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OF THE EVALUATION

of the Europe Direct Information Centres (2013-2017)

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Glossary

<i>Term or acronym</i>	<i>Meaning or definition</i>
CoR	Committee of the regions
DG	Directorate-General
EC	European Commission
EDCC	Europe Direct Contact Centre
EDIC	Europe Direct Information Centre
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EP	European Parliament
EPIO	European Parliament Information Office
EU	European Union
HQ	Headquarters

1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose and scope

The EC network of Europe Direct Information Centres (EDICs) spread out across the EU is intended to contribute to the wider EU institutional goals of enhanced communication with citizens, with the final objective of increasing people's awareness and understanding of the EU.

As per the 2015 Management Plan of DG Communication, a mid-term evaluation of the 2013-2017 EDIC network (third generation) had to be launched in 2015. The conclusions and recommendations provided a valuable contribution towards designing the call for proposals to select the 2018-2020 generation of EDICs. In accordance with the evaluation roadmap, the overall objective of the evaluation was to assess the performance of the EDIC network, identify areas of concern, produce conclusions and recommend course corrections.

The evaluation was intended to help the EC increase the network's usefulness for both citizens and the European institutions through designing an enhanced future generation of EDICs. The evaluation was carried out in 2016 by an independent evaluation team from Coffey & Deloitte. The evaluation team was supported by a Steering Group¹. The contractor's final report (hereinafter referred to as "the Final report") compiled by the evaluation team can be accessed as a separate document. The third generation of EDICs was assessed in compliance with five mandatory criteria as set out in the Better Regulation guidelines, namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE INTERVENTION

Baseline and points of comparison

The EDIC network is the local face of the Commission's strategy for dialogue with citizens. Launched in 2005, it gathers 510 centres² spread out in all the EU Member States. Unlike other information networks of the Commission, which address specific target groups, EDICs serves all audiences, having a citizen-centred approach to communication.

EDICs are the EC extended outreach channels in the Member States, promoting dialogue on EU issues and co-operating with other information networks and contact points. The centres' mission is two-fold:

¹ The Steering Group comprised members of DG Communication HQ, DG Internal market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, the Secretariat-General and EC Representations.

² 2013-2017 generation – figure at 23/06/2017. 2009-2012 generation - 517 centres. 2005-2008 generation –468 centres.

- To inform European citizens at local and regional level. They are a key partner of the "one-stop-shop" concept as a first entry point to the European Union for citizens, providing information about the EU, referring them to [Your Europe](#) or to specialised information sources and signposting to other services and networks. They give information, advice, assistance and answers to questions about the EU, and in particular about the rights of EU citizens, the EU's priorities, legislation, policies, programmes and funding opportunities.
- To promote participatory citizenship through various communication tools (website, social media, publications, etc.) and by interacting with local and regional stakeholders, multipliers and media. They stimulate debate through the organisation of conferences and events and channel citizens' feedback to the EU.

EDICs are operated by host organisations which are proven public or private bodies with a public-service mission, selected through open calls for proposals managed by the EC Representations. Upon completion of the call for proposals, the EC Representations sign a Framework Partnership Agreement with the selected EDIC host structures. By signing this agreement, the host structure commits to complying with the mission and role of an EDIC.

For each year, a Specific Agreement is signed between the host structure and the EC Representation, formalising the award of the action grant for the year in question. This agreement is signed upon acceptance by the EC Representation of the annual action programme and the related estimated budget submitted by the host structure³.

EDIC activities

Being an entry point to the European Union, EDICs provide citizens with general information, assistance and answers to questions about EU's legislation, policies, and programmes. Advising and providing information tailored to people's needs and engaging through events constitute a major part of the EDICs' daily work.

Main stakeholders and their roles

European Commission

- *DG Communication – Headquarters (HQ)*: Provides network members with information and communication products, manages the EDIC intranet, offers central trainings to equip EDICs, ensures promotion of the network and provides grant management support to Network correspondents;
- *EC Representations*: Handle issues concerning management and operations of the EDIC network through the Network correspondents. The latter provide guidance on the EDIC annual action plans, assist with grants issues, act as an

³ The host structure submits a request for payment of the balance within sixty days following the end of the reporting period. This request is accompanied by the final report on the implementation of the action. The approval of the report is a condition for the payment of the grant. If the activity report shows that the action has only partially been implemented, or has not been implemented at all, the EC Representation is entitled to recover the totality or a proportional share of the grant. The lump sum system put in place covers a number of mandatory and free-choice modules (activities) to be implemented by the host structures. Each module corresponds to a fixed amount of money. The lump sum system is based on a modular approach. The lump sums can be reached by various combinations between the proposed modules, provided the applicant respects the conditions stipulated in each specific module

interface between DG Communication HQ and EDICs and provide training at national level.

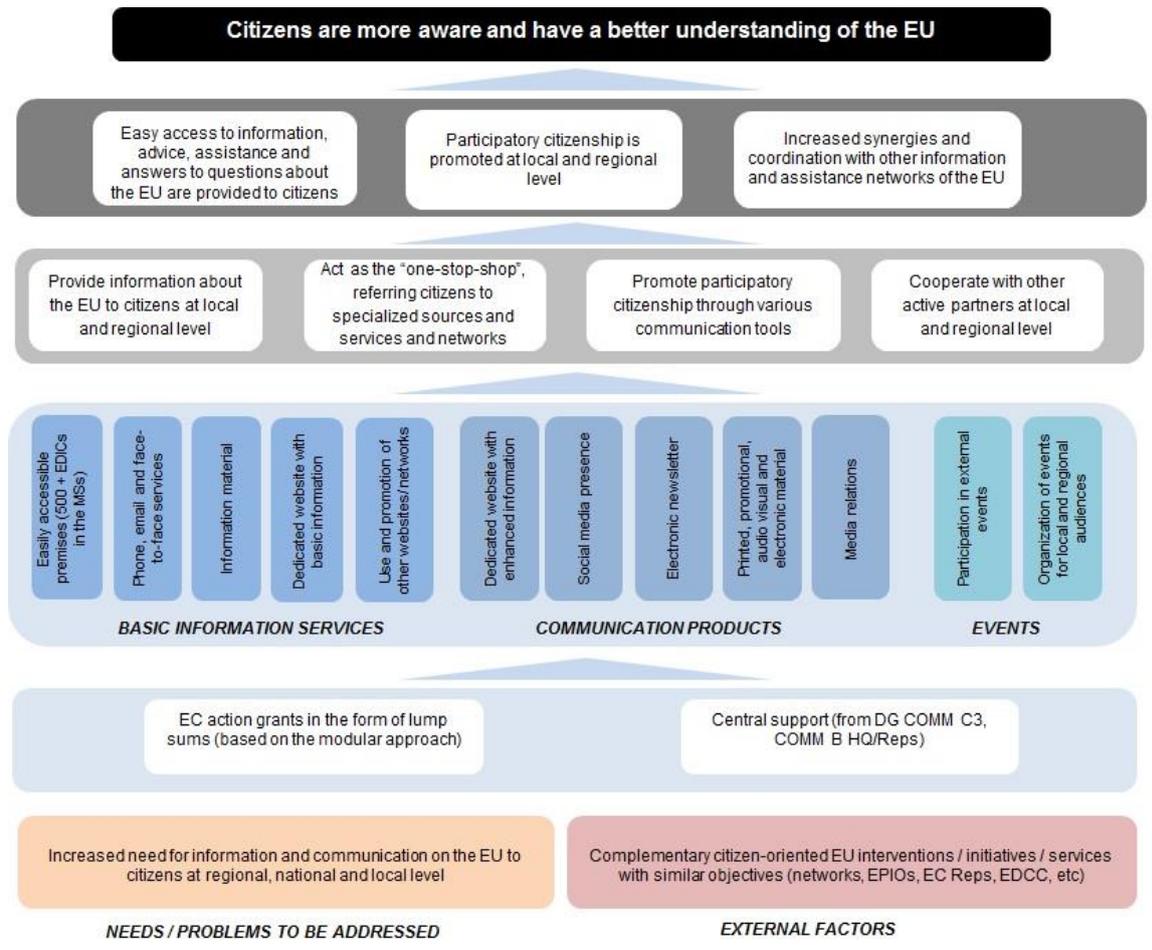
Other EU institutions:

- *European Parliament (EP)* – Cooperation between the European Commission and EP concerning the network was made official through the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding on 3 July 2012. A growing number of EDICs engage on common projects with the European Parliament Information Offices (EPIO) in the Member States. EPIO members sit in the committees set up by the EC Representations to evaluate proposals from entities to applying to become an EDIC in response to a call for proposals;
- *Committee of the Regions (CoR)* – Committee members are often involved in the EDIC trainings and annual meetings, as much as in EDIC events;
- *European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)* – As in the case of the Committee of the regions, committee members are often involved in the EDIC trainings and annual meetings, as much as in EDIC events.

EDIC Host structures and EDIC managers:

- Host structures put at EDIC disposal physical space, infrastructure and equipment and propose the EDIC managers to run the centres. The host structures

Fig 1: EDIC intervention logic (*Source: Final report*)



Previous evaluations

In the previous two evaluations, there were two overarching questions relating to compliance with the mission (relevance and effectiveness) and management systems and processes (effectiveness and efficiency).

- ➔ Both evaluations recommended reduction of the administrative burden resulting from the financial system in place. In concrete terms, the lump system based on real costs with the first generation was thought to be causing excessive administrative burden. The Commission switched, therefore, in the second generation to a system based on a lump sum approach conditioning payments on performance/ rate of implementation of the action plan, not expenditure. Beneficiaries were obliged to ensure 50% of co-financing. Control of the actions focused on operational implementation and not on financial aspects.
- ➔ Closer relations with the institutions could be established (e.g. EP, CoR, Council).
- ➔ Cooperation with other networks could be encouraged to ensure complementarities with other EC networks and services, effective resource allocation and avoiding of overlapping services.
- ➔ Geographic overlaps (with more than one EDIC claiming to cover at least part of another's catchment area).
- ➔ Intra-service cooperation could be strengthened.
- ➔ EC Representations should be resourced appropriately with policy and administrative staff as corresponding staffing could vary across the EC Representations.
- ➔ Both evaluations recommended putting more emphasis on outreach than playing a reactive role.
- ➔ The previous evaluations had identified a high degree of targeting of schools and students.
- ➔ The rigid financial climate at the time of the second evaluation, coupled with the requirement to put up 50% of co-financing, led the evaluators to conclude that the financial system should feature more flexibility. Both evaluations recommended reduction of the administrative burden resulting from the financial system in place. In concrete terms, the lump system based on real costs with the first generation was thought to be causing excessive administrative burden.
- ➔ The Commission should associate other DGs as sources of additional funding for EDICs.
- ➔ There are benefits to extending the lifecycle of the network from 4 to 5 years per contractual period.

3. IMPLEMENTATION / STATE OF PLAY

Description of the situation

The 2013 – 2017 generation follows the first (2005 – 2008) and second generation (2009 – 2012).

Reduction of the administrative burden

Some of the main changes implemented in the third EDIC generation concerned inter alia, the reshuffling of modules including the possibility to run the EDICs with reduced opening hours, a significant alleviation of the administrative burden for EC Representation staff and EDICs, including abolishment of the requirement to co-finance 50% of the expenditures.

The 2013 - 2017 generation features two categories of lump sums covering two groups of countries; countries with a standard lump sum (100%) and countries with adapted lump sum (80% of the standard lump sum). Host structures from the "standard lump sum countries" can request a grant per year of between EUR 15 000 and 25 000. Host structures from the "adapted lump sum countries" can request between EUR 12 000 and 20 000 per year. The lump sum system put in place covers a number of mandatory and free-choice modules (activities) to be implemented by the host structures. Each module corresponds to a fixed amount of money. An adapted lump sum (80% of the lump sum) is applied in countries where the price level is less than 80% of the average EU price level. Co-financing on the part of the host structures and the ensuing non-profit rule has been factored in the design of the lump sums. The level of co-financing can vary depending on the country and the host structure and is not explicitly checked by the EC.

Closer relations with the EU institutions

With the third generation the EP and CoR are being more closely involved in the life of the network. Very good examples of this involvement concern the specific trainings and the annual general meetings offered to the network where EP and CoR are regularly participating as speakers. As part of the efforts to deliver on the evaluation conclusions, the Commission has consistently ensured that representatives of the EPIO participate as observers in the committees in charge of assessing new EDIC applications.

Cooperation with other EU networks

EDICs promote the services of other EU networks and meet with them on a consistent basis. EDICs work most closely with Erasmus+, EURES and the EPIO, followed by Eurodesks and the European Enterprise Network. This is consistent with the EDICs' focus on youth and funding opportunities, and their mandate to work with EPIOs. Where EDICs are cooperating with EPIOs and other networks, this is fruitful.

Geographic overlaps

While in the previous generations more than one EDIC were claiming to cover at least part of another's catchment area, this is no longer an issue in the third generation.

Intra-service cooperation

A significant effort has been made to involve other DGs in making presentations at EDIC trainings and annual meetings. Adding provision to the agreements allowing other DGs to "use" EDICs for specific communication activities and promoting the network right before the inauguration of each new generation are part of the efforts to raise the profile of the network.

Staffing at EC Representations

While there is a need to dedicate adequate resources to managing the EDIC network, the level of commitment of EC Representation staff in charge of EDICs varies across the EC Representations. This has to do with a combination of reasons, from the increasing workload of EC Representation staff, through priorities' focus as determined by the Heads of EC Representations to reduced HR capacities. EC Representations need to juggle with scores of priority requests on urgent policy files while relying on scarce resources to meet these requests. In most cases, network correspondents need to combine their role of managing the national EDIC network with a multitude of other tasks. This issue is unlikely to be resolved over time given the growing trend of staff reduction.

Outreach

In response to the call for increased focus, the Commission prompted the 2013-2017 generation to put special emphasis on the organisation of events.

Target groups

The previous evaluations had identified a high degree of targeting of schools and students. EC Representations can only make a selection from a given number of proposals complying with all the criteria laid down in the open call. EC Representations are selecting those candidates who manage to prove that their actions will contribute to raising awareness about the EU, albeit focusing on a very specific target group. It should also be borne in mind that while some EDICs may be tailoring their events to specific audiences, the EDIC offices are open to people from all age and socio-economic groups.

Involvement of other DGs

The Commission made it possible for other DGs to involve EDICs in specific communication campaigns based on restricted calls.

Extension of the life cycle

The call for extension of the network life from 4 to 5 years was implemented by the Commission. The generation launched in 2012 was the first one to benefit from a 5-year period of operations.

Legal basis

- *European Commission Decision C(2012) 4158 final of 21.6.2012 concerning the anticipated adoption of the Annual Work Programme in the field of communication for 2013 regarding grants for financing the host structures of the Europe Direct Information Centres across the European Union for the period 2013-2017⁴;*

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/pdf/grants/c-2012-4158_en.pdf

- *European Commission Decision C(2012) 9486 final of 18 December 2012 concerning the adoption of the 2013 work programme in the field of Communication, serving as a financing decision for the election of EDIC host structures for the period 2013-2017*⁵;
- *European Commission Decision of 20.8.2014 modifying European Commission Decision C(2013) 8459 concerning the adoption of the 2014 work programme in the field of Communication, serving as a financing decision (regional call for proposals)*⁶.

Budget

The annual budget for EDIC grants in 2016 amounts to EUR 12 184 000 in commitment appropriations on DG Communication budget line 16.030103 (Information Outlets).⁷

The third EDIC generation gathers 510 centres spread out in all Member States⁸. A short list of EDICs' achievements⁹ is provided hereafter:

- 2008 – EDICs organised some 4 400 events and dealt with some 496 000 email requests and phone calls;
- 2012 – EDICs organised some 8 247 events and dealt with some 1 036 953 email requests, visits and phone calls;
- 2016 – EDICs organised some 10 276 events reaching some 1 500 000 people and dealt with some 310 732 emails and phone calls.

4. METHOD

Short description of methodology

Design and planning

Before launching the main data collection, an in-depth review of available documentation and data was carried out. The evaluation team conducted a round of interviews with EC staff directly involved in managing the network and / or those with other insights and experience, including staff of the EP. Using this information, the evaluation team refined the initial evaluation questions set and designed the questionnaires and discussion guides that would be used for the data collection.

The evaluation combined analysis of the experience and knowledge of key stakeholders: EDIC Managers and host structures, Network correspondents and other EC Representation staff, DG Communication, EPIO staff, EP, Office of Publications, other DG services, and finally citizens, both users and those who have not used EDIC services.

⁵http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/contracts-and-grants/annual_work_programme/awp/c-2012-9486-decision-workprogramme2013_en.pdf

⁶http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/contracts-and-grants/annual_work_programme/awp/c-2014-5856-work-programme-2014-amended2_en.pdf

⁷ For detailed information on the annual budget for previous years, please see Eur-Lex: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/budget/www/index-en.htm>

⁸ https://europa.eu/european-union/contact/meet-us_en

⁹ Figures from the Annual activity reports compiled on the basis of data provided by EDICs

The methodology combined both qualitative data to generate insights and quantitative data to confirm the significance of these insights and their relevance to the EDIC network. The primary research was combined with the study of existing statistics regarding citizens' use of EDICs and the administrative framework, which governs the organisation and set up of the network.

The evaluation method comprised the following¹⁰:

- *Survey of Network correspondents in all Member States*: this on-line survey was launched on 11 March 2016 and remained on-line until 1 April 2016. It was completed by all Network correspondents;
- *Survey of EDIC management staff*: this survey was completed in August 2016 - a total of 486 completed questionnaires were received in 2016 from a total possible number of 517 EDICs. This represents a response rate of 94%; this gives a high level of confidence in the validity of the results and their representativeness of the whole EDIC network;
- *Country visits to 7 Member States*: Visits to Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Poland and Sweden were carried out in 2016. This allowed a first-hand view of how the EDICs were working in practice and discussions with key EC Representations and European Parliament Information Office staff;
- *Online focus groups with citizens (users and non-users)¹¹*: A series of mainly online focus groups (complemented by 1 face-to-face group) and some additional feedback by email using the same discussion guide were completed in 2016;
- *Benchmarking exercise* : A review of 15 other EU networks (national contact points and portals to full networks) to consider management and financing approaches was completed in 2016;
- *Field work ("mystery shopping") in the Netherlands and Portugal*: The field work included phone, email and interview interactions. Websites and social media were also reviewed. The work took place in 2016;
- *Real costs exercise*: In 2016 the EC requested that host structures provide data to assess the total costs incurred by the host structures for providing EDIC services in 2015. 429 host structures replied to an online questionnaire designed for this purpose. The response rate was above the 30% minimum response threshold required to confirm the legitimacy of the data;
- *Additional views from Heads of EC Representation and Heads of Regional Representations* were collected in 2016 by DG Communication HQ to test

¹⁰ For more details, see synopsis report-Annex 2

¹¹ Users were recruited with help from EDICs. Non-users were recruited via a specialist recruitment company.

responses to the key findings that were identified at the interim phase of the evaluation;

- *Open public consultation:* The evaluation team assisted with the design of the questions that were included in the survey. The survey was launched on-line on 10 February 2016 and was available until 4 May 2016.

Limitations and robustness of findings

It must be noted that the evaluation used an analytical methodology that includes multiple different data collection instruments designed by experienced evaluators to minimise bias. In addition, the robustness of the findings was ensured through the cross-validation of the data from the different sources and instruments. Conclusions were drawn based on systematic triangulation of evidence from various data sources.

One of the main limitations of the mid-term evaluation concerns its timing: it is taking place only 2.5 years after the beginning of the third generation. This period is too short for comprehensive results and wider impacts to emerge.

Also, limitations include issues related to measurability of outcome and impact. Most of the EDICs' result indicators focus on classical input/output – number of publications, events, interactions – but not on results and impact, in particular indicators to track progress on attitude shifts. It is not possible to quantify the results achieved by EDICs beyond the number of interactions conducted.

In the focus groups, users who participated in the groups were selected with the help of EDICs. Therefore, there is some inherent bias in their responses, meaning that they are potentially positive stakeholders.

The afore-mentioned limitations led the evaluators to rely on a wide range of data collection tools. The approach was complemented by counterfactual elements involving surveys on respondents who have never used EDIC services, as much as surveys with interested parties not directly involved in the EDICs' management, e.g. EPIO, and EP staff.

In the case of the open public consultation the evaluators observed that circa 20% of respondents were themselves working for EDICs. 12% of respondents were aged under 25 - the group that EDICs consider as their main target group.

The methodology of the open public consultation enabled any individual to answer, whether EU citizen or not, and applied no sampling criteria. Therefore, the sample cannot be considered as representative of EU citizens or of EDIC users and cannot be of use to determine levels of awareness or use of the EDIC network. The channels by which the open public consultation was promoted might have induced an over-representation of individuals specifically interested in EU issues and topics, and therefore are not representative of EU citizens in general. There again the data collected cannot be used to identify the information needs and sources of EU citizens. The above limitations have made it impossible to propose measures to reduce bias.

5. ANALYSIS AND ANSWERS TO THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The implementation of the third generation of EDICs was assessed around the five evaluation criteria required by the Better Regulation guidelines, i.e. namely effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU-added value. The below sections, including findings and conclusions reflect the analysis made by the contractor.

Relevance: consideration of the extent to which the objectives still meet current needs and problems, both within the EC and EP and of citizens.

Effectiveness: analysis of progress towards achieving the objectives set for EDICs and the identification of factors that drive or hinder progress which are linked or not to the EDICs.

Efficiency: focus on the extent to which the benefits associated with running the EDIC network can be considered to justify the costs and whether there are savings or changes that can be made to the way, or amount, of funding allocated. Particular focus has been considered in relation with the allocation of the lump sum payment to EDICs.

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

EU added-value: focus on the extent to which the value generated by the EDIC network is additional to the value that would have resulted from an intervention initiated at regional and local level.

The contractor developed a number of evaluation questions (Annex 4), which aimed to guide his analysis of the performance of EDICs, the EDIC network and the management systems in place.

Relevance – sections 4, 5.1 and 5.2 of the Final report

External needs relate to ways that EDICs can feed into and support citizens' lives and internal needs relate to ways that EDICs can feed into and support the work of EC staff and complement other EC networks.

Relevance to the needs of citizens and external stakeholders

The EDIC mission outlines two key objectives for the network:

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

Overall, EDICs remain relevant to external stakeholders. Nevertheless, the objectives and activities of EDICs correspond to the needs of citizens and other external stakeholders to a limited extent. EDICs are limited by the amount of resources that they receive, but also because there is a lack of clarity with regard to whose needs EDICs are meeting. The number of citizens who receive the information provided is relatively low compared, for example, to the population of a particular region or area. This is confirmed by the typically low numbers of requests for information by telephone and email.

EDICs interact mostly with young people and teachers. According to interviewed EDIC Managers, all EDICs put a heavy emphasis on young people as a target group and on outreach activities that target youth, from kindergartens through to universities, but generally with the strongest focus being on schoolchildren. Young people are seen as a target group in their own right, who are easier to engage with, and who can also act as multipliers for reaching the older generation. Young people are also seen as ‘soft’ targets because it is perceived that they are more open to information about the EU and are less likely to have pre-set ideas.

Although the EDIC mission and objectives do not prioritise target groups, EDICs find it difficult to meet the needs of and engage with the wider population. Additionally, it has proven to be difficult for EDICs to reach citizens who are not engaged in EU affairs. During the interviews with EDIC managers the evaluators reported that the managers find it challenging to engage with citizens in an increasingly Eurosceptic environment and focus beyond the Europhile / informed audience. This is where there is a great need for information and engagement.

In terms of the local media and press, EDIC have found that it is a very challenging area which requires personal networks, a (very) strong political or local news angle – and financial investment. It is very difficult to raise the media's interest in the EU in general (other than negatively) and EDIC activities in particular. This is particularly true in large cities. The extent to which EDICs put effort into obtaining media coverage varies, with some organising relevant trips for journalists or weekly radio or TV programmes, and others being less proactive.

EDIC information provision is also limited in scope. Host structures are required to make available one full-time equivalent member of staff. There are limits to what one person can achieve.

With the above in mind, it is understandable that those citizens that are easiest to reach are those that are in a formal learning phase of their life and the teachers who support this phase, those who already know about the EU, and citizens who could benefit directly and financially from the EU, for example via a grant.

It seems that overall, EDICs need to increase their visibility beyond their main target groups of youth and teachers, although it appears that specific local groups (i.e. school teachers) may be aware of certain EDICs, this does not necessarily mean that there is a wide awareness of EDICs.

Relevance to the needs of internal (institutional) audiences

This question examines the extent to which it is possible to define that the EDIC network does, or could help, the EU institutions to achieve their goals.

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

- To inform European citizens at the local and regional level;
- To promote participatory citizenship through various communication tools, and by interacting with local and regional stakeholders, multipliers and media.

Overall, both key aspects of the EDICs' mission are highly relevant. EDICs are seen as having a critical role by acting as the local extensions of the Commission. EDICs play a very important role in terms of outreach, and directly help the Representations to fulfil their mission. EDICs enable the EU to reach citizens at a local and regional level, in a way that the EC Representations and the Commission would not be able to; however, the problem of visibility is widely recognised.

The EDIC network activities correspond to both target group and institutional needs to a certain extent. EDICs offer local knowledge and contacts, opportunities for direct contacts with citizens and other stakeholders, and act as conduits for EU information within the Member States. Although EDICs are not formally part of the institutions, a lot of their strength and understanding of the local level comes from the fact that EDIC Managers are themselves citizens who are able to interpret the EU in a way that locals can relate to. Yet the communication, listening and intelligence potential are not fully harnessed because there are no systematic procedures in place to allow the efficient take up of EDIC feedback by the institutions. In addition, the EDIC network is not reported to be very well known inside the institutions.

The EDIC network plays an important role in relaying EPIO messages locally, as well providing contacts to EPIOs, organising venues for events and providing other local support. Synergies are exploited through joint participation in radio and TV shows, thereby giving the EU as a whole a greater say in public debates, as well as organizing events attended by MEPs.

There is some caution on the part of EDICs, however, as they fear being drawn into the party-political positions of their local MEPs. The extent of cooperation with local MEPs is highly variable.

In regards to the diversity and autonomy of EDICs and their host structures, the differences between the EDICs were seen as positive because their local experience means that they are best placed on how to run an EDIC in that particular region, they know the needs of their target audiences and can therefore decide which topics to include in order keeping citizens engaged. On the other hand, this heterogeneity also makes it difficult for the EDICs to find a common strategy.

An important factor which impacts the need for EDICs to communicate EU topics is the size of the Member State. The importance of EDICs in communicating EU topics

increases proportionally with the size of the Member State, because the EC Representations find it difficult to cover the wide geographic spread of larger Member States. It appears that the larger a Member State is, the more the EC Representations rely on the EDICs to “get the message out” to citizens via local media outlets. In larger Member States, primary target groups tend to be more clearly defined with the EC Representations typically focusing their attention on decision makers (at all levels of government), whereas EDICs engage in direct communication with citizens at the local level (including via the local / regional media). By contrast, in smaller Member States, EC Representations tend to be more actively involved in regional and local outreach activities, often working in tandem with EDICs on the ground. As a result, the added value to the EC Representations is greatest in larger countries given the difficulties to get the message out.

Relevance of network coverage

Overall, the geographic spread of the EDIC network has benefits which correspond to both target audiences and institutional needs. Internal audiences such as the EC Representations and EPIOs greatly benefit from this geographic spread, as it allows them to reach citizens at a local level, something which they would not be able to do otherwise. EDICs can provide local expertise to the EU and act as intermediaries between policy makers and citizens. This added value is greatest in the larger Member States, where EC Representations find it more difficult cover the wide geographic spread. Through the EDICs the EU institutions have the local presence and face-to-face contact in every EU Member State. They also have a local contact point to support HQ activities and a source of intelligence on local issues. Yet the communication, listening and intelligence potential is not yet fully harnessed because there are no systematic procedures in place to allow the efficient take up of EDIC feedback by the institutions. In addition, the EDIC network is not reported to be very well known inside the institutions.

To conclude, EDICs are fulfilling their mission when it comes to acting as a first point of contact on the EU for citizens at local level. They are, however, constrained in fulfilling thoroughly their mission by their lack of visibility.

The objectives and activities of EDICs correspond to the needs of citizens and other external stakeholders to a limited extent. The EDIC network is relevant to the EU institutions, but it could be more useful.

And although the geographic spread of the EDIC network corresponds to both citizens' and institutional needs it is aggravated by the fact that EDICs' feedback potential is not fully utilised.

Effectiveness – sections 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 inclusive of the Final report
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EDICs are effective when it comes to acting as a first point of contact on the EU for citizens at local level. They are an effective entry point to the EU for citizens, offering general EU information, advice and assistance, referring to more specialised information sources, raising awareness and promoting participatory citizenship through bottom-up information projects. Equally, EDICs are an effective outreach point for the EU,

channelling citizens' feedback, cooperating with other information networks and assisting EC Representations with their local activities. Beyond being a first point of contact, EDICs, when contacted, are providing a type of personalised advice and recipients are very grateful for the help.

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

Despite this, EDICs are significantly constrained in fulfilling their mission by their lack of visibility. Few people identify EDICs as a primary source of information on the EU. EDICs' visibility relies to a great extent on that of the host structure, as well as their location, and thus varies across the Member States. A regional government with high visibility acting as a host institution is not the same as a smaller association with more limited resources and therefore the nature of the host structure can have a large impact on the visibility of the network.

Low visibility and a lack of targeting and strategic management, resulting in inconsistent network performance have come up in previous evaluations, but, in many cases, the previous recommendations have not been fully addressed. The reasons include the complexity and cost of 'redesigning' the network, the lack of manpower at all levels of the EDIC system and / or crowding out by other priorities within DG Communication.

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

Poor visibility cannot be tackled by simply identifying the 'right tools'. This poses a challenge to the institutions. Not only must they be ready to support more intense links between the EU and the local level, but for this to work optimally, they are likely to need engagement and support at the national level, and in federal countries, at regional level.

The EDIC mission clearly states that EDICs are required to inform about the EU's political priorities. EDICs are in contrast more effective at answering citizens' basic questions about the EU. It can be argued that EDICs are demonstrating how the political priorities work in practice by providing information that helps EU citizens. It needs to be understood that EDICs' main strength is their ability to relate to local people. It is important that EDICs retain their ability to tailor information to citizens' information needs. This suggests the need for a different approach to future communication that is built on responding to users' actual needs.

EDICs submit an annual action programme to describe their intended activities and are required to provide monthly progress reports via an intranet reporting tool. There is a deficiency in the management of this information because the procedures do not require systematic analysis of monthly reports or the feeding back of intelligence from EDICs to the EC Representations, and DG Communication HQ.

Interacting with the media is a major challenge, particularly in larger cities. This issue was also noted in previous evaluations. In addition, more attention needs to be paid, on the one hand, to the fact that media relations requires specialists and, on the other, the fact that to work effectively, the media relations specialist in an EDIC should enjoy closer relations with press officers in the EC Representations and in the line DGs of the Commission.

Another aspect that is lacking from the EC Representation management role relates to the provision of management information. This relates to a lack of systems in place to ensure that regular, structured analysis of EDIC performance and feedback from EDICs and citizens feeds into senior decision-making levels. Although the intranet reporting tool is a key channel to facilitate feedback, there is no annual systematic analysis of the information.

Despite the growing cooperation with the EP and EPIOs, linkages with the EP remain relatively weak even if EDICs have understood in recent years that they are intended to serve both institutions. Greater sharing of communication agendas is suggested as a way to improve the interaction. The linkages with Commission policy DGs could be further enhanced.

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

As regards management, there is scope to better integrate EDICs as part of the institutions' joined-up communication and feedback capacity.

With regards to management, there are limited procedures in place to ensure the EDICs are part of the institutions' joined-up communication and feedback capacity. There is a need for a much clearer statement (which may vary from country to country) of what the institutions expect from EDICs and how the network can support institutional needs, and a much better / communication focussed interface between the EC Representations / EPIOs, DG Communication HQ and EDICs. This implies a stronger focus on communication coordination with implications for the communication capacity of the EC Representations. The Network correspondents mainly ensure an administration and

coordination function, without having enough time to steer effectively the communication activities. Network correspondents report being overburdened with their EDIC network's administration / coordination tasks and they are also used to fulfil other tasks; circa half of Network correspondents work full time on their network.

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

To conclude, EDICs are effective in fulfilling their mission when it comes to acting as a first point of contact on the EU for citizens at local level. Outreach activities, and particularly events, are overall seen as the most effective way of reaching citizens.

Yet, visibility constitutes one of the main challenges for the EDIC network. Though EDICs continue communicating about the EU political priorities, the centres are more effective at answering citizens' basic questions about the EU. Interacting with the media continues to be an issue which can only be addressed through selecting EDIC staff with more competencies in the media field and through increased cooperation with EC Representations and line DGs. There is scope to generate more or better synergies with EPIOs. Better planning and a more strategic approach could help to ensure that EDICs, EC Representations and EPIOs work in a more joined up way with regards to generating communication impacts.

Efficiency – sections 6.1 until 6.9 inclusive of the Final report

The EDIC network offers value for money¹². It attracts additional funding at local level to support EU information activities and the amounts provided by local organisations average circa twice the amount allocated to action grants in standard lump sum countries and just under the equivalent amount in adapted lump sum countries (see section 3 above on the type of countries). Given the amount of activities carried out by EDICs (see Section 2 above, "EDIC activities"), it can be concluded that EDICs are doing a lot for relatively small sums of money. They are seen to be doing well to realise economies of scale and maximising opportunities to share premises and events with partners.

The main direct cost driver for EDICs is staff costs. The network has to operate with a relatively modest budget. This low budget can generate a negative effect because this limits what EDICs are able to do in terms of communication action. It can also act as a de-motivating factor when it comes to attracting the most suitable staff.

The consideration of value for money and cost drivers should also take into account the weaknesses of the system, some of which relate to poor visibility, and low numbers of

¹² The annual budget for EDIC grants in 2016 amounts to EUR 12 184 000 in commitment appropriations.

enquiries and take up of the service. The financial structure does not support an increase in visibility given that there is no spend allocated to measures that could enhance awareness including for example awareness raising campaigns, advertising, digital promotion and search engine optimisation. Greater attention needs to be paid to these aspects in the allocation of budget to EDICs, otherwise the extent of added value at local level is minimal given the enormous territory to be covered.

The support from DG Communication HQ and the EC Representations has increased the efficiency of the third generation of EDICs as compared to the previous two generations. Simplification measures including the discontinuation of the 50% mandatory co-financing have greatly improved operations.

Overall, EDIC Managers are satisfied with the level of support that they receive from the DG Communication HQ and the EC Representations, including contractual support, trainings, communication advice, documentation and the intranet tool. Still, more can be done to bring efficiency to higher levels, e.g. the Commission should strive to provide more strategic guidance as well as a strong contact point to address legal issues and control the smooth operation of the network.

From responses to the Network correspondents' survey it is clear that they would like to focus less on administration and coordination and more on strategic thinking when managing the network.

There is benefit in fully integrating EDICs in the EC Representations' national communication plan with priorities and key messages.

Another support tool put at EDICs and Network correspondents' disposal is the intranet tool. The intranet is intended to serve two goals - reporting tool for the EDICs and communication support tool for the whole Europe Direct network:

- Reporting tool – In accordance with the contractual obligations EDICs should report every month on the activities they have implemented during the previous month based on the approved Annual action programme. EC Representations make payments based on the rate of activity implementation.
- Communication support tool - It includes inter alia daily news items, surveys, pre-event and post-event information, contact details for the network and discussion groups.

EDICs do not place a high level of value on the Intranet, but tend to view it more as a way to submit the required monthly reports. A growing number of Europe Direct members favours instant and relevant communication through social media. This raises questions as to whether it would be better to focus on using the Intranet to support EDIC management given that it appears to be most suitable for this function and to find other ways / platforms to support communication functions. Language, cultural and national / local relevance are key references for communication. This being the case, there is an argument for supporting national level platforms with a higher level of flexibility, which

support communication aspects including the sharing of materials and real-time exchange between EDICs and between EDICs and EC Representations for example.

Overall, EDICs and host structures reported good working relationships with each other.

The following areas need to be addressed in order to ensure a more efficient execution of EDIC tasks:

- Reconciling the even geographic spread with high-performing network: this situation is linked directly to the way the requirements for the selection of host structures. All host structures must meet eligibility and award criteria. EC Representations also strive to make sure that the network enjoys an optimal geographic balance within the country. The goal of this objective is to try to ensure an even spread and coverage of EDICs within each Member State. Geographic spread is important, but funds should only be spent on host structures with the potential and willingness to offer a high-quality EDIC;
- Levels of host structure support and quality of EDIC managers: according to Network correspondents EDICs that receive strong support from their host structures are generally able to deliver far better results than EDICs that are not as closely linked to their host structure. In the cases when EDIC managers have a strong communication and managerial record coupled with passion and enthusiasm, the results are always positive. The converse is also true.

The monitoring done by EC Representations is rather limited, with indicators which give a very partial view of achievements and thus needs to be more closely aligned with the objectives and corresponding impact. Hence, there is a call for a more efficient Commission-led effort to standardise the measurement and reporting process.

The administrative burden of the 2013-2017 generation is generally perceived as being much less as compared to the previous generation. The lump sum approach offers a more simplified financial mechanism than the previous expenses system.

One of the shortcomings of the system is that it is so prescriptive that it can limit creativity. This relates to the fact that attached to each module is a very specific description of the activities which must be carried out and yet there are gaps relative to the description of the mission, such as cooperation with other networks or the description in the mission of media relations.

Performance is still measured quantitatively rather than qualitatively. Moreover, the quantitative reporting is of variable quality and usefulness, and often appears not to be used. This is because quantitative reporting relates to numbers of outputs rather than any outcomes related to the activities undertaken

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

Another area for flexibility relates to the ability of EDICs move budget between modules. It is worth exploring if there are ways to manage the accounting of money underspend on specific modules and reallocation to others. At the same time, there are no mechanisms in place to support EC Representations if specific modules are not implemented as expected.

There is a lack of clarity in the call for proposals governing the third EDIC generation with regards to the amount of contribution that is expected from the host structures. Although host structures are informed that they are expected to provide "adequate levels of co-financing" it is unclear what this actually means. This is a critical issue to be addressed given that the amount of host structure support is so fundamental to EDIC performance.

To conclude, overall the EDIC network offers value for money because it attracts additional funding at local level to support EU information activities.

The support received from DG Communication HQ and EC Representations, including the contractual basis, grant management, monitoring visits, trainings and intranet are perceived as positive by EDICs. Still, there is a need for a more standardised approach to managing EDICs beyond ensuring the contractual requirements are met, in particular in relation to monitoring, supporting outreach / communication approaches and managing feedback. The Intranet is useful but only in the part related to reporting.

Placing a higher focus on the quality of the host structure than its geographic location in the host structure selection process would be a step to achieving a consistently good or high performance network. Next, there needs to be more clarity with regards to the amount of contribution that is expected from the host structures.

The move from calculating lump sums on the basis of actual costs to using standard cost modules has been positive for all involved. The simplified approach reduces administrative burden for EDICs and EC Representations alike. Greater autonomy and flexibility with modules in order for EDICs to be more creative and innovative should be considered.

Coherence – sections 5.3, 5.6, 6.9 and 6.10 of the Final report

Although there is no legal requirement for EDICs to collaborate with other EDICs as a network, nor is there an administrative framework governing the cooperation between EDIC network and other EU networks the survey of EDIC Managers confirms that the majority of EDICs (68%) collaborate frequently with other EDICs in the same country and that a minority (4%) rarely collaborate. Evidence from the case study visits suggests that this collaboration tends to be done on an informal basis. Collaboration between EDICs takes different formats. Although there are no formal requirements for EDICs to work together, EC Representations and the Commission encourage networking through a number of initiatives, including the coordination of working groups, centrally

coordinated national and / or regional meetings which are held at least annually and in many cases several times a year. The meetings are reported to work well.

EDICs are collaborating with a range of other EU information sources, but with greatest emphasis on those networks and services that are most relevant to young people and / or other business networks depending on the type of host structure and its natural target groups.

The results suggest that EDICs collaborate most frequently with the Erasmus+ national agencies (43%), followed by EURES (38%), the EPIOs (26%), Eurodesk and Enterprise Europe (24%) (Section 6.10, Fig. 11). This suggests that at least 1 in 4 EDICs collaborate frequently with these information sources. The choice of interaction corresponds to the fact that the main focus group for a majority of EDICs is young people and teachers.

Levels of cooperation and referrals with the Europe Direct Contact Centre (EDCC) are lower than would seem desirable and logical. This reflects mixed views among EDICs on the quality of answers provided by the EDCC. There is also a perception that citizens see the EDCC as remote. There is room for more cooperation between the two on how they could learn from each other.

Judgements on whether or not the EDIC network complements or overlaps with other networks are tied up with the question: Where does the EDIC role stop and where do these networks' roles begin? The evidence indicates that the lines are in fact blurred.

The EDIC service complements other EU information services with its local presence, occasional face-to-face contact and local knowledge that for the moment cannot be offered by other services including the EC Representations and the EP. This added value is increased when the EU institutions require a specific local focus and lack the local knowledge / contacts to support this focus.

There is scope to generate more or better synergies with the EC Representations and EPIOs. Better planning and a more strategic approach could help to ensure that EDICs, EC Representations and EPIOs work in a more joined up way with regards to generating communication impacts.

EDICs provide one of the few “touch points” between citizens and the EU institutions. If EDICs did not provide such face-to-face interaction, they would be considered as not being any different to a simple media service or network, simply providing information. Instead, the EDIC network is seen as being unique, as there is no similar network or initiative that would serve this particular type of objectives.

To conclude, most EDICs engage in collaboration with other EDICs. This is typically on a very frequent basis with EDICs in the same country and more occasionally when it comes to EDICs in other countries. EDICs are also collaborating with a range of other information sources, but with greatest emphasis on those networks and services that are most relevant to young people and / or other business networks depending on the type of host structure and its natural target groups. A more structured approach to cooperation

with other EU networks is needed. Such cooperation exists, but more could be done. All cooperation needs to be a two-way street.

EU added value – sections 5.6 and 5.7 of the Final report

There are other services within the Member States which provide information on the EU, but they cannot be reliably benchmarked against the services provided by EDICs.

EDICs' main added value relates to the fact that they are perceived by their users to represent the European Commission at local level.

Just under half of EDIC managers considered the activities of their host structure as fully complementary with those of their EDIC (47% of respondents). A similar proportion (46%) indicated that they were to some extent overlapping. This share of EDICs who indicated that their services are to some extent overlapping infers that many EDICs strengthen services, which are already on offer by their host structures.

Host structures indicated that hosting an EDIC often enables them to provide information on a broader range of topics, to reach additional audiences and to build new networks.

To conclude, there are other services within the Member States which provide information on the EU, but feedback from users confirms perceptions that EDICs offer a more credible and reliable advice than national, regional or local agencies.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the EDIC network offers good value for money. It is relevant to citizens and to the EU institutions. EDICs offer local knowledge and contacts, opportunities for direct contacts with citizens and other stakeholders, and act as conduits for EU information within the Member States. EDICs main strength is that they adapt communication content to local audiences, know the interests and information needs of their target audiences, and are supported by host structures which can reach different national groups and stakeholders.

Although EDICs are not formally part of the institutions, a lot of their strength comes from the fact that EDIC managers are themselves citizens from the same area who are able to interpret the EU in a way that they can relate to.

In addition to their valued local presence, EDICs are also considered to provide assistance to the institutions because of their knowledge capital. EDICs know their local area and local issues. They have local networks that can be accessed by the EC Representations, EPIOs and EU institutions. This can be useful to support activities when, for example attention has been drawn to a particular issue at local level. EDICs have connections to local media and this can help strengthen the communication efforts of the EC Representations when required.

