Strengthening the Capacity of Independent Fiscal Institutions

Policy brief on increasing IFIs outreach and visibility

Technical Support Instrument

Supporting reforms in 27 Member States



Funded by the European Union

This document was produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. Its content is the sole responsibility of the author(s). The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

The project is funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, managed by the European Commission Reform and Investment Task Force (SG REFORM).

This report has been delivered in November 2026, under the EC Contract No. REFORM/2023/OP/0010. It has been delivered as part of the project Strengthening the capacity of Independent Fiscal Institutions.

© European Union, 2026



The Commission's reuse policy is implemented by Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39 – https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2011/833/oj).

Unless otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) licence (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). This means that reuse is allowed, provided that appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated.

Reform and Investment Task Force
+32 2 299 11 11 (Commission switchboard)
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 170 / Wetstraat 170
1049 Brussels, Belgium

CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations ii
Executive Summary 1
1. Context: why communication has become a strategic issue for IFIs 3
2. Analysis of the state of play: three institutions, one diagnosis 4
3. Conclusion: independent analysis must be heard to hold anyone to account 6
4. The three central policy messages 7
5. Policy agenda: specific recommendations 10
5.1. For European institutions and the IFI community 10
5.2. For relevant national authorities 10
5.3. For the beneficiary IFIs – immediate priority actions 11
6. Pillar 4 as a case study: five lessons for the IFI community 12
Annex A – Best Practices Guide 14

Cover photo credit: Headway, "person gesturing during meeting with laptop". Published on January 29, 2018, via Unsplash

List of Abbreviations

AIReF	Autoridad Independiente de Responsabilidad Fiscal (Independent Authority for Fiscal Responsibility, Spain)
CBR	Council for Budget Responsibility (Slovakia)
CPB	Centraal Planbureau (Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, the Dutch IFI)
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FPB	Federal Planning Bureau (Bureau fédéral du Plan / Federaal Planbureau, Belgium)
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
HFISC	Hellenic Fiscal Council (Greece)
IFI	Independent Fiscal Institution
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MS	Member State
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
SG REFORM	European Commission Reform and Investment Task Force
TSI	Technical Support Instrument

Executive Summary

Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs) hold a distinctive position in Europe's fiscal architecture: their influence over fiscal policy is persuasive rather than coercive. Communication is therefore not an accessory to the IFI mandate – it is the transmission mechanism through which independent analysis becomes fiscal accountability. Analyses that do not reach and convince parliaments, the media, the academic community and, ultimately, the public, cannot foster the informed constituencies that press governments to behave transparently and responsibly in fiscal matters

The reformed EU economic governance framework (Directive (EU) 2024/1265) reinforces and extends an existing requirement for IFIs to have the capacity to communicate publicly about their assessments and opinions in a timely manner. This requirement was already established under Regulation (EU) No 473/2013 and is now explicitly reaffirmed in Article 8a(4)(b) of Directive 2011/85/EU, as amended by Directive (EU) 2024/1265. At the same time, several IFIs are receiving new, highly exposed mandates – notably the costing of election platforms – while trust in governments and traditional media declines amid polarisation and misinformation. This combination creates both an opportunity for IFIs to position themselves as objective, independent sources of information, and a reputational risk for those that communicate without a strategy.

Against this background, Pillar 4 ("Outreach and Visibility") of the project "Strengthening the Capacity of Independent Fiscal Institutions" (REFORM/2023/OP/0010) – funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) and managed by the European Commission's Reform and Investment Task Force (SG REFORM) – supported three beneficiary institutions: the Independent Authority for Fiscal Responsibility (AIReF, Spain), the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB, Belgium) and the Hellenic Fiscal Council (HFISC, Greece). The pillar delivered, for each institution, a review of current communication practices against the backdrop of international good practices (Deliverables 4a), a tailored external communication strategy and action plan (Deliverables 4b) and targeted capacity-building programmes (Deliverables 4c). This policy brief (Deliverable 4d) distils the conclusions and good practices of that work for the wider community of IFIs and national authorities.

Despite very different mandates, sizes and institutional histories, the three reviews converged on one diagnosis: each institution enjoys strong technical credibility among specialised audiences, but its communication function is under-resourced and largely informal, no comprehensive communication strategy was in place at the outset, impact measurement is dominated by volume-based media metrics, and the general public remains largely out of reach. The experience of the project shows that these gaps can be closed quickly, affordably and in a replicable way if the adequate resources are provided.

This policy brief advances three policy messages for the European IFI community:

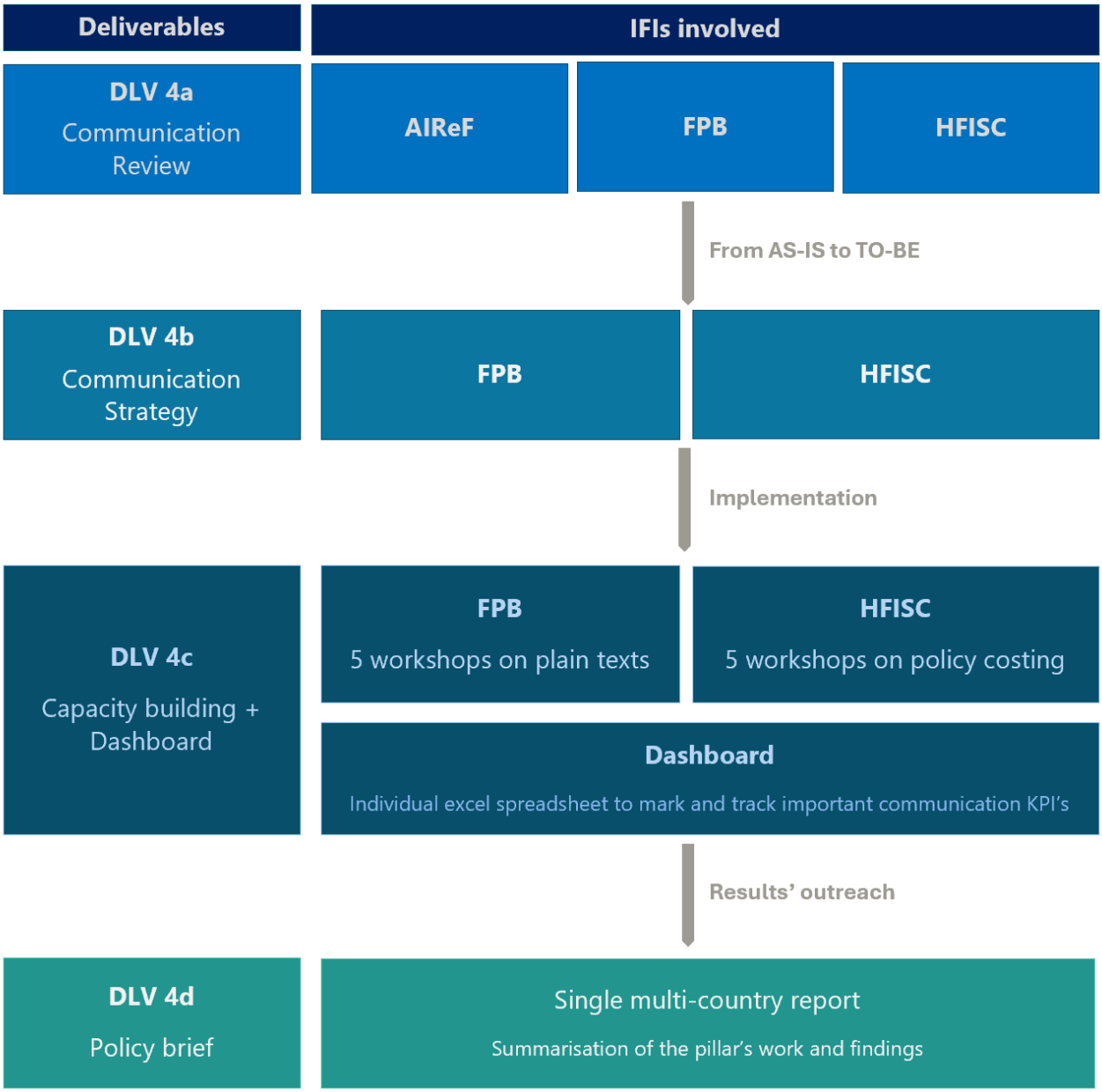
- **Communication is a core institutional function: plan it, staff it, protect it.** Every IFI needs a formal communication strategy – with explicit goals, audiences, channels, roles and evaluation mechanisms – and a dedicated, professional communication capacity. Under Directive 2011/85/EU, as amended by Directive (EU) 2024/1265 – which reaffirms a requirement already established under Regulation (EU) No 473/2013 – Member States must ensure that IFIs have the capacity to communicate publicly and in a timely manner, which requires adequate budgets, dedicated staff and operational autonomy.
- **Layer communication and speak plainly to build informed constituencies.** Since the IFI's influence extends beyond persuasion to contributing to public debate, their analysis should also be accessible to audiences beyond the expert circle. Layered products that deliver the

same message at different depths, plain language, visual content and use structured writing methods such as "text plans", proactive media engagement and visible spokespersons convert technical excellence into public reach – without compromising rigour or neutrality.

- **Measure impact, institutionalise learning and exchange across the IFI community.** IFIs should measure what matters – parliamentary citations, media quality, reputation and audience understanding – rather than counting media mentions. The capacity-building model piloted under this project, which pairs technical methodology with communication practice, proved effective and readily replicable, and points to the value of structured peer exchange among European IFIs, particularly on the communication of policy and election costings.

The sections that follow set out the evidence, the shared lessons and the specific tasks. The three beneficiary institutions are already acting on all three messages. This policy brief invites the wider IFI community – and the national authorities on which IFIs depend – to act with them.

Figure 1: *Pillar snapshot*



1. Context: why communication has become a strategic issue for IFIs

1.1. Persuasion, not coercion: the IFI accountability model

IFIs are fiscal watchdogs without direct enforcement powers. Their assessments carry no legal sanction; their influence on fiscal policy works through persuasion. The OECD's principles for IFIs recognise this explicitly: media coverage of IFI work assists in fostering informed constituencies that may then exercise timely pressure on the government to behave transparently and responsibly in fiscal matters (OECD, 2025, Principle 8.1[1]). Influence operates directly on government decision-makers, and indirectly – through parliaments, journalists, academics and citizens who can hold governments to account.

