

POLICY BRIEF

Advancing diversity in the European Commission's workforce

The European Commission is one of the most central bodies in EU politics, boasting a workforce of over 32,000 civil servants. However, it suffers from a diversity gap when it comes to the representativeness of its staff across many key dimensions. While progress has been made to include more women in middle and senior management and to improve access for people with disabilities, the inclusion of historically underrepresented groups of people remains inadequate.

Highlighting the challenges and obstacles that contribute to the Commission's diversity gap, this policy brief proposes concrete actions to address them. There are several reasons why the lack of diversity identified in this policy paper is problematic and requires policy-makers attention.

First, there is intrinsic value in diversity. In terms of justice, a political organisation should strive for optimum representativeness

in its workforce. Inclusiveness is indispensable for social justice as it improves citizens' access to institutions regardless of their background and enhances the Commission's representativeness of the overall EU population.

Second, there are instrumental reasons: The exclusion of valuable experiences and perspectives in the policy-making process may result in outcomes that fail to reflect their concerns and issues.

MAIN PROBLEMS

- 1 Lack of diversity in EPSO's pool of applicants: poor outreach towards underrepresented communities.** This problem emerges also from the lack of disaggregated diversity data on applicant cohorts, a problem that eventually compromises diversity within the Commission's workforce and that has first been addressed in 2021. This is worsened by limited engagement with civil society, geographical concentration of recruitment activities, absence of a corporate recruitment campaign, untargeted social media presence and inadequate online outreach marked by low engagement across platforms, lack of diverse imagery and absence from emerging platforms.
- 2 Lack of transparency and accountability in relation to the use of AI tools for the selection process.** The selection process currently lacks transparency on the use of such tools. First, candidates are unaware that such tools are being used.

Second, the algorithmic weighting and criteria that are used to sort candidates in the 'talent screener phase' of the selection process are not known. These transparency gaps can lead towards a gap in accountability.

- 3 Inequality of meritocracy.** Standardised measurement works on the implicit assumption that all groups within societies have the same starting point. However, there has been increasing debate over whether standardised, supposedly meritocratic, evaluation systems contribute to or cause inequality.
- 4 A lack of intersectionality.** Where diversity is being acknowledged, it is not being addressed sufficiently from an intersectional perspective. A person can be affected by discrimination in multiple ways.

OUR PROPOSALS FOR A MORE DIVERSE COMMISSION

To address these issues, we elaborated the following policy proposals:

A) To improve diversity in EPSO's pool of applicants:

- 1 Improve EPSO's outreach to civil society to encourage more applications to the Network of Diversity and Inclusion Organisations (NDIO).** Specifically, by: (i) promoting the call more intensively with institutional partners and through various communication channels and (ii) providing more detailed information in the call about the actual role of the NDIO, including how EPSO intends to engage with these organisations.
- 2 Spread calls for applications and traineeship programmes through each single local European Documentation Centres and Europe Direct's (EDC/ED) website.** The visibility of opportunities for university graduates can be enhanced by: (i) organising in each EDC/EC online informational sessions on calls for applications and (ii), providing mentoring on the application process or indicating the closest centre that can assist the candidate.
- 3 Spread out recruitment activities to reduce the current geographical concentration.** In particular, EPSO representatives should foster presences at job fairs outside of Brussels and Luxembourg.
- 4 Actively advertise the Commission as an attractive and inclusive employer, using online platforms as well as more traditional means of awareness-raising campaigns.** This could involve a revamped 'EU Careers' advertising campaign, as well as more targeted social media strategies.
- 5 Encourage Member States to draw up their own campaigns promoting EU careers,** reflecting diversity concerns and addressing country-specific inequality issues.

AUTHORS

Ashlee Beazley, Eduardo García Cancela, Riccardo Nanni, Thalia Ostendorf, Elena Porter, Lewin Schmitt, Inga Steinberg, Sue Anne Teo, Mariana Vega Martinho.

B) To improve fairness in the recruitment process:

- 6 EPSO should improve transparency and accountability around the use of AI tools in the recruitment process.** Information on the criteria and the use of AI tools should be shared with candidates and/or the public. Accountability mechanisms should be in place and the tool should be subjected to periodic external human rights impact assessments.

C) Enhancing situational awareness in the Commission:

- 7 Introduce dedicated diversity sections in the HR chapters of DG's annual management plans** to set out aims and report on progress regarding diversity, inclusivity, intersectionality and equal opportunity.
- 8 Improve continuity in diversity efforts between EPSO and DG HR.** This could be done by establishing an interface office to ensure coherence between EPSO and DG HR practices; giving EPSO a monitoring role in the hiring process alongside DG HR, e.g., by allowing EPSO officers to periodically attend job interviews as silent observers.

D) Affirmative action:

- 9 Introduce intersectional diversity quotas across all contract types to counter flaws in the hiring process.** The quantitative targets should be determined based on the demographic makeup of the EU population and change in line with demographic changes, which an intersectional hiring policy could address. For example, a policy that attempts to account for an applicant's identity as both a person of an ethnic and racial minority and of a lower socioeconomic demographic. A person can be discriminated against based on ethnic background and socioeconomic status.
- 10 Introduce alternative entry schemes for people from underrepresented groups.** This should entail a paid traineeship programme, which would conclude with the option to be interviewed by a selection board and, if successful, be placed directly on a reserve list.