

2019 Discharge

Questionnaire to the European Economic and Social Committee

Hearing: 10 November 2020

Horizontal & general questions

- 1. In a report published last year, the ECA pointed out that the majority of European institutions had not developed a real sustainable development strategy. What is the situation of your authority on this point?**

The report in question concerns the EU institutions' commitment to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Only two European bodies – the EIB and the EU Intellectual Property Office – have published sustainability reports. The ECA report already states that the EESC is not among the EU institutions/agencies that have published a sustainability report.

In terms of sustainability it is worth mentioning that in the draft 2021 Budget, the Committee has asked for the creation of a dedicated budget line to cover the carbon offsetting scheme.

- 2. What measures have been taken in respect to the safety of staff, security of buildings and communications, including cybersecurity? What were the additional expenses for security in 2019? What measures have been taken in order to improve the physical and mental health at the workplace?**

(Security of) Communications

As regards internal communications, the Committees' network is embedded in VLANs and protected with network access control. All remote access using VPN is protected by end-to-end encryption. Important online applications such as the Members' Portal are protected by transport level encryption.

Increasing the security of email communications between the European institutions was a priority of the Interinstitutional IT Committee (CII). Their recommendation was that

"Each EUI to implement TLS¹ and decide individually whether to implement "mandatory" TLS"². The Committees have implemented this recommendation in full.

Cybersecurity activities in 2019

During 2019, the IT security officer remained active in raising user cybersecurity awareness for staff, including a briefing for the IT Steering Committee and sectoral briefings at the level of individual departments. Users are systematically informed by the IT Helpdesk of any important security issues and, in particular, receive regular reminders as regards changing their passwords. The Committees actively contributed to the "2019 European cybersecurity month" campaign.

See the reply to question 83 for a complete description of cybersecurity activities in 2019.

Additional investments in 2019 for cybersecurity

In 2019, two additional projects were launched concerning cybersecurity. A project to finance advanced threat protection software was launched for an amount of EUR 44 760. A second project to improve and optimise the configuration of the security incident management software system was launched for an amount of EUR 34 425. The total additional expenses for cybersecurity were therefore (EUR 44 760 EUR + EUR 34 425 =) EUR 79 185.

Security of buildings

Work to renovate the entrance hall of the BvS building, with the main objective being to increase the security level and the service for members, staff and visitors, was completed in 2019. During 2019, the perimeter of the BvS building (Rue Remorqueur and Rue Montoyer) was secured with anti-blast windows on the ground floor as well as the entire ground floor of the JDE building in Rue Remorqueur (kitchen, à la carte restaurant and offices).

Security

¹ "Transport Layer Security" – is used to encrypt traffic when it passes between mail gateways. For emails between the EU institutions, the message is encrypted before leaving a network and decrypted on its arrival to the network of the other EU institution. This prevents eavesdropping on the message as it passes over the internet.

² Decision from the CII meeting of June 15-16, 2017, held at the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The installation of a new CCTV system was concluded for all EESC buildings in 2019. Access control of the VMA building was taken over completely by the Committees in 2019, and there was increased surveillance due to the works in the BvS entrance hall.

In addition, new software for badges was bought and implemented in 2019. With these updates, the security standards for access control and badge use have reached the same level as those of the EP and Commission. A new IT tool that will allow better management of visitors' access to the buildings was also acquired in 2019 and will be implemented in 2020. To enhance the efficiency of access control at the entrances, the entrance hall of the JDE building was refurbished in 2018 and new equipment for access control was installed in the entrance hall of the BvS building in 2019.

In 2019, the security team followed a special training programme to face criminal and terrorist threats and has begun to cooperate with the EP regarding specific security training courses.

The Security Service for both Committees carries out investigations into security incidents and cooperates with the other EU institutions as well as with the host state's services in the domain of counter-intelligence and threat analysis. The Security Service was also involved in 2019 with the other EU institutions in relaunching the security screening of external contractors' staff in 2020.

Measures to improve physical and mental health in the workplace are outlined in question 29.

3. What are the lessons learned for the EESC after it was refused the 2018 discharge? How do you plan to improve the general staff well-being and implement a 'no tolerance policy towards harassment'?

The EESC had already initiated a wider reflection on a detailed action plan and practical rules on preventing, tackling and raising awareness of harassment before the refusal of the 2018 discharge. Based on the observations made by the Parliament and also on the findings of the OLAF report as well as the reflections of the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members, the EESC will pursue its ongoing efforts to raise awareness about issues of harassment, both among staff and members (new training for members).

In this context, a joint internal working group on the ethical framework was set up, including representatives from both the administration and the Staff Committee. This group has a mandate to review all potential gaps in the current framework and existing tools, with a view to recommending improvements and potential new measures and/or structures.

A revision package is also envisaged with regard to the decisions on harassment, whistleblowing and disciplinary procedures in order to increase synergies between these instruments and to reinforce the Committee's ethics and integrity framework. The

EESC is well aware of the political impact of the refusal of the 2018 discharge and is striving to further strengthen its capacity to tackle harassment situations. This will result in a detailed action plan to be endorsed at the latest by the end of this year.

The EESC will continue to raise staff and management awareness through better-targeted internal communication on the existing structures available to help cope with any kind of difficult situation in the workplace. To do so, it will use new brochures on the confidential counsellors, new and updated visual information, awareness-raising events and will put into practice the results of the consultation forum held as a follow-up to the *respect@work* campaign. This consultation forum ensured equal representation of all directorates and levels and the feedback during and after the event was very positive.

With the 2020 renewal of the EESC, different awareness-raising actions have also targeted the new members and documents about the administrative culture at the EESC were part of their starter packs. The new members received a new brochure on "Respect and Dignity: the EESC, our common workplace", which highlights the need to prevent and combat any inappropriate behaviour, conflicts in the workplace and harassment. They were also informed about the existing procedures and decisions in force at the EESC on these topics. For this purpose, a special website bringing together all the useful texts and procedures was set up on the members' intranet.

Training sessions on "Ethics and Integrity" are compulsory for all newcomers and are systematically offered to staff who have not yet been trained according to the Internal Control Standards (see also reply to Question 51). All directors have been informed about the need to recommend this training to their staff during the appraisal exercise. This training is also available to the members.

4. How many calls for tenders did your institution organise in 2019? Please indicate the value and the number of applicants for each tender.

According to the Financial Regulation, public procurement of a value above EUR 15 000 must be open to competition; the minimum number of competitors increases with the market value.

The table below lists all procurement procedures above EUR 15 000 launched in 2019, where the EESC was the lead institution.

According to the Financial Regulation public procurement of up to EUR 15 000 ("*very low value procedures*") can be awarded on a one-offer-only basis and are not part of this list.

It is worth noting that the EESC mainly purchases goods and services through inter-institutional framework contracts led by other European Institutions. Framework contracts usually span over four or five years.

2019: EESC procurement procedures with a value above EUR 15 000.

	<i>Description/Subject of the tender</i>	Value (EUR)	Number of applicants
1	Framework contract for annual training and refresher courses for members of the firefighting department, belonging to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR) – CESE/2019/FOR/01	66 200	3
2	Call for tender for a study on "How the Digital Transformation can put humans in the centre of robotics and automation" – CES/CSS/04/2019	41 000	1
3	Call for tender for a study on "Finding a new consensus on European civil society values and their evaluation" – CES/CSS/05/2019 (estimated market value EUR 65 000) – No offer received	0	0
4	Call for tender for a study on "Recycling food packaging & food waste in plastics revolution" – CES/CSS/10/2019 (estimated value: EUR 20 000)	16 500	1
5	Rental of meeting rooms and technical equipment ACP-EU Regional Seminar organised by the EESC (REX section) and the European Commission – Port Louis (Mauritius) – 21-23/11/2019	19 011.76	1
6	Service contract – "Fire and explosion risk analysis of buildings" Estimated value: EUR 36 000 Tender not awarded because the only offer received was above the estimated value.	0	1

5. What results have been achieved since the tender on 'Analysis and proposal for improvements of the current projection system concerning cost reimbursement of EESC members, delegates and experts' have been launched in October 2018?

Following the call for tender, the contract was awarded at the end of February 2019 and the contractor submitted the analysis on 16 September 2019 in the form of a final report. The report includes recommendations on how to improve the existing

forecasting system, by achieving better quality of the database and revising the parameters used for projection. Proposals for increasing the data quality include, among others, training for the users, centralisation of the encoding and IT improvements.

Based on this report, the Bureau, at its meeting in December 2019, adopted a set of recommendations for improving the accuracy of the projection system and set up an ad hoc group of seven members (the vice-president in charge of the budget, the three group presidents and three members of the CAF) to monitor their implementation.

At the end of March 2020, a detailed administrative action plan to implement the various recommendations for potential improvements to the projection system contained in the report produced by the external service provider was sent to the seven-member group. The ongoing effects of the COVID-19 crisis have delayed the implementation of the project. It has to be noted that the explosion of the pandemic has completely modified the framework in which the traditional parameters were applied.

6. Why there has been a high rate of delayed payments with a payment time of 30 days (19,56%)? In this connection, what has been done to increase reliability?

The high rate of delayed payments is due to the invoicing errors of one supplier (i.e. the travel agency selected under the terms of the interinstitutional tender EP/FINS 2017-103).

In order to avoid the invoices from this supplier negatively influencing the statistics on payment delays, these invoices are now systematically suspended for payments (e.g. the counter stopped).

The contractor has been asked to fully comply with the provisions of the contract and the situation will continue to be monitored and if needed, penalties will be applied.

7. On 11 December 2018, the rules for data protection in the EU Institutions were brought in line with the rules set out in the GDPR. Did your institution need to make any changes in the way it handles data to adapt to this new legislation? What were those changes?

In preparation for the entrance into force of the new Regulation on data protection, a number of measures were taken:

- A **staff notice** was sent at the beginning of December 2018 explaining the main steps each service should take in order to ensure compliance with the new regulation.
- Meetings **with all directorates** were organised in order to discuss the new rules and their implementation.
- **Training and awareness** – Info sessions and training sessions were organised for staff and members.
- **Mapping out data protection processing operations** at the Committee (an interactive tool has been created to allow for easy update – each controller can add/change their processing operations list).

- A new online data protection **register** was set up. Shortly, the register will also be available on the internet.
- **Templates** were created according to the new regulation:
 - Records of processing activities (online form and Word version)
 - Privacy statements model
 - Models for collecting valid consent

All these templates are available on the DPO's intranet site.

- An update of the existing **privacy statements**.
- **Procurement**: the EESC procurement models have been updated to include the new data protection clauses. All the internal financial actors have access to these models.
- An internal **data breach procedure** was established at the Committee. In case of a data breach, a response team is established. The DPO and the CISO (chief information security officer) form part of this response team.
- Data protection impact assessments (DPIA) – A threshold assessment interactive form was created in order to help evaluate whether a DPIA is needed. This interactive tool is available on the DPO's intranet page.
- The data protection intranet and internet pages have been updated.
- **EESC websites** – privacy statement and cookies policies of a number of EESC websites have been updated.
- **A new DPO** was appointed in September 2019 for a term of five years. In accordance with Article 44 of Regulation 2018/1725, the DPO reports directly to the secretary-general and does not receive any instructions in the exercise of his functions. The EESC supports its DPO by providing resources necessary to carry out his tasks and to maintain his expert knowledge. In this context, a **new deputy DPO** was also appointed for the same term of five years.
- In accordance with Article 45 of Regulation 2018/1725, a new draft decision implementing **rules concerning the DPO** is currently under discussion in order to ensure and facilitate the exercise of his tasks, duties and powers.
- A draft decision based on Article 25 of Regulation 2018/1725 concerning the potential **restriction of data subjects' rights** in certain exceptional circumstances is also currently under discussion.

8. What was the cost of outsourcing of translation in 2019? What would have been the cost if the translations had been carried out by in-house services?

According to the KIAPI methodology, the total cost of outsourced translation for the EESC and CoR was EUR 6 043 592 in 2019 (EESC part: EUR 3 550 762). According to the same methodology, the total cost of translation in-house would have been EUR 8 781 075 (EESC part: EUR 5 159 101).

9. Has your institution developed synergies or rationalizations with other European bodies? If so, which ones?

Beyond the Joint Services shared by the EESC and CoR (the Directorate for Translation and the Directorate for Logistics, including buildings, IT, security, catering, EMAS and Printshop), further synergies are also being implemented in a number of fields. In the

HR services, close cooperation and alignment was achieved throughout the management of the COVID-19 crisis, for instance, to ensure similar specific working arrangements. Both Committees' medical services have also been working closely together and have implemented a shift system to ensure a presence throughout the crisis. In the field of finance, joint instructions are usually issued to all financial actors (whilst fully respecting the autonomy of each respective institution, and, in particular, the difference in their financial circuits).

The cooperation agreement between both committees has currently been extended until the end of June 2021. The negotiations for the renewal will also provide an opportunity for further synergies and rationalisation of services to increase efficiency and generate potential savings, particularly in the context of the pandemic. Both committees also have cooperation agreements with the European Parliament (see the answer to question 12).

In addition, an important number of SLAs exist with the European Commission to further optimise processes in HR and finance domains. Sectorial cooperation exists in other domains, for instance printing, selection of staff, training, etc.

10. **“The European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions have a long-standing record of highly developed administrative cooperation. Building on the Committees' mutual will to keep a stable relationship, the current administrative cooperation agreement, which entered into force on 1 January 2016, has been extended until 31 December 2020.”³**

Has the old cooperation agreement between the EESC and the CoR been fully implemented? What budgetary savings have been achieved through this cooperation?

Cooperation between the Committees in the field of logistics leads to considerable synergies and economies of scale, as indicated in the table below:

Yearly budgetary savings for both Committees (EESC and CoR) through cooperation

Area	Amount in million (EUR)	Comment
Infrastructure	11.8 0.75	Rent, maintenance, consumables Staff
IT	5.0 Not quantifiable	Operating IT systems Setting up of separate IT systems
Printshop	0.45 Not quantifiable	Staff Purchase of separate equipment
Security	1.50	Staff
Meeting service	0.10 0.05	Rental of meeting rooms Staff for control room (OPS room)

³ EESC-2020-02534-23-00-NB-TRA (EN) 10/21, Follow-up report – Report on measures taken in light of the European Parliament recommendations (Discharge 2018)

	0.35	Setting up of a second control room (OPS room)
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The old agreement foresaw the sharing of buildings between the EESC and the CoR: What was the ratio of office space the was foreseen to be allocated to the EESC and the CoR respectively? What is the current ratio of office space allocated to the EESC and the CoR respectively?

Implementation of old cooperation agreement:

Two points of the current administrative agreement have not been implemented yet: more balanced distribution of posts within the Joint Services for which the contribution of EESC is higher and equal distribution of spaces in the Committee flagship building.

Current ratio of office space allocated to the EESC and the CoR respectively:

In 2019, the share of office space was 53% for the EESC and 47% for the CoR.

- 11. What are the results of the new administrative cooperation agreement that was launched in 2019 with the EESC and the Parliament? How does the new administrative cooperation differ from the previous one? What budgetary savings have been achieved through this cooperation?**

The Committee and the Parliament have signed a specific Service Level Agreement concerning interpretation provided by the EP interpretation services.

The agreement allows the Committee to benefit from the services of the EP interpreters (against payment) every time the Committee uses the EP premises for its meetings and occasionally in the EESC premises. The agreement contributes to the optimisation of the interpreters' workforce of the institutions.

- 12. What amount of money has the Parliament transferred to the Committee in 2019 with regards to the cooperation agreement? To which budgetary line was that amount destined?**

The cooperation agreement between the European Parliament and the Committees was signed on 5 February 2014 and Annex II of the agreement establishes that in order to compensate for the loss of translation capacity, the following additional amounts should be provided for **both** Committees:

- An additional EUR 2 million for the externalisation of translation, with the possibility that a potential surplus can be used for further political work in a budget neutral manner.
- An additional EUR 1.1 million for increased political work.

The EESC's share of the additional amount for increased political work, totalling EUR 660 000, was put at the EESC's disposal via budget item 1004 in 2015 (EUR 550 000) and in 2016 (EUR 110 000), and the appropriations in subsequent years included this increased amount.

The EESC's share of the additional amount for the externalisation (outsourcing) of translation, totalling EUR 1.2 million, was put at the EESC's disposal via the budget line "Supplementary services for the translation service" (item 1420) from 2015 and the full amount became available in 2016.

