



# **European Centre for Minority Issues Evaluation Report 2025**

December 2025

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# Executive summary

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The present evaluation report investigates three main topics: (1) The implementation of the recommendations of the ECMI evaluation in 2019. (2) The coherence of organisational structures and processes and their influence on the implementation of ECMI's core tasks, and (3) the procedures of internal and external coordination in policy-relevant activities.

(1) The 2019 evaluation: Considering the main recommendations of the last evaluation report (i.e., respecting the mandate, rethinking the research clusters, strengthening human resource management and financial management, rethinking the organisational structure of the ECMI, revisiting the strategy of continued expansion of ECMI activities towards the wider European periphery, scrapping the denomination of 'regional office' to avoid misconceptions, and increasing the core funding of ECMI by the founders). All in all, the ECMI (or its founders) implemented most of the recommendations from the previous evaluation report. Only the recommendations regarding human resource management and financial management appear to be partially implemented.

(2) Role of organisational structures and processes: The ECMI has undergone significant changes during the last five years. For example, the salary scheme has been aligned to the (German) TV-L framework which increased the core funding of ECMI. This increase in funding is related to various challenges such as functional differentiation and specialisation, accompanied by processes of further professionalisation within the centre. These changes are related to usual challenges within growing organisations. For example, it is still unclear if the cluster structure is adequate for ECMI's research activities. The ECMI needs to clarify internal roles and responsibilities, and to develop interaction routines for individuals working in different research fields (such as processes of on-boarding for new employees). Furthermore, there is a need for a coherent implementation of performance measurement instruments. The creation of incentive structures is essential for the development of early career scholars as well as established researchers in permanent positions. This includes a strategic use of budgeting tools connected with existing tasks and structures (see Section 8).

(3) Procedures of internal and external coordination in policy-relevant activities: The ECMI has undertaken significant efforts in research and policy-relevant activities. The centre is active in national and international networks, establishing and maintaining contacts to various actors (such as EU, OSCE, the Council of Europe, etc.). Nevertheless, the manifold activities of the ECMI require adequate forms of internal and external coordination, and communication. The evaluation shows that there is room for improvement, e.g., organizing the daily work in a way that the Director is also able to conduct research as well as guiding other researchers. Furthermore, communication needs to be systematically integrated to use the different media channels effectively and maximise the outreach of the centre.

# 1 Introduction

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According to the agreement between Denmark and Germany, the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) is to be evaluated every five years (see ECMI Statute). The German state of Schleswig-Holstein is responsible for appointing an expert team to evaluate the organisation and the performance of the ECMI. The present evaluation started in March 2025 and was completed by the end of December 2025.

In principle, the mandate for the evaluation is to examine the efficiency and appropriateness of ECMI's organization, personnel, and financial management as well as its performance. The purpose is to provide a coherent, academically grounded account of the institution's evolution, to explicate inconsistencies in the available evidence, and to situate observed practices within the broader literature on research institutes operating under mixed core and project-based financing. The review is descriptive and interpretive. It considers the plausibility of causal linkages between governance choices and performance outcomes, and it aims to render judgements that are transparent about uncertainty and contestation. The results of the corresponding data collection and evaluation are then used to derive recommendations for further developing and optimising the ECMI.

Specifically, the evaluation responds to three overarching questions. First, to what extent has the ECMI institutionalised the reforms recommended during the previous evaluation cycle, particularly in human resource management (HRM) and financial governance? Second, how well do the organisational structures and processes translate strategic priorities into operational routines capable of generating academically and societally meaningful outputs? Third, what is the state of internal and external coordination, and how does it condition the Centre's efficiency in the production of research, policy-relevant analysis, and convening activities?

The following analyses are structured thematically, but also consider cross-references and linkages across domains. We recognise that HRM, finance, and coordination are mutually conditioning factors. This report assesses the ECMI along five core dimensions commonly used in organisational evaluation—human resource management, financial management, organisational structures and processes, coordination, and overall efficiency—over the period from 2020 to 2024:

- Organisation: structural and procedural organisation.
- Personnel: human resource management, with a focus on the selection and classification of academic staff, criteria for staff remuneration, and career development.
- Finances: financial management, with a focus on the use of financial resources and controlling.

- Coordination and communication: cooperation and interaction of actors within the centre, as well as internal and external communication and outreach.
- Performance: output and, to a lesser degree, impact.

The Panel consists of six senior experts, with backgrounds balanced between the academic fields of ECMI and organisational and financial matters, including outreach and international law:

1. John Siegel, Chairperson and Professor of Public Management, Berlin School of Economics and Law, DE-Berlin  
(topics: ECMI structure with respect to personnel, organisation, finances),  
together with:  
Markus Seyfried, Professor of Political Science and Governance, University of Applied Sciences for Police and Public Administration in North Rhine-Westphalia, DE-Duisburg and  
Sylvia Veit, Professor of Public Administration, Helmut Schmidt University/University of the Federal Armed Forces, DE-Hamburg.
2. Sigrid Boysen, Professor of Professor of Public Law, European and International Law, Helmut Schmidt University/University of the Federal Armed Forces, Hamburg  
(topic: Compliance of ECMI's activities with the ECMI Statutes).
3. David Nicolas Hopmann, Professor at the Centre for Journalism and the Digital Democracy Centre, University of Southern Denmark, DK-Odense  
(topic: Impact and quality of the activities of ECMI Flensburg).
4. Katarzyna Stokłosa, Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science and Public Management, University of Southern Denmark, DK-Sønderborg (topic: Structure, network, and impact of the 'Minority Issues in the Denmark-Germany Border Region' cluster).

In accordance with their fields of expertise, the members of the Panel have received specific evaluation assignments. These assignments required different evaluation criteria, which led to partly different conclusions. For instance, the implementation is assessed differently depending on whether efficiency criteria are considered (how does the ECMI implement activities, what impact do they have, and are the structures adequate in terms of fitness for purpose?), or whether it is assessed in terms of formal compliance (does the ECMI fulfil its mandate?). All these questions contribute to the overall assessment of the ECMI's structures, procedures, and activities.

## 2 Methodological Note

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The evaluation is based on a multi-method approach combining semi-structured interviews with document and content analysis. The evaluation follows a four-step research design.

In a first step, a document analysis was conducted. During this process, all relevant public documents and documents provided by the ECMI were analysed (annual reports, internal rules, handbooks, financial statements, board minutes and audit reports). The documents relate to different topics such as: (1) activities of the ECMI, (2) finance and staff, (3) partners and impact, (4) performance indicators, and (5) strategic management.

Analysing the documents provided relevant information for the development of interview guidelines for a series of semi-structured interviews. Thus, in a second step, the evaluation team conducted 28 semi-structured interviews (19 face-to-face interviews during a site visit on 2 June 2025, and nine online interviews) with 19 staff members of the ECMI and key external stakeholders. The interviews were a mixture of problem-centred and narrative interviews, and related to topics such as (1) strategy and activities, (2) mandate and expansion, (3) organisational structure, (4) financial and human resource management. The interviews ranged in duration from 30 to 90 minutes. All interviews were documented, categorised, and analysed.

Thirdly, the evaluation report contains an integrated analysis of all collected information. The document analysis and the protocols of the interviews were complemented by data about the financial situation, the staff and the performance of the ECMI.

Fourthly, the report provides a follow-up on the recommendations of the 2019 report. Our approach of qualitative assessments aligns with the evaluation's overall aim of organisational learning, in contrast to the threat of mere symbolic compliance. Thus, we investigated how far the ECMI had implemented the recommendations of the previous evaluation report. We summarise the recommendations as "fully implemented", "mainly implemented", "partially implemented", or "not implemented". We provide short qualitative descriptions and explanations alongside these assessments. This is particularly relevant when a recommendation consists of multiple components and produces mixed results. If a recommendation is considered as not fully implemented, we explain why.

In all four steps of the evaluation, we considered results were corroborated by multiple sources to be more reliable than those where the record was mixed, ambiguous, or incomplete. This approach is particularly relevant for the distinction between formal procedures written on paper and de facto practice in day-to-day operations. The

purpose is to connect documented practices with organisational effects in a factual manner.

The time frame of the evaluation report from 2020 to 2024, is analytically convenient for capturing both the end of the pandemic and the subsequent normalisation of hybrid working. The period also coincides with the most significant HRM and financial governance reforms at the ECMI. The evaluation does not replicate the granular counting of outputs already available in annual reports; rather, it interprets such (and other) data with an eye to institutional learning and capability building.

### 3 Impact and quality of activities

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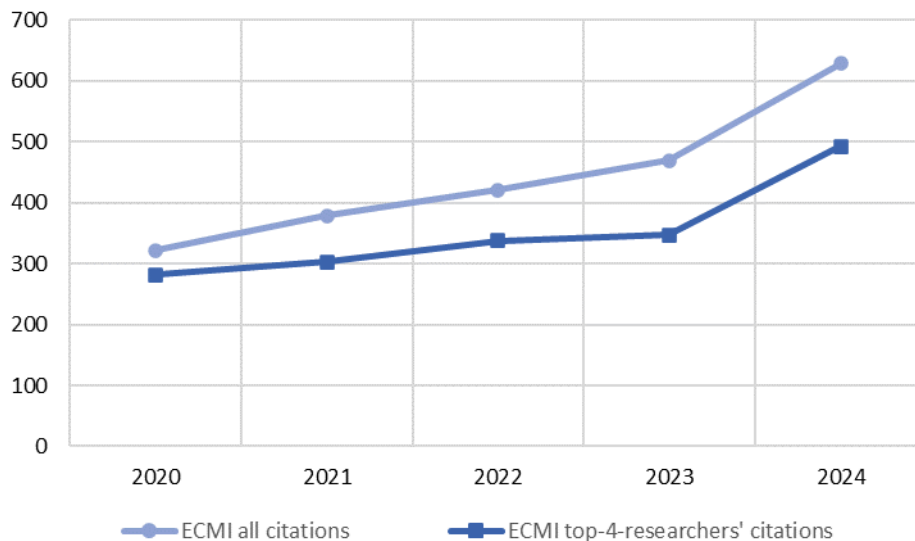


In contrast to output and outcome, it is challenging to evaluate the impact and quality of the Centre's activities. Impact and quality are both multidimensional constructs with broad definitions. Accordingly, it is evident that the operationalisation, impact, and quality present various challenges when it comes to quantitative measurement.

