluated period.

The tasks of the EEA are aligned with EU Policy as the EEA adequately cover all EU climate and environmental policy priorities and are not missing any significant environmental, climate or EGD related issues. This alignment has improved since the modernisation process. Policy priorities increasingly require expertise across different thematic areas and due to digitalisation developments, the EEA would benefit from shifting the balance towards having more staff dedicated to the interpretation of data (than to data collection). While the EEA always attends the tasks that are legal obligations, they also carry out a host of other work that they are not legally bound to do, either requested by the Commission or under their own initiative. Digital innovations (e.g., application building) and publications are examples of EEA work that some feel could be deprioritised.

### Mechanisms for prioritisation

The Single Programming Documents (SPDs) are the main instrument for defining priorities, involving the MB, Commission, Member countries/Eionet and the European Parliament. The EEA work with experts in the Eionet to identify what the priorities are, and seek to find a balance between national and EC needs. It is the Management Board who ensure that the Eionet experts involved in the consultation of the SPD are the right people. The Commission provides its Opinion on SPDs on an annual basis following an internal consultation involving relevant DGs (that are part of the ISG), where the priorities of the Commission are discussed. On this basis, the EEA provides its feedback and a dialogue takes place.

While this process seems to work well overall, an EEA Management Board member mentioned that new ways of structuring information may be needed (currently this is captured in lengthy documents). It also appears that coordination efforts between DG ENV and the EEA to prioritise tasks are not without some difficulties, with some DG ENV staff reporting that the EEA is not responsive enough to their prioritisation requests, and some EEA staff reporting that DG ENV does not provide enough clarity or sufficient overall coordination for the EEA to be able to effectively prioritise tasks. Further critique from some EEA stakeholders is that these mechanisms have tended to assign work and resources to the EEA in a rather top-down manner. This seems to be changing since the recent structured dialogue between DG ENV, CLIMA and EEA aimed at discussing prioritisation, synergies and optimisation of resources in greater detail. In the views of an EEA Senior Management and Staff interviewee, a governance structure where in addition to DG ENV, DG CLIMA could also become a

partner DG of the EEA would be more suitable in that it better reflects the cross-cutting nature of the Agency. However, this proposal goes against the current practices of the Commission where each Agency has a recognised lead partner DG.

Cases where collaboration between the EEA and the EC has been very good according to both parties are the policy areas relating to marine aspects (with DG ENV and MARE), climate (with DG CLIMA) and air quality (with DG ENV).

Further, the EEA have management processes in place for the prioritisation of publications, where thematic units together with their counterparts agree on the publications based on the policy agenda. At regular intervals (i.e. quarterly) they present a publication plan (list of publications and approximate timeline) to the Management Board.

### Alignment of EEA tasks with EU priorities

The general view amongst stakeholders is that the **EEA adequately covers all EU climate and environmental policy priorities** and that this alignment has improved since the modernisation process. In addition, the EEA are not missing any significant environmental, climate or EGD related issues. One Eionet NFP representative noted that current policy priorities require increasing efforts from Eionet experts in different thematic areas. This interviewee proposed changing NFPs into *Horizon Officers* (supported financially by the EEA), so that each MS would have at least one person fully committed to the coordination of the Network. The interviewee mentioned that is the approach taken by other EU Agencies, such as Frontex. An EEA Senior Manager explained that due to digitalisation, whereby data collection is more automated, the EEA would benefit from shifting the balance towards having more staff dedicated to the interpretation of data.

**The EEA attend both tasks that are legal obligations (“must-do”) and tasks that are not legally bound to provide or are derived from political priorities**, either requested by the Commission or out of own initiative. For instance the EEA report on progress related to EU Directives, which is their legal obligation, but also contribute to forward-looking assessments in the EAP, which is not among their legal obligations. Similarly, the backward-looking work that the EEA do for SOER goes beyond simply looking at EU Directives, and hence beyond their legal obligation.

As previously mentioned, the EEA also prioritises tasks by consulting the Commission (along with the European Parliament, Member States and the Scientific Committee) on the SPDs. The EEA needs to find a balance between what the European Commission considers the EEA and Eionet should prioritise, and what the MB members representing EEA member countries consider should be the main priorities of the Agency. However, one member of the EEA Scientific Committee explained that it is difficult for the Agency to make decisions on tasks that should be discontinued or reprioritised as whenever the EEA proposes to discontinue a task and / or adopt a new task, several Member States will disagree.

In terms of **examples of areas where deprioritisation** may be possible, an EEA Management Board member suggested that the EEA may be dedicating too many resources to **digital innovations such as ‘IT application building’** (e.g., the EU Air Quality Index App). Better IT applications exist and commercial application developers will always have more resources to do this than the EEA so arguably the EEA should not engage in this. Two interviewees from the European Commission questioned the relevance of some of the **publications** by the EEA. While they understand that the EEA use such briefings and other documents to reach out to policymakers, the current amount of these which some do not match the policymaking process or are not requested



by the EC, was considered excessive. For a detailed analysis on publications please refer to Chapter 5.3. Section 6.2.2 under the efficiency chapter provides the results of an analysis of resource allocation per activity in the period 2017-2020 showing decreases in financial and human resources for strategic actions which can be partially understood as a proxy of deprioritised areas. However, a list of deprioritised actions beyond what is recorded in the SPDs (see section 6.2.4) is not available.

#### 6.4.4 Flexibility of the EEA

This section addresses *EQ 23: To what extent have the EEA and Eionet shown flexibility, within the boundaries set by the founding regulation, and accommodated new tasks to respond to new policy priority needs?*

**Main issues considered:** This section considers the extent to which the EEA have shown flexibility in their work by adapting to changes as well as by taking on additional tasks (with and without additional budget).

**Main findings:** Stakeholders consider the EEA has been adaptable, constructive, proactive and open to dialogue to accommodate new tasks. This has been the case in particular in the last years of the period covered by this evaluation once the Agency received additional resources.

