



# Evaluation of DG ECFIN's communication activities

Final Report



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General of Economic and Financial Affairs  
Directorate ECFIN A. Policy coordination, economic forecasts and communication  
Unit ECFIN A.4 Communication & inter-institutional relations  
*Contact:* Robert Gangl

*European Commission  
B-1049 Brussels*

# **Evaluation of DG ECFIN's communication activities – ref. ECFIN/03/2021/Lot1**

Final Report

## LEGAL NOTICE

This document has been prepared for the European Commission however it reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Commission is not liable for any consequence stemming from the reuse of this publication. More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://www.europa.eu>).

---

PDF/Volume_01	ISBN	978-92-76-	doi:10.2765/03196	KC-03-22-262-EN-N
	60561-4			

---

Manuscript completed in February 2023

The European Commission is not liable for any consequence stemming from the reuse of this publication.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

© European Union, 2023



The reuse policy of European Commission documents is implemented by the Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39). Except otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC-BY 4.0) licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated.

**Evaluation of DG ECFIN's communication activities****Table of Contents**

<b>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3. BACKGROUND TO THE INITIATIVE.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4. EVALUATION QUESTIONS.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5. METHOD FOLLOWED .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>6. ANSWERS TO THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>6.1. Effectiveness .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>6.2. Efficiency .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>6.3. Coherence.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>6.4. Relevance.....</b>	<b>56</b>

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN) of the European Commission contracted Tetra Tech International Development Sp. z.o.o. to undertake the evaluation of DG ECFIN's communication activities, with support of Netcompany-Intrasoft, under the Multiple Framework contract with reopening of competition COMM/2020/OP/0020. The evaluation was launched with the signature of the specific agreement on 11 May 2022, and a kick-off meeting, which was held on 25 May 2022.

The objectives of the evaluation, according to the Terms of Reference, were to:

- to produce conclusions on the current situation (within the temporal scope of 2017-2021),
- to provide precise, practical lessons learned for future work.

### 1.1 Methodology

The evaluation methodology was designed to address the objectives listed above as well as to answer 10 evaluation questions under four Better Regulation evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence.

The evaluation was organised in three phases:

- an inception phase that lasted from mid-May until end of June 2022,
- an interim phase that lasted from July until September 2022, and
- an analysis and reporting phase that lasted from September 2022 until January 2023.

In this timeframe, we conducted the following data collection and analysis:

- a desk review of available evidence and continuous monitoring data collected from 2017-2021,
- ten scoping interviews with the DG ECFIN communication unit, DG ECFIN policy staff, representatives from DG COMM and external contractors,
- 17 targeted interviews with internal and external DG ECFIN stakeholders,
- three surveys of DG ECFIN stakeholders, national authorities and European Semester Officers,
- three online focus groups with Europe Direct Centres from Germany, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Sweden,
- a social media review of DG ECFIN's social media activities from 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2022.

The results of the individual data collection activities are available as standalone annexes to the Final Report on the evaluation of DG ECFIN's communication activities.

An analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of DG ECFIN's communication activities is presented below. It is meant to highlight and explain the differences between the communication goals of DG ECFIN and what DG ECFIN's communication is able to achieve in practice, shaped by the level of resourcing, the types of activities pursued, and a wide range of other factors, including the communication and policy environment within which the communication takes place.

## 1.2 SWOT analysis of DG ECFIN's communication activities

Based on our analysis and answers to the evaluation questions, we arrived at the following SWOT analysis of DG ECFIN's communication activities:

STRENGTHS (INTERNAL)	WEAKNESSES (INTERNAL)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well established and engaged specialist core stakeholder group</li> <li>Capacity for high quality economic analyses</li> <li>Credibility / good reputation among peers and journalists</li> <li>High-quality communication outputs: BEF, publications programme, stakeholder seminars, etc.</li> <li>Balance of cost ratios across communication activities with potential for high reach and reinforcement of other activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic framework for communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>unclear link between communication goals and policy objectives</li> <li>lack of prioritisation of stakeholders</li> <li>lack of specific objectives by stakeholder group and link to communication goals</li> </ul> </li> <li>Limited dialogue function to engage 1<sup>st</sup> tier stakeholders (specialist audiences)</li> <li>Limited capacity to engage 2<sup>nd</sup> tier stakeholders compared with 1<sup>st</sup> tier stakeholders re: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cost versus available resources</li> <li>lack of detailed understanding of needs</li> <li>limited or lack of products / moments to engage</li> </ul> </li> <li>No LinkedIn</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES (EXTERNAL)	THREATS (EXTERNAL)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessibility and reach of digital formats</li> <li>"News worthiness" of EU economic policy in the context of COVID-19 recovery and war in Ukraine</li> <li>Existing synergies: RRF communication and annual events open avenues to reach and engage non-specialist audiences</li> <li>Avenues to draw on ESOs and EDCs' support to communicate at national level</li> <li>Existing EU networks and associations could enhance "listening function" and indirect information dissemination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New stakeholder groups do not engage</li> <li>Wide geographic scope (EU-27, G20, etc.)</li> <li>Public distrust in institutions</li> <li>Fake news / disinformation</li> <li>Other unknown issues (as of yet) that may impact communication</li> </ul>

Based on our SWOT analysis, we formulated the following conclusions and lessons learned.

## 1.3 Conclusions and lessons learnt

**DG ECFIN is reaching out to the right stakeholders, with a stake and an interest in economic policy processes.** These include policy makers, economic opinion formers, financial institutions and the investor community, trade unions, business, and civil society organisations.

However:

- there is a need for a clear prioritisation between and within stakeholder groups
- economics students are less of a stakeholder for communication, yet relevant stakeholders in the context of intakes at DG ECFIN (a well-informed pool of candidates).

- bloggers / ambassadors / influencers were deprioritised from the stakeholder list featured in the 2019-24 communication strategy and replaced by “commentators” to feature alongside economic opinion-formers, to target those who regularly write opinion-pieces for key media and could function as advocates for DG ECFIN's policies.

**Media coverage has benefited from the enhanced news worthiness of DG ECFIN topics in the context of COVID-19 recovery.** There is also the general perception among the media that DG ECFIN is an open and responsive institution. However, even specialist media noted difficulty with some of the content provided by DG ECFIN in terms of length and jargon / technical language. There is also an appetite for more direct engagement with DG ECFIN experts to better understand complex EU governance structures and the thinking of the Commission behind important reforms.

**There is scope to strengthen strategic planning by not only focussing on “who” DG ECFIN communicates with and “how” (channels, tools), but also “with what purpose”.** This means:

- formulating specific objectives / expected results by stakeholder group,
- prioritising between and within them,
- ensuring that any communication is targeted appropriately in terms of content, messaging, and formats,
- ensuring that there is a clear link between communication goals, stakeholder section and DG ECFIN's specific policy objectives.

**DG ECFIN is achieving its goal of being considered an authoritative and credible institution** and performs well at information dissemination to specialist audiences. This is evidenced by progress made and targets met in most communication programmes between 2017 and 2021, and high satisfaction rates with DG ECFIN events:

- DG ECFIN's flagship event, the Brussels Economic Forum, has consistently surpassed participation targets and significantly increased its engagement on Twitter;
- the stakeholder seminars achieve high satisfaction rates on speakers, and high statistics on likelihood to share information and improved feelings about the EU, albeit with room for improvement in terms of overall satisfaction ratings; the latter particularly concern better targeting the format of seminars by stakeholder group in terms of opportunities for dialogue and length;
- DG ECFIN's publications are regarded to be of a very high quality, although awareness and perceptions of usefulness are mainly limited to the Economic Forecasts, as are statistics on publication views; this may warrant consideration whether some publications (economic briefs, technical papers) are indeed efficient to continue;
- DG ECFIN's Twitter activity shows that there has been an increase in engagement between 2017-2021, despite slower follower growth; Facebook appears to have reached at “plateau” since 2018 and should be reconsidered in the social media strategy going forward, potentially with an eye towards being replaced by activities on LinkedIn.



**There is scope to strengthen the listening and dialogue function of DG ECFIN's communication** to better meet the communication goal of being regarded as an open and responsive institution. This concerns both:

- specialist audiences, who desire more dialogue on economic analyses and trends, e.g., via dedicated webinars to enable discussions with DG ECFIN about the Economic Forecasts; and
- non-specialist audiences, where the offer of direct engagement is currently limited, yet highly desired by “2<sup>nd</sup> tier” stakeholders (trade unions, business, civil society organisations); an efficient avenue to do so in the short to medium term could be to consider adding LinkedIn into the social media mix as the most frequently used social media channel by financial services, and engaging these stakeholders through jargon-free language and accessible materials on relevant platforms and groups.

**“Listening” to discussions on social media and existing networks at EU level could be used to better inform targeting.** Avenues to keep on top of what stakeholders are interested in include:

- relevant platforms and groups on LinkedIn,
- existing networks at EU level, such as INFORM EU network, EEN network, EESC, CoR, etc.;
- these could also be exploited for **information dissemination** which could ensure indirect reach at important communication moments of both specialists and non-specialist audiences.

**DG ECFIN's communication goal of engaging in the broader public debate requires a tailored approach with less complex content and straight forward messages.** While DG ECFIN should continue providing sophisticated economic analyses as it has to date, there is some scope to consider side products that are short, jargon-free, and contain interactive or story-telling elements to be shared via the e-newsletter, social media, or distributed to ESOs and EDCs to communicate at the national level:

- there is scope for more audio-visual tools (e.g., videos, podcasts) that DG ECFIN's peers in EU and international institutions, as well as EDCs, have found to be a format that works particularly well with non-specialist audiences;
- there appears to be scope to replace materials about the euro that were targeted at the general public with new information, and there is an available network of EDCs to support dissemination;
- Non-financial journalists, as a way to reach the broader public, also require short and jargon-free press materials that can be easily transferred into a news item.

However, **any new ideas require further research and should be piloted to ensure that they are relatable for the groups that DG ECFIN wants to communicate with.**

## 2. INTRODUCTION

This document is the final report from Tetra Tech International Development for the **Evaluation of DG ECFIN's communication activities**, under the Multiple Framework contract with reopening of competition COMM/2020/OP/0020. The assessment was launched with the signature of the specific agreement on 11 May 2022 and a kick-off meeting, which was held on 25 May 2022.

This report is intended to present answers to the evaluation questions, as well as conclusions and lessons learned. It is not a legislative requirement, but rather an assessment designed to support learning aimed at refining and elaborating further DG ECFIN's communication activities. However, our assessment still follows the European Commission Better Regulation Guidelines in addressing the evaluation criteria and answering the evaluation questions.

### 2.1. Purpose of the assessment

The overarching purpose of this assessment was to provide DG ECFIN with a robust evidence-based evaluation to support DG ECFIN in refining and elaborating further its communication actions. As such, the objectives were two-fold:

- to produce conclusions on the **current situation**,
- to provide precise, practical **lessons learned** for future work.

### 2.2. Scope of the assessment

Our assessment's material, temporal and geographical scope can be summarised as follows:

- **Temporal scope:** the assessment spanned from January 2017 until July 2021, with a focus on the last two years (2020 and 2021), this means that it was both ex-post and on-going in nature and covered implementation of two Communication strategies (2015-19 and 2019-24) and the period following the WHO declaration of a global pandemic.
- **Material scope:** DG ECFIN's external communication activities within the EU Member States (including activities on the Recovery and Resilience Facility); communication related to the euro, as well as internal communication were outside the scope of this assessment.
- **Geographic scope:** this mirrored DG ECFIN's policy mandate.

## 3. BACKGROUND TO THE INITIATIVE

### 3.1. Description of the initiative and its objectives

DG ECFIN's current five-year communication strategy (2019-2024) for "Using Communication as an Integral Part of Policy Delivery" builds on the 2015-2019 strategy, "Making Communication an Integral Part of Policy Delivery". In terms of resources for

communication this amounted to EUR 3 million per year to support the 2015-2019 strategy and EUR 2.5 -3 million per year to support the present strategy.<sup>1</sup>

As per its name, the strategy spells out how DG ECFIN will embed communication into its core work in line with its mission to support *the creation of economic conditions in which all Europeans can thrive, now and in the future, and to develop the means for Europe to be a leading force for stability and prosperity in the world*<sup>2</sup>. Which in practice means that DG ECFIN is responsible for:

- economic surveillance, analysis and reporting in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- providing financial support to facilitate economic growth (through different funds / facilities)
- policy support for the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)
- engaging with international financial institutions and channelling financial support to partner countries<sup>3</sup>

DG ECFIN's communication strategy opens with an expanded set of communication aims cf. the 2015-2019 strategy, it also makes more of the need to mobilise staff for effective engagement of stakeholders and mentions the public in these overarching aims for the first time. Linked to this, the importance of explaining the benefits of DG ECFIN's work, and generating public support are included, which are very pertinent in the context of the recovery.

#### Box 1: Communication Strategy 2019-2024 'aims'

- Achieve our overall organisational objectives
- **Mobilise staff to engage** effectively with our most important stakeholders **and the public**;
- Demonstrate the success **and explain the benefits** of our work;
- Ensure people understand what we do;
- **Generate public support for the euro and the economic policies of the Commission**; and
- **Tackle fake news and misinformation.**

Note bold text highlights additions cf. previous strategy

The aim to tackle fake news and misinformation shows an awareness of the challenging communication environment. Indeed, the document sets out an explanation of the changed environment for communication, citing issues such as the growing backlash against the multilateral world order, the rise of populism and protectionism, public concern about the climate emergency, and a pro-European fight back driven in part by Brexit. The communication objectives and messages and tools (discussed in more detail below) lead from this. However, it dates from 11 November 2019 and as such, it was developed before the WHO declared a global pandemic and the seismic shifts in economic policy levers used by the Commission<sup>4</sup> to support the EU recovery from the pandemic and the changed

<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, DG ECFIN is engaged in supporting corporate communication (e.g. NextGenerationEU, the RRF and InvestEU, coordinated by DG COMM).

<sup>2</sup> [Mission statement - economic and financial affairs | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> As described under 'Responsibilities', see [Economic and Financial Affairs | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> A Berlin-based think tank, the Jacques Delors Centre published a policy brief in February 2020 titled 'Everything will be different: How the pandemic is changing EU economic governance' setting out how previously inconceivable economic policy measures were enabled by the pandemic, including

communication environment it created, such as the replacement of in-person events (including the Brussels Economic Forum – the annual flagship economic event of the European Commission), trainings or press conferences, with digital / online versions of the same, and a whole radical new set of needs and concerns.

### **Communication objectives**

DG ECFIN's communication activities have always centred around reinforcing policy efforts by advocating for, and evidencing the relevance and importance of Commission policies, and in this way, build support for them<sup>5</sup>. DG ECFIN's communication has evolved in line with the key policies of Communication was once focused on public awareness of (and support for) the Euro and EMU, and then shifted to communication on the response to the financial crisis, economic adjustment programme surveillance and EMU economic governance.

#### **Box 2: Communication objectives as per Communication Strategy 2019-2024**

- Inform and explain how the economic policies of the Commission are helping **the transition to a climate-neutral and future-ready Europe built on social fairness**, and how they support **creating jobs, sustainable and inclusive growth and investment, sound public finances** and financial stability; communicate how economic policy coordination and the Commission's proposals help to create more **resilient national economies, a stronger Europe in the world, and a more equal sharing of the benefits of the euro**; **raise awareness of EU instruments for unlocking investment for managing the climate and digital transitions**; shape the economic policy debate at the EU level; and influence policy-making at the EU and national level in line with policies developed by the DG, in particular by means of active engagement with key stakeholders;
- Ensure that the public policy debate is well-informed through the provision of clear, objective and accurate information to DG ECFIN's stakeholders and, where relevant, to the general public.
- To achieve these objectives by enhancing DG ECFIN's reputation as an authoritative and credible source of economic policy proposals based on high-quality research and analysis by means of the efficient dissemination, clear explanation and open discussion of its work.
- **Establish a reputation as an open and responsive institution, ready to engage in the broader public debate, including by communicating complex arguments in an accessible language and format.**

*Note bold text highlights additions cf. previous strategy*

The 2015 -2019 Communication Strategy, timed to cover the new Commission which took office in November the previous year, was the first formal strategy since 2004. The objectives reflected the fact that, post crisis, DG ECFIN had a more operational mandate that directly affects citizens, could move markets and had important political ramifications. The communication objectives were about informing and explaining economic policy

---

the issuing of EU bonds and resulting EU debt. See [Everything will be different: How the pandemic is changing | Hertie School \(delorscentre.eu\)](https://www.hertie-school.org/en/everything-will-be-different-how-the-pandemic-is-changing/).

<sup>5</sup> A recent study entitled: "Does media visibility make EU fiscal rules more effective?", December 2021 highlights the benefits of tying communication activities to supporting operational objectives. The study reports that media visibility appear to have contributed to the effectiveness of EU fiscal rules, as measured by stronger numerical compliance with these rules.

(centring around the exit from the financial crisis and its fallout), contributing to an informed debate, and enhancing DG ECFIN's reputation as an authoritative and credible source. However, whilst the strategy clearly built on the Commission's policy priorities, the major economic policy, which was unknown at the time was the massive Commission recovery plan (in particular the RRF).

### ***Intervention Logic***

We developed an intervention logic (IL) to depict the external communications aspects of DG ECFIN's 2019 – 2024 Communication Strategy, in-line with the scope of this assessment. It was confirmed with DG ECFIN during the kick-off meeting.

The starting point for the IL is DG ECFIN's mission and the specific economic policy objectives that have been set to support four of the European Commission's 2019 – 2024 priorities. This reflects the integral role played by communications in the achievement of policy goals.

Below the policy specific objectives, we show the aims and objectives of DG ECFIN's communications. We then highlight needs analysis, which is intended to confirm the critical importance of understanding stakeholders' and multipliers' communication needs and of taking these insights into the design of specific communication programmes. This is in-line with the EC Communication Indicator framework 2022. Providing an enhanced understanding of stakeholders and multipliers and how DG ECFIN can better engage, resonate, and also listen to these groups was central to our approach to this assignment. The IL also reflects the importance of consulting stakeholders, which was reiterated in the recently adopted Better Regulation Communication<sup>6</sup>.

The design of specific communication programmes has also considered main communication challenges<sup>7</sup> and ways to overcome these. Although not depicted in the IL, issues relating to the institutional setting, multiplicity of actors, limited resources, unpredictable nature of economic policy and its communication, and COVID-19 and the move to online have also provided a lens for our investigation.

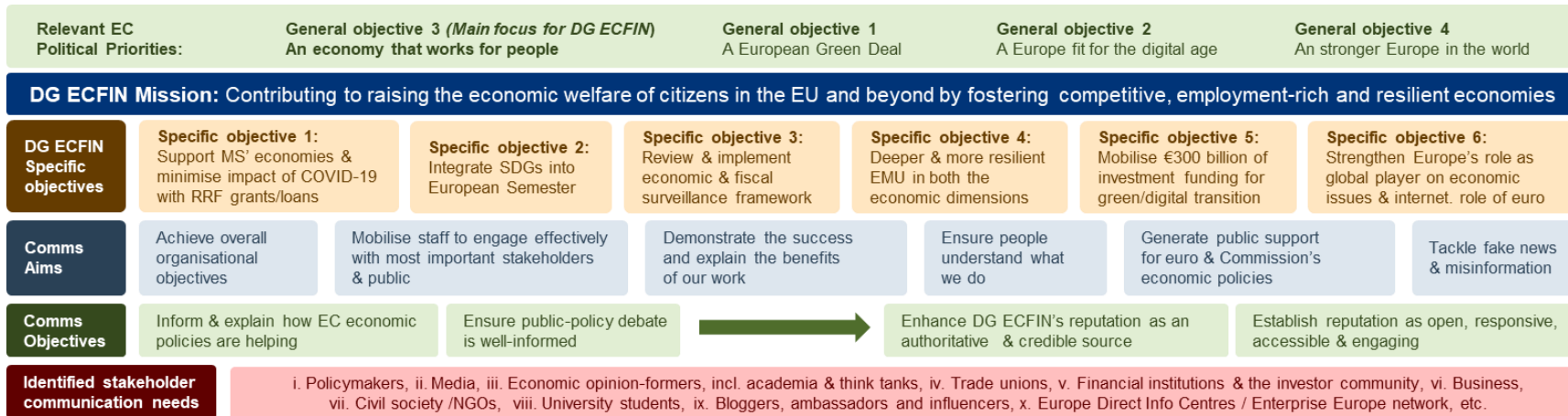
As highlighted below, we suggest a number of overarching desirable impacts, which are aligned with activities, outputs, and results and reflect DG ECFIN's communication objectives to establish itself as an authority and global voice on economic policies, which is trusted by stakeholders and the public to support the recovery and the EU economy.

---

<sup>6</sup> Better regulation: joining forces to make better laws (COM(2021) 219 final).

<sup>7</sup> Communication problems are highlighted in the 2019 – 2024 Strategy. They are not specifically illustrated in the IL for reasons of space.

