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CONTACT CENTRE**

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Annual Activity Report 2020



a single helpline for citizens

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Video and photos about the EDCC:
<https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/topnews/M-004627>

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The year in summary

The Europe Direct Contact Centre (EDCC) is a single helpline for citizens who want to get in touch with the European Union. It is managed by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication and is operated by an external contractor on behalf of the Commission.

In 2020, the EDCC continued replying to citizens' enquiries about the European Union in all 24 official languages on a variety of subjects, often about the practical and tangible benefits of EU policies and programmes.

The EDCC replied to a total of 147 199 questions. They were treated via email (76.7%) or phone (23.3%).

The number of questions handled by the EDCC was almost 20% higher than in the previous year (122 896 questions in 2019). It is the highest yearly figure in the 20 years history of the contact centre.

This year was dominated by the coronavirus pandemic. 22 259 questions (15.1%) of all of the questions in 2020 related to the virus and the European Union (EU) response. The questions concerned a wide range of specific sub-topics: passenger rights and border crossing were the most frequent.

Overall, the largest number of enquiries concerned individual rights and opportunities offered by the EU. This includes among others: consumer rights, rights of residence, job openings possibility and social protection, grants and passengers' rights. The EDCC also saw significant interest in the EU research programme "Horizon 2020" and "WiFi4EU" which provides grants to municipalities to set-up public WiFi's.

Before the end of the Brexit transition period, the EDCC continued to act and was promoted as the Brexit helpline relating to any queries of the United Kingdom leaving the EU. In addition to the normal weekday opening, the EDCC remained exceptionally open over two weekends during the transition period to offer Brexit advice to citizens. In total, the EDCC replied to 3 809 Brexit-related questions in 2020.

The largest number of questions were replied directly by the EDCC, while 7.4% of the replies were given by the relevant competent experts in associated entities within the European Commission or other EU bodies, due to the technical or sensitive nature of the question.

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147 199
questions

↑ **20%**
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previous year

a single helpline for citizens

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The coronavirus crisis hits Europe

The year 2020 was dominated by the coronavirus pandemic. In early 2020, the EU took on a new role of coordinating the European response.

The EDCC replied to a total of 22 259 questions related to the pandemic. This was 15.1% of all questions on all subjects in 2020.

At the start of the pandemic, consumer and passenger protection totalled the biggest numbers of questions received, as citizens were worried about compensation/refunds for event and travel cancellations. From the summer onwards, the rules for border crossings jumped to the top of the list. Other frequent questions related to the health situation as such and how EU schemes had to change due to the pandemic.

In July 2020, the Commission launched the "Re-open EU" platform, which contains updated information on health and travel within the EU and some neighbouring countries. The EDCC helped promote the platform as part of the individual replies and in promotional activities. This included an information email to 146 000 citizens who had previously contacted the EDCC and had subscribed to receive this type of information.

The EDCC provides weekly or monthly reports on the coronavirus questions, which fed into the internal crisis communication system.



The coronavirus crisis also had a direct impact on the work arrangements of the external contractor operating the EDCC (on behalf of the Commission): about 40 staff members used to work in a single office location in Brussels, they all moved to full time teleworking as of March 2020. As a consequence, thanks to the efforts and adaptability of the contractor, full business continuity and responsiveness could be ensured and a fast and high-quality service for citizens was maintained.

More detailed figures on the coronavirus questions can be seen on page 25.

Helping citizens cope with Brexit

The United Kingdom left the EU on 1 February 2020, but continued to follow EU rules during a transitional period until 1 January 2021.

Throughout the whole year, the future relationship between the EU and the UK was negotiated. This was a major cause of uncertainty for many people who reached out to the EU with their questions.

The EDCC acted and was promoted as helpline for citizens in the context of Brexit. The EDCC was exceptionally open for citizens on two weekends in 2020: 1-2 February (when the UK formally left the EU) and 12-13 December (up to the end of the transitional period – the EDCC was also exceptionally open the second weekend of 2021).

Altogether, the EDCC replied to 3 809 Brexit-related questions in 2020. Out of these questions, 1 818 came from people in the UK – either EU or British citizens. The total number of questions in 2019 was 4 463.



Practical questions on EU funding

The EDCC continued to reply to enquiries related to EU funding opportunities.



The most prominent example is the EU research programme, "Horizon 2020". Thanks to its Research Enquiry Service, the EDCC was able to answer to 11 471 questions from applicants and participants under this research programme.

The EDCC also helped citizens involved in "[WiFi4EU](#)", which helps municipalities to set up free WiFi networks for the public. This was 5 602 questions.

The Europass scheme helps promote learning and working in other EU countries, it is most known to help create EU-wide CVs. As from July, a [new portal](#) was launched by the Commission and the EDCC helped citizens using it, replying to 5 021 questions.

A corporate communication service

In 2020, Directorate-General for Communication took steps in preparing the future course of the EDCC and on making it a truly corporate service of the Commission. In order to strengthen the cooperation between the different Commission departments, the Commission's Corporate Communication Steering Committee endorsed a Charter for the EDCC with clear rights and responsibilities and determined ways to ensure a high quality, cost-efficient and modern service of the European Union to citizens.



Parliament and Council

The Europe Direct Contact Centre cooperates with all entities within the European Commission, and in addition also with the European Parliament and the Council. The EDCC exchanges questions that are the competence of the other party with the "Ask EP" service and the Council secretariat. The European External Action Service works fully with the EDCC.