Therefore, the present evaluation report focuses on different activities, which provide indications for impact and quality. Firstly, research under consideration of citations. Secondly, education, qualifications and learning. And thirdly, transfer and advice.

One of the core activities at the Centre is research. Conducting research means sharing results with the academic community in various publication formats. The reception of these publications and the relevance of the research can partly be assessed with citation scores and journal data. However, it is important to exercise caution when interpreting these data, as they may be subject to bias due to factors such as the size of the research field, the presence of citation circles, and self-citations. It is therefore essential that these data be critically reviewed. Figure 1 illustrates the aggregated annual number of citations of all scholars at ECMI, according to their published Google Scholar profiles.

**Figure 1: Cumulated annual number of citations of researchers at ECMI**



Source: google.scholar

Since 2019, there has been a consistent increase in citations. However, a more detailed analysis of the data indicates that the citations are predominantly focused on a small number of individuals. For instance, 25% of researchers account for 81% of all citations between 2019 and 2024, and only three researchers have an H-Index > 10. However, it should be noted that these statistics should not be overestimated, given that the

Centre's staff includes senior researchers as well as early career researchers. In addition to the differentiations that facilitate comprehension of these results, a centre comprising 15 researchers has the potential to generate greater scientific recognition. Notwithstanding, the partially low citations could assist in formulating publication strategies that target specific journals, thereby enhancing the Centre's impact within the academic community. It is evident that the ECMI could implement additional structural incentives to encourage greater publication activity. Potential measures include travel grants to attend academic conferences, salary bonuses, and minimum requirements for qualitative publications.

Another relevant outlet that generates scientific recognition is the Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe (JEMIE). JEMIE is a peer-reviewed, electronic, open-access journal which has published in 2025 its 24th volume. The journal is also listed on SCImago, an internet platform that provides journal ranking data. As demonstrated in the statistics for JEMIE, the journal is positioned in the third and fourth quartile (Q3 for Cultural Studies, and Q4 for Political Science and International Relations, Social Sciences, Sociology, and Political Science), with a marginal upward trend in scores and values (see Table 1). For instance, there has been an increase in the number of published documents, citations per document, total citations, and external citations. Whilst there has been an increase in unpublished documents, the overall development of the journal appears to be positive. As of 2025 JEMIE is also indexed in Web of Science. According to SCOPUS's own metrics database, the journal is now ranked as Q2.

**Table 1: Journal Ranking data of the Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe (JEMIE)**

| <b>Ranking data</b>               | <b>2020</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> | <b>2023</b> | <b>2024</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Total documents                   | 8           | 11          | 10          | 10          | 14          |
| cites per document (2 years)      | 0.1         | 0.056       | 0.158       | 0.619       | 0.7         |
| Total cites                       | 1           | 1           | 11          | 14          | 17          |
| Self-cites                        | 0           | 0           | 2           | 0           | 0           |
| External cites per document       | 0.1         | 0.056       | 0.379       | 0.483       | 0.548       |
| Cited documents                   | 1           | 1           | 6           | 7           | 10          |
| Uncited documents                 | 9           | 17          | 23          | 22          | 21          |
| Estimated financial value (in \$) | n.a.        | n.a.        | n.a.        | 22,449      | 54,127      |

Source: SCImago 2025

The annual ECMI Summer Academy is an example of an educational and teaching activity. The performance and evaluation data relating to the Academy demonstrates a constant level of interest in the event, with ca. 50 applications received and ca. 23

individuals participating in the Academy during the last years. The academy consistently receives positive feedback.

Due to the inherent complexities involved in evaluating the impact of ECMI in policy arenas, particularly in terms of transfer and policy advice, this evaluation process is inherently more challenging. ECMI's core value is not particular policy advice in singular fields. Instead, it is the sustained availability of expertise within networks that convene decision-makers, practitioners, and scholars. In such an environment, impact unfolds through repeated interactions, trusted presence, and the translation of complex findings into applicable and practical formats. The Centre's track record in extending invitations to advisory forums, coupled with its strategic promotion of thematic events, underscores its pivotal role at the intersection of research and policy. A review of performance data from 2022 to 2024 reveals a modest decline in the number of conversations with experts and online talks. Conversely, the outreach via social media has increased, while the visibility (total views per entry) of the ECMI minorities blog has remained consistent.

The impact of the Centre was also part of the conducted interviews. The interviewees argued that the ECMI has an impact, though it is challenging to determine the precise nature of this impact. Furthermore, the ECMI faces a number of challenges, including the scale of the centre in its dual role as regional and European centre, the various peers, and the various initiatives (see above) to increase the centre's visibility. Consequently, the centre finds itself confronted with numerous tasks and responsibilities. Defining priorities and conducting a critical analysis of tasks could be beneficial in shaping ECMI's scientific profile and societal transfer activities.

## 4 Structure, network and impact – “Minority issues in the Denmark- Germany border region”

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In September 2022, the ECMI opened a sixth research cluster which focuses on Danish-German minority issues. The following part of the evaluation of the ECMI focuses on the Minority Issues in the Danish-German Border Region cluster of the ECMI. This part of the assessment provides a summary of the most important pieces of information regarding resources and structure relevant for the assessment of the Minority Issues in the Danish-German Border Region cluster.

In general, the cluster reflects the ECMI's commitment to the Danish-German border region. The region is widely perceived as a best practice example of minority issues, conflict resolution, and resilience. In close cooperation with communities and regional stakeholders, this interdisciplinary cluster offers a critical analysis of experiences, focusing on all four national minorities in the border region: the German minority in Denmark, as well as the Danish minority, the North Frisians, and the Sinti and Roma in Germany.

Currently, the cluster has three projects in progress ("White Paper: Minorities in the Denmark-Germany Border Region", "Book Project: National Minorities in Germany", and "Intermarriage"). Regarding external research collaboration, Martin Klatt is coordinator of the EU Horizon Europe Research Project Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies (B-SHAPES) at University of Southern Denmark. WP4 of B-SHAPES studies minorities and their perceptions of European societies, where there are synergies with ECMI's work. Results are shared with ECMI, and ECMI will contribute to B-SHAPES' final conference in March 2026. EURAC Research in Bozen/Bolzano, a key research collaboration partner of ECMI, is also a beneficiary of B-SHAPES.

Considering the research publications and their recognition in the scientific community, e.g. judged by their citations and h-indexes, Martin Klatt and Ruth Kircher are among the researchers with the highest academic impact at the ECMI. Obviously, some of the publications by cluster members have been written, and even accepted for publication, before the authors have been employed at the ECMI. Nevertheless, the members of the cluster published in various genres and languages over the years, suggesting a promising continuation in the upcoming years. Furthermore, the cluster becomes visible in various outlets of the ECMI (e.g. Newsletters, 'Perspectives', 'Diskurs').

Beyond this, the cluster is engaged in providing educational materials, workshops, or seminars. For example, the cluster is working on teaching materials to integrate teaching on the minorities in the border region into elementary as well as secondary schools. This work occurs in cooperation with the Ministry of Education in Schleswig-Holstein and the Handelslehranstalt, a business-oriented high school in Flensburg. The material will be presented at a conference in Berlin in September, for representatives of the 16 German Länder's ministries of education and teachers.

The media appearance of the Danish-German Border Region cluster is also a relevant indicator to assess public outreach. An investigation for the years 2022 to 2025, despite knowing that the cluster is new and some of the recruitments are rather recent, reveals that the members of the Minority Issues in the Danish-German Border Region cluster are visible in both Danish and German media. Given the openness of Danish media outlets to contributions by external actors, in particular researchers, it is worth considering aiming at higher media visibility, however. For instance, it appears to be the case that no researcher affiliated with ECMI so far has appeared on Videnskab.dk, a journalistic outlet for research (similar to The Conversation in the UK).

So far, the establishment of the Minority Issues in the Danish-German Border Region cluster can be considered a success. With the appointment of Martin Klatt as a cluster leader, the ECMI succeeded in recruiting in one of the most renowned experts in Danish-German minority issues. Overall, the current staff of the cluster covers various relevant and complementary areas of research expertise, and methodological skills. With this composition, the cluster appears well-composed and on a promising track.

## 5 Compliance of ECMI's activities with ECMI's statutes

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The investigation into how far ECMI's activities comply with its statutes relates mainly to Article 2, paragraph 2 of the statutes. It states that "The objective of the Foundation shall be to deal with the concerns of minorities and majorities and the problems arising from these in a European perspective through research, information and consultancy. Minorities, within the meaning of the law on foundations and endowments, are national minorities and other traditional (autochthonous) ethnic groups."

## 5.1 Strategy and activities

### *Clusters*

Taken together, the five older clusters (Conflict & Security, Culture & Diversity, Equality & Inclusion, Justice & Governance, Politics & Civil Society) demonstrate the ECMI's success in maintaining a balanced and comprehensive research profile that reflects both its statutory mandate and the evolving challenges of minority protection in Europe. Each cluster has carved out a distinct thematic expertise, while contributing to cross-cluster programmes such as Roma empowerment, NTA, and minority indicators. The evaluation finds strengths in the combination of conceptual analysis and applied policy work, as well as in the production of outputs that are accessible to both academic and practitioner audiences. At the same time, there remain opportunities to enhance integration across clusters – for instance, linking security with governance, or civil society with cultural resilience – to better capture the interdependence of minority issues. A more systematic effort to situate the Centre's research in global comparative debates could further strengthen its intellectual leadership and ensure that European experiences inform, and are informed by, wider international scholarship.

