



Annual Activity Report 2023

DG COMMUNICATION

Contents

- DG COMMUNICATION IN BRIEF 3
- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4
 - A. Key results and progress towards achieving the Commission’s general objectives and the DG specific objectives..... 4
 - B. Key performance indicators 6
 - C. Key conclusions on internal control and financial management..... 7
 - D. Provision of information to the President..... 7
- 1. KEY RESULTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE COMMISSION’S GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND THE DG’S SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES 8
- 2. INTERNAL CONTROL AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT.....19
 - 2.1. Control results 19
 - 2.1.1. Effectiveness of controls 21
 - 2.1.2. Efficiency of controls 26
 - 2.1.3. Economy of controls..... 27
 - 2.1.4. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls..... 28
 - 2.2. Audit observations and recommendations 28
 - 2.3. Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems 29
 - 2.4. Conclusions on the assurance 30
 - 2.5. Declaration of Assurance 31
- 3. MODERNISING THE ADMINISTRATION 32
 - 3.1. Human resource management 32
 - 3.2. Digital transformation and information management..... 32
 - 3.3. Sound environmental management..... 36
 - 3.4. Examples of economy and efficiency..... 37

DG COMMUNICATION IN BRIEF

DG COMM MISSION STATEMENT:

Listen – Advise – Engage

DG COMM, as a corporate communication service, brings Europe closer to its citizens.

DG Communication (the DG) is the corporate communication service of the European Commission. Acting under the authority of the President, the DG leads the communication on the Commission's political priorities, and on the implementation of European Union (EU) policies and initiatives. It informs and engages with citizens and enables them to shape EU initiatives and contribute to European democracy. In 2023, the DG contributed to the general objective of a modern, high-performing and sustainable Commission through the implementation of its 2020-2024 Strategic Plan and 2023 Management Plan.

The DG's general budget ⁽¹⁾ falls under the institutional prerogatives of the Commission (see annex 3 for an overview of key budgetary figures for 2023). It is mainly implemented via an annual work programme, serving as the financing decision for specific annual activities. Separate pooled funds for corporate communication actions are anchored in the multiannual financial framework programmes and the respective annual or multiannual Commission decisions ⁽²⁾. The DG manages two types of expenditure: administrative expenditure, including real estate expenses related to European Commission Representations in Member States (Representations), and operational expenditure, carried out through procurement contracts and grant agreements.

In 2023, the focus of communication was on:

- the EU's support to Ukraine and its people, in the face of Russia's war of aggression;
- the EU's progress in phasing-out Russian fossil fuel imports, in strengthening the recovery from the pandemic as well as in boosting the EU's competitiveness and its strategic autonomy;
- the implementation of the European Green Deal, the competitiveness of the European economy, the clean and digital transitions,
- inclusiveness and equality, as well as strengthening democracy and the rule of law.

Throughout the year, the DG engaged with citizens, local and national authorities, media and stakeholders with the support of the Representations and local networks in the Member States.

⁽¹⁾ The 2023 budget amounted to EUR 170,2 million (commitment appropriations authorised) and was allocated to its different activities as defined in the programme statement which is part of the 2023 Budget.

⁽²⁾ C(2020)9390 - 18.12.2020.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual activity report is a management report of the Director-General of the DG to the College of Commissioners. Annual activity reports are the main instrument of management accountability within the Commission and constitute the basis on which the College takes political responsibility for the decisions it takes as well as for the coordinating, executive and management functions it exercises, as laid down in the Treaties ⁽³⁾.

A. Key results and progress towards achieving the Commission's general objectives and the DG specific objectives

In 2023, the DG continued to communicate on the six political priorities of the von der Leyen Commission, focusing on the successful delivery of the green and digital transitions and the implementation of the NextGenerationEU recovery plan. The EU's actions to tackle ongoing geopolitical challenges, such as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the evolving situation in the Middle East, were also high priorities for the DG's action.

The DG focused its political communication and core messages on the EU's unwavering support and commitment to Ukraine's long-term recovery and European integration. With particular attention on the energy sector, it also communicated the EU's continued efforts to break away from its dependence on Russian fossil fuels, and the measures taken to address the impact of Russia's weaponisation and manipulation of energy supplies. Communicating on global outreach, such as enhancing food security, humanitarian actions worldwide and building trusted and sustainable partnerships worldwide through the Global Gateway strategy, were also among the DG's key objectives in 2023.

The DG also focused on informing citizens ahead of the European elections, based on an approach endorsed by the Corporate Communication Steering Committee.

As part of its overall communication response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the DG launched two major advertising waves of its **corporate communication campaign 'You are EU'**, using various channels - including social media, billboards, radio spots and newspaper ads, reaching over 300 million Europeans. In parallel, from May to July, the DG ran an advertising wave on the economic recovery programme **NextGenerationEU**, via print and digital newspaper ads, as well as digital posters in 14 European airports. The ads highlighted the role of clean technologies in achieving a net-zero continent by 2050. It generated over 31 million contacts in the business community.

The website '**EU solidarity with Ukraine**', launched in February 2022, continued to serve as a comprehensive source of information about the EU's actions in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, including a wide range of practical information for Ukrainian

(3) Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

people. The site has so far gathered more than 5 million page views in all languages, including Ukrainian and Russian. The Commission and the DG were awarded the **2023 European Ombudsman award for excellence in communication** for its comprehensive communications effort in support of Ukraine and its people.

The main progress results made towards achieving the Commission's general objectives and the DG's specific objectives are listed below:

- the **spokesperson's service** hosted **350 press events**;
- **over 20 million people engaged with the Commission's social media content** across an expanding number of channels, with two most recent additions, Threads and BlueSky;
- the **audio-visual service** helped bring Europe into people's living rooms in all corners of Europe, with **150 000 TV reports** picking up EU footage;
- **Europa webpages** attracted more than **25 million visits**;
- the **EU's contact centre** provided **168 000 responses** to questions from the public – and is acting as a helpline for citizens ahead of the 2024 European elections;
- four Representations (Budapest, Nicosia, Valletta, and Vienna) qualified for **EMAS certification**, while another three (Budapest, Sofia and The Hague) started EMAS implementation;
- the **media monitoring service** sent thousands of alerts 24/7, media analysis kept Commissioners and management aware of the pulse of media in all corners of Europe, and the DG celebrated the 100th Standard Eurobarometer survey;
- **103 high-value procurement procedures** were managed, a record number for the DG;
- efforts continued to make key **publications** that inform the public about the EU's work, such as the 2022 General Report on the Activities of the EU, more inclusive, attractive and accessible;
- the **Visitors' Centre** and the **Experience Europe exhibition** welcomed **76 500 visitors altogether**;
- the DG organised and held **three European Citizens' Panels** – an innovative format, opening a new chapter in citizen engagement to support the Commission when defining policies and initiatives.;
- the **Representations** and **local networks** hosted hundreds of events across all 27 Member States, while the '**Building Europe with Local Councillors**' initiative continued to grow.

B. Key performance indicators

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>KPI 1</p> <p>Image of the European Union</p> | <p>Baseline (2019): 43%⁽⁴⁾ Interim milestone (2022): Increase Target (2024): Increase</p> <p>Result (2023): 44%</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Image of the European Union</p> <hr/> <p>D78 In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image? (% - EU)</p> <p>Source of the data: Eurobarometer</p> |
| <p>KPI 2</p> <p>Average percentage of target audience able to recall the messages of corporate campaigns⁽⁵⁾</p> | <p>Baseline (2020): 20% of audience Interim milestone (2022): 22% of audience Target (2024): 25% of audience</p> <p>Result (2023): 34%⁽⁶⁾ of audience</p> <p>Source: European Commission, DG Communication, unit B1.</p> |
| <p>KPI 3</p> <p>Estimated risk at closure</p> | <p>Target: Remains < 2% of relevant expenditure</p> <p>Result (2023): EUR 1.39 million⁽⁷⁾ < 2% of relevant expenditure</p> <p>Source: European Commission, DG Communication, <i>ex post</i> controls performed during the reporting year, unit D3.</p> |

⁽⁴⁾ Share of positive and fairly positive views. Baseline based on EU-28.

⁽⁵⁾ The indicator measured the recall of the corporate campaigns messages of the audience reached. This is an average percentage cumulative number of all the different ongoing campaigns per calendar year.

⁽⁶⁾ According to a Kantar survey in 23 Member States in 2022, 34% of all survey respondents recalled at least on asset of the NextGenEU campaign.

⁽⁷⁾ Representing 0.7% of the DG Communication’s total relevant expenditure (EUR 179.7 million).

C. Key conclusions on internal control and financial management

In line with the Commission's Internal Control Framework, the DG has assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that **it is effective and that the components and principles are present and functioning well overall, but some improvements are needed as minor deficiencies were identified**. In addition, the DG has systematically examined the available control results and indicators, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the internal auditor and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on management's assurance about the achievement of the control objectives. Please refer to section 2 for further details.

