



Strategy agenda for the Network of EU decentralised Agencies

Dublin

23 October 2015

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1. Introduction

The Heads of Agencies are more and more aware of the need to meet expectations of the citizens by providing added value in the most efficient way, and the Network is seen as a valuable platform to advance in this.

To enable this development the Heads of Agencies agreed to adopt a more strategic and proactive approach, setting our own agenda rather than reacting to external requests.

In order to focus more clearly on the strategy to be adopted, the Heads participated in a High Impact event which was facilitated by external consultants. The Heads of Agencies identified a series of levers, marking three of them as top priority for action. These latter contributions were taken into account in the discussions at the high-impact event.

The Network of Agencies has reflected on its role and the challenges facing the Agencies. The Heads are united in their determination to further strengthen the Network to provide the best position for the Agencies in their relationships with other parties and in particular with the Institutions.

This document presents an agenda for strategic priorities for the Network Agenda to be developed during the next five years. It is built on the conclusions of the High Impact event of Heads of Agencies, the written contributions and the experience acquired in recent years.

The draft was discussed in Dublin on October 23rd by the Heads of Agencies, who endorsed the principles and approach of this strategy.

I want to express my appreciation to my colleague Heads of Agencies for their very valuable input into this process and I hope that it will lead in time to a stronger and more effective Network.

Juan Menéndez-Valdés
Chair
Network of EU Agencies

Dublin 23 October 2015



2. Background / Context

The European Union has built an institutional architecture, where the decentralised Agencies are playing a key role. At present there are 42 Agencies and Joint Undertakings with a combined approved staff of approximately 6,500 represented in the Network.

Initially, with a modest number of Agencies, there was limited need for Heads of Agencies to collaborate on issues. However, as numbers increased and the pressure from the Institutions for harmonisation grew, an informal network was established. The Network developed procedures for collaboration in a number of areas of common interest and was established on a more formal footing in 2012 when Terms of Reference were adopted by the Heads of Agencies.

Current Mission Statement of the Network:

"The European Union (EU) Agencies are an integral part of the EU institutional system. The Heads of Agencies have established a network to provide a forum for coordination, information exchange and agreement of common positions on issues of common interest. The network strengthens the voice of the EU Agencies and promotes Good Governance."

In line with **a clear subsidiarity principle**, the Network acts only when and where EU Agencies are more effective and efficient together, achieving better shared objectives and creating higher value. When and where deemed appropriate, the Network can support Agencies working in clustered groups. However, the Network does not substitute for individual Agencies especially in respect to their legal obligations and mandates.

The **objectives** of the Network are in particular to:

- provide a forum for leadership within the European Union Agencies' Network;
- provide support to the EU Agencies through exchange of information, knowledge and best practice as well as the organisation of mutual support and topical cooperation;
- devise and deliver practical solutions to issues emerging within the system of EU Agencies;
- strive to formulate common positions on general aspects related to the operation of the EU Agencies vis-à-vis the EU Institutions;
- agree, to the extent possible, on common positions with regard to new policy proposals and/or developments, such as inter-institutional work in relation to EU Agencies;
- provide a mechanism for communicating the views of EU Agencies;
- serve as a platform to discuss with and provide common positions for other organisations (such as, for example, the Assembly of Agency Staff Committees (AASC)) .

The Heads of EU Agencies agreed to make best use of the Network in this context by strengthening the areas where cooperation leads to better outcomes while avoiding the dilution of each individual Agency's mission and role, or incurring unnecessary new bureaucracy.

These days, the Network is increasingly recognised as a key interlocutor by the EU Institutions when communicating new initiatives to Agencies or when seeking their feedback or information on governance and administrative matters, primarily related to budgetary and human resources issues. Nevertheless, it is necessary to be aware of the risks associated with the perception of the Network as the single interlocutor representing Agencies. This risk has clearly materialised, for example, in the concept of the 'redeployment pool' where some Agencies have to compensate others in staffing, ignoring that they are separate legal entities. The Network should not operate in a way that dilutes the separate legal identity of each Agency.



In recent years Agencies have intensively increased their cooperation and exchange of expertise through the Network on areas such as the following:

- collaborating on preparing summary papers and reports in relation to the annual Budget and Discharge procedures;
- implementing successfully the Common Approach on EU decentralised Agencies¹ and its subsequent Roadmap;
- sharing knowledge in order to improve their administrative and financial management;
- collaborating in preparing a common position on crucial matters such as the Inter-Institutional Working Group on resources of decentralised Agencies (IIWG2);
- working together in the Standing Working Party to agree common positions on new Implementing Rules for Agencies' staff;
- improving the standing and reputation of Agencies among EU Institutions;
- capitalising on sharing best practices on a broad range of common issues and developing new procedures and systems, geared to Agencies' needs.

Increase the strategic dimension and effectiveness of the Network

In reacting to the new initiatives being undertaken in recent years by the Institutions, particularly relating to the reform of the financial and staff regulations, Common Approach and Roadmap, the Heads of Agencies' meetings were focusing on operational issues to a large extent. This afforded little time for strategic debate among Heads of Agencies.

This issue was raised on a number of occasions and there was discussion about how Heads of Agencies could engage in a more strategic manner on matters of common concern and how the effectiveness of the Network could be enhanced.

Furthermore, it was felt that the Network could become a more strategic actor vis-à-vis the EU Institutions when mandated to act on behalf of the Agencies.

The proliferation in the number of sub-networks, informal sub-networks and working groups has also been discussed. To ensure their continued value added to the Network further reflection on the governance of these groups is necessary.

To address these concerns and to look at the wider strategic orientation for the Network in the future, the Eurofound Coordination organised a High Impact event in order to provide a space for Heads of Agencies to explore what were the priorities for the Network over the next years and to agree an outline strategy for making progress on these.

The outcomes of this High Impact event, along with other feedback received in writing, and the experience of recent Coordinations, are translated into strategic priorities. The Heads of Agencies discussed these at their meeting in Dublin on 23rd October 2015.

The EU Agencies Network strategic priorities are presented in the following section.

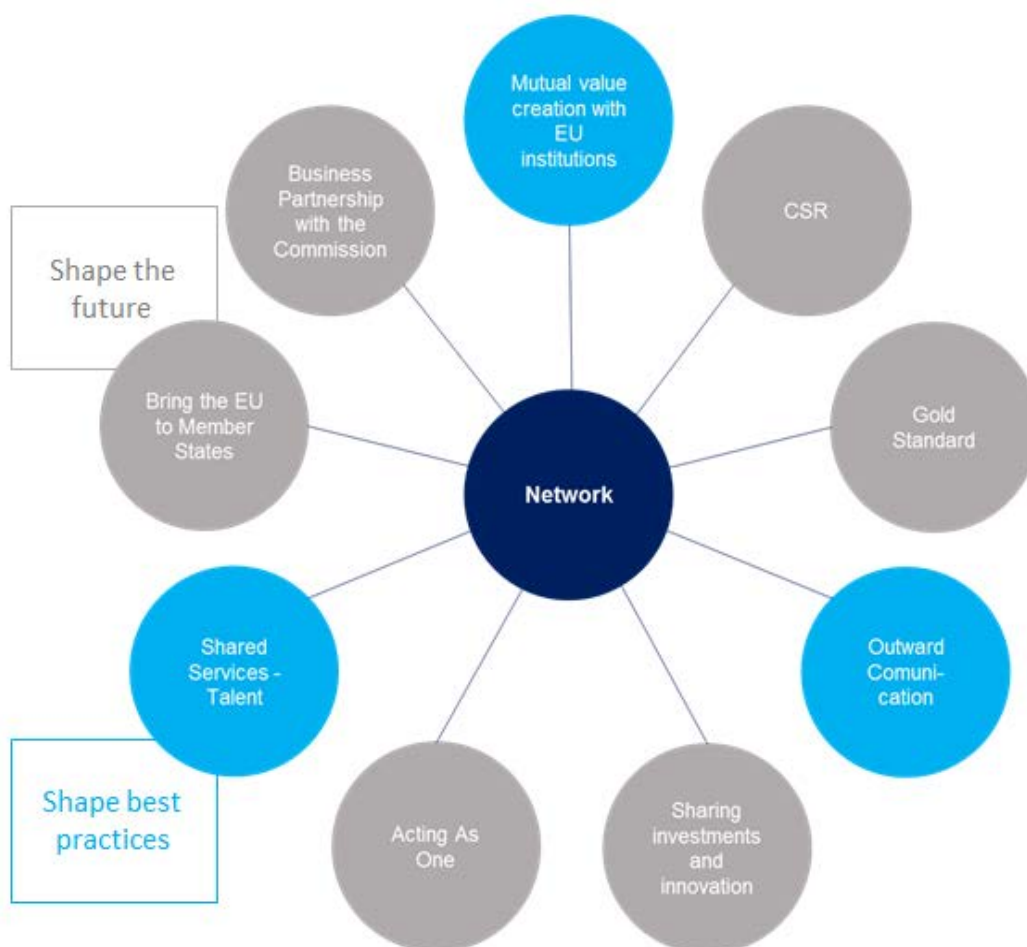
¹ Common Approach on EU decentralised Agencies – Annex to the Inter-Institutional Agreement (Joint Statement) of the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission on decentralised Agencies endorsed on 19 July 2012 as a result of the first Inter-Institutional Working Group (IIWG1).



3. EU Agencies Network Strategic Priorities

In May 2015 the Heads of Agencies discussed the key challenges ahead for the Network in a High Impact event. The deliberations of the High Impact event are set out in detail in a separate document and the following is a brief summary.

The Heads of Agencies identified the following as the main levers for the Network in helping it to increase its effectiveness:



Of this list, the Heads of Agencies prioritised the top three levers as:

- Shared services – shared talent
- Mutual value creation with EU Institutions
- Outward communication

Other levers from the list above may be adopted and implemented by agreement of the Heads of Agencies at a later date, or indeed integrated into actions for the top three levers.



The Eurofound Coordination was mandated to summarise the results of the deliberations and to prepare a strategy agenda for adoption.

Strategic priorities

This strategy agenda will focus on **four medium-term strategic priorities**.

While other levers from the list above may be adopted for implementation by the Network in due course, this strategy agenda will focus primarily on the top three selected levers² as *strategic priorities*. One other area has been included for attention: **Internal Governance**, which is complementary to the areas identified by the Heads of Agencies, on the basis that it is central to securing a high effectiveness of the Network.

The strategy agenda for the Network sets medium term strategic action areas. These action areas can be complemented in a coherent way by the ongoing activities of the Coordination, Troika and sub-networks and a more specific programme of action proposed by any Agency during its Chairing of the Network.

To implement the three main strategic priorities, *Shared services and capabilities*, *Mutual value creation with EU Institutions*, and *Outward communication*, the Network proposes the following structure:

- Establish **three senior-level Task Forces** (one each for strategic priority areas 1 to 3).
- Each task force is **mandated** to explore the feasibility of possible scenarios on how Agencies may be more effective in achieving the objectives of each strategic priority as described below.
- By doing so they will differentiate between 'ongoing' actions to be implemented in the immediate or short term (linked to the ongoing activities of the Network, ordinary activities of the sub-networks and the Coordination priorities) and the medium-term priorities of the Network. They will **assess the legal, financial and procedural dimensions of each scenario** in order to propose clear options for decision by the Heads of Agencies.
- The realisation of this work will be overseen by **Steering Committees** (one for each strategic priority area). Each steering committee will comprise Heads of three Agencies representing Agencies of different groups or clusters, and including the Head of a Troika Agency. The task forces will report back to the Network through these Steering Committees.
- The task forces will be established in November 2015, following the endorsement of the principles and approach of the strategy agenda at the Heads of Agencies meeting.
- The task forces will report back to their steering committees by January 2016 with firm proposals and a timeframe for implementation of actions, for decision by the Heads of Agencies.
- During the course of its work each task force will keep its steering committee informed of progress on a basis to be agreed between both of them. This is essential for good project management and communication, and also allows the steering committee to clarify objectives or intervene when it considers necessary.

The development of the 'Internal Governance' related actions is detailed in section D below.

² 'Shared services - shared Talent' – 'Mutual value creation with EU Institutions' – 'Outward communication'



A. Shared services and capabilities

The key objectives of this area of priority are to:

- Strengthen the EU Agencies' capacities and capabilities to mutualise/share (part of) their resources, expertise and practices associated with horizontal activities in order to achieve higher efficiency gains and better use of their resources;
- Develop a body of expertise in sharing services and capabilities specific to the EU Agencies and Network, strengthening the position of the Network and the Agencies through leading in exploring all options for efficiency gains by means of shared services;
- Develop new innovative ways and methods of sharing knowledge and practices in order to avoid individual Agencies having to 'reinvent the wheel' and to enable new Agencies to establish themselves more quickly.

Immediate actions - Ongoing activities

Ongoing activities of the Coordination, Troika and Permanent Secretariat as well as relevant sub-networks (such as the Heads of Administration, IALN, ICTAC, PDN, etc.) should be continued and further expanded in the following areas. They will not be addressed by the Task Force.

As regards *Sharing services/Resources*:

- Mapping / updating of existing tools to share services or mutualise resources at different levels (such as SLA with services of the EC; inventory of free sharing offer from Agencies; Service provision from one Agency to others, for example CdT, joint procurement initiative for Staff Engagement Survey and being implemented by 23 Agencies, contract for cloud services, etc.);
- Facilitating the expansion in areas with clear providers (e.g. Sysper, ...)

As regards *Sharing knowledge and practices within the Network*:

- Identifying innovative/alternative/common knowledge management tools and developing a plan for the Network and its Agencies aiming at a more efficient cooperation (video communication, further development of the extranet with electronic discussion platforms and portals for advertising mobility opportunities and other initiatives launched by individual Agencies, linking surveys to the Agencies to the creation of comparative databases, etc.).

Mandate of the Task Force:

The Task Force is mandated to:

- take note of existing tools to share/mutualise services or resources;
- identify areas of activity most suitable to be further shared/mutualised (e.g. recruitment, procurement, ICT, learning and development...);
- explore the feasibility of possible **scenarios** on how Agencies and/or the Network could set such options. Explore in detail the scenarios as follows:
 1. *Collaboration by clusters or all Agencies*
 2. *Options to expand exponentially existing tools with the highest potential* (provision of services between Agencies, joint procurement...)
 3. *Establishment of a common service provider*, shared by all or some Agencies, taking into account of the following:
 - a) What would be the legal, financial and HR issues to be addressed in implementing it?
 - b) What would be the priority for potential services to be shared through such a service provider?



- c) Explore a model where use of the service would be voluntary?
- d) Could the Permanent Secretariat play a role as regards such an entity?

Expected outcomes from the Task Force:

A 'priority paper' presenting:

- the different mid- to long term scenarios for sharing services and an analysis of their feasibility (including financial, legal and human resource implications);
- the specific actions within these scenarios and a timeline for implementation;
- a clear set of recommendations to the Heads of Agencies.

The proposal should be submitted through the Steering Committee four weeks before the deadline for discussion and decision.



B. Mutual value creation with EU Institutions

The key objectives of this area of priority are to:

- Strengthen the strategic image, reputation and level of intervention of the Network and the EU Agencies vis-à-vis the EU Institutions. The Network could/should become – when mandated by Heads of Agencies – the key ‘institutional partner’ representing decentralised Agencies’ joint/common/shared interests, particularly to discuss horizontal issues;
- The Network should be developed as a key lever to negotiate with the EU Institutions when they propose initiatives impacting directly on the Agencies, bearing in mind the principle of subsidiarity and avoiding the dilution of the independent nature of the Agencies;
- Strengthen the Network’ capacities for a specialised contribution of the Agencies to key policy making agendas, either by thematic clusters of Agencies or by the Network as a whole. Such interventions would help to reinforce their partnership with the EU Institutions.

Immediate actions – Ongoing activities:

Ongoing activities of the Coordination, Troika and Permanent Secretary as well as relevant sub-networks and existing working groups should be continued and further expanded in the following areas. They will not be addressed by the Task Force.

- Proactively promoting discussions on horizontal areas of improvements (e.g. carry-overs, performance management, ABB, IT, audits...);
- Representing and negotiating on behalf of the Network (e.g. IIWG2, expansion of representatives in CCA, Standing Working Party on model decisions...);
- Systemising further the contribution to annual procedures (budget, discharge...).

Mandate of the Task Force:

The Task Force is mandated to:

- explore and define **scenarios** on how Agencies and/or the Network can develop and deepen their cooperation with Institutions;
- this could include clustering thematically around **broader policy areas** (organising sub-cluster groups, for example to support better exchange on EU policy developments around the Policy Guidelines of the EC or the EU growth strategy Europe 2020, or to support a better informed budget procedure per policy heading), or, where appropriate, establishing specialised working groups, which would/could replace current sub-networks, if overlapping.

When considering options related to contributing to EU policymaking, the Task Force should also seek input from actors in the field such as the Brussels Liaison Offices or Agencies’ colleagues involved in EU institutional liaison.

Expected outcomes from the Task Force:

A detailed ‘priority paper’ presenting:

- the different scenarios and an analysis of their feasibility (including financial, legal and human resource implications);
- the specific actions within these scenarios and a timeline for implementation;
- a clear set of recommendations to the Heads of Agencies.

The proposal should be submitted through the Steering Committee at least four weeks before the deadline for discussion and decision.



C. Outward communication

The key objectives of this area of priority are to:

- Increase the visibility of the EU Agencies both towards the EU citizen and towards other key actors at EU institutional and national level, complementary to individual Agencies' communication;
- Promote EU Agencies' added value;
- Promote the Network as a 'relay or multiplier' of EU Agencies within the EU architecture, bearing in mind the principle of subsidiarity.

Immediate actions – Ongoing activities:

Ongoing activities of the Coordination, Troika and Permanent Secretary as well as relevant sub-networks and existing working groups should be continued and further expanded in the following areas. They will not be addressed by the Task Force.

Reinforcing current cooperation mainly channelled through the HICN in areas such as:

- New video, update brochure and photobook;
- Reinforce the visibility of the membership to the Network in individual Agencies webs;
- Update and upgrade Agencies area in the official web of the European Union (Europa website), including brochure, video, etc. Linking Europa to individual Agencies webs but also vice-versa;
- Collecting and developing information on added value of Agencies;
- Organising discussions with media and stakeholders;
- Reinforcing Agencies' presence in the Annual Report of the European Union (currently almost non-existent).

Mandate of the Task Force:

The Task Force is mandated to:

- explore the feasibility of mid- to long-term **scenarios** on where and how Agencies and/or the Network may be more effective in their outward communication and in increasing their visibility both towards the EU citizens and towards other key actors at both EU and national levels. The feasibility analysis should also look at how comprehensive these scenarios should be in the context of time/resources implications and the expected impact they might have.

Among issues that could be addressed: What would be a reasonable scope for a Network communication plan? In which areas can the Network best reach the EU citizens and with which communication message? How can Agencies better align themselves with the communication strategies of the EU Commission and other EU Institutions? How might the HICN sub-network be optimised? What criteria will be established to monitor, measure and assess the 'impact' of such a strategy?

- explore which *Target groups* (at EU and national levels), *communication products* (shared Agencies' outputs including infographics, videos, apps, 'cluster joint campaigns', media articles, branding etc.) and *tools and channels* (shared online platform, alternative platforms, social media, etc.) might be appropriate. If the Network's objectives cannot be achieved through the Europa website, the scenario of the creation of an alternative website could be explored.



Expected outcomes from the Task Force:

A 'priority paper' presenting:

- the different scenarios/proposals for a Network communication plan and an analysis of their feasibility (including financial and human resource implications);
- a clear set of recommendations to the Heads of Agencies;
- a timeline and a detailed implementation of a Network communication plan could be delegated to the HCIN (complementary to its annual work programme).

