



Brussels, 03.04.2020

Note for the attention of Ms Gertrud INGESTAD, Director-General, DG HR

Subject: Working conditions of the staff which need immediate attention

Dear Ms Ingestad,

First of all, the Generation 2004 team hopes that this message finds you well.

Generation 2004 would like to draw your attention to several interlinked aspects in relation to the working conditions of the staff in these difficult times, which need your immediate attention.

In our note of 23 March 2020 we already drew your attention to the challenges of the enormous pressure which has fallen on families with several children or on lone parents in relation to their new additional home-schooling and caring duties. According to our information, there is still no one common approach followed by the schools on how to proceed in this period. It is not enough to send a programme, tasks or links to be followed by children/parents. An active role of the teachers and school, such as daily contact in the framework of a genuine distance-learning approach, via tools such as Microsoft Teams (available in the EU schools), is indispensable to keep the children engaged and motivated and relieve part of the burden from the parents' shoulders.

We would be grateful if you mandated your respective services to use existing channels with the European Schools such as the Office of the Secretary-General of the European Schools.

The second point, clearly interlinked with the previous point, concerns a lack of trust in colleagues' professionalism by some managers. In the framework of the updated guidelines on telework on 30 March 2020 it is stated:

'Staff whose child(ren)'s school/kindergarten/crèche are closed, or teaching classes are suspended, and who thus need time during the day to home-school their child(ren)/or care for young child(ren), need to inform their line manager. The line manager and the staff should agree on the core tasks the staff need to perform during this period and on the extent to which they need to be available.'

Unfortunately, we have been informed of several cases of micromanagement in which staff (including those with children) are being put under high pressure:

a) Staff are being asked to fill in daily an activity report of the previous day which has to be delivered first thing in the morning.

b) Staff are being asked to report daily on their precise teleworking hours in addition to encoding them in Sysper – which raises the question on what exactly the point of this double reporting is, apart from additional unnecessary effort.

c) During unit meetings staff are clearly told that they are being paid for 8 hours of work and this amount of time is required from them even under the current circumstances.

d) Over-control of staff e.g. demand them to stay online all day (i.e. occupying network capacity unnecessarily).

We would be grateful for your position on these practices and if you could make it mandatory for managers (including team leaders/heads of sectors) to follow the updated guidelines (as well as general good practice for telework) and refrain from applying abovementioned counter-productive management methods.

In this regard, the EUSA course on Managing remote teams in times of crisis - On-line learning may be helpful. It is unfortunate that the next available course is 30 April. Therefore, we would kindly ask you verify the possibility of making more courses available.

For more than two weeks colleagues have experienced a new working reality, staying permanently home and teleworking under specific circumstances. Even if we are enduring this period in very different ways, there is nothing more important than our physical and psychological health and this pandemic crisis proves it.

DG ESTAT is currently running a survey among its staff to find out how the crisis is affecting their staff. We consider this an excellent idea and I would like to propose to you a similar exercise on a commission-wide basis. It would be helpful to have additional questions in order to have a comprehensive overview on how staff manage in these difficult times. This would allow the relevant services to have a better overview of what is running well and what still needs to be improved.

We hope to hear from you soon,

Łukasz WARDYN



Chair of Generation 2004

CC: SAKKERS Ewoud (HR)