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**EVALUATION
of the European Commission Visitors' Centre**

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Glossary

<i>Term or acronym</i>	<i>Meaning or definition</i>
DG	Directorate-General
DG COMM	Directorate-General for Communication
DG ECFIN	Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs
EC	European Commission
EC Representations	European Commission Representations in the Member States
EDIC	Europe Direct Information Centres
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union

1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose and scope

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 activities of the Commission.

The previous evaluation of the Visitors' Centre took place in 2006. Therefore, it was decided to proceed to a new evaluation of the Visitors' Centre, 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 in 2013. It covered the time period 2013-2016.

In accordance with the evaluation Roadmap, 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 involved assessing the overall impact, including the changes brought about by:

i. the setting-up of the Visitors' Centre in the new premises in the Charlemagne building, located next to the Berlaymont, the European Commission's headquarters.

and

ii. the development of a more politically driven approach, with particular emphasis on the European Commission as the political executive of the EU, highlighting its political priorities.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE INTERVENTION

Description of the intervention and its objectives

The overall objective of the Visitors' Centre is to engage with citizens so as to bring Europe closer to them. Specific objectives are to provide insight into the work and functioning of the European Commission, thereby increasing citizens' knowledge and understanding of the European Commission and EU policies.

The Visitors' Centre has been located in the Charlemagne building since 2013. Before moving to the new premises the Centre was located in Rue Van Maerlant in a building distant both physically and visually from the Berlaymont building which is the key iconic symbol of the European Commission.

Unlike the current Visitors' Centre, the Visitors' Centre in rue Van Maerlant was not solely focused on the European Commission as the executive of the EU but explained all institutions and their relationships. All meeting rooms were below the ground floor.

The main reasons for moving the Centre to the Charlemagne building were:

- proximity to and visibility of the Berlaymont building (European Commission's headquarters);
- stronger focus on the Commission as the executive of the EU;
- meeting rooms with natural light.

The Visitors' Centre has several meeting rooms and facilities for welcoming visitors as well as touch screens and multimedia material. Given the success the Visitors' Centre has had in the recent years, it occasionally has to use additional meeting rooms in other EC buildings. This is the case for around 15% of the visits.

The Visitors' Centre organises information programmes for groups of visitors of 15 or more people aged 15 and over. There are three basic types of visits:

General Information Visits

- Aimed at people with little or no previous knowledge of the EU including high school groups.
- Consisting of a general presentation on the role of the Commission as the EU political executive followed by a question and answer session.
- Last one and a half hours.

Specific Information Visits

- Aimed at undergraduate students and specific interest groups.
- Consisting of an introduction on the role of the Commission as the EU political executive followed by a presentation on a specific EU policy of direct interest to the group.
- Last two and a half hours.

Tailored Information Visits

- Aimed at multipliers such as journalists, national and local government representatives, business associations, professional groups from the public and private sector, trade unions, academics including post graduate and research students.
- Consisting of a programme which is specially tailored to the interests of the group and can consist of an introduction to the role of the Commission as the EU political executive followed by up to 4 presentations on specific EU policies given by the EC officials dealing with the issues involved.
- Last from half a day up to one and a half days.

From a content point of view, the Visitors' Centre explains the role of the Commission as the political executive of the EU and the political priorities of the Juncker Commission. To this end, a specific Standard Corporate Presentation has been developed for use in all General and Specific Information Visits.

For Tailored Information Visits, the Visitors' Centre develops high-level programmes focussing on key political topics requested by the visitors' groups.

Legal basis

Task resulting from the Commission's prerogatives at institutional level, as provided for in Article 54(2) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 (OJ L 298, 26.10.2012, p. 1).

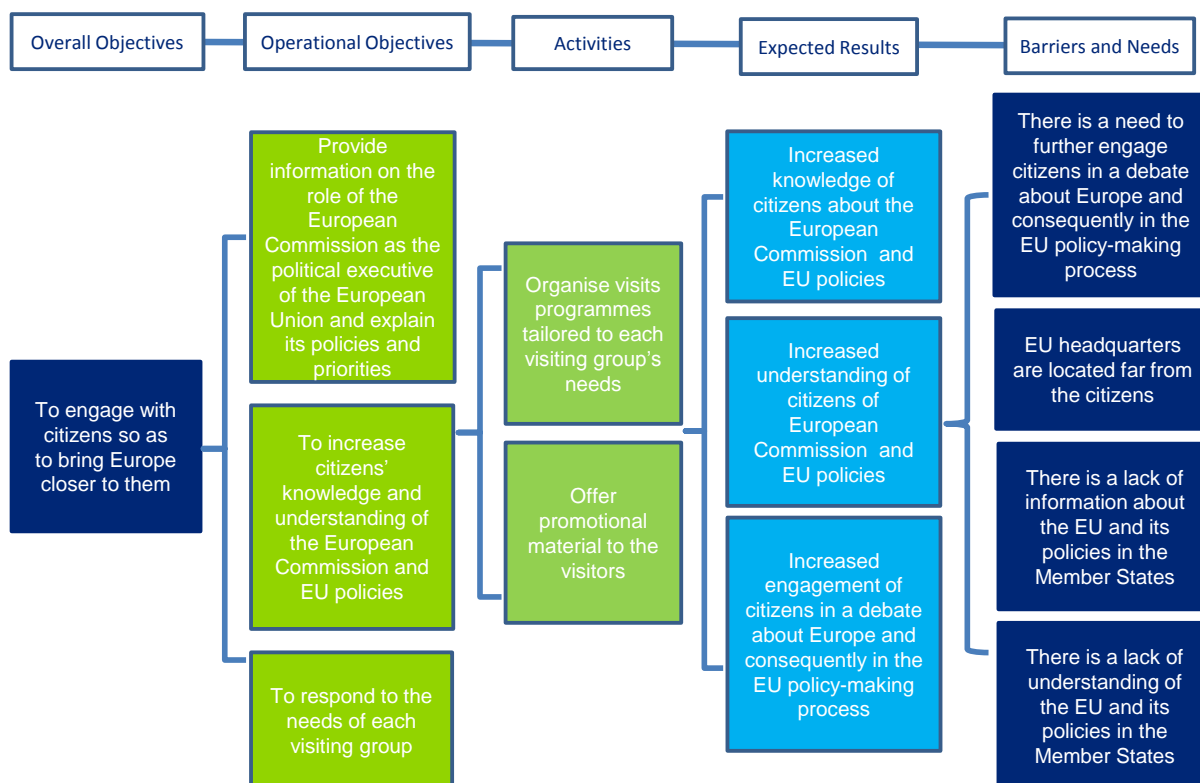
Budget

The annual budget for the Visitors' Centre in 2016 amounted to EUR 3 800 000 in commitment appropriations on DG COMM budget line 16.030201.

The intervention logic

Figure 1 shows the intervention logic linking the goals and objectives to the assessment.

Figure 1: Intervention Logic



Source: Deloitte and Coffey

The purpose of the evaluation was to measure the impact of the activities and analyse if the expected results indicated in the Intervention Logic were realised.

External factors, such as the work of the other EU institutions' visitors' centres or services, had also to be taken into account.

3. IMPLEMENTATION / STATE OF PLAY

Description of the current situation

The Visitors' Centre (Unit COMM.C.4) is part of Directorate C “Communication with citizens” of DG COMM. Its personnel consists of 22 people, including Head of Unit, Deputy Head of Unit, Information and Communication Officer, 14 Conference Organisers - Visit Organisers, Secretary to the Head of Unit, Financial Agent and Clerical Officer.

The visit organisers are in charge of organising visit programmes and logistics. They also accompany groups during the visits.

In addition to its own staff, the Visitors' Centre relies on the work of three external service providers made available via four framework contracts. These contracts cover provision of external speakers, hostesses and logistics as well as travel arrangements for visitors' groups.

The Visitors' Centre has a framework contract with an external contractor for provision of external speakers. The external contractor has a pool of 30-35 conference speakers with very different educational and professional experiences as well as linguistic skills. One third of the speakers are mobilised quite frequently by the Visitors' Centre, the rest more sporadically. Their main task is to give the Standard Corporate Presentation on the role of the Commission as the political executive of the EU for General and Specific Information Visits.

For Tailored Information Visits the speakers are EC officials.

The Visitors' Centre also has a framework contract for the provision of visit assistants (hosting staff) as well as another for the provision of hotels, restaurants and local transport services for visitors' groups. The contractor provides a team of 8 assistants in charge of welcoming visitors at the entrance, accompanying them during the visits and dealing with any technical/logistical problems. The same contractor provides the Visitors' Centre with a booking service for hotels, restaurants and local transport needs for visiting groups.