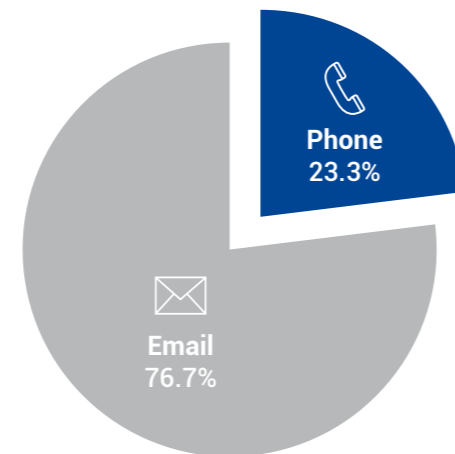


Number of questions

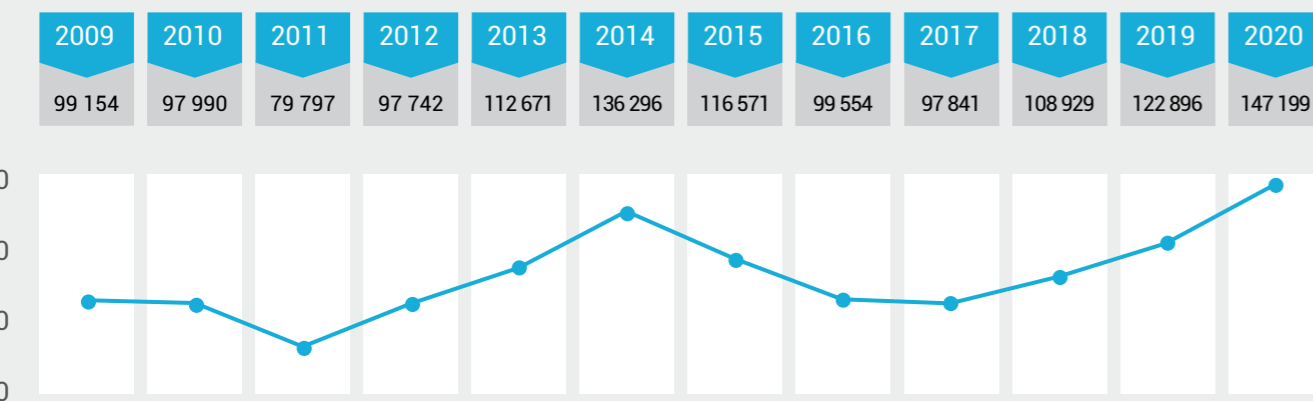
The Europe Direct Contact Centre replied to **147 199** questions in **2020**

23.3% of them were phone conversations.

Email questions came from citizens via webforms on Europa. However, **922** written questions were sent to other contacts within the EU institutions, who then asked the EDCC to reply ("internal transfer").



Trend in number of questions over years



The coronavirus pandemic contributed to the increase of almost 20% in the number of questions in 2020, but it was not the only explanation.

The total number of enquiries fluctuates from year to year. The reasons for this are varied and depend on many factors, for example on certain political initiatives and developments at European and national levels, elections, the global context, the publication of calls for proposals

under EU programmes, certain hot topics, crisis situations, communication and promotion actions by the Commission, etc.

The EDCC also received important numbers of coordinated enquiries from civil society, which can be similar or even identical ("chain letters"). At least 6 000 replied questions in 2020 were related to such coordinated enquiries (see page 24 on Hot topics).

Use of channels over years

The relative share of phone calls fell in 2020, by 23% compared to 2019. Less than a quarter of citizens called the EDCC, while 77% preferred to introduce their question in writing via the webform. This was the first time in recent years that there was a significant change in the relative use of phone and email.

Year	Phone	Mail
2014	31.1%	63.9%
2015	29.0%	66.2%
2016	31.4%	67.8%
2017	30.1%	69.8%
2018	31.4%	68.6%
2019	30.4%	69.6%
2020	23.3%	76.7%

Response time



17 seconds
average pick-up time



92%
of questions solved by first contact



1.2 days
average time to reply to emails

The EDCC picked up the phone after an average of 17 seconds.

92% of the questions by phone were solved by the first contact – meaning that the EDCC provided the right reply during the conversation or in a follow-up email immediately after the contact.

When a citizen wrote to the EDCC, a reply was given on average 1.2 days after receipt.

The commitment of the EDCC was to reply within 3 working days. This did not include the 12% of the questions that were sensitive or technical that had to be examined by the competent experts in the Commission services. These escalated questions were replied to in 14.7 days in average.

Questions per country

Country	Number of questions	Per 100,000 inhabitants	% of EDCC volume
Germany	13 642	16.4	9.3%
Spain	11 634	24.6	7.9%
Italy	11 586	20.3	7.9%
France	9 741	14.5	6.6%
Belgium	6 813	59.1	4.6%
Portugal	4 238	41.1	2.9%
Netherlands	4 202	24.1	2.9%
Romania	3 552	18.4	2.4%
Greece	3 165	29.5	2.2%
Sweden	3 079	29.8	2.1%
Poland	2 756	7.3	1.9%
Austria	2 569	13.6	1.7%
Bulgaria	1 829	26.3	1.2%
Ireland	1 807	36.4	1.2%
Hungary	1 666	17.1	1.1%
Denmark	1 608	27.6	1.1%
Croatia	1 604	39.5	1.1%
Czechia	1 524	14.3	1.0%
Finland	1 399	25.3	1.0%
Slovakia	1 021	18.7	0.7%
Cyprus	901	101.2	0.6%
Slovenia	888	42.3	0.6%
Lithuania	756	27.0	0.5%
Malta	708	138.8	0.5%
Luxembourg	637	101.1	0.4%
Latvia	457	23.9	0.3%
Estonia	377	28.3	0.3%
Total EU	94 159	35.8	64.0%

Questions came from all EU countries.

In absolute numbers, the highest number of questions came from Germany, followed by Spain and Italy. Compared to the size of the population, Belgium, Slovenia and some of the smaller Member States are over-represented. Poland is the country with fewest questions compared to the population. 24% of the questions came from outside the EU, out of which 5.7% from the United Kingdom.

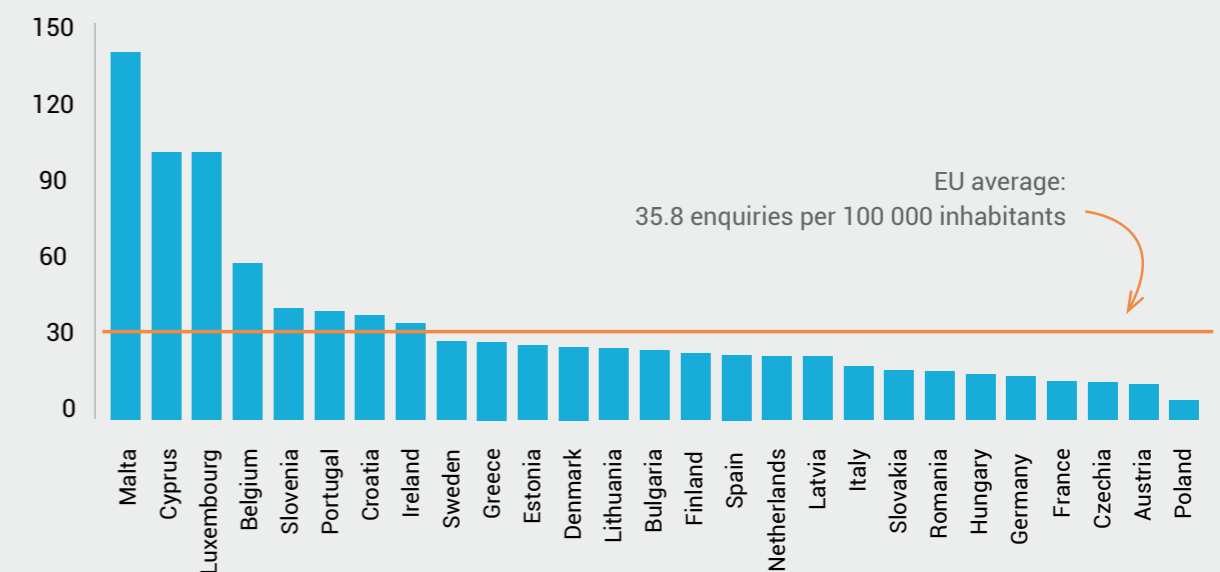
	Number of questions	% of EDCC volume	
United Kingdom	8 356	24.0%	
Other EU countries	5 044		
Asia	10 790		
North America	3 937		
Latin America	3 592		
Africa	3 119		
Australasia	489		
Unspecified	17 713		12.0%
Grand total	147 199		



Questions by country as a percentage (%) of EDCC total volumes (excluding 'unspecified' enquiries)



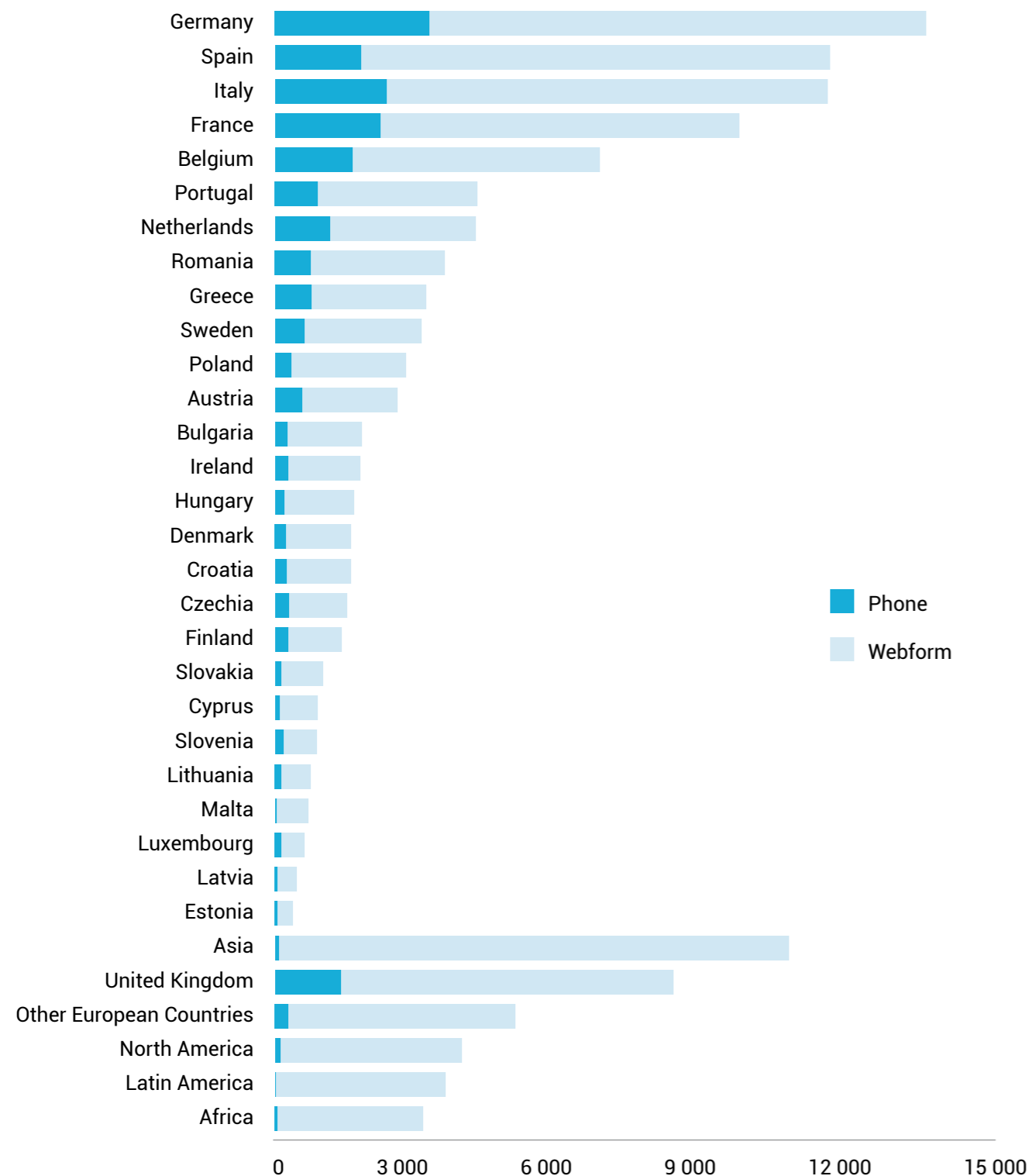
Questions by country per 100 000 inhabitants of the country's population (excluding 'non-EU' and 'unspecified' enquiries)