The DG will further improve **internal control principles 4, 5, 12 and 13**. The following actions will be taken in this respect: DG Communication will implement further its HR strategy, pursue its awareness raising actions on managerial excellence, simplify further its financial circuits and continue its training and monitoring efforts and data protection and document management. Please refer to annual activity report section 2.3 for further details.

In conclusion, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and are working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated. The Director-General, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation, has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

D. Provision of information to the President

In the context of the regular meetings during the year between the Director-General of DG Communication and the Cabinet of President von der Leyen on management matters, the main elements of this report and assurance declaration, have been brought to the attention of President von der Leyen, responsible for DG Communication.

1. KEY RESULTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE COMMISSION'S GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND THE DG'S SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

General objective 7: A modern, high-performing and sustainable European Commission ⁽⁸⁾

As one of the Commission's central services, DG Communication contributed to the general objective of a modern, high-performing and sustainable Commission in 2023, by ensuring that the College receives high-quality communication advice and intelligence. It also provided information and communication services addressing citizens directly with messages aligned with the Commission priorities.

At the same time, the DG contributed to a more modern, high-performing Commission by continuously adjusting its tools and products (including Commission websites, digital outreach and social media presence) to face the challenges of the constantly evolving communication environment.

Specific objective 1: College and services use country-specific intelligence, Eurobarometer results, media analysis and stakeholders'/citizens' feedback to inform political decision-making ⁽⁹⁾

In 2023, the DG focused on informing political decision-making and shaping communication through the monitoring and analysis of various sources of information.

The Representations provided the Commission with in-depth, accurate and timely **political, economic, and other information and analyses**. This included intelligence on the position of Member States on key policy files such as:

- the Commission's delivery on its political priorities;
- the response to the economic fallout from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine;
- the EU's continued recovery from the health crisis through the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Moreover, the **Representations** communicated on the EU's support of and solidarity with Ukraine, its cooperation with candidate, neighbouring and other partner countries, and on other international topics, including the Global Gateway initiative. They also continued their activities to counter disinformation, building on the Commission's cooperation with the European External Action Service.

⁽⁸⁾ The performance tables for the general objective can be found in annex 2 (page 5).

⁽⁹⁾ The performance tables for this specific objective can be found in annex 2 (page 6).

In 2023, the **media monitoring and media analysis** capacities both in traditional media and on social media platforms were used in an increasingly coordinated manner to provide ad-hoc consolidated reports on the most relevant issues and events. The DG's early warning and horizon scanning capabilities, proved successful in a number of ways:

- supporting decision-makers to stay on top of rapidly changing developments;
- improving the capacity to identify and measure the impact of harmful narratives in Member States and;
- ensuring a quick and effective response.

The **Eurobarometer** continued to provide data for policy decision-making. The Standard Eurobarometer was exceptionally conducted and published three times ([Standard Eurobarometers 98](#), [99](#) and [100](#)) during the year, together with a [Flash survey on EU challenges and priorities in 2023](#). The DG also conducted a qualitative study which allowed the Commission to monitor closely what Europeans consider to be the main issues faced by their country and the EU, and to get their views on key EU actions. The Eurobarometer service also coordinated and supported the work of policy DGs on surveys, ensuring alignment with the Commission's political priorities.

Specific objective 2: College receives strategic advice on communicating the headline ambitions and on media landscapes in the Member States ⁽¹⁰⁾

The DG provided strategic advice to the College based on its expertise in communication as well as on its knowledge of the situation in the Member States, gathered through media, social media and public opinion monitoring as well as stakeholder feedback.

The **Representations** supported the President, College members and senior officials by contributing to the preparation and follow-up for 758 visits to the Member States, notably providing country knowledge, help with programme design and outreach activities.

By improving community management work, the DG's **social media service**, in collaboration with the Representations, strengthened the capacity of the Commission to engage directly with citizens on social media platforms. While strengthening its flexibility and allocating more resources to ad-hoc reporting, the DG has continued to produce comprehensive media monitoring reviews on a daily basis. These offer an extensive overview of the media reception of the Commission's priorities both on traditional media and on social media platforms. Communication on the Commission's headline ambitions was closely and continuously monitored throughout the year via regular reports and a comprehensive alert system.

In the context of the [2023 State of the Union address \(SOTEU\)](#), the DG further delivered state-of-the-art communication products - using social media, audio-visual outreach (through EbS and EBU), expanding web presence also through powerful visual stories, activating social media content creators and influencers - on the main achievements of the

⁽¹⁰⁾ The performance tables for this specific objective can be found in annex 2 (page 7).

von der Leyen Commission, stemming from the six headline ambitions and policy responses to major political events. This gave citizens across the EU access to up-to-date and user-friendly information on EU policies and contributed to making them better informed ahead of the last year of the mandate. The 2023 SOTEU was widely covered by the media - a total of 1,691 items collected, compared to 1,071 in 2022 or +57%. Confirming the good performance of past years, channels in 71 countries produced over 360 reports for a total length of more than 56 hours. In 2023, social media accounts of the European Commission generated a total of 22.8M impressions, 285k interactions and 3.6M video views.

The Representations promoted SOTEU 2023 in all Member States, not only by helping to secure TV and radio coverage and ensuring strong social media communication, but also by organising a wide range of communication activities. On the day of the address, the Representations organised 45 events with a total reach of over 11 million people and over 55 media appearances of Heads of Representations, reaching over 30 million people.



Some examples of activities promoting SOTEU in Member States in 2023.

The Representations developed communication and outreach actions based on an assessment of the political and communication environment. In 2023, several Representations stepped up their engagement with citizens, stakeholders and the media. They conducted 6 973 communication activities tailored to the local media environment and needs, reaching 655 310 participants. The Representations also reported on political and economic developments related to the Commission’s policy proposals, contributing country knowledge and insight into how EU policies are implemented on the ground.

Specific objective 3: Corporate communication of the Commission's headline ambitions is aligned across the Commission's departments ⁽¹¹⁾

The DG contributed to the strategic objective of the Commission to become a more modern and high-performing organisation by aligning **corporate and political communication** to the political priorities across services.

The Commission's **external communication** is semi-decentralised, with around half of the institution's communication professionals and the majority of its communication budget allocated outside of the DG. As a Presidential Service and domain leader for communication, the DG has a mandate to ensure the alignment of the communication resources of policy DGs with the Commission's corporate communication priorities. To this end, the DG helped to coordinate the external communication activities of other DGs through:

- the review of 402 inter-service consultations;
- strengthening the monitoring of all Commission external communication activities; and
- the in-depth supervision and analysis of the policy DGs' ten biggest communication initiatives.

Meanwhile, the **Corporate Communication Steering Committee** (CCSC) ensured the strategic alignment of the Commission's communication priorities by overseeing their implementation. The CCSC met four times in 2023, focusing on political and strategic communication messaging, as well as the alignment of actions and corporate campaigns with the Commission's political priorities. The professionalisation of the communication community across the Commission was supported by 11 Communication Network meetings, attended by all policy DGs, and the organisation of workshops and regular Commission-wide meetings on specific communication topics. The following results were achieved:

- around two thirds of the Commission's overall external communication expenditure was fully aligned with its corporate communication priorities;
- the DG delivered more than 700 corporate communication contractual solutions;
- new procurement options were launched, under the strategic steer of the DG's Procurement Board, including the Dynamic Purchasing System, which offers even more flexibility and significantly increases market access for smaller and more specialised companies.

Disinformation is a growing challenge, ranked in the World Economic Forum Global Risk Report 2024 ⁽¹²⁾ as the top risk over the next two years. The March 2023 [Eurobarometer survey on democracy](#) found that 68% of respondents thought they had been exposed to disinformation at least 'sometimes' over the week prior to the survey.

⁽¹¹⁾ The performance tables for this specific objective can be found in annex 2 (page 9).

⁽¹²⁾ <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2024/>

In this context, the Commission took major steps towards fighting disinformation, with the first reports made under the [Code of Practice](#). The DG also intensified its response activities by improving the disinformation monitoring, analysis and detection. This improvement also offers potential to streamline the response to disinformation across EU institutions.

Nine plenary meetings of the Network Against Disinformation were held to coordinate the corporate disinformation response. Thirteen subgroup meetings focused on climate, migration, media literacy, and data collection and analysis. The new media literacy subgroup enabled knowledge-sharing and coordination among colleagues working on media literacy across the Commission and other EU institutions.

During 2023, the DG achieved the following:

- it published more than 400 social media posts on its central and Representation accounts, raising awareness about disinformation, as well as focusing on positive communication on key topics and on media literacy skills;
- it promoted the [Guidelines for teachers on disinformation and promoting digital literacy](#);
- it achieved 4.7 million impressions and more than 120 000 interactions, surpassing all targets set for disinformation response activities on social media (across Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and X);
- it secured 1.5 million visits to the disinformation response webpages with the [Teachers' Toolkit on Disinformation Response](#) downloaded nearly 3 800 times;
- it established a task force on strategic communication and countering disinformation, to cover the entire cycle of detection, analysis and response.