The Visitors' Centre also uses the services of American Express Corporate Travel (AMEX), the travel agency contracted by the European Commission to book transport tickets for visitors' groups. AMEX services are used mainly for priority visits organised jointly with the EC Representations and Regional Offices in the Member States.

The Visitors' Centre has its own webpage (http://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-union/visit-european-commission_en). Visits can be requested either directly by the group leaders or by the EC Representations and Regional Offices. The Visitors' Centre can fully or partially finance some of the visits coming via the EC Representations/Regional Offices.

Since 2013 (when the Visitors' Centre moved to the Charlemagne building), the number of visitors has increased significantly, reaching the peak of 53343 in 2014. From 2013 until 2016, 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 Visitors' Centre welcomes different categories of visitors ranging from students to specific interest groups and professional associations, journalists, politicians, etc. Student groups (secondary, undergraduate and postgraduate) remain by far the most significant in terms of numbers.

Each visitors' group benefits from an individual programme, especially designed to meet its interests and needs, and when possible, in its native language. Each group is given the opportunity to provide feedback on the visit by filling in an electronic evaluation form at the end of the visit.

The Visitors' Centre works in close collaboration with other DG COMM services, such as the Spokespersons' Service, EC Representations and Regional Offices in the Member States as well as with other Commission DGs. It also works closely with other EU institutions, such as the European Parliament (EP) and the Council, as well as with the Permanent Representations of the Member States to the EU.

4. METHOD

Short description of methodology

In order to carry out the evaluation and to provide answers to the evaluation questions the evaluation team applied several complementary methodologies both qualitative and quantitative. The methodologies are described in detail in Chapter 5 of the contractor's final report.

The evaluation team used the following methodological tools:

Desk research

In order to specifically meet the objectives of this evaluation, the team reviewed the following documents:

- Policy and strategic documents such as EC Decisions and Communications;

- Relevant material in relation to the Visitors' Centre's statute, objectives and daily operations;
- Monitoring data in relation to the number of visit requests, feedback forms from the visitors, qualitative data on costs, IT data, etc.;
- Literature review on good practices to serve for the benchmarking exercise;
- Minutes of meetings and other common activities.

Benchmarking exercise

A benchmarking exercise was performed, comparing the Visitors' Centre with the visitors' centres of the following EU institutions and international organisations:

- European Parliament (EP) & Parliamentarium;
- Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU);
- OECD Headquarters in Paris;
- European Central Bank (ECB) in Frankfurt;
- United Nations Office (UN) at Geneva.

Cost-effectiveness analysis

The evaluation team carried out a cost-effectiveness analysis of four framework contracts used by the Visitors' Centre: (1) hosting services, (2) external speakers, (3) logistics and (4) travel tickets.

The evaluation team also carried out the following consultation activities:

Preliminary interviews with DG COMM officials

The evaluation team organised preliminary interviews with DG COMM officials, particularly with the Visitors' Centre staff.

Stakeholder interviews

The evaluation team carried out interviews with 20 stakeholders suggested by the Visitors' Centre as relevant for the evaluation. Interviewees included staff from DG COMM (including staff from the EC Representations), DG Budget (DG BUDG), DG Economy and Finance (DG ECFIN), DG Employment (DG EMPL), DG TRADE, the Secretariat-General (SG), the Council of the EU, the Austrian Permanent Representation to the EU and the Europe Direct Information Centre (EDIC) Normandy¹.

In addition to these stakeholder interviews, the evaluation team conducted three unannounced “mystery shopper” visits in the Visitors' Centre, in order to interview visitors in the framework of different visits (one for each of the three types).

¹ Europe Direct Information Centres (EDICs) are part of the EC network of more than 500 centres spread out across the EU with the objective to increase people's awareness and understanding of the EU.

Web-based surveys

The evaluation team conducted two web-based surveys:

- One targeting stakeholders involved in the organisation of visits from the EC Representations and Regional Offices in the Member States, as well as from the EDICs (stakeholder surveys);
- One targeting the leaders of visitors' groups (visitor surveys);

These web-based surveys were hosted on a dedicated website and remained open for 12 weeks. 83 complete² answers were received in response to the stakeholder survey and 476 in response to the visitor survey.

Web-based public consultation

A web-based public consultation as a mandatory element of the Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines took place, targeting public that had never visited the Commission's Visitors' Centre.

The consultation was published on the dedicated website and remained open for 12 weeks (from 2 February 2016 - 26 April 2016).

The consultation was advertised on the Visitors' Centre' website (<http://ec.europa.eu/visits/>) and on the relevant websites dedicated to the evaluation on Europa/DG.

However, no responses were received in the framework of this consultation.

Analysis

The analysis was based on a triangulation of data, facilitating validation of data through cross-verification from multiple data sources instead of one single source. By combining multiple observers, methods, and data, the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from one single method, single-observer and single-theory studies can be overcome.

Limitations and robustness of findings

As the evaluation contract was signed before the adoption of the Better Regulation Guidelines, the evaluation Roadmap and the overall structure of the evaluation had to be adapted in the course of the evaluation. This had a negative impact on the timing as the evaluation contract had to be prolonged.

² The evaluation team took into account only the answers of respondents who completed the survey until the end.

The evaluation team conducted three “mystery shopper” visits in the Visitors' Centre (one per category). Even though three visits were considered sufficient by the Steering Committee, the contractor's final report demonstrated that accompanying such a limited number of visits did not allow the evaluators to gain sufficient insight into the different types of visits and their specificities. General conclusions were drawn up mainly from General and Specific Information Visits, without recognising sufficiently the great added value of Tailored Information Visits, particularly those organised jointly with the EC Representations on which the Visitors' Centre concentrates its main efforts.

Other limitations of this evaluation concern the cost-effectiveness analysis. In order to carry out this analysis, the evaluators relied on both qualitative data coming from the interviews and on the benchmarking data. However, the comparison with other visitors' centres posed some methodological issues as they do not have the same objectives and functioning as the European Commission's Visitors' Centre. Nevertheless, the combination of qualitative data and benchmarking allowed the evaluators to perform the cost effectiveness analysis to a reasonable extent and to have enough findings for nourishing the results of the evaluation.

5. ANALYSIS AND ANSWERS TO THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The Visitors' Centre was assessed in line with five evaluation criteria as required by the Better Regulation Guidelines: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value. The below sections, including findings and conclusions reflect the analysis made by the contractor.

How relevant has the Visitors' Centre been so far?

This question aims to determine the following two issues:

- whether the approach developed and the services provided by the Visitors' Centre are appropriate to reach the Commission communication objectives and serve its needs as the EU executive.
- whether the approach and services offered by the Visitors' Centre are appropriate to meet the target groups' needs.

Relevance towards the Commission needs

Relevance towards the Commission communication needs

According to the 2016 Work Programme in the field of communication, 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 activities of the Commission.

According to the contractor's final report, the Visitors' Centre has adjusted its communication messages in order to meet the most recent needs of the European Commission, that is to say:

- to communicate the Commission's core messages with more clarity and strength;
- to focus on the political priorities on which the Commission delivers collectively;
- to address European citizens at large.

The Visitors' Centre has produced a Standard Corporate Presentation containing all core messages to be transmitted to the visitors. This Standard Presentation is used for General and Specific Information Visits. Both, internal and external speakers use this tool although they can partially adapt it to the target audience on a case by case basis. Therefore, according to the contractor's final report the Commission's core messages are communicated clearly and consistently. The same presentation can also be used for Tailored Information Visits, although in this case the focus is less on core messages and more on specific ones (for instance on a specific policy domain or political priority).

Furthermore, General Information Visits, Specific Information Visits and Tailored Information Visits all include a presentation of the political priorities, in order to raise awareness amongst citizens regarding the political choices of the Juncker Commission. According to the contractor's final report this is consistent with the approach promoted by President Juncker in terms of focussing on the political priorities on which the Commission delivers collectively.

The contractor's final report also concludes that the Visitors' Centre addresses European Citizens at large as it welcomes a very wide audience. Although there are target groups sent through the EC Representations, any group of citizens can apply for a visit anytime through the Visitors' Centre integrated IT system.

In addition, some stakeholders noticed that the Commission has a tendency to work in policy silos. According to them the Visitors' Centre has helped to overcome this tendency by developing a common approach towards the visiting groups and a Standard Presentation with common messages to be communicated to all visitors. At the same time the Visitors' Centre meets the needs of other EC DGs, such as DG ECFIN and DG BUDG, by organising highly specialised visits on different EC priorities for their stakeholders on the basis of specific agreements.

