

TAO-The Independents

ELECTORAL PROGRAM 2025

For a competent, permanent and independent civil service in the face of Europe's challenges in a changing landscape with the advent of AI, we encourage critical thinking, protect freedom of speech for EU officials and foster the ability to think out of the box. Impermeable to dogmas and intellectual conformism, refusing to take things at face value.

NEXT GENERATION TELEWORK	1
JSIS/SICKNESS INSURANCE FUND	3
JOB PROFILES NOT ELIGIBLE FOR TELEWORK	5
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE	5
STAFF CATEGORIES: AD, AST, AST-SC, AT/CA	6
HR MANAGEMENT	12
NURSERY NURSES	12
DRIVERS	13
CATERING SERVICES AT THE HEART OF STAFF	13
PARENTAL LEAVE MUST BE EQUATED TO MATERNITY LEAVE	15
TALENT 55 + PROGRAMME: FOR THE FULL USE IN THE BENEFIT OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE IN-HOUSE EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE	15
EUROPEAN SCHOOLS: CHALLENGES AND URGENT NEED FOR ACTION	16
MOBILITY TO AND FROM THE OFFICE: WE NEED TO "MOVE"	17

NEXT GENERATION TELEWORK

The European Commission must take stock of the teleworking experience which has become a standard work pattern, defining the direction of travel for any modern public administration. We are at a crossroads and must evolve, to make our workplace more attractive, efficient, and healthy.

TAO has been following and analyzing the evolution of telework for years. From the frontlines, we have championed the paradigm shift, prodded Management to adapt to changing times, denounced the 'one size fits all' *hotdesking model*, championed telework from abroad, pioneered the right to disconnect, actively promoted a model whereby not all the staff members must be physically present. **TAO takes a keen interest in teleworking trends, their potential and their health and safety implications at the workplace.**

TAO calls on our administration to develop the teleworking model based on three principles

- **EFFICIENCY** – work performance based on flexibility.
- **EMPATHY**– staff as human beings not a factor of production.
- **HEALTH & SAFETY** - precautionary principle and duty of care.

TAO calls on the European Commission to integrate the following priorities:

1. **EFFECTIVE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT.** This fundamental right of social law must be autonomously framed and monitored to materialize.
2. **MORE TELEWORK FROM ABROAD.** 10 working days is insufficient. TAO proposes, following a public petition, 5 working days per month. For a maximum of 60 working days per year, not combined with annual leave, plus 5 additional days combined with annual leave. A reasonable compromise respecting the integrity of our European civil service, legally on point and a vote of confidence in our staff.
3. **URGENT IMPROVEMENT OF WORKING TOOLS.** Active promotion of good sound hygiene with approved microphones so that videoconferencing can occupy its rightful place as a safe, efficient, and reliable tool in the teleworking toolbox.
4. **HYBRID WORKING CULTURE:** Differentiating between autonomous telework and videoconferencing. Teleworking cannot equate physical presence and virtual presence. Videoconferencing must complement not substitute face-to-face interaction and it must sound and feel natural.
5. **FLEXI-TELEWORKING:** teleworking should not be a monolithic principle considering full working days or half-days as the single unit of measure. Selectively teleworking at certain periods of the day and physically working at the office at other times could be a very nice addition to the work-life balance arsenal and could contribute to greening, easing gridlocks in 8-10 Brussels' traffic.
6. **TELEWORKING & BURNOUT:** An urgent review of the current overuse of video conferencing must be conducted and ground rules established.
 - Monday mornings and Friday afternoons videoconference-free time.
 - Other workdays 9:00-12:30 and 14:00-17:00.
 - maximum 90 minutes with no breaks.
 - if more than 90 minutes 20 minutes break after each hour.
 - 60-minute break for back-to-back videoconferences.
 - never during lunch periods, except for voluntary training courses.
 - e-mails sent between 8: 00-19: 00 on workdays.
 - no emails read or answered outside working hours, weekend or travel.
 - digital break, at least one day working offline.
 - right to disconnect after 4 pm on Wednesdays and Fridays.
 - Signal, WhatsApp or other app groups optional.
 - informal work groups cannot be used to issue instructions outside working hours.
7. **TELEWORKING & SOUND:** Videoconferencing participants experience frequent online meetings as unpleasant and tiring. Scientists are warning that videoconferencing may have consequences for human health. Causes of videoconferencing fatigue are attributed to cognitive distress and overexposure to aggressively overprocessed sound.