The establishment of the Minority Issues in the Danish-German Border Region Cluster (see chapter 4 above) has responded directly to the 2019 evaluation recommendation to concentrate more closely on statutory minorities. By focusing on the German minority in Denmark, the Danish minority in Germany, the North Frisians, and the Sinti and Roma, the cluster has sharpened the Centre's statutory profile and reinforced its unique regional mandate. The emphasis on officially recognized minority groups ensures continuity with the Centre's institutional mission while providing a clear comparative framework for cross-border dynamics. The cluster's activities are organised in three different sections: minority languages in the border region, borders shaping perceptions of European societies (B-SHAPES), and intergroup relations in the border region. The cluster has become the centre's most productive research unit in terms of publications and citations, and its outreach activities. But it also needs to be taken into account that

the cluster has the most resources among the clusters. Finally, the cluster's outputs have been received positively by both minority organisations and state authorities, highlighting the ECMI's bridging role between research and practice.

### *Publications*

Publication, information, and documentation of national and autochthonous minority research and projects are among the core tasks of the Centre's mandate under Article 3 of the Statutes. The ECMI publishes a peer-reviewed Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe (JEMIE), and a European Yearbook of Minority Issues (EYMI). They have continued with scholarly contributions on minority protection in Europe. The Perspectives series (2020–2025) increasingly highlighted statutory compliance and the ECMI's role in European debates. The launch of Diskurs in 2024 (a newsletter in German and Danish) provides targeted regional outreach. Together, JEMIE, EYMI, the Perspectives series, and the Diskurs newsletter form the Centre's core instruments of knowledge dissemination. Each serves a distinct function: JEMIE as a platform for peer-reviewed scholarship, EYMI as a comprehensive annual record, Perspectives as a vehicle for timely and policy-relevant analysis, and the Diskurs newsletter as a specific platform and outlet for the ECMI's recent expansion into more regional minority research and collaboration.

### *Advisory activities and training*

As stipulated by Article 3 of the ECMI Statutes, advisory activities remain a central part of the ECMI's mandate, enabling the Centre to translate its research expertise into practical guidance for governments, minority organisations, and international institutions. Between 2020 and 2025, the ECMI's advisory services were directed primarily to the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and EU institutions. Its sustained engagement with the Council of Europe, OSCE, and EU institutions has ensured that research findings and field-based knowledge directly inform debates on minority protection at the European level.

Training has complemented the ECMI's advisory work by equipping both practitioners and emerging scholars with the skills and perspectives necessary for advancing minority rights. Between 2020 and 2025, activities included the annual Summer School, regular teaching contributions at Flensburg University and the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, and an internship programme that hosted 48 interns and four visiting researchers.

### *Networking and Partnerships*

According to the mandate laid down in Articles 2 and 3 of the Statutes, the ECMI participates in various research networks on minority issues. Between 2020 and 2025, the ECMI maintained and expanded partnerships with universities, research institutes, and think tanks across Europe. The close institutional link with the University of Flensburg continued to provide a solid academic anchor, complemented by cooperative teaching and joint projects. The ECMI has also cultivated working relationships with minority self-organisations, especially in the Danish-German border region. Collaboration with organizations representing the German minority in Denmark, the Danish minority in Germany, the North Frisians, and the Sinti and Roma were established. These partnerships have been central to ensuring that the Centre's research and advisory activities remain grounded in the needs and experiences of the communities it serves. Beyond its regional focus, the ECMI has been an active participant in international policy and research networks. Its cooperation with the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and EU institutions has been complemented by academic and civil society partnerships in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and beyond. Furthermore, the COST Action PLURILINGMEDIA is a major networking and partnership achievement. Bringing together over 300 scholars from 41 countries, the project was launched in November 2024 with ECMI as the lead organizer, convening and connecting the full international consortium.

## 5.2 Mandate and expansion

### *Material Scope: National and Autochthonous Minorities*

Since 2019, the overwhelming majority of the ECMI's research, advisory, and outreach activities have focused on national and autochthonous minorities, thereby aligning closely with the Centre's statutory mandate. This focus is reflected in a wide range of projects addressing Roma communities in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, minority issues in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Kosovo, as well as the recognised minorities in Germany and Denmark. The creation of the Danish-German Border Region Cluster has further anchored this focus institutionally and geographically within the Centre's home region, ensuring continuous engagement with the Danish and German minorities, the North Frisians, and the Sinti and Roma. While projects related to "new minorities" or migration have been part of the ECMI's portfolio, they have remained peripheral in both scope and intent. This indicates that the ECMI has treated "new minorities" not as a separate thematic priority, but as a contextual factor within its

broader statutory field. The evaluation finds that the ECMI's activities demonstrate a clear and measurable shift since 2019 toward its statutory core.

### *Geographic Scope: Europe*

Geographically, the ECMI has consistently maintained its focus on Europe in the broad sense employed by the Council of Europe and the OSCE. Its activities have remained concentrated in regions traditionally central to its mandate—most notably in Ukraine, the Western Balkans, and the Caucasus. This geographic focus directly reflects the Centre's commitment to address minority issues within the European framework, as understood in the context of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Concerns raised in the 2019 evaluation about a possible expansion into Central Asia or the Arab World have not materialised. Furthermore, the institutionalisation of the Danish-German Border Region Cluster represents the clearest expression of this development. Established in response to the 2019 evaluation's recommendation to strengthen the ECMI's focus on its statutory minorities, the cluster has embedded work on the four recognised minorities of the Danish-German border region—German, Danish, Frisian, and Sinti/Roma—into the centre's long-term organisational framework.

## 6 ECMI organisation, personnel, and finances

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The investigation of how ECMI structures and manages its core activities relates to six different topics: (1) organisational structures and processes, (2) coordination and communication, (3) financial management, (4) human resource management, (5) overall efficiency, and (6) strategy.

## 6.1 Organisational Structures and Processes

### *Governance*

Overall, the ECMI has made progress in this field. It has been continuously engaged in the further development of organisational governance, which has continued to be formalised since the last evaluation. Procedural rules, codified HRM instruments (see below), and clearer templates for decision-making have been introduced, and provide a practical framework that is applicable to internal staff, e.g. for recruitment, and to external stakeholders, e.g. for the administration of third-party funds and reporting.

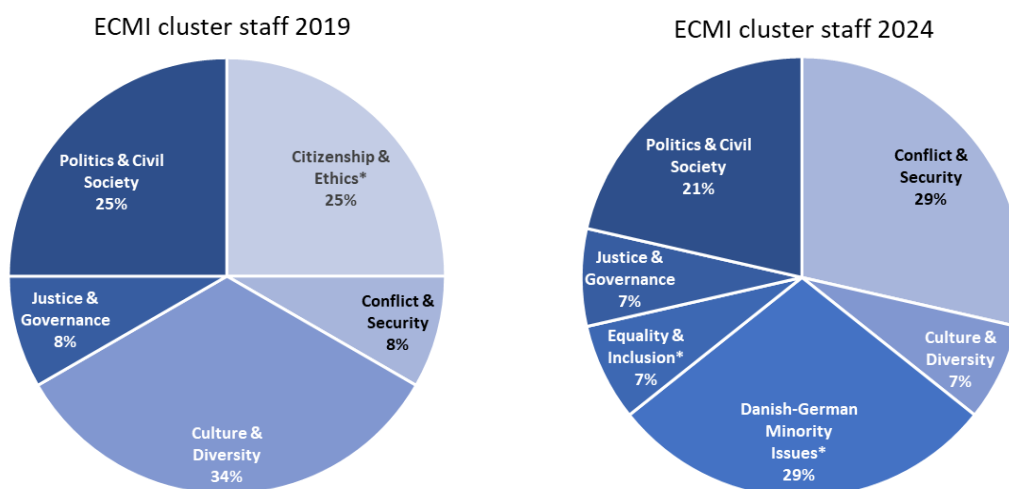
At the same time, several governance challenges remain. In particular, it became apparent during the interviews that the director's extensive administrative, leadership, and research responsibilities are perceived as a bottleneck in some HRM processes, which raises questions about an adequate organisation of academic and administrative leadership to improve throughput and clarity.

The interviews revealed occasional concerns about procedural adherence, for example, in some appointments for senior positions. While these deviations are understandable in principle, e.g. for reasons of attracting established researchers, they do have consequences within the organisation if it is not transparent that exceptions are being made and why. In academic organisations, perceived procedural irregularities—whether or not they alter outcomes—can cause reputational costs, which may have consequences for internal cooperation or external recruitment. This underlines the particular relevance of documenting and communicating decisions, ensuring that exceptions to standard processes are justified *ex ante* and recorded *ex post*. Accordingly, relevant criteria for staff decisions need to be transparent to ensure administrative justice. On the one hand, this increases administrative burden. On the other hand, it is a cornerstone to make reasons and motives of decisions transparent and understandable, to enhance acceptance within the academic organisation.

## Organisational architecture and research clusters

ECMI's organisational architecture is lean. The Executive Board<sup>1</sup> is—according to Article 7 of the ECMI's statute—the supreme authority of the centre. It is, among others, responsible for the approval of the budget, the plan of activities the financial statement, as well as appointments, remuneration, and dismissal of staff. Thus, the Executive Board provides strategic direction, while the thematic research clusters (Conflict & Security, Culture & Diversity, Minority Issues in the Denmark-Germany Border Region, Equality & Inclusion, Justice & Governance, Politics & Civil Society) appear as the primary organisational units. Originally designed to foster thematic coherence, these clusters have evolved into semi-autonomous entities with varying size, varying degrees of activity, and varying degrees productivity. The current cluster model reveals limited cooperation between clusters and perceived overweight of the Danish-German Minority Issues cluster—or underweight of small clusters, such as the Equality & Inclusion and the Justice & Governance clusters, which hardly meet external expectations associated with the term 'cluster' (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Cluster and staff structure 2019 and 2024**



Source: ECMI

<sup>1</sup> The Board membership is a voluntary and unpaid task. The members of the Executive Board are: Garbi Schmidt, Chair, Professor, Department of Culture and Identity, Roskilde University, Denmark; Monika Wingender, Vice-Chair Professor, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Giessen, Germany; Johannes Callsen, Schleswig-Holstein Commissioner for Matters related to National Minorities and Ethnic Groups, Border Area Activities and Low German; Annemarie Falktoft Deputy Director General, Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science, Denmark; Eleonora Lotti, Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities; Elise Cornu, Director, Division of National Minorities and Minority Languages, Council of Europe; Leif Bodin, Member of the German Parliament; Dorte Jagetic Andersen, Researcher, Danish academia; Rasmus Andresen, Member of the European Parliament.