The DG further increased the coherence, relevance, streamlining and cost-efficiency of the **Commission's web presence**, which spans around 700 websites by:

- following-up on the transition of the Commission's core site to the **new corporate publishing platform**, reviewing more than 600 webpages and removing outdated content;
- **intensifying cooperation** with the policy DGs;
- continually monitoring the compliance of the Commission's web presence with **web accessibility requirements**. For this purpose, more than 300 websites of 36 services and 6 executive agencies were reviewed. Additionally, all DGs were requested to publish site-specific accessibility statements on their websites.

Commission website owners were supported by a strengthened client management service, with 84% expressing their satisfaction with the Europa services.

Regarding the **Europa Web Publishing Platform**, the new seamless multilingual website navigation with eTranslation was rolled out in December 2023, facilitating access to multilingual content. Another noticeable novelty introduced in 2023 was the content sharing

functionality, which facilitates the dissemination of content related to the political communication headlines across the Commission's web pages.

Through its **operational networks** (web communities, graphic design, social media, audiovisual networks, evaluation of communication, etc.) and corporate tools (such as, corporate framework contracts), the DG facilitated the overall alignment of the activities of Commission's services across various channels. By steering such networks, the DG ensured **continuous guidance on professionalisation opportunities** and performance management across the Commission's 'external communications family'. For example:

- regular meetings of experts from all departments were organised by the graphic designers' community to improve the quality, clarity and consistency of the Commission's visual communication. These were complemented by a masterclass on typography and branding led by an external expert;
- the network of audiovisual (AV) communication correspondents, including its two subgroups of Euronews users and podcasters, met three times to discuss specific topics, such as improving YouTube presence, using parody, creating podcasts, purchasing AV equipment and using different AV studios.

The Representations enhanced cooperation with relevant policy DGs **ensuring more coherent and impactful communication on the ground**. The DG coordinated 63 requests from various DGs for advice from Representations relating to country knowledge and communication.

In 2023, the DG finalised the roll-out of full-time community managers in all 27 Representations. Social media platforms are often the battlefield of narratives. It is therefore crucial to have full-time native speaker community managers for the Representations' social media accounts. Their work on engagement and social listening has produced valuable insights into local political intelligence and demonstrated to the online audiences that the Commission is present, engaged and cares. Community managers in all Representations have been driving the local engagement of the 'You Are EU' and other corporate communication campaigns.

Specific objective 4: Meaningful and tailored messages, focused on the Commission's headline ambitions, are communicated to citizens, media, multipliers and stakeholders ⁽¹³⁾

The DG communicated the Commission's headline ambitions to European audiences using a variety of channels and tools such as online content, print publications, social media, and audio-visual materials. Activities included managing a coherent web presence, organising press and stakeholder events, and maintaining a local presence, within a framework of strengthened interinstitutional cooperation.

⁽¹³⁾ The performance tables for this specific objective can be found in annex 2 of this Report (page 13).

On 31 March 2023, the Corporate Communication Steering Committee endorsed the Commission's communication approach ahead of the **2024 European elections**. The Commission has started informing as many citizens as possible, including young people and first-time voters, about the EU and the elections. The aim is to engage them in European democracy, so that they can take informed decisions when they go to the polls. The approach revolves around six areas of action with concrete deliverables.

The Representations conducted 746 joint communication activities with the European Parliament's Liaison Offices in Member States, focusing on empowering citizens to make an informed choice in the upcoming European elections. For example, the Representation in Athens launched a tour of all 13 Greek regions during the spring. Among the topics discussed were EU policies most relevant to the region visited, and ways to increase EU coverage in the regional media. The tours lasted two days, had between 80 and 100 participants, and were covered by regional media.

The DG was at the forefront of increasing the coherence of communication about the activities of the EU by strengthening its cooperation with the other institutions and the European External Action Service (EEAS). In 2023, ten EU organisations closely coordinated their communication activities around Europe Day (9 May). The Commission was responsible for the overall coordination and was the driving force behind the common priorities, the common visual approach, the coordinated press and social media activities, the interinstitutional Europe Day web hub, and the joint monitoring of activities. This ensured a more united appearance of the European Union than ever before.

The DG contributed to the **interinstitutional coordination of crisis communication**, ensuring adequate interventions on communication-related agenda items at the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) mechanism's roundtable meetings and at its Crisis Communicators' Network (CCN).

In addition, the DG continued its work on **political and crisis communication**, through various means, including:

- strategic planning, designing and implementation of short and medium-term communication activities linked to the major political initiatives of the President and the College;
- supporting the College with high-quality communication services and products in the areas of social media, graphic design and editorial and audio-visual production, with close monitoring and analysis of trending topics on social and traditional media at EU and national level;
- defining and delivering impactful messages and narrative documents on key political priorities;
- continuously updating web content to present the Commission's headline ambitions on the [Commission's core website](#).

The **EUROPE DIRECT Contact Centre** (EDCC) answered 168 000 questions from citizens in all official languages, and also in Ukrainian and Russian. Some 92% of users of the service

claimed to be satisfied with the answers. The use of instant messaging, introduced in 2022, increased, representing 6.4% of all replies. Throughout the year, the contact centre replied to 8 400 Ukraine-related questions. It also started to act as a helpline for EU citizens ahead of the 2024 European elections, in close cooperation with the European Parliament.

The DG manages the [main website of the European Commission](#) and the [interinstitutional EU website](#). Both sites are instrumental in bringing the EU closer to its citizens. In 2023, they attracted 52 million visits, with the DG significantly stepping up its online outreach to promote the Commission's political priorities. The DG communicated the main themes and implemented new visual storytelling techniques across all webpages. The Commission's home page has also started to feature highlighted news for citizens, and through the revamped Press Corner, which recorded 16 million visits in 2023, the Commission continues to offer a better service to the media.

In the past two years, the DG launched two major **corporate communication campaigns** addressing significant challenges, namely the economic recovery following the COVID-19 crisis and the EU response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

- [NextGenerationEU](#)'s 'clean tech' advertising wave from May to July 2023, targeted the business community (through print and digital newspaper ads, as well as digital posters in 14 European airports). It highlighted the role of clean technologies in achieving a net-zero emissions continent by 2050 also in line with the Commission's Green Deal Industrial Plan. It generated more than 31 million contacts,
- the second advertising wave of the '[You Are EU](#)' campaign, in February 2023, included advertisements, radio spots, and newspaper ads. The third wave, from November to December 2023, adopted a local focus, with presence in over 3 100 towns and cities with billboards and posters, along with print media insertions in 850 local newspapers. This campaign was the first to run simultaneously in all EU Member States and had as objective to raise awareness about the importance of transition towards clean energy and energy independence, in line with the Commission's REPowerEU plan.

In 2023, the corporate campaigns surpassed earlier forecasts and target, reaching over 300 million Europeans thanks to the largest ever deployment of billboard ads. The average percentage of target audience able to recall the messages of corporate campaigns was also higher than foreseen – 34%. In September, the Commission adopted a corporate communication financing decision that extends until 2027.

In addition to supporting the 'You Are EU' corporate campaign, the **social media and visual communications** service developed specific actions to promote new legislative proposals, testing innovative formats and visuals, like its newly established community of content creators.

In 2023, the social media landscape underwent substantial changes, with the launch of new platforms, affecting the growth of platforms and follower numbers. The growth of followers did not, therefore, meet the forecast expectations. Nevertheless, the combined followership is quite impressive – almost 12 million. Against this backdrop, the DG is reviewing and

adapting its presence on platforms both now and in the future, identifying potential new audiences and tailoring messages accordingly. For testing purposes, the Commission joined two new social media platforms in 2023, namely BlueSky and Threads.

The DG updated and produced new **publications** on the EU for non-specialist audiences, including the 2022 edition of the [General Report on the Activities of the EU](#). It also further developed the interinstitutional [Learning Corner website](#) and updated its materials for children and young people. The materials are available in all 24 EU official and working languages and, when relevant, in other languages such as Ukrainian and Russian. The materials focus on the key political priorities and highlight the EU's achievements using inclusive and accessible language. In 2023, the DG increased its efforts to use plain language and started a pilot project on easy-to-read materials. It also further improved the online accessibility of its key publications aimed at the wider public.

