ACER Communications Strategy 2024-2026

January 2024

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Published, January 2024

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Executive Summary

1   This communications strategy of the EU Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) sets out the strategy for communication and engagement activities for the period 2024-2026.

2   The energy systems of Europe are undergoing massive change driven by geopolitical events, technological advances and innovation, and political priorities such as the ambitious EU Green Deal decarbonisation targets. The regulatory landscape in which ACER operates is very much evolving too, including through the widening mandate of ACER. This has clear implications on how the Agency works and communicates, how and with whom it engages, and how it deploys its resources.

3   Specifically, there are four main goals in this communications strategy:

   - Providing timely, impactful external communications on ACER's work and how it fits into the wider EU energy and climate goals.
   - Engaging effectively with stakeholders.
   - Reinforcing internal communications.
   - Enhancing ACER's data-driven digital presence with robust infrastructure.

4   Building from the lessons learnt from the previous strategy cycle (2021-2023), we will consolidate how we communicate our work externally, by crafting content that is meaningful, evidence-based, clear for a broader audience and timely to EU discussions. This means increasing the number and range of communication products (such as podcasts, videos, infographics, etc.) and experimenting with different formats that can convey our (technical) messages in an effective way.

5   For our external communications to be impactful, we must effectively engage with our stakeholders. Our aim is to reach the right audiences in the right way and at the right time. For this, we will adopt an "audience-first" approach", which will translate into a more structured and coherent stakeholders' management approach across the Agency. We will align external and internal communications.

6   New in this communications strategy is the increased focus on being a digital and data-driven Agency. Our goal is to transform ACER into a more forward-looking and more data-driven organisation that systematically uses data for evidence-based policy development, decision-making and market monitoring. Importantly, this will happen in line with the evolving role of ACER as envisaged in the revision of the Regulation on Wholesale Energy Market Integrity and Transparency (REMIT).

7   Investing in the technological infrastructures of the Agency and ensuring the latest IT and communication tools both in terms of hardware and software underpins the success of this communications strategy.

1. Introduction

8   This communication strategy supports the EU Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators ("ACER" or the "Agency") in fulfilling its strategic priorities for the period 2024-2026 as set out in our multi-annual programming documents[1]. Specifically, in a context of fast evolving energy landscape, where meeting the European Green Deal objectives is of outmost importance, the Agency aims to:

- Help implement the energy legislative framework.
- Help safeguard Europe's security of energy supply.
- Help realise the EU's decarbonisation goals under the European Green Deal.
- Increase the transparency and integrity of wholesale energy markets.
- Help meet the EU's energy infrastructure challenges.

9   Following the Executive Summary (see above) and this Introduction to this strategy, Section 2 sets out ACER guiding communication principles. Section 3 explains what is new in this communication strategy compared to the previous period. Section 4 helps contextualise ACER audiences.

10   The main part of this document is Section 5 (Communication Goals). It explains our four communication goals and how we aim to achieve them. Section 6 outlines our communication channels and tools.

11   This strategy takes account of feedback received from listening to our members (the national regulatory authorities (NRAs)), our Administrative Board and stakeholders. Experience has taught us the value of being agile to adapt to changing circumstances, be it a global pandemic, an energy crisis or new tasks assigned to the Agency, as well as integrating constructive feedback into our work.

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[1] For further details and the full list of ACER's strategic objectives, please consult ACER Programming Document 2023 – 2025.

2. Communications principles

12 ACER's communications are grounded on the following guiding principles, as:

- We are strategic and audience-focused in our communication.
- We provide objective, unbiased and evidence-based information.
- We are committed to transparency and providing accessible, timely information.

Our shared commitment to these communication principles (shown in Figure 1) allows us to work together to achieve our communication goals.

Figure 1: ACER's seven communication principles

Strategic
We focus on the priorities and work with our members to support Europe's ambitious clean energy goals.

Timely
We deliver communications in a timeframe that is best to optimise its impact.

Audience-focused
We apply an audience-first approach and tailor our communication to the needs of the audience.

Accessible
We use language that is simple and clear and we provide free access to our decisions, publications, public consultations, data and events.

ACER'S 7 COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

Impartial
We are neutral and impartial in our advisory role as an EU Agency vis-à-vis the political level.

Transparent
We strive to be open to views and transparent in sharing information and data, as long as it does not concern ongoing deliberations and is not legally required to be kept confidential.

Evidence-based
We use accurate and factual data to inform our decision-making.

