

Synthesis study on DG REGIO communication actions

Final report – Summary



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1 Introduction

This document summarises the final report of the Synthesis study on DG REGIO communication actions. It presents the key findings of this study, conclusions and recommendations. The main report with the detailed findings constitutes a separate report. The study was conducted by Technopolis Group and its partners Henningsen Consulting and Intrasoft between April 2019 and January 2020 (included).

The aim of the study was to provide a horizontal assessment of communication activities of DG Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) in the period 2017-2018, with a specific focus on: a) consistency/coherence across these activities; b) synergies with existing communication campaigns carried out by Member States/Managing Authorities and other services of the Commission (in particular at corporate level). The ultimate aim was to provide advice on the communication of cohesion policy results to the European citizens and guidelines on how to improve the way DG REGIO communicates towards external audiences.

The study did **not** evaluate every single activity. Instead, the focus was on *overall coherence and consistency* among DG REGIO activities - and between these activities and the actions of Member State authorities and those of other Commission Services, especially the corporate campaigns.

The analysis was conducted according to **six evaluation criteria**: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, EU-added value and sustainability, responding to a set of evaluation questions (Table 1).

Table 1 Evaluation questions for the study

Criterion	Evaluation questions
Relevance	Relevance DG REGIO specific communication activities versus EC corporate campaigns and MS/MA communication actions
Effectiveness	Alignment & integration of DG REGIO communication activities & effectiveness of this integration
	Overlaps among the different activities/actions
Efficiency	Efficiency from the alignment and/or integration of DG REGIO campaigns/activities
Coherence	Complementarities and synergies between DG REGIO communication activities
	Complementarities DG REGIO vs other EC & MS/MA communication actions
EU Added Value	Additional value DG REGIO communication activities compared to what could be achieved by the EU corporate campaigns
	Additional value from DG REGIO communication activities at EU level versus what could be achieved by Member States at national/regional levels
Sustainability	Sustainable elements built into the design of DG REGIO campaigns

A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods were deployed, allowing for triangulation of the findings. Our methods included a survey, statistical analysis of secondary monitoring data, social media and web analytics, desk research, 73 interviews, and five case studies.

2 Summary of the key findings

2.1 Context and background

2.1.1 Cohesion policy

The EU Cohesion Policy, its implementation and communication, sets the overarching background to this study. There are three main funding instruments available at the EU level to implement the EU Cohesion Policy: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), and the Cohesion Fund (CF). ERDF and CF are competence of DG REGIO.

Cohesion Policy is implemented under the so-called shared-management mode, Managing Authorities and beneficiaries in the Member States have the task (and legal obligation) to provide information and communicate on the aims, funding opportunities and results of the co-funded actions. Communication to the general public is part of this responsibility.

2.1.2 EC corporate communication

The Communication on corporate communication under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, adopted in 2013, was a fundamental milestone in this development of a framework, rules and means for “a more effective communication of institution-level messages, including reputation and image management.” Corporate communication involves combining and maximising EC resources to improve and better communicate the EU’s positive and tangible impact on the lives of Europeans and citizens of partner countries. It is measured by the Eurobarometer survey on the image of the European Union.

In the period of interest for this study (2017-19), corporate communication was articulated around three main strands that constituted a strategic communication framework and were mutually reinforcing. They included three corporate communication campaigns managed centrally by DG COMM (InvestEU, EUandMe and EU Protects) and the complementary communication activities carried out by the EC Representations (REPs) in the Member States and the Citizens’ Dialogues and Europe Direct Information Centres (EDIC) structures.

2.1.3 DG REGIO communication strategy and activities

DG REGIO’s communication activities are to be set in the context of DG REGIO’s competences for the implementation of the Cohesion Policy and specifically the ERDF and CF (including the Interreg programmes).

The term ‘communication activities’ stands for three categories of activities implemented by DG REGIO’s communication unit:

- ‘External’ communication activities in the form of structured campaigns and specific communication actions
- Internal and external collaboration and communication structures and processes; and
- Tools for regular communication, encompassing DG REGIO’s ‘owned’ media tools and publications.

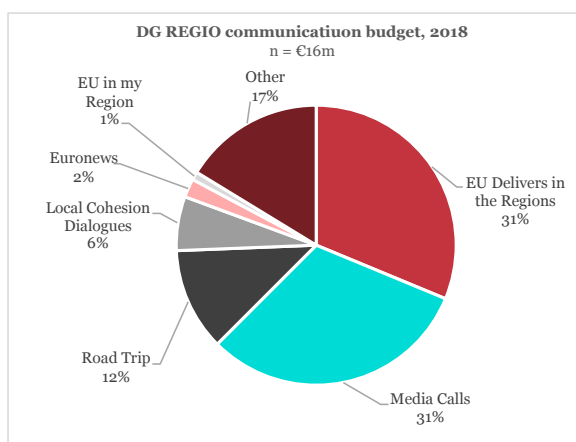
In 2017, DG REGIO stepped up its efforts to reach out to European citizens, scaling up its efforts to increase the visibility of cohesion policy. In 2018, ‘external’ communication activities targeting stakeholders and the general public accounted for 84% of DG REGIO’s communication budget. DG REGIO’s communication budget also more than doubled (from €6.7m to about €16m).

A key policy objective for the communication activities in DG REGIO is to support the positioning of cohesion policy as central to the attainment of the European project and its priorities, among EU policy makers and the general public. The Eurobarometer survey on the Awareness of EU regional support and the perception of a positive impact on the development of city or region are key parameters.