# Evaluation of DG ECFIN's communication activities



## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES (per Communication Programme)

INPUTS <i>per year</i>	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	RESULTS	IMPACTS
<p><b>DG ECFIN Human Resources</b> = +/-20 FTE</p> <p><b>DG ECFIN Financial Resources</b> Total budget for 2019 - 2024 Strategy circa EUR 2.5m - 3m</p> <p><b>External Contractor Support</b> e.g. continuous monitoring data; paid promotion; etc.</p> <p><b>Communication Strategy</b> planning &amp; reporting tools &amp; documents</p> <p>Collaboration with DG COMM, ESOs, CCSG, ECN, EDICs, RECOVER</p> <p>Collaboration / co-creation with stakeholders / multipliers</p>	<p><b>MEDIA</b> Support to CAB/SPP; Journalist seminars training; Background briefings; LTTs; press releases; Euronews 'Real Economy'</p> <p><b>SOCIAL MEDIA</b> Twitter dissemination, graphic heads-up, stakeholder takeovers, Facebook &amp; FB live, YouTube, Blogs, Paid promotion; Staff as ambassadors, corporate channels, etc.</p> <p><b>OUTREACH</b> Flagship campaigns; Stakeholder seminars; Multi-stakeholder conferences &amp; seminars; Research-focus conferences; speakers' pool; In-country events; ECFIN e-Newsletter</p> <p><b>WEBSITE</b> Content maintenance (text, visuals); Translation of content; User experience; Monitoring data and feedback</p> <p><b>PUBLICATIONS</b> Publications policy; Editorial, layout, promotion; Institutional papers; Economic Briefs; Technical papers; General interest publication</p> <p><b>ESOs</b> Country-based events; Bxl-based stakeholder seminars; Policy priority info; ESO support</p>	<p><b>MEDIA</b> # seminar / training participants, # editions and viewing figures; #on-line views; # media enquiries, #interviews, etc.</p> <p><b>SOCIAL MEDIA</b> #posts; #Twitter fans; # FB followers; #video views, # impressions, covering all channels / campaigns / influencers / ambassadors, paid versus organic, etc.</p> <p><b>OUTREACH</b> #events; # digital participants; # media participants/interviews; #newsletter subscribers; # newsletter downloads</p> <p><b>WEBSITE</b> #unique visitors; #page views; #downloads; #video views; #linguistic versions; bounce rate, etc.</p> <p><b>PUBLICATIONS</b> Adoption of publication programme; # number of publications distributed; # subscribers; #publication page views; #downloads</p> <p><b>ESOs</b> # (digital) events; #Bxl-based (digital) seminars; # participants; #ECFIN visitors received; #information pieces provided</p>	<p><b>MEDIA</b> Journalist satisfaction; ECFIN media coverage in key titles; Positive / neutral citations; Direct quotes; etc. increased stakeholder &amp; public awareness</p> <p><b>SOCIAL MEDIA</b> #likes; #shares; engagement rate; #video view- throughs, #click-throughs; #mentions, endorsement, community growth, awareness and understanding; etc.</p> <p><b>OUTREACH</b> Participant satisfaction; growth of engaged stakeholder communities; stakeholders feel involved/ view ECFIN as responsive/open</p> <p><b>WEBSITE</b> user satisfaction, enhanced awareness &amp; understanding, etc.</p> <p><b>PUBLICATIONS</b> High levels of use of ECFIN outputs /DG ECFIN analysis is widely cited/shared</p> <p><b>ESOs</b> Participant satisfaction; increased awareness &amp; understanding; positive / neutral national media coverage</p>	<p>Multipliers and key specialist stakeholders consult DG ECFIN as an authority on economic topics</p> <p>Stakeholders engage more with DG ECFIN and advocate for EU economic policies</p> <p>EU viewed as a strong global player on economic issues</p> <p>Wider acceptance that the EU is critical to the recovery and citizens' economic welfare</p> <p>Increased public trust in the EU</p>

### 3.2. *Baseline*

As noted in the introduction, this report is not a legislative requirement, but rather an assessment designed to support learning aimed at refining and elaborating further DG ECFIN's communication activities. However, our assessment still follows the European Commission Better Regulation Guidelines in addressing the evaluation criteria and answering the evaluation questions. For our conclusions and lessons learnt, we further draw on the previous evaluation conducted in <sup>8</sup>[10] on the relevance and effectiveness of DG ECFIN's communication, collaboration, opportunities and limitations of DG ECFIN's communication activities, and measurement and evaluation of DG ECFIN's communication. The evaluation found that:

- DG ECFIN's communication objectives and target audiences were relevant, but too broadly defined, with a clearer focus on areas of particular concern and more granularity in the targeting of audiences required – considering exactly who needs to be engaged and how engagement will be ensured.
- The objective of ensuring that DG ECFIN is viewed by all stakeholders as transparent and open requires not only a focus on information dissemination, but also on listening, engaging and addressing concerns, issues and variant opinions through open dialogue.
- Themes and content mostly matched the target audiences' needs, however, the tone of some of the content and messages needed to be reviewed.
- The tools targeting stakeholders were suitable and had the potential to contribute significantly to the objectives set. However, relying extensively on already existing tools without clear presentation of avenues to enhance reach was considered to limit the overall reach to primarily those already engaged.
- From a resource input perspective, the publications programme raised the question of the need for "official publications" and additional monitoring of use, as it was found to have limited viewership of many publications. It was also suggested to better segment mailing lists based on the users' backgrounds and possible preferences regarding the content.
- The Real Economy programme was found to be somewhat isolated from the balance of objectives and their priorities as described in the 2015 strategy. Issues with some of the reach data also meant that there was justification to suggest its discontinuation or how to develop this tool in a more cost -efficient manner collaborating with other DGs.
- There was a need to consider exploiting opportunities to work with DG COMM in addressing the wider public and working with other DGs on communicating economic reforms.
- There were areas for improvement as regards data collection and analysis of monitoring data and use of data to refine efforts.

---

<sup>8</sup> [ecfin\\_communication\\_strategy\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)



#### 4. EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The assessment sought to answer ten evaluation questions listed in the Technical Specifications which were reordered under five evaluation criteria, in line with the Better Regulation Guidelines, as follows:

<b>EFFECTIVENESS</b>
EQ1. To what extent has each of the communication activities included in the 2019-24 communication strategy been effective in engaging and informing the DG ECFIN audience?
EQ1.1. To what extent is DG ECFIN's use of social media tools effective in reaching its audience?
EQ2. To what extent have DG ECFIN communication activities effectively contributed to the awareness, understanding and ownership of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) by citizens, stakeholders and Member States?
EQ3. How can DG ECFIN increase the impact of its communication in the Member States, directly or with the intermediary of the European Commission central services and ESOs?
EQ4. To what extent is it useful to modify or complement the current set of continuous monitoring indicators and targets in order to get a comprehensive assessment of DG ECFIN communication activities?
<b>EFFICIENCY</b>
EQ5. Taking into account DG ECFIN's communication resource constraints (+/- 20 staff and a budget of +/- EUR 2 million), to what extent were DG ECFIN communication activities efficient in informing and engaging with DG ECFIN audiences?
EQ6. To what extent were the communication activities included in the 2019-24 communication strategy efficient?
EQ7. Which activities could be performed more efficiently, and which efficient activities could be further developed?
EQ7.1. To what extent could social media be better used as a way to increase the efficiency of DG ECFIN communication activities?
<b>COHERENCE</b>
EQ8. To what extent have DG ECFIN communication activities been complementary to the activities led by other topic-related Commission services?
EQ8.1. Which communication activities and tools used within and outside the Commission could DG ECFIN use to better reach out to its audience?
EQ8.2. To what extent have DG ECFIN communication activities on the RRF been complementary to the activities led by the Member States?
<b>RELEVANCE</b>
EQ9. To what extent has DG ECFIN reached out to the right stakeholders and multipliers to raise awareness on its policies, foster a mutually beneficial dialogue and eventually increase ownership of its initiatives among specialised audience and the general public?
EQ10. To what extent do the communication activities included in the 2019-24 communication strategy remain relevant?
EQ 10.1. Which activities could be added to remain relevant?



## 5. METHOD FOLLOWED

### 5.1. Methodology

The assessment was organised in three phases:

- an inception phase that lasted from mid-May until end of June 2022,
- an interim phase that lasted from July until September 2022, and
- an analysis and reporting phase that lasted from September until December 2022.

In this timeframe, we conducted the following data collection and analysis:

1. **Desk research:** We reviewed existing available evidence and continuous monitoring data collected from 2017 as follows:

Documents reviewed	
Monitoring reports	DG ECFIN Annual Reports (2017-2021)
	BEF digital and concept notes (2019-2022)
	BEF reports (2017-2021)
	Media monitoring 2017-2022
	Outreach programme 2018-2021 (stakeholder and journalist seminars)
	Social media monitoring Jan-March 2022
Annual statistics on ECFIN publications	2017-2021 and mailing lists analytics 2017-2022 2021 page views and downloads
Euronews	Real economy – Season 8 -Final technical and financial report
Indicators	Communication network indicators
Strategies	Communication Strategy 2015-2019 Communication Strategy 2019-2024
Annual reports	Annual activity report 2020 and 2021
Management plans	Management plan 2020 and 2021
Euroat20	Euroat20 contract Euroat20 offer Euroat20 terms of reference
RRF	RRF Scoreboard contract RRF Scoreboard contract Data Appendix RRF Scoreboard terms of reference
ECFIN communication budget	A4 budget 2020 and 2021
	AOSD reports 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021
	Commitments Payments by AOS 2017-2021

2. **Scoping interviews:** We conducted ten scoping interviews with the DG ECFIN communications unit, DG ECFIN policy staff, representatives from DG COMM and external contractors. Our aim was to discuss their experiences in designing and implementing the communication strategy and activities, as well as DG ECFIN's broader contribution to communication at the Commission, particularly in the context of the RRF.

Number of interviews	Type of interviewee
2 group interviews	DG ECFIN communications unit

2 individual interviews	DG ECFIN policy – Director ECFIN A, HoU A1
2 individual interviews	DG COMM B.1 and B.2
1 individual interview	RECOVER task force communication unit
1 group interview	External contractor (monitoring)
1 group interview	External contractors (comms activities
1 individual interview	– events and e-newsletter)

3. **Targeted interviews:** We conducted 17 targeted interviews with internal and external DG ECFIN stakeholders to collect insights on their experiences of DG ECFIN communication. Our interviewees represented the following institutions:

- 1x DG EMPL and 1x DG FISMA
- 2x European Semester Officers
- 1x European Parliament (ECON)
- 1x European Central Bank
- 1x News agency journalist
- 1x Broadcaster based in Brussels
- 1x Brussels-based financial journalist
- 1x Financial journalist working in the Member States
- 2x Bloggers / ambassadors / influencers
- 1x international financial institution
- 2x think tanks
- 1x trade union
- 1x civil society organisation

4. **Surveys:** We conducted three surveys of DG ECFIN stakeholders, national authorities, and European Semester Officers. All three surveys were hosted on the EU Survey Platform and opened on 29 July 2022.

The link to the survey of DG ECFIN stakeholders was advertised in DG ECFIN's newsletter and on DG ECFIN's website. We also asked European Semester Officers to distribute the link to the survey widely within their relevant national stakeholder networks. The survey closed on 5 September 2022. Overall, 285 respondents contributed to the survey from all EU Member States, apart from Lithuania.

The link to the survey of national authorities was distributed by DG ECFIN via a contact in the EFC Secretariat who assisted by circulating the invitation among the EFC Alternates. This survey remained open until 2 December 2022, as it had a low response rate of 9. The response rate remained at 9, as there were no opportunities after September 2022 to send out further reminders to national authorities to complete the survey.

The link to the survey of European Semester Officers was shared by DG ECFIN. Reminders were sent on 31 August, 8 September and 20 September. The survey remained open until 2 December 2022 and reached the minimum response rate of 14.

5. **Online focus groups:** We originally planned to conduct one online focus group with 6-8 Europe Direct Centres (EDCs) from five Member States, which we determined based on three factors:

- representation of each EU region (Western, Central / Eastern, Northern, Southern)
- population size (small <10 million, medium 10-29 million, large >30 million)
- results of the European Parliament Flash Eurobarometer (September 2021) on the question of whether respondents agreed that the NextGenerationEU projects will help their country to overcome the economic and social damage brought about by the coronavirus pandemic (overall, 60% of respondents agreed).

Using these factors, we selected the following Member States:

- Germany: Western Europe, large population, low EB result of 52%
- Malta: Southern Europe, small population, high EB result of 78%
- Poland: Central / Eastern Europe, large population, average EB result of 64%
- Portugal: Southern Europe, medium population, high EB result of 75%
- Sweden: Northern Europe, medium population, low EB result of 49%

An e-mail invitation was sent to EDCs in the selected Member States via DG COMM's network asking them to express their interest in participating in the online focus group. The invitation specified that we were keen on including EDCs from both larger cities and smaller towns / rural areas.

Due to a high level of interest from EDCs in Germany and Sweden, we ended up holding two online focus groups on 13 September and 20 September 2022 on Microsoft Teams. These were attended by representatives of EDCs from both large cities and smaller towns / rural areas, as follows:

- 13 September: 9 participants from Germany (1), Portugal (2), Sweden (6)
- 20 September: 4 participants from Germany (2), Malta (1), Sweden (1)

There was no interest from EDCs in Poland to participate, despite efforts made to translate the invitation e-mail into Polish, offer an online focus group in Polish, and individually distribute the invitation to all EDCs in Poland. We discussed with DG ECFIN the possibility to hold an additional online focus group with EDCs from Romania to include Central and Eastern Europe. The focus group with Romanian EDCs took place on 2 November 2022 and gathered 10 participants in total.

We also conducted one focus group with economics students from the College of Europe in Bruges, on 26 October 2022, which was attended by three students. E-mail invitations were sent out to two economics professors at the College who shared them with their students, including one reminder.

6. **Social media review:** We conducted a social media review of DG ECFIN's communication activities from 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2022. The review was comprised of three main tasks, namely:

- Twitter account benchmarking
- Twitter audience analysis
- Topic-based sentiment analysis focused on the Economic Governance Review and European Semester, and the InvestEU Programme

## 5.2. Limitations – robustness of findings

We faced several challenges in data collection activities carried out during the interim phase of this assessment. Below, we highlight the main ones as well as activities undertaken in consultation with DG ECFIN to mitigate against the impact of these challenges for the assessment. However, despite these challenges, we consider our answers to the evaluation questions, conclusions and lessons learnt to be robust and reliable. This means that they were confirmed by more than one credible source and/or are objectively verifiable.

- **Low response rate to the survey of national authorities:** despite efforts from DG ECFIN, it was not possible to send additional reminders to the survey through the EFC Secretariat. Despite staying open until 2 December 2022, the response rate remained at 9 respondents only. However, this is mitigated against through a large share of respondents to the stakeholder survey constituting representatives of public institutions in the Member States (n=38). Hence, while the stakeholder survey asked slightly different questions than the one targeted at national authorities specifically, it was still possible to capture the views of public authorities on a number of important issues, such as awareness and usefulness of DG ECFIN's communication.
- **Low response rate to the survey of ESOs:** DG ECFIN sent four reminders to ESOs asking them to complete the survey at regular intervals. However, despite staying open until December 2022, the response rate remained at 14 respondents. This coincides with our minimum target of covering half of the EU Member States, however, our aim was to capture insights from at least one ESO per Member State (n=27). Still, we consider the findings from the survey of ESOs to be robust, and complemented them with two interviews with ESOs (and one interview with a former ESO as part of the scoping interviews) to discuss insights from the survey more in-depth.
- **Low participation of economics students in online focus group:** The online focus group with economics students was a method proposed at inception stage to account for their views being included given that they are listed as a stakeholder in the 2019-24 communication strategy. However, despite proposing two different dates for the focus groups, offering incentives (Starbucks voucher) and engaging two economics professors in recruitment, only three economics students participated in the focus groups. Still, the aim of the focus group was not to achieve representativeness, but depth of engagement, and students were very keen to share their insights and perceptions, leading to useful findings to inform the relevance and effectiveness analyses through triangulation with other sources.
- **No comparative data for efficiency analysis:** It was not possible for us to obtain data from other DGs to compare with finances and results of DG ECFIN communication as regards efficiency. This was due to other topic-related DGs that we approached not conducting monitoring of their performance, thus not having results available against financial inputs. In one case, the communication approach had seen a complete overhaul in recent years, with no previous data available, and no results yet to assess. This meant that we could only conduct an efficiency analysis that compared DG ECFIN's communication programmes / own tools and channels.

## 6. ANSWERS TO THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

This section provides an assessment of the evaluation questions set in the ToR for this assessment, based on the data that was collected in earlier stages. The analysis in this section is based on the triangulation of findings from the following sources:

- desk research on DG ECFIN continuous monitoring, strategic documents and activity reports
- 9 interviews with internal Commission staff and external contractors
- 17 targeted interviews with stakeholders
- survey of stakeholders (n=285)
- survey of national authorities (n=9)
- survey of European Semester Officers (n=14)
- three online focus groups with Europe Direct Centres
- online focus group with economics students
- social media review (Twitter audience analysis, social listening)

### 6.1. Effectiveness

Effectiveness considers how successful EU action has been in achieving or progressing towards its objectives, which factors drive or hinder progress and how they are linked (or not) to the EU intervention. The effectiveness analysis looks at the benefits of the EU intervention as they accrue to different stakeholders<sup>9</sup>

Here we present our findings in relation to the effectiveness of DG ECFIN's communication. The analysis of effectiveness considers:

- the extent to which the communication activities included in the 2019-24 communication strategy have been effective in engaging and informing the DG ECFIN audience (EQ1), including social media tools (EQ1.1),
- the extent to which DG ECFIN communication activities effectively contributed to the awareness, understanding and ownership of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) by citizens, stakeholders and Member States (EQ2),
- how DG ECFIN can increase the impact of its communication in the Member States, either directly or with the intermediary of the European Commission central services and ESOs (EQ3),
- the extent to which it is useful to modify or complement the current set of continuous monitoring indicators and targets in order to get a comprehensive assessment of DG ECFIN communication activities (EQ4).

---

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, Better Regulation: guidelines and toolbox, available at: [Better regulation: guidelines and toolbox | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/better-regulation/guidelines-and-toolbox/).

**EQ1: To what extent has each of the communication activities included in the 2019-24 communication strategy been effective in engaging and informing the DG ECFIN audience (stakeholders, multipliers, and – indirectly – the broad public)?**

The communication activities included in the 2019-24 communication strategy have been effective in engaging and informing the DG ECFIN audience insofar as there is evidence of progress made between 2017-2021 in most communication programmes, with targets met in most areas, and high satisfaction rates with DG ECFIN events. DG ECFIN is performing particularly well in informing specialist audiences, with its main assets being credibility, high quality and usefulness of communication products. Media coverage in 2021 has also maintained a significant increase seen in 2020 relative to 2019 and before, and the transformed economic landscape due to the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to contribute to increased coverage of DG ECFIN topics.

The first area for improvement concerns engagement of both specialist and non-specialist audiences to meet DG ECFIN's objective of being regarded by *all* stakeholders as an open and responsive institution. This would involve strengthening the listening and dialogue function of DG ECFIN's outreach activities to keep abreast of current concerns among stakeholder groups (specialist and non-specialist audiences) and engage in discussions about economic analyses, policies and reforms (specialist audiences).

The second area for improvement concerns information provision to non-specialist audiences and the broader public, which stakeholders deemed to be an important aspect for DG ECFIN to explore. Suggestions for additional materials that DG ECFIN could include to reach non-specialists are presented in our answer to EQ10.1 under Relevance. In the context of Effectiveness, the emphasis has been on jargon-free and shorter press materials to reach non-financial journalists with the aim of informing the general public, a jargon-free and visually engaging newsletter that is targeted at particular stakeholder groups and would allow specialists to share it more easily with their non-specialist audiences (e.g., civil society organisations), and more visuals, interactive elements, and videos for social media and the website targeted at non-specialists (and the general public). A key consideration here is also the publications programme and avenues to generate greater readership of discussion papers, technical papers and economic briefs through better targeting or format adaptations, should DG ECFIN deem it important to continue with these publications.

*We note that DG ECFIN has conducted some communication activities specifically targeted at the general public, such as the EUROat20 campaign and in the context of the RRF. However, these were outside of the scope of our assessment (see section 2.2).*

**Sources of evidence:**

- 2019-24 communication strategy
- Continuous monitoring data
- 2021 annual monitoring report
- Survey of stakeholders
- Interviews with Commission staff
- Targeted interviews
- 2021 annual activity report
- Online focus group with economics students
- Web statistics on publication page
- 2021 publications page views and downloads

Our review of the 2019-24 communication strategy found that while it says that “each programme in the Annexes will have established output, results and impact indicators”, these indicators have not been applied consistently at all levels – examples by programme are provided below.

However, we note that continuous monitoring collects data on outputs, results and impacts of some communication programmes which are not listed in the communication strategy. In the following, we provide an analysis by communications programme, drawing on data for 2020 and 2021, and comparing to previous years to show progress, where relevant and where data was available.

We report on social media in the next evaluation question (EQ1.1).

## Media programme

In the 2019-24 communication strategy, under section 3.4 “How will we measure success?”, the media programme refers to *output* indicators – press releases, speeches, fact sheets, infographics, number of issues. Moreover, the Real Economy series is also assessed based on *output* indicators, such as DG ECFIN issues and number of viewers, number of seminars, briefings and training courses for journalists, etc. However, the section **does not list result or impact indicators**.

However, the continuous monitoring, which assesses earned media coverage per announcement of Economic Forecasts, Semester packages and other major DG ECFIN initiatives, further collects data on the following **results**, albeit with no set targets:

- number of mentions of the announcement
- number of mentions referring to Commissioner Gentiloni and Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis
- proportion of articles with explicit reference to EC announcements
- number of quotations of EU institutions and spokespeople mentioned in the coverage
- favourability of coverage (positive, neutral, mixed, negative)
- geographical scope of coverage (EU/eurozone, both EU and own Member State, own Member State only, covers different Member States specifically).
- key message penetration
- social listening to show number of pickups in social media of media items published by DG ECFIN

The 2021 annual monitoring report shows that for media monitoring, the KPI – the number of citations in the economic and general press per Institutional Paper/Flagship publication, was high. On average, each announcement generated around 1250 articles, of which 8/10 mentioned the publication explicitly, and 7/10 mentioned or quoted the Commissioner. In general, media coverage has maintained an increase seen in 2020 relative to 2019 and before, and the **transformed economic landscape due to the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to contribute to increased coverage of DG ECFIN topics**.

During 2021, the highest coverage of the Commissioner was for the Spring Semester package, followed by the Winter then Autumn and then Spring Forecasts. The Winter 2021 forecast received much more coverage than Winter 2020 (which was pre-COVID) and the Spring 2021 forecast received much less coverage than Spring 2020 (which provided the first estimate of the impact of COVID-19 and reached levels of coverage not reached before or since).

**Technical announcements**, such as the RRF Scoreboard and InvestEU launch, **received less media coverage**. The 2021 annual monitoring report found that while these (and other) funding-related announcements work well on social media (where there is more of a stakeholder audience than targeting the general public), they do less well in the general news media. This is possibly because the **political approval of the InvestEU and RRF**



**are considered more newsworthy**, whereas the later more technical announcements are treated as simply adding detail to news that has already been reported.

Overall, compared with 2017-2019 results, in 2020 and 2021 there was a **significant increase in the number of articles produced** (from 120 articles across the EU on average in 2017 to 1480 and 1250 articles in 2020 and 2021, respectively) as well as in the **proportion of articles mentioning the publication explicitly** (from 5/10 in 2017 to 8/10 in 2020 and 2021, respectively). We also note an **increase in mentions of the Commissioner** (from 6/10 in 2019 and 2020, respectively, to 7/10 in 2021).

However, as noted in our answers to EQ10 and EQ10.1, journalists consulted for this evaluation and our expert review of materials found that the media programme could benefit from simplification and shortening of press materials to ensure that they are picked up by the media even more. This is based on our assessment that all DG ECFIN's press materials would be difficult to understand for non-financial experts, and financial journalists may find it burdensome to translate jargon into a digestible news item. Particularly if DG ECFIN wants to inform the general public, reaching non-financial journalists and providing them with digestible information could be one approach to take. We also note that press releases are viewed by other stakeholders who do not necessarily work for the media, and links to press releases could be forwarded by and to other types of organisations, for example civil society. This warrants that jargon is removed from press materials, as much as possible, and that press materials are shortened (e.g., press releases to a 2-page maximum, length of headlines 12 words maximum, quotes up to 20 words maximum). For example:

*~~"This is the first part of the exceptional MFA package of up to €9 billion announced in the Commission's communication of 18 May 2022 and endorsed by the European Council of 23-24 June 2022."~~*

We also found that the opening paragraphs did not lend themselves to being easily copy-pasted into news agencies' "snaps", as they were lengthy and contained jargon. This limits their usefulness and impact, which could be achieved by making the information more succinct. For example:

*The European Commission, on behalf of the EU, has today disbursed the first half (€500 million) of a new €1 billion macro-financial assistance (MFA) operation for Ukraine. The second tranche (another €500 million) will be disbursed tomorrow, 2 August. The decision about this new exceptional MFA was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on 12 July 2022.*

Revised version:

*The European Union has today released the first €500 million of its financial assistance package for Ukraine. The second €500 million will be released tomorrow.*

As regards the **"Real Economy" programme**, the Season 8 technical and financial report shows that in 2021, DG ECFIN's cooperation with Euronews led to eight episodes of the **"Real Economy" programme**, which allowed to present DG ECFIN's priorities to non-expert audiences. The programme reaches a broad audience on TV (the whole "Real Economy" season is estimated to have reached an audience of 10 million viewers), web (500,000 page views worldwide and 231,000 page views in Europe) and social media (9.8 million content impressions on Facebook and Twitter and over 7000 comments left). Data on the performance of the Real Economy broadcasts from 2018 to 2021 shows that the programme has managed to **continuously increase exposure** (number of times the programme was seen, either by the same individual or a different one) from 20,251 in 2018 to 124,467 in 2021. While data on page views reported in the 2020 and 2021 annual activity reports' annexes shows that the programme **performed significantly below set targets** in terms of **completion rate** (65% target vs. 19% result) and **views per video** (80,000 target vs. 35,000 result), these statistics should be viewed with caution, as they do not account for the fact that the magazine is a TV magazine, which is only posted on Euronews' website in addition to being broadcast on TV. Moreover, these targets appear to be very ambitious,



particularly when compared with other EU programmes, such as unreported Europe, Ocean, Witness and Smart Regions – most of which are outperformed by Real Economy<sup>10</sup>.

