



New teleworking guidelines – More empathy is needed

Brussels, 17 June 2020

The Director General for HR has just announced that new guidelines for teleworking will soon be formally issued.

In essence, there will be three significant changes in comparison with those in force: the flexibility for services to organise shifts, an increase in the number of staff allowed to be simultaneously present at work, and certain flexibility regarding the possibility of teleworking from abroad (not only from a short distance from Brussels).

Subject to further scrutiny, the greater flexibility regarding shifts and staff presence would appear not to pose, in general, any serious difficulty, particularly in the light of the fact that presence still remains largely voluntary at this stage.

However, **the provisions regarding teleworking from the place of origin contained in the present draft guidelines are unnecessarily restrictive and reveal lack of empathy.**

The draft does indicate a couple of specific cases where teleworking from the place of origin will be granted as an exception to the general rule - telework from abroad remains in principle forbidden. It also states that **teleworking from the place of origin can be granted in “exceptional circumstances”**, giving examples that relate to quarantine and family support for child care.

Teleworking from the place of origin would be granted for **up to two weeks, in combination with leave, between 15 June and 15 September.**

Union Syndicale considers that, beyond those mentioned in the draft guidelines, there are many other instances which can be considered exceptional in the present context and that should constitute valid grounds for teleworking from the place of origin.

That is the case, for example, of those **colleagues that have been and are still home alone**, longing to return to their country of origin to be with family and who would like to extend their presence among loved ones combining holiday with a short period of distance teleworking.

The same goes for **colleagues that given the limitation or absence of flights, face long drives or other means of not-so-fast transportation to reach faraway places of origin**, often taking two days or more. They may also want to extend their presence at

home combining distance teleworking with holiday before their long return journey.

The above are just a couple of examples; there are certainly others that can be considered exceptional circumstances for the purpose of granting teleworking from the place of origin.

Union Syndicale believes that it should ultimately be the **line manager that determines whether distance teleworking should be granted** in the light of service needs and the exceptional grounds for the request. Once the request is granted there is **no need for further bureaucratic validation** at Director-General level as currently foreseen by DG HR. **Union Syndicale** believes that DG HR must give managers **clear guidance and ample latitude to interpret “exceptional circumstances” in the broadest, most caring and understanding possible way.**

Furthermore, in view of the fact that **new rules and amendments to existing rules on teleworking and leave** are de facto being developed, **Union Syndicale will formally ask for concertation with DG HR** as foreseen in the Agreement on Relations Between the European Commission and the Trade Unions and Staff Associations.

**The Executive committee
Union Syndicale Bruxelles**

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