Questions by country and channel

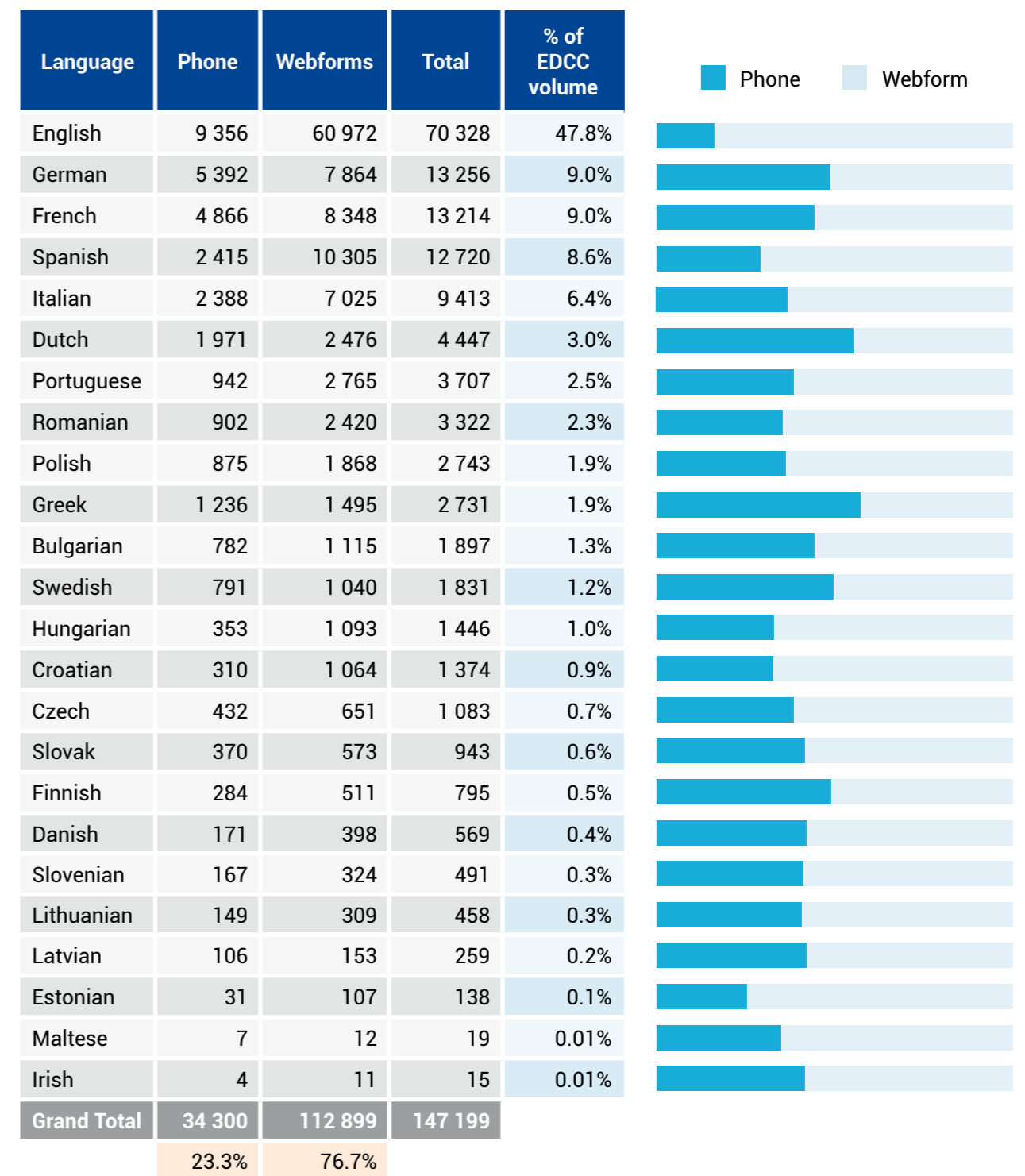
About 23.3% of the questions were phone conversations. The highest proportion of phone questions compared to mail questions came from the Netherlands (37.5%), Greece (31.5%) and Belgium (31.2%). Malta has the lowest share (8.9%).

