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Study on the performance of the Europe Direct Contact Centre

Final Report

Specific contract number COMM/08/2018/Lot1

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Study on the performance of the Europe Direct Contact Centre

Final Report

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Table of Contents

Tables

Figures

Boxes

Executive summary

The Europe Direct Contact Centre (EDCC) is a service operated by the European Commission in operation since more than a decade. The EDCC provides first-hand information to citizens, enterprises, researchers and other specialised groups in the EU and in third countries via the telephone and email. It responds to enquiries on any EU-related topic in any official EU language.

The functions of the EDCC are undertaken by a service provider who operates centrally from Brussels. DG COMM manages the contract and monitors its implementation. 27 Commission DGs, Executive Agencies and other EU services operate as "back offices" to the EDCC, treating complex enquiries related to their domain of expertise which the EDCC cannot address. The EDCC receives some 100,000 to 110,000 enquiries annually.

The study performed is an assessment of the EDCC in its latest period 2016-2019 covering the following evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, and European added value.

Findings

The general objective of the EDCC is to provide coherent information to citizens in the Member States about the EU and its policies so that they feel adequately informed about the EU. In specific terms, the EDCC works towards making the EU accessible to citizens who have questions needing a (personalised) response, providing good quality replies meeting the needs of the users of the service, and doing this as efficiently as possible, ensuring that public enquiries are addressed in a cost- and resource-efficient manner.

Both the general and operational objectives are **relevant** to the Commission's communication policy and the objectives that DG COMM has set out in its 2016-2020 Strategic Plan and recent Annual Management Plans. The service is also closely aligned with DG COMM's action as a presidential service where the DG ensures coherence in the Commission's communication. In view of DG COMM's mission to listen, advise and engage, the EDCC's potential as 'listening post' seems, however, underutilised. While all back offices receive obtain monthly, or bi-annually and yearly reports, the majority of services consulted indicated that neither the reporting nor the potential insights from the questions is widely used in-house, while also indicating a greater potential for use if reports were better tailored to their needs.

Effectiveness: To ensure that the EDCC deliver on its objectives, it must meet a number of criteria, including language availability, accessibility, timeliness of reply and user satisfaction. Overall, the EDCC performs well. Accessibility and language criteria are generally met, with the EDCC showing good ability to match the linguistic needs – by email as well as over the phone. The replies meet the set quality expectations, with an overall user satisfaction rate of 79%. When considering key indicators, the current contractor has performed better than the previous one. Difficulties to meet the timeliness criteria are linked to escalated enquiries, which are tackled by the back offices of the various services – where the two weeks deadline for response in about half of the cases poses issues.

The general perception among back offices is that the current requirements for access and quality are satisfactory and adequate. There is a broad consensus in the back offices on the need to deliver the service in the 24 official languages. Access by phone is also perceived as important. The added value of this channel is confirmed by user feedback, with citizens using the phone being more satisfied with the quality and more inclined to recommend the service than those receiving a written answer.

Assessing the potential impact on the user's image of the EU due to the use of the EDCC is rather challenging. Two proxies may be used in order to give an idea: first user satisfaction - users are, on

average satisfied with the service; four in five would recommend it to others. Second, spontaneous satisfaction mails in show some appreciation, albeit it is difficult to link to their perception of the EU.

With the current level of enquiry fluctuation, there is no evidence that the number of enquiries impacts substantially on accessibility or the quality of responses. While this is positive for the overall assessment, it may however also suggest excess HR capacity within the EDCC.

Users: most of the questions raised to the EDCC are of private nature. About 35% of all enquiries are related to business issues, while 59% are undertaken for private purposes including enquiries related to job opportunities. Among the enquiries of a private nature six in 10 questions related to free movement, passengers' rights, EU education and youth programmes, questions related to EU Member States; EU careers, immigration, visas, and consumer protection. Most citizens' questions were of "personal relevance" or related to personal circumstances (e.g. has moved/is planning to move to another country, experiencing problems when traveling or after buying something, etc.).

59% of users are EU citizens and 21% third-country nationals[1]. Most EU citizens users are from the older EU Member States, with nationals from the EU's five largest Member States and Belgium representing nearly half of all users.

About 83% of users resided within the EU and, among them, 63% were based in the EU's five largest Member States and Belgium. Among EU nationals using the service, the share of EU citizens living outside of the country of origin is high (18%), with higher shares for most of the newer Member States and for British users.

Most users are in the working-age population. The vast majority are in employment or self-employment. In the range of 16% are students, unemployed or retired citizens. Some 20% of enquiries came from 'repeat' users, meaning users that had used the service before.

The **smooth delivery of the EDCC** depends on a number of factors: well-trained EDCC staff that can provide answers to straightforward, standard questions quickly, pro-active communication between the EDCC and back offices, and motivated back offices to provide the necessary services on escalated enquiries. General coordination and collaboration between the EDCC and back offices work well. However, improvements would be needed as regards back office enquiry management. Back offices often treat escalated enquiries with low priority and see this as an additional burden to their day to day work. This requires a change in mindsets of the EC colleagues. Further avenues of improvements relate to training content and management and proactivity from the EDCC alerting back offices of emerging 'hot topics' or user-identified issues with DG websites.

Efficiency: For 2016-2018, the total cost of the EDCC service amounted to roughly €11 million. Total annual costs are around €3,8 million. In this period, an enquiry did cost €37,77 on average. Is this reasonable? There is no easy answer to this question mainly because there is no comparable public or private service with the same range of services. Comparison to private sector services indicate that the cost per enquiry is high. However, comparison to the previous contractor's cost indicates a net decrease of cost of 18%. Costs are also lower than what they are likely to be if the EDCC was closed, with the DGs and other services addressing the enquires themselves. This said, cost per enquiry remain above the estimate benchmark which was defined in the previous evaluation as the estimate for a feasible cost-per-contact ratio (€25-35).

The main factors affecting the costs (and thus efficiency) are language and operating time requirements, an overall low number of enquiries, and the contractual set-up, which provides for payment of enquiries in excess of the actual number of enquiries treated. In addition, procedural factors directly or indirectly affect the efficiency of the EDCC side with a high staff turnover, reporting time, strict performance criteria and a cumbersome knowledge management system impacting negatively on potential efficiency

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[1] The remaining 20% did not indicate their nationality

gains. Factors affecting the efficiency at back office level are the number of escalated enquiries and management burden.

Coherence: The EDCC is not the only service available for citizens. Other EC services are available (Your Europe Advice and SOLVIT) are available and the Digital Single Gateway is planned. The general collaboration between the EDCC and Your Europe Advice is smooth. The forthcoming implementation of the Digital Single Gateway, however, carries uncertainty about how it will be coordinated with the EDCC. The EDCC is not part of the seven assistance services that are linked to the Gateway by legislation. It will be part of the opt-in services. There will be no visible difference for users between these services. However, the development of the gateway and the links with new assistance services may affect the number of EDCC enquiries.

As regards **EU added value, and the potential to deliver** the EDCC service by the Member States or other decentralised bodies, the study concluded that there is little potential for decentralisation. For the Commission to ensure that it is accessible to EU citizens, it would need to deliver such services itself. The main option to decentralise would involve the European Commission Representations in Member States and EU Delegations. This option, however, is likely to require significant resources at the Representation/Delegation level and result in more work for the centrally located back offices. It is also likely to run counter to the general work of these.

Going forward

In order to remain fit for purpose, the EDCC will need to remain relevant to users' preferred languages, channels of access and preferred times. Moreover, it will need to be implementable within budget and manageable for back offices. Finally, it will be important that the channels used, do not risk the European Commission's reputation. The feasibility and usefulness of several technical and organisational changes were addressed. The findings of the study suggest that:

- The requirement to provide services to users in all EU official languages ensures accessibility to the European Commission for all EU citizens. The breadth of languages is in practice exceeding user demand, with nine languages representing only 2.5% of all enquiries. If resource optimisation is a goal, options to limit the services in rare languages could be considered (selected days, time periods or call-back only).

- A potential expansion of opening times is not needed, in contrast, there might be benefits in considering shorter opening hours if resource optimisation is the goal.

- Email and phone enquiries are the mainstay of contact centre services in general, in the short- and medium-term future. They remain the preferred access channels for all groups, besides those below 25 years' old.

- Expansion with chat services could be considered but is likely to come with increased costs – and limited use.

- According to the back offices, the addition of text services is likely to generate only marginal interest among users.

- Social media-based interaction is largely user driven (as opposed to provider driven). It is, both according to literature and expert interviews undertaken, a high-risk channel – with the operator having little control over the visibility/use of the answers ("viral" risks). An alternative would be to use one-to-one chat on social media, which carries less reputational risks.

The proposition to provide users with additional information proactively following enquiries was tested but was not supported by most back offices. The main concerns related to lack of resources and skills to run such a service. Further issues arise in the nature of questions raised with the EDCC, which in many cases are limited in content or scope for broader follow-up. A proposed alternative was to inform and empower the enquirer about his/her topic, signposting where information about developments in the area can be found.

Recommendations

The recommendations developed for this evaluation assume that the EDCC services will continue in a contracted form beyond 2020. It is also assumed that some major cost factors – i.e. the combined availability of phone/email in all official languages will continue beyond 2020.

In this context, and in view of the study findings which showcase that the main issues related to implementation reside with the cost and efficiency of the service, it is recommended that in preparing for the next call for tender DG COMM should:

A. Closely follow up on all options to increase the use of the service, working with EU bodies not yet associated with the service

B. Develop a realistic baseline of the potential number of enquiries which the service is to cater for, while working in close collaboration with DG GROW on the Single Digital Gateway. Use this baseline – rather than a baseline beyond demand – to set baseline costs for the service.

C. Maintain SLAs as these are currently for the new lower-level baseline but apply greater flexibly/lower SLA beyond the baseline, allowing for adaptation to fluctuations by the contractor. Consider the use of bonuses for achievements beyond SLA requirements, in addition to the currently used penalties.

D. Define more clearly the specific requirements for the knowledge database (content, development, maintenance, search requirements).

E. Consider if the current staff requirements are fit for purpose and necessary for the tasks at hand – with the opportunity to build on existing teams among potential multilingual providers, especially in little used languages.

F. Allow for more flexible organisation of the centre, considering that a set up might involve locations in more than one country, combined with remote working – to limit HR costs, but also to avoid only Brussels-based operations, which is likely to increase turnover.

G. Cost out new potential services – webchat, text messaging, social media – as separate opt-in items, additional to the baseline costs. This model will ensure that eventual new channels can be tested but also discontinued, if operation is not successful. Further budgetary breakdowns – covering main infrastructure costs and HR costs would also add clarity of the actual EDCC costs

H. Review reporting requirements considering actual use of the data (in the EDCC and with back offices).

I. Ensure that the upcoming call for tender is widely promoted to national representative organisations of Contact Centres

In addition, under the current contract, it is recommended that DG COMM:

J. Reviews, in collaboration with the EDCC, the current training programme – and develops training guidelines for the attention of back office (which content to present, good practice for training content) to ensure higher relevance to EDCC staff.

K. Develops mandatory guidelines for the EDCC, regarding alerts which are to be provided to back offices (emerging topics, website issues, etc.).

L. Develops and tests, together with back offices, a new reporting format, better designed and adapted to their needs

((•)) EDCC EVALUATION

2016-2018 (2019)

~80%
of users are SATISFIED

79% are satisfied and 53% very satisfied with the timeliness of the responses by the EDCC.
People on the pbone are even more satisfied.

Information sources
Brexit **Mail** WIFI4EU
24 Languages **Phone**
+ 100.000 enquiries annually
User satisfaction GDPR
First-hand information
DG COMM
European elections

KEY RESOURCES | CRITERIA

COSTS can be limited

€

- Adjust/lower fixed number of monthly enquiries
- Shorten access hours
- Envisage limiting services of rare languages
- No need to expand social media based interaction

Objectives of the EDCC are relevant to the EC's communications policy; EDCC provides coherent information, yet under-exploited by Commission services.

Effective means to reach citizens through phone or mail in 24 languages and 5 days a week. Majority of inquiries with direct relevance to individual.

€ The effective reach comes at a high price: compared to the private sector, the EDDC is more costly and thus are the costs per inquiry, It is thus less efficient.

Coordination and coherence with other existing services, ok. To remain coherent, careful alignment is needed with Digital Single Gateway

The EU added value cannot be achieved by the MS or a decentralised organisation model; it is likely that this woud result in higher direct and indirect costs and inefficiencies.

1 Introduction

This assignment provides the European Commission with an evaluative study of the performance of the Europe Direct Contact Centre (EDCC). The study was commissioned by the Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM) in December 2018 and was kicked off January 2019. The work was undertaken under DG COMM's Framework Contract PO/2016-06/01 – Lot 1 by Technopolis Group in association with Henningsen Consulting.

The Final Report is organised as follows:

- The remaining part of this section presents a recap of the objectives and scope of the study as well as a presentation of EDCC
- Section 2 presents the methodological approach to the study and the work undertaken
- Section 3, 4, 5 and 6 present the evaluation findings
- Section 7 provides the conclusions and recommendations

Several appendixes are attached to the report:

- The intervention logic of the EDCC and the evaluation framework are presented in appendix A
- Appendix B provides a list of the interviews undertaken within the study
- Appendix C presents the documents reviewed
- Appendix D provides the overview of the EDCC's service level agreements (SLAs)
- Appendix E presents example of representative EDCC questions – with a focus on questions raised by citizens for personal purposes
- Appendix F provides a review of the current categories for enquiry mapping and user satisfaction questions
- Appendix G presents select benchmarks from the industry
- Appendix H presents the calculations of costs savings compared to a decentralisation of the EDCC at the level of the DGs

1.1 Objectives and scope of the study

1.1.1 Objectives of the study

The aim of this study was to assess the functioning of the EDCC, and provide a global analysis of its operation, delivery and services, users and management. More specifically the study sets out to:

- Assess the effectiveness of the service delivery and the extent to which the EDCC delivers on its stated objectives
- Identify the nature of the users of the service
- Assess the effectiveness of the working processes and relations with the Commission services (DG COMM, other DGs having cooperation agreements with the EDCC) and the coherence with other related services
- Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the EDCC's management and implementation model
- Assess the EDCC's cost efficiency – and identify aspects of the operation which drives costs
- Identify the purpose of use and the characteristics that such a service should have in the view of prospective users
- Assess the EDCC's added value

For each of the above, the study draws conclusions and recommendations, identifying options for improving the EDCC.

1.1.2   Scope of the study

The study covered the current contracting period of January 2016 to June 2019. For comparability and consistency in data analysis, December 2018 has been used as a cut-off point for the analysis of the quantitative data. However, additional data analysis on 2019 enquires was undertaken covering two issues of policy importance: Brexit and the European elections of May 2019.

All services delivered by the EDCC were within the scope of the study. Also, the operations and relations with the "back offices" formed part of the study. Additionally, the study team has undertaken a headline trend data analysis of the services and their delivery before 2016, benchmarking current results and achievements with past results of the EDCC operation[2].

As defined by the Terms of Reference (ToR) the following aspects were not considered:

- Benchmarking with comparable governmental services (i.e. obtaining and analysing information on the mission, organisation and plans of other governmental enquiry services)
- Analysing the possible use of artificial intelligence for supporting answering enquiries
- Cooperation with the Commission social media activities and use of instant texting.
- Possible internalisation of the EDCC structure within Commission services

1.2   About the Europe Direct Contact Centre

1.2.1   Objectives of the EDCC

The objective of the Europe Direct Contact Centre is to provide reliable and coherent information about the European Union and its policies to citizens in each Member State. so that they feel adequately informed about the EU. The EDCC's main task is to answer questions from citizens and businesses on the EU's activities and policies via telephone and email (web form). It forms part of DG COMM's tools and services to inform and exchange directly with European citizens, and in this context aims to contribute to the specific objective "Citizens are better informed about the EU, in particular about the EU priorities and their rights".

The following specific objectives guide the EDCC:

- **Accessibility,** ensuring that the EC is available to citizens, in case they have questions needing a (personalised) response
- **Quality,** ensuring that the questions put to the EDCC are comprehensively addressed, meeting user needs
- **Efficiency**, to ensure that public enquiries are addressed in a cost- and resource-efficient manner, ensuring also:
  - A consistent approach to addressing public enquiries
  - Synergy and efficient use of DG resources (with the EDCC addressing "simple" and routine questions, whereas complex or sensitive issues are dealt with by European Commission officials)

In turn, accessibility and quality is expected to contribute to a positive perception of the EU, but also to mitigate any negative perceptions which might stem from an 'unresponsive' European public service.

1.2.2   EDCC services provided

The EDCC's main activity is its **enquiry service**. The EDCC operates a phone and email response service, operating with a single phone number across the EU (00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11). Replies by mail are accessible via the main European Commission contact webform, as well as through various specialised

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[2] Based on past evaluation study results.

webforms, designed for and targeted at specific audiences[3]. The service operates in the 24 official EU languages. It is available from 9AM to 6PM, 250 days a year.

The EDCC covers all EU-related topics and issues and provides first-level information and guidance on information sources relating to any EU topic – both general and specific information requested. Furthermore, the service provides access to advice to assist users in overcoming practical problems in relation to exercising their rights in Europe (transfer of enquiries to Your Europe Advice and SOLVIT) – operating as a human one-stop shop for information guidance and advisory services managed by the European Commission. The EDCC also provides **feedback** to the Commission regarding the nature of the requests.

1.2.3   *How the EDCC works*

The EDCC is operated by a service provider, selected through public procurement every five years. Since January 2016, the EDCC contractor has been Communi-K[4]. The contractor operates the call centre and the email service. It has five main responsibilities:

1. The treatment of first-level enquiries; second-level enquiries are transferred to relevant back offices or associated specialised services according to agreed guidelines
2. The maintenance of the complete telecom and IT infrastructure necessary for the operation of all communication channels
3. The recruiting, training and management of an appropriate number of Contact Centre staff according to languages, subjects and volumes of enquiries
4. Management of two instruments of data storage: the citizens' enquiries database and a knowledge database
5. Internal quality control, monitoring and reporting

The service is managed by DG COMM, whichalong with other back offices within the EC's Directorate Generals, other EU bodies, and select Executive Agencies also operate as back offices to the service. By June 2019, 29 back office agreements were in place – covering fully or partly:

- 20 DGs (DG AGRI, DG BUDG, DG DEVCO, DG EAC, DG ECFIN, DG EMPL, DG ENER, DG ENV, DG FISMA, DG HOME, DG JUST, DG MOVE, DG NEAR, DG REGIO, DG SANTE, DG TAXUD, DG TRADE, DG MARE, SEC GEN (European Citizens' Initiative) and DG GROW (SOLVIT and Your Europe Advice)

- Two executive agencies (REA: Horizon 2020 and INEA: WIFI4EU)

- Five other EU institutions and entities (Council, EEAS, EIT, European Parliament and EPSO)

Each back office is joined to the service through an operational agreement. Where specialised information is requested by a user or where users need particular assistance, the Contact Centre escalates these enquiries to DG COMM or to associated back offices (second-level enquiries). The back offices provide responses to second-level enquiries which are subsequently channelled through the Contact Centre. Enquirers in need of personally tailored guidance, advice or problem-solving, are transferred to Your Europe Advice.

In addition to addressing second-level enquiries, back offices provide training and information/documentation for EDCC's communication officers and control the quality of replies that fall under their remit. The back offices also provide, if appropriate, specific 'standard replies' and guidelines to support the provision of replies by the Contact Centre.

Quality control is ensured mainly by the contractor, but also by DG COMM. It represents an essential part of the Contact Centre's tasks. The contractor must ensure the internal quality control, covering

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[3] Including notably the Research Enquiry Helpdesk, the Export Helpdesk and the Passengers' Rights enquiry form

[4] Communi-K is a consortium comprising of Serco and Tipik Communication Agency.

content, style, relevance and accuracy of replies, as well as staff performance and compliance with performance targets. DG COMM undertakes a quality audit of 1% of answered enquiries.

As to management of the contract and ensuring consistent quality and delivery, the contract specifications define a set of Service Level Agreement (SLA's) to which the contractor must adhere. These SLAs relate notably to speed of replies/response time; first contact resolution rate[5]; maximum escalation rates, language availability and user satisfaction. The contract specifications also lay out the specific requirements and workflow for each type of information, service provided, and partnerships with other EU-bodies.

1.2.4   Overview of the use of the EDCC

At an operational level, the EDCC does not have a target related to the number of enquiries. The number of telephone and email enquiries fluctuates year on year. Overall, however, the number of contacts has remained relatively stable in the last decade. The EDCC answers by phone or email in the range of 100,000 to 110,000 questions a year in any of the 24 EU languages.

The relative weight of phone vs web-based enquiries has changed over the last decade, with an increasing number of web-based questions and a decreasing share on the phone.

Figure 1: Annual evolution of enquiries and relative weight of web-based and phone enquiries
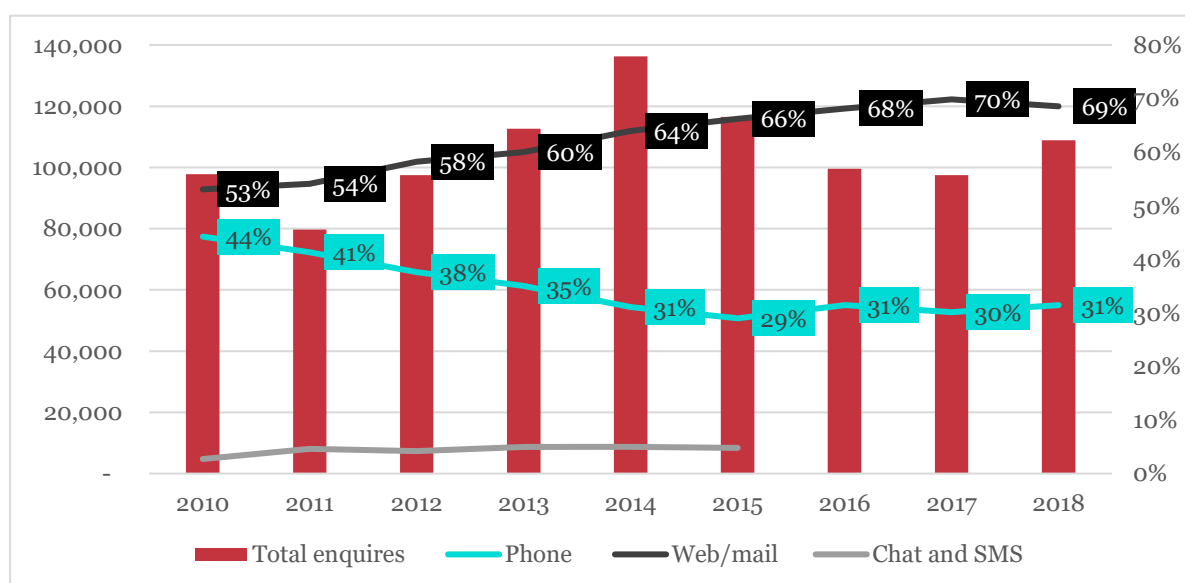
Source: EDCC annual reports 2014-2018

In total, the EDCC has addressed some 306,000 enquiries in the 2016-2018 period, or an annual average of just above 100,000 enquiries. The number of enquiries has increased in 2018 (with some 10,500 compared to 2017).

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[5]First-contact resolution rate is the percent of contacts that are resolved by the service desk on the first interaction with the customer.

2 Methodological approach to the study and the work carried out

2.1 Study questions

The methodology was developed considering the objectives of the study and the following research questions:

Effectiveness

1. To what extent were the objectives of the system to answer citizens enquiries achieved?
2. What type of citizens and subjects are served by the EDCC (i.e. which ordinary citizens are the EU in contact with, compared to professional project organisers, leaders or people from outside the EU)?
3. Are the working arrangements with the relevant Commission services effective, and how could they be improved?

Efficiency

4. Were the results of the work of the EDCC achieved at a reasonable cost?
5. Which factors influenced the efficiency of the observed results?
6. Can the objectives be obtained more effectively by changes in the way the work is organised?

Coherence, relevance and EU added value

7. Are the EDCC activities well-coordinated with other citizen-related services of the European Commission?
8. Are the defined objectives of the EDCC relevant for implementing the Commission communication policy and the political priorities?
9. Could the objective of the EDCC be obtained by the Member States or other decentralised bodies?

Additionally, a question on user needs (What are the characteristics that the EDCC service should have in the view of prospective users?) was included,

For each of these questions, the study team designed a set of sub-questions, indicators and judgement criteria. The evaluation matrix used as a basis for this evaluation is presented in Appendix A.

2.2 Study design

The report relies upon data collected through the following methods and approaches:

- Desk research
- Analysis of monitoring data and micro-data on enquiries, users and satisfaction
- Mapping and analysis of a sample of enquiries
- Interviews with the EDCC
- Interviews with back offices within the European Commission and other EU institutions
- Interviews with other services associated with the EDCC, potentially associated services and with representatives of Contact Centre organisations
- Cost-efficiency assessment

Each of these are briefly elaborated below.

Desk research

The desk research analysis undertaken had a twofold focus:

- First, on carrying out an initial documentation review to further understand the requirements and organisation of the service, its internal processes (HR, monitoring, reporting and quality insurance) and its relations with the different back offices (cooperation agreements).

- Second, on collecting available monitoring data from the EDCC. The analysis then addresses questions related to scale and the nature of the service delivered (type and typologies of enquiries, user attributes, enquiry escalation and time to address enquiries, as well as user satisfaction. Desk research also helped to map out performance indicators and the main descriptors, compliance with SLAs and treatment/handling time, user weighting, as well as quality and satisfaction indicators.

Overall, desk research covered the many different dimensions of the study and was extended to potential competitors and other similar contact centres.

<u>Analysis of monitoring data and micro-data on enquiries, users and satisfaction</u>

Two types of sources were used to analyse the number of enquiries, type of users, and overall user satisfaction: monitoring reports and the micro-data. The monitoring reports contain the aggregated number of enquiries by month and year, and they have been used to present the trends over time and the SLAs which cannot be monitored in the micro-data. The micro-data on enquiries has been extracted from two systems: LAGAN (web enquiries) and STORM (phone enquiries). The extraction covers the enquiries received from 2016 to 2018. The structure of the extracted data follows the indicators described in the table below (Table 1):

Table 1: Structure of the extracted data

Enquiry related indicators	User-related indicators	Process/Treatment of the enquiry	Categorisation of the enquiry
- Enquiry ID - Enquiry in original language - Enquiry in English	- Country of residence - EU nationality - Language - Economic category	- Date and time of response to enquiry - Response to enquiry - Content of any emails sent - Date and time of escalation (if there was one) - Status of case - Date and time of case closure	- Classification of enquiry topic (levels 1-4) - Hot topic classification - DG

The micro-data has been used to present the number of enquiries aggregated by DG, language, channel, topic, escalation, day and time. Finally, the micro-data on satisfaction, which is collected separately, has been analysed by merging it with the micro-data on enquiries extracted from the LAGAN database, based on the ID number of the respondents. In this way, it is possible to analyse data on satisfaction by the different types of aggregation available.

<u>Mapping and analysis of a sample of enquiries</u>

The enquiry mapping exercise involved the extraction of 2,000 enquiries from 2018, using stratified random sampling. Each question (and answer) was mapped against a limited set of criteria to understand the rationale/purpose of use and provide further detail on the nature of users. The mapping criteria used were the following:

- 'Purpose of use'
- Weighting of policy questions, questions of personal relevance and other types
- For professional questions: likely type of organisation
- Personalised reply (versus providing mainly links to replies)
- Nature of question (typology of questions to assess if follow-up "proactive mailing" to users would be meaningful or not)

The enquiries mapped were analysed, along with other data available per enquiry on language, nationality and socio-economic categories, and topic of the enquiry, in order to provide insight into professional and private use.

Interviews with the EDCC

Interviews with EDCC team members were carried out in order to undertake a detailed review of the service organisation and to understand how requirements influence the EDCC in practice. They were designed to identify options to enhance efficiency but also identify strengths and weaknesses of the system and processes between the EDCC and relevant Commission services. The qualitative insights provided during these interviews supported the quantitative analysis of monitoring data and fed the analysis of the overall performance of the service. Interviews with the EDCC were conducted with different staff members, including two communication officers, two supervisors, the trainer and coaching coordinator and the EDCC project manager.

Interviews with back offices within the European Commission and associated bodies

Various Commission services that have a cooperation agreement with the EDCC were consulted. A total of 16 interviews with DGs and other Commission services were conducted. Interviews with DG back offices followed a structured interview format tailored to the specificities of the type of enquiries they handle and the agreement.

Interviews with other services associated with the EDCC or with potential to be associated/linked with Contact Centre representatives

Consultation with other services associated with the EDCC or which had the potential to be linked to it were undertaken. A set of additional interviews were performed with Contact Centre representatives. Interviews focused on the quality of the EDCC's front office, effectiveness and the efficiency of its service and current collaboration mechanisms. Interview with Contact Centre representatives gave insight into the current setup of the EDCC.

Cost-efficiency assessment

To assess the cost efficiency of the EDCC, two aspects were considered: costs of the contracted service and cost efficiency of back office functions. Based on cost data and HR estimates, the estimated unit costs associated with back offices, total estimated costs and potential cost savings of the EDCC were calculated. Additionally, the study team has identified factors likely to have impacted on costs.

2.3   Issues and challenges related to the assignment

Two issues occurred in the framework of the assignment. The first was related to awareness of the EDCC and back office operation, with the level of knowledge of some of the more substantive issues differing across interviewees. For some interviewees, EDDC-related work constituted only a small part of their total workload. Additionally, it proved difficult for interviewees to assess quantitatively the HR implications with the back offices because enquiries are often addressed by other units, with the back-office contacts operating mainly as a dispatchment centre.

3 Study findings – Effectiveness

3.1 Organisation of the study findings

This section – and the subsequent three sections - provides the findings and results of the study. The sections are organised by evaluation question, under each of the evaluation themes to be covered.

This section covers, under effectiveness, the following questions

- Q1: To what extent were the objectives of the system to answer citizens enquiries achieved?
- Q2: Are the working arrangements with the relevant Commission services effective, and how could they be improved?
- Q3: What type of citizens and subjects are served by the EDCC (i.e. which ordinary citizens are the EU in contact with, compared to professional project organizers, leaders or people from outside the EU)?

Section 4 covers **efficiency**, and the following questions:

- Q4: Were the results of the work of the EDCC achieved at a reasonable cost?
- Q5: Which factors influenced the efficiency of the observed results?
- Q6: Can the objectives be obtained more effectively by changes in the way the work is organised?

Section 5 covers **relevance, coherence and EU added value**, and the following questions:

- Q 7 - Relevance: Are the defined objectives of the EDCC relevant for implementing the Commission communication policy and the political priorities?
- Q 8 - Coherence: Are the EDCC activities well-coordinated with other citizen-related services of the European Commission?
- Q 9 - EU added value: Could the objective of the EDCC be obtained by the Member States or other decentralised bodies?

Section 6 covers the following prospective question:

- Q10: What are the characteristics that the EDCC service should have in the view of prospective users?

To provides a succinct overview, each question is introduced by a summary of the findings.

3.2 Q1. To what extent were the objectives of the system to answer citizens enquiries achieved?

Two of the three main objectives of the EDCC relate to accessibility/availability and quality.

Accessibility/availability

A core objective of the EDCC is to ensure that the Commission is accessible to citizens, in case they have questions needing a (personalised) response. The review of actual performance against the accessibility target shows that the current contractor generally meets the requirements. This is also confirmed by the satisfaction rate with the timeliness of response, which is high. Issues with timeliness in reply (and consequently accessibility), related more to escalated enquiries – with only half of the escalated enquiries meeting the 15 days target stated in the Code of Good Administrative Behaviour. Beyond timeliness in reply, data shows that the EDCC has a good ability to match the linguistic needs – including on the phone.

The contractor overall delivers better than the previous contract. Whereas the previous contract underperformed on 12% of the total enquiries, underperformance under the current contract relate only to 4% of enquiries. The share of enquiries not meeting SLAs has decreased in the contracting period – from 5% in 2016 to 2% in 2018 suggesting enhanced performance over the duration of the

contract. The EDCC, comparatively, also performs as well or better than private-sector services in terms of access.

The general perception among back offices is that the current requirements for access (phone and email, and SLA requirements for both) are satisfactory and adequate, ensuring that citizens have comprehensive access to the Commission. The combination of phone and email options is seen as good. Access by phone is perceived as important, offering a channel for older citizens and those who do not have access to a computer. Limiting the services to email only is seen as problematic because it would then no longer cater to the needs of all citizens.

There is consensus on the need to deliver the service in the 24 languages. However, there is a trade-off between languages and level of specialisation. More complex services are felt to be better dealt with in one language because it allows for specialisation within the contracting service.

