

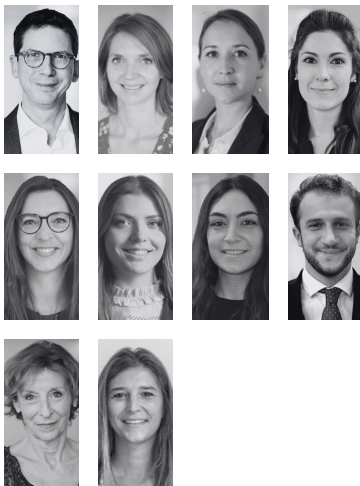


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EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

The 100th issue of **the Offici@l**!

For over ten years, our team has been delighted to engage with EU officials and agents through this medium almost every month. Your loyalty has motivated us to continue this adventure. Your feedback encourages us to constantly improve our content.

An anniversary is above all an opportunity to look to the future, and that is what we offer you in this issue with three short reflections on the future of the European public service. We hope that these reflections will spark debate and that we can gather your comments to discuss in future issues.

The first reflection is dedicated to the evolution towards open work spaces and teleworking. This evolution changes interactions between colleagues and the way of communicating, and highlights the importance of creating flexible and inclusive environments.

The second reflection is dedicated to the gradual disappearance of competitive exams and the increase in contractual and temporary agents. These changes raise crucial questions about access and equity within the European public service. Is it moving towards the models of international public service, without competitions or fixed positions?

Finally, the third reflection examines the impact of artificial intelligence, which could eliminate certain positions, thus transforming the required skills and roles within institutions.

Onward to issue 200! But above all, remember, this newsletter is yours, and we are more than ever listening to your suggestions and observations. Write to us: theofficial@daldewolf.com.

The DALDEWOLF team

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Teleworking and open space - Changes in the workspace

I. Teleworking

Teleworking is a crucial issue for the future of the European public service. It raises many questions about the very nature of work, the exercise of different professions, the organization of working time, opportunities and constraints, and the rights and obligations of European officials. Moreover, its intensification in EU institutions, bodies and agencies following the Covid-19 pandemic has also highlighted the risks it can pose in terms of health and safety at work.

Faced with these questions and risks, regulating the use of teleworking quickly became necessary, even indispensable. The decision C(2022) 1788 final adopted by the Commission on March 24, 2022, on working time and hybrid work set the basic rules and principles in this area. One of these principles is the voluntary nature of teleworking: except in exceptional cases, European public service personnel must have the full choice to use teleworking or not and have the right to go to the office every day without prior authorization, even when authorized to telework. However, there must be enough available places in the offices within the various buildings housing EU institutions, which is not always guaranteed, especially since some institutions, like the Commission, have implemented a particularly restrictive building management policy in recent years, notably by drastically reducing the number of offices.

While teleworking is generally appreciated, it is not necessarily because it increases well-being or efficiency at work but because it allows better time management, particularly better reconciliation between professional and private life. However, this advantage of teleworking sometimes paradoxically goes hand in hand with an increase in working time and overtime, thus questioning the balance between private and professional life. This has led to a discussion on the need for a real "right to disconnect," a right that is not yet really guaranteed within the European public service.

II. Open space

Sharing one's office has increasingly become the norm: fewer officials have an individual space, favouring collective spaces like open space.

From individual offices to open space through teleworking: how to work better together?

Open space is this open floor where work places and offices are no longer separated by partitions. It was often initially presented as promoting collective work, enhancing creativity, and allowing skills to be hybridized. The Covid-19 pandemic raised several questions about this new way of working and favoured the development of teleworking.

In an open space, one becomes somewhat a "work nomad," moving according to availability. This configuration can bring satisfaction in terms of exchanges, team solution building, but the official may also feel "alone with others." The others then bring nuisance factors that constantly force people to seek quieter places, meeting rooms to concentrate. However, the workspace has a significant impact on well-being, and according to studies, satisfaction drops when officials work in open space. Thus, a certain dualization in work has emerged between those who have a fixed office where they can root themselves and take possession of the space and work, and others who work in open space, which can represent a real uprooting in work for some.