Regardless of the structural options the clusters offer, they are currently used as structural elements that illustrate the research identity of the centre to its organisational environment. The cluster structure mainly allows senior scholars to shape agendas and to signal external stakeholders that the ECMI has in-depth expertise in the presented areas. Internally, the clusters as organisational units are hardly integrated in the organisational structure of the ECMI, however, which means that they are not connected to administrative procedures, e.g. the distribution of resources, or the organisation's overall strategy. For example, there is no established practice of routinised cross-cluster collaboration. This lacuna may limit synergies in research collaboration. Furthermore, uneven staffing across clusters generates asymmetries in influence and impact within the organisation. Particularly for one-person clusters, the term cluster seems to be a misnomer. For clusters with more staff, leadership roles may accumulate administrative burdens that crowd out research activities of the heads of clusters.

During the interviews with ECMI staff, it was pointed out by the interviewees that the current cluster structure is controversial. Several interviewees questioned whether clusters are needed at all, noting that most research happens in research projects. Other interviewees stressed that some clusters rather align with the positions of senior researchers, rather than providing a structure for functioning research teams. This practice leaves younger researchers unclear about their role in relation to the cluster structure, because some of them are not formally connected to any of the clusters, implying that mentoring does not take place in a systematic way and that they are not very well integrated in the existing research structure.

## 6.2 Coordination and Communication

### *Internal coordination*

In general, the analysis reveals sound operational routines at ECMI. Internal coordination rests on a set of recurring interactions: all-staff meetings, research seminars, and cluster discussions. These fora promote a shared intellectual agenda and allow for the exchange of information about acquisition of funding and dissemination of results. The presence of Personnel and Equality Units within the governance structures provides additional channels for participation. Furthermore, processes for internal task distribution and project organisation are flexible, which allows adaptation to funding requirements, but they are not fully standardised and sometimes task distribution remains loosely defined or are negotiated case by case at the ECMI. Coordination within the ECMI is marked by informal networks, but insufficient formally institutionalised communication structures. In general, coordination and communication between

ECMI's staff members is reported as collegial, yet somewhat fragmented. Internal communication practices vary across clusters, with some teams holding regular coordination meetings, while other clusters and partly individuals operate independently. Coordination across clusters relies primarily on personal initiative.

The transition to hybrid work has been absorbed without notable loss in output. Digital convening may be regarded as a normalised complement to in-person events such as coordination or bilateral meetings. Nevertheless, some services may create bottlenecks, when multiple projects peak simultaneously or when large events compress timelines for administrative and communications tasks. For example, project management support, information services including the library, and communications operate with lean capacity, but without clearly defined service levels. Hence, systematic integration of services and learning across projects is not fully established.

Some of the interviewees commented on a lack of cross-cluster cooperation, with research clusters operating independently from each other. The resulting lack of coordination tendency limits the potential for interdisciplinary synergies, despite the Centre's broad thematic mandate. This includes concerns that people sometimes lack information about what other projects are doing, indicating a deficit in cross-unit transparency, including a lack of standardised workflows, with responsibilities often negotiated ad hoc. This procedural flexibility can be advantageous in accommodating project-specific needs, but also risks inefficiencies due to parallel activities within the organisation. In some cases, growth in activities seems to have outpaced the development of adequate coordination mechanisms. Therefore, the growth of the institution needs to be administered and strategically integrated. If the Centre continues to grow, e.g. through increased efforts in applications for third-party funds, space constraints will eventually lead to problems with hosting, student engagement, or the organising short-term visiting positions.

### *External coordination*

The ECMI participates in European networks, collaborates with universities and ministries, and maintains relationships with intergovernmental organisations. These partnerships translate research into policy engagement, secure platforms for dissemination, and confer legitimacy. A recurring challenge for centres with dual academic-policy mandates is maintaining credibility in both communities. ECMI's publications portfolio and convening record are broadly consistent with this balancing act, though the distribution of effort is uneven across clusters and years, reflecting the cadence of projects and the preferences of senior scholars. Cooperation with external partners is described as generally productive, though highly dependent on individual

relationships rather than formalised agreements. This reliance on personal networks presents a risk to continuity, particularly when staff turnover is high. Similarly, cooperation between administrative and research staff is functional but lacks structured feedback loops, limiting opportunities for process improvement.

### *Internal communication*

The ECMI's internal communication – which is strongly associated with co-ordination (see above) – reveals a non-fully systematic process. The practices within the organisation are uneven. Internal communication and research culture mirror the structural issues (see above). The ambition to hold regular meetings between the director and the cluster heads, and the idea of developing research meetings, are promising to implement effective internal communication. However, there is a lack of consistent implementation. For example, the non-inclusion of some junior staff signals the partly selective character of some internal communication formats. There is also a permanent pressure that internal communication is replaced by other tasks with higher priorities.

In the interviews, ECMI's staff repeatedly requested clearer internal communication and more systematic insights into what other projects are working on. This is considered as an important instrument to structure collaboration on acquisition of third-party funds and dissemination of research results. Due to the fact that these demands are operational rather than strategic issues, they are regarded as amenable to regular internal communication formats. Furthermore, there is a demand for a systematic and continuous exchange about research practices (methods and research design), as well as deadlines and tenders of funding lines (etc.), beyond internal project-related updates.

### *External communication*

The ECMI aims to professionalise external communication. Currently, there is a rather simple but demanding communications framework that identifies priority audiences and channels at the proposal stage, links outputs to those audiences with timelines and responsibilities, and tracks a few indicators of the outreach of the Centre. Nevertheless, external communication is not used in a systematic and strategic way, as it could be part of most of the ECMI's activities. For example, externally oriented communication (e.g., social media and other outreach formats) is only loosely connected to research processes. There are also differences among the clusters. For instance, the Danish–German border area is more strongly and visibly reflected in the work of the DK–DE cluster, including through its broader regional embeddedness and its links to EU-funded activities conducted by individual scholars. At the same time, it is important to

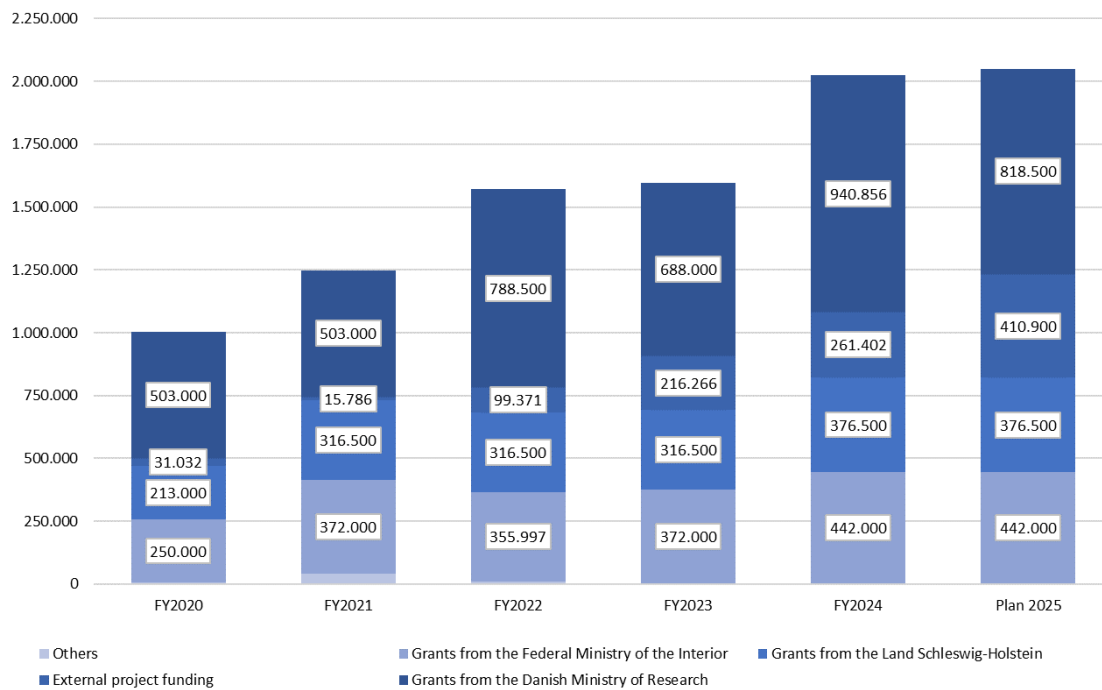
distinguish this from separate EU Horizon projects (such as B-SHAPES) that may be thematically synergistic but in which ECMI is not a formal partner.