3. What's new in this Communications Strategy (2024-2026)?

13   This new strategy builds upon the process and the lessons learnt from the past (2021-2023), as we address challenges and opportunities[2]. Namely, we will:

- Consolidate how we communicate our work externally.
- Foster current good practices.
- Keep monitoring and clearly communicating how our expertise fits within the wider (and constantly evolving) European context. Special focus is given on how ACER can contribute to achieving the European Green Deal's decarbonisation targets.

14   Compared to the previous Communication Strategy there is one big transformation, namely the new focus on being digital and data-driven. Organisationally, we strive to transform ACER into a more forward-looking and (an even) more data-driven organisation that systematically uses data for evidence-based policy development, decision-making and market monitoring. This also translates into our ways of working and hence in our internal and external communications. Investment in the technological backbone of the Agency is a central and necessary focus of the 2024-2026 Communications Strategy. Working with the latest technologies also ensures our objectives are met according to the latest cybersecurity and privacy standards.

4. ACER's audience

15   The Agency's work is anchored in its mandate. Energy National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) are integral to ACER's raison d'être. ACER is attentive to NRAs' views and concerns, mediating where needed to uphold the interest of the European integration process to further enhance efficiencies.

16   ACER will continue to concentrate its engagement efforts on the EU institutions, market players, energy entities, energy exchanges, reporting parties under REMIT and European energy sector associations. However, with its expanding mandate, ACER will need to engage with a broader set of stakeholders.

17   Going forward, ACER's outreach will draw on more strategic, proactive approaches and be underpinned by digital communication tools. The Agency will target the right audiences for its communications to be most impactful. By improving the digital accessibility of its work, ACER also aims to make it more understandable to citizens.
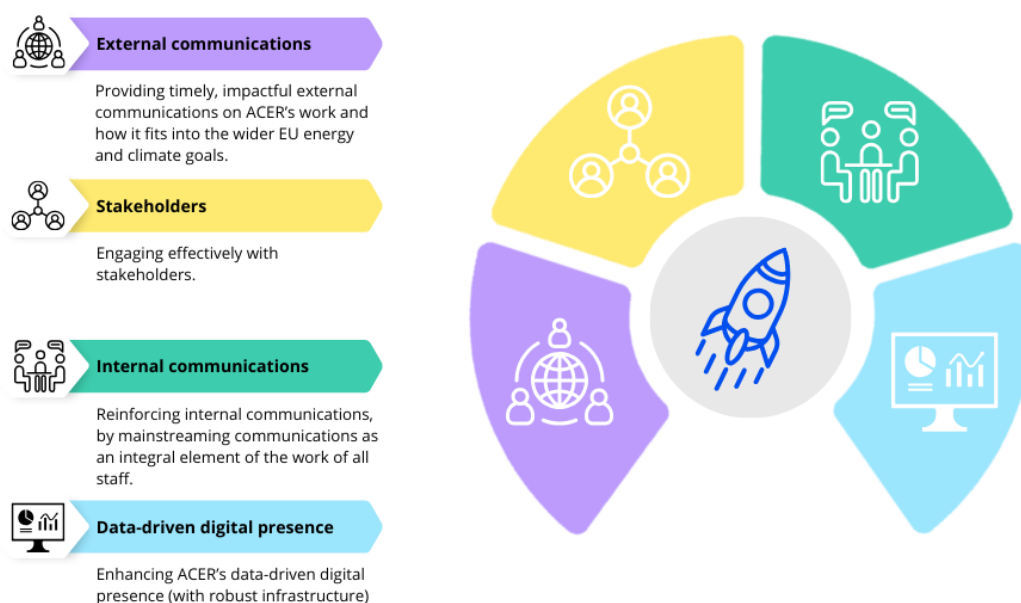
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[2] ACER addressed four main challenges in implementing the 2021-2023 strategy: the energy crisis which gave rise to new tasks mandated on the Agency (e.g. daily Liquified Natural Gas price assessments), much internal and external communications (e.g. media, and support to European Commission as it rapidly prepared new emergency legislation to address to the energy crisis); resource constraints in the communications team; Covid; and making the website cyber secure.

5. Communications Goals

18   In the period 2024-2026 ACER will focus on four communications goals (Figure 2):

- Providing timely, impactful external communications on ACER's work and how it fits into the wider EU energy and climate goals under the European Green Deal.
- Engaging effectively with stakeholders.
- Reinforcing internal communications, by mainstreaming communications as an integral element of the work of all staff.
- Enhancing ACER's data-driven digital presence while adopting the latest digital technologies.