This makes the identification of audiences and channels a first-order strategic question. In general, IFI audiences comprise the executive and legislative branches of government, the media, the academic community and the general public. Reaching them requires deliberate use of the full range of channels: publications of different depths, parliamentary hearings, press relations, events, newsletters, websites and social media, and bilateral contacts with ministries and peer institutions. An IFI that publishes rigorous analysis but leaves its dissemination to chance is delivering only half of its mandate.

1.2. A new fiscal framework and a harder public sphere

Two structural developments have raised the stakes. First, the reformed EU economic governance framework has expanded the tasks of national IFIs and reinforced the legal basis for their public voice: building on a requirement already established under Regulation (EU) No 473/2013, the amendments to Directive 2011/85/EU on requirements for budgetary frameworks of the Member States, introduced by Directive (EU) 2024/1265[2] (Council of the European Union, 2024) state that IFIs shall have the capacity to communicate publicly about their assessments and opinions in a timely manner. Communication capacity, explicitly reaffirmed in Article 8a(4)(b) of Directive 2011/85/EU, as amended by Directive (EU) 2024/1265, is thus part of what Member States must guarantee when they design and resource their IFIs. In parallel, several IFIs are acquiring new mandates with exceptional public exposure – most notably the costing of election platforms, a task the FPB already performs and which HFISC is preparing to take on. These exercises place IFIs at the centre of electoral debate, where the quality of their communication determines whether they are perceived as impartial referees or dragged into partisan controversy.

Second, the public sphere itself has hardened. Trust in governments and traditional media has declined across advanced democracies, polarisation has intensified, and misinformation is widely perceived as a threat. For IFIs, this environment cuts both ways. It creates an opening: as mistrust concentrates on political actors, independent, evidence-based institutions can channel public trust and emerge as objective allies of the citizenry. Yet, it also raises the cost of poor communication: inaccessible language, inconsistent messaging or an unprepared response to a reputational attack can quickly erode the credibility on which an IFI's entire influence rests.

---

[1] OECD. (2025). *Recommendation of the Council on Principles for Independent Fiscal Institutions* (OECD/LEGAL/0401). https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/301/301.en.pdf

[2] Council of the European Union. (2024). *Council Directive (EU) 2024/1265 of 29 April 2024 amending Directive 2011/85/EU on requirements for budgetary frameworks of the Member States*. Official Journal of the European Union, L, 2024/1265. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1265/oj/eng

2. Analysis of the state of play: three institutions, one diagnosis

The three beneficiary institutions could hardly be more different. AIReF is a large, mature IFI with a broad mandate that extends to Spain's seventeen Autonomous Regions, two Autonomous cities and local authorities, and has been strengthening its communication since its first external evaluation by the OECD in 2017. The FPB is a long-established Belgian institution that, by design, "makes the calculations and provides the facts" rather than issuing recommendations, and communicates in two languages, Dutch and French. HFISC is a young, small council whose mandate has broadened significantly since the 2025 reform of Law 4270/2014, extending to debt sustainability and the costing of electoral programmes, and which has been professionalising its communication, including the introduction of press releases in 2023, more proactive engagement with journalists, and efforts to tailor its communication to different audience groups.

The Pillar 4 communication reviews (Deliverables 4a) assessed each institution's context, strategy, audiences, channels and impact, and benchmarked them against international peers and good practices (Annex A). Each institution received a tailored diagnosis: AIReF has become a "reference" for budgetary analysis among its specialised audiences and now faces the challenge of building an "ally reputation" among citizens and regional audiences, while operating under resource arrangements that require ministerial authorisation. The FPB is highly respected and equally present in French- and Dutch-language media, but its communication has historically been informal and driven by the Commissioner's personal initiative, and the transition to a structured function remains a work in progress. HFISC has built good relations with its four priority audiences – policymakers, public authorities, the media and academia – but relies on a part-time external adviser and didn't have a formalised communication strategy.

Beneath these tailored findings, however, the reviews converged on a strikingly common diagnosis:

Shared findings across the three communication reviews (Deliverables 4A)

Strong technical credibility with specialised audiences. All three institutions are perceived as reliable, independent and useful by the executive, parliament, the media and academia. Reputation among experts is the asset on which everything else can be built.

Limited reach beyond the expert circle. The general public remains largely unreached in all three cases. There is still room for improvement in terms of accessible content, although some IFIs already use video, infographics, plain-language syntheses

Under-resourced and informal communication functions. Communication capacity ranges from an externally procured adviser (HFISC) or team (AIReF, whose resources depend on external authorisation), to a communication advisor supported by dedicated volunteer staff members (FPB).

No comprehensive communication strategy at the outset. The FPB and HFISC did not have a formal, written strategy defining goals, audiences, channels, messages, roles and evaluation when the project began. AIReF had a communication strategy that was prepared by a external team.

New mandates raise visibility and risk simultaneously. The costing of election platforms – performed by the FPB and foreseen for HFISC – multiplies public exposure precisely where impartiality is most contested.

This diagnosis is consistent with the broader evidence base. The Network of EU Independent Fiscal Institutions' survey of 28 IFIs in 26 Member States[3] finds considerable heterogeneity in communication arrangements alongside broadly similar dissemination and promotion practices and concludes that credibility rests on analytical quality but that, absent effective communication, even the most rigorous outputs risk being overlooked (Network of EU Independent Fiscal Institutions, 2026). The three-institution findings reported here are therefore illustrative of a pattern observed across the EU IFI community rather than specific to the beneficiaries.

