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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION
of the European Commission Visitors' Centre

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The European Commission's Visitors' Centre gives its visitors an insight into the work and functioning of the Commission as the executive of the EU, while explaining EU policies and main priorities. It is also a tool to communicate the overarching messages of the Commission activities.

The Visitors' Centre does it by organising three different types of visits for groups of visitors of 15 or more people aged 15 and over: (1) General information visits for people with little or no knowledge of the EU, including high school students, consisting of a presentation on the role of the Commission as the EU executive; (2) Specific information visits mainly for undergraduate students and specific interest groups, involving an introduction on the role of the Commission as the EU political executive and a presentation on specific EU policies; (3) Tailored information visits for priority groups consisting of a programme specially tailored to the interests of the group.

The Visitors' Centre is located in the Charlemagne Building since May 2013. It has several meeting rooms and facilities for welcoming visitors as well as touch screens and multimedia material.

The previous evaluation of the Visitors' Centre took place in 2006. Therefore, it was decided to proceed to a new evaluation, as set out in the DG COMM Management Plan for 2015. This evaluation was the first one carried out after the move of the Centre into the Charlemagne building. It covered the time period 2013-2016. During this period, the Visitors' Centre organised 6565 information visits for 198184 visitors. On average, the Visitors' Centre welcomed 49546 visitors per year. Out of these visits 47.46 % were Tailored Information Visits, 37.52 % General Information Visits and 16.01 % Specific Information Visits.

The main purpose of this evaluation was to assess the functioning of the Visitors' Centre in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and the EU added value. The exercise also aimed at getting operational recommendations on how to improve the impact, functioning and efficiency of the Centre in a cost-effective way.

The evaluation contract with Coffey and Deloitte was signed on 6 May 2015. The final evaluation report was approved by the Steering Group in June 2016.

In order to carry out the evaluation, the contractor applied several complementary methodologies that included desk research, preliminary interviews with DG COMM officials, stakeholder interviews, mystery shopper visits, web-based surveys, benchmarking exercise and cost effectiveness analysis. In addition, a web-based public consultation was organised but no responses were received.

The main finding and conclusions of the contractor's final report are described below.

The evaluation assessed whether the approach and services provided by the Visitors' Centre are **relevant** toward the needs of the Commission and the needs of the target groups.

The contractor's report concludes that the Visitors' Centre helps to meet Commission communication targets by communicating clear messages linked to the political priorities to the public through all types of visits. However, it should focus more on concrete outcomes of the EU policies that have direct impact on citizens' life, emphasising the role of the Commission as the EU executive. According to the evaluators, the Specific and Tailored Information Visits that have a high degree of customisation are considered more relevant towards the target groups' needs.

The evaluation also assessed how **effective** the Visitors' Centre is in improving visitors' knowledge of EU policies and engaging them in the debate about EU policies in the short and medium term.

The contractors' report concludes that the Visitors' Centre is effective in raising knowledge and awareness of the Commission and its policies through all types of visits, although for university students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) who already have a good knowledge of European Affairs, the effectiveness is more limited.

The Visitors' Centre's impact on engaging citizens depends on the level of adaptation of the visit content to the group needs, on the quality of speakers and on the level of interactivity during the visit. Specific and Tailored Information Visits meet these criteria better; therefore they are more effective in engaging citizens in the short and medium term than General Information Visits. The report also finds that the impact of some visits, in particular those organised directly by the Visitors' Centre without involving EC Representations or EDICs is limited by the absence of an ex-ante preparation.

In order to assess the Visitors' Centre's **efficiency**, the evaluation assessed the efficiency of the framework contracts in place, and whether they are the best means to support its operations.

The Visitors' Centre of the European Commission has a unique organisational structure. Compared to other visitors' centres, it externalises the most as it has external contractors providing four services: (1) external speakers, (2) travel arrangements, (3) hosting services and (4) logistics (accommodation, meals, and local transport for visitors' groups). The Visitors' Centre of the European Commission is also the only centre that externalises tasks of organising travel and accommodation for the visitors. The Commission finds that a high degree of externalisation is justified by a high number of visitors' groups it receives. This externalisation also allows the Visitors' Centre to concentrate its resources on the preparation of high-quality visit programmes.

The contractor's report concludes that the current organisation of work at the Visitors' Centre is efficient and framework service contracts are adequate tools to support its operations.

Furthermore, the evaluation assessed whether the activities of the Visitors' Centre are **coherent** 1) internally with other relevant communication activities of DG COMM and 2)

externally with the work of the visitors' centres of the European Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the Regions.

The Commission finds the Visitors' Centre works closely with all relevant DG COMM services, EC Representations and Regional Offices in the EU Member States and its activities are coherent with other activities of DG COMM. However, the contractor's final report concludes that this internal coherence is limited and should be reinforced.

As regards external coherence, the contractor's final report concludes that the work of the Visitors' Centre of the European Commission is overall coherent with the work of the visitors' centres of other EU institutions.

Finally, the evaluation assessed the **EU added value** of the Visitors' Centre with respect to other communication activities on the EU carried out in the EU Member States by the EC Representations, by the EDICs and by the Member States themselves.

The contractor's report concludes that the Visitors' Centre has a clear added value with respect to other communication activities carried out in the EU Member States. However, the added value is significantly smaller for General Information Visits than for Specific and Tailored Information Visits.

Based on the issues detected and analysed above, the contractor's report has identified several strategic and operational recommendations for future action by DG COMM.