However, an initial reduction was already made during the conciliation process in 2017.

The evolution for this budget item since 2017 is indicated in the below table:

Year	Initial estimates (EUR)	EC cuts (EUR)	Council cuts (EUR)	EP reinstatement (EUR)	Conciliation result	Budget adopted (EUR)
2017	1 624 810	- 213 735	-	+ 213 735	- 213 735	1 411 075
2018	1 411 075	-	-	-	-	1 411 075
2019	1 411 075	- 211 075	-	-	-	1 200 000
2020	1 430 000	- 230 000	-	+ 230 000	- 230 000	1 200 000
2021	1 380 000	- 180 000	-	-	N.A.	N.A.

Yearly savings resulting from the transfer of 36 posts can be estimated at EUR 3.42 million.

13. To what extent does the collaboration with the Parliament contribute to achieving the Committee's mission? What can it be done to better integrate the Committee's opinions into the Parliament's work? What would be the budgetary and staff implications?

One key aspect of the Committee's mission is to ensure that policy development ties in with economic, social and civic realities on the ground. In order for this to work, the EESC has put in place over the past years a set of mechanisms to ensure regular and close contact with the three main European institutions, and particularly with the EP, which directly represents the European citizens at Union level.

Cooperation between the EP and the EESC is generally positive. Further improvements can be achieved by better coordination of calendars and legislative planning.

Raising MEPs' awareness of the value of EESC work could be achieved through systematic invitation of EESC members to EP parliamentary committee meetings. Further strengthening of relations between MEPs and EESC members could be achieved by continuing to increase attendance at hearings and meetings on common topics.

The EESC continues to adopt exploratory opinions following specific requests from the EP, in particular to contribute to the preparation of EP INI reports. Though this practice has been revealed to be successful and mutually beneficial in the past, it remains insufficiently implemented.

The EESC fully supports the political commitment of the EP to launching the Conference on the Future of Europe. The EESC, for its part, is getting ready to offer precise proposals and suggestions to the Conference, in a positive and constructive way, on behalf of European civil society.

Cooperation with the European Parliament is therefore a key element of the Committee's outreach strategy and it is necessary in order to achieve its mission of acting as a bridge between the European institutions and civil society. This cooperation is being monitored on a yearly basis in order to assess its impact.

The EESC is actively working on improving relations with the Parliament, which have become ever closer over recent years. In practical terms, cooperation between the two institutions takes the form of regular meetings between EP and EESC members on topics of common interest and principally on ongoing legislative work and external activities. These political meetings are mirrored by equally intensive coordination work between their administrations. The EESC regularly invites MEPs to its events and hearings while the EP has provided, since 2019, information on its planning, especially in terms of EP committee hearings, making the EESC more able to participate in and contribute to EP activities. Although the EESC is continually improving its exchanges and conversations at EP committee and sub-committee levels, cooperation could be enhanced more structurally. For instance, the EESC's expertise and networks could be mobilised by the European Parliament, for example by holding workshops and activities in conjunction with regular joint events, such as the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and Euro-Latin America Parliamentary Assembly meetings.

In 2019, despite the constraints of the electoral campaign and the time dedicated to new nominations at the beginning of a new legislature:

- Exchanges of views were organised between the EESC President and the chair of the CCC, the first of which involved a meeting with the plenum of the CCC.
- A joint declaration was signed in December 2018 that provided for cooperation and common activities between the Parliament and the Committee with a view to the 2019 European elections.
- High level cooperation on holding a joint event on the Youth Climate Summit kicked off in early 2020 with EP Vice-President Ms Hautala, but had to be temporarily stopped because of the COVID pandemic.

In the area of better regulation, the EESC receives regular updates of work in progress on ex-post evaluations from the EPRS.

Additionally, the President and the EP Vice-President responsible for interinstitutional relations took part in the EESC's plenary sessions.

Since 2019 was a European election year, the overall translation demand was lower than usual, and this had an impact on the number of translation pages exchanged between the Committees and the European Parliament on the Workload Balancing platform. In 2019, the Committees translated 2 335 pages submitted by the European Parliament. During the same period, the Committees submitted only 40 pages for workload balancing and none of them were translated by the European Parliament.

The Committees and the European Parliament have stepped up their cooperation in the field of outsourcing, with the Committees using the new framework contracts signed by the European Parliament on their behalf, following joint calls for tenders launched to increase quality in translation outsourcing. In this context, they have also developed a common methodology for evaluating outsourced translations. The new outsourcing framework contracts entered into force on 1 January 2020.

Budgetary and staff implications are explained in more details in reply to question 12.

- 14. What has been the evolution of the number of requests for consultations coming from different services of the institution to the legal service in the last 5 years? Please indicate separately formal and informal consultations, and the issues analysed. What steps have been taken to ensure that the legal service is officially and systematically involved in the most important matters of the institution without leaving the decision on whether to consult it up to the different services?**

Following the practice in other EU institutions, the Legal Service may be consulted on a range of general legal issues.

(1) Figures:

	Legal opinions	Other legal consultations	Total
2019	89	97	186
2018	89	66	155
2017	101	(not recorded)	101
2016	134	(not recorded)	134
2015	186	(not recorded)	186

Currently, the Legal Service is consulted on issues producing legal effects vis-à-vis third parties which are likely to constitute a legal risk for the EESC. Over recent years, the number of legal consultations (other than formal legal opinions) has increased by almost 50%.

The main issues analysed were the following:

Questions relating to Committee members
 EU civil service (all subjects linked to the Staff Regulations)
 Public procurement
 Logistics (buildings, decennial responsibility, etc.)

SLA – cooperation agreements.

In 2019, the Legal Service was specifically consulted regarding the adoption of the Implementing Provisions of the EESC Rules of Procedure and actively participated in the drafting of the rules of procedure of the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members.

In 2020, the Legal Service was in particular asked to deliver opinions regarding the Code of Conduct and it will be involved in the revision process of the Code of Conduct.

- 15. “Concerning the question of specialised staff, including staff belonging to the Legal service who should be exempted from the EESC's mobility policy, a reflection is ongoing.”⁴ Could you please elaborate what the outcome of this ongoing reflection is?**

Decision No 130/15 A of 21 September 2015 establishing a mobility scheme within the EESC General Secretariat states in its Article 2 that "the mobility scheme shall not apply to the following specialised posts: translators (including heads of language units), IT specialists and engineers; or to any other highly specialised post which may be defined by the Appointing Authority after consulting the Joint Mobility Committee". The establishment of the register on specialised posts was completed in July 2020, following an in-depth analysis. As no such list existed previously, each directorate could propose posts to be recognised as "specialised" according to the above mentioned definition. The Joint Mobility Committee analysed these proposals and sent an opinion to the Appointing Authority, which took a final decision on the qualification of a post as specialised or general. Following the decision of the Appointing Authority, the final list of all exempted specialised posts was notified to all EESC staff on 8 July 2020.

The register includes both the head of the Legal Service as well as all lawyers of the EESC, who are therefore exempted from the mobility scheme.

- 16. Please explain how the Committee has rationalised its internal bodies and refocused the remits of its structures, as stated in the follow-up to the 2018 discharge, including clarifications on savings in connection with this process.**

In June 2019, the Bureau set up a six-member ad hoc group to provide a comprehensive review on streamlining the Committee's working structures and bodies, including the question of the remits of the sections and the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI). The final report was adopted in April 2020. The report optimised some structures, reduced the number of meetings of certain bodies and reorganised some of them, including the observatories and thematic study groups.

- 17. What is the rate of compliance of your institution with regard to the recommendations of the Ombudsman in 2019?**

In 2019, the European Ombudsman opened 2 new cases concerning the EESC and closed one of them (no maladministration). The EESC also replied to the recommendations

⁴ EESC-2020-02534-23-00-NB-TRA (EN) 10/21, Follow-up report - Report on measures taken in light of the European Parliament recommendations (Discharge 2018)

made by the Ombudsman in a decision of 2016 (no maladministration was found but it was recommended that guidelines on conflicts of interest be adopted).

In 2019, the European Ombudsman published its recommendations for all institutions regarding the publication of information on former senior staff so as to enforce the one-year lobbying and advocacy ban (SI/2/2017/NF). The EESC is examining the possibility of revising its decision on external activities.

In 2020, the European Ombudsman opened 2 new cases (one of them being at the pre-inquiry stage) concerning the EESC and closed both after the Committee implemented the solution proposed by the EO. The Ombudsman also closed the remaining case from 2019 (no maladministration was found but it was recommended that the framework agreement on social dialogue be updated).

In 2020, the European Ombudsman also published practical recommendations for the EU administration on the use of official EU languages when communicating with the public (SI/98/2018/DDJ). The EESC is currently analysing the suggested actions in order to determine which could be transposed at its level.

18. What were the costs of the institution for interpretation, translation and languages classes in 2019?

Interpreting costs in 2019: EUR 6 414 583.49.

According to the KIAPI methodology, the total cost of translation for the EESC was EUR 29 075 349.

The total cost of language classes in 2019 was EUR 100 027. 88% of this amount was linked to staff participation (294 staff) in the interinstitutional language courses organised by the European Commission and charged to the EESC.

19. How do you explain that final appropriations for travel and subsistence allowances for Members have increased in 2018 despite the reduction of meetings? Please provide us with the appropriation numbers for travel and subsistence allowances for Members and the number of meetings from 2016-2019 and indicate how the average cost per meeting developed in this time frame.

As shown in the table below, the expenditure for travel costs and subsistence allowances payable to EESC members for participation in authorised meetings has remained relatively constant over the previous four calendar years.

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Travel costs (including travel allowances) EUR, (1)	12 874 924	12 228 216	12 860 395	13 203 333
Subsistence allowances, EUR, (2)	6 373 398	6 180 212	6 535 640	6 201 503
Number of reimbursed meeting days, (3)	20 104	19 509	20 337	19 449

Average cost per meeting day, EUR, ((1)+(2))/(3)	957	944	954	998
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Travel costs and subsistence allowances depend on a series of variable elements apart from the number of meeting days such as, for example, unpredictability of air travel fares and the meeting place, the number of participants in each meeting and their place of residence, the means of transport used by the beneficiaries and the chosen itinerary pursuant to the available flight connections. A comprehensive report detailing travel costs and allowances, from which the above-mentioned data are extracted, is submitted every year by 30 April to the European Parliament and to the Council. The report is an integral part of the Annual Activity Report 2019.

20. What was the outcome of the budget group's assessment of member spending and what improvements were proposed to better plan for the budget item covering members' travel and subsistence allowances?

See the reply to question 5 on the results achieved following the tender.

Furthermore, as from 1 January 2019, members have been required to submit their reimbursement claims at the latest six weeks after the meeting. This shorter deadline allows a faster calculation of real costs incurred by members and thus better planning for the budget covering their travel costs and subsistence allowances.

21. What was the amount dedicated by the Institution to travel for Members in 2019?

In 2019, the EESC reimbursed EUR 9 232 482 for covering transport cost by members.

22. What is the whole amount of daily allowances paid in 2019?

In 2019, the EESC granted EUR 6 201 503 in daily allowances to members.

23. Excluding early booking options and shared transport solutions could you please describe in detail what further cost-effective solutions were introduced to lower travel costs?

According to Council Decision No 2013/471/EU of 23 September 2013, the EESC has a system for the reimbursement of travel expenses based on actual costs, as well as for allowances compensating for the time spent by its members and their alternates when performing their duties.

The rules relating to reimbursement of travel costs mirror the rules in force at the European Parliament: EESC members are reimbursed – upon presentation of the supporting documents – the actual cost of their travel tickets, up to a maximum of the discounted ("D") business class (or similar) air fare.

The current system – which is based on actual costs – is in line with both the Council decision and with the system in place at the European Parliament.

The EESC has produced, for members, a guide to "Smart Booking for Travelling". This guide provides tips for booking aeroplane tickets, train tickets and taxis at a lower rate.

The EESC travel agency (the same as the EP) systematically presents several cost-effective solutions to the requesting EESC beneficiaries. The EESC has established a list of reference (ceiling) prices for travel between Brussels and main European cities. It should also be noted that where members make their own travel reservations, that are above the established price ceiling, the EESC limits reimbursement to the relevant price ceiling.

With a view to constantly developing and optimising the members' travels costs, the EESC periodically reviews its internal rules on reimbursement: the most recent revisions included a provision facilitating the use of the Brussels South Charleroi airport, where mostly low-cost carriers operate.

Temporary provisions allowing members to attend EESC meetings remotely were adopted in order to cope with the travel restrictions due to the pandemic.

24. What has been made to reduce the member's transportation and travel cost? What about the use of video technology?

In 2019, the EESC started exploring the possibilities of developing its videoconferencing capacities and of introducing remote interpreting systems such as KUDO, or others. In April 2020, the Interactio videoconferencing system was used for the first time for remote interpreting and, with the onset of the COVID crisis, it has been used since in most meetings with interpreting.

In relation to core EESC meetings, where a physical presence by all or some members would normally be deemed optimal, the EESC Bureau adopted in June 2020 a decision to allow for the reimbursement of expenses for remote participation in cases where the member was prevented from travelling to Brussels as a result of COVID-19 related issues. This has led to considerable savings in travel expenditure in 2020.

25. Appropriations carried forward from 2017 to 2018 were particularly overestimated. To what do you attribute this miscalculation? What measures have been introduced to enable better budgeting forecasts?

The appropriations carried forward from 2017 to 2018 amounted to EUR 9 838 902. Of this amount EUR 2 211 398 remained unused at the end of the year 2018, corresponding to 22.48%.

The amount carried forward on the budget lines relating to "Members of the institution and delegates" was needed in order to continue to handle members' reimbursement claims in the following year. Given the uncertainty linked with this position, the amount to be carried forward cannot be calculated exactly beforehand and it therefore resulted in a leftover of EUR 1 035 964.

From 1 January 2019, a general deadline of six weeks for submitting these reimbursement claims was introduced to reduce the reimbursement lead times and therefore also to reduce the need for carry-overs on these budget lines. The system has proved to be efficient.

The leftover appropriations carried forward from 2018 to 2019 amounted to EUR 8 614 946. Out of this amount EUR 1 541 770 remained unused at the end of the year 2019, corresponding to 17.90%.

The carry-forward amount was higher in the last two years than in previous years due to the more extensive end-of-year exercise, which involves transfers of unused funds on some budget lines to other budget lines in need of funds. As the amounts transferred during these exercises are only available at the end of the year, the services are not able to spend these in the same year and they become part of the carry-forward of the next year.

26. Considering the suggested change of the system of one signature to confirm the presence of members on meetings, to the system of two signatures - one signature at the beginning and one at the end of the meeting - what best practices solutions have been carved out since the last discharge of 2018 (hearing 12. November)?

The current EESC approach is in line with the best practices of other EU assemblies, such as the European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions that require, as well as a single signature, a declaration of attendance at a meeting.

The Members' Financial Statute (Article 4(1)) stipulates that "in order to benefit from reimbursement of expenses or payment of allowances, the beneficiary must:

- a) sign the attendance list at meetings, whenever such a list is kept;
- b) complete the standard expenses declaration form for each day of the meeting, and
- c) submit the appropriate supporting documents".

Subsistence is granted for each day of participation in the work of the Committee and its constituent bodies or of official representation of the EESC.

Consideration has been given to a system of sign-in and sign-out at meetings but this was not taken up as it was considered it would not increase the efficiency of the members' political work.

This was confirmed by the president's decision of 24 April 2019 clarifying the interpretation of the EESC Bureau Decision of 26 April 2016 on the issue of members' presence and right to a daily subsistence allowance, the third recital of which states: "Given the complexity and diversity of the activities of beneficiaries at the Committee, participation in meetings is clearly only part of the work that takes place there, alongside drafting reports and tabling amendments, opinions and reports, with many of these activities taking place outside of scheduled meeting hours".

The Committee's administrative services check all declarations and supporting documents submitted by each beneficiary and ensure that they are consistent.

27. The Parliament expressed its discontent that the deadline for the 2018 annual activity report was not met as requested in the 2017 discharge. The adherence of deadlines is indispensable to assure that the discharge institution is able to conduct a profound discharge procedure. What improvements and best practices solutions have been introduced since the 2017 discharge?