The external communication strategies (Deliverables 4b) translated this diagnosis into institution-specific goals and action plans. The FPB strategy developed by the consultants defines four goals – strengthening visibility and reputation as an impartial, evidence-based authority; informing and raising awareness among stakeholders of its analyses, projections and policy impacts to support evidence-based policymaking and parliamentary and public scrutiny; attracting new talent; and enhancing the internal culture of external communication – and recommends, inter alia, communicating policy impacts more proactively, strengthening media engagement through briefings, clarifying communication roles, expanding the Commissioner's media presence, using accessible visual content, working with "text plans", and introducing Key Performance Indicators (KPI) including the systematic tracking of mentions in parliamentary debates.

The HFISC strategy sets three goals, each linked to concrete actions: 1) establish and protect HFISC's reputation as an independent, non-partisan and credible authority, mainly through closer relations with quality media and a more visible Chairperson; 2) make HFISC's opinions on the government's macroeconomic and fiscal forecasts, and on compliance with fiscal rules, accessible to Parliament, the media and other stakeholders at key points in the budget cycle, through a newsletter, simple infographics and briefing slides; and 3) make its analysis easier to understand and use, through writing guidelines, structured text plans and plain-language training for staff. The strategy also includes a dedicated communication protocol for election costings.

Finally, the capacity-building programmes (Deliverables 4c) converted strategy into skills. At the FPB, five workshops on structuring publications around "text plans" reached 61 employees between January and March 2026 – roughly 81% of the 69 FPB experts in total – with 74% of survey respondents rating the quality as good or excellent. At HFISC, a programme combining five policy-costing workshops delivered by experts with experience at the Dutch CPB (February–April 2026) and two in-person workshops in Athens on communicating policy and election costings was delivered to the six staff members directly involved in costing activities, receiving average ratings of approximately 4.7 and 4.6 out of 5 respectively, and supporting the preparation of a first "starting note" setting out HFISC's approach to election costings.

[3] Network of EU Independent Fiscal Institutions. (2026). *The role of communication for EU independent fiscal institutions in times of escape clauses* (Working Paper Series No. 2/2026). https://www.euifis.eu/publications/44

3. Conclusion: independent analysis must be heard to hold anyone to account

Pillar 4 of this project has not only diagnosed a common gap across three very different IFIs. It has produced the instruments to close it. Over the course of the project:

- three communication reviews established, institution by institution, what the communication landscape looks like and where it falls short, benchmarked against international good practice;
- tailored external communication strategies and action plans defined goals, audiences, channels, roles, KPIs and timelines for each institution;
- capacity-building programmes converted strategy into skills – reaching the majority of FPB researchers and coordinators and HFISC's entire costing team – and produced replicable training models; and
- a first protocol for the communication of election costings has been drafted, addressing the most exposed communication challenge an IFI can face.

The case for action is no longer theoretical. The reformed EU fiscal framework requires IFIs to be able to communicate publicly and in a timely manner; new mandates are multiplying their public exposure; and the erosion of trust in political institutions makes independent, evidence-based voices more valuable – and more contested – than ever. The three beneficiary institutions are already moving; the models, materials and lessons documented in this brief are available to every IFI and national authority willing to move with them.

An IFI that struggles to be heard will find it harder to hold anyone to account. Investing in communication is investing in the fiscal accountability that IFIs exist to provide.

4. The three central policy messages

The messages set out below constitute the core of the policy position that emerges from Pillar 4 of the project. Each is grounded in the evidence produced across the three beneficiary institutions and is oriented towards the wider community of European IFIs and the national authorities on which they depend.

Policy message 1: Communication is a core institutional function – plan it, staff it, protect it

An IFI's communication should rest on a formal, written strategy that defines its communication goals, its audiences, the channels and products used to reach each audience, the tone and language of its outputs, the allocation of communication roles within the institution, and the mechanisms through which performance is assessed. The FPB and HFISC did not have such a strategy before the project; they now have one, or the elements to adopt one. The experience confirms that the strategy is not a bureaucratic artefact: it is what converts scattered, personality-driven communication into an institutional capability that survives changes of leadership.

Strategy requires capacity. The project's experience suggests that even smaller IFIs benefit from some dedicated communication capacity, broadly of the order of one full-time equivalent; HFISC is planning a full-time function inspired by the Slovak CBR, combining a communications adviser/spokesperson with a content manager; and AIReF's subnational mandate justifies an in-house function of at least two dedicated professionals. The FPB, for its part, considers it important that all research staff already reflect on the main messages of a publication at the very start of a project, thereby involving them directly in the communication of the institution. Capacity also means preparedness: a crisis communication plan, with preventive risk assessment and post-crisis evaluation, is part of the core equipment of an institution whose only asset is its credibility.

Finally, communication capacity must be adequately resourced and protected. Under Directive 2011/85/EU, as amended by Directive (EU) 2024/1265 – which reaffirms a requirement already established under Regulation (EU) No 473/2013 – Member States must ensure that IFIs have the capacity to communicate publicly about their assessments and opinions in a timely manner, which presupposes adequate and stable resources and the autonomy to decide how to deploy them. The Network's own analysis likewise links IFIs' communication characteristics to their institutional arrangements, reinforcing the case for treating resourcing and autonomy as communication issues rather than purely administrative ones (Network of EU Independent Fiscal Institutions, 2026).

