



European Personnel  
Selection Office

# Annual Activity Report 2023

EUROPEAN PERSONNEL SELECTION OFFICE

# Contents

EPSO IN BRIEF .....	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	4
A. Key results and progress towards achieving of the corporate general objectives and EPSO's specific objectives.....	4
B. Key performance indicators (KPIs) .....	7
C. Key conclusions on internal control and financial management.....	10
D. Provision of information to the Commissioner(s).....	12
1. KEY RESULTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE CORPORATE GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE DEPARTMENT .....	13
2. INTERNAL CONTROL AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT.....	19
2.1. Control results .....	20
2.1.1. Effectiveness of controls .....	22
2.1.2. Efficiency of controls .....	27
2.1.3. Economy of controls.....	27
2.1.4. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls.....	28
2.2. Audit observations and recommendations.....	29
2.3. Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems.....	30
2.4. Conclusions on the assurance.....	31
2.5. Declaration of Assurance and reservation.....	32
3. MODERNISING THE ADMINISTRATION .....	33
3.1. Human resource management.....	34
3.2. Digital transformation and information management.....	35
3.3. Sound environmental management.....	36
3.4. Examples of economy and efficiency.....	36

## EPSO IN BRIEF

The European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) is an interinstitutional office, which was created in July 2002 and became operational in January 2003. EPSO is administratively attached to the European Commission, but is governed by an interinstitutional Management Board, its highest decision-making body.

EPSO **mandate** is laid down in its Founding Decision from 2002<sup>1</sup>: to organise ‘open competitions with a view to securing the services of officials on optimal professional and financial terms’ for the EU institutions. The **vision** for the implementation of this mandate has evolved with the changing times and is today underpinned by **three guiding principles**: **precision** (use the right type of tests for the right profile), **agility** (adapt to specific client needs) and **speed** (run competitions faster).

**To help build a European civil service that is of the highest quality and representative of the diversity of the citizens it serves.**

Working for the EU offers unique and exciting opportunities to make a meaningful impact in the world. So, the aim is to select passionate and motivated people, including those with no previous specific EU work experience, who can bring their unique perspective and competencies. EPSO is committed to seeking top talents (generalists and specialists) in a broad, diverse candidate pool thereby and responding to institutions’ evolving needs.

EPSO continues to work on improving the **geographical balance** in its candidate base, reaching highly specialised profiles in a targeted manner, but also talents with non-conventional profiles, from different age groups, with a focus on adjustability and capability to learn and develop throughout the career. Constantly seeking innovation, EPSO endeavours to be quicker and simpler without compromising on the quality of the laureates. Competitions need to be legally sustainable while modernising processes and thinking critically about the skills and competencies staff will require in the future.

EPSO follows a 5-year roadmap to implement the transformation of the service. **Year 1** of the roadmap (May 2020 to May 2021) was a period of observation, mapping, collecting information and preparation. **Year 2** (June 2021 to June 2022) was devoted to piloting time. **Year 3** (July 2022 – July 2023) laid the foundation of the new competition model launched in early 2023. **Year 4** runs from August 2023 to August 2024 and aims to review the progress so far and adjust where necessary considering factors such as: duration of competitions, client satisfaction, test content and design of competitions, delivery modes, Selection Board feedback, cost analysis and internal organisation, including staffing.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:14469e18-7552-43d7-bfe0-7dfb66b157c7:0004.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:14469e18-7552-43d7-bfe0-7dfb66b157c7:0004.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Annual Activity Report is a management report of the Director of EPSO to the EPSO/EuSA Management Board and to the College of Commissioners. Annual Activity Reports are the main instrument of management accountability within the Commission and constitute the basis on which the College takes political responsibility for the decisions it takes as well as for the coordinating, executive and management functions it exercises, as laid down in the Treaties<sup>2</sup>.

### A. Key results and progress towards achieving of the corporate general objectives and EPSO's specific objectives

#### Highlights of the year

In 2023, EPSO's Management Board adopted a new **competition model** that had long been in preparation. It is designed to be considerably faster, leaner and more attractive to a wider pool of candidates. The fundamentals of this rethink include: emphasis on candidates' qualifications and on a set of written tests, all to be conducted in one testing session, elimination of the Assessment Centre oral tests. The new way of running competitions is also in line with modernity, flexibility and EU's Green Deal being based on universal online testing on mass-scale. EPSO also committed to providing support at the recruitment stage, in particular the conduct of competency-based interviews.

In June-July 2023, EPSO published the **first competitions under new competition model**: EUIPO/AD/01/23 (intellectual property field), EPSO/AD/402/23 (economists field). In parallel, EPSO continued to run several competitions according to the old model (notably, in the domains of ICT and energy, climate, environment). The aim is to finalise these competitions by mid-2024.

At the same time, EPSO commenced a historic transition to a full **24-language regime, in line with a Decision of its Management Board**. To match this ambition, EPSO in cooperation with the EU institutions, started working on finetuning the test portfolio for generalist and specialist competitions.

In 2023, EPSO continued to deliver **laureates** at a steady pace from previously launched open competitions – the main pipeline of recruitment for the EU institutions. EPSO produced 22 reserve lists containing almost 800 laureates (AD + AST profiles).

During the course of the year some challenges affecting performance were encountered and, several factors led to the difficult decision to **cancel one competition** for assistants (EPSO/AST/154/22) in March: technical issues of significant scale with online testing, the way *human* proctoring was implemented and concerns about privacy and protection of personal data. Drawing lessons from this experience and with a view to providing a better testing

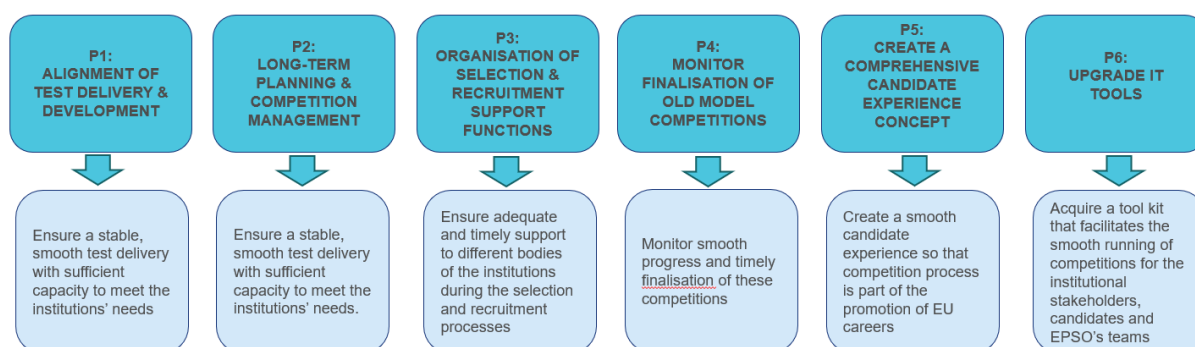
---

<sup>2</sup> Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union

platform for candidates in the future, in September 2023, EPSO transitioned to *automated* proctoring for subsequent selection procedures. EPSO's Management Board supported the move following a thorough reflection in a series of **Strategic Workshops** which discussed the right balance between anti-cheating measures, protecting the integrity of the tests and protection of personal data/privacy in open competitions.