Based on these elements, a strong majority of interviewed stakeholders believe that the Visitors' Centre is a major tool which helps the European Commission to reach its communication objectives.

All interviewed stakeholders agree that the Visitors' Centre can help to increase the EU visibility and to further engage citizens in a debate about EU policies.

Relevance towards the Commission needs as the EU executive

The contractor's final report concludes that the Visitors' Centre does not sufficiently emphasise the role of the Commission as the EU executive and its impact on citizens' lives. This is due to the fact that the Standard Corporate Presentation used for all visits is focused mainly on the EU institutional set-up and on the political priorities of the Juncker Commission and lacks concrete examples of the outcomes of EC policies and programmes on the daily life of European citizens. The wish to have more such examples was expressed by the respondents of the Eurobarometer Qualitative Study, "The promise of the EU" carried out in 2014.

Relevance towards the target groups' needs

The Visitors' Centre's approach to meeting target groups' needs is based on adapting the visit content to the three pre-defined visit types. During the online registration a group leader or a person in charge of the visit in the EC Representation is asked to select a type of visit and main topics of interest. On the basis of this selection visit organisers prepare a visit programme. This approach implies a high degree of involvement of the visit organiser or the EC Representation and their knowledge of group needs. This approach is more suitable for visits organised jointly with the EC Representations as they have close contacts with the visitors group and know well their needs. The visit organisers in the Visitors' Centre, on the other hand, have to rely on the information on policy preferences and group background expressed in the online registration form.

The contractor's report concludes that the system of expressing preferences in terms of policy topics to be covered during the visit is suboptimal as often it does not provide visit organisers with the information necessary to adapt the content of the visit to the group needs to the fullest extent.

The level of tailoring strongly depends on the type of visit chosen. The degree of adaptation to the groups' needs for Specific and Tailored Information Visits is very high. The same applies to specialised visits organised in the framework of agreements with some DGs. Most of the interviewees agree that in these cases the programmes are well prepared and relevant for the visitors.

Therefore, there is a strong agreement on the relevance of the Visitors' Centre approach and services for the most customised visits, such as Tailored Information Visits and Specific Information Visits. However, stakeholders are less positive on the relevance of the approach for General Information Visits where the adaptation of the content to the needs of the group could be very limited.

Overall, most interviewees argued that the general approach used by the Visitors' Centre allowed it to serve a wide range of needs well. The relevance towards the target groups' needs is also confirmed by the results of the satisfaction survey. Every year the Visitors' Centre organises visits for very different types of stakeholders (from students to professional associations and national administrations). However, the satisfaction rate remains consistent across all the categories implying that the approach adopted and services provided are flexible enough to respond to different needs. Moreover, there has

been no decrease in the number of visits by any of the specific category which is another proof of the appropriateness of the approach used. Thus, the relevance of the approach and services offered towards the target groups' need is confirmed both by qualitative and quantitative evidence.

To conclude, the Visitors' Centre helps to meet EC communication targets through communicating clear messages linked to the political priorities to the public through all types of visits.

However, by not focusing enough on concrete outcomes of EU policies which have direct impact on citizens' life, at present, the Visitors' Centre does not sufficiently emphasise the role of the European Commission as the EU executive. The current approach used by the Visitors' Centre privileging a high degree of customisation of the visits is considered relevant towards the target groups' needs. Nevertheless, in the case of General Information visits where such customisation is little to none, the degree of relevance is minor compared to that of Specific and Tailored Information Visits.

How effective has the Visitors' Centre been so far?

This question aims to determine the impact of the Visitor's Centre on the different target groups in the short and medium term. It also aims to find out whether a closer follow-up with different visiting groups is desirable and feasible.

Visitors' Centre's impact on visitors' awareness and knowledge of EU policies

The interviewed stakeholders consider that the Visitors' Centre is effective in raising visitors' awareness and improving knowledge of EU policies and Commission activities in the short and medium term. Most of them argue that the visit to the Visitors' Centre has a strong impact on all types of visitors, both those coming with already some background on EU affairs and those who are completely new to the subject.

The stakeholder survey respondents share the same view. Some 93% of them have a moderate or positive perception of the effectiveness of the Visitors' Centre. The respondents also believe that the Visitors' Centre provided useful information and increased their knowledge of the European Commission and EU policies.

However, satisfaction with the information received varies across categories. University students, for instance, have slightly lower satisfaction rates than the other categories (78% of them are moderately or significantly satisfied against the average of 90%). The contractor's report concludes that this is due to the fact that very often the Standard Corporate Presentation is too general for the university students who already have a background in European Affairs. Therefore the Visitors' Centre is not that effective in providing them with new information. Some students and visitors from academia expressed a wish to receive more "inside stories" and "internal knowledge" of the European Commission instead of general information which could be found in academic books and articles.

On the other hand, high school students and priority groups are the most satisfied with the services offered by the Visitors' Centre (more than 90% moderately and significantly satisfied with the information provided).

Notwithstanding the differences in the satisfaction rate of different groups, the overall satisfaction rate with the information provided by the Visitors' Centre is very high. Nearly 90% of visitor survey respondents rated the information provided by the Centre as good or very good.

Survey respondents particularly appreciate audio-visual information tools in the Visitors' Centre's premises. Nevertheless, the mystery shopper visits, showed that these tools are not always fully used by the visitors. Furthermore they are only available in the Charlemagne building and cannot be used during the visits organised in other EC buildings³.

Visitors' Centre's impact on engaging citizens in the EU debate

The Visitors' Centre's impact on engaging citizens in the EU debate was deemed significant by most of the interviewees and stakeholder survey respondents. Nearly 80% of visitor survey respondents and 70% of stakeholder survey respondents agree that the Visitors' Centre contributes to engaging citizens in the debate about Europe.

However, the level of impact on citizens' engagement depends on three criteria:

- The level of adaptation of the visit content to the needs of visitors' groups.
- The quality of speakers and the discussion with them.
- The level of interactivity during the visit.

Specific and Tailored Information Visits are considered more effective in engaging citizens in the short and medium term than General Information Visits as they have higher level of adaptation to the needs of the group, higher quality of speakers, mainly EC officials, and higher level of interactivity during the visits.

Desirability and feasibility of visits' follow-up

There is a disagreement between stakeholders and visitors regarding the desirability of the visits' follow-up. While the stakeholders consider a follow-up as an important tool for ensuring further effectiveness of the Visitors' Centre, visitors seem not to be interested in having it.

All interviewees as well as 55% of stakeholder survey respondents consider the follow-up important. However, there are different opinions on the form it should take. Some suggest sending additional information on the topics of interest of the group (e.g. leaflets, websites, publications, newsletters). Others insist on the follow up based on the

³ This is the case for around 15% of visits.

involvement of the EC Representations. Both options are equally mentioned by the interviewees and by stakeholder survey respondents.

However, the visitor survey respondents do not share this opinion. Nearly 62% of them would be against a visit follow-up, or the idea of being contacted after the visit with more information.

Many of them expressed the need for the Visitors' Centre to send information before the visit in order to prepare it better and to ensure the follow up only at the group's request. Most of the respondents underlined that instead of having a formal follow up, they would prefer to get contacts for further information if they need it. This is already the case in the Visitors' Centre as many internal speakers provide visitors with their contact details.

This view is also shared by some of the interviewees who consider that the Visitors' Centre should focus more on ex-ante preparation of the visit and less on its follow-up. The contractor's report concludes that at present the Visitors' Centre offers to the visitors a one-off experience, which means that their experience is limited to the duration of the visit without in-depth preparation beforehand and follow-up afterwards.

To conclude, the Visitors' Centre is effective in raising knowledge and awareness of the European 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 contractor's final 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.

The idea of ensuring visits' follow-up, supported by the majority of stakeholders seems not to be considered desirable by many visitors. Instead of having a formal follow up, they would prefer to get contacts for further information if they need it.

How efficient has the Visitors' Centre been so far?

This question aims to address the efficiency of the Visitors' Centre, in particular of the framework contracts in place, and to determine whether the current framework contracts are the best means to support its operation. It aims to determine their cost-effectiveness and find out whether it could be useful to internalise certain services. It also aims to determine whether the current set-up of the Visitors' Centre is adequate to cope with a further increase in quantity and quality of visits.

Efficiency of the current framework contracts

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). Other visitors' centres externalise only one or maximum two services (speakers/guides, logistics). The Visitors' Centre of the European Commission is also the only centre which externalises tasks of organising travel and accommodation for the visitors.