Technical note on implementation

The sequence that worked in this project runs from strategy, to organisation, to process. The strategy documents (Deliverables 4b) define goals and audiences first, then derive channels, products, messages and timing from them. The organisational layer clarifies who communicates what: a clear division between the institution's leadership – Chair, Commissioner or President – acting as visible spokesperson on flagship publications, and a professional communication function managing press relations, content production, channels and monitoring. The process layer embeds communication into the production of analysis itself, for example by requiring a short "text plan" – the questions a publication answers and the messages it conveys – before drafting begins, so that communication considerations shape publications from the outset rather than being retrofitted at release.

Crisis preparedness deserves explicit attention. A workable crisis communication plan identifies reputational risk scenarios in advance – contested endorsements, politicised costings, attacks on independence – assigns roles and spokespersons, pre-drafts holding positions, and provides for a structured post-crisis review.

Policy message 2: Layer communication and speak plainly to build an informed audience

Because IFIs' influence extends beyond persuasion to contributing to public debate, technical excellence only translates into accountability if it is understood. The reviews found the same pattern in all three institutions: rigorous, dense publications that serve expert audiences well, and a general public that is effectively out of reach. The answer is not to simplify the analysis but to layer its communication: the same message delivered at different depths through different products – the full report, a synthesis, a press release, an infographic, a social media post – so that each audience can engage at the level it needs. HFISC's six-page endorsement reports show how a concise flagship product can itself become a powerful communication instrument.

Plain language is the second pillar. The "curse of knowledge" – experts' inability to imagine what non-experts do not know – is the single most common barrier identified across the reviews. Clear writing guidelines, readability targets, pyramid-structured texts that lead with the message, and relatable examples that anchor abstract fiscal concepts in familiar experience all measurably widen the audience without diluting the substance. Visual content – simple, graph-based infographics, slide decks accompanying major releases, short videos on the institution's role – multiplies the effect. The UK's OBR tests the comprehensibility of its materials directly, using both high-school teachers and, more recently, AI-driven tools, to confirm its texts are accessible to a university-level reader from any field of study; it also consults regularly with stakeholders and internal audiences to refine what it produces, including the optimal length of its documents.

Reaching people also requires being present where they are. Proactive media engagement – regular press briefings around major publications, embargoed access for reputable outlets, informal thematic meetings with journalists, op-eds by the institution's leadership – and a visible, credible spokesperson on television and radio extend the institution's reach far beyond what its own channels can achieve and are fully compatible with strict neutrality.

Technical note on implementation

The "text plan" method piloted at the FPB offers a concrete, replicable entry point. Before drafting, the author sets out the questions the text answers, the key messages it should convey, and an annotated storyline; the plan then aligns the publication, its synthesis, the press release and the accompanying graphics around the same messages. Delivered through five workshops to 61 FPB staff, the method created a shared internal language around communication and is now being consolidated through follow-up coaching, applied clinics anchored in real publications and a concise written guide. Two design choices matter for replication: the balance between training in the institution's own working language (maximising direct relevance) and in English (enabling cross-IFI exchange), and the balance between organisational reach and depth of skill transfer.

Layering should be planned per audience type, not per product. The strategies developed under this project map each priority audience – executive, parliament, media, academia, general public – to the channels and formats that reach it, and assign each publication type a defined communication treatment, from full press conference to a simple website notice. Multilingual contexts add a further layer: the FPB's ability to maintain equal presence in Dutch- and French-language media is a benchmark for institutions operating across linguistic communities. Finally, fiscal literacy initiatives – open educational content, university engagement, student visits of the kind HFISC and AIReF already practise – build the informed constituencies of the future and humanise institutions that citizens otherwise encounter only through headlines.

Policy message 3: Measure impact, institutionalise learning and exchange across the IFI community

What gets measured gets managed. The reviews found impact assessment dominated by volume metrics – counting media mentions – while the indicators that actually track an IFI's influence remain unused: mentions in parliamentary debates, citations in government publications and policy documents, the quality and framing of media coverage, and the institution's reputation among its audiences. The strategies developed under this project introduce KPI dashboards combining these strategic indicators with periodic reputation instruments – surveys, journalist focus groups, sentiment analysis – so that communication choices can be evaluated and refined on evidence rather than intuition.

Learning should be institutionalised, not episodic. The capacity-building programmes demonstrated that communication skills can be built quickly and affordably – and that the gains evaporate unless they are embedded in routine: internal guidance notes, templates, checklists, review procedures and communication protocols preserve institutional memory and carry the capability beyond the individuals trained.

Most importantly, the experience of one IFI is an asset for all. The HFISC programme – in which experts with experience at the Dutch CPB trained Greek staff on policy costing and its communication – is peer learning in action. Policy costing, election-costing communication, crisis preparedness and impact measurement are challenges shared across the European IFI community; structured exchange on communication practice would allow every institution to benefit from the learning investments of all others.

Technical note on implementation

A workable KPI framework combines a small set of systematic indicators – parliamentary mentions tracked through debate transcripts, citations in official documents, media coverage weighted by outlet quality and framing, website and newsletter engagement – with periodic deeper instruments: a biennial focus group with selected quality-media journalists, reputation surveys across audiences and user research projects. The framework should be proportionate to the institution's size: the point is a feedback loop, not a measurement bureaucracy.