## 6.3 Financial Management

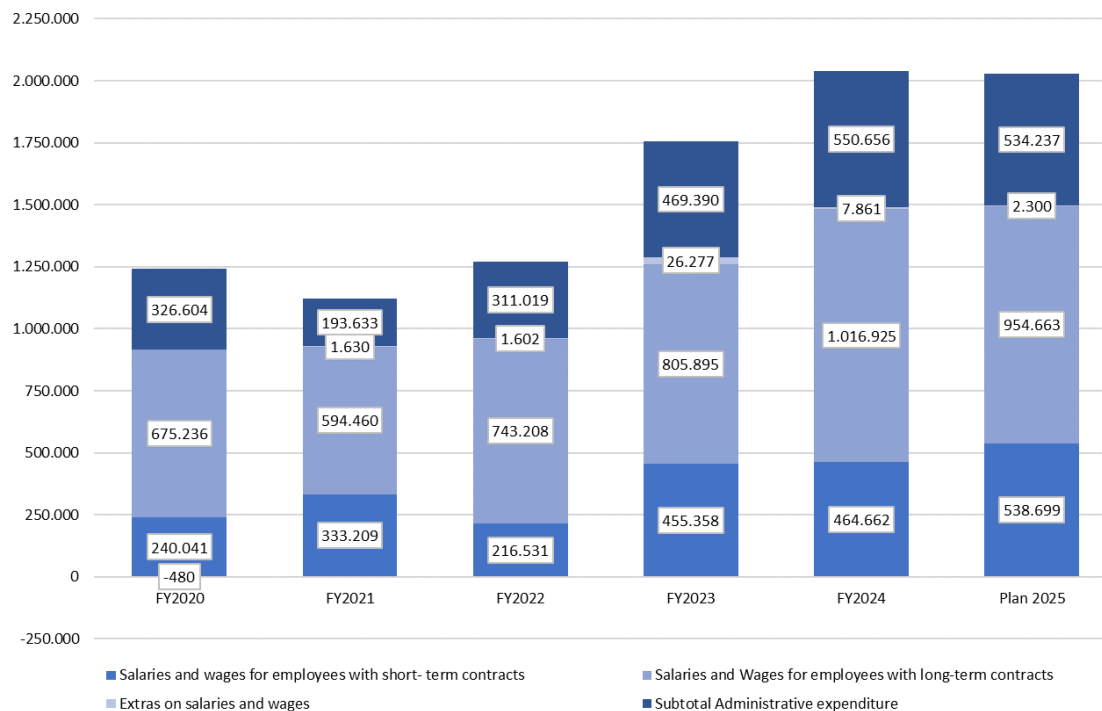
### *Financial architecture*

The ECMI's financial architecture operates under a mixed funding model which combines stable core funding from the founding partners with competitive project revenues and commissioned research. Currently the ratio of competitive project funding to overall funding is 12,9 % (in 2024) and 20,0 % (in 2025). This mixed model is familiar across European research institutes, and yields both resilience and volatility. Core funds provide continuity, fund infrastructural costs, and enable the organisation to make strategic investments, which can hardly be financed through short-term projects. Project funds are relevant as well, but they are dynamic and volatile. Hence, they create cyclical pressures on staffing, indirect cost recovery, and administrative support. The past four years from 2020 to 2024, illustrate both sides of funding: ECMI's competitive funding has strengthened in several areas, including European programmes and consultancy in the Western Balkans. Accordingly, core funding also went upward, due to personnel costs mainly driven by the transition of the salary framework to TV-L (see Figures 3 and 4).

**Figure 3: Revenue ECMI fiscal year (FY) 2020 to Plan 2025**



**Figure 4: Expenditures ECMI fiscal year (FY) 2020 to Plan 2025**



Source: ECMI

### *Financial governance*

The ECMI has professionalised financial governance. Core financial operations, such as accounting, bookkeeping, elements of legal and personnel administration, etc., have been partially outsourced to a private company. This professionalisation has improved organisational efficiency by reducing internal capacity constraints and it promotes compliance with existing regulations. Furthermore, ECMI introduced a consistent cost-type and cost-centre structure and takes care of timely financial statements. The organisation closed several fiscal years with surpluses that were driven in part by unfilled positions and by reduced travel and event costs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though these are positive signals of stewardship they should be treated as contingent rather than as structural gains or efficiency. Therefore, these results should be interpreted carefully, and they should not be considered as a substitute for deliberate and strategic austerity policies within the constraints of German non-profit law.

### *Third-party funding*

The ECMI has achieved noteworthy success in securing third-party funding. The Centre currently has applied successfully or hosts different third party or transfer projects, such as Cost Action, DFG, EU, to name a few. Considering the number of overall applications and the internal processes to apply for third-party funds, there is still room for professionalisation. There is, for example, no systematic collection of tenders or systematic training to apply for third-party funding or reach out to potential national and international partners.

Some respondents described the ECMI as relatively successful compared to similar organisations. Nonetheless, successful applications for third-party funds are not without drawbacks. One interviewee noted that some third-party funds are more demanding than others in terms of reporting and compliance. Accordingly, the handling of third-party funds is experienced as administratively demanding, with some schemes insisting on heavy reporting and compliance routines. For example, the internal transfer of a project with GIZ reportedly created accounting challenges. Therefore, staff repeatedly point to the need for dedicated support in project development and administration so that senior researchers can focus on content, research and external relationships without increasing procedural risks. The interview partners also stressed that indirect cost recovery caps in some programmes imply that these projects need to be subsidised by core funding unless the opportunity cost of project management time is explicitly considered. This relates to the debate of further professionalisation of funding work.

### *Medium term planning*

The ECMI uses different instruments and documents for short- and medium-term planning, for example the ECMI Perspectives as an annual outlook. However, two constraints complicate medium-term planning. The first is regulatory: German non-profit rules limit the accumulation of large reserves, reducing the scope for inter-annual smoothing of revenues and expenditures. The second is structural: a significant share of staffing in some clusters is project-funded, making cluster resources dependent on successful acquisition of third-party funds. Together, these two constraints reveal the relevance of setting priorities and of explicit decisions about which opportunities to pursue, given the limited administrative capacity of the organisation.

### *Budget transparency*

Though the ECMI has professionalised financial governance leading to sound oversight, the issue of budget transparency still leaves room for further development. For example, information on cluster-level allocations, spending patterns, and variances is not routinely shared. Without integrated internal controlling, or, for instance, dashboards that show planned versus actual budgets by cluster and project category, staff have limited visibility into the decisions that the management makes. This, in turn, weakens learning effects and complicates the alignment of activity with strategic priorities of the organisation.

There is limited evidence of systematic financial controlling beyond the obligations tied to grant agreements. Internal budgeting appears project-driven rather than strategically aligned with institutional priorities. An integrated financial dashboard or performance-based allocation model would promote proactive financial steering. Furthermore, several interview partners reported ongoing discussions about instituting cluster budgets, with devolved responsibility for planning within an agreed budget framework. The absence of such mechanisms is not problematic in general, however, because centralising budgeting procedures is one option of organising internal budget planning, and it comes with well-known corresponding side effects (which would be also the case for decentralised budgeting procedures, however).

### *Spending patterns*

The spending patterns of the ECMI show expected priorities in expenditures on services, public relations, and events occasionally exceeded plans; training budgets were under-executed. The latter is consequential for HRM, because underinvestment in skills development collides with publication expectations and with the need to build acquisition capabilities among early-career colleagues. A further point concerns travel

spending. At least temporarily, a practice of limiting conference attendance to a single event per year was applied, without a clearly communicated policy basis. Such practices, absent explicit strategy, risk unintended consequences for academic visibility and network maintenance, particularly for early-career staff, who build reputations incrementally through presence at field-defining fora.

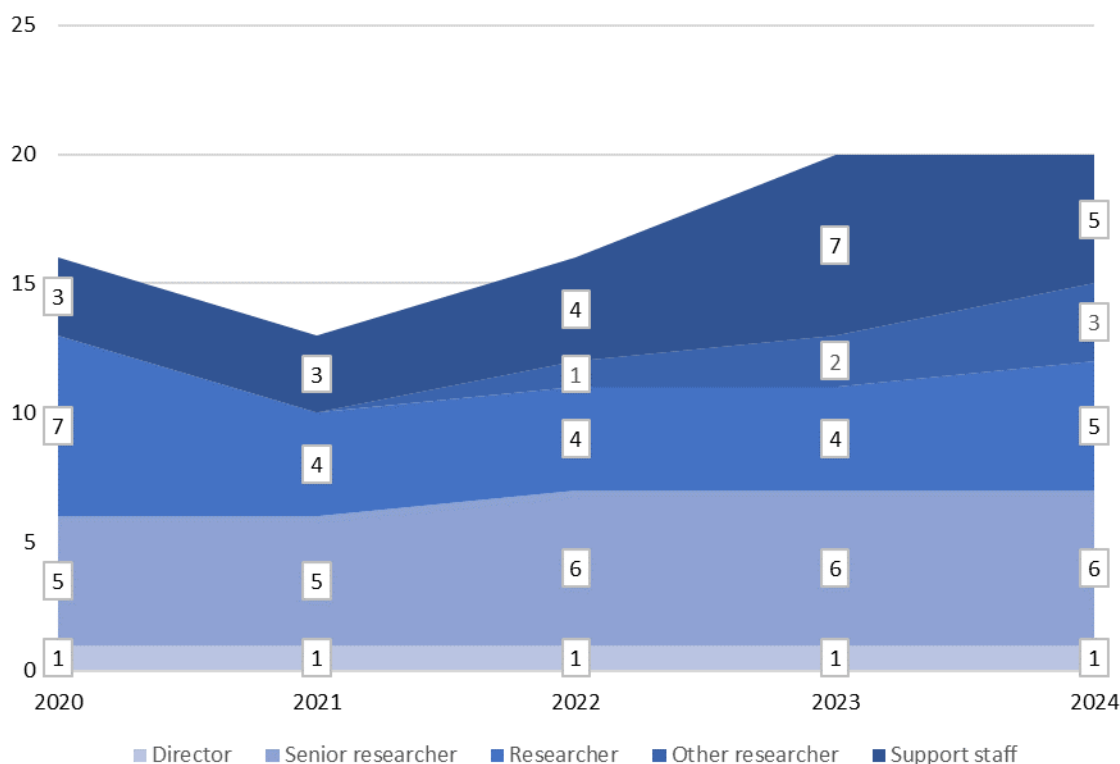
In addition, the staff pointed to inflation-eroded core funds when personnel cost increases; other parts of the overall budget will relatively decrease if they are not adjusted to inflation as well. The interviews also exhibited an uneven and from the perspective of the interviewees not necessarily reasonable allocation of funding across clusters, which may be the result of unclear routines of priority setting. Several interviewees suggested modest financial support for training expenditures as a share of personnel costs. The interviewees also suggested building a small liquidity buffer and a seed-money funding instrument for proposal development. The main problems for such budgets are the implicit crowding-out effects of staffing growth which quasi-automatically reduces the travel and dissemination budgets per capita.