Despite the intensive preparatory efforts from EPSO's teams, the launch of the new testing delivery method was unsuccessful because of the high number of technical difficulties reported by candidates when sitting the tests and issues related to Data Protection. For that reason, in mid-October, EPSO called for a **temporary timeout** to reappraise the automated proctoring and to urgently explore other possible and viable solutions to ensure smooth candidate experience. EPSO announced that testing was paused until it considers that the right conditions exist for restart<sup>3</sup>. The disruption of operations meant that EPSO could not deliver its work programme as intended and led to the issuance of a reputational reservation (see point C in this Report and Annex 9). Meanwhile, CAST-P testing continued with two testing windows in October and December 2023. The reestablishment of testing activity and return to 'business as usual' will be the absolute priority for 2024.

EPSO's transformational effort known as '**EPSolution**' continued in 2023 with the launching of 6 project priority strands: i) alignment of test delivery & development; (ii) long-term planning & competition management; (iii) organisation of selection & recruitment support functions; (iv) monitor finalisation of old model competitions; (v) create a comprehensive candidate experience concept and (vi) upgrade IT tools.



EPSO also intensified and diversified its **outreach** activities using a multitude of communication channels to reach out to diverse audiences: citizens, including university students, EU career ambassadors, Member States' representatives and partner organisations and networks.

Implementation of the **recommendations in the European Court of Auditors (ECA)** Special Report continued. As regards relations with national public administrations, EPSO's main forums of interaction with EU Member States' representatives were the twice-yearly meetings of the Network of Selection Experts and the regular exchanges at Council's Working Party on the Staff Regulations.

<sup>3</sup> Six competitions published in 2023 were put on hold: EPSO/AD/402/23; EUIPO/AD/01/23; EPSO/AD/403/23; EPSO/AD/404/405/406/407/408/409/23; EPSO/AD/410/23; EPSO/AD/411/23

EPSO has set the upgrading of its IT infrastructure as a strategic priority. In this context, it continued to play an active role in the EC's **Human Resources Transformation project (HRT)**, developing a single platform that will serve all needs of the HR family services, including selection and recruitment. First tangible results are expected early 2024.

Looking ahead to 2024, as a matter of priority, EPSO will work on:

- Implementing the EDPS audit recommendations<sup>4</sup>. The audit outcome is an additional factor that EPSO must take into consideration as it seeks to overcome the delivery crisis. EPSO is called to demonstrate that (i) ongoing competitions are put in compliance with the recommendations made in the Report within 3 months (counting from January 2024) and that (ii) these recommendations are duly implemented in any new testing methods.
- Implementing the European Ombudsman's recommendations<sup>5</sup>. EPSO has been asked to improve how it carries out remote testing. Key questions emerging are the impact of remote testing on equality of opportunity; candidates' access to instructions on troubleshooting during tests; requirements regarding equipment and physical testing area and the need for clearer guidelines on complaint handling.

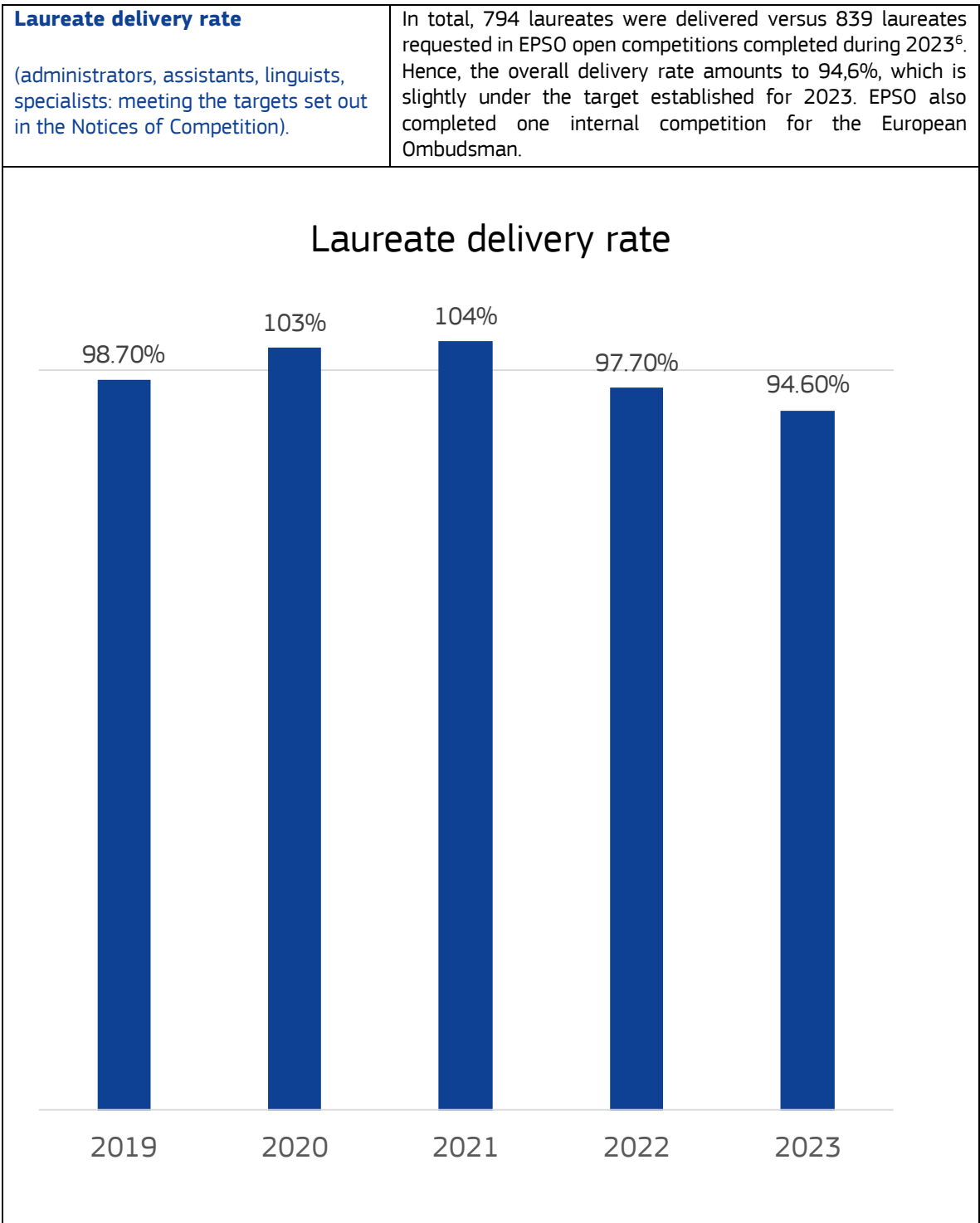
---

<sup>4</sup> In 2023, the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) conducted an audit at EPSO that focused on the main Legal data protection aspects of remotely proctored testing using external service providers. EDPS delivered its [recommendations](#) on 17.01.2024.

<sup>5</sup> In 2023, the European Ombudsman opened an own-initiative inquiry into how EPSO carried out 'pre-selection' tests as part of a procedure. The Ombudsman issued its decision on 22.01.2024.

B. Key performance indicators (KPIs)

KPI 1



<sup>6</sup> This KPI takes into account the number of successful candidates actually ‘produced’ vs the number of Successful candidates requested for the competitions finished in a given year, irrespective of when the competition was published and when the competition was due to finish.