Overexposure to artificially enhanced and heavily processed sound, which ironically is intended to make it more intelligible, ends up making it harmful. Tinnitus, hyperacusis, hearing loss and vertigo are the usual suspects. Videoconferencing is perceived by most colleagues as a necessary evil, the price to pay to benefit from telework.

However, this is a misconception. Solutions exist and they are not difficult to implement. Videoconferencing sound is typically aggressive and artificial, but can it sound natural and harmless? Absolutely, it is as simple as using the right type of **tabletop cardioid microphone**, using **headphones** to avoid feedback, and tweaking the settings in the platform of your choice: Zoom, Webex, or Teams to **disable all sound manipulation** and enhancement.

JSIS/SICKNESS INSURANCE FUND

Health care inflation in Belgium for many years and a partial revision adopted in 2007 results in an average reimbursement rate well below the 80 % and 85 % stipulated in the Staff Regulations (Article 72). It is high time the Commission addressed the situation. TAO intends to make further proposals to improve the situation of staff in and outside Brussels.

The report of the Management Committee for Sickness Insurance indicates that the net reserve amounted to over EUR 305 million and close to EUR 400 million in 2024. This capital, which belongs to the members, must be put to good use and comply with the reimbursement conditions laid down in the Staff Regulations. It is no longer possible to make minor adjustments as in 2023. Colleagues' health is at stake.

Adjusting inflation has significantly increased the cost of medical care, exposing the gap between the reimbursement caps of the Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme (JSIS) and actual costs, which have remained unchanged since 2007. In April 2022, we highlighted this issue, which has had a specific harmful impact on low-wage employees. In November 2023, after 17 years, an increase in the reimbursement caps was adopted, covering services such as:

- General and specialist consultations: Caps up to EUR 42 and EUR 64.
- Dental care: increase in several procedures to EUR 350.
- Hearing aids and incontinence supplies: Caps revised to EUR 1,800 and EUR 1,320.
- Medically assisted procreation: expanded access and revised caps.

However, these adjustments remain insufficient. They do not fully account for inflation, and further measures are needed to ensure an efficient system.

TAO PROPOSES A YEARLY ADJUSTMENT METHOD BASED ON THE BELGIAN HEALTH INDEX, A RCAM CARD RECOGNISED ACROSS EUROPE:

- Annual adjustment of all ceilings to inflation in the health sector in Brussels. TAO proposes an adaptation mechanism integrated in the JSIS legal framework. It could

be based on the Belgian Health Index applicable to all ceilings. An exception clause could be introduced which would be linked to the budget.

- The introduction of an RCAM card recognized across Europe, like the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), to simplify access to healthcare.
- Reopen the general implementing provisions for Article 72, which lay down the framework for the sickness scheme, based on the provisions of the Treaty.
- Increase the existing ceilings for dental care, which have not changed for 17 years. The overall ceiling of EUR 750/year for common care reimbursed at 80 % is clearly insufficient for current prices in Brussels and across Europe. The ceiling of EUR 350 for a crown and EUR 550 for an implant are completely exceeded by real prices.
- Revise the ceilings for lenses and frames for spectacles, which have not been modified since EUR 2 007,100 for single-focal lenses and EUR 350 for multifocal lenses no longer reflect the reality in Brussels.
- TAO also requests automated information from members when they are entitled to the special reimbursement granted for the non-refunded part of the expenses incurred during a period of 12 months, which exceeds the half-yearly average of the member's basic monthly income received during that period.
- TAO also calls for the creation of a genuine care insurance for the elderly who remain, not in a retirement home; at a time when the population of pensioners is constantly increasing.
- We support automation and integration of reimbursements with the Belgian system. This new approach, which should be implemented in the Spring, should replace the system whereby members pay up front for medical expenses, in most cases and reduce medical reimbursement bureaucracy, while facilitating PMO's task.
- JSIS reimbursements threshold revision is urgently needed. Also include diseases like Lipoedema that affects 11 % of women. JSIS remains in the dark.
- JSIS does not reimburse vitamin or supplements and does not care for stress levels in blood tests. They are not reimbursed at all! While their effects in the health are demonstrated by numerical clinical studies.
- Simplify procedure for annual checkup for personnel and partners.
- Increased coverage for psychologist sessions, essential given the rising number of burnout cases.
- An end to legally restrictive JSIS/JSIS reimbursements practices that unfairly penalize beneficiaries.
- An update in the recognition and treatment of rare diseases, providing adequate access to appropriate care.