## 6.4 Human Resource Management

### *Alignment to the German TV-L salary framework*

The ECMI shows clear improvements in human resource management, but also persistent friction. The salary framework was transitioned to the German TV-L in 2020, which has increased the attractiveness of the ECMI as an employer, and which provided increased contractual clarity for new and existing staff (for the staff structure, see Figure 5). This includes clear wording of contracts, defined expectations, and predictable pay scales for classification and progression. Therefore, the new framework reduces negotiation frictions during recruitment, and signals a commitment to parity and compliance that becomes visible to external candidates and funders.

**Figure 5: ECMI staff 2020 to 2024**



Source: ECMI

However, as the interviews reveal, a centre-wide, consistent, and coherent implementation of the grading scheme for TV-L is partly missing. The existing ambiguities relate to classification, progression, and recognition of prior experience. Consequently, single classification decisions are perceived by the interviewees as inconsistent.

### *Institutionalisation of staff representation*

The ECMI has created structures and processes to promote employment relations. It strengthened staff representation with the institutionalisation of a Personnel Council<sup>2</sup>, and it strengthened equality governance by the introduction of an Equality Unit as well as a Gender Equity Plan. Furthermore, attention has been paid to disability-sensitive recruitment, and the normalisation of English as the working language, to expand the pool of potential applicants and to reduce informal barriers to participation.

<sup>2</sup> A personnel council is the elected representative body for employees in the public sector. It represents the interests of employees vis-à-vis the employer, participates in decisions on working conditions, and advocates for the protection and equal treatment of employees.

These recent developments have been positively commented on in the interviews, though the interviewees made clear that engagement in these new fields and structures is time consuming, particularly under consideration of existing workload pressures (e.g. for research, publication). Additionally, in small organisations the difference between representation on paper and in practice is often determined by managerial style which needs to make sure that these structures and procedures become regular activities for participation in organisational development, such as for the development of recruitment, on-boarding, and mentoring processes.

### *Performance management*

The ECMI has the aim implementing performance management. Annual review conversations are stipulated and reportedly conducted in most clusters and for the organisation in general. However, the content of these conversations varies, because they are not based on a shared set of criteria and appear not to rely on existing internal support structures. For example, if publication expectations are communicated—especially for papers submitted to Q1 or Q2 journals—they are not aligned with existing possibilities to receive training and support to meet these goals. Furthermore, the review cycle is not yet consistently integrated into specific development steps, transparently communicated promotion decisions, or differentiated expectations that would tie for example publication and acquisition goals to available mentoring and training support. This gap is particularly visible for early-career researchers, which means that the performance reviews do hardly translate into a consistent system of incentives to reach performance targets and capability building. Since incentive structures at ECMI remain underdeveloped, there is no systematic performance management framework. Such a framework could promote the alignment of individual and institutional objectives.

The lack of a framework also appears to be one of the reasons, why interviewees perceive the individual performance as generic and inconsistently consequential across the heterogeneous roles of ECMI's staff. For example, similar targets are perceived as ambitious or non-ambitious depending on the working context and the qualification background. Furthermore, the performance reviews appear weakly linked to (positive or negative) consequences, which leads to the overall impression that they only formally exist.

### *Recruitment and classification*

The ECMI has made progress in the development of recruitment and classification procedures. Recruitment is described as procedurally standardised and compliant with German equality and disability provisions. Between June 2021 and August 2024, the ECMI received 277 applications for 9 positions to be filled. Nevertheless, the recruitment and classification practices, while competitive in general, are perceived as inconsistently applied. Furthermore, recruitment practices tend to orient towards project cycles and only partly to a long-term strategic personnel planning and development, which is reasonable to some extent, as the payment by ECMI is constrained by external funding conditions.

The absence of a published progression scheme and forms of systematic staff development (see above) have reinforced the impression among some staff members that the classification logic and recognition of experience do not reveal a systematic pattern. Beyond this, inconsistencies in salary classification ('Einstufung') and the singling-out of job titles have triggered perceptions of unequal treatment among the employees. It has also to be pointed out that one recruitment decision reportedly proceeded with incomplete Board and Council consultations despite codified rules in this regard. Situations like this can cause frustration, reduce trust, and leave people feeling discouraged.

### *Onboarding*

The ECMI has onboarding routines which are, by most accounts, structured and effective with respect to administrative integration. However, this does not hold for overall organisational integration. For example, the professional socialisation into clusters is not uniformly successful. In this regard, the fact that some younger researchers are not automatically assigned to a cluster (and therefore do not have a mentor in their own cluster) appears particularly challenging. This weakens possibilities for both socialisation and supervision, especially where doctoral work is involved, and where the boundary between research tasks and administrative duties is not fully transparent. Furthermore, the procedures to affiliate with clusters or to find potential mentors are not clear and depend on individual initiative on both sides.

Some researchers report strong collegial anchoring, regular research seminars, and project design collaborations; others describe a looser affiliation, with intermittent interactions. Because the cluster model is intended to support both identity and acquisition, gaps in integration dilute its benefits.

### *Personnel development*

The ECMI is interested in personnel development that becomes visible through various measures, such as trainings, qualification opportunities, travelling, project-based work, etc. This underlines the aim of the Centre to engage in staff development, though not all offers of the ECMI are accepted by its staff.

The ECMI implements a one-conference-per-year policy. Furthermore, it offers a 500 € training voucher to promote staff development. However, due to missing guidance, there is only a low uptake of the training voucher, which, for example, constrains early-career development. Younger researchers receive limited specific support in selecting suitable training opportunities. Particularly, time-limited contracts create dilemmas to decide, for example, between participation in representative bodies or engaging in the research project.

A recurrent observation among interviewees is the absence of a coherent strategic approach to personnel development, which is perceived as insufficient to meet the long-term professional growth needs of staff. Mentoring, career tracks, and re/on-boarding (especially after parental leave) are seen as underdeveloped and uneven, with divergent views even on basic onboarding quality (see above). Beyond this, some female employees, particularly with children, report feeling disadvantaged, raising questions about family-friendliness that merit systematic attention. Additionally, one senior respondent explicitly noted that ECMI has no specific focus or strategic approach in HRM, which was echoed by other interviewees.

In sum, HRM is characterised by a combination of high individual commitment and structural challenges. The Centre employs a diverse mix of researchers, post-docs, and project staff. However, the organisation lacks a structured career development pathway, which particularly creates uncertainty for early-career researchers.

### *Working conditions*

The ECMI provides working conditions that incorporate flexible and remote work arrangements under clear rules. They are an important feature for international staff and those balancing care-giving responsibilities. The post-pandemic settlement around hybrid work is pragmatic and consistent with sector norms. The challenge for any research institute is to avoid fragmenting and dissolving the community, for example, when remote work becomes habitual. ECMI's use of research seminars and all-staff meetings mitigates this risk, but the Centre might do more to convert online presence into structured intellectual exchange—such as paper meetings, methodological

workshops, or short writing retreats—particularly for early-career colleagues whose networks are still forming.

The staff describe a generally positive working atmosphere which is a strong asset for organisational change if it is used to implement reforms through structured forums and transparent routines.

## 6.5 Overall Efficiency

### *Efficiency and economies of scale*

Efficiency, as used here, refers to the relationship between inputs (such as funding, staff time, and infrastructure) and outputs (such as publications, events, and policy engagements), mediated by resource allocation and the quality of organisational processes. Based on this definition, ECMI has maintained, and in some areas increased, its output without a commensurate increase in administrative overheads. It has adapted to external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, without organisational paralysis, and it has used professionalisation in finance and HRM to stabilise routines. These are significant achievements for a modestly sized centre operating under the volatility of project cycles.

Nonetheless, efficiency gains due to economies of scale are not evenly distributed. Where clusters are adequately staffed and led by senior scholars with acquisition capacity, economies of scale and scope are evident: projects build upon one another, junior colleagues find mentorship, and dissemination is anticipated rather than improvised. Where clusters are thinly staffed, the opposite holds: administrative fixed costs loom larger, risks are concentrated, and opportunities for cooperation are restricted.

### *Output*

The ECMI's output is substantial in some areas, but insufficient in others. The output includes peer-reviewed articles, edited volumes, policy reports, working papers, and regular workshops and conferences. Thematically, the output tracks strategic emphases in minority governance, media, education, and conflict-related dynamics. The documents and data provided by the ECMI indicate improvements in journal placement and in the internationalisation of authorship networks, which can be considered as a reasonable proxy for scholarly integration. Bibliometric measures, while imperfect, suggest that ECMI's work circulates, but sometimes does not disseminate beyond niche communities. Besides this, policy-relevant outputs are cited in practice-oriented documents and partly receive media coverage. However, these results are mainly staff-

dependent, which appears to be reasonable under consideration of the different career-stages. Furthermore, there is no straightforward link between the increase in resources and a measurable increase in output.

The interviews revealed that the performance of the ECMI staff shows variance in their research output, which can not only be explained with different career levels. For members of the staff who spend most of their time on research, the output could be higher, in terms of quality and number of research papers. While some of the researchers do not publish very often or publish rather in internal outlets of the centre, other researchers are more visible with their articles in internationally recognized peer reviewed journals.

### *Performance indicators*

Evaluation literature has emphasised the importance of indicators that combine quantitative measurements with qualitative evidence. The ECMI collects data that provide a valuable basis for a basic assessment of ECMI. These indicators are related to three areas: research performance and activities (e.g. publications, workshops), education, teaching, training, and consultation (e.g. Summer Academy of ECMI), and transfer (e.g. conversations with experts, social media). Though not all of these indicators may be considered as performance indicators they underline a laudable effort of the ECMI to document its performance.

In general, the indicators are not part of an integrated system of performance appraisal. This makes sense, because the ECMI is a rather small organisation, and because of the fact, that indicator systems may become undermined by “gaming the system” and “cream skimming” or “cherry picking” (Barr 2004, 270). However, collecting relevant information about impact, performance and efficiency of the organisation is also relevant to satisfy the information needs of its founders, who provide the core funding of the Centre. For example, the performance indicators only partly show linkages to the increased resources the ECMI has received after the last evaluation report. Hence, linking input and output could be a relevant step to develop these instruments further. Focusing on individuals, the indicators may also be relevant for internal steering in identifying who needs research support or which incentives work.

