



Press Release

Luxembourg, 29 October 2020

EU is struggling with recruitment of officials

The European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) should reconsider how it selects new recruits for the EU civil service, according to a new report by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) published today. At a time of reduced staffing and advancing digitalisation, the EU institutions increasingly seek to recruit specialised staff, who can become operational quickly. However, the auditors found EPSO's selection process is not well adapted to small-scale targeted competitions that could attract such specialists to apply for positions in the EU civil service. At the same time, they also point to a number of weaknesses in the generalist selection procedures carried out by EPSO.

EPSO selects future EU civil servants via two main types of competition: large ones for entry-level generalists such as lawyers, economists and translators, and smaller ones for more specific profiles such as IT experts and scientists. It was set up in 2003, at a time when the institutions needed to recruit a large number of people every year due to the 2004-2007 enlargements. However, since 2012, specialist profiles have made up the majority of new staff sought by EU institutions and most of EPSO's competitions have had small reserve lists (i.e. fewer than 30 successful candidates).

"EPSO competitions are the gateway to a career in the EU civil service, but no longer meet the EU institutions' current recruitment needs," said Annemie Turtelboom, the ECA Member responsible for the report. "EPSO must reconsider its selection process and launch a new, faster, more flexible and cost-effective system for selecting specialists, and ramp up its capacity in order to adapt to the fast-changing recruitment environment.

The auditors examined whether EPSO's processes succeeded in attracting and selecting suitable potential recruits for the EU institutions in a timely and cost-effective manner between 2012 and 2018. They found that EPSO's selection process is not adapted to small, targeted competitions. For these, they highlighted that the institutions' own selection processes were generally cheaper and faster than those of EPSO. Rigid procedures and unreliable planning contribute to this situation. The auditors also found that EPSO does not target its communications consistently towards attracting good candidates, and that applicants with strong specialist profiles risk early elimination in psychometric exams before their job-specific knowledge is even tested.

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' special report. The full report is available at eca.europa.eu.

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The auditors also say that EPSO is successful at what it was initially designed to do: supplying the EU institutions with a large number of high-quality potential recruits with generalist profiles through large-scale competitions. These recurrent competitions are planned effectively and attract many high-quality applicants at a low cost.

Nevertheless, the auditors also point to a number of weaknesses EPSO needs to address. Two thirds of its “EU Careers” events take place in Brussels, and EPSO mainly attracts EU nationals already based in Brussels or Luxembourg, many of which are or have been employed in EU institutions. This hampers geographic and socio-economic diversity within EU institutions. EPSO has also not been successful in attracting enough graduates or young professionals to a career in the institutions, as the proportion of candidates under the age of 35 has been decreasing. This was particularly visible in one entry-level competition reviewed by the auditors, where half of the applicants were older than 35. Moreover, EPSO does not monitor the cost of its competitions or measure the institutions’ satisfaction with its recruits from EPSO selection procedures. According to the auditors’ survey among managers, candidates recruited through EPSO were not of a noticeably higher calibre than staff they had recruited through other channels.

The auditors recommend EPSO review its selection process to better meet the changing recruitment needs of EU institutions, introduce a new selection framework for specialists, better coordinate with the EU institutions, measure their satisfaction, monitor the cost of competitions and shorten their duration.

Notes to Editors

Every year, the EU institutions recruit around 1 000 new permanent staff members for long-term careers from more than 50 000 applicants to EPSO’s open competitions, which are highly selective: the average success rate is 2 %. Between 2012 and 2018, 411 000 candidates competed for 7000 positions on EPSO reserve lists: generalist competitions attract tens of thousands applicants and can result in up to 200 successful candidates (cf. specialist competitions result in under 30). EPSO has shortened its procedures from 18 to 13 months on average (cf. average 10-12 months for other international organisations and 8 months for the institutions own procedures), but still exceeds its own 10-month target. The cost per successful candidate is around €24 000: the cost structure is designed to minimise costs for large-scale competitions.

ECA special report 23/2020, “The European Personnel Selection Office: Time to adapt the selection process to changing recruitment needs”, is available in 23 EU languages at eca.europa.eu. It comes a decade after the ECA published its first report on EPSO, and follows the recent reports on the reform of EU staff regulations and staff cuts.

Information on the measures the ECA has taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic can be found [here](#).

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