European Commission

Mid-term evaluation of the Europe Direct Information Centres (2013 – 2017)

COMM-C3/25/2015 Final Report

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Prepared by:

coffey Deloitte.

PREPARED BY: Melanie Kitchener, Coffey International Ltd
                    Irina Ulcica, Coffey International Ltd
                    Marion Bywater, for Deloitte
                    Vilma Zotou, Deloitte

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This document has been approved for submission by Coffey's Project Director, based on a review of satisfactory adherence to our policies on:

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Performance Management and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Signature:

Simon Griffiths,
Evaluation & Research Practice Lead

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CoR	Committee of the Regions
DG BUDG	Directorate-General for Budget
DG COMM	Directorate-General for Communication
ECN	(European Commission) External Communication Network
EDCC	Europe Direct Contact Centre
EDIC(s)	Europe Direct Information Centre(s)
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EC	European Commission
EP	European Parliament
EPIO	European Parliament Information Office
ESN	European Service Network
EU	European Union
HQ	Headquarters
I&C	Information & Communication
Rep(s)	Representation(s) (= European Commission Representations to the Member States)
HoC(s)	Head(s) of Communication
HoR(s)	Head(s) of Representation
HoA(s)	Head(s) of Administration
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MTE	Mid-term Evaluation
NC(s)	Network Correspondent(s)
PM	Project Manager
QA	Quality Assessment
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound
ToR	Terms of Reference

0 Executive Summary

This is the Final Report on the mid-term evaluation of the Europe Direct Information Centres (2013 – 2017) which is presented to Directorate-General Communication (DG COMM) of the European Commission, by Coffey International Ltd and Deloitte. The evaluation was foreseen in DG COMM's 2015 Management Plan and is intended to pave the way for an enhanced future EDIC generation.

The Europe Direct Information Centre (EDIC) Network comprises more than 500 EDICs. It is considered to be one of the main tools of the European Commission to engage with citizens on EU-related topics at local and regional level. EDICs provide extended outreach channels in the Member States. They currently have a two-fold mission, to inform and signpost citizens to other sources of EU information and advice, and to promote engagement and debate, which is considered to be 'participatory citizenship'.

This evaluation was intended to examine the performance of the third generation of EDICs against the stated objectives and following adjustments to the mission and management system of the generation launched in January 2013. Each generation of the EDIC network has been evaluated by an external firm and it follows that this is the third evaluation of the network.

This evaluation comprised an extensive data collection exercise with:

- Interviews of European Commission (EC staff at Headquarters (HQ) and in the Representations ("Reps"), European Parliament Information Offices (EPIO) staff, the representatives of host structures and EDIC Managers

- Two on-line surveys of Network Correspondents (NCs) and EDIC Managers

- Field visits to 7 Member States to meet with EDIC Managers and host structures

- A real-costs exercise which required host structures to provide details of the costs of providing a walk-in centre, EDIC Manager costs and the costs of providing different modules

- A mystery shopper exercise to observe and analyse EDICs at work

- On-line focus groups with users and citizens (recruited via an agency who have never used an EDIC before)

In addition, it took account of available reporting data provided by the Reps and on the EDIC Intranet. The evaluation team also helped to design the survey used in the on-line public consultation exercise and took account of the results of the survey in the analysis of findings, conclusions and recommendations. The evaluation team was supported by a European Commission Steering Group, which provided feedback and commented on the individual progress reports provided.

The main conclusions and recommendations of this evaluation are presented below. Detailed conclusions are provided in response to the evaluation questions set in Chapters 5 and 6 of this report.

0.1 Conclusions

Our overarching conclusions below are a distillation of conclusions by evaluation question contained in the full report.

The **EDIC network is a positive concept.** It brings a number of benefits. It:

- is aligned with institutional goals;

- has consensus among EC staff in contact with EDICs that EDICs are important;

- provides local channels for EU information / feedback / local support to the EC and other institutions;

- brings the institutions closer to citizens;

- can generate goodwill about the EU;
- is staffed at all levels (EDIC, Rep and DG COMM HQ) by often passionate and enthusiastic people;
- has very satisfied users.

Despite this, the Network still suffers from **low visibility and impact, and a lack of targeting and strategic management**, resulting in inconsistent network performance. These issues were present in previous evaluations, but, in many cases, the recommendations have not been fully addressed. The reasons appear to include the complexity and cost of 'redesigning' the network, the sheer number of points to be tackled and / or the lack of manpower at all levels of the EDIC system and / or crowding out by other priorities within DG COMM.

As a result of this, we are still faced with a number of basic questions, which keep coming up time and again:

- Which needs does this generalist network set out to meet?
- Who should the target groups be?
- What is the right format and priorities given the amount of money available?
- What is the real added value and impact of the network?

Over a long period the Commission and the other institutions have not been able to address the basic problem of the **public's lack of understanding** about how the EU institutions work, what they do and what this means for individual citizens, as confirmed by EDICs. As long as people do not have that understanding, they are susceptible to the propagation of myths about the EU and it is not possible to engage with them on policy issues. The EDIC network can make a contribution to meeting this need.

The institutions' requirement for EDICs to inform citizens about the EU's political priorities implies a more complex level of understanding of the EU, which goes beyond the basics. Providing this information without appropriate regard to users' actual needs represents a top-down, broadcast approach, which risks being seen as propaganda and is likely to be ineffectual as a result. There is clear consensus in communication research literature that effective communicators listen to people's concerns / interests and address these concerns / interests in their messages. Telling the story of how the EU takes their concerns into account through political priorities is a later step.

Whilst **the amount of funding per EDIC is a concern** in countries which receive the so-called 'standard' lump sum' contribution to their costs, increasing individual EDIC budgets will not automatically address the limitations of coverage and visibility.[1] This would need to be part of **a bigger plan, a step change,** possibly in collaboration with the Member States – learning, for example, from the lessons of the Strategic Partnerships, in the volume of activities to support outreach to EU citizens. Following the UK referendum, Member States may be more receptive than in the past to playing their part rather than putting all or most of the responsibility for communicating with citizens on the institutions.

There have been a number of efforts to make improvements to the EDIC network over the years. Despite the more strategic recommendations from earlier evaluations, improvements have focussed at the operational level (moving from real costs to lump sums, changes to modules, increased focus on training and intra-EDIC networking, Intranet reporting). Fundamental questions remain as to which internal and external needs the EDIC network is trying to meet and how best the network can meet these needs?**'**

This is because the EDIC network format is not sufficiently relevant to EU citizens or to the EU institutions because it is not focussed on addressing specific internal and external needs by meeting SMART objectives, i.e. objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. The lack of focus is reflected in the

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[1] Countries receiving an 'adapted' lump sum of 80% of the standard amount are Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, i.e. countries where costs tend to be lower.

Network's struggle to generate visibility and impact inside and outside the institutions. **SMART objectives** are required and their absence can be seen at all levels of the network.

If needs can be identified, for example through a thorough **internal and external needs assessment,** and if the EU institutions (and Member States) agree to make the changes **and allocate the budget** that will be required to meet these needs defined as priorities within the budget available, then increased visibility and impact should be expected to follow.

Channels and tools should be understood as ways to **support** and not **generate** visibility and impact. Poor visibility cannot be tackled by simply identifying the 'right tools'. It needs to result from **having a consistently good service that is fit-for-purpose.** Internal needs relate to ways that EDICs can feed into and support the work of EC staff and complement other EC networks, and external needs relate to ways that EDICs can feed into and support citizens' lives. **This poses a challenge to the institutions. Not only must they be ready to support more intense links between the EU and the local level**, but for this to work optimally, they are likely to need engagement and support at the national level, and in federal countries, at regional level.

In the absence of the commitment that is required to generate significant levels of impact with a much more ambitious, targeted and better resourced mandate, the EDIC network needs to focus on making the substantial improvements that are required to deliver the **consistently good or high performing EDIC network** that should be expected of the next generation by:

- Excluding weak and low performing host structures and EDIC Managers;
- Redefining the objectives and mission and targeting of the network;
- Strengthening the management processes and systems;
- Increasing the level / type of support and resourcing that are available at every level, from the senior staff of DG COMM down.

This will require prioritisation. With current budgets EDICs cannot do everything. The Commission has to make choices, and EDICs have to make choices, but EDICs must make their choices within the bounds of **parameters** set by the Commission (at HQ level initially and by Reps in order to take national circumstances into account). Allowing them to play to what they perceive as their strengths or accepting host structures that were clearly not equipped to perform well just in order to have comprehensive geographic network coverage has exacerbated the heterogeneity of the network.

These overarching conclusions and the detailed conclusions on the effectiveness and efficiency of both the performance of the EDIC network and its organisation and management provided in the body of the report as replies to the evaluation questions feed two types of Recommendations – strategic recommendations in this Executive Summary and specific recommendations for the next generation of EDICs in Appendix 1.

0.2 Recommendations

This section presents overarching recommendations from the evaluation. Additional, more specific recommendations are presented in Appendix 1 at the end of the report.

It is recommended to change the EDIC Mission

- Given the institutions' **communication deficit at local and regional level, reflecting a lack of representation at this level, EDICs should be seen as part of the Commission's overall communication effort.** They should become communication and feedback channels for the EU institutions, rather than one-stop shop information centres. This takes account of the low levels of enquiries received, the amount of information available on-line and the availability of other information sources.

- As information channels **the EDIC mission needs to be realigned with the objectives already set for EC external communication.** As described in the European Commission External Communication

Network (ECN) code of conduct, the long-term overarching objective set is to restore citizens' positive perception of the EU and the operational objective is to show the relevance and added-value of the EU and its policies (and the Community method)[2]. This means EDICs should focus **on EU basics and making policies directly relevant to citizens,** so that they gain a better understanding about what the EU institutions do. This reflects EDICs' own assessment based on their day-to-day contact with the target audience of the area where there is the greatest need and where they are most effective.

- **EDICs should focus on outreach and engaging** with citizens on behalf of the EU institutions and whilst EDICs should continue to provide a walk-in facility, this should no longer be their main priority. Greater emphasis should be placed on channelling phone-calls and emails directly to the EDCC, including via EDIC websites, as well as going out to individual citizens.

- EDICs should specialise in engaging directly with citizens with **generalist** needs, in particular those with **little or no awareness** of the EU and meeting specialist needs only where there is no other network or service better placed, and thus coordinating closely both with the EDCC and other networks.

- EDICs should collect and provide **feedback** on citizens' concerns and reactions to hot political issues in a selective and structured manner that is useful to the Commission. In turn, the Commission must firm up the processes that will need to be in place to make sure that feedback is taken into account / appropriate actions are taken if required and EDICs are provided with some kind of response which confirms the Commission's position.

- EDICs should have a triple function vis-à-vis the media. First, they should develop contacts with local media to obtain coverage of their own activities and local angles to EU news, notably on funding. Second, through interactions with the Reps and policy experts in the DGs, they should act as **conduits for the Commission's relationships with local media.** The first activity should help them with the second. Third, they should also alert Reps to negative EU reporting.

It is recommended to use EDICs in a targeted way to support an increase in EU awareness

- There needs to be an **increase in research** to support the identification of local needs and the setting of SMART objectives for the whole network, country networks and EDIC activities.

- **EDICs should be required to select target groups for their activities and thus be allowed to specialise**. It is recommended that target groups should focus on age / life-style characteristics rather than attitudes, given the difficulties in identifying and reaching the latter group. It is recommended that the EC present the following groups for selection in the Call text:

  - School-age children, their teachers and parents
  - Students aged 18+ and their teachers
  - The working age population
  - The retired population

- The Commission should take a view before the next Call is issued as to whether or not **young people** (and which age groups) are to be regarded as a priority group, so that EDICs can take that into account in selecting their target groups and the Commission can, if necessary, re-calibrate tools / support produced centrally.

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[2] The Community method is characterised by: the sole right of the European Commission to initiate legislation; the co-decision power between the Council and the European Parliament, and the use of qualified majority voting in Council; http://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/community_intergovernmental_methods.html.

- EDIC efforts should then be focussed on developing **a better understanding of the characteristics and needs of the selected local target groups,** providing tailored messages and materials to this group and identifying spaces, both physical and digital, where this group, its local multipliers and influencers can best be reached. In turn, the Reps should be able to cluster mini EDIC networks working on the same target group and provide tailored information and messages to the target groups about how the EU works and the relevance of EU work to different policy areas that affect the target group.

It is recommended to reinforce collaboration across the Commission and with institutional / Member State stakeholders, so that:

- Commission communication policy positions EDICs as a **valuable** resource which DGs have a *responsibility* to use (with the possibility of funding ad hoc activities) and ensure that each DG designates an EDIC ambassador, to promote EDICs within the DG and act as a contact point for EDICs looking for thematic support.

- The Commission builds on the MoU with the **European Parliament (EP)** by closer coordination at HQ and national (Rep / EPIO) level on the mutual benefits of cooperating with EPIOs; builds on the declaration of intent of the **CoR** by identifying concrete areas for cooperation, particularly at local level and linked to the reinforced focus on outreach; and explores the potential for cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee.

It is recommended to reinforce management and communication coordination in the Reps

- Reduce the administrative burden / increase Rep-level communication leadership to EDICs:

  - Increase involvement of the Head of Administration / provide additional administrative support and re-focus NC role on EDIC communication, or
  - Retain the NC role and Head of Communication provides communication leadership with additional manpower / support
  - Consider additional low-cost support via a structured traineeship programme
  - Increase Intranet functionality for administrative processes

- Develop a **standard process for monitoring and reporting** which is used by all Reps and EDICs and supplement monitoring with outsourced Mystery Shopping. These processes and the required forms should be revised so that the results can be usefully analysed and utilised with existing staff resources, or resources should be increased. Reports should be input via the Intranet and provided in one of the three working languages of the Commission to allow wider use by DG COMM HQ.

- Require Reps to provide **communication leadership** and guidance by:

  - Defining **a yearly country-wide strategy for EDICs as part of their annual strategies**, with priority themes, messages and specific SMART objectives with quantitative and qualitative targets on which EDICs should be consulted, and which will be the context for EDIC communication plans.

  - Defining templates for the EDIC communication plans with SMART objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be collected on an ongoing basis via one standard survey. The description of the KPIs will be common to all EDICs engaging in an activity covered by a KPI, but the numbers attached to the KPIs may vary to take local specialisation and circumstances into account.

  - Using this survey to collect feedback on qualitative indicators, including increased levels of awareness and understanding of what EU institutions do, and then use the results as an 'early warning' system so that underperformance can be addressed before it becomes systemic, and to identify and then disseminate good practice.

- Creating content, including key messages, lines to take, presentations, tweets and posts, visual clips to ensure more consistency, quality & visual id. This means EDICs only exceptionally produce their own materials.

- Providing specific and detailed guidance, including a graphic charter for materials EDICs produce themselves and for materials they produce in conjunction with others, on outreach and communication expectations, how to develop a plan / KPIs.

- Managing one central website per country (which links to local EDIC pages) and there is a single EDIC brand for URLs, email addresses, Facebook addresses, Twitter handles, etc.

It is recommended to strengthen host structures, by:

- Changing the selection and **award process so that host structures and EDIC Managers are required to comply with more specific criteria which reflect the work that they will be required to do** (as per suggestions in section 6.4) and fund only **very good and excellent** host structures. Geographic spread is desirable, but not critical. The Commission should not support known weak structures **unless there are sound reasons for believing that they have taken steps to bring their performance up to standard.**

- Defining the **consequences** that can follow if host structures do not meet expectations, but encourage host structures by engaging more with them on an **on-going** basis, encouraging more **sharing** of experiences and rewarding host structures.

It is recommended to make EDICs more effective by:

- Resourcing the Reps to provide additional support to help EDICs, particularly, in the first instance, with communication planning.

- Requiring host structures to provide at least **1 full-time** member of staff, who devotes at least 75% of their time to the EDIC and has a specific profile that confirms experience of modules / activities.

- Requiring EDICs to **provide Annual Work Programmes which are de facto annual communication plans, to be updated six-monthly, which are in line with the Rep's national strategy and which contain SMART objectives**, define specific goals for numbers of people to be reached through direct physical interactions and digital engagement, as well as define target groups' key messages and a strategy, which confirms the way that target groups will be reached.

- Ensuring that monitoring by Network Correspondents takes into account whether host structures are providing an adequate amount of complementary expertise and infrastructure support taking the local context into account.

- Using on-line surveys, for example via Survey Monkey[3], designed by the Reps to support a structured needs assessment of their selected target group and multipliers, and to gather feedback on the outcomes of their efforts.

- Providing text / images to contribute to their web presence on the central website and signpost to EDCC and other Networks as much as possible.

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[3] www.surveymonkey.com. There are other similar tools, but this is very widely used, available in many languages and has proven to work effectively. Up to 10 (multi-part) questions can be included free of charge.

- Focussing on physical and digital outreach by putting Social Media and events in the basic module and making it clear that events should primarily mean proactivity in reaching out to individual citizens rather than meetings in closed conference rooms with little opportunity for interaction unless the need for these can be demonstrated.

- Describing what is required for EDICs in one outreach module which includes: web / Social Media / events and outreach activities / email bulletins, etc.

- Increasing the amount of funding to EDICs (in standard lump sum countries) and a third band of lump sum countries to allow for significantly higher costs in certain countries.

1 Introduction

This document is the **Final Report** of the **Mid-term evaluation of Europe Direct Information Centres (2013 - 2017)**. It is submitted by Coffey International Development Ltd (Coffey) and Deloitte to the European Commission - Directorate General Communication (hereinafter "DG COMM").

The network of more than 500 Europe Direct Information Centres (EDICs) is one of the main tools of the European Commission (EC) to engage with citizens on EU-related topics at local and regional level. EDICs are the Commission's extended outreach channels in the Member States, promoting dialogue on EU issues and co-operating with other information networks and contact points. The current network of EDICs managed by the EC Directorate General for Communication (DG COMM) complements and supports the work of the EC Representations (EC Reps) and European Parliament Information Offices (EPIOs) at local and regional level[4]. EDICs are operated by host structures, which are proven public or private bodies with a public-service mission, and which are selected through open calls for proposals managed by the EC Reps at national level.

The purpose of this report, which builds upon the preliminary findings from the Interim Report, is to provide answers and conclusions to the evaluation questions set in the Terms of Reference. It sets out a number of recommendations to the EC for the next steps of the evolution of the EDIC network.

This report is structured around 6 Chapters as follows:

1. **Introduction**

2. **EDIC Mid-term Evaluation:** describes the background / context, the purpose of the evaluation including scope and evaluation questions and the evaluation methodology.

3. **Review of previous evaluations:** this is the third evaluation of the EDIC network. This section provides a comparative review of the similarities and differences between the evaluations conducted to date.

4. **Relevance to current needs:** provides the answers to the first 3 evaluation questions in relation to target group needs and the needs of internal audiences.

5. **Mission compliance and performance:** describes how the EDIC network conducts the activities that have been assigned and the factors that enhance or limit this performance.

6. **Organisation and management:** provides answers to the required questions on the way that the EDIC network is managed, strengths and weaknesses of this approach and ways that this might be improved.

It should be noted that the evidence for this evaluation was provided in the four documents, which are now annexed to this report as follows:

Annex 1: Analysis of Interviews with Reps, EPIOs and EDICs

Annex 2: Analysis of On-line Surveys of EDIC Managers and Network Correspondents

Annex 3: Analysis of On-line Focus Groups with Users and Non-Users

Annex 4: A report on the results of the Public Consultation Survey on Europe Direct Information Centres.

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[4] http://europa.eu/europedirect/index_en.htm

2 EDIC Mid-term Evaluation

2.1 Background to the EDIC network

The EDIC network was first launched in 2005 and it is now in its third edition or generation (2013 – 2017). The network comprises over 500 centres located across all 28 Member States. They complement the work of the EC Reps, the European Parliament Information Offices (EPIOs), and that of the other EU Institutions and information networks. They are generalists with a focus on reaching citizens at grassroots level both directly and through stakeholders and multipliers.

The need for better communication with citizens, and thus the need to reach out at grassroots level in some way, appears to be as great now as ever. According to the Standard Eurobarometer (EB) 84 published in the autumn of 2015, a reversal of the declining trust of Europeans in the EU has gone into reverse. Moreover, the level of mistrust has been greater than the level of trust since 2009. The EB84 indicated that an absolute majority of Europeans distrust the EU (55%). Trust in the EU declined by 8 percentage points between the spring and autumn of 2015, with the result that less than one third of respondents currently trust it (32%).

Figure 1: The trust of Europeans in the EU is in decline

QA8a.10 I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain media and institutions. For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.
The European Union (% - EU)
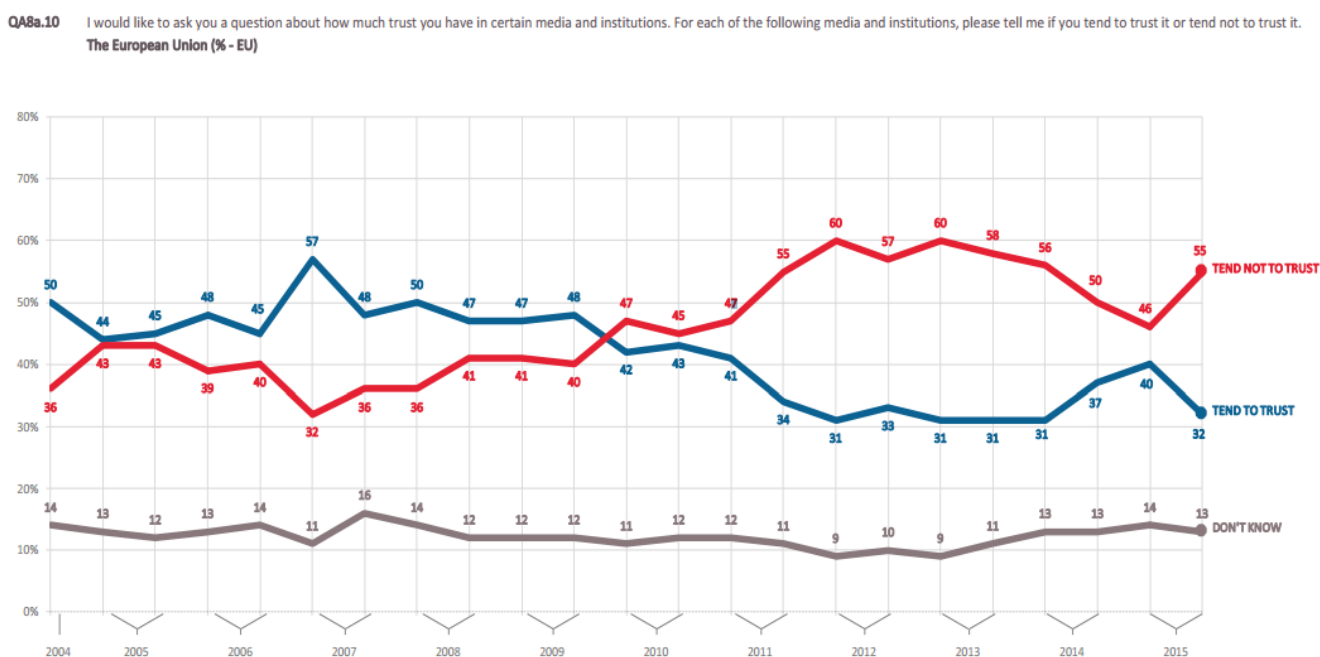
(Source: Standard Eurobarometer EB84.3, Autumn 2015)

EDICs are intended to contribute to the wider EU Institutional goals of enhanced communication with citizens, with the final objective of increasing people's awareness and understanding of the EU, as Figure 2 below shows.

Figure 2: Overview of the Europe Direct Information Centre (EDIC) Logic
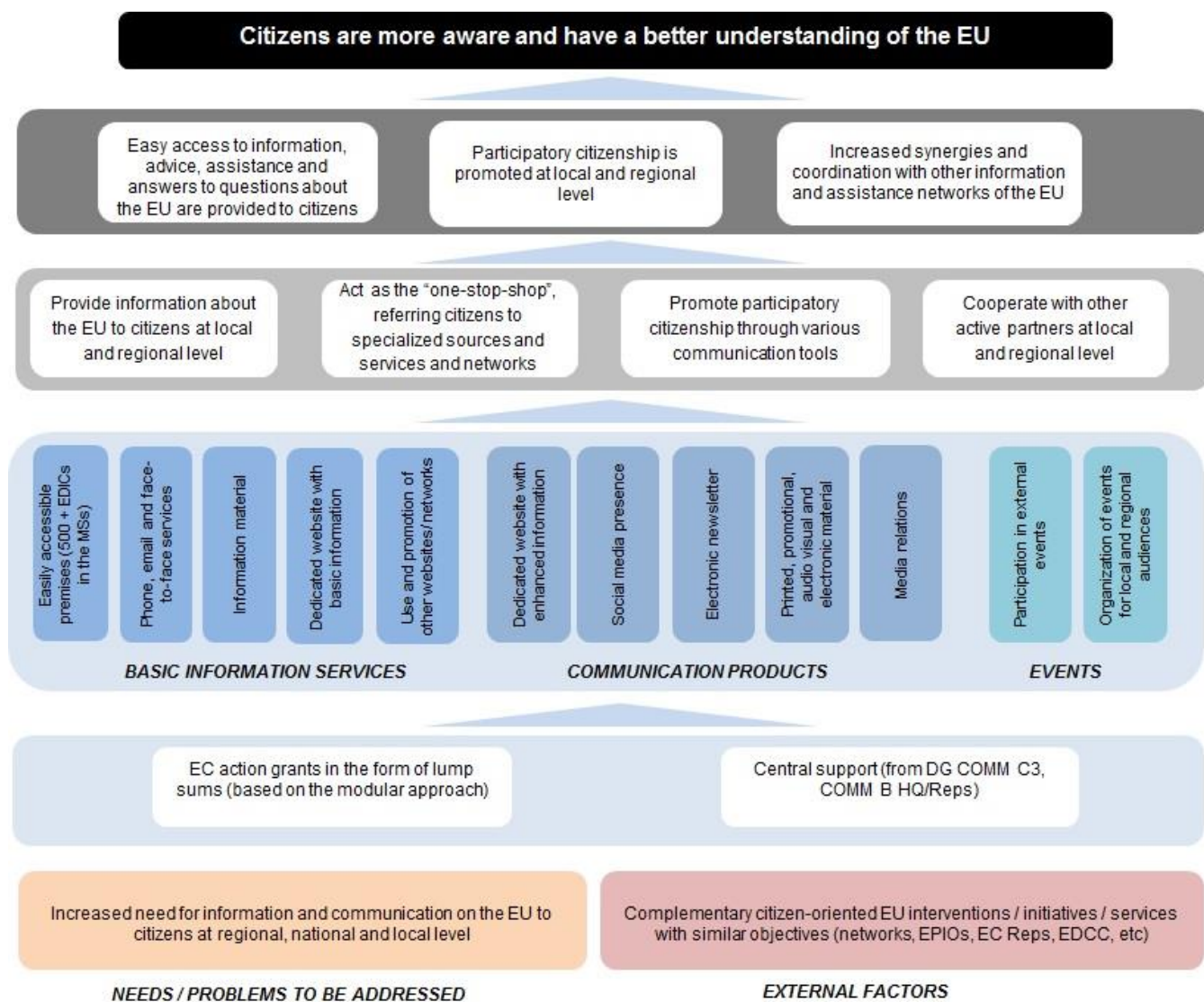
EDICs do not bear sole responsibility for informing citizens and raising their awareness about the EU. They are part of a network of networks providing information to citizens, of which we have identified the following networks which are provided overleaf.

The key characteristics of inclusion in the list are:

- receiving EC co-finance;
- having dissemination of information to / provision of assistance to citizens as part of their role.

Citizens is used here in the broadest sense of the word, so that it encompasses businesses, civil society, the world of education etc., the criterion being that any citizen with a legitimate interest could reasonably expect to find someone at the other end of a phone or by email to answer a valid query. Clearly the extent to which that is part of each network's mandate varies considerably. Similarly, some of these networks regard being available to citizens as an exception because their websites are designed to provide all the information, and forms, that a citizen could need.

Information for all citizens

- EUROPE DIRECT – information on all EU issues (DG COMM)

- Europe Direct Contact Centre – information on all EU issues by phone and email (DG COMM)

- Regional Policy Inform Network (DG REGIO)

- Your Europe – online information on all EU issues for citizens and business (DG GROW)

Information / assistance for all citizens relating specifically to cross-border issues

- Solvit - Problems with authorities in another EU country (DG GROW)

- ECC-Net – the European consumer centres network (DG JUST)

- EJN - European judicial network in civil and commercial matters (DG JUST)

- EUGO – provides information on how to set up and run a business in the EU

- FIN-Net – settling cross-border disputes with financial service providers (DG ECFIN)

Information / assistance with mobility

- Contact points for the recognition of professional qualifications (DG GROW)
- EURAXESS - career opportunities for researchers (DG RTD)
- EURES - finding a job / staff (DG EMPL)
- Euroguidance - support to career advisors (DG EAC)
- Europass Centres (DG EMPL)
- European qualifications framework – national contact points (DG EAC)
- EQAVET (European quality assurance in vocational education and training) National Reference Points (DG EAC / DG EMPL)
- National Academic Recognition Centres (NARICs) (DG EAC)
- Ploteus (online only) – online portal that acts as a search engine, providing information on learning opportunities and education systems in European countries (DG EAC)

Information / assistance for specific target groups

- Creative Europe Desks – provide support for European networks to help the cultural and creative sectors (DG EAC / DG CNECT)

- Enterprise Europe Network - information for small businesses (DG GROW)

- Eurodesk – EU information centres for young people (DG EAC)

- Europe for Citizens' contact points – practical information on funding initiatives that enhance civic participation at EU level (DG HOME)

- Horizon 2020 National Contact Points – guidance on choosing relevant H2020 topics and types of action (DG RTD)

2.2 The specific functions of EDICs

Within this mosaic, the EDICs have a **dual function**:

- On the one hand, they inform. They do this both reactively and proactively, and both directly and indirectly. In practical terms this consists of channelling enquiries from citizens to suitable sources of information, such as those above.

- EDICs also promote participatory citizenship through interactive communication tools and events aimed at citizens, other stakeholders and multipliers (including the media). The resulting debates are meant to promote European citizenship and complete the feedback loop between EU citizens and the Commission.

EDICs are operated by host organisations selected through open calls for proposals managed by the EC Reps. This leads to the signing of five-year Framework Partnership Agreements (FPA) with the selected EDIC host structures. DG COMM has overarching responsibility for the EDICs, but Reps' Network Correspondents (NCs) manage contractual arrangements and monitor the progress and results of the EDICs against their annual action programmes. Central support is provided in areas such as exchange of experience, training, and as a source of information materials and news items.

The annual budget for the EDIC grants in 2015 amounted to EUR 11,900,000[5]. This translates into action grants paid in the form of lump sums to host structures. As described in the ToR, in "standard lump sum countries" applicants can request an EC grant per year of between EUR 15,000 and 25,000 and in "adapted lump sum countries" they can request between EUR 12,000 and 20,000[6]. The level of co-financing can vary depending on the country and the host structure and is not explicitly checked by the Commission.

There is diversity inherent in the EDIC network with regards to the individualised approaches and actions that are supported to fit with the specific location and the target group needs which are to be met by each EDIC centre.

The challenge of this evaluation was to assess if there are key changes that could maximise the impact of this unique grassroots network to increase its usefulness for both citizens and the European Institutions.

2.3 Objectives of the evaluation

The 2015 DG COMM Management Plan foresees a mid-term evaluation of the EDIC network, which should pave the way for an enhanced future EDIC generation. The EDIC network is currently in its third generation (2013 – 2017). As described in the Terms of Reference, the purpose of the evaluation is to examine the performance of this third generation of EDICs against the stated objectives and to identify issues and recommend course corrections.

Five evaluation criteria have been set, which are aligned with the Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines. These are summarised below:

1. **Effectiveness:** analysis of progress towards achieving the objectives of the intervention and the identification of factors that drive or hinder progress which are linked or not to the intervention.

2. **Efficiency:** this requires a focus on the extent to which the costs associated with running the EDIC network can be considered to justify the benefits and whether there are savings or changes that can be made to the way, or amount, of funding allocated. In this respect, we have been asked to place a particular focus on consideration of the allocation of the lump sum payment to EDICs.

3. **Relevance:** requires consideration of the extent to which the objectives still meet current needs and problems, both within the EC and EP and of citizens. This assessment will enable the institution to make decisions with regards to whether to continue, change or stop the intervention.

4. **Coherence:** this is intended to consider the extent to which the EDIC network contributes to or complements the work of other EU information sources, as well as if and where there are overlaps or aspects that could be better aligned. The focus on coherence is also intended to allow consideration of synergies within the EDIC network at national level.

5. **EU added-value:** is intended to focus on the extent to which the value generated by the EDIC network is additional to the value that would have resulted from an intervention initiated at regional and local level and from this assessment to consider whether the current format can still be considered to be justified.

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[5] The total budget in 2015 was EUR 14,260,000, which was comprised of EUR 11,900,000 for EDIC grants, EUR 910,000 for coordination by DG COMM HQ and EUR 1,450,000 for management and coordination by the Representations.
[6] An adapted lump sum (80% of the standard lump sum) is applied in countries where the price level is less than 80% of the average EU price level: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia

2.4 Evaluation questions

The evaluation criteria will be assessed through 19 evaluation questions which have been set. The questions aim to explore and provide answers to confirm the performance of EDICs, the EDIC network and the management systems in place to support their activities at national and EU level. In the inception or preparation phase of the evaluation we identified the type and sources of data that would be required to enable us to answer the evaluation questions. The evaluation team also defined a set of judgement criteria that would be used to assess whether or not the data was sufficient to answer the questions.

The evaluation questions are presented in a table overleaf. The data presented in the Interim report has been used to enable us to provide answers to the questions in this report.

Table 1: Evaluation questions

Criterion	Suggested Evaluation Questions
Relevance	1. To what extent do the objectives and activities of the EDICs correspond to the demonstrable needs of citizens and other stakeholders? • Which target groups are interacting with EDICs? • Which types of needs are currently being met? 2. How relevant is the EDIC mission to meeting the needs of internal audiences? 3. To what extent does the network of 500+ EDICs correspond to target audience and institutional needs?
Effectiveness	4. To what extent have the EDICs: • Increased citizens' awareness of EU affairs? • Promoted citizens' engagement with the EU and participatory citizenship? • Helped to stimulate debate through events? • Effectively communicated EC priorities? • Been successful in mechanisms to channel feedback? • Used effective combinations of channels and tools to correspond to target groups' needs? 5. Are the EDICs visible and engaging with local and regional stakeholders and the media? 6. Have individual EDICs been implemented as planned in their Annual Action Programmes? 7. Were target groups satisfied with the level and type of service that is available / received? 8. How effective is promotion of the EDIC network and what more could be done and by whom to increase visibility inside and outside the Commission?
Efficiency	9. How efficient is the approach to financing and can any limitations be overcome, including in relation to underspent funds? 10. How could the lump sum approach be redefined to better reflect EDIC / host structure and Representation needs? 11. Is the current modular approach to defining activities appropriate? Could modules be redefined to enhance performance? 12. Have the results been achieved at a reasonable cost in terms of: • Cost drivers: what are the main cost drivers of the EDICs? • Value for money: has the EDIC provided value for money?

	13.	Have DG COMM HQ and Representation management systems and support contributed to the efficiency of the EDICs' operations? (Consideration to focus on reporting, monitoring and roles and responsibilities)
	14.	Are the requirements for host structures, EDICs and their personnel, as described in the Calls, FPA and Specific Agreements, adequate to ensure the involvement of high quality partners and outputs?
Coherence	15.	**Internal**: is there scope for greater synergies between EDICs and between EDICs and the Representations for outreach?
	16.	**External**: have the EDICs complemented the activities of other EU information providers, such as the EPIOs, Your Europe and other citizen-orientated networks / initiatives?
	17.	Is there scope for increased synergies / greater efficiencies through better collaboration with other services?
EU added value	18.	Did the EDICs lead to results that could not have been achieved by national, regional and local actors alone?
	19.	To what extent did EU-funding increase or change the type of activities that would normally be undertaken by host structures?

2.5 Methodology

This evaluation combined analysis of the experience and knowledge of key stakeholders in the process: EDIC Managers and host structures, NCs and other EC Rep and EPIO staff, DG COMM Headquarters and the Office of Publications and European Parliament (EP) and those who observed or have previously been involved with the service (other EC DGs and services), with the experiences and views of citizens including, but not limited to users.

The methodology combined both qualitative data to generate insights and quantitative data to confirm the significance of these insights and their relevance to the wider EDIC network. The primary research was combined with the study of existing statistics regarding citizens' use of EDICs and the administrative framework, which governs the organisation and set up of the network. There were three distinct phases to the work: design and planning, data collection and analysis and report. These steps are described below.

Design and planning

Before launching the main data collection, an in-depth review of available documentation and data was carried out. The evaluation team conducted a round of interviews with EC staff directly involved in managing the network and / or those with other insights and experience, including staff of the European Parliament. Using this information, the evaluation team refined the initial evaluation questions set and designed the questionnaires and discussion guides that would be used for the data collection. Next steps were then discussed and agreed with the Steering Group on 22 February 2016.

Data collection

The collection of primary data took place during March and April 2016. This comprised the following elements:

Survey of Network Correspondents (NCs) in all Member States: this on-line survey was launched on 11 March 2016 and remained on-line until 1 April 2016 and was completed by all NCs.

Survey of EDIC management staff: a total of 486 completed questionnaires were received from a total possible number of 517 EDICs. This represents a response rate of 94%; this gives us a high level of confidence in the validity of the results and their representativeness of the whole EDIC network.

Country visits: to 7 Member States - Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Poland and Sweden. This allowed a first-hand view of how the EDICs were working in practice and discussions with key Rep and EPIO staff.

Online focus groups with citizens (users and non-users)[7]: a series of mainly on-line focus groups (complemented by 1 face-to-face group) and some additional feedback by email using the same discussion guide.

Benchmarking exercise: a review of 15 other EU networks and information services (national contact points and portals to full networks) to consider management and financing approaches.

Mystery shopping exercise: was conducted given the reduced emphasis placed on benchmarking as agreed with the Steering Committee. The mystery shopping exercise focussed on two countries, the Netherlands and Portugal, who were contacted by phone and email. Websites and social media were also reviewed.

Analysis and reporting

The final phase of the evaluation was concerned with integrating any final findings, analysis and reporting. In addition, following the Interim Report meeting on 11 May 2016, DG COMM requested the collection of the real costs of running an EDIC. This data is required to meet DG BUDG requirements for justification of the use of lump sums rather than real costs.

Real costs exercise: 429 EDICs replied to an on-line questionnaire. The response rate was above the 30% minimum response threshold required to confirm the legitimacy of the data.

Additional views from Heads of Representation (HoR): these views were collected by DG COMM HQ to test responses to the key findings that were identified at the interim phase of the evaluation.

Open public consultation: was intended to form a part of the mid-term evaluation of the Europe Direct Information Centres. The evaluation team assisted DG COMM with the design of the questions that were included in the survey. The survey was launched on-line on 10 February 2016 and was available until 4 May 2016. The report of the open public consultation is annexed to this report.

The final steps of this third phase were the drafting of the Draft and Final Reports, including conclusions and recommendations.

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[7] Users were recruited with help from EDICs. Non-users were recruited via a specialist recruitment company.

3 Review of previous evaluations

3.1 Overview

Each generation of the EDIC network has required a formal external evaluation. This is the third evaluation of the EDIC network. Given the very fundamental questions being asked about EDICs, including should they continue and in which format, we take the time to review the main findings, conclusions and recommendations from the two previous evaluations, before presenting answers to the questions set for this evaluation in the next section of this report. The evidence in this section gives weight to the evidence collected and findings of this evaluation.

This is the third evaluation[8]. In both evaluations, there were only two overarching questions relating to **compliance with the mission** (relevance and effectiveness) and **management systems and processes** (effectiveness and efficiency), with a number of sub-questions each time[9]. In the case of the first generation, the mission was summed up as being an interface between the EU and its citizens, and in the second, it was to promote an informed and active European citizenship.

We summarise below the key recommendations from both and the subsequent action taken, and discuss how they relate to our own findings. While we recognise that the Commission is free not to take on board recommendations from evaluations, this exercise reveals a considerable similarity across a number of findings from all three evaluations, suggesting that there are structural issues that the Commission has struggled to find solutions to. There are also recommendations which have been taken on board, for which the evaluators cannot of course take sole credit.

3.2 Synergies and collaboration

Relations with the institutions

Both previous evaluations, and this one, found that there is **scope for closer relations** with the institutions.

Progress has been made since the first evaluation, which recommended negotiating formal arrangements with the EP, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the Council, as there is now a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the EP.

Implementation of this is uneven in practice. This in some cases appears to come from lack of commitment from EPIOs and in some from caution on the part of certain EDICs about becoming too closely associated with MEPs, given that they carry a distinct political affiliation. There is also still a tendency to see the Commission as 'primus inter pares' rather than the manager of the EDIC network.

There is still scope for closer relations with the **CoR**. This has now been formally recognised by the CoR in a June 2016 resolution, but the exact way in which this will be implemented has yet to be announced as yet. There may also be scope for closer relations with the **EESC**, although it was out of scope to explore this.

Both evaluations recommended that there be identifiable funding for specific tasks for other institutions or additional objectives, and the second evaluation stressed the importance of planning this well in advance. We endorse that, but also recognise that there are now examples of this in the dedicated funding for the last European elections and the Investment Plan[10].

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8 The "first generation" was the result of amalgamating and streamlining several other networks or information centre types.

9 http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/evaluation/search/download.do?documentId=20308 (first generation),
   http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/evaluation/search/download.do?documentId=2848197 (second generation)
10 A plan by the current Commission to mobilise EUR 315 billion of infrastructure investment over three years.

Relations with other networks

Both of the first two evaluations identified cooperation with other networks as an area of weakness. The second evaluation recommended ensuring complementarities with other EC networks and services, effective resource allocation and avoiding overlapping services. This recommendation remains valid in our view.

