



COVID - 19

For **R&D**, the protection of
staff's health comes before
everything else

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Dear Madam von der Leyen,
President of the European Commission

In our Open Letters of 31 March ([link](#)) and 21 April ([link](#)), we challenged you regarding the COVID-19 pandemic that is currently raging around the world.

We drew your attention to the political aspect and the role that the European Commission and the European Parliament should play in such context.

We welcome the proactive attitude you have adopted towards the Member States and the driving role that you are trying to give to our institutions. We hope that they will emerge from these events, and we stand by your side to act beyond political declarations.

**Solidarity,
a common value**

Your speech on 16 April before the European Parliament ([link](#)) confirmed our conviction that a Europe based on the solidarity from all to all is the only way to contain this crisis and face the future challenges that lie ahead.

Besides, as the European Parliament has also pointed out, solidarity must be restored within the European Union aiming to do more to rebuild Europe, make it more resilient and more effective; and this imperative is now accompanied by a sense of urgency.

**The staff of the Institution
committed by your side**

As you said in your speech, "a strong soul shines after every storm". To help the European Union face this unprecedented storm and walk out the front door, you know that you can count on the incomparable resource of the Institution, its staff, dedicated body and soul to the project you are carrying out

**A progressive and thoughtful
roadmap to lifting coronavirus
containment measures: we
support the recommendations
that the European Commission
addressed to the Member
States**

Some Member States are gradually preparing to enter the first phase of the **roadmap to lifting coronavirus containment measures**, concerning part of their populations, while others are extending or reinforcing the conditions of these measures. Everyone is already thinking about the "post-crisis", while laying down realistic conditions based on medical expertise still in progress. For us, such a "post-crisis" cannot be envisaged without joint action by Member States and European institutions.

The European roadmap, published on 15 April, that you presented, in cooperation with the President of the European Council ([link](#)), in view of the common and gradual lifting of containment measures, responds perfectly to this pressure; and we are already welcoming the decision to put the health of people at the heart of any recovery mechanism that might be adopted.

**We ask these recommendations to be fully implemented
within all European
Institutions and agencies,
without distinction**

While the implementation of containment measures has clearly shown a lack of coordination between the Institutions, it is now essential that the measures put in place for **lifting them** are closely coordinated and applied within all

Institutions. Otherwise, we will have learned nothing from this crisis, or not much.

In this respect, we naturally ask that the principles laid down and the measures envisaged by the Union are also applied to its staff.

Thus, the roadmap **to lifting coronavirus containment measures** must be subjected to prior and very detailed consultation of the staff

representatives and not simply announced, "for information purposes" after their adoption. This consultation is, moreover, a legal obligation for a number of EU Member States.

To this end, the roadmap to lifting these measures must be carefully thought through, progressive, reversible and must take due account of:

- the capacities of the medical staff of the Institutions, including all the materials recommended by the health authorities to deal with COVID-19
- the vulnerability of certain agents, linked to age, predispositions or known pathologies
- different individual situations, notably the family context of households made up largely of expatriates (children, dependent persons, etc.)
- staff gathering either at meetings or in shared spaces (cafeterias, canteens, etc.)
- the obligation to ensure constant monitoring of the measures put in place, in order to identify and deal without delay with any spotted difficulty
- the work location; it goes without saying that the situations of our colleagues in delegations, for example, require special consideration with the EEAS or their supervisory authorities
- the prevention of psychosocial risks during and after confinement, in particular the risk of burn-out, as specialists point out (please [read](#) ; ["The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence"](#))
- the need to include the Joint Committee on Risk Prevention and Protection at Work in all stages of the lifting of measures.

Before the effective return of any agent to his workplace, it is imperative that the premises are fully disinfected following the commonly used protocols. Thereafter, a regular and appropriate cleaning service will be needed until the end of the crisis.

Telework must remain the rule until the concerted exit from the crisis happens



It is clear that thanks to the dedication of the staff and to the efforts made by the colleagues of the IT services of each institution, whom we would like here to thank warmly, telework has enabled the services to guarantee a very high level of efficiency.

Thus, until the final exit from the crisis, teleworking must remain the default working method.

Nonetheless, as recommended by several Member States as well as by certain private companies and considering the imperatives that we have stated above to preserve staffs

health, it is important to implement a **scheme of alternate telework** (every other week) until the end of the crisis, for staff whose physical presence in the office would be considered necessary.