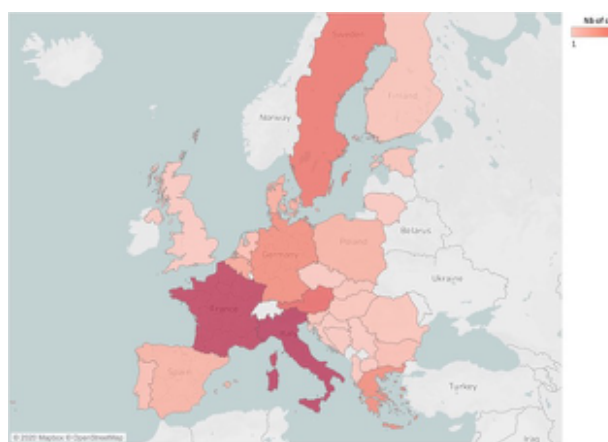
DG REGIO’s communication activities targeting stakeholders and citizens can be categorised in two groupings:

- ‘Country-specific’ communication actions that operate in a specific number of Member States and regions. These include EU Delivers in the Regions, the Cohesion Dialogues, the Road Trip Project and the Support for Information Measures action. They *jointly* account for 81% of the budget and together, resulted in a strong concentration on seven countries: Austria, Italy, France, Greece, Sweden – and to a lesser extent, Belgium and Germany
- *EU-wide campaigns* covering all or almost all EU28 MS, i.e. the EU in My Region campaigns and the Euronews projects, jointly accounting for 3% of DG REGIO’s communication budget

Distribution of the DG REGIO communication budget, 2018



Geographical coverage of the ‘selective’ communication actions



2.2 Response to the evaluation questions

2.2.1 Relevance of DG REGIO communication activities

For relevance we considered the alignment of DG REGIO’s communication activities with the needs for EC corporate communication and the needs of the Member States (MS)/Managing Authorities (MA).

Relevance for the EC corporate communication

DG REGIO’s communication strategy, objectives and implementation supports the EC corporate communication objectives and complements the corporate campaigns thanks to a strong alignment of its communication strategies and objectives and its emphasis on communication to the citizen. The two DGs share a strong result orientation in their messages, combined with a prominent human element in their narratives, which is aimed at creating emotional connections. In both DGs, the focus is on storytelling, showcasing tangible results and benefits for the individual European citizen. Both DGs also dedicate high attention to ensuring the relevance of the message to the citizens by means of localisation, even though the approach taken is different.

The scope of DG REGIO’s communication actions implemented in a specific set of regions and countries was in strong alignment with the need for communication from an EU policy perspective - both in terms of geographical coverage and targeted audiences.

Surveys that were conducted in the context of DG REGIO’s two campaigns, the EU Delivers and Road Trip, indicated scope for improving awareness and perception among the target audiences: for the Road Trip, around three-quarters said their knowledge of the EU was only weak (39% or quite strong (35%); for EU Delivers, between 70% and 85% judged the campaign would be effective in raising awareness about EU participation at the regional level to a local and regional audience. The campaigns also seemed

well aligned with information needs of the target audiences, who showed a high interest in knowing more about EU-supported actions in their region, while social media is a relevant channel for younger audiences but has some limitations in addressing older audiences.

Relevance versus the MS/MA communication campaigns

The communication strategies in the MS/MA show a growing alignment with the communication strategies in DG REGIO and DG COMM. While the communication function in MS/MA keeps its primary role of ensuring programme performance with beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, communication to the general public is overall recognised to be critical for the success of the programme – with the exception of some ‘net contributor’ countries. Localisation of the message, with an emphasis on the human element and concrete results while communicating reality and recognising the remaining challenges (in order not to confuse communication with publicity and advertising) are considered to be of major importance.

A major challenge for communication to the citizens that national and regional Information and Communication Officers (ICO) face, is the availability of resources – financial and human. Another important challenge is the difficulty to communicate cohesion policy to the citizens, due to its complexity. One in three (31%) survey respondents indicated the lack of coordination across Funds within the EU to be a complicating factor.

Notoriously challenging for the communication on EU matters to the general public in general is the lack of interest in EU policy in the media, at regional but especially national level. Equally important is the lack of awareness in the general public of regional policy and its funds, and of EU affairs in general.

Seeing the focus and characteristics of the communication strategies in the MS/MA and the challenges they face in their communication to the citizens, a broad range of areas can be identified where DG REGIO’s communication activities could be of relevance, based on their objectives. These ranged from communication actions to citizens that would compensate for resources problems to the fostering of a change in culture among the MA hierarchies in terms of importance attributed to communication to citizens on EU policy.

2.2.2 Effectiveness of DG REGIO communication activities

We assessed the effectiveness of the communication activities in terms of their performance against objectives, as well as in terms of their ‘internal coherence’, i.e. the extent to which they constituted a coherent portfolio of mutually reinforcing actions.

Effectiveness of campaigns, communication actions and regular communication channels

DG REGIO’s campaigns and communication actions can be said to have largely met their output objectives.

EU Delivers performed at a similar level to the corporate campaigns in terms of aggregate potential reach. The Road Trip reported potential reach that was lower than corporate campaigns, but in this case the target audience was very specific (young people 18-30). The Support for Information Measures action, implemented through call for proposals, resulted in a potential reach similar to the two main campaigns (based on available and comparable data).

EU Delivers in the Regions

- Reported aggregate potential reach is almost 270 million across the 32 regions in five countries (AT, EL, FR, IT and SE), averaging 9 million per region, but with around 60% of this in France alone. This is equivalent to 170% the available audience, in terms of the population of the five campaign countries
- The *deduplicated* potential reach achieved by EU Delivers in France and Austria is roughly equivalent to the countries’ total population, in Greece and Sweden it is calculated to be equivalent to around 80-90% of their populations, while in Italy is just below 70%

- In France and Austria, the biggest contributor of this potential reach was via the outdoor displays in public spaces. In France, these were reported to have exposed the campaign almost 90 million times. Sweden and Greece were the only countries where the highest potential reach was reported via social media, but this was still only a fraction of the potential reach reported for social media in France
- Analysis of the topics highlighted by social media posts using the local campaign hashtags indicates that a somewhat different audience was successfully engaged by the EU Delivers campaign than is normally engaged with DG REGIO social media content and themes
- Most of the engagement with EU Delivers outside the campaign countries was in Belgium, probably attributable to Brussels stakeholders. Among the campaign countries, Italy and France showed the highest engagement levels but Sweden, Greece and Austria are also in the top 10 EU Member States, confirming that audiences in these countries were engaged with the campaign
- Estimating the audience interest in the EU Delivers interactive billboards per region, this provides some evidence that audiences were more engaged in France and Greece than Austria and Italy, and Sweden least of all

