

Executive Summary

1. The assignment

- 1.1. As part of the framework contract VC/2007/0034, Gellis Communications was tasked by DG EMPL to undertake **an evaluation of the communication of the *Employment in Europe* (EiE) Report** as well as of its 'satellite' tools and activities, including the Quarterly Labour Market Review and the Dissemination Conference. This study was carried out between July 2008 and January 2009.
- 1.2. The EiE Report is presented as **the Commission's flagship publication on labour market analysis** in the EU. As such, it plays a decisive role in the way the European Employment Strategy (EES) is communicated to its stakeholders, and especially to Experts and Decision Makers¹.
- 1.3. The aim of the evaluation was to identify the cause(s) of the following problem: **the recognition of the EiE Report's contribution to the analysis of European labour markets is insufficient to help rally EU-wide support for the European Employment Strategy**. The Consultant was also expected to make concrete recommendations to overcome this problem.
- 1.4. **Three hypotheses** were formulated and tested against a set of data and information collected through desk research, consultations, media analysis, observation and surveys:
 - The communication strategy does not support policy goals sufficiently;
 - The selected communication tools and activities fail to deliver the expected benefits;
 - Organisational arrangements do not make the most efficient use of existing resources.

2. Relevance of strategic decisions

The Consultant's main recommendation is that **communications need to shift from an activity-based logic to an objective-driven one to become truly supportive of long-term EU policy goals**. Such a recommendation is based on the following evidence:

- 2.1. So far, there has been an **insufficiently clear vision** of what needs to be achieved through communications, as indicated by the lack of defined communication objectives.
- 2.2. In addition, the communication is hampered by the intention of **reaching all target groups with the same tactics**, whilst these groups have different levels of awareness, knowledge and agendas.
- 2.3. The above-mentioned point results in the EC's **messages being inaudible to many stakeholders**, as only a handful feel targeted by the EC's communications (mainly Experts). Likewise, **the lack of Member State-specific focus in messaging** weakens existing endeavours, especially in a policy area where the EU does not have a formal competence and is thus not identified as a key player.
- 2.4. The current **gap existing between the concept of the publication** (emphasising the year of publication and thus the topicality of its content) **and its real nature** (primarily a thematic analysis of recent employment trends) is misleading for many stakeholders and therefore should be addressed.

¹ As per PROGRESS Target Group Classification

Priority actions:

- Define communication objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound;
- Focus on a limited number of well-defined target groups (please refer to PROGRESS' classification);
- Craft target group-specific messages that better reflect national realities;
- Emphasise the thematic aspect of the publication rather than the year of publication.

3. Effectiveness of existing tools and activities

The Consultant's main recommendation is to **go beyond the mere dissemination of information to address awareness- and endorsement-related issues**. This is based on the following evidence:

- 3.1. The **uneven awareness of the Report across target groups and Member States** as well as a generally weak identity, call for a set of new marketing actions. Attention needs to be focused on:
- the online visibility of the Report, which is not equal to the publication's reputation;
 - the media outreach strategy, which is insufficiently adapted to the nature of the publication;
 - the visibility of the Report at EiE-related events, which could be improved thanks to checklists;
 - the Report's visibility 'on the bookshelf', which suffers from a weak visual identity.

Priority actions:

- Optimise the search engine visibility (and if necessary allocate resources to it);
- Make access to the EiE Report from the DG EMPL website more intuitive;
- Improve visibility of the EiE Report in email traffic;
- Shift from a one-size-fits-all media outreach strategy to a better targeted and more service-minded one;
- Adopt a more pro-active communication and networking strategy with respect to events; and,
- Strengthen the visual impact of the Report and, if possible, its 'branding'.

- 3.2. The effectiveness of a broadened communications strategy for the EiE Report will to a great extent rely on the **development of new, stakeholder-specific CN by-products**, bearing in mind that:
- Experts mainly need existing products and services to only be slightly modified. Overall, they have expressed their satisfaction with the EC's communications;
 - Decision Makers need straight-forward, concrete, policy-oriented recommendations;
 - The Media need more country-specific, newsworthy information;
 - The 'wider public' needs information with a 'human' angle.

Priority actions:

- Maintain the current positioning of the Report as a publication for Experts;
- Facilitate the Report's navigability through better signposting;
- Assist readers to source extra information through links and references to data sources;
- Adopt a clear language selection policy, based on readers' needs;
- Improve usability of the EiE webpage through concrete features; and,
- Be sure to identify the strategic elements in each CN tool/activity created.

3.3. CN activities are key contributors to the policy objectives of the EC, therefore **feedback, endorsements and citations should be more systematically sought, captured and used for communication purposes**. Elements requiring attention include:

- the Dissemination Conference, whose content should be more targeted and more ‘interactive’;
- subscriptions, which create reader loyalty and provide information on readership and readers;
- tools to facilitate the reuse of information and ready-made materials such as slideshows;
- public endorsements, which needs to be better encouraged, captured and promoted; and
- to a lesser extent, client management, which might become problematic under the new arrangements, should the volume of requests increase in line with the Report’s visibility.

Priority actions:

- Turn the existing ‘Dissemination Conference’ into a high-standard ‘endorsement conference’;
- Encourage user loyalty through subscription to ‘exclusive’ DG EMPL value-adding services;
- Set up an online assistance/client management procedure tracking the most frequent requests;
- Recruit external experts to contribute to the Report (through the writing of editorials and introductions);
- Make the maximum amount of graphs, tables and materials possible available for download.

4. Efficiency of organisational arrangements

Though **moderately efficient considering the existing communication priorities and resources, the organisation needs to undergo a major revamp** to sustain the new CN objectives of DG EMPL. The following observations can be made:

- 4.1. The broadening of the communication strategy will necessitate a greater specialisation amongst units. The Consultant encourages the subcontracting of production tasks (*e.g.* content development).
- 4.2. The insufficiency of systems allowing the storage and sharing of information needs to be addressed.
- 4.3. Punctual and tailor-made training will facilitate staff’s endorsement of new CN objectives and make working processes more efficient;
- 4.4. The establishment of partnerships with other organisations will boost the efficiency of CN actions;
- 4.5. Reflection and evaluation (through user feedback, satisfaction surveys, internal debriefings) should be used to highlight opportunities for improvement and innovation.

Priority actions

- The current division of tasks should include future expansions of the Report’s communications;
- An event planning tool, quality control checklists and a single as well as updated stakeholder database need to be put in place;
- A communications-related training should be made available to all who will speak publicly;
- The participation of other organisation’s experts at EiE events should be increased; and,
- A clear and comprehensive monitoring framework needs to be set up to facilitate current internal controls and occasional external evaluations.