



Action Plan on Geographical Balance

SLOVAKIA

2023

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1. Introduction

In line with the 2018 report on geographical balance¹, the new HR strategy² “**Communication to the Commission: A new Human Resources Strategy for the Commission**”³ highlights the importance of geographical balance of all staff, which is to be strengthened, and foresees the development of Action Plans together with under-represented Member States. This Action Plan represents a joint political commitment by the Member State and the Commission to strengthen geographical balance, and takes the form of measures to be undertaken by the Member State, by the Commission as well as joint measures.

As a rule, discrimination based on nationality is prohibited by the Treaties, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Staff Regulations. At the same time, the EU Staff Regulations require that EU institutions recruit staff from the broadest possible geographical basis.⁴ In 2014, the co-legislators introduced a new legal basis for each institution to adopt appropriate measures where a significant imbalance between nationalities of officials is observed and is not justified by objective criteria.

The methodology for defining the objective to be reached has been subject of several communications⁵ over time. It has taken the form of guiding rates or reference values, as well as indicative recruitment targets for enlargements.⁶ In its 2018 report on geographical balance⁷, the Commission considers a significant imbalance is observed if the share of nationals of one or more Member State amongst staff is lower than 80% of the relevant guiding rate and is focussing on AD staff occupying non-management functions excluding linguists. The European Commission regularly reports on the state of play on presence by nationality among its staff. Measures have been adopted by EPSO and the Commission when imbalances were observed. However, these measures have not always provided results in line with the objective. Under-representation in many staff categories is still observed in several nationalities, including in the case of Slovakia.

More recently, the Commission committed in its HR Strategy that it will prepare specific action plans, together with the Member States concerned, to address this issue and take into account the specificities of each Member State.⁸ In addition, the HR Strategy indicates that, in line with Article 27

¹ COM(2018)(377(final))/2

² [C\(2022\) 2229 final](#)

³ According to the Communication to the Commission: *A new Human Resources Strategy for the Commission*, COM(2022) 2229 final, ‘On geographical balance at all levels, though by law we need to recruit staff on the broadest possible geographical basis from among nationals of Member States of the Union, there are categories of staff for which certain Member States are currently under-represented. [...] In 2022, specific action plans will be developed together with these Member States to improve their balance, keeping in mind that by law, no posts should be reserved for nationals of any specific Member State.’

⁴ See in that sense Article 27 of the Staff Regulations and Article 12 of the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants.

⁵ Commission Communication of Mr Van Miert SEC(1994)844 of 17 May 1994 at the occasion of the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden; Communication of Mr Kinnock concerning the recruitment of Commission officials from the new Member States of 14 February 2003 C(2003)436/5, adopted on 19 February 2003; Communication of Mr Kallas C(2006)5778 concerning the recruitment of Commission officials and temporary agents from Bulgaria and Romania of 24 November 2006, adopted by Written Procedure on 1 December 2006 (SEC(2006)1574/5); Communication of Vice-President Šefčovič concerning the recruitment of Commission officials and temporary agents from Croatia of 12 July 2012, (SEC(2012)436 final).

⁶ The indicative recruitment targets refer to nationals from Member States joining the EU on the occasion of enlargements.

⁷ COM(2018)(377(final))/2

⁸ According to the Communication to the Commission: *A new Human Resources Strategy for the Commission*, COM(2022) 2229 final, ‘On geographical balance at all levels, though by law we need to recruit staff on the broadest possible geographical basis from among nationals of Member States of the Union, there are categories of staff for which certain Member States are currently under-represented. [...] In 2022, specific action plans will be developed together with these Member States to improve their balance, keeping in mind that by law, no posts should be reserved for nationals of any specific Member State.’

of the Staff Regulations, the Commission will consider adopting General Implementing Provisions to enable actions aiming at improving geographical balance.

1.1. Developments in 2022

In order to address geographical imbalances of Slovakia (both structurally and in the shorter term), the Director-General for HR and the Permanent Representative of Slovakia agreed on 8 July 2022 to jointly prepare this Action Plan, based on the specific situation of Slovakia. The aim of the Action Plan is to outline the reasons for Slovakia's low representation, and to set out measures to be undertaken by Slovakia, the European Commission, EPSO, as well as measures to be undertaken jointly in order to address it. The implementation of some of the measures has already commenced in 2022. The assessment of the results will be undertaken at the beginning of 2024.

However, in line with the Staff Regulations, all work to address geographical imbalances is to be done in the context of no posts reserved for nationals of a specific Member State, and merit remains the primary selection criterion.

2. Slovakia: challenges and outlook

2.1. Geographical balance snapshot

Slovakia's presence is at 80% of the guiding rate at the overall AD level and below 80% of the guiding rate at AD5-AD8 level (Figure 1). The former has been increasing over the years, while the latter is declining since 2016 (Figure 2). Slovakia is below 80% of the guiding rate at middle management level and at 80% of the guiding rate at senior management level. The trended presence of non-permanent positions is depicted in Figure 3. The same figure also shows that Slovakia is at 80% of the guiding rate as regards Temporary Agents and below 80% of the guiding rate for Contract Agents FGIV. Participation by Slovaks in EPSO competitions is slightly lower than the expected percentage relative to its population. The pass rate in EPSO competitions is below average adding to Slovak under-representation at entry levels ('pipeline problem').

Detailed analysis⁹:

For a guiding rate of **1,8%**, under-representation is defined as 80% of the guiding rate which for Slovak nationals corresponds to **1,4%**.¹⁰ Therefore, Slovak nationals are:

- Above 80% of the guiding rate among all Commission staff (1,7%) and at 80% of the guiding rate among AD non-linguists (1,4%). Regarding the population of all ADs, 11,9% are Temporary Agents.

⁹ The reference date is 31 December 2022.

¹⁰ This Action Plan concerns EU-27 nationalities and guiding rates without the UK from the Geographical Balance Report COM (2018) 377 final/2. Managers that changed their first nationality from British to one of the EU-27 nationalities after 29/3/2017 are considered to have kept their British nationality in line with section 2, 1.2.2.1 of the Report. Beyond the total number of managers in this briefing, there are 21 British senior managers (6 at Director-General level and 15 at Director level) and 49 British middle managers in place.

- Below 80% of the guiding rate among AD5-8 non-linguists (1,3%), of which 26,7% are Temporary Agents.
- Above 80% of the guiding rate at AD9-14 non-management grades (1,6%).
- Below 80% of the guiding rate at middle management level (1,2%) and at 80% of the guiding rate at senior management level (1,4%).

Figure 1. Slovak presence of permanent staff (including Temporary Agents) at the EC on December 31, 2022

(N.B. A nationality within a Staff category is considered as sufficiently represented when it is above 80% of the guiding rate of the Member State i.e., the red dotted line; it is considered as under-represented, when it is below 80% of the guiding rate).

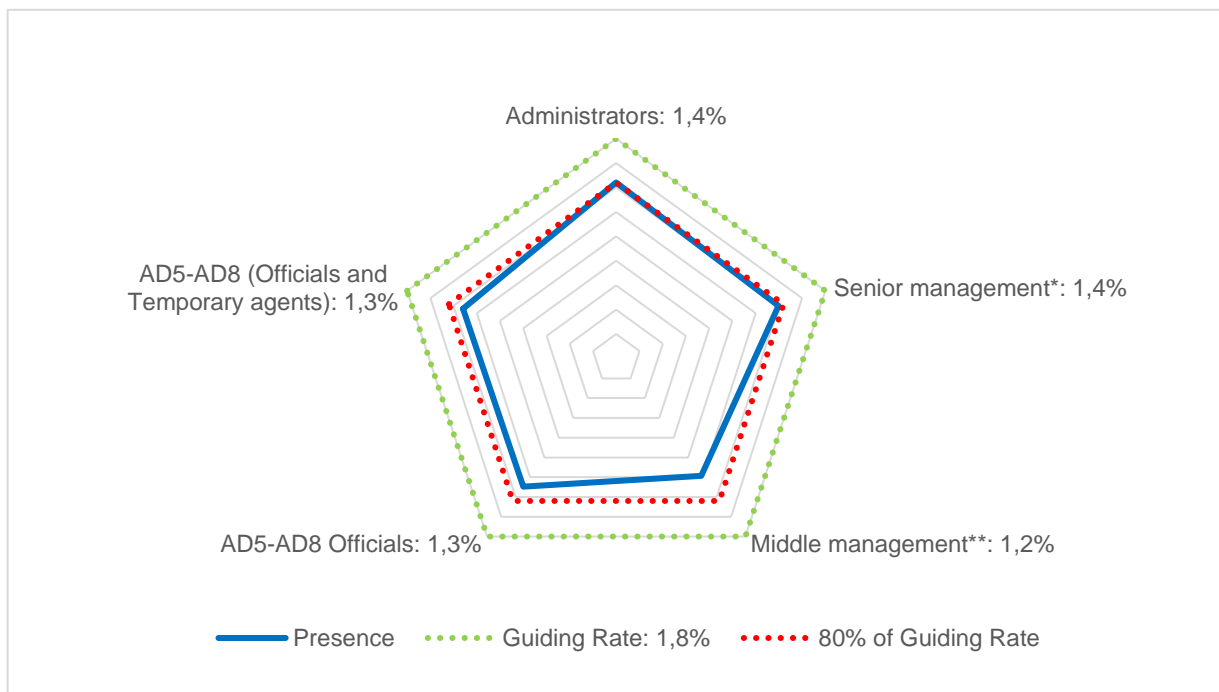


Figure 2. Slovak trended presence of All AD (non-management), All AD5-AD8, Temporary Agents as % of guiding rate

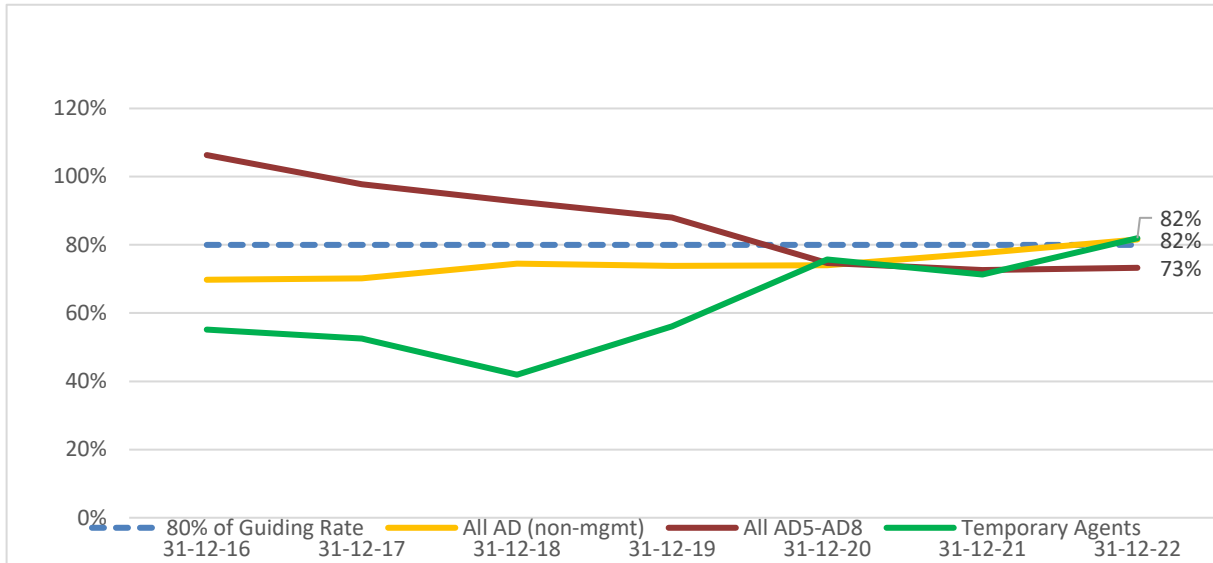
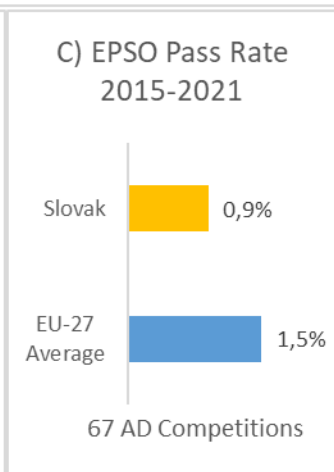
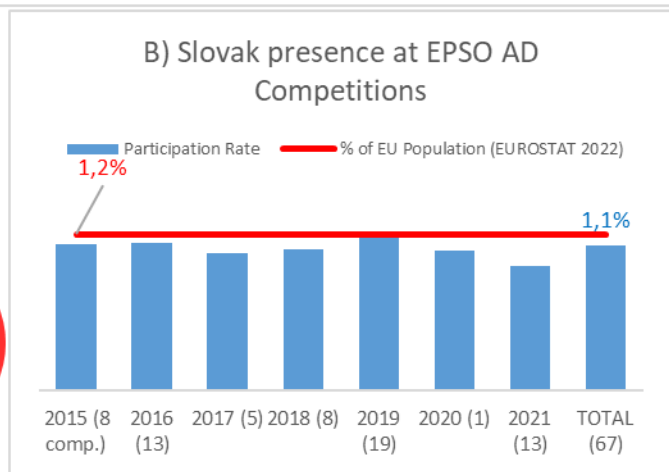
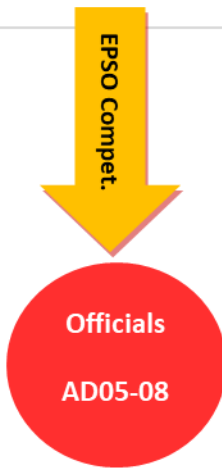
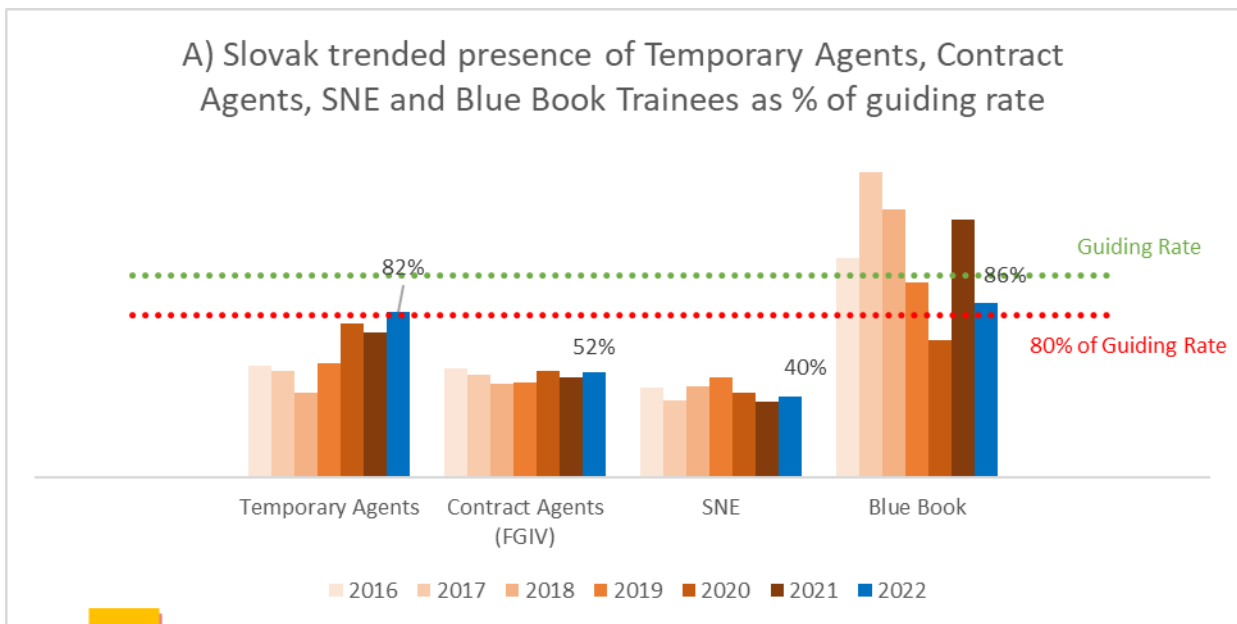


Figure 3. Factors influencing Slovak presence at the EC



A) Non-permanent Staff of Slovak nationality, apart from Contract Agents and SNEs, is above 80% of the guiding rate in 2022. Together with external candidates, they have access to EPSO (external) competitions that could lead to permanent contracts (officials AD5-AD8). In addition, Temporary Agents and Contract Agents are eligible to apply for internal competitions. Although SNEs do not fall within the parameters of the Staff Regulations, the Commission takes them into account as a relevant entry point for permanent positions, with potentially significant impact on overall representation of a particular Member State.¹¹

B) Participation in EPSO AD competitions by Slovak candidates initiated between 2015 and 2021 is slightly below the expected rate based on the size of the population.

C) The pass rate of EPSO AD competitions initiated between 2015 and 2021 is below the EU average.¹² The results from measures targeting EPSO competitions will depend on the frequency of these competitions.

2.2. Outlook

Finally, the picture should also be interpreted in light of the following additional elements:

- The number of Slovak officials (4% of current AD staff of Slovak nationality compared to 12% for EU-27 average) which is set to retire from the Commission between 2023 and 2026 could potentially increase the under-representation further if recruitments do not compensate for departures. The Commission will therefore follow carefully inflow and outflow trends;
- Lengthy and complex EPSO competitions resulting in reduced attractiveness of EU careers.¹³ The new EPSO Competition framework has been adopted at the end of January 2023 and is aimed at shortening and simplifying selection procedures.

3. Measures to address under-representation

3.1. Activities at national level in Slovakia

3.1.1. Actions implemented

- **Improving promotion and outreach activities to the public and students** - The job offers at the EU institutions and agencies are regularly published on the website of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA), on the website of Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic

¹¹ Across the Commission, 74% of SNEs are funded jointly by the Commission and the Member State (so called, "shared cost" SNEs) whereas 26% are paid in full by the Member State ("cost-free" SNEs).

¹² The indicated EPSO participation- and success rate refers to an aggregated average of all AD competitions between 2015-2021.

¹³ Meeting with Ambassador Petra VARGOVÁ, SK Permanent Representative, 8 July, 2022. P.1.

to the EU and all social media channels targeting Slovak public: Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn including a redesigned **EU Careers Slovakia website**.

- **Expanding activities aimed at promoting EU careers** – the MFEA participates in one of the largest job fairs in Slovakia (Profesia Days in Bratislava, in Košice, and for the first time also in Žilina in May 2023). Job fair in Bratislava reached over 7.000 participants, mostly of the age of 25-34 with the university degree. Job fair in Košice reached over 5.000 participants.
- **Developing promotional videos to raise awareness of possibilities of employment in the EU institutions** – uploaded videos of Slovak nationals working in the European Commission in Slovak language as part of the testimonials available on EPSO YouTube Channel.
- **Networking activities with Slovak professionals working in the EU institutions** – cooperation with the Permanent Representation in Brussels.
- **Establishing a network among Blue Book trainees** as well as trainees of the EC REP in Bratislava an informal networking with the interns of the Permanent Representation, Slovak interns doing Blue Book internship in the European Commission and other EU agencies and those working at the European Parliament and Council.

3.1.2. Measures and initiatives foreseen

Slovakia will undertake the following activities:

- Putting in place a **comprehensive strategy and framework on EU careers** (developed by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the Office of the Government). Two strands of activities will be pursued: 1) raise the share of Slovak nationals in EU institutions and 2) encourage work ambitions of those Slovak nationals already in the Institutions.
- **To increase the number of seconded national experts** from 20 to 25/30 per year until 2025/2030. The aim is to establish a centrally sponsored scheme to support, fund, and encourage SNEs in positions where Slovakia can add up expertise to EU institutions in specific areas.
- **To establish a special scholarship program** enabling two Slovak post-graduate students to study at the College of Europe.
- **To focus more on the management skills and French speaking abilities trainings** targeting civil servants applying for administrator careers (AD 9 to AD 16) in cooperation with the International Organization of Francophony (IOF) and European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA).
- **To organize a series seminar/webinar** for officials, civil servants, and later for students/graduates followed by the specific training for the EPSO tests.
- To establish a **platform for sharing best practices from the competitions** between the Slovak candidates, the Slovak nationals already working in the EU institutions and agencies and for all the people interested in EU careers.

- To mediate **tailor-made support and training** to Slovak nationals applying for posts in the EU institutions - cooperation with several specialized institutes providing such training is envisaged.
- To work on the amendment of the Act on the civil service which gives the ministries more flexibility to motivate civil servants to apply for temporary posts in European Commission and to guarantee their position at the relevant ministry after termination of their contract in the Commission.
- To create new position at the Permanent Representation of Slovakia in Brussels dealing with the better representation of Slovaks in EU institutions and cooperation with the Slovaks already working in the institutions.

3.2. European Commission's measures

The European Commission efforts to strengthen geographical balance will reflect the specificities of Slovakia.

3.2.1. Actions aiming at redressing the observed imbalances in the short term, with impact on the long term

In the short-term, actions aiming at improving geographical balance will mainly consist of promoting under-represented nationals in the recruitment of non-permanent staff as statistics show that a significant part of successful candidates in external competitions belong to these categories.

As concerns the actions focussing on non-permanent non-linguistic AD level recruitments (which are valid both for the short and the longer term):

- DG HR launched in September a pilot project aiming to increase the share of Temporary Agents (TA) from under-represented Member States. DG HR is currently working with DGs to see how to increase the visibility of job vacancies, possibly yielding more applications from these Member States. The take-up of this initiative would need to be assessed before full roll-out, also in view of new IT solutions to handle large number of applicants. Commission DGs will be asked to **interview at least one candidate** from an under-represented Member States when organising the selection of non-permanent staff as of September 2022.
 - These actions are expected to produce a short-term effect and longer-term effect, e.g. by organizing internal competitions, allowing the most successful non-permanent staff to be recruited as officials. In this sense, the Commission ensured a greater predictability for this internal track by publishing a calendar for internal competitions until 2024.
- In parallel, DG HR is preparing **General Implementing Provisions** (GIPs), which will allow the adoption of appropriate measures to tackle geographical imbalances (including competitions by nationality) if required. The HR Strategy indicates that nationality based open competitions will be used, where appropriate and in line with EU law, following an analysis of the impact of Action Plans for underrepresented Member States. Whilst nationality-based open

competitions are mentioned as possible appropriate measures under certain circumstances¹⁴, it needs to be ensured that they comply with Article 27 of the Staff Regulations.

- The **Blue Book traineeships** are also a key entry point in the European Commission. DG HR and DG EAC agreed to apply as of 2023 the Member States' **guiding rates** and replace the current geographical quotas to improve the geographical balance of the Virtual Blue Book candidate-trainees. All trainees already receive introductory training for EU Careers in general and positions as Contract Agents, AD5 and Junior Professionals Programme (JPP) in particular. For the October 2022 campaign, a top up was used to already improve the geographical balance of under-represented Member States and brought already positive results.
- Vacancies and SNEs posts should be promoted on a regular basis via the web and social media of the EC Representation in Slovakia, as it has a relatively large outreach.

3.2.2. Actions aiming at correcting the underlying causes of imbalances in the longer term.

Actions aiming at correcting the causes of imbalances in the long term have a large spectrum. They include among others communication, outreach, targeted training.

- **External competitions:** The main measures in the EPSO Action Plan include: a newly approved competition model focusing on reducing the duration of external competitions to 6 months, from publication of the notices of competition to publication of the reserve lists; terminating the use of the Assessment Centre (oral tests) and using only written tests in the selection procedures; creating a single-window review mechanism; pre-publishing information materials for the EU knowledge test (used only for generalist AD and AST competitions); possibly introducing a digital skills test for some competitions, in line with the needs of EPSO's institutional clients; universal use of remotely proctored tests; reasoning tests organised on a pass/fail basis (not ranked); multilingual competitions with some testing in one specific language, in line with the needs of EPSO's institutional clients. Moreover, EPSO will continue to publish information on competitions in due time and will strive to enhance communication with successful candidates on its reserve lists. EPSO will also continue to provide targeted information on working and living conditions in Brussels and Luxembourg, including by providing relevant statistics and video staff testimonials. EPSO will continue to produce webinars for Member States EU Careers experts, public video tutorials, public online landing pages and infographics (in all 24 languages), as well as social media posts and ads for each competition. EPSO's new website (June 2022) will remain the main information hub for external competitions.
- **Outreach:** The Commission will actively mobilise available resources in the Commission's Representations in capitals to participate in outreach, public events and spread targeted communications materials on the EU civil service and emphasising the opportunities EU careers offer (value-based jobs, variety of policy fields, possibility to be hosted in other Member States or in third countries outside EU, etc).
- **Management:** The Commission will continue to work on identification of talent for managerial functions and support those officials who aspire to middle management and senior

¹⁴ Those appropriate measures must be justified and shall never result in recruitment criteria other than those based on merit. Before such appropriate measures are adopted, the appointing authority of the institution concerned shall adopt general provisions for giving effect to this paragraph in accordance with Article 110.

management, also targeting officials coming from under-represented Member States. This includes tailored development programmes for aspiring middle managers and senior managers, and other support measures. For aspiring senior managers, this is in the form of individual coaching sessions, and for aspiring middle managers it is in the form of different learning experiences that include coaching, mentoring and career guidance.

3.3. Joint measures

Actions to be jointly undertaken by the Slovak Government, the European Commission and its Representation in Slovakia. These initiatives include among others targeted training, outreach and promotion.

- The European Commission will support EU Staff Ambassadors and motivate all departments of the European Commission to work with the Member States, support “Back to School” programme and share their experiences regarding EU careers during an event in Slovakia.
- Expanding the network of EU Careers Student Ambassadors. For the next academic year 2023/24 six EU Careers Student Ambassadors will be engaged to raise awareness about career opportunities in the EU institutions.
- EC Representation working with career development departments of Slovak Universities, creating an informal network, organizing joint information days.
- The European Commission will help to promote the Action Plan in Slovakia vis-à-vis the adoption of the Slovak National Strategy.
- Participation of the European Commission at the Job fairs/webinars about EU Careers organised by Slovakia. Identify an official within the EC Representations who is located in Slovakia, to disseminate information relating to EU Careers and collaborate with MS to provide support to citizens.
- Produce materials for social media campaigns for EU Careers by filming short inspiring testimonial videos from SK nationals who work for the EC.
- Ensure that the relevant contact point at the Permanent Representation of Slovakia to the EU is informed about updates on recruitment procedures. In particular, the Commission aims to share the information material (infographics, publications etc.) so the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs can disseminate this information. An open line of communication should be kept between the Commission and Slovakia.
- Finally, it is also important to do everything to reach potential candidates who have not traditionally seen a career for themselves in the EU institutions. This could include qualified candidates from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, from outside the main universities and centres of population, candidates with disabilities or with an ethnic minority background. These groups are currently underrepresented among Commission staff and reaching out to them could be a way of both increasing the talent pool and increasing diversity among Commission staff.

4. Data and performance indicators

4.1. Data sharing on geographical balance

The Commission is conscious that Member States need to be informed regularly on the evolution of the situation regarding geographical balance. The 2018 report on geographical balance was a one-off exercise (as foreseen by the Staff Regulations). The Commission committed however to present **data on Staff geographical balance to the Working Party on Staff Regulations (WPSR) once a year** (higher frequency would not be appropriate for several reasons: statistical significance, influence of external constraints, technical factors; granularity is to be examined also in light of personal data protection; additional ad hoc requests could be examined on a case-to-case basis).

In addition, the Commission will continue to provide **comprehensive statistics at regular intervals** through different channels: via the Europa website (HR statistics and Statistical Bulletin); three times a year directly to Permanent Representations (full staff listings); via regular updates to the WPSR on geographical balance.

4.2. Action Plan performance indicators

The measures implemented by Slovakia, and the Commission will be assessed at the beginning of 2024 according to the following indicators. The baseline used will be 31 December 2021:

Output indicators (*they relate to implemented operations/measures by measuring what is directly produced/supplied*):

- Indicators related to promotional and communication activities to be developed based on the design/setup of the measure and internal capacities to collect the data:
 - The number of participants at webinars, career fairs and information days to promote specific EU jobs as well as EU careers
 - The number of social media and website views, followers and subscribers
 - The number of candidates from Slovakia who attend training and coaching sessions
 - The number of networking events organized and the number of attendees, such as for Slovak professionals already working in the EU Institutions and Blue Book Trainees
 - The number of EU Careers Student Ambassadors
 - The number of EU Careers Staff Ambassadors
 - The number of students awarded a scholarship to study at the College of Europe
 - The number of EPSO applications resulting from participation in the promotional activities above, where relevant (includes a follow up of participants)

Result indicators (*they capture the expected effects on participants or entities brought about by an operation/measure*):

- Participation and success rate at EPSO competitions
- Share of administrators across various grades, focusing on AD5-AD8 (including TAs) and CAs
- Number of JPPs
- Number of SNEs
- Number of candidate Blue Book trainees in the virtual database, number of candidate trainees with an offer and number of trainees who start the traineeship

5. Next steps



Drafting Action Plan... Implementation... Assessment... Follow-up...

As per the HR Strategy, the European Commission, has committed to improve geographical balance by meeting all Member States and drafting joint Action Plans for those that are under- represented in entry grade categories of staff. These Action Plans are not to be seen as “a one-off reporting” but rather as a continuous, dynamic process made jointly by the European Commission and the concerned Member State.

The implementation of the soft measures in the joint Action Plans will be carried out during 2023. Based on the collected data on output and results indicators, the European Commission will jointly with the Member State make an assessment of the impact of these measures during the year 2024 (in accordance with the adoption of the Action Plan and National Strategy).

Based on the jointly reached conclusions from the assessment, it will be discussed whether to include further measures in addition to those already listed in this joint Action Plan. In addition, an annual follow-up of the statistics in the Working Party on Staff Regulations is foreseen as well as regular monitoring of geographical balance and continuation of a dialogue with the Member States.

The European Commission encourages Member States to share their best practices. Synergies can be achieved by launching joint actions in Brussels, including the joint job fairs, and organizing communication and outreach events to promote EU Careers wherein the Commission and other EU institutions could participate.

6. Annex: Glossary on Staff Grades and Categories

Administrator: This percentage includes staff between AD5-AD16. It includes managers and temporary agents. It excludes linguists.

AD5-AD8 officials: This percentage includes AD5-AD8 officials. It excludes linguists and temporary agents.

Average EPSO Pass Rate: This percentage shows the EPSO Competition pass rate in comparison to the average EU-27 pass rate (1,5%).

Bluebook Trainees (BBT): This percentage includes Bluebook Trainees who are selected twice per year. The duration of their traineeship amounts to five months starting either in March or October of a given year.

Contract Agents (CA): perform manual or administrative tasks or provide additional capacity in specialised fields when officials are not available. Contract staff are employed for a limited period, with an initial contract of 6-12 months which can be renewed up to 6 years. This percentage only includes Contract Agents FG IV.

Guiding Rate: It is used to measure and determine whether an EU Member States is underrepresented or not according to Article 27 of the EU Staff Regulations. It is calculated on the basis of: 1) population 2) number of seats in the European Parliament and 3) voting rules in the Council. A country is considered to be under-represented if there is a deviation of at least -20% from the guiding rate. It does not set indicative targets for future recruitments of certain nationalities and is used for monitoring purposes.

Junior Professional Programme (JPP): This percentage includes selected Junior Professionals (up to 50 in total per year). The JPP is targeted at Blue Book Trainees, CAST Contract Agents and Temporary Agents with less than 3 years of work experience. It gives them the opportunity to participate in internal competitions to become EU officials at the end of the programme.

Middle Management: This percentage includes Heads of Unit, Heads of Departments and Heads of Task Forces.

Participation at EPSO Competitions: This percentage shows the country's participation in EPSO competitions as a share of its population rate.

Seconded National Experts (SNE): This percentage includes national or international civil servants who are working temporarily for the Commission but remain in the service of their national employer.

Senior Management: This percentage includes Directors-General, Deputy Directors-General, Hors Classe Advisors, Directors and Principal Advisors.

Temporary Agents (TA): Temporary Agents perform specific tasks as an Administrator on a temporary basis.