Efficiency of the framework contract for provision of external speakers

The Visitors' Centre has a framework contract with a service provider for provision of external speakers responsible for presenting information on the European Commission to visitors' groups upon request.

External speakers are used by the Visitors' Centre mostly for making a Standard Corporate Presentation on the European Commission as the EU executive for General and Specific Information Visits. The results of web-based surveys show that most visitors are aware that the speakers are external. However, the mystery shopper visits showed that their status vis a vis the Commission is not always clearly presented to the audience at the beginning of the visit.

Furthermore, almost half of the interviewees question the effectiveness of external speakers and have doubts about their practical knowledge of the European Commission. The visitors coming to the Visitors' Centre generally expect to meet internal speakers in order to know better the institution and its staff. Internal speakers are highly appreciated for their ability to provide practical insights into the Commission's work and tell insiders' stories.

However, the interviewees are aware of lack of internal speakers at the Visitors' Centre. The number of EC officials volunteering to make a Standard Corporate Presentations to groups is not high enough to cover the needs of all visiting groups. According to the contractor's final report this is because the possibility of being an internal speaker at the Visitors' Centre is not known and encouraged enough in the European Commission.

The results of the visitor survey show that the satisfaction rate with both internal and external speakers is almost the same. Also, according to many stakeholders, the quality of external speakers has increased in the last few years due to the "working groups" concept. The "working groups" are the internal initiative carried out by the external contractor in collaboration with the Visitors' Centre in order to foster the quality of speakers (both internal and external) as well as to improve the knowledge of external speakers on specific topics through discussion with EC officials.

The contractor's report concludes that given a shortage of internal speakers for Standard Corporate Presentations and the increased quality of external speakers, the framework contract is an appropriate solution for dealing with the high number of visitor groups, especially for General and Specific Information Visits.

Efficiency of the framework contract for travel arrangements

The framework contract for travel arrangements can be used by all Commission DGs for booking travel tickets of EC officials going on missions and groups visiting the Visitors' Centre.

The interviewees' feedback on this framework contract is not always positive. The main negative comments concern the costs and the quality of the services delivered by the company (both in terms of occasional mistakes in reservations and in terms of quality and ease of interaction with EC officials).

However, as the internalisation of these tasks is not currently feasible because of the high additional workload it would create for the Visitors' Centre's staff and given that this contract applies to all the Commission DGs and not only to the Visitors' Centre, the contractor's report considers it as an adequate tool for arranging travel of groups visiting the Visitors' Centre.

Efficiency of the Framework contracts for visit assistants and logistics

The Visitors' Centre has two framework contracts with the same service provider for provision of visit assistants and logistical services (restaurants, hotels, local transport for the groups).

The role of the visit assistants or hostesses at the Visitors' Centre is to welcome visitors and accompany them through the security checks, stay with the group during the visit provide logistical and organisational support to speakers and prepare coffee breaks.

The work of visit assistants is very much appreciated both by the interviewees and visitors and is considered a good value for money.

Therefore in the current configuration where roles of visit organisers and hostesses are different, concentrating the attention of visit organisers on the organisation of the visits' programme, the framework contract for hosting services is considered adequate. However, the European Commission's Visitors' Centre is the only centre, amongst those benchmarked, which has dedicated external staff for welcoming and accompanying visitors throughout their visit and taking care of logistics.

The same service provider assists the Visitors' Centre with booking of hotels, restaurants and arranging local travel in Brussels. There are different opinions regarding the efficiency of this contract among the interviewees. Some are satisfied with the quality of services, others raise concerns about the suitability of the accommodation provided and difficulty to solve major problems. Nevertheless, the contractor's report concludes that this framework contract is adequate for the needs of the Visitors' Centre as the internalisation of these tasks is not currently feasible. However, according to the contractor's report there is a certain degree of overlap between this contract and the contract for travel arrangements.

The European Commission considers 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 roles of visits' organisers and the hosting staff are distinctly different and cannot be merged. Contrary to the findings of the contractor's report, the framework contracts for travel arrangements and other logistics are clear-cut and do not overlap.

Adequacy of the Visitors' Centre's set up in coping with a further increase in quality and quantity of visits

Considering the currently available resources, the Visitors' Centre would only be able to cope, to some extent, with an increase in number of visitors opting for General Information Visits.

Due to the limited human resources, in particular visit organisers and internal speakers, and lack of premises to host visiting groups, the Visitors' Centre will not be able to cope with the increase in number of Specific and Tailored Information Visits or an increase in both the quality and quantity of visits. It will only be able to sustain to some extent an increase in number of General Information Visits using external speakers provided by the contractor.

The cooperation between the Visitors' Centre and the EC Representations is essential for ensuring the quality and quantity of visits as they bring to the Centre national, regional and local stakeholders and key multipliers. The EC Representations make an annual planning of priority visits, including a limited number of all-inclusive visits. Main target groups for all-inclusive visits are high profile stakeholders and key multipliers. However, often, the EC Representations, in particular in smaller and more peripheral countries with respect to Brussels, use all-inclusive visits to send student groups. The contractor's report considers this approach not fully coherent with the Visitors' Centre's guidelines.

The contractor's report concludes that due to the fixed budget for all-inclusive visits per country and limited number of participants per visits, the EC Representations have a limited possibility to contribute to the increase of quality and quantity of visits. The contribution of EDICs is also limited as there is no structural cooperation between them and the Visitors' Centre.

How coherent has the Visitors' Centre been internally and externally so far?

This question aims to assess whether the Visitors' Centre is 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.

Internal coherence

Nearly 97% of stakeholder survey respondents moderately or strongly agree that the Visitors' Centre's activities are coherent with other activities of DG COMM. However, despite the positive stakeholders' feedback, the contractor's report concludes that the coherence between the Visitors' Centre and other DG COMM services is very limited as the DG COMM Management Plan does not indicate how the Visitors' Centre should reflect other DG COMM communication activities in the coherent manner.

The European Commission does not agree with these conclusions. It considers that the Visitors' Centre is fully part of DG COMM under the direct political guidance of the President of the Commission. It works closely with all relevant DG COMM services, such as the Spokespersons' Service, the Audio-visual Service and the EC Representations and Regional Offices in the Member States. It also co-operates with all other units within the Directorate C of DG COMM. Moreover, the Visitors' Centre co-operates actively with key EC DGs, such as DG ECFIN and DG TRADE, on the political priorities of the Juncker Commission.

External coherence

Apart from the Visitors' Centre, the visitors groups coming to Brussels can visit the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. All these institutions offer different types of visits to groups and individuals: from self-guided tours and general presentations to very tailored information visits.

Most of the interviewees agree that the content of the visits offered by the Visitors' Centre of the European Commission is coherent with the ones of the EP and the Council. This is due to the fact that the programme of the visit of each visitors' centre is focused on the role and functioning of its respective institution. The results of the visitor survey show that 40% of the Visitors' Centre's visitors are also interested in visiting other EU institutions.

The majority of respondents agree that it is important to have different visitors' centres in order to allow visitors to learn about different EU institutions. However some stakeholders note that the existence of different visitors' centres could be confusing and does not allow for giving visitors a clear message common to all EU institutions.

Moreover, the existence of different centres has some organisational disadvantages. Citizens, EDICs or EC Representations willing to organise a visit to Brussels have to deal with many different reservation systems. Additionally, scheduling more than one visit with more than one visitors' centre over one or two days is a challenge as they have different availability. This organisational complexity was also underlined by the interviewees.

A small part of the visitor survey respondents find that there is a certain overlap in the general presentations at the European Commission's Visitors' Centre and at the EP Visitors' Centres. This is due to the fact that the Visitors' Centre's presentations include, although to a limited extent, information on the structure and work of the EP.

To conclude, the work of the Visitors' Centre of the European Commission is overall coherent with the work of the visitors' centres of other EU institutions. Nonetheless, the contractor's final report finds that the content of the Standard Corporate presentation used in particular for General Information Visits is overlapping to some extent with the one of the EP Visitors' Centre.

The contractor's final report considers that there is no formal inter-institutional coordination of the work of the visitors' centres of different EU institutions aimed at ensuring coherence of the visits' content.

Although there is no formal inter-institutional coordination, the Visitors' Centre receives numerous groups that visit several institutions, and in particular groups from the constituencies of members of the European Parliament. The Visitors' Centre ensures that in these cases there is no overlap in the contents of the visit programmes with those of the other institutions.

What has been the EU added value of the Visitors' Centre so far?