The level of "frequent" cooperation of EDICs with other networks is **relatively low** and the impression is one of heterogeneity and a poor understanding across all the networks of where the synergies and overlaps are to be found, based also on benchmarking carried out for this evaluation. The second evaluation highlighted the absence of monitoring of this cooperation and we support that finding.

Relations with the host structure

The first evaluation identified geographic overlaps (with more than one EDIC claiming to cover at least part of another's catchment area). This appears to no longer to be an issue. The second stressed the importance of ensuring that the EC co-funding represents **true added value**. It recommended that DG COMM require potential host structures to clearly demonstrate the complementarities of implementing an EDIC with their existing services and activities. We have similar concerns about duplication and / or de facto cross-subsidisation by the Commission of a host structure's core business.

Intra-EC relations

Both evaluations recommended strengthening intra-service cooperation. We also endorse this. While a significant effort has been made to involve other DGs in making presentations at annual conferences, it is equally clear that **there is not an 'EDIC reflex'** across the whole Commission, and there is indeed still a high level of ignorance about the existence and potential of EDICs.

One proposal made to us in the course of this evaluation was that an explanation of EDICs be incorporated in the induction courses for new officials. This is a sensible proposal for a bottom-up approach, but we believe that the issue needs **to be tackled top-down**. The more "horizontal" role that DG COMM is now coming to occupy in the Commission should be beneficial in that respect.

Relations with the Representations

The first evaluation felt more clarity was needed about the role of Reps (at a time when Intermediary Bodies were more closely involved in the management). With the advent of NCs this issue has been significantly mitigated. Nevertheless, the **variability in interpretation** of the administrative requirements which was identified in the second evaluation remains a concern. Perhaps more serious is the **variability in the commitments of HoRs** and their **Heads of Communication** (HoCs) to the work of EDICs.

There was a recommendation in the first evaluation that Reps be resourced appropriately with policy and administrative staff, i.e. that the mix be appropriate. We believe insufficient importance is currently being attached to **communication expertise** being applied to the management of EDICs, either in the selection of NCs or in the role played by HoCs in relation to EDICs.

3.3   EDIC information and communication

Reaction versus outreach

Both evaluations recommended **putting more emphasis on outreach** than playing a reactive role. The first recommended phasing out the 'reactive' role of Relays, i.e. the provision of advice and answers to questions; the second recommended allowing EDICs to opt for a module with no requirement for opening hours. In this case, the EDICs could still act as a 'back office' to the EDCC, addressing specific enquiries. The first evaluation suggested replacing the EDCC with national call centres with good knowledge of the local content.

Both were addressing in different ways an issue that remains valid: there may be **limits to the value of the EDCC** because its staff members lack the local knowledge to provide tailored replies when these are sometimes needed. But it is recognised that EDICs lack the quality control that supports the EDCC operation. Part of the answer may also lie in paying more attention to this in EDCC recruitment policy and allowing EDCC staff, or the more experienced, to go beyond standard answers, since we also believe that too many resources are going into the reactive function at the expense of outreach.

Achieving a homogenous result

This first evaluation proposed a system which would have allowed for variable geometry. It proposed that the contribution of the Commission should be tied more closely to the services which the host structure is in a position to provide, including with the option of allowing Relays to operate beyond their natural catchment area. The system of financing via modules has addressed the first point, but has created a new set of **challenges in trying to provide a homogenous service**.

If host structures are left too free to play to their strengths, areas of activity which are important to the Commission or which should be core strengths of any EDIC may be neglected. This is the case even where the host structures are the same type of organisation; this is separate from the issue of the fundamental heterogeneity of host structures within and across some countries. That is an issue in its own right, since there has always been a temptation to compromise on the suitability of host structures in the interest of maximising geographic coverage.

The second evaluation called for a reflection on ways to limit the heterogeneity of the network. It did not identify solutions, but suggested that the better relationship between expected achievements and results, and complementarity with other EU services, would be part of the answer. It felt a coordinated and **Rep-led approach to enhancing awareness and cooperation among EC networks** would be helpful in this connection, but pointed out that it should be HQ-driven in order to ensure that all Reps understood that this is a priority.

This is still not the case, and such coordination would be complicated by the fact that the other networks do not come directly under the Reps' responsibility in the way that EDICs do. A desirable **first step** would be to ensure that the Reps be tasked with following the activities of all the networks, irrespective of how they are managed.

Over all three generations, and in some cases increasingly, there is a very **strong focus on one EDIC per region.** There are exceptions now, but there is a mindset which thinks in terms of 1+1 for historic reasons. We believe that more flexibility about the target audience, the geographic reach and the focus on 1+1, i.e. one host structure + one EDIC could be justified.

A better understanding is needed in HQ of the alternatives that exist now, and their strengths and weaknesses. This could create more heterogeneous structures, but produce more homogenous results.

Communication and media skills

Both evaluations had concerns about the adequacy of communication and / or media skills in EDICs and / or host structures, since they took it as a given that communication / outreach should be a key function of EDICs and felt that this was not fully reflected in staffing and objectives.

The second evaluation highlighted **a lack of media skills and competences –** but also given the role of EDICs as neutral information providers **–** did not feel able to recommend that media activities become a core EDIC activity. If it were to be, then it argued that further training would be necessary if the media, including social media, were to assume greater significance.

As media work is part of the basic information module, it is in fact an activity that all EDICs are expected to take on. Moreover, online activities (websites and social media) are an extension of that and also require specialist skills. Social media is not currently compulsory, but a web page (as opposed to a site) is.

We are not certain the specialist nature of online activity is fully recognised. Indeed, many EDICs rely for online expertise on interns and trainees, even if this is in supplement to the full-time equivalent required. There is some

transfer of competence, but on the whole the skills are not embedded in the permanent staff. Others rely on host structures, which may not see the Europe Direct as a priority.

Our work has also highlighted the dilemma between EDICs not being able to speak on behalf of the Commission and being expected to deal with local media. EDICs regard this as one of their major challenges, particularly in larger cities.

Recruitment does not always appear to take the right competences into account and relations between the EDICs and the Rep on media work is not always as close as it should be. **Training** is provided, but there are doubts as to whether it is as regular or comprehensive as it could be for the most effective results.

Prioritisation of target groups

All three evaluations have identified a high degree of targeting of schools and students, but an absence of guidance from HQ on whether this is appropriate, as well as a mismatch between the material provided from HQ, the competences within EDICs, and this itself being a priority target group. The messages on this from the first two evaluations have thus not been taken on board, since there is still a heavy focus on schools without this being a specific policy or mission. We see a clear position on this as a priority and this should be discussed with the other institutions given that, for example, the EP has already decided that schools are a priority target group.

Exchange of best practice

The first evaluation recommended organizing the exchange of best practice in such a way that information on best practice flows more smoothly and in a more structured fashion than at present, acquiring a knowledge of what is flowing informally, and introducing light-handed content control procedures for locally produced materials which are being adopted widely across the network on an ad hoc basis.

Although there have been improvements in the exchange of best practice, we have found that there is still scope for better knowledge of what is flowing informally and for a better understanding of what is being produced locally.

Online communication

Both earlier evaluations, albeit expressed in different ways, identified the heterogeneity of websites as sub-optimal. The first evaluation envisaged addressing this through guidelines, dissemination or good practice, and better monitoring; the second evaluation recommended one EDIC website per country.

The underlying problem of a dispersion and duplication of effort and variable quality remains. The arguments for one website per country are strong, possibly with direct access to the pages of specific EDICs or clusters of EDICs with a regionalised URL, e.g. www.europedirect.eu/toscana, as part of an across-the-board rebranding exercise that we are recommending in order to enhance visibility. Each EDIC would de facto have its own website independent of its host structure, while the latter would continue to have a web page about EDICs.

The case has been made to us for using the website of the Rep as a single point of entry, but it is not certain that there would not be a loss of identity of the 'local' flavour which is a strength of EDICs, or that EDICs would not take second place to the Reps' priorities in both operations and visibility.

In the case of social media, we advocate the same clear identity for EDICs independent of host structures, but in this case at EDIC level and under EDIC control, but under the umbrella of the community manager in the Rep in charge of the central website.

Channelling feedback

All three evaluations have identified a challenge in providing the feedback on citizens' concerns, when these are very local but important to the Commission having an understanding of grassroots' views and local issues.

The second evaluation went as far as to say that if there were not more clarity on the importance attached to this and a mechanism for channelling it, the requirement should be discontinued. We would not suggest that, since we understand that the Commission continues to feel this is an important function, as indeed it is.

It remains true, however, that there is a need for clarity on the types of local concerns which should generate some form of alert, and on the balance to be struck between this information remaining in the Rep or being passed on to HQ .There is a need for a clear feedback loop to be built into the system which is built around a feedback strategy. This implies that the institutions are ready and willing to take on feedback and will take steps to address the points raised. In many cases, this may be limited to formally recognising that certain issues / problems exist and keeping national authorities in the loop.

3.4 Managing performance

Monitoring and audit requirements

The second evaluation recommended promoting the monitoring guidelines among the Reps – and ensuring that the foreseen monitoring visits, and financial checks and audits are undertaken. It also recommended that the EDIC reporting requirements relate more directly to the Reps' needs in evaluating EDICs' final reports and the needs of external evaluators.

This recommendation remains valid. We have found no evidence of problems with financial checks and audits, but the value of monitoring visits varies, while the format of final reports is not user-friendly.

The second evaluation was concerned that the continuation of the EDIC network was at risk from the possibility of host structures not choosing to re-apply. We have not identified this as a major concern, but support the recommendation of the second evaluation on monitoring of host structure commitment and identification of potential new host structures. We consider this should be an on-going process.

Revamping of the EDIC intranet

The second evaluation recommended revamping the intranet, a process that is now complete, but should not necessarily be the final word as we have identified on-going issues with user-friendliness.

Funding and performance

The first evaluation's recommendation for a **lump sum** was followed (and was something already under consideration at the time), but the second half of the recommendation, i.e. linking to performance criteria was not picked up. Nor was the recommendation from the second evaluation about ensuring a clearer link between what is expected in terms of results and actual achievements (proportionality).

Performance is still **measured quantitatively rather than qualitatively.** Moreover, the quantitative reporting is of variable quality and usefulness, and often appears not to be used. This is because quantitative reporting relates to numbers of outputs rather than any outcomes related to the activities undertaken. The narrative format of the Annual Action Programmes and the end-year reports is a barrier to more qualitative measures, as it does not encourage structured thinking about a strategic approach to activities. This is a problem which was also specifically identified in relation to the then Work Plans in the recommendations from the first evaluation, which included calling for a **comprehensive redesign**. That remains a valid consideration.

The alternative to the lump sum would be the **real costs** basis which existed at the time of the first evaluation. This resulted in a disproportionate administrative burden and there does not seem to be any reason to revert to using real costs.

The first evaluation found that the then payments system was causing **cash flow problems** to the detriment of the effectiveness of the communication activities of Europe Directs. The funding system has changed, but the cash flow issues have not, creating planning uncertainty for EDICs and making the Commission reliant on the good will of host structures to tide EDICs over to the possible detriment of the autonomy of the EDIC Manager.

The second evaluation focused more on **levels of funding**, recommending to maintain existing levels of funding in the interest of maximising geographical coverage. It warned, however, that host structures could drop out if funding were not increased. It recommended exploring means of obtaining additional finance from host structures.

This could be difficult in the current financial climate, and in practice **host structures** are at liberty now to go beyond matching the funds put up by the Commission. In some cases, they put up significant amounts as well as often providing services in kind which are not quantified.

The second evaluation also identified **other DGs** as a possible source of add-on funding. We do not rule that out, but EDICs are currently supposed to be a service of the Commission as whole, so clear guidelines would be needed on what was a core activity for other DGs and what an add-on might be.

As explained elsewhere, however, despite pressures from some key stakeholders to increase funding significantly, there is not necessarily a case for this. There may be other levels on which any additional resources could better be spent.

4 Relevance to current needs

4.1 Overview

This is the first of three Chapters (4, 5 and 6) which present answers to the evaluation questions set in the Terms of Reference on the following topics:

- Chapter 4: Relevance to current needs
- Chapter 5: Mission compliance and performance
- Chapter 6: Organisation and management

This Chapter on relevance considers relevance to external and internal target groups, as well as the relevance of the EDIC network structure.

4.2 Relevance to target group needs

> **1. To what extent do the objectives and activities of the EDICs correspond to the needs of citizens and other external stakeholders?**

To answer this question we considered the following sub-question questions:

- Which target groups are interacting with EDICs?
- Which types of needs are currently being met and to what extent?

Source of evidence

- EDIC Managers Survey
- NC Survey
- Interviews with Reps
- Desk research
- Focus groups

Key findings

The EDIC mission outlines two key objectives for the network:

1. To inform citizens at local and regional level and
2. To promote participatory citizenship through various communication tools and by interacting with local and regional stakeholders, multipliers and media.

It can be argued that these objectives in general do meet the needs of citizens and other external stakeholders, but EDICs' activities themselves have a more varied impact. The initial assessment of needs is done on a general basis with host structures required to indicate the '*adequacy for the local and regional needs for EU information*' in their proposal to the Rep. It has not been possible to conduct a detailed review of applications in this evaluation, but it is understood that this 'needs assessment' can be of variable levels of detail and that there is an assumption of relevance to citizens given the wide sphere of influence and relevance of the EU to citizens. Nonetheless, EDICs report back on key topics of interest via the Intranet, which confirms that there is a reflection about the type of information that citizens need.

Overall, it seems that **the needs of EDICs' main target groups are most catered to; these groups being young people and teachers**. Despite the local media also being a high priority group, EDICs have faced more difficulties in engaging with them. As a result of this, activities have tended to be more specialised towards the needs of these target groups, and have been less successful at meeting the needs of other groups.

Feedback from users suggests that at least some EDICs have regular users and generate a lot of repeat enquiries. Many users who provided feedback indicated that they had frequent contacts, for example with some on a monthly basis over many years, over all three generations of EDIC. The **key strengths identified of the EDICs are their expertise and ability to interpret complex information in a more understandable way for citizens**. EDICs are also valued for their responsiveness and personal contact.

Nevertheless, despite these benefits, EDICs still face some challenges in ensuring that their activities correspond to the needs of all citizens and other external stakeholders. Firstly, the heavy focus on youth has the **potential to diverge resources and activities away from other citizens**, and some believe that more needs to be done to increase EDICs' visibility amongst a wider audience. Secondly, EDICs do not always feel equipped to answer certain topical questions which citizens enquire about, and this also raises concerns amongst users about the **uneven performance of staff in some EDICs.** Lastly, it is believed that more needs to be done to **increase EDICs' visibility** though media and online campaigns.

Target groups

According to the survey of NCs, EDICs' current priority target groups are **young people in the age range 16 – 25,** followed by **children aged up to 15 years old**. The survey results also suggest that young people should be the highest priority target group in the future. EDIC Managers' survey results also reinforced this point, showing that among individuals, EDICs interact most frequently with the 16-25 age group (80% of respondents) and children up to 15 years old (52% of respondents).

Job seekers were also identified as an important target group, but of lower priority than the younger age groups. In terms of retired people, they were identified by NCs as being of lowest priority, and NCs did not suggest a need to increase the focus on this group in the future. Only 40% of EDIC Managers interact occasionally with retired people, and even fewer (19%) interact with them on a frequent basis.

As for professional groups and organisations, NCs **identified teachers as being the most important professional target group**. This is not unsurprising considering the importance which EDICs attach to reaching young people, the majority of which are in school. This view is backed up by evidence from the EDIC Managers, 71% of which interact most frequently with teachers. Following this professional group, results from both the NCs' survey and EDIC Managers' survey highlighted the current level of importance given to **local media and academia**; both are considered to be important or very important by all but one NC respondent. The professional groups and organisations which received the lowest priority are political actors and public administration, followed by entrepreneurs and business representatives and NGOs. 51% of EDIC Managers who responded to the survey stated that their EDIC rarely or never interacts with MEPs.

Looking towards the future, NCs believed that the level of priority given to retired people, the general public, job seekers and young people aged between 16 – 25 is about right and should remain about the same in the future, but that the focus on children up to the age of 15 should be reduced. They believed that teachers should continue to be highest priority, with even greater focus placed on this group. They also argued that there is a need for a much **more significant focus on local media**. The focus on business and NGOs should remain consistent with current levels and the need to focus on public administration and political actors should be reduced.

Considering both individual and professional groups together, the picture that emerges is the need for EDICs to focus on three specific groups: **young people aged 16 - 25, teachers and local media.**

Young people and teachers

Taking the EDICs' objectives of informing citizens and promoting participatory citizenship into account, **EDIC's activities have generally corresponded well to the needs of young people and teachers.** According to interviewed EDIC Managers, all EDICs put a heavy emphasis on young people as a target group and on outreach activities that target youth, from kindergartens through to universities, but generally with the strongest focus being on schoolchildren. Young people are seen as a target group in their own right, who are easier to engage and who can also act as multipliers for reaching the older generation. Young people are also seen as 'soft' targets because it is perceived that they are more open to information about the EU and are less likely to have pre-set ideas. Because of this, many EDICs have developed tailor-made materials or lesson plans for schools, which again shows that many EDICs target schools and teachers, rather than the pupils directly.

Most interviewed EDIC Managers seemed certain that this involvement in schools was an appropriate activity, though one questioned whether they were not becoming part of the education system, when that is not really their

role. Additionally, NCs raised the point that **young people are not specifically** mentioned in the EDIC network Mission, which raises questions as to whether or not they should be the focus of EDIC attention.

Local media

In terms of the local media and press, there were diverging views amongst NCs which seem to relate to the **difficulties in engaging with the media**. EDIC Managers also thought that this is a very challenging area which requires personal networks, a (very) strong political or local news angle – and financial investment. It is very difficult to raise media's interest in the EU in general (other than negatively) and EDIC activities in particular. This is particularly true in large cities. The extent to which EDICs put effort into obtaining media coverage varies, with some organising relevant trips for journalists or weekly radio or TV programmes, and others being less proactive. At least in one country, host structure rules in some cases constrain EDICs' ability to deal with the media.

Provision of information on issues of interest

Interviews with EDIC Managers stressed that the information needs, whether of young people or more broadly, vary widely, from the very basic to complex questions on TTIP and migration. From the perspective of participants in the users' focus groups, **the main interest areas for content are issues that affect users personally**, such as travel, mobility, and education, but also professionally. These issues were highlighted across all countries. Nevertheless, users from the focus groups were also interested in other policy areas including environment and migration. This group of users indicated that they **were interested to know about Commission priorities, but not necessarily at the expense of other information that is more directly relevant**.

Other recurrent topics across most countries were mobility opportunities and related rights – particularly but not only for young people; funding for business, civil society, and regional and rural development; citizenship and social rights; the mechanics of the EU.

In general, many users reported that there is enough information on the EU and the topics which they are interested in, although some users expressed reservations as **to whether there were enough sources of information translated into local languages, and the difficulty in filtering the large volume of information** to find the parts that are relevant to them. In this respect, EDICs' activities highly correspond to users' needs as they act as interpreters of information, saving users a lot of time by answering questions and providing further information for future use. Many users had come to EDICs after other information sources had failed to answer their questions.

In general, users from the focus groups seemed to understand the range of services provided, although there were a couple of exceptions to this where individuals did not feel fully informed.

An open public consultation was launched on the Your Europe portal for a period of 12 weeks. The consultation was closed on 4 May 2016. The Commission wanted to hear what citizens, organisations and stakeholders think about EDICs, both users and non-users.

EDICs were considered by users to be **experts who are highly responsive and provide reliable information in a clear and accessible manner**; all users were satisfied that they were given the information that they had requested. The results also showed that 85% of respondents (for whom this question was applicable) agreed that the EDICs responded promptly to their enquiries. Non-user focus group participants also agreed with this, stating that EDICs are a good way for the European Institutions to provide information about the EU. Non-users found the **range of services provided by EDICs to be very positive and broad**, and that they presented a comprehensive selection of information. Participants agreed that EDICs are important and useful, and regretted the fact that they did not know about the centres before.

According to users from the focus groups, information requests seemed to start via email or telephone and then were followed up in person. This relates to the fact that these users tended to have lots of questions on a topic and what they were looking for was **guidance rather than answers to one-off questions.** This **personalised service where EDICs make the time to listen is an aspect of EDICs' activities** which is highly valued and appreciated by users.

Personal contact

This in turn highlights the **important value which users in the focus groups and public consultation place on the physical presence of EDICs**, particularly in contrast to the 'virtual' EU institutions which are regarded as absent from everyday life. Survey results from EDIC Managers indicated that overall, 60% of EDICs consider that a walk-in centre is effective for all citizens including young people, the retired and job seekers. Nevertheless, some users in Sweden were less convinced that maintaining an office for visitors was important, suggesting that offering a facility for appointments might be better than the opening hours approach. In addition to this, a couple of participants suggested that EDICs in rural areas did not work as well, which highlights the importance of geographic coverage of the EDIC network, something which will be covered in the next evaluation question.

Despite this, non-users from the focus groups also believed that the existence of a physical office is useful as not everything can be solved on the phone or via the internet. Multiple non-user participants found the idea of **personal contact in the centres to be very important**. It was mentioned several times that a walk-in service brings the EU closer to people making it 'more human'. Nonetheless, most non-users indicated that they were far from their nearest EDIC, which would be a barrier to using the walk-in centre.

As well as the physical presence of EDICs, **many users also valued the network's online presence, by following their EDIC on Facebook and Twitter**; but at the same time they liked the idea that there was someone to talk to in more detail. According to EDIC Managers' survey responses, young people (16-25) can best be reached through social media (97%), events (89%) and with electronic materials and websites (88 and 87%). This observation can be seen to coincide with young people's needs, as a public consultation survey regarding the EDIC network showed that 94% of respondents aged under 25 either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the best way for citizens to ask questions about the EU is through social media, such as Twitter and Facebook; 100% strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the best way to ask these questions is via the European Institutions' websites.

Challenges

Despite much of the positive feedback regarding the EDICs' activities, there are certain groups which have not been able to benefit as much from the networks' services. These include the target groups which were regarded as being of a lower priority, such as retired people. EDIC Managers felt that it is **challenging to reach out to some groups because they do not have tailor-made information or they cannot cover the distances.** However, one interviewed EDIC Manager felt that EDICs should not be trying to reach everybody, but to be more focused. Nevertheless, results from the EDIC Managers survey suggest that **the focus and active contacts with schools seems to have taken over other activities, such as the provision of advice, assistance and answers to questions about the EU; the promotion of discussion and debate through events; and communication tools**. Some non-users from the focus groups also stated that they regretted the heavy focus on youth and students.

Additionally, it has proven to be difficult for EDICs to reach citizens who are not as engaged in EU affairs. EDIC Managers reported that they find it **challenging to engage with citizens in an increasingly Eurosceptic environment.**

When it comes to answering citizens' queries, EDIC Managers stated that migration and asylum figured prominently in the queries which they received in the last year, including queries from asylum seekers themselves in one country. Other topical issues generating a lot of questions have been the Greek debt crisis and the British referendum and its consequences. **EDICs do not always feel equipped to answer these questions,** and they do not feel that HQ provides them with enough and frequent enough guidance on topical issues like these.

Both focus group users and respondents to the public consultation expressed concerns around EDIC staff issues. Focus groups participants indicated that EDICs could easily become overwhelmed in terms of staff, particular where there is insufficient geographic coverage of EDICs. Additionally, respondents from the public consultation indicated that **when it comes to future improvements, they would like EDICs to have more trained and competent staff, as they expressed concerns about the very unequal and sometimes poor performance of**

EDICs. In addition to this, respondents also felt that EDICs seem to have failed in providing information in relation to citizens' precise problems and enquiries.

Some non-users from the focus groups questioned whether or not EDICs actually have a successful mission, because they are **unknown and lack visibility**. Some non-users also asked if the centres were 'worth it', because they considered that they would **only be used in exceptional situations**.

Despite the popularity of online sources expressed by young people especially, it appears that **EDICs have not utilised online activities to their fullest potential to meet citizens' needs**. Respondents from the public consultation found no information about EDICs by social media, and some non-users from focus groups did not necessarily find the website to be very attractive, or conversely found the site attractive but did not find anything of interest.

It seems that overall, EDICs need to increase their visibility beyond their main target groups of youth and teachers. Some of the feedback from focus groups with users suggested that the Reps should do more to make the EDICs more visible; **although it appears that specific local groups (i.e. school teachers) may be aware of certain EDICs, this does not necessarily mean that there is a wide awareness of EDICs**. Additionally, EDIC Managers stated that one of the biggest challenges which they face is a low level / lack of visibility of EDICs. Non-users echoed this point, stating that overall more needs to be done to make people more aware that EDICs exist, and a way in which this can be done is through an advertising campaign in the media and / or an intensive online promotion campaign.

Conclusion

The objectives and activities of EDICs correspond to the needs of citizens and other external stakeholders to a limited extent. EDICs are limited by the amount of resources that they receive, but also because there is a lack of clarity with regards to whose needs EDICs are currently meeting. The number of citizens who receive the information provided is relatively low compared, for example, to the population of a particular region or area. This is confirmed by the typically low numbers of requests for information by telephone and email (up to 100 per month) for over 200 EDICs.

EDIC information provision is also limited in scope. Host structures are required to make available one full-time equivalent member of staff. **There are limits to what one person can achieve**. The scope of the EDIC network is also limited because EDICs typically focus their efforts on specific groups. Although the EDIC mission and objectives do not prioritise target groups, the evidence indicates that EDICs focus on certain elements of the population (young people and teachers) at the expense of other groups.

EDICs consider that young people and teachers are their most important target groups. But they are not doing consistently well at reaching younger people outside interactions via teachers. Direct reach of young people requires the use of social media. But not all EDICs use social media. In addition, EDICs are limited in the content that they are able to provide to younger people. Whilst there are a small number of useful publications / resources that can be used directly, EDICs are also required to develop their own presentations / materials without necessarily having the educationalist expertise or the range of materials required to convey information to younger age groups. This type of specialist support is also rarely available within the Reps and raises questions about the quality and usefulness of information provided.

The EDIC mission clearly states that EDICs are required to inform about the EU's political priorities. Yet the evidence confirms that this content is not relevant to what citizens need[11], even if some may have a passing interest in this. Citizens need information that is relevant to their daily lives and this represents a mismatch with EC instructions and expectations, which EDICs find difficult to meet. If the Commission wants EDICs to engage

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[11] The survey of EDIC Managers confirms that the current biggest target group for 80% of EDICs is young people aged 16 – 25, this is followed by 52% who indicate that they target school age children.

effectively on the priorities, EDICs need to be encouraged – and helped - to find the ways in which these resonate when there is alignment with people's own concerns.

There is limited evidence to suggest that EDICs also have a structured focus on other stakeholders, with the exceptions of EDICs located, for example, in a chamber of commerce or agricultural organisation. It has not been possible within the scope of this exercise to check the views of these professional groups, unless they responded to the public consultation. But it is clear that, with exceptions, many EDICs find it challenging to work with the local media.

The extent to which **EDIC activities correspond to citizens and stakeholders' needs is clouded by the fact that EDICs typically have low national visibility**. They are not lodged in the national consciousness as being the 'local source of EU information', even if there is evidence from a small number of users and EDICs themselves that some EDICs are well known in their local environment. This raises the question as to whether the Commission needs to work in greater partnership with the Member States to support the visibility of EDICs. But this is difficult to address. If EDIC visibility is raised, will they have sufficient resources to meet the demand that may be created?

EDICs ability to meet citizens' needs also relates to the need to 'create a need for EU information'. This means that citizens do not necessarily know that they need the EU or information about the EU or EDICs. Most citizens have only a limited, basic understanding of the relevance of the EU to their daily lives. It is, therefore, understandable that those citizens that are easiest to reach are those that are in a formal learning phase of their life and the teachers who support this phase, those who already know about the EU, and citizens who could benefit directly and financially from the EU, for example via a grant. This situation supports the rationale for EDICs to promote participatory citizenship, which is a rather unclear way of saying the EU institutions engage with citizens and stakeholders.

EDICs find it difficult to meet the needs of and engage with the wider population. This relates to the fact that those not directly affected by a specific opportunity provided by the EU are most concerned about what the EU is doing on sensitive topics and current affairs. It is accepted that the Reps need to do more to provide direction and support so that EDICs can better address these information needs. But EDICs are not required to try to address the EU's on-going information deficit by focusing beyond the Europhile / informed audience. This is where there is a great need for information and engagement.

This raises several questions in terms of what the EC wants to achieve within the limitations of a constrained budget. Is there a need to prioritise target groups and should EDICs have local media as a target group?

4.3 Relevance to internal audience needs

2. How relevant is the EDIC mission to meeting the needs of internal audiences?

For the purposes of this question, internal audiences are the departments and services of the EU institutions. This question examines the extent to which it is possible to define that the EDIC network does, or could help, the EU institutions to achieve their goals.

This needs to take into account the EDIC networks' two-fold mission:

- To inform European citizens at the local and regional level;

- To promote participatory citizenship through various communication tools, and by interacting with local and regional stakeholders, multipliers and media.

Source of evidence

- EC HQ staff interviews
- Interviews with Reps
- Feedback Heads of Rep

Key findings

Overall, interviewees agreed that both key aspects of the EDICs' mission are highly relevant. EDICs are seen as having a critical role by acting as the local extensions of the EC Reps. EDICs play a very important role in terms of outreach, and directly help the Reps to fulfil their mission. HoRs stressed that the EDIC network is crucial for the fulfilment of the Rep's actions and objectives, as **EDICs enable the EU to reach citizens at a local / regional level, in a way that the Reps by themselves would not be able to**; however, the problem of visibility is widely recognised. The greatest added value of EDICs is, therefore, seen as their **ability to act as a representative of the EU in the Member States**.

HoCs generally consider the EDIC mission and objectives to be valid and realistic. They attributed EDICs' added value to their ability to **reach beyond the 'informed' public** that typically visits EDICs and / or knows where to find information on the internet, as well as their ability to have valuable contact with citizens for which the Reps rely on the EDICs for, **sometimes using the EDICs as 'local embassies'.**

In the eyes of the EPIOs, the network's biggest added value is the **strong local networks, knowledge and experience** that they have built and that they can provide.

Overall, through the online survey, NCs rated their EDIC network's efficiency in carrying out their main tasks positively, with an average weighted rating of 3.28 out of a possible maximum score of 4. **NC's consider that EDICs are most efficient at answering citizens' queries on EU policies and institutions, and raising awareness about EU affairs**. Reaching citizens with low or no knowledge of the EU, stimulating debate through conferences and events, forwarding questions to other EU services and promoting participatory citizenship also received above average ratings (respectively 3.43, 3.43, 3.39 and 3.32).

In terms of how effective the EDIC network is at communicating the priorities of the EU 2020 strategy, NCs gave a fairly high average weighted rating of 3.04 out of 4. This was also the case for the EDIC network's effectiveness at communicating effectively on the EC's 10 priorities (3.11 out of 4). Interviews conducted with both groups during the field visits highlighted the difficulties of making the political priorities as such relevant to citizens and the mystery shopping exercise showed that few explained political priorities on their web sites. The two areas where EDICs received the lowest rating was **collecting feedback from citizens for the EC, as well as generating media coverage** (2.96 and 2.89 respectively).

Some interviewed HoCs took the view that the mission statement is, in fact, rather ambitious, and went on to say that the modules should be rethought and that greater flexibility is required with regards to communicating on political priorities.

EU policy landscape and agenda

The EU Citizenship Report 2013 outlines 12 key actions to improve EU citizens' lives[12]. Action 12 in this report states that the EC will promote EU citizens' awareness of their EU citizenship and electoral rights; propose constructive ways to enable EU citizens living in another EU country to fully participate in the democratic life of the EU; and explore ways of strengthening and developing the European public space, based on existing national and European structures, to end the current fragmentation of public opinion along national borders.

EDICs' mission can play a key role in meeting these needs, by informing EU citizens at the local and regional level, as well as promoting participatory citizenship. The EDICs are set up with the aim of enabling EU citizens to obtain information, advice, assistance and answers to questions about the EU, and in particular the rights of EU citizens, the EU's priorities (notably the Europe 2020 Growth strategy), legislation, policies, programmes, and funding opportunities.

Local and regional geographical scope and outreach

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[12] http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/files/com_2013_269_en.pdf

In the view of HoRs, **EDICs act as intermediaries between policy makers and citizens**. It was suggested that they contribute significantly to raising the citizens' awareness about the EU and provide a first-hand view of what citizens need on a local level. They provide a link to the EU which is often seen as disconnected from local reality.

As for the HoCs, **EDICs act as the extended arm of the Reps' communication department** and help to get the messages out on the ground where HoCs would not be able to reach out due to limited human resources. Interviewed HoCs see the EDICs' activities as **complementary and beneficial**. For example, HoCs are invited to present and speak at local seminars on specific EU topics, frequently participate in events, and join interviews where the topics are of a more complex / technical nature. HoCs are also frequently called upon by EDICs to act as expert speakers at local events.

Interviewed HoRs stated that in most cases, **collaboration between EPIOs and EDICs seems to be frictionless and mutually beneficial.** Synergies are exploited, for example, through joint participation in radio and TV shows, thereby giving the EU a greater say in public debates.

Part of EDIC's mission is to "inform European citizens at **local and regional level**". This is perceived to be one of EDICs' main strengths in meeting the needs of internal audiences. **The network's local and regional geographic scope and outreach allows the EU to reach citizens locally**. HoRs described the EDICs as the EC Reps' "eyes and ears" on the ground. EPIOs echoed this feeling, stating that the biggest added value of the EDICs is their strong local networks, knowledge and experience that they have built and can provide. The network plays an important role in relaying EPIO messages locally, as well providing contacts to EPIOs, organising venues for events and providing other local support. In addition to communication activities and outreach, EDICs also provide political knowledge and expertise. It is seen as very important to the EC Reps that the EDICs function well, as they are their way to reach out to EU citizens locally. As a result of this added value, the EPIOs interviewed were not in favour of creating regional hubs, as they perceived there to be no real added value, and expressed concern at disbanding the 'local' reach, which is considered to be the key strength of the network.

A key factor which allows this local outreach is EDICs' physical presence, which is seen as necessary in providing a direct contact point for citizens, particularly in larger cities where there is a critical mass. The offices provide one of the few "touch points" between citizens and the EU. If EDICs did not provide such face-to-face interaction, they would be considered as not being any different to a simple media service or network, simply providing information. Instead, the EDIC network is seen as being unique, as there is no similar network or initiative that would serve this particular type of objectives.

In regards to the **diversity and autonomy of EDICs and their host structures**, opinions varied in terms of the added value this brings in meeting internal audiences' needs. The majority of interviewed EPIO representatives stated that there is a big variability between the EDIC offices in terms of their mission and objectives. The EDICs are seen to interpret their mission differently, and this is largely tied to and dependent on the type of people / individuals who happen to be in that role. As a result, the EDIC network is seen as a very heterogeneous system which is extremely dependent on the individuals operating the EDICs.

In this respect, this high level of freedom was interpreted both in a positive and negative way. On the one hand, these differences between the EDICs were seen as positive because **their local experience means that they are best placed and informed on how to run an EDIC in that particular region / area**, as they know the interests / information needs of their target audiences and can therefore decide which topics to include in order to keep citizens engaged. In situations where the ideas of host structures and the guidance from the Reps diverge, it would be "reasonable" to give EDICs some discretion, and HoCs argue that EDICs should be free to say that a particular political priority is not the 'right' content to engage the local audience, even if EC communication priorities must be reflected in the EDICs' activities.

One EPIO representative stated that the most important thing is for EDICs to have the freedom that allows their local experience to shape their mission. Another EPIO mentioned that the EC and EP's strategic priorities in general are not the same, but this is a positive as it allows them to reach a wider audience. Additionally, interviewed HoRs considered the diversity of host structures to be positive because this allows EDICs to adopt different approaches and strategies for their communication activities. HoCs also stated that an advantage of the current mission statement was that it gives EDICs a degree of freedom to do things their way.

On the other hand, this heterogeneity was not seen as the best way of operating because if some individuals are not proactive, then this will impact how the whole EDIC is run. **This heterogeneity also makes it difficult for the EPIOs and EDICs to find a common strategy**, as it largely depends on which partners and people are running the EDICs. EDIC Managers are not EU staff and therefore have a fair degree of autonomy when it comes to deciding which topics to prioritise in their communications, and can prepare their own Annual Action Programmes which are not required to feed into specific objectives and outputs determined by the Rep. In addition to this, a regional government with high visibility acting as a host institution is not the same as a smaller association with more limited resources and therefore the nature of the host structure can have a large impact on the effectiveness of the network in meeting internal audiences' needs. It was even suggested by one EPIO that it might be better to outsource the service, rather than having open calls for proposals from host structures.

An important factor which impacts the need for EDICs to communicate EU topics is the size of the Member State. Interviewed HoCs stated that the **importance of EDICs in communicating EU topics increases proportionally with the size of the Member State**, because the Reps find it difficult to cover the wide geographic spread of larger Member States. It appears that the larger a Member State is, the more the Rep relies on the EDICs to "get the message out" to citizens via local media outlets. In larger Member States, primary target groups tend to be more clearly defined (and responsibilities more clearly delineated), with the Reps typically focusing their attention on **decision makers** (at all levels of government), whereas EDICs engage in direct communication with citizens at the local level (including via the local / regional media). By contrast, in smaller Member States, Reps tend to be more actively involved in regional and local outreach activities, often working in tandem with EDICs on the ground. As a result, the added value to the Reps is greatest in larger countries given the difficulties for Reps to get the message out.

Interaction with local and regional stakeholders, multipliers and media

The second part of the EDICs' mission is "to promote participatory citizenship through various communication tools (website, social media, publications, etc.) and by interacting with local and regional stakeholders, multipliers and media". For the EPIOs, this proves very useful when going into regions and areas where they are less familiar with the local context, as they **often look to the EDICs to get their support in terms of identifying local stakeholders, local press, and potential partners to invite and participate in their events**. The EDICs enjoy a local visibility and are well accepted in their region, and this is something that the EPIOs can capitalise on when organising events. This local knowledge is something that is seen as irreplaceable and something which the EPIOs, located in the capital cities, would not be able to achieve. Interviews with HoCs stated that Reps' communication activities are first and foremost targeted at the national media, as previously mentioned. EDICs are seen as complementary as they can reach out to local and regional actors and are more adept at getting the message out to stakeholders on the ground.

Nevertheless, some EPIOs interviewed suggested that **the EDIC network could increase its usefulness and communication impact if it had more media contacts**, and that EDICs should be encouraged to be proactive and establish good working relationships with the media. This point was echoed by NCs, who consider that one of the areas in which EDICs are least effective at is generating media coverage.

In terms of the EDICs' target groups, schools, universities and journalists are seen as having the greatest potential to act as multipliers. It was stated by HoRs that EDICs can manage purely pedagogical activities by themselves, but that for presentations on political matters, they should be seconded by other networks, such as Team Europe, because it is difficult for EDICs to be continuously up-to-date with the Commission's work, and, therefore, their role as a pedagogical tool is necessary to prepare the field for political interventions.

Key challenges

A general weak point with regards to the network appears to be that EDICs have a **"problem of visibility"** and few people among the general population know of their existence. It was suggested by one interviewed HoR that Reps are increasingly turning into embassies, and that the same formula could be considered for EDICs to better integrate them and make them visible in the public policy landscape, making elected representatives aware that

they exist and that they can rely on them. One Rep stated that one of the key challenges of the Reps is to increase the visibility of the EDICs, and to support the centres in communicating about the EC's priorities. They suggested that a more active presence with more visits and more meetings would be highly beneficial; for example, this year they have launched working groups focusing on 2 - 3 priorities, with the idea being to work together on key topics / campaigns.

Another crucial point that was raised by one of the interviewed HoRs is that EDICs' biggest challenge is reaching **people who aren't interested in the EU.** However, this requires necessary tools and reflexes which they lack. This observation was also made by the interviewed EPIOs, who highlighted **people's lack of awareness and / or interest in the EU**. One EPIO stated that **people don't want to hear about politics** anymore and that Europe is associated with politics in the eyes of the general public. These challenges of visibility and lack of public interest therefore pose barriers to how effective the EDIC network can be at engaging citizens.

Another key issue which was pointed out by NCs through the online survey is the **lack of feedback loops**. NCs **consider EDICs to be least effective at collecting feedback from citizens**. The EC highly values and is investing in providing feedback opportunities for citizens, through initiatives such as Citizen's Dialogues. NCs rated EDICs' promotion of such public engagements fairly well (3.22 out of 4); however, there seems to be a need to ensure that such feedback via the EDICs is actually collected and fed back to DG COMM HQ. An EC Rep in Spain echoed this view, stating that a challenge for the EDIC network is how to improve the flow of information from the EDICs to the Reps and HQ, given the valuable role played by the EDICs in collecting citizens' views and perceptions of the EU.

Suggestions for improvement

Some suggestions were provided to make the EDIC network more effective at meeting the needs of internal audiences. Firstly, one suggestion was to increase and **strengthen contact between the EPIOs and EDICs through an annual or bi-annual exchange**, which would allow EPIOs to know what EDICs are doing without interfering; these types of exchange do happen in some countries. The EPIO and the EDIC network sometimes cooperate on common projects, however, **EPIOs do not always feel that they have a good overview** of the EDICs in their country, with regards to the cities where EDICs are located and what EDICs are doing. This lack of overview may relate to the fact that EPIOs do not have access to EDIC reports.

Overall the current EDIC **objectives were considered to be well described**, but it was suggested that these implied a lot of work for smaller structures. One EPIO suggested that **information provision and outreach are equally important tasks for the EDIC** and that the EDICs needed to provide a unique contact point for all information on the EU in the country. It was suggested that EDICs should strengthen their interactions with other EU institutions beyond the Commission.