This is the context in which teleworking emerged during the pandemic: these hassles that open space work could generate and this inequality between those who had a good office to concentrate and those who were in the middle of their colleagues and perhaps had more difficulty doing so. This partly explains the success of teleworking, a practice increasingly widespread.

However, it should not be overlooked that the emergence of open space and a more widespread practice of teleworking has also created a more flexible and inclusive work environment that tends to improve officials' well-being by adapting to their needs, integrating more varied profiles, promoting more direct contacts, and providing an accessible work environment for all.¹

¹ This note has been written in the light of the November 2024 report (issue no. 49) of the Groupe de Réflexion sur l'avenir du Service Public Européen (GRASPE).

Disappearing competitions and increasing the number of EU contract and temporary agents: a necessary paradigm shift?

I. Current status :

Thanks to their employment framework, EU institutions attract, recruit, and retain highly qualified and multilingual staff, selected from the widest possible geographical base among citizens of member states. They determine the jobs they need and update the skills and skills lacking within their staff, applying flexible recruitment procedures according to their needs. The working conditions and employment benefits offered are competitive and allow institutions to attract and retain candidates from all member states for all job profiles.

This is the seductive vision of the European public service! A dream for many European citizens, often envied, but is it still as wonderful?

The problems related to competitions organized for all European institutions by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) have become a major issue for European recruitment policy. As noted in the Special Report of the European Court of Auditors on the future of the European public service, EPSO has faced a series of problems following the Covid-19 pandemic, which severely disrupted the organization of in-person tests, and the accumulated delays have not been fully resolved. EPSO had to suspend or cancel certain competitions while developing a new competition model, whose deployment was hampered by IT problems. Thus, according to the Court of Auditors' report, from 2019 to 2023, fewer competitions were launched (35% decrease) and completed (38% decrease) than in the previous five years, reducing the number of candidates available to meet recruitment needs.

The Special Report of the European Court of Auditors notes that the difficulties encountered by EPSO have resulted in increased recruitment of temporary or contractual agents. While in principle,

the European public service was largely composed of officials, in accordance with the principle that an independent administration relies on agents whose employment is stable and protected against unfair dismissals, the number of staff under fixed-term contracts (contractual and temporary agents) has increased significantly in recent years, representing 34% of staff in 2023. Employing temporary agents offers greater flexibility for European institutions (they are easier to recruit, for shorter periods, and under more easily terminable contracts), but this practice carries a significant risk of loss of acquired knowledge, job instability, and a risk for the continuity of activities of the concerned DGs.

These various findings are notably reflected in the recommendations formulated in the Special Report of the European Court of Auditors, which establishes that the time has come to adapt the selection process to evolving recruitment needs. Although overall, it was concluded that the competitions organized by EPSO had allowed institutions to meet their needs for recruiting agents with a generalist profile, they were less efficient and effective for recruiting specialists.

II. Parallels with other international organisations

Recruitment by competition, as practiced within European institutions, remains an exception in the international landscape. Most international organizations prefer procedures for recruiting their officials that are more flexible, similar to those currently applied for recruiting temporary or contractual agents of the EU.

Most international organizations, such as the United Nations, OSCE, OECD, or NATO, adopt a recruitment process based on the publication of job offers corresponding to specific positions. This procedure relies on precise criteria, followed by a pre-selection of candidates based on their qualifications and experience. Then, various online

tests, questionnaires, technical assessments, and interviews refine the selection.

One frequently used tool is the "roster," a list of pre-selected candidates following a recruitment process for a type of position. This system aims to allow international organizations to quickly respond to their needs for qualified personnel. This practice, initially rooted in the UN system, tends to become widespread in other international institutions, offering a more flexible and rapid alternative for recruitment.

What future for the European civil service?

The future of the European civil service seems destined to involve a modernization of its recruitment methods, particularly in light of the challenges faced by EPSO, as highlighted by the report of the European Court of Auditors, and the development of international practices.

