

FLASH
SEPTEMBER
2020



Union
Syndicale
Fédérale
Consilium

Brussels, 2 September 2020

Deconfinement and telework, in particular telework from abroad



The administration at the Council managed the impact of the lockdown on our working methods with intelligence and flexibility, and did a better job than other institutions. **Union Syndicale** thanks the administration for showing such good judgment.

The [communication](#) of 28 August from the Director-General of ORG seems to point to a gradual lifting of restrictions/'de-confinement'. However **Union Syndicale** has a number of questions in that respect.

The number of new cases recorded daily in the Brussels Region is rising again, to the extent that the region has been classified as a **red zone** by many Member States. Travel to Brussels is therefore strongly discouraged and stringent quarantine measures are applicable.

How, then, can it be reasonable to encourage colleagues to come back regularly to work in the GSC offices? Is there not a stronger case right now to insist on teleworking? And would it not be better to continue with teleworking from abroad rather than requiring returns from green zones to a red zone? More

generally, how does the Council envisage a return to normal business whilst ministers and delegates are being advised to avoid the Brussels region?

Union Syndicale is particularly concerned to read in the same communication that the exceptional rules/'derogation' relating to telework from abroad are ending this Friday, 4 September. We do not understand the reasoning behind this change. We call for the extension of these exceptional provisions - and certainly at least as long as Member States consider Brussels to be a high-risk area.

We had previously read in one of the COVID-19 updates that the Appointing Authority intended to impose a limit of twice per career on the possibility to telework occasionally from abroad ([new agreement](#) between the unions and the Appointing Authority that entered into force on 1 February).

In response to inquiries by the unions, the Director-General of ORG confirmed that this was the Appointing Authority's intention.

Union Syndicale does not accept this unilateral departure from the agreement, which is not in the interest of our institution. Reintroducing an artificial barrier makes little sense. The future will be one of **hybrid working** practices, combining presence in our buildings, missions and telework from various locations. Our colleagues will achieve optimum productivity when they are allowed to carry out their duties in a flexible way, with their preferences taken into account.

Promotions in 2020



Owing to COVID-19, decisions on promotions for 2020 have to wait until September this year. Their effect will, of course, still be backdated to 1 January.

All the same, the Appointing Authority has again proposed to the Staff Committee that not all the promotion possibilities should be used. That position is at odds with the Staff Regulations. The Appointing Authority argues that applying the Staff Regulations in full would result in promotions occurring 'too fast',

particularly at grades AD 12 and 13. As a 'sweetener', a small share of the lost promotions would be redistributed among lower grades, using a questionable method with no legal basis. Our SC and AST colleagues would hardly benefit from this measure: they face having their careers slowed down.

Compounding this slowdown in careers is the fact that the 2019 appointment of 'senior administrators' took place in... wait for it... April 2020, and with no retroactivity. **Union Syndicale** requests that this not be used as a pretext to skip the 2020 exercise, which would have the effect of further slowing AD careers. As a solution, we propose that, in future, the appointments be made in the first three months of each year.

Public transport



The FFPE and **Union Syndicale** [have asked](#) the Appointing Authority to negotiate revised rules for the reimbursement of public transport costs. The negotiations will start in September.

The climate – and air pollution – crisis requires us to immediately redouble our efforts to cut emissions. The GSC should set a good example.

Moreover, the sweeping shift to telework since the start of the COVID-19 crisis is likely to usher in *hybrid* ways of working, with staff moving between different places of work. This will radically change our transport needs. We therefore need flexible and non-bureaucratic solutions to further incentivise staff to leave their cars at home.

Electoral rules



The next Staff Committee elections will be in March 2021. For a number of years now, the electoral system in place has awarded around 90 % of the seats to the winning list for obtaining 40 % to 45 % of the votes cast. This met with a strong reaction among staff in 2019, with the majority of those who voted not feeling represented in the Staff Committee.

For this reason, **Union Syndicale** and the FFPE have tabled a proposal to the Staff Committee for a change in the rules to limit the number of candidates each voter can choose to 18 (instead of 30). This would ensure that stable majorities could always be formed, while guaranteeing a more proportionate number of seats for the lists that did not win.

We believe it is vital to allow electronic voting, because otherwise the two-thirds quorum will never be met in the current circumstances (with only a fraction of staff present in the office).

We are waiting for R&D's definitive response to these proposals.

Union Syndicale will submit this proposal to the General Meeting of Staff shortly.

Recruitment



The unions will meet the Appointing Authority again on 11 September to review recruitment policies.

Union Syndicale agrees with the objective of filling vacant posts more quickly.

We also want to avoid jeopardising the fundamental principle of equal access to civil service jobs for all citizens.

Union Syndicale would like staff representatives to play a greater role in recruitment processes, on an equal footing (as with the balanced composition of the joint selection boards for competitions).

Internal competitions are a tool that we would like to see improved, to give staff a genuine means of developing their careers in the GSC.

The top priority is to make sure that employing people on a precarious basis becomes the exception again. The GSC has recruited only 40 officials so far in 2020. At the same time, 95 new temporary or contract staff have joined our ranks. In the long term, this trend will destroy the European civil service.

Permanent duty = permanent post.

2020 adjustment of salaries and pensions



It seems certain that the exception or moderation clauses will apply to our salary and pension adjustments this year, given the sharp economic downturn in Europe. Looking at the provisional figures, we expect that the moderation clause will be applied in its most stringent form. In other words:

- the (fairly low) rate of inflation in Belgium and Luxembourg will be applied to our salaries and pensions, with retroactive effect from 1 July as usual, giving us a very small nominal increase (and hence zero in real terms);
- the evolution of our national colleagues' purchasing power will not be factored in until the EU's GDP has returned to its pre-COVID level.

We can also expect our pension contributions to go up, as is usual after years with real-term salary increases (which was the case in 2018 and 2019).

All told, the increase for pensioners this year will be zero in real terms, with staff in active employment receiving zero too, but in nominal terms. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information:

union.syndicale@consilium.europa.eu

The Union Syndicale Team at your service



If you think our work is worthwhile, [why not join us](#)? Together we're stronger!!