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Governments could have done much more in the field of energy efficiency of public sector buildings

Posted By *Guntis Beisa* On 09/10/2018 @ 07:55 In News | [No Comments](#)

BUDAPEST-BRATISLAVA-BRUSSELS-LISBON-RIGA-SOFIA-TALLINN-VILNIUS – Eight European Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) have concluded a cooperative audit that found that the efforts towards fulfilling the public sector's leading role in the field of energy efficiency of buildings – a central requirement of the Energy Efficiency Directive (EED) – should have been greater and more systematic.

Audited countries have mostly done well in transposing the concrete targets of the directives into national law. For example, most countries have put in place the 3% renovation or energy saving target for public sector buildings, devised necessary financial instruments, as well as established requirements for nearly zero-energy buildings and for public sector buildings to have and display energy performance certificates. Likewise, the systems for monitoring and control have been developed.

Nevertheless, implementation has remained a challenge. Looking more closely into how the targets, requirements and systems have been implemented, the national audits found that funding has mostly been incoherent, and the effectiveness of the financial support system has not been analysed in all but one country. And only one country could report that the funds spent for fulfilling the 3% target are being monitored.

Though both the 3% target and the deadline for nearly zero-energy buildings have been set in national legislation, proper planning and measuring for achieving the targets are lacking in some countries. Furthermore, monitoring and control systems tend not to fulfil their purpose. National audits have discovered that checking the quality and proper placement of energy performance certificates has been infrequent and, in some cases, checks have not been conducted in practice.

Though countries have been keen to use the options listed in the EED by choosing narrower definitions and smaller renovation and savings targets of central government buildings, over half of the participating countries are still struggling to meet the 3% target. According to the SAI's this was mainly due to a lack of planning or a poor implementation of existing plans. Inadequate funding and the poor quality of data on renovations or energy saved, were also pointed out by participating SAIs.

In their national audit reports, participating SAIs have recommended to undertake systematic and improved planning, as well as comprehensive strategies to enhance the energy performance of public sector buildings. SAIs also stated that implementation of energy efficiency programmes could be more efficient and effective. Furthermore, participating SAIs noted that monitoring and control activities should be more systematic. Their results should be analysed and measures should be taken to eliminate any shortcomings. Another important issue SAIs pointed out is the need for improved funding of energy efficiency measures. This includes more information about funding options, as well as more ambition in devising measures.

Background information

The supreme audit institutions of the Flanders region of Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovakia have conducted a cooperative audit on the energy efficiency of public sector buildings. The cooperative audit was conducted within the framework of the Working Group for Environmental Auditing of the European Organization for Supreme Audit Institutions (EUROSAI WGEA). The aim of the audit was to determine how well the participating countries have implemented the respective requirements of the European Union Energy Performance of Buildings Directive and the Energy Efficiency Directive.

Buildings account for approximately 40% of the energy consumption and 36% of carbon dioxide emission in the European Union (EU). While approximately a third of the EU's building stock is over 50 years old, just 0,4-1,2% is renovated each year. Publicly owned or occupied buildings represent about 10-12% by area of the EU building stock. A significant potential for energy savings therefore awaits to be tapped in this field. Public sector can lead the way in efforts to increase the rate of renovations by prioritizing energy efficiency in its own buildings and thus fostering the creation of necessary know-how in terms of new technologies and building methods.

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