These measures must be implemented to ensure equal and adequate health coverage, vital for the well-being of the staff. In turn, health is essential for the smooth functioning of the institution. TAO will continue to advocate for these measures with determination. Having a Health Card accepted by all Member States would make it easier to receive treatment and would also protect the Commission from the systematic health services overpricing.

JOB PROFILES NOT ELIGIBLE FOR TELEWORK

Changing working patterns have generated inequalities. Many workers cannot telework due to the very nature of their jobs. These professionals, indispensable for the functioning of the

institution, deserve recognition for their commitment and availability. These following measures aim to ensure that all staff, whether working remotely or on-site, are treated fairly and equitably.

1. Compensatory hourly credits:

- Allocation of hourly credits to employees who are not eligible for teleworking, to carry out at home tasks linked to their job (development, planning, conception, ...) in agreement with the line-manager.
- Arrangements adapted by activity sector, regularly monitored for fairness.

2. Improving working conditions:

- Increased flexibility arrangements, such as flexible timetables, for a better work-life balance.

3. Level playing field

- Regular quality-of-life gap analysis between telework and in-person workers.
- Proposals for gap reduction, considering professional specificities.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

TAO has been the only staff association/trade union tackling this issue which will shape our future. We call upon our administration to urgently make public its prospects. The gradual implementation of IA will surely have an impact on staffing, professional profiles and learning needs. The corollary is clear, Management must involve staff representatives

TAO has organized a series of expert Conferences to discuss, propose and contribute the consequences in the short-medium and long term for the institution from the perspective of the staff members, their jobs, and their needs. The advent of AI should not dehumanize, but rather re-humanize. Automate the drudgery but allow humans to do what they are best at.

TAO, the Commission's staff association, elaborated 10 recommendations with leading professionals in the field. Crucial to think about these aspects indeed! Thoughts welcome.

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1 The EC is a public institution

Therefore, the deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems must be guided by public interest. It is crucial that trade-offs between human expertise and AI adoption are carefully weighed, when evaluating proposals to implement AI applications. Especially proposals conducive to layoffs. An independent fundamental rights impact assessment should be conducted for any AI deployment that could affect staff members and basic working conditions

2 Center of gravity

Employees must be the center of gravity of the AI transition and be actively involved in decision-making, as they are directly concerned

3 Involvement

Staff representatives and trade unions must be fully involved in the implementation of AI from the design phase. A joint AI committee bringing together: staff representatives, trade unions, independent experts and management should be set up to monitor AI from the design and implementation to regular life-cycle evaluations. Only a social dialogue worthy of that name will ensure that the positive effects of AI can unfold, while the negative ones are mitigated

4 Digital and AI literacy

Digital and AI literacy is pivotal to AI implementation and must be the starting point for any discussion on AI adoption

5 Guarantees

Guarantees must be reinforced to ensure accountability, demonstrating how generative AI bias and inaccuracies can be effectively mitigated

6 Support of employees

AI applications must support employees, not replace them. Employees must have the right to decide when and how to use AI output

7 Good data governance

AI input data must be top quality and properly managed. Good data governance includes curation, cleaning, correcting, and safeguarding

8 Intensive AI models

Computationally intensive AI models, driving much of the investment in the field, come with extremely high-water usage, heavy reliance on rare minerals, significant energy costs, massive carbon footprint and increasing E waste costs drawing on already strained public resources. Current AI systems are incompatible with sustainability goals. An environmental impact assessment framework should be adopted to mitigate AI consequences before implementing AI solutions

9 Precautionary principle

AI-based mechanism implementation must follow the precautionary principle establishing ethical responsibilities. Risk mitigating measures should be in place

10 No one left behind

AI adoption may lead to job displacement, completely changing the career we signed up for. All staffers should have the opportunity to adapt to AI evolution with proper training and career development

STAFF CATEGORIES: AD, AST, AST-SC, AT/CA

ADMINISTRATORS

Often ignored by trade unions, the population of AD officials is important in the Commission and carries out important work for the institution. They are one of the pillars of the European civil service.