With the current level of enquiry fluctuation, there is nothing to suggest that the number of enquiries impacts on accessibility. While this is positive for the overall assessment of accessibility, it may however also suggest excess HR capacity within the EDCC.

Quality

Judging from DG COMM's assessment of the comprehensiveness, accuracy and form of replies, the quality of delivery is satisfactory. Clearly problematic cases represent less than 1% of cases treated by the EDCC and checked by DG COMM. This assessment is shared by back offices. With a few exceptions, the quality is also seen as better than previous contractors, also due to a drop in the number of escalated enquiries. Quality is also seen to have improved over the lifespan of the contract. On a positive note, higher numbers of enquiries do not appear to have driven up significantly the number of error cases.

Apart from February 2016, the target of 80% user satisfaction is met in all months during the 2016-2018 period. The EDCC's reported satisfaction rate, however, covers variation in actual satisfaction ratings. This is due to two main factors. First, the satisfaction rating is a composite indicator. Second, the satisfaction data reported by the EDCC contractor as part of the monitoring reports only covers the enquiries which are addressed by the EDCC, and not those which have been escalated.

The total average satisfaction rate (including escalated questions) for the 20216-2018 period was 79%. Data shows that the EDCC services perform better on the indicators "form of the reply" and "recommendation", and comparatively less well on the quality of the response. In the 2016-2018 period, the average satisfaction rate for "form of reply" is 85%. Some 79% would recommend the service. This compares to a satisfaction rate with the "content of the reply" of 69%.

Overall, citizens using the phone were significantly more satisfied with the quality of the response, and more inclined to recommend the service. The average satisfaction with information provided was 85% for phone enquiries, and 63% for email replies. The EDCC's short waiting times and high first-contact resolution rates were likely to have positively impacted these results. Other variations were found between:

- Escalated and non-escalated enquiries (68% compared to 78% for not escalated – accounting for email enquiries only)

- Topic covered by the enquiry

What explains such differences is not possible to assess – because the current EDCC surveys do not collect data on reasons for low(er) satisfaction. However, the different nature of enquiries can influence the appreciation of the response, as in the case of the questions related to DG MOVE, which are often related to complaints against airlines, where the citizens might not like the answer received, even when the answer is of good quality. Similarly, questions related to justice and consumer affairs are often quite personal in nature, as are consumer-related questions related to free movement – with lower satisfaction as a result. Satisfaction by user language varied, without clear trends.

Overall, the conclusion is that the service is likely to contribute to a perception that the EU is open and accessible among those who use the service. It is difficult to provide evidence to prove that the

> EDCC has contributed to a more positive image of the EU[6]. However, EDCC answers helped to showcase/clarify citizens/consumers/business rights under EU law – and may in this regard have contributed to a positive image of the EU among those using the service.

As outlined in section 1.1.1, the main specific objectives of the EDCC are related to accessibility and availability; quality; and efficiency. This section examines the EDCC's performance in relation to accessibility and quality, and whether it contributed to a positive image and general awareness-raising of the EU. Section 4 considers efficiency.

3.2.1   Performance: accessibility and responsiveness

A core objective of the EDCC is to ensure that the Commission is available to answer citizens' questions needing a (personalised) response. Direct and easy access is central to the operation. It contributes to the effectiveness and achievements of the EDCC. More globally, easy and direct access can help to address perceptions of a 'distant EU' and mitigate any potential negative perceptions of the European Commission or the EU in general, which might stem from an unresponsive European public service.

3.2.1.1   Performance against KPIs

To ensure that the Commission is easy to access, the contractor implementing the EDCC service must ensure compliance with a set of performance criteria or service level agreements – of which several are related to accessibility.

The review of actual performance against the targets set for accessibility shows that the current contractor generally meets the requirements ensuring comprehensive public access. Overall, there is full or close to full compliance with the targets related to pick-up time, language availability, and EDCC response time. Some 97% of the enquiries treated by the EDCC **front office** meet the target date of reply (maximum of. 3 days). The review of other indicators, such as satisfaction with the timeliness of the reply, average pick-up time, total share of calls abandoned, and average treatment time support the positive accessibility assessment.

The satisfaction rate with the timeliness of response is high. A solid 84% of users contacting the EDCC by phone and 83% of webform users indicating that they are satisfied with the timeliness of reply – and 53% indicating that they are very satisfied.

Issues with timeliness in reply (and consequently accessibility), usually relate to escalated enquiries. The 2018 data shows that only 51% of escalated enquiries were addressed within two weeks – with nearly one in five questions (19%) only treated after 30 calendar days. That issues with timeliness in responses is related to the back offices rather than the contractor's front office performance, as also confirmed by interviewees. Beyond DG COMM, none of the interviewees mentioned issues with backlogs stemming from the EDCC, and none perceived EDCC-generated backlogs to be a problem.

In contrast, many interviewees noted that there were issues meeting the two weeks internal Commission deadline for escalated enquiries. Different reasons for backlogs were mentioned by interviewees, including lack of efficient processes within the back office DGs, politically sensitive questions and low attention by desk officers (i.e. desk officers not investing the time necessary to send answers within 15 days). One issue in this respect seems to be that answering questions is seen as "low priority" additional work rather than a means to communicate and engage with citizens. Adequate knowledge of/experience with the LAGAN CRM software can also create delays. In some cases, peaks of enquiries (e.g. INEA call related) generate structural issues.

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[6] The evidence reviewed covered spontaneous feedback from users (i.e. thank you mails). From this evidence is it not possible to conclude that satisfaction with the services delivered leads to a more positive image of the EU, as users do not mention such a link.

Back office backlog in some cases also leads to unintended consequences, where enquiries are closed without reply. The amount of unsolved cases is not known. However, 6% of the 2018 escalated enquiries were not addressed by 5 February 2019[7].

Beyond timeliness in reply, data shows that the EDCC has a good ability to match the linguistic needs – including on the phone. While there has been an occasional use of back-ups (i.e. EDCC contracted staff responding in the language of the user on the phone but which only register, and do not treat enquiries), the number of enquiries which have been addressed by back-ups is small (1.56%). In some smaller languages the use of back-ups, however, is relatively significant.

The table 2 below provides a headline overview of compliance with KPIs. It also includes selected 'other indicators' related to accessibility, for which there are no targets.

Table 2: Compliance with SLA related to access

Service level agreements (SLAs)	Target	Performance 2016-2019, SLA and other indicators	SLA achievements
Telephone			
Calls answered within 30s	≥ 80%	• 92% of calls answered within 30 seconds • Average waiting time: 14 seconds – no months with average waiting time beyond 20 seconds	100% Months in which target was achieved
First contact resolution rate	≥92%	• Target met in 34 of 36 months (slight underperformance in December 2016 and February 2017 – between 90 and 92%)	94% Months in which target was achieved
Abandoned calls (all calls)	≤ 5%	• 6% of all calls were abandoned • Target met in 29 of 36 months (underperformance in 4 months in first semester 2016 and in 3 months in 2nd semester 2018)	81% Months in which target was achieved
All enquiries (webform and phone)			
Language coverage	100%	• Full language availability in 36 months • 1.56% of all incoming calls treated by back-ups/non EDCC permanent staff[8] • Back-up used on select languages only, with 75% of call responded by back-ups in five smaller languages only (RO, BG, LT, SL and HU. Due to this asymmetry, the shares of calls treated by back-ups/non EDCC permanent staff in these languages is relatively significant, ranging from 32% of phone enquiries in HU to 20% of phone enquiries in BG, SL and LT[9])	100% Months in which target was achieved
Response time – all enquiries (excl. obsoletes)	NA	• 1.24 days treatment time on average for all enquiries • 98% of all phone enquiries closed within 3 days • 90% of all webform enquiries closed within 3 days. The share of (non-escalated) webform enquiries closed within 3 days has been increasing in the 2016-2017 period, from 84% in 2016 to 94% in 2018	NA
Response time, enquiries treated by the front	≤ 3 days	• 97% of enquiries treated by front office – closed within 3 days • Below 90% performance in 2 of 35 months covered, no months below 85%	97% Enquiries treated within target

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[7] Not all of these, however, will be closed without an answer; there are also cases where the same user sends multiple mails on the same issue, and where only one request is closed.

[8] Data covers the period 20/2/2017-20/2/2019 – amounting to a total of 1180 calls picked up by back-ups. Data not available for previous periods.

[9] 82% of phone enquiries in HU, 27% of phone enquiries in RO, 20% of phone enquiries in BG, SL and LT.

Service level agreements (SLAs)	Target	Performance 2016-2019, SLA and other indicators	SLA achievements
office/EDCC (max.)			

Response time escalated enquiries	NA	2018 enquiries
		• 54% within two weeks:
		    37% treated within 7 calendar days
		    17% treated within 8-14 calendar days
		• 41% above two weeks
		    22% treated within 15-30 calendar days
		    19% treated after 30 calendar days
		• 6% no closing date
			NA

Second-level enquiry forwarding maximum	≤ 3 days	• 94% of all escalated enquiries sent to back offices within 3 days • Performance below 90% in 5 months – of which 4 were in the first semester 2016	94% Enquiries treated within target
Returned second-level enquiry handling maximum	≤ 2 days	• 98% of enquiries processed and sent to the citizen within 2 days • Performance below 95% in two months, incl. February 2018.	98% Enquiries treated within target
Satisfaction rating: timeliness of reply	NA	• 83% overall satisfaction with timeliness of reply • 84% satisfaction with timeliness of reply among phone questions. 65% are very satisfied • 83% satisfaction with timeliness of reply among webform questions. 48% are very satisfied	NA

Source: EDCC annual reports 2016-2018 and analysis of micro-data on user satisfaction

The fact that the EDCC performs well on its performance indicators obviously also needs to be seen in light of the number of incoming enquiries – and total enquiry fluctuation. A month-on-month analysis of the number of enquiries addressed showcased that there is some variation in the number of enquiries – with seasonal dips in February, August and December.

However, the total number of enquiries for the 2016-2018 period remained relatively stable – with very few significant peak (defined as +20% more enquiries than average number of monthly enquiries for the 2016-2018 period[10]). There was only one major peak period for total number of enquiries, and five months where peaks in either web or phone enquiries were recorded. Table 3 below provides a headline overview of the number of enquiries which have been addressed in the 2016-2018 period – along with number of peaks.

Table 3: Key indicators on enquiries (2016-2018) and number of peak months

	Web/mail	Voice in/phone	Total
Enquiries 2016-2018	210,625	95,339	305,964
Proportion of total	69%	31%	100%
Average number of monthly enquiries	5,851	2,648	8,499
Number of months in which the number of enquiries were 20% higher than average	1	4	1

[10] i.e. above 10,000 enquiries in total, above 7,000 emails/webform enquiries and above 3,150 phone enquiries.

Source: EDCC 2018 Annual report

With the current level of fluctuation, there is nothing to suggest, that the number of enquiries impacts on accessibility, as measured in abandoned calls, share of calls responded within 30 seconds or overall time of reply (Figure 2). While this is positive for the overall assessment of accessibility, it may however also suggest excess capacity[11]. This does not mean that there may not be limited periods where capacity does not meet demand. This is notably illustrated by the WIFI4EU enquiries in 2018– where 9% of all not escalated enquiries had a treating time of six calendar days or more[12]. However, impacts on overall delivery is small.

Figure 2: Number of enquiries and links to performance in accessibility
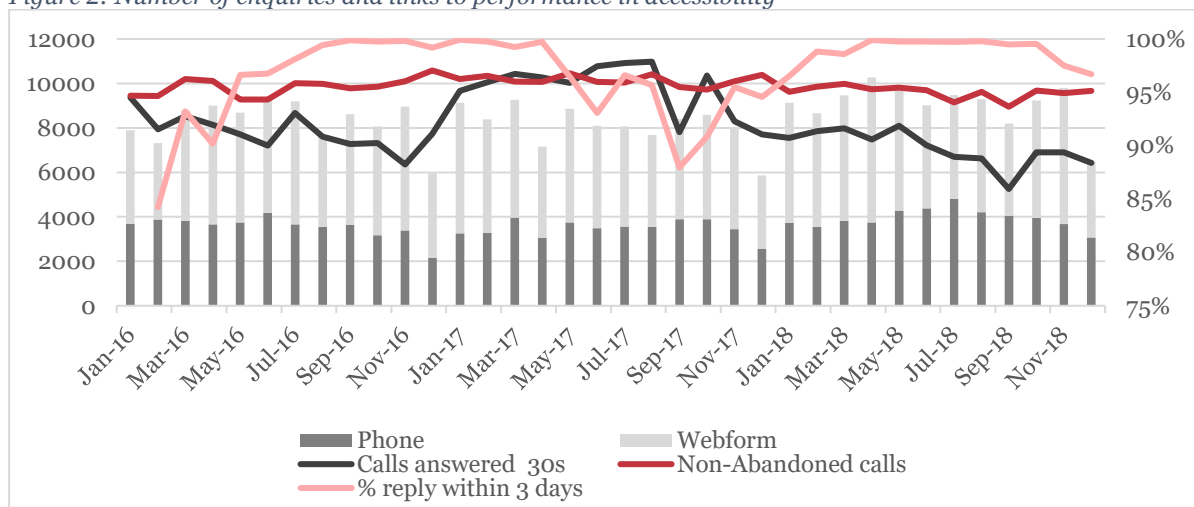
Source: EDCC annual reports 2016-2018 and study team's calculations

As indicated, overall satisfaction with speed of response is good – with 83% of users being satisfied or very satisfied. In line with what could be expected, user satisfaction with the timeliness of reply decreases with length of the response time. This trend is clear for all years covered by the study, albeit the trend is less prominent in 2018, suggesting either that the quality improved (making the response worthwhile the waiting time) or expectations of timeliness were lower.

Overall, this data suggests that there is a cut-off time of five days – after which the satisfaction rating drops below 80% of reply. In turn, this suggests that there may be scope for more flexibility in EDCC response times – but also that more attention is needed to efficient back office functions especially if the European Commission is to be seen as 'accessible' by all users. These indicators are illustrated in Figure 33.

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[11] i.e. that effectiveness comes with implications on efficiency – see also Section 3.2.

[12] Compared to 2.6% of all not escalated enquiries.

Figure 3: Satisfaction with the time it took to reply to the question – in function of the length of the time it took for the user to receive the response
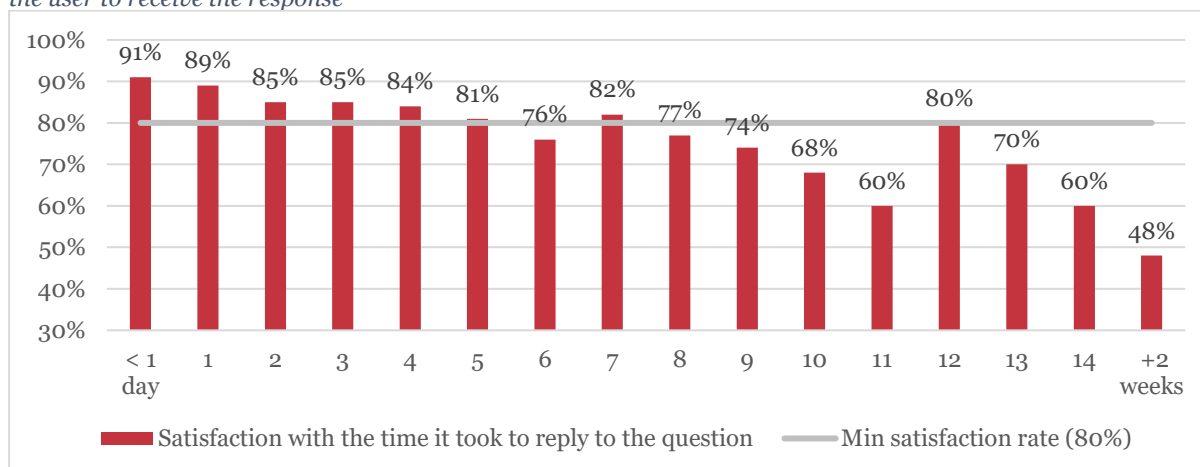
Source: study team's analysis of LAGAN micro-data (web-enquiries only, N=9502, all survey replies 2016-2018)

3.2.1.2   Performance against past contracts

The SLA-achievements cannot be directly compared to those presented in previous studies, as some KPIs have changed in absolute terms, or in the way these have been reported in past evaluations. However, for comparable indicators, it may be concluded that the EDCC in the 2016-2018 period has performed marginally less well than the 2011-2015 contractor on first contact resolution rate and abandoned calls – and equivalently well on response time - if a monthly assessment is used.

In contrast, for the calculation model which was used in the 2016 EDCC evaluation to identify the number and share of enquiries which do not meet the SLA[13], the current contract delivers significantly better (4% underperformance versus 12%) than the previous contract. The share of enquiries not meeting SLAs also decreased – from 5% in 2016 to 2% in 2018, suggesting enhanced performance over the duration of the contract.

It should also be noted that the EDCC, comparatively, performs as well or better than private-sector services in terms of access – where standard abandonment rates fluctuate between 5 and 10% depending on the market; average speed to answer ranges between 15 and 55 seconds, and first contact resolution rates range in the 80%[14].

Table 4: Comparison of performance – current and previous EDCC contract

Service level agreements (SLAs)	Performance Feb 2012-June 2014	Performance Feb 2016-Dec 2018
Calls answered within 30s	100% Months in which target was achieved	100% Months in which target was achieved
First-contact resolution rate	100% Months in which target was achieved	94% Months in which target was achieved
Abandoned calls (all calls)	100% Months in which target was achieved	81% Months in which target was achieved
Total amount of enquiries	276,417	305,964

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[13] Deloitte and Coffey 2014 Mid-term Evaluation of the Europe Direct Contact Centre, for the European Commission, see footnote 9 in this report.
[14] Contact Babel, 2018 The European Contact Centre, Decision-Makers' Guide.

Service level agreements (SLAs)	Performance Feb 2012-June 2014	Performance Feb 2016-Dec 2018
Number of enquiries which did not meet SLA	34,386	12,033
Share of enquiries not meeting SLA	12.4%	4.1%
Number of months in which at least 10% of the enquiries did not meet SLA	8 (of 29)	11 (of 36)
Level of underperformance	Seven months having +30% of enquiries not meeting SLA	Two months having +20% of enquiries not meeting SLA No months above 25%

Source: EDCC annual monitoring reports, the 2014 EDCC evaluation and study team's calculations

3.2.1.3   Qualitative review: accessibility

Judging by the interviews undertaken, the general perception among back offices is that the current requirements for access (phone and email, and SLA requirements for both) are satisfactory and adequate, ensuring that citizens have comprehensive access to the EU/Commission.

The combination of phone and email options is seen as good. Access by phone is perceived as important, especially for older citizens and those who do not have access to a computer. Limiting the services to email only would be too sensitive considering the obligation of the EC to cater for the needs of all citizens. Answering by phone is also seen as a channel to demonstrate that the Commission the listen to the concerns of citizens. Additionally, the phone is seen as an opportunity to further engage the enquirer and built a clearer picture of the issue at hand to improve or tailor the response. The importance of direct phone contact is confirmed by monitoring data on user satisfaction.

There is consensus on the need to deliver the service in the 24 languages. One interviewee (REA), however, also pointed out that there is a trade-off between languages and level of specialisation. More complex topics are felt to be better dealt with in one language because it allows for specialisation within the contracting service. Email is also favoured when there are higher volumes of queries that need to be escalated (because of the risk that enquiries are wrongly dealt with on the phone).

The current SLA of three days to provide an answer to the citizen and 95% of response rate by phone within 30 seconds of receiving a call are regarded as acceptable considering the volume of enquiries received by the EDCC.

3.2.2   Performance: quality

Together with accessibility, quality of response is the key performance indicator of the EDCC – reflecting the specific objective of the service. Quality of the response can be measured in function of the adequacy and comprehensiveness of the response or in terms of user satisfaction. These are complementary measures. The accuracy and comprehensiveness of a response may be good, and the user may nevertheless be dissatisfied with the outcome, and vice versa.

3.2.2.1   Quality of the reply

Data from the Commission's quality review, undertaken on a regular basis on a sample of the questions, suggest that the comprehensiveness, accuracy and form of the replies (as provided by the EDCC) is satisfactory. Some 90% of the enquiries checked in 2018[15] are of satisfactory quality overall – with shares increasing in the second half of 2018. Clearly problematic cases (so-called 'red cases') represent less than 1% of those treated by the EDCC and checked by DG COMM (0.8%).

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[15] Data not available for previous years.

Translation and form of the replies generally score better than the content of the response – with 95% of translation/language forms being of satisfactory quality and 92% having the right form. The quality of the content is assessed comparatively lower – with 83% being fully adequate in terms of content.

As illustrated in the figure 4 below, data does suggest that there are some modest links between quality of response and the number of enquiries. A higher number of enquiries does not appear to drive up significantly the number of error cases. However, the number of cases with some remarks on content (problematic or not) do fluctuate with the number of enquiries, suggesting a modest impact on overall quality (e.g. further elements could have been relevant in the response or parts of question not addressed or marked as potentially problematic, but picked up by the EDCC's own quality review). Judging by the Commission's quality review, language and form appear not to be affected by the volume of replies.

Figure 4: Shares of cases picked up in the Commission's quality review – and correlation with the number of enquiries (2018)
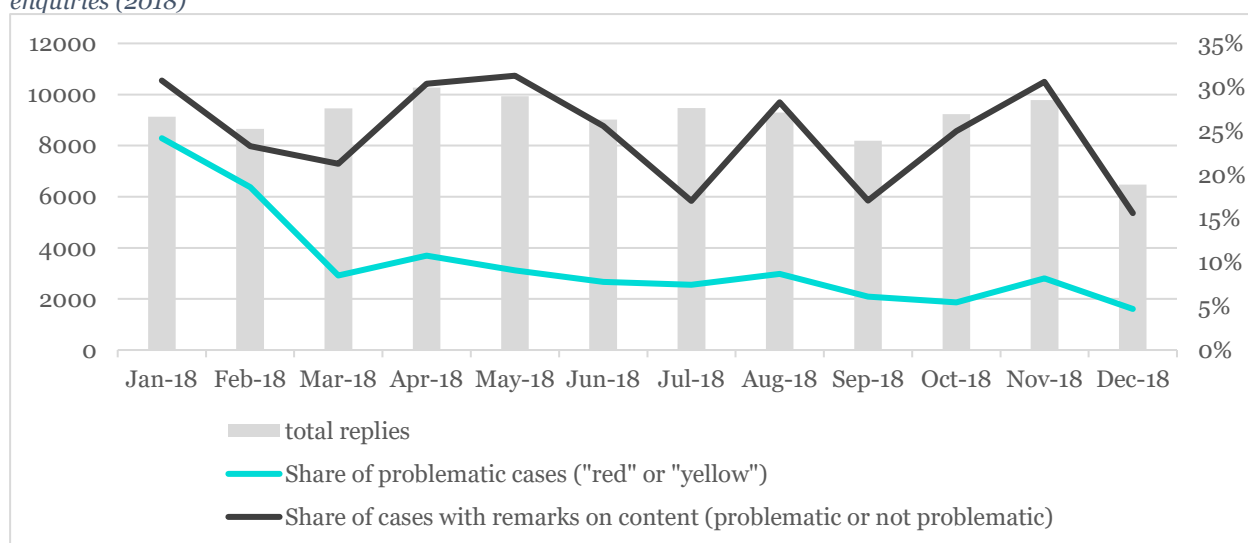
Source: EDCC annual monitoring report 2018 and the EC's quality review of cases in 2018 (N=1084)

The manual mapping of the level of personalisation in responses[16] (the extent to which answers are adapted to the individual, not the quality of response) confirms that answers are generally well tailored[17]. Some 88% of the sampled enquiries (on which assessment was possible) were tailored to the question raised[18]. Identical data is not available from the previous evaluations. However, the 2010 evaluation indicated that potentially up to half of the enquiries were largely addressed through the provision of links to Europa and other sources[19], rather than providing a tailored answer. This would indicate that tailoring of responses has improved on past contracts.

3.2.2.2   User satisfaction

User satisfaction forms part of the EDCC SLAs and data is reported on a monthly basis. Apart from February 2016, the start month of the contract, the target of 80% user satisfaction was met in all months

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[16] Covering enquiries that have been treated by the EDCC.

[17] This does not mean that answers cannot be relatively general. Indeed, broad questions are more likely to receive a more general answer.

[18] This assessment considered the question and the answer; if it was tailored to the specific request rather than simply links to information where the content could be found. In several cases, obviously a tailored reply could be a link. For example, when the person was searching for a document or a piece of legislation.

[19] EPEC/GHK, 2010 Evaluation of the Europe Direct Contact Centre.

during the 2016-2018 period. The average satisfaction rate fluctuates over the months, but there is no correlation to the number of enquiries (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Satisfaction rating and enquiries
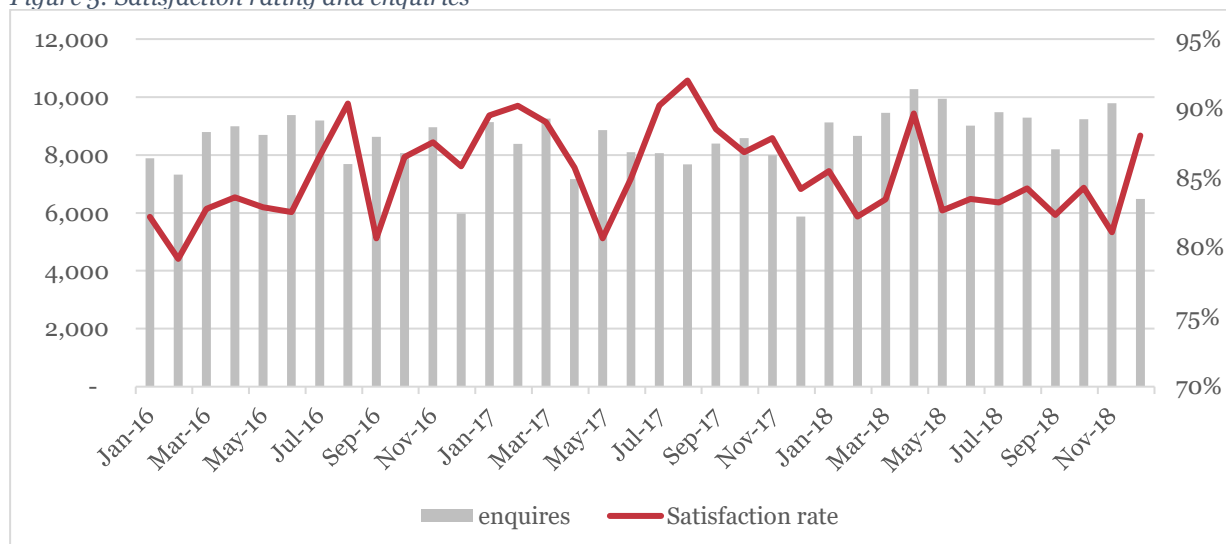
Source: EDCC annual monitoring report 2016-2018

3.2.2.3 Variation in user satisfaction: year on year, channels and front office/back office

The EDCC's reported satisfaction rate does, however, cover variations in actual satisfaction with the service. This is due to two main factors. First, the satisfaction rating is a composite indicator, covering speed of reply, quality of reply, form of reply and extent to which the user would recommend the service – across all languages and services. Second, the reported data only covers the enquiries which are addressed by the EDCC, and not those which have been escalated. This reporting makes sense from the point of view of the EDCC service provider (reporting on satisfaction on the questions replied by the front office); but does not provide a comprehensive picture of user satisfaction.

Total average satisfaction rate (including escalated questions) for the 20216-2018 period is 79%. If data is disaggregated on the three main indicators related to quality[20], data shows that the EDCC services perform better on the indicators "form of the reply" and "recommendation", and comparatively less well on the "quality of the response". In the 2016-2018 period, the average satisfaction rate for "form of reply" is 85% (share of satisfied and very satisfied) and 79% would recommend the service. This compares to a satisfaction rate with the "content of the reply", of 69%.

This result is consistent across the three years covered by the study. Seemingly, satisfaction with the quality provided has improved year on year[21]. However, this improvement is explained by data variability. User satisfaction data for the phone line is higher than for the webform, and this data is only available as from April 2017. Those being satisfied with the "quality of reply", having used the webform has improved only 2% points from 2016 to 2018 – and there is no increase in those being very satisfied.

Overall, citizens using the phone are significantly more satisfied with the quality of the response, and more inclined to recommend the service. The average satisfaction with information provided is 85% for

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[20] Disregarding satisfaction with speed of the reply, maintaining the indicator "extent to which user would recommend the service".

[21] Also, those who are "very satisfied" with the information have increased (from 31% in 2016 to 46% in 2018).

phone enquiries, and 63% for email replies. The EDCC's short waiting times and high first-contact resolution rates are likely to positively impact these results.[22]

The downside of the phone channel is that user satisfaction with the information provided is – at peak moments – linked to the number of enquiries, which decreases when numbers of calls increase. There is no similar correlation for webform enquiries, suggesting that the quality of web answers is less sensitive to spikes in enquiries. Data, however, suggest that spikes in phone enquiries also impact negatively on web-enquiries. These indicators are illustrated in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Select indicators on user satisfaction, by year and by channel

Source: analysis of micro-data from LAGAN and STORM, N=13,422
* User satisfaction on telephone enquiries from April 2017 only

As the previous evaluation has indicated, satisfaction rates are higher when the enquiries are handled by the EDCC itself, as opposed to the associated EU-services (back offices). The average satisfaction rate

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[22] Research on the contact centre industry suggests that short queue times and first-contact resolution are the key determinants for user satisfaction – aspects on which the EDCC score highly, see ContactBabel (2018), The European Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide.

for the escalated web enquiries is 68% compared to 78% for non-escalated[23]. The main factor explaining this difference is satisfaction with "timeliness" – with 23 percent point differences between not escalated (86%) and escalated enquiries (63%).

Figure 7: Differences in satisfaction ratings, escalated and non-escalated (webform enquiries) – 2016-2018
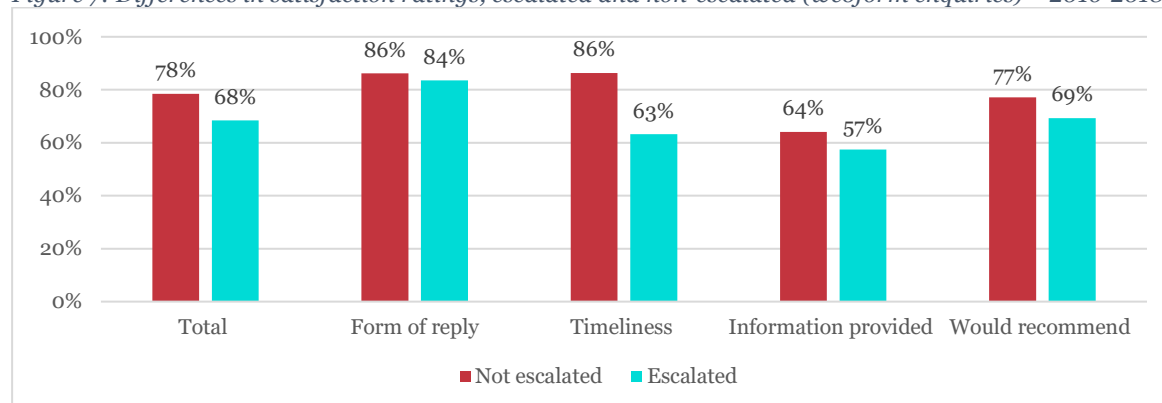
Source: Study team's analysis of micro-data from LAGAN, N= 9,503

3.2.2.4   Satisfaction: by topics and DG

The data available on user satisfaction by topic[24] suggests that there is quite some variation in satisfaction rates depending on the subject area covered by the request. Answers related to topics such as international development and cooperation, education and culture, enterprise-related policies and regional policy score well both on overall satisfaction and quality of the response. Satisfaction with answers related to justice and home affairs, questions related to the EU in general and Member States, internal market, food safety, customs and taxation and WIFI4EU, in contrast, score low. Four in ten users contacting the EDCC with questions in these areas are judging by the data available not satisfied with reply (figure 8).

What explains such differences is not possible to assess – because the current EDCC surveys do not collect data on reasons for low(er) satisfaction. However, the different nature of enquiries can influence how well people perceive the response, as in the case of the questions related to DG MOVE, which are often related to complaints against airlines, where the citizens might not like the answer received, even when the answer is of good quality. Similarly, questions related to justice and consumer affairs are often quite personal in nature, and answers related consumer complaints, rights and issues related to free movement (including third country national family members); may not meet users' expectations (either because the question is beyond the scope of available information or because the content may not be in line with users' expectations). This is likely to be the case also for customs and tax-related questions. That user satisfaction is low for Wifi4EU is likely to be seen in the context of the implementation issues related to the calls.[25]

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[23] Treatable and comparable data is only available for webform enquiries, which explains the lower average satisfaction rate.