KPI 2

<p><b>Candidate satisfaction rate</b> with EPSO's computer-based tests at pre-selection stage and Assessment Centre stage</p> <p>Target: 90%</p>	<p>In 2023, EPSO completed the move to 100% online delivery of computer-based tests: the last testing session using onsite delivery (in test centres) took place in February. In addition, in September 2023, EPSO switched to a new fully automated online delivery mode.</p> <p>The overall candidate satisfaction rate for 2023 stands at <b>66%</b> and can be broken down into two subsets, namely of 74% for tests delivered with live remote proctoring from January to July, and 60% for the automated proctoring delivery mode from September until the end of the year (on 16.10.2023, EPSO suspended all major testing operations). EPSO therefore remains at some distance to its target of 90% candidate satisfaction rate.</p>																																							
<div><p>Assessment Centre (source: online candidate survey)</p><table><tr><th>Year</th><th>Somewhat satisfied</th><th>Very satisfied</th></tr><tr><td>2012</td><td>45%</td><td>46%</td></tr><tr><td>2013</td><td>45%</td><td>45%</td></tr><tr><td>2014</td><td>46%</td><td>35%</td></tr><tr><td>2015</td><td>48%</td><td>30%</td></tr><tr><td>2016</td><td>44%</td><td>24%</td></tr><tr><td>2017</td><td>49%</td><td>27%</td></tr><tr><td>2018</td><td>31%</td><td>45%</td></tr><tr><td>2019</td><td>40%</td><td>33%</td></tr><tr><td>2020</td><td>35%</td><td>15%</td></tr><tr><td>2021</td><td>33%</td><td>28%</td></tr><tr><td>2022</td><td>36%</td><td>27%</td></tr><tr><td>2023</td><td>31%</td><td>25%</td></tr></table><p>■ Somewhat satisfied   ■ Very satisfied</p></div> <p>The satisfaction rate decreased slightly compared to 2022. EPSO will monitor candidate satisfaction in 2024, the last year where competitions with Assessment Centres will be finalised.</p>		Year	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	2012	45%	46%	2013	45%	45%	2014	46%	35%	2015	48%	30%	2016	44%	24%	2017	49%	27%	2018	31%	45%	2019	40%	33%	2020	35%	15%	2021	33%	28%	2022	36%	27%	2023	31%	25%
Year	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied																																						
2012	45%	46%																																						
2013	45%	45%																																						
2014	46%	35%																																						
2015	48%	30%																																						
2016	44%	24%																																						
2017	49%	27%																																						
2018	31%	45%																																						
2019	40%	33%																																						
2020	35%	15%																																						
2021	33%	28%																																						
2022	36%	27%																																						
2023	31%	25%																																						



### KPI 3

#### Awareness of EU Careers brand

measured by three sub-indicators:

- 1) visits of the EU Careers website
- 2) number of followers on all communication channels and
- 3) outreach via promotional activities

#### 1) Visits of EU Careers website<sup>7</sup>

Baseline: 2019	Results 2023
4 519 990	4.421.101.  The number of visits has decreased slightly in 2023 because EPSO published less competitions than in 2022 and ongoing competitions had their testing paused in October.

#### 2) Total number of followers on EPSO's communication channels

Baseline: 2019	Results 2023:
Facebook: 376160	Facebook: 443090 +0.86%
LinkedIn: 100540	LinkedIn: 240710 +25.67%
Instagram: 19920	Instagram: 73800 +19.44%
Twitter/X: 35470	Twitter/X: 40750 +4.33%

(growth compared to 2022)

#### 3) Outreach via promotional activities (number of events)

Baseline: 2019	Results 2023
970 events (including Ambassador events).	855 events took place during the year, with a total reach of 107 000 people. The number of events has increased with 57% compared to 2022 (543). This increase is mostly due to the boost in outreach activities in which EPSO staff has participated or that EPSO staff has organised.

<sup>7</sup> <https://epso.europa.eu/>

## C. Key conclusions on internal control and financial management

In line with the Commission's Internal Control Framework EPSO/EuSA has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective and the components and principles are present and functioning well overall, but improvements are needed and will be analysed in 2024 to improve risk management and impact assessment as well as minor deficiencies related to Anti-fraud strategy update, Business Continuity Plan update, Data protection records accuracy and timely implementation of some audit recommendations. The improvements and/or remedial measures implemented or envisaged are:

- Strengthen the risk management process, listing all internal and external factors and carefully assessing their potential impact.
- Assess the risks associated with the procurement of service providers and assuring that the selection criteria are aligned with the risks and controls.
- Improve the user experience by targeting and improving the information and guidance available to candidates.
- Reinforce the support available to the tested population.
- Develop contingency plans to deal with adverse scenarios.
- Review and enhance performance indicators to monitor the effectiveness of the actions taken.
- An internal task force has been set up to review and update, as necessary, the Anti-fraud strategy of EPSO and its Business Continuity Plan.
- Data protection records will be reviewed and updated as necessary to align with the new competition model, new way of testing and the upcoming onboarding on the new IT tool supporting EPSO's competitions delivery.

Please refer to annual activity report section 2.3 for further details.

In addition, EPSO has systematically examined the available control results and indicators, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the internal auditor and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on management's assurance about the achievement of the control objectives. Please refer to Section 2 for further details.

In conclusion, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being monitored and mitigated but the negative events experienced in 2023 indicate that risk management and impact analysis require adjustments. Improvements are also necessary concerning the updating of EPSO's Anti-fraud strategy and its Business Continuity Plan and maintaining the Data privacy records fully aligned with the new procedures. The Director, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation, has signed the Declaration of Assurance albeit qualified by a reputational reservation concerning the discontinuation of testing in EPSO's competitions. It should be noted that in the context of the aforementioned testing delivery issues, OLAF carried out an analysis, pertaining to the implementation of the framework contract concluded between

EPSO and Prometric, for the delivery of remote multiple-choice and essay-type computer-based tests and decided to dismiss the case, concluding that (i) the suboptimal service quality was in no way attributable to EPSO, which has seemingly taken all possible measures at its disposal to remedy the situation and (ii) there are no indications of irregularities and/or EU staff misconduct that would require the intervention of OLAF.

## **D. Provision of information to the Commissioner(s)**

In the context of the regular meetings during the year between EPSO and Commissioner's Hahn Cabinet on management matters, the main elements of this Report and assurance declaration, including the reputational reservation envisaged have been brought to the attention of Commissioner Hahn, responsible for Budget and Administration.

# 1. KEY RESULTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE CORPORATE GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE DEPARTMENT

**Specific objective 1:** Highly qualified staff is made available to all EU institutions by organising open competitions and selection procedures in an interinstitutional context – covering thereby the services' evolving needs.

In total, 794 laureates were delivered versus 839 laureates requested in EPSO open competitions completed during 2023. Overall, 22 reserve lists were finalised, in various profiles and fields ranging from external relations, chemicals policy, maritime affairs and fisheries, to audit, space and defence, heads of administration in EU delegations, operational and technical security or building technicians. Hence, the overall delivery rate amounts to 94,6%, which is slightly under the target established for 2023. Additionally, EPSO also completed 2 internal competitions for the European Ombudsman which resulted in 5 successful candidates.

In the context of the Junior Professional Programme (JPP), EPSO tested a total of 1 182 candidates.

By the end of 2023, the CAST Permanent (CAST P) database contained 190 014 applications corresponding to 111 125 candidates.