Road Trip 2018

- According to the final report, the potential reach of the Road Trip campaign in 2018 was 23 million, which equates to over half the young Europeans aged 18 to 24 who have a Facebook or Instagram account. The average frequency of exposure was around 6 times per person. In terms of engagement, the Road Trip campaign achieved close to 30 million video views, more than 120 000 interactions and 400 000 unique web visitors. In terms of community building: on Instagram, the campaign built a community of more than 10 000 followers and on Facebook, the existing community grew by 47% to over 42 000 fans
- Taking into account the countries' populations, Greece, Portugal, Lithuania, Ireland and Hungary make up the Top 5 in terms of total aggregate reach
- Assessing engagement, use of the hashtag in relation to the total number of social media users per country shows the highest rates of engagement in Belgium and smaller countries, where a greater share of the population is easier to reach. However, of the larger countries, France also ranks highly, while Spain is the highest ranked of the rest – Poland, Italy and Germany all rank in the bottom half in terms of share of audience actively engaged in using the hashtag
- The actual channels used for the Road Trip were well chosen and aligned. Campaign survey results showed almost half the target Road Trip audience preferring either Facebook, YouTube or Instagram as their first-choice social media. Engagement data provides some evidence that the audiences engaged on Twitter and Instagram were different
- Overall, the campaign reported an average interaction rate of 0.12%. In general, audiences in Eastern European countries tended to interact more than the rest of Europe, possibly because most of the road trips crossed that part of Europe. Latvia and Estonia had the highest interaction rates of the EU Member States.

Support for Information Measures action

- The capacity to obtain a view on the effectiveness of this action, implemented through open calls, is hampered by the fact that even though some of the 'Information Measures' funded under the 2017 call reported relatively detailed data on potential reach, it is not measured consistently across the measures even when addressing similar KPIs. Estimated aggregate reach varies widely, for example Portugal has a total potential reach (OTS) equivalent to just under half the population (partly due to significant viewing figures for television channels supported by the campaign) while in Italy this rises to three-quarters of the population, boosted by print newspaper readership. The assessment of the relative success of these actions would be facilitated if a set of common core indicators were defined in the call guidelines and/or included as selection criteria and/or in the reporting template
- Looking at different channels, the highest potential reach is generally reported for digital (i.e. web) and social media channels. Given the older age profiles of audiences who consume television and

print news, the overlap with the Road Trip project (chiefly using social media and targeting younger audiences) would be expected to be low

Other communication actions

- Six episodes of the Smart Regions Euronews series, supported under the Cohesion@30 campaign, were estimated to have reached a total of 8 million people, with a repeat frequency of about 3
- For the EU in my Region campaign, some limited outputs and results data are included in the final report: more than 2,500 events were held in 27 countries, with 450,000 participants overall. Some country-level figures again indicate a high level of activity in France, even relative to its population

DG REGIO’s various communication actions take place in a range of EU Member States, with an emphasis on some more than others. High reach levels were attained in France, Italy, Austria, Greece, Portugal and Sweden throughout the campaigns. With the exception of Portugal, these are all countries upon which the ‘selective’ campaigns concentrated their efforts. In the case of Portugal, this coincides with the high reach figures in all of DG REGIO’s owned media channels. For Greece there is a high usage of the Facebook page, and in the case of Italy, the high interaction with the #EUinmyRegion hashtag.

However, in most cases, the ‘regular’ communication channels (i.e. DG REGIO’s digital and social media channels) seem to complement the campaigns, with e.g. Spain, Ireland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Malta, and Slovenia as major user countries in specific channels.

Reach of campaigns and owned media channels per country, per country’s population, 2017-2019

	Campaigns	EU Delivers	Road Trip	Media Calls	FB followers	#EUinmyRegion	InfoRegio
Austria	Light Green	Dark Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Belgium	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Bulgaria	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Croatia	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Cyprus	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Czechia	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Denmark	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Estonia	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Finland	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
France	Dark Green	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red
Germany	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Greece	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Light Red	Light Red
Hungary	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Ireland	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Light Red
Italy	Dark Green	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Latvia	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Lithuania	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Luxembourg	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Light Red
Malta	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red
Netherlands	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Poland	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Portugal	Light Green	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red
Romania	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Slovakia	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Slovenia	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red
Spain	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red
Sweden	Light Green	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red	Light Red

Notes: Ranking of countries based on the number of communication actions implemented (green column) and level of reach obtained (red) taking account of population – from high (darkest shading) to low (lightest shading)

In general, the highest potential reach is reported for digital and social media channels, and the Member States with the highest aggregate social media reach relative to the total audience size (country population) are where one would expect the largest ‘overlaps’ between campaigns and/or communication actions to occur (in terms of the same population reached twice or more times). It should be noted that this is not forcefully negative; if duly planned with coordination of the message, it may also result in a ‘consolidation’ of the message

- In the case of Portugal, social media reach via the Road Trip (1 million, equivalent to over 10% of the population) and the Support for Information Measures (39%) both account for a large share of the country's population – so overlap would also be expected to be higher
- Equally, in Italy, the reach via social media of the EU Delivers campaign (30%) and the Support for Information Measures (60%) would be expected to produce a significant amount of overlap – reaching the same audience members multiple times
- France also rated highly for the social media reach reported for the Road Trip campaign, fourth highest overall (with potential reach of 1.75 million), suggesting a potential overlap with EU Delivers (with aggregate reach via social media equivalent to 40% of the target audience)

Effectiveness of the regular communication channels

DG REGIO social media account in general

- Looking at the follower base for a selection of EU institutional accounts, it is clear that DG REGIO is roughly comparable to DGs AGRI and EMPL in the number of followers of its accounts. It is different from the other two DGs mainly in that it has more Twitter followers than Facebook followers (and more Twitter followers than either of the other two DGs, while having fewer Facebook followers than they do)
- Distribution of 'EU In My Region' Facebook followers and users of the #EUinmyRegion hashtag could indicate some inefficiencies/redundancies in distribution of communication effort, as larger countries such as Germany, Romania and Poland are not being actively engaged through these EU channels