According to Article 249 of the Financial Regulation "Annual report on budgetary and financial management", the institutions shall prepare a report on budgetary and financial management for the financial year and make the report available to the European Parliament, the Council and the Court of Auditors by 31 March of the following financial year. The EESC does comply with this request. However, the deadline for publication of the Annual Activity report is 1 July, according to Article 74(9) of the Financial Regulation "Powers and duties of the authorising officer".

The EESC is ready to comply with any new decision in this respect, but it stresses the importance of all institutions adhering to the same timetable.

Staff

28. How many trainees have worked in 2019 at the EESC? Have all of trainees received an allowance that covers at least their living costs?

A total of 54 long-term trainees worked at the EESC in 2019. A long-term trainee has a five-month contract of service with the EESC and receives a monthly maintenance grant equal to 25% of an AD5/1 basic salary, plus a mobility and travel allowance.

The EESC also hosted 15 short-term trainees, who were mainly students requiring some practical work experience as part of their diploma. They have a contract of appointment for a minimum period of one month and maximum period of three months, with no grant paid by the EESC. Finally, the EESC hosted one trainee who received a grant awarded by an outside public body. This type of trainee signs a contract of appointment for a maximum of five months which does not give entitlement to any financial contribution.

All types of trainees are insured against accident risks through the insurance policy taken out by the EESC.

29. What was done to improve the well-being of the staff, thus strengthening its efforts to improve staff well-being and work-life balance?

Well-being, physical and mental health:

As part of the action plan on psychosocial risks, the mentoring scheme for newcomers was relaunched. Mentoring is a relationship in which an experienced colleague helps to guide a new colleague during the first six months after recruitment, with empathy and respect. Mentoring creates a bond between the mentor and the mentee and fosters a strong sense of belonging. It benefits the organisation as a whole. In 2019, 19 mentors and 15 new colleagues took part in the scheme. In 2020, the mentoring scheme will continue to be promoted via different channels.

Moreover, in order to enhance the physical and mental health of EESC staff, a relaxation room was opened near the Medical Service in March 2019. This space allows staff to get some rest in a calm environment in order to reconstitute their mental focus on busy and challenging days. It may also be used by the members.

In December 2019, a conference was organised for parents of children with a disability. It was also open via webstreaming to colleagues from other institutions. A brochures

titled "For parents of children with a disability" was published on paper and in electronic format.

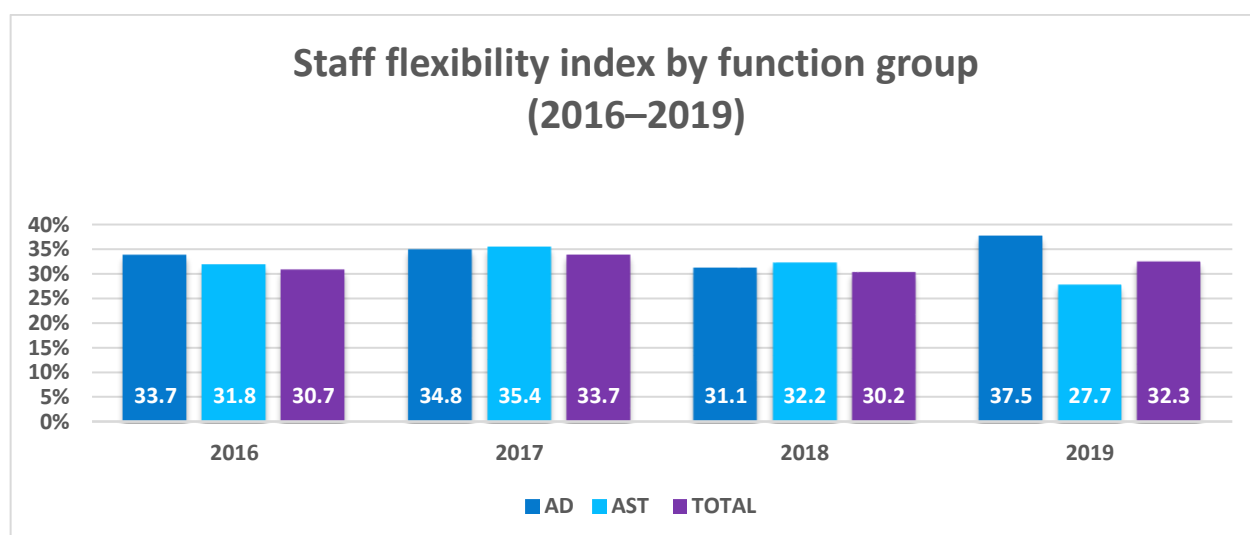
These initiatives are complemented by the organisation of events to increase a sense of belonging amongst staff, such as the annual staff ceremony celebrating staff with 20, 30 or 40 years of service as well as retiring colleagues. Moreover, events are organised to promote environmentally-friendly mobility and as part of the Week for Safety and Health at Work.

Support is also available for retired EESC staff: under the agreement with the International Association of Former EU Officials (AIACE), the EESC maintains close contact with retired staff and promotes access to social and medical activities, as well as offering specific administrative advice.

Work-life balance:

As outlined in question 40, EESC staff can make use of a variety of flexible working arrangements to improve work-life balance. These working patterns are accompanied by a wide range of types of special leave (e.g. for a serious illness or death of a close relative, etc.).

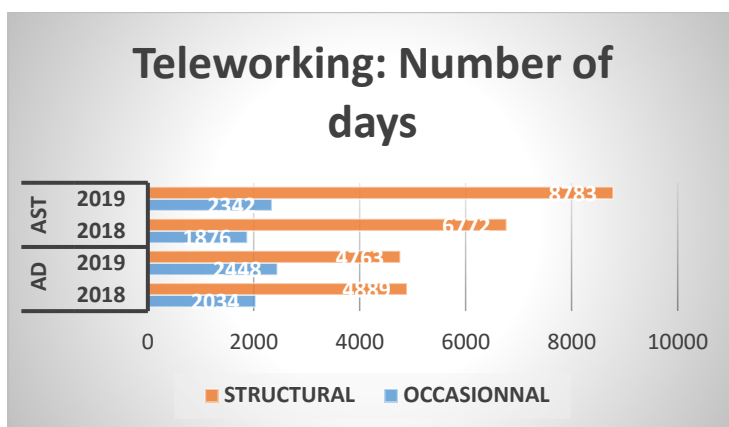
The overall flexibility index (% of active staff with a work pattern that differs from 100%) increased in 2019. In 2017 and 2018, assistants had a slightly higher flexibility index than administrators; this trend was reversed in 2019. There seems to be an inverse correlation between part-time patterns and teleworking: in 2019, while administrators tended to choose part-time patterns to a greater extent to achieve a satisfying work-life balance, assistants opted for teleworking as an alternative.



Graph: Flexibility index 2016–2019

Teleworking plays a significant role in achieving a good work-life balance. In 2019, the rules on teleworking were modernised extensively. Since the revision, technical capacity has been increased and more staff have been interested in teleworking.

In 2019, more than 58% of staff used either structural and/or occasional telework. Compared to 2018, structural teleworking days increased by 16% while occasional teleworking days stayed stable.



It goes without saying that for staff with children, places in interinstitutional childcare facilities are secured by an institutional contribution.

In order to achieve a satisfying work-life balance and to stay healthy, EESC staff benefit from individual specialist advice from a multidisciplinary team dealing with working conditions (a medical advisor, nurse, social worker, time management specialists, etc.). Further arrangements put in place during the pandemic are outlined in the reply to question 39.

30. Could you please provide a table of all human resources broken down by nationality, type of contract, gender and grade for the year 2019, and an overview of how these figures compare with the year 2018?

Breakdown of staff by type of contract and gender										
Gender	Situation on 31/12/2018					Situation on 31/12/2019				
	Officials	Temporary agents	Contract agents	Seconded national experts	TOTAL	Officials	Temporary agents	Contract agents	Seconded national experts	TOTAL
Female	375	56	25	4	460	364	67	26	2	459
Male	209	12	21	3	245	208	14	17	3	241
TOTAL	584	68	46	7	705	572	81	43	5	701

Breakdown of staff by type of contract and grade										
Grade	Situation on 31/12/2018					Situation on 31/12/2019				
	Officials	Temporary agents	Contract agents	Seconded national experts	TOTAL	Officials	Temporary agents	Contract agents	Seconded national experts	TOTAL
AD16	1*				1	1*				1
AD15	3				3	3				3
AD14	14				14	15				15
AD13	22	2			24	20	2			22
AD12	43	1			44	49	1			50
AD11	19				19	18				18
AD10	27	2			29	33	2			35
AD9	53	4			57	54	5			59
AD8	47	1			48	40	1			41
AD7	23	3			26	18	2			20
AD6	24	4			28	22	4			26
AD5	15	9			24	13	16			29
AST11	4				4	4				4
AST10	3				3	2				2
AST9	17				17	21				21
AST8	27				27	24				24
AST7	30	2			32	29	2			31
AST6	46	2			48	51	3			54
AST5	57	3			60	57	2			59
AST4	49	2			51	42	2			44
AST3	36	15			51	27	18			45
AST2	5				5	2				2
AST1	5	1			6	6	5			11
SC3						2				2
SC2	3	7			10	6	6			12
SC1	11	10			21	13	10			23
GFIV			7		7			6		6
GFIII			7		7			5		5
GFII			12		12			11		11
GFI			20		20			21		21
END				7	7				5	5
TOTAL	584	68	46	7	705	571	81	43	5	701
* AD15 official occupying AD16 grade temporary post										

Nationality	Breakdown of staff by type of contract and nationality									
	Situation on 31/12/2018					Situation on 31/12/2019				
	Officials	Temporary agents	Contract agents	Seconded national experts	Total	Officials	Temporary staff	Contract staff	Seconded national experts	TOTAL
AUT	9			1	10	10	1		1	12
BEL	109	6	13	1	129	109	7	14		130
BGR	14	1			15	15	1			16
CYP		1			1		1			1
CZE	13	2			15	13	2			15
DEU	32	3	1		36	32	3	1		36
DNK	17				17	17				17
ESP	45	3	7		55	43	3	7		53
EST	12		1		13	12	1			13
FIN	16	3			19	17	3			20
FRA	37	10	1		48	33	12	3		48
GBR	16	2			18	14	3			17
GRC	24	8	2	2	36	23	8	3	2	36
HRV	11				11	10				10
HUN	18		1		19	19				19
IRL	10			1	11	10	1			11
ITA	53	10	11	1	75	53	11	8	1	73
LTU	14	1			15	13	1			14
LUX		1			1		1			1
LVA	7	1			8	7				7
MLT	10		1		11	11				11
NLD	10		1		11	9	1	1		11
POL	22	3	1	1	27	22	3	1	1	27
PRT	22	5	4		31	23	4	3		30
ROU	23	3	2		28	17	7	2		26
SVK	19				19	18	1			19
SVN	11	2			13	11	2			13
SWE	10	3			13	11	4			15
TOTAL	584	68	46	7	705	572	81	43	5	701

31. Could you please provide us a table of staff broken down by type of contract and average duration (of contractual employments) for 2013 and 2019?

Statutory link	2013		2019	
	People	Length of contracts (average-months)	People	Length of contracts (average-months)
Contract agents (CA)	20	indefinite	21	indefinite
Contract agents (CB)	22	7.5	17	12.18
Temporary agents (TC)	29	indefinite	34	indefinite
Temporary agents (TP)	26	10	43	12.53
Temporary agents (TT)	1	75.5	1	indefinite
Total days worked	Total days worked		Total days worked	
Equivalent FGI	215		61	
Equivalent FGII (SC)	N/A		114	
Equivalent FGII (AST1)	124		121	
Equivalent FGIII (AST3)	50		101	

32. We would appreciate a comprehensive overview of staff on sick leave in 2019, broken down by the total number of staff members that were on sick leave and by how many days they were on sick leave in total.

How many days did the three longest cases of sick leave last for? How many days of sick leave were taken on Mondays and Fridays in 2018? What was the evolution since 2013?

How many days of sick leave were the result of harassment case in Chamber I?

The EESC, like most European institutions, measures its staff's absence rate based on the following method laid down in an interinstitutional agreement of 31 May 2001:

Absence rate = total absence in calendar days / (days in a year x total of staff)

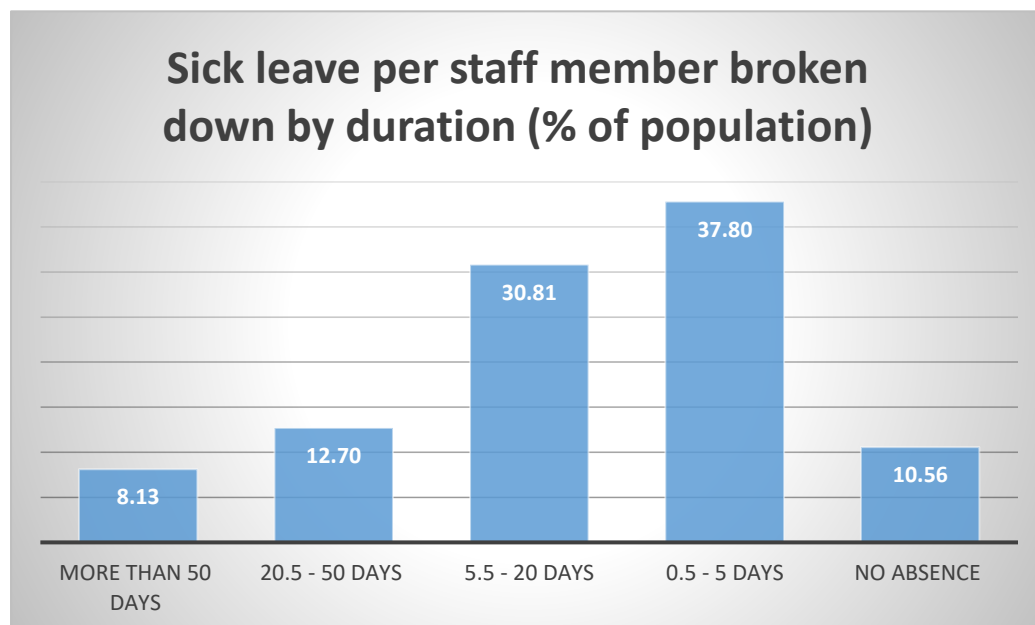
In 2019, the average length of absence due to sickness among EESC staff was 18.27 days, a slight decrease since 2017 (19.98 days in 2017 and 19.54 in 2018). This is equivalent to an absence rate of 5.00%.

	2019
Reference population (total staff)	701
Total number of registered sick leave days	12 811.5
Absence rate (including short- and long-term)	5.00
Average sick leave days (in calendar days)	18.27

Table: Total absences due to sickness

The absence rate due to sickness within the EESC General Secretariat decreased for the second consecutive year and was at 5.00% (2018: 5.35%).

The graph below gives a more precise picture of the distribution of the length of sick leave.



***Graph:** Sick leave per staff member broken down by duration (% of population)*

The three longest absences in 2019 were of two of 365 and one of 303 days.

48.36% of staff take a maximum of five days of sick leave over the year.

With regard to the specific question about sick leave absences on Mondays or Fridays, there were 852 isolated cases of sick leave days taken on either Friday or Monday, and 2 537.5 days (weekends included) of absences including both Friday and the following Monday. In such cases, the provision of a medical certificate is mandatory.

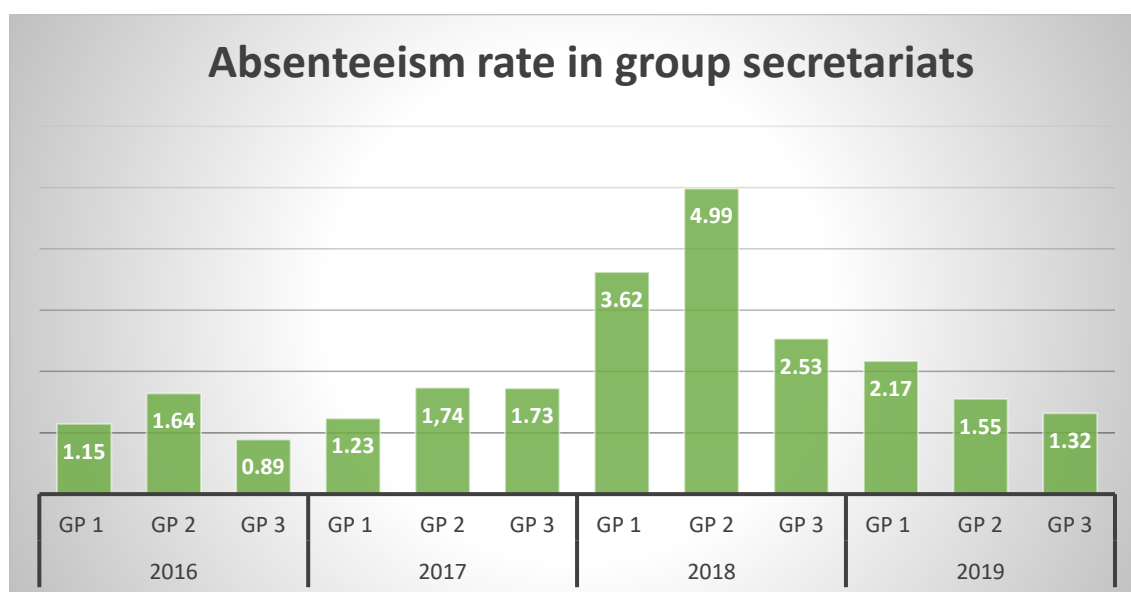
With regard to the evolution since 2013, the data show that the absence rate, meaning all types of absence due to sickness (absence with or without medical certificate and medical part-time), has increased since 2015 and seems to have reached its peak in 2017, as it slightly decreased again by 0.12% in 2018 and by 0.35% in 2019.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Reference population (total staff)	737	707	704	707	706	706	701
Total number of registered sick leave days	10 816.25	10 877.05	10 249.5	12 608.5	14 112	13 799.75	12 811.5
Absence rate	4.02	4.21	3.99	4.87	5.47	5.35	5.00
Average sick leave days (in calendar days)	14.67	15.38	14.55	17.83	19.98	19.54	18.27

***Table:** The evolution of sick leave days since 2013 (total staff = officials, temporary agents, contract agents, seconded national experts and medical advisors)*

With regard to the question about a link between perceived harassment and sick leave, it

should be noted that this connection is difficult to determine. Because of the need to respect the data protection provisions, further details cannot be disclosed.



Graph: Absence rate in group secretariats since 2016

33. What actions have been taken to reduce the long-term sick leave among Committee's heads of unit?

For managers as for other staff, sick leave is closely monitored by the health service based on a regular provision of statistical data and with the aim of reinforcing absence management and implementing an efficient return-to-work policy.

Medical part-time work remains the method favoured by the EESC to encourage and facilitate a return to work, particularly after long-term absences. It allows the combination of professional activity with possible therapies or a long convalescence. It is a preventive measure to avoid further absences due to sickness.

In 2019, out of the total number of days of absence, 1 255 days were accounted for as medical part-time (compared to 673 in 2014). Heads of unit benefit from this provision, as do all staff.

As of 2020, a medical advisor specialised in the return-to-work process provides individual support to staff during their return to work.

In the new decision on telework adopted in 2019, a new article was introduced to facilitate the return to work of persons whose mobility is temporarily reduced and to help them to remain at work. On the basis of the medical officer's opinion, it is possible for the Appointing Authority to grant a structural teleworking formula adapted to the individual's situation, including full-time structural teleworking or teleworking from a location other than the place of employment. This provision was applied to managers

who were convalescing or immobilised but able to work, which enabled them to keep in touch with team members.

34. How many requests for promotions were submitted in 2019? How many promotions between function groups were postponed or denied in 2019? Were any of these a consequence of the 2014 staff reform?

Based on Article 45 of the Staff Regulations there were 326 promotable staff members. According to Article 6 and Annex IB of the Staff Regulations, the EESC had 149 possibilities for promotion and 148 staff members were promoted. The EESC promotion system is in full compliance with the 2014 staff reform.

35. What were the most important actions taken by the institution in 2019 in order to have a more diverse workforce?

The EESC General Secretariat continues to implement its Action Plan for Equal Opportunities and Diversity (2017–2020). In addition to specific measures linked in particular to disability (see question 43), awareness raising events were organised. Together with the CoR and the EESC Joint Committees for Equal Opportunities (COPECs), a lunchtime conference on Myths and Truths about LGBTI Parenting was held on the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT). Another event, a screening of the documentary "The Man Who Mends Women: The Wrath of Hippocrates", followed by a debate on the work of Dr Mukwege, organised on the occasion of International Women's Day in March 2019.

Furthermore, as from 2019, a new decision on annual and special leave officially recognises registered partnerships, meaning that non-married partners are entitled to the same special leave as spouses. The EESC was the first EU institution to clearly classify the concept of surrogacy motherhood as far as special leave is concerned.

Finally, the "United in Diversity" conference on communication in a multicultural environment was organised in March 2019. The aim of the conference was to foster respectful relations at work while taking diversity into account.

36. Can the institution assure that the VMA building is completely safe for the staff regarding the presence of asbestos? What concrete measures have been taken on this issue? How has the institution communicated with staff regarding this issue?

The VMA building is fully compliant with all regulatory requirements on asbestos applications.

In September 2019, an update of the asbestos inventory was made by a certified supplier by checking all construction materials potentially containing asbestos. Furthermore, in September 2019, a check of the air quality was carried out on each floor of the building, including the basement. No asbestos fibres were detected in the air on any floor.

Thanks to these two steps, the above-mentioned certified supplier delivered an *asbestos safe certificate* in September 2019. This certificate specifies that the building contains asbestos, but it does not represent any risks for the users of the building.

All relevant information about asbestos in the Committees' buildings, such as asbestos policy, asbestos safe certificates as well as the asbestos inventories, has been published on the intranet webpage of the Directorate for Logistics. All staff were informed about this situation by an email sent on 6 March 2020. The renovation works in the VMA building that are planned to start in 2021, will also allow the limited number of asbestos applications to be safely removed from the basement floors of the VMA building.

37. Were there any change done to the organisation of workspaces in 2019? Could you please provide a table of the current workspaces and their capacity?

The EESC's long-term Buildings Strategy deals with strategic questions for the coming years and presents various scenarios for future needs/options for buildings.

This strategy, which was approved by the Committees in 2017, sets out improvement in four key areas related to the organisation of workspace:

- ✓ reorganisation of office allocations; Commission services (DG HR, DIGIT, OIB) have been contacted to exchange experiences in relation to "The Workplace of the Future";
- ✓ refurbishment of existing buildings in view of creating healthier workspaces aligned to ergonomic standards such as renovation of some of the older offices and common areas – technical audits of VMA and BvS have been finished; work has been launched to improve the ventilation of meeting rooms and to upgrade the capacity of lifts in the BvS building; the ventilation system as well as the video cabling system within the JDE conference rooms have been upgraded;
- ✓ increasing the security level of buildings such as the renovation of the BvS entrance hall and reinforcing the inside windows with an anti-blast film;
- ✓ reduction of electricity consumption and alignment to environmental obligations – improvement of evacuation routes, lighting, installation of energy counters in some buildings.

In addition, the ergonomist made recommendations for improving the ergonomics of more than 50 workstations following his office visits. His recommendations were subsequently implemented. For example, several desks were replaced with electrically height-adjustable desks.

BUILDING	B68	BvS	JDE	REM	TRE	VMA	TOTAL:
Work stations in use	230	413	496	25	162	232	1 558

38. ESSC has installed a working group to find solutions regarding the current lack of offices for around 200 members of staff. What are the results of the working group's analysis?

A working group has been created on the future allocation of space in order to analyse the needs and distribution of office space during the planned renovation works of the VMA building as well as after its exchange with the B68 and TR74 buildings, scheduled for September 2022.

The working group drew up a proposal for criteria and principles to be applied when allocating space to the different services, proposed different simulations for the occupation of the buildings and recommended one of those simulations.

In all possible simulations for occupation, the working group considered it essential to have an additional building such as the B100, with a capacity of around 200 members of staff, in order to be able to create good working conditions for members and staff. This analysis has led the two Committees to negotiate the renting of a buffer building, the B100. With this configuration, the average office space per person at the Committees will be 16 m², which is in line with the average of the European institutions according to the study undertaken by the Court of Auditors in 2018.

39. What specific measures were taken to ensure health safety for staff since the start of the COVID-19? What type of support is provided for teleworking? Were there any changes made following the outbreak of the COVID-19?

At the beginning of the outbreak in early 2020, a dedicated COVID-19 Task Force was established within the EESC to coordinate all action and measures required based on an evolution of the situation. The Task Force meets on a very regular basis to ensure proper monitoring of the COVID-19 situation and to coordinate all decisions to be implemented to ensure the health and safety of staff in this specific context. It should also be highlighted that all related action taken has been closely coordinated between both Committees (EESC and CoR) and regularly communicated to staff.

The EESC is also actively involved in the interinstitutional meetings to exchange information and best practices on the management of the COVID-19 crisis. The EESC Medical Service has been very actively involved in defining and implementing a large number of COVID-19 procedures, from the compulsory wearing of masks to the contact tracing procedure.

As of mid-March 2020, in addition to the technical aspects put in place by the Logistics Department to facilitate teleworking, the EESC's Human Resources Department applied Article 8.5 of Decision 248/19 A on teleworking, allowing full-time teleworking to all staff in case of force majeure. The entire staff was therefore placed on occasional teleworking.

In order to support expatriate staff in particular, two forms of telework from abroad were offered to staff:

During the summer period (July 2020 – September 2020): the possibility of occasional telework abroad for two weeks in combination with a two-week period of annual leave or parental or family leave of 50%. This measure allowed 113 staff members (= 16% of

the entire staff population) to telework from abroad, allowing them to support their older relatives and/or get support for the care of their children.

This measure came to an end as of October 2020. Currently, access to teleworking from abroad is very limited (only possible in very special family or medical circumstances). In these cases, telework is generally authorised for one month. Beneficiaries of this measure are strongly advised to exhaust their annual leave balance by 31 December. To date, 14 staff members were granted this measure.

Following a transfer approved by the Budgetary Authority in 2020, the respective investments to support 100% of staff teleworking are currently being implemented (appropriations transferred to the respective IT lines in September). OnePCs have been ordered for staff not yet equipped and distribution is expected to start in November/December. Additional screens will also be provided to support extended teleworking.

In relation to support for teleworking, three solutions are available to staff where IT is concerned:

- 1) Portable (laptop) computers which provide complete access to the IT working environment of the Committees. This solution is known as "OnePC". At the start of the crisis, there were some 650 OnePCs in operation. This number has risen steadily and all staff should be issued with a portable PC by the end of the year.
- 2) "Token" – allows secure access to a near complete version of the IT working environment. A pragmatic, and effective measure, taken at the start of the crisis was the *ad hoc* reattribution of tokens to make sure that all staff had either a "OnePC" or a "token".
- 3) Online (secure) services available from outside of the Committee including e-mail, intranet, Skype for Business and team-sites.

Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, the Committees' buildings have been adapted by installing different relevant measures in common areas:

- Relevant posters and signs have been posted on walls, floors, entrance halls, close to and inside lifts, staircases, conference rooms, meeting rooms, restrooms, toilets, cafeterias and canteens;
- Hydro-alcoholic gel dispensers have been installed in strategic places such as entrances of buildings, close to the entrance doors of lifts, staircases, conference rooms, meeting rooms, restrooms, toilets, cafeterias and canteens;
- The ventilation system is functioning with 100% fresh air;
- Cleaning procedures have been adapted and a medical disinfection procedure has been introduced to be implemented when a case of COVID-19 infection is suspected;

- The maximum number of people allowed to enter meeting rooms and conference rooms has been determined and indicated outside and inside of the rooms; similar measures were taken for lifts;

- Plexiglass screens have been installed at strategic places;

All catering vending points have been closed except for the JDE cafeteria (in take-away mode only) and the furniture in the public area of the cafeteria has been removed;

For more detailed information, please see the Annex.

Several additional improvements are planned, including the distribution of up to 800 home-office screens, the installation of a soft phone system, the distribution of headsets and the consolidation of service smartphones.

Throughout the crisis, support has been provided by the IT Helpdesk. They also took over support for the web conferencing software.

Additional details are provided in the Annex to the questionnaire.

40. Flexible working arrangements:

- What flexible working arrangements does your institution offer?**
- How often are they used? Has there been a development in the frequency?**
- What is the share of men and women respectively using these working arrangements?**
- To what extent does your institution encourage parents to make use of flexible working arrangements to better combine family life with their career?**
- Can all categories of staff apply for these working arrangements?**

a) What flexible working arrangements does your institution offer?

The EESC is committed to providing its staff with working arrangements that help them to reconcile their professional and private life such as:

- Standard part-time with options of 50%, 62.5%, 75%, 80%, 90%, 95%
- Special part-time (time-credits) with options of 75%, 80%, 90%
- Parental leave of 50% and 100% (6 months + 6 months' extension)
- Family leave (50% and 100%)
- "Serious hardship" (under exceptional circumstances, an official may be entitled to work 95% without a reduction in salary, pursuant to Article 55a(2)(d) of the Staff Regulations).

b) How often are they used? Has there been a development in the frequency?

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total staff	707	704	707	706	706	701

Number of staff who asked for at least one working pattern	205	201	217	238	213	226
% of staff members who asked for at least one working pattern	29.00%	28.55%	30.69%	33.71%	30.17%	32.23%

Table: Percentage of staff opting for a non-standard work pattern

As a general trend, requests for flexible working arrangements increased between 2014 and 2017 (with the exception of 2015, where we saw a slight decline). In 2018, there was again a slight decrease of 3.54%, before a new increase in 2019.

Number of requests registered by year (by popularity in 2019)⁵				
	2016	2017	2018	2019
Parental leave 50%	96	105	92	105
Part-time 50%	28	39	44	66
Part-time 80%	45	60	47	56
Part-time 90%	34	34	34	49
Parental leave 100%	39	31	31	40
Part-time free days 80%	21	23	23	35
Part-time free days 75%	11	11	11	31
Part-time 75%	14	17	19	26
Family leave 50%	8	9	14	22
Parental leave (extension) 100%	13	13	22	22
Part-time free days 90%	32	28	22	22
Part-time 62.5%	29	15	16	19
Parental leave (extension) 50%	22	22	24	18
Part-time 95%	12	12	7	11
Family leave 100%	1	3	4	6
Part-time 95% – paid 100% (Art. 55a(2)(d) Staff Reg)	2	4	4	4
Total	407	426	414	532

The graph refers to the total number of requests (staff can request more than one working pattern). We see a clear increase in requests, while the number of persons who benefit from these patterns does not vary considerably – in fact colleagues tended to change their formula more often during the year.

While the 50% parental leave work pattern continues to be the most popular working pattern for our colleagues, particularly during the summer months, the 90% part-time pattern attracted a higher number of staff. The 40-hour working week, sometimes

⁵ NB: It should be noted that the methodology has been changed to better take into account the needs imposed by both the IT tool and the internal rules.

combined with long commuting times, is not always compatible with a healthy work-life balance. As is to be expected, most part-time patterns are requested during the summer months (i.e. school holidays).

c) What is the share of men and women respectively using these working arrangements?

	By gender				All	
	M		F			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2019	46	19.08%	180	39.1%	226	32.23%
2018	38	15.5%	175	38.0%	213	30.2%
2017	45	18.0%	193	42.1%	238	33.7%
2016	43	16.6%	174	38.7%	217	30.7%
2015	35	17.2%	166	38.1%	201	28.6%

Table: Flexible working arrangements by gender

2019 saw a significant increase in the number of men using flexible working patterns (+3.58%) compared to 2018.

d) To what extent does your institution encourage parents to make use of flexible working arrangements to better combine family life with their career?

Parents-to-be are offered individual advice on everything they need to know about maternity/paternity leave and working-time possibilities for parents with young children or children with serious illnesses.

As part of the constant effort to modernise and update the existing rules, the updated decision on annual and special leave entered into force in October 2019. The new decision officially recognises registered partnerships, meaning that non-married partners are entitled to the same special leave as spouses. Moreover, the concept of surrogate mother has been incorporated into the section on adoption.

A certain number of provisions (pecuniary and non-pecuniary) directly address the needs of this group:

- Parental leave (50% and 100%), with an increased allowance for the first three months if the parental leave is taken immediately following maternity leave or adoption, or during maternity leave for the parent who is not entitled to it;
- Part-time work to care for a child cannot be refused before the age of 9;
- 6 days of special leave per year are possible in cases of serious illness, 15 days per year in cases where a child has a very serious illness;
- For spouses: 10 days of special leave to be taken within 14 weeks of the birth of a child;
- 2 hours of work per day are granted for cases of breastfeeding for the

first 6 months (12 months if medically proven).

A brochure is available for parents-to-be about working-time arrangements, as well as their pecuniary rights and how to register their children in nurseries and schools.

e) Can all categories of staff apply for these working arrangements?

All EESC statutory staff (officials, temporary agents, contract agents) as well as seconded national experts (SNEs) can apply for part-time solutions, regardless of their function group and grade (within the limits of the Staff Regulations).

With regard to flexible working hours, some constraints may affect certain categories of staff due to the specific nature of their role and working patterns, for example:

- staff members allocated to services that work in close contact with members;
- drivers;
- security officers.

41. Was any staff member placed on leave in the interest of the service according to Article 50 of the staff regulations? If yes, what were the reasons?

No.

42. How many posts were open in the Committee in 2019?

56 posts were open in the Committee in 2019.

43. What were the three most important actions taken by the Committee in favour of disabled people and in favour of equality?

In June 2019, the EESC, together with the CoR, hosted the interinstitutional InterCOPEC conference on "Disability: towards an inclusive workplace". After a presentation of best practices related to disability in various institutions, participatory workshops took place on topics such as the recruitment of persons with disabilities, the recognition of disability, inclusive language, the role of employees' networks and the role of social workers. The recommendations were sent to the heads of administration.

In December, on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, a lunchtime conference was organised by the EESC Medical Service on the following topic: "Being the parents of a child with a disability: announcement of the diagnosis and support".

Finally, the EESC has continued to adapt its premises to improve accessibility. After the renovation of the Jacques Delors building (JDE) entrance hall in 2018, the Bertha von Suttner building (BvS) main entrance was also upgraded in accordance with the "design for all" principle.

In accordance with the Buildings Strategy, the Committees are committed to systematically applying the "design for all" principle to their infrastructure, and certainly in their building projects for new or renovated areas.

The "design for all" concept was applied in 2019 during the security-related works in the entrance hall of the BvS building. The specific measures taken are as follows:

- Access to the hall: via an airlock for motorised PRMs (wheelchair) without the need for external assistance.
- Reception desk designed for motorised PRMs (wheelchairs) and for hearing-impaired PRMs (induction loop).
- Podotactile strips on the floor from the entrance hall to the lifts.

The "design for all" concept was also applied in the studies for the security-related works in the entrance hall of the VMA building, which started in 2020.

44. What are the most important actions taken by the EESC in favour of gender equality and geographical balance?

Under Rule 1(5) of the Committee's Rules of Procedure adopted in March 2019, "the Committee shall ensure compliance with the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination, as defined by European Union law, in all its policies. The Committee shall ensure that the proportion of women in all bodies of the Committee is greater than that in the assembly". Geographical balance is addressed in Rule 4 of the Rules of Procedure for members of the Bureau. Best practice across the Committee seeks to ensure proper geographical balance in all political bodies. Political discussions were ongoing in 2019 about the potential establishment of an ad hoc group on equality as a pilot project. The political level will take a decision on this after the 2020 renewal.

As regards the administration, it has to be noted that the proportion of women in managerial positions within the EESC general secretariat reached almost 50%. For senior management in 2019, it was above 50%. Overall, gender balance is deeply enshrined in the EESC's administrative culture.

At the end of 2019, a learning path was put in place for heads of sector, which focuses on essential managerial competences linked to the EESC's mission and culture. It offers several training sessions and a mentoring scheme to those who would like to improve their managerial skills and competencies. Around 50% of participants are women and one third of participants come from EU-13 Member States.

45. What is the gender distribution in your institution, especially for top management positions?

The gender distribution by function group and management position within the EESC as of 31 December 2019 is summarized in the table below.

	Women	Men
AST, AST/SC	70%	30%
AD	60%	40%
Middle management*	48%	52%
Senior management**	57%	43%
Total staff	66%	34%

*including acting heads of unit

**including deputy directors

- 46. What were the costs in 2019 respectively for away days, trainings, closed conferences or similar events for staff? How many staff members participated in the respective events? Where did these events take place?**

Eight teambuilding events were organised outside the EESC premises (away days). One event was organised in Dinant and two in the outskirts of Brussels (Genval and Groot-Bijgaarden), the rest took place in Brussels.

107 staff members participated and the total cost of these events was EUR 7 946.74, i.e. EUR 74.27 per person.

- 47. How many former Members or high officials (from AD 14) still receive money from the budget of your institution as advisors, contract agents or others? What are their tasks and their respective salaries?**

One former member is employed as a temporary agent of a Group secretariat with a grade below AD 14 since 2009.

- 48. How many Members have registered address in Belgium?**

As of 20 September 2020 (the final day of the 2015–2020 members' term of office) 29 members had declared their usual place of residence to be in Belgium.

- 49. Why are only 176 out of 706 staff members entitled to overtime payment?**

According to Article 56 of the Staff Regulations, an official may not be required to work overtime except in cases of urgency or exceptional pressure of work; night work, and all work on Sundays or public holidays, may be authorised only in accordance with the procedure laid down by the Appointing Authority.

Only officials in grades SC1 to SC6 and grades AST1 to AST4 are entitled to compensatory leave or to remuneration. At the EESC, overtime is typically associated with services such as the Copyshop, Infrastructure, Translation, Legislative Planning and Bureau, External Relations, Conference Technology and External Meetings.

Staff occupying higher grades cannot benefit from this kind of compensation for hours worked in excess of their normal working hours. However, they may vary their hours via the flexitime system in place at the EESC. Management cannot recuperate hours via the flexitime scheme.

The table below shows the average hours of overtime worked by staff in the aforementioned grades in 2019.

	2018	2019
Total number of staff	706	701
Number of staff entitled to overtime payment	176	181
Number of overtime hours worked by AST/SC 1–6 and AST 1–4	813.9	745.17
Average number of hours per entitled staff member	4.6	4.1

Table: Overtime at the EESC in 2019 (Article 56 of the Staff Regulations)

- 50. According to the human resources staff list for 2018, 129 out of 705 (18,3%) staff members have Belgian nationality. Since Belgium has 11,5 million habitants representing only about 2,6% of all EU citizens (446 million) there is huge imbalance in geographical proportion within EESC. How do justify this? What measures are planned to ensure a fairer geographical balance?**

Generally speaking, the number of staff employed by international organisations comprises a high proportion of personnel from the host country. In the report COM(2018) 377 final from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council pursuant to Article 27 of the Staff Regulations (on geographical balance), many Brussels- and Luxemburg-based EU institutions (the European Parliament, the Council, the EESC, the CoR, the Court of Auditors and the Court of Justice) state that staff members of Belgian nationality are overrepresented – mainly because of the seat effect. This is also the case at the EESC. No specific measures to address this imbalance are envisaged, as this is not considered to be disruptive to the service (see also Annex IX of the above-mentioned report). Efforts to ensure a better geographical balance within the EESC are more geared towards the proportion of EU-13 nationals, particularly in management positions. Further details can also be found in the Annual Report on the Human Resources and Staffing Policy of the EESC General Secretariat for 2019.

- 51. How many trainings concerning harassment, whistleblowing, preventing conflict of interest or other ethical issues did your institution organise in 2019 and how any staff members participated in such programmes?**

During 2019, eight "Ethics & Integrity" training sessions were organised. These sessions welcomed 104 participants. On top of this, the EESC also organised training and supervision sessions in this specific area for the confidential counsellors (see more in detail in question 56) and provided the EESC medical service with coaching sessions (six participants).

In 2020, 60 staff members have already participated in the training and another 60 will participate by the end of the year. This represents in total around one third of EESC staff, trained over the two years. These training sessions will continue in 2021.

Harassment

52. Has the EESC put in place and implemented an action plan to actively prevent and tackle harassment in the working environment, to raise awareness of harassment and to foster a culture of zero tolerance with regard to harassment?

The Directorate of Human Resources and Finances (DHRF) is actively working on working on the revision of the ethics and integrity framework. The internal auditor is also working on the ethical framework.

Following the initial creation in November 2019 of an internal working group tasked with revising the EESC decisions on harassment, whistleblowing and administrative enquiries, the scope of the review of the ethics and integrity framework was substantially extended by DHRF, in agreement with the secretary-general, as from March 2020, by:

- establishing a first set of documents listing all existing tools and actions undertaken so far in this field, as well as identifying the potential gaps with regard to the European Ombudsman's recommendations on dignity at work in the institutions and agencies of December 2018, the results and recommendations following the EESC staff survey of 2016 on psychosocial risks and the European Parliament's first report on the 2018 discharge;
- defining a new mandate for the joint working group, which was also presented at the first meeting of the working group on 5 June 2020.

This new mandate covers:

- the revision of three legal instruments (the EESC decision on administrative enquiries and disciplinary proceedings, the EESC decision on harassment and the EESC decision on whistleblowing) in order to further strengthen their robustness and reinforce their efficiency and suitability; further developing coordination with the Committee of Regions in this context, in particular in relation to the decision on administrative enquiries and disciplinary proceedings and the decision on external activities.
- a reflection on all types of improvements and additional measures that could be taken to further enhance the current ethical framework and establishing related recommendations in the form of a detailed action plan to be submitted to the Appointing Authority.

The working group is also able to draw on the expertise of external actors in the field of ethics and integrity (for example, the EEAS internal ombudsman was invited to the meeting of 24 September 2020). The ongoing work should also be linked to the work of the Advisory Committee in order to provide the European Parliament with a complete overview of all action undertaken.

The detailed action plan will be endorsed at the latest by the end of the year 2020 and covers, in particular, a number of measures to reinforce the administrative and legal ethical framework such as – on top of the revision of the Code of Conduct for members – the possible creation of an independent internal ombudsman function, creating and

distributing a brochure focused on respect and dignity at work, establishing a dedicated compulsory learning path before entrusting staff management responsibilities (whether for EESC managers or for members) and carrying out regular awareness-raising activities, etc.

The internal audit on ethics and integrity has a slightly different scope as it focuses on mapping existing rules (the audit will take the form of a mapping exercise followed by an analysis aimed at establishing a comprehensive overview of rules, standards and measures in relation to ethics and integrity. As a general rule, implementation will not be considered but there could be cases where it merits attention). However, the audit will also focus on sets of rules which do not fall under the current mandate of the internal working group, thereby potentially helpfully completing the picture by covering: gifts and entertainment, outside activities and assignments, conflicts of interest and post-EU employment.

In 2019, in part as preparatory work for the in-depth review outlined above, the EESC also launched its respect@work campaign:

Following a number of proposals from the Ombudsman's report on dignity at work, addressed to all institutions, the 2019 Safety and Health programme focused on "Fostering respectful relations for all". A series of conferences were organised, focusing on emotional intelligence and diversity and their link with performance. They were aimed at everyone working on the premises i.e. staff, members and external staff working in-house.

Within the EESC, a specific campaign called "respect@work" was developed to further address the findings of the staff survey on psychosocial risks at work, where the management of conflicts in the workplace had been identified as a potential area for improvement. Via an awareness-raising and participatory campaign, posters, a video production and conferences, the importance of a fair, inclusive and ethical work environment was promoted. In addition, an online survey and a consultation forum were organized in order to reach out to staff and to ensure their views were heard.

The result was a list of guidelines for all colleagues working at the EESC. Key areas and topics to be improved were also identified and communicated. The outcome of these consultations is being taken into account in the revision of the EESC's ethics framework and for further follow up actions.

A dedicated intranet page and other communication tools (e.g. a digital advent calendar of kindness, post-its, etc.) were also used to wrap up the respect@work campaign.

See also the answer to question 3.

53. Did the EESC strengthen the code of conduct for members in order to add penalties that are more effective and dissuasive, like the Parliament and the Ombudsman recommended?

Please see the answer to question 59 below.

The Bureau has renewed its call to the Advisory Committee to submit a proposal for the revision of the EESC Code of Conduct by December 2020. The EESC assembly has also set up a Rules of Procedure panel for the revision of the EESC Rules of Procedure and of the Code of Conduct, which will be partially composed of the members of the Advisory Committee. The assembly also asked the General Secretariat to provide all the assistance required for these tasks, notably from the legal service.

54. What measures have you put in place to effectively protect all of the past and future victims of harassment? What legal and medical support are victims entitled to? Have all victims been approached individually and in a timely manner?

Since 2014, Decision No 200/14 A has been a valuable tool in the protection of alleged victims of harassment, laying down the informal procedure and outlining the formal procedure in place. Confidential counsellors are in place to support and accompany persons experiencing a workplace conflict or harassment in a fully independent manner.

The Medical and Social Service plays an important role as well. Staff can spontaneously approach the service and regularly find an open ear there. The Medical and Social Service also liaises with an external psychologist, if a staff member is suffering and wishes to consult externally, and the institution covers the cost for the first two consultations.

Victims of harassment may at any time formally request the administration's assistance in accordance with Article 24 of the Staff Regulations. The institution may also cover the costs for a legal advisor once the facts have been fully established and confirmed.

In such cases, assistance is always examined on a case-by-case basis. It is personalised and adapted to the particular needs of the person concerned. Psychological, medical and social support measures are systematically offered to all victims, in collaboration with the EESC Medical Service. If need be, the alleged victim can also, with his/her consent, be temporarily moved to another administrative entity within the EESC to prevent further misconduct by the offender. This approach was also used in the recent OLAF case. Following communication of the OLAF report to the EESC, all victims among EESC staff were contacted individually by the director of human resources and finance and individual meetings with them took place between 22 January and 12 March 2020, depending on their availabilities.

Whistleblowers also have an extra layer of protection against retaliation and any possible impact on their careers (appraisal, promotion, etc.), and may also benefit from mobility measures.

In cases where a victim considers their sickness to be linked to their professional environment and makes a request in this regard to the Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme, in accordance with Article 78 of the Staff Regulations, an enquiry into the working conditions is opened in order to evaluate the impact of working conditions on the health of the person concerned.

The currently ongoing revision of the overall ethics framework will be an opportunity to further develop and strengthen prevention measures.

Concerning the victims referred to in the OLAF case, please also see the replies to questions 55 and 69 below.

55. Did the EESC address a written apology or recognition as being victims of harassment by the administration to the victims of Mr Krawczyk? Did you launch a rehabilitation process to allow them to resume their work in their previous positions?

The director of human resources and finance also met in this regard with each staff member from the Group I secretariat between January and March 2020, in order to establish individual needs and offer assistance from the administration.

Victims were heard immediately in order to assess their needs. Legal protection was granted to officials and temporary staff as early as March 2020 and in the case of the former member of the EESC, in July 2020. On 2 October 2020, the Appointing Authority also adopted formal individual decisions recognising the victim status of each of the EESC staff members who were impacted by harassment or serious misconduct by Mr Krawczyk, as duly identified by OLAF in its report. These decisions also contain an explicit expression of regret and apologies in the name of the administration and each of the victims were notified respectively of the decisions on the same day. The non-named victims in the OLAF report have the possibility to request this recognition through a request for assistance pursuant to Article 24 of the EU Staff Regulations.

Two of the victims whose careers were impacted by the behaviour of Mr Krawczyk have formally requested that their previous career situation be restored, without however asking to resume their work in their previous positions. On the contrary, in one case, the request for rehabilitation points out that the victim explicitly does not wish to return to her previous position, whereas in the other case, preference for another position has been expressed.

These rehabilitation requests are currently being processed by the administration, based on the assessment of the detailed requests received. Exchanges with victims started in January 2020 immediately after the publication of the OLAF report and exchanges with their legal representative began in June.

56. How often do you organise trainings for confidential counsellors? Are anti-harassment trainings mandatory for members of the EESC?

At the end of 2018 and beginning of 2019, three newly appointed confidential counsellors received the full basic training of six days before taking up their new role. In addition to this, all confidential counsellors (those who are already in the role and new ones) regularly receive supervision; this takes place four times per year.

Members are strongly encouraged to follow this kind of training, which is offered on voluntary basis. Making this training mandatory is one of the recommendations already issued by the joint internal working group on the review of the ethical framework, also with a view to taking this into account in the revision of the Code of Conduct.