EDICs provide an additional rather than fully complementary service to citizens. The EDIC service complements other services with its local presence, face-to-face contact and local knowledge that for the moment cannot be offered by other services.

EDICs can be brought closer to the public and can further improve their relevance and impact. There are various ways in which this could happen:

- **Visibility** constitutes one of the main challenges for the EDIC network. Ensuring that other relevant organisations and networks signpost to EDICs, and developing an "EDIC mind-set" across all staff in the EC Representations and DG Communication HQ would be a step in the right direction. EDICs should also increase their visibility by running advertising campaigns through various channels such as TV, radio, media coverage, schools and social media. This would ensure that more people are made aware of EDICs and the centres can therefore reach a wider audience. Although with the third EDIC generation the EU institutions and Commission departments are being more closely involved in the life of the network through involvement of other DGs and institutions in EDIC trainings and annual meetings, more efforts should be invested in promoting EDICs. Greater synergies on outreach by EDICs and between EDICs and EC Representations should be stimulated.
- With the 2013-2017 generation the Commission has put more emphasis on proactive (outreach) as opposed to reactive services. In practice, current EDICs are organising more **events** in comparison to previous generations. To **increase the impact** of EDICs events, EDICs need to be better equipped in order to communicate on sensitive topics. For this to happen they would need the help of EU experts both from inside the Commission and at national level. To make this work, there need to be stronger links with the Commission and greater visibility within the EU institutions of what the EDICs are doing.
- The **management system** set-up, including the contractual framework, the management and monitoring guidelines, is perceived by EDICs and EC Representations alike as relevant and useful. Still, there is a need for a more standardised approach to managing EDICs beyond ensuring the contractual requirements are met, in particular in relation to monitoring, procedures to enhance performance, outreach/communication approaches and feedback. The benefits of a standardised approach include providing a better overview of EDIC performance, allowing performance measurement / comparison and benchmarking across the network. This means the systematic collection, analysis and channelling of information about what EDICs are doing and the feedback they provide, so that it can be used to support future decision-making.
- EDICs enjoy a less rigid **financial system** than in the past. In practical terms, the Commission has steered away from the explicit 50% co-financing requirement and has allowed beneficiaries to contribute as they see fit in order to meet their

annual goals. The move from calculating lump sums on the basis of actual costs to using standard cost modules has been positive for all involved. This approach reduces administrative burden. There is, however, still an argument for supporting the view that the approach to modules implementation should be made more flexible. Having extra levels of funding for the countries where the cost of living is higher, in order to also account for the higher salaries is one possible avenue. Another area for flexibility relates to the ability of EDICs to move budget between modules. It is worth exploring if there are ways to manage the accounting of underspend on specific modules and reallocation to others.

- While EDICs manage to adapt successfully **communication content** to local audiences, the evaluation reveals that future EDICs should focus on EU basics and policies of direct relevance to citizens' needs. This being the case, there is still a room for improvement in having EDICs communicate on the EU priorities in order to better reflect people's key concerns. In terms of **support to EDICs**, there is a strong case for encouraging and equipping EC Representations to be more closely involved in supporting the EDIC communication efforts. While EC Representations have stepped up their efforts in involving EDICs closer in their communication undertakings, e.g. by integrating them into their annual communication plans, there is clearly benefit in increasing the EC Representation-level communication leadership to EDICs.

EDICs need to be seen as offering consistently good service that is fit-for-purpose. For this to happen, the EU institutions must be ready to support more intense outreach at local level. And for this to work optimally, they are likely to need engagement and support at the national level, and in federal countries, at regional level.

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

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

The conclusions laid down in the evaluation report together with the results from the open public consultation have fed into a solid process of designing the 2018-2020 generation of EDICs.

Annex 1: Procedural information

Leading DG	DG Communication
Participating Units of DG Communication	C3 – Citizens' contact – lead unit B1 – Support and partnerships D1 – Budget, accounting and evaluation EC Representations – Germany, Croatia and Finland
Participating DGs	DG Internal market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, unit R4 Secretariat-General
Roadmap approval	16 September 2015
External consulting firm specialised in evaluation	Contract signed on 22 December 2015 April 2016 with: Coffey International Development Ltd. trading as The Evaluation Partnership (TEP) Incorporated Company
Number of steering group meetings	3
Last deliverable handed in	October 2016
Approval of the final report by Steering Group	15 November 2016
Agenda planning	N.A.

Annex 2: Synopsis report

SYNOPSIS REPORT

**On the overall results of the consultation work carried out in the context
of the mid-term evaluation of Europe Direct Information Centres (2013-2017)**

Accompanying the documents

**FINAL REPORT AND STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT FROM THE COMMISSION
TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE
REGIONS**

COM(2018) XXX

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Section 1: Introduction

The Commission network of Europe Direct Information Centres (EDICs) spread out across the EU is intended to contribute to the wider EU institutional goals of enhanced communication with citizens, with the final objective of increasing citizens' awareness and understanding of the EU.

This Synopsis report outlines the overall results of the consultation work carried out in view of the design of an enhanced future generation of EDICs.

As per the Consultation roadmap and the consultation strategy, the Commission undertook to hear the views of both the EU citizens/general public who are familiar with EDICs and those who are not, including the opinions of the structures hosting and those that are not hosting EDICs. In addition, the Commission committed to probing into the opinion of EDIC managers, EC Representations, European Parliament (EP) and European Commission Directorate-Generals.

The mid-term evaluation carried out by a team of independent experts (Coffey and Deloitte) was an integral part of the consultation work. For more information on the mid-term evaluation report, please consult the Final report.

Three types of consultation work should be distinguished:

1) Consultation as part of the evaluation undertaken by Coffey and Deloitte:

- Survey of EC Representation staff in charge of EDICs in all Member States;
- Survey of EDIC management staff of the whole EDIC network;
- Online focus groups with citizens (users and non-users);
- Mystery shopping exercise in the Netherlands and Portugal;
- Country visits to Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Poland and Sweden.

2) Consultation carried out outside the evaluation undertaken by Coffey and Deloitte:

- A 4-week consultation on the evaluation roadmap was published on *Your Voice in Europe* website on 19 October 2015 and remained open during the evaluation period. All interested stakeholders could provide feedback on the design of the evaluation. The consultation did not receive any replies;
- A 12-week open public consultation launched on *Your Voice in Europe* website from 10 February until 4 May 2016. Coffey and Deloitte evaluation team assisted the Commission with the design of the questions included in the consultation. The

consultation was published in all official EU languages. It was aimed at gathering the views and opinions of the general public, including EDIC users and non-users, in order to have a better understanding of how the network is perceived. The EC Representations and EDICs were requested to promote the public consultation among their stakeholders. In addition, the EP, the Council of the European Union, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (CoR) were notified. A total of 971 respondents submitted their input. The Commission team commissioned an independent contractor, "Occurrence", to analyse the results from the consultation and draft a report. The report was submitted on 27 June 2016.

- A questionnaire targeting Heads of EC Representations and Heads of Regional Representations was launched on 14 June 2016. The questionnaire was closed on 27 June 2016. The exercise was designed to explore the views of Heads of EC Representations and Heads of Regional Representations on 7 key issues:

- To what extent is the EDIC network utilised by the EU Institutions?
- Does low visibility lead to limited added-value of the network?
- Does the amount of funding have an influence on EDICs performance and strategic thinking?
- Does the network structure in its form facilitate low performance?
- Must the EDICs have walk-in centres to guarantee physical presence?
- Should the EDIC mission undergo a change?
- Does the EDIC network meet the needs of its target groups and the needs of the EU in communicating the political priorities?