The interviewees mentioned existing target agreements and performance indicators, but they appear not well-implemented. There is no particular reward when performance targets are met, or, in reverse, no form of regular follow-up communication (or even sanctions) when performance targets are not met.

### *Procedural reliability*

A further determinant of efficiency is procedural reliability. When staff can anticipate how decisions are made, what criteria are used for decisions, and how exceptions are handled, they can plan their work with fewer buffers, which circumscribes the balancing process of (internal and external) demands and individual action. Currently, there are several areas where procedural reliability is improvable, namely performance reviews, the logic of staff classification, or travel approvals (see above). Addressing these areas by creating procedural reliability would yield throughput legitimacy by increased actual and perceived fairness.

### *Project management*

Considering the project-centred research of the ECMI, project and portfolio management emerge as crucial procedures. However, if ECMI continues its path of growth by professionalising the acquisition of third-party funds, project management needs to be developed further.

Handling third-party funds is experienced as demanding, with gaps in administrative support and elements of ad hoc practice (e.g., a problematic transfer on a GIZ project). Interviewees call for professionalised project management, integrated with budgeting and strategy, including clearer processes for application, delivery, and post-project learning. Events and travel are cost drivers; some question the value of numerous workshops, suggesting tighter criteria and scale. The library—now folded into the Information Officer role—is viewed as neglected, inviting either revitalisation with metrics or a deliberate wind-down. Notably, outsourcing bookkeeping to a private provider has contributed significantly to administrative efficiency.

## 6.6 Strategy

The ECMI has a strategic document called ‘ECMI Strategy Document 2023-2028’. This document defines how the centre will move forward into the future. The strategic document is not yet systematically operationalised into plans with milestones and associated resources, how to reach them. Furthermore, the strategy appears only partly communicated to or discussed with the staff, and it is not clear how the implementation of the strategy will be reviewed or which follow-up routines will be established.

Besides the general strategic framework, the research agenda of the ECMI appears fragmented. In part, this fragmentation can be explained with the cluster structure (see above) and coordination deficiencies. Due to increased responsibilities of the director and the heads of clusters’ regular research meetings have not been conducted since

mid-2024. General staff meetings were not able to replace this instrument because they were used mainly for reporting rather than for substantive alignment and coordination of research activities. The combination of a formal strategy that is not yet consistently translated into routines, fragmented research activities, and limited internal fora points to room for improvement in coordination and internal knowledge-sharing, and may make it harder to present ECMI's research output externally as a coherent and cumulative profile (e.g., through publications and conference participation).

The interviews suggest that the strategic orientation of the ECMI is only partially articulated within the centre, with a gap between its stated mission and a clearly defined long-term vision. Though the ECMI operates under a mandate emphasising research excellence and policy relevance in minority issues, several respondents highlighted the absence of a coherent strategic framework, translating this mandate into measurable objectives and operational priorities.

The lack of explicit strategic direction of the organisation has implications for institutional coherence, as it allows for ambiguous interpretations of goals among staff and stakeholders. Similarly, in the absence of a consolidated strategic framework and regularly updated plan, the Centre risks operating reactively and being driven by funding opportunities rather than an agenda set internally.

Without a core research strategy, thematic focus and cumulative expertise are limited, and HRM and financial planning are constrained by a lack of full alignment with long-term priorities. This could help to address major challenges such as high dependence on project funding, high staff turnover and reputational competition. Furthermore, respondents noted that research activities often follow the logic of available funding calls rather than a pre-defined thematic trajectory. While this approach can yield short-term successes in acquiring grants, it also risks fragmenting the centre's research profile and diluting its thematic identity. The absence of an agreed set of research priorities and methodological standards limits the ECMI's ability to build cumulative expertise in its core areas and hampers the creation of synergies between projects.

## 7 Follow up on the 2019 Evaluation report

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The 2019 evaluation developed a reform agenda for the ECMI. It provided a detailed assessment and clear recommendations. Both are the foundations of this follow-up assessment. Hence, the following section investigates to what extent the ECMI has made progress with regard to the recommendations of the 2019 evaluation report in seven thematic fields: (1) Respecting the Mandate, (2) Rethinking the research cluster, (3) Strengthening human resource management and financial management, (4) ECMI's organisational structure, (5) Revisiting the current strategy of continued expansion of ECMI activities toward the wider European periphery, (6) Scrapping the denomination of "regional office" to avoid misconceptions, (7) Core funding of ECMI.

### *Respecting the mandate*

The mandate of the ECMI prioritises national and other autochthonous minorities within the Council of Europe area. Within the ECMI and the advisory board there is an ongoing debate how the concept of minorities should be understood and defined. However, the 2019 evaluation report has recommended to focus on a narrow definition of minorities (see above) and leave general topics such as anti-discrimination and "new" minorities or new geographic areas aside.

The ECMI has generally adhered to the mandate and focused on autochthonous and national minorities. Furthermore, there are tendencies towards re-centring. An example is the establishment of the Danish-German border region cluster (operational in 2022). In 2024, a task-force on EU enlargement and minorities underlined the aim to become more focused regarding the implementation of the mandate. The ECMI is also linked to the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in particular to the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). Yet, residual activity in Central Asia persisted into 2022 but has not been further expanded. In sum, the recommendations of the 2019 report regarding the mandate seem to be mainly implemented, but not fully consolidated.

The Centre is currently considered to be in full and substantive compliance with Article 2(2) of its Statutes. The ECMI's activities between 2019 and 2025 have consistently focused on national and autochthonous minorities within a European framework, thereby fulfilling its statutory mandate. Its research structure organised into thematic clusters—Conflict & Security, Culture & Diversity, Equality & Inclusion, Justice & Governance, and Politics & Civil Society—has ensured both thematic depth and interdisciplinary integration. The creation of the Danish-German Border Region Cluster in 2022, concentrating on the German and Danish minorities, the North Frisians, and the Sinti and Roma, has anchored statutory compliance institutionally and geographically,

transforming what was once a project-based focus into a structural core of the Centre's work.

The evaluation highlights the ECMI's research performance, its balance between conceptual and applied scholarship, and its broad dissemination strategy through publications such as the *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe (JEMIE)*, the *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, the *Perspectives* series, and the bilingual *Diskurs*-newsletter. These outlets ensure both academic rigour and practical outreach to policymakers and minority communities. Advisory work for the Council of Europe, OSCE, and EU institutions—particularly regarding the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Language Charter—demonstrates the ECMI's ability to translate research into policy impact. Its training and capacity-building programmes, including the annual Summer School, teaching engagements, and internship opportunities, further reinforce its contribution to developing expertise in minority rights across generations.

Overall, ECMI has evolved into a mature institution that combines regional embeddedness with European and international visibility. By linking traditional minority protection with broader themes of equality, inclusion, and anti-discrimination, the ECMI has enhanced its statutory focus, situating minority rights within Europe's wider human-rights and democratic governance frameworks. The evaluation acknowledges ongoing challenges, such as limited staff and project-based funding, yet concludes that the ECMI's strategic direction, institutional resilience, and intellectual leadership position it to remain a key European reference point for research, policy, and practice on minority issues.

### *Rethinking the research cluster*

The 2019 evaluation report criticised the cluster organisation, and in particular, ambiguous roles within the cluster model. The individual tasks and roles needed further clarification. Additionally, the evaluators recommended to harmonise uneven activity levels, improve internal communication and coordination capacities, e.g., with the establishment of a dedicated research-coordination function.

Based on the evaluation report, the ECMI has provided new job descriptions, enhanced the cluster-consolidation, clarified leadership roles across clusters, and added the Danish-German Border Region cluster. Moreover, monthly research group meetings have been introduced, but they were not conducted on a regular basis.

In sum, the recommendations of the 2019 report may be regarded as mainly implemented. However, structural problems remain. Resource asymmetries persist as two clusters function as de facto single-person units. Cluster budgets are still under discussion without a developed perspective for the development of clusters as organisational units. The cooperation across clusters rests on ad hoc arrangements and a research-coordination function is still missing. It is still not clear, whether the clusters are an adequate solution to organise research at a rather small centre like the ECMI.

### *Strengthening human resource management and financial management*

The 2019 evaluation report recommended to improve the salary framework according to the German TV-L, to implement clear and effective HR regulations within the ECMI, to develop a consistent strategy for staff qualification development, and to introduce annual performance reviews, and to establish an employee representation body. In addition, the evaluators contrasted robust formal compliance with weak managerial steering. Therefore, they suggested programme-level cost planning, cost accounting linked to outputs, and basic performance budgeting.

Between 2020 and 2024, the ECMI has been adopting the TV-L-indexed remuneration and aims to be compliant with the labour agreements in the public and academic sector in Germany. Additionally, a staff representation has been established, which addresses relevant work-related issues of the employees. Since 2020, a Personnel Agreement sets predictable parameters for remote work and overtime, and the performance reviews are intended to conduct multi-evaluator appraisals for researcher grades link these to decisions about permanent and non-permanent contracts. The staff handbook (from 2024) consolidates existing procedures, embeds review cycles, and clarifies the role of the Personnel Council – which is modelled on the role of a German “Betriebsrat”, but it does not constitute one in the formal or legal sense – in application processes to select future staff. The recruitment statistics of the ECMI for 2020 to 2024 document standardised practices with attention to disability provisions and equality reporting. Since 2019, the centre has professionalised the accountability. Accounting and legal/personnel services were outsourced by late 2019 with anticipated annual savings; subsequent audits for the 2021–2024 period returned unqualified opinions; liability insurance for leadership was concluded in 2022; and budget reporting to the Board became more structured. The resource envelope grew, and reserves were built between 2021 and 2023. This marks decisive progress in financial assurance and stability.

In sum, the recommendations of the 2019 report may be regarded as partially implemented., The ECMI has strengthened human resource and financial management.