A training course on "Diversity and Respect at Work: Promoting equality and non-discrimination" was held in spring 2020 for members of the EESC and will be included in next year's programme as well.

57. Did you set up a process of independent investigation into possible harassment, which would take over any future complaint?

At this stage, the EESC cannot rely on an external independent investigation capacity (apart from OLAF when the matter falls within their remit and in accordance with the 2016 agreement between OLAF and the EESC). First contacts with the Agencies Network and with the disciplinary office of the Commission (IDOC) have not been conclusive to date. However, this issue is also currently being looked into as part of the ongoing revision of the decision on administrative enquiries, where the possibility of a joint internal investigation capacity between both committees will be further examined.

58. What progress has been made on the revision of the ethics and integrity framework?

The work of the internal working group on the ethical framework is currently ongoing and aims to review all potential gaps in the current framework and tools in place, with a view to recommending improvements and potential new measures and/or structures. The recommendations made by the working group on the ethical framework will result in an action plan that will cover all aspects of ethics and respect at work. The related action plan will be endorsed at the latest by the end of the year 2020. See also the answers to questions 3 and 52 above.

59. What concrete changes will be implemented to the institution's Code of Conduct and Rules of Procedure as a result of the 2018 OLAF's investigation and the Committee's reflection on the issue? In particular, what new rules clearly indicate who is responsible of implementing every element of the Bureau's decisions on the future cases? What is the timeline for those changes to come into force?

The Bureau has reviewed and enlarged its call to the Advisory Committee to submit a proposal for the revision of the EESC Code of Conduct by December 2020. This revision will be carried out with the assistance of the Legal Service.

The Bureau specified that the proposal should include:

- 1) Stronger sanctions;
- 2) Support mechanisms for victims;
- 3) Automatically informing the Council and the Commission of the names of EESC members who have been found to be responsible for breaching the Code of Conduct;
- 4) An annual review of the functioning of the Code of Conduct (for possible modifications);

5) The possibility of having confidential counsellors for members in the form of external experts.

Furthermore, the Advisory Committee should consider additional elements, that are either necessary or useful for disciplinary proceedings (i.e. investigative powers, the possibility of appeal, measures to further extend the protection of the victims in line with the EU legal framework, reference to applicable existing legal and interinstitutional obligations, members' obligation to cooperate with enquiries and with the Advisory Committee, etc.).

The assembly has decided to set up a Rules of Procedure panel, with a twofold mission:

- A partial "light" revision of the Rules of Procedure;
- A more comprehensive revision of the Code of Conduct, with a particular view to strengthening sanctions.

In order to ensure coherence of the overall ethical framework within the EESC and to explore possible synergies, the Advisory Committee will also have the opportunity to liaise with the joint internal working group, to exchange on ongoing reflections.

60. EESC has to deal with a case of harassment: what was the cost for EESC: legal costs, sick leave, reduced productivity, Bureau meetings, etc.? Has the Committee also borne any particular costs of the President of Group I for this case? Has the Legal Service carried out any defence work for Mr Krawczyk in a personal capacity in 2019?

Statistics are presented in the reply to question 32 and they do not show a particularly distinct pattern in Group I compared to other group secretariats.

In 2020:

The legal costs related to the harassment case were:

Case T-377/20 :	EUR 35 500 = lawyers' fees (contract to defend the interests of the EESC in this case before the General Court).
Legal assistance for the 4 victims identified by OLAF:	EUR 31 000 = lawyers' fees (contract with a law firm to defend the interests of the 4 victims in the framework of the legal assistance granted by the EESC)

The Legal Service did not carry out any defence work for Mr Krawczyk in a personal capacity in 2019.

The Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members met physically twice (23 January 2020 and 6 March 2020) and continued its work via written procedure. The first meeting incurred no cost as the participation of members was already covered by the cost of the

plenary session. The second meeting held on 6 March 2020 cost EUR 5 708.28 in addition to interpretation costs of EUR 9 671.

The president of the Advisory Committee took part in the Bureau meeting on 9 June. No specific additional cost was incurred for the Committee since his participation expenses were supported by the budget allocated to the June meeting of the assembly.

61. What were the expenditures in 2019 for the management/follow-up to Court sentences of harassment cases?

In 2019, the EESC incurred no expenses for the management/follow-up to Court sentences of harassment cases.

62. In the EESC code of conduct it's noted that it is possible to temporary suspend members. Was there any suspension put in place during the year 2019? If so, for which reasons ?

No cases were dealt with by the Advisory Committee in 2019.

Article 8(3) of the EESC Code of Conduct lays down a list of sanctions, which include the temporary suspension of a member from their duties as rapporteur, president or member of a working group, and the temporary suspension from participating in any missions or extraordinary meetings.

There has been only one case dealt with so far (in 2020) pursuant to the procedure laid down by the EESC Code of Conduct which entered into force on 15 March 2019. In that particular case, none of the applicable sanctions could be adopted as the facts had taken place before the entry into force of the Code, which means that the principle of no punishment without law applied (*nulla poena sine lege*).

In the case concluded by OLAF in 2020, the Bureau adopted the following specific measures, partially going beyond what is set out in the Code of Conduct:

The Bureau notably:

1. took note of the conclusions of OLAF and of the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members concerning the violation of the Code of Conduct by [the member concerned];
2. asked [the member concerned] to resign from his duties as president of Group I and to withdraw his application for the position of EESC president;
3. discharged [the member concerned] from all activities involving the management or administration of staff,
4. tasked the secretary-general with taking the necessary steps to ensure that, should proceedings be initiated by the public prosecutor against [the member concerned], the EESC shall join those proceedings as a civil party.

63. How many a) new b) ongoing c) closed harassment cases were there at your institution in 2019?

One case of alleged harassment by a staff member was reported in 2018. An administrative inquiry was launched in November 2018 and was closed in 2019 with a sanction.

Three other alleged cases of harassment by a member of the EESC were reported in 2018 through seven whistleblowing reports. Internal inquiries were launched and then suspended at OLAF's request. OLAF completed its work in January 2020.

64. How many Members and staff received formal complaints against them?

No cases were registered in 2019. In 2020, the EESC received two formal complaints against staff.

65. Concerning the protection of victims of workplace harassment and the possibilities to sanction employees who conduct harassment. What improvements are accompanied with the new ESSC Code of Conduct?

Sanctions for staff members are listed in the Staff Regulations: Article 9 of Annex IX.

For members, see the reply to question 59.

66. By written procedure finalised on 25 June 2020, an Advisory Committee has been mandated by the ESSC Bureau to carve out proposals to amend the current Code of Conduct of the members of the EESC. Since there has been adopted a new EESC Rules of procedure that entered into force on 15 March 2019, why there have to be made revisions again? By when do you think the new proposals will come into effect? In this connection, does the EESC consider tightening up the sanctions for harassment and severe misconduct?

Please see also the reply to question 59.

67. Requests for assistance addressed to ethics advisors, especially from women, skyrocketed in 2018. Can the significant increase in these requests be explained by Mr Krawczyk's harassment case alone? If not, what was the nature of the remaining requests for assistance? What kind of support was granted after the ethic advisors were approached?

In this question, the reference to the number of requests and their increase in 2018 suggests that the information requested should relate to the work of the confidential counsellors and not ethics advisors, the answer provided therefore comments on the work of the confidential counsellors. The role of the ethics counsellors is explained in the reply to question 70.

The increasing requests in 2018 are to a large degree linked to the OLAF case. On the other hand, the increasing demand for assistance is the positive effect of better awareness and trust in the role of the confidential counsellors, which was widely publicised via different channels (short presentations to newcomers, induction day, intranet, etc.)

In accordance with Articles 8(4) and 9(4) of Decision 200/14 A on preventing and combatting psychological and sexual harassment, no records are kept, either about the nature of the conversation or about any potential follow up. Please note that some contact with confidential counsellors relates to difficulties in workplace relations, not necessarily to harassment.

Table: Difficulties in workplace relations

	Number of requests	By gender	
		Male	Female
2020*	3	2	1
2019	28	11	17
2018	42	9	33
2017	25	9	16
2016	20	2	18

* The figures reflects the situation up to October 2020

- 68. What actions have been taken to create further synergies and to ensure more efficient exchange of information since the Committee's president and secretary-general met Olaf's director general in July 2019?**

Administrative arrangements were concluded between the EESC and OLAF in January 2016, with the aim of better implementing the applicable legislation and determining each party's areas of competence in terms of investigation, as well as the technical aspects of cooperation between the two administrations. The purpose of the meeting in July 2019 was to clarify the interpretation of the administrative agreement between OLAF and the EESC made in 2016: harassment cases were actually mentioned as low-priority in the text of the agreement, whereas OLAF clarified that possible cases related to members were considered high priority to be treated by the Office.

Whistleblowing

- 69. What protection, help or assistance was offered to whistle-blower(s) in the EESC harassment cases? Was (were) whistle-blower(s) recognised their status?**

All whistleblowers were immediately granted the protection provided by the EESC decision on whistleblowing (Articles 7 to 10). To this end, they received an acknowledgment of receipt and were subsequently systematically informed of any major steps or developments in the procedures. Each whistleblower has received at least six individual letters and they have also had the opportunity to meet with either the secretary-general or the director of human resources to discuss the follow up to their reporting. Whistleblowers also received individual assistance on a case-by-case basis, depending on their personal situation and on the type of assistance requested.

- 70. How many cases of whistleblowing were reported in your institution in 2019? Did your institution conduct surveys concerning the awareness of staff regarding**

whistleblowing procedures? What are the safe channels that your institution provides for potential whistleblowers?

A whistleblowing report submitted in February 2019 was directly related to the whistleblowing reports that had been submitted in 2018 concerning acts of harassment by a senior EESC member.

An awareness-raising campaign will be launched once Decision No 053/16 A has undergone revision. A brochure titled "The whistleblowing and the ethics counsellors" is already available to staff.

The above-mentioned decision establishes ethics counsellors at the EESC. Their role is to advise and assist staff members in order to help them fulfil their statutory obligations in the best way possible regarding the reporting of serious misconduct ("whistleblowing"), in accordance with Article 22a of the Staff Regulations of Officials of the European Union.

Ethics counsellors are impartial contact persons whose role is to provide advice and/or assistance, in full confidentiality, to potential whistleblowers. Their role is to offer a supportive environment – listening to, assisting and providing information for anyone witnessing serious misconduct. Experience tends to demonstrate that whistleblowers prefer to submit their reports directly to the director of human resources and finance.

71.

Communication

72. What was the EESC budget for communication activities in 2019 and how was it used?

The overall expenditure for Communication was EUR 1 141 540, broken down as shown below:

Line 2600 – Communication (EUR 728 880)

Culture (EUR 60 000)

- Support for exhibitions and/or cultural events

General communication (EUR 305 000)

- Organising events and outreach initiatives, etc.

PRESS (EUR 314 880)

- Organisation of press points/press conferences, production of podcasts, etc.

EESC Civil society prize (EUR 50 000)

Line 2602 – Publishing, editing and promotion of publications (EUR 412 660)

Printshop (EUR 42 000)

- Printshop and editorial support

Publications (EUR 145 000)

- Publications including digital publications

Web, social media (EUR 225 660)

Including other projects for web development (intranet and internet, CESlink, circular economy platform, database, surveys, tools and applications)

73. What has been done to improve digital communication to the public and the use of free open-source self-hosted social network platforms?

In 2019 the focus of digital communication was on contributing to the interinstitutional campaign to promote the European elections through the setting up of a dedicated mini-website. The EESC also improved the information on its opinions provided on the EESC website by introducing a comprehensive timeline for each individual opinion. It also further developed the website of the interinstitutional European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform.

The EESC ensured equal access of persons with disabilities to its website, by making it compliant with the EU accessibility standards for public sector bodies and obtaining the corresponding certification (compliance with the WCAG 2.0 and WCAG 2.1 standards, A and AA levels).

Moreover, the EESC, seeking to improve its return on investment, started the process of streamlining and rationalising its social media presence on Facebook and Twitter by concentrating on the most successful policy accounts.

In October 2019, the EESC also introduced key debates and speeches on its Twitter account, in addition to its streams on Facebook live. This has helped to extend the reach of the EESC's plenary sessions and conferences and has added interest to the platform.

December 2019 saw the opening of an Instagram account for the Committee, which is aimed at a younger audience and uses a different kind of visual story telling. The results are promising, as the account has reached over 3 000 new followers within less than a year (as of 15 October 2020).

Podcasts have also been used as a new communication tool. They are shared on the website, specialised external platforms and social media. The first podcast series was launched in May 2019 on the occasion of the Sibiu summit.

Currently, the Committee does not use free open source self-hosted social network platforms. The Online Information Unit is currently exploring the option of using such a platform for presenting the EESC website as an app to users.

74. What progress has been made in EESC outreach on social media? What are the most efficient social media channels?

At the end of 2019, the EESC's main Twitter account had 43 300 followers (+18%), while the main Facebook account had 32 600 followers (+33%). The fastest growing network is LinkedIn, which saw an increase of 54% to 14 500 followers at the end of 2019. The EESC's Instagram account was launched in December 2019.

With this combination of channels, the EESC reaches a well-balanced group of followers: Twitter and LinkedIn serve mostly to reach professional stakeholders and civil society organisations in Brussels and the Member States, Facebook caters more to the general public, while the new Instagram account rounds this off with attractive content aimed at younger people. The latter uses a less formal tone of voice, more artistic visuals and stories that followers can interact with.

75. EESC has delivered a lot of opinions and political work, how can you measure the impact of this work on the audience? What have you done to increase the coverage and to let know the EESC 's work?

The outreach of the EESC's political work goes beyond quantitative indicators and is measured by the influence of stakeholders at the national and interinstitutional level. The EESC achieves this not only via its treaty-based consultative function (which also includes own-initiative and exploratory opinions), but also through "going local" outreach activities. The EESC has been organising these activities for years and they are designed to raise civil society's awareness of the work of the Committee and its role in the EU decision-making process.

In 2019, the EESC made a particular effort to support the European Parliament in promoting the European elections by participating in the interinstitutional campaign, thus making its contribution to increasing voters.

The EESC plays a key role in promoting EU activities through a whole range of actions, including a social media campaign of several months (with nearly 17 000 engagements (likes, comments, retweets) and an overall potential reach of 18.4 million). A series of 57 short videos of EESC members was produced as part of the "This time I'm voting" campaign for use on social media.

EESC plenaries, which were also streamed via the website and partially on Facebook and Twitter, had a potential reach of up to 7.1 million on social media. A more important reference however is overall engagement (retweets, likes, replies, etc.), which reached up to 1 464 mentions per plenary.

A particularly special success was the "Civil Society for rEUnaissance" conference with Greta Thunberg in February 2019, which generated extremely wide interest on social media and gave the EESC's YouTube channel a distinct boost, with slightly over approximately 620 000 views of the related video.

– As part of its Communication Strategy in 2019, the EESC continued projects and activities such as:

Publications: in 2019, the Communication Department issued 116 publications (as compared to 102 in 2018).

Visits: the number of visitors increased by 18% from 9 419 in 2018 to 11 144 in 2019. This total number was divided into 441 groups.

Furthermore, the EESC got involved in closer cooperation with Visit.Brussels and the other EU institutions through the launch of the interinstitutional project for the branding of the European Quarter and other joint activities aimed at enhancing the EU's visibility and accessibility.

Events aimed at the general public:

- participation in the interinstitutional Open Day on 4 May, which attracted around 2 600 visitors;
- organising the tenth edition of the youth plenary session "Your Europe, Your Say" with the title "Vote for the Future!", focusing on the European elections. The EESC issued a digital publication containing the results of this event.

Cultural events: 18 cultural events were organised (photo and painting exhibitions, film screenings, music concerts, artistic performances etc.), using EU arts and culture as a tool to highlight the work done by the EESC in specific policy areas.

In 2019, the number of articles published in the EU media where members or EESC events were quoted is 8 812.

The opinion by Krzysztof Pater highlighting the obstacles in EU Member States that prevent persons with a disability from voting in EU elections attracted a lot of interest. 242 articles on this topic were published in 2019.

The Twitter press account: Twitter followers: 4 237
October 2020: Twitter followers: 5 137

EESC INFO (the Committee newsletter) subscribers

2019	4 214
2018	3 782
2017	4 717
2016	2 244

Specific events particularly designed for journalists allowed us to increase the visibility of the EESC.