The implementation of a roster system, constituting a pool of pre-selected candidates, would enable faster and more targeted recruitment. This approach could address the difficulties highlighted in the Court of Auditors' report, particularly in terms of selection times. In addition, it would offer greater flexibility, as is currently the case with the recruitment of temporary agents, as selection procedures would no longer be constrained by a fixed inter-institutional timetable and could be organized according to actual needs.

This system could be part of a mixed model combining competitions and oral interviews,

guaranteeing both transparency and efficiency. The European agencies already apply a similar system, with reserve lists of candidates retained at the end of the selection process.

Another possibility, already implemented and mentioned in the Court of Auditors' report, is the increasing organization of internal competitions to retain temporary staff, whose numbers are constantly increasing.

Do these developments mark the end of the competition as the main means of access to the European civil service? While it is undeniable that the modernization of recruitment to the European institutions has become a necessity, particularly in view of the difficulties encountered by EPSO, the competition remains an essential tool for guaranteeing impartiality and equal opportunities. However, its lack of flexibility and the slowness of its procedures make it less and less suited to the specific and urgent needs of the institutions.

The future of the competition as the main selection method will therefore depend on EPSO's ability to reform and modernize its processes. Failing this, the European institutions may be forced to adopt more flexible recruitment methods, marking a significant change in the landscape of the European civil service. In such a case, the price to be paid could be the progressive abandonment of the principles that have allowed the European civil service, from its inception, to provide an independent, transparent and efficient service to the Union's citizens.

AI in the civil service - Reflection by the Court of Justice and ChatGPT for French civil servants

The French civil service is about to take a new step in the digital era with the introduction of a conversational agent inspired by ChatGPT.

This tool will soon be available to the 5.7 million public agents in France. Developed in collaboration with French companies like Mistral, this conversational software will allow officials to

conduct research, write letters, synthesize documents, and even translate texts. This initiative is part of a broader strategy by the French government to enhance the use of artificial intelligence in public services. In addition to the conversational agent, the government plans to invest in infrastructures such as data centers to support the development of AI in France.

In reality, the European Commission has had its own artificial intelligence tool since 2017: **eTranslation**. This advanced automatic translation service allows documents to be translated into all official EU languages, as well as several other languages, while keeping all processed data within the Commission's firewalls. In addition to translating texts, eTranslation can also be used as an extension on websites, facilitating access to content in the user's preferred language.

Besides eTranslation, several other AI tools are being developed or already used in the EU public service. For example, virtual assistants and chatbots are deployed to answer citizens' questions and provide real-time information. Here are some of these tools:

- **eBriefing**: Generation of reports from document sets in official or general styles.
- **eReply**: Assistance in preparing responses to correspondences, requests, and other inquiries.
- **eSummary**: Quick summary of the main content of long documents.
- **Multilingual Post**: Short translations in multiple languages at once.
- **Speech-to-Text**: Full transcription or subtitling of uploaded media.
- **Natural Language Processing Tools (NLP)**: Tools for anonymization, classification, and named entity recognition.

These tools are designed to improve the efficiency and accuracy of public services in linguistic management. They are accessible to EU institutions, public administrations, SMEs, academia, NGOs, and projects under the Digital Europe program.

However, for these tools to be fully effective, it is essential that public officials and agents are trained in their use. By training and developing new tools, agents can not only improve their efficiency but also avoid the risk of their jobs disappearing. Indeed, human intelligence remains an indispensable asset for making artificial intelligence work optimally and ethically.

In conclusion, artificial intelligence opens up a vast field of possibilities for modernizing and optimizing public services. However, it is imperative to master the inherent risks and ensure that public officials and agents are adequately trained and actively involved in the development and use of these technologies. Their human intelligence remains an indispensable asset for fully exploiting the benefits of AI and ensuring quality public service.

AI is an ally of agents and officials, provided they are trained to avoid being overwhelmed!