This question aims to address the 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 overarching majority of interviewees and stakeholder survey respondents expressed a strong positive opinion on the EU added value of the Visitors' Centre. Stakeholders believe that the Visitors' Centre is best placed to carry out information activities for citizens and to engage them in debate about the EU. The biggest added value of the Visitors' Centre is the proximity to the European Commission headquarters. Coming to the Visitors' Centre the visitors feel closer to Europe. The Visitors' Centre helps to personalise Europe and enables citizens to benefit from the expert knowledge of the EC officials as well as create networking opportunities for them.

However, this is only relevant for Specific and Tailored Information Visits, where the speakers are EC officials and not for General Information Visits. Moreover, the Visitors' Centre helps the EC Representations to build closer relationships with major national stakeholders as EC Representation staff usually accompany visitors' groups to Brussels and stay with them during the whole duration of their visit.

Finally, the Visitors' Centre has also an added value for the EC officials who give presentations to the visitors. Being a speaker at the Visitors' Centre gives them an opportunity to be in contact with the citizens and get direct feedback and new ideas for their work. Therefore the interviewees argue that the EC officials should be encouraged to become internal speakers.

To conclude, 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.

Recommendations

The contractor's report identifies some strategic and operational recommendations for future action by DG COMM.

The contractor's report recommends conceiving a coherent strategy for the Visitors' Centre based on a customer service approach, containing the following points:

- A clear definition of target groups both for the visits organised directly by the Visitors' Centre and those organised in cooperation with the EC Representations and the EDICs. The target groups should be defined for all types of visits.
- An action plan for increasing the number of internal speakers from the European Commission in order to be able to use them for most of General and Specific Information Visits. The plan should include recruitment procedures, training and recognition systems.
- A proposal for developing collaboration with other Commission DGs with a view to organising information visits for their stakeholders building on the successful collaboration with DG TRADE and DG ECFIN. This collaboration could be developed for all types of visits, but in particular for Tailored ones.

The contractor's report also recommends making visits in the Visitors' Centre a "journey experience" rather than a one-off event, consisting of ex-ante preparation, the visit itself and the follow-up activities.

It recommends improving the interactivity of visits by increasing the use of multimedia tools installed in the Visitors' Centre, improving layout of meeting rooms and better adapting the content of the presentations to the needs of visitors groups.

In order to maximise the use of the Visitors' Centre, the contractor's report recommends to:

- Further enhance cooperation with the EC Representations. The Visitors' Centre should prepare together with the EC Representations an annual visits' planning in order to better customise the visits to the needs of their target groups. The planning should take into account the number of visits organised by each Representation in the previous years and the types of stakeholders involved. The follow-up strategy of these visits should also be developed.
- Explore the possibility of providing "virtual visits" in order to reach target groups beyond the Visitors' Centre's physical premises.
- Establish closer cooperation with the EDICs.

Finally, the contractor's report recommends coordinating the Visitors' Centre's activities with activities of the visitors' centres of other EU institutions in order to make more coherent their visit programmes.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Overall the Visitors' Centre helps to meet Commission communication targets through communicating clear messages linked to the political priorities of the Juncker Commission to the public through General, Specific and Tailored Information Visits. Nevertheless, the Standard Corporate Presentation developed by the Centre should be more focused on the role of the Commission as the EU executive and contain more examples of the impact of Commission policies on the citizens' life.

The current approach based on three pre-defined types of visits and privileging a high degree of adaptation to visitors' groups' needs is considered **relevant** for receiving all types of visitors. However, the relevance of General Information Visits is minor, compared to that of Specific and Tailored Information Visits.

The Visitors' Centre is **effective** in raising knowledge and awareness of the Commission and its policies through all types of visits, although this could be more limited for certain groups who already have a good basis, such as university students.

Specific and Tailored Information Visits are considered more effective in engaging citizens in the short and medium term than General Information Visits.

The impact of certain visits is also limited by the absence of contacts with the group leaders prior to the visits. The idea of visits' follow-up, supported by the majority of interviewees, seems not to be considered desirable by the visitors themselves.

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

While the organisation of work at the Visitors' Centre is efficient in the present scenario, the Centre will have difficulties to deal with an increase in number and quality of visits because of the limited resources. The Centre will only be able to cope to some extent with increase in quantity of General Information Visits using external speakers provided by the contractor.

The Visitors' Centre's activities are **coherent** with other activities of DG COMM. The Visitors' Centre works closely together with all relevant DG COMM services, other units of Directorate C, EC Representations and Regional Offices in the EU Member States. The Visitors' Centre also ensures that if a group visits more than one institution, there is no overlap in the visit programmes.

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 of DG COMM.

7. ANNEX 1: PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

Leading DG	DG COMM
Participating Units of DG COMM	C4 – Citizens' contact – lead unit D1 – Budget, accounting and evaluation
Participating DGs	ECFIN SG
Roadmap approval	October 2015
External consulting firm specialised in evaluation	Contract signed on 06.05.2015 with: Deloitte
Number of steering group meetings	3
Last deliverable handed in	
Approval of the final report by Steering Group	June 2016
Agenda planning	N.A.

8. ANNEX 2: STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

This Annex summarises the results of all consultation activities carried out in the framework of the evaluation of the Visitors' Centre.

The goal of the consultation activities was to collect views and opinions on the Visitors' Centre within the scope of the evaluation questions. Consultation activities were one of the methodological tools used by the evaluators in order to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value of the Visitors' Centre. The consultation results were presented in the contractor's final report.

Consulted stakeholders

- Visitors who participated in information visits organised by the Visitors' Centre
- EC Representations and Regional Offices in the Member States
- Permanent Representations of the Member States to the EU in Brussels
- Europe Direct Information Centres
- Commission staff cooperating with the Visitors' Centre
- Team of external speakers
- External contractors providing services to the Visitors' Centre
- EU citizens in general

In analysing the results of the consultation, two types of consultation work should be distinguished:

1. Targeted consultations

In the framework of the Visitor's Centre evaluation, the external contractor carried out the following evaluation activities targeting stakeholders and public who has visited the Visitors' Centre:

- Preliminary interviews with DG COMM officials
- Stakeholder interviews
- Mystery shopper visits
- Web-based surveys

2. Consultation carried out by DG COMM

As a first step, the evaluation roadmap was published together with the consultation strategy on the central Europa webpages.

Later a web-based public consultation as a mandatory element of the Commission Better Regulation Guidelines took place, targeting public that had never visited the Visitors' Centre.

However, following the end of the 12-week consultation period, no feedback was received.

Targeted consultations

Preliminary interviews with DG COMM officials

The evaluation team organised preliminary interviews with ten officials representing different functions of the Visitors' Centre in order to acquire more detailed knowledge concerning the contextual environment of this study and provide the evaluation team with insights into the policy priorities and potential challenges.

Stakeholder interviews

The evaluation team carried out interviews with 20 stakeholders suggested by the Visitors' Centre as relevant for the evaluation. Interviewees included staff from DG COMM (including staff from the EC Representations), DG Budget (DG BUDG), DG Economy and Finance (DG ECFIN), DG Employment (DG EMPL), DG TRADE, the Secretariat-General (SG), the Council of the EU, the Austrian Permanent Representation to the EU and the Europe Direct Information Centre (EDIC) Normandy⁴.

Mystery shopper visits

The evaluation team conducted three unannounced mystery shopper visits in the Visitors' Centre, in order to interview visitors in the framework of different visits (one for each of the three types).

Web-based surveys

The evaluation team conducted two web-based surveys:

- One targeting stakeholders involved in the organisation of visits from the EC Representations and Regional Offices in the Member States, as well as from the EDICs (stakeholder surveys);
- One targeting the leaders of visitors' groups (visitor surveys);

These web-based surveys were hosted on a dedicated website and remained open for 12 weeks (from the 12th of January until the 4th of April).

The first online survey questionnaire was available for respondents in English only. The second one, targeting individual visitors, was shorter and was available in three languages: English, French and German.

⁴ Europe Direct Information Centres (EDICs) are part of the EC network of more than 500 centres spread out across the EU with the objective to increase people's awareness and understanding of the EU.

The link to the surveys were disseminated by DG COMM. The evaluation team prepared a draft email that was sent to all the stakeholders concerned.

Some 83 complete⁵ answers were received in response to the stakeholder survey and 476 in response to the visitor survey (143 in German, 220 in English and 113 in French).

