



**Note for the attention of
Ms Gertrud INGESTAD, Director General DG HR
Ms Minna VUORIO, Director of EPSO**

Subject: Serious problems related to competition EPSO/AST/154/22

On 22 September 2022, the notice of competition EPSO/AST/154/22 (*the competition*) was published in Official Journal C363 A. The Central Staff Committee has received several complaints from the participants in the above-mentioned competition.

Firstly, in Chapter 4, point 4.1 of the notice of the competition, *'How will the competition be organised'*, it is stated that the delivery mode would be *'remote/in-person.'*

Instead, the Central Staff Committee was informed that the competition was **solely organised online**, which could cause a violation of the equal opportunities of the candidates. For the sake of equity, EPSO has a duty to ensure that the process runs in accordance with the EU standards and that the test provider fulfils them. Responsibility for taking the exam should not be solely shifted from EPSO to candidates.

Secondly, prior to the exam, the candidates received four large documents (47 pages, only in English), each of them providing extensive technical instructions and requirements on the necessary technical and environment conditions to run the tests, and how to book a time slot and the exam itself. This contributed to additional distress and led to hundreds of candidates being unable to take the tests or being excluded for many reasons, as you can see below:

1. Procedural and technical aspects

- Since the beginning of the competition, the process has been misleading the candidates. The booking of the test time slot was in 24h format, but some candidates were only offered appointments during the night. Adding to the confusion, the system was switched back to the AM/PM format. This situation led to errors as it did not occur to candidates that they might be offered a slot to sit the exam during the night after having specified Brussels as their testing centre.
- Any difficulties encountered by the candidates were referred by EPSO to the test provider (Prometrics), which provided, unacceptably, only a US (tolled) phone number for any issues occurring.
- The test organiser (EPSO) and provider repeatedly told candidates with non-compliant equipment that they would have to get or buy another device, otherwise they would be excluded from the competition.

- A hidden eliminatory stage: “[...] please note that the candidates are asked to conduct a mandatory enhanced system readiness check [...] by 18 November 12:00 midday, Brussels time at the latest [...] Candidates who do not launch the mock exam (step 3) by 18 November, midday, Brussels time, [...] will not be provided with an opportunity to retest” was introduced via the invitation to the test without being published in the notice of competition. As a result, candidates who did not carry out a mock test not only could not retest but could not participate in the exam.
- Even though there was a (mandatory) preparatory session for the exam intended to familiarise the candidates with the testing platform, it did not include all the tools available for the real exam.
- Although the candidates booked a specific time slot for this remotely proctored exam, the test provider did not respect it. Some candidates were kept waiting for hours beyond the scheduled time and in some cases after a delay they were requested to redo the initial verification. Consequently, these candidates could not carry out the exam in the planned conditions due to various constraints (closing of office, departure of a train, breastfeeding, return of family members etc)
- During the exam numerous technical bugs and system failures combined with inefficient helpdesk system added to the stress and stopped some candidates from completing the exam.

2. Financial status

- Specific requirements and constraints imposed to sit the test created inequality between candidates such as testing location available to candidates, availability of hardware (laptop/desktop computer with particular specifications), problems with webcams, headsets, speakers, microphone, stable internet connection etc.

3. Serious concerns related to personal data handling and respect for privacy under EU rules:

- Although some requirements are necessary to ensure the test's integrity, candidates should not be requested to give away their privacy by being obliged to provide to a US based operator an internal view of the home or the contents of their computer, still less showing body parts to the proctors). In addition, the exams have been recorded and information stored without the candidates having an opportunity to refuse or to review.
- There are concerns about the way personal data is being handled. Besides the privacy statement provided by the test organiser, the test provider also has its own privacy statement that the candidates had to agree to. This involves the storing and processing of personal data by a US based company. In addition to the name and other details, these personal data include a full copy of the candidate's ID and portrait.

A table listing the main problems reported by concerned candidates is attached to this note. The Central Staff Committee considers that the way in which the computer remote tests were run for this competition, as a discriminating exercise. The proctor and the external contractor should not have the possibility to eliminate candidates. This exercise not only required a lot of resilience, but was also a humiliating and abusive. Such a situation will not give a good image of the European institutions to citizens and potential colleagues.

Even though we understand EPSO's aim to decrease costs related to competitions, we find it unacceptable that this is done at the cost of respect for candidates and is liable to damage the European Commission's image and reputation.

In the light of the above, we ask you to organise an urgent meeting before the end of the year to discuss workable solutions for these problems and **to provide an opportunity for the candidates affected to retake the tests (MCQ) in a centre.**

Other staff associations and trade unions such as those in the Court of Auditors in Luxembourg and within the European Parliament are equally concerned about this issue. We will be in contact with them and stand united in calling for an immediate solution to be found for this competition as well as for other competitions and selections.

Kind regards,

(signed)

Athanasios KATSOGIANNIS
President

Cc: Commissioner Hahn
President COPAR et COPARCO
CSC Members
OSPs