In order to overcome the barrier of lack of public interest and to reach a wider audience, the Communication department in one Rep had put forward a set of suggestions on how the EDICs could widen their audience and reach out to people beyond the usual Europhile circle. It was recommended that the **Commission's approach to impact measurement** should be applied, as opposed to asking EDICs whether they have reached a certain number of people or distributed a certain number of leaflets.[13]

It was also suggested by interviewed HoRs that **EDICs need to share resources and good practices**, as opposed to inventing new concepts. The Reps can provide EDICs with the necessary **guidelines on initiatives such as the Citizens' Dialogues, which the EDICs can then replicate at a local level**. HoCs also believed that improvements could be made by Reps providing timely information and more relevant and updated communications material to EDICs. In the online survey, NCs rated **greater collaboration between EDICs and Rep outreach as one of the top three ways that could increase the impact of EDICs.** These suggestions are

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[13] DG COMM TOOLKIT for the evaluation of the communication activities,
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/about/evaluation/documents/communication-evaluation-toolkit_en.pdf

based on the view that the level of collaboration between Reps' communication function and EDICs may not always be optimal, even if at least in theory EDICs are considered to be the extended arm of this function

HoCs also suggested changing the objectives / mission of the network, so that EDICs become **local EU ambassadors** who act as outreach hubs. It is believed that EDICs would be more effective as local EU ambassadors with a higher focus on outreach / diplomacy and contacts with different groups. The rationale for this argument was that all the answers to questions about the EU can easily be found through a simple web search. In this model instead of being contact points, EDICs would be **outreach hubs**.

It was also mentioned by HoRs that there is a variety of, **sometimes contradicting, messages and campaigns coming from the different DGs to the EDICs**. DG COMM is centralising communication and filtering other DGs' requests to the Reps, organising the communication campaigns along main lines to prevent dispersion of messages / initiatives. However, this centralisation does not seem to happen when it comes to the EDICs, with **DGs turning to EDICs to implement their own campaigns**. It was suggested that DGs should take the EDIC network into account when determining their communication strategy, and ensure that they are all centralised by DG COMM.

Conclusion

The EDIC network is relevant to the EU institutions, but it could be more useful. EDICs fill in gaps that the institutions are not able to plug themselves. They provide local offices with local knowledge and contacts, opportunities for direct contacts with citizens and other stakeholders, and act as conduits for EU information within the Member States. The evaluation highlights consensus between audiences within the EU institutions that EDICs add value and are a necessary support. There is an acute awareness within DG COMM, the Reps and EPIOs that the institutions are not visible / represented at local level to citizens and a belief that EDICs are able to contribute to mitigating this problem. The Reps are too limited in the size of their operation and by their own geographic location to have direct interactions with citizens and local stakeholders.

In addition to their valued local presence, **EDICs are also considered to provide assistance to the institutions (at least the EP and EC) because of their knowledge capital**. EDICs know their local area and local issues. They have local networks that can, at least in theory, be accessed by the Reps and EPIOs. This can be useful to support Rep and EPIO activities when, for example attention has been drawn to a particular issue at local level. EDICs may have connections to the local media and this can help to strengthen the PR efforts of the Reps when required. Examples have been cited of EDICs providing a type of press monitoring back to the Reps when information about Europe is misreported.

Although EDICs are not formally part of the institutions, a lot of their strength and understanding of the local level comes from the fact that EDIC Managers are themselves citizens who are able to **interpret the EU in a way that locals can relate to.** EDICs add value to the service provided by the EDCC whose highly qualified staff have great expertise in answering queries concerning the institutions, but do not necessarily know or understand the local infrastructure. This means they are not able to provide the signposting to local institutions that EDICs can offer and that appears to be required in some instances.

Whilst the EDIC role is described in the call for proposals and administrative framework that supports their work, the Rep / EDIC relationship appears to be shaped by the size of the country, the number of EDICs in operation and the personal approach of those involved. EDICs provide an Annual Action Programme to describe their intended activities and are required to provide monthly progress reports via the Intranet. There is a deficiency in the management of this information because the current procedures **do not require systematic analysis of monthly reports or the feeding back of intelligence** from EDICs to the Reps, EPIOs, DG COMM HQ or the EP. The harnessing of EDICs via the Citizens' Dialogues initiative provides an example of the EC using the EDICs' listening capacity to have a better sense of how key issues are being felt on the ground. For the moment this is a relatively small initiative.

When it comes to communicating the political priorities, it can be argued that EDICs are demonstrating how the political priorities work in practice by providing information that helps EU citizens. It needs to be understood that EDICs' main strength is their ability to relate to local people. It is important that EDICs retain their ability to tailor information to citizens' needs.

Linkages with the **EP remain relatively weak even if EDICs** have understood in recent years that they are intended to serve both institutions. This relates to the size of the EPIO operations and the fact that they have no line management responsibilities. Greater sharing of communication agendas is suggested as a way to improve the interaction. The **linkages with other DGs are also weak**. EDICs have a theoretical relevance, which is not operationalized. This relates in part to EDICs' lack of internal visibility and the need for a more structured approach to interaction with policy DGs. This means that EDICs currently have theoretical relevance.

It is striking that although EC and EP staff members **claim that EDICs are an important resource, this is not reflected by the way that they are resourced or managed**. On resourcing, host structures are only required to ensure that one full-time equivalent member of staff is available. This represents a low level of capacity unless it is 'topped up' by the host structure. In addition, many EC staff members are of the view that EDICs do not receive enough funding, particularly in high-cost-of-living countries. If EDICs are an important part of the EU strategy to connect with citizens, then there needs to be sufficient resourcing at all levels, within EDICs themselves, as well as the Reps and HQ to allow EDICs to make a significant contribution.

With regards to management, there are limited procedures in place to ensure the EDICs are part of the institutions' joined-up communication and feedback capacity. In practice, HoRs and HoCs in the Reps do not always have the reflex to direct and coordinate the efforts the EDIC network. EDICs have little mention in the Rep Country Strategies and there is **no centralised communication plan** shared with EDICs, which defines priorities and how the network can support the institutions to meet communication goals. There is a need for a much clearer statement (which may vary from country to country) of what the institutions expect from EDICs and how the network can support institutional needs, and a much better / communication focussed interface between the Reps / EPIOs, HQ and EDICs. This implies a stronger focus on communication coordination with implications for the communication capacity of the Reps. The NCs currently mainly ensure an administration and coordination function, without having enough time to steer effectively the communication activities. NCs report being overburdened with their EDIC network's administration / coordination tasks and they are also used to fulfil other tasks; circa half of NCs work full time on their network.

There is a strong case for encouraging and equipping Representations to be more closely involved in supporting the EDIC communication efforts. If EDICs are to deliver valuable results, they in most cases need timely and meaningful communication support from the Representations. This would be beneficial per se and mitigate the variable performance by EDICs, which can be linked to a certain extent to the commitment of host structures and their staff.

It is of note that many EDICs are far from overstretched by the number of enquiries that they receive and it can be questioned whether the basic information service is really required. In these EDICs there is, at least in theory, greater scope to focus on other outreach type activities, but without a steer it is difficult to define the added-value achieved.

4.4 Relevance of network coverage

> **3. To what extent does current geographic spread of the network of 500+ EDICs correspond to target audience and institutional needs / allow for optimal communication outreach?**

This question will be looked at in three ways. The extent that the current network corresponds to:

- EU citizens' needs
- institutional needs and
- allows for optimal communication outreach

Source of evidence

- EDIC Managers Survey
- NC Survey
- Focus groups
- Desk research

Key findings

Overall, the geographic spread of the EDIC network has benefits which correspond to both target audiences and institutional needs. Internal audiences such as the Reps and EPIOs greatly benefit from this geographic spread, as it **allows them to reach citizens at a local level, something which they would not be able to do otherwise.** EDICs can **provide local expertise and networks to the EU** and act as intermediaries between policy makers and citizens. This added value is greatest in the larger Member States, where Reps find it more difficult cover the wide geographic spread.

In terms of the target audience, the current geographic spread and physical presence of the EDIC centres provides users with **personal face-to-face interactions** and can access and engage **harder to reach people and regions**. However, non-users highlighted the **uneven geographic coverage. In focus groups**, participants found that their nearest EDIC centres were located far away from them. This also raises the **issue of visibility,** which appears to be one of the network's biggest challenges. EDICs need to do more in order to increase their visibility and make more people aware of their presence, and a way in which this could be done is through **increasing their online and social media presence**. However, EDICs are not fully utilising these communication tools, despite the potential they have to enhance the network's communication outreach.

Additionally, there are reported limitations to the extent to which a large geographic spread can allow for optimal communication outreach given the limited budgets. Interviewed HoRs expressed **the trade-off they face in terms of wanting a large geographic coverage, but facing the risk of spreading financial resources too thinly**. Therefore, given the limited budgets which Reps have, a decision needs to be made whether the network would be more effective having fewer centres with a larger budget each, or a larger number of EDIC locations but each with a smaller budget.

Local knowledge and outreach

In terms of institutional needs, the current geographic spread of the EDIC network is considered to work very well, as it **provides local outreach** to Reps and EPIOs who would not be able to access this otherwise. Interviews with EPIOs showed that what they consider to be the biggest added value of the EDICs is their **strong local networks, knowledge and experience** that they have built and can that they can offer to the EPIOs. As there is only one (or in the case of the 6 largest Member States two) EPIO offices in a country, the EDIC network can act as a regional antennae across the country, supporting the EPIOs in outreach and thus also saving them a significant amount of money. Similarly, the EDCC is limited in terms of the requests which it is able to handle relating to local issues and it is important that EDICs are not overwhelmed, for example through last minute or short notice requests. EPIOs sharing the activity calendars with EDICs can be a way to allow EDICs and EPIOs to plan ahead for any required support. **EDICs** are native speakers **in their localities and have a deep understanding of the situation on the ground** as well as the local institutions, and can therefore signpost people in the right direction when necessary.

The EDICs enjoy a local visibility and are well accepted in their region, and this is something that the EPIOs can capitalise on when organising events. For example, when going into regions and areas where EPIOs are less familiar with the local context, EDICs can support them in terms of identifying local stakeholders, local press, and potential partners to invite and participate in their events. This local knowledge is something that is seen as irreplaceable and something which the EPIOs, located in the capital cities, would not be able to achieve alone. Because of this added value in terms of local reach, the EPIOs interviewed were **not in favour of creating regional hubs instead of the local centre approach.**

The Reps also largely benefit from the EDIC network's geographic coverage, as they are their way of reaching out to EU citizens locally. According to the interviewed HoCs, Reps' communication activities are primarily targeted at the national media and therefore EDICs are seen as complementary, as they can reach out to local and regional actors and are more adept to getting the message out to stakeholders on the ground.

Due to the large added value derived from EDICs' geographic spread, the majority of interviewed internal stakeholders and citizens **highly value the physical presence of EDICs and believe that this should be retained.** Findings from the users' focus groups showed that respondents valued EDICs' ease of access, proximity and personal service and these are the reasons why they regarded EDICs as a being good way of providing information about the EU. Even focus groups with non-users showed that participants believed that the existence of a physical office is useful and the idea of personal contact in the centres was seen to be very important. The non-users believed that a walk-in service brings the EU closer to people. Interviewed HoRs were of the view that if EDICs did not provide such face-to-face interaction, they would be considered as not being any different to a simple media service or network, simply providing information.

When asked how important it is that the EDICs retain a physical office in the next generation, 5 out of the 6 EPIOs stated the importance of keeping these. **Some regions and target groups are not yet exposed to digital communications, making it important for EDICs to retain a physical office,** in order for an optimal number of citizens to have access to their services. For example, in the smaller towns in Bulgaria, people rely on face-to-face contact and hard copy materials. By switching to a more virtual network, it is believed that the only people who will be able to access this are those who are well informed and know where to look for information. Considering that one of the main challenges of the EDIC network is reaching people who are disengaged with or uninterested in EU affairs, or who don't usually visit the EDIC centres, keeping this physical presence is seen to be essential in allowing for optimal communication outreach.

Size of Member States

It is important to note that, unsurprisingly, **the geographic spread of EDICs in the larger Member States has a greater importance to institutional needs than in the smaller Member States**. This is due to the Reps' responsibilities and capabilities, which are usually focused on the national and regional levels. It appears that the larger the Member State is, the more the Rep relies on the EDICs to spread the EU's messages to citizens via local media outlets. On the other hand in the smaller Member States, Reps are able to be more actively involved in regional and local outreach activities, often working in tandem with EDICs on the ground. Therefore, according to interviewed HoCs, the added value to the Rep of a wide geographic spread is greatest in larger countries where it is more difficult for the Reps to get the messages out.

Virtual presence

Nonetheless, despite the importance of the physical geographic coverage, **social media and general online presence can play an important role in increasing EDICs' communication outreach**. Such online activities are regarded as an important aspect which should be done alongside the physical activities and interactions of EDICs. Interviewed EDIC Managers echoed this point, stating that websites and social media are options for improving visibility. Interviewed NCs regarded social media as being an important tool both for raising awareness among citizens of the existence of the EDIC network, and as a means of communicating with existing users. Some NCs thought that there could be an increased role for the Rep here, for example by involving them in EDICs' social media activity e.g. helping draft newsletters. Nevertheless, others cautioned that if a social media

module were to be made 'mandatory' for EDICs in the future, this would need to be accompanied by appropriate training for managers. In particular, EDIC Managers would need to learn how to engage and interact with their users via social media, and not simply resend news from the institutions and other sources, as is sometimes the case at present.

In terms of online activity from users, many of the participants in the users' focus groups (who were not a representative sample) were following their EDIC on Facebook and Twitter, which highlights the **untapped potential of these online networks**. Nevertheless, it should be noted that such users at the same time like the idea of there being someone to talk to in more detail, and overall appreciated the physical presence of EDICs, which they saw in great contrast to the 'virtual' EU institutions, that many see as absent from everyday life.

Despite the benefits of this online presence, **many EDICs are still getting to grips with how to harness the potential of social media.** Whilst HoCs acknowledged the role of social media (especially Twitter and Facebook) as a means of reaching out to citizens, there was some scepticism as to whether EDICs were able to use social media effectively, given that to date their use had not increased EDIC visibility. Despite 67% of EDICs using the Intranet at least once or twice per week, they mainly use this for the reporting function, with the social media functions not being considered to be very relevant (EDIC Managers survey). Additionally, because social media usage is not a mandatory module, some EDICs don't use this at all, which is hindering their communication outreach.

It should also be noted that there are **limitations to the coverage of online activities, as these mainly target young people and can exclude some of the EDICs' target groups**, such as elderly people, people with special needs, or socially disadvantage citizens. According to the online survey with EDIC Managers, certain target groups such as retired people believe that answering questions by email and phone as well as providing a walk-in service is more effective than purely making information available on the internet. Additionally, interviewed EPIOs highlighted the value of face-to-face interaction, seeing communication via the internet as impersonal.

Lack of visibility and uneven coverage

One of the biggest challenges for the EDIC network identified by interviewed HoRs and EPIOs is **the issue of low visibility and lack of awareness that EDICs exist**. The online survey with EDIC Managers also showed that 78% of EDICs regarded the low visibility / lack of awareness of EDICs among target groups as one of the most significant challenges for EDICs. It was recognised by interviewed EDIC Managers that this is exacerbated by working with limited budgets. This is one of the reasons why interviewed EDIC Managers believe that a physical presence is important.

This issue could be seen when focus groups with the non-users took place, where **participants questioned whether or not EDICs actually have a successful mission, because they are unknown and lack visibility.** This led to the point that **participants considered the EDICs to have a low or uneven geographic coverage in some areas**. One of the key concerns expressed by non-users was that the nearest EDIC was still quite far away from them. Interviewed HoCs also recognised this weakness in terms of the geographic spread not always being optimal.

It is interesting to note that even some participants from the users' focus groups expressed this point; for example, one respondent aged 55-64 from Sweden commented that EDICs are very active, but due to the geographical distance, the office is not integrated locally into the city's activities. Overall, users were concerned that the number of EDICs was not sufficient, meaning that **not all parts of a country were covered well enough**. This point was also tied to users' concerns about staffing, indicating that EDICs could easily become overwhelmed.

One of the reasons for some regions / areas being less well covered than others was attributed to the process for the selection of host structures. In some cases, Reps struggle to attract enough applications from host structures, which can lead to uneven coverage in certain areas. There were differing reports from interviewed NCs on how to deal with uneven coverage; the launching of one-off calls was suggested as one way to bolder coverage in certain geographic areas, trying to focus on host structures with significant networks / outreach infrastructure was another.

Geographic coverage trade-off

The issue of limited budgets raises a key discussion which was brought up in interviews: the trade-off between geographic coverage and quality of EDIC centres. Interviewed HoRs believe that there should not necessarily be a certain number of offices to fit with the allocated budget. There is a **risk of spreading financial resources "too thinly"**, suggesting a trade-off between geographic coverage and giving more funding to fewer centres. EDIC Managers echoed this point, stating that one of the main challenges for them includes the geographic areas which they personally are expected to cover with the money they have been allocated, and to which they are expected to supply materials.

Interviewed HoRs generally seem to take the view that having a dense geographic coverage is indispensable. One HoR stated that the more EDICs there are, the better the outreach. However, a dilemma which they are faced with is **having to choose between better geographic coverage and including "deadweight" in the network**. The interview responses show that this can, sometimes, be a real problem (rather than just a hypothetical issue), albeit one without a clear and simple solution. HoRs recognise that the quality of centres is variable, with some EDICs being less dynamic than others, however if they do not perform then they will not be renewed.

In terms of the host structures selection process, the priorities defined by the HoRs influence the award process and choice of host structures. Although the Rep is considered to be best placed to determine the geographic coverage needed, this leads to variation in the way that this element is applied, for example, whether or not to have more than one EDIC in a city.

In terms of EDIC users, most participants from the focus groups were not in favour of reducing EDICs to fewer, but bigger regional hubs, unless this was an addition to what was already available.

Suggestions for future improvement

Interviewed HoCs provided some suggestions for improving the network's communication outreach. HoCs stated that in general, **there needs to be a better distribution and geographic spread of EDICs**. A way to do this could be through the creation of an additional module to support partnerships with small branches / structures that would help increase the network's visibility in small cities.

In terms of increasing the networks' virtual presence, one suggestion was **to introduce virtual (mobile) EDICs to improve communication and outreach in rural areas**, which would allow people in more remote areas to access the network. However, it was suggested that these virtual centres, e.g. in the form of mobile EDIC buses, could complement the activities of permanent EDIC offices, without necessarily replacing them. One HoC explained that, under the current format, EDICs are offering the greatest added value in "the big cities where there is enough of a critical mass". Mobile centres, on the other hand, **could help to improve outreach and citizen engagement in less densely populated areas.**

A common suggestion to improve the networks' visibility brought up unanimously by non-user focus group participants was to run advertising and information campaigns in the media, through national TV, local newspapers, university campuses and the radio, in order to make more people aware that EDICs exist.

Conclusion

The **current geographic spread of the EDIC network corresponds to both target group and institutional needs to a certain extent**. The EU institutions have the local presence and face-to-face contact in every EU Member State that they miss. They also have a local contact point to support HQ activities and a source of intelligence on local issues. Yet the communication, listening and intelligence potential is not harnessed because there are no systematic procedures in place to allow the efficient take up of EDIC feedback by the institutions. In addition, the EDIC network is not reported to be very well known inside the institutions. Meanwhile, a tiny

proportion of citizens in all EU Member States are able to benefit from close proximity and personalized, trusted and 'expert' advice from an EDIC in their language. Evidence confirms that users are highly satisfied and that many use EDICs for advice on multiple occasions.

It will not be feasible to reinforce the patchy coverage of EDICs by increasing their number, because **the size of the available budgetary envelope is not set to be increased**. This being the case, the question on whether the network is appropriate to ensure optimal outreach is somewhat theoretical. The larger the network, the greater the potential for outreach, although other factors are also important, for example the quality of EDICs within the network.

It is logical to try to **ensure a spread of coverage** rather than concentrating EDICs in one area. It can be assumed that this is the best way to serve more people and to connect to people's local specificity. But trying to ensure geographic coverage has been at the expense of quality. **If the institutions want a more effective network** then this is an obvious issue to be addressed. Geographic spread is important, but funds should only be spent on host structures that prove that they are desirable partners.

The **size and shape of the network needs to reflect how the institutions want to use EDICs** to provide services to internal and external target groups. Is the EDICs' primary role to inform and signpost, and / or to reach out and educate? Is it acceptable that this service is available to a minority of citizens or should efforts be made to cover local audiences to a much greater extent? Is it sufficient to signpost to EU citizens or should EDICs be part of a wider effort to make every citizen aware of how the EU benefits their lives, along the lines of EC corporate campaigns. To date there are no concrete answers to these questions, which relate to choices to be made. But the call for **greater focus on outreach**, particularly in the light of the relatively low numbers of enquiries and the availability of information on the internet, would allow EDICs to make a bigger and, therefore, more legitimate contribution to EU communication goals. At the same time, most interviewed in the Reps and, not surprisingly, within EDICs themselves confirm the need for a physical presence because it is felt that this is the EDICs' 'USP'[14]. Data on the number of visitors suggests that a walk-in centre is not really required in many cases, but there are some EC staff members who consider that losing direct physical contact with citizens would be a significant loss.

During the interviews, there was no call for an increase in the overall size of the network, even if NCs consider that in some cases it could be helpful to make changes. To date, the EU institutions appear to have been **satisfied with having a number of touch points at local level**, without having full coverage in each country. The level of coverage keeps cost and administrative burden down, but allows a sense of connection and representation towards citizens. This may be sufficient from a policy / political view point. This is not the case for citizens. Citizens who know about EDICs welcome the provision of a front-line service, but are dismayed that so few people can benefit because there are not enough EDICs. Feedback from citizens also suggests that if more people knew about EDICs they would be more likely to use them[15] and that the information of most relevance relates to people's everyday lives. This raises questions with regards to how necessary / desirable EDIC information provision really is given that cross-border / mobility issues and grants are mostly relevant to specific groups within society and then not necessarily on an on-going basis.

Whilst choices are required with regards to the shape of the network, the relevance of the network to the institutions can be confirmed. But there are many aspects that could / should be reviewed to increase this relevance, including the **systematic use of social media and digital technology to amplify and advertise the reach of each EDIC**, the definition and application of systems to channel feedback and a more precise definition of the EDIC mission statement and goal setting to provide a clearer steer to those inside and EP and EC and host structures, how EDICs can contribute to the work of the institutions.

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[14] Unique selling point
[15] This same finding was identified in the 2008 feasibility study contracted by DG COMM on streamlining EC networks: i.e. greater visibility is likely to lead to greater demand.

5 Mission compliance and performance

5.1 Overview

This Chapter provides a discussion on the way that the EDIC network reflects the mission that has been set and the performance of the different required tasks. This does not include aspects concerning management and organisation, which are discussed in Chapter 6.

The following points are discussed in turn:

- The intended mission
- Visibility and promotion
- Channels and tools
- Target group satisfaction
- Value-added in comparison to national, regional and local actors
- Funding impact on host structures

5.2 The intended mission

> **4. To what extent have EDICs fulfilled their intended mission?**

To answer this question the following issues were considered:

- Evidence that the intended activities took place;
- Achievement of objectives and limitations / barriers to achieving them;
- Clarity of information as confirmed by citizens;
- Citizens' increased information levels following contact with an EDIC.

Source of evidence
■ Desk research
■ Interview
■ On-line surveys
■ Mystery shopping
■ Public consultation
■ Focus Groups

This section starts by defining the EDIC mission, which is outlined in three key documents:

1. The Guidelines for EDIC Management of 6 May 2015 (EDIC Guidelines)
2. Rules of Procedure, European Parliament, 2014 - 2019
3. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the European Commission and the European Parliament of 3 July 2012

The EDIC Guidelines describe the **mission** of the EDIC network as both to **inform** European citizens about the EU – and particularly their rights as EU citizens and also, to **promote a participatory citizenship** by engaging the citizens in the 'European debate'. EDICs are expected to play an important role in disseminating EU information (and primarily information related to everyday life), and to act as "one-stop-shop" for citizens' requests of any kind. In addition, EDICs are called to encourage and facilitate a public dialogue between the citizens and the EU institutions and to channel citizens' feedback to EU headquarters.
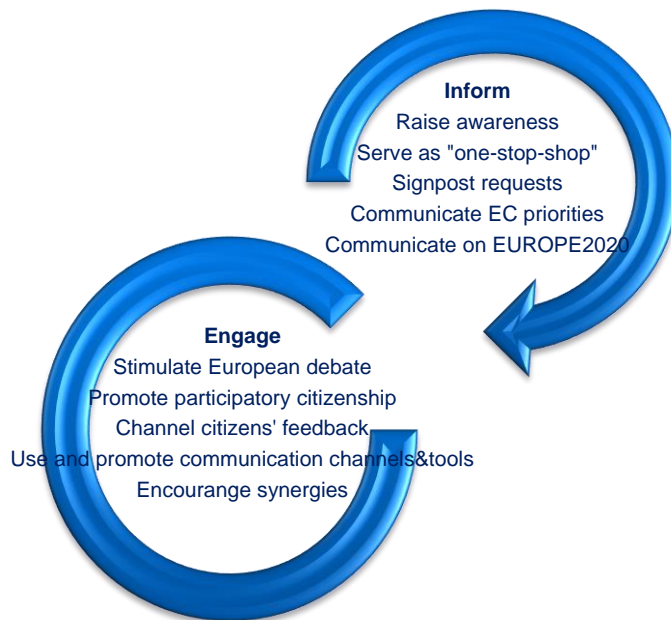
The Declaration of 22 October 2008[16] states that the Union needs to "*ensure effective communication with and objective information to the widest possible audience at the appropriate level*".

The EDIC network is an integral part of the EC communication policy, and is managed by DG COMM. EDICs are also intended to act as "an **outreach point**" for all EU institutions and to work closely with multipliers, national / regional / local media and other stakeholders involved in information / communication activities in well-established **synergies**.

The MoU between the European Parliament and the European Commission states: "*…the Europe Direct (Contract Centre, Information Centres, Documentation Centres and Team Europe) is an essential tool for both institutions to answer citizens' enquiries and to communicate with citizens at local and regional level on EU policies. Europe Direct is at the service of both institutions…EDICs are an outreach point for the EC and the EP and cooperate with other active information partners. They complement and support the work of the EC Representations and EP Information Offices at local and regional level.*"

The figure below illustrates the two-fold mission of the EDIC network and related objectives to achieve:

EDIC Mission is to:

Inform
Raise awareness
Serve as "one-stop-shop"
Signpost requests
Communicate EC priorities
Communicate on EUROPE2020

Engage
Stimulate European debate
Promote participatory citizenship
Channel citizens' feedback
Use and promote communication channels&tools
Encourange synergies

This third generation of EDICs (2013 - 2017) is expected to communicate about the EU's inter-institutional priorities for the year (EC priorities) and to adapt this to national context. They are also asked to conduct communication activities for the EC Reps and the EPIOs at local and regional level. In addition, for the current year, the EDICs have been recently asked to be involved and communicate at regional / local level on the EC communication activities for the Investment Plan for Europe, including following the specific call for proposals.

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[16] 2009/C13/02

Total number of visitors, questions received via email and telephone, and questions signposted to other network or to Europe Direct Contact Centre,...

An entry point to EU citizens at local level for information, advice and assistance

As highlighted above, the first **objective** of the EDIC network is to inform European citizens at local and regional level about the EU and to provide a one stop shop for citizens' questions.

EU officials at EC Reps reported that the EDIC network has **contributed to raising the citizens' awareness** about the EU. Interviewees suggested that because EDICs understand the interests and information needs of their target audiences, they are best placed to provide information at local / regional level. This assertion seems to relate to the fact that the EU institutions do not have official **representation at local** and regional level. Also, EDICs and NCs report that EDICs have a good understanding of the needs of their users. But it has not been feasible to determine / there is a general assumption that EDICs have an understanding of the needs of the wider population in their local or regional environment.

The NCs, replying to the survey, considered EDICs to be most **effective** in 'answering citizens' questions on EU's policies and institutions' (on top of a list of 12 activities to assess). Second in the list came their effectiveness in 'raising awareness about EU affairs'. EDIC Managers (replying to the survey) assessed their effectiveness with a similar ranking. They saw themselves as most effective in 'answering citizens' questions on EU's policies and situations' (on top of a list of 12 activities to self-assess). Third on the list came their effectiveness in 'raising awareness about EU hot topics'. On the level of importance they attach to a number of activities, the EDIC Managers judged 'provision of advice, assistance and answer to queries' as the second most important (from a list of 15 suggested activities).

The role played by EDICs in providing information to citizens is confirmed through reporting data available on the EDIC Intranet. This is highlighted in the below graphic, which confirms that over the three years between January 2013 and December 2015 there were 3,439,775 total interactions between citizens and EDICs for information purposes (including, 2,602,982 visits, 459,358 questions via email, 345,543 questions by phone and 31,892 questions signposted to other networks or to EDCC).

Total number of visitors, questions received via email and telephone, and questions signposted to other network or to Europe Direct Contact Centre, per year (Jan 2013 - Dec 2015)
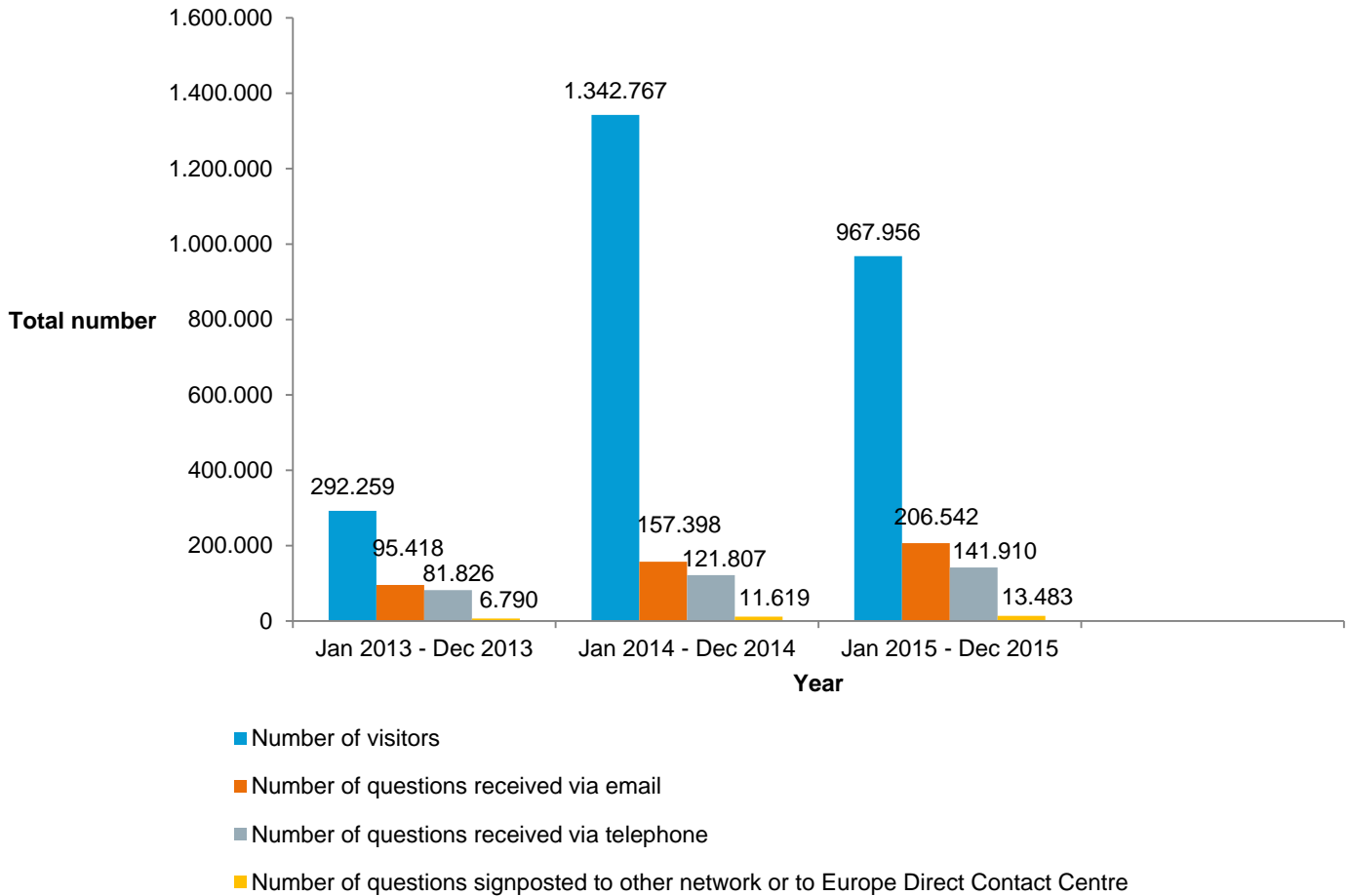
When comparing the different ways in which an EDIC receives queries, visits to an EDIC office ranked first, followed by questions via email, questions by phone, and lastly through signposting services. This pattern is identical for all 3 years in the scope. This data to some extent supports the need for walk-in centres, except that it is understood that the data is not reliable. EDICs have reported the number of people who attended events / participated in events that they attended, in the same Intranet field as per the number of visitors to the centre. It is unfortunately not feasible to have a more definite picture on the use of the walk-in centres because of this problem with the data collected.

This being the case, further analysis below relates to interactions by email and telephone. The data confirms that EDICs are providing information to EU citizens at local and regional level. When considered on a country-by-country basis, the picture that emerges is that certain countries receive many more requests for information than others. Italy, France, Germany and Spain are the top "recipients" of citizens' queries under the form of visits, questions received via email / phone, website visits and social media followers. This reflects to a certain extent the respective size of these countries' populations.

The charts below show the number of enquiries by email and telephone over the last year. It is clear that the number of requests for information is in some cases very **low**, when it is considered that there are more than 500 EDICs in the EDIC network.

Number of questions received via email (Apr 2015-Mar 2016)

Values by country:
- AT: 18.100
- BE: 3.699
- BG: 1.819
- HR: 691
- CY: 300
- CZ: 705
- DK: 784
- EE: 449
- FI: 315
- FR: 36.628
- DE: 30.251
- EL: 4.622
- HU: 5.630
- IE: 1.513
- IT: 45.032
- LV: 283
- LT: 1.521
- LU: 206
- MT: 91
- NL: 1.278
- PL: 6.756
- PT: 3.227
- RO: 6.345
- SK: 1.483
- SI: 1.333
- ES: 18.160
- SE: 2.105
- UK: 1.625
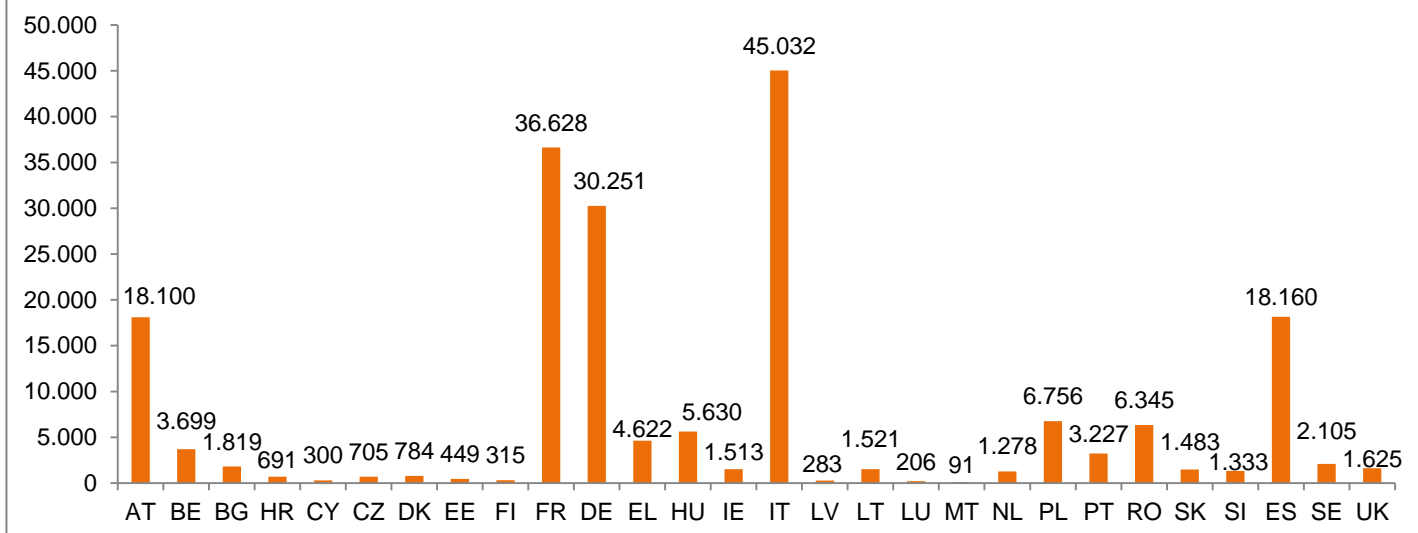
Number of questions received via telephone (Apr 2015-Mar 2016)

Values by country:
- AT: 6.477
- BE: 2.730
- BG: 3.029
- HR: 1.128
- CY: 1.092
- CZ: 738
- DK: 252
- EE: 724
- FI: 195
- FR: 20.297
- DE: 20.292
- EL: 7.583
- HU: 3.811
- IE: 809
- IT: 34.347
- LV: 529
- LT: 1.727
- LU: 205
- MT: 108
- NL: 686
- PL: 8.644
- PT: 1.688
- RO: 4.345
- SK: 2.606
- SI: 1.433
- ES: 11.211
- SE: 1.173
- UK: 1.143
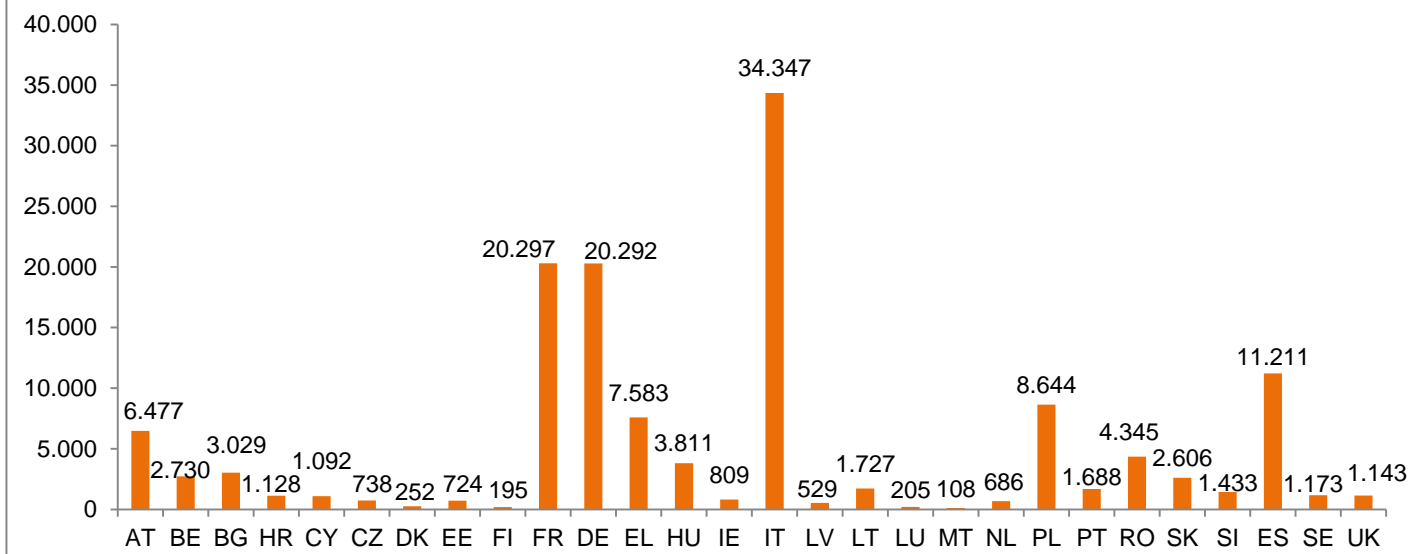
Again, the available data is not fully reliable as some EDICs did not report each month. Also, the evaluation noted that sometimes the same numbers are reported each month over, for example, a 6 month period. The below chart shows how nearly half of EDICs receive less than 100 requests by email and telephone each month.

Numbers of EDICs with questions submitted to them by email and phone in the period April 2015 - May 2016
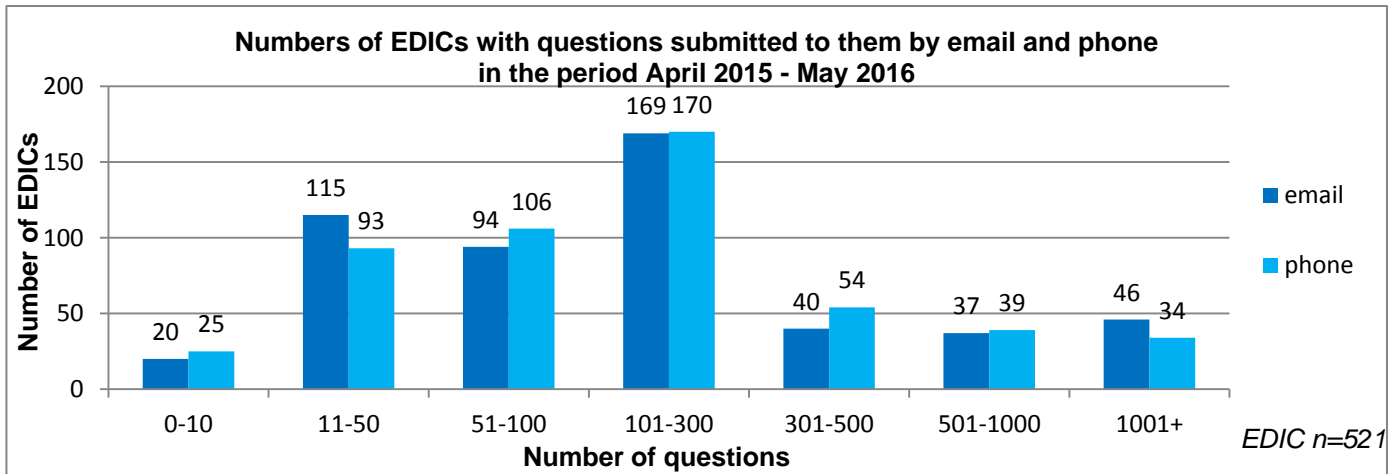
The majority of contact with the EDIC network is via visits to the EDIC network webpages / web sites. This suggests that it makes sense to continue to invest in this type of activity. Statistics reported by the EDIC network also show that there has been an increase in the total number of website visitors, as well as social media followers, between 2013 and 2015 (from 6,787,751 in 2013 to more than double in 2015, i.e. 15,264,460). More specifically, Facebook followers increased by 380% and Twitter followers by 410% over two years. These statistics support the need to focus on on-line activities as a way to engage citizens.