Firstly, to set up a genuine career and mobility service, as in any compliant international administration or company, and to carry out an individualized follow-up of any AD who requests it with a career plan. Real career developments appear to be only for those with networks and suitable connections. It is important to alternate desk officer posts with coordination posts and to provide for changes in posts in the DGs and within the COM departments and enhance mobility to the other institutions.

The Commission must employ external managers sparingly. It should offer career prospects for ADs to management posts and for heads of unit to senior management. To this end, we propose that DG HR organize preparation for assessments and offer training for senior managers for all AD staff.

The Commission must organize a real network of advisers and/or senior experts who are specialists in a file. It is also necessary to unlock Senior Expert's vacancies and to reserve a share of AD 13 and AD14 promotions for this population.

ASSISTANTS

The career prospects of AST staff are insufficient, and the skills of these colleagues are too often underutilized.

Although certification may partly meet the legitimate expectations of some ASTs (eligible for grade AST5 and above including other criteria), the results remain very limited.

In addition, we know that AST staff have evolved significantly over the years. Most of these colleagues have an increasingly high level of instruction (mainly university studies) and their skills and qualifications very often exceed the needs of the posts they occupy. Initially, these colleagues will accept and perform these functions with talent, but later the lack of career progression could demotivate them.

To cope with the lack of career prospects and considering the recruitment difficulties encountered by the Commission (EPSO crisis and lack of competitions, a sharp increase in temporary staff and potential risks of continuity and transmission of knowledge, needs for specialized occupations, geographical imbalance in certain grades, etc.)

TAO proposes 4 solutions, with current Staff Regulations, which will make it possible to meet some of our colleagues' expectations but also to meet some of the recruitment needs of the departments.

1. Draw up a complete map of current AST jobs, colleagues' profiles and their experience level.
2. A detailed overview of the ASTs in office and thus enable departments to propose posts (without obligations of course) commensurate with colleagues' skills.
3. Increase the number of successful candidates for certification.
4. Open internal AD competitions to AST colleagues with the necessary qualifications and experience.
5. Offer AST colleagues who do not envisage an AD career a more individualized professional training program allowing for a change of career (e.g. financial assistant to assistant policy officer).

CONTRACT AGENTS

Fundamental principle of EQUITY and equality of treatment must apply. The Commission cannot continue to squander the immense in-house talent at their disposal.

TAO has conducted an unprecedented institution wide broad-scale dialogue, between the staff category colleagues and our representatives and within the contract agents. Organizing

several Conferences over the course of a year. We have set up of an ad hoc task force, with periodic meetings with the colleagues, and regular contact with the administration to come up with a catalog of 12 concrete proposals to make current legal provisions work to our advantage.

CONTRACT AGENTS AT THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

12 POSITIVE MEASURES TO FULLY DEVELOP INTERNAL TALENT POTENTIAL AND ENSURE SOCIAL JUSTICE

The highest political level of the European Commission must firmly reaffirm its formal commitment to an **open career system** based on transparency, equality, merit, and competence, and implement it through concrete, positive measures

I - Job Stability: Securing and Strengthening Permanent Contracts

II - Access to the Civil Service

III - Establishing a Career Path: Progression Within Function Groups

I - Employment Stability: obtaining and consolidating CDI Contracts (Contract of Indefinite duration)

1. Access to Permanent Contracts CA 3a CEOS ("Conditions of Employment of Other Servants") and keep it in case of change of function group, as well as access to Temporary Agent Positions (Art. 2a CEOS)

- Possible redeployment of Contract Agents with permanent contracts within different directorates-generals ("*mise à disposition*") e.g., from OIB to DG TRADE.
- In line with proposal No. 11 below.