Facebook page 'Europe in my Region'

- Facebook followers grew relatively steadily from 10 000 to 50 000 during the course of the last 3 years
- Taking the population using social media in the country into account, the follower base represents a much larger share of the available audience in Greece, Portugal and Bulgaria than it does in France, Italy or Spain. These countries mainly represent important beneficiaries of Cohesion Funds. Germany and Poland are both missing from the top 10 countries of Facebook followers.
- The Facebook page appears to attract more interactions per post (taking into account the size of the follower base) than the EC corporate accounts, and has shown a higher follower growth rate, indicating that the posts on this account are found relevant by its audience

Twitter

- Taking the population using social media into account, some of the smaller countries show a high level of use of the hashtag (Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland and Portugal), but Italy, Spain and France also rank highly. The lower ranks include Germany and Poland, but also Romania
- Analysis of the DG REGIO family of Twitter accounts indicates the national reach (as a share of the population) of some geographical accounts (e.g. Poland) is comparable with the @EUinmyRegion account EU-wide. Those with the lowest reach include Denmark, UK & Ireland, Portugal & Spain and the thematic accounts for Interreg and Administrative Capacity
- Comparison of the mentions of the #EUinmyRegion, #roadtripproject and #InvestEU hashtags indicates very little cross-over in terms of posts referencing more than one campaign

InfoRegio website

- The distribution of visitors to the DG REGIO website (taking population into account) show some inefficiencies/redundancies in the distribution of the communication effort, in particular for Romania, Germany and Poland that are among the low ranks

2.2.3 Efficiency of DG REGIO communication activities

For efficiency, we looked into the budgeting and cost-effectiveness of the activities as well as the efficiency in implementation.

Budgeting and cost-effectiveness

In terms of the aggregate potential reach of the campaigns against the estimated budget spend, EU Delivers appears to be relatively cost effective with €28 spent per 1000 OTS generated (€28 CPM); for the Road Trip, the potential OTS reported resulted in €87 CPM. For the sake of completeness, we have calculated also the CPM of the Support for Information Measures (a CPM of €28.) and the EU in my Region action (€29), even though in both cases, data available was limited.

It should be noted that while this data gives an indication of cost-effectiveness, the cost of a campaign or communication action highly depends on the channels used as well as country of implementation. Detailed data on costs and potential OTS per channel was not available, which hampered our capacity to conduct a proper comparative analysis for these four communication actions.

Overall, budget spend was highest in France and Italy, which seems appropriate to their population size to be reached, but this assessment could be made with more certainty if reach data was more directly comparable among EU Delivers and various Information Measures supported, and if there was more consistent monitoring and reporting of result metrics such as engagement and recall or awareness change.

Per channel cost/spending breakdowns for the campaigns are not available, but the Road Trip social media campaigns do provide a CPM measure for their social media advertising. The reported average CPM compares well with the benchmarks set by the EC's corporate campaigns.

The estimated budget spend per country for EU Delivers is the most significant in all relevant countries apart from Italy, where several beneficiaries of the Support for Information Measures action received significant grants. Based on assumptions of roughly equal spend per country covered, the Road Trip budget was the smallest, but the reported reach was also much smaller, leading to a higher CPM overall. This is also associated with its very specific target audience, though: the more specific the audience targeted, generally, the higher the costs

In comparison to the overall CPMs for the corporate campaigns, the overall CPMs for DG REGIO campaigns are rather high. Reflecting our note above, this is dependent on the method used to calculate this indicator, the mix of channels used, and on the country. On the whole, EU Delivers was implemented in countries where media buying could be expected to be higher than average so, for example, the cost-efficiency of EU Delivers in France compares rather well to InvestEU even if the overall CPM is higher.

Efficiency in implementation

Internal communication coordination processes and structures

Overall, the internal coordination and communication structures and processes seem to be well functioning, even though they have shown some teething problems and there is room for improvement. The structure and network of Single Entry Points, Country correspondents and Senior Specialists facilitate a smoothening of the informational process on communication within DG REGIO, thus enhancing efficiency.

The Communication Matrix (CM) is at the core of the cross-unit collaboration structure on communication. Interviewees highlighted its usefulness and especially, relevance as a platform enabling the flow of thematic knowledge between the A2 unit and the more operational units such as the geographical ones. The CM makes communication processes more visible and interactive.

Interviewees also emphasised that the relevance of the CM goes well beyond the enhancement of the efficiency and effectiveness of DG REGIO's work by improving internal communication and collaborative working methods. A key function of this platform is also to mainstream communication in the work of all units. From this perspective, they considered the limited involvement of the horizontal

units and competence centres, combined with the current approach by the A2 unit of a unidirectional information transfer rather than bi-directional knowledge exchange as an opportunity lost.

Communication portfolio management

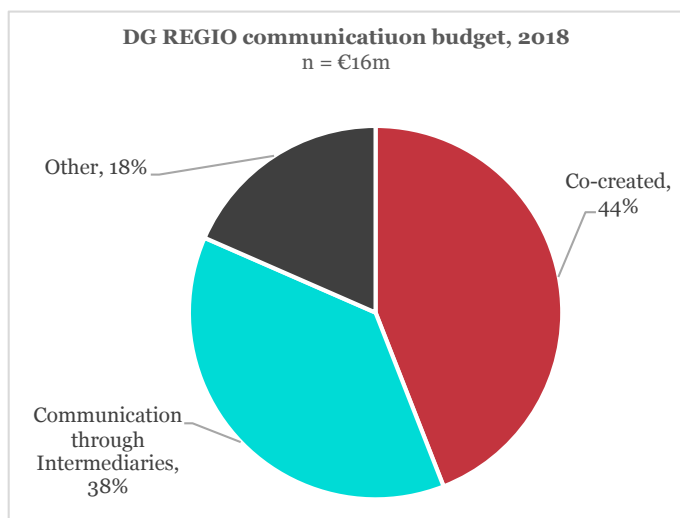
We see room for a more integrated management and strategic planning of the communication activities portfolio. We noted a limited availability of information on how the different communication activities are expected jointly to contribute to the attainment of the objectives set out in the communication strategy and how synergies and complementarities between the different communication actions are planned for. In addition, we noted the lack of a consistent monitoring and evaluation structure and processes across all communication activities.