### Stakeholder outreach programme

In the 2019-24 communication strategy, the stakeholder outreach programme aligns with standard programme logic models and specifies the following **outputs, results and impact**:

- **Outputs:**
  - number of events held
  - number of participants
  - geographical spread
  - % first time participants
- **Results:**
  - satisfaction with events
  - likelihood to share information
  - engagement in follow-up activities
- **Impact:** % of attendees have a more positive opinion of the EU

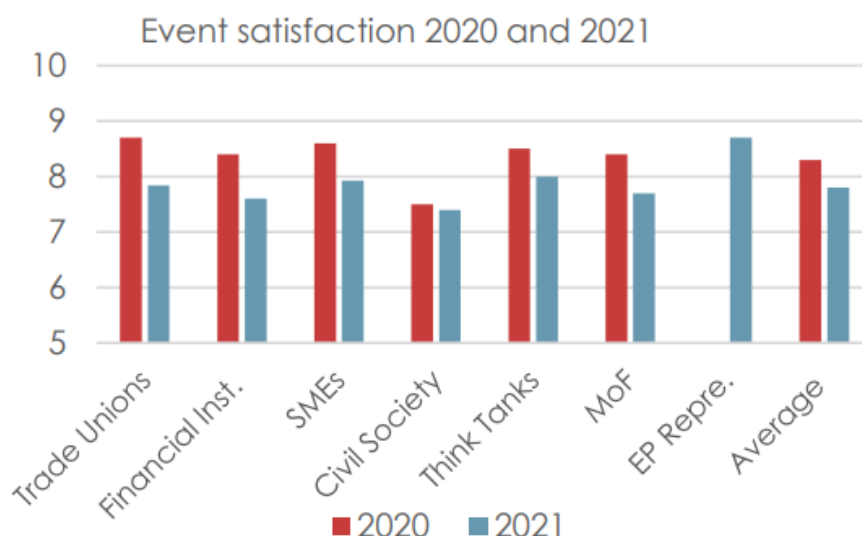
In terms of DG ECFIN's events, continuous monitoring data collected from 2017 to 2021 indicates that **engagement with the Brussels Economic Forum has vastly increased** in that timeframe, from 800+ registrations in 2017 to 2,049 in 2021, exceeding the KPI target of 800. The 2020 and 2021 events, which were held online, accumulated a further 43,000 and 23,572 online views, both on the day and afterwards on demand, also exceeding their target (12,000). Moreover, the engagement on Twitter surpassed by 25% the 2020 results, and mention of #EUBEF21 was 90% higher than for #EUBEF20. 34% of engagement was reported outside of Brussels, an increase compared with 2020.<sup>11</sup>

As regards **stakeholder seminars**, in 2020 and 2021, six and seven, respectively, were organised online gathering 180 and 251 participants, respectively, from trade unions, financial institutions, SMEs, think tanks, civil society organisations, Ministries of the Economy and Finance, and the European Parliament key staff. However, we note from the continuous monitoring data that while reach may have increased, the **online format** has led to **slightly lower satisfaction rates** among participants compared with 2020 (-0.4 points). The average satisfaction for the seven seminars was 7.8/10, which was below the set target of 8.0/10. Small areas to improve the overall rating concerned civil society organisations, national financial institutions, Member States and trade union representatives.

---

<sup>10</sup> As an example, Real Economy Season 9 achieved a completion rate of 25%, compared with 18% unreported Europe, 24% Ocean, 9% Witness and 26% Smart Regions.

<sup>11</sup> Since 2018, the BEF has been livestreamed and available on demand, however, given the pandemic, these data are not relevant for comparison with 2020 and 2021 online views.

**Figure 1: Satisfaction rates of stakeholder seminars 2021**


Source: Continuous monitoring report: stakeholder seminars, 2021.

Still, the 2021 annual monitoring report highlights that stakeholders considered the informative quality to be good, with an average satisfaction rate of 8.6/10. Topics of the events were likewise rated positively (8.6/10). All events scored above the target of 8.1/10 on both dimensions. The opportunity to network with Country Desks at stakeholder events was positively rated by those who had used this option (8.5/10). These results were in line with those achieved in 2020.

**Figure 2: Satisfaction rates of stakeholder seminars by speakers, likelihood to share information and better feelings about the EU, 2021**

	Overall rating	Speakers rating	Likelihood to share information/speak positively	Better feelings about the EU
SMEs	7.9	8.7	93%	60%
National financial institutions representatives	7.6	8.8	90%	50%
Think tanks	8.0	8.7	89%	78%
National trade union representatives and ESOs	7.8	8.1	95%	37%
CSOs	7.4	8.7	73%	64%
Member States	7.7	8.9	92%	62%
EP representatives	8.7	8.7	100%	31%
<b>Average</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>54%</b>

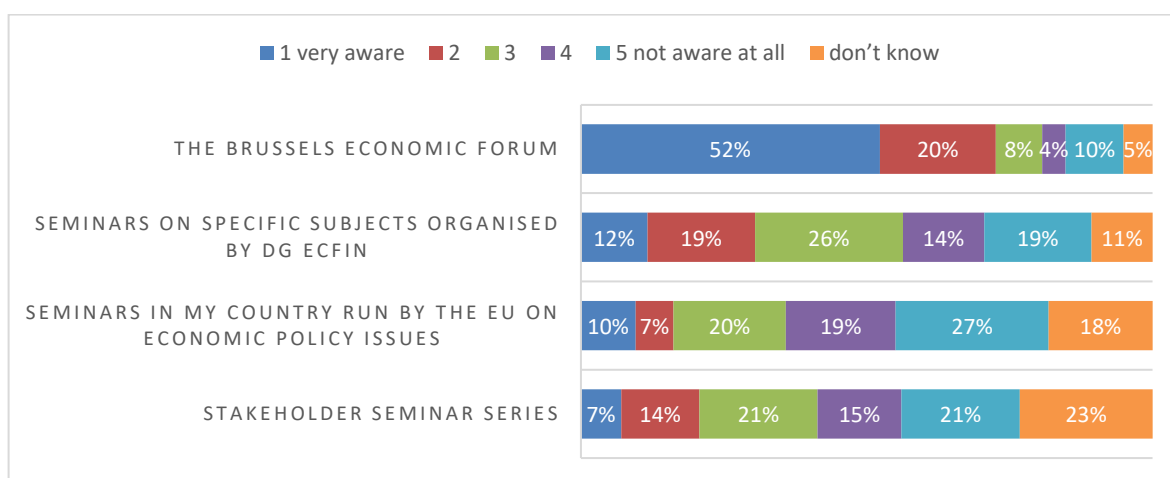
The **impact on participants' feelings towards the EU was positive and on target**: 54% stated that they had a better opinion of the EU as a result of the event (19% "much" and 35% "slightly" better). The share agreeing that they felt much more positive increased by 5 percentage points compared with 2020. As in the previous year, nearly all participants (9.5/10) said they improved their knowledge of what the EU is doing in the field of economic and financial affairs. The share "tending to agree" rather than fully agreeing was high (60%) but on par with previous years. As in previous years, nearly all stakeholders were likely to

share the content (57% “very” and 34% “fairly” likely) meeting the target for this indicator (+70%).

The 2021 annual monitoring report also notes that **webinar lengths** were overall seen as **appropriate**, but there were **differences across groups**. About 4/5 of think tanks, financial institutions, SMEs and representatives of national ministries of economy and finance considered the event length about right. The remaining share<sup>12</sup> would have preferred a shorter event. Moreover, trade union representatives would have preferred a longer, and more interactive event (also reflected in their preference for a physical event). Overall, this group was more negative as regards the engaging aspects of the event – with inadequate time for Q&A and debate mentioned recurrently as the key weakness of the event.

Moreover, our stakeholder survey found that while stakeholders valued direct engagement with DG ECFIN, there was **limited awareness** of DG ECFIN’s stakeholder engagement activities apart from the Brussels Economic Forum (for which 72% noted being “very aware” and “aware”). Awareness of the Brussels Economic Forum was particularly high among those working in academia, national / local governments and think tanks. However, only a minority reported being aware of seminars on specific subjects organised by DG ECFIN (31%), seminars in their country run by the EU on economic policy issues (17%) and stakeholder seminar series (21%). We note that stakeholder seminars are promoted differently than public events like the Brussels Economic Forum, namely through European Semester Officers, who target relevant stakeholders directly at the local level, which explains the discrepancies in awareness of different types of engagement activities.

**Figure 3: To what extent are you aware of the following initiatives?<sup>13</sup> (n=285)**



In 2020<sup>14</sup>, three seminars were organised for journalists working in the Member States (one physical, two in virtual format), attended by 88 journalists in total. The satisfaction rate with the seminars reached the target of 8.0/10, with high satisfaction reported with the quality of speakers (9.1/10) and relevance of topics (9.0/10). Almost all participants (98%) noted that they were likely to share the content with other people, and another 94% that their participation had improved their knowledge of what the EU is doing in the field of economic

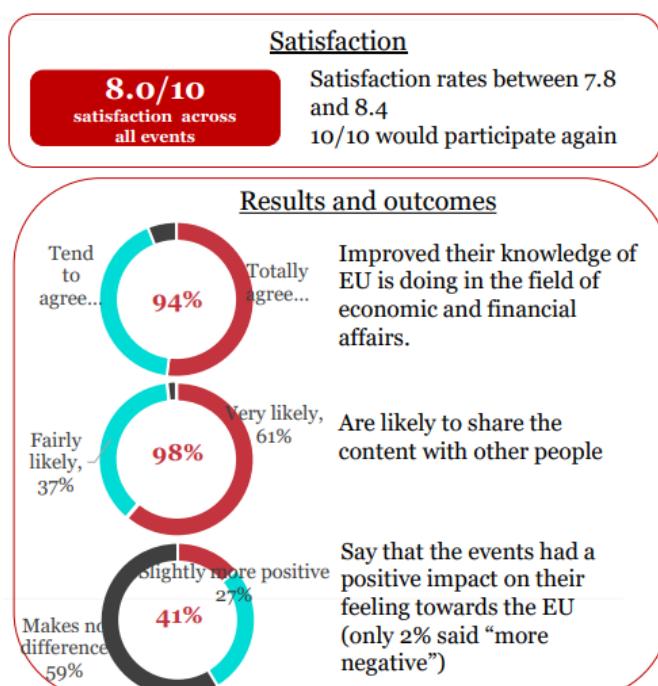
<sup>12</sup> This share is comprised of trade unions, civil society organisations and EP representatives.

<sup>13</sup> Respondents were given the answer options by scale of 1 (very aware) and 5 (not aware at all)

<sup>14</sup> In agreement with the SPP, in 2021, the journalist seminars were put on halt to avoid duplication, as the SPP was considering to open their own virtual technical briefings to journalists from the Member States.

and financial affairs. 41% also reported that the events had a positive impact on their feeling towards the EU.

**Figure 4: Satisfaction rates with journalist seminars 2020**



Source: Continuous monitoring report: stakeholder and journalist seminars, 2020

As noted in our answer to EQ10 and EQ10.1, journalists consulted for this evaluation highly appreciated direct engagement from DG ECFIN and suggested more activities that would allow them to directly access DG ECFIN experts and gain more insights on the Commission's approach to economic policy making via more technical and non-technical briefings.

### Website programme

In the 2019-24 communication strategy, the **website programme** specifies KPIs, but does not list *outputs, results and impact*:

- Visits
- Time spent
- Bounces
- Conversions from social platforms

We were unable to obtain data on time spent, bounces and conversions from social platforms due to technical constraints at corporate level. However, the annexes to the activity reports 2020 and 2021 show that in terms of visits (monthly number of visits and monthly number of page views), DG ECFIN met targets and managed to improve performance between 2020 and 2021:

**Table 1: Website statistics 2020 and 2021**

Indicator	Target	2020	2021
number of visits (monthly average)	120,000	132,803	157,667
number of page views (monthly average)	230,000	263,239	280,600

Economic opinion-formers and journalists consulted noted that the website had improved in recent years, with relevant materials now easier to find via the search function than before. However, survey findings show that key stakeholders still felt that the website would benefit from further improvements to make it more user-friendly, although no further details on possible improvements were provided.

We “tested” the website with economics students during our focus groups, who were given time to scroll through it and share their perceptions and experiences. Students recognised that the look of the website was very much in line with the Commission’s general web presence and that DG ECFIN was bound by the Commission’s visual identity in that regard. Overall, they found it to be very well structured and organised in a way that made it easy to access the right materials quickly. They were particularly drawn to any interactive elements, such as the RRF Scoreboard, which they found very well presented and useful for their own studies and interests. They<sup>15</sup> noted, however, that had they not been aware of the existence of this website, it would have been difficult to find DG ECFIN’s materials via Google searches, which was their preferred way of conducting online research.

### Publications programme

The 2019-24 communication strategy lists output and impact indicators, but not results:

- Outputs:
  - annual programme adoption, half-yearly update
  - % adherence to the plan
  - number of website publications page views
  - number of subscribers to the e-newsletter
- Impact: reader surveys – to what extent publications meet readers’ expectations

In terms of outputs, DG ECFIN staff noted that the half-yearly adoption updates have been turned into a rolling exercise, with the publications team regularly inviting authors to update the planning. Actual outputs are discussed in monthly Editorial Board meetings, where peer-reviewed and internally authorised manuscripts are screened and authors then amend their work, before it is passed on for final agreement and comments to Cabinet. This process is clearly outlined in a graphic showing DG ECFIN’s publication workflow.

For 2021, the % of adherence to the plan was 55.7% (63 published from 113 planned). However, as noted by DG ECFIN staff, this difference was beyond the control of the communication unit, has been regularly discussed with hierarchy, and is not viewed as a problem. Especially since COVID, the RRF, the war in Ukraine, MFA, etc. which caused additional work assignments throughout the year made it necessary to refocus, postpone or add new titles. This also might be the reason why compared with 2020, in 2021, publication page views did not meet the target of 250,000.

---

<sup>15</sup> This finding has limitations, as it was derived from a focus group with only three participants (see section 5.2 on limitations to this study).

**Table 2: Publication page views 2020 and 2021**

Indicator	Target	2020	2021
Publication page views for annual series	250,000	283,213	235,282

However, our assessment of data on page views by type of publication in 2021 shows that the Economic Forecasts by far surpass other publications (in terms of other institutional papers, technical papers, economic briefs and discussion papers). For example, the Winter and Summer 2021 Economic Forecasts *each* had more than double the page views than all technical papers, economic briefs and discussion papers combined. This trend can also be observed for 2020.

**Table 3: Publication page views by type of publication 2020 and 2021**

Publication type	2020	2021
<b>European Economic Forecast combined</b>	<b>228,877</b>	<b>169,152</b>
Other Institutional Papers combined	32,671	44,274
Technical Papers combined	7,421	6,447
Economic Briefs combined	6,059	3,384
Discussion Papers combined	8,185	14,326

Data on publication downloads in 2021, however, shows that in terms of downloads, the European Economic Forecasts performed worse than page views (49,160 compared with 169,152). This discrepancy between page views and downloads may be explained by the very informative Forecast webpage, which may be sufficient for some readers rather than the full reports.

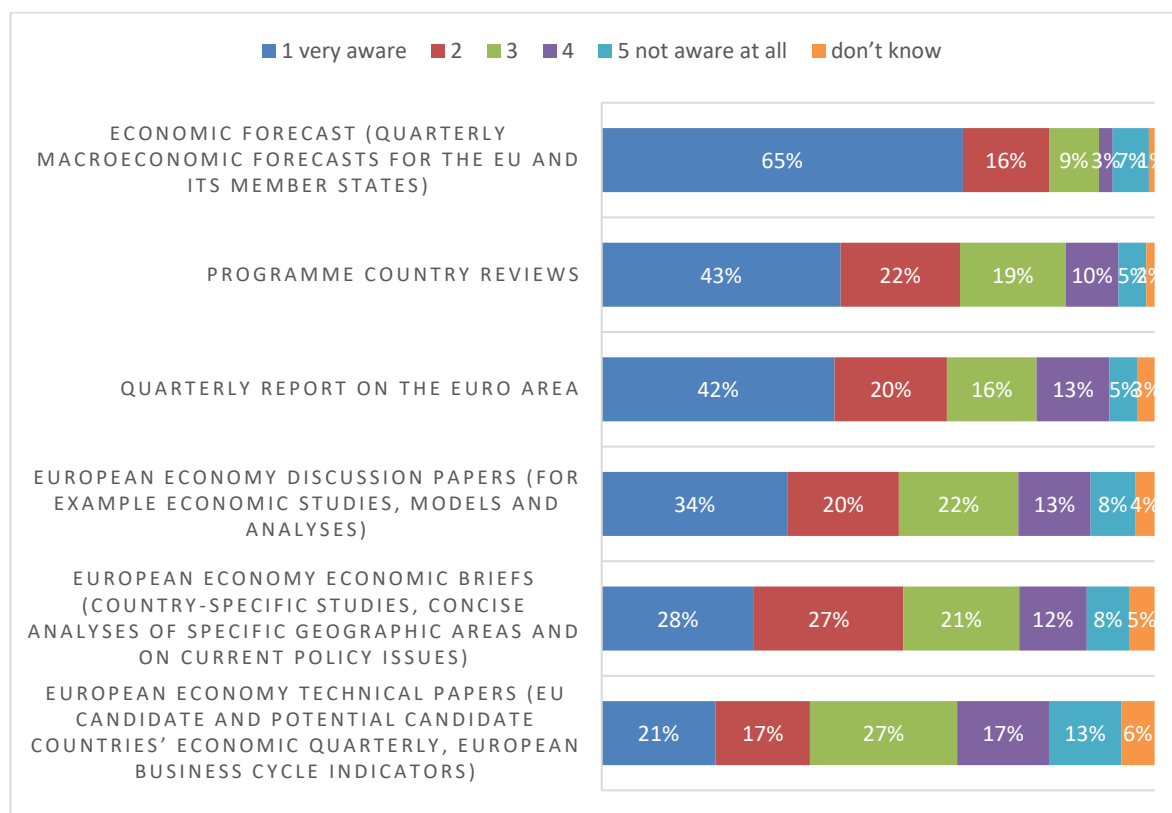
**Table 4: Publication downloads by type of publication 2020 and 2021**

Publication type	2021
<b>European Economic Forecast combined</b>	<b>49,160</b>
Other Institutional Papers combined	21,867
Technical Papers combined	2,919
Economic Briefs combined	1,880
Discussion Papers combined	7,879

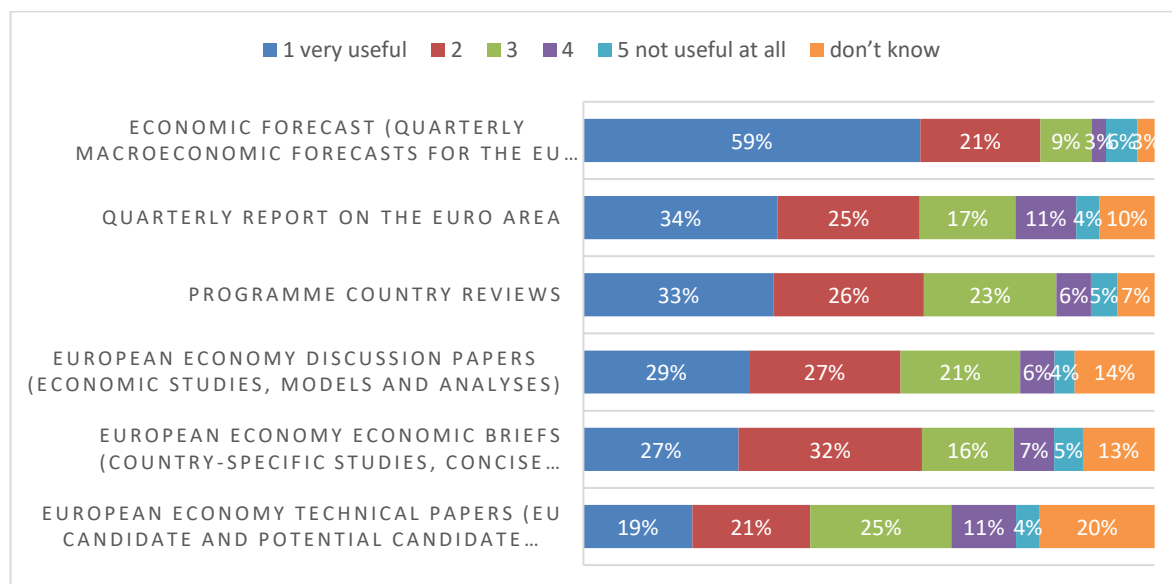
Our stakeholder survey findings show that stakeholders were generally **aware** of DG ECFIN's publications and considered them **useful**. This was particularly the case for the Economic Forecasts (65% reported being "very aware", and 59% found them "very useful"), but less so the European Economy Technical Papers. Awareness of DG ECFIN's

publications was generally highest among academics, think tanks and national / local governments, and lowest among those working in business.

**Figure 5: Awareness of DG ECFIN publications among stakeholders (n=285)**



**Figure 6: Perceptions of usefulness of DG ECFIN publications among stakeholders (n=285)**



In open comments, 83 respondents contributed their suggestions for how the usefulness of these materials could be improved. These mainly related to the **need for more comprehensive products targeted at the wider public to disseminate key findings.**



They also noted that the structure of the website could be improved, on which the publications are hosted, to make it more user friendly<sup>16</sup>.