2. Extension of the "7-Year Rule": imperative revision of the "anti-cumulation" Rule

- The current 7-year limit, which is not included in the Staff Regulations, is detrimental to both the institution and its staff.
- We shall recall that 3a contracts must not be counted towards the maximum duration.
- A possible revision of the maximum duration of this rule is already foreseen in the HR strategy, **TAO** proposes to extend it to minimum up to 9 years.

3. Provisional management of the institutions' operating requirements: (Art. 79.3 and 79.4 CEOS) and the drawing up of a public offer of employment at interinstitutional level

- Transparent communication and periodic analysis of evolving staffing needs across the institution.

4. Continuous Training, Recognition, and Certification of Acquired Professional Experience to the staff

- Better recognition of actual work performed, particularly in cases of departure from the Commission.
- The Commission should issue a certificate detailing tasks and responsibilities in line with labour market standards.

5. Creation of an Inter-Institutional Public Job Offer and Functional Mobility Between Institutions via a Cooperation Agreement

- Signing of a cooperation agreement between the HR competent services of the Commission, the Council, and the Parliament to exchange information, profiles, and vacancies, ensuring smooth transitions and career continuity between institutions.
- Inter-institutional Public Job Offer open to all.
- Establishment of an inter-institutional "headhunting" service.

II - Access to the Civil Service status

6. More Systematic Organization of Internal Competitions (minimum once every 2 years)

- Currently underutilized, this mechanism should be optimized to provide greater career opportunities.
- A minimum frequency of every two years should be established.

7. General Competitions Based on Qualifications and Exams (Art. 29 of the Staff Regulations and Annex III)

- Although legally possible, this option has never been utilized.
- Given the legislator's intent to keep internal competitions exceptional, general competitions based on qualifications and/or exams could be

organized to recognize the expertise and practical knowledge acquired by CA 3 a) and 3b) over the years.

III - Establishing a Career Path: Progression Within Function Groups

8. Classification Upon Entry and Contract Renewals

- Based on qualifications, professional experience, and labour market conditions (Art. 86.1 CA 3a) and 89.1 CA 3b).

9. Transition Between Function Groups ("FG Screening") in accordance with Art. 87.4 CEOS and Art 13 GIPs ("*general implementing provisions*" of the CA) of October 2017.

10. Reclassification in Grade (Currently Limited to CA 3a), Art. 87.3 CEOS)

- Promotion rates and frequencies should **align more closely with those of permanent officials**.
- Transitions to higher function groups should address existing career path limitations and ensure continuity, particularly for FG I (3 grades) and FG II (4 grades).
- Revision of the rules governing contract agents (*General Implementing Provisions, GIPs*).

11. Calls for Expressions of Interest and Organization of Internal Selection Procedures

- This would provide career opportunities for the best performing contractual agents, to develop their careers, including transitions between CA 3a) and CA 3b) contracts.
- A minimum frequency of every two years should be ensured.

12. Access for CA 3a) and 3b) to Temporary Agent Selection Procedures, and also to the "Junior Professionals" Program on equal footing

- This pathway would enhance career progression for high-performing CAs while also addressing the legal barrier preventing CAs Function group I from participating in internal competitions.

- Reinforcing the fundamental principle of professional bridges between staff categories, in the institution's best interest, ensuring that top-performing CAs systematically receive such opportunities.

TEMPORARY AGENTS

Temporary agents recruited to provide the institution with valuable expertise are very welcome, allowing also remedy the current geographical imbalance. TAO has fought and will continue to fight so that the selection of these colleagues is fair and transparent, its career evolution is based on merits, and the career management is conceptualized and implemented with the overall perspective of the evolving needs of the institution.

AST-SC

Considered informally by many as the "Trade union of the AST-SC", **TAO** will continue its long-lasting commitment for better professional recognition, and an adequate 4 career prospect for this staff category.

Together we have obtained an unprecedented internal competition. The challenge ahead remains high, and the need for a comprehensive treatment of our colleagues has become urgent.