Communicating EC priorities

In the focus groups, **EDIC users** highlighted that they considered EDICs to be experts, highly responsive and that they provide reliable information in a clear and accessible manner. All users were satisfied that they were given the information they had requested. Additionally, the personalised service, in particular in the walk-in centres, was very appreciated *(for a detailed users' satisfaction analysis, please read the next evaluation questions).*

NCs, other Rep staff, the representative from the Committee of the Regions and EDICs themselves all agree that EDICs find it difficult to communicate about **EC political priorities** as such. The Mystery Shopping exercises suggested that not all EDICs clearly display the 10 political priorities on their websites. Mystery shoppers also considered that the information was not relevant / suitable for use **without adaptation to make it more user- / reader-friendly**. The NC and EDIC Manager surveys indicate that EDICs feel much more effective at answering questions on EU policies and the institutions than on the 10 political priorities and Europe 2020. All interviewees reported that this aspect did not necessarily fit with the type of information that EDICs are being asked by citizens to provide. Their users are more interested in information of direct relevance to their daily lives, job or environment, as well as very basic questions about the EU and the EU's stance on hot topics like migration, the UK referendum and the Greek debt crisis. NCs and EDIC Managers both reported that EDICs find it hard to know what to communicate / how to engage on these hot politically sensitive topics. EDIC host structures indicated that they sometimes provide guidance when it comes to politically sensitive topics. This situation was already confirmed in the 2015 Online Survey Report on 'Perception by citizens of the EU'. EDIC Managers highlighted three main concerns: the economic situation (31%), unemployment (28%) and immigration (11%). However, the topics which EDIC Managers found the easiest to communicate were: 'Youth (including mobility and funding programmes)' (29%) and 'EU general, EU institutions and Member States' (23%). The 'Economic crisis, European debt crisis, euro' were identified by 57% of EDIC managers, as the most difficult topic to communicate.

There was some suggestion by the NCs that this situation could be exacerbated by delays in DG COMM HQ providing EDICs with the necessary information.

In the Interim Report Steering Group meeting and at coordination meetings with NCs, it was suggested that EDICs do communicate about political priorities. But EDICs' work involves applying these priorities to real life situations. In addition, EU officials at the Reps, including NCs, suggested that:

- EDICs need greater freedom and discretion to decide on the content and the approach of communicating EU messages;
- Reps should prepare clear '**lines to take'** on hot topics;
- There was a need for a clearer **communication strategy** at national level to support EDICs on how to communicate on political messages to local audiences.

NCs suggested[17] that there is a need to include the national / local aspect in any redefinition of the EDIC mission so that it is recognized that EDICs are required to adapt / interpret EU policies and priorities to suit local audiences. This was thought to provide the EDIC network with more flexibility on top of EC pre-defined priorities. In relation to this, EC jargon (i.e. Europe 2020) was suggested be abandoned, whereas the impact on the life of the region needed to be reflected in the text.

Signposting other services

With regard to EDICs' role in signposting citizens' queries to other EU information services, most of the EDICs interviewed said they nearly always refer 'specialist questions' to specialist networks, or sometimes the EC Rep staff or EU HQ and more rarely to other EDICs, while those seeking to answer every question themselves are the exception. This was confirmed in the EDIC Manager survey. EDIC respondents indicated that: 76% of enquiries 'are directly answered by them' and only around 8% is signposted to the EDCC (and around 9% to other EU networks and around 7% to other sources of information).

All in all, EDICs do not feel overburdened by the volume of enquiries or by the level of difficulty of the questions that they are asked. Focus groups with EDIC users also confirmed this position when they commented that EDICs are very successful in 'filtering' and 'interpreting' the large volume of information and that they rightly answer questions and provide further information for future use. Users also indicated that the EDIC that had helped them had actually been signposted by another information source (e.g. universities) that had failed to answer their question in the first place.

Promoting participatory citizenship / stimulating debate and channelling feedback

The second **objective** of the EDIC network is as follows:

> *"to promote participatory citizenship through various communication tools (website, social media, publications, etc.) and by interacting with local and regional stakeholders, multipliers and media. They stimulate debate through the organisation of conferences and events and channel citizens' feedback to the EU."* (EDIC Guidelines, 2015)

The network is thus called to encourage the engagement of the European citizens to a '**debate** around the EU' by making available to them different communication channels and tools (both online and traditional ones). It is also expected to act as a 'bridge' between the average European citizen and the EU HQ when it comes to their information needs, but also communicating their opinion (or even criticism) to Brussels. In practice, the majority of EDICs are focussing their attention on young people, school children and teachers, as multipliers to these groups. Some EDICs focus considerable attention on information to kindergartens. This is a highly questionable strategy even if it is argued that the real target group behind this activity is parents. NCs confirmed that EDICs are essentially targeting young people because they are **easiest** to interact with, given their openness to new information. This suggests that EDICs are not sufficiently prepared / do not have the right **expertise** to facilitate debates. At the same time, this is not specifically required of EDIC Managers in the Call text.

Working with the media could be another way to stimulate debate and a high level of importance is placed on **local and regional media** and EDIC capacity. But in reality there is a very mixed picture. Reps suggest that EDICs add significant value by providing access to this media, and even in some cases providing a kind of local media monitoring. But in reality, EDICs find it very difficult to generate any impact with local media. Some NCs

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[17] At the NC coordination meeting in January 2016

suggested that the local media module should in fact require a defined number of inputs rather than outputs in terms of articles written. Reps are able to support EDICs in this role, for example including them in press visits and training, although there is scope for more media training.

EDICs can be constrained in their relations with the media because quite simply there is insufficient news, they are not appropriately trained or experienced, they are not the official voice of the institutions and may not have the permission of their host structure to interact with the media. Whilst the value of contacts with local media is undeniable, there is a need to consider how to make this work best; rather than expecting EDICs to work with the media it may be more realistic to view this role as a signposting / first point of contact to experts in the wider institutions / Reps.

The NCs interviewed questioned the success of the EDIC network in achieving this second objective, and in particular when it comes to channelling citizens' **feedback** to the EU HQ. They stated that feedback on what EDICs are doing and on what citizens are asking for is currently lacking, and that this is a great loss. Nevertheless, they agreed that this objective should remain part of the EDICs' mission, but that it should be reinforced. Some even suggested that EDICs should become "**local EU ambassadors**" with a higher focus on outreach activities and networking with different networks and groups of stakeholders. Related to this, the current range of different types of host structures was considered to be an asset as it allows outreach to a wider spectrum of citizens and may, consequently, stimulate a European debate. In addition, the current geographic scope of the EDIC network was considered important not only in reaching out to a greater number of European citizens, but also in adding to the 'local dimension' offered by the network.

The EDIC Managers interviewed shared the same feeling. Engaging citizens and bringing them closer to the EU is among their daily priorities and to this, the organisation and / or participation of events has proved to be the most effective activity. Yet, they reiterated the need to improve the **quality** of the debates and referred to the need for 'innovation' in events' organisation. On channelling citizens' feedback to the EU, EDIC Managers felt that they cannot do this. Indeed, based on the Online Survey Report of 2015, some 42% believed that the voice of citizens does not count at all in the EU (doubled in comparison to 2014) and only 2% of respondents believe that the voice of citizens definitely counts in the EU.

Based on the results of a survey among NCs, carried out in January 2015, the feedback the NC gets from the EDIC network members is primarily 'political' and secondarily 'related to citizens' views on EC policies'. The figure on side confirms that this feedback is not necessarily 'channelled' to DG COMM HQ.
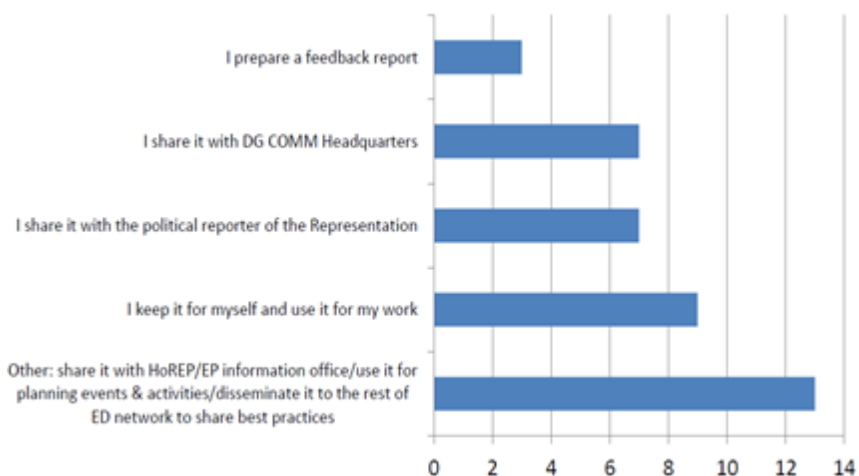
Similar findings come from the **online surveys.** Stimulating a European debate via events and 'promoting participatory citizenship' as well as 'Citizens' Dialogues' were ranked on the 4th, 7th and 8th position of a list of 12 activities that EDICs regarded that they perform in an effective way. As

for 'collecting citizens' feedback for EU HQ', this ranked last in the list. The NCs responses showed the same results. For the EDIC Managers, 'being active in creating contacts with school' came first in the priority list of tasks. 'Promotion of a debate through events' came 3rd while 'channelling citizens' feedback to the EU HQ' ranked 10th in the list of important activities. EDIC Managers indicated that setting up contacts with 'local and regional politicians' and 'business stakeholders' were the **least important** in their list, together with 'working with MEPs and the EPIO'. Related to this last point, the NCs attending the coordination meeting in January 2016 wished for stronger synergies with other EC existing networks and other public services in the EU Member States and suggested the collaboration with the EPIO to be reconsidered *(for a detailed description on synergies, please read next evaluation questions).*

When examining the **use of the most effective channels and tools** to meet the goal of 'participatory citizenship', the EDIC Managers' survey showed that events (both organising and participating in) were identified as the most efficient way in reaching out the audience in general. Basic information provision and the use of social media followed. When matching the communication channels and tools to specific audiences, social media was judged as the most effective for reaching out to young people aged 16-25, together with events, a dedicated website and AV material. Events but also personal contact via email / phone proved to be the most effective for job-seekers *(for a detailed reference to channels and tools, please read next evaluation questions).*

Finally, the vast majority of the EU officials and EDIC Managers interviewed felt that having 'walk-in' presence is a 'must' in achieving the element of participatory citizenship, as there, they can organise events and directly engage with local stakeholders and any relevant multipliers. Similarly, the **EDIC users**, in their vast majority, appreciated the physical presence of the centres, which they saw in great contrast to the 'virtual' EU institutions, which are absent from everyday life.

Furthermore, and related to the EDIC's twofold mission, the vast majority of the people we interviewed estimated that any success in accomplishing EDIC's mission is strictly related to the **visibility** of the network at EU and national level. Of course, we cannot neglect some EDICs being very visible linked to the fact that they have an outlet already established, few commented. Yet, most of the interviewees, if not all, stated that currently there is a 'problem of visibility' since few people even know about the centres. This was also confirmed by the focus group exercise, as well as the public consultation results. Feedback from non-users resulted in the link between EDIC's mission and visibility of the network; they commented that "whether or not EDICs actually have a successful mission is because they are unknown and lack visibility". Moreover, based on the results from the **public consultation**, only 51 respondents (out of a total of 972) mentioned "Local Europe Direct Information Centre" as being the first source of information they turn to when looking for information / ask a question / engage in a debate / event about the EU and their rights as an EU citizen.

Additionally, the interviewees felt that there is currently a special focus on reaching out to the youth and talking about Europe. However, they noticed that young people are not specifically mentioned in the mission statement of the EDIC network, which raises questions as to whether or not they should be the focus of EDIC attention.

People suggested that the mission statement of the network should be used to strengthen the prestige of the EDIC network in Member States, and further engage the host structures in achieving the networks' mission.

Conclusion

EDICs are fulfilling their mission when it comes to acting as a first point of contact on the EU for citizens at local level. But non users are still more likely to look to national agencies and online for information, the previous evaluation highlighted that on-line searches can leave citizens feeling uncertain about the relevance / validity of the information that they have found. Beyond being a first point of contact, EDICs are providing a type of personalised advice and those who are recipients are very grateful for the help. However, the EDIC network is a niche service because very few citizens know that it exists. EDICs are significantly constrained in fulfilling their mission by their lack of visibility. Few people identify EDICs as a primary source of information on the EU. EDICs' visibility relies to a great extent on that of the host structure, as well as their location, and thus varies across the network.

For those who are aware, the websites, social media and walk-in centres appear to be most used (although there are data issues) than enquiries by phone or email. This suggests a need to continue to invest in websites and social media, for strong on-line and targeted promotion and for visibility signposting of walk-in centres, where these add value. There is much discussion around walk-in centres and consensus on the need for direct contact with citizens. It is important to remember that a very mixed picture of EDIC use can be observed and a differentiated approach is going to be required to retain a more efficient / effective service. Nonetheless direct face-to-face contact with citizens is part of the EDICs' unique offering, but ways to make this face-to-face contact happen in a more efficient manner must now be identified. When it comes to defining the EDIC mission, key

questions relating to the information aspects are whether it is desirable and / or politically viable for the EC to:

- Continue to fund EDICs / EDIC services, which demonstrate low levels of public use;

- Continue to provide information services to people who either already know about the EU / already know about EDICs.

Some argue that the EDICs' information role has become obsolete given the low number of visitors and information requests, listing the EDCC, EEN and EURES as networks which could take up on these tasks. However, the EDIC network handles more enquiries than the EDCC, which also does not enjoy a high level of visibility among citizens. Reps view EDICs as more able to help local audiences because people don't want to call Brussels. This raises more questions about deficiencies in the presentation of the EDCC to Europeans. Whatever solutions are developed for the EDIC network it is important that the EDCC and the presentation of other EC services on-line are viewed as part of this solution rather than a separate service – so that services add value rather than duplicate. This is particularly important in the context of needing to streamline advice networks and the given that target audiences are not interested in the name or organisation of advice. Whilst significant improvements have been made to the EDCC, further steps are still required including addressing questions such as how to increase visibility and use.

There are mixed views on whether EDICs should be turned into fewer, larger outreach hubs instead of contact points since many argue that maintaining a large geographical scope allows to reach a greater number of citizens and maintain the local dimension of the network. The network prioritises outreach to youth, which does not reflect any specific mission objective but constitutes a relevant target audience for EDICs to fulfil their mission. Whilst there may not be an appetite to take such a specific focus, lack of recognition of this target group means that the Rep / DG COMM HQ do not currently place any special emphasis on tools / support that is specifically targeted to this group. There is an opportunity to work with education specialists to provide useful materials for these groups.

The EDIC network is less adapted to collecting feedback from citizens. Even where individual EDICs are making significant efforts, as can be identified in some reports on the Intranet, the approach is far from systematic. The deficiency is particularly great on the Commission's side because information that is collected does not appear to be fed into any significant processes. The Citizen's Dialogues are a step in the right direction here, but questions should be asked as to whether or not the institutions really want feedback (it will incur additional work) and if so how this can be properly collected and channelled. This would help to operationalize this aspect of the mission statement.

EDICs are intended to play an important role in both informing the European citizens about the EU and engaging them in a European debate. They achieve both objectives to a certain extent. Their main strength is that they are present at regional and local level, know the interests and information needs of their target audiences, and they are supported by host structures which allow reaching different national groups and stakeholders. They are also active in outreach activities, i.e. events. They manage to adapt communication content to local audiences. If EDICs are to engage with the wider public in proper debates, they would need to work with EU experts both from inside the Commission and at national level (for example via Team Europe / Universities). However, to make this work there needs to be much stronger links with EC DGs and much greater visibility within the institutions of what the EDICs are doing. At the moment they are mainly unknown to many EC staff. However, this does not pose a problem when it comes to inviting speakers with previous knowledge of the network. DG COMM suggests that this reflects the fact that those who have worked with EDICs tend to hold them in high regard.

The European Commission wants EDICs to communicate about its political priorities, but EDICs are more effective at answering citizens' basic questions about the EU. There is a need for a more integrated / seamless approach to this problem. EDIC communication should first identify people's actual needs and then consider whether or not there is a relationship between needs and a political priority. If they do, then this of course creates an option for the EDICs to stress how relevant the EU priorities are to the target audience's concerns. In practice, the political priorities are likely to be relevant in some way, but what is important is to shift from what EDICs

perceive is the current approach of trying to squeeze messages and lists of political priorities into communication to one which is responsive to users' actual needs and where EDICs work closely with Reps on how this can be achieved.

In parallel, EDICs find it difficult to communicate about EU positions on sensitive topical issues (e.g. migration, the euro crisis), where the limited information available to the general public leaves a vacuum for misinformation about the EU, for lack of timely and clear guidelines from the Commission on how to communicate on political messages.

5.3 Visibility and promotion

5. To what extent are EDICs visible and active at local / regional level via interaction with local and regional stakeholders, multipliers and the media?

The answer to this question considered:

- the extent of EDICs' visibility and how they assure this, including:
  - o the extent to which EDICs work with host structures, local and regional stakeholders;
  - o the extent to which EDICs work with other EU networks;
- the extent to which EDICs work with the media (as key multipliers), and
- in each case whether there are barriers to closer cooperation / areas for improvement.

Source of evidence
■   Desk research
■   On-line surveys
■   Interviews
■   Focus groups
■   Public consultation

These issues are derived from the following elements in the EDICs' mission:

(i)   to promote the centre within their region, building on the visibility of the partner / host structure. Each partner / host structure is also expected to add to the visibility and promotion of their EDIC by prominent use of the name and logo in all forms of communication, and

(ii)   to network and partner with local / regional stakeholders, multipliers and media. This includes other EU networks. Focusing on multipliers and key stakeholders is considered to contribute to maximising efficiency and impact. Interacting with the media is considered to be part of their EDICs' mission, irrespective of whether they opt into the 'local media' module.

We look first at visibility in the absolute and then at visibility through interaction with others.

Perceptions of the challenge

Overall, there is a consensus, as already concluded in answer to the previous evaluation question, that the EDIC network is not sufficiently visible.

EDICs interviewed or assessed through their Action Plans often feel they have good levels of visibility, particularly when they have been EDICs for a number of years. In the EDIC Managers' survey, the managers self-assessed making themselves visible within local settings as only second to their effectiveness in answering questions. The NCs in response to the survey also gave EDICs a good score in terms of making themselves visible in their local community. But there is an implicit suggestion that this does not extend beyond stakeholders, since the NCs gave a weak score to visibility among citizens in answer to a different question in the survey. That question addressed visibility across a range of stakeholder types and six of the seven factors scored comparatively much lower than

most of the other questions posed in the survey – the exception being EDICs' visibility vis-à-vis other EDICs in their own country.

Whatever the reality, in interviews there was general view of needing or wanting to do more, but not having the budget to do more, or having to think 'outside the box' to do so – which is, of course, not necessarily a bad thing in itself.

The challenge EDICs feel they face emerges clearly in other questions in the survey. Of eight aspects that might impact on their ability to provide information or impact on target groups which were offered as challenges in the EDIC Managers' survey, finding interesting ways to engage with target groups (79%) and visibility / awareness among target groups (78%) were the most cited by a significant margin. "A specific budget for publicity / to raise awareness that we exist" was the second most important item in list of ways in which EDICs communication activities could be improved. It came just behind better guidance on 'hot topics', which is, of course, indirectly a barrier to visibility because EDICs do not feel able to provide information or communicate on these.

One low-cost way to obtain visibility explored with the EDICs during interviews was being **'signposted' by other organisations**. Generally, EDICs do not have a strategy for this, or where they do, have not had much success. They feel they need more top-down support from the EC and national authorities (who are not currently recognised as being key EDIC partners) in raising their visibility in this way, i.e. other EU networks, and national / regional stakeholders are not receiving political messages about signposting being a two-way street, rather than Europe Direct merely signposting others.

The importance of word-of-mouth

EDICs still **rely heavily on word-of-mouth** for visibility. Feedback from the EDIC users in the focus groups is that word-of-mouth referrals were a significant element everywhere, although they had also heard of EDICs via universities, had been contacted by EDICs, the Rep or an event. Non-users were generally non-users because they had never heard of EDICs. Bulgaria, where 2 of the 8 focus group members had heard of EDICs, was an exception. The EDICs were less visible than Europa or the EDCC, though it must be added that all three had relatively low levels of visibility. There were only 3 of the 7 focus group countries where 1, 2 and 3 of the 7-9 participants respectively had heard of Europa and four where 1 (x2), 2 or 3 had heard for the EDCC.

"Word of mouth" also emerged strongly among respondents to the public consultation, since family / friends and colleagues were the second most important way of having found EDICs, just behind search engines. In fact, if being referred to EDICs by another organisation, such as a university, is added in, word-of-mouth of all forms come out in front. Some form of outreach (going to an event or an EDIC going into an organisation) came next. Shopfront visibility also played a role, since living or working close to an EDIC was the fourth most important way in which respondents have found out about an EDIC. The Internet, including Europa, and social media, or traditional media played far lesser roles.

Focus group participants (whose views were, of course, unconstrained by budgetary considerations) felt that EDICs needed to advertise on national TV, in local newspapers and on the radio, via Internet banners and campaigns on university campuses.

The role of physical presence

A key question is the role that a **physical presence** plays in promoting **visibility**. Many interviewees see the justification for a physical presence not in the number of personal callers (though many interviewees feel strongly that it is important to have this facility available however few these are), but believe that a physical presence per se enhances visibility. The condition is that the EDIC should be in a central, 'shopfront' location.

They also see the physical presence as sending an important political message, and stress that to cut back on the physical or 'front-office' presence in the current climate of Euroscepticism would send the wrong political message. There may be a risk that by cutting back on physical presence, some host structures that put a considerable effort into supporting EDICs could cut back their own activity in the area of European affairs. Some argue that having wide geographical coverage is also in itself important for visibility.

Any such move would also run contrary to the results of the open public consultation, in which "a local centre in my area where I can go and meet an expert / advisor" was felt to be the best approach. This could be difficult to ignore even though respondents may not realise what that would cost. That was followed by "an email helpdesk" (thus de facto, "via the European institutions' websites", "a free helpline", "a national centre, where I can go and meet an expert/advisor" and only last "social media (i.e. Twitter, Facebook)".

There was a general feeling among NCs, EDIC Managers and host structures that merely having someone based locally without them being accessible to the public at predetermined times would detract from visibility. However, we cannot discount the possibility that EDIC Managers were to some extent motivated by fear of losing their jobs if that happened.

Other visibility arguments made in support of EDICs having their own clearly defined premises was continuity of identity when hosting events and as a focal point in supporting Reps' activity away from the capital, e.g. for press visits.

Even though events are regarded as important for visibility, there was frequently a difficulty in perceiving that visibility could be achieved by outreach (and online) activity alone – irrespective of whether there is a physical presence or not.

That being said, there are some EDICs which have successfully adopted a 'back-office' model – and there are models other than that of one EDIC per region and one host structure per EDIC, but these are regarded as exceptions and there is a knowledge gap in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of different and alternative models. While some host structures believe strongly in having an EDIC and put up significant sums of co-finance and contributions in kind over and above the minimum, there is clearly also a risk of a loss of identity, and indeed host structures see the EDIC funding as a way of de facto funding an addition to their own staff. EDICs do not appear to see their online presence (i.e. their websites or social media) as a significant source of visibility.

EDICs in fact appear to be torn in two directions. The need to manage a physical presence and running off-site activities were seen by 64% of respondents in the EDIC Managers' survey as having a significant impact on EDICs' ability to do their job.

The role of host structures

EDICs and host structures comply with the basic requirements on using the logo and name on all communication materials, but appear often to stop at that in terms of promoting EDIC visibility as such. In some cases, there is competition between the EDIC and the host structure for visibility where there are shared premises or activities. On balance, nevertheless, association with the host structure is seen as an advantage by both, and can sometimes bring concrete advantages, e.g. in terms of visibility via host structure communication products, ranging from newsletters to radio and TV stations.

The role of HQ / the Reps

Many interviewees also expressed a wish for HQ / the Reps to give them more support with visibility – as some already do – by being available for their activities either in the absolute or in association with being in their region for other reasons. There is a correlation between this and the potential for a more consistent relationship with all relevant DGs. We have commented elsewhere on the absence of an 'EDIC reflex' within the Commission. This applies at every level. Just as when Rep staff travelling within their own Member State do not always think about synergies with the EDICs, nor do staff from Headquarters. No doubt, there are time and budgetary pressures at play, but these are only contributing factors.

Promotion through synergies with other stakeholders and networks

EDICs are expected to develop strategic partnerships at local, regional or (inter)national level, building on the networking experience of the partner / host structure, and to focus on multipliers and key stakeholders as a

means of maximising the efficiency and impact of the EDIC's activities. We understand the multipliers and key stakeholders as being the other institutions, and other EU networks (including other EDICs) and the media.

These are, **on the whole, not activities to which EDICs attach high importance**, and we note that they are part of the EDICs' mission but not separately identified in any of the modules (with the exception of media). When asked to rank 15 activities by level of importance, active contacts with local journalists and media came in at number 6, cooperating with other EDICs was number 8, and numbers 11-14 were cooperating actively with other EU networks, working with MEPs, active contacts with local and regional politicians, and working with the EPIO. (Last was working with local businesspeople; activities with schools were number one.)

This was a multiple choice question, so there was no intrinsic reason why each activity should not have been ranked as equally important. In practice, all the questions except the one about the media had below average ratings.

It would be wrong to generalise, however it is clear from interviews and Annual Action Programmes that some EDICs do nevertheless place a high focus on cooperation with local and regional networks in order to maximise their visibility. The answer from the NCs on visibility in their local communities quoted in the previous section illustrates this. This cooperation goes well beyond their host structures to **a wide range of national organisations** providing information on EU affairs, including local and regional government and parliamentary structures, and NGOs. We did not discover any particular issues in relation to this cooperation, which is generally regarded as efficient. However, based on the sample of Annual Actions Programmes we looked at, EDICs do not necessarily take a strategic approach to this, explaining their choices and what the cooperation / co-branding achieves in terms of their objectives.

Working with EPIOs

Moreover, while EDICs may rank cooperation with the EPIO as a relatively low priority overall, they are sometimes closely involved with them. There are only two other "networks" with which they cooperate more closely (national Erasmus+ agencies and EURES). However, as they only cooperate "frequently" with the EPIO in 26% of cases, this means that nearly three-quarters only cooperate with the EPIO occasionally (40%), rarely (26%) or never (7%), with 2% saying this is not applicable.

This data illustrates in fact the very wide divergence we found in terms of the relationship with the EPIO. We came across some instances when EDICs seemed to feel that cooperating with the EPIO was an imposition, even though EDICs are supposed to cooperate with the EP, where feasible, under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding governing this. In others, there was frictionless and mutually beneficial **collaboration between EDICs and the EPIOs.** Synergies are exploited, for example, through joint participation in radio and TV shows, thereby giving the EU as a whole a greater say in public debates, as well as organizing events attended by MEPs.

There is some caution on the part of EDICs, however, as they fear being drawn into the party-political positions of their local MEPs. The extent of cooperation with local MEPs was, moreover, highly variable, and again by some welcomed and smooth and by others seen as a burden.

The general view appears to be that there is scope for closer cooperation, but that the picture is highly variable. This is a factor not only of the extent to which EDICs are happy to cooperate, but also of the level of interest in EPIOs in developing synergies with EDICs.

Working with other institutions

There is **very little cooperation with the other institutions**, notably the Committee of the Regions, whose local representatives would seem like natural partners, or with the European Economic and Social Committee. A Committee of the Regions (CoR) resolution passed in June 2016 has committed the CoR to closer cooperation with the EDICs under the CoR's current communication strategy, but that strategy in fact only mentions EDICs in passing.

Working with other EU networks

Of the **other EU networks** EDICs cooperate most frequently with **Erasmus+ national agencies** (41% have frequent contacts) and **EURES** (38% of respondents). Circa one quarter of EDICs collaborate frequently with the EPIOs, Eurodesks and Enterprise Europe Network, followed closely by Europe for Citizens' contact points, i.e. the cooperation is strongly oriented towards organisations providing funding and / or services for young people. Far fewer collaborate with the European Consumer Centres (just 8% frequently). Networks with whom EDICs hardly ever cooperate include FIN-NET, Euraxess, EUGO and various contact or coordination points dealing with qualifications.

25 of the 27 NCs who responded to the survey collaborate with other EU networks in the form of annual conferences, workshops, training and joint events and campaigns for all EU networks and information providers, but several respondents felt that this type of collaboration was often difficult given the differences in interests and target groups, as well as competition between networks. Nevertheless, in the survey, all but one of the 27 respondent NCs was in favour of closer cooperation. The overlap and competition is something which EC interviewees admit exists, but recognise that it should not exist if the EDIC network was signposting to other networks to the extent that is foreseen in the mission statement.

Working with the EDCC

When examining the **collaboration between the EDICs and the EDCC**, EU level interviewees felt that the two structures share the same mission which is *to respond to citizens* and they should be complementary rather than compete, with the EDCC having the preponderant, and maybe the sole, responsibility for answering questions. Interviewees at fieldwork level were less convinced as they believe that the EDCC cannot offer the personalised guidance or information based on local knowledge that EDICs can, and that ringing a Brussels-based call centre makes the service seem too remote. Levels of referrals are low (8.11%), with EDICs handling more than three-quarters of inquiries themselves according to the EDIC Managers' survey, and only 19% says they work "frequently" with the EDCC.

Nevertheless, some felt that there is untapped potential for more cooperation, including access to the EDCC database. We understand this is under consideration but that it would have to be phased in for technical reasons. Twenty-three of the 27 respondents to the NCs survey favoured closer cooperation with the EDCC. (They were also generally in favour of closer cooperation with the European Documentation Centres – 20 of 27, but their answers were less clear-cut in relation to Team Europe, with 14 favouring closer cooperation and 13 opposed.)

Working with the media

Interacting with the media is part of the EDICs' mission and they are expected to be proactive in establishing contacts and obtaining coverage. This applies irrespective of whether they opt for the local media module. EDIC Managers told us, however, that it is increasingly difficult to **interact with the media**. The larger the city in which they are based, the more difficult it is felt to be, a challenge recognised by the EU officials interviewed. Some EDICs do not have staff with the necessary expertise. Many EDICs battle on, nevertheless, but some have put this into the 'too-hard' basket, including dropping the local media module for that reason.

Host structures can be a help and a hindrance in working with the media. They can enable EDICs to have access to the media that they otherwise do not have, in terms of contacts, products targeting the media or access to programmes which they produce or in which they participate. On the other hand, some do not feel able to share contacts or actually place constraints on the EDIC in the use of social media because of their own in-house rules.

There was a consensus among the interviewees that EDICs should be encouraged to be proactive in contacting journalists and establish good working relations with the media. This was seen as being beneficial also for the EC Reps since EDICs could be a conduit to spread the EC's messages to regions where they would otherwise not get heard. However, it was also recognised that this is specialist work which many EDICs do not have the right staff to carry out. It was suggested that it would be fruitful for Reps to invest in media training for EDICs and in closer relationships with EDICs on press work. The wording of the Guidelines to NCs on this at the moment is

very generic, i.e. "Involvement of the REP's press officer as regards EDICs' contact with the media would be beneficial."

This goes to the heart of a lack of clarity about the Commission's expectations in terms of media relations. On the one hand, EDICs are not allowed to speak on behalf of the Commission, while, on the other, they are expected to develop relationships with the media, a specialist function. If they are successful, journalists may well come to identify them as the first port of call on any issue relating to the EU. This may include 'hot topics' with a local impact, where the local dimension makes it arguably easier in some ways for the EDIC to respond than the Rep. Migration is an obviously topical example. Obtaining coverage for their own news means building lasting relationships with local media, and creating a 'win-win' situation where they are seen as an authoritative conduit. For the time being, however, the difficulty of visibility vis-à-vis the media appears to be greater than the challenges of having to deal with difficult questions. Nevertheless, there is an underlying dilemma that is only partially addressed by the stipulation that sensitive issues be referred to the Rep.

The role of branding

When EDICs in their current form were established in 2003 and several existing approaches to providing information were merged into a single structure, use of the Internet was in its infancy and it could reasonably be argued that retaining a link with the prior identity of some EDICs was more important for visibility than a single national or European identity. Cross-border cooperation among EDICs was also less developed. As a result, even with in a single Member State, it was not particularly relevant that EDICs were not all called Europe Directs.

The time appears to have come, however, to revisit this issue, both because online searching has become so prevalent and because key target groups, such as students and young people, are mobile within their own country and beyond borders. This should justify looking into **branding** each EDIC as a Europe Direct (or with a new name), and more homogenous branding across all communication and information products, including email addresses, website URLs, web pages and websites, Facebook addresses and Twitter handles.

This would also be the opportunity to take two others steps: (i) ensure that all EDICs are now called Europe Direct rather than Houses of Europe and other alternatives, and that this is nomenclature is reflected in website domain names, as the current one is based on the concept of a reactive function of providing information, and (ii) to draw up a graphic charter. In fact, two graphic charters are needed, one for independent activity and one for activity with other stakeholders.

There are models for all this within the EC.

Conclusion

Visibility constitutes one of the main challenges for the EDIC network. The main contributors to visibility are walk-in facilities, word-of-mouth and events. This illustrates how low the visibility of EDICs is: a shopfront location in a city centre and / or word-of-mouth can by definition only reach a limited number of citizens, and events can only reach limited numbers.

There is strong support for continuing the physical presence, but many EDICs themselves acknowledge that it is difficult to combine physical availability during a certain number of hours with outreach activities.

It might be tempting to cut back further on the physical presence in order to focus on outreach (and online) activity, this carries risks in the current Eurosceptic climate and could send a political message to host structures of a weakening of EU interest at local level, even if this is not intended.

If it were to be decided nevertheless to put much more emphasis on outreach at the expense of the reactive function of answering questions, it would be important for this to be strategic, both in terms of prioritisation of target groups, having the right materials available for those groups, and reaching new audiences and

stakeholders, not just the 'usual suspects'.

Successful alternative models exist within the current network, for example host structures with antennae, but they are regarded as exceptions to a norm of one EDIC per region and 1 EDIC + 1 host structure, and there is a need for a better understanding of what exists and the pros and cons.

The network's lack of visibility is mitigated through cooperation with host structures, other EU institutions and other local, national and EU networks. EDICs are more visible to local and regional stakeholders, and their cooperation with these, and with universities, makes a contribution to enhancing their visibility.

EDICs and their host structures can sometimes compete for visibility where the latter have a complementary or overlapping activity, but on balance the relationships are synergistic and mutually beneficial.

A more structured approach to cooperation with local and regional stakeholders is needed. Such cooperation exists without question, but more could be done to justify choices and target groups (as part of a wider exercise of giving EDICs a clearer steer on what is expected of them.)

Erasmus+, EURES and the EPIO are the EU entities with whom EDICs work most closely, followed by Eurodesks and the European Enterprise Network. This is consistent with the EDICs' focus on youth and funding opportunities, and their mandate to work with EPIOs, but the relatively low numbers who work frequently with these networks might be thought to be surprising. Where EDICs are cooperating with EPIOs and other networks, this is fruitful.

There also evidence of EDICs competing with or duplicating activity of other EU networks. Moreover, cooperation often consists only of referring questions without any thought-out approach to joined-up promotion and what that could achieve.

Levels of cooperation and referrals with the EDCC are low, lower than would seem desirable and logical. This reflects mixed views among EDICs on the quality of answers provided by the EDCC, which is interesting as the EDCC is subject to a quality control and EDICs are not. There is also a perception that citizens see the EDCC as remote. There is room for more cooperation between the two on how they could learn from each other.

All cooperation needs to be a two-way street. That is not always the case, including on the part of the EPIOs. In the case of the other networks, there is no clear top-down message from the Commission across all DGs on expectations in terms of cooperation. In terms of cooperation with representatives of the Committee of the Regions, who would seem like natural partners, flesh needs to be put on the bones of the declarations of good intent on the part of the CoR.

Interacting with the media is a major challenge, particularly in larger cities. It is part of the EDICs' mission, yet the basic module only deals with feedback on media coverage while the local media module is an option. If there is a belief that there is a role in relation to local media that Reps cannot play, then there is a contradiction to address. In addition, more attention needs to be paid, on the one hand, to the fact that media relations requires specialists and, on the other, the fact that to work effectively, the media relations specialist in an EDIC should enjoy close relations with press officers in the Rep and in the line DGs of the Commission. This may require thinking outside the box given the number of EDICs.

There are also some relatively low-cost ways in which visibility could be enhanced:

- Attaching more importance to ensuring that other relevant organisations and networks signpost the existence and services of EDICs;

- Developing an EDIC mind-set across all staff in the Reps and across Headquarters.

Revisiting and homogenising the branding across the network and all its communication channels consistent with

a world of online search, and mobile audiences, such as students and young job-seekers.

5.4   Channels and tools

6.   How effective is the promotion of the EDIC network and what more could be done and by whom to increase visibility inside and outside the Commission?

This chapter considers visibility from the perspective of the channels and tools that are used to achieve visibility, as follows:

- Most effective (considered most effective) tools by target group;
- Extent that geographic spread allows optimal outreach;
- Suggestions for improvement.

Source of evidence
■ Desk research
■ Interviews
■ On-line surveys
■ Mystery shopping
■ Public consultation

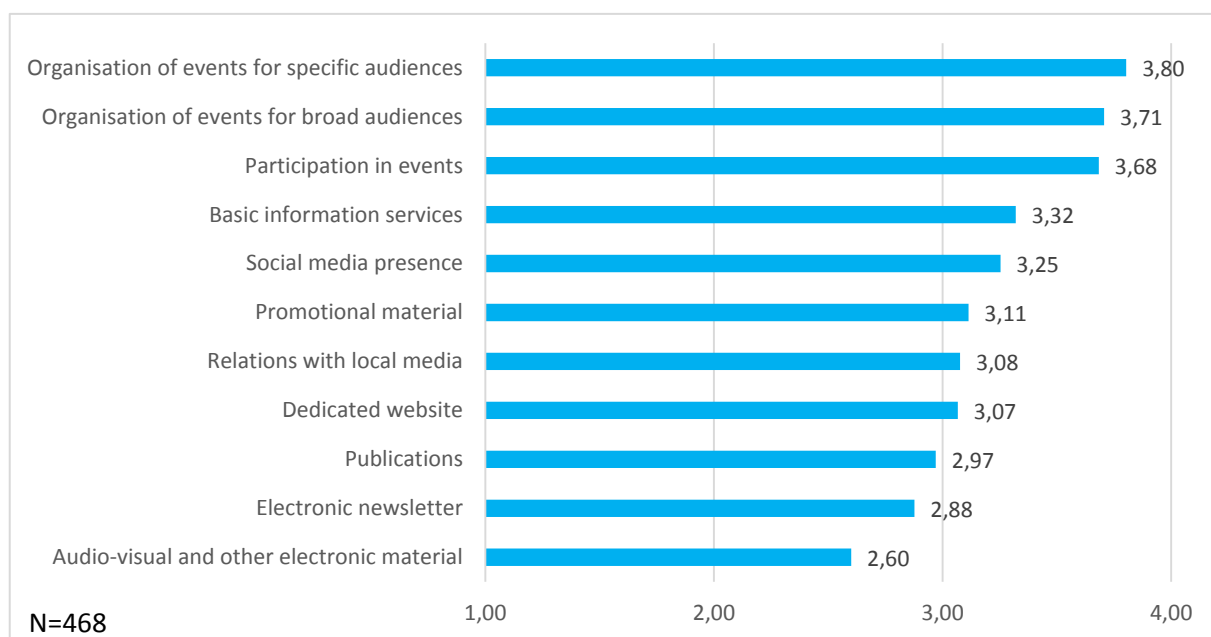There are several levels of channel and tool:

- A dedicated webpage on the EUROPA website (http://europa.eu/contact/meet-us/index_en.htm) with an interactive map with all EDICs (+ the European Documentation Centres and Team Europe);

- Links from the website of the Rep;

- Publications sent by the Publications Office or direct from DGs on topics of importance to the Commission; EDICs are a major user of print publications from the Publications Office, but there are no publications produced specifically with EDICs in mind (though a significant number are intended to be useful to citizens and there is to some extent coordination between DG COMM – the publisher – on this);

- Organisation of or participation in events; at least one of these modules is required;

- A web page, either of their own or within the host structure website, or a website or their own – depending on whether the EDIC has opted or not for the web module. In the basic information module, a web page is all that is required;

- Social media, if they have opted for the social media module. They are free to use the social media channels of their choice; social media is still a relatively unpopular module based on 2015 reporting, and significantly less widely used than the website module;

- Promotional material they have produced themselves under the dedicated module or the event modules;[18]

- Audio-visual materials EDICs have taken from the Commission (these are 'pulled' rather than 'pushed') and their own audio-visual products, if they have opted for this module – which is the least used of the modules.

Types of tools considered most effective

As shown in the Figure below, events are considered to be the most effective channels and tools for EDICs by far. This includes participation in and organisation of events for specific and broad audiences, which were given a weighted average rating of 3.68, 3.71 and 3.80 out of 4 respectively. Providing basic information services and having a social media presence were considered to be quite efficient compared to other tools, with ratings of 3.32 and 3.25 against an average rating of 3.22.

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[18] We encountered different interpretations in Representations as to whether event-related promotional material should be funded from the promotional or events modules.

Figure 3: Which of the following channels and tools has your EDIC found to be most efficient (in terms of reaching your target audience)? (weighted average)

Channel/Tool	Weighted average
Organisation of events for specific audiences	3,80
Organisation of events for broad audiences	3,71
Participation in events	3,68
Basic information services	3,32
Social media presence	3,25
Promotional material	3,11
Relations with local media	3,08
Dedicated website	3,07
Publications	2,97
Electronic newsletter	2,88
Audio-visual and other electronic material	2,60

N=468

Not all EDICs use all modules. Thus, if respondents said that an EDIC did not find a module to be efficient, but was not using it, it is to be hoped that the response meant they have taken a considered view that this is not an efficient means of reaching their audience. We cannot rule out, however, that they deemed it to be inefficient simply because they do not use it.

The same is true of local media, which is dealt with in detail in the previous chapter. There must be a suspicion that EDICs do not find it effective because they find it difficult.

Which tool for which target group?

When asked to differentiate **effectiveness by target group**, all channels rated highly, i.e. they were considered effective by more than 50% for 16-25 year olds, job-seekers and the retired. The only figures below 50% were those which are obviously less relevant to under 16's, such as the walk-in centre or electronic newsletters.

Outreach tools tended to score more highly than reactive tools, but this was relative, given that more than 70% saw answering phone and email inquiries as effective in reaching jobseekers and the 16-25's, and more than 60% said that in relation to the same group in terms of having a walk-in centre.

In the case of the 16-25's, every outreach channel or tool scored higher than email and phone except newsletters, but these outranked the walk-in centre with this group. In the case of the job-seekers only events scored more than the reactive channels, suggesting that personal contact is particularly valuable to this group. But there is overlap in EDICs' assistance to this group, which is already served by the EURES network. In interviews, we found a perception that a physical presence meets the needs of older people; this is borne out by the results of the survey in relation to retirees, but the reactive functions are again outscored by events. In both cases, however, the results should be seen in the context of the low level of walk-in activity overall.

There are also differences which seem at odds with the overall ranking of channels and tools, bearing in mind what the EDICs say are their main target groups.

The individual target group with which EDICs interact the most is young people aged 16-25 – 80% say they interact frequently with this group. It is not inconsistent, therefore, that more than 80% say that events / presentations are one of the most effective channels for reaching this group. It is, on the other hand, unexpected

that 97% say that social media is the most effective channel for reaching the 16-25 age group, 88% say audio-visual materials are among the most effective means and 87% say this of a dedicated website because these are given much lower rankings in terms of their effectiveness as tools. The perception of a high level effectiveness of promotional materials (including give-aways) among children and young people is also not totally consistent with the rating in the figure above.

It is not possible to know why the results show these inconsistencies, but it may be that the answers reflect theory more than practice.

Teachers are the professional group with which EDICs interact most – with 71% saying they interact with them frequently. Promotional materials are seen as the most effective means of reaching them, followed by audio-visual materials, and only just behind that events. In this case too, there is something of a discrepancy between the overall rating of the effectiveness of different tools and these numbers, particularly in relation to audio-visual materials.

For entrepreneurs and business representatives as well as the academia, EDIC Managers indicated that the most effective channels and tools were the organisation and presence at events and answering questions by email or over the phone. Electronic newsletters were deemed effective for public administrations.

The role of websites

A website has today become the core communication tool of any organisation, and this is recognised by the EDICs. All the EDICs visited and those tested via the mystery shopping exercise had a web presence, either independently or as part of a host structure website. They generally had clear Europe Direct branding, but were not always prominent when they were part of a host structure site.

The type of information provided varies considerably. Some succeed in having a very local focus, while others contain general information about the EU, which overlaps with other information available on Europa and the websites of the Reps. They provide news and information on events, and links to social media and useful sites, and to key documents.

Some have direct responsibility for their web page/s; others rely on a webmaster / community manager in the host structure. This has advantages in terms of efficient use of resources, but disadvantages in that Europe Direct may not always be the host structure's priority.

However, the frequency of updating, the ability to provide information tailored to the local area, the relevance of the information to the Commission's priorities, the look-and-feel in terms of what could be expected from a website in 2015, signposting of other EU services, the use of visual and audio-visual material and the availability of sections by target groups (teachers, media, young people etc.), which are standard website good practice, were **highly variable**.

In the current circumstances, this variability is unavoidable as EDICs are largely free to devote the time and attention to the website that they see fit providing they can justify the expenditure on the website module where they have opted for it. In some instances, they may be constrained by a host structure's own website design and the importance, or otherwise, they attach to this as a tool. Some have a web page some have a website, a distinction which would not be obvious to the average user and can create an impression of heterogeneity by definition. Finally, there is inevitably duplication in the generic information they provide about the EU and in the signposting they offer.

As a result, the case for each EDIC having their own website appears to be weak, both in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. This is an activity that lends itself to be centralised and independent of host structures, but also distinct.

It has already been proven that **the centralised model can work**: the Austrian EDICs have a single website with a community manager within the Rep to stimulate EDICs to provide content. Each EDIC has its own page that can be reached with a single click.

We do not see a case for simply adding EDIC activities to the Rep websites. There is a risk that it would require too many clicks for citizens to find what they were looking for and that, as in the case of host structures, other priorities on the main website might push EDICs to the back of the queue for the webmaster's time.

At the same time, there is a strong case for host structures still to carry a single web page devoted to the EDIC and what it does, with a direct link to that EDICs page/s of the central website. This is of benefit to both. It would be difficult to impose total homogeneity on the host structures, but a way needs to be found to have some degree of commonality on core content.

The role of social media

On **social media**, EDICs tend to have Facebook pages and / or Twitter accounts, mainly to reach the general public, and in some cases as a means of reaching the local media. Some EDICs are managing to generate relatively large numbers of friends / followers on their Facebook pages and via Twitter. In some cases, EDICs use Instagram and YouTube.

As with the relations with the websites, the time and effort they put into a professional level of community management and a strategic approach to social media was found to be highly variable. There are several contributing factors:

- Conservatism / lack of the right skills mix in the EDIC staffing – with EDICs often relying on young trainees and interns for this, with an evident potential for loss of continuity. In the EDIC Managers' survey, 36% reported as the most useful resources provided by the **host structure** to them the 'communication expertise (online and social media);

- Regulatory constraints: in Italy, public entities (i.e. host structures) cannot have Facebook accounts;

- Variability in access to the Internet, although this is becoming less important, particularly among young audiences;

- Variability in the way and the extent to which social media are used. This particularly applies to Twitter, which in some Member States remains primarily a tool for reaching the media and policymakers.

The number of likes and followers varies considerably, including within countries, as the mystery shopping exercise showed. A difference in a ratio of 400 to 1 in the number of Facebook likes or 50 to 1 in the number of Twitter followers cannot be totally explained by differences in the nature of EDICs, their location / geographic reach, and suggests excessive heterogeneity and different levels of commitment.

Interviewees did regard social media as an important tool, both for raising awareness among citizens of the existence of the EDIC network and as a means of communicating with EDICs' existing users. Results from focus groups confirmed that many **EDIC users** were following their EDIC on Facebook and Twitter (as well as being interested in thematic newsletters and news flashes, and at the same time liking the idea that there was someone to talk to in more detail.)

Unlike the 'pull' activity that a website represents, social media is a 'push' activity, which lends itself very well to very local tailoring. It is also not 'rocket science'. It is not as complex as website updating – though the complexity of that should not be overstated with modern tools. It is an activity which should be within the competence of EDIC staff, particularly if more importance is attached in future to their communication and outreach skills.

Host structure social media can be used in support of EDICs' activity, but EDIC visibility risks being diluted if the EDIC does not have its own accounts. This does not mean that EDICs should be left totally on their own to run these accounts, even if they apparently feel equipped to do so (either directly or via the host structure) since having a "content coordinator who provides ideas for new content, tweets, Facebook posts, etc." ranked only 9th of 14 suggested options for improvements in the EDIC Managers' survey.

A community manager within the Rep, who would also run the centralised website, could assist with visual materials and content, including content on citizen-oriented campaigns run by DGs which tend to be crowded out of the Reps' social media.

The role of publications

A total of 63% of EDICs respondents stated that the relevance of **EC publications** to people in their locality has a significant impact in their performance. The NCs agreed: 25 respondents indicated that **publications and other materials** were very useful in introducing the EU to young audiences and raising awareness on EU policies.

There was a general view that print publications still have their place in an online world, particularly in schools and universities, and in support of events. Many EDICs complained about receiving fewer and fewer print publications and the relevance of the publications they do receive, though others were happy with what the EU Bookshop has to offer.

Some felt that there is a **mismatch** between the material they need and the material that they receive, both in quantity and length. There are too many long publications and not enough short leaflets and factsheets. Almost all felt strongly that print publications are still important.

EDICs in this respect are coming into conflict with the pressures on the Publications Office and DGs to cut print runs and rely on downloads. If EDICs are not to receive printed materials, then they feel a need for a 'print-on-demand' budget for printing.

EDIC Managers see a major gap in what the Commission produces in terms of materials for **schools or young people** in general (but differentiating between the needs of different age groups). Where the material is suitable, the minimum quantity needed is the size of a school class and that is not always available. They also need material for the teachers. This is related to the **broader issue** addressed elsewhere in this report of the heavy emphasis on targeting schools being a fact but not clearly enunciated as a policy priority on the part of the Commission.

As a result of this mismatch, and a perception at least on the part of some EDICs that other material is not suitable for their needs, arrives too late, is not available (or not available soon enough) in their language, or not in large enough quantities, there appears to be a considerable amount of local output. This is of variable quality in visual terms and there is no systematic oversight of the accuracy and quality of the content, or duplication, or suitability for the audience – producing educational materials is a specialist activity, for example.

It is not clear that using Commission publications is regarded as the default mode by EDICs or that NCs, among their many other tasks, have a real handle on this activity, and still less that there is any quality or content control from Rep staff with communication expertise, whether that be the NC or someone else.

The role of audio-visual materials

EDICs also see a **mismatch** between what is available from the Commission (and the EP) in terms of audio-visual materials and what they would need. When asked about the elements that would improve EDICs' communication activities, "access to a bank of AV tools, games, on-line products in their own languages" was ranked 3rd in a list of 14 suggested options (behind better information on 'hot topics' and an awareness-raising budget).

While there are some mechanisms for establishing what publications interest EDICs, audio-visual materials appear to be a neglected area. This possibly accounts for the discrepancy highlighted in the introduction to this section between the low ranking given to audio-visual materials as an efficient way of communicating and the very high rating it is given as a means of reaching two key target audiences: schoolchildren and young people.

Conclusion

Outreach activities, and particularly events, are overall seen as the most effective way of reaching all target audiences, but reactive functions, i.e. answering questions from those who write, email and stop by are nevertheless felt to be important.

Online channels, including social media, are perceived to be an efficient means of reaching the target groups, and 16-25 year olds, in particular but are by no means limited to this group. However, there is a discrepancy between the nominal importance attached to social media and EDICs ability to harness these media in an effective way to support their outreach

Together with other results, it suggests that some EDICs attach much more importance to the use of these technologies than others. They often rely on young trainees and interns to online activities, which jeopardises continuity and a strategic approach. Examples of the latter are the exception.

Analysis of websites and social media illustrates the different levels of commitment to what it is no longer appropriate to call "new technologies." There is considerably variability in the quality of graphics and content, frequency of updating etc. as well as duplication of basic information across the EU on websites. This goes beyond any differences in access to the Internet or consumer habits in social media use.

The same issues of variable quality apply to publications that EDICs produce themselves because they feel that their needs are not met by the publications available from the Publications Office.

The major, but not only, area of mismatch is between the focus of EDICs on schools and the availability of publications for this group. The result is almost a plethora of self-published publications which are not subject to even light-handed quality and content control on the part of staff in the Rep with communication expertise. Money could be saved if more attention were paid to this mismatch than is currently the case.

Being able to call on the resources of the host structure for expertise in communication, including online products and publications, is efficient and essential for a number of EDICs, but it can impose limits on the EDICs' freedom of action.

The support of host structures – and exposure of EDICs through their own communication channels and tools, including a web page about the EDIC - is valuable, but this should not be at the expense of a distinct identity / loss of visibility for the EDIC. That identity could be better safeguarded, money saved via the avoidance of duplication, and heterogeneity achieved through a centralised website of their own, on the Austrian model (and therefore with local pages), with a community manager within the Rep.

In the case of social media, there is a case for each EDIC to have their own accounts to push information out to meet local needs, but with the same community manager supporting the EDICs with visual, content and advice, and provide greater uniformity where appropriate. That community manager could also act as liaison in the case of citizen-oriented communication campaigns of DGs which sometimes have messages more suited to the EDICs' target groups than the Reps'.

Communication is increasingly visual and EDICs recognise the importance of audio-visual materials in the absolute, but are not producing tools of their own or finding what they need in the Commission "toolkit". More attention needs to be paid to this in future.

5.5 Target group satisfaction

> **7. To what extent were target groups satisfied with the level and type of service that is available / that they have received?**

To answer this question the following elements were considered:

- Levels of user satisfaction / dissatisfaction;

- Aspects that users consistently agree would enhance their experience.

The imperative to measure user satisfaction was first described in the 2015 EDIC Guidelines: *"The EDIC should … seek citizens' feedback as to the level of satisfaction with the service provided...".*

The standard EDIC way of measuring user satisfaction is through the user satisfaction survey, which is a simple tool based on a small number of questions which can easily be applied to all EDICs because it is available in all official languages. All EDICs are invited to promote this link among their users, or to help them fill in the survey after providing a service. The overall **feedback coming from the satisfaction survey is generally positive** (the majority of replies range between the entries "Satisfied" and "Very Satisfied"). Although there is evidence that not all EDICs are using the satisfaction survey and NCs suggest that some are not measuring satisfaction at all.

Open public consultation

The public consultation survey provides another source of evidence with regards to target group satisfaction. According to the public consultation, **88% of respondents who have been in contact with the centre are largely satisfied** and rate all of the different services on offer well. Only 6% of respondents were dissatisfied with their EDIC. When citizens make use of an EDIC more than once, this can also be considered to be an indicator of satisfaction. If citizens are unhappy with an EDIC the first time they use it they are unlikely to return. Taking this into account, the public consultation indicates that (59%) of respondents have been in contact with the EDIC in their community, locality or region more than once*.*

86% of respondents agreed that their EDIC responded promptly to their enquiries. All users were satisfied that they were given the information that they had requested, as were a large majority of the public consultation respondents (85% agreed that their EDIC provided the information they were looking for). However, despite high levels of satisfaction, public consultation participants indicated that they **would like EDIC staff to be better trained and more competent**, as they expressed concerns about their unequal and sometimes poor performance. Nevertheless, when respondents from the public consultation were asked to rate particular aspects of the EDIC, the helpfulness of the staff was rated the highest, with 90% of respondents agreeing with this.

There are some questions with regards to the reliability of the data, given that it can be observed that some of the respondents circa 20% of respondents were themselves working for EDICs. Also only 12% of respondents were aged under 25 - the group that EDICs consider as their main target group.

Focus groups

Feedback from the user focus group users was nearly unanimous that EDICs are active in their local area in spreading information. But users were **concerned that the number of EDICs was not sufficient and this was a key point also expressed in the groups with non-users**, meaning that not all parts of any country were

covered well enough. Some users were **concerned about staffing**, indicating that EDICs could easily become overwhelmed.

Feedback from EDIC users affirmed that EDICs were considered to be **experts who are highly responsive and provide reliable information in a clear and accessible manner.** Information requests sometimes seemed to start via email or telephone and then were followed up in person. This **personalised service and the fact that EDICs make time to listen was very much appreciated** by the users.

However, despite these results, there are some limitations and biases to the data which should be noted. Firstly, users who participated in the focus groups were selected with the help of EDICs, as there was no other mechanism for recruitment. Therefore, there is some inherent bias in their responses.

Ideas for improvements

As for ways in which users think that their experience of the service could be enhanced, certain suggestions were made by users to ensure better promotion of EDICs and make interaction and user experience easier. Among the main comments and observations made in both the public consultation and user focus groups, respondents suggested that **EDICs should increase their visibility by running advertising campaigns through various channels** such as TV, radio, media coverage, schools and social media. This would ensure that more people are made aware of EDICs and the centres can therefore reach a wider audience.

Another suggestion made by some respondents from the public consultation was in regards to the content and information which EDICs offer. It was suggested that **EDICs should provide more practical, specific and simple information on issues such as work, studying and moving abroad**. For example, one student respondent said that they would like more information on scholarship opportunities, with another respondent requesting more information on entry visas and residency permits in the EU.

Lastly, certain recommendations were made to improve the user experience and the quality of the services which users receive. There was **a demand for more detailed and accurate answers**, whilst others requested EDICs' to receive more consistent internal information from the DGs on areas such as funding opportunities and legal advice. Other areas for improvement included having resources in both English and the local language so that foreign residents can find it easier to understand, as well as **providing complaint mechanisms for citizens who are not satisfied with the information and / or service they have received** as emails from some EDICs are from a no-reply address.

It is interesting to note that most users from the focus groups tended to have many questions on a topic and were looking for **guidance rather than answers to one-off questions**. Additionally, the **mystery shopping exercise** highlighted that EDICs referred most questions to other sources of information, mainly on the internet, and systematically referred the "difficult customer" question on migration to the EDCC. In a very small number of cases, the EDICs did not ensure the follow-up on these referrals and the mystery shoppers did not receive an answer to their query.

Conclusion

According to the standard satisfaction survey and evidence from focus groups with EDIC users, EDIC users are satisfied with the level and type of service that they receive. They are concerned though that the availability of this service is very limited in each country and that very few people know that EDICs exist. Feedback suggests that the range of services is appropriate and users appreciate the personalised service. However, it has not been possible to assess the extent that simple signposting, which is likely to be the case for many enquiries (as suggested by the mystery shopping exercise) generates the same feeling of satisfaction among users.

EDICs are seen as highly responsive experts who provide reliable information in a clear and accessible manner. There is less satisfaction with EDICs' ability to answer more topical / sensitive issues, a problem which is attributed to the lack of guidance and information which they receive on these matters from the Commission. In

consequence there is a demand for more practical and specific information that relates to people's day to day lives, as well as the provision of a complaints mechanism when users are not satisfied with the information and / or service they have received.

5.6 Value-added in comparison to national, regional and local actors

> **8. Did EDICs generate results that could not have been achieved by national, regional and local actors alone?**

This question is intended to understand whether or not EDICs provide a service, which is not otherwise provided by national, regional or local level

actors. These 'actors' are understood as being advisors, and information and advice services that are supported through national funds, as opposed

to the networks of decentralised EU information services, which are supported through EU funding.

Source of evidence
■ EDIC Managers Survey
■ NC Survey
■ Focus groups
■ Desk research

Consideration of complementarity and possible overlap with other EU information services is discussed later in this report. The scope of this evaluation was to develop a detailed understanding of the EDIC network. It was not intended to examine all possible sources of EU information within the Member States. But it is recognised that there are organisations in the Member States that act as outlets for EU specific information, for example libraries, EU grants offices in universities and so on. The existence of local level EU sources is recognised in the Call for proposals, which indicates that organisations with at least two-years of experience in communicating to the public 'preferably with regards to the EU' are eligible to apply to act as host structures. As it was not possible to review national sources of EU information, this question considers the performance and content of EDIC services to assess whether or not the type of service / results that EDICs achieve could be achieved by non-EU actors.

One of the initial difficulties in this assessment relates to the use of results to assess whether or not EDICs provide a 'unique proposition' for information, engagement and advice on the EU. EDIC results are described in annual reports to the Reps and in monthly reporting via the Intranet. The ED Intranet facilitates a mixture of commentary and the collection of quantitative data or counts of activity, for example number of emails, number of telephone calls, etc. Whilst this information is useful to provide an overview of EDIC activities, it does not provide insights into outcomes and it is not feasible to compare 'results' in any quantifiable way any results that may be achieved by other sources. For this reason, it is necessary to consider the EDIC proposition in relation to qualitative feedback and evidence with regards to the type of content provided by EDICs.

Overlap with other organisations at national, regional and local level

There is some overlap with EU information provided by national, regional and local actors, which is highlighted both in the Call text and in the results of the EDIC Managers survey. The survey suggests that 46% of EDIC Managers considered that the activities, which they provide as an EDIC are to some extent overlapping. These results infer that EDICs strengthen some of the services already on offer by host structures. This is aligned with feedback from interviews with EDIC host structure representatives. Host structures indicated that hosting an EDIC often enables them to provide information on a broader range of topics, to reach additional audiences and to build new networks.

The results of the focus groups with users and non-users also highlight the existence of other sources of information that may in some ways duplicate EDIC activities. Non-users where asked where they would typically look for information with regards to healthcare issues in another EU country. The groups from different countries indicated that national authorities and parliaments and private organisations would be the first ports of call for information on healthcare abroad, mobility and EU rights online. This assertion seems to be connected to the fact that relatively speaking there are few EDICs in each country and most citizens do not know that EDICs exist. This being the case, it is logical that citizens are most likely to search on the internet / look to source information from a relevant national or local source.

Users provided some different insights into the added value of EDICs in comparison to national sources of information. They suggested that many users consider EDICs to be experts in EU matters and indicated that they are considered to be trusted advisors on the EU, who are able to provide much more reliable information than other local sources. Whilst there is no evidence to confirm this point, it seems likely that part of the trust that can be generated relates to the fact that EDICs are 'official', designated sources of EU information. Herein are the strength and added-value of EDICs.

EDICs have the backing and trust of the EU institutions. They are credible because they are sources of official EU information. They receive training from EC representatives and headquarters and have direct links to the institutions. They are provided with information about a very wide range of EU activities and initiatives which allows an overview of a wide range of information.

Conclusion

It is not possible to quantify the results achieved by EDICs beyond the number of interactions conducted. Any other feedback is not integrated in a structured systematic way to facilitate comparisons. The only real comparison of results relates to the measurement of satisfaction, but this indicator does not shed light on any improved or reduced service provided by EDICs in comparison to national, local and / or regional stakeholders.

There are other services within the Member States which provide information on the EU, but they cannot be reliably benchmarked against the services provided by EDICs. Anecdotal evidence and feedback from users confirms perceptions that EDICs offer a more credible and reliable advice than national, regional or local agencies and that the one-stop shop element is also an added-value because EDICs are able to provide information or at least point to sources about all aspects of the EU, whereas national services may be more focussed on a specific target group or topic (although this cannot be confirmed).

EDICs' main added value relates to the fact that they are perceived to represent the EC at local level. This cannot be claimed by national, regional and local actors.

5.7 EU funding impact on host structures

> **9. To what extent did EU-funding increase or change the type of activities that would normally be undertaken by host structures?**

This question really concerns the extent to which EDICs have added-value to what is already available at the national and local level. There are many ways to understand the concept of EU-added value, but it essentially relates to EU funding not duplicating activities or support that already exists within the Member States.

<table>
<tr><td>Source of evidence</td></tr>
<tr><td>■ EDIC Managers Survey
■ Interviews with EDIC Managers
■ Interviews with host structures</td></tr>
</table>

With the scope of this evaluation it was not been feasible to have a detailed view on host structures' non-EDIC funded activities. To answer this question we took into account information provided by EDIC Managers who responded to EDIC Manager survey (94% response rate). This is complemented by feedback via interviews with host structure representatives conducted during the country visits to 7 Member States, as well as evidence from users gathered via focus groups.

Complementarity with host structure activities

EDIC Managers were asked to describe the type of organisation that acts as host structure for their EDIC. Two specific questions were relevant to the pre-existing activities already carried out by host structures. As highlighted in the below chart, 13% of respondents to the question indicated that their association had been set up for the purposes of the current generation of EDICs. This means that the activities undertaken by these associations would not have been carried out if it was not for EDIC funding.

Figure 4: Was your association set up for purposes of responding to the call for the third generation of the EDIC network?

N=486
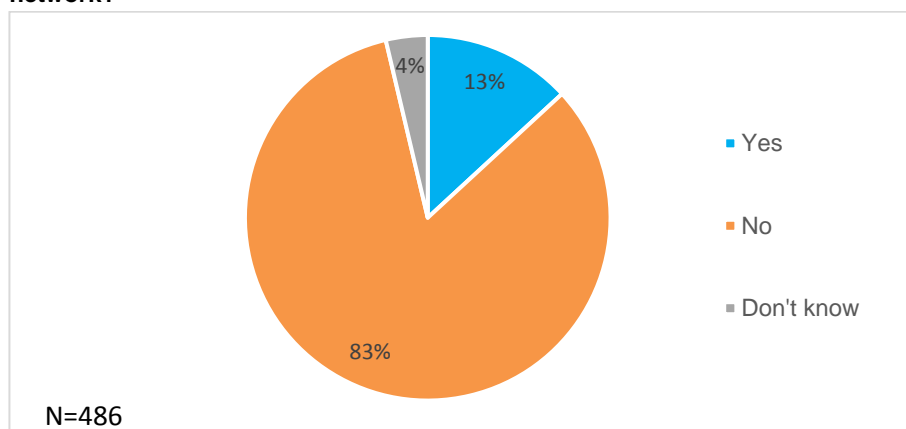
EDIC Managers were also asked to indicate the nature of their host structure according to a range of possible categories. The results indicated that 7% of respondents were hosted by an association that was set up to provide information on the EU. This result is somewhat inconsistent with the above chart, although it is within the reasonable margins of error, but together can be understood to confirm that for the majority of host structures providing information about the EU is not their core activity / organisational purpose. But that for at least one in 10

host structures hosting an EDIC is a complete change of activity because the association did not exist before or independently of the EDIC scheme.

To probe further on the question of complementarity, EDIC Managers were asked to confirm to what extent the activities of their host structure were aligned with the purpose / mission set for EDICs. The graph below highlights the responses provided.

Figure 5: EDIC Managers survey question on complementarity of EDIC services with those of the host structure
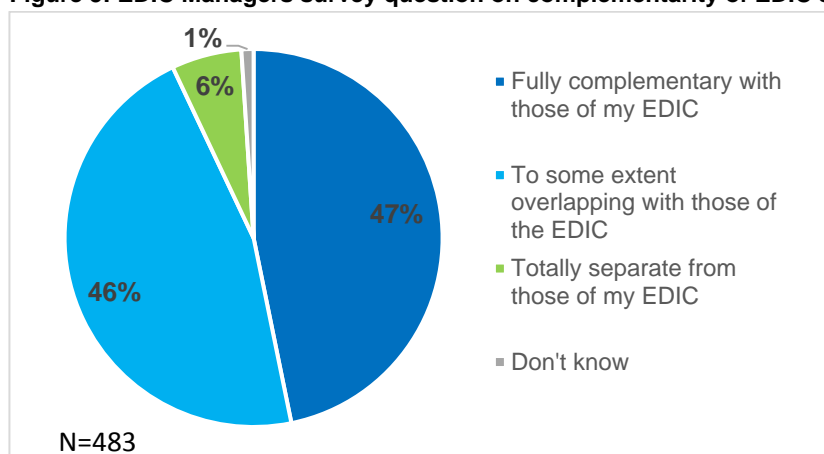
Just under half of respondents considered the activities of their host structure as **fully complementary** with those of their EDIC (47% of respondents). A similar proportion (46%) indicated that they were to some extent overlapping. This share of EDICs who indicated that their services are to some extent overlapping infers that many EDICs strengthen services, which are **already on offer** by these host structures. This could suggest that there are indeed synergies between hosts' and EDICs' activities, although (as argued in the previous evaluation question), this can also suggest that EDICs provide lower added value as hosts are already carrying out some of these services. This is in any case to be expected because the EDIC legal basis indicates that host structures must have the organisational capacity to show at least 2 years of proven experience in communicating with the public, preferably on issues relevant to EU policies. Only 6% of respondents thought that their host structure's activities were totally separate from those of their EDIC.

One of the concerns expressed by NCs was that EDIC Managers are overburdened by other priorities set by the host structures. Managers appear to be particularly at risk because in many cases this function is fulfilled by a number of staff because the legal requirements are for one full-time equivalent member of staff. With low levels of requests for information in some EDICs, it is possible that some EDIC full-time equivalent capacity is actually serving host structures **other existing needs.** In addition, there is also a possibility that when EDICs service a specific target audience, for example famers in relation for an agricultural host structure, the EDIC Manager is providing support related to host structure business as part of their EDIC role. This is a rather grey area and it is difficult to quantify this situation, although conflicts resulting from the use of part-time EDICs have been flagged up by NCs and in previous evaluations.

A further element that influences this situation is the fact that many EDICs have limited numbers of telephone and email enquiries to deal with. Whilst they are required to work on other modules it is unclear to what extent this really takes up their time because the collection of data via the Intranet on events provides qualitative commentaries rather than a quantitative count of events carried out. Our evidence is inconclusive on this issue.

Rationale for involvement and added value

Other potential indications of the extent that host structures use EDICs to increase or change their existing activities are the reasons why host structures apply in the first place. Recurring reasons giving for hosting an EDIC were to:

- gain more visibility vis-à-vis the EC and to build closer relationships with the EU;
- exploit synergies with the structure's other activities;
- provide a direct link with the EC;
- make citizens aware of European opportunities;
- improve networks at home and in other EU Member States;
- meet a need or demand for information about the EU.

One of the reasons host structures gave for applying to host an EDIC is to exploit synergies with the structure's **other activities.** Most interviewed host structures saw their relationship with EDICs as **mutually beneficial,** reinforcing host structures' ability to do their own job when that includes communicating to citizens about Europe, and in some cases providing a form of reward for a function that they carry out but are not necessarily funded for. In some cases, host structures and EDICs team up for events. However, this was not mentioned very often, but does not necessarily mean that it is uncommon.

Level of EU funding

One of the other perceived benefits of hosting an EDIC which host structures listed is the **additional source of funds** themselves. However, the current level of resourcing of EDICs is an area of concern; HoRs consider that the overall EDIC **budget is insufficient** at both the national and EU level. There is general consensus that EDICs are constrained by limited resources. Additionally, 85% of respondents stated that human and financial resources have the most significant impact on EDICs' ability to provide the type of service required, and 69% of them quoted the level of support from host structures. In an additional open question, over 60 respondents across all Member States called for increased funding in order to effectively achieve the EDICs' objectives.

Moreover, NCs indicated that the EDIC network generates additional funding at the local level to support EU institutional communication goals and does a lot for little money. EDIC Managers pointed out that **host structures provide a significant amount of funding and benefits in-kind** (e.g. office infrastructure, financial and administrative expertise, event infrastructure and mailing lists in over 60% of responses), which are critical to the survival or level of activity of some EDICs. As a result, EU funding for host structures can have a negative impact on their activities, in the sense that it may place an additional administrative burden on hosts.

Conclusion

It is very difficult to determine to what extent hosting an EDIC leads to an increase or change in host structure activity. But the evidence confirms a complete change of activities for a small proportion of EDICs. For other host structures, a mixed picture emerges with half indicating that EDIC activities overlap with what the host structure is doing anyway and half stating that host structure activities are fully complementary, and this is backed up through interviews. It is clear that host structures apply because they perceive that they will benefit from hosting an EDIC and it is implicit that this will reinforce their own capacity, including but not limited to strengthening networks, ties to the EU and possible funding opportunities. It is clear that there needs to be win-win situation for host structures to take part and that the Commission actually wants to encourage organisations that already communicate about the EU, but the Commission needs to try to ensure that they are paying to support EDIC activities and not host structure activities.

Changing the requirement for a full-time equivalent member of staff to one full-time member of staff would help to ensure that there is one individual who is working 100% on EDIC tasks. In addition, the EC needs to ensure that the tasks allocated are sufficient to take up the EDIC Managers' time so that he or she is not filling in for the host structure in less busy times and to be explicit in the call that host structures are expected to honour this commitment. There are some concerns within DG COMM that this requirement may be off-putting for host structures. However, by not being more stringent about what is expected of EDIC Managers the Commission continues to facilitate lower standards and is giving tacit approval to host structures using EC funds to support their own activities. It may be worth:

- Piloting / testing the approach;

- Confirming that the full-time equivalent can be filled by a maximum of two members of staff, but that the Commission prefers one full-time member of staff;

- Confirming that EDICs will support 80% of a full-time member of staff on the understanding that 80% of time will be spent on EDIC business.

6 Organisation and management

6.1 Overview

This section provides answers to evaluation questions required by the Terms of Reference on the following topics:

- DG COMM HQ and Rep management and support;
- Host structure support;
- The legal framework (Calls, Framework Programme and Specific Agreements);
- Monitoring and reporting;
- The modular approach / mix of modules;
- The lump sum approach;
- Value for money;
- Interaction between network members;
- Complementarity with other EU information providers.

6.2 DG COMM HQ and Representation management?

> **10.** **Have DG COMM HQ and Representation management systems and support contributed to and / or adversely affected EDICs' operations?**

To answer this question the issues were considered:

- What types of management systems and support are provided to EDICs by DG COMM HQ and the Reps?
- To what extent does this support enhance EDICs' work?
- To what extent does this limit or constrain EDICs' work?
- What are the gaps to be addressed?

Source of evidence
■ Interviews with EDIC Managers, host structures and NCs
■ NC Survey
■ EDIC Managers survey

DG COMM has overarching responsibility for EDICs and the Reps' NCs manage contractual arrangements, including the selection of host structures and monitor the progress and results of the EDICs against their Annual Action Programmes. They also provide on-going advice and support to their network and arrange periodical information meetings to bring different members of the network together. NCs visit a number of EDICs each year as part of their monitoring process. Central support is provided in areas such as exchange of experience between EDICs, but also between NCs, as well as training, and as a source of information materials and news items.

In addition to work by staff in the Reps and DG COMM HQ, the administrative and contractual framework is a third critical element defines performance requirements. This aspect is not discussed here because it is the subject of the next question.

The management systems and support provided by DG COMM HQ and EC Reps are highlighted in the below table and confirm the lead role played by the Reps in managing EDICs.

Table 2: Support to EDICs provided by DG COMM HQ and EC Rep

European Commission (DG COMM HQ)[19]	EC Reps (NCs)
Organisation of training sessions / seminars for EDICs. Documentation (fact-sheets, newsletters). ED Intranet. Promotional material. Networking opportunities (Annual General Meeting; EDIC Pan-European Working Group).	Managing contractual arrangements (preparation of agreements with HS and the annual evaluation report, agreements' addenda / exchange of letters / modifications). Providing guidance to EDICs on preparation of annual action programmes and their implementation. Reviewing financial (final) reports and making payments of pre-financing and remaining amount. Acting as an interface between DG COMM Headquarters and the centres. Providing training on communication skills. Providing communication materials adapted to national context. Monitoring the activities of the EDICs via the Intranet, and visits. Organising EDIC coordination meetings. Participating in events organised by EDICs.

A decentralised management system

The management system in place is to a large extent **decentralised.** DG COMM HQ provides the overall steer for the EDIC scheme, including ensuring a common baseline of information for EDICs via meetings, centralised training activities, documentation and the Intranet. DG COMM is responsible for **creating the sense of EU network.**

NCs in the Reps engage at a more operational day-to-day level, whilst supporting occasional exchanges with EDICs in neighbouring countries. The NC role is characterised by both formal and fixed tasks and ad hoc tasks. NCs fixed tasks relate to the selection of host structures, the checking of Annual Action Programmes and the authorising of payments, monitoring a sample of EDICs and hosting network meetings. These formal tasks are then complemented by a number of ad hoc support tasks, which are more at the discretion of the NC in post. This relates to the on-going provision of information and advice to support the work of EDICs and their relationship with the host structure. In this, NCs point out that greater clarity is required to explain DG COMM's real expectations and that this could reduce their work in explaining and interpreting the rules. The call text describes a set of minimum requirements, but in practice a **very proactive and creative approach** is expected.

The decentralised model appears to work well because Reps are also engaged in the same business of representing the Commission at national level and understand their own national target group to a much greater extent than could be expected by DG COMM. In addition, this structure is also in line with current EC practice for the provision of support and advice to citizens, which allows the central Commission to focus on policy development rather than supporting front-line services. However, whilst the decentralised approach works to a certain extent and certainly from the perspective of allowing DG COMM HQ an overview role, there are pros and cons to the current approach.

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[19] European Commission Decision C(2012) 4158 final concerning the anticipated adoption of the Annual Work Programme in the field of communication for 2013 regarding grants for financing the host structures of the EDICs across the European Union for the period 2013-2017

DG COMM HQ management

EDICs have **few direct contacts** with DG COMM HQ apart from at the Annual General Meetings and central training sessions. It is very rare for host structures to have a direct interaction with the EC, either the Rep or HQ. Both EDIC Managers and host structures would welcome a **more personal engagement** on the part of the Commission (at Rep and HQ level) in their activities, notably by attending their events and clearer guidance on priorities. Given the critical role played by host structures, it could be argued that there is a need for a closer relationship between DG COMM HQ and host structures, for example a meeting at the start of a new contract to allow host structures to put their questions directly to HQ and DG COMM to clarify expectations. NCs confirm that their agreement for additional support in the EC / host structure relationship. This could alleviate some of the administrative burden currently experienced by NCs and could provide an opportunity for the EC to confirm to host structures the value that they provide and how much it is appreciated.

The interaction with DG COMM HQ comprises activities such as meetings for NCs, training for EDICs, AGMs, pan-European working groups for EDICs and workshops. There is frequent communication between NCs and DG COMM HQ, which includes reporting and spreading information about other EDICs. DG COMM HQ has the central budget and acts as a central coordination point. DG COMM HQ support to NCs is seen as satisfactory. In particular and that they find HQ's coordination meetings to be particularly relevant and they are very satisfied with levels of support when they ask specific questions to DG COMM/C3. NCs consider that **more intensive support could be provided**, for example during the Call for proposals period. The EDIC network is seen to require more strategic guidance from DG COMM HQ (which is believed to have become too operational), as well as a strong contact point to address legal issues and control the smooth operation of the network.

DG COMM HQ organise training sessions and the AGM for the EDICs which is very important, as sharing practices and establishing new partnerships are regarded by EDICs as the biggest benefits of being in the network. EDICs have stated that they find these **meetings very valuable** and are appreciative of the support and guidance provided by EC HQ.

Half of NCs are very satisfied with the support they receive from DG COMM/C3 regarding coordination activities and help with specific questions via phone, email or the mail box. The EDIC Pan-European Working Group and the Annual General Meeting are also considered to work well. The aspects which generate most dissatisfaction are the Intranet, promotional material, and the frequency of centrally organised training sessions and seminars for EDICs, although their relevance is assessed quite positively by respondents.

NC management role

NCs confirm that they are **overburdened in their role** and that most of their time is taken up with organising meetings and dealing with unforeseen / additional contractual issues (according to 15 NCs). From responses to the NC survey it is clear that NCs focus most of their time on two key aspects: **administration and coordination**. Coordination relates to organising meetings, providing communication training and sharing good practices. NCs are **not significantly involved in developing communication content** for EDICs. In the survey, only 3 NCs indicated that they spend a lot of time on providing EC communication material adapted to their country. Current practice means that EDIC websites are hosted either by their host structure's web site or a specific site, but NCs spend little time coordinating these sites or a national EDIC site and only 1 NC indicated that he / she spent a lot of time managing the country's social media network.

As highlighted elsewhere in this report, each country's EDIC network has only a brief mention in the country strategy prepared by the Reps. **EDICs are not part of a national communication plan** with priorities and key messages, and NCs do not have the time and possibly the right profile to coordinate communication aspects. There are linkages with HoCs in the Reps, but these staff members have limited capacity to coordinate communication aspects. In consequence, current Rep management practices do not support the more focussed and targeted approach to communication that could help EDICs to increase their communication impact. At the recent NC coordination meeting (June 2016) NCs agreed that more support is required to help EDICs to be better

placed to respond to enquiries on hot topics and EDIC Managers rated this as the most significant aspect (weighted average rating of 3.74 out of 4) that would improve their communication activities.

Another aspect that is currently lacking from the NC / Rep management role relates to the provision of **management information**. This relates to a lack of systems in place to ensure that **regular, structured analysis of EDIC performance and feedback** from EDICs and citizens feeds into senior decision-making levels. Although the Intranet is a key channel to facilitate feedback, it is striking that there is no annual analysis of the information that it provides at country level. It is clear that NCs have a wealth of information and understanding about EDICs within their own network and views on how it could be improved, but this information is not distilled, written up and formally channelled into the system. In consequence, it is not feasible to understand and define year-on-year performance of the network.

The approach to monitoring follows similar lines. NCs decide their own approach with regards to which EDICs to visit and the format of these visits and any follow up, which tends to be an email exchange. The evidence suggests that direct and one-to-one interaction between EDICs and their respective NC is very useful and that EDICs feel supported. But any findings are **not formally documented** with some NCs not drafting a monitoring report. Again this means that this exercise is limited in its usefulness to providing an overall picture of the network or of individual networks. One factor that is reported to limit the monitoring process is the lack of sanctions available to NCs if and when they find that host structures are non-compliant. This aspect is discussed in more detail in response to another question.

With regards to mechanisms used by NCs to communicate, all NCs interact with EDICs through training or events, as well as (as would be expected) via personal contact by phone or email. These are rather standard tools, which may be suitable for formal / confidential information exchange, but **NCs could make much greater use of interactive on-line tools to foster a stronger networking culture** within their national network. The NC survey confirms that online tools are little used by NCs to interact with EDICs and this could be an area that could be used to enhance the efficiency of communication. For example, whilst the EDIC Intranet supports the network, a national closed social media platform could allow on-line and open questions and answers, which could help to reduce repetition in questions and answers to EDICs, as well as sharing information and supporting training via webinars. Whilst the EDIC Managers survey confirms that most EDICs collaborate with others, and the Mystery shopper exercise highlighted a sharing of information between EDICs in the Netherlands and Portugal, this sharing of information is not systematic.

Current satisfaction with management systems

One indicator of the sufficiency / adequacy of HQ and Rep support is the **level of satisfaction** that this generates. Overall **EDIC Managers are satisfied with the level of support** that they receive from the Commission and EPIO. EDIC Managers were particularly satisfied with the support they receive from the EC Rep in their country (76% of respondents). 59% of them were very satisfied with their NC.

Figure 6: To what extent are you satisfied with the level of support provided to your EDIC by the following Commission services?