Overall, stakeholders interviewed considered that the EEA is adaptable, constructive, proactive and open to dialogue to accommodate new tasks (such as those in the EGD) and to respond to new policy priority needs. The EEA seems to have been particularly flexible in the last years of the period covered by this evaluation (i.e., 2020-2021) in terms of their adaptability to attend additional requests (other than those in the EGD). This matches the period when the Agency received additional resources to undertake new tasks as per the EGD. In the first part (2017-2019) of the period under evaluation, the EEA faced a lack of resources and hence had to focus resources on core activities. The issue of de-prioritisation of tasks is discussed in more detail under efficiency in section 6.2.2.

A number of positive examples of EEA adaptability have been provided. For example, the EEA showed adaptability when working with the new UNEP reporting tool relating to aggregated industry data. The EEA also adapted well to the heavy-duty vehicles regulation (2019) as well as to the real-world monitoring of light-duty vehicles. The latter started in 2022 (outside of the evaluated period) but the EEA was fully ready and prepared to collect and process the data. Other examples of adaptation to new priorities mentioned by an interviewee are the efforts that the EEA have made in linking environment and health, and in assessing social and economic impacts of environmental pollution, so as to make their work more relevant to the 'Zero Pollution Action Plan'.

During the evaluation period the EEA have also responded to additional requests from the Commission all of which came along with additional budget. One example is that the EEA engaged with DG CLIMA to help them establish the European Climate and Health Observatory in 2020, for which the EEA received additional resources from DG CLIMA. Other examples are the Forest Information System for Europe (FISE) which the EEA helped to develop and the transfer of the Seveso platforms, which the EEA took over from the JRC.

There are also examples of the EEA having proactively undertaken additional tasks under their own initiative and without having defined or additional resources for them. In the area of air quality, for example, the EEA created the European Air Quality Index (EAQI). The EEA under its own initiative

looked beyond the air quality data in the reporting system and produced assessments to explain the links between air quality and socio-economic inequality. Similarly for industry, the EEA (which would normally simply collect data in the European Industrial Emissions Portal) did analytical work on heavy metals under their own initiative which turned out to be very useful for DG ENV. In both these cases, DG ENV were positive about the work of the EEA.

In terms of policy areas where the EEA could have offered better support to the European Commission during the evaluation period, a couple of interviewees gave some examples: *Chemicals*, to better complement the work conducted by the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) whose focus is mainly limited to Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH); *Waste*; *Agriculture*, and the impact of agriculture on the environment; and *fossil fuel subsidies*. Challenges to provide support included lack of sufficient resources, and potentially lack of expertise. In the case of waste, this might be because historically ESTAT has led the collection of data on waste. It should be noted that (beyond the evaluation period) the role of EEA is expected to be reinforced in the context of the Chemicals Strategy for sustainability. In the case of agriculture, the JRC have the greatest expertise and have a long tradition of supporting DG AGRI (e.g., for the monitoring and control of CAP subsidies) and hence any work on this would require further coordination with these parties.

## 6.5 EU Added value

### 6.5.1 Overall added value of the EEA and Eionet

This section addresses the following two evaluation questions:

- *EQ 25: What is the European added value of the work done by the EEA and Eionet compared to what could have been achieved by the Member States at national and/or regional levels in its absence? What has been the impact of the EEA and Eionet on national, regional and local authorities?*
- *EQ27: What would be the consequences at EU level if the EEA and Eionet were terminated?*

**Issues considered:** It explores possible alternatives to EEA and Eionet delivering its tasks and outlines the added value it brings as an EU-level body to its stakeholders.

**Main findings:** The EEA's EU added value stems mainly from the fact that the tasks assigned to it are relevant to stakeholders at both the EU level and in the Member States (see section 6.4), and that, by and large, it delivers these tasks more effectively (section 6.1), efficiently (section 6.2) and coherently (section 6.3) than would be possible for national authorities acting alone. There was broad consensus amongst stakeholders that the EEA and Eionet were of significant value largely because services provided by the Agency could not be alternatively provided as well by either the European Commission DGs or by the Member States. The EEA was found to add value at an EU-level particularly related to its role in providing comparable data that can serve a benchmarking function and its role in bringing stakeholders together to facilitate knowledge and data sharing. As an EU-level body, EEA also supports international engagement activities.

## Alternatives to EEA

As regards alternative ways in which the EEA's work could be delivered, a few interviewees (NFP and Commission representatives) stated that it could not be handled more efficiently by the Member States or other organisations, in particular the data collection, analytical assessments, and the organisation of the Eionet. Stakeholders felt that, in the absence of the EEA, the European Commission would need to take responsibility for providing the relevant services, which were described as indispensable by the Member States. Though this was seen as a plausible alternative, some interviewees felt that the EEA is better placed than the Commission to provide these services, since it counts with more of the requisite specialist skills and experience. Interviewees also noted that the EEA ensured objectivity in the provision of data (including its analysis and assessment) – which would not necessarily be assured if the functions were transferred to another institution, as the EEA is considered an expert on objective data collection, synthesis, and interpretation. Further to this, the EEA has the advantage of incorporating non-EU members, whereas the Commission can only act on behalf of EU Member States.

There are a number of aspects that interviewees identified as key to describe the added value of the EEA and Eionet. These are examined in turn in the ensuing sections.

### EU-level data and benchmarking

As discussed in greater detail in section 6.1, it is reasonable for Member States to feed their data and perspective to the EEA, which is well placed to compile, analyse and compare the relevant information. As noted by a Board member, this is crucial in determining the EEA's value added, because countries alone would struggle to interpret data from other countries.

The EEA collates data from different countries, thus merging different types of datasets used to monitor similar factors. Interviewees emphasised that in the absence of the EEA, access to key environmental data would have been difficult for both the European Commission and the individual countries, and it was consistently reported that the EEA's ability to handle and process data is commended and appreciated. Cooperation with Member States and Cooperating Countries is crucial in this regard, since – as was pointed out in the stakeholder consultation – delays by one data reporter can have huge impacts on the delivery of a report, and the EEA consequently supports (both with time and resources) member countries throughout the reporting process.