The training model piloted under this project is deliberately modular and transferable. Its core structure – an introductory methodological module, applied exercises based on concrete cases, a communication module built around stakeholder role-play, and follow-up clinics for the staff who will do the work – can be reused across institutions, while examples, cases and scenarios are adapted to each IFI's mandate, electoral context and media landscape. Institutions at an early-stage benefit most from a broad introductory layer; established practitioners need advanced clinics on difficult cases, indirect and behavioural effects, uncertainty and quality assurance. Combining technical methodology with communication practice in a single programme proved decisive: policy costing, in particular, is not only an analytical exercise but an institutional process that requires transparent assumptions, equal treatment of political parties and credible public explanation.

5. Policy agenda: specific recommendations

The three policy messages set out above are only meaningful if they translate into concrete action. This chapter sets out what that action could look like, organised by the institution or level of governance best placed to take it. Some enabling conditions can only be created at European level; others depend on national authorities; and a set of priority actions falls to the beneficiary institutions themselves – several of which will generate the evidence and working models that the wider IFI community can reuse.

5.1. For European institutions and the IFI community

European Commission (SG REFORM), EU institutions and the community of EU IFIs

- Continue and expand technical support for IFI communication capacity under the Technical Support Instrument, treating communication as a core institutional capability of IFIs rather than an ancillary activity.
- Support a structured peer-exchange stream on communication among EU IFIs – for example an annual practitioners' workshop and a standing community of practice of IFI communication officers – so that good practices, materials and protocols circulate systematically.
- Develop common guidance and a shared repository of protocols for the communication of policy and election costings, building on the experience of IFIs that already perform these exercises and on the protocols developed under this project.
- Promote a common reference framework of KPIs for IFI communication impact – parliamentary citations, media quality indicators, reputation tracking – enabling comparable measurement and mutual learning across institutions.
- Monitor, in the context of the implementation of Directive (EU) 2024/1265, whether IFIs effectively have the resources, staffing and operational autonomy needed to communicate publicly about their assessments and opinions in a timely manner.

5.2. For relevant national authorities

Member States national authorities

- Provide IFIs with adequate, predictable and multi-annual resources for communication, including dedicated communication staff, commensurate with the breadth of each institution's mandate.
- Grant IFIs operational autonomy over their communication budgets and staffing decisions, avoiding arrangements in which these depend on discretionary authorisation by the ministries the IFI scrutinises.
- Match every extension of an IFI's mandate – notably the costing of election platforms – with commensurate additional communication resources, recognising the exceptional public exposure such tasks entail.
- Facilitate structured parliamentary engagement with the IFI, including regular hearings on flagship publications and, where relevant, at subnational level.
- Safeguard the institutional independence and visibility of IFIs in any reorganisation of the public institutional landscape.

5.3. For the beneficiary IFIs – immediate priority actions

The beneficiary institutions' commitment is not conditional on European or national action. The following priority actions – drawn from the action plans of the Pillar 4 strategies and the recommendations of the capacity-building reports – should proceed regardless of the pace of the wider process, and several of them will generate the working models that other IFIs can adapt.

Indicative Deadline	Priority action
2026-2029	Adopt and begin implementing the external communication strategy and action plan delivered under Pillar 4
2026–2027	Establish or expand the dedicated communication function (HFISC based on the CBR model; FPB clarification of communication roles and Commissioner media presence)
2026–2027	Roll out layered, accessible content: text plans and follow-up clinics (FPB); infographics, slide decks for press briefings and an institutional video (HFISC)
2026–2027	Introduce KPI dashboards, including systematic tracking of mentions in parliamentary debates, and launch periodic reputation surveys or journalist focus groups
Ahead of the next national elections	Develop the "starting note" on election costings into a living internal framework and a tested communication protocol (HFISC); maintain and refine the communication of electoral programme costings (FPB)

6. Pillar 4 as a case study: five lessons for the IFI community

The experience of three very different institutions – a large IFI with a subnational mandate, a long-established bureau that provides facts rather than recommendations, and a young council building its function from scratch – offers more than three national stories. It identifies the design principles that hold across contexts. The five lessons that follow are grounded in that experience and are directly relevant to any IFI, whatever its size, mandate or maturity.

Lesson 1: Credibility with experts is the foundation – informed constituencies are the multiplier

All three institutions demonstrate that technical reputation among specialised audiences is the precondition for everything else: an IFI that experts do not trust has nothing to communicate. But the reviews equally show that expert credibility alone does not deliver the IFI accountability model. Influence is persuasive, and persuasion at scale requires informed constituencies – journalists, parliamentarians and citizens who understand what the institution says and why it matters. AIReF's trajectory captures the sequence: having become a "reference" for its specialised audiences, its next frontier is building an "ally reputation" among citizens and regional audiences. Building reach is not a departure from rigour; it is the return on it.

Lesson 2: Strategy before tools

The instinctive response to a communication gap is to add tools – an account here, a newsletter there. The project's evidence points the other way. None of the three institutions lacked tools; two of the three lacked a strategy that defined goals, audiences, messages, channels, roles and evaluation, and connected the tools to each other. The strategies developed under Pillar 4 derive every channel and product choice from explicit goals and audience priorities, and assign clear communication roles – including the distinctive, carefully managed visibility of the institution's leadership. A formal strategy also protects continuity: communication driven by the personal initiative of a Chair or Commissioner, however effective, may not readily outlast them.

