

# EUROPE DIRECT in 2005

A successful year for the EU citizens' hotline



00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11



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## EUROPE DIRECT in 2005

### *A year of many questions*

*2005 was an eventful year for the European Union. The debate on the constitution and the outcome of the referendums in two member states raised numerous questions about the course and direction of the EU and the future of Europe. At the same time, issues like unemployment, social exclusion and globalisation led people to ask increasingly acute questions about their future and about the future of our societies and the manner in which they are governed.*

*2005 was also the year when communicating with citizens was firmly put at the top of our priorities. EUROPE DIRECT, the European Commission's information hotline, was at the forefront of our efforts to reconnect the EU with its citizens.*

*As a result, many more people than ever before turned to EUROPE DIRECT for information about EU-related matters: people in search of straight answers to their questions. In the past, a seemingly faceless institution provided a set of standard responses to citizens' queries. Today, they hear a human voice at the other end of the telephone or receive a prompt, personalised reply to their emails. EUROPE DIRECT has become a powerful tool that needs to be strengthened and promoted as part of our strategy to improve communications between the EU and its citizens.*



**Margot Wallström**  
European Commission Vice-President  
with responsibility for institutional relations  
and communications strategy

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## Highlights of 2005: another record year

**EUROPE DIRECT**, the European Commission's real-time information service for citizens, broke new records in 2005. The service handled 112 000 queries from all 25 member countries and beyond on a wide range of EU-related topics, an increase of more than 100% in just two years.

Events during the year, particularly the votes on the European constitution in several countries and the debate on Turkish EU membership, no doubt stimulated interest. But queries on everyday issues concerning citizens' rights to live, work or study in another EU country, and on matters affecting equal opportunities, personal security and much else also rose sharply. With more of us travelling than ever before, the EU charter of passengers' rights, especially concerning delayed, cancelled or

overbooked flights, emerged as one of **EUROPE DIRECT**'s hottest topics of 2005.

The total number of queries, which can be submitted by phone or via the internet, reached a peak of 12 000 in March ahead of the French and Dutch referendums on the constitution two months later. After dipping in the summer months, they averaged nearly 9 000 a month from September onwards.

The biggest number of queries came from France, followed by Germany, the UK, Spain and Belgium. Of the new member states, Polish citizens asked most questions followed by those of the Czech Republic and Hungary. Although the new member states make up more than 15% of the EU population, they account for fewer than 9% of total queries.

### *Users reach six figures*

Queries from new EU countries may lag behind, but **EUROPE DIRECT**'s 100 000th user of 2005 was Polish. The honour fell to Mrs Malgorzata Jagora of Warsaw when she called on November 15 to find out about import duties on furniture entering Poland from outside the EU. It earned 24-year-old Mrs Jagora a free trip to Brussels, and a chance to visit the **EUROPE DIRECT** call centre and to meet its staff.



Citizens can submit queries to **EUROPE DIRECT** in any of the EU's 20 official languages. Answers are given in the questioner's language. In 2005, English was the most popular language, followed by French and German.

Users ranged from students preparing essays, owners of small businesses looking for EU funding, professionals seeking information on EU rules and people asking about social security and pensions if they move to another EU country.

In the internet era, it is significant that the telephone accounted for an even bigger share of

queries in 2005 than in 2004 (53.5% against 51.4%). This is because it provides an immediate response to questions and establishes a human contact between the citizen and an otherwise 'faceless' EU bureaucracy. E-mail is preferred by users with more detailed or complex queries.

Telephone calls to the **EUROPE DIRECT** hotline are free within the territory of the European Union. Normal international rates apply for calls from outside.

An independent evaluation carried out during 2005 showed a high level of user satisfaction with the service.

### *Reconnecting with citizens*

Simply by dialling **EUROPE DIRECT**'s free number or by sending an email, people across Europe and beyond can establish direct contact with the EU. In this way, **EUROPE DIRECT** fulfils one of the European Commission's core objectives: that of connecting citizens with the EU by helping them find answers to their questions and by listening to their concerns.