Stakeholder survey

The stakeholder survey contained the following questions:

1. Which Member State do you work in? (drop-down list of countries)
2. What is your function? (drop-down list of functions)
3. How do you rate the following statements:
 - The Visitors' Centre contributes to raising awareness and knowledge of the EU among citizens.
 - The Visitors' Centre contributes to engaging citizens in a debate about Europe and consequently in the EU policy-making process?
(Answers: fully agree, partially agree, partially disagree, fully disagree)
4. To what extent do you agree with the followings statement?
 - The Visitors' Centre is complementary to relevant communication initiatives carried out at the national level for raising awareness of the EU amongst citizen.
 - The Visitors' Centre is coherent with DG COMM strategy for raising awareness of the EU amongst citizen.
 - The Visitors' Centre activities are complementary with other DG COMM initiatives such as the Open Days, the European Years etc.
(Answers: fully agree, agree, disagree, fully disagree)
5. Would you consider it useful for achieving the Visitors' Centre's objectives to ensure a post visit follow up with visitors (through emails, further contacts or other?)
(Answers: yes, no, blank).

Visitor survey

The visitor survey contained the following questions:

1. Which Member State do you live in? (drop-down list of countries)
2. You visited the Visitors' Centre as part of a group, which type of group was it? (drop-down list of group types)
3. (Only for those respondents replying “journalists”): How interesting or useful was it for you to attend press briefings in the press room? (Answers: very interesting, interesting, somewhat interesting, not interesting).

⁵ The evaluation team took into account only the answers of respondents who completed the survey until the end.

4. How would you rate the information the Visitors' Centre provided you about the Commission's role and work? (Answers: very good, good, poor, very poor).
5. How more likely you are you to engage as a citizen in the European debate now that you visited the Visitors' Centre? (Answers: to a great extent, to some extent, slightly, not at all). Have you also visited any of these other visitors' centres in Brussels? (Yes, No) If yes, which ones?
6. During your visit at the Visitors' Centre, the speaker(s) was/were: (Answers: I don't know, both, external speaker, European Commission speaker).
7. How would you rate the quality of information received at the Visitors' Centre from the following: Commission (Commission official or a Commissioner) and an external speaker? (Answers: very good, good, poor, very poor).
8. How would you rate the quality of audio-visual material accessible on the (touch screens, ppt, other, accessible at the touch screen stations) at the Visitors' Centre? (Answers: excellent, good, bad, very bad)
9. How would you rate the opportunity to sit at the table where the College of Commissioners used to meet? (Answers: N/A, very interesting, interesting, somewhat interesting, not at all interesting)
10. Would you have liked the Visitors' Centre to contact you following your visit in order to offer more information? (Answers: yes, no)

Results

The methodologies adopted to analyse consultation results were both qualitative and quantitative and the team triangulated the data obtained in order to perform the analysis. The 12-week public consultation required by the Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines was also supposed to be taken into account by the evaluation team as part of the triangulation of data gathered during the assignment. However, no responses were received in the framework of this consultation.

The results of the analysis revealed that a strong majority of interviewed stakeholders believe that the Visitors' Centre is a major tool which helps the Commission to reach its communication objectives. They also think that the Visitors' Centre can help to increase the EU visibility and to further engage citizens in a debate about EU policies.

Overall, most interviewees argue that the general approach used by the Visitors' Centre allows it to serve a wide range of needs well. There is a strong agreement among the stakeholders on the relevance of the Visitors' Centre approach and services for the most customised visits, such as Tailored and Specific Information Visits. However, they find the General Information Visits less relevant.

All stakeholders consider that the Visitors' Centre is effective in raising visitors' awareness and improving knowledge of EU policies and the Commission activities in the short and medium term. Most of them argue that the visit to the Visitors' Centre has a strong impact on all types of visitors, both those coming with already some background on EU affairs and those who are completely new to the subject.

The visitor survey respondents believe that the Visitors' Centre provided useful information and increased their knowledge of the European Commission and EU policies. However, satisfaction with the information received varies across categories. University students, for instance, have slightly lower satisfaction rates than the other categories (78% of them are moderately or significantly satisfied against the average of 90%). Therefore the Visitors' Centre is not that effective in providing them with new information. Some students and visitors from academia expressed a wish to receive more “inside stories” and “internal knowledge” of the European Commission instead of general information which could be found in academic books and articles.

On the other hand, high school students and priority groups are the most satisfied with the services offered by the Visitors' Centre (more than 90% moderately and significantly satisfied with the information provided).

Notwithstanding the differences in the satisfaction rate of different groups, the overall satisfaction rate with the information provided by the Visitors' Centre is very high. Nearly 90% of visitor survey respondents rated the information provided by the Centre as good or very good.

Survey respondents particularly appreciate audio-visual information tools in the Visitors' Centre's premises. Nevertheless, the mystery shopper visits, showed that these tools are not always fully used by the visitors. Furthermore they are only available in the Charlemagne building and cannot be used during the visits organised in other EC buildings.

The Visitors' Centre's impact on engaging citizens in the EU debate is deemed significant by most of the interviewee and survey' respondents. Nearly 80% of visitor survey respondents and 70% of stakeholder survey respondents agree that the Visitors' Centre contributes to engaging citizens in the debate about Europe.

There is a disagreement between stakeholders and visitors regarding the desirability of the visit' follow-up. While the stakeholders consider a follow-up as important tool for ensuring further effectiveness of the Visitors' Centre, visitors seem not to be interested in having it. Instead of having a formal follow up, they would prefer to get contacts for further information if they need it.

Many of them expressed the need for the Visitors' Centre to send information before the visit in order to prepare it better and to ensure the follow up only at the group request. This view is also shared by some of the interviewees who consider that the Visitors' Centre should focus more on ex-ante preparation of the visit and less on its follow-up.

Stakeholders' feedback on the efficiency of framework contracts with external contractors varies depending on the contract. As regards the contract for external speakers, the results of the visitor survey show that the satisfaction rate with both internal and external speakers is almost the same. Also, according to many stakeholders, the quality of external speakers has increased in the last few years. However, almost half of the interviewees question the effectiveness of external speakers and have doubts about

their practical knowledge of the European Commission. The visitors coming to the Visitors' Centre generally expect to meet internal speakers in order to know better the institution and its staff.

As regards the contract with AMEX, the interviewees' feedback is not always positive. The main negative comments concern the costs and the quality of the services delivered by the company.

On the other hand, stakeholders give a very positive feedback on the contract for hosting services. The work of visit assistants is very much appreciated both by the interviewees and visitors and is considered a good value for money. Interviewees give different feedback on the efficiency of the contract for logistical services. Some are satisfied with the quality of the services, others raise concerns about the suitability of the accommodation provided and difficulty to solve major problems.

Nearly 97% of stakeholder survey respondents moderately or strongly agree that the Visitors' Centre's activities are coherent with other activities of DG COMM.

Most of the interviewees agree that the content of the visits offered by the Visitors' Centre of the European Commission is coherent with the ones of the European Parliament and the Council. A small part of the visitor survey respondents find that there is a certain overlap in the general presentations at the European Commission's Visitors' Centre and at the EP Visitors' Centres.

The results of the visitor survey show that 40% of the Visitors' Centre visitors are also interested in visiting other EU institutions. The majority of respondents agree that it is important to have different visitors' centres in order to allow visitors to learn about different EU institutions. However some stakeholders note that the existence of different visitors' centres could be confusing and does not allow for giving visitors a clear message common to all EU institutions.

The overarching majority of interviewees and stakeholder survey respondents express a strong positive opinion on the EU added value of the Visitors' Centre. Stakeholders believe that the Visitors' Centre is best placed to carry out information activities for citizens and to engage them in debate about the EU.

Consultation activities carried out by DG COMM

Web-based public consultation

A web-based public consultation as a mandatory element of the Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines took place, targeting public that had never visited the Commission's Visitors' Centre.

The consultation was published on the dedicated website and remained open for 12 weeks, from 2 February 2016 to 26 April 2016.

The consultation was advertised on the Visitors' Centre' website (<http://ec.europa.eu/visits/>) and on the relevant websites dedicated to the evaluation on Europa and on the DG COMM website.

However, no responses were received in the framework of this consultation.

The questions asked during the consultation were as follows:

1. a) Which country are you from? (drop-down list of countries)
1. b) What is your main language? (drop-down list of languages)
2. a) Which of the following categories do you belong to? (drop-down list of categories)
2. b) Are you registered in the Transparency register?

Yes/No. If yes, please indicate your number: (number box)

3. You have not yet visited the European Commission's Visitors' Centre based in Brussels. Why not?

- I have never heard of the European Commission's Visitors' Centre.
- I am not interested.
- Brussels is too far.
- The trip is too expensive.
- The electronic application process is too complicated. Please explain: (box)
- My visit request was refused by the Visitors' Centre. Please explain: (box)
- Other: (box)

4. The European Commission's Visitors' Centre provides visiting groups with an introduction to the role of the European Commission as the political executive of the European Union and its key priorities. To what extent do you think this Centre is useful for bringing Europe closer to its citizens?