Number of enquiries per EU country, sorted by total enquiries

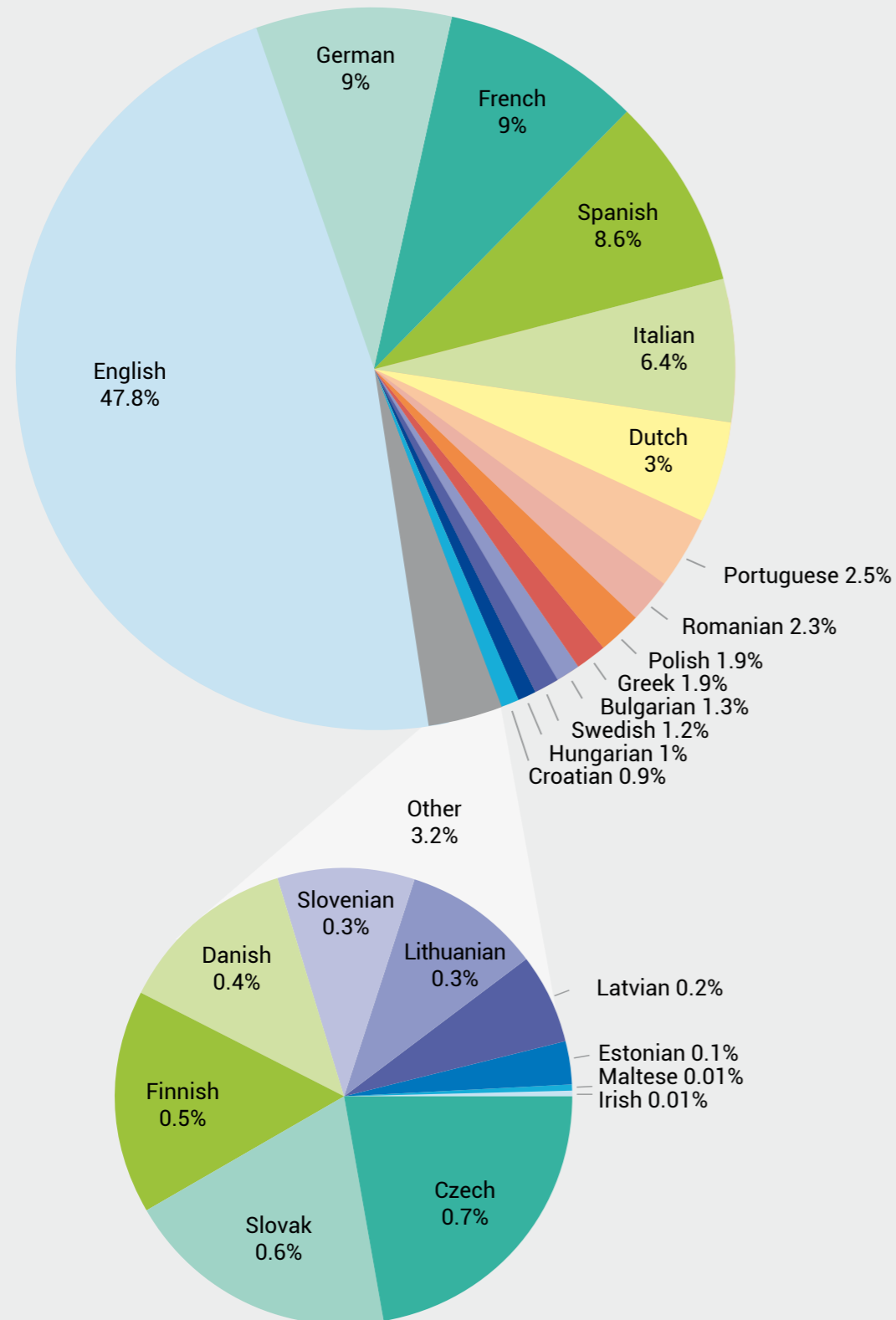


Questions per language

The EDCC replies in all 24 official languages of the EU, but almost half of the enquiries are in English. Some enquirers in non-English speaking countries prefer to use English, in particular for written questions.



Enquiries by language



Language trend over the years

English remains by far the most used language of citizens contacting the EDCC and there is no trend for English to take a higher or lower share of questions.

The share for French has fallen slightly over the last years, while Spanish has increased.

Percentage (%) of all questions per year for the five biggest languages

	English	French	German	Spanish	Italian
2015	48.8%	12.0%	10.3%	6.4%	6.3%
2016	44.2%	10.9%	9.3%	5.6%	5.2%
2017	49.4%	11.5%	9.4%	7.5%	5.2%
2018	48.2%	10.9%	10.8%	8.0%	5.2%
2019	45.0%	10.5%	10.6%	7.7%	6.0%
2020	47.8%	9.0%	9.0%	8.6%	6.4%



Subjects

The largest number of questions concerns individual rights and opportunities offered by the EU. This includes consumer rights, rights of residence, the possibility for jobs and social protection, study grants and passenger rights.

In 2020 many of these questions were combined with the coronavirus situation – such as compensation for cancelled transport and the right to cross borders (see also page 25).

Questions in the category “EU general” are also often based on personal interest.

The EDCC, upon request by the competent Commission services, has put in place specialised services to reply to questions related to the participation in the “Horizon 2020” research programme (since 2006), the “WiFi4EU” initiative (since 2018) and Europass (since July 2020).