N=462

Legend: Dissatisfied · Not very satisfied · Satisfied · Very satisfied · N/A
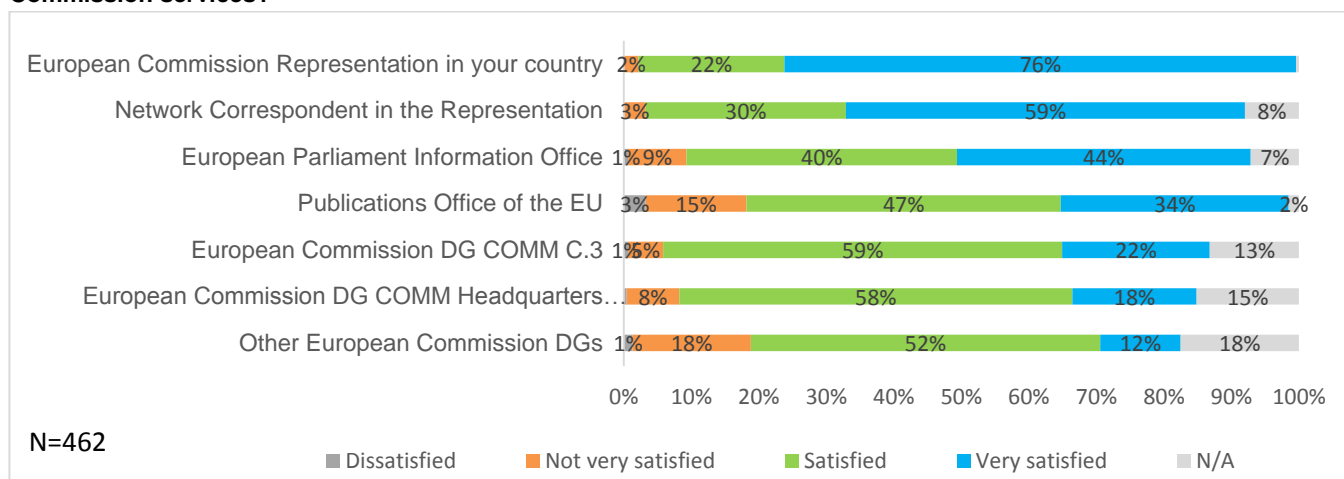
EDIC Managers are also satisfied with the services provided by DG COMM Headquarters. Among the services provided by DG COMM Headquarters and other DGs, **annual general meetings,** training opportunities, information and communication products as well as good practice exchange with other EDICs obtained the highest levels of satisfaction. Comparatively, **interactions with other DGs** and the Pan-European Working Groups did less well.

Figure 7: To what extent are you satisfied with the following services provided to your EDIC by DG COMM Headquarters (HQ) and other Directorates General of the European Commission? (weighted average)

N=462

Legend: Dissatisfied · Not very satisfied · Satisfied · Very satisfied · N/A
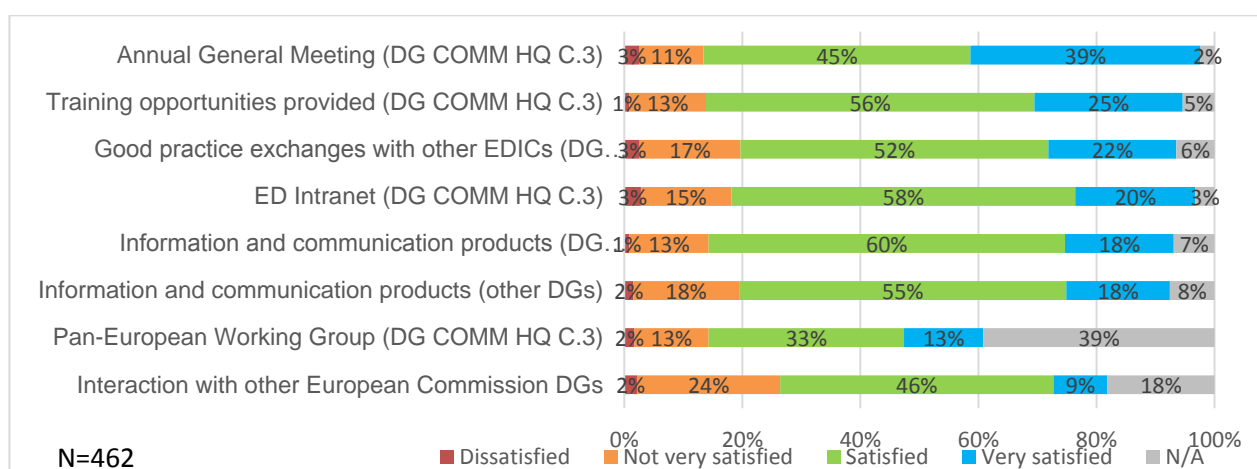
Communication, training and networking

All the EDICs visited had a **good relationship** with the Rep and the NC, though in one country there were doubts as to whether the Rep understood how limited EDICs' budgets are and the differences in the workload in different locations for the same money.

While the overwhelming responses on the AGM, national coordination meetings and training were positive, there was a significant minority view that there is **scope for more two-way communication / interactivity**, more exchanges of experience to build network benefits, and more influence for EDICs on the agenda for the AGM.

In the context of the combination of the AGM with the EuropCom communication conference as a learning opportunity, one EDIC Manager highlighted the **increasing need for communication skills** and the failure of some EDICs to recognise that. This did not come out in other interviews, however, except obliquely in a request to use these events to learn how to deal with sensitive political topics, and how to deal with the local media, and

in comments that there is too much policy theory at AGMs and not enough of practical examples that EDICs can give of what the EU does. A specific suggestion was made that a closed Facebook group could work better than communicating via Circa. Another was for an induction course for new EDICs, which could be online.

Promotional materials and publications

The main point that NCs expressed concern about support from DG COMM HQ is surrounding **the lack of materials provided**. DG COMM HQ sometimes helps in providing promotional material. However, it is felt that there is a lack of paper material on the EU, especially as some Member States still have places where there are no computers or internet. In addition to this, it is felt that a lot of the existing material is written in a difficult bureaucratic language. More copies of printed material such as publications are required, as well as more visual and interactive materials, as there are not enough for all EDICs. Some visual materials also need replacing. It is seen as difficult for the EDICs to prepare promotional material taking into account the amount of budget available in the relevant module.

EDICs explained that there is a need for printed materials as there are citizens who need to have something to take home in order to feel that their query has been taken seriously. In this regard, leaflets and fact-sheets were thought to be helpful. However, the interviews with the Publications Office highlighted the need for a balanced and more targeted approach. There is exponential growth in the demand for paper publications, which has obvious budgetary consequences. In general EDICs consider that **it would be beneficial if more materials were translated in national languages**. On one instance, it was highlighted that an EDIC has received support to access and use the EP's video database, in order to supplement their TV show with video clips on current issues and interviews with EU officials on relevant topics. It was noted that, in comparison, the audio-video service of the DG COMM database, was somewhat lacking as there were no translations and no subtitles, so the videos hosted there were not very useful. Furthermore, often these services were plagued by technical glitches.

While interviewees were by and large satisfied with the level of support received from DG COMM HQ, on occasion DG COMM HQ was criticised for being slow to provide adequate information / content on fast evolving topics. In addition, it was noted that contradicting messages and campaigns are coming from the different DGs to the EDICs which is confusing. In summary, what EDICs would like to see HQ do is **produce more material relevant to their needs** and enable them to keep up more with how thinking is evolving, even before a policy is finalised. Many EDICs feel they do not get enough guidance on dealing with sensitive topical issues.

ED Intranet

The Intranet does offer a number of advantages. It is a common platform and harmonising tool that provides an overview EDIC activity in each Member State and each EDIC. A majority of EDICs were **not impressed by the Intranet in its current format**, and generally thought it was not user-friendly and flexible. It was a shared view that there is definitely room for improvement when it comes to the reporting and website, considered too burdensome.

Impact and visibility

Nearly two thirds respondents to the NCs survey think that a **better definition of objectives** (which obtained an average weighted rating of 3.59 compared to the overall average of 3.25), **more time to coordinate networks** and **higher lump sum**, would have a very significant impact on EDICs' performance. This is interesting given that earlier in the survey we note that half of NCs allocate 50% or less than their time to managing their EDIC network.

Increased financial and human resources for EDICs and Reps are listed as crucial factors by more than half of respondents, but **more top-down support**, i.e. greater investment from HoRs in EDIC networks and strategic steer from DG COMM, are considered as quite significant factors: respondents rated them 3.54 and 3.31 respectively. It is interesting to note that NCs are much more in favour of allocating more funds per EDIC than reallocating existing funds to less EDICs. We also note that more money is required for the EDICs, but NCs do not necessarily consider that more **human resources** are required. This suggests that additional funds should be

used to support additional communication activities. According to respondents, increased levels of expertise are also needed, but rather among EDIC staff than in the Reps. Asking EDICs to set qualitative and quantitative targets are not considered to be significant factors which could increase the impact of what EDIC are able to achieve.

According to NCs, the three most significant factors in increasing the impact of EDICs would be the provision of more **targeted content**, **greater collaboration** between EDICs and with the Rep on outreach events. Increased training is also relatively important. Having a national Facebook page or other on-line platform to facilitate network interaction is not considered to be a useful way of helping EDICs to increase their impact.

The NCs were also asked to consider questions on visibility of their EDIC network. The graph overleaf highlights that **EDIC visibility is a significant problem**. All but one of the ratings given, indicate a weak performance, with six out of the seven factors scoring comparatively much lower than most of the other questions posed in this survey. Of all the target groups listed, NCs consider that EDICs and their work are **only well-known among other EDICs in their own countries.** The responses to this question raise serious questions about the EDIC network and its ability to represent and raise awareness of the EU institutions at local level. The other results suggests that the EDICs are not even that well know within DG COMM, but particularly worrying is the fact that they are not well known among the citizens that they were set up to serve and also that they are considered to have very low visibility among other EC Directorates General. Whilst it can be argued that other DGs are more focussed on stakeholder communication than communication to the wider public, EDICs provide information related to specific policy portfolios including agriculture and the environment and many of these DGs engage in communication campaigns that are intended to reach citizens, either as primary of secondary target groups.

Conclusion

The **decentralised approach** to managing the EDIC network works well to a certain extent. DG COMM HQ defines the broad structure of the network, including mission and host structure requirements, ensures that there is a platform to collect and share information from and between individual EDICs and provides training, support and back-up to NCs. It makes sense and is most **efficient that day-to-day network management happens at Member State level** given the language and cultural aspects that need to be taken into account and the fact that these activities are intended to support / complement Rep outreach. However, the current system means that Reps are mainly providing an administrative and coordination support function, not leading the communication approaches and initiatives of their network. NCs report that administering the EDIC network is very resource intensive, particularly in large Member States with many EDICs.

The **amount of workload** that administering the network creates and the fact that for nearly half of NCs this work is only part of their envisaged tasks means that the Reps provide minimal support to strengthening EDIC communication and outreach work. This supports the current fragmented approach with variable levels of quality. There are different options to increasing Rep capacity to enhance EDIC communication capacity, including the use of more efficient communication platforms / systems, strengthening Rep in-house communication capacity to allow an increase in production of materials / social media and media support, and outsourcing administration and / or communication guidance, which is the route taken by the majority of other networks reviewed in the evaluation benchmarking exercise.

There is a need for a **more standardised approach** to managing EDICs beyond ensuring the contractual requirements are met, in particular in relation to monitoring, supporting outreach / communication approaches and managing feedback. The benefits of a standardised approach include providing a better overview of EDIC performance, allowing performance measurement / comparison and benchmarking across the network. Within this revised approach there is a need to plug current gaps in the way that management information is generated. This means the systematic collection, analysis and channelling of information about what EDICs are doing and the feedback they provide so that it is better able to support future decision-making.

The fact that both EDIC Managers and NCs are satisfied with the level of support that is provided both by DG

COMM HQ and by the Reps / NCs can be considered to be a strength of the current approach. This approach and management style has generated **good will and enthusiasm.** These EDIC network strengths should not be underestimated. EDIC Managers' passion and dedication adds significant value to what EDICs are able to achieve. This is also reflected by the commitment of EC staff involved in supporting the network. NC survey results confirm that they have managed to generate a high level of mutual understanding with EDICs. However, the perceived lack of involvement by HoRs sends a message that EDICs are not really of high importance / reflects a system whereby EDIC work is not really steered as part of a coordinated communication strategy because EDICs' main function is to provide information, as described in the mandatory modules.

The network is moreover one of a web of over 20 EU information sources available. EDICs appear to be unique in that they are directly managed from the Rep. There are undoubtedly Rep staff members who follow the work of other networks, though some networks appear to bypass Reps entirely. There is no framework either at HQ level or at Rep level to ensure they are providing a seamless synergistic service without overlaps and duplication.

Despite all the goodwill, the way the EDIC network is organised and managed continues to facilitate differing levels of performance. This has been highlighted in the previous two evaluations. Although there are variables outside EC and EP control (EDIC Managers are not staff members, host structures are independent organisations, etc.), this persistent variability means that current EC management systems are not optimal / fully adapted to maximise EDIC performance.

The main key deficiencies **need to be addressed and / or at least acknowledged as relating to management** systems, these are:

- Variable performance related to:

    o unclear expectations;

    o lack of standardised monitoring systems and judgement criteria and key performance indicators;

    o lack of sanctions / procedures to help NCs to enhance performance;

    o conflict between the wish not to have gaps in geographic coverage and the fact that not all applicants are equally suitable, coupled with conservatism in terms of using new models;

- Low levels of internal and external network visibility.

NCs point to a need for much greater clarity at the outset with regards to what is expected of EDICs and that this would have a significant impact on their work. This lack of clarity on expectations is directly linked to the fact that there is no system in place to judge performance. There are currently no formal benchmarks or indicators with regards to what is high and low performing. Module descriptions are relatively general making it difficult to make firm judgements, which are perceived to relate to lack of commitment as much as EDIC capacity. The required impact assessment of 50% of activities fails to deliver systematically meaningful information given the different levels of interpretation by EDIC Managers. NCs are not really satisfied with EDICs' monthly reporting. Intranet data confirms that not all EDICs are systematically meeting their monthly reporting requirements. Whilst NCs confirm that they feel somewhat powerless to deal with the variable levels of performance across the network. Anecdotal evidence suggests host structures which ensure strong support in the initial year may hold back as the contract progresses. These aspects relate directly to descriptions of host structure requirements and the extent that NCs are supported in their management of these requirements.

The low levels of visibility across the EU institutions and at national level raise questions as to whether current approaches / channels and tools are working and whether there are additional strategies that should be pursued to improve this situation. However, increased visibility is likely to lead to increased demand. This implies a need for a clearer definition of when and how EDICs can support EC and EP initiatives and consideration / guidelines

for how EDICs should manage any resulting increase.

6.3 Host structure support

> **11. To what extent has the support provided by host co contributed to / adversely affected EDICs' operations?**

This question considers the following aspects:

- How host structure support contributed to EDICs;

- How host structure support has adversely affected EDICs.

Source of evidence
■ EDIC Managers Survey
■ NC Survey
■ NC Interviews
■ Real costs exercise

Key findings

Overall, EDICs and host structures reported good working relationships with each other. Despite the multitude of factors that can impact EDICs' activities, one of the key critical factors for the high performance of EDICs outlined by NCs is the level of support and commitment of the host structure and their degree of involvement in the EDIC. Survey responses from EDIC Managers showed that 69% of respondents believe that the level of support from the host structure is an aspect with the most significant impact on EDICs' ability to provide the type of services required. Results from the survey also suggested that the resources provided by host structures which are most useful to EDIC Managers are **office infrastructure** (90%), **financial and administrative expertise** (71%) and **event infrastructure** (69%).

More than half of EDIC Managers also mentioned network or mailing lists (63%) and general communication expertise (55%). **Specific fields of expertise were also deemed useful, but to a lesser extent**: event management expertise (according to 44% of respondents), communication expertise in the fields of media relations (40% of respondents) and of online and social media (36% of respondents), as well as publications expertise.

Visibility and local outreach

One of the main benefits of host structures' support that was highlighted by the NCs is the visibility that they provide for EDICs; both physically and online. Most NCs acknowledged that visibility is (in part) dependent on the host structure and the **accessibility of the locations** they provide. Such accessibility is also related to the size and nature of the host structure, which NCs consider to be important. A local community is more likely to be aware of the presence of an EDIC which has a street front presence in a prominent location of a large city, compared with one tucked away inside a small municipality's offices. Such an EDIC would be at a considerable advantage compared to EDICs located in smaller, less well connected host structures.

As for virtual visibility and accessibility, association with a host structure brings benefits in terms of access to local media or through host structures' social media channels. Many EDICs' web presence is through the host structure's website, with some NCs suggesting that because of this, it is it not necessary for EDICs to build and hold their own website. However, interviews with EDIC Managers suggested that when EDIC's sites are part of the host structure site, they are not as prominent.

EDICs' outreach is also argued to be enhanced through host structure's local contacts with the media. Host structures can **provide media contacts as well as local networks for EDICs when organising events**. NCs mentioned that often EDICs can struggle to attract participants and competent speakers for their events, unless they receive support from their host structure. Some host structures and EDICs even team up for events, however this was not mentioned very often. Their communication activities, ranging from newsletters to radio stations, are therefore an important asset to EDICs. However, one EDIC Manager saw this link as being a disadvantage, as it meant that it could not establish a distinct identity. In addition to this, interviews with EDIC Managers in one

country [Italy] stated that its association with a host structure can also be limiting; for example host structures whose internal rules do not allow EDICs to have direct contacts with the media or use social media.

Financial resources

The majority of NCs and EDIC Managers stated that one of the primary ways in which host structures support EDICs' operations is through financial contributions and resources. Interviews with NCs found that **EDICs that receive strong (financial and administrative) support from their host structures are generally able to deliver far better results** than EDICs that are not as closely linked to their host. EDIC Managers stated that host structures often meet operational and human resources costs, or part of them, and in some cases help with the costs or infrastructure of organising events or the production of print materials. Some also provide the physical office space and equipment. The survey with EDIC Managers showed that for 90% of respondents, the main type of support provided by host structures includes office infrastructure, and financial and administrative expertise.

However, variable levels of support are provided by host structures and many find it difficult to co-finance the EDIC. NCs suggested that the Call for host structures should clearly state that an amount of upfront funding will be required from the **host structure to cover the first 2 months of each year under the Framework Agreement**. The term currently used in the Call is 'revolving fund', which is unclear and brings a lot of questions during the Call's Q&A period. However, there were differing opinions on this point, and feedback that it is not possible for the Commission to control the host structures' provision of resources, suggesting that an element of trust is required.

In addition to this, some of the main complaints from interviews with EDIC Managers in regards to financial aspects was the lack of framework for dealing with unexpected costs from ad hoc requests, which host structures have to often absorb on a good will basis.

According to EDIC Managers, 87% of host structures are likely to reapply to be host structures in the 4th generation. However, it is estimated that less than a quarter (23%) will be able to provide more resources than at present, and up to 66% will be able to provide the same amount as they currently do.

EDIC Managers' workload and responsibilities

Despite all of the beneficial support from host structures, NCs highlighted the large workload which EDIC Managers have to manage, which often includes additional tasks from the host structure that do not form part of their formal responsibilities. Interviews with NCs suggested that the **role of EDIC Manager needs to be more clearly defined in any new contractual agreement** so that Managers dedicate all of their time to the EDIC centre. Having too many other responsibilities makes it difficult for Managers to decide priorities. It was suggested this can reduce the quality of their work. In some cases, host structures may interpret the amount of time that centres are obliged to be open to the public as the amount of time that the EDIC Manager needs to be available. This raises questions as to whether some host structures are **breaching their specific agreement with the EC by using EDIC staff for other tasks.**

The specific agreement requires host structures to make **a full-time equivalent member of staff** available for EDIC tasks. Some NCs suggested that this should be a full-time post so that the host structure does not use the Manager for other tasks. EDIC Managers having a '**heavy workload**' is said to have led to difficulties in retaining staff with frequent staff changes impacting on the efficiency of EDICs. But evidence from self-reported activities via the Intranet indicates that when it comes to basic information services many EDICs are not very busy at all. Over the period April 2015 – May 2016, 9 Member States received less than a total 1,000 emails and 1,000 telephone calls to their entire EDIC network. Also, over 200 EDICs (out of a network of over 500) received less than 100 calls and emails over the year.

NCs suggest that because EDIC Managers sign an employment contract with the EDIC host structure, rather than with the Centre itself, Managers can feel disengaged as an 'outsourced worker' and are less likely to have the high level of motivation typical of staff members at high performing EDICs. NCs argue that in order for staff to engage with the EDIC's mission, they must feel part of the same group and share an "organisational" identity.

Host structure setting and political context

A common characteristic of the lower performing EDICs which was highlighted by NCs is the **host structure setting and local political context**. The involvement of the host structure with local political parties can influence the degree of financial security that an individual EDIC has. Political rivalries in host structures and local administrations can have a significant negative impact on the performance of an EDIC, i.e. its ability to receive co-financing and therefore to have the necessary resources to fulfil its mission. For example, EDICs can sometimes get dragged into local political feuds, which can threaten their co-financing from local authorities – especially when cities, departments and regions are represented by different parties.

In addition to this, NCs stated that EDICs define their target groups according to the "character" of the host structure, i.e. depending on the audience that they can reach most easily. For example, an EDIC that is embedded within a Chamber of Agriculture would typically have farmers as its particular target group. When EDICs focus on a specific target group for example farmers or business, which links directly to the type of host structure, the line between serving the EC and serving the host structure's needs becomes blurred, particularly in cases where demand for EU advice is low.

Conclusion

Host structures are the foundation of the EDIC network system. Host structures define the nature of services provided, the target groups served and to a great extent the visibility of the EDICs that they support. The evidence confirms that when host structures are engaged and fully supportive, for example by providing significant amounts of additional finance, access to networks, and facilities and equipment, this provides the right environment for EDICs to flourish. The converse is also true.

The relationship between the EC and host structures is contractual and formal. Beyond this administrative framework nearly all interactions about EDIC operations are between EDIC Managers and the EC. Given the significance of EDIC host structures to EDIC performance, there is a clear argument that there is a need to review the EC / host structure relationship and whether this should extend beyond the Rep to DG COMM HQ.

There is no one best type of host structure. But the variable performance of EDICs is an issue that has been highlighted in this evaluation and documented in the two previous evaluations. Placing a higher focus on the quality of the host structure than its geographic location in the host structure selection process would be a step to achieving a consistently good or high performance network. Having more stringent requirements for host structures may be off-putting for some current members of the EDIC network. There are concerns that it is already difficult to encourage host structures to take part. But if the network is to evolve and confirm its added value to local communities and the EC, then there is need to improve the consistency of performance by supporting the best host structures to do more; even if this changes the make-up or reduces the size of the current network.

6.4 The legal framework (Calls, Framework Programme and Specific Agreements)

> **12. Are the requirements for host structures, EDICs and their personnel as described in the Calls, FPA and Specific Agreements adequate to ensure the involvement of high quality partners with high quality outputs? Do they ensure effective execution of tasks as per the annual action programmes?**

To answer this question we considered the following aspects:

- Levels of satisfaction with the current legal framework;

- Key issues in the current execution of tasks;

- The way that these issues are addressed or not in the legal framework;

- The extent that it is possible to identify alternative options.

Source of evidence
■ Desk research
■ EDIC Managers Survey
■ NC Survey
■ Interviews

The evidence suggests that both EPIOs, Rep staff including HoRs, NCs and EDIC Managers are broadly satisfied with the current legal framework. The five year timeframe is considered to be sufficiently long to provide stability to the network. The Call facilitates wide geographic coverage across each Member State and a range of different types of host structures, which NCs consider to be an advantage because it allows EDICs to reach different types of target group.

NCs report, and the evaluation team observed, that within the current framework there are some very good examples of EDIC activity, where driven and passionate people are working hard to deliver on the EDIC mission statement and to make a difference in their local area. There are, however, two persistent problems that impact what EDICS are able to achieve:

- **Variable EDIC performance**: '*there are good EDICs and there are not so good EDICs*'[20]. This situation is linked directly to the way the requirements for the selection of host structures. All host structures must meet eligibility and award criteria, but those that meet these criteria are there considered with regards to geographic balance within the country. The goal of this criterion is to try to ensure an even spread and coverage of EDICs within each Member State. In practice NCs report that they are obliged to select host structures that they know or suspect to be unsuitable.

  o **Levels of host structure support:** according to NCs EDICs that receive strong (financial and administrative) support from their host structures are generally able to deliver far better results than EDICs that are not as closely linked to their host. At the same time, host structures are only required to provide 'appropriate levels of funding' under the current legal set up. NCs[21] and other EC staff suggest that there is a need for greater clarity on what is expected from host structures and a better definition of expectations and objectives. The current legal framework describes a set of minimum standards.

  Feedback from NCs also highlights that there can be variable levels of effort by the host structure over the five years of operation, with host structures still technically in compliance with their contract, but reduced levels of engagement following the first year.

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[20] Described by one NC at the NC meeting on 13 and 14 June 2016
[21] Providing a clearer description of expectations for EDICs and hosts structures was rated as the most important factor that would help to increase impact by NCs in their survey (weighted average score of 3.58)

- o **Suitability of EDIC staff:** EDIC Managers are critical to what EDICs achieve, but NCs report that they are not always satisfied that the right staff are in position.

- **Low EDIC visibility**: this is perhaps the most fundamental problem of the EDIC network, which puts into question the added value, as highlighted by participants in focus groups with individuals who were unaware of EDICs. Although focus groups are not statistically representative, this finding strikes a chord with assumptions of low visibility. NCs and EDICs both consider that they are relatively good in generating visibility in their local environment, but this is still not sufficient to ensure high visibility. In the EDIC Managers survey, 78% indicated that visibility was the second biggest factor that influenced their ability to create an impact after finding ways to engage with members of the public (79%).

There are a number of aspects of the legal framework that could be refined to eliminate and / or at best reduce these problems. In this assessment, account needs to be taken of NCs' request for flexibility, which they consider to be critical to support the different types of EDICs that support their national network. Each issue is addressed in turn below.

Call text		
Criteria	**Current text**	**Assessment**
Operational capacity	*At least 2 years proven capacity at communicating with the public, preferably on EU affairs.*	This is a low level requirement if significant impact is required. Consider increasing the focus on outreach to proven expertise in outreach actions to engage with different publics.

Operational capacity	*Good communication skills (oral and written) project management, sound knowledge of European affairs and proficiency in at least one of the EU's working languages (English, French and German).*	Communication skills is a general term which does capture the need to have experience in external communication, developing channels and tools to communicate to the public, but some additions are needed:
		
		o social media;
		
		o outreach experience;
		
		o proven ability to draft / prepare materials for dissemination to:
		
		  ▪ the public;
		
		  ▪ the media.
		
		EN should be required as a minimum.

Award criteria	*Quality of the basic information services, communication products and events.*	This is a general description, which does not help NCs to make their assessment of what is high or low quality. There is no requirement for proven expertise and capacity in the preparation and dissemination of communication materials to different publics using different channels.
Geographic balance	*Preference will be given to host structures where there is no Representation or EPIO.*	This requirement results in host structures being retained that are not suitable.

As demonstrated above, the call text is too general to allow the Reps to exclude organisations from the selection process, which NCs know have either already shown low levels of commitment / expertise and or new host structures that only meet the minimal requirements. The level of communication expertise required is very general does not reflect standards that can be expected from communication savvy organisations, including use of social media as a minimum, although it is understood that some parts of the EU have less social media use, this is a key tool for interacting with young people.

The expectations that are set for host structures also need to be reconsidered. NCs indicated that having clearer definitions and better expectations at the outset[22] was the most significant factor that would influence what EDICs are able to achieve.

Call text	Lack of clarity
a) *Bear all administrative costs related to the compliance with its obligations as defined in the framework and specific grant agreements and annexes thereto,* b) *Establish a revolving fund allowing it to meet the current expenditure of the centre.*	There is a lack of clarity that host structures will be required to provide upfront financial support to seed fund EDICs / that there may be delays to payments.
The call describes how EDICs are meant to work with other EU networks and how EDICs will be required to organise events for local audiences.	The call does not describe the expectation / assumption that EDICs will be able to benefit from host structures' own networks. Host structures are not required to demonstrate that they have existing networks and with which groups.
The description of modules is very broad and sets a minimum level of service.	This facilitates smooth administrative payment processes, but the current descriptions are not very demanding. It would be feasible provide a minimum service and still be paid.

EDIC Managers are fundamental to the success of an EDIC. But the NC survey and interviews suggest that there is a need to revise the description of the EDIC Manager profile. EDIC Managers are hired directly from the host structure and do not have a contractual relationship with the Commission. NCs are not able to select EDIC Managers (this would in any case be an additional source of administrative burden), but some NCs ask to see CVs in advance and will give a view / reject a CV if a particular profile does not look appropriate. However, NCs do not receive a copy of the employment contract, which would be confidential. But this means that NCs are unable to check EDIC staff members' job description. A more precisely defined job description would help to ensure that EDICs are working with the right type of staff.

Call text	
…appoint at least one full-time staff member (not a volunteer or trainee) to manage the centre, or several part-time staff members providing a full-time equivalent,	• Many EDICs work with several part-time staff rather than one member of staff. NCs suggest that requiring host structures to provide one full-time member of staff would be more effective. When

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[22] This factor was given a weighted average of 3.59 out of 4.00. In contrast, setting quantitative and qualitative performance benchmarks were not considered to ways that would increase performance and were given a weighted average of 2.56 and 2.96.

	• there are staff who only work a few hours for the EDIC, NCs report that they can easily become overburdened by other responsibilities for the host structure.
	• In addition, division of the role between this means that training and meetings are not consistently focussed on the same person.
Ensure that the centre is serviced by staff whose competencies and qualifications include good communication skills, proficiency in at least one of the EU's working languages (English, French and German), project management and sound knowledge of European affairs.	There is no indication of the **level of required education** or the personal attributes that are desirable, for example: • A proactive and creative approach / ability to take initiative. There is no requirement for skills which are required to deliver the **outreach aspects** of the job, for example: • Experience of organising events; • Presentation skills and experience of chairing / animating a discussion. There are no requirements for skills which would enhance the reach of the EDIC, for example: • Experience of working with the media; • Understanding and experience at using SM to create on-line communities.

Conclusion

The award of a Framework Partnership Agreement for 5 years works. It ensures a financial commitment by the EC against which host structures can also commit their own resources. But the lack of requirement to develop a plan for these five years is a missed opportunity, which could be used as a way to select the most committed host structures and to hold host structures to account that meet the requirements, but lack real commitment over the lifespan of the contract. At the same time, this is an opportunity for the Reps to set out in advance their communication plans and ensure that EDICs in their country are part of this plan. This would help to ensure that communication efforts are pointing in the same direction, with the likelihood of greater impact.

The different levels of host structure commitment and EDIC performance described in this evaluation can be traced back directly to the current contractual framework. There are many areas that need to be addressed if the Commission wants to improve the current situation and raise the bar when it comes to having a consistently performing EDIC network.

The EC has tried to keep the description of requirements relatively open to make participation in the EDIC network attractive to potential host structures. This relates to the need to guarantee a geographical coverage. However, it is clear that current definitions and descriptions are too general. The call text is too inclusive and, as a result, there is a wide range of different types of organisation that are able to participate as host structures. At the same time, there is insufficient evidence to support a need to limit involvement in the EDIC network to certain categories of organisation. But participation could / should be limited to those host structures which really add value.

The current operational capacity and award criteria for host structure applicants are not sufficiently precise to

allow NCs to filter out host structures that they believe will be low performers / lack commitment. This situation is made worse by the fact that the call text and the specific agreement do not describe what happens if the required tasks are not completed to the satisfaction of the Rep. This situation means that NCs hands are tied by selecting a few undesirable host structures and then having limited scope for actions in cases of non-performance.

The requirements set for host structures and EDIC Managers in the call do not reflect the tasks that EDICs are required carry out. There is no alignment between the skills required to conduct modules and the very general description of the EDIC profile. For example, EDICs must select one of the mandatory modules on events, but EDIC Managers are not required to have any experience of event management or delivering presentations. EDICs indicate that young people are their key target group and young people are the biggest users of social media. Despite this EDIC Managers are only required to have 'good communication skills', which is too general to ensure the type of profile required. It is not unreasonable to expect that EDIC Managers have social media skills / knowledge. Also, outreach is an important part of the EDIC mission, but host structures and their EDIC Managers are not required to describe their networks and experience in outreach to the public / other target audiences. Instead there is an assumption that these will be made available.

By not providing very clear descriptions of what is required, the Commission makes it less likely to achieve its goals. If it is decided to refocus EDICs in the future, it will be critical that any changes of mission / requirements are adequately reflected in the call text to ensure that these changes are implemented in the future.

In addition, to the need for a much more precise description of what is expected and required of host structures and their staff, there is also a need to reconsider the requirement for one full-time equivalent member of staff. It is assumed that the rationale for this formulation is that it provides host structures with greater flexibility. Whilst there is no evidence to confirm the extent to which this particular flexibility is required, there appears to be a strong request for this requirement to be redefined as one member of staff. This would most likely make it easier for NCs to have greater control / oversight of the EDIC function and would mean that training could be concentrated with one individual. At the moment there is too much emphasis on a project management background and general EU knowledge rather than the skills needed to interface with citizens or the stakeholders who can reach out to them.

There are many aspects that could be changed in the current call text, which should help the Commission to raise the standard and have a more consistent performance across the network. The consequences will be that some host structures may not reapply, and there may be a loss of the full geographic coverage. But this fear was raised and not realised following the previous 2 evaluations and a strong majority of EDIC Managers consider that they host structure will reapply. However, working with a base of more fit-for-purpose EDICs should make the network stronger and there is also a chance that new host structures apply because they find the descriptions more interesting and relevant.

6.5 Monitoring and reporting

13. Do the monitoring and reporting procedures in place (reporting on Intranet, survey, impact assessment of 50% of activities, monitoring visits) ensure appropriate implementation and follow-up?

This question considered each of the different monitoring and reporting tools:

- Intranet;
- Satisfaction survey and impact assessment reporting;
- Monitoring.

| **Source of evidence** |
| --- |
| ■ EDIC Managers Survey |
| ■ NC Survey |
| ■ Desk research |
| ■ Interviews |

Intranet

The Intranet is the main support tool that is made available to EDICs, NCs and DG COMM HQ. The Intranet is effectively a common platform, which allows the sharing of information between these three groups, as well as between EDICs. One of the advantages of having **a common platform** is that it helps to create **the sense of** EDICs being **part of a European network,** which spans the different Member States.

Levels of use of the Intranet can be considered to be to some extent indicative of its level of usefulness. Most EDICs (66%) make use of the Intranet at least once or twice a week. Only 2% indicated that they hardly ever use the platform. Circa a third of EDICs make use once or twice a month. The pattern of use of the Intranet by NCs is similar, although 3 NCs indicated that they hardly ever use the Intranet, the majority (18) do so at least once or twice per week.

The level of use to some extent confirms the relevance of the Intranet to support the EDIC network. However, EDICs Managers are obliged to make use of the Intranet at least on a monthly basis to post their monthly reports, which are then checked / viewed by NCs. Therefore, levels of use are likely to reflect this obligation and confirm the usefulness of the Intranet to support management and supervision of the on-going performance of the network by the Reps, rather than necessarily to supporting the work of EDICs. This assertion is supported by feedback on the different functionalities provided by the Intranet. Both EDIC Managers and NCs confirm that the reporting field is the most useful function.

EDIC Managers only find the reporting function to be useful (weighted average 3.59). The survey suggests that none of the other functionalities of the Intranet are very useful to EDIC Managers.

Figure 8: Level of usefulness of the different fields of the Intranet for EDIC Managers
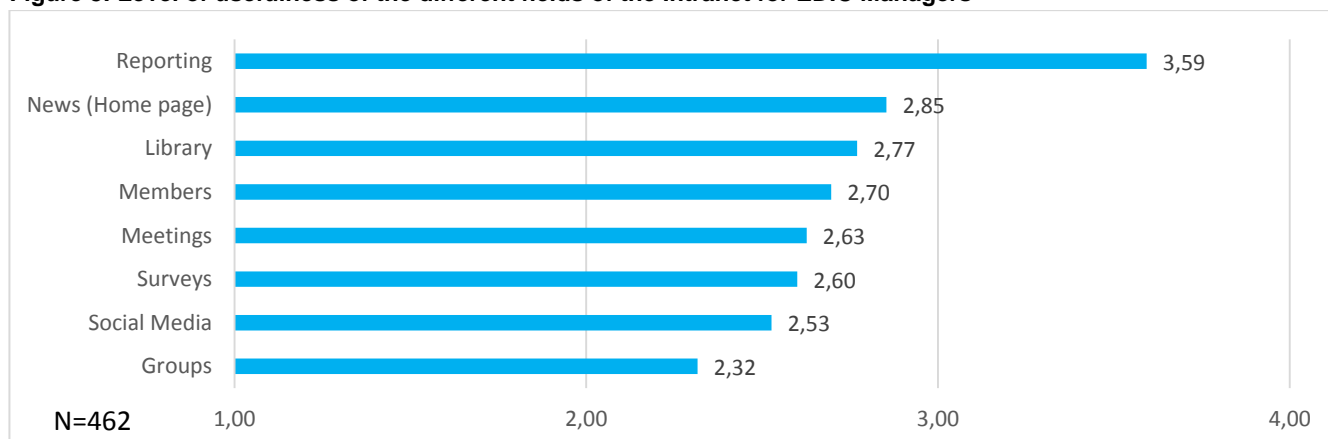
When compared with feedback from NCs, the survey confirms that the Intranet has greater use for management and supervision. NCs also rated Meetings and Surveys as providing useful functions, as well as Library, News and Members. Neither NCs nor EDICs find the Social Media functionality to be particularly useful. Anecdotal evidence from NCs provided in the recent NC meeting was that the Intranet can also facilitate the collection of feedback for example on hot topic requests and requests linked to the 10 priorities.

Figure 9: Level of usefulness of the ED Intranet tools that are the most relevant to your work?
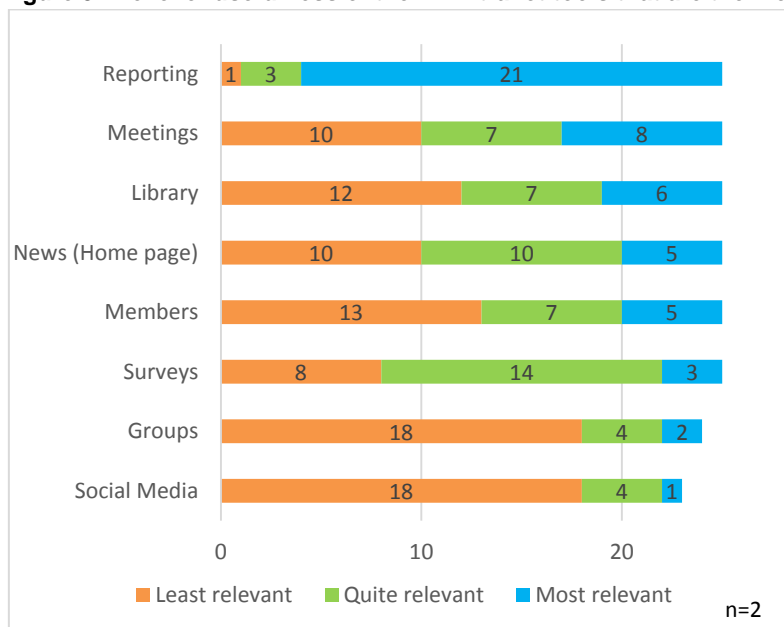
There is **significant scope to improve the Intranet** and this is reflected by the fact that many NCs call for improvements, including of the search tool (e.g. clearer fields definition, tags indicating EDICs' fields of expertise) or upgrades including sections for feedback on sensitive questions or placing the messaging section under the main ribbon. There are questions as to language use on the Intranet and whether this should be restricted to the working languages (EN, FR and DE) to increase relevance to all. The Intranet can be prone to recurring technical issues and many suggest that it is not very user friendly. The **impossibility to upload heavy documents** significantly limits the options for sharing materials and has led some EDICs to use alternative platforms to communicate such as SLACK. Some respondents think the Intranet should be a **simple administrative working tool** focusing on reporting (in English), surveys and meetings information.

Desk research on data collected by the Intranet confirms that it provides a useful, up-to-date and transparent overview of EDICs' work across all Member States, which may otherwise be difficult to collect. However, there are significant gaps and inaccuracies in the information that is provided. NCs indicated in their survey that they are dissatisfied with monthly reporting by EDICs. It can be observed that not all EDICs make a monthly report and that some of the data provided is questionable. For example, some EDICs recorded exactly the same number of emails or telephone calls each month over an extended period of for example 6 months. Also there is no specific field to allow EDICs to differentiate between recording the number of participants in EDIC meetings and those who for example might be participants in an external event, where an EDIC is represented. This data appears to be merged with the number of visitors to EDIC walk-in centres, which results in very high levels being reported sometimes for example **over 31,000 visitors[23]** in one month.

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[23] The highest number of visitors recorded by an EDIC in May 2015.

Customer satisfaction survey / impact assessment

The customer satisfaction survey is a simple survey comprised of a small number of questions. The advantages of this approach include that it is quick and easy for EDIC users to complete and when it is used consistently can provide a benchmark to allow basic tracking of satisfaction year on year, which is useful from an institutional management perspective (for example for DG COMM HQ). This approach is less useful when it comes to day-to-day management of EDICs as it does not allow EDIC Managers to better understand / quantify how their services are considered by citizens and other target groups, where there are areas for improvement and / ideas for improvement in a structured way. This is reflected by EDIC Managers response when asked how useful they find the satisfaction survey. Although most (48%) indicated that they find the survey quite useful the fact that only 22% find the survey very useful and 30% find the survey not very useful confirms its limited usefulness for EDIC Managers.

The limitations of the customer satisfaction survey can at least in theory be met by the requirement for EDICs to perform an impact assessment on 50% of their activities. This requirement did not reveal itself as a specific issue or to be problematic in the interviews with EDIC Managers nor in the open feedback in the EDIC Managers survey. Feedback from NCs confirms that there is significant variation in the way that this requirement is fulfilled, which suggests that there is a need for clearer guidelines and the definition of an approach, which can help EDIC Managers to track their own performance, whilst retaining balance between conducting activities and monitoring them. At the same time, NCs clearly indicated in their survey that they do not believe that requiring EDICs to set quantitative indicators for reach or qualitative indicators in their Annual Action Programmes would enhance what EDICs are able to achieve. This raises questions about usefulness and ensuring that feedback exercises add value beyond being a required 'box-ticking exercise'.