Finally, the **e-newsletter**, which promotes DG ECFIN publications and summarises the most relevant news on key economic policy developments, was assessed in a reader survey in 2021. The 2021 annual monitoring report presents analysis of 110 responses and found broadly positive views of the newsletter (satisfaction rate of 7.2/10, below the set target of 7.5/10) with room for improvement. The latter concerned **jargon, too technical content**, and the **use of more modern presentational aspects and visuals**. These views were also shared in stakeholder feedback collected for this evaluation, where stakeholders emphasised that less technical language and more engaging visuals would facilitate sharing the newsletter with their non-specialist audiences (civil society organisations, in particular, noted that they shared the newsletter with their constituents). Our own evaluation also found that, currently, the **newsletter is not targeted at any stakeholder group specifically**. It was also not possible to obtain data of subscribers by stakeholder group to conduct a first analysis of the key stakeholders who receive the newsletter. The external contractor responsible for the newsletter and DG ECFIN staff, however, note that targeting could indeed benefit the newsletter.

Overall, we found that the main asset of DG ECFIN's publication was their **credibility**, with 92% of respondents to the stakeholder survey agreeing that DG ECFIN was a credible and authoritative source of information. This perception was particularly strong among respondents who work in think tanks and academia, 77% of whom recognised DG ECFIN's credibility and authority. It was further confirmed in interviews with DG ECFIN's peers (economic opinion-formers, and those working for EU and international institutions), who emphasised that DG ECFIN provides **very high-quality and accurate economic analyses** done by top-class economists.

**EQ1.1. To what extent is DG ECFIN's use of social media tools effective in reaching its audience?**

DG ECFIN is on par with other EC/EU institutional accounts and features towards the top end on the size of the social media community that it has created, albeit growth of reach has slowed down between 2017 and 2021. DG ECFIN also performs well above targets set for engagement on Twitter, but significantly below targets on Facebook. While Facebook appears to be a channel better suited for multimedia events (e.g., BEF or the EU Sustainable Investment Summit), news announcements and those related to the European Economic Forecasts appear to generate the most interest and engagement on Twitter, particularly when communicated using GIFs and videos – something for the social media strategy to consider going forward.

Another consideration is the best choice of channels for social media. While we understand that DGs face limitations in setting up their own LinkedIn accounts due to the Commission's policy on this, LinkedIn is currently the most used social media channel for financial services. Exploring this option could benefit DG ECFIN's reach and engagement in the online community, and also strengthen the listening function of DG ECFIN's communication, through following LinkedIn platforms or groups to keep on top of current concerns.

**Sources of evidence:**

- 2021 annual monitoring report

<sup>16</sup> However, it is not possible to determine whether stakeholders were aware of the new structure of the website which was implemented in July 2022, as the survey ran between July and September 2022, or whether they were commenting on the previous website structure.



- Continuous monitoring data: social media 2020-2021 (monthly reports)
- Social media review

The continuous monitoring collects monthly data on the following **outputs** and **results**:

- **Outputs:** total tweets (regular tweets, retweets, replies) and number of accounts followed by DG ECFIN's account
- **Results:**
  - followers and follower growth (number of people following DG ECFIN's account and number of new people starting to follow DG ECFIN's account)
  - retweets and ratio (number of people who retweeted any regular tweets made by DG ECFIN, and average number of retweets per regular tweet)
  - likes and ratio (number of people who liked any regular tweets made by DG ECFIN and average number of likes per regular tweet)
  - replies (replies to DG ECFIN's account by others)
  - interaction level (interaction per 1x followers)
  - engagement rate (sum of interactions divided by the number of tweets made by DG ECFIN's account)
  - average impressions per post (total impressions for all posts during the month divided by number of posts in the month)

As noted in the 2021 annual monitoring report, **DG ECFIN's social media activities continuously increased their engagement**, calculated as number of "likes", "comments", "replies" and "retweets" divided by number of posts.

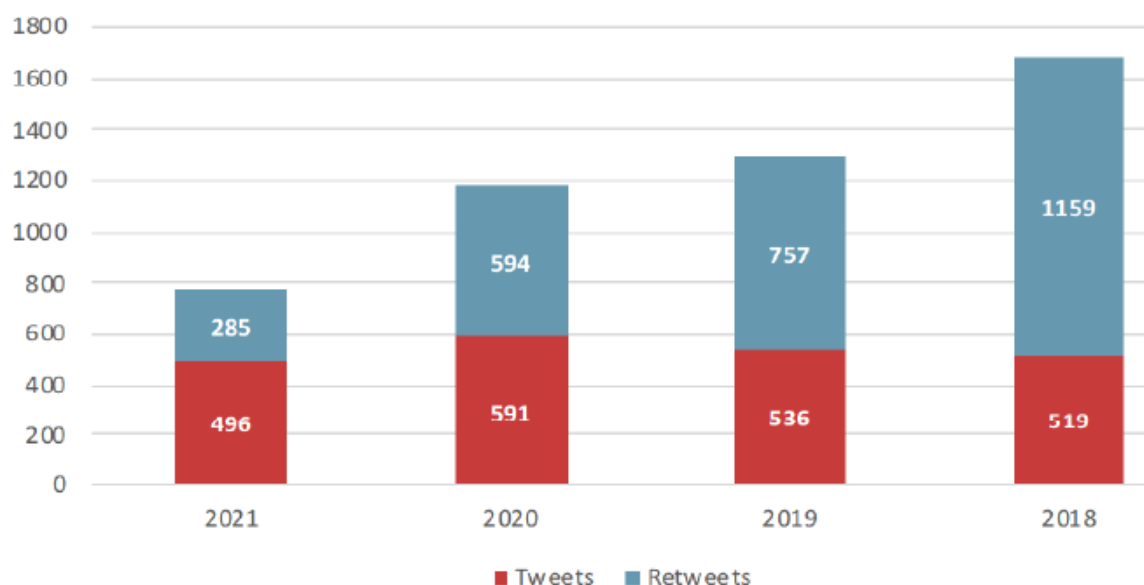
- The **Twitter engagement rate** in 2020 and 2021 was 41 and 30 interactions per post, respectively, and despite the drop in 2021, still more than twice its target of 15. The follower engagement rate remained stable between 2020 and 2021 (2.2% and 2.1%, respectively), at a level well above the target of 1.5%. In 2021, "likes" represented the highest share of the engagement with 65% of the total, with retweets representing 29% and replies 6%. This distribution of engagement did not change significantly between 2020 and 2021.
- The **Facebook post engagement rate** averaged 19 interactions per post in 2021, which was very close to the target of 20 set for this KPI, and also slightly higher than the 17 interactions per post in 2020. The fan engagement rate dropped from 0.53% in 2020 to 0.46% in 2021, meaning it was less than half of the target set of 1%. In terms of the types of interaction, while shares and reactions decreased in 2021 compared with 2020, the number of comments increased by 42% relative to 2020.

**Table 4: Engagement KPIs for social media: Twitter and Facebook**

Indicator	Target	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Twitter post engagement rate	15 per post	30	41	20	17	17
Twitter follower engagement rate	1.5% per month	2.1%	2.2%	1%	1.4%	2.5%
Facebook post engagement rate	20 per post	19	17	26	15	13
Facebook fan engagement rate	1% per month	0.46%	0.53%	0.82%	0.64%	1.2%

However, the continuous monitoring data on retweets as an indicator of engagement, for example, shows that improvements were not necessarily a “numbers game”. This is highlighted in the figure below that shows how the number of retweets has substantially decreased between 2018-2021, despite a stable number of posts per year, and a strong increase in follower growth over the same period.

**Figure 7: DG ECFIN tweets / retweets per year**



Therefore, rather than increasing the number of social media posts, the emphasis of engagement should be on content and timing of tweets, as well as who is tweeting and what the external / political context of the tweet is. The 2021 annual monitoring report shows that Twitter posts that generated increased activity and interest related to the **Economic Forecasts and news announcements**: the BEF 2021, and invitations to join the EU Sustainable Investment Summit. Moreover, tweets with **animated GIFs** did best considering average engagement (48 per post, vs. average of 26), and **videos** also performed slightly better (30), compared with picture posts (26) and posts with links (15).

In terms of **social media followers**, the **number of followers of DG ECFIN's Twitter account grew** by 3,539 from 56,606 to 60,146 between 2020 and 2021. This represents an increase of 9.7 new follower per day, on average, which does not reach the target of 15 new followers per day and is significantly lower than the increase in new followers per day seen in previous years covered by the continuous monitoring.<sup>17</sup> As in 2020, during 2021 **Forecasts appeared to attract more interest than the Semester packages**. The table below also indicates that reach on Twitter has overall slowed down between 2017 and 2021.

DG ECFIN's **Facebook** page acquired 1,048 new “fans” during 2021 (compared with 1,430 in 2020), with an **average growth rate of 2.87 per day**, which was **significantly below target** (15 new fans per day). As stated in the 2021 annual monitoring report, this low growth rate confirmed a trend already seen in 2020, indicating that the account had reached something of a **“plateau”** since the end of 2019 in terms of the potential followers that can

<sup>17</sup> 11 new followers per day, on average, in 2017, 13 in 2018, 12.5 in 2019 and 20 in 2020.

be attracted through the same online strategy in 2020 and 2021. The follower base grew by 3.2% in 2021 and 4.6% in 2020, compared with 23% in 2019 and 39% in 2018.

**Table 5: Social media growth 2017-2021**

Indicator	Target	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Twitter follower growth	15 new followers /day	9.7	20	12.5	13	11
	approx. 455 /month	295	618	384	390	200
Facebook follower growth	15 /day	2.9	4	14	18	15
	approx. 455 /month	87	120	505	540	150

The 2021 annual monitoring report found that **announcements related to the implementation of the RRF or SURE programme, as well as Forecasts and Semester Packages**, seem to have had **less growth effect on Facebook than on Twitter**. This may indicate that **multimedia events** (e.g., BEF or the EU Sustainable Investment Summit) are more successful than economic news announcements in attracting new followers on **Facebook**, suggesting that the Facebook strategy should take this into account.

Our **own social media analysis** further assessed the ways in which DG ECFIN is maximising the potential of social with its stakeholders through **comparing DG ECFIN's Twitter account with the performance of similar-sized accounts of comparable institutions** (similar target audiences, similar topics covered). As shown in the table below, in terms of Twitter followers, DG ECFIN is **performing well**:

**Table 6: Twitter followers in comparator institutions**

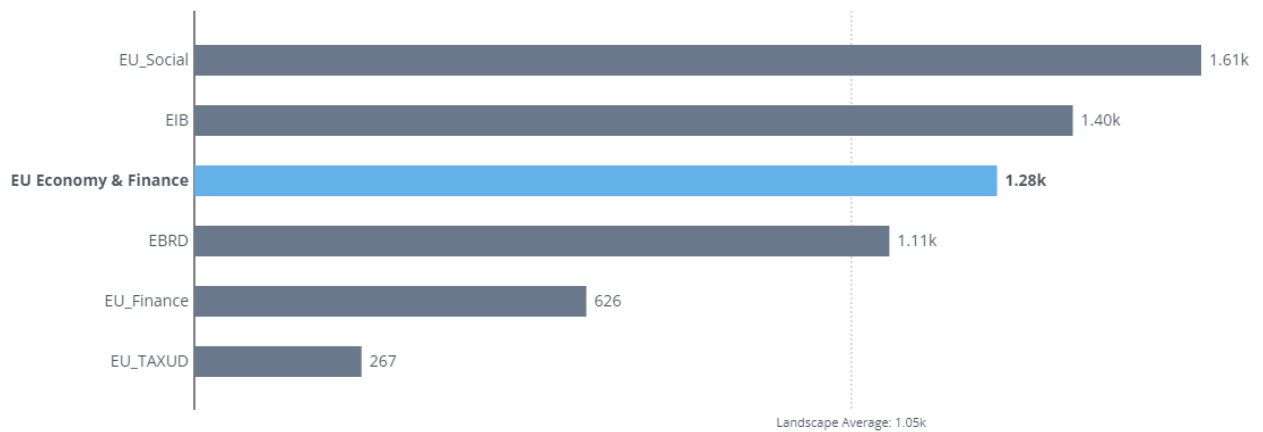
Twitter account / institution	Number of Twitter followers <sup>18</sup>
EU_Social (DG EMPL)	96 200
EIB	67 500
DG ECFIN	63 500
EBRD	53 300
EU_Finance (the Commission's account for Financial Stability Financial Services and Capital Markets Union).	42 500
DG TAXUD	21 500

Source: Scope (2022)

Figure 8 shows the net change in Twitter followers from June – September 2022 compared to the previous three months, and highlights that the number of followers for all these accounts grew, with @ecfin (1,280 new followers) not far behind the account with the highest increase @eu\_social (with 1,610), and higher than the average for all the accounts (1,050)

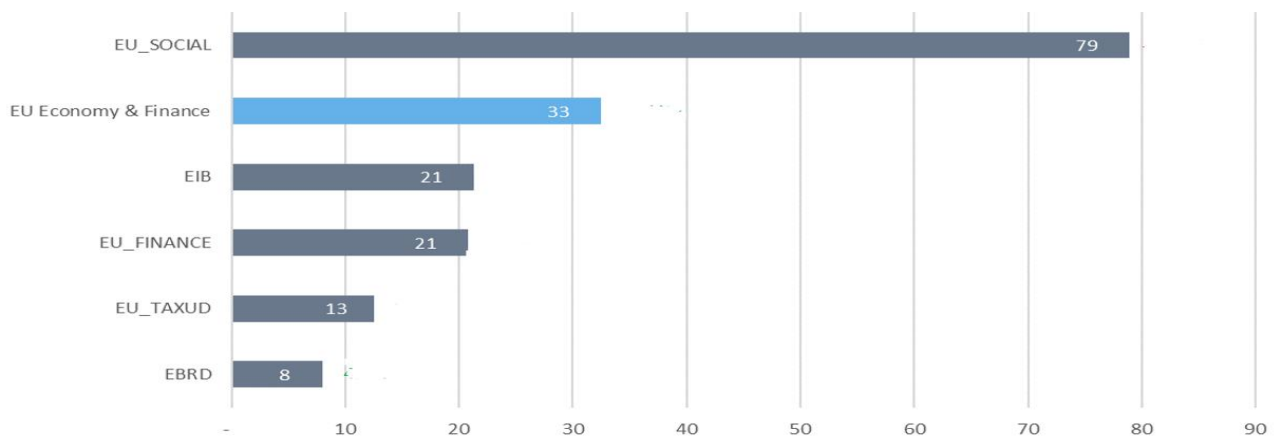
<sup>18</sup> Average, over the period 11 March 2022 to 10 June 2022

**Figure 8: Net change in Twitter followers for @ecfin and comparator accounts**



Furthermore, as illustrated in Figure 9, of the six accounts reviewed, DG ECFIN's generated the second highest level of engagement with 33 interactions (i.e., likes, retweets and replies), compared to an average of 29 for all the accounts. **This suggests that in comparison to several other institutions with similar profiles, DG ECFIN is indeed performing well.**

**Figure 9: Level of engagement with @ecfin and comparator accounts**



In open comments, suggestions for how DG ECFIN's use of social media could improve focused mainly on broadening reach via **short, simple videos, wider tag policy**<sup>19</sup>, **engaging with comments** on Twitter, organising more **live seminars and workshops** on social media, posting more **personal / human stories**, and expanding the social media use to **YouTube** and **LinkedIn**.

We also note that in terms of **choice of platforms**, **LinkedIn** currently is by far the **most used social network for financial services**.<sup>20</sup> While we understand that there is a Commission policy in place that limits the ability of DGs to set up their own LinkedIn accounts, we definitely view it as a channel to be explored by DG ECFIN to reach and engage relevant stakeholders. LinkedIn could also be used to strengthen the listening

<sup>19</sup> A wider tag policy was also suggested in interviews with bloggers, who noted that it could be worth exploring the use of certain "lifestyle" tags, such as "summer", "summer feelings", "holidays" when posting about the Economic Forecast for Summer, for example, as such tags were considered to have a much broader reach than any "institutional" European Commission tags.

<sup>20</sup> [Top 6 Best Social Media Platforms for Financial Services - Oktopost](#)

function of DG ECFIN's communication, for example through joining relevant platforms or groups to keep on top of key concerns in different economic areas and industries.

**EQ2: To what extent have DG ECFIN communication activities effectively contributed to the awareness, understanding and ownership of the RRF by citizens, stakeholders and Member States?**

Communication activities on the RRF are currently on-going, with a more intensive communication effort planned for 2023. Therefore, there was no data available for us to assess the results of these activities as regards contributing to the awareness, understanding and ownership of the RRF by citizens, stakeholders and the Member States.

However, through our surveys of national authorities and ESOs, we found that the visibility of the RRF in countries of those surveyed was high, with the level of understanding of the role and purpose of the RRF highest among economic opinion formers, financial institutions and businesses. It was deemed lowest among civil society organisations and the general public.

Both national authorities and ESOs surveyed also tended to agree that the Commission's communication activities on the RRF were complementary and added value to those of national governments, and that the EU origin of the RRF funds was visible in their Member States.

Internal Commission staff noted that what DG ECFIN and the RECOVER task force have accomplished particularly well was setting up a network of RRF national communicators who participate in regular "communication clinics", facilitating an exchange among Member States and the Commission. This network was deemed to foster a feeling of "joint ownership" and to have created "peer pressure" in the communication area through putting transparently the various country specific recommendations and how they are assessed etc., which was believed to help the effective implementation of communication and visibility rules of the Commission.

**Sources of evidence:**

- 2020 and 2021 activity reports
- Survey of national authorities
- Survey of ESOs
- Interviews with Commission staff

DG ECFIN, together with the Recovery and Resilience Task Force (RECOVER) is responsible for the design and implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), which is the centrepiece of the European economic strategy for the recovery and will finance reforms and investments in Member States until 31 December 2026. Together with RECOVER, DG ECFIN also shares responsibility for communicating about the RRF. Relevant communication activities to date include:

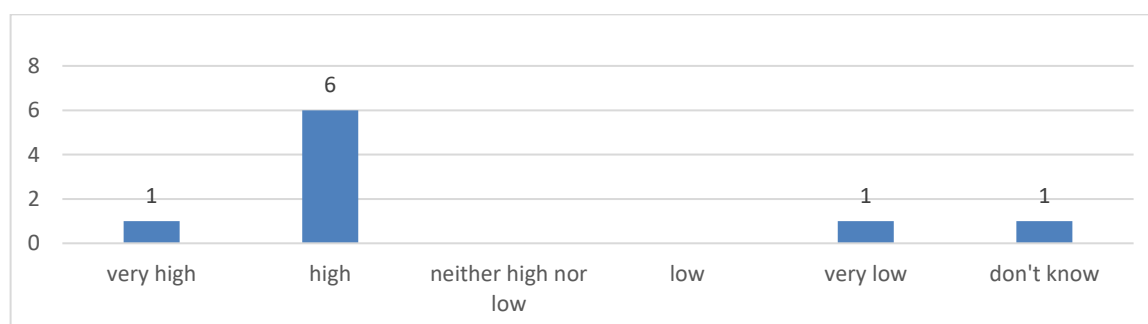
- coordination of **INFORM EU events**: plenaries, workshops and seminars aimed to bring together Member States' communications professionals working for ministries to exchange best practice and for the Commission to respond to pressing communications issues faced by Member States,
- coordination the work of country teams and ESOs on the organisation of **annual events in the Member States**, aimed at bringing together all relevant stakeholders to discuss the implementation of the RRF on the ground,

- regularly updating the **website** on the RRF with relevant information,
- production of **visual social media content**
- **Euronews episodes** on the RRF
- collecting **stories and projects** for the corporate campaign **NextgenEU** to ensure visibility of the projects financed by RRF,
- preparation of a **Eurobarometer survey** on perceptions of the RRF.

These activities are on-going, with a more intensive communication effort planned for 2023. Therefore, there is currently **no data available to assess the results** of the communication activities as regards contributing to awareness, understanding and ownership of the RRF by citizens, stakeholders and Member States.<sup>21</sup>

However, our survey of national authorities found that they placed a **“high” level of importance** on promoting awareness of their country's national Recovery and Resilience Plans in their government's own communication strategies:

**Figure 10: What level of importance is placed on promoting awareness of your country's national Recovery and Resilience Plan in your government's own communication strategy?**

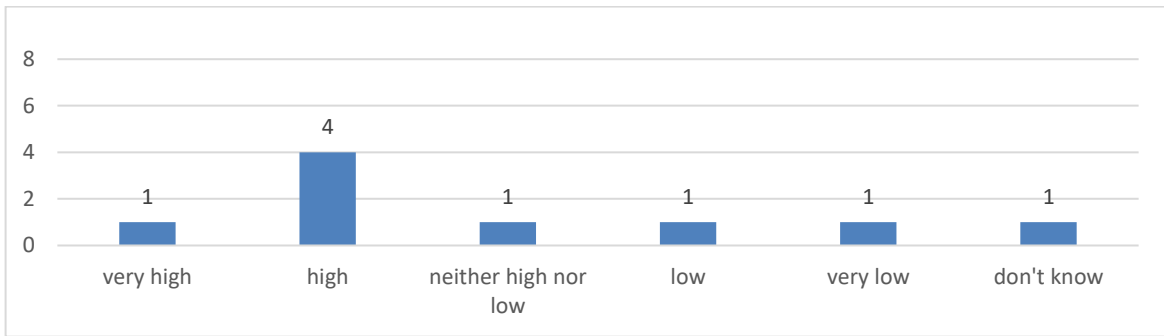


The most frequently indicated types of communication activities that respondents conducted to inform national audiences about the Recovery and Resilience Facility were **ad-hoc special meetings, formal dialogues, fora or committees, and media engagement** (n=4, respectively), followed by events, social media engagement, dedicated websites and stakeholder networks (n=3, respectively). Respondents indicated less frequently campaigns (n=2), online consultations and tailored factsheets (n=1, respectively).

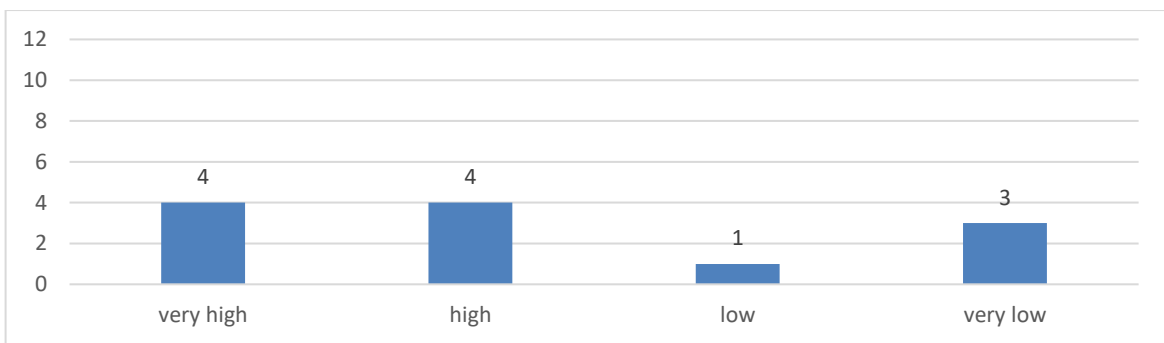
Half of the national authorities surveyed assessed the level of **visibility** of the Recovery and Resilience Facility in their country overall as **“very high” and “high”**. This was also confirmed in our survey of ESOs, where most respondents assessed the visibility of the RRF in their Member State in the same way.