[24] Only webform enquiries.

[25] Notably, that about 9,000 public authorities received an email from the system erroneously – asking them to validate their contract agreement, but those municipalities were not among the 'winning' applicants!

Figure 8: Satisfaction rating, per main topic – overall and with the information provided, 2016-2018 (webform questions only)
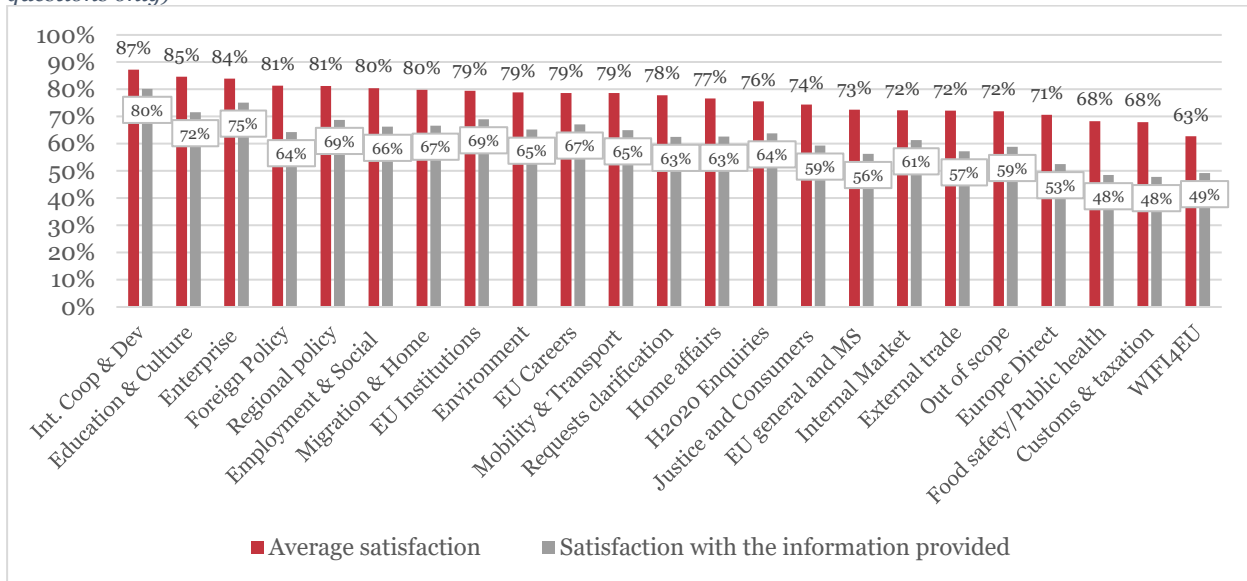
Source: LAGAN data, study team's analysis of micro-data, N= 9503 (number of survey replies) Note: the graph includes only the shares based on more than 100 respondents per topic

The graph in Figure 9 below offers an overview of the differences in overall satisfaction ratings between answers provided by the EDCC and back offices/DGs[26]. As illustrated, the general difference between front and back offices conceal differences between areas of coverage/DGs. Overall, however, only replies from a few back offices match, in terms of satisfaction, questions replied by the front office/EDCC. The only back office that receives a higher satisfaction rate is the one for the WIFI4EU from INEA, suggesting that the help of the back office is particularly appreciated.

Figure 9: Differences in satisfaction ratings, escalated by front and back office (webform enquiries) – 2016-2018
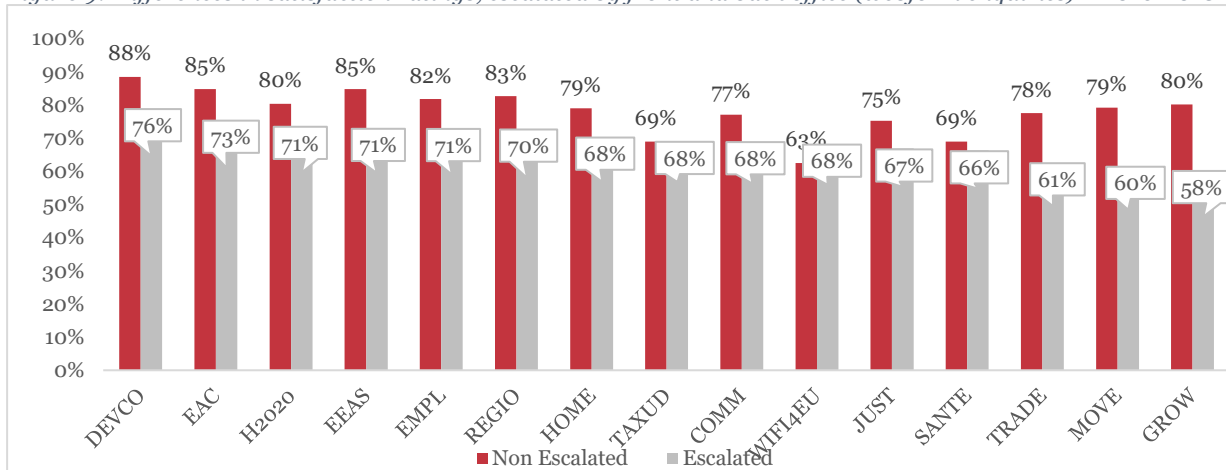
Source: Study team's analysis of micro data from LAGAN and STORM, N= 9606 (enquiries with satisfaction information). Note: the graph includes only the shares based on more than 100 respondents.

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[26]The satisfaction rate presented in the graph is an average of the satisfaction rates of the four questions i.e. "How well written was the reply you received?", "Are you satisfied with the time it took us to reply to your question?", "How satisfied are you with the information provided?", "Would you recommend the Contact Centre to others?"

3.2.2.5 Satisfaction: by language

Satisfaction by user language vary, without clear trends. Satisfaction has been tested against the aggregate satisfaction rate and against satisfaction with the form of the reply. Overall, there is nothing to suggest that users using "little used" languages are more - or less - satisfied, with the service in general or with the form of reply (i.e. the way it was written or presented on the phone).

Figure 10: Average satisfaction rate by language
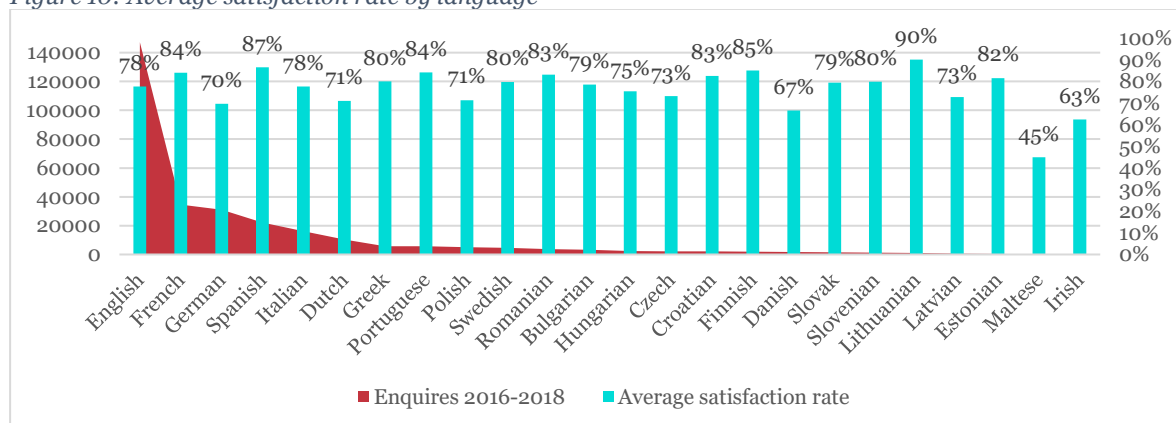
Source: LAGAN and STORM study team's analysis of micro-data, N=13,422 (survey replies)

3.2.2.6 Benchmarks

Overall, the current operation of the EDCC scores less well than under the previous contract, in terms of satisfaction. According to the 2015 evaluation, the average satisfaction rate was 86%, compared to an average rate of 79% for the current contract (2017-2018[27]). This difference may be due to two main factors. First, it is not clear if the previous evaluation accounts for all user satisfaction responses using micro data– or only those reported by the contractor (which are likely only to have covered front office replies). If satisfaction responses only cover questions addressed by the EDCC, satisfaction rates are similar. Second, the share of phone enquiries was higher, which also under the past contract enjoyed a higher satisfaction rate than web-based enquiries.

Factors such as complexity of questions, needs for more tailored answers and obviously quality may also explain differences. However, judging from the qualitative data collected, there is nothing to suggest that the quality of the content has decreased (see also below).

Table 5: Satisfaction, comparison with past contracts

	Performance 2016-2018	**Performance Feb 2012-June 2014**	**Performance 2010**
Overall user satisfaction	85% (EDCC reported benchmark) 79% (all replies)	86%	84%
Form of the reply	85%	92%	
Time to reply	83%	87%	
Information provided	69%	78%	
Would recommend	79%	87%	

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[27] 2016 data excluded as not comparable.

Source: Study team's analysis of micro-data from LAGAN and STORM (N=13422) and the 2010 and 2015 evaluation reports

3.2.2.7   Feedback on EDCC quality from back offices

The services delivered by the contractor are generally perceived as satisfactory. With a few exceptions (REA notably), the quality is seen as better than previous contractors, also due to a drop in the number of escalated enquiries. There have been few cases of answers deemed insufficient in quality.

The quality of the answers is, however, rarely assessed. Beyond DG COMM and REA, only a few back offices indicated that they undertake regular quality reviews of the EDCC's replies. Feedback, however, may come in the form of a complaint to an ombudsman or when a user contacts the EDCC a second time, or the DG directly, for clarifications.

In cases where quality is seen as inferior to past contractors (REA notably), it is noted that performance has improved, and is currently satisfactory. In this case, issues with quality are seen mainly to be related to lack of ability to judge when an enquiry needs escalation or not (with several cases where escalation would have been necessary but did not take place).

3.2.3   *Contributions to a positive image of the EU/Commission and general awareness-raising*

The current survey does not collect data on potential impacts of the information provided, in terms of generating a positive image of the EU (e.g. the extent to which the EU is perceived as accessible and/or listening to citizens' concerns). Assessing the potential impact on users' perception of the EU is therefore challenging. As outlined in the previous section, on average users are satisfied with the service – and four out of five would recommend it to others. Building on this data, it can be concluded that the service is likely to contribute to a perception that the EU is open and accessible among those who use the service.

Spontaneous satisfaction mails may also be an indicator of perception of an EU "open and responsive to its citizens". In the 2016-18 period, the EDCC received some 380 enquiries which in one form or another expressed satisfaction with the services provided by the EDCC or the EU more in general – or which alternatively provided an opportunity to express, typically, an opinion about the EU or desired actions that the EU should take. This data supports the finding that the EDCC contributes to perceptions of EU 'openness' and 'accessibility'. However, 'thank you' emails are not proof that the EDCC has contributed to a more positive image of the EU. Satisfaction mails usually only includes an expression of satisfaction for the answers received. Positive comments on the EU are typically unrelated to the service delivered or previous enquiries.

However, as, many questions are of direct relevance to the users – and EDCC answers may help by showcasing or clarifying citizens/consumers/business rights under EU law, contributing thereby to a positive image of the EU.

3.3   Q2. Are the working arrangements with the relevant Commission services effective, and how could they be improved?

<u>Effectiveness of working relations</u>

Both the EDCC and back offices indicate that the working arrangements are globally effective. Most back offices underline the quality of the relationship and ease of contact with the EDCC supervisor in the event of issues. Feedback also suggests a level of flexibility in the organisational set up, in cases where there are high numbers of questions for escalations.

Generally, there is a consensus that the contractor is timely and effective in escalating and treating the cases. The general collaboration with the EDCC is therefore good. There were no mentions of recurrent issues with wrong or unnecessary escalations. Two back offices however (REA, YEA) noted potential issues with too few escalations.

Capacity management at the EDCC is seen as quite good. Several interviewees indicated that the current service is better than the previous one, when DG staff had to spend more time on standard/easy-to-answer/repetitive questions. Data also suggests that campaign collaboration works well – and this despite unforeseen issues with both WIFI4EU and DiscoverEU in 2018.

Feedback on LAGAN is mixed. DGs where the person in charge of the back-office function has changed often, mention that there are processing difficulties with the LAGAN system. However, LAGAN's oversight and follow-up functions are generally seen as fit for purpose.

Where collaboration issues occur, they are chiefly related to:

- The format of the EDCC introductory training (and general training) is not tailored enough to the communication officers' needs. Back offices also expect the EDCC to be more proactive in proposing training sessions on specific topics.
- Frequent changes in back office functions, which increase the likeliness of backlogs/slow response rates from desk officers.
- Staff changes/supervisors in the EDCC (several DGs noting the need to reduce staff attrition, as key personnel changes correlate with temporary drops in quality).

Moreover, several complaints were made about the lack of feedback on answers provided by the back offices.

A final issue of the EDCC management system is its knowledge database. It represents one of the main weaknesses of the current system, acknowledged by all stakeholders of the service.

Avenues for improvement

What is seen as missing in the current organisation is the intelligence and first-hand knowledge on what citizens are concerned with. Such feedback would enhance the sense of ownership and the involvement of the DG-related services, allowing for further integration of the system within their own internal organisation.

The reports contain useful data and information for monitoring purposes but could be improved notably through more examples of the questions being asked by citizens and the answers provided, as well as how users perceive these answers (their satisfaction). While back offices have access to questions and replies though LAGAN, there is an expectation that insights is provided as part of the reports. Timeliness is also an issue, with many back offices indicating that reporting tended to arrive too late for data to be useful.

Beyond issues with reporting, the main options to improve collaboration are associated with:

- Better-tailored training
- More proactivity from the EDCC alerting back offices of emerging 'hot topics'; prompt data on upcoming topics can help the back offices to develop factsheets and draft answers, which in turn may lead to a decrease in escalation rates.
- EDCC feedback on user-identified issues with DG websites – allowing these to be addressed quickly
- More systematic management of escalated enquiries in back offices
- Back offices proactively defining hot topics/new topic areas for training for the EDCC, and supporting these through training or document support

In order to assess the effectiveness of the current working arrangements with the Commission services several issues need to be considered. The requirements, processes and procedures in place to support collaboration are important, as is the general organisational set up. Knowledge management and training systems also need to be considered. These issues are considered in turn.

3.3.1 Processes and procedures for collaboration

3.3.1.1 Procedures and processes for enquiry management

All incoming enquiries are registered in the Citizens' enquiries database/Contact Centre solution[28]. The system is managed and operated by the EDCC[29]. The platform facilitates enquiry management, coordination with the different Commission back-offices, oversight of the content and actions taken at each step of the process of answering citizens' questions. The platform is also used to provide data for developing management and monitoring reports.

When entered into the system, enquiries are given a reference number and filtered for further handling. When distributed, enquiries are translated into English. The EDCC communication officers[30] separate enquiries of informative nature that can be answered directly by the EDCC and the enquiries that need special treatment and assistance from the second-level information services.

In principle any enquiry about EU matters that cannot be answered by Europa or other EU websites, official EU publications and the EDCC Knowledge Database[31] (EDCC sources) can and should be escalated. Complex questions may be addressed by the EDCC if the question is regarded 'informative' in nature and the information is available.

Beyond questions that cannot be answered by using the EDCC sources, the contractor is required to escalate to the back offices any enquiries linked to sensitive information or topics, to the quality of operator, to the channel used, or to specific content. The table 6 below describes the nature of the enquiries meant to be escalated.

Table 6: Typology of enquiries meant to be escalated by the EDCC

Specific nature of the enquiry	Description
Sensitivity of the information or topic addressed	• **Political and sensitive information** – issues which are subject to intense media attention, controversial EU policies, conflicts involving a Member State, accession negotiations with controversial outcomes, enquiries criticising declarations of EU leaders, questions on sensitive policy areas in Member States on which there is no clear EU perspective, requests for an EU official position on controversial matters, and enquiries criticising policies, practices and procedures of Commission services, EU institutions and Member States • **Multiple enquiries on hot topics** requiring a standard answer from a Commission service should be escalated to DG COMM, which then sends it to the appropriate service that could develop a standard reply to be used by the EDCC later on • **Specific enquiries on non-disclosed information** to other institutions on subjects not covered by authorised EU sources
Quality of the user or person to whom the enquiry is addressed	• **Enquiries from the press** – complex and sensitive questions by journalists should be redirected to the content-related Commission spokesperson[32] • **Targeted enquiries addressed to individuals** – a specific member of EU staff, enquiries addressed to a member of the Commission • **Content related to MEPs** and their assistants (unless it is a request for publications that should be handled as usual)[33]

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[28] Which also integrates answers along with short translations of questions and answers, user profiling data which is to be provided as part of the enquiry, and enquiry mapping against a set of defined criteria, undertaken by the EDCC.

[29] The system is LAGAN, a multilingual customer relationship management (CRM) Contact Centre solution.

[30] The so-called supervisors within the EDCC.

[31] Which also contains answers provided by the back offices and associated service.

[32] Link with the list of spokespersons is offered; DG COMM should be copied in all contacts with journalists.

[33] The service provider is requested to provide a regular report on all enquiries from MEPs offices and from EU officials.

Specific nature of the enquiry	Description
Channel used to address the enquiry	• **Second-level enquiries received via the Europa** coordination mailbox, which cannot be answered by the EDCC, should be escalated to Europa Team management level, the messages not in competence of this team should be escalated to EDCC Sector level in DG COMM
Specific request addressed in the enquiry	• Multiple enquiries of identical content (**chain letters**) and about individuals requesting help due to **serious threats to themselves or to others** should be flagged to DG COMM; such cases will be passed on to the Commission's Security Directorate • **Complaints** on accessibility of the EDCC service, the speed of the reply provided, and anonymity of the reply provided • **Fraud with EU name** – enquiries reporting on the misuse of the EU name and symbols, spam messages using correct Community service or official contact details • **Publications** – requests of more than 100 copies of publications, publications out of stock and complaints regarding the EU Bookshop service should be escalated to back office

When escalated to a back office, the file must include the original request and a short summary of the case in English. In case of phone calls needing escalation, the EDCC communication agents take note of the caller's name and relevant details of the enquiry and pass on the request to the back office in DG COMM. The enquiries received through telephone calls are not directly transferred.

The EU officials then provide the EDCC with a reply or with the necessary information to allow the EDCC to draft one. The back office might also choose to answer the citizen directly, with the EDCC in copy[34]. The EDCC is thus informed and may close the case.

The working procedures between the EDCC and each Commission service are organised in the same manner for most back offices. Exceptions are Your Europe Advice, SOLVIT and DG COMM. In the case of Your Europe Advice and SOLVIT the enquiries are transferred, not escalated, as they are services themselves. They fall under the EDCC partnerships agreement. The partnerships differ from the operational agreements in that the EDCC transfers all relevant enquiries to these specialised assistance services.

DG COMM operates as the "main" back office, insofar that it deals with all enquiries which fall out of the remits of other back offices, in addition to dealing with political questions, and questions within its remit. DG COMM internally appoints a liaison officer who takes charge of identifying the relevant person within the different DGs without cooperation agreements, sends the enquiry, receives the answer and sends it back to the EDCC. The identification of the relevant contact within the DG services is made on the basis of expertise and experience with DGs in specific fields. Moreover, when no cooperation agreement exists, the different DGs concerned usually have a general contact in the unit. There is a limit on the number of enquiries which can be escalated to DG COMM back office – set at 5% of all enquiries. This limit has been respected throughout the 2016-2018 contract period.

Enquiries sent to the second level are treated via the LAGAN system which is online, and to which the back offices and the associated services have access.

Box 1 Lifetime of an enquiry

1. Entry point
   - Reception of a written enquiry: The enquiries received by the EDCC are disseminated by a communication officer (CO) to the relevant person according to language competence.

   - Reception of a phone enquiry: The enquiries are received by the different COs, entered into the system and translated. Either an answer is provided immediately, or the CO asks for more

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[34] Back office inserts a copy of the reply in the EDCC database whenever possible.

> detail in order to write the enquiry down in LAGAN. At this stage the supervisor might be involved as advisor to the CO (knowledge management).
>
> 2. Escalation (if relevant). The enquiry is then escalated to the relevant DG by the supervisor through the LAGAN system.
>
> 3. The DG back office provides an answer within 15 days back to EDCC or sends a holding reply – if the 15 days deadline cannot be met.
>
> 4. Reception of DG answer. The answer is checked by the supervisor and then sent to the enquirer
>
> 5. User satisfaction survey

3.3.2 Staff organisation and enquiry management

3.3.2.1 EDCC

The EDCC is composed of a management group, senior and junior communication officers, liaison officers and employees responsible for training and reporting. As of January 2019, 40 employees were on-site covering 24 languages. As a back-up language coverage, the EDCC works with 68 officers who are native speakers and work remotely. These flexible resources ensure adequate language coverage at any time. The table 7 below provides a task description of the different members of the EDCC staff.

Table 7: Composition of the staff and task description

Position	Task description/Main requirements
Communication officers	Responds to enquiries – demonstrating sound communication and writing skills in at least two official languages of the EU including English as well as a good understanding of EU institutions, policies and activities.
Supervisors	Specialised in defined policy themes, they supervise the operational and production aspects of a team of communication officers. They provide coaching, correction and validation of the work. They are in charge of escalating enquiries and assisted by back-ups selected among the senior communication officers.
Liaison officers	Seconded to the back-office of DG COMM, they work full-time under the guidance of DG COMM staff. They are an interface between the Commission and the EDCC. Their main tasks are: • To handle second-level enquiries transferred by the EDCC • To assist the back office in operational activities
Reporting officer	Drafts EDCC reports based on data contained in the Citizens' enquiries database.
Trainer and coaching coordinator	Defines training requirements with DG COMM and implements internal training programmes, ensuring that supervisors and communication officers are kept informed on the latest policy developments; follows the personal development of the team members.
Project manager	Responsible for the operational delivery of the EDCC service, and for all organisational tasks. The project manager is the main interface with the EC.
Back-up language coverage	Register enquiries, do not treat them

Source: EDCC terms of reference completed by data from interviews

3.3.2.2 Back offices

From the Commission services side, the management of enquiries is organised and managed around one person within each DG who ensures that the answers are sent in a timely manner through LAGAN to the EDCC. This person dispatches the enquiries to the relevant unit and monitors that the 15- day deadline to answer is respected. (S)he then copies the answer in LAGAN and forwards it in the workflow to the EDCC side.

Apart from the centralised model with a single contact point in each back office working within the defined framework of a cooperation agreement, we can observe other types of interactions between the EDCC and back offices when contacts are defined under specific arrangements or partnerships. These different types of interactions are influenced by the design of these partnerships.

Research Enquiry Service

The contacts made by the EDCC for the Research Enquiry Service (RES) follow a centralised governance by REA coordinating 36 helpdesks. The REA back office coordinates, collects and centralises the escalated enquiries received through the EDCC. On its side, the EDCC has established a team of seven that answers the questions only in English. The RES supervisor only goes through the Commission liaison officer in order to contact one of the 36 back offices.

Because of the specific nature of RES, with sensitive information and precise requirements in terms of content and time constraints, the EDCC team has its own organisation in the structure. Most of the COs involved are highly specialised in the topic. The COs with the most seniority (5 out of 7) also act as back-up on a scheduled rotating basis. When COs are also back-up, they are carrying out the escalation of the cases (gathering information from other COs, checking the cases, and assessing whether the enquiry should be escalated or directly answered). In that case, the supervisor can do the daily management of the questions with RES back office and return the cases.

Different meetings are organised in order to streamline and coordinate the processes. Using available statistics, coordination meetings provide an opportunity to forecast the workload of mails in different fields to facilitate scheduling.

DG TRADE

In DG TRADE, there is a common back office which treats the escalated enquiries to the DG but also deals with the Trade Helpdesk enquiries which fall under a separate agreement. There is an exclusive contact form. Overall, there are no issues related to the treatment and working relationship with the Helpdesk. Generally, there is a low number of enquiries that are sent to it through the EDCC.

Other cases

While the central coordination is the main model, DG JUST has introduced a two-layered coordination process: a central coordinator receives the request and dispatches it to another one at Directorate level. This person must then monitor the case and include the answer in LAGAN. The central coordinator then checks formally and sends the answer to the EDCC.

The EDCC provides a helpdesk service to INEA in the frame of the implementation of the helpdesk of the Wifi4EU. In this setting, the EDCC answers questions from municipalities instead of citizens covering topical and technical questions on the calls. Unfortunately, there have been technical issues with the portal which have resulted in a significant backlog. At the time of drafting, the number of enquiries was expected to stabilise soon. On the Commission side, the escalation and dissemination are standard.

In the case of Your Europe Advice and SOLVIT, enquiries are transferred, not escalated, as they are services themselves. They fall under the partnerships of the DG COMM/EDCC. The partnerships differ from the operational agreements in that the EDCC transfers all relevant enquiries to these specialised assistance services.

3.3.3 Effectiveness: collaboration with back offices

In practice, the intensity of collaboration between the EDCC and the DGs varies depending on the number of enquiries that are escalated. Some DGs have a high number of escalated enquiries and a well-functioning relationship (through frequent trainings and/or informal exchanges of information). The relationship tends to be looser when few cases are escalated or when the collaboration agreement does not cover all activities of the DG (e.g. DG GROW).

Despite these differences, back offices generally indicate that the working arrangements are globally effective. Most interviewees underlined the quality of the relationship and ease of communication between the back office and the EDCC supervisor. A level of flexibility has been noted in the organisational set up, in cases where there are high numbers of questions for escalations (e.g. REA).

A high turnover of staff in key positions affected throughput of cases, according to feedback from the interviews. Overall, issues with backlogs and enquiry management decreases when:

- There is staff stability in the back office (i.e. the person in charge of disseminating the cases has been in charge for enough time/does not change often)
- There is a system for sending reminders
- File tracking is used within the unit
- Communication with citizens is prioritised at the level of the DG

In addition, well-functioning systems depend on the willingness of the policy officers to respond – which reportedly varies. A final issue, identified in one case, is the use of ARES, the Commission's electronic document management system, to manage enquiries[35].

Generally, there was a consensus that the contractor was timely and effective in escalating and treating the cases. The general collaboration with EDCC is good. For most DGs, the complexity and political sensitivity of the question justifies the escalation. While a few interviewees mentioned instances of enquiries being wrongly escalated to a DG, there were no mentions of recurrent issues with wrong or unnecessary escalations.

In contrast, two interviewees noted potential issues with too few escalations. REA noted past issues with questions which should have been escalated and which were not. DG GROW, while acknowledging the relevance of the questions escalated, questioned the extent to which all potentially relevant questions were transferred to YEA.

A handful of interviewees mentioned issues with the general working arrangements – such as occasional complaints with the use of LAGAN (as opposed to email) or (quite rare) instances of enquiries being wrongly escalated to a DG. An occasional issue, however, is the management of multiple enquiries from the same citizen. Some users write several messages when their enquiry is not addressed quickly. In such cases back offices sometimes answer several enquiries of the same citizen in a single answer. However, the EDCC does not know to close the other related cases.

3.3.3.1 Campaign collaboration

The EDCC currently supports three Commission campaigns, formally or in practice. These are:

- Passengers rights (The EDCC is not mentioned on the existing campaign on passenger rights, but the EDCC phone number is mentioned for further enquiries)
- WIFI4EU (contact point)
- DiscoverEU

Data overall suggests that campaign collaboration works well – and this despite unforeseen issues with both WIFI4EU and DiscoverEU in 2018:

- In the DiscoverEU case, the EDCC is not the campaign contact point, Eurodesk is. However, the EDCC has been extensively contacted (possibly as it had better response rates than Eurodesk), creating an unforeseen workload for the EDCC
- In the WIFI4EU case, there was a significant communication issue in November 2018 where, about 9,000 people received an email from the system erroneously – asking them to validate

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[35] Which given the particularities of the EDCC, is unnecessary, and which drives up time and resources for enquiries.

their contract agreement. However, the municipalities were not among the 'winning' applicants and thus this created a lot of confusion and enquiries for the EDCC to handle

The feedback is particularly positive from INEA, where the EDCC team is reported to make very good use of material/briefings provided by INEA, raise relevant questions if something is not clear, provide very good quality replies and in the case of escalations often also provides draft replies.

3.3.3.2 Staff capacity and training

The EDCC's staff capacity is currently seen as quite good. However, several interviewees mentioned the fact that the resources might not be enough if new services are implemented.

The new EDCC COs receive three weeks of training when they join the EDCC team. The introductory training is both content-related issues and technical, functional and procedural aspects.

The format of the EDCC internal introductory training (and for other training types) might not be tailored enough to the COs' needs. More practical and participatory training, focusing on how to answer written and phone enquiries would boost staff effectiveness and efficiency (i.e. more operational from the beginning). For that purpose, mock cases and simulations would be a valuable training for newcomers, reducing the intermediate period that new staff members are shadowed by a more experienced CO. This readiness level to handle enquiries earlier/faster is a major challenge especially when considering the high turnover of the EDCC team. Accordingly, the turnover of COs and subsequent shadowing of newcomers slow down the workflow by increasing the workload on more experienced and efficient staff members.

The second type of training provided to the EDCC team are ad-hoc in nature. They depend on current events or specific training exercises related to a new campaign, programme, topic, or related to the current staff needs. The ad-hoc training can be either internal or external to the EDCC (requested by DG COMM, other DGs or the EDCC itself).

Several DGs mentioned waiting for the EDCC to proactively ask for a training on a particular topic (due to lack of time in the unit, for example, or the contact person not knowing that his/her DG is meant to provide guidelines and training to the EDCC), which might explain why some DGs have provided less training than others. However, one DG mentioned that training was recently refused to the EDCC officers as the policy units prefer to answer specific questions. Accordingly, interviews with the EDCC highlighted that training needs might not be entirely understood, both in terms of content (as mentioned previously, theoretical content is not always appropriate to answer enquiries) and requirements for the EDCC service.

Accordingly, finding the right expert to give the training is seen as difficult and not fully adapted to the work of the Contact Centre. This situation can be explained by the fact that experts are appointed based on their knowledge of specific topics that have been escalated, or are likely to be escalated, and are not close enough to the core mission of the Contact Centre. Moreover, the service requirements, and especially ensuring the continuity of service in all languages (especially for the phone enquiries) during the opening hours constitute a major challenge to implement ad-hoc training to the whole team. One of the good practices observed from the EDCC and back offices is training sessions provided to small groups of communication officers and repeated/tailored as required to ensure continuity of service. In that sense, webinars and online training are appreciated, because of their flexible nature. However, more anticipation of hot topics (which impact the workload of the COs) would implement better training programmes, fine-tuned to the needs of a high-quality service and to the employees without impacting the delivery of the service.

3.3.3.3 Satisfaction with systems and processes

The LAGAN platform is at the core of the EDCC management system and represents one of the two main tools available to deliver accurate answers to citizens. It is an integrated system centralising and streamlining the enquiries between the EDCC team and the different back offices. Interviews with the different contact points within the DG back offices revealed mixed views on the LAGAN enquiry

management system. Interviewees mentioned that the previous contractor's system was better tailored to the EC needs.

Although, the enquiries management system generates some mixed feelings from the system users, its oversight of the actions and follow-up functions are more widely seen as positive. For this purpose, LAGAN appears to generally fit the purpose of tracking and managing enquiries between the contact centre and the different back offices within the associated DGs. The follow-up of the different enquiries allowed by LAGAN is an important part of the coordination activities with the back offices.

Communication flows between EDCC and the DGs back office could be however more horizontal. There are several complaints related to the lack of feedback on the answers provided by the back offices. What is seen as missing in the current organisation is the 'intelligence' and first-hand knowledge of what citizens are most concerned about. Such feedback would enhance the sense of ownership and involvement of the DG-related services, allowing for further integration of the system within their own internal organisation.

The second component of the EDCC management system is its knowledge database. It represents one of the main weaknesses of the current system, acknowledged by all stakeholders of the service. The lack of an efficient knowledge database appears to be a systemic failure for an information service covering such a diverse set of subjects and range of users.

The reporting functions also could be improved. Reporting is currently provided to all back offices by the EDCC, but reports are not widely used. The main exception identified at this stage is REA, which uses data for regular reporting, but also uses escalated questions to generate FAQs on the website.

Most back offices felt that reporting tended to arrive too late for data to be useful. Besides REA, only one DG mentioned using the reports specifically for management planning and as a source for future campaigns. Interviewees pointed out some avenues which may improve report usefulness:

- Examples of questions and the answers provided by the EDCC (which it appears were provided in the past)
- Data on user satisfaction
- More fine-grained data (detail)
- Feedback on the quality of Europa website

3.3.4   Options to improve collaboration

The DGs agreed to delimit the burden created by the system, and few were able to provide ideas on how to really adjust the system to make it more efficient. In terms of escalation rate, the DGs did not see issues even when it was high, mentioning the technicality or sensitivity of the questions requiring escalation.