The **Audiovisual Service** continued to contribute on communicating the Commission's flagship political priorities through broadcast, web and social media campaigns by providing high quality audiovisual material. Among its achievements in 2023, the Audiovisual Service:

- produced around 800 corporate video and audio productions, and provided photo and video coverage of the participation of College members at official events;
- used targeted promotion of key political events and initiatives to boost coverage by mainstream and social media. For example, a partnership with the European Broadcasting Union was set up to promote the State of the Union address and paid promotion was used to promote the DG's podcasts;
- launched a revamp of the corporate YouTube channel which has already led to a 50% increase in subscribers in one year (to 181 000) and to the successful launch of the popular new 'Shorts' format;
- provided high-quality video and photo material to illustrate publications, brochures, leaflets, websites, social media posts, posters, backdrops and more;
- contributed to 1 773 hours of programmes transmitted on Europe by Satellite and more than 150 000 TV reports produced by around 220 different audiovisual media;
- In 2023, the Audiovisual Portal had an estimated 24 million unique visitors, leading to over 150 million page views and making it the Commission's second most visited website.

Specific objective 5: Citizens engage with the EU through face-to-face events and online interactive platforms, such as the Conference on the Future of Europe, thus stimulating the sharing of EU values and interest in and ownership of EU topics ⁽¹⁴⁾

By interacting and engaging daily with citizens, the DG contributed to the Commission's strategic objective to be a modern and a high-performing organisation. In practical terms, this translates into many different communication activities and outputs which the DG delivered during 2023.

EUROPE DIRECT centres were essential in bringing Europe closer to its citizens, by providing localised information on EU initiatives and programmes. Moreover, the EUROPE DIRECT centres:

- continued to be active and instrumental in informing citizens about the EU's actions in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The centres close to the eastern border were particularly active in their communication actions and also supported the fleeing population;
- supported the 'NextGenerationEU' and the 'You Are EU' communication campaigns, informing citizens about local EU projects and measures taken by the EU to support Europeans affected by the energy crisis;
- organised events around the European Year of Skills and activities targeting the youth community.

The DG continued reaching out locally through the network of locally elected councillors as part of the '**Building Europe with Local Councillors**' (BELC) two-year pilot project. In 2023, the network counted 900 members in all Member States. Local councillors in the participating municipalities commit to communicating and engaging with citizens and local media on EU initiatives, opportunities and programmes. They base their communication on the information they receive through the network's online platform and other initiatives, such as webinars on EU topics identified as relevant by the BELC members, or priority visits to Brussels with the participation of high-level speakers ⁽¹⁵⁾. Thanks to the synergies between EU outreach networks and BELC local councillors, the 2023 State of the Union address was discussed in 173 live physical events beyond the capitals with citizens, students, journalists and local politicians, with 86 additional live watch parties staged by local communities.

In 2023, the **Visitors' Centre** in Brussels welcomed 1 524 groups corresponding to 46 500 information visits. Creating synergies with the Visitors' Centre, the **Experience Europe exhibition** welcomed 30 000 visitors. The Commission continues to strengthen its partnership with the European Parliament, providing content for the **Europa Experience**

⁽¹⁴⁾ The performance tables for this specific objective can be found in annex 2 of this Report (page 14).

⁽¹⁵⁾ Nine webinars for BELC members were organised on different topics such as the European Citizens Initiative, Migration, Single Market, and the 2024 European Elections. Six priority visits were organised in 2023.

digital installations in 10 locations, including three new exhibitions in Stockholm, Vienna and Warsaw.

Many citizens across Europe experienced 'democracy in action' during the **Europe Day 2023** activities. The Representations, in close cooperation with the other EU institutions, the EUROPE DIRECT Centres and national, regional and local partners, promoted the key priorities and supported the EU's solidarity with Ukraine through quizzes, festivals, sports and cultural events and debates. The Representations organised more than 200 activities around Europe Day, with 1 million people participating on the ground and 31 million reached via the media.

In 2023, the Commission increased **engagement with citizens** in the follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe. It organised three European Citizens' Panels on the issues of food waste, virtual worlds and learning mobility. The three panels, bringing together 150 randomly selected citizens, each produced between 20 and 25 recommendations, which were included in a Citizens' Report on each topic.



Examples of Europe Day activities in the Member States

Furthermore, the DG developed a new interactive **Citizens' Engagement Platform**, part of a revamped 'Have Your Say' portal and set up an infrastructure to support citizen engagement and participatory methods across the Commission. To this end, it published a **Guidebook** for other Commission's services to advise on the practical aspects of citizen's engagement, set up a permanent project team for interservice cooperation, and launched a **Dynamic Purchasing System** for the necessary services formats.

2. INTERNAL CONTROL AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Assurance is provided on the basis of information on the efficiency and effectiveness of internal control systems and governance processes. Management monitors the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis and carries out an objective examination with internal and external auditors. The results are explicitly documented and reported to the Director-General. The following reports/documentation have been considered:

- reports from 111 Authorising Officers by Sub-delegation;
- the contribution by the Director in charge of risk management and internal control, including the results of internal control monitoring at DG level;
- reports on recorded exceptions, non-compliance events and any cases of 'confirmation of instructions' (Art 92.3 FR);
- reports on *ex post* supervision and/or audit results;
- the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control, and the observations and recommendations by the Internal Audit Service;
- the observations and the recommendations of the European Court of Auditors.

The systematic analysis of the available evidence provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in the full coverage of the budget delegated to the Director-General of the DG.

The section below covers the control results and other relevant elements that support management assurance. It is structured as follows: 2.1. Control results; 2.2. Audit observations and recommendations; 2.3. Effectiveness of internal control systems; and resulting in 2.4. Conclusions on the assurance.

2.1. Control results

This section reports on the control results used by management to support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives⁽¹⁶⁾. The DG's assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in the annual activity report annex 5. The annual activity report annex 6 outlines the main risks together with the control processes to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the relevant control systems.

The DG's operational and administrative expenditure⁽¹⁷⁾ fall under the **institutional prerogatives** while the separate **budget for corporate communication actions** is

⁽¹⁶⁾ 1) Effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; 2) reliability of reporting; 3) safeguarding of assets and information; 4) prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; 5) adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes as well as the nature of the payments (FR Art 36.2). The 2nd and/or 3rd Internal Control Objective(s) only when applicable, given the DG's activities.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Respectively in titles 07 and 20.

anchored in the multiannual financial framework and the respective annual or multiannual Commission decisions. The DG’s budget is implemented under direct management in all 27 Member States.

The DG’s total expenditure for 2023 was EUR 179.70 million (payments made). The commitments made amounted to EUR 163.66 million (voted budget), with a budget implementation rate for commitments of 96.16% ⁽¹⁸⁾. The DG manages two types of expenditure:

- operational expenditure, executed by using procurement contracts and grant agreements;
- administrative expenditure, including real estate expenses related to Representations in the Member States executed through procurement procedures.

The EUR 31.07 million (commitment appropriations) **budget under the corporate communication decision for 2023**, received through co-delegations, was fully implemented ⁽¹⁹⁾ via the ‘NextGenerationEU’ and ‘You Are EU campaigns’ ⁽²⁰⁾.

Overview of 2023 commitments, payments, revenues and incomes (million EUR)

| Expenditure detail | Commitments made | Payments made | Incomes and Revenues |
|--|------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Communication actions and Other budget lines (procurement) | 113.62 | 133.27 | 2.18 |
| Communication actions (grants) | 15.50 | 15.88 | 0.06 |
| Administrative expenditure – Communication policy area | 34.54 | 30.55 | 5.76 |
| Total | 163.66 | 179.70 | 8.00 |

Results

The reported control results cover 100% of the payments made by the DG. In 2023, the financial operations were managed exclusively under direct management. The table below displays different layers of controls linked to the main activities. It also lists the relevant control objectives being part of the assurance for each of the activities concerned.

⁽¹⁸⁾ The budget includes corporate, operational and administrative expenditure. All budget under the DG is included, which explains why the budget implemented is 96.16% for Commitments (only some C4 credits were not implemented).

⁽¹⁹⁾ This is calculated based on the internal reporting for 2023 on budgetary outturn. It includes only the operational budget; the administrative budget, carried over appropriations, assigned revenues and others budgetary titles are excluded.

⁽²⁰⁾ For a description of the campaigns, see chapter 1 of this Report.

Overall conclusion table (million EUR)

| Activity | Procurement | Grants | Cross sub-delegations to other Commission services | Revenues, assets, off balance sheet... | RER |
|--|---|--------------|--|--|------------|
| 07.04 Communication actions – Other budget lines (co-delegation) | 133.27 | 15.88 | N/A | N/A | <2 % |
| 20.04 Administrative expenditure - Communication policy area | 30.55 | 0 | P.M. | N/A | <2 % |
| Total | 163.82 | 15.88 | 0.3 | N/A | N/A |
| Internal control objectives | RER <2 % Sound Financial Management=OK Antifraud Strategy=OK (report for cross sub-delegated amounts = OK) | | | N/A | N/A |
| Availability of independent information from auditors (IAS, ECA) | No overdue critical or very important recommendation | | | | |
| Reservation | No | | | | |
| Links to annex 3 | 179.7 See table 2, payments made | | N/A | See table 4 (Assets) | |

Controls over budget execution (see annex 5) revealed no events or control issues that could have a material impact on assurance as to the achievement of the internal control objectives.

In line with the Financial Regulation, the DG's assessment for the new reporting requirement is as follows: no cases in 2023 which fall under the reporting requirements of FR articles 92.3, 125.3, 130.4, 181.6 and 193.

2.1.1. Effectiveness of controls

a) Legality and regularity of the transactions

The DG uses internal control processes to ensure sound management of risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions it is responsible for, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes and the nature of the payments concerned.

1) Control objective

The control objective is to ensure that the residual error rate is as low as possible and does not exceed 2% of annual budget implementation, as determined in the materiality criteria in annex 5. The amount of payments made is used as a basis for calculation. The control system is designed to prevent, detect and correct errors, irregularities and fraud by *ex ante* and *ex post* controls covering all types of financial operations and procurement and grant procedures.

Several layers of *ex ante* controls are applied to the transactions, which differ if the transaction was initiated in headquarters or in Representations. *Ex post* controls are in turn planned annually based on a risk-based analysis of the entities. In each entity, a sample of

transactions is controlled, together with selected elements of the internal control system. The DG control strategy contains a detailed description of the controls in place.

2) Assessment of the control results

Overview of controls by type of financial circuit

| | Centralised circuit in headquarters' units | Decentralised circuits in Representations |
|--|---|---|
| Review and control before award (ex ante) | Financial Unit in headquarters for grants and procurement over EUR 140 000 ⁽²¹⁾ . Units in headquarters for grants and procurement below this threshold. | Financial Unit in headquarters for grants and procurement over EUR 140 000 and exceptional negotiated procedure. Representations for grants and procurement below this threshold. |
| Financial Initiation (ex ante) | Financial unit in headquarters Coverage: 100% | Representation Coverage: 100% |
| Financial Verification (ex ante) | Financial unit in headquarters Coverage: 100% | Representation Coverage: 100% |
| Second level Financial Verification (ex ante) | - | Financial unit in headquarters; risk based-sample covering 3.2% of transactions |
| Ex post control (supervisory desk reviews) | 3 units (out of 11) controlled in 2023; risk-based sample. | 5 Representations (out of 27 ⁽²²⁾) controlled in 2023; risk-based sample. |

The Finance and Control unit also provides an ad-hoc helpdesk service giving orientation and guidance to procedural and legal queries with an awareness-raising and preventive function, for both headquarters and the Representations (see annex 6).

Procurement represented 91.16% of the administrative and operational expenditure (payments made) in 2023, where grants represented 8.84%.

Review and control before award (ex ante)

In total, 103 high-value (above EUR 140 000) procurement procedures, amounting to EUR 468 624 345, required an action in 2023 – an *ex ante* review by the central procurement team before the launch or award, and the initiation of preparations for the launch of the procedure, respectively.

The procedures for the award of specific grant agreements were concluded by the Representations under the existing framework partnership agreements with the EUROPE DIRECT centres in all Member States. In addition, three calls for grant proposals were subject to *ex ante* review before publication in 2023, amounting to EUR 1 400 000. *Ex ante* control of the evaluation of grant proposals was carried out on all three calls before an award was made.

⁽²¹⁾ Threshold from the Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26.2.2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC.

⁽²²⁾ The value of checked procedures is the value of the contract over its total duration. Therefore, the total value of the procedures checked is not linked to the annual budget.

Other procedures below the threshold were managed by units in headquarters (centralised circuit) and in the Representations (decentralised circuit).

Second level financial verification (ex ante)

In 2023, 423 transactions, amounting to EUR 7.2 million, related to procurement (commitments, de-commitments, payments and recovery orders) initiated in Representations were selected for *ex ante* second-level financial verification. This control covered 2.9% of the total number of transactions implemented by all Representations and accounts for 6.9% of the value of all the transactions. In total, 196 transactions were returned for correction due to technical errors, but these did not have an impact on the assurance.

Additionally, 94 transactions, amounting to EUR 2.5 million, related to grants (commitments, de-commitments, payments, recovery orders) initiated in the Representations were selected for *ex ante* second-level financial verification. This control covered 6.8% of the total number of transactions related to grants, implemented by all Representations and 7.75% of the value of all the transactions. A total of 28 transactions were returned for correction due to technical errors, but these did not have an impact on the assurance.

Ex post control (supervisory desk reviews)

In 2023, 112 payments, amounting to EUR 11.8 million were checked ⁽²³⁾ (corresponding to 22.2 million commitments). Among these payments, 102 (on procurement) with a total value of EUR 11.7 million were checked. A total of 8 irregularities were detected *ex post* in the sampled transactions in headquarters and the Representations, leading to non-compliance reports under internal control principle 12 (see section 2.1.3). Of these, 6 procedural errors were identified.

Additionally, 10 grants ⁽²⁴⁾ with a total value of EUR 0.2 million were checked. No quantitative (on payments) or procedural errors were detected. All grants managed by the DG are low-value (this has been the case since 2015) and have progressively been switched over to simplified forms using lump sums for EUROPE DIRECT centres (implementation of an evaluation recommendation). Given the low-risk and the limited share of grants in the overall expenditure, *ex post* control is not carried out on beneficiaries on the spot, thus keeping controls proportional to the risk and cost-effectiveness.

Error rate

The overall **detected error rate** (DER) amounts to 0.84% which can be differentiated between three segments: procurement, grants and administrative expenditure.

For both grants and administrative expenditure, no errors (either financial or procedural) were detected *ex post*. However, an average error rate of 0.5% has been used as a conservative estimate for these two segments. The detected error rate on procurement was 0.97%. For

⁽²³⁾ The *ex post* controls cover the payment and all related operations (procedure, budgetary commitment, legal commitment, etc.).

⁽²⁴⁾ EUROPE DIRECT centres grant files.

this segment, no financial errors were detected *ex post*, but some procedural errors were detected during *ex post* controls (see above). The detected error rate takes into account all errors detected, including procedural procurement errors with no financial impact. These errors have however been quantified at 100%, for the determination of the detected error rate and related estimated risk at payment but do not affect the financial exposure of the budget ⁽²⁵⁾.

Without the procedural procurement errors quantified at 100%, the **residual error rate amounts to 0.03% (see annex 7, table 1), thus below the 2% threshold set in the materiality criteria (see annex 5)**. In accordance with the instructions received, procedural procurement errors were not included in the calculation of the actual financial exposure (amount at risk), nor considered in terms of ‘quantified’ materiality for a potential financial reservation. **This leads to the conclusion that DG Communication has set up internal control processes which guarantee adequate management of the risks and a reasonable assurance relating to the legality and regularity of transactions, as well as the nature of the payments concerned**. This system operates effectively, finding, correcting and preventing errors. Furthermore, the resources assigned have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management.

In the context of the protection of the EU’s budget, at the Commission’s corporate level, the Directorates-General estimated overall amounts at risk and their estimated future corrections are consolidated.

3) Overview of DG Communication risk profile

The DG's portfolio consists of segments with a relatively low error rate.

This is due to the inherent risk profile of the beneficiaries, the funding modalities and the performance of the related control systems, respectively.

For those latter segments with control weaknesses, the (root) causes of the issues are procurement issues. Management actions taken to address these weaknesses are described in particular in the DG’s control strategy, which was adopted in 2020. The accompanying action plan contains a list of measures currently being implemented to make controls more effective on certain categories of procurement and financial operations. In this context, the improvements made during the reporting year (i.e. 2023) have already resulted in a decrease in the number of irregularities and lower and residual error rates.

⁽²⁵⁾ For such procedural errors, the Commission does not consider that the full amount is at risk (no payment errors). However, to be fully transparent, to allow stakeholders to compare the Commission’s error rate with the one published by the European Court of Auditors, the full amount at risk for the ‘procurement’ segment is reported in Table X below. These kinds of errors are not included in the calculation of the actual financial exposure (amount at risk) nor considered in terms of ‘quantified’ materiality for a potential reservation (unless there would be room for a potential reputational reservation, which is not the case here).

4) Table (X): Estimated risk at payment and at closure

Based on the information above, the DG presents an estimate of the risk at payment and the risk at closure for the expenditure managed during the reporting year in the table below:

Table (X): Estimated risk at payment and at closure (amounts in EUR million)

The full detailed version of the table is provided in annex 9.

| DG Communication | Payments made | Relevant expenditure | Estimated risk (error rate %) at payment | | Estimated future corrections and deductions | | Estimated risk (error rate %) at closure | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|--|--------------|---|-----------|--|--------------|
| | m EUR | m EUR | m EUR | % | m EUR | % | m EUR | % |
| Procurement | 133.27 | 119.30 | 1.16 | 0.97% | 0 | 0% | 1.16 | 0.97% |
| Grants | 15.88 | 15.86 | 0.08 | 0.50% | 0 | 0% | 0.08 | 0.50% |
| Administrative | 30.55 | 30.49 | 0.15 | 0.50% | 0 | 0% | 0.15 | 0.50% |
| DG Communication total | 179.10 | 165.65 | 1.39 | 0.84% | 0 | 0% | 1.39 | 0.84% |

The estimated overall risk at payment for 2023 expenditure, 0.84%, is the Authorising Officer by Delegation's best conservative estimate of the amount of relevant expenditure during the year that did not conform with the contractual and regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made.

There are no expected future corrections for 2023 expenditure, thus no difference between the estimated overall risk at payment and the estimated overall risk at closure. Compared to 2022, and considering that procedural errors are not included in the calculation of the actual financial exposure (amount at risk) nor considered in terms of 'quantified' materiality for a potential reservation, the residual error rate for 2023 has improved compared to 2022 (0.45 in 2022, 0.03% for 2023).

For an overview at Commission level, the departments' estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are consolidated in the Annual Management and Performance Reports for the EU Budget.

5) Preventive and corrective measures

As regards the corrections conducted in 2023, the DG has in place an effective mechanism for correcting errors, through ex ante and ex post controls, resulting in preventive and corrective measures, amounting to EUR 0.79 million for ex ante controls and 0.91 million in ex post controls in 2023. For ex ante controls, this represents a decrease of EUR 7.57 million, compared to 2022 (EUR 8.36 million). This is mostly explained by the lower number of related credit notes (54 in 2023 vs. 68 in 2022) and that in 2022 two exceptionally large credit notes totalling EUR 7.11 million were issued.

b) Fraud prevention, detection and correction

In 2023, the DG contributed to the revision of the Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy Action Plan.

The DG has developed and implemented its own anti-fraud strategy since 2014, based on the methodology of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). Last updated in 2020, its implementation is being monitored and reported to management notably in the framework of the annual Risk Management process. A large number of actions have been implemented, notably: (1) the provision of targeted awareness-raising sessions as part of the DG capacity-building programme and provision of refreshers on red flags during the wrap-up meetings held by the controllers with the controlled entities; (2) identification of transactions with potential red flags ⁽²⁶⁾ and reported as not exceeding 2% of all transactions checked; and (3) regular meetings of the Procurement Board which monitors the procurement strategy of the DG and its implementation. The implementation of remaining actions is in progress with completion expected end 2024.

The DG does not have any OLAF financial recommendations to follow-up.

Thanks to the anti-fraud measures in place, the results achieved during the year can be summarised as follows: the number of red-flag fraud indicators in the *ex post* controls performed has decreased compared to the previous year.

On the basis of the available information, the DG has reasonable assurance that the anti-fraud measures in place are effective.

2.1.2. Efficiency of controls

The efficiency indicators are monitored regularly to ensure that the controls in the DG operate smoothly. The DG executed 12 619 payments in 2023, against 13 003 payments in 2022. In 2023, 98 % of payments were made within time limits (98% of payments for the maximum payment time of 30 days, 100% for 45 days and 95.7% for 60 days), above the target set in the 2023 Management Plan (97%), and similar to the 2022 result. This indicator is included in the monthly budgetary report. The average Net Payment Time was 14.8 days, well below the threshold of 30 days.

Evolution of time-to-pay indicators on all expenditure:

Procurement

The average time-to-pay related to invoices was 12.1 days for the administrative expenditure and 17.9 days for operational expenditure. The share of payments within time limits was 98%.

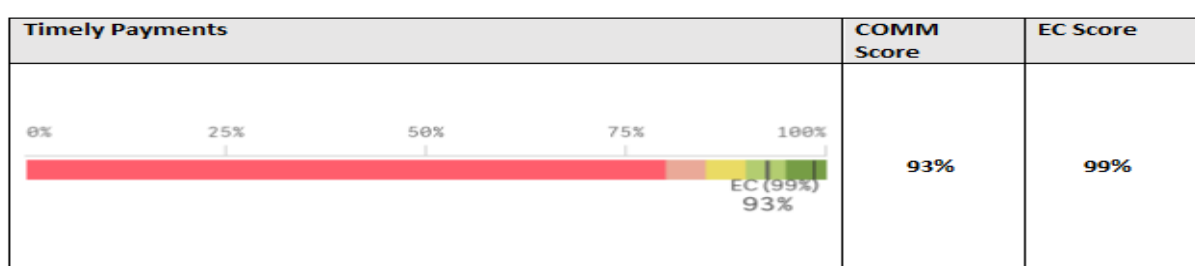
⁽²⁶⁾ Red flags are warning signals which can indicate the existence of irregularity or fraud. It does not mean that fraud has been committed; it points at certain areas of activity for attention.

Grants

The average time-to-inform, time-to-grant and time-to-pay were 40.5, 67.2 and 25.2 days, respectively, for operational expenditure. The share of payments within the time limits was 97% (a positive increase compared to 93% in 2022).

Financial scoreboard – corporate standard ‘timely payments (%)’ indicator

From 2020, the former ‘payments-on-time (%)’ indicator changed from the number of payments on time (in %) to the payment accepted amount in time (in %). This new perspective is reflected in the corporate standard ‘timely payments (%)’ indicator, as reported in the new Financial Scorecard (annex 4). The score of the timely payments indicator based on amounts paid in time in the DG is 93% of timely payments, (Commission result 99%).



The DG’s score of 93% in Timely Payments is due to the late payment of 2 large payments having a cumulative value of EUR 8 million. Given that the average of the DG payments is around EUR 9 500, the delay of these 2 payments had a very large impact on the DG score.

The first one (for an amount of around EUR 7 million) was late by 3 days. The reasons are linked to different issues related to processing time, bank guarantee management and public - bank holidays.

The second one (for an amount of around EUR 1 million) was late by 10 days. The reasons are linked to different issues related to processing time with several stops, corporate budget availability and public holidays.

Most of the late payments registered carried no or very low interest payments.

To improve efficiency, the DG has implemented different actions to obtain efficiency gains in financial management, such as dashboards for managers, standardised templates for procurement procedures, and stricter monitoring of late payments.

2.1.3. Economy of controls

The estimation of cost and benefits of controls takes into account the multi-site nature of the DG and its activities, as well as the combination of two different types of financial circuits – one centralised in headquarters, and another decentralised in the Representations. The indicators are provided separately for procurement and grants, *ex ante* and *ex post* controls based on the number of posts, allocated functions and staff categories. The overall cost-

effectiveness indicator results from the sum of these sub-indicators (see annex 7 for more detailed information).

The estimated cost of controls in 2023 is EUR 7.598 million, or 4.23 % of payments made, and is lower than the result reported in 2022 (5.09%). This is mainly due to the increase in the funds managed (payments made), which amounted to EUR 179.7 million in 2023 compared to EUR 158.97 million in 2022. The results of the analysis show that the controls carried out in 2023 for the management of the budget appropriations were relatively cost effective, considering the size of the budget and the highly decentralised organisational structure.

The benefits of controls are difficult to quantify. The main non-quantifiable benefit of controls is the compliance with the rules and the low error rate resulting from the controls implemented at the *ex ante* stage. Another non-quantifiable benefit resulting from the controls operated *ex ante*, during the programming phase, is the assurance that the financed actions contribute to the achievement of policy objectives. The *ex post* supervisory controls of the units and the Representations, in addition to the assurance they provide, have a deterrent effect, as they contribute to awareness-raising of the internal control principles and fraud. The reports of *ex post* controls provide valuable feedback on their effectiveness, identifying areas for improvement.

2.1.4. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

Based on the most relevant key indicators and control results, the DG has assessed the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of its control system and reached a positive conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of the controls for which it is responsible.

The DG operates in direct management mode. Administrative expenditure, procurement and low value grants based on lump sums are in general considered as a low risk. However, elements such as the multi-site organisational structure, the decentralised financial circuits, the differences in national law affecting public contracts, the mandatory rotation of financial agents in Representations, the wide variety of appropriations managed in co-delegation, and the relatively high reputational risk in case of error, require more sophisticated control systems than in the case of standard procurement.

2.2. Audit observations and recommendations

This section sets out the observations, opinions and conclusions reported by auditors – including the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control. Summaries of the management measures taken in response to the audit recommendations are also included, together with an assessment of the likely material impact of the findings on the achievement of the internal control objectives, and therefore on management's assurance.

European Court of Auditors

The DG is not affected by any ‘critical’ or ‘very important’ recommendations from the European Court of Auditors.

Internal Audit Service

The DG is not affected by any ‘critical’ recommendations from the Internal Audit Service (IAS).

In October 2022, the IAS issued its final audit report on **‘Physical security of persons and assets in the Commission’** and addressed two ‘very important’ recommendations to DG HR and the DG jointly, which were accepted. The recommendations relate to the ‘governance framework and organisational arrangements for physical security at the Commission’ and the ‘risk management framework for physical security at the Commission’. DG HR and the DG submitted a joint action plan, which was duly approved by the IAS. Both recommendations have been fully implemented and reported to the IAS.

In September 2023, the IAS issued its final audit report on **‘Corporate communication’** and addressed five ‘important’ recommendations to the DG, which were accepted. The recommendations relate to: ‘communication strategies for corporate communication campaigns’; ‘direct engagement with European citizens’; ‘pretesting, ‘budget monitoring and checks’; ‘monitoring of external communication actions’; and ‘operational support by the DG for the activity of the Network Against Disinformation. The DG submitted an action plan, which was duly approved by the IAS in October 2023. The first steps foreseen in the action plan are under implementation.

The Internal Audit Service issued a positive conclusion on the internal control systems in place for the audited processes of the DG for the past 5 years.

Impact on assurance

The risks related to the open recommendations from the Internal Audit Service and European Court of Auditors do not have a material impact on the assurance for 2023. Therefore, the declaration of assurance is not qualified in this regard.

2.3. Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems

The Commission has adopted an Internal Control Framework based on international good practice to ensure the achievement of its policy and management objectives. Compliance with the internal control framework is a compulsory requirement.

The DG uses the organisational structure and the internal control systems suited to achieving its policy and internal control objectives in accordance with the internal control principles and has due regard to the risks associated with the environment in which it operates.

The DG has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective and the components and principles are present and functioning well overall, but some improvements are needed as minor deficiencies were identified relating to:

- internal control principle 4 ('The Commission demonstrates a commitment to attract, develop, and retain competent individuals in alignment with objectives'),
- internal control principle 5 ('The Commission holds individuals accountable for their internal control responsibilities in the pursuit of objectives'),
- internal control principle 12 ('The Commission deploys control activities through corporate policies that establish what is expected and in procedures that put policies into action'); and
- internal control principle 13 ('The Commission obtains or generates and uses relevant quality information to support the functioning of internal control').

Details regarding the progress achieved and further measures envisaged can be found in annex 8.

Overall, important improvements have been achieved in 2023 and these will be consolidated in 2024 with the further implementation of the actions envisaged.

2.4. Conclusions on the assurance

The information reported in section 2.1 stems from the results of management and auditor monitoring contained in the reports listed. These reports result from a systematic analysis of the evidence available. The assessment of the elements reported in sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, and the sub-conclusions already reached draws an overall conclusion to support the declaration of assurance and whether it should be qualified without reservations. This information also supports the five statements included in the declaration of assurance. This approach provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in a comprehensive coverage of the budget delegated to the Director-General of the DG.

In conclusion, based on the elements reported above, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Director-General, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

2.5. Declaration of Assurance

Declaration of Assurance

I, the undersigned, Dana Spinant

Director-General of Directorate-General for Communication

In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation

Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view ⁽²⁷⁾.

State that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in this report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of the self-assessment, ex post controls, the work of the Internal Audit Service and the lessons learnt from the reports of the Court of Auditors for years prior to the year of this declaration.

Confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported here which could harm the interests of the institution.

Brussels, 2 April 2024.

(e-signed)

Dana Spinant

⁽²⁷⁾ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG.

3. MODERNISING THE ADMINISTRATION

3.1. Human resource management

As of 31 December 2023, 66% of middle managers in the DG were female, making it a big contributor to the Commission's average rate of 48 %.



During 2023, the DG also actively implemented its 2022 Equality & Inclusion action plan both internally and as domain leader for external communication. It did so by providing web accessibility guidance and monitoring compliance, developing a gallery of visual communication items, and ensuring the accessibility of publications.

In the 2023 Staff Survey, the Staff Engagement Index for the DG was 70%, unchanged from the 2021 survey results. The DG continued to implement actions stemming from the corporate HR Strategy as well as its own local HR Strategy. This included pro-actively offering career talks for staff returning from assignment to a Representation and boosting internal communication and engagement with staff, for example through weekly interactive senior management debriefing sessions.

3.2. Digital transformation and information management

Digital Transformation and Cybersecurity

a) Main/flagship digital transformation initiatives

In 2023, the DG furthered its digital transformation by endorsing the strategic objectives of the Commission's Digital Strategy ⁽²⁸⁾.

The DG also actively contributed to advancing the digital transformation at the corporate level. It should be noted that its three most cost-intensive solutions (Audiovisual Services, the Citizens' Engagement Platform and Europa ⁽²⁹⁾) contributed to achieving the strategic objectives of *Business-Driven Digital Transformation*, *Seamless Digital Landscape* and *Green Resilient and Secure Infrastructure* at Commission level.

b) Digital culture

In 2023, the DG continued to develop its *digital culture*. This followed the overhaul, in 2022, of its internal IT Governance framework to increase ownership of business stakeholders in the inception and management of digital solutions and to ensure the effective overview and

⁽²⁸⁾ Communication on the Commission digital strategy - C(2022) 4388.

⁽²⁹⁾ These are all secure corporate solutions, hosted (wholly or in part) in the cloud and adopting corporate reusable solutions and/or open-source technologies.

strategic steering at the senior management level. 2023 also brought two major innovations:

- the creation of a special committee on Artificial intelligence (AI); and
- the reporting and debating of strategic IT-related topics in the weekly sessions of the Senior Management Meeting.

During 2023, the DG also focused on cybersecurity awareness, through several events, including cyber awareness training for senior managers, end-users and staff in the Representations.

c) Digital-ready policymaking

DG Communication is not a policy-making DG, and therefore has nothing to report about *Digital-ready Policymaking*.

d) Business-driven digital transformation

IT investments were instrumental in advancing the *Business-driven Digital Transformation* in 2023. Among these investments, the Citizens' Engagement Platform reflects the commitment made by the Commission in 2022 in the [follow-up communication to the Conference on the Future of Europe](#). The DG developed a dedicated space for citizens to engage and debate on EU policies, together with DG DIGIT and in close cooperation with the Joint Research Centre (JRC), using the Decidim open-source technology. The portal and the new interactive Platform, which is part of the revamped 'Have Your Say' portal, will allow the Commission services to host participatory and deliberative processes online on a variety of topics.

Another major 2023 achievement was the launch and testing of the DG's Management Dashboard pilot project. The dashboard was developed in cooperation with DG DIGIT with the aim of presenting real-time information on the short, medium and long-term outputs and results of the DG's main communication actions. This tool integrates and presents in a dynamic way existing data streams in a single digital outlet. Its objective is to consolidate and correlate communication reach and results, enabling senior management to take more evidence-based decisions on future communication. The tool is being developed using Microsoft Power BI and is hosted on the Commission Cloud.

The Audiovisual Portal underwent a significant evolution in line with the strategic goals of the Commission's digital strategy. The shift involved the migration of the broadcasting protocol to modern technology, specifically HLS (HTTP Live Streaming), elevating video streaming quality, performance, and device compatibility. Concurrently, the Audiovisual Service initiated an experimental proof of concept for using artificial intelligence to develop automatic subtitling for Video-on-Demand products (VODs).

At a more grass-root level, the DG made progress in integrating digital tools in its daily work by updating existing business processes. This includes the daily use of collaborative tools, the migration to Sharepoint Online and the revamp of local intranet websites.

e) Seamless digital landscape

All new IT systems in the DG were designed in line with the digital transformation principles, including the Dual Pillar Approach of reusing existing (corporate) solutions (*Seamless Digital Landscape*). In addition to the adoption of open-source or Reusable Solution Platforms (CNS, eTranslation, EU Login, EU Sign, Europa Web Platform), there was already a strong cloud presence in 2023 (the case being example the three most expensive IT Solutions). Systems developed and operating before the digital transformation were adapted, including the Europa Web Platform and the Audiovisual Portal which are now fully compliant with the digital transformation principles.

f) Green, resilient and secure infrastructure

The DG has progressed considerably in its IT risk management and security compliance. Both scores were above the Commission average in the Intermediate IT Security and Risk Report of 2023.

The DG is responsible for providing robust, reliable and secure IT infrastructure (green, resilient and secure infrastructure) to the Representation offices. In 2023, two important infrastructure projects were completed:

- all wide area network data connection lines in Representations were upgraded. This increased bandwidth by two to five times and allows Representations to fully benefit from modern media-rich solutions that require high bandwidth;
- the new local area network (LAN) equipment, compatible with more secure corporate solutions already used in Brussels and Luxembourg, was also deployed in the Representations. This will be one of the technical enablers for the future migration of the Representations into the Welcome domain.

Knowledge Management

The Rolling Action Plan 2022-24 on data, information and knowledge management at the Commission lists four priorities: (1) enhancing the management, sharing, discovery and reusability of data, information, and knowledge; (2) enabling more flexible and collaborative working practices; (3) effectively exploiting data, information and knowledge for better policymaking and corporate governance; and (4) enhancing staff skills and competences for effective use of data, information, and knowledge. The DG made progress in all four of these areas in 2023.

