

TAO-THE INDEPENDENTS SHEDS LIGHT ON THE CONTRACT AGENTS' 2023 MOBILITY EXERCISE

**Here are the results of TAO's EU-survey
along with some proposals**

Brussels, 15 November 2023

Following alarming testimonies **TAO** received on the 2022 Contract Agent's mobility exercise (called 'rotation' when it is for Officials), we published the article [\(A Contract Agent Mobility Exercise odyssey\)](#) on 27 June 2022. Some of the accounts narrated to us during that period were truly worrying, even tragic, and it is not a secret that the way in which the mobility and rotation is organised and implemented in EU Delegations can be existentially devastating. We therefore decided to dig further into the process.

Before addressing the Institution, **TAO-The Independents** decided to take a responsible **evidence-based approach** through a staff survey on the 2023 mobility exercise to which more than half of the colleagues in the final mobility list replied. The findings further confirm the worrying situation:

- **80%** of colleagues consider they suffered '**significant stress**' for several months because of the fear to the consequences caused by dysfunctionalities during the mobility exercise.
- After two rounds of allocations of new posts, **47%** of colleagues were not assigned **any of their five postings of preference!**

- **Over 50%** of colleagues are **dissatisfied** with the mobility exercise.

In addition to the above, a vast majority of colleagues have demonstrated that the ‘principle of alternating positions according to the difficulty of living conditions (ICV)’ was not applied.

Furthermore, during the second round of allocations, only some colleagues had access to the list of remaining posts! Why not all or no one? How come just some?

As for the removal procedures, hardly half of the colleagues are satisfied with it.

TAO-the Independents suggests the following to prevent what some define as an “annual tragedy”:

- **More transparency and accountability:** a major grievance the of not knowing ‘why?’, ‘how?’ decisions are made and hence the pervasive sensation of being treated unfairly. To remediate this we suggest:
 - Greater efforts in genuinely aligning job-descriptions with actual expectations from the EU-Delegation and that these correspond to the interview competencies assessed.
 - Members of the panel should declare their relationships to the candidates and any potential conflict of interest in the same way we do for the evaluation committees in procurement procedures.
 - Evaluators are regularly approached by colleagues recommending candidates and/or they may ask for the opinion of former colleagues. Therefore, the use of references for the evaluation should be structured by guidelines and documented in the evaluation report.
 - The evaluation report should ideally be shared with candidates not just as a matter of transparency and accountability but also as reciprocity for the effort candidates put in preparing for interviews. Candidates are colleagues who deserve and will benefit from feedback that can help them grow. The panel may still keep certain aspects confidential, but those confidential

aspects should be shared with a staff representative who should sign a commitment to keep this confidential (but under scrutiny).

- The presence as observer of a local staff committee representative should not just be recommended but compulsory. This should play an important role as a guarantor of transparency throughout the entire process.
- The **principle of alternating postings in terms of the level of difficulty of living conditions** may be difficult to implement since the mobility exercise is a complex puzzle to solve. Either other forms of compensation are granted for those who against their will end up in hardship countries again or, if it is maintained, it should then be implemented. This may require organising interviews in two rounds: first with those in hardship countries only. And only once those in hardship countries have been assigned a new position, should the rest be interviewed.
- **Conditions in hardship countries:** The living difficulty indemnity (ICV) ranging from 0 to 40% is not a sufficient incentive for those colleagues who end up risking their lives for work and compromising the health of their families. If the ICV ranged from 0 to 80% it would be more appealing for certain colleagues to apply to hardship posts. Currently, many end up in a second, third or even a fourth hardship country coerced by fear of losing their job.
- In the **allocation of posts**, the matching should be undertaken solely considering the candidate's expressed preferences and the EU Delegations ranking of interviewed candidates. Third party influences should be totally censored such as, *inter alia*, Cabinet members lobbying for their friends.
- Allowing Contract Agents to voluntarily take **more than the current limit of one year of sabbatical off work** (so-called *congé de convenance personnelle-CCP*), would grant more flexibility in the mobility exercise. Officials can take up to 12 years. The current SR do not provide for this possibility, but more flexibility should be found along those terms.
- **Increasing the number of posts in Brussels for CAs from EU Delegations keeping their indefinite contract** should be a target for this Institution to allow for an overall staff efficiency, and in turn

facilitating the transfer of CAs from HQ to shift to EU Delegations would help in filling up vacancies and avoid sending CAs to countries where they do not wish to live.

- Ultimately, **if CAs were to become Officials**, as they should since they undertake Officials core tasks at all levels and not temporary ones, **most of the above problems would be solved** because there would be significantly less fragmentation in terms of staff categories, hence multiplying the opportunities for mobility. It will seem shocking to hear for CAs that the relevance of competencies of Official candidates to EU Delegations is generally lower than of CAs and this will be more and more the case as CAs continue to gain more experience in Delegations relative to Officials.

TAO-The Independents will continue monitoring the mobility exercises very closely. We will present these constructive and doable solutions ASAP to the administration of DG INTPA and DG NEAR and to the Human Resources DG. We believe there are alternatives to the current system, which can spare our colleagues and their families from suffering such unnecessary stressful and painful experience every 4 or 6 years.

Finally, should you have any suggestion to improve the Mobility System or you should want to share with us your experience and thoughts please write to us at OSP-TAO-AFI@ec.europa.eu (for which we thank you!!!)

Your **TAO-The Independents** team



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