Stakeholders provided various examples of the **importance of the data coordination role performed by the EEA**. For instance, in the case of collecting data for ozone depleting substances, the EEA aggregates and reports data at the EU level; reporting at national level would make it challenging to keep track of changes throughout the years.

One common theme that emerged from the interviews as regards added value is that the EEA promotes **benchmarking by providing credible and comparable data** for Member States and non-EU countries to utilise as they see fit. For example, interviewees noted that this comparable information is essential for ensuring that EU policies are in line with national agendas. Whilst the EEA provides aggregated reporting addressing environmental issues through EU-wide datasets, it also offers the chance for countries to review and compare their data to other countries. According to several interviewees, without the EEA, Member States would not be able to track each other's progress and would struggle to interpret other countries' data. Another important element of benchmarking – in the words of one interviewee from the Management Board – is that the EEA refrains from a “naming and shaming” approach. Instead, it promotes constructive benchmarking, giving countries the opportunity to compare progress on environmental issues.

Some interviewees observed that benchmarking (particularly in the context of the ‘core data flows’ via Reportnet) over the years has pushed countries to improve their performance considerably in a relatively short period of time – this is especially the case of non-EU countries. To illustrate this, interviewees mentioned that performance, as measured by core data flows indicators, improved dramatically when Eastern European countries were preparing to join the European Union, and that such good performance tended to continue once candidate countries became members (e.g. Bulgaria, Romania and most recently Croatia; see sub-section below).

### Knowledge and data sharing

In addition to providing comparable data, the EEA facilitates extensive knowledge and data sharing. This is emphasised through the EEA having had several strategic areas (SAs) related to this in the MAWP 2014-2020, namely SA 3.1: Networking and Partnerships, and SA 3.7: Capacity building in West Balkan and European Neighbourhood Countries. The EEA implemented a series of activities during the evaluation period to foster knowledge exchange among stakeholders, specifically (as part of the MAWP 2014-2020) the EEA delivered NFP/Eionet group meetings three times a year, regular NRC meetings (terminology before the Eionet Modernisation) in priority work areas and training activities as part of the EEAcademy. This commitment is carried through to the new 2021-2030 Strategy, with one of its five strategic objectives (SO3) being ‘Building stronger networks and partnerships’.

Several interviewees agreed that Eionet was the key tool to promote and support knowledge and data sharing in the context of environmental policy. In describing the modernisation process (see section on ‘Eionet Modernisation’ and case study in Annex 4), interviewees highlighted Eionet’s shift from a data provider to a structure based on data exchange and knowledge sharing, and were hopeful that this new structure would enhance active best practice sharing among the stakeholders involved. In addition to this, one interviewee explained that the added value of Eionet (together with the ETCs) lies in the involvement of Member States and subject matter experts under the same network.

Stakeholders noted that environmental policy cannot be decided in a top-down manner but needs to consider changes in different geographical and climatic areas; the EEA and Eionet bring significant added value, as it allows for knowledge to be built across such different scales.

Nevertheless, some interviewees explained that the main challenge for Eionet was to improve the bi-directional flow of knowledge between the EEA and the Member States, which would enhance the EEA and Eionet’s added value (see case study in Annex 4 for further detail).

### Support to international engagement activities

The international dimension was mentioned by some stakeholders as an area where the EEA delivers added value. For example, stakeholders from DG CLIMA and EEA Senior Management also referred to the EEA’s added value in adhering to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer; the Protocol considers the EU to be a Regional Economic Integration Organisation (REIO), and therefore it must comply with the Protocol’s obligations at Union level (this includes reporting, licensing and consumption phase-down). Though some data is also required by the Montreal Protocol at Member State level, interviewees agreed that it is crucial for data to be collected centrally, via the EEA, in order to have an overall picture and to maintain consistency.

Similar comments were made around the role of EEA *vis-à-vis* international organisations. Interviewees explained that the global nature of environment and climate issues means that there is

a clear need for a body that can support member countries in dealing with these issues in international fora. Further to this, the EEA delivered added value by providing aggregate data to international bodies, such as the UN, on behalf of countries.

### 6.5.2 Added value of cooperating with non-EU countries

This section addresses *EQ 26: What is the EU added value of having the EEA collaborating with countries that are not part of the EU in terms of acquis alignment and implementation as well as regional cooperation?*

**Issues considered:** It looks specifically at what the benefit of EEA's engagement with non-EU countries is, both for the EU and for the countries in question.

**Main findings:** Through its inclusion of non-EU European countries, the EEA is able to provide a more comprehensive picture of the data and thus the state of the environment in Europe, recognising the fact that environment and climate transcend borders. The EEA, through Eionet, was also found to increase collaboration and, crucially, play a part in supporting EU candidate countries in familiarising themselves with the EU environmental acquis, and facilitating the adoption thereof.

Most stakeholders found the value of cooperating with non-EU countries to mostly be around data. Interviewees reported the gains of cooperation were reciprocal for both non-EU countries and the EEA. Data is not only crucial for individual countries; as global issues affect all countries, the EU depends on non-EU data in order to provide a more comprehensive and overarching picture, and to subsequently determine whether its approach in responding to national and international issues is appropriate. Further, their participation in EEA can also reinforce the collaboration between the EU MS and non-EU countries on environmental matters,

Cooperation with non-EU countries further promotes research **collaboration**, facilitating learning and communication, and generates knowledge of events occurring within individual countries. The EEA acts as a knowledge partner for national organisations in the field of climate and environment, including through Eionet.

For some third countries, one of the advantages of being part of the EEA and Eionet is linked to the prospect of potentially joining the EU as members. Eionet's core data flows appear to have pushed some countries to improve their data collection and reporting capabilities significantly in preparation for becoming part of the EU and consolidating such levels of performance even after joining. In fact, the EEA can help to build reporting capabilities in non-EU countries that are keen to incorporate EU governance and legislation, and interviewees stated that the EEA plays a role in supporting candidate countries in working towards adopting the environmental acquis. In addition to providing such support, cooperation facilitates **familiarisation** and **integration** of non-EU candidate countries with EU processes and rules.