- TAO requests the Administration to table concrete ideas and implementing work calendar with measurable objectives, to ensure career development opportunities for AST/SCs, as requested by the European Court of Auditors in its 2024 special report on the European civil service.
- As there is no certification-like mechanism for this staff category, permanent fight for the launch of internal competitions every year to change function group (as the one launched in 2024), to retain the in-house talent mentioned in the HR Strategy, remove eligibility restrictions not stemming from the Staff Regulations, and give fair chances to AST/SCs to become ASTs.
- Aim for a fair promotion quota for AST/SCs, to update it and adjust it to the current context of increasing number of AST/SCs, to correctly detected imbalances, and to allow a faster growth within the function, removing existing promotion bottlenecks.
- Dignify and value the work carried out by AST/SCs by acknowledging their role and redefining in the job descriptions, job titles and tasks performed, in order to reflect the reality, in line with the recommendations from the Court of Auditors (Special report 24/2024) and on the basis of the altered talent mapping carried out by the Commission.
- Increase the number of posts accessible to AST/SCs in EU Delegations and EU Representations.

- Raising awareness among all staff about the situation and crucial contribution of the AST/SC function group to the general optimal functioning of the institution as a whole.
- Dignify, recognize and value the work OF AST-SCs, redefining their role in the job descriptions, job titles and the tasks performed, in order to reflect the reality in a talent mapping exercise.

HR MANAGEMENT

- Significant reduction in the number of units for more effective management.
- Favor “person-to-person” communication, with PMO
- Reinforce the head-hunter service: pro-active search of in-house talent.
- Compulsive mobility and 4-yearly re-evaluation of Heads of Units’ management skills.
- Management modernization with transparent panels for the appointment of Heads of Unit involving Staff Committee members.
- Attractive Commission for millennials, especially from underrepresented countries.

NURSERY NURSES

Recognition of the arduous work of nursery nurses. They play a key role in the development and well-being of our children, providing crucial support to families. Yet, the working conditions of these professionals are characterized by intense physical effort, repeated postural constraints, constant emotional stress, and a high mental burden.

1. Official recognition of arduousness:

- Registration of the profession of nursery worker in the categories of recognized arduous professions
- Accurate assessment of arduous factors, such as carrying loads, timetables (no possibility to telework or leave of absence), and psychological stress.

2. Improving working conditions:

- Staff reinforcement to reduce over working.
- Investment in suitable ergonomic equipment.
- Provision of psychological support to prevent burnout.

3. Salary evaluation and early retirement:

- Introduction of specific premiums linked to the arduous nature of the profession.
- Possibility of early retirement for nursery nurses with a long career under demanding conditions.

4. Training and awareness:

- Setting up specific training courses to manage professional risks.
- Increased awareness among staff benefiting from the crèches service and the administration of the importance of promoting these professions.

We recognize the commitment of nursery nurses and strive to provide them with decent working conditions, commensurate with the importance of their contribution to our children and society.

DRIVERS

- After updating 'more than a year ago' their descriptions of their tasks accompanying them to the transition from category 'GF1 to GF2', which had been promised.
- Working with the Article 13 Committee ("Screening") to identify their jobs as a GF2 and protocol function like all Berlaymont jobs.
- Create a working group with their delegations to select their clothing allocations "in sufficient quantities".
- Ask their hierarchies to involve a delegation of drivers to choose Commissioners' cars "Option available in vehicles" for better comfort.
- Time credit for this job profile which does not telework.

CATERING SERVICES AT THE HEART OF STAFF

TAO has launched initiatives to improve the accessibility, quality, and affordability of meals, particularly for low-wage staff:

- **Healthy and Sustainable Food:** supporting plant-based and healthy options in canteens to promote employee well-being.
- **Reduced Prices:** proposing subsidized meals for low-wage employees not increasing prices for others.
- **Reopening Canteens and Cafeterias:** calling for an increase in the number of dining facilities to reduce dissatisfaction.

TAO demands an increased budget to hire more staff and continues to advocate for prioritized catering services for employees' well-being.

- **Promotion of healthy and sustainable food:** **TAO** has contributed to introducing healthy, plant-based food options in canteens, in line with environmental and health

concerns. These efforts have resulted in an improved offer under the “fit at work” program, along with OIB support for more plant-based choice, promoting employee well-being.