Several back-office interviewees indicated that the current EDCC contractor is better than the previous one, when DG staff had to spend more time on standard/easy to answer/repetitive questions. Perceived weaknesses of the EDCC contractor are mainly related to (high) EDCC staff turnover, rather than processes, structures or set up. Most DGs praised the work of supervisors and found contact with the EDCC services regular and friendly. Several DGs pointed out the need to reduce staff turnover as a change of supervisor, for example, correlates with a temporary drop in quality.

Beyond the issues of staff turnover, the main options to improve collaboration are as follows:

- More proactivity from the EDCC alerting back offices of emerging 'hot topics'. Prompt data on upcoming topics can help back offices to develop factsheets and draft answers, which in turn may reduce escalation rates.
- The EDCC feedback on user-identified issues with DG websites – allowing these to be addressed quickly.

- More systematic management of escalated enquiries in back offices, through clear communication within the DGs on the treatment time (in line with the Code of Good Administrative Behaviour); systematic monitoring of escalated cases; and regular reminders (both before and after deadlines). Promotion of the EDCC internally (at head of unit level) in the form of annual statistics on the unit's contribution is also used in one case, to showcase the importance of the work.

- Back offices proactively defining hot topics/new topic areas for training for the EDCC – and proactive provision of policy updates and development of standard answers – allowing in turn to decrease escalation rates.

- More qualitative content (including examples of questions), on the nature of the enquiries, allowing back offices to take issues into account when developing communication.

Lastly, as discussed below, an area of potential collaboration is that of escalation from back offices to the EDCC, also in cases where the original enquiry fall *within* the scope of the back office (a web submit form for enquires which are outside of the scope of the back office/DG is already in place).

3.4   Q3. What type of citizens and subjects are served by the EDCC[36]?

Nationality and socio-demographic

An estimated 79% of all users in the 2016-2018 period were EU citizens. The remaining share made up of third-country nationals. Most users were from the older Member States (64%) – with nationals from the EU's five largest Member States and Belgium, representing nearly half of all users. Users from EU 12 represented some 15%. Patterns of residence followed nationality patterns in the user data. About 83% of users reside within the EU – 63% live within EU's five largest Member States and Belgium.

Mobile citizens were heavily represented in the user group. Most users were in the working-age population, and most were in employment or self-employment, and nearly 16% were students, unemployed or retired citizens.

A significant share of enquiries came from 'repeat' users. In total, some 20% of all enquiries (for which there is data) came from 'past users', those having already contacted the service. If this share is extrapolated on all enquiries in the January 2016, up to 20 February 2019 period, it may be estimated that the EDCC received 320,565 information requests from 256,430 unique users.

Private and professional use

Some 35% of all enquiries were undertaken in the framework of the users' work, and 59% were undertaken for private purposes including job-related opportunities. A vast majority of users consulted the EDCC for questions of direct personal/professional relevance (in the range of 80% of all questions). The remaining questions were more general interest (9%) and questions of a political/societal nature or involving commentary (8%).

Some of the main take-aways from private use of the EDCC include:

- The distribution of EU users by nationality overall reflects general population trends. However, nationals from EU-12 and smaller EU-15 are somewhat overrepresented. Third-country nationals represent some 23% of users. The distribution of users by residence is largely like distribution of users by nationality.

- The number of EU mobile citizens in the user group is high if compared to overall mobility trends in the EU (+17%). This compares to an EU average of 3.9%.

- In total, some 60% of all questions from 'citizens users' fall within eight question categories: Questions related to free movement; (15%) Passengers rights (11%); EU education and youth programmes (12%); EU careers (6%); Immigration (4%); Consumer protection (3%); and

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[36] i.e. which ordinary citizens are the EU in contact with, compared to professional project organizers, leaders or people from outside the EU

- questions related to EU Member States (7.5%). An additional 3% of questions are defined as topics not related to the EU.

- Most citizens questions are of 'personal relevance' (76%) i.e. related to an issue of personal interest and often also with reference to a situation where an individual is going or has 'taken action' (e.g. has moved to another country, or planning to do so; is experiencing problems of some sort, for example when traveling, or when having bought something; wanting to obtain a job/looking for job opportunities etc.). There are also several student questions related to information or data.

- A relatively small share of questions is those of more general interest (12%), where the user does not have a personal interest in the reply. There are, however, several more political questions (e.g. citizens commenting on a societal issue to be addressed and asking what the EU intends to do to address the issue, 11%).

The following sections consider the nature and background of EDCC users. It maps out the extent to which the EDCC serves "ordinary EU citizens" compared to professionals, other groups, and citizens outside of the EU. It also covers the main topics of interest. In addition, the section includes an overview of headline indicators for two current topics of importance: Brexit and European elections.

3.4.1   Nationality, country of origin and EU movers

The EDCC's headline registration data shows that an estimated 79% of all users in the 2016-2018 period were EU citizens. The remaining share were third-country nationals (21%)[37]. Most users were from the older MS, representing 64% of all users on which nationality data are available. Users from EU-12 represented some 15%. The relative weight of the EU-15, EU-12, and third-country users was stable in the 2016-2018 period, and there were only small country specific differences. Therefore, this analysis concentrates on data analysis of most recent users (2018).

In 2018, the largest user groups were nationals from the EU's five largest Member States and Belgium, representing nearly half of all users (46%), and 59% of all EU nationals using the service. If compared to the European population, French, German and Italians, as well as Poles, were underrepresented among European users. Belgians were over-represented. The share of EU-15 vs. EU-12 users overall reflected the EU population[38].

Figure 11: Weight of users, and EU nationals as share of the EU population (2018)

- Share of EU citizens users of the EDCC   - Share of EU population

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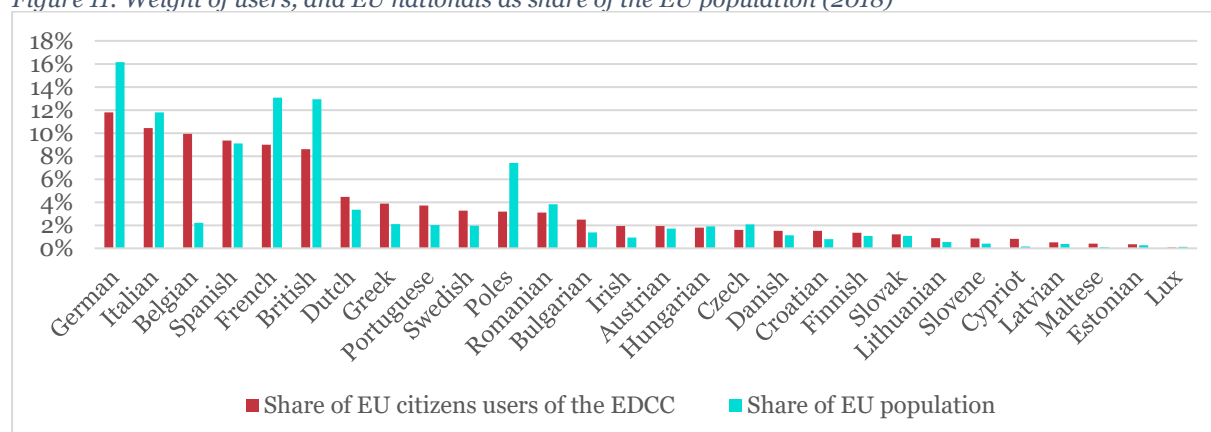
[37] For clarity, the analysis has disregarded unknown users.

[38] 19% of EU citizen users are from the newer Member States, 20% of the EU population stems from these Member States.

Patterns of residence follows nationality patterns in the user data. About 83% of users reside within the EU. Some 63% of users located within the EU are living within EU's five largest Member States and Belgium. If compared to the distribution figures of users' nationalities there are only small differences, the main being that 12% of users reside in Belgium (but only 10% of users are Belgian nationals).

Mobile citizens are heavily represented in the user group. In total, some 18% of all "EU citizen users" live outside of their country of origin – with higher shares for most of the newer Member States and for British users (≥24% being mobile citizens[39]).

Most live within the EU: 15% of all "EU citizen users" are EU-movers. This compares to an EU average of 3.9%[40]. Third-country nationals (21% of total users) are mostly residents outside of the EU (68%[41]). The remaining share (32%) lives in the EU, concentrated within the five largest Member States.

The micro-data on user background suggests that most users are in the working-age population, and most are in employment or self-employment. Based on the data available, and additional mapping of the "education and research" category, we estimate that in the range of 16% are students, unemployed or retired citizens.

Figure 12: Weight of the main user categories (unknown discarded)
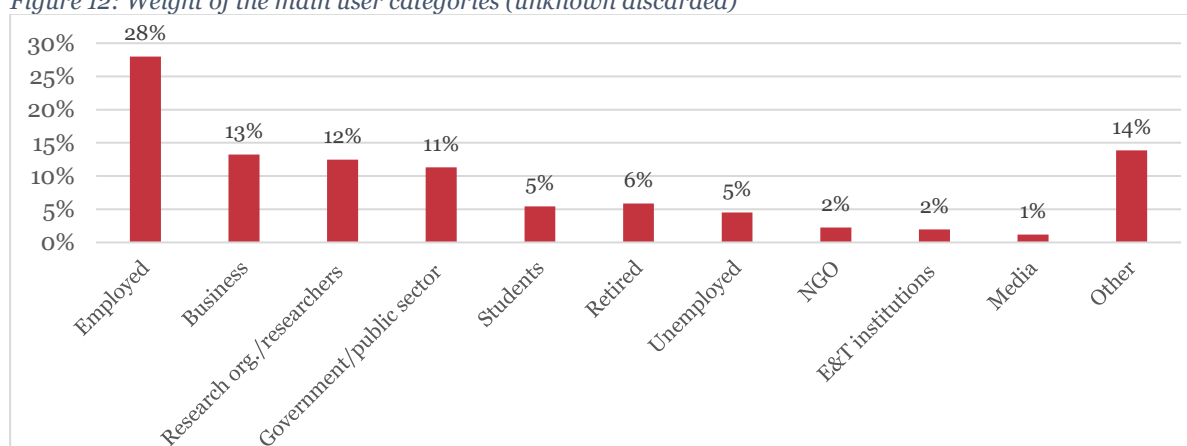
Source: Study team's analysis of 2018 LAGAN micro-data, unspecified/unknown disregarded (N= 80,658) and sample mapping, including the sub-category education and research (N=2000)

3.4.2   Topics of interest

In the 2016-2018 reference period, Horizon 2020 was the most important topic, with 9% of all enquiries. The 25 most popular topics (listed in Figure 13 below) represented 93% of all enquiries. There is some topical variation across years. However, the main topics were largely stable. Of the 15 annual 'top topics', 12 were recurrent across 2016, 2017 and 2018. The main differences relate to WIFI4EU (2018); EU careers (2017 and 2018) and 'Europe Direct' (figure 14).

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[39] Covering data for which nationality and residence is known.

[40] Share of EU movers in the working-age population in the EU-28. Source: European Commission 2017 annual report on intra-EU labour mobility, report by Elena Fries-Tersch, Tugce Tugran, Ludovica Rossi and Harriet Bradley.

[41] Of which the main locations are Asia (18%) other European countries (13%), Northern America (12%) and Latin America (11%).

'Hot topics' – often of a political nature[42] made up only modest shares of the total. In 2018, these represented only some 3.1% of total questions. Brexit, the most important hot topic in 2018, represented 1.0%, or 1,079 questions[43].

Figure 13: Top 25 topics – 2016-2018
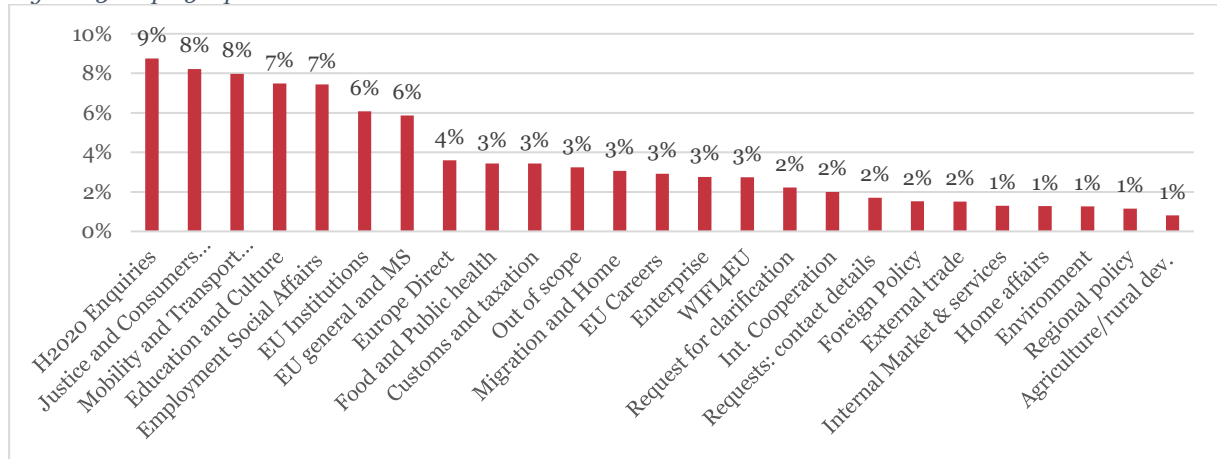
Source: Study team's analysis of micro-data: N=285,717

Figure 14: Top 15 topics, year on year – 2016-2018
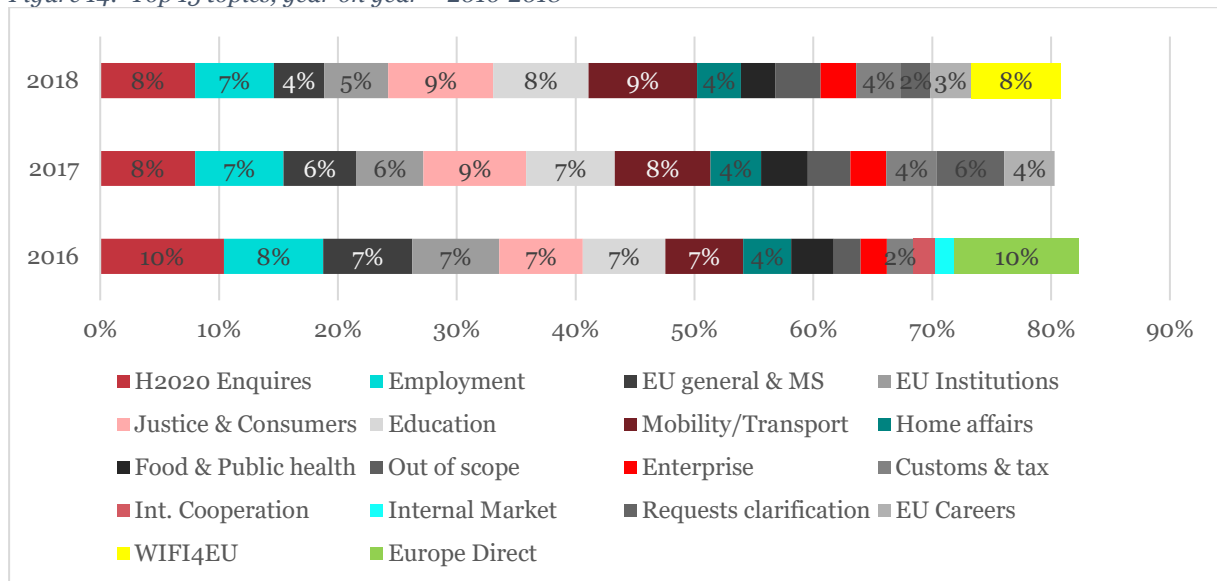
Source: Study team's analysis of LAGAN micro-data: N=247,353

There were somewhat more topical differences between channels, with different relative weight given to the main topics. Seven of the ten main topics for both phone and web, however, were identical.

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[42] E.g. in 2018: Brexit, DiscoverEU; rule of law; single-use plastics; copyright directive; summertime directive; and Catalonia.

[43] These are the questions registered under Brexit, to which a share of the RES questions should be added.

technopolis |group| HENNINGSEN CONSULTING)

Figure 15: Top 10 topics, 2016-2018, by channel
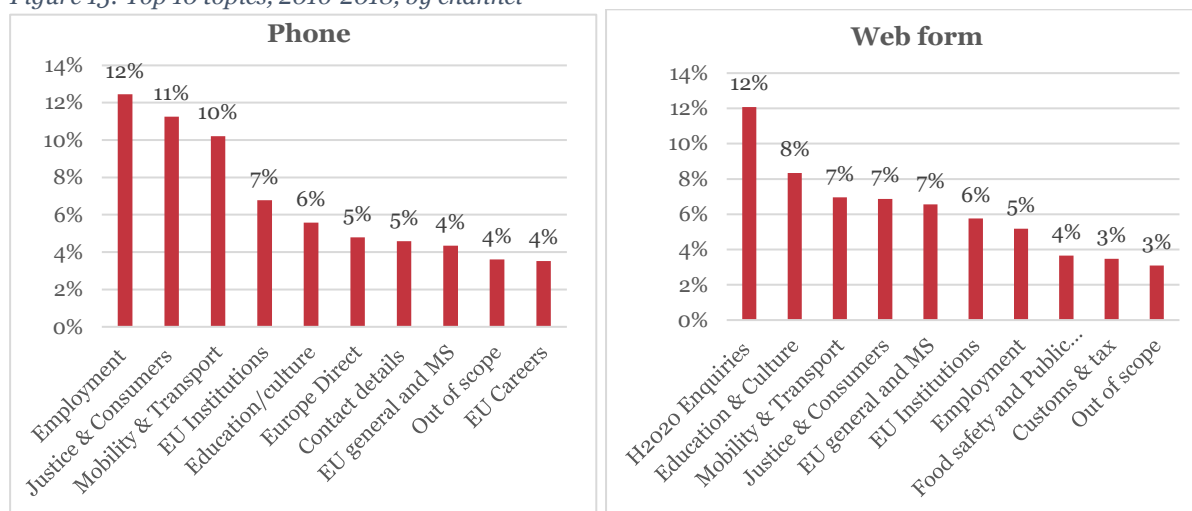
Source: study team's analysis of micro-data: N= 193479

3.4.3 *Private and professional usage and user maps*

To assess the nature of users, the study team mapped a total of 2,000 enquiries from 2018, assessing the extent to which users consulted the EDCC in the context of their work, or in their private capacity. All enquiries which related to work, work-related opportunities and living were mapped as "private purpose enquiries" with professional enquiries covering only those which were undertaken for the purpose of the work without private/personal benefits.

Based on this mapping, we estimate that some 35% of all enquiries were related to the users' work, and 59% for private purposes including job-related opportunities[44]. Professional questions include some 90% of all H2020 questions, 95% of questions related to external trade and incoming questions to the Export Help Desk, and 60% of the incoming questions on EU careers and competitions[45].

Users in a vast majority consulted the EDCC for questions of <u>direct</u> relevance. Based on the mapping, the share of questions of <u>direct</u> professional/private interest is estimated to be in the range of 80% of all questions. The remaining questions were those of a more general nature (9%); questions of a political/societal nature or involving commentary (8). A further 3% were undefined.

Overall, users consulting the service for professional reasons were significantly more likely to consult the EDCC with specific questions of direct relevance. About 93% of the questions of a professional nature were of direct relevance; and 4% were more general in nature.

Some of the main take-aways of private use of the EDCC were as follows:

- **Six out of ten** people use the service for private purposes.

- The distribution of **EU users by nationality** overall reflects general population trends. However, nationals from EU-12 and smaller EU-15 are somewhat over-represented. Third country nationals (TCN) represent some 23% of users.

- **Residence patterns** follow overall nationality patterns. EU-15, however, is more represented in the data on residence (explained by the TCNs located in the EU-15, and to a smaller extent intra EU-mobility from EU-12 to EU-15). Also, residents in the UK are more represented than UK nationals. UK residents, however, also represent a small share of total users (6%). The

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[44] Questions related to rights and administration when working abroad, career-related questions and those related to funding opportunities of individuals in a working context e.g. Marie Sklodowska-Curie Actions.

[45] 'General interest' covering general questions on work opportunities within the EU – 59% on participating in the EU's concours.

number of **mobile citizens** in the user group is high when compared to overall mobility trends in the EU (+17%).

- **Eight broad themes of questions** can be identified covering mobility and transport, justice and consumer rights; education and culture; employment and social affairs; EU careers; EU institutions; EU general and Member State-related questions; migration and home affairs; and out of scope questions.

- Further analysis of micro-data shows that a narrower set of question categories can be identified. In total some 60% of all questions from "citizen users" fall within eight categories:

    o Questions related to **free movement**, and the various rights and issues related to mobility in the EU. Free movement represents the highest share of EDCC questions from private users (15% of all questions from private users).

    o **Passenger rights** is the single most covered topic among private-user enquiries (11%). The lion's share of these questions is related to air passenger rights, linked to the Commission's successful campaigns in airports.

    o **EU education and youth programmes** with questions on these topics representing an estimated total of 12% of private-user questions.

    o **EU careers** (6%), which covers both general questions related to opportunities for working for the EU (estimated 39% of all EU career-related questions); and specific questions on the EU competitions/concours (59%).

    o **Immigration and visas** for third-country nationals (without EU family ties): 4%. A very large share of the questions in this category is, as it could be expected, raised by third-country nationals.

    o **Consumer protection** questions, usually individual rights in relation to goods bought across borders or online. Consumer protection-related questions represent some 3% of all citizen questions.

    o **Data protection**: 2% of EU citizen questions

    o **Questions related to EU Member States** (7.5%); both within and outside the EDCC scope of operations. Just over half of Member State-related questions were within scope, the rest were not. An additional 3% of questions were classified as topics not related to the EU.

- Most citizen questions are of "personal relevance" (76%) i.e. related to an issue of personal interest and often also with reference to a situation where an individual is going or has already taken action (e.g. moved to another country, or planning to do so; experiencing problems of some sort, for example when travelling, or when having bought something; wanting to obtain a job/looking for job opportunities etc.). There are also several student questions related to information or data.

- A relatively small share (12%) of questions cover general interest topics, where the user does not have a personal interest in the reply. Also represented were political questions (e.g. citizens commenting on a societal issue to be addressed and asking what the EU intends to do to address the issue) and commentary (e.g. commenting positively or negatively on EU action, without necessarily raising a question). The data mapping suggests that such questions represent an estimated 11% of all private enquiries put to the EDCC.

Box 1 and 2 below illustrate the differences between private and professional users[46], in terms of their mobility patterns, nationalities, and professional backgrounds[47].

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[46] User profiling is based on the study team's mapping of 2003 enquiries selected via stratified random sampling from the year 2018. The analysis of the enquiries mapped has been combined with analysis of micro-data from 2018 (RES, Export Helpdesk and external trade). Where necessary, data has been weighted to consider differences between micro-data and the sample.

[47] Given the differences between research enquiry helpdesk users and other professional users, these are presented separately. RES users have been included in the professional group of users. Given the share of questions related to Marie Curie actions, only 86% of the RES enquiries are included in the sample of professionals. Private RES users have not been included in the analysis of private users – as their attributes are identical to those of professional users.

Box 2 Key indicators on professional users

Professional users

35% of questions
Est. 38,150 questions in 2018

7.7/10

80% of incoming inquires by webform
61% of enquires in EN (incl. RES)

- Export HD & external trade
- H2020
- EDCC general

80%

20%

Web   Phone   2
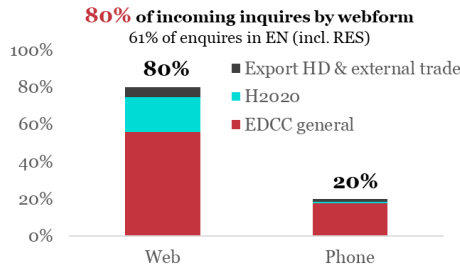
93% of inquires of direct professional interest and relevance. Few broader questions

93%

4%

- Direct relevance
- General interest
- Societal Q/commentary
- DK/other
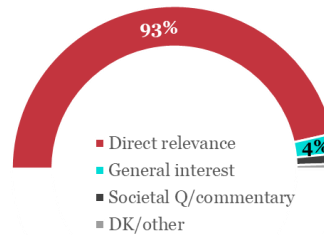
Residence, nationality, mobility patters and organisations

Residents in Belgium, and to a smaller extent BE nationals, dominate professional users of the general EDCC service. Excluding H-2020, there are more professional located in BE and more BE nationals than from all of EU-12. 66% of the general ECDD services stem from the EU. Within the general service there are more TCN users, and more users located in third countries than from the EU-12.

RES helpdesk users are predominantly located in the EU-15. While there is a good share of users from EU-12 (11%), these are predominantly located in the EU-12. only 6% of RES helpdesk users are located in EU-12.

The amount of **EU mobile citizens** in the user group* is, compared to overall data, low (7% disregarding unknowns). A third of these are located in BE. A large share of TCN users, are located in the EU, but about 11% are located in third countries. The share of EU nationals in third countries represent less than 1%.

Mobility patterns*

10%
11%
9%
6%
64%

- EU "at home"
- Mobile EU
- TCN in EU
- TCN in TC
- DK

Residence

BE, UK, DE, ES, IT, Other EU-15, EU-12, Thrid country, DK

- EDCC
- H-2020

Nationality

Belgian, British, German, Italian, Spanish, Other EU-15, EU-12, TCN, DK

- EDCC
- H-2020

7 Themes dominate questions (72% of all requests)

22% WIFI4EU
20% RES
6% EU Inst. Incl. OPECE
5% Ext. trade
6% Enterprise
4% Customs & tax
4% Education & Culture
4% Food and Pub. health
3% Int. Cooperation

No dominant organisation types H202 users the largest group

17% Business
16% Government
14% Employed
9% Edu. inst. & research
3% NGO
1% Media
20% H-2020 (not def**)
21% Other and DK

*The user group here excluded users raising career related questions
**No information on organisations in 90% of cases

Box 3 Key indicators on private users

Private users

59% of questions
Est. 64,790 questions in 2018

7.9/10

64% of incoming inquires by webform
38% of enquires in EN

76% of inquires of direct interest. Many political questions and commentary

Web — 64%
Phone — 36%

Direct relevance — 76%
General interest — 12%
Political Q/commentary — 11%

- Direct relevance
- General interest
- Political Q/commentary
- DK/other

Residence, nationality, mobility patters and organisations

The distribution of **EU users by nationality** overall reflect general population trends. However, nationals from EU-12 are slightly overrepresented (+3% points), as are nationals from smaller EU-15% (+8% points) – with corresponding fewer users from FR, IT and UK (the latter -7% difference). TCN represent some 23% of users.

Residence patters follow overall nationality patters. However, EU-15 is more represented in the data on residence (explained by the TCNs located in the EU-15, and to a smaller extent intra EU- mobility from EU-12 to EU-15). Also, residents in the UK are more represented. UK residents, however, also represent a small share of total users (6%)

The amount of **mobile citizens** in the user group* is to overall data, high. The amount of EU nationals living at home is comparatively lower. Also, judging from the review of enquiries, many questions from users relate to prospective mobile citizens.

Mobility patterns

EU at home — 53%
Mobile EU — 11%
EU nat in TC — 6%
TCN in EU — 12%
TCN in TC — 16%
DK

- EU at home
- Mobile EU
- EU nat in TC
- TCN in EU
- TCN in TC
- DK

Residence

DE 12%, ES 8%, FR 7%, UK 6%, BE 5%, IT 4%, Oth. EU-15 15%, EU-12 14%, TCN 13%, DK 15%

Nationality

German 11%, Spanish 7%, French 6%, Italian 4%, British 4%, Belgian 4%, Other EU-15 15%, EU-12 15%, TCN 18%, DK 15%

8 Themes
(and out of scope) dominate questions (74% of all questions)

Mobility/Transport 13%, Justice & Consumers 13%, Education & Culture 11%, Employment & Social 10%, EU careers 6%, EU general & MS 5%, Out of scope 5%, EU Institutions 5%, Migration and Home 5%

Professionals are the main user groups, complemented with relatively high share of students. Many other/unknown

Employed 26%, Research/education 11%, Retired 7%, Student 6%, Business 5%, Unemployed 4%, Public sector 3%, Other 13%, DK 24%

Details on topics of interest

Passenger rights 11%, Moving, working &... 8%, Free movement 15%, EU family members... 3%, Social protection &... 1%, Recognition of diplomas 1%, Professional..., EU careers 6%, Immigration and visa 4%, Education and training 8%, ET and youth programmes 12%, Youth policy, Consumer protection 3%, Data protection 2%, Member States 7%, Issues not related to EU 3%

3.4.4 Users and usage

To understand users, it is important to consider not only the users' profiles, but also the usage patterns – i.e. the extent to which the service is used in a one-off fashion, or if users are returning.

The EDCC received in the 2016-2018 period a total of 304,836 questions. However, this number does not reflect the actual number of users. The user group is smaller. In part, this is due to follow-up questions on the same issue. Illustratively, in 2018 3.9% of the enquiries were follow-up enquiries (clarification, thank you mails and similar) related to a previous question[48], meaning that the EDCC addressed 105,418 "net" enquiries (compared to total incoming enquiries of 110,329). The share of follow-ups is therefore above 5% for several policy areas[49].

To estimate total usage, unique users have been identified in collaboration with the contractor. In the period 28 January 2016 to 20 February 2019, the EDCC received a total of 320,565 enquiries. Identifiers are available for 83% of the enquiries[50], or for 264,933 enquiries. This data shows that a significant share of enquiries is from "repeat" users. In total, some 20% of all enquiries (for which there is data) are from "past users" (users having already contacted the service). If this share is extrapolated on all enquiries in the 2016-February 2019 period, it may be estimated that the EDCC received 320,565 information requests from 256,430 unique users.

Of the total usage group, 86% used the service only once. An additional 10% used the service twice. Some 2% contacted the service three times, and 1% contacted it on four occasions. The remaining 1% contacted the service five times or more. However, this latter group raised 7% of all EDCC enquiries. In absolute numbers, this means that an estimated 2,687 users raised around 22,225 questions – or about the equivalent of about 2.5 months of enquiries.

Of these users, most (estimated 2,241) used the service between five and nine times – raising some 13,430 questions. However, a very small group of users (estimated to be 446 users) raised more than ten questions for a total of around 8,797 questions. 22 users contacted the services more than 40 times each – and five users contacted the service more than 100 times.

Some "repeat usage" is likely to be explained by use of the RES (certain National Contact Points are obliged to use the RES to receive answers to their requests)[51].

3.4.5 A snapshot of usage of the Brexit hotline and enquiries related to European elections

Brexit and European elections were major political issues in the study period. In the visuals below are some headline data of the enquiries related to these two issues in the study period.

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[48] For the 2016-2018 period the share is 3.2%.

[49] AGRI (9%); BUDG (9%); ENER (6%); ENV (7%); H2020 (6%); SOLVIT (6%) and EIT (10%).

[50] 17% of enquiries do not contain identifiers because they were calls with no personal or contact details registered.

[51] The share of repeat usage stemming from the RES is not known, as the study team, due to data protection, has worked with anonymous data.

Box 4 Hot topic: Brexit

Hot Topic in 2019: Brexit

Between January and April 2019, 1,704 enquiries are about Brexit (4% of total enquiries).

58% of the total enquiries about Brexit have been asked in the first 4 months of 2019.
Only **934** enquiries about Brexit have been asked in 2018.

The majority of the enquiries are from citizens with residence in the **UK** (47%), followed by cizitens resident in **Germany** (12%), **France** (6%) and **Spain** (5%).
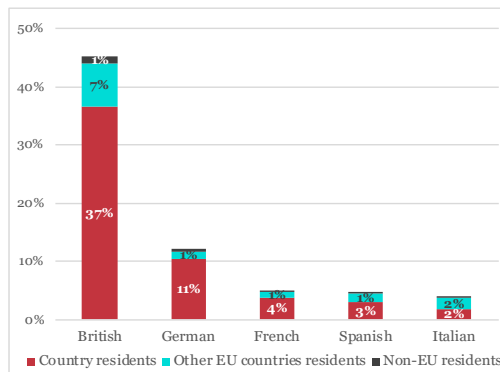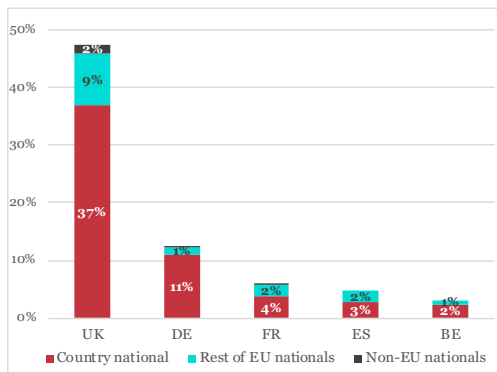
Regarding residency, the majority of the enquiries are from **British** citizens (45%), followed by **German** (12%), **French** (5%) and **Spanish** (4%) citizens.

