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REPLIES OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TO THE SPECIAL REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS

“EU CIVIL SERVICE - A FLEXIBLE EMPLOYMENT FRAMEWORK, INSUFFICIENTLY USED TO IMPROVE WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT”

OBSERVATIONS

Parliament's employment framework is greatly influenced by the context in which it operates and its ability to continuously evolve and adapt. From the evolution of job profiles to the digitalization of HR processes and the exploration of the most effective strategies for resource deployment, the institution is on a constant path of modernisation. It continues its work on several priorities to provide Members with all the necessary support during their mandate: enhancing the visibility of Parliament as an employer to attract top-tier talent; implementing recruitment schemes that align HR resources with needs; ensuring geographical and gender balance; providing the necessary support to staff for greater flexibility, well-being, and training; strengthening the ethical framework, and reengineering HR applications.

In this context, Parliament welcomes this audit, which covers the 2019-2023 period, and endeavours to assess whether the employment frameworks of Parliament, the Council, and the European Commission enable them to meet the challenges of staff recruitment and optimise the use of their staff.

The EU institutions use the flexibility in their employment framework to recruit staff but still struggle to attract some profiles

Parliament is currently exploring more efficient ways to reduce its vacancy rate and optimize the use of its human resources. The finite number of posts, combined with an increased workload, has led to resource reallocation, reorganisations, and a greater focus on the necessary skills and competencies. Some profiles, especially in IT and finance, are still hard to reach. The review of job profiles is ongoing and the yearly learning and development plans already present DGs' training requests by skills needed and competences to reinforce. The use of AI in HR and day-to-day operations is also being explored.

Due to EPSO's issues with organising open competitions in recent years, Parliament had to rethink its selection and recruitment planning. With limited expectations for competitions to be organised by EPSO in the short term, Parliament is and will continue publishing open competitions and selection procedures in 2024 and beyond to ensure the availability of laureates, whether for official or temporary staff positions.

To appeal to junior talent, Parliament has developed its traineeship programme: its Schuman Recruitment and Development Programme offers a unique opportunity to young professionals interested in starting a career in our Institution.

The issue of the attractiveness of the Luxembourg site remains a concern for EU institutions based in Luxembourg, including Parliament, hence the creation of an interinstitutional working group. A compensatory allowance for officials and other agents with remuneration below the minimum salary in Luxembourg was approved in April 2021 and a housing allowance for staff residing in Luxembourg is planned for the 2025 budget. However, additional measures should be explored to attract talent for that working place.

The EU institutions do not fully use all the available possibilities to improve workforce management

Parliament has a clear appraisal system with staff reports and merit points that reflect individual performance. There are no specific internal guidelines on how to address "poor performance" since its signs vary and depend on the individual situation of the staff member in question. The issue is however addressed as part of the training courses for managers, some of which are organised in collaboration with the European School of Administration (EuSA). In addition to the merit points system, a number of motivation tools are already in use in Parliament, including, inter alia, more senior roles within the same grade, mentoring newcomers and trainees, challenging assignments, nomination to advisory committees, participation in cross-service or inter-DG projects, opportunities for skills development and training, or advisory roles towards the hierarchy.

As regards internal competitions, Parliament organises them regularly both in lower and higher grades, and applications are considered based on candidates' training and professional experience, irrespective of their function group or grade. This approach is even more justified now, when many AST/SC colleagues are in practice performing the same tasks as others in the AST function group. The AST/SC function group has become increasingly obsolete because of the pace of digitalisation. Temporary staff members can apply for all internal competitions and, if successful, can then be recruited as officials.

Targeting under-represented Member States and under-represented groups such as people with disabilities is a clear priority. Parliament has dedicated substantial outreach efforts to correct the geographical imbalances among its staff. It is the first institution to have launched nationality-specific competitions for Dutch, Austrian and Luxembourgish nationals, in order to have reserve lists of successful candidates from these nationalities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 – Put in place a risk-based policy for the employment of temporary staff

Parliament accepts recommendation 1.

Recommendation 2 – Design targeted job attractiveness action plans

Parliament accepts recommendation 2.

Recommendation 3 – Further develop career and performance frameworks

Parliament accepts recommendation 3.