Scale of 1-5: (1=not useful at all, 2=not very useful, 3=neutral, 4=useful, 5=very useful, 0= no opinion), Please explain: (box)

5. The European Commission has information points (Representations, Regional Offices, Europe Direct Information Centres) in all EU Member States to provide information on the activities of the European Union. In comparison with these information points at national level, what for you would be the added value of the European Commission's Visitors' Centre in Brussels?

- Only a visit to the Commission Headquarters in Brussels can give me a first-hand understanding of the work and functioning of the Commission (Scale of 1-5)
- I would like to see the main Commission building (Berlaymont) where the President and the Commissioners work (Scale of 1-5)
- I can choose between different types of information visits (General, Specific and Tailored Information Visits) (Scale of 1-5)
- A visit to the European Commission's Visitors' Centre in Brussels will also allow me to visit other European institutions (Scale of 1-5)
- Other, please explain (box)

Scale of 1-5: (1=not important at all, 2=not very important, 3=neutral, 4=important, 5=very important, 0= no opinion)

9. ANNEX 3: METHODS AND ANALYTICAL MODELS

1. Analytical Framework

The Analytical Framework ensured that each objective of the evaluation was met and every evaluation question was given an answer. The information collected throughout the evaluation was linked to the Analytical Framework, allowing the evaluators to give a detailed description of the reasoning followed in the analysis. This exercise was crucial in order to structure the later steps of the analysis and ensure that conclusions and recommendations were strictly evidence-based.

The Analytical Framework was the basis of the evaluation's analysis and it was organised by evaluation criterion and divided into four main sections:

- the evaluation questions organised under the evaluation criteria;

- the judgement criteria used to answer the evaluation questions in an accurate and sound manner;

- the (qualitative or quantitative) indicators that were used to substantiate the judgement criteria; and

- the methodological tools / sources of the information used to analyse the collected data and feed the indicators.

Evaluation questions	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Methodological tools / source of information
Relevance			
<p>Is the approach developed and the service provided by the Visitors' Centre appropriate for the Commission as the executive of the European Union?</p>	<p>The approach developed by the Visitors' Centre is appropriate for the Commission as the executive of the European Union.</p> <p>The service provided by the Visitors' Centre is appropriate for the Commission as the executive of the European Union.</p> <p>The purpose(s) of the Visitors' Centre is appropriate to meet the Commission' communication targets.</p> <p>The approach and service developed by the Visitors' Centre are appropriate to meet the target groups' needs.</p>	<p>Number of visits and visitors for the three types of visits offered to different target groups.</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative data regarding the different target groups attending the Visitors' Centre.</p> <p>Perception of interviewees regarding the appropriateness of the target groups currently focused on.</p> <p>Qualitative evidence (perception of participants and visit organisers) on visit programmes and their didactic approach.</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative data on the needs of the target audiences (e.g. types of visits, topics of interests).</p> <p>Evidence on the extent to which the needs of target audiences have been/are assessed and the service/activities designed taking these into account.</p> <p>Perceptions of correspondence between the additional needs of target audiences, expressed as feedback, and any alternation of activities offered.</p> <p>The extent to which the location and the layout of the centre is suitable for and is appreciated by the target groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Desk research ✔ Preliminary interviews ✔ Interviews with stakeholders (incl. target groups) ✔ Web-based survey(s) ✔ Benchmarking exercise
Effectiveness			
<p>What impact does the Visitors' Centre have on</p>	<p>Extent to which the Visitors' Centre has an impact</p>	<p>Perceptions of participants regarding the quality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Desk research

Evaluation questions	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Methodological tools / source of information
<p>the different target groups in the short and medium term?</p>	<p>on the different target groups in the short and medium term.</p> <p>There are different types of impact per different types of target groups.</p>	<p>of speakers and the content of presentations.</p> <p>Opinions of participants about the degree to which the Visitors' Centre succeeded in increasing the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ knowledge of citizens about the European Commission and EU policies; ➤ understanding of citizens of European Commission and EU policies; ➤ engagement of citizens in a debate about Europe and consequently in the EU policy-making process. <p>Perceptions on the usefulness of attending press briefings in the press room.</p> <p>Perceptions on the degree of innovation of the services offered by the Visitors' Centre (also in comparison with relevant services of other EU Institutions and international organisations), e.g. the audiovisual material (touch screens) and the opportunity to seat at the table where the College of Commissioners used to meet.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Preliminary interviews ➤ Interviews with stakeholders (incl. target groups) ➤ Web-based survey(s) ➤ Benchmarking exercise
<p>Is a closer follow-up with the different visiting groups desirable and feasible and if so, how could it be organised?</p>	<p>A closer follow-up with the different visiting groups seems desirable.</p> <p>A closer follow-up with the different visiting groups seems feasible.</p>	<p>Feedback mechanisms already put in place (incl. visit evaluations and feedback, eventual follow-up).</p> <p>Opinions of stakeholders involved or participants about current feedback mechanisms.</p> <p>Perceptions about whether or not a closer follow-up would enhance the services offered by the Visitors' Centre so as to better meet target groups' needs.</p> <p>Data on any follow-up activities in place by other EU Institutions and international organisations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Preliminary interviews ➤ Interviews with stakeholders (incl. target groups) ➤ Web-based survey(s) ➤ Benchmarking exercise

Efficiency

<p>Are the current framework contracts the best means to support the operation of the Visitors' Centre?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Are they cost-effective? ✔ Could it be useful to internalise certain services? 	<p>The current framework contracts are the best means to support the operation of the Visitors' Centre.</p> <p>The current framework contracts are cost-effective.</p> <p>Certain services could be internalised.</p>	<p>Quantitative evidence on services delivered through the framework contracts in relationship to their price.</p> <p>Quantitative evidence on services delivered through the framework contracts in relationship to the end-results.</p> <p>Quantitative evidence on services delivered through the framework contracts in relationship to the quality of the services offered.</p> <p>Perceptions regarding the coherence of the external staff and officials within the Visitors' Centre.</p> <p>Evidence regarding the difference between the cost of external and internal staff.</p> <p>The extent to which external speakers and external assistants rotate.</p> <p>Stakeholders' perceptions about alternative solutions.</p> <p>The extent to which participants appreciate internal and external speakers to a different extent.</p> <p>The extent to which a more extensive mobilisation of EC staff for the visits is deemed desirable and feasible by relevant interviewees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Desk research ✔ Interviews with stakeholders (incl. target groups) ✔ Web-based survey(s) ✔ Cost-effectiveness analysis
<p>Is the current set-up of the Visitors' Centre adequate to cope with a further increase in quantity and quality of visits?</p>	<p>The current set-up of the Visitors' Centre is adequate to cope with a further increase in quantity and quality of visits.</p> <p>The approach of involvement of EC representations helps the centre to cope with a</p>	<p>Number of visits and visitors for the three types of visits offered to different target groups.</p> <p>Quantitative evidence on any increase of visits for the coming years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Desk research ✔ Preliminary interviews ✔ Interviews with stakeholders (incl. target groups) ✔ Cost-effectiveness analysis

Evaluation questions	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Methodological tools / source of information
	further increase in quantity and quality of visits.	<p>Perception of stakeholders about the current set-up.</p> <p>The proportion of the visits being referred by the EC representations.</p> <p>The extent to which the EC representations provide timely planning data and ensure facilitation of visits as planned.</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative data on the IT tool in place for the management of visits.</p> <p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence on the ability of the Visitors' Centre to respond to visit requests in terms of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▣ staffing (EU officials, external contractors); ▣ budget; ▣ IT support; ▣ meeting rooms, pedagogic tools, etc. 	
Coherence			
<p>Is the Visitors' Centre coherent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▣ internally, with other relevant communication activities of the Commission (i.e. Europe Day/EU Open Doors, social media)? ▣ externally, with the work of the visitors centre of the European Parliament and of the Committee of the Regions? 	<p>Activities of the Visitors' Centre and the relevant communication activities of the Commission achieved common objectives and/or complementary actions.</p> <p>Objectives of the Visitors' Centre are complementary (rather than overlapping) with those of the visitors centre of the European Parliament and of the Committee of the Regions.</p>	<p>Documented processes and involved staff's accounts on how the Visitors' Centre is working together with Europe Day/EU Open Doors, and social media activities of DG COMM and other DGs.</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative data regarding leveraging Commission social media activities at the Visitors' Centre and <i>vice versa</i>.</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative data regarding leveraging Europe Day/EU Open Doors at the Visitors' Centre and <i>vice versa</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▣ Desk research ▣ Benchmarking exercise