Another practical example of the added value of the EEA's work with the Western Balkans countries is their participation in the Energy Community, which is primarily concerned with extending the energy market to countries within the South East Europe and Black Sea regions, for the purpose of creating and strengthening a cross-border energy trade with the EU market. Interviewees highlighted the role of the EEA in providing support to the Western Balkans. Under the Energy Governance, the task of reporting for non-EU countries was given to the EEA. Given the limited financial support and

capacity available in some countries, one interviewee highlighted how this task was quite significant, indicating that the EEA played a larger role in relation to the monitoring than originally set out. In addition, under the MAWP 2014-2020, several activities were carried out in relation to the Western Balkans (SA 3.7) to support capacity building and monitoring activities. These included:

- Maintenance and further development of Eionet structures to ensure Western Balkans' contribution to the main EEA outputs;
- Establishment of a regular data flow process, with pilots conducted in 2017 and 2018;
- Organisation of capacity building workshops, technical meetings, and training sessions, alongside country visits.

In the evaluation period, the EEA also had a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with DG NEAR for activities in neighbouring countries for ENI SEIS II South Support Mechanism, which ran from 2016 until 2019. The project aimed at implementing a holistic approach encompassing environmental data and information from all the Mediterranean countries (Southern, Northern and Eastern shores) and regional sources. Whilst the SLA had the potential of delivering value added for the countries involved, some interviewees reported issues with project management and implementation that resulted in delays and lack of appropriate quality control on the outputs produced.



## 7 Conclusions and lessons learned

This chapter summarises the main findings of the evaluation and draws conclusions on each of the evaluation criteria assessed. It also outlines the key achievements as well as the main challenges encountered by the EEA, and the relevant lessons learned.

The evaluation period 2017-2021 was characterised by **several important changes and events** that lay outside of the Agency's control, but directly affected it. First of all, it encompassed parts of two Multi-annual Financial Frameworks (2014-2020 and 2021-2027), which resulted in the development of new EEA/Eionet Strategy 2021-2030. Most importantly, in 2019 the European Green Deal (EGD) was introduced, which reset and increased the Commission's commitment to tackling climate and environmental-related challenges, with significant implications for the work of the EEA, including additional tasks and a corresponding increase in resources. Another important development during the evaluation period was the Covid-19 pandemic, which had a profound impact on ways of working in 2020 and 2021 (and onward).

Overall, the evidence collected and analysed for this study – including relevant documents, literature and statistical data, as well as extensive input from a wide range of stakeholders who work with or for the EEA in different capacities, and/or are users of its outputs – demonstrates that **the Agency and its Eionet have continued to perform well throughout the evaluation period**. By and large, the EEA has adapted well to the changing context, and its work adds significant value in terms of making available data and analysis that is an important enabler for the design, implementation and monitoring of effective policy and legislation, mainly at the EU but also at the national level, in the domains of environment and climate policy, and increasingly also in adjacent fields such as agriculture, transport, energy, etc. Nonetheless, the study has also identified some key challenges and areas where there is likely to be room for further improvements in terms of how the Agency operates and how it interacts with other relevant actors.

### Effectiveness

Overall, the EEA has operated in an effective manner over the period of the evaluation. The **EEA has successfully delivered against its core objectives** defined in its founding regulation as well as its other legal obligations and has, to a large extent, **implemented the 15 core tasks set out in its founding regulation**. It has implemented these successfully through its multi-annual and annual work programmes, although in some cases planned outputs had to be cancelled or postponed due to resource constraints and, in very few cases, technical issues related to reporting.

Stakeholders across all of the different groups who were consulted for this study overwhelmingly considered that **the EEA provides objective, reliable, and comparable information**. This provided the basis for the EEA to effectively support the assessment of environmental measures, as on the one hand, stakeholders trust EEA data in order to make such an assessment and on the other hand, the EEA delivered high-quality reports and assessment outputs that were considered useful by stakeholders, especially from the European Commission. DG ENV and DG CLIMA in particular reported they were heavily reliant on data provided by the EEA, but the use of EEA data extends (to a somewhat lesser extent) to several other policy areas as well. The EEA was also valuable in directly supporting the preparation for and implementation of several new pieces of legislation, such as the Energy Union Governance Directive, and support to the EGD in general.



Stakeholders also acknowledged the EEA's efforts and the progress it has made in reaching out to stakeholders beyond the Commission, namely at the national level and the general public, to disseminate information about the state of the environment. The EEA **improved its communication and dissemination** practices over the period of the evaluation. However, more localised communication and broader language availability beyond English could further support this. **A lack of easy accessibility of raw data was also raised**; this is an issue that the EEA have already begun to address but where further room for improvement was noted by stakeholders.

The EEA was also effective in supporting the **mainstreaming of environmental and climate issues** in other policy areas. The key example to highlight here is the State and Outlook of the Environment Report (SOER) 2020, which was very impactful in the development of the EGD, a policy package which encompasses various policy areas such as energy, transport, industrial policy and more which were previously largely outside the direct remit of EU environmental and climate policy. The SOER helped evidence the justification for the EGD and was even cited on its first page, but stakeholders also highlighted the role the EEA (and the messages coming through from the SOER) played in the design process of the EGD in order to garner support and buy-in from different policy areas. The Farm-to-Fork Strategy is another example where EEA data was influential in justifying the policy direction. Additionally, other stakeholders such as NGOs and industry associations also use EEA outputs in their efforts to influence policy, thus providing another route through which the EEA has an impact on mainstreaming environmental and climate issues.

However, **resource constraints (see below) were the main barrier to fully implementing all tasks**, and some stakeholders remarked that clearer communication strategies and increased collaboration with other Commission departments and knowledge providers could improve the EEA's effectiveness. The enhanced role for the EEA, especially in reflection of the EGD, also presented challenges as the EEA increased its support across different policy areas (more significantly towards the end of the evaluation period (2021) through the internal restructuring of the EEA and the direction taken with the new EEA/Eionet Strategy).