Quality of life at work is essential during and after the end of coronavirus containment measures...

This health crisis will have the merit of having highlighted what **R&D** has always denounced concerning the working conditions of staff, attached to the need to set up a genuine staff policy aimed at the well-being at work.

The Commission, as an employer, has the duty to fulfil its obligation of safety towards its staff (Directive 89/391 of 12 June 1989). Several of our colleagues complain of an imbalance between their private and professional life during this crisis as well as of an excessive workload. As the Institution is at the heart of the action, its staff must redouble their efforts to meet these high expectations. The staff has always shown that they are ready to make an extra effort when necessary ([staff survey results](#)) but this should not be an obstacle to their physical and psychological well-being.

Under these conditions there can be no question of going to open space ...

This health crisis should serve as an experience and encourage us to review and rethink our workspaces. The European Commission has adopted on 16 October 2019 the communication "[Workplace of the future](#)" C(2019)7450", which deals with using open space under certain conditions. It is understood that this communication should be reviewed in the light of these events.

R&D has always prioritized the mental and physical health of the staff, especially when it comes to workspaces and the attempt to generalize open spaces organized ever so awkwardly by the Director General of DG BUDG ("[Workplace of the future: secession from DG BUDG?; open space file](#)").

On the one hand, the Brussels CPPT (Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work) must play an essential role in this phase - as it is already the case in other Commission's sites - and we call on you to ensure that this committee can return to fully accomplish its missions.

On the other hand, in order to protect the health of our colleagues, DG HR must also fully play its role of coordination and verification regarding the implementation by the services of all the measures that will be introduced to lifting coronavirus containment measures.

While it is obvious that the specific requirements of a service must be duly taken into account, the fact remains that when it comes to protecting the health of our colleagues, there can be no question of accepting that each manager indulges in his/her own vision of the measures to phase out confinement.



To avoid such drifts, the instructions decided at the central level must be clear and their proper execution by all the services must be ensured.

Thus, concerning the implementation of measures lifting of containment measures, there can be no question of once again attending the painful lottery which was organized by the management of flexibility days on the occasion of the Easter holidays... each service having done whatever they wanted ... while the instructions of DG HR were yet for once clear!

Indeed, while DG HR had given clear and unequivocal explanations concerning the possibility for colleagues to request the flexibility days with no need for prior authorization, alongside came flawless examples such as the information provided to DG EAC In this regard ([link](#)), other services considered that they

could simply prohibit all their whole staff from having the same possibilities. Still, others claimed the prior agreement of the head of unit, who often refused it.

It is absolutely necessary to avoid that, following the instructions which will be decided to phase-out confinement , the institution engages in this same cacophony.

Faithful to its constant constructive attitude, **R&D** presents a complete package of proposals.

To this end, **we have designed concrete and thematic measures** based on ideas and opinions that many colleagues have been kind enough to share with us.

We reiterate our commitment to be by your side and alongside the staff of all the Institutions to get out of this crisis and build the future of our Institutions and our professional practices based on sound lessons learned in due course, timely, to take advantage of these troubled times.

Cristiano Sebastiani,

President



Suggestions for a gradual, structured and reversible resumption of work on the premises of the Institutions

Structural approach

- Identify tasks and activities, beyond the critical tasks, which require rapid in situ takeover and allow for alternating telework
- Favour the familial and medical contexts of colleagues (e.g.: young children, necessary assistance for vulnerable people) and allow them to continue teleworking

Actions to prevent the spread of the virus

- Perform diagnostic tests to all staff before returning to the workplace, regularly (at least once a week)
- Quarantine people diagnosed or presenting mild symptoms, also after the holidays
- Maintain an accurate attendance register to guarantee an appropriate reaction in the event of confirmed infection of one of the staff members who has resumed her/his activity in the premises
- Establish a framework for contact tracing and for launching an effective alert to all people who are in direct contact in the workplace in the event of a COVID-19 contamination occurrence

On-site reception

- Ensure control points at the entrances of buildings by the medical service or any other service with due training to measure the fever of staff and ask for symptoms.
- Provide reinforced hygiene tools to each colleague: 2 masks per day, gloves, hydro-alcoholic gel, cleaning wipes with hydro-alcoholic solution, dustbins dedicated to masks and gloves
- Reduce the number of entry and exit points, in coordination with the DS, to allow medical or other assigned staff to control and screen, not to disperse

