

Audit on Energy Efficiency in Public Buildings

What have we audited?

The Court of Auditors has audited the actions undertaken by Portugal to improve energy efficiency in public buildings, in particular those following the guidance of Directives 2010/31/EU, on the energy performance of buildings, and 2012/27/UE, on energy efficiency, as well as the plans and measures drawn up and their implementation and monitoring.

What did we conclude?

To ensure the improvement of the energy efficiency of buildings of public bodies, as provided for in Directive 2012/27/EU, which gives public buildings an exemplary role, Portugal did not adopt the 'default approach', consisting of the renovation, each year, of 3% of the total floor area of heated and/or cooled buildings owned and occupied by the central government. Instead Portugal has opted for the 'alternative approach' also envisaged in that Directive, to achieve the same energy savings in the same buildings, estimated at 634 Megawatt-hours (MWh) per year.

However, the exemplary role of public bodies' buildings, that each Member State should ensure, has been limited due to the small number of buildings covered, because of the concept of 'central government' applied. The definition used was the central services of the direct administration of the State, a more restrictive scope than the definition in the Directive. There were also restrictions due to inadequacies of the registration of buildings in the Central Government Real Estate Information System.

The control over the implementation of the 'alternative approach' and other actions to promote energy efficiency in public administration, namely those included in the Energy Efficiency Programme in Public Administration – ECO.AP, is very poor.

Although six years have passed since the launch of this Programme, which was included in the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan, which the 'alternative approach' refers to, a significant number of bodies did not implement it.

On the other hand, the Energy Efficiency Barometer of the Public Administration, created under the Programme to compare and evaluate energy efficiency, has not been operational for several years, which puts in question its monitoring and control.

Furthermore, the concept of 'nearly zero-energy building', identified with the energy classes "B-" and "C", in the case of new and existing buildings, is also not very demanding, compared to the energy performance benchmark ranges recommended by the European Commission.

Most buildings and fractions occupied by public services with an area exceeding 250 square meters (m²) that receive members of the public do not have an energy certification. The State is the most non-compliant property owner, with a compliance rate of only 12.5%.

What do we recommend?

The Court of Auditors recommends:

- To the Ministers of Finance, Economy and Environment: to adopt the legislative and regulatory measures necessary for the establishment of a follow-up and monitoring system

for the implementation of the programmes and measures of the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan.

- To the Minister of Economy: a) the coordination and monitoring of the ECO.AP Programme and to accelerate the implementation of the measures scheduled, to compensate the delays and to fulfil the global objectives set, b) the approval of the national plan for renovation of existing buildings, to meet the requirements of the nearly zero-energy buildings, and c) to reformulate and effectively implement the Energy Efficiency Barometer.

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