



*European Economic and Social Committee*

## **2016 Discharge**

### **Answers to follow-up questionnaire from the EP CONT Committee**

#### **Staff**

- 1. *How many interim agents were employed by your institution in 2016? How many of these interim agents replaced an official? How many were they in 2015 and 2014?***

Interim agents are provided to the EESC through temping agencies, for short-term work. In the EESC, most interim contracts are rarely longer than a few days at a time. Such contracts are occasional but may be recurrent.

In 2016: In total, 26 interim agents were employed. 3 replaced an official, while a recruiting process was ongoing. 1 replaced an official on sick leave and 1 was hired for a short period to ensure business continuity in the Medical Service.

In 2015: 25 interim agents were employed. 1 replaced an official on sick leave, 1 replaced a temporary agent on maternity leave and 2 were ensuring business continuity in the medical service.

In 2014: 33 interim agents were employed. 3 replaced officials on sick leave.

- 2. *Which are the differences in the working conditions of interim agents and temporary staff?***

Temporary agents, as statutory staff, benefit from the working conditions described in the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants (CEOS). These conditions are comparable to those of officials (grading, salary grid, allowances, working hours, leave, etc.).

With regard to interim agents, their employer is the temping agency and, as such, interim staff are subject to Belgian labour law as far as working conditions are concerned. Their remuneration is calculated at an hourly rate (38 hours/week) and depends on the level of tasks they perform. They are divided into 4 types, in line with the contract agents function groups as defined in the CEOS.

The tasks of interim staff include clerical, secretarial or assistant roles and the provision of logistic support during plenary sessions. Interim staff are also called on to replace the sickness leave, family or annual leave of officials or other statutory agents, for imperative reasons of service (business continuity). Interim agents may also be hired to support

services in periods of exceptional workload or for the preparation of events. Occasionally, interim staff may be hired for the length of time necessary to complete a recruitment procedure to fill a vacant post, thereby temporarily replacing an official.

**3. *How many trainees were employed in 2016? How many of the offered traineeships were non-remunerated?***

In 2016, the EESC offered 52 five-month traineeships to university graduates. Such long-term trainees receive a monthly grant (equal to 25% of the AD5 step 1 basic salary, in line with the practice of most EU institutions) and are entitled to a contribution to their travel expenses at the beginning and end of their traineeships.

The EESC also hosted 15 short-term trainees for between one and three months. This possibility is primarily available to students obliged to undertake a traineeship as part of their studies, and such traineeships are, therefore, not remunerated.

### **Members**

**4. *The EESC has indicated in its answer to question 11 that the final appropriations for travel and subsistence allowances for Members was EUR 19 561 194. The Committee of Regions, by contrast, has indicated that its expenditure dedicated to travel for Members in the same year amounts to EUR 8 245 066 (Answer to 13, written answers by the CoR). How do you explain that the EESC has spent more than double than the CoR, although both institutions have the same amount of Members and a similar mandate? What potential savings do you envisage to make on travel expenses for Members of the EESC?***

The two Committees are both advisory bodies to the EU institutions (Art. 13.4 TEU and Art. 300-307 TFEU). However, their mandates as expressed in the Treaties are quite different.

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union defines the areas in which each of the advisory bodies is to be consulted. A large number of areas fall exclusively within the remit of the EESC, which is also reflected in the higher number of mandatory opinions adopted by the EESC. Accordingly, to ensure that the EESC can adopt its opinions within the deadlines set by the institutions, the EESC has nine scheduled plenary sessions per year. Opinions adopted at the plenary session are most commonly first adopted by one of the six specialised sections after thorough preparation in a study group.

In 2016, the EESC adopted 148 opinions and 3 information reports. The fact that the EESC represents very diverse – and in some cases directly opposing – interests creates a number of particular challenges in relation to the preparation of opinions. As opinions are adopted by simple majority, the difficult process of forging compromise positions – through ongoing

debates and negotiations in the preparatory study groups where the EESC's three constituent groups are represented in equal numbers – lies at the very heart of the way the EESC works.

Members are entitled to daily allowances and reimbursement of travel costs related to their work as EESC members. Payments take place in accordance with Council Decision 2013/471/EU (OJ L 253, 25.9.2013, p. 22-23) and its implementing EESC decision, which is largely inspired by the EP's rules on the reimbursement of travel costs for MEPs. The present cost-based system was fully implemented in October 2015 in agreement with the EP. Each year by 30 April, the EESC submits to the Council and the EP a detailed report on the reimbursement of travel expenses. Daily allowances and the reimbursement of travel costs make it possible for EESC members both to keep a permanent link with the civil society organisations they represent, and to bring their point of view to the European level, thus reinforcing the democratic legitimacy of the European Union.

The EESC attaches great importance to encouraging savings within the rules set by the Council. Constant efforts are being made to keep travel costs down. Since the beginning of 2017, section meetings have been scheduled in such a way so as to ensure that sections with most members in common have meetings on consecutive days. Such measures are designed to ensure that travel costs are kept at a minimum, without affecting the institutional role of the EESC. Moreover, the EESC makes use of the same travel agency as the EP, chosen in a joint tender procedure with the EP to allow economies of scale.

Since the mandates of the two Committees are different both in scope and substance, their mode of functioning and the volume of their activities cannot easily be compared.

---