Monitoring data is currently available for communication actions that together account for only about 60% of DG REGIO’s budget. In addition, DG REGIO is not currently using the full possibilities of the EC’s social media monitoring tools for the monitoring of engagement. For recall and awareness change, post-test surveys were not available for Road Trip and for EU Delivers changes cannot be attributed to the campaign as the pre- and post-test surveys were carried out in different regions.

Involvement of the MS/MA in the communication activities

Feedback from the MAs in the surveys and case studies on the quality of the campaigns’ planning and implementation was quite positive, even though everything was not always running smoothly. While the national/regional ICOs overall considered the briefings to be clear and timely, the timeliness of the campaigns themselves was more of an issue - and closely connected to it, planning. Another area where there’s room for improvement is the coordination between all levels of actors involved.

There are two broad categories of DG REGIO’s campaigns and communication actions targeting citizens, depending on the involvement of the MS/MA in the design and/or implementation of the actions.



Communication activities taking a **co-creation approach**, in terms of a close cooperation between DG REGIO, the Managing Authorities and the beneficiaries (EU that Delivers in the Regions, EU in my Region and the Road Trip Project). These communication actions are seen as strongly aligned with the MS/MA national communication strategies and create positive effects in the local environment.

In the case of **communication through intermediaries**’ activities (the Support for Information Measures and the Cohesion Dialogues), collaboration with the MAs was far less intense, and sometimes even pure information transfer

was totally lacking. Both MS/MA and the REPs interviewed strongly criticised those cases where they were not even informed of actions taking place.

2.2.4 Coherence of DG REGIO communication activities

The assessment of ‘external’ coherence assessed the alignment and synergies/complementarities created with other EC communication actions, in particular the EC corporate ones, and the communication actions in the MS/MA.

Coherence and alignment with other EC communication actions

DG REGIO has set up close collaboration with DG COMM for both the EU Delivers and the Road Trip campaigns, which according to all relevant interviewees worked very well.

The EU Delivers campaign has explicitly been designed to “complement” the #InvestEU campaign (2nd phase), taking the campaign from the national to the regional and local level. There are strong similarities between the two campaigns in strategy and approach, and the EU Delivers campaign was implemented in 40 regions in six countries, all of them covered also by the #InvestEU campaign.

The collaboration between the two DGs was even more pronounced for the Road Trip project, especially as of 2019. The Road Trip and EUandME campaigns are intended to be mutually reinforcing in terms of visibility and engagement, with systematic cross-referencing on all platforms. The two campaigns will also combine their young video/film makers.

Nevertheless, there was little evidence of an ‘overlap’ between any of these campaigns. Very few survey respondents (about 10%) had been involved in one of these campaigns. Comparison of the mentions of the campaign hashtags indicates that just 3% of posts mentioning #EUinmyRegion also mention #InvestEU. In the case of the #roadtripproject hashtag, the overlap is 4% of social media posts.

Coherence and alignment with MS/MA communication actions

Functionality of the communication activities

DG REGIO’s approach is generally praised for its result focus – and its objective to show the salience and relevance of EU funding locally. EU led communication, especially the EU Delivers campaign, is also praised for the local twist on content and messages. DG REGIO’s approach is seen to have undergone a positive development, with a communication approach that is more in line with national efforts and more responsive to feedback from national MAs.

Interviewees indicated positive effects of DG REGIO’s communication activities in terms of a streamlining of the messages conveyed in the DG REGIO and local communication efforts, and a professionalisation of the communication practice on cohesion policy in the MS/MA. They also indicated sustainability of the materials for re-use by the national and regional authorities – even though the lack of multilingualism was criticised in this context, mentioning also the limits this poses on the reach of the message, especially in social media but not only.

A specific complementarity of the DG REGIO communication actions consists in the scale and reach of its activities which often is not feasible within the limits of the MA’s communication budget. When comparing ERDF/CF funding data (adjusted for population) with the data on campaigns and especially reach, we can consider that the extensive coverage by the DG REGIO communication activities of Austria, France, and Sweden – and to a lesser extent, Greece and Italy, compensated for the limited communication ERDF budget available in these countries.

Functionality of the co-ordination and co-operation structures and measures

The overall feedback received indicate a high level of functionality of the INFORM network, even though there is room for improvement. Interviewees indicated a significant structuring effect of the network. Directionality is a commonly described effect and most importantly, the exchange of knowledge and experience in the context of the network’s events constitutes a driver for a shift in approach to communication in the MS/MAs. Timeliness and planning is an issue also in this context.

A final note needs to be made in relation to the Interreg Programme. Interviewees indicated the somewhat isolated position ICOs covering Interreg programmes have in the national system as well as within the DG REGIO communication structures. Their specific problems and communication issues typically are not covered in DG REGIO’s communication activities, with the exception of the Road Trip, which however targeted a very specific audience (young Europeans).

2.2.5 Added value and sustainability of DG REGIO communication activities

For added value we looked into the extent to which DG REGIO’s activities created effects that could not have been reached otherwise (additionality), to the benefit of the EC corporate communication and/or the MS/MA. For sustainability we assessed the extent to which the created effects and/or tools will be of lasting value.

Additional value for the EC corporate communication

A key factor that allows DG REGIO's communication activities to create added value is the strong alignment of its communication strategy and approach to communication targeting the general public with the EC corporate communication strategy and approach. A key asset of DG REGIO's communication activities is the close relationship with the MAs. It allows for localisation of the messages and especially, a direct access to information on needs in the local environments as well as to relevant networks and multipliers. The INFORM network as well as the network of Country Correspondents and their involvement in the DG REGIO Communication Matrix are precious sources for information – even though they do not seem yet to be used at their full potential.