Evaluation questions	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Methodological tools / source of information
		<p>Opinion of visitors about the complementarity of the Visitors' Centre with the visitors centre of the European Parliament and of the Committee of the Regions.</p> <p>Qualitative evidence of coordinating activities among the three visitors centres.</p>	
EU added value			
<p>The specific objectives of the Visitors' Centre are to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ provide information on the role of the European Commission as the political executive of the European Union and explain its policies and priorities; and to ➤ engage with citizens through a better knowledge and understanding of the European Commission and its policies / priorities. <p>What added value does the Visitors' Centre represent compared to what could be achieved in this respect by Member States at national and/or regional levels?</p>	<p>The Visitors' Centre is better placed than Member States at national and/or regional levels to provide information on the role of the European Commission as the political executive of the European Union and explain its policies and priorities.</p> <p>The Visitors' Centre can better engage with citizens through a better knowledge and understanding of the European Commission and its policies / priorities.</p>	<p>Perception of visitors about the added value of the Visitors' Centre in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ raising awareness and knowledge of the EU among citizens; ➤ engaging citizens in a debate about Europe and consequently in the EU policy-making process. <p>Survey respondents' view on comparison with the activities of the Visitors' Centre and relevant initiatives at national level (if applicable).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Interviews with stakeholders (incl. target groups) ➤ Web-based survey(s) ➤ Benchmarking exercise

Source: Deloitte and Coffey

2. Methods

In order to carry out the evaluation and to provide an answer to the evaluation questions illustrated above, the evaluation team applied several complementary evaluation methodologies. The methodologies adopted were both qualitative and quantitative and the team triangulated the data obtained in order to perform the analysis.

Preliminary interviews with DG COMM officials

As a first step the team organised preliminary interviews with ten officials representing the different functions of the Visitors' Centre in order to acquire more detailed knowledge concerning the contextual environment of this study and provide the evaluation team with insights into the policy priorities and potential challenges.

Preliminary desk research

Following the initial interviews with the Steering Committee and based on the information received, a first set of relevant documents was analysed. However, desk research was a continuous process throughout the evaluation.

Desk research

In order to specifically meet the objectives of this evaluation, the team reviewed the following documents:

- Policy and strategic documents such as Commission Decisions and Communications;
- Relevant material in relation to the Visitors' Centre's statute, objectives and daily operations;
- Monitoring data in relation to the number of visits requests, feedback forms from the visitors, qualitative data on costs, IT data, etc.;
- Literature review on good practices, to serve us for the benchmarking exercise;
- Minutes of meetings and other common activities.

Interviews with a variety of stakeholders

The evaluation team carried out interviews with 20 stakeholders suggested by the Visitors' Centre as relevant for the evaluation. Interviewees included staff from the DG COMM (including staff from the EC Representations), DG BUDG, DG ECFIN, DG TRADE, the SG as well as the Council of the EU, the Austrian Permanent Representation to the EU and a EDIC Normandy.

In addition to these stakeholder interviews, the evaluation team conducted three unannounced mystery shopper visits in the Visitors' Centre in order to interview visitors in the framework of different visits (one for each of the three types).

Web-based surveys

The evaluation team conducted two web-based surveys:

- One targeting stakeholders involved in the organisation of visits, such as the EC Representations and Regional Offices in the EU Member States, as well as Europe Direct Information Centres;
- One targeting the leaders of visiting groups;

These web-based surveys were hosted on a dedicated website and remained open for 12 weeks (from the 12th of January until the 4th of April).

The first online survey questionnaire was available for respondents in English only. The second one, targeting individual visitors, was shorter and was available in three languages: English, French and German.

The link to the surveys was disseminated by DG COMM. The evaluation team prepared a draft email which was sent to all the stakeholders concerned.

Some 83 complete answers were received in response to the stakeholder survey and 476 in response to the visitor survey (143 in German, 220 in English and 113 in French).

Web-based public consultation

A web-based public consultation as a mandatory element of the Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines took place, targeting public that had never visited the Commission's Visitors' Centre.

The consultation was published on the dedicated website and remained open for 12 weeks (from 2 February 2016 - 26 April 2016).

The consultation was advertised on the Visitors' Centre' website (<http://ec.europa.eu/visits/>) and on the relevant websites dedicated to the evaluation on Europa/DG.

However, no responses were received in the framework of this consultation.

Benchmarking exercise

The evaluation team performed a benchmarking exercise of the Visitors' Centre against visitors' centres or relevant services of other EU institutions and international organisations.

This activity also focused on identifying current market practices that could be a model for the Visitors' Centre in a mid- to long-term perspective. The following visitors' centres and services were hence benchmarked:

- European Parliament & Parliamentarium;
- Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU);

- OECD Headquarters in Paris;
- European Central Bank;
- United Nations Office at Geneva

The evaluation team initially conducted desk research to identify publicly available information and it then proceeded with face-to-face and/or phone interviews.

Cost-effectiveness analysis

The evaluation team carried out a cost-effectiveness analysis of four framework contracts used by the Visitors' Centre: (1) hosting services, (2) external speakers, (3) logistics and (4) travel arrangements.

The aim of this exercise was to identify whether comparable financial data was available to come up with alternative solutions that might prove to be more cost-beneficial for the European Commission.

Within the limits of the data available, the team looked in particular at:

- The budget allocated to the external contractors overall as well as per framework contract;
- The extent to which price ceilings are imposed, whether those ceilings are appropriate and whether alternative procedures could result in below-ceiling prices being paid;
- The resources devoted compared with the expected deliverables;
- The balance between the outputs and results and the costs or procedures that were linked to the Visitors' Centre;
- Whether internalisation of costs would be less or more cost-effective;
- Whether a single or more limited number of contractors, even if it were within a consortium, would entail a reduction of the administrative burden and costs for the Commission.

The overarching purpose of this task was to perform, to the extent possible, a comparison between some costs and outputs/results for the Visitors' Centre with comparable elements for comparable activities. Comparable data collected during the benchmarking exercise also served this purpose.

Analysis

The analysis was based on a robust and thorough triangulation of data. Triangulation facilitates validation of data through cross verification from multiple data sources instead of one single source. It is based on the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of one subject (or of an evaluation question in this context), in order to support findings with the help of other sources (validation) and to complement data with new results and additional pieces of the overall puzzle (completeness).

Triangulation increased the robustness of the analyses that are made in this study. By combining multiple observers, methods, and data, the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from one single method, single-observer and single-theory studies can be overcome.

In practice, this means:

- multiple sources of data, including secondary data (drawn from existing studies and databases), and primary data (acquired, for instance, through interviews);
- a multi-method approach - the research will include an element of quantitative analysis (e.g. analysing statistical data, etc.), together with qualitative data (e.g. interviews, case studies/country visits, structured documentary analysis, etc.); and,
- the need to elicit data from as wide a range of informants / stakeholders as possible.
- Additional analysis tools that we used includes:
 - benchmarking exercise;
 - Cost-effectiveness analysis.

The 12-week public consultation required by the Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolbox was also supposed to be taken into account by the study team as part of the triangulation of data gathered during the assignment. However, no responses were received in the framework of this consultation.

The different elements of analysis are feeding this Final Report.

Limitations and robustness of findings

As the evaluation contract was signed before the adoption of the Better Regulation Guidelines, the evaluation Roadmap and the overall structure of the evaluation had to be adapted in the course of the evaluation. This had a negative impact on the timing as the evaluation contract had to be prolonged.

The evaluation team conducted three "mystery shopper" visits in the Visitors' Centre (one per category). Even though three visits were considered sufficient by the Steering Committee, the contractor's final report demonstrated that accompanying such a limited number of visits did not allow the evaluators to gain sufficient insight into the different types of visits and their specificities. General conclusions were drawn up mainly from General and Specific Information Visits, without recognising sufficiently the great added value of Tailored Information Visits, particularly those organised jointly with the EC Representations on which the Visitors' Centre is concentrating its main efforts.

Other limitations of this evaluation concern the cost-effectiveness analysis. In order to carry out this analysis, the evaluators relied on both qualitative data coming from the interviews and on the benchmarking data. However, the comparison with other visitors' centres posed some methodological issues as they do not have the same objectives and functioning as the Visitors' Centre of the European Commission. Nevertheless, the

combination of qualitative data and benchmarking allowed the evaluators to perform the cost effectiveness analysis to a reasonable extent and to have enough findings to contribute to the results of the evaluation.