Ensure the same safety and hygiene conditions for security personnel

Prevention of psychosocial risks

- Set up a psychological counselling unit
- Strengthen the psychosocial service by bringing in psychologists trained in the management of health crises and the traumas resulting from them
- Avoid imposing and / or recommending taking leave during the confinement period
- Respect the work-life balance during telework (set up clear limits on working time without spill over into evenings, weekends, etc.)
- Ensure optimal communication in the services with a reasonable sending of emails during the days of COVID-19 containment within the respect of the workload of the staff

Ensure the role of the medical service

- Strengthen the medical service recruiting additional staff to enable it to perform its role of prevention, monitoring and controlling of the virus
- Provide it with all the necessary equipment recommended by specialists and in sufficient quantity so that it can be effective and adequately circulated to the staff
- Set up screening tests, as soon as they are available, for all staff before the lifting of social distancing measures
- Voluntarily test staff immunity to the virus and act accordingly

As soon as it is available again, the catering service should be optimized and strengthened

In the event of the resumption of the catering service and in coordination with the canteen and cafeteria providers:

- Provide staff assigned to these services with all the necessary equipment recommended by specialists so that they can protect themselves and do their work in complete safety
- Strengthen the catering service with temporary staff, in order to:
 - ⇒ Establish wider time slots for opening these services by imposing a maximum number of people per space
 - ⇒ Ensure an online reservation system that would manage the flow while respecting the requirements of social distancing
 - ⇒ Plan, for the first days of recovery, an ordering system for hot dishes that would be delivered to offices

Indoor air quality

- Stop air conditioning, or, should this not be possible, ensure faultless control of air conditioning until the end of the crisis to avoid the spread of the virus (please read the study [COOutbreak Associated with Air Conditioning in Restaurant, Guangzhou, China, 2020](#))
- Replace the air conditioning filters
- Disinfect the ventilation channels

Optimizing and strengthening the premises cleaning service

In coordination with cleaning providers:

- Provide staff assigned to these services with all the necessary equipment recommended by specialists so that they can protect themselves and do the work in complete safety
- Ensure the disinfection of premises before the staff returns to the buildings (including common kitchens and refrigerators) ; this must be uniformly applied in all buildings of all institutions, offices, and agencies
- Ensure reinforced and regular cleaning of all contact surfaces

IT Tools and connection

- Ensure the maintenance of a full IT capacity to guarantee the teleworking structure, in coordination with DG DIGIT
- Organize distance training regarding the use of IT tools, to ensure an equivalent level of IT skills between staff
- Identify, with the help of the hierarchy, the needs of computer equipment and printers for people in telework
- Maintain the optimized connectivity conditions offered by the institution's service providers (e.g. unlimited calls to local / national numbers and unlimited data for a better remote connection)
- Apply, as DG HR already announced to intend to do so, article 71 of the Staff Regulations providing that staff members are entitled to reimbursement of the costs they incurred in exercising or during the exercise of their functions

Working methods

- Maintain telework as the predominant way of working, especially for vulnerable people as defined by the medical science which includes: pregnant women, those caring for dependent relatives and / or young children or children in school until the schools open, as well as people who have to go to their workplace by public transport
- Allow staff to travel and telework to and from the country of origin / country of residence of relatives who require daily assistance, care or personal care according to the arrangements made by the country
- Maintain the rules for automatic recording of hours worked according to the rules of telework
- Maintain tele / videoconferences for units and sectors in order to keep all staff members at the same level of information thus maintaining team cohesion
- Organize meetings exclusively via tele / videoconferences
- Postpone missions to Autumn 2020, if conditions allow it
- Waive reasonably the limiting rule of 12 annual leave days carry-over for the following year; a harmonized case-by-case treatment by the hierarchy should be considered
- Set up a system alternating telework and face-to-face work, every second week, for staff returning to work, as is envisaged in many public sectors in the Member States
- Ensure that there is only one person per shared office for colleagues who have to work face-to-face
- Redouble vigilance for staff working in open space by ensuring that social distancing measures are well respected by applying the most protective standards established in this area as well as hygiene measures when tasks require a presence in the premises of the Institutions, and / or, if possible, to assign staff to an individual office
- Organize the operation of care facilities for young children and children attending school for staff whose face-to-face work is required / compulsory

*Take care good of yourselves
&
your loved ones*