The presence of Greta Thunberg at the debate on "Civil society for rEUnaissance" on 21 February 2019 attracted the attention of more than 350 journalists present in the EESC's plenary room and resulted in publications, 14 TV crews, and almost 750 press cuttings.

The Civil Society Media Seminar with press officers from civil society organisations, held in cooperation with the University of Malaga on 10-11 October 2019, attracted the attention of European, regional and local media.

The journalists' seminar on 11-12 December 2019 allowed 30 journalists from 28 Member States to get to know the EESC better through their members. They had the opportunity to take part in the Civil Society Award ceremony and to get to know the

winners. The first prize went to Women's Toponymy, an Italian project which tries to increase the number of places bearing the name of notable women, giving them the public recognition they deserve.

The presence of Andrew Caruana Galizia (the son of the Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia) at the December plenary session allowed the EESC to get to the heart of the subject of freedom of expression.

The journalists (15 from the Member States) were also invited to attend the "Your Europe, Your Say" event.

The EESC's visibility has increased thanks to several products that we offered for the first time (podcasts on the Sibiu conference, on the rule of law and on the Treaty of Lisbon). Videos were produced on the work of the EESC and the Groups, on topics such as: the new European Parliament and European Commission mandate, Brexit, the Journalists' Seminar and the Civil Society Prize and a video with Andrew Caruana Galizia on freedom of expression, etc.

Transparency

76. What was the outcome of action plan on transparency to be launched in 2019 covering topics such as the EESC rules of procedure, its code of conduct for members, creation of a transparency register and access to documents? Which of these measures were implemented?

A number of actions were taken in 2019 covering transparency issues. These include creating a dedicated page informing citizens how they can access EESC documents (<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/access-documents>). Citizens can search in the EESC document search facility (DMSearch) and in the event of an unsuccessful search, an electronic form can be filled in to request a specific document.

In addition, a register of all requests to access documents has been put in place.

Concerning the new Rules of Procedure and Code of Conduct for Members, which were adopted in March 2019, these are available in all languages on the Committee website (<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/about/rules/rules-procedure-and-code-conduct-members-eesc-march-2019>).

Fraud & Corruption

77. How did you co-operate with OLAF and ECA in the spheres of prevention, investigation or corrective measures?

The EESC has a solid and up-to-date set of measures in place that includes preventive control, detective control and corrective control. If these measures lead to a suspicion of possible fraudulent activity, a notification is submitted to OLAF for proper follow up and the EESC provides ongoing support and collaboration during any such steps. The EESC also strictly enforces OLAF recommendations both from a financial and disciplinary

point of view. Furthermore, where the follow up to OLAF cases requires, the EESC fully cooperates with national judicial authorities.

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) produces an Annual Report on the implementation of the (EU) Budget. This report contains, among other things, the results of its audit on the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions of the consolidated accounts of the European Union (as required by Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). The EESC cooperates fully with the ECA during all stages of its auditing of the EESC's financial management. The ECA's Annual Reports have not included any major shortcomings in the operation of the EESC internal control procedures in recent years. Specific remarks are immediately addressed and information is shared with the ECA accordingly.

Upon request, the Internal Auditor provides information to the ECA.

78. How many OLAF investigations were carried out in 2019 with regard to the EESC? How many of them led to a concrete sanctions carried out?

In 2019, two cases were closed concerning members and misappropriation of EU funds. The amounts have since been recuperated by the EESC.

Two cases were opened (one in relation with a member and one in relation with a staff member). The first case is ongoing. The second case was closed in 2020 with no infraction found.

In 2020, another case was closed (one from 2018 – confirming fraudulent action by a member).

Another case against a member has been opened and is ongoing.

In conclusion, to the best of our knowledge, there are currently two open OLAF investigations (both concerning members, not related to harassment).

79. An OLAF case concluded in 2019 concerned a member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), and focused on inconsistent travel declarations. OLAF uncovered a number of frauds. The member had submitted forged supporting documents (in the form of e-tickets) for his travel, declaring air travel in business class when in fact the travel had been with low-cost airlines in economy class. The forged tickets also falsified the arrival and departure dates to give the impression of overnight stays, when in fact each trip had taken place in a single day. This allowed the member to claim an additional subsistence allowance.

The member also declared his place of residence as a village 250 km from the airport in the capital city of his home country, while in fact it was in the capital itself. This allowed him to claim a car allowance of €250 per return flight. The total amount of unjustified payments was around €91 000. The member paid back the amount, but OLAF also sent a recommendation to the EESC to take appropriate disciplinary measures against the member. The rules of the EESC at the time did not provide for a disciplinary procedure unless the member in question was convicted of fraud affecting

the financial interests of the EU in his home country. OLAF also recommended that the case be sent to the judicial authorities in the member's home country.^[1]

Questions:

- a) What measures did EESC take to follow up on OLAF's recommendation to take appropriate disciplinary measures against the member?**
- b) Did EESC inform the national authorities of the home country of the member about OLAF's findings in order to initiate a criminal procedure against the member for fraud affecting the financial interests of the EU?**
- c) What measures did the EESC take to increase transparency and improve control mechanisms over financial declarations of its members?**
- d) Are there similar breaches in transparency for travel declarations of other EESC staff and did the EESC take precautionary measures accordingly?**

The case was detected by the Committee services and reported to OLAF.

- a) In line with the recommendation for action issued by OLAF, the EESC committed itself to following up on the judicial actions which may be opened by the national judicial authorities on the basis of Article 3(6) of the EESC Members' Statute, which provides that "the sentencing of a member in a court of last instance for a serious criminal offence, suspension of civic rights or permanent disqualification from public office or employment, or conviction of fraud affecting the financial interests of the EU, shall lead to termination of that member's tenure of office". At the same time, besides the possible termination of the member's tenure of office in case of sentencing in a court of last instance, the EESC did not have any other legal basis to take any measures of a disciplinary nature against the member, since at the time of the facts the EESC Code of Conduct had not yet entered into force.
- b) In its recommendations for action, OLAF informed the EESC that the national general prosecutor would be informed by OLAF and that the EESC should follow up this matter in line with Article 3 of the Members' Statute, mentioned under a). Since then, the EESC has been cooperating, through OLAF, with the national judicial authorities and has provided them on several occasions with additional relevant information and evidence about the case.
- c) The EESC has in place a well-functioning system of internal controls that has proved to be effective in preventing, detecting and following up (including the recovery of unduly paid amounts) on possible fraud risks. Indeed, the internal control system that is in place allowed for the discovery of the case referred to above, which the EESC proactively reported to OLAF.

After referring the case to OLAF, the EESC recuperated all unduly paid amounts, ensuring that there is no harm to the EU budget.

^[1] https://ec.europa.eu/anti-fraud/sites/antifraud/files/olaf_report_2019_en.pdf , p. 23-24.

Analysis and processing procedures for member reimbursements are standardised and all member claims are treated equally by appropriately trained staff members. Analysis and processing of claims is based, to a large degree, on standardised or pre-determined data (for example, ceiling prices for travel to/from main European cities and default rates of allowance for travel from members' homes to Brussels). Furthermore, reimbursement procedures are largely automated, thus limiting the possibilities for processing error, irregularity or fraud.

The internal control process is based upon the four-eyes principle and includes financial analysis of each travel and subsistence claim. This is followed by an objective verification of the proposed level of reimbursement by an independent, separate service, before authorisation at management level.

- d) After the case mentioned above, two other cases relating to members – involving much lower amounts – were discovered and brought to the attention of OLAF. One of them was closed by OLAF, and the EESC fully recuperated the amount unduly paid through the precautionary measure of temporarily blocking the reimbursements of the member concerned. The other case is still ongoing.

Conflict of Interests

80. What measures have been introduced in 2019 by the EESC to prevent and fight conflict of interests? Were there any cases examined?

The Committee strictly applies the Staff Regulation provisions concerning conflicts of interest. The new Ethics Framework will put greater focus on this aspect.

In relation to a suggestion made by the Ombudsman in case 1306/2014/OV, in which no maladministration was found, the Committee adopted guidelines concerning the behaviour of senior staff.

The guidelines concern all EESC staff, officials and agents alike, both non-management and management staff. All staff are expected to display a high degree of objectivity and good faith when assessing whether they are involved in a situation of conflict of interest. This instrument consists of a practical guide for clarifying the statutory texts, particularly in situations where a staff member would be required to carry two different "hats" in the handling of a same file. These situations are more recurrent in a small institution like the EESC and when a staff member performs staff representation activities and also deals with the same issues on behalf of the administration. The guidelines explain how staff should assess potential conflicts of interest and take all necessary precautions to maintain their impartiality and independence. It is thus generally recommended to withdraw from the processing of a file that could lead to the perception of a conflict of interest.

Where such a situation arises, the person concerned should immediately inform their hierarchy. If in doubt, they may always refer to the competent department of the Directorate of Human Resources and Finance. Staff should also draw the administration's attention to situations where a member of the management staff or another colleague appear to be involved in a conflict of interest. The whistleblowing procedure should be used in this case. Specifically, as regards managers, they also have a duty to exercise increased scrutiny towards their staff members when assigning them

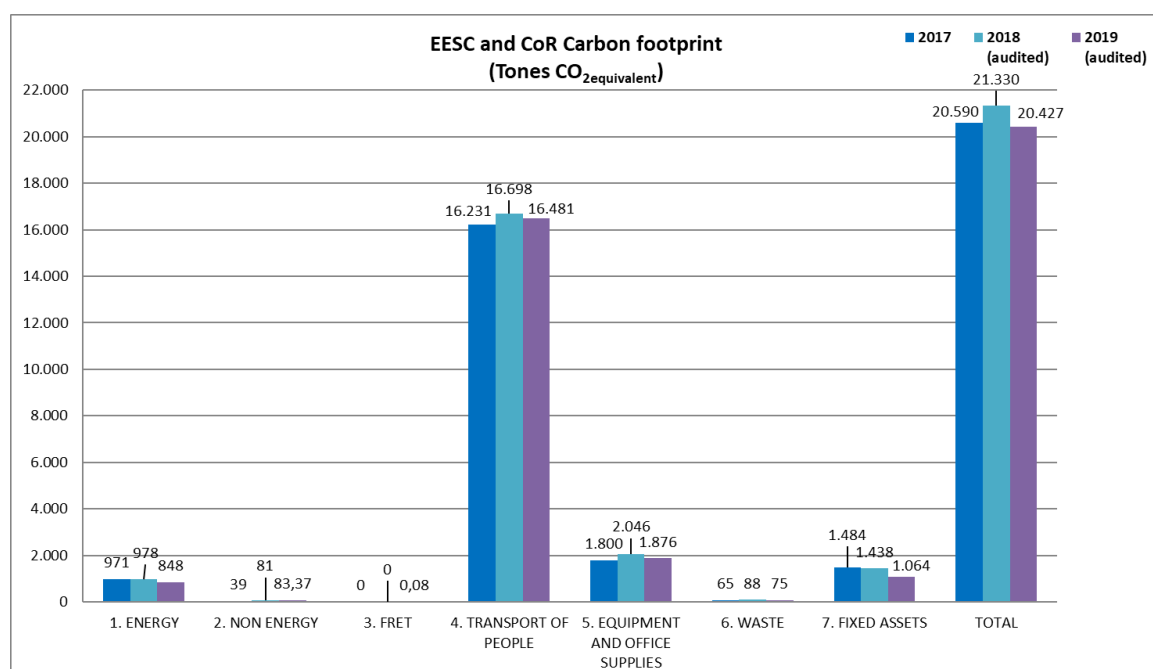
specific roles, tasks or projects, and should make sure that other additional responsibilities they may have (as staff representatives for example) do not enter into conflict with these roles, tasks or projects.

Activities to Lower the Environmental footprint

81. What results have been achieved compared to 2018 and 2017 in lowering the carbon footprint and plastic, food and paper waste?

As regards the carbon footprint, there has hardly been any evolution during the last three years. The main contributor remains the transport of people.

See detailed figures in the graph below:



Nevertheless, reducing carbon emissions is one of the most important EMAS objectives for the coming years. Several measures related to this issue were decided at the last EMAS Steering Committee, namely:

- To establish a carbon emissions reduction target and the related timeline before summer 2021. This target will be divided in two strands:
 - ✓ the first for the categories that the General Secretariat does control (buildings consumption, IT, procurement of goods and services, etc.) and taking into account the available financial resources;
 - ✓ the second for the categories outside this control (mobility of staff and members);
- To use the year 2016 as the year of reference in order to define a CO2 reduction target.
- To participate in the Joint Offsetting project with the EP, the ECB, the CJ and the ECA in 2020, for offsetting 2019 CO2 emissions.

Furthermore, as the Commission intends to do, the Committees will draw up a comprehensive plan to implement the principles and recommendations presented in the Green Deal for themselves, with the general objective of becoming climate neutral by 2030.

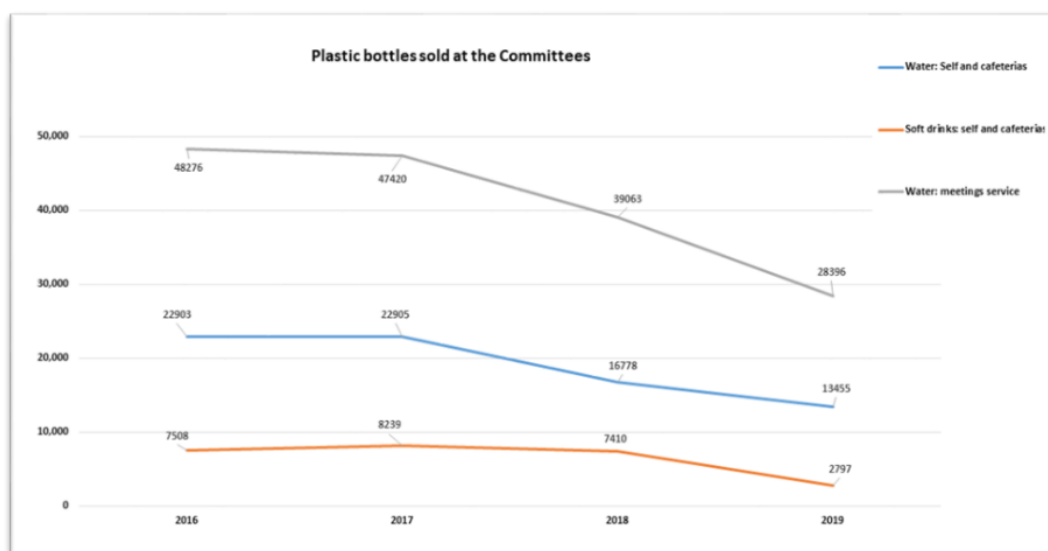
In this context, it should be noted that once again in 2020 the Committee has obtained the EMAS certification. This certification was obtained for the first time in 2011 and has been obtained every year since.

Regarding the reduction of plastic waste:

The Committee's canteen is the first EU institution canteen to go plastic free. Disposable plastic and plastic packaging are no longer used. Furthermore, with a view to reducing single plastic use, all members and staff received reusable water bottles made from stainless steel. This measure was accompanied by the installation of several water fountains on the premises.

With the new catering contract which began in June 2020, no more single use plastic will be available in the Committees' catering facilities. In addition, only glass bottles and/or glass jars will be allowed for all meetings.

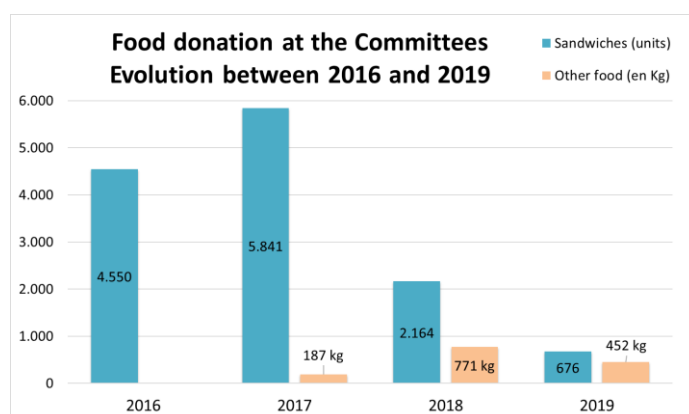
Evolution of the
number of plastic bottles sold in past years:



Regarding food waste in the canteen, the overall objective for years has been to have less than 10% of food waste at the canteen. Very low rates of food waste have been reached in recent years and the trend is one of continuous decrease: 3.2% on average in 2017 vs 2.2% on average in 2018 and 0.9% on average in 2019.