Monitoring

When it comes to monitoring there is **insufficient time and budget** to conduct more than a small number of visits / participate in EDIC events, although this relates to the size of the network. There is no mission budget for monitoring. Overall the **approach to monitoring is not standardised with NCs using their discretion** to decide what needs to be done beyond the checking of official reports for payment purposes. There is a call for a clear set of key performance indicators and a more standardised approach could allow better comparisons across countries. The 5-year Framework Agreement works well and the Annual Action Programmes are useful for managing EDICs. However, there are mixed feelings with regards to whether additional sanctions (beyond withholding the final payment or closing an EDIC) are required, when EDICs fail to perform.

Conclusion

At the moment, the Intranet is useful but it has its limitations, including in the way that it is used by EDIC Managers but also by NCs and DG COMM. The data reported tracks EDICs' work and provides an overview, which can be sorted according to a range of criteria. But this data does not appear to feed into country-by-country analysis of performance, for example on an annual basis, including the identification of strengths and weaknesses. Nor does it feed into systematic analysis and reporting of hot topics per country that is considered to be useful for DG COMM even if EDICs indicate which political priorities they have provided information on. The Citizen Dialogues were launched as one way of obtaining this dialogue, but there are day-to-day events or topics of which the Commission needs to be alerted without being overloaded with information. Local demonstration against EU policies or the impact of specific issues, such as migration, on a local areas are examples, as is feedback / monitoring of local media that some EDICs provide, although not on a systematic basis.

There are a number of areas where specific improvements should be made to the Intranet, including in relation to reporting fields, as highlighted above. There is also a need to find mechanisms to ensure that EDICs complete their monthly reporting. It is unclear whether it is feasible to enhance the functionality of the Intranet for example to allow large files to be shared, but this should be explored because this is perceived by EDICs to limit their

ability to share materials with each other.

It appears that the Intranet is intended to serve two different goals. It is used both as a management tool and as a communication support tool. In reality, the Intranet in its current format does not appear to be sufficiently supple to meet expectations for these two functions. This raises questions as to whether it would be better to focus on using the Intranet to support EDIC management given that it appears to be most suitable for this function and to find other ways / platforms to support communication functions. Language, cultural and national / local relevance are key references for communication. This being the case, there is an argument for supporting national level platforms with a higher level of flexibility, which support communication aspects including the sharing of materials and real-time exchange between EDICs and between EDICs and Reps for example. This approach could also help to further strengthen the EDIC network.

The customer satisfaction survey provides a degree of standard management information that may be useful for institutional reporting and benchmarking against other services, for example the EDCC. This value would be further enhanced if this survey could be extended across all EU information services to allow a common benchmark to be applied. The survey is less successful at meeting the need for meaningful performance / feedback data which can help EDIC Managers to do their job better and / demonstrate to NCs the relative effectiveness of EDICs work. The lack of standardised approach to fulfilling the requirement for 50% of activities to undergo an impact assessment limits the usefulness of this activity, at the same time describing the activities which are undertaken as 'impact assessments' is misleading. What is clear is that EDICs should collect some feedback from users and provide some management data to NCs. There is a need to review the current approach.

Monitoring visits can be useful because they allow NCs and EDICs direct interaction in the place where EDICs deliver their services. This provides insights and better understanding for NCs. The ad hoc approach currently undertaken relates to % of EDICs visited per country and what each monitoring visit comprises and how NCs report on what they find. NCs adapt their approach to their own specific networks, for example in big countries it is only possible to visit a fraction of EDICs each year. Lack of standardisation limits the usefulness of these visits from a management reporting view. This means that this exercise does not contribute to institutional knowledge of network performance – or innovation and good practice - and that the additional insights generated remain with the NCs involved in their implementation. At the same time the usefulness of monitoring can be considered to be somewhat curtailed given NCs limited options for sanctions. Conducting monitoring visits is one way to provide a level of supervision of EDIC, but there are other ways that could be explored as highlighted by the Mystery Shopping exercise. The key is to adopt a standardised approach and to better define the purpose of monitoring, what it is expected to achieve and how it will inform the Reps and DG COMM HQ.

6.6 The modular approach / mix of modules

> **14. To what extent is the current modular approach to defining EDIC activities appropriate? What is the most effective mix of modules?**

To answer this question we considered:

- Evidence on the actual take-up of modules;
- Views on the pros and cons of the current approach;
- Other options for awarding funding for specific activities.

Source of evidence
■ EDIC Managers Survey
■ NC Survey
■ Interviews with HoR
■ Interviews with host structures / EDIC Managers
■ Desk research

A modular approach is taken to determine which specific information and communication activities each individual EDIC will undertake.

Within the portfolio of modules, there are 3 compulsory modules:

- Basic information;
- Communication products (website, social media, e-newsletter, publications, promotional material, audio-visual and other electronic material, and local media);
- Events provides for three options: participation, organising events for specific audiences and for general audiences.

Based on data provided by DG COMM on module take up in relation to 2015, it is possible to observe that the three most popular modules are: website, events for specific audiences and the e-Newsletter. The least popular module was audio-visual, and there was also comparatively lower take up of electronic material followed by publications and social media. It is assumed that the take up of modules relates directly to the requirement for mandatory modules, host structure capabilities and target group needs. Although there is no real evidence to confirm a need driven approach beyond the description of needs in the Annual Action Programme, which is variable in quality.

Key findings

On the overall approach of the module system all visited EDICs were quite **positive**. Some HoC interviewees thought that this is a useful approach in principle, since it enables Reps to monitor EDICs' activities more easily and gives them greater "control" over their work, whilst at the same time requiring EDICs to plan their work in advance. The current approach is said to allow **flexibility** in terms of EDICs being able to choose modules which are best suited for them, as well as providing a more simplified approach than was available in the past.

Nevertheless, some general issues and suggestions for changes to the current approach were highlighted. One primary issue is the **lack of clarity** around what is expected from each module, as well as the **lack of finance** available to fully carry out these activities. In addition to this, some cases called for great flexibility in terms being able to **transfer** money from one module to another.

These issues with the current state of affairs have led to some suggestions being made on how to re-structure the available mix of modules for the next EDIC generation. Some suggestions had more split opinions, but some key ones stood out. The suggestions which received the most popular support included the **merging of events** modules 7a, b and c, introducing a module that allows and encourages greater **in-network collaboration** and synergies, and allowing greater autonomy and flexibility with modules in order for EDICs to be **more creative and innovative**.

There was also a focus on Modules 2 and 3 on website and social media, with some suggestions to merge the two modules, and others stating that social media activity should be made compulsory. Similarly, many thought

that Module 6 should be made compulsory in order to increase EDICs' interactions with the media. Other suggestions which were raised numerous times, but did not receive as much support included the merging of the modules on dissemination material (5a, b and c) and the option for EDICs to choose whether they should provide a walk-in service.

It should be noted that the majority of suggestions for improvement referred to modifications to the description of the modular approach, and not completely alternative ways of administering EDIC activity.

Current state of affairs

Overall with regards to the current modular approach, NCs and EDIC Managers appreciate the **flexibility of choosing modules.** Managers believe that this flexibility allows EDICs to play to their strengths. However, at the same time, some NCs believe that there should be a more specific selection of modules depending on host structures, and also having a closer link with the Rep's priorities. Some EDIC Managers also regard the current approach as inflexible in the extent to which it locks EDICs in to what have said they will do in advance. Nevertheless, according to those with comparative experience, they recognise that it compares well with the systems used for other networks. Additionally, some interviewed HoCs also thought that the specific description of modules can be useful because EDICs are required to **plan** their work in advance in more detail, for example in relation to the number of events to be organized.

According to NCs, from an administrative perspective, modules and the way of financing EDIC activities offer a more simplified approach than in the past. But there are many views and suggestions about changes and alternatives to the current range of modules available. Some EDIC Managers struggle to identify in which module to register their actions and NCs are frequently required to provide substantial additional clarifications.

This raises another issue which many stakeholders identified, which is the lack clarity around what is expected from each module and the indicators measured. NCs felt that the Call for host structures does not make it explicit how much will be expected from EDICs and the obligations that they will be signing up to. They are not fully aware that the descriptions of activities to be undertaken are really considered as minimum criteria. NCs expressed that once EDICs are selected, they can spend quite some time explaining the different modules and what is expected from them, and this is not always very clear for all modules (e.g. the requirement to post on social media several times per week, or for EDIC Managers to attend training sessions in Brussels where they're required to speak in a foreign language). One HoA also emphasised that in order to prevent underspend, it is crucial to make the host structures better understand what an EDIC is, in terms of the modular approach.

This issue of lack of clarity also related to the basic information module and whether it is actually useful, because although citizens may pick up leaflets, they may not actually make use of them. It was suggested that **clearer guidelines** are required to ensure that a high quality approach is taken. Just having an information stand was suggested to be insufficient if not part of a wider range of communication actions. What makes this issue more serious is also that according to NCs, the provisions of the Agreement do not allow for any consequences if an EDIC has not accomplished some activities and, therefore, not complied with agreed actions from the initial plan. Whilst the modules are relatively explicit, there is still scope for different interpretations and there is no definition of what it means to not meet the agreement and the plan.

Despite the flexibility which the current approach provides, some EDIC Managers also stated that EDICs feel that they are sometimes asked to take on **extra tasks for no extra money**. The amount EDICs are expected to for the money they receive, and the inadequate provision for different levels of local costs for the different modules, was a recurring challenge to managing an EDIC. For example, the amount allocated for promotional material and AV material were considered by EDIC Managers to be unrealistic, or disproportionate to the effort needed.

Conversely, NCs highlighted the problem of underspend that can occur when EDICs need or decide to make changes to their initial plans, which according to NCs can be justified in some cases. EDIC Managers stated that an issue with the current modular approach is the lack of flexibility in transferring any remaining lump sums from one module to another in the course of the year, which could help solve the challenge of underspend. This also related to the mentions of inadequate provision for ad hoc requests, events, or opportunities. NCs mentioned that EDICs often organise other events or activities within their modules when changes are required, which means

that they need permission to be able to move money between modules. There was, however, no real appetite for greater flexibility to allow EDICs to delay the period for the execution of their activities due to underspend, which was one idea tested by this evaluation.

In general terms, however, the majority of HoA did **not consider underspend to be a major problem**, in that it does not occur frequently and the amounts in question tend to be very small. None of the HoA interviewees were able to put forward concrete suggestions for how the content of modules could be modified in order to reduce underspend.

Restructuring of modules

Despite some of the positive comments made in regards to the current modular approach**, numerous suggestions** were made on how to modify and restructure the modules. The online survey with NCs showed that a majority, but not all, NCs are in favour of changing the current module system. Out of a total of 27 NCs who responded to the survey, two thirds (18 respondents) are in favour of re-structuring the module system for the next generation of EDICs, while around one third are either against making changes (5 respondents) or they do not have an opinion about it (4 respondents).

In terms of the specific changes that stakeholders would make, in many cases opinions varied and there was **no real consensus**. Mixed views were received from both NCs and EDIC Managers with regards to possible changes to some of the modules, for example discontinuing the publications, e-newsletter and local media modules. Nevertheless, there were some suggestions for the restructuring of modules where a larger consensus was evident.

Events

One of the most popular suggestions by NCs for the restructuring of the current modules was to **merge Modules 7a, 7b and 7c** to allow EDICs to organise any event they like, without having to distinguish between the different sizes of events. Among the NCs which were in favour of changing the current modular approach, the highest levels of consensus were for this particular merge. EDIC Managers seemed to support this view, with 76% of the managers which responded to the online survey agreeing that merging these modules on events would make sense. Of all the options presented on restructuring the modules in the next generation of EDICs, this option also came out as the most popular amongst EDIC Managers. This was also evident when interviewed EDIC Managers stated that one of the issues with the current modules is the "odd split" of Module 7, which makes reporting different. Some host structures also agreed with this change, suggesting that modules could be tweaked to take into account the fact that it is easier to attract a large number of people to an event in major, large cities than it is in rural areas.

Collaboration

Interviewed NCs expressed the feeling that the EDIC network is increasingly working as a network, with EDICs collaborating and sharing ideas with each other. Nevertheless, they believe that there is still scope to strengthen this aspect of **in-network collaboration**, for example through more coordination and planning; however, this would require a greater steer and possibly additional funds given that the current modules do not support this aspect and this implies the sharing of funding which is not aligned with the financial model.

As a result, a recurring criticism which came up about the current modular approach is that the modules do not specifically support **collaboration** with other EDICs or other networks, meaning that EDIC Managers' ability to undertake such collaboration often relates to the level and type of support provided by the host organisation. Interviewed NCs stated that whilst relationships outside the network are valued, this may require extra work from EDICs as they are not specifically required by the modules to establish such relationships. As a result of this, NCs suggested creating a **new module for joint initiatives**; it was suggested that a module on joint EDIC initiatives could stimulate national or cross-border joint initiatives and the sharing of best practices. The results from the online survey with NCs also showed an interest in introducing a cross-border activity module, something which

69% of surveyed EDIC Managers also supported. HoCs also advocated this point, suggesting that for the next generation of EDIC there should be a creation of an additional module to support partnerships with small branches / structures that would help increase the network's visibility in small cities.

Creativity and innovation

Despite many positive comments made in regards to the current modular approach allowing EDICs flexibility, there was a call by NCs for Reps and EDICs to have **greater autonomy**, for example more freedom of choice to suggest other types of modules to facilitate more creative approaches to the different modules. There was also a broad consensus among HoRs in favour of greater flexibility for EDICs, and for loosening up the modular approach and the very specific definition of activities. One interviewee, in particular, questioned the rationale behind obliging EDICs to participate in meetings or to write publications, and the reasoning for measuring their success on these criteria. It was suggested that EDICs should be given greater freedom and responsibility to carry out communications activities and to **think outside of the box**. Currently, interviewed EDIC Managers expressed the view that the modules available provide **no incentive to be creative**. Suggestions were therefore made by some NCs for a new module, e.g. titled "Innovative Initiatives", that would allow EDICs to be more creative and innovative.

However, there was some hesitancy by some NCs at the idea of a discretionary fund being available to the Reps to support unforeseen or innovative actions by EDICs, because it was unclear how this might fit with the Financial Regulation and there is a potential risk that this type of greater freedom at the Rep level could lead to a more political approach to managing EDICs. Additionally, it was recognised that a new financing mechanism would be required which would give EDICs greater financial leeway and therefore stimulate them to come up with more creative / innovative approaches (this issue will be covered in greater depth in the following evaluation question on the lump sum approach).

Online presence

In terms of modules 2 and 3 on website and social media, some NCs made the suggestion to merge them. A large proportion of surveyed EDIC Managers echoed this suggestion (71% of respondents). However, it was also suggested by some NCs that it is not necessary for EDICs to build and hold their own website, as they are hosted in the host structure's website already.

Other suggestions by NCs around making changes to EDICs' online activity was to **make Module 3 on social media obligatory**, including foreseeing ways to generate visuals and clips, for example by hiring a graphic designer to allow EDICs to develop more professional and attractive visual content. Social media was thought to be an important tool both for raising awareness among citizens of the existence of the EDIC network and as a means of communicating with EDIC's existing users. Some NCs thought that there could be an increased role for the Rep here, for example by involving them in EDICs' social media activity e.g. helping draft newsletters. Others cautioned that if a social media module were to be made 'mandatory' for EDICs in future, this would need to be accompanied by appropriate training for managers. In particular, EDIC Managers would need to learn how to engage and interact with their users via social media, and not simply resend news from the institutions and other sources, as is sometimes the case at present.

EDIC Managers also shared similar views in terms of strengthening EDICs' online presence, suggesting that more services should be included in the basic module, such as a website and social media.

Media

There were differing views on media which principally seems to relate to the difficulties in engaging with this actor. Some NCs suggested that an emphasis should be placed on working **with the media, with clearer requirements in Module 6 on local media**. There were also suggestions that EDICs should be obliged to work with the media and all media interactions should be reported in a single, separate module. Suggestions included

renaming Module 6 'Work with the media' instead of 'local media' and having clearer requirements than those currently in place, which at present describe a need to produce publications which generate media coverage.

NCs also thought that it may be useful to identify the number of people that EDICs reach through the media so that this number plays a role in selecting and negotiating media actions. Nevertheless, some host structures suggested that modules could be tweaked in relation to the local media indicator by measuring inputs rather than outputs.

Dissemination material

In regards to dissemination material, there were some suggestions that modules 5a, 5b and 5c on publications and promotional and AV material should be merged; 67% of EDIC Managers who responded to the survey suggested this. Some NCs agreed with this suggestion of combining the three modules, but there were also some suggestions made by NCs that module 5c should be discarded (however this suggestion was not as popular). Additionally, a suggestion was also made by NCs to introduce a **dissemination module** where EDICs can give material resources such as flyers to the public and stakeholders, and they can act as multipliers in spreading information. This would also mitigate the lack of budget for reproducing materials.

This issue of **lack of budget** was raised numerous times by both interviewed NCs and EDIC Managers. Some EDIC Managers felt that there is a **mismatch** between the material they need and the material that they receive, both in terms of quantity and length. They believe that there are too many long publications and not enough short leaflets and factsheets. Considering these concerns, almost all managers strongly felt that print publications are still important. They stated that if they are not to receive printed materials, then they need a budget for printing, which is currently not included in the available modules and therefore seen to be a major constraint on what EDICs can print at present. NCs expressed similar concerns, stating that there is a lack of materials provided by DG COMM HQ. DG COMM HQ sometimes helps in providing promotional material.

However, it is felt that there is a lack of paper material on the EU, especially as some Member States still have places where there are no computers or internet. In addition to this, it is felt that a lot of the existing material is written in a difficult language. More copies of printed material such as publications are required, as well as more visual and interactive materials, as there are not enough for all EDICs. Some visual materials also need replacing. It is seen as difficult for the EDICs to prepare promotional material taking into account the amount of budget available in the relevant module.

Walk-in centre

When asked in the online survey whether or not Modules 1a and 1b should be redefined to provide the option of EDICs providing a walk-in centre, views amongst EDIC Managers were divided, with 47% against this option and 46% for it. This split in opinions seems to reflect anecdotal evidence from interviews that the need for a walk-in centre may be linked to cultural differences / location of EDICs. However, views amongst NCs appeared to be more in favour of providing EDICs with this option, as 13 out of 18 NCs are in favour of EDICs being able to choose whether or not they offer walk-in services. There are questions about the split between Module 1a and 1b. Some NCs indicated that host structures tended to opt for Module 1a simply because this offered a higher level of lump sum irrespective of whether or not this was actually needed / used.

Conclusion

The current module system has allowed the Commission to take a simplified approach to administering and monitoring EDIC funding, which circumnavigates the earlier requirement for real cost data. The system does not describe the implications with regards to non-conformity with module requirements and this is a weakness. The benefits of the simplified administrative approach are also felt by EDICs. However, at this mid-term point in the 3rd generation, it is apparent that there is still scope for further streamlining and, at the same time, the main deficiency of the current system is that it is so prescriptive that it can limit creativity. This relates to the fact that

attached to each module is a very specific description of the activities which must be carried out and yet there are gaps relative to the description of the mission, such as cooperation with other networks or the description in the mission of media relations as a core activity and the wording of the basic information module, contradictions which are highlighted in response to other questions. Perhaps not surprisingly some EDICs and host structures still struggle to understand what the EC is really looking for.

When asked, there are lots of different views with regards to options to make changes to modules, including suggestions to address the fact that there are no options that allow collaboration between EDICs. There are some modules that seem to attract more discussion because there is a logic for change, including merging the three events modules and making the social media module compulsory. But different channels and tools can be used for different purposes and there is no superior option. What is lacking is any consistent evidence to confirm how effective EDICs are at implementing the different modules. This needs to go beyond counting numbers of contacts. There is a requirement for EDICs to conduct an evaluation of 50% of their activities, but the results that this exercise provides are so variable that they do not support meaningful benchmarking and comparisons. This need for effectiveness KPIs is an area that still needs to be defined and would support performance improvements as would the use of simple survey tools.

All EDICs offer a basic information module, but there are questions with regards to the added-value and duplication of providing information particularly given the availability of some 20+ other information and advice networks. At the same time, in theory EDICs offer an overall of the whole EU system and with their understanding of local audiences know how to pitch information at the right level. There is little appetite to cut opportunity for direct, physical contacts with citizens. Indeed this is considered to be part of what makes EDICs different. At the same time, the data confirms a very varied (but unreliable) picture when it comes to use of visitor centres and this means they are in some cases very inefficient. It is important to retain physical contact between citizens and the EU. To do this the EU must come to the citizens and not the other way round. However, there are other potentially more efficient options to provide this contact.

The description of what EDICs are required to do should relate directly to what the EU institutions want EDICs to achieve. This means that if there are changes to the EDIC mission, for example to place a higher level of focus on outreach then this should be reflected in the naming of the current basic 'information' module and its description. In addition, there is a strong argument to require host structures to map the individual competences of EDIC Managers to the skills and competences that match the modules they select.

The current approach to modules is very rigid. There is a need for creativity and 'thinking outside the box' to consider different approaches at all levels of the system. For example, the modular approach puts the responsibility for communication products at the EDIC level, which means that very individual and tailored approaches are feasible. The disadvantage of this approach is that there are limited economies of scale and significant variation in terms of quality. If it is decided / agreed to increase the communication capacity available within the Reps then this could allow a degree of content / product coordination to provide EDICs with the basic products or templates that they can then adapt as required.

The extent to which the sum for modules reflects the true cost of managing these aspects appears in some cases to be somewhat theoretical. It is easier to identify concrete costs where there are definite outputs such as promotional materials, publications, audio-visual, but where these direct costs do not exist, for example updating text on a website or writing Tweets or Facebook posts, there is a strong argument to make these elements the requirements of the basic EDIC module.

Given the lack of effectiveness data, the evaluation team have tried to balance findings from previous evaluations of the EDIC systems, good practice in communication and target group needs and general observations. This leads to the following more specific conclusions:

- Engaging with local media is a good reflex. However, to be able to engage EDICs need news and journalistic skills.

- Visibility is a key issue for EDICs. But the modules are not explicit that they can be used to support for advertising / search engine optimisation. It may be decided that this needs to be addressed by the Reps.

- Events require some kind of tangible give-aways. It makes sense that EDICs retain the option to produce

items locally as this is likely to be more cost effective / flexible to suit their needs.

6.7 The lump sum approach

15. How could the lump sum approach be redefined to better reflect EDIC / host structure and Representation needs? Also in relation to unspent funds?

The following aspects were explored in analysis of evidence to support and answer to this question:

- Degree of consensus on a need to revise resource allocation;

- Extent that it is possible to establish that lump sums are no longer sufficient / proportional to what the EDICs were set out to achieve;

- Extent that is it possible to identify alternative amounts and more categories – taking into account Eurostat data / national data.

Source of evidence
■ EDIC Managers Survey
■ NC Survey
■ Real cost exercise
■ Interviews with Reps

Current state of affairs

The EDIC network is co-funded by the EU under the form of fixed lump-sums per module[24]. As explained in the EDIC Guidelines, *"in accordance with the Financial Regulation requiring that there can be no profit from receiving an EU grant, the amount of the lump sums has been fixed to cover in general less than 50% of the real costs".*

According to HoAs, the lump sum approach is considered to be suitable and a significant improvement from the expenses system under the previous framework agreement, having made the management of payments much easier. This lump sum approach is thought by HoAs to be a workable compromise between the requirements of EDICs (in terms of ensuring financial stability / continuity of payments) and those of the HoA (reducing administrative burden). NCs echoed this point stating that, despite the lump sum approach having both pros and cons, it allows the measurement of results through a set of given indicators and not through invoices, which has reduced the administrative burden; it was suggested that previously there was no guarantee that the invoices actually related to EDIC activities. Some NCs also thought that the introduction of lump sums had simplified the EDIC Managers' tasks substantially; although other NCs stated that sometimes it can be a challenge for EDIC Managers to understand how grant management works and how to deal with administrative requirements.

HoRs did not take issue with the lump sum approach either, stating that this decision is seen to ultimately lie with DG COMM HQ. Where host structures had a view, and a number did not, it was felt that the lump sum approach is working well. Therefore, it can be argued that the **lump sum approach overall offers a more simplified financial mechanism than the previous expenses system.**

Nevertheless, the current level of resourcing of EDICs is an area of concern, since 85% of respondents stated that human and financial resources have the most significant impact on EDICs' ability to provide the type of service required. However, generally EDICs are fairly satisfied with the current level of financing dedicated to their current activities and tasks. According to survey responses from EDIC Managers, over half of them declared that they were satisfied with the level of lump sums allocated to their EDIC (54% of respondents), while 44% are not satisfied. Therefore despite the majority being satisfied with the current financing levels, there are still some who are not as satisfied and are calling for increased funding in order to effectively achieve the EDICs' objectives. This

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[24] The module system and the lump sums for each country are defined in the call for proposals and the Action Plan, point 4 (Annex I of the Framework Partnership Agreement).

is in line with some of the views expressed in the NC survey. Respondents suggested to set the annual maximum amount of grants per EDIC in their country to EUR 40,000 on average, with answers ranging from EUR 25,000 to 60,000. Justifications for such increases included improving EDICs' services within the same scale of operations and increasing communication activities. Furthermore, nearly two thirds of respondents place higher lump sums among the factors, which would have a very significant impact on EDICs' performance.

HoRs consider that the overall EDIC budget is insufficient at national and EU level. There is consensus that EDICs are constrained by limited resources. NCs consider that more money is required for EDICs, but not necessarily more human resources. This suggests **that additional funds should be used to support additional communication activities.** Interviewed EDIC Managers stated that the problem was not the amounts of EU levels per se, but rather the inappropriate allocation of funds between modules. HoAs made a similar point, stating that they consider the budget currently allocated to the EDIC network to be adequate because it allows EDICs to fulfil their mission. The general HoA opinion is that instead of providing more funding, it is more important to **ensure that EDICs are using funds efficiently** and in the right way.

HoAs considered that there are pros and cons to the lump sum approach. On the one hand, it facilitates payments but, on the other hand, it is considered to put a **focus on reporting rather than results**.

Overall, it is recognised by NCs that EDICs are doing a lot for relatively small sums of money. However, there is limited margin for manoeuvre, unless host structures are in a position to provide significant additional resources. Host structures are already considered by EDIC Managers to be providing a significant amount of funding and benefits in-kind, e.g. office infrastructure, which is critical to the survival or level of activity of some EDICs. According to the surveyed EDIC Managers, 69% of respondents quoted the level of support from host structures having a significant impact on EDICs' ability to provide the type of services required. However, according to NC survey respondents, host structures are said to provide variable levels of support, which further reinforces the idea that current EU funding levels can impact EDICs' achievements negatively.

Differences between lump sums and actual costs

In terms of the current level of lump sums allocated for each module, these are adapted to be set at a lower rate for countries whose comparative price levels of final consumption by private households, including indirect taxes, are at a level lower than 80% of the EU average. According to EDICs' responses to the real costs online survey, countries receiving the standard lump sum amounts have much higher costs in comparison to their allocated amounts than countries which receive the adapted lump sums. This can mean one of two things: either host structures in the standard lump sum countries are contributing a higher level of co-financing than the implicitly expected 50%, and / or the current dedicated lump sum amounts are not sufficient to carry out the minimum set of requirements of the modules. This is particularly apparent for modules 1a, 3, 4, 5a, 5b, 7a and 7b, where the actual average costs of conducting these modules is at least 3 times higher than the allocated lump sum amount. The module which shows the largest variance between the actual average cost and the standard lump sum is Module 1a on basic information services, where the **actual cost** is on average **EUR 44,267** compared to just **EUR 14,000** that is allocated through the lump sums, as highlighted in the below charts.

Average of all Adapted Lump Sum Countries: BG, CZ,EE, LV, LI,HU,PL,RO,SK, HR												
	M1a	M1b	M2	M3	M4	M5a	M5b	M5c	M6	M7a	M7b	M7c
Average costs	18,468	15,209	1,912	1,114	702	1,266	908	1,254	1,146	635	1,321	2,345
Current rates	11,200	8,000	1,600	800	400	800	400	800	800	400	800	1,600
Variance	-7,268	-7,209	-312	-314	-302	-466	-508	-454	-346	-235	-521	-745
These countries are providing less than 50% of co-financing												

Average of all Standard Lump Sum Countries: AT, BE, DK, FI, FR, DE, EL,IE, IT, LU, NL, PT, CY, SL, ES, SE, UK, MT												
	M1a	M1b	M2	M3	M4	M5a	M5b	M5c	M6	M7a	M7b	M7c
Average costs	44,267	18,649	4,541	3,185	2,594	3,087	1,769	2,347	2,338	1,679	3,839	5,363

Current rates	14,000	10,000	2,000	1,000	500	1,000	500	1,000	1,000	500	1,000	2,000
Variance	-30,267	-8,649	-2,541	-2,185	-2,094	-2,087	-1,269	-1,347	-1,338	-1,179	-2,839	-3,363
	Need[25] more			Need more	Need more	Need more	Need more			Need more	Need more	

As for the **adapted lump sum countries**, there is a different pattern emerging. For all modules across the EDICs which responded to the real costs data exercise, the average **actual costs of running these modules is less than double the allocated lump sum amounts**. This again could suggest one of two things: either the host structures in these countries are providing less than 50% implicitly expected co-financing rate, and / or the allocated lump sums to the EDICs in these countries are more representative of true costs. Again, as was the case with the standard lump sum countries, the module which runs the highest average cost and largest variance in comparison to its lump sum is Module 1a (**EUR 18,468** compared to the allocated EUR 11,200). This is unsurprising seeing as this module includes the costs having an open walk-in centre.

The Committee of the Regions also highlighted in its Draft Resolution on the situation of EDICs that *"the work of EDICs relies on strong collaboration and funding from the EU"* and proposed that *"the lump sum allocated to the basic information offer per EDIC should be doubled and the standard lump sums for funding the different modules should be increased"*, as well as increasing *"financial resources at the disposal of pilot modules"* within the current multiannual framework. The suggestion here of doubling the lump sum allocated to the basic information module can be validated with the evidence shown above from the EDICs real costs survey, where this module runs the highest cost. What this suggestion also implies is that more money should in fact be allocated to pilot modules, thus advocating an expansion of EDICs' activities.

Opinions amongst NCs were split with regards to whether EDICs should offer additional services and activities that would help them to target people more effectively (almost as many survey respondents agreed as disagreed). However, when it came to the option of introducing more categories of lump sums across Member States, twice as many respondents disagreed than agreed with this.

Adjust lump sums according to local costs

Some suggestions were made for redefining the current lump sum approach in order for it to better reflect EDICs', host structures' and Reps' needs, as well as addressing underspent funds. Within the evaluation, there has been much discussion with regards to the level of the lump sum and there have been differing views on whether the amount is sufficient, although it is recognised that **different levels of cost** are incurred **in different countries**. One recommendation which was raised on numerous occasions is for lump sums to also take into account local costs, i.e. between cities and rural areas in a country. Some host structures echoed this point, stating that heterogeneity of costs is not properly catered for, e.g. costs adjusted for EDICs located in a capital city.

Some NCs even suggested having a third level of funding for the countries where the cost of living is higher, in order to also account for the higher salaries. Interviewed EPIOs echoed this point, highlighting the difficulty in setting lump sum amounts given the significant variation in expected salary levels in **cities, towns and rural locations**, which they suggested can make it difficult to attract competent EDIC Managers, as well as the high social security costs in certain Member States. One EPIO suggested that lump sum costs should take account of local authority salaries. Some HoCs suggested that the current funding level was adequate, but others advocated a significant increase in funding in order to bring the salaries of the EDICs' Managers up to a reasonable standard. It was reported that the lump sum had not kept pace with real costs, despite the modification of the co-financing rate by DG COMM.

Decentralised approach

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[25] Need more is indicated where the real cost is at least 3 x the amount of lump sum provided by the Commission.

Interviewed HoRs suggested adopting a more decentralised approach to financial management, although there is some reluctance to individualising systems at national level for fear of adding to the already excessive administrative burden. Only a small minority of HoA took the view that a more decentralised approach to financial management is needed. This would arguably help increase EDICs' operational flexibility and allow them to better address the needs of each Member State. Nevertheless, interviewees agreed that a more decentralised approach would not work without additional administrative resources at the Reps. In addition, one HoA pointed out that the **funding inequality** that would be introduced as a result of a more decentralised arrangement would compromise the very concept of an EDIC network. They suggested that it is **important that DG COMM headquarters continues to define standard lump sum amounts** for the whole of network. The current centralised approach is seen as useful in that it allows EDICs to operate on an equal footing.

Some NCs were also in favour of the Reps having greater autonomy, for example **more freedom of choice to suggest other types of modules** to facilitate more creative approaches to the different modules. However, there was some hesitancy at the idea of a discretionary fund being available to the Reps to support unforeseen or innovative actions by EDICs, because it was unclear how this might fit with the Financial Regulation. There is also a potential risk that this type of greater freedom at the Reps' level could lead to a more political approach to managing EDICs.

Despite these risks, interviewed HoCs suggested that a new (additional) financing mechanism should be introduced to **allow Reps to issue calls for proposals for specific projects[26]**. This would give EDICs greater financial leeway and stimulate them to come up with more creative / innovative approaches to their communications activities, beyond the compulsory modules. In contrast, one interviewee argued that the current framework already allowed for creativity and that it was up to the EDICs themselves to exploit this potential. Additionally, one HoA pointed out that if Reps were entitled to build the call themselves, and distribute money in a more flexible way, this would lead to much more work for the Reps, and it would be difficult to decide how much money to give to each EDIC, and to clearly justify the differences in funding.

Nevertheless, in terms of the financial aspects, one of the main complaints from EDIC Managers was the **lack of a framework for dealing with unexpected costs** from justified ad hoc requests (which host structures have to absorb on a good will basis).

Underspend

Opinions also varied in terms of the prevalence of unspent funds and how to overcome this issue. Interviewed EDIC Managers stated that an issue which they face is the **lack of flexibility in transferring any remaining lump sums from one module to another** in the course of the year, which could help solve the challenge of underspends. This issue also related to problems mentioned in regards to the inadequate provision for ad hoc requests, events or opportunities and the need for greater flexibility. Interviewed NCs stated that underspend can occur when EDICs need or decide to make changes to their original plan, which can in some cases be justified. However, it was suggested that EDICs often organise other events or activities within their modules when changes are required, which means that EDICs need permission to be able to move money between modules. There was, however, no real appetite from NCs for greater flexibility to allow EDICs to delay the period for the execution of their activities due to underspend, for example to a 14-month period.

Nevertheless, NC survey respondents shared some recommendations on how to better execute the annual budget for EDIC grants in order to solve the problem of underspend. 58% of respondents agreed with the idea of allocating saved money to the support budget line of Reps since it would allow more flexibility in using the budget, better tailoring decisions to each country and producing more material and training. Other suggestions included introducing more flexibility in relocating money within the budget and in modifying the Annual Action Programme during the year, as well as allowing EDICs to reshuffle money from one module to another with due justification and approval of the Rep. Few NC respondents were in favour of allocating the minimum grant per Annual Action Programme and then allocating additional funds through an addendum if such funds become available, since an

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[26] It is noted, however, that this possibility already exists.

addendum was thought not to be enough to allocate additional funds and could add to the administrative burden. Despite these suggestions, overall the issue of EDIC **budget underspend** was not considered to be significant for the majority of interviewed NCs or HoAs; reasons for this included either executing the whole budget, or not having enough budget in the first place. Most interviewed HoAs reported that allocating fixed sums was a disincentive when it comes to encouraging EDICs to go beyond basic requirements.

Conclusion

The move from calculating lump sums on the basis of actual costs to using standard cost modules has been positive for all involved. The simplified approach reduces administrative burden. However, greater simplification could still be incurred by integrating all of the more standard communication elements, including social media and the e-newsletter under the basic or standard module. Another area for flexibility relates to the ability of EDICs move budget between modules. It is worth exploring if there are ways to manage the accounting of underspend on specific modules and reallocation to others. At the same time, there are no mechanisms in place to support NCs if specific modules are not implemented as expected. There is scope to articulate that funds will be withheld if this occurs without a reasonable justification.

There is consensus between those in the Commission (DG COMM HQ, the Reps) and the EPIOs that EDICs are limited in what they can achieve by the funds that are made available to them. EDIC Managers also agree that resourcing has a critical impact, but most (more than half of those surveyed) are in fact satisfied with the level of lump sum made available.

The real costs exercise suggests that there is no acute need to increase the lump sum across any of the modules for Member States which receive an adapted lump sum. But it raises questions as host structures in these countries do not seem to be able to match the level of funding provided by the Commission. For standard lump sum countries, data from a majority of EDICs suggests that the amount of funds allocated to Module 1 in particular should be substantially increased. These funds are in many cases used to support salary costs. The real costs exercise also suggests a need for increases across other modules.

The real costs exercise is limited to the tasks that EDICs currently carry out. If it is decided to change the focus or volume of EDIC activities then this would also need to be taken into account and there is no mechanism in place to support the additional costs required.

There is a lack of clarity in the Call for proposals governing the current EDIC generation with regards to the amount of contribution that is expected from the host structures. Although two examples of match funding are provided, and host structures are informed that they are expected to provide "adequate levels of co-financing" it is unclear what this actually means. This is a critical issue to be addressed given that the amount of host structure support is so fundamental to EDIC performance.

6.8 Cost drivers and value for money

> **16. Have EDICs' results been achieved at a reasonable cost in terms of:**
> - **Cost drivers: what are the main cost drivers of the EDICs?**
> - **Value for money: has the EDIC provided value for money and could this be increased in any way?**

The question was answered by considering the following criteria:

- Were EDICs' main cost drivers instrumental to the achievement of objectives?

- Have EDICs provided good value for money by delivering services in a cost-effective way?

- Are there any combinations of tools that could be more effective and / or produced / delivered at lower cost?

Source of evidence
■ Real cost exercise
■ Interviews with NCs

Main cost drivers

According to interviews with EDIC Managers, the main cost drivers of EDICs vary from country to country. This perception may relate to different costs being high in certain countries (e.g. rents or salaries), or to the nature of the in-kind support provided by host structures. Therefore, we will distinguish between the main cost drivers for standard lump sum countries and for adapted lump sum countries.

For the standard lump sum countries, the maximum amount that can be allocated per EDIC per year in these countries is EUR 25,000 and the minimum amount is EUR 15,000. Therefore, it is assumed that the average amount which an EDIC receives per year is EUR 20,000. According to the EDICs real costs survey, the average annual gross costs of providing one full time equivalent member of staff to the EDIC is EUR 38,431 (this includes salary, tax and social security). Therefore, automatically it can be seen that if a host structure provides 50% co-financing, most of the budget is spent on just one full time member of staff. This cost alone is nearly double of what the average EDIC will receive, suggesting that **staff** is the **main cost driver** for EDICs located in standard lump sum countries. The cost of premises, though still high, is not as significant, with the average cost per annum ranging roughly between EUR 17 – 20,000, depending on whether the premise have been put at the EDICs' disposal for free or not.

In terms of modules, Modules 1a and 1b on basic information services also prove to be one of the main cost drivers. For the standard lump sum countries, the average annual cost of running Module 1a is EUR 44,267, compared to just EUR 14,000 that is allocated to it in terms of lump sum. Even with 50% match funding from host structures, this cost is still extremely high.

The maximum amount that can be allocated to adapted lump sum countries is EUR 20,000, and the minimum amount is EUR 12,000. Therefore, it is assumed that the average EDIC from one of the countries receives EUR 16,000 per annum. Assuming that a host structure provides 50% co-financing (although we know that this is not always the case) would mean that the EDIC has EUR 32,000 per annum. When we compare this to the average annual cost of providing one full time member of staff (EUR 15,141), nearly half of the budget gets spent on salary. Though a large amount and a clear main cost driver, this proportion is not as significant as it is for standard lump sum countries. The average annual cost of premises are also significantly less (around EUR 5,000), which is just a quarter of the assumed available budget, compared to the standard lump sum countries where the costs of premises make up around half of the assumed available budget.

Even for modules the EDICs in the adapted lump sum countries seem to have lower costs in comparison to the allocated lump sum per module, compared to the EDICs in the standard lump sum countries. However again, Modules 1a and 1b are the main cost drivers in terms of modules.

Value for money

Overall, it seems that EDICs do show value for money. Interviewed NCs recognised that EDICs are doing a lot for relatively small sums of money. They are seen to be doing well to realise economies of scale and maximising opportunities to share premises and events with partners. Moreover, NCs indicated that the EDIC network generates additional funding at local level to support EU institutional communication goals. However, this comes down to the variable levels of support which host structures provide.

One way in which value for money is not realised as much is when EDIC staff members are stretched in terms of their workload, as often they are asked to spend some of their time on doing work for the host structures. Also, according interviewed NCs, there is a risk that the reported low levels of pay for EDIC Managers do not work as an incentive when compared to the amount of work expected of them. This can lead to difficulties in retaining staff, with frequent staff changes impacting on the efficiency of EDICs. The low salary offer (and obligation to work in small cities) does not always allow host structures to hire very competent people and it was reported that whilst generalists are able to give presentations to schools, they are not necessarily sufficiently skilled to organise higher-level events. Therefore, in some cases the costs are so low that it is having a negative impact on efficiency and quality of EDICs. Nevertheless, considering that salaries are one of the main cost drivers for EDICs, they are currently restricted in providing higher salaries with the current funding which they receive.

Conclusion

Overall the EDIC network offers value for money because it attracts additional funding at local level to support EU information activities. Amounts provided by local organisations average at circa twice the amount allocated to action grants in standard lump sum countries and just under the equivalent amount in adapted lump sum countries. However, value for money is reduced if and where the network supports activities that would have in any case taken place, which is difficult to assess given that the call states a preference for applicants with experience in communicating on EU issues.