In total, in the first four months of 2019, only 18% of enquiries on Brexit come from EU mobile citizens.

10% of citizens contacting the EDCC about Brexit are students/researchers

Main private topics:

- Questions on the implications on free movement of people in the EU after Brexit

- Request of information on rights and citizenship

- Messages from British/EU citizens sharing their personal opinion/solutions regarding Brexit

"If the UK leaves the EU, is there anyway I can retain my EU citizenship?"

"Will it be possible to move to England and study from there after Brexit?"

"Please do not extend the UK's delay in leaving the EU"

"Will it be possible to travel to the UK without a passport after Brexit?

There was a peak in the number of enquiries regarding Brexit before the 29 of March
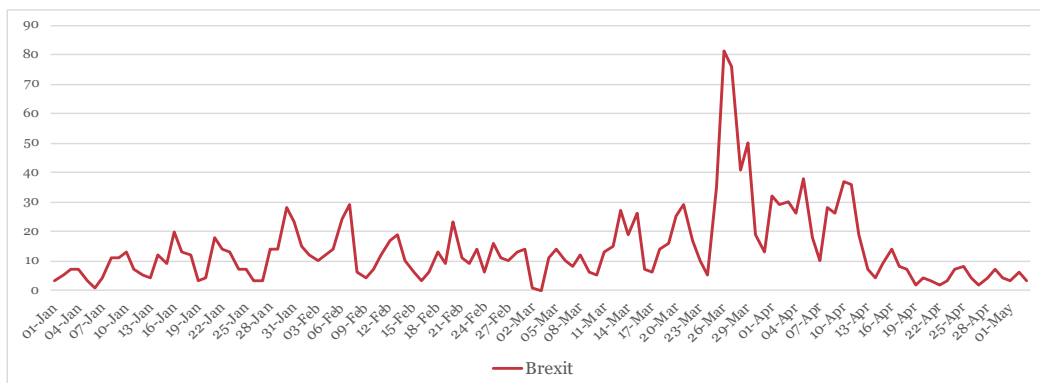
Box 5 Hot topic: EP elections

Hot Topic in 2019: European Elections

Between January and April 2019, 374 enquiries are about the European Elections (1% of total enquiries).

The majority of the enquiries are from citizens with residence in the **UK** (15%), **Germany** (8%), **Belgium** (7%) and **Spain** (6%).
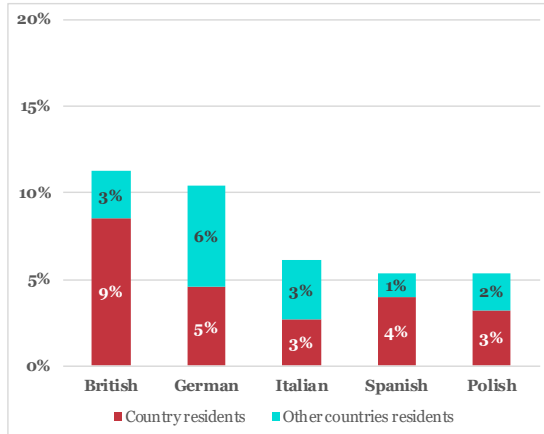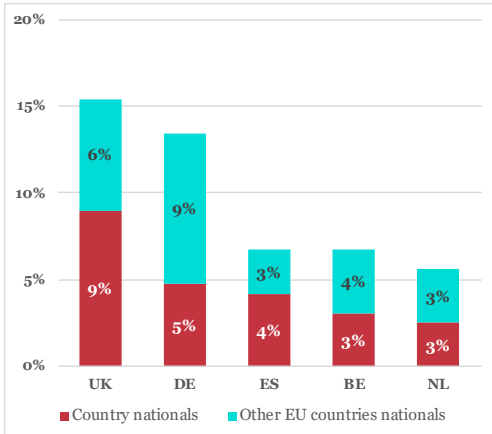
Regarding residency, the majority of the enquiries are from **British** citizens (12%), followed by **German** (11%), **Italian** (6%), **Spanish** (5%) and **Polish** (5%) citizens.

In total, in the first four months of 2019, 32% of enquiries on European Elections come from EU mobile citizens

Main private topics:

- Information on voting modalities

- Voting from abroad

- Voting rights

- General information on eligible voters

- Information on candidacy modalitites

"How can I vote from another country if I am there only temporarily?"

"What should I do to present myself as a independent candidate in the European elections?"

"Can I vote for a party from another EU Member State?"

"How many europeans are eligible to vote in the upcoming EU parliament elections?"

As expected, the number of enquiries regarding the European Elections increases with the approach of the election date.
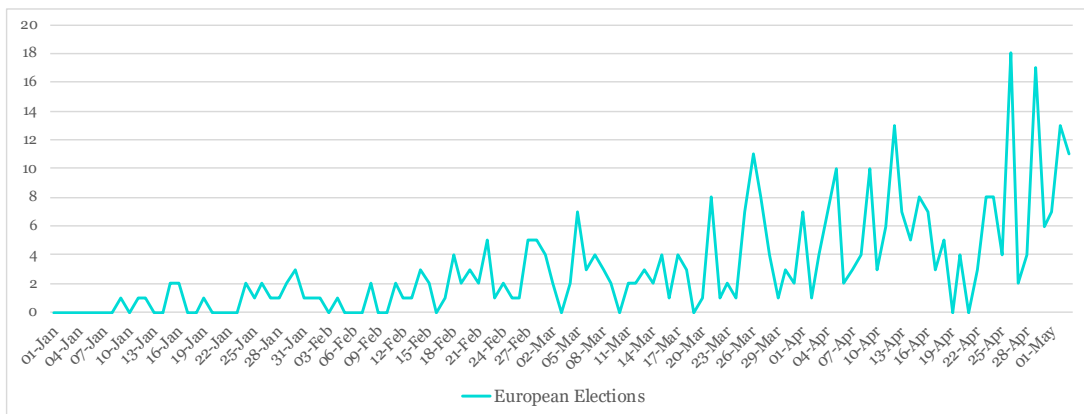
4 Efficiency

4.1 Q4. Were the results of the work of the EDCC achieved at a reasonable cost?

Cost and costing model

The total cost of the EDCC operation was, for the first three years of the contract (35 months), €11.030 million. Total annual costs are in the range €3,875,000 to €3,886,000.

The EDCC works on a flat-rate costing system, with a minimum monthly operating cost for 'basic services', and costs for 'supplemental options. Basic services constitute the essence of total payments. Additional services (flat rate for one submission form) make up less than 1% of total fees. Penalties, albeit significant in absolute terms, represent only relatively small shares of total costs.

From February 2016 to December 2018, the EDCC replied to 298,075 questions. When considering total costs, this leads to an average cost of €37.77 per enquiry. When only the flat-rate cost is considered, the costs are marginally lower. Costs per enquiry have decreased in 2018 due to a higher volume of enquiries (down to €35.39).

Reasonability of costs – costs benchmarked

If the EDCC has performed well on its performance indicators, and is seen to deliver good quality service, this service comes at a relatively high price per reply provided. The cost per enquiry is higher than average private-sector costs. However, the EDCC's costs are difficult to benchmark with other public and private services. The most valid comparison available is with the previous contractor. This comparison indicates that the current costs per enquiry dealt with are significantly lower than previously, while maintaining better overall service levels. Average costs have decreased 16.5% with the change in contractor (18% if inflation is accounted for). This suggests, in turn, that the strategy of promotion of the call for tender, leading to more offers, has had a positive impact on the cost-efficiency ratio.

Costs per contact is now closer to (but still above) the benchmark cost of €25-35 per enquiry, as defined in the previous evaluation as the estimate for a feasible cost per contact. Experts consulted in the framework of this assignment confirm costs remain high, also when considering the specificities of the contract, and a well-performing centre. Interviewees, however, also point out contact services of this nature and scale of service will tend to be higher than private-sector costs.

Costs considering the time spent

A core criterion for cost-efficiency assessment is the time spent on enquiries. If enquiries take long, costs will go up, and vice versa. The analysis of time spent suggests that emails take longer than private-sector equivalents. Phone calls are in line with private-sector call centres.

Translating time spent on enquiries data into man-days, the annual staffing required to meet average annual volume of enquiries should be 17.5 FTE (based on a prudent assessment of both training time and idle time). In the 2018 peak year, requirements should be 19.1 FTE. This is to be compared with a current team of 31 communication officers, six supervisors and two liaison officers who are also partially involved in handling enquiries.

The difference between estimated HR needs and actual staff is likely to be one of the main contributing factors driving up costs. It also helps to explain the differences between EDCC and private sector costs.

That available resources are generous given the number of enquiries can also be illustrated when considering the number of enquiries treated by staff. Each full-time employee or CO (not counting training, leave etc.), dealt with an average of 2.4 enquiries an hour during the 2016-2018 period.

Costs compared to decentralisation

Full decentralisation of the service – with back offices responding to enquiries would, most likely, result in high resource inputs and higher cost than those currently incurred. Not all back offices were able to provide estimates of potential resources necessary in the event the EDCC was decentralised. However, the partial estimates made by back offices suggest that around 67 FTE would be necessary,

a considerably higher number than current EDCC staff. If this work used contract agents and there were no associated IT management operating costs of enquiries, call services, or other contact centre activity, the annual budget to run the service could reach around €4.288 million, per year (not accounting current back office operation). That there are efficiency and effectiveness gains with the EDCC – compared with enquiries being handled at the level of the DGs – has also been highlighted by previous evaluations as well.

Back office resources

Because most back offices do not actually treat the enquiries, but signpost these to policy units, it is not possible to assess the total back office operation. More data is available on the resource implications of the main back office. In total some 11.4 FTE are involved in back office functions across the 13 DGs and services which provided indications of their resource inputs. These services deal with 79% of all escalated enquiries. Of the 11.4 FTE, five are in DG COMM and three are in REA.

4.1.1 Cost overview and costing structure

The total cost of the EDCC operation was, for the first three years of the contract (35 months), €11.03 million, or about €3.784 million on average per year. This covers all contracted services.

The EDCC operates with a flat-rate costing system covering most of its operations including, notably:

- Delivery of question/answer services, up to 11,000 enquiries (including all staff resources necessary for delivery as well as management and liaison with back offices)
- Quality control
- All training-related costs
- Telecom, IT infrastructure and physical infrastructure necessary for the operation of all communication channels
- Maintenance and development of the citizens enquiry database
- Maintenance and development of a knowledge database
- Baseline monitoring and quality control

Top-up costs are also provided for:

- Enquiries in excess of 11,000 a month (top-up cost per enquiry)
- A per unit cost for analytical or ad-hoc reports (i.e. in addition to monitoring reports for back offices)
- A flat rate for 1 web-submission form

Costs are defined on a monthly basis. A penalty system is in operation, allowing for a reduction of costs in the event of underperformance. Since the start of the contract operations, and until end 2018, such penalties have been applied 17 times/month.[52]

Total annual costs are in the range 3,875,000 to 3,886,000 for the 2016 to 2018 period. The small variation in annual costs reflects annual revisions in fees and penalties applied. The level of enquiries – on a month-to-month basis – was below the minimum threshold of 11,000/month[53]. As a result, all enquiry costs are paid under the 'basic services' fee structure.

The basic service fee also constitutes the essence of total payments. Additional services (flat rate for one submission form) represent below 1% of total fees[54]. Penalties, albeit significant in absolute terms,

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[52] With different financial implications (as penalties have been applied relative to the amount of enquiries containing quality issues). The penalties have ranged from some €1,700 (March 2017) to some €26,700 (November 2017).

[53] The highest number of registered enquiries occurred in April 2018 (10,272 enquiries).

[54] 0.6% in 2016 and 2018 and 0.7% in 2017.

represent only relatively small decreases in shares of total costs (1.5% of total fees in the 2016-2018 period, 3% in 2017).

From February 2016 to December 2018, the EDCC replied to 298,075 enquiries, leading to an average cost of **€37.77** per enquiry (and €36.77 if only the flat-rate cost is considered). Costs per enquiry have decreased in 2018 due to a higher volume of enquiries (down to 35.39 or 34.90 if only baseline costs are considered). Further decreases may be noted for January to April 2019 – again due to higher amounts of enquiries. In the first four months of 2019, the EDCC treated some 39,354 enquiries, leading to an average cost of 33.15 per enquiry (32.51 considering only baseline costs). Extra fees have been paid for the extended opening hours of the service to cover Brexit, but the costs are reported as modest.

Costs per user is higher, reflecting the level of repeat usage (see Section 3.2). Cost per user are estimated to be around €46.3 for the 2016-2018 period.

Table 8: EDCC cost overview

	2016 (11 months)	2017	2018	2019 (4 months)	Sum 2016-2018*
Total costs					
Total 'basic services' (excluding penalties)	3,458,200	3,699,128	3,801,621	1,279,449	10,958,949
Top up costs (1 webform)	22,203	24,291	24,412	8,154	70,906
Total costs	**3,480,403**	**3,723,419**	**3,826,033**	**1,287,603**	**11,029,856**
Cost per enquiry					
Total enquiries	91,665	97,481	108,929	39,354	298,075
Cost per enquiry (considering total costs)	37.97	38.20	35.12	32.72	37.00
Cost per enquiry (considering only costs for 'basic services')	37.73	37.95	34.90	32.51127306	36.77
Yearly development		1%	-8%	-7%	

Source: DG COMM, study team's calculations, *data for 2019 is not considered in overall average costs as there is an element of seasonality of enquiries. Therefore, average costs in 2019 are likely to increase, following likely lower levels of enquiries in the upcoming months

4.1.2   Assessing the reasonability of contracted costs

To assess reasonability of contracted costs, several aspects should be considered. A comparison with costs under the previous contract is helpful to identify if there have been savings associated with the wider promotion of the last call for tender. It is also useful to consider contact centre costs more globally – while recognising that the services are not necessarily comparable, due to the specifies of the EDCC operations.

Second, it is key to consider the time spent on each enquiry. If all enquiries require significant time/resource inputs, this drives up costs. Assessing costs considering the resources spent also provides indications of the extent to which service requirements generate excess capacity. Finally, the potential costs of operating the service without contracted support should be considered.

EDCC costs benchmarked

If the EDCC has performed well on its performance indicators, and is seen to deliver good quality service, this service comes at a relatively high price per reply provided. With an average cost of €37.00 for the

2016-2018 period, the cost per enquiry is higher than average private-sector costs. They are also higher than costs per enquiry of public service centres for which data is available.[55]

EDCC costs, however, are difficult to benchmark with other public and private services, due the particularities of the services (language, number of enquiries etc.). The most valid comparison available is with the previous contractor, which indicates that the current costs per enquiry dealt with are significantly lower – while maintaining better overall service. Average costs have decreased 16.5 % with the change in contractor – 18% if inflation is accounted for. This suggests, in turn, that the previous strategy of wider promotion of the call for tender, leading to more offers, had a positive impact on the cost-efficiency ratio.

Costs per contact is now closer to (but still above) the benchmark cost of €25-35 per enquiry, as defined in the previous evaluation[56]. Experts consulted in the framework of this assignment confirm costs remain high, also when considering the specificities of the contract, and a well-performing centre. Interviewees, however, also point out contact services of this nature and scale of service will tend to be higher than private sector contact centre services.

Table 9: EDCC costs per enquiry benchmarked with past contractors

	Contract 2000-06	Contract 2006-2010	Contract 2011-15	Contract 2016-20
Yearly number of contacts	99,789 (2006)	99,095 (2009)	112 990 (2013)[57]	102,197 (average 16-18)
Cost per enquiry (cost in currency of the year)	24.9 €	43.1 €	44.3 €	37.0 €
Development from previous contract		+73.1%	+2.8%	-16.5%
Cost per enquiry (accounting for inflation, base year 2015)	28.70 €	46.96 €	44.51 €	36.35 €
Development from previous contract (accounting for inflation, base year 2015)		64%	-5%	-18%

Source: calculated on data from DG COMM, past EDCC evaluation results, and the Euro area Consumer Price Index (CPI)

EDCC costs, considering time spent per enquiry

To assess costs against resource involved, the study team has worked with two sets of data, monitoring data from LAGAN on phone enquiries and for email enquiries, where no data is available, the contractor's estimate.

LAGAN monitors time from start to closure. As many phone enquiries need follow-up by mail, time needed for all phone enquiries is not representative of total estimated time spent on these. The study team therefore organised enquiries into three categories. Those which took less than 30 minutes from

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[55] For private and public benchmarks see annex G

[56] Deloitte and Coffey 2014 Mid-term Evaluation of the Europe Direct Contact Centre, for the European Commission

[57] The basis for the cost per contact calculation is not available in the previous final report. We assume that it is based on 2013 data.

start to closure (78% of phone enquiries[58]), those taking more than 30 minutes but less than 60 minutes (5%), and those taking more than an hour (18%).

We have estimated that those taking less than 30 minutes, have all be dealt with on the phone. On this basis, the average treatment time to assess total resource inputs necessary can be calculated. For the written enquiries, the estimation provided by the contractor was used (which is longer than the average treatment time for phone calls).

According to these criteria, the average time spent on enquiries which are addressed on the phone is almost 6.45 minutes. The median is less than the average (4.18 minutes), meaning that, in general, total treatment time is more often four to five minutes in length.

Similar data is not available for email enquiries. However, the EDCC contractor states that the average treatment time for email enquiries is 15 minutes (all enquiries and complexity considered – including time for translation of enquiries and reporting)[59]. Based on these two data estimates, the man-days and staffing necessary to treat the enquiries can be calculated.

In man-days (based on 7.6 hours working day), it would require in the range of 2,736 working days to address 106,000 enquiries, which is the average annual number of EDCC enquiries in the 2014-2016 period. Usual full-time employment involves 220 effective working days (holidays excluded[60]). However, not all days will be allocated to addressing enquiries.

We have estimated, that of 220 days of work, 40 working days per individual employed would be allocated to training, sick leave, meetings, administration and other similar activity, leaving 180 days for work on enquiries (82% of total working time). On a basis of 180 effective working days on enquiries, 15.2 FTEs would be enough to cover the average EDCC year.

Contact centres, however, are not operating at a 100% level, with the reported level of 'idle time' of around 10.5% of effective hours working on enquiries[61]. Even with idle time above this share (at, say, 15% of effective time spent on enquiries), annual staffing required to meet an average annual number of enquiries would be 17.5 FTE. In the 2018 peak year, requirements would be 19.1 FTE[62].

This is to be compared with a current team of 31 communication officers, six supervisors (working an estimated 50 to 70% on enquiries) and two liaison officers who are partially involved in handling enquiries.

This difference is likely to be one of the main contributing factors driving up costs. It is also - combined with longer treatment time for email enquiries[63], linguistic and staff requirements - likely to contribute to explaining the differences between EDCC costs and private sector costs. Indeed, while the EDCC has a set of specificities compared to private-centre services (see below), the time spent on enquiries is not one of them. Indeed, EDCC call times are not significantly longer than those of private contractors[64]. Differences only occur on treatment time of email enquiries.

That available resources are generous given the number of enquiries can also be illustrated by considering the number of enquiries treated by staff. The 31 full-time communication officers each dealt

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[58] In the period February 2016-20 February 2019.

[59] The study team was told that this estimate is reliable, based on internal monitoring data. It is unlikely that the average is higher, as communication officers must escalate enquires to supervisors if they spend more than 15 minutes on a case.

[60] 220 working days implies a full-time contract with six weeks of holidays, plus 10 days of bank holidays.

[61] Calculated based on data presented in the report ContactBabel (2018), The European Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide.
[62] At a global occupancy rate of 73% (of effective working days).

[63] The analysis of time spent suggests that emails take longer than private sector contacts. This is likely to be due also to the requirement for reporting, including the translation of questions and answers into English. Phone calls are in line with private sector call centres

[64] See for example ContactBabel 2018 The European Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide.

with an average of 3,297 enquiries per year during the period 2016-2018. If the effective number of working days dealing with enquiries is set at 180 days/year, then each staff member deals on average with 18 enquiries a day, or 2.4 enquiries an hour. Further resources are spent by supervisors and liaison staff.

These numbers are lower than benchmarks of public services.[65] According to market experts, they are also lower than private-sector operators.

<u>How does the EDCC costs compare with the potential costs of discontinuing of services – with back offices delivering on enquiries</u>

All interviewees indicate that a full decentralisation of the service – with back offices responding to enquiries would, most likely, result in high resource inputs and consequently higher cost. One of the reasons is that officially treated questions (by the Commission) would need to pass through ARES the Commission's electronic document management system, and, consequently, would have to be treated – and ultimately approved – by several individuals.

A second major issue would be that of translation, with many back offices indicating that it would either be unfeasible or very resource intensive to ensure, at DG level, responses to all enquiries in the languages in which they were sent. As such, none of the interviewees felt that full decentralisation would be better or more efficient. In this respect, one interviewee also noted that there were some benefits with one centralised system which could not be matched in a decentralised model. Such benefits relate to a more professional enquiry management and monitoring system, which would not be feasible with decentralisation. Also having one Commission point of contact avoids proliferation of contact points, within the Commission services[66].

Many back offices, however, were unable to assess the potential resource implications of internalisation. Those providing an assessment indicated quite different estimates. They also highlighted that they are "very rough estimates only". On a systematic basis, however, all back-office estimates for staff needed are higher than current EDCC treatment times – ranging from nearly double of time of an EDCC email enquiry to up to more than 10 times the amount of the time spent by the EDCC.

If estimates are extrapolated on the total amount of current non-escalated enquiries, the FTE staff necessary would be around 67 FTE[67] – a considerably higher number than current EDCC staff. Assuming that this work would involve contract agents rather than Commission officials, and that there would be no costs associated with the IT management of enquiries, call services, or other contact centre activity, the costs would be in the range of €4.288 million per year (pensions excluded).[68] This would be in addition to the costs of the current back office operation.

That there are efficiency and effectiveness gains with the EDCC – compared with a situation of enquiries handling at the level of the DGs – has also been highlighted by previous EDCC evaluations[69].

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[65] See EPEC/GHK, 2010 Evaluation of the Europe Direct Contact Centre. As noted in the introduction, it was out of scope of this evaluation to collect similar data in the framework of this study.

[66] As it is currently the case within DG GROW.

[67] FTE assessment has been calculated on back offices assessment of the time necessary to treat the enquiries. Of the back offices consulted 8 provided an estimation of the potential resource input needed to address the enquiries which were treated by the EDCC on their behalf/their topics. This data then considered the number of enquiries dealt with for these eight back offices – and estimated amounts were then extrapolated on the total amount of enquiries dealt with by the EDCC, using 2018 as a baseline. The calculation details are presented in appendix H.

[68] Based on the estimated average staff and overhead costs for contractual agents in the Commission (at a level of €64,000), as assessed in the study Cost Benefit Analysis for the delegation of certain tasks regarding the implementation of Union Programmes 2014-2020 to the Executive Agencies, 2013, undertaken for DG BUDGET by ICF GHK in association with Technopolis.

[69] EPEC/GHK, 2010 Evaluation of the Europe Direct Contact Centre.

4.1.3 *Assessing resource implications of back offices*

Because most back offices do not actually treat the enquiries, but signpost these to policy units, it is not possible to assess the total back office operation. Simply, most interviewees did not know how much time policy officers spent on an individual enquiry. Where back offices dealt with some or all the escalated enquiries (REA, INEA and EPSO), it was generally noted that dealing with these was relatively quick (mostly reported in the range of 10 minutes). Policy officers' treatment of enquiries is perceived to take longer.

More data is available on the resource implications of the main back office. This data suggests that the main resource inputs for back office functions are in DG COMM and in REA. The 11 other DGs and services which provided estimations[70] indicated that they spent less than one FTE on back office functions (in the case of INEA, one FTE).

In total some 11.4 FTE are involved in back office functions across the 13 DGs and services which provided indications of the resource inputs. These services deal with 79% of all escalated enquiries. Of the 11.4 FTE, five are in DG COMM and three are in REA.

In the case of REA, high resource inputs are explained by the higher number of escalated enquiries overall (one third of all EDCC escalated enquiries). Moreover, the central REA back offices deal with many escalated enquiries themselves (all legal and financial validation of entities requests).

DG COMM likewise has a high number of escalated enquiries, many of which are managed within the unit. Addressing enquiries takes up an estimated 40% of the back office human resources. In addition, the DG COMM back office undertake training, ensure external quality assurance, monitor and manage the contract, and plan tendering. It is estimated that these activities take up some 60% of the DG COMM back office resources.

4.2 Q5. Which factors influenced the efficiency of the observed results?

Factors affecting the costs and efficiency of the contracted services

It is the study team's assessment that there are several factors which influence overall efficiency (including cost efficiency) of the EDCC. v We consider that the most important factors impacting on cost and efficiency are:

- Language requirements (a service operating in 24 languages, with nine hours of opening time in all languages, 250 days a week) which drive up the baseline staff necessary
- The overall low number of enquiries which does not allow to maximise economies of scale and staffing, and drives up operating costs (e.g. training, management, HR, IT support, technical infrastructure, rent, video conference facilities etc.) relative to total costs
- The contractual set up, and specifically the number of enquiries paid for, which is in excess of the actual number of enquiries treated

The study team additionally consider that there are other secondary requirements which impact on the efficiency of the service (albeit, with the current contractual set-up not necessarily on the costs). These are:

- Relatively strict SLAs
- Staff requirements
- Staff turnover (attrition)
- Reporting time (incl. time for translation of enquiries and the provided answers)
- Knowledge management

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[70] TRADE, EAC, EEAS, EMPL, INEA, JUST, NEAR, REGIO, TAXUD, AGRI and EPSO.

It is important to note that it is the *combination* of these factors which impact on efficiency. More enquires would lead to greater cost-efficiency. Likewise, a limitation of language availability would limit demand for staff resources– as would different potential changes in staff requirement and better knowledge management. However, it is not possible to estimate potential cost implications/savings, of changes to the above factors - notably because "baseline costs of the operation" (i.e. i.e. cost of set up, infrastructure and management, disregarding communication staff) is not known.

<u>Factors effecting the efficiency of the back offices</u>

The main factor impacting back office functions and resource inputs are the number of escalated enquiries – with high back office inputs generally going together with high resource inputs (REA, INEA and DG COMM). The other main factor impacting on resource efficiency is contract management, with an estimated three FTE involved in the management and control of the contract. This is in addition to the resources the contractor is using on management and quality control.

4.2.1 *Factors influencing on the efficiency of contracted services*

Based on the data collected and assessed It is the study team's assessment that there are several factors influencing the overall efficiency (including cost efficiency) of the EDCC. These factors operate in tandem, but several are mutually interdependent. This section reviews the factors which influence the efficiency of the EDCC (contracted aspects) and subsequently those that impact on back office efficiency.

4.2.1.1 Language requirements and (telephone) availability of the services

The EDCC is required to operate in all official EU languages (24), with effective telephone and email operation in all languages from 9 AM to 6 PM, 250 days a year. The languages and requirements for telephone availability make the service costly – especially with the low number of enquiries (see also below).

Even in periods with low volume the contractor is obliged to have a sizeable team available at any opening hour to cover all official EU languages. While staff may be able to cover several languages, their abilities would typically cover only one small language plus the main languages. For example, as at January 2019, 13 languages were only covered by one communication officer/supervisor.[71]

Hence with low numbers of enquiries, the contractor is likely to have excess capacity.[72] In the section above it was shown that the EDCC needs in the range of 17.5 to 19 FTE (with an effective operation of 69.5% during working days[73]), to match the time necessary to address enquiries.

In practice however, the team is larger (31 communication officers when all posts are filled, plus supervisors spending time on enquiries). Language requirements is a major contributing factor to this discrepancy. That language requirements drive up staff (and consequently costs) is also recognised by the current contactor as an impacting factor on efficiency. A service offer only in the most commonly used languages (or in English only) would operate more efficiently, requiring less staff and fewer translations y. Finally, some interviewees pointed out that offering less language options, or one language only, would free up time for more specialisation, allowing in turn staff to address enquiries more efficiently.

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[71] Croatian, Czech, Bulgarian, Danish, Estonian, Finnish, Gaelic, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Hungarian, and Slovenian. An additional two languages were covered by one communication officer, but with back up from other supervising staff, Slovakian and Romanian.

[72] However, this does not necessarily imply that the EDCC/contractor at any given time has excess capacity. Even with the current level of enquiries there may be times when the EDCC will have difficulties in meeting demands on a short-term basis – and in particular within the given SLAs which compared to other services are strict. This is due to the fluctuations in enquiries at any given period.

[73] 220 working days of which 18.8% are spent on training and sick leave; 69.5% of effective time spent on enquiries, and 12.2% of "idle time" (15% of total time on enquiries).

There are, however, positive spin-offs of the excess capacity – notably in term of overperformance on some of the SLAs, and also "add on" services delivered by the EDCC, which are not required by the ToR (e.g. revision and editing of back offices' answers before they are sent to users asking for clarification if necessary). Such services would have been unlikely in a more 'resource-efficient' system.

4.2.1.2   Total number of enquiries

Compared to public- and privately-operated services, and in view of the geographical scope of the services, the total number of enquiries handled by the EDCC is low. Consulted experts highlight that a service which operates with an average of 408 enquiries a day[74], is both in national and cross-national terms a very small operation. Small operations are per definition less efficient than large operations, also because they are more sensitive to fluctuations in the number of enquiries. They also cater less well for specialisation – which is an issue for the EDCC, given the number of topics to be covered.

Finally, and importantly, beyond the 'baseline costs' of multilingualism[75], operating costs (e.g. training, management, HR, IT support, technical infrastructure, and access to the EDCC as well as video conference activities, rent, etc.) will need to be paid irrespective of the number of enquiries. What share 'baseline costs of operation' represent of total current costs is not known, as these form part of the EDCC basic services.

This said, baseline costs for operation – along with the baseline costs for multilingualism – are likely to represent a sizeable share of total costs. This is also illustrated by the fact that costs decrease significantly with increased enquiries. This can be seen by the current contractors' budgetary offer – which has a marginal cost per enquiry (in excess of 11,000 enquiries a month) which is 11% of the current average cost per enquiry[76]. This marginal cost per enquiry is largely in line with the previous contractor[77].

4.2.1.3   Contractual set-up: the number of enquiries paid for

The ToR for the EDCC specify that the baseline service is to cover – at no additional costs – up to 11,000 enquiries a month. Irrespective of the number of incoming enquiries, any potential contractor must budget for the possibility of receiving, processing and addressing up to 11,000 enquiries a month meeting the SLAs – and without generating any extra revenue. The contractor must also budget for a situation where potentially only 5% of enquiries are escalated[78]. A potential contractor which does not budget for this possibility – even if unlikely in practice – risks a loss.

The number of enquiries in the 2016-2018 period was systematically below 11,000 a month. In the February 2016-December 2018 period, the EDCC registered 298,075 enquiries – or 77% of the maximum number of enquiries in the period. In different terms, the Commission has in the 2016-18 period paid for 86,925 potential enquiries which have not been raised. Positively, the share is lower for the first four months of 2019 (91%), which explains the lower costs per enquiry.

The fact that the Commission services currently pays for enquiries which have not been raised, however, does not necessary mean that the contractor, at any given time, ensures that staff can deliver up to the maximum number of enquiries.

From the contractor's point of view, having staff which is in excess of what is necessary for the project to be delivered successfully, is likely to be unattractive, not only from a commercial point of view, but

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[74]A yearly average of 102,197 in the 2016-2018 reference period – divided by 250 working days (monthly average of 8,516.43).

[75] Baseline costs of having staff available to address enquiries in 24 languages – irrespectively of the number of enquiries coming in

[76] Or €4.06 per enquiry (adjusted to €4.10 at the latest revision).

[77] The 2016-2010 EDCC contactor had a marginal costs on phone enquiries of €5.28 (start costs) and a marginal cost of mail request at €3.4 (start costs). Marginal cost data from the 2011-2015 is not available.

[78] Whereas escalations in a cost-efficient system would in principle imply lower resource inputs.

also because more than necessary staff decreases staff motivation (as it generates unreasonable idle time). Over time, too much staff decreases staff efficiency.

That the contractor in practice is unlikely to have staff to deal with 11,000 enquires at any point in time is also supported by data collected. Both qualitative feedback from interviews with back offices, and part of the monitoring data suggests that the EDCC has had challenges meeting SLAs and/or quality requirements when enquiries have peaked, but nevertheless have been below 11,000 enquiries[79].

As such it is questionable if the current contractual set-up maximises cost efficiency for the European Commission.

4.2.1.4   Contractual set up: SLAs

The EDCC service level requirements are, compared to industry standards, rather high. This is the case for first-contact resolution rates and abandoned-call rates.