In 2023, recruiting institutions and agencies issued 8 755 requests for candidates to be tested, and 6 976 tests were delivered.

The security profiles requested by the institutions were introduced with an addendum to the Call for Expression of Interest published in June 2023.

A total of 22 897 computer-based tests were administered for open competitions, CAST P, and JPP. This represents a marginal decrease of less than 1% compared to the 2022 figure of 22 924. Notably, 99% of these tests in 2023 were conducted remotely.

In 2023, a total of 218 candidates sought reasonable accommodations for testing events. Among them, 32 were pregnant candidates who requested either a postponement of the testing event or an additional break for breastfeeding. Additionally, 127 candidates taking computer-based tests received various testing accommodations, such as the preparation of Braille exams, flexible breaks, extra time, adapted security checks, and the use of special equipment.

Under Article 45(a) of the Staff Regulations, Assistant (AST) officials of grade 5 or higher can be proposed by each institution, to participate in the **Certification** exercise. They follow a specific training programme organised by the European School of Administration to prepare for the exams. In the 2023 Certification exercise, 141 candidates (76 new candidates and 65 re-sitters) followed the training and participated in the three exams organised (1 exam

(written) delivered online, 2 exams (group exercise and oral presentations) in person). The overall pass rate was 36,88% for the entire population (52 out of 141 candidates) and 32,89% for the new candidates (25 out of 76 candidates).

### **Ensuring optimal operational capacity**

Following the endorsement of the new competition model by EPSO's Management Board in January 2023, EPSO published the first competition under that model in June 2023. In parallel, EPSO continued to deliver reserve lists for competitions launched under the old competition model. EPSO also supported an internal competition for the European Ombudsman in the second half of 2023.

The revamped planning process started with the institutions in 2022 continued in 2023, with more bilateral meetings as well as a dedicated space to capture their needs in a more transparent and straightforward way. This new way of collaborating will allow EPSO to further align with EPSO's delivery capacity as well as increase planning accuracy. The outcome of this process was presented to the Management Board in June 2023 for the long-term planning as well as the envisaged publications of competitions in 2024. Towards the end of 2023 and following the continued technical issues, EPSO encountered with the new way of remote test delivery, testing of candidates for most competitions had to be suspended to allow EPSO to find an adequate solution. Meanwhile, publications of new open competitions are on hold.

In 2023, following a tendering procedure, EPSO signed a 4-year framework contract for the delivery of Digital Literacy Skills tests, to be used in generalist competitions. The contractor has already delivered the agreed number of test items for 2023.

### **Collecting interinstitutional feedback**

As envisaged in its Management Plan 2023, EPSO has reached out to various levels of stakeholders and carried out a variety of actions, to further strengthen its client focus and to put in place a systematic feedback mechanism.

EPSO ensured regular **feedback** from its client institutions via bilateral meetings as well as the revamped 'Working in Partnership' network. Focus was put on the implementation of the new competition model and the future use of the reserve lists as well as the planning of competitions. EPSO also implemented regular feedback gathering from Selection Boards working under the new competition model, using a new IT tool. The system will be rolled out in 2024.

Furthermore, in June 2023 EPSO launched a **survey** targeting recruiting managers and Recruiter Portal users in all its client EU institutions. The purpose of the survey was to measure the satisfaction with officials recruited from EPSO reserve lists as well as the use of the Recruiter Portal.

### **Implementation of new testing methodology**

In 2023, EPSO continued to finetune the **test portfolio** to match the new competition model for generalist and specialist competitions and taking into account the decision of the Management Board to offer tests in 24 languages. EPSO has developed innovative tests, such as Field Related Short Text Questionnaire (FRSTQ), designed to assess the candidate's field related knowledge, whilst minimising the workload impact on Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), and translation and proofreading services. An EU Free Text Essay (EUFTE) has been designed to assess written communication skills as required by the institutions, whilst at the same time not being over-burdensome for SMEs and translation services. Existing texts in 24 languages will be used as the sources for the development of the EUFTE.

In line with modern trends in the assessment industry, EPSO also continued exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools by SMEs for the development of field related multiple-choice questions (FRMCQ). Whilst some efficiency gains were achieved in the initial development stage, there was nevertheless a considerable increase in the quality control required from EPSO psychologists and SMEs on the items developed.

EPSO completed work with SMEs on the development of EU Knowledge tests in 2023, and it now has an extensive databank of meticulously proofread items, which are currently being translated into 24 languages to allow delivery for the next AD Generalist competition.

During 2023, EPSO continued to work closely with the institutions on developing a new model for linguistic competitions (linguists and lawyer linguists).

In addition, outside of the competition phase, EPSO has put in place a comprehensive 3-tier **Recruitment Support Service** designed for the institutions, with services ranging from advice, training, templates etc., in tier 1 to a full evaluation of all 8 general competencies by EPSO psychologists in tier 3, including the provision of a competency report for each candidate evaluated.

EPSO provided 'tier 3' support to the European Ombudsman for its internal competition, with EPSO's psychologists evaluating candidates using 3 tests - competency based interview (CBI); a situational competency-based interview (SCBI); and a case study (CS). Positive feedback was received on the organisation and delivery of the service.

Following the decision to end the testing of competencies in CAST P selections, EPSO initiated a pilot programme to cover such tests in the form of Video Recorded Interviews (VRI). Since September 2023, this was successfully delivered to 2 institutions for 3 selection procedures.

## Improving the work of Selection Boards

In 2023, EPSO continued to deliver targeted **training** to Selection Board members and specific training for chairs and vice chairs. All Selection Board members have access to e-learning modules allowing them to participate in the training at their own pace and to review individual modules at key stages of the competition.

Selection Board members receive targeted information and training sessions, with EPSO Psychologists providing advisory and analytical feedback, when required. Individual competition managers support Selection Board members in their work.

EPSO continued its cooperation with research communities at European and international level, exchanging best practices on developments in testing modalities in large-scale global assessment testing.

**Specific objective 3:** EPSO's communication and outreach with potential candidates is proactive and targeted in order to reach a pool of diverse talent in an inclusive manner according to the needs of the recruiting institutions.

## EU Careers website

With 2.464.286 visitors in 2023, the EU Careers website continues to be one of the most visited Europa sites (see KPI 3 on page 9) and the number one source of information for applicants interested in a career in the EU institutions. Several EPSO webpages were revamped and continue to be improved. New staff testimonials about working in Brussels and Luxembourg were added to attract more candidates to Luxembourg/Brussels-based EU institutions.

## Social media initiatives

Throughout 2023, the EU Careers presence on social media kept growing. The number and regularity of posts on all social media channels have increased compared to 2022 aiming to create a loyal following that will then learn about and disseminate information on EU career opportunities. This resulted in more followers and increased engagement. LinkedIn and Instagram proved to be particularly successful. EPSO increased cooperation with other EU institutions and bodies by promoting their campaigns, traineeships, and vacancies.

## External communication and outreach

EPSO's continuous key challenge is to reach out to more diverse talent, to communicate the attractiveness of EU Careers and to promote the EU institutions as an employer of choice. Outreach activities are presented to *EPSO's Network of Experts in the field of personnel selection* bringing together Member States in biannual meetings hosted by the Member State holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU.

EPSO maintained and strengthened its flagship **EU Careers Student Ambassadors programme**. This network ensures a visible presence on campuses in all EU Member States.