- **Advocacy for discount meals for low-wage employees:** TAO has advocated for the lowering of prices for employees with modest incomes, not increasing prices for the rest of the staff. Based on subsidies provided by the Luxembourg Commission for canteens, TAO has calculated that a budget should be allocated in Brussels to subsidized meals for low-income employees. Meals would be affordable without disrupting the financial balance of the canteens.
- **Reopening of Canteens and Cafeterias:** Due to the significant reduction in the number of canteens (from 13 to 9) and cafeterias (from 35 to 23) since the pandemic, TAO has emphasized the need to increase the number of dining facilities. Challenges include a shortage of hospitality staff, budget constraints, and high costs for employees, leading to dissatisfaction and difficulties for staff to access on-site meals.

Budgetary solutions:

- increase the hiring budget, like measures taken in 2018 for nurseries.
- finalizing the request to implement meal price reductions for employees with the lowest salaries, like the transportation cost reductions already in place.
- Continue to improve the offer of plant-based food options.

TAO urges the Commission to prioritize catering as an essential service for the well-being and cohesion of employees. TAO’s key demands – wider adoption of social pricing and the reopening of more catering facilities-have yet to be fully implemented.

- **Reopening of Catering Spaces:** Ensure at least one cafeteria per 1,000 employees or per Directorate-General, creating essential spaces for staff well-being and social interaction.
- **Fair and High-Quality Meals:** Enhanced quality and larger portions while introducing social pricing for lower-income employees, financed through internal subsidies, without increasing costs for other staff members.
- **Investment for Better Service:** Increased budget allocations to hire sufficient staff and ensure the efficient operation of cafeterias and canteens.

Together, let’s create accessible, inclusive, and well-equipped break areas for everyone.

- Clear display of ingredients and allergens beside each dish in canteens and cafeterias.

- Plant based options available for meetings through CARES (not just fruit!)
- Introduce the option of “no meat day”, promised but never materialized
- No surcharge for plant based ‘milks’ in your tea or coffee.

PARENTAL LEAVE MUST BE EQUATED TO MATERNITY LEAVE

To foster equal opportunities on the road towards a fair parental leave policy. To ensure gender equality between parents, we propose aligning paternity leave with maternity leave by extending it to 140 days, matching the current maternity leave duration. Currently, mothers receive 20 weeks (140 days) of leave, while fathers are limited to only 10 days. Fair measures, like those already implemented in some European countries, must be adopted to ensure equal treatment for all parents and support a better work-life balance.

The Commission is discussing equal opportunities and gender balance. However, significant inequalities persist, particularly concerning maternity and paternity leave. These disparities are now unjustifiable and must be addressed. Currently, mothers are entitled to 20 weeks (140 calendar days) of maternity leave, while fathers receive only 10 days of paternity leave. In a modern society, this inequality should be corrected for obvious reasons.

- **Career Management Fairness:** Recruiters favor men during hiring processes, because childbirth and ‘extended absences’ are a source of concern. This bias is deeply unfair and reinforces outdated gender stereotypes in the workplace.
- **The Essential Role of Fathers:** Increasing evidence shows that the father during the first months of a child’s life is crucial for bonding, but to support mothers, often overwhelmed by new family responsibilities. Fathers must be empowered to play an active role during this critical period.
- A modern administration should follow the example of some EU member states by granting equal parental leave for both parents following the birth or adoption of a child. This approach would ensure equal rights.

For these reasons, **TAO believes** it is time to reform the parental leave policy (Commission Decision of 16.12.2013) and align paternity leave with maternity leave. Paternity leave should be extended to 140 days to promote true equality between parents and support a balanced family life.

TALENT 55 + PROGRAMME: FOR THE FULL USE IN THE BENEFIT OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE IN-HOUSE EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE

TAO proposed the creation of a **Talent 55 + program** for all staff categories AD, AST, AST-SC, CA, TA. With the following guiding principles.

- best use of existing in-house experience, knowledge and institutional memory.

- recognition for the contribution of colleagues 50+ who are not managers
- professional performance rewarded, beyond becoming a manager
- facilitated mobility of senior staff to posts of similar responsibilities and public relevance
- temporary staff allowed to work on new policies, initiatives and high-profile projects

colleagues over 55 that continue to learn, grow and develop professionally must be treasured.