Figure 2. ACER's four communication goals (2024-2026)

5.1. Providing timely, impactful external communications on ACER's work and how it fits into the wider EU energy and climate goals

19   A key focus of ACER communications will be on the Agency's (and energy regulators') contributions to the "bigger EU picture". This will be tailored to the audience so that we communicate in a timely way using an effective channel. Often this will likely showcase the value of an integrated European energy market and how ACER's work helps EU security of energy supply, decarbonisation (and in particular to the implementation of the European Green Deal) and competitiveness.

20   EU legislators have (in 2023) updated the Regulation on Energy Market Integrity and Transparency (REMIT) to further protect the European wholesale energy markets against market manipulation and insider trading. It also foresees an expanded role for ACER. ACER's communication will keep pace with the new priorities of the EU Commission and Parliament, and with ACER's evolving mandate and tasks. ACER will continue to use its knowledge, data and unique insights to aid opinion-making on a few selected items (where appropriate) linked to ACER's mandate.

5.2. Engaging effectively with stakeholders

21   For our communications to be impactful, ACER listens to and engages our key audiences. This requires choices, given ACER's limited resources, to engage on the issues that matter the most. We are guided by the priorities that stem from the European Commission's work programme, from our own work programme and from topics that our members and audiences care about.

22   Our aim is to reach the right audiences in the right way and at the right time. In adopting an "audience-first" approach, we are putting a greater effort (Agency-wide) to better understand our audiences and tailor our communications and outreach to their needs. Hence, more focus will go on structured horizontal approaches to stakeholder engagement. This goal entails:

- Broadening the scope of our engagement to new audiences, due to an enlarged ACER mandate and ever evolving energy system.
- Adopting a structured horizontal stakeholder management approach for efficient and impactful outreach with the right audiences.
- Leveraging the existing ACER networks (i.e. national regulators, Administrative Board) to multiply key messages and outreach activities at national and European level.

5.3. Reinforcing internal communications, by mainstreaming communications as an integral element of the work of all staff

23   ACER is building a corporate culture that integrates communications and regulatory work. This requires aligning internal and external communications because staff plays a critical role in communications and outreach right from the start of their policy work through to the dissemination of their outputs to the target audiences. The period 2024-2026 will be about:

- Reinforcing a collaborative culture of information sharing among ACER staff to underpin policy with coordinated external messaging.
- Embedding an "audience-first" communication approach from the start of policy development.
- Upskilling staff in communications.

5.4. Enhancing ACER's data-driven digital presence

24   To deliver on our data-driven digital presence objective, it is essential for ACER to:

- Invest in the latest IT and technological infrastructure.
- Implement its data strategy.
- Recruit more professional energy staff.

25   Firstly, a robust and cyber-secure communication and IT environment, requires continuous investment in tools and technology. Significant investment in the external website and in the extranet is now needed to ensure our digital and data solutions can maximise the performance and cyber security of the Agency.

26   Secondly, the objective is to further transform ACER into an organisation that systematically uses data for evidence-based regulatory work, decision making and market monitoring/surveillance. With the new (2023) revisions of the REMIT regulation, ACER will be dealing with even larger quantities, and increased scope of, data being collected and potentially more data reporting entities, as well as an enhanced ACER oversight role in cross-border market abuse cases.

6. Communication channels and tools

ACER uses a range of outputs and channels in communicating with our various target audiences. These include:

Events: organising and participating in policy events allow ACER to promote its work, learn from others, give visibility to staff and collect feedback from the attendees. Internal events facilitate information sharing among staff.

ACER News alert ("ACER Latest News"): allows subscribers to be updated with ACER's latest news and activities.

Website: is the Agency's main communication channel, where visitors can access all publications, consultations, events, latest news and detailed information about ACER's work.

Extranet: it is a dedicated (internal) platform that allows NRAs, members of the Administrative Board, Board of Appeals, as well as those of the task forces and working groups, to collaborate virtually by sharing data, documents, and any other relevant information ahead and after each meeting.

Social media: ACER uses social media (X, LinkedIn and YouTube) for broad outreach. ACER will continue to strengthen its presence by enlarging the pool of its followers, give visibility to staff and create relevant content.

Podcasts and videos: ACER aims to expand its video production, as well as to start producing podcasts.

Relations *with the press and TV*: maintaining regular and structured relations with journalists and media outlets is key to broadly promote the Agency's work.

Each channel is closely monitored through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are collected monthly.