A key step in adapting working methods was taken with the development of the DG's Management Dashboard pilot project that encourages the development of connections between data providers from units across the DG, thus improving working methods. This has improved data sharing in the organisation and is making data easily available to decision-makers in the DG and to staff. The Dashboard is the DG's flagship response to the DataStrategy@EC action plan.

The dashboard project highlighted the need for consistent metadata through the coherent use of controlled vocabularies and taxonomies in tagging the data. This is driving a renewed focus on, and re-examination of the DG's key data assets in the Commission Data Catalogue, in line with the Commission's corporate actions on the data catalogue in the DataStrategy@EC action plan.

A similar search for synergies was also enabled by the emergence of new AI tools. To meet the challenges and opportunities represented by AI, the DG created an 'AI Subgroup' as part of its Digital Operational Committee. The committee is dedicated to coordinating and establishing connections between units that have previously experimented with new AI tools independently. Among the key initiatives launched during 2023 were two AI chatbots, one to assist social media community managers and the other to aid communication procurement professionals in the DG. These tools are expected to continue improving efficiency and working methods in these areas, and could be exploited elsewhere, notably by social media community managers in the Representations and the EUROPE DIRECT Contact Centres.

In parallel, the DG began the process of developing a local data, information and knowledge management strategy, with an associated action plan, aligned to its requirements. This will present an opportunity to formalise the leveraging of synergies and improved working methods championed by initiatives like the Dashboard and the above-mentioned AI chatbot projects.

Much progress was made in 2023 to enhance access to country knowledge in the Commission through the development and launch of the Commission's 'Country Knowledge Portal'. The tool is complemented by the Commission-wide 'Country Knowledge Community', which comprises staff working on country knowledge (such as country desk officers in policy departments). Both initiatives were led by the JRC, with the DG as a key partner given its role in managing the Representations across the EU.

The ever-growing importance of social media, as well as the need for vigilance in countering democracy-threatening disinformation, led to a renewed push to develop staff's digital capacities by highlighting training opportunities on the DG's intranet and in newsletters to colleagues based in the Representations. Internal communication channels were used to raise awareness of the LinkedIn Learning platform, accessible to all staff and offering enhanced digital learning opportunities.

Data Protection

The DG continued its work on implementing the Commission's Data Protection Action Plan and delivering the goals set in the Strategic Plan 2020-2024. More specifically, the DG achieved the following:

- delivered four training sessions on data protection principles as well as specialised training on social media targeting. These training sessions covered 18.4% of the DG's staff including those working in the Representations;
- completed its annual record review exercise. As a result of this exercise three records were archived and one new record was created for the Citizen's Engagement

Platform In addition, all other records were reviewed and updated with particular emphasis in reinforcing the clarity of information for data subjects and the underlying legal basis;

- reviewed its procedures on handling of data subjects' requests in view of new guidance from the Data Protection Officer.

3.3. Sound environmental management

In line with the European Green Deal and its 2030 target of a climate-neutral Commission, the DG continued in 2023 to implement various initiatives to reduce the carbon footprint of its operational activities, with a particular focus on the Representations.

The progressive extension of the Eco-Management and Audit Schema (EMAS) to the Representations underlines the DG's engagement in environmental and sustainability policies in relation to its activities in the Member States. In 2023, the Representations in Cyprus and Hungary qualified for EMAS certification⁽³⁰⁾. Three more, in Bulgaria, Denmark and the Netherlands, started the certification process, which is expected to be completed in 2024. Detailed results of the environmental performance are available in the latest Environmental Statement⁽³¹⁾ verified by accredited auditors.

The DG introduced comprehensive reporting on environmental performance for Representations not in the EMAS scheme. The reporting is based on the EMAS methodology and is intended to enable the Representations to monitor their environmental footprint and track their progress towards the objectives of 'greening' the Commission. Environmental actions implemented in the Representations targeted key sources of greenhouse gas emissions, notably: (1) energy used for buildings, through energy saving actions, the installation of energy-efficient lighting and the commissioning of energy efficiency audits; and (2) mobility, through the switch to electric fleet cars of the Representations and the promotion of sustainable commuting.

Other 'greening' actions implemented across the entire DG aimed to:

- reduce the use of resources, including paper, through the continued implementation of digitalisation and paperless strategies;
- reduce emissions from staff travel, through improvements in video-conferencing facilities, hybrid-meetings, and the promotion of greener travel;
- reduce waste generation and improving waste separation through awareness raising campaigns and data monitoring;
- make communication events more sustainable through the promotion of the corporate guidelines for sustainable events and conferences;
- implement Green Public Procurement criteria in relevant contracts through training and the development of procurement templates for frequent supply and service contracts.

⁽³⁰⁾ Joining Austria and Malta already certified in 2022

⁽³¹⁾ [EMAS Environmental Statement 2022 – Annex I for the Houses of Europe](#).

Main results:

- **Energy savings in Representations** – Data from EMAS reporting shows a 17% decrease in energy consumption, contributing to a decrease of 21% in the total carbon footprint in 2022 ⁽³²⁾, compared to 2019.
- **Reducing mobility emissions** – The greening of the Representations' car fleet further progressed in 2023. Fully electric vehicles are the default option for new purchases/leases. Low or zero emission cars currently represent 51% of the fleet and the action is well on track to meet the corporate target of a 100% by 2027.

Reducing staff travel emissions – In 2023, the DG joined the corporate pledge to reduce the travel emissions of staff and invited experts. The commitment to reduce emissions needs to be aligned with operational needs. To fulfil the DG's mandate, the Spokesperson's Service (SPP) needs to accompany the President and Members of the College on their professional trips, while the Representations engage with the public throughout the territory of the EU. Total emissions from staff travel decreased by 2% in 2023, compared to 2019. During the same period, the number of professional trips or missions decreased by 25%, while the average emissions per mission increased by 32%, representing a setback compared to 2022. The increase is due to the missions of SPP staff travelling with Commission VIPs. Security and operational constraints require the use of transport with higher emissions, particularly in the context of travel to war zones and high-risk areas, or during the COVID-19 pandemic. Excluding the SPP from the calculation, total emissions decreased by 46% between 2019 and 2023, with a reduction of 32% in the number of missions and a decrease of 14% in the average amount of emissions per mission. This shows a strong and persistent uptake of a sustainable travel culture in the DG, despite the challenges inherent to its geographic spread. These results also reflect the effects of budgetary restrictions, inflation, and new ways of working which lead to the overall containment of emissions through fewer and smarter missions.

3.4. Examples of economy and efficiency

Efficiency gains in web communication

The DG provides technical enablers to implement the editorial strategy of its web presence that render it more relevant, coherent and cost-efficient, for example:

- **the Europa Component Library**: providing technology agnostic, standardised design to be used on online solutions;
- **the Europa Web Publishing Platform**: an off-the-shelf content management system, allowing websites to be set up within a matter of days;

⁽³²⁾ Latest year for which environmental performance data has been collected and externally verified, stemming from the Representations taking part in EMAS. The results reflect factors beyond energy saving measures, such as teleworking and climate conditions.

- **webtools**: various technology agnostic visualisation or other technical solutions such as machine translation, maps, charts, etc.

By using these central tools, other services are saving important resources as they reuse existing solutions and do not incur any costs for custom IT development. In 2023, the corporate web publishing platform hosted a total of 150 sites. These sites benefit from 'out of the box' integration with the Europa Component Library and webtools. The DG rolled out a new solution to share content across websites and web applications. This feature limits the duplication of content, improving the coherence of the web presence.

In 2023, machine translation was further rolled out across Commission websites. The web feature (based on DG Translation's machine translation solution) is currently used on 158 sites and is helping to significantly expand the language coverage of Commission websites. The feature, developed by the DG, is used by other institutions, notably the Council, which uses the tool for its Council presidency websites.

Efficiency gains in the new financial circuits

At the end of 2022, a series of measures were taken to simplify the financial circuits in the DG. The main measures with the most significant impact are listed below:

At headquarters (Brussels):

- merging the operational verifying agents (OVA) and Authorising Officers by sub-delegation (AOSD) roles and transfer of responsibility from Director to Head of Unit for commitments equal to or below EUR 60 000. Some 180 transactions have been impacted by this measure;
- merging the operational/financial verifying agents (OVA/FVA) and AOSD roles for payments below EUR 5 000. Some 402 transactions have been impacted by this measure.

The time necessary to perform each step in the financial circuits (in person-days per year) is estimated at 164 man-hours (based on ad hoc best estimates).

In the Representations:

- allowing mass payment for administrative payments below EUR 5 000 (regrouping several payment requests into one payment order). Around 500 payment orders have been avoided by using mass payments.