Judging by the feedback collected from interviews with the EDCC and the analysis of performance indicators (see Section 3.2.1), the EDCC does generally not have significant issues with meeting these requirements. It is the study team's assessment that the good level of compliance needs to be seen in a context of the consequences of language requirements on staffing (i.e. that more staff is available than would ordinarily be needed).

However, if the EDCC was to raise its cost-efficiency, this would most likely need to come together with more flexible or lower SLAs than current levels. This is especially the case if the number of enquiries remain at a relatively low level.

4.2.1.5   Contractual set-up: staff requirements

According to some market experts interviewed, the key particularity or quirk of the EDCC is not the scope of questions, or the language requirements, but the requirement that staff must have completed university studies of at least three years – and must already have good knowledge of EU institutions, activities and programmes. The extent to which such requirements in practice are necessary for the day--to-day activities of the communication officers, is to some extent questioned by those operating the services. Skills in terms of language, ability to search for information but also soft skills like patience, ability to handle stress and communication skills are overall seen as crucial. Only some questions are considered to need a background in EU affairs.

Quality review of questions is outside of the scope of this study. We have therefore not considered if questions are of a complexity or a nature requiring a university background in European affairs. However, it is the study team's assessment that this requirement has impacts on the potential tenderers for the service and for the set-up.

Existing contact centres are unlikely to have the staff already available with the necessary (university degree) qualifications. Therefore, staff must be recruited for the tasks. In turn, the team requirements mean that tenderers already running a multilingual and multi-thematic contact centre are unlikely to be able to draw on pre-existing staff as communication officers or back-ups (for example in rare languages). This increases the likeliness that the contact centre will be set up as a separate entity (as it is currently the case). In turn, this will drive up the abovementioned baseline costs of operation – leading to higher baseline costs.

It also increases the likeliness that the centre will be placed in Brussels, where there is a more abundant offer of multilingual jobseekers with a university degree in European studies. Brussels, however, is according to market experts not a cost-efficient placement.

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[79] This needs to be seen in a context where the set-up is not geared towards important ad hoc peaks in enquiries.

4.2.1.6 Staff turnover (attrition)

Staff turnover or attrition is consistently quoted in the contact centre literature as one of the major worries of contact centre management. Along with staff absences, high levels of attrition can cripple a contact centre's ability to provide an acceptable level of service, creating a negative user experience. Staff attrition also significantly impacts on staff efficiency because of increased recruitment and training cost. This is illustrated with the EDCC's induction training programme which lasts a month – and even longer for EDCC communication officers to become fully operational. Staff attrition, moreover, is bad for morale and may generate a 'snowball effect' of leavers.

According to the literature[80], reducing staff attrition comes down to two main factors. First, that the successful candidates are suited to, and competent for, the tasks they will undertake. Second that the work and conditions in which they find themselves will be conducive to a long-term stay.

Judging from the feedback collected through the interviews, the EDCC appears to have taken a proactive approach to ensuring the best possible working conditions for the team – with the EDCC investing in job satisfaction, motivation and training, personal and professional development and social activities.

Such activities have, somewhat, decreased the staff attrition rate recently[81]. Staff attrition has increased over the first three years of the contract, from 15% in 2016, 27,5% in 2017 to 45% in 2018. However, staff attrition remains high. In the first five months of 2019 six of the 41 staff members have left the service. If departures continue at this rate, average annual attrition will be 35% for 2019. This is significantly higher than industry norms[82].

It is the study team's assessment that the main staff retainment challenge for the EDCC is 'over-qualifications' in a competitive market. While Brussels provides the ideal location for recruiting competent multilingual staff with a university degree in European studies, such candidates are likely to be highly qualified (and therefore attractive to other Brussels based employers). Also, many are likely to have ambitions beyond contact centre work[83].

In this context, it is the study team's assessment that the benefits of a Brussels-based location in terms of recruitment possibilities, to some extent, is minimised by the inconvenience of higher staff attrition. In turn, higher levels of staff attrition lead to lower levels of efficiency among available staff resources, but also, judging by the feedback from back offices, to temporary issues with service quality.

Potential efficiency gains resulting from higher retention rates would benefit service quality for the Commission services, minimising the identified issued with fluctuation in service, stemming from staff attrition. It would also benefit the contractor's efficiency.

In contrast, the Commission services, would with the current set-up not benefit financially from decreases in staff attrition. This is because of the current contractual set-up of one baseline cost, covering both delivery and baseline services – above the service level which is actually to be delivered (i.e. 11,000 enquiries a month).

4.2.1.7 Reporting time

A final issue, which is seen to impact on the general staff efficiency of the EDCC, is reporting. The actual amount of reporting time is not known, as LAGAN only register open and closing time. However,

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[80] Contact Babel, 2018 The European Contact Centre, Decision-Makers' Guide.

[81] The staff attrition rate is the total number of agents leaving the contact centre in a 12-month period, divided by the average number of occupants during the same 12-month period, expressed as a percentage

[82] Contact Babel, 2018 The European Contact Centre, Decision-Makers' Guide. According to this source, 31% of European Contact Centres have an attrition rate of 10%; 29% have an attrition rate of 10 to 19%; 18% have an attrition rate of 20 to 29%; 8% have an attrition rate of 30 to 50%; 14% have an attrition rate above 50%. Overall attrition rates tends to be higher for large contact centres and comparatively smaller for small contact centres (defined as sub-50 seat operations).

[83] And are likely to have moved to Brussels for kick starting their career

reporting is seen as burdensome, with mapping of enquiries and answers and their translation requiring an unreasonable amount of time.

It is the study team's assessment that reporting time, given the low number of enquiries per communication officer, does not impact on efficiency overall. However, it is likely to impact during peak times in enquiries.

4.2.1.8 Knowledge management

The ToR for the EDCC contract specifies that the contractor is to maintain and update a knowledge database, which is to include data from various information sources (enquiries already handled, data form official publications, information from briefing material, FAQs, etc.).

In practice, the EDCC operates a database with past enquiries and answers. Evidence collected through interviews, and practical presentations of the database, suggest that the database currently does not effectively support knowledge management.

In practice, communication officers and supervisors rely on Europa and documentation stored separately when addressing enquiries. From an efficiency point of view, this form of knowledge management appears sub-optimal. It is the study team's assessment that efficiency gains could be generated if EDCC services were supported by an easy-to-search and comprehensive knowledge management tool – leading to faster queries and responses. Such benefits would especially materialise for email requests which, as indicated above, take an average of 15 minutes to address (which is way above market standards).

However, there appear to be few incentives for its development under the current contractual arrangements. There are two interrelated reasons for this. First, in a situation of staff "excess" (due to accessibility and language requirements) an average treatment time of 15 minutes does not represent any extra costs for the EDCC contractor. The development and maintenance of a knowledge database in contrast does incur costs, which will need to be borne under the baseline figures. Second, and related, it is questionable whether the EDCC contractor has an interest in generating a more efficient service if staffing levels remain the same.

4.2.2 Factors influencing the efficiency of back office functions

The main back office activities are related to enquiry management/addressing enquiries. In most cases, HR involvement is relatively small. Judging from the consultations undertaken in the framework of the study, the main back offices taking up resources are REA (three FTE, plus 36 helpdesks), DG COMM (five FTE) and INEA (one FTE).

The main factor impacting back office functions and resource inputs is the number of escalated enquiries. There is nothing to suggest that the EDCC escalates in any significant fashion enquiries which should have been addressed by the front office. There are, in contrast, some other factors which drive up the number of escalated enquiries and/or the time spend on these. These are chiefly the Commission's legal validation systems for grants/beneficiaries and the preparation of the financial capacity assessment for grant applicants – which drives up the mandatory number of escalations to REA (all validation requests need to be addressed by the back office, as such activity requires access to the Commission databases). The fact that SEDIA is now covering multiple EU funding programmes and not just H2020, has reportedly increased the amount of escalations. In the case of DG COMM, higher resource inputs are necessary to treat escalated enquiries. This is because the DG deals with enquiries which need to be addressed by other DGs. The management of these enquiries is more time-consuming because of the difficulties in identifying the right contact persons and because of the resources needed for monitoring and follow-up with the other DGs to ensure replies.

Finally, as indicated above there are quite some resources involved in the management of the contract overall. In total, three FTEs are involved in the management and control of the contract (training, quality

assurance, contact management and tendering). This is in addition to the resources the contractor is using on management and quality control.

4.3 Q6. Can the objectives be obtained more effectively (and efficiency) by changes in the way the work is organised?

It is the study team's assessment that there are several opportunities to enhance the service by changing the ways in which the EDCC operates, is managed and is supported. Reflecting the findings in Question 5 – these opportunities are related to:

- A revision of the budgetary structure underpinning of the EDCC, setting a level of payment which reflects actual service levels. Ideally, this would go in tandem with the use of bonuses along with penalties, and a budgetary set-up providing greater clarity on the fixed and marginal costs.

- Enhanced use of the EDCC.

- Adjustment of service level requirements and the development of a fit-for-purpose knowledge database.

Building on the findings presented, this section presents potential avenues for service enhancements. As Question 3 covers the working arrangements with back offices, including avenues to enhance effectiveness, this section concentrates on potential changes in the working and tendering organisation of the contracted services. As a general introduction to this subsection a few issues are important to note.

First, as outlined in the previous sections, there are a set of interrelated factors which impacts on effectiveness and efficiency of the services. Some are internal factors. Others, notably the amount and nature of questions, are largely external factors on which DG COMM has little influence. Illustratively, the limited use of the Brexit hotline showcases that proactive promotion of the service does not necessarily generate significant spikes in enquiries from users. The EDCC usage, can in contrast, be impacted, positively or negatively by actions of other EC services, as the case of WIFI4EU illustrate.

Second, the sort of "internal" factors which impact substantially on the effectiveness and efficiency of the contracted service are central to the service, meaning availability of 24 languages, phone and email services from 9 to 6 combined with few incoming requests. As illustrated in the section above, there are staff implications of these requirements – and unless changed, costs will unavoidably remain high.

Third, it should be noted that it was excluded from the scope of this study to consider the potential internalisation of the EDCC into, for example, an Executive Agency (EA) of the European Commission. Section 3.3.1 showcase that the potential costs of full decentralisation of the EDCC are likely to be higher than current costs and that effectiveness and efficiency are likely to be lower. In contrast, several interviewees have suggested that a fully-fledged integration of a "contact centre function" in an EA, might potentially generate greater efficiency, along with better quality services. Being internalised, enhanced efficiency may be generated through staff having direct access to EC IT tools, which would decrease the number of enquiries which would need to be dealt with by both the EDCC contractor and the back offices (e.g. for validation questions for the RES). An internalised service may also benefit from greater efficiency through:

- More efficient use of resources, involving staff covering minor languages in other Executive Agency tasks and/or using contact centre staff for other tasks in period of low demand

- More flexible knowledge sharing

- Higher staff retention

Finally, it should be observed that the potential use AI based technologies to optimise the EDCC was excluded from the ToR and such issues have therefore not been explored. This said, judging from the

feedback from market researchers consulted, the potential cost implications of AI development for a small contact centre with the particularities of the EDCC, are likely to outweigh, by a margin, potential benefits.

4.3.1   *Setting the right basis for payment - EDCC questions going forward*

Understanding the number of enquiries which the EDCC might receive in the future is important as a baseline for assessing the right level of potential enquiries which may be covered under a contract.

According to the market experts interviewed, and in line with the data received from national contact centres, identifying a realistic baseline is important for cost efficient delivery. A contractual system which set baseline cost to include more enquiries than what will realistically be incoming will lead monetary losses from the acquiring unit. An ideal system involves a realistic baseline of enquiries to be covered, with top up costs for enquiries in excess of the baseline.

If data from the last three years is taken as a baseline it may be assumed that the EDCC will receive on average some 8,500 enquiries a month (considering overall average and average if extreme months are excluded). In this had been used as a baseline for the current contract, 16 months would have required baseline payments, 20 months would have required top up payments. If the baseline had been set at 9,000 enquiries a month, 24 months would have been covered by the baseline, with 12 requiring a top up payment. At 9,300 enquiries, 31 of 36 months would have been covered by a baseline payment.

It is by nature difficult to project the number of enquiries. However, there are some key aspects to be considered:

- The potential expansion of enquiries which may stem from increased cooperation agreements – for example with the currently uncovered DGs; potential agreements with Executive Agencies of the Commission; and other EU institutions.

- Current cooperation agreements – and potential trends/developments, for example it will be important to consider:

  o If WIFI4EU (which largely explains the increase in enquiries from 2017 to 2018) will continue to generate the number of enquiries generated in 2018. As a large share of these enquiries were related to errors with WIFI4EU management, the number of EDCC enquiries is expected decrease drastically.

  o The potential implications of the approach used by DG MOVE in its most recent passenger campaign – to include a reference to Your Europe – but no longer to the EDCC phone number[84].

- Potential increases or decreases from SEDIA and the Single Digital Gateway (SDG) are also to be considered. In addition, 2019 data from the RES can provide insights on potential developments. In the case of the SDG, it will be important to consider how the EDCC is linked to services – once this aspect is further clarified (see Section 3.4).

If it is not considered feasible to project future enquiries in the short- and medium-term future, there would be benefits in working under a contract involving a regular revision of the baseline, as it is for example the case under the French public service contact centre.

Ideally, a revision of the baseline payment in view of a realistic baseline, and use of top-up payments for enquiries in excess of the baseline would go in tandem with:

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[84] This change is the result of the EDCC reporting/indicating that many callers think that this is the number where they can file a complaint. Therefore, the new campaign has a link to the 'Your Europe' site only.

- The use of bonuses along with penalties (which are already used)
- The use of budget breakdowns in the financial proposals to be presented as part of the next tendering round; separating out some of the main infrastructure costs. While this might not lead to greater cost efficiency, it will lead to greater clarity as regards the relative costs of staff versus other costs. It may also encourage greater use of the tenders' software and tools.

4.3.2 Promoting enhanced used of the EDCC services

As current contracting involves payment for enquiries which are not actually raised, expansion of enquiries would be at low/no additional costs – and would consequently improve cost-efficiency. However, also in a scenario of baseline costs reflecting actual number of enquiries, costs per enquiry would go down, as the fixed costs for service operation (including language availability) would be spread over more enquiries (i.e. decreasing marginal costs).

DG COMM is already acting with that objective in mind – promoting the service while also aiming to expand back offices. Cooperation agreements have been gradually expanding with DGs and agencies over the last two decades – with 2019 reaching a high of 30 agreements.

However, nine Commission DGs are currently not (fully) covered by agreements. These DGs offer alternative access points to potential users. Usually, these involve one point of access, either in the form of a centralised email address (DG CONNECT, DG DIGIT, DG MOVE other than travel rights, and DG COMP) or in the form of a webform (JRC, DG CLIMA and DG ECHO). The main exceptions are DG GROW, which provides contact points to all units, and OLAF which provides various webforms and contacts.

Figure 16: Total number of collaboration agreements
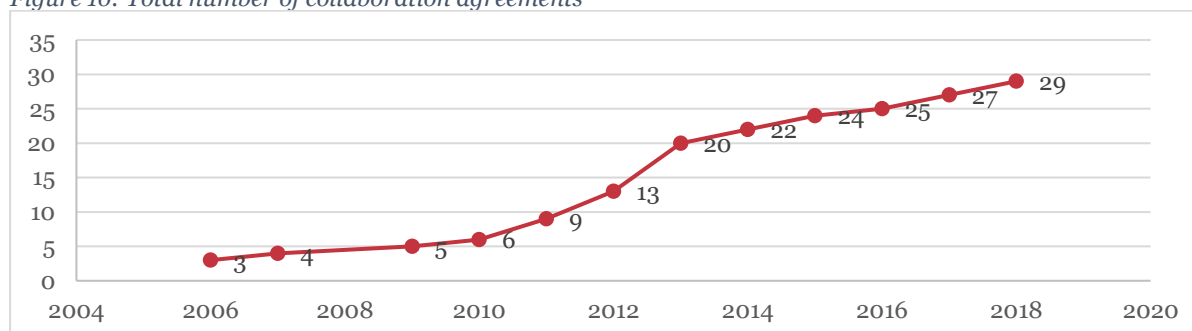
Source European Commission monitoring data

To maximise success there would be benefits in going beyond DGs considering also Executive Agencies, EU agencies and other EU bodies. More systematic campaign support – to campaigns needing contact back –appear likewise to be a relevant avenue, considering the positive assessment of services from back offices having used the EDCC to this end.

In addition, hereto more systematic promotion of the EDCC on the EC's Representations websites would be beneficial. Judging by a sample review of ten Commission Representation websites, few refer to the EDCC on their website. Instead, they offer direct contacts to the Representation itself, through a common mail and/or individual contacts to staff.

Finally, there appear to be options to allow back offices which also have direct engagement with citizens through other channels, to escalate their enquiries to the EDCC – increasing total enquiries. The extent to which such other channels exist appear to vary. However, some back offices report that they deal with

a significant number of enquiries directly outside of the EDCC channels[85], which helpfully could be treated by the EDDC (e.g. EPSO).

Options for escalation already exist. In the frame of its cooperation with EDCC, DG MOVE has the possibility to send questions which were received through other channels but are in the realm of the EDCC topics, to the EDCC. Also, all EU staff can forward to the EDCC for treatment the questions, which they might receive from citizens and which do not come under their own competence.

However, the current options do not appear to comprehensively cover cases where questions are "within competence of the receiving organisation", but which could nevertheless be replied by with the EDCC.

4.3.3   Adjusting service level requirements

It is the study team's assessment that efficiency gains could be generated by adjustment – or partial adjustment – of the service level requirements. Beyond language, flexibility in terms of location, staff requirements and SLA (especially in peak times), will allow the contractor greater flexibility in terms of staffing, maximising the available staff resources.

4.3.4   Knowledge database

As outlined in previous sections the current knowledge database is not fit for purpose. In practice, due to poor quality (inappropriate queries, management of content, glitches and slowness of the platform), communication officers often prefer to keep track of the information on their own personal system, or search for it on Europa. The result is inefficient time spent. This is even more the case in a context of high staff turnover/attrition, where keeping the information and sharing it between the different team members appear to be a real challenge.

The development of a fully-fledged and up-to-date knowledge management system would free up resources from supervisors, facility insertion of new staff and would make treatment time more efficient. Again, such benefits would especially be felt in a context of a more realistic costing structure for enquiries – baseline payment, with top-up payments for enquiries in excess of the base.

5   Relevance, coherence and EU added value

5.1   Q7. Are the defined objectives of the EDCC relevant for implementing the Commission communication policy and the political priorities?

> The objectives of the EDCC are highly relevant to the Commission's communication policy and the objectives that DG COMM has set out it its 2016-2020 Strategic Plan and recent Annual Management Plans. The EDCC's work informs the political priorities and its inputs are closely aligned with DG COMM's objective which is to ensure coherence and professionalism in the Commission's communication. In contrast, its potential as a 'listening post' is currently underutilised.

5.1.1   Relevance to the European Commission's communication objectives

DG COMM's mission is to listen, advise and engage to help bring Europe closer to its citizens. This involves continuous actions to ensure that citizens perceive the EU as working to improve their lives and

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[85] i.e. questions which are <u>within</u> their domain of expertise and which do not require input from the back office, but which they receive from channels which are not covered by the EDCC, such as existing email contacts.

that their concerns are taken into consideration in the European decision-making process, and that they know about their rights in the EU.

Better informing and engaging citizens has a particular significance in DG COMM' strategic plan. The 2019 management plan emphasises the role of DG COMM and other DG services to fight against disinformation whenever inaccuracies in relation to the EU and its policies are reported. Fostering a culture of early detection, debunking and positive messaging is all now part of the wider mission to keep citizens well informed, and the EDCC's objectives are closely aligned to this[86].

The EDCC supports the Commission's communication policy by providing a single point of access to the EU institutions, by addressing questions on political priorities and citizens' rights, and by providing useful insights on citizens' concerns to enhance tailored communication efforts. This last point focuses on the listening function of the EDCC, which is supported by the reorganisation of DG COMM' services and efforts to streamline EDCC interactions with different DG services through more cooperation agreements.

5.1.2   Covering the political priorities

The share of enquiries related to the ten priorities (also known as Juncker priorities) of the European Commission (2015-2019) among the questions addressed to the EDCC has been growing between 2016 and 2018. The share that fell outside these priorities decreased from 84% in 2016, to 24% in 2018. These results, however, may reflect changes in the internal processing or categorisation of enquiries during that period.

Notwithstanding those internal changes, several growth trends can still be observed in three main fields: Justice and Fundamental Rights (+14 percentage point increase in queries); Jobs, Growth and Investment (+16 pp); and Digital Single Market (+8 percentage points). A large share (16% of the 2018 enquiries) also went to the Internal Market priority. Other priorities, such as Migration, Energy Union and Climate, Democratic Change, Stronger Global Actor, and a Deeper and Fairer Economic Monetary Union remained quite stable over time, representing about 14% of enquiries in 2018.

Figure 17: Enquiries in terms of the European Commission's priorities between 2015 and 2019

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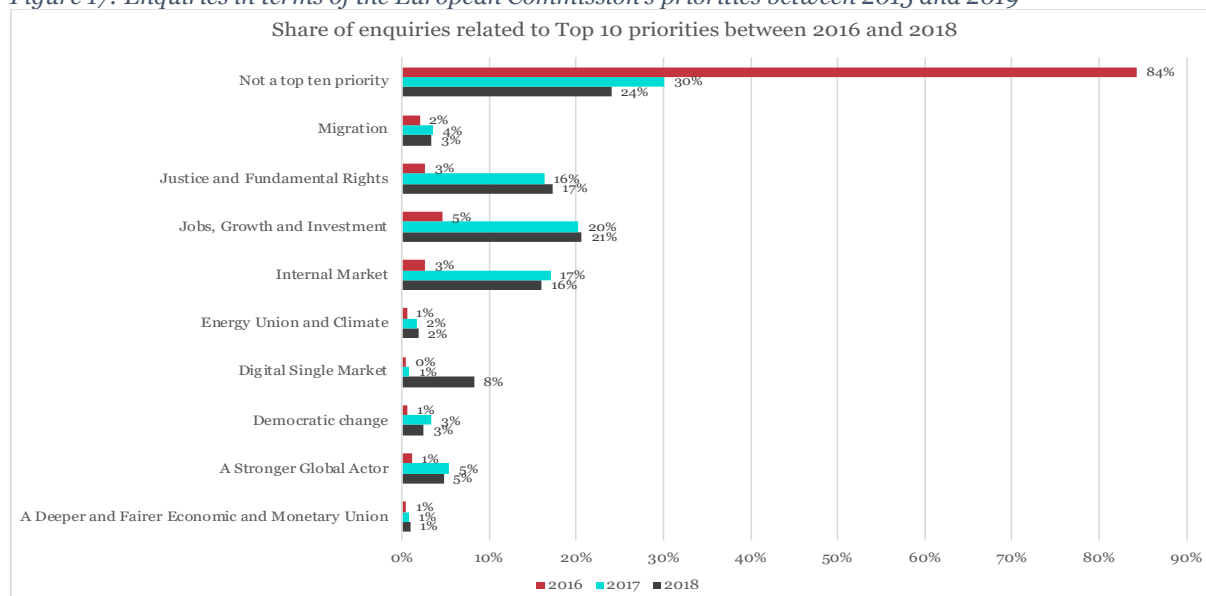
[86] This objective in turn is closely aligned with the DG COMM objective to ensure that 'citizens are better informed about the EU, in particular about the EU priorities and their rights', according to DG COMM's Strategic Plan 2016-2020.

Source: Study team's analysis of LAGAN micro data – the two priorities 'Balanced and Progressive Trade Policy to Harness Globalisation' and 'Balanced EU US Free Trade Agreement' are not presented in the results because of the low level of enquiries attributed to them.

5.1.3 Supporting listening

DG COMM' strategic objectives call for increasing emphasis on the listening function of its services to enhance the tailoring of its communication towards citizens, getting closer to their needs. The EDCC is well placed to provide insights in this regard. In this regard, different interviewees among the DGs described the reporting as an underestimated tool that has potential to provide a clear view on what people are dealing with, and the problems and issues they are facing. The main advantage lies in the very direct approach, contrasting with the more 'filtered' opinions DGs might gather from stakeholders, such as NGOs, business associations, or experts.

The reports provided by the EDCC does not cover such content, but focuses on quantitative indicators (number of enquiries, main topics, origin etc.). Beyond the questions which are escalated. access to more qualitative information on the actual nature of enquiries is available to back offices via LAGAN. However, back offices are unlikely to collect this data themselves – and there is no evidence that back offices request other (ad hoc) reports than those provided.

Nevertheless, this raw source of information is often seen as underexploited in management planning, campaign tailoring, and during Directors' briefings. According to DG back offices, current EDCC reporting is not sufficient 'grounds for action'; it lacks the analytical and qualitative dimension. Better visibility and more promotion of the EDCC's added value among different DGs could enhance its role as a listening post for the Commission and make its services and reporting tools more action oriented.

5.1.4 The corporate function

With the aim of making the service more efficient and comprehensive, the EDCC has been gradually expanding cooperation agreements with DGs and agencies over the last two decades. This strategy is in line with and supports the objective of DG COMM to ensure coherence in the Commission's communication. Also, it supports a set of the priorities which were defined in DG COMM's strategic plan for 2016-2020 under "corporate communication"; to professionalise and rationalise communication and performance measurement with a view to creating more economies of scale.

The ongoing efforts to bring back offices together at annual meetings; to exchange best practice and ensure that all Commission DGs are associated with the service are also closely aligned to these objectives.

5.2 Q8. Are the EDCC activities well-coordinated with other citizen-related services of the European Commission?

> The general collaboration between the EDCC and Your Europe Advice (YEA) is smooth, with no issues raised by DG GROW or the contractor in charge of YEA. When enquiries are escalated to YEA, they are rarely ineligible which means that the EDCC knows YEA's eligibility criteria well. There are no cases of DGs forwarding escalated cases to YEA.
>
> The forthcoming implementation of the Single Digital Gateway (SDG) carries uncertainty about how it will be coordinated with the EDCC. It is still unclear how the EDCC will be included in the SDG in practice. For example, it is not clear whether the EDCC will have new or different 'entry points' for citizens or if citizens will have to contact the EDCC through its current channels.
>
> In terms of enquiry volume that might be expected, it is therefore difficult to estimate; it could mean more visibility to the EDCC or fewer questions reaching the EDCC covering the topics of the SDG.

The EDCC is one of several citizen-related services and networks offered or managed by the European Commission. It has specific agreements with two of these (Your Europe Advice[87] and SOLVIT[88]). Additionally, DG COMM is currently working with DG GROW to develop the assistance pillar of the Single Digital Gateway [89].

In the framework of this study, research was undertaken on YEA and on the SDG.

5.2.1 *Cooperation with the YEA*

The general collaboration between the EDCC and YEA is smooth, with no particular issues raised by DG GROW or the contractor in charge of YEA.

In 2108, the EDCC escalated 677 enquiries to Your Europe Advice. This represents a 2% share of the overall enquiries treated by the YEA. In 2008, the enquiries coming through the EDCC represented 25%. The EDCC does not escalate all enquiries marked as relevant to that service (only 86%). YEA does not have access to the enquiries list and is not aware whether all relevant enquiries for the service are escalated or not. YEA noticed a decrease in the number of escalated enquiries but does not know why. Theories explaining the drop of transfers to YEA were:

- The Commission websites are better/more informative

- The EDCC escalates more often to the DGs rather than YEA

- The scope and mandate of the EDCC has changed and they can now reply to questions YEA would have handled to in the past

When enquiries are escalated to YEA, they are rarely ineligible, which means that the EDCC knows the YEA eligibility criteria well. There are no cases of DGs forwarding escalated cases to YEA.

Sometimes citizens contact directly YEA after having been in contact with the EDCC. When such a case arises, YEA does not have access to the reply that was given to the citizen. Once a year, YEA's contractor organises training with the Commission to which the EDCC takes part. There is no other specific training for the EDCC (unlike in the past).

5.2.2 *(Foreseen) cooperation with the Single Digital Gateway*

The Single Digital Gateway is being developed by DG GROW and aims to facilitate online access to the information, administrative procedures and assistance services that citizens and businesses need to be active in another EU country. The SDG is based on three pillars:

- Information: the new Your Europe portal will provide citizens with easy-to-find and reliable information about the rules and procedures that apply in EU countries. The SDG will implement a new search engine; once a question is typed in, it retrieves a list of links on EU but also national legislation and links to national websites.

- Procedures: the SDG will offer a clear path to citizens about how to carry out the procedures and what steps to follow. In a few clicks, the citizen should have access to the correct national service.

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[87] Your Europe Advice is part of a set of information and advice tools for citizens and businesses about their EU rights. It offers practical advice and useful tips on issues such as living, studying, working, shopping, travelling or doing business within the EU. Your Europe Advice is an EU advice service for the public, currently provided by the legal experts from the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) operating under contract with the European Commission. It is managed by DG GROW.

[88] SOLVIT helps when the EU rights of a citizen or a business are breached by public authorities in another EU country and the case has not been taken to court yet. The service is operated mostly online by the national administration in each EU country as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. It is managed by DG GROW.

[89] The Single Digital Gateway will facilitate online access to the information, administrative procedures and assistance services that citizens and businesses need to be active in another EU country. As of the end of 2020 the SDG will provide a platform with three pillars: information about the Digital Single Market; procedures to follow with MS administrations, and access to national services and an access to Commission assistance services. It will be managed by DG GROW.

- Assistance services: the SDG will offer a single access point listing the relevant assistance services for a specific issue. Similarly, to the information part, users will be using an "assistance service finder" tool (not yet completely defined) that will guide them to the right services.

The forthcoming implementation of the Single Digital Gateway carries uncertainty about how it will be coordinated with the EDCC. The EDCC is not part of the seven assistance services that are planned by the Regulation to be linked to the SDG. It will be part of the opt-in services (including SOLVIT, YEA, EU consumer centres). There will be no visible difference for users between these services. All included assistance services will need to comply with the SDG quality requirements, which in the case of the EDCC should not be a problem.

It is still unclear how the EDCC will be included in the SDG in practice. For example, it is not clear whether the EDCC will have new 'entry points' for citizens (e.g. webforms) or if citizens will have to contact the EDCC through its current channels.

The EDCC's interaction with the SDG will be two-way; it is expected to provide the Gateway with information on the cases they are dealing with (what areas that are causing issues). This relates back to the 'listening function' to earmark the issues that need EU legislation or changes.

There are also two monitoring aspects: one is the information on the cases treated by the assistance services (compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR), and the other is that all the services will include user feedback tools to collect user statistics and which issues need to be addressed. The second monitoring aspect is a management tool related to the quality of the assistance services.

The nature of enquiries sent to the assistance services should be more complex, as the easier to solve cases should be filtered out with the cascade approach being developed for the SDG. In terms of number of enquiries that might be expected to arrive at the EDCC, it is difficult to estimate; it could make it more visible or conversely lead to less cases being handled by the service. Moreover, there will not be a 100% overlap of the services since the EDCC has a wider scope than the rights in the Single Market. In the specific case of the RES, questions about access to funding would also go through the SDG, but requests related to the specific calls would remain a competence of the EDCC. How this will all be managed is yet to be fully determined.

Overall, there is a possibility that the number/volume of cases would increase, with added complexity. The importance of the language would be a criterion for signposting cases, but the weight of this criterion is not defined yet. In all cases, translation needs would have a marginal impact on the cases received by the EDCC.

5.3 Q9. Could the objective of the EDCC be obtained by the Member States or other decentralised bodies?

It is unlikely that EDCC's services could be delivered by Member States or other decentralised bodies. For the Commission to ensure that it is accessible to EU citizens, it would need to deliver such services itself.

The main option would be to decentralise to the European Commission Representations in Member States and EU Delegations. This could run counter to the general work of both Representations and Delegations, require more resources, and result in more escalated questions. Ensuring consistent service levels would similarly prove considerably more challenging to achieve, and possible only with higher human resource and training requirements.

Judging from the interview feedback, it is unlikely that EDCCs services could be delivered by Member States or other decentralised bodies. The EDCC ensures that the European Commission (and other EU bodies associated) are directly accessible to European citizens. Even if it would be possible, in practical terms, to have questions answered by an outside body (not part of the European Commission or a contracted agent, e.g. the EDICs), such services would, by their nature, no longer be delivered by the

European Commission. For the Commission to ensure that it is accessible to EU citizens, it would need to deliver such services itself.

The main option would be to decentralise to the European Commission Representations in Member States. Such an option would also require the involvement of EU Delegations, as many questions are from third-country nationals/third countries. There are, however, a set of considerations which make this option unlikely.