Single telephone number: **00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11**

E-mail via [europa.eu.int/europedirect/](mailto:europa.eu.int/europedirect/)

## 2005 in focus: the year in detail

### Top subjects

Personal mobility and issues linked to working, living or studying in another EU country replaced items related to the EU's institutions as the subject most frequently raised by users of **EUROPE DIRECT** in 2005. Mobility-related issues accounted for 25% of all queries.

The second most popular subject (22% of queries) was the functioning of the EU, including the constitution adopted by member governments in 2004 but rejected by voters in France and the Netherlands a year later. Other top subjects included relations with outside countries, questions linked to commerce and industry and consumer concerns on matters like food safety and public health.

### Top 10 subjects of 2005

	Queries	Per cent of total
Cross-border issues: to travel/work/live/study in another country	27 832	24.8
Functioning of EU institutions – treaties, incl. constitution	25 126	22.4
Relations with third countries	6 608	5.9
Enterprise and industry, in particular measures in favour of SMEs	5 760	5.1
Consumer – food safety – public health	3 826	3.4
Internal market	3 599	3.2
Customs and taxation	2 769	2.5
Justice, freedom and security, incl. fundamental rights – asylum/immigration	2 597	2.3
Employment and social affairs	2 476	2.2
Environment	2 324	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>82 917</b>	<b>74.0</b>

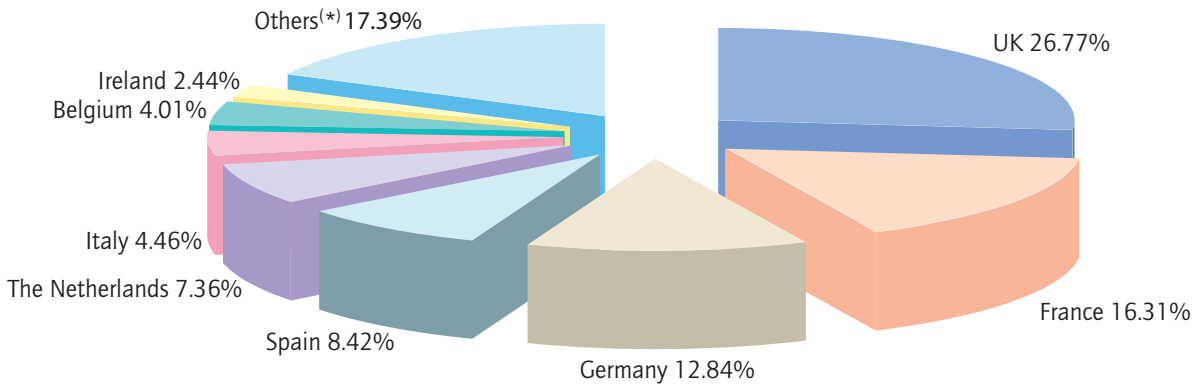
### Hottest topics

Within each subject, a number of items emerged as particularly hot topics. The hottest mobility-related topic was the new improved EU charter on air travellers' rights which came into force in February 2005. It explains passengers' rights to compensation or alternative arrangements when, for example, flights are delayed, cancelled or overbooked. With airlines competing fiercely for business, with a

growing number of budget airlines, and with more package holiday travel than ever before, it is not surprising that this was 2005's hottest topic, with nearly 12% of all **EUROPE DIRECT** queries. The United Kingdom generated most calls and emails on this issue.



Queries on air passengers' rights per country



(\*) This figure includes those EU countries which generate fewer than 2% of queries.

The stalled European constitution was another hot topic, although interest dropped after the negative outcomes of the referendums in France and the Netherlands.

In the three months prior to the votes, total monthly queries averaged nearly 12 000, with France and Germany together accounting for 35%.

