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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION**  
**of the Europe Direct Information Centres (2013-2017)**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The European Commission network of more than 500 Europe Direct Information Centres (EDICs) spread out across the European Union (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. EDICs have a two-fold mission, to inform and signpost citizens to other sources of EU information and advice, and to promote engagement and debate.

The implementation, performance and results of the 2013-2017 generation of EDICs (third generation) was subject to a mid-term evaluation in 2016. To ensure independence, the evaluation was tendered to an independent evaluation team proposed by Coffey and Deloitte. The aim of the evaluation was to contribute to the design of an enhanced future generation of EDICs. The real challenge of the evaluation was to assess how to maximise the impact of the network to increase its usefulness for both citizens and the European institutions. The evaluation team was supported by a European Commission Steering Group.

The contract was signed on 22 December 2015 and the last deliverable was handed in October 2016. The evaluation used a wide variety of methods, including study of the administrative network and reporting, surveys of Network correspondents and EDIC management staff, online focus groups with users and non-users, benchmarking, mystery shopping and country visits to 7 Member States. In addition a 12-week open public consultation canvassed the views of EDIC users and non-users.

The method and corresponding limitations are detailed in the Staff Working 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.

In line with the main conclusions of the report, the Commission considers that the third generation of EDICs' objectives to help enhance communication with citizens and increase their awareness and understanding of the EU have been met to a certain extent.

### ***Relevance***

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

EDICs are considered by users to be experts who are highly responsive and provide reliable information in a clear and accessible manner. Despite this, EDICs still suffer from low

visibility and impact, and a lack of targeting and strategic management, resulting in inconsistent network performance.

The scope of the EDIC network is also limited because EDICs typically focus their efforts on specific groups. Although the EDIC mission and objectives do not prioritise target groups, the evidence indicates that EDICs focus on certain elements of the population (young people and teachers) at the expense of other groups. In addition, EDIC visibility relies to a great extent on that of the host structure and their location, and thus varies across the network. Host structures and their staff are critical to the success of the network. The evidence confirms that when host structures are engaged and fully supportive this provides the right environment for EDICs to deliver better results. The converse is also true.

### *Effectiveness*

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

Most citizens have only a limited understanding of the relevance of the EU to their daily lives. It is, therefore, understandable that the 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.

EDICs were found less effective in enhancing their communication capacity through interaction with local media. More attention needs to be paid, on the one hand, to the fact that media relations requires specialists and, on the other, the fact that to work effectively, the media relations specialist in an EDIC should enjoy close relations with press officers in the Representations and in the Commission.

The EDIC mission clearly states that EDICs are required to inform about the EU's political priorities. The evaluation found that if the Commission wants EDICs to engage effectively on the priorities, they need to be encouraged to find ways in which these resonate when there is alignment with people's own concerns.

The assessment found that outreach activities, and particularly events, are overall seen as the most effective way of reaching all target audiences. If it were to be decided nevertheless to put much more emphasis on outreach at the expense of the reactive function of answering questions, it would be important for this to be strategic, both in terms of prioritisation of target groups, having the right materials available for those groups, and reaching new audiences and stakeholders.

### ***Efficiency***

Given the limited EU funding EDICs provide good value for money and bring a number of benefits, e.g. they are aligned with the institutional goals, provide local channels for EU information tailored to the local context, they are often staffed by enthusiastic people and recipients are very grateful for their help.

Looking at the grant module system, the evaluation concluded positively that the lump sum action grant system has allowed the Commission and beneficiaries alike to work more efficiently. 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 and managing feedback. There are benefits to adopting a standardised approach which provides a better overview of EDIC performance, allowing performance measurement and benchmarking across the network.

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

The variable performance of EDICs is an issue that has been highlighted in this evaluation and documented in the two previous evaluations. Placing a higher focus on the quality of the host structure than its geographic location in the host structure selection process would be a step to achieving a consistently good or high performance network. If the network is to confirm its added value, then there is need to improve the consistency of performance by supporting the best host structures to do more; even if this changes the make-up or reduces the size of the current network.

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

The main direct cost driver for EDICs is staff costs / salaries..

### ***Coherence***

The evidence suggests that most EDICs engage in collaboration with other EDICs. This is typically on a very frequent basis with EDICs in the same country and more occasionally when it comes to EDICs in other countries. Synergies with other institutions and other DGs do not appear to be as strong as those between EDICs and between EDICs and the Representations.

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

EDICs provide an additional rather than fully complementary service to citizens. The EDIC service complements other services with its local presence and occasional face-to-face contact

that for the moment cannot be offered by other services. This added value is increased when the institutions require a specific local focus and lack the local knowledge and contacts to support this focus.

### ***EU added value***

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.

### **Lessons learned**

The extent to which EDIC activities correspond to citizens and stakeholders' needs is clouded by the fact that EDICs typically have low visibility and impact. They are not lodged in the national consciousness as being the 'local source of EU information', even if there is evidence from a small number of users that some EDICs are well known in their local environment.

The evaluation found many lessons specific to the EDIC case. The authors make clear that there is scope to improve EDIC visibility and impact. For this to happen, the Commission should focus on two main levels:

***Operational level*** – there are a number of aspects that should be reflected in the future calls, which should help the Commission to raise the standard and have a more consistent performance across the network. Such aspects include changes to the EDIC mission, e.g. placing a higher level of focus on outreach through events targeting wider societal layers and allowing for greater financial flexibility and including moving budget between modules. In addition, there is a strong argument to require host structures to hire EDIC staff sufficiently skilled and competent to organise bigger-impact events;

### ***Strategic management level***

There is a strong case for encouraging and equipping staff at Representations in charge of the network to be more closely involved in supporting the EDIC communication efforts and shift their focus on more strategic communication activities. This suggests the need for increasing the Representation-level communication leadership to EDICs.

In addition, there is benefit in supporting stronger linkages between EDICs and Commission Directorates-General on the one hand and between EDICs and the European Parliament on the other hand.

Finally, the EU institutions must be ready to support more outreach at 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.