Likewise, it expanded the **EU Careers Staff Ambassadors programme** through which EU staff share about their life and work in Brussels, Luxembourg or in Delegations.

## **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

In 2023, EPSO continued to implement its dedicated Equality and Diversity action plan (2022–2024), aimed at taking specific actions to increase the diversity of EPSO's pool of candidates. The action plan covers various diversity groups with special focus on persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities (EU anti-racism action plan). Emphasis has been put on the gathering of qualitative data on blocking factors for applying to EPSO's selection procedures, through meetings with focus groups of underrepresented backgrounds. The analysis and findings will be published in 2024.

In November, EPSO organised a first hybrid conference in Brussels for its *Network of Member States' Equality and Diversity coordinators*, including speakers of several EU institutions and staff associations. The event received positive feedback from all stakeholders involved.

EPSO's call for cooperation to all EU Diversity and Inclusion organisations remained open on EPSO's website and was promoted throughout various networks and on social media. A dedicated webinar for all registered diversity organisations took place at the end of 2023.

## **Internal communication**

EPSO's intranet is partly open to staff from all EU institutions and aims at attracting colleagues from across all institutions to become Selection Board members, Subject Matter Experts or EU Careers Staff Ambassadors. It also promotes corporate and internal communication campaigns; training offers, job vacancies and various events.

EPSO started the development of a new Intranet hub (migration in 2024), to be partly open to all EU institutions and attract EU staff to become Selection Board members, Subject Matter Experts, markers or EU Careers Staff Ambassadors. The new hub will continue to promote corporate and internal communication campaigns; training offers, job vacancies, staff transfers and various events.

## **Communication with citizens and candidates**

In 2023, EPSO's Candidate Contact Service received 23 500 written requests (compared to 19 350 in 2022) in all 24 EU official languages from candidates and citizens interested in an EU career. Candidates mainly asked for information on the competitions published in 2023 under the new competition model, as well as for help and advice for their remotely proctored tests.

The Europe Direct Contact Centre also replied to 2 425 queries on EU careers in 2023 (stable number of questions compared to 2022). The communication with citizens and candidates and available information on EU selection processes continued to be supported in 2023 via the various channels: [an online job search tool](#), with access to details on vacancies within EU Institutions and agencies, including traineeships; regularly updated online information on ongoing [EPSO selection procedures](#); regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions on the

website for detailed information on selection procedures and tests as well as general information on recruitment [https://epso.europa.eu/help\\_en](https://epso.europa.eu/help_en). Citizens and candidates can [contact the EU on job opportunities through the Europe Direct Contact Centre](#) that responds to all EU-related queries by phone and e-mail in 24 languages and via the [EPSO online contact form](#) in 24 languages for queries on candidates' specific applications and personal data.

**Specific objective 4:** The linguistic abilities in a third language of staff eligible for a first promotion<sup>8</sup> are evaluated in a harmonised, consistent and cost-efficient manner.

During 2023, a total of 803 diplomas underwent assessment across multiple languages. 90% of these assessed diplomas were deemed acceptable by the evaluation committees, serving as valid evidence of linguistic proficiency in a third language with the rest being rejected.

EPSO delivered 510 language tests in the framework of the compulsory assessment of third language skills and with an overall pass rate of 90% (which is 5 percentage points below the 2022 figure pass rate 95%).

In 2023, third language testing saw a distribution of 124 tests (24%) conducted face-to-face and 386 tests (76%) administered remotely. This data highlights the candidates' inclination for online testing, given that the choice of delivery mode is based on their preferences. The success rate for face-to face testing amounted to 91%, while in case of the online testing it reached 97%.

Since December 2021, EPSO offers face-to-face testing in Brussels and Luxembourg as well as remote testing. Staff members are free to choose their preferred option.

The satisfaction survey, distributed to all staff members utilising the third language assessment facilities during the reference period, indicates a consistently high satisfaction rate among end-users. Online testing is particularly valued by candidates situated outside of Brussels or Luxembourg, and notably, those in EU representations and delegations express a strong appreciation for this mode of assessment.

---

<sup>8</sup> Article 45(2) of the Staff Regulations

## **2. INTERNAL CONTROL AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

Assurance is provided on the basis of information on the efficiency and effectiveness of internal control systems and governance processes. The management monitors the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis and carries out an objective examination with internal and external auditors. The results are explicitly documented and reported to Director of EPSO. The following reports / documentation have been considered:

- Reports from Authorising Officers by sub-delegation (AOSDs);
- Contribution by the Director(s) in charge of Risk Management and Internal Control, including the results of internal control monitoring at department level;
- Reports on recorded exceptions, non-compliance events and any cases of 'confirmation of instructions' (Art 92.3 FR);
- Reports on ex-post supervision and/or audit results;
- Limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control, and the observations and recommendations reported by the Internal Audit Service (IAS);
- Observations and the recommendations reported by the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

The systematic analysis of the available evidence provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in the full coverage of the budget delegated to the Director of EPSO.

This section covers the control results and other relevant elements that support management's assurance. It is structured into 2.1. Control results, 2.2. Audit observations and recommendations, 2.3. Effectiveness of internal control systems and resulting in 2.4. Conclusions on the assurance.

## 2.1. Control results

This section reports on the control results used by management to support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives (ICO) <sup>(9)</sup>. EPSO's assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in annual activity report annex 5. The annual activity report annex 6 outlines the main risks together with the control processes to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the relevant control systems.

In line with the 2018 Financial Regulation, EPSO's assessment for the new reporting requirement is as follows:

- Cases of "confirmation of instructions" (FR art 92.3): zero cases
- Cases of financing not linked to costs (FR art 125.3): not applicable to EPSO
- Financial Framework Partnerships >4 years (FR art 130.4): not applicable to EPSO
- Cases of flat-rates >7% for indirect costs (FR art 181.6) not applicable to EPSO
- Derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity pursuant to Article 193 of the Financial Regulation: not applicable for EPSO

Financial management and control are grouped around three core processes: 1) Procurement (from the needs assessment to the selection of the suppliers/award decision), 2) Financial operations (from establishing the financial commitment to payment, contract implementation and eventually recoveries) and 3) Supervisory measures (including 'ex post' controls and management checks).

In 2023 EPSO was allocated a budget of around EUR 27.9 M, which also included the budget of the European School of Administration. The amount of payments made for operating administrative expenditure amounted to EUR 6 804 221,65. EPSO has responsibility for administrative credits only, committed under its sole responsibility, except for transactions made on behalf of EPSO by PMO (staff related expenditure), OIB and OIL (expenditure for buildings in Brussels and in Luxembourg), DG HR (expenditure for security and trainings) and DIGIT (expenditure for IT), according to Internal Rules or based on Service Level Agreement (SLA). The co-delegated budget to the services indicated above (around EUR 20.3 m) is covered by the internal control measures of those entities and covered in their AARs.

Description	M€
Staff related expenditures, managed by PMO	15.41
Expenditure for buildings, managed by OIB and OIL	2.11
Expenditure for security and some trainings, managed by DG HR	0.32
IT expenditures, managed by DIGIT	2.47
Managed by EPSO and the EU School of Administration	7.57
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>27.88</b>

<sup>9</sup> 1) Effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; 2) reliability of reporting; 3) safeguarding of assets and information; 4) prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; and 5) adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes as well as the nature of the payments (FR Art 36.2). The 2nd and/or 3rd Internal Control Objective(s) (ICO) only when applicable, given the DG's activities.

The budget directly managed by EPSO/EUSA was reduced from EUR 7,57 m to EUR 5,2m after various internal transfers (e.g., SCIC and DGT). The final credits linked to interinstitutional competitions and training activities of the School were distributed as follows:

<b>EPSO</b>	<b>Final credits</b>
INTERINSTITUTIONAL COMPETITIONS	430,883.48
PUBLICITE	286,882.45
LOCATION DE SALLES	0.00
ELABORATION DE TEST	51,857.49
REPRODUCTION DE TEST	0.00
FRAIS DE VOYAGE	11,900.00
FRAIS DIVERS	505,900.00
MEMBRES DES JURYS DES CONCOURS	12,756.14
CBT (COMPUTER BASED TESTING)	218,243.75
TROISIÈME LANGUE	105,803.35
ASSESSMENT CENTRES	743,644.38
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,367,871.04</b>
<b>EUSA</b>	<b>Final credits</b>
MANAGEMENT TRAINING	1,470,272.55
INDUCTION COURSES	851,230.12
TRAINING FOR CERTIFICATION	512,497.33
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,834,000.00</b>

The consumption rates of final credits are 88% for commitments (4.58 m) and 38% for payments (2.01 m).

In addition, EPSO/EuSA revenues amounted to 0.63 m.

DG HR provides administrative support services to EPSO in internal control and financial management (especially ex-post verifications, procurement, financial reporting and accounting) under the SLA (last revised at the end of 2023). This SLA is accompanied by a co-delegation between Authorising Officers by Delegation.

A charge back process has also been integrated into the SLA in compliance with the applicable corporate rules to accurately reflect and compensate the costs of services provided by DG HR to EPSO in this context.

A co-delegation agreed with the Director-General of DG HR covers administrative credits in a limited number of areas: trainings and security.

The Director of EPSO remains responsible for the overall internal control system and the design, implementation and monitoring of the internal control measures applied in EPSO.

EPSO has chosen to operate using a partially decentralised financial circuit for its operational expenditure. According to this model, the finance team of the unit Corporate Services (EPSO.05) carries out financial initiation and ex-ante verification; other units are responsible

for operational initiation and verification, as well as the function of authorising officer by sub-delegation for operational expenditure.

EPSO uses, along with some other low spending DGs, a simplified cut-off procedure.

### 2.1.1. Effectiveness of controls

#### ***a) Legality and regularity of the transactions***

EPSO uses internal control processes to ensure sound management of risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions it is responsible for, taking into account the nature of the payments concerned.

##### *1) Control objective*

EPSO's main control objectives aim at ensuring the efficiency of financial transactions, with the main share of our expenditure resulting from services offered by external providers.

The main efficiency indicator related to the timely paid invoices. DG EPSO score is in 2023 100% of payments on time. Nevertheless, another indicator to consider is the number of non-compliance/exception. EPSO reported 2 events in the end of 2023, both for the same issues (an order was placed with a contractor without budgetary and legal commitment signed by a responsible authorising officer). These 2 transactions totalled 55.950 € (1.4% of the budget appropriation concerned and 0.2% of EPSO budget).

##### *2) Assessment of the control results*

The [estimated overall risk at payment](#) for 2023 expenditure is 0.5% of EPSO's total relevant expenditure for 2023. This is the delegated Authorising Officer's (AOD) best conservative estimate of the amount of relevant expenditure during the year, not in conformity with the contractual and regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made.

EPSO has reviewed the following indicators on legality and regularity grounds as well as on sound financial management. More information is covered in annex 7.

##### [Ex ante controls](#)

No erroneous payments were detected during the year and for this reason EPSO didn't have to recover any unduly paid amounts.

##### [Ex post controls](#)

Based on the afore-mentioned SLA between EPSO and DG HR, unit HR.F.2, and the Director of EPSO, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation (AOD), proceeded with ex post controls on commitments, payments and recovery orders. No material issues were noted for

any of the transactions. Any potential weaknesses highlighted in 2023 will be reviewed and addressed appropriately by EPSO.

No financial transaction has been earmarked as “unacceptable” in 2023. In view of the above, the ex-post controls confirm all transactions checked in the ex-post controls were acceptable and only 8 had minor shortcomings, mainly missing supporting documents to the “certified correct” process, countersigned OF/PO).

These minor issues will be addressed during info/Q&A sessions to be held (3 planned in 2024) with EPSO operational and financial agents in the frame of an initiative aiming at strengthening internal training (high turnover) to target specific recurrent issues/shortcomings and to complement the training on offer in DB BUDG. The check-list will also be reviewed to ensure that the supporting documents are not overlooked and correctly linked/attached.

## Reporting

Management reporting focused on different aspects such as human resources (HR dashboard EPSO, which is updated on a monthly basis), finances (monthly financial reporting on payment delays), budget execution (monthly financial reporting on the evolution of appropriations: commitments and payments) and internal control (reporting on open audit recommendations and risks). The main findings were discussed at the level of EPSO management and appropriate measures were taken as necessary, when needed.

## Reports by the Authorising Officers by sub-delegation (AOSDs)

Since 2015, AOSD reporting is carried out at six-monthly intervals (twice per year). EPSO's Director received a copy of each individual AOSD report. An analysis of these reports did not highlight any problems or weaknesses.

## GAMA

'GAMA' is a consultative committee, which performs a final check on procurement procedures from DG HR, OIB, OIL, DIGIT, PMO and EPSO and is composed of designated members thereof. The consultation takes place after the evaluation and before the award of the contract and is obligatory for any procurement procedure reaching or exceeding the directive threshold as estimated total value. Files examined then result in a positive or negative opinion and (if applicable) recommendations for the service. DG HR, Unit HR.DDG.R1, holds the presidency and secretariat of GAMA.

## Exceptions reporting and non-compliance events

In 2023, two non-compliances were registered both linked to non-compliance with the rules on expenditure, as services have been ordered before the order form was issued. Both events have been followed up internally, with refresher trainings (on Expenditure lifecycle) made mandatory for the colleagues concerned.

### *3) Overview of EPSO's risk profile*

EPSO's portfolio consists of segments with a relatively low estimated error rate of 0.5%.

This is, respectively, thanks to the inherent risk profile of EPSO's budget and the performance of the related control systems (EPSO expenditure is only administrative).

### *4) Table (X): Estimated risk at payment and at closure*

Based on all the above, EPSO presents in the following Table X an estimation of the risk at payment and risk at closure for the expenditure managed during the reporting year:



The full detailed version of the table is provided in annex 9.

DG EPSO/EUSA	Payments made	Relevant expenditure	Estimated risk (error rate %) at payment		Estimated future corrections and deductions		Estimated risk (error rate %) at closure	
	m EUR	m EUR	m EUR	%	m EUR	%	m EUR	%
Administrative operating expenses	6.80	6.80	0.03	0.50%	0.00	0.00%	0.03	0.50%
DG total	6.80	6.80	0.03	0.50%	0.00	0.00%	0.03	0.50%

For an overview at Commission level, the departments' estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are consolidated in the AMPR.