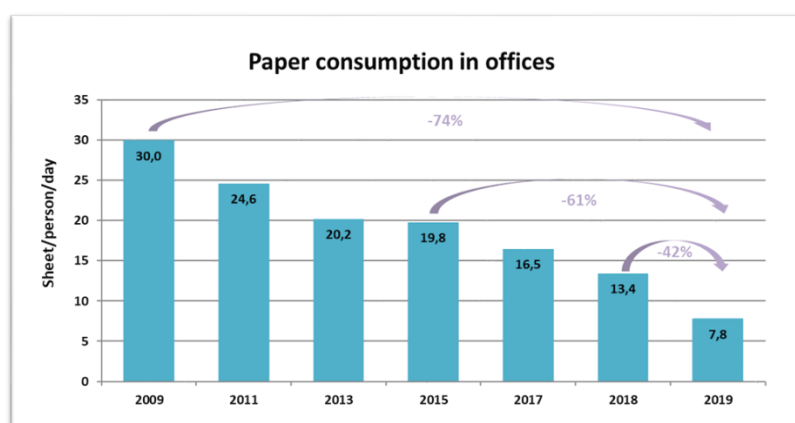
Action has been taken in order to prevent and reduce waste during events (buffets) such as the introduction of the green event guide for food waste prevention and sustainable food, the monitoring of buffets in three stages and the introduction of a service procedure (gradual serving of food).

The implementation of the Food Donation Project has been ongoing since 2017, beginning with the donation of sandwiches. Since spring 2018, food donation has been extended to other kinds of food. Around 450 kg of other types of food and 676 sandwiches were donated in 2019. As the main goal is to reduce waste production, by cascade effect, food donation decreased.



Regarding the reduction of paper:

Paper consumption in offices has continued to decrease in recent years, especially due to the fact that personal printers have been replaced by the MFD (there are only nine individual printers left in total at the Committees):



Furthermore, a significant number of measures have been implemented with IT and other services in charge of organising conferences and meetings in order to digitalise the different processes and workflows as much as possible.

82. The committee has done a lot of political work on climate change and sustainable development, but has the EESC put in place a sustainable development strategy for its own institution?

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is fully committed to implementing the 17 UN sustainable development goals (SDGs). Each year, the EESC strives to raise the bar. This means working towards managing the institution in a more sustainable way and ensuring the lowest possible impact on the environment, which is fully in line with the EMAS approach.

The integration of sustainable, environmental (including EMAS) and accessibility standards is part of the Committees' Buildings Strategy, approved by the Bureau at the end of 2017 as follows:

"In line with the EU's commitment to being a frontrunner in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (COM(2016) 739 and 390), the Committees will play an exemplary role in their internal organisation. Therefore, the Committees will apply the best possible sustainable choices to be in line with these goals and the different EU strategies such as the Energy Union, Europe 2020 Strategy, 2030 Climate and Energy Policy Framework, Climate Change Policy, Circular Economy, Sustainable work, EU water policy, EU public procurement framework, EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) and EU Ecolabel. New contracts and activities relating to buildings will be undertaken in full compliance with all these decisions".

In 2019, the EMAS service organised a series of training sessions on SDGs for the services in charge of buildings. This training was provided by CIFAL, a UN training centre especially created to offer training on the SDGs. These custom-made training sessions/workshops have been organised with the aim of adopting a "sustainable way of thinking" in order to integrate the SDGs into daily buildings management as well as into the medium and long-term strategies.

In addition, in 2019, all EESC senior managers followed custom-made training on the SDGs provided by CIFAL.

In the yearly EMAS brochure containing the environmental indicators, the different SDGs are linked with the EMAS objectives:

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/legal-information/environmental-statement>

It is worth noting that at political level the EESC has an observatory on the SDGs, the only one within the EU:

Digitalisation and Cybersecurity

83. What steps has the EESC taken towards improving digitalisation and cybersecurity of the institution in 2019? Were any of these steps coordinated with any other EU institution?

Digitalisation

The following list shows the status of recent EESC digitalisation projects:

	Action
1	Appointment of experts – electronic approval procedure.
2	Authorisation of replacements (Rules 21 & 66)
3	Job descriptions: integrating the job description for each post into SYSPER.
4	Members' expenses – electronic statement.
5	New Adonis tool: electronic workflows (legislative documents, referrals, Bureau notes and Quaestors' meeting documents)
6	EESC Digital Strategy – Back-office processing of amendments (development in progress)
7	EESC Digital Strategy – Printing on demand
8	Plenary sessions – reduce the number of dossiers for "non-members" (visitors, journalists, etc.)
9	New Adonis tool: short-term visits, leave for trainees, appointment/withdrawal of financial actors, etc.
10	Electronic invoicing by contractors.

Part of these projects are carried out in close cooperation between the Committees.

Many of the projects concern the digitalisation of human resources and financial processes, where the Committees use the Sysper and ABAC systems provided by the Commission. The proper functioning of these applications depends on appropriate funding from the budgetary authorities and proper coordination by the host institution.

Cybersecurity measures in 2019

- The Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR) platform that was evaluated in 2018 was deployed in all windows workstations. Leveraging big-data and machine-learning algorithms, behavioural signals are translated into insights, detections, and recommended responses to advanced threats.
- Evaluation and selection of the solution to enhance the security of Remote Access to applications by using Multi-Factor Authentication.
- Improvements were made in the implementation of the patching process through the automatic installation of updates in test and acceptance environments.
- Improvements in email security were made by implementing the DMARC standard.
- The EESC-COR IT security officer delivered user-awareness sessions that aimed to educate users on cyber threats.

Cybersecurity cooperation with other EU institutions/agencies in 2019

- Based on the interinstitutional arrangement for the set-up of CERT-EU, two of the Committees' IT officials work at CERT-EU on a half-time basis. In the context of this very important cooperation, the Committees received the following services from CERT-EU:
 - On-the-job training for cloud security using the major cloud platforms (Azure, AWS);
 - Cyber threat intelligence information about targeted attacks against EU institutions;
 - Incident response and forensics services;
 - Vulnerability assessments for web applications;
 - A phishing exercise to test end-user awareness.
- The Committees participated actively in the CII (Interinstitutional IT Committee) Security Subgroup. A presentation of the selected EDR platform was delivered to the CII Security Subgroup meeting in September 2019.
- The EESC-COR IT security officer represents the EU institutions/agencies at the Modern Email Security Standards for EU(MESSEU) Forum.

84. Did the EESC implement a new digital strategy and multiannual IT expenditure plan, as recommended by the Parliament?

The EESC Bureau adopted its Digital Strategy in June 2019, including the following vision:

“Within 10 years the IT systems of the EESC should be user-focused and data-driven, endowed with a range of modern applications and flexible solutions supporting its political work and administrative processes with the aims of increasing its efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and facilitating the delivery of borderless digital services to both its members and staff”.

This strategy envisages an investment plan over a period of three years, and this plan was used as a basis for preparing the budget estimates for 2021.

A status report on the implementation of the Digital Strategy was presented to the EESC members' IT Group in June 2020. The report focused on progress made in the digital workplace and political work domains.

The Digital Strategy envisages the development of new information systems and the improvement of the existing ones. It pays particular attention to the deployment of digital solutions covering existing gaps in the political work domain. The module for printing documents on demand is in production. Until September, "opting in" was the default. As from the new term of office, the default status will be "opting out". A "diffing" tool will enable section secretariats to manage and submit amendments for translation by Q4 2020. Business managers (in the Foresight, Studies and Policy Assessment Unit) have been appointed for the Strategic Management Tool and development work has started.

The strategic objective of the digital workplace is to allow users to work anywhere, any time and on any device. The work covers the redesign of the end-user environment and its underlying digital infrastructure, addressing six points (devices, office automation, mail and calendars, unified communication, collaboration & social media, integration and identity & access management). Significant progress has already been made with most of these points. The next important step is to implement the digital workplace software components in a hybrid cloud environment.

- 85. Has the EESC considered the use of open-source technology, using software and hardware in order to prevent vendor lock-in, retain control over its own technical systems, provide stronger safeguards for user's privacy and data protection, increase security and transparency for the public? What measures have been taken in this regard?**

The Committees are active in the area of open source technology. This is clearly stated in the "IT Guide" which is distributed to all new users.

A general inventory of open source software in use at the Committees is kept in the IT Portfolio. For 2019, 39 open source software applications are included in the inventory of software packages.

The main uses for open source software are end-user tools (some 25% of tools in the standard configuration), development tools and database server operating systems. Some of the most important operational applications used at the Committees have been developed using open source tools. The new Digital Signature Portal will be based on open source software (DSS library funded under the CEF programme). There is currently an active project to implement an open source database management console.

The Committee has participated actively in the EU-Fossa project and IT officials have taken part in the EU-Fossa hackathons.

86. Did the EESC continue to work on how AI artificial intelligence (AI) will change the labour market and displace a big proportion of jobs currently existing? What activities did it conduct in 2019 in this regard?

The main approach is to adopt machine learning in the context of the development of off-the-shelf software tools. We see this particularly in the area of cybersecurity (threat hunting, log-file analysis, etc.).

The new Translation Helpdesk software tool will feature an AI-based chatbot (a very productive AI application according to the literature).

The EU's eTranslation platform is an AI-based neural machine translation system, which is integrated into the translation tools used at the Committees. The Committees also co-chair the Interinstitutional Task Force on Speech Technologies, which is looking into the opportunities for interinstitutional cooperation on AI-based speech recognition systems. In its 2019 paper on *New Technologies and Artificial Intelligence in the Field of Language and Conference Services*, the respective network sets out some of the key AI applications in the field of language and conference services. These go beyond the use of neural networks for machine translation and speech recognition, to include possibilities such as AI-enhanced planning and programming of interpreting, workflow management, and workload forecasting. Moreover, the role of AI and derived technologies in safeguarding the linguistic diversity and multilingualism on which the EU is founded should not be underestimated.

Nevertheless, the focus remains on delivery of the Digital Strategy. Resources do not allow for extensive work on AI. From the users' point of view, interest in innovative tools is mainly based on the development and deployment of XML content management tools.

Concerning its political activities, the EESC has continued its work on artificial intelligence (AI) in general and particularly on its consequences on the labour market. In this context, the EESC has:

- set up a temporary study group (TSG) on AI, which aims to contribute to a broad approach towards AI, covering all its effects (negative and positive) on society as a whole and promoting the involvement of all stakeholders in this debate. Such stakeholders include: policy-makers, industry, the social partners, consumers, NGOs, educators, and experts and academics from various disciplines. The TSG AI identified several priority topics, including the effects on work and the labour market, and the group invited expert speakers to participate in its regular meetings;
- drafted two opinions where these issues are also covered: INT/877 (Plan on the Development of Artificial Intelligence in Europe) and INT/887 (Human-centric artificial intelligence).

87. Only 3% of the Committee's budget has been spent for IT products and equipment, which caused structural underfinancing and backlogs of IT projects and systems. Does the EESC consider increasing the budget for IT services and products? How much was invested in IT projects and equipment in comparison with 2018?

In 2019, the total appropriations committed for IT projects, services and equipment by the EESC (budget lines 2100 and 2102) amounted to EUR 4.7 million, which represents an increase of 13.2% compared to 2018.

This trend has continued in 2020.

The budget request for 2021 envisages an increase of EUR 702 450 compared to 2020, representing an increase of 14.8% compared to 2020, which will allow the Committee to make a further step towards compensating for the backlogs from the past.



Subject: Adaptation of buildings in 2020 due to COVID-19

Summary:

In 2020 the Directorate for Logistics adapted the Committees' buildings to the present COVID-19 crisis by taking a number of relevant measures, particularly in common areas:

- Relevant posters and signs have been placed on walls and floors in entrance halls, close to and inside lifts, staircases, conference rooms, meeting rooms, restrooms, toilets, cafeteria and canteen;
- Hydro-alcoholic gel dispensers have been installed at strategic places such as entrances of buildings, close to the entrance doors of lifts, staircases, conference rooms, meeting rooms, restrooms, toilets, cafeteria and canteen;
- The ventilation system is functioning with 100% fresh air;
- Cleaning procedures have been adapted and a medical disinfection procedure has been introduced, to be implemented when a case of COVID-19 infection is suspected;
- The maximum number of people allowed to enter meeting rooms and conference rooms has been determined and indicated outside and inside of the rooms;
- Plexiglas screens have been installed at strategic places;
- All catering vending points have been closed except for the JDE cafeteria and the furniture in the public area of the cafeteria has been removed.

Measures taken during 2020 by the Directorate for Logistics in order to adapt the Committees' buildings to the present COVID-19 crisis, are as follows:

A. Entrance halls

1. Posters have been put on the walls providing the following information:

- Reminder to wear a mask in the premises;
- Reminder to keep a physical distance of 1.5m;
- Reminder to disinfect hands;
- General information about COVID-19.

2. Signs have been placed in certain common spaces to:

avoid gatherings – the floor has been marked with signs every 1.5 metres in the areas where queuing is possible.

- separate the corridors into two direction lanes; the floor has been marked in the middle of frequently used corridors near the entrances.

3. Hydro-alcoholic gel dispensers have been installed.

B. Lifts and staircases

1. The number of people allowed in the lifts has been reduced to one or two depending on the dimensions of the lift;
2. People are encouraged to use the staircases;
3. Hydro-alcoholic gel dispensers have been installed close to the entrance doors and to the staircases;
4. Signs have been fixed as follows:
 - Floor stickers have been placed at the waiting areas on the most frequently used floors in front of the lifts, where queueing is possible, marking a physical distance of 1.5 metres;
 - Inside the lifts, the floor surface has been marked indicating where the passengers should stand;
 - The number of people in the lift has been reduced to one or two depending on the dimensions of the lift.

C. Ventilation system:

1. All air humidifiers have been shut down;
2. All primary ventilation units have been disinfected;
3. The ventilation system is functioning with 100% fresh air. Air recycling has been completely stopped.

D. Cleaning and disinfection measures:

1. Approximately 300 hydro-alcoholic gel dispensers have been placed in the buildings (entrance halls, strategic crossing points, Services to Members, medical services, etc.)
2. Twice a day, all physical contact points in all buildings are disinfected in a preventive way:
 - a. door handles of building entrance doors;
 - b. door handles of restroom doors;
 - c. lift control buttons;
 - d. handrails in lift cabins;
 - e. doors to footbridges;
 - f. doors to staircases;
 - g. handrails in staircases.
3. All physical contact points in the conference rooms are disinfected after each meeting.
4. A medical disinfection procedure has been set up in collaboration with the Medical Service to be implemented when a case of COVID-19 infection is suspected.

E. Installation of plexiglass screens:

Plexiglass screens have been placed at the following spots:

- Services to Members;
- Members' space;
- Reception desks in the entrance hall of each building;
- Security points (X-ray desk, accreditation office, cargo receiving point);
- Medical services;
- SG's and president's secretariats;
- Interpreting booths of conference rooms
- Ushers' desk in Atriums at JDE 5 and JDE 6;
- Helpdesk IT;
- Distribution service;
- Printshop;
- Library desk;
- Cafeterias (JDE, BVS, T74);
- Offices where people are received such as secretariats and reception desks;
- Shared offices.

F. Restrooms and toilets:

1. Dryers have been removed and paper towels have been put back;
2. Posters have been put up reminding people to keep a physical distance of 1.5m;
3. Hydro-alcoholic gel dispensers have been installed near the restrooms.

G. Canteen, restaurant and cafeterias:

1. All catering vending points have been closed except for the JDE cafeteria;
2. The furniture in the public area of the JDE cafeteria has been removed;
3. Hydro-alcoholic gel dispensers have been installed;
4. Relevant posters and signs have been installed.

H. Meeting rooms:

1. The maximum number of people has been determined as appropriate;
2. Posters have been put up reminding people to keep a physical distance of 1.5m and to wear masks.

I. Conference rooms:

1. Posters and signs have been put up reminding people to keep a physical distance of 1.5m, to wear masks, to keep to the right and indicating which direction to walk in the room.