

# The use of contract agents in decentralised EU agencies

This [study](#) by Deloitte<sup>1</sup> examines various aspects related to the **management of Contract Agents** in seven decentralised Agencies of the European Union: ECHA, EEA, EIGE, ENISA, ESMA, Eurofound and Europol. It evaluates the **evolution** of Contract Agents **as part of the workforce** and presents findings on processes related to **personnel budgeting, recruitment and retention, salary and remuneration**, and **advancement prospects** for contract staff.

Check out the [full study](#) by scanning this QR code!



## Background

Over recent decades, the regulating or supporting activities of decentralised EU Agencies have become essential for implementing EU policies, with their number growing accordingly. Currently, there are **35 decentralised EU Agencies** with separate budgets, **collectively employing over 11.000 people**. Among the various staff categories are Contract Agents (or contract staff). **Contract Agents (CAs)** were **created in 2004** as part of the reform of the Staff Regulation, with lower entry-level salaries combined with a longer career path comprising more grades. CAs are **hired on a fixed-term contract** and their employment conditions are stipulated by the Staff Regulations of Officials and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants. In general, Contract Agents' **activities and salaries are clearly defined based on their function group** (FG I through IV) – ranging from manual and administrative support services to clerical, administrative or technical tasks. In 2014, the EU Agencies were subject to a 5-10% staff cut. This impacted the general workforce composition at the Agencies, with many of them compensating for staffing gaps by employing Contract Agents. The **growing number of Contract Agents** has implications for the overall talent management of staff at the decentralised EU Agencies.

## Key observations and conclusions

The **number of Contract Agents** in EU institutions, Agencies and other bodies has been **increasing** over the last decade – both in absolute terms as well as a proportion of the total workforce. Over time, across all decentralised EU Agencies, function groups III and IV have become the most common types of Contract Agents, with staff performing administrative, accounting, or technical tasks. Today, Contract Agents seem to be mostly considered **part of the structural workforce**, while constituting a separate staff category, which raises a number of issues.

The Agencies follow the **standard process of defining their needs for Contract Agents**, with the Single Programming Documents and the annual work programmes as the starting point. Since Contract Agents' positions are



not part of the establishment plans of the Agencies, the category provides some much-needed flexibility in workforce management. This is limited in practice, however, as the European Commission reviews the staffing plans with scrutiny in light of long-term implications on administrative costs, including pensions.

The **recruitment and selection** process steps are mostly the same for Contract Agents and Temporary Agents. For both, agencies face similar challenges in attracting talent related to the financial attractiveness of the roles as compared to the private market, scarcity of labour force, or specific technical skills.



The Agencies offer **contracts of varied duration** to Contract Agents. All Agencies in the scope of this study offer contracts within the rules stipulated by the Staff Regulation, with the first contract duration varying between three and five years, and the second from two to five years. In principle, any further potential extension results in a contract of indefinite duration. Many of the Agencies in the scope of this study are careful about contract durations and renewals, as the number of authorised CA positions and corresponding budgets may change in the future. Next to this, shorter contract duration is seen as a way to increase workforce planning flexibility and boost agility in addressing emerging business needs. This has however impact on a higher rotation of Contract Agents. The potential loss of contract staff working in more specialised roles may pose challenges for protecting organisational knowledge.

The **differences between the salaries of Contract Agents and average salaries in the private sector** seem to vary across Member States and function groups. The study observed that the correction coefficient does not seem to compensate for the differences between Contract Agent salaries and those of similar roles in the private sector in Western and Northern Europe. The financial attractiveness of CA posts in those regions can impact the geographical diversity of applicants.

*Example of FG IV salary with local adjustments – green: above regional benchmarks, red: below benchmarks*

FG IV coordinating profile	Finland - ECHA	Denmark - EEA	Lithuania - EIGE	Greece - ENISA	France - ESMA	Ireland - EUROFOUND	Netherlands - EUROPOL
Western	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Southern	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Northern	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Eastern	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

Source: United Nations Geoscheme (M49 standard), Glassdoor, Indeed, Payscale, LinkedIn salary, Salary.com, Totaljobs, IT jobswatch, Careercross, Monster, Career Builder, SimplyHired and Salary Finder.

**Prospects for Contract Agent advancement** seem more limited than those of other staff categories. The career path of Contract Agents is longer (in years of experience before grade reclassification) and financially less rewarding than that of a Temporary Agent. Agencies deploy several talent management strategies aimed at increasing staff motivation and satisfaction, including offering the same learning and development opportunities to all staff and increasing the variety of tasks. The latter can lead to the similarities in tasks between AD5-7 and CA FG IV, AST 5-6 and CA FG III. The discrepancies in career paths and salaries can pose challenges to staff motivation.

## Key considerations

Overall, staff reduction and pressure to decrease administrative costs may have longer-term consequences for the talent management of Contract Agents at decentralised Agencies. **Three key considerations** can be brought forward for the future management of Contract Agents at decentralised Agencies.

1. The **role of the Contract Agents** may need to be redefined or clarified: is it to support specific assignments or projects, or are CAs a structural part of the workforce involved in the Agency's core tasks?
2. Deploying **enhanced processes for strategic workforce planning** may help to further align the planned work outcomes with longer-term strategic objectives and skillsets of staff, and maximise efficiency gains.
3. A detailed **evaluation of the employer brand** of the Agencies and a **salary benchmarking towards the private sector** could help define targeted actions for recruiting and maintaining talent.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/749451/IPOL\\_STU\(2023\)749451\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/749451/IPOL_STU(2023)749451_EN.pdf)

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