*EPSO did not implement any preventive and corrective measures in 2023 due to the fact that no errors have been identified during the ex-ante and ex-post controls.*

## ***b) Fraud prevention, detection and correction***

EPSO has developed and implemented its own anti-fraud strategy since 2012, based on the methodology provided by OLAF. It was last updated in December 2019. Its implementation is being monitored and reported to the management as part of the Annual Activity Report exercise. All necessary actions have been implemented. There were no financial recommendations issued to EPSO by OLAF between 2019 and 2023.

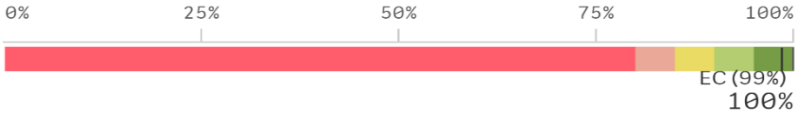
On the basis of the available information, EPSO has reasonable assurance overall that the anti-fraud measures in place are effective. Current measures are in place mainly at operational level (Selection Board training, access monitoring to tools, secured handling of any confidential data, etc.). However, despite reasonable assurance, EPSO intends to update in 2024 its anti-fraud strategy, to cover new ways of tests delivery and changes brought to the way EPSO's competitions and selection procedures are organised, esp. when it comes to the functioning of the Selection Boards. During 2024, the following measures will be taken in order to strengthen the strategy and its implementation:

- Identify high-risk areas (esp. in relation to the new competition model and the use of new contracts)
- Further follow-up on the implementations of the IAS (Internal Audit Service) audit on IT security (incl. access policy and rules)
- Establish mandatory trainings for new staff
- Conduct additional ad-hoc audits/checks of logs/accesses of our IT systems.

EPSO continued to regularly participate to the meetings hosted by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) in the context of the Fraud Prevention and Detection network where inter alia Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy (CAFS) and its Action plan are followed-up.

### 2.1.2. Efficiency of controls

EPSO paid 100% of the total amount on time. The average time to pay in 2023 was 11 days, compared to 9 in 2022 and 10 in 2021.

Timely Payments	EPSO Score	EC Score
	100%	99%

The number of payments done in 2023 was 575. In 2023 EPSO did not take any special measures to improve its financial managements, however, EPSO plans to reinforce control measures over procurements.

### 2.1.3. Economy of controls

As a result of ex-post controls, EPSO had no red codes but 8 yellow codes: 4 for payments, 2 for recoveries and 2 for commitments. A quantitative estimation of the volume of errors prevented and detected is not available. The cost of controls are estimated at 848 200 euro, which amount to 12.47% of payments made in 2023. EPSO has limited spending operations and only manages administrative appropriations under Heading VII. The total number of FTEs involved in the three main control activities in EPSO/EuSA (procurement, financial operations and supervisory measures) is estimated at 5.5 FTEs. The control activities are to a large extent a regulatory requirement which cannot be curtailed. As a quantitative estimation of the volume of errors prevented and detected is not available, it is not possible to quantify the related benefits, other than the amounts recovered as a result of these controls. The benefits of control in non-financial terms cover: better value for money, deterrent effects, efficiency gains, system improvements and, as mentioned above, compliance with regulatory provisions. Taking into account the above, EPSO has decided to use, again, a single global indicator to monitor and to report on the efficiency of its control systems: the overall cost of control, in percentage at DG level.

This indicator is calculated by dividing the total costs of control by all expenditure made during the year (payments made). This represents a slight decrease of 1.36% compared to 2022, due to less staff working on this. It should be noted that this process is closely linked to operations and therefore not fully under EPSO's control. The relatively high cost of control results from a number of inherent factors. Firstly, given the nature of its activities, EPSO is handling mostly low and middle value transactions. Examples of such transactions are the amounts paid for online publicity and promotional material, or the contributions paid towards candidates' travel expenses. As a result, the administrative costs of handling these

transactions are relatively high. Secondly, given the staff composition of EPSO's financial sector - which is primarily composed of AST-officials and contractual agents of function group II - the estimated overall costs of our control activities would have been lower if the calculations had been based on the real (salary) costs of our staff, and not on the average cost of a Commission official and average cost of a contractual agent, respectively.

#### 2.1.4. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

EPSO continues to make efforts to improve the efficiency of financial processes and contract implementation. Based on the most relevant key indicators and control results, EPSO has assessed the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of its control system and reached a positive conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of the controls for which it is responsible.

## 2.2. Audit observations and recommendations

This section sets out the observations, opinions and conclusions reported by auditors – including the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control. Summaries of the management measures taken in response to the audit recommendations are also included, together with an assessment of the likely material impact of the findings on the achievement of the internal control objectives, and therefore on management's assurance.

Work undertaken by the Internal Audit Service, in the period 2019-2023:

- Limited review on the implementation of the new internal control framework (2019);
- Audit on IT security management in the HR family (2021)

Following the review by the Internal Audit Service (IAS) in 2023 of the status of the implementation of the recommendations, all of them were confirmed closed except two (Logical system-related controls and IT service provider management), which were reopened as their implementation was not considered fully adequate.

In 2020, ECA published a Special report (23/2020) on EPSO, covering weaknesses in the selection process, the need to introduce a new selection framework for specialist competitions and to improve EPSO's capacity to adapt to a fast-changing recruitment environment. In 2023, (and beginning 2024) EPSO provided the remaining clarifications to ECA which then closed the special report.

In 2023 there were **no observations or recommendations** done by IAS or ECA in relation to EPSO's **financial management or internal control**.

The 2019, IAS recommendations in relation to the limited review of the new internal control framework in EPSO, were accepted by EPSO's management and implemented in 2020.

In 2023, EDPS carried out an audit on data protection focusing on remotely proctored testing used by EPSO in open competitions; the final Report and recommendations were issued in the beginning of 2024 (see Executive summary).

The impact of IAS and ECA fieldwork is most evident in the adoption of the new competition model in 2023 that takes into account their respective findings.

## **2.3. Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems**

The Commission has adopted an Internal Control Framework based on international good practice, to ensure the achievement of its policy and management objectives. Compliance with the internal control framework is a compulsory requirement.

EPSO uses the organisational structure and the internal control systems suited to achieving its policy and internal control objectives in accordance with the internal control principles and has due regard to the risks associated with the environment in which it operates.

For its assessment EPSO's management has considered the following sources:

- Register of exceptions
- Analysis of internal control weaknesses
- Non-compliance events
- Risk assessment
- Very important IAS recommendation
- EDPS audit on data protection
- Outstanding recommendations from the Court of Auditors (ECA)

In line with the Commission's Internal Control Framework EPSO/EuSA has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year. Despite the severe problems encountered with test delivery, which resulted in a temporary halt of operations, EPSO assessed its control measures and concluded that they were effective in identifying issues, while their severity required additional time for resolution. All components and principles are in place and functioning well overall, but some improvements are needed as minor deficiencies were identified related to Anti-fraud strategy update, Business Continuity Plan update, Data protection records accuracy, timely implementation of certain audit recommendations. The improvements and/or remedial measures implemented or envisaged are:

- An internal task force has been set up to review and update, as necessary, the Anti-fraud strategy of EPSO and its Business Continuity Plan.
- Data protection records will be reviewed and updated as necessary to align with the new competition model, new way of testing and the upcoming onboarding on the new IT tool supporting EPSO's competitions delivery.
- Strengthen:
  - Controls in order to avoid similar issues in future and plan alternative/fall back solutions in case a service would not be adequately delivered, to minimize as much as possible the negative impact.
  - Procurement procedure (request hard evidence and take into account the negative impact of penalties).