However, three caveats turn out to be relevant for further development of HRM: First, until now there is no consistent and centre-wide codified grade architecture for the assessment of staff members regarding grading and promotion. This lacuna leads to misunderstandings and open questions about the fairness of norms within ECMI's staff. Second, the current recruitment practice reveals that existing rules are not consistently implemented. For example, moving loans were inconsistently applied, career perspectives for younger researchers remain rather narrow, and processes of staff recruitment partly reveal incoherent actions. This underlines the relevance of further efforts to ensure the fairness of existing procedures. Third, the managerial instruments envisaged by the evaluation—programme-level cost accounting, stable cluster budgets, and a centre-wide system of key performance indicators related to targets and incentives—appear not to be routine practice. Internal reporting exists, but the transition from compliance and ex post accounting to performance-oriented steering remains incomplete.

#### *ECMI should rethink its organisational structure*

The 2019 evaluation report recommended developing organisational structures to avoid internal communication problems, and to link performance, capabilities, routines, resources, missions and strategy.

Focusing particularly on structural aspects of organisation, the ECMI has realised several achievements: It stabilised workplace relations through the consolidation of its organisational structure. For example, the ECMI has formulated a strategy document for the further development from 2023 to 2028. The rules and procedures of the Executive Board have been revised in 2021. Explicit quorums, voting modalities, minute-keeping, and the director's advisory role were introduced as well. Furthermore, the ECMI institutionalised a Personnel Council and an Equality Unit, materially addressing concerns about transparency, voice, and internal checks.

In sum, the recommendations of the 2019 report may be regarded as mainly implemented. The governance changes provide more reliable channels for internal communication and coordination. It is important to make sure that these channels are used on a regular basis to foster their institutionalisation.

### *Revisiting the current strategy of continued expansion of ECMI activities towards the wider European periphery*

The 2019 report asked for consolidation in the periphery, clarity about the nature of presence, and a retreat from the ambiguous ‘regional office’ label in favour of precise descriptors.

Post-2019 practice converged substantially with that advice. The Georgia office had been closed. Activities in the Ukraine are explicitly treated as project based. A Serbian outlet is treated as contingent, and any connections to the office in Kosovo were discontinued. Particularly for the latter, and after an Equality Unit investigation into a harassment complaint, the ECMI clarified that the Kosovo NGO was independent, and suspended collaboration in late 2020. This response produced legal issues, which have continued until today.

In sum, the recommendations of the 2019 report may be regarded as mainly implemented. However, the ECMI should take care of the integrity of its own brand and take further measures to make clear that, for example, the ECMI Kosovo is no partner organisation (e.g. regarding the logo of the ECMI, the use of the phrase “because minorities matter”).

### *Scrapping the denomination of “regional office” to avoid misconceptions*

The evaluators recommended to rename the geographical “focus areas” of ECMI, and to consider the direct inclusion of regional directors.

The ECMI has undertaken serious efforts to terminate relations with former regional offices (see above). Internal usage of the word “regional office” is replaced with alternative terms, though a full web-footprint verification was beyond the reviewed materials.

In sum, the recommendations of the 2019 report may be regarded as fully implemented.

### *Founders should increase the core funding of ECMI*

The recommendation to strengthen core funding sought to reduce reliance on earmarked project funding and to support the reform efforts, e.g. the implementation of the TV-L framework.

After the 2019 evaluation of ECMI, the resource base grew and surpluses permitted reserve building. Hence, there are clear indications of higher founder contributions, including a Danish top-up in 2022. At the same time, the 50/50 parity principle continued to bind decisions, and the 2024 budget process illustrates fragility when one founder’s public budget lags. The overall verdict is “fully implemented”: stabilisation advanced, attribution between founders and external income remains insufficiently documented, and structural resolution of the mix is incomplete.

In sum, the recommendations of the 2019 report may be regarded as fully implemented. However, the founders may consider establishing an incentive structure to award the ECMI with bonuses for excellent and successful research grants.

**Table 2: Implementation of the recommendations of the 2019 evaluation report**

| <b>Recommendation</b>  | <b>General assessment</b> |
|--|---------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respecting the Mandate</li> </ul>   | mainly implemented        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rethinking the research cluster</li> </ul>  | mainly implemented        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening human resource management and financial management</li> </ul>   | partially implemented     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECMI should rethink its organisational structure</li> </ul>   | mainly implemented        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisiting the current strategy of continued expansion of ECMI activities towards the wider European periphery</li> </ul> | mainly implemented        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scrapping the denomination of “regional office” to avoid misconceptions</li> </ul>  | fully implemented         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Founders should increase the core funding of ECMI</li> </ul>  | fully implemented         |

# 8 Recommendations

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**R1: The ECMI should rethink its cluster structure and develop it further, e.g., as research fields or research programmes, which may help to integrate current activities.**

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For example, while the Danish-German Border Region Cluster has been effective in consolidating the centre's statutory profile, further development is needed to ensure sustainability and long-term impact. The cluster could benefit from deeper integration with the other research clusters, particularly in areas such as governance, civil society, and cultural diversity, to capture the multidimensional nature of minority life in the Danish-German borderland. This could be done by looking at the broader research fields in which the clusters engage.

**R2: The ECMI needs to reconsider recruitment processes, and to clarify the roles as well as responsibilities of the heads of clusters, researchers and other functions at the centre (this should be done in connection with R1).**

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The ECMI needs a transparent logic for staff classification, accompanied by anonymised exemplars, and a clear appeal process. This would reduce uncertainty and strengthen perceptions of fairness without unduly constraining managerial discretion. Decision trails and exception handling should be documented as well as workshops for internal communication and professional staff onboarding or integration are needed. Furthermore, the ECMI needs minimum standards for early integration of young and new researchers. For example, naming an academic mentor, scheduling a first research talk within two months, and co-designing an acquisition plan, could be useful measures that respect autonomy while providing scaffolding. However, this implies re-defining the roles of other members of the ECMI so that they can take on these responsibilities while carrying out their own tasks.

**R3: The ECMI should extend its instruments to measure performance (such as performance reviews) and outreach, particularly because some of the individuals have permanent positions but they should be still competitive with academia.**

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There is a need for clear and explicit formulations of expectations regarding varying career stages. Performance reviews are formally codified yet unevenly implemented; management should provide completion rates, stage-appropriate criteria, and information on follow-up actions. A compact set of indicators could include: the share of outputs in journals within field-relevant quartiles; co-authorship networks and their evolution over time; instances of uptake in policy documents; alumni trajectories into policy and civil society; and measures of network centrality in relevant epistemic communities. These indicators should be used diagnostically, not punitively, to identify

where the centre is learning and where it is stuck. Furthermore, it should be clarified in how far the different task profiles undermine individual publication activities, and what are the specific demands to each researcher. Furthermore, the Centre should increase its international visibility in research communities through recognized publications in international, peer-reviewed academic journals (e.g. Q1 journals) and make sure that adequate internal or external trainings enable researchers to publish in high quality outlets.

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**R4: The ECMI should revise existing incentive structures and develop a precise framework that makes clear which bonuses or rewards can be expected when employees meet their target agreements.**

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It is noticeable that there are few structural incentives at the ECMI to increase publication activities, but they are not applied in a consistent way. Incentives to promote, for example, more publishing could include travel money (for instance, to attend academic conferences) or salary bonuses. Also, no minimum requirements regarding publications appear to be set in place. One model could be, for instance, a goal of three international peer reviewed academic journal articles, computed as a three-year moving average. Furthermore, it may be worth considering how staff can be supported and incentivised to engage more in acquiring external funding.

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**R5: The ECMI should use budgeting as a strategic tool internally, anchoring cluster-level planning in transparent budget frameworks, and calibrating training and travel policies to longer-term capability building rather than short-term austerity logic.**

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A potential response would be to set a floor for training outlays as a share of personnel costs, and to monitor compliance as part of annual planning. Moving from ex post compliance to simple, forward-looking, performance-aware budgeting would close a visible gap without over-engineering a small organisation. Further suggestions include building a liquidity buffer and a small 'war chest' for applications, while also tightening overall staffing levels (some see 1 to 2 FTE as excess) to reduce crowding-out of discretionary categories like travelling.

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**R6: ECMI should re-establish internal coordination and communication formats to connect individuals from all research fields and career levels. Furthermore, structural adjustments need to be made to make sure that the director can perform his research duties.**

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Time-bound regular research meetings, agenda-driven all-staff sessions that reserve space for discussions about research designs and methods are valuable instruments that may help to close internal communication gaps. While the ECMI has parts of these instruments, the staff needs to take care that these coordination meetings become institutionalised. A definition of specific fora and a shared calendar could be a feasible solution, including dates of internal meetings, acquisition deadlines, and conference opportunities that support early-career colleagues in promoting their presence in the academic community. Furthermore, internal processes need to be structured in a way that the director of the ECMI has more possibilities to conduct own research and create a promoting environment for research activities of the staff.

**R7: ECMI should develop consistent external communication procedures, which means that communication activities should become routines and be integrated with research activities. Additionally, communication should be further professionalised to increase outreach and impact of research results.**

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Parts of the external communication activities are still loosely coupled with other activities such as networking or research. However, aligning activities of the ECMI with communication from the outset to maximises visibility and impact.

**R8: The ECMI should continue its activities with the strategic plan.**

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The ECMI needs a strategic discussion about its further development in the scientific community and its role as scientific institution, in politics and its role as policy advisor, but also in the public as information provider to citizens. The integration of a coherent strategy—encompassing both institutional and research dimensions—would provide a guiding framework for operational decision-making, enhance institutional coherence, and improve resilience in the face of fluctuating funding conditions. In this sense, strategy is not merely a matter of defining thematic focus, but also a central mechanism for aligning the ECMI’s diverse resources and activities towards shared, long-term objectives. The challenge is to do so in a manner consonant with academic freedom and the unpredictability of research trajectories. These challenges can be mitigated through clearer career pathways, diversified funding, disciplined project selection, and stronger documentation. Leveraging ECMI’s strengths in convening and networked research will require translating strategy into practical frameworks for HRM, budgeting, and cross-cluster coordination. A formal research strategy could serve not only to focus internal resources but also to strengthen the centre’s positioning in the competitive academic and policy landscape.

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