TOP 10 SUBJECTS	Total	
Migration and home affairs	21 590	14.7%
Justice and consumers rights	14 979	10.2%
H2020 research	11 471	7.8%
EU general, EU institutions and Member States	10 638	7.2%
Employment and social affairs	9 806	6.7%
Internal market, enterprise, industry and services	6 988	4.7%
Passenger rights	6 947	4.7%
Education and culture	6 694	4.5%
WiFi4EU	5 602	3.8%
Food safety and public health	5 161	3.5%
Total	99 876	



OTHER SUBJECTS	Total	
Europass	5 021	3.4%
Customs and taxation	4 923	3.3%
Foreign policy	3 003	2.0%
Careers and jobs in the EU	2 782	1.9%
Road safety	2 195	1.5%
Environment	2 005	1.4%
International cooperation and development	1 764	1.2%
Trade policy	1 618	1.1%
Financial markets and capital movements	1 351	0.9%
Agriculture and rural development	990	0.7%
Competition	977	0.7%
Energy	947	0.6%
Information society and media	725	0.5%
Regional policy	658	0.4%
SOLVIT	633	0.4%
Humanitarian aid	602	0.4%
European Parliament	584	0.4%
Neighbourhood policy and enlargement	572	0.4%
Europa Server	563	0.4%
Mobility and transport, other than passenger rights	557	0.4%
Council of the European Union, European Council	551	0.4%
Your Europe Advice	547	0.4%
Secretariat-General	536	0.4%
Europe Direct	529	0.4%
Economic and monetary affairs	455	0.3%
Climate policy	379	0.3%
Budget	284	0.2%
European Institute of Innovation and Technology	271	0.2%
Maritime affairs and fisheries	244	0.2%
European Citizens Initiative	147	0.1%
Translation	48	0.0%
Out of scope ¹	5 723	3.9%
Request for clarification ²	3 878	2.6%
Request for contact details of EU staff	975	0.7%
Non-EU language	286	0.2%
Grand total	147 199	

¹ Questions that do not fall under the scope of the European Union (citizen receives a reply explaining why the EDCC cannot provide an answer to their question).

² Enquiries with either no clear question or important details missing: the citizen receives a reply inviting them to submit this additional information.

Details of the most popular subjects

This table provides more detailed information about the exact issues citizens were interested in under the previously mentioned top 10 subjects. In addition, it lists the sub-areas related to external relations.

MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS	21 590
Information Systems for Borders, Migration and Security	11 711
EU migration policy	7 764
Asylum	604
Visa (except rights of spouses of EU citizen to reside in EU > justice)	450
Immigration	433
Schengen: internal and external borders, border controls	287
Specific document / report / legislation	111
Law enforcement and security	45
Funding	45
Counter-terrorism	28
SIS (Schengen Information System) and Eurodac (asylum seeker fingerprint database)	29
Agencies (EASO, Europol, FRONTEX, eu-LISA)	22
Organised crime (including drugs coordination and corruption inside the EU)	21
Police cooperation	15
VIS (Visa information system)	14
Active citizenship	6
Terrorism and Crisis Management, inside EU	5

JUSTICE AND CONSUMERS RIGHTS	14 979
Consumers (rights and safety)	3 348
Protection of consumers economic and legal interests	1 647
Free movement of EU nationals (residence, travel)	1 624
Civil justice	1 239
Family members of EU nationals (residence, travel)	1 149
Rule of law	891
Free movement of persons	739
Justice and other related policies	650
Data protection	590
EU family members and residence	582
Fundamental rights and citizenship	427
EU citizenship	355
Fundamental rights	327
Anti-discrimination	291
Judicial cooperation	269
Specific document / report / legislation	150
Anti-discrimination and fundamental social rights	120
Consumer policy	120
Criminal law	111
Other	350



EU GENERAL, EU INSTITUTIONS AND MEMBER STATES	10 638
Member States	3 390
European Commission	2 787
OPOCE	881
Databases / official documents	700
Symbols	532
Statistics	468
Others	437
Court of Justice	287
Future of Europe	240
Personnel	219
Agencies	195
Languages	133
Treaties	90
History	69
Decision-making process and treaties	63
European Central Bank	55
Other specific institutions and bodies	53
Visits	29

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS	9 806
Moving and working in Europe	6 853
Social protection inclusion	1 807
Funding	427
Rights at work	287
European employment strategy	178
Specific document / report / legislation	118
European Skills Agenda	43
Skills	32
Agencies and partners	31
Analysis, evaluation, impact assessment	30

H2020 RESEARCH	11 471
Validation services	3 457
Info on H2020 (NCPs legal docs guides forms)	2 559
Request for clarification	1 542
Proposal submission and evaluation	918
Obtaining funding under H2020	670
Info about on-going H2020 projects	452
Legal and financial issues	441
H2020 policy issues	416
European research policy and non H2020 issue	335
Experts	139
Publications / reports of funded projects	130
Communication	127
Outstanding problem with an on-going project	69
Horizon Prize	48
FP 7 projects, legal, financial or policy issues	48
Support activities	47
Ethics	38
Previous Framework Programmes	25
Gender equality	10

INTERNAL MARKET, ENTERPRISE, INDUSTRY AND SERVICES	6 751
Funding	2 111
Harmonisation and standardisation	1 345
Promoting entrepreneurship / SMEs	858
Services and establishment	783
Industry sectors	640
Business environment	416
Specific document / report / legislation	308
Free movement of goods	116
Commerce services and tourism	52
Enterprise policy / competitiveness	47
Internal market strategy / scoreboard / impact / SLIM	38
Medical devices	21
e-Business / ICT	16

PASSENGER RIGHTS	6 947
Air passenger rights	6 706
Maritime passengers' rights	111
Rail passenger rights	62
Bus and coach passengers' rights	68

EDUCATION AND CULTURE	6 694
Education and training	4 318
Youth policy	1 264
Traineeships	579
Culture	412
Sports policy	80
Languages	41

FOOD SAFETY AND PUBLIC HEALTH	5 161
Public health	2 455
Food	1 267
Animals	638
Medical devices	300
Plants	261
Specific document / report / legislation	175
Funding	54
Scientific committees	11