The main direct cost driver for EDICs is staff costs / salaries and there are concerns that the amounts available are not enough, which is backed up by the available data. Whilst operating the network with a relatively modest budget means that the Commission cannot necessarily be accused of overspending and / or wasting EU funding, it can still generate a negative effect because lack of funding limits what EDICs are able to do and can act as a de-motivating factor when it comes to attracting the best / most suitable staff. When it comes to indirect costs staff time related to organising events for specific audiences take up the most time, yet these outreach activities are considered to be a way that EDICs can add value to the types of activities carried out by the Reps.

The consideration of value for money and cost drivers should also take into account the weaknesses of the current system, some of which relate to poor visibility, and low numbers of enquiries and take up of the service. The current financial structure does not support an increase in visibility given that there is no spend allocated to measures that could enhance awareness including for example awareness raising campaigns, advertising, digital promotion and search engine optimisation. Greater attention needs to be paid to these aspects in the allocation of budget to EDICs, otherwise the extent of added value at local level is minimal given the enormous territory to be covered.

6.9 Interaction between network members

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17. How effective is the interaction between network members and is there scope for greater synergies on outreach between EDICs and between EDICs and the Representations?

The following elements were considered in this answer:

- The extent that EDICs collaborate with each other;

- Evidence of systematic win/wins from greater collaboration;

- Evidence of appetite for greater collaboration between different actors (EDICs, NCs, etc.);

- Existence of mechanisms to facilitate greater collaboration.

Source of evidence
■ EDIC Managers Survey
■ NC Survey
■ Interview with EDIC Managers
■ Interviews with Reps

To answer the question on effectiveness it is necessary to first define how EDICs interact with each other and then to define how effectiveness will be judged in this context. The ToR indicates that effectiveness relates to progress made against the stated objectives and the need to consider the factors that drive or hinder this progress. As the objectives describe expected actions rather than targets it is not possible to assess progress. Therefore, this answer is centred on identifying the key factors that enhance or limit interaction and opportunities for outreach that are generated by EDICs and the Reps working together.

Interaction between EDICs

There is no legal requirement for EDICs to collaborate with other EDICs as a network. Applications to the Commission are made by individual entities and the description of EDICs' mission is focussed on information and interaction with end target groups and as the first entry point signposting to Your Europe and 'other' services and networks. There is no provision for groups of entities to apply as 'mini networks' or for an entity to provide a whole country network. This means that the **national network** concept relates to the way that EDICs are managed by the Reps and DG COMM HQ.

The survey of EDIC Managers confirms that the majority of EDICs (68%) collaborate **frequently** with other EDICs in the same country and that a minority (4%) rarely collaborate. Evidence from the case study visits suggests that this collaboration tends to be done on an informal basis. The sharing of information was demonstrated in practice via the Mystery Shopper Exercise, where EDICs in Portugal and the Netherlands, questioned why the same question had been received by another EDIC. At the same time, data collected via the Intranet confirms that some EDICs receive no email or telephone enquiries at all in a given month, and we suggest that this fact may have resulted in EDICs sharing the questions, because some EDICs receive very few requests at all. Nonetheless both mystery shoppers considered that EDICs were acting as a network.

Although a majority of EDICs may collaborate with other EDICs the extent that EDICs feel that they are part of a network can vary considerably. The stability of the host structure is considered to be a factor in this. When there are limited changes to host structures over the generations this can help relationships between EDICs. But collaboration between EDICs is variable and takes different formats. Some EDICs meet regularly and exchange experience, ideas, materials[27] and speakers for events[28]. Others organise joint initiatives including competitions at regional or national level.

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[27] For example the EU calendar of events that was shared between EDICs in Poland and helped to reinforce the network.
[28] For example, but not limited to in Northern Greece

It is easiest and can make sense to work with neighbouring EDICs for example when some form of joint presence is required for example at an event. However, EDICs' ability to run joint events is perceived to be limited by the need to increase the number of participants who are required to be involved. There is some variation to this pattern of collaborating with the EDICs who are closest by. Some EDICs work more in isolation, particularly those in rural locations, and would welcome more networking opportunities although running joint activities is less feasible when the area is sparsely populated. At the same time, being 'too' local can be a problem for some EDICs that are more focussed on their own host structure, have not grasped the bigger picture, tend to forget that they are part of a network and that they can make use of the network to their benefit.

Some EDICs also collaborate occasionally with EDICs in other countries as highlighted by 54% of EDIC Managers surveyed. 8% indicated that they do this frequently. This suggests that EDICs are answering enquiries of a cross-border nature. This type of activity can be facilitated by NCs, for example the annual meeting between EDICs in Sweden and Finland. However, cross border collaboration implies that EDICs have fluency in English or the language of the neighbouring country. In the EDIC Managers survey 69% indicated that they would be interested in a cross-border module.

The Intranet is a platform that can and is used by EDICs to share information and messages with its real time posting mechanism. But it has limitations because EDICs are typically not able to share communication materials via this platform even the platform can create some sense of a community. EDICs do not place a high level of value on the Intranet, but tend to view it more as a way to submit the required monthly reports.

Synergies and outreach

Although there are no formal requirements for EDICs to work together, NCs and DG COMM HQ encourage networking through a number of initiatives, including the coordination of working groups and the Pan-European Working Group, the shared platform for EDIC collaboration in France, and the NC centrally coordinated national and / or regional meetings which are held at least annually and in many cases several times a year. The meetings are reported to work well and they reinforce the sense of team. Meetings allow EDICs to **share their experiences** with other EDICs and with NCs, and to find solutions to common problems. In the survey, 47% of EDICs were very satisfied with the support provided by NCs to enhance collaboration with other EDICs, with 44% satisfied and 7% not very satisfied.

As well as providing **motivational** support, collaboration has potential to help EDICs to increase their efficiency; they can work faster and reduce costs by working together, for example to **share materials** no longer provided by the Commission, as reported in Germany. Collaboration is also important given that the biggest challenge identified by 79% of EDIC Managers in the survey is finding interesting ways to engage with target groups.

Despite the current efforts made by some network members to collaborate, it is widely considered that more could be done to strengthen and increase the scope of these synergies. When asked in an online survey about the factors which increase the impact of EDICs, NCs believed that one of the most significant factors in increasing the impact of EDICs is **greater collaboration** between EDICs and with the Rep on outreach events.

Figure 10: How useful / important could the following factors be to increase the impact of EDICs? *(weighted average, NC Survey)*
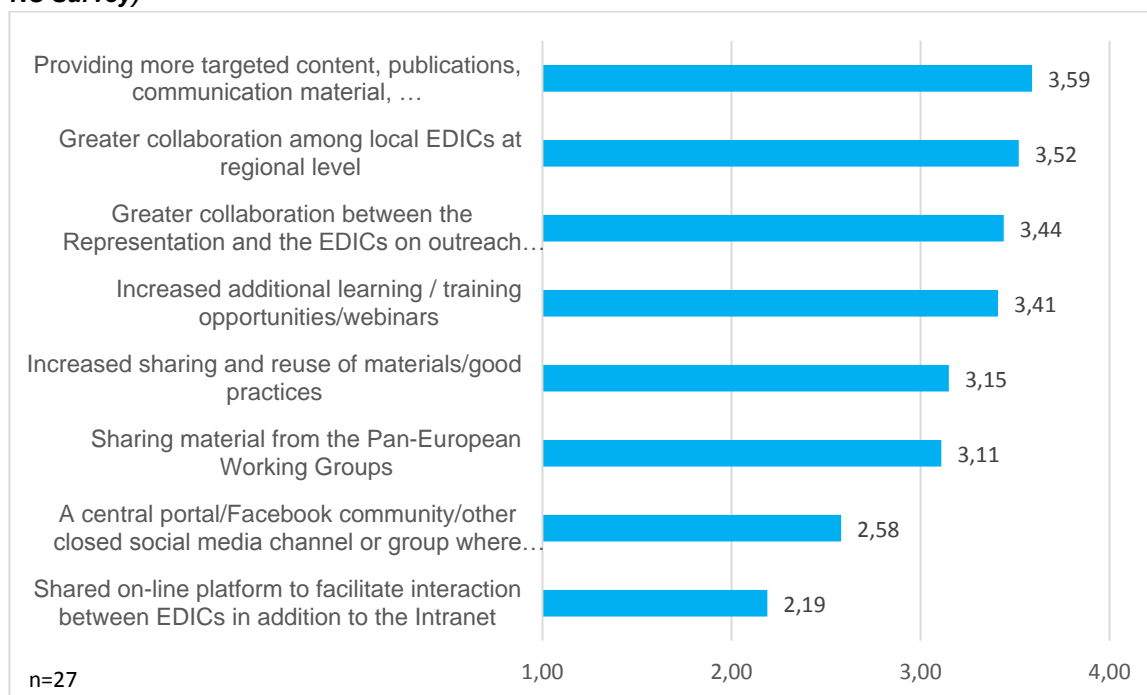
As highlighted above, greater collaboration among local EDICs at a regional level was given a weighted average of 3.52 out of 4, whilst greater collaboration between the Rep and the EDICs on outreach events had a weighted average of 3.44.

More centrally coordinated meetings to provide **opportunities for exchanges /** meetings between EDICs and NCs, and greater scope for EDICs to have more **influence** on the agenda for the Annual General Meeting.

A more coordinated approach on communication content and priorities between EDICs, Reps and DG COMM HQ is called for to allow EDICs to contribute to working under a common strategy. Concrete actions suggested include sharing the communication planning of the EC and the EP, including the Reps' country strategies. However, in the current set up NCs are limited by their workload and focus on administrative processes rather than coordinating a more **strategic** approach to coordinate contents, planning and ideas to support greater network impact.

Nevertheless, it was recognised by NCs that such coordination, planning and systematic approaches would require a greater, more specific, **steer** by the Reps to confirm that collaboration is an imperative. **Additional funds** would also be required, given that the current modules do not support this aspect. A suggestion was made to introduce a **module on joint EDIC initiatives**, as this could stimulate nation or cross-border joint initiatives and sharing of best practices. This finding was echoed in the survey with EDIC Managers, where it was indicated that 69% of EDICs would be interested in a cross-border module. NCs also suggested that more money should be made available, either to the EDICs for regional cooperation, and / or to the Rep to potentially run some communication activities in-house.

Conclusion

The evidence suggests that most EDICs engage in collaboration with other EDICs. This is typically on a very frequent basis with EDICs in the same country and more occasionally when it comes to EDICs in other countries. There are at least two levels of collaboration. Collaboration involving joint physical activities, which is typically only feasible for neighbouring EDICs and the sharing of good practices, ideas and materials, which allows collaboration over a wider geographic area. There are no specific goals or formal requirements for EDIC networking although this is encouraged by the Commission. There is no mechanism in place to assess the

relative effectiveness of collaboration between EDICs. There is anecdotal evidence that collaboration is beneficial for all involved, NCs, EDICs and end target group. NCs' and EDICs' work can be more efficient because when ideas are pooled EDIC users get more varied activities and materials, which are not all generated directly by the local EDIC.

There is scope and it is desirable to stimulate greater synergies on outreach by EDICs and between EDICs and Reps. This implies a more planned and systematic approach to collaboration / communication, with greater levels of input / coordination, which could be relatively 'light touch' by the Reps. However, given NCs' current workload and emphasis on managing processes and administration, it seems unlikely that this potential will be reached. A closed / members-only social media group could be useful, because this would allow EDICs to interact in real-time with each other. It would also provide a permanent on-going record of interaction and / or frequently questions and answers by NCs. This type of platform worked well for community managers in the Share Europe On-line initiative. Questions are asked whether collaboration and networking are separate activities which require support under a specific module. There is insufficient evidence to confirm that this is really required.

Synergies with other institutions and other DGs do not appear to be as strong / effective as those between EDICs and between EDICs and the Reps. If and how this should be improved in the future relates to the extent that changes to the current mission are required as well as there being platforms available to facilitate better collaboration.

6.10 Complementarity with other EU information providers

> **18.** **To what extent have the EDICs complemented the activities of other EU information providers, such as the European Parliament Information Offices, EC Representations, Your Europe, EDCC, EU social media activities, EU online information and other citizen-oriented networks / initiatives?**

To answer this question we considered the following judgement criteria:

- Extent that EDICs are collaborating with other EU information providers;
- Evidence that this collaboration adds value / overlaps;
- Extent that there is scope for increased synergies / greater efficiencies.

Source of evidence
■ EDIC Managers Survey
■ NC Survey
■ Interviews
■ Mystery shopping

Collaboration with EPIOs and EC Reps

Despite the Memorandum of Understanding with the European Parliament, **only a quarter of EDICs confirm that they have frequent contacts with EPIOs**. In addition the EDIC Managers survey indicates that EDICs do not place a high level of importance on contacts with EPIOs (weighted average of score 2.93), which was considerably lower than the level of importance placed on contacts with end target groups schools, universities and local and regional media (with weighted averages of 3.71, 3.4 and 3.28). When interviewed, EPIOs explained that they do not have the **resources** to engage systematically with EDICs and that they do not always have a good overview of what EDICs are doing. This is assumed to be a greater limitation in countries with higher numbers of EDICs. At the same time, EDICs themselves reported lower levels of understanding of the importance / value of collaborating with EPIOs although some NCs confirm that this situation is evolving. The EPIO perspective is that it can be useful to collaborate with EDICs because they have a **strong local knowledge / networks**, which EPIOs cannot cover given that there is one EPIO in each country. One of the suggestions for enhancing synergies between EDICs and EPIOs is the sharing of communication planning and calendars.

Given the management structure and location in the country, the natural partners for EDIC collaboration are the Reps. Feedback from different Rep staff suggests that EDICs are **valued** because they provide an **extension to** the sphere that can be covered by each Rep both in geographic terms and also in terms of outreach activities. It seems to be accepted that levels of interaction with EDICs are variable with some EDICs being highly proactive and others not going beyond the basic minimum required in the Framework Partnership Agreement. Reps can benefit from the most proactive EDICs who can answer questions, provide feedback, including in relation to negative press coverage, hot topics or local contacts. EDICs can re-tweet social media posts and amplify EU social messages, in some cases with some success, although not all EDICs select the social media module or are very effective, as highlighted by the mystery shopping exercise. EDICs provide support when Reps need a more local focus.

The extent that Reps are able to play a role in maximising the impact of the EDIC network is reported to be limited in part by the current focus of NCs on the administrative aspects of managing grants. In consequence, NCs report that they are not able to take as significant a lead as they would like to direct the work of their network. Despite this, NCs report a number of specific initiatives to support their networks, including setting up specific platforms for collaboration, arranging meetings with other EU information sources, sharing materials and lessons learned. Also a majority of EDICs are very satisfied with support provided by the Reps (76% very satisfied) and also, but to a lesser extent by NCs (56% very satisfied and 30% satisfied). Irrespective of NCs' reported administrative burden, the contractual set-up means that NCs play a supportive rather than directive role. EDIC Managers are not EU staff and prepare their own individual annual action programmes, which are not required to feed into a wider communication plan with, for example, specific objectives and outputs determined by the Rep.

Nonetheless there is always scope to do more / to generate more synergies as 79% of EDIC Managers surveyed indicated that finding new and interesting ways to communicate with citizens is their biggest challenge (from the list of options presented). In the NC survey, NCs rated greater **collaboration** between EDICS and Rep outreach as one of the top three ways that could increase the **impact** of EDICs.

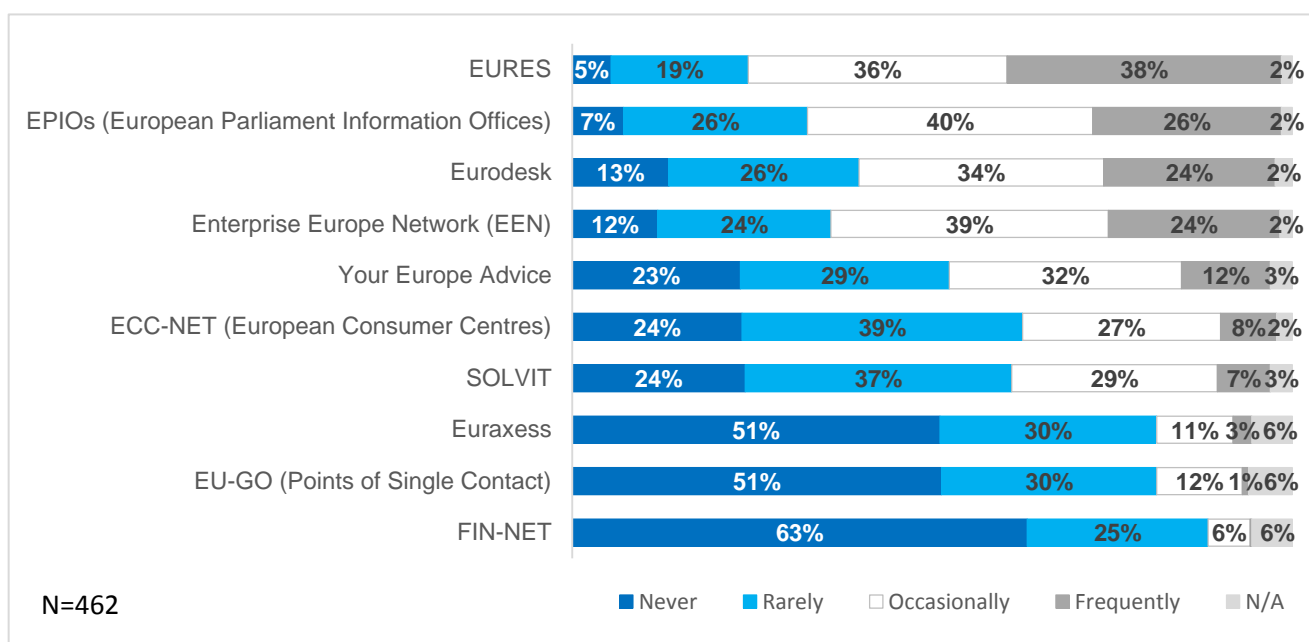## Collaboration with other information sources

EDIC Managers who participated in the survey were asked to indicate whether they collaborate frequently, occasionally, rarely and never with the other information sources supported by DG COMM (EDC, EDCC and Team Europe). From this list the most frequent collaboration was reported to be with the EDCC, with 19% collaborating frequently. EDICs were then asked to indicate levels of collaboration with lists of 19 other sources of EU information. The results suggest that **EDICs collaborate** most frequently with the **Erasmus+ national agencies** (43%), followed by **EURES** (38%), the EPIOs (26%), Eurodesk and Enterprise Europe (24%) (which suggests that at least 1 in 4 EDICs collaborate frequently with these information sources). There is considerably less interaction with the ECCs and Your Europe Advice, as highlighted by the two charts below. The choice of interaction corresponds to the fact that the main focus group for a majority of EDICs is young people and teachers.

Figure 11: Levels of frequency of collaboration with other information sources (1/2)

N=462
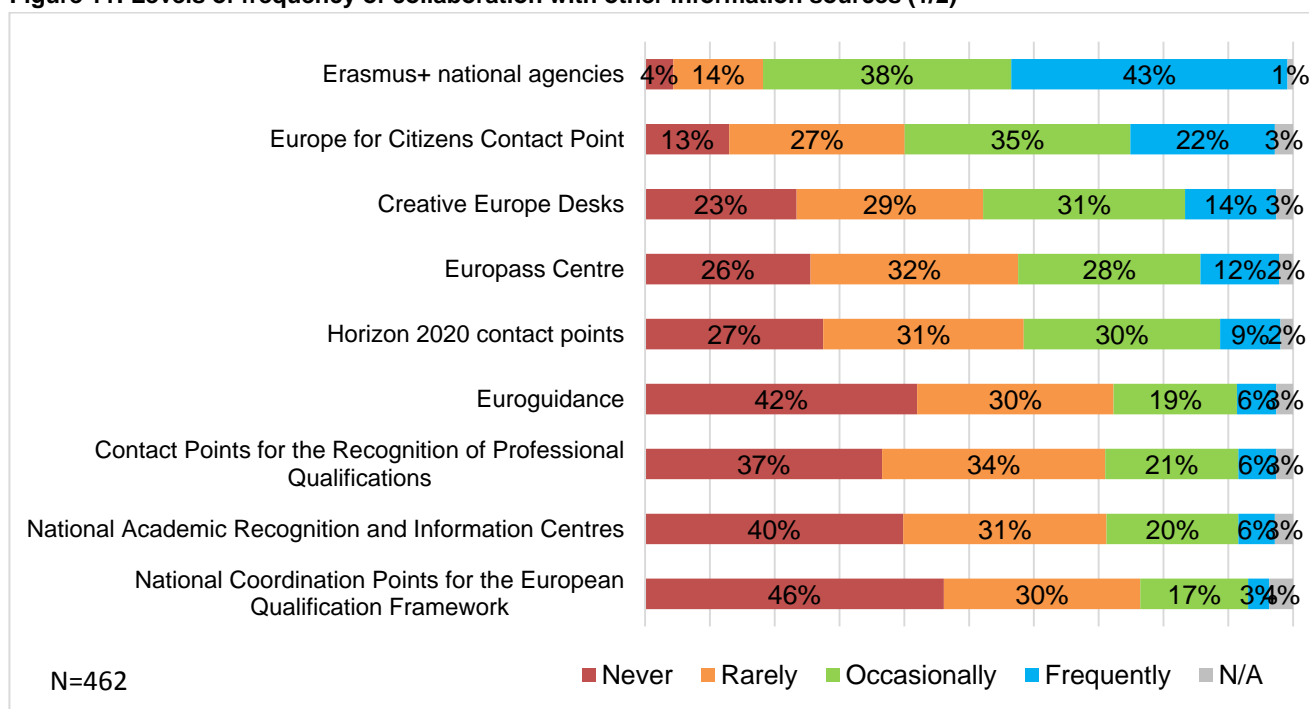
Source: EDIC Managers survey

Figure 12: Levels of frequency of EDIC collaboration with other EU information sources (2/2)

Source: EDIC Managers survey

The evidence confirms that EDICs are collaborating with a range of other EU information sources. NCs and DG COMM HQ can support this collaboration by organising joint information sessions and reinforcing messages about the range of information support available.

The need to sign post citizens' and other target groups' requests for information to appropriate sources in case of need is highlighted in the EDIC mission, which describes that EDICs are:

> '…a one-stop shop' … [and] 'first entry point to the European Union or to specialised information sources and signposting to other information services and networks...'

In terms of contractual requirements, host structures are expected to enable citizens to obtain information. The need to collaborate with other EU networks to ensure high quality and relevant information is implicit rather than explicit in this expected result.

In practice, EDICs and NCs consider that they are well placed to answer the types of questions that EDICs receive and the provision of information, advice and assistance is described as part of the EDIC network mission. The below chart confirms that EDICs answer 76% of questions that they receive without the need to forward them to other EU information sources. Yet the mystery shopper exercise highlights how EDICs may in fact point citizens to other sources of information on the internet, for example by providing links in their email response even if they do not directly and forward the information requested themselves. There was one exception to this approach in the mystery shopper exercise when EDICs in Portugal and the Netherlands were asked a question about migration by an 'awkward / nuisance' citizen they informed the citizens that they would consult the EDCC, who then responded directly to the mystery shopper / the mystery shopper received no further information. NCs confirm that what is required are presentations of very basic information about the EU and how citizens benefit from the EU.

Figure 13: Estimation of the proportion of incoming enquiries that EDICs answer directly and signpost to other sources
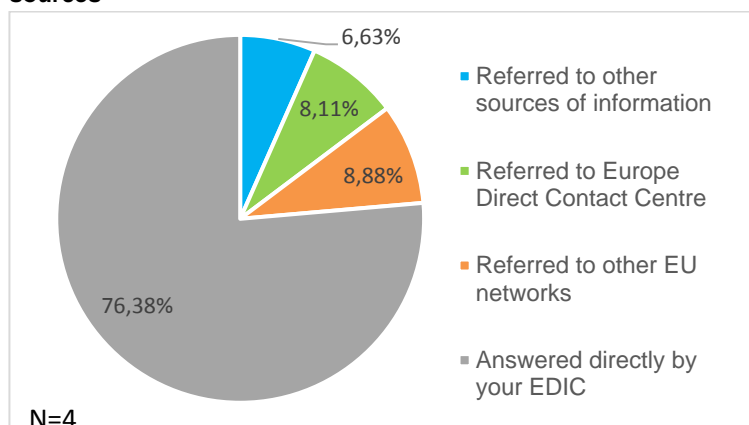
Source: EDIC Managers Survey

When EDICs indicate that they collaborate with other specific sources of information for example EURES and ERASMUS + it is unclear whether this means that they relay specific information from these sources, which implies duplication in terms of content, or whether this means that they forward specific enquiries. However, given that circa 40% indicate that they liaise 'frequently' with Erasmus+ and EURES and circa 1 in 4 EDICs liaise frequently with Eurodesks, Europe for Citizens and EENs, this suggests that EDICs are **duplicating** the information provided by these services because EDICs indicate that they only refer 6.6% of enquiries to other sources of information. There are pros and cons to this situation. It may be too arbitrary and impact on citizens' levels of satisfaction with the EDIC network, if the Commission was to insist that EDICs must forward all questions that relate directly to another service. However, there is a risk that EDICs who take it upon themselves to provide specific information about EU programmes and grants (for example) may provide information of lower quality than would be available if citizens were in direct contact with the relevant information source.

When it comes to consideration of overlap with other services, perhaps the most obvious area for discussion relates to the EDCC, which presents itself as relevant to anyone who has questions about the EU. The EDCC provides a unique freephone number which should be available at no cost[29] to callers inside the EU. In 2015 the EDCC received circa 117,000[30] enquires via web and telephone. This compares with 348,452[31] emails and calls received by EDICs between January and December 2015. The EDIC network makes available at 500+ full-time equivalent members of staff in comparison to the EDCCs circa 35 – 40 members of staff. The EDCC is offering basic information with the support of a database of enquiries and answers and a high level of emphasis is placed on the quality of answers provided. The EDIC network is dealing with **higher numbers of enquiries, but is not supported by a database.** EDIC Managers indicate that they do not find the technical nature of enquires to be such that it impacts upon their ability to provide a service. Although the Intranet facilitates some feedback on key topics received, there appears to be no / limited oversight at institutional level on the content of actual emails unless they are escalated to EC services. There is some risk in this set up that EDICs provide information of low quality.

There appears to be consensus among NCs that there is a need to promote the EDCC more, but that at the same time the EDCC is not able to provide the same service as EDICs. The reasons for this appear to relate to the fact that, according to NCs, the EDCC service is not fully attractive to citizens. NCs reported that citizens do not like to call 'Brussels' and that citizens are put off because when they call first hear a menu in several different languages before they are able to hear their own language. NCs perceive that the reason that EDICs are not able to provide the same level of information, even if this is basic information, is because the agents, located in Brussels, lack practical knowledge of systems and services in place in their own countries. This was suggested to limit their

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[29] The NC from Croatia reported that the EDCC phone line is not free in Croatia
[30] Figure reported in the interview with the representative of the EDCC.
[31] Figures reported by EDICs in the Intranet.

ability to, for example, sign post to information sources at local or national level. This suggests that if it is decided to place greater focus on the EDCC to answer emails and telephone questions on behalf of the EDIC network it would be necessary to make some adjustments to ensure that this works in practice.

It is interesting to compare feedback from those responsible for the EDCC. The EDCC receives few enquiries from EDICs (EDICs report forwarding circa 8% of all enquiries). It was suggested that EDICs may view the EDCC as a competitor. In contrast to the view that the EDCC is not able to handle citizens' requests due to a lack of knowledge, the view put forward was that EDICs are not sufficiently trained to provide information about the EU institutions. This was reported to have been confirmed during the pilot to allow a sample of EDICs access to the EDCC database. The feedback received was that the database was far too specific. This suggests **some complementarity** between EDICs handling of enquiries and EDCC handling, but the question remains as to whether there could be a more efficient approach. It is noted that the EDCC agents answer circa 95% of enquires and escalate complex enquiries to other services, including to Unit C3 when requests come from EDICs. It was suggested in interviews that there is more scope for collaboration with the EDCC and the automatic transfer of calls to the EDCC would be one way of handling this.

Conclusion

EDICs are collaborating with a range of other information sources, but with greatest emphasis on those networks and services that are most relevant to young people and / or other business networks depending on the type of host structure and its natural target groups.

Judgements on whether or not the EDIC network complements or overlaps with other sources of EU information relate to the extent that it is possible to define where the EDIC role stops and where these other sources' roles begin. The evidence indicates that these lines are in fact blurred. This situation reflects the current EDIC Mission which describes EDICs signposting <u>and</u> providing information, advice and assistance. Taking this into account EDICs provide an additional rather than fully complementary service to citizens. The EDIC service complements other services with its local presence, occasional face-to-face contact and local knowledge that for the moment cannot be offered by other services including the Reps and Parliament. This added value is increased when the institutions require a specific local focus and lack the local knowledge / contacts to support this focus. EDICs can provide the institutions with additional representation in the Member States, although it is not possible to guarantee the quality of this representation in the current set up.

There is scope to generate more or better synergies with the Reps, EPIOs and EDCC. Better planning and a more strategic approach could help to ensure that EDICs, Reps and EPIOs work in a more joined up way with regards to generating communication impacts. However, unless alternative approaches are found for management of the administrative aspects of EDICs, only Reps and EPIOs in small countries may be able to make any significant improvements in this area. In consequence the full potential of EDICs may not be harnessed. There is overlap in the provision of basic information by the EDCC and EDICs but any rationalisation of the approach would need to take into account the factors that limit each service in fully replicating the other. For example, if the EDCC is to replicate the type of telephone and email enquiry service currently provided by many but not all EDICs, it would need a more localised approach. This may in turn be more difficult to monitor and guarantee the high level of quality currently provided by the EDCC.

7 Appendix 1: Suggestions for the next generation

7.1 Detailed plan for DG COMM HQ, REPRESENTATION and EDIC activity

4th GENERATION OF THE EDIC NETWORK		
Type of action and measures	**EDIC ACTIONS**	**DG COMM HQ/ REPRESENTATION ACTIONS**

Strategic and reporting frameworks	**Five year outreach plan**
	
	• Needs analysis. Where it is not possible to base this on local market research, it should nevertheless be well substantiated.
	
	• The 5-year plan outreach plan, with SMART objectives for outreach actions to reach new audiences.
	
	• The plan will describe which of the following target group/s the centre will 'proactively' target:
	
	    1. School age children, their teachers and parents
	
	    2. Students aged 18 and above
	
	    3. The working age population
	
	    4. Retired population.
	
	• Describes the types of any activities to be undertaken by the host structure and describes how the host structure will seek to increase its penetration of the target group over the 5-year period, and the complementarity and synergies between the EDIC and host structure activities. Host structures should be encouraged to define SMART objectives as part of this plan.
		• DG COMM HQ defines a 5 year communication plan with SMART objectives for the whole EDIC network
		
		• HQ draws up policy framework on the role of EDICs as a resource and in relation to other networks, and sets up EDIC ambassador network across all DGs
		
		• The EDIC Intranet provides HQ with an overview of progress against national action plans and their contribution to EDIC 5-year objectives.
		
		• HQ to define social media metrics drawing on inputs already provided by ESN as part of the Share Europe Pilot Project
		
		• HQ to define a new standard approach to monitoring using KPIs as early warning system and source of good practice to be implemented by Reps for an agreed % of EDICs per year.
		
		• HQ defines feedback process and channels to be used by EDICs, Reps and coordination team at HQ to ensure relevant feedback taken into account. HQ and HoR define lines to take on hot topics.
		
		• HQ to update Intranet to include template for media coverage to include news source, date, brief summary and tone positive/ neutral / negative. Negative

- Identifies the main multiplier stakeholders (EU networks and others) with whom the EDIC will work, the nature of the cooperation, SMART objectives, and the complementarity and synergies between the EDIC and stakeholder activities.

- Identifies key media channels for (a) news on EDIC activities and local angles to non-political EU news, e.g. funding, and (b) for policy news, where EDICs act as conduit and facilitator in relations with Rep and HQ.

Annual local market research

An annual EU information needs / interests quantitative survey designed by the Rep with a minimum number of participants in the target group, among stakeholders with whom the EDIC works, and representatives of the local media with a focus on:

o   Views on level of information and information sources, etc. EDCC

o   Topics and issues of most interest

o   Main concerns about the EU

o   Key questions / unknowns

o   Views on how the EDIC could have more potential

The first edition of the market research should be conducted to support the 2nd annual communication plan and supplemented by focus groups discussions / debate to discuss the outcomes

Annual communication planning

Annual communication plan to be prepared in liaison with

- coverage to be 'red flagged'.

- Reps develop a 5-year communication strategy for communication / awareness actions in the Member State

- Reps conduct annual national market research on topics to be defined

- Reps develop an annual communication plan with overarching SMART objectives for the EDIC network in relation to awareness-raising and engagement and main key messages by target group

- Reps define an on-line survey template for annual market research to be implemented at local level. This should allow the EC to build up a better understanding of local audiences across the MS.

- Reps to supplement monitoring with outsourced mystery shopping exercise, using HQ coordinated template / instructions.

- Reps develop national EDIC network Annual Analysis report on national EDIC network drawing on EDIC annual communication plans.

- Reps analyse and track monthly progress via Intranet and flag feedback issues to HoR and DG COMM HQ

the NC / Rep, which describes:

o   The aims of the communication;

o   The strategy for direct and on-line reach of target groups;

o   Main messages and themes to be conveyed as agreed with the Rep;

o   Target groups and target number of people to be reached each year physically and through the EDIC's website page and social media;

o   Number of journalists in database; identification of specified local media and their relevance for local news and policy news; targets for coverage in numbers and including feature articles;

o   The proportion of budget that will be allocated to the different activities, including an estimate of the travel budget required to support outreach.

Monthly reporting on activities in EN / FR or DE:

- Numbers of enquiries by email / phone

- Social media statistics[32]

- Feedback about key concerns of citizens / stakeholder groups

- Local media coverage on EU and on target group topics based on a pre-defined template on Intranet to indicate title, date, tone positive, negative, neutral and summary or main points. Serious misinformation / negative coverage to be scanned and forwarded to the Rep as

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[32] This assumes that there will be one central website per country with each EDIC having their own page/s, and that there will be central measurement not only of the central website pages, but also of individual EDIC pages, and reporting on these.

soon as possible.

Annual communication report

<u>Step 1</u>

Implement user on-line survey using Survey Monkey to provide evidence of outcomes (satisfaction, understanding, appreciation, increased knowledge and additional needs). Contact details and agreement to participate in survey to be collected over the year.

<u>Step 2</u>

- Describe results of user survey

- Describe overarching EDIC results against SMART quantitative and qualitative targets set in the plan

- Provide a SWOT assessment of outcomes of past year

- Consider lessons learned:

  - Is my audience more informed / engaged about the issues I have presented? What evidence do I have?

  - Based on audience responses, do I need to change my audience?

  - Are my messages gaining visibility in the media I have targeted? If not what can I did to bring more visibility?

  - Did I turn to the right media outlets for the objectives I am pursuing?

<u>Step 3</u>

Definition of new plan / updating communication plan for the

	next year including:	
	• Identifying areas for future focus at local level for next year and new / revised objectives for next year.	

Information actions
 	
(There are no modules in the 4th generation. This is one aspect of EDIC activity)
	• Provide a contact telephone number including an answerphone and email address and forward questions without local element / not related outreach actions to EDCC.
	
	• Provide a walk-in facility.
	
	• Make available publications in an information area space (optional) within the host structure visited by large numbers of individuals, i.e. cafe / library, etc.
	
	• Negotiate space for EU information in local libraries, cafes, town halls in local region, shopping centres etc. for permanent or one-off activity (e.g. pop-up shops in unused retail space);
	
	• Supply material for web page on the central EDIC website under the responsibility of the NC publicising the centre's activities and any specifically local / regional aspects of EU related topics.
	
	• Send out email bulletins as required to summarise outreach actions
	
	• Dissemination of EU publications / information / clips / messages / lines to take and where necessary produce and adapt centrally produced Rep information materials in-line with the Rep graphic charter.
	
	• Be present as a minimum on Facebook and Twitter, including allowing comment and moderating comment. Update several times weekly, continuous interaction with users; focus on key interest areas / opinion leaders / influencers / target groups.
		• Reps cluster EDICs by target group and provision of materials / presentation adapted to each target group once annual communication plans are in place.
		
		• A central communication community manager in the Rep to provide: monthly e-mail bulletins with:
		  o EU news updates
		  o Lines to take on hot topics
		
		• Provision of national content:
		  o EU basics information targeted to different groups: leaflets, presentations adapted for different types of target group
		  o Posters / promotional materials
		  o New visuals/ posts for sharing via social media
		
		• A graphical charter to allow EDICs to have a standard format
		
		• Provision of one overarching website that all EDICs link to. Train EDICs in updating their own web pages on central website. Take actions to promote the website, for example to national authorities.
		
		• Point of contact for policy DGs and channelling materials and messages including for campaigns from the DGs to EDICs

		Office of Publication Actions
	• The website must:	• Provision of EU information / publications in print form on the basis of what is available from DG COMM and other DGs (in line with current practice)
	○ Be compliant with standard web domain and name requirements for the central website (e.g. EuropeDirect) and standard URLs for EDICs' own pages and in the national language, e.g. europedirect.eu/toscana, europedirect.eu/köln[33]	
	○ Link to other EU websites (europa, EDCC, other EC networks, EC Rep, EPIO)	
	○ Publicise the EDCC telephone helpline for questions about the EU and EDIC number for contacts re presentations / information sessions.	
	○ Be updated at least on a monthly basis or more frequently if required.	
	○ Provide news relevant to target groups	
	○ Provide downloadable information for target groups	
	○ Be visible from the host structure's home page / own social media	
Outreach, awareness-raising and engagement actions (There are no modules in the 4th generation. This is one aspect of EDIC activity) Total expected direct outreach = a minimum of 1,500 direct face-to-	• Organisation of an event for 9 May involving a minimum of 200 participants in the first year. • A detailed programme of activities to reach individuals who have never had contact with the EU institutions before. The programme should be prepared for each quarter, and should include both physical and digital outreach, for example: ○ Travelling exhibition stand to go on location to	• Provision of a basic information stand (three models for EDIC to choose which is most suited to their needs), posters and promotional items (budget for promotional items to be centralised) • Provision of audio-visual clips / interviews / talking heads / pictures for sharing via social media / EDIC websites • Drafting of on-line survey templates to expand upon the

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[33] Use of the national language is important for Search Engine Optimisation

face contacts Minimum expected number of followers / friends on social media site by end of year one = 2,000 and year on year community growth. Annual mini social media survey On-line survey	places frequented by high numbers of individuals: festivals / events / shopping malls, train stations, motorway service stations, public libraries, town halls, etc. o Building an outreach mailing list to include as many representatives of the target group as possible, forwarding a Rep-prepared news bulletin / to be supplemented by EDIC information, as relevant, with targets each year for the increase in the following year. o Using social media as key outreach channels to new audiences / those with little or no awareness of the EU and create a community among the selected target groups on Facebook and Twitter • A detailed programme of activity to reach journalists/media who have not been reached before.	basic satisfaction survey, to be hosted via survey monkey, but allowing EDICs to add certain specific questions.
Networking actions	• Participation in coordination / training meetings (incl. AGM) organised by Commission Headquarters and Reps • Participation in presentations to and by EC, EP and CoR staff, MEPs and COR members (and option of EESC and members) • Acting as a point of contact for EU institutions when local knowledge is required • Collaboration with other EDICs in the same target group cluster to share ideas / approaches • Signposting to EU networks when relevant. • Structured involvement in Citizens' Dialogues • Inviting EU representatives to speak at events / activities.	• HQ and Reps planning and facilitating the coordination and training meetings. • HQ instruction / guidance from EC, EP and CoR that EDICs should be regarded as key partners • Rep facilitation of cluster meetings (e.g. during regular national / regional coordination meetings) • DG COMM policy that EDIC Manager is 'primus inter pares' among EU networks in order to ensure coordination and synergies. EU networks included should as a minimum be EDCs', EENs, EURES, Eurodesks.

7.2 Suggested KPIs for the 4th EDIC Generation

"I see it as my key task to rebuild bridges in Europe after the crisis. To restore European citizens' confidence. To focus our policies on the key challenges ahead for our economies and for our societies. And to strengthen democratic legitimacy on the basis of the Community method".

Jean-Claude Juncker, Political Guidelines.

The following KPIs are KPIs for the Commission as a whole, as represented in this instance by DG COMM, but they are the sum total of the results of KPIs set at local level. The definitions will be identical across the whole network. Actual numbers will depend on local specialisations and circumstances.

Five-year plans should set the baseline with objectives for increases over time. There will be no baseline for these in the first instance, but a baseline will be built up over time. Annual Work Plans may modify the objectives, but any reduction in numbers must be explained.

Long-term objective	Restore citizens' positive perception of the EU
Operational objective	Show the relevance and added-value of the EU and its policies (and its Community method)
End target audience	Which target audiences and size of target audience
Multipliers	Which multipliers, number of multipliers to reach the target audience
Input	Amount of budget and manpower Which key EC messages Which pieces of information Which channels, tools and distribution lists
Output	Number of products distributed Number of questions and answers by email and telephone Number of participants in events / visitors to stands per month
Target outputs	Number of participants to events / visitors to stands per outreach activity who indicate low or near zero knowledge of the EU

1500 face-to-face contacts[34] An on-line community with a minimum of 2,000 followers[35]	Number of website visitors per month
	Numbers of tweets and re-tweets / likes / followers (SM metrics as defined in the Share Europe pilot project)
	Main output KPIs
	Total number of individuals reached directly on a face-to-face basis over the whole year
	Total number of individuals following (growth in community) on Social Media at year end.
Outtake To be tested by surveys Contact data to be systematically collected	Extent that key EC messages were understood
	Extent that information was perceived to be relevant by members of the target group / multipliers
	Evidence of gaps / areas not covered and / or issues that are poorly addressed.
Short term outcomes To be tested by surveys – contact data to be systematically collected	Extent that target groups feel better informed
	Extent that target groups can see the relevance of the EU and its community approaches
	Extent that target groups share information that they receive
	Extent that target groups feel more positive about the EU and its community approaches than they did before contact with EDICs

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[34] Indicative, but based on what best-practice EDICs currently achieve
[35] Indicative, but based on what best-practice EDICs currently achieve