First, as illustrated in section 3.3, decentralisation of enquiries is likely to require more (not less) resources. While EC representations have the benefit of language capacity, individual staff in EC Representation cannot realistically cover all EU topics. For this reason, a decentralised approach, unavoidably would drive up the amount of questions needing to be addressed by the DGs/back offices. A decentralised approach would also require a sizeable team at Representation/Delegation level, if the accessibility were to be provided at the same service levels as currently contracted (i.e. 250 days, from 9 AM to 6PM). Ensuring consistent services levels (accessibility and quality) would similarly prove considerably more challenging to achieve – and only possible with high human resource inputs.

Finally, from a practical point of view, decentralisation could potentially run counter to the current Representation approach. While communication with citizens and interest groups is central to their mandates, it is rather in the form of proactive outreach (as opposed to information provision).

Taking into consideration these arguments, it is the study team's assessment that decentralising the EDCC's tasks to the EC Representations and EU Delegations would incur significantly higher resource costs implications or potentially lower the accessibility and quality levels as a result.

6 Forward looking

6.1 Q10. What are the characteristics that the EDCC service should have in the view of prospective users?

For the EDCC service to be fit for purpose in the medium-term, it will need to remain relevant to users' preferred languages, channels of access and preferred times. Moreover, it will need to be implementable within budget and manageable for back offices. Finally, it will be important that the channels used do not carry a reputational risk to the European Commission.

The findings of the study suggest that:

- The requirement to provide services to users in all EU official languages reflects the vision of the EDCC service and the broader aim to ensure accessibility to the European Commission for all EU citizens. The breadth of languages, in practice more than meets user demand, with nine languages representing only 2.5% of all enquiries. If resource optimisation is the goal, options to limit the services in rare languages could be considered (selected days, time periods or call-back only).

- Evidence does not support a potential expansion of opening times. In contrast, there might be benefits in considering shorter opening hours if resource optimisation is the goal.

- Email and phone enquiries are the mainstay of contact centre services in general, in the short- and medium-term future. They remain the preferred access channels for all groups, besides those below 25 years' old.

- Expansion with chat services could be considered but is likely to come with increased costs – and most likely with limited use.

- The addition of text services is likely to generate only marginal interest among users. The relevance of text services for a public institution is questioned by back offices – due to its informal nature. Moreover, in general there is reluctance among back offices to employ these more and more channels (proliferation) – and use of automated services – due to potential

> resource implications, technical difficulties associated with multilingual services, and unwillingness to have non-human services.
>
> - Social media-based interaction is largely user driven (as opposed to provider driven). It is, both according to literature and expert interviews undertaken, a high-risk channel – with the operator having little control over the visibility/use of the answers ("viral" risks) – and with high demand for responsiveness.
>
> - Because of the reputational risks, social media interaction is often not managed by the contact centre – but by the public relations department. An alternative would be to use one-to-one chat on social media, which carries less reputational risks.
>
> - The proposition to provide users with additional information proactively following enquiries was tested but was not supported by most back offices. The main concerns related to lack of resources and skills to run such a service. Further issues arise from the nature of questions raised with the EDCC, which in many cases are limited in content or scope for broader follow-up. A proposed alternative was to inform the enquirer about his/her topic, signposting where information about developments in the area can be found.

6.1.1 Languages

The EDCC operates in the EU's 24 official languages. This requirement reflects the vision of the EDCC service and the broader aim to ensure accessibility to the EU/Commission for all EU citizens.

In practice, however, user demand for services in the languages differs significantly. In 2018, 83% of all enquiries were made in just five languages: English, French, German, Spanish and Italian. An additional 10% of all the enquiries were made in five other languages (Dutch, Portuguese, Greek, Polish and Swedish). The remaining 8% of all enquiries were made in 14 languages. Only 1.5% of enquiries (1,635 enquiries annually) were submitted in seven of the official languages. This very significant difference in language demand is presented in Table 10.

If the EDCC is to fully match the linguistic demands of all EU citizens, then it will be necessary to continue operating in all languages. However, if resource optimisation is the goal, it could be envisaged to set targets at lower levels (e.g. at 98%). Alternatively, options to limit the services in rare languages (selected days, time periods or call-back only) could be considered.

Table 10: Relative weight of languages – 2018

Language	Enquiries by language	Proportion of total enquiries	Cumulative importance of the languages/enquiries
English	52,475	48.17%	48.17%
French	11,825	10.86%	59.03%
German	11,735	10.77%	69.80%
Spanish	8,666	7.96%	77.76%
Italian	5,667	5.20%	82.96%
Dutch	3,139	2.88%	85.84%
Portuguese	2,097	1.93%	87.77%
Greek	2,065	1.90%	89.66%
Swedish	1,681	1.54%	91.21%
Polish	1,566	1.44%	92.64%
Romanian	1,392	1.28%	93.92%

Bulgarian	1,220	1.12%	95.04%
Hungarian	873	0.80%	95.84%
Croatian	811	0.74%	96.59%
Czech	811	0.74%	97.33%
Danish	636	0.58%	97.92%
Finnish	635	0.58%	98.50%
Slovak	601	0.55%	99.05%
Slovenian	393	0.36%	99.41%
Lithuanian	325	0.30%	99.71%
Latvian	186	0.17%	99.88%
Estonian	102	0.09%	99.97%
Irish	20	0.02%	99.99%
Maltese	8	0.01%	100.00%
Total	108,929	100.00%	100.00%

6.1.2 Preferred time

Timing of access is an important feature and understanding when people use the service is key. Overall, the data does not present a compelling case for extending opening times to weekends. Analysis of incoming enquires in January-April 2019[90] suggest that few users contact the service over the weekend – by phone or by mail. Some 90% of all enquiries were received during working days. Qualitative feedback from the EDCC, moreover, suggests that the number of enquiries slows down in the afternoon, with few incoming requests in the 4 to 6 PM timeframe.

As such, evidence does not support a potential expansion of opening times. In contrast, there might be benefits in considering shorter opening hours – if resource optimisation is the end goal.

6.1.3 Channels

6.1.3.1 Proliferation and user demands

One of the current core trends in contact centre development is 'channel proliferation', offering more and more avenues for users to access the service.

Whereas contact centres historically were call centres they are increasingly becoming multichannel – more oriented towards

- 'self-service' (web/application-based services and interactive voice response (IVR);
- Web-chat (dedicated chat line integrated in a website);
- SMS messages
- Chat via messenger apps (e.g. WhatsApp); and
- Social media-based interaction (public replies in social media discussions).

The drive towards multi-channel interaction is not only being seen in the private sector. Much of public-sector interaction is now handled online, with many national public authorities prioritising the

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[90] Chosen because the EDCC was open during weekends in part of the period.

development of self-services, in the form of comprehensive online sources (both information and actual self-service), and the use of emails/online contact rather than phone. The current development of the DG GROW's Single Digital Gateway also follows this logic, with a three-step approach of information (online); self-service of administrative procedures (online) and finally 'back up' provided by associated services.

Channel proliferation is running in tandem with increased use of such channels. Yet private-sector contact centres typically still largely rely on the telephone – followed by email contact. Overall, the relative share of phone across private-sector contract centre operators (inbound calls) ranges across Europe between 59% (Central Europe, UK excluded) to 70% (northern European countries). Email follows with shares ranging between 12% (northern European countries) and 27% (Western Europe, UK excluded). This is markedly different from the EDCC – with phone calls representing 31% and mail representing 69%. Webchat in most markets is small (<5%). In the European market, use of web chats is most widespread in the Nordic countries, representing in the range of 9% of contacts in 2018. Use of SMS represents, in practice, only a very marginal share of incoming enquiries (<1%). Social media use ranges between 2 and 5% across European markets.

While trend data available suggests that there will be increasing usage of especially web chat, and to a smaller extent social media (both public replies in social media discussions and messenger apps) the expectation in the short term is that these channels will remain secondary to the main lines of communication. Current use of text messages is marginal and there are modest growth expectations in the near future.

Population demographics partially explain these trends. According to market research, what drives user preference for channels is primarily age[91]. While social media in general is popular across age groups, it does not replace people's inclination to use the phone to reach out to contact centres. For large segments of the working age population, phone remains the top choice (all age groups above 35). Email is the second choice – and first choice for those between 25 and 35 years' old.

Social media are the top choice only for those in the youngest age category. It is not among the three top choices for any other group. Mobile applications (including messaging) are placed second for younger groups but are not among the top choices of other groups.

This data implies that channel use will change over time, but also that this change might be slower than the general uptake of new communication channels across population groups (although change can be expected to be quicker than general ageing, due to take-up of technology among older groups).

Table 11: Popularity of channel by age group – top 3 choices highlighted

	Under 25	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 54	Between 54 and 70	Above 70
Social media	1st choice	5th choice	5th choice	6th choice	5th choice
Mobile application	2nd choice	2nd choice	4th choice	5th choice	4th choice
Email	3rd choice	1st choice	2nd choice	2nd choice	3rd choice
Telephone	4th choice	3rd choice	1st choice	1st choice	1st choice
Web chat	5th choice	4th choice	3rd choice	4th choice	6th choice
Other	6th choice	6th choice	6th choice	3rd choice	2nd choice

Source: Adapted from Dimension Data, Global Contact Centre Report, 2016

[91] See for example Dimension Data, Global Contact Centre Report, 2016.

Other research suggests that many users prefer human interaction – even when the same results could be achieved as rapidly through self-service options. This may explain many EDCC enquiries, to which answers are already available online at Europa.

Lastly, the more complex and emotional the enquiry, the higher the demand for personal interaction – with older groups preferring the phone (or ideally personal interaction), and younger groups preferring electronic contacts along with the phone.

6.1.3.2   Advantages of new channels

While user preferences for contacting private and public information services are important, what principally has driven channel proliferation is cost. With large numbers of enquiries, it is more efficient to develop self-service options (IVR, and web-based services). Also chats and mails, have lower unit prizes than phone calls. This is largely explained by the fact that chats and mails allow agents to be engaged with several contacts at the same time (handling between 2 and 3.6 parallel chats per agent is standard in the private sector).

The extent to which the EDCC may reap the benefits of parallel chats, however, is to be explored. Past evaluation results and cost estimates by previous contractors, suggested that the operation of the webchat for the EDCC was not a cost-efficient option. Past evaluation results also suggested that the interest in the chat function was small – with total usage being below 5% of all enquiries under the previous contracts although general consumer habits and the market were different in the period 2012-17 than now.

More generally, market experts have underlined that investment in new channels and approaches goes with a certain level of baseline costs. Cost/investment estimates of automated services such as chatbots (either as a front-line service to citizens or as a supporting service to operators) and artificial intelligence (AI) technology vary. But experts generally agree that, with the current operation and the defined requirements, changes are likely to increase rather than decrease costs.

6.1.3.3   Disadvantages of new channels

As a difference self-services, chats and mails, social media-based interaction, is largely user driven. According to literature and experts consulted, social media-based interaction – in particular public replies in social media discussions - can be high-risk channels – with the operator having little control on the visibility/use of the answers (with the risk that answers/exchanges perceived negatively going viral). Obviously, a written email answer may also go viral, but it is considerably more time-consuming to post such email exchanges than simply to share something on social media – making risks much smaller.

As such, public replies in social media discussions is seen to be a channel to avoid, rather than a "go-to channel". Because of the reputational risks and need for responsiveness, social media interaction is often not managed by the contact centre – but by the public relations department. An alternative, more realistic option would be to use one-to-one chat via messenger apps (WhatsApp and Messenger) which carries less reputational risks.

6.1.3.4   New channels and back offices

Judging by the interviewee feedback, there is a limited appetite for expanding the offer of channels. Additional services are generally not considered as providing enough added value, though it was recognised that a call-back or IVR option would in theory be more efficient. There are different reasons for this:

- Lack of resources at the EDCC (and back offices) to run extra services

- Technical difficulty to implement new services in the required 24 languages

- Unwillingness to have non-human services (e.g. IVR or call-back), especially for urgent or sensitive enquiries

The options of text messaging and social media were generally considered acceptable; however, they would be less formal for the official communication between citizens/businesses and an administration. Moreover, some interviewees expressed concern that offering more channels may lead to more enquiries – leading to more escalations, with additional need for back office services.

Online chat was slightly preferred because it is fast, simple and already implemented in professional settings.

6.1.4 Options to engage in proactive outreach

Providing users with additional information proactively following enquiries was tested during interviews with back offices. Furthermore, enquiries were mapped to identify if the questions were suited to such follow-up mechanisms.

Back offices generally raised comments about the lack of resources and skills to run such a service. Though most interviewees appreciated the idea of providing added-value information to citizens, it was pointed out that identifying the right topics and linking them to the right users would be complicated.

Analysis of the mapping of 2,000 enquiries in this exercise points in the same direction. Overall, follow-up appears challenging for a clear majority of questions. This is due to the nature of the questions, which in a clear majority are too limited in content or scope , too technical, and/or too limited in time (e.g. many of the consumer right issues where the user concretely has a problem with a bought good) to be followed up in the manner proposed. Follow-up in specialised areas and where users are experts, such as for REA cases is more appreciated.

Such an augmented information service should, however, not be offered if it is not sustainable in the long run, the consultation revealed. A proposed alternative was to pointing enquirers in the right direction where information about developments in the area can be found (as part of the reply provided by the EDCC).

7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

The Europe Direct Contact Centre (EDCC) provides information to citizens, enterprises, researchers and other specialised groups in the EU and in third countries via the telephone and email. The EDCC responds to enquiries on any EU-related topic. It provides responses in any official EU language.

The service is funded by the EU and managed by the Commission services. The functions of the EDCC are undertaken by a service provider who operates centrally from Brussels. DG COMM manages the contract and monitors its implementation. 27 Commission DGs, Executive Agencies and other EU services operate as back office to the EDCC under specific EDCC cooperation agreements. The back offices treat complex enquiries related to their domain of expertise which the EDCC cannot address, and other types of enquires meeting a set of specific criteria. DG COMM operates as the central back office, dealing with enquiries under its remit, and with escalated enquiries which do not fall under other back office agreements. The EDCC receives some 100,000 to 110,000 enquiries annually.

Relevance

The general objective of the EDCC is to provide coherent information to citizens in the Member States about the EU and its policies so that they feel adequately informed about the EU. In specific terms, the EDCC works towards making the EU accessible to citizens who have questions needing a (personalised) response, providing good quality replies meeting the needs of the users of the service, and doing this as efficiently as possible, ensuring that public enquiries are addressed in a cost- and resource-efficient manner.

Both the general and operational objectives, and the actual delivery, are relevant to the Commission's communication policy and the objectives that DG COMM has set out in its 2016-2020 Strategic Plan

and recent Annual Management Plans. The EDCC is also closely aligned with DG COMM's strategic objectives, as a presidential service, to ensure coherence and professionalism in the Commission's communication. In view of DG COMM's mission to listen, advise and engage, the EDCC's potential as 'listening post' seems underutilised.

Effectiveness

The review of the core performance indicators, against the specific objectives set, shows that the EDCC performs well. Overall, the current contractor meets the requirements to ensure comprehensive public access to the EU. The replies meet the set quality expectations, with an overall user satisfaction rate of around 80%. When considering key indicators, the current contractor has performed better than the previous one. Compared to other private-sector services, the EDCC performs as well or better in terms of access. Beyond timeliness and quality in reply, evidence shows that the EDCC has a good ability to match the linguistic needs – by email as well as over the phone.

Overall, citizens using the phone are significantly more satisfied with the quality of the response than those receiving a written answer, and more inclined to recommend the service, demonstrating its added value. The EDCC's short waiting times and high first-contact resolution rates are likely to impact positively these results.

There is no data to support the expectation that the EDCC has contributed to a more positive image of the EU. It is, however, likely to have contributed to a perception that the EU is open and accessible. Also, by showcasing/clarifying citizens' rights under EU law, it may have contributed to a positive image of the EU among those using the service.

At an operational level, front office-back office collaboration works well. The processes and procedures for collaboration, as well as the tools supporting it are generally fit for purpose, although there is room for improvement, especially as regards training of EDCC staff, knowledge management and efficient/timely back office management of escalated enquiries.

With the current level of enquiry fluctuation, there is no evidence that the number of enquiries impacted substantially on accessibility or the quality of responses. While this is positive for the overall assessment, it may however also suggest excess HR capacity within the EDCC.

EDCC users

In the period February 2016 to December 2018, the EDCC received 320,565 information requests from 256,430 unique users. Some 20% of enquiries came from 'repeat' users, meaning users that had used the service before.

59% of users in this period were EU citizens, 21% were third-country nationals. Most users were from the older Member States (64%) – nationals from the EU's five largest Member States and Belgium represented nearly half of all users. About 83% of users resided within the EU and, among them, 63% were based in the EU's five largest Member States and Belgium.

Most users were in the working-age population, employed or self-employed. Some 16% were students, unemployed or retired citizens. Mobile citizens from one Member State residing in another one was heavily represented in the user group.

About 35% of all enquiries were related to business issues, while 59% were undertaken for private purposes including enquiries related to job opportunities.

77% of the "private purposes" enquiries were from EU citizens. The distribution of the latter by nationality reflects EU population trends by country. Third-country nationals represented 23%. The share of mobile EU citizens in this group is, at 17%, high. This compare to 3.9% in the general EU population.

Some 60% of the questions from individual citizens ("private purpose questions") fell within eight categories. These were (in descending order) questions related to free movement, passengers' rights, EU education and youth programmes, questions related to EU Member States; EU careers, immigration, visas, and consumer protection. 3% of questions are not related to the EU or to Member States.

Most citizens' questions were of "personal relevance" or related to personal circumstances (e.g. has moved/is planning to move to another country, experiencing problems when traveling or after buying something, etc.) or looking for job opportunities. A number of students asked for access to data and other information for research purposes. A smaller share of enquiries (12%) were of a more general nature, where the users did not have a personal interest in the reply. There were, in addition, several more political questions (11%) where, for example, citizens commented on a societal issue to be addressed and asked what the EU intends to do.

Major political 'hot topics' in spring 2019, Brexit and the European elections, has received attention but among the portfolio of themes, the shares were rather limited. The EDCC, which was promoted as a 'Brexit hotline' with additional resources made available for weekend opening, received 1,704 questions Brexit-related between January and April 2019 (4% of all questions). 374 questions related to the European elections (1% of all questions).

Efficiency

The EDCC has performed well and is seen to deliver good quality service but this level of service comes at a relatively high cost per reply provided. The total cost of the EDCC operation was, for the first three years of the contract (35 months), €11.03 million. Total annual costs are in the range €3,875,000 to €3,886,000. This leads to an average cost of €37.77 per enquiry.

Compared to the previous service contract, costs per enquiry have decreased by 16.5%.[92] This shows that the strategy to promote more widely the call for tender, leading to more offers, had a positive impact on the current cost-efficiency ratio – while delivering overall better services. Costs are also lower than what they are likely to be if the EDCC was closed, with the DGs and other services addressing the enquires themselves. The cost per enquiry is, however, higher than average private-sector equivalents, and remain above the benchmark which was defined in the previous evaluation as the estimate for a feasible cost-per-contact ratio.

There are several factors which influence the overall efficiency (including cost efficiency) of the EDCC. Some of these factors go hand in hand. The most important factors impacting on costs are:

- Language and accessibility requirements (a service operating in 24 languages, with nine hours of opening time in all languages, five days a week). The language requirements drive up the baseline number of necessary staff with an estimated excess capacity of 38%.

- The low number of enquiries which makes economies of scale and staff optimisation difficult to achieve and which drives up operating costs[93] relative to total costs

- The contractual set-up. Specifically, the number of enquiries paid for as stipulated in the contract exceeds the actual number of enquiries treated.

Other factors which impact efficiency include the relatively strict SLAs, staff requirements, high staff turnover, reporting time, and knowledge management.

Coherence

Collaboration with associated services, is generally considered to be smooth, with no significant issues identified. However, the forthcoming implementation of the Single Digital Gateway (SDG) carries some uncertainty about how it will be coordinated with the EDCC. It is still unclear how the EDCC will be included in the SDG in practice.

The number of enquiries that can be expected to reach the EDCC via the SDG is difficult to estimate. One the one hand, the EDCC will be more visible. On the other questions that are simple and informative may increasingly be addressed via the SDG self-service functions.

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[92] 18% accounting for inflation

[93] e.g. training, management, HR, IT support, technical infrastructure, rent of the EDCC premises, video conference facilities etc.

EU added value

It is unlikely that the EDCCs services could be delivered by Member States or other decentralised bodies. The main option for decentralisation would be to provide the service through the European Commission Representations in Member States and EU Delegations. Such an option is likely to run counter to the general work of both Representations and Delegations. This could run counter to the general work of both Representations and Delegations, require more resources, and result in more escalated questions. Ensuring consistent service levels would similarly prove considerably more challenging to achieve, and possible only with higher human resource and training requirements.

Meeting needs going forward

For the EDCC to be fit for purpose in the medium-term it needs to respond to users' preferred languages, channels of access and access times. Moreover, it needs to be implemented within budget and be manageable for back offices. It will also be important that the chosen channels used to communicate with citizens do not carry a reputational risk to the European Commission.

The findings of the study suggest that the requirement to provide services to users in all the EU official languages and via both mail and phone reflects the vision of the EDCC service and the broader aim to ensure accessibility to the EC for all EU citizens. It also matches back office expectations. Access by phone is perceived as important considering the obligation of the Commission to cater for the needs of all EU citizens. Likewise, there is consensus on the need to deliver the service in the 24 languages. The available breadth of languages does in practice, however, more than meets user demand with nine languages make up for only 2.5% of all enquiries.

Email and phone enquiries will remain the mainstay of contact centre services also in the short- and medium-term. These channels are favoured by all groups above the age of 25. Extending the offer to include webchat services could be considered but is likely to incur increased costs – and potentially limited use. Adding t messenger services is likely to generate only marginal interest among users. There is a reluctance among back offices to offer more and more channels (proliferation). There is also reluctance among back offices to the use of automated services due to the potential resource implications, technical difficulties associated with multilingual services, and unwillingness to have non-human interaction. Also, the introduction of social media-based interaction is high-risk.

There is no evidence supporting the need for a potential expansion of opening times. In contrast, there will be cost-benefits in considering shorter opening hours – if the approach is that of resource optimisation.

The proposal to provide additional information 'proactively' as follow-ups to enquiries was tested but was not supported by most back offices. The main concerns related to lack of resources and skills to run such a service. Further issues arise from the nature of questions raised with the EDCC, which in many cases are limited in content or scope for broader follow-up. A proposed alternative was to inform the enquirer about his/her topic, signposting where information about developments in the area can be found.

7.2 Recommendations

The recommendations developed for this evaluation assume that the EDCC services will continue in a contracted form beyond 2020. It is also assumed that some major cost factors – i.e. the combined availability of phone/email in all official languages will continue beyond 2020.

In this context, and in view of the study findings which showcase that the main issues related to implementation reside with the cost and efficiency of the service, it is recommended that in preparing for the next call for tender DG COMM should:

A. Closely follow up on all options to increase the use of the service, working with EU bodies not yet associated with the service. This includes DGs, Executive Agencies as well as other EU bodies and institutions. The use can also be increased through the provision of a contact point for

relevant Commission campaigns. This would also involve the option to encourage, on a systematic basis, the forwarding of enquiries from the DGs to the EDCC, which they receive through other channels such as functional DG mailboxes, but which could be addressed by the EDCC[94]. With increased usage the efficiency can be improved thanks to decreasing marginal costs. The example of WIFI4EU shows how individual collaboration agreements may substantially affect total usage – to the benefit of the associated service as well. In contrast, the example of the Brexit hotline suggests, that that number of questions are likely to be impacted through promotion.

B. Develop a realistic baseline of the potential number of enquiries which the service is to cater for, while working in close collaboration with DG GROW on the SDG. If it is not possible to estimate the potential impact of the SDG on the EDCC's enquiries, the baseline should be developed in view of the number of enquiries that the EDCC has been treating since the start of the contract – using monthly/annual averages, or slightly above average monthly enquiries and a clause for potential adjustments.

C. Use this baseline – rather than a baseline beyond demand – to set baseline costs for the service. A realistic baseline will help drive down costs, avoiding offers with conservative budget estimates to cater for an (unlikely) high number of enquires. By setting realistic baseline costs, the actual costs for questions in excess of the baseline will also be more realistic. A model involving a regular revision of the baseline may also be considered.

D. Maintain SLAs as these are currently for the new lower-level baseline but apply greater flexibly/lower SLA beyond the baseline, allowing for adaptation to fluctuations by the contractor.

E. Consider including budget breakdowns in the financial proposals to be presented as part of tenderers' proposals; separating out some of the main infrastructure costs. While this might not lead to greater cost efficiency, it will lead to greater clarity as regards the relative costs of staff versus other costs. It may also encourage greater use of the tenders' software and tools.

F. Consider the use of bonuses for achievements beyond SLA requirements, in addition to the currently used penalties.

G. Define more clearly the specific requirements for the knowledge database (content, development, maintenance, search requirements).

H. Consider if the current staff requirements are fit for purpose and necessary for the tasks at hand – with the opportunity to build on existing teams among potential multilingual providers, especially in little used languages.

I. Allow for more flexible organisation of the centre, considering that a set up might involve locations in more than one country, combined with remote working – to limit HR costs, but also to avoid only Brussels-based operations, which is likely to increase turnover.

J. Cost out new potential services – webchat, text messaging, social media – as separate opt-in items, additional to the baseline costs. This model will ensure that eventual new channels can be tested but also discontinued, if operation is not successful.

K. Review reporting requirements considering actual use of the data (in the EDCC and with back offices).

L. Consider a delimitation of the services in time for rare used languages.

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[94] I.e. questions which are *within* the DGs remit.

M. Consider a limitation of the services to users who disproportionately occupy EDCC services[95] (RES users excluded).

N. Ensure that the upcoming call for tender is widely promoted to national representative organisations of Contact Centres

In addition, under the current contract, it is recommended that DG COMM continues to:

O. Review, in collaboration with the EDCC, the current training programme – and develops training guidelines for the attention of back office (which content to present, good practice for training content) to ensure higher relevance to EDCC staff.

P. Develop mandatory guidelines for the EDCC, regarding alerts which are to be provided to back offices (emerging topics, website issues, etc.).

Q. Develop and tests, together with back offices, a new reporting format, better designed and adapted to their needs[96].

Lastly, having worked on the user-categorisation (information to be provided at the time of the enquiry), and user-satisfaction survey, it is the study team's assessment that there would be benefit in reviewing these in order to provide better data for onward use/analysis – while at the same ensuring a level of consistency between past and current indicators. Further recommendations on this are included in Appendix F.

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[95] subject to baseline costs reflecting actual number of enquiries

[96] Accepting that most back offices are unlikely to collect and analyse information on enquiries though LAGAN

technopolis |group|

HENNINGSEN CONSULTING

Appendix A Intervention Logic of EDCC and analytical framework

| External (contextual) factors – news and hot media topics, development of EU policies, key EU events and political developments |

Inputs

Activities
Direct responsibility

Outputs
Direct responsibility

Results
Significant influence

Outcomes
Some/limited influence

Priorities: ensuring that the EC is accessible and available for European citizens which have specific questions to the EC – while providing such services in a coherent and cost-efficient manner

FWC
+/- 3,9 M
annually

HR input
(DG COMM,
other DGs)

Operation of the EDCC (contracted services)
Incl. campaign support (passengers rights and in 2018 also WIFI4WEU & DiscoverEU)

Back office support (DG COMM and other DGs)

Management of contract, quality assurance, call for tender etc.

Delivery of feedback services

Delivery of Q/A Services for European cities and European and other enterprises having dealings with the EU
Phone + web
Est. max 150,000 enquiries year
250 days/year
24 languages

Useful insights on citizens concerns

The EC is accessible to cities and businesses

Services are of quality (and perceived as such)

Campaigns and EU programmes are effectively supported though Q/A services

Enquiries are addressed in a cost and resource efficient manner – maximising internal/EC resources)

Enhanced/tailored communication efforts of DG COMM

Contribution to a positive perception of the EU/mitigates negative perceptions

Efficient campaign/call implementation

Financial/HR gains are generated for the EC overall

Evaluation questions	Research/sub-questions	Indicators	Judgement criteria	Data collection and analysis focus
Effectiveness				

To what extent are the objectives of the system to answer citizens enquiries achieved?	To what extent does the EDCC deliver a reliable and accessible service?
	