## **2.4. Conclusions on the assurance**

In conclusion, based on the elements reported above, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Director, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation has signed the Declaration of Assurance albeit qualified by a reputational reservation concerning the suspension of testing in EPSO's open competitions.

The information presented in section 2.1 is derived from assessments conducted by management and auditors, as documented in the listed reports. These reports are the result of a careful examinations of available evidence, ensuring that the information provided is both complete and reliable and that the budget allocated to EPSO is fully accounted for.

The declaration of assurance is based on ex-ante and post internal controls to guarantee a true and accurate representation. All Resources were used in alignment with their intended purposes or redirected with clear and transparent justification. All significant details were reported, adhering to legal and regulatory requirements.

Additionally, ongoing efforts are underway to enhance our anti-fraud strategy and Business Continuity Plan, as reported.

## 2.5. Declaration of Assurance and reservation

### Declaration of Assurance

*I, the undersigned, Director of EPSO,*

*In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation, declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view <sup>(10)</sup>.*

*State that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in this report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.*

*This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of the self-assessment, ex-post controls, the work of the Internal Audit Service and the lessons learned from the report of the European Court of Auditors for years prior to the year of this declaration.*

*Confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported here which could harm the interests of the Office or those of the Commission.*

*However, the following reservation should be noted: "Reputational reservation on the problems encountered with a launch of a new automated proctoring system in online testing". More details are provided in annex 9.*

*Brussels, 15 May 2024*

.....

*(signature)*

*Minna VUORIO*

---

<sup>10</sup> True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the DG/Executive Agency.



### **3. MODERNISING THE ADMINISTRATION**

EPSO is implementing a new IT system, via the HRT Programme, to be used for its core tasks, in particular the organisation and running of open competitions. The new tool will have features particularly designed to cover specific processes and workflows (such as the admission tool) allowing EPSO to be faster, more efficient, streamlined with the ability to monitor resources use at the same time. This follows the recommendations from the last European Court of Auditors audit on EPSO's selection methods.

Given that this is a corporate HR Family project, a number of synergies will be achieved, on top of complying with the Digital strategy (once only principle, data protection by default and design, etc.).

### **3.1. Human resource management**

In 2023, EPSO continued to focus on the effective management of human resources in an ongoing context of transformation and heavy workload. The Office continued to strive to make the best possible use of all the talents available while developing internal capability.

In this context, a thorough analysis continued to define the ideal future workforce, develop the knowledge and competencies of the staff so that they remain adaptable while maintaining their engagement and ensuring their well-being. The newly created small operational sector, 'Rapid Response Team', directly attached to the Director, has allowed quick reinforcements in case of peaks of workload, long term absences and/or specific/punctual needs.

In 2023, EPSO continued to pay particular attention to gender balance in all categories of statutory staff which is currently composed of 67% women. The ratio between AD and AST posts (37/63%) is also improving with the upgrading of 2 AST posts in 2023.

In 2023, EPSO ensured that managers could benefit from appropriate trainings and coaching to help them achieve their objectives and those of the Office. In addition to the already existing welcome session for newcomers, a mandatory training path including data protection, internal control and risk assessment and ethics has been offered to newcomers. Thanks to job shadowing and temporary assignments, some staff members started to train or explored new jobs to prepare the transition to the new competition model while finalising the last competitions still running under the old model. Finally, two AD colleagues were selected to participate in the corporate Female Talent Development Programme.

Some social/well-being activities have been organised in 2023. The European Week of Sports took place end September with a tailor-made programme allowing staff to participate to at least one activity every day of the week. Formal and informal meetings with EPSO's Director have been maintained throughout the year in 'townhall' as well as bilateral format.

EPSO's internal communication correspondent continued to work closely with the HR Correspondent and DG HR to ensure that corporate messages were shared and followed-up.

## 3.2. Digital transformation and information management

- EPSO is a member of the Corporate HR Transformation Programme, which aims to replace the numerous internal IT applications in the field of HR, with modern and up to date ones. EPSO is the front-runner amongst the members of the HR family to have its existing legacy IT applications (and subsequently IT infrastructure and data) replaced with new ones. In 2023, important progress has been made, implementation work (design and development) started, and the first releases of modules will happen in Q1 2024.
- Through these new IT applications, EPSO will contribute to the objective of a seamless digital landscape replacing the current legacy solutions.
- As for the objective green, resilient and secure infrastructure, EPSO is contributing by updating its Information Systems IT security plans and with replacing its current obsolete IT applications by modern cloud-based ones (HRT Program). EPSO has one of the highest percentages (at corporate level) of staff migrated to the new Welcome domain and ensures that its staff is encouraged to update their skills in information management, data protection and cyber security.
- EPSO continued to improve its IT security environment as guided by Commission Decision 2017/46 and DIGIT.S IT Security Standards and Policies. Particular attention has been given to protecting the confidentiality, integrity and availability of sensitive non-classified information held by EPSO. This was achieved by implementing the corresponding mitigating measures of the EPSO systems IT Security plans and of relevant Audits (IAS) that took place. In addition, drafting of the IT security plan for the new EPSO IT systems started in 2023 and will be finalised in Q1 2024.
- EPSO staff were invited to participate in corporate Cyber Awareness training sessions.
- Data, information and knowledge management (implementation of a new platform in Q1 2024, SharePoint.)
- New *EPSO INTER-Institutional Competition platform* has been put in place to cover online collaboration needs between EPSO and its stakeholders. SharePoint has become a preferred platform to share information, inside the organisation but also with other actors participating in our processes.
- Regarding the new IT applications that are being developed as part of the HRT Program, EPSO actively participates in all the Program's activities that will ensure a coherent, efficient and secure Data and information management across all members of the Program and is implementing its IT applications in line with them.

### Data protection

EPSO has continued to implement the Commission's Data Protection Action Plan in particular by further awareness raising amongst EPSO/EuSA staff. Training courses on data protection matters have been made mandatory for newcomers and staff dealing with personal data. The Data Protection Coordinator (DPC) and the assistant DPC have continued to act as a trusted first point of contact and advice for any data protection matters in EPSO/EuSA, while the legal aspects, including data subject rights, have been covered by the legal team. The DPC has also been very closely involved in the HRT project and any other IT projects with data protection aspect, or when a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) is needed.

Both DPC and assistant DPC have continued to participate in relevant specialists' trainings. The DPC has successfully passed a formal EIPA DPO certification training.

### **3.3. Sound environmental management**

EPSO staff has been involved in various greening initiatives deployed in the L-107 environment by using collaborative workspaces, reducing of energy consumption (heating, lighting). Paper use has been reduced on a large scale.

Two outdoor activities were organised in Spring and Autumn. Visits of two neighbouring green areas in the Brussels European Quarter discovering tree species and awaking interest for biodiversity. These experiences contribute to cultivating a more ecologically conscious and environmentally responsible mindset. About 12% of EPSO staff took part in these activities.

### **3.4. Examples of economy and efficiency**

Whilst initial economies resulted from the introduction of innovative technologies, such as and automated proctoring in the delivery of our tests, the subsequent pause in our operations implies that these will be only measured in 2024.

Also, major economies are expected from implementation of the HRT programme mentioned in the introductory paragraph. However, these are only expected in the longer-term period once the obsolete systems are fully replaced.