### Wide-ranging concerns

EUROPE DIRECT handles more than just hot topics. Samples of other user concerns:

- My daughter is looking for a job in another EU country. Where can we find any addresses? *(query from France, October 2005)*
- I heard there is going to be a .eu domain. How can I register my company? *(query from Belgium, December 2005)*
- Does a Polish citizen need a work permit to work in Spain? *(query from Poland, March 2005)*
- I'm Irish living in Spain. Although an EU citizen, I can vote in neither country. What recourse, if any, do I have? *(query from Spain, January 2005)*
- A friend needed a passport to go to the Czech Republic recently and she's been told she also needs one to visit Britain. Isn't an ID card good enough for travel in the EU? *(query from Greece, April 2005)*
- I want to ask whether a non-European country like India can be a member of the EU? *(query from India, November 2005)*

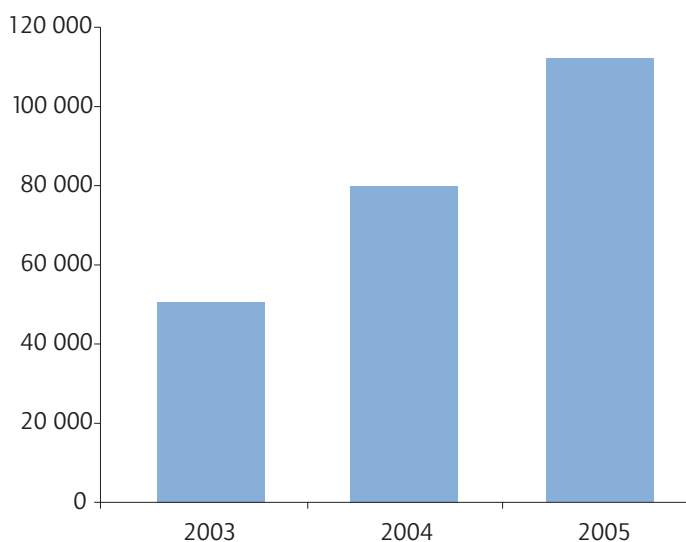
## Most significant trends

The most significant trend of 2005 was undoubtedly the strong surge in usage by citizens in all EU countries of the **EUROPE DIRECT** service. Overall, queries rose to 112 083 in

2005 from 79 857 in 2004 and 50 491 in 2003. France was the biggest source accounting for 16% of the total, followed by Germany with 14.5% and the United Kingdom with 11%.

### A steady rise in the number of queries

Number of queries



	2003	2004	2005
Calls	23 945	41 070	59 953
E-mails	25 108	33 105	43 548
Web assistance	1 438	5 772	8 582
<b>Totals</b>	<b>50 491</b>	<b>79 857</b>	<b>112 083</b>

### Monthly queries, 2005

Month	Calls	E-mails	Web assistance	Total
January	3 932	2 661	530	7 123
February	5 622	3 183	654	9 459
March	6 327	4 772	1 027	12 126
April	6 095	4 501	921	11 517
May	6 015	4 397	768	11 180
June	5 594	3 640	678	9 912
July	4 642	3 002	594	8 238
August	4 338	3 064	626	8 028
September	5 080	3 305	715	9 100
October	4 543	3 837	745	9 125
November	4 536	3 986	797	9 319
December	3 229	3 200	527	6 956
	<b>59 953</b>	<b>43 548</b>	<b>8 582</b>	<b>112 083</b>

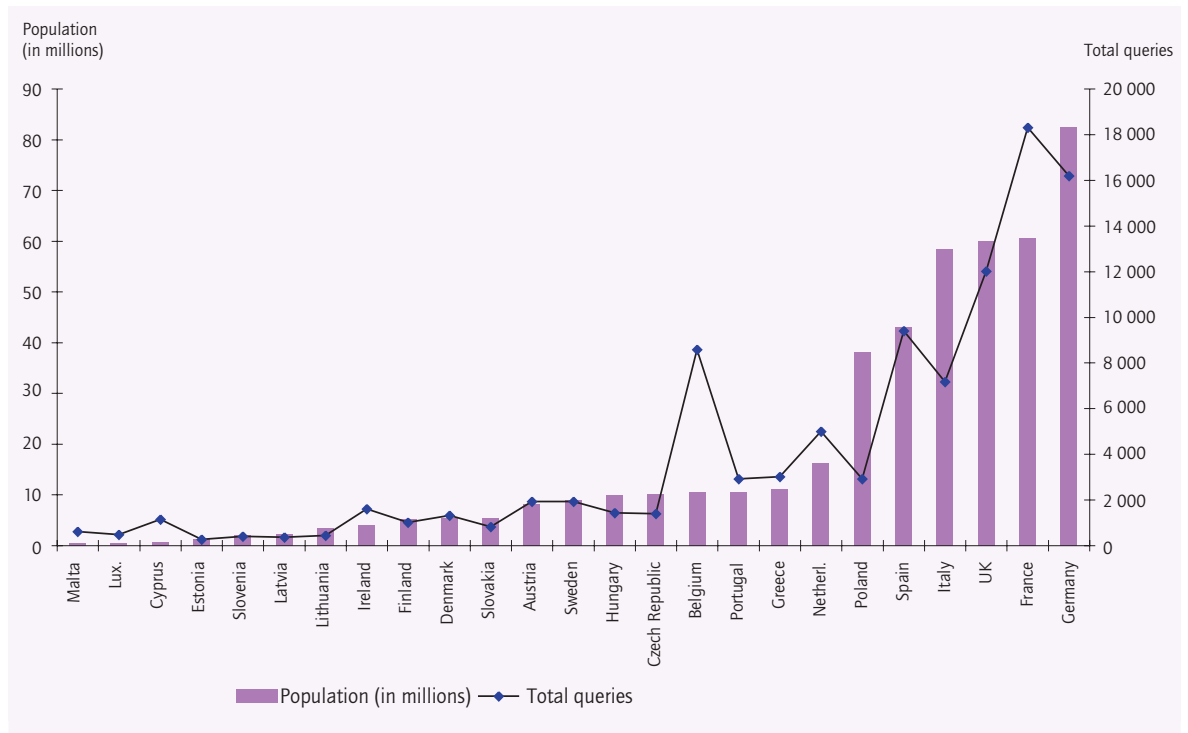
Queries per country and source, 2005

Country	Calls	E-mails	Web assistance	Total
Belgium	5 167	2 587	831	8 585
Czech Republic	661	605	120	1 386
Denmark	617	628	79	1 324
Germany	11 033	4 768	395	16 196
Estonia	116	135	23	274
Greece	1 733	1 045	233	3 011
Spain	5 334	3 410	653	9 397
France	12 036	5 052	1 223	18 311
Ireland	881	535	177	1 593
Italy	3 305	3 106	751	7 162
Cyprus	636	354	149	1 139
Latvia	146	173	48	367
Lithuania	172	223	45	440
Luxembourg	299	147	29	475
Hungary	700	512	216	1 428
Malta	167	348	95	610
Netherlands	2 632	1 906	448	4 986
Austria	1 122	732	79	1 933
Poland	1 515	1 142	256	2 913
Portugal	1 566	1 136	216	2 918
Slovenia	166	197	36	399
Slovakia	378	379	68	825
Finland	361	583	62	1 006
Sweden	939	828	168	1 935
United Kingdom	7 270	3 897	837	12 004
Non-EU	1 001	7 493	1 336	9 830
Unknown	0	1 627	9	1 636
<b>Total</b>	<b>59 953</b>	<b>43 548</b>	<b>8 582</b>	<b>112 083</b>

Although big countries asked most questions, the picture is different if calls are related to the size of national populations. On this basis, most small countries had more per capita queries than the bigger ones, with the exception of France.

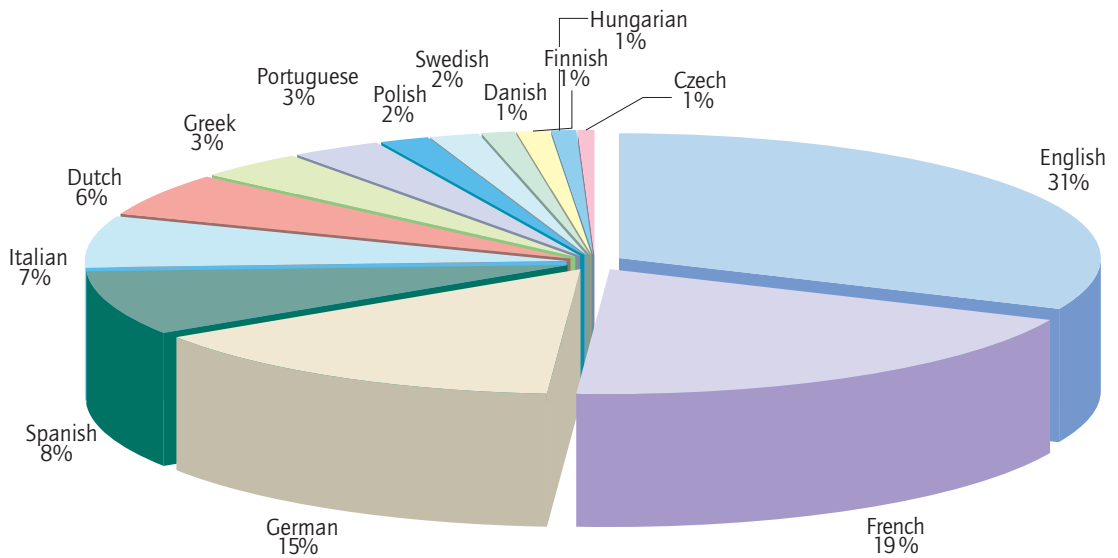
Figures for the UK, Germany and Italy were low in relation to their size. The position of Belgium, the source of more queries than Italy in 2005, no doubt reflects the fact that the main EU institutions are located there.

Queries per country – based on population size



English remained the most-used language in 2005, accounting for 31% of all queries, compared with 19% for French and 15% for German.

Queries by language



None of the other official EU languages reached 1% of total queries in 2005.

Queries from outside the EU accounted for 8.8% of the 2005 total, 31% of which came from other European countries (principally Switzerland and Norway). Queries from Latin America followed with 22% and North America with 20%.

## The EU is just a phone call away: how EUROPE DIRECT works

The **EUROPE DIRECT** service was launched in 2000 and the single freephone number **00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11** was introduced two years later. Calls are free from anywhere within the Union.

However, some mobile phone services or alternative fixed-line operators do not grant access to 00 800 numbers. Others may levy a minimum charge. Calls from public payphones or hotels may also be chargeable.

Calls to **EUROPE DIRECT** from outside the EU can be made to **(32-2) 29-99696**. These are charged at standard international rates.

E-mail queries can be sent via the EU's Europa server at [europa.eu.int/europedirect/](mailto:europa.eu.int/europedirect/)

This web address also gives access to **EUROPE DIRECT**'s web assistance service where users can spend an interactive session with a **EUROPE DIRECT** agent on how to find information on the EU's website.

The **EUROPE DIRECT** call centre is open Mondays to Fridays from 9.00 to 18.30 CET. Outside these hours, you can leave a message on the voice-mail system.

Telephone calls are answered immediately; the deadline for responding to e-mails is three working days.

### *What the service does for you*

**EUROPE DIRECT** answers questions from citizens about how the EU affects them. If you need more information, it tells you where to go.