- promoting the creation of a 'Talent 55 +' network open to all 50+ staff.
- experience as an advantage for staff mobility and headhunting, whether for high profile or sensitive projects.
- tap into the experience and knowledge of 50+ staff for training or mentoring.
- specific training programs for 'talented senior' staff, including external experts.
- implementation of the program monitored by Administration and Staff representatives.

EUROPEAN SCHOOLS: CHALLENGES AND URGENT NEED FOR ACTION

European Schools in Brussels are grappling with a severe overcrowding crisis, jeopardizing the quality of education and the well-being of students and staff. This urgent situation calls for immediate action and a clear long-term strategy.

Alarming Situation

- Widespread overcrowding: all schools are operating well beyond their capacity, with student numbers exceeding limits by 160 to 800 per site. In 2024, the total student population reached 14,700 and is expected to rise to 16,000 by 2030.
- Infrastructure delays: The 5th school site in Neder-Over-Heembeek, originally scheduled for 2028, will not be ready until 2030. Additionally, the future of the Evere site, currently in use, remains uncertain beyond 2037.

Proposed Solutions

1. Measures to alleviate Pressure

- Request the European Commission's intervention to identify alternative solutions to overcrowding while pressuring Belgian authorities to accelerate the construction of the 5th school.
- Redistribute students to rebalance enrollments across all schools.

2. Accelerate Current Projects

- Demand a firm commitment from Belgian authorities to meet the construction timeline for the 5th school.
- Develop a comprehensive integration plan to ensure a smooth transition for new students when the school opens.

3. Strengthening Human Resources and Support Services

- Hire additional psychologists, social workers, and counsellors to support both students and staff.
- Advocate for an increase in the number of seconded teachers, improving their training, and enhancing their working conditions.

4. Adopts a Long-Term Vision

- Develop an Education Plan 2040 that Incorporates innovative and sustainable educational solutions.
- Conduct regular assessments of infrastructure and future needs to ensure schools remain fit for purpose.

The European Schools in Brussels are facing an escalating overcrowding crisis, marked by insufficient infrastructure and concerning project delays. Our proposed solutions include immediate actions such as adding modular classrooms and redistributing students, along with medium- and long-term strategies like speeding up school construction, strengthening psychosocial teams, and expanding the pool of seconded teachers. Strategic planning and greater transparency are essential to ensure a high-quality, student-focused learning environment.

MOBILITY TO AND FROM THE OFFICE: WE NEED TO “MOVE”

Improvements to Commission’s EV charging infrastructure.

While we welcomed the launch of a small number of EV chargers in selected buildings, we are committed to lobby for necessary improvements to said infrastructure:

- The number of EV chargers has not increased since the launch of the system in April 2023 and is clearly below current and rapidly growing needs.
- The extremely low charging speed of 1 to 3 kW/h seriously limits the practical utility of the current infrastructure.
- We will lobby for the contractor in charge to take better care of malfunctioning chargers, repairs are delayed weeks or even months.
- Improved EV charging facilities in Commission buildings could help reduce pollution in the European quarter.

- We are requesting more charging points with improved access. Current access and signposting leave a lot to be desired.
- We also need to address the issue of ICE cars illegally occupying EV charging bays.

100% reimbursement of public transport season tickets in Belgium.

Public transport is key in the fight for efficient transport and reducing city centre congestion. A 100% ticket reimbursement, instead of the current 50% would create additional incentive for public transport use.

Encouraging the use of alternative sustainable means: 100 EUR reimbursement upon receipt for purchasing an electric bicycle.

The development of urban cycling in Brussels in the last 15 years has been impressive but we must build momentum:

- Electrification has enhanced the bicycle as useful and versatile mode of transport in a hilly city like Brussels, suitable for covering longer commuting distances, useful for older and less physically fit cyclists, great for carrying children and shopping bags.
- With battery prices falling over the years, electric bicycles have become slightly more affordable than, say 10 years ago, but they are still expensive enough to prevent many potential users from buying them. A 100 EUR contribution would be a nice incentive for some, which could help broaden the pool of users.