WIFI4EU	5 602
Registration and application (municipalities)	1 235
Payments	1 121
Implementation and operation	1 083
Selection and award	779
Registration of eligible entities	328
Registration (installation companies)	237
Registration of WiFi Company	192
Communication and events	140
Calls for application	138
Operations	118
Eligibility	94
EU Login account	57
General	57
Web-portal technical	23

EXTERNAL RELATIONS	7 163
Foreign policy	3 003
International partnerships	1 764
Trade policy	1 618
Neighbourhood policy, enlargement	572
Humanitarian aid	206



Hot topics

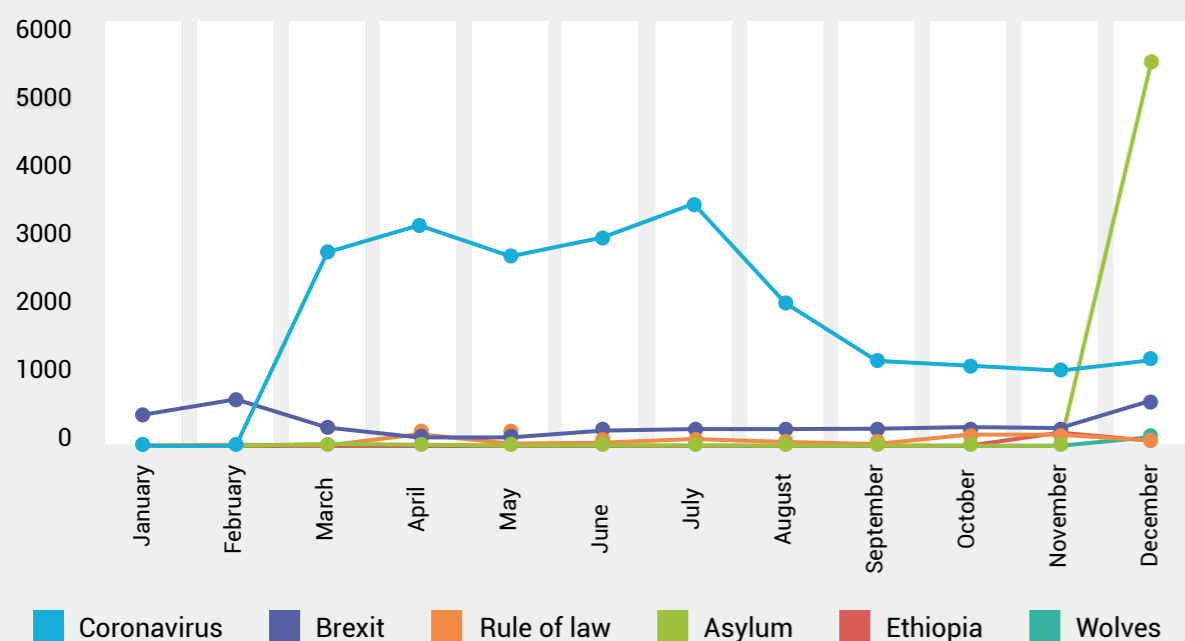
Questions on selected sensitive recurring or one-off topics are labelled as "hot topics" in order to allow the Commission to follow the concerns of citizens. This comes in addition and in parallel to the registration of the subject matter.

Some hot topics can represent coordinated questions from civil society, which can be similar or even identical ("chain letters").

When appropriate the EDCC sends a standard reply to all such questions. This was the case for most of the questions of the hot topics: asylum, Ethiopia and wolves.

Coronavirus See pages 25 et 26.	22 259
Asylum Enquiries coming mostly from Syrian and Turkish citizens asking for information about asylum procedure.	5 682
Brexit See page 5.	3 809
Rule of Law These are questions about the political and constitutional situation in specific EU countries	863
Ethiopia Enquiries concerning the security and humanitarian situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.	267
Wolves Enquiries from citizens who are concerned about the protection of wolves as a direct consequence of an event in France where one had been killed.	128
Total	5 682

Hot topics per month



Details on coronavirus questions

Questions related to coronavirus came from all EU countries and from outside the EU (21.3%) with no significant difference compared to questions on other subjects. Border crossing and passenger rights represented the highest number of specific subjects related to coronavirus questions. March to July was the busiest months. See also page 24.