<sup>21</sup> DG ECFIN is regularly monitoring the RRF and SURE instruments via Eurobarometer surveys which contain specific questions, e.g. October 2022 [The euro area - December 2022 - - Eurobarometer survey \(europa.eu\)](#). However, this was outside the scope of this evaluation.

**Figure 11: How would you assess the level of visibility of the Recovery and Resilience Facility in your country overall? National authorities (n=9)**

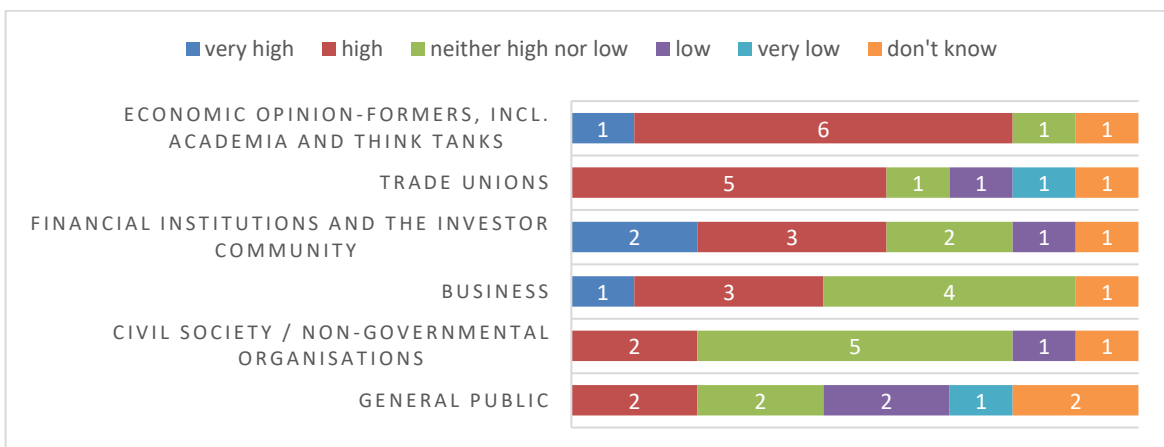


**Figure 12: How do you assess the level of visibility of the Recovery and Resilience Facility in your Member State overall? ESOs (n=14)**

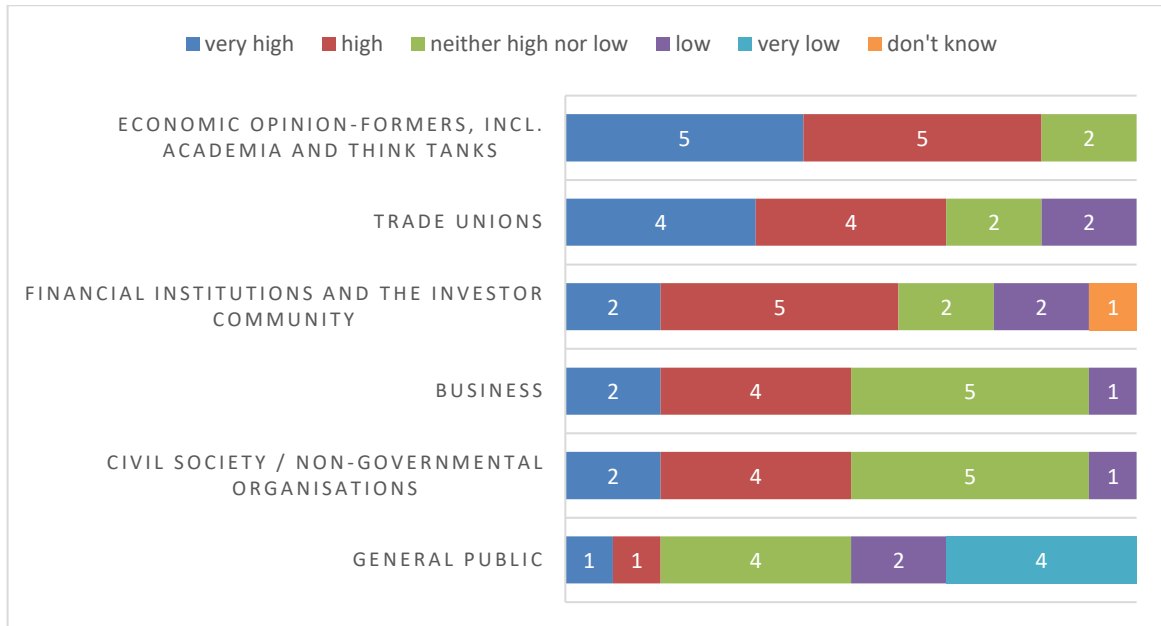


Both national authorities and ESOs surveyed assessed the **level of understanding of the role and purpose of the Recovery and Resilience facility highest among economic opinion formers**, including academia and think tanks, as well as financial institutions and the investor community and business, and lowest among civil society / non-governmental organisations and the general public.

**Figure 13: How would you assess the level of understanding among the following stakeholders and the general public of the role and purpose of the Recovery and Resilience Facility? National authorities (n=9)**



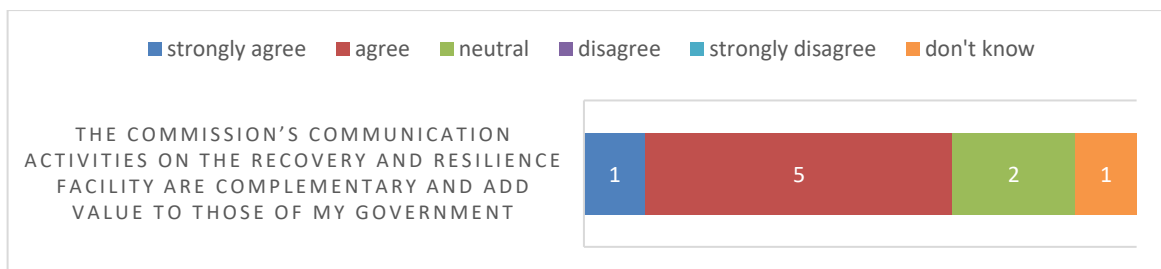
**Figure 14: How would you assess the level of understanding among the following stakeholders and the general public of the role and purpose of the Recovery and Resilience Facility in your Member State? ESOs (n=14)**



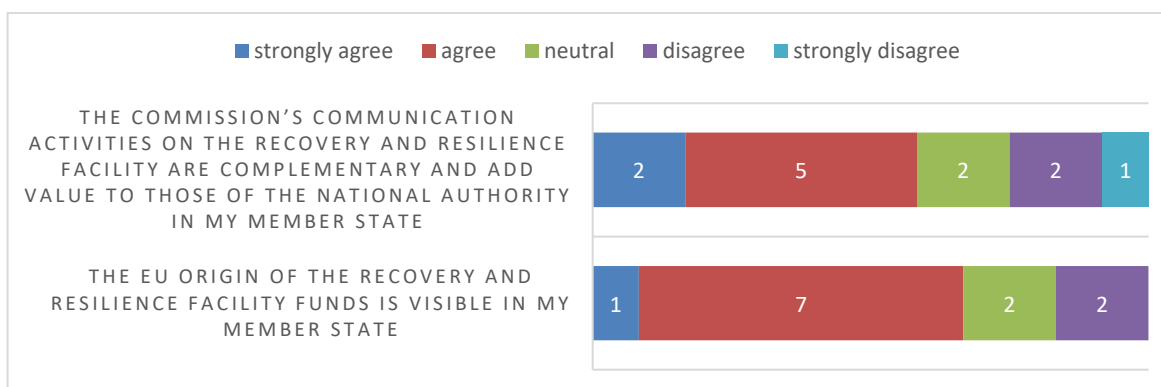
As for the **main challenges in communicating about the RRF**, six respondents emphasised in open comments that **reaching a wider audience beyond institutions involved** was the main challenge.

Both national authorities and ESOs surveyed tended to agree that the Commission's communication activities on the Recovery and Resilience Facility were **complementary and added value** to those of national governments. Most ESOs also tended to agree that the EU origin of the RRF funds was visible in their Member State.

**Figure 15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement. National authorities (n=9)**



**Figure 16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements. ESOs (n=14)**





In interviews with internal Commission staff and open comments to the survey of ESOs, the biggest challenges in RRF communication that was emphasised concerned:

- thinking about external audiences to ensure through the rather complex governance in Member States on communication that everything happening under the RRF was part of a European response: interviewees recognised that there was a temptation in Member States to nationalise and monopolise successes and national programmes without linking these back to the European picture.
- communicating about the RRF within a broader context of other EU instruments, cohesion funds, and the investEU campaign: this makes it difficult to be granular and disentangle these different elements – although here again there were contrasting views whether this should, in fact, be an objective for communication about the RRF.

There was consensus among interviewees that the “visibility” of DG ECFIN in the context of the RRF was not a priority. Rather, they felt that the RRF was an important opportunity to communicate a “truly European message” to EU citizens.

It was also noted that a communication challenge for the RRF was the fact that Member States were at different stages in the recovery process, and therefore with different communication needs and opportunities, which required a very country-specific approach to communication, also in terms of content. This was found to place additional pressure on DG ECFIN and the RECOVER task force to prepare an instrument that could facilitate relevant and timely communication in the Member States.

What DG ECFIN and the RECOVER task force were perceived to have accomplished particularly well was setting up a network of RRF national communicators that they bring together regularly in “communication clinics”, facilitating an exchange among Member States and the Commission, and fostering a feeling among participants that this was a joint endeavour. This network was found to have created “peer pressure” in the communications area through putting transparently the various country specific recommendations and how they are assessed etc., which helps the effective implementation of communication and visibility rules of the Commission.

### **EQ 3: How can DG ECFIN increase the impact of its communication in the Member States, directly or with the intermediary of the European Commission central services and ESOs?**

Our evaluation found that as regards increasing the impact of DG ECFIN’s communication in the Member States, there are several avenues that DG ECFIN may want to consider, depending on their feasibility. One concerns closer collaboration with national governments through creating opportunities for national representatives to meet with national desk officers. The second concerns exploiting the potential of ESOs further to reach and engage national audiences, e.g., through asking them to share the e-newsletter with their stakeholder networks. Given that ESOs reported that they only had limited capacity to tailor DG ECFIN’s materials to national contexts and translating them into national languages, considerations could be made around hosting such materials on the DG ECFIN website and using the Commission’s automated translation function. However, they would still need to be advertised to ensure that stakeholders are aware of them, which could again be done through the e-newsletter.

Apart from ESOs, we also found that EDCs, who are in direct communication with citizens, have a keen interest to support DG ECFIN in communicating about EU economic policy issues in their Member States. However, they would also require appropriate tools to be able to do so. Suggestions included videos that explained economic concepts and legislation in simple terms (and could be subtitled – automated solutions are available),

but also paper-based materials that could be distributed in schools and to senior citizens that contained story-telling and interactive (“game”) elements. They also suggested slide packs with basic information on DG ECFIN’s policy areas and statistics that they are happy to adapt to local contexts for events on related topics.

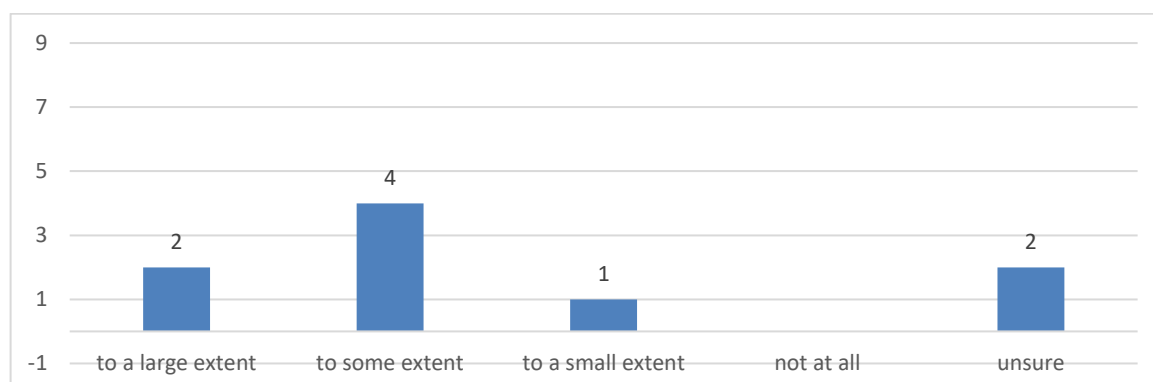
Finally, the RRF represents a unique opportunity for DG ECFIN to communicate in an impactful way with national audiences, including the broader public, as it appears to lend itself better than other economic topics to story-telling and visual materials. These could be shared at annual events planned in the Member States for 2023 and beyond, and also distributed to ESOs, EDCs and the Representations. Considerations could be made whether there is more scope or continued scope to benefit from the EU INFORM network (see answer to next EQ) in particular to support goals of extending reach in the Member States. In this context, the network could serve as a source for identifying the best channels and tools to do that.

**Sources of evidence:**

- Survey of national authorities
- Survey of ESOs
- Targeted interviews
- Online focus groups with EDCs
- Interviews with Commission staff

In our survey of national authorities, respondents indicated that there was generally **scope for closer collaboration** between the European Commission / DG ECFIN and their government to better communicate on the EU’s economic policy and coordination tools at national level.

**Figure 17: To what extent do you feel that there is scope for closer collaboration between the European Commission / DG ECFIN and your government to better communicate on the EU’s economic policies and coordination tools at national level? (n=9)**

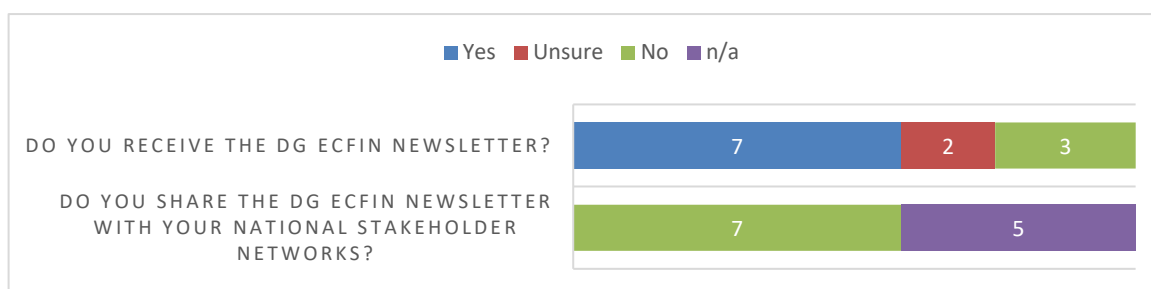


In open comments, five respondents provided examples of areas where they felt that closer collaboration would be possible and desirable, which included **closer communication and centralised information on matters such as economic policy analysis and fiscal issues** would be desirable. Another suggestion involved meetings with national desk officers.

As regards feedback from ESOs, most respondents surveyed received the DG ECFIN newsletter, but they did not share it with their networks. In open comments, four respondents

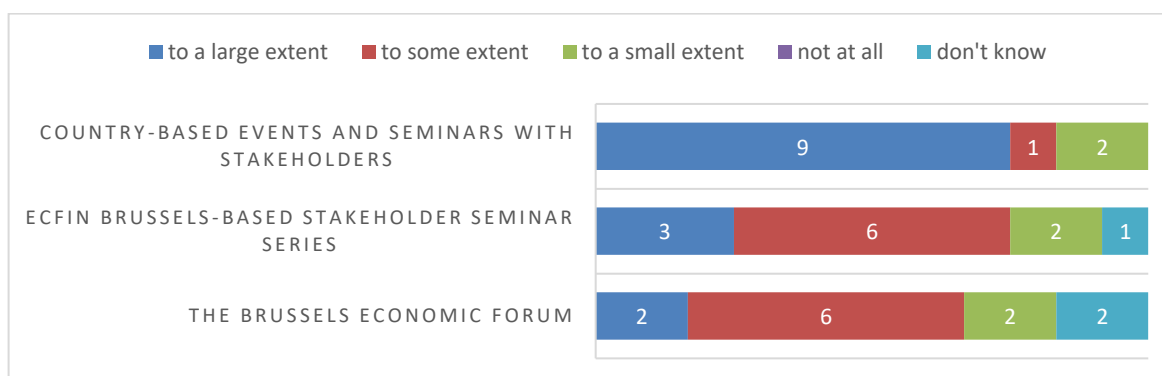
elaborated that they did not share the newsletter as it would need to be translated into the national language, and that they were not aware that they were “allowed” to share it.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 18: Do you receive the DG ECFIN newsletter? Do you share the DG ECFIN newsletter with your national stakeholder networks? (n=14)**



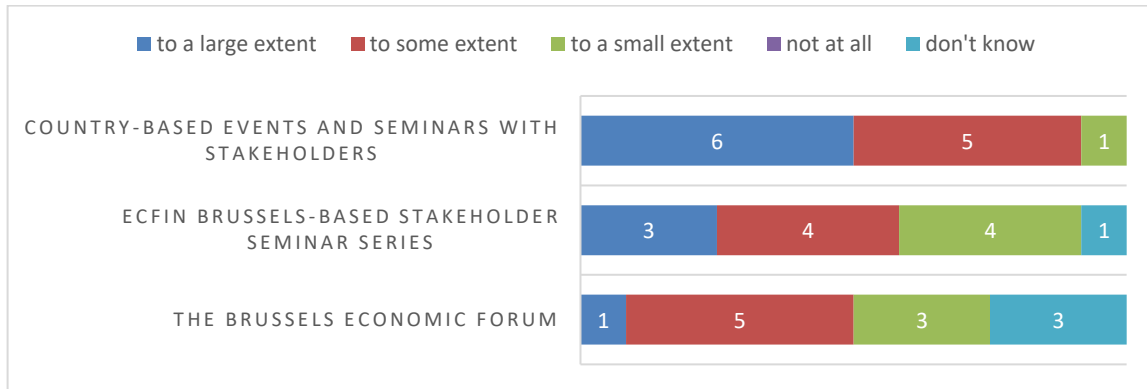
Respondents to the survey of ESOs were also asked to what extent they found DG ECFIN’s events useful for informing and engaging national audiences in their Member States. Nine respondents indicated that country-based events and seminars with stakeholder were useful “to a large extent”. The ECFIN Brussels-based stakeholder seminars series and the Brussels Economic Forum were considered useful “to some extent” by half of the respondents. Most respondents also indicated that there was interest from national audiences to participate more in these types of events.

**Figure 19: To what extent do you find DG ECFIN’s events useful for informing and engaging national audiences in your Member State? (n=14)**



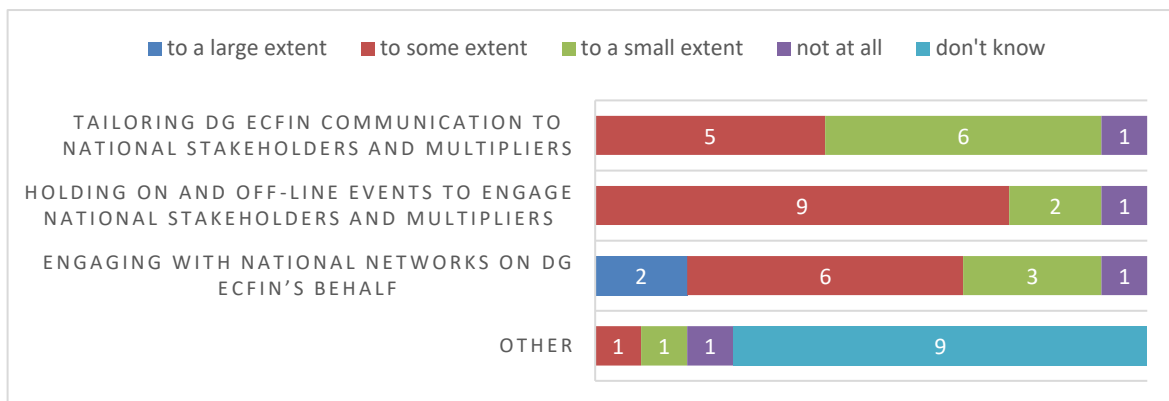
<sup>22</sup> Each ECFIN E-newsletter has in its footer the Unsubscribe / Subscribe" links. Example: <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/ecfin/newsletter-archives/42470>

**Figure 20: To what extent do you feel that there is interest for national audiences to participate more in these events? (n=14)**



Most respondents indicated that they had some capacity to provide additional support to DG ECFIN on holding on and offline events to engage national stakeholders and multipliers. Most also indicated capacity to engage with national networks on DG ECFIN's behalf "to a large extent" and "to some extent". Half of the respondents indicated that they had small capacity or no capacity at all to tailor DG ECFIN communication to national stakeholders and multipliers. In interviews, ESOs explained that the RRF had led to resources being taken up by RRF specifically, which had limited their capacity to provide additional support on communicating about EU economic policy issues in other areas.

**Figure 21: To what extent do you have capacity to provide additional support to DG ECFIN in the following areas:**



In our focus groups with EDCs, EDCs voiced a keen interest to support DG ECFIN in communicating about EU economic policy issues in their Member States. However, there was consensus that **citizens rarely enquired** about EU economic policy issues, and that this topic was reserved for schools, municipalities, non-governmental organisations and businesses in different sectors (e.g., agriculture, fisheries, construction). **EU economic policy was considered a topic that was best "sold wrapped in something else"** – meaning that it was only digestible and interesting to citizens when directly linked to tangible examples of how it impacted or could impact their everyday lives in different areas that were not necessarily economic (e.g., the environment, education).

**Videos were considered an important tool** to reach broader audiences and explain different economic concepts and legislation in simple terms. However, EDCs emphasised that given that children and senior citizens constituted important segments of their target audience, pamphlets, leaflets and other **paper-based materials were equally important as social media or web content**. EDCs noted that they would welcome the opportunity to work with DG ECFIN on such materials, particularly to **fight misinformation** that might exist on certain topics. One example of materials that EDCs felt could add value to their work

were **slide packs with basic information on DG ECFIN's policy areas and statistics** that they could use during events on related topics.

Key internal staff in DG ECFIN and the Commission more broadly recognised that when it comes to **communication with national audiences**, including the broader public, **the RRF represented for DG ECFIN a unique opportunity** to do so (compared with other economic topics, where it was deemed less feasible), as it was considered to lend itself particularly well to **story-telling and visual materials** that would explain the Commission's results and impact in this area. In this context, the planned organisation of a broad programme of annual events in the Member States was mentioned as a key communication effort planned for 2023.

**EQ4: To what extent is it useful to modify or complement the current set of continuous monitoring indicators and targets in order to get a comprehensive assessment of DG ECFIN communication activities?**

DG ECFIN will implement the 2022 EC Communication Indicators as required by DG COMM, which is why this evaluation question did not constitute a focus in our assessment. Key findings and evidence are therefore not available.

However, some observations:

- the 2022 EC Communication Indicators aim to measure outputs, results and impacts, and list inputs and activities. As noted in our answer to EQ1, this framework will need to be applied consistently for all communication programmes. Currently, the 2019-24 communication strategy does not list the indicators consistently.
- while we feel that the targets set for engagement are appropriate (see EQ1 and EQ1.1), reach targets could be increased, particularly where they are surpassed by more than double (e.g., the BEF).