The service gives you:

- an answer in any of the 20 official EU languages;
- a complete answer to simple questions and/or a reference to further sources of information;
- an answer from an expert in the relevant policy area for more complex questions, or from one of several specialised EU problem-solving services like *Citizens' Signpost Service* or *Solvit*;
- free postal delivery of certain EU publications for callers with no internet access.

## A reality check: satisfied customers

After five years of operation, the European Commission requested an evaluation of **EUROPE DIRECT** from an independent outside body. This took place between March and August 2005.

The evaluation showed a high level of user satisfaction. Of users surveyed, 79% said their questions had been answered 'very well' or 'well'. The language ability of the operators was rated highly and respondents appreciated their competence and helpful attitude.

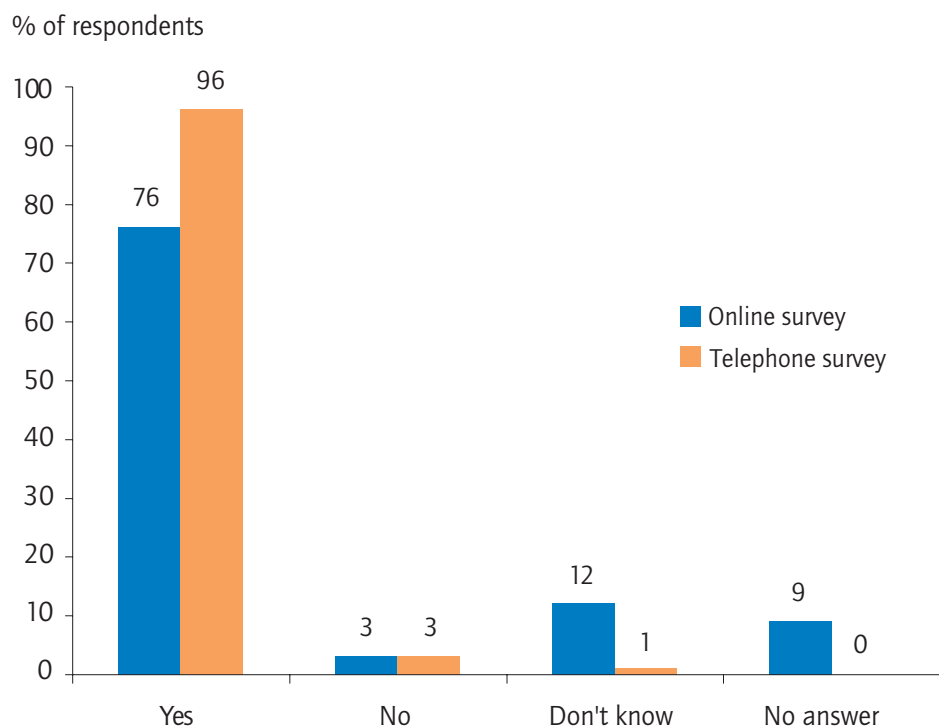
According to respondents, one main advantage of **EUROPE DIRECT** is its ability to answer a wide range of questions, from specific topics to more general information and practical advice on European issues. The evaluation report says **EUROPE DIRECT** enhances the image of the European Commission and of the EU.



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The report recommends more media or outdoor advertising for the service, and says it should carry out regular user surveys so as to better know and serve their needs.

*Will you use EUROPE DIRECT in the future?*



Source: Evaluator's survey.

## Structure and organisation

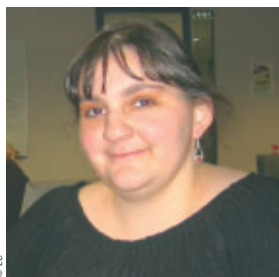
The European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication (DG Comm) is responsible for **EUROPE DIRECT**. The service is outsourced to an external contractor. The present contract began in June 2003 and runs for a maximum period of five years. The basic annual cost is €2.3 million.

DG Comm monitors the contractor's performance. Questions that deserve more in-depth analysis are passed to the Commission services for a response. Daily contacts between DG Comm and the **EUROPE**

**DIRECT** team are generally by telephone or e-mail. Formal meetings are held at least once a month. The contractor provides weekly, monthly, quarterly and yearly activity reports to DG Comm.