Lesson 3: Plain language and layering are the mechanisms for delivering the mandate

Making analysis accessible is sometimes perceived as a concession of rigour. The project's experience suggests the opposite: plain language, layered products and visual content are the mechanism through which rigorous analysis reaches the audiences that give it effect. The most appreciated practices across the three institutions were precisely those that lowered the barrier to understanding – concise endorsement reports, plain-language syntheses, graph-based infographics, structured "text plans" that force clarity about the message before drafting begins. The "curse of knowledge" is the default condition of expert institutions; countering it requires an established methodology.

Lesson 4: Communication capacity can be acquired – and the model travels

Within a few months, the project trained roughly 81% of FPB' experts in a structured writing method and equipped HFISC's costing team with both the methodology of policy costing and the skills to communicate it – with participant ratings of approximately 4.7/5 (HFISC) and 74/100 (FPB). Three replication principles emerge. First, combine technical methodology with communication practice in a single programme: costing and explaining are two halves of the same institutional process. Second, design modularly – a broad introductory layer reusable across institutions, plus applied clinics tailored to each IFI's mandate, electoral context and data environment. Third, embed the outputs: internal guides, templates, checklists and protocols are what convert a training event into institutional capability, and peer exchange between IFIs – as between the CPB experts and HFISC – compresses the learning curve for everyone.

Lesson 5: New mandates are communication opportunities – design the protocol before the storm

The costing of election platforms places an IFI at the most exposed point of the political cycle. The project's work with HFISC and the FPB shows that impartiality in such exercises is protected by process designed in advance. Three elements matter most: rules ensuring equal treatment of all political parties; a communication protocol covering background briefings to the press on timelines and methodology; and transparent documentation of assumptions and uncertainty. The same logic applies to any high-exposure mandate: the moment to design the communication protocol is before the mandate is exercised, not during the application considering the controversy it may generate.

Read together, the five lessons form a single argument: credibility creates the licence, strategy provides the architecture, plain language delivers the message, training builds the capability, and preparation protects the institution when exposure peaks. Whether communication capacity is developed in-house or outsourced, these measures require financial investment as well as sustained institutional commitment and dedicated staff time.

Annex A – Best Practices Guide

This annex consolidates the communication good practices identified in the institutional communication reviews carried out under Deliverable 4a for the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB), Hellenic Fiscal Council (HFISC) and the Independent Authority for Fiscal Responsibility (AIReF). The practices were gathered through desk research and interviews with peer institutions - the Brazilian IFI, CARF (Colombia), the PBO (Canada), the CPB (Netherlands), the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council and the OBR (United Kingdom) - complemented by central banks, statistical offices and international organisations facing comparable challenges in reaching non-specialist audiences.

Across all cases, the most effective communication actions rest on a small set of cross-cutting principles: clear communication (accessibility and plain-language standards), layering and segmentation by audience, humanisation of the institution, storytelling that links data to everyday life, regionalisation, and physical presence. The tables below summarise the practices themselves: Table A.1 covers practices observed among IFIs, and Table A.2 practices from other public institutions that are transferable to the IFI context.

Table A.1 – Communication practices observed among Independent Fiscal Institutions

Practice	What it involves	Where observed
Plain language and clear communication	Accessible wording without loss of technical accuracy; readability and complexity tested periodically, including with non-specialist readers and AI-assisted tools; target set at comprehension by a university graduate from any field.	OBR (UK), PBO (Canada), CPB (Netherlands)
Layered publication formats	The same analysis released at different depths - a 2-page, a 20-page and a full-length version - so each audience chooses its level of detail; long reports progressively replaced by short products backed by in-depth annexes.	OBR (UK), PBO (Canada)
Dedicated editorial and design functions	In-house control of the whole production chain: graphic design, internal coherence checks, accessibility compliance; an information specialist managing data flows in publications and a dedicated infographics function.	OBR (UK), CPB (Netherlands)
Writing support and staff training	An externally hired writing coach available throughout document production, a writing course for all new staff, in-house writing guides, and seminars from an external communication academic.	CPB (Netherlands)
Website as a structured repository	One online space combining publication repository, institutional news, reference material for journalists and experts; content in English (and co-official languages) plus an active SEO strategy.	AIReF (Spain)
Report entry points on the website	Colour-coded highlights box opening each report; plain-language summary with a table or chart; "at a glance" graphic overview; interactive index and full-text reading on site; chart and table repositories; downloadable PDF.	PBO (Canada), OBR (UK)
Thematic explainer spaces	Standing sections that group simple information by topic and link data to everyday life ("Tax by tax, spend by spend"), plus brief guides and explainers on public finances.	OBR (UK)
Visual identity and imagery	Calm colours and a locally recognisable institutional look; use of photography to localise and personalise findings; access to premium image libraries; short videos and infographics explaining publications.	PBO (Canada), AIReF (Spain)
Spokesperson discipline in interviews	Interviews used to explain the mandate's limits; when asked beyond remit, the institution states plainly that it cannot comment rather than improvising.	OBR (UK)
Institution before individual	Representatives answer on behalf of the institution and reference it explicitly, so that personal and institutional reputation reinforce each other and leadership transitions carry no reputational cliff.	OBR (UK), Brazilian IFI
Distributing visibility beyond the head of institution	Representation tasks delegated to researchers and junior analysts according to the relevance of the announcement; interview preparation and media training provided; short videos of analysts explaining their own findings.	CPB (Netherlands), OBR (UK)