## 6.2. Efficiency

Efficiency considers the resources used by an intervention compared to the changes generated (which may be positive or negative). Efficiency analysis typically considers whether:

- the costs generated are necessary to reach the policy objectives;
- the benefits exceed the costs;
- there is potential for simplification and further efficiency savings.<sup>23</sup>

Here we present our findings in relation to the efficiency of DG ECFIN's communication. The analysis of efficiency considers:

**EQ6:** The extent to which DG ECFIN communication activities were efficient in informing and engaging with DG ECFIN audiences, considering DG ECFIN's communication and resource constraints (+/- 20 staff and a budget of +/- EUR 2 million)

<sup>23</sup> European Commission, Better Regulation: guidelines and toolbox, available at: [Better regulation: guidelines and toolbox | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/better-regulation/guidelines-and-toolbox/).

**EQ7:** The extent to which the communication activities included in the 2019-24 communication strategy were efficient.

**EQ7.1:** Which activities could be performed more efficiently, and which particularly efficient activities could be further developed.

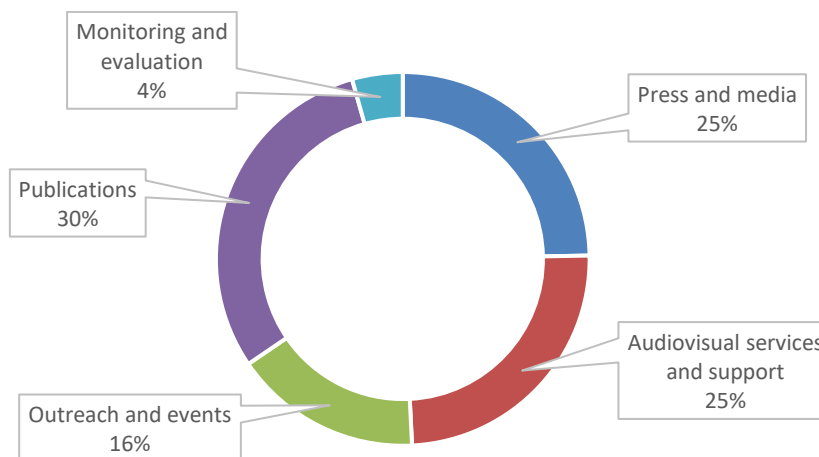
**EQ 7.2:** To what extent social media could be better used to increase the efficiency of DG ECFIN communication activities.

Due to a **lack of comparable data** from the topic related DGs that we approached for this study we were **unable to conduct an assessment** that would allow us to provide an **answer to EQ6**. This was mainly because we did not find recent and comparable evaluation of communication activities in topic-related DGs that would allow us to measure the outcome of their activities, which we could have then compared against costs to assess the efficiency of DG ECFIN's communication activities, considering DG ECFIN's communication and resource constraints.

In our analysis below, we provide one answer to EQ7, 7.1 and 7.2. We compared internal data on the outputs of selected communication activities in 2021, and their cost as a proportion of the communication unit's operation budget, with their reach and outcomes based on the continuous monitoring data, and the perceptions of stakeholders consulted for this study.

Figure 21 overleaf provides a graphic representation of costs as the percentage of the operation budget by activity in 2021. InvestEU and the Recovery and Resilience Facility are outside of the scope of this evaluation, given that data on results were not available at the time of conducting our assessment. Our analysis, therefore, focuses on the remaining activities: press and media, audiovisual services and support, outreach and events, publications, and monitoring and evaluation.

**Figure 22: Costs as a percentage of the operational budget by activity, 2021**



Please note that the costs above were derived from the ECFIN A4 budget and do not include the costs of statutory staff. The FTE of statutory staff by communication priority is as follows:

Priority	FTE	Details
Press and media	3.0	Press packages, replies to journalists, Euronews, newsletter
Audiovisual services and support	5.5	Web, graphic design and social media (incl. 3 intramuros consultants)
Outreach and events	4.5	

Publications	2.5	
Internal communication	1.5	
Support	2.0	Budget, HR, reporting, missions, evaluations, continuous monitoring
Management	1.0	

**EQ7, 7.1 and 7.2: To what extent were the communication activities included in the 2019-24 communication strategy efficient? Which could be performed more efficiently, and which particularly efficient activities could be developed further, including social media?**

DG ECFIN's communication strategy 2019-24 is efficient overall, insofar as there is a balance of cost-ratios of activities across the board, and activities that take up the largest proportions of the operational budget (press and media relations, audiovisual services and support) being likely to generate the largest indirect reach and high potential for reinforcing other communication activities. The relatively low cost of outreach and events, coupled with high satisfaction and impact rates among stakeholders, also make it a commendable communication effort.

Activities that generate positive outcomes should be prioritised in spending, and these include the Brussels Economic Forum, stakeholder seminars, and social media activity. The Euronews "Real Economy" magazine also shows extensive potential for reach, so it may be considered how this product could be further used to reinforce other communication activities, for example by repurposing particular segments for social media use.

The efficiency of some communication activities, including social media, could be improved by capitalising on mutually reinforcing effects and improving some outcomes. Considerations may include:

- adding LinkedIn to the social media mix, as it is the most frequently used social media channel by financial services<sup>24</sup>, potentially by replacing Facebook, which appears to have reached a "plateau" (see answer to EQ1.1)
- improving satisfaction rates with stakeholder seminars through better targeting in terms of formats (e.g., webinar lengths, interactive aspects);
- reconsidering the publication of some types of publications, which do not generate much reach (e.g., Economic Briefs, Technical Papers) to allow additional budget for Economic Forecasts and Institutional Papers to be accompanied by "side materials" for non-specialist audiences;
- improving satisfaction rates with the e-newsletter through the use of more inclusive language for non-specialist audiences (if targeting the newsletter to a particular stakeholder group is not a priority/not possible);
- replacing EURO@20 communication materials with a new topic gauged through the Eurobarometer flash surveys, and using EDCs to support distribution to the general public;

<sup>24</sup> [Top 6 Best Social Media Platforms for Financial Services - Oktopost](#)



- identifying partnership opportunities with other DGs for producing Eurobarometer surveys (see answer to EQ8).

**Sources of evidence:**

- Answers to EQ1-3 and EQ8
- Cost data on expenditures 2021

The initial objective of this assessment was to identify the most cost-effective communication activities to allow a possible prioritisation thereof in DG ECFIN's 2019-24 communication strategy. However, due to being unable to obtain comparable data from topic related DGs, outlining cost per unit of outputs, results and impacts<sup>25</sup>, we could not conduct this type of analysis. Ideally, outcome data for each tool and channel would need to be collected by DG ECFIN that would allow for internal benchmarking year on year, but as noted in our answer to EQ1, this is not always the case.

When looking at efficiency, it is important to consider that there is always a cost to impactful communication. This means that cutting budgets or focusing on elements that may appear to be cheaper may not be an effective strategy, particularly if this results in lower levels of activity. Moreover, the effectiveness of individual channels and tools relates to several factors including their timing, content and its resonance with target groups, as well as the other issues that are in the public space at the time.

Taking this into account, it is usual for organisations to manage a portfolio of different and complementary channels and tools to allow messages to be reinforced in different ways to different target groups. DG ECFIN has a communication toolbox, which meets expectations for this type of organisation. Therefore, the focus of this assessment was to provide a better understanding of costs and the relationship between reach and stakeholder appreciation by channel and tool. This does not take account of the effectiveness of content and messages.

Despite the limitations of the cost-effectiveness exercise, we answered the evaluation questions by focussing on two key aspects:

- i. What is the cost-efficiency of DG ECFIN's different communication activities?
- ii. How cost-efficient was the strategy as a whole?

The cost-efficiency exercise concerned a **comparison between the costs of different activities and their reach to target groups** in terms of breadth and frequency of exposure, as well as **outcomes** and/or **stakeholders' satisfaction** ratings as collected through continuous monitoring and our stakeholder survey and interviews.

The table below describes:

- the costs of the different activities and their outputs in 2021,
- the proportion of this cost in the overall budget,
- reach (and potential reach), and
- outcomes and/or satisfaction ratings provided by stakeholders in continuous monitoring and our stakeholder survey and interviews.

<sup>25</sup> While we were able to obtain cost data, the topic related DGs that we approached for this study did not conduct monitoring or evaluation that would give us an indication of their results or impact, which made a cost-effectiveness analysis impossible.



Communication activity	Total cost (EUR)	% of operational budget / % of total activity budget	Reach (potential reach)	Outcomes / stakeholder feedback
<b>Press and media</b>	<b>430,750</b>	<b>25%</b>		
Euronews "Real Economy" magazine	363,761.40	84%	approx. 10 million viewers 500,000 page views	9.8 million content impressions on Twitter and Facebook 7000 comments left Low completion rate (19% vs 65% target) and views per video (35,000 vs. 80,000 target)
E-newsletter	66,988.87	16%	ca. 25,000 subscribers	7.2/10 satisfaction rate
<b>Audiovisual services and support</b>	<b>426,879.06</b>	<b>24%</b>		
Cost DIGIT support Europa	8,326.63	2%	N/A	N/A
HR intra-muros support for web technical maintenance / development and graphic design	404,360.00	95%	157,667 visits (monthly average) <i>number of individual user unknown</i> Estimated potential reach: 339 million people	N/A
Social media promotion	11,140.43	3%	Total number of followers on ECFIN social media accounts: 93,415 <sup>26</sup> 1,051 posts, 16,445 engagements Estimated potential reach: 339 million people	Performance on par with DGs / EU institutions similar in size (DG EMPL, EIB, EBRD, EU-Finance, DG TAXUD)
Production, installation and deinstallation of external banner for Euro@20	3,052.00	1%	N/A	N/A
<b>Outreach and events</b>	<b>283,791.14</b>	<b>16%</b>		
Brussels Economic Forum 2021	247,244.14	87%	2,049 registrations 23,572 online views	Overall satisfaction: 9/10

<sup>26</sup> Twitter: 60,146; Facebook: 33,269

Evaluation of DG ECFIN's communication activities

Webinars for stakeholders and journalists	17,547.00	6%	251 participants	Overall satisfaction: 7.8/10 Informative quality: 8.6/10 Topics: 8.6/10 Opportunity to network: 8.5/10 Impact: 91% of participants likely to share information learnt
Events organised by European Semester Officers in the Member States	19,000.00	7%	N/A	<i>Most ESOs surveyed found country-based events and seminars with stakeholders useful "to a large extent" for informing and engaging national audiences in their Member State</i>
<b>Publications</b>	<b>525,150.00</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>Number of citations in economic and general press per Institutional Paper/Flagship publication: 1250 articles on average, 8/10 mention publication, 7/10 mention or quoted the Commissioner Estimated potential reach: 339 million people</b>	<b><i>Economic Forecasts: 65% of stakeholders surveyed "very aware" and 59% find them "very useful"</i></b> <b><i>Forecasts generate most media coverage, technical announcements (RRF Scoreboard, InvestEU launch) less media coverage</i></b>
Printing and distribution of general-public publications	40,000.00	8%	N/A	N/A
Three Eurobarometer flash opinion polls (spring, autumn, winter)	485,150.00	92%	N/A	N/A
<b>Monitoring and evaluation</b>	<b>76,317.00</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>

We observe that **DG ECFIN's communication portfolio is fairly traditional**, and the **cost ratios also appear to be balanced across the board**. It is noteworthy, that press and media relations together with audiovisual services and support take up about one third of the communication budget and have the likelihood to generate the largest indirect reach. They also have the potential for **reinforcing other activities**, such as publications (via e-newsletter, for example) and events (via graphic support and social media, for example).

For the remaining activities, where data was available, the potential reach is relatively high for the costs incurred, especially concerning **social media promotion**. The **relatively low cost of outreach and events**, coupled with the **high satisfaction rates** among stakeholders for these activities, also makes it a commendable communication effort.

Indeed, while events can attract only a limited number of visitors compared with website or social media reach, their personal engagement is assumed to be much more impactful.

We note that the most expensive activity was the Eurobarometer surveys, website development and the Euronews “Real Economy” magazine, while one of the least expensive activities was social media promotion (see Figure 22). While the Euronews “Real Economy” magazine has the potential for high indirect reach, there is scope for improvement as regards completion rates and video views. Efficiency could be improved by drawing on the “reinforcing potential” of Euronews videos for social media, e.g. by repurposing short, 30 second video segments for distribution using social media.

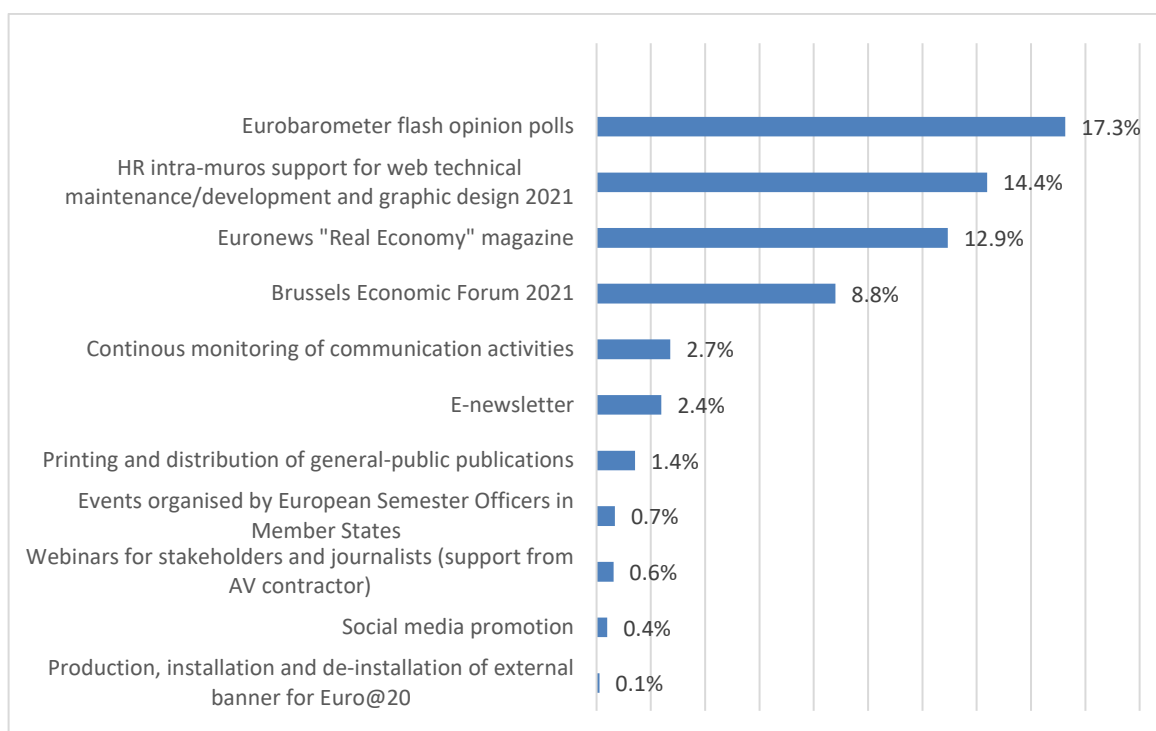
Other considerations to improve the efficiency of DG ECFIN’s communication activities include:

- adding LinkedIN to the social media mix, as it is the most frequently used social media channel by financial services<sup>27</sup>, potentially by replacing Facebook, which appears to have reached a “plateau” (see answer to EQ1.1)
- improving satisfaction rates with stakeholder seminars through better targeting in terms of formats (e.g., webinar lengths, interactive aspects);
- reconsidering the publication of some types of publications which do not generate much reach (e.g., Economic Briefs, Technical Papers) to allow additional budget for Economic Forecasts and Institutional Papers to be accompanied by “side materials” for non-specialist audiences;
- improving satisfaction rates with the e-newsletter through the use of more inclusive language for non-specialist audiences (if targeting the newsletter to a particular stakeholder group is not a priority/not possible);
- replacing EURO@20 communication materials with a new topic gauged through the Eurobarometer flash surveys, and using EDCs to support distribution to the general public;
- identifying partnership opportunities with other DGs for producing Eurobarometer surveys (see answer to EQ8).

---

<sup>27</sup> [Top 6 Best Social Media Platforms for Financial Services - Oktopost](#)

**Figure 23: Communication outputs by proportion of total budget, 2021**



### 6.3. Coherence

The evaluation of coherence involves looking at how well (or not) different interventions, EU/international policies or national/regional/local policy elements work together. The 'internal' coherence element considers how the various components of the same EU intervention operate together to achieve objectives, while the 'external' coherence element examines how EU intervention work in relation to other interventions at different levels, for example, between EU interventions within the same policy field<sup>28</sup>.

Here we present our findings in relation to the coherence of DG ECFIN's communication. The analysis of coherence considers:

- the extent to which DG ECFIN communication activities have been complementary to the activities led by other topic-related Commission services (EQ8)
- which activities and tools used within and outside the Commission DG ECFIN could use to better reach out to its audience (EQ 8.1)

We note that in section 4, under "Evaluation Questions", we list EQ8.2 under Coherence: *To what extent have DG ECFIN communication activities on the RRF been complementary to the activities led by the Member States?* However, given that there is no data on results, we consider this question answered under EQ2 on Effectiveness.

<sup>28</sup> European Commission, Better Regulation: guidelines and toolbox, available at: [Better regulation: guidelines and toolbox | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/better-regulation/guidelines-and-toolbox/).

**EQ8: To what extent have DG ECFIN communication activities been complementary to the activities led by other topic-related Commission services?**

Our evaluation found that DG ECFIN's communication activities have been complementary to the activities led by other topic-related DGs to a large extent. We did not identify any direct overlaps or duplications. Synergies and complementarity were particularly found in DG ECFIN's approach to update and support other DGs in relevant communication efforts and in replies to the press. To exploit synergies, DG ECFIN has also cooperated with DG COMM more closely than before the pandemic, and co-chaired with DG COMM the economy cluster of the Coronavirus Communication Taskforce.

In close partnership with SG-Recover, DG ECFIN also communicates extensively on the RRF. DG ECFIN also regularly liaises with communicators in the Member States through the DG REGIO-managed INFORM EU network that ECFIN joined in 2021. The link between the RRF network and INFORM EU network was also highlighted as a synergy between cohesion policy and RRF policies.

However, topic-related DGs did identify some scope to exploit synergies further, which included more sharing of media planners than to date, advertising each other's events in newsletters or stakeholder mailing lists, and organising joint events and seminars / webinars where there is scope to look at the economy at large.

**Sources of evidence:**

- Interviews with Commission staff
- 2020 and 2021 annual activity reports

There was consensus among topic-related DGs whom we interviewed that DG ECFIN's communication activities have been complementary to their own, given that DG ECFIN covers a broader spectrum of economic sectors and issues than other DGs in the same economic portfolio. No direct overlaps or duplications were identified.<sup>29</sup> In fact, in agreement with the SPP, the 2021 journalist seminars were put on halt to avoid duplication, as the SPP considered introducing their own virtual technical briefings to journalists from the Member States.

Interviewees emphasised that DG ECFIN's communication unit was very approachable and proactive in regularly updating them and providing support on other DGs' projects and campaigns. DG ECFIN was also found to complement DGs in terms of replies to the press. To explore potential areas for synergies and complementarity further, interviewees suggested to share media planners even more than to date, to be able to better anticipate when key projects were being delivered and support each other's communication efforts further. This also included advertising each other's events in newsletters or stakeholder mailing lists. However, given current privacy statements, the latter might not be possible, as subscribers to the ECFIN newsletter only accept to receive information about DG ECFIN events.

---

<sup>29</sup> We understand "direct overlaps or duplications" to constitute the same activities targeted at the same stakeholder groups, making them an inefficient and incoherent communication effort (for example, if another DG were to hold an event that replicates the Brussels Economic Forum, or publish another version of the Economic Forecasts). This contrasts with communication efforts which are aimed at reinforcing messages, which we consider to benefit coherence.

Where other DGs identified a gap was in organising joint events, which they recognised would not work on every economics topic but noted that there were unexplored opportunities to join up operations on common parts of projects. This also concerned outreach activities, such as stakeholder seminars and webinars, where interviewees identified further scope to look at the economy at large and identify areas where it would make sense to organise webinars in partnership with DG ECFIN. Examples mentioned included sustainable finance, the digital euro, and sanctions in the context of the war in Ukraine. Other suggestions included producing Eurobarometer surveys in partnership with DG ECFIN in areas that touch upon the broader economy.

The pandemic has also led to a much closer cooperation with DG COMM than before, as it led to a readjustment of DG ECFIN's previous plans so as to redirect resources and budget towards communicating this challenge. This enabled DG ECFIN to highlight, explain and present the economic and financial aspects and DG ECFIN's contribution to the European Semester process and overall EU response. To exploit synergies, ECFIN external communication co-chaired with DG COMM the economy cluster of the Coronavirus Communication Taskforce. That allowed DG ECFIN to coordinate and ensure the coherence of the wide range of communication actions on economic aspects of the EU response. A main output was the communication plan of the economy cluster to identify key priorities, objectives and deliverables to communicate to the general public and stakeholders alike. This was key to ensuring highly convergent common communication actions to maximise impact and cost-efficiency.

Other contributions to the corporate approach concerned DG ECFIN providing existing audio-visual materials to the 2021 edition of the Open Day, which was aimed at bringing the Commission closer to citizens.

In close partnership with SG-Recover, DG ECFIN also communicated extensively on the RRF. It used press releases, webpages, infographics, factsheets, videos and social media posts, as well as a number of events and seminars to communicate on the different steps leading to the endorsement of the national recovery and resilience plans and to the subsequent first disbursements of funds. It set up the recovery and resilience scoreboard, an interactive web tool giving an overview on the progress in the implementation of the RRF. It also regularly liaised with communicators in the Member States through the DG REGIO-managed INFORM EU network that ECFIN joined in 2021. This allowed in particular to raise Member States awareness on their RRF-related visibility obligations. The link between the RRF network and INFORM EU network was also highlighted as a synergy between cohesion policy and RRF policies.

In interviews with key internal Commission staff, the RRF was mentioned as a “shining example” of DG ECFIN maintaining the bigger picture of the Commission's corporate communication approach and “very proactively” offering strands of cooperation and involvement in RRF communication with national communicators. This included identifying communicable stories and projects for the corporate campaign nextgenEU.

**EQ8.1: Which communication activities and tools used within and outside the Commission could DG ECFIN use to better reach out to, and increase engagement with, its audiences.**

This question is very vast, making it impossible to cover such extensive ground within the scope of this assessment. Overall, DG ECFIN uses similar tools and communication activities to those that are employed across the Commission. Key differences in approaches seem to relate to budgets and access to specialist resources. One point to consider is that capacity to generate communication effects is directly linked to resource availability, in terms of both the volume of communication activities pursued but also their intensity. For example, paid social media posts are usually more impactful, at least in the



short term. Another point to consider is that communication effects tend to be short term, in some cases very short term, so there is a need for a level of continuous communication.

Considerations could also be made around communication in its broadest sense, thinking about who else is engaging with relevant audiences and how this can be leveraged in practice. Such approaches could include:

- accessing relevant networks on social media, e.g., via LinkedIn to both disseminate information and engage directly with stakeholders and listen in to identify key concerns;
- plugging into existing EU structures to engage indirectly with stakeholders through different networks (e.g., EEN network, CoR, EESC) and other channels (ESOs, EDCs, Representations) by disseminating materials on EU economic policy at relevant communication moments, and listen in to identify key concerns;
- plugging into existing stakeholder networks at Member State level to engage indirectly with stakeholders, e.g., via EU level associations which represent different interests, and listen in to identify key concerns.

In terms of specific changes that DG ECFIN's peers in the Commission and other EU and international institutions have implemented motivated by the COVID-19 pandemic and being able to reach new audiences to a larger extent than before online, concerned a shift from written materials to audio-visual products. Examples included videos produced for a "literacy campaign" to explain complex financial concepts to the general public. As noted in our answer to EQ 10.1, this type of video could also be an avenue for DG ECFIN to explore. Other approaches concerned engaging with the general public in a two-way dialogue through virtual Q&A sessions hosted on social media, which could then be transferred into a reference material for the website. However, were DG ECFIN to explore this approach, it would need to be very selective and focus on topics that would be particularly pertinent at important communication moments to ensure that this approach is efficiency and effective.

Collating contacts to existing networks used by other units in the DG and informing them via the e-newsletter could be another approach for DG ECFIN to take to ensure broader reach among national audiences. However, this approach would also need to be tailored, e.g., by hosting an occasional meeting, presentation or workshop with relevant network representatives to understand their context and needs, and create a newsletter that addresses them.

Finally, more stakeholder outreach activities could be implemented with a format that emphasises interaction and exchange, rather than "top-down conferences", but only where there is an identified need of stakeholders for this type of engagement. In DG ECFIN's case, this particularly concerned trade unions and civil society organisations, which deemed the interactive elements of the stakeholder seminars to have room for improvement (see EQ1).

#### **Sources of evidence:**

- Interviews with Commission staff
- Targeted interviews with stakeholders

Feedback from other DGs and DG ECFIN's peers in EU and international institutions shows that they all face a similar challenge to DG ECFIN in communicating about economics and finance beyond highly specialist audiences. However, as noted in our answer to EQ 2.1, the

key lesson that DG ECFIN's peers have taken away from the COVID-19 pandemic is in fact the need to “get out of the expert world”, motivated by the opportunity to reach new audiences online.

One approach taken by topic-related DGs and international institutions was to shift their focus from written materials to audio-visual products. One example included the production of a series of videos for a “literacy campaign” to explain complex finance concepts to the general public. Another approach concerned opening up a two-way communication between a DG and interested members of the public by holding Q&A sessions on social media. This garnered a very good response rate and over 500 questions and answers were then collated and published on the DG's website as reference material. However, given DG ECFIN's broad mandate, the choice of following this type of approach would require being very selective and focussing on topics that DG ECFIN would be prepared to invest required resources in.

In terms of better reaching out to specialist audiences, one DG interviewed reported collating contacts of networks of all units in the DG (policy-specific networks) to share information with different networks at national level via a newsletter. Other suggestions for better engagement mainly referred to the format of seminars and webinars being interactive, “creating a space for industry to shape the rules together”, which was considered more beneficial than “top-down conferences”.

#### **6.4 Relevance**

The evaluation criterion **relevance** looks at the relationship between the needs and problems at the time of introducing the intervention and during its implementation. Relevance also looks at the relationship between the current and future needs and problems in the EU and the objectives of the intervention. Relevance analysis requires a consideration of how the objectives of an EU intervention correspond to the wider EU policy goals and priorities<sup>30</sup>

Here we present our findings in relation to the relevance of DG ECFIN's communication. The analysis of relevance considers:

- the extent to which DG ECFIN has reached out to the right stakeholders and multipliers (EQ9),
- the extent to which the communication activities included in the 2019-24 communication strategy remain relevant (EQ10) and which activities could be added to remain relevant (EQ10.1).

**EQ 9: To what extent has DG ECFIN reached out to the right stakeholders and multipliers to raise awareness on its policies, foster a mutually beneficial dialogue and eventually increase ownership of its initiatives among specialised audiences and the general public?**

DG ECFIN is reaching out to the right stakeholders and multipliers insofar as policy makers, economic opinion-formers, trade unions, financial institutions, business, and civil society organisations each have a stake and interest in economic policy processes and

---

<sup>30</sup> European Commission, Better Regulation: guidelines and toolbox, available at: [Better regulation: guidelines and toolbox | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/better-regulation/guidelines-and-toolbox/).



engage in EU and national level activities which influence policy making. Journalists also consider DG ECFIN to be relevant for their work compared with other players (IMF, OECD, etc.), particularly in the European context. The appropriateness of these stakeholders and multipliers is further confirmed by consensus among DG ECFIN and key Commission staff that these are indeed the right ones for DG ECFIN to inform and engage with.

In terms of stakeholders and multipliers that were added to the 2019-24 communication strategy, namely university students, bloggers / ambassadors / influencers and Europe Direct Centres and similar institutions, there has been limited communication with these to date. However, we found that economics students tend to draw on DG ECFIN's communication products for their studies and dissertations and were a relevant stakeholder for DG ECFIN in terms of intake (a well-informed pool of candidates). EDCs also have a keen interest to support DG ECFIN in reaching broader audiences and communicating with impact at the national level, through utilising their direct access to citizens in the Member States. Bloggers / ambassadors / influencers have not really been targeted by DG ECFIN communication to date and it was deemed not useful by DG ECFIN staff to do so.

Other stakeholders that DG ECFIN may want to consider – less in terms of “additions” but more in terms of further specifications of existing stakeholder groups, are:

- international financial institutions (IMF, OECD, etc.) currently not covered under the heading “policy makers”, and to be differentiated from financial institutions, who are private operators
- “commentators” in place of bloggers / ambassadors / influencers, a segment of economic opinion-formers, meaning those who frequently publish opinion pieces in key media and could advocate for DG ECFIN's policies
- market participants, as part of financial institutions and the investor community, to account for rating agencies, for example, who communicate with markets on issues such as risks
- “economics students” studying for post-graduate degrees rather than “university students”.

However, apart from focussing on “who” DG ECFIN communicates with, it is important to consider **with what purpose** – a key element that is currently missing from the strategy. Formulating specific objectives / expected results by stakeholder group would further inform their **prioritisation, segmentation and targeting**, and ensure that there is a **clear link between DG ECFIN's communication goals and stakeholder selection**. These are all areas where the strategy is currently showing important gaps to be filled by further strategic thinking and planning.

#### Sources of evidence:

- 2015 evaluation study on DG ECFIN's communication strategy and activities
- 2019-24 communication strategy
- Continuous monitoring results
- Stakeholder survey
- Survey of national authorities
- Survey of ESOs
- Targeted stakeholder interviews
- Focus groups with economics students
- Twitter audience analysis
- Stakeholder workshop

Under the heading “**Our Stakeholders**”, the 2019-24 communication strategy lists **ten stakeholders and multipliers**:

- **Policy makers**<sup>31</sup>
- **Media**<sup>32</sup>
- **Economic opinion-formers, including academia and think tanks**: those based in the EU and outside Europe, particularly institutions that are most influential and expert on DG ECFIN's core business.
- **Trade unions**
- **Financial institutions and the investor community**: private operators (banks, institutional investors, venture capital and private equity funds, etc.)
- **Business**: influential business and SME federations
- **Civil society organisations**: those with an important stake in economic issues
- **University students**: at universities and faculties with a reputable economics department
- **Bloggers, ambassadors, influencers**
- **Europe Direct Centres (EDCs) or similar contact points**

All stakeholders / multipliers on this list already featured in the 2015-19 communication strategy, apart from university students, bloggers / ambassadors / influencers and EDCs or similar contact points. They were identified based on a **stakeholder analysis** that assessed their potential to influence the achievement of DG ECFIN's operational objectives through their **decision-making capacity** and their **ability to shape the public debate**, and the **importance to them of DG ECFIN's work**. Their relevance was confirmed in the 2015 evaluation study on DG ECFIN's communication strategy and activities.<sup>33</sup> University students, bloggers / ambassadors / influencers and Europe Direct Centres or similar contact points were added in 2019, as stakeholders with an **ability to reach out to citizens** and having the potential to **amplify ECFIN's messages to a broader audience**. This addition was motivated by the economic and political context at the time of drafting the 2019-24 strategy, which was one of decreasing trust in institutions and experts and increasing anti-establishment feelings. While the general public does not constitute a stakeholder group for DG ECFIN, DG ECFIN aims to have the **general public as the “ultimate target”** of their communication activities, with the strategy relying on the **stakeholders to act as multipliers** in order to reach the general public, rather than DG ECFIN addressing the general public directly.<sup>34</sup>

There are **three main issues** as regards stakeholders presented in the strategy:

---

<sup>31</sup> ministers, senior officials working on EU issues in finance/economics or other relevant ministries and related institutions, members of the ECON Committee of the European Parliament and their main advisors, members of budget / economic committees of national parliaments and their staff, as well as key policy makers of member countries of the G7 and the G20 as well as the IMF and World Bank

<sup>32</sup> broad range of broadcast and print media, but only limited subset considered “key stakeholders” that enjoy more intensive engagement: major economics-focused journalists among the Brussels press corps, economic and financial journalists of the major serious press in the Member States, journalists for the specialised economic and financial press.

<sup>33</sup> [ecfin\\_communication\\_strategy\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>34</sup> However, DG ECFIN does implement some activities targeted at the general public specifically, such as the Euro Change-over programme, communication on InvestEU, and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of euro notes and coins.

- The lack of **prioritisation of stakeholder groups** (within and between them) contained in the strategy.
- While all stakeholder groups have a rationale for their selection<sup>35</sup>, only economic opinion-formers are clearly linked to a communication goal (DG ECFIN being viewed as a credible and authoritative source for economic analyses). For other stakeholders, a **clear link to DG ECFIN’s communication goals is missing**. They may implicitly fall under the goal of “informing and explaining” EU economic policy, and “shaping the economic debate at EU level and influencing policy-making”, however, we could not identify **specific objectives and expected results** for these stakeholder groups to reach these goals.
- The merging of multipliers and stakeholders under one heading “Our Stakeholders”, and the frequent emphasis of stakeholders being “leveraged as multipliers” to reach the general public is confusing and not viable; there is a need to **differentiate between those that DG ECFIN wants to influence**, and the **channels that DG ECFIN wants to use to do so** (e.g., media, EDCs, ESOs), which will also enable robust measurement of effectiveness and efficiency.

In interviews, there was consensus among key internal Commission staff that DG ECFIN’s primary stakeholders and multipliers were **policy makers, economic opinion formers, financial institutions**, and the **media**. Where interviewees agreed less was whether there was scope or it was a priority to engage with other stakeholders listed in DG ECFIN’s communication strategy 2019-2024, such as **civil society organisations and trade unions**, bloggers / ambassadors / influencers, or university students. Particularly as regards civil society organisations and trade unions, some interviewees felt that DG ECFIN was **not a natural interlocutor for them** given the macroeconomic focus. Others emphasised that this was again a case of tailoring messages and materials appropriately on certain topics that could be of interest to these stakeholder groups. University students studying economics and finance, for example, were mentioned as a stakeholder group that could be targeted in the same way as academics, given that they were also familiar with sophisticated language and economic analyses.

Findings from our stakeholder survey confirm that most respondents considered the **European Union to be an important reference point on topics reflected in DG ECFIN’s communication goals**. These included the green transition, digital transition and economic growth and recovery, where most respondents rather looked to the EU than international and/or national institutions. Only on the topic of employment, 72% of respondents indicated that they rather followed national institutions.

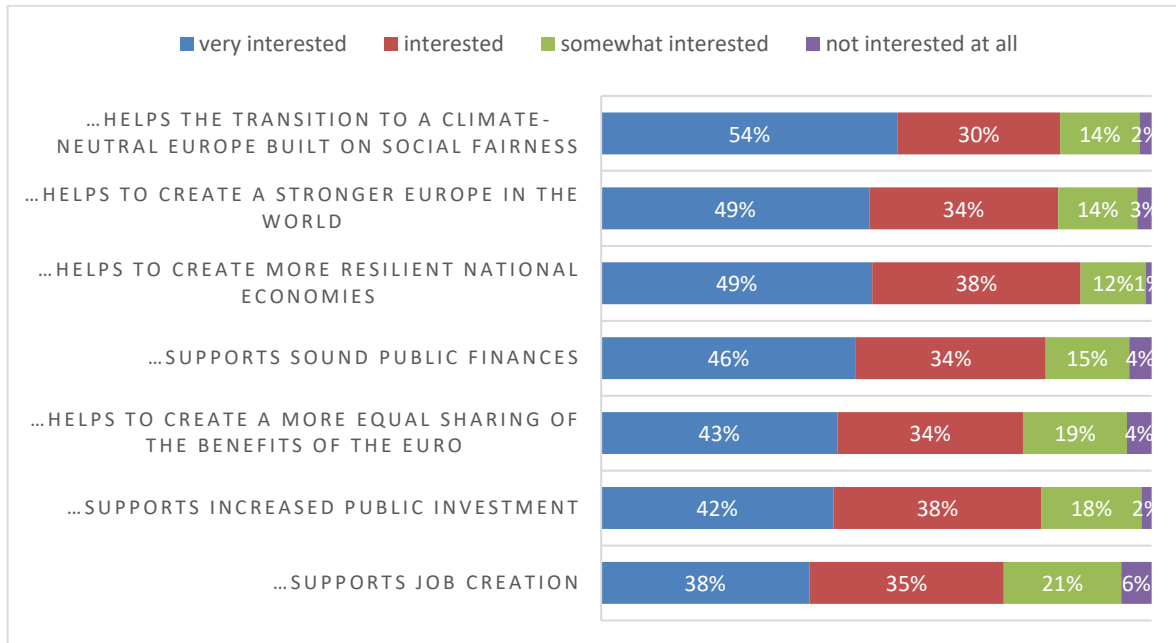
While most respondents considered themselves “informed” about the policy areas relevant to DG ECFIN<sup>36</sup>, they also indicated they were **“very interested” to learn more** about how the European Union helps to transition to a climate-neutral Europe, how it helps to create a stronger Europe in the world, and how it helps to create more resilient national economies.

---

<sup>35</sup> E.g., engagement with trade unions to support the delivery of ECFIN’s priorities given the importance of fairness in the context of fighting inequalities and need to consider the social impact of economic policies that DG ECFIN advocates

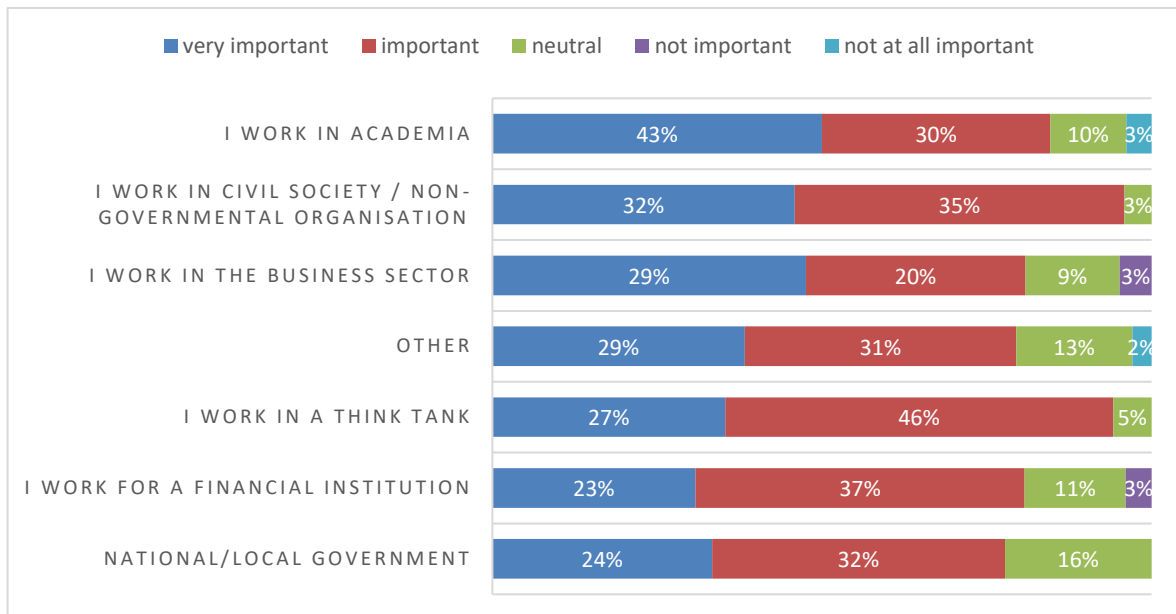
<sup>36</sup> Respondents indicated that they felt “very informed” and “informed” about how the European Union helps to transition to a climate-neutral Europe, which is built on social fairness (72%), supports sound public finances (67%), helps to create more resilient national economies (65%) and supports increased public investment (63%). By contrast, respondents felt less informed about how the European Union helps to create a more equal sharing of the benefits of the Euro and supports job creation.

**Figure 24: To what extent are you interested to learn more about how the European Union... (n=285)**



DG ECFIN communication was deemed important for stakeholders' work or studies, with **88% of survey respondents** who indicated that it was “**very important**” and “**important**”. This was particularly the case for stakeholders working in **academia** and **civil society organisations**, who indicated that updates from DG ECFIN were “**very important**” for their work (43% and 32%, respectively).

**Figure 25: Importance of updates from DG ECFIN for work/studies by stakeholder group (n=285)**



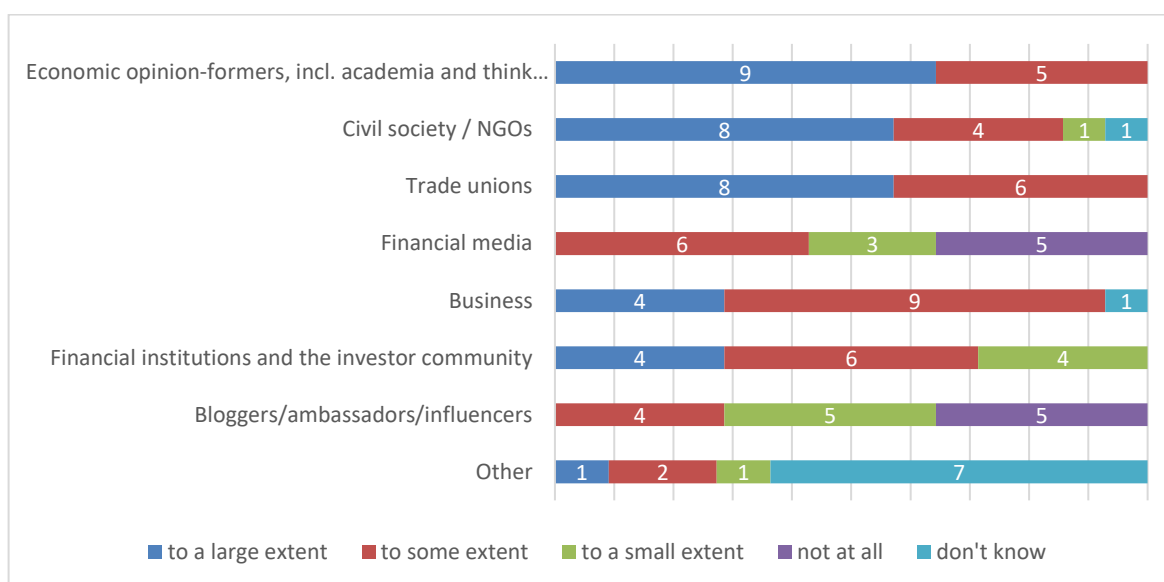
**Journalists** interviewed also noted that DG ECFIN was **relevant for their work compared with other main players** (IMF, World Bank, etc.), especially in the European context. Focus groups with **economics students** also confirmed that they considered the DG ECFIN website and publications an **important source** for their studies and dissertations and were **interested to learn more** about the day-to-day policy work of DG ECFIN. Moreover, almost all national authorities surveyed for this evaluation (8 out of 9) reported that they followed

economic policy debates taking place at the EU level “to a large extent” and were aware of the work of DG ECFIN.<sup>37</sup>

Our **Twitter audience analysis** also shows that the main audiences that DG ECFIN reaches and engages online are indeed **policy makers, international financial institutions, trade unions and journalists / news broadcasters** (see social media report in Annex V).

European Semester Officers (ESOs) surveyed further confirmed that **economic opinion-formers, civil society organisations, trade unions and businesses** were the stakeholders that they **most often engaged with** on EU economic policy issues. They did so to a lesser extent with multipliers, such as bloggers, ambassadors and influencers, and the financial media.

**Figure 26: To what extent do you engage with the following stakeholders and multipliers on EU economic policy issues in your Member State? (n=14)**



ESOs also reported that if DG ECFIN considered expanding its reach to more non-economic specialists on specific policy topics, the organisations that would be most interested in EU economic policy debates would be **environmental organisations and trade unions**.

During a stakeholder workshop with DG ECFIN communication and policy staff, the stakeholder list was further refined and roughly prioritised. The focus was on “stakeholders”, so multipliers (media, EDCs and similar contact points) were removed from the original list. The results of the stakeholder workshop are as follows:

**Policy makers (EU and national) and international financial institutions (IMF, OECD, etc.):**

DG ECFIN does not consider policy makers as stakeholders in the traditional sense, but as a “first priority” given that their communication aims to influence the decision-making

<sup>37</sup> However, it is important to note the small response rate (9 respondents – see section XXX on limitations of use the study). At the same time, a significant proportion of stakeholders who responded to the stakeholder survey consisted of representatives from national and local authorities (n=38), so their views have been captured through the stakeholder survey.

of EU and national institutions in the first instance. It was suggested that more nuance is required to differentiate between the EU and national level when it comes to allocating resources for communication. Furthermore, international financial institutions were added, as central banks and international public institutions were found not to be covered by the category of EU and national policy makers; this is to distinguish them from “financial institutions” (point 3), a category meant to capture private operators.

**Economic opinion-formers / commentators (incl. academia and think tanks):**

It was suggested to add “commentators” to this stakeholder category and target those working in the media (to be distinguished from reporters), due to their influence on policy makers, trade unions and/or businesses; these include well-known academics and economists who regularly publish opinion-pieces in key media, particularly pertinent in the context of the economic governance review, which will be a key topic in the coming months.

**Financial institutions, market participants and investors:**

“Market participants” were added to account for rating agencies, for example, who communicate with markets on issues such as risks; DG ECFIN agreed that they were a particular vector, but that currently a systematic line of communication with them is missing.

**Trade unions:**

DG ECFIN do not consider themselves to be a natural interlocutor for trade unions (compared with other DGs, such as DG EMPL or DG GROW), however, it was emphasised that it was important to not only inform trade unions about developments at ECFIN, but also listen to them, as they were deemed particularly important constituents as regards discussions about investment and the SURE programme; it was also emphasised that the current outreach targeted at trade unions was met with great approval and seminars tended to be lively and engaged, with trade unions particularly valuing Q&A sessions; this also indicates that they deem it important that DG ECFIN listens to their views.

**Businesses / industry bodies:**

Like trade unions, DG ECFIN do not consider themselves to be a natural interlocutor for businesses, unlike DG GROW and other regulatory DGs; however, it was deemed important to inform businesses about developments at DG ECFIN in the context of conducting regular temperature checks to gauge the economic sentiment among businesses and SMEs; it was emphasised, however, to specify “industry bodies”, as DG ECFIN mostly interacts with EU and national umbrella organisations, rather than individual businesses.

**Civil society organisations (where relevant) and general public (where relevant):**

“Civil society organisations” was deemed to constitute a very broad audience, which needed to be specified and targeted by relevant communication at specific moments; suggestions included targeting in the context of the RRF (e.g., green organisations on green investment and reforms) and the digital Euro (consumer organisations); similarly, DG ECFIN agreed that the general public – while not a stakeholder of DG ECFIN's communication, but still the “ultimate target” – could be segmented further and targeted with communication on very specific topics (e.g., on the RRF or the Euro Change-Over programme); it was also recognised that EDCs were a particularly useful channel to communicate DG ECFIN's messages to the general public, but needed targeted materials that could be easily localised to communicate at specific moments when DG ECFIN would seek to inform the general public.



**Economics students (post-graduate) / intake:**

It was agreed to replace “university students” with a more specific category of “economics students (post-graduates)”; DG ECFIN noted that while university students had been targeted in the past for activities aimed at “young people”, they have not been a specific target of communications to date; however, it was deemed important to keep them as relevant stakeholders in the context of “intake” at DG ECFIN, to ensure that the right calibre of candidates apply for positions who are knowledgeable about the DG.

**Bloggers, ambassadors, influencers were deprioritised** and instead, emphasis was placed on commentators (see economic opinion-formers above. Other DGs with a focus on broad public initiatives are better placed to target this group.

**EQ 10: To what extent do the communication activities, content and messaging included in the 2019-24 communication strategy remain relevant?**

The communication activities, content and messaging included in the 2019-24 communication strategy remain relevant insofar as stakeholders generally consider them useful, albeit with room for improvement. The latter concerns three aspects:

- an emphasis in DG ECFIN’s communication on information dissemination, with lesser focus on listening and engaging in dialogue with stakeholders,
- limited relevance of communication products for non-specialist audiences and non-financial journalists who could ensure broader reach,
- a focus on tools and channels in communication planning, rather than stakeholder needs and how these may be addressed to reach communication goals and contribute to specific policy objectives.

**Sources of evidence:**

- 2019-24 communication strategy
- 2020 and 2021 management plans
- 2020 and 2021 annual activity reports
- Management plan 2021 – mid-term review
- DG ECFIN 2021 financial report
- Stakeholder survey
- Survey of ESOs
- Targeted interviews
- Focus groups with economics students
- Focus groups with EDCs
- Continuous monitoring results
- Expert review of communication materials

DG ECFIN currently implements a complex set of activities organised through seven operational programmes and a workstream that is focused on exploiting the well-established resource of the Commission’s European Semester Officers (ESOs) in the Representations, namely:

- Media programme
- Social media programme
- Stakeholder outreach programme
- Website development programme

- Publication programme
- Internal communication
- On-the ground communication through European Semester Officers
- Euro change-overs programme

The 2019-24 communication strategy opens with the statement that it aims to “demonstrate how effective communication, if well integrated into policy development, can help us **achieve our overall organisational objectives.**” It further specifies that “... communication must be seen as an integral part of DG ECFIN's work which is essential for the **achievement of its operational objectives.**”

Commitment to this approach is shown in the annual activity reports and management plans for 2020 and 2021, where **external communication features in dedicated sections** below each of the four general objectives<sup>38</sup> and six specific policy objectives<sup>39</sup>, showing how it aims to support or has supported their achievement each year. However, these sections very much **focus on tools and channels** used by DG ECFIN to disseminate relevant information. There is an element missing which would highlight how the communication goals of DG ECFIN are supported by specific objectives formulated for each stakeholder group, and in turn how these communication goals align with DG ECFIN's specific policy objectives and the wider Commission's general objectives.

DG ECFIN has also not conducted a formal **stakeholder needs assessment** to assess the relevance of activities per type of stakeholder group and multiplier. Moreover, the communication strategy is organised by communication programmes with specific objectives and expected results defined by programme rather than stakeholder groups. We also note that in the 2019-24 communication strategy, communication programmes target multiple stakeholder groups at once, as follows:

---

The four general objective are: 1. A European Green Deal, 2. A Europe fit for the digital age, 3. An economy that works for people, 4. A stronger Europe in the world.

<sup>39</sup> The six specific objectives for 2021 are: 1. Support the Member States' economies to become more economically and socially resilient and minimise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the EU, including by delivering up to EUR672.5bn in grants and loans under the RRF; 2. Integrate the SDGs into the European Semester, supporting inclusive, green and digital economic transformations in the post-COVID19 recovery; 3. Review and implement the economic and fiscal surveillance framework, to deliver conditions for sustainable economic growth; 4. A deeper and more resilient EMU in both the economic and financial dimensions; 5. Mobilise around EUR300bn of investment funding to finance the green and digital transitions of the EU economy; 6. Strengthen Europe's role as a global player on economic issues and increase the international role of the euro.



Target stakeholder group	...also targeted in particular by...
Policy-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications programme</li> <li>• Website</li> <li>• Social media policy</li> <li>• On-the-ground communication</li> </ul>
Academics, university students and think-tanks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications programme</li> <li>• Website</li> <li>• Social media policy</li> <li>• On-the-ground communication</li> </ul>
Social Partners (Trade Unions and Business organisations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website</li> <li>• Social media policy</li> <li>• On-the-ground communication</li> </ul>
Civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website</li> <li>• Social media policy</li> <li>• On-the-ground communication</li> </ul>
Financial institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications programme</li> <li>• Website</li> <li>• On-the-ground communication</li> <li>• Social media policy</li> </ul>
Europe Direct Information Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications programme</li> <li>• Website</li> <li>• On-the-ground communication</li> <li>• Social media policy</li> </ul>
Bloggers, ambassadors and influencers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications programme</li> <li>• Website</li> <li>• Social media policy</li> <li>• On-the-ground communication</li> </ul>

However, DG ECFIN has **published two Flash Eurobarometer surveys**<sup>40</sup> aimed at a better targeting of communication, notably in the context of the communication campaign on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the euro cash and on the preparation of the communication on Croatia’s euro changeover. Apart from respondents’ perceptions of and support for the euro, and how well they felt informed about the common currency, questions included how and where they wish to be informed, and what type of information they considered most important.

There has also been a **continuous monitoring contract** in place since 2017 aimed at assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of communication activities and at guiding adaptations if required, in line with the best practice and guidance from DG COMM. Indeed, DG ECFIN staff confirmed that some communication activities were adapted in response to the changed environment for communication and lessons from continuous monitoring. These included:

- a more “modern” presentation of DG ECFIN’s publications to update the previous “look” and be more in line with publications from peers, such as the IMF, OECD and World Bank<sup>41</sup>;

<sup>40</sup> The Flash Eurobarometers were respectively on “introduction of Euro in Member States that have not yet adopted the common currency” (Flash Eurobarometer 508, June 2022) and on “views and attitudes related to the Euro in 19 Euro-area countries” (Eurobarometer, December 2022). We note that there are two such Eurobarometer surveys each year.

<sup>41</sup> We note that in July 2022, the new publication splash page was published after website migration [ECFIN Publications \(europa.eu\)](https://ecfin.europa.eu)

- an on-going redevelopment of the website to make it more user-friendly and include more visual materials, such as infographics and interactive charts;
- more use of video, for example, to short overview videos on the Commission's economic forecasts., featuring the Commissioner, to make the content more digestible and foster engagement with publications; video clip in 24 EU languages on the new InvestEU instrument.
- move of events and stakeholder/journalist seminars online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our evaluation confirms that **DG ECFIN's website is a relevant source of information** for stakeholders and that the on-going redevelopment of the website responds to stakeholders' needs of becoming more user-friendly to facilitate the search for relevant materials. Economics students also noted that while they found the website easy to use and well-structured, they had difficulty finding DG ECFIN's materials through Google searches, which was their main way to conduct research for their studies and dissertations. Journalists confirmed that the website was now easier to use than in the past, with relevant materials more readily accessible via the search function.<sup>42</sup>

In interviews, economic opinion-formers, in particular, appreciated that the "look" of DG ECFIN's publications had evolved, but noted even more scope for further modernisation in terms of formats and colour schemes. They also felt that the **move towards more interactive elements of the website was positive**, allowing them to quickly assess the relevance of a full report in a 3-4 minute read. In focus groups, economics students were also first and foremost drawn to interactive elements, such as the RRF Score Board, and assessed them positively. Providing **visual summaries of materials (such as videos)** was also confirmed as a **positive development** by civil society organisations, and Europe Direct Centres, who noted that such a format very much corresponded with the needs of their audiences (interested members of the general public).

As noted in our answer to EQ3, satisfaction rates with the **stakeholder outreach programme**, collected through continuous monitoring, are high, although our own evaluation shows **very limited awareness** among stakeholders surveyed of outreach activities other than the Brussels Economic Forum (see EQ3). Feedback from ESOs also shows that there is interest from national audiences to participate more in country-based events and seminars, and more scope to engage civil society organisations in these types of activities.

In general, stakeholders surveyed and interviewed voiced a **desire for more direct engagement with DG ECFIN**, which indicates that the "listening" and "dialogue" function of DG ECFIN could indeed be strengthened:

- Economic opinion-formers felt it would be beneficial for important publications (such as the Economic Forecasts) to be accompanied by an **opportunity to directly discuss economic analyses, trends and changes with DG ECFIN**, for example via dedicated **webinars**; the example of the OECD was mentioned as an organisation that organises big events for global and country reports that are a staple in the diary of every economic opinion former, with people willing to travel to Paris to participate in them.

---

<sup>42</sup> However, we note that this findings is based on a limited number of interviews, see section 5.2 on limitations.

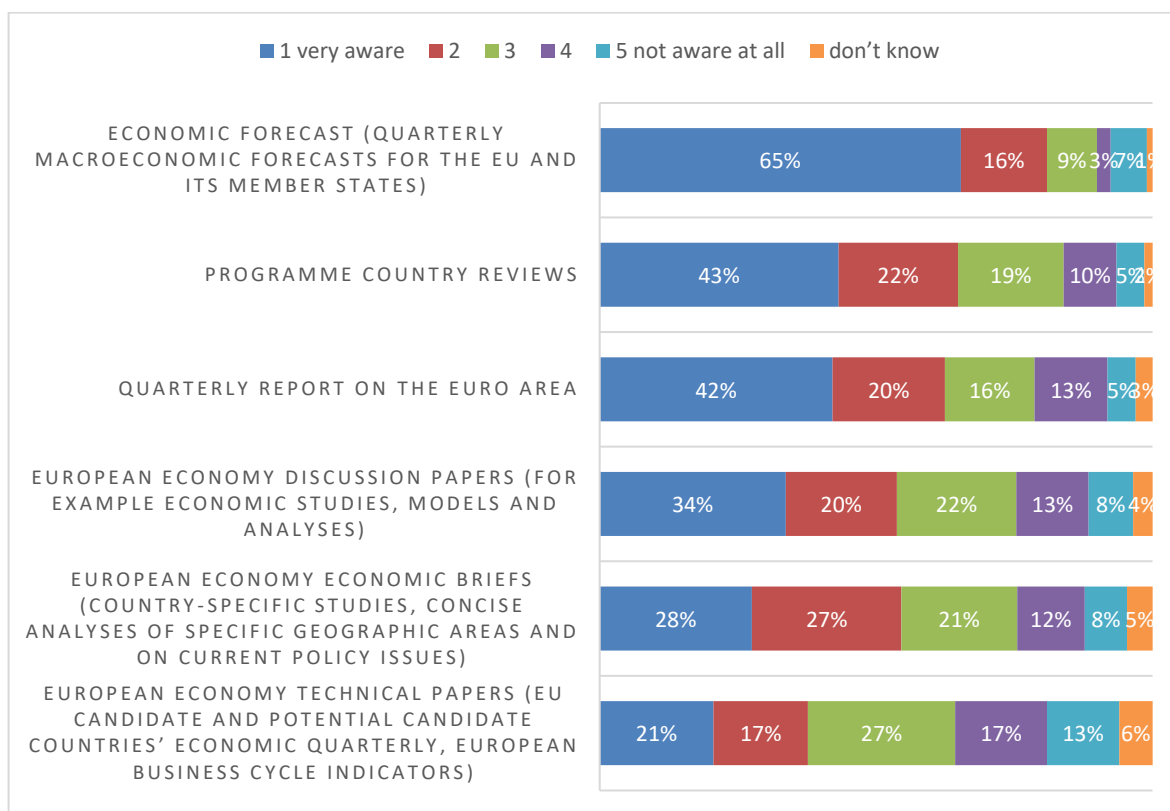
- Trade unions appreciated direct engagement offered by DG ECFIN in the form of dedicated stakeholder seminars; however, they felt that **more informal opportunities to participate in economic debates** would benefit their work further and suggested a **dedicated contact point in the DG** (an economist rather than communications staff); continuous monitoring data also highlights that trade unions, in particular, expect more opportunities for Q&A at dedicated stakeholder seminars.
- Civil society organisations emphasised a desire to **“work with” DG ECFIN** particularly in the context of **promoting national buy-in of DG ECFIN proposals**; they strongly underlined that they considered their role to be one of constructive support, especially on topics with broader social or environmental impact; suggestions for more direct engagement with DG ECFIN included a **dedicated expert group**, for example on fiscal policy, or **patronage of DG ECFIN over a membership organisation** of relevant civil society organisations with expertise in economic and fiscal policy, to participate in ECFIN consultations in an informed way.

In terms of the **media programme**, journalists confirmed the **usefulness** of existing activities, but noted that further adaptations to materials would increase their relevance for their work. Desired adaptations concerned **shortening and simplification** of press releases and “soundbites”, as journalists interviewed voiced a need for short statements that can be read “at one glance” on a mobile phone (“short sentences for huge stories”). They also voiced the need for summary materials (e.g., 1-page summaries, see also answer to EQ 3) written in **clear and concise language without jargon**, which could be **easily transferred** to a news article. This was also a key finding in our expert review of materials. Additional suggestions to enhance relevance included **more visuals and real-life examples** to illustrate findings and strengthen the link to areas of public interest.

Moreover, journalists also expressed a desire for **more direct engagement** with DG ECFIN to ensure that journalists had a basic knowledge of certain concepts and topics, which in turn could lead to Q&A sessions during briefings being “better and more fluid”. They felt that this could be achieved through **more opportunities for briefings and access to DG ECFIN’s experts**, to understand the economic and political thinking behind the Commission’s approach and complex EU governance structures (e.g., architecture of Eurozone governance). Such briefings could be either on themes or on individual countries that were in the news. Other suggestions included **off-the-record technical briefings**, like those currently organised in the context of the RRF, but for example on the Stability and Growth Pact or other important reforms. More engagement was also desired as regards opportunities to foster relationships with policy makers, e.g., through a **journalist event** for those new to Brussels **every September / October** to meet and greet DG ECFIN Directors and Heads of Unit, similar to a “university starter-week”.

In terms of the **publications programme**, survey and interview data confirmed that the publications, particularly the **Economic Forecasts**, are relevant for stakeholders. Respondents to the stakeholder survey were particularly **aware** of the Economic Forecasts, Programme Country Reviews, Quarterly Report on the Europe Area and European Discussion Papers. They reported less awareness about the European Economy Technical Papers.

**Figure 27: To what extent are you aware of the following materials published by DG ECFIN? (n=285)**



In terms of their usefulness, the **Economic Forecasts were considered “very useful”** by 59% of respondents. All DG ECFIN's publications were assessed particularly highly by respondents working in academia, except the Programme Country Reviews, which were rated highest among civil society organisations and financial institutions. Feedback from ESOs also confirmed the usefulness of these publications, as they reported using the Economic Forecasts (to a large extent” to support their work in the Member States, and “to some extent” the remaining publications, apart from the European Economy Technical Papers, which they used the least.

In interviews, stakeholders representing economic opinion-formers, trade unions, civil society organisations, and EU and international institutions, praised DG ECFIN's projections, comparisons and interpretations of statistics, and considered them of a **very high quality and very valuable** for their work. However, they noted that the relevance of DG ECFIN's work could be improved if it was less “mainstream” and created space to promote different perspectives and ideas that were thought-provoking to their audiences.<sup>43</sup>

Our expert review of DG ECFIN's communication materials also suggested that for one stakeholder group, namely **economic opinion-formers**, they are very **much in line with their needs** for accurate, detailed and technical data to support their own work and facilitate comparisons with other sources of evidence. We also identified several publications with scope to be of particular interest for civil society organisations, whose needs concern information (on a finding or findings) focused on the impact of economic policies on specific policy areas. Our focus groups with economics students also confirmed that the materials

<sup>43</sup> We recognise that DG ECFIN faces limitations in this respect as a political institution guided by political leadership. However, the finding that stakeholders perceived DG ECFIN's communication to be “too mainstream” frequently recurred in in the stakeholder survey as well as targeted interviews.

were in line with their expectations and needs and that they frequently consulted them for their studies and dissertations.

Other stakeholder groups, namely trade unions, businesses and civil society organisations, voiced the need for **simple jargon-free language in summary documents** that could accompany important publications, particularly with an eye towards **sharing them with their own non-specialist audiences**. **Videos** were also emphasised as a useful tool to do that. Moreover, for organisations and national/regional level, **materials in national languages** are key, also to allow organisations to share messages with their national members.

We found that there was generally a **strong sentiment** among stakeholders for DG ECFIN to **communicate more directly with non-specialists and the general public**, particularly to “educate” citizens on EU economic issues. Through our focus groups with EDCs, we found that while citizens rarely enquired about EU economic policy issues directly, topics relevant to DG ECFIN were important for schools, municipalities, non-governmental organisations and businesses in different sectors (e.g., agriculture, fisheries, construction). However, in order to ensure that DG ECFIN’s materials are relevant for these groups, EDCs voiced the need for **jargon-free, pedagogical and interactive stories** (ideally in national languages), and suggested **slide packs** to accompany important publications that they could present to their audiences. In the survey of ESOs, respondents also specified in open comments that DG ECFIN’s communication products were not useful for the general public, given their **technical nature**. They also mentioned that **simpler language** in some instances and **more summaries, visual images, and country-specific slide packs** could support the communication effort.

#### **EQ 10.1: Which activities could be added to allow the 2019-24 communication strategy to remain relevant?**

DG ECFIN’s current communication activities are in line with specialist audiences’ needs and expectations. However, to ensure reach to non-specialist audiences, “side materials” could accompany important publications, which would communicate findings in an easily accessible way. Suggestions included:

- more audio-visual materials, e.g., videos for social media containing simple explanations of basic economic concepts and terms to accompany publications of the Economic Forecasts, for example, and be a source for non-expert audiences to refer to basic information.
- slide packs for EDCs that could be easily adapted to local contexts to share DG ECFIN’s messages with their audiences. EDCs also suggested more materials that are “pedagogical” and interactive, which could work particularly well for schools.
- 1-page documents for journalists that would facilitate distilling information on the Commission’s position on important topics, ideally in national languages if the topic warranted a national focus.

As noted in our answer to EQ2, most stakeholder groups and multipliers also voiced a desire for more direct engagement with DG ECFIN. Suggestions included:

- webinars for economic opinion-formers to discuss economic analyses, trends and changes, following the publication of important findings, such as the Economic Forecasts



- a dedicated expert group or patronage of DG ECFIN over a membership organisation for civil society organisations to be able to participate in EC consultations in an informed way
- more briefings and access to DG ECFIN experts for journalists to gain clarity on complex economic concepts and EU governance structures, as well as more technical briefings and/or a journalist event every autumn to facilitate relationship building between journalists new to Brussels and DG ECFIN Directors and Heads of Unit.

The main lessons learnt since the COVID-19 pandemic for communication professionals working in other DGs, EU and international institutions concerned “getting out of the expert world” (reach of new audiences due to online format of events), having a “palette of formats to target different audiences” (shift from written to audio-visual materials) and entering into dialogue with citizens (e.g., via Q&A sessions on social media that were then published on the institution’s website).

**Sources of evidence:**

- Analysis conducted for EQ9 and EQ10
- Interviews with communication professionals working in other DGs, EU institutions and international organisations

In our answer to this question, we drew on the analysis conducted for EQ9 and EQ10 to assess the extent to which there was interest from priority stakeholders and multipliers in new or additional activities and the extent to which such new additions would continue to resonate with priority stakeholders and multipliers.

We found that there was indeed a keen interest from some stakeholder groups for new formats of materials and engagement. However, it was emphasised not to “improve or shorten existing materials”, as they were considered of a very high quality and in line with specialist audiences’ needs and expectations. Rather, it was suggested to develop “side content” that would present findings from documents in an accessible way to be shared with non-specialist audiences. This was also a view shared among key internal Commission staff and ESOs consulted. In focus groups, EDCs also agreed that such content, ideally with “pedagogical” and interactive elements, could engage their non-specialist audiences (schools, municipalities, civil society organisations, segments of the general public) on EU economic policy issues.

Suggestions included more videos for social media containing simple explanations of basic economic concepts and terms, such as “inflation”, “growth”, “interest rate”, which could accompany the publications of Economic Forecasts, for example, and be a source for non-expert audiences to refer to for basic information. EDCs also mentioned slide packs as a material that they could adapt to local contexts to share DG ECFIN’s messages with their audiences.

Journalists also emphasised the need for short, ideally 1-page documents that would allow them to easily distil information on the Commission’s position on important topics, which would ideally be in national languages if the topics had a national focus.

As noted in our answer to EQ9, most stakeholder groups and multipliers also voiced a desire for more direct engagement with DG ECFIN, be it via webinars to discuss economic analyses, trends and changes (economic opinion-formers), a dedicated contact point in the DG (trade unions), or a dedicated expert group / patronage of DG ECFIN over a membership organisation to participate in consultations in an informed way (civil society organisations). Feedback from journalists also highlighted a desire for more opportunities for briefings and access to DG ECFIN experts to gain clarity on complex economic concepts

and EU governance structures, off-the-record technical briefings and/or a journalist event every September/October, to facilitate relationship building between journalists new to Brussels and DG ECFIN Directors and Heads of Unit.

We also collected suggestions from communication professionals working in other DGs, EU institutions and international organisations on the adjustments that they made in the last two years. These asserted that “getting out of the expert world”, having a “palette of formats to target different audiences” and entering into dialogue with citizens were the main lessons learnt since the COVID-19 pandemic. They noted that the need to adapt the format of events during the COVID-19 pandemic opened them up to different and more audiences than ever before. This also meant that they started to adapt resources and shifted strongly from print media to social media and TV, developing different types of formats to reach these different audiences. Especially videos were repeatedly mentioned as a useful tool to address the general public. Another example of citizens’ engagement was virtual Q&A sessions with citizens on particular topics on social media that were then published on the institution’s website. Finally, TikTok was mentioned as a “frontier tool” that could be used by the Commission for events targeting young people. Interviewees recognised that institutions such as the European Union could benefit from a greater presence on informal media but needed to be careful not to look “artificial” on such new platforms. We understand that TikTok is now being piloted at central level due to data protection issues.