The performance of DG REGIO's communication activities suggest an added value in terms of scale and financing of communication activities with a high level of complementarity with the corporate campaigns and similar scope.

Additional value for the communication actions in MS/MA

A key factor that allows DG REGIO's communication activities to create added value for the MS/MA is the growing alignment of its communication strategy and approach with the communication strategy and approach in the MS/MA – and vice-versa, combined with the significant attention to the needs in the local environment.

We see an added value of the DG REGIO communication activities in terms of scale, financial additionality, capacity building and behavioural additionality, fostering a shift in approach to communication.

2.2.6 Sustainability of DG REGIO campaigns

Interviewees as well as survey respondents indicate the longer-term value especially of the approach adopted by DG REGIO in its campaigns, from a professional and conceptual perspective.

The high appreciation also of the tools developed in the campaigns confirms the quality of the message development and overall campaign implementation. From the case studies we have learned that this constitutes a key value especially of the EU in my Region campaign.

3 Conclusions and recommendations

The expectations were that the study would provide recommendations

- As regards the orientation of the allocation of resources for DG REGIO communication activities – and recommendations on how to deliver closer integration of DG REGIO communication actions.
- On how to further integrate DG REGIO communication campaigns and align them with communication actions by Member States and Managing Authorities
- On how REGIO could improve its contribution and build more synergies with other communication campaigns carried out by other services of the Commission and ESI funds implementing authorities

In order to facilitate the formulation of these recommendations, we structure the summary of our main findings along the lines for investigation identified rather than the evaluation criteria.

3.1 A coherent and integrated portfolio of communication activities

Conclusions

DG REGIO's communication actions implemented in 2017-19 show a high level of diversity.

A first distinction regards the **target audience**:

- Communication actions targeting stakeholders and general public, accounting for about 84% of the budget, and
- Those addressing EU, national and regional policymakers which consists mainly in events.

The actions targeting stakeholders and citizens can be subdivided in two groups, depending on their **geographical scope**:

- *'Country-specific' communication actions* that operate in a select number of Member States and regions: EU Delivers in the Regions, the Road Trip Project, the Cohesion Dialogues, and the Support for Information Measures action. They account jointly for about 80% of the budget and together, show a strong concentration on seven countries: Austria, Italy, France, Greece, Sweden – and to a lesser extent, Belgium and Germany (in the years 2017 and 2018)
- *EU-wide campaigns* that have a broad coverage, encompassing all or almost all of the 28 EU MS: EU in my Region and the Euronews projects, jointly accounting for 3% of DG REGIO's communication budget

A distinction can be made also depending upon the approach to the **involvement of the local authorities**. The two categories account for a similar share in the budget.

- Communication activities taking a **co-creation approach**, in terms of a close cooperation between DG REGIO, the Managing Authorities and the beneficiaries: EU that Delivers in the Regions, the Road Trip Project, and EU in my Region (44% of the budget).

EU Delivers and the Road Trip campaigns take a *semi-decentralised* approach (even though at different levels of intensity) and target audiences are defined in terms of *segments of citizens*, while the EUinmyRegion takes a *fully decentralised* one

- Communication activities taking a **'communication through intermediaries'** approach where the activities are implemented by means of grants: the Support for Information Measures action and Cohesion Dialogues (38% of the budget). There is no direct involvement of the MS/MA, *no overall definition of specific target audiences*, and they typically address a *mix of audiences*, including

citizens but also intermediaries, beneficiaries and policy decision-makers. There is also close to no oversight by DG REGIO

There is evidence of overlaps between the campaigns and an unbalanced geographical scope

Available data allows us to state that overall, DG REGIO's campaigns and communication actions have largely met their output objectives. DG REGIO's social media accounts equally seem to perform well and have a follower base that is roughly comparable to the one in DGs AGRI and EMPL institutional social media accounts.

Overall, data on effectiveness shows that the five 'top' countries of focus for the 'selective' campaigns are also the countries with the highest figures for reach. However, the regular communication channels (Facebook, Twitter, InfoRegio) seem to complement the campaigns with high reach figures for other MS.

The 'co-created' campaigns show a high level of complementarity, successfully targeting different audiences. Overlaps were visible between the co-created and the top-down campaigns, instead. The largest overlaps are in the Member States with the highest aggregate social media reach relative to the total audience size (country population), i.e. Italy, France and Portugal.

There is evidence that some countries (Germany and Poland) receive relatively little communication from the EU, while others (France, Portugal and Italy) receive a lot, creating overlap. The distribution of 'EU In My Region' Facebook followers and users of the #EUinmyRegion hashtag indicates some inefficiencies/redundancies in distribution of the communication effort, as larger countries such as Germany, Romania and Poland are not being actively engaged through these EU channels.

Budgeting and cost-effectiveness seem appropriate taking targeted channels and audiences into account

While the campaigns analysed appear to be relatively expensive compared to EC corporate campaigns, this may be somewhat related to more specific target audiences (located in specific regions and/or in specific age groups) and in media mix (some Support for Information Measures beneficiaries depend on print/broadcast media that is more expensive even if it is more effective in reaching older age groups). This assessment could be made with more certainty if more consistent output and result data was available.

Overall Road Trip CPM is rather expensive compared to the other campaigns, while the campaign's social media CPM performs very well. This suggests that there was spending under the Road Trip campaign, not related to social media buying, that could be further optimised.

The Support for Information Measures, based on the available reach data reported, appear to be more expensive in all countries except Italy, where big media beneficiaries ensured very high reach.

EU Delivers is most cost-effective (€18CPM) and the Road Trip project least (€87CPM). The Support for Information Measures reach €28CPM, but data is partial. An estimate for the EU in my Region indicates a similar CPM as for the Support for Information Measures.