3) Contributions submitted outside the scope of the evaluation undertaken by Coffey and Deloitte:

- Letter from unit "Horizontal and thematic monitoring", Directorate for Information Offices, Directorate-General Communication at the EP, 12 July 2016;

- Adoption of a resolution on the situation of EDICs submitted by PES, EPP, ALDE, EA and ECR political groups during the 118th plenary session of the CoR, 15-16 June 2016;

- Letter from Ms Lucia Puttrich, Minister for Federal and EU Affairs of Hessen and Chairwoman of the Conference of the Ministers of European Affairs of the German Länder sent on behalf of the Ministers in charge of European Affairs of the German Länder, 28 April 2016.

Section 2: Results

Results from the overall consultation work reveal that there is scope for greater efficiency by increasing EDIC visibility and their role as providers of practical information of direct relevance to citizens' lives.

While some respondents expect a reduction in the number of EDICs provided that this will be accompanied by an increased funding, and more human resources at the EC Representations, others do not see any benefit in reducing the number of EDICs. Similarly, respondents take diverging views as regards the requirement for the existence of a full-fledged walk-in centre.

All respondents agree that EDICs should be better integrated in the European Commission overall communication effort.

They also outline that the diversity of host structures should be retained. On the question of whether communication should be limited to specific audiences, respondents share the view that EDICs should be as inclusive as possible. The dominant view is that EDICs should cover both information and outreach. Respondents conclude that EDICs should communicate practical information of direct relevance to citizens' lives.

The conclusions from the **consultation work implemented by Coffey and Deloitte** suggest that EDICs should focus on outreach to citizens while being seen as part of the Commission's overall communication effort. The results obtained emphasise the need for more outcome and impact-based EDIC activities.

On the results obtained via the **12-week open public consultation**, the Commission welcomes the overall report, whilst acknowledging that the findings and conclusions need to be considered against the recognition of limitations in data collection, most notably the fact that the exercise was not based on a representative sample. As the consultation was disseminated through EU channels and tools, it can be argued that the respondents are individuals who already know those tools or who have a higher interest for EU topics. Nevertheless, the results can still be useful to draw some general positive trends regarding users' satisfaction with EDICs' services. EDICs generate a very high satisfaction rate among citizens who have already been in contact with them. Among their main comments and observations, respondents suggested that EDICs should gain better visibility.

In its **letter of 12 July 2016**, unit "Horizontal and thematic monitoring", Directorate for Information Offices, DG Communication at the EP acknowledges the excellent cooperation between EPIOs and EDICs and calls for a more active involvement of EPIOs in EDIC activities.

Through the **adoption of a resolution on the situation of EDICs during its 118th session, the CoR** proposes that the financial resources allocated to the EDICs for the next funding period be substantially increased. In addition, the CoR concludes that there is a need to identify different areas of interest to citizens, so that European information can be better tailored to citizens' questions.

Finally, in her **letter of 28 April 2016 sent on behalf of the Ministers in charge of European Affairs of the German Länder**, Ms Lucia Puttrich, the Hessen Minister for Federal and EU Affairs and Chairwoman of the Conference of the Ministers of European Affairs of the German Länder calls for a reinforced financial network of the next generation and non-reduction of the number of EDICs, as well as for a reduction of the administrative burden and more flexibility in terms of EDIC communication activities.

Annex 3: Methods and analytical models

The evaluation combined analysis of the experience and knowledge of key stakeholders in the process: EDIC Managers and host structures, EC Representation staff in charge of EDICs other EC Representation, European Parliament Information Offices (EPIO) staff, DG Communication Headquarters (HQ) , Office of Publications, European Parliament (EP) and those who observed or have previously been involved with the service (DG Communication, Directorate B, other EC DGs and services – DG Internal market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs), with the experiences and views of citizens including, but not limited to users.

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

Design and planning

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

Data collection

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

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

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

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

Online focus groups with citizens (users and non-users)¹³: a series of mainly on-line focus groups (complemented by 1 face-to-face group) and some additional feedback by email using the same discussion guide.

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

"Mystery shopping" exercises: the mystery shopping exercises focussed on two countries, the Netherlands and Portugal, who were contacted by phone and email. Websites and social media were also reviewed.

Analysis and reporting

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

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

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

Open public consultation: was intended to form a part of the mid-term evaluation of the EDICs. The evaluation team helped to design the survey used in the on-line public consultation exercise. The survey was launched on-line on 10 February 2016 and was available until 4 May 2016. An independent evaluator (Occurrence) was tasked with analysing the results and producing a report. The team in charge of the evaluation took account of the results of the survey in the analysis of findings, conclusions and recommendations.

In addition, the evaluation took account of available reporting data provided by the EC Representations and on the EDIC Intranet.

The evaluation team was supported by Steering Group, which provided feedback and commented on the individual progress reports provided. Detailed information on the interviews, surveys and focus groups can be found in the annexes to the Final report.

¹³ Users were recruited with help from EDICs. Non-users were recruited via a specialist recruitment company.

Annex 4: Evaluation questions

Criterion	Evaluation Questions
Relevance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent do the objectives and activities of the EDICs correspond to the demonstrable needs of citizens and other stakeholders? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which target groups are interacting with EDICs? • Which types of needs are being met? 2. How relevant is the EDIC mission to meeting the needs of internal audiences? 3. To what extent does the network of 500+ EDICs correspond to target audience and institutional needs?
Effectiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. To what extent have the EDICs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased citizens' awareness of EU affairs? • Promoted citizens' engagement with the EU and participatory citizenship? • Helped to stimulate debate through events? • Effectively communicated EC priorities? • Been successful in mechanisms to channel feedback? • Used effective combinations of channels and tools to correspond to target groups' needs? 5. Are the EDICs visible and engaging with local and regional stakeholders and the media? 6. Have individual EDICs been implemented as planned in their Annual Action Programmes? 7. Were target groups satisfied with the level and type of service that is available / received? 8. How effective is promotion of the EDIC network and what more could be done and by whom to increase visibility inside and outside the Commission?
Efficiency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. How efficient is the approach to financing and can any limitations be overcome, including in relation to underspent funds? 10. How could the lump sum approach be redefined to better reflect EDIC / host structure and EC Representation needs? 11. Is the modular approach to defining activities appropriate? Could modules be redefined to enhance performance? 12. Have the results been achieved at a reasonable cost in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost drivers: what are the main cost drivers of the EDICs? • Value for money: has the EDIC provided value for money? 13. Have DG Communication HQ and EC Representation management systems and support contributed to the efficiency of the EDICs' operations? (Consideration to focus on reporting, monitoring and roles and responsibilities) 14. Are the requirements for host structures, EDICs and their personnel, as described in the

	Calls, FPA and Specific Agreements, adequate to ensure the involvement of high quality partners and outputs?
Coherence	<p>15. Internal: is there scope for greater synergies between EDICs and between EDICs and the EC Representations for outreach?</p> <p>16. External: have the EDICs complemented the activities of other EU information providers, such as the EPIOs, Your Europe and other citizen-orientated networks / initiatives?</p> <p>17. Is there scope for increased synergies / greater efficiencies through better collaboration with other services?</p>
EU added value	<p>18. Did the EDICs lead to results that could not have been achieved by national, regional and local actors alone?</p> <p>19. To what extent did EU-funding increase or change the type of activities that would normally be undertaken by host structures?</p>