The proposal should be submitted through the Steering Committee four weeks before the deadline for discussion and decision.



D. Internal governance

More reflection is also necessary in regard to the internal governance of the Network.

This will be managed by the Coordination, the Troika and the Permanent Secretariat, who will explore, suggest and help implement a set of new developments and rules aiming at improving the internal efficiency of the Network. This will operate over several years to assess future needed improvements. The expertise of existing sub-networks, such as the Inter Agencies Legal Network (IALN) or the PDN, will be available to the Coordination, where necessary, in addressing these matters. The annual programmes of the sub-networks will include such collaboration and support as a standard item.

Among options for improvement to be explored:

- Update the mission statement of the Network in line with the priorities by adding reference to two new areas, namely communication of the Network views and initiation of common actions;
- The frequency of meetings of the Heads of Agencies. There has been a proposal to reduce from three to two meetings per annum. The timing of these meetings would be important since the current meetings are timed to coincide with the Budget and Discharge processes (annual EP hearings with Agencies representatives). They are also run in tandem with the Heads of Administration Network - would a reduction also apply to that meeting?
- Agencies chair the Coordination of the Network for 12 months. There is a steep learning curve that is not always addressed through membership of the Troika during the previous year. Is 12 months considered sufficient or would a longer coordination cycle be of greater benefit to the Network?
- Consolidate procedures, for instance in relation to preparation of the budget and discharge;
- Update the Network's Terms of Reference (incl. sub-networks, etc.) following preparatory work by the current Coordination (Eurofound) and development of functioning procedures for the Troika. Representatives from an earlier Coordination might be requested to contribute;
- Set out clearly the role, mission and reporting of the Permanent Secretariat, and particularly how it relates to the support of the Troika;
- Examine the mid-term relevance of current sub-networks (and informal working groups): how they are operating and their contribution to the work of the Network (alignment with the Network renewed objectives, reporting to the Heads of Agencies; overlaps; sunset clause), and clarifying their governance, reporting and accountability. Develop clearer procedures governing the creation of new sub-networks and working groups;
- Examine the benefits of launching short consultations or longer surveys;
- Role of the Permanent Secretariat in relation to the systematic collection and storage of comparative information and the extranet in general.



4. Timeline of the strategy – Monitoring its implementation

The Network foresees the following timeline for implementing the objectives of this strategy document. The specific timelines and milestones will be reviewed annually by the Heads of Agencies in May of each year to ensure that there is no loss of momentum and that sight is not lost of the objectives to be achieved in order to secure the ambitions of the Network.

Deadline	Action
October–November 2015	Discussion of draft strategy agenda and agreement
November 2015	Adoption by written procedure
November 2015	Nomination of Task Forces / Steering Committees
November–January 2016	Task Forces operational
early February 2016	Steering Committees reporting and proposals to Heads of Agencies
18 February 2016	Endorsement of proposals by Heads of Agencies
March 2016–October 2019	Implementation (including regular reporting on implementation to the Heads of Agencies and correction/reorientations, if needed).



5. Closing Statement

The Network sees this strategy and set of actions as the start of a more forward-looking approach. This change is necessary in order to ensure that the voice of the EU Agencies is recognised and heard, that there is the development of relationships between the Agencies and the Institutions that are based on mutual respect, inclusion and partnership.

EU decentralised Agencies also need to support each other more and deepen the level of collaboration on matters of common concern, develop initiatives geared to realising more efficient ways of working, proactively seek to work within the regulatory restrictions rather than using them as an excuse for inaction.

The Network, through endorsement of this document, commits itself to following through on the action areas outlined above. The Heads of Agencies will actively oversee the process, with the assistance of dedicated Task Forces and Steering Committees. In this respect it will be a concrete example of constructive collaboration between Agencies at senior level and evidence that the sum of the Agencies is clearly stronger and more effective than its individual parts.



Heads of Agencies, Dublin, 22-23 October 2015