The EEA dealt well with the major challenges it faced during the evaluation period, namely the COVID-19 crisis, and ensured continuation of operations without any major disruptions. Similarly, Brexit did not have an undue effect on the EEA's ability to fulfil its mandate and tasks.

### Efficiency

The **direct costs of the Agency** (i.e., the financial and human resources allocated to it by the EU and member countries) increased during the period covered by the evaluation. The annual **core budget** increased by approximately 10 million EUR in 2021 compared to the beginning of the evaluation period, due to increased resources for existing and new tasks assigned to the Agency, and inflation correction. **Non-core funding** fluctuated significantly over the whole period (between around 30 million EUR in 2017 and 7 million EUR in 2019), partially due to the fact that certain grant agreements were 'front-loaded' (i.e., not provided evenly across the years). As a result, the overall budget of the EEA decreased (from approximately 70.5 million EUR in 2017 to approximately 65 million EUR in 2021), which was mainly driven by the fluctuations in non-core funding.

In light of the fact that quantification of benefits in context of environmental policy is complex, the **benefits** that the EEA provides were found to be of continual and diverse nature, notably with regard to being able to maintain data over a long period of time and provide long-term assessments, and to provide assessments that give greater insights on systemic interlinkages between environmental, climate and other policies. While not possible to quantify, it can be concluded that the EEA provides

considerable benefits to the development and implementation of environmental and climate legislation, and it appears safe to assume that, with the expansion of its areas of engagement and increased funding, benefits will continue to increase.

The EEA completed most outputs for the years 2017-2021 with some variations across years and some areas partially due to resource constraints, Covid-19, management changes and heavy workload. Despite not having adopted a formal strategy to pursue efficiency gains, the Agency managed to make improvements **in efficiency** during the 2017-2021 evaluation period. This particularly related to data handling and reporting, the increased use of reporting databases, more streamlined reporting (including gains achieved in response to the Fitness Check on Environmental Reporting) and the introduction of Reportnet 3.0. The EEA now handles 250 times more data than in 2002 (when Reportnet was first launched), and the number of dataflows has increased from around 30 immediately before the evaluation period, to approximately 120 in 2021, with only marginally more resources allocated to data management. Efficiency gains are also due to a rethinking of the EEA's way of working, partly prompted by the austerity conditions it operated under until 2019, and the prioritisation of activities related or resulting from legal reporting obligations and the SOER 2020. Efficiency gains were furthermore generated through increased online meetings, as mission budget that was no longer required due to Covid-19 associated travel restrictions could be reallocated to other budget lines.

In light of the limited resources and growing demands, the **efforts for exploring potential for future efficiency gains** should be pursued. IT developments in years to come and use of other data sources and digital technologies (including Artificial Intelligence) were two areas regarded as having potential for generating further efficiency gains in the future. Other suggestions for further improvements involved more transparency on how data can or cannot be used for multiple purposes to justify additional resources, a review of the cost efficiency of the Scientific Committee, and greater cooperation between the EEA and the Scientific Committee (although the latter seems to have been addressed through the recently adopted SC Engagement Plan). Furthermore, a standardised approach for tracking reporting obligations and for classifying publications (that would allow to trace publications back to specific reporting obligations / legislative instruments) would be useful for comparability and gaining better insights on efficiency and resource intensity developments in the future.

Regarding the **adequacy of the resources** the EEA has at its disposal, it was widely felt that the budget at the end of the evaluation period was adequate, but that the Agency was operating at full capacity, and that any further additional tasks would require additional resources, considering also further synergies, efficiency gains or prioritisation. However, other Commission stakeholders consider that the EEA can absorb additional tasks in light of the additional resources received, in line with recent Commission Opinions on the EEA SPD. Impacts on the LIFE budget need to be kept under observation for the whole MFF period, since projections suggest that increased funds for the EEA could eventually take up a fifth of the procurement envelope of the LIFE instrument. As for shared projects as a means of providing additional revenue, it was shown that they produced a wide range of important IT platforms.

Although there are mechanisms in place for the EEA to carry out prioritisation of tasks, there is room for improvement in the coordination between DG ENV and the EEA. This could be done by seeking discussions concerning the identification of new priorities and needs, and by further exploring options to accommodate such tasks through re/de-prioritisation of current activities. In addition, the EEA MB could play a stronger role in the priority setting process of the EEA.

While increased interest in the Agency from all sides was seen as a positive development in general, there were more **differentiated views regarding the benefits of the increasing number of service-level agreements with other DGs**. It was also reported that this situation led to increased pressure on staff and an imbalance between operational and technical staff. This situation was aggravated by the fact that non-core funding provides the Agency with more operational resources but not always additional support resources (as was already pointed out in the IAS report on project-financed activity in 2020). This has shifted the balance of staff in the EEA and presents a risk of developing into an unsustainable situation that puts excessive pressure on support staff. Early signs of dissatisfaction are apparent in the negative trends in the 2021 staff satisfaction survey.

As regards the **EEA's governance system**, SPDs and CAARs remain the main vehicle for annual programming and reporting, while the MAWP was replaced by the EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030. While SPDs and CAARs have been aligned with the guidelines and templates provided by the European Commission in view of achieving greater homogeneity across Union bodies, the level of detail they contain has decreased considerably since 2021 (in comparison with the documents prior to this period) and information is reported in a more aggregated fashion. This will make it more difficult for future evaluations to draw comparisons with previous evaluation periods and to adequately assess delivery of results.

The EEA has introduced **17 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** for better monitoring. While in general these are welcomed as having increased the efficiency of decision-making by the MB, a strategic discussion within the MB on the potential revision of the performance indicator system, in particular in light of the new EEA-Eionet Strategy, might be beneficial. The EEA's governance system was generally seen as fit for purpose, but the issue of adequate involvement of the MB in priority-setting still seems to be an unresolved matter.

### Coherence

Overall, **the EEA's work, structure and governance are coherent**, and the study found evidence that efforts are being made to further improve the coherence of the EEA's internal as well as external working relationships. A number of relevant agreements, mandates and cooperation mechanisms have been, and continue to be, developed and worked on in order to avoid overlaps, and create synergies. These include the ISG, which appears to have contributed to improving communication and alignment of the EEA with Commission services. However, some challenges remain in terms of setting clear roles and responsibilities and aligning tasks, leading to challenges in matching the EEA's workload with its budget and the expectations of Commission services, the EEA member countries and the requirements of the founding regulation. In a few areas the risk of some duplication of work remains, largely as a result of lack of communication and missed opportunities for synergies. However, these examples are relatively isolated; in general, duplication of actions is avoided and the actions taken within the EEA are complementary to other bodies' roles and comparative strengths.

In terms of the **working relationship between the EEA, the Commission and other agencies**, the degree of coherence varies. However, overall the relationships are positive and a number of actions have been taken to facilitate these further. DG ENV is the partner DG in charge of overseeing the work of the EEA. Although there are virtually all positive collaborations at the operational level, there remain some different points of view around the strategic oversight role of DG ENV, prioritisation of core vs non-core work and the extent to which the EEA should interpret data. These challenges are being partly addressed via enhanced forms of cooperation (including those introduced following the IAS audit of 2021) between the partner DG and the EEA as well as across

the whole Commission. Some of the remaining differences could possibly be addressed via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) mechanism or even a reopening of the founding regulation, as discussed under relevance. With respect to DG CLIMA, the EEA's relations and collaboration appears well structured and were perceived as positive and impactful overall. The EEA's collaboration with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and Eurostat has encountered some issues, but efforts to harmonise and improve collaboration through joint responsibilities and working groups are taking place. Otherwise, the study shows that the EEA works cooperatively and coherently with Commission DGs as well as other EU agencies on common environmental and climate issues, and has made a positive contribution to the mainstreaming agenda.

The EEA's mandate and activities are largely **coherent with the Common Approach to EU decentralised agencies**, as it aligns well with the key principles. However, further articulation of the mandate and activities could potentially enhance clarity and coherence.

The EEA has set up internal processes for seeking synergies and coordinating core and non-core activities. While **efforts to exploit synergies and avoid duplications are evident**, there is room for further improvement in internal coordination and communication, especially with the Scientific Committee, whose role and input is useful at a strategic level, but which is less able to influence detailed outputs. The increasing amount of 'non-core' activities requires close monitoring and, arguably, a clearer or modified definition of core versus non-core activities (which might imply the addition of some non-core activities to the core list, if the EEA's mandate is revised).

## Relevance

The **outputs of the EEA are generally perceived as relevant and impactful by its stakeholders**. The SOER, which is widely seen as the most well-known and relevant output of the EEA, was regarded as relevant to the preparation and introduction of the EGD. Beyond this, the relevance of different outputs of the EEA differs per stakeholder group. The European Commission is main 'customer' of the EEA and relies heavily on several of its outputs (e.g., support in revision of different policies, reporting obligations, preparation of technical guidance and/or support in meeting the EU's international obligation). National authorities (including NFPs) are also users of the EEA's outputs and also benefit from its services in terms of their data reporting obligations. Furthermore, stakeholder feedback suggests that civil society and business organisations also use EEA data and reports as a trustworthy source that can be helpful for influencing policy makers.

In relation to **the general public**, throughout the evaluation period the EEA made efforts to make environment and climate information relatable and usable and to engage with the public directly, although these efforts were hampered slightly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as in-person events (e.g., via site visits, public photo competitions, etc.) had to be replaced by online events. The EEA also improved its online presence, including the launch of a dedicated LinkedIn account in 2019. Stakeholders, while recognising the EEA's efforts, saw further room for improvement; while recognising that the public is not the EEA's main target audience, many believed that the efforts to engage citizens should be maintained and, to the extent possible, strengthened.

In terms of EEA's **relevance in relation to current policy priorities**, the EEA played an important role in the review of the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP, which helped inform the development of the 8<sup>th</sup> EAP, as well as the EGD. The 8<sup>th</sup> EAP was also used to assess whether the EEA's tasks as outlined by the founding regulation still match the current policy priorities of EU, which remains the case.

The study identified no significant issues that would necessitate an **urgent revision of the founding regulation**. The study found that there would be both benefits and drawbacks:

- Potential **benefits** include a clearer formulation and delineation of EEA's tasks; aligning the mandate with policy priorities such as circular economy, climate change, biodiversity, pollution to the environment or sustainability; addressing some gaps in the Regulation (linked to digitisation, new technologies and data source); further aligning with the Common Approach; and updating the outdated terminology. It could also be an opportunity to incorporate some long-term agreements into core tasks and to further reflect on the funding mechanism.
- The **drawbacks** are that it could be a costly and long process with uncertain outcomes of the political negotiations. Since the Regulation is broad enough to incorporate new tasks and activities, there is a risk that being more precise would lose this flexibility. Moreover, there is no evidence that the current situation is untenable, or creates problems that could not be resolved by other means (such as enhanced prioritisation and coordination mechanisms). A joint MOU between DG ENV and the EEA was suggested as a political avenue to clarify tasks, which would also be more flexible than a legislative revision.

The study concludes that the **tasks of the EEA are aligned with EU policy** (even more so since the Eionet modernisation process), and that the Agency demonstrated overall efficiency and a high degree of **flexibility in terms of prioritising tasks in light of the evolving policy context**. The general view is that the EEA adequately covers all EU climate and environmental policy priorities, and is not missing any significant issues related to the EGD. While the EEA always delivers on the tasks that are pursuant to legal obligations, it also carries out a host of other work that it is not legally bound to do in some cases. Overall, stakeholders considered the EEA to be adaptable, constructive, proactive and open to dialogue to accommodate new tasks.

### EU Added Value

The EEA and Eionet provided **significant added value at the EU-level in several key areas**. As outlined previously, by and large the EEA delivers the tasks assigned to it effectively and efficiently – undoubtedly more so than if they had to be carried out by member countries acting alone. The EEA consolidates and analyses environmental data from different countries, ensuring the availability of credible and comparable datasets for benchmarking and monitoring of environmental policies. This creates EU-level datasets and an overview of what is happening across all of the EU, rather than in just a single country. Additionally, through its cooperation with non-EU countries, the EEA enhances the understanding of environmental issues beyond the EU's borders, facilitating a more comprehensive and accurate approach in tackling environmental challenges. Without the EEA, this would not be possible or would need to be done by the European Commission.

In addition to data, the EEA, through Eionet, **facilitates extensive knowledge and data sharing among its member countries**. By promoting best practice sharing, research collaboration, and communication, they enable countries to learn from each other and build knowledge across different geographical and climatic areas. The EEA also supports countries through capacity building, especially non-EU countries. Through this, it also contributes to the alignment of practices with EU standards and helps candidate countries in preparing for the adoption of the environmental acquis.



## Key achievements, challenges encountered and lessons learned

This study confirms that the **relevance of the EEA's work is high** and has only grown further with the increasing importance of environmental and climate policies, especially since the adoption of the EGD. This has meant the EEA now works across more policy areas, with and for more stakeholders (including Commission DGs) and has taken on additional tasks (including taking on new, and increasing the intensity of, its involvement in some existing reporting obligations).

Overall, it **has adapted well to this new environment** – it continues to deliver well on all its main tasks and is making important contributions to the achievement of all of its objectives. In particular, it is widely recognised and appreciated by stakeholders and partners for its indispensable role in collecting and analysing relevant data, including by offering support and coordination for data providers in its member countries. But its role goes well beyond data collection – it also supports stakeholders (in particular the Commission) in assessing the results of environmental measures and in meeting obligations stemming from EU legislation, and endeavours to disseminate information about the state of the environment as widely as possible.

Its reports, datasets and other outputs are **widely regarded as reliable and high-quality**, and there are numerous instances where they have been used by policy-makers at EU and national level to help design and implement policies (not least the EGD itself). The EEA's efforts over the evaluation period to improve its dissemination and communication activities beyond its core (institutional) partners have been quite successful, as evidenced by the increasing number of mentions in EU documents, media articles, downloads of its outputs and followers on social media.

The EEA also demonstrated a **high level of flexibility to adapt to emerging issues and priorities**. For example, it brought forward the publication of its most high-profile and arguably most important output, the SOER 2020, to coincide with the presentation of the EGD. It also dealt remarkably well with the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, by rapidly and effectively switching to remote / online working and meetings as needed. However, over time, this put a strain on staff, which is to some extent reflected in lower staff satisfaction scores in 2021.

The new EEA Strategy 2021-2030 reflects the enhanced need to work in a more systemic way that cuts across different policy areas. **The EEA works well with an increasing number of Commission DGs** (including other data providers such as ESTAT and the JRC) **and other EU agencies**. However, the feedback collected for this study suggests that the increasing number and complexity of the EEA's relationships with additional actors (in particular DGs) leads to some coordination issues and challenges for DG ENV which, as partner DG, is responsible for providing effective oversight and monitoring of the work of the EEA (as also requested by the 2021 IAS report), including ensuring that any new tasks and activities taken on by the Agency are aligned with its mandate and adequately resourced.

Over the evaluation period, the EEA has embarked on a number of **processes to make its work more effective and efficient** – including the Eionet modernisation process, the re-organisation of the ETCs, an internal re-structuring, and an update of Reportnet. While some of these projects are still 'work in progress', there are strong indications that, overall, the EEA's efforts to streamline and modernise have meant it is better equipped to meet the increasing demands it faces – although there are also some open questions regarding the extent to which the EEA itself and its partners at the national level are equipped to work in a more systemic, cross-cutting way without losing the required attention to, and grasp of, the details of specific policy areas and pieces of legislation.

In this context, it is worth noting that, during the period 2017-2019, the EEA had to operate under austerity conditions, with intense pressure on its resources that meant it had to de-prioritise certain non-core tasks. However, it should be noted that the study was unable to provide a comprehensive account of tasks that were deprioritised, since this was not systematically reported in SPDs or CAARs for the period in question. Since 2020, the EEA has been given additional resources to deal with its expanded remit. This has enabled it to recruit additional staff and allowed it to **cope with its increased workload reasonably well overall**. Nevertheless, it must be highlighted that these additional resources are mainly ringfenced for operational functions, thus increasing the strain on the EEA's administrative / support functions. Thus, feedback from Agency staff and management suggests that, as of 2021, the Agency was again operating at the limits of its capacity, meaning that any additional tasks assigned to it would continue to have to be accompanied by extra resources. On the other hand, as stated in recent Opinions on the EEA SPDs, the Commission considers that with the reinforcements the EEA has the capacity to accommodate new tasks and knowledge needs.

### Key developments after the end of the evaluation period

It is important to keep in mind that the evaluation study was meant to assess only the period 2017-2021, but the bulk of the data collection and analysis was undertaken in the first half of 2023. This means that a number of ongoing or new developments are not strictly speaking relevant for the study, but should nonetheless be kept in mind when considering some of the key achievements and challenges outlined previously. These include:

- **New mechanisms to improve coordination between the Commission and the EEA:** A new Interservice Group (ISG) was created in February 2022, bringing together 22 Commission services in order to foster coordination between the Commission and the EEA. DG ENV also created a senior management level dialogue (recurrent joint senior management meetings) and an intergroup at Director level (with DG CLIMA). These appear to be significant steps in the right direction, but due to their recent nature, this study was not in a position to ascertain the extent to which they are sufficient to address the coordination challenges that were evident during (parts of) the evaluation period.
- **Eionet modernisation process:** This process officially began in 2020, and by the end of 2021, a series of initiatives had been put in place to guide a comprehensive review of Eionet. However, the new set-up of Eionet (including the new cross-cutting ETCs) was not formally introduced until January 2022. While stakeholder feedback collected for this study suggests the reforms enabled the network to become more visible and more aligned with the EGD priorities, there was still limited evidence on the actual improvements it brought about.
- **Reportnet 3.0:** Delivery of the new Reportnet 3.0 started in 2018, and the latest version was launched in July 2020. However, the transition was not yet complete by the end of the evaluation period. Reportnet 2.0 will remain partly operational at least until 2025, when the last obligations are due to be transitioned to Reportnet 3.0.
- **SC engagement plan:** An approach and an engagement plan for 2021-2024 was adopted in May 2021. Its purpose was to provide a strategic basis and direction for the work of the EEA with the Scientific Committee, with a view to strengthening the role of the EEA and Eionet as a knowledge broker at the science-policy interface. However, the extent to which this has strengthened or will strengthen cooperation between the EEA and the SC could not yet be ascertained by this study.



- **New service-level agreements:** The number of SLAs has continued to increase after the evaluation; for example, DG CLIMA have signed at least three new SLAs with the EEA since 2022. This study has not considered this growth in our analysis, but it is likely that the positive and negative aspects it brings have continued.
- **Increasing staffing levels:** The upward trend in the human resources allocated to the EEA has continued after the end of the period covered by the evaluation. In 2022, 243 posts had been filled (out of 256 authorised posts),<sup>93</sup> and by the end of the current political mandate in 2024 the Agency is projected to receive a total of 86 new staff (compared with 2020). This enables the EEA to take on new tasks but also implies a greater strain on the budget of the LIFE programme.

### Main issues that warrant further attention

In summary, the main issues identified by this study that warrant further attention with a view to further maximising the EEA's effectiveness and efficiency are all related to a greater or lesser extent to the ongoing efforts of the EEA (as well as the organisations it works closely with) to adapt to the more systemic, cross-cutting approach to environmental and climate policy introduced by the EGD:

- **Prioritisation of tasks:** The growing demands on the EEA across various policy areas in the context of limited resources and budgetary constraints, and the manifest need for more joined up working to mainstream environmental and climate policy objectives into other areas, raise questions as to what the EEA should prioritise (and de-prioritise), including the extent to which it should engage in tasks beyond data collection, such as the provision of policy assessments and advice. While the EEA was generally thought to have adapted well to the evolving context, there were different views among key stakeholders regarding the appropriate balance between different tasks. A stronger mechanism may be needed to handle priorities, through reinforced coordination with the Commission (for which new mechanisms have already been set up after the end of the evaluation period, see above), and reinforcing strategic discussions on additional tasks and prioritisation at the MB level (facilitated by more systematic and explicit reporting by the EEA on additional tasks and their resource implications, as well as tasks that have to be de-prioritised).
- **Relationship with the European Commission:** Overall, the working relationships between the EEA and all relevant Commission DGs are good. However, as noted above, the expansion of the activities of the EEA, the increasingly numerous and complex demands from other Commission DGs, as well as (in some instances) different views on the core tasks of the EEA, have led to some questions around exactly how DG ENV can best play its role as the EEA's partner DG, i.e. to provide the necessary strategic oversight as well as facilitate effective coordination with other DGs. Steps have already been taken to address this (see above), but it remains to be seen whether these are sufficient to foster more effective relations not only at the operational, but also at the strategic level.
- **Eionet modernisation:** While the Eionet modernisation process was generally welcomed by stakeholders, the re-alignment of the Eionet (introduced in early 2022) along more cross-cutting lines implies significant challenges for member countries, where authorities

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<sup>93</sup> EEA: Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2022

are frequently organised by themes rather than cross-cutting priorities, and many also face tight resource constraints. Although the principle is sound and in line with the strategic direction of Commission environmental policy, the transition process towards the realisation and implementation of the modernisation requires further attention, resources and support, including from the Management Board, in order for it to be embedded and accepted fully.

- **KPIs and annual reporting:** The EEA Strategy 2021-2030 – with its reduced number of work areas, and emphasis on the understanding of interlinkages within and between these – was widely considered to be an appropriate response to the evolving policy context in which the EEA operates. Nonetheless, there are concerns around whether the less detailed annual reporting on outputs, coupled with the relatively low numbers of KPIs, could lead to a reduction in the transparency and accountability of the EEA and the important work it delivers.
- **Staffing situation:** Non-core funding has proven to be an important enabler to provide the resources for certain new tasks, but is typically allocated for additional operational staff only. The same is true for additional core staff. This has meant that, over time, the number of operational staff at the EEA has increased, but support functions have not. This has led to a severe strain on some support functions, which is an unsustainable situation that would need to be addressed if further growth is envisaged.
- **Risks from reliance on non-core funding:** Also, the heavy reliance on non-core, project-specific funding, and the resulting need to rely on temporary staff, means long-term planning, efficient resource allocation (in particular re-allocation in light of evolving priorities), and timely recruitment can be difficult. More broadly, there are also certain questions about the coherence between core tasks and non-core activities that warrant further reflection, in particular as regards non-core activities that address long-term strands of work.
- **Scope for further efficiency gains:** The study identified several areas where there is likely to be potential for the EEA to achieve further efficiency gains. Most of these are related to taking full advantage of the opportunities provided by new technologies and digitalisation, in particular IT developments in years to come (including enhancing interoperability with the databases of member countries to facilitate more automatised reporting), use of other data sources (potentially including Copernicus data, ‘big’ data and citizen science) and digital technologies (including Artificial Intelligence) that could be used to monitor the state of the environment in a more dynamic way. Other areas where there is room to make further efficiency gains include providing better access to (raw) data, more transparency on how data can or cannot be used for multiple purposes, a review of the cost-efficiency of the Scientific Committee, a standardised approach for tracking reporting obligations, and improved communication between EEA and relevant stakeholders, including NFPs and the Commission, regarding planned publications, specifically to give more advance notice.

A revision of the EEA’s mandate (i.e., its founding regulation) could potentially be *helpful* in terms of updating and consolidating the reporting obligations the EEA is involved in and clarifying the interpretation of its EEA’s remit and priorities. However, there are also potential drawbacks to

reopening the founding regulation, such as risks linked to the political negotiation. This study has found nothing to suggest that such a revision is *urgently needed* to address these issues.