The number of staff has grown as **EUROPE DIRECT** has expanded, particularly when nine new languages were introduced following EU enlargement in May 2004. Staff levels rose from 24 in 2003 to 38 in 2005. Agents are expected to know two languages plus their mother tongue.

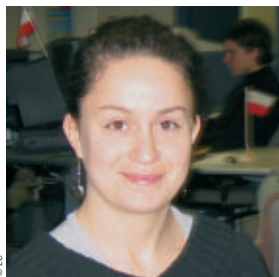
## Profiles



*Sabrina Fasoli*  
Information officer

I am Italian and lived in Rome until I was 27. I have a degree in modern languages and literature and speak English, French, Spanish and Dutch. After job-hunting in Italy for two years, I moved to Belgium in 2000 where I had earlier studied as an Erasmus student. Within two weeks I found a job at **EUROPE DIRECT**. At first I was a communication agent, and became information officer

(my present job) two years later. I look after the information flow from DG Comm and the Europa server to my colleagues. I also deal with hot topics and quality control. In my future career, I would like to go on using my language skill and what I have learned about the EU. Maybe I would like to work in the Commission, as a translator or in the field of education.



*Sharon Spiteri*  
Senior operator

I am 26 and graduated in 2001 from the University of Malta with a bachelor's degree in communications. I worked as a journalist with *One News*, a radio and television station in Malta, until 2002, when I moved to Brussels and got a job with an online service covering EU news. I came to **EUROPE DIRECT** in August 2004.

Besides Maltese, I speak English and Italian. I have intermediate French, and have recently started learning Finnish. I like the multicultural atmosphere at **EUROPE DIRECT**. The job has also made me see what people think of the EU. As for my career, I would definitely like to stay in EU affairs.

## Targets for the future

The European Commission is already implementing some recommendations from the 2005 evaluation report. To raise awareness about **EUROPE DIRECT** a billboard advertising campaign was launched in Belgium in December 2005 and is being gradually extended to other EU countries.

There are also plans to streamline access to other Commission contact centres and helpline services by bringing them under the **EUROPE DIRECT** brand with a view to promote one-stop-shop access for citizens.

At a practical level, the **EUROPE DIRECT** service will be expanded with two more languages to cover Bulgaria and Romania, the next countries to join the European Union.

DG Comm will continue its efforts to get Europe's mobile telephone operators to grant free access to 00 800 international freephone numbers so that calls to **EUROPE DIRECT** can be made free of charge from all mobile telephones.

As part of the European Commission's commitment to listen to EU citizens, DG Comm intends to analyse the abundant material provided by users of the **EUROPE DIRECT** service in order to be more attentive to their comments and concerns. This will serve as input to its overall communications strategy and help improve future information on the EU.



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## **Other information sources on the European Union**



Information in all official languages of the European Union is available on the internet. You can access it via the Europa server: [europa.eu.int](http://europa.eu.int)



All over Europe there are hundreds of local EU information centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you at this website: [europa.eu.int/comm/relays/ed\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/relays/ed_en.htm)

# EUROPE

# DIRECT

## in 2005

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## Reconnecting with citizens

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Call EUROPE DIRECT free of charge from anywhere in the EU on  
00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11  
or send an email via [europa.eu.int/europedirect/](mailto:europa.eu.int/europedirect/)

## What EUROPE DIRECT does for you

Usage of the EUROPE DIRECT hotline for EU citizens broke new records in 2005 when the number of queries exceeded 112 000.

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- an answer in any of the 20 official EU languages;
- a complete answer to simple questions and/or a reference to further sources of information;
- for complex or politically sensitive questions, an answer from an expert in the relevant policy area, or from one of several specialised EU problem-solving services like Citizens' Signpost Service or Solvit;
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