The positive effects of the highly relevant internal coordination processes and structures could be further maximised

The internal communication and coordination processes in DG REGIO are in general perceived as highly relevant from an effectiveness and efficiency perspective. The Single Entry Points system provides an important element of clarity on who to contact in the system for communication issues; the Country Correspondents structure sets an important basis for an improved communication between DG REGIO and the national/regional Managing Authorities.

The Communication Matrix acts as an important platform to enhance the visibility of the communication function throughout the DG as well as the enhancement of interactivity in the shaping of the communication strategy and activities. The relevance of the CM goes well beyond the enhancement of the efficiency and effectiveness of DG REGIO's work by improving internal

communication and collaborative working methods. A key function of this platform is also to mainstream communication in the work of all units.

Teething problems illustrate that also within DG REGIO, the shift in culture towards a full appreciation of the importance of communication and a full exploitation of the relevant knowledge spread over all units is not yet an accomplished fact. There is a limit to commitments especially in the horizontal units and competence centres.

Communication Matrix meetings are not sufficiently interactive, too often focused on a unilateral transfer of information from the A2 unit to the other units and centred around operational topics, even though there were many instances of ‘informal’ knowledge and experience sharing. A topic for discussion that was considered of interest to all is how to communicate on cohesion policy, how to ‘sell’ it.

Action is needed for an improved integrated management of the communication actions portfolio

A more integrated management and strategic planning of the communication activities portfolio would be beneficial. This implies the availability of structured information at the overall portfolio level on how the different communication activities are expected jointly to contribute to the attainment of the communication strategy objectives and the expected synergies and complementarities. A consistent monitoring and evaluation structure and processes across all communication activities would facilitate the attainment of lessons learned for the planning of future actions.

In terms of data availability, we estimate that monitoring data is currently available only for communication actions accounting for about half of the budget dedicated to communication to citizens. There is a lack in consistency in the approach to the reporting of the monitoring data – among the different actions and for the media partnerships, among the different actions funded.

In addition, communication strategies for the specific actions are typically described only in the Terms of Reference and eventually, final reports.

As a result, there are important limits to the capacity of reaching an overarching view on the approach to communication as well as effects of the communication portfolio, hindering the creation of an overarching strategic framework and planning of the communication activities - as a portfolio rather than alone-standing activities.

Recommendations

We recommend DG REGIO:

- To take a more integrated approach to the strategic management of the communication actions in order to enhance effectiveness and internal efficiency, as well as creating a stronger alignment with the needs for EC corporate communication and the needs of the MS/MA
- To overcome the current level of fragmentation by focusing budget spending on a more restricted number of actions and one campaign only, thus allowing for the enhancement of scale
- To develop an overarching strategic framework for the communication actions portfolio, considering the appropriate balance between the actions in terms of target audience and approach to MS/MA involvement, and including the owned social and digital media channels
- To develop and implement a consistent monitoring and evaluation structure and processes
 - More consistent monitoring and reporting of country and channel breakdowns of budget spend and campaign outputs and (especially) results.
 - Demographic data for engaged audiences (i.e. those that use the hashtag) can be collected from social media monitoring and would be useful to provide in future campaign and communication action reports. Media organisations (newspaper and TV/radio stations) also have demographic

- data on audiences – and this would be useful to provide in future whenever these media channels are involved
- Given the potential for overlap with other campaigns, it is important to enable a coordination of actions funded under the Support for Information Measures action at the national or regional level, with at least information on the timetable and messages to the MS/MA and REPs
 - Monitor engagement by adding all DG REGIO social media accounts to SocialBakers and linking them to Facebook Insights and/or Twitter analytics, which would provide valuable additional information and help improve monitoring the performance of the social media posts and accounts.
 - Ensure that recall and awareness/perception are measured before and after in a way that allows for comparison to assess the results of the campaign: for EU Delivers, polls should be carried out in the same region before and after; for Road Trip, a post-test survey would be informative. An indication along those lines in terms of ‘Ex-post evaluation methodology’ seems to be provided for in calls for the Support for Information Measures actions
- To maximise the value of the Communication Matrix by enhancing the interactive nature of the CM reaching an improved balance between information transfer on operational issues and the exchange of knowledge and experiences
 - To further enhance the value of the Communication Matrix by acting as a platform for a collective cross-DG knowledge exchange on communication and more conceptual policy-related issues such as ‘how to communicate Cohesion Policy’, which may be of more direct interest to all units in the DG

3.2 Coherence with communication actions in the MS/MA

Conclusions

DG REGIO has a major role to play in addressing current shortcomings and failures in the national and regional environments

The communication strategies in the Member States/Managing Authorities show a growing alignment with the communication strategies in DG REGIO and DG COMM. While the communication function in MS/MA keeps its primary role of ensuring programme performance with beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, communication to the general public is overall recognised to be critical for the success of the programme – with the exception of some ‘net contributor’ countries.

The challenges faced by the national and regional Information and Communication Officers in their communication to the citizens are to be set in the context of the diverging management structures and availability of communication budgets in the MS/MA. A major challenge is the availability of resources – in particular human resources, determining the time available to the ICO for their communication to the citizens. Another important challenge is the difficulty to communicate cohesion policy to the citizens, due to its complexity.

The needs range from supporting and fostering a shift in culture related to communication among the Managing Authorities (which not always finds its implementation in practice yet) to providing support to the communication officers in tackling the challenges posed by the local environment and the complexity of the Cohesion Policy itself. Communication to the citizens on regional policies – and cohesion policy in general– is a major challenge for all. Interviewees highlighted the importance that MAs attribute to indications and suggestions coming from DG REGIO for the priority-setting in their own activities.

There are considerable differences in the creation of synergies and complementarities with the actions at the national/regional level

DG REGIO's campaigns and communication actions taking a **co-creation approach** are seen as strongly aligned with the MS/MA national communication strategies and create positive effects in the local environment. Within this group of actions, EU in my Region – taking a **decentralised approach** - is seen as the communication action that is best designed from a co-creation point of view, in so far that it does not deliver outreach, but rather a framework and concept, a time for action and a set of supporting tools to be used – as deemed relevant and useful – in a local context. As such it allows tailoring of the approach/freedom to adapt to the context.