	To what extent are the SLA conducive for supporting the delivery of a reliable and efficient service?
		• Number of calls and written requests treated
		• % of incoming written requests answered within the defined target time (SLAs - working days for enquires addressed by the EDCC directly and those escalated to be identified)
		• Share of calls answered within the maximum SLA time
		• % of total calls abandoned
		• % of contacts treated in the preferred language of the user
		• Satisfaction rate of with the response time
		For each of the above: broken down by
		• language
		• Telephone/web
		• Type of enquiry/topic
		• Escalated vs. non-escalated questions.
			• Share of enquires for which the maximum response time for e-mail enquiries was respected (SLA target of 3 working days)
			• Months during which the maximum response time for e-mail enquiries was respected (SLA target of 3 working days)
			• Months for which the maximum response time for calls were respected (SLA targets met)
			• Service level requirements are met across:
			  – Languages
			  – Different services delivered (general services & those under service level agreements),
			  – Over time
			  – across simple/complex questions
			  – Different communication channels (email and phone)
			• SLAs in line with market standards
				Desk research and analysis of monitoring data on the enquiries (incl. micro data analysis)
				Desk research and analysis of user satisfaction data
				Consultations with the EDCC contractor. DG COMM, back offices and associated services
				interviews with sector organizations

	To what extent does the EDCC delivers a service of quality?	**Services delivered to users**
		• Satisfaction rate of the EDCC service: **with the way the answer is written**– broken down by language – and if possibly per type of enquiry
		• Satisfaction rate of the EDCC service: **with the answer provided**
		• Share of users who would recommend the service to others
		For each of the above: broken down by
		  - language
		  - Telephone/web
			• Share of replies meeting the SLAs for user satisfaction
			• Stable/positive increases in user satisfaction
			• SLAs for user satisfaction in line with market standards
			• DG COMM and other DGs satisfied with quality of services delivered to users
			• Target for reports to be delivered to the EC met
			• DG COMM satisfied with the reports and feedback provided by the EDCC contractor
				Desk research and analysis of user satisfaction data (incl. micro data analysis)
				Desk research and analysis of monitoring data – including data from the internal control systems
				Consultations with the EDCC contractor. DG COMM, back offices and associated services

Evaluation questions	Research/sub-questions	Indicators	Judgement criteria	Data collection and analysis focus
		- Type of enquiry/topic - Escalated vs. non-escalated questions. • Development of the satisfaction rate over time (answer provided, and if possible other comparable indicators) • First contact resolution rate for telephone and mail enquiries **Services delivered to the EC** • Reports delivered to the EC • Satisfaction with feedback report **Quality of the response** • Share of replies providing a personalized reply (as opposed to providing mainly links to replies) • Share of Reponses containing the accurate content • Share of responses containing the accurate structure		Mapping and analysis of enquires for quality of response
	To what extent does the EDCC helps generating a more positive perception of the EU	• Amount of spontaneous positive feedback generated • Share of spontaneous positive feedback generated which says something positive about the EC/EU	NA	Desk research and analysis of obsolete cases
What type of citizens and subjects are served by the EDCC?	NA	• Main socio-economic attribute of users – Gender – country of origin and country of residence – share EU nations vs. third country national users – Share of users being mobile citizens – Economic category	NA	Desk research and analysis of monitoring data Mapping and analysis of a sample of enquires for use Consultations with the EDCC contractor and DG COMM

Evaluation questions	Research/sub-questions	Indicators	Judgement criteria	Data collection and analysis focus

		• Share of enquires stemming from specific services which can be associated with professional use (e.g. Research Enquiry Service and other as relevant)
		
		• Share of enquiries which are reasonably likely to be of a personal nature/use and
		  – Typology of the questions raised of users with a "private purpose"
		  – Breakdown of main socio-economic attributes of users & incl. geographical distribution
		
		• Share of enquiries which are reasonably likely to be of a professional nature/use and
		  – Typology of the questions raised of users with a "professional purpose"
		  – Breakdown of typology of organizations (as available) & geographical distribution
		
		• Share of repeat usage		

Are the working arrangements with the relevant Commission services effective, and how could they be improved?	Which processes and procedures are in place to support collaboration and to what extent are these effective? To what extent is the organizational set up - including organisation of DGs versus policy areas; knowledge management system, validation process of replies – incl. hot topics – optimal to ensure efficient delivery? To what extent does the service provide organizational efficiency gains for the EC?	• Number of DGs making use of the service – and number of information requests for each of these • Increases/development in the number of EC services associated to/making use of the EDCC • Share of enquiries addressed by the contractor & share escalated to EC services • Identification and typology of enquiries which encounter difficulties with shares of escalation – and with delays in response times (either by contractor or back office) • Time spend by DG COMM and other services monitoring the quality and delivery of the services provided by the EDCC	• The enquires escalated all meet the requirements for escalation • DG COMM and other DGs satisfied with the nature and scale of escalation of enquires • Evidence of clear efficiency gains for the EC stemming from the operation of the service	Desk research and analysis of monitoring data (incl. analysis of micro data) Consultations with the EDCC contractor. DG COMM, back offices and associated services

Evaluation questions	Research/sub-questions	Indicators	Judgement criteria	Data collection and analysis focus
		• Scale of non-monetized and monetized benefits for sector DGs		
	Which systems and processes support collaboration between the EDCC and the relevant EC services What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of these systems and processes? how optimally does the current knowledge management database support the delivery of services?	NA	• DG COMM satisfied with the current collaboration and the systems supporting collaborations • Other relevant partner services	Desk review of current contractual requirements Organisational review (organisational set up and processes supporting collaboration with relevant EDCC services) Consultations with the EDCC contractor. DG COMM, back offices and associated services
	Which aspects needs to be covered in the forthcoming contract to address needs of new services efficiently (SEDIA, Digital Single Gateway) – and what are the potential of overlaps	NA	NA	Interviews with other services associated with the EDCC and potential "competitors"

Evaluation questions	Research/sub-questions	Indicators	Judgement criteria	Data collection and analysis focus
Can the objectives be obtained more effectively by changes in the way the work is organized?	Which of the SLA and other requirements drive costs and resource spend? Which processes, and practices might be improved within the current contractual framework? Which practices and processes would be beneficial under a new contractual set up? What would be the potential implications of changes in service delivery? Which incentive structures and contractual models are used within the industry? What would be the potential cost implications?	NA	All avenues for optimization of collaboration already exploited (within current contractual requirements)	Desk review of current contractual requirements Organisational review (organisational set up and processes supporting collaboration with relevant EDCC services) Consultations with the EDCC contractor. DG COMM, back offices and associated services Consultation with industry
	Are enquires of a nature where follow up would be relevant? Would users and back offices be interested in follow up?			Mapping and analysis of a sample of enquires for use Interviews with back offices
What are the characteristics that the EDCC service should have in the view of prospective users	To what extent is there demand for services via social media and use of instant texting – and which relative benefits are there of such services To what extent does the current service offering meet a demand (languages and access)	Projections of use of the telephone line of the EDCC over the next five years use of the service for professional vs. private use	NA	Desk research covering relevant literature Analysis of monitoring data (incl. microdata) Interviews with industry representatives
Efficiency				
Were the results of the work of the EDCC	What are the average costs and marginal per enquiry	• Average and marginal costs per inquiry • Cost increases or cost decreases compared to the previous contractor	Costs per EDCC enquiry below 30 Euros (as defined in the DG COMM management plan The cost of the services	Analysis of monitoring and costing data

Evaluation questions	Research/sub-questions	Indicators	Judgement criteria	Data collection and analysis focus
achieved at a reasonable cost?	How does these costs compare to past EDCC costs? How does current costs compare to costs of previous contractors – considering quality of the service delivered (user satisfaction, SLA compliance and share of responses containing an accurate reply)?	• SLA and satisfaction rating – compared to previous contractor • Estimated time savings generated from the collaboration agreements with the EDCC (sector DGs) – and calculated in monetary benefits • Other non-monetized benefits of collaboration (sector DGs)		Analysis of parts costing, SLA and user satisfaction data (from past evaluation reports)
Which factors influenced the efficiency of the observed results?	Which of the SLA and other contractual requirements (Staff requirements, opening hours, linguistic requirements, service offering via mail and phone etc.) costs/resource demand of the EDCC? What are the opportunities to enhance implementation efficiency of the services delivered? How does the current costing/budgeting of the contract impact on costs (baseline costs vs. marginal costs for enquiries beyond a minimum level	NA	NA	Analysis of monitoring, contractual and costing data – and past evaluation results Consultations with the EDCC contractor. DG COMM, back offices and associated services Consultations with industry organizations
Coherence				
Are the EDCC activities well-coordinated with other citizen-related services of the European Commission?	How efficient and effective is the collaboration with YEA and SOLVIT? What is the scale of potential overlap with the forthcoming service Digital single gateway – managed by DG GROW?	• Satisfaction with the collaboration systems and efficiency of collaboration between the EDCC and related services • Scale of collaboration	• All avenues of collaboration and use of the EDCC services exploited • Collaboration mechanisms operating satisfactory	Desk review covering documentation and requirements related to collaboration with other services and networks (YEA, SOLVIT) – as well as DG GROW Analysis of monitoring data Interviews with DG COMM

Evaluation questions	Research/sub-questions	Indicators	Judgement criteria	Data collection and analysis focus
Relevance				
Are the defined objectives of the EDCC relevant for implementing the Commission communication policy and the political priorities?		• Share of inquiries covering citizens' rights and the EC's political priorities • Time savings generated by the EDCC within the EU institutions	The EDCC supports the Commission communication policy and the political priorities: • Providing a single and easy access to the EU institutions • Generating efficiency gains for the EU institutions • By addressing questions on the EC's political priorities and citizens' rights	Desk review: strategical documents of DG COMM Analysis of monitoring data Interviews with DG COMM
EU added value				
Could the objective of the EDCC be obtained by the Member States or other decentralized bodies?		• NA	NA	Interviews with DG COMM Desk research

Appendix B Interviews conducted

Organisation / Position	Name
European Commission	
REA	■■■■■■■■■
AGRI	■■■■■■■■■
JUST	■■■■■■■■■■■
EMPL	■■■■■■■
TRADE	■■■■■■■■■
EAC	■■■■■■■■■■
TAXUD	■■■■■■■■■■
MOVE	■■■■■
HOME	■■■■■■■
REGIO	■■■■■■■■■■■■■■
NEAR	■■■■■■■
INEA	■■■■■■■■■■■
DG COMM	■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■
Other EU institutions	
EEAS	■■■■■■■■
EPSO	■■■■■■
EDCC staff members	
Communication officers	■■■■■■■■■■■■■
Supervisors	■■■■■■■■■■■■■
Trainer and Coaching coordinator	■■■■■■■■
Project manager	■■■■
Consultation with other services associated with the EDCC and potential "competitors"	
GROW – Your Europe Advice	■■■■■■■
DG COMM – EC Representations	■■■■■
ECAS – Your Europe Advice	■■■■■
GROW – Digital Single Gateway	■■■■■
RTD - SEDIA	■■■■■
Contact centre representatives	
The European Confederation of Contact Centre Associations	■■■■■■■■■
Customer Contact Association Global	■■■■■■
Association Française de la Relation Client	■■■■
Inter Mutuelles Assistance	■■■■■

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Appendix C Documents reviewed for the study and data sources

Topic	Document
Requirement of the service, organisation and functioning of the EDCC	• Tender specifications • QA for tender • Framework service contract • Price list, 2018
SLAs, compliance and monitoring reports	• Annual reports 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 – Administrative • Quarterly reports 2016, 2017, 2018 – • Monthly reports 2016, 2017, 2018
Quality monitoring and quality assurance	• Monthly reports QA, DG COMM – all months covering 2018, and January 2019
General organisational set up	• Cooperation agreement (AGRI) • Overview of cooperation agreements January 2019 • Feedback report – replies to enquiries from the UK after Brexit
Internal organisational set up	• Staff table as of December 2018 & monthly report 2018 • Training check list
Previous evaluations	• The evaluation partnership, 2005, Evaluation of the Europe Direct Service, undertaken for DG COMM • GHK/EPEC, 2010, Evaluation of the Europe Direct Contact Centre, undertaken for DG COMM • Deloitte and Coffey, 2015, Mid-term Evaluation of the Europe Direct Contact Centre, undertaken for DG COMM
Gathered and aggregated EDCC dataset	• LAGAN dataset 2016-2019 • STORM dataset 2016-2019 • Satisfaction data 2016-2019 • Number of calls managed by backup • Number of unique visitors – and usage of the EDCC by unique visitors • Obsolete cases: thank you messages
Benchmarking data	• Contact Babel (2019) The Inner Circle Guide to AI, Chatbots & Machine Learning • Contact Babel (2018) The Inner Circle Guide to Omnichannel – UK version • Contact Babel (2018) The Inner Circle Guide to Omnichannel – US version • Dimension Data's (2016) Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report, Global results • Talkdesk (2018) Contact Center KPI Benchmarking Report • Contact Babel (2018) The European Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide • Contact Babel (2018) The UK Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide • Contact Babel (2018) The US Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide • Contact Babel (2017) The Inner Circle Guide to Customer Interaction Analytics • Contact Babel (2017) The Inner Circle Guide to Multichannel Workforce Optimisation
Other data	• Guidelines for Europe Direct Information Centres (EDIC) 2018-2020management

Appendix D Service Level Agreement overview

Service Level Agreement criteria	Description and target
Telephone only	
Calls answered within 30 second (80%)	80% of incoming calls must be answered by an agent within 30 seconds, measured from the time the call is routed to an agent. A cascade system is implemented in order to avoid unanswered calls after 30 seconds by routing it to another agent.
First contact resolution rate (≥92%)	The first contact resolution rate must be at least 92%. First contact resolution is defined as an enquiry resolved during the first contact with the citizen, without requiring any call-back to the citizen or any more action from the citizen (e.g. re-submitting the enquiry by email for instance)
Abandoned calls (>5%)	Abandoned calls must not exceed 5% of all incoming calls. A call is considered abandoned if the citizen, after having waited 30 seconds or more, hangs up without either speaking to an agent or without leaving a message.
All Enquiries (Web and telephone)	
Maximum response time (3 days)	First level enquiries must be answered within a maximum of 3 days. (email enquiries as well as phone enquiries that have not been resolved at first contact)
Second level enquiry forwarding maximum (3 days)	Second level enquiries must be forwarded to the back-office within a maximum of 3 days.
Returned second level enquiry handling maximum (2 days)	Returned second level enquiries must be proceed and sent to the citizen within 2 days.
Second level forwarding percentage maximum (5%)	A maximum of 5% of all enquiries may be escalated to back-office.
General KPIs	
Minimum user satisfaction (80%)	The minimum rate of satisfied users must be 80% over for any given month. It is determined through users' satisfaction surveys which are used to assess quality.
Language Coverage	All official languages of the EU must be covered by agents who are speakers of native or bilingual proficiency during the Contact Center's opening hours
Relevance and accuracy of replies	Relevance and accuracy of replies are assessed by the contractor through its internal quality control, by an insurance control of DG COMM (through a sampling) and rated by customers. As a basis, the different elements of information must be clearly presented in a logical order of priority, remaining factual and concise and personalised. It should cover all parts of the enquiry but not go beyond the questions asked. The reference to further sources of information must fit the information needs the citizen expressed.
Opening hours of the service	Monday to Friday – 09.00 to 18.00 hours – 250 days per year

Appendix E Enquiries examples sent by private users

DG	Enquiry	level 1	level 2
COMM	There is a rich person in Denmark who is manipulating me and forces me to take medicines and be hospitalized. The Danish authorities are not helping. I want you to submit my complaint to the police.	Out of scope	Issues not related to EU
COMM	My son lost his Nintendo game in an airport in Spain. It was found. Now I am trying to have the airport sending it to me in a package, but everyone refuses, what can I do?	Out of scope	Issues not related to EU
COMM	The stealing from DRLD, world wide, with the dutch police who has to be fired, for as the eu government knows for trying to kill DRLD for 370+ days, and making a TV show out of me, for 100's of days, till this day, and DRLD never having to type it in, as in this E-mail, for the highest persons working of the european governemnt to know of this for more then 375+ days the stealing, as in before the experiments, thus they as european President know of it to, and literally never care to do 1 thing about the law, 9000+ hours of images is there. 100% illegal. The dutch police trying to kill DRLD as they know, for 100's of days, and never doing something to.	Out of scope	Issues not related to EU
COMM	I am a victim of theft hello happening in France with the evidence even the French police is still suspect with the evidence I seek contact for filing complaint with the evidence against the evildoers	Out of scope	National authorities
COMM other	Are EU member states still sovereign? Is there an EU sovereignty?	EU general and Member States	Member States
COMM other	The European Union and the Euro In 2002, on 17/12, the European Constitution was passed. This day is my birthday. I have a health problem and have asked for my pension, but I have visited Belgium and other countries of the European Union. What can I do to support the Euro?	EU general and Member States	Member States
COMM other	Dear EU thank you for work and for all what for eu and democracy make,in slovakia we have problem with russian propaganda it is some politic who make it in Smer- is name of political group and also maby one person in EU parlament- Monika Benova whitch father and mum worked for STB, STB was in time of komunismus before 1989 like KGB in russia and who was too mutch democrat or for west put him in prison .this made people from STB.and this person who grow up still in totality sistem have not idea what is democracy work in EU and say all news is fake in slovakia is alll ok , that is not truh we have a lot problems and is a her job make it all good, now i read thay want check also fake news, well for them is all fake news, what talk opsit Them.well news is news and if is a fake is not important. we live in democracy and we can read what we want. now police in slovakia want control fake news-cenzura, but is democracy and democracy can whrite what tay want,news can say what thay want is a freedom, so inform this people do not make russian propaganada , because we are in EU and we will be. we young people from slovakia we are in EU and with EU, thanks for your help	EU general and Member States	Member States
COMM other	My 17-year-old daughter (three months left to her 18th birthday) is in Greece now, where she wants to find a job. For this, she has a parental consent confirmed by a notary public and translated into Greek by the Embassy. However, Greek employers refuse to employ her, saying that she is a minor and it is not allowed to employ minor foreign citizens in Greece. Is this true?	EU general and Member States	Member States
COMM other	unfair real estate contract Hello there. I need a legal advice to find out if the slovenian law regarding real estate agencies is according to the european law. This is my case. I am selling my appartment in Slovenia through the real estate agency. In my contract with them it says they are entitled to provision in the amount of 2% from the total selling amount for the contract made (instead of for the estate sold as it would be fair). I n my case it happened the contract was made in front of notary but the appartment wasnt sold in the end due to unfulfillment on the side of the buyer. I obly got the first part of the payment which is avans amount. The agency claimed the complete amount of provision from me at the signing of the contract and now they dont want to refund it to me or at least partly refund it. Do they really have the right to claim it up in front before the appartment is really sold or contract completely fullfilled or should they wait until the end at least? In my opinion they should claim only 2% on the avans amount for now but not the whole amount. And what i am afraid of is that in the end they will even dare to claim another full provision amount on the new contract made with the new buyer. What shall i do? Claim the rest of my provision back and to prevent complications cancel my contract with them? Thank you so very much in advance for your answer and best regards!	EU general and Member States	Member States

DG	Enquiry	level 1	level 2
COMM other	we need to take action Dear ,i'have the knowledge that here in Belgium nothing works wright nbot the justice departement Nothing at all we need to solve this serieus problem, With kind regards ,	EU general and Member States	Member States
COMM other	As the Bulgarian Presidency began, i use this chance to ask the EU for help on a problem the BG institutions do not wish to resolve. It is about the true content of the word "river" - the Perlovska river. At present, the "river" is a collector for wastewater from the southern neighborhoods of the capital, which carries domestic-faecal water throughout the city. The responses from the institutions in Bulgaria, which should not allow such disgrace , are in the spirit of "come tomorrow, so that we will not return you today".	EU general and Member States	Member States
COMM other	assume and act Hello, the views of the State of France currently, the angry people, a president who makes the turtle, CRS who gauze or who taps on citizens who have the right to express their despair. How can you let it go without acting? What were you waiting for to react ?? A civil war ??	EU general and Member States	Member States
EAC	I'm looking for information about volunteering programs, (services in exchange for accommodation and food) to learn English outside the country (and if others collaborate with a social cause it would be perfect). I request information about the programs to which I can choose (I am 30 years old), their duration, how they are organized and if they are free, and, failing that, how much each one costs. I am looking to learn English in an experiential way and changing context. It could be from 2 or 3 months to a year. Many thanks. Comment that I have high level of oral and written French (French maternal family are regular stays in France), if it were interesting in order to facilitate my incorporation to a program (although my ultimate goal is to learn English, not French).	Education and Culture	Youth policy
EAC	I am from Australia and I am a BA student. I got the possibility to persent findings on my study at the European Academy Management next year in Portugal. Is there any funding possible for this (transport, accommodation, etc.)?	Education and Culture	Education and Training
EAC	I have applied for the Interrail tickets with DiscoverEU, but I cannot find my ID on the list of winners. Does it mean I have not received the tickets?	Education and Culture	Youth policy
EAC	My son was confirmed as eligible for Discover EU rail ticket and he received a code to contonue with the application. However, when puts in the code, the system says that he is too old for it, which he is not.	Education and Culture	Education and Training
EAC	University external assessment Dear Sir / Madam, My name is xxx and I'm a student at the Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering in Skopje. I am doing a research regarding the quality control at the universities in Europe. According to my research, every European university is required to do both external and internal evaluation. I have a few questions regarding this process: 1) Is there an official law in higher education that applies to all EU countries which requires from universities to do such evaluations? 2) How much does it cost to do an external evaluation? 3) Who has the right to perform external evaluation? Any information you can provide me would be greatly appreciated. Thank you in advance, Best regards,	Education and Culture	Education and Training
EAC	Recognition of diplomas Good morning. I am preparing an application for a public competition announced by the National Center for Scientific Research of the French State (CNRS). I have a degree and a research doctorate obtained in Italy from the University of Venice. I have available the relevant official certificates issued in Italian and English. The terms of the CNRS call include a certificate of equivalence of the French diplomas issued by the French ENIC-NARIC. I ask you whether this request is justified under European legislation or whether an official certificate translated into English by a public university of a Member State should still be accepted. Thank you. With best regards,	Education and Culture	Education and Training

DG	Enquiry	level 1	level 2
EAC	Scholarship Dear Madam/Sir, I am from Croatia but I study at the University of Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina). I applied for your programme to study at the University of Granada (Spain). I got accepted and I would like to know the amount of money that I will be getting on a monthly basis. All the best,	Education and Culture	Education and Training
EMPL	My partner work in Germany. I am in Bulgaria - i live and work here; I pay social contributions and I am socially covered here. I will go into 'maternity' soon. I wish to go to Germany (just for few months) - so can i be in 'maternity' under the Bulgarian system, but use German health care?	Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion	Moving and working in Europe
EMPL	On Monday I'm starting a new job in Switzerland for about 2-3 months for my Austrian employer. Do I have to pay taxes in Switzerland during this time? What rules will apply to me?	Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion	Moving and working in Europe
EMPL	I was just wondering if there is a reason why your website still hasn't been updated, since Croatian nationals are now allowed to work in Netherlands, Slovenia and GB, but as shown here below (copied from your web site) information is still showing restrictions towards Croatian nationals: Nationals of Croatia Your right to work as an employee in another EU country may be restricted by transitional arrangements until 30 June 2020. Most EU countries have dropped these restrictions. However, you may still need a work permit to work in these countries: Austria the Netherlands Slovenia United Kingdom Working in Croatia Your right to work as an employee in Croatia may be restricted by transitional arrangements. You may need a work permit if you are from one of these countries: Austria the Netherlands Slovenia United Kingdom	Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion	Moving and working in Europe
EPSO	I was asked to phone Europe Direct. An acquaintance of mine works as a lawyer in Hungary. He is 29 years old, studied law (summa cum laude), and speaks English at Level B2. He would like to be employed in the European Union and not necessarily in his profession. He wants to know what possibilities he has.	Careers / Competitions	Careers / Competitions
EPSO	What should I fill in at work experience when applying? Can you advise?	Careers / Competitions	Careers / Competitions
EPSO	Vacancy apply-Driver position? Dear Madame/Sir,I would like to work as a driver for the EU headquarters in Brussels or other locations. Is there any position exist under the organization? If yes, how should I apply for that? Thank you for your answer in advance.	Careers / Competitions	Careers / Competitions
EPSO	application Hello, I would like to apply to your organization. Can you please give me the address where I can send it. Thank you. Thank you.	Careers / Competitions	Careers / Competitions
HOME	My husband and I are wanting to travel to Europe in April, and I wanted to gather information regarding required documentation. We both have passports. Do we need visas or any special vaccinations? We are traveling for pleasure for approximately 3 weeks. Likely we will concentrate our time in France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy. We just don't want to get there and find out that we are not able to travel freely between countries as our itinerary is very flexible. I would appreciate any assistance you can provide.	Migration and Home affairs	Visa (except rights of spouses of EU citizen to reside in EU > DG JUST)
HOME	I am Venezuelan and I have a residence permit in Italy. Now, I want to go to work in Spain. What are the requirements?	Migration and Home affairs	Immigration

DG	Enquiry	level 1	level 2
HOME	Violation of EU rules and laws Hello. I have an information about violation of EU rules and laws by another person and want to tell you about this. Her name is xxx (Russian citizen). I have have an info that she faked her documents to get a Schengen visa in local French embassy (and maybe in other european embassy too, not sure). Please, check this information to be sure this person is not dangerous for EU. Best regards	Migration and Home affairs	Visa (except rights of spouses of EU citizen to reside in EU > DG JUST)
HOME	I am a Nigerian citizen living in Italy. My residence permit in Italy expired in November 2016. I have applied for a renewal but the documents have not yet been issued. Can you please give me the contacts of the dept of the commission that deals with this?	Migration and Home affairs	Immigration
JUST	Travel documents to go to UK. I am Congolese, my companion is German, I have a EU citizen family member card thanks to my children. Do I need a visa?	Justice and Consumers rights	EU family members and residence
JUST	GDPR Under GDPR laws, is it legal for companies to require me to send photo ID and proof of address to them when I am demanding they delete an account? I am sending the deletion request from the email that is associated with the account, so they know the request is coming from the account holder. Thank you.	Justice and Consumers rights	Data protection
JUST	COMPENSATION FROM INSURANCE COMPANY A vehicle caused damage to my motorbike in June 2017. The driver of the car took over the full responsibility for the accident and the damage estimate was 500E. Without explanation, the insurance company proposed as a blackmail a 250E compensation and if I did not accept it, they suggested that I appeal to the courts. Since the cost of the appeal is far greater than the cost of the damage and because my case is simply a matter of resolving without any doubts or disagreements, I have appealed to the relevant services (I imagine European laws) and specifically to the Bank of Greece at the Ministry of Development and to the Consumer Ombudsman. Because the answers I received from the above services seemed to me that they were rather serving the interests of the Insurance Company and did not give the right solution to my simple and pure problem, as they ought, I denounced their behavior to the Inspectors of Public Administration under complaint number xxx. I have not yet received a reply. So I would like to ask what office of the European Union (as a citizen) I can address to find my right and to be compensated as the international laws and rules mention. It is not known to me, other inhabitants from Netherlands and Germany in similar accidents to be repaid in 10 days and in Greece with the treatment we have from the extortionist behavior of the ins. companies to waste time and money in court	Justice and Consumers rights	Consumer policy
JUST	Dear Sir/Madam I would like to know if there is any valid legal reason why an valid Estonian ID card holder with Dutch citizenship would be denied boarding a within Europe flight? The land of departure, destination, issuer of the ID card and citizenship (Latvia, Germany, Estonia, the Netherlands) are all part of the European Union and the Schengen. Yours sincerely,	Justice and Consumers rights	Free movement of persons
MOVE	Our (mine and my husband) luggage (two bags) was lost during the flight from Warsaw to Toronto. We have already make a complain to the airline but we have not got any reply. We sent the complain more than 30 days ago. What we can do right now? Is there any institution we can appeal to? Best regards	Mobility and Transport DG MOVE	Passenger rights
MOVE	My flight that was scheduled for July 8th at 15:00 was cancelled, after having to wait until 23:00. My understanding is that in such case there is a compensation due but I have not been provided with any information on what I should do next in order to receive the compensation. The reason I am reaching out to you is if you can give me guidance what steps I should take in this case? Thank you!	Mobility and Transport DG MOVE	Passenger rights
MOVE	Due to flight delay of 2 and a half hours we lost train that was purchased in advanced and airline refuses to cover it. We supposed to come at 4.50 am and we came in 7.10 am (our train was at 7 am). Airline didn't inform us that flight will be delayed. After we checked in staff informed us that plain is about to go from the Spain as we spoke (the same one that should be in Belgrade in that time). We didn't receive any explanation why our flight is delayed and received 2 sandwiches and one drink for two tickets as a 'refreshment'.	Mobility and Transport DG MOVE	Passenger rights

DG	Enquiry	level 1	level 2
MOVE	Our flight from Prague to Frankfurt was delayed in departure for 40 minutes. Because of that, we were late in Frankfurt and I did not make my connecting flight for Zagreb. I had to stay over night in Frankfurt. I was offered a voucher for a hotel, dinner and breakfast. Due to this incident, I was not able to go to work on the next day (11 Dec). I had very important meeting. I took a day off, which is going to be deducted from my salary. Can I get a compensation for this delay? Can I get my money back for a ticket?	Mobility and Transport DG MOVE	Passenger rights

Appendix F Data collection review

Indicator	Positive aspects	Criticalities	Suggestions/ recommendations
Mandatory data collected when filling the contact form			
Economic categories	The existence of the data and the availability over time	Confusing categories, not reflective of the reality. Available only for written enquiries.	Change for a clearly defined categories – ensuring that they are mutually exclusive.
Nationality	Useful in analysing the user profile and mobility	None	Possible ulterior breakdown for third countries
Residency	Useful in analysing the user profile and mobility	None	Possible ulterior breakdown for third countries
Data collected by the EDCC team			
Classification of enquiry topic (levels 1-4)	Detailed classification	It does not represent everything what DGs are doing	Possible review of the classification in order to cover all DGs' activities
Hot Topic classification	Important for prioritising and escalating	Not consistent over time	Possible backward review of the classification
Survey data			
Survey responses	Possibility to link the survey responses to the enquiries received by web through the ID number	It is not possible to link the survey responses to the enquiries received by phone call	Harmonise the ID number of the survey responses received by phone call with their respective enquiries
Potential additional indicators to consider			

As to avoid that prospective users are overburdened with profiling questions, before accessing the service there would be benefit in adding to the survey questions the following aspects:

- **Private/Professional user.** This mandatory indication would enable a better understanding about the users

- **Purpose of the enquiry.** Provide a limited number of categories. Again, this is useful to know the user better and to filter questions.

- **Age/age range.** This is an important indication also to decide in the longer run if the service needs/benefits from adaptation. It clarifies which are group uses predominantly the phone/mail service. It is preferably by age range since it requires a much smaller space and no long dropdown in the form and it is less hassle for the user.

- **Gender.** Again, it provides a better understanding about the user.

Additional indicators should be categorical and thus only require a ticking. To ask more personal information about the user makes only sense if this data is also used by the services, such as tailoring the EDCC services for adapting processes (e.g. automatic escalation if field xyz is ticked), or using profiles and questions users have to use for communication activities or other activities of the services.

To support their effective implementation, reviewing how the user satisfaction survey is presented/promoted in the emails would be beneficial.

Appendix G Select benchmarks from the contact centre industry

G.1 Cost benchmarks

Costs per contact: Estimated cost per inbound call / email / web chat, by region - covering Europe (UK excluded).

Source: Contact Babel, 2018 The European Contact Centre, Decision-Makers' Guide

Region	Average	Phone	Email	Web chat
CE Europe	Mean	€2.21	€2.23	€2.54
	Median	€1.20	€1.75	€1.48
Nordics	Mean	€4.00	€1.75	€2.90
	Median	€3.50	€1.67	€2.50
W Europe	Mean	€5.81	€4.30	€3.44
	Median	€4.50	€4.50	€3.10
UK	Mean	€4.48	€4.14	€3.64
	Median	€3.84	€4.07	€3.08
US	Mean	€4.93	€3.13	€2.71
	Median	€3.93	€2.50	€2.28

G.2 Staff attrition

Staff attrition rates, by contact centre size

Source: Contact Babel, 2018 The European Contact Centre, Decision-Makers' Guide

Mean and median agent attrition by contact centre size
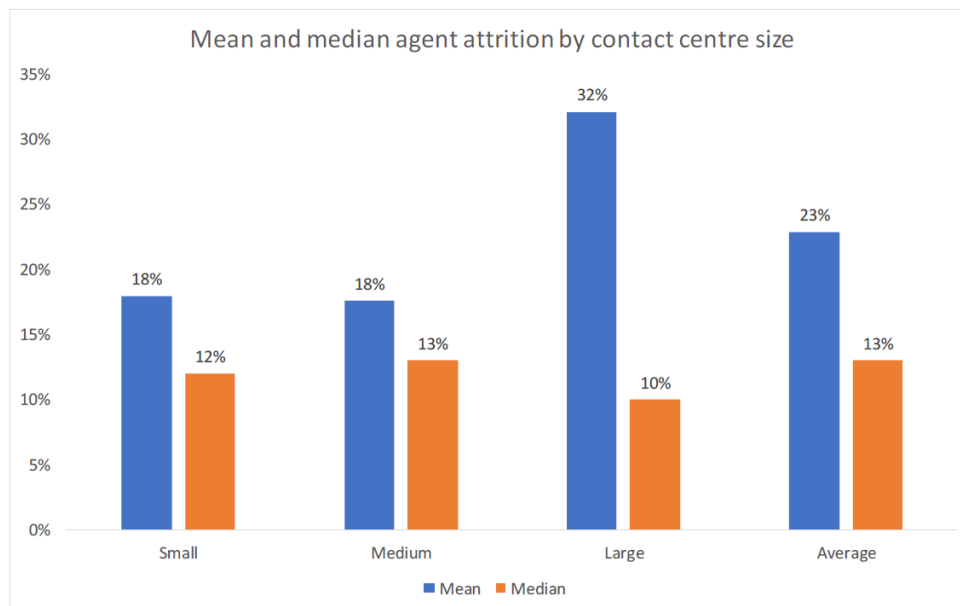
G.3   Average call duration

Covering private sector contact centres – services (telemarketing not included)

Source: Contact Babel, 2018 The European Contact Centre, Decision-Makers' Guide

Vertical market	CE Europe	Nordics	W Europe
Inhouse	4m 19s	4m 38s	5m 42s
Outsourcing & Telemarketing	4m 32s	5m	4m 22s
Average	**4m 24s**	**4m 52s**	**5m 11s**

G.4   Performance indicators

G.4.1   Call abandonment rate mean and medians

Source: Contact Babel, 2018 The European Contact Centre, Decision-Makers' Guide

Region	Call abandonment rate (mean)	Call abandonment rate (median)
CE Europe	10.0%	9.0%
Nordics	9.4%	9.0%
W Europe	4.8%	4.0%
UK	*5.6%*	*4.7%*

G.4.2   Average speed to answer – in seconds

Source: Contact Babel, 2018 The European Contact Centre, Decision-Makers' Guide

By market (average meaning average number of seconds to reply)

Vertical market	CE Europe	Nordics	W Europe	*UK*
Inhouse	15	55	38	*37*
Outsourcing & Telemarketing	34	60	28	*23*
Average	**22**	**58**	**34**	**35**

By size (average meaning average number of seconds to reply)

Contact centre size	CE Europe	Nordics	W Europe	UK
Small (<51 seats)	23	30	44	28
Medium (51-200 seats)	22	59	25	39
Large (>200 seats)	18	108	28	41
Average	**22**	**58**	**34**	**35**

G.4.3 Median and mean first contact resolution rates

Source: Contact Babel, 2018 The European Contact Centre, Decision-Makers' Guide

Average	CE Europe	Nordics	W Europe	UK
Median	80%	82%	79%	81%
Mean	85%	82%	76%	73%

Appendix H Potential HR implications of a decentralised EDCC

The below table presents the data on which potential cost savings for back offices was estimated.

DG/ EC service	Estimated HR needs if fully decentralised (additional to current resource)	Estimate used for calculation	Number of enquiries dealt with by the EDCC on behalf of the back office (not escalated) – baseline: 2018
TRADE	NA	NA	NA
EAC	3-4 FTE	3.5	8462
EEAS	3-4 FTE	3.5	1486
EMPL	At least 3 FTE	3.5	7012
INEA	On average 10-15 minutes per answer.	3.18	7811
JUST	NA	NA	NA
NEAR	At least twice the time, especially if we take into consideration the translation needs (currently using 0.2)	0.5	317
REGIO	1.5 FTE	1.5	570
TAXUD	5 FTE	5	3685
MOVE	NA	NA	NA
YEA	Wouldn't make a difference	0	116
AGRI	1 FTE	1	845
EPSO	NA	NA	NA
REA	NA	NA	NA
COMM	NA	NA	NA
Home	NA	NA	NA
Total		21.7	30304.0
Share of total enquiries dealt with by EDCC			32%
		FTE necessary	
At 100% enquiries treated by EDCC (2018)		**67.20**	93,942

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