Practice	What it involves	Where observed
Structured relations with journalists	Annual one-to-one catch-up sessions between the director and the most relevant journalists; regular briefings and background sessions ahead of publication.	CPB (Netherlands)
Agreements with parliamentary and public media	Joint strategies with parliamentary broadcasters to place content in existing news, economic and citizenship programmes, and joint social media campaigns.	Brazilian IFI, PBO (Canada)
Deliberate social media triage	Platform choices revisited explicitly: X downgraded to a dissemination-only channel or closed, LinkedIn prioritised for reach and interaction, BlueSky prepared as a contingency.	CPB (Netherlands), PBO (Canada), Irish Fiscal Advisory Council
Staff blogs in a personal register	All staff contribute posts on fiscal and economic issues written from personal experience and in accessible language, with a workshop on blog writing; humanises the institution and gives visibility to analysts.	CPB (Netherlands)
Fiscal literacy with schools and universities	Reactive support to secondary-school teachers, a staff member writing for schools, presence in the national curriculum, open days and guest lectures for university students with purpose-built materials, and a plain-language dictionary of fiscal terms.	CPB (Netherlands), Brazilian IFI, PBO (Canada)
Traineeships as reputation and reach	Structured traineeships for graduates and master's students, run with universities across regions; builds employer brand, regional visibility and long-term standing among new generations of economists.	AIReF (Spain)
Direct channels with key stakeholders	Standing WhatsApp or Telegram channels to alert journalists to new publications and to maintain direct contact with parliamentarians.	Brazilian IFI, PBO (Canada), CARF (Colombia)
Audience research and evaluation	Reputation survey of the general population run by an external firm every three years; internal staff surveys covering the communication function; consultations with stakeholders on product design and length.	CPB (Netherlands), OBR (UK)
Caution with media-mention counts	Media mentions treated as a weak impact metric, since repeated syndication of the same mention overstates reach and says nothing about audience sentiment.	OBR (UK)
Internal staff and civil society engagement	Staff-run charitable and community events (book and bake festival, art auction, staff soup buffet) that strengthen internal cohesion and local presence.	PBO (Canada)

Table A.2 – Transferable practices from other public institutions

Practice	What it involves	Where observed
Instagram as an institutional front door	Multi-level organisations run a general website plus an Instagram profile as the main entry point for non-specialist audiences; spokespeople also maintain their own accounts.	ECB, IMF, European Committee of the Regions
Gamification	Quizzes, polls and playful formats to explain concepts, raise interest in publications and generate behavioural insight on followers.	ECB, Eurostat
Influencers and ambassador figures	Collaboration agreements with niche opinion leaders; the long-standing Goodwill Ambassador model; influencer partnerships for turnout campaigns; a Digital Ambassadors initiative convening journalists, editors and influencers.	United Nations, European Commission
Partnerships and agreements	Joint initiatives with other institutions and presidencies; curated networks of local and regional community organisations; corporate-responsibility agreements with broadcasters to carry campaign content.	OECD (with G20), United Nations
Economic and financial literacy campaigns	Recurring awareness campaigns targeted at young audiences, run with dedicated websites and private-sector partners.	OECD (Global Money Week), European Banking Federation (European Money Week)
Literacy newsletter and webinars	A literacy strategy delivered through several channels at once: teaching webinars on the institution's data and tools, a dedicated newsletter, and social media dissemination.	Eurostat, European Commission
Podcasts and minipodcasts	Short regular audio formats explaining the institution's work, promoted through social media.	ECB, Eurostat

Practice	What it involves	Where observed
Awards and competitions	Knowledge contests attached to literacy programmes, including competitions with schools and agreements with regional broadcasters; external festivals that award institutional literacy campaigns.	OECD, Bank of Spain, EducaFestival
E-learning portals	Open online courses hosted on a dedicated learning portal, offered as a standing service to professional and general audiences.	European Commission (Customs & Tax EU Learning Portal)
Guide-style websites	"For dummies" or guide sites built on very little text, clear layout, strong visuals and direct messages, which invite the user to participate and explain how to act.	OECD (Better Life Index)
Civil society liaison function	A dedicated civil affairs or civil society coordination function, suited to institutions with multi-layered or regionalised structures.	IADB, IMF, ECB, United Nations
Open days and site visits	Open visits and explanatory talks on the institution's mission and functioning, scheduled across the academic year and bookable in advance.	National Bank of Belgium, Bank of Spain
Field engagement strategies	A deliberate programme of physical presence: in 2016 senior officials made around 60 visits to regional agencies, engaging close to 5,000 companies and charities, a school competition involving more than 250 schools, and a public Future Forum.	Bank of England
Standing citizen advisory bodies	A Community Advisory Council of 15 citizen representatives created in 2015, meeting the Board twice a year to give views on policy issues affecting low- and moderate-income citizens.	Federal Reserve
Community initiatives with young audiences	Charity and community activities co-organised with partner organisations and tied to the audience's own concerns, embedded in a wider campaign.	European Youth Forum (#DiscoverEU)

-

Visit our website:



AARC



Funded by
the European Union

Find out more
about the Technical
Support Instrument:

