



Munich, 08/07/2022  
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## Report on the GCC meeting of 5 July 2022

Dear Colleagues,

There were three documents on the official agenda. The President had scheduled one hour for the meeting, although two of the documents on the agenda were clearly of very great importance:

- Circular 405: Extension & Conversion of fixed-term appointments ([GCC/DOC 12/2022](#)) – **for consultation**
- “Bringing Teams Together” ([GCC/DOC 13/2022](#)) – **for information**

We sent a written and reasoned opinion to the President on both documents, regardless of whether the document was officially categorised as “for consultation” or “for information”. It seems that the categorisation is becoming increasingly arbitrary.

“Bringing Teams Together” is already a hot topic before the summer break. In the meeting, the administration explained that it was much better to ask the managers than to ask the staff for their opinion in a survey. You can expect yet more interesting discussions with your manager after the summer break but in the meantime do not hesitate to voice your opinion. The President explicitly refused to involve the Staff Committee(s) but we will try to follow up after the summer break.

Under “Any Other Business”, we also were told that information given to staff representatives during meetings of some official bodies were supposed to be confidential. The occasion for this clarification was the meeting of the Harmonisation Committee supposed to ensure transparency and a consistent approach across all DGs in the rewards exercise. A later mail to our observer confirmed that it was forbidden to share any details (no statistics on rewards!) with us and it was allowed only “*to report... in general terms to the CSC what [he] observed, including by raising any issue of a general nature*”. Consequently, we will receive the same information as you, at the same time as you. This is clearly an attempt to intimidate and censor the Staff Representation. The rewards exercise 2022 promises to be a “transparent” exercise where the administration has nothing to hide...

Have a nice and peaceful holiday.

The Central Staff Committee

### Annexes:

- Opinion on Circular 405
- Opinion on “Bringing Teams Together”

# Opinion of the CSC members of the GCC on [GCC/DOC 12/2022](#) Circular 405: Extension & Conversion of fixed-term appointments

The CSC members of the GCC give the following opinion on document GCC/DOC 12/2022.

## Introduction

Since the introduction of fixed-term contracts, Staff Representation has fought to diminish the risk of non-conversion. Civil servants need stability to be able to carry out their tasks with full independence, and this is even more valid for the intellectually challenging tasks that the staff of the EPO perform. Job security is crucial for anyone who wants to settle down with their family and everybody should be given the opportunity to do so. Countless studies have shown how gruelling the effect of temporary contracts is. Planning life or even just the next few years is practically impossible if your contract is due to expire.

The modalities and mechanisms for the extension/conversion of fixed-term appointments were listed as a priority in the [2020 social dialogue agenda](#). A review of the whole new employment framework with an initial focus on, *inter alia*, setting transparent time limits and criteria regarding the extension/conversion of fixed-term contracts is crucial for our colleagues who are suffering from the effects of job instability. Of course, the preferred solution would be the complete abolishment of fixed-term appointments.

## A short history of fixed-term appointments at the EPO

From one generation of EPO staff to the next, work conditions have often worsened. Recent years have certainly not been an exception: fundamental changes have been introduced to the employment framework with the introduction of fixed-term contracts for all new recruits.

One leitmotiv of recent reforms is that risks related to uncertain future developments have been outsourced from the Organisation to the individual employee. The introduction of fixed-term contracts for all new recruits in 2018, for which extensions or conversions depend on “business needs”, or even a “strong business case”, is the most recent of a number of such reforms that are at the expense of staff. This dependency on “business needs” refers, among other things, to the number of incoming patent applications and the development of technical fields.

Colleagues on fixed-term contract also are ineligible for home leave or home loans; the former appearing completely unjustified when these colleagues are in the same situation as the rest of the staff, often living far from their families and friends; and the latter being particularly detrimental when considering the current state of the housing market in the places of employment of the EPO.

## Fixed-term contracts before 2018

Before 2018 the EPO had three kinds of fixed-term contracts and the total number of staff with such contracts was limited to a maximum of 5% of the overall workforce.

- **Euro Contracts** were introduced in 1992 with [CA/D 15/92](#). They had a maximum five-year term, exceptionally extendable by two years. The introduction of this type of contract was contested in front of the ILOAT (Judgement No. 1618 of 30.01.1997).

They were introduced to respond “to a temporary staff shortage (...) for the purpose of carrying out occasional tasks (...) which justify limiting the term of the contract.”

- **Non-renewable contracts** (NRC) are contracts for the performance of short-term duties or to replace other staff for a maximum term of three years. NRC were introduced in 2009 in [CA/D 6/09](#). They had a term of at least six months and at most three years. As of 1 April 2018, staff can no longer be recruited on NRCs.
- 5-year contracts for directors, PDs and VPs.

## Fixed-term contracts as of 2018

### First proposal: Abolishment of permanent appointments for all newcomers

In October 2017, the EPO management reflected on expanding the use of fixed-term contracts. The initial plan was to exclusively use fixed-term contracts<sup>1</sup> (duration of some months up to five years) for all newcomers. Multiple renewals of contracts were possible, and newcomers would have been under contract until retirement. However, this did not find support by the Administrative Council (AC). Staff representation was alarmed by the plans for a further “precarisation<sup>2</sup>” of the EPO employment framework and its consequences on the working conditions of staff<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 1).

In November 2017, a new proposal<sup>4</sup> was presented which included a maximum duration under contract of 15 years followed by a possible conversion of the fixed-term appointment to a permanent appointment (under the discretion of the management). An upper ceiling on the proportion of staff on contract of 40% was introduced.

### Shock proposal: Abolishment of permanent employment also for current staff

As this new proposal also found no support in the AC, management switched to “attack mode” and, in February 2018, tabled a proposal<sup>5</sup> including the *de facto* abolishment of the permanent nature of appointments for all new and current staff of the EPO<sup>6</sup> (see Figure 2). This was quickly identified as a rather invidious but effective diversionary tactic. The ominous Article 53(1)(f) ServRegs proposal, helped to draw the attention and efforts away from opposing the introduction of fixed-term appointments for newcomers.

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<sup>1</sup> Modernisation of the Employment Framework at the EPO, [CA/103/17](#) and [CA/103/17 Add. 1](#), 06.10.2017

<sup>2</sup> From “To render precarious”, the process by which the number of people who live in [precarity](#) increases. Precarity is a precarious existence, lacking in [predictability](#), [job security](#), [material](#) or [psychological](#) welfare.

<sup>3</sup> The precarization of the Employment Framework, Central Staff Committee, 09.11.2017, [link](#)

<sup>4</sup> Modernisation of the EPO's employment framework: Orientation paper, [CA/121/17](#), 24.11.2017

<sup>5</sup> For Consultation – Modernisation of the Employment Framework of the EPO (CA 3/18), [GCC/DOC 1/2018](#), 13.02.2018

<sup>6</sup> Abolishing permanent employment for all staff, Central Staff Committee, [link](#), 12.02.18.

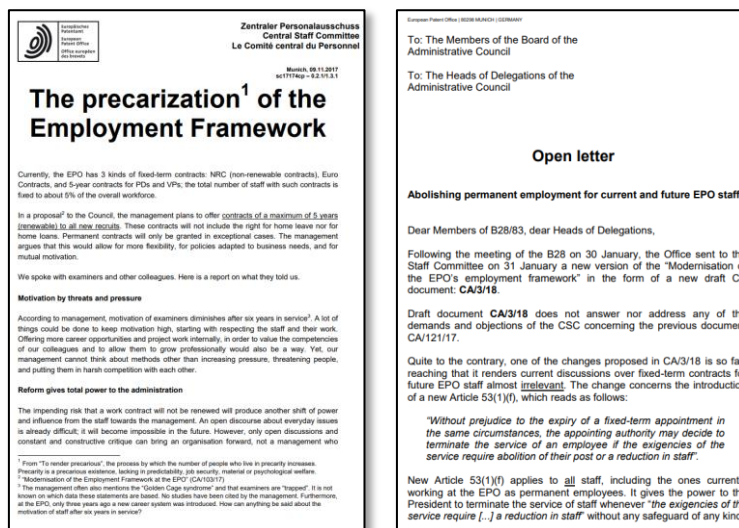


Figure 1: Publications on the new employment framework by the Central Staff Committee in 2017 and 2018

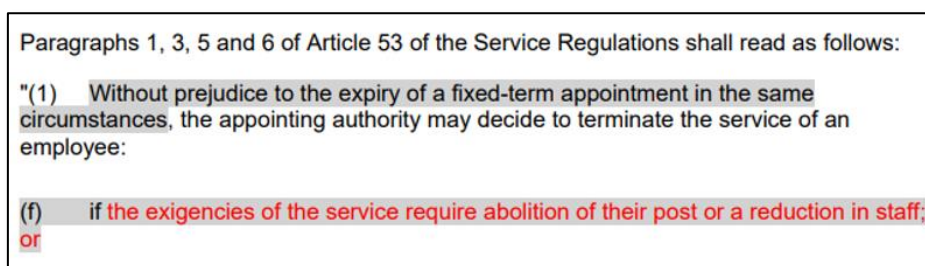


Figure 2: De-facto abolishment of permanent contracts for all staff. Proposal for new Article 53(1)(f) ServRegs<sup>5</sup>

## March 2018: A consensus in the AC has been reached: maximum 10 years of contracts

In March 2018 the Administrative Council (AC) approved a revised proposal<sup>7</sup> for introducing fixed-term appointments which did not include Article 53(1)(f) ServRegs. The proposal did still not find approval among all delegations: the delegations of Germany, Italy and Switzerland voted against the revised proposal<sup>8</sup>. The delegations from Ireland and Liechtenstein abstained.

## As of 1 April 2018, fixed-term appointments for all newcomers have become the reality

All newcomers are offered fixed-term appointments with the following terms (see CA/3/18<sup>7</sup>):

<sup>7</sup> Modernisation of the EPO's employment framework, [CA/3/18](#), 23.02.2018

<sup>8</sup> Draft minutes of the 155<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Administrative council, point 115, [link](#)

- For job groups 4 to 6: duration contract ≤ 5 years (e.g., 2 years, 3 years, etc.), total duration of consecutive fixed-term appointments ≤ 10 years (Article 8(2) ServRegs).
- Proportion of staff under fixed-term appointment up to 20% of the total budgeted posts<sup>7</sup>.
- Indemnity for loss of job<sup>9</sup>, safeguard of maternity leave<sup>10</sup> and cases of incapacity<sup>11</sup>.
- On termination of a contract possibility to keep office's health insurance for 12 months (contributions are to be borne by the employee) (Article 83(a) ServRegs).
- No obligation for the EPO to convert a fixed-term appointment to a permanent appointment. After 10 years of service, the Office may decide not to convert a contract into a permanent one because conditions such as needs of the service, satisfactory performance and quotas are not fulfilled (Article 11(4) ServRegs).

### Today, 270 colleagues are on fixed-term appointment

As of the end of 2021 the number of staff on fixed-term appointment was 270, more than double the number at the end of 2017, when 105 staff had fixed-term appointments (see Table 1).

Headcount	Function	31 Dec. 2017	31 Dec. 2018	31 Dec. 2019	31 Dec. 2020	31 Dec. 2021
Permanent staff	Examiners	4 237	4 204	4 143	4 005	3 907
	Patent procedure support	613	615	623	497	556
	Other	1 593	1 506	1 412	1 345	1 332
<b>Total permanent staff</b>		<b>6 443</b>	<b>6 325</b>	<b>6 178</b>	<b>5 947</b>	<b>5 795</b>
<b>Total language fixed-term contracts</b>		<b>152</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Normal fixed-term appointments	Examiners	0	12	93	94	92
	Patent procedure support	105	0	6	7	7
	Others		124	141	159	171
<b>Total normal fixed-term contracts</b>		<b>105</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>270</b>
<b>Members of Boards of appeal</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>6 859</b>	<b>6 696</b>	<b>6 608</b>	<b>6 403</b>	<b>6 261</b>

Table 1: Number of permanent and non-permanent staff at the EPO.

Source: [EPO Social Reports 2017-2021](#)

<sup>9</sup> Article 53 ServRegs. One month's basic salary for the first five years of continuous service, 1.25 months' basic salary for the following five years of continuous service and 1.5 months' basic salary for any further years of continuous service, (ii) together with the household and dependant's allowance

<sup>10</sup> Article 61 ServRegs: Should a fixed-term appointment expire during the period of maternity leave it is automatically extended for the fixed duration necessary to bring the maternity leave to a maximum of ten weeks after the birth of the child

<sup>11</sup> Article 62c ServRegs: Should incapacity be confirmed for a fixed-term employee upon termination of service the employee continues to receive a salary and full benefits under the social security scheme

## 2021-2022 Working group on conversion/extension of fixed-term contracts

The employment framework ([CA/3/18](#)) introduced in 2018 lacked details on how and when fixed-term appointments are to be extended/converted. To clarify this procedure the administration planned to draft a new circular. To this end a working group including members of staff representation and management has been set up. The mandate is illustrated in Figure 3.

### Mandate

On the basis of the legal framework in place and in view of a transparent, proactive and harmonized approach, the mandate is framed to clarify the process and procedure on extension and conversion of fixed term appointments via a new circular.

*Figure 3: Mandate of working group on conversion/extension of fixed-term contracts.*

The administration stated that the aim of the new circular was to outline a proactive, harmonised, and transparent process that gives staff on fixed-term contracts greater clarity about their future prospects at the Office<sup>12</sup>. The working group met seven times over the period January 2021 - Mai 2022.

The CSC appointees in the working group have made several publications during the consultation process:

- [A part](#) summarising arguments by the management & counter-arguments from Staff Representation
- [A part](#) explaining why fixed-term contracts are a serious cause for concern
- [A part](#) explaining our proposal for the conditions for conversion/extensions of fixed-term contracts

The initial time plan foresaw the implementation of a new Circular No. 405 as from 1 July 2021. Only on 5 July 2022 the new Circular No. 405 has been discussed in the General Consultative Committee (GCC). The entering into force was foreseen for 1 August 2022.

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<sup>12</sup> Fixed-term appointments, announcement EPO intranet on 17.06.2021, [link](#)

## Opinion on Circular No. 405

Circular No. 405 provides minor improvements of working conditions for staff on fixed-term appointments. However, it still falls short of providing more predictability and work stability. Every decision regarding conversion/extension is at the discretion of the administration and the administration does not commit to anything with regard to the employees, e.g., offering alternative posts in case a job position is abolished.

**There are some positive aspects in Circular No. 405**, which are worth mentioning:

- Contracts must have a length of 5 years and the fixed-term appointment can only be extended once. While 5-years contracts were the de facto practice already for all newly recruited examiners since 2018, this was not true for non-examiner colleagues on fixed-term appointments. In future, contracts with a length of less than 5 years (e.g., 1 year, 2 years) are no longer possible.
- The uniform notice period of 12 months for all decisions on extensions/conversions, the transitional measures for colleagues currently under fixed-term contracts, and the fact that employees have the possibility to comment in case a contract risks not to be converted/extended are further improvements.

However, **two crucial issues remain**:

- the lack of predictability and the general principle of the total duration of 10 years on fixed-term appointment for (almost) all. Staff representatives in the WG challenged this proposal, by asking whether this would allow colleagues to take major decisions, for example to start a family, to settle down, to purchase a house. The answer is no: Circular No. 405 and especially the 10 years do not make it any easier to plan the future.
- the only vague criteria for deciding on conversion/extension are not further specified “business needs” and “performance”. Colleagues on fixed-term contracts might have shown a good performance but their post might still run the risk to disappear after 10 years because of changing “business needs” which are out of their control.

The lack of predictability and the 10 years are two points which have been raised times and times again by colleagues on fixed-term contracts. Figure 4 shows feedback which staff representation gathered during MS Teams meetings and from emails from colleagues on fixed-term contracts. After the publication of draft Circular No. 405 many colleagues expressed their disappointment of the outcome of the working group. Every publication of the administration stated that the goal was to give greater clarity to our colleagues. The preamble of the circular mentions the term predictability four times. But the outcome on predictability is indeed modest.



Figure 4: Feedback from staff on fixed-term contracts

### Ten years are too long

Ten years on fixed-term appointment is far too long. Job security is crucial for anyone who wants to settle down and have a family and everybody should be given the opportunity to do so. Constant insecurity has a tremendous impact on health and wellbeing.

Fixed-term appointments not only put undue pressure and stress on our colleagues, but also create many risks for the EPO and have inevitable negative effects. It jeopardizes the attractiveness of the Office as an employer, collaboration, employee engagement, corporate culture, diversity and inclusion, and many others. These are all essential ingredients for an environment in which knowledge workers can thrive and produce the high-quality work that the European economy and public expect from the EPO.

The CSC members of the GCC are surprised about the rather dogmatic view of the administration on the 10 years and they believe that the management is pushing the issue on contracts to a counterproductive extreme without sound arguments. Flexibility for the administration is still very high with a single 5-year contract (followed by conversion) but holding staff on a contract for 10 years just creates more problems than it solves.

The following questions remain without answer:

- Administration claims that the 10 years would be good for EPO finances. What would be the difference for EPO finance if we had only 5 years on contracts as opposed to 10 years. How are the risks for example on recruitment and patent quality quantified?
- Administration states that the 10 years would not have a negative effect on recruitment. Was there a change since 2018 in the numbers of people refusing an EPO job-offer as compared to before the introduction of fixed-term contracts ?

The administration was reluctant to discuss these issues.

### Reality check of the CSC proposal: European Space Agency (ESA)

The EU Commission offers contracts for up to 10 years but it seems that they are struggling to recruit the best. At the German patent office employees get permanent after 5 years. In France, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy (to name but a few), contracts of 10-year duration are not possible.

It is worth having a look at the working conditions at the European Space Agency (ESA). At ESA employees become permanent after 4 years and only in exceptional cases will the contract be extended. This shows that our proposal to convert appointments after 5 years is not only positive, but also realistic. (See [here](#) and Rule 9/3 of Staff Regulations of the ESA [here](#))





- Initial 4-year contract
- Permanent after 4 years
- 1-year notice period

Rule 9/3	Contract – Category A and L staff
(i)	Category A and L staff other than those covered by Rules 9/1, 9/4, 9/5 and 9/6 shall be appointed for an initial period of 4 years.
(ii)	Their letter of appointment shall state that, not later than by the end of the third year of their appointment, they will be informed either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) that their appointment will not be extended, or</li> <li>(b) that their appointment will be extended for an indefinite period, or again</li> <li>(c) that their appointment will be extended for a fixed period, if the Director General considers it inappropriate to grant an indefinite appointment at that stage. Not later than one year before expiry of this extension, the staff member concerned shall be informed of one of the three decisions mentioned in this paragraph (ii).</li> </ul>
(iii)	For scientific staff serving in the Space Science Department on the basis of fixed-term contracts, the non-extension of a contract after eight years of service shall confer an entitlement to an indemnity for loss of job calculated under the provisions of Rule 21.7/2 (ii).
(iv)	Reasons will not be given for decisions concerning the extension or non-extension of appointments; however, the staff member concerned shall be heard by his Director before the Director General takes a decision.
(v)	An A-grade staff member's previous service in Category B shall be taken into account in the calculation of the periods referred to in paragraphs (i) and (ii) above. If such service amounted to three years or more by the time he transferred to Category A, he shall immediately be given an indefinite-term contract.

Figure 5: Working conditions at ESA

### Core value of the EPO: Fairness – but not for the younger generation

With the introduction of the new employment framework in 2018, the challenges and unpredictability of the future (e.g., fluctuations in incoming workload, ongoing digitalisation, technical fields which are dying, etc.) have been delegated to a young generation of new employees, whereas in the past these challenges have been partly taken over collectively by the Organisation. If the EPO were to face problems, these colleagues could conveniently be let go and with them the risks and related problems are externalised.

In the time of a global pandemic, colleagues on contracts and especially those who are parents with younger children have been working under more pressure than just about everyone else at the Office. They are literally fighting for their livelihoods, there is no room for mistakes or excuses. If production targets were set at high levels, they did everything humanly possible to meet these targets.

Putting the risks of the future on the shoulders of a young generation is conflicting with the core values of the EPO. Individual responsibility of each employee for their work and for the future of the EPO is very important; however, a better balance must be found between what risk should be shared and handled by the Organisation as a whole and what risk can be put on the shoulders of individual colleagues and to the younger generation. Circular No. 405 does not at all address this issue.

### Criteria for conversion/extension

The only criteria for deciding on conversion/extension in Circular No. 405 are not further specified “business needs” and “performance”. Conversion of a contract before the end of the 10 years of continuous service is possible but will be exceptional. The circular lacks clear criteria which could provide greater clarity or predictability.

### 20%-ceiling on budgeted posts

The number of employees on fixed-term appointments may not account for more than 20% of the total of budgeted posts (see [CA/D 2/18](#)). The apparent motivation behind using the

budgeted posts for the 20%-limit was to define a limit which would not fluctuate very much but would approximately mirror the actual number of staff working at the EPO. However, today there is a gap of about 10% between the actual headcount at the EPO and the budgeted posts.

It is proposed to use headcount instead of the budgeted posts to calculate the limit. According to our simulation in this way the 20%-limit would be reached in 2029 (based on data from the [Actuarial report 2021](#) and the [Orientation paper on recruitment 2022](#), active staff members reduced by 1000 over the next 10 years and replacement rate of 64%). If budgeted posts were used, the 20% limit would be reached only in 2032.

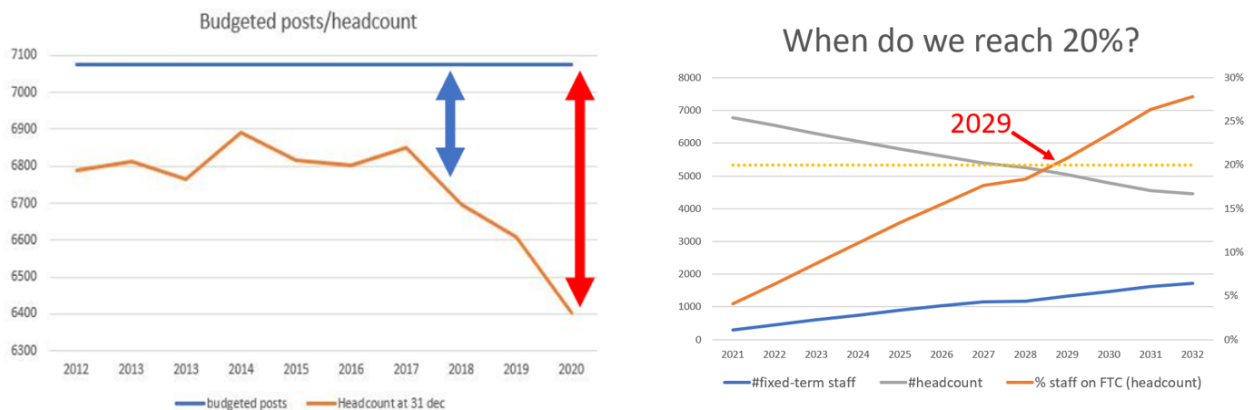


Figure 6: Difference between budgeted posts and the actual headcount (left). When will the 20% limit be reached considering the predicted evolution of the headcount at the EPO (right).

The problem of the gap has been acknowledged. However, the President decided to approach the problem differently. Instead of defining a new 20% limit based on headcount the President will propose to the AC to adapt the number of budgeted post (currently 7,075 posts) to bring it closer to the actual headcount, which is currently 6,261 ([Social Report 2021](#)). A concrete number has not been mentioned. The CSC members of the CSC do not support this approach.

It is difficult to evaluate the impact of a reduced number of budgeted posts. What can probably be said with certainty is that colleagues currently on fixed-term contracts will unfortunately not benefit from this, they will not be converted earlier than 10 years because of the 20%-ceiling. They will suffer the consequences of the recruitment freeze in recent years.

A general model of one 5-year contract and then conversion should be implemented also to avoid the issue with hitting the 20%-limit. What would happen once the 20% limit is reached? The administration assumes that colleagues will probably be converted earlier if the requirements on performance and business needs are met. Seniority should in any case be the primary criteria for conversion. Circular No. 405 is silent on this issue which causes yet another point of insecurity for staff on fixed-term contract.

### Conversion earlier than 10 years

A conversion should take place for all colleagues before 10 years as a general rule and only in exceptional cases at the 10-year mark. The 20%-limit will be reached at some point in time, there is no doubt. Following that point, at a steady state of recruitment and retirement,

contracts will probably have to be converted after 5 to 6 years in order to comply with the 20%-limit.

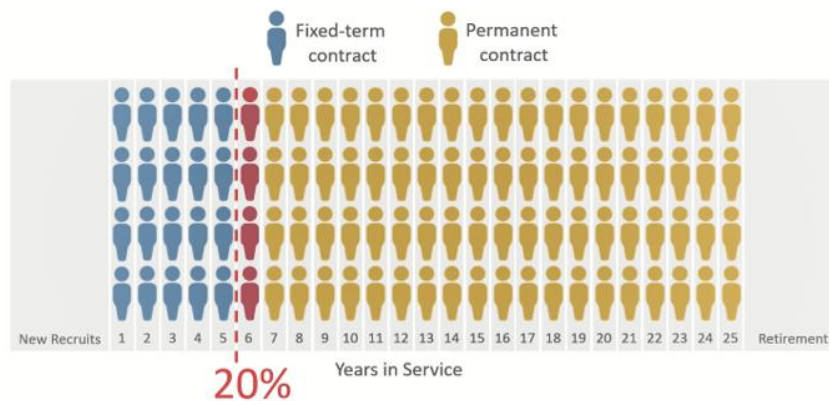


Figure 7: At a steady state of recruitment and retirement, contracts will definitely have to be converted after 5 to 6 years to comply to the 20% rule (see [explanatory video](#)).

With the introduction of the 20%-limit the Administrative Council's intention was that in exceptional cases a staff member should remain on a contract for 10 years, but the normal cases should be converted earlier. If the intention would have been to keep everyone on a contract for 10 years, then the Administrative Council would have set the limit not to 20% but to 40%.

### Unsatisfactory possibility to comment in case of non-conversion/non-extension

Circular No. 405 stipulates a possibility for a colleague to submit comments to the administration within a 10-day time limit in case of non-extension/non-conversion. The CSC members of the GCC generally welcome this approach.

It is required that colleagues are notified in writing of the underlying reasons for non-conversion/non-extension of a contract before they are expected to give counter-arguments. Staff would learn about the non-conversion/non-extension in informal meetings with their line managers or through HR. However, written communication offers less space for ambiguity and interpretation. The administration has rejected the requests to include such a written communication before being invited to comment and the extension of the time limit for comments to 20 working days.

### Staff Representation involvement

Staff representation involvement should be part of the circular. This would allow for more transparency and support for all colleagues on fixed-term contracts, especially in view of possible non-extensions/non-conversions. In addition, it was proposed to jointly monitor the implementation of the circular. The administration rejected a direct involvement but promised to provide information about the implementation of the circular during regular meetings with the CSC.

### Alternative job allocation

An "extra effort" should be made by the administration for job re-allocation, so that colleagues whose contracts could not be extended or converted, would be preferentially offered alternative job opportunities within the EPO.

The administration confirmed their effort to accommodate colleagues in another suitable post in case non-extension/non-conversion was linked to a non-availability of a budget post in the current unit. According to them, this has been common practice also in the past, as the intention is to retain talent. Unfortunately, the circular is silent on this topic. Only in the preamble reference is made to this intention.

### **Equal treatment**

A safeguard for colleagues on fixed-term contracts should be added to the circular, so that their vulnerable position during their contractual period cannot be abused to exert extra pressure. All colleagues should be equally treated and colleagues on fixed-term appointment should not be asked to perform more than other staff. Further, non-conversions and replacement by cheaper new recruits or overrecruiting so that newcomers have to compete for a limited number of permanent appointments must not happen.

The home loan scheme should be accessible to colleagues on fixed-term appointments, preferably under the same conditions as permanent staff, or at least after they have been at the Office for 5 years. The loan is protected by entry in the land register, the Salary Savings Plan and the severance grant, hence the risk for the EPO is low.

Furthermore, colleagues on contracts are generally more hesitant to ask for parental, special leave, etc. , to which they are entitled. This should be monitored to ensure inequality does not increase further.

Oral assurance that everybody should and will be treated equally is welcome. However, the introduction of a safeguard in the Circular No. 405 on these issues has been refused.

### **Transitional measures**

Circular No. 405 will be applied also to those colleagues currently on fixed-term contracts and Article 4 vaguely defines the “transitional measures”. The CSC members of the GCC insist on transparency and fairness when applying the new rules. The assurance that colleagues will be treated on a case-by-case basis and that colleagues in the same situation will be treated in a similar way is no commitment. The CSC members of the GCC request that clear rules be defined for the transitional measures and that the Staff Representation be involved in the process.

### **Conclusion**

During the consultation process, the administration has taken up some of the suggestions made by the Staff Representatives. However, the CSC members of the GCC are of the opinion that the outcome of the process, i.e. Circular No. 405, contains too many stumbling blocks and is too far from aligning the interests of the Office and those of the new staff.

**Opinion of the CSC members of the GCC on**  
**[GCC/DOC 13/2022](#)**  
**“Bringing Teams Together”**

1. The CSC members of the GCC give the following opinion on the “Bringing Teams Together” pilot project proposed in document GCC/DOC 13/2022.
2. The document announces a new management of office space in view of the New Ways of Working “[Pilot](#)” started on 1 June 2022 for a period of two years.

**On the consultation**

3. The document is tabled **for information**, which means that it shall not be subject to a vote and that the President does not expect an opinion to be submitted.

*The project kicked off before any discussion*

4. The project “Bringing Teams Together” was mentioned for the first time in the [May report](#) of 2 June 2022 and foresees a new management of office space allegedly “*to ensure that teams cluster in our buildings when working onsite*”. This project was never submitted to statutory consultation.
5. On 7 June 2022, the project kicked off with presentations per DG to line managers (see page 11).
6. The Local Staff Committee Munich (LSCMN) requested by [letter](#) of 9 June 2022 that statutory consultation take place in the LSCMN and the LOHSEC. In particular, it argued that this project introduces the deepest change in working conditions ever in the history of this organisation, and definitely requires a sound legal basis and a formal decision with an identifiable signatory.
7. The Central Staff Committee (CSC) urgently demanded by [letter](#) of 14 June 2022 that this new management of office space, and any other project implementing [Circular No. 419](#) (New Ways of Working), be discussed with Staff Representation and that statutory consultation in the GCC (Art. 38 ServRegs) and in the COHSEC (Art. 38a ServRegs) take place prior to entry into force.
8. On 20 June 2022, the GCC Secretariat sent the agenda for the GCC meeting of 5 July. Item No. 3 referred to a document “Bringing Teams Together” which was not yet made available.
9. On 24 June 2022, the President of the Office replied (see Annexes 1 and 2) that:

*“Bringing Teams Together does not require a prior, formal consultation of the GCC, nor a reasoned opinion of COHSEC”. Indeed, the principle of individual workplace allocation remains and the concept is flexible, adaptable and based on the needs expressed by the managers and*

*individual staff. Additionally, the foreseen changes will have no impact on staff's occupational health, safety and ergonomics."*

10. The document was finally made available on 27 June 2022 in the evening, namely 7 days before the GCC meeting.
11. On 28 June 2022, a CIN meeting took place during which the document was presented. When staff expressed major concerns against the project, the Communication Department declared "*[w]e are not here to discuss the **why** but rather the **how** because the decision has already been taken*".
12. While information to staff is important, we note that CIN meetings shall be no replacement for statutory consultation with the staff representation. Staff present in the CIN meeting brought reasoned arguments against the project but only got flawed answers or non-answers. It is further noted that CIN meetings can also not substitute for dedicated information available to staff via the intranet or e-mails.
13. The present document can be seen as an implementation of Title IV ServRegs (Working Conditions), in particular Articles 55 and 55a thereof. These articles expressly mention "*consulting the relevant joint committee*". Therefore, merely "informing" the GCC or any other joint committee of any changes in the working conditions is by far not sufficient.
14. The GCC meeting took place on 5 July 2022. In the meeting, the CSC members of the GCC requested that the agenda item be rescheduled for final consultation. The President refused and referred to the arguments exposed in his letter of 24 June (see Annexes 1 and 2).

#### *Lack of consultation of local staff committees*

15. In accordance with Art. 37(1)(d) ServRegs, the Local Staff Committee is "*responsible for maintaining suitable contacts with the local Administration*" and has the competence to "*raise site specific issues*" (Art. 37(1)(c) ServRegs). Pursuant to Art. 37(1)(a) ServRegs, the Local Staff Committee "*shall be consulted on any proposal [...] which concerns the **conditions of employment** of the whole or part of the staff at the place of employment concerned*".
16. The project is "*focusing on our most modern buildings*" (page 8) and therefore aims at emptying the Pschorrhöfe 1-4 and the Shell Building. This alone justifies a consultation of the local staff committees which never took place.
17. Staff working on site less frequently will only be allowed to book a "workplace-for-the-day" and keep their personal effects in an allocated locker/cupboard after work (page 5). This definitely implies a change in working conditions.

### *Lack of consultation of LOHSEC/COHSEC*

18. In accordance with Art. 38a(6) ServRegs, “*the President of the Office shall keep the [...] relevant Local Committee informed of any projects envisaged or implemented affecting its **area of competence**.*” The latter is defined in Art. 38a(4) ServRegs as “*all **measures** and reports relating to occupational health, safety and ergonomics on the premises of the place of employment concerned*”. Similar provisions apply to the COHSEC (Article 38a(3) ServRegs).
19. By generalizing “workplaces-for-the-day”, increasing the sharing of office space and densifying the workplace, the project does impact occupational health, safety and ergonomics.
- First, an unnamed and simply labelled “*office for the day*” makes it physically more difficult to individually locate staff members in case of emergency involving a power outage (only the booking system knows who is where).
  - Second, a “workplace-for-the-day” will be alternately used by different staff members. It will be the responsibility of staff members to disinfect IT equipment with the wipes available on the desk itself. Cleaning staff will perform only a standard cleaning and only in the evenings (page 10) although such an office is bookable for half-days and can hence change occupant during the day. There is no denial that the project will densify office spaces, which have an health impact in a time of a pandemic, for instance.
  - Third, the height of the chair, screen and table may have to be readjusted each time there is a change of occupant, and personal keyboard and mouse be connected and disconnected.
20. Finally, the distribution of post is affected (page 10).

### *The consultation is flawed*

21. The document contains links (page 10) to other sources which may change over time. GCC documents should be self-contained.
22. The decision to generalize “workplaces-for-the-day” comes with no benchmark nor cost/benefit analysis.
23. The document (page 6) promises that the implementation will be monitored and continuously improved based on lessons learned and the occupancy reviewed. However, there is no mention of any involvement of the staff representation. Quite to the contrary: in the GCC meeting, the President announced that (only) managers would be consulted and that this was better than asking staff with a survey. This is tantamount to excluding consultation of the Staff Committee(s) from day one as well as in the future.
24. In accordance with Art. 38 ServRegs, the General Consultative Committee (GCC) shall be **consulted** on any proposal which concerns the conditions of employment of

the whole or part of the staff to whom these Service Regulations apply. Working conditions (Title IV in the ServRegs) are an integral part of the conditions of employment.

25. As explained above and expressly requested by the CSC, the project definitely has an impact on the working conditions and hence should have been tabled **for consultation** instead of “for information” prior to entry into force.

### **On the merits**

*The objectives are contradictory and unclear*

26. The document (page 2) pretends to “*enshrine the flexibility and choice of the last two years*”. This statement is a misrepresentation of the facts. The last two years covered a pandemic period with mandatory teleworking.

### **Objective 1: Bring our teams together to benefit from all advantages that come with close collaboration**

27. This objective is actually contradicting the latest Office reorganization which generalized cross-site teams and directorates. Some directorates used to work with a team of Formalities Officers were suddenly assigned to a team solely based at another site. Collaboration remains purely virtual in such cases.
28. During the pandemic, the Office had actually recommended physical distancing to prevent infections. Now, by concentrating staff in neighbourhoods and shared office spaces, physical distancing will become more difficult and the situation worse when the number of infections rise.

### **Objective 2: Strengthen the sense of belonging and avoid ghost town effect due to lower occupation**

29. The project foresees the generalization of “workplaces-for-the-day”. As explained in this [paper](#), the literature shows that by introducing hot-desking also known as office hotelling, staff may interpret it as a message that they do not count. Such a project may hence worsen staff engagement. The Technologia survey 2022 run by SUEPO shows in the [results](#) that disengagement of staff in the role and development of the EPO continues to increase from 13% of staff in 2016, and 19% in 2020, disengagement peaked to 41% in 2022.



### **Objective 3: Implement a new flexible model of space utilisation aligned with the New Ways of Working**

30. The superficially positive term “flexible” actually hides the burden imposed on staff who will have to book an office, connect/disconnect personal equipment, unpack/pack personal belongings and disinfect IT equipment.
31. The objective is unclear. What does the Office exactly want to achieve? If there are no plans to sell buildings, then why empty them (see page 8, “*focusing on our most modern buildings*”)? Is the Office trying to rent them or make them available to other organisations?
32. Back in 2019, management proposed to sell one EPO building ([CA/69/19](#), par. 23) but faced opposition from the Council. The project was abandoned. The CSC members in the GCC are asking for the reasons and whether or not they would remain valid three years later.
33. The programme New Ways of Working is a pilot foreseen for two years and under possible review by the Administrative Council. Therefore, it is not clear what the aim behind emptying buildings might be. Furthermore, staff might want to come back more to the offices and therefore office space must be available to them.
34. In the GCC meeting of 5 July 2022, the President promised that the **emptied buildings would not be sold** but added that if the Office reaches only 50% occupancy rate consistently, then the **renting of buildings will be considered**. The President even added that this would improve the finances of the Office and that the revenues would be transferred into the RFPSS (Reserve Funds for Pensions and Social Security).
35. If the renting of buildings materializes in the future, it will put an end to flexibility and the reversibility of the project will be very difficult.

### **Objective 4: Recognize the different needs between colleagues coming often to the offices and other coming less often**

36. This objective already concludes that colleagues coming less often to the office premises have different needs than those coming often. All colleagues actually need close collaboration when working on-site, a sense of belonging or are entitled to expect the same health, safety and ergonomic conditions regardless of how often they are on-site. Assuming that it can be achieved for these less coming colleagues by setting up a different workplace introduces a bias upfront from the beginning of the project.

*The project is based on wrong assumptions*

37. The document (page 3) states “[a]s we return from the pandemic” although the pandemic is far from being over.

38. It even considers *“it is likely that building occupancy levels will be lower than pre-pandemic levels”* and *“[o]n the peak days we are currently around 20% occupancy”*.
39. Management actually made it unattractive to come to the Office’s premises over the last two years. Amicale facilities and canteens remained closed even at a time restaurants and fitness centres had reopened in the host countries. 36% of staff who work fully at the Office indicated that their work situation has worsened (see Shaping the New Normal survey [results](#) of 2020, page 6). In the GCC meeting of 5 July 2022, the project manager confirmed that the staff members complaining the most are those coming primarily to the Office’s premises.
40. The Isar and Pschorrhöfe canteens only reopened on 22 June 2022 in Munich. Many staff members are already on leave and mandatory presence only starts from 1 September 2022. **The current data cannot be relevant at all** to assess a post-pandemic occupancy rate.

*“It is a journey”, but staff is not on-board*

41. The CIN meeting of 28 June 2022 was well-attended, where many staff members stressed their reluctance to this project. It is said to be a journey, but many do not want to take off.
42. The lack of trust in the project stems from its alleged aim *“to bring our colleagues and teams together to deliver the benefits that close proximity can bring”* (page 4): creating *“neighbourhoods”* (page 5) to *“stay together”* (page 5).
43. This is contradictory to the alleged *“One-Office concept”* of the President generalizing cross-site teams with large physical distances in DG1. This contradiction has been made further evident in the GCC meeting on the 5 July 2022 when the project manager indicated that the staff is however free to book any bookable room in any building not only next to the team. For instance someone having the team in Pschorrhöfe could book a room in the Isar building if so wished, therefore rendering futile the principal reason of the whole project of *“bringing teams together”*.
44. Concerning the New Main building, the plan intends to *“[w]here possible, bring some DG4 / DG 5 staff into unused space in New Main”* (page 7). When it comes to stuffing empty spaces to empty the Shell building, it appears that teams can be split. In the GCC meeting of 5 July 2022, the project manager nevertheless assured that the same principle of neighbourhoods will equally apply. This should however be unambiguously clear from the document.
45. Inherent contradictions and double standards give rise to the suspicion that the wish to save money is actually the main driver.
46. Staff is said to play a key role but their feedback is only filtered through *“engagement with managers”*. The word *“managers”* is mentioned four times (page 4) whereas the word *“staff”* only once. It is remarkable that the project pretends to achieve trust and cooperation (page 4) solely through discussions with line managers and without involving staff and staff representation directly.

47. In practice, managers are polling their staff in different ways (MS Teams Forms, shared Excels sheets and emails) with different questions in view of the limited information made available to them. To show that they are more sustainable than others, some managers even insist that an allocated fixed workplace shall only be granted in case of special circumstances, leading to discretionary decisions.
48. Direct and honest staff feedback is missing. We strongly advise the Office to make a survey asking staff their opinion on “workplaces-for-the-day”. Such a question was missing from the latest Willis Tower Watson [survey](#) which only asked about working patterns without clearly indicating the conditions (allocated fixed workplaces vs. workplaces-for-the-day).
49. In the GCC meeting of 5 July 2022, the project manager considered that dialogue between staff and their line manager is better than a survey. In his view, resorting to managerial discretion is a preferable solution and “*it is all about being sensible*”.
50. Unfortunately, past experience shows that managerial discretion at the EPO often leads to arbitrariness.

*The project is premature and will rely on an unreliable basis*

51. The document already sets the date of 30 September 2022 as the deadline for receiving the needs of each team/directorate/community. The New Ways of Working may have started on 1 June 2022, it remains that the mandatory presence is only scheduled as from 1 September 2022.
52. In his letter of 24 June 2022, the President argues that “*4 weeks to fully experience New Ways of Working*” are sufficient to make long-term plans concerning management of office space.
53. First, most of the school holidays end only mid-September. It is hence not four weeks but only two weeks which may allegedly enable to “fully experience” the New Ways of Working.
54. Second, the pandemic is not over. A summer Covid-19 wave is taking place in Europe and another one is expected in autumn. It is not even clear whether the Office will trigger the mandatory presence or will return again to mandatory teleworking.
55. Third, an energy crisis is expected to come in autumn and the Office might follow the practice in the host states and might order the closure of office buildings to guarantee sufficient energy for private homes.
56. **In conclusion, an observation of working patterns of staff can only be reliable in an actual post-pandemic period and over a longer period of time.**

*The principle of individual workplace allocation is affected*

57. In his letter of 24 June, the President denies that the principle of individual workplace allocation is affected. This is a misrepresentation of the project.
58. First, the document (page 5) pretends that floor layouts remain the same with “*mostly single offices*”. However, the distributed floor plans show an increased number of shared offices, especially in the buildings in Munich (several workplaces in the same office). It is not clear whether sites and units will be affected equally.
59. Second, even if an office has a single workplace, it will be of a different nature (page 5):
1. an **allocated fixed workplace** for colleagues “mainly working” in the buildings **or** having specific needs which cannot be covered by different means.
  2. a **workplace-for-the-day** in their “neighbourhood” if they will be “less regularly” in the premises and an **allocated locker/cupboard** for personal effects in the direct vicinity of their neighbourhood.
60. Therefore, even if the workplace-for-the-day is individual in **space**. It is not individual in **time**. A “workplace-for-the-day” may be booked at any other time by someone else. The document is essentially playing with words.
61. During the CIN meeting of 28 June, the project managers explained that “a workplace-for-the-day” is “your home”. However, staff will not have the keys and anyone being given the code via the booking tool will be allowed to enter.
62. The **allocated locker/cupboard** will offer more limited space to store personal items. The fact that such items have to be removed after the end of work will deter staff from placing them in the first place. This will inevitably lead to an impersonal workplace.
63. In the same meeting, staff was even worried to hear that such a recommendation will also apply to allocated fixed workplaces so that they can be used in case of absence by other colleagues. Such workplaces will however not be bookable via the booking system.

*The allocation criteria are unclear*

64. The criteria for obtaining an allocated fixed workplace are unclear and could vary in time. The **frequency of 3 days or more per week** is given but only as an example. Later in the document (page 8), the project is said to focus on the most modern buildings, thereby meaning that some buildings shall be emptied (e.g. Pschorrhöfe 1-4 in Munich, and the Shell in The Hague). This strongly suggests that the Office intends to adjust the criteria according to this goal. If too many staff members request an allocated fixed workplace, a higher frequency of 4 days or even 5 days per week may be required.

65. The objective of emptying buildings will obviously set physical limits to flexibility at some point. This [paper](#) from the Local Staff Committee Munich explains why.
66. The document promises that “[u]ltimately if all staff chose to come mainly in the office each week, we have the capacity to host everyone” (page 5). However, each neighbourhood will have a final size (page 5) thereby making any reversibility difficult, especially if the emptied buildings are used for other purposes.
67. Specific needs could justify an **allocated fixed workplace**. In our view, a non-exhaustive exemplary list should be mentioned such as: disabilities, but also specific roles like confidential counsellors, reporting officers, staff representatives, ethics and compliance, etc. For some staff members, focused work requires to be in the same office and not to change office regularly.
68. In the GCC meeting of 5 July 2022, the project manager explained that **3 days or more** is “*not a hard rule, it’s only a guidance*”. We understand therefore that staff planning to come two days per week may request their line manager to be awarded an **allocated fixed workplace** if they so need.

## Conclusion

69. For the above reasons, the CSC members of the GCC:
- request that a dedicated working group is convened,
  - request that the LOHSECs and COHSEC are consulted regarding health matters, as well as building capacities (ventilation, sanitation, etc.), ergonomics and safety matters,
  - consider that the project is premature and might further worsen staff engagement and the sense of belonging,
  - recommend observing the working patterns of staff in a post-pandemic period and over a longer period of time,
  - request to run an honest staff survey clearly indicating the conditions (allocated fixed workplaces vs. workplaces-for-the-day).
  - request that this item is rescheduled for final consultation.

## Annexes:

1. Reply from the President of 24 June 2022 to the LSCMN letter of 8 June 2022
2. Reply from the President of 24 June 2022 to the CSC letter of 14 June 2022

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Your letter dated 8 June 2022

Dear Mr Chair,

Reference is made to your open letter of 8 June 2022 related to several topics, i.e. Bringing Teams Together, New Normal planning tool, opening of the canteen in the Isar building and construction of a terrace.

Before addressing these points in more detail, the Office would like to recall that the mentioned topics have, as part of larger wholes, been pursued for several months now and were the subject of different announcements on the Intranet. Additionally, it is recalled that the Office invited the Local Staff Committee ('LSC') Munich for a meeting initially scheduled on 15 June 2022, and requested to communicate any topics the LSC wanted to add to the agenda. This meeting had to be rescheduled, but the Office reiterated its invitation to the LSC Munich to indicate which topics it wishes to discuss.

While regretting the unnecessarily polemical tone of your letter, the Office wishes to specify the following:

#### 1. 'Bringing Teams Together'

The Office has long been committed to ensuring that our buildings offer an exceptional work environment for our staff, which is adapted to the evolving way in which we work. With this in mind, the Office revised its medium-term building strategy in June 2021 based on the principles of offering staff greater flexibility, while ensuring that our buildings remain a space where staff can gather, collaborate, network and socialise. The ambitious renovations and improvements of the building in Vienna and the Isar building – which were consistently communicated about – are the direct results of this commitment and directly and visibly benefit the staff.

Bringing Teams Together goes hand-in-hand with these changes, and aims to ensure that our buildings and the workplaces they offer are used to their

fullest potential and are adapted to the new reality we work in. Indeed, the organisation of the workplaces should reflect the increased flexibility offered to staff with regard to where they work from under the New Ways of Working, as well as the organisation of DG1 in Technology Communities and cross-functional principal directorates which has been completed since April 2022.

Attached to this letter you will find the letter the Office sent to the CSC, which contains additional information regarding Bringing Teams Together and the intended timeline. It is noted that this topic will be submitted for information at the upcoming GCC meeting of 5 July 2022. The letter sent to the CSC shows that the conditions of employment of our staff are not impacted by Bringing Teams Together. The principle of individual workplace allocation remains and the concept is flexible, adaptable and based on the needs expressed by the managers and staff. It recognizes the different needs between colleagues working mainly from the Office, who may need fixed workplaces, and others choosing to work on site less frequently, who are recommended to use workplaces-for-the-day in their neighbourhood. An initial three and a half-month period is foreseen during which input from staff and managers will be gathered to determine the detailed accommodation plans.

## 2. New Normal Planning Tool

In line with Circular No. 419, adopted following a broad and thorough consultation process, employees are given increased flexibility with regard to where they work from and an online tool is put in place to register their working/teleworking plans in advance. The opening of the New Normal Planning Tool corresponds to the administrative implementation thereof. As to the default settings of the tool, staff who so desire can select an entire time range and indicate that they will be working from the Office premises.

## 3. Canteens and Terrace

First, it is noted that staff has been kept informed of the re-opening of the canteens – which depended on the evolution of the pandemic and the arrangements with the caterer. This has also been announced and discussed with the Local Staff Committee Munich in the past, for example during the meeting of 23 June and 28 October 2021. As regards your remark related to the former canteen committee, we refer to our letter dated 21 October 2021 and the need to centralise the discussions on this topic in the bodies foreseen by our legal framework, i.e. the LSC.

As to the construction of the outdoor terrace, we refer to the communication to staff on [7 December 2021](#) on this topic, and my services remain available should you have particular questions.

We hope that the above information clarifies the Office's position on the points you raised. Should you have any further questions, my services would gladly clarify these in a meeting. In that respect, please allow us to reiterate the Office's invitation for a meeting with the LSC Munich in July, and to share with us the points you wish to discuss and add to the agenda.

Yours sincerely,

António Campinos

Encl. 1: Copy of letter to CSC



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### Bringing our teams together: use of the Office's workplaces

Dear Mr Chair,

Reference is made to your open letter of 14 June 2022 related to Bringing Teams Together. As you are aware, this topic will be submitted for information at the upcoming GCC meeting of 5 July. However, we would like to already take this opportunity to explain the background of Bringing Teams Together and what it precisely entails before addressing the envisioned timeline and the stakeholders' involvement.

#### 1. Bringing Teams Together – the concept

The Office has long been committed to ensuring that our buildings offer an exceptional work environment for our staff, which is adapted to the evolving way in which we work. With this in mind, the Office revised its medium-term building strategy in June 2021 based on the principles of offering staff greater flexibility, while ensuring that our buildings remain a space where staff can gather, collaborate, network and socialise. The ambitious renovations and improvements of the building in Vienna and the Isar building – on which we have consistently communicated – are the direct results of this commitment and directly and visibly benefit the staff.

Bringing Teams Together goes hand-in-hand with these changes, and aims to ensure that our buildings and the workplaces they offer are used to their fullest potential and are adapted to the new reality we work in. As you know, those workplaces have traditionally been organised based on the concept of staff members being physically present in our buildings. However, building on the lessons learnt during the pandemic, staff will be offered increased flexibility with regard to where they work from in the framework of the New Ways of Working, which will take full effect in September. The organisation of the Office's workspaces should reflect this new reality, as well as the

organisation of DG1 in Technology Communities and cross-functional principal directorates which has been completed since April 2022. The time has come to bring our teams together and also close to the teams with which they shall collaborate.

In embarking on this new chapter, the Office remains committed to providing an attractive home for our professional community, thereby strengthening our sense of belonging. This is all the more important, given that as we return to our buildings, occupancy levels may be lower than in pre-pandemic times. This reinforces the need to bring our teams together and for our workplaces to be flexible and adaptable, so we can respond to the changing needs of colleagues and of each and every team, and to avoid that large areas of the office become empty spaces.

Further thereto, please note the approach the Office is planning to take:

- collect information on the needs of each staff member, team, and unit through consultation with line managers. Staff will be able to provide their feedback via their line manager.
- keep the floor layouts as they are, meaning that the vast majority of the rooms remain single offices, with only slight amendments if absolutely required.
- bring together teams in neighbourhoods to ensure that teams, directorates, technology communities and principal directorates stay together.
- recognise different needs of colleagues working mainly from the Office and others choosing to work on site less frequently. By way of guidance to bring life back to our buildings and avoid creating areas with large numbers of empty offices, line managers and staff will be recommended to consider:
  - being allocated fixed workplaces for colleagues mainly working in our buildings
  - booking workplaces-for-the-day in their neighbourhood if they will be less regularly in our premises and have an allocated locker/cupboard for personal effects in the direct vicinity.

The approach aims at balancing individual and collaborative work needs in our buildings while encouraging social connections between colleagues. There will be a step-by-step approach per building to keep buffers and allow flexibility. As from September 2022, we will first move all DG0/4/5 staff back in Isar once the Isar daylight project is completed. Priority will then be to bring the teams of DG1 together to reflect the reorganisation. Moves in Pschorrhöfe and Isar in Munich, and in Main in The Hague are expected to start in November 2022. The workplaces in Berlin will be assessed at a later stage. The new building in Vienna will adopt a similar concept from the beginning.

## 2. Timeline and information/feedback from the stakeholders

The detailed accommodation plans will be elaborated after successive consultations with all managers and through engagement between each manager and their staff. While we have, as you pointed out in your letter, already introduced the general approach to all managers in dedicated meetings per DG on 7 June 2022, the next steps are outlined as follows:

- Provide more detailed information to all line managers in smaller groups per site and per technology community (for DG1) or per PD (other DGs) in meetings between mid and end June 2022. For each group, single points of contacts will be nominated to liaise regularly and directly with Facility Management.
- Inform staff in a CIN drop-in session on 28 June 2022 (another CIN meeting took place already on 23 June 2022).
- Along the process, inform staff through intranet of the approach and keep them updated on the progress of the implementation.
- Request from line managers to define the needs for their teams. They should provide consolidated list of requirements (including the list of staff who need an allocated workplace) by 30 September 2022. This allows line managers about three and a half months to reflect and engage with their teams, including 4 weeks to fully experience New Ways of Working.
- With this, Facility Management can finalise the detailed accommodation plans and start the moves for DG1 as from November 2022.

The situation will then be closely monitored and continuously improved based on lessons to be learnt.

The Office has attached great importance to communicating extensively and transparently on all evolutions with regard to our buildings. This is reflected in the numerous Intranet publications on the renovations, and – specifically related to Bringing Teams Together – the early information meetings with staff on this topic and the publication of the MAC report.

As mentioned above, the Office will submit this topic for information at the upcoming GCC meeting of 5 July. Additionally, should any site-specific considerations arise, these may also be discussed with my relevant services.

That being said, the Office considers that Bringing Teams Together does not require a prior, formal consultation of the GCC, nor a reasoned opinion of COHSEC. Indeed, the principle of individual workplace allocation remains and the concept is flexible, adaptable and based on the needs expressed by the managers and individual staff. Additionally, the foreseen changes will have no impact on staff's occupational health, safety and ergonomics.

We hope that the above information clarifies the Office's position on the points you raised.

Yours sincerely,

António Campinos