The communication actions taking a '**communication through intermediaries' approach**, where collaboration with the MAs was less intense, were highly criticised by the MS/MA and REPs whenever collaboration or even just information on these actions had been inexistent, hampering integration of these activities within the overall portfolio of communication on EU policy at the national or regional level.

The functionality of DG REGIO's support to the MS/MA through the campaigns is high in all aspects, but with some flaws in timeliness and planning

DG REGIO's approach is seen to have undergone a highly positive development over the last years, with a communication approach that is more in line with national efforts and more responsive to feedback from national MAs.

The support provided by DG REGIO is of critical importance, in terms of the creation of the INFORM network for the sharing of knowledge and experiences, the transfer of skills and tools for communication through the website and close links and contacts between DG REGIO and national officials, the showcasing on the ground of communication to citizens campaigns, in close collaboration with the local communication officers, and last but not least, the concrete support provided in the context of the EU in My Region actions.

Feedback on the quality of the campaigns' planning and implementation was quite positive, even though there were issues with timeliness and planning. Another area with room for improvement is the coordination between all levels of actors involved.

Positive effects are in terms of a streamlining of the messages conveyed and a professionalisation of the communication practice on cohesion policy in the MS/MA. Materials and tools produced are sustainable and useful for use in the local environments – even though the lack of multilingualism was criticised in this context, mentioning also the limits this poses on the reach of the message, especially in social media but not only.

A specific complementarity of the DG REGIO communication actions is in the scale and reach of its activities which often is not feasible within the limits of the MA's communication budget. The concentration of the communication activities compensated for the limited communication ERDF budget available in some of the countries, especially for Austria, France, and Sweden.

The INFORM network is crucial for the MS/MA knowledge and capacity building

The INFORM network has a high level of functionality and is considered to have a significant structuring effect. Directionality is a commonly described effect. Most importantly, it acts as a driver for a shift in approach to communication in the MS/MAs. Timeliness and planning are issues also in this context.

The only more critical note regards the inclusions of the Interreg Programme ICOs and the need for more attention to their specific needs for support.

Recommendations

We recommend DG REGIO

- To set the conditions for a full integration of communication actions in the MS implemented by the EC and/or intermediaries with the overall portfolio of communication actions on EU policy at the national/regional level
- To consider the potential for a strengthened integration of the Support for Information Measures in the overarching strategic planning of DG REGIO's communication activities, taking inspiration from similar initiatives in other DGs
- To enhance the support delivered to the MS/MA in the form of toolboxes and training
- To consider the importance of compensating the limited activity in certain Member States due to budget constraints
- To consider the adequacy of the balance in terms of budget between the communication actions taking a co-created, top-down, and decentralised approach
- To address and involve also policymakers in the MS/MA in order to foster a change in culture related to the importance of communication to citizens

3.3 Coherence with communication actions by other Commission services

Conclusions

IN RELATION TO THE EC CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

The alignment in strategies is strong but overall, less so in terms of actual implementation of the campaigns and communication actions

Overall, the DG REGIO's communication strategy is in strong alignment with the communication strategy and approach in the corporate communications.

In terms of concrete implementation of this strategy, the strong alignment regards especially the **co-creation actions**, and in particular the EU Delivers and Road Trip. For these campaigns (accounting for 43% of the budget), there was a strong alignment with the need for communication from an EU policy perspective - both in terms of geographical coverage and targeted audiences. A key difference with the corporate campaigns is the focus on EU cohesion policy and its benefits versus the EU project in general.

The 'communication through intermediaries' actions showed a considerably less intense alignment.

The added value is mixed but overall positive

EU Delivers and the Road Trip both complement the related corporate campaigns (InvestEU and EUandME). Using a similar approach as the corporate campaigns (even though with differently defined target audience specifics) and at least for EU Delivers, covering the same countries, the risk for overlaps between the DG REGIO and DG COMM campaigns is high. Evidence of such overlaps is very little, though. In terms of outputs, both campaigns seem to have performed at a similar level to the corporate campaigns in terms of aggregate potential reach.

There are some concrete differences in the concrete implementation of the campaigns, linked to the available budgets, that may influence the capacity for creating the desired effects:

- *The lack in multilingualism:* criticised by the MAs who set question marks behind the potential to reach the local audiences and the targeted population segments
- *The limited involvement of the local authorities in the design of the materials* – especially for the Road Trip. Interviewees considered that MAs should be involved (also) in the beginning of the design process. It may be a factor behind the insistence from some interviews against the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, which seems not to be in line with the typical “Go local” approach in DG REGIO

Overall, however, a key asset of DG REGIO’s communication activities is the close relationship with the MAs. It allows for localisation of the messages and especially, a direct access to information on needs in the local environments as well as to relevant networks and multipliers. The INFORM network as well as the network of Country Correspondents and their involvement in the DG REGIO Communication Matrix are precious enabling factors for DG REGIO’s added value.

IN RELATION TO THE OTHER EC COMMUNICATION ACTIONS

The limited coordination between the ESIF-managing DGs is in contrast to the needs in the regions

A frequent comment received from the MS/MA as well as the REPs was the lack in coordination between the DGs in their communication efforts, creating fragmentation of the efforts and confusion ‘on the ground’. Concrete cooperation between the ESIF DGs is little and only on an ad-hoc basis (e.g. the Rural campaign involving DG COMM, DG AGRI and DG REGIO).

This limited collaboration constitutes a burden for their communication management in terms of dilution of the communication efforts and hinders an effective communication on the EU project goals and objectives to the citizens.

Recommendations

We recommend DG REGIO:

- To consider the adequacy of the balance in terms of budget between the communication actions taking a co-created, decentralised and ‘communication through intermediaries’ approach
- To ensure the full alignment of the campaigns implemented with the needs of the MS/MA
- To enhance the efforts for coherence with the communication actions in other ESIF DGs, for example by designing common communication frameworks that link communication strategies and actions to policies and highlight how the campaigns are connected between each other and between them and their interlinkages

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