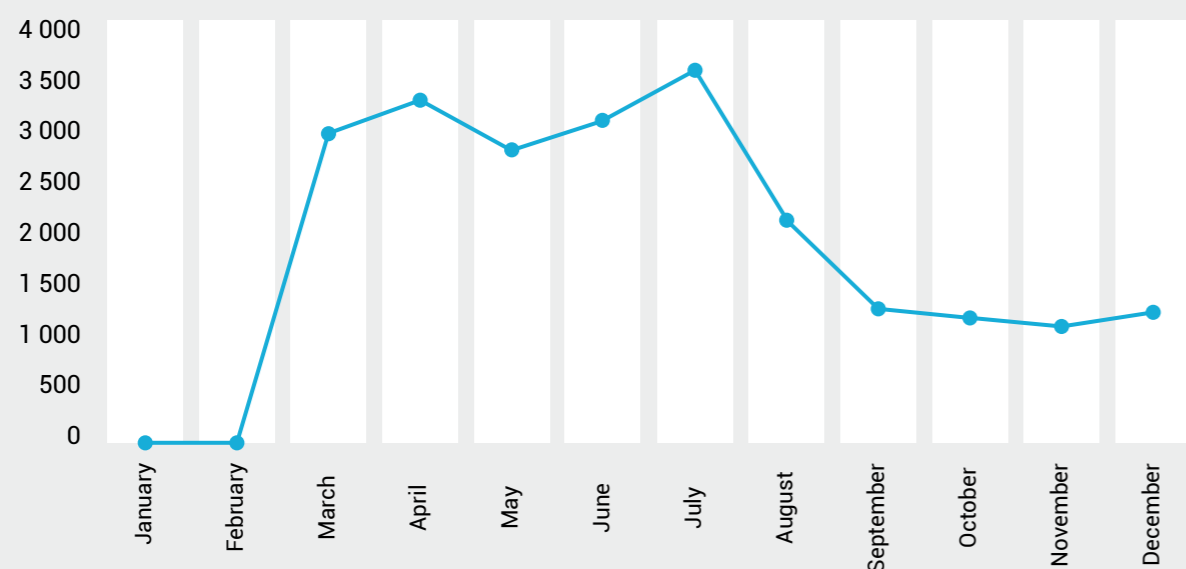
Country of residence

Country	Number of questions	Percentage
Germany	2 400	10.8%
Spain	2 111	9.5%
France	1 881	8.5%
Italy	1 302	5.8%
Belgium	1 100	4.9%
Portugal	626	2.8%
Netherlands	601	2.7%
Sweden	491	2.2%
Romania	480	2.2%
Poland	446	2.0%
Greece	443	2.0%
Austria	368	1.7%
Africa	302	1.4%
Ireland	276	1.2%
Bulgaria	263	1.2%
Czechia	256	1.2%
Croatia	252	1.1%
Hungary	234	1.1%
Denmark	221	1.0%
Cyprus	217	1.0%
Finland	160	0.7%
Slovakia	147	0.7%
Luxembourg	136	0.6%
Slovenia	103	0.5%
Lithuania	99	0.4%
Malta	98	0.4%
Latvia	53	0.2%
Estonia	43	0.2%
Unspecified	2 407	10.8%
EU total	17 516	78.7%
United Kingdom	1 146	5.1%
North America	1 119	5.0%
Latin America	866	3.9%
Other European Countries	826	3.7%
Asia	696	3.1%
Australasia	90	0.4%
Total	22 259	

Top 10 subjects of coronavirus questions

	Number of questions	
Migration and home affairs, incl. border crossing	9 110	40.9%
Transport, incl. passengers rights	3 103	13.9%
Justice and consumers rights	1 686	7.6%
Food safety and public health	1 464	6.6%
EU general and Member States	1 303	5.9%
H2020 Enquiry Service	1 098	4.9%
Employment and social affairs	559	2.5%
Education and culture	538	2.4%
Enterprise and industry	512	2.3%
Foreign policy	396	1.8%

Number of coronavirus questions replied by month



Escalations

By far the largest number of enquiries are replied directly by the EDCC based on general guidelines and information already published.

A small part of the questions (7.4%) were so technical or sensitive that the EDCC had to refer to experts within the European Commission or other EU entities. The Directorate-General for Communication focussed on reducing it to 5%, since fewer escalations mean faster replies to citizens and less work in the various EU departments.

The Research Executive Agency responsible for the implementation of the "Horizon 2020" programme, maintains guidelines that require more questions to be escalated than for other subjects. When the research area is included, the escalation share is 12.4%. This share of escalations were lower than in 2019, where the figure was 14.4%.

The table shows the entities that work as a formal "back office". The Directorate-General for Communication's back office handles escalations under the authority of other entities within the EU institutions.

The figures for "Your Europe Advice" and "SOLVIT" are transfers, as these services reply to citizen within their particular field (legal advice on single market and single market issues with public authorities in other EU countries). However, the "EC Solvi" is a back office for complaints and general questions about "SOLVIT".

	Number of escalations	
Research Horizon 2020	7 163	39.6%
DG COMM	1 920	10.6%
WIFI4EU	1 232	6.8%
SANTE	933	5.2%
EEAS	726	4.0%
TAXUD	485	2.7%
SOLVIT	472	2.6%
YEA	458	2.5%
EAC	373	2.1%
TRADE	333	1.8%
European Parliament	332	1.8%
AGRI	298	1.6%
FISMA	291	1.6%
ENV	291	1.6%
ENER	251	1.4%
EMPL	238	1.3%
JUST	231	1.3%
DEVCO (now INTPA)	198	1.1%
WEB EUROPA	192	1.1%
NEAR	177	1.0%
Council	176	1.0%
EUROPASS	169	0.9%
REGIO	161	0.9%
ECFIN	160	0.9%
HOME	102	0.6%
GROW	101	0.6%
SG	95	0.5%
Passenger rights	86	0.5%
ECHO	80	0.4%
MARE	74	0.4%
EPSO	65	0.4%
Road Safety	57	0.3%
BUDG	46	0.3%
European Institute of Technology	40	0.2%
EC Solvit	27	0.1%
European Citizens Initiative	24	0.1%
DGT	24	0.1%
CLIMA	15	0.1%
Europe Direct Information Centres	14	0.1%
Total	18,110	

User satisfaction

Citizens have the option of giving feedback to the EDCC service when they receive a reply, no matter if this is given via phone or by e-mail. The overall satisfaction rate in 2019 was 85.8%. This compares to 85.5% in 2018.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Unsatisfied citizens	82	83	103	69	67	73
Satisfied citizens	542	505	490	434	452	554
Total	624	588	593	503	519	627
Satisfaction rate	86.86%	85.88%	82.63%	86.28%	87.09%	88.36%

	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Average or total
Unsatisfied citizens	110	82	83	92	59	62	477
Satisfied citizens	654	526	452	458	417	284	2 977
Total	764	608	535	550	476	346	3 454
Satisfaction rate	85.60%	86.51%	84.49%	83.27%	87.61%	82.08%	85.56%

